

2026

Broker Services Survey



Overview

The **2026 Broker Services Survey** provides valuable insights into the constantly evolving broker-client relationship. The results highlight what employers across the United States expect from their insurance brokers and the challenges they currently face. For over a decade, Zywave has been delivering these insights to help brokers stay informed, competitive and aligned with employer needs.

The data confirms the value of the broker-client relationship: Most clients rely on their brokers for guidance and expect more timely, effective service than ever before.

Yet service expectations are only part of the story. A more urgent theme runs through the data: escalating risk. Compliance burdens are intensifying, new threats are emerging, budgets are shrinking and timelines are tightening. In this volatile environment, brokers must fundamentally reevaluate how they operate. Strategic planning and proactive communication are no longer optional. When the margin for error narrows, even small missteps can trigger outsized consequences.

The 2026 Broker Services Survey was completed by more than 1,400 respondents from organizations of all sizes across the United States.

This report breaks down the survey results by broker-client relationship and line of business (employee benefits and commercial lines), each with an at-a-glance summary, highlights and analysis.

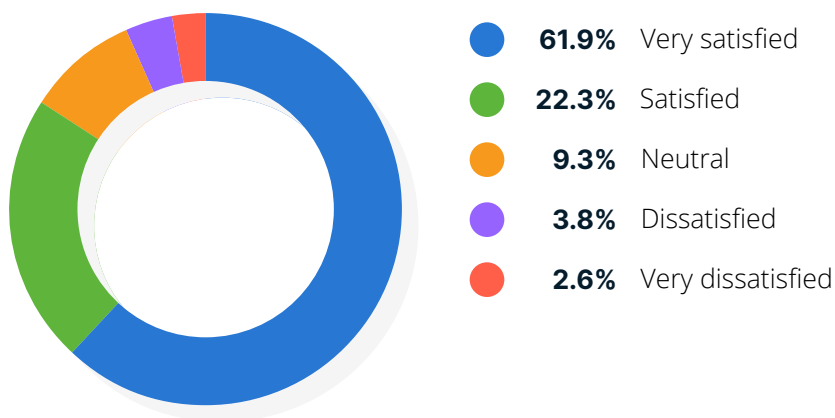
The Broker-client Relationship

Around **85% of respondents** are satisfied or very satisfied with their broker's services, in line with the gains made in 2024 and 2025. Satisfaction has held near its all-time high, but high scores can mask vulnerabilities (**33%** of clients evaluate their broker only when something goes wrong). A book of business that looks secure on paper may be quietly at risk.

While clients are generally more satisfied with their brokers, there are key distinctions between the high- and low-end respondents. With the gap between "satisfied" (**22%**) and "very satisfied" (**62%**) widening in 2026, closing it requires consistent, proactive value delivery. On the low end, the share of clients reporting they are very dissatisfied rose from **1.1%** to **2.6%**, more than double the prior year. The absolute numbers are small, but the direction matters: Very dissatisfied clients are the most likely to switch brokers or leave negative reviews, increasing renewal risk.

Nearly 85% of clients are satisfied or very satisfied, yet 33% evaluate their broker only when something goes wrong. High satisfaction scores can obscure real vulnerability and a churn risk beneath the surface.

How satisfied are you with the services your insurance broker provides?

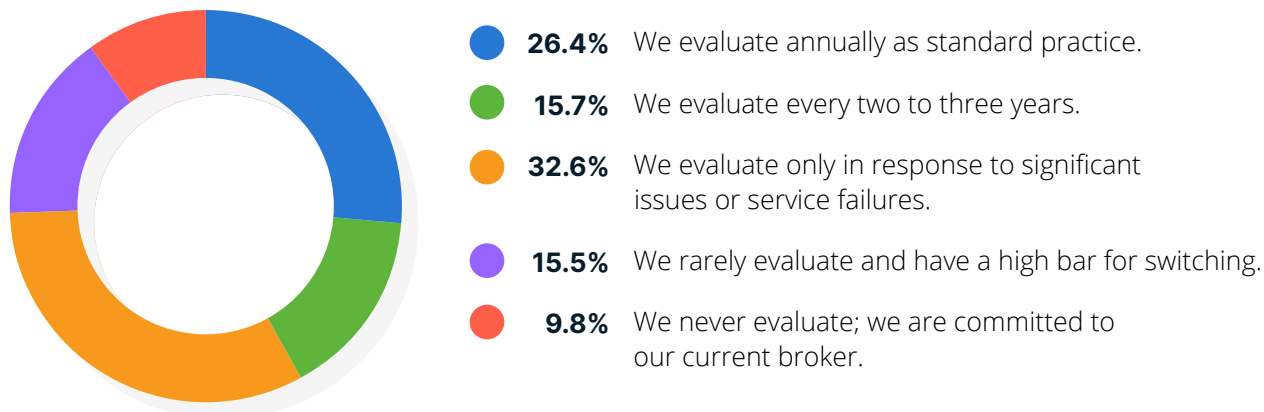


EVALUATING THE BROKER RELATIONSHIP

Most clients don't actively shop for new brokers until they have a reason to. **Thirty-three percent** say they evaluate their broker only after significant issues or service failures, and another **16%** rarely evaluate at all. Long-term retention often hinges on avoiding missteps. What might once have been overlooked, such as a missed email or a delayed renewal quote, is now magnified in a marketplace defined by rate volatility and shifting regulations.

Meanwhile, **26%** of clients reevaluate annually. This group is discerning by nature, regularly benchmarking their broker's performance and comparing results against expectations. To retain them, brokers must take a tailored, data-driven approach that consistently reinforces credibility and positions them as strategic partners rather than simply coverage providers.

How often do you evaluate your current broker relationship?



WHY DO CLIENTS CHANGE BROKERS?

In today's fast-paced environment, slow response times and ineffective service top the list of reasons an organization would drop its broker. A lack of consistent communication follows closely behind as the next most common reason. Slow service is often perceived as disengagement, and brokers who show up only at renewal time may find they're competing with brokers who've been providing more frequent or timely communication. Especially in today's market, clients don't just want answers, but reassurance that they are partnering with the right broker.

Many employers are also willing to cut ties with a broker who isn't able or willing to act as a strategic advisor, the third most cited factor this year. The days of merely quoting policies are over. With an escalating risk trajectory, organizations need brokers who function as true advisors equipped with the tools and mindset to offer proactive, high-level insights. A broker without the right tools is in danger of becoming invisible at the most critical moments.

Top Factors That Would Lead an Employer to Consider Changing Insurance Brokers

- 1 Slow response times or ineffective service
- 2 Lack of consistent communication
- 3 Inability/unwillingness to act as a strategic advisor
- 4 Insufficient understanding of your industry/business needs
- 5 Failure to provide a strategic plan consistent with your business needs
- 6 Failure to provide a wide range of services
- 7 Failure to offer adequate compliance resources
- 8 Failure to leverage modern technology and AI-powered tools

SELECTING A BROKER

Prompt, effective service remains the most important broker selection criterion, a position it has held for four consecutive years. Being a trusted advisor rather than a salesperson continues to hold as the second most important criterion, up from third place as recently as 2023. The ability to effectively negotiate renewals rounds out the top three, with the ability to offer compliance resources and maintain a good relationship rounding out the top five.

Service quality is how clients measure reliability. The way a broker handles day-to-day questions signals how they'll perform when something urgent is on the line. The sustained rise of the trusted advisor expectation means strategic guidance is no longer a differentiator but a baseline requirement. Today's organizations seek brokers who stay ahead of regulatory changes; deliver meaningful support across risk management, HR, benefits and wellness; and demonstrate a deep understanding of each client's business. Renewals remain where the battle is won or lost. Clients understand they're entering renewals from a defensive position, and they want brokers in their corner who will fight for them.

Top 10 Criteria Employers Use to Select an Insurance Broker

- 1 Provides prompt and effective service/answers questions
- 2 Is a trusted advisor rather than an insurance salesperson
- 3 Has the ability to effectively negotiate your renewal
- 4 Offers resources to help keep you in compliance with laws and regulations
- 5 Maintains an overall good relationship with you or your organization
- 6 Offers competitive pricing
- 7 Has the ability to compare plans/coverages to benchmark data
- 8 Brings expertise in servicing your organization's industry/business
- 9 Offers products and services tailored to meet your organization's needs
- 10 Has access to a wide range of insurance companies/markets

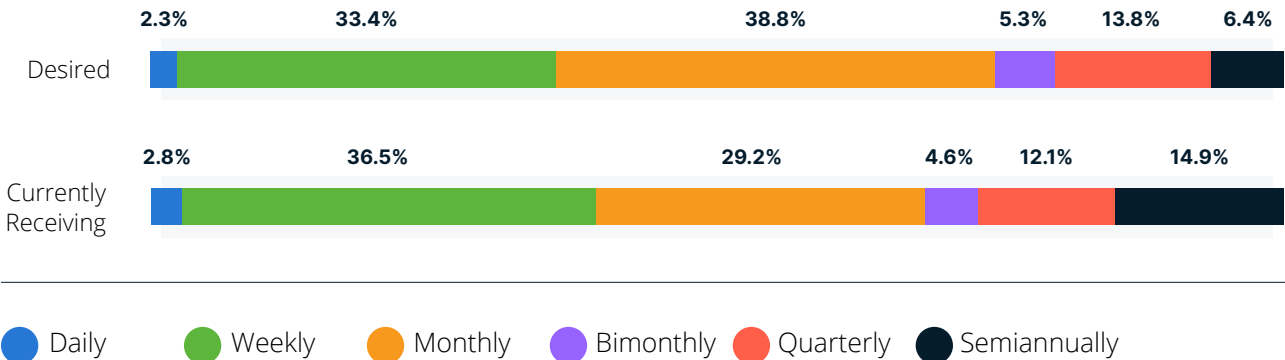
COMMUNICATION EXPECTATIONS

Seventy-five percent of clients want to hear from their broker at least monthly, and while current delivery largely matches the expectation of employers at the daily and weekly level, monthly communications are falling short. **Thirty-nine percent** of respondents prefer monthly communications, but only **29%** are receiving information at that cadence.

