

# HR.com's Future of Employee Well-Being 2026

Close the gap between  
well-being investment and  
impact



MAY 2026

# CONTENTS



3	<b>Executive Summary</b>
4	<b>Our Major Research Findings</b>
6	<b>Current State and Trends in Employee Well-Being</b>
19	<b>Well-Being Strategies, Integration, and Impact</b>
28	<b>Organizations Emphasize Healthcare Access But Underinvest in Proactive Well-Being</b>
32	<b>Financial Stress Is Driven by Immediate Pressures</b>
35	<b>Work Environment Strategies Emphasize Comfort Over Holistic Well-Being</b>
39	<b>Mental Health Challenges Are Widespread, But Support Remains Largely Reactive</b>
43	<b>Employee Stress Is Rising, Driven by Financial Pressure and Workload</b>
48	<b>Planning for Well-Being in the Face of AI and External Uncertainty</b>
55	<b>Key Takeaways</b>

# Executive Summary

Employee well-being is under increasing strain, with 60% of organizations reporting high levels of workplace stress. But the bigger story is what's causing it. For the first time in four years, money worries have overtaken workload as the top source of employee strain. In just one year, that figure jumped from 55% to 72%.

Of course, that's just one part of a larger picture. The good news is that organizations continue to invest in employee well-being. Most still focus on traditional areas such as physical and mental health, while newer challenges like digital strain receive far less attention. The problem is that the impact of these initiatives remains uneven. Many efforts lack coordination, limiting their overall effectiveness.

Stress is a major piece of the well-being puzzle, and it is shaped by both workplace demands and external pressures. Financial strain, workload, and broader societal uncertainty are combining to create a more complex well-being landscape.

But not all organizations suffer from these issues to an equal degree. In fact, our research shows that well-being leader organizations<sup>1</sup> achieve much stronger and more consistent well-being outcomes by focusing on execution, integration, and managerial support.

The following key findings show where organizations are making progress, where gaps remain, and what differentiates high-performing well-being strategies.

## About This Survey

HR.com's "Future of Employee Well-being 2026" survey ran from January 2026 to April 2026. We gathered responses from 200 HR professionals in virtually every industry vertical. Respondents are located all over the world, but most of them reside in North America, especially the United States.

The respondents represent a broad cross-section of employers by number of employees, ranging from small businesses with fewer than 100 employees to enterprises with 20,000+ employees. About eight in ten responses are from employees in midsize (33%) and large organizations (46%).

\*Organizations that report high/very high effectiveness of their well-being initiatives

## Our Major Research Findings

### Major Finding 1

#### Organizations still focus on physical and mental well-being, while digital and integrated approaches lag behind

- Physical (77%) and mental/emotional well-being (71%) remain the top well-being priorities.
- Digital well-being continues to be overlooked, with only 29% of organizations addressing it despite rising digital strain.
- Social well-being programs have grown steadily, reaching 64% in 2026, while career (56%) and financial well-being (54%) initiatives remain less prevalent.
- Only 36% report high or very high integration of their various well-being initiatives, indicating limited progress toward a holistic approach.

### Major Finding 2

#### Effectiveness of well-being initiatives has plateaued after prior gains

- Just 36% of organizations report high or very high effectiveness of well-being initiatives, down from 41% last year.
- The largest share (44%) continues to report only moderate effectiveness.
- Earlier gains from 2023 to 2025 have stalled, suggesting that expanding programs alone is no longer improving outcomes for now.

### Major Finding 3

#### Financial stress and workload now drive rising employee strain

- Financial stress has become the top employee stressor, cited by 72% of respondents, surpassing workload issues (62%) for the first time since we started doing this research in 2023.
- Negative stress is prevalent in 60% of organizations, the highest level observed in recent years.
- Burnout (54%) remains the leading organizational well-being challenge, alongside time constraints (49%).
- Organizational barriers such as lack of leadership support (38%) and weak measurement (32%) continue to limit effectiveness.

## Our Major Research Findings (continued)

### Major Finding 4

#### Future well-being plans focus on measurement and financial support, but political/social tensions are expected to decrease employee well-being over the next two years

- Organizations plan to improve tracking of well-being impact (46%) and expand financial wellness programs (44%).
- Fewer plan to strengthen core supports such as mental health programs (22%), flexible schedules (25%), or hybrid work (19%).
- AI is expected to reduce workload stress (50%), but 33% anticipate increased job-related anxiety.
- External factors such as political and social tensions (44%) are emerging as the top future risk to well-being.

### Major Finding 5

#### Well-being leaders achieve stronger outcomes through better execution and integration of their initiatives

Compared to organizations with less effective programs (well-being laggards), well-being leaders are:

- ▶ over 6x more likely to report high integration of well-being initiatives (67% vs. 10%)
- ▶ more than 2x as likely to achieve strong outcomes such as employee engagement (82% vs. 40%) and retention (78% vs. 36%)
- ▶ nearly 4x more likely to report higher productivity (35% vs. 9%)
- ▶ more likely to invest in leadership capability, culture-building, and continuous supports such as coaching and digital tools
- ▶ more proactive in using advanced approaches, including AI for personalized well-being support (38% vs. 17%)

Please note that the findings and recommendations contained in this report are informational only. Nothing in this report should be construed as constituting legal opinions or advice. Please consult an attorney if you have questions about the legal requirements, rules or regulations associated with any content discussed in this report.

# Current State and Trends in Employee Well-Being

## Overall Scope and Effectiveness



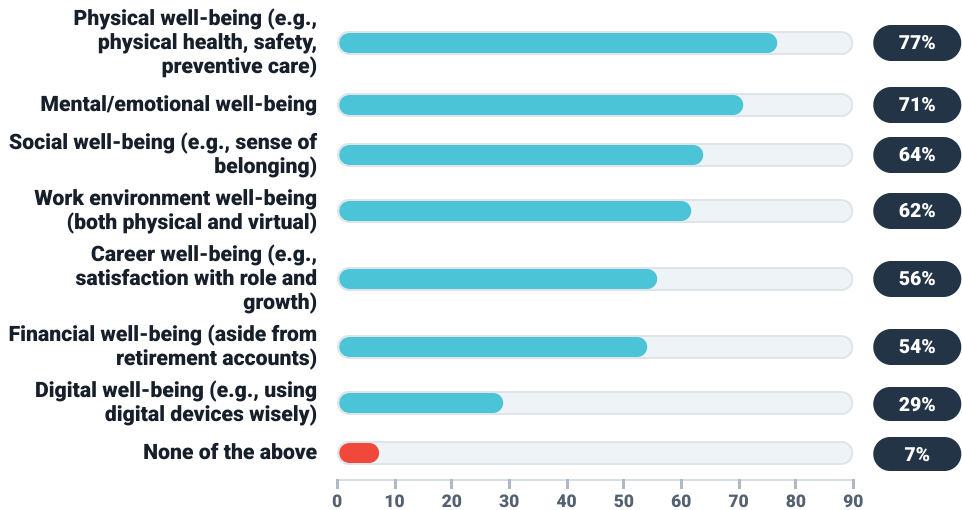
### Finding: Organizations prioritize physical well-being while overlooking digital strain

HR professionals were asked which dimensions of employee well-being their organizations actively support through specific initiatives, highlighting where efforts are currently concentrated. Physical (77%) and mental/emotional (71%) well-being lead, reflecting a continued emphasis on traditional health-focused programs. Attention declines across social (64%), work environment (62%), career (56%), and financial well-being (54%), indicating uneven investment in broader well-being drivers.

Digital well-being is the least prioritized at 29%, despite its growing impact on burnout and productivity in digitally intensive work environments. This may be because this topic is subsumed under other types of well-being, such as mental or work environment well-being. Nonetheless, this gap suggests that many organizations have yet to align well-being strategies with how work is actually done and experienced in many organizations today.



**Which types of employee well-being does your organization try to enhance via specific initiatives? (select all that apply)**



**Under a third (29%) of organizations strive to enhance digital well-being**



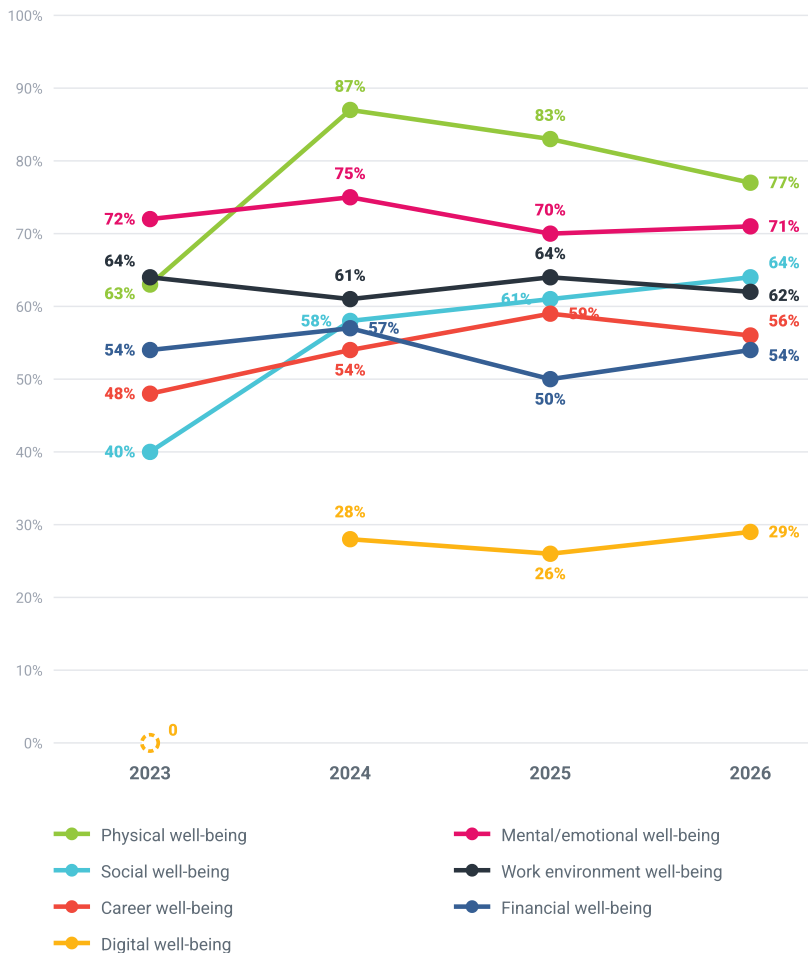
## Finding: Physical and mental health are still the main focus, though social well-being has climbed steadily over four years to become a top three priority.

