



## Case Study August 2012

# Wellness Metrics in Action Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation: Achieving Success at Every Level

**T**he Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) traces its origins back to the late 1920s,<sup>1</sup> when Nova Scotians voted to allow beverage alcohol to be sold in the province. Formerly a liquor commission, in 2001 the NSLC became a Crown corporation, a shift that allowed it to become more focused on customer service, innovation, and the promotion of responsible sales and intelligent consumption. Today, there are 106 NSLC retail stores across Nova Scotia.<sup>2</sup>

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1 This case study is based on information from Cathy Lockhart (Manager, Workplace Health and Safety, Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation). Interview by Louise Chénier and Crystal Hoganson, January 27, 2012.

2 Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation, *About NSLC*.

### HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOCUS

The NSLC believes that its employees are a key to its success. And it views a healthy workplace—one that keeps employees fit, happy, and engaged—as a corporate performance strategy.

Senior management at the NSLC is committed to promoting and sustaining the health and well-being of all employees. But it is the employees' involvement at the grassroots level that has led to the successful implementation of the wellness program.

### About This Series

The Conference Board of Canada recently published a report, *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*,<sup>1</sup> that provides small, medium-sized, and large organizations with advice on how to measure the impact of their workplace health and wellness programs. The report identifies practical, research-backed approaches to measurement, as well as a variety of tools and metrics, that employers can use to demonstrate the return on investment of their health and wellness initiatives.

Research for the report, which included an in-depth review of the literature, identified several employers that are currently evaluating the impact of wellness programs on their organizations. These leaders have invaluable information and guidance to offer to other employers that are trying to measure the impact of their own health and wellness initiatives. This briefing is the fourth in a series of case studies that profile these organizations, their wellness programs, and the methods they use to evaluate their initiatives.

1 Chénier, Hoganson, and Thorpe, *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*.

The NSLC’s health and wellness program was established in 2009 and is firmly linked to the organization’s strategic plan, purpose, vision, and culture. In 2010, the NSLC decided to bring together an innovative group of employees who volunteered to be “champions of a healthy workplace.” Their goal is to increase employee participation and engagement in the wellness program. These champions can be found at every NSLC retail store—and they are passionate about promoting health and wellness at the NSLC. This approach allows NSLC employees themselves to take ownership of the wellness program and build engagement in the initiatives from the bottom up.

The program touches every employee at every level of the NSLC. Members of the NSLC executive team remain engaged through their participation in the Healthy Workplace Steering Committee. The steering committee, in turn, supports the organization’s Healthy Workplace Advisory Committee, which is charged with coordinating wellness initiatives. This advisory committee is made up of one champion from every region across Nova

Scotia (five in total), the distribution centre, and head office. Committee members were carefully selected to ensure that different job roles and levels within the organization are represented. Through the advisory committee, the NSLC can effectively listen and respond to the health needs of its employees.

Along with having healthy workplace champions, the NSLC’s healthy workplace plan also includes:

- ◆ monthly postings of information on a “healthy workplace bulletin board”;
- ◆ an agreement with Weight Watchers that allows NSLC employees to attend meetings at any location across the province; and
- ◆ bimonthly activity challenges with opportunities to win prizes for participating.

## MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION, AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The NSLC recognizes the importance of measuring the impact of its wellness program. It knows that such measurement encourages employee participation and increases engagement. Active monitoring not only shows workers that the organization truly values their health and wellness, but it also provides inactive employees with concrete evidence of the health gains that can be achieved through participation. For example, monitoring revealed that during the NSLC’s Inch Your Way to Wellness program, 65 teams of employees lost a combined 1,118 pounds and 412 inches.

Every year, the NSLC reviews the wellness program to ensure that it focuses on the areas that need attention. In addition to working with the Healthy Workplace Steering Committee and the Healthy Workplace Advisory Committee, the NSLC continually solicits feedback from each of the stores’ healthy workplace champions, as well as from all employees. The result is a much more effective and focused program. For example, based on employee input, mental health, nutrition, and physical activity have been chosen as the focus areas for this year.

Although the NSLC does look at data on absenteeism rates, health risk assessment results, employee and family assistance program (EFAP) use, and the costs of NSLC benefits programs, it believes that measures such as engagement and participation rates are more important for evaluating the effectiveness of the wellness program. A biannual employee survey is administered to capture employee engagement and participation rates, as well as the level of employee satisfaction. The NSLC is convinced that without employee engagement and participation, the program will not be successful or sustainable.

## CHALLENGES

For the NSLC, privacy issues are one of the biggest barriers to measuring the return on investment of this program. Employees are hesitant to share personal health information (e.g., cholesterol levels), and it is difficult to assure them that any information shared will be held in confidence. The NSLC has found it particularly difficult to convince older workers that it is in their interests to disclose personal health information.

The NSLC also finds that ensuring the validity of data is a challenge. For example, although the organization can measure absenteeism, EFAP use, and drug spending, various factors can influence or distort these results in any one year, making useful comparisons with other years difficult. As well, integrating wellness with the broader goals of a healthy workplace has been an ongoing challenge.

## ADVICE FOR OTHERS

For the NSLC, a key success factor has been having healthy workplace champions in every store, distribution centre, and business unit to communicate and promote the health and wellness programs and activities and to motivate and engage employees. Incentives have also helped to encourage employees to participate.

When it comes to tracking outcomes, the NSLC's partnerships with its benefits provider (Great-West Life) and EFAP provider (Homewood Human Solutions) have been invaluable. They provide the NSLC with excellent information on wellness programs and a number of useful tools such as a mental health risk assessment.

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