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# Benefits 2.0

Building a market-leading  
benefits strategy



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# Contents

<b>3</b>	<b>About this report</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Key findings</b>
<b>8</b>	1. View benefits as a driver of competitive advantage
<b>11</b>	2. Evolve plans to meet diverse worker needs
<b>15</b>	3. Benefits don't have to be baffling
<b>18</b>	<b>Energy and utilities industry spotlight</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Appendix 1: Methodology</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>Appendix 2: Summary of survey questionnaire</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>Endnotes</b>

# About this report

Benefits 2.0 is a research initiative conducted by Economist Impact and sponsored by Nuveen, a TIAA company. This initiative delves into the impact of employer-provided benefits across three levels: workers, employers and the broader US economy. Our research endeavors to assist employers in crafting leading-edge benefits strategies by providing insights aimed at bolstering competitiveness, fostering inclusion and improving communication and implementation.

The report presents findings and insights derived from an Economist Impact survey of 1,500 full-time workers, an economic model and a series of consultations with industry experts.

We would like to thank the following experts for their time and insights:

- **Caroline McGoldrick**, health solutions innovation and integrated solutions leader at Aon
- **Christopher Wimer**, director of the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University School of Social Work
- **Jeff White**, senior director of global health benefits at Boeing
- **Jeris Stueland**, expert associate partner in the healthcare systems and services practice at McKinsey
- **Jill Mongelluzzo**, director of benefits strategy at National Grid

- **Lisa Lynch**, director of the Economic Policy Institute and senior professor at Brandeis University
- **Mark Devine**, head of life, absence and disability products at Prudential
- **Maureen Kennedy-Harlan**, director of global benefits at Rockwell Automation
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# Executive summary

Employer-provided benefits are a core feature of the US labor market, accounting for nearly one-third of all compensation in the US.<sup>1</sup> From paid time off to training and education, they span the gamut from essential protections to perks. Workers take benefits packages seriously when deciding which job to take. But how well suited are current packages to meet the diverse and evolving needs of workers? How effectively are employers communicating their benefits plans?

And to what extent is the provision of benefits data-driven and inclusive, reflecting the diversity of the workforce, and evolving over time to incorporate feedback?

In a knowledge-driven economy, an organization's greatest asset is its people. Benefits play a crucial role in talent acquisition and retention, fostering workforce engagement, and promoting mental and physical health and well-being. Getting it wrong can have a significant material impact on a company's financial performance, productivity and reputation.

This Economist Impact research program, sponsored by Nuveen, a TIAA company, examined the impact of benefits at three levels: across workers, employers and the broader US economy. The analysis included a survey of 1,500 full-time workers, economic modeling and consultations with industry experts. The research aims to help employers design market-leading benefits strategies and offers tactics to help them enhance competitiveness, inclusion, communication and tailoring.

This report highlights three key findings for optimizing benefits:



## 1. View benefits as a driver of competitive advantage

**Seven in ten full-time workers are willing to switch jobs for better benefits, underscoring the significance of benefit plans for building talent competitiveness.** Rather than viewing benefits as a cost, organizations can seize a competitive advantage by treating them as a strategic investment. Attractive packages are a magnet for talent and a motivator for that talent to stay longer and commit to an organization. It will only become more important in the years to come, with 66% of Gen Z respondents considering taking a new job solely for the education or wellness benefits. Conversely, inadequate benefits weaken the appeal of a company and lead to higher attrition, which levies its own cost in terms of repeated onboarding, training and acculturation. Our research also finds that many workers feel their current benefits are failing to meet their fundamental needs in areas like healthcare and financial stability. Those who can will move to better pastures; those who cannot will be less engaged and productive.

## 2. Evolve plans to meet diverse worker needs

**One-size-fits-all benefits are ineffective and inefficient, and too many workers are falling through the gaps. Priorities and needs vary significantly across demographic groups and different life stages—parents, young people and minorities often prioritize non-traditional**

**benefits, for instance.** From confidence about health and retirement to preferences about wellness and education, our research found substantial variations across age, gender, parental status, seniority, race and ethnicity. By understanding diverse needs, access challenges and actual usage, organizations can spot gaps and save costs on ineffective blanket policies. By tailoring benefits, organizations can demonstrate commitment to an inclusive culture and work environment. That starts with gathering better data about what workers truly desire through measures like persona-mapping, seminars, digital outreach and in-person discussions.

## 3. Benefits don't have to be baffling

**Two-thirds of workers believe their organizations do not effectively promote benefits, explain them or innovate how they are implemented, meaning their offerings go underused.** Common complaints include unclear communication about available benefits, limited opportunities for worker feedback, and a perception that certain benefits lack relevance or usability. Eighty percent of workers say that their company's culture does not encourage taking time off, for instance, even when paid leave is available. Organizations that take a thoughtful, proactive approach to worker benefits, focusing on addressing the real-world gaps and communicating effectively, can improve effectiveness and targeting to better serve their workers and themselves.

# Introduction

Given that most workers would be willing to switch jobs for better benefits, it seems untenable that so many employers are not paying more attention to creating attractive, tailored packages. The issue is about more than just the magnitude of investment in benefits, however. **Employer-provided benefits already account for nearly a third of all compensation in the US,<sup>2</sup> making it a major expense for companies. But are they making the most of that spending?**

Benefits packages are especially important for US workers, given the country's lack of broad-based safety nets, as compared with European economies. Career decisions are often informed by this, ranging from access to staples such as retirement plans and health insurance to the availability of education, training and wellness programs. In a knowledge-driven economy, firms' success hinges to a large degree on how well they compete for and retain this talent.

This Economist Impact study analyzes how effectively companies are using benefit plans to build competitive advantage; whether benefits provision is meeting diverse needs; and how well organizations communicate the benefits they offer. Despite the importance of all three, the research (see methodology) reveals that current worker expectations are not being met. The ramifications extend not only to workers, but also their employers, the economy and society.

This report identifies key gaps and misalignments between benefits provision and workers' priorities and perspectives. It also offers tactical advice for companies to design and deliver more effective benefits as part of a holistic strategy to build competitive strength, achieve diversity and inclusion goals and optimize their spending.



