



2026 C-Suite Stress Index: Healthcare

Healthcare executives demonstrate resilience
in face of complex set of threats



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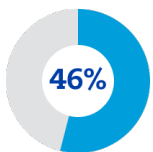
Executive summary

On behalf of Sentry Insurance, Wakefield Research surveyed 1,250 U.S. executives at companies with a minimum of 10 employees—including 111 executives from healthcare organizations.

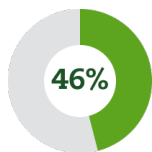
The 2026 Sentry C-Suite Stress Index revealed an executive group maintaining a generally positive outlook for their organizations, while still acknowledging the looming threats keeping them up at night. As we reviewed the survey results, we noticed that one subset—healthcare executives—consistently exceeded their peers’ levels of concern over numerous risks.

There’s no clear consensus among healthcare executives regarding **primary threats to their businesses**. This stands out in comparison to the total surveyed group, which identified two issues—supply chain or logistics challenges (45%) and economic pressures (44%)—selected by more than 40% of executives. Healthcare executives, on the other hand, identified six such threats:

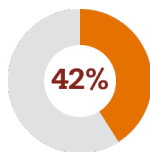
Healthcare executives’ top 2026 concerns



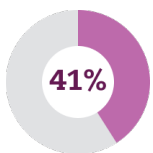
Rising cost of employee healthcare



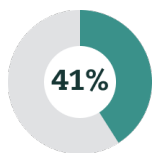
Supply chain or logistics challenges



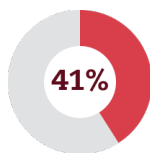
Cyberattacks



Economic pressures



Labor shortages



Natural catastrophes

This indicates healthcare executives share a comprehensive view of the risks impacting their organizations. Several of these threats are ongoing, daily concerns, such as employee healthcare costs and economic pressures. Others—particularly natural catastrophes—are relatively low-probability, but a single such event could be devastating.

MODERATE OPTIMISM SHAPED BY EXPERIENCE

It’s not surprising a smaller percentage of healthcare executives (43%) expect their businesses to thrive this year compared to the total group (54%). However, their relative confidence in their organizations’ ability to remain stable this year (30% vs. 22%)—if not necessarily grow—reflects a level-headed approach when faced with challenging circumstances.

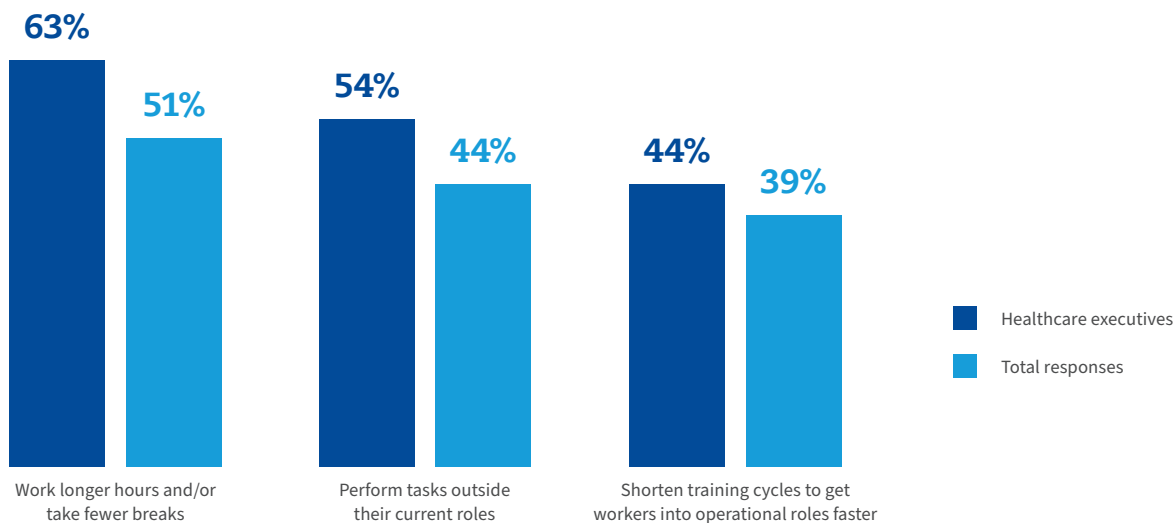
In fact, as a whole, healthcare executives are actually **less stressed** than their peers across other industries. Nearly a quarter (23%) report feeling less stressed than last year, compared to just 16% of total respondents.

There’s nothing naïve about this perspective. After all, leaders at healthcare organizations are clearly aware of the challenges they’re facing. When the threats appear from every direction, executives are focused on doing what needs to be done to move their organizations forward, day by day.

Despite the risks, healthcare employees are being asked to do more with less

Healthcare leaders recognize the increased demand being placed upon their employees. It's nearly unavoidable in such a fast-paced, rapidly changing industry—especially one in which 41% of its executives cite labor shortages as a top threat. Unfortunately, these demands are straining the workforce, and leaders are concerned. In fact, nearly two-thirds (63%) worry these additional demands could lead to more workplace injuries.

