

Break through the stigma

Menopause in the workplace

BANK OF AMERICA

Approximately 1.3 million women in the U.S. will enter menopause each year[1] and 20% of the workforce are in some phase of menopause transition,[2] yet the word "menopause" is rarely uttered, and seldom heard, in workplaces across the country. Often felt to be "too personal" or "taboo," employees and employers are simply not talking about it. But that's about to change.

Bank of America, in partnership with the National Menopause Foundation, is championing a broader conversation on menopause in the workplace through groundbreaking research reflecting the perspectives of female employees and male and female HR benefit managers. In an effort to end the silent suffering of women trying to simultaneously manage menopause symptoms, stigma and careers, we are addressing the topic head-on, with the respect and compassion it deserves. Our goal is to ensure a better understanding of menopause, its impact on women in the workforce and what can be done to support them.

I think you will find this report incredibly eye-opening, as it reveals a number of disconnects between employees and employers on topics such as company culture regarding menopause and how often employees are talking to HR about their needs. The findings on menopause-specific benefits may also interest you, with a look at the positive impact these benefits can have — on employees and employers alike.

Let's turn the insights from this report into actions that can help women in all life stages bring their best selves to work.



Lorna Sabbia

Managing Director,
Head of Workplace Benefits

Bank of America

"Women should not be embarrassed about the menopausal symptoms they experience, or fear being discriminated against in the workplace because of them. We hope this research will inspire positive change in how people perceive, understand and experience menopause and drive a call to action to go beyond the status quo to support women in this stage of life."

— Claire Gill, founder, National Menopause Foundation

[1] National Menopause Foundation.

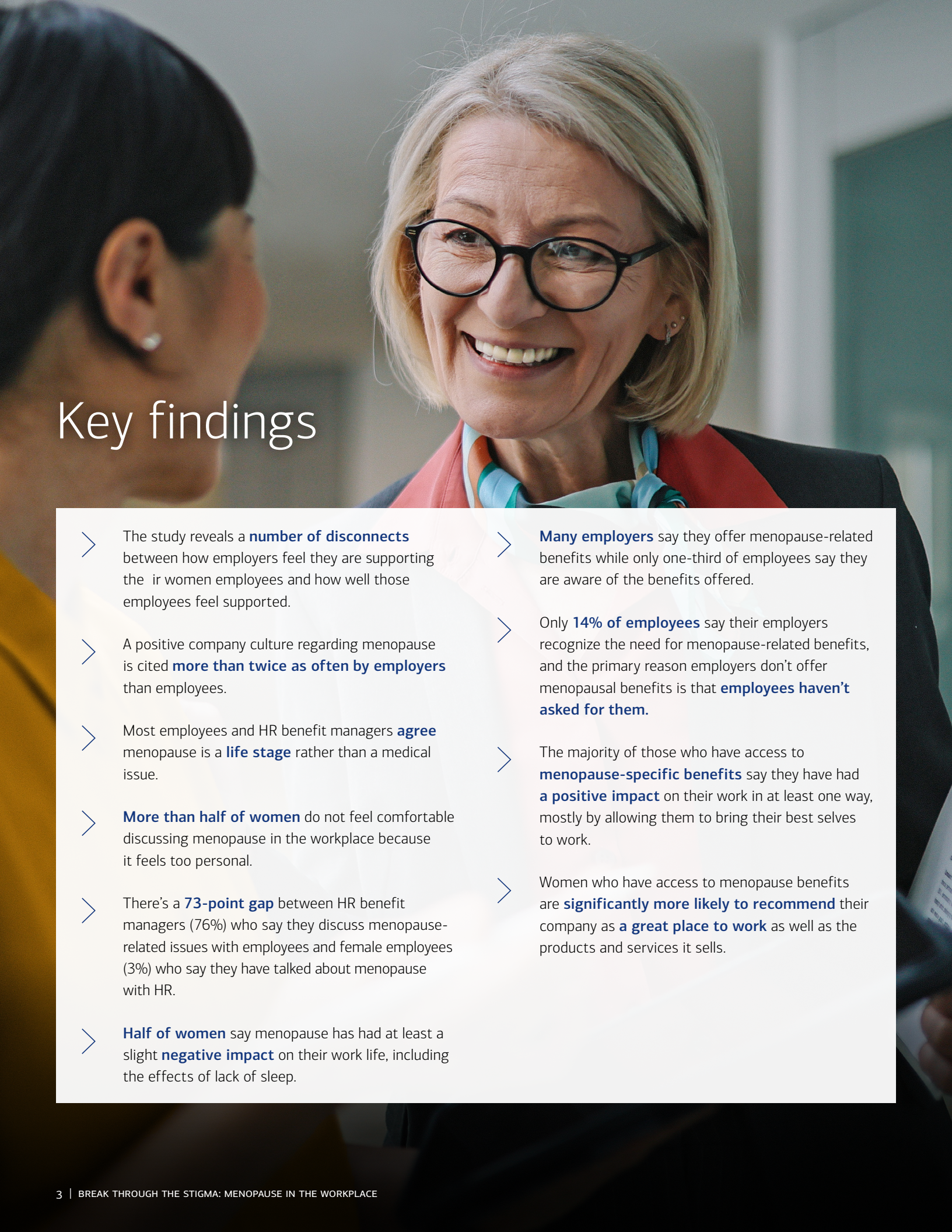
[2] Letstalkmenopause.org, as of April 2023.

