

# Well-Being Disconnect: Employees Want More From Employers

2020 WebMD Health Services Report



**WebMD**  
health services

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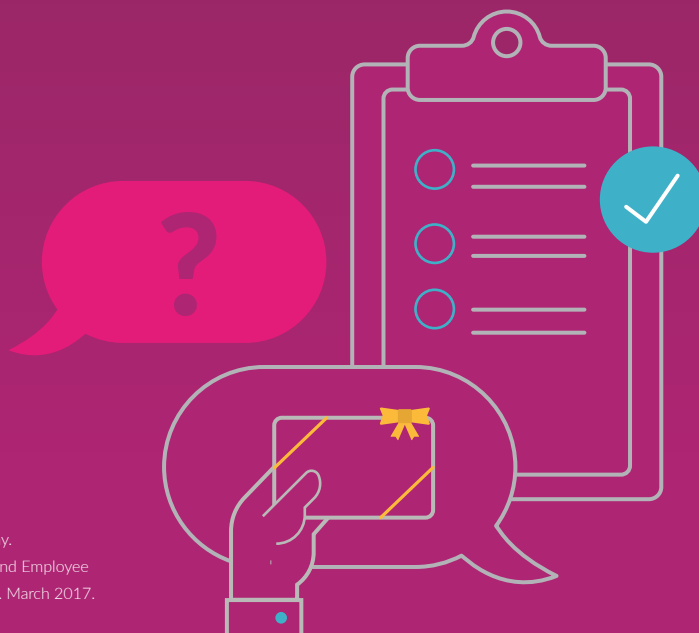
## INTRODUCTION

Ping pong tables, coffee bar, beer on tap, office gyms, wellness rooms, dog-friendly workplaces, free lunches—all these benefits are fun, but are they really what your employees want? It depends on who you speak to.

Some employees think that perks like these are counterproductive and distracting.<sup>1</sup> So, how can employers pivot to continue attracting and retaining talent? Offer robust well-being programs. If organizations haven't already included a comprehensive well-being package in their arsenal of benefits, it would be wise to do so soon—most employees feel their employers should play a role in improving their health.<sup>2</sup>

We were curious to learn more about which offerings employees expect their employers to provide, including some seemingly

“unconventional” or “untraditional” employer-sponsored programs. With this as a backdrop, we commissioned Blue Research®, an independent research consultancy, to conduct a study with 1,002 adults working either full-time or part-time for U.S. companies with at least 1,000 employees. We asked respondents questions about which well-being offerings they expect from their employer, which ones they're most likely to use if they had access to them, and which offerings they currently use most. Here's what they told us.→

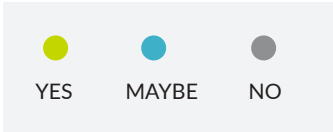


1. Hana. Forget foosball: People want a better place to work, not play.

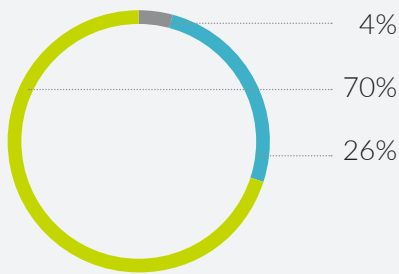
2. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Employer and Employee Opinions About Workplace Health Promotion (Wellness) Programs. March 2017.

# People Need a Comprehensive Well-Being Program

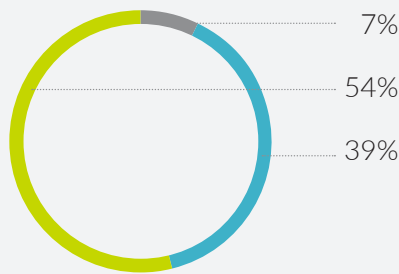
We asked people whether they believe companies should offer specific programs to their employees, such as fertility and family planning, caregiver support, and at-home fitness. The results indicated that, across all generations, employees are interested in a wide range of well-being program offerings that support them in many different aspects—especially in their personal lives.



