

# tilt

## 2026

# Leave Benchmark Report



Made in partnership with



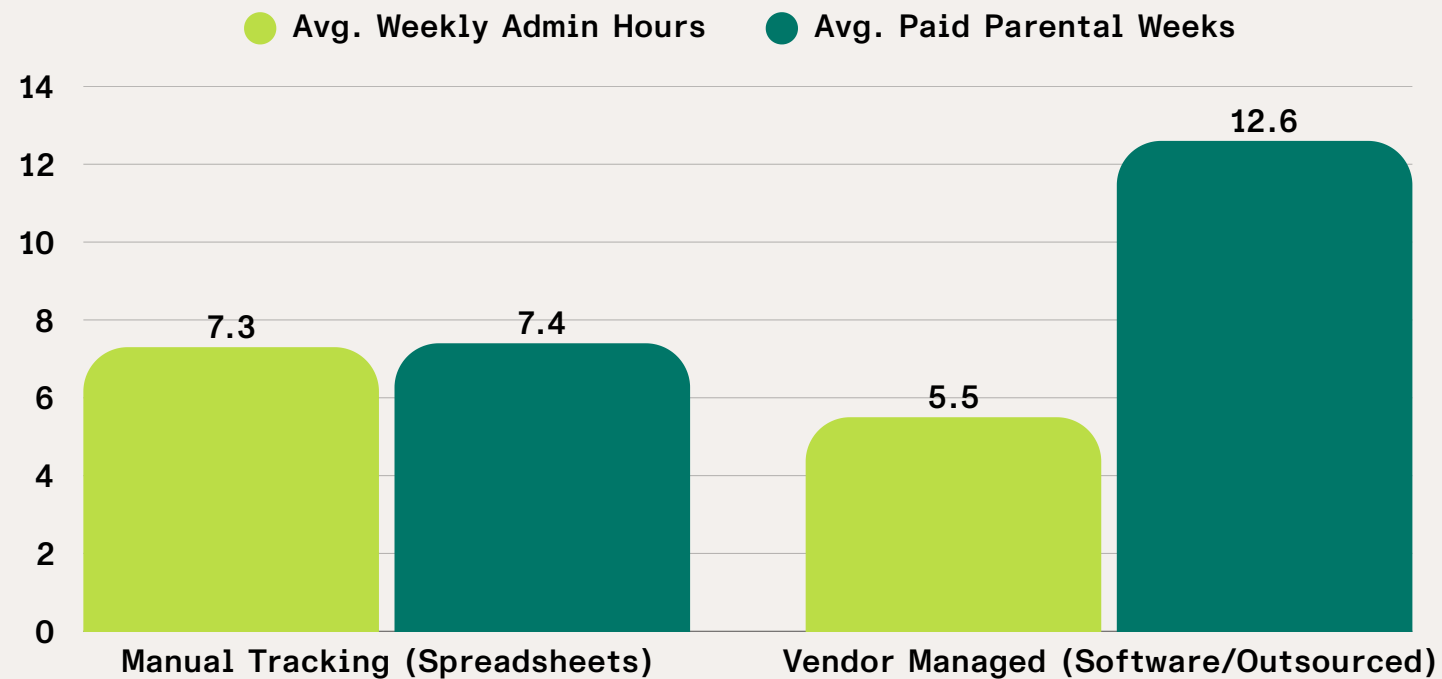
# Overview

The 2026 Leave Benchmark Survey, spanning 121 organizations across industries like technology, professional services, and healthcare, reveals a clear shift: leave management is no longer just a compliance function—it’s a strategic lever for growth, retention, and employee experience. While many organizations have standardized core leave policies, gaps in caregiving support, operational efficiency, and return-to-work practices highlight where the next phase of evolution is taking shape.

Paid parental and bereavement leave have become near-universal, signaling a baseline of support across organizations. However, caregiving leave remains underdeveloped, with fewer than one-third of companies offering it as a paid benefit—despite rising demand, particularly around aging parent care. This gap represents a key opportunity for differentiation as employee needs continue to expand beyond traditional leave categories.

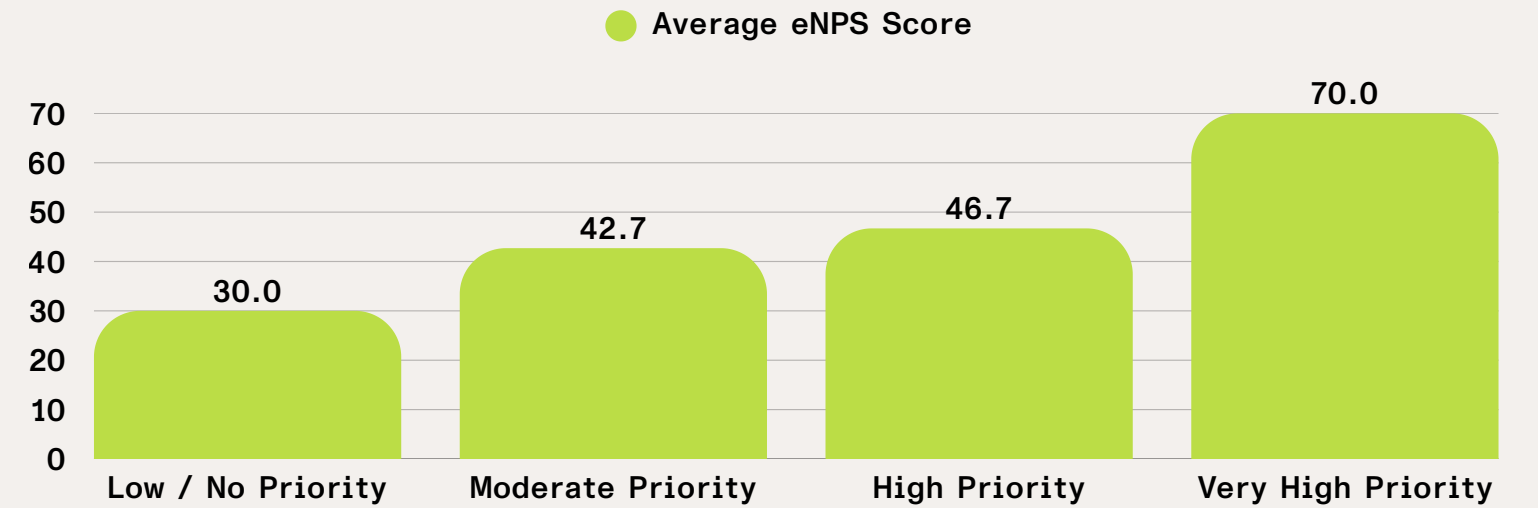
Leave management continues to place a significant burden on HR teams, especially those relying on manual processes. Organizations using spreadsheets spend more time on administration while offering less generous benefits. In contrast, those leveraging dedicated systems or vendor support not only reduce administrative time but also expand leave offerings—demonstrating that operational efficiency directly enables more competitive and scalable programs.

## Admin Hours vs. Time Offered by Leave Tracking



**Automate to Liberate: Organizations using vendors manage 70% more paid leave while spending 25% less time on admin.**

## Leave Priority vs. eNPS Scores



In addition, the quality of the leave experience appears to be a strong predictor of employee engagement and advocacy. Organizations that prioritize this experience see dramatically higher eNPS scores, while environments where employees feel comfortable requesting leave foster significantly higher engagement. This underscores that how leave is delivered—not just what is offered—has a measurable impact on workforce sentiment.

In addition to strong eNPS score, effective leave management drives other tangible business results. Higher engagement, supported by strong leave programs, correlates with improved retention rates among leave-takers. Additionally, more generous leave policies are linked to stronger post-leave performance, with employees more likely to meet or exceed goals upon returning to work.

Despite progress in policy design, the return-to-work phase remains a critical weak point. Many organizations lack visibility into post-leave performance, and employees frequently struggle with schedule transitions, workload backlog, and inconsistent manager support. This disconnect highlights an opportunity to better support employees during one of the most pivotal moments in the leave journey.

## Conclusion

Leave management is increasingly defining how organizations support, retain, and empower their workforce. The most successful companies are those that reduce administrative burden through automation and partnerships, allowing HR teams to focus on delivering a more human, supportive experience. Closing the caregiving gap and improving the return-to-work process will be essential next steps for organizations looking to build a more resilient, engaged, and high-performing workforce.

Leave is no longer a policy sitting quietly in the background of an employee's benefits package. It's a defining moment in their experience, and increasingly, a reflection of how organizations operate at their core.

Across this year's data, the contrast is clear. **Some organizations are still approaching leave as a compliance exercise.** Managed in spreadsheets, reactive by nature, and disconnected from the broader employee journey. Others are recognizing leave for what it is: a complex, high-impact lifecycle event that demands clarity, coordination, and care.

That gap is widening, but so are the consequences.

Today's workforce expects more. Leave is more frequent, more varied, and more visible than ever before, shaped by evolving state regulations, expanding definitions of needs, and rising expectations around equity and support. Employees aren't just evaluating what policies exist, they're evaluating how those policies are experienced in practice.

When leave is managed reactively, the downstream effects are hard to ignore. Teams experience breakdowns in communication. HR absorbs administrative burden. Employees return from leave without the clarity or support they need to re-engage effectively or don't return at all. And over time, those moments compound which causes irrefutable impacts to retention, performance, and trust.

