

## Small but Mighty: An Analysis of the Small Employer Sample in the Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey

By Jake Spiegel and Bridget Bearden, Employee Benefit Research Institute

---

### AT A GLANCE

In previous work, the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) has investigated the role of financial wellbeing benefits within the context of large employers (those with 500 or more workers). EBRI's Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES) has shown that large employers use these benefits to help their workers improve their day-to-day finances as well as to drive business outcomes, such as higher retention, lower absenteeism, higher productivity, and reduced medical or mental health claims. However, little is known about the extent to which smaller firms — those with fewer than 100 workers — engage with financial wellbeing benefits. To gain insights into smaller employers, EBRI fielded a version of the FWES to benefits decision makers at small employers.

In some cases, small employers appear to be similar to their larger counterparts. Both large and small employers believe that they have a role to play in improving workers' wellbeing across multiple dimensions, and they both self-rate themselves highly in accomplishing those goals. While small employers are not a homogenous group, they do systematically differ from larger employers in several important ways.

***Both large and small employers agreed that they have a responsibility in helping their employees —***

Across three different dimensions of wellbeing — mental health and emotional, health and physical, and financial — the vast majority of benefits decision makers believed that there is a role for the company to play in ensuring that their workers are well.

***Both large and small employers have aimed to address day-to-day financial issues*** — Previous editions of the FWES, focusing on large employers, found that employers were primarily focused on addressing retirement preparedness with their financial wellbeing initiatives until relatively recently. After a period of above-trend inflation, large employers appear to have broadened the focus of their financial wellness initiatives to include helping workers deal with the high cost of living, financial-related stress, and day-to-day living expenses. This survey's focus on small employers reveals that they, too, have been concentrating on addressing day-to-day financial issues with their financial wellbeing benefits.

***Costs of financial wellness initiatives may be a barrier for wider adoption of financial wellbeing***

***initiatives*** — Nearly three in 10 small employers cited costs to the employer as a challenge in offering financial wellness initiatives, and nearly one-quarter cited costs to the employee as a challenge. Additionally, small employers were more likely than large employers to report that their financial wellbeing initiatives were fully paid by workers, which may have an adverse effect on enrollment.

***Smaller employers tended to lag behind large employers in their propensity to offer core, voluntary, and financial wellbeing benefits*** — Small employers were less likely than large employers to offer health insurance; a defined contribution retirement plan; dental or vision benefits; or supplemental benefits such as accident insurance, critical illness insurance, and supplemental life insurance.

***Both large and small employers viewed their benefits as successful in both improving the wellbeing of workers and in driving business outcomes*** — A majority of both large and small employers viewed their efforts in improving worker physical, financial, emotional, and social wellbeing as very good or excellent. Also, a majority of small employers viewed their financial wellness benefits as very effective in driving certain business goals, such as improving worker productivity, attracting/retaining workers, improving employee satisfaction, and reducing absenteeism and tardiness.

EBRI was able to fund the development of this research thanks to generous support from Paychex.

Jake Spiegel is research associate II, Health and Wealth, at the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI). Bridget Bearden is research and development strategist at EBRI. This *Issue Brief* was written with assistance from the Institute's research and editorial staffs. Any views expressed in this report are those of the authors and should not be ascribed to the officers, trustees, or other sponsors of EBRI, Employee Benefit Research Institute-Education and Research Fund (EBRI-ERF), or their staffs. Neither EBRI nor EBRI-ERF lobbies or takes positions on specific policy proposals. EBRI invites comment on this research.

**Suggested Citation:** Spiegel, Jake, and Bridget Bearden, "Small but Mighty: An Analysis of the Small Employer Sample in the Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey," *EBRI Issue Brief*, no. 635 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, May 15, 2025).

**Copyright Information:** This report is copyrighted by the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI). You may copy, print, or download this report solely for personal and noncommercial use, provided that all hard copies retain any and all copyright and other applicable notices contained therein, and you may cite or quote small portions of the report, provided that you do so verbatim and with proper citation. Any use beyond the scope of the foregoing requires EBRI's prior express permission. For permissions, please contact EBRI at [permissions@ebri.org](mailto:permissions@ebri.org).

**Report Availability:** This report is available on the internet at [www.ebri.org](http://www.ebri.org)

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
The Current State of Financial Wellbeing Programs at Small Employers .....	5
Strategies and Implementation.....	7
Concern for Worker Wellbeing .....	8
Top Priorities.....	10
Benefit Offerings .....	11
Measuring and Defining Success.....	14
Costs and Budgets.....	15
Engagement With Financial Wellbeing Benefits .....	17
Challenges and Hurdles.....	18
Conclusion .....	19
Endnotes .....	19

## Figures

Figure 1, Current Approach in Offering Financial Wellness Initiatives .....	6
Figure 2, Primary Approach to Offering Financial Wellness Initiatives.....	6
Figure 3, Number of Financial Wellbeing Benefits Currently Offered.....	7
Figure 4, Financial Wellbeing Strategies .....	8
Figure 5, Helped Design Financial Wellness Strategy .....	8
Figure 6, Company's Level of Concern About Employees' Financial Wellbeing .....	9
Figure 7, "Your Company Has a Responsibility to Make Sure Employees Are..." .....	9
Figure 8, Top Issues to Address With Financial Wellness Initiatives .....	10

Figure 9A, Top Priority of Offerings.....	11
Figure 9B, Top Priority of Offerings.....	11
Figure 10, Core Benefits Offered.....	12
Figure 11, Voluntary Benefits Offered.....	12
Figure 12, Financial Wellbeing Benefits Currently Offered or Planned to Be Offered .....	13
Figure 13, Personal Financial Wellbeing Benefits Offered or Planned to Be Offered by Employer Size .....	13
Figure 14, Data Tracked to Evaluate Effectiveness of Offerings .....	14
Figure 15, Effectiveness of Financial Wellness Offerings — Share of Firms Rating Efforts as “Very Effective” .....	15
Figure 16, Rating of Company’s Efforts to Improve Employees’ Wellbeing as “Excellent” or “Very Good” .....	15
Figure 17, Paying for Initiatives .....	16
Figure 18, Anticipation of Organization’s Financial Wellness Budget in Next One to Two Years .....	16
Figure 19A, Employee Engagement With Benefits Increased in Past 12 Months .....	17
Figure 19B, Employee Engagement With Benefits Increased in Past 12 Months .....	17
Figure 20, Top Eight Challenges in Offering Financial Wellness Benefits .....	18
Figure 21, Bottom Six Challenges in Offering Financial Wellness Benefits .....	18

# Small but Mighty: An Analysis of the Small Employer Sample in the Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey

*By Jake Spiegel and Bridget Bearden, Employee Benefit Research Institute*

## Introduction

Large companies are often at the leading edge of financial wellness benefits. As a result, there is a growing body of research examining benefit offerings at large employers. However, less is known about financial wellbeing benefits at smaller firms. To that end, the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) fielded a version of the Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES) — a survey that has typically examined firms with 500 employees or more — to benefits decision makers at firms with fewer than 100 employees. While a majority of employees in the United States (55 percent) work for a company that employs over 500 workers, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that about 98 percent of businesses in the United States employ fewer than 100 workers.<sup>1</sup> Understanding how small businesses conceptualize, design, implement, prioritize, and analyze their financial wellbeing benefits is therefore essential to developing a complete understanding of the financial wellbeing benefits offered in the workplace.