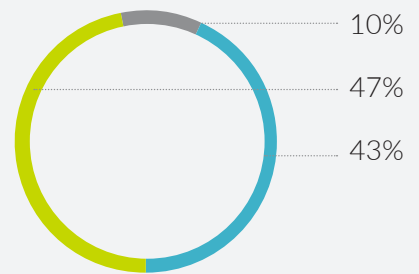
Mental and emotional health



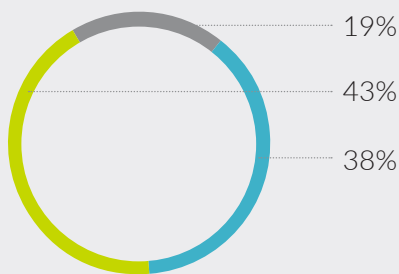
Caregiver support



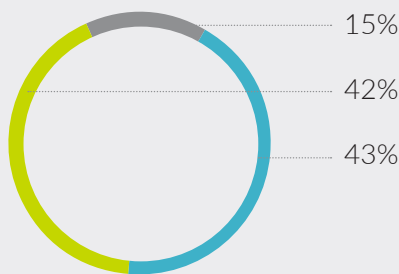
Pain medication addiction



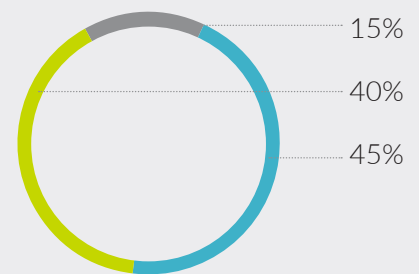
LGBTQ resources



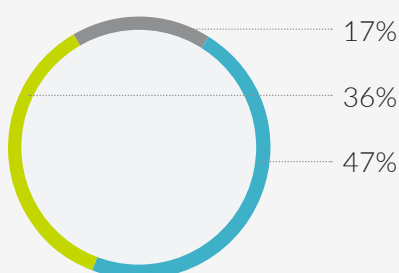
At-home fitness



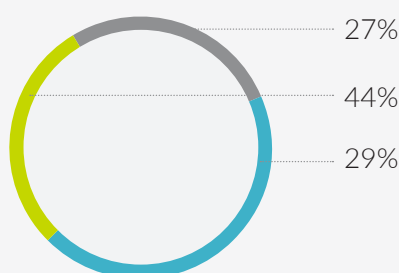
Social connectedness



Fertility and family planning



Relationship and sexual health



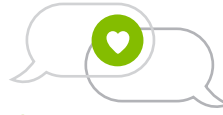
People believe employers should offer:

7 in 10



Mental and emotional health program

54%



Caregiver support

47%



Pain medication addiction support

43%



LGBTQ resources

4 in 10



Social connectedness programs

42%



At-home fitness

**Overall, the data is clear:** employees expect offerings that support their lives outside of work.

We anticipate that employees will continue shifting their expectations of employers within the next few years, focusing even more so on balancing all aspects of their lives rather than just enjoying perks during working hours. They'll expect their employers to lead the charge in offering these holistic, well-rounded benefits—and if employers don't, talent may seek out a new company who meets their needs.

What's also noteworthy is the percentage of people who indicated that employers should *maybe* include specific programs within their offerings. The highest percentage was for a program that's becoming more common in modern-day benefits packages, family

and fertility planning,<sup>3</sup> followed by relationship and sexual health programs.

While family planning is becoming expected of employers to attract and retain talent, people may still be on the fence about whether these types of programs should be the employer's responsibility, or if people should seek these services on their own. That said, of those who currently have access to these two programs through their employer, 50% have used relationship and sexual health programs, and 39% have used fertility and family planning. This tells us that employers who do offer these types of programs see positive outcomes on their investments.

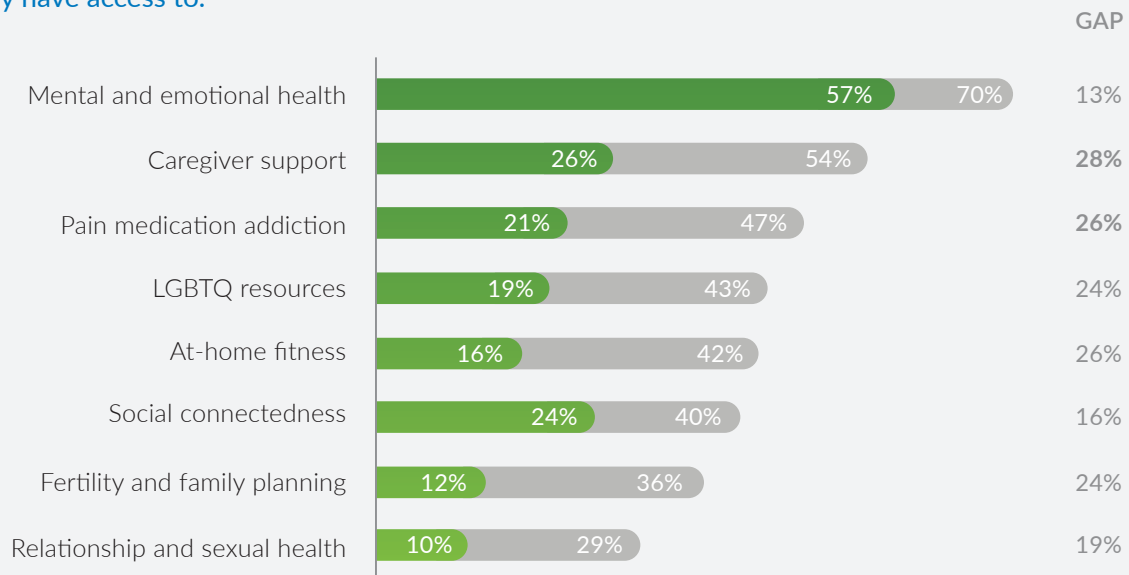
3. Willis Towers Watson. Survey Report: Employers prioritize family-friendly benefits. June 3, 2020.

## There Are Gaps Between What Employees Expect and What They Currently Have

After asking respondents which programs they think employers should offer, we asked them which ones, if any, they currently have at the organization they work for.

● CURRENTLY OFFERED  
● SHOULD OFFER

Across all programs, there was a large gap between what people expect employers to provide and what they currently have access to.

