



NATIONAL
COUNCIL
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Wellbeing

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

Industry Workforce Shortages Research

Prepared for National Council for Mental Wellbeing by The Harris Poll

March 16, 2023

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Background & objectives

- This research was designed to understand current experiences of those working in mental health and substance use disorder settings including current workloads, challenges, satisfaction, and future outlook. The findings will be used to inform and support NCMWB's advocacy efforts and help to develop more effective solutions.
- Specifically, the research:
 - Explored current work environment including hours works, and workload issues
 - Evaluated importance and satisfaction with various aspects of work environment
 - Explored future career outlooks, such as likelihood to stay in the professional and rationale for why/why not
 - Assessed the supports needed to help mental health and SUD workers better serve their clients and draw future workers to the industry
 - Quantify the impacts - current and potential - of the workforce shortage of the industry and society
- In light of workforce shortages, the research also evaluated perceptions of the industry, among a general public audience.

Notation guide

Please refer to this slide for explanations of the various notations and formatting used throughout this deck:

- Throughout the report **mental health and SUD employee** data are presented in **orange** and **general population** data will always be displayed in **blue**. Markers are included on the top right corner of slides to indicate when general population data are displayed on that slide.
- Some of the slides include data with a small base size ($n < 100$), we have marked these specifically throughout. We recommend reviewing these results directionally.
- Responses may not add up to 100% due to computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.
- An asterisk (*) denotes a value less than one percent but greater than zero. A dash (-) denotes a value of zero.
- The following abbreviations are used throughout the:
 - Behavioral health (BH)
 - Mental health (MH)
 - Substance use disorder (SUD)

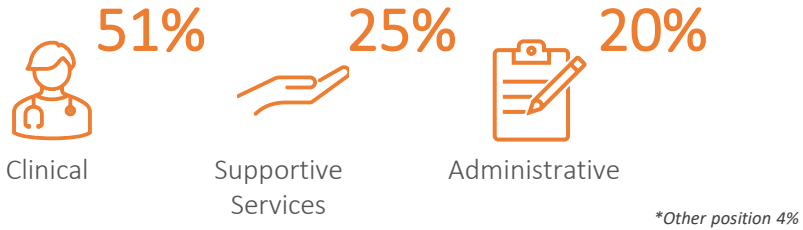
Method overview

	Mental Health and SUD Workers	General Population
 Fieldwork Dates	✓ February 3 – 19, 2023	✓ February 7 – 9, 2023
 Total Sample	✓ 750 mental health and SUD employees <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ US adults Age 18+✓ Employed full or part time✓ Work in health care or social assistance, specifically in mental health or SUD	✓ 2,080 US adult Age 18+
 Survey Length	✓ 15-Minute Survey	✓ 6 Question Survey



Mental health and SUD worker profile

Current Occupation



Years in Field (mean)



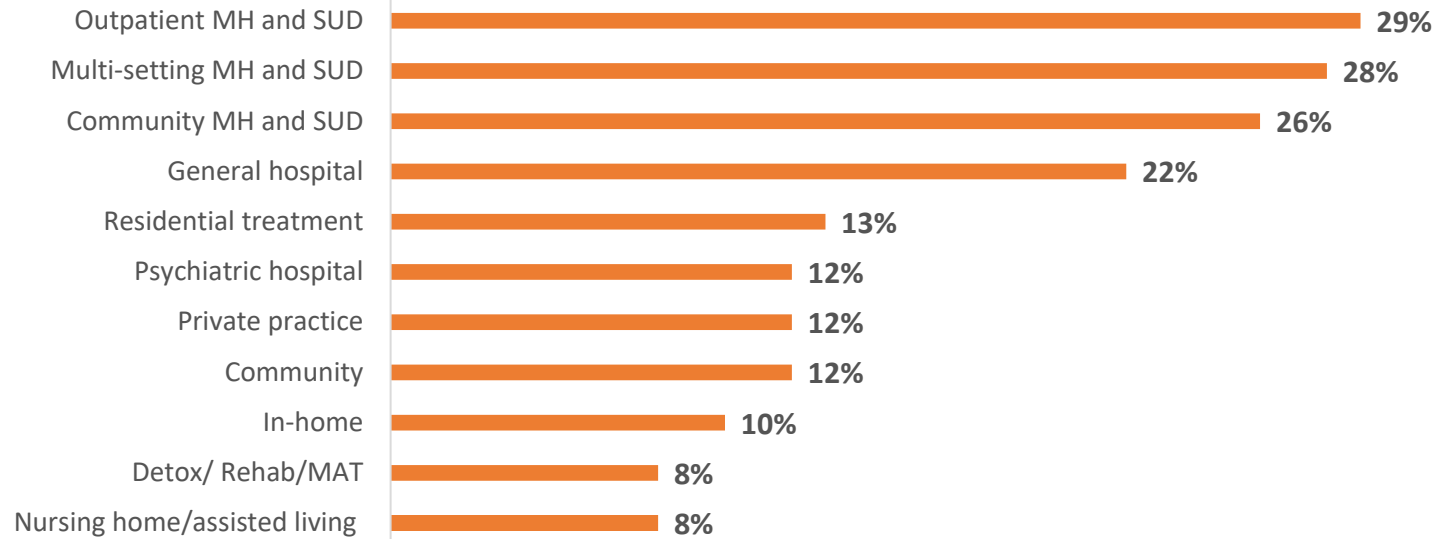
Years in Current Role (mean)



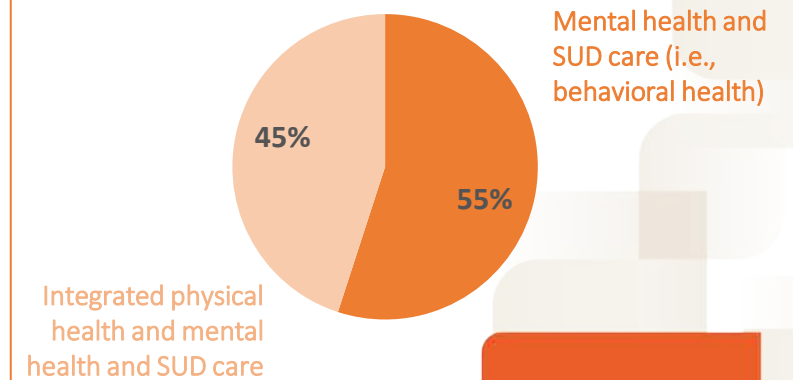
Urbanicity of Work Environment



Current Work Environment(s) (top 10 selections)



Health Care Industry



Executive Summary and Implications

Executive summary

Concerns of societal impact and lack of access along with the longevity of the mental health and SUD industry may be amplified by current workforce shortages. In addition, workforce shortages are causing added problems resulting in openness to looking for employment elsewhere.

- More than 4 in 5 employees (83%) worry that workforce shortages in MH and SUD industry will negatively impact society as a whole
 - And many (60%) have been kept up at night thinking about those who are not able to access the care they need
- Around three quarters (76%), also fear the number of lives that will be lost due to the lack of access caused by workforce shortages
- A strong majority (90%) are concerned about the ability for those not currently receiving MH and SUD care to gain access to it
 - And 83% are concerned about enough new workers entering the MH and SUD industry
- Nearly half (48%) agree that the impacts of the workforce shortage have caused them to consider other employment options - and a similar proportion (49%) report they don't want to leave the industry, but often feel like they may have no other choice

Employees highlight the need for policy changes to meet current demands and many are willing to help.

- More than 4 in 5 (83%) think without any policy changes, it will not be possible for providers to meet the demand of the industry
- More than two-thirds (68%) believe they will be able to influence change in the system to address the workforce crisis
- And 82% are concerned about adequate reimbursement rates



Executive summary

Mental health and SUD industry employees have been affected by workforce shortages in a variety of ways – commonly in the form of increased caseloads and administrative burdens

- Around a third (31%) are seeing more than their ideal number of clients on a weekly basis
 - And nearly 3 in 5 (58%) say their waitlist is longer than ever
- COVID has increased client severity (72%) and caseloads (65%) for many workers
- More than two-thirds report the time they spend on administrative tasks takes away from time that could be spent on direct client care
- A third of workers (33%) are spending a majority of their time on administrative tasks and a similar proportion say they are not able to manage these demands without working extra hours (43%)
- Nearly half (47%) say most of the administrative work they do feels unnecessary

Despite the challenges mental health and SUD employees face, many feel passionate and fulfilled by the work they do – however, many are experiencing ramifications on their personal lives

- Nearly all employees are satisfied with their ability to make a difference for their clients (96%) and help others (95%) at their current job
- And the passion for working in the industry is unwavering for a majority (82%)
- However, 62% have moderate or severe levels of burnout and 4 in 5 (80%) report work has had some negative impact on their life- including their mental health (37%)

Implications

Mental health and SUD industry challenges impact both its current and future workers – and to a larger extent society. There are concerns for the lack of access to care and the number of lives that could be lost as a result, so it is imperative that the field maintains, or even increases, its workforce. However, shortages are causing issues for the industry, individual practices/clinics, and employees. Increased caseloads and client severity, administrative demands, and personal mental demand are weighing heavily on mental health and SUD employees – some of which are among the reasons current employees would not recommend the field. Some employees are even looking to other areas and fields for employment, which could cause further shortages for the field – and ultimately greater impact on society. This difficult cycle highlights the need for immediate action.

