

The Case for a Comprehensive Workplace Wellness Initiative for NYC Municipal Employees



HEALTHY WORKFORCE. HEALTHY CITY.



NYC Office of Labor Relations

Prepared by

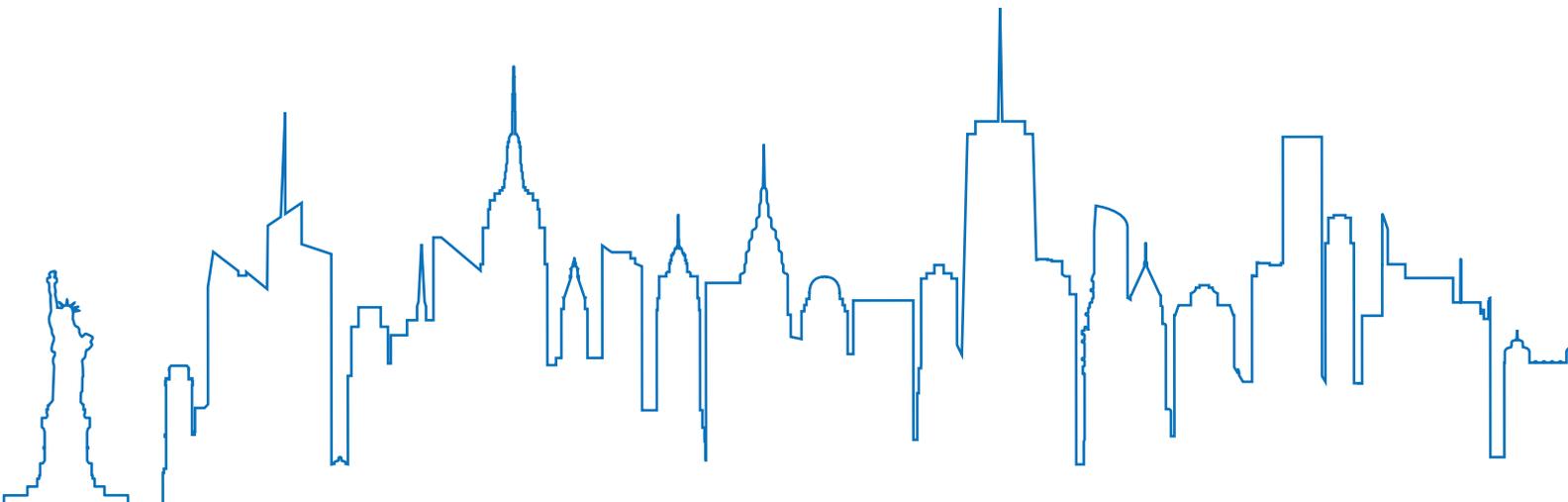
Leslie F. Boden, MSUP
Leslie Boden Consulting

Andrew Goodman, MD, MPH
New York University College of
Global Public Health

Special thanks and acknowledgements to everyone who assisted, including: **Administration for Children's Services:** Eric Brettschneider, David Hansell, Dale Joseph, Willie Maye Jr., Consolata Mogeni; **Department of Environmental Protection:** Renee Alfieri, Zoe Ann Campbell, Grace Pigott, Herbert Roth; **Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Oxiris Barbot, Julie Friesen, Jermei Taylor; **Department of Parks and Recreation:** Mitchell Silver; **Department of Transportation:** Aubry Bright, Gordon Goldberg, Doreen Johann, Anne Marie Porto, Polly Trottenberg, Sinikka Wahab; **Mayor's Office of Labor Relations:** Sakara Bey, Renee Champion, Deborah Friedman, Claire Levitt, Robert Linn, WorkWell NYC Team; **Unions:** Henry Garrido, Chris Policano; and many more.

Introduction

New York City's roughly 380,000 municipal employees power our vibrant, safe, and thriving city. New York City's workers need to be healthy to be productive and effective at work and in their communities. A worksite wellness program enables city workers to live healthy, productive lives and deliver the best public services in the nation.



Executive Summary

Why NYC Should Invest In its Municipal Employee Workplace Wellness Initiative

New York City's roughly 380,000 municipal employees power our vibrant, safe, and thriving city. Yet, as in the city's general population, many employees suffer from or are at risk for preventable diseases or mental health challenges—hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and depression, among others—that diminish their work performance and impact their quality of life. New York City's workers need to be healthy to be productive and effective at work, at home, and in their communities. Investing in a comprehensive workplace wellness initiative will reduce health care costs and enhance efforts to attract well-qualified candidates to civil service employment. Most importantly, it will enable city workers to live healthy, productive lives and deliver the best public services in the nation.

WorkWell NYC, an innovative workplace wellness program of the New York City Office of Labor Relations in collaboration with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), ThriveNYC, and the leadership of the city's unions, has taken initial, successful steps to improve the health of NYC's municipal workforce with a spectrum of evidence-based health promotion programs that have been enthusiastically embraced. WorkWell NYC can have the urgently needed deep and broad impact on the health of the city's employee population if this initiative can be sustained, expanded, and disseminated further. WorkWell NYC is well positioned to make an important contribution to reaching the de Blasio administration's goals of health, equity, and resiliency for all NYC residents.

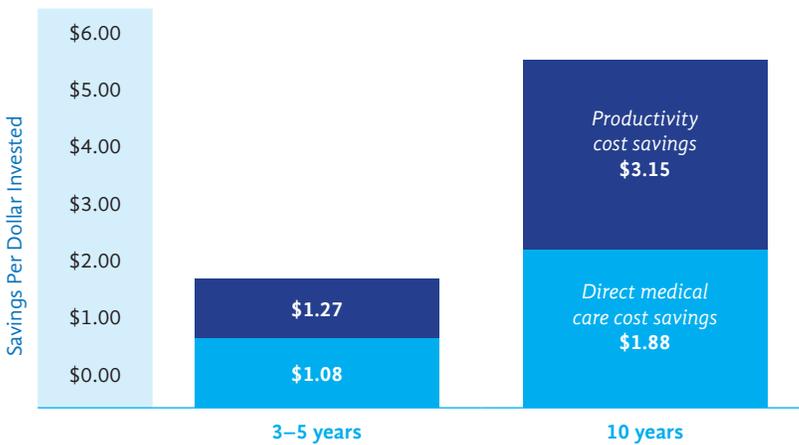


Benefits of workplace wellness initiatives

Worksite wellness programs that are well designed, well implemented, and have strong leadership support can result in numerous benefits for employees, employers, and the public that depends on myriad government services. These include:

- Improved employee physical and mental health, including reduced stress and mental health issues.
- Reduced health care costs. Return-on-Investment analyses of comprehensive workplace wellness programs show medical care cost savings of \$3.27 per dollar spent, after initial start-up costs, which increase over time. A recent Return-on-Investment analysis conducted for NYC, with conservative assumptions, projected a positive ROI on direct medical expenditures within five years (\$1.07 ROI per dollar spent) and growing over time (\$1.88 at ten years).*
- Improved productivity due to reduced absenteeism, presenteeism (coming to work but not fully functioning due to illness or injury), and short-term disability, and improved employee retention, recruitment, and job satisfaction. While these improvements have enormous non-monetary value in the workplace, their benefits are also generally shown to result in a ROI of \$2.73. The recent ROI analysis for NYC projects a savings of \$1.27 within three years and \$3.15 at ten years, in addition to savings of direct medical expenditures.

