



2021

HR Leader's

**ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
PLANNING YOUR CORPORATE
WELLNESS PROGRAM**



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MASTER INDEX

EBOOKS ◀

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DID YOU KNOW? This ebook is interactive!



HR Leader's

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 employers¹ 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 employees² 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 productivity³ 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 impact⁴** 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 costs⁵**, 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 employees⁶ to better understand their needs and include questions specifically designed to gauge their interest in a wellness program.

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

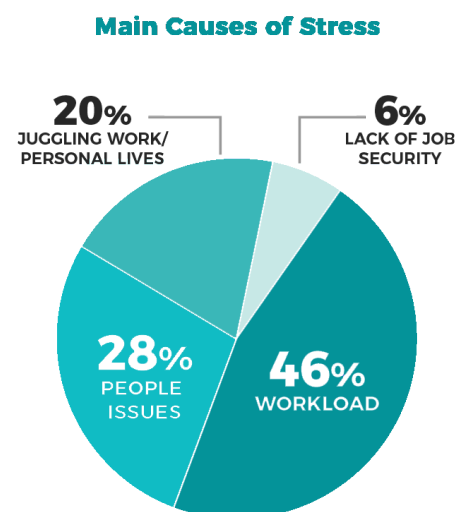
What do you want to accomplish with your wellness program? What are you trying to accomplish in general when it comes to your employee’s wellbeing and overall success?

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).⁷ 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 employees⁸ 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.⁹

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?

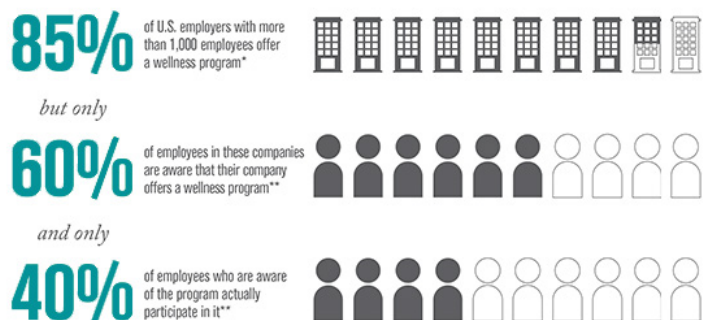
One measure of success in a wellness program is engagement and participation. Keep in mind that not all wellness programs are created equal when it comes to engagement.

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 survey¹¹ 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.¹⁰



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.¹²

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 Shortlister¹³ or the SHRM directory¹⁴ 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 salary¹⁵ 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 costs¹⁶ 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?



PLAYBOOK TO PLANNING A CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAM

RECAP ◀

01

You need a Corporate Wellness Program to boost engagement and productivity, recruitment and retention, and reduce healthcare costs.



02

5 Steps to Planning Your Corporate Wellness Program:
(1) Create a plan (2) Set your goals and objectives
(3) Write your companies wellness mission statement
(4) Assess your current wellness program status and your employees needs and (5) Determine a budget.

03

When evaluating your wellness provider be sure to ask a series of questions around your goals and the provider's services and expectations.

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When planning the launch of a program identify the timeline that works best for your unique employees' needs.

▶ RESOURCES

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[MEET OUR TEAM](#)

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HR Leader's Definitive Guide

IMPLEMENTING AND LAUNCHING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

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



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CREATING A CULTURE OF WELLNESS

Workplace Wellness Efforts Are At An All-Time High

It has been a difficult year for everyone, and nowhere is that more evident than in the workplace. Not only have physical office spaces transformed for millions of employees around the world as they adapt to working from home, but stress and isolation are also increasing. For large, mid-size, and small companies alike, the old way of doing corporate wellness programs just isn't working in this new reality.

The idea of corporate wellness has evolved over the past 40 years from an obscure perk at a few companies—Johnson & Johnson¹ is often considered one of the first companies to offer a full wellness program when it launched “Live for Life” in 1979—to something that 84% of companies offer in one way or another,² according to a 2019 Kaiser Family Foundation report.

In the Willis Towers Watson 23rd Annual Best Practices in Health Care Employer Survey, 94% of respondents said they want to develop a workplace culture that supports and enables employees in their pursuit of well-being, while holding employees accountable for their own health.³

As a result, corporate wellness spending has increased from \$1.8 billion in 2011 to over \$8 billion in 2019,⁴ and shows no signs of slowing down. Many companies have moved far beyond offering basic wellness benefits, such as health insurance, to include things like mental health, smoking cessation, weight loss programs, and financial health resources.

Employers Benefit from Workplace Wellness

The reason corporate wellness programs are increasingly important for companies is not entirely altruistic.

Employers want healthy and happy employees, but there are financial benefits as well.

83% of Americans report suffering from work-related stress,⁵ and companies lose around \$300 billion a year because of workplace stress.

Around one million people miss work each day for stress-related reasons.

78% of employees with high financial stress say it distracts them from their work.⁶

Chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and obesity, significantly drive up healthcare costs⁷ for employers and employees.

Employees miss 28.2 million work days a year⁸ (costing almost \$5 billion in lost profit) as a result of chronic illness.

Nearly 60% of employees⁹ think workplaces should offer wellness benefits, but only 42% of employees think their employer cares¹⁰ about their work-life balance.

Employees that report high levels of well-being are 45% more likely¹¹ to be able to adapt to change; they are also 59% less likely to look for another job in the next 12 months.

High-well-being employees are far more likely to rate their own work and their organization as “excellent.”

How to Create a Meaningful Wellness Culture

For many employers, the biggest factor in determining whether a workplace wellness program will succeed is not how much money you spend or how many different perks you offer. It's how well you weave wellness into your overall corporate culture.

Social support and encouragement from those around your employees can significantly increase their participation in corporate wellness initiatives. In fact, one of the most effective means of sustaining the behavioral changes required for disease prevention and wellness promotion is social support, either in person (64%) or [virtually](#) (48%).¹²

The support of coworkers, employers, and medical professionals is important, but perhaps even more important is the support of an employee's immediate circle. Including family and close friends in wellness efforts can increase participation levels exponentially. A 2015 JAMA Internal Medicine study¹³ found that someone trying to make healthy lifestyle changes will be 67% more likely to succeed if a spouse or partner makes the same changes.

Launching a wellness program and creating a culture that celebrates wellness is not easy. Even with careful planning and preparation, things probably won't go perfectly, but that's not an excuse to avoid it altogether. In the midst of unprecedented change and upheaval in the workplace, now is the time to revisit your mission and vision as an organization and create an impactful corporate wellness program that will benefit your employees and your company.

