

**We RPN**

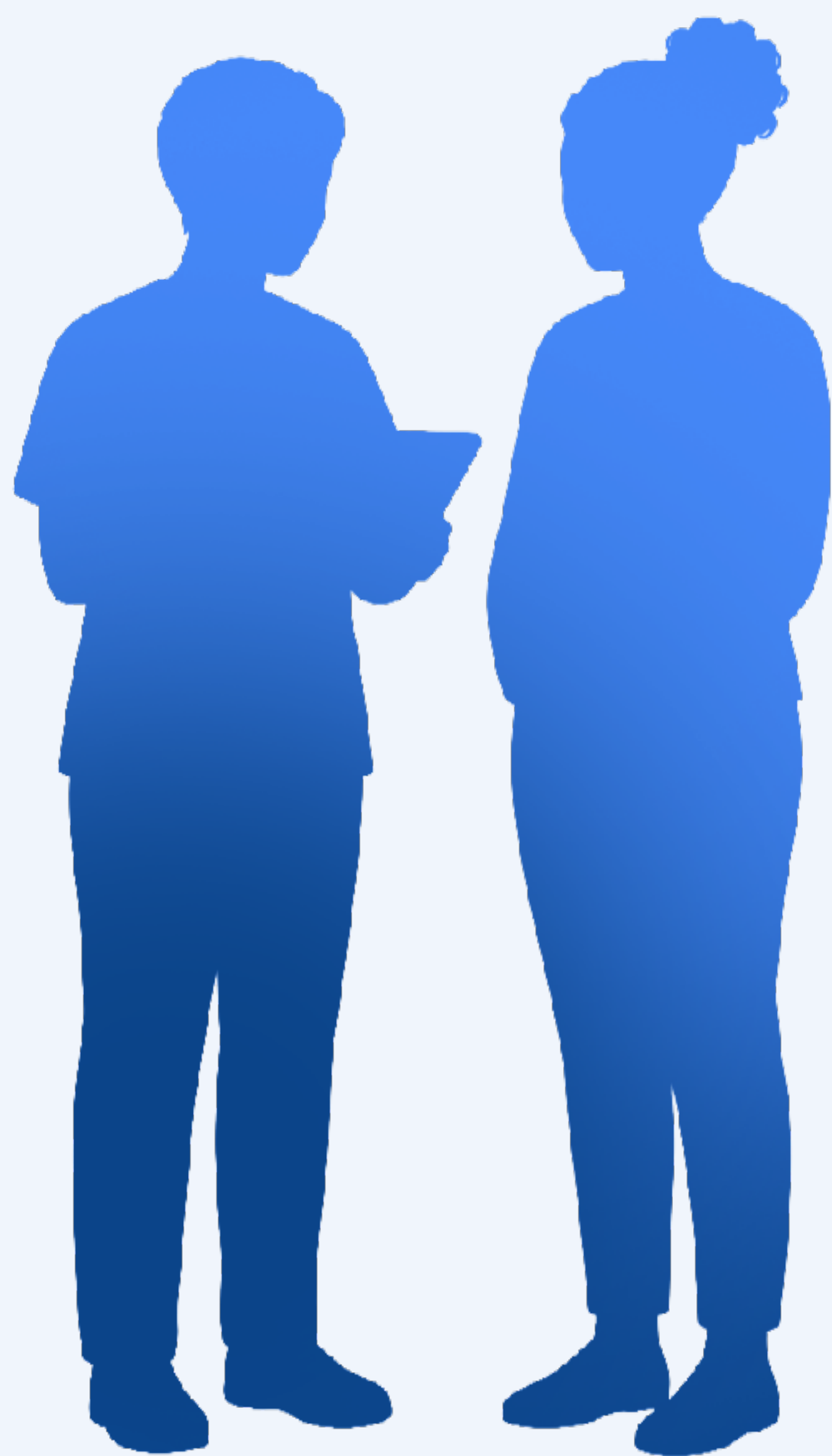
Registered Practical Nurses  
Association of Ontario



# THE STATE OF NURSING IN ONTARIO

THE RPN EXPERIENCE IN FOCUS

A 2026 REVIEW



**FACTSHEET**

# THE STATE OF NURSING IN ONTARIO

## THE RPN EXPERIENCE IN FOCUS

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### A 2026 REVIEW

## FACTSHEET

Commissioned by WeRPN | Spring 2026

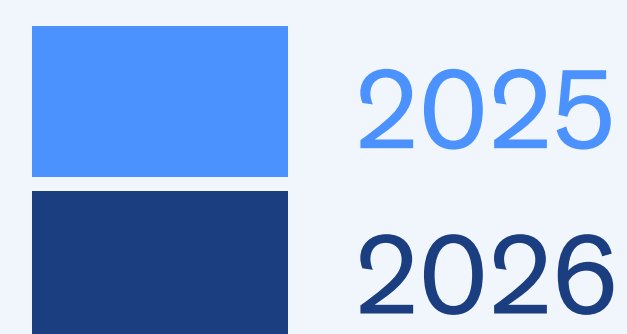
In Spring 2026, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) conducted its annual survey on the state of nursing across the province. More than 800 Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) participated, sharing their experiences to help track changes in the profession and benchmark progress year over year.

