

# WEX Health Trends & Insights

## Embracing and Promoting Social Wellbeing among Employees

Companies that understand the importance of investing in employees, as genuine resources are moving toward a more whole-person care approach to meet their diverse needs. Workplaces can no longer be viewed as silos, separate from all other aspects of employees' lives. Keeping employees positively connected to their families, communities and coworkers provides a holistic method to delivering workplace benefits.

## Taking a Wellness Program Beyond Health

Wellness programs are often used to bridge gaps in health coverage and more often than not simply equated with physical wellbeing. However, employee stress levels are reaching new highs and wellness programs need to expand and address these additional stressors in employees' lives. Wellness programs components today, need to be comprised of physical, financial, emotional and social strategies to be effective.

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# The Social Component of a Wellness Program

The social component is probably the least talked about aspect of a wellness program. However, it probably shouldn't be considering its impact. For example, an employee is responsible for an elderly parent that is ill. The employee's time outside the workplace is consumed by caring for the elderly parent, leaving little time for any social interaction among friends or for group activities.

Additionally, employer surveys nationwide indicate that companies recognize that caregiving responsibilities negatively impact employee productivity too. So now at work, the less productive employee may not feel as connected to his or her team and/or organization. That's a lot of stress and negativity for an employee to deal with both inside and outside the workplace.

## Creating an Environment Conducive to Employee Social Wellness

So what can employers do to foster an environment that promotes social wellness?

First, **recognize its importance and impact on an employee's life.**

Many more employees are going to be dealing with caregiving situations as the U.S. population older than 85 has doubled in the past two decades and as more women (who are traditional sources of caregiving) now comprise 47% of the workforce, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor 2016 statistics.

## Opportunities to Improve Social Wellbeing in the Workplace

The positive impact that healthy relationships both in and outside the workplace bring to an organization need to be incorporated into corporate wellness initiatives. A recent Employee Benefit Plan Review article offered several insights for organizations to discuss to positively grow this aspect of their wellness program offerings.

- Consider **celebrating milestone markers of company anniversaries** and bringing employees together for birthdays.

- **Make time for larger team and department meetings to share achievements and challenges**, as well as reconnect employees to the vision, core values and mission statement of the organization.
- Provide an **employee social network**, where employees can ask questions and ask for help from other employees.
- **Promote all aspects of diversity to create a culture of social acceptance** and an opportunity for all opinions to be heard and valued.
- Look to **foster relationships between the organization and the community**. Broaden the scope of social connectedness to outside the workplace and involve employees and their family members and everyone will benefit.

Source: *Employee Benefit Plan Review. Wellness Programs – Social Wellness. May 2017. PP5-6.*

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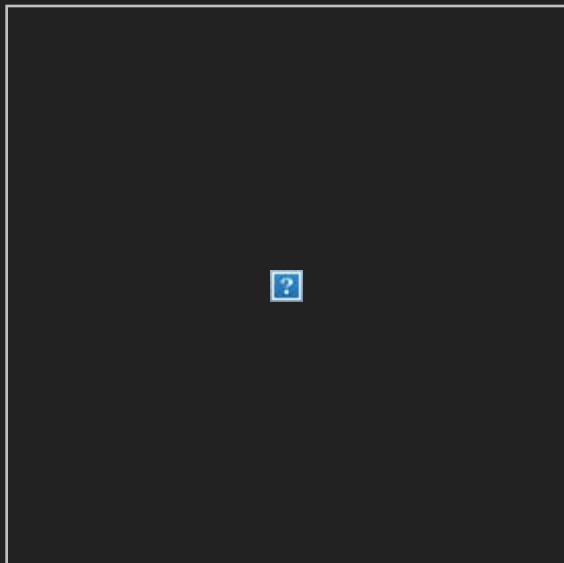


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