



2024

Voice of the Workplace Report

Mental Health Trends for HR Leaders and Executives



Most employees aren't feeling better, despite your hard work

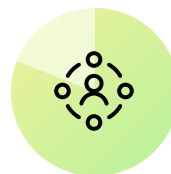
Leaders of organizations are listening to employees more closely than ever before. Here at Calm, we talk with executives and HR leaders around the world every day who have embraced continuous listening to better understand and address employee needs. Amid the nonstop turbulence of the past four years, your commitment to improving employee mental health and well-being has only grown stronger, and data is increasingly at the heart of your efforts.



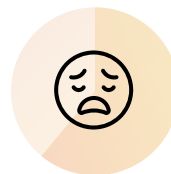
Against that backdrop, you might be surprised by a few key findings in our research:



69% of employees say their mental health has stayed the same or **worsened** in the past year



81% of employees say they've struggled with nervousness, anxiousness, and stress recently

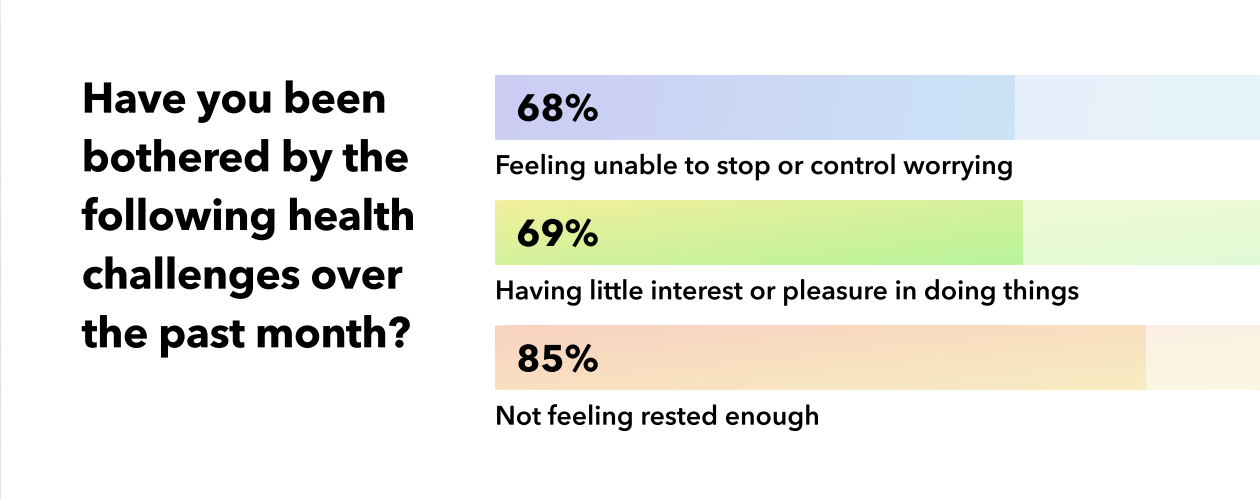


61% of employees have felt down, depressed, or hopeless recently



68% of employees are having trouble falling asleep


As you know, when employees don't feel their best, their work suffers. They largely agree: about 60% of people who experience anxiousness or toss and turn at night say it **affects their performance at work.**



What now?

Where do you go from here to close the gap between the goals of your workforce mental health strategies and the impact they're having? And how do you increase their impact with fewer or limited resources?

We've analyzed an extensive body of research to uncover insights about the current state of workforce mental health. Here are our sources:

	A September 2023 general audience survey of 4,000+ respondents in the US, UK, Germany, and India	A survey of 150+ HR/benefits leaders conducted by EBN/ Arizent on behalf of Calm	An analysis of Calm usage patterns of more than 4 million Calm users globally
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Unless otherwise specified, all data in this report comes from the September 2023 general audience survey conducted by Calm.

We hope the insights and recommendations we share in this report, by augmenting your own internal research, can help you **quickly identify steps you can take to foster a healthier, happier, and more productive workforce.**

Get to the root of employee mental health challenges

Based on our research, here's what caught our attention when it comes to current employee sentiment:

Top factors negatively impacting employee mental health

- 1 Cost of living or inflation
- 2 Financial instability
- 3 Being overworked
- 4 Health concerns
- 5 The state of the world
- 6 My physical appearance
- 7 Loneliness
- 8 Career uncertainty
- 9 Climate change
- 10 Politics

Employees are feeling underwater. They're stressed about their finances and their workloads, but you can take steps to alleviate the pressure.

When employees were asked to describe their workplace



49% used negative terms



35% used positive terms

About half of employees feel negatively about their organization, using words such as "toxic" or "tumultuous" to describe their workplace. Managers play a major role in the employee experience.

