Social Workers Registration Board
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Social Worker Workforce Report 2024

A high-level overview of the social worker workforce in 2024

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He ara pūkenga, he ara tauwhiro, hei whakamana mātā waka

The many pathways of knowledge, the many pathways of social work, upholding the dignity of all

Introduction

This Annual Social Worker Workforce Report presents data collected from the 2024 Social Worker Workforce Survey conducted by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). The purpose of the survey is to understand trends for the current practising social worker workforce. Social workers are invited to share information about their role, experiences, opinions, and beliefs. The survey enables us to build an evidence base to support social worker workforce planning and decision-making.

All social workers who renewed their annual Practising Certificates (PCs) from May through to July 2024 were invited to participate in the voluntary online survey. Responses were received from 5,002 out of a total of 8,354 practising social workers who renewed their PC in that period, representing a 60% response rate. This has increased from a total number of responses in 2023 of 4,411 and is an increase of 9%.

The survey sample closely resembled the demographic profile of the 'active' workforce of practising social workers for the 2023/24 financial year (Appendix 1). This gives us high confidence that the results of this survey are representative of the broader practising workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The 2024 survey followed the same six core domains of questioning as in 2023:

- workforce composition
- knowledge and skill development
- workforce sustainability
- employer support
- standing of the profession
- safety and conduct.

Tailoring certain domains each year allows for a deeper understanding of topical issues at the time of the survey. It helps the SWRB as an occupational regulator, to further our understanding of how registration supports public safety and supports our Lead Agency role for workforce planning for all social workers. Many of the survey questions invited social workers to give feedback or reasons for their answer. These comments are included in the relevant sections throughout the report to reflect the social worker voice alongside statistical findings.

This report is intended for use by decision makers across the health and social services sector, key government departments and policy makers, social work employers, members of the public and social workers themselves.

The workforce survey dataset is a key part of the evidence base used by the SWRB in its Lead Agency role for workforce planning for all social workers. This role was designated by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee in 2020. More information about this role can be found in Appendix 2.

Summary of Key Findings

The social worker workforce is an ageing, experienced, qualified, female-dominated workforce with high Māori and Pacific Peoples representation

- Around a quarter of surveyed and practising social workers identify as Māori, a higher proportion than 2023 (24% and 25% respectively), and higher than many other 'caring' professions such as nursing and midwifery[1]. Around 12% of social workers identify as Pacific Peoples.
- Most surveyed and practising social workers (86%) register through the New Zealand qualification pathway and around 11% through the Overseas Qualified pathway. This is consistent with previous years. Only a small proportion (2%) registered through the Section 13 Experience Pathway.
- Male representation in the workforce remains low at 15%.
- The majority of survey participants describe themselves as 'experienced' or 'advanced' practitioners, with an average age of 49 years old. Over a quarter were aged between 50 – 59 years old.

The employment landscape is changing, with higher salaries, more part-time working and a greater number of social workers working in health settings

- The distribution of annual salary has shifted higher than last year, with a 'peak' category of $100,001 - $110,000 reported by 26% of social workers, compared to the peak of $80,001 – $90,000 in the 2023 survey.
- Salaries reported by social workers employed by Health and in Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) increased between 2023 and 2024. They now more closely match those of Oranga Tamariki at a peak of $100,001 – $110,000.
- Over a quarter of survey participants work for an NGO (29%). The second highest employer is now the health sector (26%). Oranga Tamariki, once the biggest single employer of social workers, has seen a decline in the number of social workers it employs to 22% of the overall workforce.
- This is the first year that mental health has been the most common field of practice reported by survey participants (36%). This runs parallel to a decline in the proportion who report that they work in statutory care and protection (from 34% in 2022 to 28% in 2024).
- The proportion of participants described as part-time workers (25%) continues to increase, compared to 12% in 2022.

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[1] https://nursingcouncil.org.nz/Public/NCNZ/About-section/Corporate_Documents.aspx?hkey=26f0518b-0c03-42b8-b697-e734697d78ff
https://www.midwiferycouncil.health.nz/common/Uploaded%20files/Workforce%20surveys/Midwifery%20Workforce%20Survey%202024.pdf

- There is geographic variation in the number of social workers per capita, with some areas having higher numbers (Nelson; Gisborne; Northland; Hawke's Bay) and some areas where there are a lower number of social workers per capita (Tasman; Marlborough; Waikato).

Social workers are keen to develop their skills in managing complexity and social work practice with Māori and other ethnic and cultural groups

- Social workers continue to seek Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to enhance capability and demonstrate competency in working with Māori, Pacific Peoples, and other ethnic minorities.

- Developing skills for managing complexity, is also indicated as a priority, suggesting complex problems continue to be faced in the work environment.

Workforce sustainability needs attention across the sector

- Making a positive difference to people's lives continues to be the main reason social workers are attracted into the profession (79%), and is the same reason that social workers stay in the workforce.

- Recruitment and retention of social workers are once again noted as the biggest challenges facing the profession, with more social workers leaving the profession than entering. Thirteen percent of survey participants plan to leave the profession in the next five years, which would equate to a loss of close to 1,100 practising social workers across New Zealand.

- Retirement is the main reason for social workers leaving the profession and the number indicating intention to retire has increased by 13% since 2023. Burnout, high workloads, the costs of being a social worker, lack of career progression, and a challenging work environment were given as reasons for leaving the profession.

- The complex nature of social work practice and balancing work and personal life were the most noted barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession. Those indicating that balancing work and personal life is a barrier has increased from 41% in 2023 to 52% in 2024, signalling a growing issue with work-life balance across the profession.

- A higher proportion identified the increasing reliance on an unregulated support workforce as a challenge for the profession (30% in 2024, compared to 18% in 2023), particularly social workers employed by iwi-based organisations.

Employers support practitioners with training and professional supervision, and paying practising fees

- Professional reflective supervision and training and skills development continue to be the most common categories of employer support received by social workers in the survey.

- Across the top four employer types, survey participants from Oranga Tamariki and health organisations reported lower levels of employer support across almost all the categories, including those forms of support that are required for the social work profession (professional supervision and Continuing Professional Development {CPD}).

- In 2024, the trend for employers paying social workers' practising certificate fees in full continues upward to 91%.

The standing of the profession has lifted but challenges remain

- The proportion of social workers who think the profession is more respected since mandatory registration is growing.

- Eight out of ten participants thought that media coverage of social work has had a negative impact on public trust and confidence in the profession. This is consistent with findings in 2023.

Social workers support safe and accountable conduct

- 91% of participants are confident that their employer has adequate policies and procedures in place to deal with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct.

- Social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki, and other Government agencies had the lowest levels of confidence in their employer's policies and processes to deal with serious practice and/or conduct.

- Almost all participants confirmed they would raise concerns about another social worker's practice and/or conduct with the SWRB if it could not be resolved with their employer.

The SWRB wishes to thank all social workers who took part in the 2024 survey. We appreciate the time and effort taken by social workers to share their experience and support our understanding of their mahi and the workforce as a whole.

Section 1A – Workforce Composition – Demographics

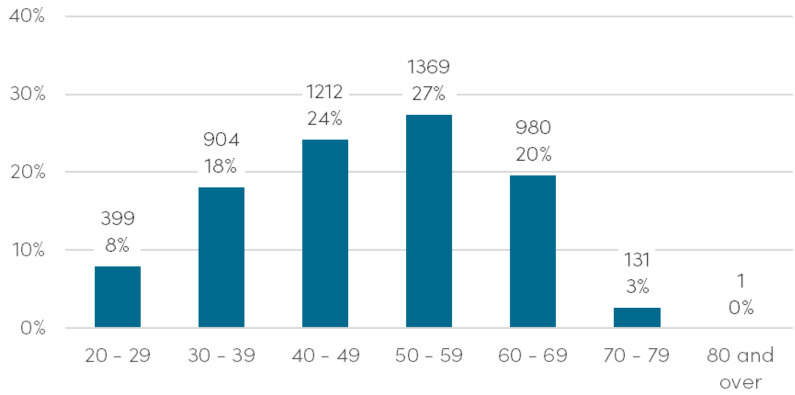
The demographic information provided by survey participants gives a picture of the current social worker workforce. This includes age distribution, gender, ethnicity, experience of disability and geographic region.

