

MAXIMIZING BENEFITS

MEN'S HEALTH: HOW YOU CAN ENCOURAGE PREVENTIVE CARE

FOR MANY men, taking care of their health often falls behind work responsibilities and family obligations. But new research suggests employers have an opportunity to change that and improve workforce health, productivity and engagement in the process.

A recent eHealth survey of more than 900 men found that 42% skipped recommended medical care in the past year, while 82% said they prioritize their family's needs over their own health. Sixty percent said they tend to put off medical care unless a loved one encourages them to seek treatment.

Those findings should be a wake-up call for employers. Preventive care can help identify health issues before they become serious and expensive, yet many men are delaying routine screenings, annual physicals and even mental health care.

Employers that actively promote preventive care can help remove barriers and create a culture where employees feel supported in taking care of themselves.

One of the biggest issues is men's perception of costs, with 33% saying they have delayed care due to cost concerns.

Education can go a long way toward overcoming those concerns. Employers can regularly remind workers about the preventive services available through their health plans, including annual wellness exams, cholesterol and blood pressure screenings, cancer screenings, mental health benefits, and dental and vision care.

Men also may need additional encouragement to prioritize screenings. The eHealth study found that only 26% of men age 30 and older knew that colonoscopy screenings are now generally recommended beginning at age 45. Awareness of recommended prostate screening timelines was also low.

Mental health is another area where employers can make a difference. Men historically underutilize behavioral health services, despite high rates of stress, anxiety and depression.

Employers can encourage utilization by reminding workers that counseling, employee assistance programs and telehealth services are confidential and covered under their health plans. Research has found that employer-sponsored mental health

programs can improve productivity and reduce absenteeism while delivering measurable returns on investment.

Routine dental and vision exams should also be part of any workplace wellness strategy. Oral health problems are associated with other chronic health conditions, while untreated vision and hearing issues can affect quality of life, productivity and overall well-being.

What employers can do

Employer initiatives that can improve men's health engagement, include:

- Promoting annual wellness exams and preventive screenings during benefits communications.
- Consider offering rewards or recognition for completing health screenings or participating in wellness activities. This can motivate men to take proactive steps towards better health.
- Providing clear explanations of no-cost or low-cost preventive services.
- Sending reminders during Men's Health Month, Father's Day and open enrollment.
- Organize lunch-and-learn sessions or distribute materials about the importance of preventive care.
- Encouraging employees to establish a relationship with a primary care physician.
- Highlighting mental health benefits, employee assistance programs and telehealth services.
- Offering flexible scheduling or paid time off for medical appointments.
- Include dental, vision and hearing exams in outreach.
- Train managers to support work-life balance and normalize taking time for preventive care.

Encouraging preventive care today can help reduce future medical costs, improve workforce productivity and demonstrate that an organization values the well-being of its employees and their families.

