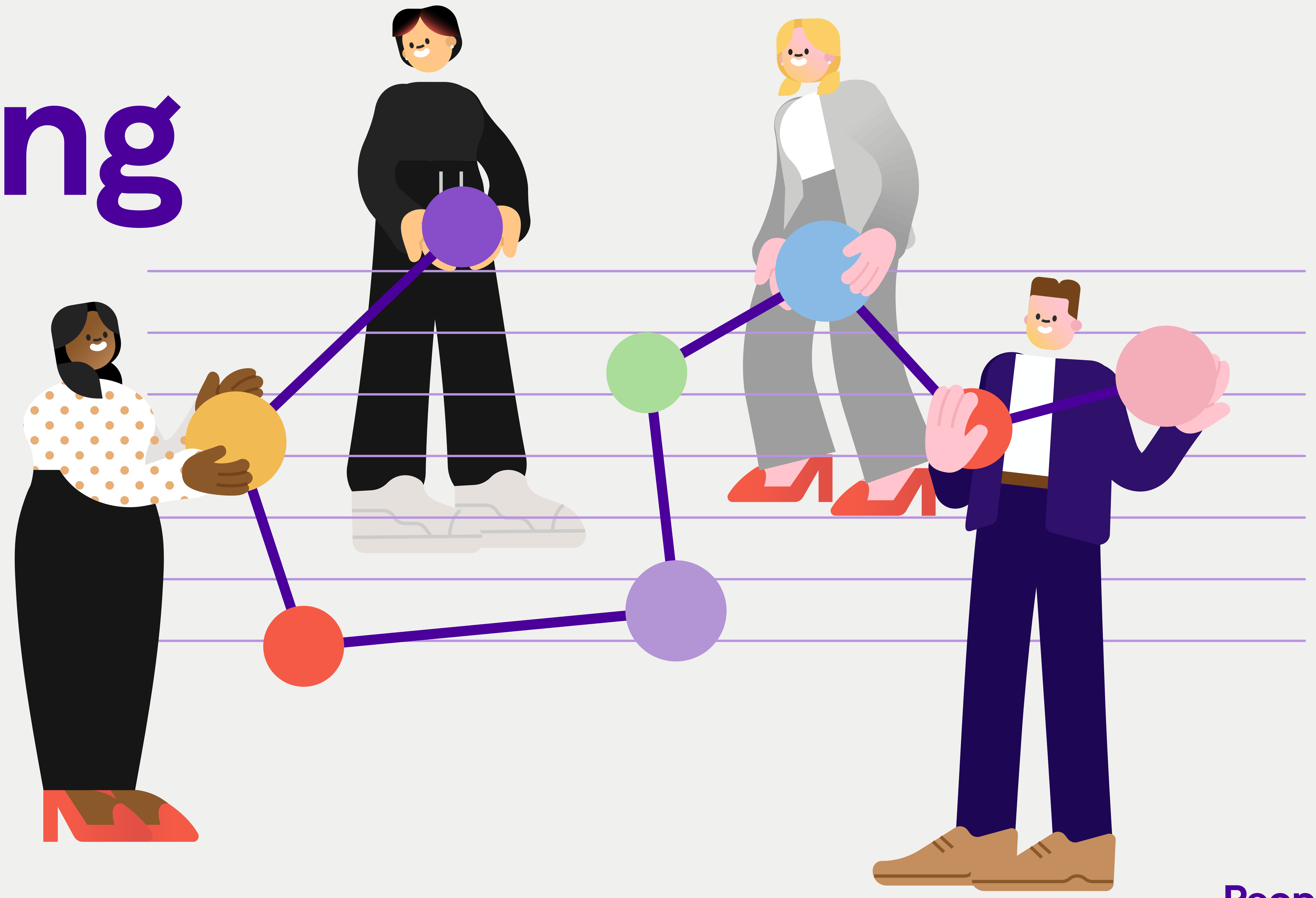
2026
health trends and insights

Connecting the Dots

Focus paper
Young adults
(ages 18 to 30)



beneva

People protecting people

Young adults (ages 18 to 30)

The new talent on the block

Our youngest group belongs to Gen Z, often nicknamed the Digital Natives. This tech-savvy generation has grown up in a world where the internet, smartphones and social media are omnipresent.

