

We RPN

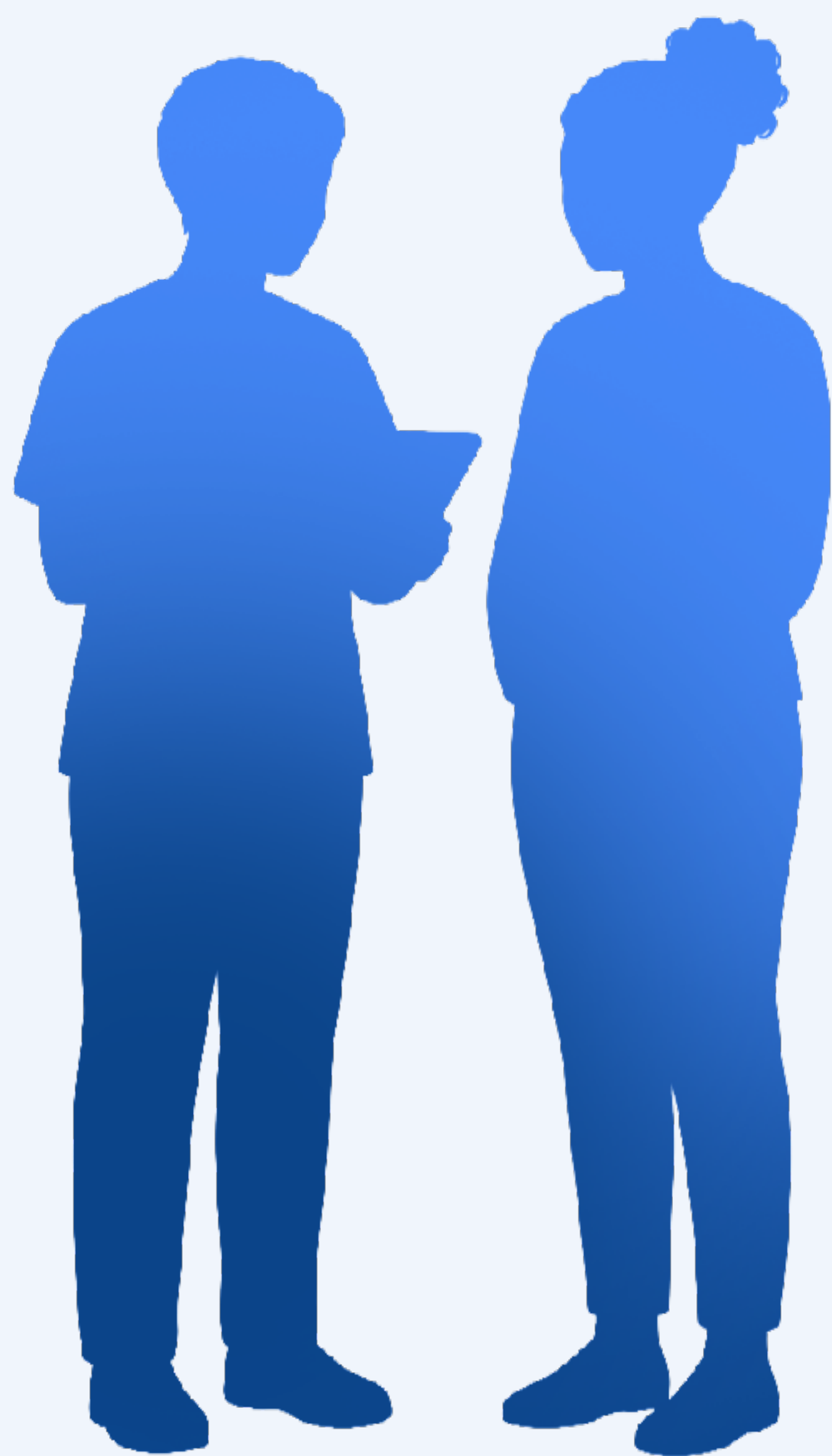
Registered Practical Nurses
Association of Ontario



THE STATE OF NURSING IN ONTARIO

THE RPN EXPERIENCE IN FOCUS

A 2026 REVIEW



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Research Summary Report

Commissioned by WeRPN | Spring 2026

About WeRPN

The Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) is the professional voice of Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) across the province. There are approximately 62,000 RPNs in Ontario. WeRPN builds the profile and professional capacity of RPNs so they can better care for patients and better support their fellow healthcare workers. The association works closely with its members and the healthcare community to support and advocate for the concerns of Ontario's RPNs

About this survey

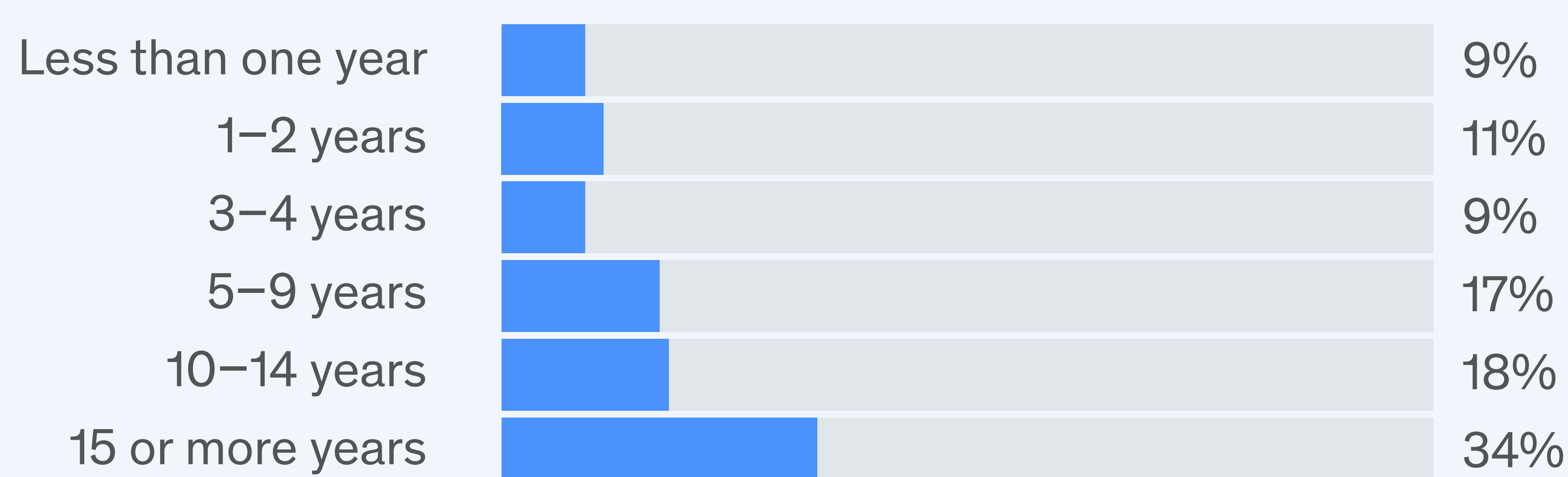
In 2026, WeRPN conducted a comprehensive survey to document and benchmark the current state of nursing in Ontario and the challenges and opportunities facing this profession. Over 800 RPNs participated from across the province. This annual survey follows previous research conducted in 2025, 2024, 2023, 2022, and 2020.

Methodology

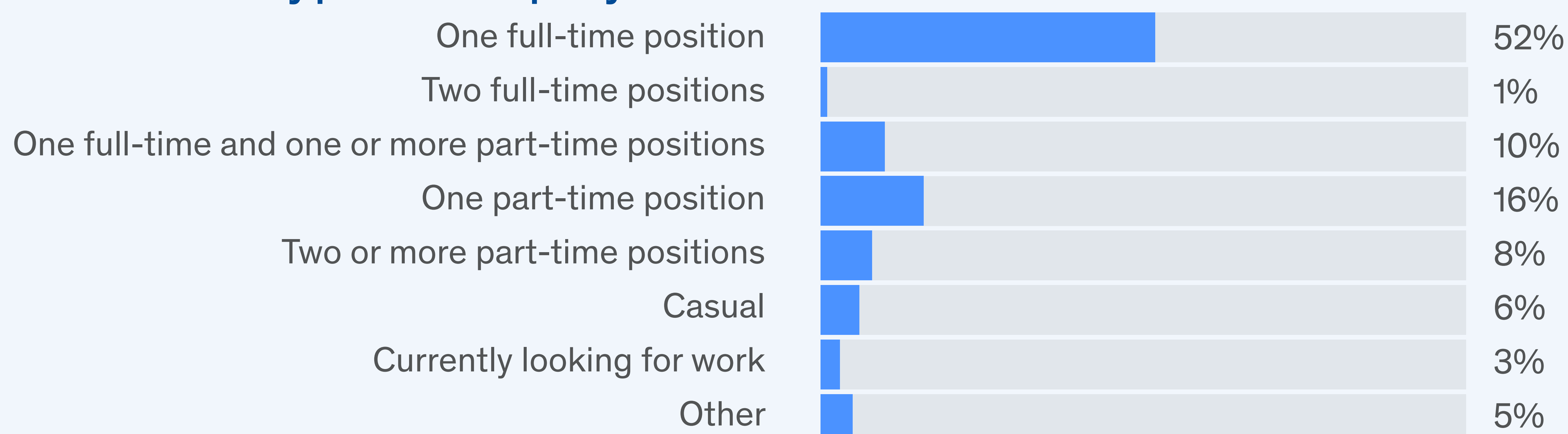
From March 18 to April 9, 2026, an online survey was conducted among 845 Registered Practical Nurses across Ontario, by WeRPN. For comparison purposes only, the sample plan would carry a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

Length of time in the profession



Type of employment



Where are they working



*Respondents were asked to select all industries that applied.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early improvements and modest gains emerge as systemic pressures continue across Ontario's nursing workforce.

Through its annual research survey and report, *The State of Nursing in Ontario: A 2026 Review*, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) brings forward the voices and experiences of nurses from across the province. The findings provide policymakers, healthcare leaders, and the public with an evidence-based snapshot of the nursing profession in Ontario and the conditions impacting patient care today.

This year's data point to a more nuanced picture than in previous years. Modest improvements are emerging in some areas of the nursing experience, including perceived workplace support and intent to leave the profession. Fewer Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) reported feeling unsupported in the workplace compared to last year, and the proportion considering or planning to leave nursing has declined slightly. These shifts are encouraging and suggest that sustained advocacy, collaboration, and system attention may be having an impact. However, these gains remain fragile and are outweighed by persistent pressures that continue to shape the day-to-day realities of RPNs across Ontario.

Workload, staffing shortages, and the resulting impact on care remain among the most urgent concerns. Most nurses reported that their workload increased over the past year, with many continuing to take on extra shifts, overtime, and additional hours to compensate for staffing gaps. Nearly all respondents said patient care had either worsened or failed to improve over the past year, while most also reported that staffing shortages are directly affecting care delivery. These findings reinforce that workforce challenges are not isolated staffing issues; they are system pressures with direct implications for the quality, safety, and consistency of care Ontarians receive.