Organizations report a high focus on physical well-being, though the metric has dropped steadily from 87% (2024) to 83% (2025) and down to 77% (2026). It is crucial to evaluate this metric strictly from 2024 onward because the survey methodology was updated that year to explicitly include "health insurance" under the umbrella of physical well-being programs. Because the overwhelming majority of employers subsidize health insurance, this definitional expansion established a new, much higher baseline for the data. The subsequent decline to 77% (2026) suggests that beyond standard health insurance offerings, organizations may be slightly scaling back or struggling to maintain supplemental physical wellness initiatives. Mental well-being followed a similar curve. It started strong at 72% in 2023, peaked slightly at 75% in 2024, and has leveled out around 70% for the last two years. This may be because organizations initially accelerated investments in response to heightened post-pandemic health concerns but have since stabilized or rebalanced their focus as well-being strategies expand into other areas such as social, financial, and career well-being.

The most consistent year-over-year change belongs to social well-being. It started as a low priority at 40% in 2023. It then jumped to 58% in 2024, grew to 61% in 2025, and climbed again to 64% in 2026. This unbroken four-year growth streak shows that employers are increasingly focused on building workplace connections.



### Which types of employee well-being does your organization try to enhance via specific initiatives? (select all that apply)



**Note:** The phrasing changed slightly over the years from "strive to enhance" to "try to enhance." Also, the survey did not ask about digital well-being in 2023.



## Finding: Most organizations report only moderate impact from well-being initiatives

Perceptions of well-being effectiveness remain concentrated in the middle, with 44% of HR professionals rating initiatives as only moderately effective. This indicates that while programs are in place, they are not consistently translating into strong improvements in employee well-being.

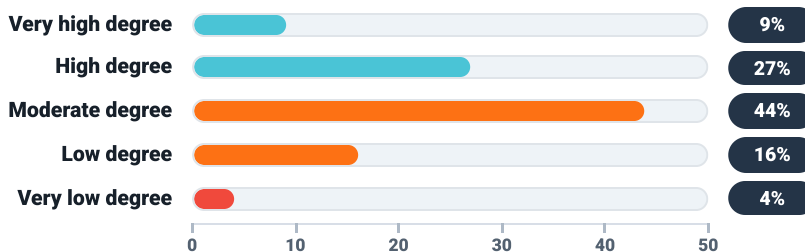
Just 36% report high (27%) or very high (9%) effectiveness, while 20% indicate low (16%) or very low (4%) impact, reinforcing a persistent gap between effort and outcomes.

For the purpose of this report, large organizations have 1,000 or more employees, midsize organizations have 100 to 999 employees, and small organizations have 99 or fewer employees.

### Differences based on size of organization:

Large organizations (34%) are more likely to rate their employee well-being initiatives as effective to a high/very high degree compared to midsize (31%) and small organizations (28%).

### Overall, to what degree are the initiatives that promote employee well-being effective in your organization?



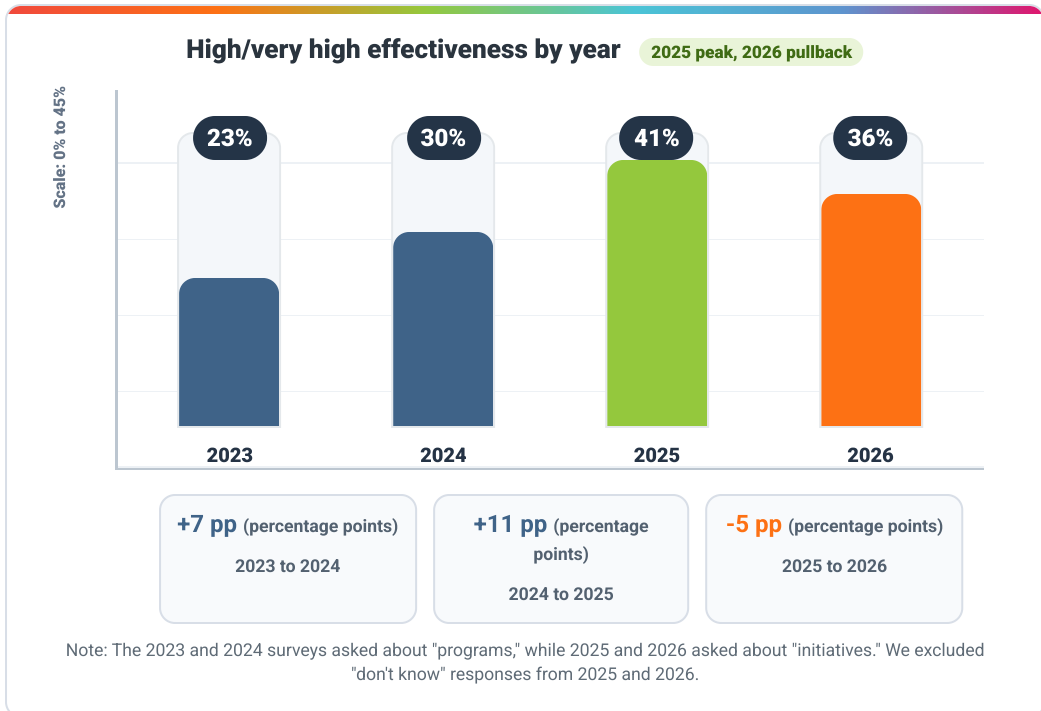
Editor's Note: As stated in the survey, "effective" refers to improvements in employee well-being levels. In the original data, 5% of respondents stated that they "don't know." For the purpose of this graph, we removed those responses and recalculated; so only those who confidently answered the question are included.



## Finding: The steady, incremental improvement in program effectiveness seen from 2023 to 2025 has plateaued and slightly retracted in 2026

The trend from 2023 onward shows early gains followed by recent stagnation. In 2023, only 23% of organizations rated their programs as highly or very highly effective. This increased to 30% in 2024 and peaked at 41% in 2025, before declining to 36% in 2026.

This reversal suggests that initial improvements may have come from expanding access to well-being programs, but sustaining impact is proving more difficult. As organizations scale initiatives, gaps in integration, measurement, and leadership capability (as discussed later in the report) may limit further progress. In addition, rising external pressures such as financial stress and workload may be offsetting the benefits of existing programs.



## Well-being cohort definition

For this report, we conducted various analyses to gain insights into which practices are most widely used by organizations that report greater effectiveness of their well-being programs. Specifically, we analyzed responses and segmented the data into two groups:

**Well-being leaders:** these represent respondents who answered the question "Overall, to what degree are the programs that promote employee well-being effective in your organization?" as "high" or "very high" degree.

**Well-being laggards:** these represent respondents who answered the same question as "low" or "very low" degree.

Of course, correlation is not the same as causation. While we cannot state that any particular practice will definitely lead to higher well-being, we do see intriguing relationships that may, if used judiciously, result in greater success.



## Well-Being Problems



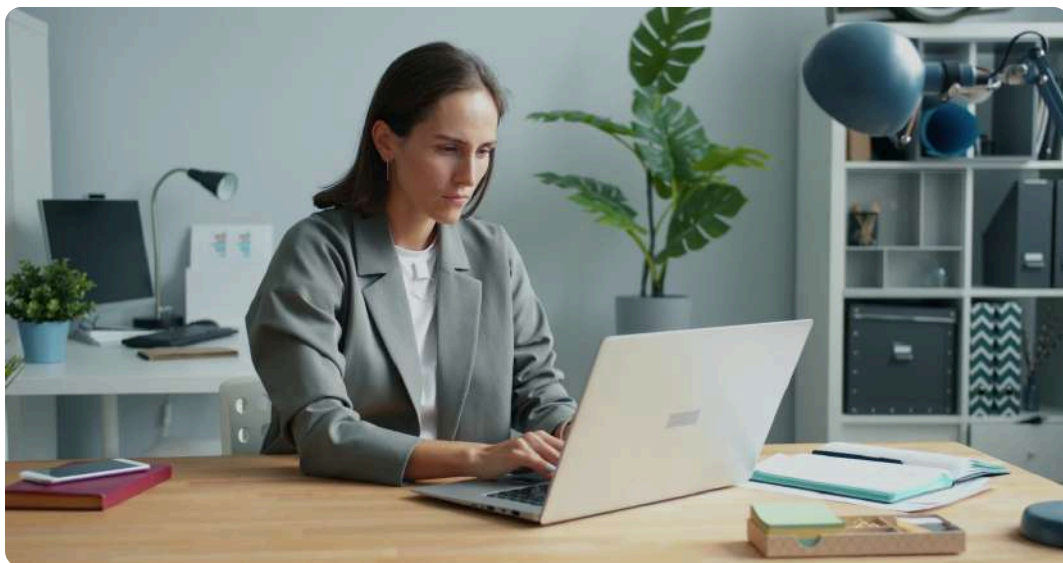
### Finding: High stress and burnout remain the biggest threat to well-being

High stress and burnout (54%) is the leading challenge to employee well-being, reinforcing that employee strain remains widespread despite ongoing well-being investments. In fact, this remains the top challenge to employee well-being from 2023 onwards. Time constraints follow closely at 49%, indicating that even when programs exist, employees often lack the capacity to engage with them.

