

# Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace survey back for third year

MOHD SHAHRIN YAHA/THE EDGE

AIA is on a mission to empower Malaysians to live healthier, longer, better lives. Its annual survey provides corporate Malaysia with the best insights and strategies to help improve productivity and overall employees' well-being.

BY SYAHIRAH SYED JAAFAR

Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace survey by AIA Vitality survey wants to continue motivating Malaysians to prioritise their well-being and take better care of their health. With the aim of helping Malaysians live healthier, longer, better lives, the annual survey seeks to find out more about how employees are feeling and what practices and initiatives are being set in place by their employers.

AIA Bhd's chief corporate solutions officer Sainthan Satyamoorthy says there is an urgent need for Malaysian employees' health and well-being to be improved and more awareness to be created. As such, employers play a critical role in supporting their workforce on this important journey.

"This is our motivation behind Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality survey. Our mission is to empower Malaysians to live healthier, longer, better lives. In the corporate space, AIA aspires to do the same by promoting and advocating the importance of workplace health, where we provide corporate Malaysia with the best insights and strategies to help improve productivity and overall employees' well-being," he says.

In order to help Malaysians live better lives, a clear picture is needed to understand the health landscape of corporate Malaysia, says Sainthan. That is why the insurance company offers the annual surveys for free to enable companies and employees to assess their health diagnosis.

"With the personalised organisational health reports from Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality survey, employers will be able to understand better the health of their people as well as the effectiveness of their current health strategies.

"This can act as an important 'reality check' from which the companies can develop, implement and customise workplace interventions that truly meet their employees' unique needs. Employees feel more comfortable and valued when they know that the programmes are designed



with their needs in mind," says Sainthan.

He adds that AIA wants to make sure there is enough understanding and information around the issue of health and wellness in the workplace to educate the market and employers in Malaysia.

"It is important to engage employers and employees who both have an equally important role in bringing about improvements to workplace health."

He explains that with the survey, employers will be able to understand the economic costs and potential economic gain from investing in the health of their employees.

In 2018, the Malaysian workforce lost a total of 73.1 working days per employee per year — 7.7 days due to absenteeism and 65.4 days because of presenteeism.

Absenteeism refers to the actual absence of employees from working, taking into account absences due to sickness or health problems. Whereas presenteeism refers to a scenario when an employee clocks in but is unable to perform work due to health issues, loss of sleep, or stress, among others.

"The most pertinent issue that stands out from the surveys we have been doing over the past couple of years so far is the cost of presenteeism — people actually coming to work but not being able to be as productive as they could possibly because there is something going on, be it a physical or stress issue. This has an impact on our economy and our productivity in our companies. In fact, that's costing us more than absenteeism," says Sainthan.

From a business perspective, Malaysian companies lose RM2.27 million per company per year due to employee absence and presenteeism, he notes.

“With the personalised organisational health reports from Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality survey, employers will be able to understand the health of their people as well as the effectiveness of their current health strategies.” — Sainthan

Sainthan says the biggest reason companies may not be tackling health issues currently is because they are not aware about them or there is not enough data to assist them in decision-making.

"The reason we do this survey is because people don't have access to the data. So, we take away that challenge for them by providing the survey for free. Through the survey, they are getting a better idea of what their staff think about health and wellness and what is affecting them, plus how the staff actually perceive what the company is doing about it.

"Hopefully, with the data, they will also have more discussion on it at more senior levels, which will lead to action," he says.

As the leading provider of employee benefits schemes, says Sainthan, AIA has a first-hand view of the impact an unhealthy workforce has on employers. AIA has over 13,000 corporate clients with more than 1.5 million employees.

This year, AIA is looking forward to grow the number of companies and employees participating in the survey. "Last year was great. We had around 117 companies, with more than 11,000 employees participat-

ing. We are very encouraged that over 300 companies have registered to take part in the survey so far but we hope to have more companies come on board with us," he says.

As for returning companies, he says AIA will be looking closely to see how much change they have made in a year.

The 2018 survey, which looked at 117 companies and 11,551 Malaysian employees, revealed that 45.9% Malaysian employees are physically inactive, while 91.7% are not eating a balanced diet. Furthermore 54.4% sleep less than seven hours per night and 50.2% are at risk for at least one dimension of work-related stress.

"Interestingly, we also found that one in five Malaysian employees are bullied, 4% are bullied often, and some 18.2% have a lot of financial concerns," says Sainthan.

