



BEYOND THE BASICS:

Top voluntary benefits for today's employees



INTRODUCTION

Are you hoping to hire and retain the strongest talent? Want to motivate your team to put the pedal to the metal? Long gone are the days of traditional benefits packages.

Today's employees want more than the usual healthcare, vision, dental, and a 401(k). Offering innovative voluntary or fringe benefits—going beyond the basics—is key to attracting, motivating, and retaining strong talent in today's highly competitive workforce.

By speaking with employees across 8 industries, ZayZoon dug into the top voluntary benefits that today's workers want.



What are voluntary/fringe benefits?

Voluntary or fringe benefits are perks that employers can offer to go above and beyond commonly offered benefits like healthcare, vision, dental, and a 401(k).

These benefits are an enticing tool to attract and motivate high-value talent, especially if they are weighing multiple offers or thinking about new jobs.

Remote work, gym memberships, child-care assistance, commuter benefits, pet insurance—which voluntary benefit could be the deciding factor for high-value employees weighing their employment options?



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Methodology

In August 2024, we surveyed 327 employees across 8 industries. They are a mix of hourly and salaried employees, and represent remote, hybrid, and in-person workers from every region in the United States.

We asked workers about the benefits they currently have and the benefits they wish they had.

We learned about the benefits making the biggest difference for today's employees, and which benefits might have them signing an offer for a new job—even if it means taking a pay cut.



Industries

Both the employer and employee survey included respondents from the following industries:

01 Healthcare

02 Hospitality

03 Quick service restaurants

04 Technology

05 Finance

06 Retail

07 Manufacturing

08 Education



Quick Stats

Of the employees we surveyed:

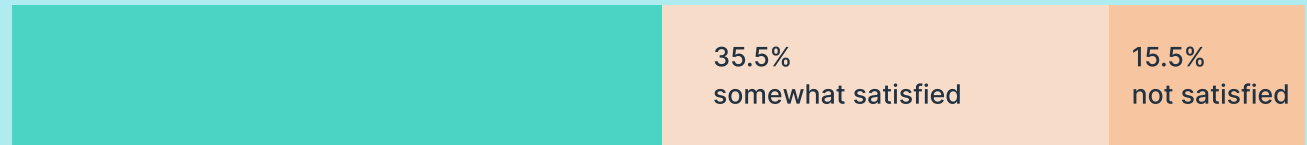
91%

said that benefits are important or very important in their decision to accept a job.



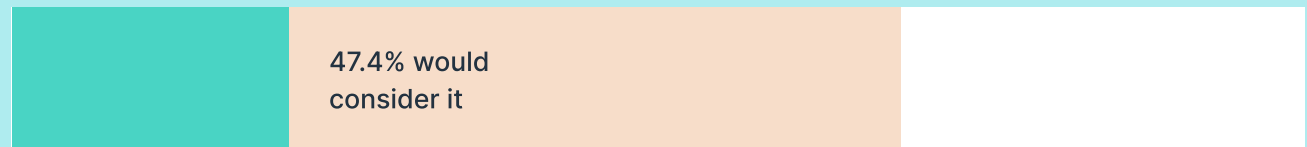
49%

said they were satisfied with their current benefits package.