NYC Workplace Wellness Projected Return on Investment



*Goetzel, Ron PhD, A Return-on-Investment (ROI) Analysis Resulting from a Comprehensive Risk Reduction and Health Promotion and Well-Being Program for City of New York Employees, September 2018.

WORKSITE WELLNESS PROGRAMS THAT ARE WELL DESIGNED, WELL IMPLEMENTED, AND HAVE STRONG LEADERSHIP SUPPORT CAN RESULT IN NUMEROUS BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES, EMPLOYERS, AND THE PUBLIC THAT DEPENDS ON MYRIAD GOVERNMENT SERVICES.

“WorkWell NYC has been able to bring programs that people are excited about to workers at their jobs, with the added bonus of improving both morale and productivity.”

—RENEE CAMPION
Commissioner,
Office of Labor Relations

“By focusing attention on mental and emotional health, WorkWell NYC’s new Be Well initiative of ThriveNYC gives our members skills, activities and positive, new habits to maintain and enhance all aspects of their wellbeing. Our goal is simple: keep people healthy and lower their risk of costly and devastating chronic illness.”

—**HENRY GARRIDO**
Executive Director
AFSCME DC 37

“The agency’s mission is to promote and protect the health of all New Yorkers. This starts with making sure we promote and protect health for our workforce and their families.”

—**DR. OXIRIS BARBOT**
Commissioner, Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene

What’s needed to realize the known benefits

The workplace is a natural and powerful place in which to promote health among workers, who typically spend about half of their waking hours there.

No element is more pivotal than senior executive leadership in promoting a culture of health and wellbeing in the workplace. Agency and union leaders are able to model behaviors by engaging in workplace health programs, steering organizational plans, priorities and policies, and committing resources to implement approaches that work. In organizations with leadership support employees are more likely to engage in health promotion programs, recommend their employer to others, be motivated to do their best, and are less likely to leave their jobs.

For worksite efforts to be effective, employers must go well beyond health education sessions or on-site physical activity classes and establish an organizational culture of health, defined as “a workplace that places value on and is conducive to employee health and wellbeing,” a critical underpinning to successfully improve the physical and mental health of employees. Cultivating a workplace culture of health is essential for a worksite health promotion initiative to achieve its potential fiscal, health, wellbeing, engagement, and productivity outcomes.

Programs with all of the following ingredients have been shown to succeed in realizing the value of investing in employee health and wellbeing:

- 1 Organizational leadership.
- 2 Dedicated team of managers, union representatives, and workers.
- 3 Data-driven strategy built on workplace health assessment.
- 4 Operating plan that includes program and implementation planning and management.
- 5 Comprehensive, varied, integrated programs and activities.
- 6 Policies and practices that support workplace wellness goals.
- 7 Strategic communications.
- 8 Evaluation that determines impact and allows for program refinement.

7 WAYS TO MAKE AN IMPACT

CALL TO ACTION

Join With WorkWell NYC to Grow Its Impact on NYC Employees' Health

The value and benefits of a comprehensive approach to promoting municipal employee health and wellbeing are clear. Building on the foundation laid by WorkWell NYC and ThriveNYC a comprehensive workplace wellness initiative should be developed and advanced by senior agency and union leaders across all city agencies, as ThriveNYC has been championed by Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray. In addition, meaningful steps to influence the health of a sizeable population devoted to public service can be taken within individual agencies, tailored to each agency's own needs and capacities, regardless of whether such a citywide initiative is adopted. By building on the strong expertise and foundation created by WorkWell NYC, New York City can realize the benefits through actions big and small that multiply the impact of what already exists.

There is already momentum within many agencies and unions for generating a culture and environment that promotes workers' physical and mental health. Consider opportunities to help that momentum grow beginning with these seven opportunities (see chart at right).

Preventable health problems diminish the quality of city workers' lives, their productivity at work, their engagement as productive community members, and the quality of the services they deliver. WorkWell NYC provides a ready foundation of expertise and resources for a robust workplace wellness initiative for all city employees. Seizing on emerging opportunities to implement comprehensive workplace wellness efforts within agencies will increase workforce health literacy and education and enable city employees to make more strategic use of their medical benefits, have better health, and provide better service while lowering costs for the City, agencies, and employees alike.



Partner with the WorkWell NYC team to assess what's working and what's needed in your agency and see what more can be done



Create a **steering committee of union representatives and management** to jointly identify opportunities for work environment policy and practice changes



Provide training to supervisors and managers in stress reduction methods to improve work environments and cultivate a culture of health



Assign a staff member to be a Wellness Coordinator, or create a new staff position for one, to take the lead in promoting health and wellbeing



Ask your agency's Wellness Ambassadors what they've learned are the most pressing needs to expand the impact of your agency's wellness efforts



Provide recognition for the efforts of your agency's Wellness Ambassadors and Coordinators



Increase your visible participation in wellness activities and encourage managers to do the same

Defining the Need

Why NYC Should Invest In Its Municipal Employee Workplace Wellness Initiative

New York City's roughly 380,000 municipal employees power our vibrant, safe, and thriving city. Yet, as in the city's general population, many suffer from or are at risk for preventable diseases or mental health challenges that diminish their work performance as well as the quality of their lives and those of their families and communities.

New York City's workers need to be healthy to be productive and effective in their jobs. Investing in a comprehensive workplace wellness initiative will reduce health care and other costs and enhance efforts to attract well qualified candidates to civil service employment. Perhaps most importantly, it will enable city workers to live healthy, productive lives on the job and in their communities and deliver the best public services in the nation.

