

# NHS Staff Survey results 2021

## Introduction

Today, NHS England and NHS Improvement published the annual [NHS staff survey results](#). The survey ran from September to December 2021, amid winter demand and an upswing in COVID-19 cases due to the new Omicron variant. The survey was aligned to the overarching categories of the [NHS People Promise](#) for the first time, in order to provide a metric for progress against each area. 648,584 staff responded (8.96% up from 2020), with responses from 280 NHS organisations, including all 217 trusts. This briefing gives a summary of the national level findings, and NHS Providers' view.

## Key findings

- Only 27.2% of staff think there are enough staff in their organisation for them to do their job properly. This is an 11.2% drop from 2020, and a 16.4% drop for ambulance trusts specifically.
- All metrics relating to recognition were down in comparison to last year. Only 32.7% of staff were satisfied with their pay (4% decrease, lowest for four years). This is particularly concerning given that the survey was conducted before the latest rise in the cost of living. A meaningful, fully funded uplift to pay is therefore of particular importance this year.
- 31.1% of staff reported often thinking about leaving their organisation, a four-year high and an increase of over 4% since 2020. Similarly, 59.4% of staff would recommend their organisation as a place to work, a 7% reduction compared to 2020 and the lowest for five years.
- Results relating to immediate line managers remain positive overall, with 66.8% of respondents saying that their manager works with them to understand problems, 69.3% feeling that their manager is interested in listening to the challenges they face, and 70.6% feeling that their manager values their work.
- Nearly one in five (17%) ethnic minority staff in the NHS personally experienced discrimination from a manager or colleague in the past 12 months, the highest level since recording began. Only 44.4% of ethnic minority staff feel their organisations act fairly with regard to career progression / promotion (44% in 2020), compared to 58.7% of white staff.
- Only 34.7% of disabled staff feel their work is valued within their organisation (down from 39.2% last year). While discrimination experienced on the basis of disability is relatively low (9%), it has increased to its highest level since recording of this metric began in 2018.

- 67.8% of staff are happy with the standard of care provided by their organisation, down by more than 6% compared to 74.2% in 2020. Similarly, 72% agree that patient concerns are acted on, down by 7% from 2020.
- 81.4% of staff enjoy working with their team colleagues and 71.3% of staff feel their team colleagues understand each other's roles.
- 54.5% of staff have worked despite not feeling well enough at some point in the past three months. Following a significant 10.2% decline in this metric between 2019 and 2020, it has now increased by 8.1%.
- 74.9% of staff feel secure in raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice (a 2% increase from 2020 and the highest for five years), and 62% of staff felt able to speak up about anything that concerns them (a 3% drop from 2020).

## Burnout, health, and wellbeing

### Workload and staffing pressures

Given the levels of burnout which we have seen since the pandemic began, and the huge ask of staff in tackling care backlogs and rising service demand in the face of severe workforce shortages, it is worrying but unsurprising that morale and wellbeing are low, despite 57% of staff reporting that their organisation takes positive action on health and wellbeing. The survey also found that:

- 57.2% of staff reported working additional unpaid hours, a 1.9% increase from 2020, while 36.8% reported working additional paid hours, a 2.8% increase from 2020.
- Only 27.2% of staff think there are enough staff in their organisation for them to do their job properly. This is an 11.2% drop from 2020, and a 16.4% drop for ambulance trusts specifically.
- 43.2% feel able to meet the conflicting demands on their time, a 4% decrease from 2020 and the lowest for five years.
- Only 23.5% of staff say they never or rarely have unrealistic time pressures (25.2% in 2020).

### Physical and mental wellbeing

16.6% of staff experienced at least one incident of physical violence in the last 12 months: the majority of these incidents (14.3%) from patients, relatives of patients, or the public (the lowest reported rate for five years); with 0.7% from managers; and 1.6% from other colleagues. The rate of reported violent incidents from managers and other colleagues has remained stable from 2020 (increasing by 0.1% and 0.2%, respectively). 71.4% of those who experienced violence said that they or a colleague reported the incident.

