



Project Health is a program delivered by Region of Waterloo Public Health. The program provides information, services, and resources to workplace intermediaries (employers) in Waterloo Region to help support workplace wellness locally. To determine how workplaces in Waterloo Region prioritize workplace wellness, Project Health distributed an online survey on September 13, 2010 to all of its workplace intermediary contacts. This survey aimed to assess what workplaces have done, aim to do, and require assistance for developing supportive work environments and policy related to workplace wellness.

Who Responded?

- Survey was emailed to 329 workplace intermediaries, received 119 responses, resulting in a 36% response rate.
- 78% from workplaces with 100 or more employees.
- 24% from workplaces with at least 1000 employees.
- Top four industries represented: health care and social services (22%), manufacturing (22%), insurance (14%), and government (13%).
- Positions of respondents: human resources (43%), management (33%), health and safety or wellness (33%), and other (e.g., administration, marketing, occupational health nurse, etc.).
- 58% had workplace wellness as officially part of their position.

How Was Workplace Wellness Supported in the Organization?

- 74% indicated that their workplace had a workplace wellness program.
- 67% had at least one person who officially had workplace wellness as part of their position.
- 55% had a workplace wellness committee. The most frequently cited representatives on workplace wellness committees included management (74%), human resources (74%), interested employees (71%), and health and safety representatives (52%).
- 58% completed an assessment of employee needs or interests in the last three years.
- 53% made a business case to obtain management support for a workplace wellness program.
- The top five reasons why their workplace would invest in a workplace wellness program included: improve the health of employees (66%), improve employee job satisfaction or morale (54%), reduce insurance or benefits costs (41%), improve work-life balance (39.3%), and decrease absenteeism (39%).



Developing Supportive Environments for Project Health Topics

Sixty-two percent (62%) reported implementing environmental supports: thirty-three percent (33%) said they had “started to implement environmental supports”; while the remaining twenty-nine percent (29%) said they had “implemented on-going environmental supports and will continue to do so.”

Twenty-two percent (22%) said they were “thinking about implementing environmental supports, but haven’t taken action.”

Readiness to Implement Supportive Environments	
Top Topics Implemented	Topics Not Yet Thought About
1. Adult immunization (74%)	1. Breastfeeding (56%)
2. Healthy eating (67%)	2. Healthy pregnancy (44%)
3. Substance misuse (66%)	3. Cancer screening (40%)
4. Physical activity (65%)	4. Active transportation (31%)
5. Tobacco (44%)	5. Road safety (26%)

“We’ve found Project Health to be very helpful in our wellness efforts. Overall a very good service.”

Developing Policies for Project Health Topics

- 46% reported at least starting to develop wellness policies.
- 22% said they “have started to develop wellness policies.
- 24% said they “have developed wellness policies and I will continue to do so.”
- 24% said they were “thinking about developing wellness policies, but haven’t taken action.”

Readiness to Implement Policy Development	
Top Topics Implemented	Topics Not Yet Thought About
1. Adult immunization (62%)	1. Breastfeeding (56%)
2. Tobacco (53%)	2. Cancer screening (44%)
3. Substance misuse (53%)	3. Active transportation (41%)
4. Road safety (37%)	4. Healthy pregnancy (40%)
5. Physical activity (34%)	5. Sun protection (32%)

Priority Placed on Supportive Environments and Policy Development

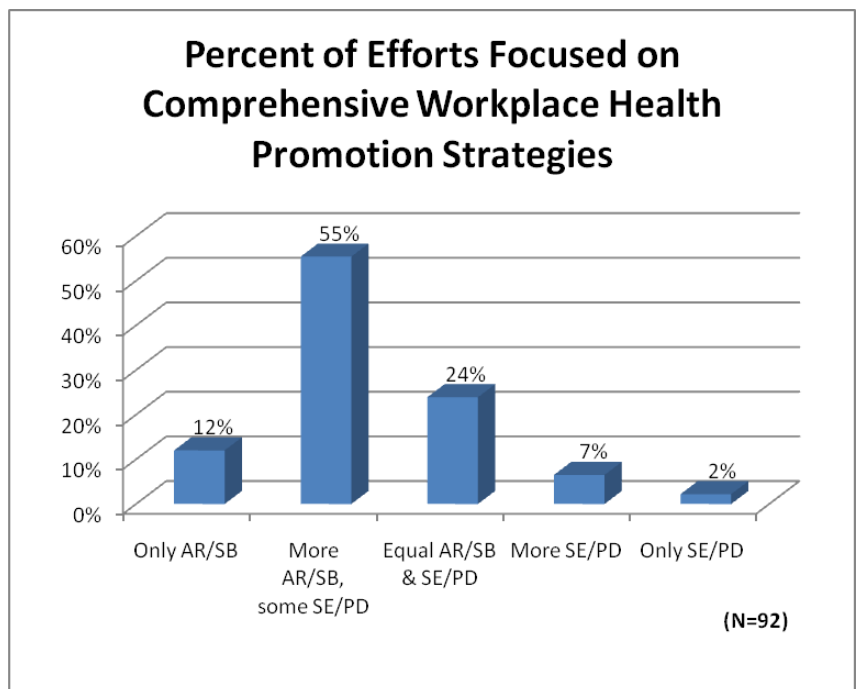
Most respondents placed a ‘medium’ (54%) or ‘high’ (34%) priority on supportive environments and policy development as a means to achieving workplace wellness. Only twelve percent (12%) reported their priority as ‘low’ or ‘not a priority.’

