

Poll Results: Wellness Programs Shouldn't Be Required But Encouraged



Getting management to invest in the company's OHS program is hard enough. Getting the money for an optional wellness program—that is, a program that helps workers lose weight, get in shape, quit smoking and address other general health issues—may be impossible. So maybe the government should require companies to have wellness programs.

We recently asked if you thought companies should be required to have wellness programs. No one polled said that these programs are a waste of time and money. But you did say:

- No, but government should provide incentives for companies to create such programs, such as workers' comp premium discounts. (54%)
- Yes. Such programs improve workplace safety and have financial benefits. (29%)
- No. Such programs shouldn't be mandatory but remain optional. (17%)

Thus, the consensus seems to be that although wellness programs shouldn't be mandated, they are valuable and so should at least be encouraged.

If wellness programs stay voluntary, how do you get management to invest in them? A new study can help.

New Study Demonstrates Benefits of Wellness Programs

The study on workplace wellness programs suggests that such programs may lead to improved worker health, increased productivity and reduced costs for employers.

Conducted by Zoe Consulting Inc., the researchers examined multiple years of medical claims data, including health care spending, workers' comp and short-term disability claims, for two groups: companies with wellness programs and companies without such programs.

The wellness programs studied focus on identifying those at risk for core conditions, including asthma, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive lung disease, diabetes and hypertension, and controlling or mitigating those conditions through early detection and prescribed therapies. Worker participants are encouraged to focus on proactive versus reactive health care.

The study found that both workers and their employers benefited from having wellness programs. Researchers found that:

- Wellness programs reduced medical spending by up to \$1,332 per member per year.
- On average, the wellness program saved \$2,554 per workers' comp claimant and \$451 per short-term disability claimant.
- Program participants returned to work up to 9 days sooner from workers' comp and 17 days sooner from short-term disability.
- 85% of workers who participated in the wellness program maintained or reduced their health risk level.
- Employers experienced a 6% average annual medical cost reduction overall and an average reduction of 13.5% in annual medical costs for members with core conditions.

Here's a [summary](#) of the study results and a [white paper](#)

discussing the study in detail.

And you can go to [Safety Smart](#) for wellness-related safety talks such as:

- [Six Habits of Healthy People](#)
- [Strategies for Winning the War on Weight](#)
- [Staying Strong and Healthy](#).

Not a subscriber to SafetySmart? Sign up for a [free trial](#).