### Research methodology

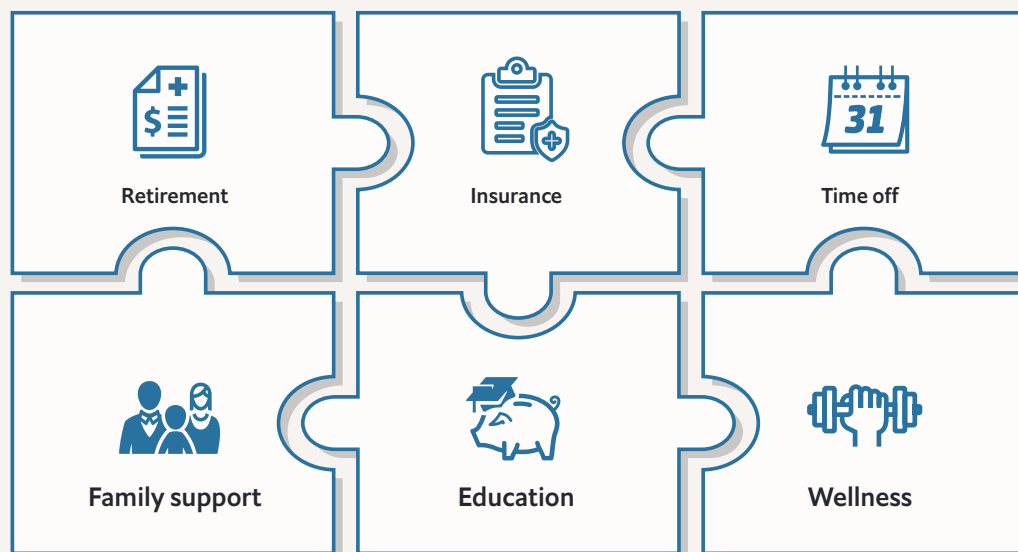
An Economist Impact survey, conducted in October and November 2023, captured the views of 1,500 full-time workers at medium- to large-sized companies (at least 1,000 workers) across three industries in the US: manufacturing; sports, media and entertainment; and energy and utilities.

The survey was designed to enable data disaggregation across a range of demographics and worker characteristics, such as age, sex, ethnicity, company size, seniority and job function. The full survey specifications are available in the appendix.

To supplement the analysis, Economist Impact conducted interviews with business leaders, benefits providers, unions and consultants to provide insights into topics such as the provision of employer-provided benefits, demographic trends across benefits, how companies design, use and treat benefits packages, and potential gaps in benefits research. These interviews were used to develop the survey, validate and interpret results, inform recommendations and guide future work on this project.

For specific industries, we also conducted economic modeling to understand the scope of spending across benefit types (including how much companies and individuals spend) and assessed what this spending means for the wider economy in terms of inter-industry spending, job creation and value creation.

Our research focuses on six types of employer-provided benefits:



# Key findings

## 1. View benefits as a driver of competitive advantage

By attracting talent and supporting the well-being necessary for productive employment, comprehensive benefits drive significant competitive advantage for employers; however, many workers are unhappy with their current provision and say they would consider changing jobs based on benefits packages.

Seven out of ten workers in our survey would be willing to switch jobs for better benefits, with younger workers expressing the greatest willingness to move on (see figure 1).

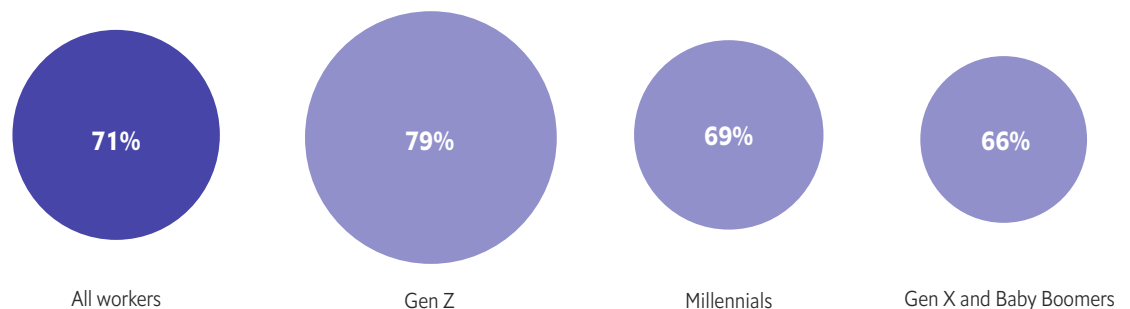
This reflects just how concerned workers are about the adequacy and quality of current plans. Only 50% of full-time workers feel confident that they can afford their (or their family's) healthcare needs, for instance, stressing just how important

these benefits are in the decisions of job seekers. Research from The Commonwealth Fund has found that nearly 24 million Americans with employer health plans still spend a large share of income on healthcare via deductibles, copayments and coinsurance.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, even though over 90% of the population has some form of health insurance, medical debt stands at more than US\$1,000 for 14 million people (6% of adults) and over US\$10,000 for 3 million.<sup>4</sup>

Such insecurity causes stress and increases the risk of burnout, low engagement and lagging productivity. These symptoms are widespread, with only six in ten respondents in our survey reporting that they feel healthy enough to effectively perform their job duties.

**Figure 1: Seven in ten workers—eight in ten among Gen Z—would consider switching jobs for better benefits**

Percentage of workers who would consider switching jobs



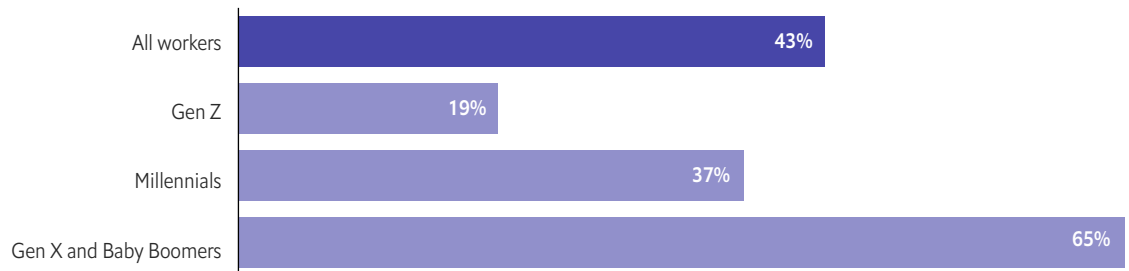
Source: Economist Impact



**Figure 2: Gen Z and racial minority groups are uncertain about their ability to retire on time**

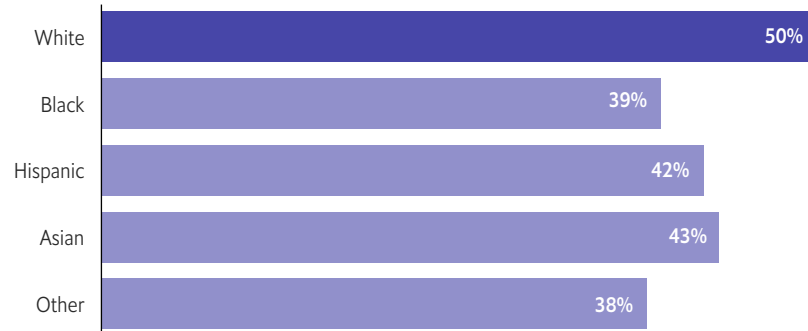
"I feel confident that I will be able to retire at the federal retirement age"