The workplace is a natural and powerful place in which to promote health among workers, who typically spend about half of their waking hours there. It presents numerous opportunities to intervene, as a setting with built-in social and organizational supports and communication channels, and ways to introduce new policies, procedures, and practices or create incentives for participation. Workplaces gather groups of people with a shared purpose and culture, and can reach large numbers of people who are not otherwise exposed to or engaged in efforts to improve their health.¹ Nearly all US employers are committed to improving the health of their employees and the vast majority (87%) are implementing some workplace wellness strategies.²

With the 2016 implementation of WorkWell NYC, an innovative workplace wellness program of the New York City Office of Labor Relations (OLR) in collaboration with the leadership of the city's unions and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), NYC has taken initial, successful steps to improve the health of its workforce. WorkWell NYC's pilot programs have already engaged thousands of employees across more than 50 agencies in a spectrum of evidence-



based health promotion programs including worksite flu vaccination, diabetes prevention, weight loss, and smoking cessation, among others. As part of WorkWell NYC, more than 600 employees from across the city serve as “Wellness Ambassadors” within their agencies. Wellness Ambassadors have embraced WorkWell NYC’s programming with great enthusiasm, successfully hosting educational workshops, screenings, fitness classes and more at their worksites across the city. For WorkWell NYC to have the deep and broad impact on the health of the city’s employee population that is so urgently needed, its accrued expertise in the possibilities and realities of implementing workplace wellness programs must be sustained, expanded, and disseminated further.

Recent research shows that for worksite efforts to be effective, programs must go well beyond the health education sessions or on-site physical activity classes that may come to mind when thinking about workplace health promotion, and establish a culture of health, defined as “a workplace that places value on and is conducive to employee health and well-being.” An organizational culture of health has been identified as a critical underpinning for the success of workplace wellness programs that promote the physical and mental health of employees.³

Many employers are motivated to contribute to the health and wellbeing of employees simply by a sense of moral obligation to do what is right. However, when designed and implemented using state of the art approaches—which all entail leadership from senior executives at their core—and with sufficient commitment of resources, worksite wellness programs have also resulted in numerous benefits for employees, employers, and the public served by government. These benefits include:



Improved employee physical and mental health

Urgent health conditions that affect thousands of city employees can be prevented or modified by known

interventions in the workplace. If we apply citywide average rates to the municipal workforce, it is estimated that 106,000 (28%) employees have hypertension, 217,000 (57%)—more than half—have overweight or obesity, 44,000 (11.5%) have diabetes, and about 76,000 (20%) suffer from mental health issues.^{4,5} Risk factors that contribute to these health problems, such as smoking, poor diet, lack of physical activity, and job-related stress, can be addressed at the workplace and reduced.

“The STEPtember Walking Challenge was a great way for me to join more than 100 Parks staff getting our steps in while walking all over Manhattan together as a team. We’re excited to further the Parks-WorkWell NYC partnership with MoveNYC 5K, the first 5K for City Employees; and I look forward to seeing everyone in the parks.”

—**MITCHELL SILVER**
Commissioner, NYC Parks

THE WORKPLACE IS A NATURAL AND POWERFUL PLACE IN WHICH TO PROMOTE HEALTH AMONG WORKERS, WHO TYPICALLY SPEND ABOUT HALF OF THEIR WAKING HOURS THERE.

Our Health Snapshot



Overweight/Obesity

57%



Diabetes, Prediabetes

12%

29%



Hypertension

28%



Smoking

13%



Mental Health Conditions

20%

Studies have shown there is strong evidence that workplace programs can result in decreased fat intake, cholesterol levels, tobacco use, and hypertension, thereby reducing the health risks associated with those factors. Evidence also points to reduced alcohol use, increased physical activity, and increased seat belt use resulting from workplace wellness programs.^{6,7}

Outcome	Result	Evidence
% Fat Intake	↓	Strong
Cholesterol	↓	Strong
Tobacco Use	↓	Strong
Hypertension	↓	Strong
Alcohol Use	↓	Sufficient
Physical Activity	↑	Sufficient
Seat Belt Use	↑	Sufficient
Stress	↓	Moderate

Since launching, WorkWell NYC has initiated worksite efforts to reduce the risk factors known to contribute to chronic health problems.

WorkWell NYC has:

- Offered more than 1,200 health screenings across 21 agencies and more than 8,000 blood pressure screenings through kiosks established at six participating city agencies.
- Established a weight loss program in partnership with WW (formerly Weight Watchers) that has resulted in the loss of more than 100,000 pounds by more than 40,000 city employees and their dependents, as well as the creation of more than one hundred workplace meetings.
- Launched a Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), for which WorkWell NYC is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-recognized provider, with more than half of the 400+ graduates losing over 5% of their total weight.
- Led more than 3,200 individuals from 27 city agencies in a four-week walking challenge where a combined total of 779,408,087 steps were taken, or approximately 390,000 miles. Also, daily step averages were increased by 27% (from 7,973 to 10,917).
- Increased flu vaccination among city employees and their dependents by 25% with intensive worksite promotion and outreach.

Many more city employees stand to benefit if efforts like these are expanded.

Increased mental health awareness and strengthened supports for mental health

Employee stress is ubiquitous and takes a toll on the workplace, as illustrated in the chart below. Studies have identified stress as the leading workforce performance issue worldwide and three-quarters of US employers say it is their primary workplace-related risk factor for poor performance.⁸ ThriveNYC, a 5-year public investment to improve mental health outcomes for New Yorkers, has launched Thrive in Your Workplace to help employers implement policies and workplace practices focused on emotional wellbeing and mental health. WorkWell NYC's Be Well program is working in partnership with ThriveNYC to increase emotional resilience, mental health awareness, fight stigma, and strengthen supports for mental health at work for municipal workers specifically. Recent interviews with WorkWell NYC leaders in several agencies underscored that many of the positions held by city workers are inherently stressful, which contributes significantly

WORKWELL NYC, WHICH HAS ALREADY MET GREAT SUCCESS THROUGH ITS INITIAL PROGRAMS, STANDS POISED TO DEEPEN AND EXPAND ITS REACH WHILE AMPLIFYING THE IMPACT OF RELATED ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS.

“At ACS, many of our staff members work around the clock and, often times, encounter traumatic family situations. Given the challenges of this work, we have to take good care of ourselves and sustain ourselves so that we can serve others. WorkWell NYC offers supports, including fitness classes, nutritional workshops, courses on stress management and more. This wellness program has played a critical role in our mission to serve New York City’s most vulnerable children and families and I look forward to its successes.”

