

Putting wellness data on the balance sheet

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Corporate financial statements may start to include well-being index scores that gauge employees' health and fitness, John Harris, senior vice president and chief wellness office at **Healthways**, told attendees last week at the 4th Annual Employer Health and Human Capital Congress.

The three-day event, held in Washington, D.C., focused on health care benefits and corporate performance.

Well-being indices, a comprehensive collection of data on the workforce health status and attitudes on wellness, are slowly gaining popularity in the C-suite as tools that help executives make the link between wellness and corporate performance.

Healthways, a health management firm, teamed up with Gallup, the polling outfit, to create a [well-being index](#) that represents survey data examining the direct and indirect key drivers of wellness and health issues that affect Americans.

"As the data becomes deeper and we understand more about it, I can honestly see the day where we might pick stock in a company based, in part, on how that company scores on this index," said Harris. "If you are in the low ranking, then the organization is not going in the right direction in terms of their productivity and people," he added.

So far, Wall Street investors are not factoring in corporate well-being indices as part of their investment strategies. "That said, a well-being index is the kind of data that you need out there, because there so many variables tied to wellness and corporate performance that you cannot narrow it down to one thing," observed the 30-plus year veteran of the wellness industry.

Some executives and investors are saying this wellness idea is just too complicated, and that we really cannot make out the correlation between a healthier workforce and

the bottom line, Harris explained. A well-being index may start to undo some misconceptions about measuring ROI on wellness and health improvement programs.

For instance, he recalled talking to an employer that wanted to open up new locations, but was having a hard time measuring the effectiveness of wellness initiatives.

The employer eventually decided to study the obesity statistics in various communities, hoping to build plants where the obesity rates are low. The company saw obesity as a big factor in health care costs. "But when you think about it, that's an inexact science because the company is only using one indicator," Harris said.