

SIPTU Nursing
Home Workers
Survey

**CARE AT
THE BREAKING
POINT**

May 2026

**Organising
for Fairness
at Work and
Justice in
Society**

Forward

The Department of Health Strategic Workforce Advisory Group of Home Carers and Nursing Home Health Care Assistants report was published in September 2022. Within the report’s recommendations, it committed to investigate and report on an appropriate mechanism to reach agreement in the private and voluntary sector in respect of pay and pensions for nursing home Health Care Assistants. In 2026, care workers across the private nursing home sector in Ireland still await such a mechanism to negotiate for fair pay and working conditions in their workplaces.

The results of SIPTU’s Nursing Home Workers Survey lays bare the harrowing impact on workers and residents, where poor pay and conditions of employment continue to drive experienced staff away from the sector.

As a Health Care Assistant, I see firsthand that our work is the heartbeat of the nursing home; we don’t just provide clinical support, we provide the companionship, reassurance and dignity that turn a place of care into a true home for residents. Our roles can involve intense physical and emotional labour, yet the true “hard work” often goes unseen.

Our commitment shapes residents’ daily lives and wellbeing. While we are deeply dedicated to those we care for, having a voice in the workplace is essential to sustaining that dedication. Having a collective voice in the workplace is what ensures we are equally dedicated to one another. In an industry where many HCAs in Ireland work without the protection of collective bargaining, having a seat at the table transforms our roles from being silent providers of care into active participants in shaping a fairer, safer workplace and a more sustainable profession. When care workers are empowered to speak up together, the result is not only better working conditions, but a higher standard of care for the residents who rely on us.

We are often the voice of the person being cared for. If we have no voice, the person has no voice.

We hope the results of this survey and the voices of nursing home care workers within it, serve as a reminder to the Government of their previous commitments and that they must act now to prevent a further worsening of the crisis within the sector.

Martha Buckley,
Health Care Assistant and SIPTU Activist

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A Warning from the Frontline

The findings of the SIPTU Nursing Home Workers Survey 2025 serve as an urgent warning to policymakers, stakeholders and the public: The quality of care for our most vulnerable citizens is now directly threatened by a staffing crisis that employers and the Government have failed to address.

This report, based on the views of 760 nursing home staff, primarily Health Care Assistants (HCAs), reveals a direct link between poor working conditions and the erosion of care standards.

The conclusions are clear: it is not possible to maintain high standards of care with a workforce that is burnt-out, underpaid and actively looking to leave.

Key Findings:

Care is Suffering: 54% of all respondents report that staffing shortages are “significantly” affecting the quality of care residents receive. Only 17% of respondents always have “enough time to provide residents with the care they need”.

The Exodus: We are in a retention emergency. 40% of respondents are actively seeking jobs in other sectors entirely. Low pay and stress/burnout were reported as the top two causes.

The Root Cause: There was no shortage of interest in caring; it is a shortage of decent jobs. 89% of respondents struggle to make ends meet, with 74% unable to cope with an unexpected expense, such as replacing a washing machine.

THE IMPACT ON RESIDENTS: “Rushed, Missed and Lonely”

The starkest finding of this research is about the daily reality for residents. For many respondents, the recruitment and retention crisis means there are simply not enough staff to provide the dignity and attention elderly residents deserve.

The responses show that 30% of staff “regularly” have to rush or skip care tasks due to time pressure, while another 56% do so “sometimes”. This means 86% of staff are forced to compromise on care due to understaffing.

VOICES FROM THE FLOOR:

“Residents are left alone for long periods. We don’t have time to sit and talk to them, just task, task, task. It’s heartbreaking.”

“We are short-staffed every day. Residents are not getting the care they deserve. We are rushing them to get washed and dressed. It is not fair on them.”

“Basic care is done, but the ‘extras’ - the chat, the holding a hand, that is gone. We are running from room to room.”

When staff are burnt out and rushing, safety is compromised. 80% of workers identified understaffing as the main cause of their stress. This stress inevitably bleeds into the nursing home environment.

THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION EMERGENCY

Nursing homes are losing experienced staff at an unsustainable rate. Staff turnover for HCAs in private and voluntary services was 54% per year in 2022¹. This survey reflects the findings that nursing homes are becoming a “revolving door” workplace.

73% of current staff would not recommend a career in a nursing home to a friend or family member.

