

Working Towards Wellness Executive Summary



This report was developed in conjunction with the World Economic Forum's *Working Towards Wellness* initiative, a collaborative, multi-stakeholder effort to facilitate and stimulate greater business engagement to help prevent chronic disease.

Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability worldwide. Increasingly it affects people in low to middle-income countries as well as in high-income countries. Chronic diseases impair productivity and lead to associated costs. Multinational companies are using the workplace to promote long-term behavioural changes which will benefit employers, employees and communities.

Key Findings

The global challenge of chronic disease

- **Chronic diseases caused approximately 60% of deaths worldwide in 2005**, including cardiovascular disease (stroke and heart disease), cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.
- **Deaths from chronic diseases will increase by 17% over the next 10 years**, from 35 million to 41 million, caused largely by population ageing and increasing numbers of people exposed to risk. Deaths from infectious diseases, maternal and perinatal conditions and nutritional deficiencies combined are projected to decline by 3% over the same period.
- **Chronic disease is not restricted to developed nations or older populations:** chronic disease is growing fastest in low-income countries; almost half of those who die from chronic diseases are younger than 70 years of age.
- **Only 3% of all health expenditure was directed at prevention and public health in 2004** in the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Many business leaders and policy analysts acknowledge that prevention is not adequately financed.

Chronic disease and workplace wellness programmes

- **The workplace is an important location for successful prevention strategies** because employees today spend a growing amount of time at work and employers can influence behaviour by providing a supportive environment and leveraging existing infrastructure to offer low-cost but effective interventions.
- **Potential to increase productivity:** a conservative estimate of the benefits from improving the general wellness of a workforce indicates a likely annual return of three to one or more.
- **Winning the global war for talent:** Fortune magazine's annual ranking of the Best 100 Companies To Work For in the US shows that healthcare benefits, work-life balance and perks are important to companies which want to keep employees happy and to attract new talent. At the same time, wellness programmes can mitigate the risks of an ageing workforce.

- **Positive impact on brand:** employee and customer wellness is becoming a key component of corporate social responsibility reporting by multinational companies.
- **33% of companies surveyed are rolling out comprehensive wellness programmes in multiple countries**, while another 17% are rolling out a single wellness programme in multiple countries.
- **Challenges in implementation:** Employers say they face three main issues: evaluation and monitoring, use of incentives and the creation of a supportive environment.

A call to action

Take the pulse:

Business leaders should assess the health risks of employees. The metrics can provide a baseline to measure progress.

Embed a culture of health:

The principles of healthy living must become integral to an organization. Wellness must be inseparable from business objectives and long-term mission.

Manage the change:

Commit the appropriate resources to improve the health of the working population. Help employees to change and sustain improvements in their lifestyles by, for example, developing programmes for them to follow.

Collaborate and consolidate:

Enhance the effectiveness of wellness programmes by collaborating with and supporting health programmes in the wider community.

Lead by example:

Executives – starting with the CEO and through to department heads – can demonstrate their personal commitment to a healthy work environment by engaging with employees and their communities on health initiatives.