

# IT'S OUR BUSINESS

Addressing addiction and mental health in the workplace

Information for Leaders

## Workplace health programs: Frequently asked questions

### Do these programs cost a lot?

Workplace health programs do not have to be costly. Low-cost activities include providing brochures and resource information, having a speaker come in at lunch (many health organizations provide free speakers, including your employee assistance program/employee and family assistance program) or having workers organize fitness activities at lunchtime or after work.

### How do we encourage people to participate in health-promoting activities?

Make them fun! Activities that require too much effort, equipment or planning may seem overwhelming. Make it easy for people to participate by keeping activities simple. It's also important to ask employees for their input. A committee can decide that there are too many overweight employees, for instance, and that an exercise room is the answer. But if employees aren't interested in exercising, and would rather attend a weight loss support group at lunch, then the exercise equipment might not get used. Other ways to encourage people to participate include

- giving employees incentives for participating
- providing work time for employees to participate
- developing methods for employees to provide input on the activities or things they would like to see provided in the workplace (e.g., health

and safety committees they can join or a suggestion box they can contribute to)

### We offered a tobacco cessation program and nobody came. Why?

It's very important to involve employees in making decisions about programs that you hope they will attend. Not everybody who smokes is interested in quitting—that might be too big a step. To encourage and support employee participation, it may be important to include and offer support such as incentives for participation, providing a supportive environment and providing work time to participate.

Some smokers might be interested in looking at ways to cut down, while others might like to attend an information session on nicotine patches or other methods to quit with assistance. Start where your audience is and provide programs that they are interested in.

### References

1. Health Canada. (n.d.). *Tobacco reduction—common questions*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.health.alberta.ca/initiatives/tobacco-reduction-questions.html>
2. Statistics Canada. (2010). *Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS)*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/tobac-tabac/research-recherche/stat/index-eng.php>



## For more information

Alberta Health Services, Addiction and Mental Health offices offer a range of prevention and treatment services to assist businesses in managing workplace addiction and mental health concerns. For more information, and to find an addiction and mental health services office near you, please call the 24-hour Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322 or the 24-hour Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-303-2642. For more workplace-specific resources, please visit: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/2672.asp>



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## Ways to promote workplace health

- Have pamphlets, videos and books available to your employees on topics like smoking, alcohol and drug use, problem gambling, stress management, weight control and anger management.
- Provide courses and seminars on topics such as substance abuse, problem gambling, heart-smart cooking, anger management, shift work, dealing with conflict, and healthy eating. These can be made available to family members too.
- Develop a health committee at your workplace. Identify interested and appropriate people, and call a meeting. If your company already has a health and safety committee, suggest that the committee make health promotion a priority.
- Give employees more control over their workplace environment. Employees need to be heard, to have input on decisions that affect them, to be treated fairly and to participate in solving problems. Create opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making and to provide input and suggestions regularly. Ensure that they are kept informed through ongoing communication. One way to collect this type of information is through general health and interest surveys.
- Invite speakers from health and community agencies to talk with leadership and employees about the health or counselling services they provide.
- Support employees in making improvements to their own health. Creating a supportive environment is an important step, alongside offering health-promoting programs. Health-promoting programs may include supporting employees in quitting smoking, making healthy food alternatives available in lunchrooms, creating safe and attractive stairways and encouraging their use, and providing exercise equipment and encouraging its use during breaks.
- Introduce flexibility in work scheduling to assist employees in balancing their work and family needs. Allow them to adjust their schedule so they can successfully care for aging parents, raise a family or adjust to physical ailments. Explore alternatives like job sharing and working from home to enable employees to juggle work and home demands successfully.

*Being healthy and feeling well is about more than just the absence of disease.*

Some ideas about how you can maintain or enhance your own health include

- doing things that will improve your health, such as eating well, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep and getting regular medical checkups
- reducing or stopping behaviour that puts your health at risk
- learning to manage stress in healthy ways, such as exercising, talking things out with someone you trust, meditating, getting a hobby or simply relaxing your mind and body
- taking steps to reduce stress when you can and learning healthy ways to manage stress when you can't
- getting support with the ups and downs of everyday living from friends, co-workers and family members
- getting professional help when you need it
- participating in workplace wellness programs or committees to make your workplace as healthy and safe as possible



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## Workplace culture and substance use

Workplace culture refers to what is considered normal and acceptable behaviour at work. This is the unwritten way of doing things, including attitudes in the workplace, and it may or may not support the formal policies in place. As a leader, you contribute to establishing the culture of your team and work environment. A healthy work team will not encourage or tolerate the use of nonmedicinal mind-altering substances at work.

Alcohol and other drug use continue to rank high on the list of concerns that result in referrals to an employee assistance program (EAP) or employee and family assistance program (EFAP). While there is no foolproof way of preventing these problems from affecting employees, there are some steps that you, as a leader, can take toward the prevention of alcohol and other drug-related problems in the workplace:

- Set a good example and be a role model by recognizing that your actions send a strong message to other employees about what is and is not acceptable behaviour.
- Know your organization's guidelines and policies on alcohol and drug use, take a clear stand and enforce them consistently.
- Make sure that the employees on your team know about the guidelines and policies regarding substance use, as well as the support programs your organization provides, such as an EAP/EFAP, treatment programs, short-term disability or modified work.
- Take a look at the role alcohol use plays in your team's social activities and consider how this contributes to the culture of your team at work.

### For more information

Alberta Health Services (AHS), Addiction and Mental Health offers information, prevention and treatment services through a province wide network of offices, facilities and funded services. Services include a toll-free helpline, prevention and education, detoxification, outpatient counselling, opioid dependency programs and residential treatment.

