



# Healthy active workplaces

## Work life balance fact sheet 13

### What is a healthy active workplace?

A healthy active workplace encourages employees to live a healthy and active lifestyle to better equip them to achieve work life balance. A workplace health program provides opportunities for employees to participate in health events and physical activity and makes changes to the workplace environment and the organisational culture to support employees in making healthy choices.

### Business benefits

Promoting health and wellbeing in the workplace makes good business sense. It contributes to happier, healthier and more productive employees and reduces business costs associated with illness, injury and absenteeism.

Health is a significant employment issue. Workplace injury and disease is estimated to cost over \$7 billion per year nationally.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-two per cent of Australian workers are overweight, 50 per cent are either totally inactive or engage only in minimal exercise and almost half have poor diets. Over 50 per cent of workers are stressed and 56 per cent are in the medium to high-risk range associated with smoking.<sup>2</sup>

### A healthy active workplace example

The Department of Commerce's 'Work Safe, Work Well' program, launched in July 2008, has strong management support and a dedicated workplace well-being co-ordinator. The comprehensive program includes health assessments, information sessions covering topics such as exercise, healthy eating, and stress management, a range of before/after work and lunchtime fitness activities, and facilities such as bicycle racks and showers. Employees are encouraged to use flexible working hours to participate in events and activities. One year on, the results are very positive:

- the proportion of staff in the ideal cardiac health category increased by 10%;
- more than half employees surveyed reported improved energy/concentration; increased knowledge of health/wellness topics; and healthier eating habits; and
- other benefits reported by staff included improved physical health; motivation; and morale.

### Flexible work arrangements and workplace health

Variable start and finish times enable employees to walk or cycle to work, and to undertake physical activity before or after work and at lunch time. Flexible hours may also help employees to participate in sporting teams on a regular basis and be involved in family sporting activities.

## Implementing a workplace health and physical activity program

There are 3 key steps to consider when beginning a workplace health and physical activity program.

### Step 1: Create

Gain endorsement and financial support from senior management; find out what employees want in a program; develop goals and objectives; and integrate the program into the organisation's business plans. Setting up a project team and/or workplace health coordinator will help you get started.

### Step 2: Activate

Ensure that the program meets both employee and business needs. Build in some flexibility so that the program can change to meet emerging needs. Consider a mix of in house activities and support for employees using external facilities, such as offsite gyms and outside expert service providers. Develop and communicate a workplace health policy that outlines employee entitlements and obligations, including the use of flexible hours to undertake health and fitness activities.

### Step 3: Evaluate

Assess the extent to which the objectives of the program have been met by getting employee feedback, identifying behavioural change, and measuring improvements in health and fitness indicators. Use the evaluation results to identify enhancements to the workplace health and activity program.

#### Ideas to include in a workplace health program:

- Lunchtime walking groups
  - Workplace sports teams
  - Yoga, tai chi, meditation, massage
  - Facilities that encourage employees to walk or cycle to work
  - A healthy catering policy for workplace functions
  - On site gym or gym memberships
- Information and services on topics such as:
- Nutrition and healthy eating
  - Back care
  - Functioning disorders (tiredness, poor quality sleep, anxiety)
  - Obesity management
  - Smoking cessation
  - Reducing alcohol and substance abuse
  - Stress management

### Where to go for more information

For more information on how to create a healthy, active workplace visit the Department of Sport and Recreation's website [www.dsr.wa.gov.au](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au) or email [activeworkplace@dsr.wa.gov.au](mailto:activeworkplace@dsr.wa.gov.au)

Further information about work life strategies is available from the Department of Commerce work life website [www.worklife.wa.gov.au](http://www.worklife.wa.gov.au)

<sup>1</sup> LaMontagne AD et al. (2006) *Workplace Stress in Victoria – Developing a Systems Approach: Full Report*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Medibank Private (2005). *The Health of Australia's Workforce*. [www.medibank.com.au/pdfs/MEDI\\_Workplace\\_Web\\_Sp.pdf](http://www.medibank.com.au/pdfs/MEDI_Workplace_Web_Sp.pdf).