

Reference document

THE BENEFITS OF PROMOTING HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

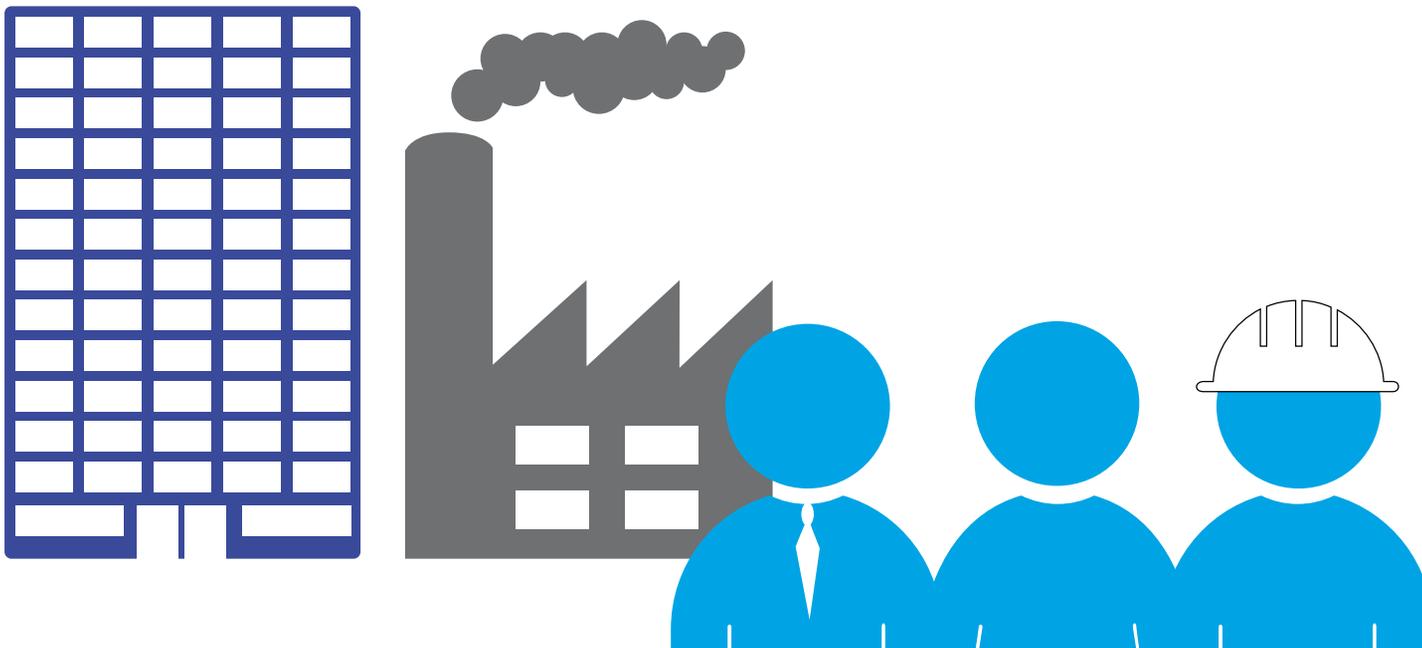


Table of contents

Introduction	2
Definition	2
Risk factors	2
Program benefits and added value	3
A global and integrated approach	4
Conclusion	5

Introduction

The success of any organization is intimately linked to the health and wellness of its employees. With a healthy lifestyle and adequate support, human resources are more fulfilled and productive, which is beneficial for the individual, the organization and society in general.

According to a Health Canada report, a physically active employee is 12% more productive than a less active or inactive colleague. Since a healthy staff ensures a more dynamic and more stable organization, it is in the best interest of all organizations to take this information into consideration to ensure their growth, especially in a highly competitive market.

Based on this principle, how can we make employees aware of this and support them, in order to improve global health within the organization? How should organizations deal with this human factor when they already have to focus on development and productivity requirements? It is in fact to address these questions that our program, based on prevention and promotion of a healthier workplace, proves to be a key factor.

Definition

The rather simplistic definition of a healthy person being “non sick” has become incomplete and even obsolete since we now consider the individual through a global and environmental approach. *Being healthy* is not just about the satisfactory physical condition of an individual, but also a combination of mental and social well-being.

Approximately two thirds of Canadians over 15 years of age are active people who spend an average of 60% of their waking hours in the organization they work for. It is therefore obvious that all that takes place within the working environment will have visible effects on the health and well-being of each individual, which will generally affect productivity as well as quality of life.

For several years now, occupational health has become a major concern and a national issue. Health Canada has increased its efforts in this area in order to help employees achieve a better balance in their everyday life. And with good reason: “the economic impact of physical inactivity [or unhealthy habits] could be substantial as it is estimated that in 2001, it reached 5.3 billions of dollars, which is 2.6% of the total health service costs in Canada.” (Source: Statistics Canada, www.statcan.gc.ca)

The days are long gone where we could divide personal and professional life as two completely separate spheres. Many companies, concerned about establishing sound foundations at the heart of their organization, have come to that precise understanding.