## Methodology

The 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES) was fielded from September through December 2024. All respondents worked full time at companies employing between 1–99 employees and were either interested in offering financial wellness programs or currently offering them.

Additionally, respondents were required to have at least a medium amount of influence on their company's benefits programs and the selection of financial wellness benefits. Respondents were also required to hold positions such as executive, owner, or manager in the areas of human resources, compensation, or finance. The small employer sample consisted of 405 respondents working at firms with fewer than 100 workers.

## The Current State of Financial Wellbeing Programs at Small Employers

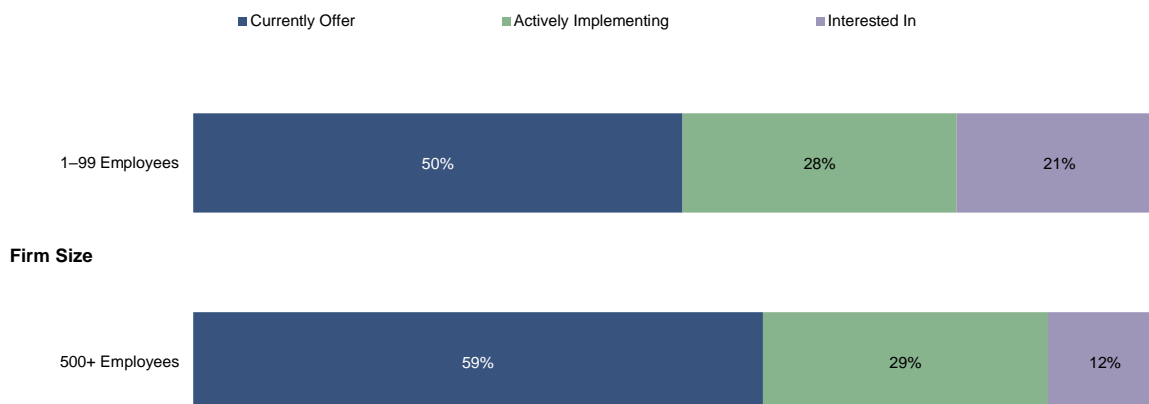
Half of the firms surveyed reported currently offering financial wellness initiatives, with another 28 percent actively implementing them (Figure 1). These proportions are slightly lower than those observed among larger companies: 59 percent of firms employing 500 or more workers responded that they were currently offering financial wellness initiatives, with another 29 percent working on actively implementing them. An additional 21 percent of small employers reported not currently offering financial wellness initiatives but having an interest in offering them, nearly 10 percentage points more than the share of larger employers that reported the same (12 percent).

Smaller employers were also more likely to report that their primary approach in offering financial wellness initiatives took the form of a one-time initiative (19 percent) or a pilot program (20 percent) than larger employers (Figure 2). Larger employers, meanwhile, were much more likely to report that their financial wellness initiatives were offered in the form of a holistic program. The higher propensity for smaller employers to offer financial wellness benefits as a one-time initiative or a pilot program may reflect smaller employers lacking the financial resources of larger employers. Small employers may know they need to offer financial wellness initiatives to attract and retain a high-quality work force, but they also face financial constraints that nudge them to offer financial wellness initiatives in more limited forms, like pilot programs or one-time initiatives.

Each firm has its own definition of what constitutes a financial wellbeing benefit. One firm may consider their retirement plan to be part of their financial wellbeing program — helping workers retire comfortably and on time can be seen as constituting part of a broader strategy to ensure financial wellness — while another might view retirement benefits simply as “table stakes” they need to offer in order to attract workers and not explicitly as part of a broader effort to improve financial wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> As such, in an attempt to develop a better understanding of how many financial wellbeing benefits firms offer, EBRI asked benefits decision makers about benefits commonly thought of as pertaining to financial

wellbeing that they currently offered.<sup>3</sup> On average, small employers offered slightly fewer of the financial wellbeing benefits listed than large employers. The average small employer offered 5.4 financial wellbeing benefits compared with 5.6 for large employers (Figure 3). Further, this survey found that a larger share of small employers reported currently offering zero financial wellbeing benefits than did larger employers (16 percent vs. 8 percent). However, a slightly higher share of small employers offered eight or more financial wellbeing benefits compared with larger employers (34 percent vs. 30 percent). This may be a result of a slice of high-revenue niche businesses, such as small consultancies or law offices, offering a particularly rich suite of benefits to their workers.

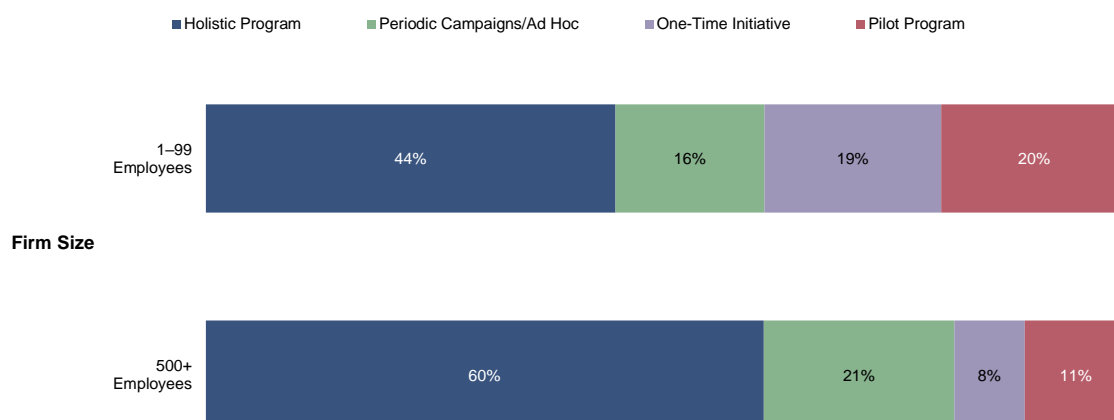
Figure 1  
Current Approach in Offering Financial Wellness Initiatives



Q5. Which statement most accurately reflects your company's current approach in offering financial wellness initiatives to employees? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