**But the organizations leaning into this complexity are seeing a different outcome.**

They are moving beyond manual processes and fragmented ownership, investing in systems and strategies that bring structure to leave while preserving the human experience. They are proactively managing the process, not reacting to it. They are designing leave programs that are not only equitable on paper, but consistent and transparent in practice.

And importantly, they are recognizing that how you support someone during a moment that matters - whether it's the birth of a child, a medical event, or caregiving for a loved one - shapes how they view your organization long after that leave ends.

Over the past several years, we've seen a clear pattern emerge: more evolved organizations are treating leave as a strategic lever, while others remain anchored in administrative, reactive approaches.

The data reinforces what many HR leaders are already feeling, that leave is becoming more complex, not less. The question is no longer whether organizations need to adapt, but how quickly they are willing to do so.

Because in this environment, standing still isn't neutral. It creates risk - operationally, legally, and culturally.

Organizations that bring clarity to complexity, that combine automation with empathy, and that treat leave as a core part of the employee lifecycle are positioning themselves for what's ahead.

Those that don't will continue to feel the strain. The strain in inefficiencies, in employee experience, and ultimately, in their ability to compete for and retain talent.

**In that moment, people don't remember the policy. They remember how you showed up. And that's what defines your organization.**

**Jen Henderson**

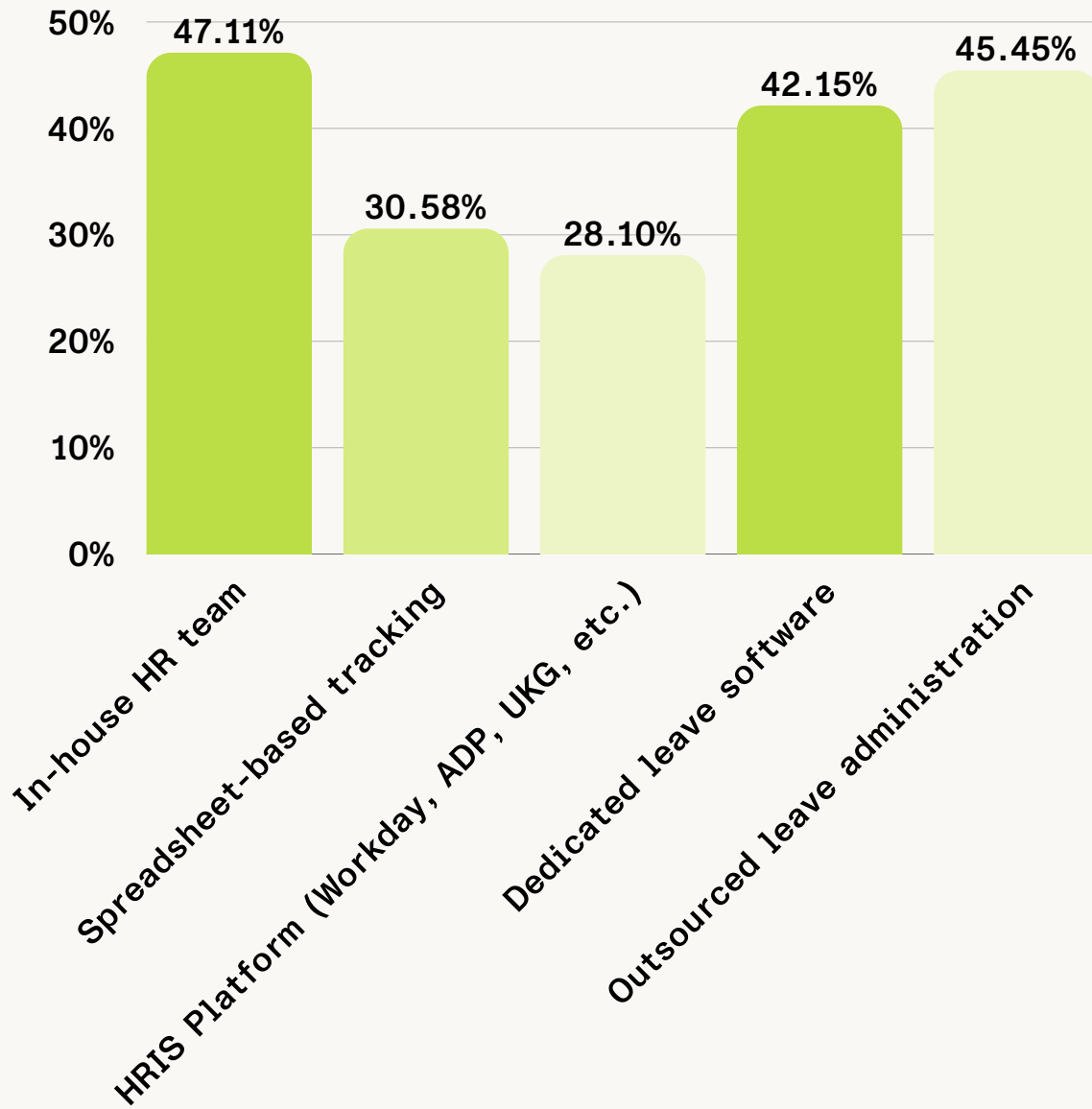
Chief Executive Officer





## How is your time spent?

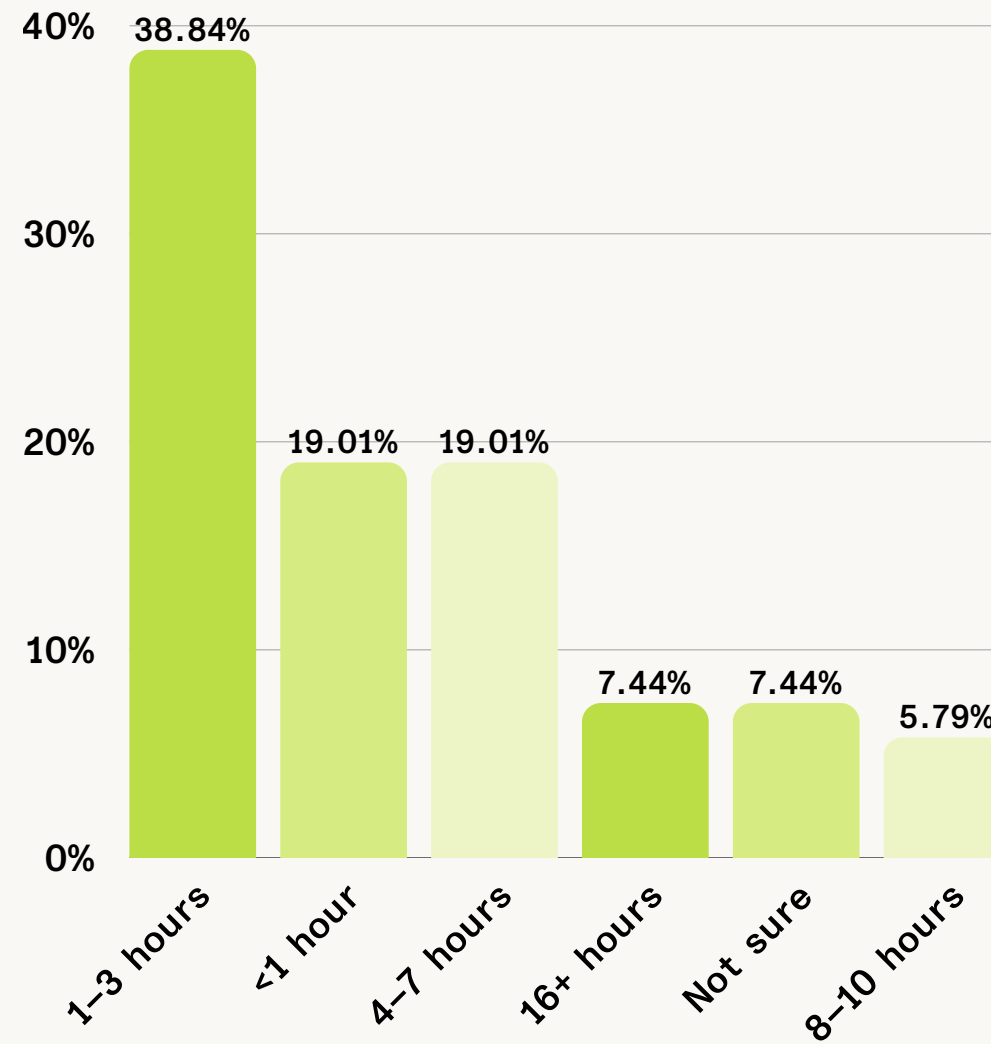
### How Leave is Managed



Leave management remains highly manual—driving significant administrative burden for HR teams.

Despite increasing complexity in leave policies and compliance requirements, most organizations continue to rely on manual or semi-manual processes. This reliance introduces inefficiencies, increases administrative workload, and creates inconsistencies in the employee experience.

