

Job Satisfaction Among Registered Nurses – Data from the 2022 NSSRN

March 2024

Nursing is the nation’s largest health care profession, with an estimated 4,349,377 actively licensed registered nurses (RNs) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), as of December 31, 2021. The National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (NSSRN) surveyed a nationally representative sample of approximately 125,000 RNs and APRNs in the United States on a variety of topics, including nurses’ employment characteristics. More than 49,000 nurses responded to the survey and those results were extrapolated to estimate population totals. For details on the NSSRN, see the end of this brief.

About the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis provides analysis to inform health workforce policy by expanding and improving the data available on the health workforce, projecting the supply and demand for health workers, and disseminating workforce data to the public.

For more information, visit the [Health Workforce Analysis](#) webpage.

An adequate supply of RNs is essential to meet the nation’s health care needs. Because of this, researchers have long studied the factors influencing nursing supply and turnover. One area that has received considerable attention is the relationship between job satisfaction and job turnover. It has been shown that job satisfaction is a predictor for anticipated turnover and that anticipated turnover is a predictor of actual turnover.¹ This brief provides information on job satisfaction among the 3,459,209 nurses employed as RNs² in the United States who were employed on December 31, 2021. Key takeaways include:

- While overall job satisfaction among RNs remains relatively high, many nurses were less satisfied in 2021 than they were in 2017.
- The share of nurses who expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with their primary nursing position nearly doubled between 2017 and 2022 (increasing from 11.0% to 19.9%).
- RNs with patient care responsibilities experienced a larger decline in job satisfaction than nurses without patient care responsibilities.
- Job satisfaction declined in 20 out of the 21 clinical specialties between 2017 and 2021, with the largest declines for nurses specializing in orthopedics and infectious or communicable diseases.
- Job satisfaction declined the most among hospital-based RNs.
- 82.3% of nurses who had been employed in the same position for at least a year indicated that they had felt burned out at some point in their career, and 88.8% of those nurses indicated that their feelings of burnout had increased during the pandemic.
- The most common reasons given for switching nursing jobs after December 31, 2021, were burnout, inadequate staffing, and a stressful work environment. For nurses who left the workforce altogether, the most common reasons for leaving were retirement, burnout, and a stressful working environment.

¹ See, for example, Coomber B, Barriball KL. Impact of job satisfaction components on intent to leave and turnover for hospital-based nurses: a review of the research literature. *Int J Nurs Stud.* 2007 Feb;44(2):297-314. doi: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2006.02.004.

² Includes nurses employed in jobs that require an RN or APRN license but excludes nurses with an RN license working as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN).

- More than half (55.9%) of nurses who remained in their primary nursing position between December 31, 2021, and the date they responded to the survey indicated that they considered leaving their primary nursing position in the past year.
- Of the RNs employed on December 31, 2021, 1.2% had already retired by the time they completed the survey and another 16.1% indicated they plan to retire within the next five years.

Job Satisfaction Among Registered Nurses

While overall job satisfaction among RNs remains relatively high, many nurses were less satisfied in 2021 than they were in 2017 (**Table 1**). In fact, the share of nurses who expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with their primary nursing position nearly doubled between 2017 and 2022 (increasing from 11.0% to 19.9%).

Table 1. Job Satisfaction Among Nurses, 2021 Compared to 2017

	2021	2017	Change
Extremely Satisfied	27.6%	40.2%	-12.6%
Moderately Satisfied	52.5%	48.8%	3.7%
Moderately Dissatisfied	14.7%	8.5%	6.1%
Extremely Dissatisfied	5.2%	2.5%	2.8%

Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#) and [2018 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses](#).

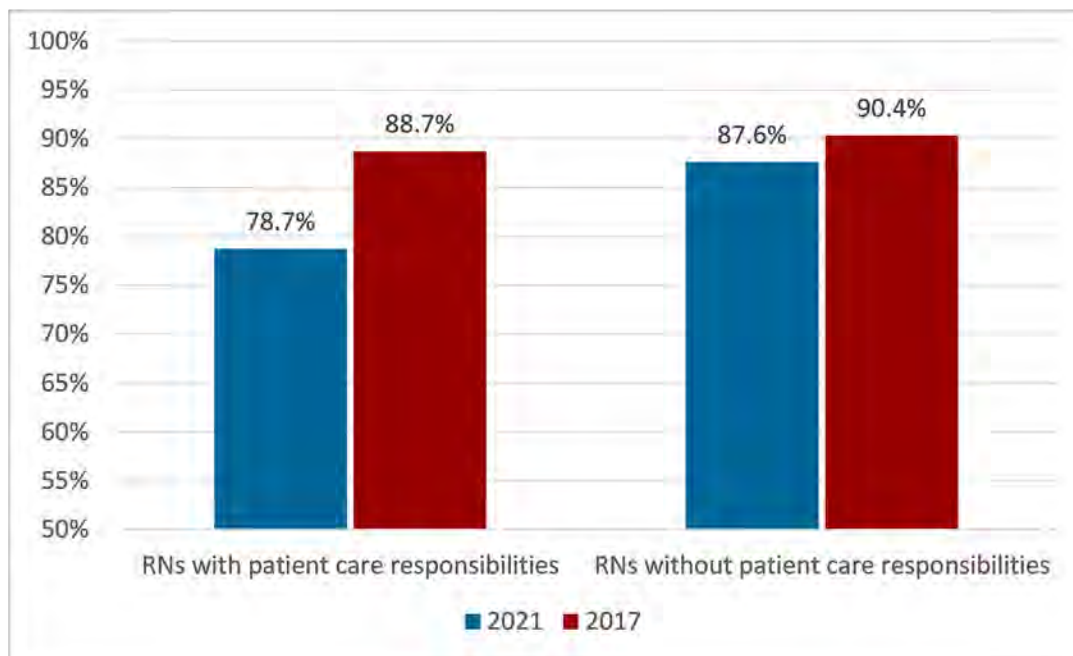
Even among nurses who expressed some degree of satisfaction with their primary nursing position, the share of nurses who were extremely satisfied with their job declined by 12.6 percentage points between 2017 and 2021 (from 40.2% to 27.6%).