5 QUICK STEPS TO CREATING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

Before launching any wellness program, it's critical to know what's available. This is a very important first step, but we're not going to cover it in detail here because we've already got an incredible guide you can download with a lot more detail:

[HR Leader's Playbook to Planning a Corporate Wellness Program.](#)

In general, here are the important things to keep in mind when you're evaluating the available programs:

1. **Review your specific needs** as a workplace, and your unique corporate structure and employee demographics.
2. **Identify your central goals:** education, community building, or habit building (or some combination of all three).
3. **Create a budget**, but remember that a good wellness program is an investment—on average, employees who succeed in wellness programs provide employers with \$353 in savings from improved productivity.¹⁴
4. **Survey your employees** to determine what they want out of a wellness program. In a 2013 EBRI/Greenwald & Associates Consumer Engagement in Health Care Survey,¹⁵ 53% of employees said they don't participate in wellness programs because they believe they are already healthy; another 53% don't participate because they lack the time, and 43% say they're inconvenient. Taking employee feedback into account can help you avoid things that lead to non-participation.
5. **Make a list** to help you prioritize what you need most, and things you want but are not necessarily essential in your wellness program.

TELL EVERYONE ABOUT IT

In a Harvard Business Review survey,¹⁶ 6 out of 10 of employees who were not participating in a wellness program said they would be open to participate, but 69% cited a lack of information or awareness as the primary reason they were not involved.

Let's talk about how you can avoid some of these awareness gaps to help set your program up for success.

1: Brand your wellness program

Just like any successful marketing campaign, wellness programs should have a strong visual brand that employees instantly recognize when they see communications about the program. Consumer product giant Proctor & Gamble rebranded their corporate wellness program, creating a bright orange logo for the new Vibrant Living program.¹⁷ Employees now associate that logo—which is on everything from wellness-related communications and stairs in their offices to vending machines—with their health and wellness.

2: Discuss the bigger picture with your wellness provider

Involve your wellness provider in your vision by giving them the bigger picture of who you are as a company and how you hope to benefit employees. The right wellness program provider will want to be integrally involved in helping you launch, communicate, and encourage participation in your program (rather than just passively selling a service to you). Here at [BurnAlong](#), our Customer Success team helps clients launch their wellness programs with hands-on support.

3: Create a communications plan

For many employees, the biggest obstacle in corporate wellness program participation is simply knowing it exists. In a 2014 Gallup study¹⁸ only 60% of employees were aware of corporate wellness programs, and only 40% of those were participating actively in the program. That means only 24% of your total employees are taking advantage of corporate wellness perks.

Before you launch any new program, it's critical to have a structured communications plan with multiple touch points to engage your employees. It's not enough to hand out a flier with an orientation packet, have a single kickoff event, or send out an email once a year to let people know they can enroll. It should be a concerted effort to communicate with every employee multiple times each year through various channels—emails, fliers, in-person or virtual meetings, social media, events, and more.

As with any effective marketing message, repetition is the key to employees understanding and engaging in corporate wellness - the "Rule of 7"¹⁹ that says consumers need to hear a message 7 times before they will take action. Recruit your marketing or internal communications team to help with this effort to ensure your employees are not only aware of the program, but are also excited about it.

5 KEY WELLNESS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Now that you've got your plan, it's time to implement your wellness program.

Step 1: Establish a wellness committee.

Your wellness committee should own the entire process: implementation, launch, and ongoing communications. The committee should have representatives from key areas of your company, and should be led by someone who fully understands and is passionate about the success of your wellness program.

Step 2: Designate “wellness champions” throughout the company.

Depending on how large your company is, you can designate several “wellness champions” to help implement the program throughout the organization. There is no right or wrong way to do this, but it's important to be inclusive. You may choose to designate these roles geographically, by department, or by some other role, and the wellness committee should have regular contact with all your wellness champions. Creating an effective wellness champion team helps teams that are across many locations maintain a hands-on connection with the wellness program.

Step 3: Incorporate your communications plan.

Create a communications calendar to disseminate information about the wellness program. The first touch point for new employees should be a brochure, announcement, or flier included during orientation. Future emails, events, meetings (virtual or in-person), and other communications should follow a structured plan to ensure they go out at regular intervals throughout the year.

Step 4: Develop campaigns around themes or timelines each year.

One of the best ways to keep people engaged is to plan events and campaigns throughout the year. These might be centered around specific calendar events (like holidays) or seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter). They could also be tied to specific corporate timelines or initiatives. Check out these monthly theme ideas²⁰ from Canada Life. It's important to have your full campaign plan and themes mapped out before you start (and refreshed each year) so employees can plan ahead for what's coming and how they can participate.

Step 5: Test your software before the launch.

No matter what software program you're planning to use as part of your corporate wellness program, have your wellness committee test it before the go-live. Get everyone to navigate through the system, then gather feedback and work out any kinks or roadblocks that emerge. As you're planning the full rollout to the rest of your team, be sure to give them a clear channel for delivering feedback so any bugs or issues can be resolved quickly.

LAUNCHING YOUR WELLNESS PROGRAM

The final step to get your new wellness program off the ground is the launch. It's hard to overstate the importance of the launch phase of any new wellness program—this is your opportunity to make a big splash and show your commitment to the program. It's also likely the most visible part of any corporate wellness program, so while it should not be the last communication your employees get about the program, it should definitely be the biggest.

Phase 1: The Signup

Start with an announcement about the corporate wellness program, along with important information and links about how people can get signed up. Roll out the software solution to every employee and provide information on how to download and get signed up. It might be helpful to make it a contest or offer a reward for signing up within a specific timeframe so when you hit Phase 2, everyone is enrolled in and ready to go.

Phase 2: The Rollout

Next it's time to focus on engagement. Even the most incredible corporate wellness programs and all the planning in the world cannot substitute for employee engagement.

Virtual Launch Event

Start with a “virtual launch event” where employees can learn to use the software. Don't fall into the trap of thinking of this like a traditional software demo where someone drones on for 30 minutes showing people how to click menu items. Think of this like an event—a virtual party—and try to come up with creative ways to showcase the features. This is a great time to involve your wellness champions so their participation and endorsement of the product are front and center. You can add contests, games, or other interactive components to get people fully engaged.

Incentivize Participation

Now that you have everyone's attention and they know how to use the program, show them why they should be involved and how they can participate. Outline your calendar of events and activities for the coming year, and what's in it for them. If you're planning to offer incentives, such as discounts on healthcare premiums or prizes, let people know what those are and how they can earn rewards.

Encourage Connections and Support

One of the biggest factors of success in any wellness program is encouragement and support from others. In the 2016 Harvard Business Review study²¹ discussed previously, employees overwhelmingly said they want to interact with coworkers who share their interests, but barriers like inconvenience or lack of support from their employer were holding them back. Help your employees find ways to connect with others who share their interests to motivate and encourage ongoing participation.

Personalize the Experience

Wellness programs should not be one-size-fits-all, but too many employers select programs that fall into that category. They focus heavily on a single activity or wellness initiative, which can alienate a significant part of your workforce for whom that is not applicable or appealing. Instead, your wellness program should be something that is customizable and can be personalized for each individual. Offer a variety of fitness programs with various coaches and various intensity levels to allow people to start in the place that is most comfortable for them. Include other wellness initiatives beyond just fitness too, like financial health classes or mental health offerings.