Organizational barriers also stand out, with lack of leadership buy-in (38%) and failure to track well-being metrics (32%) limiting accountability. Gaps in communication (30%) and staffing shortages (29%) point to structural issues that hinder effective implementation. Fewer organizations cite lack of programs (22%) or program ineffectiveness (16%), suggesting the issue is more about accessibility and execution than availability.

#### Differences based on size of organization

The most widely cited challenge in large organizations is high employee stress/burnout levels while midsize organizations are more likely to cite insufficient time and small organizations are most likely to grapple with not enough well-being programs.



**From the list below, which five work-related well-being challenges are most problematic in your organization? (select up to five)**



**Almost a fifth struggle with coping with a toxic workplace**

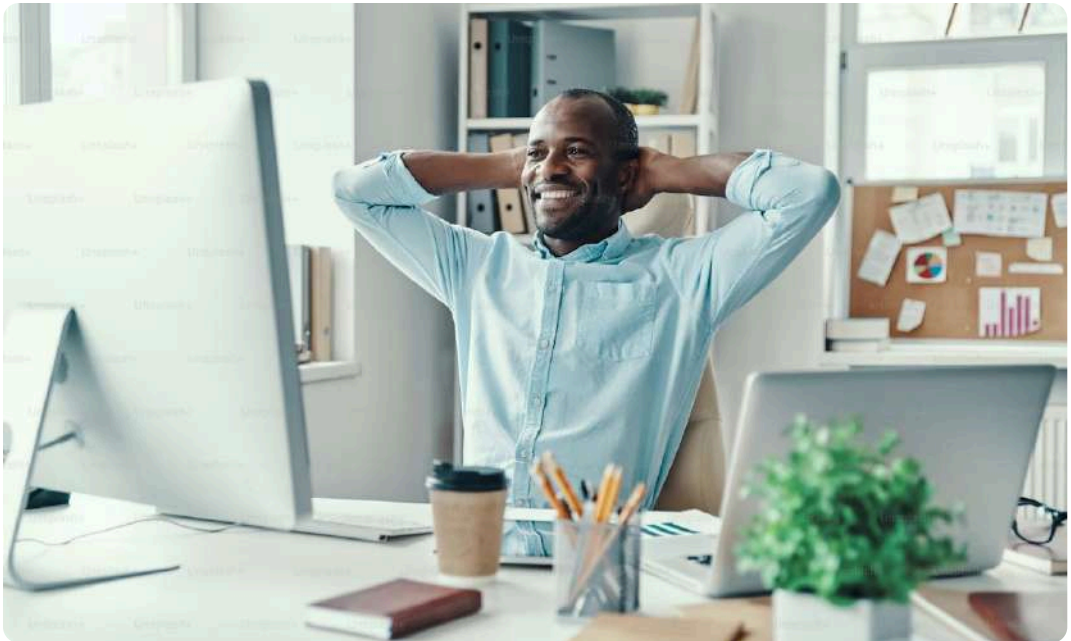
# Measuring Well-Being



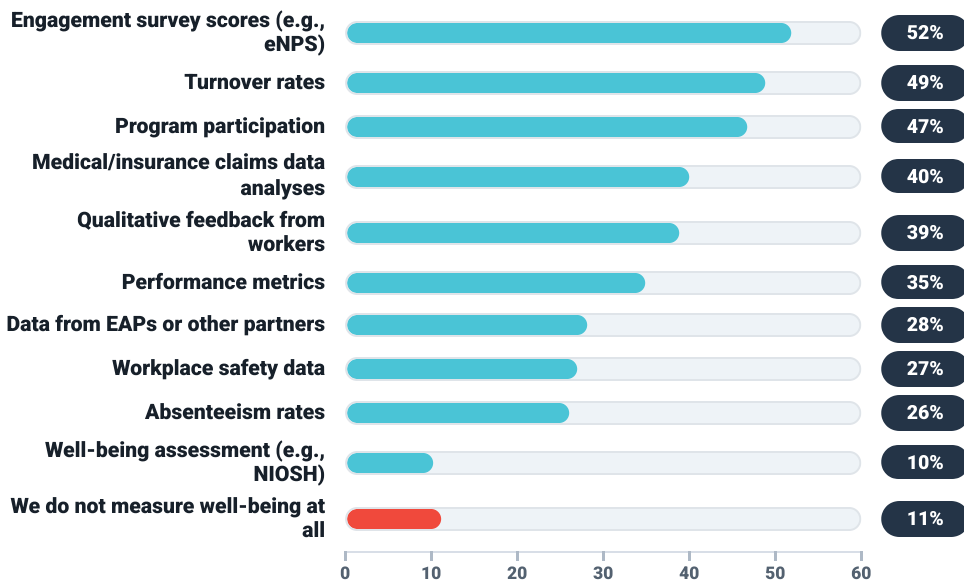
## Finding: Engagement surveys and turnover rates dominate measurement of employee well-being

Measurement approaches are led by engagement survey scores (52%) and turnover rates (49%), indicating that most organizations rely on indirect or lagging indicators to gauge well-being. Program participation (47%) and claims data (40%) follow, reinforcing a focus on activity and outcomes rather than holistic well-being insights.

More direct and employee-centered methods, such as qualitative feedback (39%), are used less consistently, while only 10% adopt standardized well-being assessments. Notably, 11% do not measure well-being at all, highlighting a fundamental gap in accountability.



## What are the top five ways your organization measures employee well-being? (select up to five)



**Over 1 in 10 organizations do not measure employee well-being at all.**



## Finding: Well-being leader organizations are nearly twice as likely as laggards to use performance metrics to measure employee well-being

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to use the listed metrics to measure employee well-being.

Well-being leader organizations show a stronger focus on outcome-based measurement, with nearly twice as many using performance metrics compared to laggard organizations (49% vs. 28%). They also lead in using engagement surveys (63% vs. 47%), though the gap is smaller. This indicates that leaders combine perception and performance data, while laggards rely more on basic measures.



## HRRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Improve the effectiveness of existing well-being efforts.** Many organizations already have multiple initiatives in place, but not all deliver value. For instance, review program participation and outcomes, identify which initiatives employees use, and redirect budgets toward those that show clear improvements in engagement or reduced burnout.
- **Address digital overload more deliberately.** Digital strain is increasing yet often overlooked in well-being strategies. In some instances, the use of AI has exacerbated this trend. Organizations can set clearer norms around communication, such as limiting after-hours emails, reducing unnecessary meetings, and encouraging focused work time without interruptions.
- **Tackle the root causes of employee stress.** Well-being programs alone cannot offset high workloads or staffing gaps. A practical step is to analyze workload distribution, streamline repetitive tasks, and ensure teams are adequately resourced to manage expectations.
- **Use better data to understand what is working.** Tracking only participation or satisfaction does not provide a full picture. Organizations can combine survey feedback with metrics such as turnover, absenteeism, and performance trends to identify which initiatives are making a difference.
- **Enable managers to support well-being consistently.** Managers play a key role in shaping employee experience but often lack the tools to do so effectively. Provide guidance on regular check-ins, recognizing early signs of burnout, and setting realistic goals, and reinforce these expectations through performance reviews.

# Well-Being Strategies, Integration, and Impact

## Overall Strategic Approaches

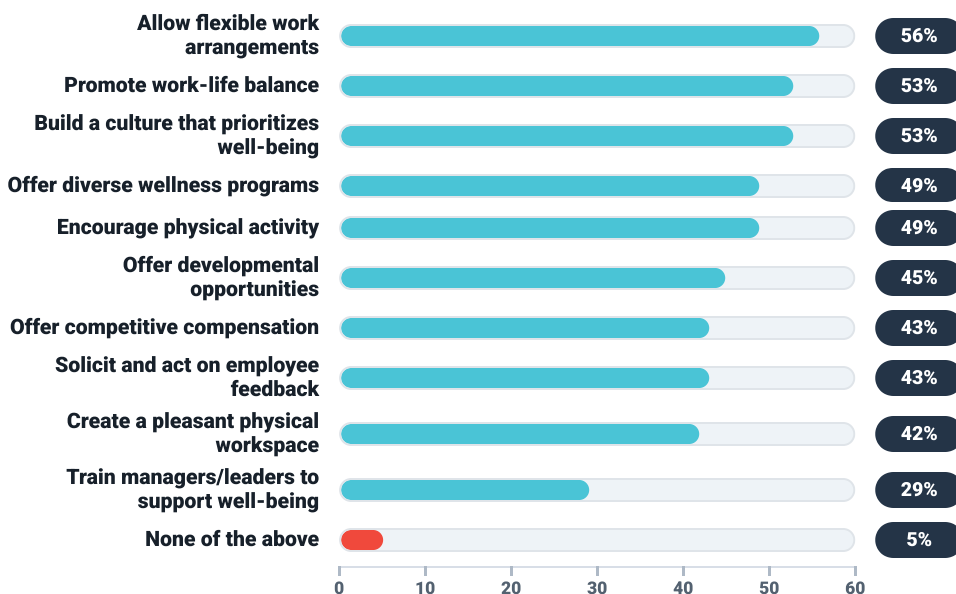


### Finding: Well-being strategies focus on flexibility

Organizations primarily focus on flexible work (56%), work-life balance, and culture (both 53%), showing strong emphasis on both structural supports and creating workplace environments that prioritize employee well-being. Supporting initiatives such as wellness programs (49%), physical activity (49%), and development opportunities (45%) further indicate a broad but surface-level strategy mix.