The toll on nurses remains profound. Nearly all respondents said their work has affected their personal well-being, while many reported worsening mental health, an immediate need for mental health support, and ongoing moral distress tied to being unable to provide the level of care patients need. Workplace violence also remains a serious concern, directly affecting retention, which continues to be a critical issue. Although fewer nurses plan to leave than in 2025, many are still considering exiting the profession and healthcare altogether. This points to a continuing risk to long-term workforce stability, particularly as experienced nurses are lost from the system.

This year's report also introduces new findings on artificial intelligence in nursing, showing that while use remains limited, awareness is growing and many nurses remain uncertain about its role, implications, and future impact on practice.

Ontario's nursing profession is at a critical juncture. While some indicators have improved, substantial work remains to address workload pressures, support nurses' mental health and well-being, improve workplace safety, and protect quality patient care. WeRPN is calling on government, policymakers, and healthcare leadership to build on early progress through sustained investment and coordinated action to retain experienced nurses and rebuild confidence in the profession. Only through continued system-wide action can Ontario strengthen the stability of the nursing workforce and ensure the high-quality care patients deserve.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	Summary of Top Research Findings
13	Critical Conditions Impacting Nurses
13	Nursing shortages and staffing levels
15	Mental health and nurse well-being
16	Moral distress
17	Workplace conditions
20	Implications
20	Quality of patient care in 2026
21	Experience and support for complex cases
22	Impact on Nursing Retention
22	Loss of valuable nursing expertise
23	Leaving the province of country
24	Nursing Culture Shifts
24	Experienced nurse perspectives
24	New graduate nurse perspectives
25	Nursing Talent Retention and Career Opportunities
25	Retention considerations
26	Nursing education and career growth opportunities
27	Wage dissatisfaction
28	Pride in nursing: connecting with shared purpose
29	Emerging Technology
29	Artificial Intelligence (AI) in nursing
31	WeRPN's Five-Step Action Plan
32	Conclusion

SUMMARY OF TOP RESEARCH FINDINGS

While modest improvements have emerged in some areas of the nursing experience over the past year, WeRPN's 2026 State of Nursing survey reflects on the significant pressures that continue to shape the day-to-day realities of RPNs across Ontario's healthcare system. Continued and coordinated effort is required to strengthen nurses' experiences across the province and build a more sustainable foundation for the road ahead.

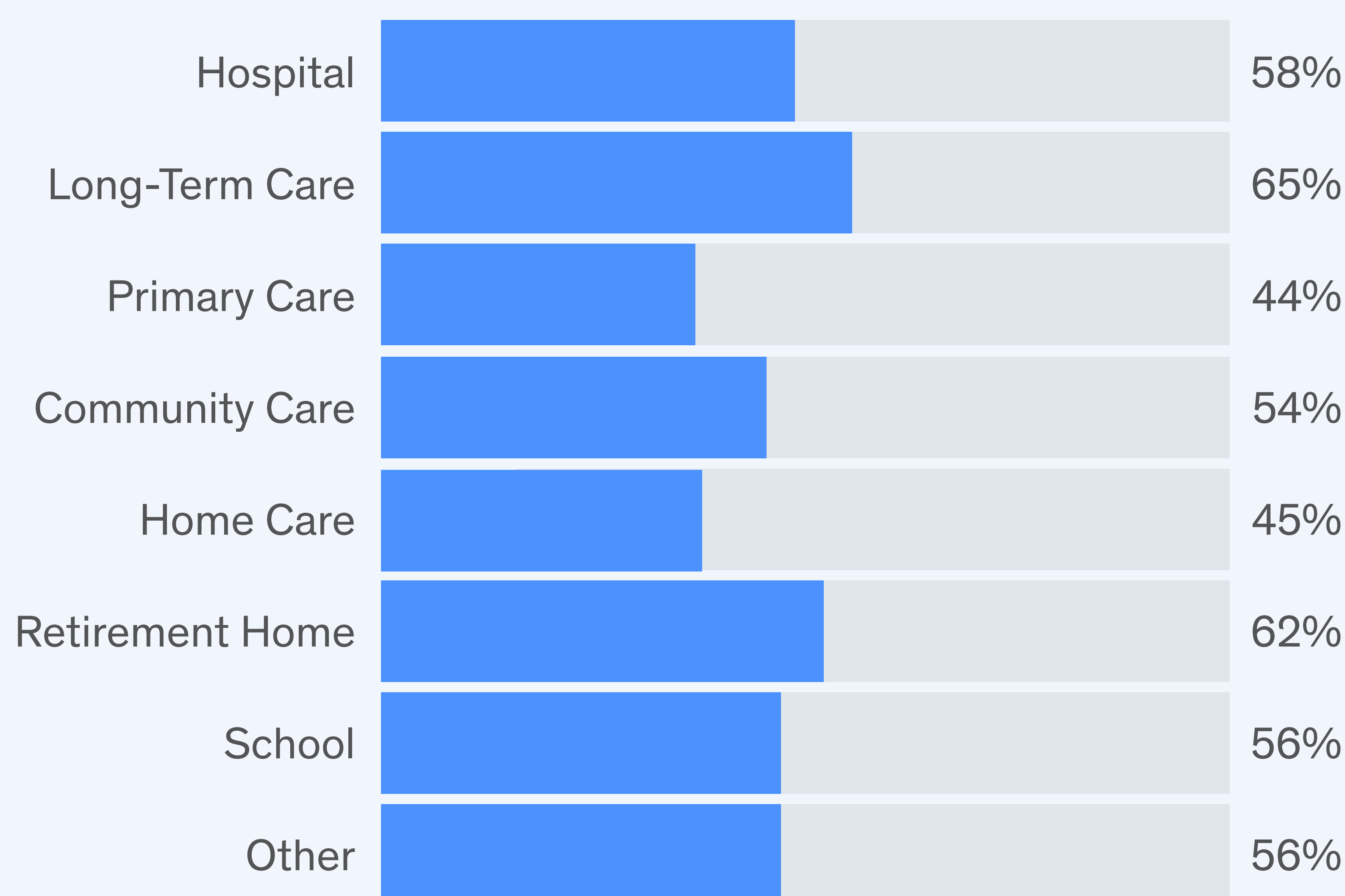
In Spring 2026, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN), the professional voice of Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) across the province, conducted its annual survey, *The State of Nursing in Ontario: A 2026 Review*. Drawing on responses from nearly 850 nurses, the survey captures the lived experiences, perspectives, and workplace realities of RPNs across Ontario. The findings provide an evidence-based snapshot of the nursing profession today, highlighting where modest improvements are emerging, where pressures persist, and how current workforce conditions continue to affect both nurses and patient care across the province.

Consider the following key insights into workplace pressures and conditions impacting care reported by practical nurses in Ontario today:

The current state of nursing shortages and staffing levels

While Ontario has seen marginal improvements in staffing levels in recent years, with growth in the number of nurses registered to practice amid the province-wide nursing shortage, systemic barriers to addressing the shortage remain. According to CIHI and supplemental data from the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), while the absolute supply of Registered Practical Nurses has grown modestly (0.7% in 2025), the number of RPNs per 100,000 population has begun to decline.^{1 2} That suggests current growth levels are failing to keep pace with the needs of Ontario's rapidly increasing population. This year's data tell a story of a profession that continues to face unsustainable pressures.

More than half (57 per cent) of RPNs say there is currently a shortage of nurses in their workplace. The perception varies by sector, with the highest levels reported in Long-Term Care (65 per cent), Retirement Homes (62 per cent), Hospitals (58 per cent), and School settings (56 per cent). Slightly lower levels are seen in Community Care (54 per cent), Home Care (45 per cent) and Primary Care (44 per cent).



What's more, a majority (77 per cent) of nurses say they have seen patient, resident, or client care negatively impacted due to staffing issues.

At the same time, 59 per cent of RPNs say they feel unsupported in their role – down from 78 per cent last year when perceived lack of support peaked, suggesting meaningful year-over-year improvement. While this marks progress, a majority of RPNs still feel unsupported, and 43 per cent are considering leaving the profession altogether, compared to 48 per cent in 2025.

Consistently high workloads

The majority of nurses continue to report significant workload pressures, with 72 per cent indicating their workload has increased this year, compared to the previous year. As well, 63 per cent say they are being asked to take on additional shifts or overtime to cover staffing shortages.

Increased daily demands and manageability concerns

Seventy-six per cent of nurses say their daily experiences in the workplace have become significantly more stressful, with 63 per cent being asked to care for more patients and 64 per cent stating their work has had a negative impact on them in the past year. Perceptions of workload manageability are mixed, with the largest share of respondents (37 per cent) describing their workload as somewhat manageable, and nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) finding it difficult to manage.

Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2024a). Health workforce in Canada: Overview. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/health-workforce-in-canada-overview> ; College of Nurses of Ontario. (2025). Registered Practical Nurses (RPN) at a Glance: 2025. Toronto, ON: CNO. Available at: <https://www.cno.org/Assets/CNO/Documents/Statistics/latest-reports/registered-practical-nurses-rpn-infosheet.pdf>

Reduced flexibility and recovery time

Beyond workload volume, nurses also report increasing constraints on time and autonomy: 51 per cent are working more hours than scheduled, 37 per cent are unable to take time off when needed, and nearly one in four (21 per cent) report they are unable to decline shifts without facing consequences.

Mental health and well-being concerns

Almost all RPNs surveyed (98 per cent) report that their work took a toll on their personal well-being, up from 89 per cent last year. Mental health pressures remain significant, with 61 per cent of respondents reporting that their own or their colleagues' self-care and mental health worsened over the past year. Concerningly, 43 per cent report an immediate need for mental health support, up from 28 per cent last year. Forty-eight per cent of respondents report that there was an increase in sick time among nurses at their workplace. More than half (51 per cent) feel that their workplace culture has worsened in the last year.

Moral distress

Moral distress remains a key driver of negative workforce outcomes, with over half (54 per cent) 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 per cent) and witnessing the impact of the nursing shortage on patients, residents, or clients (77 per cent). Both of these figures have worsened compared to 2025.

No substantial improvement in workplace experience

When asked to compare their experience to last year, RPNs stated a majority of elements of the job remain unchanged from year-to-year, including: the availability of mental health support (62 per cent); support from coworkers (59 per cent); nurse-to-patient ratios (51 per cent); the number of shifts they've had to cover (51 per cent); and overtime needed to cover staffing gaps (49 per cent). Workplace safety concerns

Workplace violence continues to be a prevalent issue, with nearly half (47 per cent) of RPNs reporting they have personally experienced violence in the workplace over the past year. That figure has marginally improved from last year (59 per cent in 2025) but remains alarmingly high. Among those intending to leave the profession, 32 per cent cite workplace violence as a contributing factor.

Retention risks remain high

Although WeRPN's research shows a year-over-year improvement, it remains concerning that over two in five (43 per cent) of RPNs are considering or intending to leave the nursing profession entirely. Among those intending to leave, nearly half (46 per cent) plan to do so within one year, while 32 per cent plan to leave within the next one to two years. This highlights a significant short-term retention risk. Notably, 62 per cent of those considering leaving the profession report they intend to leave healthcare entirely, underscoring broader system-wide retention challenges.