Top 5 Search Words on Calm in 2023

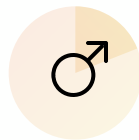
- 1 Sleep
- 2 Anxiety
- 3 Stress
- 4 Grief
- 5 Focus

“Grief” and “focus” are now top 5 search terms on Calm, which isn’t surprising given the state of the world. Employees need help staying engaged, motivated, and on task.

When asked about their mental well-being...



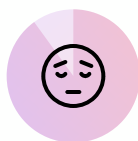
36% of females say it's worse



19% of males say it's worse

More women than men say they’re struggling with their mental health. With people choosing to work longer, menopause is emerging as a major challenge for female employees, and they’re not likely to be supported in discussing it.

Gen Zers are feeling anxious and stressed



90% report feeling this way

The mental health of Gen Z is at serious risk. Those entering the workforce for the first time often don’t have access to the built-in social/ support system found in traditional workplaces, and that’s having a profound effect on their well-being.

The bottom line: evolve both benefits and culture

Making a bigger positive impact on employee mental health will require rapidly evolving not just benefits but workplace culture. Beginning with a deeper understanding of the challenges facing specific employee populations, leaders will need to identify key gaps and deficiencies in both areas, be open with their employees about them, and put a plan in place, communicating often about progress. With everything you're already managing on a daily basis, this might feel like a daunting task, but Calm is here to help.

The following pages are designed to help you get started. To begin, we'll take a more in-depth look at these five trends:



Financial woes are the top stressor for employees



Technology is contributing to burnout



Managers are the problem and the solution



Women need more mental health support for life stages



Gen Z, struggling the most, is leading the charge for change



Financial woes are the top stressor for employees

With inflation beginning to cool in the US, it's tempting to believe that employees will start to feel better about their finances. But inflation rates remain high elsewhere, and in some countries, including France, Germany, and India, inflation is on the rise.¹

How is your mental health impacted by financial instability?



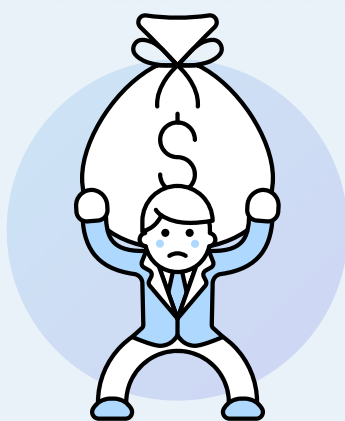
59% have increased feelings of anxiousness and worry about money



33% experience frustration or irritability caused by financial pressures



24% report sleep disturbances or insomnia caused by money-related stress



What's more, when the rate of inflation falls, not all employees benefit equally,² economists say. Employees who spend a larger share of their paycheck on food and rent are more affected by the weight of high prices, even prices that aren't continuing to rise.

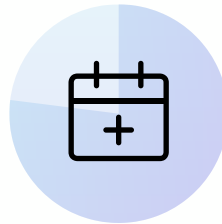
Combine this reality with the spate of layoffs, particularly in the tech industry, and it's easy to see why the cost of living and financial instability top the list of employee concerns negatively affecting their mental health.

52%

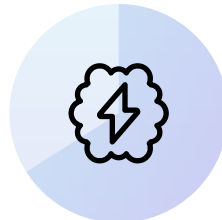
Of employees say they're actively looking for an additional source of income to get through this time. Unfortunately, a side hustle might reduce financial worries in the short term, but it would also likely increase overall stress and burnout risk.

The good news? Most employers want to take steps to reduce financial stress.

More employers understand how financial stress is harming employees:



77% of HR/benefits leaders recognize that financial anxiety is affecting mental health and want to address this need in the next 1-2 years



66% agree that financial stress affects employee mental health overall



41% are aware that it affects employees' ability to focus at work

Source: Arizent/Employee Benefit News survey conducted on behalf of Calm, September 2023.

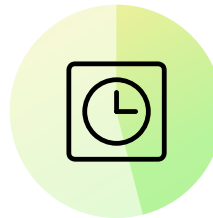
Technology is contributing to burnout

The continued evolution of workplace technology, especially in support of remote work, enables employees to be more efficient and productive. On the flip side, it can blur work-life boundaries and contribute to stress and burnout.

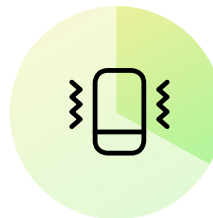
With smartphones, messaging apps, and instant access to the cloud from anywhere, employees often feel pressure to be “always on” and to respond in the moment, both during and outside work hours, whether or not they’re expected to do so.