In contrast, only 29% invest in training managers and leaders, despite their central role in shaping day-to-day employee experience.

### What strategies does your organization use to improve overall employee well-being? (select all that apply)





## Finding: Well-being leaders are twice as likely to build a culture that supports well-being

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to use the listed strategies to improve employee well-being.

Well-being leaders consistently outpace laggards across well-being strategies, with the largest gaps in building a supportive culture (81% vs. 40%), offering wellness programs (75% vs. 35%), and providing competitive compensation (65% vs. 31%). Even core well-being strategies such as promoting work-life balance (75% vs. 44%) show substantial differences.

The gap extends to execution-focused well-being strategies, including acting on employee feedback (56% vs. 37%) and training leaders to support well-being (46% vs. 21%).



## Integration of Well-Being Programs



### Finding: Most organizations report only moderate integration of well-being initiatives, limiting a truly holistic approach

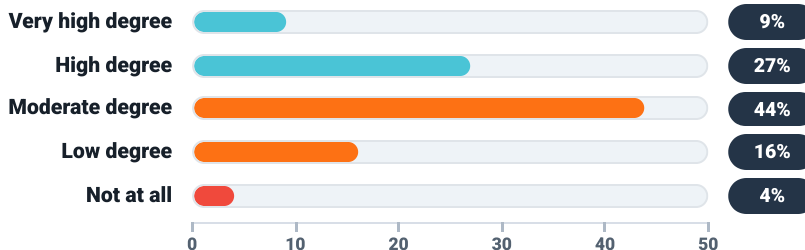
HR professionals report mixed levels of integration across well-being initiatives, with some organizations offering coordinated approaches while others still operate programs in isolation.

A majority of organizations rate their well-being initiatives as only moderately integrated or less, suggesting that many programs still do not work together as a fully cohesive system. The largest single group (44%) rates integration as moderate.

Only 36% report high (27%) or very high (9%) integration, while 20% report low (16%) or no integration (4%).

In short, most organizations have only fragmented integrations. This dilutes impact, leading to inconsistent employee experiences and reduced effectiveness of well-being investments.

#### To what degree do you feel the various wellness initiatives in your organization are well integrated with one another to create a comprehensive and "holistic" approach to employee well-being?



Editor's Note: In the original data, 5% of respondents replied "don't know." For this chart, we removed those responses and recalculated.



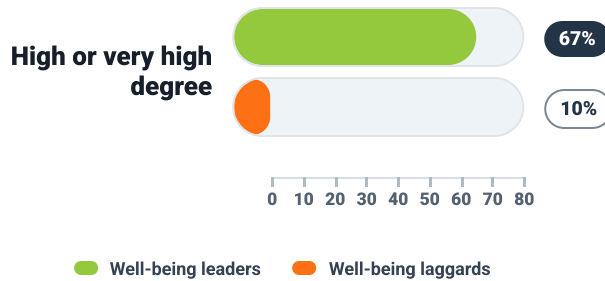
## Finding: Well-being leaders are over six times more likely to achieve high integration of well-being initiatives

Well-being leaders are far more likely to report that their well-being initiatives are highly integrated, with 67% indicating high or very high integration compared to just 10% of laggards. This marks one of the largest gaps, highlighting integration as a defining capability of well-being leaders.

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to say their well-being initiatives are well-integrated with one another.

**To what degree do you feel the various wellness initiatives in your organization are well integrated with one another to create a comprehensive and "holistic" approach to employee well-being?**



## Outcomes of Well-Being Programs



### Finding: Employee engagement and experience are the primary outcomes of well-being initiatives

As a result of well-being initiatives, HR professionals most often report improvements in engagement (54%), employee experience (51%), and retention (49%). However, impact is less widely cited across performance (41%), stress reduction (37%), and absenteeism (34%), indicating that deeper or more sustained outcomes are less consistently achieved.

Fewer organizations report gains in attraction for potential employees (32%), wellness metrics (28%), and cost reduction (25%), while creativity remains the least cited outcome (16%). This is notable given that one of the original drivers behind workplace wellness programs was reducing rising healthcare expenses, whereas current well-being efforts are now more often associated with engagement and employee experience outcomes.

Further, 18% select "don't know," highlighting a lack of visibility or measurement around outcomes.



## Outcomes of Well-Being Programs (continued)

Which of the following are outcomes of employee well-being initiatives in your organization? (select all that apply)





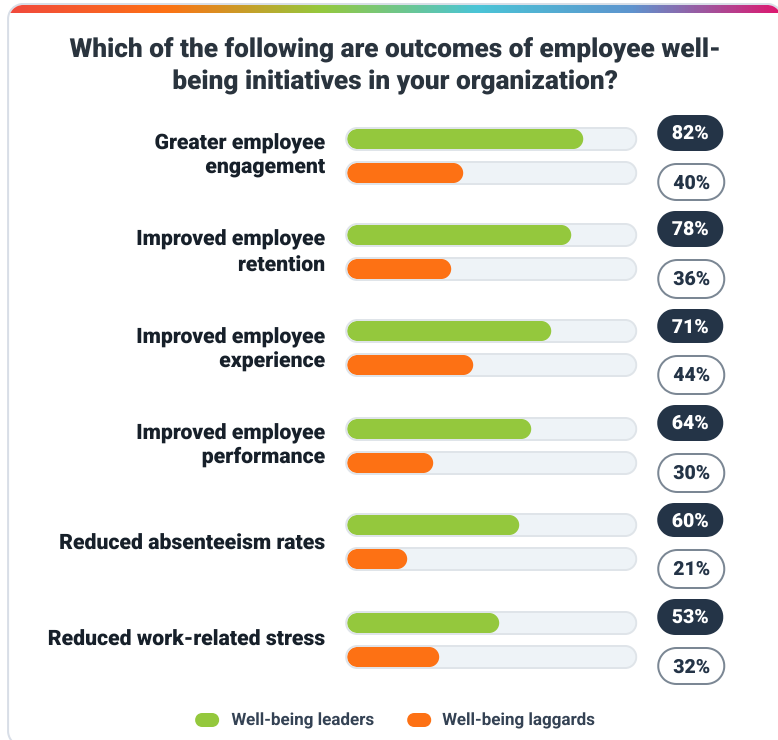
## Finding: Well-being leader organizations are over twice as likely to report better employee engagement due to well-being initiatives

Well-being leaders consistently report stronger well-being outcomes than laggards, with the largest gaps in engagement (82% vs. 40%) and retention (78% vs. 36%). Substantial differences also appear in performance (64% vs. 30%) and absenteeism (60% vs. 21%).

Even in areas like stress reduction (53% vs. 32%) and attraction (53% vs. 22%), leaders outperform by a wide margin, showing more consistent impact across outcomes. These differences suggest that leaders focus on execution, integration, and measurement to convert well-being strategies into tangible business and employee outcomes.

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to say employee well-being results in the listed outcomes.





## Finding: Well-being leaders are nearly four times more likely to report higher productivity

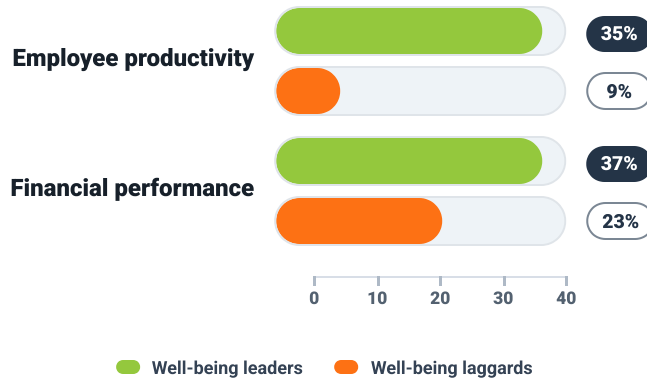
### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to be in the top 10% of employee productivity and financial performance.

Well-being leaders report substantially stronger business outcomes, with 35% indicating higher productivity compared to just 9% of laggards. A similar pattern appears in financial performance (37% vs. 23%), though the gap is far less pronounced.

These differences show that well-being leaders are more likely to translate well-being strategies into measurable business results, particularly in productivity.

**Please rate your organization's relative performance in the most recent fiscal year compared to competitors in your industry in the following areas** (% responding top 10% or higher)



## HRRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Focus on how well-being strategies are applied in day-to-day work.** Many organizations offer flexibility, wellness programs, and policies, but these do not always translate into better employee experiences. For example, flexible work policies may exist, but heavy workloads or unclear expectations prevent employees from using them. Organizations should ensure managers actively support these policies, monitor workloads, and create an environment where employees feel comfortable using available benefits.
- **Build manager capability to deliver well-being consistently.** Managers have the strongest influence on employee experience, yet few organizations invest in preparing them. Organizations can provide practical training on recognizing signs of burnout, having regular one-on-one conversations, and setting realistic goals. Embedding well-being expectations into manager performance reviews can also reinforce accountability.
- **Bring all well-being initiatives together into one clear strategy.** When programs operate separately, employees experience them as disconnected and less effective. Organizations should align initiatives under a single framework, define shared goals, and ensure coordination across HR, leadership, and business teams. For example, linking mental health programs with workload management and flexible work policies creates a more cohesive experience.
- **Use well-being data to drive decisions and improve programs.** Collecting data is not enough if it does not inform action. Use insights from engagement, retention, absenteeism, and productivity trends to regularly review which initiatives are delivering results and which are not. Establish a simple review cadence, such as quarterly check-ins, to adjust or discontinue low-impact programs and scale those that show clear value.
- **Adopt practices used by high-performing organizations.** Organizations that report stronger results consistently invest more in culture, integration, and execution. For example, they act on employee feedback, ensure leadership involvement, and connect well-being initiatives across areas. Other organizations can benchmark these practices and gradually scale them to improve consistency and impact.

