



American  
Heart  
Association.

An American Heart Association  
study conducted by The Harris Poll.

# Voice of the Employee Survey

**2026**



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# Executive Summary

Survey results highlighted key focus areas for healthcare quality, accessibility, and affordability. This data offers a foundation from which CEOs, HR leaders, and policymakers can optimize their programs.

The American Heart Association's 2026 Voice of the Employee Survey reveals a workforce highly motivated to improve its health but constrained in its ability to do so.

Employees are setting goals for exercise, nutrition, sleep, and financial well-being. However, for many, achieving those health goals feels out of reach due to time and financial constraints.

The result is a growing gap between intention and action. Employees are looking to employers to help fill that gap.

In March 2026, the American Heart Association worked with The Harris Poll to survey 2,001 employees who rely on their employers for insurance and wellness benefits.

**This survey explores the opinions, perspectives, and self-reported experiences of those employees at this moment in time:**

- **95%** are actively trying to improve their health and well-being
- **50%** report healthcare costs have affected their ability to pay for day-to-day expenses, including food, childcare, and rent
- **47%** have stopped or decreased retirement contributions

The findings show motivation is not the issue.

Employees face barriers that make health difficult to sustain: rising healthcare and living costs, caregiving responsibilities, and the structure and intensity of work.

These barriers limit employees' ability to maintain healthy behaviors, and they are looking to employers for support and guidance.

Notably, the areas employees most want to improve are also where they struggle most. Work-life balance and stress management emerge as critical pressure points. Many employees indicate that their job makes it harder to prioritize their health.

To address this, employees are seeking their own solutions and using multiple tools, including AI, to manage their health and navigate benefits. This reflects urgency and unmet needs as employees look for support.

At the same time, **90%** of employees would welcome more support from their employer, specifically to manage their health. And they expect that support to be practical, accessible, and embedded in their daily work.

**Employees pointed to wide-ranging opportunities for employer support:**

- **84%** cite challenges navigating employer-provided health benefits
- **28%** currently use AI tools, and **73%** are interested in more AI-powered health solutions from employers
- **92%** believe health and well-being should be supported through day-to-day work practices, not just policies and programs

Organizations that address these barriers and align support with how work actually happens are better positioned to improve well-being, sustain performance, and retain talent.

# Current Employee Health Trends & Challenges

Survey respondents demonstrated clear goals, challenges, and priorities for their health – as well as how they currently support it. These results lay a strong foundation for effective engagement.

