



Health organisations walk the healthy talk

There are some workplaces where the impetus for healthy living was perhaps more apparent — like health insurer HBF who paid out when the body starts to fail, or St John of God Healthcare and Hospitals where many patients were treated for chronic diseases.

Then there are workplaces such as the Department of Sport and Recreation where health programs have been stepped up to “walk the talk”.

With little need to extol the virtues of good health to their staff, these organisations have established health and wellbeing programs and found staff were keen to support them.

HBF employee and organisational wellbeing manager Jon Haines said the insurer was offering health checks for external companies when they realised they needed to do more to support their own 600-plus staff.

The health fund renovated its Perth city offices to install new showers, change rooms and gymnasium equipment. It now offers staff subsidised fitness classes including yoga and pilates, team sports and events and holds lunchtime workshops with guest speakers.

It supports staff-initiated activities such as a group that walked the Bibbulmun Track. A campaign to get employees ‘Slimmer for Summer’ resulted in 33 staff losing a combined 32kg.

At St John of God Hospital in Subiaco the result is fitter and healthier staff who are better able to do the difficult job of caring for the sick. In October each year hospital workers are provided with free pedometers and given the challenge to take 10,000 steps in four weeks.

When this program started in 2005, 50 staff took it up but last year, 500 were stepping out and showed an 18 per cent average increase in steps taken each week of the challenge.

The Subi Spinners is a group of 24 staff who cycle to work and are subsidised by \$5 a day for taking an environmentally friendly route. They have a dedicated bike lock-up area and fully equipped showers.

The Department of Sport and Recreation measures participation in their health program and found in the last year, 75 per cent of staff participated in the activities provided and 80 per cent exercised at least twice a week — with lunchtime being the preferred time to exercise.

They can join a fitness circuit or participate in team sports among other organised activities. Exercise is used as a team building opportunity. At the department’s Peel office, staff participate in a canoe polo competition. The department also has a pool of bikes available for loan to workers who want to ride to meetings or cycle around the lake at lunchtime.

A complimentary ‘taster’ program offers weekly therapeutic seated massages, relaxation meditation, tai chi, and dance and yoga classes.

IT team member Troy Stephens said: “I enjoy getting out at lunchtime, playing sport and having some fun with my workmates. I feel really good afterwards.”

Michelle Tobin in human resources said: “I started out trying to just get fitter. Over the past 18 months I have increased my physical activity gradually and now I am training for a half-marathon.”

Department director general Ron Alexander said: “We are in the business of building stronger, healthier, happier and safer communities through sport and recreation, and through our corporate health and wellbeing program we are now also building stronger, healthier and happier staff.”



Wheel deal: The HBF Bike Hike is just one activity in which employees are encouraged to participate