



NAVIGATING WORKPLACE WELL-BEING PROGRAMS

Perspectives from Employers and
Employees on Participation and Satisfaction

May 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explores the challenges of employee engagement with workplace health and wellness programs (HWPs). Despite organizations' significant investments in these initiatives, there is a notable gap between program availability and employee utilization. The study surveyed over 900 employers and employees to understand their perspectives on HWPs. Findings indicate that employers generally believe in the efficacy and importance of these programs. However, employees express lower perceived value and participation rates, highlighting a mismatch between the programs and employee needs.

Key Findings

- **Employee HWP awareness:** 49.8% stated that their employer offers HWPs, which they are familiar with.
- **Employer HWP offerings:** 32.2% of employees report their employer does not offer any HWPs.
- **Top reasons for employee participation:**
 - To improve physical health (65.2%)
 - To enhance mental well-being (54.7%)
 - To manage stress (50.9%)
- **Major barriers to participation:**
 - Lack of time (60.9%)
 - Limited interest in offerings (36.9%)
 - Lack of awareness/access (34.2%)
- **Age, income, and tenure was associated with participation rates:** Participation was found to decrease as age increases; however, participation was found to increase with longer tenure and higher income.

- Employers struggle with low participation across most program types - including 63% reporting low participation in weight loss, nutrition (50%), mental health (56%).
- **Differing Perceptions:** employers overestimate employee satisfaction, comfort discussing programs, and reliance on programs.
- **Communication gaps:** employers believe they promote open discussions, but employees say these talks occur infrequently.
- **Areas of opportunity:**
 - Employees desire improved healthcare benefits, stress management programs, health education, flexible work arrangements and incentives.
 - Cultural sensitivity strategies like multilingual materials help but more can be done to increase inclusivity of programs.

To bridge this divide, this report recommends tailored communication strategies to raise awareness, embedding wellness initiatives within the organizational culture with leadership support, customizing program design to meet diverse workforce preferences, addressing practical barriers to participation, and establishing continuous feedback loops. By implementing these evidence-based strategies, organizations can significantly enhance HWP participation rates while fostering a healthier, more engaged, and productive workforce. This holistic approach not only improves employee well-being but also yields tangible benefits for employers, such as reduced healthcare costs and increased productivity. The findings underscore the need for a collaborative effort between employers and employees to design and implement wellness programs that resonate across diverse industries, company sizes and demographics. Ultimately, this investment in employee health and wellness can drive organizational success while promoting a culture of well-being in the modern workplace.

BACKGROUND

The contemporary workplace is increasingly characterized by heightened stress levels, demanding schedules, and a pervasive sense of being constantly "on." In response to these challenges, organizations are turning to health and wellness programs (HWPs) to promote employee well-being and mitigate the negative impacts of the modern work environment [1,2]. These programs offer numerous benefits, ranging from improved physical health outcomes to enhanced emotional well-being and ultimately increased productivity [3,4].

Despite the documented advantages of HWPs, a significant disparity often exists between the availability of these programs and actual employee participation rates, leading to what is commonly referred to as the participation gap [5,6]. Various factors contribute to this gap, including communication barriers, time constraints, perceived lack of program value, and cultural factors within the organization [7,8]. Additionally, the failure of traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches to adequately address the diverse needs and preferences of a heterogeneous workforce further exacerbates this issue [9]. Tailoring programs to specific demographics and addressing identified health priorities can be crucial in enhancing engagement and program effectiveness.

Figure 1. Organizations Offerings VS Employees Using Well-being Programs
Source: Gartner

Of organizations offering various wellbeing programs only about a third of HR leaders and employees report using them



Bridging the divide between employer and employee perspectives is essential for overcoming these challenges and fostering greater engagement with HWPs [10,11]. Employers must gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee participation and actively involve employees in the design and implementation of wellness programs to ensure alignment with their needs and expectations.

To address these complex issues, our study conducts a comprehensive examination of the factors shaping employee participation and engagement in health and wellness offerings. By exploring both employer and employee perspectives, we seek to identify evidence-based strategies that can guide organizations in maximizing participation and realizing the full potential of their health and wellness initiatives. Through this research, we aim to contribute to the advancement of health and wellness programs that are not only more effective and engaging, but also better suited to promoting both employee well-being and organizational success.

The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. Why are employees not engaging in health and wellness offerings?
2. What are the common employee attitudes, barriers, motivations, and influencing factors regarding engagement with health and wellness offerings?
3. How do organizational culture, leadership support, and communication strategies encourage or discourage employee engagement with available health and wellness resources?
4. What are the key differences and alignments between employee and employer perspectives on health and wellness offerings?
5. What are the best practices for designing and implementing health and wellness offerings that resonate across diverse industries, company sizes, and demographics?

METHODS

Survey Design

This study employed two survey instruments to gather data on employers' wellness program offerings and employees' perspectives on workplace health and wellness programs.

The first survey gathered insights from employers about their companies' health and wellness offerings for employees. It covered topics such as the types of wellness programs offered, participation rates, incentives, communication strategies, program evaluation, and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, it included questions about the cultural competency of the programs. This survey consisted of a combination of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended questions.

The second survey focused on employees' perspectives and experiences with workplace health and wellness programs. It comprised 45 questions covering the availability and familiarity with employer-sponsored health and wellness programs, participation rates, program formats and drivers, perceived impacts on physical and mental health, barriers to participation, communication channels, and overall satisfaction. This survey employed multiple-choice, Likert scales, ranking, and open-ended response formats.

Data Collection

IBI worked with a third-party survey firm for sampling and survey distribution. For the employer survey, the vendor identified and recruited survey participants from a panel of employers representing various industries, company sizes, and geographic regions. For the employee survey, the vendor ensured a diverse and representative sample across industries, geographic regions, and demographic characteristics.

The vendor administered both surveys online. They invited potential participants to complete the surveys via email and used appropriate screening questions to ensure only qualified respondents were included in the final samples. The vendor implemented quality control measures, such as attention checks and data validation, to ensure the integrity of the collected data. After the data collection periods ended, the vendors provided the raw survey data, which the IBI research team then cleaned, coded, and prepared for analysis.

RESULTS

Sample

Employee Sample

The employee sample consists of 507 individuals from diverse age groups, regions, and backgrounds. The South is the most represented region, followed by the East, Midwest, and West. Gender distribution shows a slight male majority, while most identify as White, followed by Hispanic or Latino, and Black or African American. The majority identify as heterosexual, with nearly equal proportions having children under 18 at home or not. Additionally, about a third reported being primary caregivers to someone other than a child. The majority reported not having a disability, with mental health conditions being the most common disability.

Employment status varies, with a majority working full-time and being paid hourly. Salary distribution falls mainly within the \$30k-\$75k range. Various sectors are represented, with Retail, Hospitality/Services, Healthcare, and Information Technology being prominent. Most have employer-sponsored health insurance and about half do not work from home, reflecting diverse work arrangements.

Employer Sample

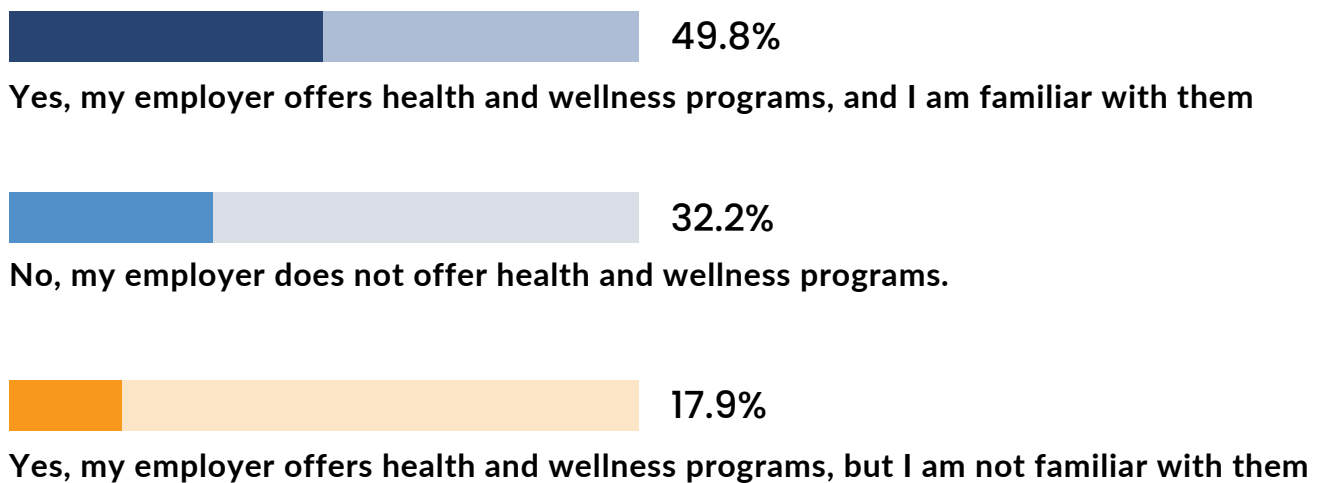
The employer sample included 455 respondents from diverse US industries and regions, all with decision-making roles in their organization's employee health and benefits. The sample organizations span industries such as Information Technology, Healthcare, Business/Consulting Services, Retail, and Finance/Banking. Geographically, participation rates were highest in the South, followed by the East, Midwest, and West, reflecting insights from various business sectors. In terms of company size, the majority were small to medium-sized businesses, with mid-sized and larger organizations also well-represented. Full-time employees predominated, highlighting a traditional employment model focused on full-time roles.

EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES

Understanding Engagement and Awareness

Half of employee respondents (49.8%) stated that their employer offers HWP, which they are familiar with. However, there is a notable gap, as 17.9% of employees reported awareness of such programs without actual participation. This gap suggests a misalignment in the program offerings or possibly a lack of motivation to engage. A substantial 32.2% of the workforce indicated that their employers do not offer any health and wellness programs, pointing towards a significant opportunity for growth in this area across various organizations.