Incidents of violence have a higher reporting rate than incidents of harassment, bullying or abuse (just 48.7% of staff experiencing this treatment reported such incidents). This is particularly concerning given the prevalence of harassment, bullying and abuse, with 57.8% of staff experiencing this at least once in the previous 12 months: 27.5% of staff experienced this treatment from patients, relatives of patients, or the public (0.7% increase from 2020); 11.6% from managers (0.8% decrease from 2020); and 18.7% from other colleagues (static since 2020). It is worth noting that ambulance trusts have now seen a 3.6% decrease in harassment, bullying and abuse from managers since 2017, by far the biggest improvement of all trust types.

Findings relating to the varied experiences of violence, bullying, and harassment in terms of protected characteristics are detailed in the below 'Inequalities' section of this briefing.

In terms of physical and mental health:

- 46.8% of staff have felt unwell due to work-related stress in the last 12 months: 2.8% higher than 2020 and 8.4% higher than 2017. This metric is particularly stark for ambulance staff, at 57.7%.
- 54.5% of staff attended work despite not feeling well enough on at least one occasion in the past three months of the surveying period. Following a significant 10.2% decline in this metric between 2019 and 2020, it has now increased by 8.1%. This sharp increase has been seen across all trust types.
- 38% of staff find that work is often or always emotionally exhausting, 34.3% are often or always burnt out due to work, and 31.1% are often or always exhausted at the thought of another day at work. These are new questions this year and so have no trend comparison, but results are worryingly high, with results for ambulance staff markedly worse.
- 30.8% of staff experienced musculoskeletal issues due to work in the last 12 months, the fourth year of consecutive increases in this metric, and 1.4% higher than 2020.

Questions pertaining to the psychological safety of staff yielded varied results. 90.4% of staff feel trusted to do their job, but only 53.3% felt they had a choice in how to do their work: a 2% drop on the same metric last year, and the lowest for four years. Similarly, 74.9% of staff feel secure in raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice (a 2% increase from 2020 and the highest for five years), but 62% of staff felt able to speak up about anything that concerns them (a 3% drop from 2020).

## Inequalities

The 2021 results have shown a disappointing lack of progress in key measures of working experience for ethnic minority staff. This is seen both in data reflecting experiences of bullying, harassment and

discrimination, and in findings which continue to show differential access to promotions and career progression.

## Racial inequalities and racism

- Nearly one in five (17%) ethnic minority staff in the NHS personally experienced discrimination from a manager or colleague in the past 12 months. This is a small increase from last year and the highest level since recording of this metric began in 2017.
- Ethnicity remains by far the most common reason for staff to experience discrimination at 47.5% (slightly down from 48.2% in 2020), compared to gender which is the next highest reason for discrimination at 22.5%.
- There has also been an increase in the proportion of staff experiencing bullying, harassment or abuse from patients, their relatives or members of the public. This continues to be higher for ethnic minority staff (29.2%, up from 28.9% in 2020), than white staff (27%, up from 25.9% in 2020). (To note: NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard metrics for the Staff Survey are collected as "White staff" and "staff from all other ethnic groups combined.")
- There has been a small decrease in the proportion of both ethnic minority staff (27.6%, down from 28.8% in 2020) and white staff (22.5%, down from 23.2% in 2020) experiencing bullying, harassment and abuse from a colleague or manager.
- There continue to be unequal opportunities between white staff and ethnic minority staff when it comes to promotions and career progression in the NHS. Only 44.4% of ethnic minority staff feel their organisations act fairly in this regard (44% in 2020), compared to 58.7% of white staff.
- It is important to note that while the finding is stable from last year for ethnic minority staff, it is 3% down on the initial figure in 2017, while it is the lowest recording for white staff in the five-year period.

## Disabled staff

- 33% of disabled staff (data collection defines as 'staff with one or more lasting health conditions or illnesses') have personally experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from patients and the public in the past 12 months, an increase from last year (31.6% in 2020), whereas 25.3% of disabled staff have experienced this treatment from a manager (25.7% in 2020).
- The figure is lower for disabled staff experiencing bullying, harassment or abuse from colleagues (17.2%) and has been declining since 2018 (19.6%). However, disabled staff are nearly twice as likely to have experience of this treatment than staff without a long-lasting health condition or illness (9.8%, down from 10.7% in 2020).

