

Workplace policies and guidelines that support physical activity

Description and Benefits

Access to and participation in physical activity can be increased through changing policies and norms, creating or enhancing physical environments and infrastructure; and amending laws. Policies and guidelines can influence changes to infrastructure and laws in community settings, workplaces and schools (Kahn et al., 2002). Policies are the foundation upon which introduction of a range of interventions that support physical activity can be established. Cross sectional data indicate that environmental and policy variables are associated with physical activity behaviours of young people and adults (Sallis et al., 1998).

A physical activity policy is a written document which includes a statement of intent about how a company proposes to address physical activity issues in the workplace. A policy offers the opportunity for management to demonstrate a formal commitment to the health of your employees; will outline physical activity goals with clear direction and methods for achieving these goals; offers a structured and coordinated approach to improving the physical activity status of your workforce; offers a basis for consultation with staff over the matter and is likely to be well received.

A physical activity policy should be complementary to any existing policies within the company such as tobacco or alcohol. A policy will give recognition to the good physical activity practices already present in many companies (Health at Work). Workplace policies relating to physical activity might reflect a range of interventions supporting physical activity for staff including changes to the work environment, programs and time allowed for physical activity during the work day (Department of Health).

Participants in workplace physical activity programs report:

- Improved mental concentration, stamina, reaction time and memory;
- Being more alert;
- Experiencing a better rapport with co-workers;
- Enjoying work more than non-participants;
- Greater satisfaction;
- Improved performance.

Workplace physical activity initiatives are a good investment as employees' health is directly related to the costs of sick leave and absenteeism. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) workplace physical activity programs can reduce sick leave by up to 32% and increase productivity by up to 52%. Poor employee health and absenteeism is costing Australian businesses 7 billion dollars annually (Medibank Private, 2005). Active workplaces are seen as being more socially responsible and improve corporate image; are more attractive places to work and improve work life balance (Medibank Private, 2005).

Adopting a physical activity policy in a workplace is the way in which the workforce perceives the policy. Unlike many other policies which may appear restrictive to the employee, a physical activity policy makes a very positive statement about the value a company places on the health and well-being of its workforce. Adopting such a policy is a very practical way of improving company public relations both internally and externally (Health at Work).

There are many guides to developing physical activity policies for the workplace including templates that details unique to each workplace can be inserted. These guides also describe the numerous ways in which organisations can promote physical activity, some of which are very easy and inexpensive to implement (Department of Health).

Size and distribution of the problem

General data about physical activity (including available data for Gippsland) can be found at

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/275845/PhysicalActivity.pdf

Leadership

Employers – policies that support physical activity breaks, access to equipment, supportive environments.

Suggested Partners, their roles and responsibilities

Employees – contribute to the content and review of a policy.

Recreation providers – may be invited to deliver programs within the workplace if this is identified as an area of need.

Resources for Implementation

Go for your life Active Inform Issue 6 May 2006 Creating Environments for Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Suggestions and Resources for Schools and Workplaces

[http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au/hav/admin.nsf/Images/Active_Inform_Issue_6_May_2006.pdf/\\$File/Active_Inform_Issue_6_May_2006.pdf](http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au/hav/admin.nsf/Images/Active_Inform_Issue_6_May_2006.pdf/$File/Active_Inform_Issue_6_May_2006.pdf)

Work Place Physical Activity Resource Kit, Department of Health, Government of South Australia

<http://www.beactive.com.au/workplace.html>

Health at Work. A guide to writing and implementing a physical activity policy in the workplace. UK

<http://www.healthatwork.org.uk/pdf.pl?file=haw/files/PhysicalActivityPolicy.pdf>

Department of Health. Government of South Australia. Eat Well Be Active Community Programs.

<http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/branches/health-promotion/hp-eat-well-be-active.htm>

Department of Sport and Recreation of Western Australia. A website including links to programs to promote physical activity within the workplace. <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/index.php?id=1313> An activity planner and examples of how this may be adapted to the workplace is provided

http://www.beactive.wa.gov.au/whatson_beactiveday_work.asp and

<http://www.beactive.wa.gov.au/docs/ActivityPlanner.pdf>

For some presentation ideas around workplace physical activity promotion: PowerPoint presentation by Gavin Fairbrother, Department of Sport and Recreation SA

http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/uploaded_files/W63_Be_Active.pdf

World Health Organisation (2008) Preventing non communicable diseases in the workplace through diet and physical activity. FORUM, W. W. E. http://www.weforum.org/pdf/Wellness/WHOWEF_report.pdf Discusses key elements to consider when developing and implementing successful policies and programmes to promote healthy diets and physical activity in the workplace.

Examples for workplace policies include

Cancer Council Victoria http://www.cancervic.org.au/downloads/ceu/workplace/physical_activity_policy.pdf

Evaluation Tools

Methods for measurement of impacts such as levels of physical activity and the methods for conducting assessment of fine motor skills are described at

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/275861/PhysicalActivity.pdf

International Physical Activity Questionnaire – Long form (IPAQ-L): Self-administered Format – asks about the kinds of physical activities that people do as part of their everyday lives. The questionnaire asks about job-related physical activity, transportation physical activity, housework and caring for family, recreation, sport and leisure time physical activity and time spent sitting. The questionnaire is available from

http://www.deakin.edu.au/hmnbs/cpan/PA_assessment_toolkit.pdf

Tools and guides for evaluating health promotion policies and programs are available at

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/hp_practice/eval_dissem.htm

Reference

Department of Health. Work Place Physical Activity Resource Kit. Government of South Australia. Accessed on 08 October 2008. <http://www.beactive.com.au/workplace.html>

Health at Work A guide to writing and implementing a physical activity policy in the workplace. UK,.

Kahn, E., Ramsey, L., Brownson, R., Heath, G. & al., e. (2002) The effectiveness of interventions to increase physical activity. A systematic review by the U.S. Task Force on Community Preventative Services. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 22, 73-107.

Medibank Private (2005) The Health of Australia's Workforce.

Sallis, J., Bauman, A. & Pratt, M. (1998) Environmental and policy interventions to promote physical activity. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 15, 379-397.