

# Influence

Unconscious bias in  
employee benefits

*Unconscious bias*





## Is unconscious bias driving your benefits decisions?

We talk a lot about unconscious bias when it comes to people. Whether it's facilitating better hiring decisions, enabling better conversations, or supporting the management of diverse workforces - over the past few years the concept has been front and centre of the HR zeitgeist.

But one area where we haven't seen the phrase used as often is in the world of employee benefits.

It got us wondering. Are we biased when we make decisions about employee benefits? And if so, what tools can we use to help us navigate this?

This report delves into some of our research to understand whether our benefits decisions are potentially biased, and provides pointers on how HR leaders can make decisions that aren't influenced by their own inherent bias.

If you'd like to chat through anything in this report, please get in touch with our team at [contact@pib-eb.com](mailto:contact@pib-eb.com).

*David*

**David Skinner**  
Managing Director



# What is unconscious bias?

## Unconscious Bias *noun*

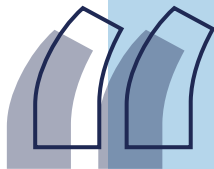
[ uhn-kon-shuhs bahy-uhs ]

Unconscious (or implicit) bias is a term that describes the associations we hold, outside our conscious awareness and control. Unconscious bias affects everyone.

Unconscious bias is triggered by our brain automatically making quick judgments and assessments. They are influenced by our background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes, and cultural context. It is not just about gender, ethnicity, or other visible

diversity characteristics - height, body weight, names, and many other things can also trigger unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviours, especially towards other people. It can influence key decisions in the workplace and can contribute to inequality, for example in selection and recruitment, appraisals, or promotion.



**In the world of employee benefits, biased decision-making could lead to the implementation of benefit schemes that don't cater to the actual needs of an employee population."**

*Clare*



# Are we biased when it comes to employee benefits?

## Perception of employee needs

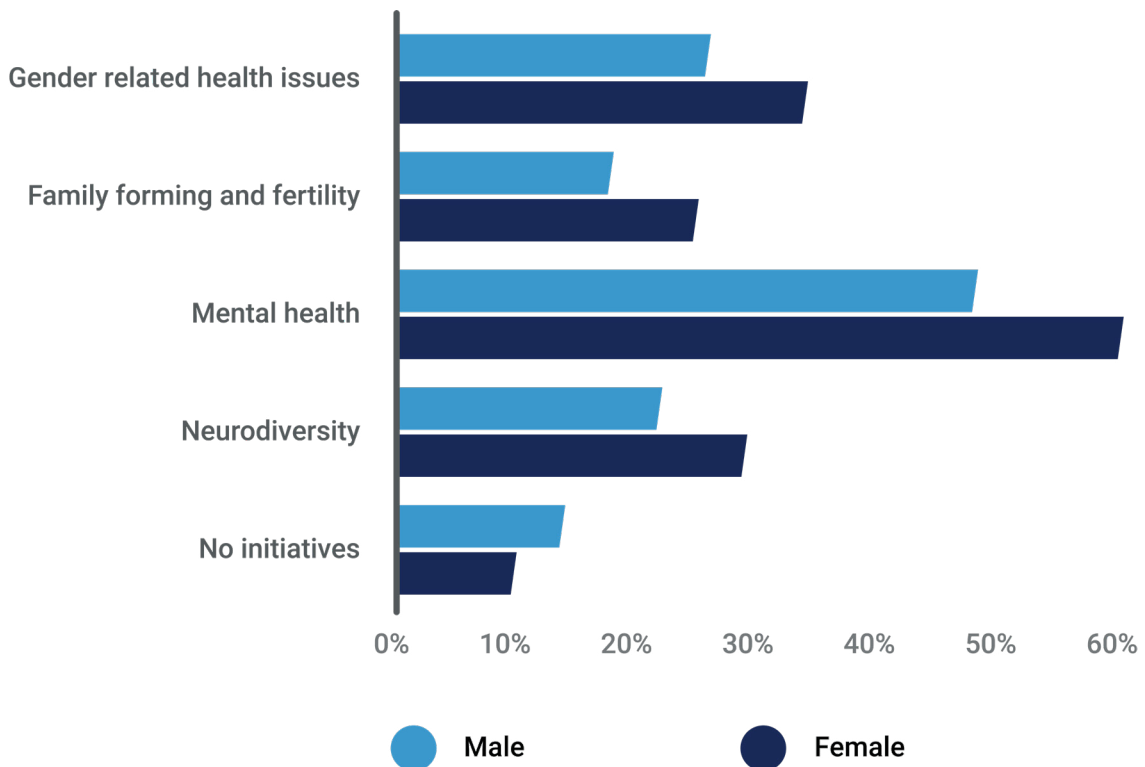
Across 8 out of 10 factors, female HR leaders were more likely to want to implement benefits vs their male counterparts

