

# The Current State and Future of Employee Well-Being Programs 2019

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## Contents

Executive Summary

3

Employee well-being programs are widespread

7

Few employee well-being programs are very effective

9

There are diverse well-being program elements and offerings

13

The perceived impact of well-being programs

23

Differences amongst well-being leaders and well-being laggards

24

The future of employee well-being programs

28

Key Takeaways

33

## Executive Summary

In recent years, the concept of employee wellness has evolved into something more expansive and holistic, often referred to as employee well-being.

“Wellness” typically refers to employees’ physical health and is defined by the absence of illness or disability. Examples of programs that fall under the wellness umbrella could be weight loss, exercise classes, health assessments, on-site gyms, etc.

In contrast, “well-being” programs encompass not only physical well-being but mental, emotional, social, financial, and environmental. Some commentators describe well-being programs as being part of an improved employee experience.

New employees and potential candidates look at many different factors that contribute to what a new job could provide them. They consider a range of work elements that affect overall well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Some experts argue that employee well-being programs are growing in importance and significance. This study, which is based on a major survey, is intended to shed light on the current state of employee well-being programs and offer some guidance on the value of such programs.

### About this survey

HR.com partnered with Cigna, a provider of a variety of health services to employers to conduct *The Future of Employee Well-Being Programs* survey which ran during December 2018 and January 2019.

There were 410 usable responses gathered from HR professionals in virtually every industry vertical and from organizations of various sizes. All respondents were from U.S.- based organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Bersin J, Mazor A, Flynn J, Melian V. (2017, February 28). The employee experience: Culture, engagement, and beyond. Deloitte Insights. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/improving-the-employee-experience-culture-engagement.html>. Need to be a subscriber to access this link.



## Below are some key findings from the study:

**Most employers offer well-being programs but few say they are highly effective.** Although 87% of respondent organizations offer employee well-being programs, less than one in four see their programs as highly effective.

**Larger organizations are more likely to offer such programs.** Ninety-four percent of organizations with 1,000 or more employees offer employee well-being programs, whereas only 72% of smaller organizations (with 99 or fewer employees) do.

**Organizations do not promote all types of employee well-being to the same extent.** HR professionals agree or strongly agree that these top five areas of well-being are promoted the most:

- Physical well-being (77%)
- Workplace environment well-being (67%)
- Mental/emotional well-being (63%)
- Financial well-being (62%)
- Social well-being (52%)

**Nearly two-thirds (63%) say well-being programs help improve employee engagement.** Fifty-seven percent say such programs boost the retention of skilled employees, and 46% say they help in the recruitment of skilled employees.

**Compared to other organizations, those that report having better well-being programs are:**

- More likely to provide mental, environmental, financial and social well-being programs in addition to physical well-being programs
- Likely to offer employee fitness opportunities, flexible work arrangements, group exercise and volunteer efforts, and stress management support
- Considerably more likely to say their well-being programs help retain, engage and recruit employees

**About half of the organizations that do not currently offer employee well-being programs plan to do so in the future**, suggesting such programs will become more prevalent in coming years.

**Over the next several years, new technologies will become more useful in promoting the well-being of employees:**

- 64% agree devices that track wellness indicators will have a positive impact on well-being
- 76% say artificial intelligence will play a key role by alerting employees to potential health dangers
- 66% say Internet of Things (IoT) technologies will improve the physical well-being of employees

**Few organizations have a policy in regard to fitness tracking devices.** Organizations should, however, be informed of the legal issues associated with these technologies, especially if they are incorporated into wellness programs and well-being initiatives.

Please note that the findings and recommendations contained in this report are informational only. Nothing in this report should be construed to constitute legal opinions or advice. Please consult an attorney if you have questions about the legal requirements, rules, regulations or associated matters related to employee health issues.





As the demographics of the workplace continue to change, the influence of Millennials—that is, those reaching young adulthood in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century—appears to be growing. They are now 35% of the workforce, making them the largest demographic in the U.S. labor force.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Millennial generation is not solely responsible for the move towards greater employee well-being in the workforce, they are sometimes viewed as pushing organizations towards more progressive work policies.

For example, Millennials are often interested in workplace flexibility and a stronger sense of social connectedness, suggests Alan Kohll, writing in *Forbes*.<sup>3</sup> The growing prevalence of such generational attitudes might motivate some employers to pay greater attention to employee well-being issues.



2 Kohll, A. (2018, October 3). Why Millennials are good for employee well-being. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2018/10/03/why-millennials-are-good-for-employee-well-being/#1783b99d1da5>

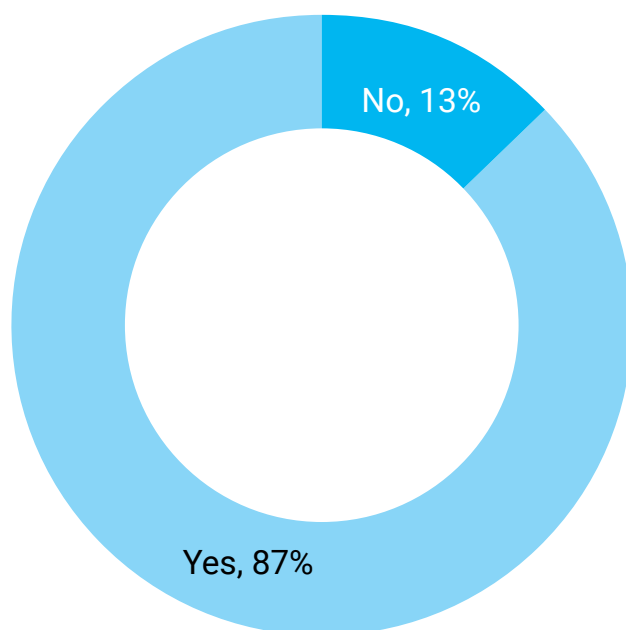
3 Kohll, A. (2018, October 3). Why Millennials are good for employee well-being. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2018/10/03/why-millennials-are-good-for-employee-well-being/#1783b99d1da5>

## Employee well-being programs are widespread

### Finding: Employee well-being programs have become the norm

Employee well-being programs are pervasive, with 87% of HR professionals saying their organizations offer programs or benefits that promote employee well-being.

**Survey Question:** Does your organization provide programs and/or benefits to promote employee well-being?

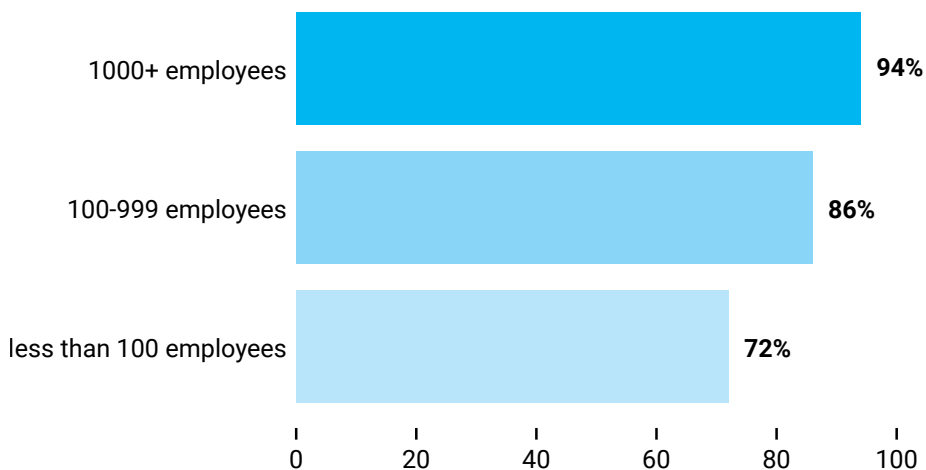


Nearly nine out of ten employers offer employee well-being and/or benefits

## Finding: Larger organizations are more likely than smaller organizations to offer employee well-being programs or benefits.

