



THE MOST VALUABLE HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY RESEARCH TOPICS

INSIGHTS FROM EMPLOYERS

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SUMMARY FINDINGS

- Representatives from 80 employers identified research topics they would find most valuable in their efforts to help employees become healthier and more productive.
- Among 17 items, respondents identified measuring program impacts; descriptions of the most impactful health, well-being, and leave management policies; and the disease burden of chronic physical and mental health conditions as the most valuable.
- Demonstrating how investments in health impact business performance; helping employees become more cost-conscious health care consumers; and fostering a culture of health were also considered among the most valuable topics.

Background

IBI's research agenda is developed to help employers make sound decisions about how they invest in the health and productivity of their workforce.

As part of its agenda-setting process, IBI surveyed a group of employers about the research topics they would find most valuable in their efforts to help employees become healthier and more productive. Respondents were provided lists of items organized into three topic areas shown in Table 1. The list was developed by IBI to reflect discussions that emerged from recent meetings of its Research Committee (the latest meeting was held in October 2018), but also in consideration of questions and suggestions arising from interactions with member organizations.

Table 1: Topic areas and items included in the survey

Topic area	Survey item	Item label (short version)
Health and Well-being	Strategies for encouraging employees to adopt healthy habits	Encouraging healthy habits
	Fostering a culture of health	Culture of health
	The effect of incentives on participation in wellness programs	Effects of incentives
	Descriptions of the most impactful health, well-being, and leave management policies	Most impactful programs
	Demonstrating how investments in health impact business performance	Demonstrating business impact
Medical and Pharmacy Benefits	Helping employees become more cost-conscious health care consumers	Cost-conscious health care consumers
	Lower wage workers' health and productivity challenges	Lower-wage workers
	Disease burden of chronic physical and mental health conditions	Chronic conditions
	Understanding the value of specialty pharmaceuticals	Specialty pharmaceuticals
	The full health and productivity impact of high deductible health plans	High-deductible plans
Absence and Productivity	Measuring the impact of workplace health and productivity programs	Measuring program impact
	How to determine whether an accommodation request is reasonable	Determining reasonable accommodations
	Productivity implications of expanded parental and family leave laws	Expanded parental/family leave laws
	Impact of leave policies on employee recruitment, engagement, retention, satisfaction or well-being	HR impact of leave policies
	Productivity implications of legalized medical and recreational marijuana	Marijuana
	Managing leaves among call center employees	Call center employees
	Health and productivity challenges for caregivers of elderly or ill family members	Caregivers' health and productivity

Human resources and benefits professionals participating in the survey represented diverse industries, company sizes and professional functions. These are reported in the Appendix.