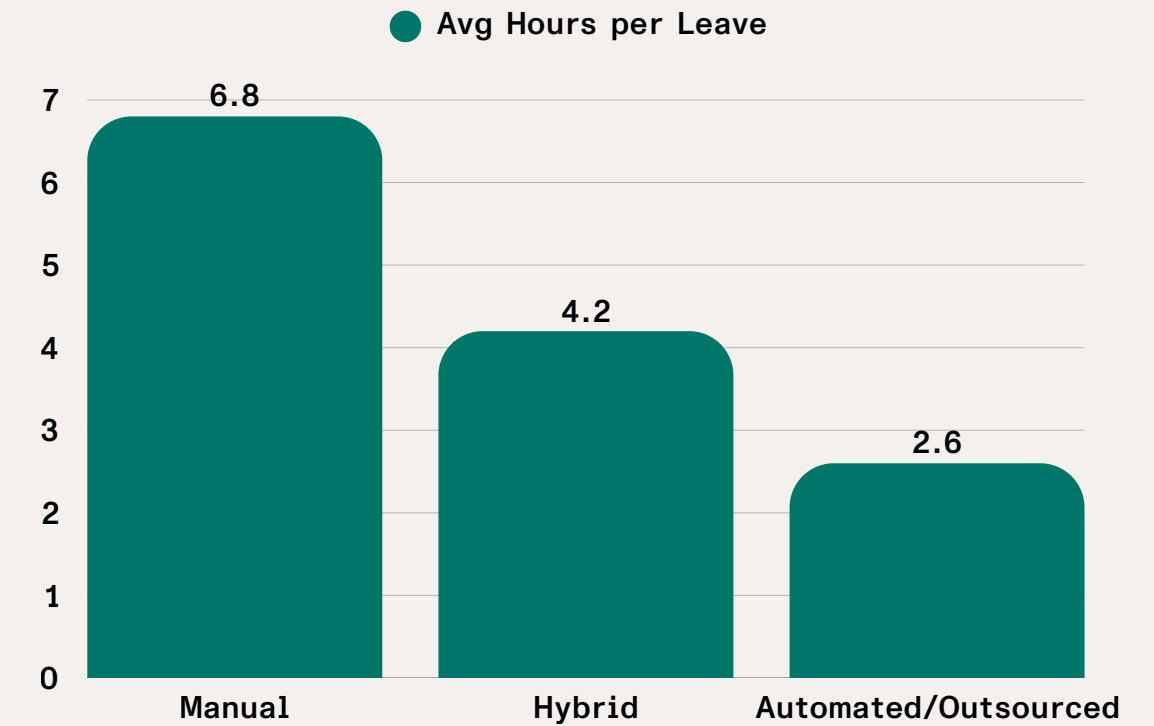
### HR Time Spent Managing Leave



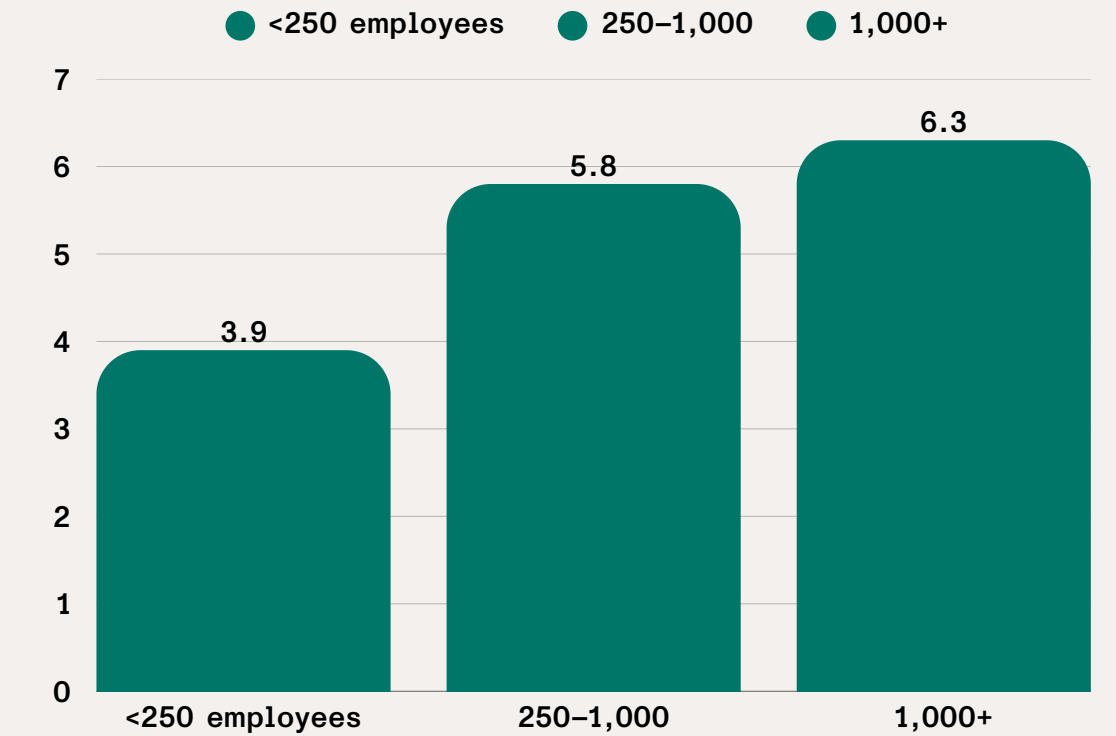
Leave management requires meaningful time investment—often several hours per case.

The data shows a clear relationship between how leave is managed and the time required to administer it. Organizations relying on manual processes report significantly higher time investment per leave case, while those with more structured or automated approaches see meaningful efficiency gains.

### Time Spent Per Leave By Leave Process

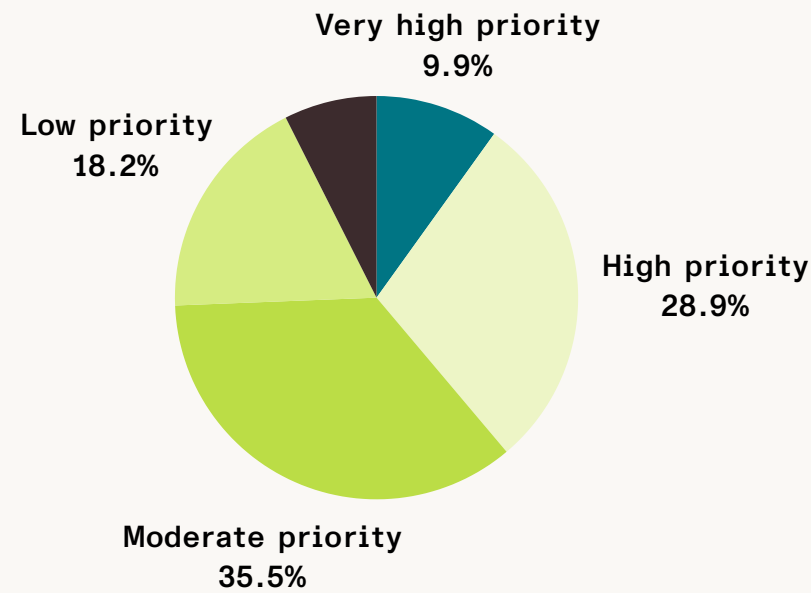


### Time Spent Per Leave By Company Size



Time burden increases ~60% from small to large organizations

### Leave Experience Priority



Here’s the honest takeaway we keep coming back to: how you treat the leave experience shows up everywhere — especially in whether your people stay, how they perform, and how they feel at work.

And it’s worth acknowledging upfront: managing leave is **hard**. For HR teams, it’s a constant balance between compliance, coordination, and care. For managers, it often means supporting one employee through a major life moment while asking the rest of the team to stretch and adapt. There’s real tension in trying to do right by everyone.

When leave is truly prioritized, the impact is hard to ignore. These organizations aren’t just being empathetic, they’re creating systems that better support everyone involved — the employee on leave, the team stepping in, and the people responsible for holding it all together. **They’re the ones seeing over 90% of employees still with them a year after taking leave.** When leave is treated as a low-priority task, retention starts to slip, and it becomes much harder to understand (or earn) long-term loyalty.

Of course, in a perfect world, every employee would have all the time and space they need. In reality, leave has to work within the constraints of the business and the team supporting it. **That’s what makes this so challenging — and so important to get right.**

But improving the leave experience doesn’t always require new policies, expanded benefits, or additional cost. Often, the biggest impacts can come from something much simpler.

