

Workplace Wellness Programs Aren't Just for Big Companies



Studies have shown that both workers and employers benefit from workplace wellness programs. For example, [one study](#) suggests that such programs may lead to improved worker health, increased productivity and reduced costs for employers.

But don't assume wellness programs are only possible in big companies. A study from researchers at the [Colorado School of Public Health](#) found that small businesses are good targets for implementing workplace wellness programs.

An article on the study, 'Implementation of a Worksite Wellness Program Targeting Small Businesses: The Pinnacol Assurance Health Risk Management Study,' was published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

According to past research, nearly 80% of large employers offer wellness programs, but less than one-third of small businesses engage in these programs.

'Small businesses face significant barriers when considering worksite wellness programs because they lack the money, time and knowledge about how to implement them,' said the study's lead author, Lee Newman, MD, MA, professor of environmental and occupational health at the Colorado School of Public Health at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus.

Between 2010 and 2014, Pinnacol Assurance, Colorado's leading

provider of workers' comp insurance, offered a free health risk management program and implementation assistance to its policyholders. The wellness program first offered workers an online questionnaire to assess their health risks and then provided feedback in the form of a letter that offered suggestions for health improvement. Workers could also choose to talk to a health coach via telephone and use online educational resources.

Of the 260 small businesses that participated in the program, 6,507 employees, or 47.9% of eligible employees, took the health risk assessment. Of those participants:

- 34.3% were overweight
- 25.6% were obese
- 22% reported depression
- 20.4% faced chronic fatigue.

The study found that, based on workers' self-reported health risks and disease rates, there are opportunities to address important modifiable health risks in the small business workforce.

In addition, 'we demonstrated that Colorado small businesses will adopt worksite wellness programs if the program is provided free of charge and comes with advice on how to execute it,' said Newman. 'This study provides important on-the-ground insight into how to structure these programs.'

Karyn Gonzales, Pinnacol's vice president of medical operations and healthcare strategy, said, 'The study has generated robust data indicating that worksite wellness programs have the potential to improve the health of participants. Study data also linked health risk factors to the frequency and cost of workplace injuries and demonstrated a medical and productivity savings of \$2.03 for every \$1.00 invested in our worksite wellness program.'