



HR Edge

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Presented by Employco USA, Inc.

4 Wellness Trends Reshaping the Employee Experience

Today's employees expect more than health benefits. Employee wellness has entered a modern era defined by personalization, priority and purpose. Driven largely by younger generations changing the workforce, wellness is shifting from a perk to a core business strategy. In 2026, organizations are rethinking how they support their workforce not just physically, but also emotionally, socially and professionally. Here are some key trends shaping workplace wellness in 2026.

1. Gen Z and Millennials Are Redefining Wellness

Generation Z (Gen Z) and millennials make up the majority of the workforce—and they're reshaping wellness expectations. These generations (born between 1981 and 2012) prioritize holistic well-being, flexibility and inclusiveness. McKinsey's Future of Wellness research revealed that 30% of these cohorts are prioritizing wellness "a lot more" than one year ago, compared with up to 23% of older generations. Stress, burnout, anxiety and worry are top mental health concerns for Gen Z and millennials, and they're prioritizing health and sleep.

Furthermore, the Gen Z and millennial generations generally consider wellness a daily priority rather than an occasional indulgence. These young consumers are more likely to spend their hard-earned money on wellness-related items and services, including the following:

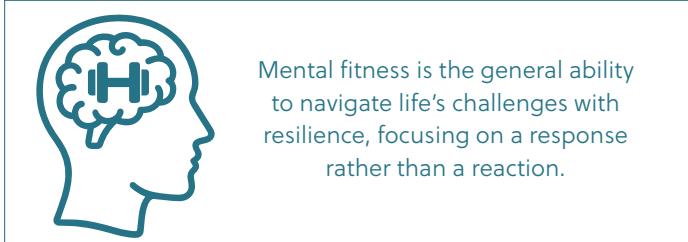
- Wearable technology
- Wellness coaching or retreats
- Fitness
- Recovery (e.g., massage tools and IV drips)
- Nutrition (e.g., supplements, vitamins, energy drinks, gut health and weight management)
- Skin and hair care (e.g., longevity treatments)

- Sexual health
- Somatic healing (e.g., mindfulness and breathing exercises)

These younger working generations are interested in a personal and holistic approach to wellness that's based on science-backed support and helps them focus on recovery and longevity.

2. Mental Health Becomes Mental Fitness

The conversation around mental health continues to evolve. This year, the focus is on mental fitness, which involves proactively building resilience and emotional strength rather than reacting to burnout or crisis. Similar to how regular exercise helps individuals maintain their physical fitness, proactively taking care of one's mental health is also crucial to overall well-being.



Mental fitness is the general ability to navigate life's challenges with resilience, focusing on a response rather than a reaction.

Mental fitness is essential for a healthy and resilient workforce. More employers are introducing perks and benefits, including mental health coaching to develop coping strategies and emotional agility, as well as dedicated mental fitness days to recharge without stigma. Employers may be considering ways to expand their employee assistance programs (EAPs) and subsidize mental health apps. A significant part of this shift involves normalizing mental health conversations in the workplace and training managers to recognize the signs of stress and burnout.

Modern employers are investing in resources and tools to equip employees with the skills and support they need to be resilient and prevent issues before they escalate. This shift reframes mental health as a skill to be cultivated, not a problem to be solved.

3. Spotlight on Women's Health Support

Driven by increasing demand from workers, women's health is driving change in workplace wellness. More employees are looking for fertility support, menopause care and maternal health resources. However, according to Maven's 2025 report, only 40% of organizations provide fertility services, 49% include prenatal support and 21% offer menopause-specific support in their benefits.

As women of Generation X (Gen X)—those born between 1965 and 1980—experience perimenopause and menopause, they are more vocal than previous generations about needing more information, advocating for themselves and sharing their experiences. Gen X is the first generation to bridge the digital and analog eras, and they're finding that little menopause information is available. Furthermore, many doctors aren't well-versed in menopause care, further fueling confusion. Many Gen X women were shocked by perimenopause symptoms, timing and other changes happening, so they're speaking up, advocating for treatment options like hormone therapy and taking control of their menopause experience.

