

● 2023 Alight international workforce and wellbeing mindset study

# Calming the crisis

Reigniting wellbeing momentum  
through AI-driven platforms

**alight**



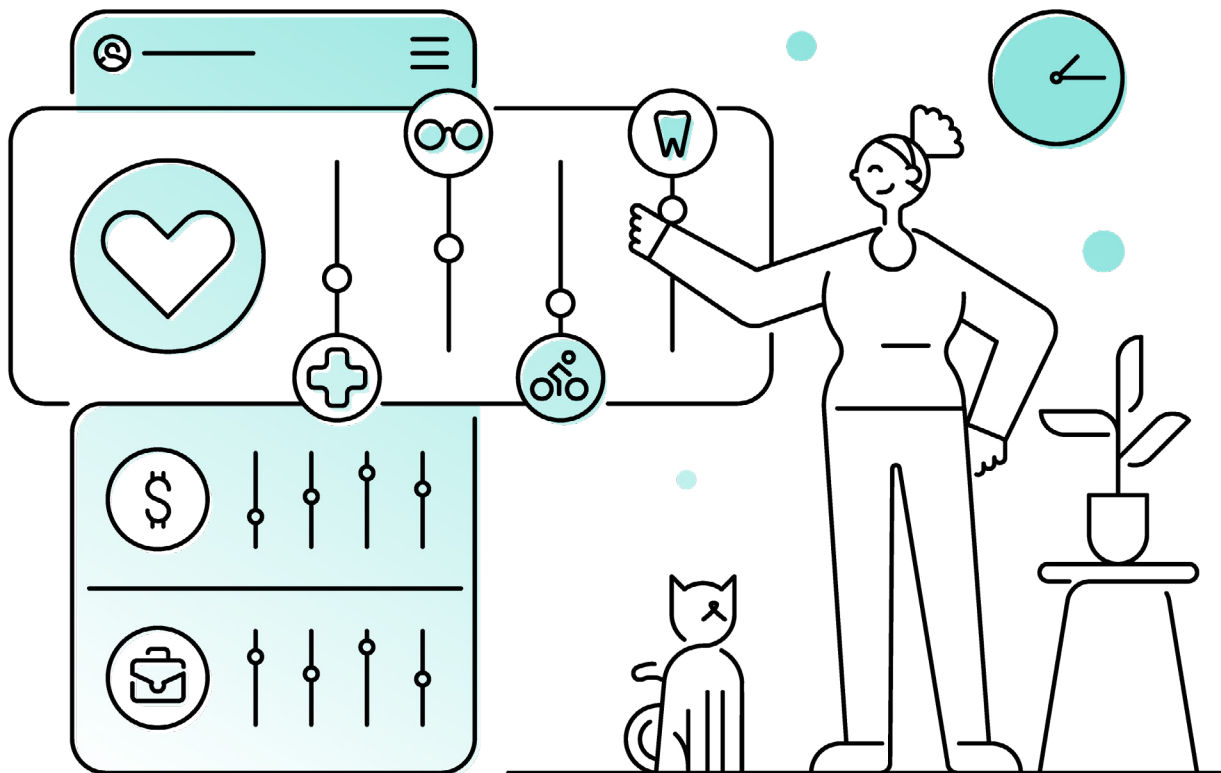
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Delivering a stellar employee experience is paramount to cultivating a high-performing workforce, but the ongoing wellbeing crisis is making it difficult for workers to achieve a healthy mind, body, wallet and life. More than ever, people expect their employers to provide tools, resources and guidance to help improve their wellbeing. Employers have ramped up wellbeing investments, but employees often fail to recognize their value or relevance.

Workers are rapidly losing faith in their ability to achieve their desired level of wellbeing and losing trust in their employer's willingness to support them in their wellbeing pursuits. Consequently, utilization of wellbeing programs is low, and employees are setting their sights on employers they feel will be more likely to have their back in their moments of need.

Wellbeing momentum has shifted, and companies are losing ground. Removing barriers to using wellbeing programs by investing in the right technology will help companies foster an environment where employees are inspired to do their best, where they feel connected to the purpose and values of the organization and where they appreciate the company's investment to help them attain optimal wellbeing in every facet of their lives.