# Organizations Emphasize Healthcare Access But Underinvest in Proactive Well-Being



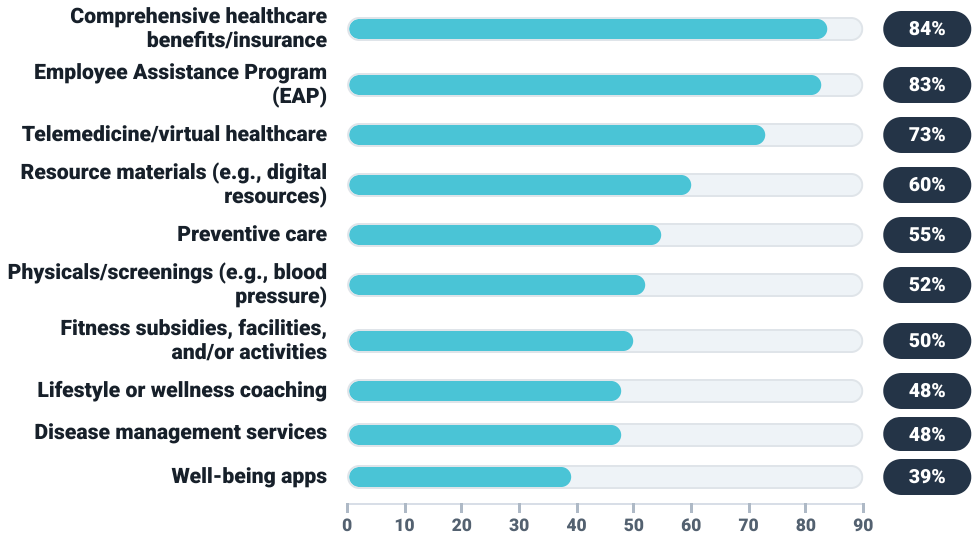
## Finding: Physical well-being practices center on healthcare

When it comes to helping employees maintain their physical well-being, organizations primarily rely on comprehensive healthcare benefits (84%) and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) (83%), followed by telemedicine (73%), showing a strong focus on access to care and support services. Preventive care (55%) and screenings (52%) receive moderate attention, indicating some emphasis on early intervention.

Adoption declines across more proactive and behavior-driven supports such as fitness initiatives (50%), disease management (48%), and wellness coaching (48%). Digital tools such as well-being apps are used by only 39%, suggesting limited use of scalable, continuous engagement solutions.



**Which of the following does your organization have in place, either directly or via a partner organization, to promote physical well-being?** (select all that apply)



**Just two-fifths offer well-being apps**



## Finding: Well-being leaders are twice as likely to prioritize coaching and digital tools

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to offer the listed initiatives to promote physical well-being.

Leaders consistently outpace laggards in providing physical well-being supports, particularly in lifestyle coaching (66% vs. 40%) and well-being apps (54% vs. 33%). Even access to resource materials shows a notable gap (72% vs. 56%).

These differences indicate that leaders invest more in continuous, behavior-driven well-being strategies, while laggards rely more on basic or static resources.



## HRRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Expand beyond healthcare benefits to support daily health behaviors.** Most organizations provide strong access to healthcare, but fewer help employees build healthy habits. For example, introduce fitness challenges, step-count programs, or nutrition support that encourage regular engagement rather than one-time use of benefits.
- **Increase use of digital tools to support continuous well-being.** Digital tools remain underused despite their ability to scale support. Organizations can promote well-being apps, integrate them with existing programs, and use reminders or gamification to keep employees engaged over time.
- **Invest more in coaching and personalized support.** Coaching helps employees translate knowledge into action, yet adoption is still limited. Offering lifestyle or wellness coaching, either virtually or in person, can support areas such as nutrition, exercise, and chronic condition management.
- **Strengthen preventive care and early intervention efforts.** Preventive services are available but not always fully utilized. Organizations can increase awareness through targeted communication, provide incentives for screenings, and make it easier for employees to access preventive services.
- **Learn from leaders by shifting toward proactive and ongoing support.** Leading organizations invest more in continuous and behavior-driven approaches. Other organizations can follow this by combining healthcare benefits with coaching, digital tools, and regular engagement initiatives to create a more complete well-being strategy.

# Financial Stress Is Driven by Immediate Pressures, But Support Focuses on Long-Term Benefits

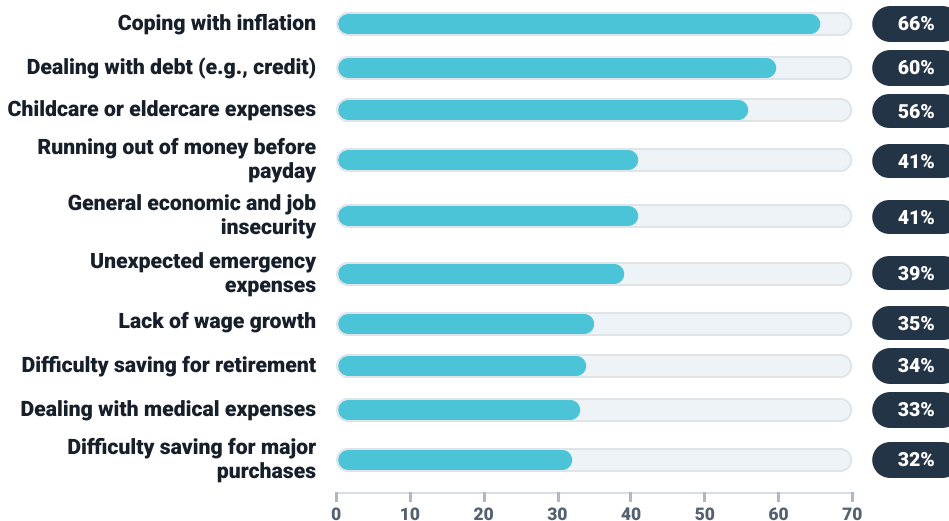


## Finding: Inflation is the top financial stressor for employees

Inflation (66%) leads as the primary source of financial stress, followed by debt (60%) and childcare or eldercare expenses (56%), highlighting the pressure of rising living costs.

General economic and job insecurity (41%), running out of money before payday (41%), and emergency expenses (39%) point to ongoing short-term financial strain. In contrast, longer-term concerns such as wage growth (35%) and retirement savings (34%) receive less emphasis.

### What do you believe are your employees' five greatest sources of financial stress? (select up to five)



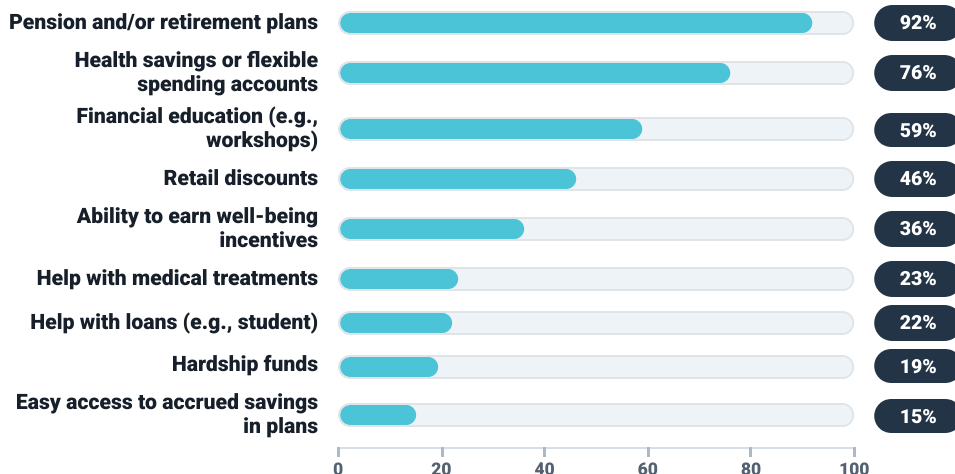


## Finding: Pension and retirement benefits lead financial support initiatives

Organizations heavily emphasize retirement-focused benefits, with 92% offering pension or retirement plans and 76% providing savings accounts. Financial education (59%) is also common, indicating a focus on long-term financial planning.

In contrast, fewer organizations offer support for immediate financial needs, such as medical help (23%), loan assistance (22%), hardship funds (19%), or access to accrued savings (15%). This indicates a gap between long-term planning tools and short-term financial realities. This gap is particularly important given that financial pressure is now believed to affect 72% of employees and has overtaken workload as the leading source of stress (as we see later in this report).

### Which of these initiatives does your organization offer to employees?



One-fifth offer assistance with loans

## HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Address immediate financial pressures alongside long-term planning.** Employees are most affected by inflation, debt, and caregiving costs, yet support focuses on retirement. Organizations should consider and vet other initiatives. For example, they could introduce short-term support such as emergency savings accounts, grocery or transportation subsidies, and financial assistance for caregiving expenses.
- **Expand practical financial support tools.** Many employees struggle with day-to-day financial pressures and cash-flow challenges. Organizations can explore practical supports such as flexible pay options, emergency savings programs, or targeted financial assistance based on workforce needs.
- **Make financial education more practical and action-oriented.** Financial education is common but often focused on long-term planning. Shift content toward budgeting, managing inflation, and handling unexpected expenses, using tools, workshops, and real-life scenarios that employees can apply immediately.
- **Align financial well-being strategy with employee realities.** Current offerings do not fully reflect the financial challenges employees face. Use employee feedback and data to identify key stress points and adjust programs accordingly, ensuring support covers both short-term needs and long-term financial security.

