



Technology and Wellbeing:

Artificial Intelligence as an Employee's Mental Companion

01 What this report is about

This report examines how artificial intelligence is used in the workplace as an employee's **mental and emotional companion**: chatbots that listen, offer coping strategies and track mood over time.

02 Why now: the demand backdrop

Mental health at work is no longer a background issue. Stress, anxiety and burnout now sit at the centre of HR work, and they increasingly define how complex each case becomes. At the same time, the mental-health system itself faces staff shortages and provider burnout, which accelerates the search for scalable, accessible solutions.

The scale of demand

50% of employees have cried because of a work issue. — *Headspace, Workforce State of Mind, 2025*

~60% have considered leaving their job over mental health. — *Headspace, Workforce State of Mind, 2025*

61% reported at least one mental-health symptom. — *U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2023*

31% said work had harmed their mental health. — *U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2023*

A new, self-referential stressor is layered on top: **anxiety about AI itself**. Uncertainty around automation and change raises tension among employees, and it should be treated as a distinct people issue, not merely a technology trend.

03 What these tools actually do

A purpose-built “clinical” AI companion, unlike a general chatbot, operates within a defined scope. It provides psychoeducation for mild distress - coping strategies, structured reflection and self-help resources — as an always-available first layer. Its second function is mood tracking: through regular check-ins the system notices a shift and nudges the person toward more substantive support before a crisis develops.

A separate “passive” mode observes not emotion but work rhythm. Long stretches without breaks or frequent late-night activity correlate with fatigue, and making these patterns visible helps a person recognise when they need rest. It is precisely this passive mode that sits closest to surveillance.

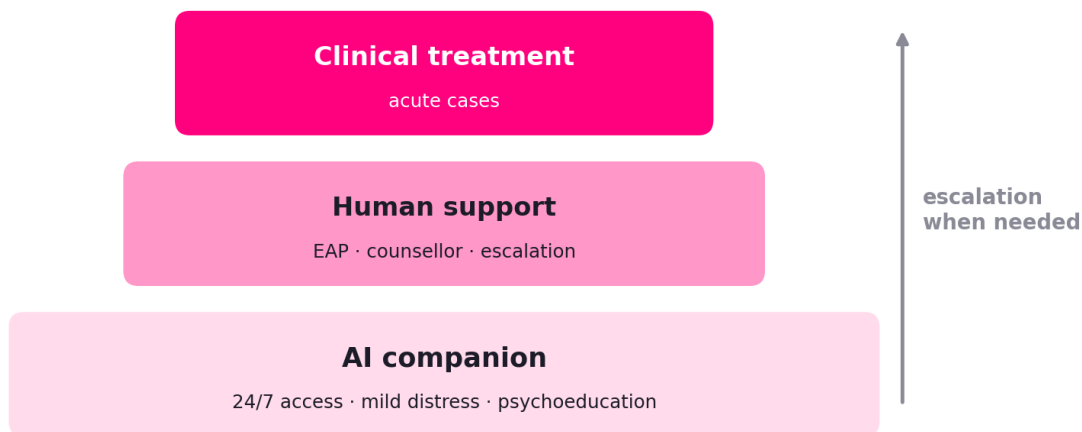


Figure 1. A three-tier model of support: AI as the first layer, escalating to human and clinical care.

Workplace products already exist: companions embedded in EAP and wellbeing platforms that draw on evidence-based approaches similar to motivational interviewing, helping employees process emotions and delivering the right resource at the right moment.

04 Does it work? The evidence

The picture is mixed, but for mild-to-moderate, short-term symptoms the signal is real. Controlled trials showed a significant reduction in depressive symptoms, while real-world observation revealed a dose-response relationship: the more frequently people used the tool, the more their condition improved.



Figure 2. Effect size (symptom reduction): individual studies vs an 18-study meta-analysis.

Concrete results and a caveat

>5 point drop in PHQ-9 for Wysa users engaging $\geq 2\times/\text{week}$ (2 weeks). — *Inkster et al. (Wysa), 2018*

3.6 point drop in PHQ-9 for Youper users ($n=4,517$, 2 weeks). — *Youper study*

~3 months later, the effect faded: durability is not confirmed. — *Zhong et al., meta-analysis (18 trials), 2024*

The weaknesses are just as clear, however. A large share of users abandon the tool quickly, evidence in languages other than English is thin, and much of the research is funded by the vendors themselves. On top of that, the effect weakens in severe cases.