## The perfect storm: wellbeing in crisis

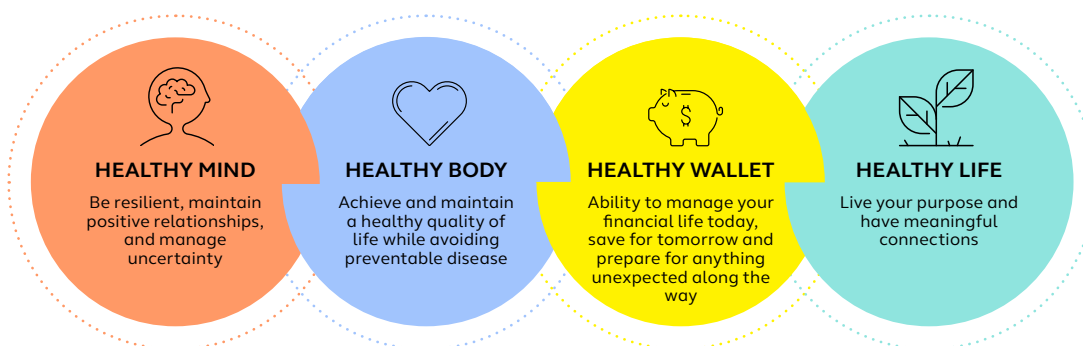
America is deep in the throes of a wellbeing crisis. After decades of steadily rising, life expectancy peaked at 78.9 years in 2014,<sup>i</sup> then began drifting downward, reaching a low of 76.4 — the lowest in nearly two decades — during the height of the pandemic in 2021.<sup>ii</sup> In the years since, that number has rebounded somewhat, reaching 77.5 averaged across all races and genders, although Native Americans/Alaska Natives and Black Americans still lag significantly behind at 67.9 and 72.8, compared to 77.5 for whites and 84.5 for Asians.<sup>iii</sup>

A significant factor in the decline of life expectancy is the rise in chronic diseases, like heart disease, cancer or diabetes. Six in 10 American adults have a chronic disease, while four in 10 have two or more chronic diseases.<sup>iv</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. obesity rates have nearly tripled over the past 60 years, with severe (morbid) obesity rising tenfold.<sup>v</sup> Nearly 70% of U.S. adults are either overweight or obese, which greatly increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some cancers.<sup>vi</sup>

Unhealthy habits play a significant role in the development of many chronic and acute conditions. While cigarette smoking reached a historic low in 2019, declining to 14% of the U.S. population,<sup>vii</sup> vaping continues to grow in popularity, especially among young males.<sup>viii</sup> Meanwhile, alcohol use, which surged during pandemic lockdowns, remains a major problem, with 28.8 million adults ages 18 and older (11.2% in this age group) suffering from Alcohol Use Disorder in the past year. Disturbingly, that number rises to 29.5 million Americans ages 12 and older.<sup>ix</sup>

It's not just physical wellbeing that has reached the crisis point. Americans are struggling in all four pillars of wellbeing — healthy mind, healthy body, healthy wallet and healthy life.

### Alight's Wellbeing Framework



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As with physical wellbeing, declining mental wellbeing has been on the minds of doctors, researchers and health organizations for many years. Over two decades ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified stress as “the health epidemic of the 21st century” and a 2019 HBO documentary, *One Nation Under Stress*, explored the connection between our increasingly stressed-out nation and the fall in U.S. life expectancy.<sup>x</sup>

The impact on the workplace is enormous, with an estimated 12 billion working days lost to depression and anxiety globally each year — a whopping \$1 trillion in lost productivity.<sup>xi</sup> In the U.S. alone, mental health issues cost companies \$47.5 billion in lost productivity due to unplanned absences alone.<sup>xii</sup>

Nine out of 10 U.S. adults say America is facing a mental health crisis,<sup>xiii</sup> and just 31% consider their mental health “excellent,” down from 43% two decades earlier.<sup>xiv</sup> Nearly a third report symptoms of depression or anxiety,<sup>xv</sup> while one in 25 have a serious mental illness, like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.<sup>xvi</sup> Most concerning, suicide rates have risen roughly 30% since 2000.<sup>xvii</sup>

