

2012



PROJECT BRIEF



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Department of Health



Background

The workplace is not only a place where the workforce spends most of its time. It directly influences the physical, mental and social well-being of employees and indirectly impacts on their families and the community. With over three million people in the workforce, the workplace is an ideal setting to engage people in healthy lifestyles.

Overseas experience has shown that effective workplace health promotion reduces absenteeism, sickness payments and compensation. A healthy workplace not only boosts staff morale, it also enhances staff wellbeing, raises productivity and helps establish a positive image for the organisation. A healthy workplace promotes a win-win situation for both employers and employees.

The Department of Health (DH) launched the "Health@work.hk Pilot Project" in 2010 to call on employers and employees to join hands to create a working environment that supports, guides, motivates and encourages everyone to live in better health. The first phase of the Pilot Project completed smoothly with very positive response from users and favourable outcome. Besides, it has also provided a workable model of workforce health promotion (WHP) for introduction to the local business community.

To enable the WHP project to be introduced to a greater number of organisations for the benefit of a larger workforce, DH is ready to launch the second phase of the Health@work.hk Project.

Objectives of Health@work.hk

The objectives are:

- To promote healthy lifestyle through workplace setting; and
- To develop a cost-effective and sustainable model for application in the wider business community.

Proposed action areas

The main health modules are:

- Physical activity;
- Healthy eating;
- Avoidance of alcohol use;
- Promoting the baby friendly workplace (breastfeeding); and
- Smoking cessation.

In addition, all modules will have three broad categories of interventions:

- Organisational policy interventions;
- Supportive environmental measures; and
- Lifestyle and personal health skills.

Key factors to success

Among others, the Pilot Project identified the following three components of a participating organisation which are key success factors of workforce health promotion programme:

- **Management support**- senior management needs to be committed and supportive of workforce health promotion;
- **Setting up a committee structure**- a coordinating body needs to be set up to plan, oversee and execute the programme; and
- **Allocation of resources** – Adequate resources in time, space and finances are required to be allocated to the WHP programme.

Management support

Support from all levels of management is one of the most important indicators of success of WHP programmes. Leaders of organisation can support health promotion in the form of policies, statements, procedures and visible management backing. Active leadership to support the implementation of WHP initiatives includes demonstrating the organisation's commitment to achieving optimal health and emphasizing the value of wellness as a key organisation-wide strategy.

Setting up of Wellness Committee

A well-planned committee structure is essential to the success of the WHP programme. An effective way to spark enthusiasm is to involve employees in planning and implementing the programme. Therefore, a committee structure should be formed as early in the process as possible. DH will provide guidance to each participating organisation to set up its wellness committee whose members should include employee representatives and senior management. The roles of the wellness committee are:

- To serve as a coordinating body to promote WHP within the organisation;
- To serve as a focal point for communication between front-line staff and managerial staff, and with DH;
- To work with DH, Occupational Safety & Health Council (OSHC) and other partners / service providers in facilitating the implementation of the Project;
- To collect the health needs and feedback from the front-line staff for project planning and evaluation;
- To organise and coordinate the implementation of the project intervention within the organisation; and
- To share the information on the planning and evaluation results of WHP with all staff.

A member of the wellness committee should be assigned as the **health**

facilitator to serve as the contact point with DH on issues related to WHP. At this point, DH will organise a working meeting with the wellness committee to kick start the Project and take the organisation through all stages of the process.

Allocation of resources

Building a successful WHP programme requires resources, including staff time and finance. Monetary costs will depend on types of interventions selected, number of participants, whether the employer pays, the employees pay, or the costs are shared. Cost will also be affected by whether the programme components are implemented in-house or by a service provider.

Needs assessment

The purpose of a needs assessment is to understand challenges and opportunities within an organisation and use this information to determine the appropriate content, scope and approach for the WHP programme. For better understanding of current organisational practice and health environment as well as general health condition of its workforce, DH will conduct an assessment of organisational strengths and staff health needs. The assessment has two parts: corporate scanning and health day. Results would be presented as aggregate data to the wellness committee for setting goals and action planning best suited to the organisation's needs. This stage should best be completed in one to two months following the meeting of DH with the wellness committee.

Corporate scanning

The corporate scanning comprises a questionnaire to the organisation and a site visit by DH staff to obtain baseline environmental information with a checklist.

Health Day

Occupational Safety & Health Council (OSHC), DH's strategic partner in Health@work.hk project, will conduct Health Day for staff, preferably in their work locations. The aim is to increase health awareness among staff with emphasis on modifiable behavioural risk factors and to collect a snapshot of overall health profile of the workforce.

On Health Day, participating staff are required to fill out a questionnaire that covers demographic data and lifestyle practices. Measurements on blood pressure, weight, height, waist circumference, and physical activity tests are recorded. Copies of these questionnaires (which are anonymous) will be kept by the staff personally and by DH for aggregate data compilation and report purposes. Staff will be given a motivational souvenir pack.

