EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

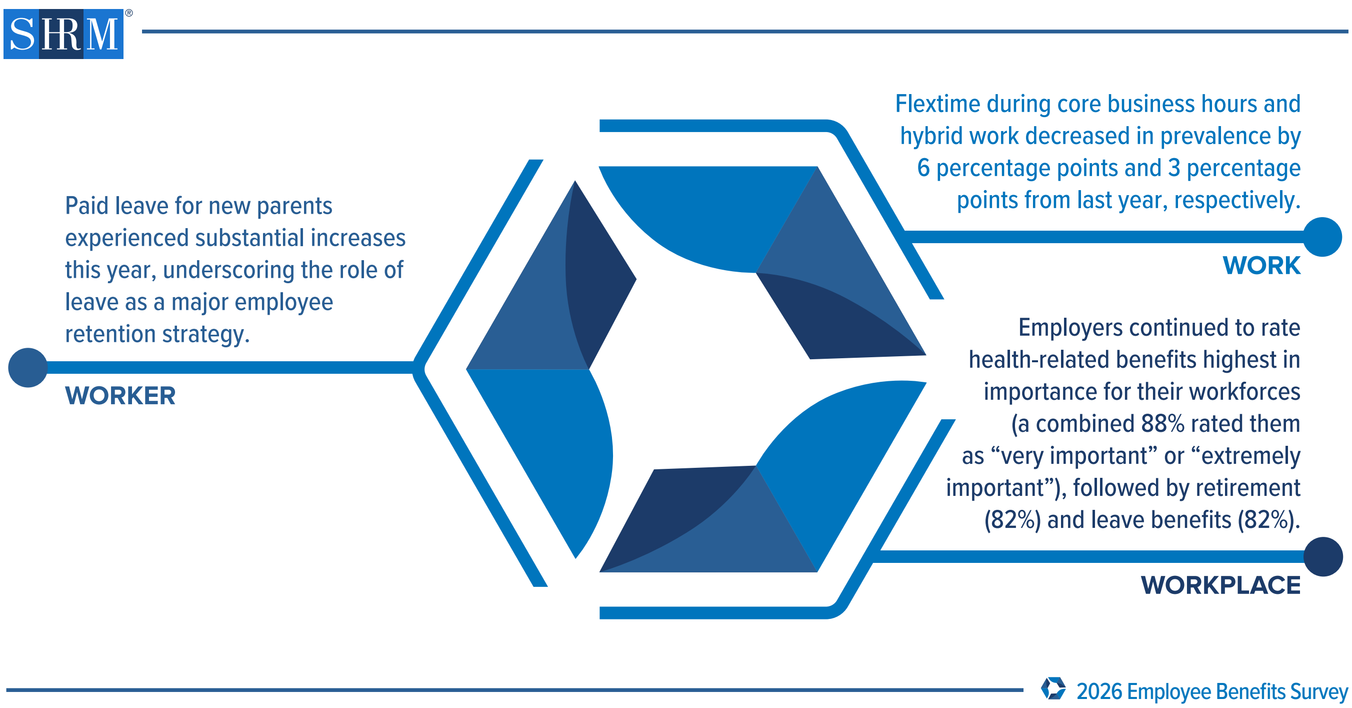
2026 Employee Benefits Survey

Trends with Benefits: 2026 Employee Benefits Survey

The SHRM Employee Benefits Survey is a long-standing tradition and one of the longest-running annual surveys of employee benefits trends in the U.S. For the last 30 years, SHRM has collected data from organizations nationwide representing a variety of industries, sizes, sectors, and regions across the U.S. This year, 5,472 organizations shared details about the benefits they offer employees to inform our latest benchmarks.

In this executive summary, we explore trends in benefits offerings by major benefits categories and offer actionable insights for benefits leaders who wish to apply these findings within their organizations.

If you want more targeted insights for organizations like yours, SHRM Members have exclusive access to an interactive online database to benchmark the survey results by industry, organization size, and location (region and state) across the last five years of data, dating back to 2022.



