

2026 Employee Benefits Benchmarking Report

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About the Survey

This report provides a snapshot of industry trends, highlighting key priorities, challenges, and trusted resources among benefits brokers and consultants focused on selling health benefit solutions or managing clients and supporting their employer benefit solutions. This survey also included input from employers in finance and human resources roles. Nova Healthcare Administrators, Inc. surveyed brokers and employers representing a range of organization structures and sizes across the United States.

Survey Conducted: February 12 – March 20, 2026

Survey Length: 5 mins (*average*)

Sample: 50 = (total respondents)

Collection Method: Online survey

Employee Benefits Experience: 24 years (*average*)



Medical Benefit Trends

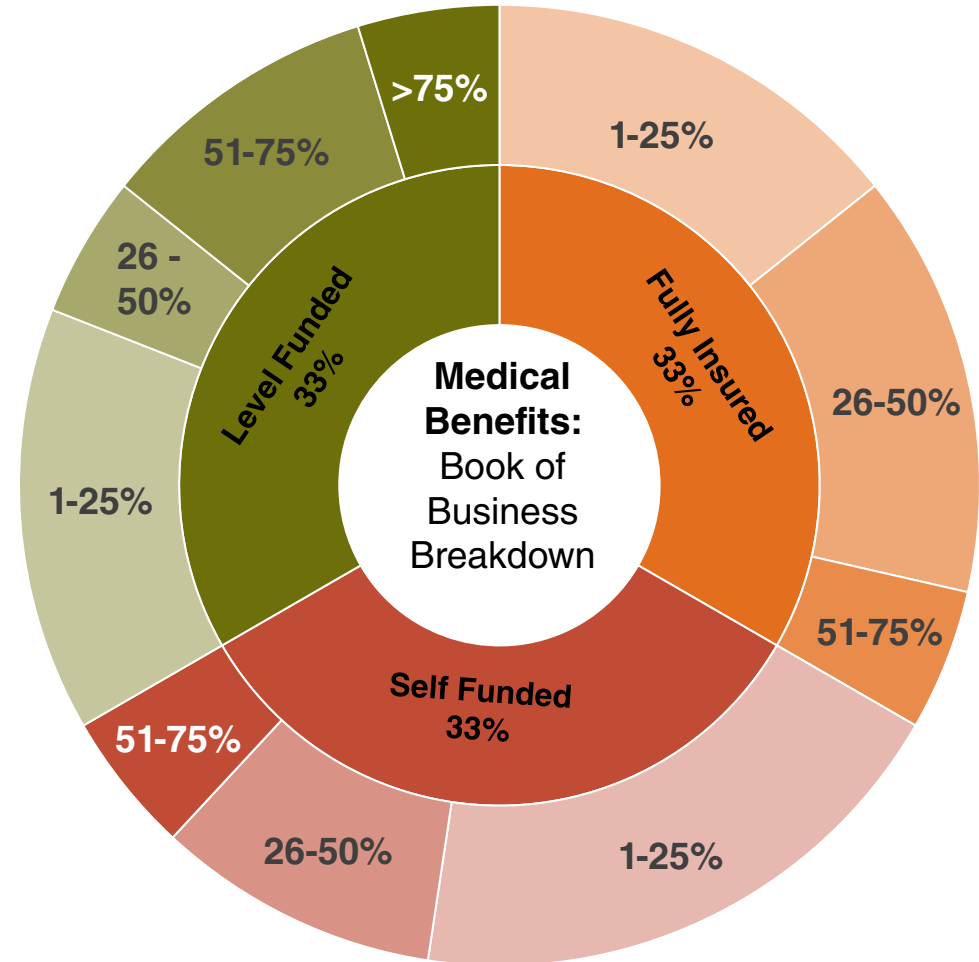
BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

This year's survey reflected that **100% of participating insurance brokers have clients with self-funded or level-funded plans**, highlighting the widespread adoption of these funding models.

Up from 85% the year prior, this "increase" likely reflects greater respondent participation, not a meaningful shift toward more diversified portfolios across brokers. Among respondents, **client portfolios reflect a mix of funding arrangements** though responses consistently skewed more heavily toward self-funded or level-funded plans.

At a national level, employer-sponsored benefits skew toward self-funding with an estimated **65% choosing self-funding** compared to approximately 35% offering fully insured plans.

The chart below outlines how brokers & consultants identified the medical plan types they sell as a percentage of their overall medical benefits portfolio.





