

How gender and work site affect employee
engagement: a joint national business group
Optum™ study



Study background and objectives

Many organizations with wellness programs face an ongoing challenge: How can they more effectively engage consumers to increase wellness program participation? To answer this question, organizations need to identify the numerous variables that influence how they communicate their wellness program offerings to individuals. Among these variables are work site location and gender, as well as individual communication preferences, such as email, intranet sites, printed materials and other mediums. Organizations that tailor their consumer engagement strategies to account for these variables and preferences can improve the effectiveness of their consumer engagement efforts.

To better understand these variables, Optum commissioned an external third party to develop profiles of key target market segments and examine five key research objectives:

1. Evaluate the impact of demographics on consumer engagement.
2. Identify differences between consumers in the types of information or tools they find most valuable.
3. Understand preferences for health care communications media across subgroups to develop the best communication efforts.
4. Review likelihood to take action in a wellness program as a result of communications by subgroup.
5. Understand activities that employees are engaging in to make lifestyle changes.

Subgroups were evaluated by gender and by work location, which could include field, office or plant workers.

To accomplish this, data was analyzed from a nationwide study conducted in 2008 by the National Business Group on Health. This study surveyed 1,502 workers ages 22 to 69, and all respondents worked for companies with at least 2,000 employees. A top-line analysis of the findings was completed and focused on:

- The activities that employees are currently engaging in to make lifestyle changes
- The factors that keep employees from achieving optimal health
- The best communication efforts to support employees' improved health care choices

Survey highlights

Current health activities and information sources

- Women are more likely than men to proactively manage their health issues.
- Workplace location affects wellness program participation and employees' perception of privacy when divulging personal health information.
- Employees view their primary care physicians as a top source of information.

Communication preferences and value of communications

- Overall, email is the preferred method of communication, but a mix of communications methods is desired by employees.
- Field and plant employees cited a lower preference for email communications than office workers.
- Workplace location affects communications preferences more than gender.

Participation in wellness and health-related activities

While quality of life and feeling healthier are important to all:

- Women seem more motivated than men by physical appearance
- Men were more influenced by their family to participate

Key findings: current health activities

Current health activities by gender

In evaluating current health activities by gender, women appear to take a more active role in their health care. The survey shows that about 60 percent of women, vs. 49 percent of men, have had physical exams or regular health-related screenings within the past year (see Figure 1). Despite the more active role that women take in managing their health, the survey showed that men are significantly more likely than women to complete an online health questionnaire.

These results seem to show that women are more likely than men to proactively manage their health issues. Therefore, work site wellness programs may be especially beneficial to populations that skew male, given the tendency for males to be less compliant with getting regular screenings on their own.

Current health activities by work location

Aside from gender differences, work site location plays a significant role in how individuals manage their health. Overall, office workers are more proactive than field and plant workers when it comes to managing their health and staying current with health screenings. Also, office workers are more likely than field and plant workers to research health conditions or doctors (See Figure 2).

The difference in responses by work location illustrates that organizations should consider the location of their employees in their risk assessments when they are planning wellness programs. Organizations need to ensure they expand the reach of their wellness programs beyond the location of their main office to engage field and plant workers who may be less likely to proactively manage their health.

Health assessments: incentives and barriers

Engaging employees to participate in wellness programs often begins with encouraging them to complete an online health assessment. Organizations can increase health assessment completion by communicating the value of the assessment’s findings, and by offering incentives.

Figure 1: Which of the following health-related activities, if any, have you been doing for one year or longer?