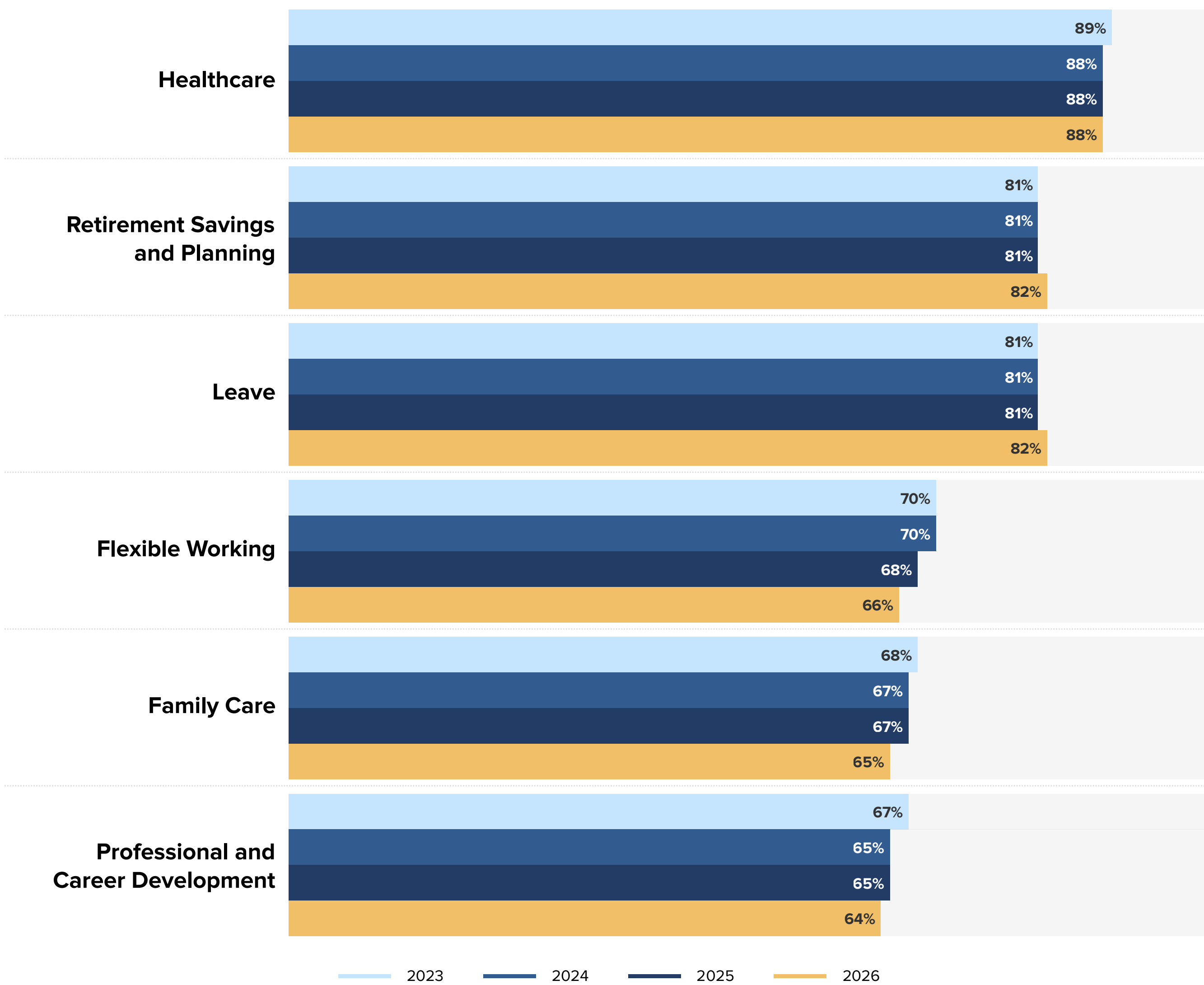
How have employers' attitudes about the importance of benefits changed over time?

The categories most commonly rated as important remained the same as last year, topped by healthcare-related benefits (88% of employers rated them as "very important" or "extremely important"), retirement savings and planning, and leave. Retirement and leave were tied for second place for the fifth consecutive year, with 82% of employers rating these categories as "very important" or "extremely important."

The percentage of employers who rated flexible working benefits as "very important" or "extremely important" has been steadily decreasing (down 2 percentage points from last year). Similarly, family care benefits experienced a 2-percentage-point decrease since last year. Leave and retirement have increased slightly.

Employer-Rated Importance of Top Benefits Categories

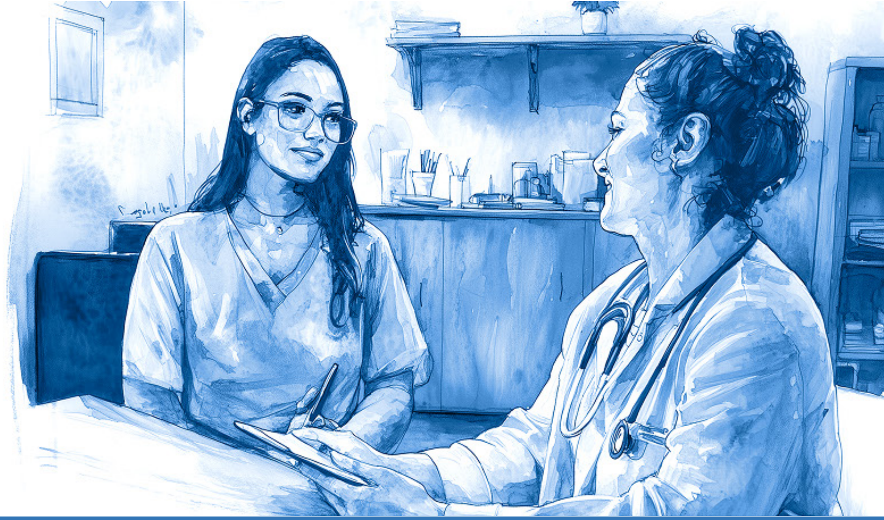
Percentage of employers who rated each type of benefits category as "very important" or "extremely important" to their workforce



SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

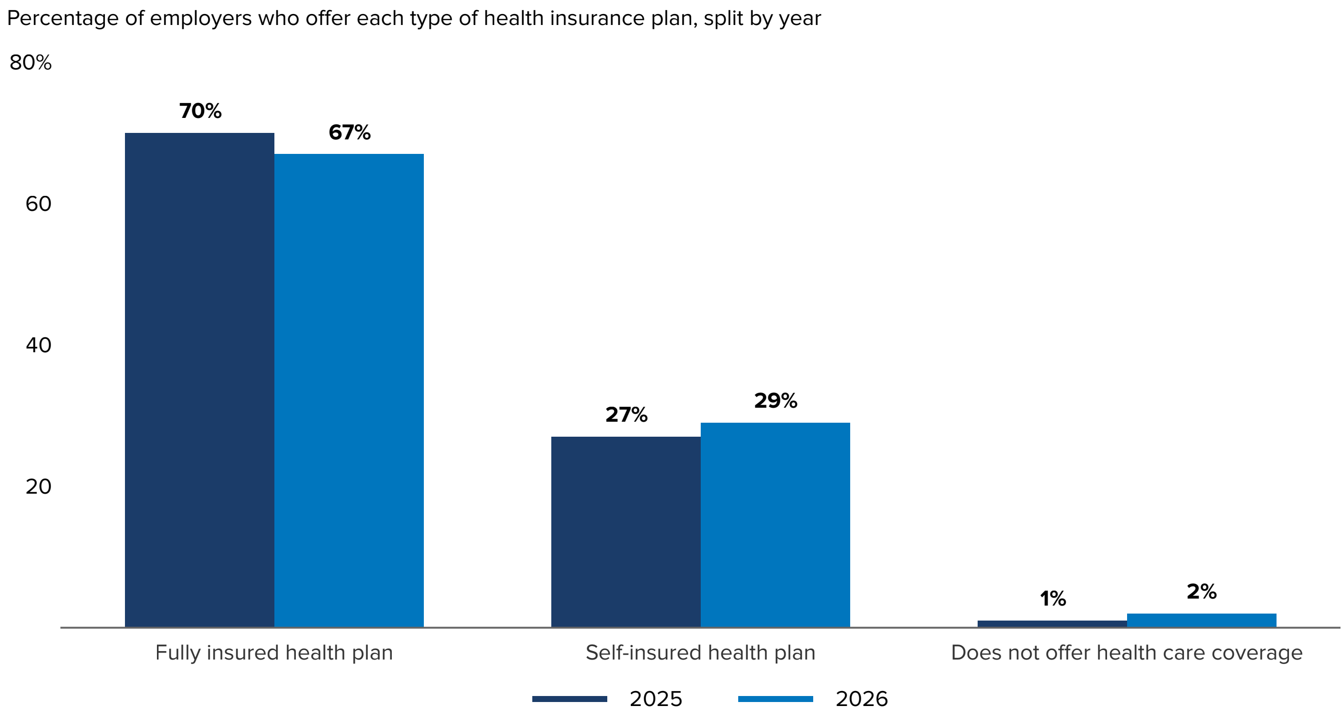
BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

Healthcare



Health-related benefits remain the highest priority for organizations. Currently, 67% of employers offer a fully insured health plan, meaning they pay a fixed amount to an insurer, which is down from 70% last year. Meanwhile, 29% offer a self-insured health plan, where employers operate their own health plan and pay medical claims themselves, often through a third-party administrator, an increase from 27% last year.

Self-Insured Health Plans Are More Common in 2026 Compared to 2025



SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

Recent Trends in Healthcare

Employers continue to face challenges with specialty medications, such as GLP-1 drugs, which are used for diabetes management and have gained popularity for weight loss. The prevalence of prescription drug coverage bundled with insurance (77%) dropped by 16 percentage points, likely due to organizations' struggles to absorb the costs of specialty medications. Similarly, the prevalence of third-party pharmacy management programs has increased (up 5 percentage points from 2025), which is an opportunity for employers to shed the costs associated with GLP-1 coverage.

GLP-1 coverage differs according to the purpose; employers were more likely to offer GLP-1 coverage for type 2 diabetes management than weight management:

47% of organizations offer GLP-1 coverage for type 2 diabetes management.

15% of organizations offer GLP-1 coverage for weight management.

SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

In addition, to support weight management goals in a cost-effective way, 24% of organizations reported that they offer nutritional counseling, 5 percentage points more than did so last year.

Contraceptive coverage experienced a sharp decrease from last year (66%, down 10 percentage points). It was mandatory for employers to provide contraceptive coverage under the Affordable Care Act, for which certain provisions expired in December 2025, meaning that average premiums have increased and employers may have been less likely to offer plans that cover contraceptives.