With nearly 90% of organizations offering employee programs and/or benefits to promote employee well-being, we wanted to see if the pervasiveness of employee well-being programs differed based on the number of employees. The data shows size matters when it comes to offering employee well-being programs or benefits. Ninety-four percent of organizations with 1000+ employees offer such programs or benefits. However, the smallest employers, with fewer than 100 employees, offer employee well-being programs or benefits only 72% of the time.

**Survey question:** Does your organization provide programs or benefits to promote employee well-being?



Small employers are far less likely to offer employee well-being programs or benefits than larger employers





## Few employee well-being programs are very effective

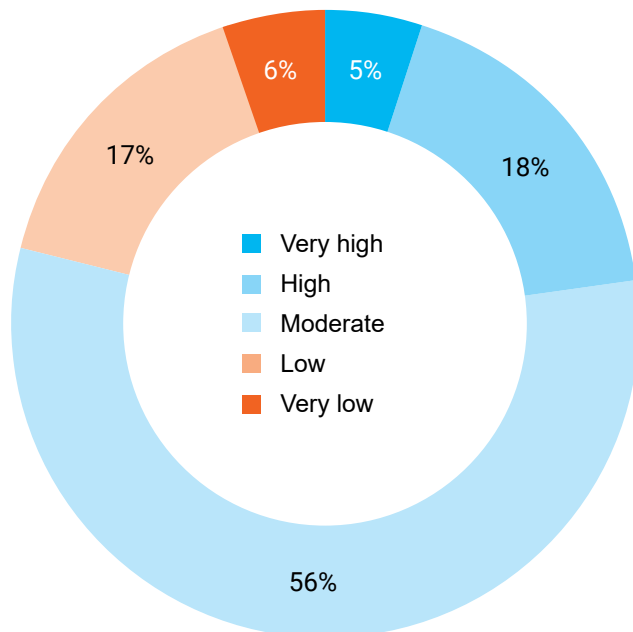
Based on the responses from our survey, the widespread use of employee well-being programs or benefits does not necessarily translate into widespread effectiveness. There are a number of plausible explanations with the disconnect between adoption and efficacy. For example, some employer programs may not be tailored to the specific needs of their employees. In some instances, there may be relatively low levels of employee participation. Like most voluntary programs of any type, the effectiveness and impact of the programs is heavily dependent upon utilization and participation.

### Finding: Less than a quarter of organizations consider their employee well-being programs to be highly effective

We began our exploration of employee well-being programs by asking participants to rate the effectiveness of their programs. The responses to the question resulted in the same percentage above and below (23%). The majority of participants reported their programs are moderately effective. Based on this data, we broke the higher and lower respondents into two research cohorts:

- **Well-being leaders:** Respondents who state that their organizations' well-being programs are effective to a high or very high degree
- **Well-being laggards:** Respondents who state that their organizations' well-being programs are effective to a low or very low degree

**Survey Question:** Overall, to what degree are employee well-being programs effective in your organization?



Most respondents describe their well-being programs as moderately effective



**Finding: A majority of organizations agree that their employee programs promote employee well-being to some degree**

Fully 78% of respondents agree to some extent that their programs promote the overall well-being of employees, but only 22% strongly agree. That is about the same percentage as those who say their programs are very effective.

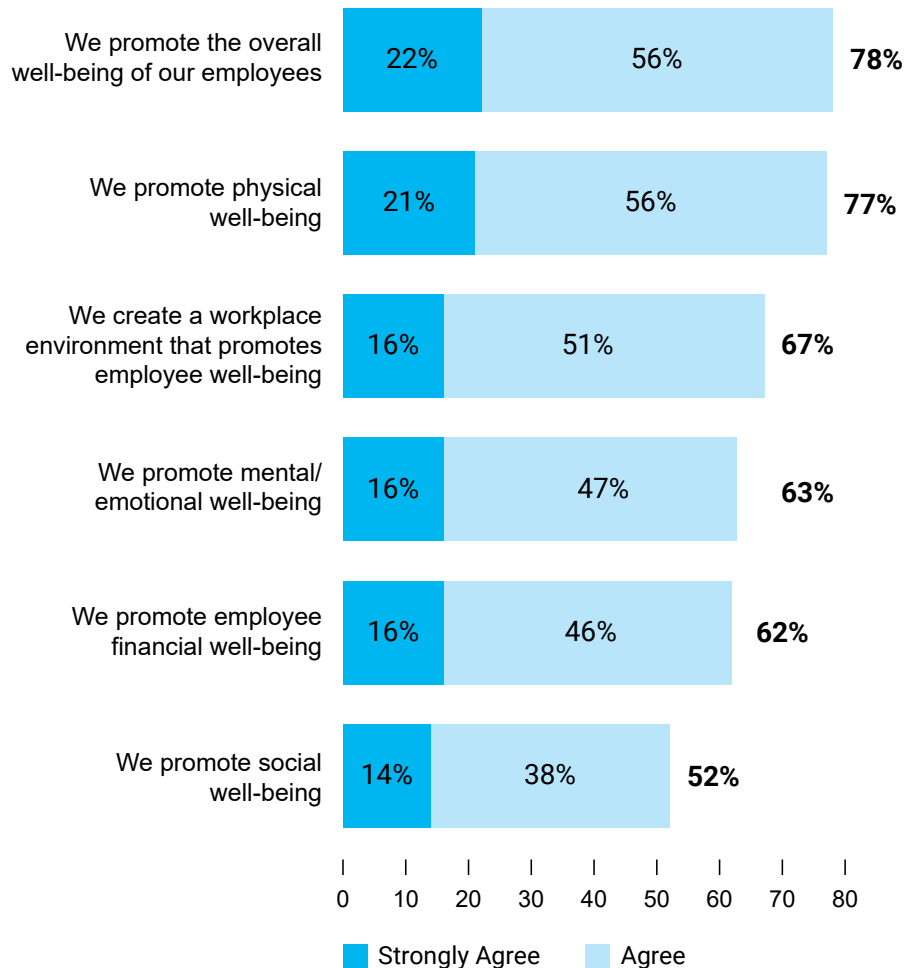
We interpret this to mean, although most programs have an impact on overall employee well-being, there is a lot of room for improvement.

Understandably, HR professionals agree most strongly with the assertion that their organizations promote physical well-being. Programs that are focused on physical well-being have formed the cornerstone of employee wellness programs for decades. These programs are mature, well-known and familiar.

The next two most widely cited areas are workplace-environment-related well-being and mental/emotional well-being. These are also areas that employers have been trying to influence for years via adjustments to the physical workplace, employee assistance programs (EAPs) and similar programs.

Although compensation planning has a long history, employers are less likely to think in terms of “financial well-being.” This requires a relatively new mindset, as does “social well-being.” Therefore these two areas are less commonly promoted in organizations.

**Survey question:** To what extent do you agree with the following statements as they pertain to employee well-being in your organization?



Twenty-two percent strongly agree that their organizations promote employee well-being



## There are diverse well-being program elements and offerings

We inquired about five areas of employee well-being programs – physical, environmental, mental/emotional, financial, and social. As we noted above, on average, organizations view themselves best at promoting physical well-being and worst at promoting social well-being. In this section, we see the wide assortment of programs and initiatives being used to improve employee well-being.