21.4%

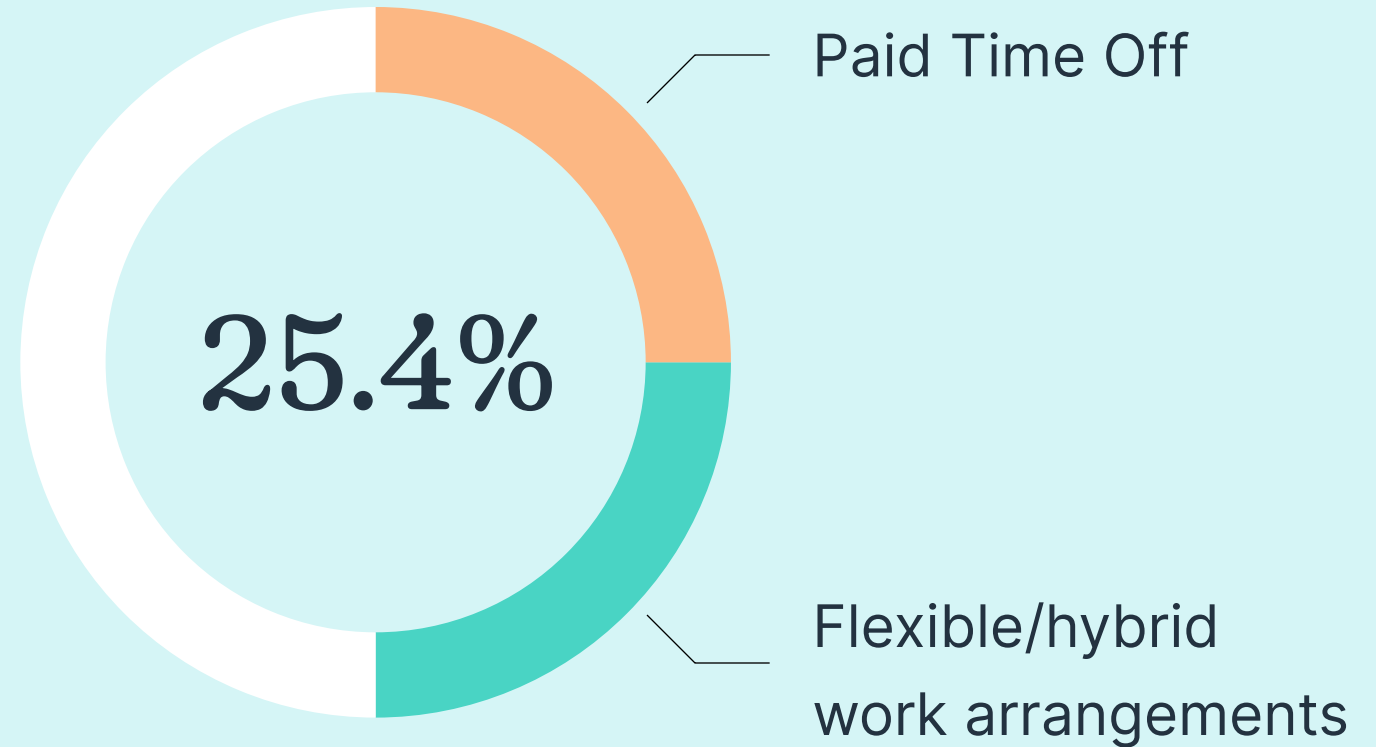
of employees said they would take a pay cut at a new job for better benefits.





Quick Stats

When we asked which voluntary benefit is the most important to workers today, Paid Time Off (PTO) and flexible/hybrid work arrangements tied for first place, with each benefit being chosen by 25.4% of respondents.



CHAPTER 01

Health & wellness



Work-life balance

Among those we surveyed, the most popular voluntary benefits were related to employees' health and wellness.

When we asked why, employees said they want these benefits to help achieve better work-life balance.

This should come as no surprise – in a study published by [Aviva](#) in 2022, work-life balance overtook salary as the reason workers were attracted to their current role.

Work-life balance is a win-win for you and your employees. It's a direct path to increased productivity on your team as it decreases employee stress



Paid Time Off (PTO)

Just over a quarter (25.4 percent) of respondents to our survey ranked paid time off (PTO) as the most important voluntary benefit.

PTO might seem basic to some, but not all businesses are required to provide it to their employees. According to [Forbes](#), 28 million Americans don't get guaranteed paid vacations or holidays.

However, paid time off is critical for employees' health, relationships, and motivation, and ultimately helps them to be more productive at work.



25.4%

chose PTO as the most
important benefit for them

—— Paid Time Off (PTO)

Alice C., an Administrative Assistant in Connecticut, does not get PTO and ranked it as the most valuable benefit to her, saying:

“People have less and less time to actually dedicate to the family and to their own being. Prioritizing that, to me, would be the most important thing.

Alice also says that a “generous, actual PTO policy” would convince her to take a different job, even if it meant taking a pay cut. “Something where you can see that you’re appreciated and you have time to rest,” she says.



Mental health days and resources

85% of surveyed employees said that mental health benefits are important or very important in their benefits package.

There are many ways to help employees prioritize their mental health, including but not limited to:

- 😊 Dedicated paid mental health days
- 😊 Subscriptions to mindfulness and meditation apps
- 😊 Company-wide wellness days, or flexible work hours, like “Summer Fridays”
- 😊 Discounts on wellness programs



—— Mental health days and resources

Building a workplace culture where mental health is openly discussed and supported matters just as much as offering mental health benefits.

Otherwise, employees will be less likely to take advantage of what's available, due to fear of stigma and retaliation.

Gianna P., who works in healthcare in Florida, recounts the time her company shared mental health resources to manage stress. "It was literally right after they let go of 10 people, so everybody was afraid. They sent a mass email [with resources], but I don't think that's really helpful. Everybody's still on pins and needles."

Mental health resources, policies, and benefits should be regularly communicated and easily accessible to employees. This communication should come not only from HR teams, but all people leaders—and not just in times of crisis, but year-round.



Gym memberships

Gym memberships are the top benefit that survey respondents wish they had.

20% of surveyed employees chose gym memberships as one of their top wish-list benefits.

Americans spend [\\$265 billion](#) annually on physical activity—more than any country in the world. Depending on where they live, gym memberships cost Americans an average of \$40 to \$75 per month. That's up to \$900 each year.

Subsidized or free gym memberships through work can motivate employees to manage their physical and mental health. They can be a critical way to signal to workers that their employers care about their holistic wellness, making them feel valued. And ultimately, more motivated to perform at work.



