

Workplace Vision Health Report

The Importance of Customized Benefits for a Diverse Workforce

Presented by

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vision care





The State of Workforce Eye Health

The past few years have been marked by seismic shifts in the modern workplace and workforce. A significant number of people now work remotely or have hybrid arrangements, splitting their time between home and their company's offices.

One outcome of this shift has been a surge in screen time among today's employees. This trend is having an enormous impact on workforce eye health, which in turn is affecting the business bottom line.

To better understand the issues workers and their employers are facing, VSP® partnered with research firm Workplace Intelligence to survey 800 HR leaders and 800 full-time employees at U.S. organizations. All employees were required to use a computer for their work at least some of the time.

Our goal in conducting this research was to pair survey data with actionable solutions to help employers make informed decisions and support their employees. **Our main takeaway: employers have a momentous opportunity to focus on meeting the diverse needs of today's workforce, including the needs of different generations and those with varying work arrangements. They also have the ability to have a measurable impact on overall population health.**

The Center for Vision and Population Health Management notes that eye health is a fundamental driver of quality of life.¹

However, barriers such as poor access to eye care, lack of insurance coverage, and inconsistent policies for eye health can prevent early detection and treatment of eye disorders.

By offering vision benefits (or improving existing benefits), encouraging workers to take care of their eye health, and managing factors that may be contributing to excessive screen time, employers can play a key role in supporting population health.

“At VSP, we believe that eye health is essential — and everyone deserves to see their world clearly. Vision care is a powerful and vital tool in helping to ensure the overall health and well-being of today's workforce.”

– Dr. Valerie Sheety-Pilon
VSP Vice President, Clinical and Medical Affairs



¹ Center for Vision and Population Health. <https://cvph.preventblindness.org/the-center-for-vision-and-population-health/#1589421481188-f5daaf76-c22a>



In this report, we highlight key findings around:

- **Excessive Screen Time:** The primary concern affecting employees' eye health is too much screen time, with an average of over 96 hours a week.
- **Long Working Hours:** A majority of employees report working longer hours, exacerbating eye health issues and indicating a potential area for intervention.
- **Productivity Loss:** Eye health issues negatively affect productivity, focus, and mental health, underscoring the broader impacts of inadequate vision care.
- **Generational Impact:** 82% of Gen Z employees (versus 69% overall) report working nights and weekends, impacting their eye health more than other generations and highlighting the need for generational considerations in benefits planning.
- **Remote Work Considerations:** Remote/hybrid workers experience more work-related screen time than their onsite counterparts, suggesting the need for customized policies and interventions.
- **Awareness Gap:** There's a lack of awareness among employees and HR leaders about the wide range of health conditions detectable through eye exams, for example diabetes, indicating a potential focus area for educational campaigns.
- **Underutilization of Vision Benefits:** Despite the high value placed on vision benefits, there's a significant gap in their utilization, with many employees not getting annual eye exams – sometimes due to work demands.
- **Vision Care as a Retention Tool:** Offering or improving vision benefits could influence employees' decisions to stay with their employer, pointing towards its importance in retention strategies.

