WELLNESS programs have the potential to create cost savings for both plans and members through lower premiums and reduced health care usage when the focus is put on engagement and not just enrollment.

Many wellness programs are centered on stopping high-risk behaviors like smoking cessation, providing preventive or disease management services or screening for health risks.

But there’s an opportunity for wellness programs to help employees build healthy habits that can lead to even greater efficiency and cost savings.

Nearly four out of five employers offer health improvement programs that might include incentives or education on eating right, being active, reducing stress, & being aware of health status.¹

More than $700 per employee is spent on wellness program incentives per year, and large employers invest even more—closer to $900 per year, per employee.¹

### MOST POPULAR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING PROGRAMS

- **91%** Smoking Cessation
- **86%** Physical Activities & Challenges
- **79%** Weight Management

### COMMON WELLNESS PROGRAM INCLUSIONS

- Health Risk Assessments
- Biometric Screenings
- Flu Shots
- Smoking Cessation

$3 return in medical cost savings and cost of absenteeism for every $1 invested in wellness programs.⁸
Challenges Facing Wellness Programs

BUILDING healthy habits isn’t easy. Despite a high number of employees indicating interest in participating in a wellness program offered by employers, only two in five employees participate.3

Even fewer are willing to give up personal time for their health. Only one in four employees are willing to spend one to three hours of their time each week on wellness activities like exercising, attending wellness coaching sessions or researching healthy recipes.1

And the majority of employees who do participate in the wellness program aren’t using the dollars that employers allocate for them.1

The bottom line: financial rewards alone aren’t enough to overcome the complexities of human social psychology to stimulate behavior change.

The wellness program’s design can overcome the challenges of gaining participation, keeping employees interested, and forming long-term habits.

2 in 3 (67%) of employers identified employees’ poor health habits as one of their top three challenges to maintaining affordable health coverage.8
Embrace Personalization

Consumers fully expect a delightful experience that’s catered to their needs and preferences. Employees aren’t any different. Yet many wellness programs take a one-size-fits-all approach that program managers hope will not only be useful to the most active employees, but also accessible to the least active employees with the least amount of administrative work it takes to run the program.

The result is a program that doesn’t meet the needs of either group. Those most likely to be healthy don’t use it because it doesn’t fit their needs, while the least likely to use it remain unengaged in healthy behaviors.

58% of employees are interested in customized plan options based on personal info.

Personalization gives employees choices about the fitness activities they enjoy. If they enjoy it, they’ll continue to do it. By offering a personalized wellness solution, active employees have opportunities to try new activities while becoming motivators for their co-workers.

At the same time, personalization entices those who are least likely to use it with easy access points and the ability to personalize their wellness journey based on their needs and skill level.

Beyond personalization, the wellness program has to seamlessly integrate into employees’ daily routines. Technology can help wellness program managers scale personalization in a way that’s easy to use for both the employee and program manager.

Changing employees’ mindset to interested & engaged.

Here are four strategies to change employees’ mindset from unengaged and disinterested in wellness programs to enthusiastic, engaged, and excited about the offerings:
Program managers should ask if corporate wellness technology solutions fit three criteria:

// 1
Would this technology be successful as a consumer solution? In other words, would I or my colleagues pay to use it on their own?

// 2
Is the technology so simple and universal that it can be used wherever and whenever my co-workers want to use it?

// 3
Can it integrate with existing programs?

Provide Variety
The ABC’s of fitness today might just be aerial yoga, barre and CrossFit®. Specialized fitness studios are growing at eight times the rate of big box gyms, yet many employers continue to provide fitness subsidies to big box gyms, which are notorious for low engagement and high turnover.4

Part of specialized fitness studios’ success lies in being nimble enough to offer the latest trends in fitness like high-intensity interval training (HIIT) and hybrid classes like cycling and boxing in one session. They’re offering fresh takes on fitness experiences that keep people interested and engaged in fitness. Variety and flexibility in choosing fitness classes are key to a successful wellness program.