# Work Environment Strategies Emphasize Comfort Over Holistic Well-Being

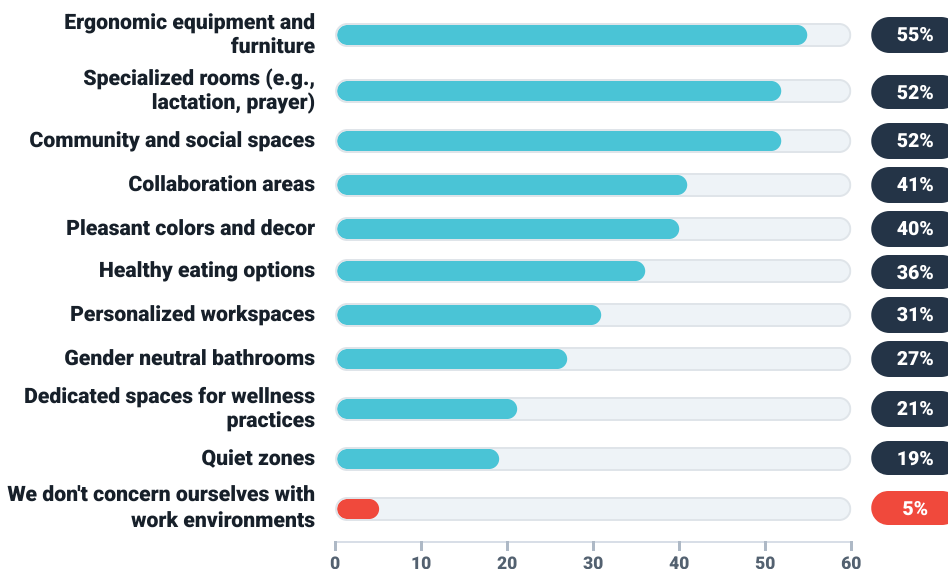


## Finding: Work environment efforts focus on ergonomics

When it comes to improving the employee work environment, organizations most commonly invest in ergonomic equipment (55%), social spaces (52%), and specialized rooms (52%). This reflects attention to workplace safety, inclusion, and basic workplace functionality. The strong emphasis on ergonomics likely reflects ongoing concerns about repetitive stress injuries and other physical strain associated with modern work environments. Mid-level adoption of collaboration areas (41%) and workplace aesthetics (40%) suggests attention to general work environment improvements.

However, fewer organizations provide dedicated wellness spaces (21%) or quiet zones (19%), indicating limited support for focused recovery, reflection, or mental well-being within the workspace.

### Which of the following does your organization have in place to promote well-being via an improved work environment? (select all that apply)





## Finding: Well-being leader organizations are twice as likely as laggards to invest in collaboration spaces

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to offer the listed initiatives to promote well-being via improved work environment.

Leaders consistently invest more in work environment well-being, with the most pronounced gap in collaboration areas (63% vs. 32%). This is particularly notable in an era where remote and hybrid work have reduced everyday in-person interaction. The findings suggest that well-being leaders may recognize the continued importance of intentional spaces that support collaboration, connection, relationship-building, and team cohesion within the workplace.

They also lead in workplace aesthetics such as colors and decor (57% vs. 32%) and healthy eating options (53% vs. 26%), showing a broader commitment to enhancing the employee experience. Social spaces (69% vs. 43%) and ergonomics (65% vs. 50%) further reinforce this pattern.



### Which of the following does your organization have in place to promote well-being via an improved work environment?



## HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Expand beyond ergonomics to support mental well-being at work.** Most organizations focus on physical comfort but provide limited support for mental recovery. For example, create quiet zones, meditation rooms, or low-stimulation areas where employees can recharge during the workday.
- **Design workplaces that support both collaboration and focus.** While collaboration spaces are increasing, focused work areas are often overlooked. Organizations can balance open and collaborative areas with private or quiet spaces to support different types of work.
- **Use workplace design to improve daily employee experience.** Work environments can influence mood, energy, and productivity. Simple changes such as better lighting, access to natural elements, and comfortable shared spaces can improve overall well-being.
- **Encourage use of well-being spaces, not just availability.** Even when spaces exist, employees may not use them. Promote awareness, normalize usage through leadership behavior, and integrate these spaces into daily routines.
- **Learn from leaders by investing in a broader workplace experience.** Leaders invest more consistently across multiple areas of the work environment. Organizations can adopt a more balanced approach by combining ergonomics, social spaces, and well-being-focused areas to create a more supportive and engaging workplace.

# Mental Health Challenges Are Widespread, But Support Remains Largely Reactive

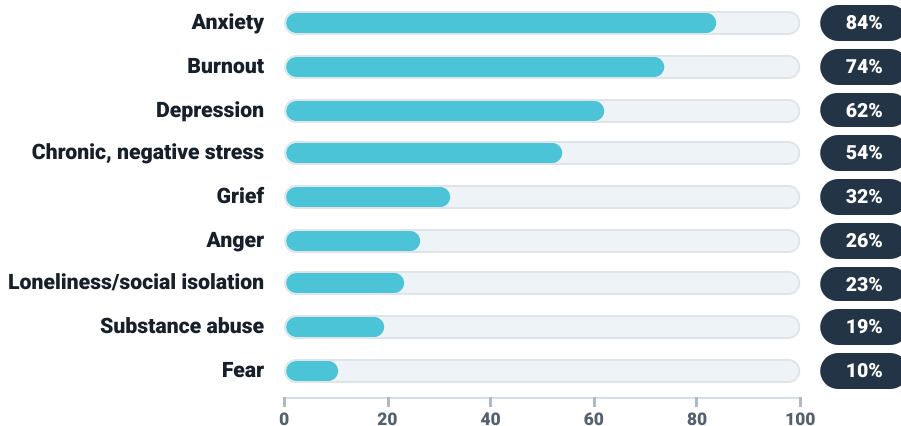


## Finding: Mental health challenges are widespread, led by anxiety and burnout

Anxiety (84%) emerges as the most common mental-health-related issue, followed by burnout (74%) and depression (62%). Chronic stress (54%) further reinforces the persistence of ongoing strain rather than short-term episodes.

Other issues such as grief (32%), anger (26%), and loneliness (23%) are reported less frequently but still affect a notable portion of employees.

**To your knowledge, which five of the following mental-health-related issues are employees in your organization most likely to have dealt with over the past year? (select up to five)**



**Over half of respondents say depression is among the top five issues employees have dealt with over the past year**

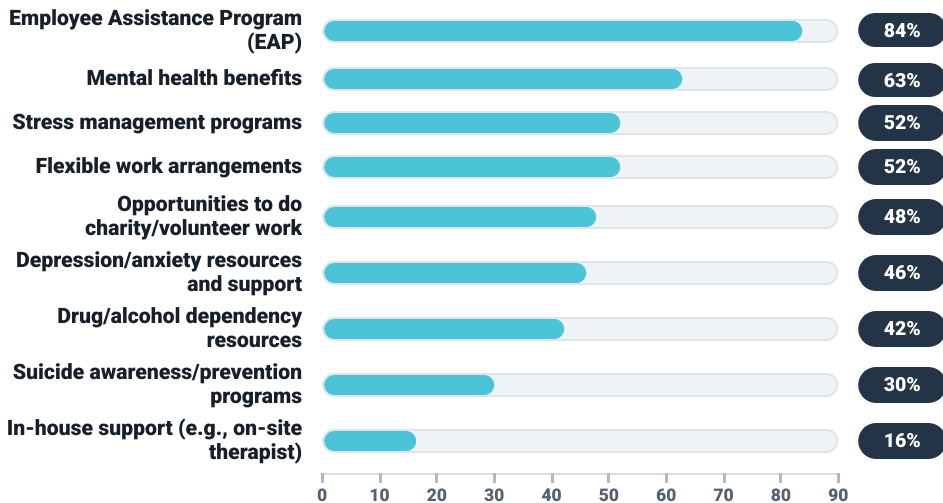


## Finding: Mental health support relies heavily on EAPs

Organizations rely heavily on EAP services (84%) and mental health benefits (63%), indicating a strong focus on external, benefits-based support. Flexible work (52%) and stress management programs (52%) are also fairly widely used ways of reducing day-to-day mental strain.

However, fewer organizations provide more direct or intensive support, such as suicide prevention (30%) or in-house services like on-site therapists (16%). Most organizations instead rely on broader and more accessible resources such as EAPs, mental health benefits, flexible work arrangements, and stress management programs to support employee mental health.