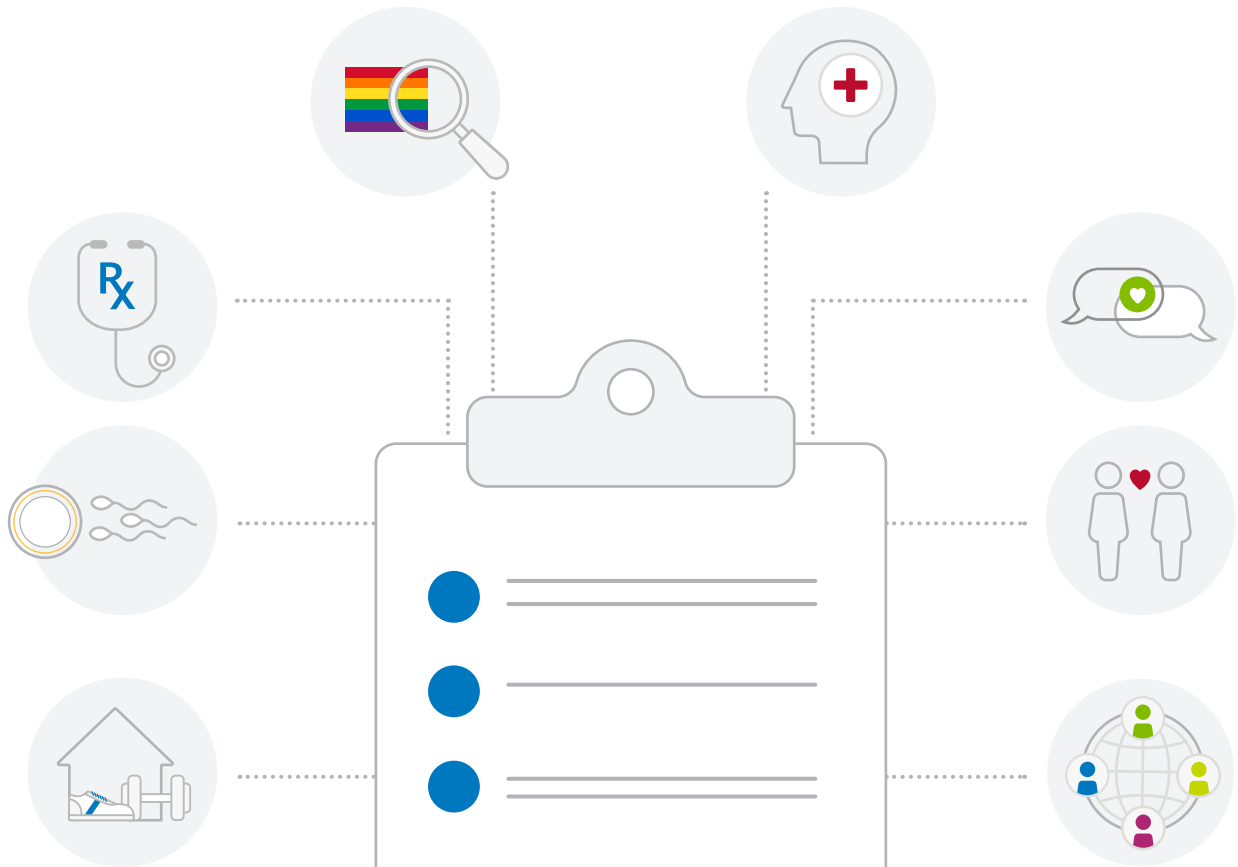


The most significant gap was for caregiver support, at a 28% difference. Pain medication addiction support also showed a wide gap—21% currently have access to a program, while 47% think it should be offered. A similar 26% difference exists for at-home fitness programs.



Across the board, the data indicates that employees are not currently receiving the support they think employers should offer. We predict that organizations who can pivot quickly to meet the workforce’s growing needs and expectations will be better equipped to retain their talent, and for good reason. Those who already invest in their human capital recognize that holistic benefits like well-being programs contribute to increased productivity, performance, employee engagement, and morale.<sup>4</sup>

So, we know that many employees indicated that their employer is lacking. But for those who currently have access to specific programs, are they actually good enough, robust enough, and helpful enough for employees to use? Maybe not, as the next set of data shows.

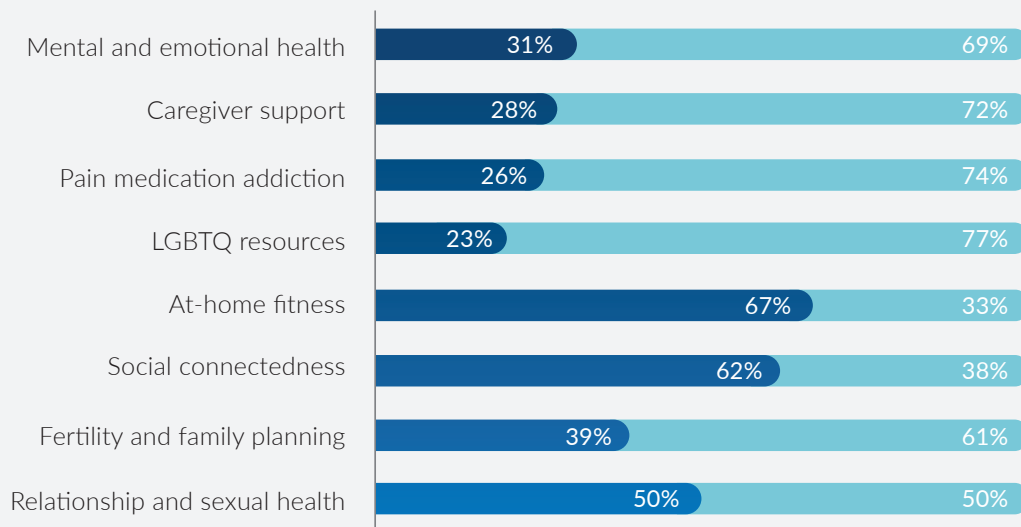


4. Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO). Exploring the Value Proposition for Workforce Health. February 2015.