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Key findings

- The study reveals a **number of disconnects** between how employers feel they are supporting the ir women employees and how well those employees feel supported.
- A positive company culture regarding menopause is cited **more than twice as often by employers** than employees.
- Most employees and HR benefit managers **agree** menopause is a **life stage** rather than a medical issue.
- **More than half of women** do not feel comfortable discussing menopause in the workplace because it feels too personal.
- There's a **73-point gap** between HR benefit managers (76%) who say they discuss menopause-related issues with employees and female employees (3%) who say they have talked about menopause with HR.
- **Half of women** say menopause has had at least a slight **negative impact** on their work life, including the effects of lack of sleep.
- **Many employers** say they offer menopause-related benefits while only one-third of employees say they are aware of the benefits offered.
- Only **14% of employees** say their employers recognize the need for menopause-related benefits, and the primary reason employers don't offer menopausal benefits is that **employees haven't asked for them.**
- The majority of those who have access to **menopause-specific benefits** say they have had **a positive impact** on their work in at least one way, mostly by allowing them to bring their best selves to work.
- Women who have access to menopause benefits are **significantly more likely to recommend** their company as **a great place to work** as well as the products and services it sells.

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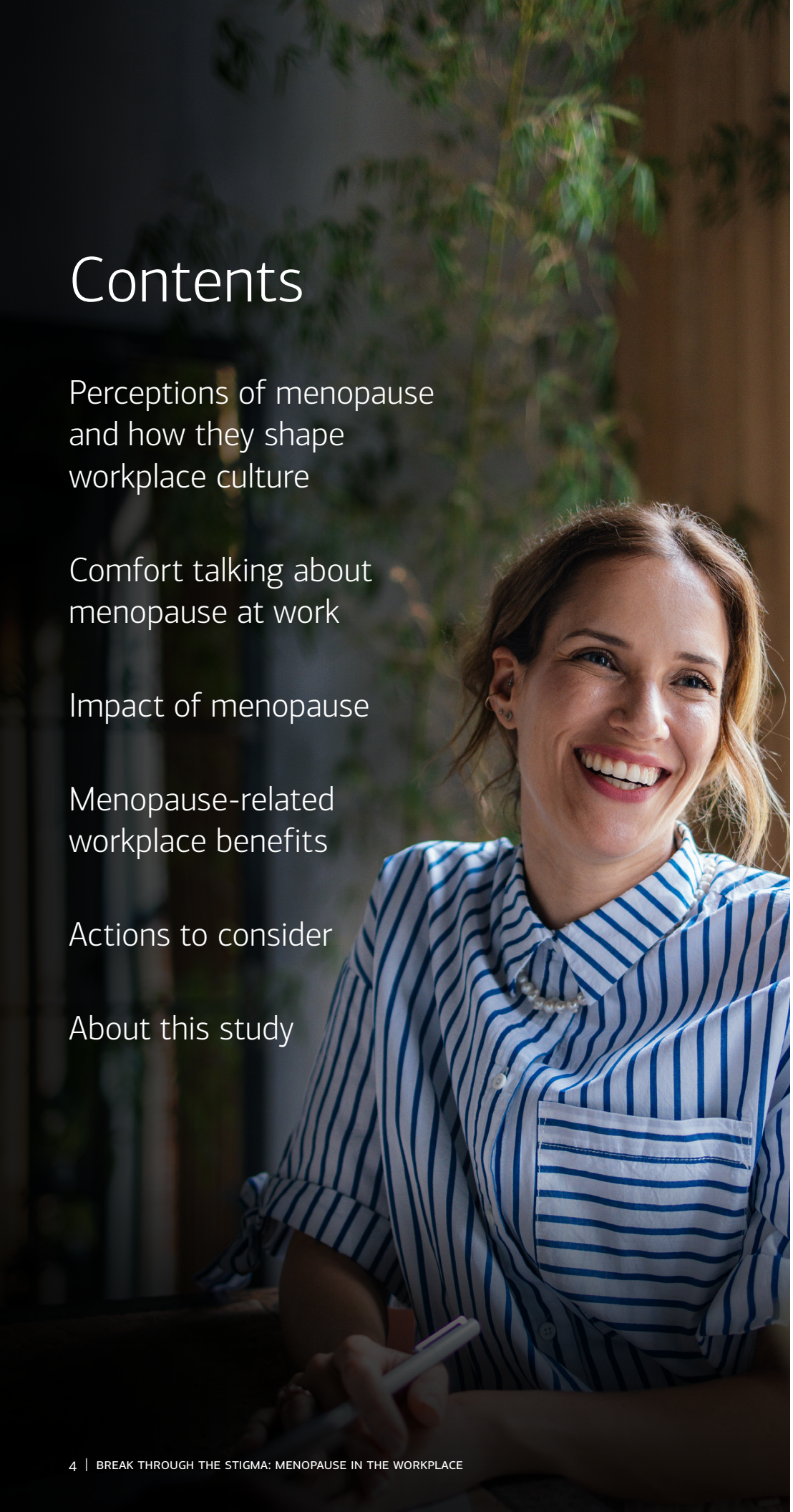
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About this study