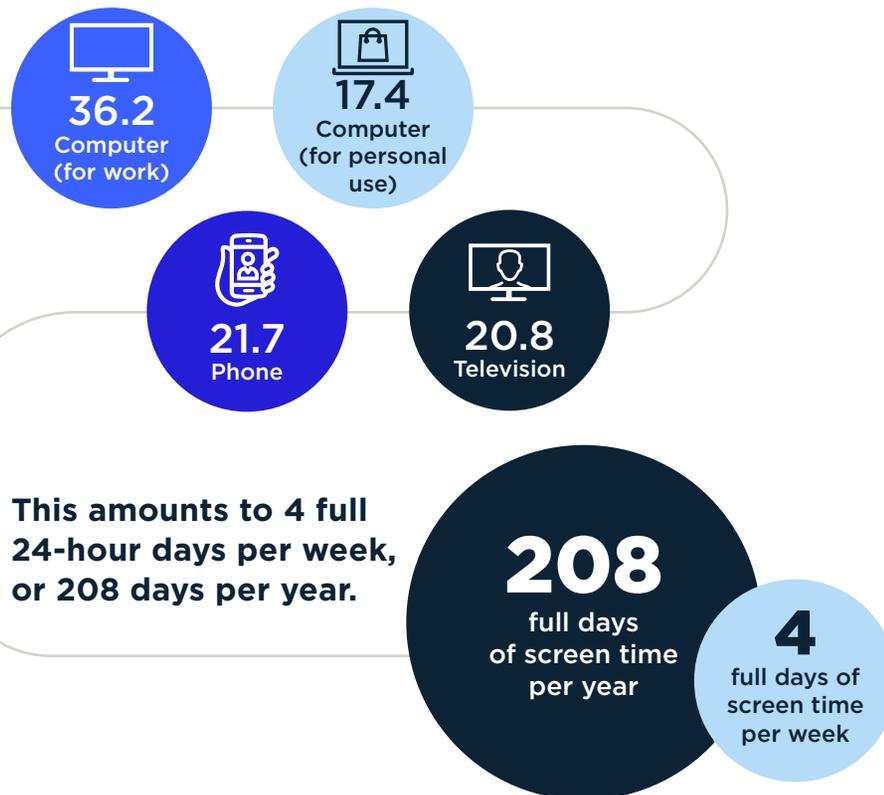




Screen time by the numbers

Excessive screen time can contribute to poor eye health, and most workers are getting far too much of it.

In a typical week, workers reported getting 96.1 hours of screen time:



Excessive screen time can lead to digital eye strain, headaches, dry eyes, and blurred vision.² Our research found that workers are getting over 96 hours of screen time per week, with more than a third of that time coming from work.

In fact, on workdays people are spending 91% of their waking hours looking at a screen. Even on weekends, people spend 74% of their waking hours looking at a screen.

What's more, nearly all workers surveyed— 95% — say they look at a screen before bed at least a few nights a week, including 74% who do so every night. Getting screen time late at night has been shown to impact sleep quality and duration.³

Employees say the **#1 factor** impacting their eye health is excessive screen time.



² American Optometric Association. Digital Eyestrain. https://www.aoa.org/AOA/Documents/Healthy%20Eyes/Digital_eyestrain.pdf

³ The influence of blue light on sleep, performance and wellbeing in young adults: A systematic review. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9424753/>



Work's impact on eye health

With nearly 7 out of 10 employees working longer hours — including nights and weekends — it's no surprise that eye health is deteriorating.

The majority of workers (69%) say they worked longer hours over the past year, and an alarming 43% report that their eye health is worsening as a result.

People report that they're working longer hours primarily because their company is understaffed, and they have too much work to do (42%). However, others note that workplace cultural issues play a role as well. For example, 25% feel obligated to work longer hours because their manager or co-workers are doing this. Another 21% say their company's culture rewards this behavior via promotions or raises.

Employees don't even get a break from screens when they take time off. Nearly half (44%) say they work or respond to emails while on vacation, estimating that they log 30 minutes of work-related screen time a day. This adds up to 3.5 hours — or nearly half a day's work — during a one-week vacation.

Perhaps most concerning, 69% of employees say their company expects them to work longer hours and 35% say they're expected to work while they're on vacation. Yet leaders appear to be largely unaware that this might be an issue for some team members.

In fact, 58% believe their employees don't mind working longer hours or while they're on vacation.

Notably, younger generations are struggling much more than others with their employer's increased demands and the negative impacts to their eye health. An alarming 82% of Gen Z says they're working longer hours, with 54% reporting that their eye health has worsened as a result.

	Overall	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
% working longer hours	69%	82%	78%	65%	50%
% experiencing worsening eye health due to longer work hours	43%	54%	49%	39%	31%
% who work while on vacation	44%	50%	57%	43%	36%



The hybrid disadvantage

Hybrid workers supposedly have the best of both worlds, yet 78% say they're expected to put in longer hours.

Gen Z workers aren't the only ones putting in more hours — our research revealed that hybrid workers also appear to be at a disadvantage, when it comes to work-related screen time.

It's not surprising that remote workers get more screen time than their hybrid or onsite colleagues. However, hybrid workers are getting nearly as much work-related screen time as remote workers, and they're also more likely to be working longer hours — including nights, weekends, and while they're on vacation.