Health Savings Accounts

Health Savings Accounts or HSAs round out the top wellness-related benefits for today's employees. These were ranked as the fifth most valuable benefit among our survey respondents.

HSAs are a kind of savings account that allows employees to set aside pre-tax money to pay for medical expenses. They can help people lower their out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

Offering HSAs reflects proactive thinking on the employer's part. It signals a commitment to employees' health and wellness, attracting talent who may be thinking about their long-term goals.

According to [MetLife](#), employees with access to a Health Savings Account are:



20%

more likely to feel
financially healthy

34%

more likely to be satisfied
with their benefits package



Considering that investing in work-life balance results in a [more productive workforce](#), it can be argued that these benefits are not a want but a need.

Money spent on health and wellness benefits for employees is money saved on turnover, absenteeism, and lost productivity costs.



CHAPTER 02

Hybrid/ remote work & commuter benefits



Hybrid/remote work options

Flexible working arrangements (remote or hybrid) tied with paid time off as the top benefit that today's employees value most.

25.4 percent of our respondents chose hybrid/remote work options as the most important perk for them.

Hybrid and fully remote employees are more satisfied with their work arrangements than those who work fully on-site. In a [2023 report](#), Workhuman stated that 60 percent of workers were happy working on-site, while 87 percent were happy working fully remotely.



25.4%

chose hybrid/remote work options as the most important perk for them.

—— Hybrid/remote work options

Almost half of the employees surveyed by [Owl Labs](#) said they would take a pay cut of up to 5 percent to be able to work hybrid or remotely. It's clear that agency over their working arrangements is important to workers.

Working from home can also provide a sense of comfort and safety, especially for employees from marginalized backgrounds—many of whom [prefer to work from home](#) to avoid microaggressions, code-switching, and other negative aspects of office life.

If employees' roles allow for hybrid/remote work, giving them the benefit of choosing their working location is a valuable tool for retention and [productivity](#).



Commuter benefits

Some occupations and industries require an on-site presence for tasks that cannot be completed from home. But, nearly one in four workers have [quit their jobs](#) because of a long or complicated commute.

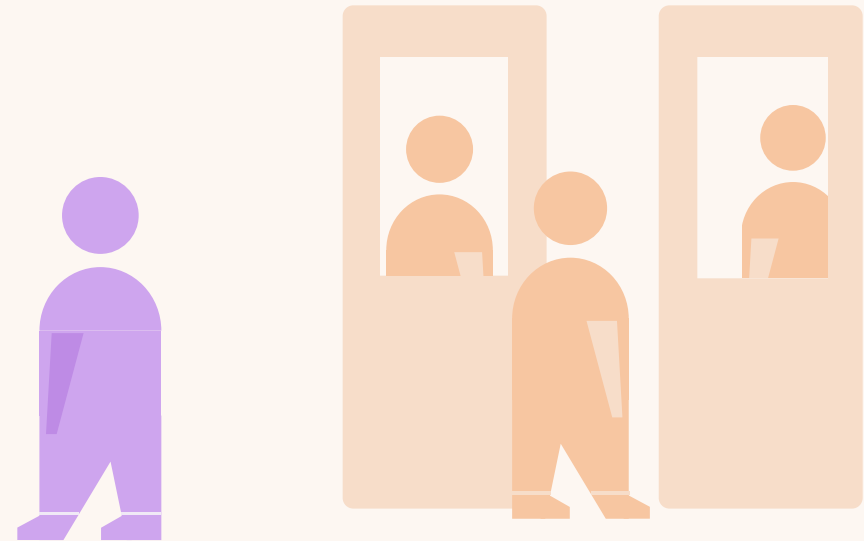
So if locational flexibility isn't possible, what benefits related to working arrangements remain an option?

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We asked employees: “Which benefits do you want, but don’t have currently?” 12.5 percent of respondents said they wished they had commuter benefits.

Business Insider [reported](#) that US workers spend anywhere from \$2,000 to \$5,000 each year on commuting to work.

That’s a big cost that could be alleviated for employees through reimbursement for public transit passes, mileage, parking, ride-shares, or vehicle maintenance and repair expenses.



Commuter benefits

For example, companies like [Capital One](#) allow their employees to set aside a part of their paycheck before tax deductions for commuting costs—the money is then used to pay for commuting expenses, reducing taxable income.

Commuter benefits alleviate the financial burden of commuting, and they demonstrate your company values its employees' time and well-being. This is attractive for top talent and can contribute to a more positive work environment with higher team morale.



With ZayZoon's Gas Card, employees can access their earned wages for free and save money at the pump. Employees get \$5 extra the first time they use the card, no matter how much money they withdraw. Each time after, they get a 5% bonus.

