



*HR Leader's*

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# PLAYBOOK TO PLANNING A CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAM



 **BURNALONG**

Why You Need a Corporate Wellness  
Program (And How to Start One)

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# INTRODUCTION

## What is a Corporate Wellness Program?

Many companies provide wellness for their employees in some form or another. In fact, 58% of US employers<sup>1</sup> offer a general wellness program. Emphasis on general. As we'll explore in the rest of this guide, not all wellness programs are created equal.

Corporate wellness programs can come in many forms, some of which are more general (such as a generic steps or hydration challenge), and some are much more specific to employee needs (such as diabetes support, direct access to nutrition coaching, or [virtual wellness programming](#)).

There are many wellness program options to choose from, and as you are in the process of planning your program it's important to start by understanding both your employees' needs and the goals your company has around employee engagement and wellness.

Understanding the importance of wellness in the workplace is a key first step to supporting the diverse needs of your workforce.

As employers are faced with greater complexities as a result of the global pandemic, many companies are choosing to reduce or reallocate budget and support for corporate wellness programs.

However, this may prove to be a costly decision in the long run and can result in **lower engagement, reduced retention, and can also directly affect recruitment.**

In this guide, we'll explore the reasons you need a corporate wellness program for your employees, the steps to take when planning your program, how to develop a budget and a launch timeline, and tips for generating internal executive buy-in.

# 3 REASONS WHY YOU NEED A CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAM

## Engagement & Productivity

A recent study found that 89.4% of employees<sup>2</sup> think employers should attempt to improve the health of their workers.

There are many benefits to implementing a corporate wellness program at your company.

**Boosting engagement and productivity, bolstering retention and recruitment, and reducing healthcare costs** are often cited as the main 3 reasons wellness programs work for leading employers.

A study from the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans found that of companies that instituted wellness programs, 67% saw an increase in productivity<sup>3</sup> and 67% reported that their employees were more satisfied.

When considering a wellness program for your company, it's important to also think about it from the perspective of your employees.

## Recruitment & Retention

In a study conducted by Virgin Pulse, **~85% of employers said the wellness program had a high impact<sup>4</sup>** on employee engagement, recruitment, retention and company culture when wellness program outcomes were satisfactory. Of those surveyed, 42% cited improving employee engagement as the top reason for having a wellness program.

## Reducing Healthcare Costs

Considering that unhealthy lifestyle behaviors contribute to the **chronic diseases that cause 75% of healthcare costs<sup>5</sup>**, wellness programs can also lower healthcare expenses for employers while simultaneously affecting the long term health of the employees (and their family members) who are under employer's plans.

# 5 STEPS TO PLANNING YOUR CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAM

## Step 1: Create a Plan

So at this point, maybe you're convinced that it's time to implement a corporate wellness program, or revisit the wellness program you've been running in the background for the past few years.

Still not convinced? You can always survey your employees<sup>6</sup> to better understand their needs and include questions specifically designed to gauge their interest in a wellness program.

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The first step to create a plan for your wellness program is to ask yourself the following questions:

- What needs are you trying to meet?
- Have employees specifically been asking for something?
- Is your leadership team looking for a specific result, like trying to boost engagement?

It helps to understand your goals going into this process so you can set yourself up for success.

Understanding what type of wellness program you'll want to explore is important.

Are you trying to support your employees physical needs, emotional health, or social support?

Many companies underestimate the importance of emotional and social health in their wellness programs.

One study found the two most effective means for sustaining behavior change are [in-person support and virtual support](#) – both of which ranked higher than motivators like improved access to preventative care and even financial rewards.

## Step 2: Set Your Goals and Objectives

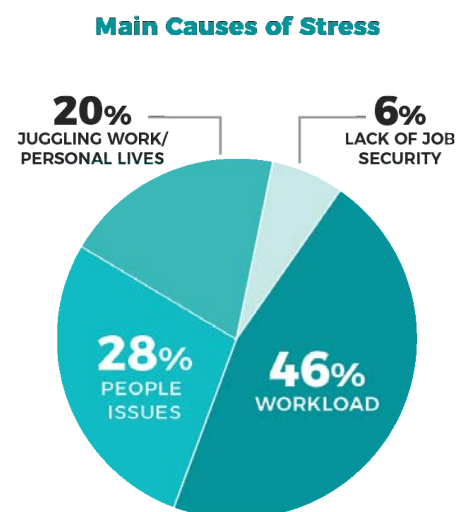
What do you want to accomplish with your wellness program? What are you trying to accomplish in general when it comes to your employee’s wellbeing and overall success?

