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LIFESTYLE MEDICINE INITIATIVE



# Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis: A Systems-Based Lifestyle Medicine Approach to Burnout Prevention and Organizational Resilience

**How Evidence-Based Lifestyle Medicine, Behavioral Science, and Organizational Culture Design Create Pathways to Sustainable Workforce Health**

**Lifestyle Medicine Initiative | January 2026**

## **FOREWORD**

**Workplace wellbeing is in crisis. Despite a \$6.8 trillion global wellness economy, workplace wellness is the only sector that remains below pre-pandemic levels, with spending declining 1.5% and only 9.8% of employees having access to formal wellness programs. Meanwhile, 76% of employees globally report moderate-to-high stress, and burnout, now recognized as an occupational phenomenon, is driving declines in productivity, creativity, retention, and safety.**

**This white paper synthesizes the Lifestyle Medicine Initiative's webinar "Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis" into an evidence-informed, systems-based framework for organizations seeking to move beyond superficial wellness perks toward integrated, scalable, culturally embedded approaches that prevent burnout and build resilience.**

**It argues that workplace wellbeing is not a benefit—it is a strategic imperative. The framework positions lifestyle medicine pillars (nutrition, movement, sleep, stress management, substance avoidance, social connection) as foundational to both individual resilience and organizational vitality, and outlines how assessment, customization, implementation, and evaluation create sustainable culture change.**

**For wellness operators, employers, health systems, and consultants, this white paper offers a practical blueprint for transforming workplace wellness from reactive, fragmented programs into proactive, evidence-based ecosystems that support thriving, resilient workforces.**

# THE CONTRIBUTORS

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The panel of recognized thought leaders translated cutting-edge resilience science, workplace wellness data, and lifestyle medicine evidence into actionable frameworks from three perspectives: the organizational systems approach, the science of personal and workplace resilience, and the implementation roadmap for sustainable culture change.

## ABOUT THE GLOBAL WELLNESS INSTITUTE

[The Global Wellness Institute \(GWI\)](#), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is considered the leading global research and educational resource for the global wellness industry and is known for introducing major industry initiatives and regional events that bring together leaders and visionaries to chart the future. GWI positively impacts global health and wellness by advocating for both public institutions and businesses that are working to help prevent disease, reduce stress, and enhance overall quality of life. Its mission is to empower wellness worldwide.

## ABOUT GWI INITIATIVES

[The Global Wellness Institute's Initiatives](#) support a wide range of industry efforts that advance the growth of multiple sectors within the wellness economy. Led by Initiative Chairs who are renowned thought leaders in their fields, GWI Initiatives have been instrumental in powering the growth of the multi-trillion-dollar wellness economy and uniting the health and wellness industries.

## ABOUT THE LIFESTYLE MEDICINE INITIATIVE

[The Lifestyle Medicine Initiative](#) at the Global Wellness Institute advances lifestyle medicine as a primary tool for disease prevention, health optimization, and longevity across the wellness and healthcare sectors. We bring together clinicians, researchers, wellness operators, employers, and educators to translate evidence-based lifestyle interventions into scalable, accessible programs that improve health outcomes, reduce chronic disease burden, and extend both lifespan and healthspan.

**Our Mission:** To educate GWI delegates and the world about the importance of lifestyle and behaviors for health, longevity, mental health, and overall well-being. We bring the best minds in Lifestyle Medicine, the ancient lessons of the world's healthiest, longest-lived cultures, and principles of positive lifestyle habits—combining lifestyle medicine with evidence-based well-being therapies and 21st-century longevity research to sustainably improve well-being.

**Our Goal:** To foster sustainable services around wellness and lifestyle medicine that enhance and extend life, and to find the pressure points where healthcare and self-care intersect. Evidence-based lifestyle medicine has emerged as the future of healthcare, controlling costs and delivering better health outcomes by treating root causes of disease. We exchange ideas, build bridges with other GWI Initiatives, and leverage the intersections of well-being innovations to advance longevity through holistic wellness practices.

# **I. THE WORKPLACE WELLBEING CRISIS: CONTEXT AND URGENCY**

Workplace wellness is the only wellness sector that has not recovered from the pandemic. While the global wellness economy reached \$6.8 trillion in 2024, workplace wellness spending declined 1.5% between 2023 and 2024, with annual growth of just 0.7% from 2019 to 2024—the slowest of all 11 wellness sectors.

## **A. The Gap Between Need and Action**

Crisis indicators include:

- 92% of workers lack formal wellness support (only 9.8% have access to programs)
- 76% of employees globally report moderate-to-high stress levels
- Burnout is now classified by WHO as an occupational phenomenon linked to chronic workplace stress
- Workplace wellness programs are often superficial, reactive, and not integrated into leadership strategy or organizational culture

**Key insight:** The gap between employee needs (safety, recovery, autonomy, purpose, connection) and employer action (fragmented perks, one-size-fits-all programs) is widening. Organizations that lead in workplace wellness will build healthier, more resilient, and more productive teams.