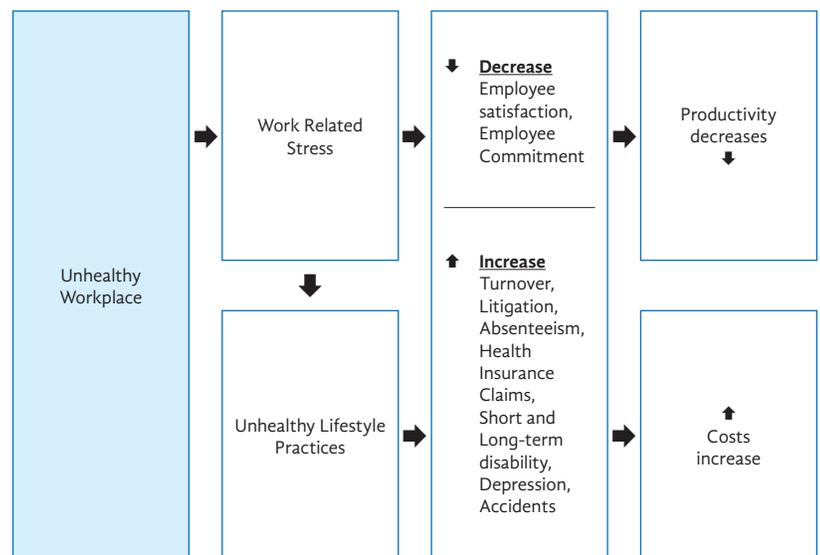
—**DAVID HANSELL**
*Commissioner, Administration
 for Children’s Services*

to burnout, mistrust, absenteeism, and turnover. Though specific challenges in some agencies and positions may intensify mental health issues and stress, workers contend with these problems in all city agencies and all workplaces.

Creating an organizational environment that supports emotional wellbeing and addresses conditions that exacerbate stress, depression, and other mental health issues can improve worker health, increase worker productivity, reduce costs, and in the context of the city workforce, improve provision of public services. ThriveNYC’s activities include Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training, which teaches people how to help friends, family members, and co-workers who are experiencing mental health challenges and how to respond effectively in a crisis. WorkWell NYC’s Be Well program focuses on workplace-based resilience-building initiatives, education, and training to supplement the NYC Employee Assistance Program. Together these initiatives will serve to improve workplace culture, among other strategies to address the mental and emotional health needs of NYC employees.

In addition to improving individuals’ quality of life, improving employee health and wellbeing results in benefits that include reduced health care utilization and controlled worker disability and their associated costs as well as enhanced productivity due to reduced presenteeism, absenteeism, and turnover.⁹

The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace





Reduced health care costs

The City of New York currently spends over \$8 billion annually on health care for its 1.25 million covered employees, retirees, and their dependents. Workplace health promotion interventions that keep healthy workers healthy for longer time periods, reduce risk factors, and improve disease management have, as might be expected, also been shown to reduce health care costs. While some worksite wellness programs have been found not to be cost-efficient, leading to controversy about their value, extensive evidence shows that comprehensive, well-executed programs reduce health care costs and have a positive return on investment. A recent Return-on-Investment analysis of a potential comprehensive, evidence-based health promotion and wellbeing program for NYC employees, conducted for OLR, included conservative engagement assumptions and still projected a positive ROI of \$1.07 per dollar spent on only direct medical expenses after five years, increasing to \$1.88 at ten years.¹⁰ An analysis of the literature on costs and savings of workplace wellness programs found that comprehensive programs result in more substantial savings of \$3.27 in medical care costs for every dollar spent. The returns on investment may increase over a period of years, as the health benefits grow gradually and program costs decrease following the initial program start-up expenses.¹¹



Improved productivity

Investing in workplace wellness initiatives that modify risk factors may reduce health care expenditures, but also yields value in numerous other ways. The benefits are evident in factors that collectively result in improved productivity: reduced presenteeism, reduced absenteeism, and improved recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction. Overall, comprehensive programs result in a healthier, less stressed, more highly engaged and committed workforce.^{12, 13}

These changes, too, bear fiscal benefits in addition to their enormous non-monetary value. The analysis of literature on workplace wellness programs found that, by reducing absenteeism, each dollar invested in worksite wellness saves \$2.73.^{14, 15} The recent analysis of the ROI projected to result from a comprehensive workplace wellness program for NYC employees found that increased productivity and decreased absenteeism will produce savings of \$1.27 per dollar invested within three years and \$3.15 at ten years. Combined with health care cost savings, the ROI would be \$2 at three years, \$2.95 at five years, and \$5.03 at ten years.¹⁶

“As part of our Health Savings initiatives, the City and the Municipal Labor Committee have redesigned the Health Benefits Program to encourage employees and their families to take care of their health. These changes have included no-cost preventive care and access to high quality care. Through WorkWell NYC, the City is making a long-term investment in promoting the health of our employees, who typically have long tenure with the City. This investment will pay off with healthier and happier employees and lower health care expenses.”

—CLAIRE LEVITT

*Deputy Commissioner,
Mayor’s Office of Labor Relations*

CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND ADDRESSES CONDITIONS THAT EXACERBATE STRESS, DEPRESSION, AND OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES CAN IMPROVE WORKER HEALTH, INCREASE WORKER PRODUCTIVITY, REDUCE COSTS, AND IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CITY WORKFORCE, IMPROVE PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES.

“The WorkWell NYC program at DOT helped incentivize me to take my fitness routine to the next level. Even between walking challenges, my colleagues and I still sync our steps using the app and compare our progress!”

—**GORDON GOLDBERG**
*Director of Labor Relations,
Department of Transportation*

WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS IMPROVE RETENTION, AND MAY ESPECIALLY APPEAL TO YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE WORKFORCE.

Reduced presenteeism

The condition that results when employees are physically present at work, but not engaged or not working and are therefore not productive is known as presenteeism. Poor employee health and unhealthy individual behaviors, such as smoking, eating unhealthful food, or lack of exercise, are strongly associated with presenteeism. In the long run, these behaviors increase the risk of chronic disease. Other factors, including pain, existing chronic disease, and depression also increase the likelihood of presenteeism. The cost of lost productivity due to such causes is estimated to far exceed—by 2–3 times—that of direct health care costs.¹⁷ Nutrition-, weight-, and blood pressure-related risk factors have been shown to be closely associated with increased costs of medical care, workers’ compensation, and short-term disability, and even a small reduction in the risks—as little as 1%—can yield improved productivity and annual per capita cost savings of \$83.02 to \$103.39.¹⁸ Workplace initiatives that support employees in developing and maintaining healthy behaviors improve productivity.