The 2024 survey sample closely resembled the demographic profile of the 'active' workforce of practising social workers for the 2023/24 financial year, as shown in Appendix 1. This gives confidence that the results of this survey are representative of the broader practising workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.1 Age

The average age of survey participants was 49 years old. The age distribution has not changed in the past three years of the survey, with the peak age group being 50-59 years (1369 participants, or 27% of the sample). Both the survey sample and Register data for practising social workers show that one in five social workers are aged 60 or above. This age profile signals that loss to retirement may continue to be an issue for workforce sustainability in the coming years.

Figure 1. Age group distribution 2024



1.2 Gender

The majority of social workers in the survey identified as female (85%). This gender distribution is consistent with past results and the Register of practising social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Figure 2. Gender distribution 2024

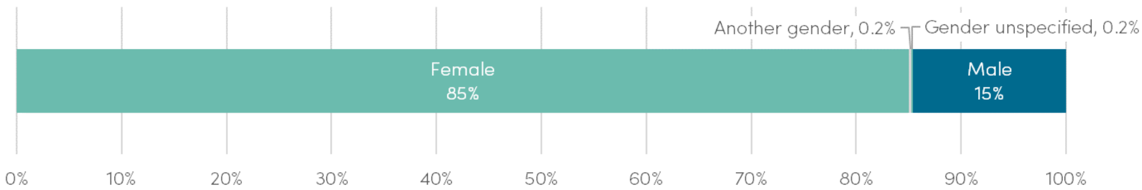


Table 1. Gender distribution 2024

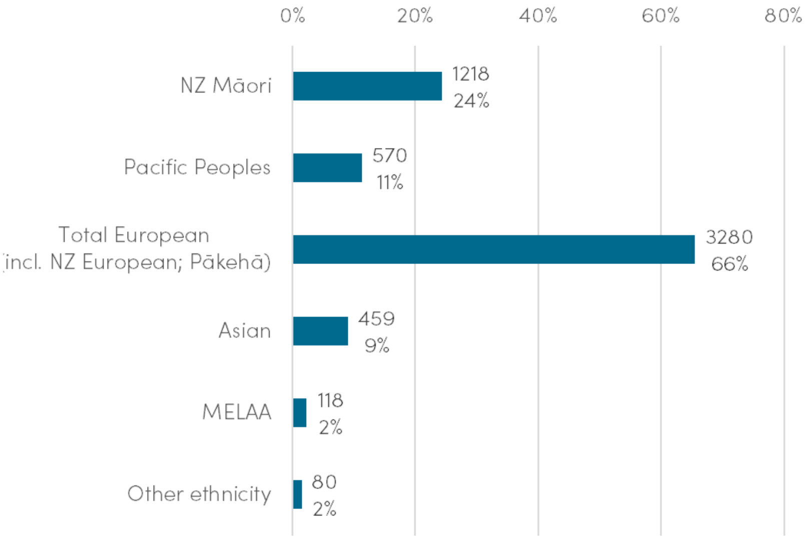
Gender	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %
Female	4251	85%
Male	728	15%
Another gender	11	0.2%
Unspecified	12	0.2%

1.3 Ethnicity

The SWRB uses a 'total ethnicity' analysis and reporting approach. This allows social workers to identify with more than one ethnic group which better recognises and reflects the diversity of the workforce. The total ethnicity approach aligns with reporting by Statistics NZ and other Government agencies. A social worker may appear more than once across ethnic group categories, so totals will add to more than 100% of the sample.

The largest ethnic group for workforce survey participants was European (66%), which includes NZ European/Pākehā (51%) and other European (17%). Almost one quarter of participants identify as Māori (24%), an increase from 19% in 2022. Eleven percent of social workers identify as Pacific Peoples, which has also increased from 8% in 2022.

Figure 3. Ethnicity distribution 2024



Survey allows participants to identify with more than one ethnic group, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

The table below shows the survey and practising workforce distribution by ethnicity compared to the most recent census of the NZ population (2023). This comparison shows that the 2024 workforce survey sample and practising social worker workforce have a higher proportion of Māori and Pacific Peoples than the general population.

Table 2. Ethnicity distribution 2024 – comparing survey to practising workforce and census

Ethnic group	2024 survey %	2024 practising workforce %	2023 Census[2] %
Māori	24%	25%	18%
Pacific Peoples	11%	12%	9%
Total European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā/other European)	66%	63%	68%
Asian	9%	10%	17%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2%	3%	2%
Other ethnicity	2%	1%	1%

[2] https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

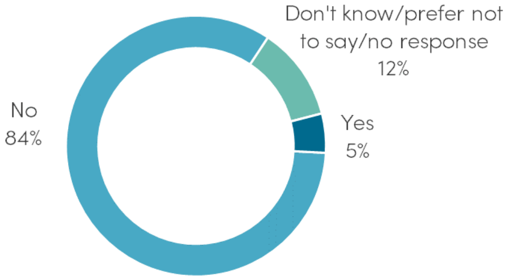
1.4 Disabilities

In 2023, to better reflect the diversity of the workforce, the SWRB added a survey question about disability. This builds an understanding of how the workforce reflects the general population, and how those with specific needs might be better supported. The SWRB understands that some participants may have hesitated to disclose disabilities that could affect the perceived ability to fulfil their role. The question included a preamble as follows:

> We do not currently hold information about disabilities or long-term conditions as part of MySWRB profiles. The answer you give here will not be connected in any way to your PC declaration about your mental or physical health. We will remove your response from your file after the workforce survey data analysis has been completed. This means it cannot be accessed in the future. We will only ever report on disability status as a combined, summarised dataset, so individuals cannot be identified. We ask the questions below to understand how the social worker workforce compares with the general population.
>
> *Do you have a permanent disability or long-term condition that impacts your ability to carry out everyday activities? [Yes/No/Prefer not to say]*

In the 2024 survey, five percent of survey participants indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition that affects their ability to carry out everyday activities (Figure 4). This corresponds to a total of 243 participants, and has increased from two percent reporting a permanent disability or long-term condition in the 2023 survey.

Figure 4. Disability experience 2024



Of the 243 participants who indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition, the type of disabilities included mobility or agility (91 participants), hearing (52), vision (20), psychiatric/psychological (32), or learning (32).

1.5 Region

The geographic distribution of survey participants is shown in Table 3 below. As shown in Appendix 1, these closely align with the geographic distribution of all practising social workers on the SWRB's Register in the 2023/24 period. The geographic distribution of social workers in the survey sample closely aligns with the NZ population, except for Auckland which has a lower proportion in the survey sample.

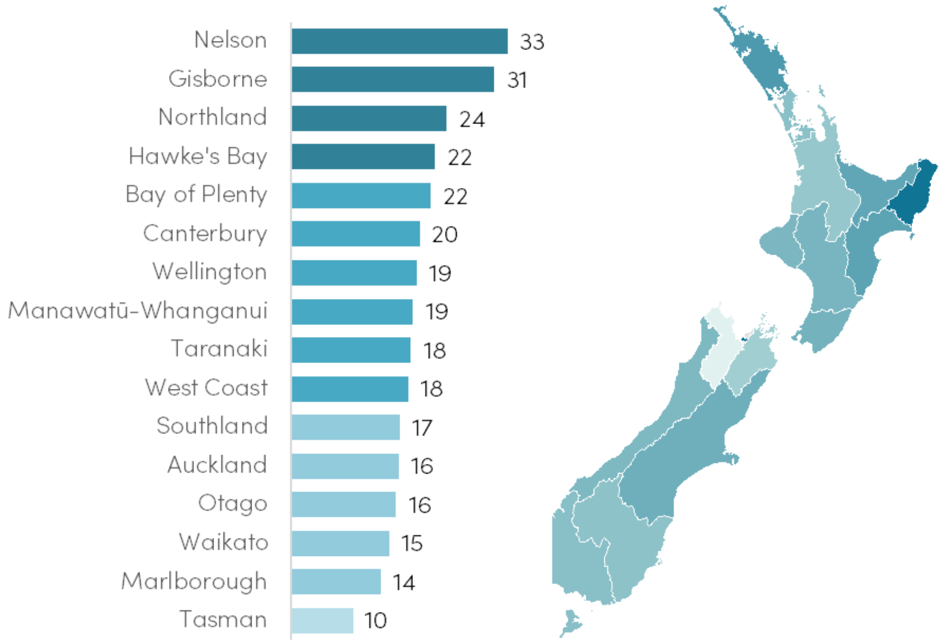
Please note, this geographic distribution is based on social workers' residential addresses as recorded in the SWRB's Register. This may not always reflect the full coverage of area(s) where social workers work.