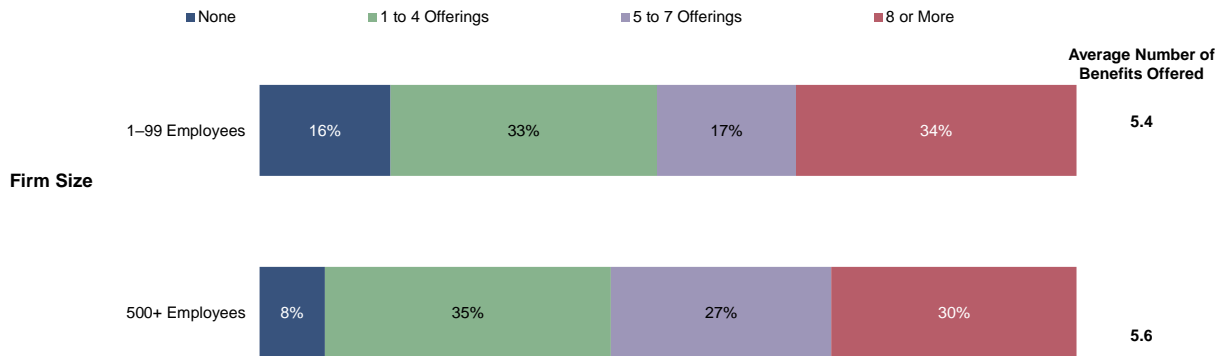
Figure 2  
Primary Approach to Offering Financial Wellness Initiatives



Q103. How do you or might you offer your financial wellness initiatives? Please select your primary approach. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

**Figure 3**  
**Number of Financial Wellbeing Benefits Currently Offered**



Q15. Does your company offer or plan to offer any of the following financial wellbeing or debt assistance benefits to employees? (Small Employer Sample n=405)  
Q20. Which of the following does your company offer to help employees with personal financial challenges? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

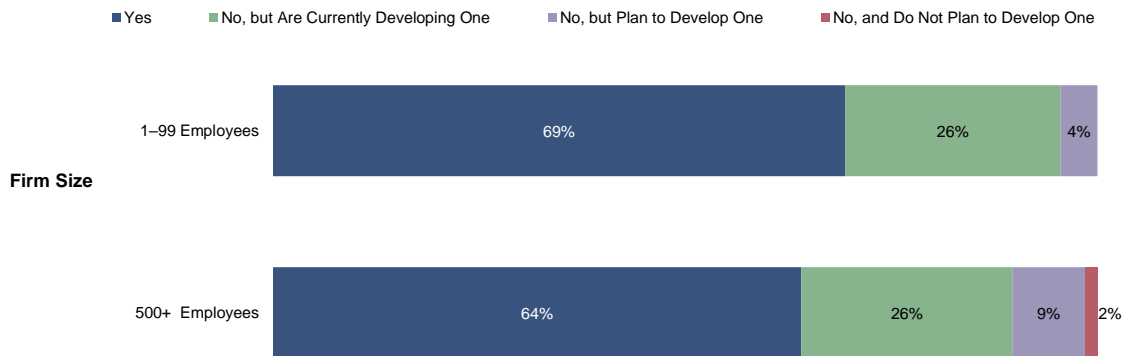
Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Strategies and Implementation

To maximize the impact of the benefits they offer, many firms develop strategies for designing and implementing their financial wellbeing offerings. Indeed, 69 percent of small firms and 64 percent of large firms indicated that they had developed or were in the process of developing a strategy for their financial wellness offerings (Figure 4). Another 26 percent of small employers surveyed were in the process of developing a strategy, identical to the share of large employers. No small employers responded that they did not have a strategy and did not plan to implement one, while 2 percent of large employers did not plan to develop a strategy.

Among firms that responded that they had or were developing a formal strategy, small employers differed from large employers in the sources they turned to for developing and designing their company's financial wellness strategy. Like larger employers, small employers frequently responded that the design and development of a financial wellness strategy was performed in-house (Figure 5). They were less likely than their larger counterparts to turn to benefits consultants, financial wellness benefits vendors, or retirement plan providers. Indeed, only 62 percent of smaller employers had help from an outside source, compared with 96 percent of larger employers, which may reflect cost constraints, a lack of organizational capacity, or both.

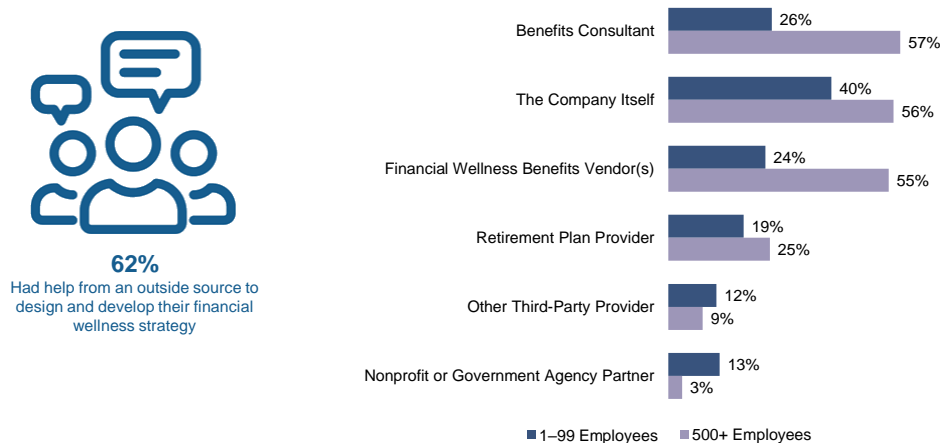
Figure 4  
Financial Wellbeing Strategies



Q129: Does your company have a strategy for improving your employees' financial wellness? (Small Employer Sample n=405).

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 5  
Helped Design Financial Wellness Strategy  
*Among those with a strategy or developing one*



Q105: Who helped design and develop your organization's financial wellness strategy? Please select all that apply. (Have or are developing a strategy, Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

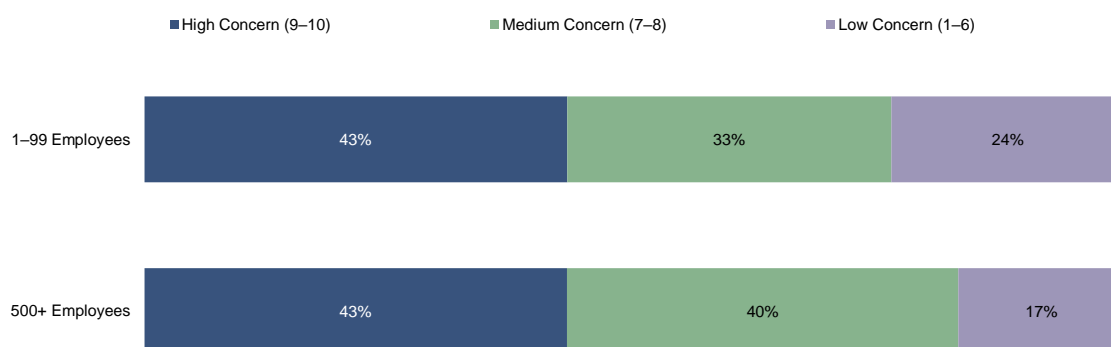
## Concern for Worker Wellbeing

Like their counterparts at large employers, benefits decision makers at small employers expressed concern over their employees' financial wellbeing. In fact, virtually identical shares of benefits decision makers at small employers and large employers reported having a high level of concern for their workers' financial wellbeing, defined as a nine or 10 on a 10-point scale (Figure 6). Small employers were, however, slightly more likely than large employers to report having a low level of concern for their workers' financial wellbeing. Benefits decision makers at some small employers may not have sufficient resources for financial wellness benefits, and, as a result, these topics may not be top of mind for them.