Employee Benefit Trends

Medical Plans

The list below outlines the trends brokers and consultants shared they have noticed over the last few years. How does that compare to the trends you're seeing?

- **General concern about cost pressure**
- **Strong emphasis on cost-containment strategies**
- **Increase in interest and movement to self-funded plans**
- **Greater consideration for level-funding**
- **Transition away from employee cost-shifting**
- **Pharmacy spend driving strategy**
- **Increased focus on care navigation and member support**

More than 85% of all comments reference trends to address plan costs. Of those comments, 43% referenced movement away from a fully insured model.

Benefit Trends – Beyond Medical

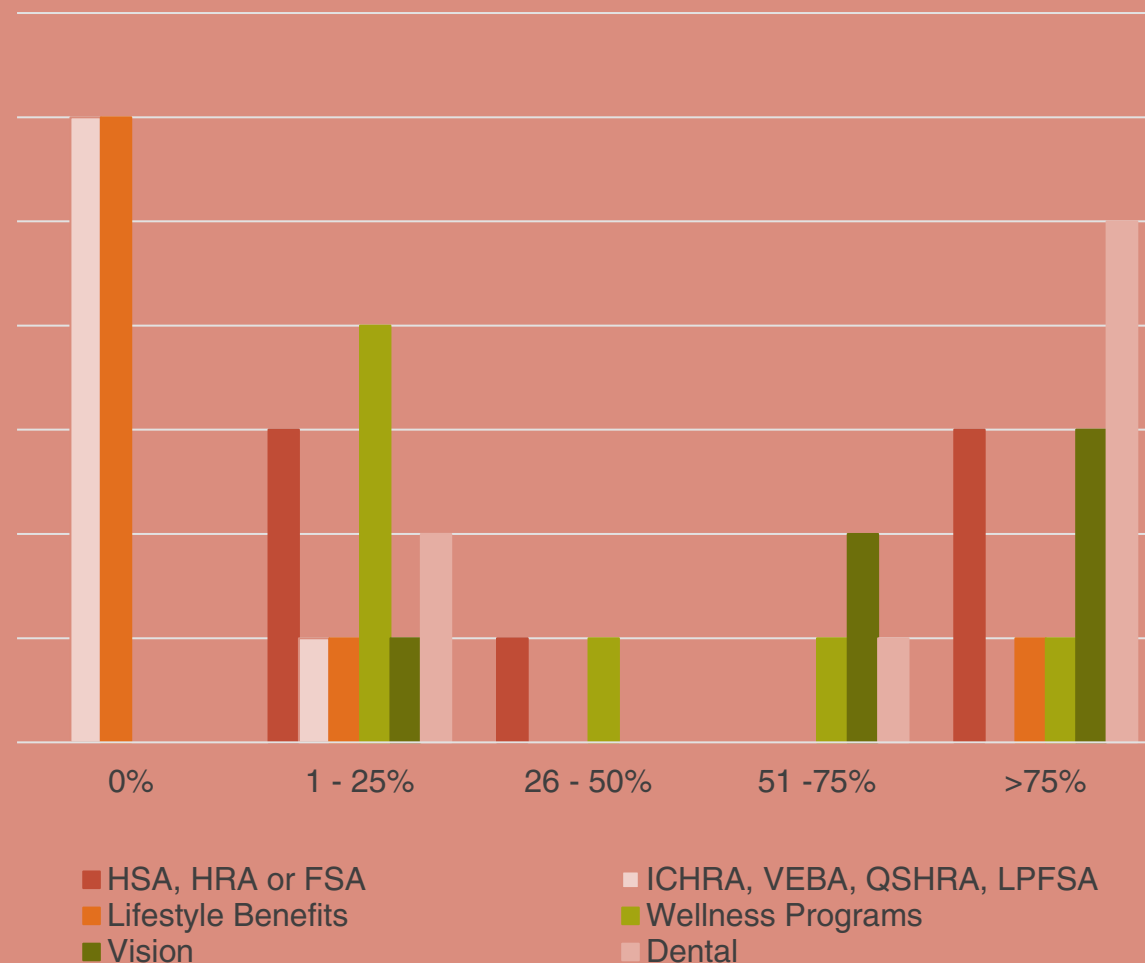
BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

Vision and dental coverage remain as plan musts for total reward packages. This year, however, responses indicate a greater number of plans investing in wellness programs. While HSAs, HRAs, and FSAs show more varied adoption, more specialized tax-advantaged accounts, including ICHRA, VEBA, QSHRA, and LPFSA, remain niche offerings, with most brokers reporting low adoption rates. And lifestyle benefits show minimal penetration.