"Menopause takes a physical and emotional toll on women, more so than financial, as they simultaneously try to manage symptoms, stigma and careers. And solutions are likewise not focused on money, but on creating an open and supportive culture, policies and benefits that can help women feel good about themselves and the company they work for."

— Lisa Margeson
Managing Director,
Retirement Client Experience
& Communications
Bank of America

MENOPAUSE

The final menstrual period, confirmed after 12 consecutive months without a period, marking the permanent end of menstruation and fertility. It is a normal, natural event associated with reduced functioning of the ovaries, resulting in lower levels of ovarian hormones (primarily estrogen).



Perceptions of menopause and how they shape workplace culture

Attitudes about menopause reveal there's work to be done to support female employees

- 81% There is a need for better education on menopause before, during and after it starts
- 74% I understand how hormones affect multiple aspects of my health
- 70% I am open to a range of solutions to help my menopausal symptoms
- 60% Menopause is generally stigmatized
- 59% I am interested in tech innovations centered on identifying and managing menopause
- 57% Menopause was/is/would be/could be disruptive to my personal life
- 52% Finding helpful information about menopause is easy
- 42% Menopause was/is/would be/could be disruptive to my work life
- 39% The thought of menopause causes me stress
- 37% Menopause is a taboo subject

"Menopause is a taboo subject overall in society, including among women. It will take some successful and courageous women to talk about it to break the stigma. Employers should encourage this."

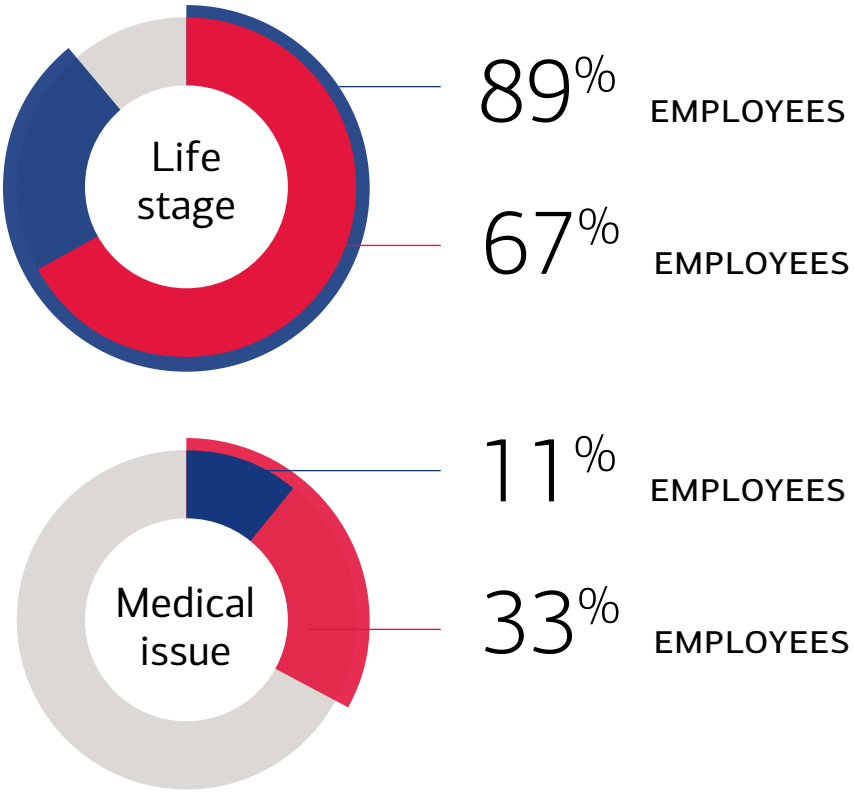
— Female employee survey respondent, age 52

ONLY

14%

of women feel their employers recognize the need for menopause-related benefits.

