

TOP 5 WORKPLACE POLICY ISSUES

FOR HR PROFESSIONALS TO WATCH IN 2026

HR professionals are on the front lines of implementing new regulations, supporting employees, and maintaining day-to-day compliance. Rapid policy changes, shifting workforce needs, and increasing administrative demands are making their role more critical than ever. SHRM equips HR practitioners with trusted tools, templates, training, and real-time guidance to navigate these top issues effectively and support both organizational goals and employee success.

1 Shifting AI Regulations, Ethics, and Workforce Transformation

In Brief: Artificial intelligence and automation are reshaping HR — including recruitment and performance management — while introducing legal and compliance risks. Employees' anxiety over AI displacement persists as organizations invest in these tools. HR must balance AI and the human element to ensure that employees use the technology responsibly and help organizations navigate a complex regulatory landscape.

Top Action for HR Pros: Lead AI adoption by supporting workforce upskilling and reskilling, clarifying accountability for AI-assisted decisions, and translating technical changes into clear guidance. Ensure AI tools enhance human judgment rather than replace it, fostering confidence, engagement, and compliance across the organization.

SHRM Resource: [Artificial Intelligence in the Workplace Resource Hub](#)

2 Escalating Costs and Design Complexity of Benefits

In Brief: Rising health care costs, new state mandates, and evolving benefits management compliance requirements are making programs increasingly complex. Changes in tax credits are adding further uncertainty. HR professionals are managing administration, communicating updates, and ensuring that benefits align with organizational goals and support the well-being of a multi-generational workforce.

Top Action for HR Pros: Implement, manage, and communicate benefits clearly to ensure workforce understanding and engagement. Evaluate programs for affordability, feasibility, and cultural alignment. Your role is critical for maintaining employee morale, talent retention, and smooth day-to-day operations.

SHRM Resource: [2025 Employee Benefits Survey](#) and [Total Rewards Resource Hub](#)

3

Mounting Workforce Shortages, Talent Gaps, and Economic Pressures

In Brief: In 2025, nearly 70% of organizations struggled to fill full-time positions, which often required new skills. This trend is not expected to subside as evolving roles demand reskilling and careful talent management. HR professionals must navigate recruitment challenges while maintaining organizational efficiency, employee development, and competitiveness.

Top Action for HR Pros: Prioritize upskilling and reskilling, leverage untapped talent pools, and audit job descriptions to reflect actual needs. Support skills-first hiring and workforce development strategies to attract and retain qualified talent in a competitive labor market.

SHRM Resource: [2025 Talent Trends Report](#), [Skills-First at Work Toolkit](#), and [Upskilling Your Workforce Express Request](#)

4

Evolving Workforce Compliance in a New Legal Environment

In Brief: Executive orders, Supreme Court decisions, enforcement actions, and state legislation are creating uncertainty for inclusion and diversity (I&D) programs and anti-discrimination practices. HR professionals face confusion as practices once considered permissible are now under heightened scrutiny, requiring careful review of I&D programs, training, mentorship, and broader workplace practices.

Top Action for HR Pros: Evaluate and communicate the goals of I&D initiatives, ensuring equal opportunity for all is prioritized. Audit programs for compliance, monitor federal guidance, and translate legal requirements into practices that reduce risk while supporting inclusion and engagement.

SHRM Resources: [Inclusion & Diversity Resource Hub](#) and [SHRM's BEAM Framework Toolkit](#)

5

The Pressing Future of Caregiving and Workforce Well-Being

In Brief: Caregiving responsibilities — including elder care, child care, and support for family members with disabilities — are increasingly affecting workforce participation, productivity, and costs. HR professionals implementing employee support programs must anticipate growing demands and design solutions that sustain well-being while meeting organizational goals.

Top Action for HR Pros: Foster workplace cultures that destigmatize caregiving, and communicate available benefits effectively. Design flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and caregiving resources to retain talent, control costs, and boost engagement across a multi-generational workforce.

SHRM Resource: [Creating a Caregiver-Friendly Workplace Express Request, Benefits and Beyond: Top Ways to Support Caregivers](#), and [Supporting Employees with Dependent and Elder Care Responsibilities Toolkit](#)



Read the unabridged version of SHRM's Top 5 Workplace Policy Issues to Watch in 2026 at [shrm.org/hrpropolicytrends2026](#) or get regular updates on SHRM's workplace policy initiatives by subscribing to the HR Policy Briefing newsletter.