What's even more concerning is that **15%** of clients currently receive communication only semiannually, more than double the **6%** who actually want that cadence. Brokers who check in only twice a year are significantly out of step with client expectations and may find themselves vulnerable at renewal time, even with clients who appear self-sufficient.

Compared to 2025, employers are less likely to hear from their brokers monthly or more. This decline is driven in part by the rise of client self-service tools, which risk moving that cohort away from viewing their broker as a trusted advisor, especially during the summer when engagement naturally dips and Q4 renewals are on the horizon.

How often would you like your broker to provide information or guidance?

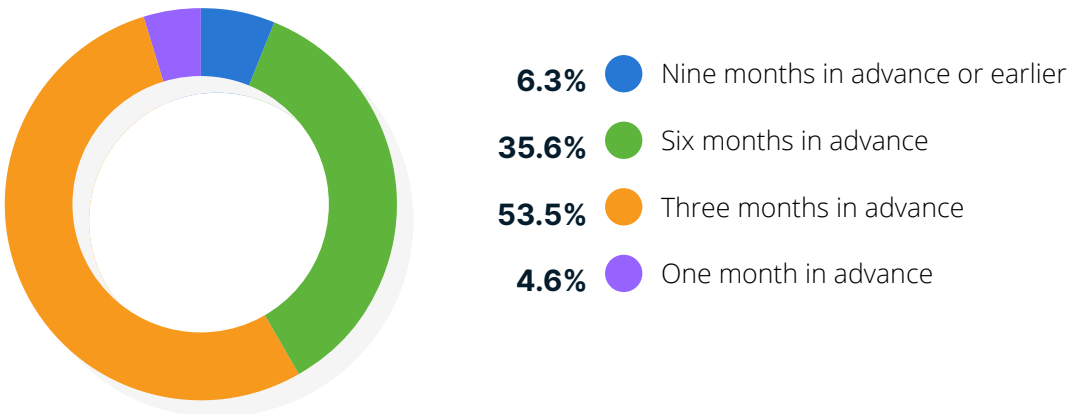


POLICY RENEWALS

Ninety-five percent of clients want renewal conversations to begin at least three months out, and **42%** want outreach six months in advance or earlier. Proactive outreach allows brokers to present benchmarking data, conduct gap analyses, explore carrier options and align coverage with upcoming business changes. None of this is possible when a broker first reaches out 30 days before renewal.

Proactive outreach signals to clients that their broker is engaged and invested in their success throughout the year, not simply at renewal time.

How far in advance of policy renewals would you like to hear from your broker?



Highlights and Analysis: Employee Benefits

In addition to employee benefits broker services, the 2026 Broker Services Survey asked employers about their organizations' most pressing challenges regarding employee benefits and HR. This section compiles these responses and provides general insights regarding the employee benefits market in 2026, along with potential service gaps for brokers.

2026 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS CHALLENGES

Healthcare cost management continues to define the market, ranking as the **#1 benefits challenge** for the third straight year. Compliance has climbed to its highest level of urgency since 2021. A pair of emerging themes, benefits communication and strategic planning, are being named explicitly by clients as needs their brokers aren't fully meeting.

Top Employee Benefits and HR Challenges

-  **1** Offering a competitive benefits package while controlling rising healthcare costs
-  **2** Staying compliant with evolving federal and state laws and regulations
-  **3** Getting the level of strategic guidance and support needed to make informed benefits decisions
-  **4** Benchmarking benefits against industry peers to ensure competitiveness
-  **5** Managing the day-to-day burden of benefits administration
-  **6** Keeping up with the administrative burden of open enrollment
-  **7** Selecting and managing voluntary benefits offerings
-  **8** Integrating AI effectively into benefits administration and HR operations
-  **9** Helping employees understand and utilize their benefits
-  **10** Attracting and retaining employees

    denotes change from 2025 Broker Services Survey

Competitive Benefits Amid Rising Healthcare Costs

For three consecutive years, healthcare cost management has ranked as the #1 benefits challenge. In addition to respondents citing it as their top concern, almost **90%** rate broker guidance on managing rising healthcare costs as very important and rank it as the top category that they anticipate needing support in the next 12 months. No other issue comes close to this level of sustained, cross-cutting urgency.

Cost pressure is not easing. Healthcare trend rates are running out of control, driven by a combination of factors including the rapid uptake of GLP-1 medications, specialty drugs entering the market, rising behavioral health utilization, deferred care coming due and sustained medical cost inflation across most service categories. For many employers, these forces are compounding simultaneously, and traditional cost-management levers are losing effectiveness.

Cost management is an area where brokers can provide genuine, differentiated value. Brokers who are willing to engage on plan design, funding strategy and benefit structure, rather than simply renewing the status quo, are positioned to serve as true advisors rather than transactional intermediaries. Employers increasingly need partners who can help them think through trade-offs, model alternatives, and make informed decisions, not just quote the market.

Federal and State Compliance

Compliance has reached its highest level of urgency since 2021. After falling to #5 in 2023 as pandemic-era regulations stabilized, it has climbed back to #2 in 2026, driven by a new administration and an accelerating wave of state-level activity on issues like pay transparency and leave entitlements.

While some employers may expect compliance enforcement to ease under a Republican White House, this survey data shows that that is not the case. Whether it's different enforcement priorities at the federal level or focused state activity, employers are feeling the compliance burden. In fact, the results show that employers are expecting more compliance support from their brokers than at any time in the last five years. Clients need brokers who proactively flag changes before they become problems, not just answer questions after the fact.

Benefits Communication and Employee Education

Helping employees understand and maximize their benefits has emerged as one of the top two workforce challenges that employers anticipate needing support in the next 12 months. Benefits are valuable only if employees know how to use them, and poor communication leads to low utilization, wasted spending and dissatisfied workforces.

With healthcare costs rising sharply, cost-mitigation strategies can only be so effective. Employers are now turning to effective communication strategies and leveraging the right resources to help their workforce understand why costs are rising and to equip them with the tools they need to take actionable steps to lower their healthcare spend.

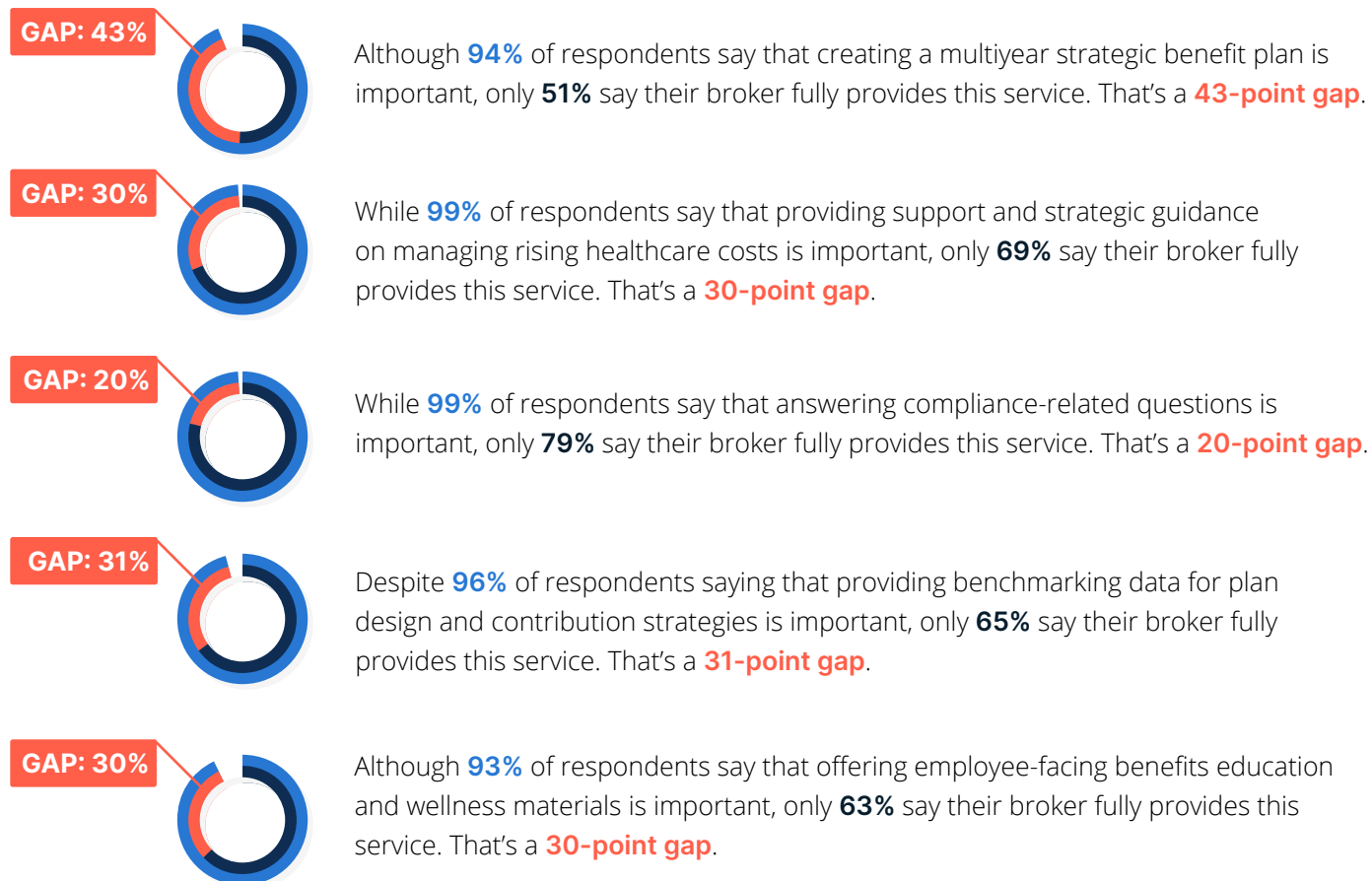
Brokers who position themselves as ongoing partners in benefits education, rather than annual enrollment facilitators, have a clear opportunity to deepen client relationships throughout the year.

