

Unhealthy relationship between employee wellness expectations and reality

While many employers recognise the role they have to play in influencing good employee health, most are not employing strategies that best enable these outcomes.



Gavin Griffin of AON Employee Benefits

A [survey](#), which covers more than 900 employers across the EMEA region, in 25 industries and covering 2.7-million employees aims to identify the key health issues employers are facing as they develop their people risk strategies, including the opportunities and challenges.

The majority of employers overwhelmingly recognise the importance of having a well-defined, well communicated health and wellbeing programme and that there is a correlation between employee health and their performance, and 100% of South African firms agree that they have a role to play in positively influencing good employee health.

Nearly 70% of overall respondents either have a specific budget in place, or plan to have within the next two years, to fund health initiatives.

Most employers seem to have a good idea of the types of health and wellbeing issues they need to focus on, for example, lifestyle risks, and financial, physical and/or emotional wellbeing. Stress and mental health issues are the primary concern of 72% of South African respondents.

Yet, in spite of this recognition of a correlation between health and employee performance, many organisations do not appear to be implementing strategies that best enable these outcomes, and the prevalence of health programmes of all types is lower than two years ago.

Only 40% of employers say they have a defined health strategy in place, the same as 2016, and even fewer (36%) have a clear view of the impact (including cost) of the health issues in their organisation.

No budget

The key barriers to running or implementing successful wellbeing programmes include having no budget or a budget that is not deemed enough, having limited resources, or not being able to measure the effectiveness of any initiatives.

Only 22% of employers use data to support their health and wellbeing strategy, and just 17% of South African employers measure ongoing success of their health programmes.

Less than 40% of employers rate their health and benefits communication to employees as good.

Top HR issue

The survey also finds that attracting and retaining talent is the top HR issue in 2018, overtaking increasing productivity and employee performance, which has dropped to the number three concern since the last survey in 2016. Improving engagement and morale is the second highest ranked concern.

"In spite of these obvious concerns, South African firms appear less proactive in offering almost all types of health initiatives. Programmes addressing stress and mental health in particular are the least likely to be provided. Putting in place more structured programmes to address this would seem a good investment," says Gavin Griffin of Aon Employee Benefits in South Africa.

"Although South African respondents are more confident in their health and benefits communications than many others in the survey, low utilisation by employees has jumped into second place when they are asked to rate the obstacles to health initiative success. This is often a symptom of poor or ineffective communications and a review of current communications programmes would be a worthwhile exercise."

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