Yet, a vast majority of small employers believe that they have a role to play in their workers' wellbeing. Across three different dimensions — mental and emotional health, physical health, and financial wellness — both large and small employers overwhelmingly reported a belief that their company has a responsibility to ensure workers are well (Figure 7). While smaller employers lagged behind their larger counterparts slightly, nearly nine in 10 agreed with the sentiment. EBRI's Workplace Wellness Survey indicates that employees feel similarly, believing that their employer has a responsibility to make sure they are well across the same three dimensions. With employee buy-in and a clear sense of the responsibilities they owe to workers, employers have an opportunity to foster worker wellbeing meaningfully.

Figure 6  
**Company's Level of Concern About Employees' Financial Wellbeing**



Q25\_1. Please rate your company's level of concern about employees' financial wellbeing. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 7  
**"Your Company Has a Responsibility to Make Sure Employees Are..."**  
Percentage Agree



Q123. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Top Priorities

After concerning themselves primarily with their workers' retirement preparedness, benefits decision makers at large employers have increasingly broadened their aim to include helping workers with a broader range of issues.<sup>4</sup> While retirement preparedness remains top of mind among large employers, recent years have seen employers aiming to help workers address more immediate, day-to-day concerns, with an increase in efforts to address health care costs, the high costs of daily living, financial-related stress, and budgeting and money management. While we are unable to trace the evolution of the issues among small employers in recent years, small employers did report aiming to address similar issues to those targeted by large employers.

Small employers tended to report that their financial wellness initiatives were designed to address similar issues to those addressed by their larger counterparts (Figure 8). Day-to-day issues, such as budgeting and money management, health care costs, and unexpected expenses were frequently cited by both large and small employers as issues their financial wellness initiatives were designed to address. Other issues, such as caregiving for children/balancing work and parenting, were low on the list of concerns small employers' financial wellness initiatives were designed to address. This also held true for larger employers, though large employers were more likely to say their benefits were designed to address caregiving for children/balancing work and parenting.

The effort to help workers address day-to-day financial issues was also reflected in the benefits firms considered to be their highest priority. Small employers frequently responded that benefits like personalized financial counseling, coaching, or planning; financial planning education, seminars, or webinars; and basic money management tools (such as budgeting tools or calculators) were their highest priorities, although "none of these" was the most common response (Figures 9A and 9B). Large employers shared these priorities as well, as personalized financial coaching, budgeting, or planning and financial planning education, seminars, or webinars were most frequently cited as a top priority by large employers as well. For their part, large employers also focused on bank-at-work partnerships with banks or credit unions.

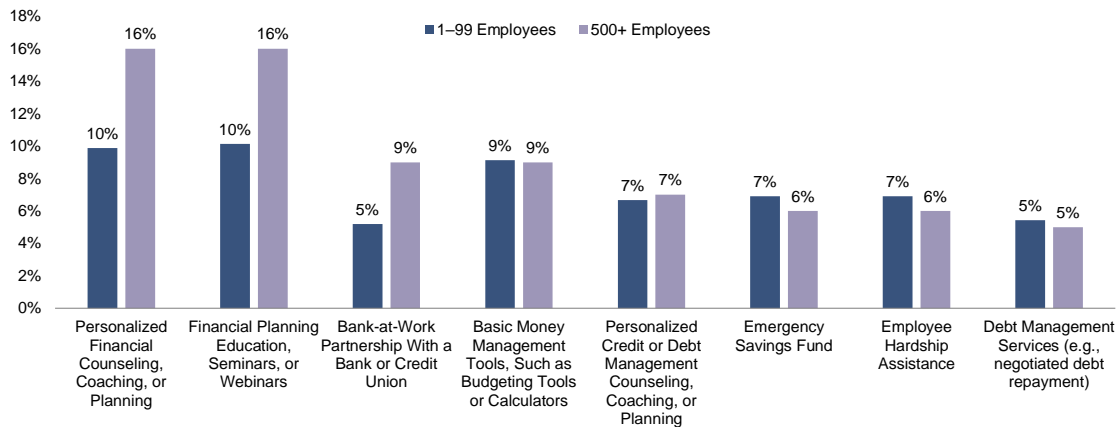
Figure 8  
Top Issues to Address With Financial Wellness Initiatives



Q126. What are the top three issues faced by your employees that your financial wellness initiatives are designed to address? Please select your top three reasons. (Small employer sample size n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

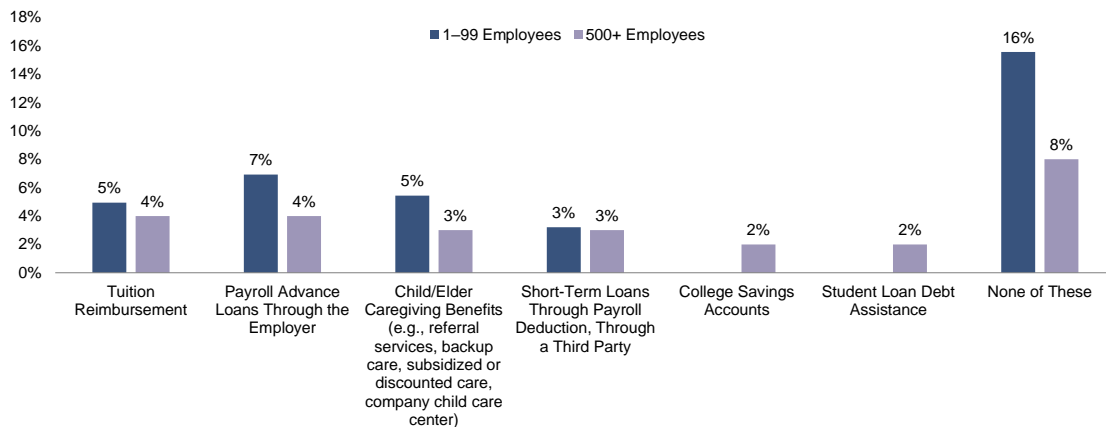
Figure 9A  
Top Priority of Offerings



Q43: Which of your financial wellbeing offerings is your company's highest priority? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 9B  
Top Priority of Offerings



Q43: Which of your financial wellbeing offerings is your company's highest priority? (Small Employer Sample n=405)  
Note: <500 samples for College savings accounts = 6 and Student loan debt assistance = 15; breakdowns not shown

