

South Canterbury workplace project identifies key factors for success

South Canterbury DHB (SCDHB) undertook a three-component healthy workplace project for small businesses in 2010. The principal objective was to inform employees about the scope of health services available to them in South Canterbury, with emphasis on SCDHB's core focus of reducing the incidence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and smoking.

The three components of the project were to:

- develop and implement a pilot at a single work site
- increase the capacity amongst workplaces in South Canterbury to develop their own workplace programmes
- facilitate a coordinated approach to workplace health in South Canterbury.

A pilot with the local office of Fulton Hogan (63 employees) delivery of workshops to other workplaces, and the creation of a Healthy Workplace Network (HWN) met these objectives, with the overall project being informed by the pilot.

Project outcomes included positive health changes among employees in the Fulton Hogan pilot, with increased employee and organisation engagement. Additionally, 70% of the 11 workplaces taking part initiated healthy changes after attending the workshops.

SCDHB identified three key factors for a successful healthy workplace project:

- a competent, credible coordinator who is well-resourced and supported by the DHB
- a well-informed network to support the coordinator and work with local workplaces
- the support of management within workplaces.

The predominant recommendation from SCDHB for future projects of this type was to have a quarterly (rather than monthly) health focus to make planning easier. Having four health areas for employees would help create further personal integration of each area without being too intensive.

Read more about the SCDHB workplace project . . .

Project initiation

South Canterbury DHB (SCDHB) recognised a need to raise awareness among employees of small South Canterbury businesses about the scope of health services available to them. In response, SCDHB created a project with three objectives to raise employee awareness of health options, as well as facilitate measurable health changes:

- develop and implement a pilot at a single work site
- increase the capacity amongst workplaces in South Canterbury to develop their own workplace programmes
- facilitate a coordinated approach to workplace health in South Canterbury.

Underlying these objectives was SCDHB's core focus on reducing the incidence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and smoking.

The planning phase of the project took six months, commencing in March 2009. Small businesses that might benefit from being involved were identified from data available on health days previously run in workplaces by the PHO, and suggestions from existing network partners. These workplaces were then investigated as potential pilot sites and for their suitability based on the following criteria:

- majority of employees of a low socio-economic status (defined by income bracket)

- management support of the project
- proportion of employees who were Māori and/or Pacific Islanders
- predominantly male employees.

Though Fulton Hogan Ltd is a large national business, the local South Canterbury operation is a small business and was chosen as the pilot as it best matched these criteria.

The Healthy Workplace Coordinator (HWC) was appointed in August 2009, and assigned the following tasks:

- develop a framework for the pilot
- facilitate intersectoral cooperation with other agencies to achieve this
- support the delivery of the pilot
- evaluate the pilot.

The framework was developed based on national and international literature of best practice methods for sustainable change, and grounded in established theory. All initiatives acknowledged whānau ora, and resources were supplied in Te Reo where possible.

Implementation of the pilot

The pilot was implemented at Fulton Hogan in December 2009, and situational assessments were conducted in January 2010 to provide baseline data for the project. The programme was delivered in the workplace until November 2010 and focused on three critical factors that impact on health in the workplace: individual lifestyle practices; organisational change initiatives; and occupational health and safety.

Each month, a different area of health (eg, mental health, diabetes, after-work physical activities) was chosen as the focus for the pilot, and information provided to employees

by an appropriate community-based health organisation. Occupational Health Nurses were involved at the pilot site with screening for cardiovascular disease and the opportunity was identified to provide a similar future service for diabetes. The Fulton Hogan Best Practice team was consulted on organisational and occupational health and safety changes, which were supported by Fulton Hogan management – examples included providing a healthier milk option for employees, and offering a \$50 supermarket voucher to employees who remained smokefree for six months.

A second situational assessment was conducted in November 2010 to assess the health changes that occurred during the pilot period. The results of this assessment were combined with employee feedback to provide a summary of health changes that occurred at Fulton Hogan in 2010. Highlights included:

- an increase in the number of smokefree employees and households
- a decrease in the number of employees with a BMI over 30
- 81% of employees rated the Workplace Health Pilot “very valuable” or “valuable”.

The delivery of the Fulton Hogan pilot was very successful, mainly due to a highly motivated Fulton Hogan manager overseeing the pilot in the workplace. This manager is now a mentor for wellness programmes in other small businesses in South Canterbury. The pilot was also a successful catalyst for the creation of a network of health providers in the local area.

Complementary project components

The second two components of SCDHB’s overall healthy workplace project provided a complement to the Fulton Hogan pilot. The workshops that ran concurrently with the pilot were modelled on insights it generated. Small businesses in South Canterbury were invited to take part in two half-day workshops, with ongoing support provided by the HWC if required. The workshops were designed to empower a healthy workplace champion within each organisation.

To facilitate a coordinated approach to workplace health in South Canterbury, local health and community providers were represented on a newly formed Healthy Workplace Network (HWN), the objectives of which were to:

- facilitate discussion of the pilot project
- share information about the process for creating healthy workplaces, as informed by the Fulton Hogan pilot
- facilitate communication among South Canterbury providers about the health needs of workplaces.

Evaluation

Project findings for the three components were very positive, with the pilot implementation in Fulton Hogan particularly successful. The substantial health changes noted above among some employees were matched by improvements over the year in both employee and organisation engagement with initiatives. Organisational and environmental health measures of the work site also improved over the year. Evaluation of the workshops showed that seventy percent of the 11 workplaces taking part had initiated healthy changes after attending either one or two of the workshops, and members of the HWN provided 100% positive feedback regarding the success of the pilot project.

What was learned from the project?

SCDHB identified three key factors for a successful healthy workplace project:

- a competent, credible coordinator who is well-resourced and supported by the DHB
- a well-informed network to support the coordinator and work with local workplaces
- the support of management within workplaces.

The predominant recommendation from SCDHB for future projects of this type was to have a quarterly (rather than monthly) health focus to make planning easier. Having four health areas for employees would help create further personal integration of each area without being too intensive. Integration of the healthy workplace project initiatives at an organisational level is also critical and overall business objectives that reflect these initiatives will make a project such as SCDHB's sustainable over the long term.