

Recommendations on Development and Implementation of Corporate Healthy Lifestyle Programs for Employees

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Healthy lifestyle and prevention of non-infectious diseases have been in the focus of global and national organizations in charge of human health and well-being in recent years. Besides, many companies, being aware of the healthy lifestyle program (HLP) advantages, implement the efforts to promote healthy habits of their employees (and sometimes their family members). These efforts largely supplement the initiatives at the federal level and are very useful to employees, employers and the entire country.

Nowadays, there is a great number of studies on assessing the efficiency of both individual efforts and HLPs implemented in foreign countries. Studies on Russian data are not so numerous so far, though the need in them is obvious – despite the drastic changes in the governmental attitude to healthy lifestyle in recent years, the population is rather inert. Smoking prevalence in Russia is among the highest worldwide; the “northern model” of alcohol consumption still prevails; Russians’ physical activity is extremely low; and the nutrition type is far from healthy. AIPM Draft, *Recommendations on Development and Introduction of Corporate Healthy Lifestyle Programs in the Russian Federation*, was intended to bridge this gap. For this purpose, the meta-analysis of foreign literature has been carried out; data and materials on Russia available at the time of the study have been reviewed; an opinion survey of employees and top managers of the companies implementing HLPs has been held in cooperation with Aston Consulting. As a result, the recommendations on arranging for HLPs in Russian companies and on the governmental support of such programs have been substantiated.

Foreign literature analysis suggests that the efforts to control the main risk factors of non-infectious diseases – smoking, alcohol abuse, low physical activity, and unhealthy nutrition – have become the most common worldwide. Most generally, these efforts can be subdivided into information-related, administrative and economic. Using them, it is possible to shape or change people’s preferences and to influence the limitations, within which people select their behavior and fall into habits.

For each of the risk factors, it is possible to single out the efforts that have proved their high efficiency in many countries: for instance, fiscal efforts are the most efficient in fighting smoking and alcohol abuse; and mass media campaigns, in fighting low physical activity and unhealthy nutrition. At the same time, to achieve the maximum effect, one should use the entire range of possible efforts.

The analysis of the Russian situation suggests that the healthy lifestyle policy efforts adopted in recent years have been rather restrictive (prohibitive) by nature, while the efforts incentivizing people to healthy behavior have been elaborated rather poorly and introduced rather slowly. The only exception is anti-tobacco efforts. At the same time, simultaneously with the programs and initiatives adopted at the federal and regional levels, many Russian companies implement healthy lifestyle efforts for their employees.

Analysis of some healthy lifestyle efforts and HLPs implemented in Russian companies suggests that, even though almost three quarters of employers country-wide offer some or other health support efforts, they are spread very unevenly. The large businesses, old enterprises that have preserved their Soviet-era infrastructure, and state-owned institutions are in an advantageous position. Medium and especially small businesses are often unable to allocate financial resources to healthy lifestyle efforts. Lack of information and experience is also a major obstacle.

The sociological survey based on the interviews with enterprise top managers and the employee focus group results has suggested that the enterprises offer a lot of programs aimed at creation of healthy lifestyle opportunities – vaccination, arrangement for and provision of hot food, participation in sports events. VHI programs and standard medical examinations, payment for sports classes, resort vouchers, payment for healthcare and some other programs are also common. Restrictive efforts (e.g. limited smoking breaks) are less frequent and unpopular among employees.

The focus groups and interviews have revealed that Russian enterprises lag behind their foreign peers in terms the set and the content of implemented healthy lifestyle efforts/ HLPs and in terms of the process arrangement. Even at large enterprises investing into employee health heavily, there is no program principle for implementation of these efforts; the efficiency of the efforts is not assessed; the employees are

not involved into development of the programs; the proposed efforts are not customized, which results in low coverage. However, judging by the focus group data, there is a demand on the part of employees for HLPs (firstly, co-financing of sports classes, healthy nutrition subsidies/ discounts, general health screening). Many parameters describing the quality of proposed programs (such as convenience, intelligible program implementation, confidentiality as to health etc.) are important for employees. Therefore, Russian companies have a great potential for HLP development.

Taking into account the situation, we can recommend the enterprises implementing or planning HLPs in Russia to significantly expand the range of the proposed efforts, to customize them to the production features and the employee wishes, to plan efforts with participation of employees, to involve corporate management in these activities, to regularly monitor and track the results.

The program success depends on the company's top management support, the individual motivation by implementing monetary and non-monetary incentives for the program participants. When unpopular efforts are developed and implemented, it is necessary to explain why they are implemented and to shape the employees' positive attitude to them. To ensure wide program coverage, it is important to make an efficient use of all communications channels, to involve employees in the program development, to create a favorable work environment.

In view of the benefits created by corporate HLPs, both in Russia and elsewhere, their governmental support is appropriate. The support areas may vary – from direct co-financing of certain events to provision of information, organizational and methodical assistance. Healthy lifestyle should not be supervised by the Ministry of Health only. Other authorities, including regional and municipal ones, as well as the population, public authorities, nonprofit entities should be actively involved in these activities. Governmental support will bring win-win outcomes: for the employees (good health and wellness), for the employers (increased productivity and revenues, reduced personnel turnover, greater personnel loyalty), for the community and the entire economy (GDP growth, social and medical expense cuts).

The full study is downloadable [here](#).

