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A New Era: Cross-Industry Executive Perspectives on Building Resilience

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> **"I think we sometimes forget the power of one voice—of each of our voices—to make a difference. I encourage you to use yours."**
>
> —Rich Ditizio, CEO, Milken Institute, reflecting on 2026 Global Conference

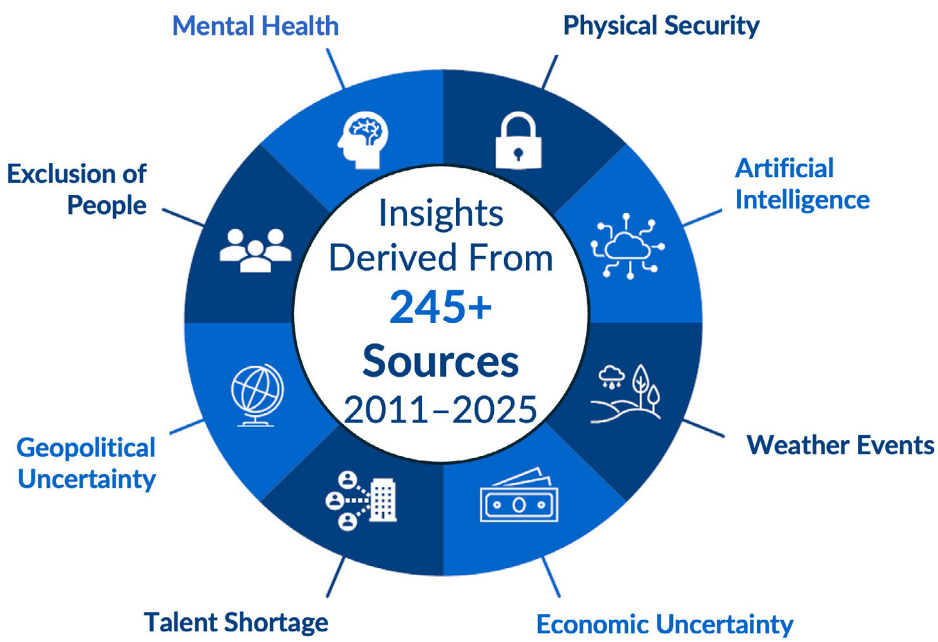
As a C-suite leader, what "signals" make you stop in your tracks and consider a change of course? What risks—to your business, employees, and local community—keep you up at night? Are you anticipating the curves and bends in the road ahead and leaning into evidence-based investments to sharpen your company's competitive edge?

Background

Through its ongoing *Executive Insights* interview series, the Milken Institute's Employer Action Exchange (EAE) highlights the varying perspectives of executives across roles, industries, sectors, and organizational sizes, including small businesses—the innovation engine of the economy. The EAE carefully selects executives to be featured in these interviews, which are published twice a month and focus on the employer's role in investing in whole-person health to mitigate risk and increase resilience, well-being, and performance for employees, communities, and organizations. These interviews are compiled and analyzed on both a cumulative and annual basis to identify and keep a finger on the pulse of emerging trends in executive perspectives. A brief published in 2025, *Executive Reflections on Building Resilient Businesses Through Whole-Person Health Investments*, highlighted themes from the launch of the series through 2024. While the wording of the questions continues to evolve since the series launched in August 2023, executives have consistently identified key risks for employers to prioritize and actions they must take to build resilience via human-centered investments.

The themes that emerged from the interviews are closely aligned with the independently conducted EAE foundational research focused on escalating risks impacting employers. In an EAE landscape analysis based on 245 sources published between 2011 and 2025, the EAE identified eight emerging risks employers face, impacting their organization, employees, and surrounding communities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Emerging and Escalating Risks Employers Face



Source: Milken Institute (2026)

Cumulative Results

From August 2023 through December 2025, the *Executive Insights* series featured interviews with C-suite leaders from 49 organizations with both global and local reach across eight business sectors and 27 industries, as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), as seen in Figure 2. This brief examines the common challenges facing these leaders and the actions they are taking to protect health and performance, with the goal of offering peer-tested strategies to inspire other leaders navigating similar circumstances.

Figure 2. Executive Voices Represented via *Executive Insights* Interviews

Executive Roles Represent 49 Employers August 2023–December 2025

8 SECTORS

27 INDUSTRIES

ORGANIZATION TYPE

55% Nonprofit

39% Corporate

6% Government

INDUSTRIES REPRESENTED

Education Services • Finance and Insurance • Health Care and Social Assistance • Information • Manufacturing • Other Services (Except Public Administration) • Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services • Public Administration • Retail Trade

Note: Industry and sector classifications are based on NAICS definitions.