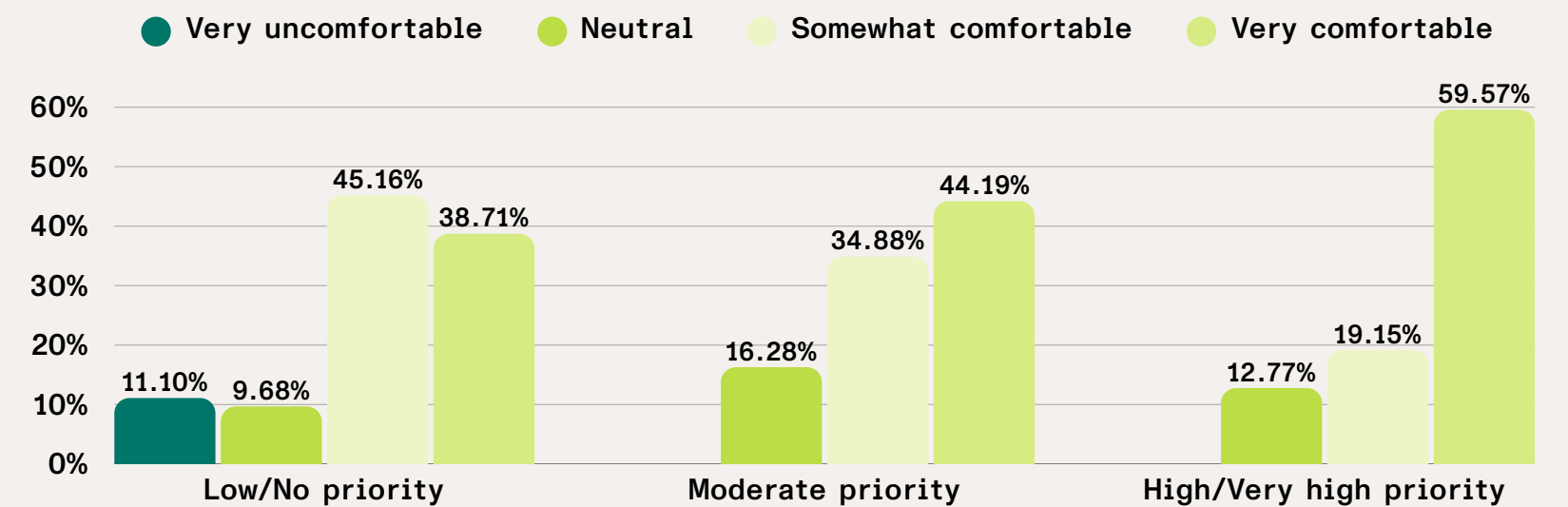
The return-to-work moment is where this really comes into focus. That first quarter back is challenging for everyone, it’s a big transition. When re-entry is thoughtfully designed it reduces strain on the team, gives managers a clearer path forward, and helps employees regain confidence more quickly. Suddenly the entire experience feels more stable, not just for the individual returning, but for everyone around them.

And there’s another layer to this that matters just as much: how people feel. Prioritizing leave has a direct impact on eNPS and overall engagement.

When employees trust that they’ll be supported during major life moments, everything shifts. In high-priority environments, that hesitation around taking leave disappears. **People feel safe.** They feel supported. And that shows up in advocacy. **Organizations that lead here are nearly three times more likely to report top-tier eNPS.** That kind of trust isn’t built overnight, but leave is one of the clearest ways to earn it.

And it’s worth grounding this in reality: the goal isn’t to create a perfect leave experience in theory. It’s to build one that works in practice — within what is reasonable and achievable for the business — without losing sight of the people at the center of it.

### Comfort Requesting a Leave vs. Leave Priority



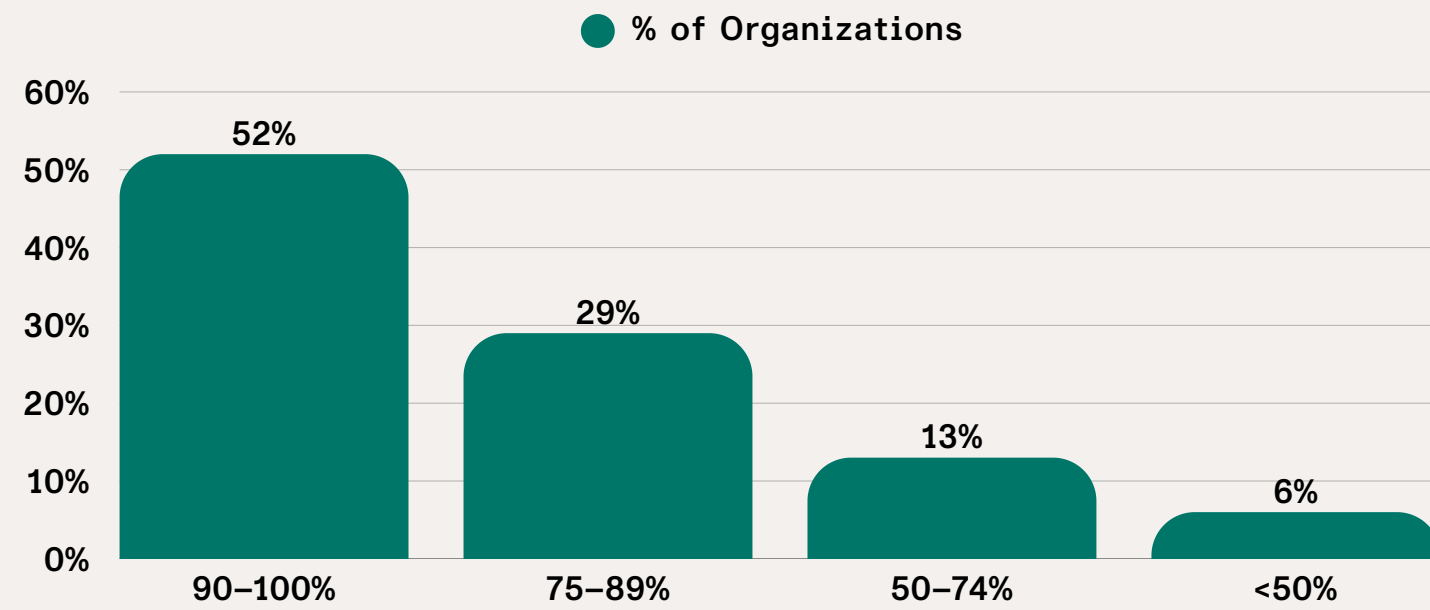
So if there’s one thing we’d encourage, it’s this: don’t think about leave solely as something that needs to be “managed.” Think about it as something to design. Not just in a way that supports the employee taking leave, but the people responsible for making it work - and makes sense for the business. The teams seeing the biggest impact are the ones investing in the right tools, building intentional return-to-work experiences, and creating an environment where people feel confident using the benefits available to them.

Because in that moment, you’re not just supporting one employee, you’re showing everyone how much support they can expect when it’s their turn.



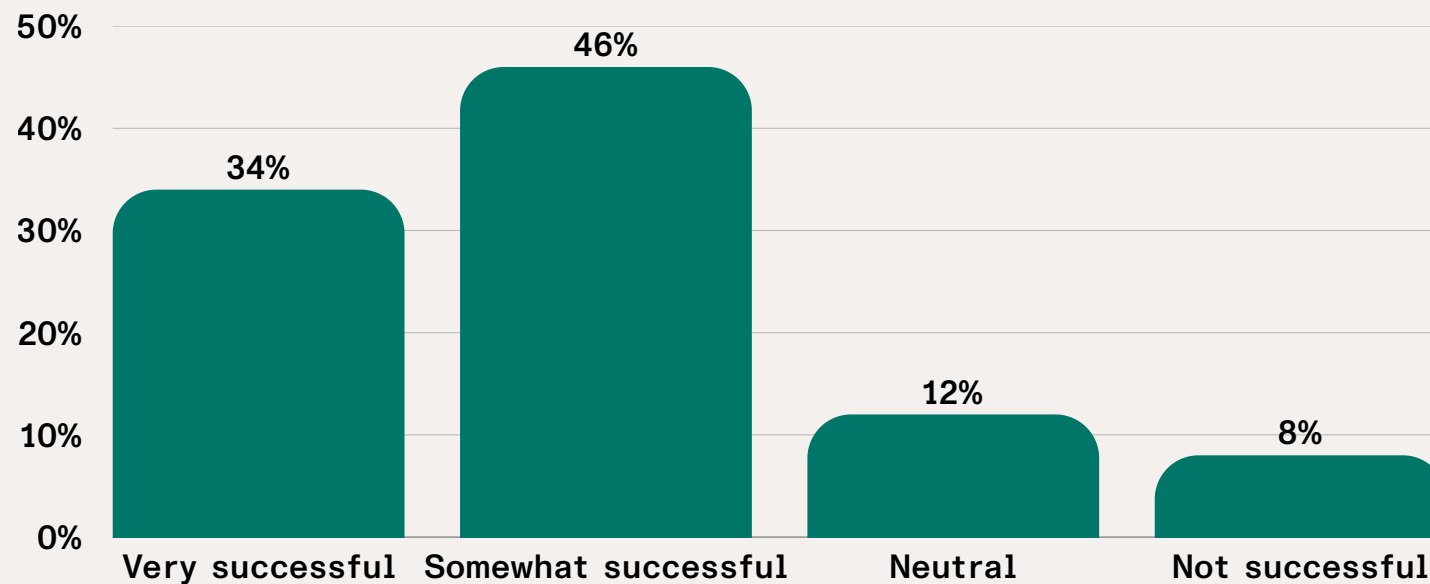
**Jessi Johansen**  
Chief Growth Officer

### % of Employees Retained After Leave



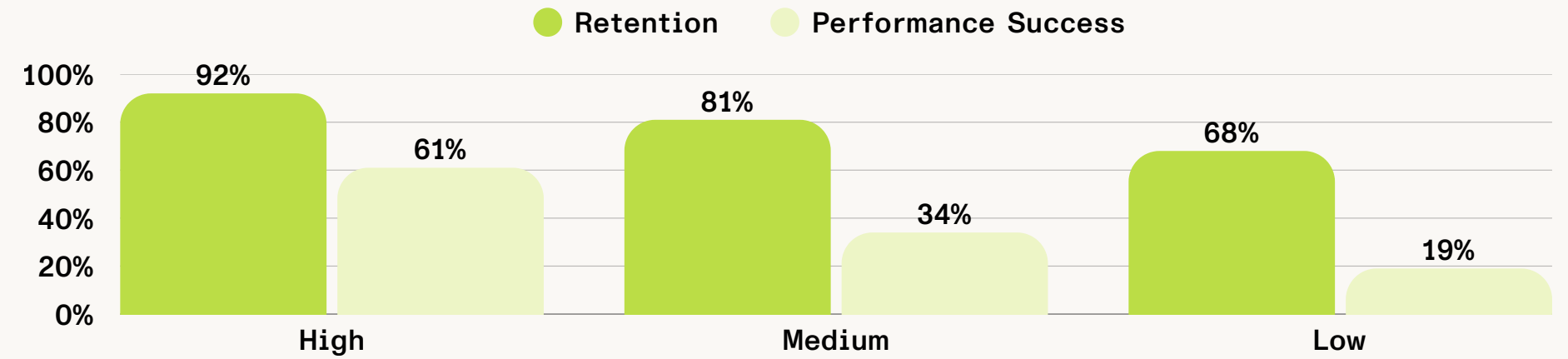
81% report retention above 75%  
But 19% lose at least 1 in 4 employees after leave

### Post-Leave Performance



While most organizations report strong retention following leave, performance outcomes tell a more nuanced story. A significant portion of employees do not immediately return to full productivity, indicating an opportunity for improved reintegration and support.