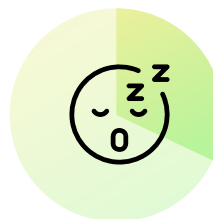
58% of global workers agree that they’re always connected or available for work



46% say they often work outside working hours



1 in 3 workers are often interrupted by their devices while they’re at work

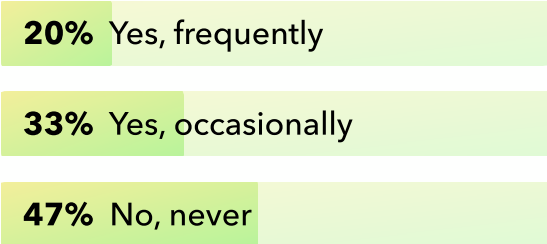


32% feel tired from being online for work

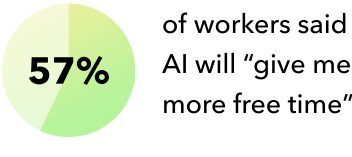
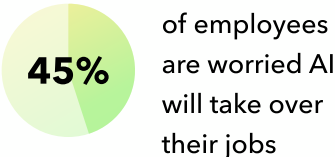
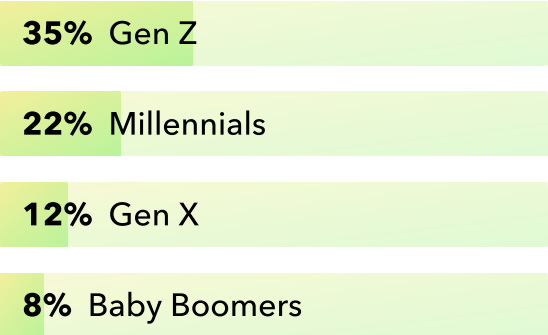
Rapid technology innovation is also creating anxiety

With the advent of AI, the power of technology to reshape the workplace is only going to build. Many employees are worried.

Have you ever experienced anxiousness or nervousness due to the rapid pace of technology developments in your workplace (e.g., AI)?



State that the rapid pace of technology change in the workplace makes them anxious on a frequent basis:



By contrast, nearly half of HR leaders are bullish about the impact of AI on mental health



49% of HR/benefits leaders think integrating AI tools into the workplace will have a positive impact on employee mental well-being



32% think AI tools will have a negative impact on employee well-being



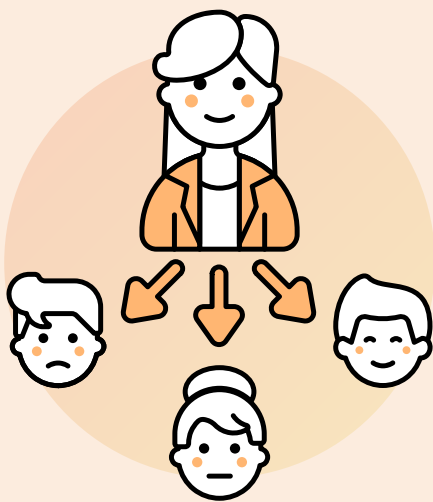
Managers are the problem and the solution

A manager can make or break the employee experience, and relationships with managers are the number one factor in employee job satisfaction, according to analysts.

Most employees (65%) say that managers significantly influence their mental health. A caring and supportive manager can improve their mental health, for example, while a stress-inducing manager can have a negative impact.

What can managers do to better support employee mental health?

Up to half of employees say their managers are doing well when it comes to leading with empathy, managing their emotions, checking in regularly with them, modeling PTO, and establishing work-life boundaries. But about one-third of workers say they wish their manager would do these things.



According to employees, here's where managers need to improve:

- Adjusting workload
- Fostering a low-stress environment
- Allowing employees to take mental health breaks throughout the day
- Referring employees to mental health benefits and being open about their own mental health experiences

How does your manager support your mental health in the workplace?