### Physical Well-Being

#### Finding: Organizations do not offer a uniform set of programs to promote employee physical well-being

We did not ask about healthcare benefits per se in this survey. However, according to the U.S. [Bureau of Labor Statistics](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf), about 88% of U.S. employers with 500 or more employees and 83% of employers with 100 to 499 employees, offered medical benefits. The wide offering of such benefits may explain why so many respondents (77%) say their organizations support the physical well-being of their employees.<sup>4</sup>

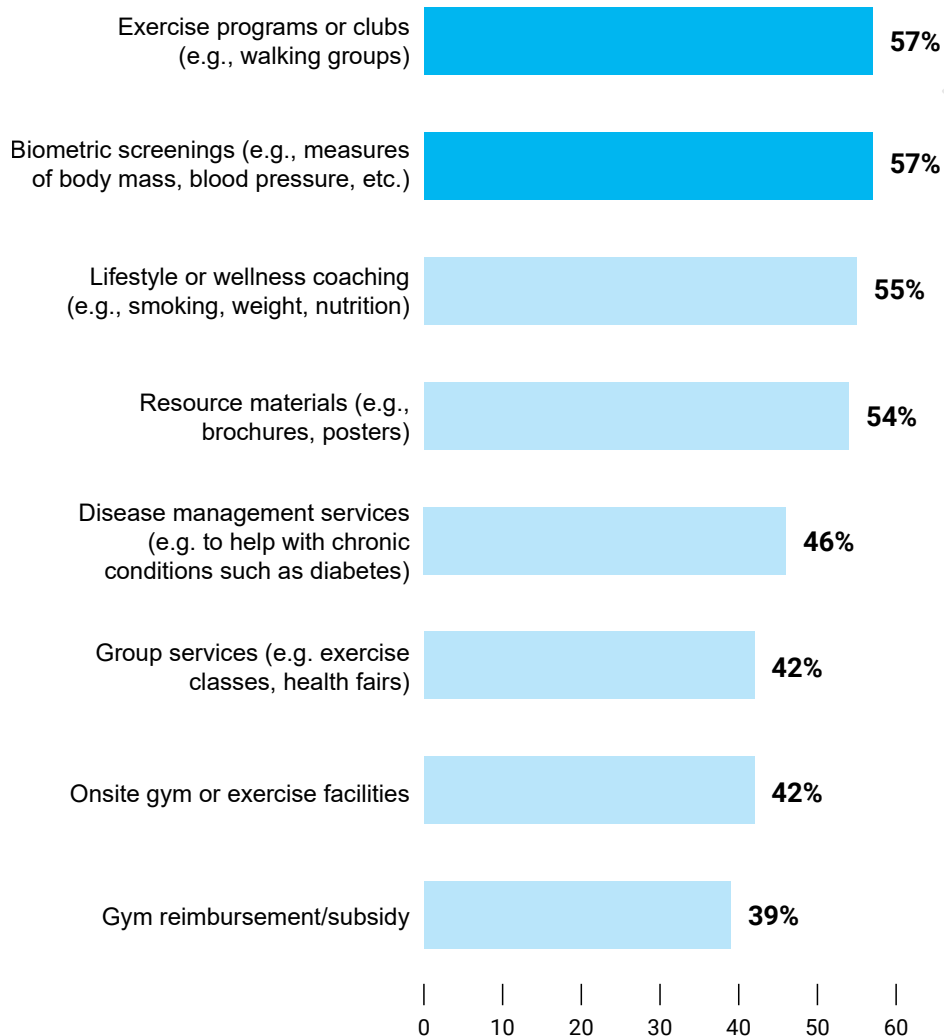
When it comes to health-promotion programs such as biometric screenings, exercise programs or wellness coaching, organizations are much less likely to provide offerings. For example, just 57% offer biometric screenings or exercise programs, 55% offer lifestyle or wellness coaching, and 42% offer gym or exercise facilities.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018, July 20). Employee Benefits in the United States. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>. You will need to copy paste link into browser to avoid the 404 error.





**Survey question:** Which of the following offerings does your organization have in place to promote employee physical well-being? (choose all that apply)



**Exercise programs and biometric screenings were the most commonly cited offerings supporting physical well-being**

## Environmental workplace well-being

Employers have been considering the impact of the workspace on employees for hundreds of years, but one of the most significant developments occurred in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Frederick Winslow Taylor started the [Scientific Management](#) movement. He and his colleagues studied how work was performed, and Taylor concluded that making people work hard was not as efficient as optimizing the way they performed their work and the way the workplace was laid out.<sup>5</sup>

Taylor was, however, famously criticized for making work monotonous and unfulfilling as employees were required to do one, or a few small and rigidly defined pieces of work instead of using complex skill sets. Some felt Taylor was turning people into automatons.

As a counterpoint of these influences, management thinkers also began thinking about the impact of work on [health](#). In 1919, the work of Polish scientist by Józefa Joteyko, who wrote *The Science of Labour and Its Organization*, was published in English. It included ideas such as the measurement of occupational fatigue.

The idea of “ergonomics” emerged. This refers to an applied science that focuses on designing and arranging workplace tools and objects so that people and things interact both efficiently and safely. In 1921, Kan-ichi Tanaka published *Research of Efficiency: Ergonomics*, which introduced human engineering to Japan.<sup>6</sup>

Since that time, a variety of groups (management thinkers and labor unions, as well as employers) have devoted considerable time and effort into thinking about how the work environment influences employee health and well-being. This history may be why, as reported above, two-thirds of employers say they create a workplace environment that promotes employee well-being.

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5 Frederick Taylor and Scientific Management. Mindtools. Retrieved May 2019 from [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM\\_Taylor.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_Taylor.htm). You will need to copy paste link into browser to avoid the 404 error.

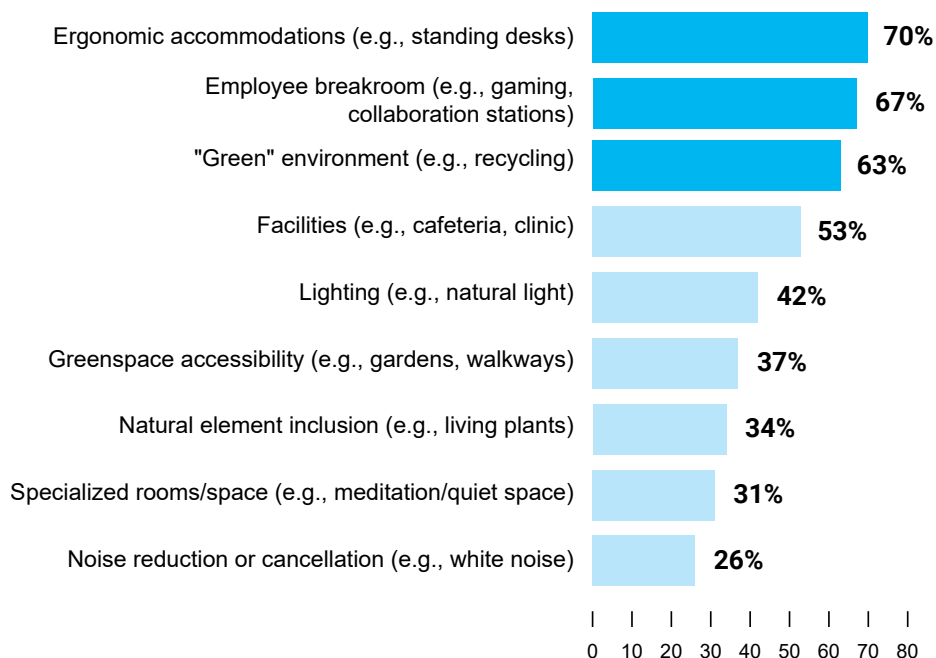
6 The History of Ergonomics. Japan Ergonomics Society. Retrieved May 2019 from [https://www.ergonomics.jp/e\\_index/e\\_outline/e\\_ergono-history.html](https://www.ergonomics.jp/e_index/e_outline/e_ergono-history.html)

## Finding: Employee environmental workplace well-being programs represent a blend of programs aimed at equipment, social space and external considerations

The workplace environment is affected by a range of influences and factors. Many organizations offer programs or initiatives related to these factors. In fact, the most frequently cited offering was “ergonomic accommodations” (e.g. standing desks), cited by 70%.