While modest improvements are emerging in areas such as perceived workplace support and intent to leave the profession, ongoing challenges remain. Workload pressures, mental health and well-being, workplace safety, and the ability to maintain high-quality patient care continue to require focused attention.

Sustained action is essential. Continued efforts to strengthen support for RPNs will be critical to ensuring they can deliver the quality care Ontarians rely on and deserve.

# 2025 VS. 2026

WeRPN compared key data points from its 2025 survey findings to its 2026 survey results. While there is some consistency and improvement in the nursing experience noted in this year's results, RPNs continue to report unsustainable challenges, indicating that progress is slow and falling short of what is needed to support nurses' and their patients' well-being.

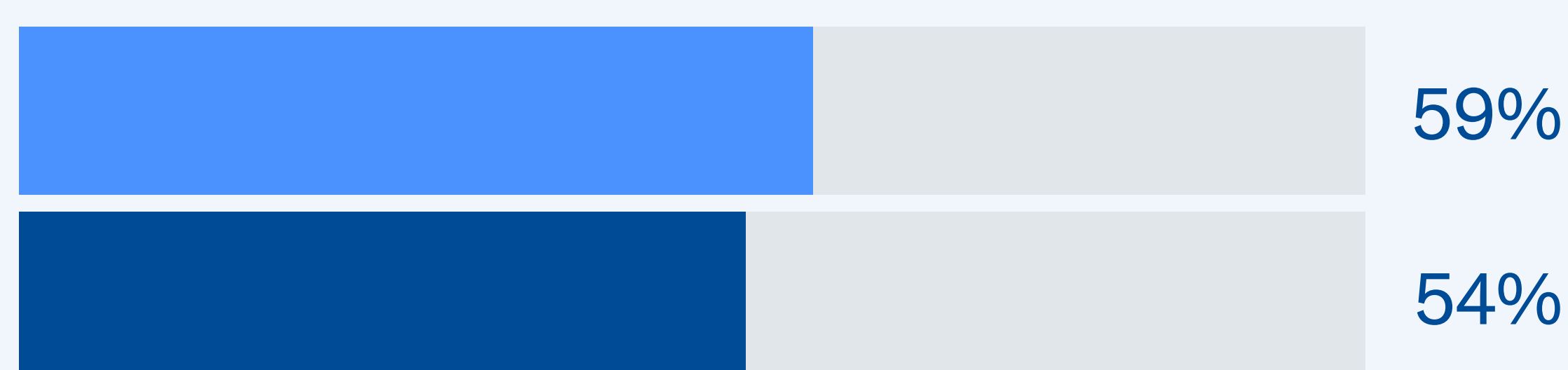


## RPN mental health and nurse well-being

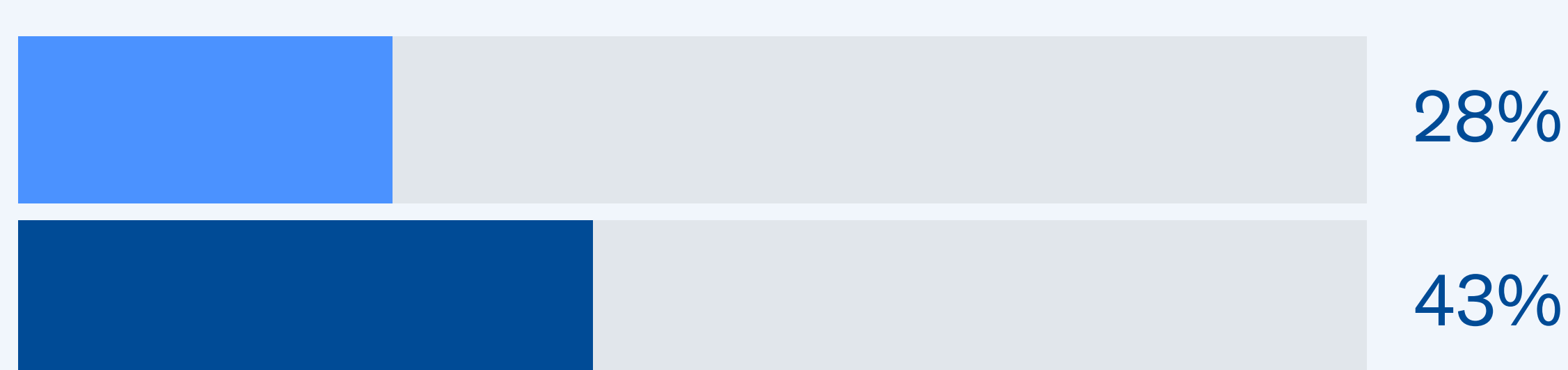
Experiencing work taking a toll on personal well-being