Percentage who agree



"I feel confident that I will be able to retire at the federal retirement age"

Percentage who agree



Source: Economist Impact

Retirement readiness is another worry, with the majority concerned that they will not be able to stop working at the federal retirement age. Workers from Gen Z and racial minority groups are more uncertain about their ability to retire on time compared with their older counterparts (see figure 2). At the same time, younger employees were also significantly more likely to deprioritize retirement benefits, with just 2% of Gen Z and 16% of Millennials ranking them as “most important” compared with 55% of Gen X respondents. This tendency to defer retirement planning until later, especially if workers are contending with high living costs and immediate challenges now, underscores a key benefit gap. Given the compounding effects of retirement savings, those impacts add up, with workers losing significant cumulative capital if they start saving too late.

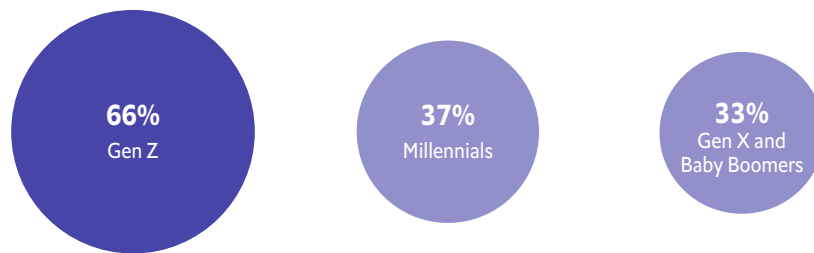
Therefore, by offering comprehensive retirement plans and clearly communicating retirement benefits with workers, especially younger cohorts, employers can create a sense of financial security

and stability that will resonate deeply with a younger and more diverse workforce. Racial minorities are also less likely to feel confident about their ability to retire at the federal retirement age, especially black and Hispanic respondents. Black workers aged 51-64 are, according to US government data from 2023, the least likely to have a retirement account, and the accounts that do exist are far smaller than the median account of their white counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

These statistics reflect a crucial reality for workers: their benefits are not adequately addressing their needs in core areas such as healthcare access and long-term financial stability, with racial minorities and young workers particularly disadvantaged. These shortcomings are often seen as deal breakers and will drive them to seek opportunities elsewhere. Those with in-demand skills—the very people that companies need to attract and retain—will vote with their feet. Those that remain will be less engaged, productive and loyal.

**Figure 3: Non-traditional benefits like education are a significant motivator for younger workers**

"All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better access to education/training benefits"  
Percentage who agree



Source: Economist Impact

Health and retirement, however, are only part of the package. Nearly half of workers say they would consider taking a new job solely for its education or wellness benefits. Gen Z, in particular, is attracted to education and training benefits, with 66% saying they would consider switching jobs for better access to these perks (see figure 3). An organization looking to build a young workforce should look to capitalize on these benefits, especially in an age of 'automation anxiety' in which many roles and functions are disrupted by artificial intelligence.

"In today's competitive landscape, where industries intersect and talent pools blend, we can't just look at what's happening in our own industry," says Jill Mongelluzzo, director of benefits strategy at National Grid. "We must attract the talent to do all kinds of work: finance, engineering, technology, human resources. We must have an employee

value proposition that resonates with the talent marketplace and a rewards package competitive with all industries in order to develop the workforce depth that will help drive our mission forward."

Besides attracting high-quality talent, robust benefits foster a more engaged workforce that experiences less turnover, offering further cost savings from reduced onboarding, training and acculturation. These strengths in turn enhance innovation capacity, productivity and efficiency.

"When you're meeting the needs of workers from a benefits perspective, then they're more engaged, they stay with the company longer and they know the organization cares about them. In turn, they produce superior results, and it truly does impact business performance," says Maureen Kennedy-Harlan, director of global benefits at Rockwell Automation.



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## 2. Evolve plans to meet diverse worker needs

A second key finding is that benefit priorities vary immensely across demographic groups, making one-size-fits-all approaches ineffective. The problem may be compounded by a lack of data and engagement. The prevalence of one-size-fits-all packages suggests companies lack sufficient insight into what their workers truly desire. Workers are often vocal about competitive wages, but they may be 'quietly' disgruntled about the portion of their compensation made up of benefits.

"So few employers are genuinely seeking in-depth input from workers about their preferences regarding benefits," says Jeris Stueland, expert associate partner in the healthcare systems and services practice at McKinsey. "This has unfortunately led to a lack of creativity and a lack of better understanding about what could truly be a differentiating factor."

Priorities also vary substantially across demographic cohorts and life stages, driven by diverse needs and circumstances. Younger and older workers, parents, and those from ethnic minority groups all express distinctive preferences and needs across benefit categories, from retirement packages to parental leave. Despite

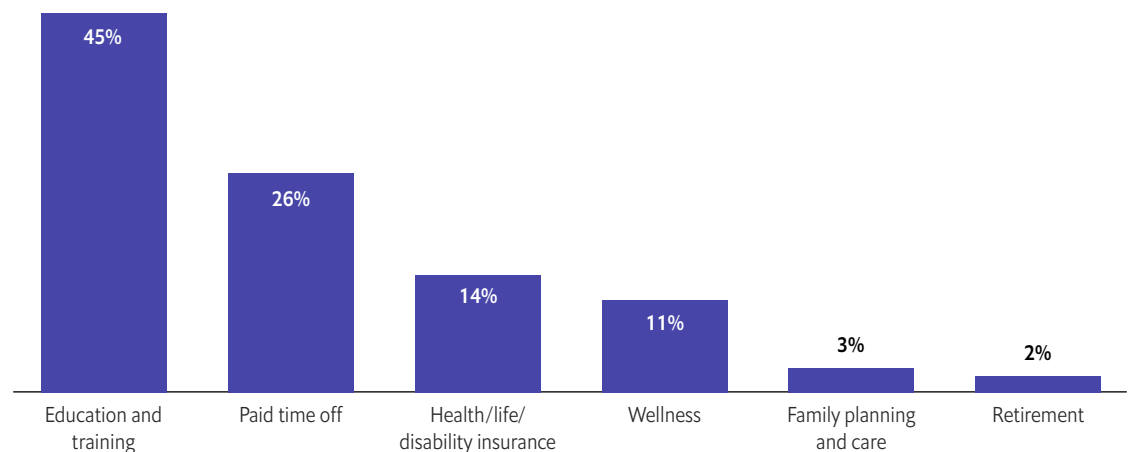
these differences, our survey reveals that access to benefits fails to correspond to the specific needs and preferences of each group.