Two other elements are in place in over three-fifths of organizations: employee breakrooms (67%) and “green” environment initiatives such as recycling (63%). A substantial portion of employers are also incorporating more natural elements into the workspace, such as gardens, living plants and natural light. There is, in fact, a growing body of [research](#) suggesting that employee access to greenery and green spaces can increase both wellness and productivity.<sup>7</sup>

**Survey question:** Which of the following offerings does your organization have in place to promote employee workplace environmental well-being? (choose all that apply)



Employee workplace environment programs blend ergonomic initiatives and other programs such as greenspaces and enhanced breakrooms

<sup>7</sup> Seppala E., Berlin J. (2017). Why you should tell your team to take a break and go outside. Retrieved May 2019 from <https://hbr.org/2017/06/why-you-should-tell-your-team-to-take-a-break-and-go-outside>

## Emotional well-being

Various studies indicate a relationship between the emotional well-being of employees, their physical well-being and their workplace productivity. One [study](#) notes that in the Netherlands, as many as 58% of the work-related disabilities are connected to mental health issues. In the United Kingdom, researchers estimate 30% to 40% of the sickness absences are linked to mental illness. Even when employees are not absent from work, those who suffer from work-related stress can be especially subject to problems such as lower productivity, more human error and worse occupational health.<sup>8</sup>

### Finding: EAP services and flexible work arrangements are most frequently offered initiatives for promoting emotional well-being

The large majority of employers (87%) give workers access to Employee Assistance Programs, or EAPs. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) reports that an EAP is generally an employment-based program that provides confidential help with personal or work-related challenges, such as substance abuse, stress, grief, and a range of other issues.<sup>9</sup>

Flexible work arrangement (FWA) represents the other emotional well-being initiative offered by a majority of participants (60%). This is, a broad term that can [include](#) flexibility in:<sup>10</sup>

- time when work begins
- the number of hours worked
- the location where work is done

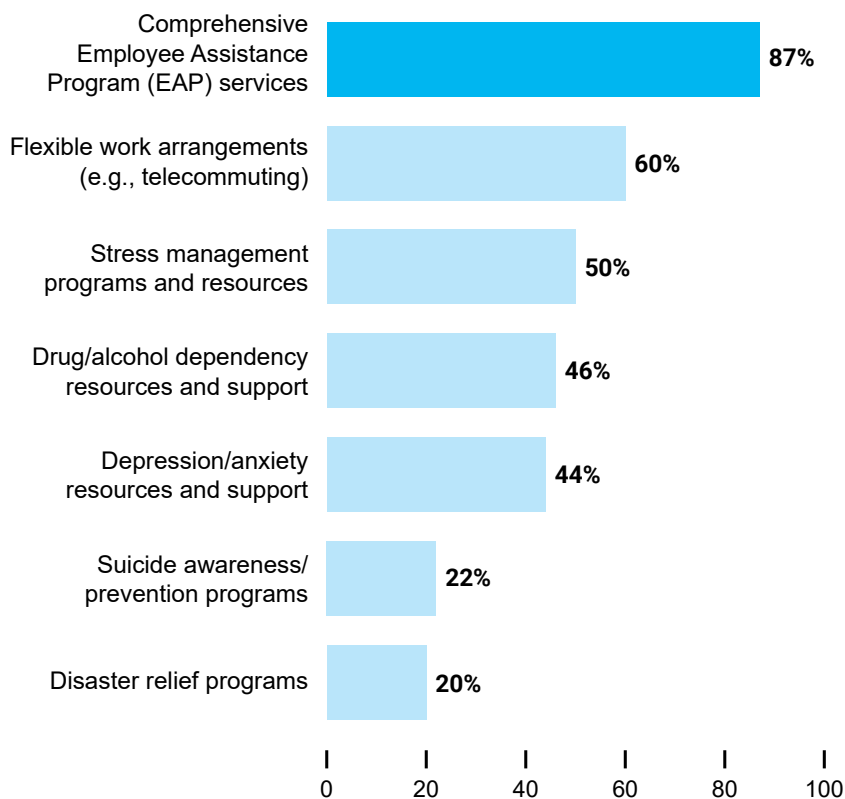
There are various possible arrangements, such as flextime, compressed work weeks, break arrangements, part-time work, job sharing, telecommuting, telework, and more.

8 Rajgopal, T. (2010, September-December) Mental well-being the workplace. Indian Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine, pp. 63-65. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3062016/>

9 What is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)? U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Retrieved from <https://www.opm.gov/faqs/QA.aspx?fid=4313c618-a96e-4c8e-b078-1f76912a10d9&pid=2c2b1e5b-6ff1-4940-b478-34039a1e1174>. You will need to copy paste link into browser to avoid the 404 error.

10 Georgetown University Law Center. Flexible Work Arrangements: A Definition And Examples. Retrieved May 2019 from <https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=legal>

**Survey question:** Which of the following offerings does your organization have in place to promote employee mental/emotional well-being? (choose all that apply)



**EAPs are widely used in today's organizations**





## Financial well-being

Paid work has, of course, always been inextricably linked to financial well-being, but this topic has become more prominent in recent years. Some is linked to stagnant wage growth in some countries. In the U.S., the average wage after inflation has about the same purchasing power as it did 40 years ago. Significant wage gains have mostly gone to highly paid employees.<sup>11</sup>

Other factors have also influenced employee financial well-being. One of the most critical for younger employees is the issue of student loans. Student loan debt in the U.S. affects more than 44 million borrowers who collectively owe \$1.5 trillion. After mortgage debt, student loan debt is the second highest consumer debt category.<sup>12</sup> A PwC research [report](#) on financial well-being found that 64% of employees are impacted by student loans, and 54% of employees are stressed about the finances.<sup>13</sup>

### **Finding: There is a high level of consistency in the type of employee financial well-being programs in organizations**

Organizations tend to offer three types of programs to promote employee financial well-being 80% or more of the time: medical and pharmacy benefits (89%), supplemental benefits such as dental and vision (87%), and financial planning/resources/services (80%). Other popular programs include flexible spending accounts, competitive salary/wages and educational reimbursement programs. Organizations offer Health Savings Account (HSA) or Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) contributions nearly two-thirds of the time.

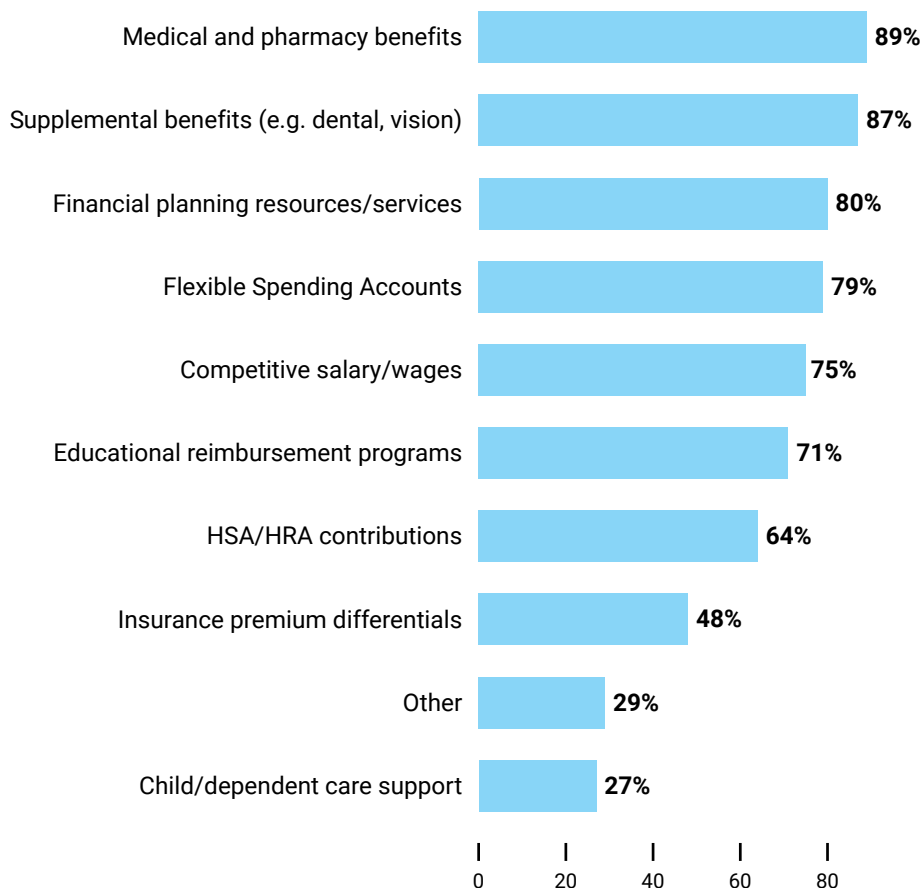
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11 Desilver, D. (2018, August 7). For most U.S. Workers, real wages have barely budged in decades. Retrieved May 2019 from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/07/for-most-us-workers-real-wages-have-barely-budged-for-decades/>