Most employees and HR benefit managers agree menopause is a life stage rather than a medical issue



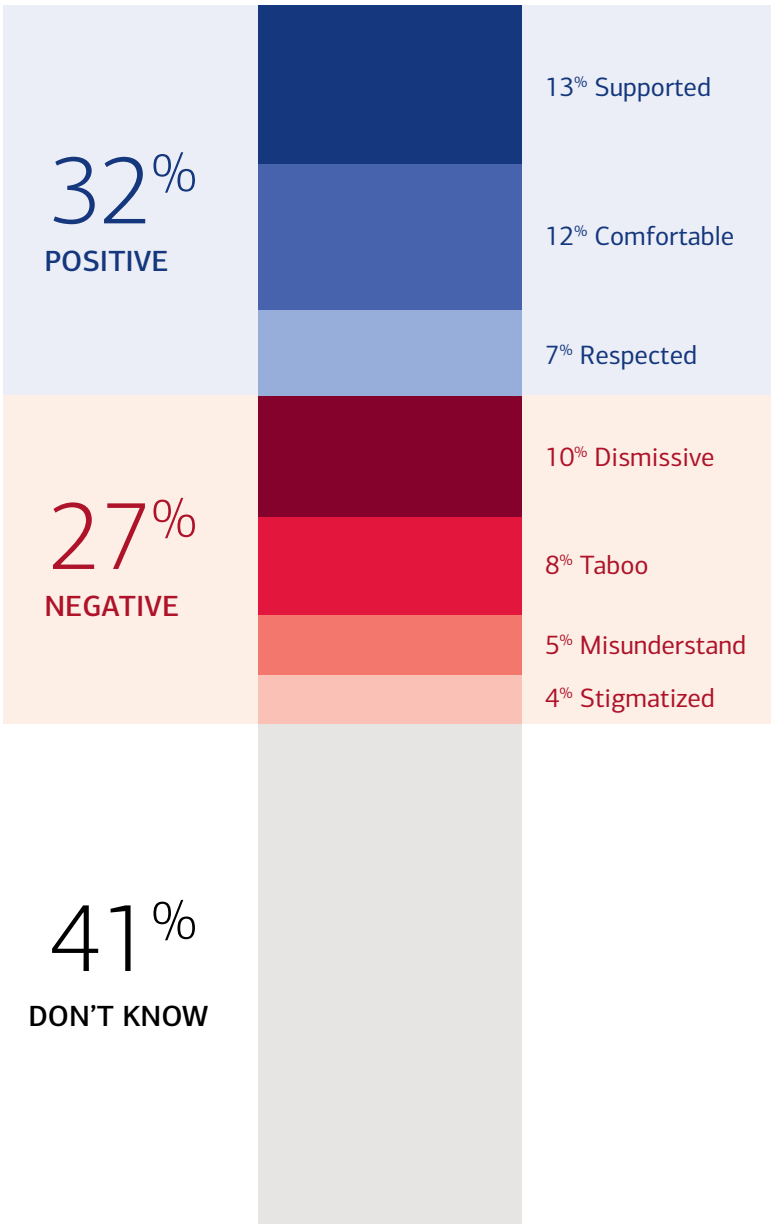
"It's a stage of life that will be experienced, so why not meet it head-on?"

— Female survey respondent, age 52





Many women are unclear about their company's culture regarding menopause



2 in 5 women don't know what culture their organization has when it comes to discussing menopause. The remaining are almost evenly split between positive and negative attitudes.

