

# Workforce Education Trends Report

## Healthcare's Defining Moment:

Retention, Education, and the Skills  
to Meet the Future



# A Healthcare Workforce at a Crossroads



## Beyond Burnout



Five years after the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the healthcare system is still feeling the aftershocks. Burnout remains high, turnover is accelerating, and the demands on workers have only intensified.

## AI Reshapes Care With Promise and Pressure



At the same time, technology and AI are transforming the way care is delivered — offering promise, but also creating new skill demands and anxieties.

## Demand Amid Strain



An aging Baby Boomer population is driving unprecedented demand for care, even as economic pressures squeeze both organizations and their employees.

## Keeping Healthcare's Heart Strong



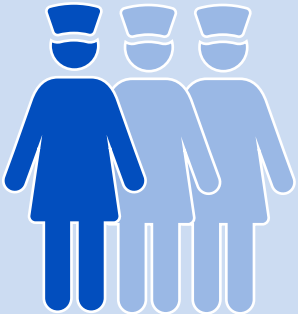
In this moment, the industry faces a defining question: how do we retain, support, and prepare the people at the heart of healthcare to meet both today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities?

# The 2025 Healthcare Workforce Research Uncovers that...

LESS THAN

**1 in 3**

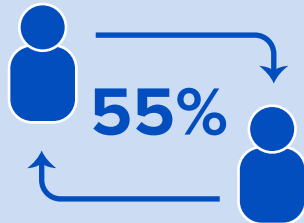
healthcare employees feel very valued by their current employer or very loyal to them



OVER

**HALF**

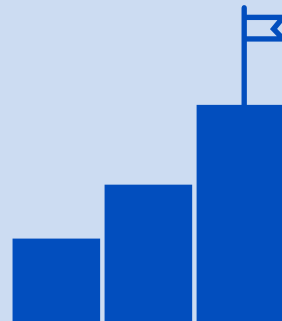
of healthcare employees (55%) admit that they'll look for job openings, interview for, or switch to a new role in the next year, either inside (38%) or outside their organization (40%)



ONLY

**1 in 5**

healthcare employees feel their employer is very invested in their long-term career success beyond their current role



MORE THAN

**8 in 10**

employees believe employers should be investing in their education, and employers agree



Employers also recognize that lacking career development opportunities leads to:

reduced employee loyalty

higher turnover

burnout

**3 in 4**

healthcare employees are interested in continuing their education, though only 54% report that their employer offers education benefits



YET

**75%**

of employers say they do offer these, and estimate that, on average



FEWER THAN

**2 in 5**

employees (39%) use the education benefits available to them

MONEY PRESENTS A  
KEY ROADBLOCK

**2 in 3**

employees indicated that their current income doesn't allow them to pay up front for out-of-pocket education expenses



BUT THIS IS WHERE  
EMPLOYERS CAN HELP

**6 in 10**

healthcare employees agree that they'd be more likely to stay with their employer if tuition support were provided



While employers identified retention and career growth among their top organizational priorities, less than half use tuition assistance or education benefits as a retention strategy



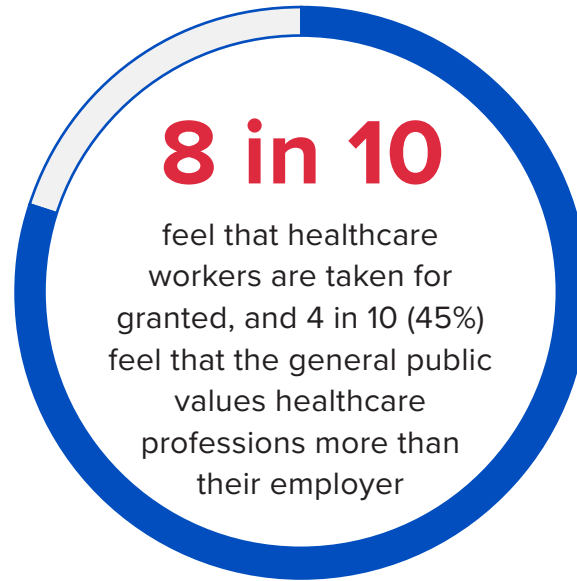
# Healthcare Meets its Breaking Point

Healthcare employees feel undervalued and unsatisfied – signaling that a profession built on providing care to others is running low on it themselves.