Source: Milken Institute (2026)

Among the employers interviewed from the beginning of the series from August 2023 through the end of 2025, in nonprofit and government sectors (representing 61 percent of all interviews through 2025), several collective themes emerged about the challenges they face when employers do not adopt a whole-person health approach. These interviews highlighted workforce risks, including mental health concerns, disengagement, and persistent retention issues as employees increasingly seek flexibility and support for well-being through workplace culture and benefits.

Financial instability driven by evolving government policies and economic shifts, along with economic and health inequities in the workforce and gaps in care, also surfaced as notable concerns. Employers in these sectors recognize that the greatest risks center on the erosion of workforce capacity, driven by interconnected health, systemic, and environmental pressures in an increasingly uncertain environment. These risks are amplified by health and economic inequities, weak system resilience, and insufficient evidence on effective interventions, ultimately threatening productivity, sustainability, and organizational viability.

2025 Results

Interviews published in 2025 featured insights from 22 executives across industries, during times of varying economic volatility. Most frequently, executives reported facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining talent and adjusting to the fast-paced technological changes driven by the integration and adoption of artificial intelligence.

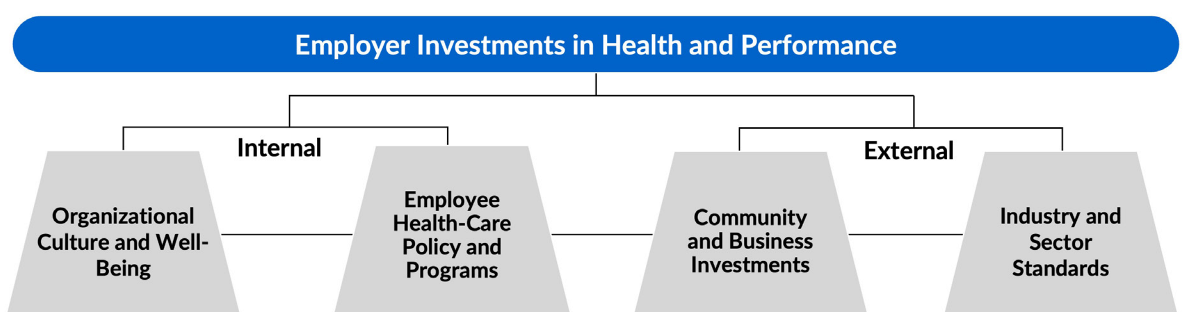
These interviews were designed to elicit responses that are relevant and actionable for employers of all sizes. Across the board, the following priorities and employer takeaways rose to the surface.

Key Takeaways for Employers

1. Three key risks identified across roles and industries in 2025 remain consistent with the risks highlighted by executives since 2023: retention, mental health, and workforce development.
2. Across industry and sector, C-suite leadership is emphasizing health investments as vital contributors to organizational performance.
3. Widespread and rapidly changing technology and uncertainty contribute to increased stress. Employers should anticipate these challenges and create comprehensive action plans that support employees and business continuity.
4. Transparent and consistent communication from leadership year-round is vital for building trust and fostering a positive and productive environment.

The insights and actions align with the four types of employer investments captured in the EAE framework (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Milken Institute Employer Action Exchange Framework



Source: Milken Institute (2026)

Internal: Organizational Culture and Well-Being

Internal Impact

Insight: Talent Shortage and Tenure Decline for Leadership

Employers are facing increased challenges in retaining talent amid rising workforce burnout and mental health concerns. This trend is evident across organizational roles, including senior leaders. The average tenure of CEOs is declining, leading to disjointed leadership, as highlighted in "2024 CEO Transitions: The Measure of the Market." These issues are compounded by shifting expectations and the ongoing demand for meaningful support and development opportunities across all levels.

Executive Insight for Action

To retain talent, executives agree that employers must address the multifaceted nature of today's workplace pressures with proactive workforce development strategies that foster resilience and well-being across their teams—prioritizing empathetic leadership, ongoing mentorship, and clear pathways for career growth. By leveraging employees' strengths and adopting hybrid work models, organizations can create flexible environments that support both productivity and well-being. It is essential to communicate expectations and goals transparently, while also investing in workforce development through customized leadership training, well-being strategy and initiatives, and opportunities for advancement and contribution at all stages of one's career. Some of this will require reimagining the approach, content, and involvement. Above all, fostering a culture of accountability, purpose-driven leadership, and open dialogue empowers employees to thrive and helps protect the organization and, in turn, the communities it serves.

Employer Example: Northwell

"Employers must adopt a proactive and holistic approach to risk mitigation. This begins with sustained investment in workforce development, including leadership training, career advancement pathways, and wellness initiatives.