While the data suggests urgent policy changes are needed, those in the field may also serve as a useful step towards alleviating shortages and even highlighting the need for policy makers to take action. As many employees feel they can influence change, it may be worth utilizing the voices and firsthand recounting of employees' experiences, needs, and challenges to help emphasize the urgency.

Implications

Meanwhile, it may be useful to amplify and/or maintain current actions/policies to help reduce challenges employees face. Increasing partnerships with other systems (e.g., schools, physical health care providers, and hospitals), ensuring permanent access to telehealth, and having greater collaboration at federal and state levels are among the actions the industry took during the COVID-19 pandemic – actions which mental health and SUD employees feel should be continued to promote better access to care.

In addition, looking within the industry for more immediate relief may be an option. Many in the industry say they are likely to recommend the field and feel fulfilled by the work they do. By speaking to the public and potential future employees about their work and passion, they have the ability to highlight the advantages to a career in the field – ultimately, drawing in future workers, which has the potential to further help to reduce workforce shortages and ensure the longevity of the field.

The mental health and SUD industry is in a difficult place – caught in the middle of high demands, workforce shortages and an uncertain future. Our society is urgently in need of solutions – solutions which could affect change for us all. And while there are steps the industry can take to alleviate certain problems, problems, policy solutions are urgently needed. The gravity of the challenges the mental health and SUD industry faces cannot be taken lightly and requires swift and impactful action.

DETAILED FINDINGS

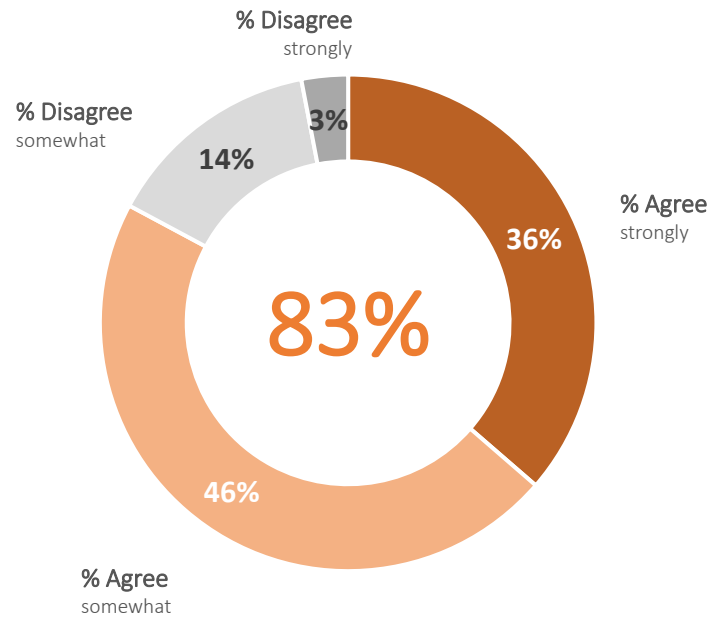
Overarching Key Findings



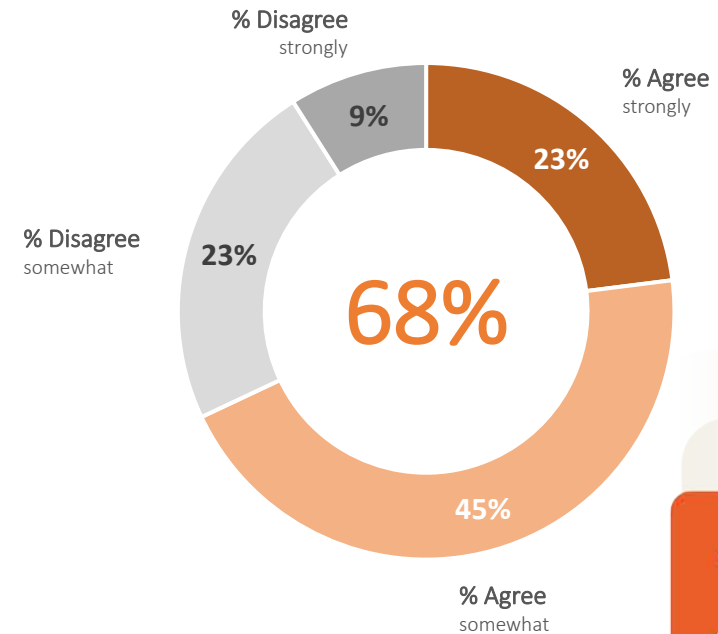
Policy changes viewed as necessary to meet the demands for mental health and SUD care

And nearly 7 in 10 feel they will be able to influence change in the system to help address the workforce crisis.

“Without any policy changes, it will not be possible for providers to meet the demand for mental health and substance use disorder care.”



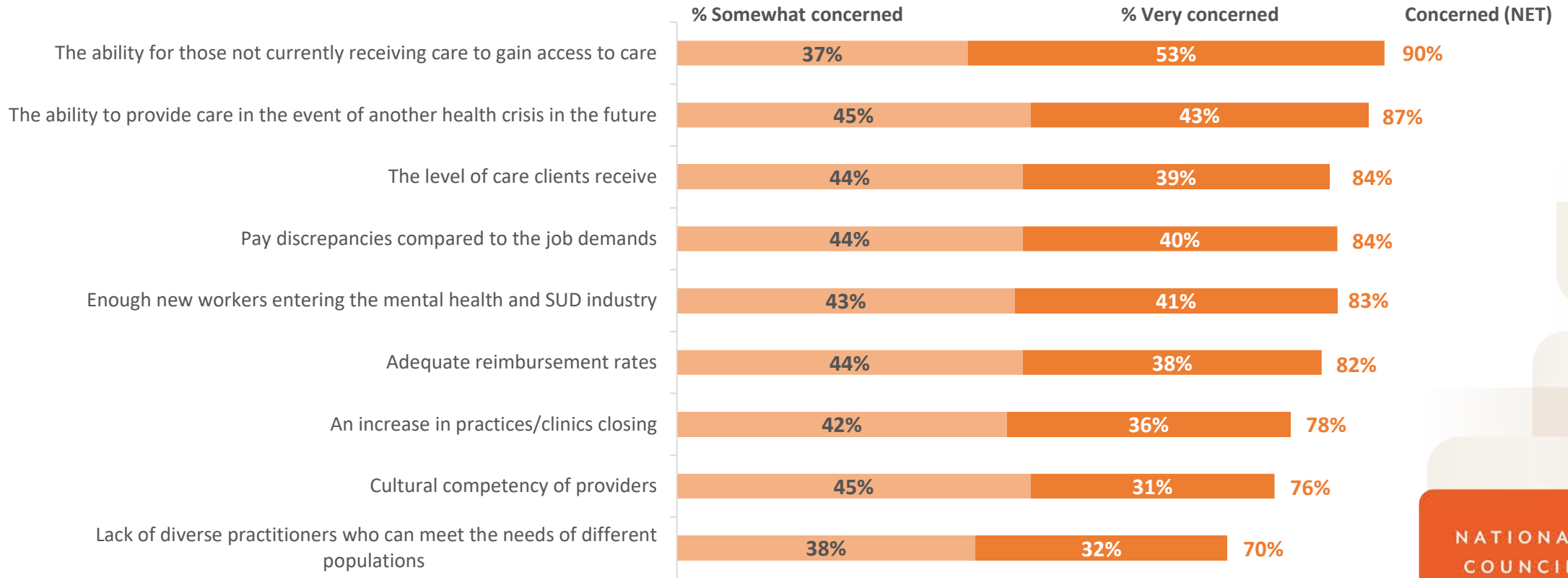
“I believe I will be able to influence change in the system to help address the workforce crisis.”



Access to care and caring through another health crisis are key concerns

More than 4 in 5 also identify concerns related to the level of care patients receive, pay discrepancies vs. job demands, new entrants to the workforce, and reimbursement rates.