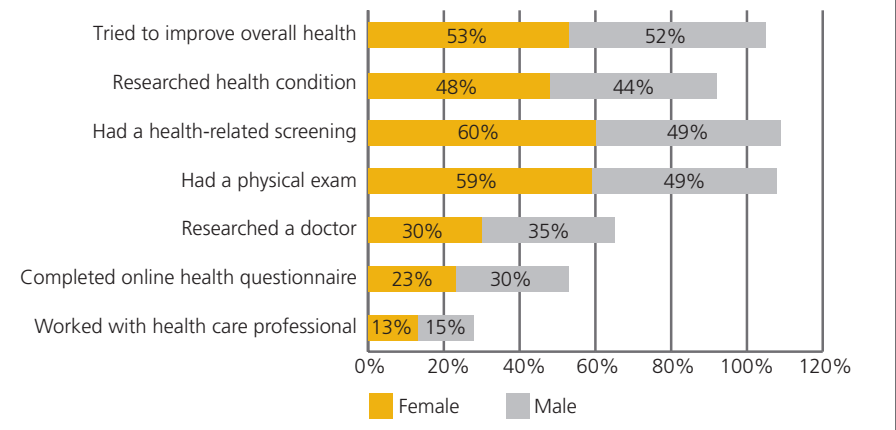
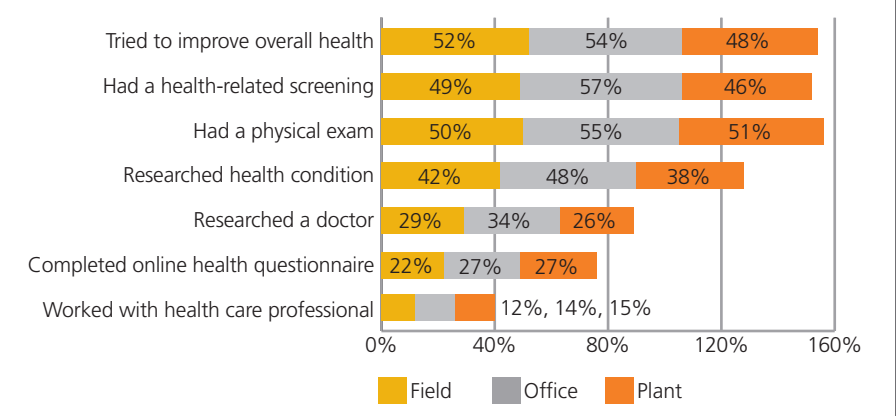


Figure 2: Which of the following health-related activities, if any, have you been doing for one year or longer?



Regardless of work location or gender, the top two reasons that motivated individuals to complete a health assessment were:

- To find out if they had any health risks based on family or personal history (57 percent of respondents)
- Because their employer provided a financial incentive, such as a discount on employee health care premium contributions (32 percent of respondents)

Although incentives are a strong motivator, organizations should emphasize that the true value of health assessments is that they help individuals better understand their health risks. This value is an equally powerful motivator.

A small percentage of office workers, however, indicated that they are hesitant to complete a health assessment because they do not want to share their personal medical history with their employer (13 percent) or health plan (3 percent). These barriers can be overcome with wellness program communications that emphasize the confidentiality of health assessment responses. This is especially important when communicating to office workers vs. field or plant employees, since office workers indicate that they are especially sensitive to this issue.