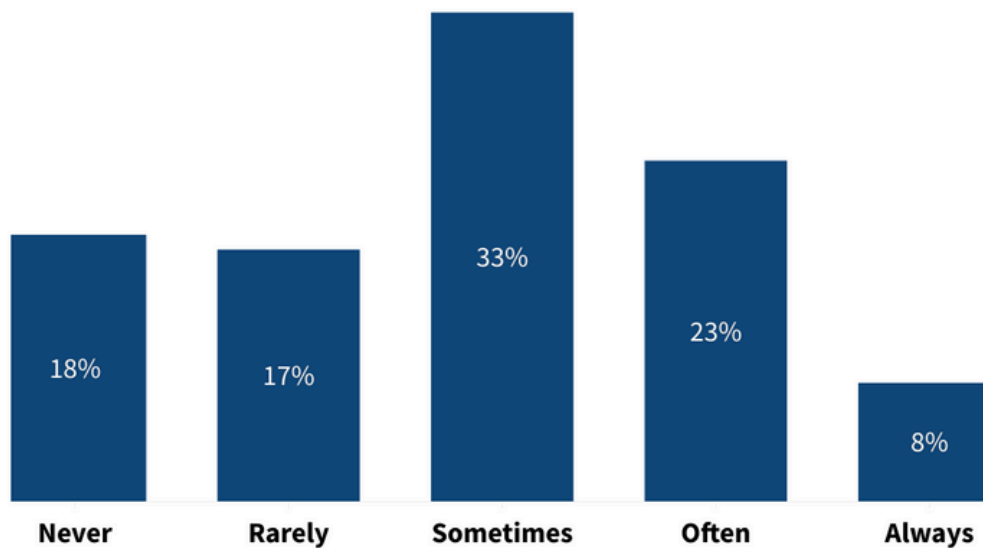
Figure 2. Health and Wellness Offerings



Participation Trends and Preferences

Of those employees whose organizations offer health and wellness, 33% use them occasionally, 32% engage with them frequently and 35% rarely or never use these programs. These insights suggest a relatively balanced distribution in participation levels, prompting exploration into factors influencing usage, such as accessibility and awareness.

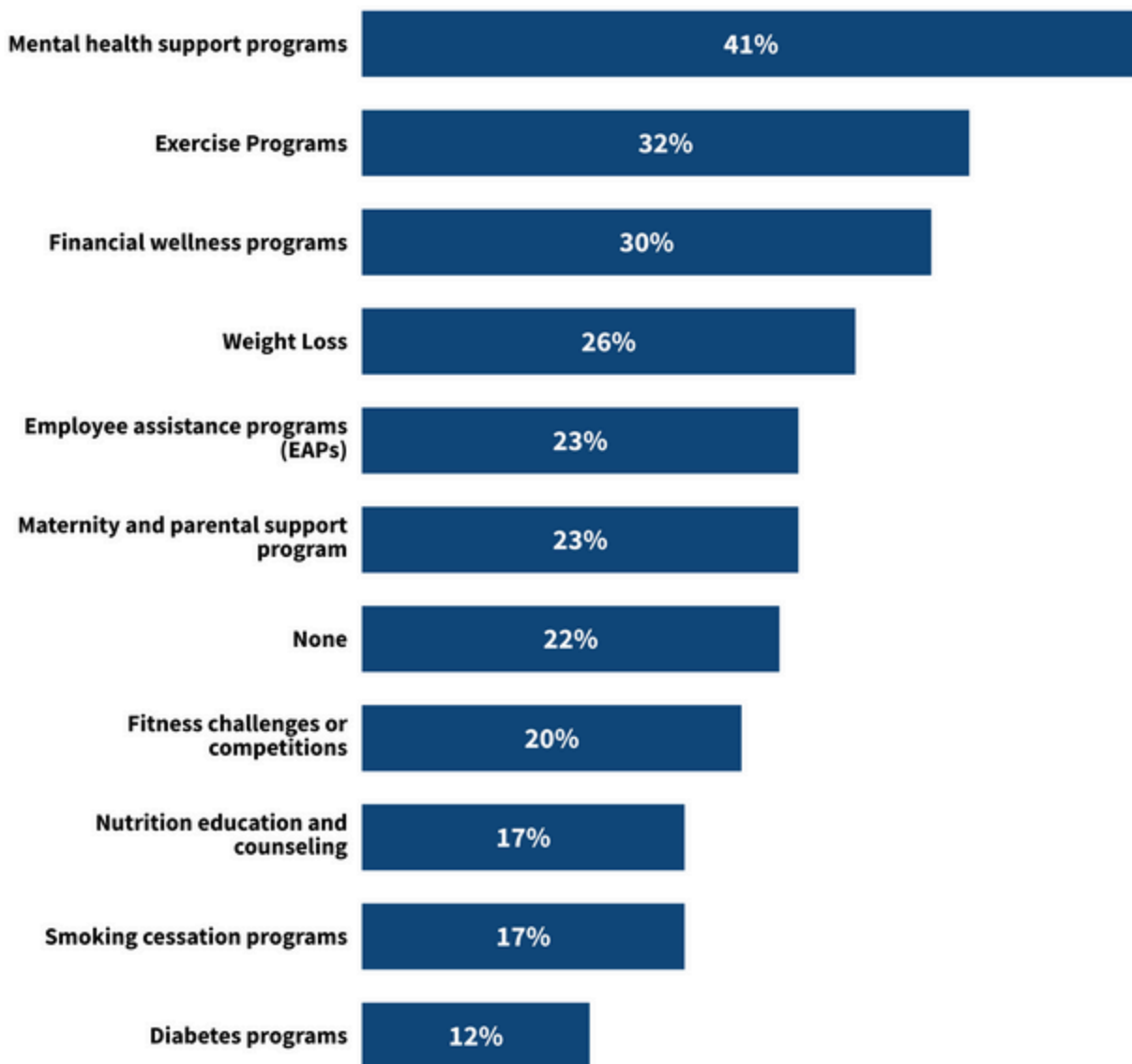
Figure 3. Employee Reported Frequency of Utilization of HWP



Factors contributing to participation: Regression analysis indicated age, tenure at the company, and household income were associated with how much employees engage in health and wellness programs. The analysis showed a decrease in participation with increasing age, pointing to a need to investigate if current programs align with older employees' needs or preferences. Conversely, a longer tenure at the company and a higher household income ($p < 0.05$) were associated with greater program engagement, pointing to the importance of socio-economic status and organizational loyalty in influencing health and wellness initiative participation.

When diving into the specifics of program participation, our study identified mental health support, including counseling services and stress management, was the most popular with 41.1% of employees engaging in these services. Exercise and weight loss initiatives followed, with participation rates of 31.7% and 26.0%, respectively. Financial wellness programs and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) had 29.5% and 23.4% participation rates. Interestingly, 22.1% of respondents did not engage in any health and wellness programs offered, highlighting a significant potential for increasing program uptake.

Figure 4. Employee Program Participation



Motivations vs. Barriers: A significant majority expressed a desire to improve physical health (65.2%) and enhance mental well-being (54.7%) as their top reasons for participation. Managing stress and learning healthy lifestyle practices were also high on the list of motivators, cited by 50.9% and 34.9% of respondents, respectively. On the flip side, time constraints emerged as the primary barrier to participation (60.9%), along with a limited interest in the offerings available (36.9%) and a lack of awareness or access to programs (34.2%).

Figure 5. Employee Reported Motivation for Participation in HWPs

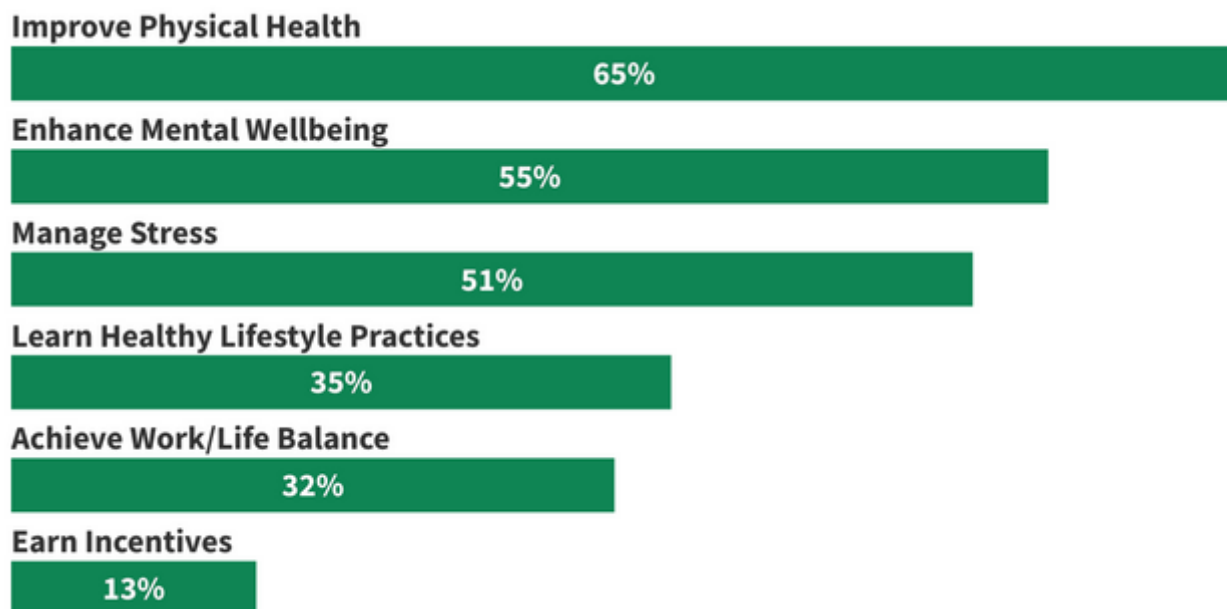
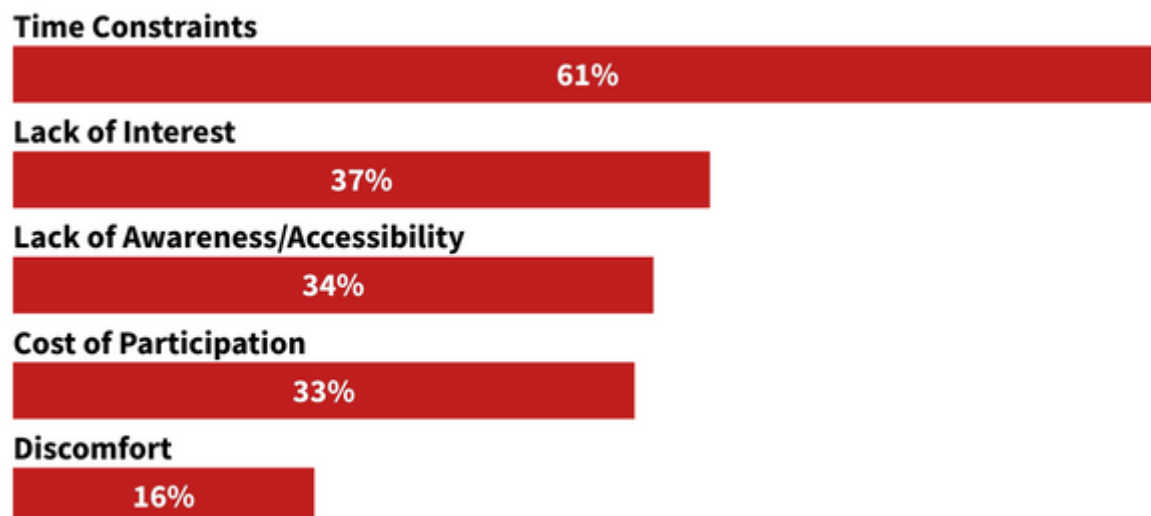
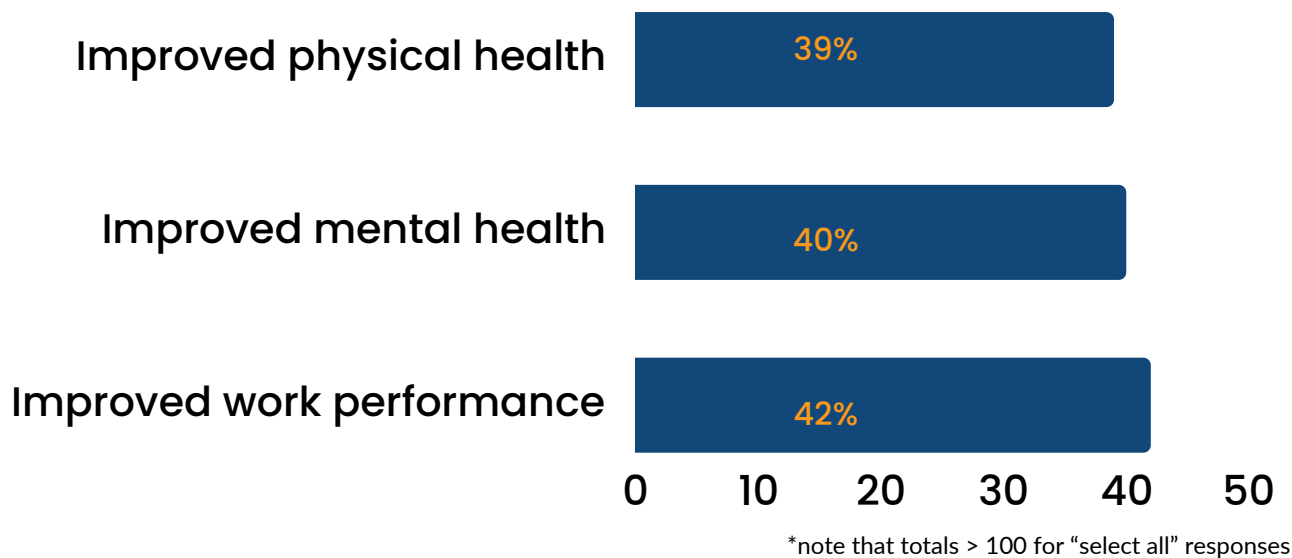