ONLY  
**37%** of employees are very satisfied  
with their current job

ONLY  
**32%** feel very valued by their current employer

ONLY  
**37%** feel very loyal to their current employer



**42%**  
of healthcare workers reported that they  
feel underappreciated by their manager  
or supervisor

(Indeed, 2024)

This begs the question:

**Do the people we trust  
with our lives not feel seen  
in their jobs?**



Healthcare professionals who feel valued by their organizations are 40% less likely to experience burnout.

([Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2021](#))

Nearly half of U.S. healthcare workers report feeling undervalued in their jobs.

([Keep Financial, 2023](#))

# Healthcare's Retention Crisis Is Here

Healthcare employees aren't just burned out — they're planning their exit.

MORE THAN

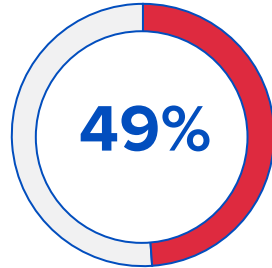
**HALF** 

(55%) admit that they'll look for job openings, interview for, or switch to a new role in the next year, either inside (38%) or outside their organization (40%)

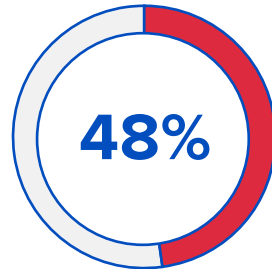
Employers report that younger, early-career employees and nursing assistants / personal care aides are the hardest individuals or roles to retain (43% and 42%, respectively).

## Top Reasons for Planning Their Exit

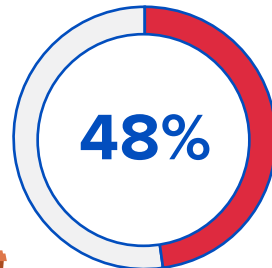
Those that plan to look for a new role cite the following reasons:



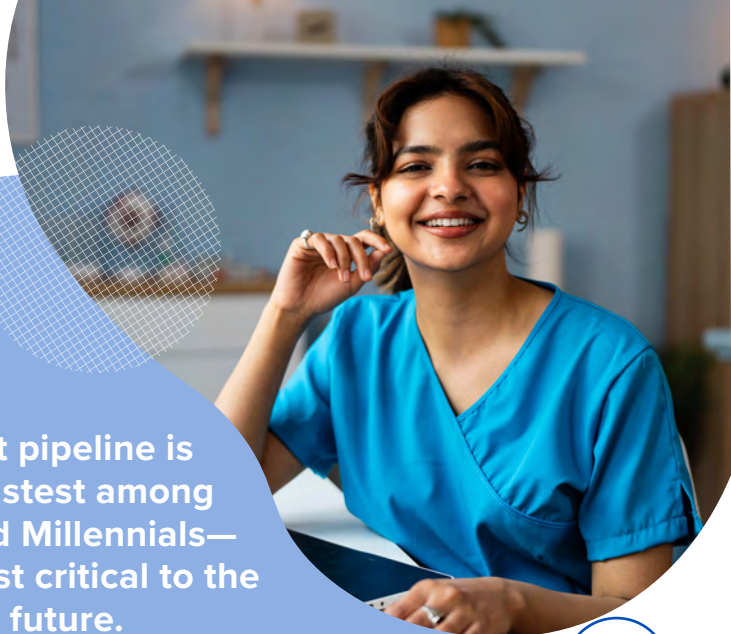
inadequate  
compensation and  
benefits



burnout or  
emotional fatigue



a lack of career  
advancement, personal  
development, or  
education opportunities



The talent pipeline is  
leaking fastest among  
Gen Z and Millennials—  
those most critical to the  
industry's future.