In addition, hybrid workers were the most likely employee group to report that their company expects them to work longer hours. This is valuable information employers may wish to keep in mind as they contemplate how to address some of the root issues behind excessive screen time.

On workdays, hybrid workers get nearly as much screen time as remote workers.

7.3 hours - hybrid workers

7.8 hours - remote workers

5.5 hours - onsite workers

They're also much more likely to say they work while on vacation.

50% of hybrid workers

33% of remote workers

44% of onsite workers

Hybrid workers are more likely to be putting in longer hours.

75% of hybrid workers

66% of remote workers

65% of onsite workers

Nearly 8 out of 10 hybrid employees say their company expects them to work longer hours.

78% of hybrid workers

58% of remote workers

66% of onsite workers

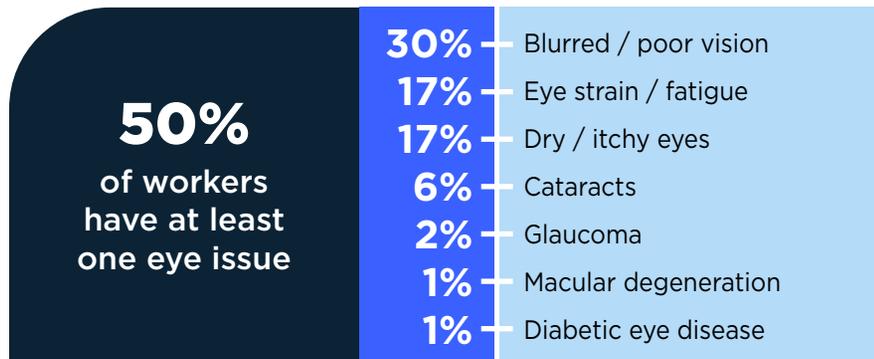


The impact on workers and employers

Too much screen time isn't just harmful to workers — it's also bad for the bottom line.

Half of employees say they're struggling with at least one eye issue. The top three issues they report — blurred vision, eye strain / fatigue, and dry / itchy eyes — can all be caused by excessive screen time.⁴

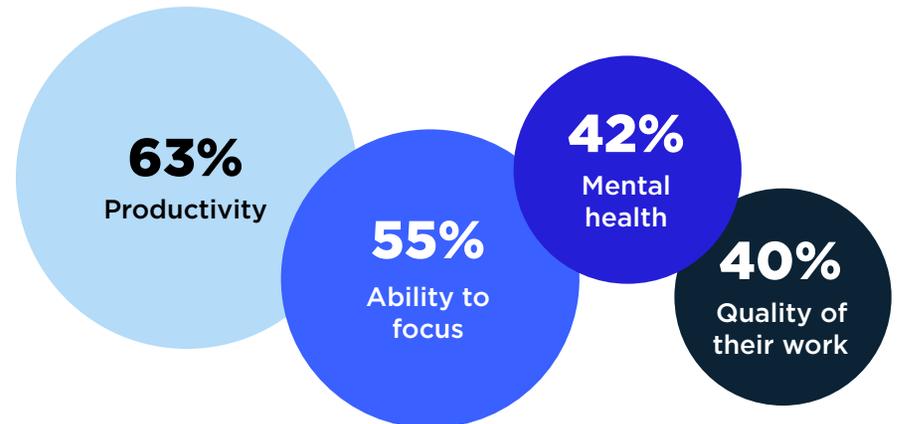
The business implications of deteriorating eye health could be far more wide-reaching than most companies realize. First, organizations may face higher healthcare costs due to increased demand for eye care services, including exams, corrective eyewear, and treatments for conditions exacerbated by screen exposure.



Poor eye health can also lead to decreased effectiveness at work.

In our research, employees with eye issues reported impacts to their productivity, ability to focus, and work quality. Over 4 out of 10 workers say their eye issues have affected their mental health, for example by worsening their stress, anxiety, or depression.

Workers say their eye issues have negatively affected the following:



⁴ American Optometric Association. Digital Eyestrain. https://www.aoa.org/AOA/Documents/Healthy%20Eyes/Digital_eyestrain.pdf



Underutilization of vision benefits is also an issue

Working longer hours isn't just affecting eye health — it's also impacting people's ability to use their vision benefits.