12 Friedman Z. (2018, June 13). Student loan debt statistics in 2018: A \$1.5 trillion crisis. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2018/06/13/student-loan-debt-statistics-2018/>

13 2018 Employee Financial Wellness Survey highlights. PwC. Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/industries/private-company-services/library/financial-well-being-retirement-survey.html>. You will need to copy paste link into browser to avoid the 404 error.

**Survey question:** Which of the following offerings does your organization have in place to promote [employee] financial well-being? (choose all that apply)



There is relatively a broad agreement on the most popular employee financial well-being programs



### Social well-being

Compared to the types of well-being listed above, employee social well-being tends to be a newer employer concern. Over the last several decades, [research](#) has shown that factors such as employee relationships have an impact on employee engagement and retention. And other studies indicate such relations affect overall well-being. For example, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which tracked the lives of 724 men for 79 years, showed relationships have a large impact on health, happiness and the quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

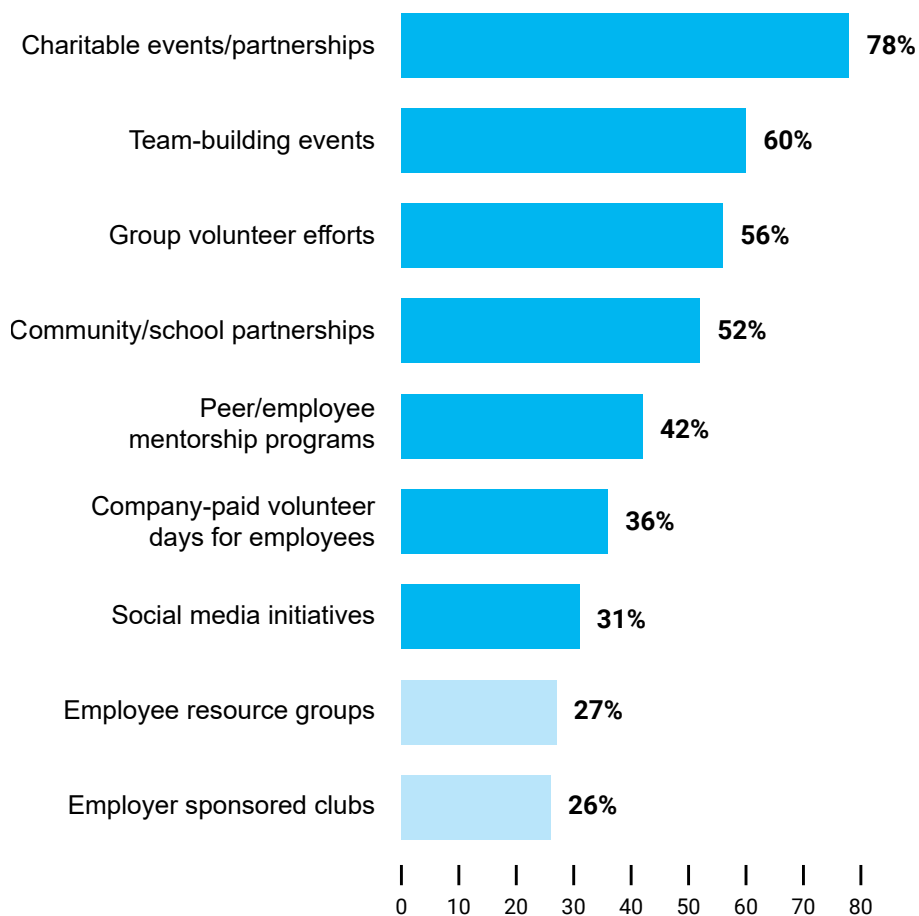
#### **Finding: Charitable support and team-building are most frequently mentioned as ways of promoting the social well-being of employees**

Of the four most frequently mentioned programs to promote the social well-being of employees, three of them are philanthropic in nature. The most popular program is charitable events/partnerships (78%). Group volunteer efforts (56%) and community/school partnerships (52%) are third and fourth respectively. Of the top four, the only program that is not about externally directed philanthropy, is team building (60%).

Although externally directed efforts and events can be helpful in building up social capital, more organizations should also consider internally focused initiatives that encourage socialization, interaction and community-building in the workplace.

14 Kohll, A. (2018, January 2018). 5 reasons social connections can enhance your employee wellness programs. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2018/01/31/5-ways-social-connections-can-enhance-your-employee-wellness-program/#7243d4f0527c>

**Survey question:** Which of the following offerings does your organization have in place to promote employee social well-being? (choose all that apply)



Relatively few organizations offer employee resource groups or employer-sponsored clubs

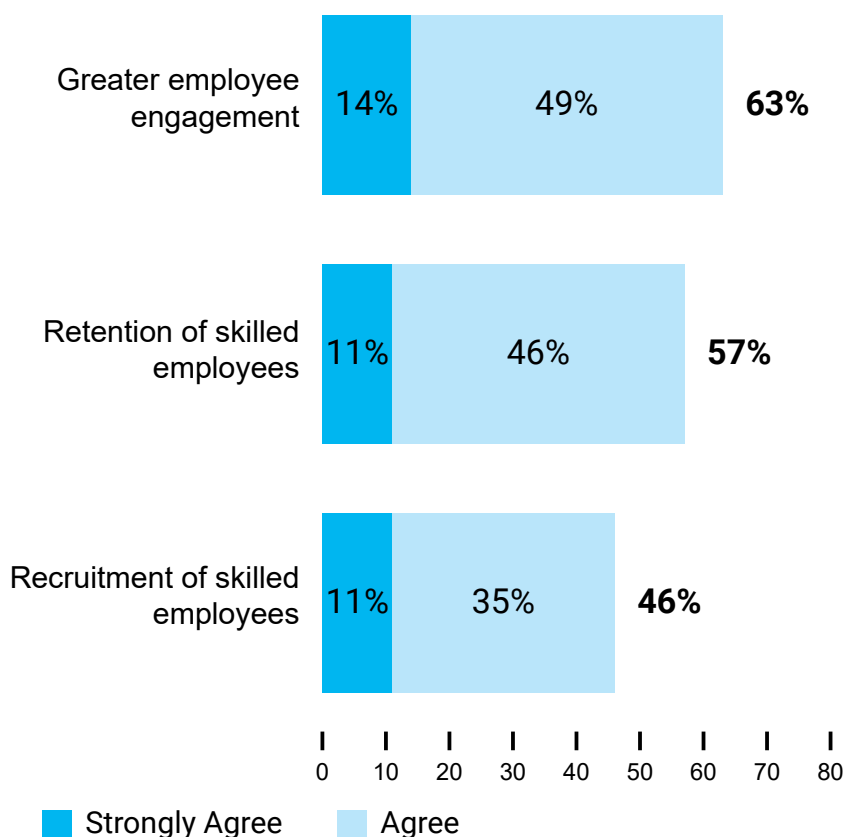


## The perceived impact of well-being programs

**Finding: Employee well-being efforts tend to improve the levels of employee engagement and retention more than the recruitment of new talent**

Although recruiters can use employee well-being programs to attract prospective employees and burnish the employer brand, such efforts appear to have more of an effect on engaging and retaining current employees. In fact, most responding HR professionals (63%) agree or strongly agree that employee well-being programs drive greater employee engagement, where 46% think well-being programs help their organizations recruit skilled employees. Most (57%) participants also agree that well-being programs contribute to retention.