This isn't a future threat. It's already happening, and means an overburdened system that Americans depend on:

The U.S. is projected to have a shortage of nearly

**700,000**

critical healthcare workers, including physicians, RNs and LPNs by 2037.

(HRSA, 2024)

# Retention Starts with Investing in Employees' Future

In 2025, healthcare employees aren't just looking for a paycheck. They're looking for a path forward.



## KEY TAKEAWAY

Career development is no longer just a nice perk, but rather a loyalty driver.

ONLY

# 1 in 5

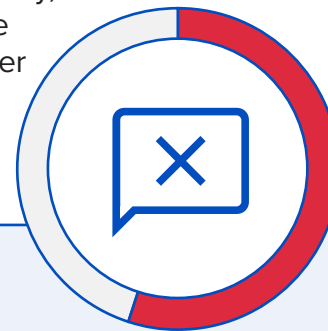
employees feel their employer is very invested in their long-term career success beyond their current role



AMONG THOSE WHO FEEL THAT THEIR EMPLOYER IS LESS INVESTED

# 55%

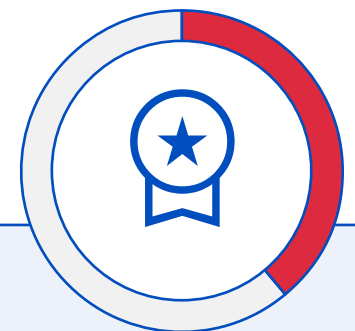
say that besides pay or salary, they feel this way because their employer doesn't offer or fails to communicate upskilling or education opportunities



YET, NEARLY

# 2 in 5

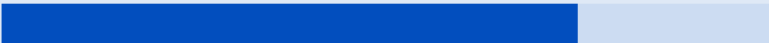
agree workforce training / education benefits are a reason they stay with their employer — a figure that rises to 61% among Gen Z



# Education Is the Currency of Career Mobility

In today's economy, healthcare workers aren't just pursuing education for personal enrichment, but also to get ahead financially.

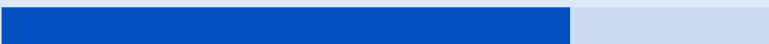
**3 in 4**



healthcare employees agree that additional education would significantly improve their career opportunities and salary potential

AND, NEARLY

**3 in 4**



healthcare employees agree that it's difficult to progress in their career in healthcare without education

**2 in 3**

are motivated to pursue additional learning to increase their salary or earning potential



**And we know that these equate to real terms:**

Among nurses, for example, each higher degree—from associate through doctorate—corresponds with a ~10% higher average salary.

(Elite Learning, 2020)





# Employees and Employers Agree: Education is Essential

On both sides of the workforce, one message is clear: education should be a built-in part of the job, not an extra burden for employees.

MORE THAN

8 in 10

believe their employers should be investing in their education

8 in 10

also agree that education benefits should be a standard part of employee compensation packages

3 in 4

feel that education shouldn't be a separate burden but rather built into how they work

And, employers agree:

NEARLY

9 in 10

agree that they have a responsibility to help employees advance in their careers



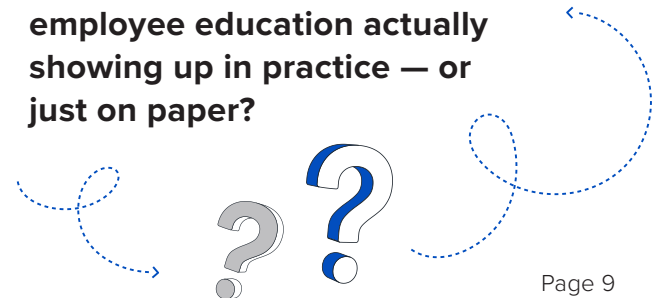
8 in 10

believe supporting employees' education is what is required to help employees advance in their careers



Despite near-universal agreement, the question remains:

**Is employer support for employee education actually showing up in practice — or just on paper?**

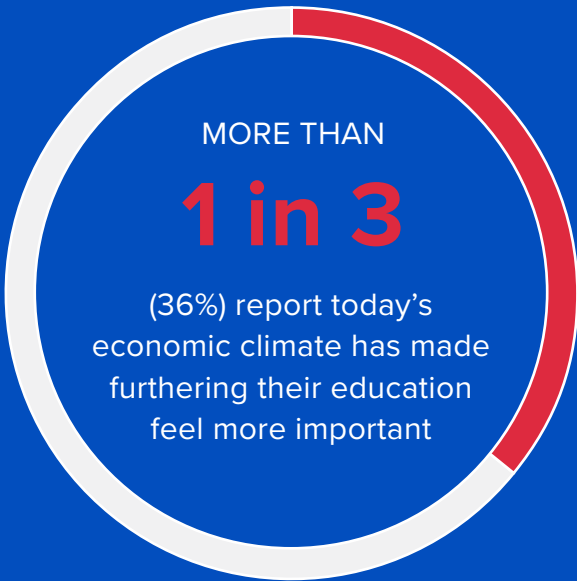




# A Tough Economy Further Increases the **Pressure** of **Upskilling**

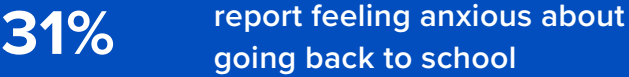
In 2025, the pressure for healthcare employees to continue leveling up is real, though financial constraints make this a challenging goal for employees on their own.

For many healthcare workers, additional education is now essential vs. optional. But the financial toll of pursuing additional education is significant.

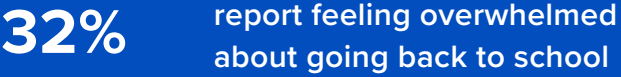


feel positively about the idea of going back to school

However



report feeling anxious about going back to school



report feeling overwhelmed about going back to school

NEARLY



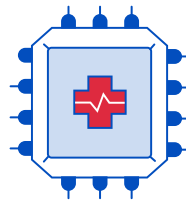
(58%) agree that they are hesitant to explore educational opportunities because they do not want to take on student debt

# In Addition to Economic Pressure, AI is Changing the Stakes

## As AI Accelerates, So Does the Burden of Keeping Up

The rise of AI in healthcare, as with many industries, is unfolding in real time. Healthcare employees feel the pressure to upskill quickly or risk falling behind.

Healthcare workers see AI as increasingly essential, but many lack the confidence in their ability to use AI tools.



# #1

AI is the #1 clinical / technical skill healthcare workers expect to need in the next five years (43%)

# 56%

report that AI skills are becoming more and more critical in the healthcare profession

# 42%

worry AI will replace some aspects of their job

YET ONLY

# 41%

agree that they feel comfortable using AI tools in their current role

AND OVER

# 1 in 3

(36%) feel behind their peers in non-healthcare industries when it comes to AI and emerging tech

Employers also identify AI skills training as an organizational priority (92%), but 60% report that it's difficult to find the right resources to provide training for these skills on the job.

For many employees, while the AI boom may be exciting, it's also anxiety-inducing. The expectation to adapt is growing, but the support to do so isn't keeping pace.



# A Benefits **Blind Spot**

Employees express high interest in education benefits — but too many employees don't know they exist.

The demand is clear:

**3 in 4**

healthcare employees are interested in continuing their education

**8 in 10**

are interested in participating in an employer-paid education benefits program

**Gen Z**

employees report particular interest in participating in employer-paid education benefits (89%)

Employees show interest primarily in non-degree education options:

- > earning professional certifications or licenses (59%)
- > taking individual courses for skill development (51%)
- > participating in short-term workshops or seminars (41%)

Whether it's a gap in access or awareness, the result is the same: high interest, low participation — yielding a potential missed opportunity to retain motivated talent in the healthcare field.

But, there is a disconnect...



ONLY  
**54%**

of employees report that their employer offers education benefits

YET

**75%**



of employers report that they do offer these benefits

# Education Benefits Fall Short in **Employee Follow-Through**

Although the benefits might be there, they're going unused. Uptake is low, especially for tuition assistance.

