Workplace Wellness Talking Points

Chronic Disease in the U.S.

- In the U.S., 7 in 10 deaths are due to chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. And together, these chronic diseases account for 75% of U.S. medical care costs.

- More than half of all deaths in the U.S. are thought to result from “modifiable risk factors” that lead to chronic disease. This means that more than half of all deaths in the U.S. are linked to harmful behaviors that we could easily change:
  - Tobacco Use: linked to 19% of U.S. deaths
  - High Blood Pressure: linked to 16% of U.S. deaths
  - Physical Inactivity: linked to 8% of U.S. deaths
  - Overweight / Obesity: linked to 8% of U.S. deaths

Role of the Workplace

The workplace is an important setting for health protection, health promotion, and disease prevention programs. On average, Americans working full-time spend more than one-third of their time, five days a week, at the workplace.

For a company, maintaining a healthier workforce can lower direct costs such as insurance premiums and worker’s compensation claims. It will also positively affect many indirect costs such as absenteeism and worker productivity.

Why Invest in Workplace Wellness?

Poor Worker Health Costs Employers Money

Employers pay more as workers’ health problems increase. And employers often do not realize that the indirect costs of poor worker health can be 2-3 times greater than the direct costs.

- Productivity losses related to personal and family health problems cost U.S. employers $1,685 per worker per year ($225.8 billion nationwide). These indirect costs affect all employers, even those who avoid direct medical costs by not funding health insurance.

- Between 2000 and 2004, cigarette smoking in the U.S. was estimated to cost $193 billion in annual health-related economic losses. ($96 billion in direct medical costs and $96.8 billion in lost productivity.)
In 2009, the economic costs of cardiovascular diseases and stroke in the U.S. were estimated at $475.3 billion. This included $313.8 billion in direct medical expenses and $161.5 billion in lost productivity ($39.1 billion due to sickness/disability, and $122.4 billion due to premature death).

Of the 10 health conditions that are most expensive to U.S. employers, 4 are related to heart disease and stroke: High blood pressure, Heart attack, Diabetes, and Chest pain.

Sedentary workers cost employers $250 more in annual health care costs, compared to workers who are moderately active (exercising 1-2 times/wk) and very active (exercising 3+ times/wk).

Due to their poor health, obese workers (BMI > 35) are 4.2% less productive than other workers. This means a loss of $506 per obese employee per year.

Every year, employers pay $1,429 more in medical costs for obese individuals than for normal weight workers.

The cost of obesity, including medical expenditures and absenteeism, for a company with 1,000 employees is estimated to be $277,000 per year.

In 2007, U.S. medical costs attributed to diabetes included $27 billion to directly treat diabetes, $58 billion to treat chronic complications from diabetes, and $31 billion in excess general medical costs connected to diabetes.

Medical costs fall by about $3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs and absenteeism costs fall by about $2.73 for every dollar spent.

Studies show there is a strong link between employee health and employee productivity in the workplace. Health-related productivity costs are significantly greater than medical and pharmacy costs alone.

While employers understand that investing in human capital improves the company bottom line, they are only recently beginning to understand the impact that worker health has on worker productivity. The cost of insurance premiums and employee medical claims is at an all-time high, and continues to rise. Business leaders are being called upon to make changes at the workplace in order to curb rising costs. Many are turning to workplace health programs to help workers adopt healthier behaviors and lower their risk of developing tragic and costly chronic diseases.

**Workplace Wellness Programs are Proven to be Effective**

- There is strong evidence that workplace health promotion programs are effective at helping workers improve the following behaviors and conditions:
- Tobacco use
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Days absent due to illness or disability
- Dietary fat intake
- Psychosocial work factors, such as stress, known to cause or exacerbate chronic disease
- Musculoskeletal disorders including lower back, neck, and shoulders

For more facts on workplace wellness, visit:

http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/

References


