

Where to Start with Corporate Wellness

Ten Steps Toward Strategic Health Management

The wellness management world is evolving rapidly. Each month, there are new research findings that support the premise that wellness and disease management have a long-term impact on health care costs. Many large companies that started wellness initiatives three to five years ago are showing savings in health, disability, and workers compensation costs. Small to mid-size companies are watching all this and wondering where to start with true health management.

Getting senior management support and budget approval is one of the challenges at the beginning of a wellness initiative. Wellness initiatives are expensive, averaging \$150-300 per employee per year in large companies. Most of the savings are not realized for a number of years. This long-term investing is hard for companies on the move.

The key to success in wellness is to take a strategic approach. Here are ten steps to consider when embarking on a wellness initiative.

- 1. Start with senior management.** Without senior management support, a health management strategy can fall flat. Start with the health of your executive team and discover your wellness champions at the top of the organization.
- 2. Analyze the problem.** Look at your health care claims and analyze the trends. Which conditions are driving your medical, disability, and workers' compensation claims and which are modifiable? What's worked and what hasn't thus far? What is the long-term impact of doing nothing?
- 3. Hold an initial wellness meeting.** Invite your key stakeholders both inside and outside the company. Ask your broker to facilitate the meeting and invite key health vendors including health, disability, EAP, fitness, and occupational nursing. Review claims and utilization data and identify key areas of concern. Look at current offerings and see how they can be tailored to the needs of the population.
- 4. Consider both healthy and unhealthy employees.** Since 85% of claims are usually attributed to 15% of claimants, it is essential to reach those with the most costly conditions while also reaching people who are at risk for developing preventable diseases in the future. Voluntary wellness programs such as lunchtime seminars miss many of the people who need them most. Consider programs that are population-wide or target intact workgroups. Incentives help but do not motivate everyone.
- 5. Set short-term goals for wellness.** Set some realistic short-term goals based on your key areas of concern. Are there any plan design changes that could have an immediate impact on spending? Are there some programmatic actions that could have immediate results?

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6. **Find out what employees are thinking.** Hold some focus groups to determine where people are with wellness. What's working? What isn't? How much interest do people have in wellness? What obstacles and barriers are employees experiencing when they try to change behavior?
7. **Make sure you have a high-impact EAP.** Your first wellness dollars should go into upgrading your EAP. A highly utilized EAP can provide a foundation for all of your future wellness activities. A good EAP is a trusted link to the hearts and minds of employees. At no additional cost, the EAP can provide needed follow-up coaching and personal attention for employees who are working on modifiable health behaviors or involved in disease management programs. Nutritionists, fitness, pregnancy, and stress management specialists are all part of a high-value EAP.
8. **Set three to five year goals for health care savings and measure them.** Get help from your broker and insurance carrier help you on long-term goals for your health, disability, and workers compensation plans. Establish program metrics that will help you to measure ROI. Go beyond participation rates, completion rates and program satisfaction. Measure changes in readiness, changes in behavior, and changes in risk factors. Establish rigorous methods to measure health care savings over the long term.
9. **Set goals for organizational health.** Consider the more intangible benefits of a wellness initiative and quantify them whenever possible. Include employee turnover rates, cost of new hires, employee morale, benefit satisfaction data, and employer of choice issues in setting goals. Establish ways to measure success in these areas.
10. **Add specifics to your short and long-term plan.** Include a program strategy, a communication strategy, and an incentive strategy that will fit with your corporate culture. Focus on integration of related components along a health continuum with communications that are focused, simple, and human. Establish a budget that includes key components such as consumer education, health promotion, health risk assessments, and regular biometric screens.



Kathleen Greer is President and Founder of KGA, Inc., a human resources consulting firm dedicated to improving employee and manager performance. In the wellness world, KGA is known for its high-touch EAP service that helps to integrate related wellness components. KGA also provides Strategic Stress Management, Strategic Wellness Management and Wellness Day programs for companies embarking on a wellness initiative.