Offering education benefits may not be enough — they have to be seen, understood, and accessible. And right now, most of the workforce isn't using them. Employers estimate that :

FEWER THAN  
**2 in 5** (39%, on average) use the education benefits available to them.

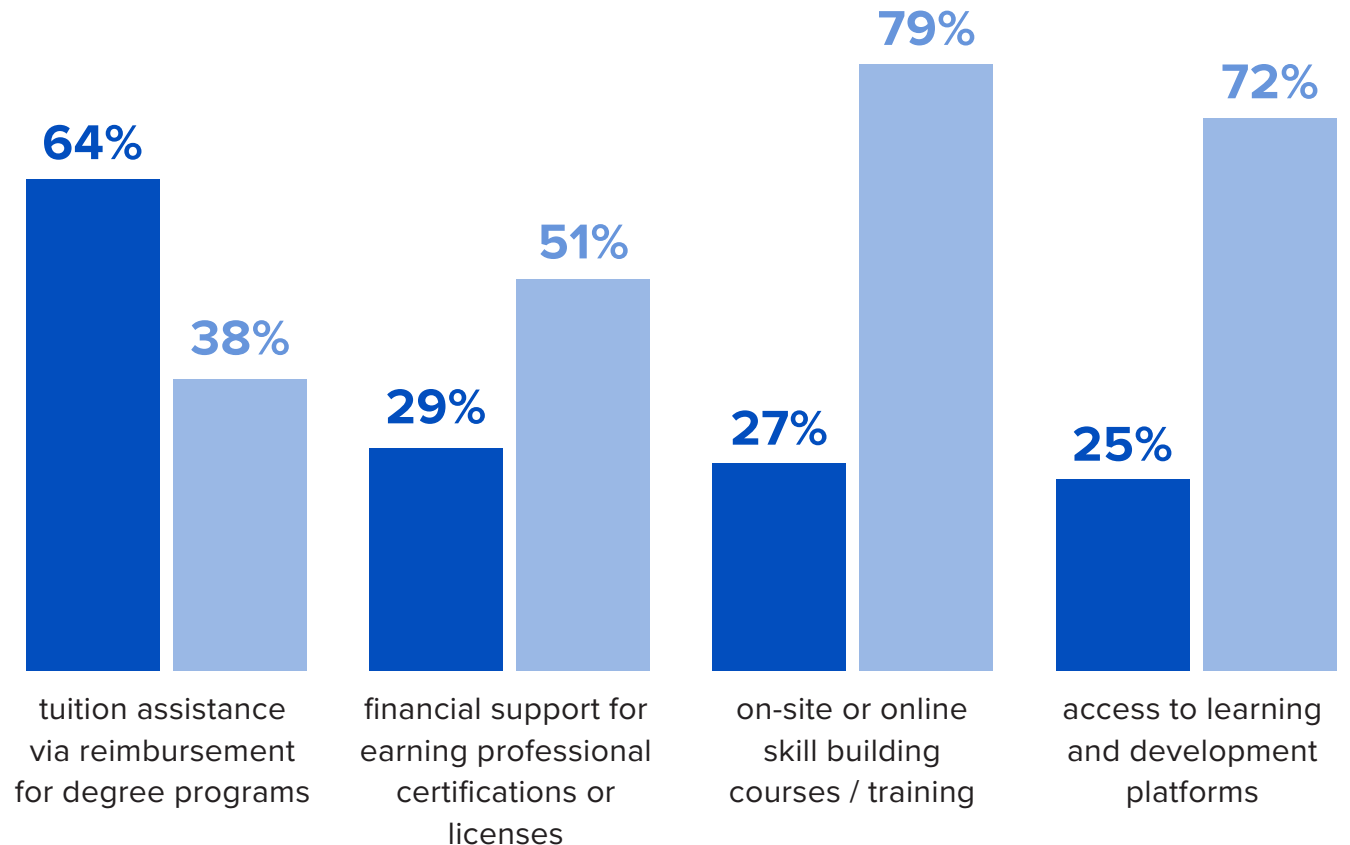
FEWER THAN  
**1 in 3** (31%) use tuition assistance specifically

Affordability drives engagement in benefits.