As cited earlier, younger workers place a higher premium on education and training, with nearly half of Gen Z ascribing it as their most important benefit (see figure 4). And though many employers do offer certain basic training benefits, only 47% of US businesses offer tuition assistance.<sup>6</sup>

Gen Z workers also place much more weight on paid time off than their older peers, but they express the least satisfaction with their opportunities for taking advantage of this. For instance, they are the least likely to say they can use all their vacation days, reported by only 72% compared with 86% of Baby Boomers. They are also the least likely to think their employer offers sufficient time off for volunteering, bereavement and mental health (53% hold this view compared with 64% on average). In addition, they are more likely to feel that their company culture does not actively encourage taking time off. These disparities are notable for employers, given that 71% of Gen Z consider paid time off as a critical factor in choosing a job, compared with a survey average of 63%.

**Figure 4: Education and time off are high priorities for younger workers**

Percentage of Gen Z ranking each benefit as most important



Source: Economist Impact

Meanwhile, older workers place a greater emphasis on retirement benefits—87% of this cohort rank retirement among their top three most important benefits. However, only 32% of them have access to automatic retirement contribution plans from their employers (see figure 5).

**Figure 5: Automatic retirement contributions are not as accessible for older workers**

"My employer contributes [to my retirement savings plan] regardless of whether I contribute"

Percentage who agree



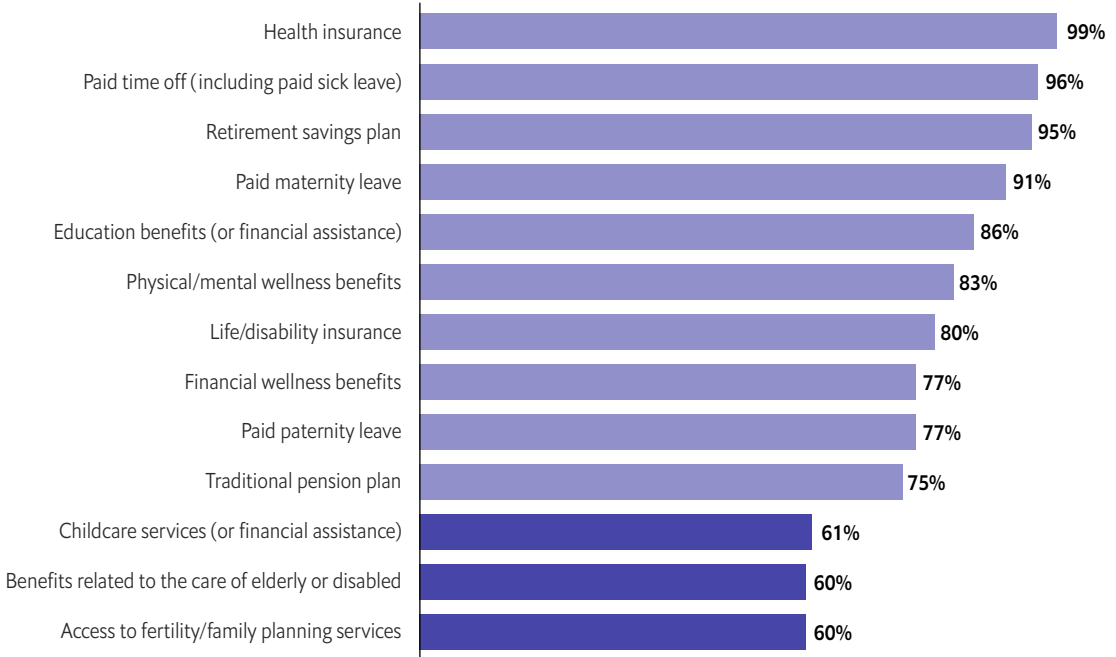
Source: Economist Impact

For parents, family planning and care benefits are an obvious priority, with 42% stating that these offerings have allowed them or their partner to remain in their current jobs. However, only six in ten workers have access to such benefits (see figure 6). Paid maternity and paternity leave are significantly more common than child care assistance, meaning that offerings for parents with older children are lacking.

**Figure 6: Only six in ten workers have access to family planning and care benefits**

"Does your employer offer the following benefits?"

Percentage offered each benefit



Source: Economist Impact



**“The advantage of tailoring benefits to specific employee segments is that you can then really optimize plans to address what each group cares about most, and you can minimize offerings that they care about less.”**

Jeris Stueland, expert associate partner in the healthcare systems and services practice at McKinsey

Caregiving benefits are crucial for mid-career professionals, and especially for women, who statistically carry a higher burden of family care.<sup>7</sup> Their impact extends beyond those who directly utilize them. For example, when one parent has access to childcare through their job, it can provide relief for the child’s other parent or grandparents, whether that be to continue working or focus on other obligations. This ripple effect creates a supportive and inclusive environment that alleviates the pressures and challenges faced by working parents and caregivers.

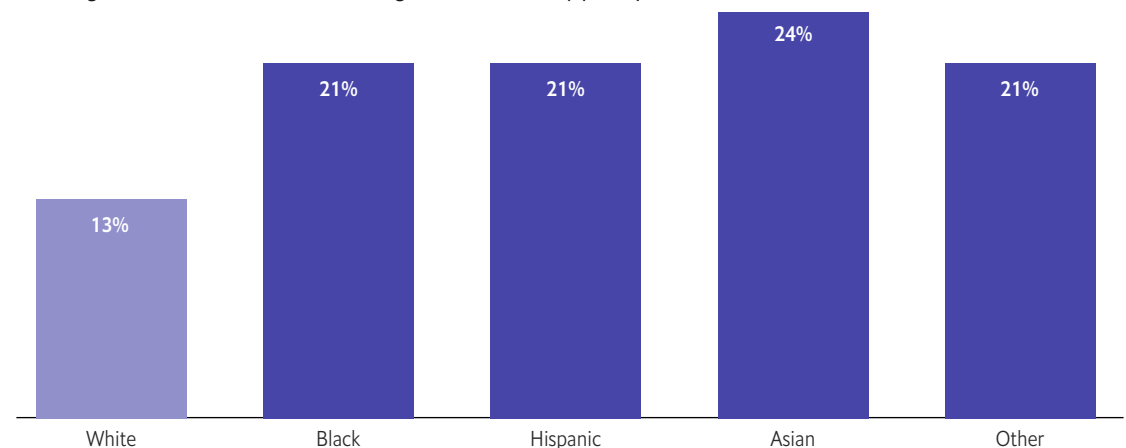
Minority groups also have distinct priorities. They are 70% more likely than white workers to rank

education perks as a top priority. This preference is also reflected in utilization trends, with 83% of minorities taking advantage of their education benefits compared with 70% of white workers.

