



Health-related workplace policies

When it comes to healthy workplaces, it's vital to have practical, health-related policies in place that make sense for employees and employers. Today, all kinds of employers—from small operations to large corporations—are tuning in to the fact that healthy employees are productive employees.

Health-related workplace policies go a long way towards increasing employee satisfaction and health and can provide a boost to an employer's reputation. But first, it's important to have these policies clearly defined and to understand your reasons for having them in place.

Developing clear policies

In general, workplace policies let employees know what's expected of them and what they can expect from their employer. For an organization, the benefits of having health-related policies are real.

For instance, by having policies in place around wellness promotion and health and safety, you can positively influence the behaviours of many employees, lowering the risk of workplace injuries, work-related illness and diseases like heart disease and diabetes. It also shows your employees, clients and industry peers that your organization is one that actively supports the health of its employees.

Many leading companies show their commitment to healthy workplaces "from the top down." For instance, the company's mission statement, corporate wellness policy or health and safety policy may include content that outlines the ways in which health is supported within the organization.

Why have health-related policies?

There are many good reasons for employers to implement health-related policies, and associated programs and events. For example:

- Policies and programs that promote health have a positive effect on employees and your business.
- Organizations that support health generally benefit from having more productive staff.
- Healthier staff will often take fewer sick days per year, are generally happier at work and may be more likely to provide better customer service and demonstrate improved work performance.

Some health-related workplace policies are required. For instance, workplaces are expected to have them for smoke-free environments, employee health and safety and exposure to radiation. It's also considered common or standard practice to have policies that provide employee health benefits, such as medical coverage and dental care.

However, leading companies take these basics much further and include programs for wellness promotion, healthy eating and physical activity, employee and family assistance and more.

Many of these extra efforts help widen the scope of health promotion to address mental well-being and create positive social environments at work. Plus, such efforts demonstrate to employees that their employer is serious about supporting their health goals and outcomes.

When you think about it, policies that promote workplace health make sense. They're an important part of improving the health of individual Albertans.

What do health-related workplace policies look like?

Organizations that support workplace health through their policies often do so through formal, written documents such as their business plans and policy manuals.

In some cases, health policies are carried out informally without any formal documentation; in general, however, it's better to have a policy written down so that it's understood by everyone within your organization. Ideally, the policy will be posted, included in orientation materials and provided in a staff manual or handbook. Policies can be made available in hard copy, via email or through your company intranet.

Policies can be designed to influence behaviour at different levels: the individual, environmental or societal or community level. In the best cases, an organization has policies that deal with all three levels.

- At the individual level, policies can encourage more physical activity (e.g. transit passes and fitness centre memberships), healthy eating (e.g. healthy snacks at meetings) and reduced alcohol consumption (e.g. education programs).
- At the environmental level, policies can improve physical safety (e.g. health and safety initiatives), support physical activity (e.g. providing bicycle racks) or offer healthy food

environments (e.g. restricting deep fried foods in the cafeteria).

- At the societal or community level, policies can show that an organization is socially responsible, while offering a chance for employees to get involved in healthy activities. For instance, a company policy can set out objectives or terms for helping local social services agencies, perhaps by supporting annual events. This could involve events that feature physical activity or health-related components (e.g. a 10-kilometre run in support of a healthy cause).

Effectively putting policies in place

Policies are the responsibility of the organization and provide structure and consistency for what happens at work. In practice, it's people (employers, managers and employees) who make things happen together.

In some organizations, employees can influence whether new policies are put in place by discussing possible changes with their leaders. For example, employees who want to be able to exercise before work or at noon may be able to influence whether a policy allowing flexible work hours is acceptable in their workplace.

Some workplaces have workplace wellness committees in place. In others, an existing workplace health and safety committee may start to address more issues or policies that have a direct impact on health and wellness.

Today, a growing number of organizations are looking to attract new employees by demonstrating that they have modern, health-related policies. Associated offerings and

programs, such as an employer that pays full or partial costs towards their employees' physical activity, can be appealing for prospective employees.

Similarly, employers may offer health-related services to employees, like bicycle racks and showers, that help to encourage employee health and active transportation.

Collaboration

Experience shows that when it comes to health, safety and wellness at work, a collaborative approach is best. This means that company leadership and employees must learn to work together when implementing or updating health-related workplace policies, programs and offerings.

Many large and small employers across Alberta have policies that contribute to the health of their employees. If your employer does not have such policies, start the conversation. As an employer, if you're looking to update or improve your policies, be sure to get input from your employees.

When good health is promoted, supported and valued by employers and employees, everyone wins.

Learn more

[Workplace Physical Activity Framework](#)

The Workplace Physical Activity Framework provides a blueprint for developing a physical activity program in your workplace.

[Policy: the Key to a Healthy Workplace](#)

A guide to making your organization healthier.

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



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