Female employees are more likely to feel positive about their company culture when they have:

A female manager



37% female manager

22% male manager

Access to menopause-specific benefits



47% benefits

25% no benefits

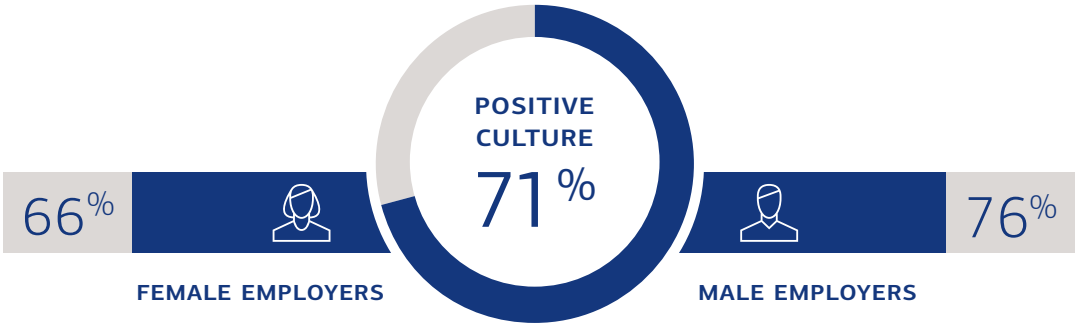
MORE THAN

half of employers

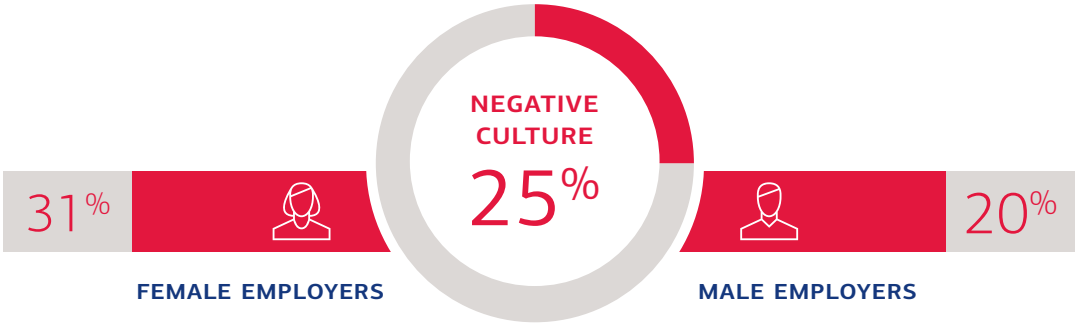
feel they have a positive menopause culture even when they don't offer menopause benefits.

HR manager views on company culture differ by gender

The majority of female benefit managers view their company in a positive light, but when compared to their male colleagues, they are more likely to report that menopause in their company is misunderstood, taboo or stigmatized.



Comfortable	Supported	Respected	Comfortable	Supported	Respected
26%	25%	15%	32%	24%	21%



Misunderstood	Taboo	Stigmatized	Misunderstood	Taboo	Stigmatized
12%	7%	6%	8%	5%	4%

"Since I work in a primarily male-dominated industry, it is kind of stigmatized about getting older as a woman and still performing the job..."

— Female employee survey respondent, age 45

Different points of view on culture surrounding menopause

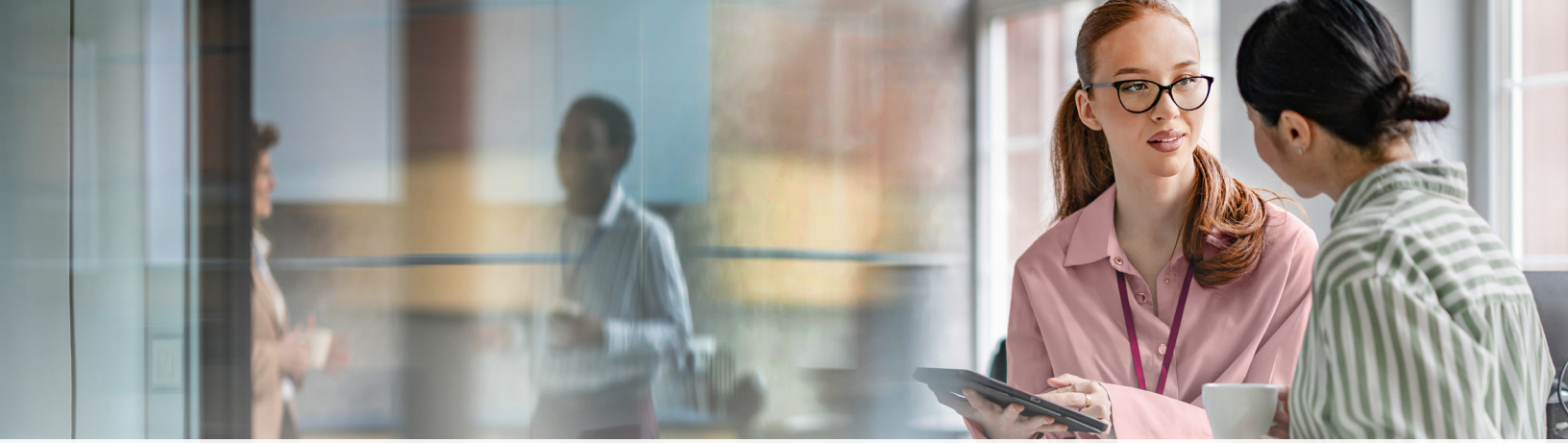
Employers are more than twice as likely as employees to have a positive perception of their company culture regarding menopause.