Table 3. Geographic distribution 2024

Region	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %	NZ population[3] %
Northland	252	5%	4%
Auckland	1445	29%	33%
Waikato	433	9%	10%
Bay of Plenty	380	8%	7%
Gisborne	78	2%	1%
Hawkes Bay	218	4%	4%
Taranaki	140	3%	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	294	6%	5%
Wellington	538	11%	10%
Tasman	30	1%	1%
Nelson	91	2%	1%
Marlborough	42	1%	1%
West Coast	32	1%	1%
Canterbury	704	14%	13%
Otago	225	4%	5%
Southland	97	2%	2%
Unspecified/International	3	0%	n/a
Total	5002	100%	

Figure 5 shows the geographic distribution of practising social workers in New Zealand, using a calculation of practising social workers per 10,000 population. This highlights the regions where there is a higher number of social workers per capita (Nelson; Gisborne; Northland; Hawke's Bay) and areas where there are a lower number of social workers per capita (Tasman; Marlborough; Waikato).

Figure 5. Geographic distribution 2024 – Practising social workers per 10,000 population



[3] https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

Section 1B – Workforce Composition – Qualifications, role, and employer

This section describes the composition of the social work workforce by registration pathway, and time since registration. It includes information about social workers' current role and employment situation, their primary client group and field of practice.

1.6 Pathway to registration and qualifications

Most social workers who participated in the survey were registered through the New Zealand social work qualification pathway (86%), and 11% were registered through the overseas social work qualification pathway. Two percent of survey participants gained registration through the SWRB's Experience pathway: S13. The proportions match those of the full practising workforce (see Table A8 in Appendix 1). One third of social workers who gained registration through the Experience pathway identify as Māori (32% in both the survey sample and the full practising workforce).

Table 4. Pathway to registration 2024

Pathway to registration	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %
NZ social work qualification	4292	86%
Experience pathway: S13	124	2%
Overseas social work qualification	570	11%
Australian social work qualification	16	0%

Of those survey participants who registered through the New Zealand qualification pathway, 72% did so with a level 7-8 Bachelor's qualification, and 13% registered with a Master's degree.

Table 5. Qualification level of NZ pathway 2023

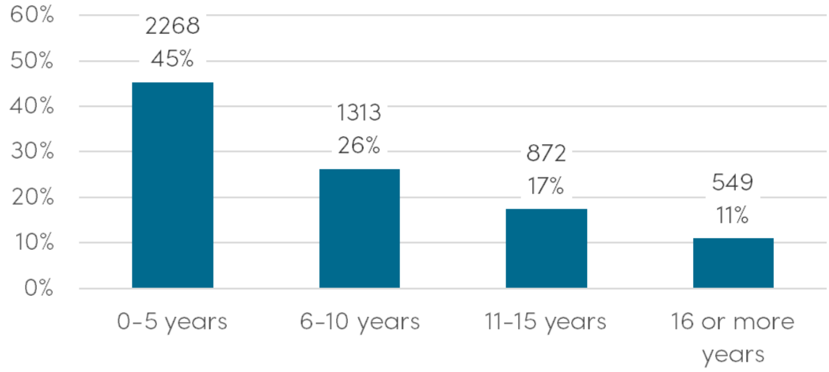
Tertiary qualification level	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %
1-6 Certificates/diplomas[4]	633	15%
7-8 Graduate certificates/diplomas/ Bachelor's/Honours	3096	72%
9 Master's	542	13%
10 Doctoral	0	0%
Unspecified/None[4]	21	0.5%

1.7 Years since joining the SWRB Register

Over half of survey participants have been registered with the SWRB for six or more years (55%). The remainder (45%) have been registered for five years or fewer. Of those who registered within the last five years, a significant number registered when it became mandatory in February 2021. They may have been practising for some time beforehand.

[4] The SWRB's Register includes a number of certificates, diplomas and unspecified qualifications which were to gain historic registration in the period before registration became mandatory in February 2021.

Figure 6. Years since joining the SWRB Register 2024

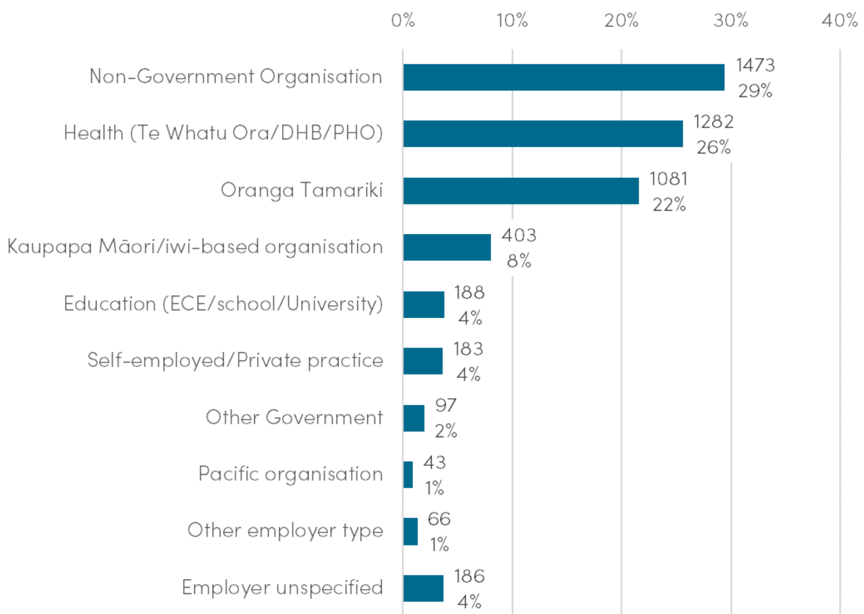


1.8 Employer type

In 2024, over a quarter of survey participants reported that they work for an NGO (29%), and this matches the full practising workforce. Just over a quarter of survey participants report that they are employed in health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHOs, 26%)[5], and 22% report that they are employed by Oranga Tamariki. Eight percent of participants reported that they work for an iwi-based organisation. In comparing the survey with the full practising register of social workers, the sample closely resembles the distribution by employer type (see Table A7 in Appendix 1).

The proportion of survey respondents reporting that they work for Oranga Tamariki has dropped since 2022, when nearly 35% of survey participants reported that they worked for Oranga Tamariki, and this has dropped to 22% in 2024.

Figure 7. Employer type 2024



[5] *In 2022/23, the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) restructure of the New Zealand health system merged the functions of 20 DHBs into Te Whatu Ora, which leads the day-to-day running of the health system for the whole country. In the past, we have reported 'DHB' as an employer category. Since 2023 we have used a collective 'health' employer category that includes Te Whatu Ora, Te Aka Whai Ora, DHBs (which are still used as interim employment entities during this transition phase), and PHOs.*

In reporting by employer type, the SWRB acknowledges the 'real world' overlap between employer categories. Many employer types (particularly those delivering community-based, iwi-based and services for Pacific Peoples) often deliver both social and health services. For the purposes of this analysis, employers are reported as a single category which means a social worker's place of employment is assigned to a single category which is the best fit, for example NGO *or* health/hauora.

1.9 Setting of work

In 2024, the survey asked specifically about the setting for the majority of social workers' current role. There is close alignment with results by employer type above, as seen in the highest category of social workers who report working in community-based/NGO settings (29%). Fifteen percent of participants report working in hospital-based settings, and nine percent work in residential sites and regional offices. Four percent of participants report working from home or remotely.

