Encana is a leading North American energy producer that is focused on growing its portfolio of natural gas, oil, and natural gas liquids resources.¹ With over 2,000 Canadian employees, it is headquartered in Calgary, Alberta.

**Disability Management in Practice**

**ENCANA**

**Fitness for Work.**

**At a Glance**

- Encana’s disability management program is a fundamental part of its focus on reducing absenteeism.
- The company takes a collaborative approach to disability management. An employee’s return to work is a partnership between human resources, medical practitioners, and the employee.
- Having occupational health professionals on staff is integral to the success of Encana’s disability management program.

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**ABSENTEEISM AND DISABILITY MANAGEMENT**

Encana’s focus on managing absenteeism starts with prevention. The company offers a variety of benefits to support work-life balance and employee wellness. Encana’s preventative approach is founded on a defined health and wellness strategy. The strategy supports

¹ Encana, *About Us*. 
employees as they “adopt and sustain behaviours that reduce health risks, improve quality of life, enhance personal effectiveness, and benefit the organization’s bottom line.”

Wellness initiatives include education sessions delivered by recognized subject matter experts, health risk assessments, and a wealth of web-based educational resource material. Annual analysis of Encana’s demographic profile assists the team in focusing on wellness initiatives that address trends and target audiences.

Encana’s disability management program is an integral part of the company’s focus on reducing absenteeism, and is part of the company’s health and wellness strategy.

Encana is committed to a holistic case management approach to manage absenteeism, and each disability management case is evaluated and supported internally on an individual basis. The company’s STD plan is self-insured and covers employees for up to 52 weeks. Sally Rabeau (Lead of Benefits, Pensions and Investment, Health and Wellness) explains that at Encana, disability management is viewed as a partnership. An employee’s successful return to work and ongoing support is a shared responsibility among key stakeholders, including the employee, occupational health and wellness advisor, employee’s supervisor, human resources advisor, and health care practitioners.

Encana customizes the management of each claim. The company employs proven disability management strategies that include accommodation practices, modified work, gradual return to work plans, and work hardening programs—programs designed to help employees rebuild the physical skills required to do their job. Its in-house medical management model features a case

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2 Berry, Mirabito, and Baun, “What’s the Hard Return?”

3 Encana, Health.
management approach focused on the employee’s recovery rather than a case adjudication approach focused on ensuring the validity of the leave. This supports the Encana employee experience while managing financial risk.

RESULTS

The company is increasingly managing cases that do not involve any lost time as employees are seeking support before there is an impact to their ongoing medical fitness for work. The low number of lost-time incidents related to workers’ compensation can be attributed to Encana’s focus on safety and early intervention, as well as accommodation when incidents occur. Compared with others in its industry, the company also has fewer employees that transition from short-to long-term disability.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

One of the health and wellness team’s main challenges is balancing the need to support employees with the need to manage risk to Encana. The occupational health professionals who are part of the health and wellness team are able to provide support for the employee while being cognizant of the impact to organizational costs (lost time, medical expenses) associated with an employee’s illness or injury.

Communication among all stakeholders is an important component to successfully managing medical absences. Rabeau’s team works closely with HR advisors and managers to assess each absence and determine whether it is a medical issue or a performance issue.

The geographic and demographic diversity among Encana’s employees requires special consideration. A creative communications strategy is necessary to ensure that all employees are aware of the programs and supports available within the organization. For example, the company has a large number of employees positioned in field locations, and reaching these employees can be more challenging than those located at the company’s headquarters in Calgary.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Rabeau believes that one of the key factors in the success of Encana’s absence management practices is the engagement of clinical occupational professionals (nurses and physicians). The company has been able to ensure that the right professionals with the right skill sets are collaborating together. This collaboration, combined with a strong working partnership between key stakeholders in the organization (leaders, HR, employees), has been very effective.

A key factor in the success of Encana’s absence management practices is ensuring that the right professionals with the right skill sets are collaborating together.

Encana’s disability management model is about helping employees get back to “wellness and return to work.” “By managing the disability, reduced costs for the organization and reduced lost time are natural outcomes,” says Rabeau. A supportive, collaborative model and education on the organization’s fitness for work expectations mean employees are not judged for being ill or injured. Rabeau also believes it is important for the team to remain current on recent research and best practices in the area of disability management and overall wellness trends.

GOING FORWARD

While satisfied with their program, Rabeau and her team are always looking for ways to improve and offer support to the organization and its employees. Looking ahead, Encana will continue to analyze best practices, demographics, and wellness trends.4

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4 Sally Rabeau (Lead of Benefits, Pensions and Investment, Health and Wellness, Encana) and Wafa Salem (Occupational Health and Wellness Advisor, Encana), phone interview by Nicole Stewart, February 19, 2013.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Creating a healthy workplace is no easy task in today’s demanding work environment. The organizational benefits of a healthy workplace are many—including reduced health-care costs, improved productivity, and increased employee attraction and retention. To realize these benefits, organizations need current information on the most effective tools and resources.

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Encana: Fitness for Work

by Nicole Stewart