## Gaps Also Exist Between Which Programs People Have Access To and Which Ones They Use

● HAVE USED  
● CURRENTLY OFFERED

### The most often used programs by those with access:



For those who already have access to these programs, the most used ones include at-home fitness (67%), social connectedness (62%), and relationship and sexual health (50%). These numbers are great, as it shows that they're being

used and appreciated by employees. But this doesn't mean employers should only focus on these three areas—employees still think other offerings should be available, such as mental and emotional health support.



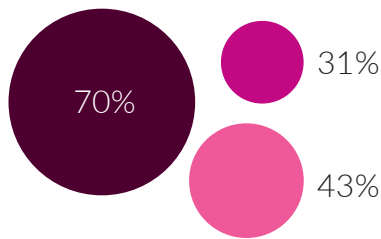
The data revealed considerable variations in programs employees believe should be offered versus how many people currently have access to and use the program. While 70% of people indicated that employers should provide mental and emotional

health programs, for example, only 31% who have access to this program use it. And, while only 42% think employers should provide at-home fitness offerings, nearly 7 in 10 (67%) use them.

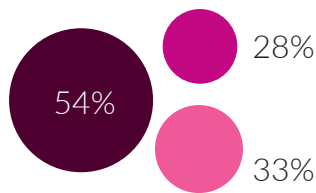
The divide is shown in other categories, as well:



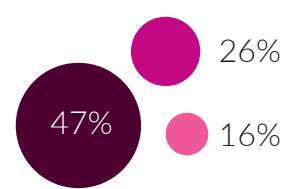
Mental and emotional health



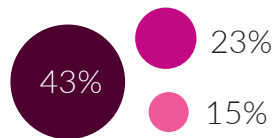
Caregiver support



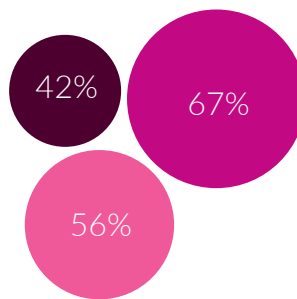
Pain medication addiction



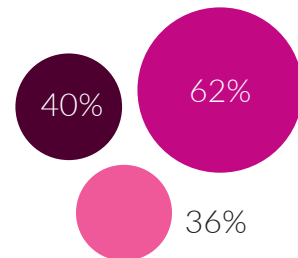
LGBTQ resources



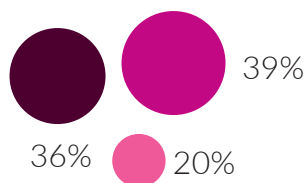
At-home fitness



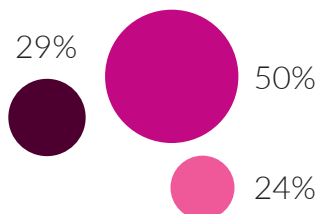
Social connectedness

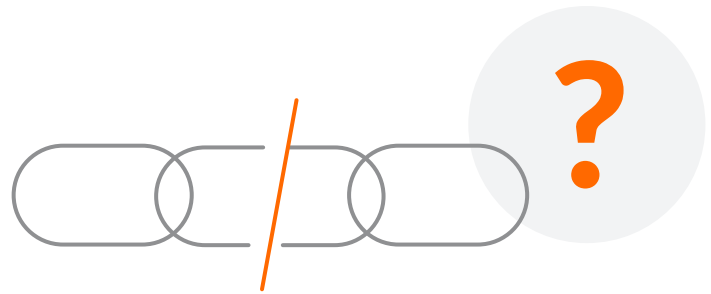


Fertility and family planning



Relationship and sexual health





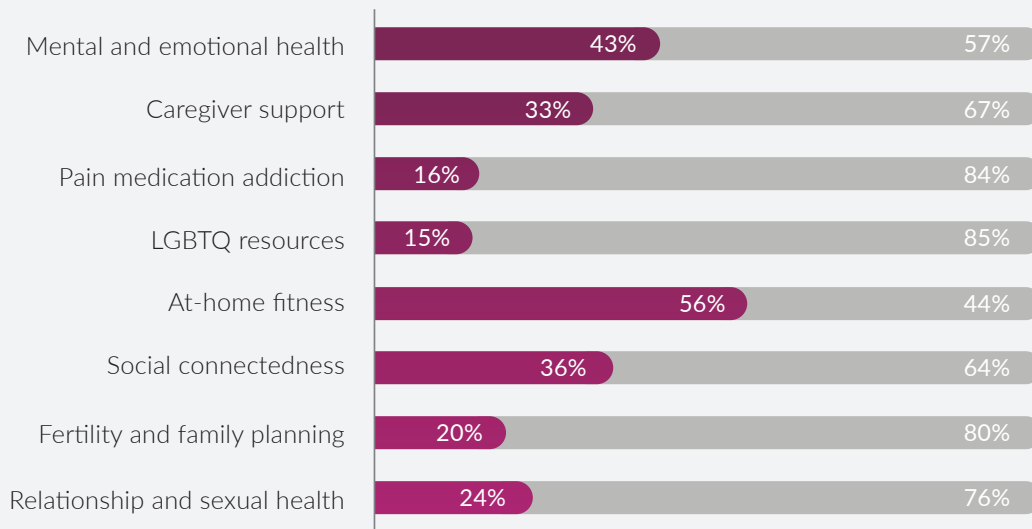
**Why is there such a disconnect?** There could be several reasons why there's such a gap between what employees want to have and which programs they use.

