

Workplace Health Promotion: background, aim and principles

This document gives information about:

- The rationale for Workplace Health Promotion
- Settings Approach to Health Promotion
- European Network for Workplace Health Promotion

Workplace Health Promotion



Definition WHP

Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work.

This can be achieved through a combination of:

- improving the work organisation and the working environment
- promoting active participation
- encouraging personal development

Workplace health promotion (WHP) involves the creation of a work environment that promotes positive health and well-being and has many benefits for both employers and employees, including:

- increased morale,
- reduced illness and absenteeism and
- reduced staff turnover.

“**Workplace health promotion** seeks to improve worker health by **empowering** individuals to choose healthier lifestyles and by providing a **working environment** which is conducive to workers’ health” (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions)

A health-promoting workplace seeks to:

- improve the work environment and conditions of work,
- focuses on the organisation culture and policies and
- incorporates programmes that raise awareness at an individual level in order to motivate behavioural change.

To achieve this, a **partnership approach** is needed between the many disciplines in the workplace including management, health and safety, occupational health, human resources and employee organisations.

Key characteristics of Workplace health promotion are:

- **Pro-active**, rather than reacting to some 'problem'.
- It focuses on the '**whole health**' of workers, and not just physical health.
- Workplace health promotion is **comprehensive in its approach**, including initiatives that focus on: the individual, the environment and the organisation.
- **Management commitment** and **Employee participation** are the essential prerequisites for the successful outcome to any initiative.

WHP involves:

- Having an **organisational commitment** to improving the health of the workforce
- Providing employees with appropriate information and establishing comprehensive **communication** strategies
- **Involving employees** in decision making processes
- Developing a working culture that is based on **partnership**
- Organising work tasks and processes so that they **contribute to**, rather than damage, health
- Implementing policies and practices which enhance employee health by making the **healthy choices the easy choices**
- Recognising that organisations have an **impact on people** and that this is not always conducive to their health and well-being

The rationale for Workplace Health Promotion

Employers are more dependent on well trained, highly qualified and motivated employees today than ever before. The potential of the workforce and its ability to develop have become the subject of a new understanding of health, which encompasses both physical and mental well-being, the quality of life and learning. Promoting health in the workplace improves the working environment and is beneficial for society, companies and employees alike.

Companies benefit from Workplace health promotion because by working in a healthy working environment, their employees are better motivated. This consequently results in a reduction in sickness-related and other costs, a higher quality of products and services, more innovation and a rise in productivity. Workplace health promotion also helps to improve the public image of a company and makes it become more attractive as an employer.

There are also many benefits for the employees themselves. Stress decreases while their well-being and attitude to work improves. As a company is only as healthy and efficient as its employees, workplace health promotion results in a situation where there are only winners and no losers!

Settings Approach to Health Promotion

There are many ways to plan health promotion initiatives. In general, the most effective way is to promote the health of individuals and groups in terms of the environments where they live and work. This is known as the "settings" approach. The workplace is considered to be an important setting for health promotion activity for the following reasons:

- **Structures** already exist within the workplace for occupational health and health and safety requirements. These can be easily used to deliver health promotion activities.
- The workplace offers enormous potential to **reach large numbers** of people with information and assistance to improve their health and well-being. Some of these people are in groups which are **otherwise hard to reach**.
- It is in the common interest of employers and employees to promote health at work.
- **Forward thinking** organisations recognise that the management of their **human capital** is as important, if not more so, than the management of their financial and other resources. Employee health and fitness for work are closely linked and are key factors in any organisations drive towards greater effectiveness, competitiveness and productivity.

At one level all workplaces can be considered to be in the "workplace setting". However, there are many different types of organisation and so the "workplace setting" is a general title which incorporates the many specific organisational settings, including:

- large organisations
- small and medium sized enterprises (SME's)
- public administrations
- health service and welfare (e.g. hospitals)
- education and training (e.g. schools)
- labour market and administration

European Network for Workplace Health Promotion

The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) is an informal network of national occupational health and safety institutes, public health, health promotion and statutory social insurance institutions. In a joint effort, all the members and partners aim to improve workplace health and well-being and to reduce the impact of work related ill health on the European workforce. For further information, please check <http://www.enwhp.org>



Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion First International Conference on Health Promotion Ottawa, 21 November 1986 - WHO/HPR/HEP/95.1



Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986¹

In 1986, the World Health Organization issued the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. This Charter outlined that:

- Health promotion is the process **of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health.**
- Health is seen as a **resource** for everyday life, not the objective of living.
- It is a positive concept **emphasising social and personal resources**, as well as physical capacities.
- Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but **goes beyond healthy lifestyles to wellbeing.**

Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life: where they learn, work, play and love. In recent years actions to promote health and well-being have moved away from concentrating on specific health problems, at risk groups and disease prevention to addressing the multitude of complex factors that determine an individual health status.

The Ottawa Charter outlines 5 areas of work, which are necessary for health promotion:

1. Healthy Public Policy
2. Create Supportive Environments
3. Strengthen Community Actions
4. Develop Personal Skills
5. Reorient the Health Services

¹http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/ottawa_charter_hp.pdf

The Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalized World



Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalised World, 2005 ¹

The Bangkok Charter identifies actions, commitments and pledges required to address the determinants of health through health promotion. The Charter outlines that the promotion of health needs to be a key focus for communities and civil society and a requirement for good corporate practice.

