



BUILDING A WORKPLACE CULTURE OF HEALTH

has been proven to positively impact employee engagement, improve health and workplace productivity, and bend the health benefits cost curve. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a culture of health is a working environment where employee health and safety is valued, supported, and promoted through worksite health and wellness programs, policies, benefits, and environmental supports.

Healthcare is a significant cost to companies—averaging \$7,911 in employer-paid costs per employee in 2022 with the average premium for single coverage increasing 41% since 2012¹. The annual cost to employers for employee productivity losses due to illness is \$575 billion in the U.S. alone². Studies have shown that employers receive an estimated \$2.30 in improved performance and productivity for every dollar saved in direct health care costs. This is reinforced by research that shows companies that score high on culture of health assessment scores (CHAS) to quantify “cultures of health” tend to have lower health care cost trends without the need to reduce benefits or shift more costs to employees³.

“Corporate cultures that foster health and well-being become part of the company’s DNA. Employees both consciously and unconsciously make better and more healthy decisions, and likely better business decisions,” stated Dr. Ray Fabius, president and chief medical officer of HealthNEXT, a population health consultancy. “They understand that one of their responsibilities within these companies is to take care of themselves and foster healthful behaviors within their families and coworkers. The feeling of personal responsibility, in turn, encourages teamwork and collaboration.”

Bette Francis, chief human resources officer for the YMCA of Delaware, has been participating in a Culture of Health Collaborative

with six other employers in the tri-state region this past year. Led by the Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health (GPBCH) and with funding from the CDC Foundation, participating organizations are using a peer-reviewed methodology developed by HealthNEXT to assess their readiness and track their progress in creating a multifaceted culture of health and wellbeing.

The YMCA of Delaware offers programs and resources to the community for youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. “Thinking about our mission and participating in the Culture of Health Collaborative helped us formalize and brand wellness activities for our own employees, reinforcing that we value them and how they serve the community,” said Francis. “As part of the c-suite, the chief HR officer should be one of the drivers of these efforts to ensure that improvements in employees’ health and well-being are sustained over time.”

In building a culture of health, the City of Wilmington has implemented health and wellbeing programs to help employees and families address chronic conditions such as obesity and diabetes by covering services for diabetes prevention, nutrition, fitness and weight management, including the National Diabetes Prevention Program, pharmaceuticals and bariatric surgery. Dany Bourjolly Smith, the City’s benefits director, explained, “Having our Mayor and department leaders support these programs demonstrates our commitment to the health and wellbeing of our employees and their families.”

Employers of any size can access tools and guidance to build a culture of health by utilizing expertise and tools from the CDC, the regional healthcare coalition (GPBCH), national organizations such as the Health Enhancement Research Organization and Integrated Benefits Institute, and consultancies such as HealthNEXT. As part of the planning process, employers should also check in with their benefit

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advisors, health plans, vendors, and public entities. According to Dr. Fabius, HealthNEXT's approach summarizes action steps into the following ten best practice pillars:

- Leadership support and management alignment
- Wellbeing strategic plan
- Health supportive environment
- Wellbeing on-site activities
- Health and wellness across the continuum
- Data driven approach
- Marketing and communications
- Incentives and benefit design
- Engagement and navigation
- Vendor integration

Many employers already have many key components for a culture of health in place. Pursuing a benchmark culture of health and wellbeing pays dividends by improving health, productivity, and cost reduction for employers. Advancing a culture of health within organizations also enables employers to attract and retain employees and to be an employer of choice. ■

1. *Premiums and Worker Contributions Among Workers Covered by Employer-Sponsored Coverage; Kaiser Family Foundation*
2. *Poor Worker Health Costs U.S. Employers \$575 Billion A Year; Forbes*
3. *Companies That Promote a Culture of Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Outperform in the Marketplace; Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*



Jill M. Hutt, MSHP, is vice president of member services at the Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health, which serves employers in southeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and Delaware.

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