Percentage of employers who offer contraceptive coverage, split by year:

2025: 76% **2026: 66%**

In parallel with the increase in nutritional counseling, there has been a broader shift for organizations to take a *proactive* approach to healthcare (i.e., investing more in preventive healthcare education and solutions) rather than a *reactive* approach (i.e., addressing health issues after they arise). Wellness-related benefits saw steady increases. The prevalence of offsite fitness center membership reimbursement (25%) grew by 5 percentage points, fitness equipment subsidies and reimbursements (12%) grew by 5 percentage points, and annual health risk assessments (23%) and health fairs (23%) each grew by 4 percentage points. Investing in preventive programs such as these could help save on healthcare costs in the future. Additionally, some employers that offer GLP-1 coverage for weight management may require employees to first participate in wellness or weight management programs before covering the drugs. Therefore, as GLP-1 coverage becomes the standard, wellness benefits may become more common, as well.

Healthcare Insurance Plans

Preferred provider organization (PPO) plans remain the most common healthcare option at 84%. High-deductible health plans (HDHPs) linked with a savings account — examples include a health savings account (HSA), health reimbursement arrangement (HRA), or flexible spending account (FSA) — were the second most common option at 66%. Health maintenance organizations (HMOs) are offered by 30% of employers.

The average annual premium costs for PPO plans (rounded to the nearest hundred) are as follows:

$3,500 Employee contribution (individual coverage)

$8,000 Employer contribution (individual coverage)

$7,900 Employee contribution (family coverage)

$17,300 Employer contribution (family coverage)

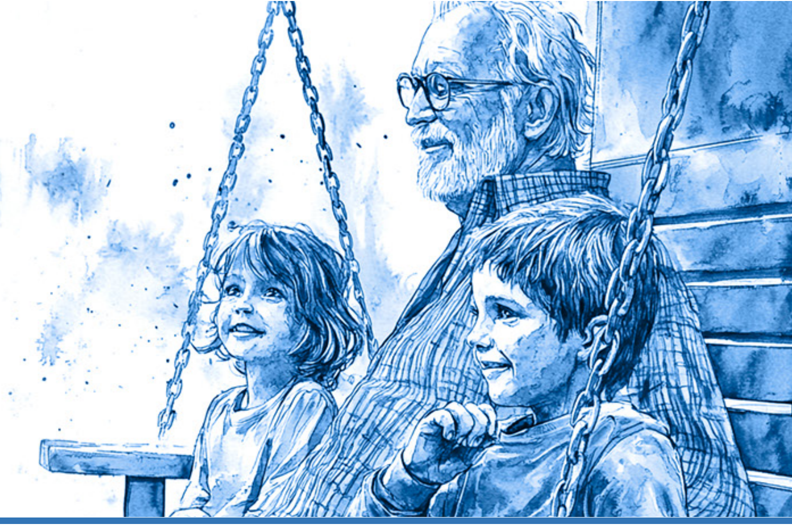
SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

HSAs have maintained their prevalence at 63%. The average maximum employer contribution for HSAs slightly increased from last year to $1,060 for individuals (0.09% increase) and $1,769 for families (1.96% increase). The average maximum employer contribution for HRAs decreased slightly to $2,041 for individuals (2.62% decrease) and $3,334 for families (0.9% decrease).

FSAs are offered by 62% of employers, unchanged since last year. However, the percentage of organizations that offer an FSA grace period dropped by 5 percentage points, and the percentage of organizations that offer an FSA carryover period dropped by 2 percentage points.

Visit the Employee Benefits Survey results interactive online tool to explore more health-related benefits trends, including those on:

- Annual premium costs for the following types of health insurance plans: PPO, HMO, HDHP (both linked and not linked with a savings plan), point of service (POS), exclusive provider organization (EPO), and fee-for-service (FFS).
- Additional insurance coverage.
- Short-term disability (STD), long-term disability (LTD), and accidental death and dismemberment (AD&D) insurance.



BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

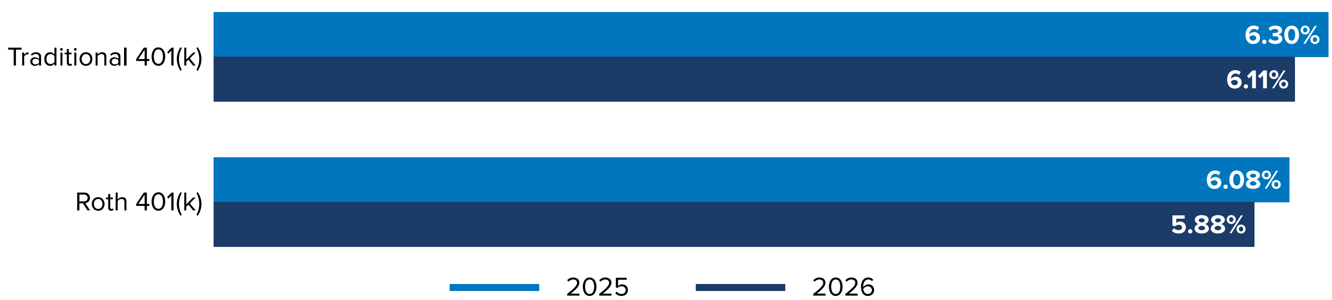
Retirement

Traditional 401(k) plans remain the most common retirement benefit at 90%, though the percentage of employers that offer a 401(k) plan dropped by 3 percentage points from last year. Roth 401(k) plans are as common as they were in 2025 (76%) and have increased in popularity since 2022 (8-percentage-point increase).