Figure 6. Employee Reported Barriers to Participation in HWPs



Impact of Participation: Employees report varied impacts of participation on their well-being and work performance. Improved mental well-being was noted by 40.0% of respondents, with 38.6% reporting better physical health. Additionally, 42.2% of employees observed an improvement in work performance due to their participation in these programs.

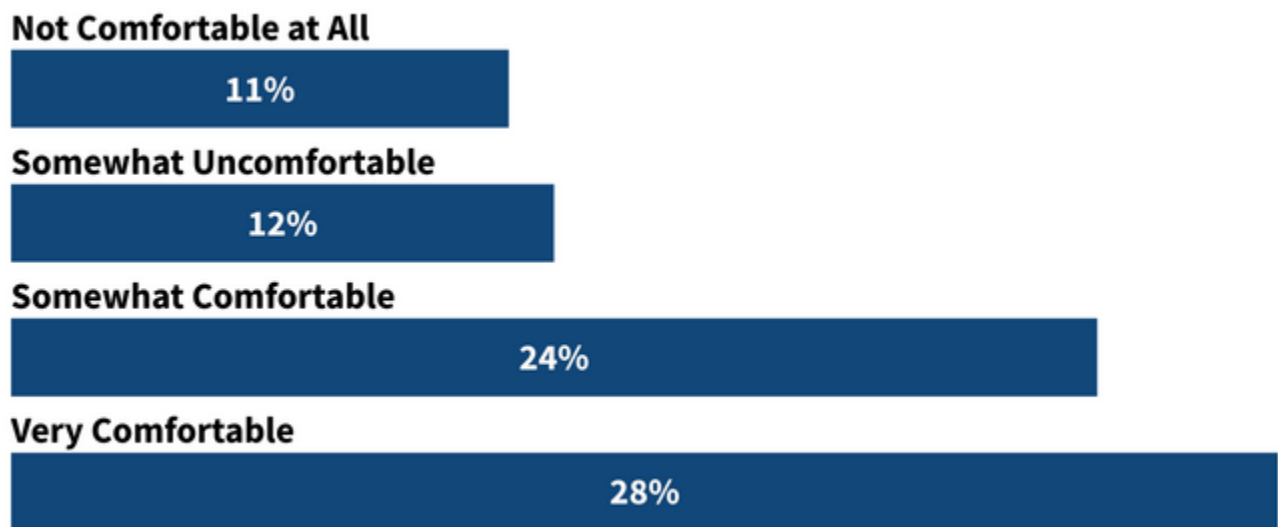
Figure 7. Employee Reported Impact on Health and Performance



Perception of Program Importance: 70% of employees consider it moderately to extremely important for employers to offer health and wellness programs. Preferred areas for support include work-life balance (58.8%), stress management (55.8%) and emotional/mental health (51.3%). Further analysis found that age, working from home and compensation type were significant predictors of how employees perceived the importance of employers offering health and wellness programs.

Communication and Accessibility: Almost half of respondents indicated a relatively high level of comfort discussing their health and wellness with their direct supervisor, with 28.1% rated their comfort level at the highest – 5, and 24% rating it as a 4. Age and gender are identified as contributors in regression analysis, with younger employees and males feeling more comfortable in these discussions. Remote working conditions also play a role, as increased days working from home are associated with decreased comfort in discussing HWP, possibly due to reduced face-to-face interactions with supervisors. However, a significant portion of respondents reported that such discussions occur either rarely (27.4%) or never (23.0%). Only a minority reported having these discussions regularly (14.2%) or very regularly (7.6%).

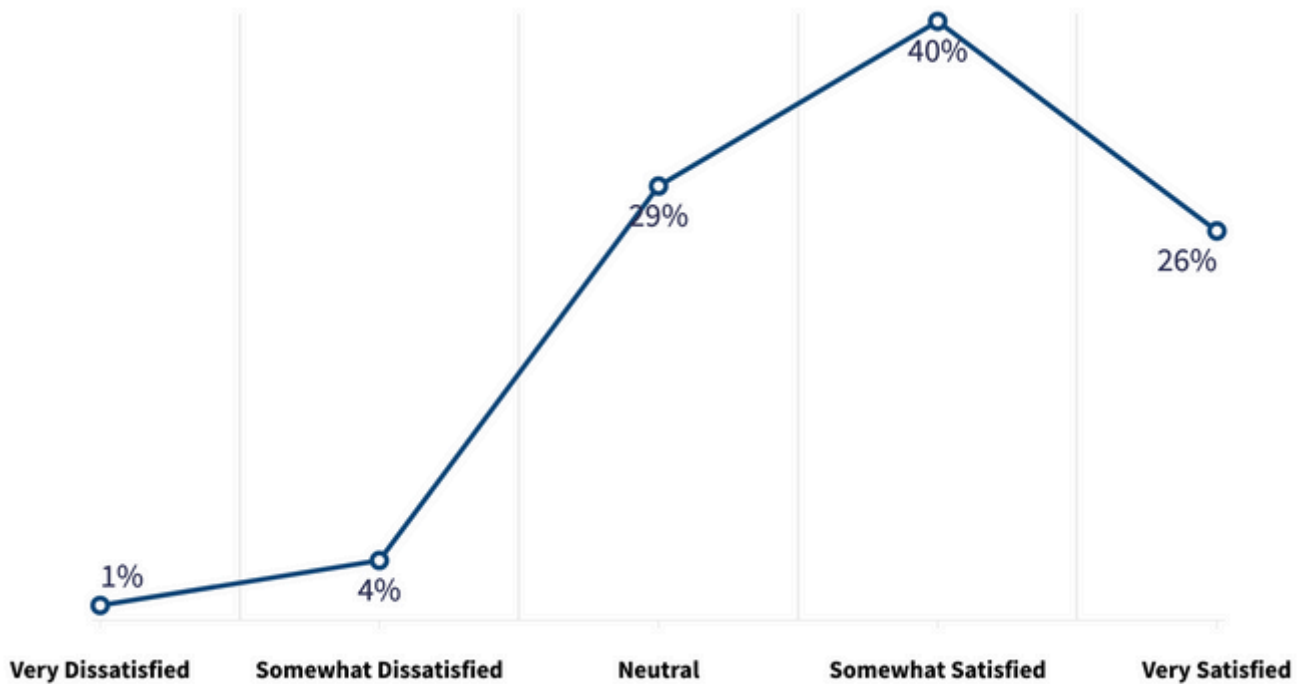
Figure 8. Employee Reported Comfort Levels in Discussing Health with Supervisors



Only 15.1% of respondents receive updates about available health and wellness offerings frequently, while a notable majority receive them less often, indicating potential gaps in communication that could impact awareness and participation. Despite this, 74.8% express interest in educational content on health and wellness, with a strong preference (74.7%) for email as the communication channel. In terms of program delivery, 68% favor in-person, 48% virtual, and 33% a hybrid approach, with parental and caregiver status significantly influencing the preference for hybrid options. This reflects a demand for flexibility and diversity in access to health and wellness programs to meet varied employee needs.