Health care information sources

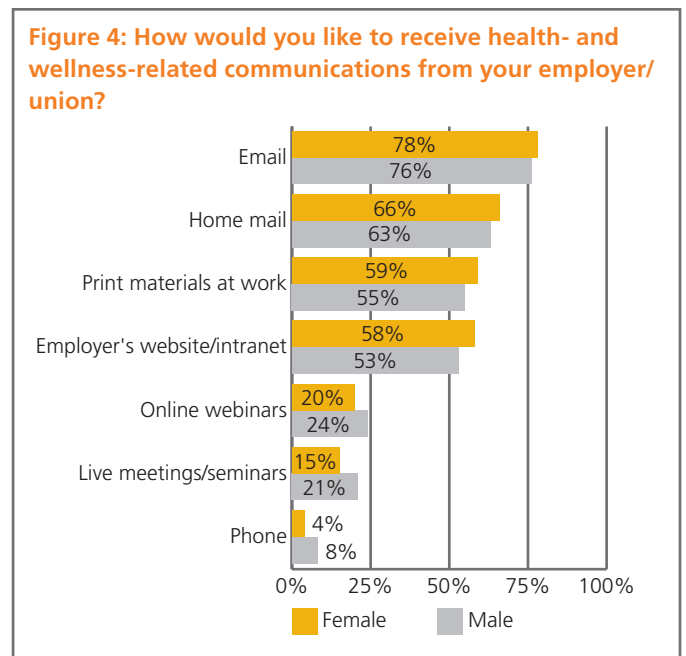
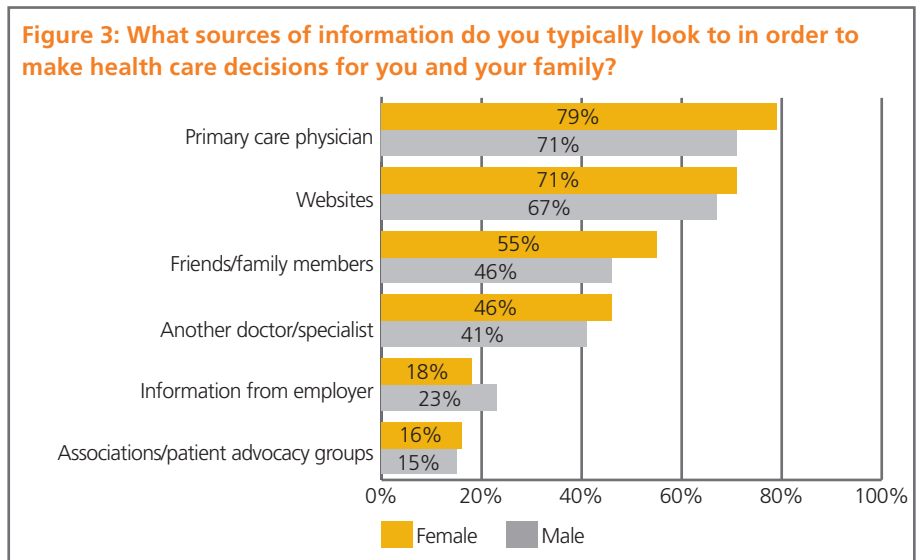
Seventy-nine percent of women and 71 percent of men cited primary care physicians as the top source used for their health care decisions. This source was followed by information found on websites. However, women are more likely than men to turn to friends and family members when making health care decisions (see Figure 3).

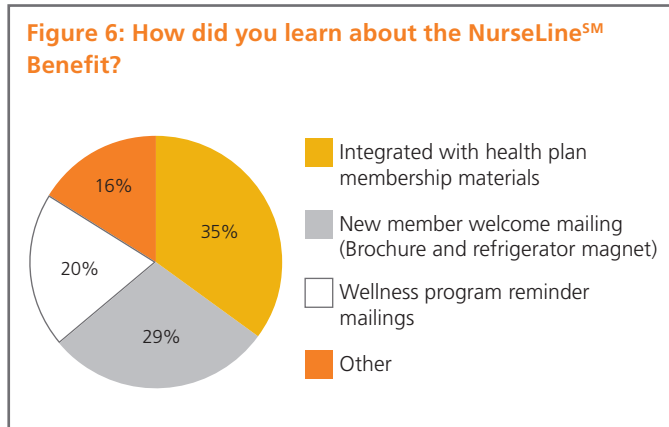
Overall, considering that physicians are the top source for health information, organizations should consider working with wellness vendors that have strong provider connectivity to better engage individuals with their physicians.

Key findings: communication preferences

Preferred communications media by gender

Both genders surveyed said that they prefer to receive health- and wellness-related communications from their employer or union via email (78 percent for women, and 76 percent for men). This was followed by home mail, as well as printed materials and the employer’s website or intranet (see Figure 4). The variation among these responses suggests that while online media is the most highly preferred media, traditional media is still a key component in a complete communications plan.