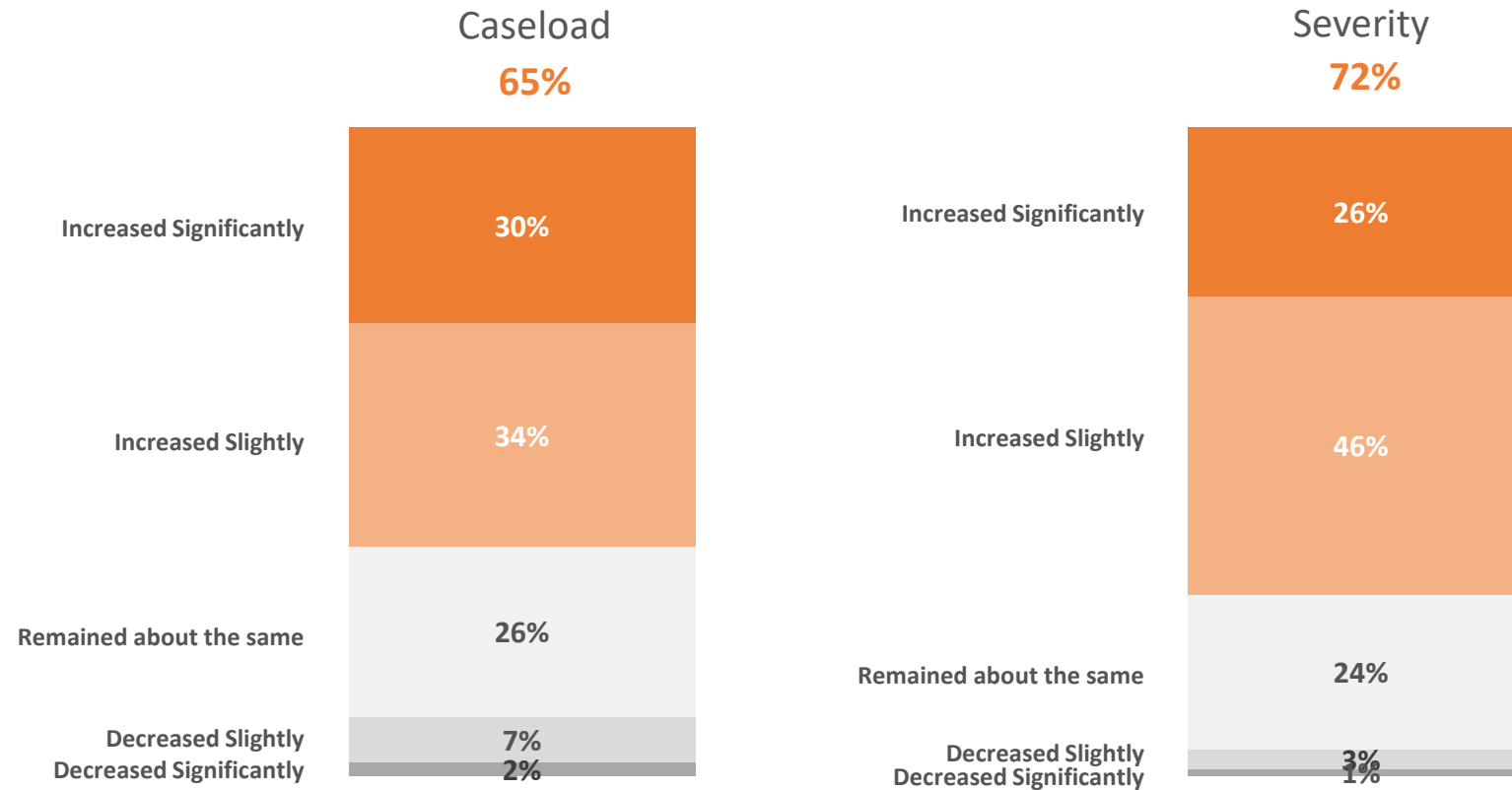
Mental Health and SUD Industry Concerns



COVID-19 appears to have had large impacts on caseloads and client severity

A quarter or more say since COVID-19 their client caseload, and the severity of their clients, has increased *significantly*.

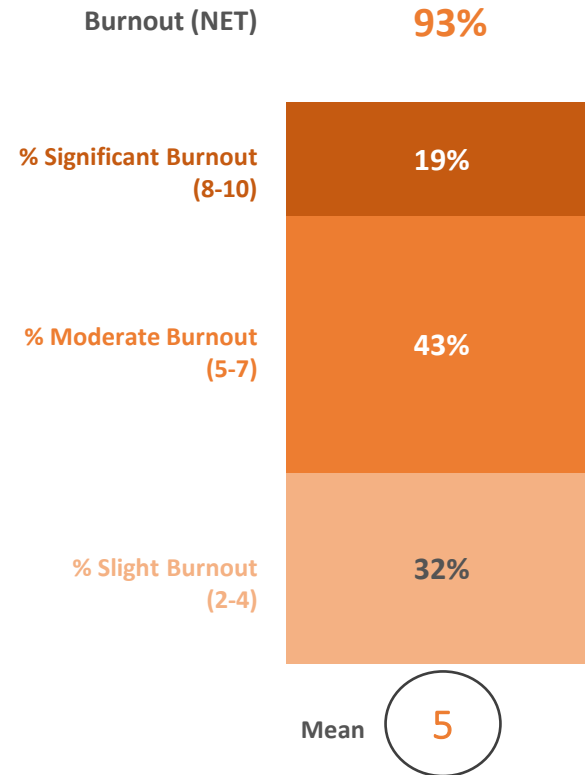
COVID-19 Impact On Client...
(among those who provide care to clients)



Most behavioral health workers report some level of burnout

Current Burnout at Work

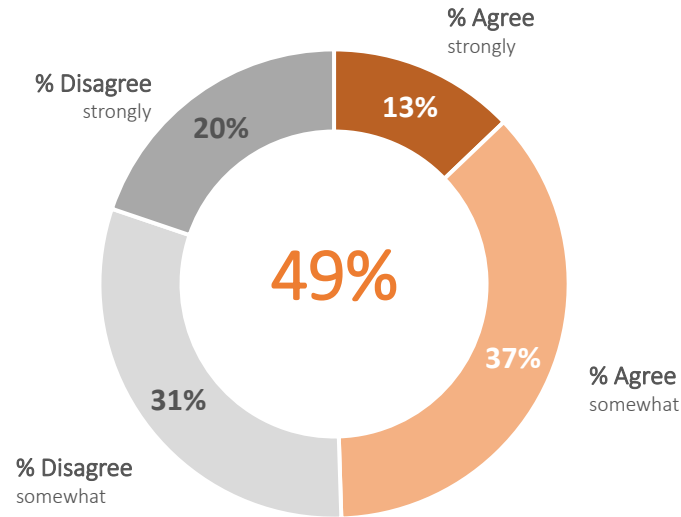
*Burnout defined as “a state of physical and/or emotional exhaustion”
1 – No burnout at all, 10 – Significantly burnt out*



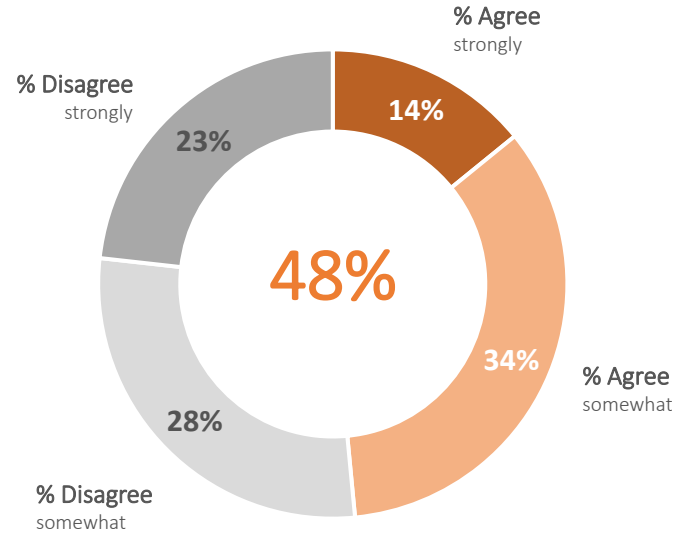
Workforce shortages causing nearly half to consider other options

A similar proportion say they don't want to leave the industry, but often feel like they have no other choice.

“I do not want to leave the mental health and substance use disorder field, but it often feels like I have no other choice.”



“The impacts of the workforce shortages have caused me to consider other employment options.”

