



HR Leader's Definitive Guide

IMPLEMENTING AND LAUNCHING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

Why You Need a Corporate Wellness
Program (And How to Implement One)



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CREATING A CULTURE OF WELLNESS

Workplace Wellness Efforts Are At An All-Time High

It has been a difficult year for everyone, and nowhere is that more evident than in the workplace. Not only have physical office spaces transformed for millions of employees around the world as they adapt to working from home, but stress and isolation are also increasing. For large, mid-size, and small companies alike, the old way of doing corporate wellness programs just isn't working in this new reality.

The idea of corporate wellness has evolved over the past 40 years from an obscure perk at a few companies—Johnson & Johnson¹ is often considered one of the first companies to offer a full wellness program when it launched “Live for Life” in 1979—to something that 84% of companies offer in one way or another,² according to a 2019 Kaiser Family Foundation report.

In the Willis Towers Watson 23rd Annual Best Practices in Health Care Employer Survey, 94% of respondents said they want to develop a workplace culture that supports and enables employees in their pursuit of well-being, while holding employees accountable for their own health.³

As a result, corporate wellness spending has increased from \$1.8 billion in 2011 to over \$8 billion in 2019,⁴ and shows no signs of slowing down. Many companies have moved far beyond offering basic wellness benefits, such as health insurance, to include things like mental health, smoking cessation, weight loss programs, and financial health resources.

Employers Benefit from Workplace Wellness

The reason corporate wellness programs are increasingly important for companies is not entirely altruistic.

Employers want healthy and happy employees, but there are financial benefits as well.

83% of Americans report suffering from work-related stress,⁵ and companies lose around \$300 billion a year because of workplace stress.

Around one million people miss work each day for stress-related reasons.

78% of employees with high financial stress say it distracts them from their work.⁶

Chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and obesity, significantly drive up healthcare costs⁷ for employers and employees.

Employees miss 28.2 million work days a year⁸ (costing almost \$5 billion in lost profit) as a result of chronic illness.

Nearly 60% of employees⁹ think workplaces should offer wellness benefits, but only 42% of employees think their employer cares¹⁰ about their work-life balance.

Employees that report high levels of well-being are 45% more likely¹¹ to be able to adapt to change; they are also 59% less likely to look for another job in the next 12 months.

High-well-being employees are far more likely to rate their own work and their organization as “excellent.”

How to Create a Meaningful Wellness Culture

For many employers, the biggest factor in determining whether a workplace wellness program will succeed is not how much money you spend or how many different perks you offer. It's how well you weave wellness into your overall corporate culture.

Social support and encouragement from those around your employees can significantly increase their participation in corporate wellness initiatives. In fact, one of the most effective means of sustaining the behavioral changes required for disease prevention and wellness promotion is social support, either in person (64%) or [virtually](#) (48%).¹²

The support of coworkers, employers, and medical professionals is important, but perhaps even more important is the support of an employee's immediate circle. Including family and close friends in wellness efforts can increase participation levels exponentially. A 2015 JAMA Internal Medicine study¹³ found that someone trying to make healthy lifestyle changes will be 67% more likely to succeed if a spouse or partner makes the same changes.

Launching a wellness program and creating a culture that celebrates wellness is not easy. Even with careful planning and preparation, things probably won't go perfectly, but that's not an excuse to avoid it altogether. In the midst of unprecedented change and upheaval in the workplace, now is the time to revisit your mission and vision as an organization and create an impactful corporate wellness program that will benefit your employees and your company.

5 QUICK STEPS TO CREATING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

Before launching any wellness program, it's critical to know what's available. This is a very important first step, but we're not going to cover it in detail here because we've already got an incredible guide you can download with a lot more detail: [HR Leader's Playbook to Planning a Corporate Wellness Program](#).

In general, here are the important things to keep in mind when you're evaluating the available programs:

1. **Review your specific needs** as a workplace, and your unique corporate structure and employee demographics.
2. **Identify your central goals:** education, community building, or habit building (or some combination of all three).
3. **Create a budget**, but remember that a good wellness program is an investment—on average, employees who succeed in wellness programs provide employers with \$353 in savings from improved productivity.¹⁴
4. **Survey your employees** to determine what they want out of a wellness program. In a 2013 EBRI/Greenwald & Associates Consumer Engagement in Health Care Survey,¹⁵ 53% of employees said they don't participate in wellness programs because they believe they are already healthy; another 53% don't participate because they lack the time, and 43% say they're inconvenient. Taking employee feedback into account can help you avoid things that lead to non-participation.
5. **Make a list** to help you prioritize what you need most, and things you want but are not necessarily essential in your wellness program.

TELL EVERYONE ABOUT IT

In a Harvard Business Review survey,¹⁶ 6 out of 10 of employees who were not participating in a wellness program said they would be open to participate, but 69% cited a lack of information or awareness as the primary reason they were not involved.

Let's talk about how you can avoid some of these awareness gaps to help set your program up for success.

1: Brand your wellness program

Just like any successful marketing campaign, wellness programs should have a strong visual brand that employees instantly recognize when they see communications about the program. Consumer product giant Proctor & Gamble rebranded their corporate wellness program, creating a bright orange logo for the new Vibrant Living program.¹⁷ Employees now associate that logo—which is on everything from wellness-related communications and stairs in their offices to vending machines—with their health and wellness.

2: Discuss the bigger picture with your wellness provider

Involve your wellness provider in your vision by giving them the bigger picture of who you are as a company and how you hope to benefit employees. The right wellness program provider will want to be integrally involved in helping you launch, communicate, and encourage participation in your program (rather than just passively selling a service to you). Here at [BurnAlong](#), our Customer Success team helps clients launch their wellness programs with hands-on support.

