



Heart
Foundation

Championing Hearts in NSW

Staff Wellness Program 2009





Overview

The Heart Foundation implemented a comprehensive Wellness Program for staff in New South Wales from June to December 2009. Activities ranged from meditation classes, volunteering opportunities and physical activity sessions to team building initiatives, healthy lifestyle education and encouragement to find more physically active ways of travelling to work.

Improved working relationships within the organisation and better staff morale were among the greatest benefits attributed to the program. Individual online health assessments conducted before and after the program indicated small but positive improvements in the overall health and wellbeing of staff. Staff absentee rates declined significantly and reductions in staff turnover were also noted. Support for the program was strong, particularly from senior management, and it is continuing with future commitment demonstrated through inclusion in Human Resources (HR) operational planning with an assigned budget and performance measures.

Key concepts – Wellness

Wellness – is generally used to mean a balance of positive mental and physical health which results in an overall feeling of wellbeing. A successful workplace health program incorporates activities which promote the wellbeing of employees, focussing on individual behaviour change and organisational change, creating policies and environments (physical and social) which support healthy behaviours.

Individuals who have a strong sense of wellbeing will contribute to a satisfied, productive and stable workforce. Hence there are benefits for employees and for organisations in improving health and wellness.

Evidence base

There is good evidence that workplace programs can improve health and wellbeing. Increased physical activity and healthier eating in particular have been demonstrated as results of well-designed programs.

Essential elements of successful programs include:

- Organisational policies and management support aligned with program goals
- Effective resourcing, communication and marketing of programs
- Involving workers in design and implementation of programs

- Tailoring programs to employee needs and attaining high participation rates
- Providing training or support in individual behavioural skills
- Ensuring programs have several components, are evaluated and results reported back to participants.

Research also demonstrates that better employee health and wellbeing is linked to improvements in productivity, customer and job satisfaction, along with reduced absenteeism, work place injury and business costs.¹

1. Ref. Chau J. (2009) Evidence module: Workplace physical activity and nutrition interventions. Physical Activity Nutrition and Obesity Research Group, University of Sydney.

Background

In November 2008 external consultants were contracted to coordinate online staff health assessments. Following the health assessments senior management concluded that there was a need for a program to support all staff to improve or maintain their health behaviours. The priority areas of stress management, healthy nutrition, sleep management and healthy body weight were identified. To reduce costs and take advantage of internal expertise, the organisation decided to implement an internally coordinated program, with external providers engaged on an 'as needs' basis.

Program goals

- Promote health and wellbeing of staff through a structured program
- Improve staff relationships across work teams through the program activities
- Reinforce the Heart Foundation's commitment to the health and wellbeing of staff
- Maximise the number of people participating in the program and their commitment to it
- Position the Heart Foundation as an employer of choice by having healthy, productive and satisfied employees.

Structure of the organisation

The Heart Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation with divisional offices in all Australian states and territories. In late 2008 the NSW Division comprised:

- approximately 80 employees based in the East Sydney office broadly divided across key functions – research, heart health promotion, communications, fundraising, information technology, human resources, finance and administration.
- six staff in Newcastle regional office and one in Kiama
- senior management group – the CEO and five directors
- twelve middle management positions
- seventy percent female staff with most in the 21 to 40 year age group.



Program planning

Planning and implementation of the program is described within a best practice framework for workplace health promotion. The actual process was dynamic with some steps happening simultaneously.

Step 1. Engaging Management Support

- The senior management group were the initial drivers for the program. It was included in the 2009 HR operational plan with a budget and performance measures
- A Wellness Committee was formed to oversee the program. It included management and staff from different functional groups.

Step 2. Introducing the concept and identifying needs

- Managers consulted with staff to introduce the idea of a wellness program
- Online health assessments gave individual feedback to staff and an overall picture of the health and wellbeing of employees
- The assessments identified key areas for improvement which led to the program themes of 'Mind, Body, Spirit'.

Step 3. Gaining staff support and establishing program responsibilities

- Responsibility for the program was assigned to a HR staff member with coordination supported by the Wellness Committee
- Staff members, including regional staff, were randomly selected to form four teams of about 20 people, with a mix of employees from different functional areas
- Two team leaders were allocated to each of the four teams. The team leaders were all from a senior management position within the organisation, reinforcing management support for the program
- The program was launched with a health themed trivia event
- The program became part of induction for all new staff
- Management were very sensitive to the needs of staff who did not wish to participate and feedback indicated that staff did not feel pressured to participate.