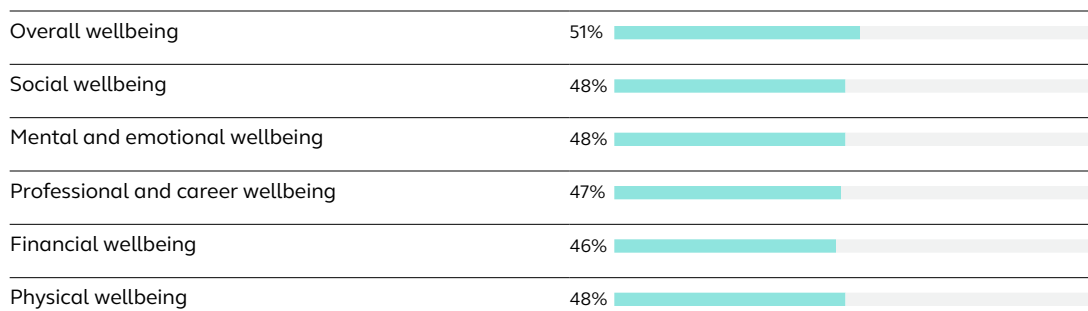
The mental health problem is even more pronounced among the nation’s youth, as nearly 10% of teens and tweens report anxiety so debilitating, it interferes with their everyday functioning.<sup>xviii</sup> Even more alarming, suicide rates among people ages 10 to 24 increased by 62% from 2007 through 2021,<sup>xix</sup> with nearly one-third of teen girls admitting they seriously considered suicide in 2021, a 60% increase since 2011.<sup>xx</sup>



Meanwhile, soaring inflation, high interest rates, rising health care costs and resumption of student loan payments have American workers struggling to keep their heads above water. While inflation has cooled significantly from a high of 9.1% in June 2022,<sup>xxi</sup> more than half (55%) of U.S.-based employees say they were living paycheck to paycheck in 2023, up from 43% in 2022.<sup>xxii</sup>

These trends are reflected in the 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study, which found American workers feeling less-than-enthusiastic about their personal wellbeing across all measures:

### Percent of employees who rate aspects of their wellbeing positively



Source: 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study

Sadly, these measures have stagnated, remaining virtually unchanged year-over-year. In other words, employers are not making any progress in moving the needle above 50%. With wellbeing efforts seemingly stuck, it's no wonder America is facing a perfect storm of wellbeing challenges. As employers increasingly look to deliver a stellar employee experience, while improving productivity and strengthening the bottom line, the need to provide personalized, value-added wellbeing tools and resources is greater than ever.

The good news is the majority of employees want to do better. **Over half (56%) say prioritizing their wellbeing is important to them. That number soars to 75% for employees who work at companies with a great employee experience.**<sup>xxiii</sup>

This raises an interesting question — do companies that support wellbeing deliver a better employee experience? Or do people who prioritize wellbeing have a more optimistic view of everything, including their employee experience? Either way, it points to the need for a comprehensive wellbeing strategy built around a commitment to care for the whole person in such a way that employees are not only aware of the wellbeing benefits available to them, but that they actually utilize them and recognize their value.

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## Dangerous disconnect

There's no doubt American workers — and their families — are struggling. Given a front row seat to the totality of employees' lives during the pandemic, employers increased their budgets for wellbeing programs substantially, up 22% from 2020 to 2021.<sup>xxiv</sup> In the aftermath of that unparalleled time, there was hope they would continue providing caring, flexible and healthy environments leading to improvements in employee wellbeing and an overall better employee experience. As COVID fears were replaced by recessionary fears, however, 40% of businesses either cut their wellbeing budgets or left them unchanged,<sup>xxv</sup> despite growing pressures on their people at work and at home.

Employees were left wondering whether wellbeing was merely a “topic du jour” given that the world was in a health crisis. Findings from our 2023 Mindset Study point in that direction, with 38% of U.S. workers reporting that their employers have discontinued a variety of wellbeing programs such as stress management, nutrition, parental and caregiver support and mortgage assistance in the past year. This may explain why just 43% say their company supports them with resources to better manage and improve their wellbeing — an 11% drop year-over-year.