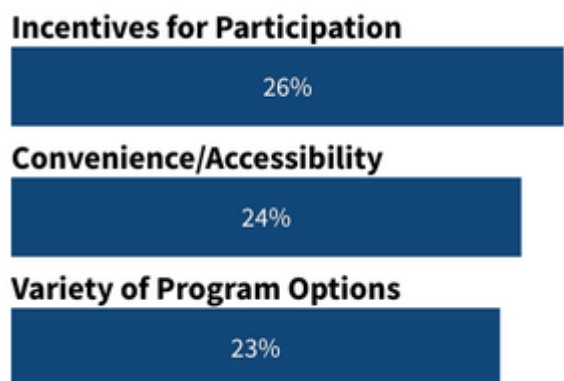
Satisfaction and Desired Improvements: More than half of the employees surveyed said they hardly rely on their offerings to manage their health and wellness. However, our findings show that 65.9% of respondents are either very or somewhat satisfied with their health and wellness programs. Concerning program alignment with health priorities, views are mixed, with 49.5% feeling their needs are significantly met and 20.3% seeing limited or no alignment. Employees cite improved healthcare benefits, stress management programs and health education programs as being most valuable to them.

Figure 9. Employee Reported Satisfaction with HWP



Areas for improvement include better participation incentives, program accessibility, and a wider variety of programs. Employees desire new initiatives like flexible work arrangements (49.2%), increased time off (42.6%), fitness challenges (35%) and healthy cafeteria food options (31.2%). Most respondents consider themselves healthy across financial (54.6%), mental (70.9%), physical (70.3%), and social (69.8%) aspects.

Figure 10. Areas for Improvement



DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS: DISSECTING PARTICIPATION TRENDS ACROSS DIVERSE GROUPS

Annual Income

Middle-income individuals, especially those earning between \$51k and \$75k, show the highest participation in health and wellness programs. On the other hand, those who earn under \$30k and the \$76k-100k groups reported the least frequent use. Interestingly, the \$51k-75k bracket also showed the highest number of individuals who felt like their performance improved. Many respondents, particularly in the \$51k-75k and \$101k-150k brackets, felt their work performance improved, which might be attributed to their active involvement in health and wellness programs. Moreover, the survey revealed that those in the \$30k-50k and \$51k-75k income brackets show the most interest in receiving health education content from employers. Unfortunately, time constraints appeared to be a particularly prominent issue for the \$30k-50k, \$51k-75k, and \$76k-100k brackets.

Parental Status

The study found that participants without children showed the least interest in health and wellness education from their employers. On the other hand, those with children under 18 living at home demonstrated the highest levels of engagement in such programs. Interestingly, there was a significant interest in receiving educational content about health and wellness from employers across all parental statuses, with parents of children under 18 expressing the most interest. Moreover, parents of children under 18 displayed a higher tendency towards satisfaction with these programs. When examining the impact of these initiatives, improvements in physical health, mental well-being, and work performance were reported across the board, with those having children under 18 often seeing the most benefit. Lastly, the study revealed that time constraints were particularly notable for those with children under 18, indicating that parents with young children may have more difficulty finding time to engage in health and wellness programs offered by their employers.

Industry

The Information Technology (IT) and Healthcare industries stand out for their high utilization rates of wellness programs, while the Education sector demonstrates the highest rate of 'Never' utilizing such programs. Retail, on the other hand, exhibits the greatest lack of awareness or accessibility to these wellness initiatives, whereas IT and the Hospitality/Services sectors show a limited interest in the current offerings. Nevertheless, individuals in IT, Retail, and Healthcare report notable improvements in both physical health and mental health. Furthermore, professionals in the IT and Healthcare fields not only rate the importance of wellness programs highly but also express greater comfort in discussing health and wellness issues with their supervisors. When considering financial, mental, physical, and social health metrics, those working in IT and Healthcare perceive themselves as healthier compared to those in other industries.

Employment Tenure

Employees with less than 1 year of service tend to utilize these programs the least. Employees who have been with the company for 1-3 years and over 10 years are more likely to use health and wellness programs frequently. It was also observed that employees with 1-3 years of service were more likely to cite lack of awareness or accessibility as a barrier to participation. On the other hand, employees with over 10 years at the company show the highest limited interest in current offerings. However, those with over 10 years of service are more likely to consider themselves financially, mentally, and physically healthy compared to those with shorter tenures.

Being a Caregiver to Someone Other than a Child

Primary caregivers tend to participate more frequently in health and wellness programs, with higher rates falling in the 'Often' and 'Always' categories compared to non-caregivers. Achieving work-life balance through wellness programs is highly valued by caregivers, who are also more comfortable discussing their health and wellness with their manager. Additionally, caregivers show a higher interest in receiving educational content about managing their health and wellness from their employer.

The exploration of data trends across various demographics sheds light on the complex interactions between different employee groups and their utilization of health and wellness programs. This kind of demographic analysis highlights areas where certain groups may require more support or where programs may be underutilized, pointing to potential gaps in communication, accessibility, or relevance.

Having examined the perspectives of employees concerning their participation and attitudes towards HWPs, it becomes evident that their experiences and levels of engagement vary significantly. This insight into employee responses provides a solid foundation to pivot our focus towards employers. By exploring how employers perceive the effectiveness of these wellness initiatives, their motivations for implementing such programs, and the challenges they face in doing so, we can gain a fuller understanding of the dynamics at play.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

Most employers (86.2%) indicated they offer health and wellness programs, showing a strong commitment to their employees' well-being. Over 80% of these organizations consider employee health very important and over 65% of respondents view their company as 'very responsible' or 'extremely responsible' towards employee health and wellness. Regarding goals set by their organizations for employee health and wellness offerings, employers ranked lowering healthcare costs, increased productivity and positively impacting employee overall health as the top three. In assessing the achievement of these goals, employers report a positive impact, with a significant 63.3% considering their achievements as 'successful' or 'extremely successful'.

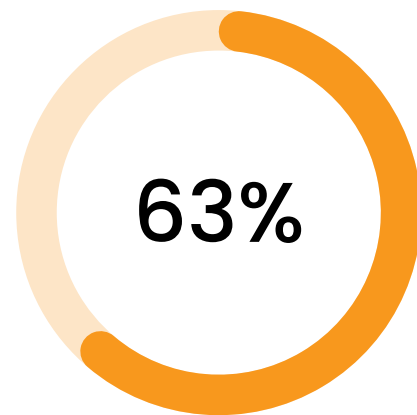
Figure 11. Employer Goals for HWPs

Goals for HWPs

 53%
Lowering Healthcare Costs

 33%
Increased Productivity

 33%
Positively Impacting
Employee Overall Health



Employer Reported
Success in Achieving Goals

Health and Wellness Offerings, Participation Trends, and Insights

Mental health programs are the most common, offered by 68% of employers, followed by preventive health screenings, financial wellness programs and physical activity programs. However, participation varies, with preventive health screenings

seeing the highest engagement but maternity and weight loss programs experiencing low participation. The table below shows the percent of employers who reported low (0 to 29%) medium (30 to 59%) and high (60 to 100%) employee participation for each program.

Program	Employee Participation		
	Low (0-29%)	Medium (30-59%)	High (60-100%)
Physical Activity	42	23	35
Nutrition	50	20	30
Mental Health	56	24	20
Financial Wellness	48	16	36
Maternity	71	22	7
Preventive Health Screenings	36	16	48
Weight Loss	63	24	13
Disease Management	51	26	23

The data presents a trend of low participation across various health and wellness programs. For instance, maternity programs have the least participation 71%, as it is likely not relevant to the majority of employees. The majority of employers (63%) reported lowest participation rates for weight loss programs while disease management and nutrition programs are also predominantly in the low participation bracket, with over half of employers reporting minimal engagement at 51% and 50%, respectively. Mental health initiatives also show a majority of employers (56%) observing low participation.

Even programs such as physical activity and financial wellness, which have more balanced engagement levels, still report their highest percentages in the lowest participation category, at 42% and 48% respectively. Preventive health screening is the only program with the highest reported participation in the high bracket (48%), yet still a significant 36% of employers report low engagement. Overall, despite some varying successes, most employers struggle to get more employees involved in health and wellness programs.

For all types of programs, the main obstacles to participation are lack of interest and awareness. This indicates that increasing participation could involve making more employees aware of these programs and making them more appealing. The cost of participating is another common issue, suggesting that the expense may prevent many employees from taking part in wellness programs. The table below shows the barriers by program type.*

Program Type	Barriers to Participation (%)				
	Lack of Awareness	Lack of Interest	Time Constraints	Cost	Logistics
Physical Activity	51	54	46	43	38
Nutrition	50	61	37	42	24
Mental Health	49	55	41	39	27
Financial Wellness	38	44	58	42	33
Maternity Programs	54	51	35	41	30
Preventive Health Screenings	49	46	49	43	30
Weight Loss	41	50	44	28	41
Disease Management	49	49	40	46	23

*note that totals > 100 for "select all" responses

Incentives: Over 60% of companies surveyed use incentives to motivate employees to participate in health and wellness programs. The most common incentive is monetary, used by 73.6% of companies, including health savings contributions or gift cards, valued between \$20 to \$1000. Among employees, 33% earn up to half of the available incentives, and 16% take full advantage, earning all they can. However, the majority of employers (66%) believe that incentives offered have a strong impact on program engagement.

Accessibility, Inclusion and Communication

Employee Feedback and Satisfaction: Most employers (76%) gather health and wellness program feedback through surveys and team meetings, typically on a quarterly basis. The majority of employers (80%) report that their employees are satisfied with these offerings, and 85% are confident these programs meet key health priorities. Overall, employers view their health and wellness programs as effective in promoting stress management, work-life balance, and healthy lifestyles, though some recognize room for improvement.