CHAPTER 03

Family & pet care



Child-care assistance

14 percent of employees we surveyed chose childcare assistance as the most valuable benefit for them today, making it the third most important benefit among overall employees surveyed.

Parents and guardians without access to paid leave or affordable childcare often resort to taking unplanned absences. Childcare responsibilities affect women disproportionately – the [Census Bureau](#) says that 85 percent of all childcare-related absences reported by parents in the last 20 years were taken by women.



A donut chart with a light yellow outer ring and a darker yellow inner ring. The inner ring represents 14% of the total, which is the percentage of employees who chose childcare assistance as the most valuable benefit. The text '14%' is displayed in large, bold, dark blue font in the center of the chart.

14%

chose child-care
assistance as the most
valuable benefit for them
today



Only 12 percent of American workers have access to childcare benefits through work, even though providing those benefits shows a significant return on investment (ROI) for employers.



Childcare assistance

A [2024 study](#) conducted by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and the nonprofit organization Moms First found:

86 percent of working parents are more likely to stay with their current employer because they provide childcare benefits, and;

A range of returns like retention, recruitment, and productivity, resulting in up to 425 percent ROI for companies offering childcare benefits, such as Etsy and UPS.

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With numbers so compelling, it's clear that childcare benefits come with great returns.

This kind of practical support helps employees effectively manage their responsibilities but also reduces stress and increases job satisfaction.

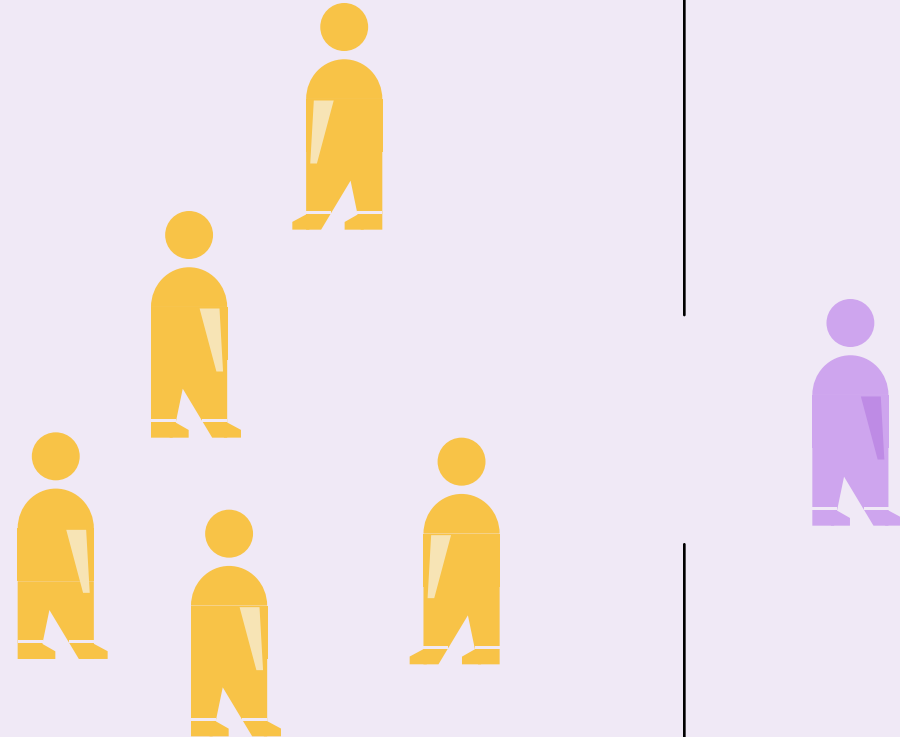


Just over half of all Americans live in [“childcare deserts”](#) – areas of the country that are without an adequate number of childcare facilities.



86%

of working parents are more likely to stay with their current employer because they provide childcare benefits.



Pet insurance

12.5% of employees we surveyed said they wished they had pet insurance through work.

For pet owners, pets are like family and deserving of the best care, but the costs add up even for healthy pets. Between wellness visits, physical exams, vaccinations and other preventative care, the ASPCA [estimates](#) that the annual cost of owning a cat or dog ranges from \$700 to \$1000.

Pet insurance covers a range of expenses including injuries, illnesses, testing and diagnostics, and behavioral therapy for pets.



— Pet insurance

Several companies provide pet insurance or related benefits to employees with furry friends. [Ben & Jerry's](#) offers workers a monthly pet-care stipend in addition to a dog-friendly workplace.

One of our survey respondents, Dorothy M., who works in education in Ohio, selected pet insurance as the most valuable benefit for her and told us:



“

Pet insurance is super expensive. If anyone's like me, I'm an animal lover, I love dogs. I'm always gonna have a dog. So [pet insurance] would come in handy. Adding [benefits] like that would really make a world of a difference.

For the millions of pet lovers out there, offering pet benefits can set you apart in today's competitive job market.