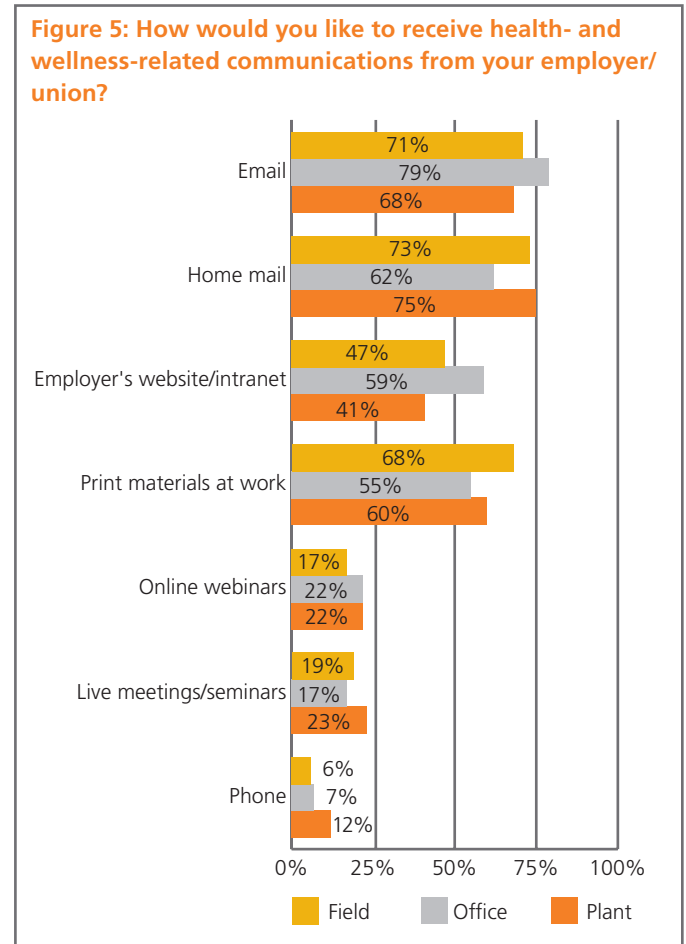


The findings show that employees, especially those in non-office environments, want to receive communications both at home and at work, suggesting that organizations should provide a mix of media types in their communications strategy.

Preferred communications media by work location

Media preferences vary significantly by work location (see Figure 5). While employees across all locations generally preferred email, home mail and printed materials at work, there were some significant differences among preferences at different locations:

- Email is preferred by office workers more than it is by field and plant workers
- Field and plant workers prefer receiving home mail more than office workers
- Field workers prefer receiving printed communications at work significantly more than office workers