Understanding and serving this diversity can improve impact and efficiency; ensuring benefits are relevant and fit for purpose will mean that employers no longer pay for one-size-fits-all plans that some may not use. “The advantage of tailoring benefits to specific employee segments is that you can then really optimize plans to address what each group cares about most, and you can minimize offerings that they care about less,” says Ms Stueland.

**Figure 7: Minorities are more likely to rank education benefits as their top priority**

Percentage who ranked education and training benefits as their top priority



Source: Economist Impact

Indeed, though many organizations have developed and publicized their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), this predominantly focuses on equity in hiring decisions. While clearly a necessary and important step, a truly inclusive workforce is not only meritocratic in recruitment but also in the real working life it offers staff. Workers who have more generous benefits packages are also more likely to rate their company as embodying values like DEI (see figure 8).

Tailored benefits create an inclusive environment by proving to prospective hires that the company prioritizes individualized support—and backs that up with action. A workforce that feels supported and represented is in turn more innovative, collaborative, productive and engaged. “Workers want to feel that they belong, and benefit packages that ‘meet them where they are’ are an

incredibly important part of that,” says Caroline McGoldrick, health solutions innovation and integrated solutions leader at Aon, an insurer.

To offer a truly inclusive benefits plan, organizations need to proactively reach out to their workforce and apply those insights to the design of flexible and customized plans. That could be achieved by gathering data on worker preferences and through approaches like persona-mapping. “I think the changing generations present a great opportunity for employers to do this, since Gen Z tends to really devalue traditional benefits,” says Ms Stueland. “It’s presenting an even more pressing opportunity for employers to really understand what they want and create a benefits package that supports those worker preferences and meets those worker needs.”

**Figure 8: Less adequate benefits packages are linked with perceptions of a less accommodating workplace**

Average percentage who agree that their company (a) attracts a diverse workforce, (b) ensures equal opportunities for career progression and (c) makes specific accommodations to improve accessibility



Source: Economist Impact

### 3. Benefits don't have to be baffling

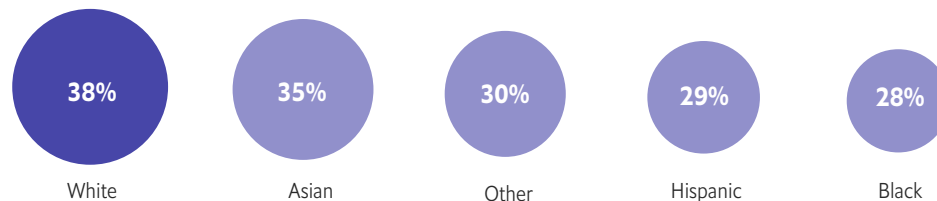
A third key finding is that poor communication and inadequate implementation are hindering and discouraging workers from taking advantage of available benefits. Two-thirds of workers say there is room for improvement, reporting that organizations do not do enough to promote benefits, explain

them or innovate how they are implemented, leading to under-utilization. In particular, companies are failing to ensure their workers know about and can fully access their benefits, with minority groups more likely to report difficulty in taking advantage of them (see figure 9).

**Figure 9: When it comes to making benefits usable, significant room for improvement exists**

"My employer makes it easy for employees to take full advantage of employer-provided benefits"

Percentage who strongly agree



Source: Economist Impact

Organizations waste money by paying for benefits that go unused. While significant investments are spent on benefit plans, optimizing value and return requires more than generic provision. Our findings identified several areas that employers should prioritize.

To ensure benefits are communicated effectively and utilized to the fullest extent, employers need to rely on diverse approaches that are

tailored to the varied needs and preferences of their workforce. This could include in-person discussions, seminars, mailers and digital outreach to ensure that benefit details reach all workers—and their families—through channels that they are most receptive to. Recognizing that “workers consume information in very different ways”, Ms McGoldrick stresses the need for multi-modal communication—from mailers to voice messages to face-to-face conversations.

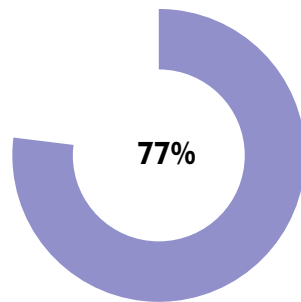


**“The average number of places that a worker needs to go to access benefits is through at least three portals. That is a lot. It’s not just providing the benefit as much as it is actually making sure that that benefit is able to be accessed by your entire population.”**

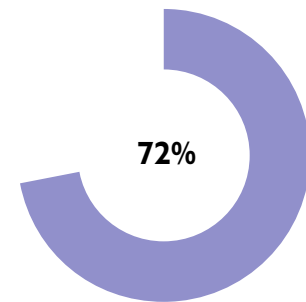
Caroline McGoldrick, health solutions leader at Aon

**Figure 10: Poor implementation and design often cause benefits to go unused**

"My company's culture encourages taking time off"  
 Percentage who disagree or only somewhat agree



"The education/training benefits offered by my employer are useful to me"  
 Percentage who disagree, only somewhat agree or are not familiar with them



Source: Economist Impact

Strategic communication ensures tailored benefits achieve their intended impact by reaching and resonating with a diverse worker base. "One of the biggest gaps we see is employees being able to understand and navigate their benefits; employers who creatively think about leveraging different channels tend to be more effective," says Ms Stueland.

Employers should prioritize an accessible, user-friendly experience to encourage workers to take advantage of available benefits, argue experts. "The average number of places that a worker needs to go to access benefits is through at least three portals. That is a lot," says Ms McGoldrick. "It's not just providing the benefit as much as it is actually making sure that that benefit is able to be accessed by your entire population." A digital portal consolidating all benefits information allows workers to easily view and compare options. By streamlining administration, employers ensure their investment in tailored benefits achieves maximum value and impact.