- **They are social norms.** Perhaps many people believe that certain programs, such as LGBTQ resources, should be offered as an equitable expectation. Employees expect that programs like this should be provided for those who need that support, but they may not necessarily need to use the program themselves.
- **There's a lack of awareness.** People can't use programs if they don't know they exist. Perhaps some employees don't know that they have access to specific programs through their employer, like caregiver support or pain medication addiction support. This would make it less likely that they'd go out of their way to find information about a company-provided program.
- **The current programs aren't ideal.** It's also possible that employees have access to certain programs, such as mental and emotional health, but they don't utilize it because it's not as helpful as it could be. For example, a more robust mental health program that offers meditation and mindfulness, resilience training, access to the EAP, and more is likely to have more users than one that simply includes an EAP as part of a standard benefits package.
- **They want it, but don't need to use it yet.** Other employees may expect that their employers offer specific programs that they can use in the future, but they may not need to access them just yet. This could be possible for those who expect an employer to offer caregiver support, as those with aging parents or expecting to have children may eventually want more help and flexibility from their employer.
- **They don't think the responsibility lies on the employer, but appreciate the program nonetheless.** This seems like a clear answer for those using at-home fitness, social connectedness, and relationship and sexual health support programs. While some people indicated that they don't think employers should offer these programs, the number of people who have access to these programs—and actually use them—is significantly higher. We believe this gap is because people may not necessarily think employers should help in these areas, but they still appreciate and use these programs anyway.

# Those Without Access May Use Some Programs More Than Others, if Given the Chance

● LIKELY TO USE  
● IF OFFERED

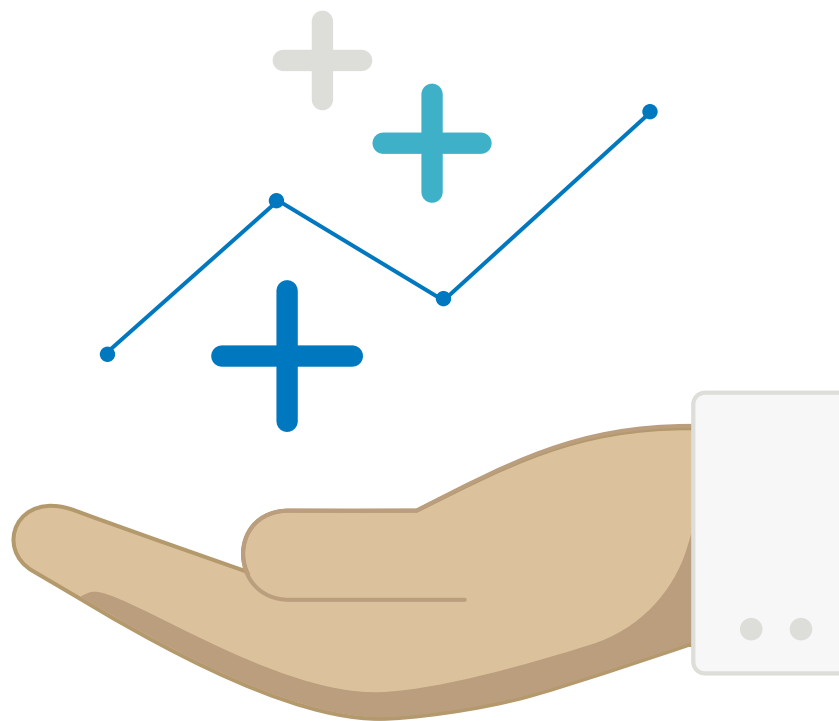
The most expected to use by those without access:



For those who don't currently have access to these types of programs through their employer, respondents indicated that they were most likely to use at-home fitness (56%) and mental and emotional health (43%). This shows us that there's a healthy mix between which programs people think an employer should offer—or not—and what they'd actually use if given the opportunity.

Take at-home fitness, for example—only 42% of people thought employers should offer it, yet more than half (56%) would use it if they could. What does it all mean? Even the programs that people don't think an employer should offer can still be appreciated—and frequently used—indicating that organizations with robust benefits packages will get incredible usage out of their investments.

At WebMD Health Services, we know how important it is to make sure there's something available for everyone to benefit from. Although a smaller percentage indicated that they'd use certain programs if they were offered, such as LGBTQ resources (15%), pain medication addiction (16%), or fertility and family planning (20%), we still think these metrics are just as important as the programs that may get used more often. We predict offerings like these will become a more significant expectation as we see younger generations becoming a driving force in the workplace.



## Speaking of Generations

Consider this—for the first time in history, four generations of employees are represented in the workplace. Millennials now make up the largest portion of the workforce, while the first wave of Generation Z—people in their early 20s—are making their debut.

### Programs Employees Believe Should Be Offered By Generation

	<b>BABY BOOMERS</b> 56-74 yrs. old	<b>GEN X</b> 40-55 yrs. old	<b>MILLENNIALS</b> 26-39 yrs. old	<b>GEN Z</b> 18-25 yrs. old
Mental and emotional health	64%	69%	69%	80%
Caregiver support	50%	51%	54%	64%
Pain medication addiction	48%	44%	49%	47%
LGBTQ resources	33%	36%	49%	56%
At-home fitness	28%	40%	50%	49%
Social connectedness	24%	35%	48%	54%
Fertility and family planning	20%	33%	46%	43%
Relationship and sexual health	17%	26%	36%	39%

We now have significantly varying perspectives, attitudes and motivations to consider. Our study shows that designing a well-being program for multigenerational workplaces matters, as well-being is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

After reviewing the data across all respondents, we saw that age does play a factor in well-being program expectations. In fact, the younger generations are more likely to expect their employer to offer these types of programs.

