

76% of Canadian Employers Plan to Increase Support for Wellness Programs



Getting support for workplace wellness programs has been an uphill battle in many companies' but the tide may be turning.

According to the 2013/2014 Staying@Work Survey by Towers Watson, 76% of Canadian organizations are planning to *increase* their support for workforce health programs over the next two years.

The survey was conducted between May and July 2013 in North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia and completed by a total of 892 employers, including 114 in Canada and 199 in the US, representing all major industry sectors.

Canadian employers continue to offer basic health awareness and prevention services:

- 45% offer health risk assessments
- Close to 40% offer biometric screenings
- Vaccination programs, such as flu shot clinics, are provided by approximately 80%
- Web-based health information tools are available at 65% of participating organizations.

Some have started to expand from these traditional services to implement newer approaches. For example:

- 11% have expanded access to on-site health services, such as a physician or dietitian
- 20% are offering additional access to behavioural health services through virtual sessions
- 18% are promoting the use of mobile apps to complement health promotion programs.

The news wasn't all good, however.

Although 43% of Canadian respondents are focused on workplace culture where workers are responsible for their health and understand its importance, only 10% report having a formal health strategy and just 13% report having effectively

communicated that strategy.

But there's hope'18% of respondents are planning to implement formal plans with defined goals, while an additional 25% are planning to communicate and deliver the value behind the strategy over the next three years.

Another roadblock is the workers themselves.

Despite expanding the choice of wellness activities offered, employers have seen relatively small increases in participation rates by workers for most activities.

The 2013/2014 survey found that about 1 in 4 employees is participating in health risk assessments and biometric screenings, just marginally higher than the participation rates reported in the 2011/2012 survey.

Respondents said the top two barriers to worker participation were lack of:

1. Employee engagement in their own health and well-being
2. Adequate budget or staff to support effective programs.

The root causes of low participation rates may be directly linked to the top three health risks cited by respondents:

1. Stress (83%)
2. Lack of physical activity (49%)
3. Obesity (41%).

The key to a successful wellness program' The study results suggest that highly effective organizations:

- Take a broader view of health and productivity
- Focus on different metrics
- Build strategies to develop and sustain a workplace culture that supports workforce health.