Aside from streamlining administration, other aspects of benefit design are too often overlooked. User-centric design can make workers feel more comfortable using their benefits. For instance, despite paid time off being a standard offering, nearly 80% of workers say their company's culture discourages taking advantage of this benefit. Or when it comes to education benefits, 70% of workers cite inadequacies in the usefulness of those programs and training options (see figure 10).

A key factor in design is inclusive feedback; the most efficient and effective way to learn if your offerings are meeting workers' needs is to ask. Few are doing so. The tendency, according to Ms Stueland, is to benchmark benefits against those offered by competitors rather than looking internally at whether their benefits are meeting the real world needs of staff. Respondents to our survey concur, with seven in ten workers saying opportunities to provide feedback could be improved.



**Figure 11: Opportunities to provide feedback are limited, especially for junior workers**

"My employer decides which benefits to offer based on worker feedback"

Percentage who disagree or only somewhat agree



Source: Economist Impact

Junior workers are even less likely to agree that their employers listen to feedback (see figure 11). Improving communication in a way that is not intimidating or unwelcoming for junior workers is important for changing this perception. Empowering them with accessible ways to share feedback on their benefit needs showcases the organization's commitment to a worker-centric benefits philosophy and helps employers get the most out of their benefits investments.

Surveys, focus groups, open discussion forums and other feedback channels are under-utilized. Gathered systematically across demographic cohorts, these data should capture the full range of workers' experiences, including areas in which benefits are working effectively. This can help inform more rigorous and quantitative

evaluation of benefit effectiveness. Employers can use worker input to assess performance against measurable goals such as worker satisfaction, retention, productivity and DEI. As Ms McGoldrick explains, "That return on investment may be in a financial return, that you're seeing savings, but it also might mean that you're seeing increased worker engagement."

Finally, it is important to ensure that measurement is end-to-end, from planning to integration, administration and evaluation, to fully capture how well benefits enhance overall workforce experience. With robust tracking of return on investment, employers can determine whether their investment in tailored, flexible benefits delivers on its expected outcomes.

# Energy and utilities industry spotlight

Wellness benefits are massively popular among energy and utilities workers; over half would consider switching jobs for better wellness benefits, a much higher rate than in other industries (see figure 13). Moreover, 80% report that both physical and mental wellness benefits are useful or important to them. This underscores how workers, especially younger demographics, are increasingly seeking holistic benefits that support their overall well-being both at and away from the workplace.

**Figure 13: Energy and utilities workers are more willing to switch jobs for better wellness benefits**

"All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better access to wellness benefits"

Percentage who agree

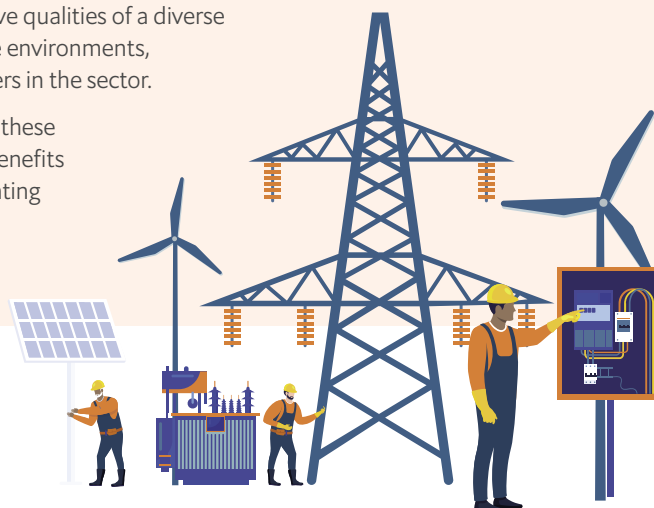


Source: Economist Impact

In a similar trend, respondents from this sector were also more likely to consider switching jobs for better health insurance (55%) compared with the average (46%), further emphasizing a focus on health in this sector. With the energy sector struggling to attract talent in some areas—30% of young North Americans believe that working in the oil and gas industry is unattractive<sup>13</sup>—appealing to workers by addressing their prioritization of health and wellness is essential. Given that spending on wellness benefits in the industry tops out at US\$480m (just 1.5% of total benefit spending), there is a strong case for a greater use of these benefits as a pragmatic and cost-efficient strategy to reduce absenteeism, increase retention and boost the innovative capacity of workers.<sup>14</sup>

A further concern in the energy industry is the underrepresentation of women, who make up fewer than one in five leadership roles.<sup>15</sup> To unlock the innovative qualities of a diverse leadership team, more work needs to be done in fostering inclusive environments, combating discrimination and encouraging women to pursue careers in the sector.

Benefits packages that support holistic well-being are a key part of these efforts. Companies that strategically offer useful, comprehensive benefits stand to realize a substantial return on investment while differentiating themselves from competitors in the talent marketplace.



# Appendix 1: Methodology

Economist Impact conducted a comprehensive research program aimed at understanding the scope and impact of employer-provided benefits. This analysis evaluates benefits at multiple levels: across workers, employers, industries and the US economy. This appendix offers a concise overview of the methodological approaches utilized to assess the impact of employer benefits.

## Survey specifications

Our survey captured the views of 1,500 full-time workers at medium- to large-sized companies across three major industries in the US. The survey, conducted between October and November 2023, was designed to enable data disaggregation across a range of demographics and worker characteristics, such as age, sex, ethnicity, industry company size, seniority and job function, as detailed in the specifications below:

- **Length:** 32 questions (19 content plus 13 demographic questions)
- **Geography:** US only
- **Sample size:** 1,500
- **Industry:** 500 each in:
  - Energy and utilities
  - Manufacturing
  - Sports, media and entertainment
- **Company size:** minimum 1,000 employees, with 50% of the manufacturing sector at 5,000+ employees
- **Job function:** range, with no more than 10% in any one
- **Seniority** (per industry): 33% junior (entry level), 22% middle management, 22% non-CxO leadership and 22% CxOs
- **Sex:** minimum 45% female and minimum 45% male (for the entire sample, not nested)

- **Ethnicity:** minimum 100 of each ethnicity per industry (minimum 20% Asian, 20% black, 20% Hispanic and 20% white)
- **Languages:** English and Spanish

## Economic modeling

Economist Impact estimated total benefit spending (by employers and workers) across each industry to understand the economic impacts on workers. The ripple effects of that spending were also modeled to understand the economic impacts of benefit spending across the wider economy (ie, the impact on GDP and jobs). Details about the methodology, data sources and assumptions are provided below:

### 1. Impact on workers: estimating total benefit spending

Total spending on benefits (by both employers and workers) served as a proxy for estimating the economic impact on workers. A bottom-up approach was used to calculate employers' benefit spending. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) workforce data and benefit access and utilization rates were used to estimate the overall number of beneficiaries across various industries. To determine total employer spending across each benefit type, a simple unitary method was applied, calculated as:

$$\text{number of beneficiaries} * \text{average cost of benefit per beneficiary} = \text{total benefit spending}$$

or

$$\text{number of workers} * \text{average cost of benefit per worker} = \text{total benefit spending}$$

Our methodology relied on a range of secondary data sources, including the Employee Benefits database from the BLS National Compensation Survey, as well as various private surveys and proprietary data from our own survey. Inflation adjustments were applied to data sources that pre-dated 2022.

