



## Creating a framework to promote employee health and wellness

It's a big challenge to effectively implement and promote your organization's wellness program to employees.

A great way to meet this challenge is by developing a health and wellness program framework. Even if you already have a framework in place, occasionally reviewing and updating your approach is a practical way to support the health and wellness of your employees. Typically, "one-off" programs don't generate or sustain workplace cultures that can support lasting employee wellness.

According to Dr. Michael O'Donnell, a leading expert on workplace health promotion, the four main elements of your framework should address

- awareness (e.g. boosting awareness around health risk factors and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle);
- motivation (e.g. ways to motivate participation and behavioural change);
- skill development (e.g. building skills such as goal setting, and mastering healthy behaviours); and
- opportunity, the most important aspect of any successful wellness program.

O'Donnell refers to this framework with the acronym AMSO, a model that he developed through 30 years of research in workplace health promotion. He suggests that opportunity, under this framework, covers a lot of territory and requires the most emphasis (about 40 per cent). Opportunity includes:

- access to nutritious food;
- access to safe, engaging places for exercise; and
- the extent of your employees' health plan coverage (e.g. for health and fitness participation).

Whether your program is new or renewed, robust or under development, ask yourself, "How well does our program enhance awareness, motivate change, convey skills and provide opportunities?"

Here are additional suggestions from the AMSO model:

- engage people in the design and delivery of your program;
- create a wellness committee and promote mentorship; and
- embrace people and help them embrace their passions and aspirations through health.

O'Donnell also notes that an organization should provide effective leadership by recognizing the importance of their wellness or health promotion programs, assigning an appropriate budget, serving as program champions and acting as visible program participants.

Although O'Donnell recognizes that some wellness programs include financial incentives, he suggests intrinsic motivators are generally more successful in bringing about behaviour change. These include:

- feeling good about yourself;
- having more energy;
- feeling better physically; and
- being a healthy, active role model.

O'Donnell recommends goal setting and promoting self-efficacy as important parts of the overall program.

Promoting healthy behaviours among employees is a big task that won't be achieved overnight; however, with a boost to your organizational effectiveness and some fresh strategies, you can develop or adjust your framework to help more employees reach their health and wellness goals.

### Learn more

[A Framework to Develop an Effective Organization and Individual Behavior Change Program](#)

A slide show presentation from the 2013 International Wellness Symposium.

*Content provided courtesy of Alberta Health's Healthy U initiative.*