



## Workplace Health Promotion for Employers

### What is workplace health promotion?

Workplace health promotion (WHP) is the combined effort of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work <sup>(1)</sup>. This is achieved through a combination of:

- improving the work organisation and working environment,
- promoting the participation of workers in healthy activities,
- enabling healthy choices, and
- encouraging personal development.

### Examples of WHP measures:

Organisational measures:

- offering flexible working hours and workplaces,
- enabling employees to participate in the improvement of their work organisation and their work environment,
- giving employees opportunities for lifelong learning.

Environmental measures:

- providing social rooms,
- a comprehensive smoking ban,
- providing a supportive psychosocial work environment.

Individual measures:

- offering and funding sports courses and events,
- encouraging healthy eating,
- offering smoking cessation programmes, and
- supporting mental well-being by, for example, offering external anonymous psychosocial advice, counselling, and anti-stress training.

### Why invest in WHP?

A successful organisation is based on healthy employees working in a supportive environment <sup>(1)</sup>. By making workers feel better and healthier, WHP leads to <sup>(2)</sup>:

- reduced absenteeism,
- enhanced motivation,
- improved productivity,
- easier recruitment,
- reduced turnover,
- a positive and caring image.



Research shows that every Euro invested in WHP yields a Return on Investment of €2.5 - 4.8 in reduced absenteeism costs <sup>(3)</sup>.

### How to implement WHP?

#### Four steps to a healthy organisation

One of the most important elements in the successful implementation of WHP is the continued commitment to the topic from all sides. Thus management commitment is essential for avoiding a conflict between the WHP programme and management practices. It's also of major importance to integrate staff wherever possible and to encourage a maximum participation during all stages of the WHP implementation.

Furthermore on most well-planned WHP programmes combine the needs of the organisation with those of the workers. As a consequence, there isn't a standardised model for WHP. Instead, each organisation needs to tailor the core principles of WHP to fit its own circumstances. These include:

#### 1. Getting ready

- **Build a task force** responsible for planning and implementing WHP. It should optimally include representatives from:
  - senior management,
  - staff committee,
  - human resources department, and
  - occupational health and safety service and committee.
- **Inform everyone** about the WHP programme using diverse communication channels, such as posters, notice boards, intranet, and meetings.

<sup>(1)</sup> <http://www.enwhp.org>

<sup>(2)</sup> [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/topics/workplace/en/index1.html](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/topics/workplace/en/index1.html)

<sup>(3)</sup> [http://www.iga-info.de/fileadmin/texte/iga\\_report\\_3e.pdf](http://www.iga-info.de/fileadmin/texte/iga_report_3e.pdf)

- **Make sure legislative requirements on health and safety at work are followed.** WHP is only effective when occupational hazards are managed successfully.

## 2. Planning

- **Assess the needs.** You can maximise the effectiveness of a WHP programme by assessing workers' needs and expectations. Options to do this include:
  - focus groups;
  - surveys conducted by online questionnaire;
  - tying-in the assessment with existing similar actions. (e.g. including questions on health and well-being into a risk assessment survey);
  - reviewing the existing data: company statistics, such as work force demographics, absenteeism, turnover rates, and other health data from occupational health surveillance or voluntary health screening might indicate areas where action is needed.
- **Decide on priorities.** Identify the specific goals of the WHP programme and set priorities accordingly. These goals might include:
  - enhancing work-life balance,
  - reducing musculoskeletal complaints,
  - promoting a healthy lifestyle in general.
- **Connect to risk prevention activities.** Wherever possible, WHP planning and interventions should be connected to risk prevention activities.
- **Integrate existing successful health activities,** such as running groups, into the WHP programme.
- **Implement a coordinated programme** rather than running several disconnected interventions.
- **Involve intermediary organisations,** if necessary, and take advantage of any offers, materials or initiatives. These could include:
  - statutory accident insurance companies offering, for example, reduced premiums to organisations implementing WHP programmes,
  - health insurance plans offering members a refund if they enrol in a sports club or course,
  - taking advantage of insurance cover to treat workers for tobacco dependence.
- **Give opportunity to all workers.** Avoid producing inequalities by, for example, not taking into account the timetables of all workers. It might also be worth considering how to communicate with those without email accounts.
- **Think about evaluating the outcome** before starting the process. Monitoring the signs of success or failure will help to evaluate and improve the programme if necessary.

## 3. Realisation

- **Get active and visible support from senior, middle and ground management.** This is one of the most important factors in creating a healthy workplace culture.

- **Engage workers** as much as possible. The better you match the WHP programme with workers' needs, the less you will need to promote it. Incentives tailored to your organisation can be useful for changing to a healthy culture within your organisation. These may include:
  - financial inducements and donations towards the cost of external social or sporting activities,
  - time off for participation,
  - competitions and prizes to honour and reward participation in WHP programmes.
- **Adapt materials to the target audience.** The degree of complexity, detail, and reading level should be appropriate for your audience. Ask for feedback.

## 4. Evaluation and ongoing implementation

- **Analyse the impact of the WHP programme:**
  - on staff satisfaction by, for example, conducting a survey,
  - on relevant economic factors, such as staff turnover, productivity, and rates of absenteeism.
- **Evaluate the financial benefits** of the WHP programme,
- **Communicate the results** of your evaluation: inform people about your successes and the changes that you plan to make in the future,
- **Don't stop planning and improving:** good WHP is a continuous process,
- **Understand** the detailed results of the evaluation when planning for the future.

### Remember:

- There is no point in implementing a WHP programme without also offering a safe and healthy working environment. WHP is based on a healthy culture first of all requiring proper risk management.
- Workplace health promotion goes beyond legal requirements. It's based on voluntary action on both sides.
- WHP can only be successful if it is integrated as a permanent component in all organisational processes.

**More information** on WHP is available at <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp>

**More information** on workplace health promotion in English is available at:  
<http://www.ohsa.org.mt/>  
<http://www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.workingforhealthni.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.workplacehealth.ie/>

### European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Gran Vía, 33, 48009 Bilbao, SPAIN  
 Tel. +34 944794360, Fax +34 944794383  
 E-mail: [information@osha.europa.eu](mailto:information@osha.europa.eu)

© European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. Printed in Belgium, 2010