Primary data sources for each benefit type are provided in the table below:

Benefit type	Number of beneficiaries	Average cost to employer	Worker contribution
Education and training	US Census, BLS, Economist Impact survey	Training research survey	N/A
Family planning and care	US Census, BLS, Economist Impact survey, IWPR	BLS, Great Place To Work, UrbanSitter	N/A
Health insurance	US Census, Economist Impact survey	AHRQ	AHRQ, KFF
Life and disability insurance	US Census, BLS	BLS	N/A
Paid time off*	US Census, BLS	BLS	N/A
Retirement	US Census, BLS	BLS	BLS, US Census, Vanguard, Economist Impact calculations
Wellness	US Census, BLS	UnitedHealthcare	N/A

\*The cost of paid time off is calculated by *total leave time used* \* *the rate at which the worker was paid during leave*

In addition to employer costs, we also computed key worker contributions to their own benefits, including health insurance premiums, healthcare spending and retirement savings. For health, worker spending was computed using data on average annual employee premiums from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and out-of-pocket costs per capita from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). For retirement, worker contributions to retirement plans were estimated by considering the average savings rate per beneficiary alongside their salary level.

## **2. Impact across industries and the economy**

The results from the previous stage (total benefit spending) were subsequently used to trace the flow of funds to other industries that are directly or indirectly associated with benefits provision. This analysis relied primarily on product-to-industry maps from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), with spending on various benefit “products” (such as healthcare) mapped to the corresponding industries that supply those goods (such as insurance or pharmaceutical manufacturing). This served to highlight the direct impacts of benefit spending on various industries across the US economy.

Finally, these industry-specific impacts were incorporated into an input-output multiplier model to determine the total impact of certain benefits to the US economy, encompassing direct + indirect + induced impacts. Direct impacts refer to the direct industry flows described above. Indirect impacts refer to the resulting ripple effect on industry supply chains (eg, a health provider purchasing inputs from suppliers). Induced impacts refer to the resulting effect on workers in those industries (eg, they earn wages, which they spend on goods and services). The input-output model utilized value-added and employment multipliers from the BEA.

# Appendix 2:

## Summary of survey questionnaire

### Demographic questions

1. In which state do you live?
2. In what year were you born?
3. Which best represents your gender?
4. Which of the following best represents your ethnicity or race?
5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?
6. What is your organization's primary industry?
7. How many employees work for your organization globally?
8. Which of the following best describes your title? *Select one.*
9. Do any of the following apply to you? *Please select all that apply.*
  - a. Member of an industry union
  - b. Head of household
  - c. First generation working in the US
  - d. Parent/guardian of child(ren) living at home
  - e. Caregiver, eg, to elderly, sick or disabled family member(s)
  - f. Single-income household
  - g. Multiple-income household
  - h. None of these
10. Which of the following most accurately describes your current working arrangement?
  - a. Working fully remote (100% from home)
  - b. Working hybrid (partially on site, partially from home)
  - c. Working fully on-site
11. What is the highest level of education you have completed? *Select one.*
12. What is your total individual annual salary?
13. What is your total annual household income?

## Content questions

1. **Do you agree or disagree that your company does the following?** [Scale: *Strongly disagree to strongly agree.*]
  - a. Regularly makes improvements to processes/products/services based on customer feedback
  - b. Attracts a diverse workforce
  - c. Ensures equal opportunities for career progression
  - d. Makes specific accommodations to improve accessibility
  - e. Takes meaningful steps to decrease its carbon footprint
  - f. Regularly organizes volunteering, community, or donation initiatives
  - g. Encourages experimentation and willingness to invest in new ideas
  - h. Is an industry leader in its adoption of sophisticated technology
  - i. Upholds a strict code of ethics (eg, transparency, conduct)
  - j. Makes it easy for employees to take full advantage of employer-provided benefits
  - k. Decides which benefits to offer based on employee feedback

### Experience with employer-provided benefits.

2. **Please drag and drop to rank the following employer-provided benefits in order of importance to you.** [Scale: *most important to least important*].
  - a. Retirement benefits
  - b. Health/life/disability insurance
  - c. Paid time off (eg, vacation days)
  - d. Family planning and care (eg, fertility services, parental leave, childcare, elderly care)
  - e. Education and training benefits
  - f. Wellness benefits (eg, physical, mental, financial)
3. **Does your employer offer the following benefits?** *Please select one in each row.*  
 Sub-question: Do you (or would you) use each benefit?
  - a. Traditional pension plan (depending on years of employment and salary)
  - b. Retirement savings plan such as 401(k), 403(b), payroll deduction IRA, SEP, SIMPLE IRA plan
  - c. Health insurance
  - d. Life/disability insurance
  - e. Paid time off (including paid sick leave)
  - f. Paid maternity leave
  - g. Paid paternity leave
  - h. Access to fertility/family planning services
  - i. Childcare services or financial assistance for childcare
  - j. Benefits related to the care of elderly or disabled family members
  - k. Education benefits or financial assistance for education/training
  - l. Physical/mental wellness benefits (eg, gym memberships, meditation sessions)
  - m. Financial wellness benefits (eg, financial advice, credit resources)

4. **What reasons do you have for not using (or saying you would not use) the following benefits?**

*[List of benefits filtered based on question 3]*

Reasons:

- a. I obtain it another way (eg, privately or using family member's benefits)
- b. I can't afford it
- c. I don't want/need it
- d. Other/Don't know

**The next three questions cover retirement benefits. These include employer-sponsored investment plans (eg, pension, 401k) to help employees save for retirement.**

5. **Does your employer's retirement savings plan include any of the following?** *[Options: Yes, no, don't know]*

- a. My employer matches employee contributions (up to an extent)
- b. My employer contributes regardless of whether I contribute
- c. My employer's retirement plan allows me to diversify my retirement savings (eg, through self-directed investment options)

6. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** *[Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]*