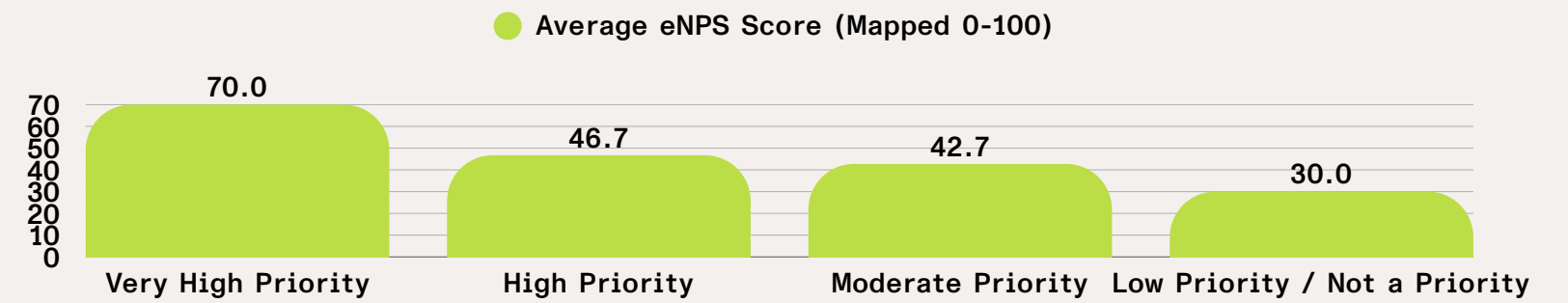
### Leave Experience Priority and Retention/Performance



#### Defining Leave Experience Priority

Survey responses on how organizations prioritize leave were grouped into high (top or strategic focus), medium (moderately prioritized), and low (low or no formal priority). These categories provide a consistent framework to benchmark practices, track trends, and identify actionable insights.

### Leave Experience Priority vs. eNPS Score



The quality of the leave experience directly impacts retention and performance.

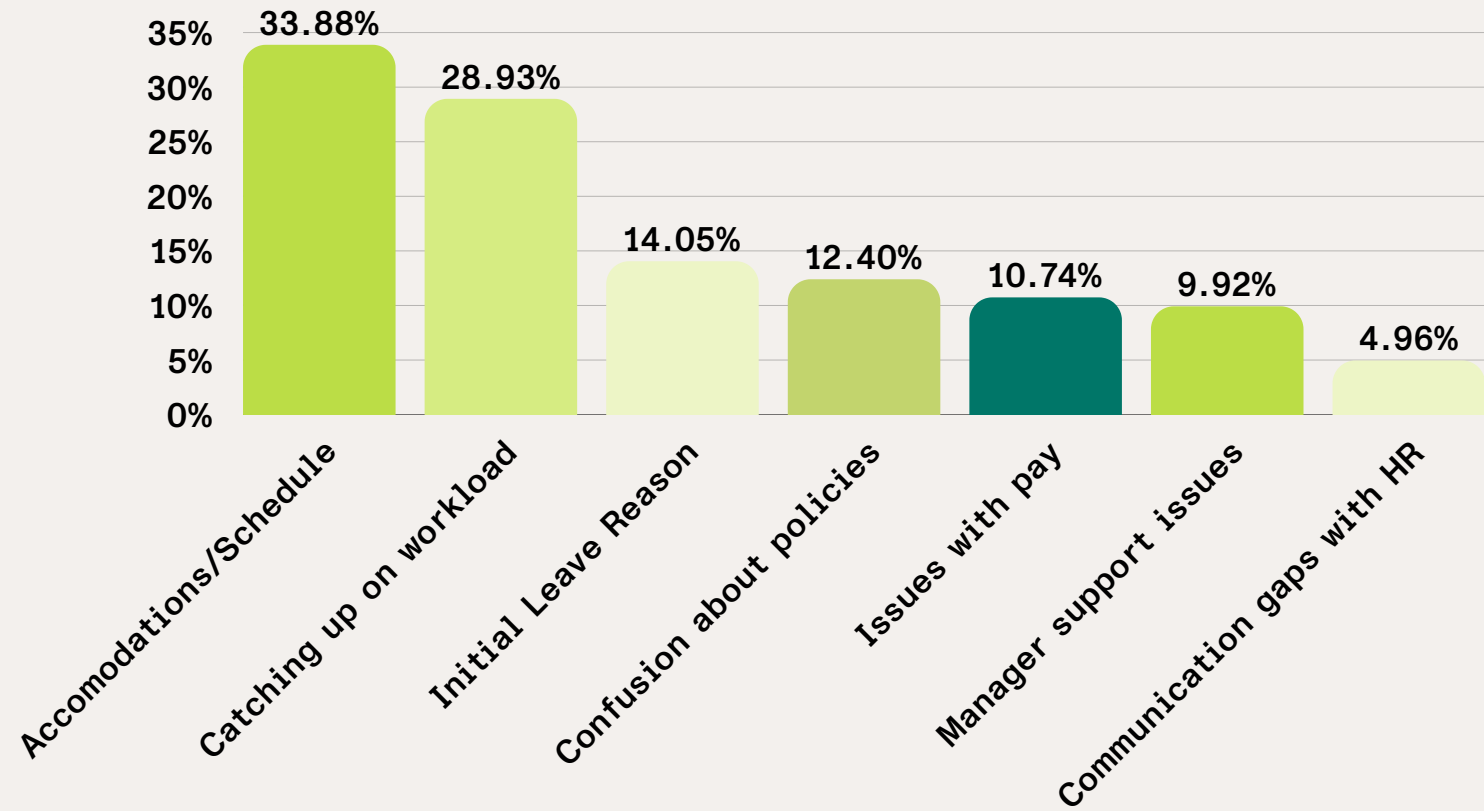


**Jen Henderson**  
Chief Executive Officer

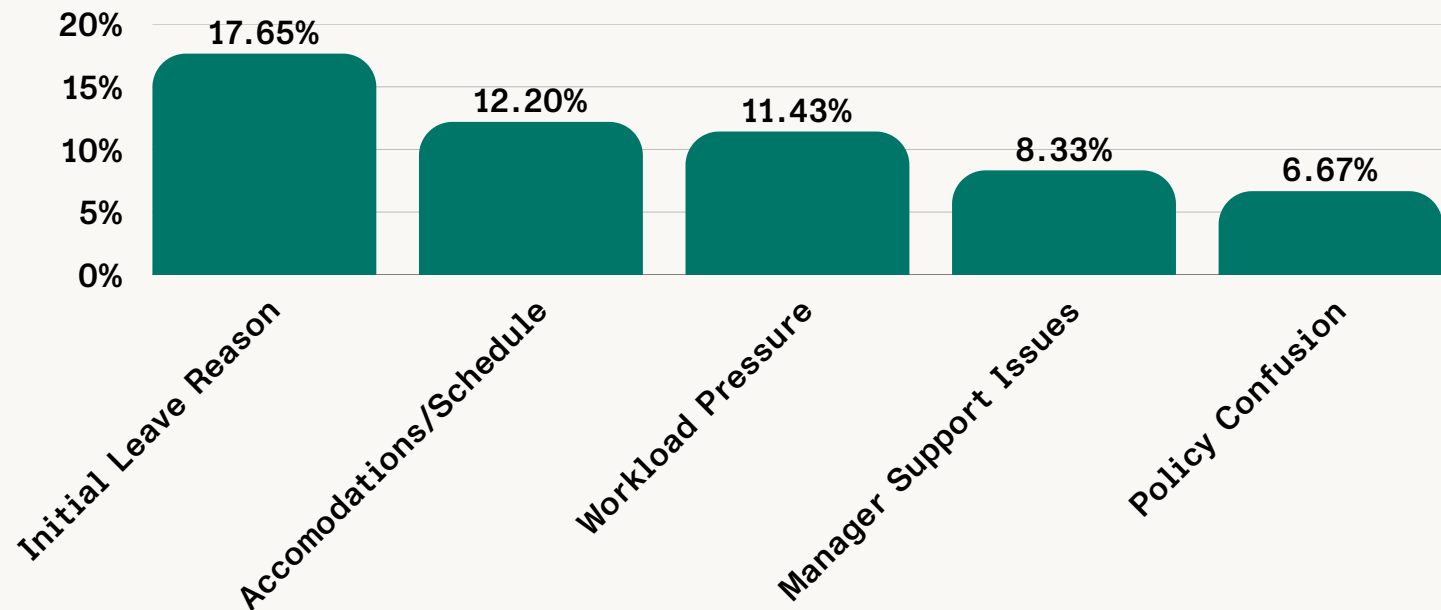
“High-growth organizations recognize that retention and performance are the outcomes of how we support our people through their most impactful life events.