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Benefit Offerings

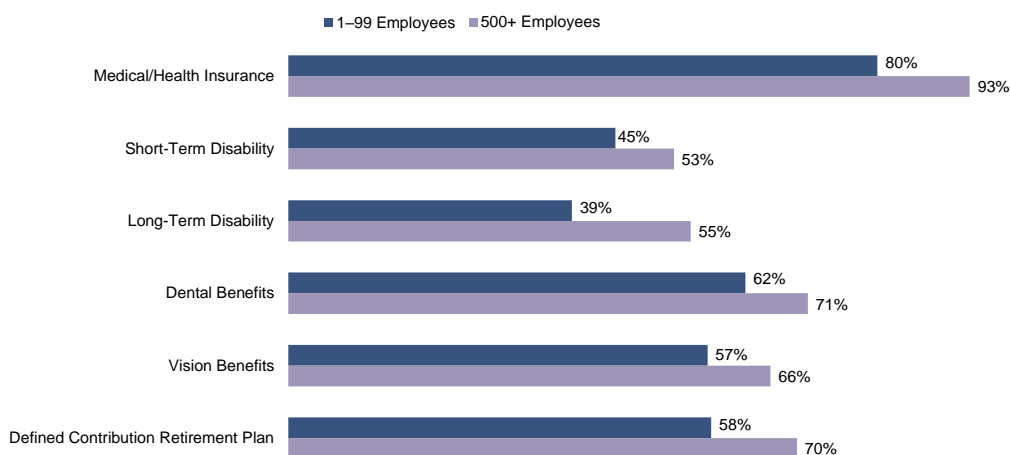
Employee populations are diverse, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to financial wellbeing benefits. Employers must also make difficult decisions about how to allocate scarce resources. As a result, small employers and large employers systematically differ in the lineup of benefits they offer to their workers.

Medical benefits were the most commonly offered benefit for both large and small employers alike. Previous research EBRI has conducted found that benefits decision makers at large employers often view health insurance as “table stakes” — benefits they need to offer in order to attract quality workers.<sup>5</sup> Small employers may see medical benefits in a similar way, with eight in 10 companies surveyed offering them (Figure 10). Over half of small employers offered dental benefits, vision benefits, and defined contribution (e.g., 401(k)) retirement plans. Short-term and long-term

disability benefits were less commonly offered among both large and small employees. For each benefit offered, however, small employers lagged their large counterparts in their propensity to offer.

Smaller employers similarly lagged behind larger employers in their propensity to offer voluntary benefits. Paid time off was the most common voluntary benefit, with 81 percent of large employers and 63 percent of small employers offering it (Figure 11). Life insurance, mental health benefits, and employee assistance programs were also less frequently offered at small employers than large employers, which may be another reflection of the smaller budgets found at small employers. Relatively few small employers offered supplemental benefits such as critical illness insurance or accident insurance. These benefits, however, were relatively uncommon offerings among large employers as well.

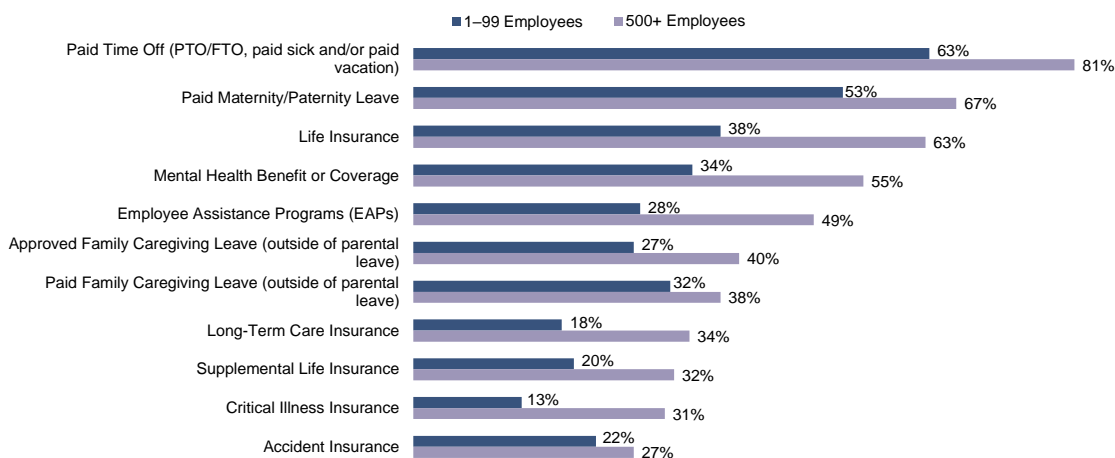
**Figure 10**  
**Core Benefits Offered**



Q85. Which employee benefits does your company offer? Please select all that apply and Q83: Does your company offer employees any of the following retirement benefits? Please select all that apply. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

**Figure 11**  
**Voluntary Benefits Offered**



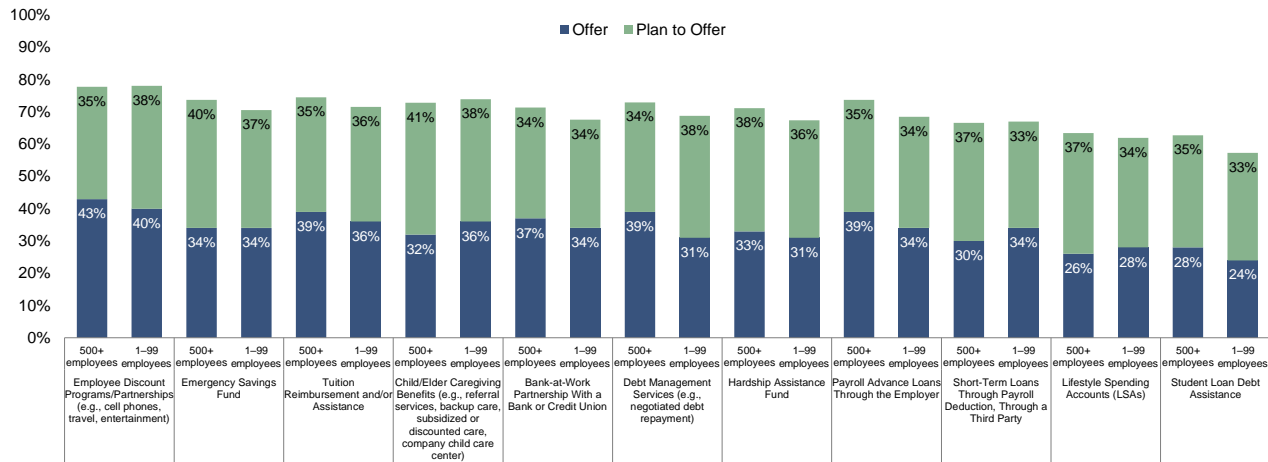
Q85. Which of the following benefits does your company offer? Please select all that apply. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

This trend continued when specifically examining financial wellbeing benefits. Smaller employers tended to lag several percentage points in their propensity to offer a selection of 11 financial wellness benefits, such as employee discount programs/partnerships, tuition reimbursement and/or assistance, and debt management services (Figure 12). Additionally, smaller employers often reported a lower likelihood of planning to offer these benefits in the future than large employers.

Another way employers can help workers manage financial stressors is by offering benefits targeted to address personal finances. Here, too, smaller employers were less likely to offer personal finance benefits than larger employers. In particular, smaller employers were 14 percentage points less likely to report offering personalized financial counseling, coaching, or planning, and 9 percentage points less likely to report offering financial planning education, webinars, or seminars, as well as financial investment/investing education, seminars or webinars (Figure 13). Smaller employers were, however, more likely to report planning to offer certain personal finance benefits, such as personalized financial counseling, coaching, or planning, than larger employers. Yet, the combined share of firms responding that they were already offering or planning to offer this benefit was still smaller than that for large employers.