Among those considering leaving the profession, the key factors influencing their decision include workload (82 per cent), wages (74 per cent), lack of respect or recognition (60 per cent), unfair compensation practices (60 per cent), burnout or mental health concerns (56 per cent), and moral distress (54 per cent). Among this same group, the factors most likely to influence them to stay include better wages (82 per cent), better benefits (64 per cent), improved workload (62 per cent), and better nurse-to-patient ratios (56 per cent).

Loss of pride in the profession

Forty-eight per cent of RPNs surveyed report that their pride in the profession has worsened or stayed the same in the last year – a figure that has improved slightly from 51 per cent in 2025.

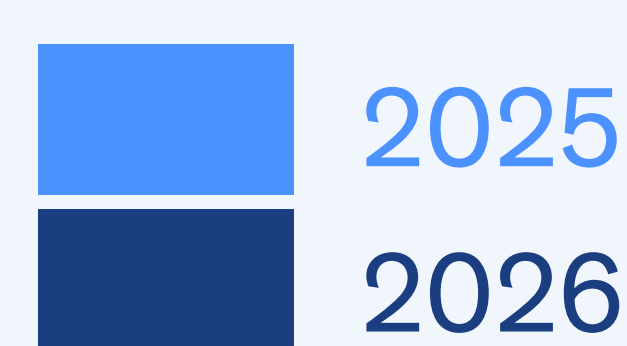
Implications for patient care

Patient care and system pressures persist, with the cumulative impact of these challenges being felt most acutely by patients across Ontario. Nearly all RPNs report stagnant or declining patient care conditions, with 48 per cent reporting that care quality worsened and 45 per cent reporting no improvement over the past year. In total, 93 per cent of respondents report either deterioration or no meaningful change in patient care quality. Additionally, 77 per cent report that staffing shortages have negatively impacted patient care. This data highlight certain elements of the work RPNs do in their day-to-day that have implications on the quality of patient care Ontarians are receiving.

To ensure high-quality patient care across Ontario now and into the future, WeRPN continues to call upon government policymakers and healthcare leaders to work collaboratively to drive material change.

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.

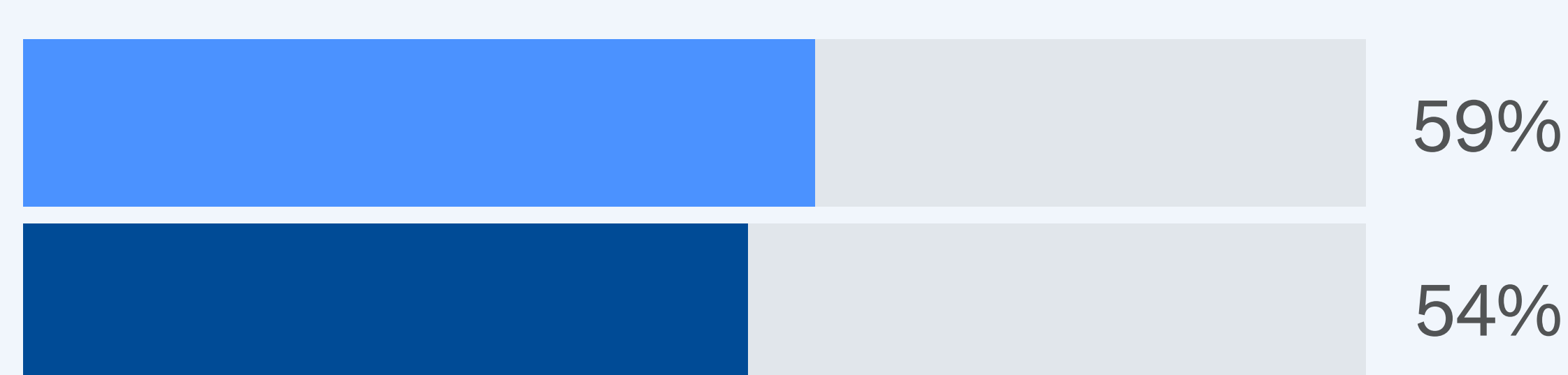


RPN mental health and nurse well-being

Work is taking a toll on personal well-being



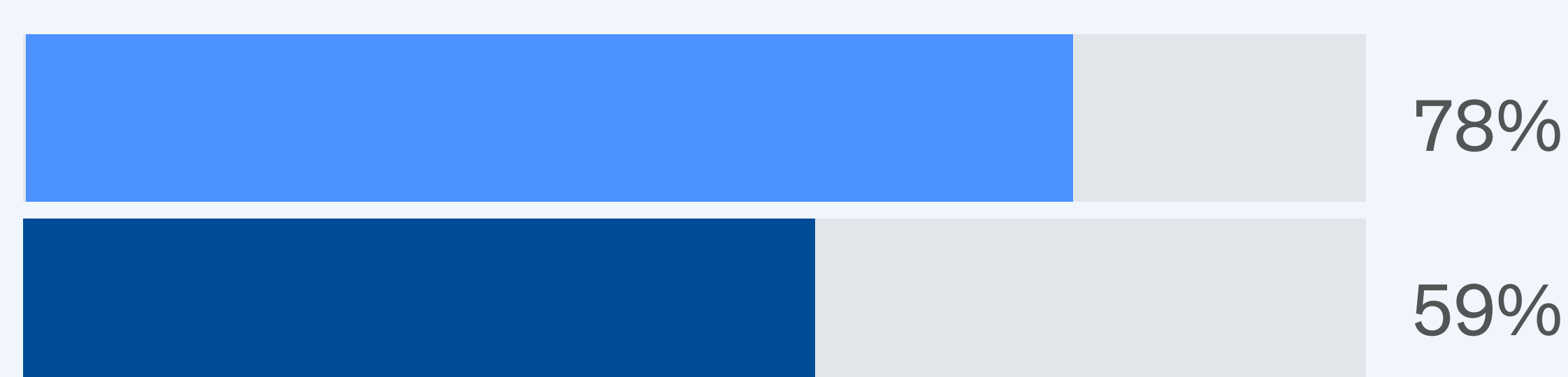
Experiencing moral distress



In immediate need of mental health support



Do not feel supported in current role

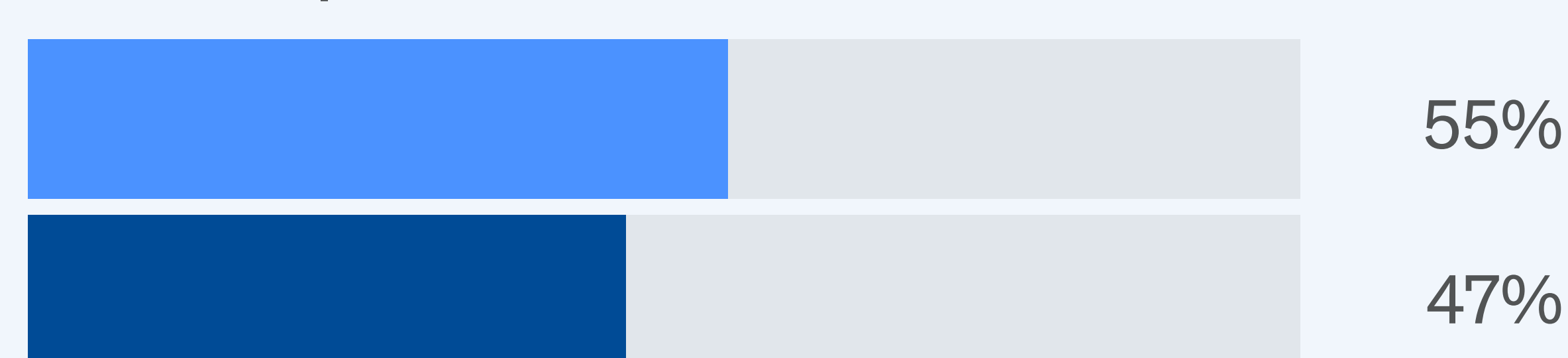


RPN workplace conditions

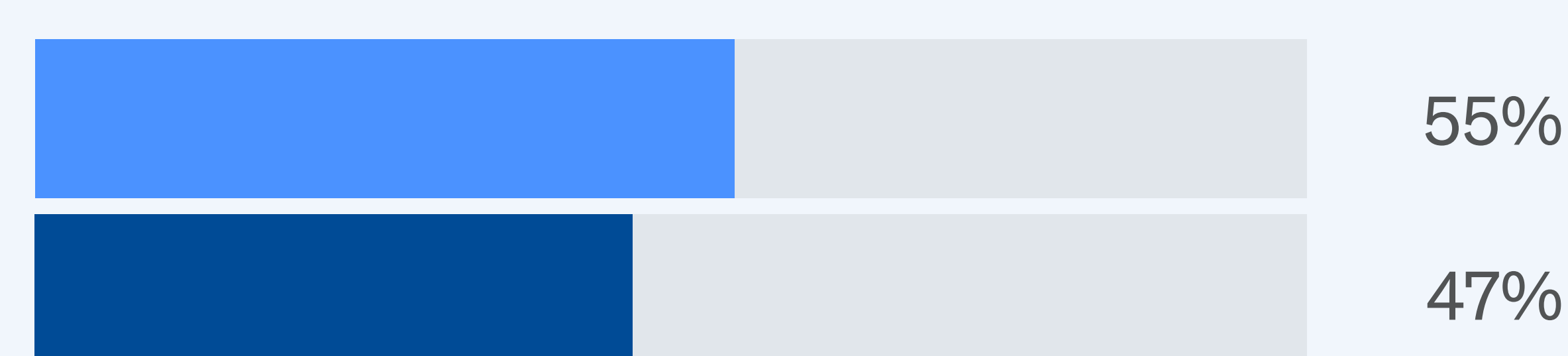
Daily experience significantly more stressful



Witnessed an increase in workplace violence



Personally experienced workplace violence in the last year



RPN nursing shortages

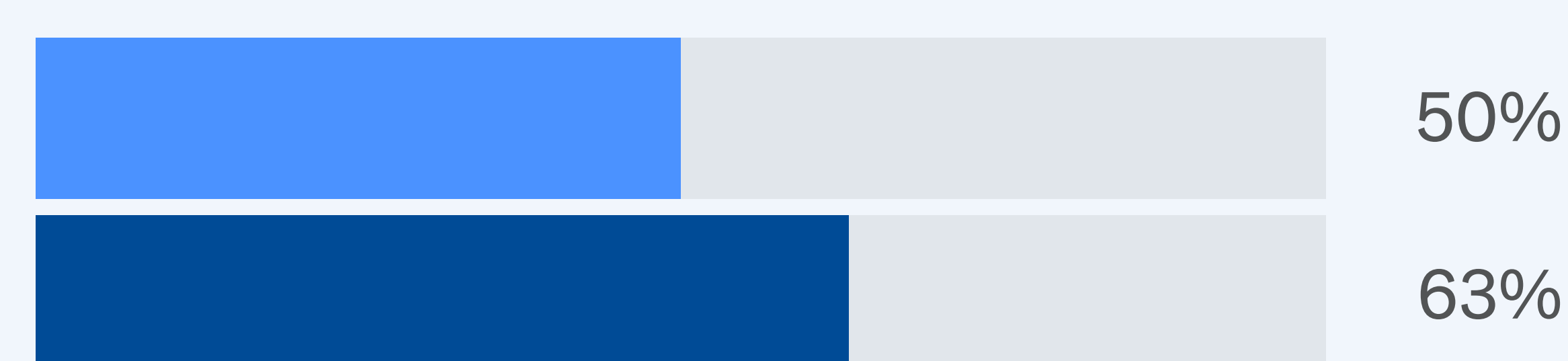
Patient care is negatively impacted due to staffing issues