05 Risks and the central tension

The same quality that delivers benefit also carries risk. 24/7 availability widens access, but it also creates the danger of **emotional dependency**. The core fear is that a person substitutes professional care with an algorithm's generic advice, while in a crisis the safeguards may prove insufficient.

In a workplace context the sharpest risk is **surveillance**. Here the employer both provides the tool and benefits from its data. “Passive” monitoring easily shades into tracking, which is why the International Labour Organization (ILO) calls for new rights: to an explanation of AI decisions, to human review, and to data protection.

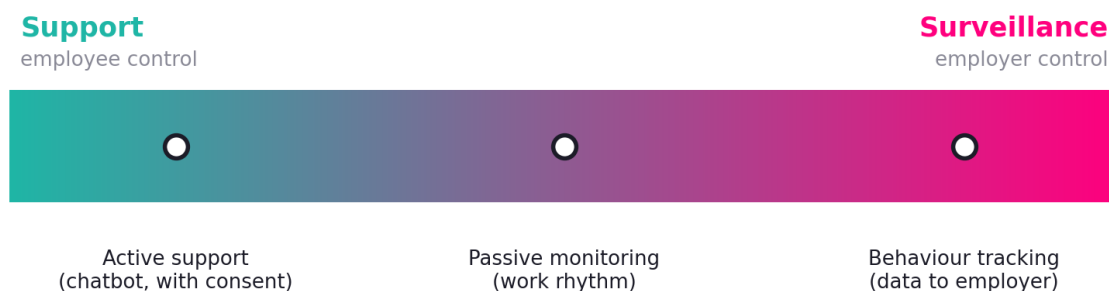


Figure 3. The spectrum from support to surveillance: where the line falls between employee and employer control.

06 Regulation: a fast-moving field

The law is catching up with the technology. Several U.S. states have already passed laws regulating “companion chatbots”: mandatory transparency (users must know they are talking to AI), self-harm prevention protocols, and additional safeguards for minors. In some jurisdictions therapists are restricted from using AI for treatment decisions.

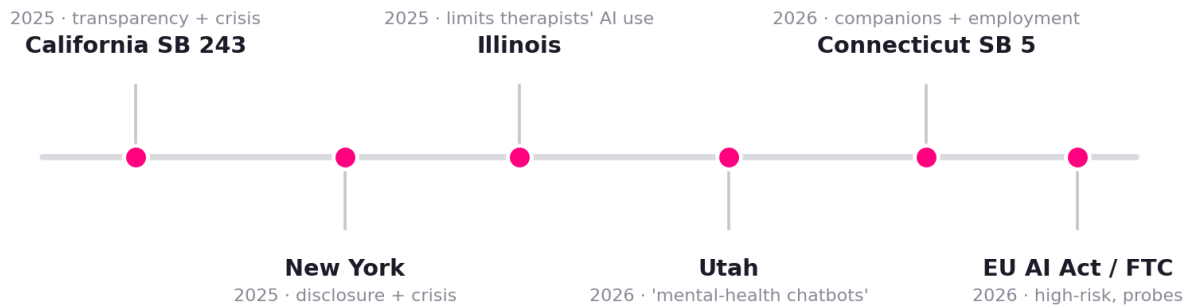


Figure 4. The wave of regulation 2025–2026: selected legislative steps.

For employers this means stricter due diligence at procurement: what is the AI's precise scope, who is the responsible clinician, what is the full crisis-escalation path, and does the tool meet data-protection requirements. The advice is simple: choose a platform that can show independent, peer-reviewed results.

07 Georgia: how would this work here?

In Georgia, workplace mental health is weakly institutionalised: EAP systems are rare, stigma is high, and the number of accessible specialists is small. It is precisely this deficit that makes a scalable, low-cost “first layer” potentially valuable where professional capacity is thin.

As elsewhere, Georgian employees increasingly turn to general-purpose models (**ChatGPT and the like**) for informal emotional support. This “shadow” use is unregulated: it happens beyond any employer's control, and the quality in the Georgian language is uneven.

The key difference lies in one detail. Experts regard AI only as a “first layer”, behind which stands a human “second layer”. In Georgia it is precisely this second layer - accessible clinicians - that is thin. That shifts the balance of risk: the companion easily becomes **a de facto replacement rather than an addition**, which is exactly the danger experts warn about.

Where the risk and the leverage lie for Georgia

The leverage is that, where professional capacity is thin, an AI companion can become a scalable **first layer**. But that benefit depends on three conditions: the tool must be well-built and validated in the Georgian language; there must be a clear path to hand a person over to human help; and there need to be clear data-protection rules. Without these, the same tool becomes a risk..

08 Sources

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