



Worksite Wellness

Are you getting what you hoped for from your worksite wellness program? As a leader in your organization do you know how you influence participation and perceived value?

While conceived to help reduce health care costs, worksite wellness programs provide many additional benefits, including higher productivity, lower absenteeism and greater job satisfaction and commitment. Employers can profit greatly from these positive outcomes. But simply having a worksite wellness program is not enough. Wellness needs to become part of the culture, and that cultural shift must start at the top.

The American Heart Association's Start! program, which supports employers' efforts to get their employees physically active and adopt healthier habits, commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct research to explore the value and impact of wellness programs from the employee's perspective.

This paper will discuss the influence of organizational encouragement on employee participation in worksite wellness programs. Unlike other research that has focused on availability of programs and their benefits or costs, this research looked expressly at the role leadership plays in creating an atmosphere in which employees feel free to actively take advantage of these programs.

The national survey of nearly 3,000¹ employees was conducted online between July 12 and July 24, 2007.

Based on employee reports, organizations were divided into two² key categories:

1. Those that encouraged participation in wellness programs extremely or very well. These are called "actively encouraging" or "highly encouraging" organizations; and

¹The sample included 2,885 adults, 18 and older who are employed full- or part-time, work at a company with 25 or more employees at their location and whose company offers health insurance. Of the total sample, 303 employees believe their organization encourages participation in wellness programs extremely or very well and 1,285 believe their organization encourages participation somewhat or not at all well.

²Employees who believe their company encourages participation "well" are excluded from this analysis; however, in general their companies more closely resemble highly encouraging organizations than non-highly encouraging organizations.



- Those that encouraged participation in wellness programs somewhat or not at all well. These are called “not actively encouraging” or “not highly encouraging” organizations.

Whether your organization’s goal in offering a worksite wellness program is reduced health care spending, healthier and happier employees or both, you have an important role to play. As a leader, read on to learn how you can positively influence participation and enhance the value of wellness offerings. You’ll also find out how your role influences the workplace environment and, as a result, participation in wellness programs.

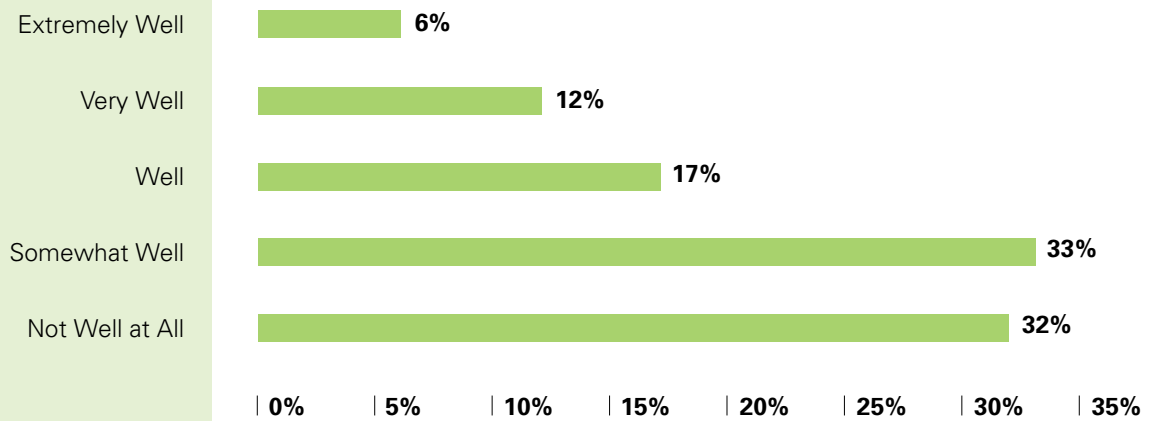
Organization & Leadership Support

The Influence of Leadership

Organizational leaders have an important role to play in the success of wellness programs, which goes far beyond the decision to implement them. How much an organization encourages participation is key to understanding employees’ interest.

Fewer than one in five employees (18%) evaluate their employer as encouraging participation extremely or very well. However, employees in these highly encouraging environments are more likely to participate in and value these programs. This makes their experiences particularly valuable as a learning tool. This is particularly relevant and important as nearly one-third (32%) of employees report that their organizations do not encourage participation well at all.