Positive perception



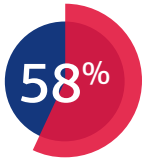
"Creating an open dialogue on menopause in the workplace is imperative to correcting any misconceptions about women experiencing this life stage. It can start with something as foundational as creating a policy about menopause and then communicate, communicate, communicate! Just hearing menopause talked about in the workplace can go a long way toward creating a more positive work environment for all."

— Cynthia Hutchins
Director of Financial Gerontology
Bank of America



Comfort talking about menopause at work

Concern about what others might think could deter women from talking about menopause



of peri- and post-menopausal women say they don't feel comfortable discussing their menopause symptoms at work, primarily because it is too personal; but they are also concerned about how they might be judged by their coworkers.

- 80% Too personal
- 32% Perceive me as old
- 28% Embarrassing to talk about my body
- 23% Don't want peers to treat me differently
- 18% Won't be respected by male peers
- 16% Peers will not think I can do my job well
- 9% Fear what others will think

"My coworkers and I talk a little about menopause, but our employer doesn't say anything about it."

— Female employee survey respondent, age 43

Female employees are likely to feel more comfortable talking about menopause when they have:

A female manager



48% female manager

34% male manager

Access to menopause-specific benefits



55% benefits

38% no benefits

"I think menopause discussions would bring unwanted attention to women."

— Female employee survey respondent, age 43

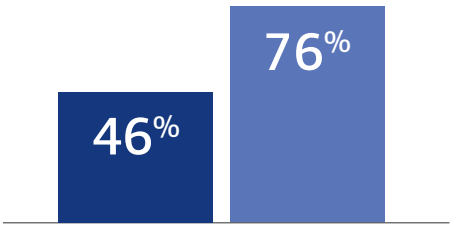


Are employees and employers connecting?

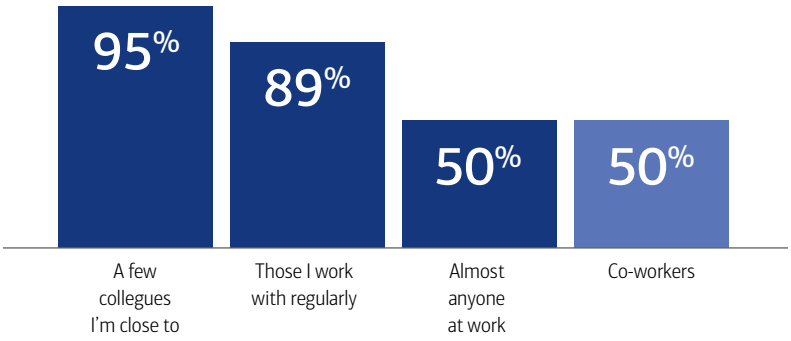
Most employers believe that employees are comfortable discussing menopause with HR, and less so with peers or direct managers. But among employees that report feeling comfortable talking about menopause at work, the reverse is true — they are more likely to say they discuss with a few close colleagues, or not at all.

FEMALE EMPLOYEES **HR MANAGERS**

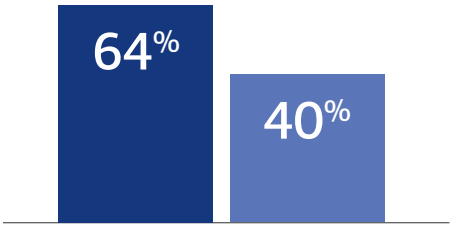
Feel comfortable talking to HR



Feel comfortable talking to co-workers

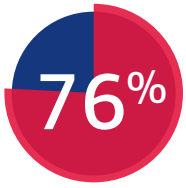


Feel comfortable talking to managers



There is a clear disconnect

76% of HR benefit managers say they discuss menopause with their employees either regularly or sometimes.



VERSUS

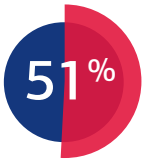


Only 3% of peri-post menopausal employees say they have talked about menopause with HR.



Impact of menopause

Impact on work life



of peri- and post-menopausal employees report menopause has had at least a slight negative impact on their work life, while 49% report it having no impact. The majority of those who report "no impact" are post-menopause, and generational attitudes could play a role in how they view its impact on their lives.

"Not getting good sleep probably was somewhat harmful, especially if it went on too long."

