

## Wellness programmes in the workplace in India

India is witnessing rapid economic growth. Today, people of working age (15–64 years) represent a large percentage of Indian population, and the proportion of professionals in full-time work (46%) in India is higher than the global mean (34%).<sup>1</sup> With the Make in India campaign, the Indian Government aims to transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub and to create many more employment opportunities in the private sector.<sup>2</sup> However, wellness programmes at the workplace are key for India's economic progress.

The phenomenal growth of the information technology and business process management sector in India offers many lessons to the other rapidly growing employment sectors. About 3.7 million people are directly employed in this sector, it is the largest private employment sector in India, and it contributes to about 10% of the gross domestic product of the country.<sup>2</sup> Although the Indian information technology sector has fuelled employment and vast economic opportunities, the work environments and lifestyles that it brought in are partly responsible for exacerbating the already growing rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs); in 2005–15, the economic loss associated with these NCDs in India was estimated to be US\$200 billion in national income.<sup>3</sup> Due to long and irregular working hours, night shifts, high work targets, and frequent travel, employees spend approximately a third of their day at work, and they often adopt unhealthy food habits, sedentary lifestyles, and show signs of work stress. The National Health Policy 2017 of India, emphasises “preventive and promotive health care” (ie, helping people to increase control over and improve their health), to reduce stress and improve safety at work,<sup>4</sup> since the

workplace offers an ideal setting to promote an employee's health.

The concept of the workplace as an important area of health promotion is not yet widely accepted in India. Although, some multinational corporates offer health check-up packages, screening tests, and counselling, they are often not used by the employees because of a lack of awareness, motivation, or time (because of work targets). A report from the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India states that wellness programmes could save Indian Inc (the Indian corporate sector) up to US\$20 billion by 2018 by reducing employee absenteeism associated with NCDs.<sup>5</sup>

Investing in nutrition and wellness programmes in the workplace could not only reduce NCDs but it could also be key for India's economic success. A holistic approach to create a corporate enabling environment with an effective health and nutrition communication plan to generate health awareness, sustain motivation, and to reach out to families and peers, could improve employees' lives inside and outside the workplace. A strategic wellness programme that uses the Communication for Behavioural Impact<sup>6</sup> framework that acts at individual, interpersonal, and corporate levels can help employees and positively affect their nutrition and lifestyles (appendix). It is time that workplace wellness is seen as an important public health measure in India.

We declare no competing interests.

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- 5 ASSOCHAM India. Corporate wellness can save India Inc revenue to US\$20bln: ASSOCHAM. Jan 15, 2018. <http://www.assochem.org/news/detail.php?id=6684> (accessed Sept 11, 2018).
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See Online for appendix