Experiencing moral distress



In immediate need of mental health support



Does not feel supported in their current role

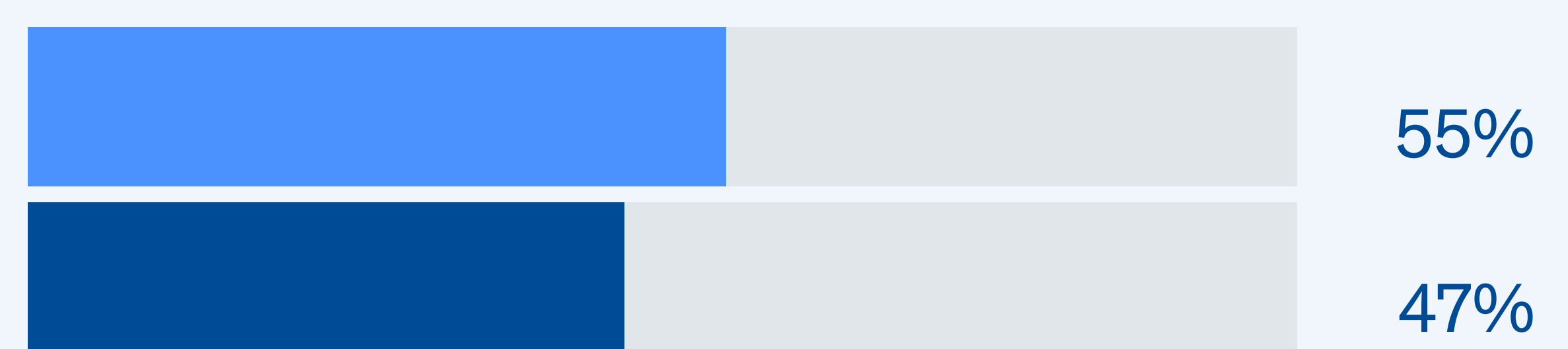


## RPN workplace conditions

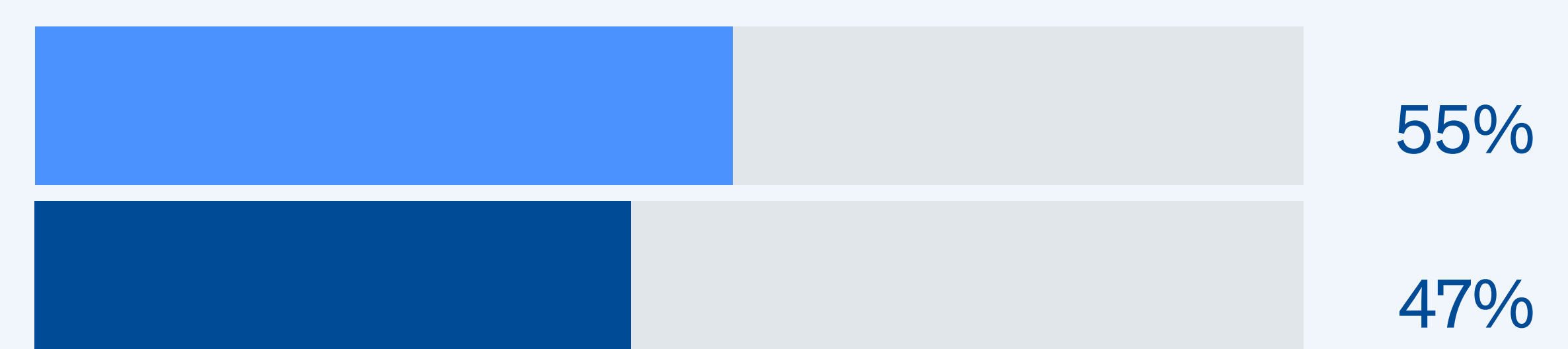
Reporting that daily experience significantly more stressful



Witnessing an increase in workplace violence



Personally experiencing workplace violence in the last year



## RPN nursing shortages

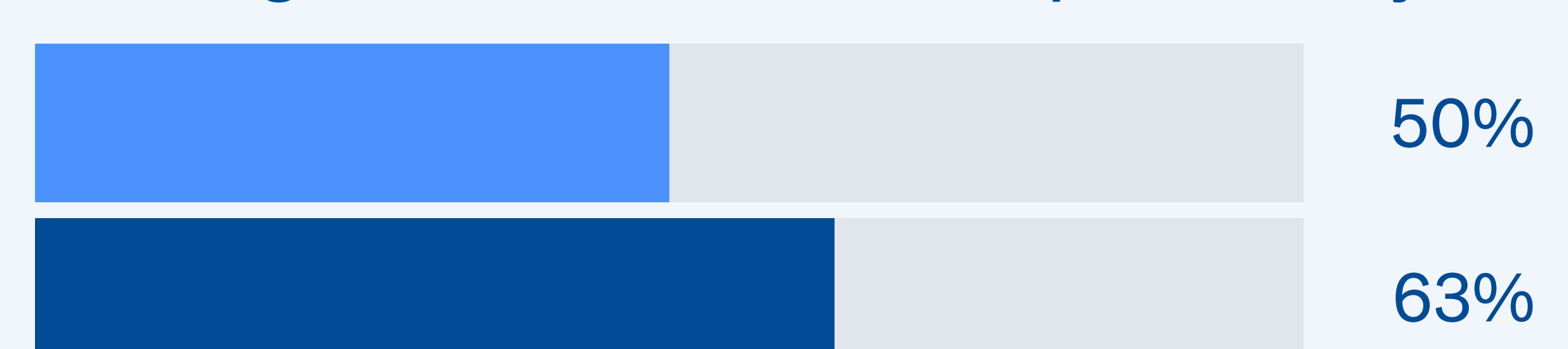
Witnessing patient care negatively impacted due to staffing issues



