

# Which workplace benefits are on the rise (and which aren't)

Jun 29, 2015 | By [Kathryn Mayer](#)

LAS VEGAS—Don't even think about considering [wellness programs](#) as just a flash in the pan. New research from the Society for Human Resource Management finds that wellness programs are continuing to grow in prevalence in workplaces around the country.

The organization's annual survey, released Monday during SHRM's annual conference in Las Vegas, found a significant jump from 2014 to 2015 in several different wellness benefits including health and lifestyle coaching, smoking cessation programs, and premium discounts for getting an annual risk assessment. The most prevalent wellness benefits offered are wellness resources and information (80 percent of respondents) and wellness programs (70 percent).

Employers are increasingly turning to wellness programs to combat [rising health care costs](#), SHRM said. Some employers are putting their efforts into preventative programs that may reduce costs while shifting a greater burden of costs onto employees.

“Wellness benefits provide employers with a preventative approach that can reduce health care expenses for organizations over the long haul,” said Evren Esen, director of SHRM's survey programs. “Rising health care costs also remain a primary driver for how other benefit costs are allocated, as employers are still evaluating the impact of the Affordable Care Act.”

Here are some wellness program ideas from a benefits manager who created a killer one.

Overall, the survey of 463 HR professionals had some good news for employees: 35 percent of those employers said they increased employer-sponsored benefits in the last year. That number is up from the 28 percent who said so last year.

SHRM examined the prevalence of more than 300 benefits—from the most common, which include paid holidays (offered by 98 percent of respondents), dental insurance (96 percent), mental health coverage and professional memberships (both 91 percent) and 401(k) plans (90 percent)—to less common benefits, including on-site massage therapy (11 percent) and prepared take-home meals (1 percent).

The report also showed five-year trend increases in the percentage of organizations offering mental health coverage, contraception coverage, **vision insurance**, short-term disability insurance, **critical illness insurance**, and coverage for laser-based vision surgery.

As for what workplace perks are on the decline, those include health benefits (SHRM noted declines in the percentage of organizations offering health care premium flexible spending accounts over the last five years); some work travel perks (reimbursing people for personal calls while they're on business travel dropped to 37 percent, down from 51 percent in 2011) and on-site stress reduction programs (down from 12 percent in 2011).

Family friendly benefits also experienced a big dip when compared to five years ago: bringing children into work in an emergency (22 percent, down steadily from 33 percent in 2011), child care referral services (9 percent), and on-site parenting seminars (1 percent).

And, maybe most interesting to note, SHRM also included some new benefits in the survey's mix this year: **egg freezing** for nonmedical reasons (offered by 2 percent of respondents), paid surrogacy leave (5 percent), company-provided **fitness bands/activity trackers** (13 percent), company-organized fitness competitions (34 percent), and company-provided student loan repayment (3 percent).

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Also interesting to note from SHRM's survey:

**Telecommuting on the rise.** Three out of five organizations offered some form of telecommuting: 56 percent of respondents reported that their organizations offered telecommuting on an ad-hoc basis, 36 percent part of the time, and 22 percent on a full-time basis.

**Slow health care cost shift.** Five-year trends also show a slow shift of health care costs to employees. For example, consumer-directed health plans such as **health savings accounts** have risen by 8 percentage points, and employer contributions to HSAs have also increased by 10 percentage points.