26% of Working Americans Have Less Than One Month of Savings, Study Finds

More than three-quarters have worked through pain, illness, or burnout because they felt they could not afford to stop.

Quikaid research finds 72% of workers who lost income due to injury or illness say the financial impact was worse than expected.

SAINT PETERSBURG, FL, UNITED STATES, July 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For millions of American workers, a missed paycheck can quickly become a financial emergency. Rising living costs, limited savings, and gaps in workplace protections are leaving many people with little room to recover from an illness, injury, or other sudden interruption in income.

A new study from Quikaid finds that 26% of Americans have less than one month of savings available to cover essential expenses if their income stopped today. That includes 13% who would reach a financial emergency in less than two weeks and 6% who have no savings at all.

The survey of 1,000 U.S. adults who are currently employed or have worked within the past two years examined financial preparedness, experiences of working through illness or injury, income-loss coping strategies, employer benefit awareness, and attitudes toward disability support.

The results show that many workers are sacrificing their health to protect their income, while uncertainty, workplace pressure, and limited knowledge prevent others from pursuing benefits that may help them recover.

Key Takeaways

• 26% have less than one month of savings to cover essential expenses after losing income
• 13% would reach a financial emergency in less than two weeks
• 76% have worked through pain, burnout, illness, or another health risk because they felt they could not afford to stop

• 37% continued working while experiencing significant physical pain
• 42% continued working through serious mental health challenges
• 47% have felt pressure to minimize or hide a health issue at work
• 72% of workers who lost income due to illness or injury say the financial impact was greater than expected
• 42% took on credit card debt after losing income, while 42% cut back on food
• 44% have never seriously considered disability benefits
• 40% would not know whether they qualify for disability support

Americans’ Financial Cushions Are Running Thin

Workers are often advised to keep several months of expenses in savings, but many do not have enough income left over to build that kind of financial cushion.

More than one-quarter of respondents, 26%, say they could cover less than one month of essential expenses if their income stopped. Thirteen percent could cover less than two weeks, and 6% have no savings available at all.

More than one-third of workers, 38%, have already experienced income loss because of an injury, illness, or ongoing health condition.

Lower-income workers face the greatest exposure. Nearly two in five, 39%, have less than one month of expenses saved, compared with 15% of workers earning more than $100,000 annually.

• 15% of lower-income workers have no savings at all
• 30% of women have less than one month of expenses saved
• 21% of men have less than one month saved
• 9% of women have no savings, compared with 3% of men

At the other end of the income spectrum, 57% of workers earning $100,000 or more say they have over one year of expenses saved, compared with 16% of respondents overall.

The gap leaves lower-income workers more vulnerable to debt, missed payments, and delayed medical care when illness or injury interrupts their earnings.

The Cost of Taking Time Off Is Too High

For many workers, being sick or injured does not mean being able to stop working. More than three-quarters, 76%, say they have pushed through physical pain, mental health challenges, illness, or another health risk because they felt they could not afford to take time away.

More than half, 56%, say they continued working because they could not afford to lose income.

Another 42% feared falling behind on essential expenses, while 41% worried that taking time off could threaten their job security.

• 37% continued working in significant physical pain
• 42% worked through serious mental health challenges
• 24% downplayed the severity of an injury or health condition
• 14% avoided reporting a workplace injury because of income or job-security concerns
• 27% did not have enough paid sick leave to recover properly

Women were more likely to work through stress, burnout, or mental health challenges, at 44% compared with 33% of men.

Men were more likely to avoid reporting workplace injuries, at 16% compared with 11% of women.

Financial pressure also shaped behavior. Seventy percent of lower-income workers say they could not afford to stop working, compared with 37% of high-income workers.

Americans Are Cutting Food and Taking on Debt to Survive

Many workers attempt to prepare for income loss before it happens. Forty-six percent have built up general savings, while 33% have created a dedicated emergency fund.

Others have reviewed employer disability plans, planned to rely on a partner or family member, or explored additional income protections.

Still, preparation often falls short once a paycheck disappears.

• 42% cut back on food
• 42% took on credit card debt
• 40% borrowed money from family or friends
• 30% sold personal belongings or other assets
• 26% skipped or postponed medical care
• 20% reduced or stopped retirement contributions
• 17% withdrew from or borrowed against retirement savings
• 16% missed or deferred a rent or mortgage payment

Only 12% applied for government assistance.