### Which initiatives does your organization offer to support employee mental health? (select all that apply)





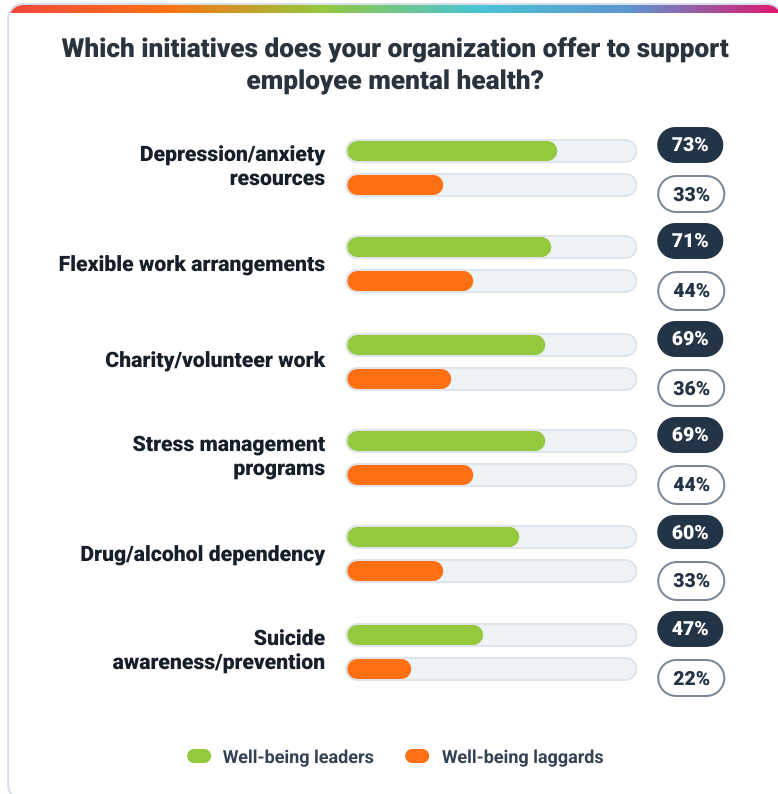
## Finding: Well-being leaders are over twice as likely as laggards to provide depression/anxiety support

Leader organizations invest far more in core mental health supports, with the largest gap in depression and anxiety resources (73% vs. 33%). Similar differences appear across flexible work (71% vs. 44%) and stress management programs (69% vs. 44%), indicating a broader and more proactive approach.

Gaps also persist in areas such as substance abuse support (60% vs. 33%) and suicide prevention (47% vs. 22%), showing that leaders are more likely to address both everyday and critical mental health needs.

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to offer the listed initiatives to promote mental health.



## HRRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Move beyond EAPs to provide ongoing mental health support.** EAPs are widely available but often underused and reactive. Organizations can introduce regular mental health check-ins, embed support into daily workflows, and offer easier access to ongoing care such as virtual counseling or on-site resources.
- **Focus on prevention, not just support after issues arise.** High levels of anxiety and burnout indicate ongoing strain. Organizations can address root causes by managing workloads, setting realistic expectations, and promoting regular breaks and recovery time.
- **Expand access to core mental health resources.** Support for anxiety and depression is not consistently available across organizations. Providing dedicated resources, such as therapy coverage, guided programs, and self-help tools, can help employees manage common mental health challenges earlier.
- **Normalize conversations around mental health.** Stigma can prevent employees from using available resources. Leaders and managers can model open conversations, share available support options, and create a culture where seeking help is encouraged.
- **Adopt a more comprehensive approach like leading organizations.** Leaders provide broader and more proactive support across multiple areas. Organizations can follow this by combining flexible work, stress management, and targeted mental health programs to create more consistent and effective support.

# Employee Stress Is Rising, Driven by Financial Pressure and Workload

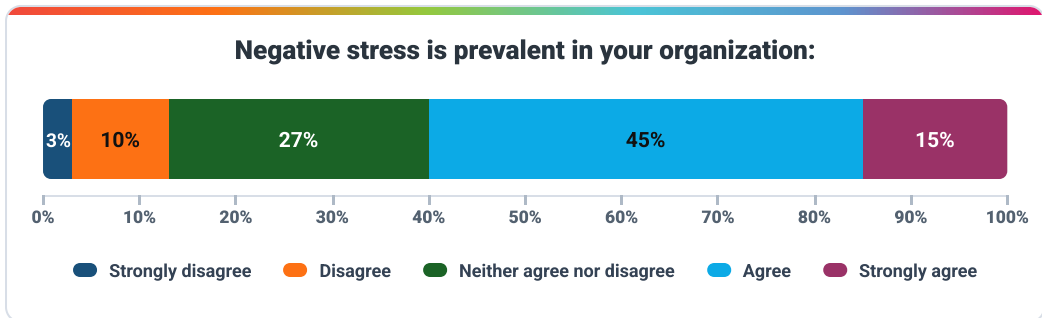


## Finding: Negative stress is prevalent in three-fifths of organizations

A majority of HR professionals agree (45%) or strongly agree (15%) that negative stress (harmful or chronic stress that negatively impacts employee well-being) is prevalent in their workplaces. Only 12% disagree (10%) or strongly disagree (2%), while 27% remain neutral. The strong skew toward agreement highlights that stress is not isolated but embedded in many day-to-day work experiences.

### Differences based on size of organization:

Respondents from large organizations are more likely to report negative stress (70%) compared to midsize (60%) and small organizations (45%).





## Finding: Negative stress reached a new high in 2026

The overall agreement that negative stress is prevalent has fluctuated over the last four years. In 2023, 45% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. This spiked to 56% in 2024, dropped back down to 47% in 2025, and then shot up to a high of 60% in 2026. The massive spike in visible stress in 2026 aligns with the explosive rise in financial worries noted below.



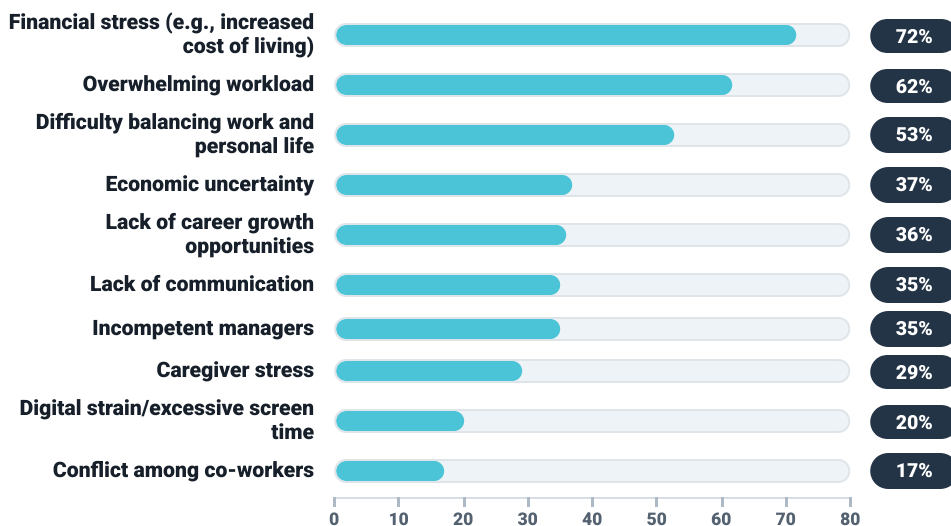


## Finding: Workload and financial stress are the top drivers of employee strain

Employee stress is driven by a combination of financial pressures and workplace conditions. Financial pressure (72%) emerges as the most common stressor, followed by overwhelming workload (62%) and difficulty balancing work and personal life (53%). These top factors point to both external economic strain and internal work demands shaping employee stress.

Mid-level stressors such as economic uncertainty (37%), limited career growth (36%), poor communication (35%), and ineffective managers (35%) highlight organizational gaps that further contribute to strain. Lower-ranked factors like caregiver stress (29%) and digital strain (20%) still affect a notable share of employees. However, with only 29% of organizations addressing digital well-being, this area remains underprioritized despite its continued impact, suggesting a gap between emerging stressors and organizational response.

### In your organization, what are the five most common employee stressors? (select up to five)



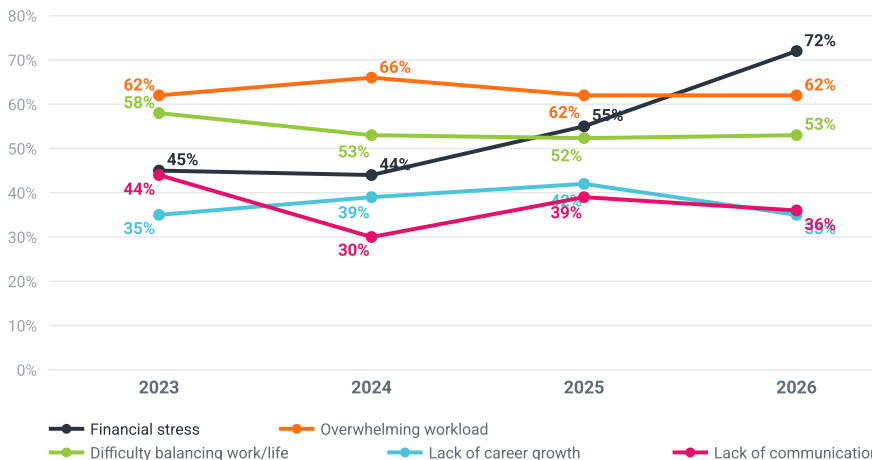


## Finding: For the first time in four years, financial stress is now a bigger problem than heavy workloads

The year-over-year data highlights a dramatic shift in what is hurting employees the most. From 2023 to 2024, financial stress was completely flat, moving only from 45% to 44%. It started to bubble up in 2025, reaching 55%. Then, in 2026, it exploded to 72%.

Overwhelming workload has had a different journey. It started high at 62% in 2023, peaked at 66% in 2024, and has slowly declined back down to 62% by 2026. Another positive long-term trend is the steady drop in work-life balance stress, declining from 58% in 2023 to 53% in 2024 and holding at that level since.

### In your organization, what are the five most common employee stressors? (select up to five)



Note: The 2023 and 2024 surveys asked for general top stressors, while 2025 and 2026 specifically asked respondents to select the top five.