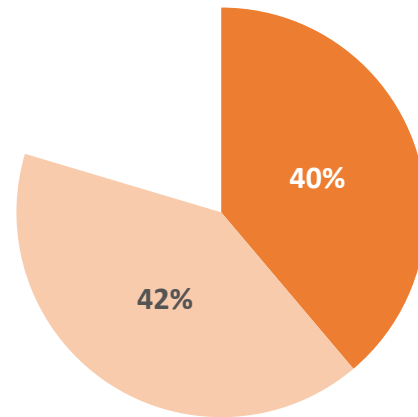


Concern of negative societal impacts due to workforce shortages is evident

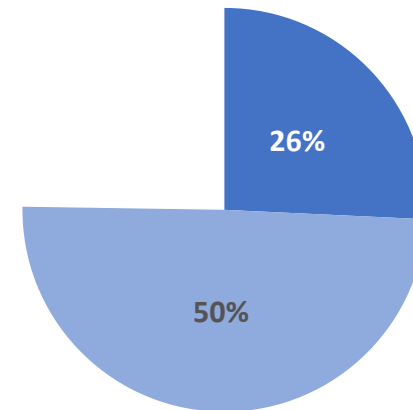
This is true among both mental health and SUD workers and Americans as a whole.

“I worry the workforce shortages in the mental health and substance use disorder industry will negatively impact society as a whole.”

83% Agree

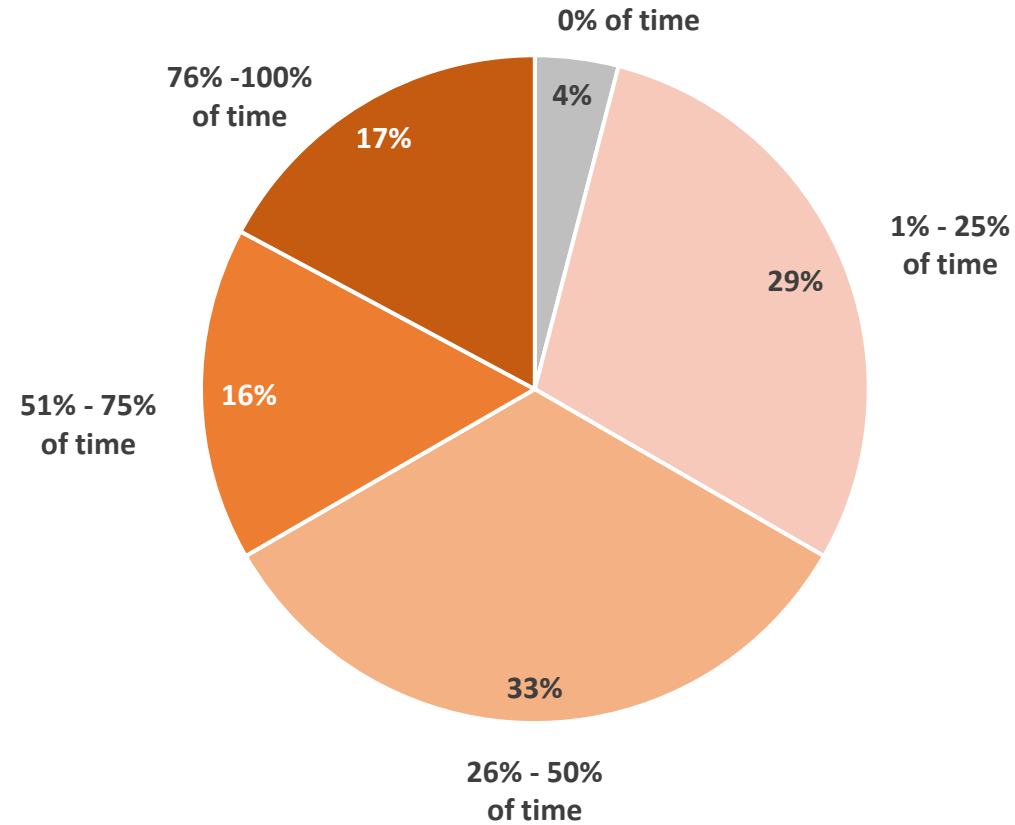


75% Agree



A third of mental health and SUD employees spend a majority of their time on administrative tasks

Proportion of Weekly Work Hours Spent on Administrative Tasks

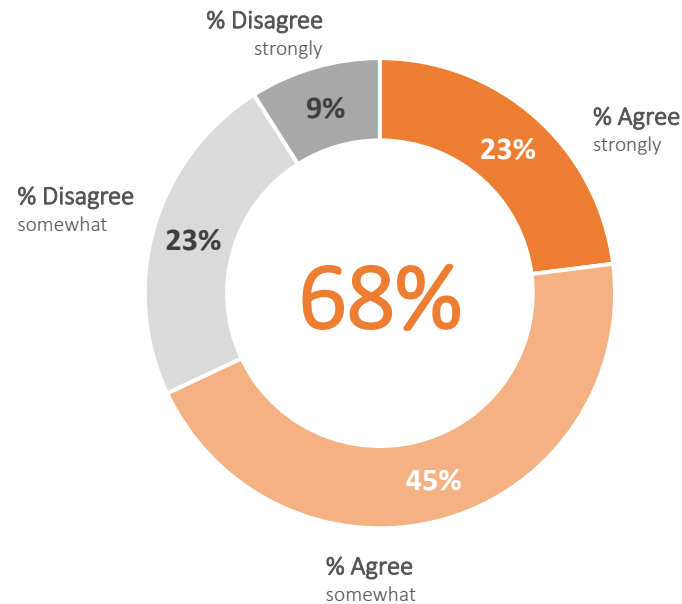


Of mental health and SUD employees spend **a majority** of their weekly hours on administrative tasks

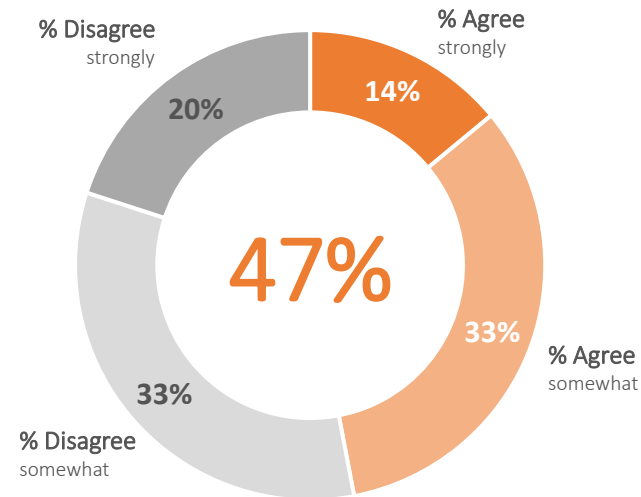
Admin tasks are taking time away from client care and for nearly half feels unnecessary

About 2 in 5 are not able to manage their administrative tasks within traditional working hours.

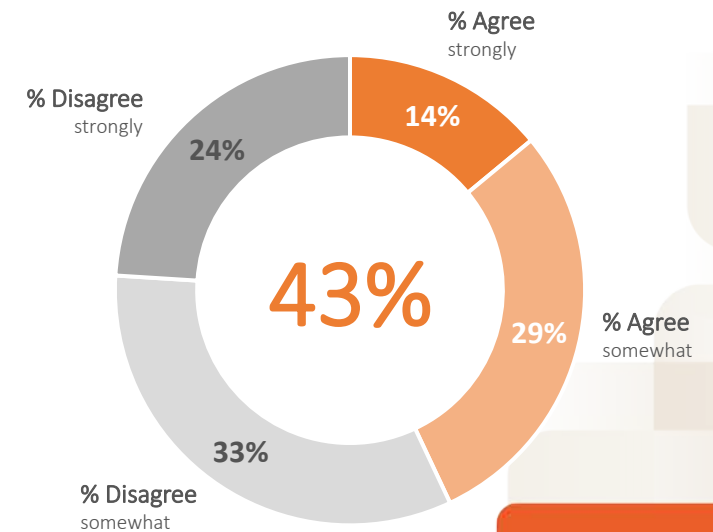
“The amount of time I spend on administrative tasks takes away from time I could be directly supporting clients.”
(among those who provide care to patients and have administrative tasks)



“Most of the administrative work I am required to do feels unnecessary.”
(among those who have administrative tasks)



“I am not able to manage the administrative demands of my job without working extra hours.”
(among those who have administrative tasks)