Employers prioritize traditional core benefits, while newer and more flexible options have yet to achieve widespread acceptance.



The chart below outlines the percentage of respondents' clients that offer supplemental benefits as a compliment to their core medical package.



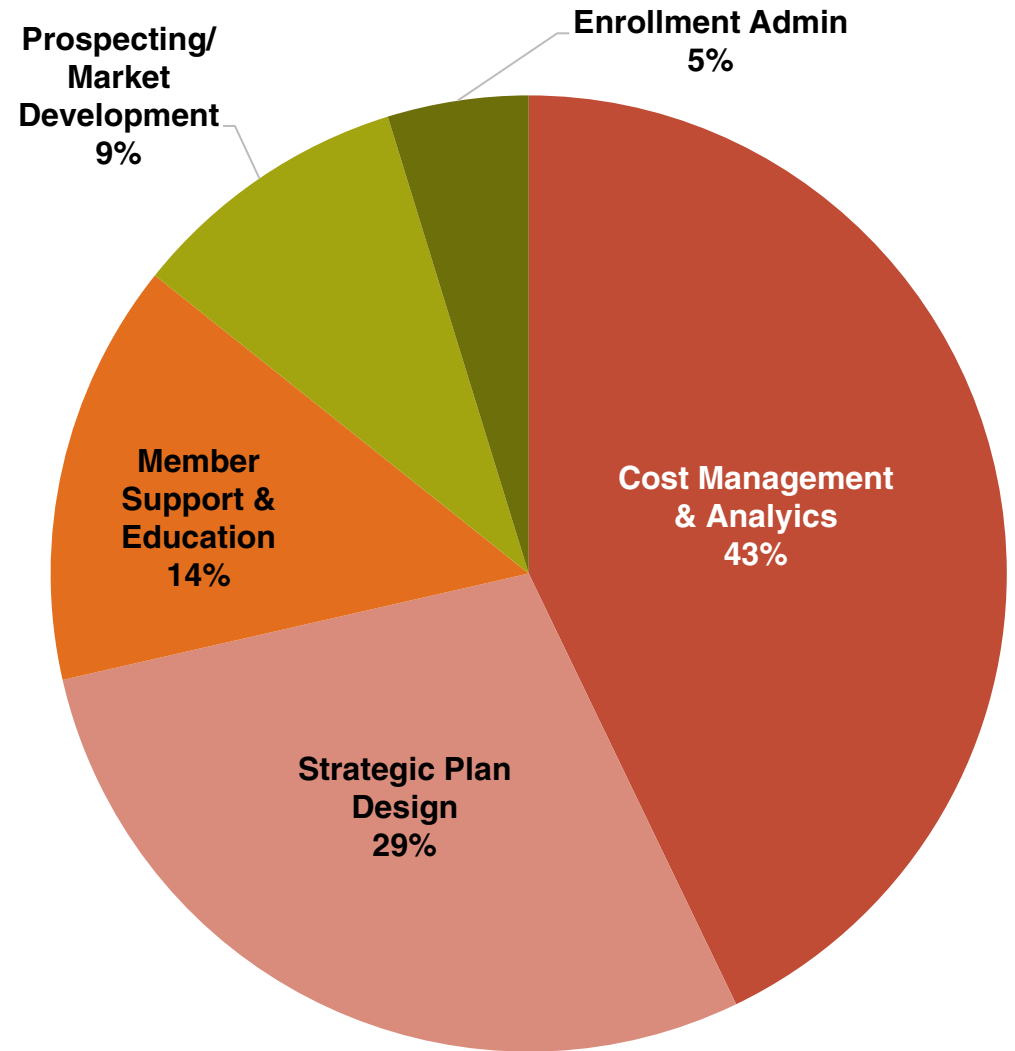
Priorities

BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

The results highlight brokers' focus on **cost management** is clear with a strong emphasis on **vendor partnerships and reporting** to understand what's driving cost and focusing on ways to address it. Addressing **member education** is a natural next step to ensure employees understand how their plan works.

Brokers selected priorities from a predefined list, which may not fully capture the nuances of their strategic approach. While member education and reporting were identified as key priorities, brokers may place additional emphasis on personalized consultation and reporting solutions that were not explicitly listed in the survey.

Overall, brokers and consultants cited the following priorities based on client needs.