Phase 3: The First 30 Days

Wellness program success often hinges on how well you can get employees engaged from the start. At BurnAlong, our most successful clients see the highest activation in the first 30 days. That means focusing a lot of time and energy on your launch for existing employees. It also means creating a long-term plan to engage new employees right from the start when they join your company.

Ready to
implement
and launch
your corporate
wellness
program? We'll
make it easy!

SCHEDULE A DEMO



RECAP ◀

01

It's important to create a culture of wellness in your organization to support employees on their health and wellness journey.



02

Employers with effective wellness programs can reduce healthcare costs — companies lose around \$300 billion dollars a year because of workplace stress.

03

There are 5 steps to implementing your wellness program: (1) Establish a wellness community (2) Designate wellness champions (3) Incorporate your communication plan (4) Develop campaigns around monthly themes and (5) Test your software before the launch.

04

There are 3 phases to launching your wellness program:
Phase 1: The sign up
Phase 2: The rollout
Phase 3: The first 30 days

▶ RESOURCES

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IMPLEMENTING AND LAUNCHING A WELLNESS PROGRAM





A Guide for HR and Benefits Managers

EVALUATING THE SUCCESS OF YOUR WELLNESS PROGRAM



Measuring the Effectiveness (and the Right Metrics) of Your Corporate Wellness Program

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FIRST, LET'S DEFINE THE TERMS

Around 85%¹ of employers today have a corporate wellness program, according to Gallup. Offering wellness programs as part of a comprehensive benefits package can help you attract and retain employees, but there is one question that often arises in the process of examining all the options for wellness programs out there: are they worth the cost?

This guide will help you determine the metrics to measure the success of your wellness program, and arm you with the right tools to make the case for wellness to your C-suite.

Before we talk about how to measure a wellness program's effectiveness, let's define two central terms to the conversation: "wellness" and "return."

What exactly do we mean by wellness?

A corporate definition of “wellness” has long focused on specific physical fitness and lifestyle management activities—such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and quitting smoking. Advocates argue that focusing on these things can help lower the cost of healthcare claims, thus benefiting an employer’s bottom line. However, this definition misses an important and overarching reality: physical fitness alone does not constitute wellness. Certainly it is one part of wellness, but there are so many more factors.

Gallup and Healthways developed a more comprehensive tool² to measure five elements of well-being:

- Career purpose
- Social connectedness
- Financial stability
- Community engagement
- Physical health

While it’s not explicitly stated, mental health is woven throughout all five elements and plays a big role in whether an employee is thriving, getting by, or struggling in the workplace.

When we define wellness, we are referring to things that improve all these elements of well-being for your employees.

How do we define a return for companies?

Corporate wellness programs are often classified as an expense without taking into account the financial benefits they can provide. The primary reason for this is that many companies don't understand exactly how to measure and assign value to employee health and wellness outside of a single metric: savings on healthcare claims and insurance costs.

When we discuss measuring the return that a company can achieve with a better and more comprehensive wellness program, we want to use a more holistic measurement that calculates multiple success factors. We'll discuss what metrics to measure, and how to measure them, in more detail later in this guide.

How Does Wellness ROI Compare to VOI?

One phrase that has emerged recently in corporate wellness program discussions is value on investment (VOI). It's a divergence from return on investment (ROI), which can only be calculated using hard numbers. To some that might sound like semantics, or a term used to avoid justifying the dollar value of a workplace wellness program, but the difference between ROI and VOI is actually a very important concept to understand.

The Pitfalls of Solely Measuring ROI

Most companies view wellness program ROI through a lens of how much money they will save by reducing total healthcare claims, thus lowering the amount an employer must spend on benefits (health insurance) for employees. The calculation uses year-over-year changes in healthcare claims and subtracts the cost of the wellness initiative to determine savings.

The problem with this definition is that it focuses too narrowly on one metric that is easy to quantify—total claims costs—while ignoring other factors that affect a company's bottom line. The actual benefits of a wellness program ranges from things that are easy to assign a monetary value to those that are “softer” but no less important.³

The Benefits of Measuring VOI

Using VOI to measure the success of a wellness program means taking into account things like employee engagement, morale, recruitment, and feelings of belonging and purpose. It can also use quantifiable numbers from metrics like:

- Higher customer satisfaction ratings
- Increased profitability for the company
- Increased productivity from the employee
- Lower turnover
- Fewer safety incidents
- Lower levels of shrinkage (employee theft)
- Fewer missed workdays
- Better product quality (measured by product defects)
- Lower healthcare claims costs

Taken together, ROI and VOI provide a better and more complete picture⁴ of whether your wellness program is beneficial and exactly how valuable it is to your company.

WHY LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS AREN'T ENOUGH ANYMORE

The number of Americans with chronic health conditions has been steadily rising for several decades, and today it represents a significant health crisis.

- An estimated 157 million people⁵ in the U.S. have one or more chronic health conditions
- About 30% of people with these conditions report that it limits their daily activities
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 90% of \$3.5 trillion in annual healthcare expenditures⁶ goes toward treating chronic and mental health conditions
- The economic cost of chronic disease⁷ in terms of lost productivity was \$1.24 trillion in 2016

It's no surprise, then, that companies thinking about incorporating wellness programs have focused a lot of time and effort on lifestyle management. Most of the time these efforts are centered around encouraging physical fitness, smoking cessation, healthy eating, and exercise.

While these are all good things, the benefits of lifestyle interventions are often long-term. Companies will not achieve much (if any) short-term savings on healthcare claims and may not realize any significant long-term benefit either. Lifestyle management also does not address the very immediate downsides of chronic disease on employee wellness.

Employees with chronic conditions like obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and depression are more likely to miss work and to incur costs in the healthcare system. As part of a comprehensive wellness program, companies and employees will be better served by disease management programs to help people:

- Better manage their disease with personalized care management programs
- Get appropriate care in the most cost-effective settings—for example, avoiding the emergency room or hospital admissions whenever possible

These simple factors can generate significant savings, boosting the short-term value of a wellness program and dramatically lowering claims costs. They can also improve the long-term health and well-being of employees with chronic health conditions.

A Rand study⁸ examined 10 years of data from wellness programs at Fortune 100 companies and found that for those with both lifestyle and disease management components, only the latter contributed significantly to a reduction in healthcare claims costs. Disease management delivered an average of \$136 in savings per member per month, and reduced hospital admissions by 30%. For a large company (2,000+ employees), this could realistically save hundreds of thousands in healthcare costs.