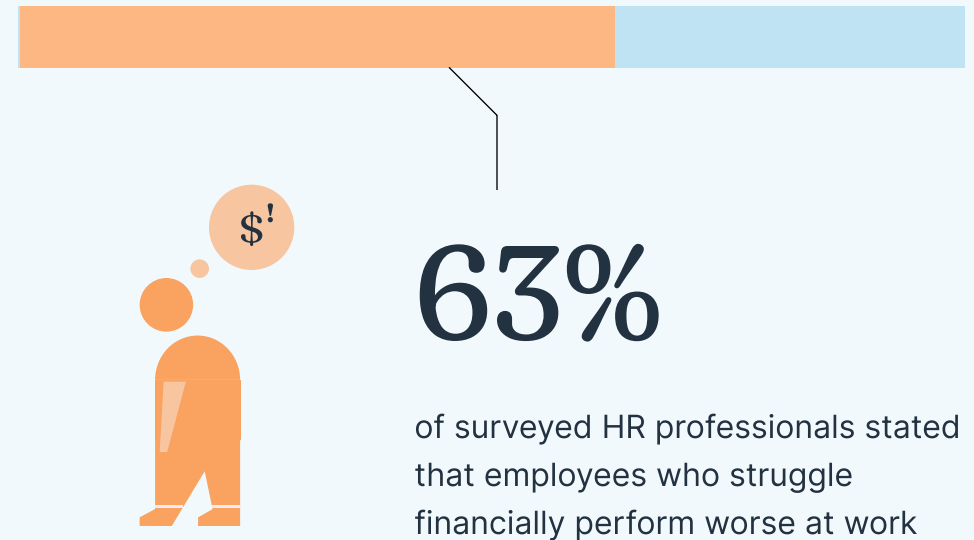
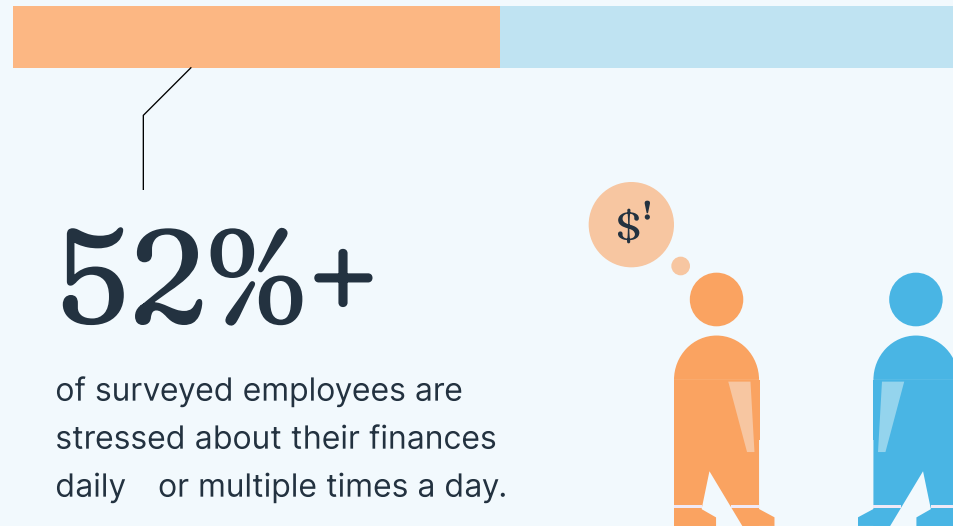
CHAPTER 04

Financial wellness



Why financial wellness matters

For our [2024 State of Employee Financial Wellness report](#), we surveyed 5000 employees across 8 industries and 500 HR professionals to determine how financial stress impacts performance. We found that:

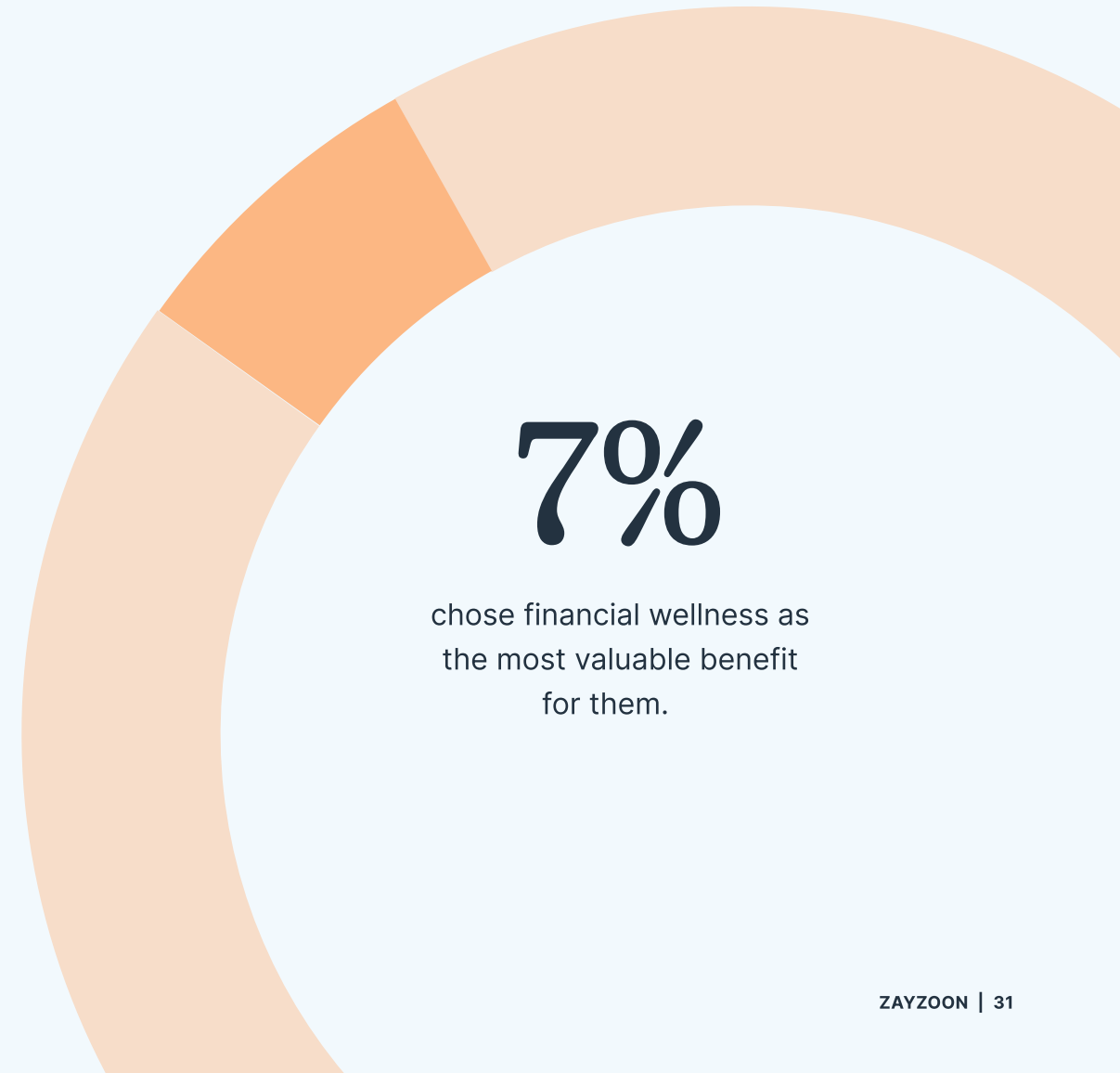


—— Why financial wellness matters

So it should come as no surprise that, in our survey about voluntary benefits, financial wellness benefits ranked as the fourth most valuable for today's employees.

7 percent of all respondents chose it as the most valuable benefit for them.

Here are some examples of what financial wellness benefits can look like based on our survey results.



Education subsidies

Investing in continuing education for employees is an impactful perk, especially for early-to-mid-level workers eager to grow in their careers.

Companies that offer tuition reimbursements and education subsidies include Disney, Home Depot, Apple, Bank of America, and more.

[Starbucks' College Achievement Plan](#), a partnership with Arizona State University that fully covers tuition and fees for Starbucks' employees, has seen more than 13,000 graduates to date. [Chipotle](#) increased its retention rate by 3.5x among students enrolled in its Cultivate Education program.