Step 4. Developing goals and objectives

- Goals were developed by the Wellness Committee and signed off by the senior management group
- Organisational policies and practices already in place that supported the program goals and activities were:
 - flexible work policy
 - employee assistance program
 - smoke-free work environment
 - healthy catering policy
 - annual staff CPR training
 - facilities e.g. a shower, spaces suitable for group classes, storage room and bicycle storage racks.

Step 5. Identifying program activities and developing an action plan with budget

Activities were selected by the Wellness Committee using the Mind, Body, Spirit theme – see figure 1. The physical activity components encouraged employees to meet national guidelines for heart health.

Budgeted expenditure for the program was minimal, with activities planned to be low cost and/or user pays (e.g. \$10 each for a yoga class).

Pre and post assessments with analysis and reports from an external consultant cost \$1600. The end of year event cost \$500 including food, equipment and prizes. From a budget of \$4000, just over \$2000 was actually spent.

The major costs included staff time to coordinate, promote, manage and report on the program. Fifty percent of the HR staff member's time was devoted to the program in the establishment phase and this reduced to about thirty percent during the implementation phases and in the second year of the program.

Figure 1: Mind, Body, Spirit – program activities



Mind

- spiritual meditation
- lunch time seminars – topics included Heart Foundation program updates, stress management, sleep and fatigue.

Body

- lunchtime group physical activities e.g. yoga, boxercise, core strength, soccer, basketball, walking and running groups
- entering Heart Foundation teams into events and challenges e.g. Sun Herald City2Surf, Blackmores Sydney Running festival, Sydney Tower run up, 7 Bridges Walk
- healthy lifestyle behaviours such as 30 minutes of daily physical activity
- lunchtime seminars - topics included healthy eating, physical activity, heart health
- online resources and tools – information about health and wellness posted on the organisation's intranet.

Spirit

- volunteering for the Heart Foundation and other charities e.g. participate in Heart Foundation Doorknock Appeal
- charity fundraising
- staff social activities
- community work
- blood bank donation.



Step 6. Selecting incentives and rewards

The competitive team element was introduced as part of the program in the belief that it would help maintain interest and participation, encourage peer support for activities and enhance relationships among staff in the teams.

An online excel scoring system was established on the organisation's intranet. Individual participation in wellness activities during or outside work hours counted towards the team score. Bonus points were awarded for activities with fellow staff.

An awards ceremony was held during the end of program event, where the team with the most points was awarded the Wellness Program trophy. Prizes, such as cinema tickets, were also given to the individuals with the highest point scores in each team. Some incentives were also provided throughout the year for high participation (e.g. 3 month membership at local gym).

Step 7. Identifying additional support

Internal expertise was used for a weekly core conditioning class and to provide physical activity, healthy eating, stress management and sleep education using seminars and information bulletins. To increase the range and variety of group classes, external providers were engaged to conduct weekly boxing in the park, meditation, yoga and running sessions, with a user pays system.

Staff were also provided information on the following support services:

- NSW Health – Get Healthy Coaching Service
- Heart Foundation Health Information Service
- Australian Better Health Initiative resources
- Corporate memberships at several local health clubs.

Step 8. Promoting the program

A number of communication strategies helped to promote the program:

- management briefings of staff
- launch event with health trivia – fun and engaging
- monthly healthy team events
- weekly Heart Foundation internal e-newsletter included wellness program section with information and health tips
- program was included in induction process for new staff
- CEO updates at staff meetings often included a wellness program update
- wellness team leaders co-ordinated monthly team meetings
- program bulletin board in the staff kitchen displayed healthy lifestyle information and a weekly update of the team scores
- end of year event and awards ceremony.

