


Fast Facts from EBRI

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How Do Americans View Wellness Programs?

WASHINGTON—Many employers use or are considering wellness programs as a way of controlling health care costs, and in general employed Americans feel positively about employers offering programs that encourage workers to adopt healthier lifestyles. What does the latest Health Confidence Survey, released last week, say about specific attitudes toward wellness programs?

Overall attitude:

- Eight in 10 report they are *strongly* or *somewhat positive* about these types of programs (41 percent each). Less than 2 in 10 feel *somewhat* (12 percent) or *strongly negative* (4 percent) about these programs.

Where reservations appear:

- Employees' comfort with wellness programs decreases sharply as the programs become more managed. Six in 10 (60 percent) say they would be *extremely* or *very comfortable* if their employer were to offer lower-cost opportunities for health screenings and programs.
- Only half (50 percent) express this level of comfort with a program that sends reminders when annual checkups, health screenings, or prescriptions are due.
- Even less (44 percent) would be *extremely* or *very comfortable* if their employer were to offer insurance at reduced cost to workers who take a physical and qualify for the reduction, even if workers in poorer health or with at-risk behaviors could qualify by agreeing to manage their illness or lower their health risk.

Impact of premiums:

- Despite some discomfort with wellness programs, sizable portions of workers might take advantage of them if they reduced health insurance premiums. More than 4 in 10 employed Americans report they would be *extremely* (21 percent) or *very likely* (23 percent) to participate if it reduced their premium by 5 percent.
- Half would be *extremely* (29 percent) or *very likely* (21 percent) to participate if it reduced their premium by 10 percent. But almost 3 in 10 (28 percent) state would be *unlikely* to participate for a 5 percent reduction, and 2 in 10 (21 percent) would be *unlikely* to participate even with a 10 percent reduction.
- The data suggest that those in poorer health, with chronic conditions, or with at-risk behaviors would be considerably less likely than other workers to participate, even with a 10 percent reduction in premium.

Employer motivations important:

- Although many workers agree that wellness programs can help people develop healthier lifestyles, many have reservations about employer motivations for offering them. More than 8 in 10 each *strongly* or *somewhat agree* that wellness programs can help people (89 percent) or themselves (83 percent) develop healthier lifestyles.
- Three-quarters (76 percent) agree employers that offer wellness programs are showing concern for their workers. However, sizable portions of employed Americans agree that employers that offer wellness programs are only concerned about their bottom line (65 percent) and are intruding on worker privacy (45 percent).

Full results of the 2007 Health Confidence Survey appear in the November 2007 *EBRI Notes*, published by the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute and available at www.ebri.org

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