

# WORKSITE WELLNESS PROGRAMS BENEFIT YOUNG ADULT WORKERS, NOT JUST OLDER EMPLOYEES

A common misconception is that companies employing a large proportion of young adults don't need to establish comprehensive wellness programs because their workforces are already healthy. But adults under 35—and the businesses that employ them—greatly benefit from comprehensive worksite programs designed to maintain and improve employees' health. That's important because adults younger than 35 account for more than a quarter of the nation's workforce.<sup>1</sup> And despite their relatively young age, they face significant health risks. Getting and keeping these younger workers healthy is key to their long-term well-being. Businesses that recruit and hire them benefit as well, in terms of worker productivity and lower medical costs.

Interactive Health draws upon 25 years of experience and data from more than 3,000 clients to debunk three commonly-held misperceptions about the value of comprehensive employee wellness programs for young adult workers.

**Myth #1:** Young adults are healthier than their older colleagues and don't need wellness programs.

**Myth #2:** Programs offering comprehensive or annual screenings are of little or no value to workers under 35.

**Myth #3:** The financial impact of chronic health conditions on an employer's workforce can be minimized by hiring young adults.

## Myth #1

**Young adults are healthier than their older colleagues and don't need wellness programs.**

**FACT:** You would expect that young adults would face fewer health threats due to their age, but that's not always the case. Our 2015 member data indicate that **workers under 35 are more likely to struggle with mental health issues, such as stress, depression and anxiety. They also face significant risks for conditions such as diabetes and severe anemia.** Interactive Health focuses on early detection for specific health risks through targeted outreach—in the case of physical conditions, for pre-diabetes, metabolic syndrome, hypertension and high cholesterol.



Young adults made up about 10% of those flagged for targeted outreach, while an additional 10% were flagged for critical outreach, or nearly 15,000 employees, according to our data.<sup>2</sup>

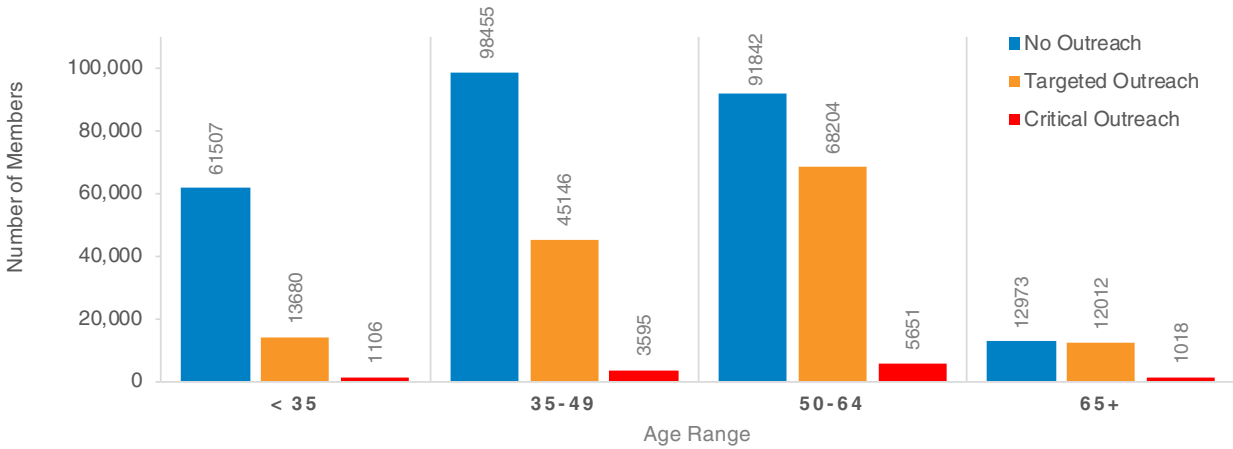
Results that were not within normal range (trending risks) received targeted outreach. Those with critical risks that call for immediate follow-up or medical intervention received critical outreach. Among conditions flagged were severe anemia, diabetes progression that could eventually result in kidney damage and alcohol use that can put young adult workers at high risk of developing liver disease. Individuals often are unaware of these problems prior to a health evaluation because such conditions typically lack symptoms in their early stages. When screening results are out of range, employees can and should be directed to a doctor.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.census.gov/population/age/> - "Age and Sex Composition in the United States: 2010 Census Brief"

<sup>2</sup> See Exhibit 1 (pg.2)

## EXHIBIT 1

### Employees identified for critical and targeted outreach



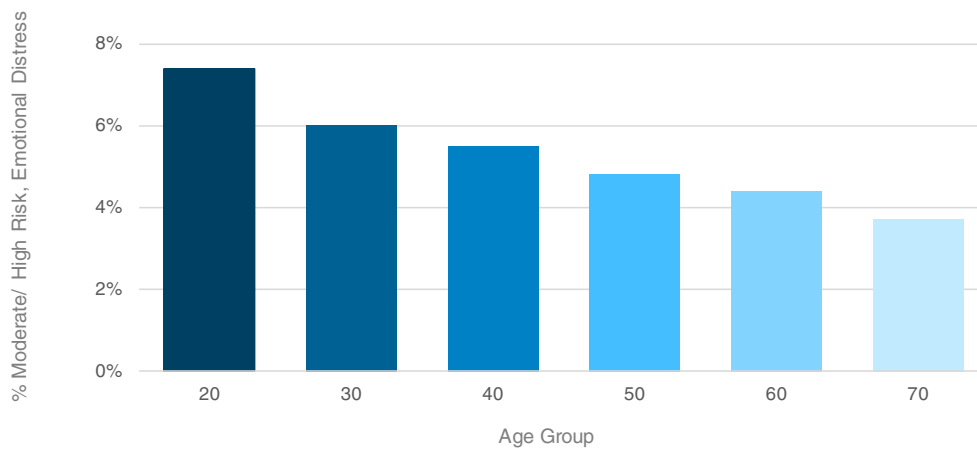
2015 Book of Business; Sample Size = 415,000 individuals  
The data represented by the bars are derived from screening results