Figure 1: Evaluation of Organizational Encouragement



*How well does your organization encourage participation in wellness programs?
Base: Resources and programs available through employer*

**“Encouragement
to get out and
exercise.”**

Female, 55, Education

Leadership Involvement and Participation

Who needs to be involved?

When asked how well leaders within the organization encourage participation in wellness programs, human resources (19%) fares best while fewer believe immediate supervisors (13%) or senior management (13%) encourage participation extremely or very well.

Among employees in highly encouraging organizations each leadership group is far more likely to be perceived as encouraging. Among these employees, 55% believe their human resources department encourages participation in worksite wellness extremely or very well, 45% think senior management encourages participation and 35% think their immediate supervisor does the same.

When asked which leadership group is least likely to actually participate, four in 10 employees (40%), and almost half (47%) of employees from the highly encouraging organizations believe senior management is least likely to actually participate. This suggests that employees may not expect to see their leaders walking, eating fruit instead of chips, or getting their blood pressure taken. They might view their leader's most important role as creating the right atmosphere and culture for them to participate.

Creating the Right Environment

There is no one-size-fits-all model – encouragement takes many forms and should include a range of activities and outreach efforts. Employees who report greater levels of encouragement are far more likely to report that their company offers a variety of tools and techniques to promote, educate and inform employees about program characteristics, opportunities to participate and the potential successes they may achieve.

Employees reporting more active encouragement are more likely to report that support is available to them online, in person, one-on-one or in groups. Encouragement includes health education and screening, access to healthy foods, a time and place to exercise, and information on how these activities can be beneficial. And not only are employees in highly encouraging organizations more likely to report having each kind of support examined in the survey, they are also more likely to report that their companies engage in a greater number of these techniques (an average of three methods of encouragement, compared to just one among less active companies).

Figure 2: Methods of Encouragement

	All Employees	Encouraging Organizations ³	Non-Encouraging Organizations ⁴	Percentage Point Different
Availability of online tools	26%	48%	18%	30
Providing incentives to participate	17%	40%	7%	33
Providing time during the work day to participate	16%	36%	8%	28
Seminars	15%	33%	8%	25
Access to nutritious foods	15%	30%	10%	20
Sharing information on how company healthcare costs are impacted by participation	11%	25%	5%	20
Scheduling appointments with a nurse or other health professional for medical screenings	9%	21%	4%	17
Sharing success stories	8%	20%	4%	16
Seeing senior management participate	7%	19%	2%	17
Lower healthcare costs for participation or reaching a specific health goal	6%	16%	3%	13
Scheduled times to walk with colleagues	5%	13%	2%	11
Meetings with my manager or human resources to review aspects of the program that would be beneficial to me	4%	7%	2%	5

How does your company encourage use of wellness programs that are offered? Base: Resources and programs available through employer

Please note that it is not necessarily true that companies that scored poorly on encouraging participation do not use any of these techniques. However, it does suggest that, if offered, they may not be doing enough to promote these tools among their employees.

Benefits of Wellness Programs

Health and Business Outcomes

Are wellness programs worth the investment? Without a doubt.

While conceived as a way to contain or reduce health care costs, wellness programs also educate employees to help them make changes that can positively influence their health and their work. Some benefits (e.g., feeling better, increased productivity) may be difficult to quantify, but they do have an impact on the bottom line and should be measured to track progress and improvement. Overall, wellness programs present a win-win situation for employers and employees, particularly for organizations and workers who believe their companies actively support worksite wellness.

³Organizations evaluated by their employees as encouraging participation in wellness programs extremely or very well.

⁴Organizations evaluated by their employees as encouraging participation somewhat or not at all well.

Participants report both general and specific improvements including feeling better, losing weight, lowering blood pressure and lowering cholesterol.