Strategic Planning and Benchmarking

Strategic guidance and benchmarking are areas where client demand is explicit, and delivery is lagging. Getting the level of strategic guidance needed to make informed benefits decisions ranks #3 overall. Employers are not waiting to be asked. They are naming exactly what they need, and brokers who can deliver structured, data-driven planning conversations will be best positioned to turn those conversations into long-term loyalty.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS BROKER SERVICES: SERVICE GAPS

This year's survey also asked about employee benefits broker services. The findings validate the benefits challenges highlighted above and identify potential service gaps and opportunities. Consider these key results:



Broker delivery on several strategic services improved year over year, with compliance support up 7 points, multiyear strategic planning up 9 points and healthcare cost guidance up 5 points. That progress is meaningful. The largest gaps, however, fall precisely where client urgency is highest, and one service moved in the wrong direction entirely.

Strategic planning is the biggest gap in the dataset. With **94%** of respondents saying a multiyear benefit plan is important, but only **51%** of brokers fully delivering it, this is the most persistent gap in the entire benefits dataset. With **46%** of clients anticipating they will need help with benefits strategy in the next 12 months, it is also the single most concrete opportunity to deepen the client relationship.

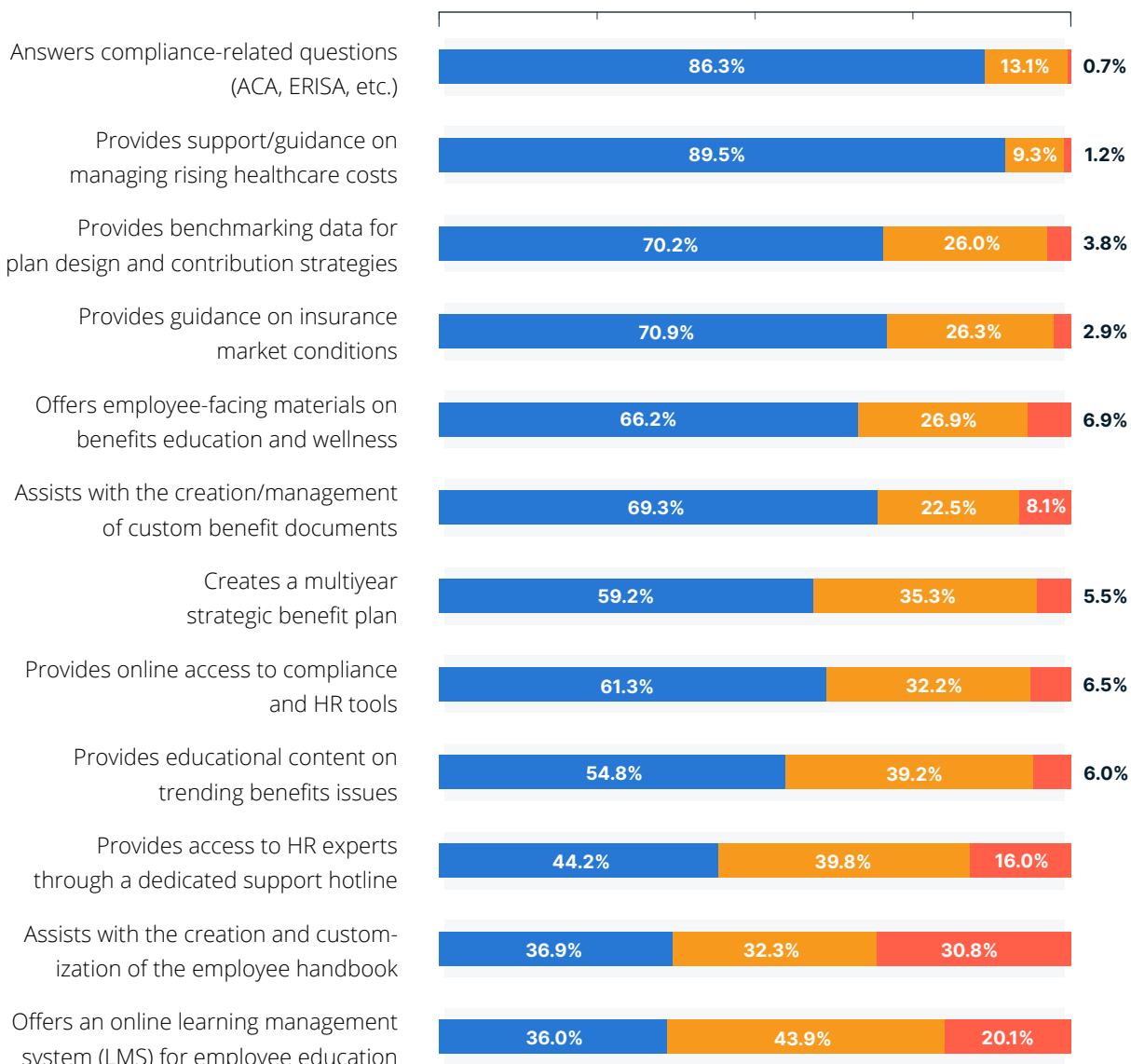
Healthcare cost guidance still falls short. The #1 client challenge for three consecutive years, and **89%** rate broker guidance on it as very important, yet only **69%** say their broker fully delivers. Despite a 5-point improvement since 2025, a **30-point gap** remains on the issue clients care about most.

Employee-facing benefits education is the only service that declined year over year, even as **62%** of clients anticipate needing open enrollment communication support in the coming year. This divergence between client need and broker delivery is a priority area.



Please tell us the level of importance you attribute to the following employee benefits broker services.