4 in 5 (81%) of wellness program participants saw a positive impact on their physical well-being.6
Hickory, NC based Alex Lee, Inc. started leveraging personalized fitness in the beginning of 2017. Its use of a flexible fitness membership has led to much higher engagement rates than previous wellness programs. Employees of Alex Lee have embraced the flexibility and regularly attend classes at nine different fitness studios in their small town. This flexibility gives employees the chance to test out different workout styles with co-workers, all while driving wellness dollars to local studio owners.

1 in 6 (15%) of employers provide a health care premium discount for participating in a wellness program.9
In addition to trying latest trends, employees expect that convenience be considered in options for wellness programs. A single option ‘near work’ is no longer acceptable for fitness. Employees expect their fitness studio to be located ‘near them,’ which might mean near their home or office—or near a friend who works out with them.

28% of employees say their company provides gym passes, work-out facilities or wellness benefits.³
Designate Wellness Champions

People who join a fitness social network exercise 100% more than people without online workout buddies, according to research from the University of Pennsylvania. Seeing how often others exercise and what they’re doing builds a competitive spirit that motivates people to exercise more.

Internal wellness champions take this idea of digital motivation into the physical workplace. If C-suite leaders and other key influencers are involved in the wellness program, then participation and a culture of fitness will follow. Leaders who partake in wellness programs set an example for the rest of the employees to mirror.

More than eight in ten (86%) employees ranked their colleagues as one of the top motivators to improving their overall health and well-being at work. Being part of a group that’s focused on a healthy lifestyle creates a feeling of being in this together. This concept helps transition exercise from a duty to a benefit, and puts forth the greatest motivator when it comes to keeping employees consistently active: accountability.

The key to cultivating this network is focusing on the sense of community. Use invite-a-friend functionality, identify influencers, and create community fitness challenges.

At Canaveral Port Authority, three employees are designated as wellness champions, and they personally invite colleagues to join them in fitness activities. It creates opportunities for employees to break out of silos and talk across departments about a challenging workout, or share tips for trying a new type of workout for the first time. The best part: they’re able to connect and build relationships that might not have otherwise happened.
These wellness champions are game changers. **Employers with active & engaging wellness ambassadors see nearly half of employees engage in fitness**—significantly higher than the industry average of 20% engagement.⁷
Be Data-Driven

Tracking and reporting on the return on investment in corporate wellness programs has traditionally been hard to measure. New technology advancements are creating opportunities to use data to drive wellness program decisions.

Subsidies can give a low return on investment because they’re available to lots of employees without knowledge about actual use. Less than one in four employees of Jacksonville based St. Vincent’s Health Care who received a fitness subsidy for a big box gym actually visited the gym.

St. Vincent’s Health Care moved from a subsidy to a personalized fitness program with variety, technology, and champions in 2015. They nearly tripled engagement numbers within a month of launch, and they’ve sustained high engagement since 2015.

Program managers and senior leaders need to know how their wellness investment is being used. Today’s corporate wellness technology should be able to provide the data and personalization the program needs to be successful while still being easy to implement and use providing key metrics to produce a solid return on investment.
PEERFIT uses worksite wellness dollars to give employees access to the best boutique studios and premium gyms—offering a variety of classes that cater to all levels of fitness—in their community and at locations nationwide.

Peerfit is unlike typical one-size-fits-all workplace wellness programs because it’s designed for engagement.

Peerfit has doubled enrollment and quadrupled engagement in worksite wellness for some companies.

Its robust network of fitness studios & thriving community of fitness enthusiasts work together to drive employee engagement and habit-building to increase overall health.

Plus, Peerfit’s platform seamlessly integrates with payers’ existing wellness and HR technologies.

A personalized, interactive dashboard allows employees to book classes and to plug into their social networks and Peerfit’s ready-built community of fitness enthusiasts for motivation and accountability.

The result: a healthier workforce and an organization building a culture of health and wellbeing.

Peerfit is the preferred workplace wellness solution for many companies, brokers, and insurers across the nation.

For more information, visit Peerfit.com.
Endnotes


5 “Efficacy and causal mechanism of an online social media intervention to increase physical activity: Results of a randomized controlled trial.” Zhang, J., Brackbill, D., Yang, S., Centola, D. Preventive Medicine Reports, 2015


#RedefineWellness