Overall, the share of nurses who were either moderately or extremely satisfied with their primary nursing position declined by 8.9 percentage points between 2017 and 2021.

Job Satisfaction Varies by Area of Specialization

In general, job satisfaction was lower in 2021 for nurses with patient care responsibilities than for nurses in nonpatient care roles (**Figure 1**). Overall, 87.6% of RNs without patient care responsibilities indicated they were either extremely or moderately satisfied with their primary nursing position, compared to 78.7% among RNs with patient care responsibilities. Job satisfaction also declined more between 2017 and 2021 among nurses with patient care responsibilities (10 percentage points) than for nurses without patient care responsibilities (2.7 percentage points).

Figure 1. Job Satisfaction Among Nurses With and Without Patient Care Responsibilities, 2017 and 2021



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#) and [2018 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses](#).

Among nurses with patient care responsibilities, satisfaction varies across areas of specialization, ranging from a low of 71.1% for orthopedics to a high of 84.9% for psychiatric or mental health (including RNs specializing in substance use disorders). As shown in **Table 2**, job satisfaction declined between 2017 and 2021 for 20 out of the 21 specialties, with the largest declines for nurses specializing in orthopedics (16.3 percentage points), Infectious or communicable diseases (16.0 percentage points), general medical surgical (15.7 percentage points), labor and delivery or neonatal care (15.0 percentage points) and emergency or trauma care (14.8 percentage points). Only nurses specializing in mental health showed an increase in job satisfaction between 2017 and 2021. For nurses in this specialty, the percentage of nurses indicating they were either moderately or extremely satisfied increased by 1.2 percentage points, from 83.7% to 84.9%.

Table 2. Share of Nurses Indicating Extremely Satisfied or Moderately Satisfied with Primary Nursing Position, Select Areas of Specialty

Clinical Specialty	2021	2017	Change
Psychiatric or mental health*	84.9%	83.7%	1.2%
Occupational health	84.3%	89.2%	-4.9%
Geriatrics/gerontology	83.9%	87.6%	-3.8%
Home health or hospice	83.1%	90.2%	-7.1%
All other specialties	82.9%	88.8%	-5.9%
Ambulatory care (primary or specialty care)	82.4%	89.0%	-6.6%
Neurological	81.9%	87.5%	-5.6%
Renal or dialysis	81.9%	91.7%	-9.9%
Oncology	81.8%	92.9%	-11.1%
School health service	81.5%	92.7%	-11.2%
Obstetrics and gynecology	80.8%	92.7%	-11.9%
Chronic care	80.8%	88.9%	-8.1%
Gastrointestinal	80.2%	93.8%	-13.6%
Labor and delivery or neonatal care	79.1%	94.1%	-15.0%
Infectious or communicable disease	78.5%	94.5%	-16.0%
Cardiac or cardiovascular care	76.9%	86.2%	-9.4%
Critical care or intensive care	73.1%	85.1%	-12.0%
Emergency or trauma care	72.5%	87.2%	-14.8%
Pulmonary or respiratory	72.3%	85.6%	-13.3%
General medical surgical	72.2%	87.9%	-15.7%
Orthopedics	71.1%	87.4%	-16.3%

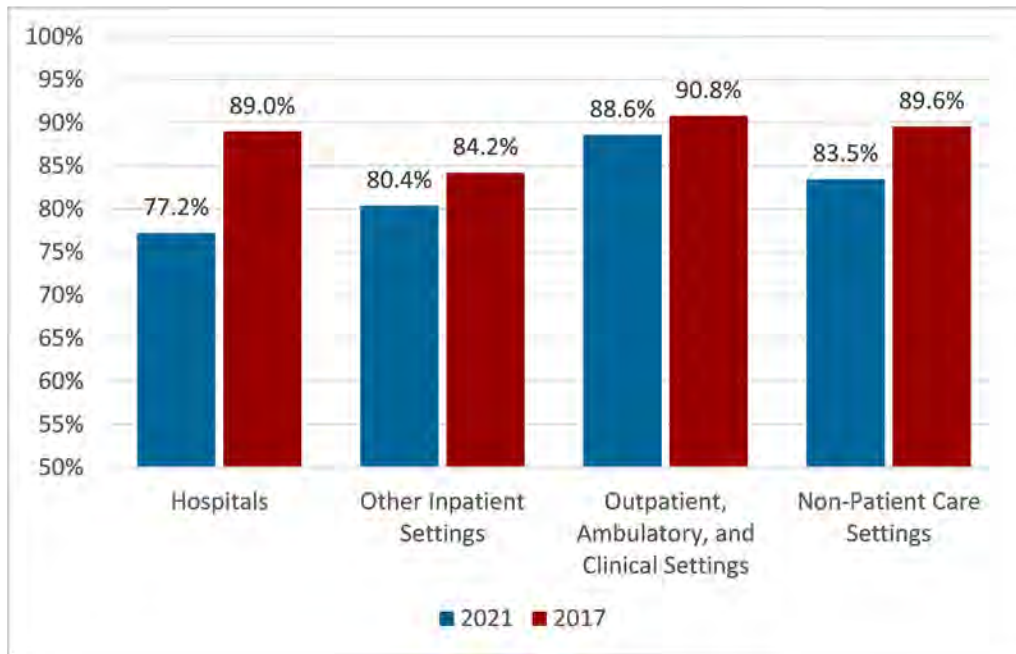
*Includes nurses specializing in treatment of substance use disorders.

Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#) and [2018 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses](#).

Job satisfaction also varies by employment setting (**Figure 2**). As was the case in 2017, job satisfaction in 2021 was highest among nurses employed in outpatient, ambulatory, and other clinical settings. In fact, job satisfaction for nurses in outpatient, ambulatory, and other clinical settings declined by just over 2 percentage points between 2017 and 2021, from 90.8% to 88.6%.

In contrast, job satisfaction among hospital-based RNs declined by 11.8 percentage points, from 89.0% to 77.2%, between 2017 and 2021. Job satisfaction in nonpatient settings (such as public health, community health, government, insurance, and university settings) declined by more than 6 percentage points, from 89.6% to 83.5%.

Figure 2. Share of Nurses Indicating Extremely Satisfied or Moderately Satisfied with Primary Nursing Position, by Employment Setting

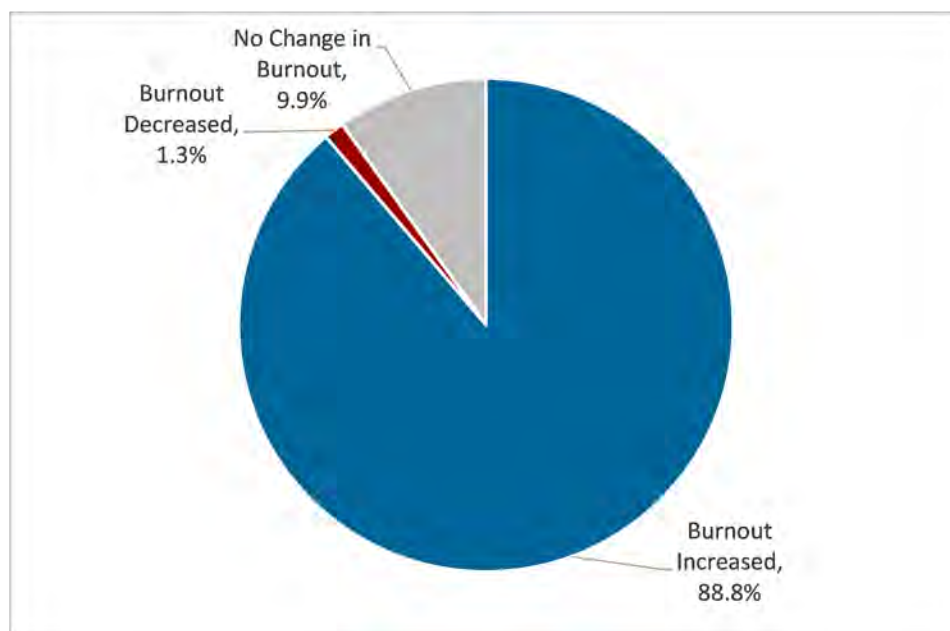


Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#) and [2018 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses](#).

Stress and Burnout Are Areas of Concern

Although the majority of RNs indicated that they were either moderately or extremely satisfied with their current nursing position, stress and feelings of burnout are common. In fact, 82.3% of nurses who had been employed in the same position for at least a year indicated that they had felt burned out at some point in their career. Of those nurses, 88.8% indicated that their feelings of burnout had increased during the pandemic (**Figure 3**). Only 1.3% of nurses who had felt burned out reported a decrease in burnout during the pandemic.

Figure 3. Impact of the Pandemic on Burnout Among RNs



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

There is evidence that higher burnout leads to higher turnover.³ In fact, according to the 2022 NSSRN, 25.7% of RNs left their primary nursing position between December 31, 2021, and the date they responded to the survey in late 2022 or early 2023.⁴ The majority of RNs who left their primary nursing position continued to work in nursing. In fact, only 3.8% of all RNs employed on December 31, 2021, were no longer employed as nurses at the time they responded to the survey.

