

Good Reasons vs. Real Reasons:

How Employers Can
Successfully Lead
Workplace Health and
Well-Being Initiatives

Marcas Miles, M.A.

Vice President, Industry Relations

Employers have made remarkable progress in workforce well-being. Over the past decade, they've built initiatives grounded in what any thoughtful organization would consider "good reasons": corporate responsibility, employee morale, compliance and optics. These efforts should be acknowledged and celebrated.

But good reasons don't guarantee real results. Caring is not the same as changing. Too many employer-led health and well-being initiatives are built on good reasons, yet meaningful change only comes when we focus on the real reasons:

[REDACTED], [REDACTED],
[REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

The patterns we can't ignore

Many employers have invested time, resources and attention into workforce health and well-being. Yet even well-funded, well-intended programs often stall or fall short. Why?

- Capacity and bandwidth — teams are stretched too thin
- Lack of a clear prioritization framework — what to do first and why
- Unclear return on investment (ROI) — difficulty justifying population health investments to finance and leadership
- Competing priorities — retention; diversity, equity and inclusion; compliance; talent acquisition
- Solution fatigue — too many vendors, too little differentiation

GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT A STRATEGY. Employers understand they should do more, but they struggle to identify what will actually work and how to prioritize competing demands.

From idea to impact: four real reasons to act

Employers who implement successful population health initiatives focus on four key actions:



Data-driven assessments of employee health trends are essential, but they must focus on what matters most, not every possible variable. Many struggle with knowing which metrics matter most and how to access reliable data. Employers that leverage claims data, biometric screenings and pharmacy utilization insights can pinpoint risks early.

EXAMPLE:

Understanding that depression and anxiety are prevalent among many working adults, an employer may launch a mental health awareness campaign, believing it's the right thing to do. That's a good reason. But the real reason to act is to reduce productivity loss [REDACTED], minimize disability claims [REDACTED] and reduce turnover [REDACTED] by addressing mental health in ways that deliver measurable business outcomes.

Health programs must improve productivity, reduce absenteeism and manage costs. A Harvard Business Review study found that organizations investing in targeted workforce health and well-being programs see a 3-to-1 return through health care savings and productivity gains.

EXAMPLE:

Offering paid gym memberships might seem like a valuable perk for employees. But unless it's integrated into a broader strategy to reduce musculoskeletal issues or cardiovascular risk, conditions that directly impact absenteeism and health care claims, the investment may only benefit already active and healthy employees. The real reason for such a program should be tied directly to reducing future high-cost claims [REDACTED], supporting employee engagement [REDACTED] and improving workforce productivity [REDACTED].

Employers should start with programs where ROI can be measured early and clearly. Small, focused initiatives create momentum, build leadership support and provide proof of concept before scaling.

EXAMPLE:

Many employers offer on-site biometric or cancer screenings since early detection is crucial — a good reason. But real impact happens when those screenings are connected to programs that help prevent chronic disease or risks of cancer in the first place. Pairing screening initiatives with targeted lifestyle coaching or risk management interventions can reduce future diagnoses [REDACTED], lower absenteeism [REDACTED] and support employee longevity [REDACTED].

Employers need partners who help prioritize and execute, not just provide products. The right partners offer guidance, analytics and implementation support that align population health strategies with business goals.

EXAMPLE:

It's common for employers to engage multiple vendors like employee assistance programs (EAPs), wellness apps and screening providers. Offering a broad array of solutions seems like a good reason to meet diverse employee needs. But real value comes from selecting partners that not only provide services but also integrate data, offer strategic insights and help focus efforts where they'll have the greatest business impact: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

Why progress has stalled, and why it matters now

Employers have not failed. They have simply reached the limits of what fragmented, good-intentioned efforts can achieve. The issue is not a lack of caring or effort, it is the absence of a unified, strategic framework that connects population health to broader business outcomes. Multiple national employer surveys, including those from Business Group on Health, KFF and Mercer, consistently show that while benefit investments remain high, many organizations report limited clarity on long-term health ROI and ongoing challenges in prioritization. This reinforces what the team at Employers Health has observed firsthand in our work with hundreds of employers.

When your work supports the health needs of millions of covered lives, patterns emerge. You stop guessing. You notice what's working and where promising programs stall. You see the friction points others miss, and you recognize the difference between caring and committing. You understand where resource gaps, not apathy, cause promising programs to stall. We're not asking employers to care. We're showing them why decisive action, grounded in real reasons, drives meaningful change.

A challenge to employers

You've done many of the right things. Your intentions have been good, but good reasons don't close the gap between effort and outcome. That's not a failure; it's the starting point for what comes next.

The question is no longer, *"What should we do?"* It's *"What will make the biggest difference — right now?"*

We encourage you to question what's driving your workforce health decisions today, good reasons or real reasons that target: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]?

Employers Health remains committed to helping employers translate good intentions into real, measurable outcomes. To learn more about how Employers Health supports organizations in building business-aligned population health strategies, reach out to Marcas Miles at mmiles@employershealthco.com

References

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4. CDC,
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