Education subsidies

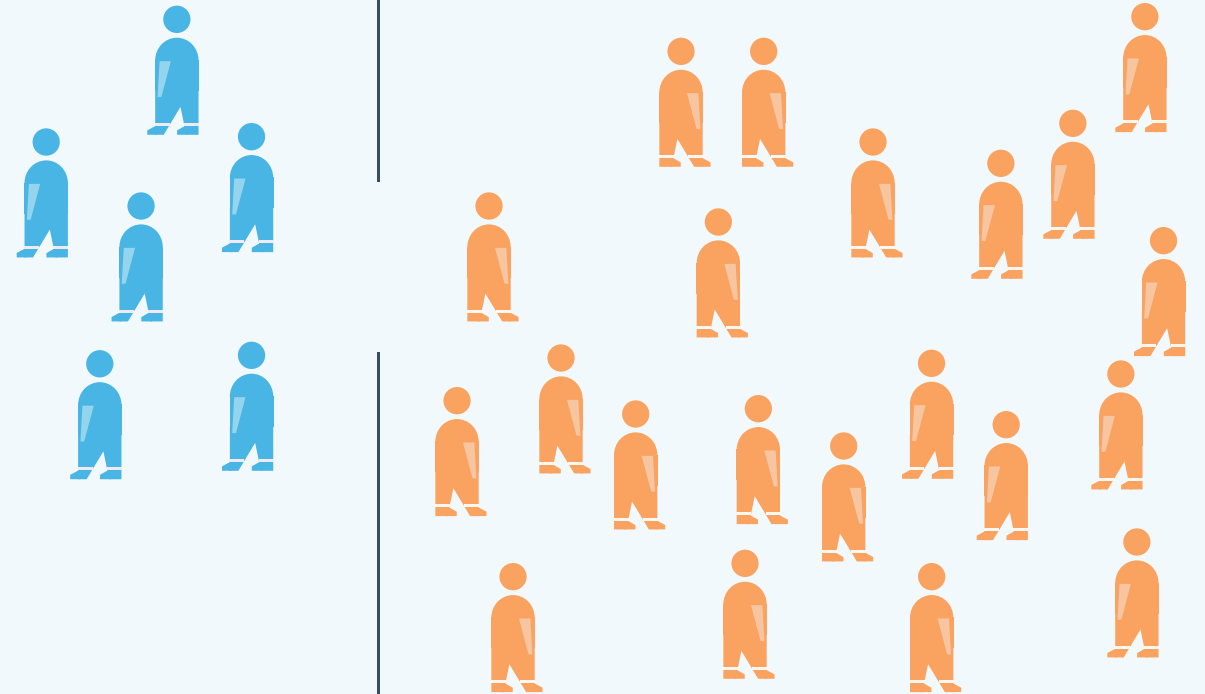
Growth-oriented talent will be attracted to companies that show an interest in their employees' professional and career development.

Upskilling employees also has a clear connection to retention.



76 percent of employees are more likely to stay at a workplace that offers a tuition reimbursement benefit.

One of the surveyed employees, Ida L., who works in healthcare in California, told us that her workplace regularly mandates new certifications—each of which can cost hundreds of dollars to complete. Ida is reimbursed for time spent in classes but not the cost of them, and said she would consider taking a pay cut at a new job if they reimbursed tuition.



—— Education subsidies

By offering reimbursements on certifications and tuition costs, employers can demonstrate a long-term commitment to employees' success. When employees feel valued and see that their professional growth is supported, they are more likely to work hard and excel in their roles.



Financial education

Financial education programs provide employees with the necessary skills and coaching to navigate tricky topics like budgeting and saving, student loan payments, retirement planning, and more.



The traditional focus on financial wellness, which was almost exclusively around the 401(k) plan, is just not sufficient anymore. Our employees are asking for help with all aspects of their financial life

Kevin Cammarata,
Vice President of benefits
Verizon to [CNBC](#).

Financial education

There are plenty of free educational resources available through places like [Bank of America](#). However, dedicated in-house financial education that is as relevant as possible to an organization's workforce sees the highest participation and engagement.

Whether offered through on-site training or digital tools, financial education benefits increase financial literacy, thereby reducing stress for employees and increasing productivity.



ZayZoon offers the following financial education tools for employees at no cost to employers:

- 😊 Resources that build financial education and literacy
- 😊 Earned wage access for on-demand pay
- 😊 Budgeting tools
- 😊 Debt management resources

These resources financially empower employees to become more financially literate, reduce financial stress, and achieve their financial goals.

Earned wage access (EWA)

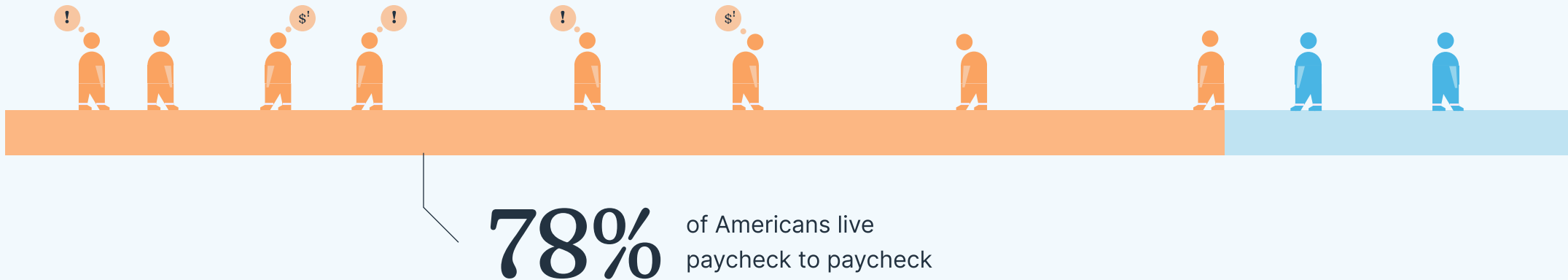
About 78 percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, and nearly a quarter of Americans have no emergency savings.

If an emergency comes up between pay periods, many workers must resort to relying on overdraft or predatory payday loans, which both come with high-interest fees and often short repayment schedules.

Earned wage access (EWA) is rising in popularity—this benefit helps employees get advances on their wages with low or no fees.

