



Health Program

Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative

Healthy Workplaces

For many Americans, the workplace is second only to home in terms of time spent and impact on lifestyle choices. Fortunately, growing numbers of employers are seeing the connection between healthier workers and healthier profits. By doing their part to provide healthy workplaces, employers can improve worker productivity, reduce rates of absenteeism and presenteeism (when people are present, but not working effectively), and reduce their direct and indirect health care costs.

RECOMMENDATION: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC), IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIVATE COMPANIES, SHOULD DEVELOP A DATABASE OF EXEMPLARY WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS WITH A RIGOROUS COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS TO HELP SCALE UP EXISTING BEST PRACTICES IN BOTH THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND WITHIN GOVERNMENT. THE SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SBA) SHOULD PROVIDE SUPPORT HERE.

Such a database would help employers design employee wellness programs that are well-suited to their particular circumstances. Better tools for analyzing program costs and impacts, more pilot programs and program evaluations, and supporting certification and accreditation programs would help lower barriers to participation and accelerate the dissemination of best practices.

RECOMMENDATION: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD BOTH SCALE UP SUCCESSFUL WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS AND CONTINUE EXPLORING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES.

The federal government's Office of Personnel and Management (OPM) currently spends \$40 billion per year covering health care costs for federal employees. But because it pays all employee-related medical and pharmacy claims, individual departments or agencies have no way to track their health care costs and no direct incentive to promote employee health or disease prevention. Changing this situation should be explored as a first step toward modeling leadership on the issue of workplace wellness in the federal government. Federal investments in data collection and tracking to substantiate the benefits achievable through workplace wellness programs can help point the way toward replicable approaches for firms and their employees throughout the economy.





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The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is already demonstrating strong leadership in the arena of workplace wellness. For example, the Army’s new “Soldier Fueling Initiative” combines enhanced physical education and training with healthier food choices and an information/awareness campaign to emphasize the importance of good nutrition for soldier performance. DoD has also worked to improve food offerings at military dining facilities more broadly and is looking at other options to promote nutrition and physical activity among service members and their families. These options could involve a variety of improvements and initiatives, similar to those recommended elsewhere in this report, both on base (e.g., in military-run hospitals, childcare centers, etc.) and in communities with a high percentage of military families. Because our national security depends on a fit and high-performing military, DoD is an employer with a particularly critical charge. It also has the capacity, influence and organization to change “business as usual” in ways that affect the rest of government, as well as institutions in our larger society.