Pain Points

BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

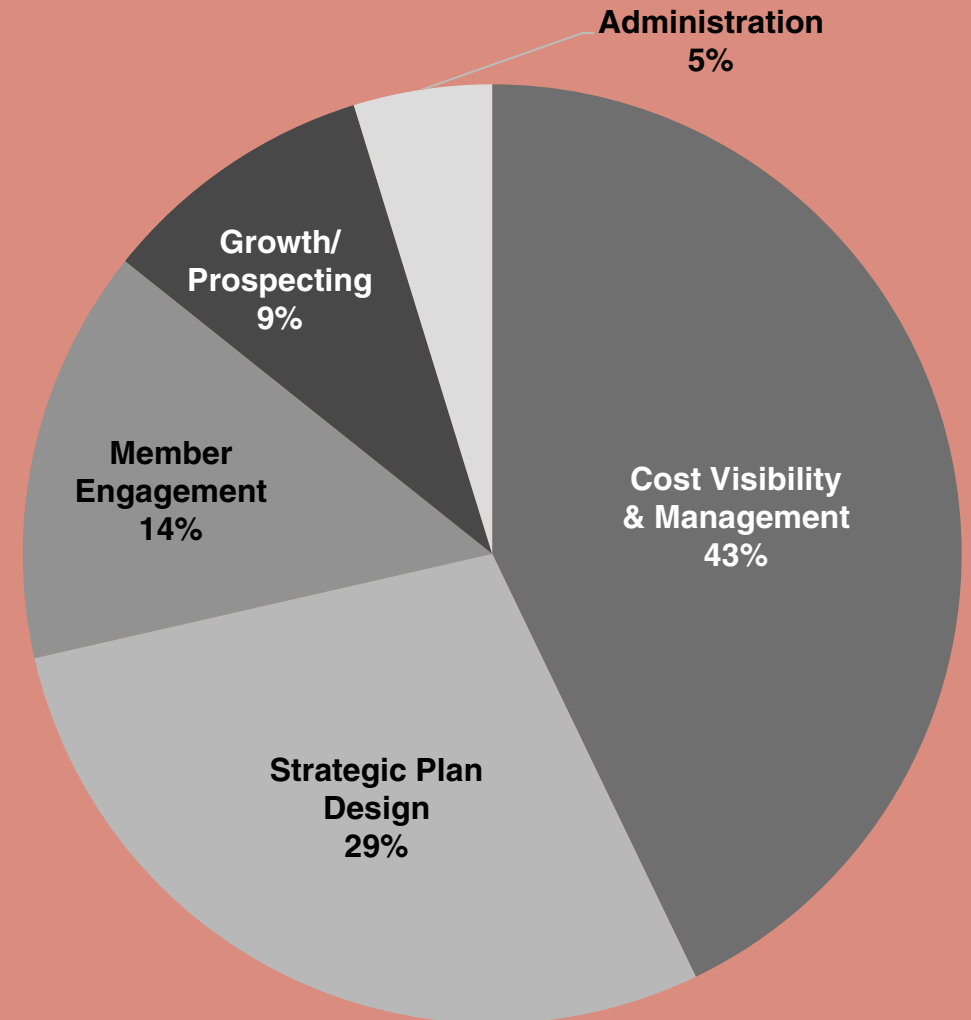
Survey results suggest brokers face persistent friction in obtaining, analyzing, and communicating actionable claims and cost data, limiting their ability to guide more informed benefit strategy decisions.

While **reporting** tools and **point solutions** may help address member health and plan costs, challenges around data access and solution integration continue to create barriers.

This underscores the pressure brokers face as they help clients balance affordability with competitive benefit offerings.



Brokers and consultants cited the following pain points and challenges to winning new business and meet the needs of current clients.



Trusted Resources

BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

Brokers, consultants and benefit advisors indicate they rely on the following to learn about topics and trends in the employee benefits space:

1. **Research Groups**
2. **Industry Groups**
3. **Publications**
4. **Webinars**
5. **Conferences**

Organizations producing aggregated insights and research, like EBRI, KFF, and Mercer, serve as trusted industry resources that consultants leverage to stay current on trends in the benefits industry. Industry organizations like NABIP, HCAA and AHIP are also highly regarded to report on the pulse of stresses and successes in the benefit space.



Benefits Benchmarking

EMPLOYERS

The Employer Perspective



The following insights reflect employer opinions on employee benefit solutions. Nova surveyed human resources and finance professionals representing a range of industries and company sizes across the United States. The variations in their perspectives showcase both common ground and differences that correspond to their job functions.