DETAILED FINDINGS

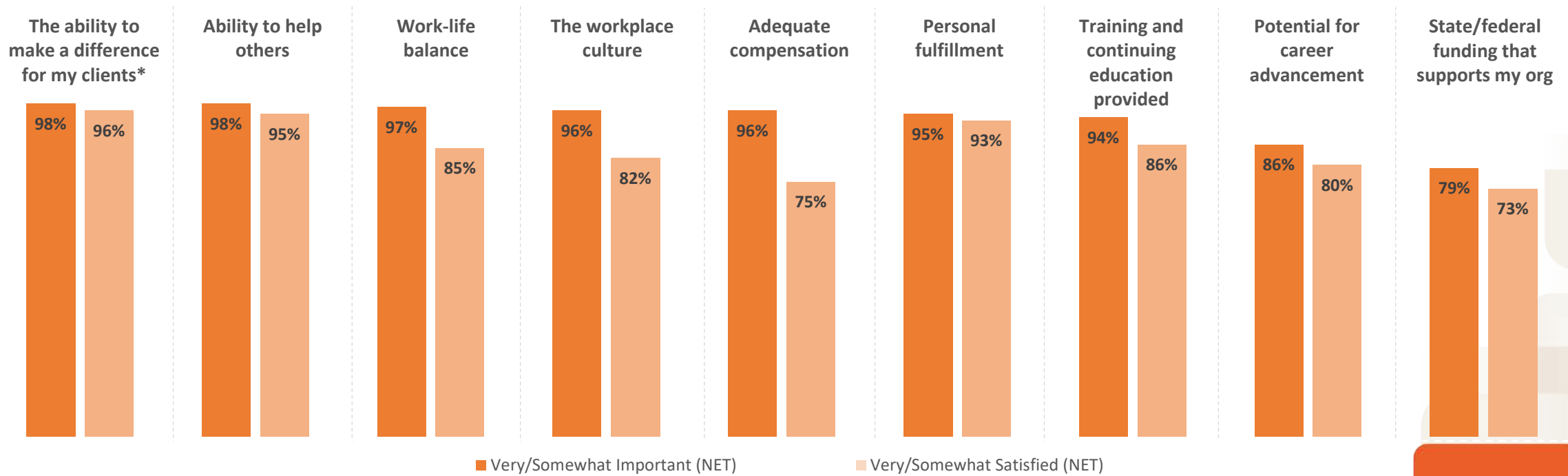
Burnout

Nearly all place importance on helping and making a difference in their career- and most are satisfied with their ability to do so

Larger gaps exist between stated importance and current satisfaction related to compensation, workplace culture, and work-life balance.

Importance & Satisfaction With Aspects of Current Job

Very/Somewhat (NET)



Ability to help people and passion are top reasons to stay in the industry, something that is unwavering for most

Three-quarters say their investment in their career is too extensive to leave the industry now.

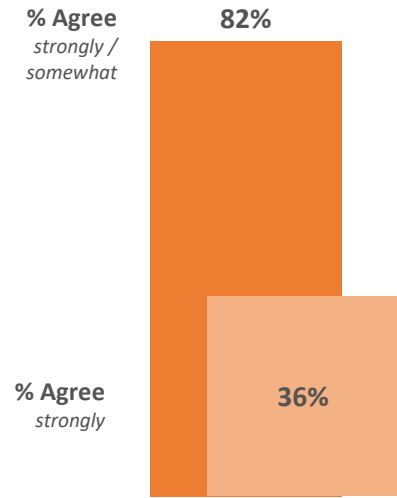
Influencers on Likelihood to Stay in Mental Health and SUD Industry

(among those likely to stay)

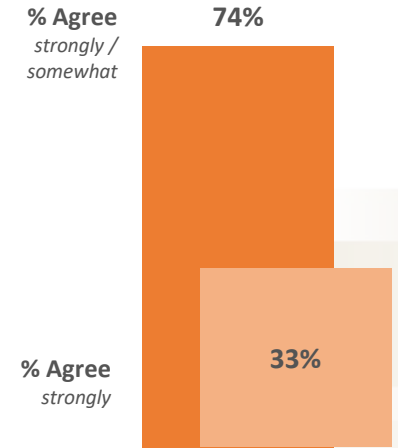


92%

% Very/somewhat likely to stay in mental health and SUD industry



“My passion for working in the mental health and substance use disorder industry is unwavering.”



“I have invested too much in my career to leave the mental health and substance use disorder industry now.”

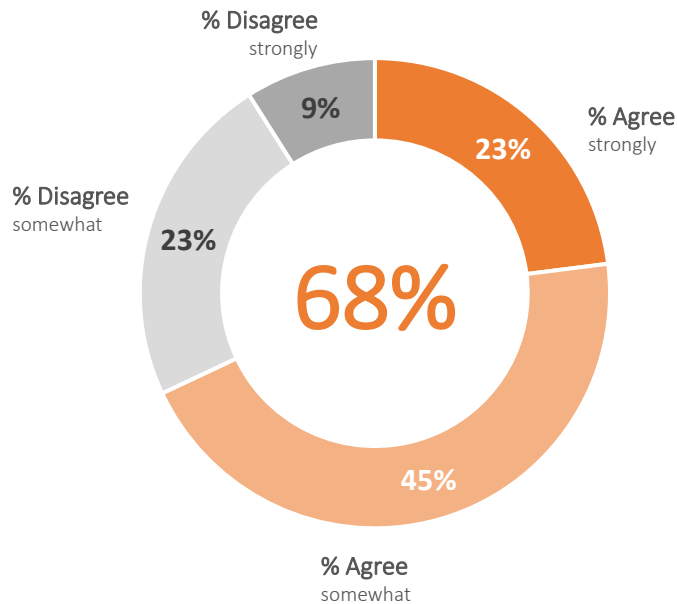


BASE: LIKELY TO STAY IN MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER INDUSTRY (n=695)
 Q917: Which of the following influence your likelihood of staying in the mental health and substance use disorder industry? Please select all that apply.
 BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (n=750)
 Q925: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

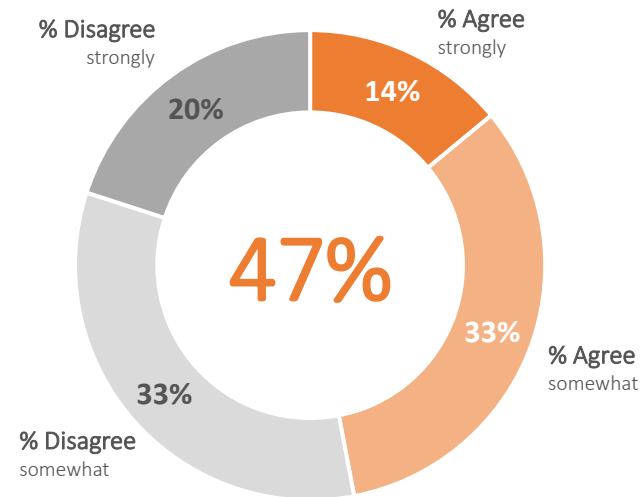
Admin tasks are taking time away from client care and for nearly half feels unnecessary

About 2 in 5 are not able to manage their administrative tasks within traditional working hours.

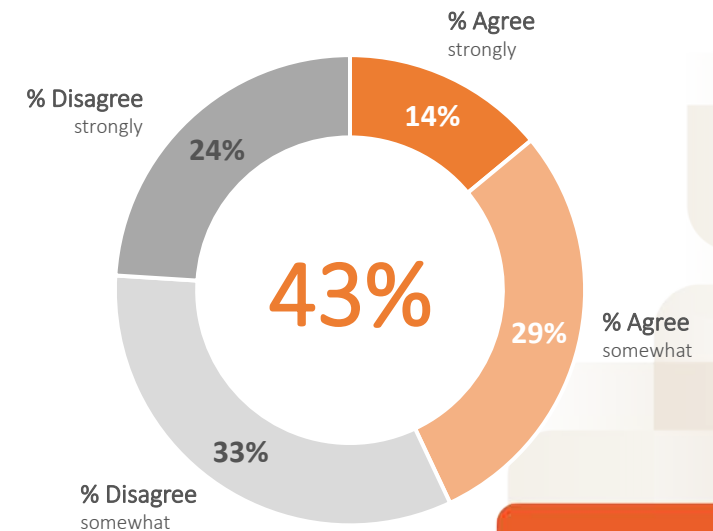
“The amount of time I spend on administrative tasks takes away from time I could be directly supporting clients.”
(among those who provide care to patients and have administrative tasks)



“Most of the administrative work I am required to do feels unnecessary.”
(among those who have administrative tasks)



“I am not able to manage the administrative demands of my job without working extra hours.”
(among those who have administrative tasks)

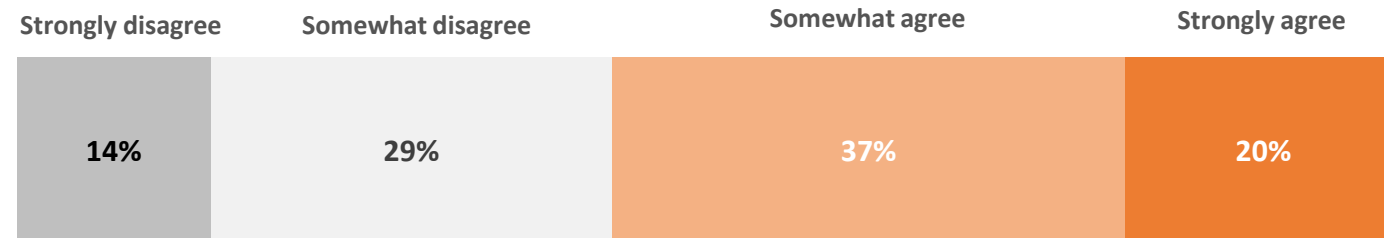


Client waitlists are growing for many

“My waitlist for clients is longer than it has ever been in the past.”