Understanding your goals and objectives during the planning phase is vital, since the decisions you make during this process should be guided by those very goals. In order to achieve your goals and objectives in wellness you should be focused on specific areas that will help anchor your success in a variety of ways.

**Engagement:** How many people attend your wellness program events, or participate in the resources available to them? If engagement is a goal, plan to look for programs that can reach many employees at once and are not limited to a specific physical location (like [virtual fitness and wellness programming](#)).

**Including Families:** Employers pay a lot for family healthcare (on average more than \$14,000 per year according to a recent study).<sup>7</sup> Yet most wellness programs don’t support the family, and therefore even the most effective wellness program can’t reduce those healthcare costs. Addressing family wellness can be an important goal in your overall wellness strategy to help bring down costs, and boost participation and engagement.

**Supporting Mental, Emotional, and Social Health:** Offering yoga classes or fresh fruit may not be enough to support an increasingly stressed out and anxious workforce. With 75% of employees<sup>8</sup> saying they are experiencing more stress than a generation ago, wellness programs need to address more than just physical health. Offering mindfulness or stress management classes, access to mental health resources, and layering in social support can go a long way in supporting your employees overall wellness.



## Step 3: Write (or Revisit) Your Company's Wellness Mission Statement

What does your company value most in their employee's wellness? How is your company's mission translated into the mission of your wellness program?

If you don't yet know how to answer these questions, it's important to sit down and write a company wellness mission statement.<sup>9</sup>

There are some basic steps to consider when writing your company's wellness mission statement. First, consider the following topics:

- Why the company values wellness
- The goal of the wellness program
- Specific problem areas for employees you're focused on
- Your plan for addressing the problem areas

Once you're ready to write your mission statement, keep in mind:

- Keep it short and sweet. 2-6 sentences will do fine
- Focus on results, like employee focused outcomes
- Use simple, clear language to convey your goals so there's no misunderstanding when you communicate this statement internally

Want to learn more about effectively surveying your employees and supporting them during the open enrollment process? Read the [HR Leader's Guide to Virtual Open Enrollment](#).

## Step 4: Assess Your Current Wellness Program Status (and Your Employee's Needs)

Maybe your company has a corporate wellness program already in place. What measures are you using to evaluate the success (or failure) of that program?

Refer back to your company's wellness mission statement and identify the core things you're hoping to accomplish when it comes to the wellness of your employees. Are you meeting those goals? Or is it time for a change?

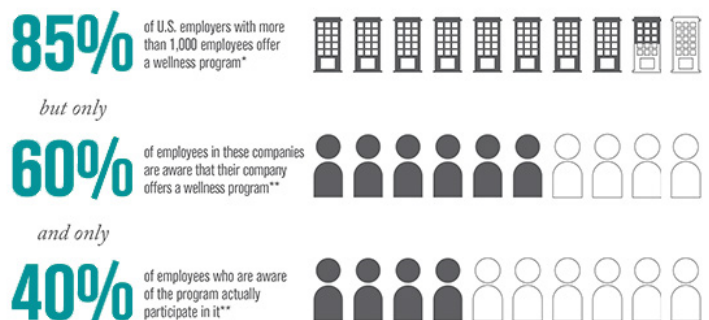
One measure of success in a wellness program is engagement and participation. Keep in mind that not all wellness programs are created equal when it comes to engagement.

So as you evaluate your current program and research options, it's essential to focus on programs that can offer something for everyone to boost engagement and participation.

**The best way to understand the effectiveness of your current wellness program, or identify the needs of your employees that aren't currently being addressed, is to actually ask your employees!**

You can develop an employee wellness survey<sup>11</sup> to identify opportunity areas for your wellness program. These surveys are typically a mix of questions regarding the employee's current health and wellness routines and how they can benefit from a workplace wellness program.

**In fact, only 24% of employees with access to a corporate wellness program participate.<sup>10</sup>**



**THE BOTTOM LINE: ONLY 24% OF EMPLOYEES AT COMPANIES THAT OFFER A WELLNESS PROGRAM PARTICIPATE IN IT.**

## Step 5: Determine a Budget

Wellness programs can range from a few hundred dollars a month to tens of thousands, depending on your company size and your goals.

**Keep in mind as you evaluate your budget: your employees' health is worth investing in.**

In fact, one study found that when employees use wellness programs to make lifestyle changes, they can save their companies about \$353 per employee per year in recouped productivity.<sup>12</sup>

Your company may not currently have a large budget for wellness, but you can still evaluate your options and determine the potential value of implementing a program.

Consider the cost of your existing program or wellness efforts and other areas like engagement and retention when determining a budget. Further in this guide we'll explore the ways to get executive buy-in for your wellness program to help get your budget approved.