Most workers instead relied on personal sacrifice, debt, or support from people close to them. Those decisions can solve an immediate cash shortage while creating longer-term financial consequences.

Disability Benefits Remain Difficult to Understand

Many Americans do not fully understand what workplace or government income protections may be available to them.

Sixteen percent say their employer does not provide disability insurance, workers' compensation, or paid sick leave beyond the legal minimum. Another 14% are self-employed or independent contractors without employer protections.

Lower-income workers are again the most exposed. Twenty-nine percent say they have no employer-provided income protections, compared with 10% of middle-income workers and 8% of high-income workers.

Even among people who may have access to benefits, uncertainty remains widespread.

- 40% would not know whether they qualify
- 24% would not know where to begin the application process
- 37% are very familiar with what their disability benefits cover
- 32% understand how long it could take to receive support
- 49% say their employer does not encourage the use of income-protection benefits
- 33% would wait until after losing income to explore their options

Nearly one in five workers, 19%, say they would wait more than one month after losing income before exploring disability benefits. Another 7% would not pursue support at all.

Many Workers Have Already Written Off Disability Support

Nearly half of respondents, 44%, say they have never seriously considered disability benefits.

More than half, 57%, do not believe the benefits would be enough to cover essential expenses, while 70% believe disability support is difficult to rely on over the long term. Despite those concerns, 66% say they would be willing to pursue benefits if they received professional guidance.

That gap shows how much uncertainty shapes the decision. Workers may know support exists but still hesitate because they do not understand eligibility rules, expected benefit amounts, filing requirements, or the appeals process.

Professional guidance can help workers understand what programs may apply to their situation and what steps are required to pursue them.

Workers Fear Career Consequences for Using Benefits

Confusion is not the only barrier. Many workers worry that using disability or income-protection benefits could affect how they are viewed at work.

Nearly half, 48%, believe using disability benefits could limit future opportunities. Another 41% fear they would be treated differently or excluded by colleagues or managers.

Only about half trust their employer to prioritize their health over productivity, and 47% say they have felt pressure to minimize or hide a health issue at work.

- 49% say their employer does not actively communicate about disability or income-protection benefits
- 57% would feel comfortable using available benefits
- 53% believe their employer would support them in doing so
- 59% believe their employer would support an extended period of recovery

Men reported greater concern about the workplace consequences of using benefits. Fifty-three percent believe doing so could harm future opportunities, compared with 42% of women. Men were also more likely to fear being treated differently, at 47% compared with 34% of women.

Income Loss Costs More Than Workers Expect

Among workers who have lost income due to illness or injury, nearly three in four, 72%, say the financial damage was greater than they expected.
More than one-third, 36%, say it was much worse than anticipated. Only 5% say the experience was less financially damaging than expected.

The impact can continue long after someone returns to work. Credit card balances, missed housing payments, delayed medical care, loans, and reduced retirement savings can turn a temporary interruption into a lasting financial setback.

Workers often turn to options that are immediately available, even when those options are expensive. Credit cards, personal loans, retirement withdrawals, and deferred bills can provide short-term relief while increasing future financial pressure.

The speed of that financial decline helps explain why early planning and access to reliable information are so important.

Financial Stability Requires More Than Personal Savings

Savings remain an important part of financial preparedness, but many workers do not earn enough to build a substantial emergency fund.
Employer communication, paid leave, disability coverage, workers’ compensation, and public benefits all play a role in helping people recover without creating long-term financial damage.

Clearer information can also make existing protections more useful. Workers are less likely to pursue support when they do not know whether they qualify, where to begin, or how long the process may take.

For employers, making benefit information easier to access can help workers take appropriate time to recover and return to their jobs in better health.
For individuals, understanding available options before an emergency occurs can reduce delays and help prevent a short-term income interruption from becoming a long-term crisis.

View the full study here:
https://quikaid.com/article/income-loss-financial-trends

About

Quikaid helps Americans navigate the Social Security Disability benefits process by connecting applicants with experienced disability advocates and legal professionals. The company specializes in helping individuals understand eligibility requirements, complete applications, and appeal denied claims, making the often complex disability benefits system easier to navigate during financially vulnerable periods.

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