Figure 3: Employees' Reported Health Outcomes

	All Employees	Encouraging Organizations	Non-encouraging Organizations	Encouragement Gap
Some Improvement (NET)	69%	83%	60%	23%
Feel better	40%	51%	34%	17%
Eat healthier	36%	50%	29%	21%
Lost weight	32%	47%	26%	21%
Exercise regularly	30%	42%	25%	17%
More energy	28%	41%	23%	18%
Less stress	23%	29%	19%	10%
Look better	22%	30%	18%	12%
Lowered cholesterol	19%	24%	14%	10%
Lowered blood pressure	18%	31%	12%	19%
Sleep better	17%	23%	14%	9%
Stopped smoking	3%	6%	2%	4%
None of these	31%	17%	40%	-23%
<i>Average number of responses</i>	3.0	3.9	2.6	1.3

What specific health outcomes do you attribute to your participation in these programs? Base: Used resources available through employer

The bottom line is also enhanced. Participants report improved productivity, higher job satisfaction and lower absenteeism.

Figure 4: Employees' Reported Work Performance Outcomes

	All Employees	Encouraging Organizations	Non-encouraging Organizations	Encouragement Gap
Some Improvement (NET)	65%	73%	59%	14%
Fewer sick days	47%	54%	45%	9%
Better productivity	36%	44%	29%	15%
Improved quality of work	25%	33%	21%	12%
Higher job satisfaction	21%	28%	15%	13%
None of these	35%	27%	41%	-14%
<i>Average number of responses</i>	1.6	1.9	1.5	0.4

What specific work-related outcomes do you attribute to your participation in these kinds of programs? Base: Used resources available through employer.

“Gave me a chance to have healthy snacks & meals that are well-balanced.”

Female, 69, Banking & Finance

“I was protected from the flu.”