## Employee Use of Main Benefits Offered

■ Benefits offered

■ Benefits used




# Why Benefits Go Unused

## Time and money: The two biggest barriers to participation

Healthcare workers want to pursue more education — but real-world constraints are holding them back.

### Top cited barriers to pursuing additional education / training

- 1** lack of time due to work hours / responsibilities **(49%)**
- 2** having to cover the cost of tuition / program fees upfront **(44%)**
- 3** lack of time due to personal responsibilities **(40%)**




**2 in 3** 

employees indicated that their current income doesn't allow them to pay up front for out-of-pocket education expenses

**77%** 

agree that they'd be more likely to use employer-sponsored tuition benefits if they were given PTO or time during work hours to attend classes or do schoolwork

### What would make it easier to pursue education / training?

-  flexible shift / work scheduling to accommodate classes **(53%)**
-  financial assistance from their employer for the cost **(54%)**
-  reduced workload while enrolled in programs **(35%)**

Meeting employees where they are financially and logistically could remove barriers to accessing education benefits.

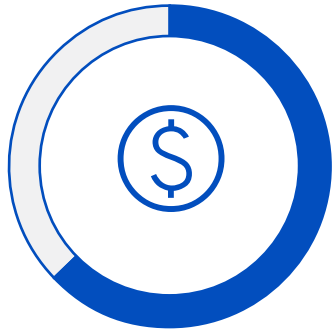


# When Costs and Time Get in the Way for Employees, **Employers Can Clear the Path**

Education benefits aren't just generous - they're strategic. They boost employee morale, loyalty, and long-term retention.



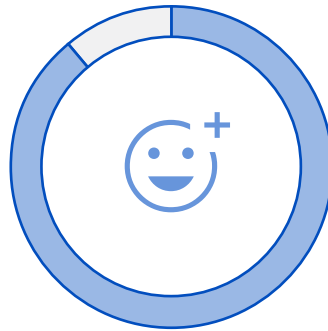
The case for education benefits and career development opportunities goes beyond individual advancement. Employers who offer them see real gains in morale and loyalty.



MORE THAN

**6 in 10**

of healthcare employees agree that they'd be more likely to stay with their employer if tuition support were provided



ALMOST

**9 in 10**

agree that education opportunities improve workforce morale

**Employers recognize that lacking career development opportunities has an impact in retention at their organization in the following ways:**

reduced employee loyalty **(57%)**

higher turnover among early-career employees **(54%)**

employee disengagement **(46%)**

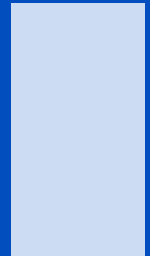
Investing in employees' careers benefits everyone – 9 in 10 employers report that it benefits employees' career (90%) as well as their organization (94%).

# Employers Know Why Employees Leave, but Only Half are Acting on It

Nearly half (48%) of employers recognize that a lack of advancement and education opportunities are leading reasons that healthcare employees leave their organization, yet too few are doing something about it.

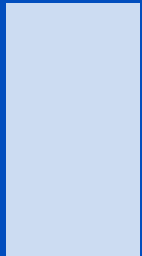
Top Organizational Priorities (Identified By Employers)