# EVALUATING AND CHOOSING YOUR WELLNESS PROVIDER

You're ready to make the leap; you've written your wellness statement and have goals and a budget in mind. The next question is: "What provider do I start with?"

Evaluating the options out there can seem daunting, but it helps to first understand the landscape and what you're looking for before you start the search.

'Corporate wellness programs' is a fairly large umbrella - they can range from [online nutrition & wellness classes](#) and

on-site yoga all the way to providing fresh fruits and vegetables, to buying everyone in the company a wearable device and running step challenges.

Understanding your employee's needs and the diverse workforce you're supporting from the previous steps should help you narrow it down.

If your team is distributed across 100 locations, or if most of them work from home, then providing in-person fitness classes

or weekly fruit baskets probably won't have the impact you're hoping to achieve. You want to optimize your program to reach and impact the most employees possible.

Searching through sites like Shortlister<sup>13</sup> or the SHRM directory<sup>14</sup> is a good place to start the evaluating process. Ask your colleagues who may have implemented wellness programs in the past, or are currently running one, to get a better sense of what has and hasn't worked for them.

Entering into the buying process for a corporate wellness program doesn't have to be daunting. There are many options out there, and evaluating them takes time. When you're starting to look closer at a wellness program, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the wellness goals of my program in general?
- What have my employees been asking for that they must have in this wellness program?
- Will this program only need to support physical health challenges, or mental, emotional, and social health too?
- How do I want to reach my employees: online or on-site?

Look at the wellness provider's website and make sure it answers the following questions:

- Will the wellness provider's service work for my specific employees' needs or is it catered to a general audience?
- Can this platform effectively reach my whole company, regardless of where they are located in the world?
- Can this service impact the long-term health of my employees, and does it have statistics to back it up?
- Is reporting and measurement included in their program?

The next step of the evaluation process is getting in contact with a representative from the company. If your wellness provider doesn't have the ability to speak with a representative, and there's nowhere you can find to contact them, they're likely a self-service provider who may not have the personalized support resources you need to help run a corporate wellness program.

An example of this is a general fitness mobile app that is designed for individual users, but doesn't have any corporate plans, features, or customer success resources that are necessary to support larger corporate clients.

When speaking with a representative of a wellness provider, it's good to be sure they answer these questions:

- What type of support resources do you offer during the launch and management of this program or service?
- What do you do to support my employee's individual needs, such as disabilities, chronic conditions, etc.
- What are your typical engagement rates and how does that compare with the rest of the industry?
- How long will it take for us to implement this program?
- Can I use my wellness dollars or work with my insurer to support the cost of this program?
- Can you work with my health plan to identify the cost drivers and develop ways to target those cost drivers?

Going through the evaluation process will also help you understand your goals and needs. In these conversations, many wellness providers will ask you about your employee's unique needs and the goals you'd like to reach. Having these discussions will help you identify what is most important to you and your workforce.

## Getting Executive Buy-In

One of the biggest challenges that HR leaders cite during the evaluation and buying process is getting executive buy-in and approval of the wellness program. Having a measurable impact on your employee's wellness and the true costs to the company helps in these conversations.

Let's revisit the ideas listed above about the importance of providing wellness to your employees - these are a great place to start when having a conversation with leadership teams about the need for a corporate wellness program.

**Productivity:** Productivity has a direct correlation to cost and overall output of employees. Recouping productivity as a result of a wellness program can often be a good starting point when internally discussing the value of wellness.

**Retention:** Losing an employee can cost an organization in the short and long term. Studies have shown it can cost between 20%-200% of an employee's annual salary<sup>15</sup> to replace an employee who has left - depending on the complexity of the role and the training required. Wellness programs can help reduce employee burnout, which is often cited as a reason to quit.

**Reducing Healthcare Costs:** Take a look at your most recent employee healthcare costs, and be sure to familiarize yourself with the main drivers of this cost. When evaluating your wellness program, and discussing with your executive team, bring up these primary cost drivers and align your goals of your wellness program with reducing these costs. In some cases, supporting employees with specific chronic conditions can reduce your healthcare costs<sup>16</sup> more than the total cost of the wellness program.

# TIMELINE PLANNING

When do you want to start your program?

Does it need to be tied to open enrollment or can you launch it as soon as its ready?

Are there immediate needs for your employees that you want to address and therefore launch sooner?

The timeline of launching your program is an important step to maximizing its impact and long-term success. Think about when you want to start your program while you're in the evaluation and buying phase.