Table 6. Setting of current role 2024

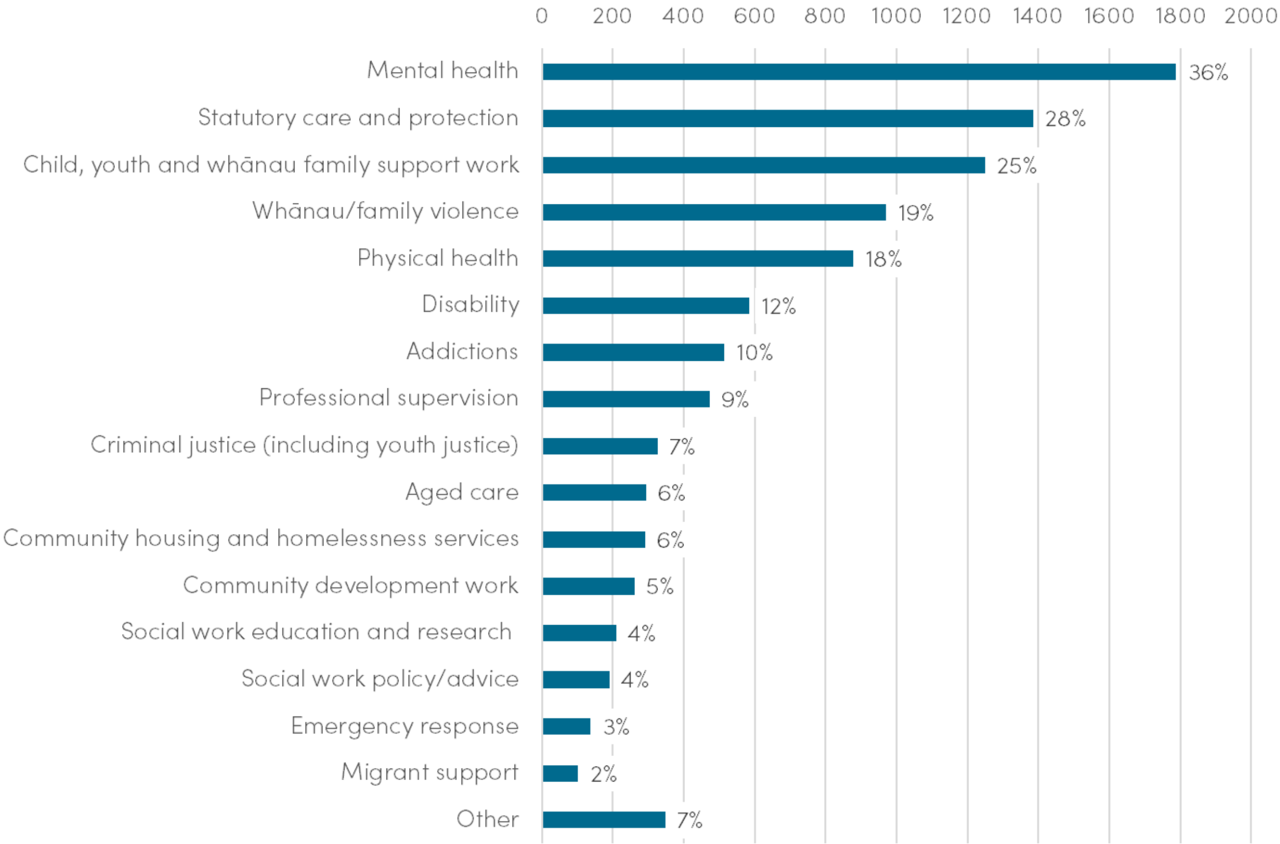
Setting	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %
Community-based/NGO	1396	29%
Hospital-based	739	15%
Residential site	430	9%
Regional office	414	9%
Kaupapa Māori/iwi-based health and/or social services	339	7%
Primary health organisation	282	6%
Work from home/remotely	201	4%
ECE/Primary/secondary school	154	3%
Head/national office	101	2%
Tertiary education academic/educator	93	2%
Pacific health and/or social services	61	1%
Tertiary education student well-being	45	1%
Other	612	13%

In conducting this analysis, we acknowledge that social work roles often span different settings and employer types – for example, a social worker may be employed by an NGO such as the Salvation Army but their day-to-day work is in hospital-based services.

1.10 Field of practice

Survey participants were asked to indicate the fields of practice that they mainly work in. Over a third of participants mainly work in mental health (36%), and over a quarter work in statutory care and protection (28%). An additional 25% work in child, youth and whānau/family support. This is the first year that mental health has been the most common field of practice (36%) compared to previous years (21% in 2023 and 18% in 2022), and runs parallel to a decline in the proportion who work mainly in statutory care and protection (from 34% in 2022, 32% in 2023, to 28% in 2024).

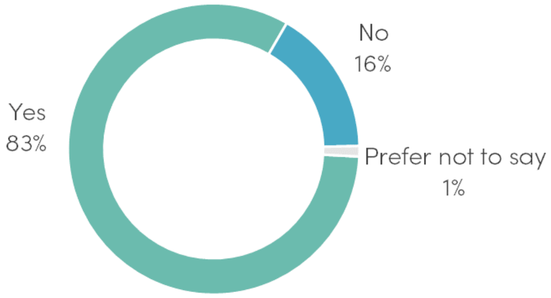
Figure 8. Field of practice 2024



1.11 Current role – frontline

In 2024, a new question was added to the workforce survey to ask if a social worker's current role was frontline/client-facing. The majority said yes (83%). Those who are not frontline tend to be in professional advisor or team/clinical lead positions.

Figure 9. Current role frontline/client-facing 2024

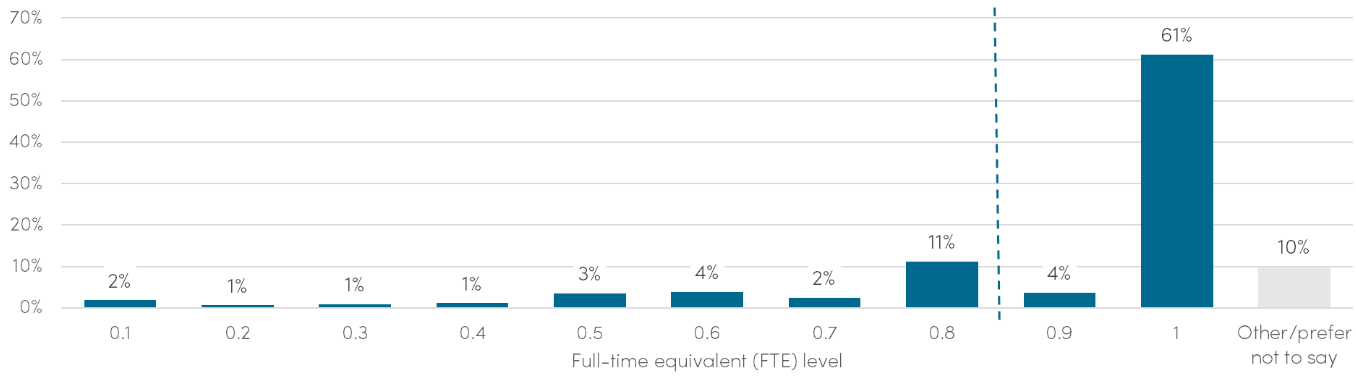


1.12 Current role –Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) level

In 2024, social workers were asked to indicate the FTE level of their current role. Two-thirds (65%) said that they work 0.9 or 1 FTE (considered full-time, shown with a dashed line on the chart below), and a combined total of 25% of participants work part-time, or between 0.1 to 0.8 FTE. Ten percent answered other, or that they would prefer not to say.

The increasing trend towards part-time work continues. In the past few years this has grown from 12% who reported working part-time in 2022, to 20% in 2023 and 25% in 2024.

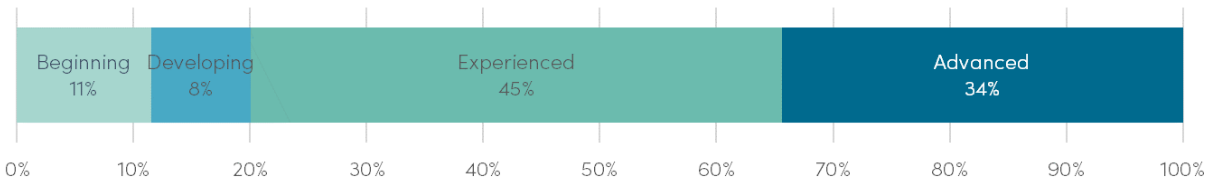
Figure 10. Current work status 2024



1.13 Level of experience and responsibility in social work practice

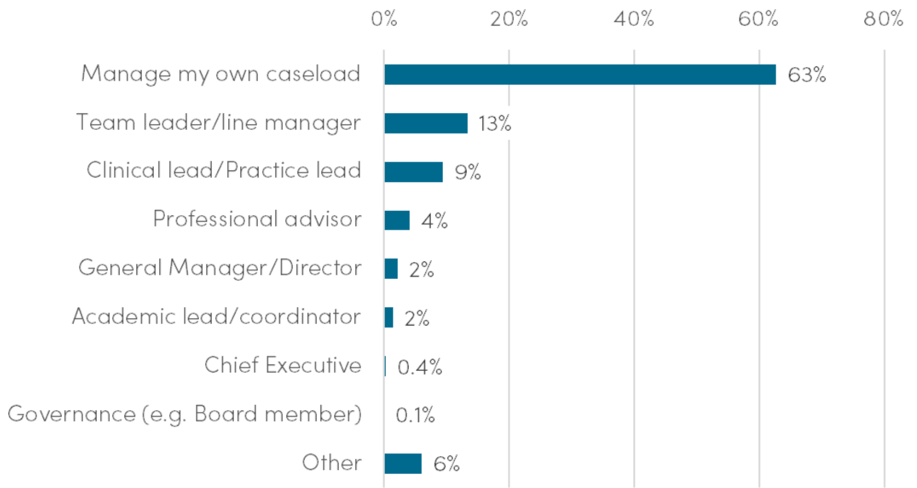
Social workers were asked which category best described their level of experience in social work practice. One in ten described themselves as 'beginning practitioners' with 1 to 3 years of experience (11%). Close to half described themselves as 'experienced' (45%), and a third 'advanced' (34%). The remaining 8% described themselves as 'developing'. While the response categories for this survey question changed slightly between 2023 and 2024, the proportion of social workers who described themselves as 'beginning practitioners' remained the same (also 11% in 2023).