They bring a level of digital fluency and adaptability that no previous generation has matched. For employers, that makes them more than the workforce of tomorrow. It makes them a powerful force in shaping today's workplace.

Beyond representing future leadership, they are already influencing how organizations evolve. Their expectations around technology, flexibility, well-being, and inclusive culture are pushing companies to modernize, redefine their employee experience, and strengthen their employer brand. In other words, Gen Z isn't just entering the workforce; they're helping transform it.[1]

But the flip side of this always-connected lifestyle is a new strain of financial anxiety, as the pressure of social media perfection meets a job market with limited opportunities.[2]

1. Catalano, J. (2025, April 2). The evolution of work: How Gen Z is reshaping leadership and workplace culture. Forbes.
2. Randstad Canada. (2025, October 14). The Gen Z workplace blueprint: Future-focused, fast-moving.

Picture-perfect expectations

Gen Z is starting out in the labour market at a moment when everything feels more intense. The cost of living is climbing, job opportunities are harder to secure, and social comparison is constant. The result is financial stress showing up earlier—and more sharply—than for any other generation in Canada today.[3]

Life is getting more expensive faster than income can keep up. Nearly half of Canadians say rising prices have a significant impact on their daily expenses, up from about one third just two years ago.[4] With young Canadians spending 50% or more of their income on basic necessities, many live from paycheque-to-paycheque, take on second jobs, or cut back on leisure or hobbies to stay afloat.[5]

The employment situation offers little relief. Youth unemployment remains elevated, reaching its highest level in more than a decade outside the pandemic years. This makes early career mobility harder to achieve and pushes many young adults to stay longer in jobs with limited advancement opportunities, or to rely more heavily on family support.[6,7]

At the same time, social media has intensified the pressure to appear financially successful. Over 50% of young Canadians say they feel compelled to maintain a successful image online, and nearly two thirds believe they are falling behind their peers financially. With curated images of achievement appearing constantly, even realistic goals can feel out of reach.[8]

Financial literacy gaps make this landscape even harder to navigate. Almost half of young adults do not know where to find reliable financial advice. Many are still learning the basics of budgeting, credit, saving, and insurance. Only one in five young adults feels financially secure, while 83% feel stressed about their career prospects. Instability, short-term contracts, and shifting jobs mean uneven income and inconsistent coverage, which only increases uncertainty.[8,9]

The emotional toll is significant. Many are delaying personal goals or relying on short-term coping mechanisms, such as living on credit to prioritize financial survival over long-term stability.

3. Wilson, Jim. "Top challenges for Canadian youth: Digital fatigue, mental health strain, cost-of-living pressure." Human Resources Director, December 10, 2025.
4. Statistics Canada. Nearly half of Canadians report that rising prices are greatly impacting their ability to meet day-to-day expenses. The Daily, August 15, 2024.
5. Rentals.ca. Half of young Canadians spend over 50% of income on rent, Rentals.ca survey. August 13, 2025.
6. Statistics Canada. Youth faced a challenging labour market in the summer and into September. October 28, 2025.
7. Galbraith, Nora, and Laflamme, Nadine. Adulting together: Parents and adult children who co-reside. Statistics Canada, August 14, 2025.
8. Rabinovitch, Ariel. "Financial struggles risking mental health of Gen Z, expert says." Global News, October 17, 2025.
9. FP Canada. 2026 Financial Stress Index. Financial Planning for Canadians.

Impact on group plans

Where stress and health intersect

Young adults are an important part of an employer's talent strategy. Keeping them healthy supports long-term workforce stability and helps organizations maintain the skills, capacity and energy they need to thrive. When stress or health issues escalate, employers face higher absenteeism, disability leaves and turnover, increasing costs through lost productivity and repeated recruiting and onboarding. Investing in young adults' health is therefore both a talent strategy and a cost-management approach.

The trends

Our data shows a consistent pattern among young adults. From 2017 to 2025, the number of young insured persons who consulted a mental health professional doubled, translating into an average 9% yearly increase. Over the same period, antidepressant usage also grew at a rate 2.5 times higher than that observed in other age groups.