Figure 12. Mode of Feedback Collection

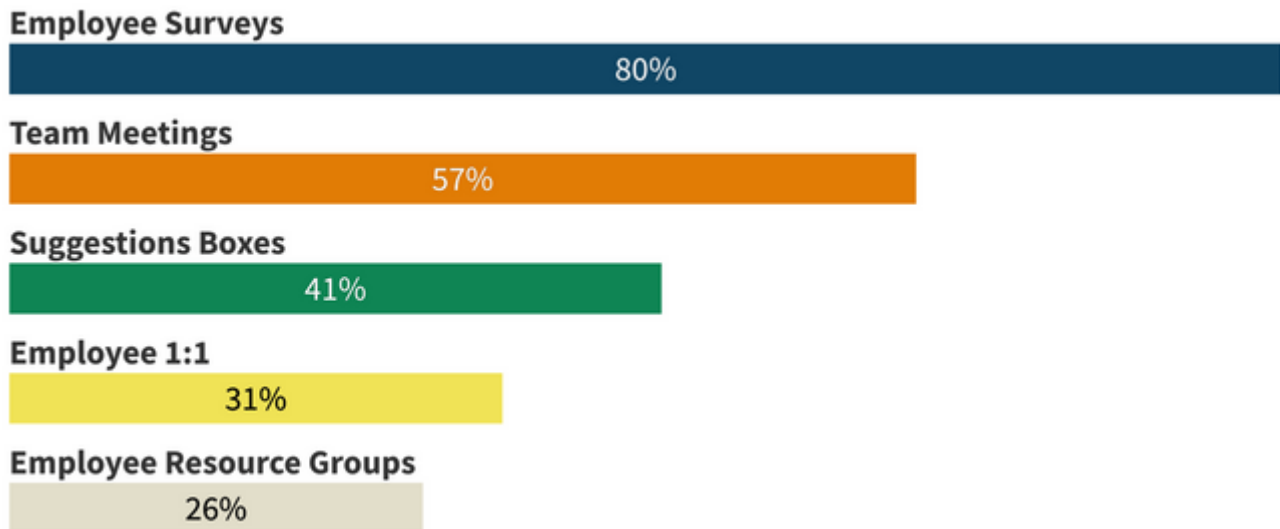
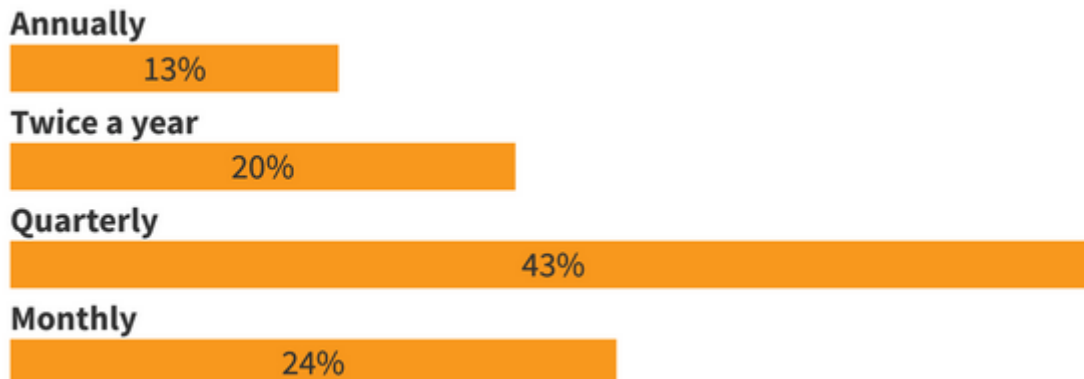


Figure 13. Frequency of Feedback Collection

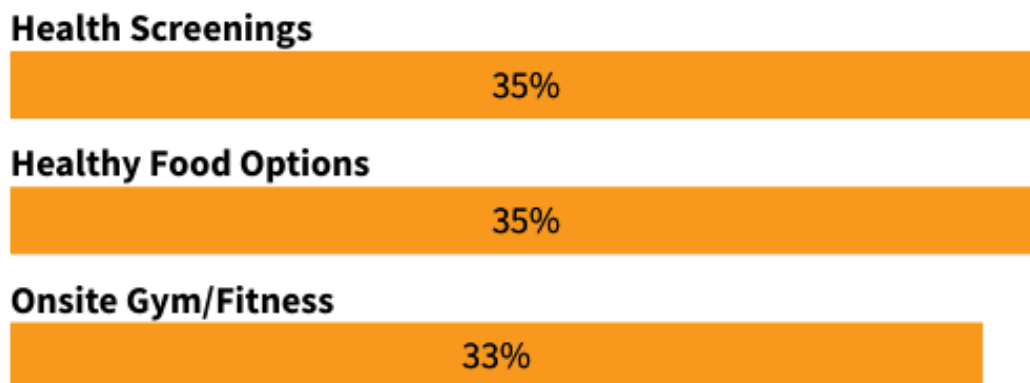


Communication & Comfort Levels: Employers largely agree (73%) that their company culture fosters open discussions about health and wellness. Similarly, 78% believe that their employees are somewhat or very comfortable discussing health and wellness with their supervisor. A notable 63.7% of employers believe their employees turn to them for health education, with about 35% seeing their wellness programs as the main source of this education. Nearly 44% of employers report that health and wellness discussions between managers and employees occur regularly. Furthermore, more than 57% of employers frequently update their staff on health and wellness offerings, primarily through email announcements and team meetings, which are considered the preferred communication channels by employees.

Program Formats & Cultural Sensitivity: In-person program formats (64%) are perceived as the most accessible and engaging, followed by online and hybrid options. 60.4% of companies employ strategies to ensure their programs are culturally sensitive and inclusive, like offering materials in multiple languages and considering cultural beliefs.

Opportunities for Improvement & ROI: Employers see the greatest opportunities for improvement in diversifying program options and increasing utilization and participation. Concerning ROI, onsite gym/fitness classes, health screenings, and healthy food options are seen as the areas providing the least return. However, 17% of employers think that all offerings provide value; stress management programs and increased health education are top priorities for new initiatives.

Figure 14. Employer Reported Programs with least ROI



*note that totals > 100 for “select all” responses

Employee Reliance & Perceived Employee Health: Employers believe that their workforce relies on their health and wellness offerings to varying degrees, with a significant portion indicating a moderate to high reliance. Most employers view their employees as financially (70.1%), mentally (78%), physically (76.5%), and socially (74.9%) healthy, although there is a notable proportion that is unsure, highlighting possible gaps in employers' understanding of their employees' overall well-being.

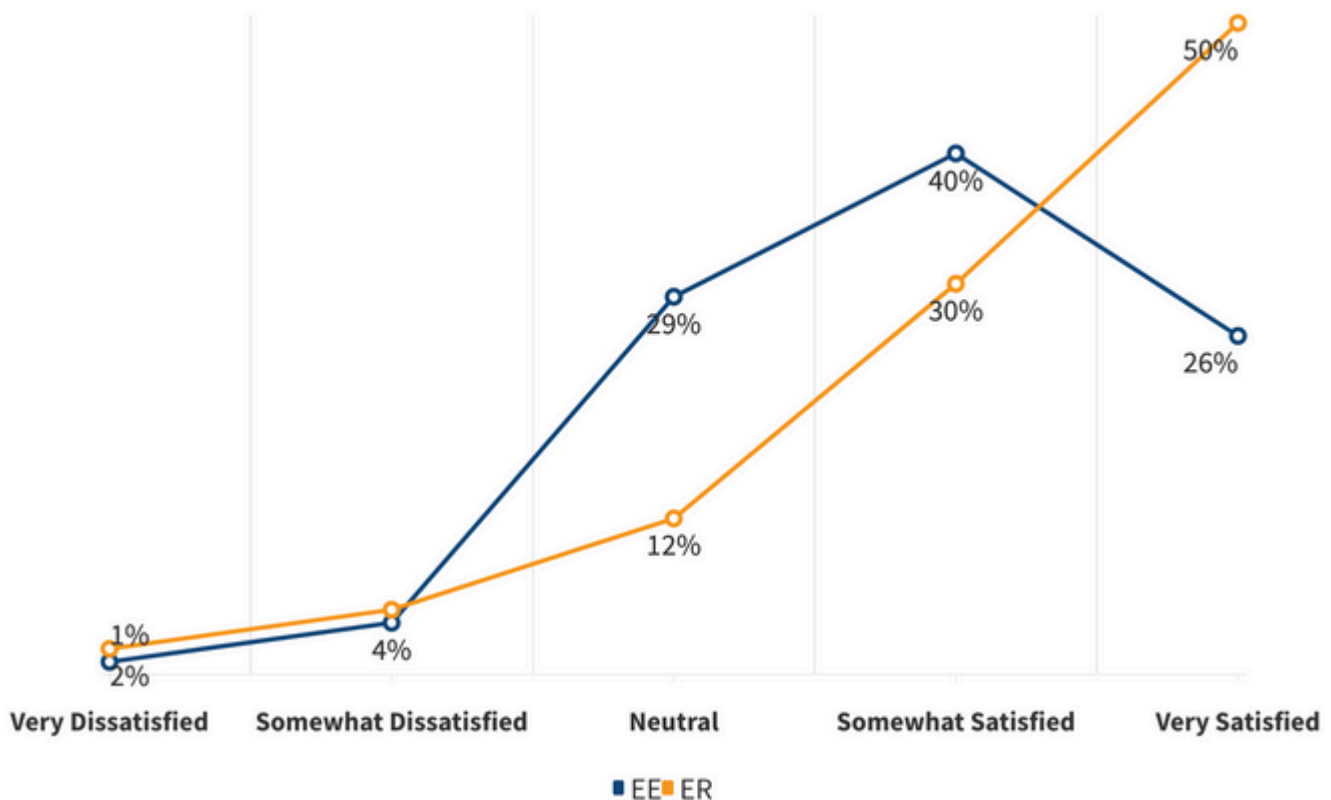
COMPARING PERSPECTIVES

To build a healthy workplace culture, understanding both employers' and employees' views on health and wellness offerings is essential. While employers design these initiatives to support staff, aligning them with employees' needs is key. Our analysis aims to highlight differences and common ground to enhance these initiatives. Through this comparison, we hope to foster better collaboration and understanding between employers and employees, leading to more effective health programs and a healthier workplace overall.