- Only around half of staff living with one or more lasting health conditions experience fair opportunities for career progression and promotion (51%), with this number failing to meaningfully improve since 2018 (50.8%).
- There has been a decrease in the proportion of disabled staff feeling pressured by their manager to come into work (30.2%, down from 31.3% in 2020), but there has also been a decrease in the proportion who feel their employer has made reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their work (71.9%, down from 76% in 2020).
- Only 34.7% of disabled staff feel their work is valued within their organisation (down from 39.2% last year). While discrimination experienced on the basis of disability is relatively low (9%), it has increased to its highest level since recording of this metric began in 2018.

## Quality of care and working environment

Since 2017 there has been an almost 5% increase in the proportion of staff who feel secure in raising clinical safety concerns at their organisation, with 74.9% of staff stating they feel safe to do so in 2021. Staff are also clear that their roles make a positive difference to patients and service users, with 87.3% feeling their roles make a difference.

Over the past year, however, there have been significant reductions in the staff perception of quality of care:

- 75.6% felt that patient care is the top priority for their organisation, a decrease of 4% from 2020.
- 67.8% are happy with the standard of care provided by their organisation, down by more than 6% compared to last year.
- 72% agree that patient concerns are acted on, down by 2.9% from 2020.
- 59.4% reported having confidence that their organisation would address patient concerns. While overall this is a slight decrease compared to 2020 (60.4%), this measure has improved at mental health and learning disability trusts, as well as at community trusts.

This year's survey shows some positive results regarding the working environment, team working and workplace flexibility within organisations:

- 66.7% of staff feel that they can approach their manager to talk about flexible working options (new question this year).
- 52.1% believe they achieve a good work-life balance; however, this varies across roles with non-clinical roles more likely to agree (new question this year).
- 72.1% of staff feel they work as part of a team with a shared set of objectives, this is a slight increase on 2020 (71.8%).

- 81.4% enjoy working with their team colleagues and 71.3% of staff feel their team colleagues understand each other's roles.

It is also positive to see that 90.4% of staff report feeling trusted to do their job, and 85.7% feel that they always know what their responsibilities are. While both measures have seen marginal reductions compared to 2020, overall, these results are strong.

However, in some areas, staff satisfaction with flexibility, team working, and working environment has decreased since 2020. Most notably, 59.4% of staff reported that they would recommend their organisation as a place to work, a significant 7% reduction compared to 2020 and the lowest level in the past five years.

- 53.9% of respondents also reported being satisfied with opportunities for flexible working patterns, a 3% reduction compared to last year. Previously, between 2017 and 2020 this measure had been increasing year on year.
- 70.6% of staff feel they receive the respect they deserve from their colleagues; however this has declined from 72.3% in 2019.

## Pandemic effects

Recurring questions which were first incorporated in 2020 gave specific attention to the experience of staff working during the COVID-19 pandemic. These found that:

- 19% of staff have been redeployed due to the pandemic in the past 12 months, a 0.5% increase on the same figure in last year's survey.
- 39.4% of staff have been required to work remotely in the past 12 months, with the highest proportions in mental health / learning disability or combined MH/LD and community trusts (66.0%), and in community trusts (63.2%). 86.3% of staff from central functions and corporate services have worked from home, followed by 58.9% of registered mental health nurses.
- As in last year's findings, ethnic minority staff are significantly more likely to have worked on a COVID-19 specific ward (49.2%, vs 34.7% for white staff), and are less likely to have worked remotely or from home (30.8%, vs 41.6% for white staff).

## Pay, recognition, and management

### Development

Findings relating to the varied experiences of staff in terms of progression and discrimination are detailed in the above 'Inequalities' section of this briefing. However, a new set of questions have given overall findings that:

- 67.2% of staff have opportunities to improve knowledge and skills, with 52.5% feeling supported to develop their potential (though this is 7.9% lower for staff with chronic health issues).
- 55.1% can access the right learning and development opportunities when they need to, and 52.9% think there are opportunities for them to develop within their organisation.

Staff opinion on the value of their appraisals is low, with 20.4% reporting them to have improved how they do their job; 30.9% found them helpful in agreeing clear objectives; and just 29.8% left their appraisal feeling that their work was valued by their organisation. These metrics have all decreased since they were last asked in 2019 (by 3%, 4.5%, and 3.1%, respectively)

## Relationship with managers

Results relating to immediate line managers remain positive overall, with 66.8% of respondents saying that their manager works with them to understand problems; 69.3% feeling that their manager is interested in listening to the challenges they face; and 70.6% feeling that their manager values their work (though this result is 2% lower than last year). The question relating to colleagues showing appreciation to one another also yielded a positive response, with 67.4% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this happens.