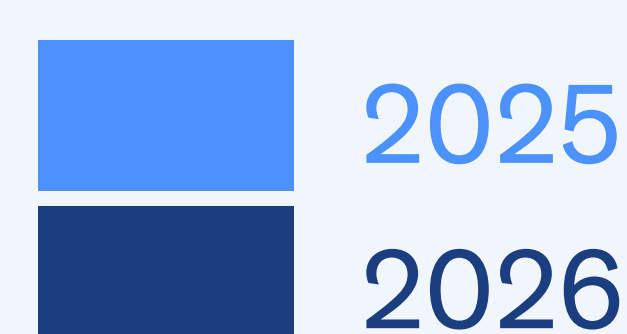
Experiencing an increased workload



Having to take on more responsibility

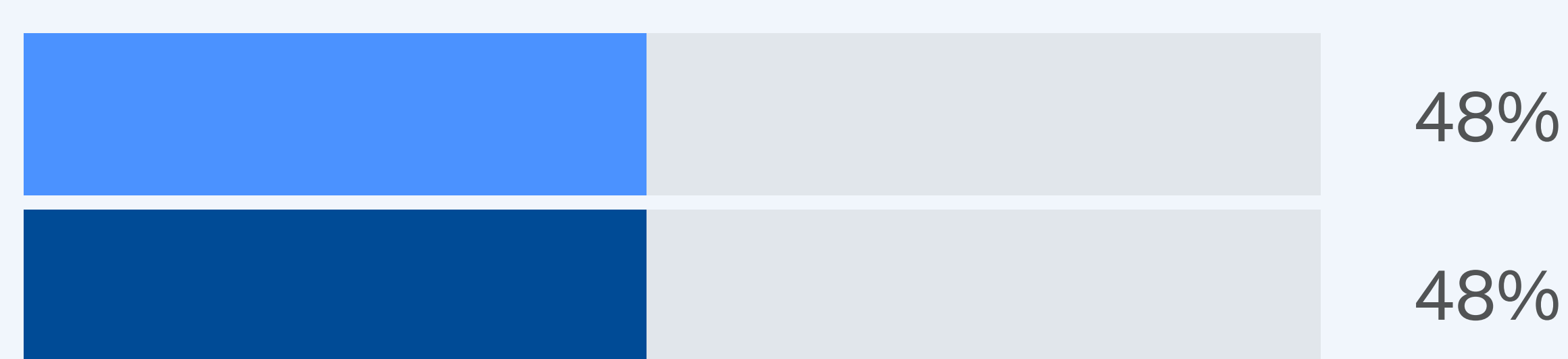


2025 VS. 2026



Impact on patient care

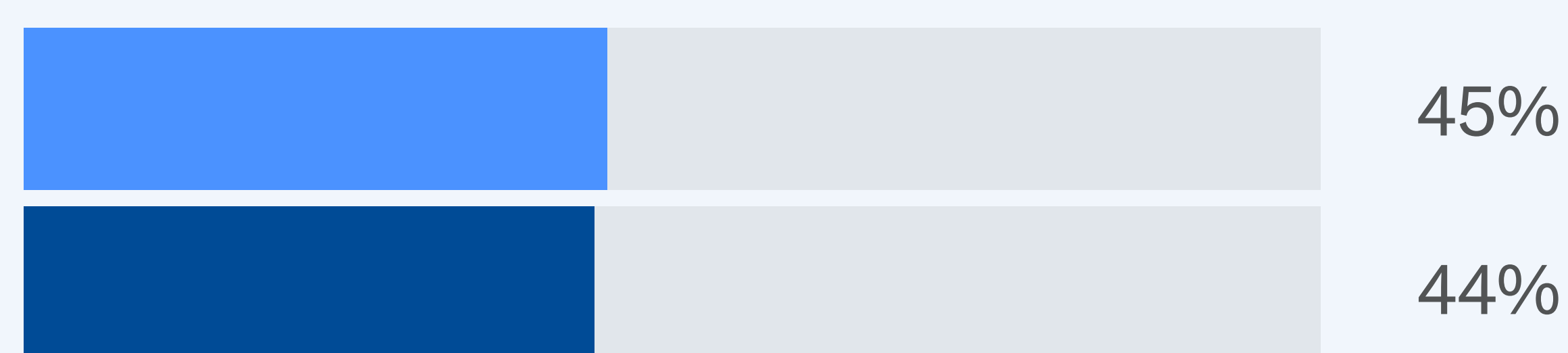
The quality of patient care has worsened



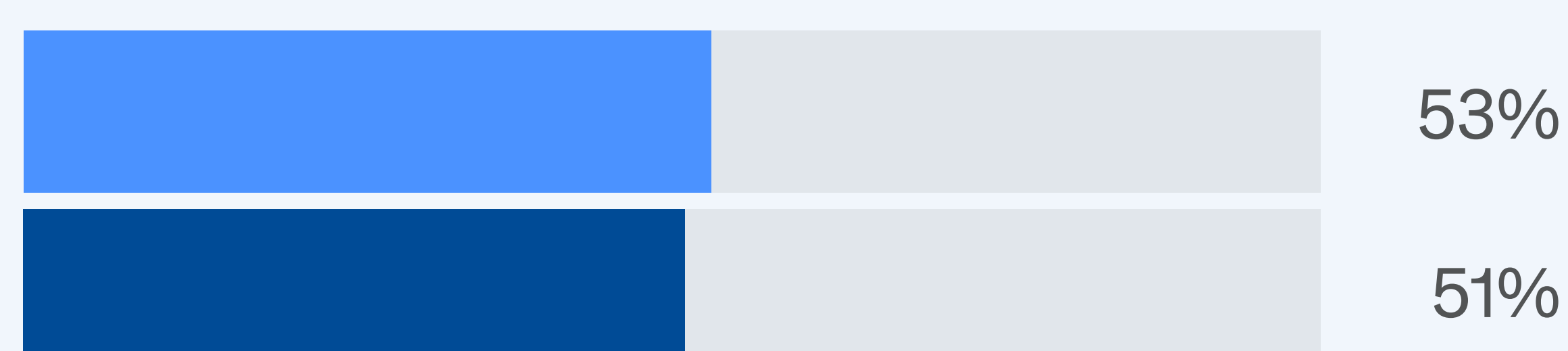
Compromised patient care due to longer wait times