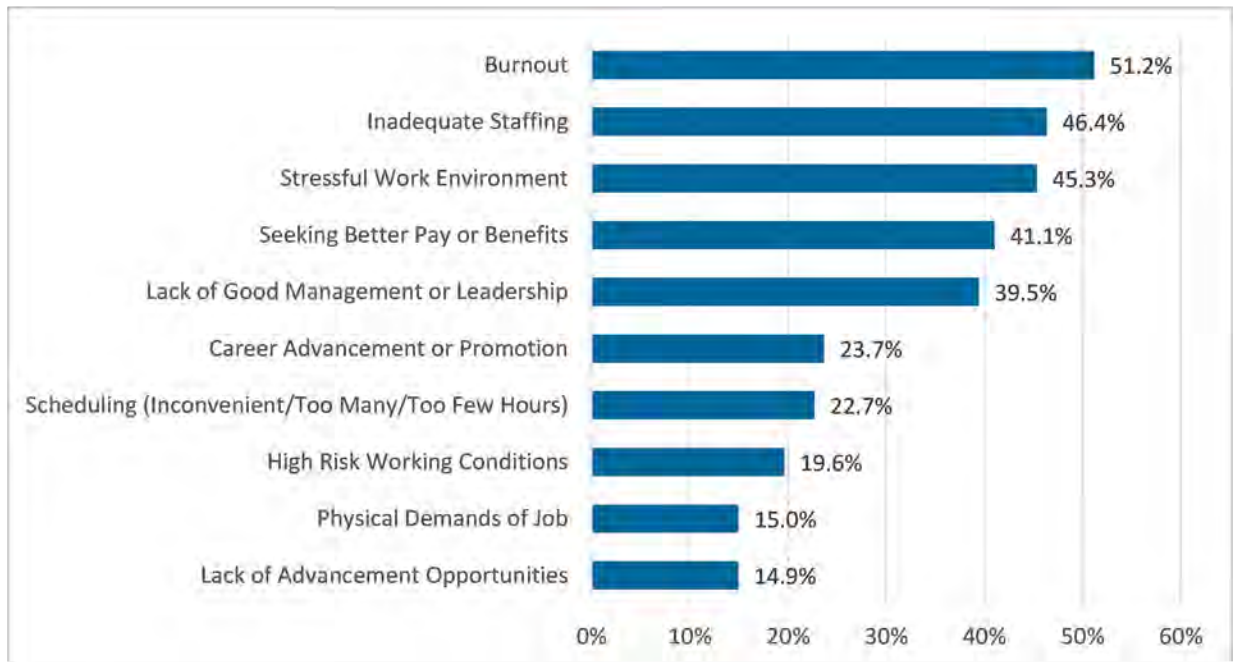
Nurses may leave their jobs for a number of reasons. For RNs who left their primary position for another nursing position, the most common reasons for leaving were burnout, inadequate staffing, a stressful working environment, seeking better pay or benefits, and lack of good management or leadership (**Figure 4a**). In contrast, in the 2018 NSSRN, lack of good management or leadership was the most common reason cited for switching nursing positions, followed by a stressful working environment, inadequate staffing, and burnout.⁵ For nurses who left nursing, retirement was the most common reason given, followed by burnout, a stressful working environment, inadequate staffing, and lack of good management or leadership (**Figure 4b**).

³ See, for example, Kelly LA, Gee PM, Butler RJ. Impact of nurse burnout on organizational and position turnover. *Nurs Outlook*. 2021 Jan-Feb;69(1):96-102. doi: 10.1016/j.outlook.2020.06.008.

⁴ This is more than double the share of nurses who left their primary nursing position reported in the 2018 NSSRN. However, because the length of time between the reference date and when the survey was administered was greater for the 2022 NSSRN, it is not clear whether these results are due to an increase in turnover or just a function of a longer period of time.

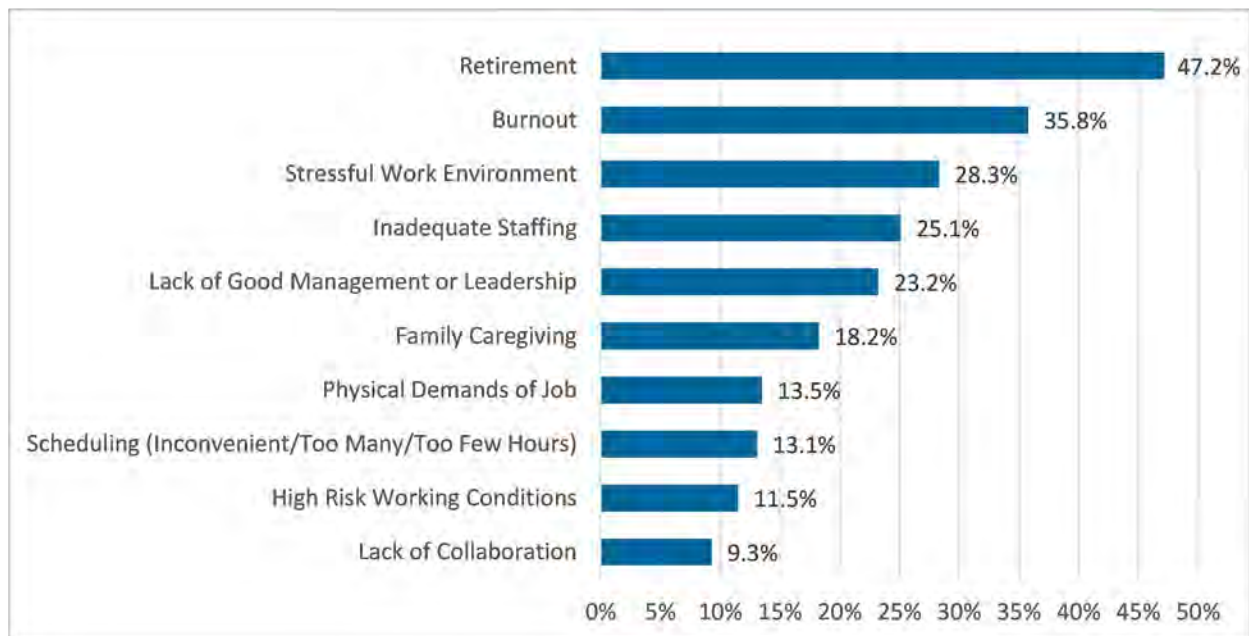
⁵ 2018 National Sample of Registered Nurses - <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/nursing-workforce-survey-data>.