This conversation also highlights the rising demand for information and support across all aspects and phases of women's reproductive health. As such, employers are increasingly introducing these benefits:

- Fertility benefits, including in vitro fertilization (IVF) coverage and fertility preservation (e.g., embryo and egg freezing)

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options

- Enhanced maternity support, including expanded parental leave, lactation services, doula services, mental health support and caregiving
- Accommodations to manage menstrual health issues and menopause symptoms
- Menopause support through coverage, virtual care, symptom management programs, workplace policies and employee resource groups

The Menopause Society reported that fewer than **20%** of primary care physicians in the United States receive formal menopause training. As a result, patients often receive misdiagnoses and a frustrating sense that "everything is fine."



These initiatives reflect a growing recognition that women's health needs are not niche—they're integral to workforce well-being. Gen Z, millennial and Gen X workers alike are looking for access to women's health, including fertility, menopause support and everything in between.

4. Building Financial Resilience

Economic uncertainty and rising health care and living costs have pushed financial wellness to the forefront. Employees increasingly link financial stress to mental health challenges, making this an essential pillar of workplace well-being. Moreover, Vanguard research found that nearly 75% of Americans fell short of their saving and spending resolutions in 2025. However, they're ready to recommit in 2026 and are optimistic about it.

While the majority of workers are concerned about economic

uncertainty this year, there are some generational differences. For example, baby boomers are concerned about unexpected expenses, millennials are struggling with insufficient income and Gen Z is most likely to live beyond their means. In response to the growing need for financial education and support, more organizations may offer the following types of benefits:

- Financial education workshops and debt counseling
- Flexible pay options and emergency savings programs
- Student loan repayment
- Retirement planning
- EAPs

Similar to how mental fitness is characterized by resilience, today's workers are looking for financial resilience so they can handle what comes their way in life. Fortunately, employers are well-positioned to help workers gain their financial footing this year.

Employer Takeaway

Health and wellness continue to evolve and can vary across different generations. Wellness is a very personal journey, but employers have the opportunity to offer meaningful support. As these trends continue to shape employee wellness, employers can evaluate their current wellness initiatives and consider ways to improve them to better support workers in 2026.

More than 8 out of 10 Americans have a financial resolution for 2026, with building an emergency fund and using a high-yield account for short-term savings goals as the top two resolutions.

Fertility Benefits on the Rise

The market for employer-provided fertility benefits is entering a period of expansion, driven largely by regulatory guidance and strong evidence that these benefits are important for employee attraction and retention. With infertility being recognized as a disease by the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association since 2017 and affecting 1 in 6 people globally, employers are increasingly considering fertility coverage as a critical component of their benefits package. This surge is largely due to the positive impact family-building benefits can have on employees' mental health, performance and loyalty.

According to the Maven Clinic's 2025 State of Women's and Family Health Benefits report, **2 in 3** employers plan to invest in family health benefits within the next three years, a **44%** increase since 2024.

Regulatory developments have also played a key role in driving expansion. Increasing access to and reducing costs for infertility treatment—both for employees currently experiencing infertility and for those seeking coverage for potential future challenges—has been a stated priority of the Trump administration. In February 2025, an executive order directed agencies to develop policy recommendations to expand IVF access and reduce out-of-pocket and health plan costs for IVF treatment. Following that directive, in October 2025, the White House announced drug pricing reforms for fertility medications through a new government website, TrumpRx.gov (expected to be operational in 2026), and stated that the Food and Drug Administration will prioritize review of lower-cost fertility drugs.

