

## **Employer Engagement in Employee Health is a Good Investment**

The 2010 sanofi-aventis Healthcare Survey provides insight on roles and responsibilities for improved and sustainable workplace health

MONTREAL, July 28 /CNW Telbec/ - Employers should be active partners in the overall health of their employees and can play a strong role by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own health. While the thirteenth edition of The sanofi-aventis Healthcare Survey suggests that no employer or employee would dispute the return-on-investment from benefit plans such as prescription drugs, dental care, or employee assistance programs, improved and sustainable health in the workplace can only be achieved by a deeper commitment to early disease detection, preventative care, and wellness in general.

"Benchmarking employer-sponsored health benefit plans gives us a broader understanding of our stakeholders' needs," said Hugh O'Neill, President and CEO of sanofi-aventis Canada. "We're happy to share the results of this year's survey because they will bring value to Canada's organisations by turning ideas into action. Supporting wellness programs is not only beneficial to the individual and the company, but they are also in line with the Government's priorities regarding the health of Canadians."

Perceived quality and value are high - especially in uncertain times

A majority of Canadian employees (59%) that benefit from a health benefit plan think highly of their plan's quality; especially those who feel their employers do a very good job communicating about their benefit plans. A convincing 90% believe the quality of their plan is excellent (48%) or very good (42%) among those employees who feel their employers do a very good job communicating health benefits.

The current economic uncertainty has deepened this appreciation of quality with close to eight in ten (77%) respondents agreeing that the existing economic environment has increased the value they place on their health benefit plan.

"The survey showed us that having a health benefit plan encourages Canadian employees to stay with their current employers," Jacques L'Espérance, Survey Advisory Board Member and President, J. L'Espérance Actuariat conseil Inc. "Employees also think more positively of their employer because of their health benefit plan."

Wellness and preventative care are strategic investments

Coverage for prescription drugs continues to be the most common benefit enjoyed by more than nine in ten (94%) of employees and a significant 90% of all employees agree that it is very important for their health benefit plan to cover vaccinations.

The study survey also reveals that 9% of respondents said they may not fill a needed prescription if it's not covered by their benefit plan. Among those from households with incomes below \$30,000, this figure jumps to 23%. In addition to unnecessary effects on employee health, these decisions could cost employers in higher rates of absence, disability, and health-related distraction that affects injury rates and productivity.

The survey showed that about one fourth of plan members do not know about cost differences between pharmacies. Clearly this indicates a need for more education and information provided to employees in order to make them better consumers. Plan sponsors, insurers, or advisors could survey pharmacies and promote those with lower fees or that offer special services in employee communication.

Almost four in ten (37%) plan members say their physician has asked if they have benefit coverage before writing a prescription which is up from 28% in 2009. Job layoffs and lack of universal coverage in some provinces may have prompted the rise in physician queries, noted the Advisory Board.

Work-related issues blamed most for stress/fatigue/insomnia

Close to two thirds (63%) of plan members say they have suffered from stress, fatigue or insomnia more often over the past year. Almost half (45%) of them reported work-related issues as the biggest cause, followed by personal issues (22%), financial issues (20%), and medical issues (19%). One in three (33%) for insomnia, but this figure nearly doubles to 63% for those in poor or very poor health, and is also much higher (at 50%) for those with household incomes below \$30,000.

When asked how their employers specifically help manage workplace health issues, close to one in five (17%) employees don't know, and less than 10% say that they can count on their management for flexibility, availability and support. Workplace wellness programs appear to be on the decline and less than one in three

(29%) plan members have access to wellness programs through work. The 2010 sanofi-aventis Healthcare Survey Advisory Board agrees that, while the potential for return-on-investment may be high, employers should build wellness programs on a foundation of employee engagement.

"When respondents were asked why they don't participate in workplace wellness, the number one answer was time. They don't have time to do their jobs, let alone attend an educational seminar or go to the fitness centre," said Jacques L'Espérance "Employers offer wellness programs on the one hand, but take them away on the other due to lack of time. This needs addressing if we hope to improve both enthusiasm for and the relevance of workplace health programs."

#### About the Survey

The 2010 sanofi-aventis Healthcare Survey was conducted between January 5th and 13th, 2010 by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of Rogers Business and Professional Publishing using an online (Internet survey) methodology. A total national sample of 1,508 primary holders of group health benefit plans completed the study. Completed interviews were conducted using a random sample drawn from the 240,000+ members of the Ipsos-Reid Canadian i-Say Panel.

Overall results have a 95% certainty within +/- 2.5% of what they would have been had the entire population of Canadian plan members been polled. The data has been statistically weighted to ensure that the age, gender, and regional composition of the sample reflect the adult population according to the 2006 Census data.

Members of the Survey's Advisory Board are among the most highly esteemed professionals in the Canadian health benefits industry, with each member representing an essential industry stakeholder, including health benefit plan sponsors, healthcare service providers, insurers, and consultants. For more information about The 2010 sanofi-aventis Healthcare Survey please visit [www.sanofi-aventis.ca](http://www.sanofi-aventis.ca) for the complete edition of this year's report.

#### About sanofi-aventis Canada

Sanofi-aventis, a leading global pharmaceutical company, discovers, develops and distributes therapeutic solutions to improve the lives of everyone.

Sanofi-aventis is represented in Canada by the pharmaceutical company sanofi-aventis Canada Inc., based in Laval, Quebec, and by the vaccines company Sanofi Pasteur Limited, based in Toronto, Ontario. Together they employ more than 2,000 people across the country. With combined R&D investments of \$181.6 million in 2009, they are leaders in Canada's biopharmaceutical sector, a critical knowledge-based industry that generates jobs, business and opportunity throughout the country.

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