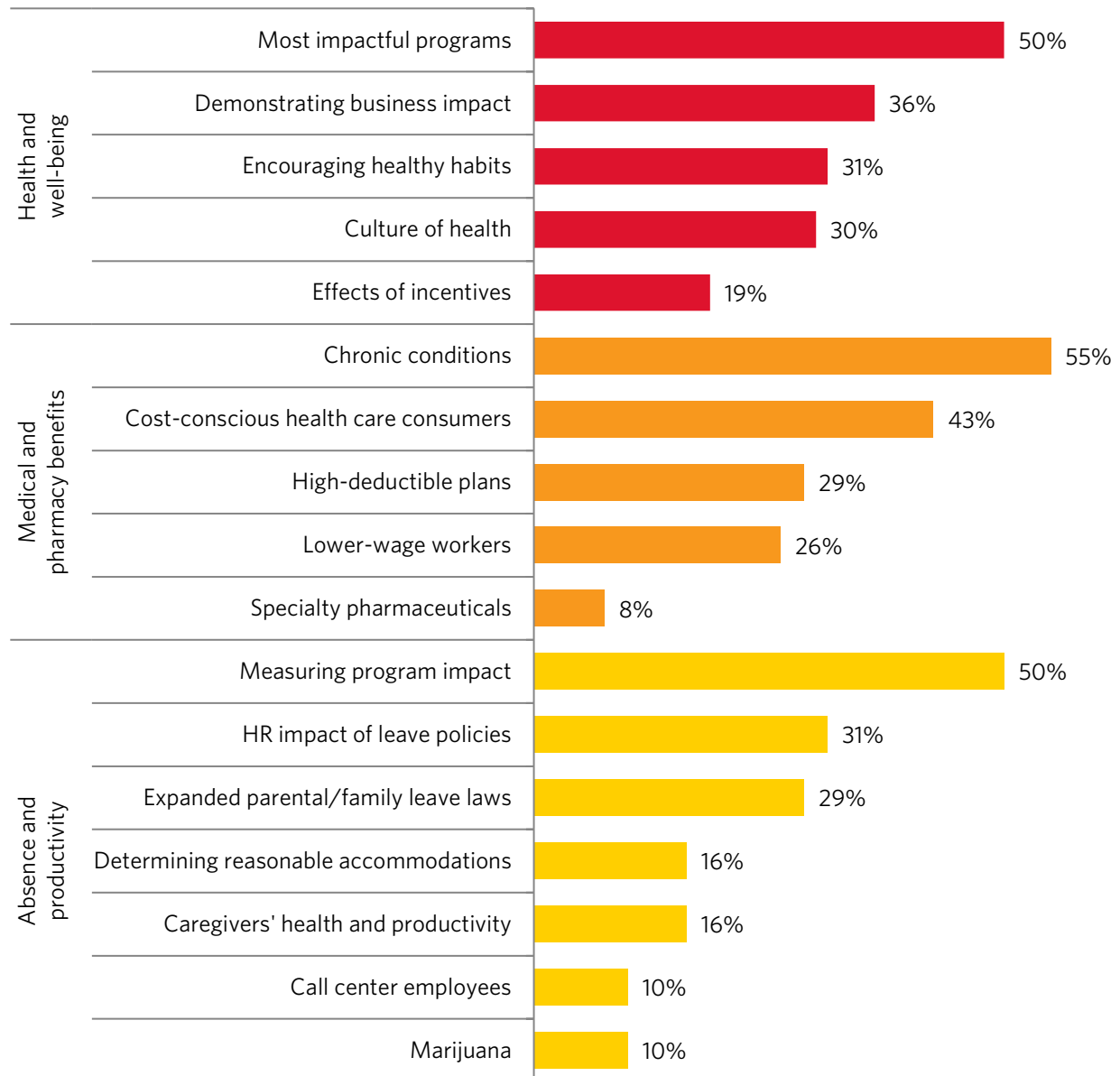
ANALYTIC APPROACH

Respondents were then asked to rate the two most valuable topics in each area (for a total of six topics). Finally, they were asked to rank their six choices in terms of the most and least valuable. To prioritize the topics for developing a research agenda, we apply a modified ranked-choice voting approach designed to address at least one valuable topic for most respondents. If a respondent's first ranked topic was not among the top six overall, we substituted their second-ranked topic. This process was repeated until all six choices were re-allocated. In practice, the most valuable six topics were decided by the fourth ranking.

Findings

Figure 1 shows the percentage of employers reporting the most valuable items, within each topic. For each area, at least half of employers identified one topic as among their top two most valuable items.

Figure 1: Employers said that descriptions of impactful programs, disease burdens of chronic conditions, and approaches to measuring impacts would be most valuable.



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Among the items in the health and well-being area, half of employers indicated that descriptions of the most impactful health, well-being, and leave management policies would be most valuable to their work. Nearly two in five employers cited demonstrating how investments in health impact business performance as most valuable in this area.

MEDICAL AND PHARMACY BENEFITS

Among the items in the medical and pharmacy benefits area, more than half of employers indicated that descriptions of the disease burden of chronic physical and mental health conditions would be most valuable to their work. More than two in five employers cited helping employees become more cost-conscious health care consumers as most valuable in this area.

ABSENCE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Among the items in the absence and productivity area, half of employers indicated that approaches to measuring the impact of workplace health and productivity programs would be most valuable to their work. One in three employers cited the impact of leave policies on employee recruitment, engagement, retention, satisfaction or well-being as most valuable in this area.

