

4 key employee benefit trends to watch

Employers are broadening the scope of their employee benefit offerings to meet the changing demands of their workforce. Among the benefit trends to watch this year, according to the Society for Human Resource Management:

- 1. Emotional health moves to the forefront.** Coverage will improve for a range of issues, including stress, addiction, depression and other mental disorders. So will the range of treatment options through onsite and virtual counseling, network expansion and the integration of EAPs and mental health benefits.
- 2. More family-friendly perks.** The talent war and changing social expectations (along with state/local laws) will push more employers to enhance paid parental-leave programs—and consider adding new paid caregiver leave for family-related absences. A SHRM study says 29% of employers offered paid paternity leave in 2018, up from 8% in 2016.



- 3. Voluntary benefits become more personal.** As consumer expectations evolve, employees will depend on their employers to leverage benefits to address personal needs. Look for more employers to use data-driven approaches to tailor their guidance and voluntary benefits to employees' specific lifestyle needs.
- 4. Direct contracting with health care providers will grow.** As health costs increase, employers will get more aggressive in efforts to offer better-quality, lower-cost care. As a result, more employers will contract directly with doctors and hospitals. They'll design plans to steer workers to providers that offer evidence-based, competitively priced care.

A 2020 view of employee-benefit tech trends

Technology continues to put the power to manage benefits into employees' hands. Three trends to watch for, according to a PlanSource, a cloud-based benefits administrator:

More mobile options. More than 70% of American's online time is spent on mobile devices, and that number is growing. Investing in benefit-related text alerts is the easiest way to jump into this trend. To go "all in," invest in a responsive benefits enrollment system that will allow employees to access benefits information on any device. You can also partner with a tech company that offers a mobile app.

Artificial intelligence. More tech vendors are offering AI solutions to engage staff through their entire careers. For benefits, AI will unlock greater potential in data analysis, which can lead to better forecasting.

Decision support tools. As benefits grow in cost and complexity, so has employee confusion. Talk to your broker about new tools and add-ons for your benefits software that can help employees make informed decisions.