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REDUCING HEALTHCARE COSTS WITH TARGETED WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Healthcare costs continue to spiral and can hurt an employer’s growth and profitability. To remain competitive and reduce healthcare costs, more employers are introducing employee wellness programs in the workplace to improve the health of their workforce and target employees who are at risk of chronic diseases.

Employee Wellness & Chronic Disease

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), chronic disease accounts for approximately 75 percent of the nation’s aggregate healthcare spending – or an estimated $5,300 per person in the U.S. each year. To achieve cost savings, employers need to focus on reducing employees’ risks to diseases that include: heart disease, stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes, obesity and arthritis – the most common and costly health problems in the U.S.

The majority of chronic diseases are preventable if risky behaviors, such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, use of tobacco and ignoring known risks like family history are controlled. It’s estimated that as the population ages, more people will have multiple chronic diseases. While chronic diseases affect an individual’s health and quality of life, it is also a major driver of healthcare costs and has a related impact on businesses, such as absenteeism and presenteeism (the act of working while sick).

An employer-based wellness program can be put into place to better engage employees with their health early on so they can make the right behavioral, lifestyle and health choices to help prevent their risk of developing chronic diseases. It also allows businesses to better predict and control healthcare costs.
Reducing Healthcare Costs with Employee Wellness Programs

Identifying Risk

Before employers develop a wellness program, they must first identify the employee population that is the highest risk for chronic diseases. The most significant data about employees comes from medical and pharmaceutical claims. It’s very important to analyze the claims and find the “gaps in care” in order to precisely create a targeted wellness program based on the employee population. For example, health claims data can pinpoint a large population of diabetics or asthmatics in an overall employee population. The wellness program can then be tailored to meet the employees’ needs.

Leveraging Health Data

In a wellness program, employers will often offer routine biometric screenings. Through on-site wellness screenings, a registered nurse or qualified healthcare provider will administer blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels, disease risk, body mass index (BMI), triglycerides levels (the amount of fatty acids in the blood) and other measurements an employer chooses. All of these results are collected to assess an individual’s risk for chronic diseases

Because of privacy mandates on personal medical information, the health data that is obtained from the wellness screenings is not released to the employer, only the employee. A third party then monitors the report to determine the greatest disease stats and the best possible wellness intervention for that group. For example, The Graham Company partnered with BioSignia, a company that offers a single-source wellness, health coaching and care management solution for employers. BioSignia’s program Know Your Number® is operated by its subsidiary, Doctors Direct Healthcare Inc. The data derived from the Know Your Number® program allows The Graham Company to assist employers in implementing targeted wellness programs and incentives to motivate at-risk employees to meet with their doctors and get the appropriate preventative care and treatment.
A wellness program can also include wellness coaching, nurses and other healthcare providers to help motivate employees to take the necessary steps to break unhealthy habits and adhere to a healthier lifestyle.

Creating Your Program

When employers introduce a wellness program into the workplace, they need to first understand the overall health of their employee population by gathering the appropriate health claims data. By doing this, the employer can then better allocate resources to create targeted wellness program unique to its employee population.

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