8/10

Our data suggests that decisions are - at least partially - influenced by our own experiences - whether individual or societal - rather than driven by the needs of the workforce.

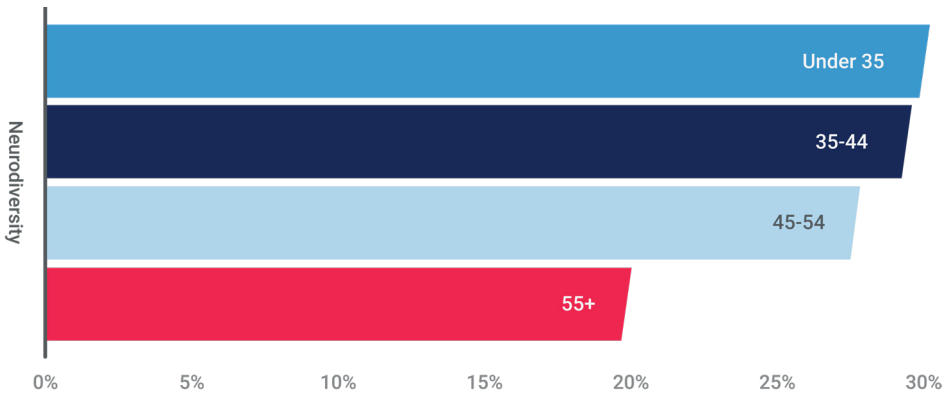
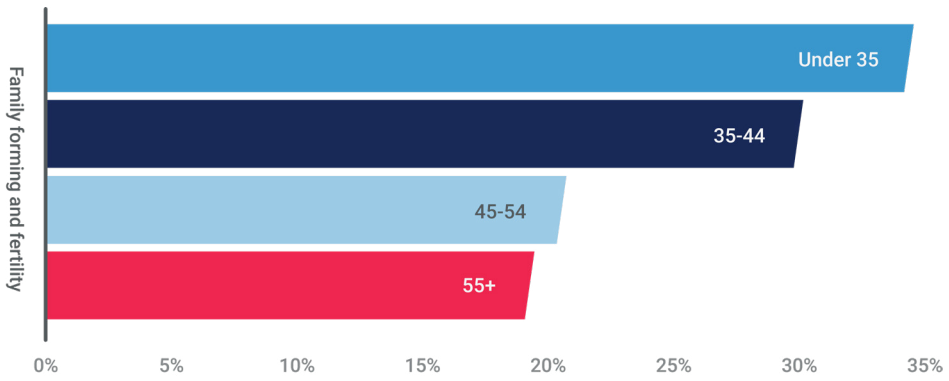
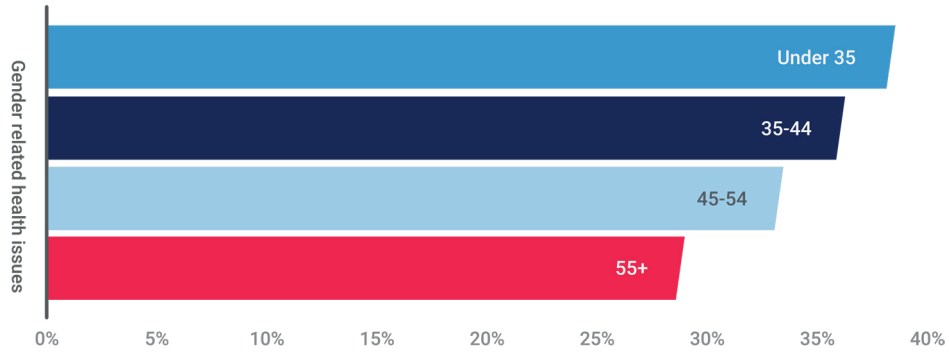
As part of our Wellbeing Revolution survey, we asked HR decision makers about the benefit areas they would want to invest in if budget were no issue.