Chart 1: Average annual growth in psychological care and antidepressants

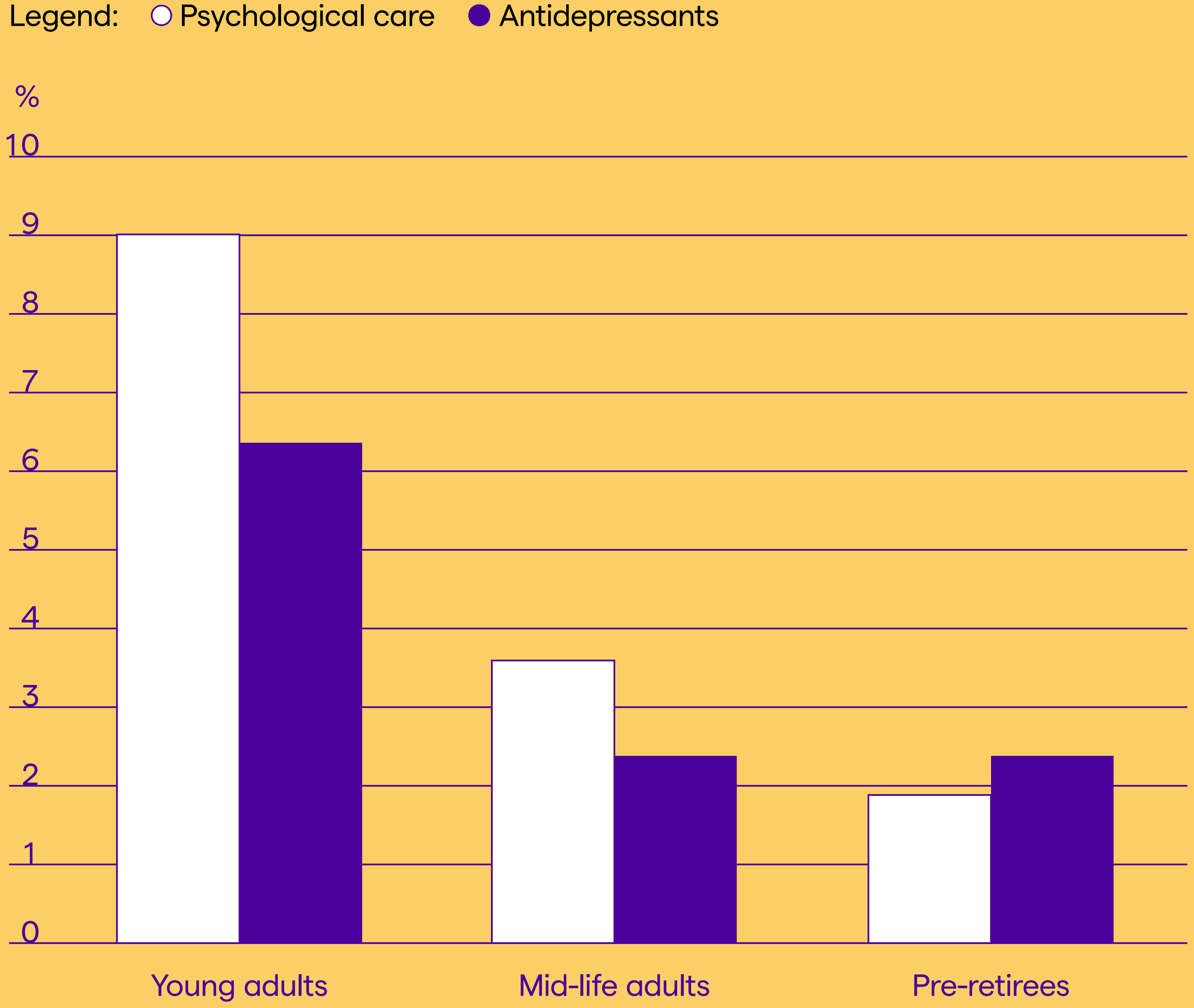
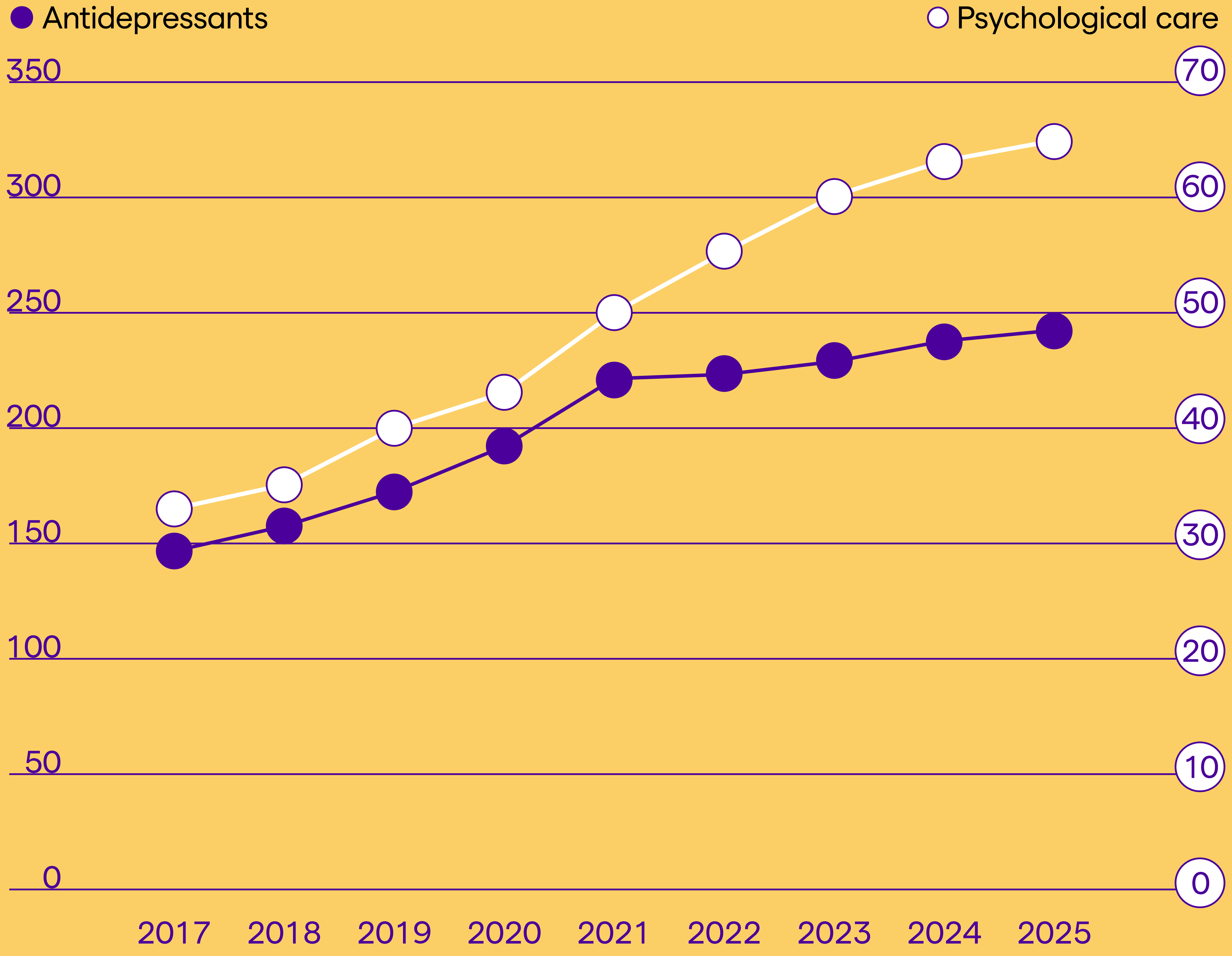