(among those who provide care to clients)

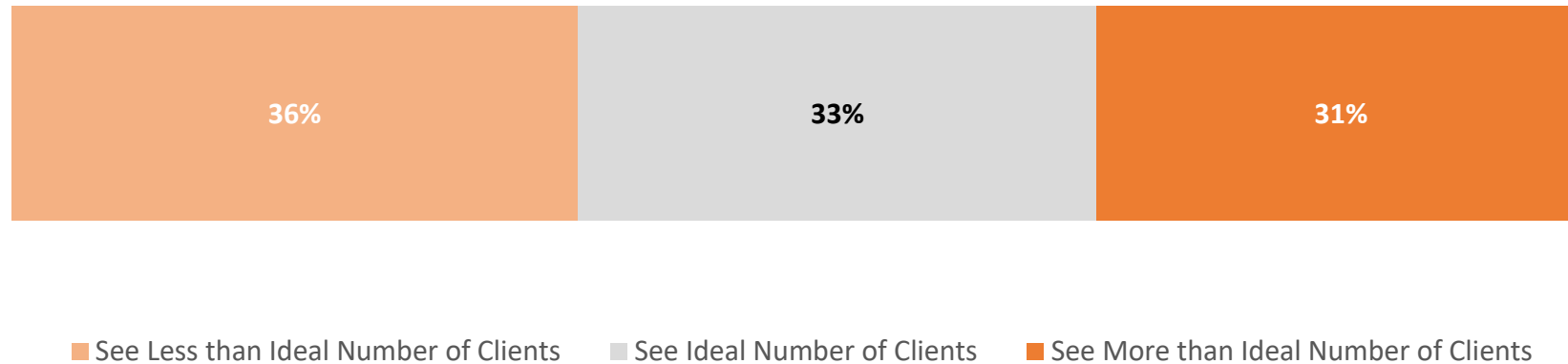
58%



Nearly a third see more than their ideal number of clients a week

A similar proportion feel they see the exact right number of clients.

Number of Clients Seen Compared to Ideal Number of Weekly Clients
(among those who provide care to clients)



BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (n=750)

Q410: What is the ideal number of individual clients you believe you could see each week and still provide them with high-quality care? *Your best estimate is fine.*

BASE: PROVIDE CARE TO CLIENTS (n=608)

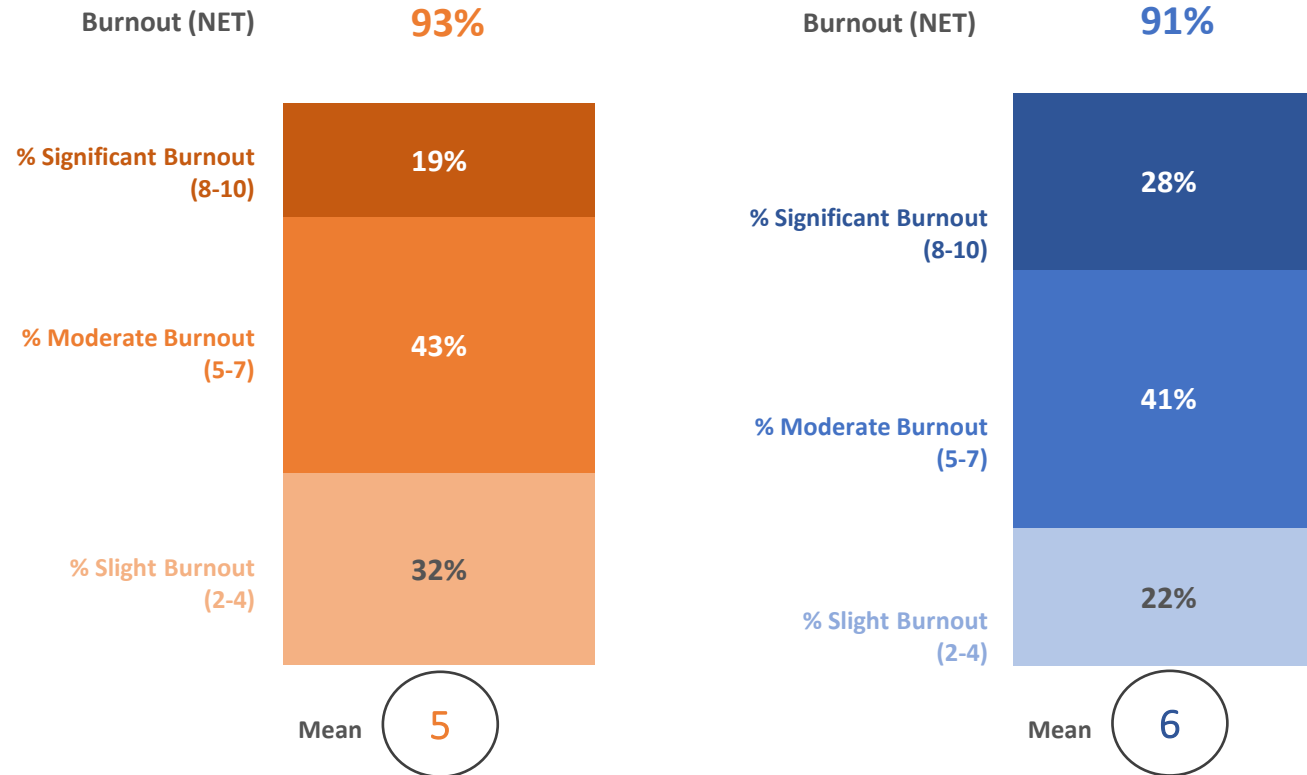
Q415: On average, how many individual clients do you see each week? *Your best estimate is fine.*

Q410/Q415. See More or Less Clients Compared to Ideal Number of Weekly Clients

Most workers report some level of burnout

Current Burnout at Work

Burnout defined as "a state of physical and/or emotional exhaustion"
 1 – No burnout at all, 10 – Significantly burnt out



BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (n=750)

Q520: On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your level of burnout (i.e., a state of physical and/or emotional exhaustion) at work?

BASE: EMPLOYED RESPONDENTS- GENERAL POPULATION (n=1305)