In comparison, he notes that in the UK, there have been significant changes on prevalent issues such as presenteeism.

"Britain's Healthiest Workplace survey shows us that UK employees who did not engage in any health and wellness intervention demonstrated an increased productivity loss of 8.6 days while employees who always engaged in interventions

## Malaysian workforce experience high productivity loss

Assuming a 260 working day year, organisations in Malaysia lost about **73.1 days per employee per year** compared to:

- 52 days in Australia
- 79 days in Hong Kong
- 73 days in Thailand



Presenteeism constitutes majority of the overall loss and seems to be rising

Absence **7.7 days** Presenteeism **65.4 days**

That's **RM2.27mil** lost per organisation annually!

showcased a reduced productivity loss of 7.8 days.

"This was measured on repeated participants over a period of four years from 2014 to 2017. We hope to see the same in Malaysia over time, which would then show that we are moving in the right direction as a country," he says.

Last year, the survey introduced a new category to award companies that have made the most improvement, giving recognition to those which made use of the information they received from the first survey and subsequently made changes to their workplace.

"Companies would focus on particular areas which they felt were putting a high proportion of employees at risk, for example, physical health, which is the best place to start and the most impactful," says Sainthan.

"The other thing we do with the survey is to host an annual summit where we bring international and local companies to come and share their experiences and best practices with all the participating companies," he explains.

### Putting interventions in place

In terms of interventions offered, 90% of Malaysian employers offer at least one intervention, says Sainthan. "Only 13% of

employees are aware of any interventions. However, for those who are aware of the offer, 59% participate in at least one workplace intervention. If awareness is done enough, employees will take part."

Interventions can be initiatives such as setting up gyms in the workplace, rewarding people for doing physical activity, providing fresh drinking water, and promoting smoking cessation.

However, Sainthan cautions that companies should take note of the potential misalignment between the risks employees face and the interventions provided by the employer.

"A lot of it has historically focused on physical health because it is an obvious risk but actually, there is a multitude of other areas that can be focused on as well, such as nutritional health, which is an area that is not as focused on though I believe employers are starting to take it more seriously," he says.

When it comes to nutritional health, it is a matter of education and understanding the importance of eating right, he adds.

"You can provide healthy food options but it doesn't necessarily mean that people will use them. You can provide fruits and vegetables, but a person can still choose to eat something else elsewhere. So, one is about making it available and secondly,

making sure that employees understand why it is there and how it helps them. Ultimately, it is about creating sustainable change and behaviour."

Sainthan says another area that should be given more attention — not just in companies but in the country — is the issue of mental health.

"The previous survey done shows 1 in 2 Malaysian employees are at risk of at least one work-related stress. So, the question is, what support is there for them?"

"Quite a few companies have put in employee support helplines. It does help as it is independent and allows employees to talk about these issues to someone."

"As an employer, what is important is to first provide the service to employees and letting them know it is there. Some companies we have spoken to have even gone as far as training their managers to be able to spot some of the potential signs

that people are having depression so that they can help support those affected.

"We also see some interesting correlations whereby companies with high staff engagement have lower stress levels. Companies whose staff feel they have a lot more control, or influence, on what they do have lower stress levels as well," he notes.

All in all, Sainthan understands that the process of change takes time. "I think it is quite realistic to say that we can't change our employees' health overnight. We have to focus on areas where we can make an impact, areas most meaningful to businesses. We hope to achieve that with information gathered from the survey." **E**

The Edge is the media partner of Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality 2019

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MALAYSIA'S  
HEALTHIEST  
WORKPLACE

AIA Vitality

## Mental health, sleep, stress are key drivers of productivity loss

A high proportion of Malaysian employees report significant **financial concerns**. Mental issues are on the rise with 50.2% of employees having at least one **work-related stress**.



COUNTRY	% OF EMPLOYEES WITH 'A LOT OF' FINANCIAL CONCERNS		% OF EMPLOYEES WITH AT LEAST ONE DIMENSION OF WORK-RELATED STRESS		% OF EMPLOYEES WITH TWO OR MORE DIMENSIONS OF WORK-RELATED STRESS	
	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>53.4</b>	<b>19.68</b>	<b>22.9</b>
Australia	12.3	10.9	53.7	54.4	26.04	25.3
Hong Kong	12.6	11.9	57.3	64.1	24.14	25.8
Thailand	27.4		46.3		18.36	