Employee Satisfaction with Organization's Health and Wellness Offerings

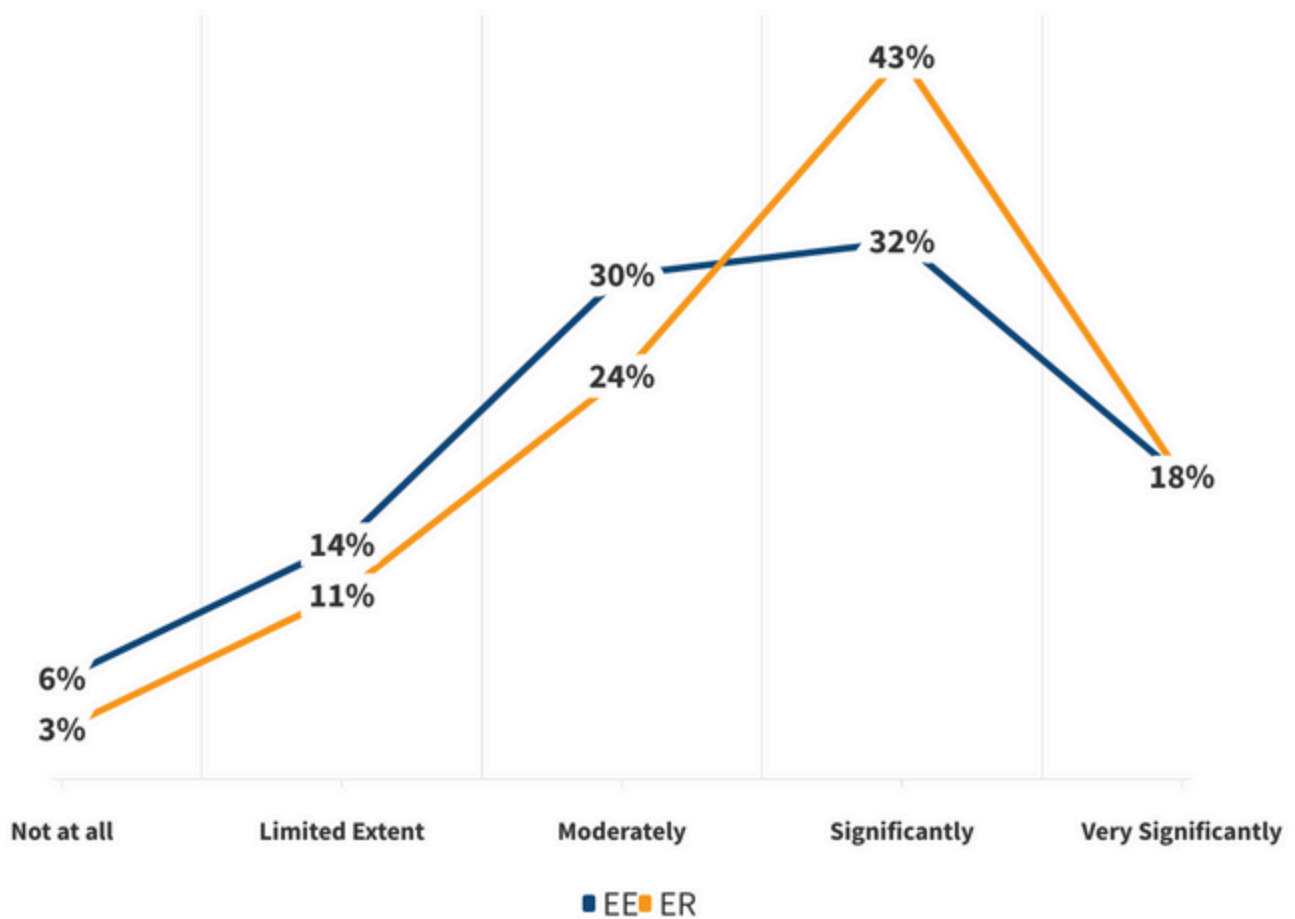
Employers tend to overestimate high satisfaction levels, anticipating that nearly half of employees would be very satisfied with the programs, while only a quarter of employees report such high satisfaction levels. Our findings show a trend of employer optimism regarding the impact of health and wellness programs that doesn't fully square with employee feedback. Employers have a more favorable view of how well health and wellness programs align with employee health priorities. Employees, while agreeing that the programs address their health priorities to some degree, are more likely to see the impact as moderate.

Figure 15. Comparing Perceived HWP's Satisfaction Levels



Our findings show a trend of employer optimism regarding the impact of health and wellness programs that doesn't fully square with employee feedback. Employers have a more favorable view of how well health and wellness programs align with employee health priorities. Employees, while agreeing that the programs address their health priorities to some degree, are more likely to see the impact as moderate.

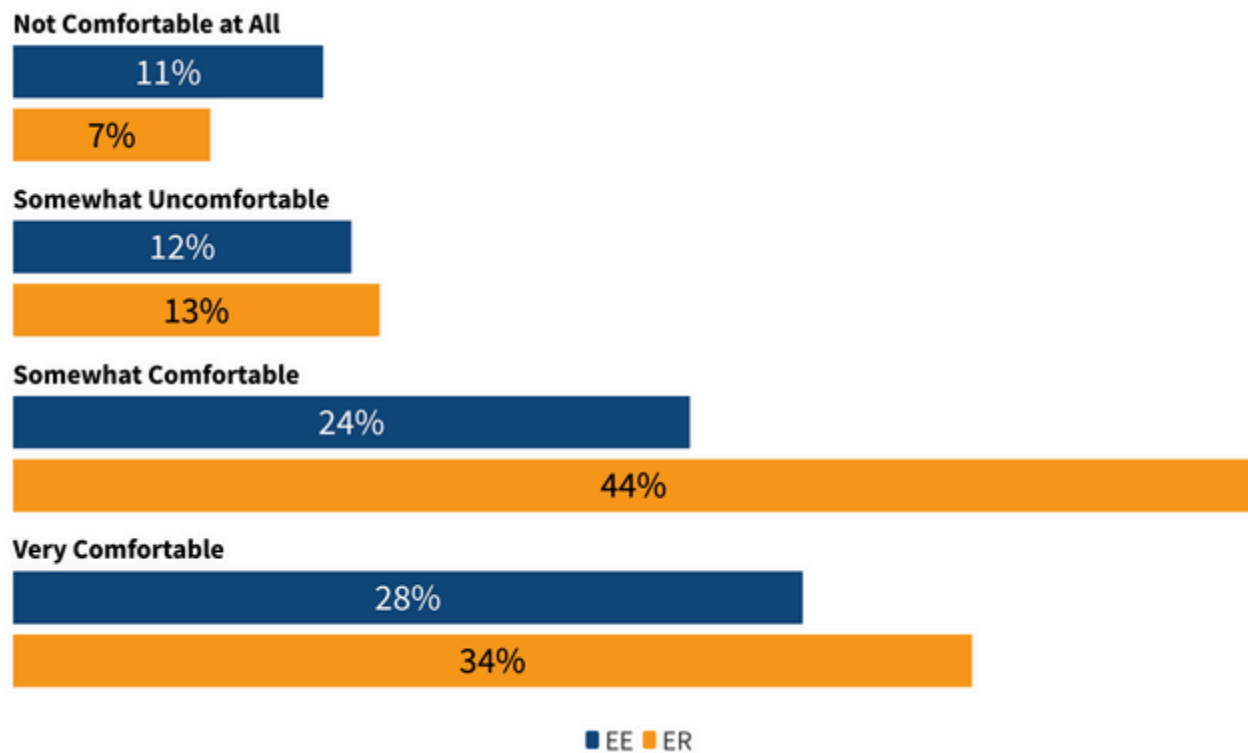
Figure 16. Comparing Employee and Employer Reported Alignment of Programs with Health Priorities



Communication and Feedback

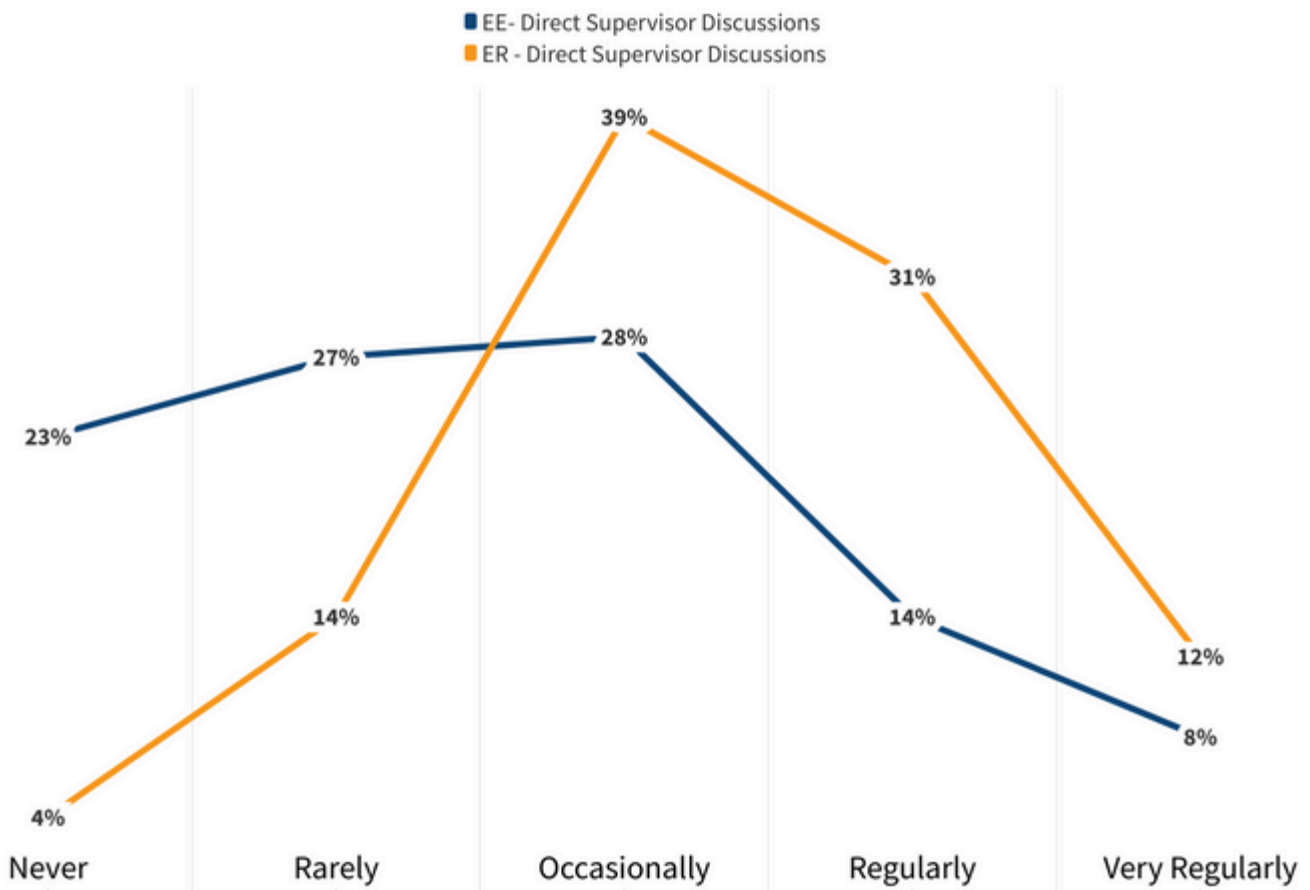
We looked at communication around health and wellness in the workplace. Employers believe in promoting an open discussion culture around health, but employee feedback shows these discussions are less frequent than desired. Nearly 80% of employers believe that their employees are either very or somewhat comfortable having health and wellness discussions with their supervisors, compared to just about half of employees (52%) who say they feel this way. The marked difference in the neutrality and uncertainty suggests that employers might not be fully aware of the employees who are on the fence about opening up regarding health and wellness issues.