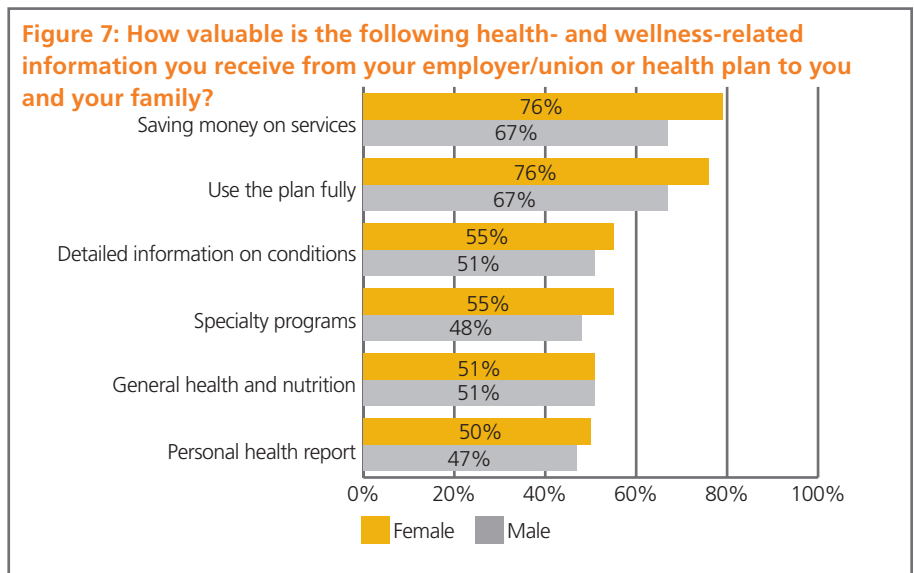


Home mailings and membership materials have high recall

Although the majority of respondents cited e-mail as their preferred method to receive communications, home mailings are still effective. Optum customer experience shows that consumers read and remember the information that they receive from home-based mailings (See Figure 6).

The perceived value of communications by gender

There are variations among genders when rating the perceived value of health- and wellness-related communications from employers, unions or health plans. Seventy-six percent of women rated saving money on services and getting information on specialty programs as valuable, vs. 67 percent of men (See Figure 7). Also, women gave higher ratings than men on information on how to use their health care plan to its full



advantage.

