New Survey Reveals Financial Preparedness Gaps Among U.S. Workers and Employers

New report from PNC Bank finds many workers are confident managing day-to-day finances, but lack preparedness for complex financial decisions, creating opportunities for employers to strengthen workforce outcomes.

PITTSBURGH, Sept. 17, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- PNC Bank today released findings from its annual Financial Wellness in the Workplace Report, titled "Turning financial preparedness into workforce advantage," which examines how U.S. workers and employers view financial wellness, workplace benefits and long-term financial preparedness. The 2026 report is based on survey responses of 1,000 U.S. workers and 500 U.S. employers, along with in-depth interviews with workers and business leaders.

The 2026 report found a growing disconnect between workers' confidence in managing everyday finances and their preparedness for more complex financial decisions. While many workers report feeling capable of handling day-to-day financial responsibilities, fewer demonstrate the knowledge and preparedness needed for longer-term goals such as retirement planning, investing, emergency savings and healthcare expenses. Among workers surveyed, 71% said they feel confident creating a savings plan, while only 33% demonstrated high proficiency in foundational financial knowledge.

"Financial wellness is no longer just a personal issue. It's increasingly becoming a workforce issue," said Kaley Keeley Buchanan, executive vice president and head of PNC Financial Wellness Solutions. "Our research continues to show that many workers feel confident managing everyday financial decisions, but confidence doesn't always translate into long-term preparedness. When employers help employees build financial knowledge and connect them with guidance and resources, they can support stronger financial outcomes while helping employees get more value from the benefits available to them."

The findings show that financial stress remains a persistent part of workers' experiences. Eighty-five percent of workers said they worry about personal finances during the workday, and workers spend an average of 3.5 hours per week worrying about finances at work. Employers also reported seeing the effects of financial stress in the workplace, including reduced productivity, workers borrowing from retirement plans, requests for pay advances and wage garnishments.

Other notable findings include:

- **Employers and workers are experiencing the same economy differently.** Seventy percent of employers said they are very or somewhat optimistic about the economy, compared with 47% of workers. Additionally, 86% of workers said inflation negatively affected their financial situation in 2026.
- **Employers may be overestimating workers' retirement preparedness.** Seventy-five percent of employers said workers are at least somewhat prepared for retirement, while 45% of workers said they feel prepared for retirement. Only 10% of workers said they feel very prepared for retirement, and 15% said they do not

believe they will ever be able to afford to retire.

- **Access to financial guidance is linked to stronger confidence.** Forty-two percent of workers said they have worked with a professional financial planner or advisor at some point. Workers who have worked with an advisor reported higher confidence across several financial activities, including setting a budget, managing debt, creating a savings plan, retirement planning and investing in the stock market.
- **Employers are taking a more data-driven approach to benefits.** Sixty-five percent of employers said they measure the return on investment of their benefit offerings, up from 51% last year. Additionally, 95% said they use or plan to use artificial intelligence in human resources operations.
- **Workers show strong interest in financial education, yet access remains limited.** Thirty-two percent of employers said they offer financial education benefits, while 57% of workers without access to those benefits said they would use them if offered. Among employers offering financial education, 92% said their education includes retirement planning.

"Employers continue to invest in benefits, but the real opportunity is helping employees understand, access and use those benefits in ways that improve financial outcomes," Buchanan said. "By aligning benefits with employees' needs and measuring outcomes, employers can help build a more financially resilient workforce."

According to the report, the most effective financial wellness strategies connect employees with education, guidance, banking, savings, borrowing and retirement resources that support better financial decision-making throughout their financial lives. More findings, including the complete report and information about PNC's Workplace Advantage program, are available at pnc.com/WorkplaceReport.

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Methodology
The Financial Wellness in the Workplace Study was conducted in early 2026 and surveyed two populations: U.S. employers and U.S. workers. The research was conducted in two phases. The qualitative phase included in-depth interviews with employers and workers in January 2026. The quantitative phase included separate online surveys with employers and workers in March 2026. The employer survey was conducted online with a national sample of 500 U.S. employers with 100 or more workers and annual revenue of $5 million or more. The sampling error is +/- 4.4% at the 95% confidence level. The workers survey was conducted online with a national sample of 1,000 U.S. workers ages 21 to 69 who work full time at companies with 100 or more workers. The sampling error is +/- 3.0% percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The study was conducted by Willow Research, a custom market research firm and certified woman-owned business. Gen Z 1997-2012, Millennial 1981-1996, Gen X 1965-1980, Boomer 1946-1964.

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NOTE: The sum of percentages may not add to the total due to rounding.

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