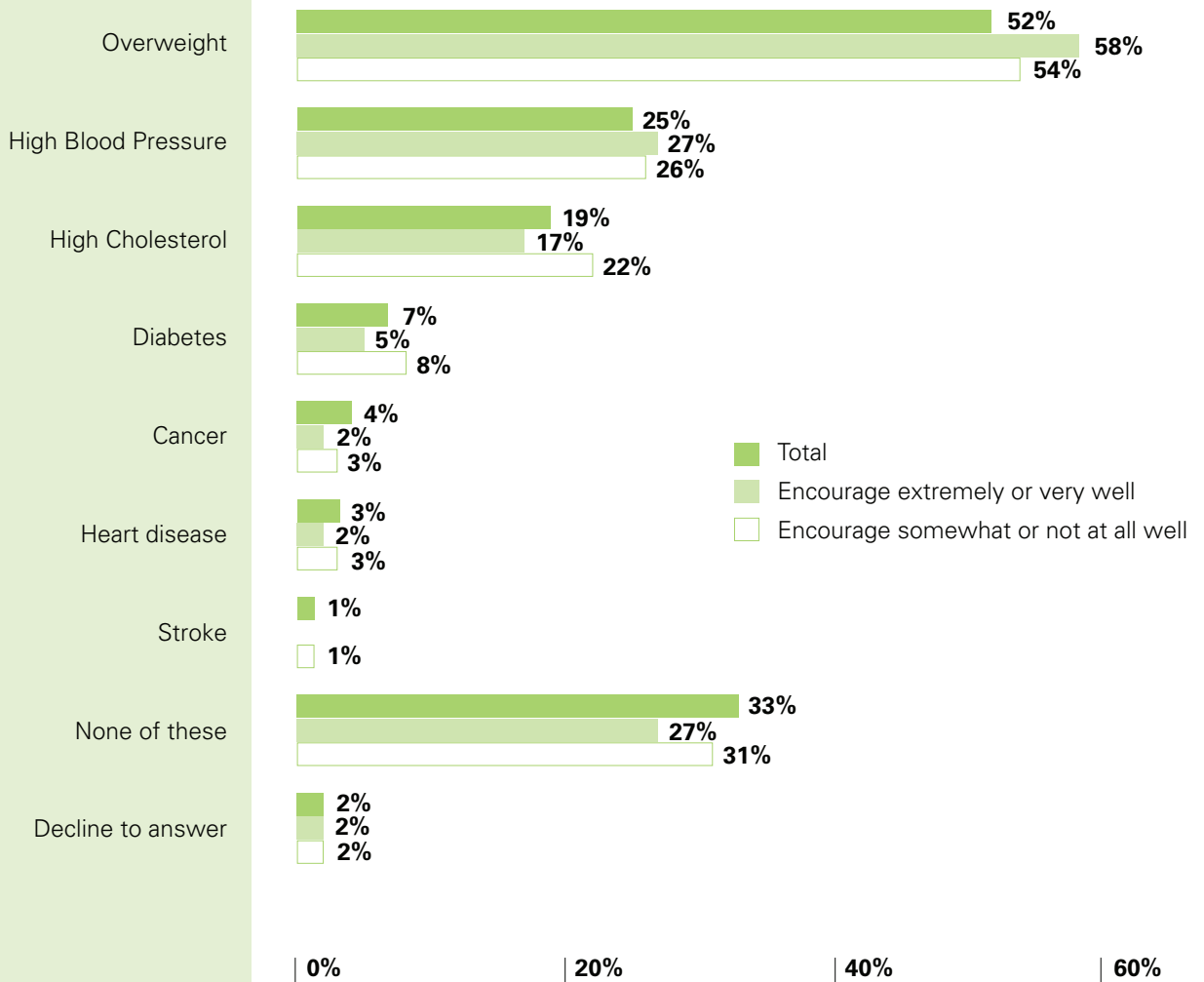
Male, 63, Education

Employees’ Health Status and Influence on Perception

Do only healthy employees benefit? Are wellness initiatives reaching those that really need it?

Wellness seems to benefit employees across the board. Employees in more encouraging environments are as likely as those in less encouraging environments to have experienced specific health conditions examined in the survey, suggesting that people with a range of health conditions can benefit from worksite wellness programs.

Figure 5: Employees’ Experience with Various Health Conditions



*Have you ever experienced any of the following?
Base: All employees.*

Employee Perspective

What Do Employees Use and What Do They Value?

Employees who have benefited from worksite wellness programs have the potential to advocate for them in their organizations. They can explain their value, emphasizing what they found most valuable.

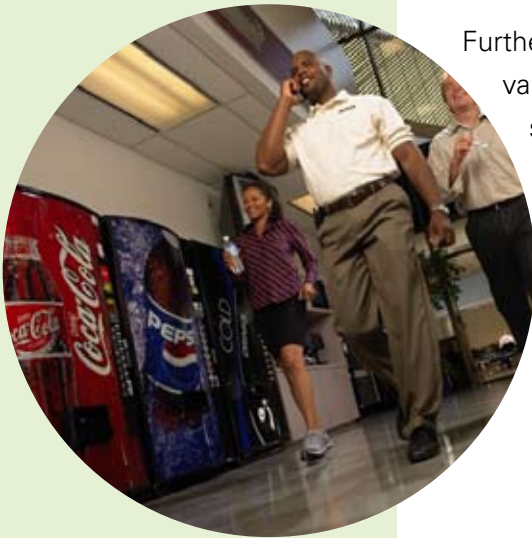
Employees especially value programs that are easy and accessible, echoing some of the reasons non-participants cite for their lack of participation.

Employees in highly encouraging organizations are more likely to have taken advantage of the following resources:

- On-site nurse or health clinic: 61% vs. 41% of employees in less encouraging organizations
- Routine blood pressure screenings: 61% vs. 37%
- Access to on-site gyms: 57% vs. 38%
- Weight loss programs: 37% vs. 17%
- Smoking cessation programs: 14% vs. 3%

Employees in more actively encouraging organizations also use more elements of their programs (four, on average) than those in less encouraging organizations (two, on average).

Further emphasizing the importance of easy access, participants most value access to an onsite gym, free or reduced price gym membership, walking courses, flu shots, on-site nurses, nutritious food choices, weight loss programs, smoking cessation programs and health information. They view these as having had the greatest impact on their health or health habits.



“Gave me more information about my husband’s condition, and helped us both eat healthier.”