Figure 11. Level of experience in social work practice 2024



Social workers were asked about their level of responsibility at the time of the survey. Almost two-thirds manage their own caseload (63%), and 13% are team leader/line managers. Nine percent report that they are clinical/practice leads.

Figure 12. Level of responsibility 2024

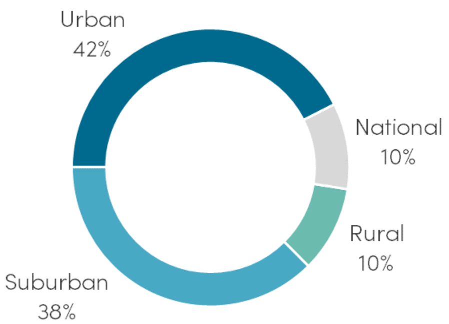


1.14 Current role - rural/urban and primary client group

In 2024, most survey participants reported working in urban (42%) or suburban areas (38%). One in ten reported working in rural areas (10%) and across the whole country (10%).

This distribution has not changed since 2022 and 2023, continuing the trend of a risk of a lower rural workforce (10%) compared to the New Zealand population who live in rural areas (19%[6]).

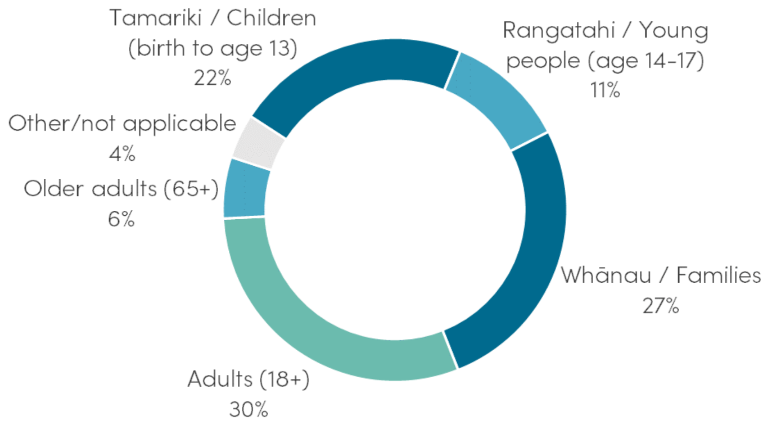
Figure 13. Population area of work 2024



When asked about their primary client group or focus of their practice, the most common groups were, adults aged 18 and over (30%) and whānau/families (27%). Over a third of participants report that their primary client group is tamariki/children or rangatahi/young people (22% and 11%, respectively). The distribution across primary client groups has not changed since 2023.

[6] https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2023-07/rural-health-strategy-oct23-v2.pdf

Figure 14. Primary client group 2024



Section 2 – Knowledge and skills development

This section includes survey results about social workers' knowledge and skill development, to better understand areas where social workers need additional support and continuing professional development (CPD). It is not the SWRB's role to deliver CPD for social workers. However, it is important to support and understand the needs of the workforce as part of the SWRB's guidance for professional standards and regulatory expectations.

2.1 Continuing Professional Development needs

Survey participants were asked which CPD areas would be most helpful for furthering their knowledge and skills development. They were able to select as many options as applied to them. Close to half of all participants said that CPD in social work practice with other ethnic and cultural groups would be helpful (45%), and 44% said CPD in social work practice with Māori would be most helpful. All areas of CPD were reported at similar levels to the 2023 survey.

Table 7. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2024

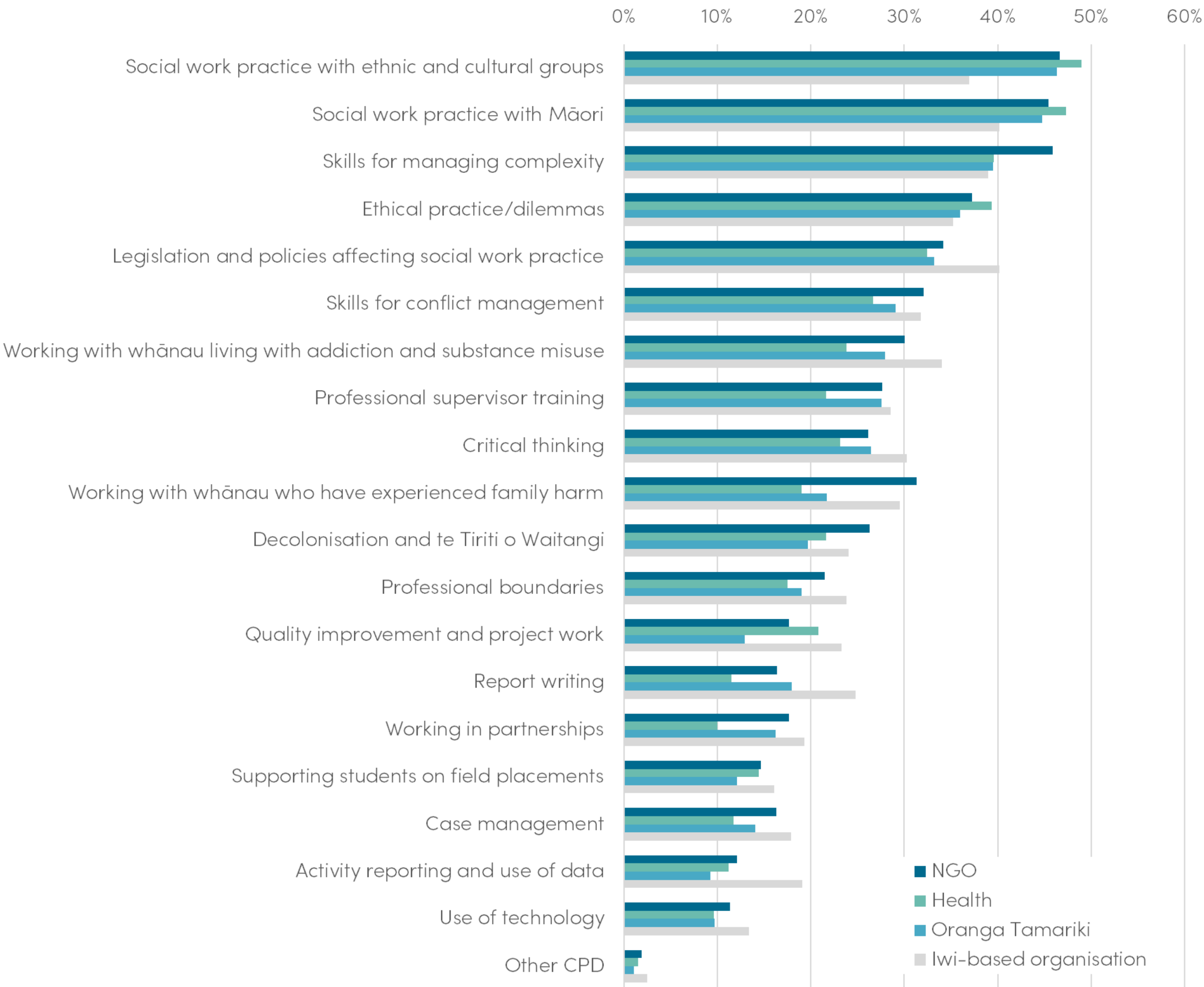
CPD area	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %*
Social work practice with other ethnic and cultural groups	2246	45%
Social work practice with Māori	2203	44%
Skills for managing complexity	2048	41%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	1841	37%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practice	1674	33%
Skills for conflict management	1430	29%
Working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse	1325	26%
Professional supervisor training	1321	26%
Critical thinking	1249	25%
Working with whānau who have experienced family harm	1188	24%
Decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi	1147	23%
Professional boundaries	987	20%
Quality improvement and project work	889	18%
Report writing	769	15%
Working in partnerships	717	14%
Supporting students on field placements	688	14%
Case management	677	14%
Activity reporting and use of data	585	12%
Use of technology	542	11%
Other CPD	99	2%

* Participants can select more than one CPD area, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

2.2 Area of development for employer types

The chart below shows the areas of CPD identified by social workers across the four largest employer types (NGOs; health; Oranga Tamariki; iwi-based organisations). As also seen in 2023, social workers employed by iwi-based organisations indicated higher levels of interest and need for almost all types of CPD compared to social workers from other employer types.