● Very Important
 ● Somewhat Important
 ● Not Important

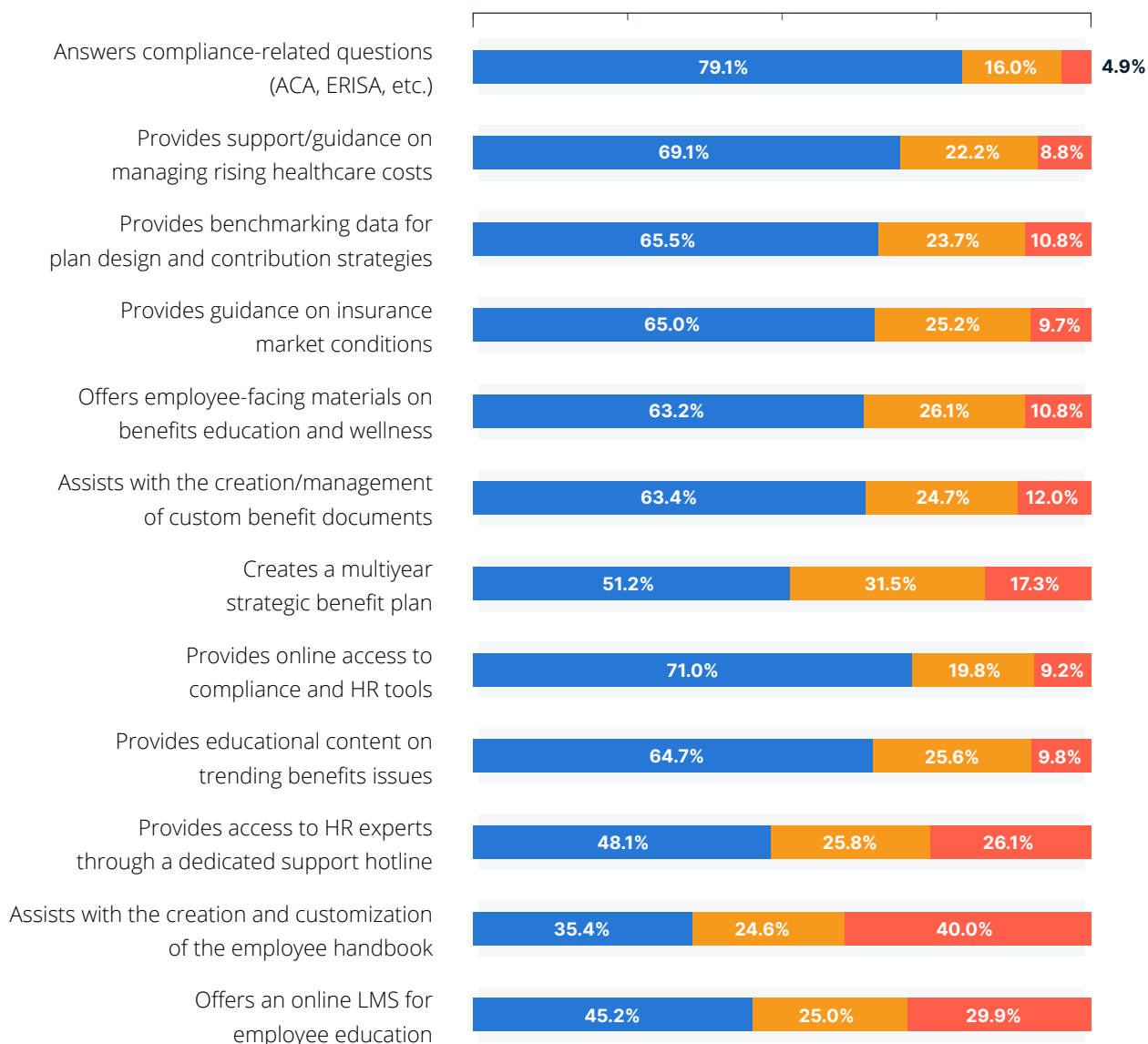


Please tell us whether your benefits broker is providing these services or expertise.

● Fully Provides

● Partially Provides

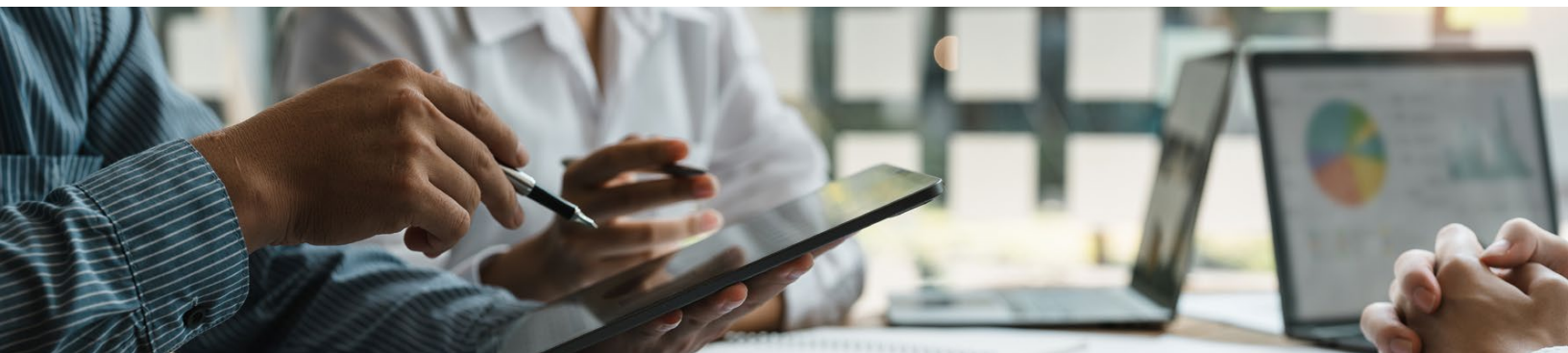
● Does Not Provide



LOOKING FORWARD: EMPLOYEE BENEFITS NEEDS

Managing rising healthcare costs is expected to drive broker support, with respondents ranking it as the top area they anticipate needing support in the next 12 months. This is consistent with its three-year run as the top benefits challenge. But the second most-anticipated area demonstrates that employers are looking for more from their broker: Respondents expect to need broker support in communicating benefits during open enrollment or onboarding. Helping employees understand and maximize their benefits is now viewed as critical for delivering a competitive benefits package and mitigating the impact of rising costs, and it is increasingly becoming a broker's responsibility. Brokers who treat benefit communication as an employer-only HR function rather than a service they can provide are missing a clear client signal.

Along with being a top-two current challenge, support for federal and state compliance ranks as the third most critical area where employers anticipate needing support in the next year. Respondents recognize that while maintaining compliance presents an ongoing area of difficulty, proactive brokers who use the right resources and tools can help address this challenge.



Strategic planning and benchmarking round out the top five anticipated needs. The multiyear strategic benefit plan remains the largest delivery gap in the benefits dataset, and closing it represents both a retention and growth opportunity.

Top 10 Areas Employers Anticipate Needing Additional Support in the Next 12 Months

- 1 Managing rising healthcare costs
- 2 Communicating benefits to employees during open enrollment or onboarding
- 3 Complying with federal or state laws
- 4 Creating or updating employee benefits strategy or plan design
- 5 Benchmarking benefits against industry or peer organizations
- 6 Enhancing employee engagement with benefits
- 7 Managing or selecting voluntary benefits offerings
- 8 Providing insightful wellness and employee communications resources
- 9 Evaluating or implementing alternative funding models
- 10 Improving mental health, well-being or total reward strategies

Clients overwhelmingly value strategic guidance on critical employee benefits topics like healthcare cost management and compliance, but most brokers aren't fully delivering. For brokers using Zywave products, this gap becomes a clear opportunity to differentiate, retain current customers and win new business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The 2026 data makes clear that healthcare cost guidance, strategic planning, compliance support, and benefits communication are all areas where client need is high, broker delivery is incomplete, and gaps persist. Employers are actively signaling where they need more support. Brokers who respond to those signals with proactive, structured service delivery will be best positioned to retain clients and win new ones.



Highlights and Analysis: Commercial Insurance

The 2026 Broker Services Survey also asked employers for their views on the most pressing challenges in commercial insurance and risk management. This section compiles these responses and provides insights regarding the commercial market in 2026, along with potential risk management and insurance service gaps for brokers.

2026 COMMERCIAL INSURANCE CHALLENGES

Employers' top challenges with commercial insurance in 2026 are managing year-over-year increases in insurance premiums, understanding the level of coverage needed and aligning insurance coverage with the organization's risk tolerance. Cost is top of mind for many organizations, but education and coverage adequacy remain critical concerns.

Top 10 Commercial Insurance Challenges

-  **1** Managing rising insurance premiums year over year
-  **2** Understanding the level of coverage that your organization needs
- NEW**  **3** Aligning insurance coverage with the organization's risk tolerance
-  **4** Receiving the level of customer support and guidance our organization needs
-  **5** Understanding what is and is not covered by our organization's current policies
-  **6** Coordinating coverage across multiple policies, layers and/or insurers
-  **7** Understanding additional policies our organization may need
-  **8** Addressing coverage gaps created by business growth or operational changes
- NEW**  **9** Addressing coverage needs for emerging risks
-  **10** Managing deductibles, self-insured retentions and cash-flow impact

   **NEW** denotes change from 2025 Broker Services Survey

Cost Is Still a Dominant Concern

Managing rising insurance premiums year over year is the top commercial insurance challenge for businesses in 2026, with **70%** of respondents citing it as an area of concern this year. The finding is consistent with prior years and reflects the cumulative impact of a hard market cycle that, while moderating in some lines, has left businesses paying significantly more for coverage than they were three to four years ago. With this increased cost, businesses are paying close attention to their overall insurance spend.

The current market is not moving uniformly, and that shapes how clients experience their overall insurance spend. Property pricing has softened considerably as carrier capacity has expanded. Workers' compensation remains stable and competitive, continuing its run as the bright spot of the primary casualty lines. Cyber and directors and officers liability are also seeing favorable conditions, with capacity abundant and rates flat to declining for well-controlled risks. On the other side of the market, commercial auto and excess and umbrella liability are still hardening, driven by nuclear verdicts and social inflation. General liability profitability remains a concern industrywide, with upward pressure on rates persisting for many classes. Most businesses' insurance programs span multiple lines, so the softening they hear about in the market often does not match what they see in their overall insurance spend.

For insurance brokers, the **70%** figure is a direct signal about where clients need help. Well-prepared renewal advocacy, accurate exposure data, and proactive exploration of markets and coverage structures are the most immediate ways to deliver value. Beyond the renewal itself, helping clients think about total cost of risk—deductible strategy, loss control investment and claims management—reframes the conversation from a pricing exercise to a longer-term strategy that builds trust and retention.

Understanding the Level of Needed Coverage

Businesses want to ensure their policy limits will be sufficient when called upon. In 2026, understanding the level of coverage their organization needs ranks as the second most pressing commercial insurance challenge, trailing only the cost of premiums. The commercial insurance space has grown increasingly complex, and more employers need guidance on how much coverage they actually need to protect their organizations. This presents a clear opportunity for brokers to step up as trusted advisors and help clients understand the full range of insurance and risk transfer options available to them.