DOES EMPLOYEE WELLNESS REALLY MATTER? EXPERTS AGREE IT DOES

Making the case for employee wellness as an essential investment means understanding all the ways it can benefit your company. Several studies reinforce the financial benefits:

- Employees with high overall well-being have **41% lower health-related costs**⁹ compared to employees who are struggling, and **62% lower** compared to those who report they are suffering
- Companies with 9.3 engaged employees for every 1 disengaged employee report **147% higher earnings per share (EPS)** than competitors
- Companies in the top quartile for employee engagement and well-being had **65% lower turnover** and outperformed bottom-quartile companies by **22% in profitability**
- Employers report major financial returns and competitive advantages¹⁰ with **higher employee engagement, productivity, and workplace morale** from wellness programs
- In one study, **57% of high-health-risk employees** who participated in a worksite cardiac rehabilitation and exercise program subsequently **reached low-risk status**, saving an average of \$1,421 in medical claims¹¹ per patient compared to the prior year
- Physical and emotional health lead to **increased productivity** in what the Society for Human Resource Management¹² calls an “**Employee Positivity Factor**”

HOW TO DEFINE AND MEASURE ROI AND VOI FOR YOUR WELLNESS PROGRAM

Now that you know measuring the effectiveness of your wellness program requires a much more holistic approach than just a reduction in healthcare claims, where do you start? While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the exact metrics you should use, here are a few to consider.

1: Employee retention

We already discussed that engaged employees who report high levels of well-being are less likely to look for a new job or voluntarily leave your company. Year-over-year comparisons of voluntary turnover can provide insight into benefits like your wellness program. There are many factors that contribute to turnover, though, so use tools like exit surveys to remove employees who leave for other reasons (for example, relocation for a spouse's job) that might skew this metric.

2: Cost of turnover

Losing employees because they don't feel fulfilled, healthy, and happy with your company is costly and could be avoided. Tracking the cost of turnover (lost productivity with open positions, recruitment, training, and onboarding), and combining that with your metrics on better retention can provide a cost justification for wellness programs that reduce turnover.

3: Employee happiness

Use surveys to gauge overall morale and general well-being for employees. They provide a valuable tool to show a correlation between wellness programs and higher satisfaction.

4: Absenteeism

Missed workdays cost employers in lost productivity. Measuring your absenteeism rates can provide insight into a couple different wellness-related items. Increases in missed work days for health reasons (e.g., chronic health conditions) might indicate that your wellness program isn't providing enough support for short-term disease management, or that your mental health resources are not adequate to help employees deal with stress and anxiety. A high volume of missed workdays could also indicate low employee morale and low job satisfaction. Conversely, a reduction in absenteeism could indicate success with your wellness program and support, leading to a happier and healthier workforce and ultimately, higher productivity.

5: Productivity per employee

Knowing how much revenue each employee brings in and comparing it year over year can uncover red flags for low morale, disengagement, and other job satisfaction indicators that impact revenue.

6: Benefit costs per employee

Calculating benefit costs per employee helps you allocate the right amount toward wellness programs. Along with other metrics it can demonstrate the ROI and VOI of wellness programs by showing a relatively low cost relative to the rewards.

7: Customer satisfaction

Employees who feel better are more likely to take good care of customers, leading to higher customer satisfaction ratings. This is not only true of customer service departments, but across the workforce ranging from product, sales, on-site staff, and more.

8: Wellness program enrollment and engagement

Track the number of employees who are enrolled and actively participating in your program. Gather regular feedback from all employees about why they do (or don't) participate, and what they would like to see offered in a wellness program. Some programs have high enrollment but low engagement, meaning there was initial interest that wasn't sustained. Others have lower enrollment but high engagement, which means it may not be a program that was widely communicated enough for more employees to know about, or it serves a specific audience.

9: Healthcare claims

We've talked a lot about how healthcare claims shouldn't be the sole measurement for the success of a wellness program, but tracking healthcare claims data can show positive results over time as your wellness program improves the physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being of employees.

This certainly isn't an exhaustive list of all the ways you can measure success, and your company may have its own specific metrics for a wellness program. The most important thing is to have the metrics in place and track the data for a wide variety of factors to prove the value of this benefit.

GATHERING EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK ON YOUR WELLNESS PROGRAMS

One of the easiest and most effective methods for determining employee satisfaction and participation in your wellness program is through surveys. There are a wide variety of free survey tools online,¹³ as well as more sophisticated tools¹⁴ that offer in-depth analysis and reporting. Or you can always go with an old-fashioned printed paper survey.

No matter how you gather your data, follow these best practices:

- **Keep it simple** – limit the number of questions to only the most relevant ones so employees don't have to spend a significant part of their day filling it out.
- **Include a variety of questions** – ask about general satisfaction and happiness, company culture, growth opportunities, pay, benefits, and your wellness program.
- **Use a number scale** – this makes it easier to quantify and analyze results.
- **Send follow-up surveys regularly** – a one-time survey provides a snapshot in time, but regular surveys uncover trends (both good and bad). Send out surveys at least once a year, or consider quarterly or monthly to get even more trend data. If you plan to send them out more often, make them short so it's not a burden.
- **Test your survey** – before sending it to all employees, test your survey on a small focus group and make any necessary tweaks for clarity, conciseness, or organization.
- **Allow anonymity** – to get the most relevant and unbiased information, gather survey data anonymously.

Organizations like the Wellness Council of America¹⁵ and the CDC¹⁶ offer sample surveys to help if you're not sure where to begin.

NOW WHAT? QUICK TIPS TO HELP YOU TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

Now that you know how to measure the success of your wellness program, the next step is to get management and employees involved.

- **Get management buy-in:** the most successful wellness programs¹⁷ are the ones that are supported at every level of your organization. Make wellness part of your culture and get everyone from your C-suite to your managers to promote it.
- **Promote it to your employees:** one of the main reasons¹⁸ employees don't participate in wellness programs is simply not knowing they exist. Make sure employees know what benefits are available and how to sign up.
- **Make your case:** help employees understand how your wellness program will make their work (and personal) lives better. Be transparent about healthcare costs and trends, and how those numbers can improve through participation in wellness initiatives. Employees want to be healthy and happy, and knowing their employer has resources to help can go a long way toward getting buy-in.
- **Incentivize rather than penalize:** employers cannot force employees to be healthy, so it's better to offer incentives—for example, lower healthcare premiums for meeting certain participation levels—than penalties (subtle or obvious) for non-participation.

NEXT STEP: FINDING THE RIGHT WELLNESS PARTNER

At [BurnAlong](#), we're passionate about helping employers find better ways to engage employees and improve physical health and well-being. We've taken what we know works offline — the choice of classes, instructors, and interactions with friends — and make it available online. Since the start of the current health crisis, BurnAlong clients have seen significant increases in virtual engagement.

— How BurnAlong Works —

We provide 1000's of live-streamed and on-demand classes across 45+ health and wellness categories from 100's of certified instructors all over the country. With so many options to choose from, people can find classes to specifically fit their needs.

Classes go beyond just physical activity to incorporate key categories that address and support overall health and well-being for happier, healthier employees.

