

Benefits on Onsite Wellness Program

There are few better ways to keep your employees healthy and their medical insurance costs down than with a wellness program. Kristie Howard, Vice President, Employee Benefits, for Longfellow Benefits, who is a Certified Worksite Wellness Program Consultant, says the numbers have never been more obvious. “The *Journal of Health Affairs* did a meta-analysis overview of all of the literature on the topic and threw out lesser studies. What they found was the average return was \$3.27 for every \$1 spent on in terms of reduction of medical costs. For absenteeism, it was \$2.73 for every \$1 spent on wellness programs”

Howard says she’s seen common threads in programs which have these kinds of results. “In terms of best practices, it starts with senior leadership explaining why wellness is important to the organization and that it’s something they take seriously,” she says. “Another is making sure that your wellness program is data driven. This means understanding the needs of your employees and the risks that exist within your population—whether smoking, obesity or stress. Make sure to understand environmental or cultural factors that exist in the organization so, when the wellness program is rolled out, all of this is addressed through the data available.”

Besides seeing problems within the employee population, you can go off of national trends in health and wellness. “We often see the top three important factors are exercise, nutrition and stress and each of those can be addressed without expensive changes,” she says. “With exercise it could be as simple as the office being a part of charity walks or encouraging employees to take the stairs in the building or a walking path...When it comes to nutrition, it might just be taking a look at what’s available in the vending machines and offering better choices.”

Howard also points out other positives of wellness programs not always seen in the data. “Improved morale is one of the more intangible benefits,” she says. “It also helps employee retention and recruitment...Though you can’t measure all of these so easily, it’s clear that wellness programs are one of the best investments an employer could make.”