With an **88% retention rate** in high-engagement cultures, it's clear that a well-managed leave program is one of the strongest levers we have to protect our most valuable asset—our talent—and keep our momentum moving forward.”

### Top Reported Challenges for Returning Employees

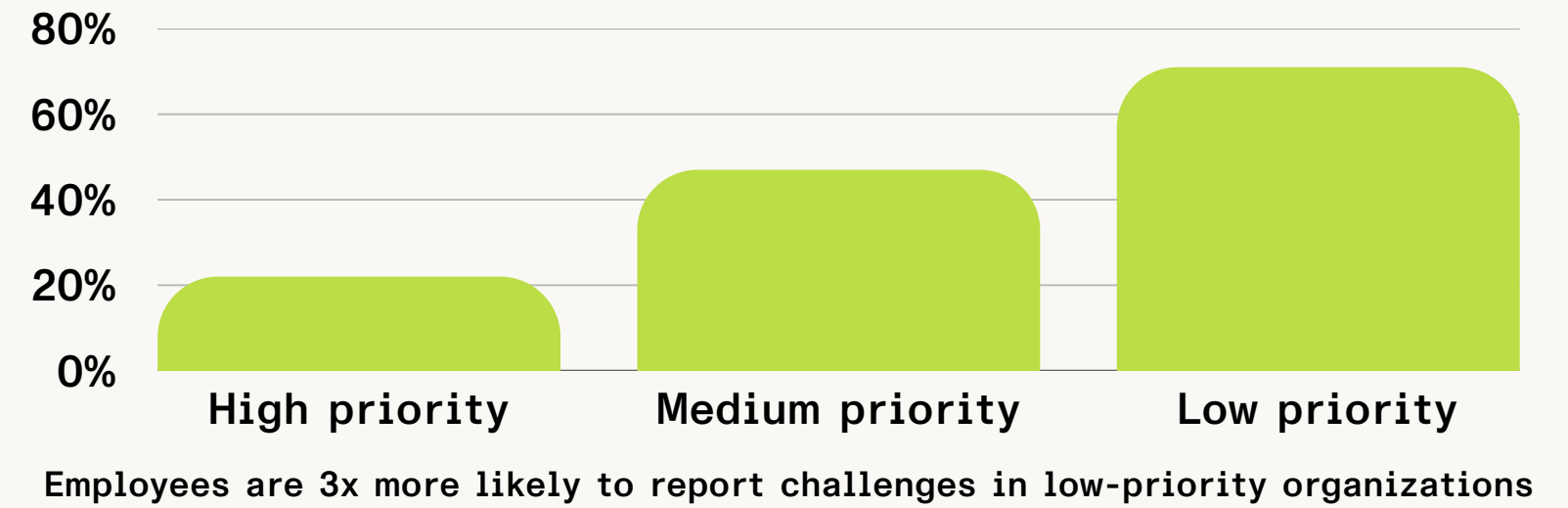


### The Real Barriers to Post-Leave Performance



This chart shows the most common leave problems reported by organizations who are reporting employees struggle to meet expectations after returning from leave. The "Support Gap" is the #1 Performance Killer: Employees who reported "Still needing support for the initial leave reason" were the most likely to struggle, with 17.6% partially meeting expectations. This suggests that "returning to work" does not mean the "need" has ended.

### Leave Experience Priority



There's a clear next layer to the leave conversation: what actually gets in the way of performance when employees come back - and why visibility matters.

The data shows these challenges are predictable. The biggest barrier isn't capability, it's a support gap. Employees who still need support for the reason they took leave are the most likely to struggle, reinforcing a simple truth: returning to work doesn't mean the need has ended. From there, friction shows up in more operational ways like catching up on workload, navigating schedule transitions, and managing accommodations. And while HR shapes the overall experience, managers are the ones who ultimately influence performance day to day. When manager support is inconsistent, performance tends to suffer.

At the same time, there's a visibility issue many teams underestimate. Organizations that aren't tracking how leave utilization is changing are often the same ones who lack confidence in their retention data. Without a clear view into what's happening, it becomes incredibly difficult to measure impact or make informed improvements.

The takeaway: supporting leave isn't enough. The real impact comes from supporting the return with equipped managers, human support from HR teams, intentional re-entry plans, and the visibility to understand what's working.



**Brandon Salisbury**  
Chief Revenue Officer

One thing we see every day at Wellthy - and that this data makes hard to ignore - is just how much caregiving has evolved. Care has always been a reality for families, but today's employees are navigating it in more complex and sustained ways than ever before. Many are balancing responsibilities across generations, supporting children while also managing the growing needs of aging parents. In fact, 52% of the workforce is now caring for an older family member.

As caregiving needs continue to evolve, many organizations are still determining how best to meet this moment. Only 3.3% of companies expanded their caregiving leave in the past year, and nearly two-thirds (62.8%) do not yet have a formal caregiving leave policy in place. At the same time, many leaders recognize that leave alone cannot address the full day-to-day realities of caregiving. Without broader support for the ongoing logistics, decisions, and coordination employees manage outside of work, a meaningful gap will remain between employees' needs and the resources available to them.

And that gap doesn't just stay at home, it follows employees back to work. Caregiving is ongoing, often unpredictable, and comes with a heavy logistical and emotional load. Coordinating care, managing appointments, finding providers, understanding benefits - these are day-to-day responsibilities that don't end when leave does. Without the right support, employees return still carrying that weight, which can impact focus, performance, and overall well-being.

This is where we see meaningful opportunity. Organizations that pair leave policies with active caregiving support can create a stronger experience for their people. Resources like care coordination, benefits guidance, and thoughtful return-to-work support help employees navigate the full arc of caregiving with substantially less strain and more stability.

Caregiving leave is an important part of that foundation. Like parental leave, it gives employees the space to manage critical moments and return ready to re-engage. As caregiving responsibilities continue to touch a large share of the workforce, formal leave policies are increasingly emerging as a baseline expectation for modern employers. With at least half of the workforce navigating caregiving responsibilities, offering that support is becoming a practical response to today's workforce realities.

Because caregiving isn't going away, and it's not something employees can manage alone. The organizations that recognize that, and respond with more holistic support, are the ones building deeper trust, stronger retention, and a more resilient workforce.



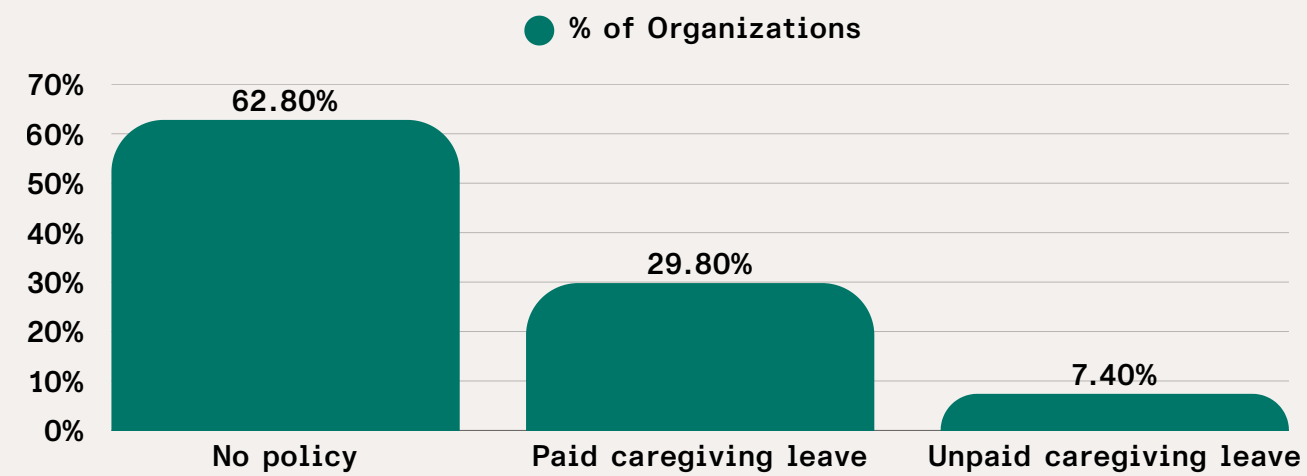
### About Wellthy

Wellthy is a caregiving support platform that helps employees navigate the complexity of caring for aging parents, children, and loved ones. Through personalized care coordination and expert guidance, Wellthy reduces the administrative and emotional burden of caregiving—helping employees manage everything from healthcare logistics to long-term care planning. By bridging the gap between traditional benefits and real-life caregiving needs, Wellthy enables organizations to better support employees through some of life's most challenging moments.



