



How the Big Boys Do Wellness

November isn't just the start of the holiday season – it's the start of the wellness season! Many companies tie their wellness initiatives into their open enrollment process, especially since the move to offer premium discounts for wellness activity is still on the rise. At UnityPoint Health – Des Moines, our wellness team is putting the finishing touches on a two-month employee wellness screening that served more than 7,000 employees and their spouses. We use this screening data in a variety of ways to enhance our wellness programming and help employees achieve a higher quality of life. As with any employer, we know that increased health means decreased health care costs, so we're working hard to achieve that balance.

A cohort of some of the country's largest employers is bringing national attention to this idea in a new way. This fall, Reuters reported on the preliminary efforts of the "CEO Council on Health and Innovation", a self-proclaimed wellness advocate for large employers seeking to bring heightened awareness to the successful implementation of wellness programs at their respective companies that can serve as models for employers of all sizes nationwide. The same goal drives this effort: Reducing health care costs while improving the quality of life for employees and their communities. The group hopes to accomplish this goal by:

- Sharing innovative strategies and best practices in wellness
- Encouraging employer adoption of successful wellness programs
- Promoting learning by sharing and tracking wellness program outcomes

It's a noble cause and a lofty goal, but several key players from Fortune 500 companies have fully committed themselves to the effort.

Resources:

[Click here](#) to read the full Health Innovation Initiative report.

Visit the CEO Council's website at <http://www.healthinnovationcouncil.org/>.

The Reuters article highlighting the Council's early work is copied below for your reference.

(Reuters) - Leaders of some of the biggest U.S. corporations, from Coca-Cola Co ([KO.N](#)) to Johnson & Johnson ([JNJ.N](#)), unveiled a campaign on Tuesday to reduce the nation's healthcare costs, urging their peers to embrace wellness programs to improve employee health.

The newly-formed group, called The CEO Council on Health and Innovation, said it came together "to lead the U.S. business community" in improving employee and community health and reducing costs. The council's members also include Verizon Communications Inc ([VZ.N](#)), Aetna Inc ([AET.N](#)), Bank of America Corp ([BAC.N](#)), Walgreen Co ([WAG.N](#)), McKinsey & Co, Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association and the Institute for Advanced Health. Combined, the group said its healthcare benefits cover 150 million people.

In a report released at a press conference in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the Bipartisan Policy Center, the council called on employers to accelerate the adoption of wellness programs to improve nutrition and weight management, promote physical activity, help employees quit smoking and manage chronic diseases.

Several council members described successful wellness initiatives at their own firms and urged others to follow suit.

"Today is about a call to action," said Coca-Cola Chief Executive Officer Muhtar Kent. The company's sugary soft drinks have been the target of public health advocates who argue they contribute to obesity and related diseases such as diabetes.

Workplace wellness programs, a \$6 billion-a-year industry, are popular because they promise to improve productivity, cut absenteeism and reduce medical costs by averting expensive illnesses. Some employers, including Bank of America, offer financial incentives for employees to get screened, while others have begun to penalize workers who don't participate in wellness requirements. Despite the rising popularity of such programs, some independent research has shown that wellness campaigns do not always cut costs as hoped.

A long-running workplace wellness program at PepsiCo ([PEP.N](#)), for example, helped reduce costs for workers with chronic diseases by cutting down hospital admissions. But the savings for employees who were urged to make preventive changes to their lifestyle were negligible, according to a report published in the journal Health Affairs in January.

Still, Dr. Fikry Isaac, vice president of global health services at J&J, said the company's own research showed that every dollar it spent on wellness programs yielded a potential \$2 to \$4 return on investment.

"We believe it does work and we have the ability to show quite a bit of evidence," he said. One J&J study that lasted more than six years showed a \$565 dollar saving per employee per year, Isaac said, adding that healthcare costs for J&J over the period rose just 1 percent, compared to a gain of 4.7 percent for its peers.

(Reporting by Toni Clarke in Washington; Editing by Michele Gershberg and Tom Brown)