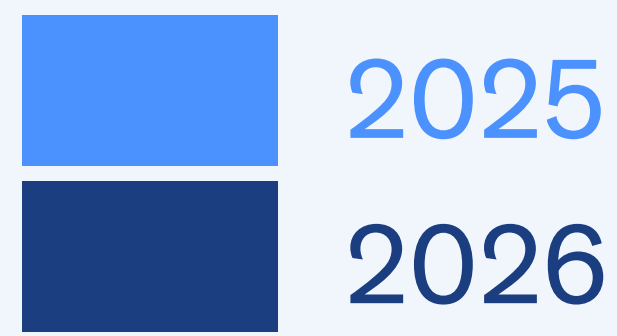
Experiencing an increased workload



Having to take on more responsibility

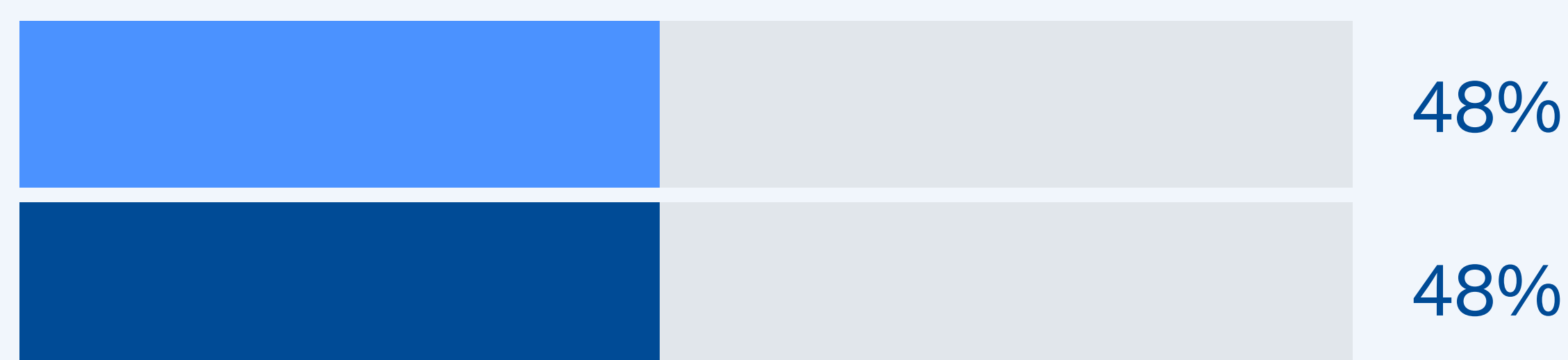


# 2025 VS. 2026



## Impact on patient care

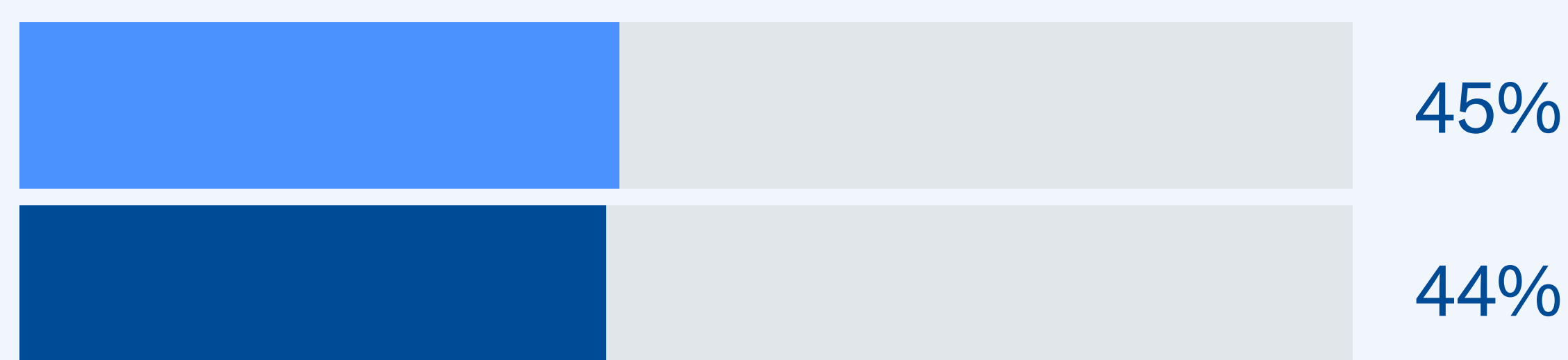
The quality of patient care has worsened