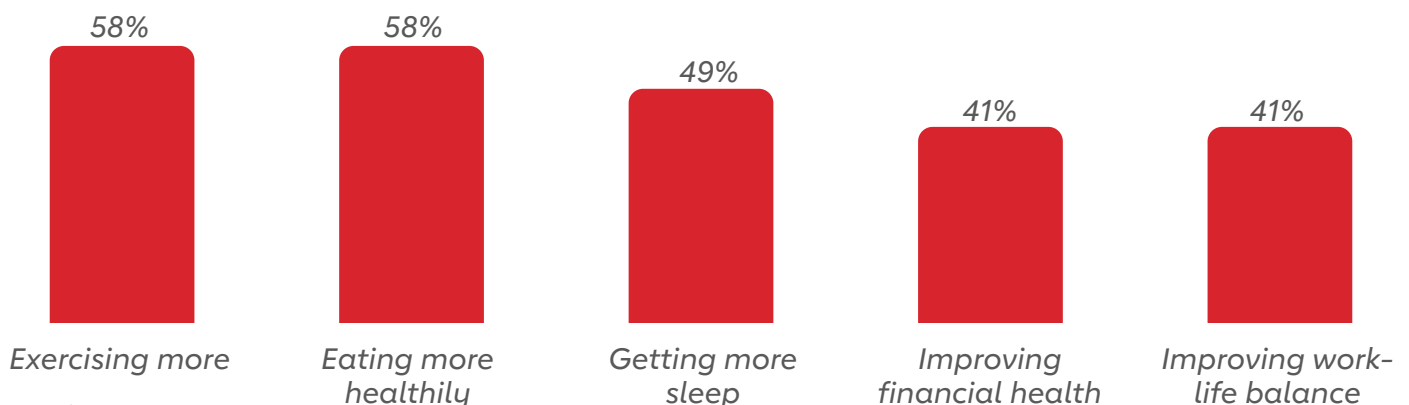
## Employees Care About Their Health

Across the board, survey respondents have multiple goals related to their health – reporting **5 health and lifestyle goals on average**. This trend makes it clear that employees view health not as a single dimension of well-being, but as an interconnected set of priorities. They also expect employers to consider them in a similarly holistic way.

Generally, employee goals focus on lifestyle improvements, such as sleep, exercise, and nutrition. However, many respondents also cited goals focused more directly on the workplace:

- **Nearly 1 in 2** employees at large and very large companies want to improve work-life balance
- **1 in 3** employees at all company types want to reduce stress and burnout

## Top 5 Employee Health & Lifestyle Goals in 2026



# 95%

*Of respondents are actively trying to improve their health and well-being.*

### Broad Employee Health Trends

Employees in 2026 are focused on their health and well-being.

Not only do they consider it a priority for themselves, but they also expect their employers to prioritize their health through policies and workplace values.

- **97%** have health and lifestyle goals
- **90%** would welcome more health-related support from employers
- **78%** believe employers should play an active role in their health and well-being

## Lack of Time, Motivation, and Support Can Hinder Employee Progress on Goals

While employees cite motivation for improving their health, several challenges and pain points impact their ability to achieve their goals.

Across the board, those challenges align with employee goals – specifically around nutrition, sleep, exercise, stress management, and work-life balance.

Nearly **1 in 3** employees report difficulty finding the time to work on their health.

That challenge compounds when other stressors, including financial stress and caregiving obligations, enter the mix.

**51%**

*Of respondents say family and caregiving responsibilities make it hard to prioritize health.*

“

*I would appreciate more flexible scheduling options that allow me to balance personal responsibilities with work demands, reducing stress and giving me more time to focus on my physical and mental well-being.*

- Woman, 41 | Medium-size Company

## Top 5 Employee Challenges in 2026 – and Where They Want Support\*

### Eating Healthily



### Getting Enough Quality Sleep



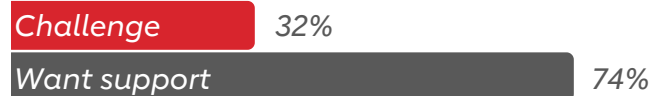
### Staying Physically Active



### Managing Work-Life Balance



### Managing Stress, Burnout, or Mental Health Concerns



\*Among those experiencing each challenge

## Well-Being and Productivity

The strong employee focus on work-life balance and reducing stress and burnout demonstrates an opportunity to support employee well-being by optimizing how work is structured and experienced day to day.

Organizations with aligned workplace practices are better positioned to support well-being and productivity.

## Employees Have Embraced Tools – and AI – To Manage Their Health and Track Goals

# 86%

*Of respondents use at least one tool in their daily lives to manage their health.*

Employees across the board rely on multiple tools to support their health management and goals, **using 3 tools or resources** on average.

Additionally, over **1 in 4** respondents report using AI websites or apps as a tool for regular health management, and **73%** are interested in AI solutions for health management provided by their employer.

Apps, memberships, and other tools that focus on lifestyle goals – specifically exercise and nutrition – rank among the most common resources for employees.

### Top 5 Most Popular Tools for Employees

- Gym memberships or fitness classes
- Wearable health or activity trackers
- Mobile health or fitness apps
- Nutrition or healthy eating resources
- AI websites or apps (i.e., ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc.)

