

# Healthy Workers are More Productive

Healthy workers are productive workers and that's good for the economy. In contrast, workers with health issues may drop out of the labor force, miss work, or just perform below their capabilities, all of which is a costly drag on economic productivity. A study by the Commonwealth Fund underscores the high cost of poor worker health:

In 2003, an estimated 18 million adults ages 19 to 64 were not working and had a disability or chronic disease, or were not working because of health reasons. Sixty-nine million workers reported missing days due to illness, for a total of 407 million days of lost time at work. Fifty-five million workers reported a time when they were unable to concentrate at work because of their own illness or that of a family member, accounting for another 478 million days. Together, labor time lost due to health reasons represents lost economic output totaling \$260 billion per year. Workers without paid time off to see a physician are more likely to report missing work or being unable to concentrate at their job.<sup>1</sup>

Another study estimated the medical costs and lost-productivity costs to employers for the 10 most significant medical conditions. The annual productivity costs ranged from \$324 to \$1,601 each, and in some cases rivaled the medical costs.<sup>2</sup>

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Other research has shown that the productivity losses from illness are often costly enough to justify substantial employer investments in worker health and to view health insurance as an investment in productivity rather than simply a cost to be minimized.<sup>3</sup>

Increasing the share of the workforce that is covered by health insurance improves worker health. A state that chooses to expand Medicaid can expect a small increase in state costs, but that investment in health is likely to improve productivity by reducing absenteeism and underperformance at work.

1. □ Karen Davis, Sara R. Collins, Michelle M. Doty, Alice Ho, and Alyssa L. Holmgren. *Health and Productivity Among U.S. Workers*. Issue Brief. The Commonwealth Fund, 2005.

<http://www.commonwealthfund.org/~media/files/publications/issue-brief/2005/aug/health-and-productivity-among-u-s-worker>

[s/856\\_davis\\_hlt\\_productivity\\_usworkers-pdf.pdf](#)

2. □ Rebecca Mitchell and Paul Bates. "Measuring Health-Related Productivity Loss." *Population Health Management*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2011.

3. □ Ronal Kessler and Paul Stang, editors. *Health and Work Productivity: Making the Business Case for Quality Health Care*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.