96%



employee retention

96%



career growth

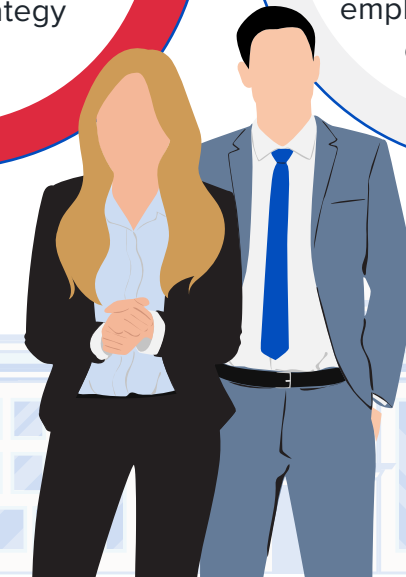
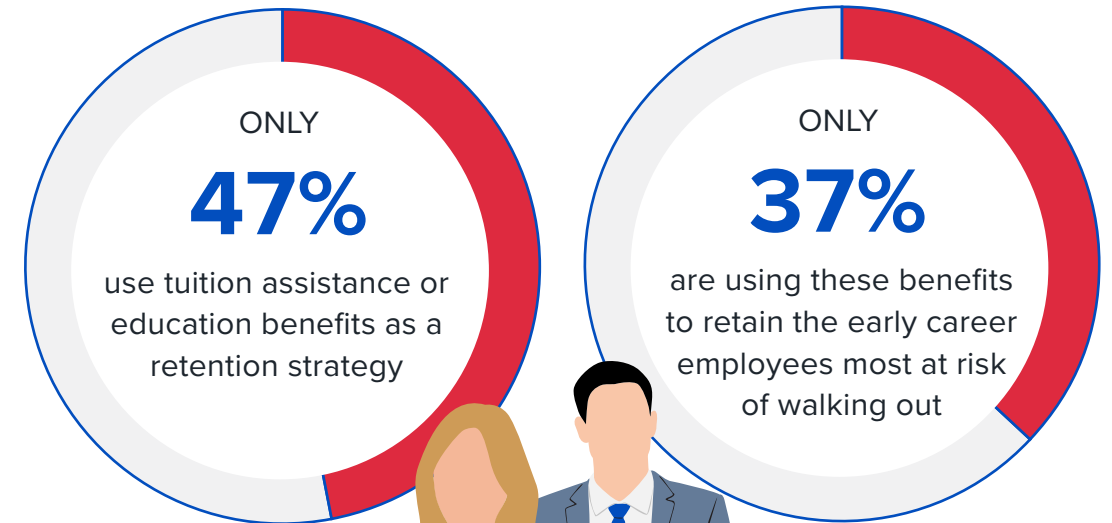
They indicate:

**YOUNGER OR EARLY CAREER WORKERS**

are the most difficult individuals or roles to retain (43%)

Awareness is high, but action is lagging. If education was treated as a core development tool, the healthcare workforce could reduce churn.

And yet...



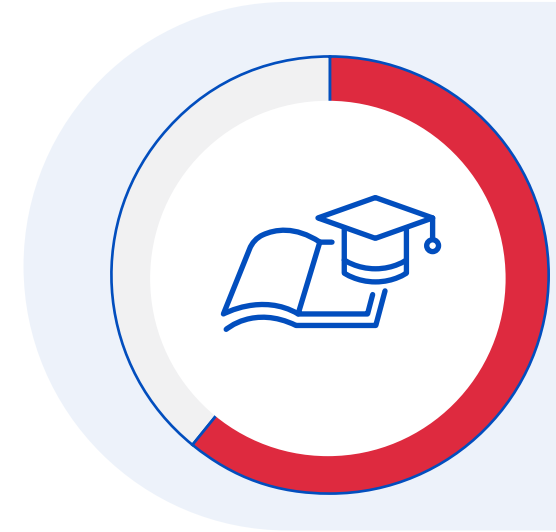


# Gen Z Healthcare Workers are Ready to Leave - **Education Might be What Keeps Them**

The healthcare talent pipeline is leaking fastest among Gen Z and Millennials, who are most likely to report looking for a new role in the coming year.