Nurse-to-patient ratios have worsened

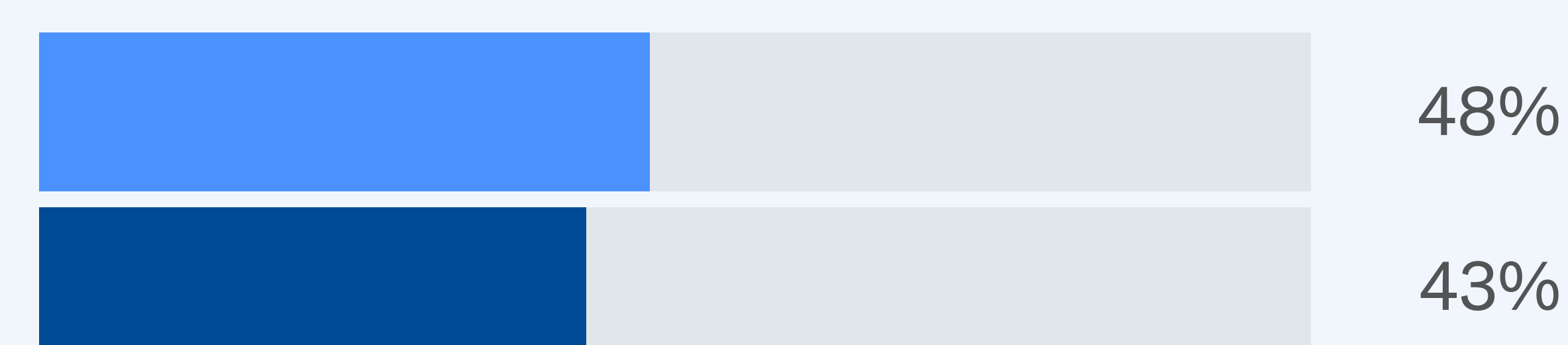


Do not feel they have the resources to provide adequate care to patients

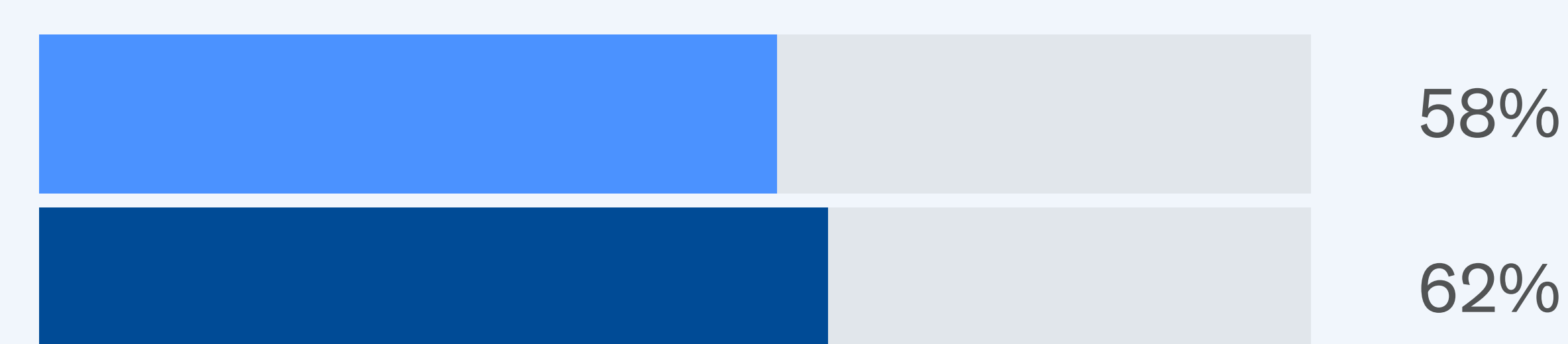


RPN nursing talent loss

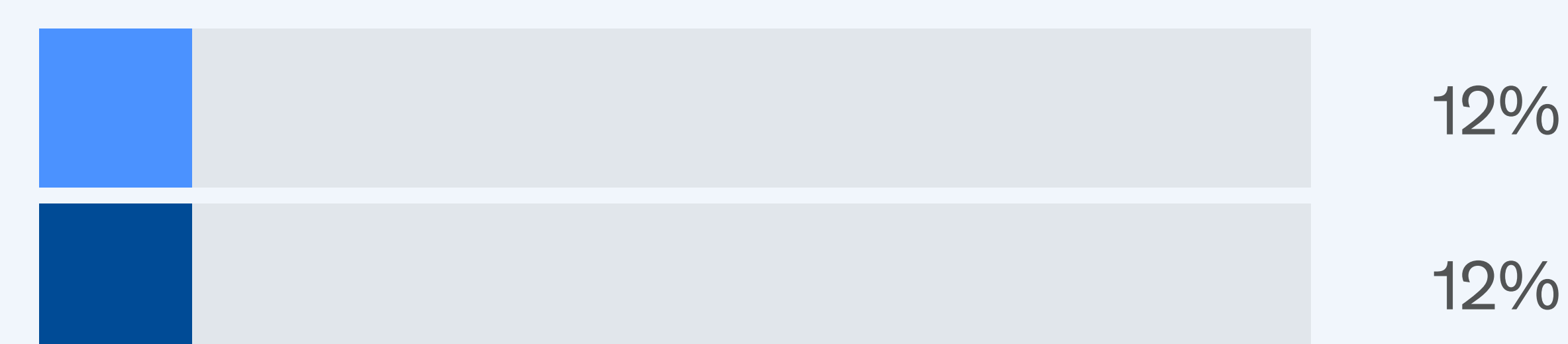
Intend to/are considering leaving the healthcare profession entirely



Those planning to leave, intend to leave healthcare entirely



Plan on moving out of province



CRITICAL CONDITIONS IMPACTING NURSES

Nursing shortages and staffing levels

Adequate staffing remains essential to ensure nursing workloads are manageable and sustainable. While Ontario has seen marginal improvements in staffing levels in recent years, systemic barriers continue to contribute to ongoing workplace staffing shortages.

Lower staffing levels and increasing workloads impacting patient care

RPNs continue to face workload pressures related to inadequate staffing levels, with more than half (57 per cent) of nurses surveyed reporting current nursing shortages at their workplace.

A majority of RPNs polled (72 per cent) report that their workloads have increased this year, compared to the previous year – with 63 per cent saying that they are being asked to take on additional shifts or work overtime to cover staffing shortages. This is a significant rise from 2025 when half (50 per cent) of nurses reported being asked to work beyond what would routinely be expected of them. Additionally, one in four (21 per cent) say they feel unable to decline shifts from their employer without facing consequences, highlighting ongoing pressures related to workload and staffing.

Of significance, a majority (77 per cent) indicate that they have seen patient, resident or client care negatively impacted due to staffing issues. What's more, this year, half (51 per cent) of nurses do not feel they have the time and resources to provide adequate care to their patients, residents, or clients. Less than a third (30 per cent) did, while 19 per cent reported feeling unsure.

Also notable, among the respondents who indicated they are planning to leave their roles, eight in 10 (82 per cent) nurses cite their workload as a top contributing factor, an increase from 69 per cent in 2025. This is a clear indication that there is still much to be done to address workload strain, retain RPNs, and support patients across Ontario's healthcare system.

In their own words

“Frequent short-staffing, missed breaks and extended shifts contribute to fatigue and reduced ability to provide optimal care.”

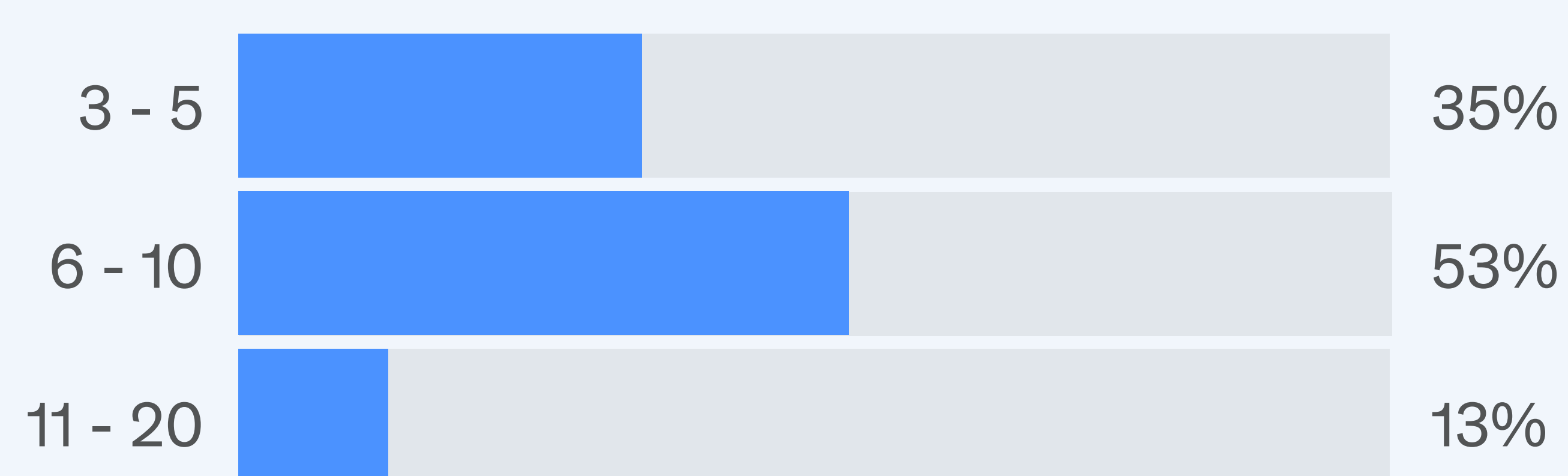
“I pick up a lot of shifts because we are so short-staffed ... The residents are the ones that suffer, and the agency staff do not do the same amount of work as us, causing a lot of frustration.”

“Workloads in some positions have become too much for some nurses causing an increase in burnout in the profession.”

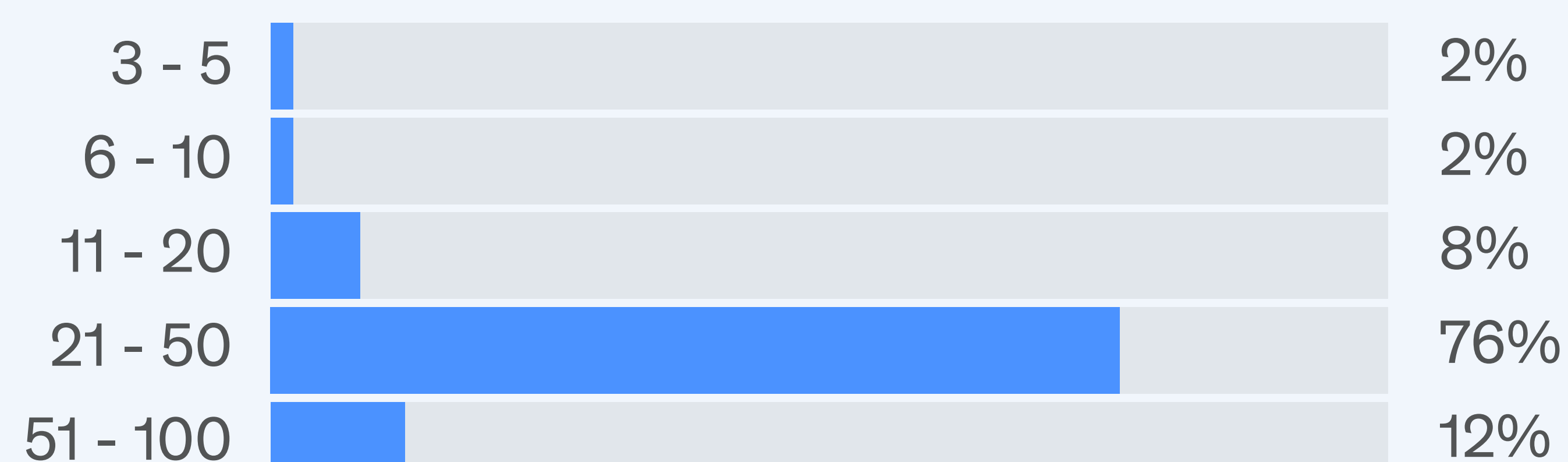
DID YOU KNOW?

How many patients, residents, or clients do RPNs care for in Ontario, on an average day?

