Health, Equity, and the Bottom Line: Workplace Wellness and California Small Businesses

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Project Goals

- Affordable Care Act emphasizes the use of WWPs
- Workplace wellness programs can aid in prevention
- Identify gaps in literature
- Underserved communities historically haven’t benefited
Key informant interviews:
- 10 small business and non-profit organization owners and executive directors of color from Northern and Southern California
- 2 Female, 8 Male; 6 For-Profit, 4 Non-Profit; and 2 Asian, 2 Black, and 6 Latino.

Scan of peer-reviewed and practice literature
“Studies have found an association between workplace smoking policies... and decreases in the number of cigarettes smoked per day, increases in attempts to stop smoking, and increases in smoking cessation rates.”

-Surgeon General's Report on Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke, 2006
Cost and lack of options and support for small business are barriers to implementation

◆ Most small employers believe that employee health is important to the bottom line yet only 22% offer WWPs to employees.

◆ The vast majority of the literature, case examples, and formal supports focus on large, white collar workplaces.
Financial incentives/penalties can have significant negative consequences

“American families with average health benefits could have $6,688 a year riding on blood tests and weigh-ins.”

-Washington Post
Financial incentives/penalties can have significant negative consequences

- The evidence does not demonstrate effectiveness
- The result can be less affordable care
- Lower-income employees and people of color will be unfairly impacted
Findings

Targeting workers with the poorest health outcomes can produce the biggest health gains

◆ People of color and low-wage workers experience higher rates of chronic disease, but are the least likely to have access to effective WWPs.

◆ Concerns about discrimination, perceived cost, cultural relevance, compatibility with work schedule are potential barriers.
Need flexible approaches that avoid "one size fits all"

“I would consider [a workplace wellness program] if it was designed for small businesses. It should be flexible enough that the number of participants doesn’t determine success. A lot of programs are geared for big offices.”

– Owner, temporary employment agency
Comprehensive approaches that focus simultaneously on individuals and their environment have the greatest impact

“[Workplace wellness programs] must promote a healthy work environment and address individual health & well-being.”

– Director, non-profit housing development agency
Findings

- Physical environment
- Workplace policies
- Programs and events
- Assessment and monitoring
- Counseling and information
- Community Environment
Employee/management collaboration is critical to the success of wellness programs

- More likely to succeed if developed collaborative between management and staff
- Employee involvement ensures cultural relevance and buy-in
1. Policy: How to legislate workplace wellness

2. Research: Identified gaps in the research

3. Education & Outreach: How small business would like to receive information
1. Encourage comprehensive approaches
2. Seamlessly incorporate workplace wellness policies into existing structures
3. Facilitate small business participation
4. Eliminate the use of health outcome benchmarks to receive incentives
Recommendation: Research

1. Establish a workgroup to develop recommendations on implementation:
   1. Conduct a survey with a representative sample to identify best practices
   2. Tailor program for “blue collar” settings
   3. Best practices for implementing within diverse communities
   4. Best practices for using non-punitive incentives to encourage participation in a WWP.

2. Identify patterns of illness and injury in small business employees
1. Develop linguistically and culturally appropriate materials to support WWP development

2. Enlist business associations and labor unions in providing implementation and evaluation support for small businesses

3. Create a venue for discussing ways that businesses can address factors in the community environment that impact health