	My manager does this	I wish my manager did this
My manager shows care and empathy	53%	29%
My manager has my back and continues to support me if I make a mistake at work	51%	30%
My manager handles emotions well, maintaining a calm and respectful demeanor	50%	30%
My manager genuinely cares about my well-being	49%	28%
My manager conducts regular well-being check-ins during our 1:1 meetings	41%	32%
My manager sets a positive example by taking regular time off	41%	28%
My manager establishes clear work/life boundaries, such as no after-hours communication	40%	31%
My manager adjusts my workload for better work/life balance	38%	35%
My manager fosters a low-stress work environment	38%	38%
My manager allows me to take mental health breaks throughout the day	36%	34%
My manager openly discusses and shares their own mental health experiences	32%	26%
My manager refers me to mental health benefits/resources when needed	29%	29%

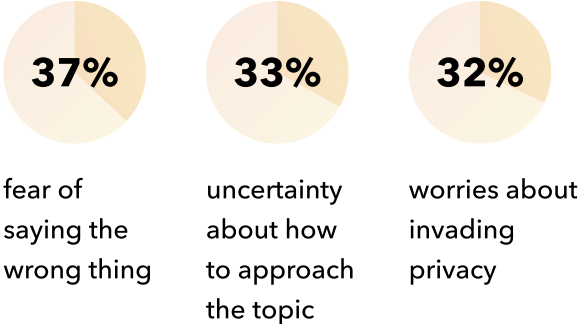
What’s holding managers back from supporting employee mental health?

Fifty-five percent of managers say they feel confident having mental health conversations with their direct reports, but the rest feel less so. **Nearly one-third** feel they will be ineffective or awkward if they try to have a supportive discussion. There’s room for employers to train managers and help them feel more equipped to have mental health conversations.

Employers are doubling down on manager support

Employers recognize that managers play a key role in the mental health of their employees and are increasingly making manager training an important part of their mental health strategy.

Concerns holding managers back from mental health conversations*



Employers’ top 4 current manager strategies	Employers’ top 4 manager strategies in next 1-2 years
1. Encourage managers to model PTO (67%)	1. Develop mindful managers (30%)
2. Encourage managers to include well-being check-ins in their 1:1s (56%)	2. Train managers to recognize mental distress (29%)
3. Ensure that managers evaluate & reprioritize workload to ensure work-life balance (54%)	3. Train managers to speak openly about mental health (29%)
4. Encourage managers to create work-life boundaries (51%)	4. Develop caring managers who lead with empathy and high EQ (26%)

*Source: Arizent/Employee Benefit News survey conducted on behalf of Calm, September 2023



Women need more mental health support for life stages

In recent years, employers have increasingly prioritized family-forming benefits, including financial support for aspiring parents pursuing in vitro fertilization, adoption, and surrogacy.

Employers also are beginning to recognize the mental health implications of these life experiences for all aspiring parents and the need to provide more support, especially for women. Research has shown that women with infertility suffer from the same level of anxiety and depression as those with cancer or heart disease, for example.³ Shame and isolation are other common emotions associated with infertility.

90% of women said family planning challenges can be all-consuming and affect their overall mental health as well as their ability to focus at work and be productive.

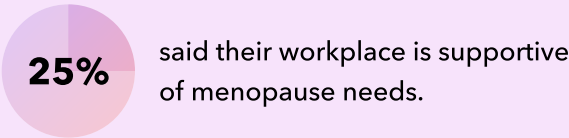
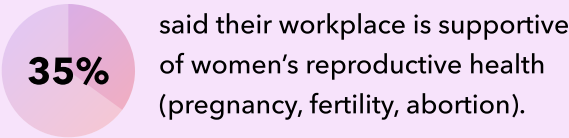


In which of the following areas did these experiences impact your well-being and work life?

	Experienced a miscarriage	Began fertility treatments	Experienced menopause	Had an abortion
Mental health	61%	47%	47%	42%
Sleep	39%	30%	52%	25%
Outlook on life	31%	33%	26%	20%
Ability to focus on work	40%	48%	33%	42%

Employees say the workplace is not supportive of women’s reproductive health

When we asked employees if their workplace is supportive of women’s health:



61% increase in Calm search topics related to women’s health and family planning—e.g., pregnancy, menopause, fertility, abortion, and miscarriage—from 2022 to 2023

Menopause is the most taboo women’s health topic at work

Menopause is the least-discussed women’s health topic at work, with 28% of women saying they would not share their menopause experiences with coworkers. By contrast, 5% of women said they would keep quiet about their fertility treatments, and 14% of women said they would not discuss a recent miscarriage with anyone at work.

I don't talk to anyone at work about this			
Death of a loved one	16%	Dealt with a family member's illness	15%
Experienced a personal illness	12%	Experienced a miscarriage or pregnancy loss	14%
Experienced challenges with my child/children's mental health	17%	Had an abortion	8%
Began or completed fertility treatments	5%	Underwent egg freezing or egg donation	6%
Experienced menopause or perimenopause-related changes	28%		

The good news is that employers are making supporting women’s mental health related to pregnancy and menopause one of their top five areas of benefits focus in the next 1-2 years.



