

Why invest in workplace health facilities?

Research in factories by the ILO/IFC Better Work Program finds that managers significantly underestimate the value workers place on non-compensatory benefits like quality health services.

It is not easy for workers to take care of their health. Many are poorly served by public and private health services or lack access to these services, due to their gender, migrant status, place of residence or unawareness.

Many workplaces already have in place health facilities and health providers that are often under-used and poorly managed. These health investments represent a cost already allocated (sunk cost), thus an underutilized business resource. No business would allow other productive resources to be as underutilized as many do with their health resources. Health investments should not be viewed differently.

Looking beyond occupational health norms from focusing on inputs (number of nurses or availability of first aid kits) and safety issues (use of protective clothing), to also look at the quality of health services and practices of healthcare teams can make the difference. Through their daily routines, workplace health providers can do much more to educate workers, promote healthier behaviors, and provide needed services or referrals to quality services in the community.

There is a strong business case to invest in workplace health facilities:

- **Existing workplace health facilities are often under-used and poorly managed (under-used business resource);**
- **Addressing workers' health needs contributes to increased productivity and improved workplace relationships;**
- **Better health services can strengthen buyer-supplier relationships.**

Where can you start?

- **Work on the basics:** The basic quality of a clinic sends an important signal to workers that management cares about their health.
- **Go beyond occupational health:** Companies should consider how their policies and services can promote preventive healthcare for workers.
- **Secure management's buy-in.**
- **Invest in health providers:** Health providers, usually nurses and paramedics, are often not given clear responsibility and fail to proactively anticipate and address health needs. By investing in professional training and on-the-job coaching, companies can turn these personnel into valuable business resources. Experience around the world suggests that better trained nurses can not only improve the health of workers, but also help improve occupational health compliance.
- **Use external service providers:** In the case where factories feel constrained to provide certain services, they can connect with external service providers in the community.