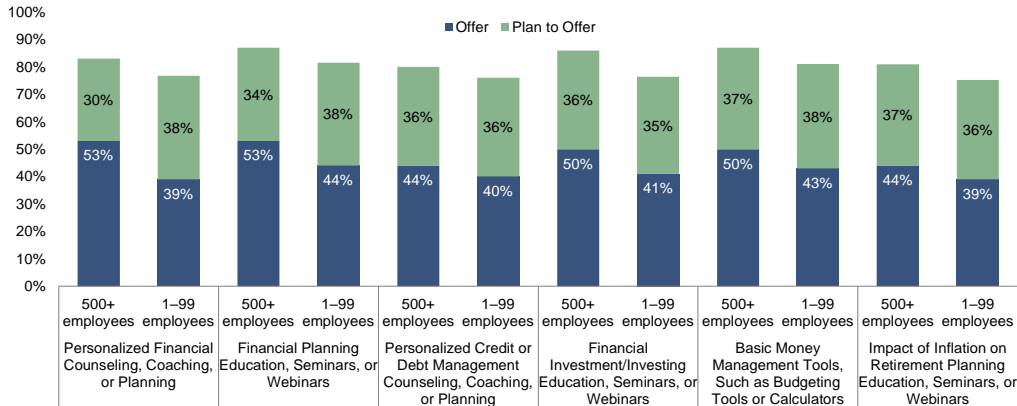
Figure 12  
**Financial Wellbeing Benefits Currently Offered or Planned to Be Offered**



Q91: Does your company offer or plan to offer any of the following financial wellbeing or debt assistance benefits to employees? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 13  
**Personal Financial Wellbeing Benefits Offered or Planned to Be Offered by Employer Size**



Q95: Which of the following does your company offer to help employees with personal financial wellness? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Measuring and Defining Success

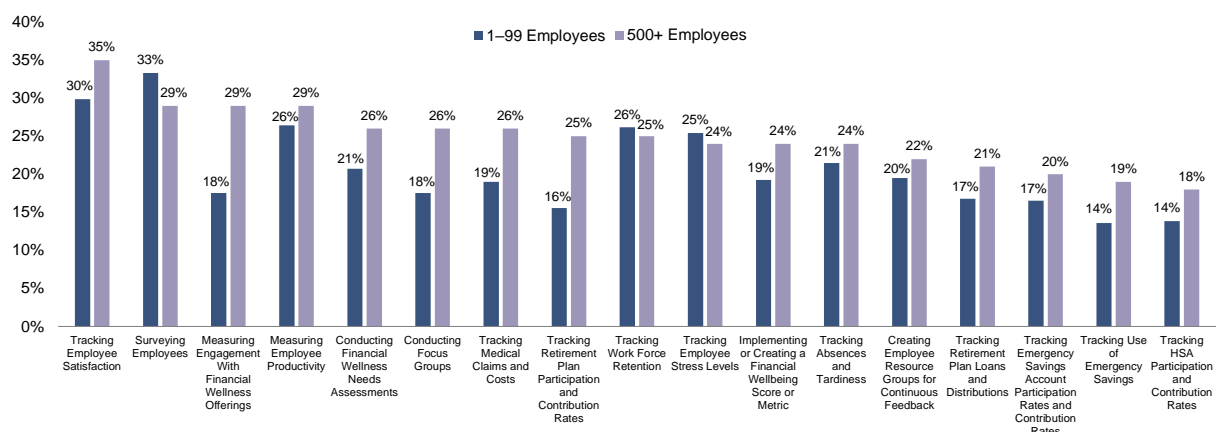
In addition to fulfilling what they view as a responsibility to ensure their workers' wellbeing, employers may also decide to offer financial wellbeing benefits because they drive certain business needs. Financial wellbeing benefits can play a role in attracting and retaining a high-quality work force, and some studies suggest that stressing about personal finances is a distraction at work.<sup>6</sup> Different firms have different goals; workers at an auto body shop face different challenges and pressures than workers at a dental clinic, and, as a result, firms will need to develop different targets to determine whether they are meeting the needs of their workers.

Large and small employers differed in their approaches to tracking data to evaluate the effectiveness of their financial wellbeing offerings. Both large and small employers had the same top two responses, but large employers were significantly more likely than small employers to cite measuring engagement with financial wellness offerings, as well as conducting focus groups and tracking retirement plan participation and contribution rates (Figure 14). Small employers, meanwhile, were slightly more likely than large employers to signal that they track worker retention rates and employee stress levels. With three exceptions, small employers were less likely than large employers to track any given data point. This again may be a result of some small employers lacking the financial and organizational resources that large employers enjoy.

Regardless of the method or data collected, employers large and small tended to be enthusiastic in evaluating the effectiveness of their financial wellbeing offerings. Over half of employers, regardless of size, responded that their offerings were very effective in improving employee productivity and in the attraction and retention of employees (Figure 15). Additionally, small employers were slightly more likely to rate their financial wellbeing benefits as very effective in reducing absenteeism and tardiness.

Both large and small employers were enthused about their self-rated efforts to improve worker wellbeing. Across four different dimensions of wellbeing — physical, financial, emotional, and social — employers were asked to rate their efforts in helping improve workers' wellbeing (Figure 16). Over two-thirds of large and small employers alike rated the effectiveness of their efforts as either "excellent" or "very good." Workers, for their part, may not necessarily feel the same way, as previous research suggests that this is one area in which employers and employees are not on the same page.<sup>7</sup>

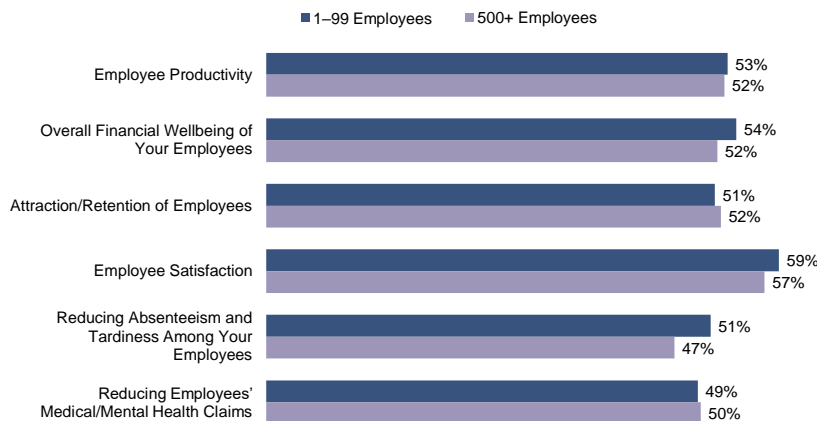
Figure 14  
Data Tracked to Evaluate Effectiveness of Offerings



Q34: Do you track any of the following to evaluate the effectiveness of your financial wellness offerings? Please select all that apply. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