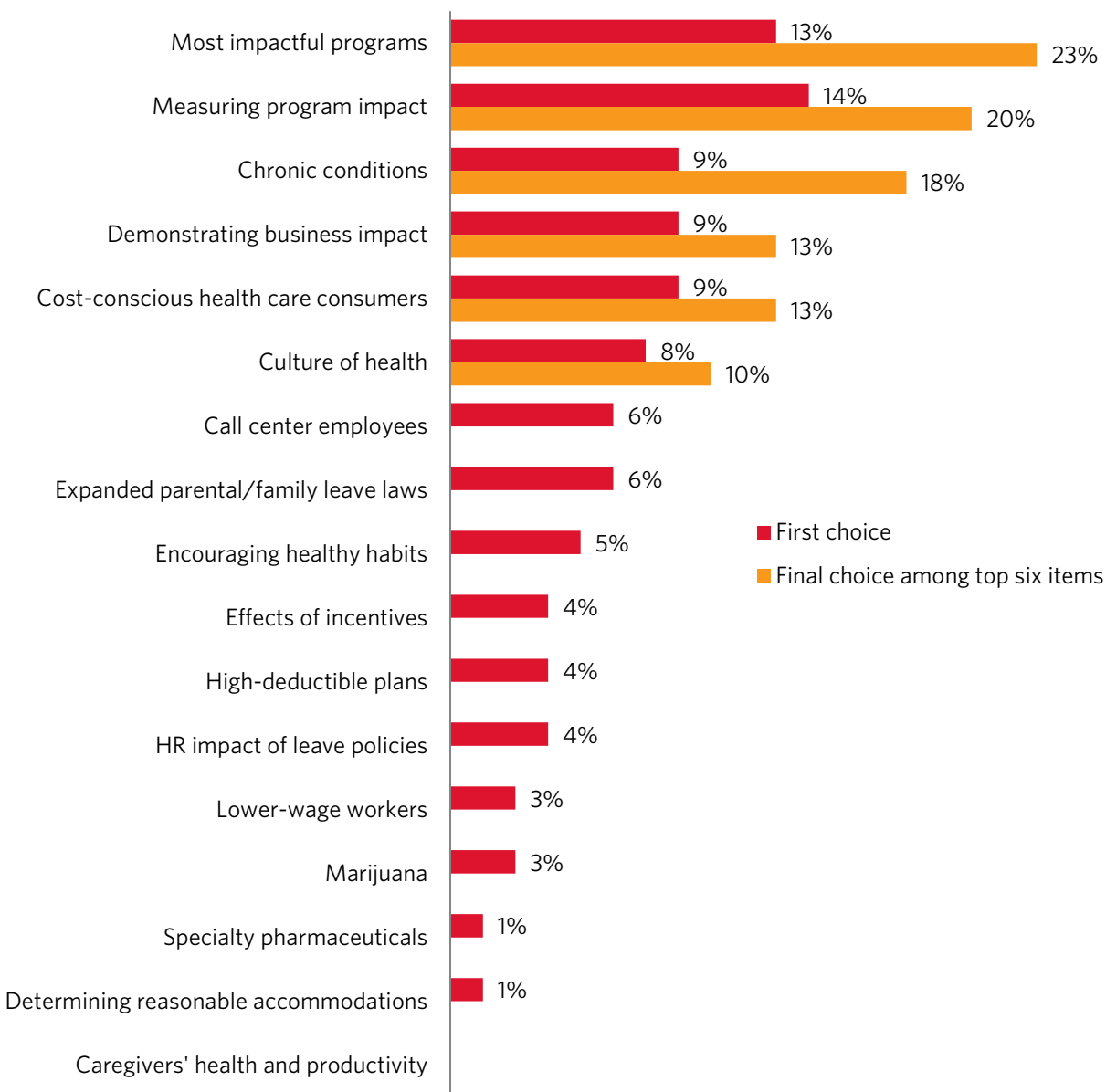
THE MOST VALUABLE RESEARCH TOPICS

Figure 2 shows the percent of respondents that ranked an item as most valuable, and the top six most valuable items overall after the ranked-choice voting method was applied.

No item was ranked most valuable by a majority of respondents. Measuring program impacts received the most first choice rankings overall (14%), followed closely by descriptions of the most impactful health, well-being, and leave management policies (13%). However, the order of these items changed once the ranked-choice approach is applied, with approximately one in five respondents ranking these items as most valuable. Along with measuring the disease burden of chronic physical and mental health conditions, the order of the top three ranked items mirrors the topic area choices shown in Figure 1.

The other three items among the top six include demonstrating how investments in health impact business performance, helping employees become more cost-conscious health care consumers, and fostering a culture of health.

Figure 2: Descriptions of impactful programs, approaches to measuring impacts, and the disease burdens of chronic conditions were among the top ranked items overall.



Discussion

IBI considers many factors when developing its research agenda—but weighs input from employers highly. Going forward, IBI’s staff, Board of Directors and Research Committee representatives will incorporate findings from the current survey into discussions of how IBI can produce relevant, actionable material for employers and their supplier partners.