Gen Z is leading the charge towards change

Workforce demographics are shifting to include more Generation Z employees, so we took a closer look at their needs when it comes to mental health benefits. The bottom line:

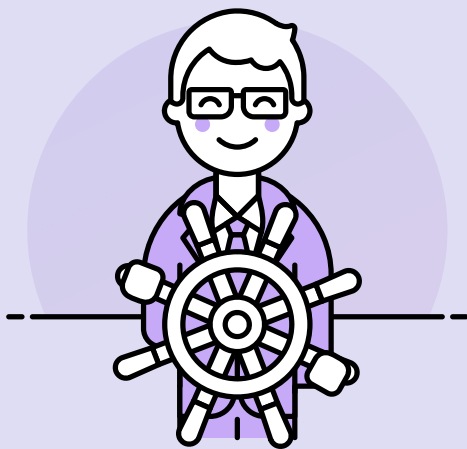
A Gen Z mental health epidemic is brewing

We surveyed Gen Z respondents 18 to 24 years old (Gen Z is defined as ages 9 through 24). Employers will need to pay special attention to supporting the mental health of both Gen Z employees and Gen Z dependents of older employees, especially teens.

Gen Zers feel worse than all other generations

While feelings of stress and anxiousness are running high across all generations, Gen Z is the most stressed and anxious generation, perhaps because Gen Zers have come of age during a global pandemic and in a technology-saturated world.

Additionally, nearly three-quarters of Gen Zers feel down or depressed, whereas about half of Gen Xers and baby boomers do.



	Percentage feeling anxious or stressed	Percentage feeling down or depressed
Gen Z	90%	74%
Millennials	85%	64%
Gen X	75%	54%
Baby Boomers	71%	47%

Gen Z is the loneliest generation

Like the general population, Gen Zers are feeling stressed about the cost of living, financial instability, and being overworked. But Gen Zers are struggling more with loneliness (#4) and career uncertainty (#5) than the general population. Social media and “figuring out who I am” are also top 10 sources of stress unique to Gen Z.



2X+ increased searches for “loneliness” on the Calm app from 2021 to 2023, likely due to remote work.

Top 10 mental health stressors for Gen Z

Gen Z	General Population
1. Cost of living/inflation	1. Cost of living/inflation
T2. Financial instability	2. Financial instability
T2. Being overworked	3. Being overworked
4. Loneliness	4. Health concerns
T5. Career uncertainty	5. State of the World
T5. Health Concerns	6. My physical appearance
T5. Physical Appearance	7. Loneliness
8. Stressful commute	8. Career uncertainty
T9. Climate Change	9. Climate change
T9. State of the World	10. Politics
T9. Social Media	
T9. Figuring out who I am	

Gen Z views benefits differently than the general population

On a more positive note, Gen Z is leading the charge to evolve workplace benefits and change workplaces for the better—more than 75% have advocated for a stronger focus on this. Furthermore, they want different benefits than the general population does.



Gen Zers are **60%** more likely than the general population to campaign for diversity and inclusion programs.

Top 5 benefits Gen Zers want

Gen Z	General population
T1. Advocating for increased health care coverage for mental health and/or fertility care	1. Campaigning for cost of living/inflation adjustments to wages
T1. Pushing for eco-friendly initiatives like reusing or recycling plastics and sustainable commuting in the workplace	T2. Expressing a preference for a hybrid work setup
2. Pushing for more unstructured working hours, such introducing summer hours or flexible schedules	T2. Pushing for more unstructured working hours, such as introducing 'summer hours' or flexible schedules
4. Campaigning for cost-of-living/inflation adjustment to wages	4. Advocating for better mental health
5. Pushing for improvements to accessibility	5. Advocating against meetings on certain days, like Fridays, to establish designated no-meeting days

5

Actionable takeaways for HR/benefits leaders

In the past few years, HR leaders around the world have made huge strides in supporting the mental health of employees and their families. You've worked to break through the mental health stigma, expand access to therapy, standardize EAPs across geographies, and consolidate well-being resources in centralized hubs. In short, you've done the critical work of laying a strong foundation for employee mental health.

Now it's time to build on that foundation to accelerate positive change and results. Here are five practical steps you can take to make a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of your people at work and at home.

1

Supplement your EAP with preventive resources to support employees struggling with stress, anxiousness, and depression

In the US, more than 75% of employers say they offer EAP services that include therapy visits and basic preventive resources, but only roughly a quarter of employees are aware that these benefits are available to them. EAP utilization rates are even lower (under 10%) for a number of reasons,⁵ including the common perception that EAPs are only for crisis situations and the stigma often associated with using an EAP.

To reach your entire workforce more effectively, add preventive resources that are easy to access and can help employees manage stress, anxiousness, and sleep issues every day.



