



Case Study August 2012

Wellness Metrics in Action Town of Conception Bay South: Reducing Absenteeism

Conception Bay South, Newfoundland and Labrador, is home to approximately 25,000 residents and is made up of some of the island of Newfoundland's oldest settlements.¹ The growing town is strategically located on the south side of Conception Bay just minutes from the provincial capital, St. John's. The municipality—the Town of Conception Bay South—offers a variety of services to its residents and business owners and currently employs 175 people.²

1 This case study is based on information from Keith Arns (Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Conception Bay South) and Denise Stirling (Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator, Town of Conception Bay South). Interview by Crystal Hoganson and Louise Chénier, January 31, 2012.

2 Town of Conception Bay South, *Bright Town*.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOCUS

In 2008, after senior leaders noticed a significant increase in Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission (WHSCC) claims and premiums, the Town of Conception Bay South decided to create a health and wellness program. It was aware that absenteeism and workplace accidents could decrease as the health and well-being of employees improved. Increasing morale and productivity, as well as recruiting and retaining top talent in a competitive market, were also motivating factors for implementing such a program.

The Town understood from some employees that fitness—and, in particular, the lack of exercise equipment—was a concern among the workforce. In order to gain more

About This Series

The Conference Board of Canada recently published a report, *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*,¹ 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 third 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*.

insight into the issues, the Town sought more feedback from all employees on health and wellness concerns. With this information in hand, the Town met with the recreation department to discuss what types of activities and facilities it could offer employees.

The Town's health and wellness program has a number of components. For example, employees are provided free use of all recreational facilities (swimming, tennis, skating, squash, etc.). They are also strongly encouraged to use the employee assistance program (EAP), attend lunch-and-learn sessions, and read the monthly wellness newsletters.

MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION, AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The Town is convinced that an organization needs to measure the impacts of its investments in a health and wellness program if it is to truly determine the effectiveness of that program. Through measurement and

evaluation, the Town has been able to assess whether there are any areas that need improvement. Currently, it examines absenteeism rates by looking at the number of sick days being used monthly. It calculates average sick days per employee and compares this figure with the averages from previous years.

Since the health and wellness program was implemented, the Town has noticed a decline in absenteeism that has resulted in annual savings of approximately \$45,000 in sick leave—approximately 1 per cent of the Town's payroll. It has also observed considerable and sustained savings in its annual WHSCC premiums—which fell from \$170,000 to just under \$100,000—as a result of a decline in claims. Further, by managing its claims costs, the Town was able to secure a \$28,000 refund from the WHSCC for 2011. Additionally, the Town's occupational health and safety audit score, provided by the WHSCC, has increased considerably. On its first audit, the Town scored 38 per cent. However, after its third audit, it scored just over 90 per cent—a rating that organizations rarely achieve.

The Town's wellness program has resulted in reduced absenteeism, monetary savings, increased morale, productivity, and engagement, and fewer workplace injuries.

Apart from monetary savings, the Town has also seen an increase in employee morale, productivity, and engagement, coupled with a significant decrease in workplace injuries. For the future, the Town is looking at adding return-to-work programs for non-occupational injuries and illnesses.

CHALLENGES

The Town has faced a few barriers along the way. For example, the information it receives from its EAP provider is general in order to maintain the privacy of employees. As a result, the Town is unable to determine the reasons for EAP use and cannot adjust its program to address some of these issues (e.g., mental health issues).

A further challenge is the lack of statistical benchmarking data from other municipalities and the significant delay in getting provincial data from Statistics Canada. For instance, at the time of the interview for this case study (January 31, 2012), the Town had already calculated its absenteeism rates for 2011, yet it was still waiting for provincial results from Statistics Canada.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Designing a health and wellness program that has clear objectives has been the foundation of the Town of Conception Bay South's success. The Town advises other organizations to determine the most important area of focus for their health and wellness programs (e.g., reducing absenteeism rates) and to work on this objective first. The key is to start small and build the program over time.

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Chénier, Louise, Crystal Hoganson, and Karla Thorpe. *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2012.

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