

Evaluate your workplace wellness program

The only way to know if your wellness program is having any effect on employees and the organisation is evaluation. The process also allows you to see what processes can be improved on. Evaluation is also one of the steps often not completed by organisations. The evaluation process needs to be completed continually throughout your program. It also needs to be completed at the commencement of your program to collect baseline data. This means you need to think about the evaluation when you begin to plan your wellness program.

There are 5 key steps to effective evaluation

Step 1: Identify what you want to know

There are 3 types of evaluation indicators. They measure process, impact and outcome. Together, these indicators help you show the program's effectiveness and highlight areas for improvement. This can help you to secure continuing support and extra resources for your wellness program.

Process

This indicator helps you see how well you are implementing the program. It measures who is participating and how satisfied they are with the program and activities.

Useful process evaluation information includes:

- participation rates (e.g. classes, overall participation, management participation)
- satisfaction with program components (e.g. the activities, policy changes program as a whole)
- level of employee involvement and satisfaction with the program planning process
- assessing the delivery of each of the program's activities.

Impact

Impact evaluation looks at the short-term changes resulting from the wellness program. The indicators usually relate to the objectives of your action plan.

Useful impact evaluation information includes:

- employee awareness and knowledge of healthy lifestyle behaviours
- intention to make changes to lifestyle behaviours
- changes in lifestyle behaviours at work (e.g. fewer unhealthy food purchases)
- usage of workplace environment changes (e.g. lockers, bike racks)
- uptake of new wellness policies (e.g. healthy catering policy, smoke-free policy).

Outcome

You need to know the long-term results from your wellness program, including whether or not it's meeting your goals. You can measure this with an outcome evaluation.

Useful outcome evaluation information includes:

- › sick leave rates
- › employee health status
- › productivity measures
- › return on investment data
- › workers compensation costs
- › healthy lifestyle behaviours outside work.

Step 2: Decide how to collect the information

Once you know what you need to measure, you can identify how and when to collect the information.

Numbers or words

The most informative data is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data.

- Information you can state in numbers, or convert to numbers, is 'quantitative'. Surveys can have questions which you convert to numbers and analyse (e.g. a scale of not satisfied to very satisfied). You can present quantitative results in several ways including tables, graphs, actual numbers, percentages and rates.
- Data you can express in words is 'qualitative'. It provides detailed information and expresses the opinion or attitudes of individuals. Qualitative data can often reveal the reasons underlying certain behaviours.
- Surveys can have open-ended questions, which you can group into themes and summarise.
- In-depth interviews provide detail on a person's thoughts, views and behaviours about a particular topics, ideas or issues.
- Online or face-to-face forums explore the views of many people through group discussion.

Ways to gather quality information

Collect information from different sources to help you evaluate your program. You may already have valuable sources of data available or you can introduce new methods.

Some example sources of information include:

- workplace observation
- surveys
- audit tools
- human resources data
- in-depth interviews
- focus groups
- anecdotal reports
- case studies

Consider your work environment and the people

You need to decide which way of collecting data suits your workplace. Factors to consider include:

- › are there multiple sites that may affect the way information is collected
- › are people available to collect information from (e.g. shift work, fly-in fly-out services and depots)
- › can the information be collected in the timeframe available
- › what's most likely to encourage employees to participate in the evaluation
- › are there any language or literacy issues that may impact on participation
- › are there any cultural sensitivities or issues related to gender or age?

Consider timeframes

Collect information for your evaluation before starting the wellness program, during and after its completion. Some outcomes are longer-term. They will require more time between implementation and the measurement before the results become clear. Literature suggests that it may take 3 to 5 years to reap the full benefits of workplace wellness programs.¹

Measure change over time

- Use the information you gather during the needs assessment stage as baseline data.
- Compare the same data with the information you gather after implementing a strategy.
- Tracking the results over time will show change

Surveying employees

If you're creating a survey, test it with a small group first. This helps to ensure the questions are clear and the data is informative and useable.

For interviews or focus groups, develop a discussion guide for the facilitator. This will provide consistency between interviews. Consider how you will gain participants consent and ensure confidentiality.

Step 3: Collect the information

You need to decide who will collect and analyse the information. Consider including management, wellness committee members, wellness champions, leaders in your organisation or an external wellness provider.

More response means less bias

Encourage as many people as possible to participate in program evaluations.

The greater your sample size (number of employees who take part), the more accurate your data will be. The fewer employees who take part, the more you risk presenting biased data.

Consider asking a random selection of people the same questions, including those who took part in the wellness program and those who didn't.

Keep the information safe

You must maintain employees' privacy and confidentiality at all times. Keep evaluation data in a safe and secure place. Consider collecting anonymous information to avoid any issues concerning privacy or confidentiality.

Step 4: Analyse and review

Examine the information you've collected. Draw conclusions about how effective each strategy was:

- What worked?
- What didn't?
- Why?
- What improvements can you make?

Don't jump to conclusions

When you're interpreting your results, consider other factors that may be contributing to the outcome. Events outside the workplace may have had an impact.

For example, employees may be participating in a weight loss group outside of work. In this situation, it will be difficult to know if a change in eating habits is due to the strategies in your workplace wellness program—or a combination of participating in both programs.

Step 5: Report back

Share the information. Provide feedback to management, employees and stakeholders. Learn from the evaluation and use the results to improve your program. Celebrate successes.

References

1. The Health and Productivity Institute of Australia 2010, 'Best Practice