

10 practical actions to combat communicable and non-communicable diseases

A lot of attention has been paid to the role of business in the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

This is without doubt an important issue, but it needs to be looked at in the wider context of a company's health and safety work.

IBLF strongly believes that companies should include in their health and safety policies and procedures responses both to a range of communicable diseases - including HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria, SARS, Bird flu - and to non-communicable diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and alcohol and drug dependency.

All these problems have the potential to seriously affect the lives of employees and their families and to disrupt operations.

1. The business case for investing in health should be clearly articulated and disseminated to support advocacy and awareness raising on the valid and distinct role of business.
2. Each company's health and safety work should embrace a response to both communicable and non-communicable diseases, with the consequent management and training that is required.
3. Business should play its part in improving local capacity in government, public services and civil society organisations for the delivery of education and health care services. All too often, actors work individually and therefore the impact is nominal. All actors need to work together towards a common agenda, with each bringing their distinct competencies.
4. Business should take advantage of opportunities for collective action in their overall response to the health and safety agenda - sharing knowledge and experience, pooling resources, increasing impact, and as a platform for business to engage in public policy debate.
5. When leaders speak, people listen. Companies could encourage international and national leaders to make informed public announcements where appropriate, for example in the case of HIV/AIDS to help overcome issues of stigma. They should also encourage their own CEOs to speak out on important and relevant public health issues.
6. Companies should strive to ensure their actions do not have a negative impact on the capacity of the local community, for example by attracting too many competent health care staff to private clinics by paying more or giving better benefits.
7. Companies should scale up impact by making health benefits as far as possible also available to migrant workers and other seasonal workers, as well as to spouses, dependents of employees and, where feasible, the local community.
8. Companies should conduct regular impact assessments to ensure that they anticipate the problems rather than react to developments.

9. Companies need to be mindful of the influence of local culture and religion on their approach to awareness raising, prevention and education around many health and safety issues. With regards to HIV/AIDS, for example, there are important differences between the situation in Middle Eastern (Islamic countries) and some countries in sub Saharan Africa.

10. With respect to HIV/AIDS, businesses should pay special attention to the particular vulnerability of women (and therefore children) in terms both of growing female infection rates and maternal-to-child transmission.