Developing the 'Year Plan'

Planning a WHP programme can be a rewarding experience for company leaders and other employees whether an organisation decides to develop a comprehensive WHP programme all at once or begin with just a few ongoing health promotion activities. Having a programme plan helps an organisation to stay on track, prioritise and evaluate the effectiveness of its WHP programme. DH will present the result of the corporate scanning and Health Day to the organisation and her staff. This will provide useful information for the wellness committee to identify opportunities to enhance staff health and wellbeing. DH will also run a workshop for wellness committee members for them to share experience with one another. Working with DH, the wellness committee is encouraged to prepare a 'Year Plan', with well considered and prioritised actions to address staff health needs over an achievable timeline and within means affordable to the organisation.

A 3-pronged approach

Health is shared responsibility. Whilst employers are primarily responsible for the health of an organisation including policies and physical environment; employee also need to assume personal responsibility. An important concept to include in the WPH is to combine individual strategies with environmental and policy changes as a way to increase impact by making it easier to achieve the behavior change. Effective employer-sponsored activities will help employees make lifestyle changes. A supportive social and physical environment will facilitate employees to maintain healthy behaviours. Therefore, an effective WHP programme uses a combination of organisational policies, environmental interventions, and lifestyle and personal skills to improve employee wellness.

Participating organisations are encouraged to plan its WHP within the scope of the five action areas as mentioned above. Other areas, based on organisational needs, can also be selected for intervention as long as the latter is evidence-based. However, participating organisation is encouraged to focus on small number of action areas with achievable outcomes than to embark on a diverse range of issues achieving minimal impact. Before starting WHP interventions, a year plan should be devised with interventions at (i) policy, (ii) environmental and (iii) personal levels that contribute to a healthy workplace.

Organisational policy interventions

Workplace policy is required to ensure sustainability of healthy environments. The organisation will be advised to formulate corporate policies in respect of the selected health promotion action areas. Policy enhancement is of utmost importance as this guides and drives all future health promotion activities of the organisation.

Supportive environmental measures

An important part of creating a support system for a WHP programme is to modify the physical work environment that promotes workplace health. The

organisation will be encouraged to introduce changes to the work setting, work routine and/or facilities, such as active promotion of physical activities and provision of healthy food choices in the work site, in order to create an atmosphere that supports and sustains healthy lifestyle choices. Environmental changes, which are simple to introduce from the company perspective, can benefit large numbers of staff and prove to be cost-effective means of health improvement.

Lifestyle and personal health skills

Enhancing staff's health knowledge and skill is also critical in enabling them to make healthier choices. DH will provide the organisation with suggestions of service providers for planning of health enhancement programmes for employees. Organisations have the liberty to select appropriate service providers to organise health promotion training / workshops for their staff. These classes are ideally conducted at the work site and at convenient times to maximize their reach to staff. Through these empowerment programmes, staff will be equipped with the knowledge and skills for making healthier choices for living. DH will provide continuous guidance throughout this stage.

Resource implication

It takes resources to implement activities necessary to achieve programme goals. Effective WHP programme requires both adequate resourcing and effective use of available resources to coordinate, execute and manage health promoting initiatives.

DH will provide information and professional support by referring relevant service providers/ community resources to participating organisations in relation to the five action areas, with particular emphasis on healthy eating and physical activity. DH's thematic website will serve as an information hub and platform for sharing among participating organisations. DH will work with the organisation's wellness committee to regularly monitor and review progress of the WHP throughout the year.

Evaluation

Evaluation and monitoring is critical for informing decision making (e.g. on programme design and modification), and for contributing to the collection of evidence on WHP for further development of effective WHP programmes. DH will drive WHP activities and monitor progress by reviewing input and output data, feedback from users, WC and stakeholders by questionnaires and interviews. Project indicators (e.g. number of staff attended the workshops, proportion of healthy / unhealthy food provided in the work site, environmental changes, etc) will be collected at the end of the year when reviewing the year plan. From the organisation's perspective, collection and comparison of management statistics e.g. absenteeism, employee compensation on health-related issues, staff turnover, productivity, etc, will help to build a business case for continued involvement in the project.

Recognition

Certificates of appreciation will be issued to participating organisations after completion of the "Health@Work.hk Project" as a token of appreciation and encouragement. It will also serve as the organisation's continued driving force for workforce health enhancement.

Enrolment

DH is recruiting organisations to join the Health@Work.hk Project. You are cordially invited to enrol in the project. Building support for WHP programme is an important place to start. This commitment is the foundation for any WHP programme. Therefore, if your organisation is interested in joining the project, please complete the attached pledge, the "C.R.E.A.T.E. My Pledge" (**Annex**) and return it to the Central Health Education Unit of DH by fax (no. 2591 6127). For more information on the Health@work.hk Project, please visit the thematic website of the Health@work.hk Project at <http://www.cheu.gov.hk/healthatwork>.

You may also wish to contact us at health_cheuweb@dh.gov.hk.