Employer Action Exchange:

Executive Reflections on Building Resilient Businesses Through Whole-Person Health Investments

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Our *Executive Insights* series—part of the Milken Institute Employer Action Exchange (EAE)—began in late 2023, capturing the voices of executives from a variety of industries and sectors on the role employers could take to invest in their employees and advance whole-person health priorities. In 2025, the series is focused on how employers invest in mitigating risk and building resilience for their employees, communities, and their business or mission.

Collective Priorities Across Executives, Industries, and Sectors (November 2023–January 2025)

We posed two questions to **31 executives** across **11 diverse industries**, including venture capital, nonprofit, biotechnology, communications, research, investment management, health care, defense and aerospace, sports, retail, and insurance. Together, these leaders represent a collective global reach of **440,000 employees** in **87 countries**.

Among all the responses, one theme remained constant: **when whole-person health is not prioritized for employees, there are prominent impacts on the health of the organization**. At the individual level, downstream effects include decreased productivity, absenteeism, disengagement, and burnout. These effects can extend to an erosion of trust between an organization and the local community, tarnishing the reputation of a business. These individual and community impacts have significant implications for the well-being of a business, leading to reduced company profit, retention issues, a high turnover rate, and overall higher costs.

Regardless of business size, industry, or sector, whole-person health investments have clear economic and social benefits. Healthier individuals are better employees, building healthier communities and, ultimately, businesses.

Each time a risk was mentioned in an executive interview, we noted and quantified it across all responses (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Likely Impacts When Business Fails to Prioritize Whole-Person Health (Frequency with Which Each Risk Was Mentioned)

Note: Terms mentioned more often appear in larger type size.   *Source: Milken Institute analysis (2025)*

Question 2. How do employers build a sustainable whole-person health approach that anticipates the ebb and flow of the external environment, whether those are shifts in the economic, social, or political landscape?

Although executives emphasized the need to customize whole-person health resources to the needs of their people, three overarching themes emerged.

Employers should understand what employees need by leveraging data-driven approaches. Data may be manifest through listening efforts, such as surveys (with follow-up), or simply through open channels of communication and transparent approaches that reach all employees.

Adaptability, agility, and flexible policies are key to thriving during times of uncertainty. Building these values into an organization's people and operational approaches enables employees and businesses to stay nimble. However, policy alone is not enough to ensure lasting change; leaders must be intentional and model "policies in action" to demonstrate true organizational commitment to the priorities impacting employees.

Last, across all interviews, executives voiced the need for businesses to stay true to their organizational values. Consistency builds a sense of trust, not only with employees but also with the community through partnerships, both of which are essential for long-term, sustainable success.

Across all executive interviews, we tracked and tallied the components for building a sustainable, whole-person health approach. The word cloud in Figure 2 highlights how often each component was mentioned.

Figure 2: How to Build a Whole-Person Health Approach (Frequency with Which Each Component Was Mentioned)

Note: More frequent terms appear in larger type size.   *Source: Milken Institute analysis (2025)*

Actionable Insights for Employers from Interviews

1. **Stay true to your organizational purpose and values.** Acting in alignment with your values generates trust and stability, even while navigating uncertainty.

2. **Monitor the environment for risks.** By preparing for external and internal threats, employers can create a sense of physical, financial, and psychological safety for individuals, organizations, and communities.

3. **Lead with empathy.** Trust and transparency start with listening, with a goal of understanding the needs of others. Building and maintaining trust with employees and the broader community are invaluable for businesses. By leading with empathy, business leadership can set the tone for the entire organization, which can lead to better economic and social returns on investment. Business leaders should take inventory of what works within their organizations and identify any gaps or opportunities to build and maintain trust using a multifaceted approach.

Employer Resources

- Employers Investing in Mitigating Risk to Build Resilient Workforces, Communities, and Businesses

- Summary of Future of Health Summit Private Session: "Employers Investing in Leading with Empathy"

- The Evolution of Employers' Role in Public Health

- Milken Institute's Employer Action Exchange Elevates the Role of Employers Prioritizing Public Health Priorities

- Employer Action Exchange: Listening to Executive Insights on Whole-Person Health Investments

- Employer Investments: Mitigating Risk to Maximize Business, People, and Community Resilience and Performance

- Competitive Edge: Investing in Workforce Resiliency and Risk Mitigation

Executive Voices

- Employers Leveraging Technology to Advance Employee Whole-Person Health, One Interaction at a Time

- Collaboration as a Means to Build Resilience in Our Global Workforce

- Coming Out Stronger: Navigating Challenges to Build a More Resilient Organization

- Fostering Whole-Person Health: How Employers Can Help Employees Living with Obesity

- Navigating the Journey: The Need for a Multi-Pronged Approach to Reach Long-Term Goals

- Placing Bold Bets Because Your Mission Demands It: How an Unwavering Sense of Purpose Builds Resiliency

- Positioned to Thrive: Leveraging Data to Meet Evolving Needs and Build a More Resilient, Adaptable Workforce

About the Milken Institute

The Milken Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan global 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 bridges innovation gaps across the health-care continuum to advance whole-person health throughout the lifespan by improving healthy aging, public health, biomedical science, and food systems.

About Public Health at the Milken Institute

Public Health at the Milken Institute develops research, programs, and initiatives to activate sustainable solutions leading to better health for individuals and communities worldwide. To catalyze policy, system, and environmental change in public health and sustain impact, we approach our work in four interconnected areas: Prevention and Chronic Disease, Mental Health, Health Equity, and Employers and Public Health Priorities, which includes the Employer Action Exchange.

About the Milken Institute Employer Action Exchange

The Employer Action Exchange provides a trusted platform and includes expert guidance from key opinion leaders, briefings, and networking to advance customized, tangible actions on whole-person health priorities and investments. It offers a cultivated experience for employers representing diverse sectors and industries.