Risk factors

The risk factors weighing most on businesses in relation to planning, therefore to costs, are as follows:

Mental health (including anxiety and depression)

Each day, it is estimated that close to 500,000 Canadians miss work due to mental illness, which represents a substantial annual loss of 51 billions of dollars for the country's economy.

Stress

Stress is part of everyday life for each and everyone, and can even be an excellent motivator. However, it can become disabling when a person cannot find a way to address an issue, a sudden change or a situation without worrying. The employee may then lose self control and become unable to make proper decisions and, in a worst case scenario, develop mental illness such as depression.

Musculoskeletal disorders

In the workplace, these disorders refer to a set of painful injuries to muscles, tendons and nerves. Carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, thoracic outlet syndrome and cervical tension syndrome are examples. They usually lead to the employee's disability by making even simplest tasks impossible to perform.

High blood sugar

In some people, high blood sugar does not generate any particular disabling effects. However, beyond a certain point, hyperglycemia tends to lead to symptoms such as intense fatigue, chronic bladder or genital infections, abdominal pain, nausea with or without vomiting, etc.

Obesity

52% of Canadians are overweight or have obesity problems, which generally convert to multiple health issues. A lack of physical activity and poor eating habits are the main causes.

Smoking

In Canada, smoking is the leading cause of many preventable diseases, disability and premature death, with more than 45,000 deaths per year. These numbers also include second hand smoke victims – smoke released by a burning cigarette or smoke exhaled by a smoker –, which exposes employees to carcinogenic pollutants.

Hypertension

It can be genetic, related to medical history (diabetes, heart problems, etc.) or to lifestyle habits (alcoholism, smoking, overeating, etc.), or even be related to mental pressure experienced in the workplace. In all cases, it may result in an increased rate of absenteeism due to its effects on health.

Physical inactivity

Less active or inactive people are more inclined to suffer from health problems such as cardiovascular disease, certain types of cancer, obesity, high blood pressure, depression, etc.

If some leaders and managers have decided to make these issues a corporate concern, it is because they are fully aware of the uncontrollable nature that these health issues and habits can have on the very functioning of the organization and the devastating effect they may cause on individuals if they are not taken care of.

Program benefits and added value

Through Optima Global Health's program, companies and organizations do more than focus on health in the workplace, they also invest in the general well-being of their human resources which leads to tangible and measurable outcomes:

Reduced costs related to disability, absenteeism and presenteeism

Our program allows to reduce risk factors related to psychological and physical health, to lifestyle habits and to company operations.

Control over the increase of insurance premiums

Improving the organization's group experience in disability and reducing medication use are elements that allow better control of group insurance premiums.

Reduced workload for managers and union representatives

Our program allows managers and union representatives to spend more time on activities that add value to the organization, not to mention improving their management practices.

Better talent retention and hiring of new employees

When considering staff turnover, employee satisfaction is of primary importance. Our program facilitates both talent retention and the hiring of new employees. Indeed, an organization with a well-established prevention program tends to be more highly regarded by job seekers and current employees.

A global and integrated approach

In order to reach its goals, the program offers a various actions ranging from increasing awareness to direct intervention. Here is a list of the services used:

- Employee Assistance Program
- Coaching for managers
- Health education and screening activities
- Medical questionnaires and assessments
- Training workshops and conferences
- Disability Support
- Etc.

In connection with these services, our approach can lead to the implementation of a policy for returning to work after a prolonged absence, against harassment or promoting work-life balance.

Our program always offers solutions that are well adapted to the needs and philosophy of each organization, in a global and integrated approach.

A program that pays

The benefits of our program to improve workplace health can be quantified through the ROI, more commonly known as “return on investment”.

Of all the research reviewed by our experts, that of Harvard University stands out for its methodology and rigour, to name only one. The study in question concluded that initiatives related to wellness in the workplace have an average return of 336%, meaning savings of \$3.36 for every dollar invested. Many other Canadian and Quebec research have come to the same conclusions.

However, to achieve such success, it is essential for the organization to implement a multifaceted program covering everything from prevention to disability support.

Conclusion

All the benefits we've just discussed have been demonstrated repeatedly. Without a doubt: the success and sustainability of organizations starts with the health and well-being of their human resources.

In this sense, implementing a multifaceted program will among others lower the costs related to health, increase productivity and foster better employee satisfaction with regards to the workplace.

An integrated approach is the key!

**To find out more about this program
or to benefit from the services mentioned in this document,
CONTACT OPTIMA GLOBAL HEALTH'S TEAM OF WORKPLACE
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