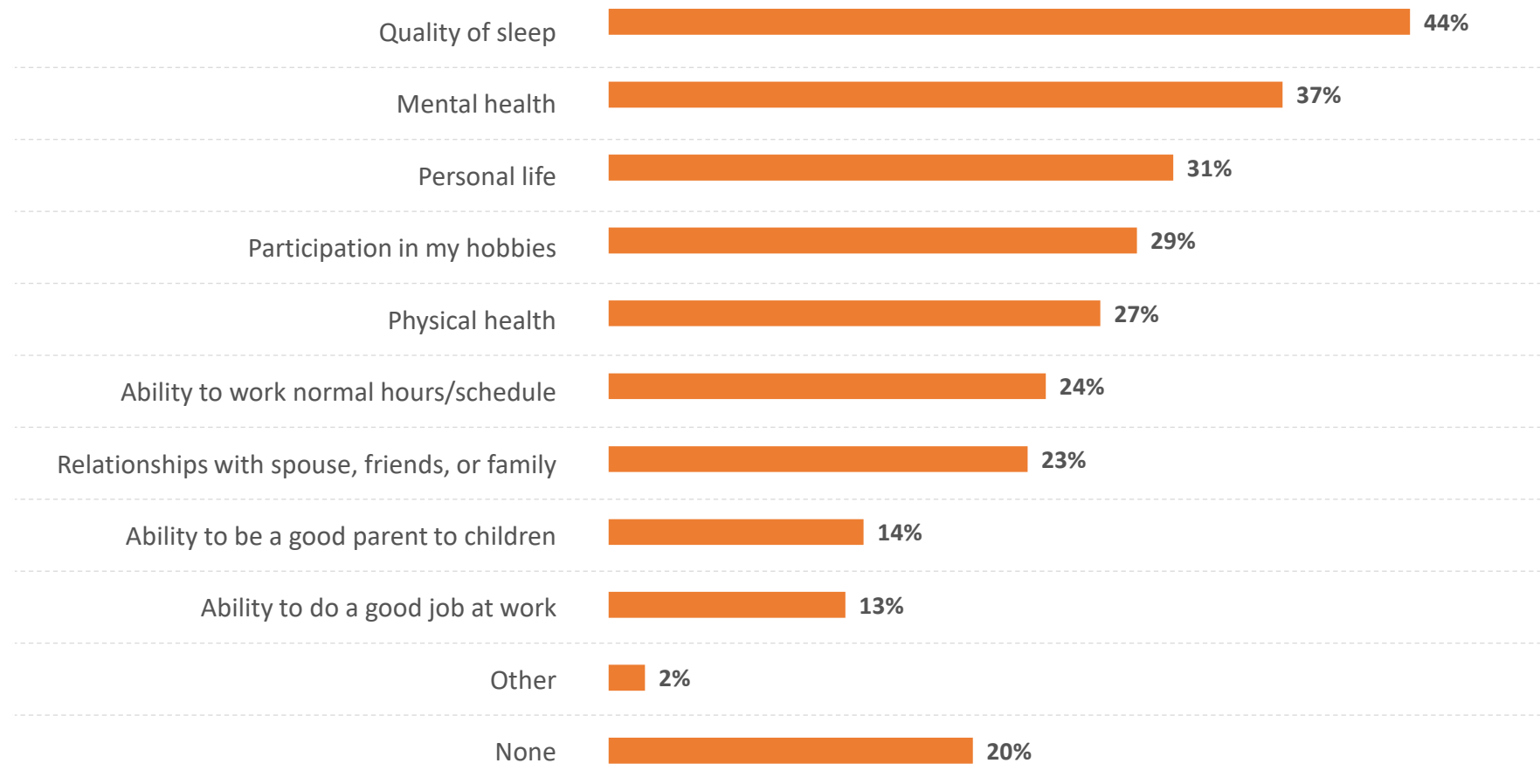
Q2 HOD: On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your level of burnout (i.e., a state of physical and/or emotional exhaustion) at work?



4 in 5 cite negative impacts of work on their life

Most commonly related to their quality of sleep and mental health.

Aspects of Life Negatively Impacted by Work



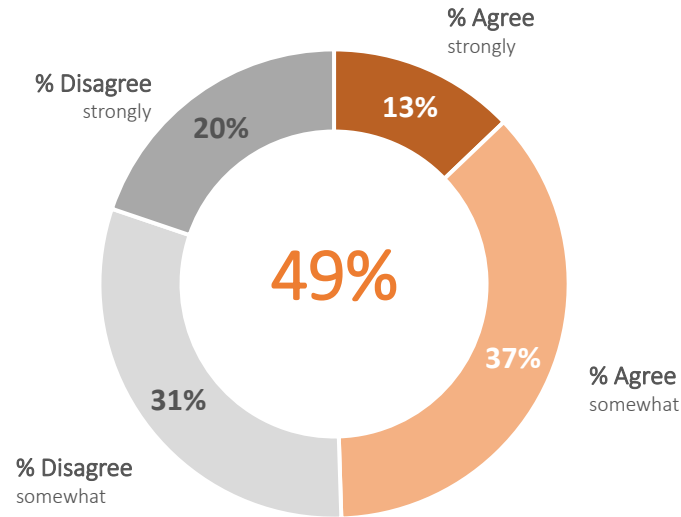
80%
Say their life has been negatively impacted by their work in some way



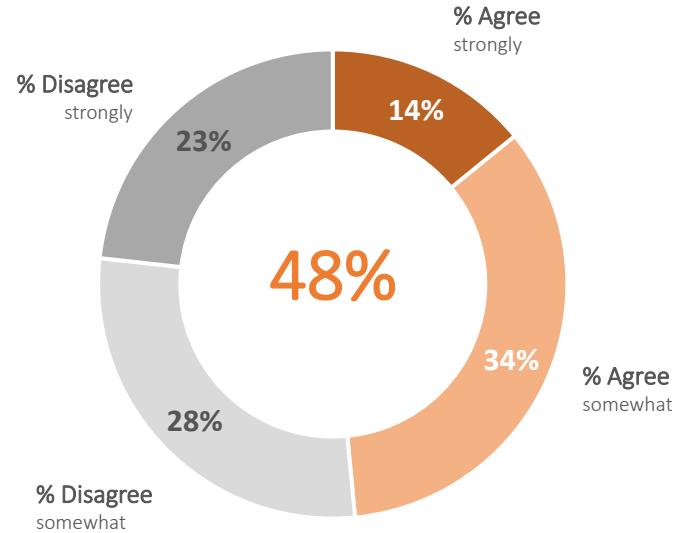
Workforce shortages causing nearly half to consider other options

A similar proportion say they don't want to leave the industry, but often feel like they have no other choice.

“I do not want to leave the mental health and substance use disorder field, but it often feels like I have no other choice.”



“The impacts of the workforce shortages have caused me to consider other employment options.”



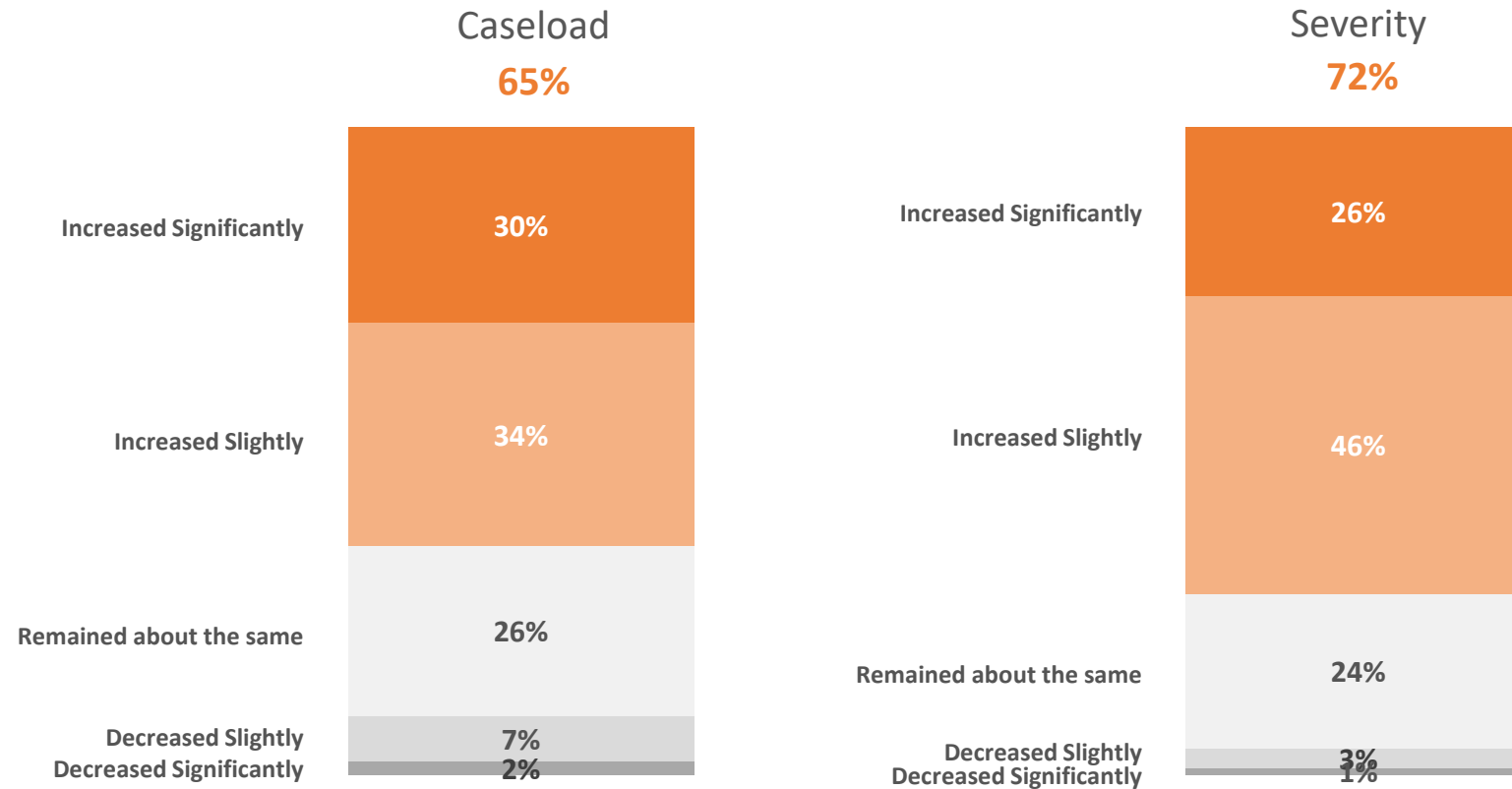
DETAILED FINDINGS

Societal Impacts

COVID-19 appears to have had large impacts on caseloads and client severity

A quarter or more say since COVID-19 their client caseload, and the severity of their clients, has increased *significantly*.

