



RETURN ON WELLBEING '25

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wellness has reached a turning point. It's no longer a nice-to-have or a feel-good extra. It's a serious business advantage. As stress climbs and turnover spikes, employee wellbeing is taking center stage in the C-suite. But belief alone isn't enough. Real impact requires action and alignment between leaders and their teams.

That's why Wellhub dug into what executives really think about wellness. We surveyed more than 1,500 CEOs and business leaders across 10 global markets to uncover their goals, concerns, and experiences.

OUR FINDINGS?

Leaders are all-in on wellness. Many are boosting investments and seeing real returns, but a critical gap remains between how CEOs view the wellbeing of their workforce and what employees actually feel.

CEOs Believe Wellness Is Their Responsibility—But Employees Aren't Feeling It

Across industries and regions, executive leaders see wellbeing as more than just a perk. **Sixty percent of CEOs strongly believe employee wellness is a corporate responsibility**, not just an HR initiative. Half strongly believe employees value wellbeing as much as they value pay. And a striking **74% say that top talent won't even consider their company** unless it demonstrates a real commitment to wellbeing.

Yet even with this growing conviction, there's a stark disconnect between what CEOs think and what employees actually experience. While 92% of executives think



employees believe leadership prioritizes wellbeing, only 68% of employees agree. And just 33% say their mental health has improved compared to 77% of CEOs who believe it has.¹

This perception gap is more than just a PR issue. It’s a barrier to trust, engagement, and retention. For HR leaders, it represents a clear call to action: to build programs that are visible, accessible, and grounded in what employees truly need, not just what executives assume they want.

Wellness Is Delivering Real ROI—And CEOs Are Watching the Numbers Closely

Empathy might start the wellness conversation but data seals the deal. Wellness is gaining traction in the C-suite not just because it feels right but because it delivers results.

CEOs are seeing real ROI. More than 80% report positive returns from their wellness programs, and one in three say that return tops 100%. The impact is clear: 97% say wellness boosts productivity, 67% see less absenteeism, and 73% report stronger retention. Those aren’t soft wins, they’re solid business outcomes.

Productivity is their top motivation. Over half of CEOs say it’s their number one reason for investing in wellness. Right behind that are engagement, morale, and burnout prevention. As stress takes a toll on teams, leaders are betting on wellness to power performance.

It’s also a smart talent strategy. Forty-two percent of CEOs invest in wellness to attract and keep top talent, and they’re onto something. Nearly half of employees have left a job due to poor wellbeing

support², and 89% say they’ll only consider roles at companies that prioritize it. It’s clear that wellness is a critical differentiator in a competitive hiring market.

Finally, cost savings also play a major role. With healthcare costs on the rise and preventable conditions accounting for three-quarters of medical expenses, 34% of CEOs say reducing healthcare spend is a major reason for funding wellness programs. For these leaders, wellness is about the health of their spreadsheets too.

The CEOs Who Thrive Are the Ones Who Invest—and Participate

One of the clearest takeaways from our research is that **wellness works best when it starts at the top**. CEOs who actively engage in wellness programs—and feel the benefits personally—are significantly more likely to boost funding. In fact, leaders with excellent mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing are almost **twice as likely** to expand their wellness budgets compared to those who are struggling.

¹ Fisher, J., Bhatt, J., & Fields, A. (2023, November 14). Six leader/worker disconnects affecting workplace well-being. Deloitte Insights. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/environmental-social-governance/six-leadership-disconnects-affecting-workplace-satisfaction.html>
² Fisher, J., & Silverglate, P. H. (2022, June 22). The C-suite and workplace wellness. Deloitte. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/leadership/employee-wellness-in-the-corporate-workplace.html>

These execs aren’t outsourcing wellbeing—they’re living it. **Every single executive surveyed engages in regular physical activity, and nearly 90% report strong nutritional habits. Eighty-four percent say their sleep is excellent or good, and 90% rate their mental wellbeing positively**, with the vast majority attending therapy and practicing mindfulness. And the results are clear: Those who participate in their company’s wellness programs daily report the strongest gains across every dimension of health.

But this also reveals a troubling contrast. **While 98% of CEOs say their wellbeing has improved over the past year, only 50% of employees agree.**³ Disparities in sleep, mental health, and fitness persist—often due to limited access, lack of awareness, or inflexible schedules. For HR, this is both a challenge and an opportunity: You have the opportunity to close the wellbeing gap and make executive-level wellness available to every employee, not just those at the top.