Just 55% of workers get an eye exam at least once a year. While 29% of employees note that they're too busy with their personal lives, nearly a quarter (22%) say they're too busy due to work.

HR leaders also admit that their team members aren't making the most of their benefits. In fact, leaders estimate that just 62% of their enrolled employees used their vision benefits last year, either for themselves or their family.

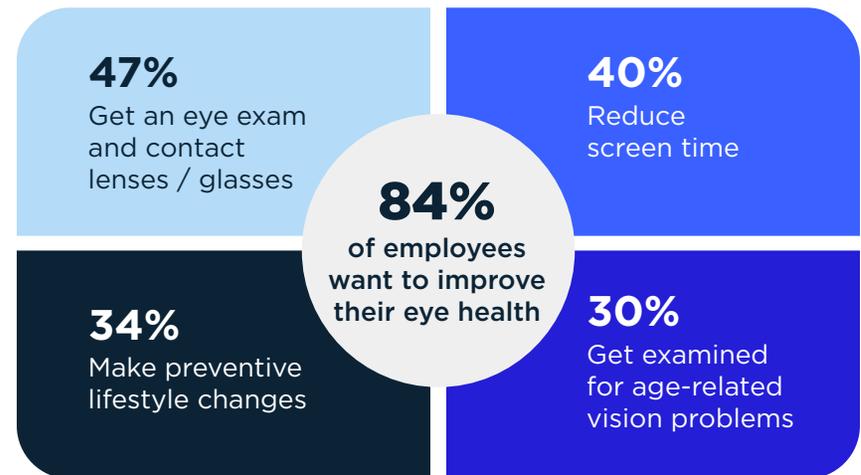
It's not that employees don't want to improve their eye health.

On the contrary, 84% have at least one priority for their eye health. Many report that they want to get an eye exam (47%) or reduce their screen time (40%). Over a third say they're prioritizing preventive lifestyle changes, for example wearing sunglasses, taking vitamins, or eating more eye-healthy food.

However, some workers may need help to make progress toward better eye health — and employers have a compelling opportunity to meet this moment for their people. Not only is providing more support advantageous for the employee, but it's

also an important way for employers to demonstrate they care about their workforce's holistic well-being.

That's because eye health isn't just about seeing clearly — it contributes to overall well-being and is a key component of taking care of the whole employee. In the remainder of this report, we'll discuss these themes in more detail, and offer strategies that can help employers move the needle on workforce eye health, well-being, and more.



How Employers Can Move the Needle on Workforce Eye Health





Help workers reduce their screen time

Employers have an important role to play in managing the eye health impacts of excessive screen time.

To address this issue, companies can help employees reduce their workload if possible. However, the reality is that many of today's workers, especially those who work remotely, will still be required to spend the majority of their day using a computer.

With that in mind, companies can encourage their team members to take breaks during the workday. Taking just a 20-second break every 20 minutes can go a long way toward reducing eye strain and fatigue.⁵

Leaders can also address any cultural issues driving people to work longer hours — especially younger employees or hybrid team members. This might mean examining whether expectations differ for certain employee groups, and taking steps to ensure that all workers are being treated fairly.

⁵ American Optometric Association. 20/20/20 to Prevent Digital Eye Strain. <https://www.aoa.org/AOA/Images/Patients/Eye%20Conditions/20-20-20-rule.pdf>



In some cases, organizations may want to consider adopting policies designed to prevent work from extending past normal business hours. For example, 52% of leaders have implemented policies that prohibit replying to emails after office hours or on the weekends. An even higher percentage (69%) say their company has a policy that requires workers to use a certain amount of their vacation time each year.

The American Optometric Association recommends the 20-20-20 rule:⁵

Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break to look at something 20 feet away.