Figure 4a. Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Leaving Primary Nursing Position After December 31, 2021: RNs Still Employed in Nursing



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

Figure 4b. Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Leaving Primary Nursing Position After December 31, 2021: RNs No Longer Employed in Nursing



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

The reasons given for RNs leaving their primary nursing position are similar across employment settings. Burnout was the most common reason given in 3 out of 4 employment settings (**Tables 3a-3d**). A stressful work environment is the top reason for leaving in nonhospital inpatient settings, such as nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, and mental and behavioral health treatment facilities.

Table 3a. Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Leaving Primary Nursing Position, by RNs Employed in Hospital Settings

Reason	Percent of Nurses Reporting
Burnout	54.2%
Inadequate Staffing	49.5%
Stressful Work Environment	47.3%
Lack of Good Management or Leadership	36.5%
Better Pay or Benefits	36.1%

Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

Table 3b. Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Leaving Primary Nursing Position, by RNs Employed in Other Inpatient Settings

Reason	Percent of Nurses Reporting
Stressful Work Environment	49.9%
Inadequate Staffing	49.5%
Lack of Good Management or Leadership	44.6%
Burnout	41.8%
Better Pay or Benefits	37.4%

Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

Table 3c. Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Leaving Primary Nursing Position, by RNs Employed in Outpatient, Ambulatory, and Other Clinical Settings

Reason	Percent of Nurses Reporting
Burnout	31.4%
Better Pay or Benefits	29.4%
Lack of Good Management or Leadership	26.0%
Career Advancement or Promotion	24.6%
Retirement	22.3%

Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

**Table 3d. Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Leaving Primary Nursing Position,
by RNs Employed in Nonpatient Settings**

Reason	Percent of Nurses Reporting
Burnout	42.4%
Lack of Good Management or Leadership	39.3%
Better Pay or Benefits	37.7%
Stressful Work Environment	35.8%
Inadequate Staffing	32.7%

Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

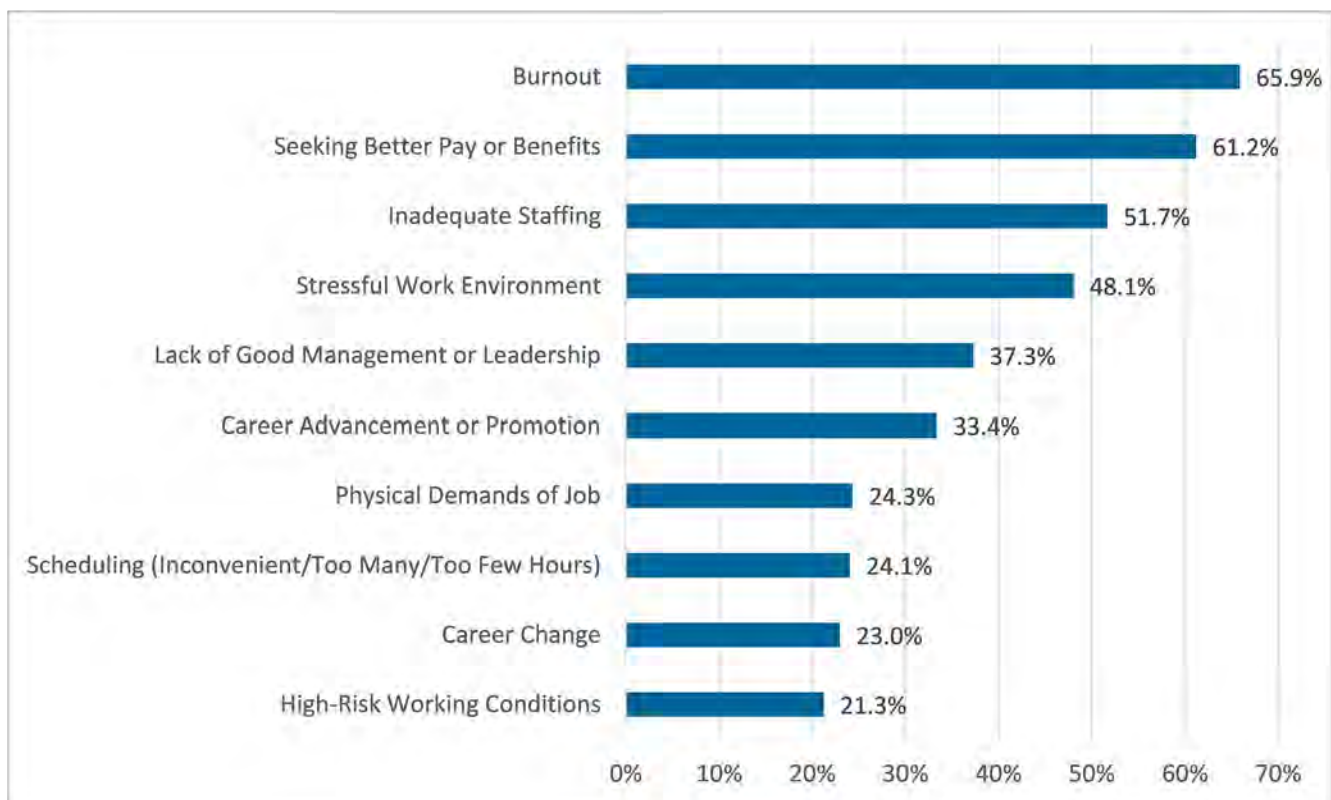
Retention Remains a Concern

Although overall job satisfaction remains relatively high, the large increase in the share of nurses who expressed some level of dissatisfaction with their primary nursing position raises concerns about retention and future job turnover. In fact, 61.6% of nurses who remained in their primary nursing position between December 31, 2021, and the date they responded to the survey indicated that they considered leaving their primary nursing position at some point in the past. More than half (55.9%) of all RNs who remained in their primary nursing position indicated that they have considered leaving their primary nursing position in the past year.

By employment setting, the share of nurses who have ever considered leaving their position was highest in hospitals (65.4%), followed by nonpatient settings (57.7%), other inpatient settings (56.3%) and outpatient, ambulatory, and other clinical settings (52.7%).

The most common reasons given for considering leaving were similar to the reasons for leaving given by nurses who left their primary nursing position, including burnout, seeking better pay and benefits, inadequate staffing, a stressful work environment, and a lack of good management or leadership (**Figure 5**).

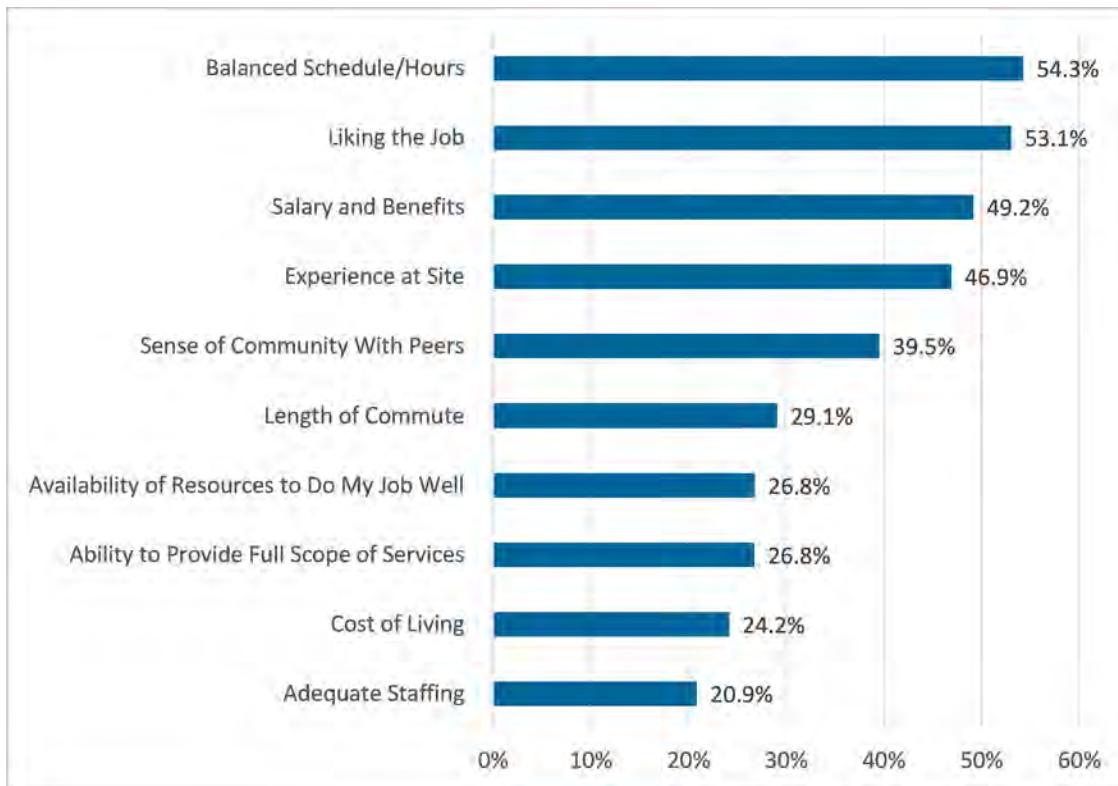
Figure 5. Most Common Reasons Given for Considering Leaving Primary Nursing Position



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

In contrast, a balanced schedule, liking the job, adequate salary and benefits, experience at the site, and a sense of community with peers were the most common reasons given for RNs deciding to remain in their primary nursing position after December 31, 2021 (**Figure 6**).

