

CLIENT ADVISORY

Three Key Components that Help Employees on the Path to Wellness and Productivity

In today's 24/7 world, employees' work and personal lives often collide. Knowing the stress that comes with juggling responsibilities, some employers encourage their workers to take advantage of company-sponsored wellness benefits. Increasingly, these benefits encompass three interconnected areas of employees' lives: physical, mental and financial.

Why Employers Should Care

Benefits that cast a wide wellness net help employees live healthier and less stressful lives. This, in turn, helps employers potentially achieve greater healthcare savings and productivity. According to a Gallup study¹, engaged and thriving employees are more likely to be agile and resilient. They are "13% more likely to report excellent performance and 32% more likely to stay with the company than those who are engaged but are struggling or suffering in their overall lives."

The study also indicates that engaged, thriving employees have fewer health problems and therefore lower healthcare costs to their employers. Compared to engaged but struggling workers, these employees have 46% fewer unhealthy days, are 39% less likely to contract a new disease in the next year and are 43% less likely to have anxiety and depression.²

Wellness is More than Physical

Wellness benefits clearly help employees and their employers; the following are the three components of comprehensive wellness benefits.

Physical Wellness – In their infancy, wellness benefits focused exclusively on physical health – a common-sense starting point. That focus was, and remains, needed.

According to the Integrated Benefits Institute, common physical ailments continue to cost employers in many ways. For example, employees with diabetes are 47% more likely to miss at least one day of work per month than workers without the disease. Also, low-back pain costs employers \$51,400 annually per 100 employees in lost productivity and medical treatments.³ Employees can manage these and other conditions, and employers can help them do it.

Physical wellness benefits include diabetes and high blood pressure management, smoking cessation, weight loss counseling and cancer screenings. But wellness benefits cannot lead every employee to health, so benefits that help address the financial consequences of injury or illness are also important.

Critical illness insurance, disability income insurance and life insurance are especially useful in this area. Employees can access these through their employers' voluntary benefit menus at a reduced cost and little to no cost to companies.

Mental Wellness – For years, companies have offered benefits that address employees' mental wellness, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are perhaps the oldest of these programs. They are designed to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely affect their job performance, health and wellness. EAPs may include short-term counseling and referral services for employees and their household members.

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¹ State of the American Workplace Report 2013, Gallup

² Ibid.

³ [IBI](#), via Employee Benefits Advisor, Look beyond health care financing to workforce health, Thomas Parry, Ph.D., 4/26/14

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What are those problems? They include everything from substance and spousal abuse to caregiver (to both children and aging parents) concerns and work or occupational stress. Alcohol and drug abuse, in particular, are widespread. More than 17 million adults abuse these substances⁴ which affects not only themselves but family, friends and coworkers.

EAPs help employees deal with these and other life events through assessment, support and referrals. AmWINS offers a Workplace Conditions Assessment that, among other features, comprehensively examines potential issues that contribute to workplace stress.

Financial Wellness – Half of all employees are worried about not having emergency savings for unexpected expenses, and more than four in 10 worry if they can retire when they want.⁵ These are just some of the financial concerns occupying employees' minds and impacting their productivity, but they are far from the only two issues. One in seven employees provides care to an aging parent or in-law, and 15% have been victims of identity theft. Employees also worry about how to balance paying for a child's higher education and even just meeting monthly bills.

Some employers offer financial advice or counseling to help workers deal with everything from juggling competing financial priorities to balancing a checkbook. They may also refer workers to specialists, including attorneys, eldercare experts, financial advisors and other professionals.

Completing the Circle

If a three-legged stool needs all three legs to balance properly, a happy and productive workforce depends on three legs of wellness for maximum productivity. Each leg relates to the other.

For example, learning to deal with a potential disability or illness may lead employees from the financial to physical wellness realm, where they can find critical illness and disability insurance to help ease the financial burden. Likewise, dealing with an actual illness may require the services offered through an EAP.

Some progressive companies are adding a fourth leg, so to speak, to help reduce stress even further. Concierge services help employees do everything from scheduling a child's birthday party to picking up the dry cleaning. Even these small gestures can reduce stress and increase workplace productivity.

If employees are to truly achieve wellness, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting they must address the physical, mental and financial burdens that contribute to stress. Employers who provide the tools to help are more than altruistic when they offer these benefits – they are increasing their workers' capacity to remain fully productive.

⁴ [National Council on Drug Alcoholism and Drug Dependence](#)

⁵ Employee Financial Wellness Survey, April 2014, PwC