COVID-19 Impact On Client...
(among those who provide care to clients)

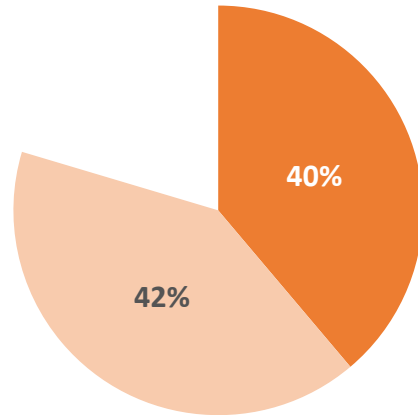


Concern of negative societal impacts due to workforce shortages is evident

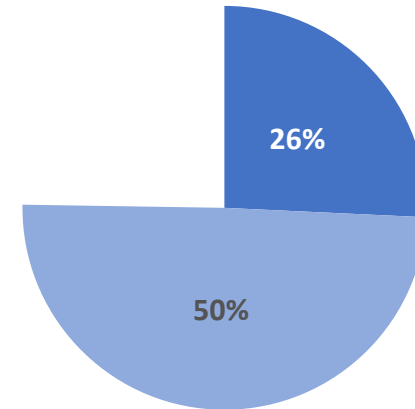
This is true among both mental health and SUD workers and Americans as a whole.

“I worry the workforce shortages in the mental health and substance use disorder industry will negatively impact society as a whole.”

83% Agree



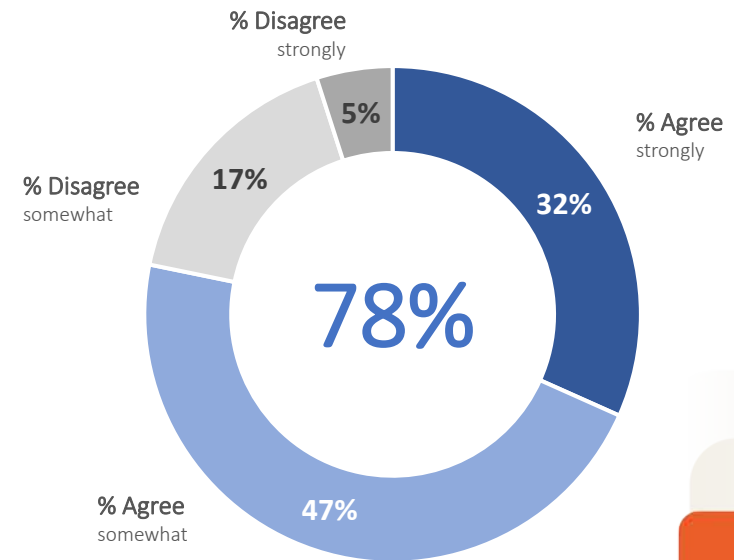
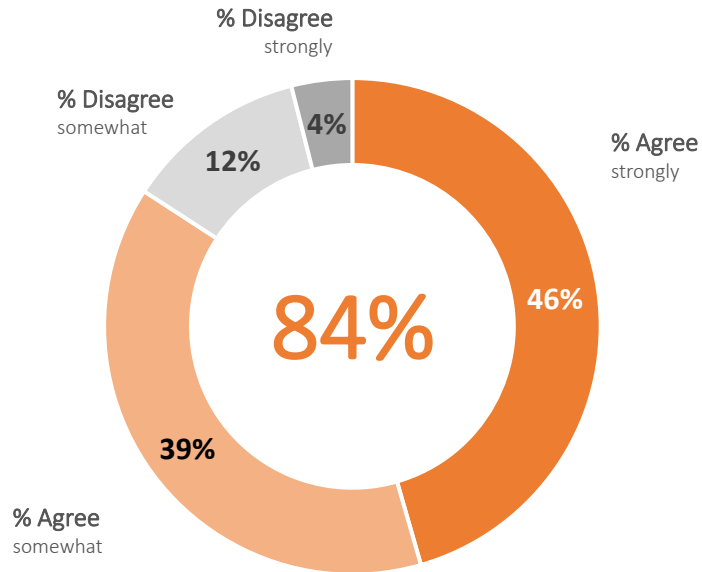
75% Agree



Majorities recognize that the people most in need often have the hardest time accessing care

And more than three-quarters of the broader population of Americans agree.

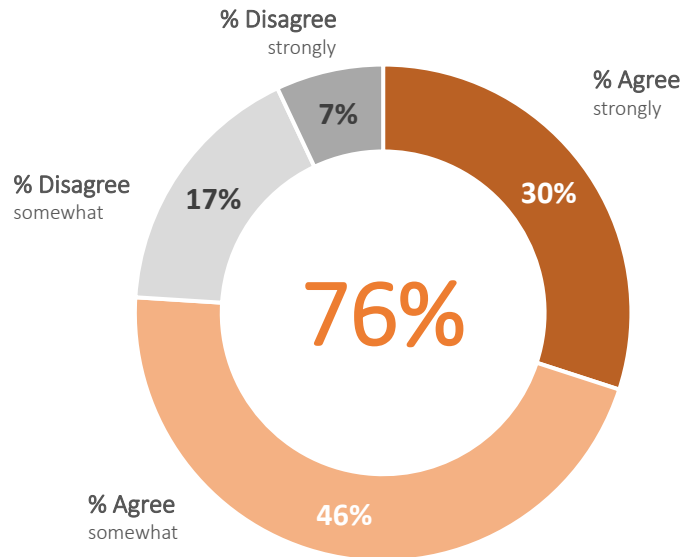
“People most in need of mental health and SUD care often have the hardest time accessing care.”



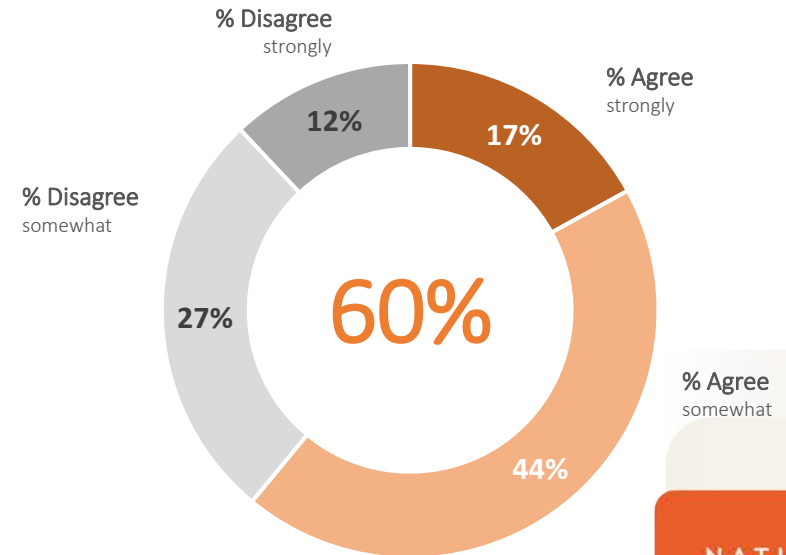
Mental health and SUD workers fear severe impacts of lack of access

Three-quarters fear the number of lives that could be lost due to the lack of access to care caused by workforce shortages.

“I fear the number of lives that will be lost due to the lack of access to care caused by workforce shortages.”



“I have been kept up at night thinking about those who are not able to access the care they need.”



Access to care and caring through another health crisis are key concerns

More than 4 in 5 also identify concerns related to the level of care patients receive, pay discrepancies vs. job demands, new entrants to the workforce, and reimbursement rates.

Mental Health and SUD Industry Concerns