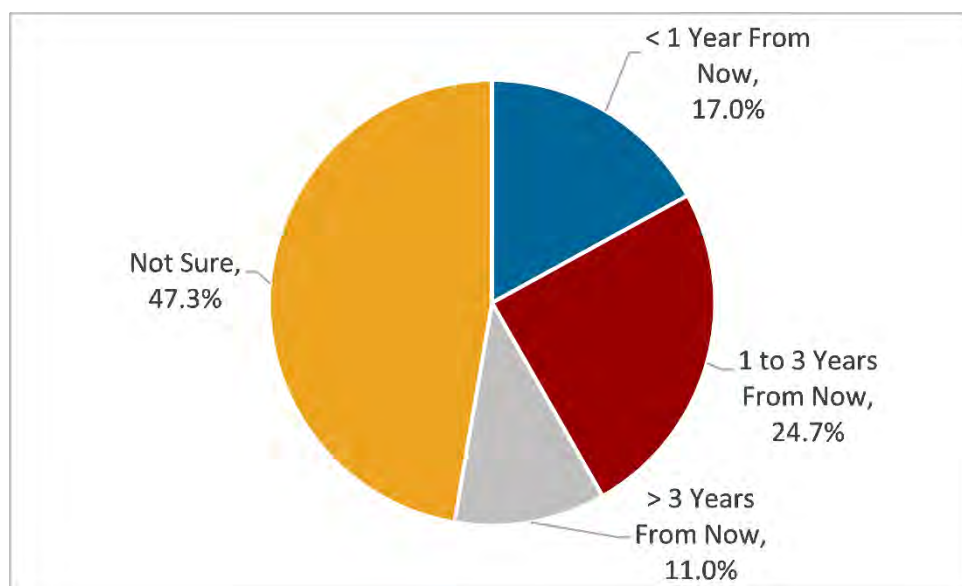
Figure 6. Most Common Reasons Given for Remaining in Primary Nursing Position



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

For RNs who have considered leaving their primary nursing position, nearly 42% plan to leave within the next three years (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7. Time Frame for Leaving Primary Nursing Position, RNs Who Have Considered Leaving

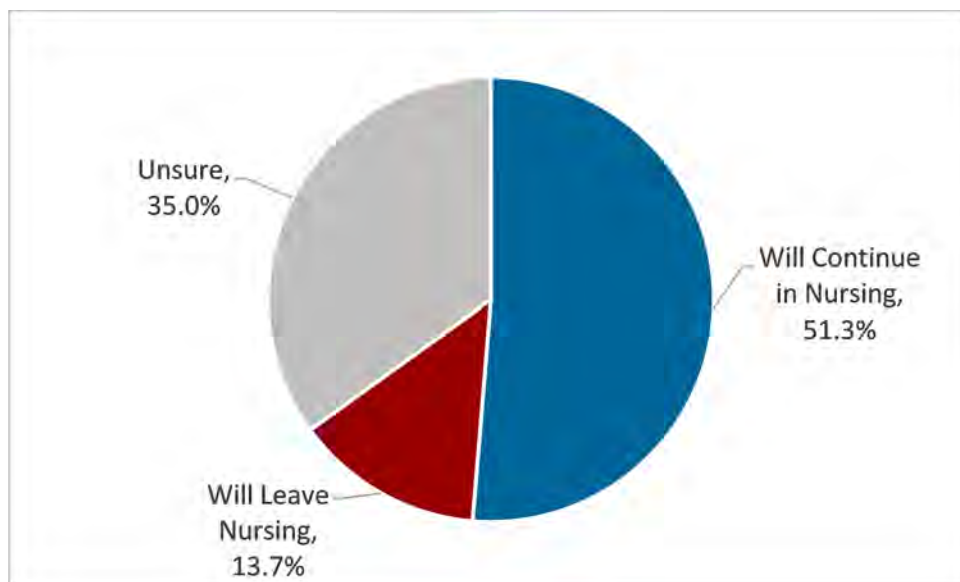


Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

More than half (51.3%) of RNs who have considered leaving their primary nursing position plan to continue in nursing after leaving their current position (**Figure 8**). This is lower than the share of nurses who planned to continue in nursing in the 2018 NSSRN (68.3%), suggesting that a greater share of nurses is considering leaving than before the pandemic.⁶

Only 13.7% of RNs indicated that they planned to leave nursing altogether, and 35.0% were unsure if they would continue in nursing or not.

Figure 8. Future Plans for RNs Who Have Considered Leaving Their Primary Nursing Position



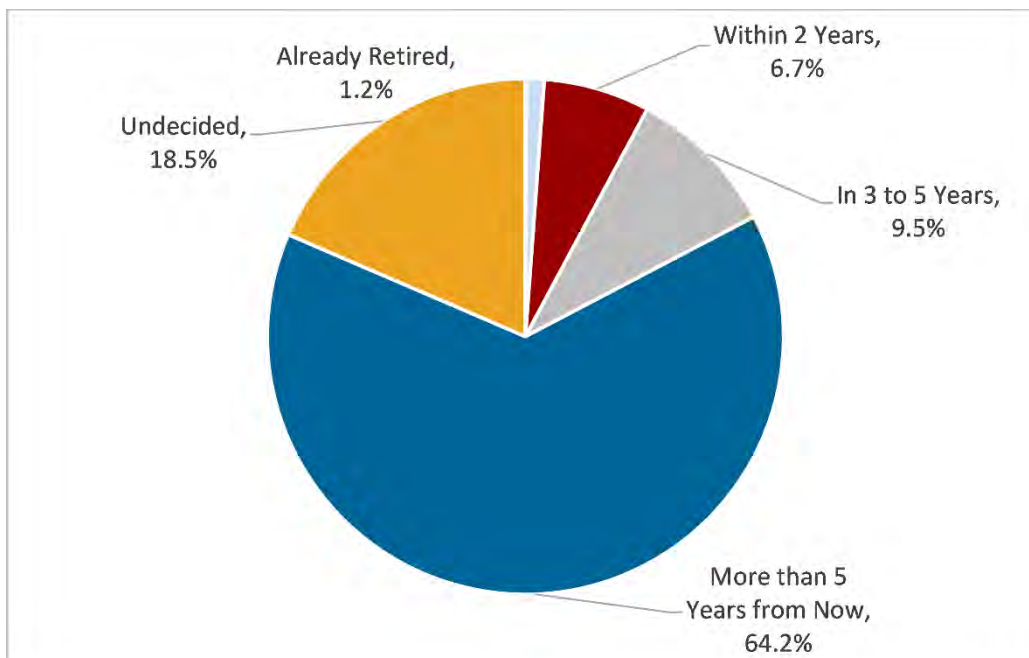
Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

⁶ 2018 National Sample of Registered Nurses - <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/nursing-workforce-survey-data>.