Reduced absenteeism and short-term disability

Employee absenteeism, often due to the same health factors, results in great costs to organizations. In the same way that comprehensive worksite wellness programs diminish presenteeism by helping to modify risk factors, reduce stress, and ultimately improve employee health, research shows that they can reduce absenteeism and short-term disability. Employee morale is higher in organizations with a culture that supports their health and wellbeing, making employees less likely to be absent. A review of worksite health promotion programs found that making a comprehensive, strategic investment in employee health reduces sick leave by 27% and reduces worker compensation costs by one-third.¹⁹

Improved employee retention, recruitment, and job satisfaction

Workplace wellness programs produce outcomes that are not directly health-related but that are of great value to employers. Employee turnover is considerable in several critical positions at city agencies, leading to inefficiencies and a frequent need for recruitment and training. In fact, recent interviews with agency leaders revealed that employee burnout, mistrust, and very high turnover are urgent concerns at a number of agencies. Workplace wellness programs

improve retention, and may especially appeal to younger members of the workforce. They convey to employees that their employer cares about and values them and is committed to their health, wellbeing, and happiness. Being treated well and feeling appreciated can improve job satisfaction and persuade workers to stay in the most challenging jobs. A workplace that nurtures health and wellbeing is also able to attract strong candidates. For many employers with workplace wellness programs, the value of these factors—improved retention, reduced turnover, increased job satisfaction, happiness, and morale, and enhanced candidate recruitment—provide motivation for implementation that far outweighs their return on investment.^{20, 21, 22}

A health-centered workplace culture and its improved morale also have beneficial, if less tangible, outcomes, such as increased employee pride, trust, creativity, and respect. The impact reaches beyond the workplace. A healthy, energetic workforce delivers excellent services and drives healthy, productive communities, which enable a city to thrive economically, socially, and culturally.^{23, 24}

Alignment with mayoral priorities

The de Blasio administration is committed to promoting health, equity, and resiliency for all NYC residents, as demonstrated through a number of aligned initiatives. City employees and their families account for over a million city residents, up to about 14% of the population. WorkWell NYC is well positioned to engage participants at a scale that can make an important contribution to reaching those goals, driven by its mission to promote the health and wellbeing of city employees and their dependents. WorkWell NYC, which has already met great success through its initial programs, stands poised to deepen and expand its reach while amplifying the impact of related administration efforts, such as those described below.



WORKWELL NYC IS WELL POSITIONED TO ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS AT A SCALE THAT CAN MAKE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO REACHING THOSE GOALS, DRIVEN BY ITS MISSION TO PROMOTE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CITY EMPLOYEES AND THEIR DEPENDENTS.

BY EMPLOYING THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPED BY WORKWELL NYC, THE DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION CAN EXPAND THE IMPACT SUBSTANTIALLY BY ESTABLISHING A CITYWIDE COMPREHENSIVE WORKPLACE WELLNESS INITIATIVE BUILT ON CREATING WORK SETTINGS THAT SUPPORT THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF ALL CITY EMPLOYEES THROUGH POLICIES, PRACTICES, PROGRAMS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

ThriveNYC

ThriveNYC has elevated understanding and coordination of efforts to address the mental health needs of New Yorkers, modeling a comprehensive approach to improving how mental health is addressed that includes taking steps to make NYC municipal workplaces more mental health-friendly. By joining forces with WorkWell NYC, the initiatives together support city agencies in establishing the culture of health that is essential to improve employees' mental and physical health.

Healthy eating & physical activity

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has implemented numerous initiatives to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods and promote physical activity through programs and built environment interventions for NYC residents as well as for city employees. Its Neighborhood Health Action Centers may provide opportunities for meaningful community engagement for city employees in their home communities.

Expanded comprehensive community based healthcare

The One New York Plan for a Strong and Just City includes the expansion of comprehensive, community-based health care through Health + Hospitals.

Paid family & parental leave

Mayor de Blasio led the way for Paid Family Leave, later implemented for all NYS private employees, by establishing a Paid Parental Leave benefit for NYC managerial employees, and, through collective bargaining with the unions, for United Federation of Teachers (UFT) members as well as the option for Paid Family Leave through the New York State plan for a number of groups, including American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees District Council 37 (AFSCME DC 37), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Locals 300 and 621, International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 237 (IBT L237) New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) employees, Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1183,

and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 3 Supervisors of Mechanics and Electrical Inspectors. Additional unions are currently in negotiations and additional groups are expected to opt in.

These existing programs and partnerships have potential to improve the health and emotional wellbeing of the city's workforce. By employing the infrastructure and knowledge developed by WorkWell NYC, the de Blasio administration can expand the impact substantially by establishing a citywide comprehensive workplace wellness initiative built on creating work settings that support the physical and mental health of all city employees through policies, practices, programs, and the environment. Individual agencies, too, can embrace worker health and wellbeing as a priority that guides decisions related to workplace norms, policies, practices and programs. Doing so has the potential to generate health care cost savings and result in healthier workers that are more productive, engaged, and energized in the workplace as well as in their communities. By investing in WorkWell NYC, New York City will model the leadership role to be played by a large municipality in promoting health for all.

A WORKPLACE CULTURE THAT “PLACES VALUE ON AND IS CONDUCIVE TO EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING” IS ESSENTIAL FOR A WORKSITE HEALTH PROMOTION INITIATIVE TO ACHIEVE ITS POTENTIAL FISCAL, HEALTH, WELLBEING, ENGAGEMENT, AND PRODUCTIVITY OUTCOMES.

8 INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS



Leadership



Dedicated Team



Data-Driven Strategy



Operating Plan



Interventions



Policies and Practices



Communications



Evaluation

What's Needed to Realize the Known Benefits

A workplace culture that “places value on and is conducive to employee health and wellbeing”²⁵ is essential for a worksite health promotion initiative to achieve its potential fiscal, health, wellbeing, engagement, and productivity outcomes.

Thus, a “culture of health” is both the scaffolding necessary for a program to succeed and the product of employing the elements that extensive research and practice have shown are necessary for success.

