

6 tips to upgrade your workplace wellness strategy in 2026

Navigating workplace mental health is as challenging and nuanced as it's ever been. HR, benefits, and people leaders are facing growing pressure as organizations prepare for another year due to:

- **Rising healthcare costs**
- **Increasing mental health leave**
- **AI's expanding impact on work**
- **Growing employee disengagement**

To meet these challenges with confidence, here are the tips you need to build a more resilient, connected, and effective workforce in 2026 and beyond.



1

The new enterprise risk: emotional numbness

The primary threat to engagement is no longer just burnout — it's what April Koh, CEO of Spring Health, calls "The Great Disconnection," where employees quietly detach from meaning, connection, and their work. As she puts it, "Many aren't burning out — they're checking out."

This emotional numbness is easy to miss: employees still show up, still deliver, and still say they're "fine," even as performance, energy, and commitment erode.

\$438B

Disengagement cost the world economy \$438B in 2024

27%

Only 27% of managers globally are engaged at work

18%

Only 18% of individual contributors are engaged at work

Source: Gallup's 2025 State of the Global Workplace Report

Your tip:

Leaders must treat emotional disengagement as a critical business risk, not just a morale issue.

The solution is to measure and operationalize connection as a core business strategy.

2

Mental health as a core strategy for cost control

With **healthcare costs projected to increase by 10%** and **pharmacy costs by 11-12%** in 2026, the traditional cost-cutting playbook isn't enough.

Mental health programs are one of the most effective cost-control strategies available to employers today. A JAMA study found that for every \$100 invested in effective mental health care, organizations **can reduce medical spend by \$190** — a 14% net savings in the first year, with impact that increases over time.

Proactive, preventative mental healthcare is becoming a central part of the cost-management playbook.

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Source: FEBP, BGH, JAMA Network Open

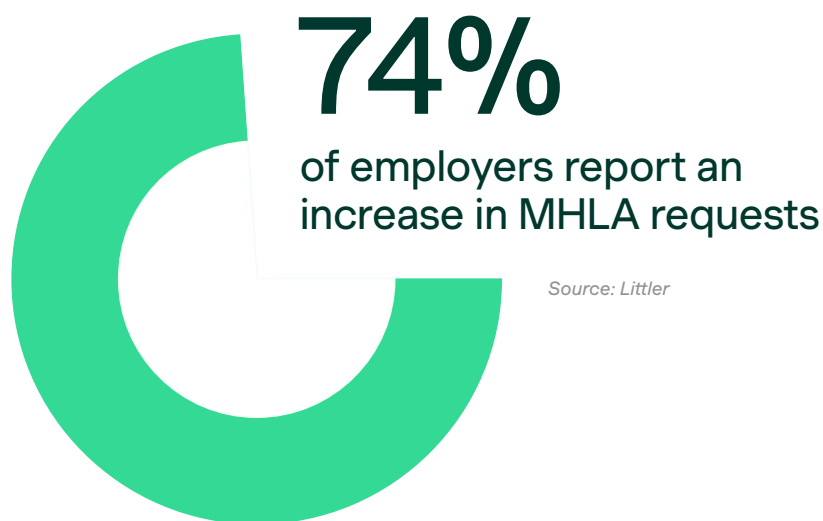
Your tip:

- Treat mental health as a core financial strategy to flatten medical trend without reducing coverage.
- Shift budget from reactive treatments to proactive mental health solutions with proven ROI to turn a cost center into a source of sustainable savings.

3

Modernize your approach to rising leaves of absence

Leaves of absence for mental health continue to climb, with **74% of employers reporting** an increase in requests. A modern approach involves seeing these leaves not as isolated incidents but as data points that reveal systemic pressures and gaps in support.



Your tip:

- Use leave data to pinpoint root causes and organizational stress fractures before they escalate.
- Modernize leave policies and support systems to help employees stay healthy and thrive without needing to step away

4

AI: The new workplace risk — and a governance imperative

AI is reshaping work faster than most organizations can keep up, creating new risks around employee anxiety, job security concerns, and the safety of AI-driven mental health tools.

Anxiety about AI is widespread, with **72% of U.S. adults worried** about its economic effects and **47% concerned about their job security**. This anxiety is a significant, and often unaddressed, stressor for employees.

With over **48% of U.S. adults using LLMs** for psychological support, many employees are already turning to AI for care. Without proper clinical validation and governance, employers risk promoting ineffective or harmful solutions.

72%

of U.S. adults are worried about AI's economic effects

47%

of U.S. adults are concerned about their job security

Source: YouGov/Udemy

Your tip:

- CHROs must ensure governance for AI in mental health. Partnering with clinically vetted solutions is essential to maintain trust, ensure safety, and guide employees toward effective care.
- Proactively address AI-related anxiety through transparent communication, reskilling opportunities, and mental health support. Acknowledge these fears to build trust and psychological safety

5

Employees expect always-on support

The world has shifted from episodic to continuous engagement in every aspect of life, from entertainment to commerce. Employees now expect the same level of immediate, on-demand access from their mental health benefits.



Your tip:

Evaluate your mental health offering to ensure it provides **continuous, easy-to-access support** that meets modern expectations. Solutions with long wait times or limited access points will fail to engage your workforce.

6

Control your plan, not social issues

Political and social issues are increasingly sources of distraction and conflict at work, with **64% of U.S. workers** witnessing negative treatment due to political views. While you can't control external events, you can control your organization's response.



64%

of U.S. workers witness negative treatment due to political views

Source: Brightmine

Your tip:

Equip your leaders with the resources and confidence they need to navigate the emotional toll of societal stress. Foster an inclusive environment and provide resources that help employees manage these pressures effectively.

Ready for what's next?

Take a deep dive

Watch these sessions on demand and dig deeper into the trends shaping workplace mental health in 2026.

[Watch the full on-demand series](#) →

Evaluate the effectiveness of your mental health solution

See how your current program stacks up against leading organizations and uncover the biggest opportunities for improvement.

[Explore the mental health maturity model](#) →