Employers, both private and public sector, have a responsibility to ensure health and safety in the workplace, and to promote the health and wellbeing of their employees, their families and communities.

Employers can also contribute to lessening global health impacts by complying with local, national and international regulations and agreements that promote and protect health.

Ethical and responsible business practices and fair trade exemplify the type of business practice that should be supported by consumers and civil society, and by government incentives and regulations.

Civil society needs to exercise its power in the marketplace by giving preference to the goods, services and shares of companies that exemplify corporate responsibility.

¹http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/6gchp/hpr_050829_%20BCHP.pdf

Luxembourg Declaration on Workplace Health Promotion in the European Union, 1997¹



The Declaration states that Workplace health promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This is achieved through a combination of:

- Improving the work organisation and the working environment
- Promoting the active participation of employees in health activities
- Encouraging personal development

The Declaration outlines that WHP contributes to a wide range of work factors which improve employees' health, including:

- Management principles and methods which recognise that employees are a necessary success factor for the organisation instead of a mere cost factor
- A culture and corresponding leadership principles which include participation of the employees and encourage motivation and responsibility of all employees
- Work organisation principles which provide the employees with an appropriate balance between job demands, control over their own work, level of skills and social support
- A personnel policy which actively incorporates health promotion issues
- An integrated occupational health and safety service

WHP is based on multisectoral and multidisciplinary co-operation and can only be successful if all the key players are committed to it. WHP should be oriented along the following guidelines:

1. All staff must be involved
2. WHP has to be integrated in all important decisions and in all areas of organisations
3. All measures and programmes have to be oriented to a problem-solving cycle: needs analysis, setting priorities, planning, implementation, continuous control and evaluation (project management).
4. WHP includes individual-directed and environment-directed measures from various fields. It combines the strategy of risk reduction with the strategy of the development of protection factors and health potentials (comprehensiveness).

The **Priorities of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP)** include:

1. Increase awareness of WHP and promote responsibility for health with regard to all stakeholders
2. Identification and dissemination of models of good practice
3. Develop guidelines for effective WHP
4. Ensure commitment of the Member States to incorporate respective policies
5. Address the specific challenges of working together with SMEs
6. Develop supportive infrastructures at national level involving all relevant stakeholders, thus creating a lasting basis for the dissemination and incorporation of WHP



The Luxembourg Declaration was adopted by all members of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion in 1997. It was updated in 2005.

¹http://www.enwhp.org/fileadmin/rs-dokumente/dateien/Luxembourg_Declaration.pdf

Determinants of Health

Many factors influence and determine health, whether at an individual or population level. Social, economic and environment factors are the main external determinants, while at an individual level age, sex, and lifestyle choices are important.

The environment in which people work can be regarded as an external factor that influences people health, especially when one considers that those of us who are in regular employment spend a third of our waking hours at work.

A model of the main determinants of health, outlined in Figure 1 below, highlights some of the main factors determining the health of populations. This model demonstrates that there are layers of influence on health that can be modified to improve health.

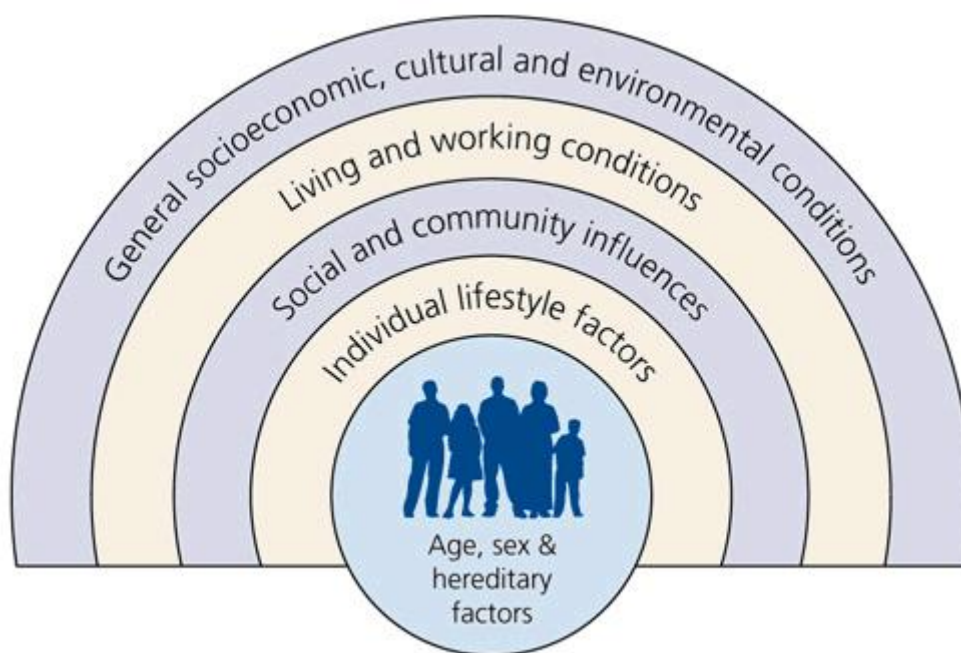


Figure 1. The picture is of: G Dahlgren and M Whitehead Policies and Strategies to Promote Social Equity in Health (Institute of Futures Studies Stockholm 1991)

With thank to:

With many thanks to colleagues of the Healthy Together Programme for the collection and summarizing of the information. Source: www.healthy2gether.net, 2009