Among the most concerning findings: less than half (46%) feel their employer would have their back if they experienced a wellbeing challenge, a 9% decrease from the previous year, and more than a quarter (27%) have lost trust in their employers' wellbeing efforts. Perhaps most disheartening, only 41% of employees believe their company genuinely cares about their wellbeing. That's a 14% drop year-over-year<sup>xxvi</sup> and something that should weigh heavily on the minds of all employers.

This could prove catastrophic for companies already struggling to recruit and retain much-needed talent, as a whopping 77% of employees say they would consider leaving a company that does not focus on wellbeing.<sup>xxvii</sup>

While many employees are convinced employers are letting them down when it comes to supporting their wellbeing aspirations, 81% of employers say their wellbeing programs are more important now than they were just one year ago. What's more, roughly half say they are likely to make additional investments in programs in the next 12 months.<sup>xxviii</sup>



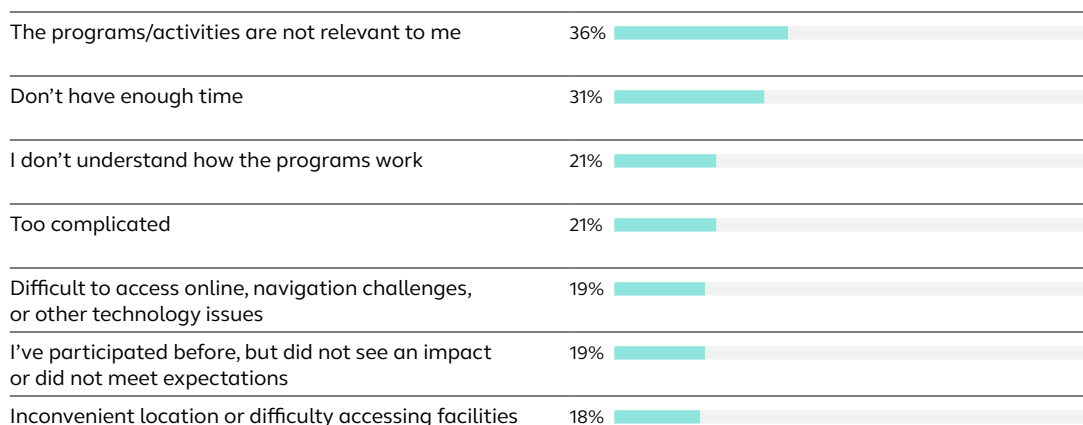
Employers are ramping up their investments across all four pillars of wellbeing, particularly in the following areas:

	Among those not already offering			Already offer
	Very likely to add this year	Moderately likely to add this year	Not at all likely to add this year	
<b>Healthy mind</b>				
Self-service digital/smartphone apps for everyday mental health	52%	33%	14%	61%
Mental/emotional/behavioral health coaching resources	50%	44%	6%	70%
<b>Healthy body</b>				
Weight management	56%	38%	6%	69%
Women's health	54%	31%	15%	50%
Exercise/fitness	50%	50%	10%	73%
Musculoskeletal	45%	41%	14%	58%
<b>Healthy wallet</b>				
Basics of financial markets, simple investing, etc	45%	38%	5%	63%
Help saving for specific life stages (emergency savings, home purchase, college savings, etc.)	41%	31%	22%	40%
Financial planning (creating a financial plan incorporating purchases, medical expenses, retirement savings, income planning, etc.)	39%	50%	17%	57%
Prioritize savings (emergency savings vs. debt reduction vs. retirement savings, etc.)	39%	41%	16%	43%
<b>Healthy life</b>				
Career and personal development and training programs including coaching, mentoring and leadership development	54%	23%	23%	76%
Employee Resource Groups (ERG's)	38%	38%	25%	85%
In person or virtual social gathering events	38%	38%	25%	85%
Family forming (adoption, surrogacy, fertility)	25%	56%	19%	70%

