



# Executives and employees agree: A healthy workforce is business critical

## New survey reveals alignment and opportunities to advance a culture of health

A new survey shows that business executives and employees agree workforce health is fundamental to business success and that employers play an important role in supporting employee health.\* However, perceptions about health and well-being vary by employment level. This means there is room for improvement, and employers can take steps to help people take better care of themselves by advancing a culture of health and strengthening the foundation for business success.

In early 2021, The Economist Intelligence Unit surveyed 600 executive leaders and 1,200 employees across six business sectors: hospitality, financial services, manufacturing, retail, health care and technology. The survey, commissioned by Cigna, quantified executive and employee perceptions about the value of workforce health and how it contributes to business growth and overall economic recovery. Notably, the two groups are in agreement about its importance at the macro level.

	EXECUTIVES AGREE	EMPLOYEES AGREE
Investing in a healthy workforce is an investment in economic recovery	92%	94%
Companies that put employee health and well-being first will recover faster than companies that do not	89%	91%
Offering employer-sponsored health benefits is more critical than ever to ensure a healthy workforce	93%	92%
Employers are an important player in health innovation and should be actively involved	92%	90%



Offered by Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company or their affiliates.

## Opportunities to build understanding around health and well-being

Mental health issues — specifically, a combination of fatigue, burnout and stress — are recognized as one of the top barriers to business growth, more by employees than executives (41% vs. 33%, respectively). Employees also ranked mental/emotional/behavioral health coverage more important than executives did for supporting better business performance (59% vs. 54%).\*

Employees were less likely than executives to rate their professional well-being highly (“excellent”), which may have an impact on their engagement and productivity. Employees are less likely to feel a sense of purpose in their work (Excellent rating: 33% vs. 47%), to feel connected with their organizations (29% vs. 44%) and to feel valued by their companies (29% vs. 45%) compared to executives.\*

When asked to define a healthy workforce, executives ranked “Having access to quality health care” as the most important aspect, whereas employees ranked “Having a good work-life balance” as most important.\* Executives also ranked “Employee health and well-being” sixth on a list of indicators used to measure business performance.\*

## Working together for greater workforce health

Employers play a leading role in employee health, and they can take three important steps to better align with employees and support workforce well-being for greater business success.

**1. Make a culture of health a business priority.** Creating a workplace that promotes employee health and well-being requires engagement at all levels of an organization.

- Leadership support is crucial — and not just from a resource allocation standpoint. Senior executives can lead by example by engaging in health and wellness programs and sharing their own success stories while regularly communicating the value of employee health and well-being.\*\*
- A culture of health should be a business-wide strategy, beyond human capital management. Many workplace initiatives for improving employee health — such as implementing wellness programs, setting up ergonomic workstations and even creating flextime schedules to enhance work-life balance — often reside with human capital and/or benefits management. However, to truly nurture a culture of health across the entire workforce, the related business, financial and social conversations should go beyond the scope of just those departments.
- It is critical that the culture of health encompass a holistic view of physical and mental health. This includes destigmatizing mental health conditions, such as stress, isolation and depression, and increasing acceptance in seeking help for such issues.

### While important, is workforce health a priority?

Although **9 in 10** executives surveyed believe that investment in employee health and wellness has a direct impact on a company’s financial performance, they rank it **6th** on a list of indicators used to measure business performance.\*

1. Financial growth (profits/earnings)
2. Customer retention/satisfaction
3. Employee retention/satisfaction
4. Employee productivity
5. Efficiency of operations

### **6. Employee health and well-being**

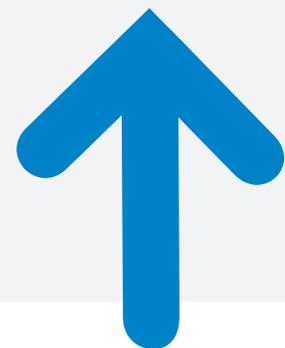
A recent McKinsey study\*\*\* found that roughly

# 75%

of U.S. employers surveyed have started, are continuing or are planning to expand investments in behavioral health services as part of their employee benefits, while only

# 23%

reported implementing an anti-stigma awareness campaign.



**2. Actively communicate and involve employees.** Proactive employee engagement will help close the perspective gap between executives and employees on the workforce health experience.

- Include a diverse perspective in health and wellness program design. Employees with diverse cultures and demographics may have different needs, priorities and preferences (e.g., some employees are comfortable using a telehealth app, while others prefer face-to-face services).
- Gather employee input to shape health improvement initiatives. This can be done with confidential surveys and assessments as well as employee focus groups. This understanding is crucial to developing a set of benefits and health and wellness programs that can serve everyone. What's more, employee involvement in the planning can lead to higher employee engagement in the final programs.

**3. Continuously gauge the effectiveness of health programs and initiatives.** Keep the lines of communication open to gather employee feedback, in addition to tracking engagement, expenditures and productivity. It is also important to follow through and make adjustments when needed.

Healthy, productive employees represent a true competitive advantage for American businesses. Regardless of company size and industry, executives and employees can work together to enhance and maintain workforce health and help drive a robust economy.

For more details on The Economist Intelligence Unit's exploration of workforce health and its importance for business and economic vitality, visit [healthyworkforce.economist.com](https://healthyworkforce.economist.com).



### Helpful Resources

The **CDC Workplace Health Resource Center** has suggestions, assessment tools and resources for promoting a healthy workplace: [cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/initiatives/resource-center/index.html](https://cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/initiatives/resource-center/index.html).

The **HERO (Health Enhancement Research Organization) Scorecard** helps organizations discover best practices for promoting workplace health and well-being as well as opportunities to improve and measure progress over time: [hero-health.org/hero-scorecard](https://hero-health.org/hero-scorecard).



\*Findings from a January 2021 online survey conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit, commissioned by Cigna, among 1,800 participants working full-time, including 600 senior executives (director and above for employers) and 1,200 employees. More information available at [healthyworkforce.economist.com/infographic](https://healthyworkforce.economist.com/infographic).

\*\*Kent K, Goetzel RZ, Roemer EC, et al (2016). Promoting Healthy Workplaces by Building Cultures of Health and Applying Strategic Communications. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*; 58:2, 114-122. [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26849254](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26849254).

\*\*\*McKinsey and Company. National surveys reveal disconnect between employees and employers around mental health need. April 21, 2021. [www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/national-surveys-reveal-disconnect-between-employees-and-employers-around-mental-health-need](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/national-surveys-reveal-disconnect-between-employees-and-employers-around-mental-health-need).

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