Figure 15. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2024 – by top four employer types



Section 3 – Workforce Sustainability

This section explores factors related to the sustainability of the social worker workforce, including why people join, and remain in, the social work profession. The survey asks social workers about their plans for the next five years, and reasons for planning to leave the workforce. Salary levels and distribution are also included as possible determinants of workforce sustainability.

3.1 Attraction into the social work profession

The three most selected reasons attracting survey participants into the social work profession were making a positive difference to people's lives (79%); an interest in social justice, advocacy and welfare (71%); and serving/working with/supporting whānau and community (71%). The relative distribution of reasons for joining the profession have not changed since 2023.

Table 8. Reasons for joining social work profession 2024

Reason	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %*
Making a positive difference to people's lives	3929	79%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	3496	70%
An interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare	3388	68%
Sense of purpose	2153	43%
Using my own personal/lived experience to help others	1858	37%
To become part of a recognised profession	857	17%
Career opportunities	569	11%
A known need for social workers	486	10%
Work flexibilities	455	9%
Salary	338	7%
Other	54	1%

*Participants can select more than one reason for joining the profession, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

> *To demonstrate my Māoritanga within a professional setting that is meaningful and supportive of others.* (wahine Māori)

3.2 Retention within in the social work profession

The most selected reason for remaining in the profession is the same reason most participants initially join the profession – making a difference to people's lives (80%), and the order of reasons has remained largely unchanged since 2023.

Table 9. Reasons for remaining in social work profession 2024

Reason	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %*
Making a difference to people's lives	3968	79%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	3373	67%
Positive client relationships	3052	61%
Varied nature of the role	2853	57%
Continuous learning/professional development	2036	41%
Being part of a profession	1664	33%
Positive working environment	1531	31%
Peer support	1153	23%
Career growth opportunities	1041	21%
Salary	937	19%
Culturally safe environment	904	18%
Other	52	1%

* Participants can select more than one rewarding factor, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

3.3 Barriers to entering the profession

The most commonly cited barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession were the complex nature of social work practice (57%) and balancing work and personal life (52%). The proportion indicating that balancing work and personal life is a barrier has risen from 38% in 2022 and 41% in 2023, signalling a growing issue with work/life balance across the profession.

In contrast, the proportion who indicated salary is a barrier to entering or re-entering the profession has declined to 34% (from 43% in 2022). This likely reflects the extension of pay equity agreements that were implemented by Cabinet in 2023.

Those who reported other barriers to entering or re-entering the profession (4%) noted the increased cost of registration and practising certificates, and a lack of consistent and sustainable funding for services, among other barriers.

Table 10. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2024

Barriers to entering or re-entering profession	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %*	2023 %	2022 %
Complex nature of social work practice[7]	2833	57%	–	–
Balancing work and personal life	2590	52%	41%	38%
Salary	1680	34%	42%	43%
Public perception of social work	1560	31%	35%	32%
Hours of work	1055	21%	19%	17%
Lack of career progression	1021	20%	23%	21%
Concerns about meeting other entry requirements (such as for overseas-qualified social workers)	265	5%	7%	–
Concerns about meeting fit and proper requirements (such as having previous convictions)	244	5%	11%	–
Other	187	4%	3%	4%

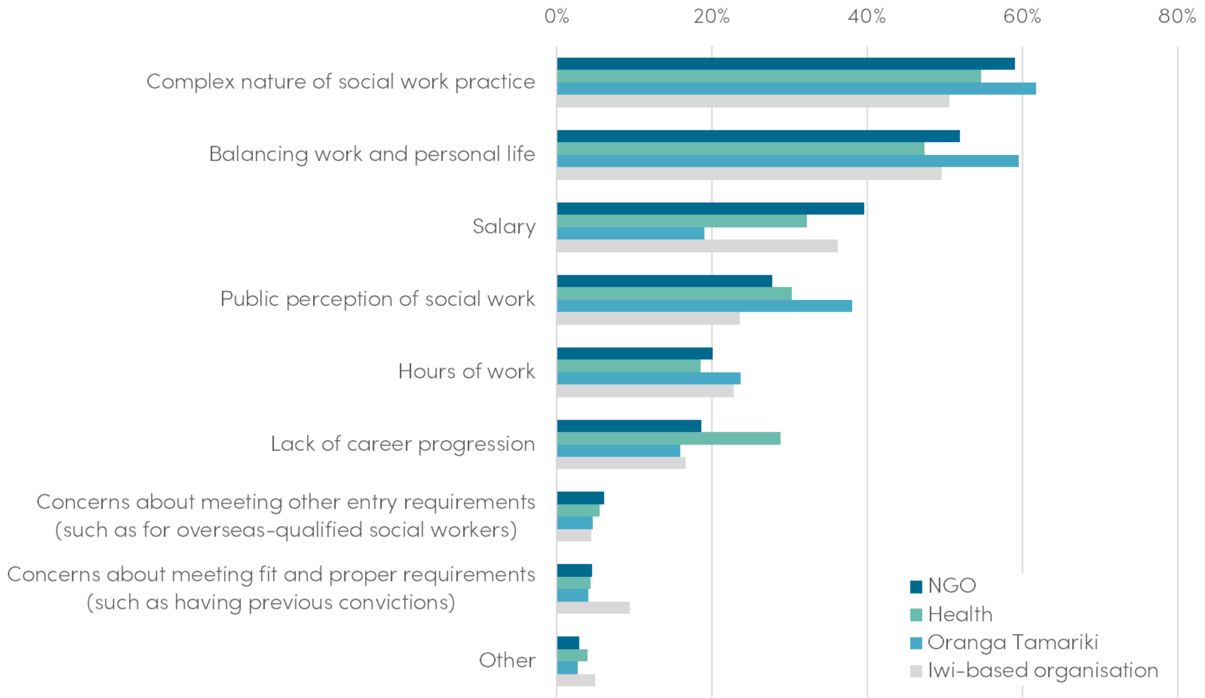
* Participants can select more than one barrier, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

[7] This was a new category added for 2024 in response to findings and feedback from the 2023 survey

> *Lack of resources - lack of effective support, supervision, practice guidance, administration support, backup from my organisation when there are complaints, completely unreasonable workload, lack of interest and support to invest in families so that they can be effectively supported to actually make change...* (European female)

Social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki were more likely to identify balancing work and personal life and the public perception of social work as barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession, which may reflect a large part of their work in statutory care and protection. Salary was more likely to be identified by social workers employed in NGO and iwi-based organisations than health or Oranga Tamariki, and the lack of career progression was seen as a barrier for more social workers employed in health/hauora compared to the other top four employer types.

Figure 16. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2024– by top four employer types



3.4 Five-year plan for staying in the workforce

Almost three-quarters of survey participants plan to remain in the social work profession over the next five years (73%). Thirteen percent of participants plan to leave in the next five years, which has declined slightly from 16% in 2023.

This survey finding represents a loss of over 600 social workers from the profession, and if the proportion is extrapolated out to the full practising workforce (a total of 8,354 at the time of the survey closing), it would indicate a loss of close to 1,100 social workers across New Zealand.

