

**WHITEPAPER**

# The Key to More Inclusive Women's Health Benefits? Awareness and Access

Employers and employees need more education about pelvic health disorders, and how digital physical therapy solutions can bridge the care gap to deliver relief for these common-but-treatable conditions.



While many companies claim to offer holistic support for women's health through their benefit plans, employers often overlook a critical coverage area: pelvic floor disorders. These disorders are all too common. In fact, one in four women will suffer from a pelvic floor disorder in her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Not only are these conditions prevalent, but they are also undertreated due to lack of access, stigma and widespread lack of information about treatment options.

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To better understand how benefits professionals are approaching women's health and pelvic floor physical therapy, Arizent Research and Employee Benefit News surveyed 100 benefits professionals on behalf of Hinge Health. The results suggest employers can help provide a truly comprehensive women's health solution in their benefits offerings through two key avenues: awareness, for both employers and employees, and better access to care.

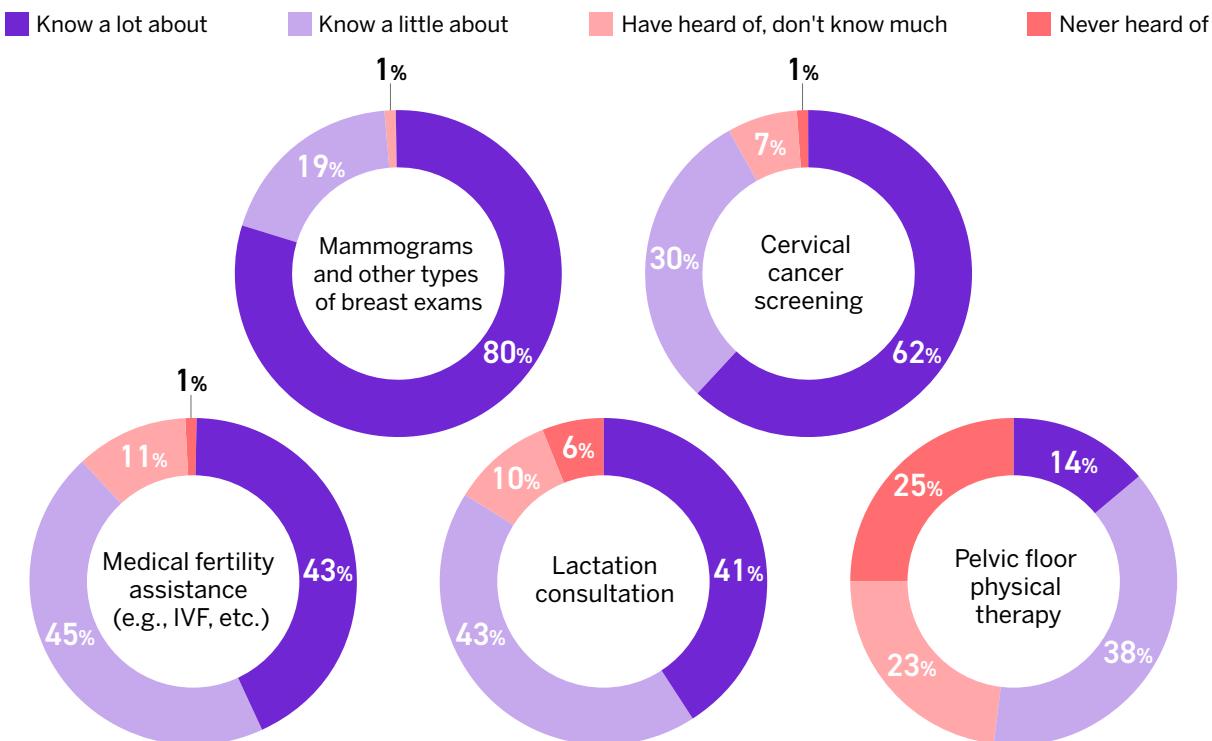
## Pelvic health is misunderstood and stigmatized

When it comes to women's health, benefit professionals put cancer (31%) and fertility (29%) at the top of their lists. Respondents mention those topics ten times more frequently than women's pelvic health, which less than 3% cite. Unfortunately, this means that a pervasive health issue is likely not getting the attention that its frequency warrants. As noted, a fourth of women are likely to suffer from pelvic floor disorders that can cause incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse, sexual dysfunction and pelvic pain, among other symptoms.

