

# Tackling intense anxiety

Navigating intensified  
anxiety in the workplace

May 2024

Keep your finger on the pulse.



# Tackling intense anxiety

In Iaya healthcare's second Workplace Wellbeing Index pulse report for 2024, we're looking at how to navigate intensified anxiety in the workplace. Since 2020, our extensive national surveys of employees and employers in Ireland have sought to uncover the crucial trends shaping health and wellbeing at work.

Intense anxiety and very poor mental health are on the rise. And among their troubling effects: a marked increase in substance abuse. While the numbers show this anxiety isn't necessarily due to work, people bring their whole selves to work, including their anxiety.

The good news is that employees are finding increased support and less stigma around mental health from their employers. This suggests employers are on the right track and can gain traction by intensifying their current efforts.

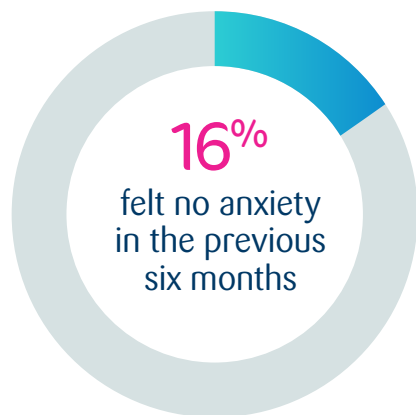
**Sinéad Proos**

Head of Health & Wellbeing,  
Iaya healthcare



## Intensifying anxiety and poor mental health among employees.

While the percentage of people feeling no anxiety is slowly rising, the intensity of anxiety felt is rising more dramatically. Meanwhile, the rise of very poor mental health is also outpacing overall increases in good mental health.