## **B. Why Workplace Wellness Lags**

- 1. Reactive, not preventive approaches addressing burnout after it occurs rather than building resilience systems**
- 2. One-size-fits-all interventions disconnected from organizational culture, employee demographics, and strategic priorities**
- 3. Not integrated into leadership or strategy wellness treated as HR perk, not business imperative**
- 4. Misaligned priorities employer focus on cost containment vs. employee focus on safety, recovery, meaning**
- 5. Lacks consistent, evidence-based frameworks—no shared language or standards for systemic wellness**

## **II. LIFESTYLE MEDICINE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR WORKPLACE RESILIENCE**

**Lifestyle medicine, as defined by the American College of Lifestyle Medicine (ACLM), uses evidence-based behavioral interventions primarily nutrition, physical activity, stress management, adequate sleep, avoidance of risky substances, and positive social connection to prevent, treat, and reverse chronic disease.**

**For workplace wellbeing, the six pillars of lifestyle medicine provide the foundation for both individual resilience and organizational vitality.**

## **A. The Six Pillars of Lifestyle Medicine Applied to Work**

<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Workplace Application</b>
<b>Nutrition</b>	<b>Access to whole-food, plant-forward options in cafeterias, vending, meetings; cooking classes and nutrition education; hydration support</b>
<b>Physical Activity</b>	<b>Movement breaks, walking meetings, on-site fitness, sit-stand desks, active commuting support</b>
<b>Restorative Sleep</b>	<b>Flexible work hours, sleep education, circadian-friendly shift scheduling, quiet/nap spaces, limits on after-hours communication</b>
<b>Stress Management</b>	<b>Mindfulness programs, meditation apps, mental health resources, workload boundaries, recovery practices</b>
<b>Avoid Risky Substances</b>	<b>Smoking cessation support, alcohol awareness, substance use resources, psychological safety</b>
<b>Social Connection</b>	<b>Team-building, employee resource groups, mentorship, community service, belonging initiatives</b>

**Key message: You cannot "wellness-program" your way out of a toxic culture. Lifestyle medicine must be integrated into leadership, workload design, boundaries, and strategic priorities, not bolted on as an afterthought.**

### **III. THE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK: STRESS, RECOVERY, AND PERFORMANCE**

**Resilience is not about eliminating stress, it is about building capacity to oscillate between activation (stress) and recovery (regulation).**

#### **A. Stress vs. Burnout: Critical Distinction**

<b>Stress</b>	<b>Burnout</b>
<b>Over-engaged</b>	<b>Disengaged</b>
<b>Emotions overactive</b>	<b>Emotions blunted</b>
<b>Produces urgency, hyperactivity</b>	<b>Produces helplessness, hopelessness</b>
<b>Loss of energy</b>	<b>Loss of motivation, ideals, hope</b>
<b>Leads to anxiety disorders</b>	<b>Leads to detachment, depression</b>
<b>Primary damage: physical</b>	<b>Primary damage: emotional</b>

**Stress = overload; Burnout = depletion.**



## B. The Resilience Equation

**Resilience = Stress + Recovery**

- Stress = activation (challenge, demand, load)
- Recovery = regulation (rest, repair, restoration)
- Resilience = oscillation between both (adaptation capacity)
- Burnout = chronic imbalance (prolonged activation without recovery)

Recovery practices are essential, not optional. Organizations that build recovery into workflows, schedules, and culture prevent burnout and sustain performance.

## C. Four Engines of Personal Resilience

1. Biological: Sleep quality, movement, nutrition, circadian alignment
2. Psychological: Mindset, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, purpose
3. Social: Connection, belonging, psychological safety, team cohesion
4. Environmental: Workload design, autonomy, boundaries, physical workspace

Integration across all four engines builds sustainable resilience.

## IV. THE PREP™ FRAMEWORK: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE WELLNESS

**Dr. Sunil Kumar's PREP™** framework integrates personal and organizational resilience into a structured, actionable model:

**P – Prevent:** Reduce unnecessary load (workload boundaries, role clarity, eliminate low-value tasks)

**R – Rewire:** Strengthen emotional and cognitive patterns (mindset training, emotional regulation, stress reappraisal)

**E – Elevate:** Optimize lifestyle foundations (sleep, nutrition, movement, recovery practices)

**P – Perform:** Sustain high performance without burnout (energy management, sustainable habits, culture of recovery)

**PREP™** is both an individual resilience tool and an organizational systems framework—it can be applied to employee development, leadership training, team culture, and strategic planning.

## **V. SYSTEMS-BASED IMPLEMENTATION: THE FOUR-PHASE ROADMAP**

**Elizabeth Schy's** systems-based approach provides a structured roadmap for launching and sustaining workplace wellness initiatives that align with company culture, mission, and executive priorities.

