



Next Generation Healthcare™

20 Armory Lane
Milford, CT 06460-3361
Phone: (203) 876-1660
Toll Free: (800) 447-6689
Fax: (203) 877-9557

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Wellness programs remain prevalent

Wellness programs and education initiatives are widespread and appear to be reaping rewards for employers, according to the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, which surveyed 464 U.S. and Canadian employers.

Roughly 62% of employers offer a wellness program. Of those, 80% provide wellness education, which may include books, newsletters, seminars or speakers on wellness topics. Other popular offerings include health screenings, subsidized flu shots and health risk assessments.

The programs have paid off for some employers. About 44% of companies say their wellness program improved employee health, IFEBP finds. Other common results include improved employee morale, lower medical costs and reduced absenteeism.

Participation rates for wellness programs, however, have been less than thrilling at many companies. More than 80% of employers see average employee participation of 50% or below. Companies often dangle carrots to get workers to participate in wellness initiatives. Merchandise and gift cards are the most popular incentives, IFEBP reports.

Wellness programs and incentives may increase the workload for the HR department. About 46% of employers that provide a wellness program use in-house staff to plan and implement the program.