

How science-based wellness measurably improves employee health: A 3-year case study



Since 2018, Sun Life has offered its wellness program, myWellness Rewards, to its own employees. Now, the results are in, with high engagement and measurable improvements to employee health.

The most valuable asset an organization has is its people. Workplace wellness programs help ensure employees have access to the tools and benefits they need to support their overall health and wellness.

In August 2018, Sun Life launched myWellness Rewards, a white-labeled version of BestLifeRewarded. This is Canada's leading comprehensive wellness rewards program, delivering science-based wellness programming for more than 10 years. The program is an example of Sun Life's active commitment to their corporate sustainability strategy, and Sun Life living out its purpose of helping Clients achieve lifetime financial security and live healthier lives.



myWellness REWARDS

Wellness: a holistic gauge of health

Wellness can represent many aspects of health, but its true meaning is a holistic one. Wellness goes beyond illness prevention, it also encompasses awareness and educated decision-making that leads to optimal holistic health. Good health is central to overall well-being, and better organizational health can bring enormous benefits. Employers are better positioned than ever to facilitate both.

Sun Life's myWellness Rewards (mWR) is built with science and engages with emotion by providing individuals with tools to follow their own wellness journey while offering community support, encouragement and rewards that lead to long-term success.

Science based wellness programs can lead to improvements in physical, mental and financial health for individuals, and improved productivity and engagement for organizations. Sun Life's mWR program also incorporates:

- illness prevention and improved health awareness
- a move to educated decision-making that can lead to better health in the future
- data driven behaviour change models to motivate members to embrace the benefits of healthy living.

Governments, people and employers all bear the costs of poor health. For governments, poor individual health means higher public health care costs. Individuals must deal with out-of-pocket expenses and a potentially restricted lifestyle. For employers, costs include high employee turnover, burnout, absenteeism, and disability claims.

The need for wellness is real

Even before the pandemic, employee health issues were significant enough to warrant wellness interventions. COVID-19 is making it worse. A Sun Life 2020 survey revealed that 56% of Canadian respondents said COVID-19 is negatively impacting their mental health.^[1]

Employees want and expect support from their employer. A majority of employees (84%) believe that employers are responsible for supporting the physical health of their employees. And 86% feel the same about their mental health.^[2]

What the numbers say:

- 43% of Canadians are so financially stressed that their performance at work is suffering ^[3]
- Stress affects 72% of all employees who identified that they want their employers to help. It has also caused one in four workers to leave their employer ^[4]
- Mental health issues keep 500,000 Canadian workers away from work each week, costing employers \$16.6 billion annually.^[4]



We expect the pandemic to put additional pressures on employee health, especially mental health. But employer supports—like wellness initiatives—can help.

A science-based approach

The key to a successful wellness program lies in science-based programming. Science-based wellness programs like BestLifeRewarded have data-driven reporting and proven evidence-based models. The goal is to ensure sustainable health behaviour change in the employee population.

These proven wellness models:



Use behavioural science to determine what motivates employees to change—and work toward their long-term goals.



Provide positive reinforcement to increase confidence in the ability to achieve goals. This results in the transition from extrinsic (e.g. rewards based) to intrinsic motivation.



Offer personalized interventions and motivators to support improved health and overall well-being changes. Models consider the individual's physical, financial, and mental health needs. There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution.



Focus on workplace wellness—it works!



Lower absence rates.

Canadian workplace health programs cut absenteeism rate to half of the national average. These bring a cost benefit of three times the return for every dollar invested.^[5]



Individual cost savings.

The BestLifeRewarded program is the gold standard in wellness programming. It's demonstrated significant improvements in five modifiable risk factors. These total an annual cost avoidance per year/person of \$73.28 (\$61.77 per female and \$98.12 per male).^[6]

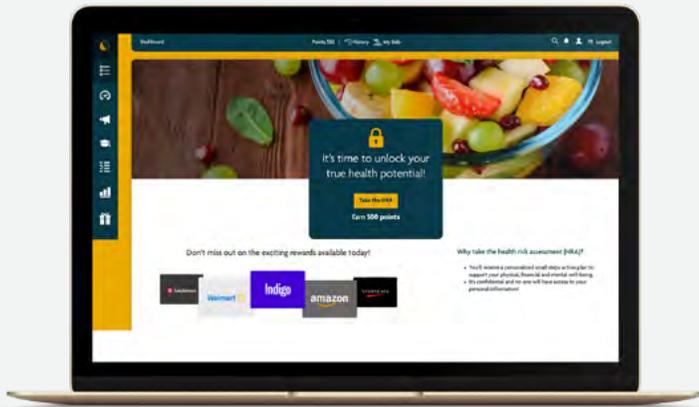


Small improvements, big differences.