Over a quarter (27%) of respondents could say with certainty that they will still be working in a nursing home in 12 months’ time.

The loss of experienced staff is devastating for residents, particularly those with dementia who rely on familiar faces and consistent routines.

VOICES FROM THE FLOOR:

“New staff come, see the workload and the pay, and leave within a week. We are constantly training new people while trying to do our own work.”

“I love my job, and I love my residents, but I can’t keep going like this. My body is broken, and I am mentally exhausted.”

¹PWC (2023) Challenges for Nursing Homes in the Provision of Older Persons Care

THE DRIVER: POVERTY PAY AND POOR CONDITIONS

Why is the sector struggling to recruit and retain staff? The answer is clear: caring is skilled work, but it is not reflected in pay or conditions, particularly for HCAs working in private nursing homes.

Solely focusing on **HCAs employed in the Private Sector** the survey confirms that financial hardship is the norm, not the exception, for instance:

- 87% stated that low pay is their biggest issue.
- 82% stated they could not cope with an unexpected expense, such as a broken boiler or washing machine.
- Over 62% earn less than €14.49 per hour, significantly below the Living Wage of €15.40 per hour.
- Respondents could only ‘make ends meet’ with ‘great difficulty’ (46%) or ‘with difficulty’ (50%)

HCA’s working in the Public Sector enjoy significantly better terms and conditions employment compared to those working in the Private Sector. A HCA in the HSE commences employment at a starting rate of €17.83 per hour, which increases on a 9-point incremental salary scale up to €22.35, reflective of their experience.

Furthermore, HCAs in the Private Sector often do not have standard conditions of employment as those enjoyed in the public system, such as increased paid sick leave, paid maternity leave and premia pay for unsocial working hours. This is resulting in HCA’s exiting the Private Sector to move into the public sector in search of better conditions of employment.

VOICES FROM THE FLOOR:

“I am working 60 hours a week just to pay my rent. I have no life, just work and sleep.”

“It is insulting that we are trusted with people’s lives but paid less than shelf stackers in a supermarket.”

“No sick pay means if I am sick, I either come in and risk residents or stay home and can’t pay bills. What kind of choice is that?”

DEDICATION VS RECOGNITION

Despite these harsh realities, the survey highlights the profound commitment of nursing home staff. When asked for the best part of their job, 62% of all respondents cited “having a positive impact on the lives of residents”.

Staff are staying for the residents, but the conditions are forcing them to leave because they are stressed out, burned out and on poverty-level pay.

VOICES FROM THE FLOOR:

“We are the residents’ family. We are the ones holding their hands when they die. We just want to be respected for that.”

“I go home crying because I know I didn’t get to spend time with ‘Mary’ or ‘John’ because I was too busy covering for short staff. It feels like we are failing them.”

CONCLUSION AND DEMANDS

The survey responses are clear: **low pay is a patient safety issue.**

We are witnessing the hollowing out of the nursing home workforce. If we want our elderly citizens to live with dignity, we must treat the people who care for them with dignity.

SIPTU calls for:

- 1. Negotiated Pay Scales:** A Joint Labour Committee should be established for HCAs working in private and not for profit nursing homes as recommended by the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group, so that SIPTU and employers can negotiate pay and conditions that reflect the skills and responsibilities of the role, similar to those in the public sector.²
- 2. Safe Staffing Ratios:** Safe staffing ratios for all Health Care Workers to ensure safe and manageable workloads for staff and quality care for residents.
- 3. Professionalisation:** The professionalisation and regulation of the HCA occupation, including minimum qualifications, a protected title, regulation and Continuous Professional Development.