— Female employee survey respondent, age 59

Impact on life

(Extremely/very impactful)

- 45% Sleep
- 30% Mental health/mood
- 20% Physical health
- 20% Relationships with partner/family
- 17% Ability to focus on work
- 15% Daily activities
- 9% **Career progression**

Awareness of the ways menopause can affect women varies between employees and employers.

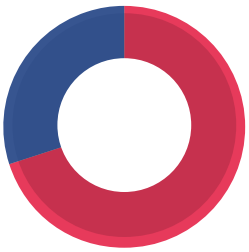
14 Female employees are aware of an average of 14 menopausal symptoms

7 While employers report knowledge of about half as many

Who's responsible for addressing the impact of menopause in the workplace?

While female employees see the responsibility to be more on themselves, employers see it as equally shared.

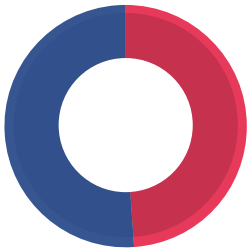
Employees



70% Employee's responsibility

30% Employer's responsibility

Employers



49% Employee's responsibility

51% Employer's responsibility





Menopause-related workplace benefits

Many employers say they offer menopause benefits, but many are not menopause specific, and most employees are not aware of them

LESS THAN
1 in 3
women are aware of these benefits

AND ONLY
1 in 10
of these women use the benefits

- 40% Access to menopause health professionals
- 38% Menopause policy (time off, flexible work arrangements, etc.)
- 38% Hormone replacement therapy covered by health insurance plan(s)
- 34% Lifestyle Spending Account (LSA) with approved use for menopause-related services
- 33% Menopause awareness sessions
- 32% Cooling rooms

"Menopause doesn't tend to come up too much in discussions, so it's never been made known how employees would feel about related benefits. I definitely think it's worth looking into and discussing, as I know it can be an uncomfortable topic and experience, and I want our employees to feel supported."

— HR benefits manager survey respondent, female, age 27

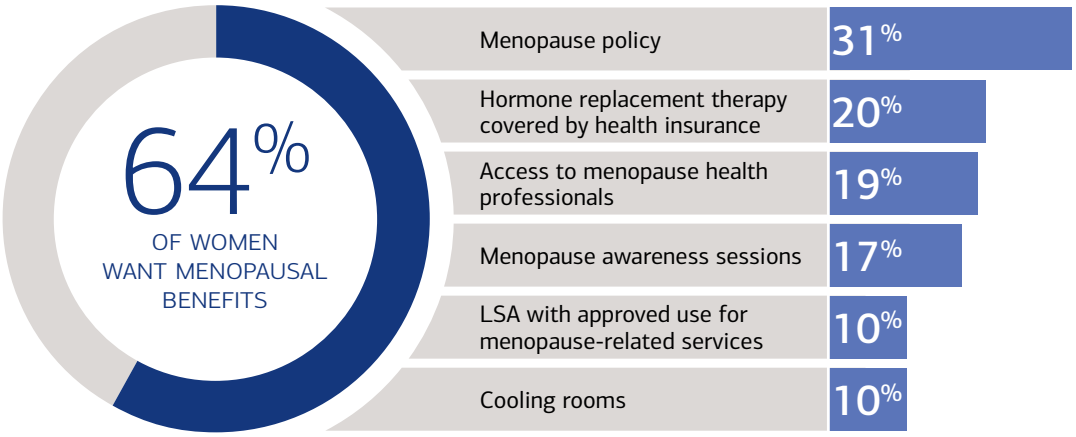
The number ONE reason employers don't offer menopause benefits:

Employees haven't asked for them.

What do women want?

Nearly two-thirds of women say they want some kind of menopause-related benefit. Simply having a clear policy on menopause is the most common.

Benefits wanted:



"It never occurred to me that menopause as a life stage change should be something that could also be supported."

— Female employee survey respondent, age 59

Women who have access to these benefits say that they have had a positive impact on their work

Positive impact of access to menopause benefits:

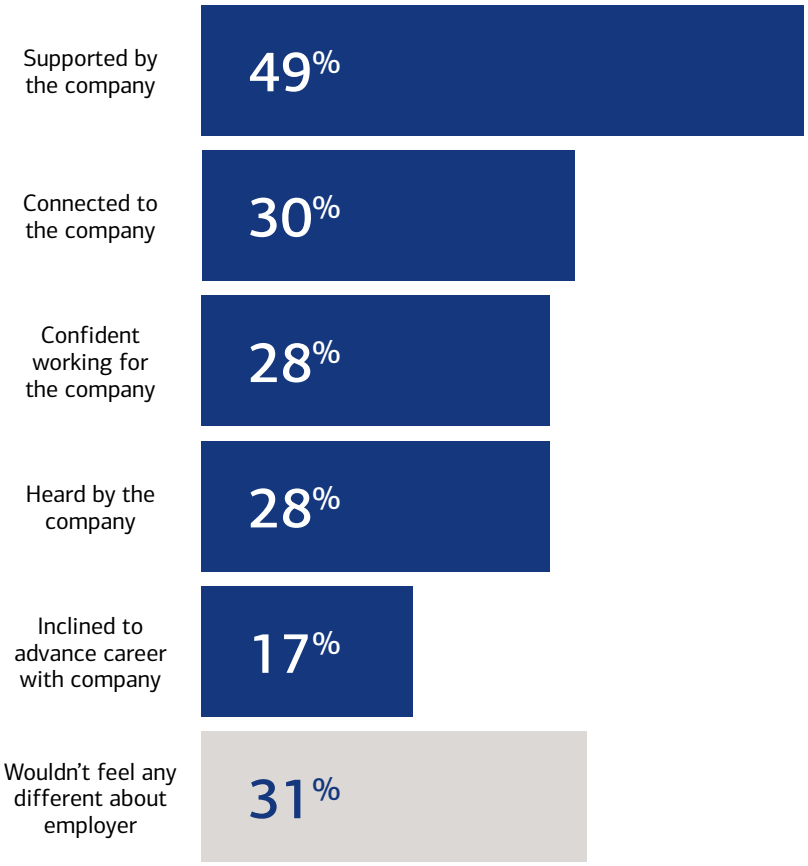


"It's hard to implement something like this that is so personal and embarrassing for people. If they have a cooling room, for example, using it will essentially label that person menopausal."

— Female employee survey respondent, age 40

More employer support for women going through menopause could have a positive impact in the workplace

Women say they would feel more:



Employers believe they would see improvements in employee:

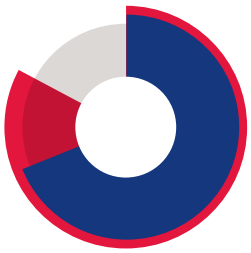
63% Loyalty	57% Client relationships
61% Productivity	54% Referrals
58% Engagement	51% Company financials
57% Retention	50% Absenteeism



Offering menopause benefits can turn employees into brand ambassadors

When thinking about benefit programs and accommodations offered by their employer, women with access to menopausal benefits are more likely to:

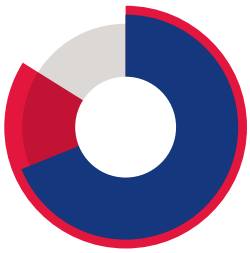
Recommend employer as a great place to work



70% with menopausal benefits

69% no menopausal benefits

Recommend company's products and services



84% with menopausal benefits

69% no menopausal benefits



Actions to consider



"Reducing the stigma around menopause is the most crucial thing businesses can do."

— HR benefits manager survey respondent

- **Talk about menopause openly and often to help increase awareness and understanding of menopause and create a culture of caring where women can feel more comfortable to communicate their needs.**
- **Offer manager training as well as educational sessions and resources specifically on menopause.**
- **Regularly engage employees in a dialogue about how your company can be more supportive of their needs and ask for feedback on the value of your benefits offering. Show you're listening by following up on their requests.**
- **Create an employee network or peer support group focused on menopause, or introduce this topic to an existing group.**
- **Consult with professionals who specialize in menopause support to identify ways you might be able to add or enhance menopause-related programs and policies, such as:**
  - Access to clinically sound education and health platform
  - Resources and advocates for guidance on symptoms, treatments, referrals and the management of physical and emotional impacts
  - Provider-managed support groups
  - Direct access to specialists on the menopause journey

About this study

Methodology

These are the findings of two polls conducted by Ipsos between February 21 and March 8, 2023. The first was conducted among a sample of 500 human resource benefit decision makers from companies that have at least 1,000 employees. No post-hoc weights were applied to the data and findings reflect the opinion of these respondents. The second was conducted among 2,000 women ages 40-65 that are employed full-time at a company with 1,000 or more employees and have had a menstrual cycle. Both surveys were conducted online in English in the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii. Results among human resource benefit decision makers have a credibility interval of plus or minus 5.4 percentage points for all respondents. Results among employed women have a credibility interval of plus or minus 2.7 percentage points for all respondents. Survey content was developed by Ipsos in consultation with the Bank of America team. Bank of America, Merrill, their affiliates, and advisors are not affiliated with Ipsos. For additional details, please see ipsos.com/en-us/menopause-in-the-workplace.

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