

## Workplace Wellbeing Trends to Watch in 2026



Workplace wellbeing continues to evolve quickly. Employees today are more aware of their health, more open about their needs, and more selective about the cultures they choose to work in. At the same time, organisations are navigating rapid technological change, new expectations around flexibility and a growing appetite for personalised support.

Drawing on global research\* and our **Health of the Nation 2025** findings, we have identified some key wellbeing trends to watch in 2026.

### 1. Human sustainability and healthy work design

Wellbeing is increasingly tied to how work is structured, not just what support is offered. Employees want balanced expectations, manageable workloads and the psychological space to stay focused and well.

Our recent survey shows rising mental health pressures across all age groups. Younger adults are affected by time pressure, constant connectivity and social media overload, while midlife employees are experiencing increased strain from workload, finances and caring demands. The encouraging takeaway is that both groups respond well when meaningful, tailored support is provided.

External research also highlights increased pressure on workers to perform in fast-paced and often uncertain environments.\* In 2026, organisations will continue moving away from surface-level wellbeing initiatives and towards healthier work design with clearer boundaries, honest communication and supportive management.

## **2. AI at work - opportunity, pressure and the need for confidence**

AI is becoming part of everyday working life. It is reshaping roles, speeding up processes and creating opportunities for learning and collaboration.\* But with change comes uncertainty. Many employees feel unsure about how to use AI effectively or how it may alter their roles.\*

Research shows people feel more confident and less stressed when they understand how AI supports their work, when training is accessible and when leaders communicate clearly about what AI will and won't be used for.\*

In 2026, the focus will be on building trust and digital confidence. When introduced thoughtfully, AI can reduce workload noise, remove repetitive tasks and free people to focus on meaningful work.

## **3. Gen Z, digital overwhelm and the need for real connection**

Younger workers continue to shape workplace culture. They value open communication, in-person learning and the chance to build strong relationships. But they are also facing significant wellbeing challenges.

Our Health of the Nation report shows that 47% of under-35s feel lonely or isolated, yet many say their strongest social connections are made at work. It also found that 3 in 5 under-35s want to reduce their digital and social media use, highlighting the strain of constant connectivity and information pressure. Research shows that fully remote work is least popular with Gen Z, who prefer hybrid models that support mentoring, collaboration and human interaction. Loneliness has tangible effects too, it impacts mental health, resilience, engagement and retention.

In 2026, workplaces that nurture connection, collaboration and digital balance will be better placed to support younger employees, strengthen early-career engagement and retain talent.

## **4. Culture, inclusion and belonging remain central to wellbeing**

Culture sits at the heart of every wellbeing strategy. People want to feel included, respected and supported not just through formal policies, but in everyday interactions.

Research highlights that inclusive leadership, fairness and psychological safety are essential for trust and wellbeing at work.\* Employees are more likely to stay engaged when they feel listened to, valued and able to bring their authentic selves to work.

In 2026, inclusion won't be a standalone programme. It will be a daily practice that needs to be shaped and integrated by leaders, managers and team behaviour.

## **5. Personalised wellbeing support, powered by smart technology**

Employees increasingly expect wellbeing support that feels personally tailored to their lifestyle, habits and life stage. Digital tools are more intuitive and can help people understand their health patterns in a simple and meaningful way.\*

For example, our Irish Life Wellbeing app is called **MyLife**, the app can help improve all areas of our health; from physical activity and nutrition to sleep, stress, and mindfulness It

can also connect to popular wearables, so activity and sleep data update automatically, making personalised wellbeing easier and more relevant. On average MyLife users are healthier than the general population.

In 2026, HR teams will prioritise wellbeing solutions that are flexible, data-informed and relevant to different workforce needs, rather than one-size-fits-all offerings.

## Looking ahead

Let us help you translate these insights into a practical, high-impact wellbeing strategy for 2026. Our research shows there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to employee wellbeing.

## We can support you with:

- Tailored recommendations for your workforce
- Proven programmes that support younger employees
- Ideas to boost retention through wellbeing

Please get in touch to find out more by emailing [gary.scott@irishlife.ie](mailto:gary.scott@irishlife.ie)

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