

7 critical strategies for healthier, safer, more productive workers

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Work injuries happen at work, off-the-job injuries happen elsewhere, and never the twain shall meet, right? Not so, says one worker safety and health advocate.

Dr. Casey Chosewood, Director of the Office for [Total Worker Health™](#) at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, brought that message recently to the Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare (AOHP) annual [conference](#).

Chosewood says the separation of work health and home health has to be broken down.

Think of it this way: There is no greater indication of overall health than the ability to work.

With that in mind, Chosewood revealed his Seven Critical Strategies for a Healthier, Safer and More Productive Workforce at the conference:

1. Don't underestimate the **connection between health at work and health at home**. Chosewood says if we want true worker well-being, we have to first look at the conditions workers face on the job. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study compared the calendar age and cardiovascular ages of people. On average, women's cardio age is five years more than their calendar age; for men it's seven years. Chosewood says a main cause of this cardio-calendar age difference is work. In other words, work is making our cardiovascular systems age faster than we do chronologically.
2. Be vigilant and responsive to **risks that work represents to employee health**. Chosewood says it's not reasonable to expect workers to change their behaviors when their surroundings haven't changed – that is, when hazards haven't changed.
3. Focus first on **culture building and policies** that affect the way work is done. Take a look at how work conditions contribute to chronic diseases. Almost half of adults have a chronic condition. Of this group, half have multiple conditions.
4. **Fix fat jobs; don't focus on fat workers**. Can the specific job predict whether a person is more likely to be obese? Yes, says Chosewood. Example: truck drivers. Chosewood says it's the nature of truck driving that creates overweight and obese employees.

5. **Train supervisors** with health outcomes in mind. Train them to recognize the early signs of workers having a health problem. Supervisors should pay particular attention to these groups: new workers who have a steeper learning curve; contract/temp workers who tend to have the more hazardous tasks; and people who are having particular challenges with work-life integration, perhaps because they're taking care of younger children, a sick relative or older parents.
6. Craft **benefit programs** with worker safety and health in mind. Provide support to employees so they are able to effectively use their paid-time-off benefits. (A benefits program offering a week's worth of paid sick leave per year is no good if workers aren't effectively able to use it when they need it.) A NIOSH study shows employees with access to paid sick leave have a 28% lower likelihood to be injured.
7. Make intervention **personal** for the workers. Let them know that their health does matter to you.

Chosewood says the ultimate goal is to create ways for people to be healthy enough so they can spend more time with their loved ones.

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