In human resources departments, a lack of understanding about pelvic health conditions, their impact and their treatments – on individuals and on their productivity – is common. A quarter of the benefit professionals surveyed say they have never heard of pelvic floor physical therapy and only 14% report any substantial knowledge of it (see Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24463674/>

**Figure 1. Level of Knowledge of Women's Health Concerns or Treatments Among HR Professionals**



Source: Arizent/Employee Benefits News, 2022

This gap in understanding stands in sharp contrast to the impact pelvic floor disorders have on women across the country. Consumer data collected by Hinge Health found that 50% of women say pelvic floor disorders have affected their workplace productivity. Pregnancy, childbirth, menopause and activities that increase abdominal pressure like chronic constipation or coughing and obesity can increase risk of certain complications such as incontinence and prolapse.

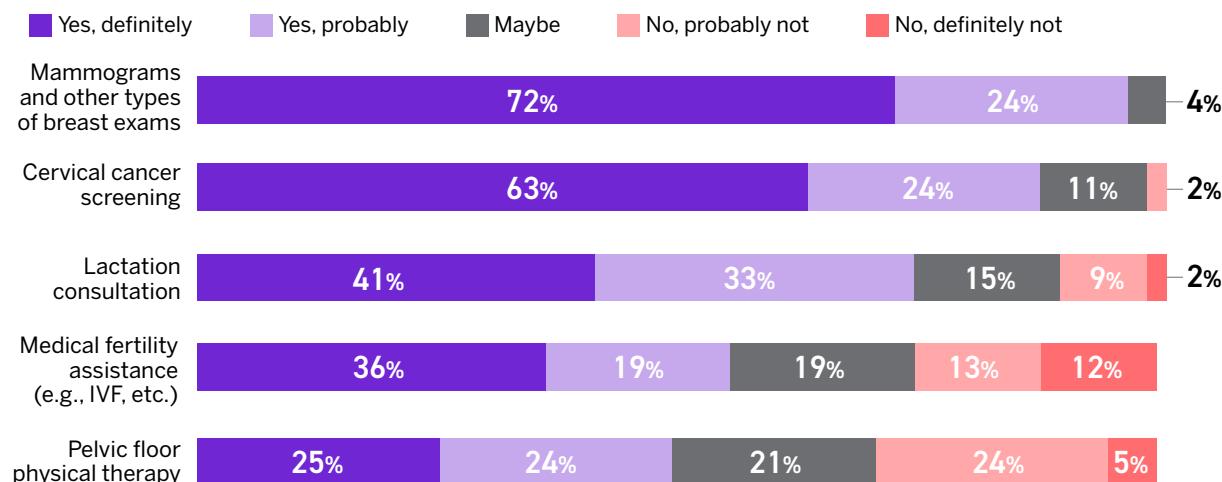
The prevalence of pelvic floor conditions is not well understood by the general public, in part because many women are reluctant to admit they are incontinent or suffering from the other symptoms caused by pelvic floor disorder. Hesitancy to reveal symptoms can also seriously delay treatment. "Many women are not aware of the many conservative, non-surgical options available to treat most pelvic floor conditions. For example, pelvic health physical therapy, is an evidence-based treatment for urinary leakage and control issues and can even help some women with prolapse and certain types of pelvic pain," says Tamara Grisales, urogynecologist and senior expert physician at Hinge Health.

### Benefits coverage for pelvic floor health is lacking

Benefits that offer specific coverage for women's pelvic health are relatively rare. More than half of benefit professionals who are familiar with pelvic floor physical therapy (51%) either recognize that their plans do not adequately cover it or are not sure whether the coverage is adequate (see Figure 2). About a sixth of all respondents (15%) don't believe that women's pelvic health is covered as part of their existing suite of benefit offerings at all.

"With a severe shortage of available physical therapists and long wait times for care, coverage in theory does not always equal access in practice," says Grisales.