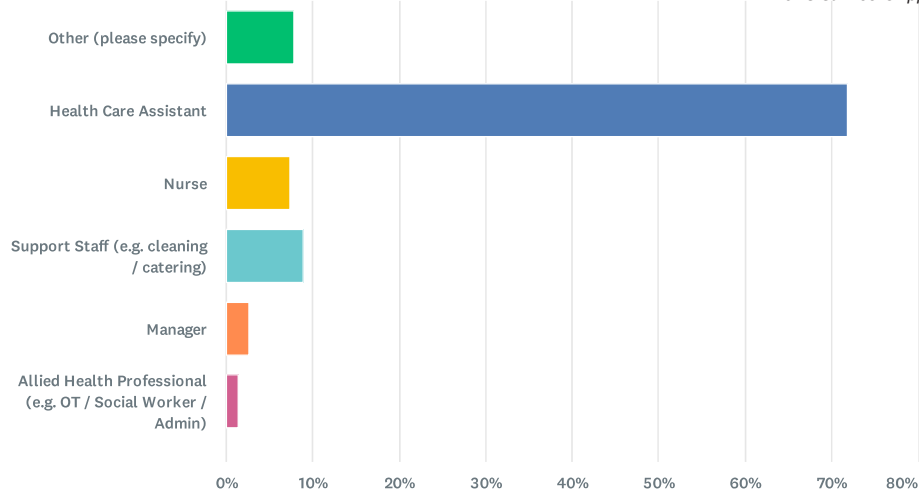
The current model is broken. We cannot continue to rely on the goodwill of underpaid staff to care for the nation's vulnerable. It is time to care for the carers.

²The Strategic Workforce Advisory Group was established in 2022 by the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, and produce the "Report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Health Care Assistants"

The Survey was conducted between September to December 2025, with 760 respondents.

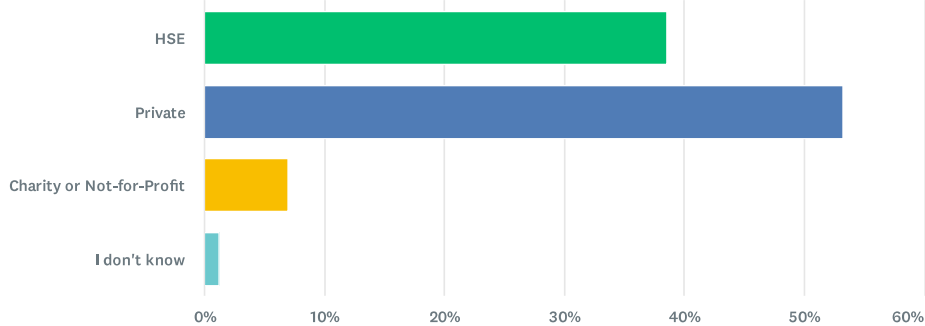
Q1 What is your job role?

Answered: 760 Skipped: 0



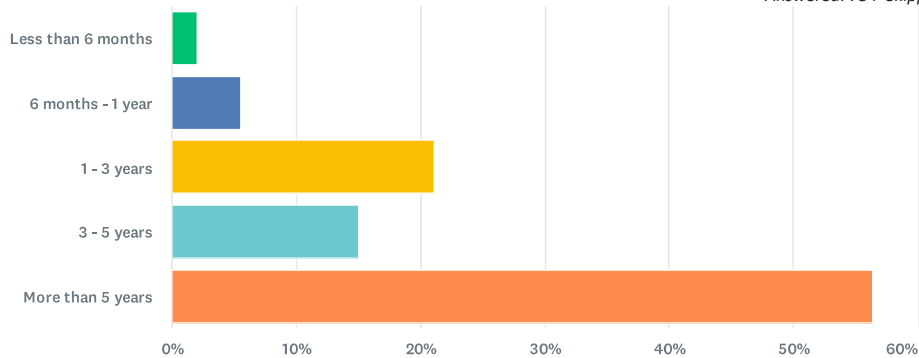
Q2 What type of Nursing Home do you work in?

Answered: 760 Skipped: 0



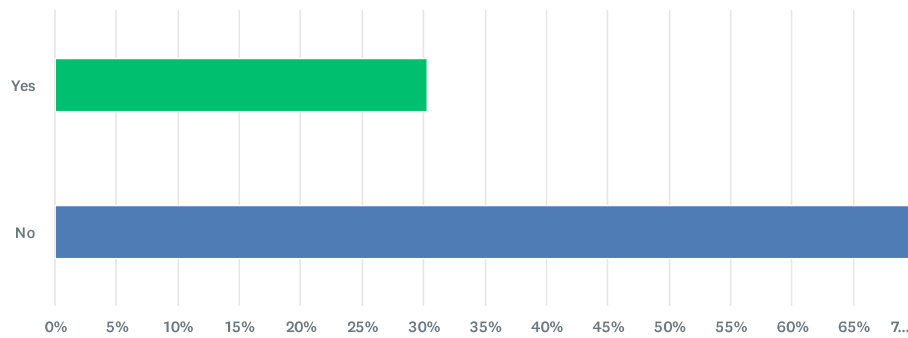
Q4 How long have you worked for your current employer?