Though many employers offer some form of workplace-based support for health, levels of participation and success vary greatly, frequently because organizations do not implement them fully and evaluate them rigorously. Programs with all of the ingredients described below have been shown to succeed in realizing the value of investing in employee health and wellbeing.



Leadership

The visible commitment of organizational leadership is critical for the success of workplace wellness efforts. A leader’s endorsement of employee health and mental wellbeing signals that promoting it is an organizational priority, to be woven into vision, governance, structures, strategic plans, and processes. Organizational leadership, including senior and mid-level managers, may have the ability to adopt and integrate such worksite programs and policies as mental health supports, health promotion, benefits design, or physical environment change, and to secure buy-in from and collaboration with important partners, such as union leaders. Strong leadership support has been shown to result in improved health outcomes.^{26, 27} Leaders demonstrate support of employee health promotion in numerous ways, from being personally engaged in workplace opportunities through transforming the organizational culture with long-term plans. For example, Parks Commissioner Silver led his agency in the STEPtember Step Challenge, with a highly engaged team and daily motivation.

Organizations with leadership support, in contrast with those that lack it, have employees who are likely to be engaged in health promotion programs. In such organizations, the vast majority of employees have a positive relationship with supervisors and coworkers, are likely to recommend their employer, are motivated to do their best, and are less likely to have plans to leave their job in the next year.²⁸



Dedicated Team

Engaging managers and workers, along with leaders, in collaboratively defining objectives and goals and crafting, implementing, and evaluating an approach built on evidence-informed programs and policies increases the likelihood that an initiative will inspire participation and have a positive impact. The engagement of employees at every stage also serves to reinforce an organization's pervasive commitment to health, as employees take ownership of the integrated health promotion effort. WorkWell NYC has cultivated a citywide network of more than 600 Wellness Ambassadors who are already engaged in extending the reach of wellness programs in their agencies. In addition, several WorkWell NYC partner city agencies are served by Wellness Coordinators, each of whom manages implementation of their agency's innovative efforts. The presence of dedicated team members like these, who can bolster engagement by other managers and staff, contribute to the success of workplace wellness programs.



Data-driven Strategy

Successful workplace wellness initiatives are tailored to specific workplaces. They are designed based on an assessment of individual, organizational, and community health risks, concerns, and conditions and take into consideration the organizational culture and framework, as well as the available personal health resources and conditions in the physical worksite, community, and workplace culture environments. By measuring what is most important to the organization and its individuals, a strategy can be designed to address those particular issues.

“Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has a robust engagement and wellness program that supports the whole employee. We listen to our employees through our surveys. Through our Farm Share and Meatless Mondays programs, Walking Club, hiking events, participation in Move NYC, and in collaboration with our QWL partners, we support healthy eating, promote fitness, and support strong mental wellness with meditation and de-stressing activities. We look forward to our continued collaboration with WorkWell NYC.”

—ZOE ANN CAMPBELL
*Deputy Commissioner of
Organizational Development and
Human Resources, Department of
Environmental Protection (DEP)*

WORKWELL NYC WORKS WITH AGENCIES AND UNIONS TO CONDUCT WORKPLACE HEALTH ASSESSMENTS OR INTEREST SURVEYS TO INVENTORY EXISTING WORKPLACE HEALTH PROGRAMS AND POLICIES AND GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF WORKER NEEDS AND GOALS, LEADERSHIP SUPPORT, WORKSITE ISSUES AND CONDITIONS, CULTURE OF HEALTH, AND ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS.

WorkWell NYC works with agencies and unions to conduct workplace health assessments or interest surveys to inventory existing workplace health programs and policies and gain an understanding of worker needs and goals, leadership support, worksite issues and conditions, culture of health, and organizational goals. An assessment will reveal strategies that are working well and identify opportunities to improve health.

WorkWell NYC devises programs by using available data or gathering additional pertinent data, though its assessment and evaluation have at times been limited by the absence of uniform employee data maintained by the city as well as limitations on access to existing data sources. Greater access to more complete data, within and across agencies, would increase WorkWell NYC's ability to design high-impact interventions.



Operating Plan

Developing an operating plan ensures that the workplace wellness initiative will be implemented effectively. A wellness plan that incorporates an organization's vision, values, purpose, and goals, and articulates the steps needed to achieve them serves as a map for implementation, and may be developed by the dedicated team of a range of engaged stakeholders.

Creating an infrastructure that will support a workplace wellness program is the first step toward implementation. A basic governance structure that includes designated key personnel—senior agency leaders, union representatives, and agency staff—who will champion, oversee, and manage the health promotion initiative is needed prior to implementation of any programs, benefits, or other supports. This infrastructure will provide the strategic direction and leadership to design and roll out a workplace wellness plan tailored to the agency's needs. The pilot plans developed will be based on the assessment data and incorporate all of the ingredients essential for success, including health-related programs, policies, practices, and environmental support strategies, and regular evaluation and assessment. Plans can subsequently be revised to reflect what is learned about opportunities, challenges, and employee and agency needs and assets.



Interventions

Research has shown that initiatives that are successful in reducing health risks and improving wellbeing are comprehensive in scope, using varied, integrated strategies to address multiple factors in the employee population, rather than isolated programmatic interventions aimed at a small number of employees or a single health condition.²⁹ They should consider the health and safety concerns and opportunities in the physical work environment, the psychosocial work environment, the personal health resources in the workplace, and the communities in which workers and their families participate, all of which contribute to the health of workers.³⁰

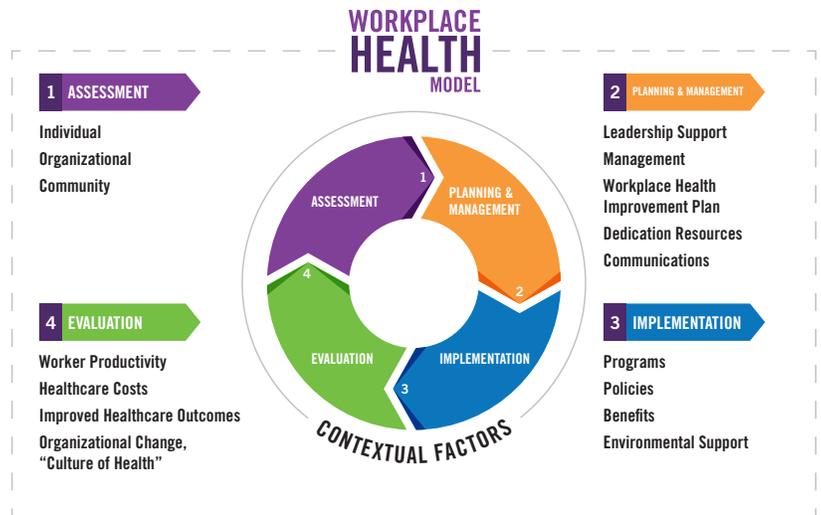
Elements of a comprehensive workplace health program include health education focused on skills and behavior changes that support health, supportive social and physical environments, integration into an organization's benefits, links between health promotion and other related programs, and health risk screenings followed up with education and counseling.^{31, 32} WorkWell NYC selects relevant state-of-the-art interventions, such as the Diabetes Prevention Program and Employee Smoking Cessation Assistance Program (ESCAPE), based on data derived from an assessment and evidence of the intervention's effectiveness to promote the physical and emotional wellbeing of a wide range of employees.



