

WORKPLACE  
WELLNESS

# Workplace wellness toolkit:

## Developing your own workplace wellness plan



### Introduction

If your company isn't doing a lot to promote or support workplace wellness, getting started can seem daunting.

The good news is that by taking action now, you can start to improve the health and wellbeing of your employees and your workplace right away. Even small changes can make a big difference.

When it comes to the holistic wellbeing of your workplace and helping your employees become healthy, fulfilled and productive members of your team, there are many factors to consider. For example, employee demographics, the size of your organization and your company culture will all influence how the plan works in your organization.



## How to get started?

### 1. Taking inventory (do your research)

Although you're probably excited to start implementing health initiatives right away, it's important to do an inventory to determine how your organization is doing. You might be surprised to find your company has policies in place that you are unaware of. Perhaps certain groups have undertaken health initiatives you don't even know about. You might even learn that your organization has fallen behind in certain wellness areas. A thorough inventory can help you identify priority areas, so you can allocate resources and create a plan that best addresses the needs of your organization.

#### Taking stock

Take stock of the ways your company currently supports a healthy workplace. Some examples include employee health and dental coverage, workplace ergonomics and staff access to healthy food options.

#### Gather information

Gather information from employees about their needs and interests related to health, wellness and physical activity. In smaller organizations, this can be done more informally by talking to staff directly or in a staff meeting. In larger organizations, it's common to formally survey employees or use focus groups.

#### Encourage employee buy-in

If you listen to your employee's health needs and interests, employees are more likely to be engaged with your wellness plan. Your plan will also address the real issues your workplace is facing.



## 2. Consider all aspects of workplace wellness

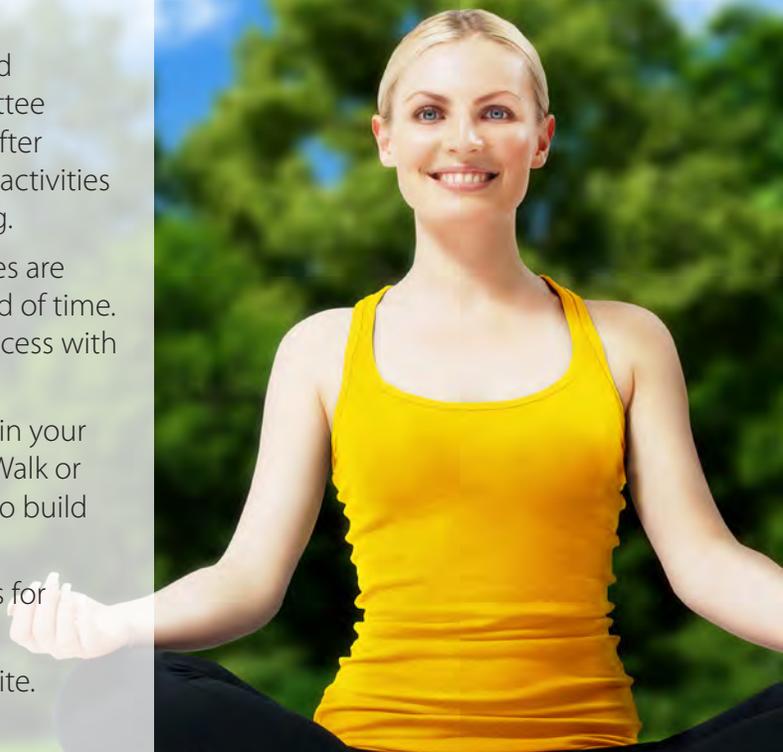
When we think about what makes us healthy, many things come to mind. Not only does our diet and physical fitness have a huge effect on our health, so do our stress levels, how supported we feel, the amount of sleep we get and the leisure time we have. Here are some key considerations and tips to consider when creating your workplace wellness plan:

### Healthy eating

- ✓ For employee gatherings, choose healthy catering options like yogurt and fruit instead of cookies or donuts.
- ✓ Fast food options will almost always be less healthy, so it's important to create a culture where it's convenient and enjoyable for employees to bring a lunch and eat at work. Ensure employees have enough kitchen space to prepare or warm up their food. A comfortable lounge or seating area is also ideal. When the work atmosphere is conducive to bringing a lunch, the trend will catch on.
- ✓ If you have a cafeteria or vending machines, ensure the choices are healthy.
- ✓ Consider offering reimbursements for dietitian services or weight management programs like Weight Watchers.
- ✓ If you have professional development days, have a dietitian talk to employees about the importance of making healthy food choices.
- ✓ Have employees submit their favourite healthy recipes or bagged lunch options and share them in the employee newsletter.

