

Worksite Wellness Policy

Why do I need a worksite wellness policy?

Worksite wellness policies can have long-term impacts on the health of employees and the community. At the same time, these initiatives can also reduce health care costs, increase productivity, reduce absenteeism and improve employee morale. Many employers have implemented worksite wellness programs to promote the health and well-being of their employees, but have not integrated these programs into written policies. Written worksite wellness policies are critical to the sustainability and effectiveness of worksite wellness efforts. A range of different legal and policy issues must be considered when developing and implementing worksite wellness policies. Well-crafted worksite wellness policies can provide essential direction and leadership in creating a culture of wellness and support for the long-term health and well-being of employees, consumers and the surrounding communities.



Employers across the country are exploring innovative approaches to worksite wellness policies that incorporate a broad vision of health. Increasingly, these initiatives are geared toward improving the health of the workplace through healthy food procurement and tobacco-free policies. As employers seek to reduce health care costs through the improvement of employee health, worksite wellness policies hold great promise in the movement toward greater health, productivity and well-being.

Where do I begin?

Once you have identified your worksite wellness goals and objectives, it's a good idea to review and adjust worksite policies or develop new ones. Focus policy development on key components of your wellness goals. For example:

- Increased Health Awareness and Education
- Losing Weight and Eating Healthier Foods
- Increased Physical Activity
- A Smoke or Tobacco-free Work Place
- Reduced Stress

What should I include in a wellness policy?

Purpose or Problem Statement: Include a brief section on the importance of worksite wellness and how programming can improve staff health.

Goals and Objectives:

Goals are broad statements that provide the overall context for what the wellness program is trying to accomplish. Goals need to be realistic enough to attain and yet demanding enough to bring about a clear improvement in the problem area.

Objectives are more concrete statements describing what the program is trying to achieve. The objective

should be specific and measurable, so that they can be used to evaluate your program.

Plan Development: Include when and how you will update your plan to provide wellness programming to employees. Will you complete an assessment every year? Where will this document be housed? How will new employees be aware of your program and policies?

Evaluation: Include a process to evaluate your wellness programming. To see if the bottom line was affected, attendance, sick leave usage, and employee turnover can be reviewed before, during and after interventions. If your organization is self-insured, you can also review health care usage.

Legal Bounds of Wellness Policies and Programs

As employers increasingly turn to creative solutions to the health care problem, such as wellness policies, they should be aware of regulations under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Americans with Disability Act (ADA), and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The following are general guidelines:



- The wellness program must be a voluntary plan.
- Medical information obtained in the course of conducting the plan must remain confidential.
- The program must not penalize nonparticipants.
- Medical examinations should not be conducted in the workplace.

At a minimum, employers interested in implementing wellness programs should consider the following recommendations:

- Frame incentives in a wellness plan as rewards rather than as penalties or disincentives.
- Provide accommodations for individuals with disabilities who choose to participate in a wellness plan.
- If providing health premium discounts or other health insurance rewards to plan participants, provide accommodations for those whose medical conditions make it inadvisable to participate.
- Avoid setting wellness plan incentives on specific weight-related criteria (i.e., reaching a specific BMI).
- Keep all medical information obtained as part of a wellness plan confidential, and segregate the information from other personnel documents.
- Where possible, have a third-party administrator handle all medical information and have the administrator shield the information from the employer.

Sample Wellness Policies

The following pages include examples of comprehensive worksite wellness policies. Policy examples are meant to be used as a template for creating your own organizational policies. The following topics are included:

- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Tobacco
- Injury Prevention
- Ergonomics

- Emergency Preparedness

Resources:

http://www.tuftshealthplan.com/employers/health/pdfs/worksite_wellness_program_development_guide.pdf

http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/worksite/how_to_plan.htm