## 61%

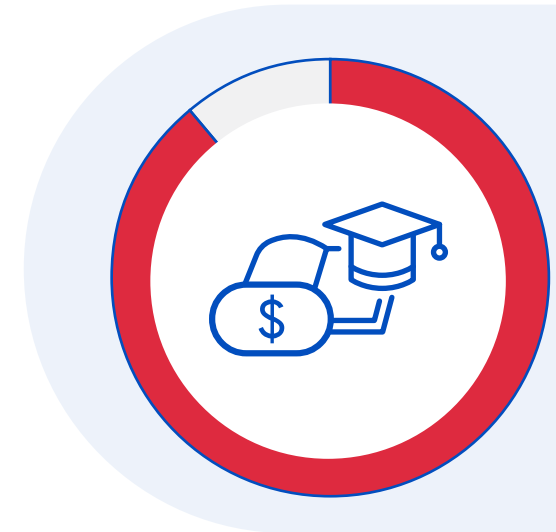
of Gen Z employees cite education benefits as a reason they stay with their current employer (**far above average**)



ALMOST

## 9 in 10

Gen Z employees express interest in participating in an education benefits program paid for by their employer



# Leaders' Advice: Make Education Benefits Work for Your People and Your Organization

When asked what advice they would give to other healthcare leaders looking to invest in education benefits as a retention strategy, employers say...

“

Do it. Invest in your employees and they will invest in you. Employees having the support from their boss to continue their education helps them follow their dreams... it will show in their work.

“

Allow those education benefits to be accessible up front. This will get more employees involved in the program and lower income employees can also afford to buy in.

“

Be clear that the goal is both personal improvement for the employee (benefits to them) and improvement in performance to the organization (benefits to the clinic).

# Implications for Healthcare Employers



## Make education benefits a retention priority

They're proven loyalty drivers, especially for early-career workers, yet too few employers are using them strategically.



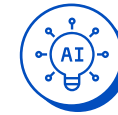
## Close the awareness gap

Many employees don't know benefits exist; better communication can unlock untapped retention potential.



## Pair funding with flexibility

Covering costs up front and offering time to learn removes the biggest barriers to participation.



## Turn AI anxiety into technical readiness

Rapid changes in healthcare tech mean employees need targeted upskilling to feel confident and stay competitive.



## Prove you're invested in their future

Demonstrating clear, long-term career growth opportunities strengthens loyalty and keeps talent engaged.

# Background & Objectives

The 2025 research updates and expands upon Strategic Education's research conducted since 2022 with a focus on healthcare. Over the past three years, the research has explored employee perspectives on workplace education, the role of the employer in facilitating education and the impact on employee satisfaction and loyalty.

In 2025, the survey explores four key focus areas:



## Education demand and employer impact

Tracking healthcare employees' interest in continued education, the role of the employer in enabling it, and how it affects job satisfaction and career growth.



## Barriers to access

Identifying the financial, logistical, and emotional challenges healthcare workers face in seeking workforce education.



## Effectiveness of tuition benefits

Assessing how education benefits influence employees' ability to pursue and complete educational programs.



## Emerging skill needs

Exploring the role of AI and other evolving technologies in shaping future upskilling demands in healthcare.

# Methodology

## Overview

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Strategic Education Inc. among 1504 healthcare employees (U.S. adults aged 18 years or older who are employed full-time in healthcare and provide direct patient care in care-giving roles) and 304 healthcare employers (U.S. adults aged 21 years or older who are employed full-time in healthcare and provide direct patient care in director or higher roles and are responsible for training, hiring, workforce development). The survey was conducted between June 26 - July 21, 2025.

Data for employees are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race / ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, occupation, household income to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Data for employers are weighted where necessary by employee-size categories to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys.

The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 3.7$  percentage points (employees) and  $\pm 7.9$  percentage points (employers) using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

### Survey Qualifications

#### Patient Care Employees in Healthcare

# n=1,504

- U.S. adults, 18+
- Employed full-time in healthcare and provide direct patient care
- Physicians / Nurses / NPs / PAs: ~40% of the sample
- All other professions: ~60% of the sample

#### Patient Care Employers in Healthcare

# n=304

- U.S. adults, 21+
- Employed full-time in healthcare organization providing direct patient care
- Director level or higher; responsibility or influence over hiring, training, and workforce development