Answered: 754 Skipped: 6



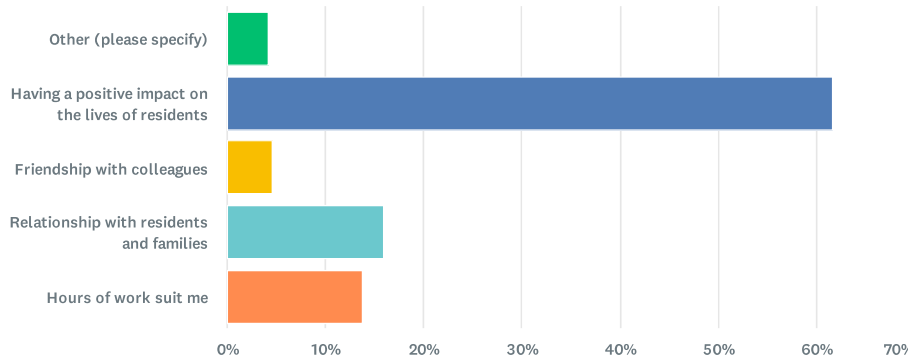
Q7 Are you employed under a General Employment Permit/Work Permit?

Answered: 743 Skipped: 17



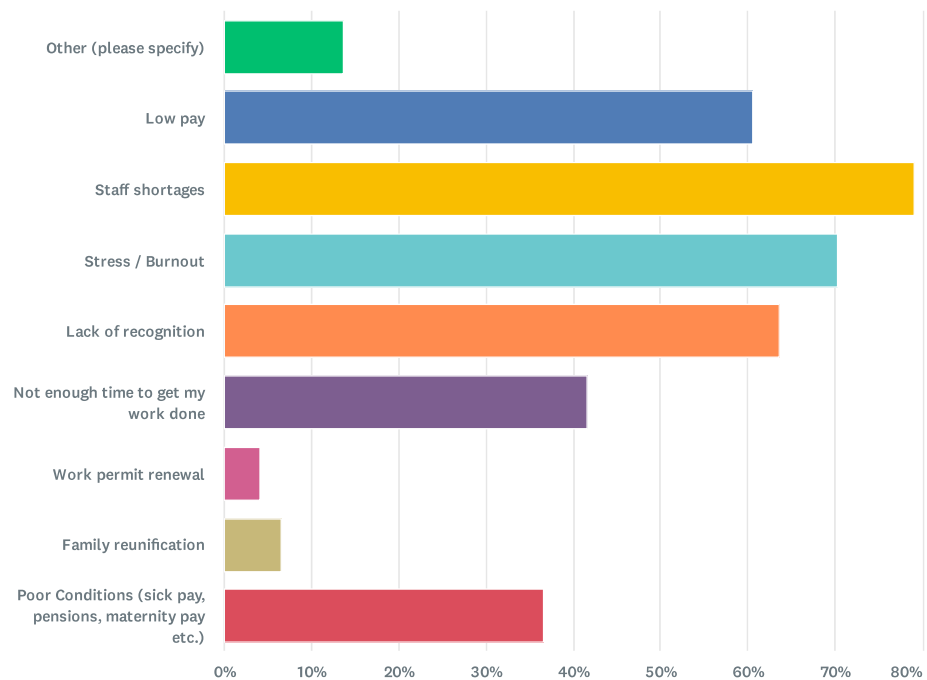
Q8 What is the best thing about working in a Nursing Home?

Answered: 753 Skipped: 7



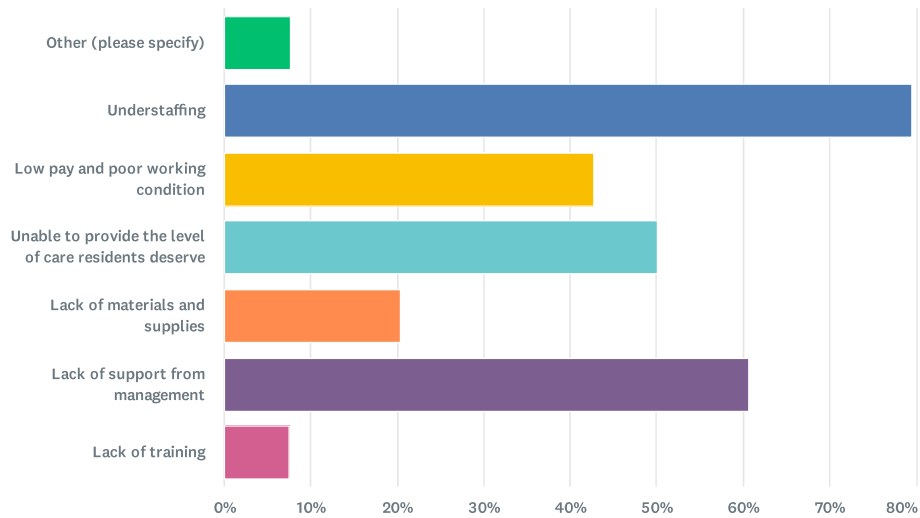
Q9 What are the biggest work issues for you? (please tick all that apply)