### Physical activity

- ✓ Develop a physical fitness committee that can lead employees in fitness-related activities. The committee could start a running or walking club at lunch or after work or encourage employees to try out different activities together such as yoga, rock climbing or swimming.
- ✓ Start a physical activity challenge where employees are encouraged to reach fitness goals over a set period of time. Finish the challenge by celebrating everyone's success with a party and prizes.
- ✓ Get involved in different walks or runs happening in your community. For example, start a team for the MS Walk or the Run for Arthritis. These fitness activities can also build workplace morale and improve company culture.
- ✓ Offer a spending account to reimburse employees for wellness-related expenses.
- ✓ If you have enough space, offer fitness classes onsite.





## Work/life Balance

- ✓ Flex time is the best thing a company can do to help employees maintain a good work/life balance. Employee demands outside of work are different, so if they can pick their own hours, they're more likely to find balance.
- ✓ Offer earned days off. It's often difficult for individuals to get everything accomplished without hours available during the work day. Employees with an earned day off have the freedom to tackle other responsibilities or enjoy uninterrupted time with family.
- ✓ Allow employees to work from home when possible and practical. For example, employees with small children or an elderly parent to care for may manage both work and home responsibilities more time effectively.
- ✓ Allow employees to schedule appointments during work when needed. Employees will feel less stressed and more accommodated if they can take time out of their day without worrying about losing pay or taking vacation time.
- ✓ Encourage employees to leave work at work. Employees who take work home end up tired and less productive. Individuals need time to rest so they can be alert and productive the following day.

## Company culture

- ✓ Make sure your mission, vision and values have a strong emphasis on people. The attitudes and work ethics of your employees have the power to make or break your organizational success. Every member of your organization needs to feel like they matter, belong and are an important contributor to the overall success of your company.
- ✓ Although productivity is important, workplaces can't be all about work all the time. It's important for organizations to build community and company morale. This can be done by volunteering together, celebrating people's birthdays and milestones together, or sharing potlucks.
- ✓ Recognize employees when they go above and beyond, or reach a workplace milestone. A little appreciation goes a long way.
- ✓ Corporate values are infused from the top down. It's important that senior management lead the company culture by living out the values, vision and mission of the company.





## Mental health

Mental health is directly affected by all other areas of health listed above. However, mental health can also be a lot more complicated. In fact, 500,000 Canadians are absent from work every day for psychological reasons (Partners for Mental Health). To ensure employees feel supported and get the help they need, your workplace could:

- ✓ Invite a speaker from your local mental health association to educate staff about mental health triggers, signs to watch for and how to get help or encourage someone else to get help.
- ✓ Sign up for the Not Myself Today campaign through Partners for Mental Health. You will receive useful resources to share with your employees: <http://www.notmyselftoday.ca/home>.
- ✓ Ensure counseling is included in your employee health benefit plans, or that employees are aware of affordable counseling services in your community.



## Environmental health and safety

- ✓ Make sure you follow occupational health and safety standards and regulations: <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/working-in-alberta.html>
- ✓ Designate a workplace health and safety committee to help keep your organization accountable.
- ✓ Hire an ergonomics specialist to inspect your workplace and make suggestions.
- ✓ Ensure the air quality in your building is up to code and temperatures, lighting and noise levels are conducive to good health and productivity in the work place.

### 3. Creating your wellness plan

Now that you have a proper inventory of your organization's current health and wellness and an understanding of each wellness area, you are ready to start planning.

#### Your Wellness Plan will include:

An analysis of where you're coming from and where you want to go.

This will outline the priorities determined by your inventory and employee input. If you have multiple areas to work on, feel free to create more than one plan. Your analysis might sound something like, "Many employees report very low levels of physical activity outside the workplace which could be contributing to lethargy, lower levels of productivity as well as compromised mental health. In response, our wellness plan will focus on increasing our employees' physical activity levels, so that they achieve better overall health and can reach their full potential both at work and in their personal lives."