That said, it is worth noting that IBI's recent output reflects the topics employers identified as most valuable. This includes our most recent [CFO survey](#),¹ our series of [Leave Management Benchmarks](#)² and [Health and Productivity Impact of Chronic Conditions](#) (HPICC)³ reports, and ongoing efforts to demonstrate the advantages of incorporating health and productivity into [business performance assessments](#).⁴

On the other hand, some of the highest profile issues of the last few years were not among employers' highest rated items. For example, employers increasingly offer high-deductible plans as a way of bending the cost curve for health benefits. Yet there is evidence that medical and pharmaceutical cost savings achieved through [high-deductible health plans may come at the expense of workforce productivity](#).⁵ While the expansion of specialty pharmaceuticals offers new hope to many patients with serious, often life-threatening conditions, high costs that contribute to [nonadherence may diminish their clinical and productivity value](#).⁶ And employers will continue to face the challenges of coordinating their time-off policies as [more jurisdictions mandate paid parental, family, and sick leave](#).⁷

It is tempting to conclude that the survey respondents and their supplier partners have largely "solved" these issues and are now focusing their attention elsewhere. However, if their preference for research on the impact of health and productivity efforts is an indication, the immediate need to manage the costs of benefits may still crowd out the evidence-base for the longer-term productivity and business impact of health investments. It will be incumbent upon IBI and others in the health and productivity field to demonstrate more clearly how improving workforce health can cost-effectively create business value.

¹ Gifford B, Parry T, Jinnett K. Finding the Value in Health: Results From the Integrated Benefits Institute's 2015 CFO Survey. San Francisco: Integrated Benefits Institute. 2016. < <https://www.ibiweb.org/finding-the-value-in-health-results-from-the-integrated-benefits-institutes/>>

² IBI Leave Management Benchmarking Series. San Francisco: Integrated Benefits Institute. 2018. < <https://www.ibiweb.org/leave-management-benchmarking-project/>>

³ Health and Productivity Impact of Chronic Conditions. San Francisco: Integrated Benefits Institute. 2018. < <https://www.ibiweb.org/tag/chronic-conditions-impact-report/>>

⁴ Gifford B. Linking Workforce Health To Business Performance Metrics: Strategies, Challenges and Opportunities. San Francisco: Integrated Benefits Institute. 2015, < <https://www.ibiweb.org/linking-workforce-health-to-business-performance-metrics/>>

⁵ Gifford B. Consumer-Directed Health Plans: The Challenge to Managing Workforce Health, Performance and Productivity. Health Insurance Underwriter. Washington, DC: National Association of Health Underwriters; June 2015:30-37