Companies can also create virtual challenges and other activities that encourage engagement and foster social connections. Every class is accessible from any internet connected device — smartphone, tablet, computer, or television — and any location. Each corporate account comes with 4 free family sub-accounts, so employees can invite friends and family members who motivate them to participate, keeping them connected when health concerns or geographic distance may keep them apart.

[**SCHEDULE A DEMO**](#)



EVALUATING THE SUCCESS OF YOUR WELLNESS PROGRAM

RECAP ◀

01

Wellness is about more than just physical health. The five elements of wellbeing include: career purpose, social connectedness, financial stability, community engagement, and physical health. While it's not explicitly stated, mental health is woven throughout.



02

The key metrics to keep in mind when evaluating a wellness program are Value on Investment (VOI) and Return on investment (ROI).

03

While ROI may feel like a more business-centric metric, VOI involves understanding the true success of a wellness program by taking into account things like employee engagement, morale, recruitment, and feelings of belonging and purpose.

04

Additional metrics to measure success include: employee retention, cost of turnover, employee happiness, absenteeism, productivity per employee, benefit costs for employees, customer satisfaction, wellness program enrollment & engagement, and health care claims.

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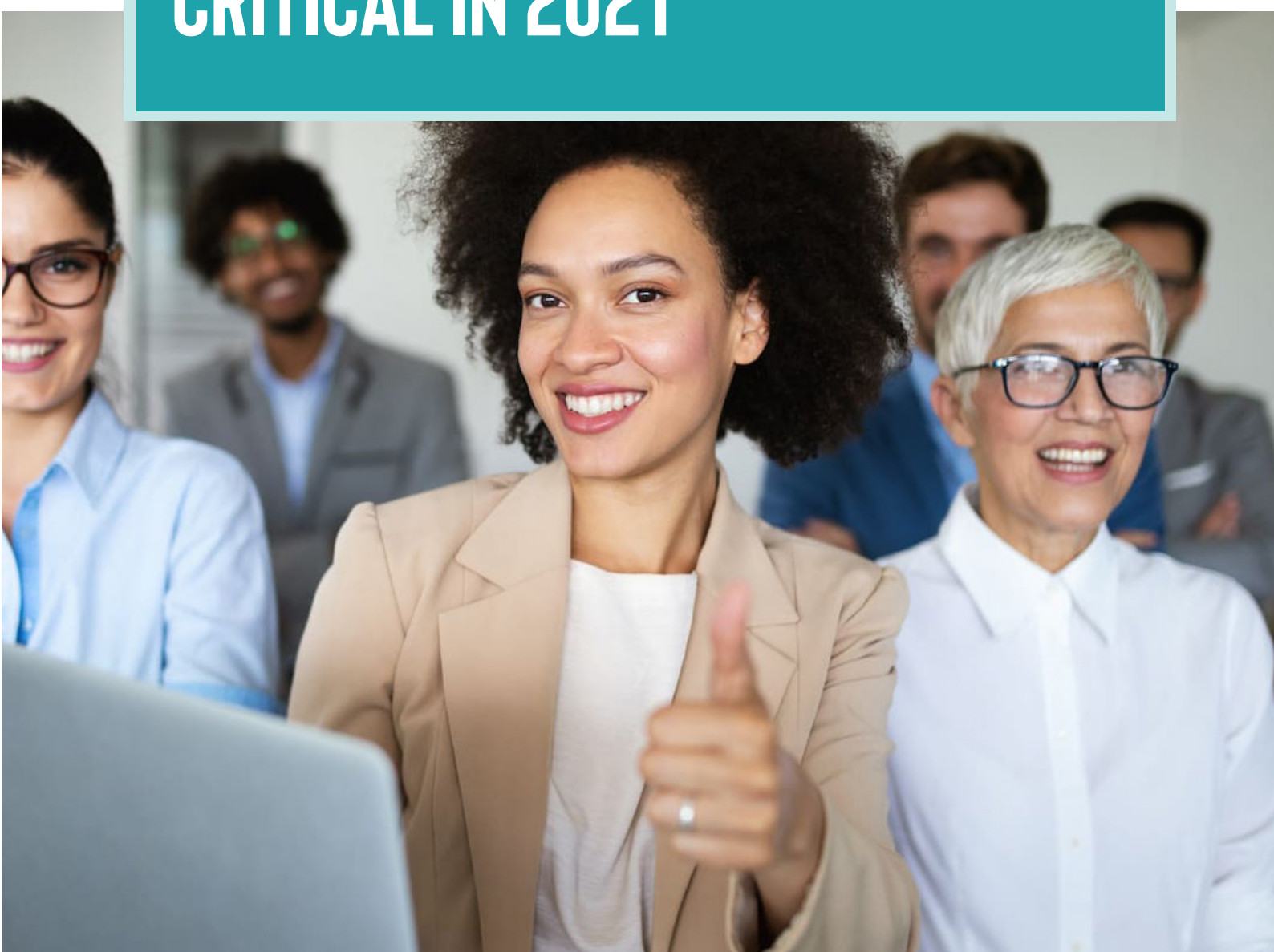
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HR Leader's Definitive Guide

**BEYOND FITNESS: WHY HOLISTIC
WELLNESS PROGRAMS WILL BE
CRITICAL IN 2021**



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In the world of employee benefits, the term “wellness” has long been thought of as a synonym for “fitness.” Today that definition needs a makeover as mounting evidence points to the fact that physical health is important, but not the only factor that contributes to a happy, engaged workforce. As we wrap up what has been one of the most stressful and challenging years many of us have ever faced, it’s time to expand our definition of what employee wellness means and create programs that are broad, inclusive, and holistic.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WELLNESS PROGRAMS

The 1970s was the decade when the first official workplace wellness programs began, introduced by Johnson & Johnson¹ and Control Data Corp.² (both in 1979). This was also when medical researchers began focusing more on how employee health could impact the bottom line of a company—both positively and negatively.

Today, workplace wellness is almost universally offered by employers. More than 9 in 10 organizations surveyed by the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans³ (IFEFP) had some level of wellness benefit available to employees. More than 60 percent of organizations reported having a budget for their wellness program, and at least half expect that budget to increase over the next two years. Moreover, at least 25 percent of companies increased their wellness offerings between 2016 and 2017, while just three percent reduced benefits.

WHY FITNESS IS NO LONGER ENOUGH

Broadening the definition of your workplace wellness program to include more aspects of overall wellness—and become more holistic in your approach—can lead to a more effective program that benefits employees and your organization.

Companies clearly understand the benefits of offering wellness perks to their employees, but the biggest challenge for many organizations today is having programs that only address physical fitness and physical health, with benefits centered around:

- Health risk assessments (HRAs)
- Health and biometric screenings
- Exercise programs, on-site fitness facilities, or gym membership discounts
- Smoking cessation

While physical fitness is certainly important for wellness, it is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Even the most physically fit employees can still experience high levels of financial stress, mental health issues, and social stress—all of which can have just as much or more impact on well-being and work performance.