Source: 2023 Alight Hot Topics in Employer Wellbeing Programs Report

With employers expanding their offerings, why are so many employees feeling decidedly negative about the wellbeing investment being made in them? Their reasons center around three primary themes: lack of relevancy, complicated programs that are difficult to understand and not having time to engage with their employer's offerings.<sup>xxix</sup>

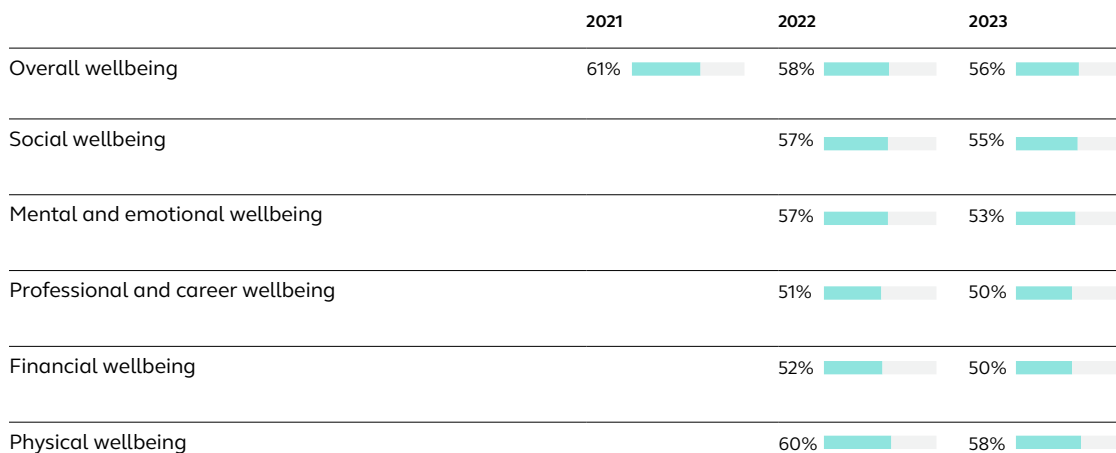
### Reasons for not participating in wellbeing programs



Source: 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study

This could easily explain why so many employees feel a lack of control when it comes to their personal wellbeing. If they don't understand what's available to them, how to use it or how it can improve their life, it's no wonder they feel like they don't have the power to advance their wellbeing. Across the spectrum, they actually feel less in control than they have in years past. In terms of their overall wellbeing, their sense of control has been steadily declining in recent years.

### I have a great deal of control over my personal wellbeing:



Source: 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study



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At the same time, only 65% of employees say they feel responsible for their own health and wellbeing — a 10% drop year-over-year. What's more, barely over half (52%) say they have the power and resources to improve their own health and wellbeing — a 14% drop year-over-year. This is a definitive sign that people are losing faith in their abilities and looking for someone to help them achieve their wellbeing goals.

All this adds up to one thing: employees need and want help with navigating and using their wellbeing benefits — and they are willing to share personal information with their employer to access more relevant resources. Two-thirds say they are comfortable sharing health information (69%) and financial information (65%) to receive unique guidance.<sup>xxx</sup> That's a clear indication employees recognize the value of personalized support to help them regain control and feel empowered to make smart, confident decisions to improve their wellbeing.



## Personalized, powerful technology

Personalization is key to a successful wellbeing initiative. Powering that personalization is technology, which has a major role to play by creating a single “front door” for all wellbeing solutions and benefits. A platform or portal that combines all aspects of wellbeing, provides timely prompts and aids decision-making helps employees connect the dots between each component of their total wellbeing.

Increasingly, organizations are tapping into powerful technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) to deliver highly visible, personalized employee experience programs and wellbeing support through the employee’s preferred vehicles. Through automated decision support and recommendation engines, AI drives employee utilization and engagement with their wellbeing benefits, nudging them toward the best and most cost-effective outcomes.

AI doesn’t merely direct people to the lowest-cost option, however. Through a combination of high-tech and high-touch, AI-driven employee experience platforms like Alight Worklife® give employees access to valuable information, while an experienced care team of certified nurses, clinicians, financial planners and others provide the human touch that is so necessary, especially when someone is in crisis. This empowers employees to take control of the situation and supports them through complex decisions that directly impact their physical, emotional and financial wellbeing.