76% of US employers say they offer EAP services that include therapy visits and basic preventive resources*



Only 24% of employees are aware that these benefits are available to them

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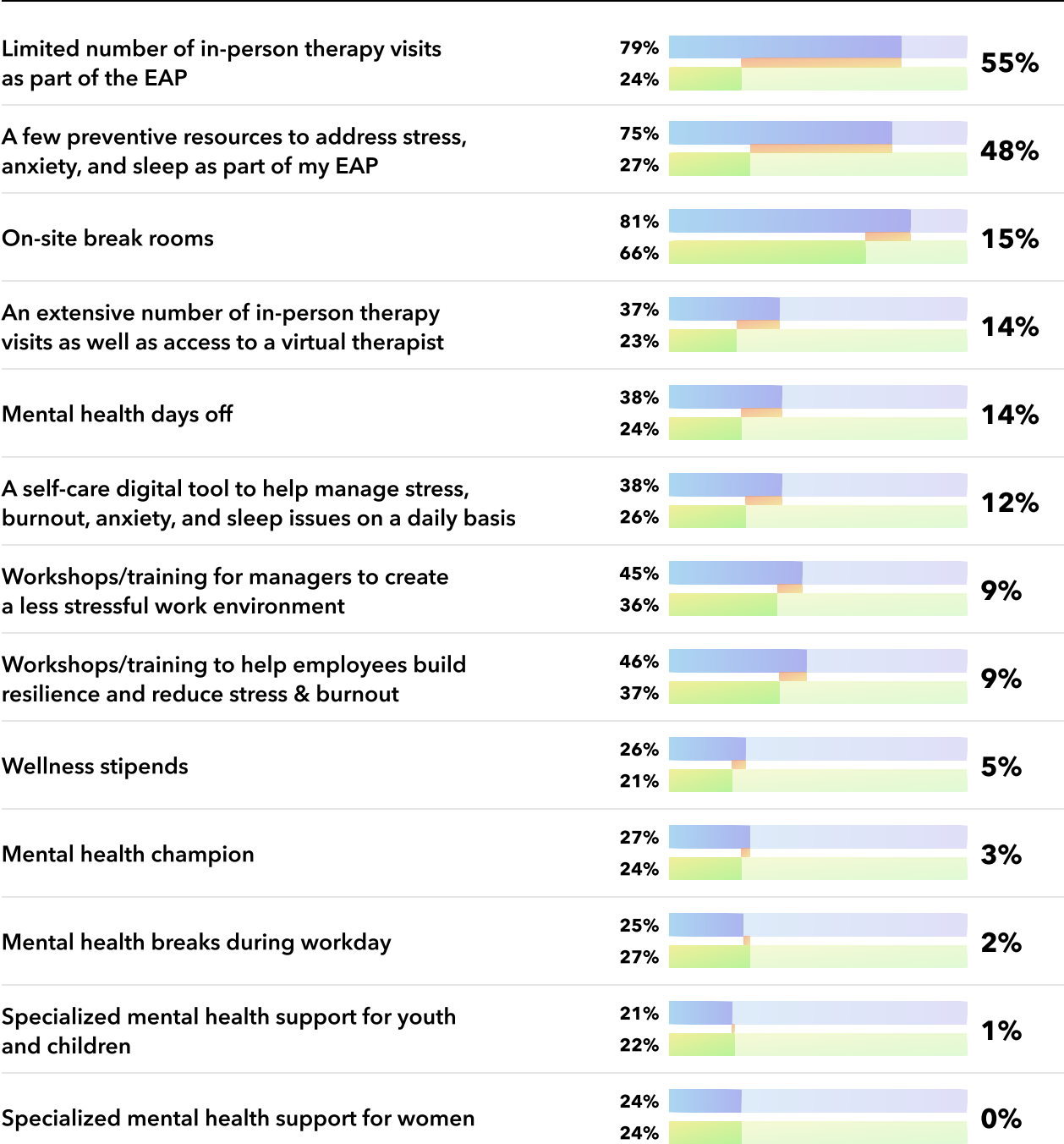
We noticed that utilization of our employee assistance program was low and realized we needed to expand our mental health resources...First, we wanted a preventive mental health tool to help our workforce manage stress and prevent burnout...We decided to partner with Calm because it was a trusted and well-known brand.”

Dan Warzoha, Manager of Employee Wellness, Sacred Heart University

*Source: Arizent/Employee Benefit News survey conducted on behalf of Calm, September 2023

Gap between what employers offer versus what employees think they offer

■ What employers say they provide
 ■ What employees say their employer offers
 ■ Gap



2

Add less-stigmatized mental health benefits to your mix

Adding these benefits to your plan could help you break the mental health stigma associated with an EAP and reach more employees needing support.