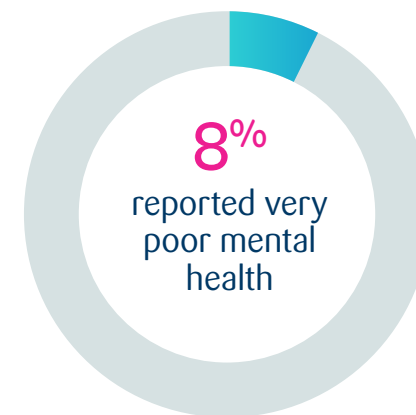
up from 15% in 2022



up from 8% in 2022



up from 35% in 2022



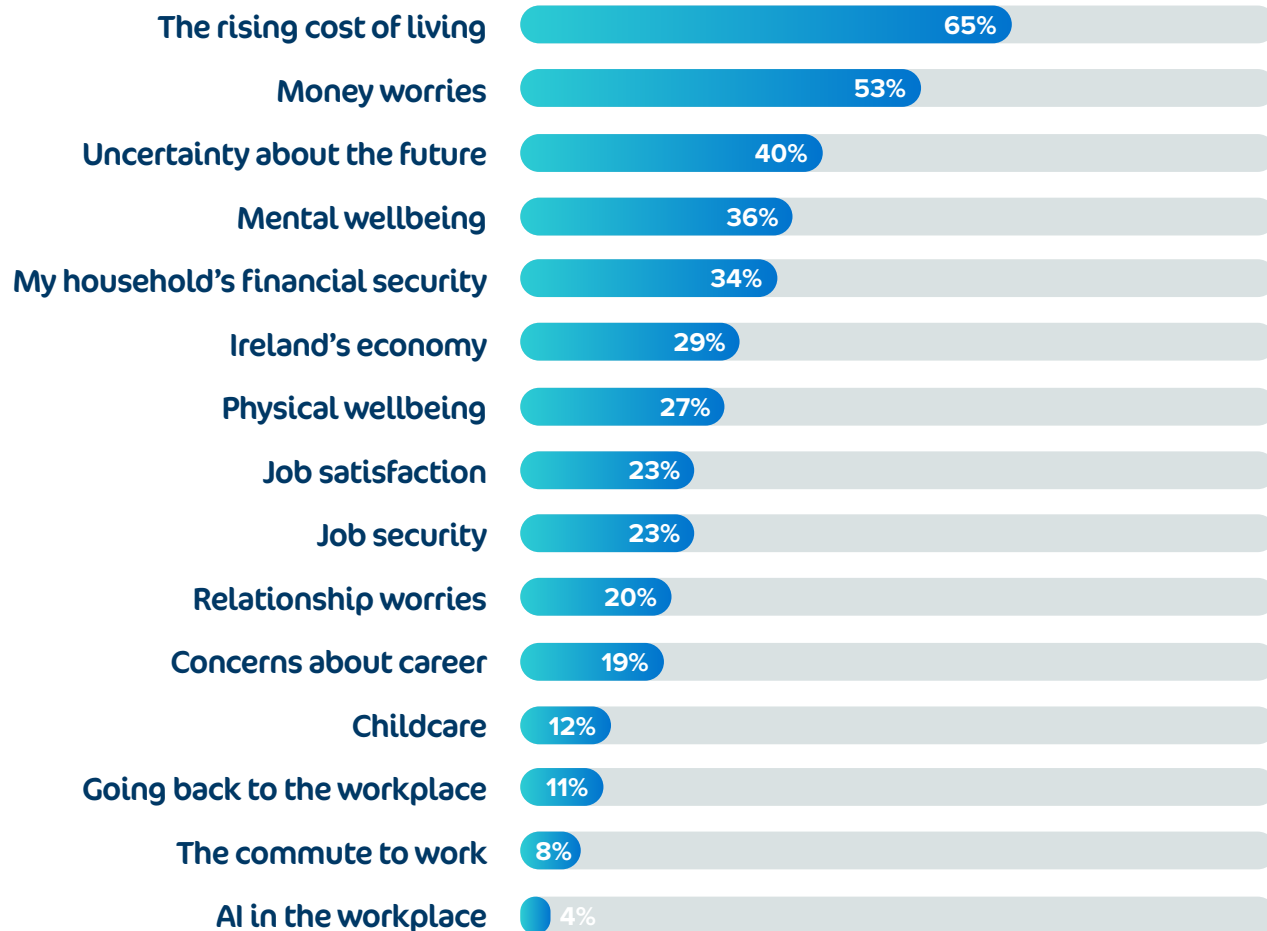
up from 5% in 2022

Discover more vital guidance and insights to help you shape your HR strategies and initiatives, visit [layahealthcare.ie/wellbeingindex](https://layahealthcare.ie/wellbeingindex)

# Worries around finances

As before, financial concerns are driving much of employees' anxiety. They include the rising cost of living, money worries and Ireland's economy – along with concerns about mental health.

## Causes of concern/anxiety



# Troubling effects of anxiety

Among those suffering with anxiety, in 2023 more people struggled with loneliness, sleeplessness, suicidal thoughts and substance abuse.

Those who struggle to get a good night's sleep cite general anxiety as the main reason (85%), followed by financial concerns (41%) and an inability to switch off from work (40%).

## The impact of poor mental health 2023 vs 2022

### Felt lonely and isolated



### Struggle to get a good night's sleep



### Had suicidal thoughts



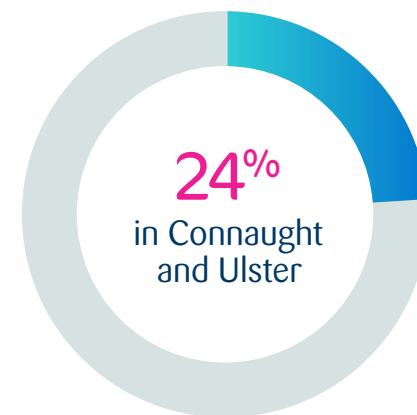
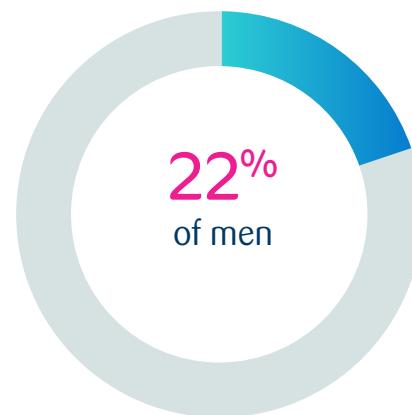
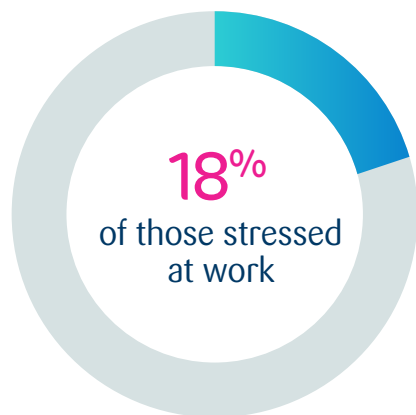
### Struggle with substance abuse