For example, a 2016 study by the Center for Retirement Research⁴ at Boston College found that workers who reported experiencing high levels of financial stress had twice the level of absenteeism than their counterparts with low or no financial stress. Even when they were at work, those employees reported being “highly distracted” from their duties, which contributed to the equivalent of another 12 missed days of work.

HOW “HOLISTIC WELLNESS” WAS DEFINED IN THE PAST

It’s hard to pinpoint exactly when the term ‘holistic wellness’ appeared in discussions about employee wellness. In the early 2010s as employers discussed the need for a more holistic approach, they were still often focused almost exclusively on physical health factors. That was driven by research that showed how chronic health conditions cost companies a lot of money, and how wellness initiatives aimed at reducing obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure could reduce healthcare costs.

Articles and studies by Harvard Business Review⁵ and Rand Corporation⁶ showed how disease management delivered a whopping

86% in healthcare cost savings, while lifestyle management was much harder to measure in terms of ROI. At-risk employees who suffer from chronic health conditions tend to have more avoidable healthcare costs like emergency room visits or hospital admissions.

The scientific research and theory behind a disease management approach made sense at the time, but it placed all the emphasis on physical health to the detriment of other aspects of employee wellness. When HR managers are under pressure to prove ROI in the short term when focusing exclusively on physical health benefits, it creates a disincentive to focus on more holistic wellness initiatives that have higher impact in the long-term.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A HOLISTIC WELLNESS PROGRAM

To truly achieve a holistic employee wellness program, employers must take into account all aspects of well-being: physical, financial, social, mental, and emotional health.

Financial Wellness

In recent years financial stress has become one of the biggest concerns for employees. A 2016 IFEBP report, *Financial Education for Today's Workforce*,⁷ revealed top financial concerns:

- Debt (66 percent)
- Retirement savings (60 percent)
- Paying for a child's education (51 percent)
- Affording basic living expenses (48 percent)
- Medical expenses (36 percent)

These things are classified as “financial stress,” but the effects are not limited to a person's bank account. Many people who experience financial stress also experience physical symptoms⁸ of fatigue, headaches, depression, and anxiety. These physical manifestations of stress make it difficult or impossible to separate personal and work life. Employees with high financial stress report poor overall health, more sick day absences, more unplanned absenteeism, and lower productivity while at work. A significant number of respondents in a Bank of America Merrill Lynch Workplace Benefits Report⁹ (40 percent) reported spending three hours or more per week on personal finances during work hours, and about half of those respondents were spending five or more hours.

Fortunately there are ways that employers can help ease some of these burdens, beyond giving employees a raise (although that probably wouldn't hurt if they are due for one). Holistic wellness programs that include financial literacy and education, as well as other financial planning resources, can significantly reduce the stress employees feel about money.

Programs like benefits education, retirement planning, and financial literacy can help employees feel more in control of their personal finances. Benefits managers should consider adding educational classes or on-demand offerings that cover topics like:

- Savings
- Investing
- Insurance
- Budgeting
- Retirement planning

It's also important for employers to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to financial wellness. Financial goals and concerns vary based on many factors. In the Bank of America Merrill Lynch report younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials) were far more concerned about paying off debt like student loans, but only four percent of organizations have benefits to help with that, according to the 2017 Employee Benefits SHRM survey.¹⁰

Younger employees are also more likely to worry about buying their first home and growing savings, while older employees (Gen X, Baby Boomers, and Silent Generation) see savings as a lower priority to retirement savings and paying off credit cards and mortgages. For example, Cisco now provides a wider variety of financial tools and employees can select the ones they need based on five "personas"¹¹ in various stages of life.

To be truly effective, a holistic wellness program must provide customized and personalized tools for employees based on their priorities and goals.

Emotional Wellness & Mental Health

Social health and emotional well-being are other aspects of wellness that have long been ignored in the workplace. Over the past several months as much of the workforce moved to more isolated work-from-home settings and interactions that used to occur in person now happen entirely online, these emotional needs have become even more apparent.

Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health disorders, affecting millions of people in the U.S. every year.¹² These conditions are often treatable, but limited access to mental health resources, and a stigma around seeking help for mental health often keep people isolated and alone. Someone with anxiety and depression is three to five times more likely to go to the doctor, and six times more likely to be hospitalized, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

There is a significant body of research¹³ that shows that people who have satisfying social relationships with friends, family, co-workers, and others in their community live longer, healthier lives.¹⁴ Unfortunately our modern workplace (whether at home or even in the office pre-COVID-19) doesn't always lend itself to

these interactions. We can complete most of our work online or through technology tools, and spend most of our workdays face-to-face with a computer screen rather than other people.

There might not be much employers can do to reduce the volume of work people do online, but there are ways that a holistic wellness program can help facilitate meaningful social interactions. For example, companies can encourage volunteering or facilitate workplace get-togethers where people have a chance to meet others with similar interests and hobbies. They can also encourage employees to participate in wellness activities together, such as online group classes or attending financial wellness workshops as a group.

Emotional well-being activities in a wellness program can also include:

- Mindfulness and meditation activities
- Tools to improve employees' understanding of how to get higher quality sleep
- Involvement in charitable causes or organizations that employees are passionate about
- Access to mental health professionals and resources to address anxiety and depression

Family Wellness & Parenting

The United States has struggled when it comes to workplace policies that support family and parental leave. It remains the only developed country¹⁵ without mandated parental leave policies—other countries without parental leave laws¹⁶ are Papua New Guinea, Suriname, and a few island nations in the South Pacific.

This lack of parental leave creates a significant challenge for new mothers. About 40 percent of women¹⁷ exit the workforce after the birth of their first child, according to Shadia Sigala, CEO of childcare benefit provider Kinside. The average maternity leave is 10 weeks,¹⁸ but many women take less than that before going back to work, and 16 percent reported taking almost no time off at all. Some women fear discrimination at work or negative repercussions for their

career, while others might not be able to afford more time off. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires employers to provide 12 weeks of maternity leave for full-time, but that is unpaid leave and only applies to a segment of the workforce.

Even when women return to work, they spend a significant time worrying about the safety of their child and the financial costs of childcare, which averages around \$16,000 a year for infants but varies widely from state to state.¹⁹

Workplace wellness programs that address the need for more both maternal and paternal leave, as well as flexibility in the workplace to attend to childcare needs, can help women remain in the workforce as they raise children.

The need for work-life balance for parents has substantially increased in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Millions of schools and daycares closed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, leaving parents stranded trying to find childcare resources or stressed trying to work from home while also helping children adjust to online learning or caring for young infants and toddlers.