Future Retirement Plans

In addition to job satisfaction and future turnover, retirement can also have an important impact on the future supply of RNs. Of the nurses employed as RNs on December 31, 2021, 1.2% have already retired and another 16.1% plan to retire within the next 5 years (**Figure 9**).

Figure 9. Future Retirement Plans for Nurses Employed on December 31, 2021



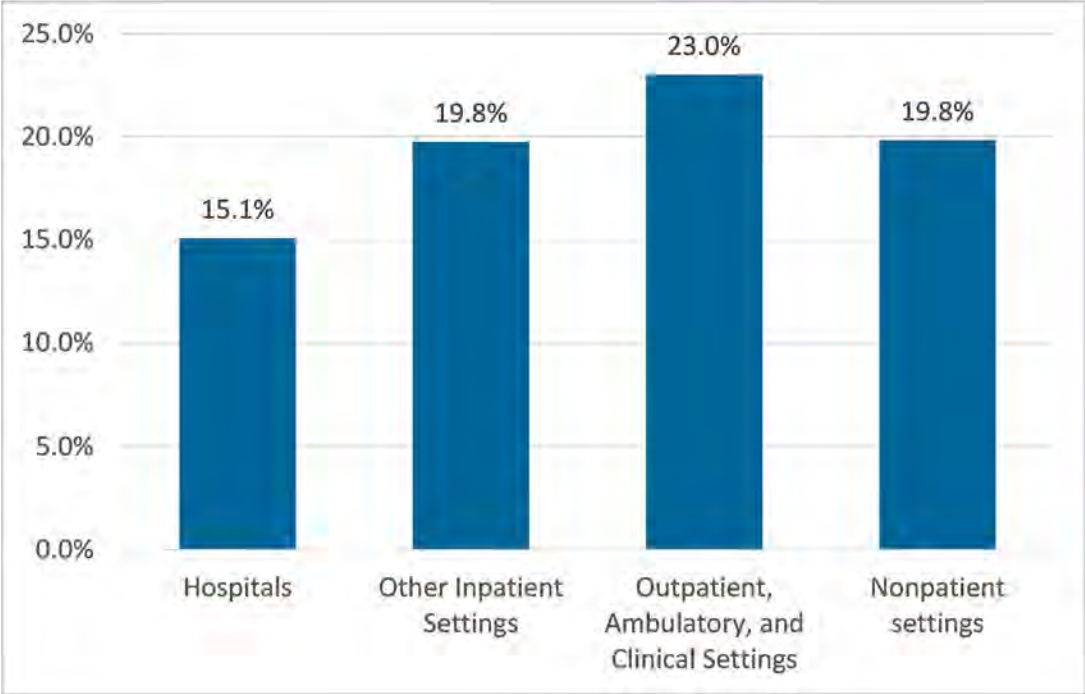
Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

These results indicate that planned retirement is about the same as it was in 2018 when 15.8% of RNs employed on December 31, 2017 reported that they were already retired or planned to retire within 5 years. Furthermore, a greater share of RNs in the 2022 NSSRN were undecided on when they planned to retire than in the 2018 NSSRN (18.5% compared to 14.9%).⁷

By setting, outpatient, ambulatory, and clinical settings has the highest percentage (23.0%) of nurses who have already retired or plan to retire over the next 5 years (**Figure 10**), followed by nonpatient settings (19.8%), and other inpatient settings (19.8%). While hospital settings had the lowest share of nurses who have already retired or plan to retire over the next 5 years (15.1%), nurses employed in this setting had the lowest levels of job satisfaction.

⁷ 2018 National Sample of Registered Nurses - <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/nursing-workforce-survey-data>.

Figure 10. Share of RNs Who Have Already Retired or Plan to Retire Over the Next Five Years, by Employment Setting



Source: [2022 National Sample of Registered Nurses](#).

About the Data

The National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (NSSRN) is the longest running survey of registered nurses (RNs) in the United States. Since its inaugural assessment in 1977, the NSSRN has provided educators, health workforce leaders, and policymakers with key details and developments of the nursing workforce supply. Considered the cornerstone of nursing workforce data, this comprehensive exploration provides information on the demographics, educational attainment, licenses and certifications, and employment characteristics of RNs in the United States.

In collaboration with the U.S Census Bureau, the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis administered the 11th NSSRN data collection beginning in December 2022. From December 2022 to April 2023, a total of 49,234 registered nurses completed the survey via a web form or a paper questionnaire with an unweighted response rate of 40.6% (41.1% weighted). This survey gathered data from participants with active RN licenses from all U.S. states revealing a comprehensive look into the RN and Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) workforce.

To learn more about the NSSRN or to download data and reports, visit [National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses \(NSSRN\)](#).