## Pay and recognition

All metrics relating to recognition were down in comparison to last year:

- 51.9% of staff were satisfied with the recognition they receive for good work (a 5.3% decrease since 2020, and the lowest for five years). This figure was at 32.3% for ambulance trusts.
- 42.1% were satisfied with the extent to which their organisation values their work (5.9% decrease, lowest for 5 years). This figure was at 25.7% for ambulance trusts.
- Only 32.7% of staff were satisfied with their pay (4% decrease, lowest for four years). This is particularly concerning given that the survey was conducted before the sharper uptick in the rate of inflation in the early months of 2022.

## Engagement and motivation

Overall, the theme scores for staff engagement (6.8) and morale (5.8) have declined since last year, with the latter declining to below the 2017 level of 5.9. This year's results show that:

- 52.5% of staff report looking forward to going to work, which represents a 6% decrease compared to 2020. The largest declines were for medical and dental staff, registered nurses and midwives, nursing and healthcare assistants and ambulance operational staff.
- 67.4% of staff reported being enthusiastic about their job, a reduction of more than 5% compared to 2020.

Staff do, however, feel that they have opportunities to show initiative in their role (72.3%) with registered nurses and midwives more likely to report frequently having these opportunities in their daily work. Nationally this measure has remained relatively static in the last five years.

53.1% of staff shared that they felt able to make improvements happen in their area of work. This represents a 2% decrease compared to 2020. 70.2% of respondents feel able to make suggestions to improve their team and/or department, a 4% decrease since 2018.

After two years of working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, measures of staff morale in the 2021 survey show downward trends:

- 31.1% of staff reported often thinking about leaving their organisation, demonstrating a four year high that is over 4% higher than in 2020.
- 22.9% of respondents stated that they would likely look for a job at a new organisation in the coming 12 months, which is also the highest rate in four years.
- 16.6% said that they will leave their organisation as soon as they find an alternative role, which is again the highest rate in four years.

## NHS Providers' view

Responding to the 2021 NHS Staff Survey from NHS England and NHS Improvement, Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers said:

“The last two years have been hugely challenging for NHS staff who have worked tirelessly in the pandemic and continue to work flat out tackling care backlogs and ongoing pressures from COVID-19. It’s no surprise that all of this has affected staff morale and wellbeing, and these factors are compounded by critical staff shortages across the NHS.

“Just 27% of people working in the NHS feel there are enough staff in their organisation to allow them to do their jobs properly, while there are also concerning increases in the proportion of staff suffering work-related stress and considering leaving.

“Trust leaders are equally concerned about the impact of workforce pressures on services, with 97% of respondents to our [recent workforce survey](#) saying that shortages are having a serious and detrimental impact on services.

“It is vital that the government comes up with a fully-costed and funded workforce plan to ensure the NHS has the staff it needs to meet increased demand for services now and in the future. Along with almost 100 health and social care organisations we support an amendment to the Health and Care Bill which would require the government to publish regular assessments of workforce numbers needed across health and care, and we call on ministers and MPs to pledge their support too.

“It’s disappointing too to see a lack of progress on key measures for ethnic minority NHS staff. It’s still too common that staff are subject to bullying, harassment or abuse from patients or colleagues, and it is particularly concerning to see that nearly one in five ethnic minority staff have experienced discrimination from someone they work with in the last year. There are similar concerning trends for staff living with lasting health conditions and we must find ways to address the large proportion of disabled staff who don’t feel valued.

“Leaders across the NHS and government must act to address this and work to eliminate inequalities based on race and disability in promotions and career progression where a large gap has persisted to the detriment of staff with protected characteristics.

“Trusts are working hard to prioritise staff wellbeing and it’s good to see that the majority of staff feel their leaders are compassionate listeners who take effective action to help alleviate their concerns.

“But staff satisfaction with pay is at its lowest in five years. The cost of living is rising significantly therefore trust leaders and staff must see a meaningful, fully funded uplift to pay from the government this year to help organisations address the many concerning trends in the survey results.”