Answered: 757 Skipped: 3



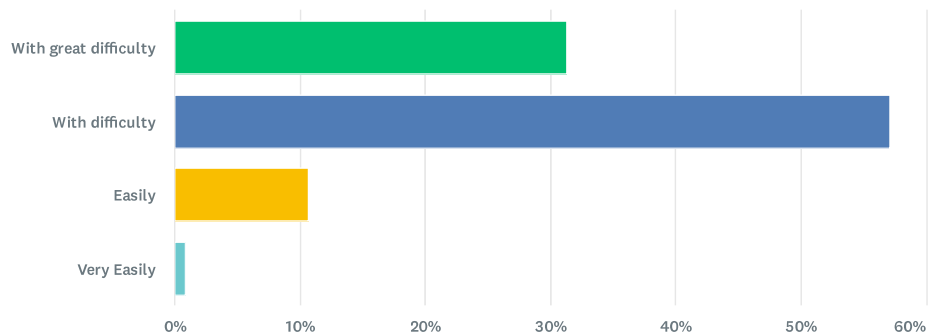
Q10 If you experience stress and burnout at work, what are the main causes? (please tick all that apply)

Answered: 729 Skipped: 31



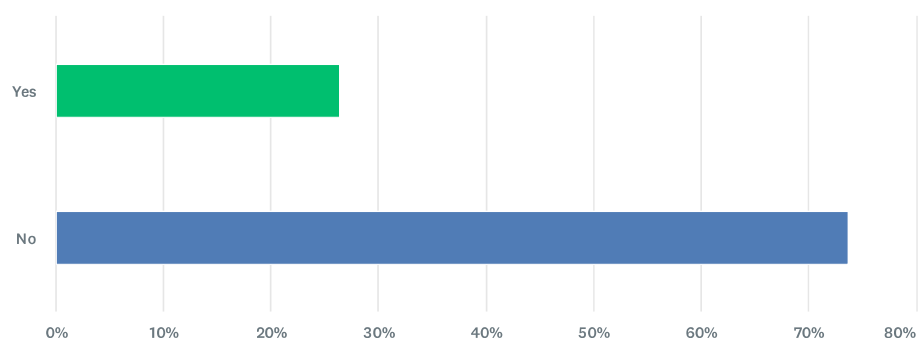
Q12 Are you able to make ends meet with your income?

Answered: 740 Skipped: 20



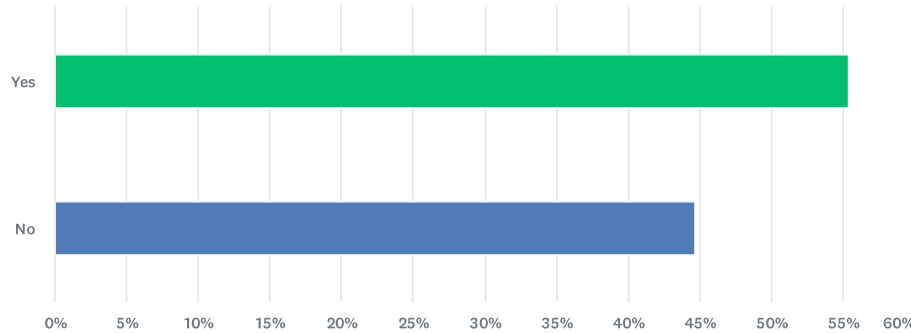
Q13 Are you able to cope with unexpected expenses? (e.g. replacing a washing machine or boiler)

