

Healthy Workers – Healthy Futures

Case Study: ACH Group

ACH Group recognises the importance of employee health and wellbeing and appreciates that a good work culture benefits not only the organisation, but also staff and volunteers, with a flow on effect to customers, their families and the broader community.

The Approach

ACH Group is a not-for-profit organisation offering a wide range of services within South Australia and east Melbourne to support older people to live good lives. The organisation specialises in retirement and residential accommodation, domestic, personal and nursing care in the home, respite choices and short-term transition services. In addition, ACH Group supports older people to transition from one stage in their life to the next and remain socially connected.

ACH Group is a self-insured employer, with over 1700 staff and hundreds of volunteers across 23 individual sites. The focus on wellbeing at work is particularly important in aged care, as the workforce is predominantly part-time, lower paid, older and female. At ACH Group the average age of the workforce is 46 years and almost half (45%) work part time.

ACH Group cultivates a positive culture with a focus on health, safety and wellbeing across all levels of the organisation. Leadership support is demonstrated through a number of top-down initiatives including an Employee Assistance Program, early intervention physiotherapy program, and an immunisation program.

In addition, ACH Group offers a flexible employment structure; promotes various health awareness weeks on the intranet, sponsors a team in the City-to-Bay Fun Run and provides physical activity and nutrition resources. A number of sites have gym facilities, available to both staff and customers.

Organisational policies such as a smoking policy and a flexible employment policy contribute to the health and wellness culture.

Additionally ACH Group supports site specific health and wellbeing initiatives through a

Wellness Grant program. This is coordinated by the Work Health and Safety Department. Previous initiatives have included a 10,000 step challenge, purchase of an outdoor dining setting, team Weight Watchers™ programs, Quit Smoking supports, subsidy of Pilates™ and personal training and the development of running/walking groups. Grant recipients must report back on participation levels and any measurable outcomes.

Local sites have also been supported to work with external groups such as SAPOL, who provide driver safety training and Breast Screen SA, who promote breast cancer awareness and regular checks.

All staff have access to ergonomic assessments and several workstation alterations have occurred. For example, a recent initiative saw the introduction of sit to stand workstations for a group of Health and Community staff. Staff who are required to be physically active in their roles are encouraged to partake in pre-work exercises.

Fit with organisational core values

‘Our commitment to these wellbeing programs for staff is simply an extension of our overall ‘good lives’ philosophy. We recognise that happy staff contribute to a positive, productive workplace and in turn the service offered to our customers is of the highest quality. It’s also another way we can let our staff know that they are valued – and in an industry such as ours that can have a high turnover rate, this is very important.’

Jane Mussared, General Manager of Innovation and Development



ACH Group's vision of 'Good Lives for Older People' recognises health as a foundation for a good life. Encouraging and supporting staff aligns with this mission and fosters a positive culture among staff and volunteers where health and wellness is valued and encouraged.

ACH Group facilitates continuous improvement and lifelong learning opportunities, supported through opportunities for staff to complete qualifications, strive for new roles and responsibilities, and become champions in their area of interest or specialty.

ACH Group believes that these strategies create a happier, healthier, more engaged workforce; resulting in an improved customer experience.

Positives and Achievements

The wellbeing strategy at ACH Group contributes to a positive work environment across sites.

The Wellness Grants program has been well received by staff, delivering some particularly positive stories. For example, the Health and Community Services South team used the wellbeing fund to participate in 'Walk Around Australia', an activity where 6 teams of 10 wore pedometers for a month to track their progress around a map of Australia, and compete for prizes.

Overcoming the Challenges

ACH Group has a diverse workforce, with locations spread across South Australia and in east Melbourne. It's challenging at the organisation level, to find ways of reaching all staff and volunteers through a wellbeing program. As a result, the health and wellbeing strategy at ACH Group has many components and a current challenge is consolidating the various components so that they are clearly promoted as part of an overarching 'health and wellbeing strategy'.

ACH Group recognises that staff have varying needs, interests and commitments which contribute to their individual capacity to prioritise good health.

The culture remains supportive and policies such as the flexible employment structure respect varying individual needs and participation interests.

Sustaining initiatives beyond the accomplishments of champions at each worksite is an identified challenge, including access to funds for the Wellbeing Grants program. However, there remains an underlying culture of wellness and a strong commitment from leadership.

The Future

ACH Group continues to be innovative in developing and strengthening the health and wellbeing strategy and as such, has developed links with other organisations with a key interest in workplace health, such as universities and the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS). These networks help to keep ACH Group Leadership informed and ahead of the game.

Duration and Resources

ACH Group commenced discussions on the need for a workplace wellbeing program in 2005. The formal grants program was implemented shortly after.

The Wellness Grants are funded through the Work Health and Safety budget. Additionally most sites use some of their operational budget to improve wellbeing. Commitment of operational budget reinforces the idea that health is a supported and valued part of 'what we do here'.

Find out more about how you can create a healthy workplace and find a Healthy Worker Adviser for your sector:

Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyworkers
Email: healthyworkers@health.sa.gov.au



Government
of South Australia
SA Health