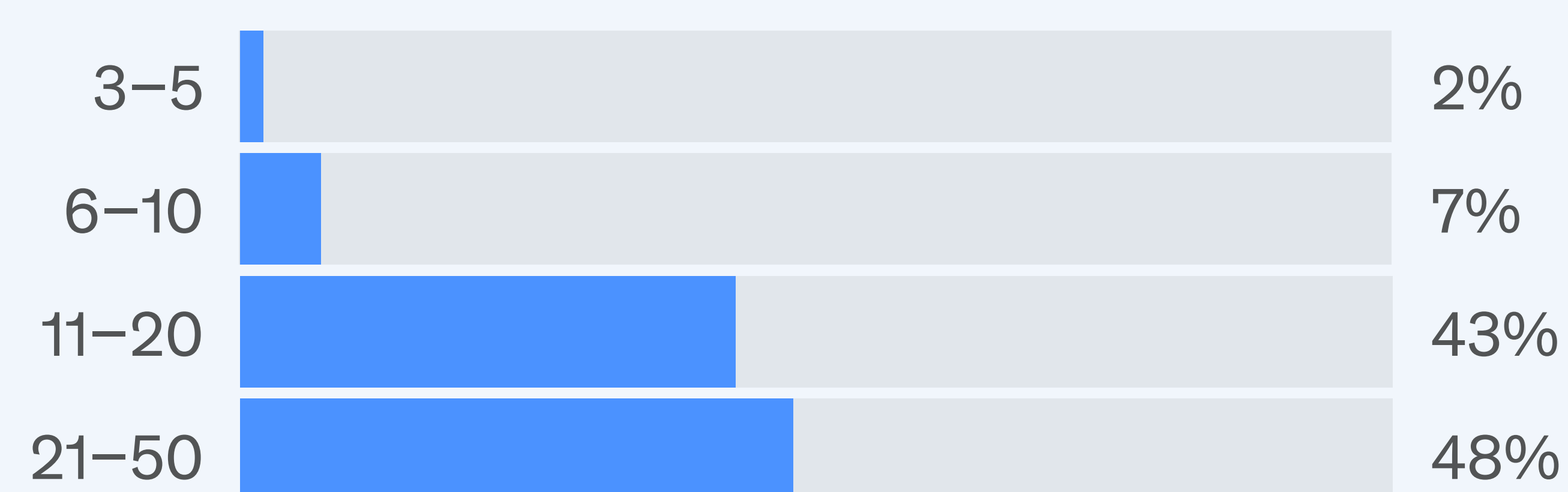
Hospital



Long-Term Care



Primary Care



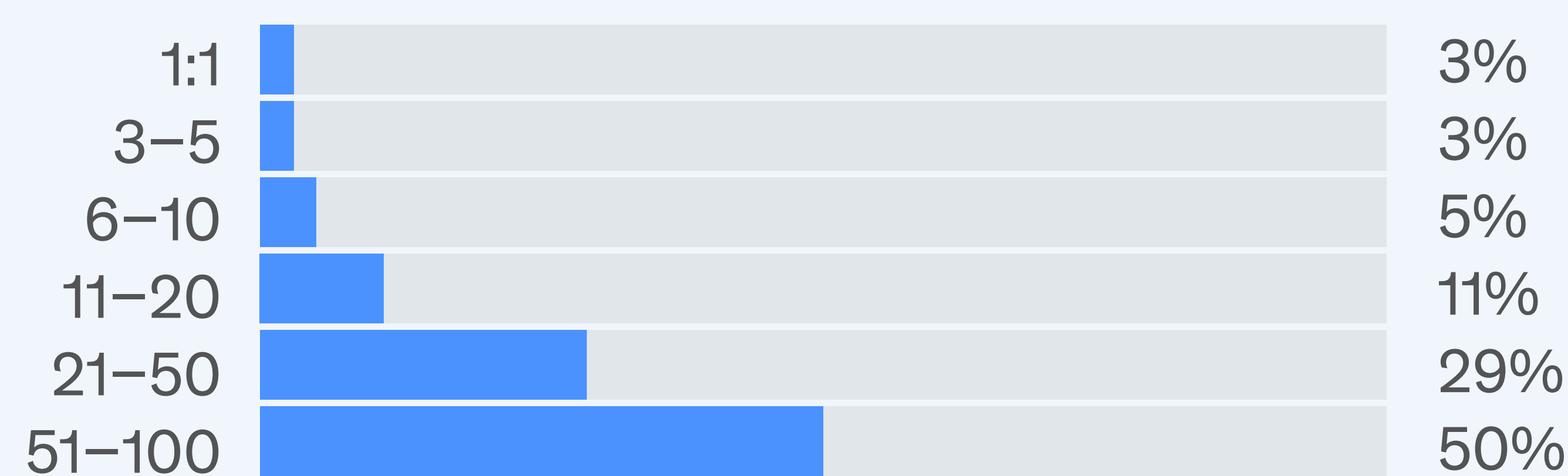
Community Care



Home Care



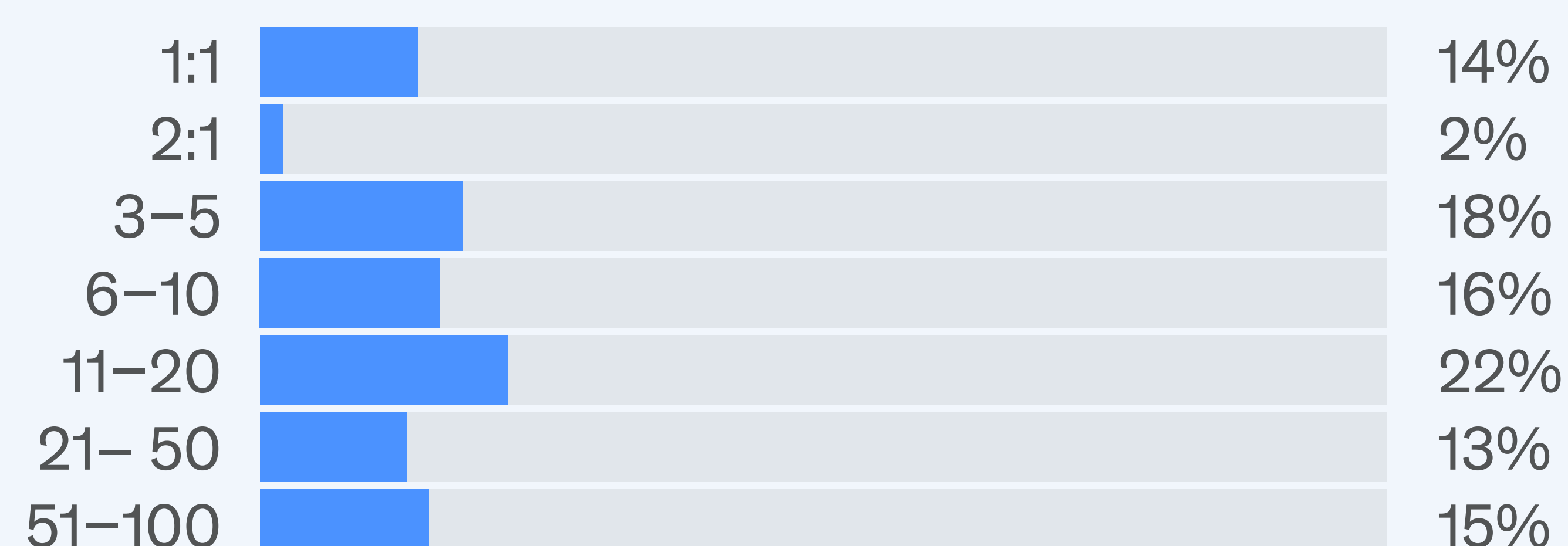
Retirement Home



School



Other



Mental health and nurse well-being

Despite continued calls for increased support, this year's survey results indicate a disconcerting decline in nurses' mental health and well-being overall, compared to previous years. In fact, a vast majority of nurses are carrying multiple struggles that must be addressed with haste.

Almost all RPNs surveyed (98 per cent) report that their work took a toll on their personal well-being. This figure has increased from 89 per cent in 2025. What's more, 61 per cent say theirs and their colleagues' self-care and mental health worsened compared to a year ago. Nearly half (48 per cent) of respondents report that there was an increase in sick time among nurses at their workplace, a slight decrease from 2025. Several nurses also report transitioning away from direct patient care roles as a result of the pressures of their work environment.

Mental health and managerial support

In 2026, nearly a third (29 per cent) of nurses say that the availability of mental health support in the workplace has worsened from the previous year. Sixty-two per cent reported it stayed the same in 2025, compared to 60 per cent in 2024. Notably, 43 per cent of RPNs say that they still are in immediate need of more mental health support relative to workplace stress. This figure has significantly increased from 28 per cent in 2025.

At the same time, 47 per cent of respondents say their managerial support has worsened when compared to last year (this figure was 42 per cent in 2025).

These findings suggest that while some indicators have remained stable, many nurses continue to require stronger and more responsive mental health and managerial support to help address ongoing workplace stress. It is important to recognize again that when advocacy bodies, government policymakers, healthcare leaders and associations collectively come together to make changes, positive advancements are possible.

In their own words

“I need additional mental health access.”

“I need more hands-on support from managers. They need to be present.”

“It is well known that nursing is one of the most rewarding careers; but also one with the most burnout.”

“I need more debriefing and access to mental health support.”

Moral distress

Moral distress, defined as knowing the ethically appropriate decision to make but being unable to act on it in your environment, is a phenomenon felt by the majority of practical nurses in Ontario. There continues to be an urgent need for systemic change to address this critical challenge that has a major impact on the province's nurses.

Consider the data:

In 2026, over half of RPNs surveyed (54 per cent) report that they experienced moral distress due to their job in the last year. While there has been modest improvement compared to the previous year (59 per cent), the incidence of moral distress remains concerningly high.

More than eight in 10 nurses (83 per cent) say they've found themselves in situations where they knew their patient required more care, but they were unable to provide that care – a slight increase from 81 per cent in 2025. Among respondents who experienced moral distress, other top contributing factors cited are: witnessing the impact of staffing on patients, residents, or clients (77 per cent); not having the resources to provide proper quality care (63 per cent); feeling guilty during time Off knowing their unit is understaffed (48 per cent); and being unable to balance workloads and overtime with family demands (48 per cent). It is important to note that some of these indicators have worsened, compared to 2025, a reflection of increased strain on the nursing workforce.

The impact of moral distress extends beyond day-to-day practice and is also shaping decisions about whether nurses remain in the profession. In 2026, moral distress was a contributing factor cited by 54 per cent of the RPNs who intend to leave the profession. This figure has increased from 42 per cent in 2025.

Taken together, these statistics show that moral distress remains a persistent and deeply consequential issue for RPNs, with clear implications for nurse well-being, retention, and the quality of patient care across Ontario. These findings underscore the urgent need for attention and action from government, policymakers, and healthcare leaders to safeguard the standard of patient care Ontarians rightly expect from the healthcare system.

In their own words

“I am witnessing the declining quality of care for my clients.”

“I have experienced moral distress related to ongoing challenges in advocating for patient and staff safety despite repeated efforts.”

“I feel so stressed knowing I have to walk back into work. Knowing that management is looking for more and [with] more issues in the work I do every day.”

Workplace conditions

Workplace conditions continue to place considerable strain on nurses across Ontario, with many reporting high-pressure environments with less flexibility and ongoing concerns about safety at work. These realities are affecting nurses' well-being and contributing to broader challenges related to morale, retention, and patient care.

In 2026, 76 per cent 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 per cent of nurses reporting the same in 2025.

Several factors contribute to such stressful working environments, as outlined below.

Workplace violence

While there has been modest improvement year-over-year, workplace violence continues to be pervasive among Ontario nursing workplaces. It remains a critical issue and a key area of concern for the profession. In any other work setting, workplace violence is not tolerated, and it must not be accepted as part of Ontario's frontline care.

In 2026, nearly half (47 per cent) of Registered Practical Nurses 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 per cent in 2025. Additionally, the same proportion (47 per cent) report personally experiencing workplace violence in the past year.

In their own words

“Nurses suffer from much more abuse from patients and their families than I was expecting.”

“Nurses have a high rate of abuse and violence daily.”



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

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

Understandably, the presence of workplace violence is a consideration for nurses when assessing their careers, with 32 per cent of those who say they intend to leave the profession citing workplace violence as a contributing factor. While this statistic is down from 44 per cent in 2025, there remains an urgent need to identify and implement immediate solutions to protect nurses and influence retention. These findings reinforce that safer workplace conditions are essential not only for nurse well-being, but also for sustaining a stable workforce and protecting quality care.

Challenging workplace dynamics and waning support from leadership

Again this year, more than half (51 per cent) of RPNs surveyed feel that their workplace culture has worsened in the last year. As well, 59 per cent of RPNs still report feeling unsupported in their roles – a figure that has decreased from 78 per cent in 2025.

While there have been notable improvements, this remains an area of significant concern and responses indicate the need for continued and coordinated focus.

Additionally, 63 per cent of nurses feel that their employer did not do enough to ensure adequate staffing levels. This underscores the ongoing pressures affecting nurses' well-being in the province as well as the gap in colleague and leadership support required to confront these challenges.