Answered: 748 Skipped: 12



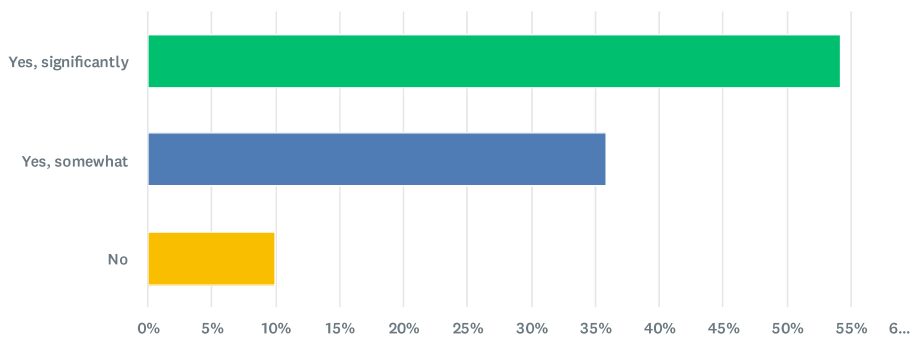
Q14 Do you have enough time to take your breaks?

Answered: 751 Skipped: 9



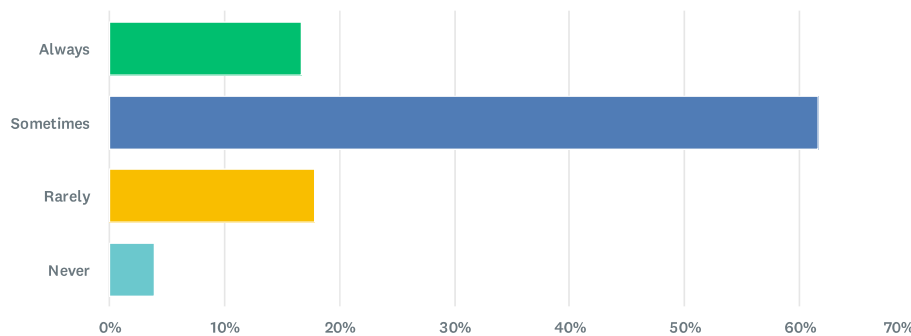
Q15 Have staffing shortages affected the quality of care for resident?

Answered: 755 Skipped: 5



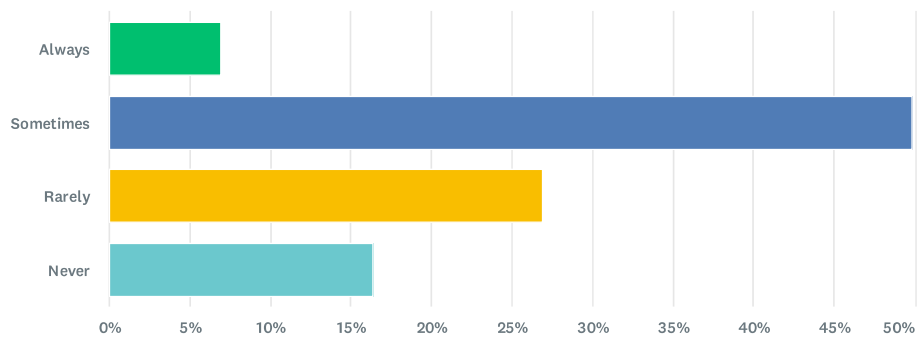
Q16 Do you have enough time to provide residents with the care they need?

Answered: 749 Skipped: 11



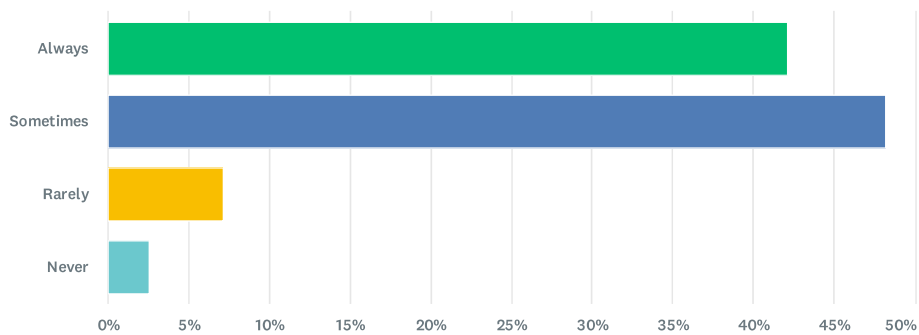
Q17 Do you believe your nursing home is adequately staffed?

