

## Most favor employee wellness programs

Fitness, weight control, nutrition education top list of programs readers like

More than 80 percent of respondents to this week's RBJ Daily Report Snap Poll say employers should offer workplace wellness programs. Though just over half—51 percent—say there is an employee wellness program at their workplace.

The majority of respondents favor incentives to motivate workers to participate in wellness programs but oppose penalties such as high premiums if they opt out.

Roughly 70 percent of respondents said employees should be offered incentives to participate in a wellness program. Slightly fewer readers—68 percent—say companies shouldn't require employees to pay higher premiums if they don't participate in a wellness program.

Preventive health and wellness benefits increasingly are seen by employers as a key strategy to boost productivity, reduce absenteeism and curb health care benefits costs. A 2015 research report by the Society for Human Resource Management found 70 percent of companies now offer wellness programs, up from 58 percent seven years earlier.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, workplace wellness programs and policies are "designed to

support healthy behaviors and improve health outcomes while at work." These programs consist of activities such as health education and coaching, weight control programs, medical screenings, stress management and on-site fitness programs.



File photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Fitness, weight control and nutrition education were the top vote-getters for activities in which respondents say they would participate in as part of an employee wellness program.

Views differ on the effectiveness of workplace wellness efforts. A Kaiser Family Foundation survey found nearly three-quarters of companies think employ-

ee wellness programs are effective, but other researchers say the return on employers' investment is not clear.

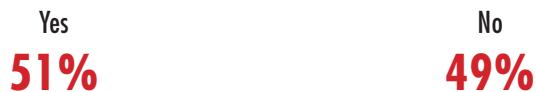
For the past decade, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, Rochester Region, and the Rochester Business Journal have presented the Wealth of Health Awards to recognize employers' health initiatives. The deadline to nominate is March 18; go to [wealthofhealthawards.com](http://wealthofhealthawards.com). The event is June 8.

Nearly 475 readers participated in this week's poll, conducted Feb. 29 and March 1.

### In your view, should employers offer workplace wellness programs?



### Currently, is there an employee wellness program at your place of work?



### Should employees be offered incentives to participate in a wellness program?



### Should companies require employees to pay higher premiums if they do not participate in a wellness program?



### COMMENTS:

Worker wellness programs are good for employer and the employee. What I don't want is to see government involvement or mandated programs. Must remain optional!

—George Thomas, Ogden

Employers should recognize the investment they have in their employees. Mine does.

—Mark Williams

A happy, unstressed, healthy employee is much more productive, creative and collaborative and takes much better care of your customers. Also, wellness programs drive retention up and attrition down.

—Fred Dewey, owner, Alive! 9 to 5

Employers should determine the effectiveness of such initiatives on their workforce. They may also choose to employ and retain employees who benefit from such programs. In my case, I'd merely prefer seeing my employer eliminate the availability of free soda and junk food all day long. Last week

our employees consumed more than 900 cans of soda that contained the equivalent of 85 pounds of raw sugar.

—Delina Madison, Henrietta

It's great if people want to be in shape, quit smoking and the rest. It is their personal business, however. If employers seek to compete for the kind of employees who would respond to that benefit, let them offer it. But to say that employers "should" offer it smacks of another manifestation of the nanny state in the making. (And we have more than enough of the nanny state.)

—Jim Cronin

Being able to balance your work and home life is so important. Wellness programs offered at work—during work hours—is a great way to add positive and helpful benefits, which create healthier, happier employees.

—Mia Mueller, DiMarco Group

Research estimates that \$170 billion per year is spent on smoking-related diseases and that another \$150 billion to \$200 billion is spent on obesity-related

diseases. In addition obesity costs employers an estimated \$4.3 billion annually in absenteeism and lost productivity. If employers want to get serious about cutting their health insurance costs they need to implement wellness programs and provide incentives for employees to participate.

—David Belcher, LeRoy

The Kaiser Family Foundation surveyed employer opinions on the most effective cost containment strategies. Wellness programs were ranked as effective by 71 percent of those surveyed. RBA, as an early adopter of these strategies, has guided its clients into robust, data-driven programs that produce the reduction of biological risk necessary to prove the cost benefit analysis of resources allocated to such a program.

—Barbara Cote, Relph Benefit Advisors

Meditation and chair yoga are easy to do and do not require special space or equipment.

—John Costello, First Niagara Risk Management

### Can-do teams

Seven local teams have designed and constructed giant sculptures made out of canned food with a "Bon Appétit: All Things Food" theme for the ninth annual design-build competition Construction Rochester.

Presented by Buckingham Properties, Construction Rochester serves as a major fundraiser for Foodlink and provides a fun way for local architects, engineers and students to team-build, officials say. Since its inception in 2006, the



competition has resulted in more than 300,000 pounds of donated food for local families.

The sculptures are open for public

viewing now through March 11 at The Wintergarden at Legacy Tower downtown. Viewing the sculptures is free, but guests are encouraged to bring a can of food for donation. A panel of local judges reviews the sculptures and will present awards in several categories. Fans of Construction Rochester on Facebook can vote for a People's Choice Award. Winners then go on to compete internationally.

The 2016 teams are: American Society of Civil Engineers, Bergmann Associates, HBT Architects, Kids Can Too, LaBella Associates, SEI Design Group and Wegmans Development Group.

### Bank on it

The University of Rochester has gained another connection to central banking—this one with an international flavor.

The Bank of Canada, our northern neighbor's central bank, has appointed Sylvain Leduc, a researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, to the group of policymakers that sets interest rates in Canada.

Leduc replaces Agathe Cote, who retired at the end of January, on the Bank of Canada Governing Council.

Leduc, born in Montreal, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at Montreal's McGill University. He earned his doctoral degree in economics at UR in 1999. His appointment takes effect on May 2.

Bloomberg reported the central bank "had been looking for a Francophone who was strong on economic modeling to fill the position as it prepares this year to renew its five-year mandate with the federal government."

UR's other ties to central banking include Narayana Kocherlakota, the former leader of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, who this year took on a new post in the economics department at UR, and, of course, Charles Plosser, who left the Simon Business School after 28 years to become president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia in 2006. He retired from that post in 2015.

Send tips, rumors, inside information or strange tales for the Loop to Managing Editor Mike Dickinson at [mdickinson@rbj.net](mailto:mdickinson@rbj.net).