### **Phase 1: Assessment**

**Objective:** Evaluate current organizational wellness landscape and employee needs.

**Methods:**

- Data collection (engagement surveys, health risk assessments, absenteeism/turnover metrics)
- Site tours (observe physical environment, workload patterns, culture signals)
- Interviews and focus groups (employee voice, manager input, executive priorities)
- Surveys (stress levels, wellbeing pillars, barriers to health)

**Outcome:** Baseline understanding of culture, needs, gaps, and opportunities.

## **Phase 2: Planning – Customized Systems Approach**

**Objective:** Define the process required to align wellbeing initiatives with company culture, mission, and executive priorities. Evaluate data and identify themes, priorities, quick wins

- Name the initiative (customize branding to organizational identity)
- Create a rollout plan using the Lifestyle Medicine framework (six pillars)
- Present to executives for buy-in and strategic alignment
- Assign or hire role-specific management (wellness champion, coordinator, director)
- Recruit and train workplace wellness champions (peer advocates embedded in teams)

**Outcome:** Executive-endorsed, culturally tailored wellness strategy with named leadership and champions.

## **Phase 3: Implementation – Run the Rollout Like a Campaign**

**Objective:** Outline a structured plan for launching and sustaining system-level wellbeing initiatives that reinforce long-term cultural change.

**Primary process steps:**

- Workforce messaging: Clear, compelling communication to all employees
- Kickoff champions preparation: Train champions to model and amplify wellness behaviors
- First event or initiative within a month: Create early momentum
- Long-term initiatives: Ongoing programs (e.g., walking clubs, lunch-and-learn sessions, coaching)
- Integration within healthcare offerings: Embed wellness into benefits, EAP, health screenings
- Include individual coaching and behavioral change: Personalized support for sustained habit formation

**Outcome:** Visible, accessible, culturally aligned wellness ecosystem integrated into daily work life.

## **Phase 4: Evaluation – Data-Driven Continuous Improvement**

**Objective:** Demonstrate how integrated evaluation methods support data-driven decision-making and justify continued investment.

**Methods:**

- **Annual employment engagement surveys:** Track culture, satisfaction, belonging
- **Pulse surveys:** Frequent, short check-ins on wellbeing, stress, program utilization
- **Casual feedback from champions:** Real-time insights from embedded advocates
- **Present to executives:** Share data, obtain feedback, elicit ideas, secure financial commitment for continuation

**Outcome:** Evidence of impact, executive buy-in for sustained funding, continuous program refinement.

## **VI. MICRO-HABITS FOR DAILY RESILIENCE**

Small, consistent actions build long-term resilience. Organizations can teach and model these micro-habits across teams:

- **60-second breath reset:** Box breathing (4–4–4–4) to calm the nervous system
- **5×5 movement snack:** 5 exercises, 5 reps each (squats, push-ups, stretches)
- **Simple boundary scripts:** "I'll respond first thing tomorrow" or "Let's schedule a focused meeting"
- **3-question evening reflection:** What went well? What did I learn? What will I prioritize tomorrow?

Small daily actions → long-term resilience gains.

## **VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

## **A. Assess Your Culture**

1. Evaluate current organizational wellness landscape using data, surveys, focus groups, and site observations
2. Identify gaps between employee needs and current programs
3. Understand stress and burnout drivers (workload, culture, leadership, boundaries)

## **B. Implement the PREP™ Framework**

1. Prevent: Reduce unnecessary load through workload design, role clarity, and process improvement
2. Rewire: Build emotional and cognitive resilience through mindset training and stress reappraisal
3. Elevate: Optimize lifestyle foundations (sleep, nutrition, movement, recovery)
4. Perform: Sustain performance without burnout through energy management and recovery culture

## **C. Engage Leadership**

1. Secure executive commitment and strategic alignment (wellness as business imperative, not perk)
2. Model wellness behaviors at leadership level (boundaries, recovery, authenticity)
3. Integrate wellness into organizational strategy (KPIs, performance reviews, culture metrics)

## **D. Measure and Evaluate**

1. Use integrated evaluation methods (surveys, pulse checks, champion feedback, turnover/absenteeism data)
2. Track program utilization, employee engagement, stress levels, resilience behaviors
3. Present data to executives regularly to demonstrate ROI and secure continued investment
4. Refine programs based on employee feedback and outcomes

## E. Why Employers Want Wellbeing Programming

Employers seek workplace wellness programs to:

- Positively impact employee morale
- Boost productivity
- Improve health directly and indirectly
- Bend the healthcare cost trajectory
- Reduce absenteeism and presenteeism
- Improve retention

The goal: A happier, healthier, more resilient workforce.

## SOURCES:

[Lifestyle Medicine Initiative at the Global Wellness Institute. Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis \(webinar recording, January 2026\).](#)

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