Providing digital self-care tools to help relieve everyday stress and anxiousness can also help reduce burnout and more serious mental health conditions. Research shows that mental health breaks throughout the workday—such as kicking off team meetings with a breathing exercise—can make a significant positive impact on employee mental well-being, focus, and productivity.⁶

You can also customize Calm solutions to triage users to an EAP program or other third-party solutions, providing an additional entry point for employees to explore resources for more serious mental health conditions.

Employee benefits wish list

Employees are more likely to use less-stigmatized solutions. Here's their wish list:

Top 4 mental health benefits employees wish their employer offered

1. Mental health days off
2. Mental health breaks during workday
3. A self-care digital tool to help me manage my stress, burnout, anxiety, and sleep issues on a daily basis
4. Wellness stipends

Employees are more aware of these benefits:

- On-site break rooms
- Mental health breaks
- Mental health days off
- Wellness stipends
- Resilience workshops
- Digital self-care tools

zoom  Microsoft

Calm integrations with workplace meeting tools such as Zoom Meetings and Microsoft Teams enable seamless sharing of Calm resources that support mental health breaks before or during team meetings.

Tackle the root causes of mental health challenges

Combating financial stress

Cost-of-living/inflation and financial instability are the top two sources of employee stress and anxiety. Not surprisingly, employees want cost-of-living wage adjustments above all else. In addition to several states and counties having raised their minimum wage, companies in many industries have been able to increase wages. But as the labor market cools, pay raises are expected to be smaller than last year's,⁷ according to analysts.

Here are a few other ideas for helping employees with financial stress:

- Build employee awareness of tools and resources that can help them with financial planning activities such as budgeting, managing cash flow, and reducing debt
- Provide access to experts who can help employees navigate benefits selections (e.g., health plans, retirement plans)
- Bring in guest speakers with expertise in financial management and/or keep them informed about free webinars they can attend
- Empower managers to work with their lower-salaried employees on a plan to increase their participation in company-sponsored retirement plans over time



In 2024, Calm is launching a program that focuses on the thoughts and emotions that arise around finances, leveraging professional expertise to improve how people think about their relationship with money.

Strengthen work-life boundaries and reduce overwork

As productivity tools seamlessly connect people to work from anywhere, anytime, employees experience feeling pressured to be “always on” as a major source of stress and burnout.

Just as employers have workplace safety guidelines to protect physical health, they can create technology-use guidelines to protect employee mental health and well-being. For example, you could establish a workplace guideline to turn off app notifications at the end of the day and on weekends.

We’ve outlined some additional ideas to help you tackle overwork and create a healthier workplace culture. Download [“Workforce Well-being Checklist: 5 Tips for Establishing Healthy Workloads.”](#)

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We’re hearing consistently, through our continuous-listening approach, the themes of stress and burnout, mostly as a result of heavy workloads... A feeling of being always on is contributing to higher stress and burnout in our workforce. To help address employees’ feeling of being always on, ERM partnered with Calm to provide them with an everyday preventive tool they could reach for in the moment to address stress, anxiety, and sleep challenges.”

Scott Brown, Employee Experience Manager, ERM

Minimize the negative impacts of AI on employee well-being

AI has the potential to reduce workloads—a root cause of stress and burnout. But the prospect of AI replacing workers can create stress and anxiousness. Employers need to be mindful about the impact of new technologies on employee well-being and communicate clearly and often about their objectives in adopting it.

[President Biden’s AI Executive Order](#) will help safeguard privacy, equity, and civil rights, but employers will also play a critical role in minimizing the negative impact of AI on their employees’ well-being.

4

Cultivate caring managers as a key part of your workplace mental health strategy

Stress-inducing managers are a major source of employee stress, and caring, empathetic managers can make a positive impact on workforce mental health. Training your managers to improve their mental health literacy should be a key part of your mental health benefits strategy.

Managers can create less-stressful work environments and help balance employee workloads to address some of the root causes of stress, anxiousness, and burnout at work.

For example, Calm Workshops offer interactive and practical “how-to” guidance on teaching managers mindful leadership skills, including better regulation of emotions and leading with empathy. Calm also offers in-app resources to help managers reduce their stress and become more self-aware as a leader.

Strategies employers are implementing in the next 1-2 years that could be part of your mental health workplace strategy*:

- Developing mindful managers who can regulate their emotions and create less-stressful work environments
- Training managers to recognize mental distress in employees
- Training managers to speak openly about mental health
- Developing caring managers who lead with empathy and high EQ



Providing resources to help your managers reduce stress and manage their emotions can result in more positive moods, such as feeling grateful and happy, and fewer negative moods, such as feeling anxious and angry.

