

Benefits Insights

Emerging Wellness Trends in 2026



Today's employee expects more than health benefits. Employee wellness has entered a modern era defined by personalization, priority and purpose. Primarily driven 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.

This article highlights five employee wellness trends to monitor in 2026.

1. Gen Z and Millennials Redefining Wellness

Generation Z (Gen Z) and millennials now 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" compared with one year ago, versus 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, these generations generally consider wellness a daily priority, rather than an occasional indulgence. In fact, McKinsey reports that these generations account for more than 41% of annual wellness spending. To put this into perspective, consumers aged 58 and older account for only 28% of wellness spending. 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 building resilience and emotional strength proactively 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. As such, 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 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 seeking 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 information is available about menopause. Furthermore, many doctors aren't well-versed in menopause care, further fueling confusion. According to The Menopause Society, fewer than 20% of primary care physicians in the United States receive formal training on menopause. As a result, patients often receive misdiagnoses and a frustrating sense that "everything is fine." 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 the following benefits:

- Fertility benefits, including in vitro fertilization coverage and fertility preservation (e.g., embryo and egg freezing) options
- Enhanced maternity support, including expanded parental leave, lactation services, doula services, mental health support and caregiving services
- Accommodations to manage menstrual health issues and menopause symptoms
- Menopause support through coverage, virtual care, symptom management programs, workplace policies and employee resource groups

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 benefits, 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 this year and are optimistic about it; 84% of Americans have a financial resolution for 2026, with building an emergency fund and using a high-yielding account for short-term savings goals as the top two resolutions.

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
- Employee assistance programs

Similar to how mental fitness is characterized by resilience, today's workers are seeking financial resilience to handle life's challenges. Fortunately, employers are well-positioned to help workers gain their financial footing this year.

5. AI-driven Wellness

Artificial intelligence (AI)-driven wellness is centered on hyper-personalization, powered by advanced algorithms and biometric data. Wearables and health apps now integrate continuous monitoring of sleep patterns, heart rate variability, glucose levels and even stress indicators. These systems feed into AI platforms that create dynamic, individualized wellness plans, covering nutrition, exercise, hydration and mental health practices. Unlike generic programs, these plans adapt in real time based on user behavior and physiological changes, making wellness guidance far more precise and actionable.

For employers, this trend has significant implications. First, AI-driven wellness tools can reduce long-term health costs by identifying risks early and promoting preventive care. For example, predictive analytics can identify metabolic issues or stress-related conditions before they escalate, enabling interventions that are less costly than managing chronic diseases. Second, these tools enhance employee engagement with wellness programs. Personalized recommendations feel more relevant, increasing participation rates and improving outcomes, something traditional one-size-fits-all programs often struggle with.

Summary

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.

Contact us for more additional information.

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