**Survey question:** Our employee well-being programs help my organization achieve the following:





## Differences amongst well-being leaders and well-being laggards

As noted earlier, we examined the survey data by breaking respondents into two cohorts designated as well-being leaders and well-being laggards. In this section, we examine the differences between these two groups.

### **Finding: Well-being leaders tend to provide physical and mental health well-being initiatives more frequently**

Below are nine specific well-being offerings where the difference between the well-being leaders and well-being laggards is 17 percentage points or more. In eight of the nine, leaders utilize the offering more frequently than the laggards.

Leaders are more likely to offer physical well-being initiatives to a much greater extent in the following areas: onsite gyms, group services, and exercise programs. The areas in which the well-being leaders offer mental well-being services considerably more frequently are depression and anxiety support, flexible work arrangements and stress management.

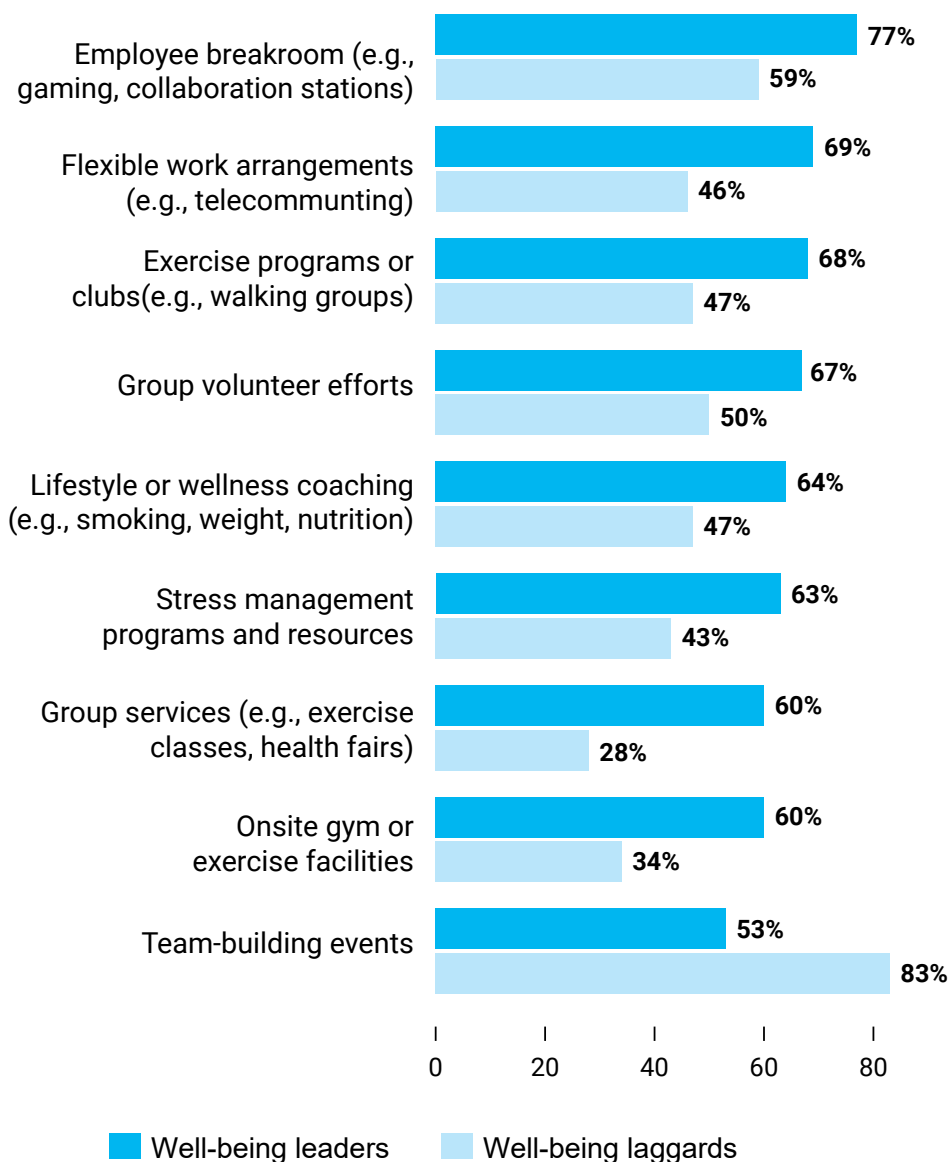
We should note that there's a single area in which the leaders offer a service considerably less frequently than laggards: team building. This does not imply that team building is not important. In fact, correlation does not necessarily mean causation in any of these areas, so we should be careful in interpreting such data as from the perspective of "best practices."

That said, it appears leaders are more likely to provide:

- Employee fitness opportunities
- Flexible work arrangements
- Group exercise and volunteer efforts
- Stress management support



**Survey question:** Our employee well-being programs help my organization achieve the following:



### **Finding: Well-being leaders indicate they see better results from their efforts across all five areas of well-being**

Compared to laggards, leaders are more likely to convey their programs promote employee well-being across each of the five levels. This is based on the percentage that agree or strongly agree with statements related to these areas.

- Physical well-being – 92% to 61%
- Emotional well-being – 89% to 43%
- Creating a workplace environment that promotes employee well-being – 87% to 48%
- Financial well-being – 84% to 43%
- Social well-being – 79% to 21%

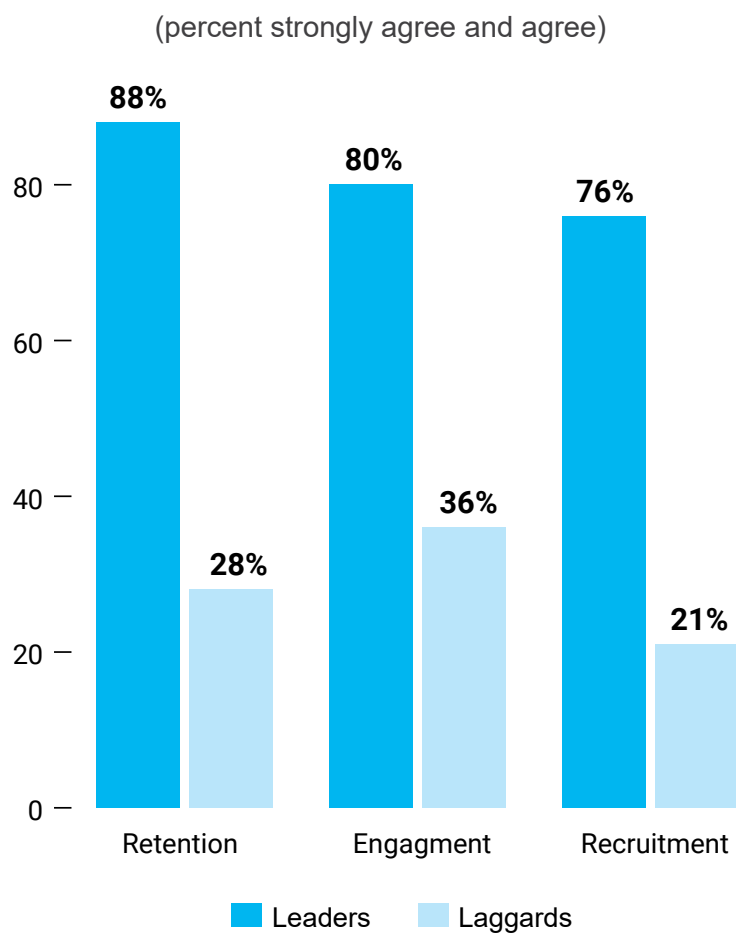
### **Finding: Well-being leaders are much more likely to report impacts on employee engagement, retention and recruitment**

Well-being leaders appear to gain a greater positive impact from their employee well-being efforts. For example, whereas 88% of well-being leaders agree or strongly agree that employee well-being programs drive greater employee retention, only 28% of the well-being laggards do.