This need is especially acute for commercial casualty policies. Commercial auto and excess and umbrella liability remain in a hard market, driven by forces pushing claim costs upward. Social inflation, nuclear verdicts, third-party litigation funding, and frivolous lawsuits all factor into what adequate limits should look like, and businesses increasingly need help working through those considerations at renewal. Property limits also warrant attention, as inflation in construction costs and materials has pushed replacement values higher, meaning previously selected limits may no longer reflect actual exposure.

Brokers serve a critical function in limit selection by guiding what constitutes an adequate limit based on the business's characteristics, exposures and risk tolerance. Brokers who can have data-driven conversations with their clients about limits will be best positioned to win new business and retain existing clients. In a market where both pricing and risk are moving, brokers can help businesses focus on the factors they can control and ensure their coverage keeps pace with how their organizations have changed.

Aligning Insurance Coverage With the Organization's Risk Tolerance

Aligning insurance coverage with an organization's risk tolerance ranks third among commercial insurance challenges in 2026. This challenge sits at the intersection of financial strategy and risk management. Every organization has a different appetite for retained risk, and that appetite shifts as the business grows, changes ownership, enters new markets or absorbs losses. Risk tolerance is not static, and many businesses struggle to revisit it as often as the topic warrants. Operational changes, leadership transitions, new contractual obligations, and shifts in revenue or headcount can all alter an organization's exposure profile in ways that are not always visible at renewal. When coverage decisions are made without a current understanding of those changes, businesses can end up with insurance programs that don't meet their needs.

Brokers are well-positioned to lead that conversation. By combining knowledge of the client's financial position, loss history and strategic priorities with a clear understanding of available coverage options, brokers can help businesses build insurance programs that drive positive outcomes.



Addressing Coverage Needs for Emerging Risks

Addressing coverage needs for emerging risks appears as a new entry in the top 10 commercial insurance challenges for 2026. Its arrival reflects how quickly the risk environment is changing and how difficult it has become for businesses to keep pace. Emerging risks lack established coverage frameworks, historical loss data and clear underwriting standards, which makes them harder for businesses to evaluate. Artificial intelligence, geopolitical instability, supply chain disruption and climate-related events are all creating exposures that span traditional coverage lines. Many organizations are still working to identify where their current programs leave them exposed before they can even begin to address those gaps.

Brokers who stay current on emerging risk trends are positioned to provide clients with clear assessments of where their program has blind spots and what insurance options exist to address them. Those conversations reinforce the broker's role as a forward-looking advisor.

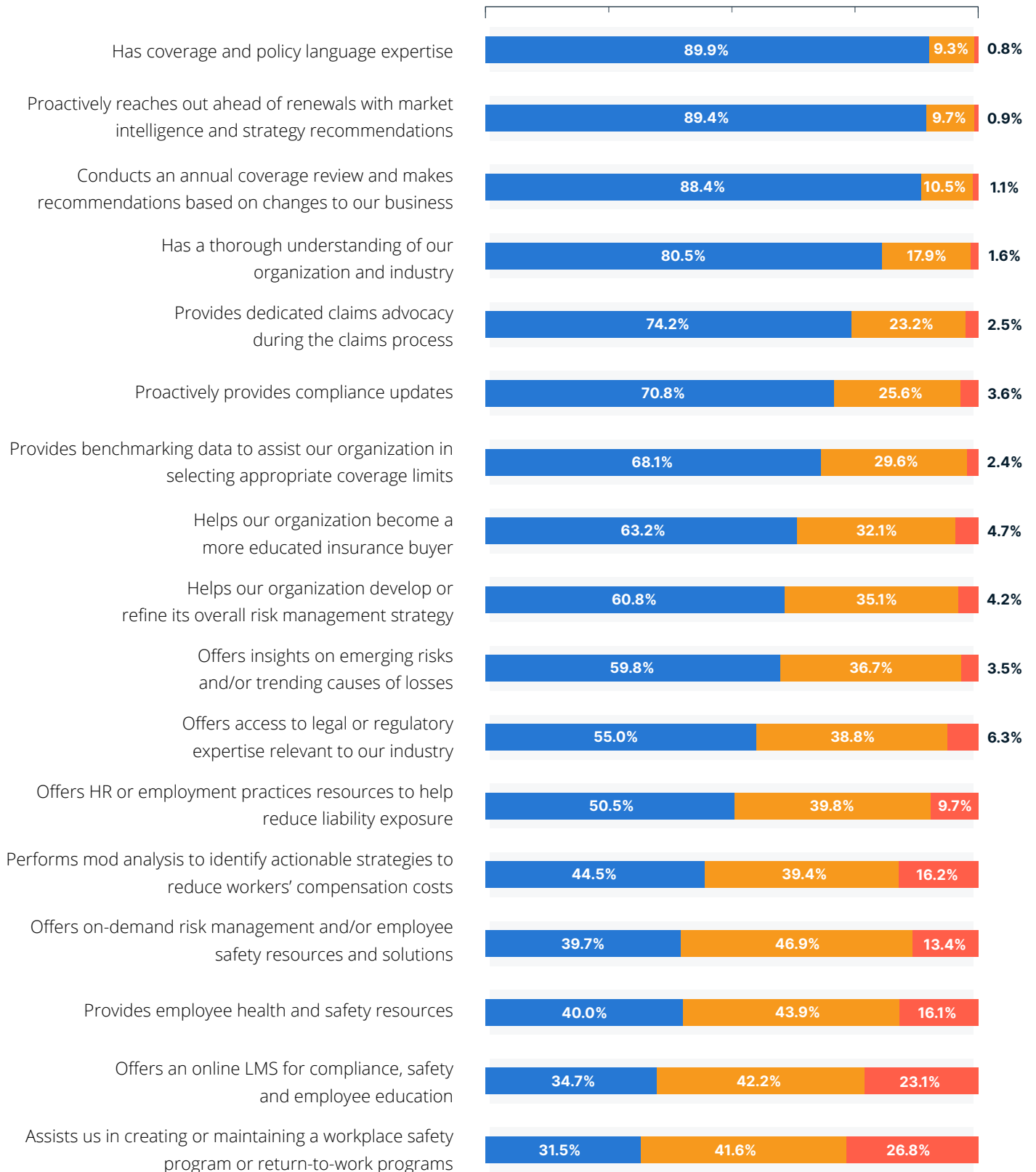
COMMERCIAL INSURANCE BROKER SERVICES: SERVICE GAPS

This year's survey also asked about commercial insurance broker services. The findings highlight potential service gaps and opportunities:



Please tell us the level of importance you attribute to the following commercial insurance broker services.

● Very Important
 ● Somewhat Important
 ● Not Important

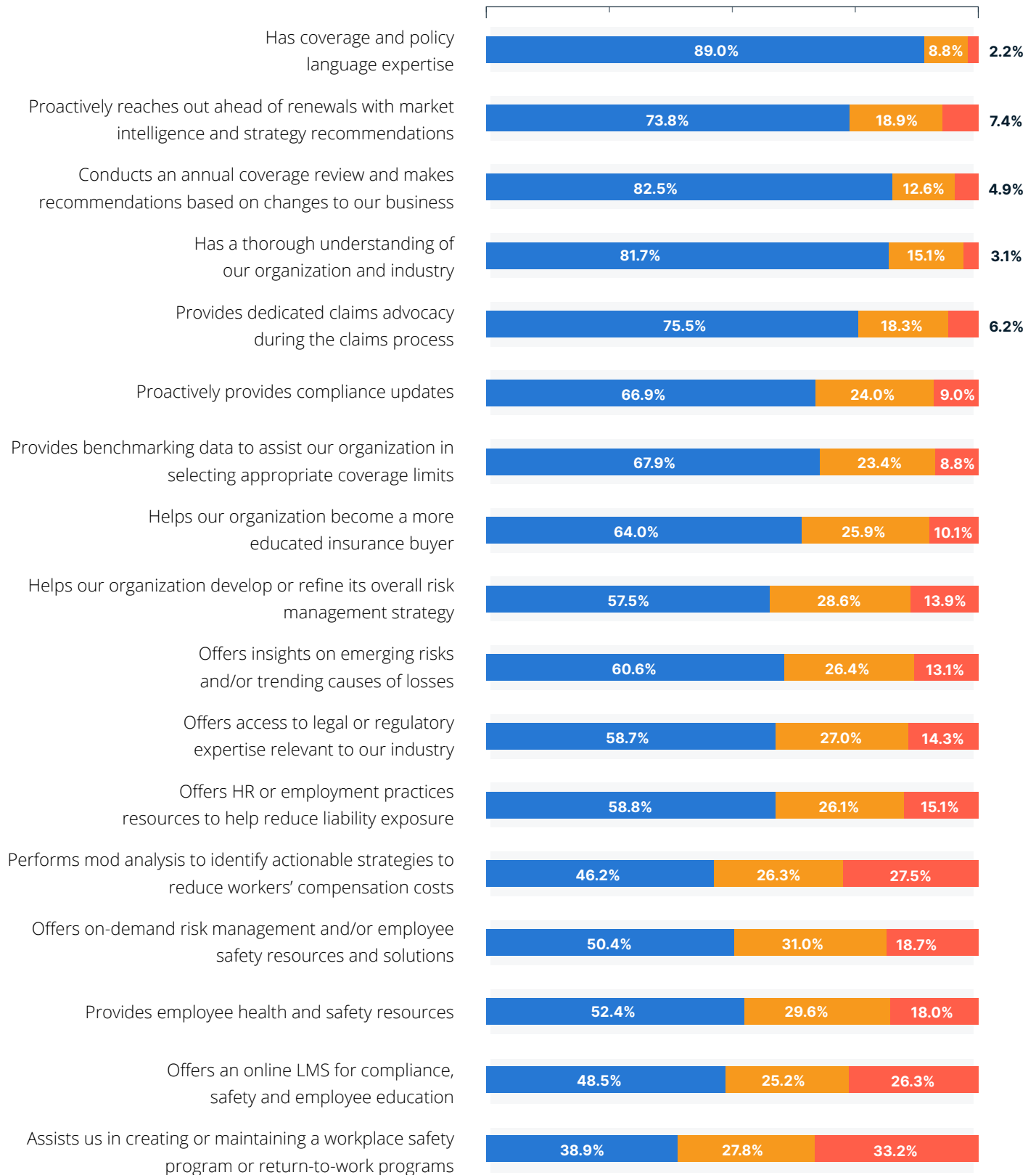


Please tell us whether your commercial insurance broker is providing these services or expertise.