Figure 17. Comparing Employee and Employer Reported Comfort Levels in Discussing Health with Supervisors



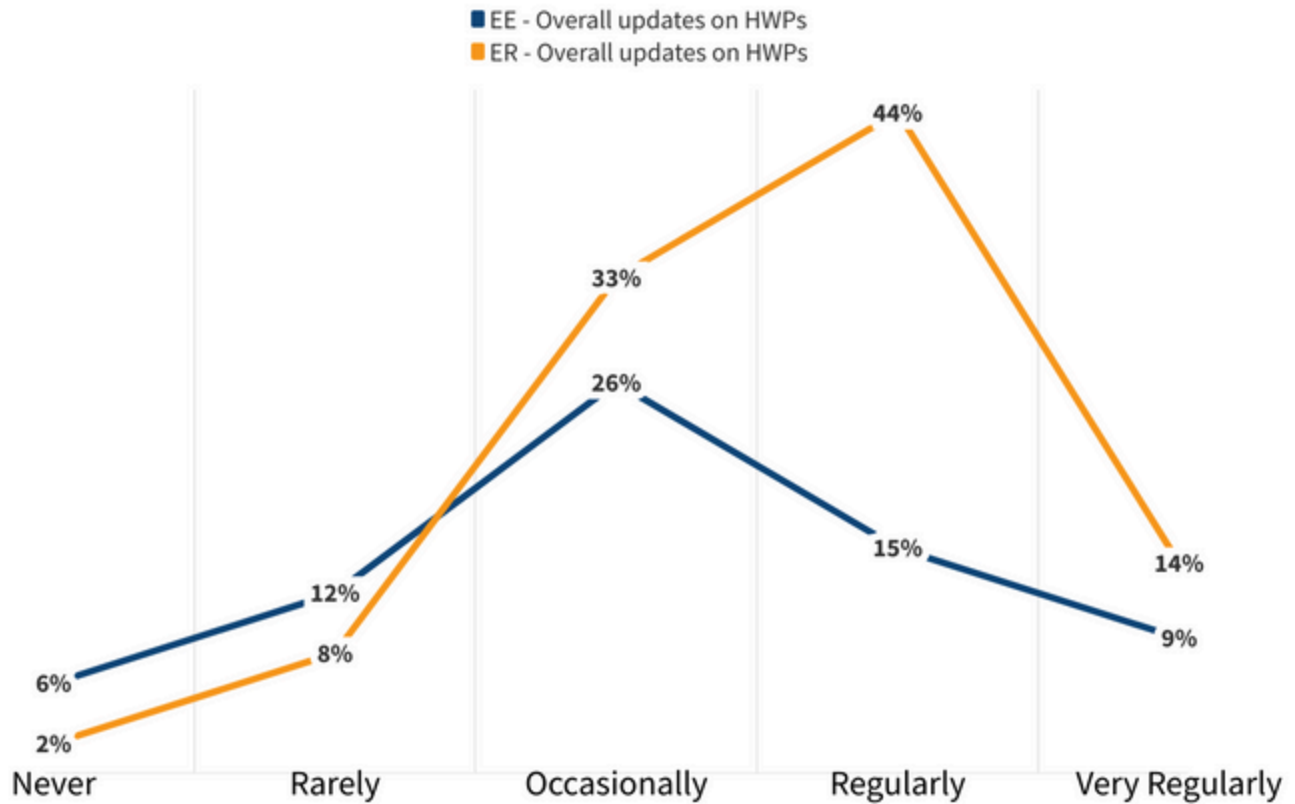
Among employees, the majority report having direct discussions occasionally (28.0%) or rarely (27.0%), with fewer reporting them as regular (14.0%) or very regular (8.0%). On the other hand, employers perceive these one-on-one discussions as more frequent, with a significant portion reporting them as occurring regularly (31.0%) or very regularly (12.0%).

Figure 18. Comparing Employee and Employer Reported Frequency of Direct HW Discussions with Supervisors



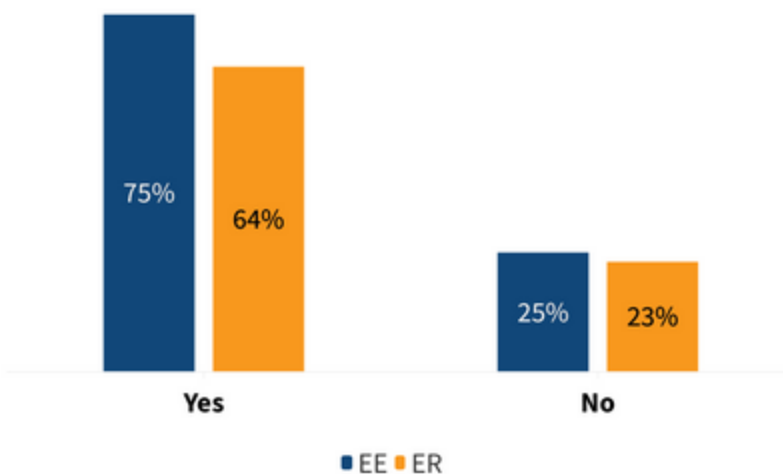
Similarly, employees report receiving updates on health and wellness offerings occasionally (26.0%), with fewer receiving updates regularly (15.0%) or very regularly (9%). In contrast, employers believe that they provide updates regularly (44.0%) or very regularly (14.0%) to their employees.

Figure 19. Comparing Employee and Employer Reported Frequency of Overall HWP Updates



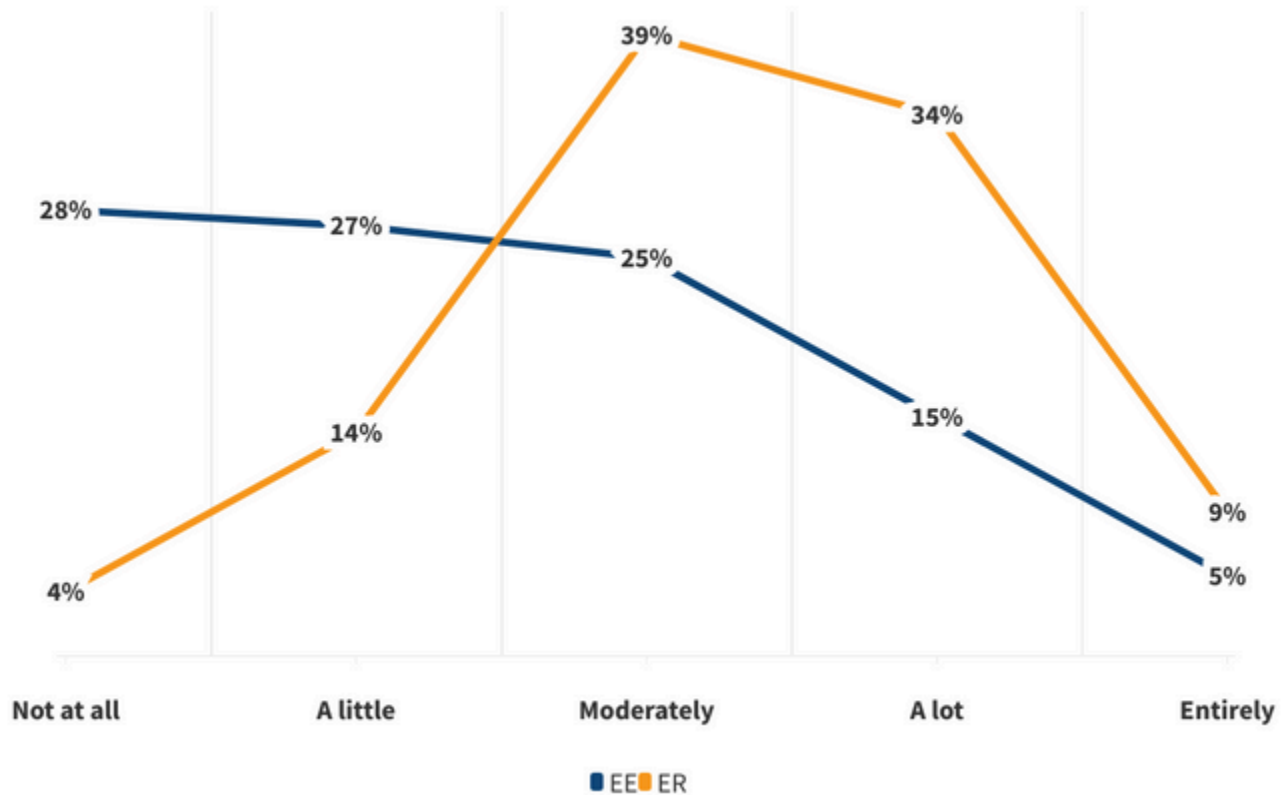
The slight variations in perceived interest in organization provided health and wellness educational content suggest that, generally, employers have a pulse on their employees' interest in health management education.

Figure 20. Comparing Employee and Employer Response to Employee Seeking Health Education from Employer



However, there is a notable difference in perception of reliance on organization for managing health and wellness. This data suggests employers may overestimate the level of dependency employees place on workplace health and wellness resources, with over 40% of employers perceiving that their employees heavily rely on organizations for health and wellness, while only 20% of employees report doing so.