Figure 17. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2024

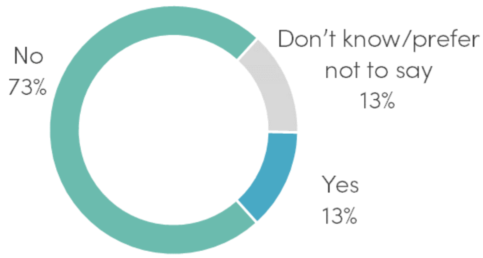
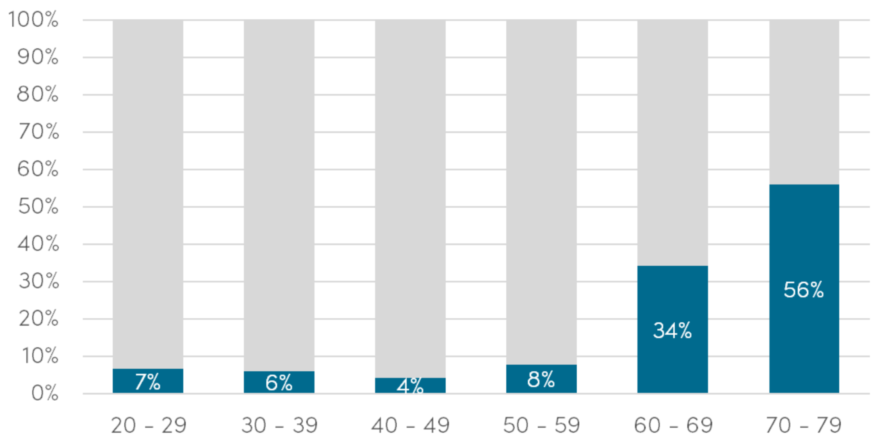


Table 11. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2024

Are you planning to leave the social work profession in the next five years?	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %	2023 %	2022 %
No	35111	73%	74%	82%
Yes	622	13%	16%	15%
Don't know/prefer not to say	645	13%	10%	3%

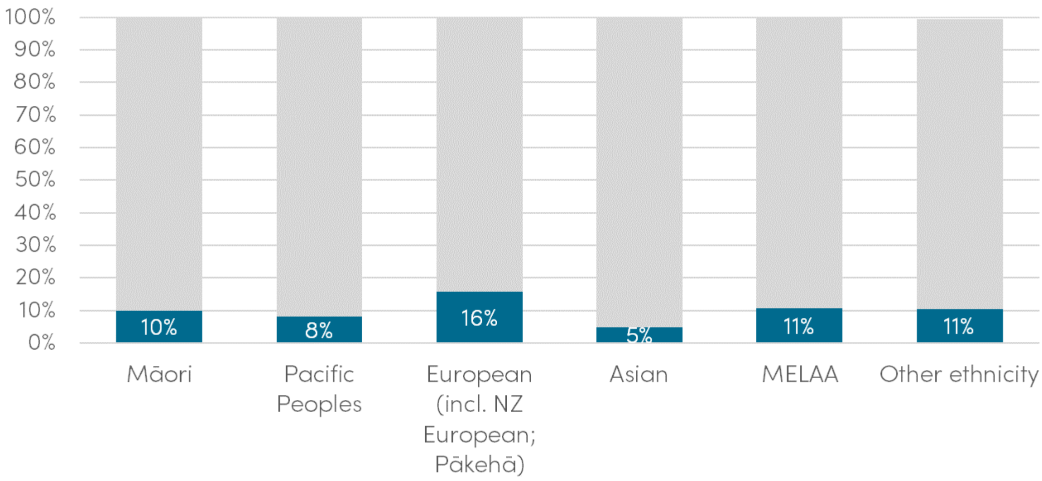
The chart below shows the proportion of each age group planning to leave the social work workforce in the next five years. The peak in the older age groups is consistent with retirement as the highest reported reason for leaving the profession in section 3.5 below.

Figure 18. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2024 – by age group



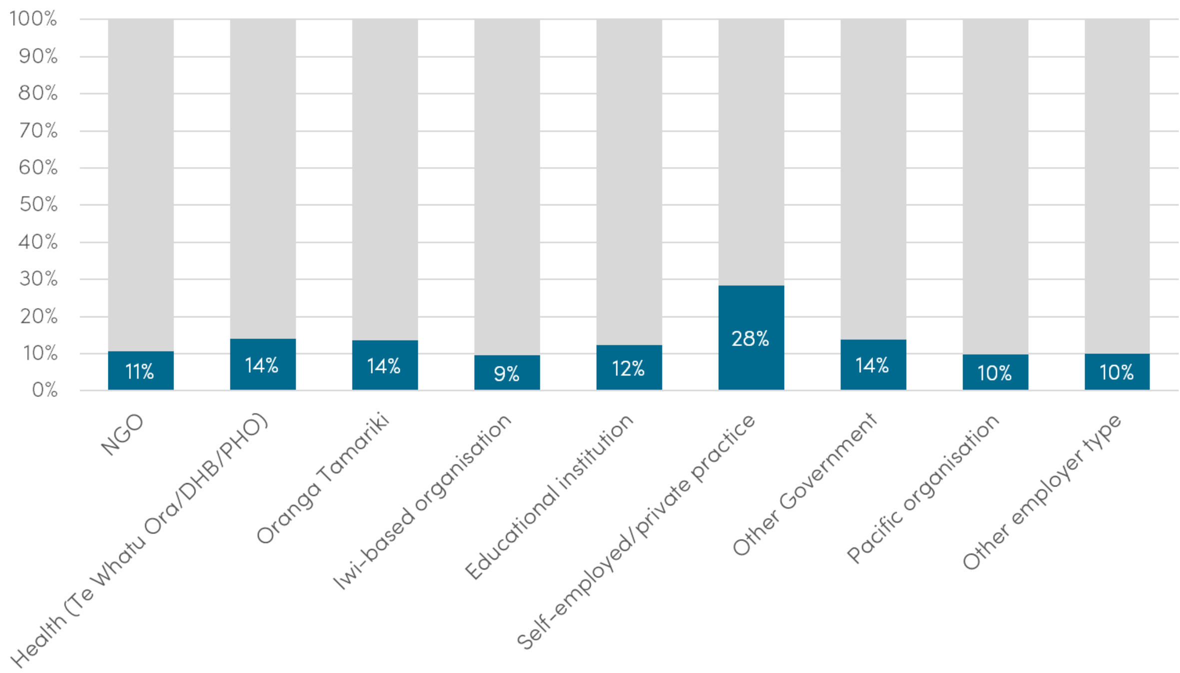
Within each ethnic group, the proportion of social workers who say they plan to leave the profession in the next five years ranges between 5% and 16%, similar to last year's survey results. Social workers who identify as European were at the higher end of the range in planning to leave the profession in the next five years.

Figure 19. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2024 – by ethnicity



For the largest employer types (NGO, Health and Oranga Tamariki), the proportion of social workers who intend to leave in the next five years is very similar (between 11% and 14%). A higher proportion of social workers who are self-employed or in private practice (28%) reported that they intend to leave the profession in the next five years.

Figure 20. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2024 – by employer type

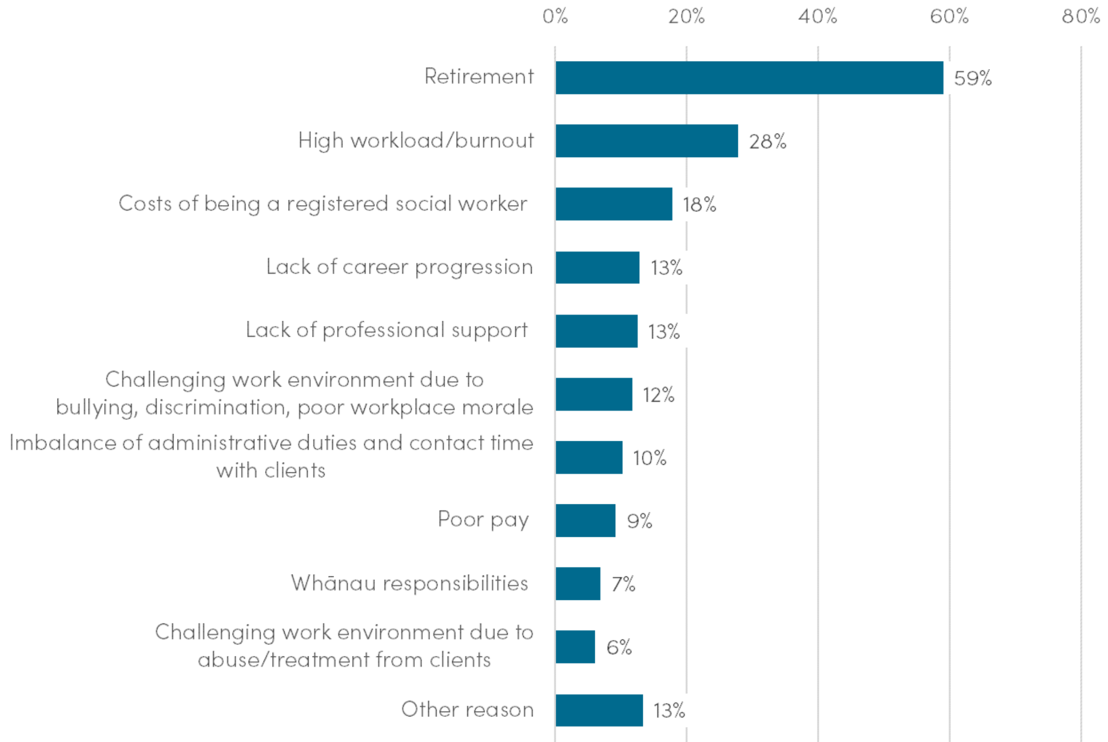


3.5 Reasons for leaving the profession – overall, and by employer type

Of the 13% (or 622 survey participants) who indicated that they plan to leave the social work profession in the next five years, the main reason for leaving was retirement (59%). This was the main reason cited by 46% of those planning to leave in 2023, confirming that increasing numbers of social workers retiring will continue to challenge workforce sustainability.