Female, 41, Accommodation and Food Services

Figure 6: Program Element with Greatest Impact on Health

	All Employees
EXERCISE (NET)	69%
Access to onsite gym	61%
Free or reduced priced membership to an offsite gym	61%
Walking course	39%
MEDICAL CARE (NET)	61%
Flu shots	56%
On-site nurse or health clinic	32%
Routine screenings for cholesterol	19%
Routine screening for blood pressure	15%
NUTRITION (NET)	39%
Nutritious food choices at meeting or in cafeteria	35%
Nutritious snacks in vending machines	26%
COMMUNICATION (NET)	34%
Email or online resource with general information about a specific condition you may have	33%
Newsletter or brochure with general information about healthy lifestyles	25%
Email or online resource with information about healthy lifestyles	20%
Newsletter or brochure with information about a specific condition you may have	6%
OTHER (NET)	35%
Weight loss programs	38%
Smoking cessation programs	32%
Personal coach to help you improve some aspect of your lifestyle	30%
Other online wellness tools	21%
None of these	5%

*Of the programs you participated in which two or three do you think have had the biggest impact in helping you improve your health or health habits?
Base (Variable): Used each specific resource or program*

Employees’ Concerns

What concerns might employees have and why should you address them?

The most common employee concerns are easy to deal with and, if successfully addressed, may increase participation in and the perceived value of wellness programs.

Privacy concerns (41%) is the most common issue reported by employees. The next most common concerns are lack of organizational support (29%), a belief that participation takes time away from work (20%), healthcare costs being tied to participation (19%) and having too much work to take advantage of the programs (17%). Employees who consider their employers to be doing poorly on encouraging participation are more likely to cite all of these factors as disadvantages.

Figure 7: Perceived Disadvantages of Wellness Programs

	All Employees	Encouraging Organizations	Non-encouraging Organizations
Privacy concerns related to employer access to employee personal health information	41%	32%	47%
Lack of support within the organization	29%	11%	36%
Takes time away from work	20%	17%	25%
Healthcare costs are tied to participation	19%	14%	20%
Too much work to take advantage of	17%	13%	20%
Incentives are not worthwhile	14%	14%	18%
Participating will hurt my career	3%	3%	3%
Other	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	*	-	*
There are no disadvantages to wellness programs	32%	48%	25%
Decline to answer/no answer/None	*	*	*

Based on what you know, what are the disadvantages of wellness programs? Please select all that apply. Base: All employees

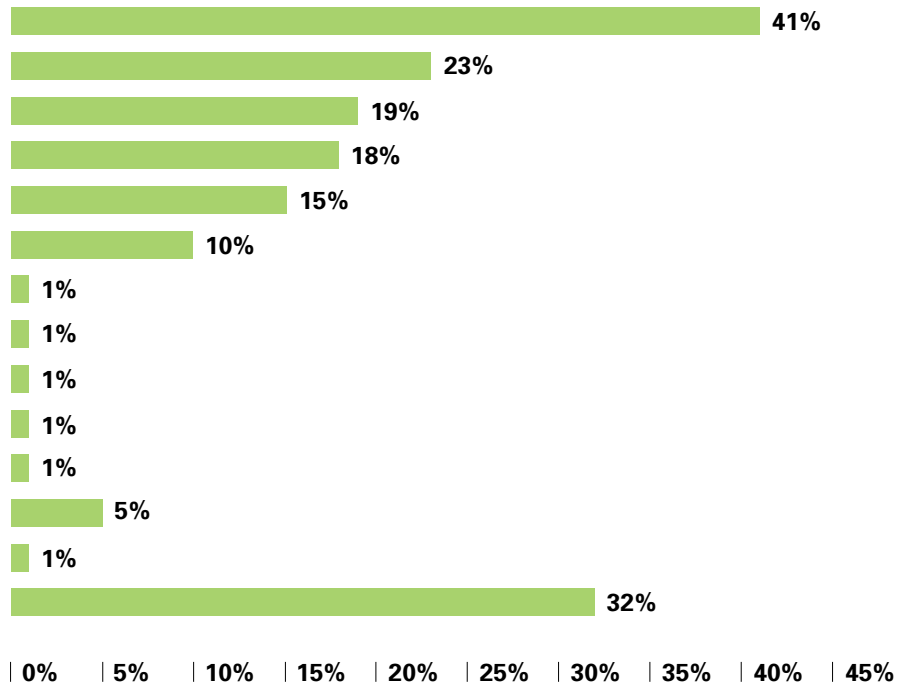
Moreover, among non-participating employees, similar reasons are cited for their lack of participation:

- Time constraints (34%);
- Already exercising outside of work (26%);
- Not interested (26%);
- Being healthy and not needing these resources (18%);
- Privacy concerns (12%); and
- Lack of encouragement by employer (9%).