Answered: 752 Skipped: 8



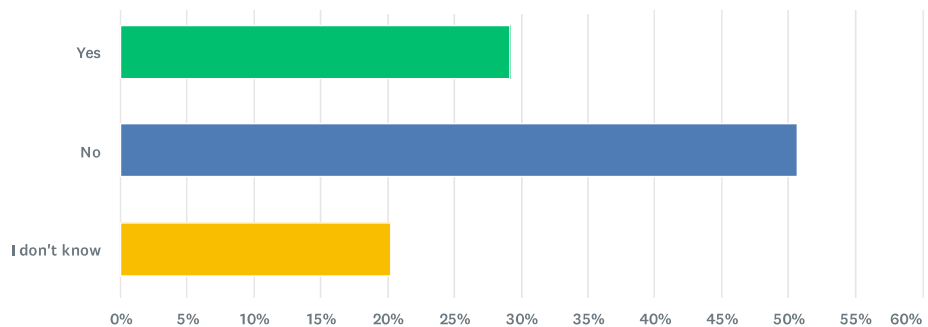
Q18 Do you have all the necessary equipment or supplies to carry out your work?

Answered: 753 Skipped: 7



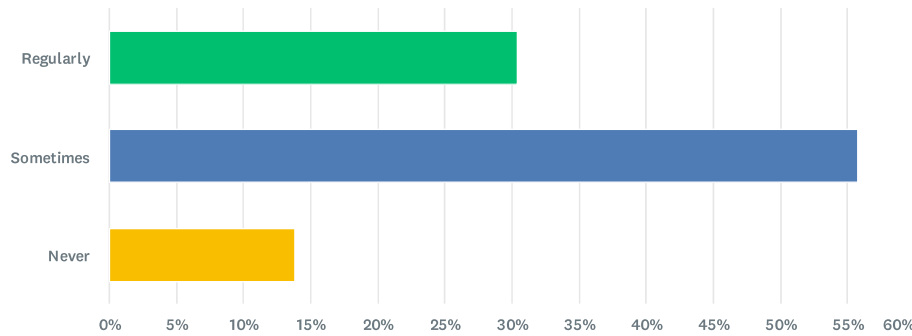
Q19 Do you feel management prioritises resident wellbeing over cost-saving?

Answered: 752 Skipped: 8



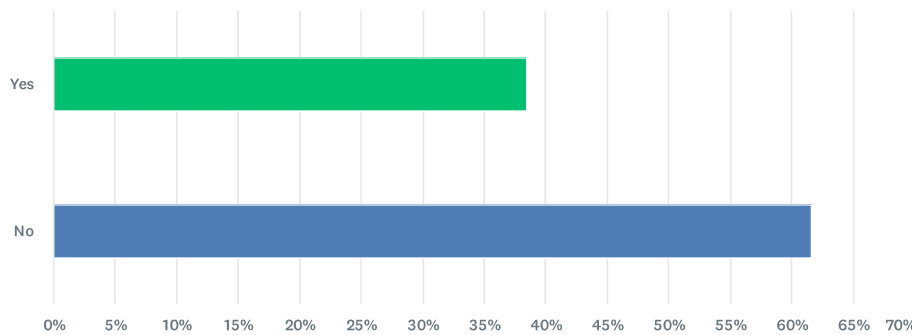
Q20 Have you ever had to rush or skip care tasks due to time pressure or short staffing?

Answered: 746 Skipped: 14



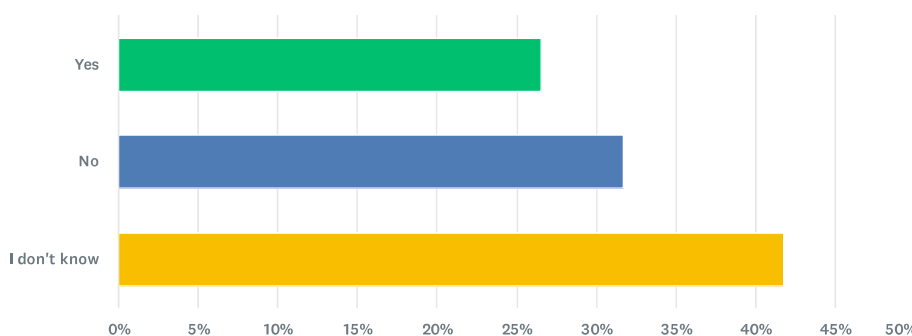
Q21 Can you speak up about problems at work without worrying that it will get you into trouble?

