

AHA new recs for designing, measuring and recognizing comprehensive workplace wellness programs

April 13 2015

The American Heart Association (AHA) released new recommendations today to address gaps in common standards around comprehensive workplace wellness programs (CWWPs). The recommendations improve the design, measurement and recognition of CWWPs, and, if adopted by employers, could significantly impact efforts to improve the cardiovascular health of the American workforce.

An advisory panel of experts in population and workplace [health](#), cardiology and preventive medicine conducted the review, which includes an extensive evaluation of workplace [wellness programs](#) and "culture of health" recognition programs.

"As employers increasingly adopt or refine workplace wellness programs, they need guidance on evidence-based measures and optimal programs that will ultimately improve employee health—or they will be not fulfill the true potential of such programs," said advisory chair Gregg C. Fonarow, M.D., Eliot Corday Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine and Science at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. "Our recommendations provide a blueprint for employers to accurately track the heart health of their employees and provide clear, evidence-based solutions to improve cardiovascular health."

The recommendations were released as part of the panel's presidential

advisory in the peer-reviewed AHA journal *Circulation*. Through their review of research of workplace wellness programs and six major "workplace culture of health" recognition programs, the panel identified two important gaps in knowledge around CWWPs. First, there is little consistency in how recognition programs score workplace wellness programs. Second, CWWP recognition programs fail to explicitly account for the heart health of employees in a comprehensive and evidence-based manner.

The advisory also concluded CWWPs and recognition programs would be strengthened by inclusion of clear criteria to measure and score employees' levels of cardiovascular health. The panel highlighted AHA's Life's Simple 7 —seven measures of health identified by the AHA to significantly impact [heart health](#)— as an example of a scoring system that could be used by both employers and CWWP recognition programs. As its name implies, Life's Simple 7 provides seven concrete steps to help prevent cardiovascular disease:

1. Stop smoking
2. Get active
3. Lose weight
4. Eat better
5. Manage blood pressure
6. Control cholesterol
7. Reduce blood sugar

AHA provides an online tool called My Life Check to calculate an individual's level of cardiovascular health based on these factors and gives them a score out of ten.

"These findings have important implications for the design and recognition of workplace wellness programs. In the U.S., heart disease is the leading cause of death, and stroke is the fifth leading cause of death,

and workplace wellness programs have the potential to prevent many of these deaths," said advisory co-author Elliott M. Antman, M.D., senior physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital, associate dean for clinical and translational research at Harvard Medical School, Boston, and president of the American Heart Association. "If we can increase the proportion of the 155 million working-age adults in the United States with improved cardiovascular health, we will make a major step towards achieving our 2020 impact goal of improving the [cardiovascular health](#) of all Americans by 20 percent and decreasing mortality from cardiovascular diseases by 20 percent."

The advisory panel recommendations are the latest in a series of efforts by AHA to help make America's workplaces healthier, including through initiatives like the CEO Roundtable, a group of more than 20 CEOs from America's leading corporations.

Provided by American Heart Association

Citation: AHA new recs for designing, measuring and recognizing comprehensive workplace wellness programs (2015, April 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-aha-recs-comprehensive-workplace-wellness.html>

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