



Health Enhancement Research Organization

**Health, Performance, and Productivity Study Committee**



**WEARABLES IN WELLNESS**  
***EMPLOYER USE OF WEARABLE TRACKING DEVICES IN WELLNESS PROGRAMS***

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The **Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO)** is a non-profit corporation dedicated to the creation and dissemination of employee health management (EHM) research, education, policy, strategy, and leadership. HERO's vision is to promote a culture of health and performance through employer leadership.

The **Health, Performance, and Productivity (HPP) Study Committee** was created to inform HERO members on the state of the evidence about the influence of all aspects of workforce health on performance at work. The committee charter is to document what is known about the HPP connection, identify the gaps in the current evidence base, and identify new opportunities for innovation and research.

### **Contributors to This Report**

This report is a product of the HERO HPP Study Committee. Survey development, interpretation of key findings, and development of this report was led by HERO staff and members of the HPP Study Committee. Contributors to the report are listed alphabetically below.

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### **Survey Partners**

HERO administered the survey with promotional support from several partners. Special thanks to the following partners for their efforts to promote the survey to a diverse group of employers.

- Leaders Edge Magazine
- Preventure
- Intermountain Healthcare/SelectHealth
- Utah Council for Worksite Health Promotion

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) monitors emerging trends in the wellness field to identify best practice drivers of employee engagement with their health and population-based health outcomes. One of HERO's major areas of focus is how improvements in employee health and wellness correlate with higher levels of workplace performance and productivity. The use of wearable activity tracking devices (trackers) is one of the most technology-driven approaches currently being used to promote employee health and well-being. HERO designed *The HERO Wearable Tracking Device Survey* to better understand how employers are incorporating wearable tracking devices into their health management or "wellness" programs as well as to identify gaps in the current evidence base and opportunities for further research and application.

This web-based survey was administered October 2014 through January 2015, collecting information from 188 responding organizations representing a range of organization industries and sizes (63% had fewer than 5,000 employees, and 29% had more than 10,000 employees). The key findings are summarized below.

- **Employer Sponsorship of Trackers** - Nearly one half of the 188 employers (46%) responding to the survey offered or sponsored some type of tracker as part of a wellness program, ranging from more advanced trackers such as Fitbit® devices (77%) to simple pedometers (near 24%).
- **Subsidizing Trackers** - A significant majority (83%) of employers subsidized trackers: fully (51%), partially (12%), or using alternative funding methods (20%), which are detailed in the full report. Most employers (91%) permitted an employee to use a tracker device they already owned.
- **Registration and Activation of Tracker** – A majority of organizations (55%) reported that more than half of eligible employees registered to receive a tracker. Additionally, 68% of organizations reported that a majority of those receiving a tracker successfully activated and used their trackers.

- **Duration of Use** - Of initial device users, more than half the employers (59%) reported average employee use of a device for three months, and 54% of employers reported that more than half of their employees continued use of tracker device after six months.
- **Activities to Support Use** - Employers supported use of the trackers in several ways: through individual use (74%), team (71%) and departmental (35%) challenges, usage incentives (59%), and by setting organizational goals (48%) for tracker use.
- **Objectives for Use** - When asked why they incorporated trackers into their wellness program, 94% of employers aimed to increase physical activity. Additional objectives included increasing engagement with health (77%), adding excitement and fun to the wellness program (75%), improving wellness program participation (59%), improving employee performance and productivity (51%), and controlling health care costs (34%).
- **Measures to Assess Tracker Program** - When asked about their program reporting efforts, 65% of employers reported some assessment metrics were reported with the most common metrics being number of participants (84%), total and average steps (66%), participant satisfaction (57%), impact on health and health risks (50%) and duration of active use (39%).
- **End-User Perceptions** - When asked about end-user engagement and feedback, 53% of employers reported high initial and sustained interest in tracker-supported programs while 38% reported high initial with low sustained interest.
- **Data Privacy Concerns** - 82% of employers reported end-users did not raise any concerns regarding data privacy.

In summary, this survey-based effort indicates that both employers and employees have a strong and growing interest in using wearable tracking devices to enhance wellness programs. The majority of companies currently offering tracking devices intend to continue doing so, and many additional companies plan on beginning to offer the devices in the future.