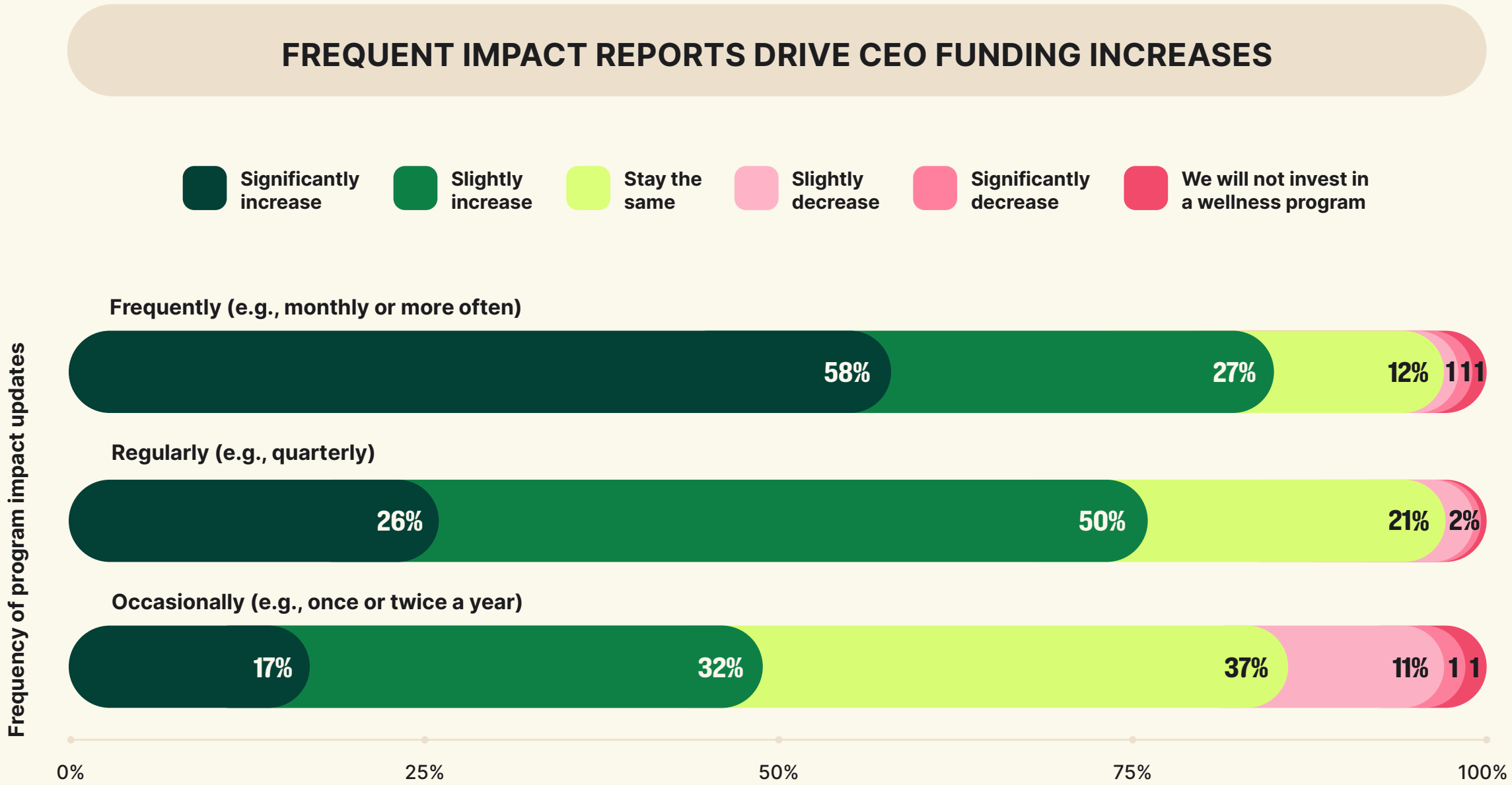
From Belief to Buy-In: How HR Can Turn Skepticism into Strategy

Even the most wellness-forward CEOs have their hesitations. Every single leader we surveyed raised at least one concern before greenlighting a program. Some worry employees won’t engage while others question the ROI or struggle with competing budget priorities. But these aren’t roadblocks. They’re chances for HR to lead the way.

