



GROWING THE VALUE OF WORKPLACE CANCER INITIATIVES

Improving the health of families, friends and communities

There are real benefits in reaching out to employees' families and communities on ways to prevent cancer and detect it early.¹ These initiatives can play a big part in helping people to change their habits and make healthier choices, because people who feel supported are far more likely to sustain positive habits for a lifetime of health and wellbeing.

For family members and friends of a person living with cancer, coping with the challenges of treatment and recovery has far-reaching effects. They are often the primary source of emotional and practical support and at the same time must deal with the impact of taking on the role of a cancer caregiver in their own lives, including their ability to fulfill their work obligations.² Many cancer caregivers and family members are in paid employment, and this dual role of caring and working can place significant stress and strain on an employee.

Although an increasing number of companies recognise the importance of extending employee health and wellbeing programmes to families and local communities,³ very often there is a need for improved communication and support so that workplace cancer initiatives deliver value for everyone.

There are multiple benefits for businesses in taking a more holistic approach to improve awareness around cancer prevention and early detection, and to support families and caregivers to cope with the full impact of the disease.⁴ As well as avoiding sickness-related absence and sustaining a resilient, productive workforce today, it will help to build a healthier workforce for the future.



With over 3 billion people in employment, if all businesses engaged their own employees in improving their health, the impact would be enormous. Taking a holistic approach to employee health will have a ripple effect upon families and the wider community so that together businesses could act as a catalyst for positive, long-lasting change on the whole of society.

Cary Adams,
Chief Executive Officer, UICC

How employers can grow the value of workplace cancer initiatives

Support conversations about cancer at home

Employers need to be aware that the attitudes and beliefs of family members, friends and the wider community, can have a big influence on engagement in cancer prevention and early detection initiatives, and be motivated to take steps to involve families and communities in conversations about cancer. Supporting conversations about cancer beyond the workplace can improve knowledge about cancer, counter stigma and misinformation and strengthen the success and support for cancer interventions. In practice, this means using all the communication tools available in businesses, as well as community settings, such as information and resources for parents, friends, partners and other family members.

Promote cancer prevention and early detection for all the family

By providing access to nutrition education, healthy foods and enabling physical activity in the workplace, employees can be empowered with the knowledge and tools to support and encourage healthy attitudes and habits for the whole family. This is important as individuals can reduce their risk of many common cancers by maintaining a healthy weight, and making physical activity part of their everyday lives.⁵

Employers can also educate employees about specific actions for cancer prevention. For example, employee health and wellbeing programmes can provide information about the importance of safe, effective vaccinations against cancer-causing infections including human papilloma virus (HPV) and hepatitis B virus (HBV) – the cause of cervical and liver cancers respectively – both of which are best provided in childhood. Likewise, information about the early signs and symptoms of cancer and the importance of participating in proven and effective cancer screening can have major benefits for the whole family, increasing the chances of successful treatment.

Help family members and caregivers to deal with the full impact of cancer

Access to flexible workplace procedures, reinforced with policies, is critical for family members and caregivers who may need time away from work to provide care, as well as manage shifting responsibilities or emotional support and recovery.⁶

Open and honest conversations with employees about expectations and about what is and is not possible are critically important to supporting a caregiver or family member to stay in employment. This could include discussions on flexible work arrangements, allowing extended leave, and providing access to resources and workplace counseling to deal with both emotional and practical issues.



With so many people in our community caring for a family member or friend with cancer, ensuring these individuals are provided with the necessary help and support to remain in employment is crucial for their own physical and emotional health, and helps businesses to keep their workforce productive and engaged, as well as creating healthy communities.

Dr. Fiona Adshead, Chief Wellbeing and Public Health Officer at Bupa

Bupa and UICC have produced the guide **'Working with Cancer'** to help employers understand and respond to the needs of employees dealing with a cancer diagnosis, including family members and caregivers. The guide offers practical advice from around the world to employers on how to implement comprehensive frameworks and a supportive culture for employees returning to work with and after cancer.

References

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