Since the start of the pandemic, women have left the workforce at a rate four times higher than men,²⁰ as the burdens of work, childcare, and home demands left them with no other choice. Experts

predict that it could negatively impact women's participation in the workforce and earnings for decades,²¹ perhaps even a generation or more.

As employers and benefits managers examine offerings for 2021 and beyond, finding ways to help all employees (and especially women) balance home and work obligations with childcare resources and assistance can improve overall well-being.

Physical Health Initiatives Need a Makeover

Physical health remains an important part of overall wellness and should not be ignored. However, many of these programs need a makeover. Companies that look beyond gym memberships and annual health assessments to incorporate customized options that meet employees where they are in their personal health and wellness journey will find more participation and satisfaction with these initiatives. Expand your definition of physical health by offering options like standing desks, on-site clinics or preventive care like flu shots, and personalized tools for nutrition, diet, and exercise. There are also programs that support aging populations, chronic conditions, and adaptive exercise programs for people with disabilities.

WHY IT'S TIME TO PIVOT TO TECHNOLOGY

A great holistic wellness program is about more than just what the program delivers; it's also about how your company delivers it.

Many workplace wellness programs have historically provided in-person benefits like on-site fitness centers or healthy snacks in the breakroom. Even before 2020, workplaces were trending toward geographically dispersed employees with more flexible schedules and work-from-home options. Those who didn't work or live in the immediate vicinity of the office couldn't really take advantage of any of these wellness benefits.

COVID-19 has sped up what was an inevitable shift in the workforce away from centralized offices, necessitating workplace wellness programs that can be delivered virtually. The biggest challenge with a shift to virtual tools is the risk of losing some of the human connection and collaboration that keeps employees motivated and engaged. BurnAlong offers the best of both worlds, with virtual classes that span a wide variety of wellness areas, plus the ability for each employee to select the customized benefits they need most, and facilitate social interactions via private group classes that further boosts engagement.

FINAL TIPS FOR A BROAD AND INCLUSIVE WELLNESS PROGRAM

As you're looking for a broader and more inclusive wellness program, here are some helpful tips to get started.

- **Ask for input.** Before you implement any wellness program, ask your employees what benefits they want and what tools they prefer.
- **Individualize and customize.** The more employees can pick and choose the things that are most beneficial to them, the more likely they will participate. Offer a wide range of benefits to cater to employees of all ages, genders, health levels, and life stages.
- **Tell everyone about it.** One of the biggest barriers to employee participation in wellness programs is often simply not knowing the benefits exist.²² Create a comprehensive communications plan to share the information with all employees. Consider creating incentives like prizes to motivate participation.
- **Make it easy.** The easier it is to participate in a wellness program, the more employees will get involved. Find tools that allow people to participate in multiple ways that are most convenient for them.
- **Involve families.** We are all influenced by the behavior of those in our closest circles, so offering wellness programs that get families involved increase the chance of long-term employee buy-in and participation.

YOU'VE IMPLEMENTED A HOLISTIC WELLNESS PROGRAM, NOW WHAT?

Once you've chosen the right holistic wellness program, the next step is making sure that everyone in your organization is aware of the benefit and can participate. Use these tips to improve activation and long-term engagement:

- **Create a comprehensive communications plan** that reinforces the wellness program multiple times in multiple ways throughout the year.
- **Partner with your wellness provider** to promote the program to your employees.
- **Get buy-in** from the top and designate champions within your organization to promote the program.
- **Incentivize and encourage** participation from the start.
- **Don't penalize** people for non-participation.
- **Transparency and leadership** is the key to employee buy-in and their desire to want to live a healthier lifestyle.

You can find more in-depth information about these steps in our e-book [Implementing and Launching a Wellness Program](#).

Ready to
implement
and launch
your corporate
wellness
program?

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RECAP ◀

01

To truly achieve a holistic employee wellness program, employers must take into account all aspects of wellbeing: physical, financial, social, mental, and emotional health.



02

A great holistic wellness program is about more than just what the program delivers; it's also about how your company delivers it.

03

Developing an inclusive wellness program involves: asking for input, individualizing and customizing, telling everyone about it, making it easy, and involving families.

04

Broadening the definition of your workplace wellness program to include more aspects of overall wellness—and become more holistic in your approach— can lead to a more effective program that benefits employees and your organization.

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WHY HOLISTIC
WELLNESS
PROGRAMS
WILL BE
CRITICAL IN
2021

HR Leader's Definitive Guide

THE KEY TO ROI: MAXIMIZING WELLNESS PROGRAM PARTICIPATION



Why You Need a Corporate Wellness Program (And How to Increase Employee Involvement)

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In our e-book *Evaluating the Success of Your Wellness Program*, we discussed in detail the differences between return on investment (ROI) and value on investment (VOI), and why it's important for companies to measure both when evaluating the success of a wellness program. Both ROI and VOI stem from your ability to get more employees involved, so ongoing engagement is a key metric. The higher participation and engagement you get, the more likely your company will see both ROI and VOI. But that information begs the question: how do you get more employees involved in your wellness program?

HOW TO MEASURE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Before we dive into the factors that influence engagement in your wellness program, it's important to distinguish between various types of participation:

- **Enrollment** measures the number of people who have taken some steps (either on their own or automatically) to sign up for your wellness program. This metric is one that you should measure, but it's not actually the most important metric.
- **Engagement** measures the number of people who are actively participating in various aspects of your wellness program, and doing so in a way that allows them to achieve a benefit.

- **Hollow engagement** is actually a third metric to be aware of when it comes to wellness programs. It describes people who “go through the motions”¹ of participation because there is a negative consequence for not doing so, or because there is a very significant positive reward for taking specific and simple actions. An example would be employees who attend a health screening fair every year to save 10% on health insurance premiums. They do very little (or nothing) in between health screenings to improve their health, but faithfully attend the screening fair to get their insurance premium discount. It’s critical to understand the positive and negative ways that rewards can impact “participation” and “engagement” levels and structure wellness programs in a way that both reward participation and encourage meaningful engagement beyond just checking a box.

It’s not bad to measure enrollment or participation numbers, but you should also find ways to measure meaningful engagement in the form of long-term health and wellness benefits. Since some of these metrics can be hard to assign a specific number or dollar value, you may need to send out [employee surveys](#) to gauge the positive impacts of your program and solicit feedback on reasons employees may not be engaging.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE WELLNESS PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT

There are several factors that impact how much employees engage with your program. Figuring out which factors matter most to your employees is the best way to provide a wellness program that is both valuable (in terms of the benefits it provides) and useful (in terms of getting people involved).

Family and social support

JAMA Internal Medicine featured a study² about the influence of a spouse or partner's behavior on specific behavioral changes. The study examined three healthy behaviors:

- Quitting smoking
- Engaging in more physical activity
- Losing 5% or more body weight

In the study, they discovered that a person trying to make healthy lifestyle changes is far more likely to succeed when they have the support of a partner or spouse. Another study³ found that the support of family and friends has a positive effect on the level of physical activity in adolescents. Both studies underscore the importance of having the support of friends and family when trying to make positive changes in your overall well-being. More support often leads to greater participation and engagement overall. Family support is perhaps the most critical, as the behaviors of those who are closest to you are the ones most likely to impact your own behaviors (especially related to health), but social support from friends and those outside your immediate family can also make a positive difference.