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Data collected from the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), an assessment tool incorporated into the health evaluations offered by Interactive Health, reveal that young adults face a significantly higher risk of emotional health issues than their older counterparts.<sup>3</sup> Assessing and addressing mental health needs is central to an effective worksite wellness program because mental health issues impact physical health, work productivity and overall well-being. For that reason, comprehensive wellness programs that address both physical and emotional health risks are essential.

## EXHIBIT 2

### Employees at risk of moderate or high levels of depression, anxiety or stress, by age



2015 Book of Business; Sample Size = 410,000 individuals

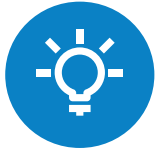
<sup>3</sup> See Exhibit 2

## Myth #2

Programs offering comprehensive or annual screenings are of little or no value to workers under 35.

**FACT:** Annual screenings that evaluate lab values beyond lipids, glucose, weight and blood pressure can be invaluable for employees of all ages.

### OUR 2015 PARTICIPANT DATA UNCOVERED



**16% of young adults** learned of a condition or risk factor they had been unaware of



**1,100 young adult cases** identified as requiring immediate medical follow-up



**505 of those would have** only been discovered through comprehensive screenings

Comprehensive annual programs can address an existing gap in preventive care while encouraging physician engagement. A U.S. News and World Report news article in 2015 reported that millennials—young adults between 18 and 34—are the most likely age group to skip preventive care, according to an online survey.



Of millennials surveyed, **93 percent** said they avoided scheduling doctor visits. For adults overall, it was **80 percent**.<sup>4</sup>

Results obtained through comprehensive, annual screenings can identify problems early enough to prevent serious illnesses down-the-road. And results that necessitate immediate intervention can be life-saving, such as those that indicate the presence of certain cancers and other conditions that might not have been discovered otherwise.

## Myth #3

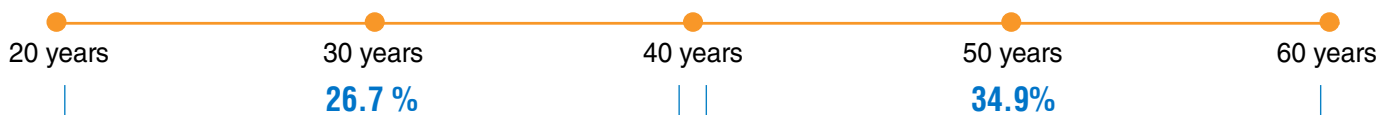
The financial impact of chronic health conditions on an employer's workforce can be minimized by hiring younger adults.

**FACT:** Given the health risks faced by employees under 35, it is clear that hiring a younger workforce will not, in itself, eliminate the impact of chronic diseases on workforce health and overall healthcare costs. As our data have shown, young adults are at risk for a number of trending health issues, as well as those that call for immediate follow-up or intervention.

Consider this: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that, while the prevalence of obesity is highest among adults 40 to 60 and up, the risks are still significant and increasing for young adults 20 to 39.<sup>5</sup>

### EXHIBIT 3

#### Prevalance of obesity by age range<sup>5</sup>



<sup>4</sup> <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/patient-advice/articles/2015/09/02/millennials-get-the-most-from-your-health-care>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/earlyrelease201602\\_06.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/earlyrelease201602_06.pdf)

## YOUR FUTURE WORKFORCE

# 30%

increase in  
type 2 diabetes

A mounting body of research has found that chronic conditions are being diagnosed at younger and younger ages. For example, a study by the Colorado School of Public Health reported that the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes increased by more than 30 percent in children between 2001 and 2009. And the rate continues to rise. The leadership of one of Interactive Health's large clients, a children's hospital, found the trend so alarming that they are working to adapt our comprehensive health evaluation to study nutritional deficiencies in their pediatric patients.

## CONCLUSION

Comprehensive worksite wellness programs that focus on the prevention and management of a broad spectrum of physical and emotional conditions benefit workers of all ages, including young adults. Through these programs, employees can be alerted to their mental and physical health risks and learn positive behaviors that can result in a lifetime of good health.

By adopting a long-term strategy that includes improving health awareness and practices, employee wellness programs can fill a much-needed gap. Interactive Health's comprehensive programs can serve as a catalyst for meaningful engagement because awareness of one's health status establishes a baseline for comparison over time, a vitally important step in preventing future medical problems. By engaging and empowering employees to be proactive, worksite wellness programs can help lower medical costs for employees and employers and ensure that a company's workforce remains healthy and productive.