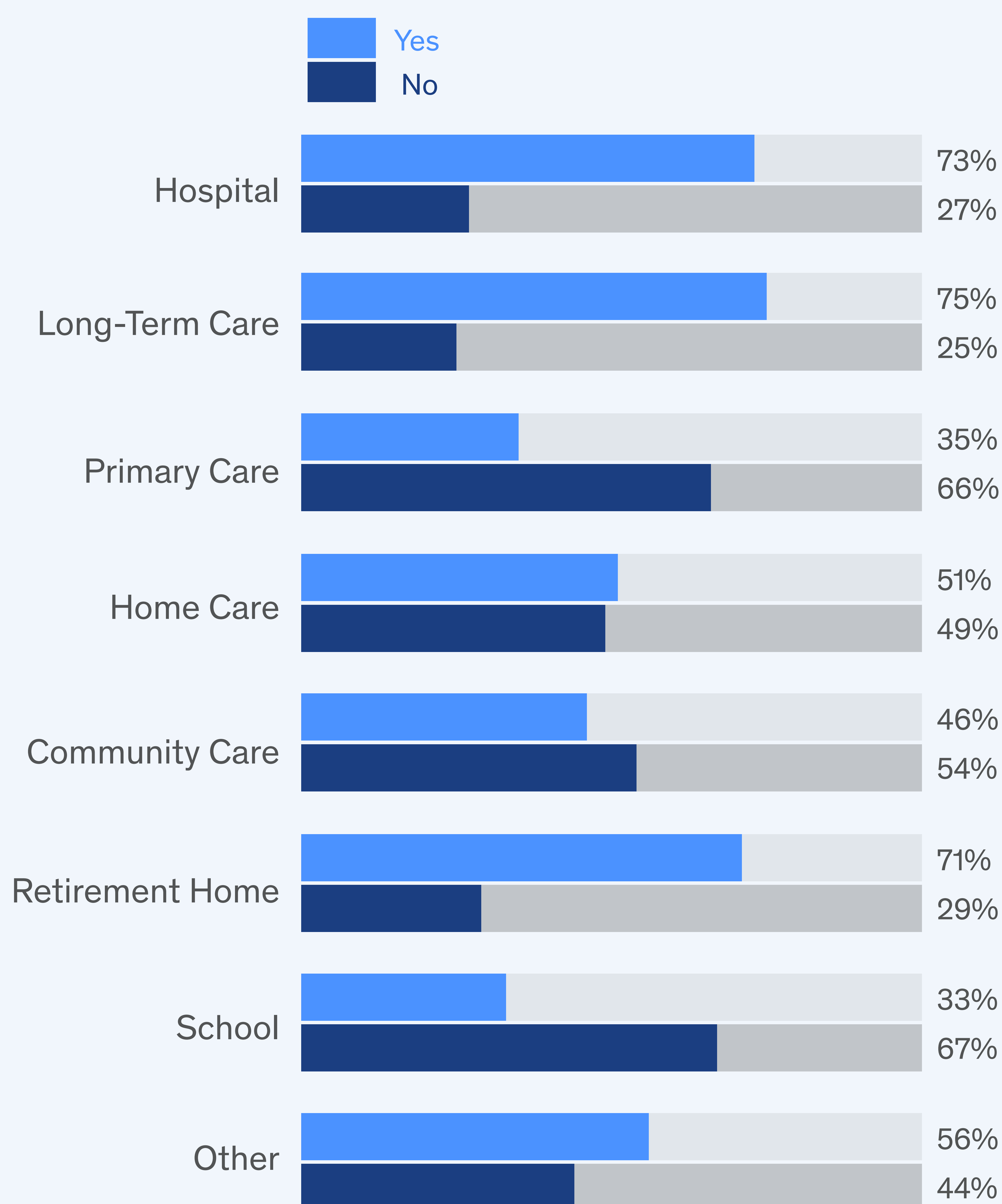
Limited downtime due to heavier workloads

Seventy-two per cent 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 per cent) describing their workload as somewhat manageable, and nearly one quarter (24 per cent) finding it difficult to manage.

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

The sector breakdown of where nurses are being asked to take on additional shifts or work overtime to cover staffing shortages is as follows:

Asked to Cover Shifts / Work Overtime



Among those taking on additional shifts or working overtime, nearly half (48 per cent) report being asked to take on one to three additional shifts or overtime hours per week. This figure has seen a modest improvement since 2025, when 49 per cent of RPNs reported being asked to take on the same number of additional shifts per week.

Additionally, one in five nurses (21 per cent) surveyed report that they do not feel able to decline shifts without facing consequences from their employer. This suggests many nurses have little to no downtime, despite the need for adequate rest and recovery to maintain high-quality patient care.

IMPLICATIONS

Quality of patient care in 2026

This year's survey data suggest that the quality of patient care in Ontario continues to suffer. Nearly half (48 per cent) of RPNs surveyed say that the quality of patient care worsened over the past year, while 45 per cent say they saw no improvement. The findings reinforce that the pressures experienced by nurses are not contained to the workforce alone; they are also being felt at the point of care, with direct consequences for patients, residents, and clients across the system.

As noted previously in this report, a majority (77 per cent) of nurses report that staffing issues have negatively impacted patient care, underscoring the ongoing strain on the system. While these figures have improved slightly, compared to 88 per cent in 2025, and 91 per cent 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 were patients enduring overall longer wait times (74 per cent), less consistency in the schedules of patients, residents, or clients (65 per cent), longer waits to be assessed (58 per cent), delays in assessment resulting in decline in patient, residents, or client health (53 per cent), more difficulty for patients to access necessary care, such as surgeries and diagnostic tests (49 per cent), and patients waiting in hallways (38 per cent).

In their own words

“When staff are short on a medical unit, this directly impacts patient care. We have larger patient assignments, which means every patient we add on is taking time away from our other patients. Now we are skipping things to fit all the basic needs in.”

“The residents do not have consistent nurses taking care of them, resulting in responsive behaviours.”

“Nurse-to-patient ratios are too unbalanced. Patients are not being properly assessed, followed through and followed up on because [the] ability to do that is non-existent.”

Experience and support for complex cases

In 2026, 44 per cent 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 the time and resources to provide adequate care (51 per cent), a majority (73 per cent) cite being asked to care for more patients, residents, or clients with more complex health conditions.

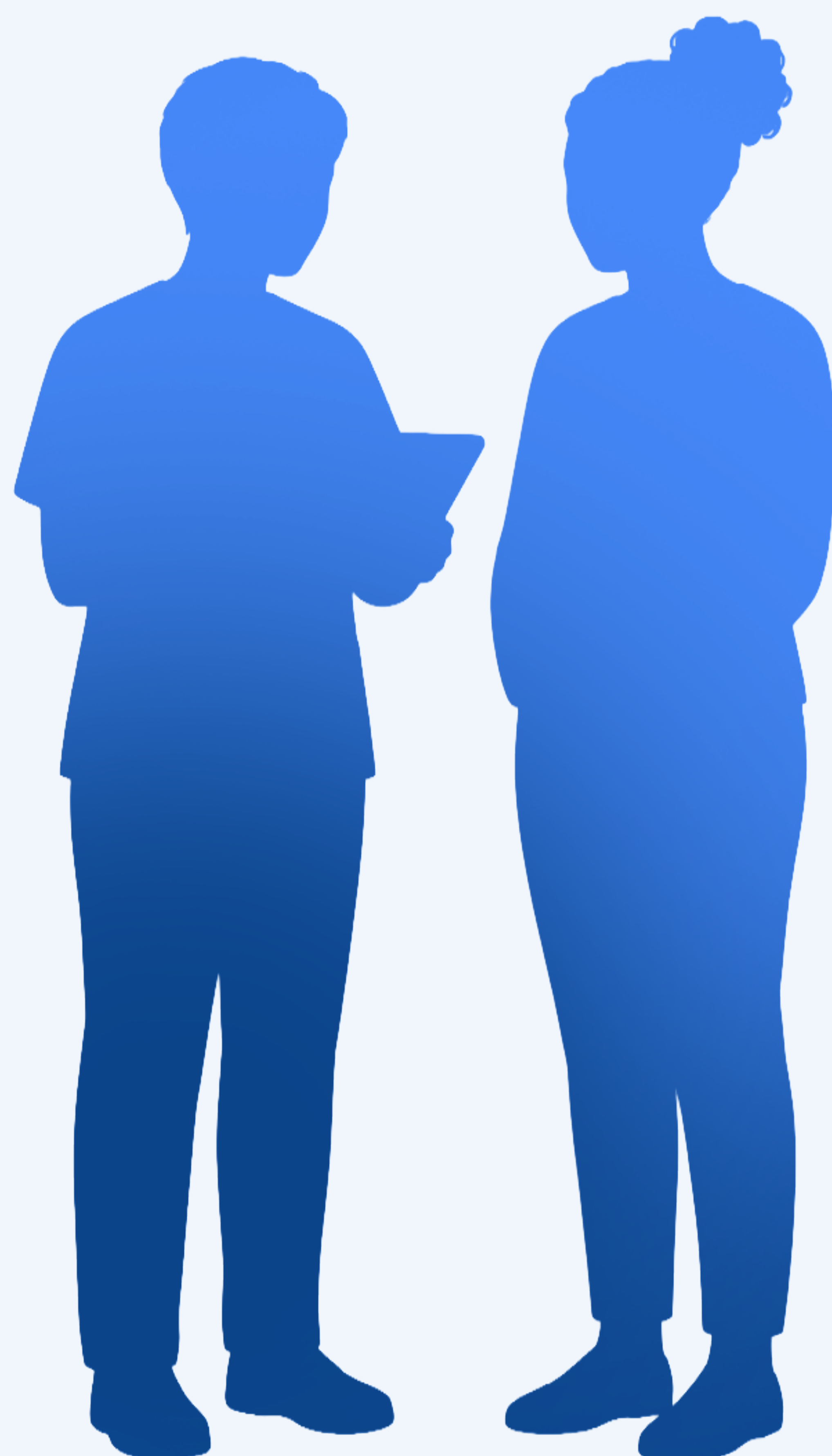
However, there has been some improvement in the availability of experienced nurses, with just 38 per cent of respondents asked about the impact of new graduates on their workplace citing a lack of experienced nurses for complex cases.

This figure is down from 59 per cent last year.

In their own words

“There is not enough time to assess patient needs thoroughly due to high patient-to-nurse ratios.”

“I am unable to connect and foster professional relationships with patients due to workload demands. I am unable to perform tasks in a timely manner.”



IMPACT ON NURSING RETENTION

Loss of valuable nursing expertise

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

Among those who intend to leave the profession, nearly half (46 per cent) plan to do so within the next year, including 12 per cent who intend to leave within the next one to three months, highlighting the urgency of retention challenges. Thirty-two per cent plan to leave within one to two years, and 22 per cent plan to leave more than two years from now.

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



This highlights how important wages and fair compensation are to preventing nurses from leaving. Among nurses planning to leave the profession altogether, 78 per cent plan to remain for two years or less, providing a short window to improve conditions to potentially change their minds. With over half of nurses (57 per cent) intending to remain in the profession, there is a critical opportunity to improve conditions and retain the existing workforce.