“

*We leverage AI so much that it gives us an edge in understanding my health care benefits. I feel this helps us understand our health care benefits better because sometimes there's just so much information to read at once, AI helps us to summarize key points and best way to go.*

*- Man, 50 | Medium-size Company*

### AI & Health Management

Employees are using AI for health guidance and to help translate their health benefits and insurance.

Some survey respondents also use AI as a triage tool to help them understand their symptoms and determine whether they should seek care.

However, the most common ways employees leverage AI focus on lifestyle and wellness support:

- **48%** to manage stress or anxiety
- **47%** to create workout routines
- **42%** to track health goals
- **41%** to develop meal plans and nutrition guidance

These numbers suggest that many employees are comfortable using AI to support daily lifestyle actions.

# Priority Areas for Employer Support & Leadership

Survey respondents indicated that employers should play an active role in supporting employee health and well-being and provided clear focus areas for employer involvement and engagement.

## Employees Want More Support from Their Employers

Employees are clear on their stance. Employer support for health and well-being isn't a nice-to-have; it's an expectation.

And that expectation for support goes beyond basic benefits. **Only 22% believe an employer's role in health should be limited to providing insurance and benefits.**

This trend is even more pronounced the larger the organization is. Among very large employers with 10k+ employees, **83%** of respondents say employers actively support employee health, compared with **75%** from small companies.

“

*My employer could improve my overall health and well-being by offering more mental health support such as free counseling sessions, flexible work schedules to support work life balance, wellness stipends for gym memberships or healthy meals and regular wellness check-ins.*

- Man, 35 | Large-size Company

The survey results paint a holistic picture of the employer's role in the health of their employees. Employees don't just want support for mental, physical, and financial health. They also want targeted workplace policies to support well-being.

# 78%

*Of respondents believe employers should play an active role in supporting employee health and well-being.*

## Top 5 Areas of Expected Support



## A Note on Very Large Orgs

Employees from very large organizations **rated support for work-life balance, parental leave, and childcare ~10 percentage points higher**, on average, than those from smaller companies.

## Employees Feel Mixed on Employer Intent to Support vs. Their Experience of Support

While **84%** of employees believe their employers want to support their health and well-being, **50% agree their jobs make it difficult to prioritize their health.**

This trend is even more pronounced for employees at very large companies, **55%** of whom note difficulty in prioritizing health.

This disparity suggests there is room for more substantial, practical support within the workplace to ensure that health and well-being are appropriately prioritized.

Compared to other workplace perks, employees want to see more active investment in health programs and resources, with **87% prioritizing health-focused support over offsite activities, in-office food and drinks, or game rooms.**

# 90%

*Of respondents would welcome more health-related support from employers.*

“

*Having a strong work-life balance from C-Suite and executive level down – to highlight that having balance is encouraged – would be tremendous.*

*- Woman, 43 | Very Large-size Company*

## Organizational Culture and Leadership Examples Matter to Employees

Employees look to organizational leadership to demonstrate not only their commitment to supporting employee health, but also to set an example through their own values and behaviors.

# 93%

*Of respondents believe that health and well-being should be reflected in their organization's policies.*

### Driving Organizational Culture

Employees want health and well-being policies and initiatives embedded in their workplaces.

In practice, that looks like:

- Company leadership demonstrating good work-life balance (**93%**)
- Opportunities to volunteer for causes they care about (**80%**)
- Supporting health and well-being through the organizational approach to day-to-day work (**92%**)

## How Employees View Their Benefits

On the whole, survey respondents indicated that they are mostly satisfied with their health and wellness benefits. But that satisfaction comes with key caveats for employers.

### Employees Paint a Complex Picture of Employer Benefits

While **92%** of employees agree that health benefits are relatively easy to access when they need care, many still report difficulty fully understanding their benefits. This is particularly true when it comes to estimating costs, understanding covered services, and finding providers.

