COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF WORKPLACE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Giving the community a voice on important health issues

ALL PART OF GENERATION BETTER
### ABOUT THE MEDIBANK HEALTH CHECK

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This Medibank Health Check is the third in a series of quarterly health checks focusing on issues where Australians have noticed some health or wellbeing impacts and personal action or involvement of the health services sector maybe required.

The Medibank Health Check aims to inform debate around such issues and unpack what may be required to take action to address emerging health concerns.

We chose workplace health and wellbeing for our third Medibank Health Check because we wanted to find out: how important it is to Australians; who is responsible for developing/maintaining workplace health and wellbeing; how workplaces make people feel; and the perceived impacts of poor workplace health and wellbeing.

The first Medibank Health Check report looked at the health impact of ‘screen-time’ (insert link to report) while the second Medibank Health Check focused on life aspirations (insert link to report) and where living in good health rated on Australians ‘bucket list’.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issue that this Medibank Health Check explores is health and wellbeing in the workplace – its importance, responsibilities and health impacts.

The key findings from the survey of 1,500 members of the Australian community are:

- The health and wellbeing of employees is the highest priority in the workplace above other factors including: profitability, leadership, stimulating work, flexible working hours and career progression. However, 1 in 4 respondents believe that their workplace is not good for them.
- The impact of poor workplace health and wellbeing is costly to the individual in terms of health impacts like stress and depression, and also to the business in terms of increased absenteeism, low productivity and high staff turnover.
- Professionals are the most positive about their workplaces and sales/clerical staff the most negative.
- The C-suite/director level is the least likely to rate health and wellbeing as the most important factor in the workplace.
- Tradespeople are more aware of the factors influencing workplace health and wellbeing and the impacts of poor workplace health and wellbeing than professional and sales/clerical workers.
- There is a strong belief that it is up to the individual to make sure they remain healthy at work (62 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing), but only 43 per cent of respondents agree that their workplace takes workplace health and wellbeing seriously.
- The overall responsibility for workplace health and wellbeing rests with the individual (32 per cent) and senior management (26 per cent). The direct manager is perceived to have little influence on workplace health and wellbeing.

The most important drivers of a healthy workplace are:

- A strong health and safety culture (68 per cent said it was extremely or highly important);
- Health and safety training (61 per cent);
- Part time opportunities (41 per cent);
- Counselling services (37 per cent).
97% are saying that health and wellbeing are the most important factors to a workplace.

1 in 4 people have a negative feeling towards their workplace with 12% are saying it makes them feel slow and uninspired, 6% stressed and unproductive and 6% depressed and unwell.

34% are saying that health and wellbeing are the most important factors to a workplace.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of encouraging health and wellbeing in the workplace have been widely reported for some time now. Healthy workers are happier, more motivated and more productive than unhealthy workers, ultimately creating not only a positive work environment but also a healthier bottom line.

A study commissioned by Medibank in 2005 found a measurable link between a person’s health and lifestyle and how productive they are at work.

The results showed that healthy employees are nearly three times more productive than unhealthy employees. The study also found that employees with poor overall health are far more likely to be absent from work, and are nine times more likely to have sick days compared to healthy employees. Employee morale and stress in the workforce contributed significantly to absenteeism and sick leave.

Productivity is not the only benefit for corporations. Studies from around the world show that organisations that promote employee health and wellbeing have improved reputation and staff retention rates. In Australia, 97 per cent of the top performing organisations have implemented health and wellbeing initiatives.

With so much awareness of the benefits of health and wellbeing in the workplace, is it something that Australians value? In the representative sample of 1,500 people across Australia, this Medibank Health Check examines:

1. What attributes are most important to you in the workplace?
2. If employee health and wellbeing is not treated as a priority in the workplace, what do you think will happen?
3. What creates good health and wellbeing in the workplace?
4. Who is most responsible for ensuring health and wellbeing in the workplace?
5. How important do you think employee health and wellbeing is in your workplace?