Fully Provides

Partially Provides

Does Not Provide



LOOKING FORWARD: RISK MANAGEMENT AND INSURANCE NEEDS

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2026 and into 2027, survey respondents indicated several areas where they anticipate needing additional support from their commercial insurance brokers. Of note, businesses expressed a need for more guidance on navigating a changing insurance market, addressing industry-specific risks and exposures, managing cyber risks, and evaluating alternative risk financing options such as captives and self-insurance.

Top 10 Areas Employers Anticipate Needing Additional Support in the Next 12 Months

- 1 Navigating a changing insurance market
- 2 Addressing risks and exposures specific to our industry
- 3 Addressing cyber risks
- 4 Evaluating, selecting or managing alternative risk financing options (e.g., captives, self-insurance)
- 5 Structuring layers of insurance
- 6 Supporting workplace safety initiatives
- 7 Addressing commercial auto challenges
- 8 Navigating property insurance challenges
- 9 Addressing executive/management liabilities
- 10 Creating, maintaining or updating disaster or business continuity planning

Clients seek a true risk management partner, and for insurance brokers, this often means having deep knowledge of their clients' industries. This allows the broker to act as a strategic partner for the business as a whole, not just in terms of risk transfer. When a broker has a genuine understanding of the unique challenges a business and its industry face, they can have more meaningful conversations and help clients address the particular risks and exposures that matter most to them.

Cyber risk continues to climb as a priority for employers, reflecting the growing frequency and severity of attacks across all industries. Ransomware, business email compromise and supply chain vulnerabilities remain leading drivers of claims activity, and businesses are increasingly looking to their brokers for guidance on both coverage adequacy and risk mitigation strategies. Brokers who can connect clients with the right cyber resources and help them evaluate their current exposure are well-positioned to deliver value well beyond the policy itself.



As commercial insurance costs remain a top concern, more businesses are exploring alternative risk financing options, including captives and self-insurance programs, to gain greater control over their insurance spend. The captive market continues to grow as organizations seek ways to manage long-term costs and strategically retain more of their own risk. Businesses are turning to their insurance partners for guidance on whether these structures are appropriate for their situation, making it an area where brokers with the right expertise can meaningfully differentiate themselves.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The responses to the 2026 Broker Services Survey suggest that brokers' ability to guide clients through an ever-changing commercial insurance market is critical. Commercial insurance is complex, and factors beyond a business's control often determine market conditions. There are more insurance products than ever before, and risk transfer strategies are increasingly varied. This is where brokers can drive value for their clients and support client education and understanding.



Long-term Trends

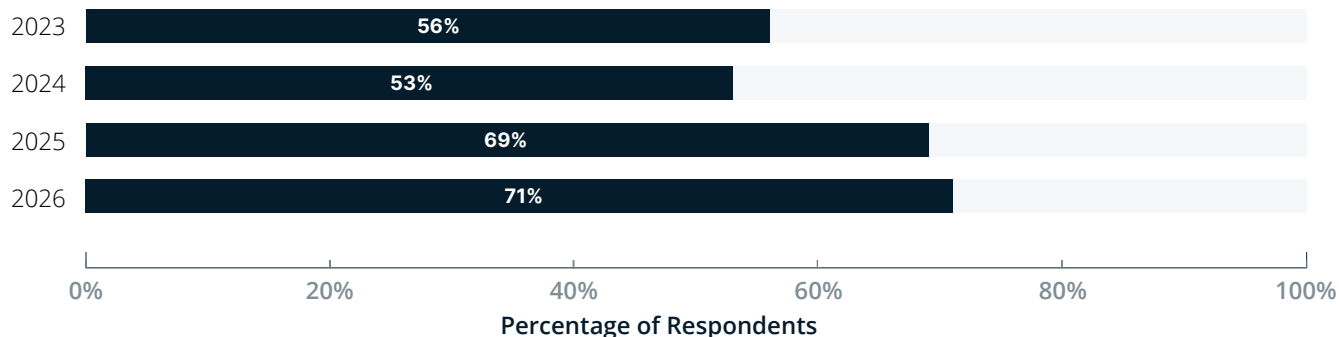
Over roughly five years of data, five structural shifts stand out as durable changes in what employers expect from their brokers. Brokers who understand these shifts can respond before competitors do.

1. THE TRUSTED ADVISOR EXPECTATION HAS CLIMBED 15 POINTS.

When asked what criteria they use to select a broker, employers increasingly point to finding a trusted advisor rather than an insurance salesperson. In 2023, **56%** of all respondents still listed it as a top criterion. By 2025, it had reached **69%**, and in 2026, it climbed to **71%**, making it the second-most important selection criterion overall, just behind prompt service.

Finding a trusted advisor has become a baseline expectation. The data suggests that brokers who lead primarily with product access and pricing may be underestimating how much clients value strategic counsel and guidance.

Trusted Advisor as a Broker Selection Criterion (% Selecting)

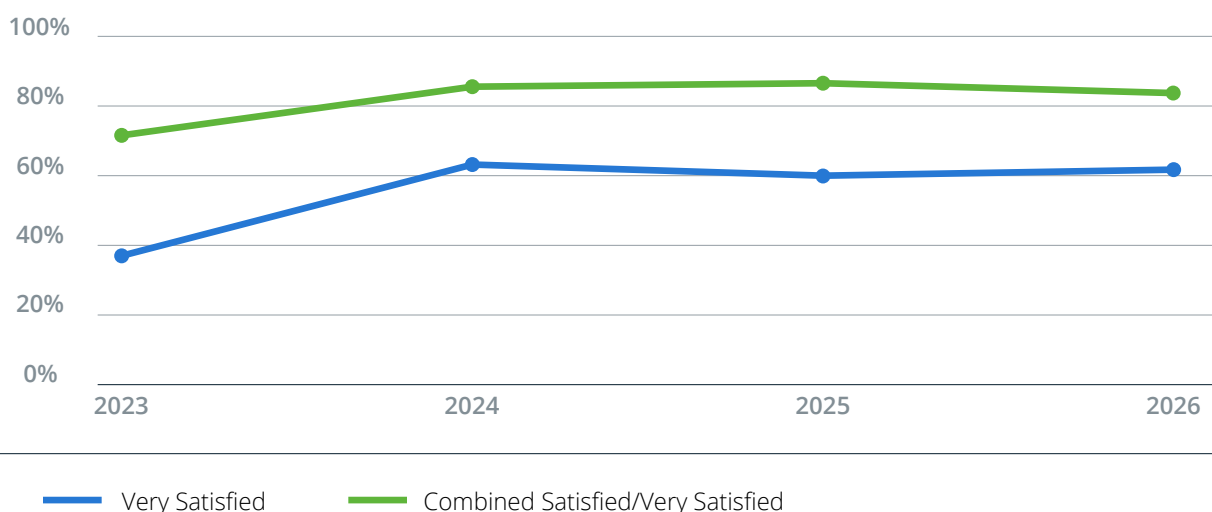


2. SATISFACTION HAS RISEN, BUT SWITCHING TRIGGERS HAVEN'T CHANGED.

Overall, broker satisfaction has climbed meaningfully over the survey period. In 2023, the combined satisfied/very satisfied rate sat at approximately **72%**. By 2024 and 2025, it had risen to the mid-to-upper 80s, and the 2026 figure of **84%** represents a mature, largely stable relationship overall.

Yet despite rising satisfaction scores, the top reasons clients would switch brokers remain identical in 2026 to those in earlier survey years: slow response times, inconsistent communication and failure to act as a strategic advisor. Clients may be satisfied until they have a reason not to be, and brokers who aren't proactively delivering on these fundamentals can lose accounts that look stable on paper.