What's noteworthy about this data is that those who thought employers should offer programs for two key areas—pain medication addiction support and caregiver support—were similar in response across all generations. Pain medication addiction can affect anyone, no matter their age group.

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**The use of prescription pain medications is associated with approximately:**



Pain medication addiction support is an emerging program. Employers may benefit from adding this service in the form of educational content, coaching or text-based support.

In regard to the caregiver support metrics, we speculate that the equal interest has to do with the fact that all generations are caring for loved ones in some capacity. Some generations may have to care for aging parents, while others have to care for their children. Some, known as the sandwich generation, must care for both parents and children. Regardless,

they want help and flexibility to care for their loved ones while also balancing their careers. And COVID-19 has exacerbated this need. We predict that increased caregiver support and flexible work arrangements will be a permanent expectation for employees.

5. Integrated Benefits Institute. Opioids, Pain and Absence: The Productivity Implications of Substance Use Among U.S. Workers. April 18, 2019.

## Generation Z Expects the Most

Gen Z is expecting more from their employers than any other generation. 8 in 10 think employers should offer mental and emotional health support—11% more than what millennials and Gen X think. And, 64% think employers should provide caregiver support, which is well above their older cohorts' data points.

### Gen Z expects more than the traditional employee benefits:



Gen Z shows unique characteristics that set them apart from older generations, including being known as radically inclusive, understanding others' perspectives, and mobilizing around causes they believe in—even if that means leaving differences aside.<sup>6</sup> As a fiercely loyal and community-oriented population, they're going to expect more from

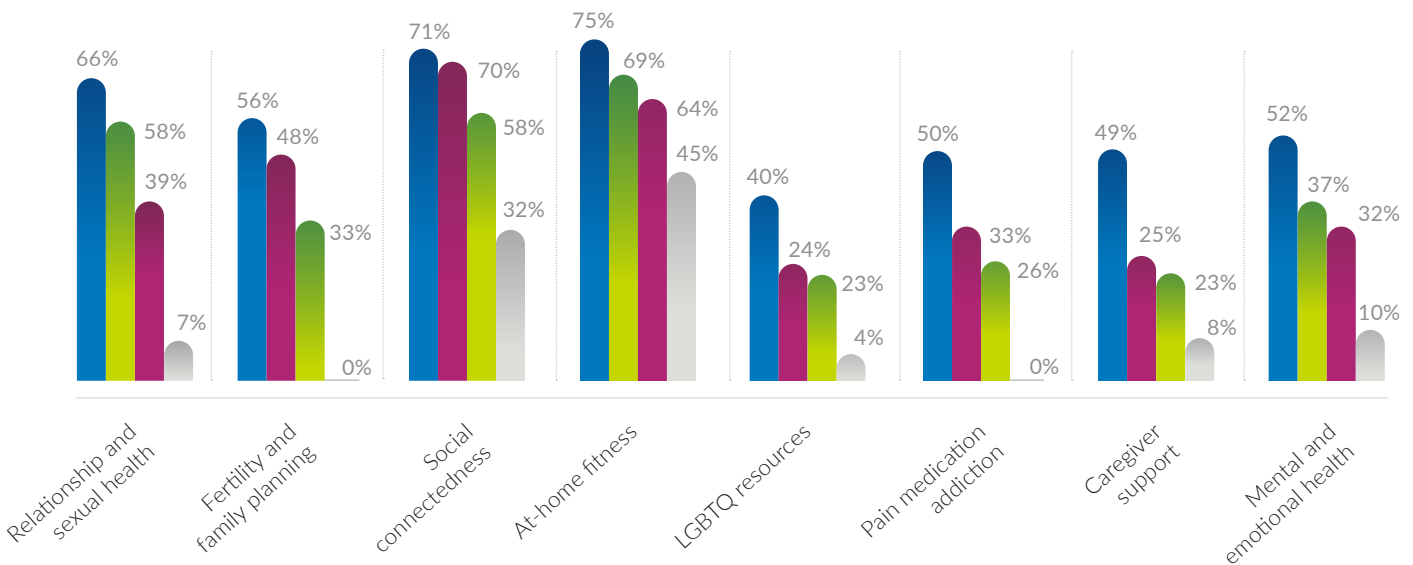
their employers. A traditional benefits package just won't cut it anymore—to attract and retain this talent pool, organizations must pivot their existing benefits to meet the demands of this up-and-coming generation.

6. McKinsey & Company. "True Gen": Generation Z and its implications for companies. November 12, 2018.



# Millennials Overwhelmingly Use Programs the Most

- **MILLENNIALS**  
26-39 yrs. old
- **GEN X**  
40-55 yrs. old
- **GEN Z**  
18-25 yrs. old
- **BABY BOOMERS**  
56-74 yrs. old

