



Startling figures a wake up call for industry

By Nathan Deans*

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) recently reported that one in eight indigenous Australians had cardiovascular disease as a long term condition.

Furthermore, it was the leading cause of indigenous deaths, accounting for 27% of those deceased.

The risk factors for cardiovascular disease include daily smoking, physical inactivity, eating less than two serves of fruit daily, eating less than five serves of vegetables a day, high alcohol consumption, hypertension, obesity, diabetes and long term kidney disease.

More than half (53%) of indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over have three or more of these risk factors for cardiovascular disease and research has shown that individuals with multiple risk factors are exponentially more likely to contribute to lost productivity through absenteeism and presenteeism.

Productivity losses in the domestic mining industry due to presenteeism is estimated to be around 2.9% on average and costs the nation's employers about \$17.6 billion annually.

Ngarda Civil and Mining is one of the largest indigenous owned and operated contracting companies in the domestic mining industry, with several high profile joint ventures with companies like BHP Billiton Ltd and Rio Tinto Ltd.

The very foundation of Ngarda is to improve the lives of indigenous Australians by creating employment and wealth through the successful delivery of civil and mining services to their clients.

Earlier this year, Body Active Consultancy was invited by Ngarda to provide a snapshot of the current health status of one of its workforces in Western Australia's Pilbara region with a view to developing and improving their pre-employment assessment process.

Key health findings included:

- Some 36% of the workforce currently smoked;
- Around 64% of employees reported insufficient or disrupted sleep patterns;
- Over half (58%) of the workers did not

meet recommended daily intakes of fruit and vegetables, and;

- About 58% of the workforce did not achieve the minimum recommended weekly exercise levels.

There was strong evidence that the core health issues within this workforce could be attributed to insufficient health education, with 31% of individuals believing that being fit was the same as being healthy. Meanwhile, 39% believed smoking did not affect job performance.

Additionally 31% of the workforce thought it was not necessary to be fit to perform at work, which was of real concern given the workers in question were primarily involved in manual labour where physical fitness is essential.

Ngarda is now seeking to take the initiative and implement a pro-active approach to the health and wellbeing of its workforce by redeveloping its frontline pre-employment assessment process to include both medical and functional components.

As well as the standard pre-employment medical screening, Ngarda will be working with BAC to develop an additional pre-employment functional assessment to evaluate an individual's health and fitness level and provide the tools for determining whether that person would be physically and functionally capable of meeting the specific physical demands of the job or position.

By matching the



Fruit is an essential part of any employee's diet.

functional assessments to the physical demands of the job positions within a workforce, we can identify those individuals who would be at increased risk of suffering a manual handling sprain or strain injury while performing their work duties.

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