

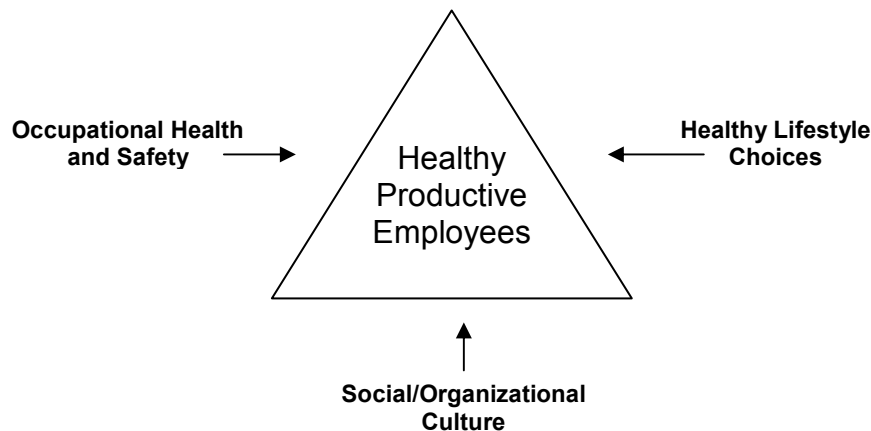
# WELLNESS OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

## Comprehensive Workplace Wellness

A healthy workplace is an environment where both the people are healthy *and* the organization they work in is healthy. Today, more than ever, we know that employee health is strongly connected to organizational productivity and effectiveness, and employee satisfaction and retention. Workplace wellness programming is more than putting up topical health posters. Although education is important, it does not generally lead to improved habits. A growing number of employers are recognizing that for a workplace health promotion strategy to be effective and have impact, it needs to be *comprehensive*.

**Comprehensive workplace wellness** recognizes the importance of responding to:

- Occupational Health and Safety,
- Social/Organizational Culture, and
- Healthy Lifestyle Choices.



Workplace health and safety needs are traditionally managed by designated workplace specialists and/or committees guided by Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act.

A workplace's social/organizational culture is influenced by management priorities, expectations and style, and interpersonal relationships amongst staff. Healthy lifestyle choices are behaviours related to physical activity, nutrition, substance use and abuse, stress management and work-life balance. Both of these workplace influencers are best addressed by a **wellness committee** made up of individuals fully representing the makeup of the workplace. The wellness committee coordinates activities addressing employee interests, needs and concerns as determined by **surveying** – formally or informally – the employees themselves.

All three of the *comprehensive workplace wellness* themes – health and safety, social/organizational environment, and individual lifestyle practices - need to be recognized when responding to the health of your workplace and planning your healthy workplace activities. Although these categories are separated in theory, they overlap in practice. (For example, employee stress is primarily caused by organizational issues in the working environment, but healthy lifestyle habits will increase an individual's ability to cope with stressful situations.)

A *comprehensive workplace wellness* approach also includes initiatives from a number of promotion strategies. These include:

## 1. AWARENESS RAISING/EDUCATION

These are activities that increase employee awareness and understanding of a health and wellness topic in order to help them make positive changes. For example:

- The creation of a wellness bulletin board to feature resources related to healthy lifestyles,
- The inclusion of short articles in internal newsletters or staff e-mails,
- Regularly updated Intranet pages dedicated to wellness topics.

*Comprehensive workplace wellness* critically recognizes that education alone does not increase behaviour change, therefore, it is complemented by the following promotional strategies:

## 2. SKILLS BUILDING

These activities provide staff with the skills needed to switch to and support positive health and wellness behaviour. For example:

- Deliver interactive presentations or workshops through "lunch and learn" sessions on health and wellness topics,
- Set up and promote inclusive healthy lifestyle contests,
- Offer incentive programs to encourage employees to try new activities.

## 3. CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The definition of a supportive environment is broad. It can range from having sustainable activities that encourage ongoing participation to ensuring the tools required for employees to participate in health and wellness behaviours are in place. For example:

- Have flexible working hours to allow employees to balance work-life activities (i.e. to participate in physical activities, to support breastfeeding mothers, to attend medical appointments, etc.),
- Offer appropriate healthy foods in workplace cafeterias, vending machines and at workplace functions,
- Provide on-going education and training for management and employees,
- Offer a workplace quit smoking program/support group,
- Place monitored bike racks on the property to encourage active commuting.

## 4. HEALTHY WORKPLACE POLICY

Workplace policies are designed to define and support healthy lifestyle choices. They are a very important goal for wellness committees. They show dedication on behalf of the employer and help to clarify roles and expectations between employees and employers. For example:

- Have policies regarding healthy food choices when catering for meetings or for staff vending machines,
- Have policies that ensure the needs of breastfeeding moms are supported.



### Please Contact

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