

## BURDA ON HEALTHCARE

# Five Healthcare Lessons for Employers if They Read to the Bottom

By David Burda  
November 29, 2022

As you know, it's open enrollment season. It's kind of like hunting season, but in this case you're trying to bag the best health plan benefits for the least amount of doe, er, dough. Hey, I have a lot of relatives who like to hunt this time of year, OK?

It also means a lot of reports and surveys on employer health plan benefits are coming out. I try to catch and read them all, so you don't have to. Below are five of the latest reports and surveys, what you may have heard of about them and what you may have missed about them.

### 2022 Annual Employer Health Benefits Survey from the Kaiser Family Foundation

The granddaddy of them all, this year's annual employer benefits report from the Kaiser, released Oct. 27, is based on a survey of 2,188 non-federal public and private companies with three or more workers.

**What you may have heard:** Annual premiums for employer-based health insurance barely budged this year. Annual premiums for family coverage rose 1.1 percent to \$22,463, and annual premiums for single coverage rose 2.2 percent to \$7,911.

**What you may have missed:** Only 12 percent of the companies with 500 or more employees said they are aware of state all-payer claims databases that collect and analyze medical claims paid by public and private health plans.



States use those databases to compare cost and outcomes of providers and payers and report those comparisons publicly to help employers make better healthcare purchasing decisions. Seventy-three percent said they aren't aware of state all-payer claim databases, and 14 percent said they didn't know enough to even answer the question, which is like not being aware. Of the companies with 500 or more workers that said they were aware of state all-payer claims databases, only 9 percent contributed their claims data to the databases. This is clearly a missed opportunity for companies to lower their premium costs for themselves and for their employees.

### 2022 Best Practices in Health Care Survey from WTW (formerly Willis Towers Watson)

This report from WTW, released Oct. 20, is based on a survey of 455 U.S. employers that employ about 8.2 million workers.

**What you may have heard:** Eighty-eight percent of the companies said they took steps this year to better meet their workforce's mental health needs, and 67 percent said they intend to make employee mental health and emotional wellbeing one of their top three health priorities over the next three years.

**What you may have missed:** Only 17 percent of the companies said they currently evaluate the cultural competencies of providers in their behavioral health networks, though 27 percent said they plan or will consider doing so in the future. With all the talk about health disparities and health equity ignited by the pandemic, you'd think these percentages would be much higher. Do you really want to send your staff to culturally incompetent behavioral health providers when your employees already are suffering from anxiety, depression or burnout? Probably not a good idea.

## The Economic Cost of Poor Employee Mental Health from Gallup

This report from Gallup, released Nov. 3, is based on a survey of nearly 16,000 U.S. working adults who are part of the standing Gallup Panel of 115,000 survey respondents.

**What you may have heard:** Workers who said they are experiencing fair or poor mental health cost the U.S. economy \$47.6 billion in lost productivity each year, mostly from unplanned absences from work. Forty percent of the workers said their jobs have a "somewhat" or "extremely" negative impact on their mental health.

**What you may have missed:** Eighty-one percent of the respondents described their mental health as "good," "very good" or "excellent." Thirty percent said their jobs have a "somewhat" or "extremely" positive impact on their mental health with another 30 percent saying their jobs don't affect their mental health one way or another. It's that not complicated. Creating a great workplace improves employees' mental health. Running a lousy workplace harms employees' mental health.

## Pulse of the Purchaser from the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions

This report from the national organization that represents healthcare business coalitions, released Oct. 28, is based on a survey of 152 public and private employers.

**What you may have heard:** Eighty-two percent of the survey respondents said rising healthcare costs are negatively affecting their ability to remain competitive in their markets. The main reason? Seventy-three percent said higher healthcare costs are directly or indirectly crowding out their ability to raise salaries and wages.

**What you may have missed:** Ninety-seven percent of the employers said they think prices for hospital care are "unreasonable" and/or "indefensible" with 93 percent saying hospital mergers and acquisitions haven't improved the cost or quality of hospital care. Really? No kidding. The question is why companies rarely — if ever — step up and speak out against



hospital and health system mergers in their markets. That inaction is coming back to bite them. Forty-five percent said hospital price and quality transparency is one of their leading strategies to control their healthcare costs. Too little, too late?

## Healthcare Costs Putting Financial Pressure on Small Business from Small Business for America's Future

This report from the trade group representing small business, released Oct. 18, is based on a survey of 1,209 small business owners. Eighty-four percent of the respondents employed 20 or fewer people with only 53 percent offering health benefits to their workers.

**What you may have heard:** Forty-one percent of the small business owners said rising healthcare costs have forced them to raise the prices that they charge for their goods and services, and 38 percent said rising healthcare costs have made them less competitive in attracting talent from other companies that offer less expensive and/or better benefits.

**What you may have missed:** Somewhat expectedly, the No. 1 reason respondents said they didn't offer health insurance to workers was the cost, cited by 78 percent. Somewhat unexpectedly, 15 percent said they didn't offer healthcare benefits because the administration of health plans is too complicated and time-consuming. I know it's only 15 percent, but even that small percentage speaks volumes about how the healthcare system works. It's not for consumers, it's for incumbents.

That finding also dovetails with a finding from a recent report from Accenture, [Healthcare experience: The difference between loyalty and leaving](#). The Accenture report is based on a survey of about 11,000 U.S. consumers age 18 or older. The No. 1 reason for switching health plans was "ease of navigation," or more accurately, the lack of it, cited by 49 percent of the consumers.



There are lots of little gems in employer benefits surveys like these for us healthcare journalists to find and write about. More importantly, there are lots of insightful tips in them for employers who want to improve the health of their workforce and lower their healthcare costs.

- Get involved with and support your state's all-payers claims database.
- Make sure that your in-network providers are culturally competent.
- Improve your workplace culture to improve your workers' mental health.
- Aggressively oppose hospital and health system mergers in your market.
- Pick health plans that are easy for your employees to navigate and use.

It's your money. It's up to you to get what you pay for.

Thanks for reading.

## AUTHOR



**Dave Burda** began covering healthcare in 1983 and hasn't stopped since. Dave writes this monthly column "Burda on Healthcare," contributes weekly blog posts, manages our weekly newsletter 4sight Friday, and hosts our weekly Roundup podcast. Dave believes that healthcare is a business like any other business, and customers—patients—are king. If you do what's right for patients, good business results will follow.

Dave's personal experiences with the healthcare system both as a patient and family caregiver have shaped his point of view. It's also been shaped by covering the industry for 35 years as a reporter and editor. He worked at Modern Healthcare for 25 years, the last 11 as editor.

Prior to Modern Healthcare, he did stints at the American Medical Record Association (now AHIMA) and the American Hospital Association. After Modern Healthcare, he wrote a monthly column for Twin Cities Business explaining healthcare trends to a business audience, and he developed and executed content marketing plans for leading healthcare corporations as the editorial director for healthcare strategies at MSP Communications.

When he's not reading and writing about healthcare, Dave spends his time riding the trails of DuPage County, IL, on his bike, tending his vegetable garden and daydreaming about being a lobster fisherman in Maine. He lives in Wheaton, IL, with his lovely wife of 35 years and his three children, none of whom want to be journalists or lobster fishermen.

Visit [4sight.com/insights](https://4sight.com/insights) to read more from Dave Burda.