

# Section 3: Health Promotion in the Workplace

## WHAT IS HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE WORKPLACE?

### What is the definition of health and health promotion?

To understand the definition of health promotion, it is important to know the meaning of 'health'. The World Health Organization (WHO) states health is a "complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, not just the absence of disease."<sup>11</sup>

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. Health promotion aims to improve or protect health through behavioural, biological, socio-economical and environmental changes.

### What is workplace health promotion<sup>12</sup>?

Practicing health promotion in a workplace helps encourage and increase the health of employees, and improves the "health" of the organization as a whole.

The first step to implementing health promotion activities in the workplace is to have support from your supervisor, manager or director. Section 2 provides more information on how managers can support your group in creating a healthy workplace. Also, having a "wellness group" or a few co-workers willing to participate will make planning a lot easier. For more information on how to get support or to create a "wellness group" for your unit or department, see Section 1.

Once you have support and some co-workers to help you out, what are the next steps?

There are four basic steps<sup>7</sup> to get you and your team where you want to be:

**STEP 1: Find out what your co-workers want**

**STEP 2: Put a plan together**

**STEP 3: Put the plan into action**

**STEP 4: Find out if the plan is working**

### STEP 1: FIND OUT WHAT YOUR CO-WORKERS WANT

Assessing and understanding the needs and preferences of your co-workers is an essential part of the process. If a workplace health promotion activity is going to be successful, it has to reflect what employees themselves consider important.

For example, there is no point in arranging for a speaker on stress management if employees aren't interested and won't attend.

How do you find out what your co-workers are interested in? The following are ideas on how you can find out what co-workers need and want to take part in.

## Use a suggestion box

One of the easiest, most efficient and least intrusive ways to get employee input is to set up a suggestion box. (If you have computer capability, you might consider an “electronic suggestion box”).  
Make sure to:

- Promote it to staff both before and during the time in which it is set up.
- Ask for suggestions about how staff would like to promote health in their department.
- Stress that all suggestions will be considered and confidential.
- Put it out when most of your staff are likely to be around i.e., not during a holiday period.
- Make the suggestion box attractive, visible and easily accessible.
- Follow up on all the suggestions in some way even if it's just acknowledging them.
- Compile all suggestions and have staff rate them to decide which ones you can work on first.

A sample meeting agenda is available in APPENDIX E. For surveys examples, see APPENDIX H & I.

## Host a Circle

To try something different, have a circle. A circle is an ancient form of a meeting in which opinionated discussion is replaced with thoughtful speaking, receptive attitude and deep listening. To learn more about having a circle conversation, see Appendix G.

## Have an informal discussion

Sit down with your co-workers and generate ideas ideas to improve health. You don't have to schedule a special meeting — just “piggyback” it on to another meeting or ask people informally. Ask for input about how to go ahead with some of their ideas. If you don't have a group, now is a good time to recruit co-workers to help. (See Section 1 for more information on forming a Wellness Group)

## Host a meeting

Organize a meeting with some of your co-workers to identify needs and how they might be addressed. If only some of your co-workers can attend, make sure you have a good mix of all the different groups in your unit or department. Keep in mind that staff may not want to discuss some health issues (e.g., alcohol and substance abuse issues) and personal and family issues. Also keep in mind that some staff may not feel comfortable speaking their mind if a supervisor, manager, or director is present. It is important to let co-workers know that you have support from management and everyone's ideas will be considered. It may be necessary to ask supervisors etc. not to be present at the meeting (just assure management that results will be shared without identifying specific names).

## Conduct a mini-survey

A brief survey can tell you a lot about what health and safety issues are important to co-workers. If you choose this option, you will need to promote it well in order to get a good number of responses. Keep in mind that you'll also need to tabulate and summarize the responses, so this process is more labour intensive than the others. Allow the option of anonymity so staff can be more comfortable about identifying workplace concerns.