

TWO NEW GUIDES ADDRESS LACTATION, OBESITY IN THE WORKPLACE

By Anthony Schoettle

Hoosier business owners and managers are operating in a progressively intricate world, and the Indiana Chamber’s Wellness Council of Indiana (WCI) has published new materials to help with two important workforce considerations.

The *Indiana Employer Lactation Program Guide* and *Obesity and the Workplace Employer Workbook* are available for free to Hoosier employers thanks to support from WCI’s funders.

“Employers are navigating an increasingly complex health and well-being environment, and our goal is to make that easier,” explains WCI Executive Director Ashley O’Rourke. “Through resources focused on lactation, obesity and mental health we’re helping organizations turn awareness into action. Each toolkit offers practical steps employers can take to support their people and foster healthier, more resilient workplaces across Indiana.”

Each publication can be accessed and downloaded through WCI’s website, O’Rourke imparts. “We also offer consultations on all of these topics for members and non-members who would like to take a deeper look into the toolkit or who have questions.”

For nursing mothers at work

The *Indiana Employer Lactation Program Guide* is designed to provide organizations with practical guidance, resources and actionable steps to establish and maintain a workplace lactation program. The *Guide* is intended for HR professionals, business leaders, managers and workplace wellness coordinators who are responsible for implementing and maintaining workplace policies and programs.

Supporting lactating employees not only fulfills legal obligations but also demonstrates a commitment to employee well-being and long-term retention, the guide notes.

The book explains how and why workplace lactation support benefits employers and employees. For employees, it reduces stress and barriers to breastfeeding, contributing to better health outcomes for mother and child. For employers, lactation support has been shown to improve employee retention, reduce absenteeism and enhance workplace satisfaction.

According to a study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, businesses that provide lactation support experience a 94% retention rate among employees after maternity leave, compared to the national average of 59%. Additionally, the



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that absenteeism related to infant illness is reduced by up to 50% in companies with lactation programs.

The Lactation Program Guide gives step-by-step guidance on how to get started setting up an in-office program, policy development, designing lactation and multi-use wellness spaces, providing time and flexibility for lactating mothers, educating and training staff, building a supportive culture, monitoring and improving the program, supporting parental mental health and supporting the non-birthing partners in the workplace.

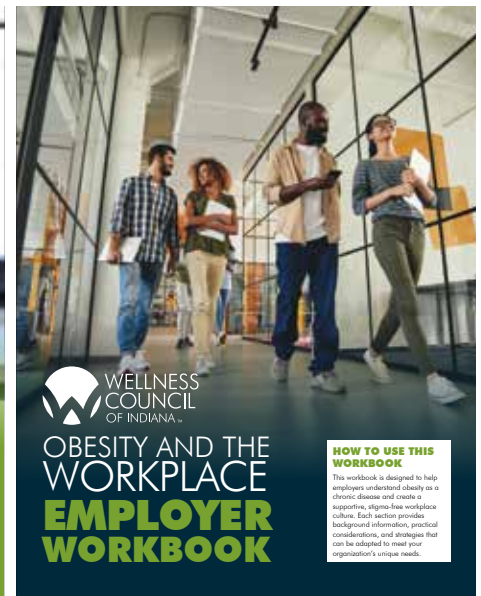
Encouraging better worker health

The *Obesity and the Workplace Employer Workbook* likewise offers important information for employers and employees.

According to the CDC, more than 40% of U.S. adults struggle with obesity. Obesity significantly impacts working-age adults, with 24 million full-time U.S. employees experiencing obesity and an additional 32 million classified as overweight.

The CDC states that obesity in the workplace is a complex issue with health and economic consequences, and it recommends that employers create environments that support healthier lifestyles by improving the food environment and increasing physical activity opportunities.

Addressing obesity in the workplace is important because it improves employee well-being and reduces costs for employees and employers through decreased healthcare expenses and lost productivity. Workplace



health initiatives can support employees by promoting a healthier environment, which in turn leads to a more productive, engaged and healthier workforce, according to the CDC.

The *Obesity and the Workplace Employer Workbook* is designed to help employers understand obesity as a chronic disease and create a supportive, stigma-free workplace culture. Each section provides background information, practical considerations and strategies that can be adapted to meet an organization’s unique needs.

In a workplace culture where obesity isn’t stigmatized, employees are more likely to be aware of available resources, seek treatment sooner and begin their health management earlier. The workbook will guide employers through building and implementing accountable systems to support improved workplace culture, practices and policies regarding obesity and its accompanying stigma.

The workbook walks employers through understanding obesity and the accompanying stigma, the economic impact of obesity in the workplace, legal and ethical considerations including anti-discrimination laws and equal employment opportunity compliance and accommodations, and business strategies for employers. The workbook helps employers assess their organization, create a healthy worksite environment and culture, provide obesity-related health programs and foster a supportive workplace while reducing the stigma for employee well-being.

Employers can download each publication at www.wellnessindiana.org, under the employers section, business resources tab. ■