The most effective HR leaders anticipate these objections and come prepared. They show employee demand through surveys and testimonials. They pilot programs that prove engagement. They link wellness to productivity, turnover, and cost control. And they equip executives with regular

impact reporting, especially the metrics they care about most.

That reporting matters. It moves execs from governing by gut instinct to making data-driven decisions. That’s why **CEOs who get monthly wellness updates** are the most likely to boost budgets.



3 Wellhub. (2024, October 16). The State of Work-Life Wellness 2025. Wellhub. <https://wellhub.com/en-us/resources/research/work-life-wellness-report-2025/>

The Future: Tailored, Mindful, and Adaptable

The future of wellness is taking shape. It’s smarter, more personal, and deeply embedded in how people work.



Mental health is leading the way. Nearly half of CEOs plan to increase investment in mental wellbeing over the next five years. Technology is playing a critical role, with AI-powered tools helping to detect early burnout, guide employees to the right support, and integrate care into daily routines.



Personalization is an expectation, not a bonus. Forty-one percent of CEOs say custom wellness offerings will be essential, and 45% are betting on real-time health data as the next big opportunity. Generic benefits are giving way to flexible, adaptive programs that fit individual needs.



And flexibility remains the cornerstone of engagement. Over half of leaders say schedule flexibility is the single most important factor in employee wellbeing. Employees can’t use wellness programs if they don’t have time or permission—and CEOs are beginning to see that, too.

Make Wellness Real, Measurable, and Shared

There’s never been more executive belief in employee wellbeing. But belief alone isn’t enough. HR leaders have a critical role to play. This is about more than running programs, it’s about making them real. That means showing the data. Sharing the stories. And designing wellness that reaches every level of the org.

When CEOs experience wellness for themselves, they invest more. When employees feel that support, they stay longer, perform better, and bring more energy to their work.

The companies that close the gap—and turn wellbeing into a shared value—will be the ones that win in the long term. Not just because they care, but because they’ve built the business case to prove it.

Global Key Findings

58%

of CEOs strongly agree that wellbeing is critical to their organization's financial success.

94%

of CEOs have the final sign-off on wellness budgets.

58%

of CEOs who receive impact updates at least once a month significantly increased funding for their wellness program last year.

50%

of CEOs strongly agree that employees care about their wellbeing as much as their salary.

56%

CEOs invest in wellness programs to enhance employee productivity and performance.

63%

of CEOs that engage in their wellness program daily significantly increased program funding last year.

82%

of CEOs see a positive ROI from their wellness program.

47%

say workforce productivity is extremely impacted by their wellness program.

30%

of CEOs say employee engagement rates in wellness programs are a top concern, making it the most common objection to program adoption.

Key Insights

#1 CEOs recognize wellness as a business asset—but overestimate the wellbeing of their workforce, risking underinvestment in this strategic advantage.

#2 CEOs view engagement rates as the most effective way to gauge the ROI of wellness programs.

#3 CEOs see wellness as boosting employee productivity and retention, driving improved financial returns.

#4 CEOs need clear ROI metrics to justify wellness spend.

#5 CEOs who receive frequent reporting on wellness impacts are more likely to approve bigger budgets.

#6 CEOs are more likely to approve funding when wellness is framed as a strategic investment, not a luxury perk.

#7 CEO engagement in wellness drives the company's wellness culture and funding.



United States Key Findings

49%

of CEOs strongly agree that wellbeing is critical to their organization's financial success.

93%

of CEOs have the final sign-off on wellness budgets.

54%

of CEOs who receive impact updates at least once a month significantly increased funding for their wellness program last year.

45%

of CEOs strongly agree that employees care about their wellbeing as much as their salary.

43%

of CEOs invest in wellness programs to enhance employee productivity and performance.

44%

of CEOs that engage in their wellness program daily significantly increased program funding last year.

79%

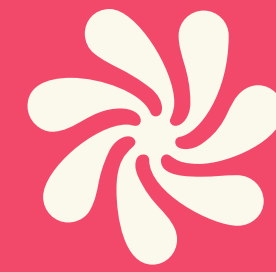
of CEOs see a positive ROI from their wellness program.

40%

say workforce productivity is extremely impacted by their wellness program.

22%

of CEOs say employee engagement rates in wellness programs are in their top concern.



Ready to Make the Business Case for Employee Wellness?

Get access to our full report for expert insights and valuable guidance.

Download the Full Report