- Does it need to be tied to open enrollment or can you launch it as soon as it's ready?
- Are there immediate needs for your employees that you want to address and therefore launch sooner?

Some wellness providers offer what's called a 'turnkey' solution, meaning you can get up and running pretty much once the contract is signed. Others might require a few months ramp-up time, and may not be ready on your timeline.

Consider the short-term needs of your employees as well as their long-term needs when timeline planning: launching quickly could drive impact for employees who need it today, whereas waiting until key times of year like open enrollment may optimize for early adoption given the emphasis and communication about new benefits and offerings.

# PREPARE TO LAUNCH / GO LIVE

*Getting your team ready for launch, assembling internal team as needed for any tech integrations, for internal communication, etc.*

Once you have a launch date set you can develop a launch plan with your internal team. These are some considerations to make leading up to launch:

**Technical Setup:** If there are any technical integrations needed, ensure you have the internal resources allocated before launch. Again, some wellness providers don't require a technical setup, while others may require a few weeks of dedicated support.

**Communication Plan:** Develop an internal communication plan with your team so when the program launches you have these messages ready to send. Consider the ways your employees typically receive information, such as email, internal messaging platforms, company intranet, or at-home mailers. All of these are great channels to use when communicating the launch of a new wellness program.

**Prepare Your Team:** Depending on the size of your company, you may be running this wellness program alone or you are responsible for a large team. In a larger organization you can prepare your internal team for the new program launch through a series of planning sessions and initial communications to educate them about the new program. As an individual or on a smaller team, you can consider identifying wellness champions who can help support the wellness program at scale.

# SAMPLE WELLNESS PROGRAM COMPONENTS

There are many misconceptions about wellness in general, and especially corporate wellness programs. Reflect on the diverse needs of your workforce - whether you have 50 employees or 50,000, everyone has different lifestyles, levels of wellness, interests, and motivating factors.

Consider this: Is a hydration challenge enough of a wellness program to engage your entire workforce? Will it push the needle on employee engagement, productivity, retention, or recruitment? How big of an impact will it have on your organization's healthcare costs?

Many of these standalone wellness program components have permeated the industry as full 'wellness programs', and have created a check-the-box mentality around corporate wellness programs. Your employees deserve more than a checkmark next to wellness - they deserve a full-scale wellness program.

These are some common standalone components to a wellness program. Your employees need more than one of these components for a highly effective wellness program.

### **1. On-Site Fitness Programming & Classes**

Encouraging employees to stay active and fit while they're in the office is a great way to engage employees and boost their health. However, when offering gym classes or a gym membership to employees there is a high likelihood you will only engage the employees who already regularly go to the gym and exercise. The most effective and engaging wellness programs meet employees where they are, and wherever they prefer working out.

### **2. Step Challenge**

One of the most common components of a wellness program. This may motivate a select group of people who have a wearable and can track their steps, but it may de-motivate or alienate anyone in your workforce who has a disability or is unable to walk due to health conditions.

### **3. Hydration Challenge**

Everyone in your workforce has a bottle of water at their desk. Employees should drink the bottle of water throughout the day.

### **4. Biometrics Scan**

Understanding your employee's health level and underlying conditions is an important component of a wellness program. The misconception here is that a biometric screening or scan can serve as a wellness program in and of itself. Without actionable recommendations, resources, or support after a scan your employees won't see any of the value of the scan on an annual basis.

### **5. Providing Healthy Food Options**

Organic snacks, fruits, and vegetables in the office are one of the most visible alternatives to a wellness program. Providing healthy options in the office can be great for employee morale, but it does not push the needle in increasing engagement, productivity, or reducing employee stress and reducing healthcare costs. There are plenty of employees who will follow up a healthy snack of an apple with a liter of soda or a fast-food lunch.

# GO VIRTUAL: HOW TO DEVELOP AN ONLINE CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAM

*Benefits of going virtual (reaching people where they are, ability to support remote teams without changing anything, flexibility for new hires, etc.)*

Many companies have implemented long-term work from home policies during the pandemic. As a result, many wellness programs no longer reach your employees where they are. To accommodate a diverse and remote workforce, you need a solution that was designed to reach them wherever they are, like [virtual fitness and wellness programs](#).

Virtual wellness programs like BurnAlong are designed to provide optimal support for a diverse and distributed workforce. Built on top of a platform with 1000's of on-demand and live-streamed fitness and wellness classes are additional corporate wellness features like challenges, wellness champions, wellness habits & goals, and health metrics. A dedicated customer success team works with you through the planning and launch process to fully understand the needs of your workforce and set your program up for success.

Want to speak with a wellness consultant to start planning your wellness program?