Policies and Practices

Evaluating and modifying or instituting new policies and practices that support the workplace wellness goals reinforces that the health and wellbeing of workers is a consistent priority and an integral part of the organization's purpose. An effective approach requires policies and practices that aim to reduce risk by influencing employees' behaviors, the physical worksite environment, the organizational workplace culture, and employees' broader environments, often concurrently.³³ This may encompass how an organization protects employee privacy and complies with worksite health and safety-related regulations, and can also entail partnerships or other defined relationships with unions, community resources, and vendors.

WORKWELL NYC SELECTS RELEVANT STATE-OF-THE-ART INTERVENTIONS, SUCH AS THE DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM AND EMPLOYEE SMOKING CESSATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ESCAPE), BASED ON DATA DERIVED FROM AN ASSESSMENT AND EVIDENCE OF THE INTERVENTION'S EFFECTIVENESS TO PROMOTE THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF A WIDE RANGE OF EMPLOYEES.



Workplace Health Model, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

WORKWELL NYC HAS LAID THE FOUNDATION BY COMMUNICATING REGULARLY WITH ALL CITY EMPLOYEES ON A VARIETY OF HEALTH TOPICS AND HAS DEVELOPED TOOLS AND RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT HEALTH PROMOTION WORK IN PARTICIPATING AGENCIES.



Communications

Effective strategic communications are pivotal to the success of workplace wellness programs, and one of the most important factors for increasing employee participation.³⁴ They convey much more than the existence of programs and resources, though that of course is essential, as employees can only become engaged if they are aware of them. WorkWell NYC has laid the foundation by communicating regularly with all city employees on a variety of health topics and has developed tools and resources that support health promotion work in participating agencies. A broader communications strategy disseminates the values and commitment of leadership to health promotion and helps to support behavioral changes that can lead to improved health. In addition to regular email communications to all city employees on wellness issues, WorkWell NYC uses diverse methods to reach employees in a broad range of workforce roles, and regularly shares communications materials and tools on wellness topics with its network of Wellness Ambassadors, who in turn share information with coworkers across their agencies.

Effective strategic communications are designed with well-defined objectives: to increase awareness of and educate employees about health issues, to motivate employees to improve or maintain their

health, to market the health program offerings to employees, and to build trust in the initiative within the organization. That trust is built, in part, by communicating the findings of evaluations, the organization's commitment to ongoing program improvement, and its celebration of success. Communications must be integrated into an ongoing process of gathering information from employees about their needs, interests, and obstacles faced, and, in response, refining which messages are subsequently communicated and how.³⁵



Evaluation

Evaluation should be an integral aspect of all agency plans, allowing for continuous reflection on the program's progress and refinement as needed. Developing an evaluation plan at the outset enables organizations to track the progress of their workplace health promotion efforts, adjust strategies and activities to overcome obstacles along the way, and ascertain program outcomes and impact over time. In addition, a transparent process of collecting and analyzing data and then reporting on multiple outcomes can build trust and accountability within organizations. Evaluations may be designed to measure success as defined in a number of ways, such as the impact on modifiable risk factors in the employee population, changes in absenteeism or employee retention rates, or employer health care cost savings. The findings of well-designed evaluations also contribute to a growing evidence base upon which similar workplace wellness programs may be modeled. WorkWell NYC has an evaluation team equipped with tools to measure program engagement and satisfaction and to track some health outcomes. Improved access to more complete data, as described above, would increase WorkWell NYC's ability to measure, learn from, and report on the effectiveness of interventions.



Call to Action

CALL TO ACTION

Join With WorkWell NYC to Deepen Impact on NYC Employees' Health

The value and benefits of a comprehensive approach to promoting employee health and wellbeing are clear, as are the elements that are essential for a successful initiative. Building on the foundation laid by WorkWell NYC and ThriveNYC a comprehensive workplace wellness initiative should be developed and advanced by senior agency and union leaders across all city agencies, as ThriveNYC has been championed by Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray. In addition, meaningful steps to influence the health of a sizeable population devoted to public service can be taken within individual agencies, tailored to each agency's own needs and capacities, regardless of whether such a citywide initiative is adopted. By building on the strong, expert foundation created by WorkWell NYC, New York City can realize the benefits through actions big and small that multiply the impact of what already exists.

There is already momentum within many agencies and unions—perhaps yours among them—for generating a culture and environment that promotes workers' health. Consider opportunities for you to help that momentum grow. You can, for example:

- 1 **Partner with the WorkWell NYC team** to assess what's working and what's needed in your agency to promote wellness.
- 2 Create a **steering committee of union representatives and management** to jointly identify opportunities for work environment policy and practice changes.
- 3 **Provide training to supervisors and managers** in stress reduction methods that can be implemented to improve work environments and cultivate a culture of health.



-
- ④ **Assign a staff member to be a Worksite Wellness Coordinator or Ambassador**, or create a new staff position for one, to take the lead in promoting health and wellbeing by, for example, convening a labor-management steering committee, supporting WorkWell NYC programs and practices at your agency, and serving as a liaison with WorkWell NYC and its network of Health Ambassadors and Wellness Coordinators.
 - ⑤ **Ask your agency's Wellness Ambassadors or Coordinators what they've learned** are the most pressing needs to expand the impact of your agency's wellness efforts. They might include some things that could be fairly easy to address, such as consistent access to a space suitable for stretching or meditation or simply managerial encouragement for employees to take lunch breaks.
 - ⑥ **Provide recognition** for the efforts of your agency's Ambassadors and Wellness Coordinators.
 - ⑦ **Increase your visible participation in wellness activities** and encourage managers to do the same.

