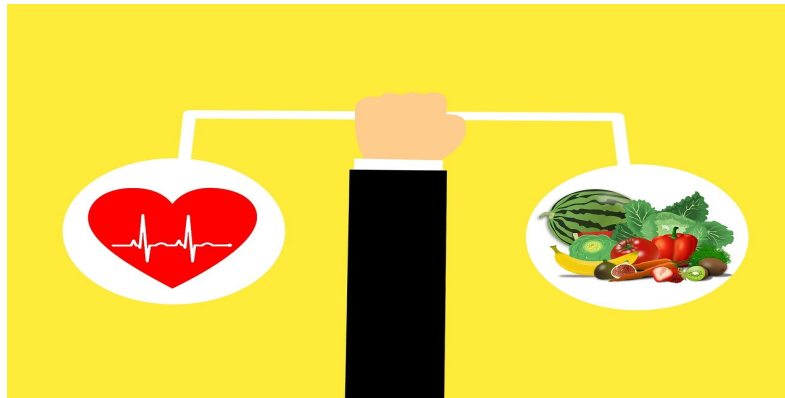


National Wellness Month



August is National Wellness Month, National Immunization Awareness Month, and National Eye Exam Month. All these topics are crucial to an individual's everyday health. Wellness for the Workplace (W4TWP), as the name implies, is a passionate proponent of wellness.

The primary goal of W4TWP is to help organizations see that their profits and healthy workers go hand in hand. Companies are only as healthy as their sickest worker. When companies ignore the health and wellness of their workers, they lose money.

No organization can have significant profits with a bunch of unhealthy workers! Sick or unhealthy employees cost their organizations \$150 to \$250 billion every year!

Even though August is National Wellness Month, organizations should aggressively promote physical and mental wellness in the workplace every day. This aggressive promotion should go far beyond just preventing workers' compensation injuries or offering employer-sponsored health insurance.

Webster's Dictionary defines **wellness as the** quality or state of being in good health, especially as an actively sought-after goal.

Very early on, the Greeks understood the concept of wellness, which they termed Eudaimonia. Eudaimonia means complete well-being or good health. The basic idea behind eudaimonia is overall or total health is multi-dimensional. W4TWP has categorized these dimensions of health as the 4 Ps of Wellness:

1. Physical
2. Psychologic
3. Psychosocial
4. Professional

When one or more components of well-being are missing, health **is not** optimal.

In the US, full-time employees spend over one-third of their time at work. The workplace is the perfect environment for providing easier access to health education, literacy, and wellness programs that increase workers' overall quality of health.

The biggest nemesis to individual health is the almost total reliance on medication to solve health conditions after they happen rather than finding ways to prevent the disease from starting. It is substantially cheaper to prevent chronic diseases than it is to treat them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that in 2022, 90% of all healthcare costs each year go towards chronic disease treatment (about \$3.8 trillion). Shockingly, only 3% of the total amount spent on chronic disease was for actual disease prevention.

Preventing and reducing chronic disease can be a daunting task. Especially when you consider that, according to the American Journal of Managed Care:

- 75% of US workers have one (1) chronic condition.
- 54% have multiple chronic conditions.
- 17% have five (5) or more chronic conditions.

Approximately 80 percent of all large employers in the US provide at least one wellness program. These programs are usually Disease Management Programs or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). While these programs are provided as a benefit, they don't continually advance or improve workers' health.

Healthcare, insurance, and wellness are multi-trillion-dollar annual businesses in the US. Employer-sponsored health insurance and wellness programs are expensive benefits to offer. It only makes good financial sense for companies to thoroughly examine whether these programs are a good fit for their workers.

Disease Management Programs have historically reached approximately 20%—40% of employees in the workplace.

Experts believe these participation rates are higher because the organization often mandates the programs. For example, if a worker is a smoker, the employer could mandate participation in a smoking cessation program. If the worker is successful, their premiums for group health insurance will not increase.

When workers were polled regarding why they did or did not use disease management programs, these were the most frequent responses:

- They believe they can make health-related changes without the program.
- Lack of time to participate.
- They believe they are healthy, so the program is not intended for them.
- They don't understand the importance of chronic disease prevention.

Many organizations receive data about health conditions dominant in their workplaces from their group health insurance providers. Companies use this information to help determine which wellness programs to offer and implement.

While information regarding disease prevalence is helpful, a huge part of successful disease prevention and management is related to individual use. If the programs aren't used, they can be effective.

Organizations mistakenly assume that once a wellness program is offered, their responsibility to the health of their workforce ends. This opinion is short-sighted and is against their best financial interest.

Once organizations decide which programs to offer, they must increase the resources (time, analysis, and money) needed to promote and implement them. At a minimum, consideration should be given to how health risk assessments, health education, and health literacy platforms, programs, and services can be effective supplements.

The CDC says that health education and health literacy can help reduce mortality from chronic conditions. However, most organizations only passively pursue or provide access to health education or health literacy information. As a result, their disease management programs only achieve mediocre results.

Anxiety and stress in the workplace are important issues that lack serious discussion. Consider the following:

- In 2023, an Atticus Study found that stress and anxiety are the most common workplace injuries in the US.
- The US Surgeon General says that 52% of all workplace injuries are related to stress and anxiety.
- Employees who said they experienced high anxiety levels at work were almost twice (2X) as likely to suffer from multiple work-related injuries than workers who did not.

Here are other statistics that should concern organizations:

- The American Institute of Stress (AIS) says that approximately one million Americans miss work daily because of stress.
- 60%–80% of outpatient clinic visits are related to stress, which increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes.
- Workplace stress is responsible for 120,000 deaths every year, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA.)

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) came into favor in the US in the 1930s. They were initially designed to help workers who were struggling with alcoholism. They later evolved to include other substance use disorders as well as providing mental health counseling.

Historically, EAPs have reached approximately 3%—5% of workers. Workers say they don't use EAPs because:

- They don't really understand what EAP is.
- They are worried that their employer will have access to their mental health information.
- They are reluctant to admit to having mental health problems.

Many organizations, including most State and Federal agencies, offer EAPs mostly because other large organizations do. Just because other companies offer EAPs does not mean your organization should. When you consider the statistics regarding anxiety and stress, EAPs do nothing to address these critical mental health issues.

W4TWP believes that traditional EAPs, as currently structured, are a total waste of money and should be dismantled or, at the very least, retooled. If organizations aren't going to revise or reboot their EAPs to make them more functional, then they should be scrapped.

Evidence-based research supports our assertion of their historical ineffectiveness. The resources organizations waste on EAPs could be better used to strengthen other programs that have a better chance of improving employee mental and physical health.

Harvard University says that efficient wellness programs can provide as much as a 3:1 return on investment related to employee healthcare costs. Harvard goes on to say employee wellness programs are the most critical element in boosting the quality of an organization's customer service.

When employees are content and healthy, they communicate more positively and professionally with customers, which makes customers happier and more likely to purchase.

The HEALS Integrated Wellness Strategies can help organizations reboot their EAPs and improve their disease management programs for their workers.

If you are interested in W4TWP speaking to your HR/Benefits Management Department about improving your [EAP or Disease Management Programs](#), click the link to schedule a keynote, lunch and learn, or webinar.