To take advantage of these findings, organizations with a high percentage of female workers should strongly consider creating communications that highlight how the program helps to save money on services. This effort can increase the program’s appeal to female workers. In addition, communications targeting female spouses of workers should take a similar approach to increase appeal.

Key findings: participation in workplace programs

Factors that prompt participation at work

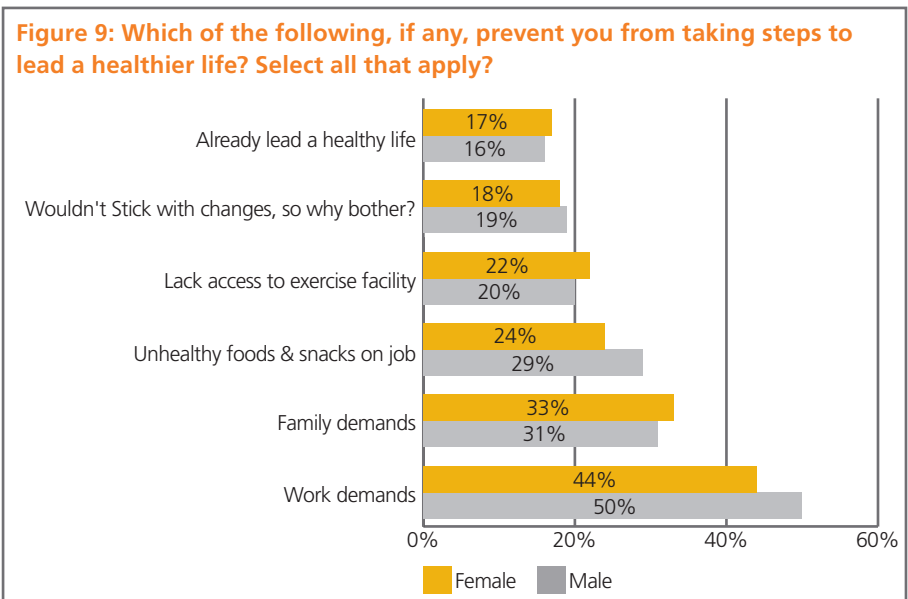
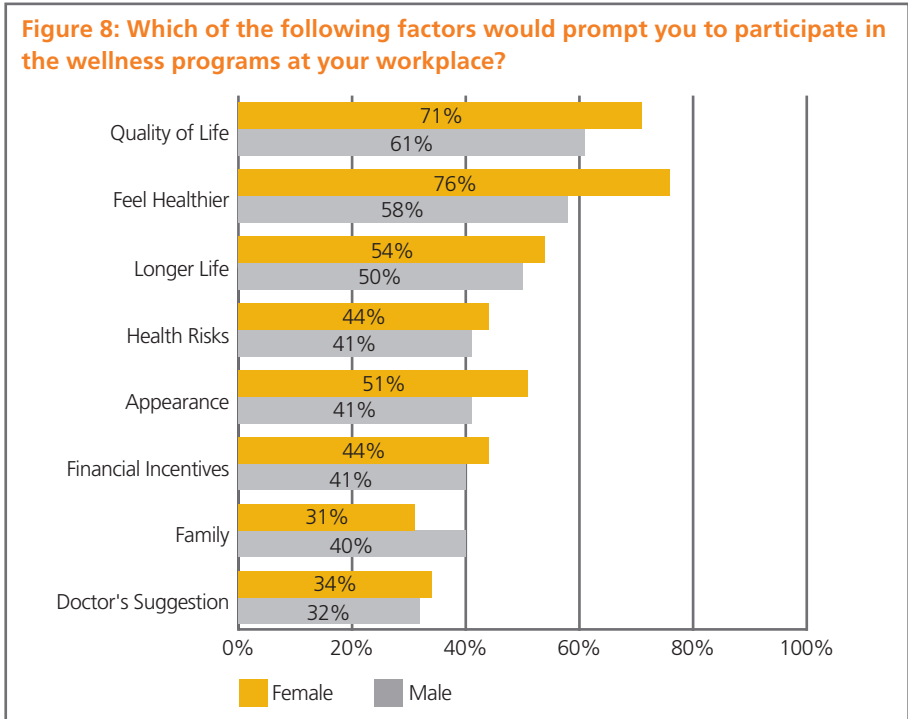
Among both genders, quality of life and feeling healthier are important factors that prompt participation in workplace wellness programs (see Figure 8). Other factors prompting participation vary by gender. Physical appearance is one factor that prompts women more than men to participate in workplace programs. To capitalize on this driver, communications should focus on the end result or benefit of program participation to maximize engagement, and include incentives that support the message and drive a call to action.