Despite 82% of employers rating retirement benefits as “very important” or “extremely important” to their workforces, several related benefits decreased from last year. Pay loans from defined contribution savings plans dropped by 8 percentage points. Fewer employers offer matches for traditional 401(k) plans this year (81%) compared to 2025 (85%), and retirement education (46%) dropped by 3 percentage points. The average maximum employer match for traditional 401(k) plans sits at 6.11%, while the average maximum employer match for Roth 401(k) plans is 5.88%, both slight decreases from last year’s average maximum employer matches of 6.30% and 6.08%, respectively.

Maximum Employer Contributions for Retirement Accounts Have Decreased Since 2025

Average maximum employer match for employees' retirement accounts, split by year



SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

Visit the Employee Benefits Survey results interactive online tool to explore more retirement-related benefits trends, including those on:

- Defined contribution plan features.
- Retirement programs and services.

BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

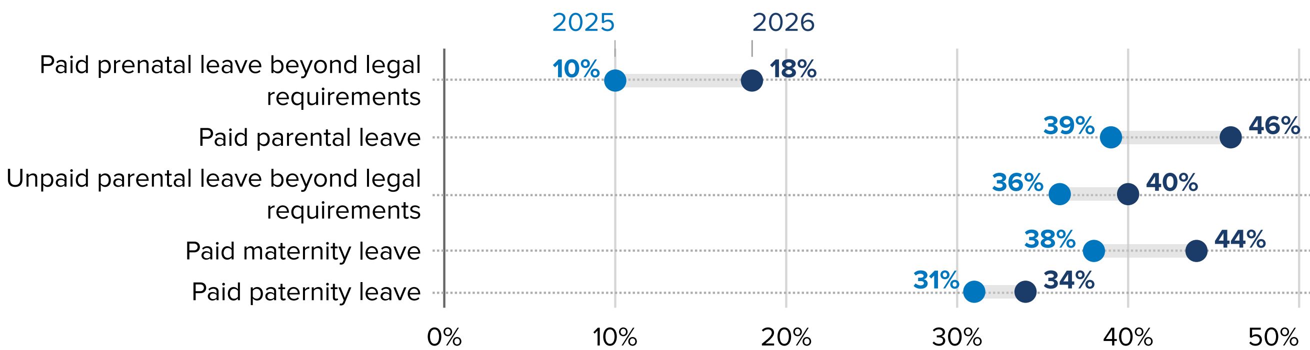
Leave

The majority of employers offer vacation (99%) and sick leave (95%). The prevalence of paid time off that combines vacation and sick leave sits at 68%, and the prevalence of paid open leave has remained unchanged from last year (6%).

Leave for new parents saw substantial growth in 2026:

Leave for New Parents Became More Common in 2026 Compared to 2025

Percentage of employers who offer the following benefits, split by year



SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

In addition to an uptick in the number of states introducing mandatory paid family and medical leave laws, employers are also recognizing the value of paid family and parental leave. The composition of the workforce has changed, and there are more caregivers needed to meet the needs of an aging population. Second, offering paid family leave can increase mothers' participation in the workforce by 25% after birth. Taken together, paid family leave is now a baseline retention strategy to meet the needs of an evolving workforce.

Conversely, civic leave offerings have experienced declines:

- Paid military leave (offered by 22% of employers) dropped by 10 percentage points.
- Unpaid time off to vote beyond legal requirements (39%) dropped by 6 percentage points.
- Paid time off to vote (46%) dropped by 5 percentage points.
- Paid jury duty (66%) dropped by 4 percentage points.

SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

Federal policy changes may have contributed to some of these declines. In January 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order that rescinded federal workers' right to four hours of leave for voting as well as the provision for federal workers to take administrative leave to staff polls. This may have impacted the private sector, as well, because organizations often follow federal and state labor regulations.

Visit the Employee Benefits Survey results interactive online tool to explore more leave-related benefits trends, including those on:

- Leave donation programs.
- Average number of employer-provided paid days off, presented by employees' service time.
- Family care leave.

BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

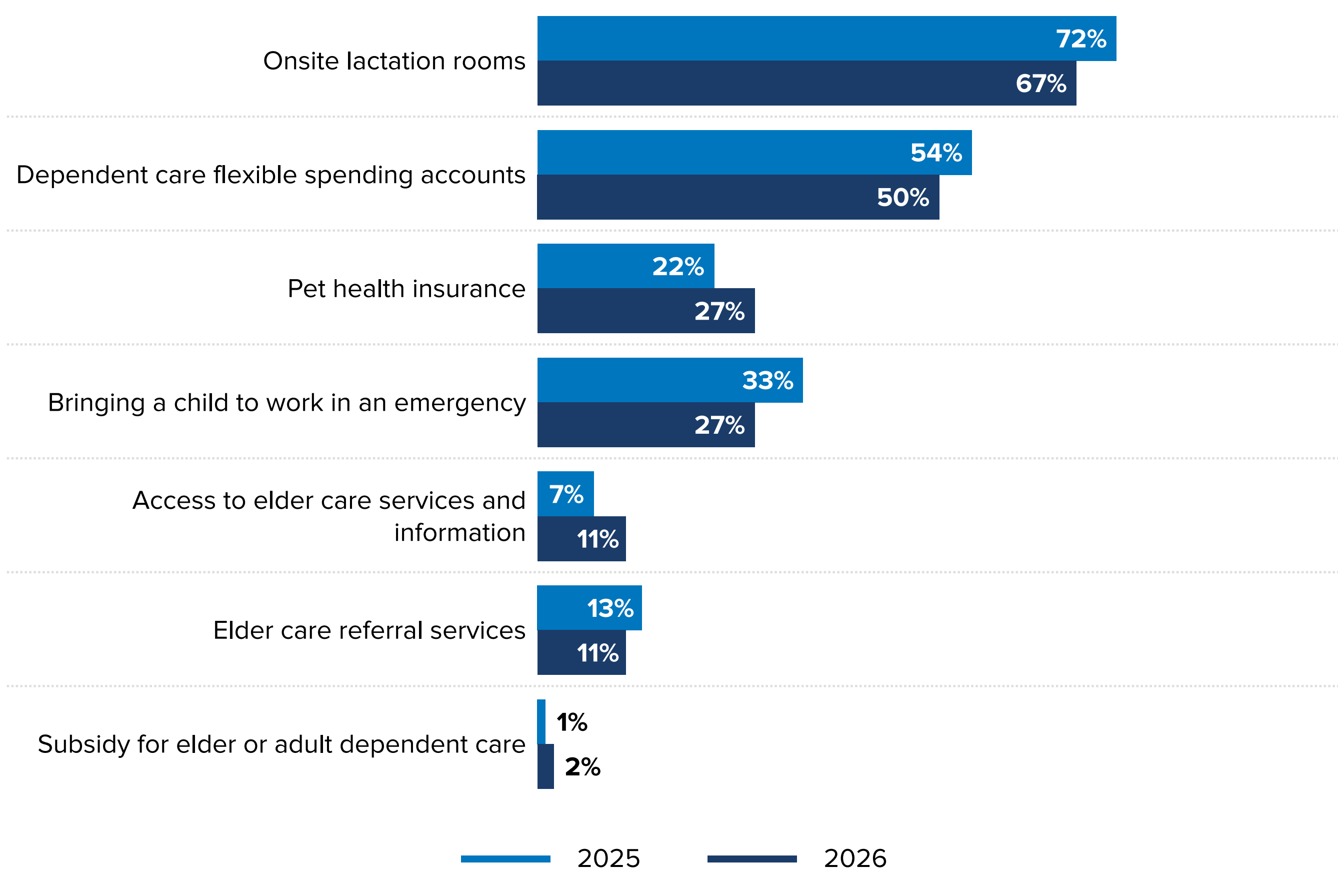
Family Care Benefits

In addition to family and medical leave, other family care benefits have experienced increases. Pet health insurance grew by 5 percentage points (now offered by 27% of employers). Access to elder care services and information (11%) grew by 4 percentage points, reaching a new high.

On the other hand, some family care benefits experienced decreases. Bringing a child to work in an emergency (27%) dropped by 6 percentage points, onsite lactation rooms (67%) dropped by 5 percentage points, and dependent care FSAs (50%) dropped by 4 percentage points.

Changes in Family Care Benefits from 2025 to 2026

Percentage of employers who offer each type of benefit, split by year



SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

Visit the Employee Benefits Survey results [interactive online tool](#) to explore more family care benefits trends, including those on:

- Child care.
- Adoption and foster care.

BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

Flexible Work

The percentage of employers who rated flexible work benefits as “very important” or “extremely important” to their workforces decreased by 2 percentage points and has decreased consistently since 2022.

Likewise, a few related benefits experienced decreases since last year:

45% of employers offer flextime during core business hours, a 6-percentage-point drop.

57% offer hybrid work, a 3-percentage-point drop.

However, this was not the case for all flexible work benefits:

10% of employers offer four-day workweeks, a 2-percentage-point increase

41% offer break arrangements, a 1-percentage-point increase.

SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

Though the prevalence of subsidies for at-home equipment for remote work fell slightly to 53% (from 55% last year), the maximum amount provided per year for at-home equipment remained largely unchanged at $901. The most common pieces of equipment eligible for reimbursement remained similar to 2025: office technology (95%), general office supplies (62%), cellphone service coverage (35%), office chairs (22%), and well-being items (e.g., chair lumbar support or standing desks, 21%).