*Source: Arizent/Employee Benefit News survey conducted on behalf of Calm, September 2023

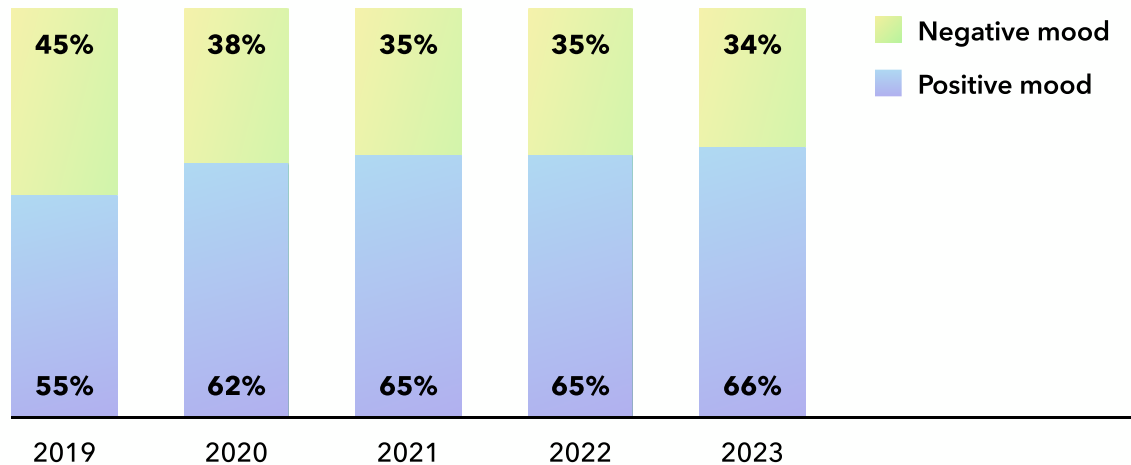
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As a result of our mindfulness leadership program, our leaders are more self-aware and can see the impact of investing in their own well-being and mental health. We felt that Calm and our collaboration on the Mindful Manager program was an incredible step toward a mental health intervention that helped our leaders reduce their own stress and create a more connected, supportive work environment for their teams.”

Erika Sheridan, Associate Director of People Experience at Ogilvy

Managers using Calm show an increase in positive moods year over year.

Yearly positive vs. negative mood trends amongst managers



Negative moods: sad, angry, anxious, stressed, tired and unsure

Positive moods: excited, grateful, happy, relaxed, content

Double down on supporting populations in need

Make women's mental health a priority

Employers cited women's mental health as a new benefits focus area in the next 1–2 years, including providing mental health support related to infertility, pregnancy, and menopause. Our research reveals that employees have high mental health needs in these life stages, yet they encounter little employer support and even stigma. Providing a day-to-day digital self-care tool such as Calm—with specialized content focused on pregnancy and the postpartum period, for example—can help women better manage their stress, anxiousness, and sleep issues.

Pay special attention to the needs of Gen Z

Gen Z—which includes both younger workers and the children of Gen X and baby boomer employees—are struggling the most with stress, anxiousness, depression, and loneliness.

- Ensure that you offer digital mental health self-care tools and adequate digital/in-person therapy support to help them manage their mental health challenges.
- Remote/hybrid work likely is taking a toll on Gen Zers. They're missing out on the rich learning and mentoring that happens in the office and important social and bonding opportunities. HR leaders should consider filling these gaps by creating social clubs around key hobbies and/or setting up mentorship programs.
- Gen Zers have a clear set of priorities, such as improving eco-friendly practices, accessibility, and DEIB in the workplace. Tap their passion and drive to help you evolve your benefits and stay on the cutting edge.

Calm's expanding catalog of support for women's health and for Gen Z covers these topics:

- programs for new mothers
- experiences related to the menstrual cycle
- thriving through the menopause transition
- coping with miscarriage
- anxiety and depression in teens and college-aged youth
- parenting

References

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Everyone should be able to access mental health support. At Calm, we take our award-winning approach to better sleep, mental resilience, and relaxation and apply it to robust tools for HR and people leaders to confidently address mental health at work and beyond. We combine scientifically backed techniques with beloved voices to create comfort and engagement throughout the mental health journey.

Organizations rely on our expertise to fill the care gap created by stigma and life's daily stressors. This approach allows our customers to take an active role in making quality mental wellness a pillar of their culture, which helps their employees effectively manage their well-being and stay as productive as possible.

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