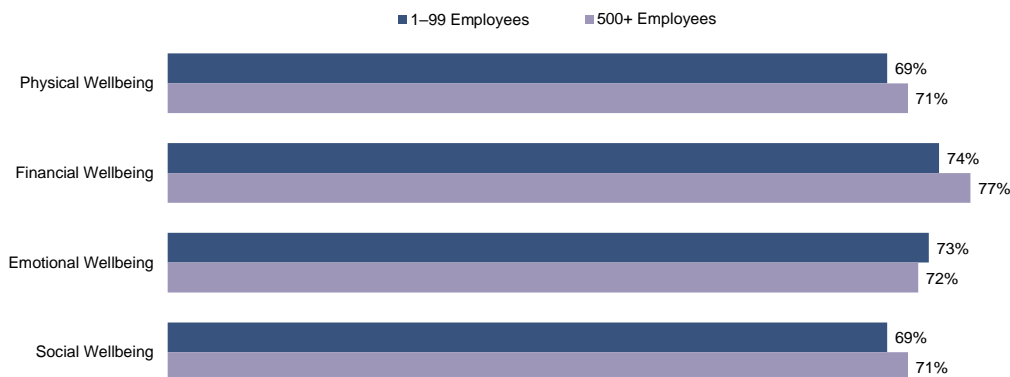
Figure 15  
Effectiveness of Financial Wellness Offerings —  
Share of Firms Rating Efforts as “Very Effective”



Q34B. How effective do you feel your financial wellness offerings/programs are on each of the following? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 16  
Rating of Company's Efforts to Improve Employees' Wellbeing as  
“Excellent” or “Very Good”



Q124. How would you rate your company's efforts to help improve your employees' wellbeing in the following areas? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Costs and Budgets

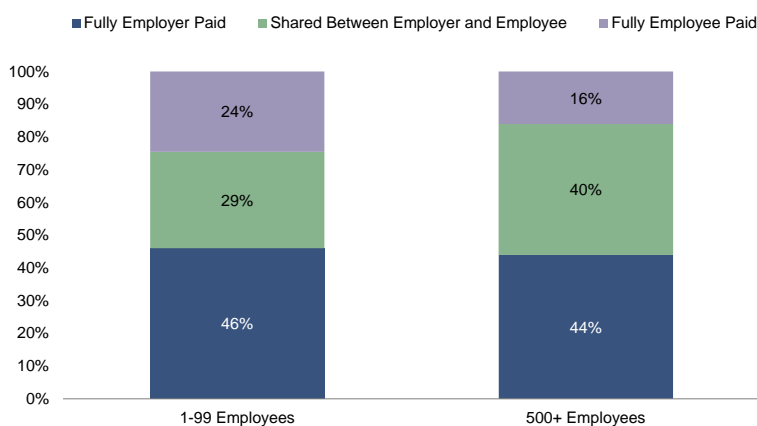
Surveys have suggested that costs and fees play a role in workers' decision to forgo participating in financial wellbeing benefits.<sup>8</sup> However, employers face financial constraints — particularly small employers — and may not be able to pay the full cost of financial wellbeing benefits on behalf of the worker.

To examine whether workers are asked to shoulder higher costs when working for small employers, benefits decision makers were asked about the cost-sharing structure of their financial wellness initiatives. Similar shares of large and small employers responded that their financial wellness initiatives were fully employer paid (Figure 17). However, there was a smaller share of small employers reporting that costs were shared between employee and employer. This

corresponded with a higher share of small employers reporting that their financial wellness initiatives were fully employee paid (24 percent vs. 16 percent of large employers).

Benefits decision makers at small employers were slightly rosier in their projections for their organization's financial wellness budgets. Seventy-two percent of small employers believed that their budgets for financial wellness initiatives would either increase significantly or somewhat in the next one to two years, an optimism that was shared by large employers as well (71 percent) (Figure 18). Smaller employers were less likely to project no change in their budgets over a short time horizon (20 percent vs. 28 percent) and were slightly more likely to project a decrease in their budgets than large employers (6 percent vs 3 percent). Budget projections not only depend on the firm's revenue, but also reflect its priorities. By anticipating that their budgets will increase either somewhat or significantly, small employers appear to be signaling that they plan to remain committed to financial wellbeing initiatives.

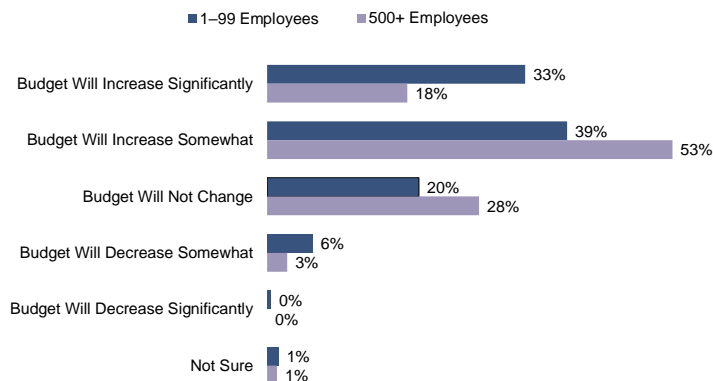
**Figure 17**  
**Paying for Initiatives**



Q36. Who pays or might pay for your financial wellness initiative program? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

**Figure 18**  
**Anticipation of Organization's Financial Wellness Budget in Next One to Two Years**  
*Among those who currently offer financial wellness initiatives*



Q38. Overall, how do you anticipate your organization's budget for financial wellness initiatives will change in the next one to two years? (Currently offer financial wellness initiatives, Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

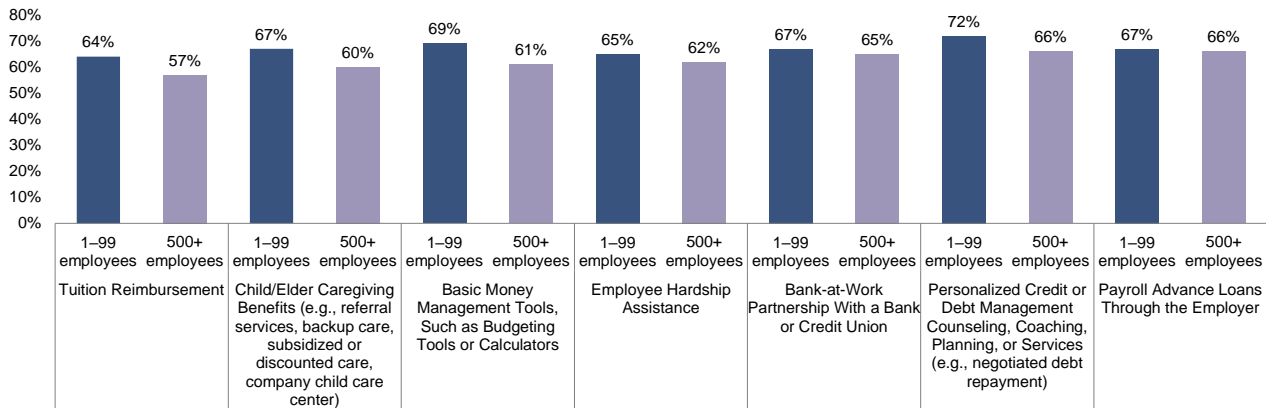


# Engagement With Financial Wellbeing Benefits

Actively engaging with financial wellbeing benefits is a critical step in the process of improving finances. Increased engagement can be a referendum on the efficacy of those benefits, or it can be a reflection of an increased need for that particular benefit. Although this analysis cannot differentiate between those two factors, benefits decision makers estimated how engagement had changed with various financial wellbeing benefits over the past 12 months.

