



Simple Wellness Solutions

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*Need support creating  
a wellness program  
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Government of Alberta

## Building a Workplace Wellness Program

By: HealthyAlberta.com

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There is no single right way to approach workplace wellness programs but winning programs share common success factors. These include commitment from management, employee involvement, adequate resources, and a policy on workplace health that goes hand in hand with the organization's mission, vision and values.

### A Range of Approaches

Although the goal is to eventually have a long-term, comprehensive workplace wellness program, some companies prefer to begin with a single program at a basic level. For example, the first steps could be as simple as offering lunch-hour sessions on first aid or healthy eating; or they could launch a pilot project to find out how interested employees are to ensure employees needs are being met before taking on anything more ambitious. This approach provides a chance to show the impact on employees and the workplace so management will be more willing to consider a larger and more far-reaching strategy.

Other companies plan a variety of initiatives to meet the needs of the different types of people that make up their workforce. And some decide to develop a sound business case, complete with a health strategy, before attempting any type of program. Companies want to ensure that a new program is fully integrated with their overall business vision and mission.

### Success Factors

Whether your company chooses to think big from the outset or to start with something smaller, always keep in mind the following key success factors:

- support and participation from management;
- employee involvement in planning;
- programs that meet employee needs;
- a realistic budget; and
- continuous review.

In sports, a game plan is a series of steps that a team must follow to accomplish its goal of winning. Most winning teams plan to win. Organizations also need game plans, even if they don't call them by that name.

Good planning will help to ensure that your workplace wellness program happens the way you want it to, and that costs can be identified in advance and kept within budget. Good planning prevents small problems from becoming bigger.

### Steps in Planning a Program

Obtain management support. You may need to develop a business case to convince managers that workplace wellness is a business strategy—that employee health and job satisfaction affects their productivity. Employees need to see evidence that senior management believes in and is committed to employee health.

Establish a planning committee. Members can include representatives from employee groups as well as from human resources, health and safety, and communications.



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Collect information. To prove that your program is beneficial, establish a benchmark before the program begins. You may wish to look at employee satisfaction, absenteeism rates, stress levels, drug costs or WCB expenses. Assess what workplace facilities are available to support employees to make healthy choices such as showers and change areas or a secure place to store a bicycle. Assess employee needs through a survey or questionnaire, suggestion box or focus group. Communicate the results.

Develop the plan to reflect the information gathered. Include program objectives, activities and how you are going to measure whether your objectives were met. Keep the plan flexible. You may have to change direction in response to employee feedback or changes in the company's structure.

Get management approval. Support for staff time and a budget are needed.

Put activities in place. Offer a variety of activities that create awareness, increase knowledge, develop skills, and provide social interaction. (Activities could include walking clubs, participation in national campaigns such as Workplace Wellness Week, SummerActive, WinterActive, corporate challenge, golf days, and newsletters that provide information about community resources.) Workplaces can also make it easier for employees to make healthy choices by providing flextime to allow employees to fit activity in when it is convenient or by subsidizing programs in cooperation with community or private fitness facilities. A policy on catering for meetings can ensure that healthy foods are offered.

Evaluate the plan. Share your successes with others, learn from your mistakes and modify activities.

A workplace wellness program doesn't have to be complicated or a huge investment. Just do it. Get support from management, bring a few committed people together to generate some ideas and get started.