

## Sun Life Canadian Health Index™ Update

### Overconfident and overextended – is our health in trouble?

On January 18, 2011 Sun Life released new findings as part of the Sun Life Canadian Health Index™. Research shows that nearly half of Canadians (45%) are not making health a top priority, and in some cases it's not on their list of priorities at all.

Analysis of the Sun Life Canadian Health Index survey results finds that Canadians fall into **five** major categories that indicate their behaviours and perception when it comes to their personal health – *overconfident*, *overextended*, *health achievers*, *resilient* and *inhibited*. The *overextended* and *overconfident* categories show worrisome patterns that can lead to poor health outcomes, however they also have great opportunity for improvement.

Canadians who fall into the **overextended** category are less likely than others to devote time to staying healthy, or doing everything they can to maximize their health. Engaging in healthy behaviours is at the bottom of a long list of priorities for this group, falling behind the demands of a career and family obligations. They cite **lack of knowledge, time and money as major barriers to healthier habits**.

The **overconfident** group, on the other hand, think that they are healthier than they really are. Their behaviour around health is average, but their perception of their health is above average. The concern is that even average behaviour isn't optimal, since most Canadians (63%) report three or more unhealthy behaviours as part of their lifestyle. Because the overconfident think they're healthy, their responses indicate that they aren't being proactive to ensure they stay healthy.

Of concern is the fact that these two groups are over represented within the workplace and together represent 58% of full-time employed individuals in Canada.

### What does this mean to employers?

With the biggest barriers for many Canadians being time, money and motivation, employers are ideally positioned to help remove these barriers. Workplace health solutions can provide employees with targeted health messages, more convenient access to wellness programs, a supportive and health conscious environment and employer subsidized programs in order to help change their behaviour.

The benefits of workplace health programs are felt by employees and employers alike:

- For employees, reducing health risks in three lifestyle areas – smoking, diet and exercise alone can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes by 80% and the risk of cancer by 40%.<sup>1</sup>
- According to a U.S. study, for every dollar employers spend on wellness programs, medical costs fall by about \$3.27 and absenteeism costs by \$2.73.<sup>2</sup>
- Employers with highly effective workplace wellness programs have performed more than 55 per cent better than their industry peers, achieved higher average revenue per employee and seen less absence, disability, total turnover and lower annual medical costs.<sup>3</sup>

For more information on the other major categories identified in the survey findings, please go to our website at [www.sunlife.ca/canadianhealthindex](http://www.sunlife.ca/canadianhealthindex). You can also download our in-depth December 2010 Canadian Health Index Report [here](#).

### Stay tuned

Detailed analysis of the Sun Life Canadian Health Index survey findings will continue through 2011 and the survey will be repeated at regular intervals in the future.

### Questions?

For more information on our health & wellness solution Healthy*RETURNS* please contact your Sun Life Financial group benefits representative.

**Sun Life Canadian Health Index™**

**58%** of full-time employed Canadians are not making health a priority

Find out how employers are uniquely positioned to break down barriers to better health, and reap the financial rewards of a healthier workforce.



<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization "Preventing Chronic Diseases: A Vital Investment" 2005

<sup>2</sup> Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings" Harvard University: Health Affairs, Baickler, Cutler & Song – February 2010

<sup>3</sup> WatsonWyattWorldwide 2009/2010 Staying@Work Report