New in the 2026 Employee Benefits Survey: Limited-Time Work-from-Anywhere Arrangements

Flexible work benefits can be differentiators for organizations in attracting top talent. This year, SHRM asked organizations if they offer employees the option to work from anywhere in the world for a temporary, specified amount of time: 27% of employers offer this benefit.

Visit the Employee Benefits Survey results interactive online tool to explore more flexible work benefits trend, including those on:

- Break arrangements.
- Compressed workweeks.
- Four-day workweeks.

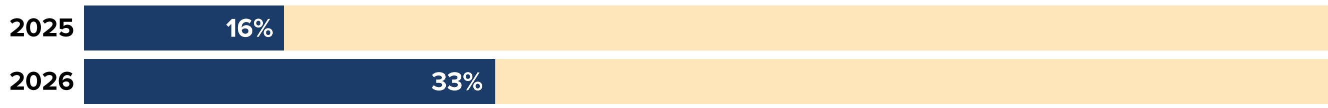
BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

Artificial Intelligence

Employer-sponsored subscriptions to AI tools surged to 33%. This marks a massive 17-percentage-point increase from last year. This trend reflects the rising prioritization of AI tools in the workplace and employers' encouragement for employees to experiment with their use.

Employer-Sponsored AI Tool Subscriptions Increase in Prevalence

Percentage of employers offering AI subscriptions, split by year



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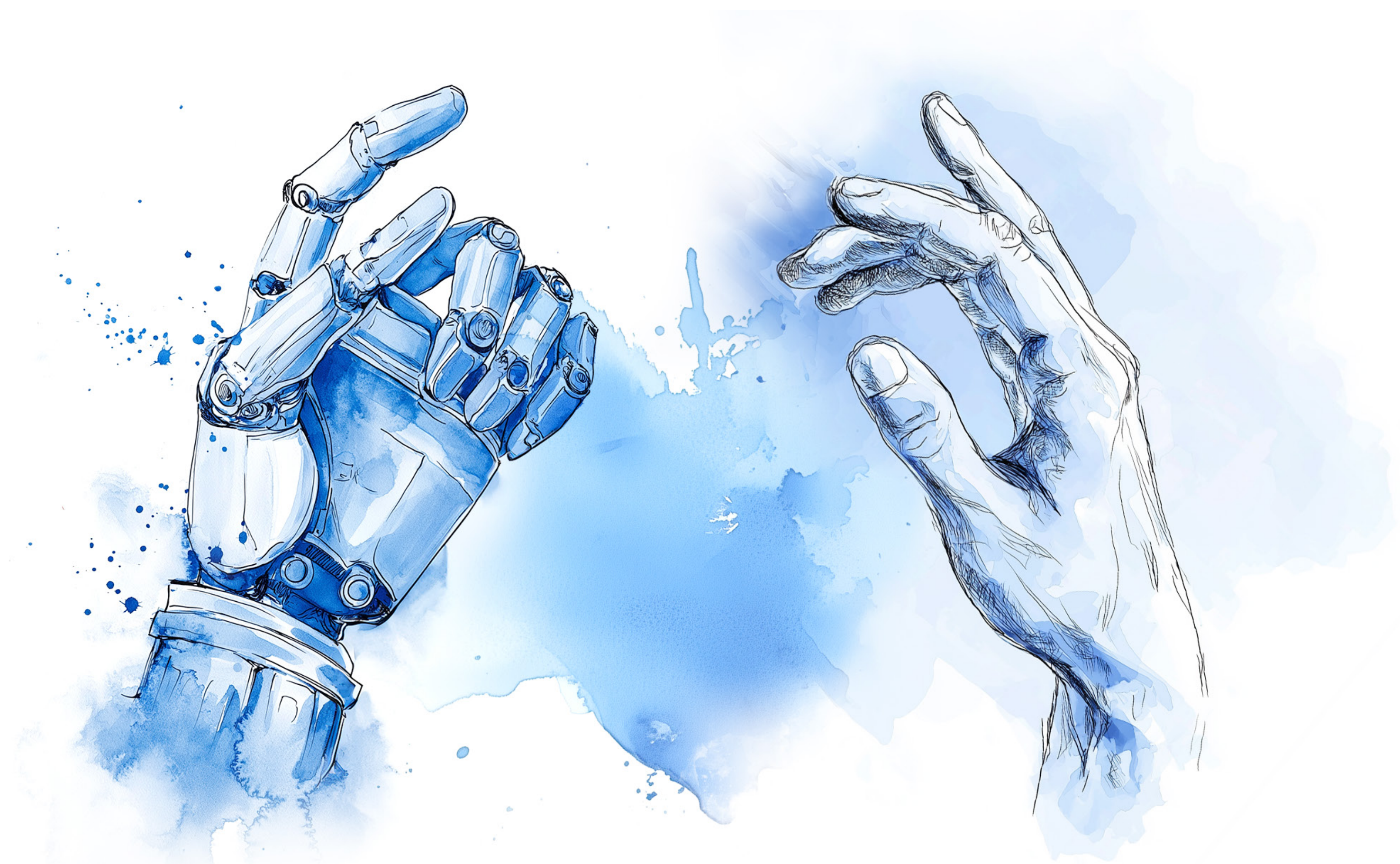