ADP found that 76 percent of employees say that it's important for their employer to offer EWA. Four out of five employees have used EWA when it's available to them.

Nearly half (47 percent) of organizations say that implementing EWA has made their operations more efficient.



—— Earned wage access (EWA)

An employer who offers earned wage access through ZayZoon says it's a helpful recruitment tool:



“As a hiring coordinator, I don't like telling folks we have a biweekly pay cycle in an industry where weekly is the norm. I explain ZayZoon immediately after and it always helps. I appreciate having it available to our employees because there are many people coming from the gig economy—daily pay to biweekly is very hard and I would lose a lot of good people without it.

—— Earned wage access (EWA)

“

Because our pay advance process is kind of complicated, we don't get too many requests. Some people would like the process to be less stringent. I've heard people say, "It's my money. Why can't I have it if I need it for an emergency?"

Tanya L.

HR pro in New Mexico



Does your organization offer pay advances too? We bet the process is complicated.

ZayZoon takes 30 minutes to set up, integrates into your payroll provider, and takes care of the process at no cost to employers.

Action items & takeaways



Concluding thoughts

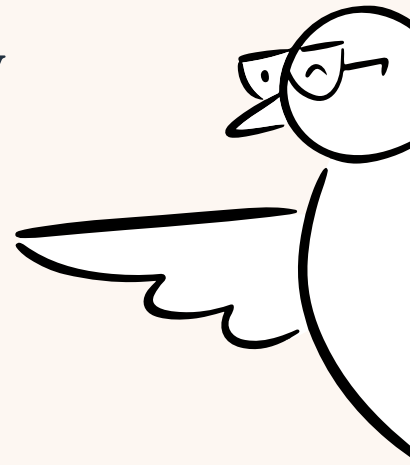
Survey data reveals that today's employees want more than just the basics when it comes to benefits. Innovative voluntary benefits are a strategic necessity in order to attract, motivate, and retain top talent in today's competitive market.

Our findings underscore the importance of true work-life balance for employees, whether that's through health and wellness benefits or flexible work arrangements. Assistance with childcare and pet insurance are also key factors in employee satisfaction.

Additionally, investing in career development and the financial wellness of employees is proving to be a strong incentive for today's workers as they seek growth and stability.

By aligning benefit offerings with their employees' needs, employers can create an engaged, loyal, and satisfied workforce.

As we look into the future, it's clear that the modern workforce is evolving—so the benefits offered by employers should evolve, too.



Talk to your employees and research competitors

If you're thinking about upping your benefits game, start by asking your employees what benefits they may find most valuable and why. The what will help you decide what to offer, and the why will help you make the financial case to decision-makers in your organization.

Gather feedback in as many ways as you can: surveys, focus groups, and 1-on-1 conversations will yield important information about your workforce and the benefits your employees need to remain loyal to your organization.

Don't skip out on researching your competitors, especially if you're seeing high absenteeism and turnover rates. It costs anywhere from 40 to 200 percent of an employee's salary to hire their replacement. Turnover is a costly problem that can be addressed with more holistic benefits.

?

What benefits are your competitors offering employees that you aren't, and how can you close the gap?

How to motivate employees to use their benefits

If the participation rate in certain benefits offered through your organization is low, there are creative ways to motivate employees to use what's provided.

Try sending out themed or holiday-focused reminders and clear instructions about the available benefits. For example, information about education subsidies can be sent out during the back-to-school season.

Not all details need to be communicated via information-heavy PDFs or emails. Try sharing screen recordings or even gamifying your updates through interactive polls.



—— How to motivate employees to use their benefits

Employees with direct reports should also be empowered to learn the fundamentals of your organization's benefit offerings so they can answer frequently asked questions. Questions can always be redirected to HR for clarity and accuracy, but the more information shared in frequent touch-points, the better.

Finally, consider creating **total compensation figures that quantify how much employees' benefits are actually worth** to them. Hard numbers will be easier to digest and can increase interest during the hiring process, especially if a salary is lower than expected.



“

We actually put the value of our benefits as a physical number. Even though obviously [candidates] are not getting an extra \$15,000 in their paycheck, that's the value of our benefits.

Chuck M.

HR pro based in New York

“

[August] was national dog month. So I took the opportunity to remind people that we offer pet insurance and pet wellness, and did a deep dive about that and how to access it.

Dee B.

HR pro based in Virginia

About ZayZoon

The earned wage access (EWA) provider for SMBs

With ZayZoon, payday finally comes with the push of a button. Employees can use ZayZoon to get paid part of their earned wages when they need it. The platform also offers educational resources and tools to help workers break the paycheck-to-paycheck cycle. And it works.

89 percent of employees who use ZayZoon report less financial stress and employers who offer ZayZoon boast a 29 percent reduction in turnover.

To learn more, visit ZayZoon at:
www.zayzoon.com