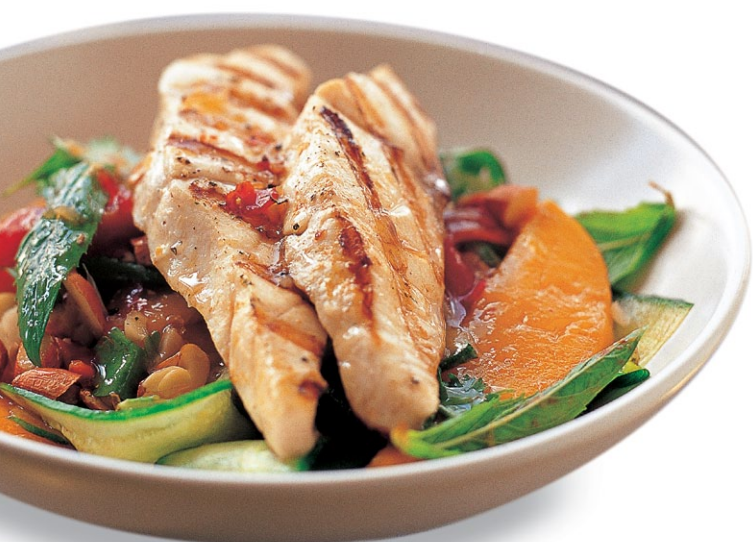
Step 9. Managing the program

The HR staff member managed the budget, timeline, program promotion and external providers. Other duties included:

- documenting and reporting on the program
- convening wellness committee meetings and consultation by email as needed.

Step 10. Reviewing the program and making continuous improvements

- The Wellness Committee and teams met regularly to plan and review their activities and direction.
- A program evaluation survey was implemented by the HR staff member, using an online survey tool. The questions were developed by the HR staff member with input from the Wellness Committee.
- Staff were encouraged to provide feedback on the program through the survey, Wellness Committee, wellness team leaders and the HR staff member.
- External consultants conducted post program online staff health assessments, providing individual feedback on current health status and changes from the initial assessment. An overall report detailed changes in the organisation's health profile.



Program impact

Key findings from the staff evaluation survey

The evaluation survey was sent online to all 80 staff in December 2009, at the completion of the 2009 program. The response rate was 52 per cent (42 completed surveys). The age and gender profile of the respondents was a close match to the overall staff profile.

Most popular activities pursued on a regular basis were:

- lunchtime health seminars (26 people or 68%)
- walking 30 minutes or more each way to work (26 people or 68%)
- lunchtime exercise sessions (e.g. yoga (26%), boxercise (26%), core strength (24%).

Improvements in health and health behaviours:

- 30 people (79%) reported some improvement in their health or health behaviours by participating in the program.
- 22 people (42%) were more physically active at work than before the program and the same number claimed to have sustained their increased physical activity level three months after the cessation of the program.
- 25 people (48%) noted other improvements in their lifestyles as a result of the program e.g. “more energised outside of work”, “better relationships with people I don’t work with directly”.

The top three things that staff liked about the program were:

- getting to know other staff through shared activities, having fun and improving staff morale.
- the wide range of activities and their availability in-house and as part of the working day.
- management support and encouragement to participate.

The majority of respondents thought the program’s six month time frame, the ‘Mind, Body, Spirit’ theme and the points allocation system were appropriate.

Over 90 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Heart Foundation “cares about employee health and wellness” and “lives the values of employee health in the performance of its business”.

Individual health assessments before and after

All staff were invited to complete an online self report health assessment, both before and after the 2009 program. The external consultants analysed the data and gave each individual confidential feedback. The overall report to the Heart Foundation which aggregated the data suggested there had been small positive changes in some health behaviours.

Organisation level impact

Although absentee rates were already well below industry benchmarks, there was a thirty-three percent decline in sick days taken from July 2008 to June 2010. There was also a five percent drop in staff voluntary turnover from July 2008 to June 2010.

Changes for ongoing program

A number of suggestions were put forward by staff to improve the program. These included:

- streamlining the points score sheet to make it easier to enter points
- including non-management staff in team leader positions as a professional development opportunity
- incorporating new strategies for physical activity, stress management and nutrition e.g. recognising walking meetings and 2 and 5 daily serves of fruit and vegetables in the points system
- creating new promotional material for activities and targeting particular health issues by month
- encouraging staff to set three health/wellness goals at the beginning of the program
- providing individual incentives based on contribution to their wellness team instead of just for the highest points scorers.



Considerations

Future considerations for the Heart Foundation

When the first health assessment was commissioned, it was envisaged that the whole program would be provided by external consultants. Containing costs was important so initial goals and expectations were reviewed. In-house expertise was used where ever possible.

In the start-up phase and evaluation phase, the program took up a significant proportion of the HR staff member's time. This significantly reduced during the implementation phase and in the second year of the program.

