

healthier work

CASE STUDY: ActewAGL



Name and position of person completing the survey:

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Number of employees within the organisation:

ActewAGL is a diverse organisation with over 1,100 employees, 30% field based and the rest office based. About 30% of the employees are female. We have six work locations across Canberra.

Brief description about the organisation:

ActewAGL is Australia's largest multi-utility company, providing electricity to more than 164,000 customers, natural gas to more than 120,000 customers, water to more than 146,000 customers and wastewater services to more than 142,000 customers in Canberra and the surrounding region.

Why did your organisation start a workplace health and wellbeing program?

ActewAGL implemented a Health Safety Environment (HSE) Management system named Life Guard in 2002. The system compliments our safety motto Work safe. Home safe. Always safe. After four years of

implementing a comprehensive HSE system, which has now been rebranded to Always safe, the then current ActewAGL CEO and Senior Executive decided to extend the focus to include the health and wellness of employees. In July 2006 ActewAGL launched the ACTIVE Health and Wellness program.

ActewAGL was motivated to implement the ACTIVE Health and Wellness program to:

- improve the level of employee health at both an individual and collective level
- increase productivity and reduce costs due to illness and injuries
- reduce health risk factors to support productivity
- assist ActewAGL in positioning itself as an "employer of choice" to attract and retain employees at a time when organisations were experiencing skills shortages
- improve employee morale.

Staff indicated in the annual employee surveys that they were interested in creating a workplace focused on health and fitness and that it would boost morale.

Prior to implementing the ACTIVE Health and Wellness program, ActewAGL offered all

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employees free flu vaccinations every year. There were also various divisions offering

employees short-term benefits such as manual handling and back care workshops.

Our program is driven from the ActewAGL CEO and Senior Executive team and is financially sustainable with yearly funding guaranteed. It is an extensive, well-designed employee health and wellness program that is managed internally by ActewAGL, with certain aspects being delivered by a number of external specialist service providers.

ActewAGL is about to introduce a Corporate Health Strategy 2012-2013 as a significant step beyond our legislative obligation and to promote ActewAGL's commitment to improving and maintaining staff wellbeing, health and safety.

“The strategy is designed to benefit employees by ensuring a healthier, happier and productive environment while attracting, retaining and motivating the best people for the job.”

What did the organisation do to get a health and wellbeing program started?

In 2006 ActewAGL's Human Resources division's Health, Safety and Environment team researched what best practice organisations similar to ActewAGL's business were offering. They also attended workshops, seminars and forums to obtain knowledge on health and wellness programs.

The diverse range of roles across the organisation's business units were considered in the design of our health and wellness program. These roles include:

- water treatment plant operators on shift work
- water industry operators on shift work
- electrical linesman on shift work
- lawyers, accountants and office-based staff
- IT specialists

- call centre employees.

Our employee's demographic profile, was also considered in the program's design.

The design of the program was based on both quantitative and qualitative measures, which were used to assess the specific health and wellbeing needs of ActewAGL's workforce.

Quantitative measures included an evaluation of:

- the wide range of job types within ActewAGL, the task and skill sets associated with each and the desired level of health and fitness for optimum personal health as well as work functionality and productivity
- absenteeism, presenteeism, sick leave and injury rates in particular work areas and across the organisation
- staff costs and productivity and the scope for improvement.

Qualitative measures included:

- an assessment of poor health behaviour (such as smoking, poor food choices, lack of physical activity) and its effects on staff (such as high numbers of overweight and obese employees and ill health)
- demonstrated staff interest in health and wellness issues and in improving individual health status
- corporate desire to provide staff with healthy employment benefits.

Our very first program was launched by each of the General Managers addressing the employees in their division. The launch covered the program's components, how they would benefit employees health and wellbeing and its links to personal and occupational health and safety risk factors. It

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also gave the employees an opportunity to book in for a free health and fitness assessment before launching into a series of health and wellness forums. Some forum topics were covered at all sites and others were specific to each site. Our program also included an analysis of the physical demands of field work before specific forums were delivered to address identified health risk areas within field employee groups.

We utilise the annual health check assessment data to look at staff priority health risk factors and design each year's program accordingly.

Information sessions are held at the start of the financial year to outline the 12 month program. All programs are evaluated with a staff survey.

Were there any barriers that had to be overcome to get the program started? If so, how did you achieve this?

One of our challenges has been to address the issues that over 30% of our employees are field based and do shift work. We realise one corporate health program doesn't suit the whole organisation. Therefore we have to be very flexible and run programs to suit their needs, as well as at times convenient to the operational needs of the business unit.

One example we are currently running is a Quit smoking program in two of our locations from 3.00 to 4.00pm, which is the last hour of shift workers day time shift. Also sometimes we have to run sessions at 7.30am in order to get participation from two shifts.

In this year's program we are running two field specific workshops to further reduce soft tissue injuries. One workshop is to help improve strength, core stability and flexibility, and the other is a workplace warm up sessions. These

will be run to suit the operational requirement of the specific areas.

One division will run the workshop during their scheduled training days, the other division will run theirs directly after their work group meetings.

What were some of the initial strategies of your health and wellbeing program?

The health and wellbeing offerings are flexible to meet the needs of a variety of staff. Some of the offerings include:

- yearly health and fitness assessments – used for benchmarking (by providers)
- gym memberships – on participating in a health and fitness assessment
- QUIT smoking programs
- weight management programs for staff with BMI > 28, run in conjunction with physical activity and nutrition coaching (8 week program)
- one-on-one personal training session to design physical activity programs (8 week program)
- men's and women's health months with testing and education
- flu vaccinations
- beyond blue mental health awareness information sessions
- healthy eating and nutrition seminars
- 10,000 steps inter-divisional corporate challenge.

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What are some of the benefits that have been achieved as a result of your organisations health and wellbeing program?

The program is completely voluntary and it has been encouraging to see a high level of

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participation at approximately 65% maintained since its inception in 2006.

Two years ago we ran a Quit smoking program for the first time in the organisation and had a 36% success rate with those employees now non smokers. We are currently running another Quit smoking program this year and are hoping for even better success.

ActewAGL ladies have access to having mammograms and pap test yearly during women's health month. Two years ago we had four ladies diagnosed with early stages of breast cancer as a result of this testing and have now received treatment and doing well.

Last year before we designed our program for the year we sent out a survey and 40% employees responded. Of those who responded:

- 99.6% believed the ACTIVE health and wellness program is a valuable staff benefit
- 87.4% indicated they found the health and fitness assessments useful. In 2010 46% of employees did not know they had high blood pressure
- seventy five respondents provided additional feedback and improvement ideas some of which have been included in this year's program.

ActewAGL was also a recipient of the Best Workplace Health and Wellbeing Program at the Safe Work ACT awards in 2009.

What has the return on investment been since implementing your health and wellbeing program?

We believe that healthy people are engaged people and are better equipped to juggle pressures and responsibilities both at work and at home.

We have an entry and exit survey with both specifically asking if the organisation's health and wellness program had any impact on them joining the organisation or if they valued the program. So far staff feel valued and the results are very positive.

The return on investment is an area we are currently working on. We propose to set Key Performance Indicators within the business for effective return on investment. We are also looking at other avenues of measuring success.

Would you be willing to speak with other workplaces that need help or advice developing a health and wellbeing program? If yes, please provide your contact details:

To find out more about ActewAGL's ACTIVE health and wellness program you can contact:

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If you would like to share your organisation would like to share its health and wellbeing experiences with other workplaces, please contact the Healthier Work team by emailing healthierwork@act.gov.au or phoning 02 6207 3000 (option 1, then 4).