

Employee Fitness Equals Pro-Business



The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) stresses the idea of prevention. While there are many unknowns with the law as it is, currently one thing we do know is that prevention is a key component. This component is crucial for the future of American workers and their employers. There are staggering statistics on how much preventable illness is costing our employers.

These staggering statistics are primarily related to an unhealthy workforce. Employees who do not take care of themselves ultimately are costing themselves and their employers a fortune. It is estimated that sedentary living (not moving) in the U.S. costs our nation approximately \$150 billion dollars. (Welcoa) This is only related to healthcare costs associated with disease that are caused from a sedentary lifestyle. According to the Surgeon General, the new recommendations for physical activity are at least 30 minutes of moderate, intensive physical activity daily. Sadly, over half of the U.S. population does not meet that standard.

Let's face it, unhealthy lifestyles are costly to American business. There is no question that a vast portion of health care expenditures are driven by unhealthy lifestyles. These unhealthy lifestyles are causing a number of different problems, like chronic diseases. Many of them are preventable, like heart disease, cancer, stroke, etc. These diseases account for somewhere around 70 percent of deaths in America and a considerable amount of health care costs. Chronic conditions account for a good 75% of the nation's \$2 trillion in medical care costs, which in turn accounts for 15% of our nation's gross domestic product. (Welcoa) Obesity itself is the most prominent among those, costing a whopping 66% in health care spending.

It is safe to conclude that the American workforce is not healthy. Still, to this day, approximately 20 percent of the workforce still uses tobacco. America's obesity rate is the worst in the world and is linked to over 30 medical conditions, including chronic degenerative disease, heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, age-related dementia, and osteoarthritis, just to name a few.

The bottom line is that our nation's unhealthy workforce is costing our businesses. Workplace health and wellness programs are designed to improve health and help with behavior changes to improve unhealthy lifestyles. Various peer-reviewed studies have indicated that worksite health promotion programs are known to increase health knowledge, health behavior and underlying health conditions, which in turn saves on overall health care costs. (Wellness Council of America) Lifestyle intervention counseling has been known to be more effective in preventing disease than pharmaceutical treatment.

Where do we go from here? Currently, businesses are trying to stay abreast of what is going on with the new laws and regulations that keep coming out on what seems like a weekly basis. What businesses can do now is encourage their employees to participate in healthy lifestyle behaviors, like being physically active, eating healthy and not using tobacco. Health promotion programs do not have to be expensive. They may be as small as having one day a week set aside for a healthy lunch or allowing your employees to have a flexible schedule to get to the gym. Many Montana businesses are already doing this. Montana Chamber Choices works closely with the Worksite Health Promotion Coalition. To see what other Montana businesses are doing to keep their employees healthy, go to: www.MontanaWorksiteWellness.org.