AHS, Addiction and Mental Health has counsellors with specific training in workplace issues. This allows us to better meet the needs of employees and supervisors, and to respond readily to referrals from the business community. Other specific services for the Alberta workplace include

- addictions-related information and prevention resources for the workplace
- addictions education, employer consultation and supervisory training
- the Addiction and Mental Health Business & Industry Clinic, which offers residential treatment for employees who have problems related to alcohol or other drugs

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## Responsible hosting of workplace social events

Many workplaces host social events, such as staff barbecues and Christmas parties. Sometimes alcohol is served at these functions. Staff are also sometimes expected to host clients or be hosted as a client as part of their official or unofficial job duties. It is very important to practice responsible hosting when holding a workplace function, as there may be liability issues if employees cause harm to themselves or others after using alcohol at a work function. If you decide to serve alcohol at these events, here are some tips:

- Always have non-alcoholic beverages available.
- Hire a bartender to mix standard, measured drinks.
- Make sure that the bar is attended at all times, and has designated opening and closing times.
- Make sure food is available whenever the bar is open.
- Offer taxi/bus services or accommodation arrangements to ensure that those guests who have been drinking do not drive.
- Encourage responsible drinking by setting a tone for the event that does not emphasize drinking, and offer alternative activities, like dancing or other games.
- Ensure all of the above information is communicated to employees before and during social events so that all leadership and employees are aware.

- Develop guidelines about hosting and entertaining with alcohol. Be sure to address situations when the employee is the client and when the employee hosts clients. Share the guidelines with employees and also consider other ways to entertain without alcohol.
- Consider how your organization celebrates. Brainstorm a variety of ways your organization can celebrate organizational success or employee success in ways that don't involve alcohol or other drugs.

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## Promoting health and wellness

Promoting workplace health and wellness is valuable, both as a way to retain and attract employees and as an ethical responsibility. But how does an organization move from good intentions in building a program to getting good results? This can be accomplished by working together. Any group of interested employees can work together to create a healthier work environment.

You can provide leadership and promote health within your own working group or by connecting with other work units within your organization. Your initiatives may be informal, or you can set up a workplace health committee. In larger organizations, you can involve safety representatives, members from occupational health and safety, someone from the social committee, an employee assistance program (EAP) or employee and family assistance program (EFAP) representative and other interested employees and managers. If your organization already has an established health and safety committee, encourage the integration of health-promoting topics.

Examples of some initiatives you and your workplace health group can undertake include

- setting up and maintaining a display of pamphlets and brochures aimed at employee health
- organizing information sessions for employees and their families on health-related topics
- organizing lunchtime exercise sessions or walks
- providing fun social activities that promote physical activity, such as hallway bowling, noon

baseball games and badminton tournaments

- promote information about the workplace EAP/EFAP
- participating in the development or annual review of workplace policies that involve health and wellness

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## Steps for building your workplace health program

Follow these steps to promote health and wellness within your workplace.

### Step 1: Get support from management.

Strong organizational, management and leadership support is essential for the success of workplace health programming. This support also creates and promotes a positive workplace culture. The organization needs to be committed to generating the human and financial capital required to provide health programming to their employees. Ways to demonstrate support include

- developing a vision or mission statement that outlines commitment to the health of employees
- budgeting for workplace health programs and activities
- communicating regularly with staff about resources and initiatives
- creating workplace policies and implementation and enforcement strategies, with employee feedback

### Step 2: Find out what employees need and want.

It is critical that employees at all levels participate in developing a workplace health initiative. Effective workplace health programs must reflect the interests of employees. To find out what employees want in a workplace health program, employers can meet informally with

staff, conduct a written employee health and interest survey, install a suggestion box or hold formal meetings.

### Step 3: Put together a plan.

Once you have gathered information about what employees want, develop an action plan for a workplace health program. Identify goals, timelines and the resources needed. The planning process will help highlight what can and cannot be done, based on what is available. It is important to continue working with employees throughout the planning and implementation process.

Develop an evaluation plan alongside your action plan to demonstrate that your workplace is achieving what you want and to show the employer benefits over time, such as decreased absenteeism and decreased health costs to the company. More information on monitoring and evaluating can be found in Step 7.

### Step 4: Build commitment.

Encourage those planning and developing a workplace health program to spread the word and get support from others within the organization, especially top-level management. Have management actively involved and participating. Encourage employee commitment by being an active leader, developing and implementing activities people are interested in and rewarding progress.

## Step 5: Put activities in place.

Once a plan is in place, it's time to act on it.

Activities should

- raise awareness and provide education about health issues, to give employees the information they need to make informed choices
- build skills to encourage, support and enable people to keep themselves and their families healthy
- create a supportive work environment to send out a strong message about your commitment to health and safety in the workplace

## Step 6: Communicate your activities.

Effective communication is essential for engaging employees, providing information and promoting employee health initiatives. Be sure to use multiple methods to communicate health initiatives, programming, education and awareness opportunities. Communication methods can include

- notice boards
- team briefings
- company intranet
- email
- paycheque stuffers
- staff surveys
- focus groups
- health and safety committees
- employee orientation to health and safety and benefit options offered by the organization
- manager distributions
- social media

## Step 7: Monitor, evaluate and revise your activities.

As with any initiative, it is important to regularly evaluate whether or not a workplace health program is working, and explore ways to make it better. Celebrate successes!

Employers can evaluate and track the success of their programs with the following information: achieved program goals, human resource data (e.g., absenteeism, stress leave or injury rates), employee assistance program (EAP) or employee and family assistance program (EFAP) data, employee participation rates, changes in health-related behaviour, increased knowledge and awareness of health-related topics.

There is a saying that success breeds success. What's important is starting, no matter how small or simple. As employees get involved and start to enjoy the benefits of improved health and wellness, the committee can grow and tackle larger projects.

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