We cannot make any clear causal connection between well-being programs and specific business outcomes such as engagement and retention, but the data does suggest that better well-being programs might have an impact in these areas.



**Survey question:** How well-being leaders and laggards compare in three key areas



## The future of employee well-being programs

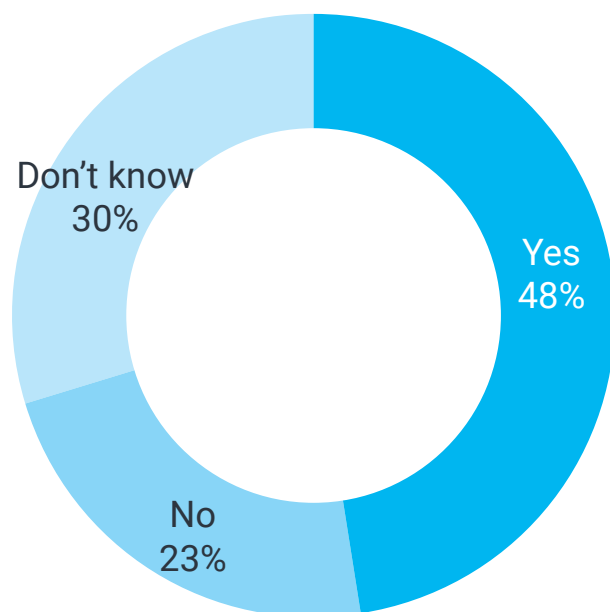
The survey on which this study is based also asked respondents to look ahead to the future. We wanted to know whether those organizations not currently offering well-being programs plan to do so in the future. We also wanted to know what future employee well-being programs might be included in coming years.

### Finding: About half of the organizations not offering employee well-being programs plan to do so in the future

The majority of responding organizations (87%) already provide some form of well-being programs and benefits. But what is the outlook among the 13% that do not provide such programs? This study indicates about half plan to provide well-being-related programs or benefits in the future. This suggests that well-being programs will become more common in future years.



**Survey Question:** Does your organization plan to provide programs or benefits to promote employee well-being in the future?



One quarter of firms currently not providing well-being programs or benefits, plan to promote well-being in the future



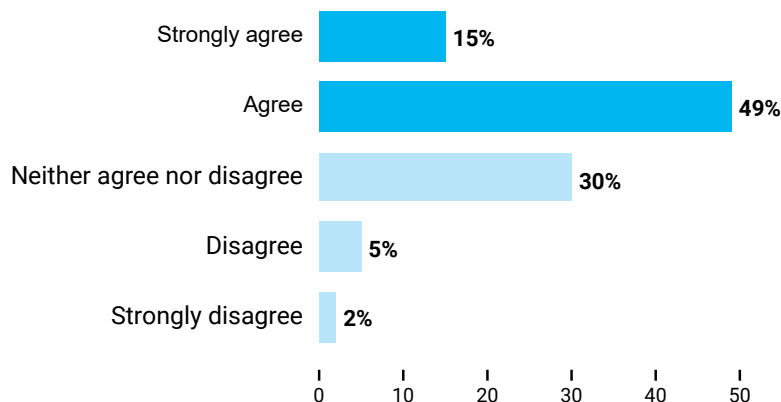
### Finding: Over the next few years, wearables will likely be useful in promoting the physical well-being of employees

In recent years, wearable devices have gone mainstream, and future growth is expected. Industry analyst CCS Insight [forecasts](#) that worldwide wearable sales will grow by an average of 20% per year from 2018 to 2022, when it is expected to become a \$29 billion market with 243 million unit sales.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, fitness trackers have been a large portion of the wearable market. Although the sales of fitness trackers is expected to decline, many other wearables are likely to have fitness capabilities. The [Apple Watch](#), for example, can measure steps taken, distance travelled, calories burned and allow users to set daily goals and track progress over time.<sup>16</sup>

According to our study, two-thirds of HR professionals agree or strongly agree, “wearable devices that track exercise levels and other wellness indicators will have a positive impact on employee well-being over the next several years.” Well-being leaders are even more positive about the future impact of wearables, with 72% of participants from those organizations expressing confidence in their future impact.

**Survey statement:** Wearable devices that track exercise levels and other wellness indicators will have a positive impact on employee well-being over the next several years.



Almost two-thirds of employers believe wearable fitness devices will have a positive effect on employee well-being

<sup>15</sup> Lamkin, P. (2019, February 22). Smartwatch Popularity Booms With Fitness Trackers On The Slide. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paullamkin/2018/02/22/smartwatch-popularity-booms-with-fitness-trackers-on-the-slide/#e14b1397d96d>

<sup>16</sup> Elliott, M. (2019, May 8). How to count steps with your Apple Watch. CNET. Retrieved from <https://www.cnet.com/how-to/count-steps-with-apple-watch/>

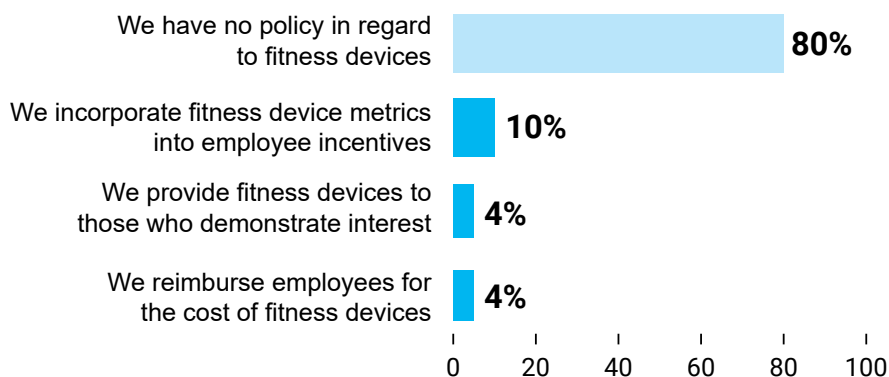
### Finding: Even as wearables grow in popularity, very few organizations have any type of policy about them

While most participants agree that wearable technology can be positive for employee well-being, relatively few organizations have a policy about them. Organizations should, however, be informed of the legal issues associated with these technologies.

The information from such devices, depending on how they're used, can not only raise privacy concerns but could be viewed as constituting an illegitimate medical examination. Moreover, the information might reveal undisclosed health conditions that should not be in the hands of employers.<sup>17</sup>

If organizations plan to incorporate data from wearable devices into their fitness programs, they should consider the legal implications and fashion policies accordingly.