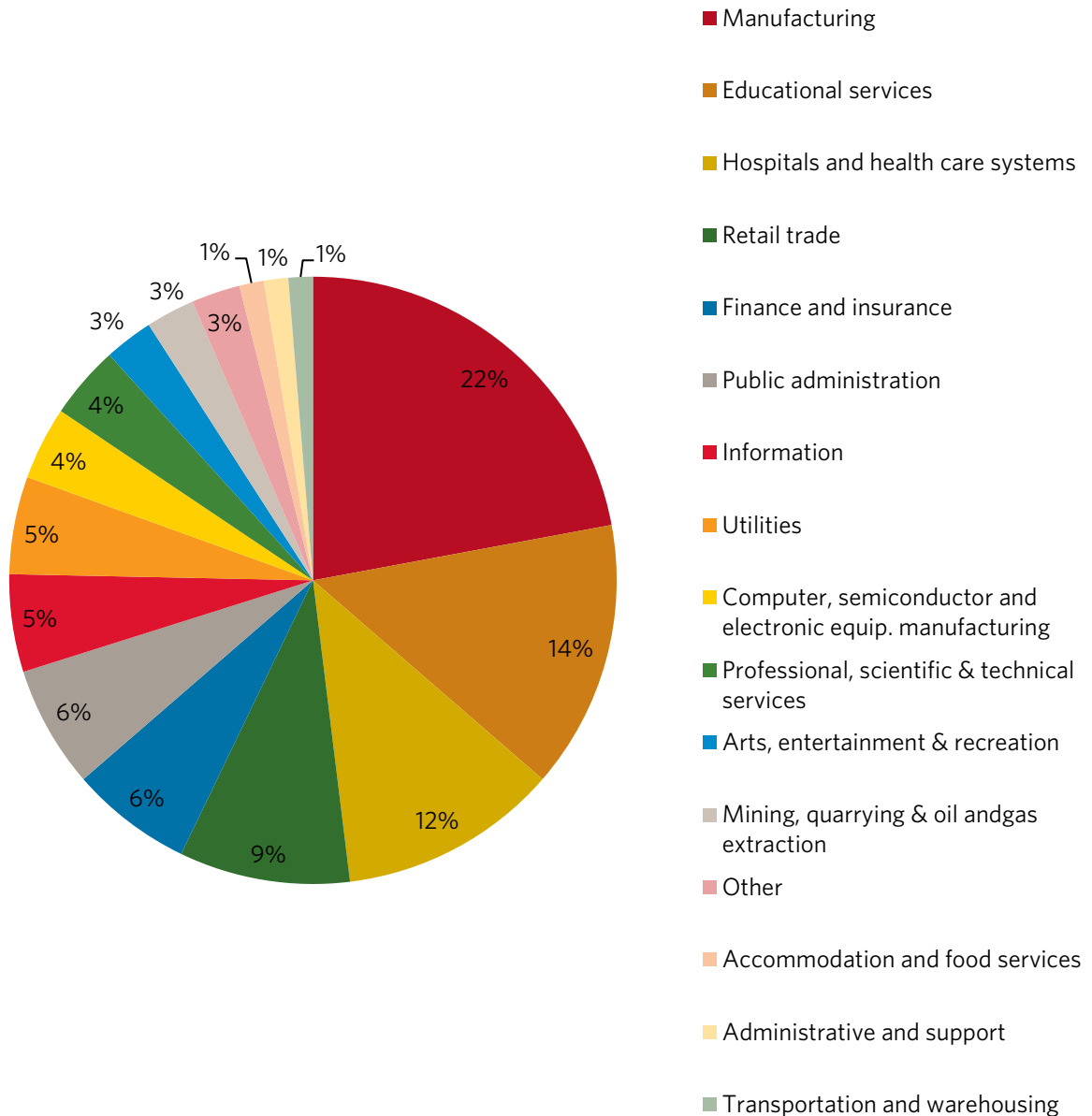
⁶ Gifford B, Geppert P, Zayance R, Lin R. The Impact of Medication Adherence on Workplace Productivity Outcomes. San Francisco: Integrated Benefits Institute. 2018. < <https://www.ibiweb.org/medication-adherence-improves-productivity-for-employees/>>

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Family and Medical Leave Laws, 2016. < <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-family-and-medical-leave-laws.aspx>>, Accessed January 11, 2019.