20
minutes



20
seconds



20
feet
away

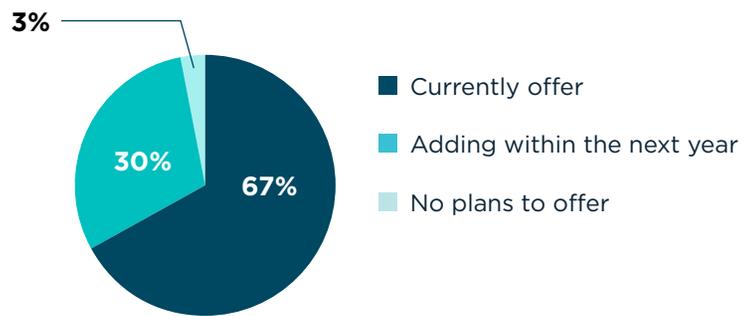


Increase access to vision benefits

Digital eye strain is a very real issue among today's workforce, but not all employees have vision benefits.

Nearly 9 out of 10 employees say it's important for their employer to provide vision benefits, but just 66% of HR leaders report that their company offers them. However, another 30% say they plan to add vision benefits within the next 12 months.

Only 2 out of 3 companies offer vision benefits



Offering vision benefits could influence employees' decisions to stay at or take a job, pointing towards its importance in both retention and recruitment strategies. For example, among workers without access to vision coverage, over half say they're seriously considering finding a job that provides these benefits.



Vision care as a retention and recruitment tool

89% of employees say it's important for their employer to provide vision coverage.

72% would be more likely to take a job with a company that offers vision benefits.

52% are seriously considering finding a job that offers vision benefits.*

* among workers who do not have vision benefits.



Improve existing vision plans

1 out of 4 workers are considering finding a job with better vision benefits.

74% of employees and 92% of HR leaders are not satisfied with their company's vision insurance. These are the top improvements they'd like their vision carriers to make:

- #1** Offer a better selection of plan options
- #2** Provide faster and more convenient access to care
- #3** Allow employees to customize coverage for their family
- #4** Improve the quality of their doctors / facilities
- #5** Decrease the costs of their services
- #6** Let employees start / stop their coverage at any time

Customization is key. Within this list of improvements, the need for greater customization is clear. Customizing vision benefits can help employers better meet the needs of their workforce, including different generations, job roles, and individual health requirements.

However, 69% of HR leaders admit their companies aren't doing enough to offer customizable healthcare benefits, citing reasons such as a lack of time or resources (32%), high costs (29%), and challenges within their current tech stack (20%).

A focus on costs is paramount.

Both HR leaders and employees are concerned about the increasing costs of vision plans, emphasizing the need for cost-effective benefits solutions. Over two-thirds of HR leaders say that compared to 2023, the cost of their 2024 vision plan increased for their organization (73%) and their employees (67%).

The stakes are high. Among employees whose companies provide vision coverage, 25% are seriously considering finding a job with better vision benefits. Among Gen Z, this number is 36%.

For employers, these findings should serve as a strong indicator to consider benefit improvements. Offering vision care isn't enough if workers are dissatisfied with their benefits. In fact, there's a pressing need to address some of the issues people are facing with their vision carriers, before it's too late.





Increase communication around vision benefits

Employees and leaders agree that vision care is important, yet nearly 1 out of 4 workers can't name their company's vision care provider.

Investing in vision care offers many benefits. First, it directly impacts people's overall well-being and quality of life, and therefore plays an important role in improving population health. It can also help minimize productivity loss due to eye issues.

For employers, offering quality, comprehensive vision care can lead to significant long-term savings by reducing overall healthcare costs. That's because eye exams can catch many health issues early on, potentially saving companies costs down the road.

In our survey, respondents highlighted these and other benefits, with over 9 out of 10 employees and HR leaders (91% and 96%, respectively) agreeing that getting regular vision care is just as important as other forms of healthcare.

Despite these positive perceptions, an alarming 22% of workers don't know the name of their company's vision care provider.

This could be due to a lack of timely and effective employer communication. At companies with vision benefits, 43% of leaders admit they communicate about their plan either once a year (29%), only if there is a significant change (13%), or never (1%).

Overall, 77% of leaders agree that their company needs to communicate more with employees about their healthcare benefits. And with just 55% of workers reporting that they get an annual eye exam, doing so could play an important role in increasing benefits utilization.