#### Goals

Your goal will be an overarching statement of what you want to achieve. For example, "we want to increase physical activity in the workplace."

#### Objectives

Your objectives will be measurable outcomes that outline what you want to achieve. They will also include a deadline for when you want to reach the outcome.

Examples:

- "By April 2014, 40 per cent of participants will report increased physical activity levels."
- "By April 2014, 30 per cent of employees who report increased physical activity levels will also report an improved sense of wellbeing."

#### When drafting objectives remember...

- Your objectives should be achievable. If you know your employees will be resistant at first, make small changes to start out.
- While in an ideal world you will be able to measure outcomes using data, even if you don't have the means to measure, you can still find informed ways to assess your progress.



## Tactics

(The action you will take to reach your goals and objectives)

This is your action plan. If your objective is to “increase the amount of people that eat their lunch at work by 20%”, your tactics could include:

- ✓ Buy more microwaves for the lunch room
- ✓ Make the lunch room more inviting and comfortable
- ✓ Have reusable cutlery and plates available
- ✓ communicate easy lunch recipes to staff
- ✓ Use the employee newsletter to inform staff about how much healthier and cheaper it is to bring a lunch versus buying a lunch. For example, how much money you can save each year, how many calories are in a McDonald’s meal versus a homemade soup and sandwich etc.
- ✓ Start clubs at lunch to encourage employees to stay on site. ie. A book club, movie club, knitting club etc.

## Evaluation

Here’s where you find out how well you did by gathering input from staff. Once again, this can happen more formally or informally depending on the size of your company and your company’s culture and demographics. You can use a formal survey, focus groups, staff meetings etc. You will then measure your outcomes against your benchmark data to see if you reached your objectives.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand resting on a red running track with white lane markings. The hand is positioned near the start of a race, with a starting block visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people on the track.

## 4. Continuing your wellness journey

It's important to remember that working towards workplace wellness is an ongoing process. To be proactive and address important health and wellness issues, it's important to take inventories and gather input from staff often.

**Remember:** Creating a holistic workplace wellness environment doesn't happen overnight. It's something your workplace must infuse in your values, vision, policies and procedures. It requires genuine commitment and support from upper management.

A portrait of a young woman with long, dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

### The importance of communication

Effective internal communications will be essential to the success of your wellness plan. If you currently have a low level of communication with your employees, you may need to implement different communication mediums to help get the word out about your health and wellness initiatives and to improve your company culture.

For example:

- ✓ You may want a poster/memo holder installed in your elevators, or posters placed in the hallways to get the word out.
- ✓ If you don't have an employee newsletter, you may wish to start one. This is a great way to get information out to employees and build a positive company culture by celebrating employees and increasing community involvement. **Note:** If your employees are computer users, online newsletters or email newsletters will have a better readership than print.
- ✓ If your organization is small, regular staff meetings are also a great way to communicate wellness initiatives to employees and instantly get feedback.

## Limited resources: Drawing on the help of community

We understand that resources in most companies are tight. This is where drawing on community resources can help.

### Some ideas:

Many communities have low-cost counseling available through non-profit organizations. If your employee health plan doesn't include counseling, you can promote these services to your employees.

- ✓ Many community or non-profit organizations are also willing to visit your workplace to educate employees. For example, a city representative could be invited to talk about the low cost activities available through the city.
- ✓ Non-profits hold walks and runs regularly with affordable registration fees.
- ✓ Use your organization's talents. For example, if you have an employee who's an avid reader, perhaps encourage him or her to start a book club at work.



## Conclusion

Keep in mind that what works for one organization might be completely wrong for another. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and create a plan that fits your organization's size, your employee demographics, your available resources and your current level of workplace wellness. Your journey to workplace wellness will start with small changes that evolve over time through commitment, intention and good planning. Know that by making positive changes to employee health and wellness, your organization will reap the long term benefits by having happy, healthy employees who are committed to working towards organizational success.

**Best of luck on your journey!**



83176 2013/10

This toolkit is provided by Alberta Blue Cross to support employers and organizations who are interested in taking steps toward promoting workplace wellness.

For more information and additional resources, please visit [www.workplacewellnessonline.ca](http://www.workplacewellnessonline.ca).