Informal feedback on the program has been strongly positive. However only about half of the staff responded to the formal feedback survey. So although those results were also very favourable it is possible that they represent the views of those who were more positive about the program. Incentives will be considered in future to improve response rates to the feedback survey as well as using a number of feedback methods.

The health assessments in late 2008 helped to identify needs and therefore shape the program. They might also have been motivating for individuals to participate in the program. However aiming to show behaviour change and improved health status may have been optimistic, given it was initially a six month program. Refining and improving the internal staff feedback survey to assess changes in knowledge, awareness and intention to change behaviour may be a more useful evaluation goal in future, with changes in health status or behaviours measured over a longer time period.

Considerations for other organisations

In considering how easy it would be for other organisations to replicate this program, there are a few factors to take into account.

Organisational Factors

The Heart Foundation has staff with professional skills and knowledge in nutrition, physical activity and healthy lifestyles and an organisational mission that is about heart health. The organisation was able to call on this workplace culture and expertise in many ways for the program e.g. in making the commitment to the program, relevant speakers and topics for seminars and lunchtime activities, online resources and newsletter articles. Policies such as flexible work policy also supported the program.

For other organisations an internal audit of staff skills may identify people who could contribute to a workplace wellness program. Local providers charging a fee for service may also be an option.

Supportive Physical Environment

The Heart Foundation Sydney office is in the inner city close to parks, ovals, swimming pools and gyms so there was good access to facilities for a range of program activities. It is also close to public transport so that a combination of walking and public transport is a good option for many workers. The office has facilities that support the program such as a shower, space for classes, clothes storage room and bike racks. Preparing a simple workplace travel plan² could help to identify environmental enablers and gaps for specific workplaces.

2. A Workplace Travel Plan is designed to address an organisation's travel needs and impacts, promoting 'sustainable' travel choices such as walking, cycling, using public transport and car-sharing. The NSW Premiers Council for Active Living has developed a best practice Workplace Travel Plan resource to assist workplaces to develop their Travel Plan (http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/workplace_travel_plan)



Conclusions

A multi-faceted health and wellbeing program for Heart Foundation employees has been a worthwhile investment for individuals and for the organisation as a whole.

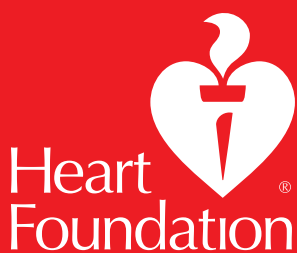
- Staff reported improved health behaviours and wellbeing.
- Pre and post assessments showed some small but positive improvements in overall health and wellbeing.
- Stronger working relationships were established across the organisation.
- Staff hold the belief that the Heart Foundation is demonstrating the values and best practice that are inherent in its mission as an organisation.
- The program contributed to reduced absentee and staff turnover rates.
- There was strong support for the program to continue.
- A slightly refined Staff Wellness Program was implemented in 2010 and there is strong organisational commitment to continue the program in 2011.

For further information contact the Heart Foundation NSW/ACT Human Resources Consultant on (02) 9219 2444.



Useful workplace health program resources

- New South Wales Premiers Council for Active Living – Active workplaces
www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/active_workplaces
- Tasmanian Premier’s Physical Activity Council – Get moving at work: a resource kit for workplace health and wellbeing programs
www.getmoving.tas.gov.au/RelatedFiles/PPAC_Wellbeing%20Kit%20Complete.pdf
- Western Australia Department of Sport and Recreation - A resource kit for physical activity and health in the workplace
www.dsr.wa.gov.au/workplace
- NSW Health – Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service
www.gethealthynsw.com.au
- Heart Foundation – Healthy catering at work
www.heartfoundation.org.au/healthiercatering
- Heart Foundation – Heart Foundation Walking program
www.heartfoundation.org.au/walking
- Heart Foundation – for Heart Health Information call 1300 36 27 87
www.heartfoundation.org.au
- Physical Activity Nutrition and Obesity Research Group (Sydney University) – Evidence Module: Workplace physical activity and nutrition interventions
www.sydney.edu.au/medicine/public-health/panorg/pdfs/Evidence_module_Workplace.pdf



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Newcastle

Suite 5, OTP House
Bradford Close
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Illawarra

Kiama Hospital and
Community Health Service
Bonaira Street
Kiama NSW 2533

Tel: (02) 4232 0130

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