**Theresa M. Roma**  
Head of Insurance Solutions  
Wellthy

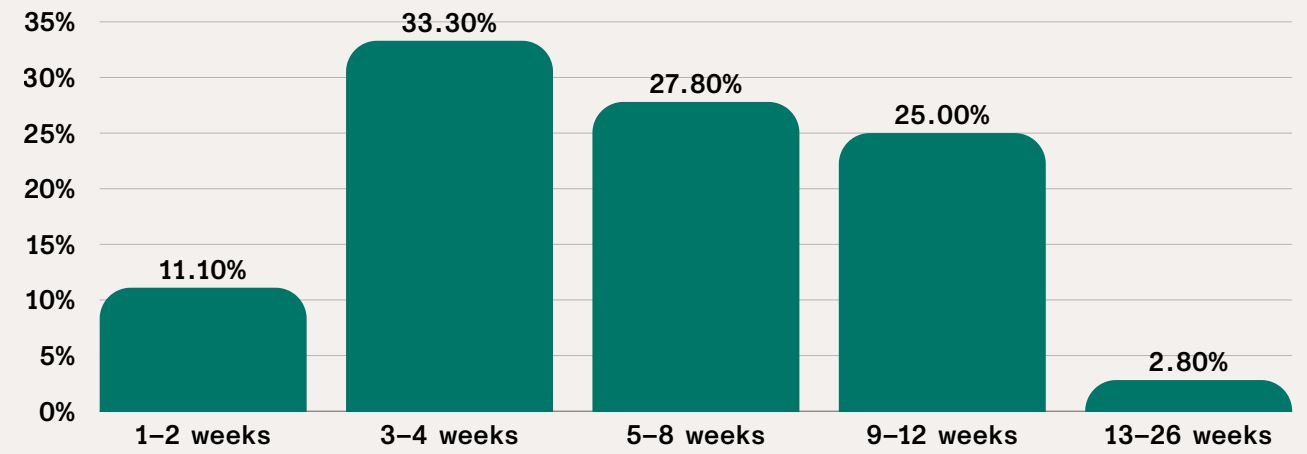
### Leave Policy Breakdown



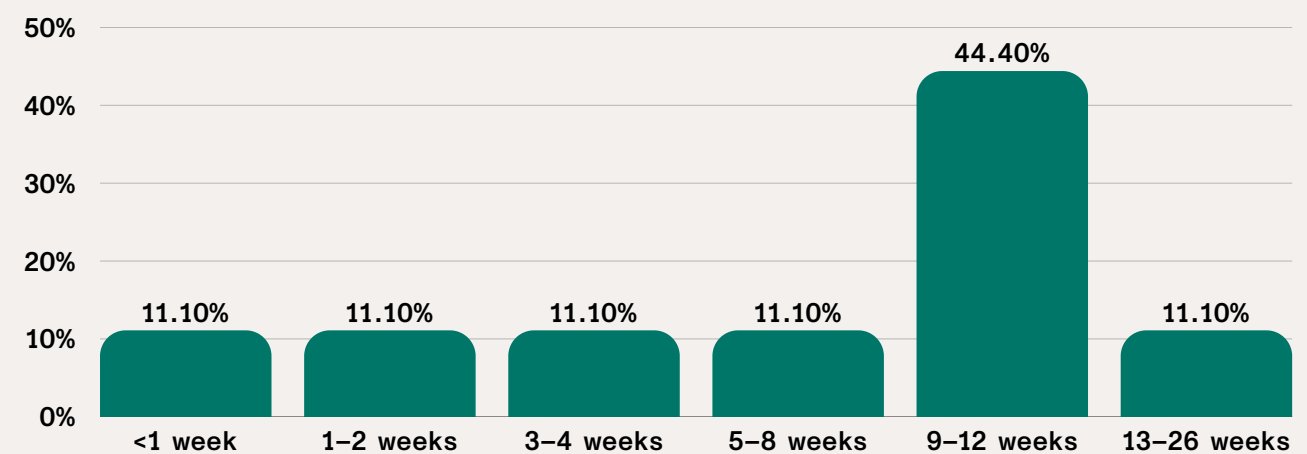
**Most organizations do not offer formal caregiving leave despite growing employee need.**

Nearly two-thirds of organizations (62.8%) report having no formal caregiving leave policy in place. While 29.8% offer paid leave, and a small portion provide unpaid leave, the data highlights a significant gap between employee caregiving needs and formal organizational support.

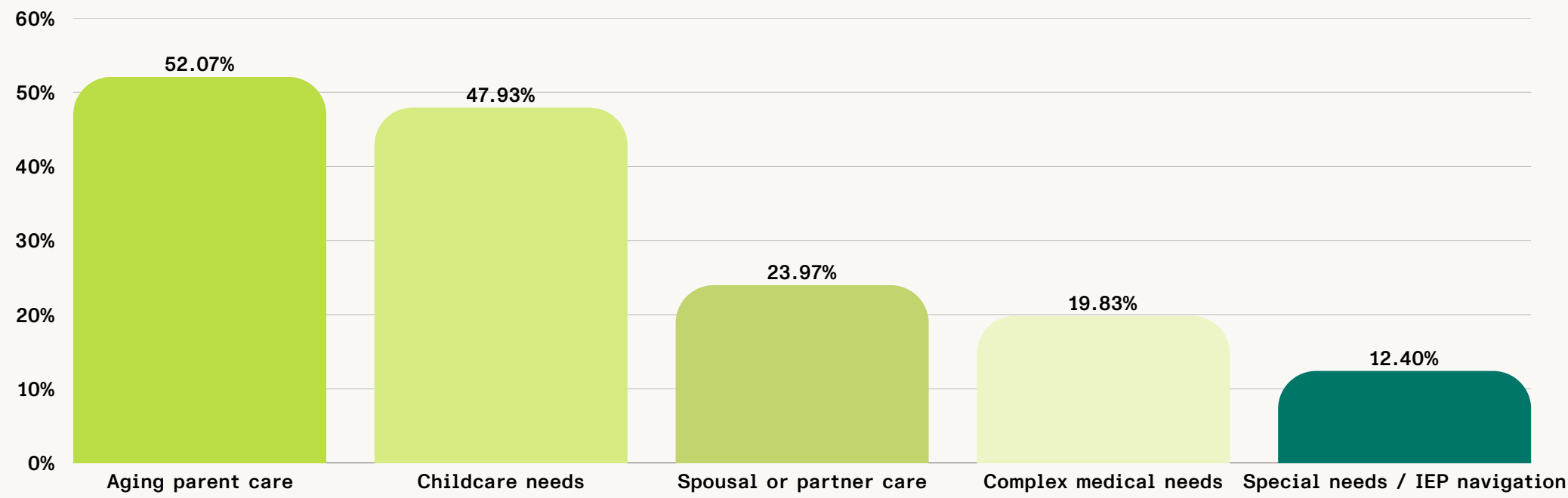
### Paid Policy - Duration



### Unpaid Policy - Duration



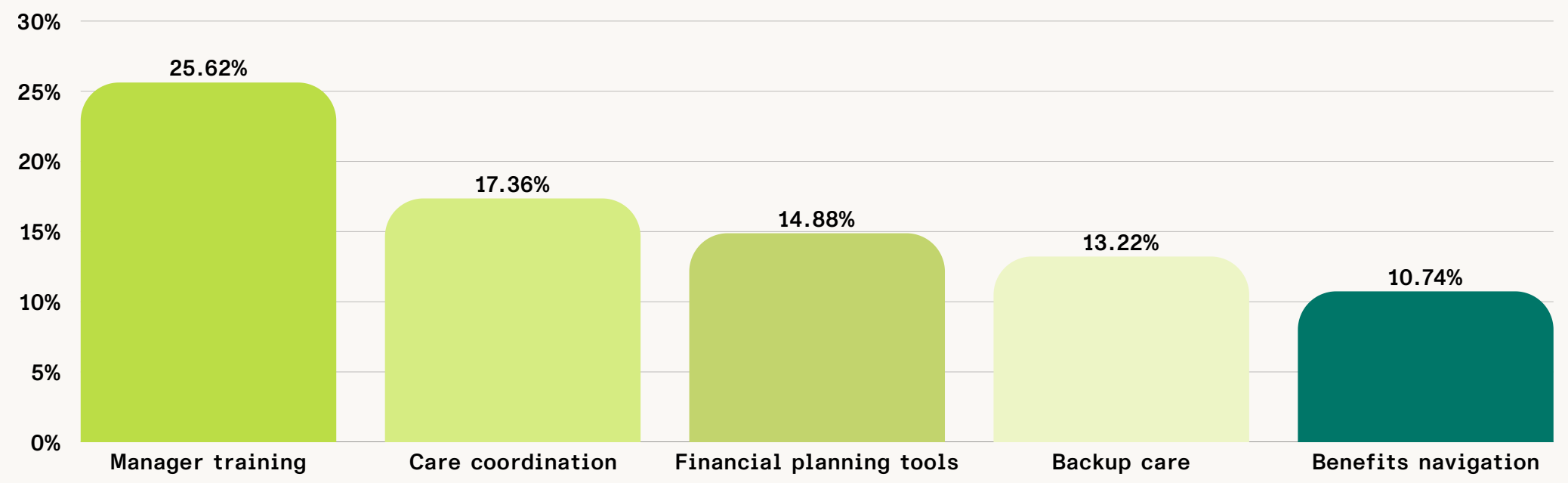
### Caregiving Support Needs



The data tells a clear story: Employees are increasingly needing support for eldercare (Aging Parents) and spousal care. While many companies focus on parental leave or caregiving for children, the organizations that "win" on engagement are those that recognize caregiving as a broader life event.