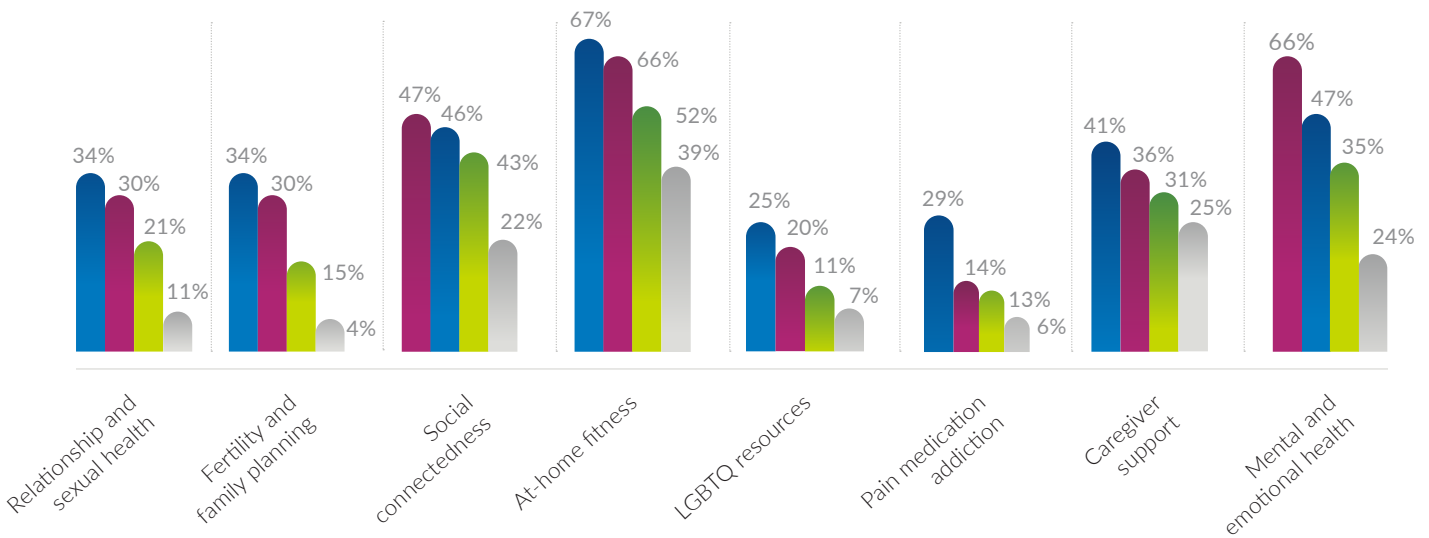
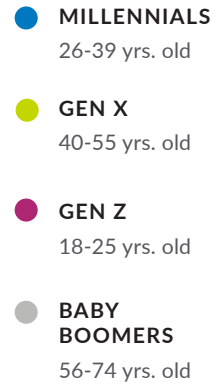


Of those with access to programs, millennials tend to lead in the percentage of users. Baby boomers lag in use across all offerings. This came as no surprise to us—baby boomers are more likely to prefer traditional benefits packages and are more motivated by monetary rewards, including retirement planning, than modern offerings.<sup>7</sup> They may not necessarily believe that it’s the employer’s responsibility to provide specific resources, and so, if baby boomers need help, they may seek support on their own.

If your workforce includes a good portion of millennials, make sure you’re offering meaningful programs, as they’ve indicated that they’ll use them when given the opportunity. Remember that they’re going to appreciate and use offerings that support their personal lives and holistic well-being, including mental health support, social connectedness, and at-home fitness.

7. SHRM. What Motivates Your Workers? It Depends on Their Generation. May 9, 2016.

# Millennials and Gen Z Are More Likely To Use Programs, if Given the Access



Again, younger generations are making it clear that they would use comprehensive well-being programs if they had the opportunity to do so. But these programs need to be thought out—again, a basic package just won’t cut it anymore. These generations have a bigger focus on work-life balance and want valuable, meaningful benefits that make a difference in their everyday lives.

If they had access, millennials and Gen Z reported a higher likelihood of using these programs than baby boomers and Gen X populations:

- Mental and emotional health
- At-home fitness
- LGBTQ resources
- Fertility and family planning
- Relationship and sexual health

## THE TAKEAWAYS

As employers, it's our job to empower our employees to be the best they can be—at work, at home and anywhere in between. Based on this report, here are some things organizations should do to ensure they're doing right by their populations. →

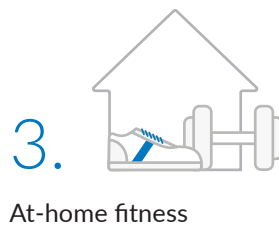


## Well-being matters. Make the investment.

We never recommend doing something just to check a box on a to-do list. Your benefits packages should be thought out with your employees' needs in mind. Make sure your offerings are meaningful enough for your populations to actually use them.

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Based on interests, needs and usage, we've identified **four programs** that are absolutely essential to incorporate into your organization's benefits:



This last one shouldn't be ignored. Pain medication addiction is one area where every generation agrees that employers should offer their support.

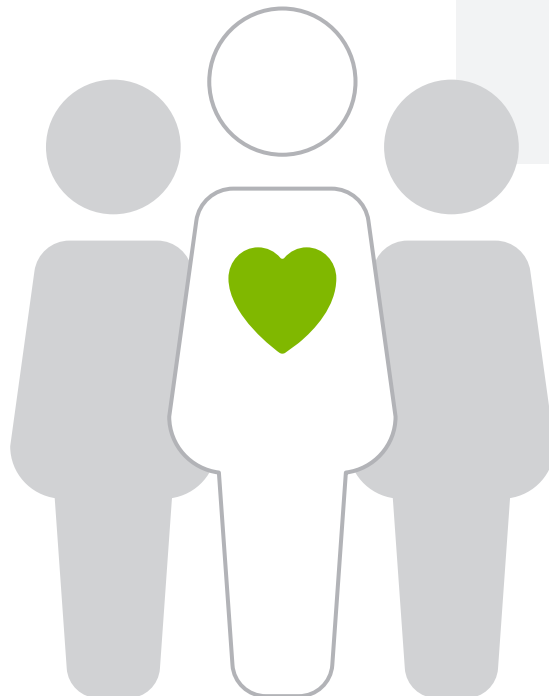
## Support your multigenerational workplace.