According to the survey, 100% of participating employers partner with an insurance broker, considering them a necessary voice for benefit guidance. Collaboration between TPAs and brokers is key to showcasing value for employers, underscoring the importance of sharing our insights with the broker community.



Employee Benefits Focus

PLAN SPONSORS

The chart below outlines the average number of employees* who spend at least 50% of their time on employee benefits along with the size of the benefit-eligible employee base according to HR & finance professionals.

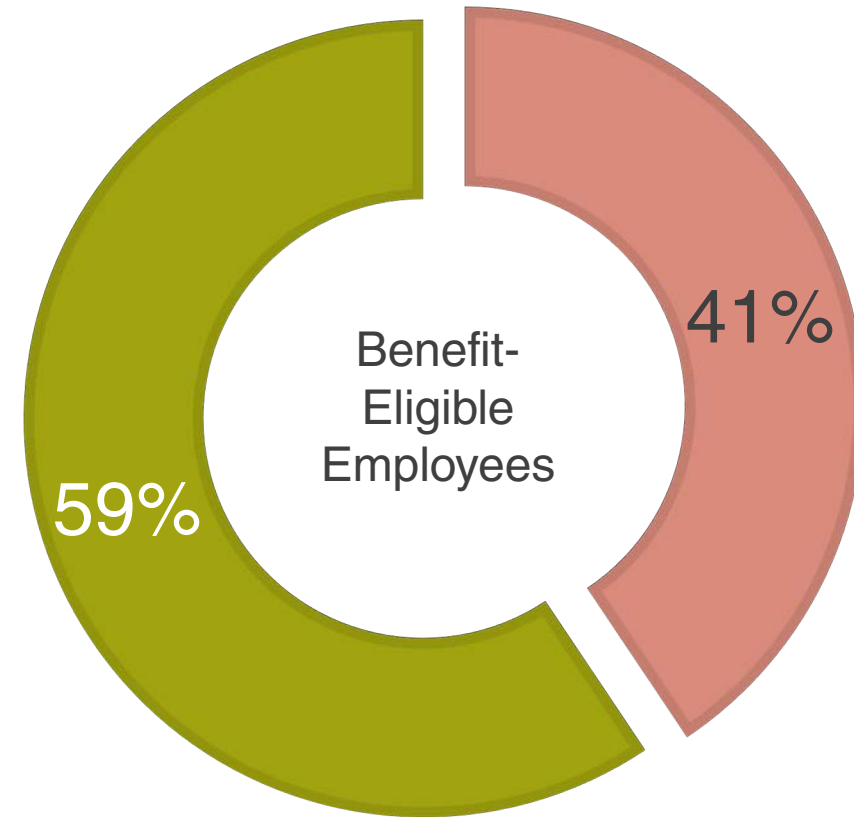
# of Benefit Eligible Employees	Benefits Team Size
<100	1.4
101–250	1.5
501–1,000	2.3
1,001–2,500	2

**Responses exclude the support of external benefits consultants.*

Benefit Participation

Nearly 60% of employers surveyed indicate that **more than half of all eligible employees enroll** in the employer-sponsored plan. Generally, very low participation rates seem to be the exception, not the rule.

There were no discernable trends related to the number of benefit-eligible employees and the rate of enrollment on the plan. To address lower participation rates, we need to explore whether cost, plan design, or gaps in employee education are contributing factors.