**Survey statement:** What is your organization's current policy on fitness tracking devices? (select all that apply)



Four-fifths of employers have no policy about wearable fitness technology

17 Zielinski, D.(2018, June 5). Wearable technology may boost wellness, but be careful. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/technology/pages/wearable-technology-boost-wellness-be-careful.aspx>

## Finding: Artificial intelligence will likely play an important role in employee well-being efforts

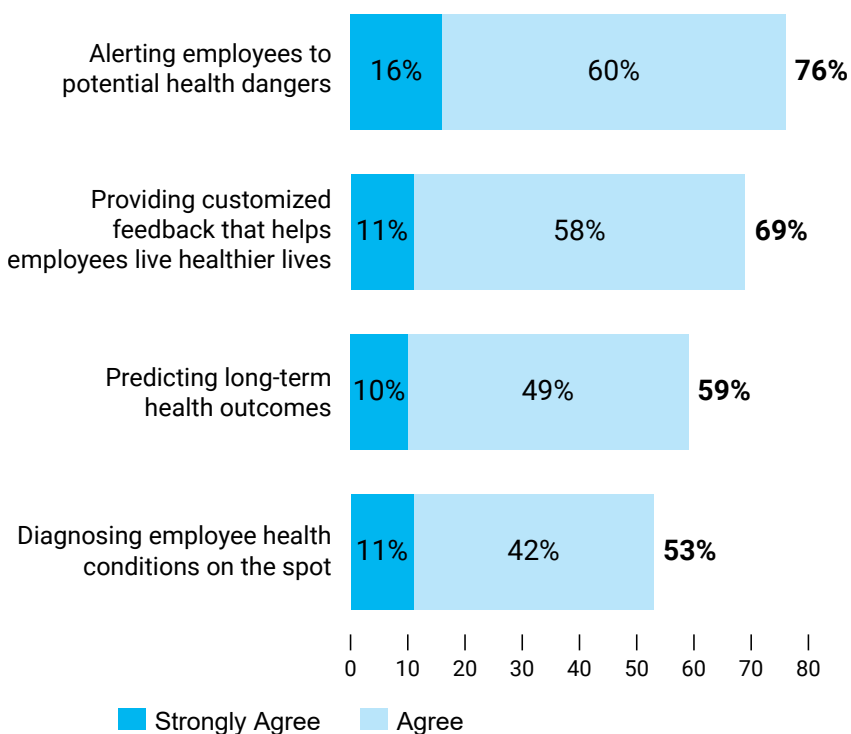
We are surrounded by artificial intelligence (AI), and in many cases we may not even be aware. AI is already playing a large role in transportation, banking, medicine and education. So, it's not much of a stretch to see an expanding role for AI in a variety of employee well-being areas. Over half of our survey participants see AI playing an expanded role in improving the physical well-being of employees. The two most widely cited roles are:

- Alerting employees to potential health dangers
- Providing customized feedback that helps employees live healthier lives

With fitness tracking technology, however, employers should stay aware of any legal implications of incorporating such technologies into official wellness and health promotion activities.



**Survey statement:** Artificial intelligence will play an increasingly important role in the following areas



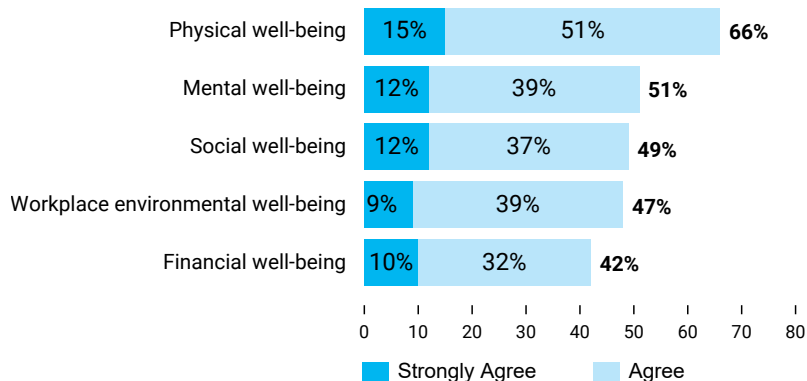
Over three-fourths of participants see AI alerting employees to health dangers

## Finding: The Internet of Things (IoT) is widely seen as having a future impact on employee well-being

The Internet of Things (IoT) [refers](#) to the billions of physical devices that collect data and share data and are connected to the internet. They include—but aren't limited to—mobile, wearable and voice-activated devices. For many people, these devices add convenience and ease of use to personal technology, homes and automobiles.<sup>18</sup> Study participants see these tools as increasing the capability of employees to improve their well-being in several areas.

The area where respondents envision the most substantial increase in capabilities is in employee physical well-being (66%), although about half also cited an impact on mental and social well-being.

**Survey statement:** As mobile, wearable and voice-activated devices (e.g., Alexa) are connected via Internet of Things (IoT) technologies, employees will have increased capabilities of improving their well-being in the following areas:



Two-thirds agree that IoT technologies will improve the physical well-being of employees

Although it's likely true that IoT will have an impact on employee well-being, the sheer novelty of these technologies means that no one can be sure how they will impact everything from employers' wellness policies to the interpretation of civil-rights and privacy laws. These are areas that HR professionals should keep an eye on if they plan to leverage IoT for the purpose of employee well-being in the future.

<sup>18</sup> Ranger, S. (2018, August 21). What is the IoT? Everything you need to know about the Internet of Things. ZDNet. Retrieved from <https://www.zdnet.com/article/what-is-the-internet-of-things-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-iot-right-now/>



## Takeaways

Based on the findings in this study, below are recommendations on how organizations can increase the impact of their employee wellness and well-being programs.

1

**View employee well-being from a holistic perspective.** Organizations that excel in this area tend to promote well-being to a greater degree in all five areas studied: physical, emotional/mental, workplace environment, financial and social.

2

**If just beginning, consider focusing first on physical and mental health initiatives.** Organizations that excel in well-being initiatives are especially likely to provide employee fitness opportunities and stress management support. Over time, however, also consider other types of well-being initiatives.

3

**Consider offering incentives to employees to participate in well-being programs and initiatives.** Such incentive programs must be conducted carefully, so they are in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Organizations may wish to start during the open enrollment for insurance. It's an annual event and an opportunity for HR teams to communicate with every employee about benefits beyond insurance. Add explanations of your employee well-being programs to the open enrollment information sessions and materials. Make the well-being information positive and explain how it benefits the employees. When possible and in compliance with laws and regulations, use employee/peer testimonials about your well-being programs. It's one thing for HR to talk about the benefits of well-being programs, but it's an entirely different level of credibility when peers tell employees how the programs have helped them. Generally speaking, the incentives themselves are less important than connecting fun and interesting incentives to your workplace culture.

4

**Audit your employee well-being offerings.** Make sure your offerings meet the needs of your workforce and match the standard in your market. Are you offering the programs and initiatives that your employees want and need most? Use the audit to find areas in which your organization can step ahead of your industry competitors to help you gain advancements in engagement, recruitment, retention, employer brand and overall employee well-being.

5

**Nurture a workplace culture that is supportive of healthy employees.**

Although culture-change efforts are seldom easy, leaders and HR managers have many tools at their disposal. You can start with manager training. If managers champion employee well-being as a priority, then employees will believe it. If not, other well-being initiatives are not likely to be very effective. There are, of course, many other initiatives that can help nurture a wellness culture. For example, HR might implement regular health fairs with an emphasis on exercise, diet and stress management. HR could also find the space to add a gym or exercise facilities or, if that's not possible, help subsidize gym memberships. Finally, as you put these programs together, find senior leaders to sponsor the efforts and participate in visible ways.

6

**Consider leveraging fitness technologies, but be careful in how they are used.**

One of the benefits of wearable fitness devices is people can “keep score” with their own progress and activities. While many people profess to being “non-competitive,” having measurable indicators of progress towards fitness can be powerful motivators to engage in healthy pursuits such as walking, swimming, biking, aerobic exercise classes, etc. If you can find fun ways to blend wearable devices with games and contests, employees might not feel as though their efforts toward fitness are lonely and isolated ventures. Adding group incentives can be a fun and productive way to foster a team approach to employee fitness. However, it's critical that HR understands using data from such devices can trigger employee privacy concerns and might even constitute a “medical examination” under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Given that these are new and evolving technologies, HR should only incorporate them into well-being programs once all the legal and privacy implications are well understood.



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All statistics unless otherwise noted are from the Cigna "The Future of Employee Well-Being Programs" 2018-2019 survey.

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