Well-being programs designed to support millennials and Gen Z may have the most positive impact. Across all types of well-being programs offered, this population is most likely to have used them. And, they're expecting more from their employers than older generations are. Attracting and retaining younger talent may warrant offering programs like social connectedness and at-home fitness—about half of millennials and Gen Z believe their company should offer these programs, and about 3 in 4 with access have used them.

That said, it's also important to be considerate of your entire workforce, including baby boomers and Gen Xers. Check in to make sure everyone's needs and expectations are being factored into your program design. Remember, it's essential to make sure there's something available for everyone to improve their well-being, even outside of the standard workday.

### Don't know what your populations want, or what they'd find useful? Ask.

Pulse surveys help you get a feel of what they would be interested in, what they expect from you, and what their long-term needs are.



## Be holistic.

To differentiate yourselves in the hiring market, it's crucial to include offerings that support people in all aspects of their lives, including areas that may not traditionally be seen as an employer's responsibility. These include fertility and family planning, caregiver support, relationship and sexual health, and other programs supporting employees outside of their workday.

### Some other ideas you could incorporate into your offerings include:

- Wellness money:**  
 Give employees a certain amount of money each month to put toward well-being, such as at-home fitness equipment, gym memberships, spa days, and ergonomic equipment.
- Daycare:** If appropriate for your environment, provide an onsite space where employees with children can drop off the kids for daycare and learning.
- Meetups:** Empower employees to create groups to encourage social connectedness, like virtual book clubs, movie groups, soccer teams, and more.
- Financial education programs:**  
 Offer access to educational workshops, including budgeting tips, managing debt, and saving for big investments.
- Mental health offerings:**  
 Diversify your mental and emotional health benefits by providing a wider range of support, including resilience training, coaching, meditation apps, workshops, and more.
- Volunteer opportunities:**  
 Allow employees to volunteer through work, like creating a toy drive, taking paid time off to volunteer locally, and creating a volunteer committee to support ongoing ideas that match your company's culture.



**Want more interesting, out-of-the-box well-being ideas?** Check out our podcast, HR Scoop, where our Head of People sits down with other HR leaders to discuss their organization's unique employee benefits.

[LISTEN NOW >](#)

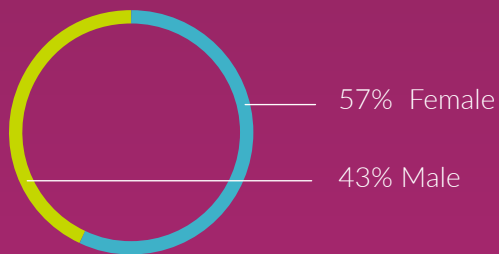
## METHODOLOGY/ABOUT THIS REPORT

To better understand which programs employees want from employers, WebMD Health Services commissioned Blue Research® to conduct an independent study with 1,002 U.S.-based employees of companies with at least 1,000 employees. This ~15-minute survey was conducted blind without disclosing the research sponsor and included the flow, logic, and quality control metrics needed to ensure valid and reliable data, while minimizing respondent fatigue.

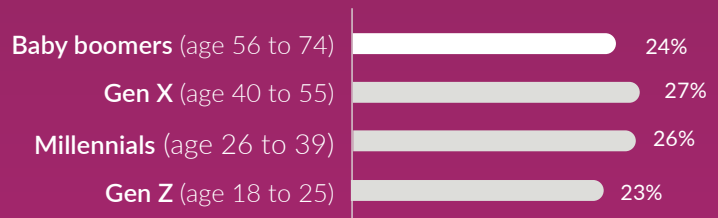
The sampling framework ensured the data was not biased to any specific industries, locations, or functional roles within organizations, such as factory floor vs. office personnel. We also gathered data from a close representation of all four generations currently in the workforce: baby boomers, Gen Xers, millennials, and Gen Zers. We asked respondents about the programs they think employers should offer, which ones they currently use, and which ones they would likely use if given the opportunity.

### Participant Demographics

#### GENDER



#### GENERATION





## Definitions

A guide to terminology used in the study and its findings.

### **Fertility and Family Planning:**

Helps employees who are trying to start a family, but are having trouble doing so, by providing help in finding the right doctor for them, helping them understand their options and providing emotional support.

### **Relationships and Sexual Health:**

Helps employee couples of all types (straight, gay, polyamorous, etc.) improve their relationships and sexual health.

### **Mental and Emotional Health:**

Offers on-demand access to coaches or services that can help employees manage symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress or focus attention on mindfulness, meditation and gratitude.

### **LGBTQ Resources:**

Offers tools such as support groups, educational content, etc., to help support employees dealing with challenges such as questioning their sexuality, coming out at work, exploring gender reassignment, parenting a gay youth, etc.

### **At-Home Fitness:**

Offers employees reimbursement on in-home fitness equipment and/or offers access to on-demand and live streaming exercises or access to a fitness trainer.

### **Caregiver Support:**

Offers employees guidance and benefits for caring for a family member (aging parent or child).

### **Paid Medication Addiction:**

Offers employees online or phone access to support for addiction to pain medications (such as opioids) through a variety of approaches including educational content and coaching.

### **Social Connectedness:**

Offers employees the opportunity to host or participate in virtual social events (such as book clubs, happy hours, exercise classes, etc.) with coworkers, friends, family or others with similar interests.

# Are you **Ready?**

Start your journey with the  
partner you can trust.

[connect@webmd.net](mailto:connect@webmd.net) | [webmdhealthservices.com](http://webmdhealthservices.com)