When we reviewed the responses by gender and age, there were some significant differences in the results:





When assessed generationally, there are considerable gaps for gender-related health issues, family forming benefits and neurodiversity:



# Perception of risk

Our research also uncovered differences when it came to the perception of business risk and wellbeing-related challenges. Women were more likely to state that they saw childcare support as a key upcoming wellbeing-related challenge; 21% of female HR leaders listed it as a challenge, whereas only 15% of male HR leaders did.

Female HR leaders were also more likely to cite that creating organisational resilience was a concern; nearly half (48%) of women stated it was an upcoming wellbeing-related challenge, vs only 41% of men.

Generationally we saw also saw some variance when it came to perceiving future wellbeing-related challenges:

	Under 35	35-44	45-54	55+
<b>Addressing generational needs</b>	29%	27%	18%	16%
<b>Diversity, equity and inclusion objectives</b>	31%	31%	22%	14%
<b>Childcare and family support</b>	26%	18%	13%	13%
<b>Support for individuals with caring responsibilities</b>	29%	23%	11%	16%
<b>An ageing population</b>	16%	17%	16%	19%
<b>Providing financial wellbeing support</b>	27%	26%	19%	13%
<b>Line manager wellbeing training</b>	25%	21%	21%	17%
<b>Managing the costs of providing wellbeing support</b>	35%	33%	28%	26%
<b>Addressing underlying health risks</b>	19%	16%	12%	10%
<b>Organisational transformation</b>	33%	28%	20%	18%
<b>Organisational resilience</b>	46%	47%	41%	40%





# How can we prevent bias influencing our decisions?

Recognising bias is the first step to reducing its influence; but what other steps can HR leaders take to prevent inherent bias from influencing their benefits decisions?

## Use data

Our research shows that 46% of businesses do not use data to inform their wellbeing strategy. Gathering employee data to inform decision making is a good way to validate strategic direction.

Regular surveys, line manager feedback, and specific focus groups can all help HR leaders assess and monitor whether employee needs and challenges are being addressed by their benefits programme.

## Facilitate choice

It can be difficult to balance diverse needs with budgetary constraints. Utilising voluntary benefits is one way that HR leaders can provide more choice whilst controlling costs.

Additionally, companies could look to introduce flexible benefits or seek alternative solutions to avoid the constraints of 'traditional' benefits - for example, switching to a health cash plan rather than providing private medical insurance.

## Unconscious bias training

Companies could consider rolling out unconscious bias training for benefits decision makers to ensure they are aware of how their own bias might unfairly impact the strategic decisions they make about benefit programmes - and how data can help underpin better decision making.

**66% of employees would like more choice and flexibility around the employee benefits they receive from their employer**

66%

*Mind the Gap Survey 2023*



# Get in touch



For more information on the issues covered in this guide, please get in touch with our benefits experts.

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# Endnotes

## Endnotes

<https://bma.org.uk/media/6520/the-country-is-getting-sicker-bma.pdf>