

Highlights of 2008 Survey & Sample Series on Wellness Programs

In October and November 2008, the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans conducted a survey of wellness plan sponsors drawn from the membership of the Foundation and as well as the International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists. Of the 586 sponsors from the U.S. and Canada who responded, 55% were from corporations, 23% represented a professional service provider, 16% were in the public sector 7% were from multiemployer benefit plans. In addition to responding to survey questions, participants were asked to submit samples of wellness plans, forms and communication pieces—115 samples were collected.

- Among respondents, the primary reasons for offering wellness programs are to control health care costs (46%) and to help workers enjoy better overall physical health (35%).
- Two-thirds (67%) of the survey participants have offered their wellness programs for four years or less.
- Three-quarters of the wellness plan sponsors responding to the survey use an outside vendor to implement or provide wellness initiatives; wellness firms/consultants (53%) and employee assistance plan (EAP) providers (51%) are used most often.
- Among wellness plan sponsors, the most popular screening and treatment initiatives are flu shot programs (82%), health risk assessments (73%) and health screenings (69%). Three-fifths provide smoking cessation programs.
- In the area of fitness and nutrition, the most prevalent initiatives include weight loss/management programs (49%), wellness competitions such as walking or fitness challenges (48%), and healthy food choices in the cafeteria or snack areas (42%). About a third of wellness plan sponsors offer on-site fitness equipment (33%) or off-site fitness programs/subsidies (32%).
- Wellness programs often include access to health information resources. At least half of the plan sponsors do one of the following: direct workers to online wellness resources (61%), sponsor health fairs (57%), offer health care advice hotlines staffed by nurses (53%) or distribute wellness newsletters (52%).
- Worker participation rates for wellness programs are modest and vary by initiative. About a third of sponsors report a participation level exceeding half of eligible workers for health fairs (34%), health screenings (33%) and health risk assessments (32%). A participation rate above 50% is even less common for wellness seminars (16% of sponsors) and fitness programs (11% of sponsors).
- A significant majority of sponsors (80%) use incentives to encourage participation in wellness programs. The most popular incentives are non-cash such as prizes or raffles (39%) and gift cards or gift certificates (32%). Cash rewards (22%), reductions in worker contributions to health insurance premiums (22%) and fitness center discounts (21%) are relatively common as well.
- Most of the sponsors are unsure of the extent to which they and participants benefit from wellness programs. Plan sponsors perceive worker health and morale as the greatest benefits. While reducing health care costs is the primary motivation for offering wellness programs, more than half (57%) of the sponsors are not sure if their health care costs have decreased as a result of their wellness initiatives.
- Only 13% of sponsors measure the return on investment (ROI) of their wellness programs. For those who do measure ROI, more than three quarters (78%) report a positive return, with the majority (58%) seeing returns in the range of \$1.01 to \$4.00 for each dollar spent.