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Worker Well-Being a Priority for US Businesses, but Program Usage Falters

23 June, 2021

Over the last year, workers around the world have been struggling with mental health issues—particularly burnout and isolation. As employers prepare for a post-COVID-19 world, a more holistic view of worker well-being is key to helping employees at all levels manage stress and remain engaged. A new report from The Conference Board, *Holistic Well-Being @Work*, examines what organizations are doing to implement more comprehensive well-being initiatives and offers recommendations for building healthier, resilient work environments.

As the report details, while organizations recognize the importance of a holistic well-being strategy, many struggle to build a fully integrated approach, with low program participation and limited resources cited as the top barriers to success.

Featured in the report are results from two surveys, including one of more than 200 practitioners responsible for their organizations' wellness initiatives. In addition, more than 1,000 workers across the US were surveyed. The study also includes takeaways from in-depth interviews with US-based leaders from six organizations headquartered in the US and Europe. Insights include:

Most businesses recognize well-being as a strategic priority, with buy-in from executive leadership.

- More than three-quarters of practitioners agree that holistic well-being is a strategic priority.
- Two-thirds believe that executive leaders understand the importance of holistic well-being.
- A little more than half believe they have a good understanding of their workers' well-being needs.



"The COVID-19 crisis accelerated the evolution of workplace well-being efforts. Organizations are now enhancing their offerings to support *multiple* aspects of well-being, beyond just mental and physical health; social connectedness and professional well-being are just as important," said Rebecca Ray, PhD, Executive Vice President, Human Capital at The Conference Board. "These businesses recognize that stress and burnout can take a toll on worker engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction. There is a clear business case for fostering well-being initiatives of all types."

Mental and physical well-being are the top priorities for both organizations and individual workers.

- Financial well-being (e.g., financial literacy, tuition support) ranked third on the list of organizational priorities but not as high among workers' concerns; social well-being ranked third for workers.

	Company priorities (practitioners' ranking) N=235	Top three concerns (workers' ranking) N=1135
Emotional/psychological well-being	1	1
Physical well-being	2	2
Financial well-being	3	5
Professional/career well-being	4	4
Social well-being and belonging	5	3
Environmental/community well-being	6	6
Spiritual well-being	7	7

Note: The table features responses from two separate surveys. The survey questions were "Which of the following elements of worker's well-being are currently core priorities in your organization's people strategy?" for practitioners and "Which of the following are your current top concerns regarding your well-being at work?" for workers.

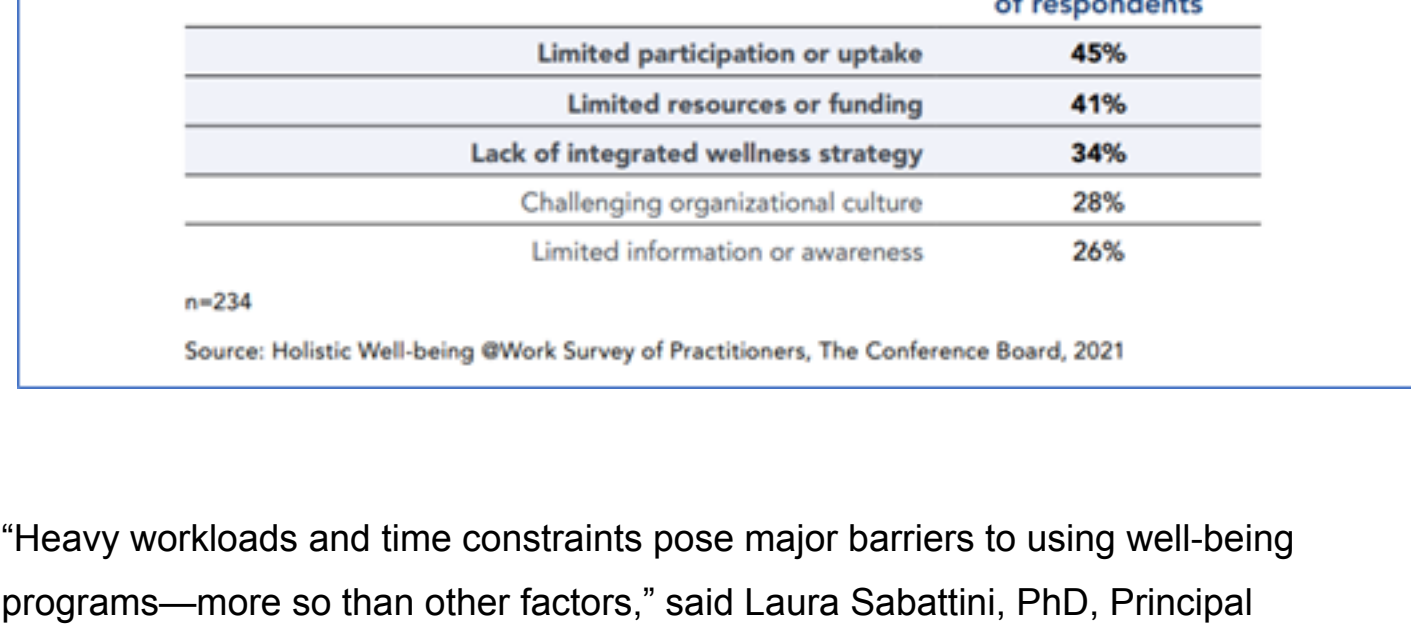
Source: Holistic Well-being @Work Survey of Practitioners and Well-being Survey of US Workers, The Conference Board, 2021.

While most practitioners surveyed believe workers are aware of and seem comfortable using well-being programs, there is still room for improvement.

- Only about 40 percent of practitioners believe workers are "strongly aware" of programs and "very" or "completely" comfortable using them.
- More than half believe that workers are only somewhat or moderately aware of the programs that are available to them.

Low program participation and limited funding are the top barriers to a successful wellness strategy.

- Limited participation or uptake and limited resources or funding were cited by almost half of respondents.
- Lack of integrated wellness strategy was cited as a barrier by one third.



"Heavy workloads and time constraints pose major barriers to using well-being programs—more so than other factors," said Laura Sabatini, PhD, Principal Researcher, Human Capital at The Conference Board. "Implementing a successful wellness strategy starts with looking at your work culture. Are there communications, policies, and practices that might reduce workers' ability to engage with these initiatives or lead to burnout? Are senior leaders and managers modeling healthy behaviors? For any holistic well-being strategy to succeed, companies must nurture a work culture that supports and values these healthy behaviors."

According to the US workers surveyed, their participation in well-being offerings, including those to support mental health and well-being, stalled or decreased during the pandemic.

- Usage of online tools and participation in social activities increased.
- Participation in all other wellness activities decreased.



"These variations highlight the importance of crafting and implementing more customizable solutions to meet the needs of different businesses, departments, and workers," continued Sabatini. "Providing a wide range of offerings and using surveys and other data to understand the specific needs of your workforce will help to address the urgent challenges workers face."

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