**The Caregiving Gap: Despite 52% of employees managing aging parent care, only 3.3% of companies expanded caregiving leave in the last year, suggesting that while the need is high, the policy response is still lagging.**

### Caregiving Support Most Impactful to Improving Employee Stability



### Which additional leave type(s) do you believe your company would benefit from offering?

HR leaders are looking beyond statutory requirements to support the "whole employee," focusing on mid-career longevity and modern family structures:

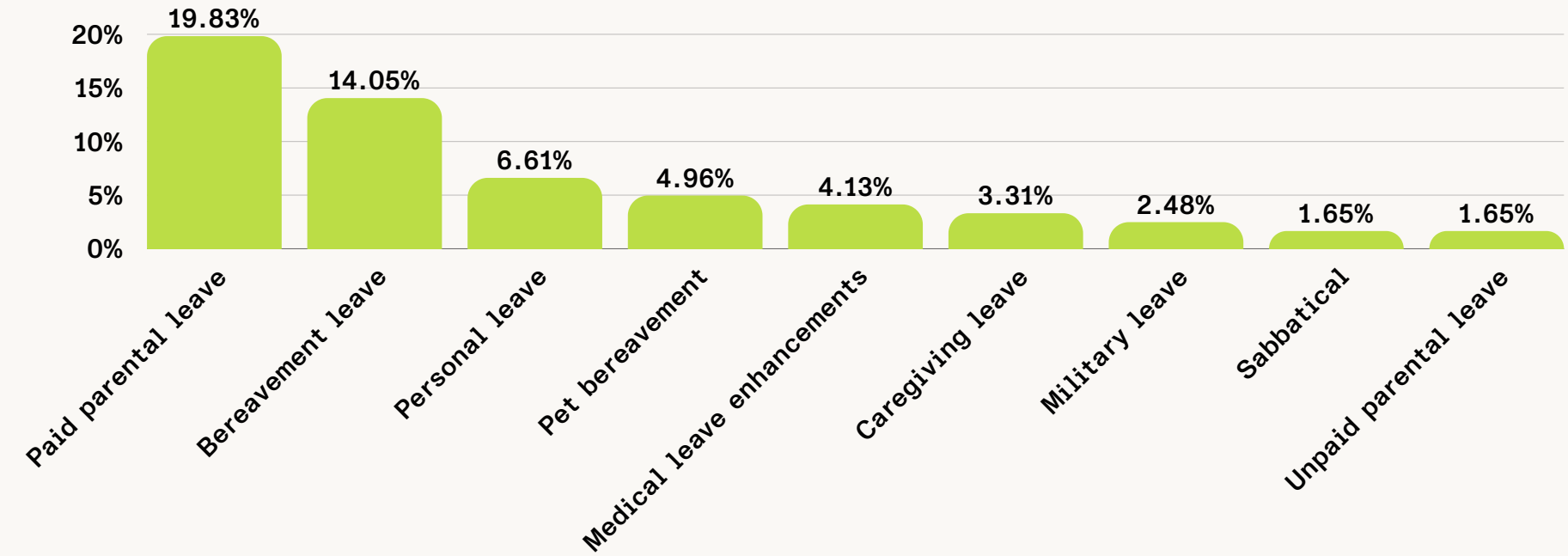
- **Burnout Prevention:** Sabbaticals and "micro-retirements" are the most sought-after additions to reward tenure and allow for deep recovery.
- **Expanded Compassion:** A strong push for Formalized Caregiving Leave (separate from personal medical leave) and Pet Bereavement to acknowledge modern family dynamics.
- **Core Enhancements:** Upgrading existing policies from unpaid to Company-Paid Parental/Medical leave and broadening the scope of bereavement to include reproductive loss.
- **Modern Health:** Interest in specialized support for Mental Health, Menopause, and Menstrual Leave.

### What cultural improvements related to leave are you prioritizing in the next 12 months?

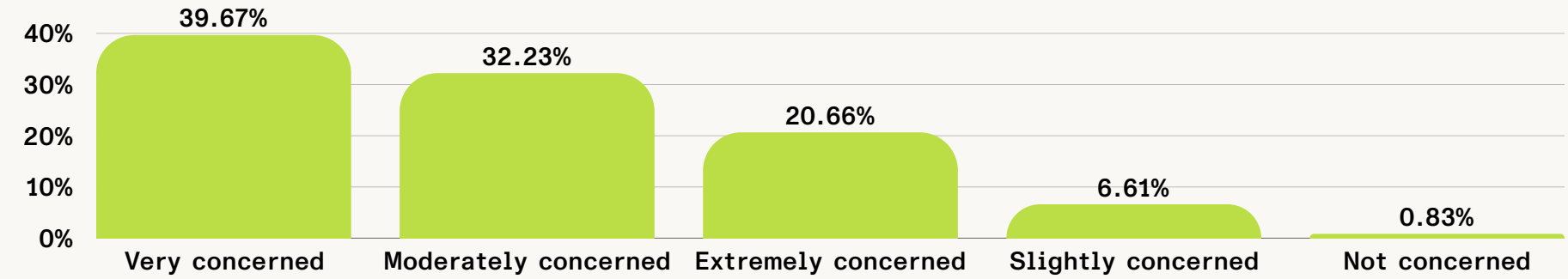
For the next 12 months, the focus is shifting from "what" benefits are offered to "how" they are experienced, with an emphasis on equity and empathy:

- **Manager Consistency:** Prioritizing Manager Training to eliminate the "manager lottery" and ensure leave requests are handled consistently and without bias across the organization.
- **Eliminating Stigma:** Actively working to de-stigmatize taking leave by modeling behavior from the top down and removing the "guilt" often felt by caregivers and non-birthing parents.
- **Operational Transparency:** Moving away from hidden policies toward proactive communication and clear, accessible guides that demystify the administrative process.
- **Re-entry Support:** Formalizing phased return-to-work schedules and "soft landings" to help employees reintegrate without immediate performance pressure.

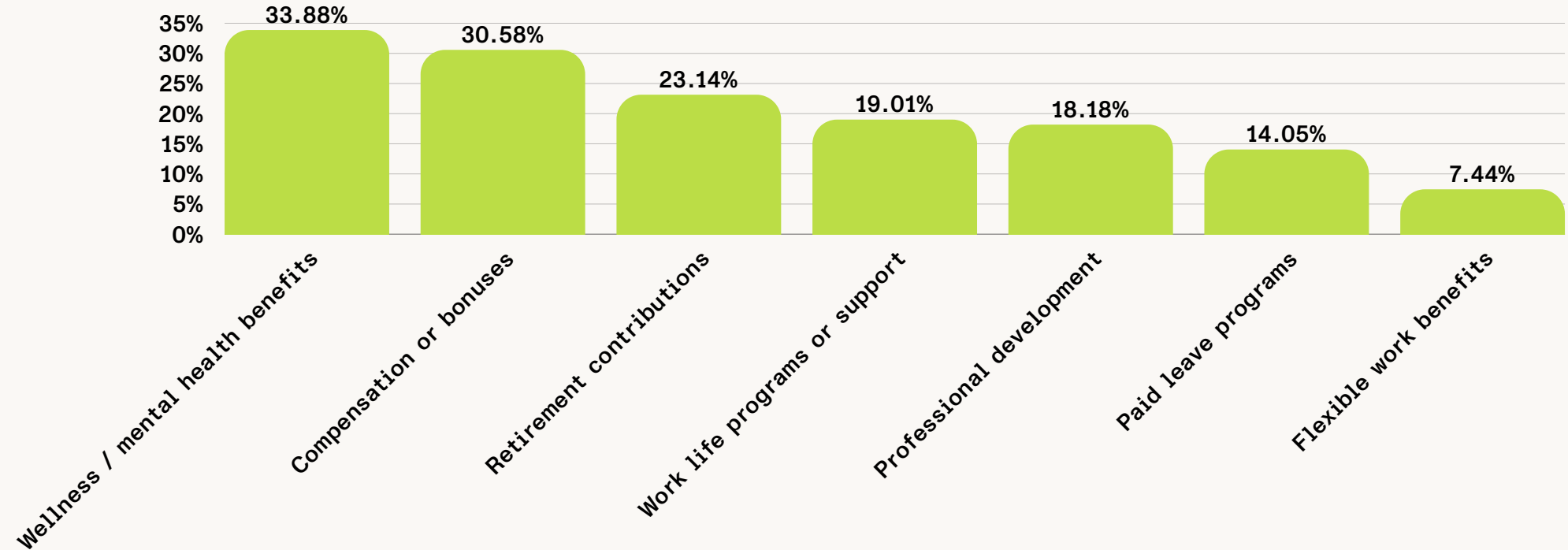
### Leave Types Added or Expanded in the Last Twelve Months



### How concerned is your organization about rising healthcare benefit costs?



### Which benefit areas are most impacted? (by rise in healthcare costs)





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