A majority of employers, both large and small, noted increased engagement with financial wellbeing benefits during the previous year, although there were a few areas in which small employers were more likely to report increased engagement. Among small employers that offered student loan debt assistance, 74 percent reported significantly or somewhat increased engagement with that benefit in the past 12 months, perhaps a reflection of the expiration of COVID-era student loan modifications (Figures 19A and 19B). Among small employers offering personalized credit or debt management counseling, coaching, planning, or services, 72 percent reported seeing significantly or somewhat increased engagement over the past 12 months, a larger share than observed at larger employers.

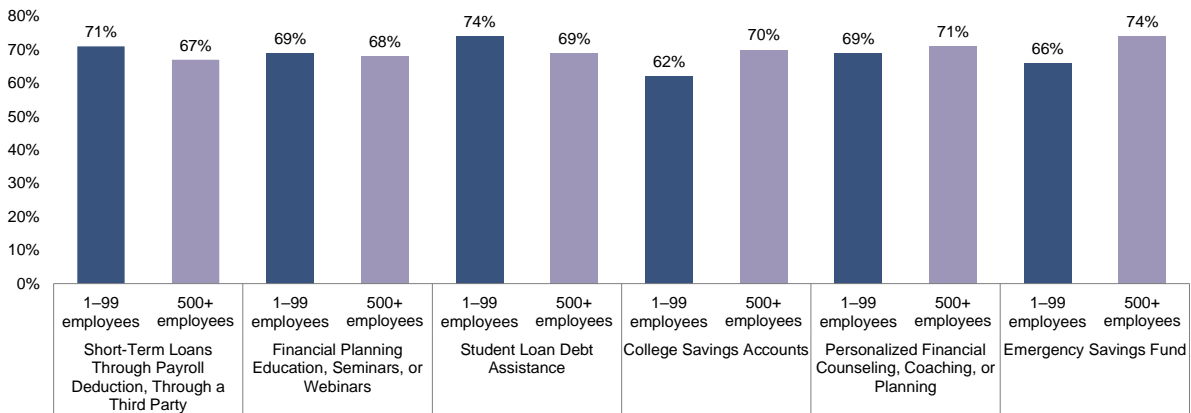
Figure 19A  
**Employee Engagement With Benefits Increased in Past 12 Months**  
*Among those offering each benefit (increased significantly or increased somewhat)*



Q42: How has employee engagement with the following benefits changed in the past 12 months? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 19B  
**Employee Engagement With Benefits Increased in Past 12 Months**  
*Among those offering each benefit (increased significantly or increased somewhat)*



Q42: How has employee engagement with the following benefits changed in the past 12 months? (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Challenges and Hurdles

Despite the financial challenges that some small firms might face, small employers did not disproportionately cite costs to the employer as a major impediment to offering financial wellness benefits. Twenty-nine percent of both large and small employers responded that costs to the employer were a hurdle (Figures 20 and 21). Also, a relatively lesser share of small employers considered costs to employees to be a challenge in offering financial wellness initiatives (23 percent vs. 29 percent).

Other differences were small in magnitude and not statistically significant. Similar shares of small and large employers indicated that barriers such as data and privacy concerns, a lack of interest among employees, or complexity in choosing programs were challenges in offering financial wellness benefits. Encouragingly, relatively low shares of both large and small employers pointed to issues such as legal and/or regulatory hurdles, a lack of ability or data to quantify value-add of financial wellbeing initiatives, or a lack of buy-in from upper management as serious impediments in offering financial wellness benefits.

Figure 20  
Top Eight Challenges in Offering Financial Wellness Benefits



Q32: What are the top three challenges your company faces or anticipates facing in offering financial wellness benefits in the workplace? Please select your top three. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

Figure 21  
Bottom Six Challenges in Offering Financial Wellness Benefits



Q32: What are the top three challenges your company faces or anticipates facing in offering financial wellness benefits in the workplace? Please select your top three. (Small Employer Sample n=405)

Source: 2024 EBRI Small Employer Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey (FWES).

## Conclusion

Like large employers, small employers are concerned about their employees' wellbeing. However, on average, small employers do not offer as many financial wellbeing benefits as larger employers. They cannot leverage economies of scale and may also lack financial resources, as well as internal resources to research, analyze, and make available benefits for their workers.

Small employers are diverse, but they do differ from large employers in meaningful ways. They tend to offer fewer financial wellbeing benefits than larger employers and are less likely to offer health, dental, or vision insurance, as well as defined contribution retirement plans. Perhaps as a result of resource constraints, they are more likely to require workers to pay the full cost of financial wellbeing initiatives. They are generally less likely to track data to evaluate the effectiveness of financial wellbeing initiatives and less likely to offer many personal financial wellbeing benefits than large employers.

Still, small employers believe they have a role to play in improving workers' financial wellbeing. Small employers behave similarly to their larger counterparts in several key ways: both look to gather and analyze data about their financial wellbeing offerings to drive business outcomes, and both look to help their workers address health care costs, prepare for retirement, and deal with high costs of living with their financial wellbeing initiatives.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> See the 2021 Survey of US Businesses (SUSB) from the U.S. Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/econ/susb/2021-susb-annual.html>.

<sup>2</sup> This survey found that 93 percent of small employers did indeed consider their retirement benefits to be part of their financial wellness program.

<sup>3</sup> In total, EBRI asked benefits decision makers about 16 financial wellbeing benefits, including emergency savings accounts, tuition reimbursement, and employee discount programs, among others.

<sup>4</sup> Spiegel, Jake, Craig Copeland, and Bridget Bearden, "2024 EBRI Financial Wellbeing Employer Survey: Employers See Financial Wellness Benefits as a Tool to Improve Worker Satisfaction and Productivity," *EBRI Issue Brief*, no. 623 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, October 31, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Spiegel, Jake, and Paul Fronstin. "What Employers Say About the Future of Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance," Commonwealth Fund (January 2023).

<sup>6</sup> See PwC, "2023 PwC Employee Financial Wellness Survey," May 9, 2023, and Metlife, "The Advantages of Employee Care: Creating human-centric employee experiences and work environments," 2023. See also Copeland, Craig, "Perceived Helpfulness of Financial Well-being Programs: Results from the 2017 and 2018 Retirement Confidence Survey," *EBRI Issue Brief*, no. 457 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, August 20, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Spiegel, Jake, "Satisfaction After Service: Findings from a Focus on Veterans in the 2024 Workplace Wellness Survey," *EBRI Issue Brief*, no. 627 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, January 9, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Employee Benefit Research Institute/Greenwald Research, "2024 EBRI/Greenwald Workplace Wellness Survey Summary Report," March 13, 2025.