## The rise of substance abuse.

The percentage of employees reporting struggles with substance abuse, as an effect of poor mental health, doubled from 7% in 2022 to 14% in 2023. That percentage rises even further among certain groups.

### Struggles with substance abuse among people reporting poor mental health



What's more, HR leaders report that addiction problems among friends and family are affecting a full 20% of employees.



# Learn from the experts

Brain Pennie, former heroin addict turned doctor, spoke at our most recent Workplace Wellbeing Summit about his mission to show people that change is possible.

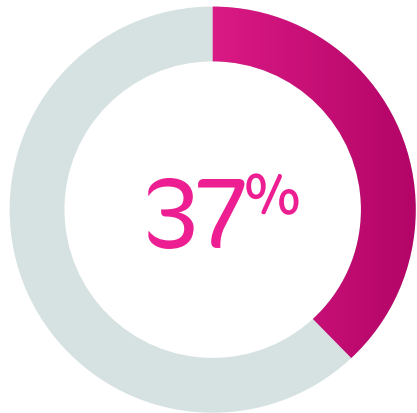
Watch “Tackling the impact of rising substance abuse”



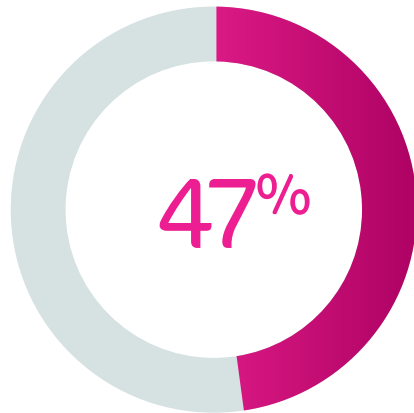
## There's good news.

There's good news. Fewer people agree that there's a stigma around mental health in the workplace, and more workers are taking advantage of mental health support their employers provide.

Stigma at work

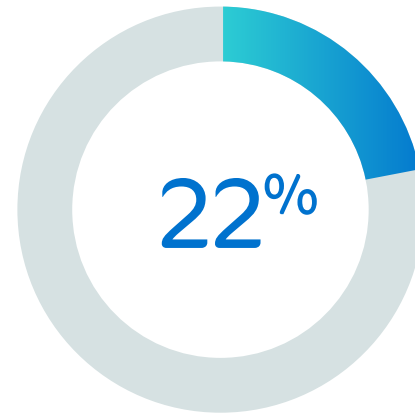


of employees report stigma around mental health in the workplace down from 43% in 2022

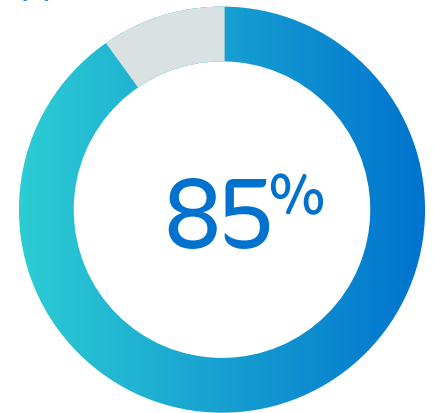


of employers report stigma around mental health in the workplace down from 74% in 2022

Use of employers' mental health supports



of employees are using mental health services provided by employers up from 19% in 2022



say they'd use them again up from 82% in 2022



## There's good news.

More businesses are offering wellbeing strategies – 45%, up from 39% in 2022 – and more employees feel supported by their employer in their health and wellbeing needs.

**What blocks access to support:** Employers should note that, among those workers who wouldn't consider using mental health and wellbeing supports at work, the top barrier to engagement is confidentiality (38%), followed closely by concerns about being seen differently (36%).