"Embracing hybrid work models and leveraging artificial intelligence to enhance—not replace—human productivity are essential strategies. Financially, organizations must diversify revenue streams through strategic ventures and partnerships. Operationally, a disciplined approach to resource allocation ensures that investments align with mission-critical priorities. Above all, fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and purpose-driven leadership is paramount to protecting and empowering employees and the communities they serve."

Source: "Caring for Community, Starting with Employees: Building Resilience Through Collaboration, Perseverance, and Adaptability"—*Executive Insights interview with John D'Angelo, MD, CEO, Northwell Health*

Internal: Employee Health-Care Policy and Programs

Insight: Access to Benefits and Investing in Measurable Outcomes for Employees

Employers recognize the importance of offering benefits that truly make a difference in employees' lives. Implementing programs without measurable impact not only fails to effectively support employees but also diverts resources from initiatives that could deliver greater value. To address this concern, leaders are prioritizing evidence-based benefits that reflect employees' real-world experiences, measuring the benefits' outcomes, and using data to anticipate future needs.

Executive Insight for Action

Employers can embrace a data-driven approach by consistently measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of new benefit programs. Rather than relying on calculated assumptions about employee needs, leaders should define meaningful outcomes and use baseline measurements and real usage data to refine their offerings and ensure that benefits and access align with employees' actual experiences.

Employer Example: Aon

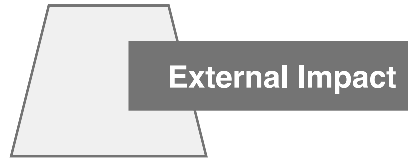
"One of the most powerful things employers can do is use data to see around corners. Today's risks are multifaceted, spanning economic uncertainty, workforce burnout, and shifting community expectations. But with the right insights, leaders can make smarter, faster decisions that protect both people and performance.

"At Aon, we believe workforce resilience begins with a full understanding of where support is most needed. That means going beyond surface-level metrics to identify challenges like mental health strain, financial pressure, or workload imbalance. When those insights are embedded into your people strategy, you're not just reacting to risk—you're staying ahead of it.

"It's also about making well-being part of how the organization operates. Encouraging open dialogue, building in time for recovery, and designing benefits that reflect real-life challenges all contribute to a more engaged, adaptable workforce. When your people are thriving, your business and the communities you serve are better protected."

Source: "Positioned to Thrive: Leveraging Data to Meet Evolving Needs and Build a More Resilient, Adaptable Workforce"—*Executive Insights interview with Lisa Stevens, chief administrative officer, Aon*

External: Community and Business Investments



Insight: Sustainable Investments

According to The Bridgespan Group's report *Needle-Moving Collective Impact Guide: The Next Generation of Community Participation*, relationships with nonprofits and community organizations are not simply philanthropic. Rather, they are strategic infrastructure for community resilience because they hold intelligence on emerging needs, community trust, and effective implementation strategy.

Nonprofits are increasingly aware of the risks associated with depending on a single funding source, alongside budget reductions, economic instability, shifting reimbursement models, and the need for sustained investment. Employers that invest in nonprofit organizations must recognize the potential consequences of withdrawing funding. To minimize disruption, they should consider implementing thoughtful upfront planning and potential transitions or sunsetting protocols when their support decreases or ends. Employers can build relationships with nonprofit partners in which they share responsibility through strategic planning and transparent communication about the impact of their financial investment and collaboration.

Executive Insight for Action

To address these risks, employers are proactively investing in local organizations, community stakeholders, and industry partners as highlighted in the 2025 EAE report *The Evolving Role and Economic Impact of Employers in Communities*. By fostering collaborative relationships and expanding sources of revenue, leaders can help their teams navigate financial uncertainty and create a more stable foundation for continued growth and community well-being.

Employer Example: Computers 4 People

"The most effective risk mitigation strategy is operational clarity and financial discipline. Employers should start with transparency—clearly communicating goals, expectations, and decision-making processes across all levels. Teams perform best when everyone understands the mission, and anyone not aligned with that mission should be reevaluated.

"From a financial standpoint, nonprofits should aim to have at least six to 12 months of operating reserves in the bank. Weekly, monthly, and quarterly cash flow reports should be reviewed against both projections and actuals. That discipline ensures you know not just how much you're spending, but whether you're on track or headed toward risk. Avoiding surprises is half the battle."

Source: "A Mission-Driven Strategy: Prioritizing Operational Clarity and Financial Discipline"
—*Executive Insights interview with Dylan Zajac, founder and executive director, Computers 4 People*

External: Industry and Sector Standards

Insight: Technology's Impact on Well-Being, Trust, and Standards

Employers across industries and sectors are increasingly challenged by rapid technological advancements, which impact employee well-being and organizational stability. Alongside this trend, a decline in trust between employees and employers creates barriers to continuity, adaptability, and preparedness within the workforce. These factors contribute to heightened stress, uncertainty, and scaling challenges.