### Technology’s role in support of the experience

What makes it valuable:

- #1: Tools to make better health decisions (50%)
- #2: Tools to make better financial decisions (46%)
- #3: Provides easy access to carriers and vendors (43%)
- #4: Has personalized content (41%)
- #5: Provides me with recommendations or suggestions (41%)

**86%**

feel it’s important to have a one-stop shop for all of their health, wealth and wellbeing needs

**87%**

feel it’s important to have a mobile app for all their health, wealth and wellbeing benefits

**60%**

with a mobile app (personalized or general) report they can manage benefits on the go and at the time of need

**35%**

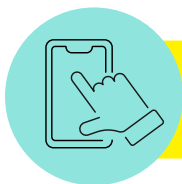
report having a wellbeing site available

**49%**

report using the wellbeing site if they have it available

**85%**

say it’s available if they used it (an increase from only 74% of those who simply had it available)



**only 4 in 10** have access to a personalized mobile app for all of the health, wealth and wellbeing benefits

Source: 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study

By utilizing AI-driven technology to personalize the experience, employers can maximize their wellbeing investments, improve outcomes and deliver a more positive employee experience. Rather than viewing the wellbeing program as a “tick-the-box exercise” designed to garner positive PR for the company, employees come to recognize the value it holds for their family and appreciate the investment their employer is making in them. Not only do they have a more positive view of their overall wellbeing, they also feel more productive and are more likely to recommend their employer to others.

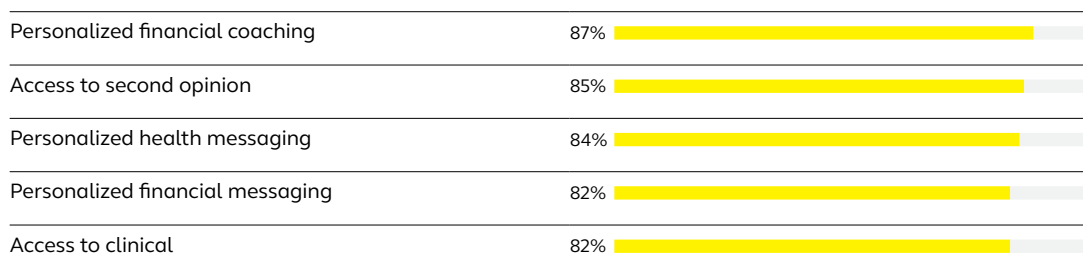
**Employees who have access to a full supportive employee experience feel better about themselves and their employer**



Source: 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study

Nearly 85% of employees who receive personalized health and wellness communications consider them valuable. When asked which forms of employer support they find most helpful, personalized financial coaching, personalized health messaging and personalized financial messaging all receive high marks.

**Most valuable types of employer support**



Source: 2023 Alight International Workforce and Wellbeing Mindset Study

Technology is a powerful enabler for personalizing communication, removing barriers and boosting utilization of wellbeing programs. AI-driven platforms deliver personalized nudges and guide employees in the moments that matter — big and small — so they can make the best use of their wellbeing benefits. The result is a healthier, happier, more engaged and productive workforce — and a stronger, more resilient bottom line.

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## How Alight can help

At Alight, we believe employers have no higher calling than to care for the wellbeing of workers and their families. We're leading the wellbeing revolution with Alight Worklife®, a high-tech platform with a human touch, delivering integrated wellbeing solutions and driving better outcomes for organizations and individuals.

Our AI-driven employee experience platform cuts through the noise and empowers your people to interact with their benefits in the moments that matter. Alight Worklife's suite of web-based tools guides employees through their wellbeing journey, allowing them to make more confident decisions, resulting in a happier, healthier, more productive workforce.