Healthcare executives report asking their employees to perform each of the following tasks at notably higher levels than the total surveyed group:



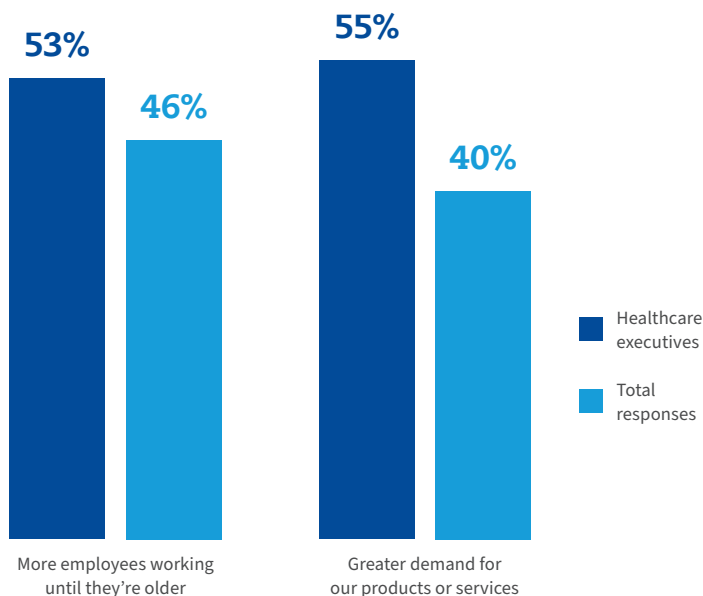
Additionally, more than half of healthcare executives (52%) have asked their employees to increase their output beyond current expectations.

It's easy to envision the compounding—and potentially dangerous—consequences of organizations requiring their employees to increase their output when they're already above capacity due to being understaffed.

The aging population is straining the healthcare industry—internally and externally

More than perhaps any other American industry, the country's aging population and shifting retirement age is directly affecting healthcare. Combined with the increased pressure on employees, these compounding threats are creating a potential powder keg for costly workers' compensation claims.

Not only are healthcare workers being asked to work longer hours and/or taking fewer breaks, they're working until they're older at a higher rate than in other industries. And as the U.S. population ages, healthcare executives are seeing demand for their services outpace the broader business landscape.



“When considered all at once, these factors are especially startling,” said Jean Feldman, Director of Managed Care at Sentry. “First, healthcare employees are working until they're older. They're working longer hours than they used to, and they're taking fewer breaks. Many of them are being asked to perform tasks they're unfamiliar with. At the same time, they're seeing increased demand for their services—and their time—from an aging population.”

Like many healthcare executives, Feldman is concerned that these compounding issues could result in more workers' compensation claims. Additionally, she anticipates extended recovery times in the event of such injuries, due in large part to the ages of many of the impacted workers.

“We've seen the data from our in-house Claims team and our Injured Employee Complexity Factor (IECF) models here at Sentry,” said Feldman. “After people reach a certain age, it takes longer for them to recover from injuries. As people age, comorbidities make an even larger impact on recovery, which increases recovery time. And with extended recovery periods for injured employees, businesses face more lost work hours and additional replacement costs.”



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Jean Feldman

Director of Managed Care

Healthcare executives are concerned about the costs of their own employees' healthcare

Throughout the 2026 C-Suite Stress Index survey, healthcare executives routinely cited a specific threat—employee healthcare costs—at a significantly higher level than the total surveyed group did.

This pattern emerged across several survey questions:



What are the biggest threats to your company in 2026?

46%: Rising cost of employee healthcare, versus 38% of total respondents



How has the aging population and shifting retirement age impacted your company?

52%: Increased employee healthcare expenses, versus 46% of total respondents



What is your company hoping to gain by increasing investments in worker safety?

49%: Combat rising costs of healthcare, versus 42% of total respondents

This places healthcare executives in a unique position. They're working to manage their own employees' healthcare costs while operating within an industry that's partially contributing to that very issue.

Setting aside the imposing scale of that issue, there are steps these executives can take to help mitigate or reallocate their risk.



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Jeff Cole

Assistant Vice President – National Accounts

SEEKING SOLUTIONS

More than three-quarters (77%) of healthcare executives plan to increase their investment in worker safety in 2026, including nearly a quarter (23%) who plan to **significantly increase their investment**—compared to just 15% of the total surveyed group.

Additionally, the vast majority (96%) of healthcare executives plan to reevaluate their business insurance policies this year:

- 56% say they need to increase their coverage due to their business expanding
- 50% have identified areas that should be covered but aren't currently

“I’m encouraged by these leaders’ recognition that yesterday’s workplace safety programs—and yesterday’s insurance programs—may not be most appropriate for today’s risks,” said Jeff Cole, Assistant Vice President of National Accounts at Sentry. “Building strong relationships with their insurance providers, and working together to articulate and anticipate the unique threats they face, can make a real difference for these businesses.”

Conclusion

Given the challenges the entire healthcare industry is facing, healthcare executives clearly recognize the need to increase their investment in worker safety. And even while the trends we identified throughout this report indicate healthcare workers are often put in unenviable situations, the results of our survey indicate healthcare executives are dedicating time, effort, and resources to protecting their employees.

These commitments are commendable. At the same time, they won't eliminate the many challenges these executives and their employees face. Indeed, with a half-dozen threats earning nearly equal levels of concern from this group, there are plenty of obstacles to overcome. But collectively, we're encouraged to see these leaders focused on making a series of practical, meaningful steps in the right direction this year.

Methodological notes

The Sentry Insurance Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research among 1,250 U.S. executives between December 4 and December 16, 2025, using an email invitation and an online survey. The healthcare cohort of this survey was comprised of 111 executives of companies in the healthcare sector. In order to participate in the study, respondents had to belong to an organization with at least 10 full-time employees and to be either the owner of the company or hold one of the following titles: CEO, CFO, or CRO (Chief Risk Officer). Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.1 percentage points in the main sample and by more than 9.8 percentage points in each oversample, from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.



About Sentry



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