## Figure 2. Level of Belief that Company Benefits Provide Adequate Coverage for Specific Female Employee Healthcare Needs



Source: Arizent/Employee Benefits News, 2022

### Benefits leaders understand the value of an inclusive offering

This shortfall in coverage exists despite increasing efforts among benefits administrators to meet the diverse needs of all employees. More than three in four respondents (76%) report that their company is examining healthcare benefits to ensure they address the needs of all employees, regardless of race, gender, sexuality and ability status. Nearly all (98%) of those asked say their companies are taking action to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion. And nearly all (98%) of those surveyed agree that improving the overall health of their employees is beneficial to their company.

Addressing urgent gaps in coverage could help these efforts. Four in five respondents (81%) say their benefits strategy would be more inclusive if it included a women's pelvic health program. Better inclusivity can produce positive impacts across the organization as well.

Attracting and retaining key talent are among those positive impacts. Almost half of women from the consumer study say women's health benefits at a prospective employer would influence their decision to accept a job — an important advantage in today's tight labor market.

### Digital solutions can bridge the women's health benefits gap

Offering a digital option for pelvic floor physical therapy and health can help employers close a care gap and meaningfully improve their benefits offerings. Therapy offered through a digital experience provides rapid access to a professional who can assess movement to identify the root cause of the problem and customize the care plan accordingly. Evidence suggests this type of offering is highly effective, more convenient and more easily accessible than in-person care.<sup>2</sup>

Benefits of a digital women's health solution include:

- No need to wait for physical therapy appointments.
- No need for transportation to get to the doctor's office.
- Patients can schedule treatment at times that work for them.
- Patients can also attend those sessions from locations that are convenient and private, such as their own home.

<sup>2</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33175229>

**“ A quarter of the benefit professionals surveyed have never heard of pelvic floor physical therapy.”**

Convenience is important because too many women are reluctant to visit therapists in person. Based on Hinge Health consumer research, 20% of women fail to seek treatment for pelvic disorder because they don't feel comfortable going to an office or undergoing internal pelvic floor muscle exams.

Equally importantly, digital solutions can reduce the amount of time patients have to wait before they can get treatment. In many cases, patients can set up same-day video treatments with experienced pelvic floor physical therapists who provide customized care plans. Digital care teams can follow up easily and often with patients to evolve those plans as the condition changes.

Patients can also tap into a wide range of custom-created resources and educational materials about pelvic floor disorders and the treatments that are available. Women's health coaches can offer one-on-one guidance to help users navigate these resources successfully and recommend lifestyle changes that can help improve patients' overall condition more quickly and help form habits that support long-term change.

In cases where co-existing conditions such as hip, joint, back or other musculoskeletal issues exist, the app serves as a single platform for coordinating care. This approach has been clinically proven to improve physical health and mental wellbeing. Based on pilot results from the Hinge Health program, members see an average of 58% improvement in pain and symptoms.

#### **A chance for employers to make a real difference**

Although pelvic health issues affect one in four women, pelvic floor disorders remain poorly understood by the general public and health benefits administrators. Better education and better resources will help women in critical need of it. Simply having access to a digital tool that is centered on pelvic floor health provides easier access, confidentiality and personalized treatments that produce effective, lasting results. Benefits administrators are in a position to help their employees and, by extension, their own organizations by offering access to digital tools that can meaningfully improve their women's health offerings.

## Methodology

The professional research was conducted online by Arizent/Employee Benefit News during September 2022 among 100 qualified respondents. To qualify, individuals were screened for human resources roles at organizations that provide group health benefits to more than 2,000 active, benefits-eligible employees.

The consumer research was conducted online by Hinge Health among more than 300 women.



## About Hinge Health

Hinge Health is creating a new health care system, built around you. Accessible to more than 25 million members across 1,250 customers, Hinge Health is the #1 digital clinic for joint and muscle pain, delivering superior member outcomes and proven claims reductions. We pair the industry's most advanced motion tracking technology and wearable pain relief with a complete clinical care team of physical therapists, physicians, and board-certified health coaches to help people move beyond pain and reduce surgeries and opioid use. Hinge Health's HingeConnect integrates with 1 million+ in-person providers to enable earlier interventions for avoidable MSK surgeries. Four in five health plans and employers with a digital MSK solution trust Hinge Health, including Land O'Lakes, L.L. Bean, Salesforce, Self-Insured Schools of California, Southern Company, State of New Jersey, US Foods, and Verizon.

Learn more at [hingehealth.com](https://hingehealth.com).



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