



## Briefs Focus

### 2014 Workplace Wellness Survey Results Reveal Rise in Wellness Initiatives



If you would like additional information about the 2014 Workplace Wellness Survey, or the HASC Wellness Taskforce, please contact Teri Hollingsworth, Vice President of Human Resource Services at HASC, at (213) 538-0763, [thollingsworth@hasc.org](mailto:thollingsworth@hasc.org).

In its first year, the *2014 HASC Workplace Wellness Survey* provided insights into how health care organizations in California implement and evaluate strategic wellness initiatives. The survey was created by FutureSense, Inc. in conjunction with the HASC Wellness Taskforce. Survey sponsors include Anthem Blue Cross, Keenan and HASC.

Survey participants included: general acute-care hospital/medical centers, psychiatric hospitals, ambulatory medical clinics, ambulatory surgery centers, skilled nursing facilities, rehabilitation hospitals, heart hospitals, orthopedic hospitals, children's hospitals, continuing care retirement communities, and assisted living facilities. The survey explored strategy, design, objectives, incentives, measurement, evaluation and communication to provide insights into how these organizations implement and evaluate strategic wellness initiatives.

Invitations to participate in the study were sent to 384 health care organizations, of which 90 participated. The 90 organizations that participated in this study represent primary facilities, associated clinics and administrative entities, and 385,740 employees.

For the purposes of this survey, workplace wellness programs are defined as health promotion activities or organization-wide policies designed to support healthy behavior and improve health outcomes while at work. These programs are also health-focused and worker-centered.

### Why Focus on Wellness?

The health and wellness movement is garnering increased attention as health care expenditures and lost productivity costs related to poor health and uncontrolled chronic conditions continue to spiral upward by billions of dollars. To help address this national health issue, federal legislation, including the Affordable Care Act (ACA), has been passed which articulates the many beneficial impacts of wellness programs for both employees and employers, provides definitions of the different types of programs, and supports the use of robust rewards for employee participation.

Wellness initiatives are on the rise across organizations and the communities they serve. Health care practitioners are now being held to higher standards, and their involvement in wellness program will help them act as role models and leaders in promoting the health of their organizations and their local communities.

Most respondents in this survey (92 percent) offer a wellness program of some sort, reflecting the growing trend in the prevalence of wellness programs among healthcare organizations.

## Program Components

Employers have a multitude of ways in which they implement wellness and health-promotion activities. Following are the top three program components from our survey (out of 83 respondents offering wellness programs):

- Immunization/vaccination
- Health and wellness fairs
- Health risk assessments

## Making the Case for Wellness

The strongest drivers of participants' wellness program strategies were community-focused, including expanding the reach of their program to local businesses and fulfilling their social/community responsibility. Promoting their own internal goals of a healthier workplace and maintaining a quality workforce were also of relatively high importance. Interestingly, of the 83 responding organizations with a wellness program in this study, only 40% have set company-wide health promotion goals and only 53% have a dedicated wellness staff.

The top issues driving wellness program strategy – wellness program goals are:

- Replicating the organization's wellness program to other local businesses
- Fulfilling social/community responsibility
- Supporting a healthier workplace as advocated by the Affordable Care Act

## Wellness Program Challenges

Here are the top challenges in ensuring wellness program effectiveness:

- Measuring specific program effectiveness/ROI
- Communication with employees about the program
- Motivating employees over extended periods of time

Of the respondents in the survey, 71 percent indicated they offer some kind of incentive/reward, with the most popular being reductions in health insurance premiums and cash equivalents (e.g. gift cards).

## Measurement and Financial Outcomes

### *In Favor of the ROI of Wellness*

Proponents for measuring ROI argue that it can be measured by the following means:

- Calculating the overall cost savings in health care expenditures
- Evaluating increases in productivity, effectiveness, and engagement
- Measuring the reduction in sick and absent days

### *The Contention of Wellness ROI*

Many critics of wellness programs and their ROI bring up legitimate concerns about their ultimate impact on employers. They argue that no concrete measurements/metrics have evolved yet to capture their impact and savings and there is a lack of a clear definition of "wellness" or "well-being" and even deny the health care crisis associated with U.S. workers and its impact on work and productivity. In addition, many of the ROI metrics would require long-term studies to determine the full impact of wellness programs on reducing healthcare costs because health and prevention are long-term efforts, with long-term results.

It is noteworthy that only 6 percent of respondents utilize the results conducted by a third party, while 81 percent of respondents report that they use a

third-party wellness vendor to manage their wellness program.

## Health Care's Role in Wellness

For the health care industry, employees and employers are increasingly being seen as leaders and role models in the wellness movement. Changing the culture of an organization to one that fully supports and promotes wellness may take some time, and can be very difficult to initiate, but once it is in place, it serves to strengthen and maintain health initiatives over time. It is also important that employers place high importance on meeting objectives related to improving and maintaining the health of their own workforce.

Hospitals are often viewed as the representatives of community health and need to be held to this higher standard. Here lies the current paradox of the evolving health care industry—from an intuitive perspective, the industry values prevention and sees well-being as the ultimate outcome, but the contemporary basis has been built around fixing problems. In addition to further clarity around wellness program definitions and their scopes, new payment models will improve both the quality and efficiency of care delivered as healthcare continues to move towards a “value over volume” model.

In next year's survey, we expect to go into greater detail regarding questions about ROI, issues driving outcomes, and comparing what successful programs have in common. Our goal with this survey is to continue to provide solid benchmark information and to be a practical resource to help health care organizations reach their specific wellness goals, providing information on best practices and how to address barriers to success.

The full survey, conducted by the Hospital Association of Southern California (HASC), is available to non-participating CHA members for \$450. For more information, contact Teri Hollingsworth at (213) 538-0763