Figure 21. Comparing Employee and Employer Response to Reliance on Organization's HWP Offerings

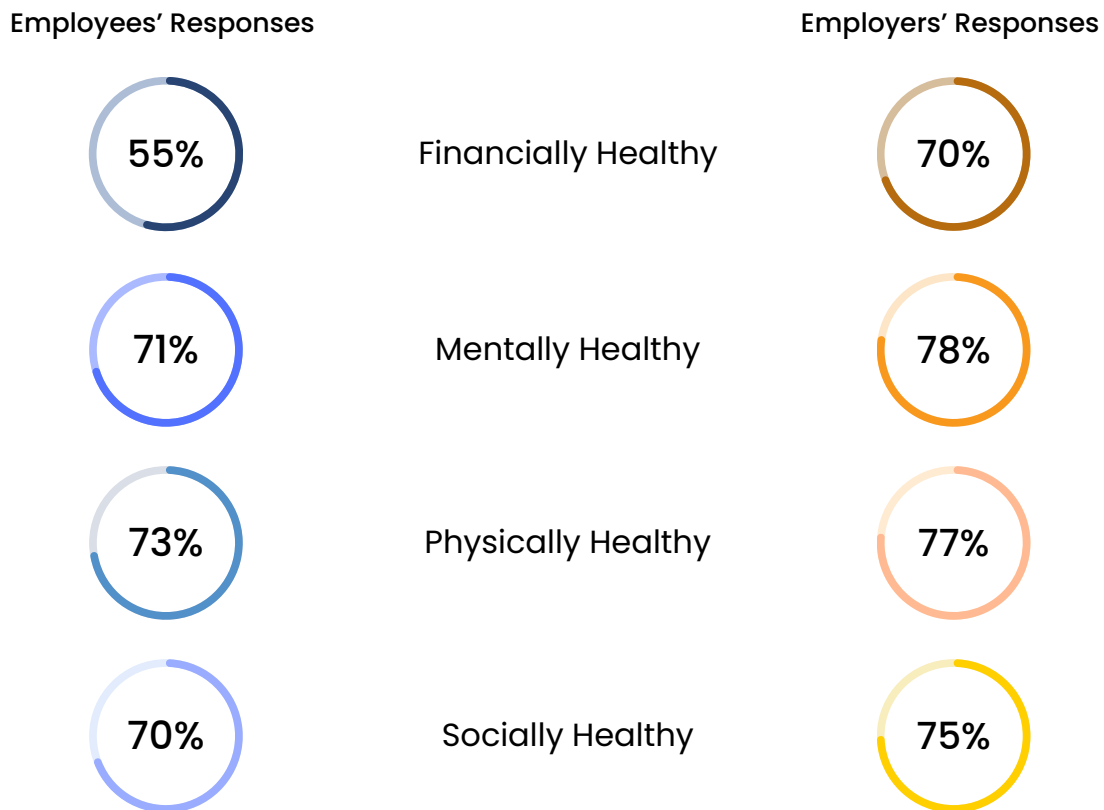


In terms of valuable programs, there is notable agreement as employees rated healthy food options and onsite gym/fitness as lowest in their rankings of most valued current programs and employers report it as having the least ROI. Employers reported stress management programs at a higher ROI and employees report it as being a valued program. Regarding perceptions on the cultural sensitivity and inclusivity of health and wellness offerings, both groups demonstrate a majority agreement that their organizations achieve this. It is noteworthy that employers are slightly more likely to disagree with the statement, suggesting that they believe their organizations could be doing more on the diversity and inclusion front.

Overall Health

Overall, employers generally have a more positive perception of their employees' health in all four categories – physical, mental, financial, and social- compared to the assessment of the employees we surveyed. The data indicates that employers may overestimate the well-being of their employees, which could impact how they tailor and offer health and wellness programs. The disconnect, particularly in the financial and mental health aspects, suggests that employers may need to reassess and align their strategies to better support their employees' actual health concerns and needs.

Figure 22. Employer and Employee Reported Perceptions of Employee Overall Health



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The Participation Gap in Workplace Wellness Programs

The findings from this study underscore a significant gap between the availability of workplace health and wellness programs (HWPs) and employee engagement with these initiatives. Despite the evident commitment from employers, as reflected in the high percentage of organizations offering HWPs (86.2%), the actual participation rates are notably lower. This participation gap reveals a complex interplay of factors that influence employee engagement, which are crucial for employers to understand and address.

Factors Influencing Participation

Our analysis reveals a complex landscape of participation barriers:

- **Time Constraints:** Employees frequently cite a lack of time as a major barrier, indicating that program scheduling and demands do not align with their personal and professional responsibilities.
- **Relevance of Offerings:** There is a noticeable lack of interest among employees in existing HWPs, suggesting that these programs may not be tailored to meet the diverse needs and preferences of the workforce.
- **Awareness and Accessibility:** Many employees are simply unaware of the programs available to them or find them difficult to access, pointing to deficiencies in how these programs are communicated and implemented.

These barriers are further influenced by demographic factors such as age, tenure at the company, and income levels, which can affect individual engagement levels and preferences for wellness initiatives.

Cultural and Leadership Influence

Organizational culture and leadership play decisive roles in the adoption and effectiveness of HWPs. Programs that are embedded into the organizational culture and promoted by leadership tend to see higher participation rates. This observation emphasizes the necessity for leadership to not only endorse but also actively engage with these wellness initiatives, embodying the health-first values they wish to instill in their organization.

Communication Gaps Between Employers and Employees

Our study underscores a significant gap between employer and employee perceptions regarding the frequency and quality of communications around health and wellness programs. Employers tend to believe that they are successfully promoting health and wellness initiatives and fostering an open culture for discussing these topics. In contrast, employees frequently report that actual discussions about health and wellness are much less common than employers perceive. Younger employees and those in remote working conditions report particularly lower levels of comfort in discussing health and wellness with their supervisors, which may reduce their likelihood of participating in wellness programs or discussing their needs and barriers openly.

Strategies for Enhancing Engagement

- **Enhanced Personalization and Relevance:** Organizations should tailor their health and wellness offerings to better meet the specific needs and preferences of their diverse workforce, keeping in mind the trends in data among various demographic groups.
- **Robust Communication Strategies:** Develop and implement dynamic communication strategies that engage employees through multiple channels and at regular intervals. This should include clear, engaging explanations of the benefits of participation and instructions on how to easily access the programs.
- **Leadership Engagement and Cultural Integration:** Strengthen the role of leadership in promoting and participating in wellness programs. This involves integrating health and wellness into the core organizational values and daily practices, making it a cornerstone of the workplace culture.
- **Addressing Practical Barriers:** Actively work to remove barriers such as time constraints and program accessibility. Consider flexible scheduling, remote access to programs, and simplifying processes to increase participation rates.

- **Continuous Adaptation and Feedback:** Establish continuous feedback mechanisms to ensure that wellness programs can adapt to changing employee needs and circumstances. This should involve regular surveys, suggestion boxes, and perhaps a dedicated wellness committee that includes employee representatives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of workplace health and wellness programs, revealing a landscape marked by well-intentioned but underutilized initiatives. The identified participation gap, driven by various organizational and individual factors, presents both challenges and opportunities for enhancing workplace wellness. By adequately addressing these strategic areas, employers can significantly enhance the effectiveness of their health and wellness initiatives. Not only will this lead to higher participation rates, but it will also promote a healthier, more engaged, and more productive workforce. Ultimately, the investment in employee health is an investment in the organization's success, yielding substantial benefits in terms of reduced healthcare costs, enhanced employee morale, and increased overall productivity.



GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS

IBI spoke with employers from global organizations, about health and wellness programs and employee engagement. We discussed approaches to developing specific solutions, enhancing communication and access, and incorporating employee feedback into their health and wellness initiatives.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Rely on empirical data and analysis to guide your wellness initiatives.

Understanding historical health claims and trends can provide a solid foundation for predicting future needs and crafting interventions that preemptively address these concerns. This method ensures that programs are relevant and genuinely beneficial, moving beyond one-size-fits-all solutions.

Tailoring Programs to Demographic Needs

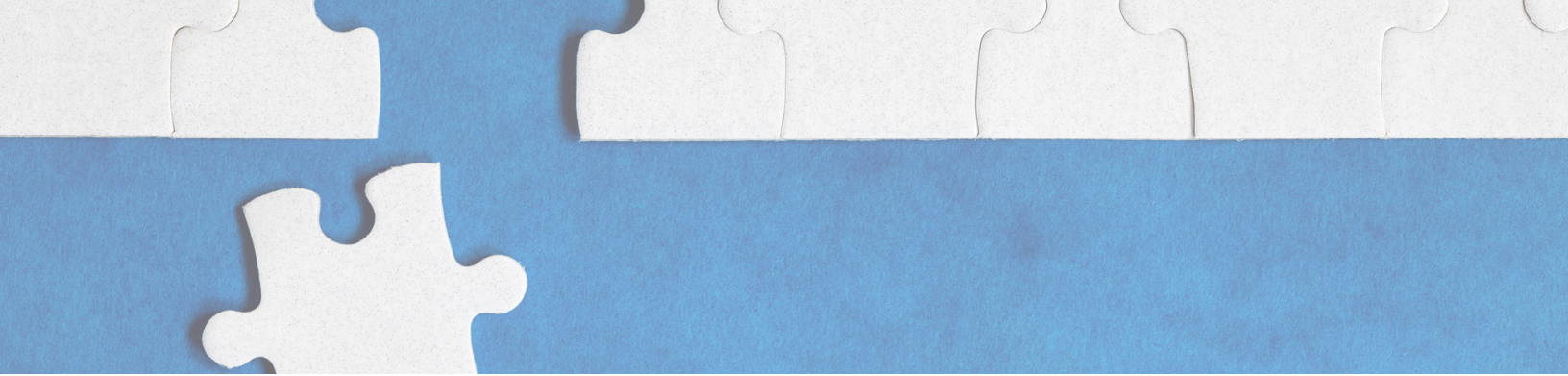
Develop wellness programs that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of different employee groups within your organization. Use data to identify the health priorities and risks of various demographics, such as age, gender, job role, and geographic location. Customized programs ensure higher engagement and efficacy, as they resonate more closely with the individuals they are intended to support.

Proactive Health Management

Incorporate predictive analytics to not just react to health issues as they occur, but to prevent them. By analyzing trends and forecasting potential health challenges, you can introduce wellness initiatives that address these issues before they become widespread. This proactive approach can lead to significant improvements in employee health and reduce long-term healthcare costs.

Continuous Evaluation and Adjustment

Maintain an ongoing evaluation process to monitor the effectiveness of wellness programs and make necessary adjustments. Use feedback from employees and continuously analyze health outcomes to refine and improve the offerings. This iterative process ensures that the wellness strategy remains dynamic and responsive to changing employee needs and health landscapes.



Employee Involvement and Feedback

Encourage active employee participation in the development and evaluation of wellness programs. By involving employees in these processes, you gain valuable insights into their preferences and experiences, which can enhance the relevance and appeal of the programs. This engagement also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the wellness initiatives among the workforce.

Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion

Ensure that wellness programs are culturally sensitive and inclusive by incorporating multilingual resources, considering cultural holidays and observances in scheduling, and respecting diverse dietary and health practices. For a global organizations, it's crucial to adapt wellness initiatives that accommodate the rich diversity of their workforce, enhancing both accessibility and engagement.

Linking Wellness to Overall Business Goals

Connect the dots between wellness outcomes and business objectives. Demonstrate how improvements in employee health reduce healthcare costs, enhance productivity, and decrease absenteeism. Regularly share these outcomes with senior leadership to align wellness initiatives with broader business strategies and to secure ongoing support and funding.

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