# 84%

*Of respondents cite challenges navigating employer-provided health benefits – including costs and covered services.*

These responses suggest opportunities exist for employers to embrace more robust offerings to meet employee needs. For example, **87%** of employees are comfortable with more personalized health offerings from their employers.

This personalization can take the form of tools and resources provided by employers:

- **88%** believe employers should provide health management tools and programs
- **73%** would be interested in AI tools from their employers

Additionally, employee responses point to another trend employers may want to keep an eye on: **affordability**.

# 50%

*Of respondents agree that rising healthcare costs have made it difficult for them to afford day-to-day expenses, including food, childcare, and rent.*

### Financial Stress and the Healthcare Landscape

Affordability remains a substantial issue for many. Rising healthcare costs are driving employees to pinch pennies in other aspects of their lives – with **47% of employees reducing or stopping their retirement contributions** due to the financial burden.

While employees at very large companies tend to be more protected from this cost burden – with **39% saying healthcare costs have affected their ability to pay for food, childcare, or rent compared to 50% of employees overall** – it's clear that these stressors impact quality of life.

## Employer Support Should Focus on Benefits that Provide Real Value

Employees showed a clear preference for employer benefits, support, and resources most likely to affect their quality of life.

That means prioritizing comprehensive health insurance, retirement offerings, and work arrangements or leave – as well as resources that could help them better manage stress, healthcare costs, and employer-provided benefits.

Employee responses showed less overall interest in benefits like wellness challenges, new-drug access, or educational content about health. With that in mind, employers may consider deprioritizing those elements of their benefits program in favor of more robust investment in the benefits and resources employees value most.

### Top 5 Most Valuable Benefits for Employees

1. Health insurance coverage
2. Retirement benefits
3. Flexible work arrangements
4. Health savings accounts
5. Paid family leave

### Top 5 Most Valuable Resource Topics from Employers

1. Caregiving responsibilities
2. Managing stress, burnout, and mental health
3. The cost of healthcare or health-related expenses
4. Managing work-life balance
5. Accessing new prescription drugs



*My employer could significantly improve my overall well-being by offering student loan repayment assistance and a generous emergency savings match program, which would reduce my financial stress.*

- Man, 45 | Medium-size Company

### Key Takeaways for Employers

The survey findings indicate that employees are motivated and engaged in improving their health, but their ability to do so is constrained by the structure of work, financial pressures, and the complexity of navigating benefits and resources.

Employers have a key role to play in closing that gap by:

- Aligning support with employee needs: work-life balance, stress and burnout, affordability, and overall wellness
- Understanding how a personalized approach can better support employees, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities and chronic conditions
- Moving beyond static benefits toward more accessible, personalized tools
- Ensuring leadership and organizational norms reinforce these efforts

Ultimately, organizations that treat employee health as a leadership and operational priority, rather than a benefits offering, will be better positioned to meet this moment for employees.

# Survey Methodology

The research was conducted online in the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the American Heart Association.

The Harris Poll conducted research among 2,001 employees, defined as U.S. adults age 18+ who are employed full or part time (not self-employed) with a company with 25+ employees, are enrolled in a health plan offered by their employer, and their coverage is provided by their employer.

The survey was conducted from February 26–March 12, 2026.

Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, employment, household income, as well as company size in order to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval.

For this study, the sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

## Respondents by Company Size

- **565** respondents from small companies (25–99 employees)
- **401** respondents from medium companies (100–999 employees)
- **556** respondents from large companies (1,000–9,999 employees)
- **479** respondents from very large companies (10,000+ employees)

## About The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is a global public opinion, analytics, and market research consultancy that strives to reveal society's authentic values to inspire leaders to create a better tomorrow.

With a global research reach of more than 90 countries, Harris offers advisory services across sectors to world leaders, CEOs, and business decision-makers with state-of-the-art analytics, real-time software services, and practitioners in marketing, reputation, customer experience, trends, futures, and thought leadership/research-for-public release. The Harris Poll translates shifting social sentiment into a competitive marketplace advantage.

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