When compared to awareness raising and skill building wellness strategies:

- 55% said that their workplace focused “more on awareness raising and skill building, but also put some effort and/or resources into supportive environments and policy development.”
- 24% said their workplace focused “equally on awareness raising and skill building activities and supportive environments and policy development.”
- 9% placed more effort on supportive environments and policy development.
- 12% said they focus only on awareness raising and skill building.

While it is encouraging to see the use of all wellness strategies, it is clear that workplace intermediaries place more emphasis on

awareness raising and skill building at this time rather than on building supportive environments and policy development. These results reinforce the importance of Project Health’s focus on the areas of supportive environments and policy development to ensure a well-balanced, sustainable, impactful wellness program in the workplace. Workplace intermediaries had the opportunity to provide further context to their responses about the relative importance of the four wellness strategies in their workplace. Some key findings were revealed.



Interesting Finding: for the topics of **sun protection** and **road safety**, there was a discrepancy between the implementation of environmental supports, and the development of related policies. Although sun protection was listed as one of the top topics for which workplaces had implemented environmental supports, it was listed as a topic with little thought focused on policy development. Similarly, there was little thought focused on road safety environmental supports, yet road safety was listed as a key topic for policy development.

For more information, contact Project Health at: www.projecthealth.ca
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Barriers to Working on Supportive Environments and Policy Development

Top Barriers to Working on Supportive Environments:

1. Financial constraints (58%)
2. Scheduling challenges (57%)
3. Lack of time to develop and implement wellness initiatives (55%)
4. Location challenges (55%)

"I have always received great support from Project Health. Your toolkits and support make it easier. Thank you."

Potential Project Health Opportunities:

- Further inform workplace intermediaries of the "business case" for wellness programming in the workplace.
- Provide tips on how to develop a supportive environment with little or no additional funds.
- Engage workplaces in discussions about "scheduling challenges" and "time-saving tips such as information to describe the minimal time required to implement some workplace wellness strategies.

Top Barriers to Working on Policy Development:

1. Lack of time to develop and implement wellness initiatives (58%)
2. Policy enforcement issues (37%)
3. Location challenges (36%) (e.g., multisite organizations)
4. Lack of buy-in by management (34%)

Potential Project Health Opportunities:

- Provide sample policies and templates to help reduce the time required to develop policies.
- Support workplace intermediaries with the barriers of policy enforcement issues and lack of buy-in by management.
- Approximately 32% of respondents specifically indicated that more information was needed to help support them with policy development for workplace wellness.

Note: Wellness committees do not usually develop policies; they mainly advocate for policy change, but do not develop the policies themselves. It is normally the role of management or human resources to develop workplace policies, therefore, some respondents may not have been able to appropriately answer some of the questions related to policy development.

Project Health Service Use Highlights

The survey results clearly illustrate the utility of existing Project Health services:

- Almost 90% of the respondents had visited the Project Health website, 60% of whom visit a few times a year.
- Over three quarters of respondents had attended a Project Health networking session or other event.
- Nearly half of all respondents received one-on-one consultation support from Project Health, 47% with respect to awareness raising or skill building, and 21% with respect to supportive environments or policy development.
- Approximately one quarter of respondents applied for the Waterloo Region's Healthy Workplace Awards, and over three quarters had stated that they would consider applying in the future.
- Most respondents considered Project Health as a useful resource for both developing supportive environments and wellness policies.

"I have used Project Health materials in the past - excellent stuff."



Usefulness of Project Health for Creating Supportive Environments and Policies

Over three-quarters of respondents indicated that Project Health was a useful resource to assist them in developing supportive environments (86%) and wellness policies (79%). In addition, slightly over half of respondents (54%) indicated they had used Project Health's toolkits to help them with their supportive environment and policy development wellness efforts.

Additional Supports

All of Project Health's existing supports were identified by at least 33 percent of respondents as helpful to their workplace for developing supportive environments or wellness policies efforts in the future. "Project Health toolkits or other resources" was listed most by respondents (89%), followed by the Project Health website (75%), and "speakers and information shared at Project Health networking sessions" (75%).

In addition to the existing supports, each of the potential Project Health supports listed in the survey were also identified as helpful by almost one-quarter of respondents. Providing sample policies was listed most by respondents (53%), followed by additional topic-specific toolkits (41%), and evaluation tools for wellness initiatives (40%).

Considerations for Project Health

- Enquire about the use of terms such as 'needs/interest survey' and 'business case' and ensure that appropriate language is being used by Project Health.
- Further support workplace intermediaries with information and skill building regarding planning and implementing environmental supports and policy development in their respective workplaces.
- Educate workplace intermediaries about how to balance the four workplace health promotion strategies, and when each strategy is particularly useful in workplace wellness planning and programming.
- Provide additional business case information to workplaces in Waterloo Region and share information, resources, and success stories about how to implement environmental supports on a minimal budget.
- Offer time saving tips, resources, and information such as templates for policy development plans and information about how to achieve 'quick wins' when creating a supportive environment.

"You are doing a fantastic job! Keep up the great work. We really appreciate your services and assistance you have provided in the past."

Conclusions

Workplace wellness was supported in various ways by the majority of workplaces represented in the survey. In addition, nearly all respondents (89%) indicated a high or medium priority on supportive environments and policy development to support workplace wellness. These results support Project Health's efforts in creating supportive environments and policy development in workplaces in Waterloo Region. Project Health will continue to support workplace intermediaries in their wellness planning efforts with the goal of shifting more workplaces towards these key workplace health promotion strategies.

Lastly, respondents also indicated a keen interest in potential supports such as policy examples, topic-specific toolkits, and evaluation tools. Therefore, although Project Health is currently offering many useful services, there is room for growth for new and expanded services to better serve workplaces in Waterloo Region.



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