## Employers are better at supporting health and wellbeing

I have/would be able to take time off to look after my health and wellbeing



Leadership promote a culture of supporting staff's health and wellbeing



My leaders/company genuinely care about the health and wellbeing of staff



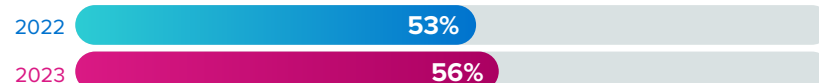
I feel encouraged by leadership to take care of my health and wellbeing



I feel that leadership actively participate in the health and wellbeing supports offered



Leadership frequently talk about the health and wellbeing supports that are available



# What employers need to do

## Focus areas for improvement

1. Be aware of signs of addiction, and lean into **substance abuse prevention** as a behavioural health priority.
2. Offer education, advice and support around **personal finances**.
3. Provide **confidentiality reassurances** every time you promote counselling resources.
4. Take a **strong stand against stigma** by communicating openly about mental health challenges, and creating opportunities for employees to hear or share real-life stories in a positive context.



# What employers need to do

With employees feeling increasing support for their health and wellbeing at work, overall, employers are on the right track. Their continued efforts to offer, promote and increase support should keep this trend positive. But it's worth considering some new approaches too to keep the momentum going.

## The support employees value

Access to counselling

39%

Stress management tools and techniques

35%

Mental health training

33%

More information about mental health in the workplace

26%

Financial management advice

25%

Access to personalised health and fitness support

24%

Tips on physical wellbeing, exercise tips and supports

23%

Access to meditation/mindfulness sessions

22%

Personal development while remote/hybrid working

20%

Access to yoga sessions

19%

Sleep seminars and advice

14%

Parenting advice/support

12%

# Expert advice

“No employer can afford to ignore the rise in substance abuse challenges and the other effects of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis on employee mental health. Financial stress and other worries can have a hugely detrimental effect on employees’ performance, relationships and overall wellbeing. Support your employees by asking them to share their concerns, helping them to understand where and when they can take breaks and step back, and by making sure they have access to counselling and other health and wellbeing resources.”



Dr Emelina Ellis

Chartered Counselling Psychologist and Chief Clinical Operations Officer, Spectrum Life

# Spotlight: HR sees health and wellbeing challenges

While employees feel increasingly supported around their health and wellbeing needs, HR respondents have cited the challenge of engaging staff with health and wellbeing support.

Health and safety, as well as occupational health, are also of concern. This applies across the board – to workers at home as well as on-site.

## Where HR professionals feel their organisations need the most support

### Occupational health in relation to staff working from home

2022 17%

2023 22%

### Engagement with health and wellbeing supports on site

2022 14%

2023 22%

### Health and safety assessment for staff working from home

2022 19%

2023 22%

### Health and safety assessment for onsite staff

2022 22%

2023 20%

### Engagement with digital health and wellbeing supports at home

2022 16%

2023 19%

### Occupational health in relation to onsite staff

2022 13%

2023 19%

# A word from our Director of People & Culture

“Your employees have their own workloads and goals to meet, so all too often, engaging with health and wellbeing programmes can end up at the bottom of their to-do lists.

But early intervention is key to addressing any budding issues, and engagement in workplace wellbeing offerings can make a big difference to employees’ quality of life as well as the quality of their work.

Keep your wellbeing offerings top-of-mind with clear, frequent communication. Encourage open discussion of issues and challenges, and walk the walk – engage with supports yourself.”



Erika O'Leary

Director of People & Culture, Iaya healthcare



# Navigating intensified workplace anxiety

At laya healthcare's most recent Workplace Wellbeing Summit, leading experts spoke about the challenges of navigating intensified workplace anxiety and what HR leaders can do to support their employees.

- Eoin McGee, Financial Advisor and Best-selling Author
- Ann Marie Clyne, Vice President, HR, Mastercard
- Jennifer Cashman, Partner, RDJ
- Joanna Murphy, CEO, Clunetech.



Watch back at:  
[www.layahealthcare.ie/wellbeingindex/event](http://www.layahealthcare.ie/wellbeingindex/event)





Keep your finger on the pulse.



Get in touch with our team:  
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