Non-participants indicate they would be more likely to participate if they had time during the day to participate (41%); information on how their healthcare costs would be reduced (23%); information on how their privacy is protected (19%); and support from management (18%).

Time during the day to participate
 Info on how health costs will be reduced
 Info on how privacy will be protected
 Support from Management
 Better understanding of what's available
 Info on how wellness programs work
 Individually tailored programs
 Reduced priced membership fees
 Incentives
 Convenient locations
 Free facilities
 Other
 Don't know
 Nothing could make me participate

Figure 8: Encouraging Participation for Non-Participants



Q685. What else would make you more likely to participate in the programs available to you? Base: Not using any resources or programs

“Kept me informed about relevant health topics and trends.”
Male, 20, Manufacturing

Communication Techniques

Effective Communications

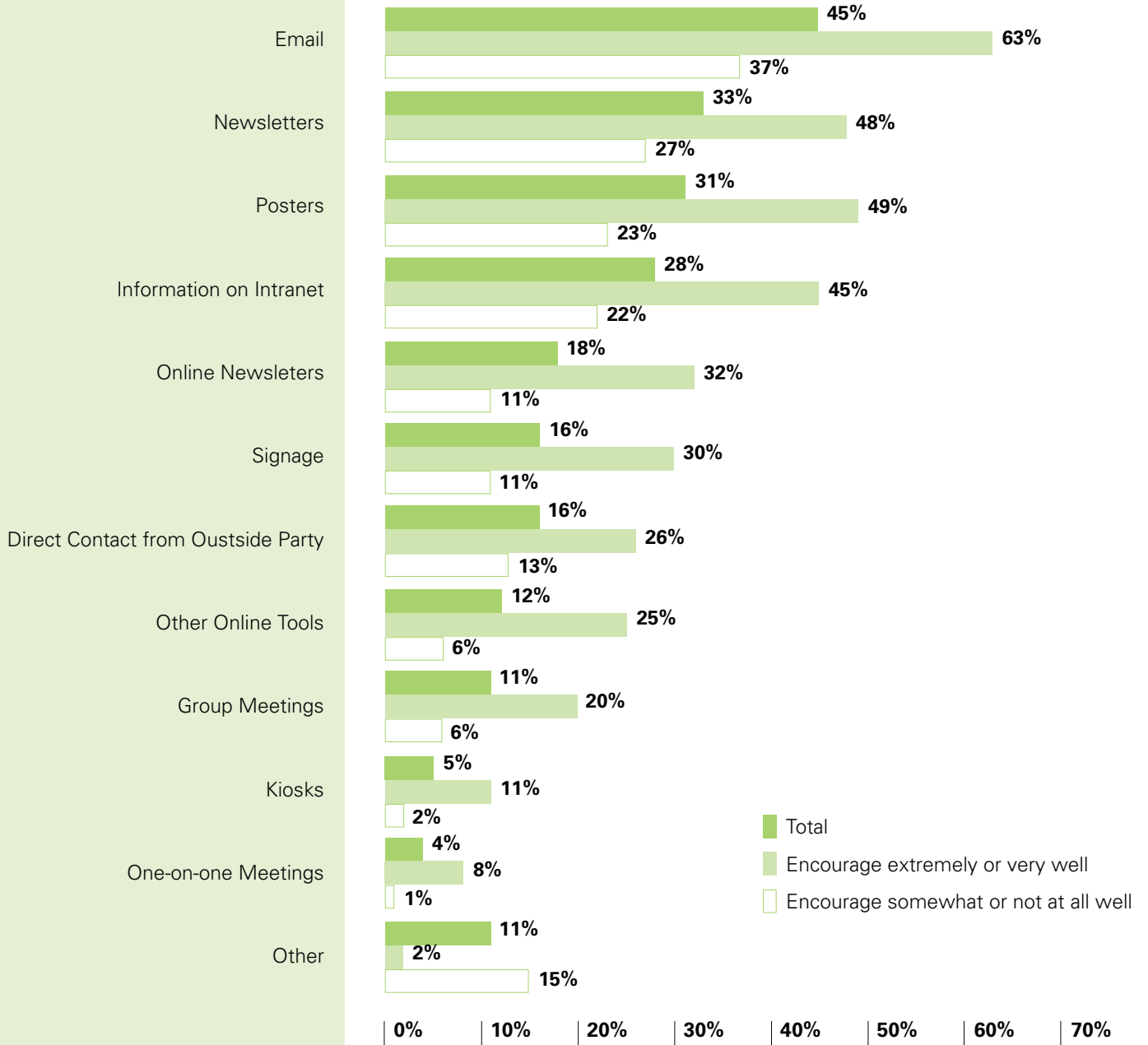
Along with a demonstrated commitment from senior leadership, an effective communications strategy is needed to successfully implement a worksite wellness program. The data suggests that using multiple channels, including online resources, are essential to convey a variety of messages.