- 1 Alight Navigation and Clinical Guidance resources** empower employees to make smart healthcare decisions through expert medical opinions and personalized in-network provider recommendations for highly rated, cost-efficient providers with expertise in a specific diagnosis or procedure.
- 2 Alight Well** engages employees across multiple dimensions of wellbeing through team and individual challenges, incentives, digital therapeutics, gamification and activities. Employees also may connect with other resources for additional live coaching and support, resulting in better health and a greater sense of connectedness.
- 3 Alight Engagement Services** uses omnichannel campaigns and AI-based content, along with personalized decision support tools and interactive media to increase awareness, understanding and utilization of wellbeing programs, drive greater engagement in the moments that matter and power more confident decisions.
- 4 Alight Behavioral Health Guidance** matches each participant with a registered nurse and provides access to a range of clinicians: licensed mental health counselors, licensed social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioners, psychiatric advanced practice registered nurses and psychiatrists who provide a completely confidential, non-judgmental space to ask questions, be vulnerable, talk about their symptoms and understand the options for help.
- 5 The Alight Partner Network** combines content, solutions and delivery services to provide access to trusted providers across all four pillars of wellbeing — mind, body, wallet and life. From caregiver support and earned wage access to assistance with higher education funding and the day-to-day management of musculoskeletal conditions, this holistic offering delivers high-value options that promote employee wellbeing at every stage of life.

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The evidence is clear. Healthy, happy employees are more productive, engaged and loyal. This translates into a happier, healthier, more profitable organization. Reigniting wellbeing momentum and realizing ROI hinges on removing barriers to using programs, communicating authentically and providing crucial guidance in the moments that matter. The key is for employers to commit themselves fully to wellbeing and embrace powerful technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) to deliver personalized programs and support so employees can make confident decisions that will positively impact their lives at work and at home.

**Employees are prioritizing wellbeing, but they need your help. An AI-driven platform is key to empowering them to succeed.**

## About Alight

Alight is a leading cloud-based human capital technology and services provider that powers confident health, wealth and wellbeing decisions for 36 million people and dependents. Our Alight Worklife® platform combines data and analytics with a simple, seamless user experience. Supported by our global delivery capabilities, Alight Worklife is transforming the employee experience for people around the world. With personalized, data-driven health, wealth, pay and wellbeing insights, Alight brings people the security of better outcomes and peace of mind throughout life's big moments and most important decisions. Learn how Alight unlocks growth for organizations of all sizes at [alight.com](https://alight.com).

**Powering confident decisions, for life.**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/interactive/2023/american-life-expectancy-dropping/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/12/22/1144864971/american-life-expectancy-is-now-at-its-lowest-in-nearly-two-decades>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr031.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/index.htm>

<sup>v</sup> [https://usafacts.org/articles/obesity-rate-nearly-triples-united-states-over-last-50-years/#:~:text="](https://usafacts.org/articles/obesity-rate-nearly-triples-united-states-over-last-50-years/#:~:text=)

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/index.html>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/acs-report-smoking-rates-historically-low-but-other-cancer-related-behaviors-need-improvement.html>

<sup>viii</sup> [https://www.singlecare.com/blog/news/vaping-statistics/#:~:text="](https://www.singlecare.com/blog/news/vaping-statistics/#:~:text=)

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<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/404174/economic-cost-poor-employee-mental-health.aspx>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/05/health/cnn-kff-mental-health-poll-wellness/index.html>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/467303/americans-reported-mental-health-new-low-seek-help.aspx>

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>

<sup>xvii</sup> <https://time.com/6271257/suicide-rates-increased-2021/>

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Mental-Health-and-Teens-Watch-for-Danger-Signs.aspx>

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<sup>xx</sup> <https://time.com/6255143/teen-girls-sadness-sexual-violence-cdc/>

<sup>xxi</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/10/12/heres-the-inflation-breakdown-for-september-2023-in-one-chart.html>

<sup>xxii</sup> <https://www.metlife.com/workforce-insights/2023-employee-benefit-trends/>

<sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.alight.com/thought-leadership/2023-international-workforce-wellbeing-study>

<sup>xxiv</sup> <https://hrexecutive.com/how-much-are-employers-investing-in-wellness-programs/>

<sup>xxv</sup> <https://www.iirsm.org/special-report-future-wellbeing>

<sup>xxvi</sup> <https://www.alight.com/thought-leadership/2023-international-workforce-wellbeing-study>

<sup>xxvii</sup> <https://www.gympass.com/en-us/resources/report>

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