Given Australia’s ageing workforce, the issue of health and wellbeing in the workplace is becoming increasingly important for employees and employers alike. While the benefits are well documented, are people actually ‘experiencing’ health and wellbeing in the workplace and, if so, how best can it be achieved?

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The Medibank Health Check is a representative survey of 1,500 respondents across all Australian States and Territories. This survey was conducted on 19-22 August 2014. The sample was proportionally spread by State, gender, age, income and employment status. A full list of the questions from the survey can be found at the end of this report.

The respondents included people in employment and not employed. Those employed came from a range of occupations.
The health and wellbeing of employees was rated the most important factor in the workplace.

Respondents were asked to rate a range of workplace issues in terms of importance to the workplace. The top 3 factors were:

1. Health and well being of employees
2. Flexible working arrangements
3. Strong leadership from management

Significantly, health and wellbeing was rated the most important factor by more than double that of the next two factors.

72 per cent of respondents rated health and wellbeing of employees in their top three most important factors in the workplace. This positions health and wellbeing as the leading workplace issue requiring serious and significant attention.
It was those outside of the workforce that ranked health and wellbeing as the number 1 factor ahead of those in full or part time employment.

Students ranked the health and wellbeing of employees as the most important factor ahead of all other categories of respondents.

The C-suite/director level is the least likely to rate health and wellbeing as the most important factor in the workplace.

Tradespeople and sales/clerk employees are more likely to rank health and wellbeing as the most important factor in the workforce ahead of professional workers.
Almost 1 in 4 respondents have negative feelings toward their workplace with 12 per cent feeling slow and uninspired, 6 per cent stressed and unproductive and, disturbingly, 6 per cent saying their workplace made them feel depressed and unwell.

The vast majority of respondents were satisfied with their workplace, with 41 per cent reporting their workplace makes them feel ‘fine and able to cope with work’ and 27 per cent saying it was ‘good and productive’.

Professionals were the most optimistic about their workplace (82 per cent of them positive about their workplace).

Sales/clerical workers closely followed by tradespeople were the most pessimistic (25 per cent and 23 per cent with negative feelings to their workplace).
Australian workplaces are perceived to be bad for workers’ health.

When it comes to views on the workplace environment there is a strong belief that individuals are responsible for their own health at work, however 28 per cent of respondents believe that work contributes to not being 100 per cent well and nearly one in five believe that their workplace was making them sick.

This graph highlights an undercurrent of concern among respondents as to the adverse health impacts of Australian workplaces. Respondents were not convinced their workplaces are doing everything they can to provide a healthy workplace. Only 43 per cent of respondents believed that their workplace takes health and wellbeing seriously and only 37 per cent believe their workplace is doing all it can to keep them healthy. 1 in 4 people said they see very little health and safety information in their workplaces.

Tradespeople have different views on workplace environment.

A breakdown by occupation highlights that tradespeople have different views on health and wellbeing in their workplaces than sales/clerical and professional workers.

Of particular interest is that 19 per cent of tradespeople, 22 per cent of professional and 23 per cent of sales/clerical workers believed their workplace was making them sick.
A good health and safety culture backed by training are the leading factors contributing to employee health and wellbeing.

Time away from work is also important with 40 per cent of respondents saying that regular holidays are a ‘highly important’ contributor to employee health and wellbeing.

The survey did highlight that work based social events are the least important contributor to employee health and wellbeing.

Tradespeople stand out as having stronger views on particular contributors to employee health and wellbeing.

Tradespeople believed that regular holidays, part time opportunities and counselling services are more important contributors to workplace health and wellbeing than sales/clerical workers and professionals.
The answer to the question of who is responsible for workplace health and wellbeing lands almost equally with the individual and senior management.

This is an interesting outcome with more respondents believing they are personally responsible (32 per cent) than any other relevant stakeholder. A larger proportion of respondents believed workplace health and wellbeing is the responsibility of senior management (26 per cent) than their direct manager (10 per cent). Unions and HR departments were perceived to play a minor part in workplace health and wellbeing.

There is considerable variation between different occupations when it comes to the question of responsibility for workplace health and wellbeing.