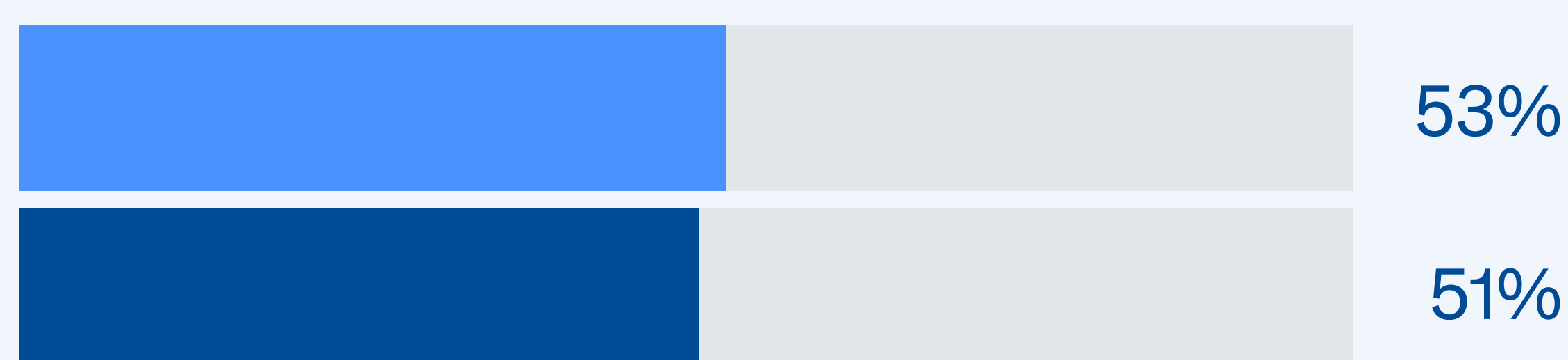
Compromising patient care due to longer wait times