Benefits of regular vision care

Improves overall health	95% of employees
	98% of HR leaders
Increases productivity	86% of employees
	96% of HR leaders
Lowers healthcare costs	For employees (71% of employees)
	For employers (91% of HR leaders)



Boost awareness around the link between vision care and preventive healthcare

Most people don't realize that eye exams can detect signs of a wide range of health conditions.

It's promising that 96% of respondents agree that eye exams can play a role in preventive healthcare. However, among workers who don't get annual eye exams, 29% think they don't need to because they have perfect eyesight, highlighting that some workers don't understand how vision care can support other aspects of their well-being.

In fact, few people — including HR leaders, who are making decisions around vision benefits — are aware that signs of many health conditions can be detected through an eye exam.

Eye care is healthcare:

Signs of over 270 health conditions can be identified through an eye exam.¹

For example, less than 3 out of 10 respondents are aware that an eye exam can detect signs of diabetes, hypertension, cancer, thyroid disease, stroke, high cholesterol, multiple sclerosis, and arthritis. Even with conditions like cataracts and glaucoma, a significant number of respondents were not aware that an eye exam can detect signs of these conditions.

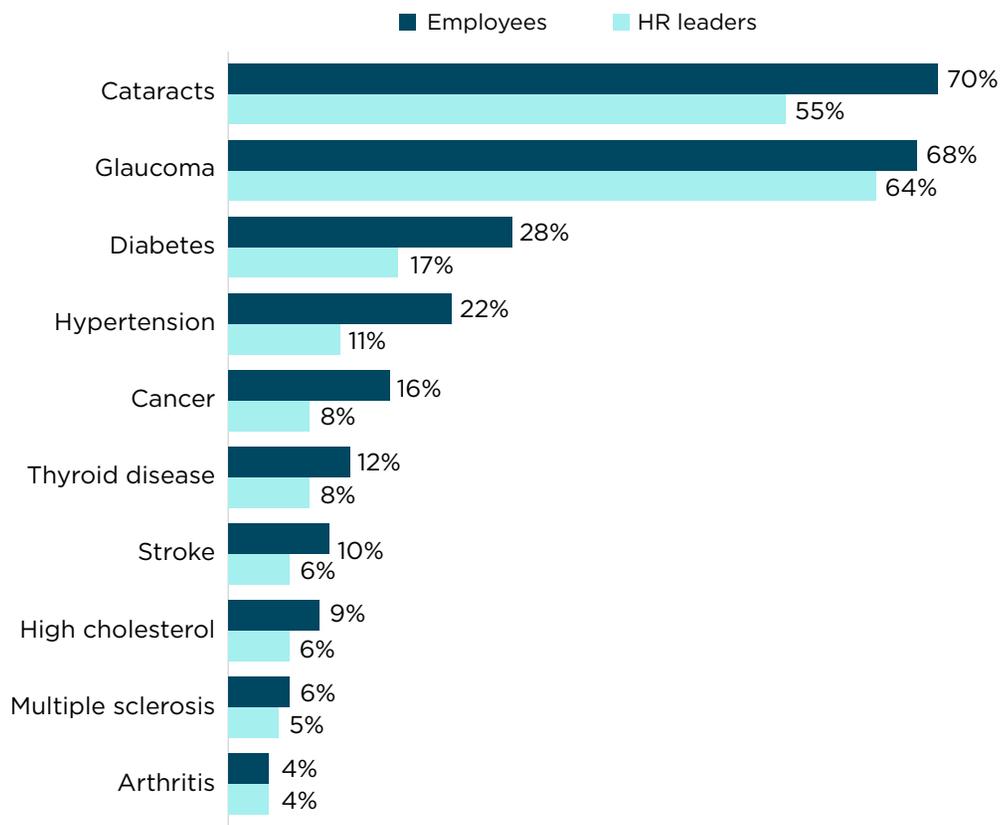


¹ American Optometric Association. Full Picture of Eye Health. <https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/caring-for-your-eyes/full-picture-of-eye-health>



There's a great opportunity for leaders to boost awareness around how eye exams can support preventive healthcare, for their employees as well as themselves. Early detection of these health conditions doesn't just benefit workers — it can also save companies money in the long-run. Partnering with a vision carrier who helps you communicate the value of vision care can encourage higher benefits utilization.