Effective communications will ensure that employees know what their program offers, how to become involved and who to contact with questions. They can also provide motivation for employees to get involved and let them know that their privacy is being protected.

As detailed in the table below, communications can include one-on-one or group meetings, e-mails, newsletters, access to special web sites, success stories and information on how much money their company has saved or how much healthier employees are. Consistent with earlier findings, employees who believe their company does a good job

encouraging participation in worksite wellness programs are more likely to report that their employer communicates about the program through nearly every method included in the survey.

Figure 9: Communication Techniques



*How does your employer communicate with you about wellness programs?
Base: Resources and programs available through employer*

Recommendations and Best Practices



Active and ongoing leadership, encouragement and support are needed for employers to fully reap the benefits of worksite wellness programs. This may include all or many of the elements discussed above: creating an environment where participation is possible, communicating the breadth of the program and most importantly, why the organization has undertaken the wellness initiative; and what they hope to gain for themselves and their employees.

Employees need to feel confident that their participation won't be perceived poorly, that they can take the time required to fully engage in their wellness programs and that their privacy will be protected. Regular, varied communications are needed. One aspect not explored in the survey is frequency of communication, although the data would suggest that more frequent communications are needed to effectively spread the message.

If you are not already doing so, consider offering:

- Healthy snacks in vending machines
- Healthy food at company gatherings
- A "walking time" or "walking course"
- Access to health screenings such as blood pressure readings and cholesterol screenings
- Access to flu shots and other preventive health treatments
- Incentives such as reduced health care costs, money or trips
- Regular communications about all aspects of the wellness program

How Can Start! Help?

Start! is the American Heart Association's national movement that calls on all Americans and their employers to create a culture of physical activity and live healthier lives through walking. Start! provides tools and resources to help organizations motivate employees to get moving and engage in healthy behaviors. It is a great complement to support your wellness initiative.

Start! is free, simple and successful. The program helps employers promote good health with these components:

- Start! Worksite Walking Program, a four-week plan to get employees moving
- MyStart! Online, a tool that allows employees to track their activity
- Start! Fit Friendly Companies, a recognition program for companies that create a culture of physical activity and health in their workplace
- Start! Heart Walk, a signature community event to increase excitement around healthier living and to raise funds for heart disease and stroke
- National Start! Walking Day, a day to wear your sneakers to work and walk for 30 minutes along with Americans from coast to coast

Start! participants⁵ included in this research exemplify some of these best practices and the results are evident. Start! participants are more likely than other employees to participate in wellness programs, report better outcomes, feel their employer encourages participation well and report more diverse communication methods.

For more information about Start! or how to become recognized as a Start Fit-Friendly company visit us online at www.heart.org/start and click on Start! for HR Professionals.

Methodology

This Worksite Wellness Survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of American Heart Association's Start! program between July 12 and July 24, 2007 among 2,885 adults, 18 and older who are employed full- or part-time, work at a company with 25 or more employees at their location and whose company offers health insurance, including 303 employees who believe their organization encourages participation in wellness programs extremely or very well and 1,285 who believe their organization encourages participation somewhat or not at all well. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

⁵The sample also included interviews with 680 respondents who are Start! participants and also are 18 or older, employed full- or part-time, worked at a company with 25 or more employees at their location and whose company offers health insurance.