Nurse-to-patient ratios have worsened

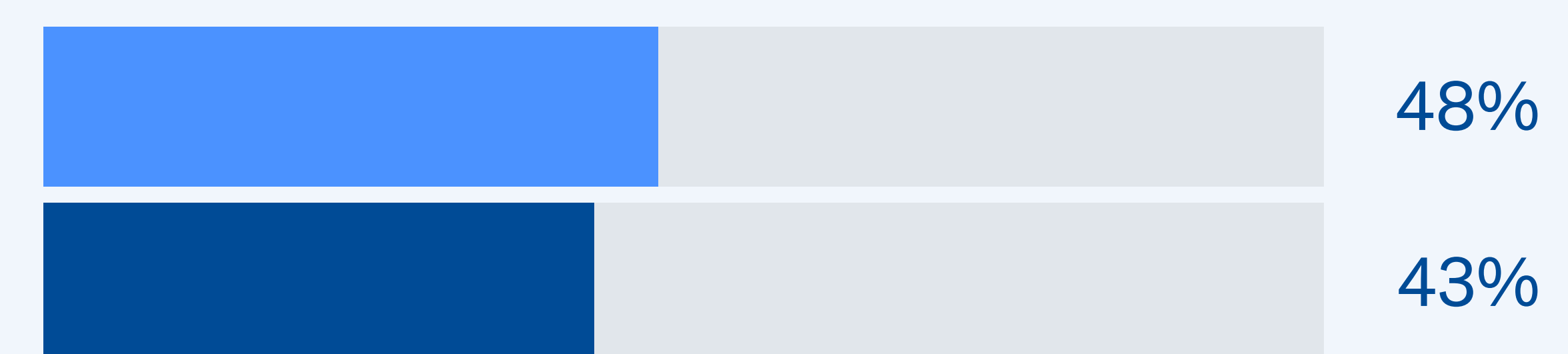


Does not feel like they have the resources to provide adequate care to patients

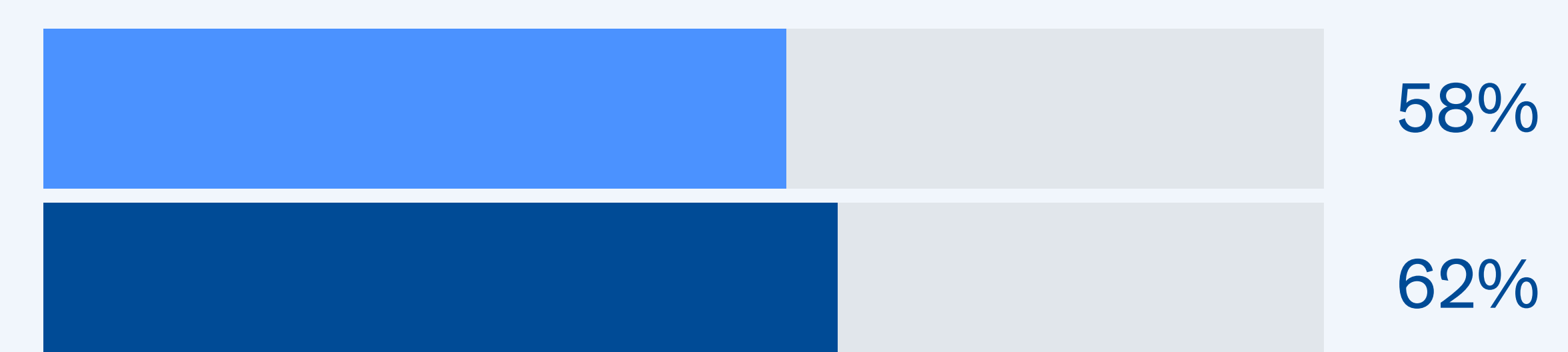


## RPN nursing talent loss

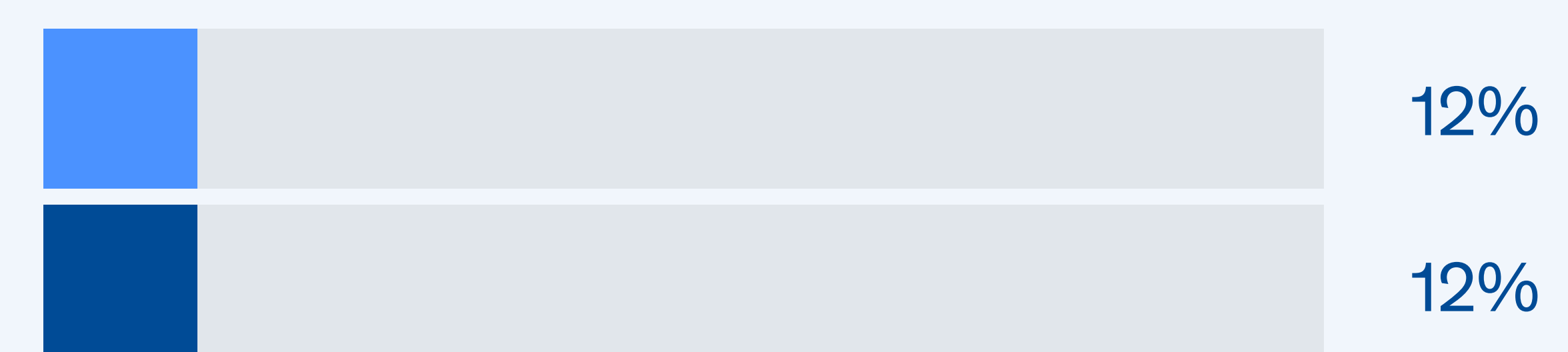
Intending to/are considering leaving the profession



Those planning to leave, intend to leave healthcare entirely



Planning on moving out of province



# CRITICAL CONDITIONS IMPACTING NURSES

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## Inadequate staffing levels and increasing workloads impacting patient care:

RPNs continue to face workload pressures related to inadequate staffing levels, with 57% reporting current nursing shortages at their workplace. A majority (72%) report their workloads have increased this year, compared to the previous year.

- **63% say they are being asked to take on additional shifts or work overtime to cover staff shortages - a significant rise from 50% in 2025.**
- **21% say they feel unable to decline shifts from their employer without facing consequences.**

77% say they have seen patient, resident or client care negatively impacted due to staffing issues, and more than half (51%) of nurses do not feel they have enough time and resources to provide adequate care to their patients, residents, or clients.

Among respondents indicating they are planning to leave their roles:

- **82% cite their workload as a top contributing factor - an increase from 69% in 2025.**

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## Mental health and nurse well-being:

Almost all RPNs surveyed (98%) report their work has taken a toll on their personal well-being - an increase from 89% in 2025.

61% say theirs and their colleagues' self-care and mental health worsened compared to a year ago.

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## Access to mental health and managerial support:

29% say that the availability of mental health support in the workplace has worsened from the previous year. 43% of RPNs say that they still are in immediate need of more mental health support relative to workplace stress - significantly increasing from 28% in 2025.

47% say their managerial support has worsened when compared to last year.

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## Moral distress:

Remains a key driver of negative workforce outcomes, with over half (54%) of RPNs surveyed reporting that they experienced moral distress due to their job in the last year, driven primarily by the inability to provide the level of care they believe patients require. Of the respondents who experienced moral distress, the top contributing factors cited are knowing their patient deserves more care but being unable to provide it (83%) and witnessing the impact of the nursing shortage on patients, residents, or clients (77%). Both of these figures have worsened compared to 2025.

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## Workplace conditions:

In 2026, 76% of RPNs surveyed say their daily experiences in the workplace were significantly more stressful than the last year. This statistic remains mostly unchanged with 80% of nurses reporting the same in 2025.