Few people are aware that an eye exam can detect signs of diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and over 270 other health conditions



heart disease + **stroke** +
cardiovascular + Alzheimer's
+ hypertension + aneurysm +
diabetes + **brain tumor**
+ high blood pressure +
cancers of blood, tissue, skin
+ **high cholesterol** + Lyme
disease + multiple sclerosis +
lupus + sickle cell disease +
stroke + **thyroid disease**
+ vascular disease + brain
tumor + melanoma + squamous
cell + **Lymphoma** +
leukemia + rheumatoid
arthritis + giant cell arteritis
+ **medication toxicities** +
myasthenia gravis + sarcoidosis
+ sjögren's syndrome +
vitamin a deficiency



Encourage employees to make the most of their vision benefits

Despite the high value placed on vision benefits, there's a significant gap in their utilization — but some companies are taking action.

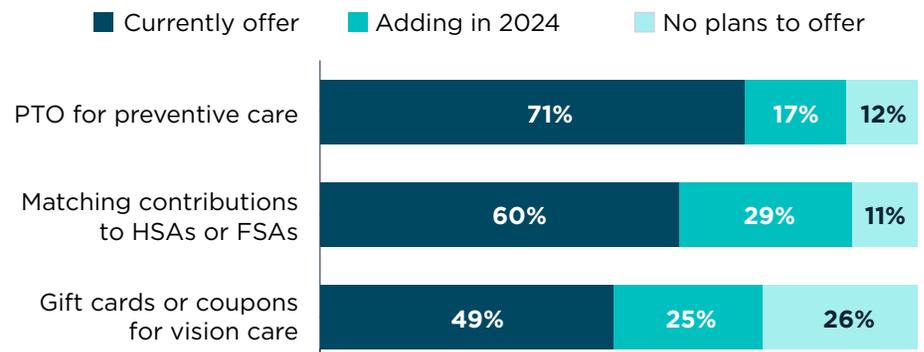
Seven out of 10 leaders say their company offers paid time off (PTO) for employees to get preventive care, including eye exams. This benefit can be immensely helpful for workers who find it difficult to make time for regular vision care amidst a challenging work schedule.

However, a somewhat lower percentage of leaders (60%) report that their company provides matching contributions to Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) or Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs), which can be used for eye exams. Only around half (49%) offer gift cards or coupons for eye exams, glasses, or contact lenses.

Fortunately, at least 1 out of 4 employers say they plan to begin offering these incentives in 2024. These benefits can be enormously valuable for employees who struggle to afford vision care expenses for themselves and/or their families.



Does your company offer any of the following to incentivize employees to get regular eye exams?





Consider offering technology-driven solutions

A growing number of workers are open to smart eyewear or AI-powered technologies.

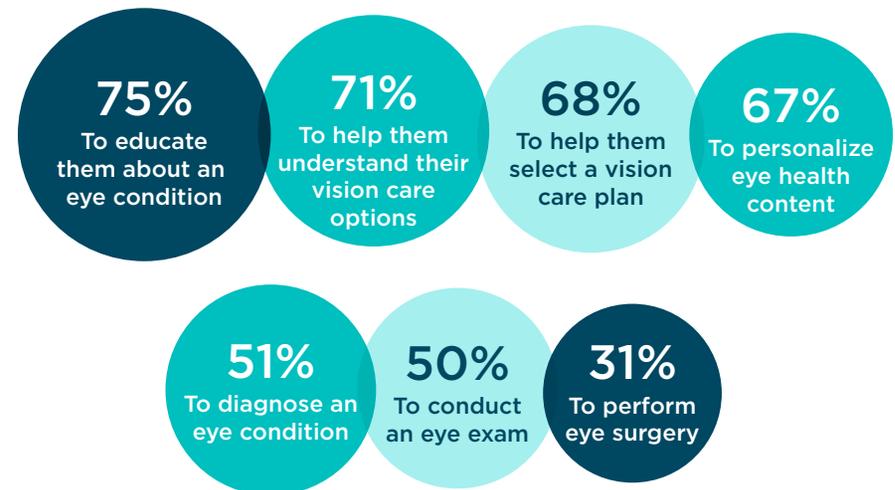
Over half (54%) of employees already own or would consider purchasing smart eyewear, for example glasses that integrate augmented reality (AR) displays or health monitoring features. An even higher percentage (78%) own or are interested in purchasing glasses that could help defend against blue light, which is emitted from screens and may disrupt sleep patterns.⁶