Leaving the province and country

When asked specifically about remaining in the province, 88 per cent of nurses surveyed indicated they plan to continue practicing nursing in Ontario. However, similar to what was reported in 2025, 12 per cent say they intend to leave the province to practice nursing. What's more, seven per cent plan to leave Ontario for another province and five per cent plan to move outside of Canada.

Among nurses who intend to leave the province, the top contributing factors cited include the opportunity to earn more income (69 per cent), dissatisfaction with Ontario's healthcare system (56 per cent), hiring bonuses offered in other locations (49 per cent), more opportunities in other places (43 per cent), the opportunity to expand their skills in a different sector (30 per cent), relocation of family (27 per cent), and dissatisfaction in current role (27 per cent), reflecting ongoing competitiveness in nursing retention across the country.

The conditions are in place for government, policymakers and healthcare leaders to take meaningful action on wage parity, fair compensation, and retention strategies that will help keep experienced nurses in Ontario's healthcare system.

In their own words

“Other provinces in Canada offer better working conditions, compensation and opportunities for nurses. In Ontario, ongoing staffing shortages, limited retention efforts and barriers to career advancement make it difficult to stay in the profession.”



NURSING CULTURE SHIFTS

Experienced nurse perspectives

Loss of nursing expertise and viewpoints on working with new nurses

In 2026, 51 per cent of practical nurses feel like they don't have enough time and resources to care for their patients, residents, and clients. Of those nurses, 41 per cent feel there is a lack of experienced nurses to mentor newer graduates. Also relevant with respect to this notable shift in culture is that nearly half (44 per cent) of nurses don't feel like their workplace has enough experienced nurses to consult on complex cases, a key statistic when considering the importance of knowledge transfer within workplaces and across the broader healthcare system.

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

New graduate nurse perspectives

Support, guidance, and workplace realities

WeRPN's survey found that 52 per cent of new graduates in 2026 reported working with more patients than they had anticipated, an increase from 35 per cent in 2025.

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

While 44 per cent of new graduates surveyed say it was easy finding employment after graduation, over half (56 per cent) report having difficulty. And, with continued staffing shortages and heavy workloads, new graduates are entering into high-pressure nursing environments, with little room for learning while on the job. Of new graduate nurses surveyed, 44 per cent indicate the experienced nurses on their team were very welcoming and supportive; however, the same number of nurses reveal the experienced nurses on their team were often too busy to support them. These figures have worsened since 2025.

In their own words

“The realities of the role leave new grads overwhelmed and they quit due to unrealistic demands and pressures.”

“There is a lack of appropriate training leading to inconsistent care of patients between nurses.”

“I love having student nurses. With improved staffing, I have time to spend teaching them again.”

NURSING TALENT RETENTION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Retention considerations

With nearly half of nurses surveyed (43 per cent) intending to or considering leaving the profession, Ontario must act now to better support nurses and create opportunities for career growth and retention. These findings reinforce that retention is not only about keeping nurses in the system, but also about ensuring they see a future for themselves within the profession.

Among the cohort of nurses planning to leave the profession, the most commonly cited factors that could encourage them to stay include: better wages (82 per cent), better benefits (64 per cent), improved workload (62 per cent), better nurse-to-patient ratios (56 per cent), improved workplace support (54 per cent), more flexibility (40 per cent), and better practices to protect nurses from workplace violence (40 per cent).

The majority (76 per cent) of nurses surveyed cite better wages as a key factor to improving overall job satisfaction. This further suggests that fair and competitive compensation remains central not only to retention, but also to how nurses experience and value their work.

The majority (62 per cent) of RPNs who reported that they are planning on or considering leaving the profession identified that they intend to leave healthcare altogether. Eighteen per cent plan to stay as RPNs in healthcare, but move to a more administrative role or non-direct practice role, while 18 per cent would consider going back to school for a different role in healthcare. This underscores the importance of taking action not only to retain nurses in their current roles, but also to create conditions that make healthcare a sustainable long-term career choice.



Nursing education and career growth opportunities

Educational and professional development opportunities continue to play an important role in supporting retention and workforce sustainability. This year's survey found that while many RPNs are interested in additional opportunities, some face barriers that limit access to existing programs and ongoing professional development.

Over half (56 per cent) of nurses surveyed have heard of the Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing (BEGIN) program but are not enrolled or have not applied. Key barriers to this include: difficulty completing schooling while working (33 per cent); lack of financial resources to pay upfront for tuition before being reimbursed (33 per cent); not wanting to bridge to become an RN (31 per cent); and not meeting eligibility criteria (16 per cent).

Of the RPNs who received BEGIN funding, a majority completed their Return of Service (RoS) in Long-Term Care (47 per cent), followed by Hospital (32 per cent), Home Care (18 per cent), and Primary Care (3 per cent).

More than one third of respondents (36 per cent) are aware of the provincially funded Nursing Education Initiative (NEI) program but say that they have not applied or enrolled. Nineteen per cent report that they are aware of the NEI program and have submitted a recent application or used the program in the past.



Wage dissatisfaction

Wages remain a key factor in addressing nurse retention and professional opportunities. Compensation is not only a matter of fairness, but also a reflection of how the skills, expertise, responsibilities, and contributions of RPNs are valued across the healthcare system. When nurses feel their compensation does not align with the demands of their role, it can influence morale, career decisions, and long-term commitment to the profession.

About four in five nurses surveyed (81 per cent) feel that they are unfairly compensated for their role as an RPN. This points to a widespread perception that current compensation does not adequately reflect the realities of frontline nursing work.

Among nurses considering leaving the profession, wages remain one of the top contributing factors in that decision (74 per cent), second only to workload (82 per cent). This underscores that compensation and workload management are key retention levers.

While 65 per cent of respondents have received a wage increase in their current role within the past two years, surprisingly, 35 per cent of nurses have not benefited the same way, highlighting ongoing concerns around wage stagnation. This uneven experience may further contribute to dissatisfaction across the workforce and reinforces the need for more consistent and equitable compensation practices.

In their own words

“Sick time and burnout is high with minimal pay. Wage is a HUGE issue.”

“Our wages are so low that we can’t attract new staff or keep casual staff.”

“RPN respect in the workplace [is important]. RPNs are educated and trained, and yet, we are paid less.”



Pride in nursing: connecting with shared purpose

Pride in the profession remains an important indicator of how nurses are experiencing their work and how connected they feel to the purpose that brought them into nursing. While pride can be shaped by workplace pressures, it is also closely tied to whether nurses feel supported, valued, and able to provide the quality of care they believe patients deserve.

Nearly half of all RPNs surveyed (48 per cent) report that their pride in the nursing profession worsened in the last year. A year ago, this figure was 51 per cent and in 2024, 60 per cent, indicating marginal improvement in the reignition of pride in the profession, year-over-year. Yet, there is still much to be done to keep nurses connected with their shared purpose of caring for others.

Over nine in 10 (91 per cent) RPNs say that making a difference in the lives of their patients, residents, or clients brought joy to them at their workplace.



A heartening indication is that over nine in 10 (91 per cent) RPNs say that making a difference in the lives of their patients, residents, or clients brought joy to them at their workplace. This suggests that even amid sustained system pressures, nurses continue to draw meaning from the human impact of their work.

Among nurses planning to remain in the profession, the top contributing factors include: making a difference in someone's life (73 per cent); taking care of patients, residents or clients brings joy to their life (72 per cent); and the nature of the work (50 per cent). This further highlights the intrinsic motivators that remain a key driver of retention.

While nursing morale is currently low, it is critical that nurses are able to practice to the fullest extent of their role and provide optimal care to patients. Meaningful action by policymakers and healthcare leadership will be essential to rebuilding pride in this valued profession.

In their own words

“It brings me joy in the workplace to see how the care we provide creates and brings positive change in people's lives, and improves it for the better.”

“Nurses are forming more professional relationships and supporting each other.”

EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in nursing

With the rise of AI and its growing application across the healthcare sector and in various professional settings, it is not surprising that some interest and early, but limited, adoption is beginning to emerge in nursing. New to the report this year is a review of AI as an emerging technology and its role in the profession, including current awareness, early adoption, and overall sentiment among nurses.

These findings offer an early snapshot of how RPNs are encountering AI in practice and where uncertainty remains.

According to the WeRPN survey, just under half (45 per cent) of RPNs indicate using AI tools in their work. Contrary to that, more than half (55 per cent) never personally use AI tools in the workplace.

Twenty-eight per cent of nurses indicate that colleagues are using AI tools in their practice. At the same time, the majority (55 per cent) of RPNs surveyed are unsure if their organization has policies or guidelines in place regarding the use of AI tools in clinical practice. Less than a quarter (22 per cent) affirm their organization does have such guidance in place. Taken together, these findings point to a landscape in which awareness and use may be emerging faster than organizational clarity or formal guidance.

Understandably, scrutiny is widespread, with over three quarters (78 per cent) of nurses expressing some level of concern about the use of AI in nursing practice. Many RPNs (54 per cent) are uncertain about its overall impact on nursing, while nearly a third (30 per cent) believe AI will have a negative effect. Just 16 per cent 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.

As AI continues to evolve, these findings underscore the importance of clear guidance and thoughtful implementation to ensure nurses are supported in understanding its role in practice.



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.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this report show that while modest improvements are beginning to emerge in some areas of the nursing experience, significant pressures continue to define the realities facing Ontario's Registered Practical Nurses. Persistent workload demands, staffing shortages, worsening mental health impacts, workplace safety concerns, and ongoing effects on patient care make clear that progress remains uneven and fragile. While some improvements are emerging, they should not be taken lightly as persistent structural pressures continue to define the nursing environment. Together, these factors reflect a system that remains under sustained strain.

These results point to a profession at a critical juncture. Early gains are encouraging, but they must not be mistaken for recovery or resolution. Too many nurses continue to work under conditions that are unsustainable for their well-being and increasingly difficult for the delivery of safe, high-quality care. Without sustained action, the long-term stability of Ontario's nursing workforce remains at risk, along with the quality of care patients and families depend on. These findings reinforce that workforce instability is not isolated, but a systemic challenge with direct implications for patient care delivery and the health of the overall system.

WeRPN believes meaningful progress is possible, but it will require more than incremental change. It will demand continued investment, coordinated action, and a stronger commitment from government, policymakers, and healthcare leaders to address the persistent challenges nurses continue to face. Achieving this will require sustained, system-level action rather than incremental or short-term solutions. This includes addressing workload pressures, improving access to mental health and workplace supports, and strengthening the retention of experienced nurses. Protecting and improving retention is critical to preventing further erosion of frontline capacity and ensuring continuity of care.

Strengthening frontline staffing levels, enhancing workplace supports, fostering safer and healthier practice environments, and retaining experienced nurses must remain urgent priorities. These are deeply interconnected and essential to stabilizing the nursing workforce.

The time to act is now: Ontario must build on early progress with sustained system-wide action to stabilize the nursing workforce and safeguard the quality of care Ontarians expect and deserve for years to come. With continued commitment and aligned action, Ontario has an opportunity to improve the nursing experience and meaningfully strengthen the nursing workforce and the future of healthcare in the province.