Tools, resources, and information

Another critical part of engagement is information, specifically resources and tools to participate in your wellness program. A study published by Harvard Business Review found that the most common reason people don't participate in a wellness program is not a lack of interest, but instead a lack of information.⁴ They simply didn't know what was available or were not aware of how to participate. A significant majority of those employees would consider participating in wellness programs if they knew more.

Other surveys⁵ asking why people don't participate in wellness programs found that they:

- Already feel like they are healthy/don't need it
- Lack the time
- Don't think the program is convenient
- Don't know enough to decide whether to participate
- Don't want to share private health data with employer

In addition to providing the right tools and resources, offering diverse programs that address more than just physical health can increase participation by providing more ways for everyone to get involved.

Overall company morale and engagement

We've all heard about the potentially negative consequences of peer pressure, but there are some situations when peer pressure can be a good thing. Workplace wellness programs are one of those situations. When an organization has buy-in at all levels⁶—executives, directors, managers, and co-workers—more employees are likely to want to be part of it. Get high-level buy-in and make sure people at the top are promoting the program to improve engagement.

Clear cost-benefit analysis

Employees who don't participate in wellness programs often don't understand exactly what those programs can provide. "Wellness" is sometimes used as an all-encompassing term that sometimes includes paid employee benefits like health care coverage, so it's important for employers to outline exactly what is available⁷ to employees and how much each part costs. Be sure you have a comprehensive and ongoing marketing plan to promote your paid and free wellness offerings to employees multiple times through multiple channels every year.

Personalized and targeted programs

Since the early days of wellness programs there has long been a focus on physical health. Part of the reason is that employers can tie specific cost metrics from health insurance and claims costs to wellness program ROI. [You can check out our e-book on why this is not the only metric for measuring success](#), but it bears repeating that your employees' needs are not all the same, so your employee wellness program should address the broadest range of wellness aspects possible to encourage more participation.

The most successful wellness programs are the ones that address and improve well-being in five key areas:⁸

- Career development and satisfaction
- Social life
- Physical health
- Financial security
- Community engagement

BEST PRACTICES TO MAXIMIZE PARTICIPATION

Now that we know what can influence participation and engagement (both positively and negatively) the next step is to put that knowledge to work. These best practices from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)⁹ will help ensure the highest possible participation levels.

Relevant offerings

First and foremost, make sure that the things you offer in your wellness program are appropriate for everyone at your company. HR departments and benefits managers can fall into the trap of selecting something that is narrowly focused on the interests of a small group of decision makers while failing to account for the diversity of your organization.

For example, if you offer a financial wellness program you should have a range of financial tools:

- [Paying off student loans \(younger employees\)](#)
- [Buying a home or saving money \(mid-career employees\)](#)
- [Retirement planning \(older employees\)](#)

Offering just one risks alienating a significant portion of your employees who are at a different stage of their financial life.

Similarly, if you offer physical fitness resources, make sure they are available in ways that anyone and everyone can take advantage. An on-site fitness facility or membership to a specific gym may not be useful for employees who work remotely or prefer to work out at home rather than in a public setting.

Having a wide range of choices, like the 45+ wellness categories available through the [BurnAlong platform](#), allows people to select the things that are most meaningful and relevant to them at that moment. From yoga and nutrition classes to diabetes education, sleep health, and prenatal fitness, BurnAlong users as young as 6 months old (in Mommy & Me classes) and as old as 97 can find fulfillment and relevant programming.

Social reinforcement

In the late 1970s a psychologist named Albert Bandura introduced the social learning theory.¹⁰ It suggests that we model our behaviors on what our peers and those around us are doing. We are more likely to mimic things we see as having a positive reward. When it comes to wellness, our social circles can influence us positively to engage in and continue healthy behaviors. Having a program that allows and encourages social participation can significantly increase the chance that people start and continue to use the program.

BurnAlong allows your employees to take private classes on their own, or take classes with friends and family—even those who live in different states or around the world. The live private classes are like being in a virtual fitness studio together, watching and encouraging each other along the way for added motivation and accountability. With a corporate account, employees can even invite four additional family members to join for free.

Positive rewards over negative consequences

Building on the social learning theory, many studies show¹¹ that positive reinforcement leads to more lasting behavioral change than negative punishment. Similarly, wellness programs that are built on providing employees with positive (and tangible) rewards for their participation can significantly increase engagement levels. Punishing employees for lack of participation—by increasing health premiums, for example—generally does not lead to lasting changes or better health. Instead it leads to behaviors that only do the minimum necessary to avoid the negative consequences.

Integrated and all-encompassing

Wellness programs that offer a more holistic approach might require multiple vendors that offer:

- EAP
- Health insurance
- Training and ergonomics
- Disease management
- Health screenings
- Fitness activities
- Mental health support
- Financial seminars

It might not be possible to get all of this from a single vendor, but you should do what you can to integrate and consolidate these offerings wherever possible. For example, BurnAlong offers courses addressing multiple aspects of wellness (physical fitness, mental health, social health, chronic condition support, financial health, and more) and removes some of the barriers to participation. Employees just need one app and one login to take advantage of multiple wellness benefits from a platform that's proven to boost employee engagement 5x over traditional wellness programs.

Protecting employee health information

Some employees don't participate in wellness programs because they worry about sharing private health information with an employer. Part of that concern may come from HR departments that don't focus enough on things like data security, integrity, HIPAA and regulatory compliance.¹² HR leaders must understand compliance and data security and work with a vendor who values your employees' privacy as well.

BURNALONG MAKES EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION EASIER AND MORE CONVENIENT

Employee wellness programs remain one of the most important and effective ways to boost overall health and create a [culture of productive, happy employees](#). At BurnAlong, our mission is to support employees and employers with tools that make this easy to achieve. Find out more about our wellness programs and schedule a demo to see how we're helping employees find the motivation to reach and sustain their wellness goals.

Ready to
implement
and launch
your corporate
wellness
program?

SCHEDULE A DEMO



RECAP ◀

01

The most effective metrics for measuring employee activation and engagement area: enrollment, engagement, and hollow engagement.



02

Boosting wellness program engagement involves: incorporating family and social support, tools, resources and information, overall company moral and engagement, clear cost benefit analysis, and personalized & targeted programs.

03

Best practices to maximizing participation include: providing relevant offerings, building in social reinforcement, using positive rewards over negative consequences, creating an integrated and all-encompassing program, and protecting employee health information.

04

Looking to 5x your employee engagement? Schedule a demo with BurnAlong to speak with one of our wellness consultants who can help!

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