In contrast, 40 percent of men responded that their families prompt them to participate, vs. 31 percent of women. For this situation, in-home communications targeting female spouses may be an effective way to encourage greater engagement among male employees.

Factors limiting participation in healthier activities

Factors limiting participation are somewhat similar across genders (see Figure 9), except:

- 50 percent of men cited work demands as a limiting factor, vs. 44 percent of women.
- 22 percent of female office workers said that the lack of access to an exercise facility is a barrier, vs. 20 percent of male office workers.



Reviewing differences by location, employees in office locations and female plant workers seem to have the most concern about unhealthy snacks in the workplace.

To offset these factors that limit participation, organizations should evaluate programs that help employees manage stress so they can alleviate work- and family-related stresses. Also, conducting a cultural audit of the organization may identify issues (e.g., the widespread availability of unhealthy snacks and lack of exercise facilities) that are a detriment to employee health and decrease program participation.

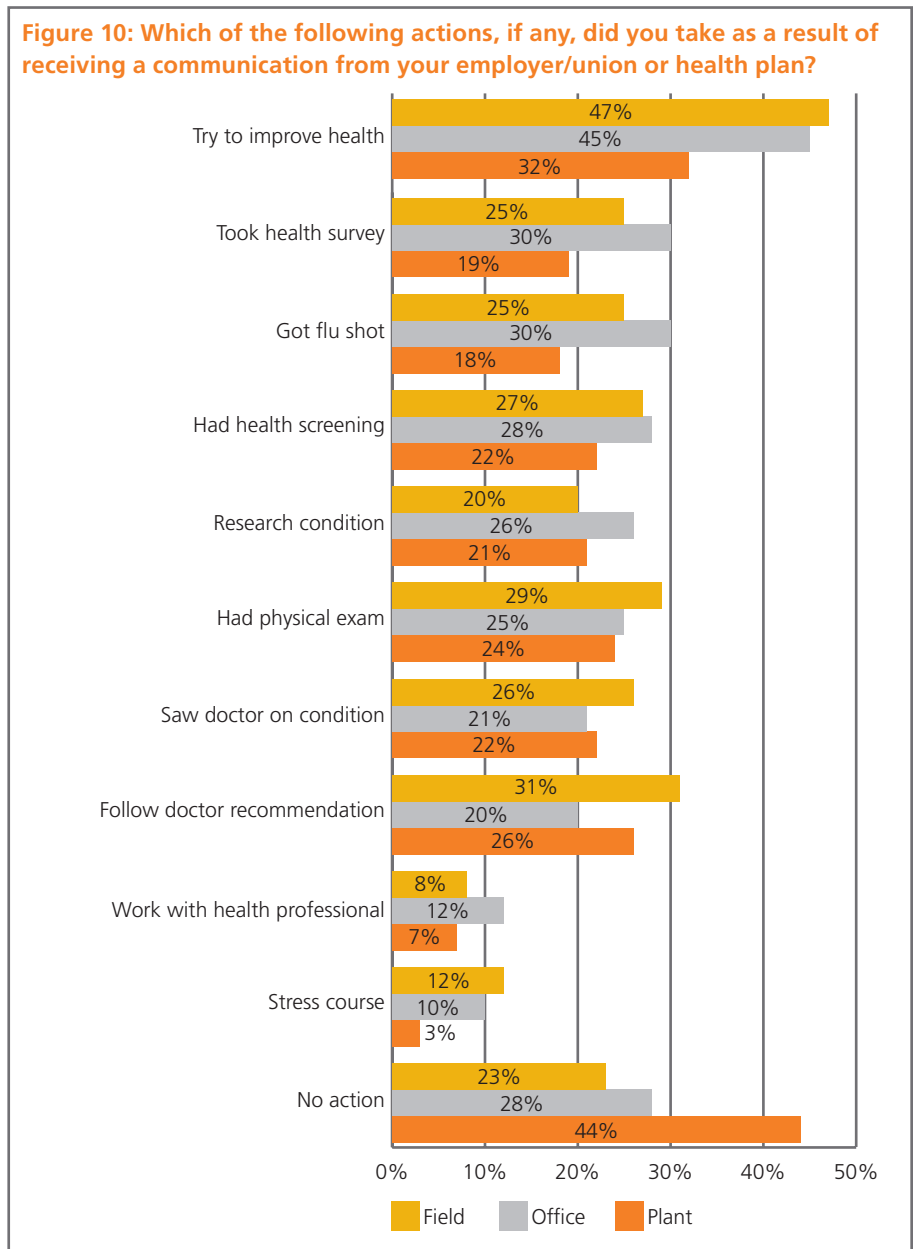
Resulting actions from communication

Office workers — as a result of receiving a health-related communication from their employer, union or health plan — are significantly more likely than field workers to (see Figure 10):

- Try to improve their overall health
- Take an online survey
- Get a flu shot
- Participate in a stress management course

To increase the actions that employees take as a result of receiving health-related communications, organizations should:

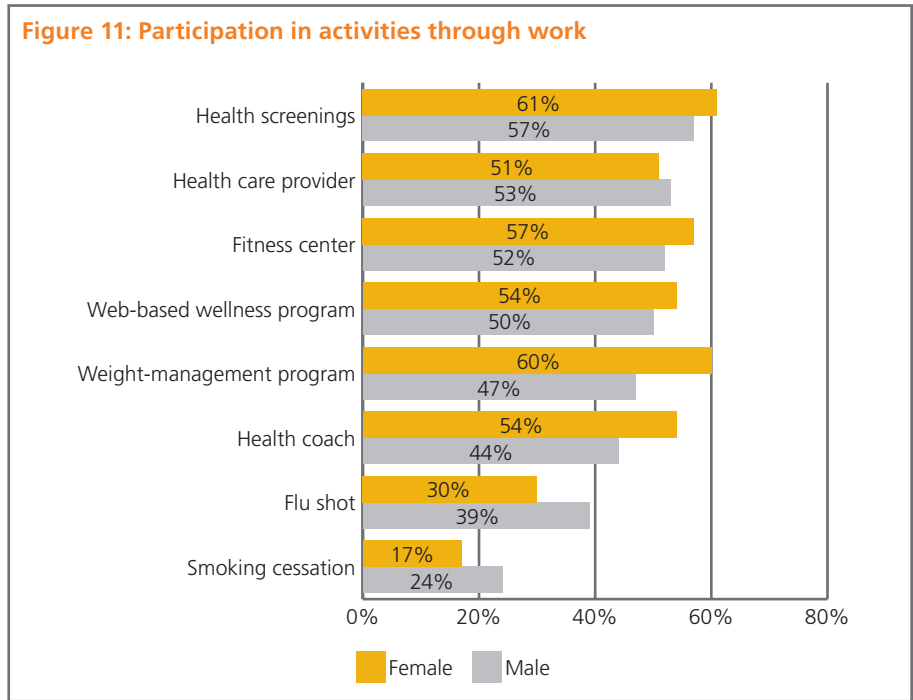
- Ensure that their engagement strategy is not primarily focused on only the employees at the company’s headquarters
- Create a company-wide culture of health that spans across locations
- Enroll senior-level support at the site level and empower local wellness committees



Participation in activities in the workplace by gender

Overall, both genders expressed interest in health screenings, web-based wellness programs and fitness centers (see Figure 11). However, men are more likely than women to participate in smoking cessation programs, and are more likely to get flu shots. In contrast, women are more likely than men to participate in a weight-management program or use a health coach.

Populations that heavily skew male may require a more robust communications approach to drive engagement. In general, women are much more likely than men to participate in wellness coaching. This is demonstrated by an analysis of Optum customer experience, which evaluated the eligible population vs. those who participated in a program. While only 46 percent of the eligible population was female, actual participation for wellness coaching skewed much higher for females (53 percent) than males (47 percent). Although Optum satisfaction surveys show that women have high levels of participation, men who worked with a coach highly rate the experience.



Final thoughts

While there is a lot of information presented in this white paper, here are a few key actions you can take to drive engagement by leveraging the insights from this research:

- Demographic and work location skews can influence activation and engagement in your wellness programs. Work with vendors who have member engagement expertise to incorporate these insights into communication plans that support your wellness solutions.
- Incorporate these four key communication modalities as part of your strategy to drive engagement within your populations:

- Email
- Home mail
- Print
- Online (intranet)

Check to see if your vendors have experience with each of these communication modalities.

- Aspirational messaging can have a dramatic impact on driving response rates for engagement in the clinical solutions available within your population. Optum developed customized campaigns to support your communication plans.
- Always survey your employees periodically to assess their awareness of your wellness programs, their interest in it, and their engagement level for each of your wellness offerings. If you haven't established a baseline survey, start one immediately!
- Ensure your engagement strategy is not primarily focused on headquarters; create a culture of health company-wide by enrolling senior-level support at the site level, and empower local wellness committees to take action. Create a specific communications plan for each site. Your vendor's wellness consultants can help you get started.
- Work site wellness programs (health fairs, biometric screenings, etc.) are an important enabler to drive awareness of key risk factors, particularly among males. The research shows that men are less likely to comply with regular screenings/checkups than women. Consider a strategy to leverage work site wellness programs consistently within your population to drive awareness of risk factors and compliance with screenings. Look for vendors that have multiple options available for you to leverage based on where you are with your overall wellness strategy.
- Workers in headquarters locations appear to be most sensitive to privacy/confidentiality when thinking about wellness programs offered in the workplace. Ensure that you emphasize confidentiality when communicating your wellness programs to this population. Also, check your vendors' privacy and compliance policies to ensure you are working within legal guidelines.

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