## HRR I Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Address financial stress as a core well-being priority.** Financial pressure has become the leading source of stress, surpassing workload. Organizations can support employees through financial wellness programs focused on budgeting, debt management, and emergency savings as well as by offering benefits such as subsidies, hardship funds, or flexible pay options.
- **Reduce workload pressure through better work design.** Workload remains a major contributor to stress across organizations. Review team capacity, redistribute tasks, and remove low-value work. Simplifying processes and setting realistic deadlines can help reduce daily strain.
- **Take a combined approach to stress management.** Stress is driven by both external and internal factors, not just one. Organizations should combine financial support with workplace improvements such as clearer communication, better role clarity, and stronger management practices.
- **Monitor stress levels regularly and act quickly.** Stress levels are not stable and have increased in recent years. Use pulse surveys, check-ins, and team-level data to track stress trends and respond early before issues escalate.
- **Tailor solutions based on organizational context.** Stress drivers vary by organization size and workforce needs. For example, focus more on financial support in small and mid-sized organizations, and prioritize workload management and staffing in larger organizations.

# Planning for Well-Being in the Face of AI and External Uncertainty



## Finding: Monitoring well-being impact and financial wellness lead future plans

Organizations most commonly plan to improve how they track the link between well-being and employee satisfaction (46%) and expand financial wellness programs (44%), signaling a growing focus on measurement and financial stress. Health information resources (37%) and volunteer opportunities (29%) follow, indicating moderate expansion across supportive initiatives.

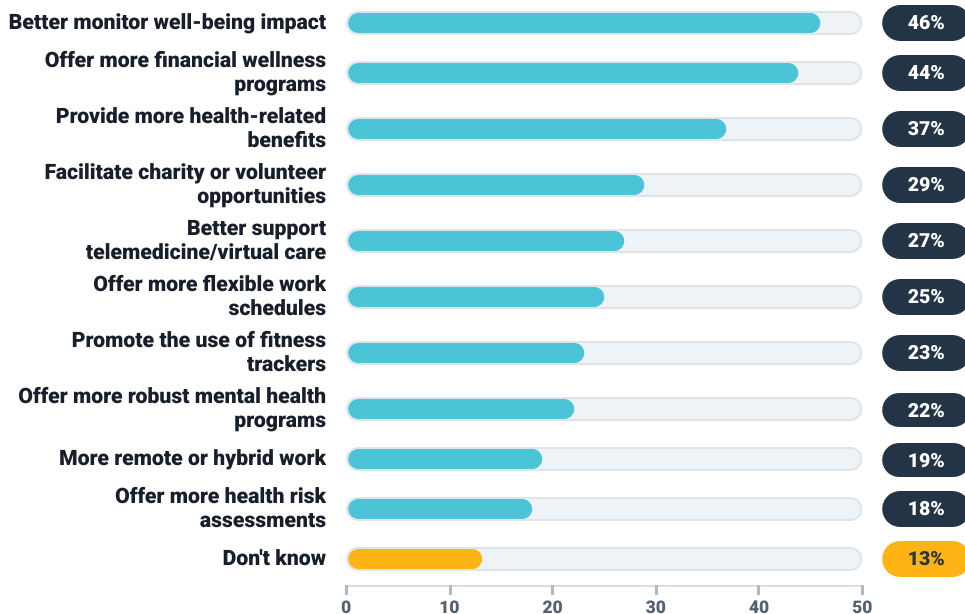
Lower priorities include telemedicine (27%), flexible schedules (25%), and mental health programs (22%), indicating limited momentum in strengthening core well-being supports. Adoption of digital tools (23%) and hybrid work (19%) also remains relatively modest.

Notably, 13% select “don’t know,” highlighting uncertainty or lack of clarity in future well-being planning. Unclear direction and uneven prioritization may limit the effectiveness of future well-being investments.

### Under a fifth plan to offer health risk assessments



### Which of the following well-being-related initiatives does your organization plan to implement or maintain over the next two years?





## Finding: AI is expected to ease workload stress but may also heighten anxiety about job security

HR professionals most often expect AI to automate repetitive tasks (50%), reducing workload-related stress. However, a third anticipate increased job-related anxiety or fear of obsolescence, highlighting a dual impact on well-being.

Other anticipated benefits, such as improved collaboration (33%) and predictive risk detection (26%), suggest the potential for more proactive well-being support. At the same time, expected adoption of personalized recommendations (23%) and enhanced mental health tools (20%) remains moderate.

Notably, 23% select “don’t know,” indicating uncertainty about AI’s role, while concerns around privacy (14%) and bias (10%) further complicate its perceived impact. Without clear strategy and safeguards, AI may simultaneously reduce and create new sources of employee stress.

### How do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will impact employee well-being in your organization over the next two years? (select all that apply)





## Finding: Well-being leader organizations are twice as likely as laggards to use AI for personalized well-being

Leaders show a stronger focus on using AI to enhance well-being, particularly in delivering personalized recommendations (38% vs 17%). They also lead in improving virtual collaboration tools (44% vs 29%), indicating broader use of AI to enhance employee experience.

This suggests that leaders adopt AI more proactively to support both individual well-being and day-to-day work, while laggards lag in leveraging its potential.

### Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that well-being leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to anticipate the use of AI for well-being in the listed ways.

### How do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will impact employee well-being in your organization over the next two years?



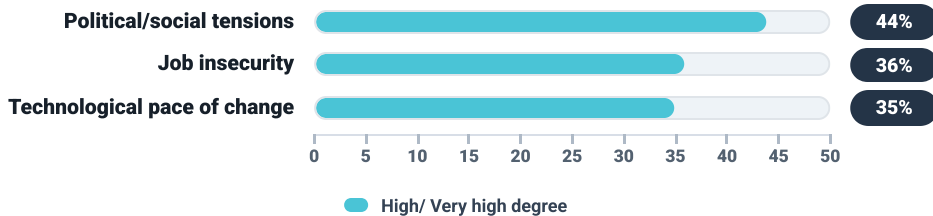


## Finding: Political/social tensions outpace job insecurity and technology as top future risks to employee well-being

HR professionals continue to identify political and social tensions (44%) as the leading high-impact risk to employee well-being, exceeding both job insecurity (36%) and the technological pace of change (35%). While lower than last year (49%), this factor remains the most prominent, reinforcing the sustained influence of external pressures.

The consistency of this pattern suggests that broader societal instability continues to shape employee stress and mental health. However, many organizations still focus primarily on internal drivers, such as job security and workplace change, which rank lower in comparison.

### To what extent will these issues lead to decreased employee well-being over the next two years?



Editor's note: In the original data, 12% to 18% of respondents replied "don't know." For this chart, we removed those responses and recalculated.

## HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, please consider the following suggestions:

- **Set a clear and focused well-being roadmap.** Future plans are spread across multiple areas, with some uncertainty. Organizations should define a few key priorities, such as financial well-being or stress reduction, and align all initiatives and investments around those goals instead of spreading efforts too thin.
- **Strengthen financial well-being as a near-term priority.** Financial stress continues to grow and is reflected in future plans. Organizations can expand financial wellness programs, offer tools for managing expenses and debt, and provide practical support such as savings programs or financial counseling.
- **Use AI carefully to balance benefits and risks.** AI can reduce workload but may also increase anxiety about job security. Organizations should communicate clearly about how AI will be used, provide reskilling opportunities, and ensure employees understand how technology supports rather than replaces them.
- **Leverage AI to personalize well-being support.** Leaders are already using AI more effectively to enhance employee experience. Organizations can explore tools that provide personalized recommendations, identify well-being risks early, and improve collaboration, while ensuring privacy and fairness.
- **Prepare for external stressors, not just internal ones.** Political and social tensions are emerging as major risks to well-being. Organizations can support employees by strengthening communication, offering mental health resources, and creating safe spaces for dialogue during times of uncertainty.

# Key Takeaways

## 1

### **Prioritize the biggest drivers of employee stress**

Financial stress (72%) and workload (62%) are the top contributors. Focus well-being efforts on reducing these pressures rather than expanding general programs.

## 2

### **Balance financial well-being support**

Although 92% offer retirement plans, only 15% to 23% provide short-term financial support. Add solutions that address immediate financial needs.

## 3

### **Expand beyond traditional well-being areas**

While 77% focus on physical and 71% on mental well-being, only 29% address digital well-being. Update strategies to reflect modern work conditions.

## 4

### **Shift from offering programs to improving impact**

Only 36% report high effectiveness of well-being initiatives. Review existing initiatives and focus on those that deliver measurable results.

## 5

### **Improve integration across well-being initiatives**

Only 36% report high or very high integration of well-being initiatives. Align programs under a unified strategy to avoid fragmented efforts and inconsistent employee experiences.

## Key Takeaways (continued)

**6**

### Strengthen measurement to track real outcomes

With 11% not measuring well-being and many relying on indirect metrics, connect initiatives to outcomes such as levels of health and well-being, healthcare costs, engagement, retention, and performance.

**7**

### Invest in leadership capability

Only 29% train managers to support employee well-being, yet leaders are over 2x more likely to achieve strong outcomes such as engagement (82% vs 40%). Equip managers to support well-being daily.

**8**

### Adopt more proactive and continuous support models

Current approaches rely heavily on healthcare (84%) and EAPs (84%), but fewer organizations invest in coaching (48%) or digital tools (39%). Increase ongoing, behavior-based support.

**9**

### Address rising mental health challenges more directly

Anxiety (84%) and burnout (74%) are widespread, yet organizations still rely heavily on reactive supports such as EAPs. Expand access to consistent mental health resources, stress management support, and preventive well-being practices that employees can access regularly.

**10**

### Prepare for emerging risks and uncertainty

Political and social tensions (44%) and AI-related anxiety (33%) are growing concerns. Support employees through change with clear communication and adaptable strategies.



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