BENEFITS SNAPSHOT

Professional and Career Development

Traditional employee learning formats are becoming less common in 2026. Both formal training to develop new skills (offered by 72% of employers) and training to maintain current skills (75%) decreased by 7 percentage points each compared to 2025. Likewise, funds for professional memberships (81%) dropped by 6 percentage points, and funds for professional license applications or renewal fees (70%) dropped by 5 percentage points. Recent SHRM research indicated that 77% of CHROs expect an increased use of short, focused learning modules in 2026. As such, organizations are shifting toward experiential, bite-sized, or on-the-job learning modes, rather than traditional classroom-based experiences.

Employer-Sponsored Traditional Learning Avenues Are Less Common in 2026

	Prevalence	Percentage-point change from 2025
Formal training to develop new skills	72%	↓ 7
Formal training to maintain current skills	75%	↓ 7
Funds for professional memberships	81%	↓ 6
Funds for professional license applications or renewal fees	70%	↓ 5
Executive and leadership coaching	55%	↑ 8

Decrease Increase

SOURCE: 2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY, SHRM, 2026. VISIT SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH TO LEARN MORE.

On the other hand, the percentage of organizations offering executive and leadership coaching grew 8 percentage points to reach 55%. This reflects a larger trend of executive roles becoming harder to fill — a motivating factor to upskill internally. Recent SHRM research indicated that leadership and manager development was the top priority for CHROs in 2025 and 2026, likely influencing its increase in prevalence this year.

The percentage of employers that offer employer matches for 529 plans grew 4 percentage points to reach 5%. This is a low-cost benefit for employers to offer and is an attractive recruiting and retention strategy that can promote employee financial wellness. In addition, as of 2024 (following the passage of the SECURE 2.0 Act), employees can roll over certain unused 529 funds into a Roth IRA account. To encourage more employers to provide this benefit, seven states offer tax credits or deductions for employers matching employees' 529 plan contributions.

Employers are prioritizing helping employees manage student loan debt. The percentages of employers offering educational scholarships for employees' family members (10%) and company-provided student loan repayment (10%) increased by 2 percentage points each. In addition, the average maximum dollar amount that employers will provide for tuition assistance or student loan repayment assistance is $5,546, a slight increase of $174 from 2025.

Visit the Employee Benefits Survey results interactive online tool to explore more professional development benefits trends, including those on:

- English as a second language (ESL) classes.
- Mentoring programs.
- Certification and recertification fees.

Takeaways

Adapting benefits packages to meet changing workforce realities while managing aggressive cost pressures is vital. Employers should should consider the following takeaways when making benefits decisions.

Manage the High Cost of Specialty Medications

The sharp decline in bundled prescription coverage shows that employers are struggling to fund expensive medications such as GLP-1 drugs. Organizations should explore third-party pharmacy management programs and alternative wellness offerings, such as nutritional counseling, to support employee health without breaking the budget.

Prepare the Workforce for the Age of AI

Employer-paid AI subscriptions experienced the largest growth among surveyed benefits, yet employer-provided or sponsored training to gain new skills in general decreased in prevalence. Organizations that provide AI tools to their teams must also provide the training required to use them safely and effectively.

Invest in the Next Generation of Leaders

The surge in executive and leadership coaching highlights a dire need for capable managers and leaders. Organizations want strong leaders to navigate economic uncertainty and should shift their professional development budget toward targeted coaching programs that prepare top talent for senior roles.

Rethink Your Leave Offerings

The massive expansion in parental and family leave proves that family support remains a major retention tool. Organizations should review their current policies to ensure their benefits packages are positioned to effectively compete for top talent, especially as more states implement mandatory paid family and medical leave programs.

SHRM offers a member-exclusive interactive online benchmarking tool at shrm.org/benefits, where users can filter results from the Employee Benefits Survey according to their organizations' size, industry, and location (region and state). In addition, users may view and export results across the entirety of the benefits surveyed — all available on demand.

Methodology

The 2026 Employee Benefits Survey was conducted from January 28 to March 23, 2026. Responses were collected through general SHRM Membership and the Voice of Work panel, yielding 5,472 responses from HR professionals representing independent organizations across the U.S. Respondents were asked to provide answers regarding what employee benefits their organizations are offering during plan year 2026. A stratified sampling approach was used to ensure coverage of all locations (including states) in the online benchmarking tool. Respondents represent organizations of all sizes — from two employees to more than 50,000 — in a wide variety of industries and sectors across the U.S. The data is unweighted. Prevalence data and monetary amounts (USD) are presented as whole numbers; otherwise, decimal values are presented.

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Our mission is to empower people and workplaces by advancing HR practices and by maximizing human potential. Our vision is to build a world of work that works for all.