Chart 2: Incidence per 1,000 – Young adults (18-30)



Taken together, these trends point to a clear shift toward help-seeking within group benefits. When viewed in terms of usage levels, however, antidepressants continue to dominate throughout the period. This contrast suggests that while young adults are increasingly reaching out for professional support, pharmacological treatment remains the most common form of care.

However, according to Dr. Robitaille, a psychiatrist and medical consultant for Beneva, medication has its limits. “For most common mental health disorders, medication contributes only partially to clinical and functional improvement. Other forms of care, including support from health professionals such as psychotherapists or occupational therapists, often play an essential role alongside the treating physician. While medication can help, it’s rarely the only ingredient needed for a better recovery.”

Access barriers also play a part in this utilization imbalance. According to Dr. Denis, who is both a family doctor and a medical consultant for Beneva, access to psychotherapeutic support can remain uneven even when these services are included in group plans. Psychotherapy involves significant costs, and not all benefit plans offer the same level of coverage, which can result in substantial out-of-pocket expenses. In addition, lengthy wait times may delay access to therapy. In the absence of accessible psychotherapeutic support, physicians may at times have little choice but to prescribe medication to help alleviate symptoms.

In this context, trends suggest antidepressants remain more widely used than psychotherapeutic services, not because they are more effective or preferred, but because they are often more accessible with lower upfront costs.

Solutions and preventive measures

To rebalance the situation and align benefits with the health needs of this generation, plan sponsors may want to consider targeted adjustments to coverage and access.

Expanding coverage or increasing limits for mental health professionals such as registered therapists, social workers or registered counsellors facilitates earlier intervention. Reducing out-of-pocket costs makes professional support a more realistic option at the point when symptoms first emerge, avoiding escalation to disability or medication.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) can play a complementary role within this care pathway when they are clearly positioned and well understood. EAPs are designed to provide early, short-term support and navigation for emerging psychological, financial or personal stressors. Their value lies in prevention and timely engagement, not in replacing ongoing mental health care.

That said, many young employees report barriers to using EAPs, including limited awareness of available services and uncertainty around confidentiality.[10] When the role of EAPs is not clearly communicated, plan members may bypass them altogether. Clarifying how these programs fit within the broader mental health ecosystem can help ensure they are used as intended and at the appropriate stage of need.

Beyond traditional care pathways, healthcare spending and wellness accounts offer additional opportunities to support mental health in more flexible, people-centred ways. While healthcare spending accounts can help cover remaining balances for eligible services, wellness accounts open the door to preventive solutions that reduce financial barriers and encourage earlier action.

Physical activity particularly stands out as a highly accessible lever with well-documented benefits for mental health, including in the management of mild to moderate depression. Making physical activity and exercise programs eligible for reimbursement through a wellness spending account offers a practical, non-stigmatizing way to encourage healthier habits, reduce financial barriers, and support long-term plan sustainability.[11]

Finally, given the digital habits of this generation, virtual healthcare can be an appealing complement to in-person care by providing quick access to medical services.

10. Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). Mental Health Services Coverage, Benefits and Employee Assistance Program Access and Use. November 2023.

11. Dr. Fabiano, N. Portail de l'assurance. September 23, 2025.

How financial stress shows up at work

Interview with **Doreena Sophie,** Manager, Human Resources and Compliance at XN Worldwide Insurance

Financial stress doesn't stay at home. It shows up at work, often quietly, and often before employees name it themselves. For employers, the challenge is to recognize these signals and respond in ways that support early-career employees without stigma or assumption. At XN Worldwide Insurance, a globally oriented organization with a diverse, multigenerational workforce, financial pressure is understood as a workplace reality that can influence engagement, performance and well-being.

In this conversation, Doreena Sophie, Human Resources and Compliance Manager at XN Worldwide Insurance, shares what financial stress looks like on the ground—and how employers can create conditions that help younger employees stay engaged, supported and confident as they build their careers.

Do you see a link between financial concerns and aspects of employee well-being at work?

Yes. While young employees do not always articulate their financial worries, the impacts are visible. Financial strain appears through lower productivity, reduced work quality, waning motivation, absenteeism, and a greater tendency to renegotiate salaries or consider job changes.

What tangible manifestations do you observe when people are under financial pressure?

Financial stress often leads to social withdrawal, especially from activities that involve personal expenses. Employees may also experience heightened stress linked to commuting or other work-related costs. Over time, this pressure can reduce productivity and engagement.

What trends do you see in how employees seek mental health support?

Younger employees often look for someone who will listen, for flexibility, and for short-term accommodations. Some use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which offers financial and legal guidance, tools for budgeting, and resources for building resilience. There is also a rise in requests for exceptional accommodations, such as occasional remote work, to maintain balance.

What inspiring message can you share with employers to support early-career employees?

Financial stress is becoming less taboo, and employers should bring it forward proactively. Young employees arrive with strong potential but also vulnerabilities. Supporting their financial well-being and normalizing access to resources is both compassionate and strategic. Doing so helps build confident, engaged, resilient employees who can contribute fully to the organization while feeling more secure about their future.

Our *Ask the experts* podcast is your go-to for insights on trending and classic topics for that extra edge that translates into better recommendations. Listen now

For more information on our group insurance solutions, talk to your account executive. If you don't have one, simply get in touch with our team at beneva.ca/en/group-insurance/form

People protecting people

87931 (2026-06)