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## Workplace violence:

While there has been modest improvement year-over-year, workplace violence continues to be pervasive among Ontario nursing workplaces. In 2026, nearly half (47%) of RPNs surveyed reported that they have experienced or witnessed an increase in workplace violence against nurses in the past year. This figure is slightly down from 55% in 2025. Additionally, the same proportion (47%) report personally experiencing workplace violence in the past year.

Among those who have experienced violence in their workplace, the perpetrators of violence were identified as:

- **84% patients, residents, or clients**
- **45% from patients' families**
- **21% from co-workers**
- **17% from managers or supervisors**

32% of those who say they intend to leave the profession cited workplace violence as a contributing factor. While this statistic is down from 44% in 2025, there remains an urgent need to identify and implement immediate solutions to protect nurses and influence retention.

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## Challenging workplace dynamics and waning support from leadership:

More than half (51%) of RPNs surveyed feel that their workplace culture has worsened in the last year. As well, 59% of RPNs still report feeling unsupported in their roles - a figure that decreased from 78% in 2025.

63% feel that their employer did not do enough to ensure adequate staffing levels.

## Limited recovery time due to heavier workloads:

72% of nurses surveyed say their workload has increased this year. When it comes to workload manageability, perceptions are mixed, with the largest share of respondents (37%) describing their workload as somewhat manageable, and nearly one quarter (24%) finding it difficult to manage.

On an average shift, just over half (51%) of nurses surveyed say that they are working more time than they are scheduled. 63% of RPNs surveyed are being asked to take on additional shifts or work overtime to cover staffing shortages.

- Among those taking on additional shifts or working overtime, 48% report that they were asked to take on 1-3 additional shifts or overtime per week. Slightly improved since 2025 (49%).

21% of those surveyed do not feel like they are unable to decline shifts from their employer without consequences.



# IMPLICATIONS

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## Inadequate staffing levels and increasing workloads impacting patient care:

This year's survey findings suggest the quality of patient care in Ontario continues to suffer as nearly half (48%) of RPNs surveyed saw the quality of patient care worsened in the past year. 45% say they saw no improvement.

A majority (77%) report that staffing issues have negatively impacted patient care.

While these figures have improved compared to 88% in 2025, and 91% in 2024, the impact of staffing levels on quality of care remains concerning.

Among those who witnessed compromised patient care this year, the most common indications cited are:

- Patients enduring overall longer wait times (74%)
- Less consistency in the schedules of patients, residents or clients (65%)
- Longer wait times to be assessed (58%)
- Delays in assessment resulting in decline in patient, residents, or client health (53%)
- More difficulty for patients to access necessary care such as diagnostic tests (49%)
- Patients waiting in the hallways (38%)



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## Experience and support for complex cases:

In 2026, 44% of nurses say they do not feel like their workplace has enough experienced nurses to consult with on more complex cases.

Among nurses who indicated that they do not have time and resources to provide adequate care (51%), a majority (73%) cite being asked to care for more patients, residents, or clients with more complex health conditions.

There has been some improvement in the availability of experienced nurses, with 38% of respondents who were asked about the impact of new grads on their workplace cited a lack of experienced nurses for complex cases, compared to 59% last year



# IMPACT ON NURSING RETENTION

## Loss of valuable nursing expertise:

Ontario continues to be at risk of losing even more nurses as WeRPN research reveals 43% of RPNs surveyed intend to or are considering leaving the profession entirely. While this figure has improved from 48% in 2025, it remains concerning that over two in five RPNs are considering leaving the nursing profession.

Among those who intend on leaving the profession

- 46% plan to leave within the next 1-3 month
- 32% plan to leave within 1-2 years
- 22% plan to leave more than 2 years from now

Among nurses considering leaving the profession, the top contributing factors cited are:

- Workload (82%)
- Wages (74%)
- Unfair compensation practices and lack of respect or recognition (60%)
- Burnout or mental health concerns (56%)
- Moral distress (54%)
- Workplace culture and lack of staff/chronic understaffing (52%)
- Not enough time with patients, residents, or clients (46%)
- Lack of leadership support (46%)



## Leaving the province or country:

When asked specifically about remaining in the province, 88% of nurses surveyed indicate they plan to continue practicing in Ontario. However, 12% say they intend to leave the province to practice nursing.

- 7% plan on leaving Ontario to go to another province
- 5% plan on moving outside of Canada

Among nurses who intend to leave the province, top contributing factors cited are:

- The opportunity to earn more income (69%)
- Dissatisfaction with Ontario's healthcare system (56%)
- Hiring bonuses offered in other locations (49%)
- More opportunities in other places (43%)
- The opportunity to expand their skills in a different sector (30%)
- Relocation of family (27%)
- Dissatisfaction in current role (27%)



# NURSING CULTURE SHIFTS

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Experienced nurse perspectives: loss of nursing expertise and viewpoints on working with new nurses:

51% of RPNs feel like they do not have enough time and resources to care for their patients, residents, and clients. Of those, 41% feel there is a lack of experienced nurses to mentor newer graduates. Also relevant to the shift, 44% of nurses do not feel like their workplace has enough experienced nurses to consult on complex cases.