Answered: 750 Skipped: 10



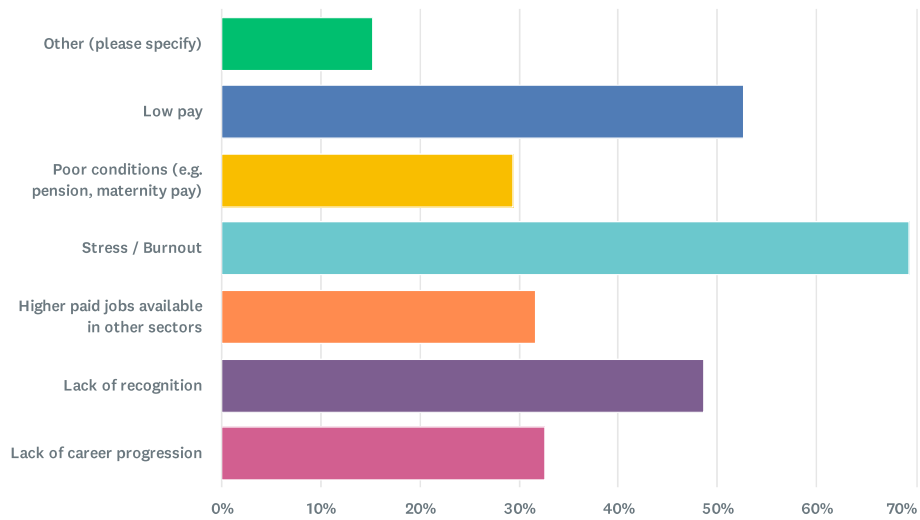
Q23 If things stay the same, I will still be working in a Nursing Home in 12 months time

Answered: 754 Skipped: 6



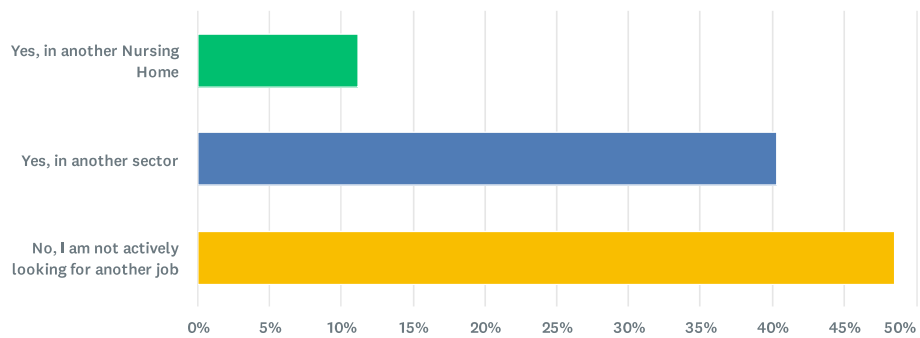
Q24 If you intend to leave the sector, what would be the main reason?

Answered: 727 Skipped: 33



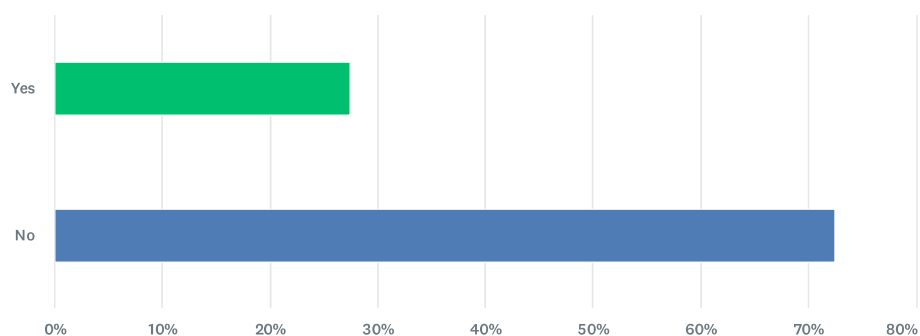
Q25 Are you actively looking for another job?

Answered: 750 Skipped: 10



Q26 Would you recommend a career in a Nursing Home to a friend or family member?

Answered: 753 Skipped: 7



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