Professionals identified the individual employee as the most responsible while sales/clerical workers pointed the finger at senior management. Interestingly, 34 per cent of tradespeople identified senior management as the most responsible but also highlighted health and safety officers.
There is only basic understanding of the impacts on a workplace if health and wellbeing is not treated as a priority.

Finally we looked at the perceived impacts on the workplace if health and wellbeing is not treated as a priority. The tangible issues were well understood, with increased sick days and high levels of stress rated as the most likely outcomes. However the connection with the intangible issues like increased public health costs and health issues, such as overweight or obese employees, were less apparent.

Tradespeople appear to be more aware of the consequences of poor workplace health and wellbeing.

Tradespeople stand out from professionals and sales/clerical workers as holding stronger views on the impact of poor health and wellbeing in the workplace. The main differences were around levels of employee stress, low productivity, and depression and mental issues caused by poor workplace health and wellbeing.
WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

The overarching insight from the third Medibank Health Check is that in terms of health and wellbeing, Australian workplaces are letting their employees down, with identifiable health impacts and potential costs for businesses.

Health and wellbeing was rated the most important factor in the workplace but less than half of the respondents believed their workplace was taking it seriously. Senior management was identified as one of the groups most responsible for workplace health and wellbeing, but the C-suite/director level is the least likely to rate health and wellbeing as the most important factor in the workplace.

There are considerable impacts of poor workplace health and wellbeing. For the individual this includes: stress, depression and obesity; and for the business: absenteeism, low productivity and higher staff turnover.

Of real concern is that six per cent of respondents said that their workplace was making them sick.

Workplace culture and training were identified as the drivers behind health and wellbeing. This highlights an opportunity for organisations to improve the health and wellbeing of their workplaces. For instance, a renewed focus on workplace health and wellbeing led by senior management and underpinned by ongoing training and education could be considered to improve employee and business outcomes.
How do you rate the following in terms of importance in the workplace?

(Rank in order of importance)
- Profitability of the company
- Strong leadership from management
- Health and wellbeing of employees
- Stimulating work for employees
- Flexible working arrangements for employees
- Career progression for employees

If employee health and wellbeing is not treated as a priority in the workplace, which of the following do you think is likely to occur:

(Scale: very unlikely, somewhat unlikely, somewhat likely, very likely)
- High levels of stress
- Depression / mental health issues
- Lack of work/life balance
- Overweight or obese employees
- Increased sick days
- Low productivity
- High staff turnover
- Underperforming business
- Increased public health costs for taxpayers
- Increased workers compensation claims

Which of the following do you think are important to ensure good employee health and wellbeing in a workplace?

(Not very important, somewhat important, moderately important, highly important, extremely important)
- Shorter working hours
- Part time opportunities
- Regular exercise for employees
- Counselling services in the workplace
- Health and safety training
- A strong health and safety culture
- Work-based social events
- Regular holidays
MEDIBANK HEALTH CHECK #3 QUESTIONNAIRE

Who is most responsible for ensuring health and wellbeing in a workplace?
(rank in order of responsibility)

- Individual employee
- Direct manager
- Human resources department
- Health and safety officers
- Unions
- Senior management
- Government

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your work environment?
(scale: not applicable – not currently working, strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

- My workplace is doing all it can to keep me healthy
- I see very little health and safety information in my workplace
- My work environment takes my health and wellbeing seriously
- It is up to me to make sure I remain healthy at work
- Not being 100 per cent well comes with having to w...

Which of the following best describes how your workplace makes you feel:

- It makes me feel alive and eager to embrace the day ahead
- It makes me feel good and productive
- It makes me feel fine and able to cope with my work
- It makes me feel slow and uninspired
- It makes me feel stressed and unproductive
- It makes me feel depressed and unwell
“1 IN 4 AUSTRALIANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HEALTH IMPACTS OF THEIR WORKPLACE”

FOR MORE INFORMATION
WWW.MEDIBANK.COM.AU/ABOUT-US/MEDIA-CENTRE.ASPX

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