While half (50%) of nurses say they enjoy mentoring new graduates, 48% also acknowledge that it adds additional demands on more experienced nurses. 60% report that new graduates are surprised by the demands of the role.

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New graduate nurse perspectives: support, guidance, and workplace realities:

More than half (52%) of new graduates reported working with more patients than they had anticipated, an increase from 35% in 2025.

New graduates are also continuing to seek mentorship; however, nearly half 44% of young nurses say they did not receive the guidance they hoped for into the profession.

While 44% of new graduates surveyed say it was easy finding employment after graduation, over half (56%) report having difficulty.

Of new graduates surveyed, 44% indicate the experienced nurses on their team were very welcoming and supportive, however, the same amount of nurses reveal the experienced nurses on their team were often too busy to support them.

# NURSING TALENT RETENTION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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## Retention considerations:

Among the cohort of nurses considering leaving the profession (43%), when asked what would sway them to remain, the top contributing factors cited include:

- **Better wages (82%)**
- **Better benefits (64%)**
- **Improved workload (62%)**
- **Better nurse-to-patient ratios (56%)**
- **Improved workplace support (54%)**
- **More flexibility (40%)**
- **Better practices to protect nurses from workplace violence (40%)**

Asked amongst all respondents, the majority (76%) of nurses surveyed cite better wages as a key to improving overall job satisfaction.

Among those planning on or considering leaving the profession:

- **62% identified that they intend to leave healthcare altogether**
- **18% plan to stay as RPNs in healthcare but move to a more administrative role or non-direct practice role**
- **18% would consider going back to school for a different role in healthcare.**

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## Wage dissatisfaction:

About four in five nurses surveyed (81%) feel that they are unfairly compensated for their role as an RPN.

Among nurses considering leaving the profession, wages remain one of the top contributing factors to that decision (74%), second to workload (82%).

While 65% of respondents have received a pay increase in their current role within the past two years, surprisingly, 35% of nurses have not benefited the same way, highlighting ongoing concerns around wage stagnation.

## Pride in nursing: connecting with shared purpose:

Nearly half of all RPNs surveyed 48% report that their pride in the nursing profession worsened in the last year. A year ago, this figure was 51%, and in 2024, 60%, indicating marginal improvement in the reignition of pride in the profession year-over-year.

A heartening indication is that 91% of RPNs say that making a difference in the lives of their patients, residents, or clients brought joy to them at their workplace.

Among nurses planning to remain in the profession, contributing factors include:

- Making a difference in someone's life (73%)
- Taking care of patients, residents or clients brings joy to their life (72%)
- The nature of the work (50%)



# EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

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## Artificial Intelligence (AI) in nursing:

Just under half (45%) of RPNs indicate using AI tools in their work. Contrary to that, more than half (55%) never personally use AI tools in the workplace.

Over a quarter of nurses (28%) indicate that colleagues are using AI tools in their practice. At the same time, the majority (55%) of RPNs surveyed are unsure if their organization has policies in place regarding the use of AI tools in critical practice. Less than a quarter (22%) affirm their organization does have such guidance in place.

Understandably, scrutiny is widespread, with over three quarters (78%) of nurses expressing some level of concern about the use of AI in nursing practice. Many RPNs (54%) are uncertain about its overall impact on nursing, while nearly a third (30%) believe AI will have a negative effect. Just 16% believe AI will have a positive impact, indicating a need for more discussion and education around the use of AI tools, policy, and practice in nursing.





# WERPN'S FIVE-STEP ACTION PLAN



# WeRPN's Five-Step Action Plan for Government Policymakers and Healthcare Leaders

## A call for coordinated action

Encouraging improvements point to what's possible, but lasting change will depend on continued investment in nurses, ensuring they are supported, valued, and equipped to remain in the profession for the long term. The path forward is clear.

Based on these findings, WeRPN recommends the following course of action:

1

### **Ensure Fair Compensation for RPNs**

Establish a harmonized provincial framework to ensure consistency in salary and benefits for RPNs across all health sectors, including Hospitals, Long-Term Care, and Home Care, to support robust recruitment and retention.

2

### **Mandate Evidence-Based Nurse-to-Patient Ratios**

Establish a provincial strategy to adopt maximum nurse-to-patient staffing ratios and transparent workload reporting requirements across all healthcare settings to ensure patient safety and professional sustainability.

3

### **Enforce Workplace Violence Protections with Accountability**

Require all healthcare employers to adopt a zero-tolerance framework that includes mandatory public reporting of violent incidents and protects nurses from professional reprisals when they speak out.

4

### **Establish Universal Mental Health Supports for Healthcare Workers**

Provide permanent, provincial funding for specialized, barrier-free mental health and trauma supports tailored to the unique needs of the nursing workforce

5

### **Secure Continued Funding for Professional Development**

Commit to the long-term, multi-year sustainability of the Nursing Education Initiative (NEI) and the Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing (BEGIN) to ensure RPNs have uninterrupted access to career advancement and specialized clinical education.