
WORKPLACE MATTERS

Businesses continue adding wellness programs

Given the state of the economy, you might think businesses would be reducing benefits such as wellness programs. Pacific-

Source Health Plans, in Springfield, reports that while some employers have cut back in this area, overall the number of participating employers has kept growing.

"According to WELCOA (Wellness Councils of America) a proven wellness program can save \$3 for

everyone \$1 spent," said Dr. Stephen Marks, chief medical officer for PacificSource. "These programs also increase employee morale and productivity. Business leaders see these programs as a valuable strategy to control increases in health care costs and insurance premiums."

GloryBee Foods in Eugene ment in response to the downturn.

"We decided to expand our wellness program to encourage positive changes in the physical and mental health of our employees," said Rae-Jean Wilson, human resource manager at GloryBee. "We've seen the data that supports a high return on every dollar spent in this area."

In addition to providing preventative health information, GloryBee reimburses employees for gym memberships, weight loss programs and for participating in fun walks or runs that support community causes.

Some companies that discontinue their wellness programs due to shrinking budgets expect to reinstate them when the economy improves.

Jeri Ray, insurance administrator for Timber Products Company, said it had a popular on-site wellness program in 2007. Over 75 percent of the employees participated.

"It's impossible to calculate the total return on investment from these programs, but I'll never forget an employee coming up to me and saying the program was the most wonderful thing because she found out she had diabetes during a wellness screening," Ray said. "She was able to take steps immediately to manage the diabetes, preventing long-term consequences. How do you measure this type of prevention?"

Many wellness programs have a monthly theme such as nutrition, fitness, personal safety, financial health and interpersonal relationships. Trends in wellness programs include computer and technology-based activities, such as online support groups for specific health issues or the use of social networking sites.

Charis Allenbaugh, PacificSource's wellness coordinator, has tips for businesses that want to start or expand their wellness programs:

"Form a wellness committee with representatives from all levels of your organization. Plan activities and

themes a year ahead. Engage employees by offering fun competitions or a monthly healthy luncheon with speakers on different topics."

Allenbaugh encourages employers to use an incentive-based approach to get their employees to participate.

Most health insurers offer wellness programs at little or no cost. If your insurance company doesn't, the Wellness Council of America sells a program for a subscription fee of \$365.

Recently, the Well Group formed in the Eugene-Springfield area to support local wellness coordinators. Its next meeting is Aug. 4. Contact Mary Joy Sahara, EWEB's wellness coordinator, at (541) 484-2411.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or (541) 682-7224.



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