Overall Broker Satisfaction: Satisfaction Rate by Year



3. COST AND COMPLIANCE HAVE DISPLACED TALENT RETENTION AS THE DEFINING BENEFITS NARRATIVE.

Healthcare cost management has ranked #1 in every survey year since 2024; in 2023 it was edged into third as employers competed for talent post-pandemic. That talent urgency has since faded. Attracting and retaining employees ranked among the top three challenges through 2024, but by 2026 had dropped entirely from the top three, replaced by the need for strategic guidance and benchmarking support.

Compliance has traced a similar arc. It ranked #2 in 2021, driven by pandemic-era regulatory complexity. As those rules stabilized, it fell to #5 in 2023. But by 2026, it had surged back to #2, fueled by the current federal administration and expanding state-level regulations on pay transparency, leave, and ACA enforcement. Brokers whose conversations are still primarily focused on talent retention may find their approach less relevant to where employers are focused today. With more employers using self-service tools such as portals to meet compliance needs, brokers now operate in a more complex landscape for demonstrating their value. As portal adoption grows, more clients may default to self-service, a convenience that risks quietly eroding the broker relationship over time. However, brokers who take a proactive approach to meeting clients' compliance needs through multiple channels and touchpoints can mitigate that risk, even as the frequency of direct communication trends down.

Top Employee Benefits Challenges: Year-Over-Year Rankings

	2023	2024	2025	2026
Healthcare cost management	#3	#1	#1	#1
Compliance	#5	#4	#3	#2
Attracting and retaining talent	#2	#2	#4	#10
Competitive benefits package	#1	#3	-	-

4. COST AND COVERAGE ADEQUACY HAVE DEFINED THE COMMERCIAL INSURANCE CHALLENGE NARRATIVE IN RECENT YEARS.

Affording commercial insurance has ranked #1 or #2 in every survey year since 2023, reflecting the sustained financial pressure businesses have faced through an extended hard market cycle. Even as rate moderation has taken hold in select lines, the cumulative effect of several years of elevated pricing has kept cost at the top of the list. The 2026 results show no sign of that changing, with managing rising premiums year over year again claiming the top spot by a wide margin.

Understanding the level of coverage needed has moved considerably over the same period. It ranked fifth in 2023, jumped to first in 2024 as market complexity intensified, and has held at second for two consecutive years. The consistency of that ranking signals something more than a passing concern. Businesses are grappling with a coverage environment that has grown harder to navigate, where limits that were adequate a few years ago may no longer reflect current exposures, and where the cost of being wrong has increased alongside claim severity.

Two other findings are worth noting. Receiving adequate customer support and guidance has ranked in the top five every year beginning in 2024, a signal that businesses are not just looking for insurance products but for brokers who show up as responsive, informed partners.

Top Commercial Insurance Challenges: Year-Over-Year Rankings

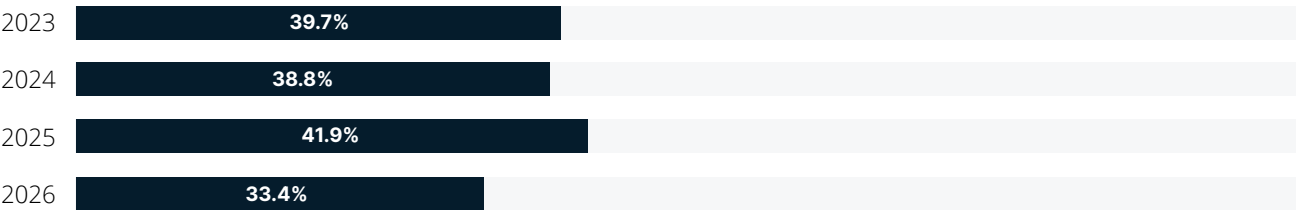
	2023	2024	2025	2026
Affording commercial insurance	#1	#2	#1	#1
Understanding the level of coverage needed	#5	#1	#2	#2
Aligning insurance coverage with risk tolerance	-	-	-	#3
Receiving customer service	#7	#5	#4	#4

5. THE COMMUNICATION GAP HAS WIDENED, AND CLIENTS MAY BE LOWERING THEIR EXPECTATIONS.

In earlier survey years, clients sought broker information primarily on a monthly basis, and weekly contact was the aspirational standard. By 2025, weekly had become the dominant expectation, with **41.9%** of clients wanting weekly outreach and brokers delivering **42.2%** weekly contact, a rare moment of near-alignment.

The 2026 data, however, points to a more nuanced picture. Actual weekly delivery has dropped from **42.2%** to **36.5%**. More concerning, desired weekly contact has also dropped, from **41.9%** to **33.4%**. Clients are not demanding more; they appear to be adjusting their expectations downward to match what brokers are actually providing. At the same time, the gap between desired monthly contact (**38.8%**) and actual monthly delivery (**29.2%**) has widened to 9.6 points, the largest in the dataset. Clients are not complaining louder; they are quietly accepting less, and that may be the more consequential retention signal.

Communication Frequency: Desired Weekly Contact



● Desired Weekly



C-Suite Spotlight

Of the more than 1,400 survey respondents, **42.5%** identified as business owners or C-suite executives (e.g., president, chief executive officer, chief financial officer or chief operating officer). As a group, their responses reveal a more results-focused perspective that tends to hold brokers to a higher standard across several dimensions of the relationship.

SATISFACTION AND EXPECTATIONS

The C-suite posts slightly lower “very satisfied” rates (**60% vs. 62%**) and higher dissatisfaction rates (**5.8% vs. 4%**) than the general population, a pattern consistent with prior years. Executives prize responsiveness and pricing above rapport: They weigh prompt service (**80% vs. 78%**) and competitive pricing (**47% vs. 43%**) more heavily than the overall population, while placing less value on maintaining a good overall relationship (**42% vs. 51%**).

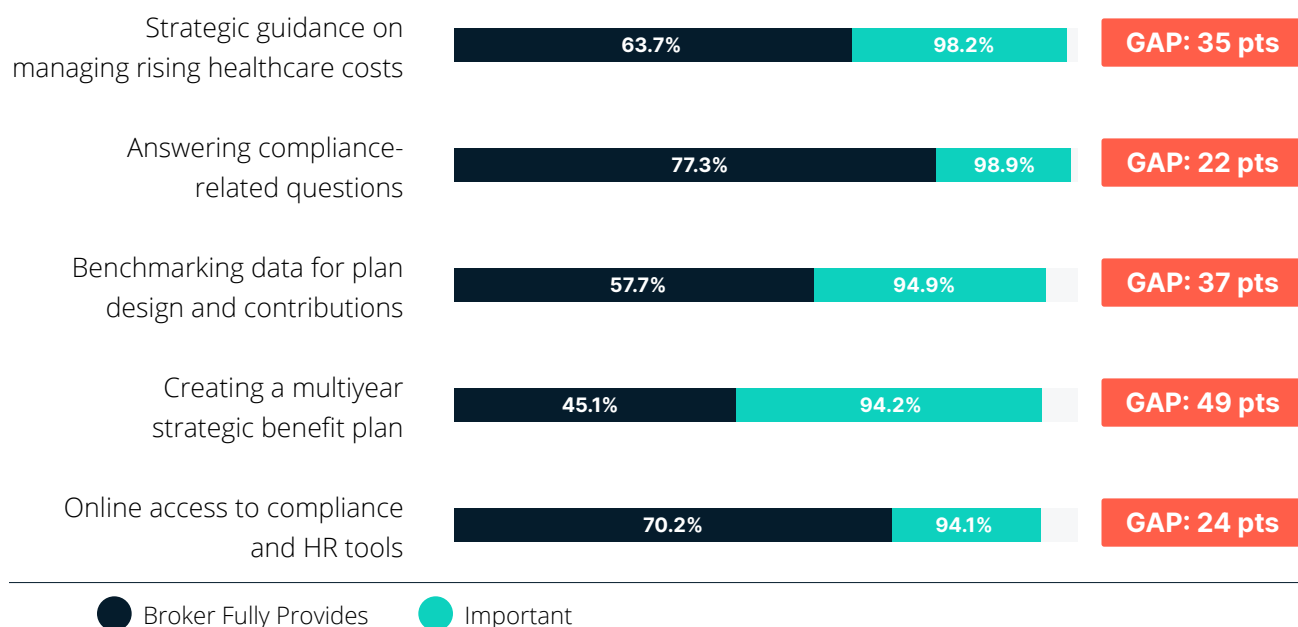
VENDOR MANAGEMENT DISCIPLINE

Thirty percent of C-suite respondents evaluate their broker relationship annually, compared to **26%** across the full survey population. This more disciplined approach to vendor management means brokers serving executive clients should be prepared to consistently demonstrate measurable value, as this segment is more likely to conduct formal reviews of the relationship.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS: THE HEALTHCARE COST GAP

Strategic guidance on managing rising healthcare costs carries a massive service gap among C-suite respondents: Over **98%** call it very important, yet under **64%** say their broker fully delivers it. This 35-point gap represents a clear opportunity to win and retain executive clients. Compared to only a 30-point gap for general respondents, this shows that managing healthcare costs is on the C-suite agenda. Brokers have the resources available to help close this gap.