At the same time, state-level mandates continue to expand. California recently joined more than 20 other states with fertility benefit mandates. Under the California law, large group health plans (generally those that cover over 100 people) must cover

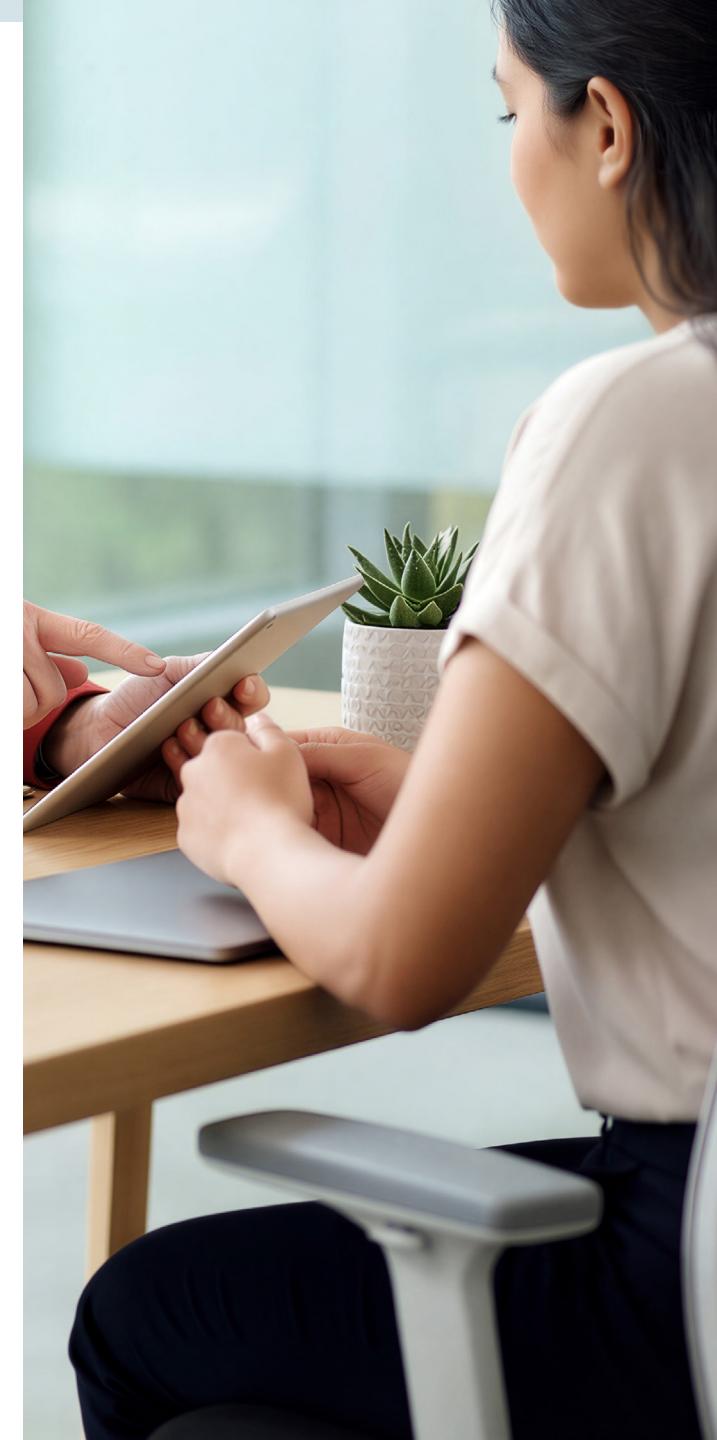
fertility services, including IVF. Although originally scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2025, implementation was delayed and will now apply to plans issued, amended or renewed on or after Jan. 1, 2026. While small group plans will not be required to cover such services, they are required to offer such coverage beginning Jan. 1, 2026.

Employer Takeaway

As fertility benefits gain traction through both federal initiatives and expanding state mandates, employers have an opportunity to lead in offering inclusive, family-friendly benefits. Cost sharing and coverage gaps, particularly for self-funded plans not subject to state mandates, remain a barrier to access. A single IVF cycle can exceed \$30,000, with typical costs ranging from \$12,000 to \$25,000 per cycle—and multiple cycles are often required to achieve pregnancy, creating a substantial financial strain.