- a. I am satisfied with the retirement plan offered by my employer
- b. My employer clearly communicates information about retirement plans
- c. I have enough clarity about how much income I will receive in retirement
- d. Retirement plan benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
- e. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better retirement plan benefits

7. **Regarding your retirement, which of the following apply to you?** *Please select all that apply.*

- a. I (or my partner) work extra hours/an extra job to save enough for retirement
- b. Other financial priorities limit the amount that I save for retirement
- c. I am worried that my retirement income won't provide me or my family with financial security
- d. I feel confident that I will be able to retire at the federal retirement age
- e. I feel motivated to save for retirement
- f. I am the first person in my family to have retirement benefits through my employer
- g. None of these

**The next two questions cover health insurance benefits. These benefits provide access to routine healthcare and coverage in case of emergencies.**

8. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** *[Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]*

- a. The premiums for the health insurance offered by my employer are very expensive
- b. The deductibles and co-pays for the health insurance offered by my employer are very expensive
- c. The types of healthcare procedures covered under my employer's insurance do not cover the care I need
- d. I need to purchase supplemental insurance to cover my healthcare needs
- e. My employer clearly communicates health insurance plan options
- f. Health insurance benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
- g. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better health insurance benefits



9. **Regarding your health and health insurance situation, which of the following apply to you?**

*Please select all that apply.*

- a. In my current job, I have taken more sick days than allotted by my employer
- b. I (or my partner) work extra hours/an extra job to cover health expenses
- c. I feel stress about my health or health expenses
- d. I am financially constrained by medical debt or expenses
- e. I am healthy enough to do my job effectively
- f. I feel confident I can afford the healthcare my family needs
- g. I am the first person in my family to have health insurance through my employer
- h. None of these

**The next two questions cover time off benefits. This includes paid time off for vacation, sick leave, mental health, family reasons or volunteering.**

10. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** [Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]

- a. I am able to use all my vacation days
- b. I have enough flexibility in scheduling my time off
- c. My employer offers enough vacation days
- d. My employer offers enough sick days
- e. My employer offers enough time off for volunteering, bereavement, mental health, etc
- f. My company's culture encourages taking time off
- g. Paid time off benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
- h. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better paid time off benefits

11. **Regarding your experience with paid time off, which of the following apply to you?** *Please select all that apply.*

- a. Taking time off makes me feel like I'm falling behind at work
- b. I feel financially stressed because I need to take unpaid time off
- c. Taking time off allows me to be engaged and productive at work
- d. I have enough time off to devote to family and personal pursuits
- e. I have enough time off to manage my mental health/well-being effectively
- f. None of these

**The next four questions cover family support benefits. This includes fertility/family planning benefits (eg, financial support for IVF), parental leave/support (eg, maternity/paternity leave) and caregiving support (eg, financial assistance for daycare).**

12. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** [Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]

- a. Despite fertility benefits offered by my employer, fertility treatments are unaffordable
- b. My employer's coverage of fertility/family planning services is very limited
- c. Fertility/family planning benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
- d. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better fertility/family planning benefits

13. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** *[Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]*

- a. My employer offers adequate time off for paid maternity leave
- b. My employer offers adequate time off for paid paternity leave
- c. My employer offers adequate compensation during maternity leave
- d. My employer offers adequate compensation during paternity leave
- e. My employer provides adoptive parents with similar benefits as other new parents
- f. Maternity/paternity leave benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
- g. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better access to maternity/paternity leave benefits
- h. My employer offers special accommodations to take extended leave (for family reasons, caregiving, etc)
- i. My employer provides adequate re-entry programs for those returning from extended leave to readjust to the workforce

14. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** *[Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]*

- a. My employer offers daycare services that match my needs
- b. My employer offers financial assistance that meets my childcare/eldercare needs
- c. My employer offers special accommodations for employees with caregiving responsibilities (mothers' rooms, flexible work, counseling, etc)
- d. Benefits that support caregiving are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
- e. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better access to benefits that support caregiving

15. **Regarding your experience with family planning, parental support and caregiving, which of the following apply to you?** *Please select all that apply.*

- a. I feel financially stressed by caregiving costs
- b. I struggle to ensure my child/parent/dependent receives the care they need
- c. My performance at work is negatively impacted because of time taken out of work for caregiving responsibilities
- d. Family planning benefits give me more control over my professional and personal goals
- e. Caregiving or parental leave benefits allow me or my partner to keep a job (rather than leave the workforce)
- f. I am the first person in my family to have access to family planning/fertility benefits through my employer
- g. I am the first person in my family to have access to maternity/paternity leave or caregiving benefits through my employer
- h. Not applicable to me
- i. None of these

**The next two questions cover employer-provided education benefits, such as education or training offered/sponsored by an employer.**

16. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** *[Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]*
- a. Education/training benefits are equally available to all employees in my company
  - b. The education/training benefits offered by my employer are useful to me
  - c. My employer offers adequate financial support for education/training
  - d. Education/training benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
  - e. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better access to education/training benefits
17. **Regarding your experience with education/training benefits offered through your employer, which of the following apply to you?** *Please select all that apply.*
- a. I struggle to secure a better job or promotion because of inadequate education/training benefits
  - b. I struggle to take full advantage of new and upcoming technologies
  - c. My education/training benefits help me increase my earnings
  - d. My education/training benefits contribute to my happiness and success at work
  - e. My family takes advantage of education/training benefits through my employer
  - f. Not applicable to me
  - g. None of these

**The next two questions cover wellness benefits. These include physical wellness benefits (eg, gym memberships), mental wellness benefits (eg, employee assistance programs, meditation sessions) and financial wellness benefits (eg, financial advice, credit resources).**

18. **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** *[Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree.]*
- a. Physical wellness benefits offered by my employer are useful or important to me
  - b. Mental wellness benefits offered by my employer are useful or important to me
  - c. Financial wellness benefits offered by my employer are useful or important to me
  - d. My employer clearly communicates about available wellness benefits
  - e. Wellness benefits are an important consideration for me in choosing a job
  - f. All else equal, I would consider switching jobs for better access to wellness benefits
19. **Regarding your experience with wellness benefits offered through your employer, which of the following apply to you?** *Please select all that apply.*
- a. I feel poorly equipped to manage personal financial matters
  - b. I frequently feel burned out or disengaged at work
  - c. I have more disposable income because of access to physical, mental or financial wellness benefits
  - d. The wellness benefits available to me through my employer contribute to my overall health and well-being
  - e. My family takes advantage of wellness benefits through my employer
  - f. Not applicable to me
  - g. None of these

# Endnotes

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