3: Create a communications plan

For many employees, the biggest obstacle in corporate wellness program participation is simply knowing it exists. In a 2014 Gallup study¹⁸ only 60% of employees were aware of corporate wellness programs, and only 40% of those were participating actively in the program. That means only 24% of your total employees are taking advantage of corporate wellness perks.

Before you launch any new program, it's critical to have a structured communications plan with multiple touch points to engage your employees. It's not enough to hand out a flier with an orientation packet, have a single kickoff event, or send out an email once a year to let people know they can enroll. It should be a concerted effort to communicate with every employee multiple times each year through various channels—emails, fliers, in-person or virtual meetings, social media, events, and more.

As with any effective marketing message, repetition is the key to employees understanding and engaging in corporate wellness - the "Rule of 7"¹⁹ that says consumers need to hear a message 7 times before they will take action. Recruit your marketing or internal communications team to help with this effort to ensure your employees are not only aware of the program, but are also excited about it.

5 KEY WELLNESS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Now that you've got your plan, it's time to implement your wellness program.

Step 1: Establish a wellness committee.

Your wellness committee should own the entire process: implementation, launch, and ongoing communications. The committee should have representatives from key areas of your company, and should be led by someone who fully understands and is passionate about the success of your wellness program.

Step 2: Designate “wellness champions” throughout the company.

Depending on how large your company is, you can designate several “wellness champions” to help implement the program throughout the organization. There is no right or wrong way to do this, but it's important to be inclusive. You may choose to designate these roles geographically, by department, or by some other role, and the wellness committee should have regular contact with all your wellness champions. Creating an effective wellness champion team helps teams that are across many locations maintain a hands-on connection with the wellness program.

Step 3: Incorporate your communications plan.

Create a communications calendar to disseminate information about the wellness program. The first touch point for new employees should be a brochure, announcement, or flier included during orientation. Future emails, events, meetings (virtual or in-person), and other communications should follow a structured plan to ensure they go out at regular intervals throughout the year.

Step 4: Develop campaigns around themes or timelines each year.

One of the best ways to keep people engaged is to plan events and campaigns throughout the year. These might be centered around specific calendar events (like holidays) or seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter). They could also be tied to specific corporate timelines or initiatives. Check out these monthly theme ideas²⁰ from Canada Life. It's important to have your full campaign plan and themes mapped out before you start (and refreshed each year) so employees can plan ahead for what's coming and how they can participate.

Step 5: Test your software before the launch.

No matter what software program you're planning to use as part of your corporate wellness program, have your wellness committee test it before the go-live. Get everyone to navigate through the system, then gather feedback and work out any kinks or roadblocks that emerge. As you're planning the full rollout to the rest of your team, be sure to give them a clear channel for delivering feedback so any bugs or issues can be resolved quickly.

LAUNCHING YOUR WELLNESS PROGRAM

The final step to get your new wellness program off the ground is the launch. It's hard to overstate the importance of the launch phase of any new wellness program—this is your opportunity to make a big splash and show your commitment to the program. It's also likely the most visible part of any corporate wellness program, so while it should not be the last communication your employees get about the program, it should definitely be the biggest.

Phase 1: The Signup

Start with an announcement about the corporate wellness program, along with important information and links about how people can get signed up. Roll out the software solution to every employee and provide information on how to download and get signed up. It might be helpful to make it a contest or offer a reward for signing up within a specific timeframe so when you hit Phase 2, everyone is enrolled in and ready to go.

Phase 2: The Rollout

Next it's time to focus on engagement. Even the most incredible corporate wellness programs and all the planning in the world cannot substitute for employee engagement.

Virtual Launch Event

Start with a “virtual launch event” where employees can learn to use the software. Don't fall into the trap of thinking of this like a traditional software demo where someone drones on for 30 minutes showing people how to click menu items. Think of this like an event—a virtual party—and try to come up with creative ways to showcase the features. This is a great time to involve your wellness champions so their participation and endorsement of the product are front and center. You can add contests, games, or other interactive components to get people fully engaged.

Incentivize Participation

Now that you have everyone's attention and they know how to use the program, show them why they should be involved and how they can participate. Outline your calendar of events and activities for the coming year, and what's in it for them. If you're planning to offer incentives, such as discounts on healthcare premiums or prizes, let people know what those are and how they can earn rewards.

Encourage Connections and Support

One of the biggest factors of success in any wellness program is encouragement and support from others. In the 2016 Harvard Business Review study²¹ discussed previously, employees overwhelmingly said they want to interact with coworkers who share their interests, but barriers like inconvenience or lack of support from their employer were holding them back. Help your employees find ways to connect with others who share their interests to motivate and encourage ongoing participation.

Personalize the Experience

Wellness programs should not be one-size-fits-all, but too many employers select programs that fall into that category. They focus heavily on a single activity or wellness initiative, which can alienate a significant part of your workforce for whom that is not applicable or appealing. Instead, your wellness program should be something that is customizable and can be personalized for each individual. Offer a variety of fitness programs with various coaches and various intensity levels to allow people to start in the place that is most comfortable for them. Include other wellness initiatives beyond just fitness too, like financial health classes or mental health offerings.

Phase 3: The First 30 Days

Wellness program success often hinges on how well you can get employees engaged from the start. At BurnAlong, our most successful clients see the highest activation in the first 30 days. That means focusing a lot of time and energy on your launch for existing employees. It also means creating a long-term plan to engage new employees right from the start when they join your company.

Ready to
implement
and launch
your corporate
wellness
program? We'll
make it easy!

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