In 2026, employers should assess whether their current health plans meet applicable state mandates, particularly in states like California, where new requirements will soon take effect. Employers with self-funded plans that are not subject to state mandates should consider voluntary coverage or supplemental benefits to remain competitive. Monitoring forthcoming federal rulemaking on excepted benefits and supplemental coverage can help identify cost-effective strategies for offering fertility benefits outside traditional group health plans. Additionally, budgeting for high-cost treatments (such as IVF) and exploring reimbursement arrangements or partnerships with fertility care platforms can help mitigate employee out-of-pocket expenses.

Overall, clear communication about available benefits and support services reinforces an employer's commitment to family-building and employee well-being, strengthening attraction, retention and productivity.



While 89% of HR leaders are confident AI will transform their operations, 64% of employees worry that relying too heavily on AI will reduce the quality of support, according to a Zendesk survey. These results highlight a significant trust and buy-in gap.

Getting Employee Buy-in on AI

Employers of all sizes and across industries are increasingly realizing operational benefits, including improved productivity, greater accuracy and smoother workflows, when employees are effectively trained to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Yet, organizations often face a common barrier: getting employees to buy into adopting and utilizing these tools. Without genuine buy-in from employees, investments in AI can under-deliver or even create unintended friction.

Common Challenges and Obstacles

While the promise of AI is clear, gaining employee acceptance isn't always easy. Workers bring a mix of excitement, skepticism and uncertainty to new technologies, and those perceptions can shape the success or failure of any rollout. The following are some of the most common hurdles organizations face when introducing AI in the workplace:

- Employees worry that AI will replace their jobs.
- There's a lack of training or clarity from the organization.
- Employees don't always see how AI benefits them.
- Employees are concerned that AI will add more work rather than less.
- There's a misalignment of leadership and workforce perceptions about AI.

Tips for Getting Employee Buy-In

Overcoming resistance takes more than simply introducing new tools; it requires communication, training and trust. Organizations that take a thoughtful approach can turn initial hesitation

into genuine enthusiasm. The following strategies can help leaders build confidence and long-term adoption across their teams:

- **Train employees effectively.** Training goes beyond introducing software. It involves helping employees understand how AI can support their job, link to career growth and reduce mundane work. Effective training should include hands-on practice, job-relevant examples and ongoing support rather than a one-time orientation.
- **Help them realize the benefits.** Employees are more likely to adopt AI when they see a clear advantage—time saved, fewer errors or new opportunities. For example, highlighting how AI reduced the time needed to complete a tedious or repetitive task can make its value tangible. Leaders should showcase early wins and share real stories of how AI has enabled people to work smarter and focus on more meaningful tasks.
- **Enable choice.** Compelling adoption by mandate often backfires. Employees know that while AI can create efficiencies, not every application is a good use case. By allowing voluntary adoption pathways and championing users to emerge, organizations can build momentum organically.
- **Address fears transparently.** Employee reluctance often stems from unresolved fears: "Will my job be replaced?" "Will my work now be judged by an algorithm?" "Does this tool bring extra risk?" Organizations should address these directly and honestly.
- **Allow for feedback and continuous**

improvement. Involve employees early. Let them shape how AI gets deployed, which workflows it supports and how training will work. Create mechanisms for user feedback, iterate on the tool/process and recognize contributions.

- **Link AI use to career development and meaningful work.** Rather than simply saying "use this tool to be more efficient," frame AI as enabling employees to focus on more meaningful, higher-value work. Many employees are ready for AI, and they want to gain new skills for it. Focus on how to position AI use as part of employees' professional growth: new responsibilities, creative problem-solving and broader impact.
- **Ensure leadership alignment and manager support.** Successful adoption depends heavily on frontline managers. Leaders should demonstrate their own AI use, highlight successful cases and communicate purpose, not just mandate policy.

Employer Takeaway

For organizations to benefit, employees must embrace the tools and processes. That means acknowledging their fears, equipping them with training and showing them how it can benefit their career. With thoughtful execution, employee buy-in becomes a catalyst—not a barrier—to unlocking AI's full value.

Contact us for more HR trends, industry insights and proactive strategies to maintain a competitive edge in today's workplace.