

Workplace Health Program Definition and Description

DEFINITION

Workplace health programs are a coordinated and comprehensive set of health promotion and protection strategies implemented at the worksite that includes programs, policies, benefits, environmental supports, and links to the surrounding community designed to encourage the health and safety of all employees.

DESCRIPTION

A comprehensive approach puts policies and interventions in place that address multiple risk factors and health conditions concurrently and recognizes that the interventions and strategies chosen may influence multiple organization levels including individual employee behavior change, organizational culture, and the worksite environment. It is important for the overall workplace health program to contain a combination of individual and organizational level strategies and interventions to influence health. The strategies and interventions available fall into four major categories:

- Health-related programs—opportunities available to employees at the workplace or through outside organizations to begin, change, or maintain health behaviors.
- Health-related policies—formal or informal written statements that are designed to protect or promote employee health. They affect large groups of employees simultaneously.
- Health benefits—part of an overall compensation package including health insurance coverage and other services or discounts regarding health.
- Environmental supports— refer to the physical factors at and nearby the workplace that help protect and enhance employee health.

Additionally, comprehensive workplace health programs can benefit from community linkages that are partnerships with surrounding community organizations to offer health-related programs and services to employees when the employer does not have the capacity or expertise to do so or provide support for healthy lifestyles to employees when not at the workplace.

Within this framework and approach any number of specific health risks (e.g., physical inactivity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, stress), conditions (e.g., obesity, musculoskeletal disorders, mental health), and diseases (e.g., heart disease and stroke, diabetes, cancer, arthritis) can be addressed.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

- *Healthy People* (www.healthypeople.gov) provides science-based, 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. Comprehensive workplace health programs as defined by *Healthy People* contain the following five elements:
 1. Health education, which focuses on skill development and lifestyle behavior change along with information dissemination and awareness building, preferably tailored to employees' interests and needs.
 2. Supportive social and physical environments that include an organization's expectations regarding healthy behaviors and policies that promote health and reduce risk of disease.
 3. Integrating the worksite program into your organization's structure.
 4. Linkage to related programs like employee assistance programs (EAPs) and programs to help employees balance work and family.
 5. Worksite screening programs ideally linked to medical care to ensure follow-up and appropriate treatment as necessary.
- CDC Workplace Health Model (<http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/pdfs/WorkplaceHealthModel.pdf>) a systematic and stepwise process of building a workplace health promotion program that emphasizes four main steps:
 1. An assessment to define employee health and safety risks and concerns and describe current health promotion activities, capacity, needs, and barriers.
 2. A planning process to develop the components of a workplace health programs including goal determination; selecting priority interventions; and building an organizational infrastructure.
 3. Program implementation involving all the steps needed to put health promotion strategies and interventions into place and making them available to employees.
 4. An evaluation of efforts to systematically investigate the merit (e.g., quality), worth (e.g., effectiveness), and significance (e.g., importance) of an organized health promotion action/activity.
- NIOSH Essential Elements (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-140/pdfs/2010-140.pdf>) identifies 20 components of a comprehensive work-based health protection and health promotion program and includes both guiding principles and practical direction for organizations seeking to develop effective workplace programs. The Essential Element's 20 components are divided into four areas: Organizational Culture and Leadership; Program Design; Program Implementation and Resources; and Program Evaluation.

For Individual Employees and Workers

Wellness is defined as a dynamic process of learning new life skills and becoming aware of and making conscious choices toward a more balanced and healthy lifestyle across seven dimensions: Social, Physical, Emotional, Career, Intellectual, Environmental, Spiritual (Adapted from WHO: The Seven Dimensions of Wellness). (<http://www.paho.org/English/AD/dpc/nc/7-dimensions-wellness.pdf>). Through a balance in these seven dimensions, individuals develop their own resources and capacity to continue a healthy lifestyle and positively engage in all facets of their life (e.g., work, community, family).