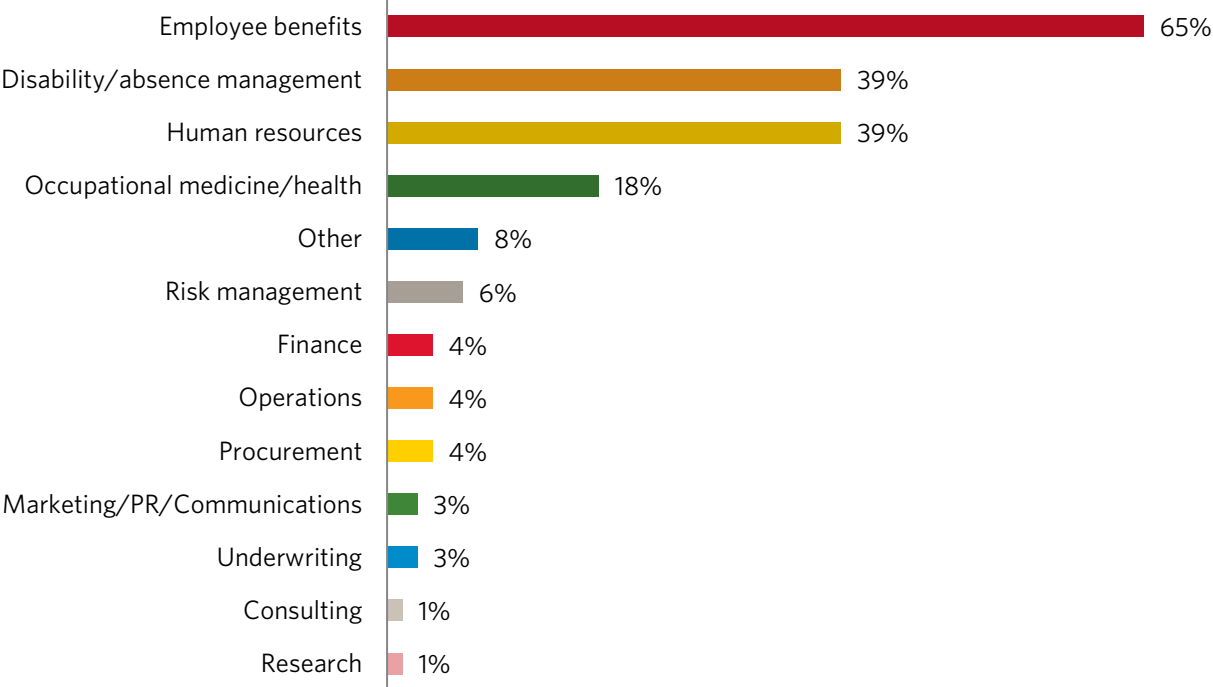
Appendix: Respondent characteristics

The appendix tables below summarize respondents' relevant characteristics. Respondents represent several industries, but nearly half were employed in the manufacturing, education, or healthcare industries. Two-thirds were responsible for employee benefits, while two in five were responsible for disability/absence management and human resources. Nearly all respondents worked at firms with more than 1,000 employees. Than half worked at firms with at least 10,000 employees.

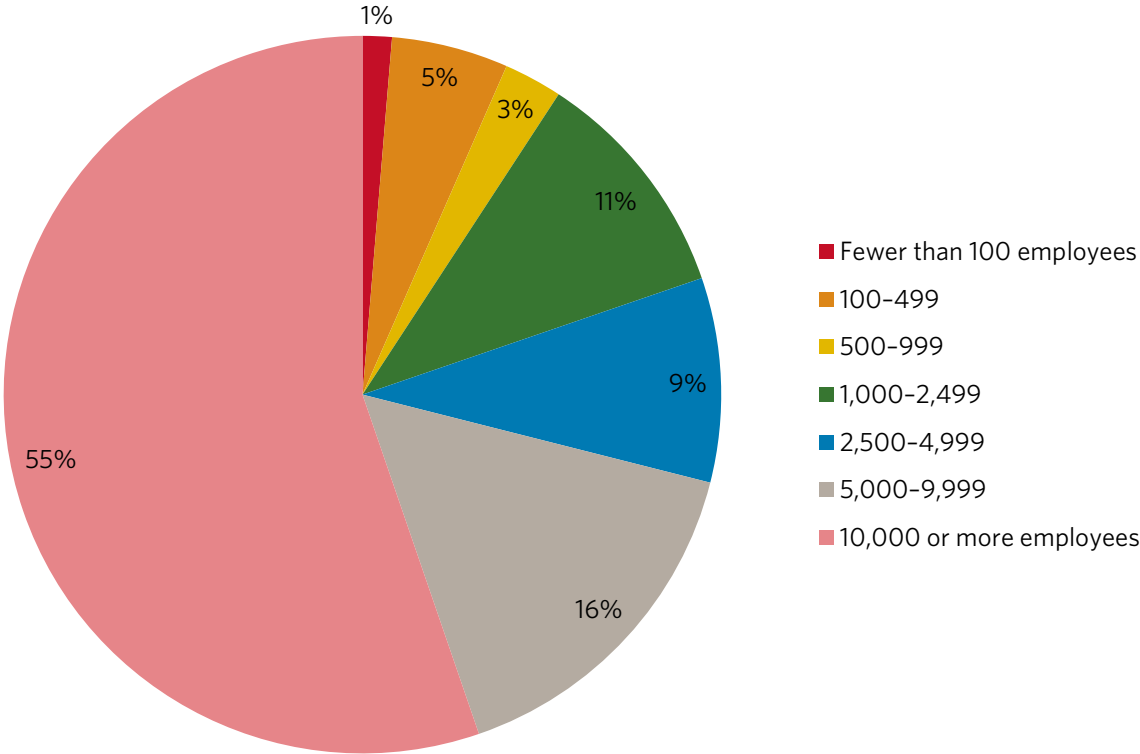
Appendix Table 1: Respondents' industry



Appendix Table 2: Respondents' functions (more than one may apply)



Appendix Table 3: Size of respondents' employer





About IBI

Founded in 1995, the Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI) is a national, nonprofit research and educational organization focused on workforce health and productivity. IBI provides data, research, tools and engagement opportunities to help business leaders make sound investments in their employees' health. IBI is supported by more than 1,100 member companies representing over 20 million workers.

IBI's Board of Directors includes the following leaders in health and productivity:

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