Most workers also say they'd be open to using technologies powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support their eye health. For example, at least 2 out of 3 workers say they'd welcome the use of AI to better understand their vision care plan or to receive eye health education. At least half would allow AI to diagnose an eye condition (51%) or conduct an eye exam (50%), and nearly a third (31%) would be receptive to having AI perform eye surgery.

Some of these AI-driven solutions are not yet widely available. However, 57% of HR leaders say their company already uses AI to support employees' vision care experience in some capacity. In addition, leaders are even more accepting than employees when it comes to incorporating AI into vision care in the future.

Over 9 out of 10 say their company would be open to having AI provide information and education to their employees about eye health, vision care options, and more.

Workers are open to using AI-powered technologies to support their eye health in the following ways:



⁶ The influence of blue light on sleep, performance and wellbeing in young adults: A systematic review. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9424753/>



Our call to employers

The research findings highlighted in this report reveal that the future of workforce eye health is greatly at risk.

With a growing number of employees working longer hours, screen time may be at an all-time high.

HR leaders have an important opportunity to take care of their employees, improve their organization's productivity, and reduce healthcare costs by providing the support and benefits their people need to improve eye health and get the vision care they need.





Research methodology

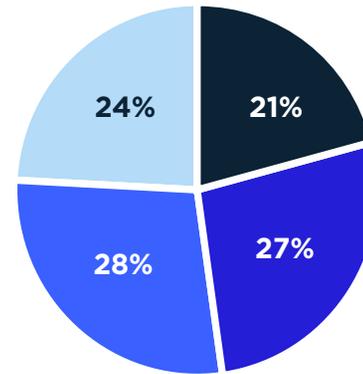
Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Workplace Intelligence and VSP between February 19 - March 4, 2024. The survey audience included 800 human resource / employee benefit leaders and 800 employees who were working full-time, between the ages of 18 - 67 years old, and living in the U.S.

Employees who took part in the survey were required to be using their employer's medical plan and needed to be at least somewhat involved in making healthcare decisions for their household. Employees were also required to be using a computer or laptop for their work at least "sometimes." Similarly, HR leaders had to be working at an organization where at least some non-management employees require a computer for their work.

The survey included a 50/50 mix of male and female employees, and respondents from all four generations were evenly represented. The survey also sampled a mix of employees with hybrid, remote, and on-site work arrangements.

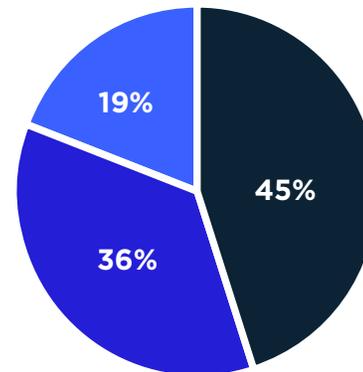


Employees - Age



- Gen Z (ages 21 - 27)
- Millennials (ages 28 - 43)
- Gen X (ages 44 - 59)
- Baby Boomers (ages 60 - 67)

Employees - Work Arrangements



- 100% on-site
- Hybrid
- 100% remote



About the research sponsors



About VSP Vision Care

VSP was founded in 1955 as the first not-for-profit eye health company. At VSP Vision Care, we believe in providing vision care that goes beyond just correcting eyesight. We're dedicated to offering comprehensive eye care solutions that enhance not only our members' vision but also their overall well-being. As a leading vision insurance provider, we aim to foster eye care connections for a lifetime of well-being.

Interested in reviewing your benefits? We want to help.



About Workplace Intelligence

Workplace Intelligence is an award-winning thought leadership and research agency focused on the world of work. We help companies, and their executives, tell their workplace story in a meaningful, relevant, and impactful way using primary data, insights, and interviews. For more information go to our [website](#) and subscribe to our [LinkedIn newsletter](#).