NYC's workers are burdened by physical and mental health conditions that cost city government much more than the dollars spent on avoidable medical care. Preventable health problems diminish the quality of workers' lives, their productivity at work, their engagement as productive community members, and the quality of the services they deliver. WorkWell NYC provides a ready foundation of expertise and resources for a robust workplace wellness initiative for all city employees. Seizing on emerging opportunities to implement comprehensive workplace wellness efforts within agencies will enable NYC employees to make more strategic use of their medical benefits, have better health, and provide better service while lowering costs. Ultimately extending the reach to include all agencies in a citywide workplace wellness initiative will have a vastly broader impact and will go a long way toward realizing Mayor de Blasio's vision of a healthy, equitable, and resilient city.

Footnotes

- ¹ Goetzel, Ron Z., Ph.D., The State of the Art in Workplace Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Programs – What is the Evidence for Effective Programs? Johns Hopkins University and Truven Health Analytics. 1199-SEIU Training and Employment Fund's Labor Management Project, May 6, 2014, New York, NY.
- ² Improving workforce health and productivity: Connecting the elements of workplace culture, U.S. findings of Willis Towers Watson's 2015/2016 Staying@Work Survey, Willis Towers Watson, willistowerswatson.com.
- ³ Kent, Karen, MPH, Ron Z. Goetzel, PhD, Enid C. Roemer, PhD, Aishwarya Prasad, MPH, MBBS, and Naomi Freundlich, MA, Promoting Healthy Workplaces by Building Cultures of Health and Applying Strategic Communications, *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Volume 58, Number 2, 114-122, Feb 2016.
- ⁴ New York City Community Health Survey 2017, <https://a816-healthpsi.nyc.gov/epiquery/sasresults.jsp>. Prediabetes Estimate from CDC, 2017 National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2015 data.
- ⁵ Thrive NYC: A Roadmap for Mental Health for All, <https://thrivenyc.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ThriveNYC-3.pdf>.
- ⁶ Soler, Robin E., PhD, et al, A Systematic Review of Selected Interventions for Worksite Health Promotion, CDC Community Guide to Preventive Services Review, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, February 2010, in R. Goetzel, May 6, 2014.
- ⁷ Wagner, SL, et al, Mental Health Interventions in the Workplace and Work Outcomes: A Best-Evidence Synthesis of Systematic Reviews, *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Jan 2016.
- ⁸ Improving workforce health and productivity: Connecting the elements of workplace culture, U.S. findings of Willis Towers Watson's 2015/2016 Staying@Work Survey, Willis Towers Watson, willistowerswatson.com.
- ⁹ Goetzel, R. May 6, 2014.
- ¹⁰ Goetzel, Ron, PhD, A Return-on-Investment (ROI) Analysis Resulting from a Comprehensive Risk Reduction and Health Promotion and Well-Being Program for City of New York Employees, Institute for Health and Productivity Studies, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, September 4, 2018.
- ¹¹ Baicker, Katherine, David Cutler and Zirui Song, Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings, *Health Affairs*, 29, no. 2 (2010):304-311 (published online January 14, 2010; 10.1377/hlthaff.2009.0626).
- ¹² Goetzel, R. May 6, 2014.
- ¹³ Aldana, Steven, The 7 Best Reasons To Have A Wellness Program: Benefits Of Wellness, Wellsteps Effective Employee Wellness Solutions, July 23, 2018. <https://www.wellsteps.com/blog/2018/07/04/reasons-to-have-a-wellness-program-benefits-of-wellness/>.
- ¹⁴ Aldana, July 2018.
- ¹⁵ Baicker, 2010.
- ¹⁶ Goetzel, September 2018.
- ¹⁷ Aldana, July 2018.
- ¹⁸ Henke, Rachel M., PhD, et al, The Relationship Between Health Risks and Health and Productivity Costs Among Employees at Pepsi Bottling Group, *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 52(5):519-27, May 2010.
- ¹⁹ Chapman, LS, The Art of Health Promotion: Meta-evaluation of worksite health promotion economic return studies: 2005 update. *Am J Health Promotion*, 19(6), July/Aug 2005 (cited in Creating a Culture of Wellness in Municipal Workplace, wellnessatworkoregon.org).
- ²⁰ Lavizzo-Mourey R., Workplace wellness: not just about the dollars, cited in Pronk, N.P., Placing Workplace Wellness in Proper Context: Value Beyond Money, Preventing Chronic Disease, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 11:140128, July 10, 2014.
- ²¹ Grossmeier, Jessica with Ryan Picarella, Communicating the Value of Your Wellness Program, Expert Interview, Welcoa News and Views, <https://www.welcoa.org/uploads/pdf/survey/ei-jessicagrossmeier.pdf> December 2008.
- ²² Aldana, July 2018.
- ²³ Pronk, N.P., Placing Workplace Wellness in Proper Context: Value Beyond Money, Preventing Chronic Disease, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 11:140128, July 10, 2014.
- ²⁴ Aldana, July 2018.
- ²⁵ Kent, 2016.
- ²⁶ Dellve, L., Skagert, K. & Vilhelmsson, R. Leadership in workplace health promotion projects: 1- and 2-year effects on long-term work attendance. *Eur. J. Public Health* 17, 471–476 (2007), cited in Workplace Health Playbook, American Heart Association CEO Roundtable, American Heart Association, <https://playbook.heart.org/>.
- ²⁷ Lemon, S. C. et al. Perceptions of Worksite Support and Employee Obesity, Activity and Diet. *Am. J. Health Behav.* 33, 299–308 (2009) in Workplace Health Playbook, American Heart Association CEO Roundtable, American Heart Association, <https://playbook.heart.org/>.
- ²⁸ 2016 Work and Well-Being Survey, Center for Organizational Excellence, American Psychological Association, 2016. www.apaexcellence.org.
- ²⁹ Goetzel, Ron, PhD et al, Do Workplace Health Promotion (Wellness) Programs Work? *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol 56, No. 9, Sept 2014.
- ³⁰ Burton, Joan, WHO Healthy Workplace Framework and Model: Background and Supporting Literature and Practices, World Health Organization, February 2010.
- ³¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/pdf/workplace-health-program-definition-and-description.pdf>.
- ³² Workplace Health Playbook, American Heart Association CEO Roundtable, American Heart Association, <https://playbook.heart.org/>.
- ³³ <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/pdf/workplace-health-program-definition-and-description.pdf>.
- ³⁴ Kent, 2016.
- ³⁵ Kent, 2016.