C-Suite: Key Employee Benefits Service Gaps

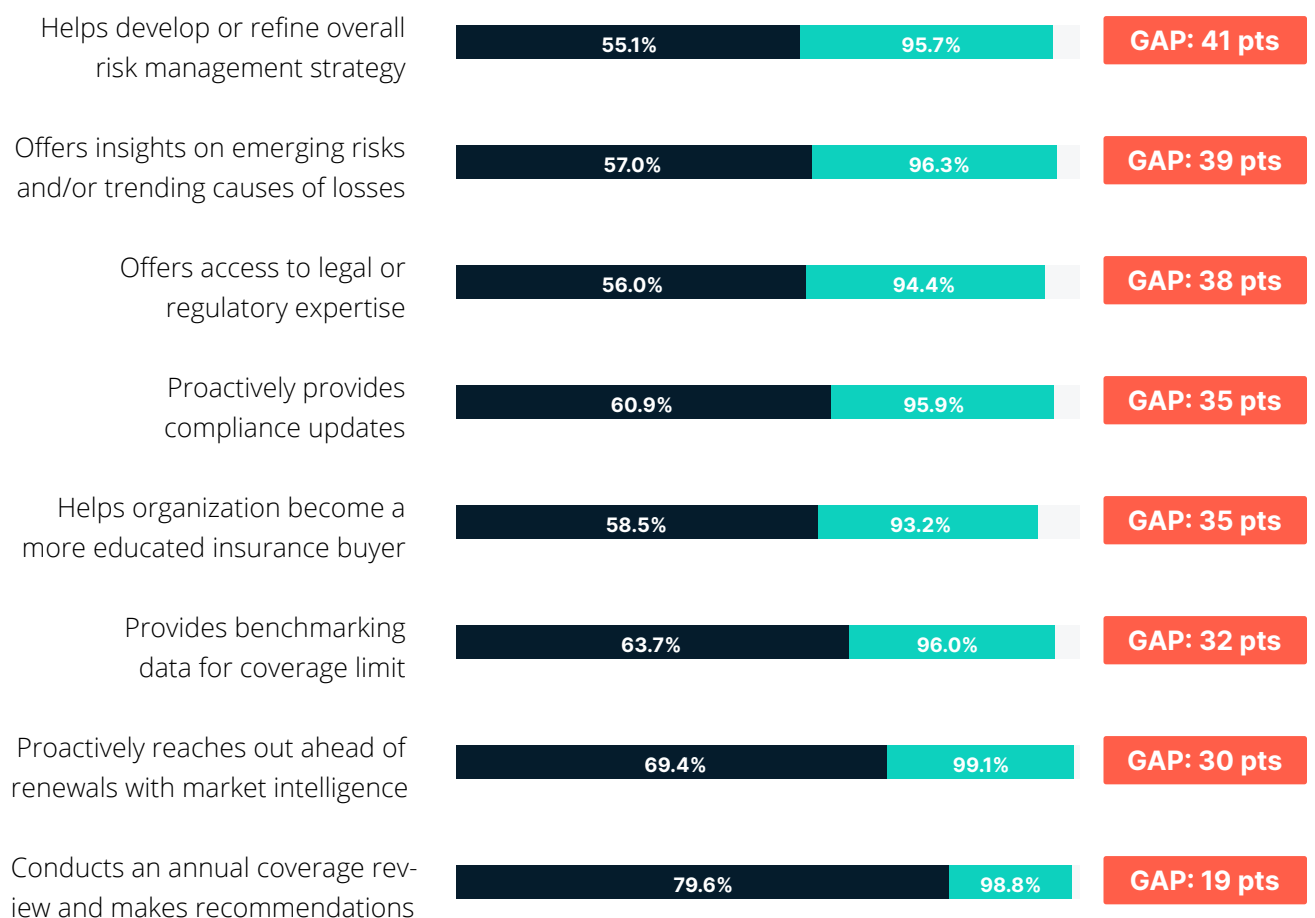


The bottom line: C-suite clients are more demanding, more price-aware and more likely to put the broker relationship under formal review. Brokers engaging executives should lead with measurable results, speak to financial impact and never let communication gaps go unaddressed, as this is the group most likely to notice and act on them.

COMMERCIAL INSURANCE: THE STRATEGIC ADVISORY GAP

C-suite expectations for commercial insurance broker services are nearly universal across the board. Yet delivery gaps tell a different story. Helping organizations develop or refine their overall risk management strategy carries the largest gap: **96%** of C-suite respondents say it is important, but only **55%** report their broker fully delivers it, a **41-point gap**. Offering insights on emerging risks and providing proactive compliance updates follow closely, each carrying gaps above 35 points. The pattern is consistent: C-suite leaders broadly expect strategic and advisory services from their brokers, and those expectations are going unmet at a significant rate.

C-Suite: Key Commercial Insurance Service Gaps

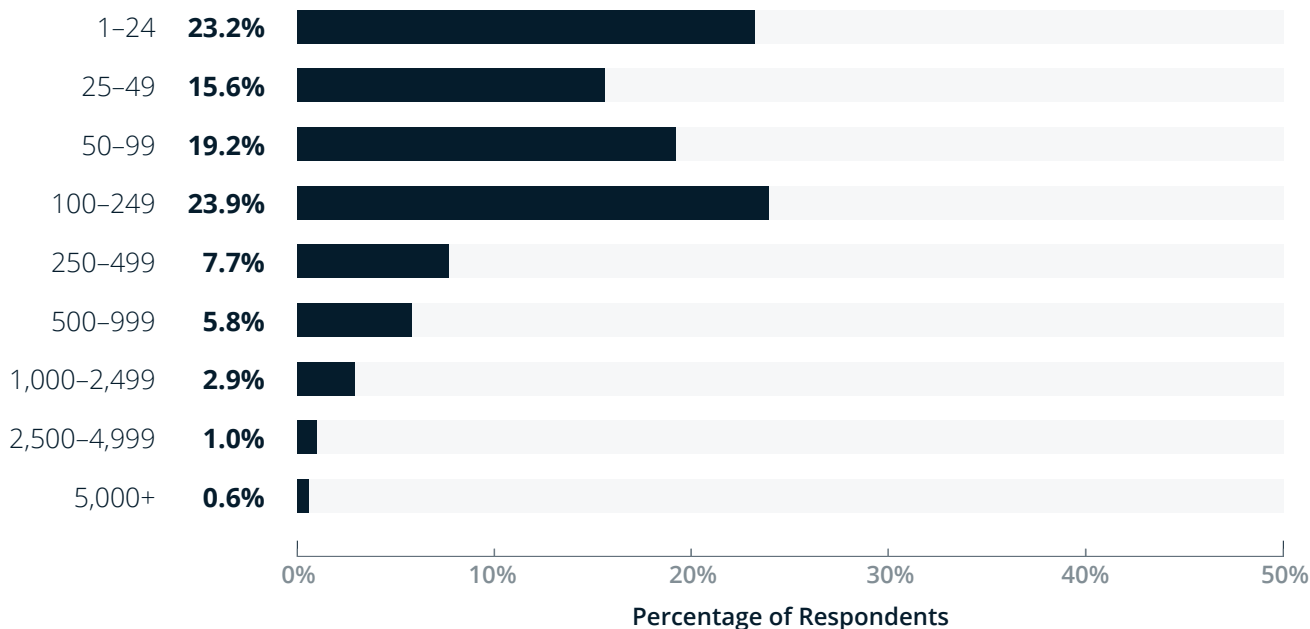


● Broker Fully Provides ● Important

Demographics

This survey was completed by over **1,400 employers** in all regions of the United States. The overwhelming majority of survey respondents were from organizations employing fewer than 500 employees.

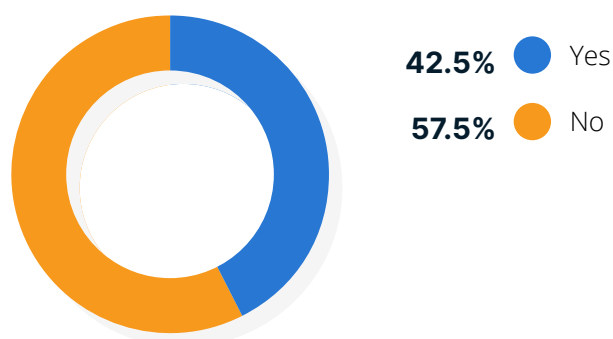
How many employees does your organization employ?



In which industry sector does your organization operate?

Nonprofit	14.6%
Construction	13.7%
Manufacturing	13.7%
Other	20.8%
Retail and wholesale trade	6.6%
Finance, insurance and real estate	6.3%
Healthcare	6.3%
Transportation, communications, electric, gas and sanitary	3.6%
Education	3.6%
Public administration	3.3%
Hotels/hospitality	2.3%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.9%
Social services	1.9%
Legal	1.5%

Are you the owner of your business or a member of the C-suite or leadership team (e.g., president, chief executive officer, chief financial officer or chief operating officer)?





INSURING GROWTH

Rankings are generated through weighted averages (1-to-5 scale). The first-place selection gets more points, then the second and so forth. Sometimes, the weighted value (with decimals) is shown; other times, a placed rank is used. Nevertheless, the scoring method is the same for ranking questions.

Please note that due to rounding conventions, some graph percentages might add up to less than 100%.

For more information about the Broker Services Survey and Zywave's suite of industry-leading tools, please visit [Zywave.com](https://zywave.com). To speak to our sales team, call (855) 454-6100.

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