■ 50% or less ■ 51% or more

Pain Points & Priorities

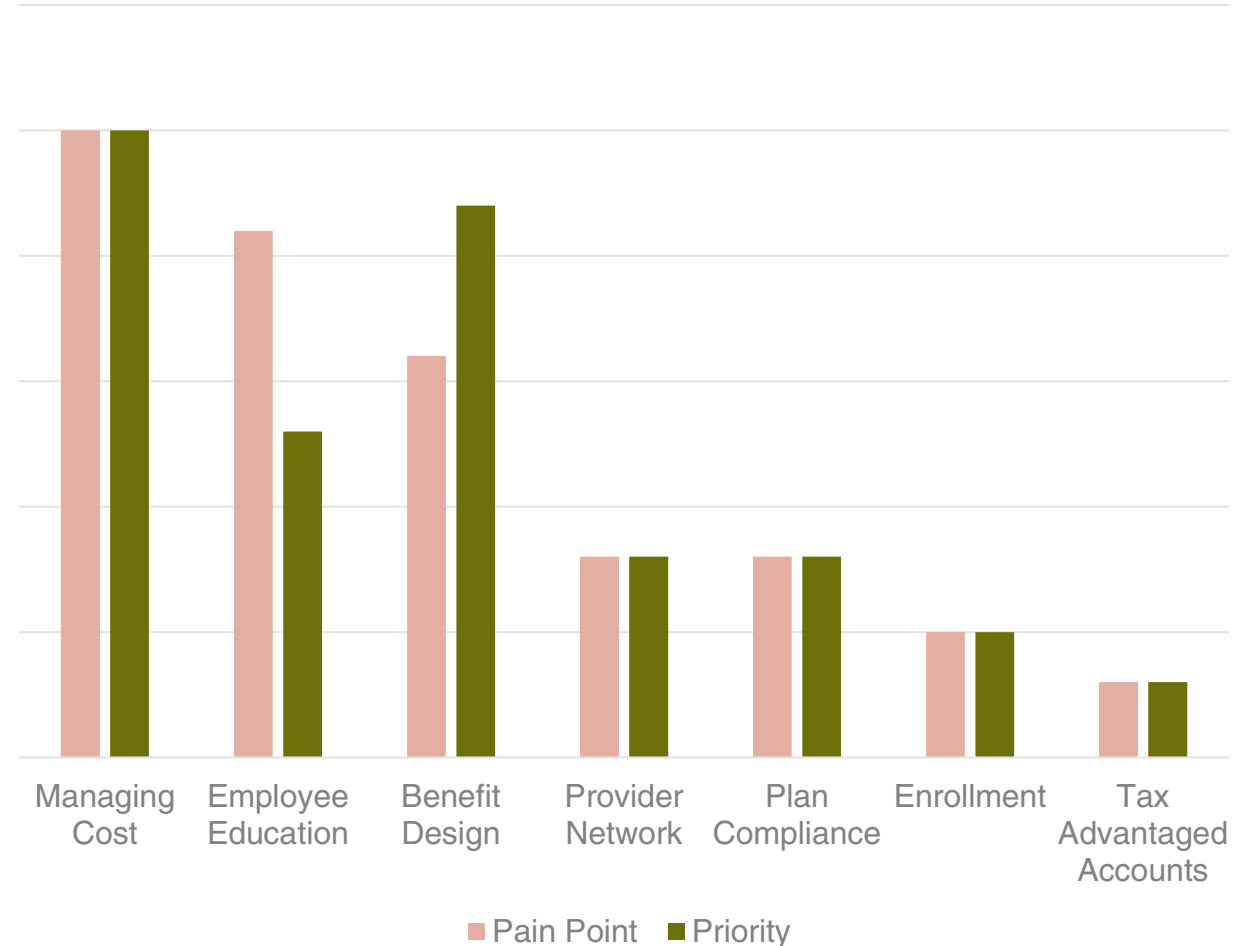
FINANCE & HR

Managing plan cost emerged equally as the top challenge and priority indicating cost pressure and a focus on directing attention toward addressing it.

Employee education remains an area of opportunity for advisors to support employers since it ranks highly as a pain point but deprioritized in comparison. Addressing decision support, engagement, and communication can lead to smarter utilization and improved health and financial outcomes.

Executives may not always experience competitiveness as an acute pain, but they increasingly see it as something requiring investment and attention. **Offering a competitive benefit package** to recruit and retain talent is clearly a focus.

Select the three (3) biggest pain points and priorities for your company related to employee benefits:



Trusted Resources

FINANCE & HR

When asked to provide the resources HR and finance teams turn to when they want to learn about employee benefits, employer representatives cast a wide net to learn. However, they lean in for narrow, practical, and actionable guidance from a **triangle of trust** including **their broker/advisor, professional associations,** and **third-party research.**

Consultants were most consistently noted in the top three most trusted resources, likely because the benefits space is constantly evolving and brokers reliably bring clarity and recommendations.

Sources abound for research and information gathering but when the buzz needs validation, the most helpful resources come from human connection.





Nova Healthcare Administrators 2026 Employee Benefits Benchmark Report

Our mission is to be a **trusted strategic partner** in benefit plan administration, offering **flexible** and **creative solutions** to **improve health outcomes** and **manage cost**.

By fostering a culture of **integrity**, **collaboration**, and **accountability**, we provide **expert support** to clients and **compassionate service** to their members.

We strive to provide **best-in-class** benefit plan administration by helping clients **navigate challenges** and **improve health outcomes**.

Learn More

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