

Focus on Preventing Excessive Alcohol Use

Excessive alcohol use, including binge drinking (four or more drinks for a woman or 5 or more drinks for a man within a short period of time), has been linked to serious health and social problems, including alcohol dependence, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, mental health problems, liver disease, injury from motor vehicle crashes, traumatic injury, risky sexual behavior, interpersonal violence, on-the-job injury, and self-inflicted injury.⁴⁶

More than 70 percent of the estimated costs of alcohol abuse in 1998 were attributed to lost productivity (\$134.2 billion) and the remaining 30 percent were attributed to the costs of treating alcohol abuse and dependence, treating the adverse medical consequences of alcohol consumption, alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, and alcohol-related crime.⁴⁷

To the small/medium-sized employer, having an employee who misuses alcohol can be devastating not only from a human capital perspective, but also for the potential impact on business operations. However, the good news is that there are relatively low cost interventions that have been shown to be cost-effective:

- Screening adults for alcohol misuse and providing brief counseling with follow-up. If all adults were counseled periodically, it would prevent 6,000 deaths and 400,000 injuries annually.⁴⁰
- Implementing early interventions for treating problem drinkers.

Ideas for Small/Medium-Sized Employers

- Distribute written policies on prohibiting the use of alcohol during company time, disciplinary protocols, as well as screening procedures.
- Provide nonalcoholic beverages at company-sponsored events or limit to one drink per female employee and two drinks per male employee (e.g., ticket system).
- Provide information about community and national support services (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], Al-Anon).
- Review what is covered by the company's health plan (e.g., counseling, medication, and in- and out-patient treatment).
- During holiday periods, promote "Don't drink and drive" and designated driver practices.
- Consider implementing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through a third-party vendor.

Susan Kuruvilla
President



CLARK Security Products and General Lock

Flourish Company Overview

- Wholesale physical security products distributor
- 15 locations with 300+ employees nationwide
- 68% male and 32% female

Program Components

- Provided employees' biometrics data.
- Implemented annual health risk assessment.
- Made value-based plan design changes to benefits program (e.g., reduction of targeted copays).
- Promoted company-sponsored healthy food.
- Designed a nationwide walking program.
- Promoted an employee assistance program.
- Planted onsite community gardens.
- Evaluate the wellness program annually.

Program Success Story

- 78% participation in the annual health assessment.
- Saw measurable improvements in employee health risk behavior beginning as early as the first year of the health assessment, including weight management, decreased blood pressure levels, and early disease detection from recommended health screenings.
- Increased employee engagement with 88.4% employees satisfied with their jobs in 2009.
- Achieved a progressive three-year reduction in the number of individuals who reported having trouble performing work/life tasks due to mental health issues.
- Had less than a 2.9% increase in year-over-year costs for wellness and benefits programs by quantifying reductions in absenteeism, excess health claims, and lost productivity.
- Winner of San Diego's *Healthiest Employers 2010* award in the medium-business category and one of five case studies presented to the White House illustrating what employers are doing to bend the health care trend.

President's Statement

"You don't have to spend a lot of money to drive a change in behavior. It starts at the top. All of our executives are motivated, healthy, and active. We believe in living healthy lifestyles."