The rising cost of health care in the United States is generating significant concern for Massachusetts’ employers. A variety of efforts are underway to combat that trend including offering workplace wellness programs for employees. Despite the growth of worksite wellness programs, their definition and effectiveness are not widely understood. In effect, what does it mean to have a worksite wellness program and what are its benefits?

In June 2014, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in partnership with the Worksite Wellness Council of Massachusetts surveyed a random sample of 10,000 Massachusetts worksites. The goal was to assess policies, practices, and programs that promote and protect employee health and wellbeing within their organizations. The survey was designed to update information collected in previous worksite wellness surveys conducted in 2008 and 2011.

In addition, it addressed a range of topics relating to the administration and management of worksite health improvement initiatives. It also provided a comprehensive review of evidence-based health promotion interventions using a validated tool, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Worksite Health ScoreCard.

Approximately 6% of businesses responded, providing insight into how well the Commonwealth’s businesses support employee health and wellbeing. The Benchmarking Survey Report provides evidence-based strategies to build or enhance corporate health programs to create healthy work environments.
The survey’s major findings indicate that Massachusetts’ employers are offering some elements of a worksite wellness program, yet fall short in terms of offering a comprehensive program. The key findings of the survey suggest two main themes: first, businesses aren’t using strategic planning to drive the wellness initiative, and second, businesses aren’t measuring program impact and success.

Based upon the findings and data of the survey, the following action items will help corporations accomplish their corporate wellness goals:

**Importance of Strategic Planning**

- 90% of survey respondents do not have a written strategic plan (annual or long-term) for worksite wellness.

- Only 2% of respondents have a long-term strategic plan.

When planning worksite wellness efforts, businesses should strive to incorporate a healthy workplace as part of the core business strategies of the organization, identify how the program fits with the overall organizational strategy, and develop an operating plan to carry out the program.

**Measure Program Impact and Success**

- 71% of respondents indicated that they are not currently measuring the success of their program.

- 58% of businesses have not attempted to measure change in health risk status.

Despite the low percentage of businesses that are currently measuring the impact of their wellness efforts, businesses should feel confident in their ability to incorporate evaluation strategies. Measuring progress does not have to involve complicated logic models and evaluation frameworks. Processes businesses can use to measure progress and impact include satisfaction surveys, participation rates, health improvements, and change in health risk status.

The full Benchmarking Survey Report is anticipated to be released this Fall 2014. The story is promising; collectively we can strive to create a true culture of health in Massachusetts.