Just a 1% year-over-year reduction of only five modifiable health risk factors could save the Canadian economy over \$7 billion over five years. The savings rise to a staggering \$28.1 billion in the next 10 years. The five risk factors are physical activity, smoking, excess weight, use of alcohol and low fruit/vegetable consumption.^[7]



Embracing the science—the Sun Life case study



Sun Life introduced mWR to their employees with the goal of helping them improve their overall wellness and holistic health with the gold-standard platform. But it was also to gain first-hand experience with the best approach as they rolled out the program to clients. Sun Life has a long history of using their own workplace as a proving ground for new, innovative practices. The launch of mWR is one such example.



BestLifeRewarded built Sun Life's custom platform with learning modules, healthy recipes, articles and tips, health reminders and wellness challenges. There were four key elements:

1

A “total health” personalized approach. The program encompassed the three pillars of health: physical, financial and mental. The comprehensive health risk assessment (HRA) that each participating employee takes reflects this. Answers to the assessment questions produce distinct individual scoring for financial, physical and mental well-being.

2

Individual action plans. Based on the HRA results, employees receive individualized action plans specific to each health pillar. An individual plan is critical for pursuing the right wellness goals, with improvement in modifiable health risk factors.

3

Customized rewards. Employees earn points for actions completed on the platform, rewarding effort versus outcome. They can use the points to bid on a collection of curated rewards. This encourages continued engagement and overall program satisfaction.

4

Reporting and insight. The program provides strategic and robust reporting for employees over time to capture rich, aggregate health and engagement data. This provides strategic insight for program leaders and stakeholders.

What to Expect

To ensure myWellness Rewards had the best conditions for success, Sun Life undertook several activities to drive member engagement.

Online activities included:

- Personalized health risk assessment campaign
- Physical activity and financial wellness focused campaigns
- Automatic reward entry draws to promote engagement
- Generous and varied rewards offerings
- Targeted member nudges
- Physical health group challenges.

Offline activities included:

- Workplace intranet and social media promotional activities
- Wellness Ambassador advocacy
- Integration with off-line wellness initiatives, such as lunch and learns.

Results

Three years* after the launch of myWellness Rewards, Sun Life's employee base has demonstrated high and sustained platform engagement and health risk reduction.

High Member Engagement



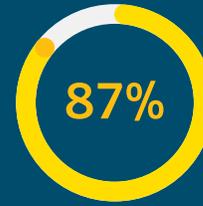
* Average logins are calculated based on total number of logins for the time frame selected divided by the number of unique members during that time. During the 36-month period, the number of individual members in myWellness Rewards grew by approximately 40%. Accordingly, new members have a lower total number of logins over the 36-month period, but individual logins remain consistent at 28 logins per year.

High Health Risk Assessment (HRA) Completion

HRA average completion rate* of eligible members per year



Overall HRA completion rate* of all eligible members over 36 months



Industry comparison

5x mWR's HRA completion rates are over 5x the industry standard

(Sanofi) [9]

* Based on 3-year data of 10,237 unique HRA completions vs. total pool of 10,869 eligible employees

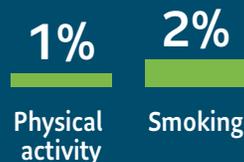
Sustained Health Behaviour Change

Reduction of Members in High Risk Category over 36-months*

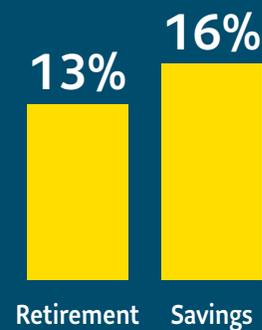
Mental health



Physical health



Financial health**



Industry comparison

6x myWellness Rewards has demonstrated a significant health impact up to 6x the industry standard

(JAMA) [10]

* August 2018 – August 2021

** Note: a percentage of change to Financial Health behaviors could be attributed to increased savings rates during the pandemic.

Employee Satisfaction

Employee feedback on myWellness Rewards has also been positive.^[11]



find the site straightforward and easy to use



believe that myWellness Rewards helps to improve their well-being



said it motivates them to sustain healthy habits

Moving the health needle through wellness

The Sun Life myWellness Rewards study demonstrates the positive impacts that a science-based wellness program can deliver. With an individual approach that covers all health aspects, Sun Life has engaged employees to create a sustainable wellness culture.

Want to learn how science-based workplace wellness rewards program can help your employees and organization? Contact your Sun Life Group Retirement Services Representative or visit www.bestliferewarded.com.

About Sun Life

Sun Life is a leading international financial services organization providing insurance, wealth and asset management solutions to individual and corporate Clients. Sun Life has operations in a number of markets worldwide, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, India, China, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia and Bermuda. As of June 30, 2021, Sun Life had total assets under management of \$1.36 trillion. For more information please visit www.sunlife.com.

About BestLifeRewarded Innovations

BestLifeRewarded (BLR) is a health behaviour change system. BLR gives employers the opportunity to take a proactive role in managing the wellness of their employees by providing resources and programs centred on overall well-being. BestLifeRewarded supports over 12,000 Canadian companies and nearly four million Canadians and growing. The platform has been recognized globally for its evidence-informed innovation in health behaviour change. For more information on BestLifeRewarded Innovations, please visit www.bestliferewarded.com.



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