Executive Insight for Action

To address these issues, employers can provide targeted training on AI integration and digital tools, aiming to reduce administrative burdens and enhance daily work experience. Additionally, clear internal communication about appropriate AI use and modeling of organizational values by senior leadership foster a supportive environment, strengthening trust and promoting employee well-being.

Employer Example: Leidos

"Employers have opportunities to normalize whole-person health approaches with the sheer volume of employee interactions they have on a recurring basis. From the recruiting process to onboarding, to daily responsibilities, to offboarding, employers can demonstrate their commitment to whole-person health. As chief information officer, I look at each interaction with an employee from a qualitative and quantitative perspective to constantly improve our ability to not only react to employees' whole-person health needs but also to anticipate them. If a technology-enabled digital assistant bot can see there is a planned out-of-office scheduled on an employee's calendar, it can prompt the employee to ask the bot to generate a request for leave or put up an out-of-office message.

"Reducing the friction and administrative toil between the employee and their technology and corporate processes relieves the mental load and time for the employee. Seeing each employee's interaction with technology through the lens of a whole-person health approach is not just about 'increasing productivity' but about making the employee's experience more enjoyable, seamless, and effective—therefore leading to increased productivity."

Source: "Employers Leveraging Technology to Advance Employee Whole-Person Health, One Interaction at a Time"—*Executive Insights interview with Alexandra Guenther, chief information officer, Leidos*

Topline Findings: Executive Actions Across the EAE Framework

- **Internal: Organizational Culture and Well-Being:** Build resilience and retention through empathetic, purpose-driven leadership; mentorship; hybrid flexibility; transparent communication; and clear career pathways across the organization/roles.
- **Internal: Employee Health-Care Policy and Programs:** Prioritize evidence-based, measurable benefits to ensure that programs genuinely improve employees' lives and direct resources where they deliver the most value.
- **External: Community and Business Investments:** Build relationships with nonprofits and community organizations as strategic partners in building a stronger, more resilient surrounding community.
- **External: Industry and Sector Standards:** Train staff on AI tools and set clear use expectations and support, with leaders modeling the approach, to cut administrative burden and protect employee well-being. Upskilling workers helps employers maintain a competitive edge and retain talent.

Resources: Leader Perspectives from 2025 *Executive Insights* Series

- Millicent Gorham, PhD, CEO, Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention
- Jonathan Melk, MD, CEO, Chiricahua Community Health Centers
- Eric Cioe-Pena, MD, vice president, global health, Northwell Health
- Phil Schermer, founder and CEO, Project Healthy Minds
- Christopher Swift, chairman and CEO, The Hartford
- Tom Bognanno, founder and partner, Alliance Practice
- Jon Gordon, founder and CEO, F|42
- Michelle Morse, MD, (former) acting commissioner, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- Daniel Knecht, MD, chief medical officer, Emblem Health
- Jeff Winton, founder and chairman, Rural Minds
- Sean Khozin, MD, CEO, CEO Roundtable on Cancer
- Mary Stutts, CEO, The Healthcare Businesswomen's Association
- Eric Eversole, president, Hiring Our Heroes; vice president, US Chamber of Commerce
- Sara Johnson Davis, vice president, head of patient advocacy and policy, Fulcrum Therapeutics
- Bill Heffernan, founder, ScreenSafe
- Uché Blackstock, MD, founder and CEO, Advancing Health Equity
- Courtney Gray Haupt, chair, global and US health, Edelman
- Dipal Doshi, CEO, Entrada Therapeutics

About the Milken Institute

The Milken Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank focused on accelerating measurable progress on the path to a meaningful life. With a focus on financial, physical, mental, and environmental health, we bring together the best ideas and innovative resourcing to develop blueprints for tackling some of our most critical global issues through the lens of what's pressing now and what's coming next.

About Milken Institute Health

Milken Institute Health develops research and programs to advance solutions in biomedical innovation, public health, healthy aging, and food systems.

About the Milken Institute Employer Action Exchange

The Employer Action Exchange (EAE) is a trusted platform that informs and advances employer priorities through customized, tangible actions and investments that impact health and performance at the organizational, employee, and community levels. Anchored in research highlighting emerging and escalating risks and actions for employers, the EAE delivers customized research, projects, and a thought leadership framework centered on four key levers: organizational culture, benefits, community and business investments, and industry/sector standards that challenge the status quo. The EAE offers a cultivated experience for C-suite leaders across a variety of roles, sectors, and industries.