Over a quarter of this subset of participants cited high workload/burnout as a reason for leaving the profession (28%), and the costs of being a registered social worker were the reason for 18% of those intending to leave the profession.

Figure 21. Reasons for leaving the profession in the next five years 2024

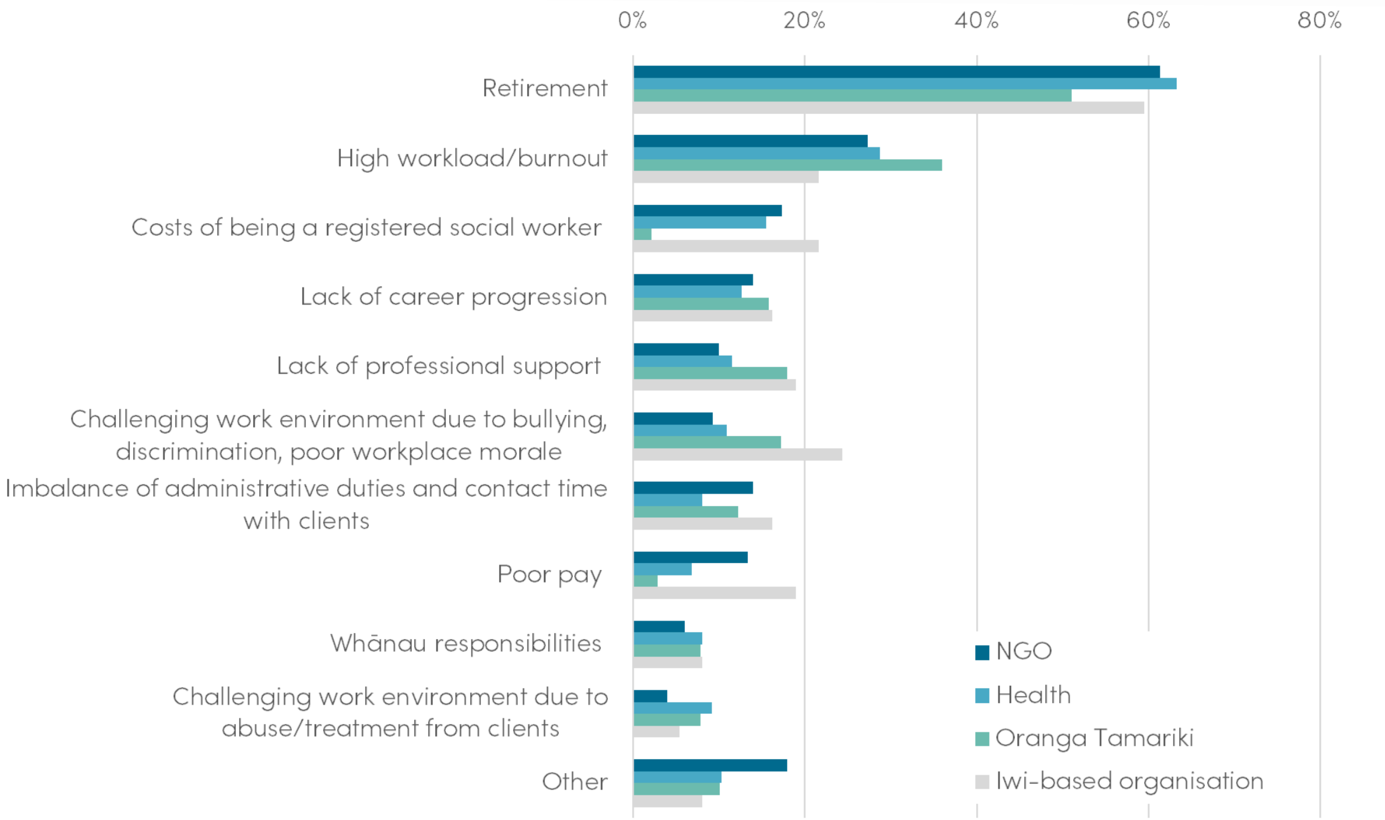


*This chart is based on the number of participants who indicated they were planning to leave the profession in the next five years (622). As participants could give more than one reason for leaving, the totals exceed 622.

Figure 22 below shows the reasons for leaving the profession grouped by the top four employer types (NGO; health; Oranga Tamariki; iwi-based organisation). For all employer types, retirement was the most selected reason for leaving the workforce. Social workers in the health sector were more likely than other employer types to intend to leave due to burnout and high workload, which was also seen in 2022 and 2023 results.

Oranga Tamariki social workers were less likely to indicate the costs of being a registered social worker as a reason to leave the profession, in keeping with the highest level of employer support for practising certificate payments (Section 4.2 below). A higher proportion of social workers employed by iwi-based organisations indicate their reason for leaving as a challenging work environment due to bullying, discrimination and poor workplace morale, or poor pay.

Figure 22. Reasons for leaving the profession in the next five years 2024 – by top four employer types

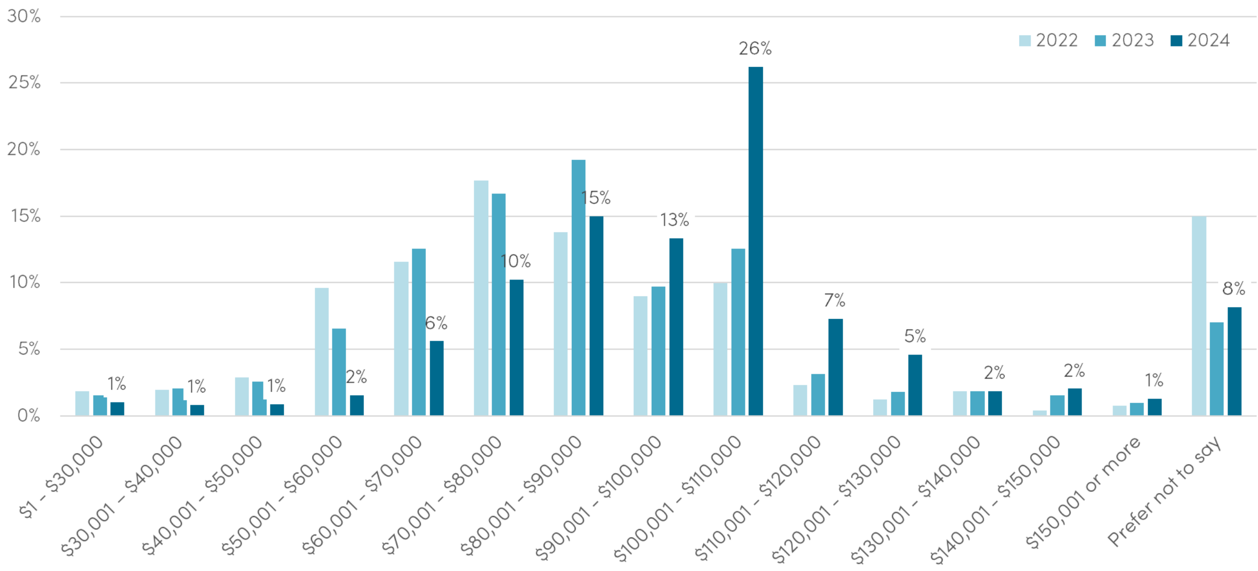


3.6 Salary distribution – overall, by employer type, and by ethnicity

The most common salary category selected by survey participants was $100,001 – 110,000 annually (26%). A combined total of 43% of social workers in the survey reported earning more than $100,000 annually. The distribution of salaries has shifted up from last year, when the 'peak' category was $80,001 – $90,000 annually.

It should be noted that participants gave their full-time equivalent (FTE) salary when answering this survey question.

Figure 23. Salary distribution 2024 – comparing over time



There has been a noticeable shift in the distribution of salaries by employer type since past workforce surveys. In the past, social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki have had a significantly higher 'peak' in salary distribution than other employers (Figure 25 below from the 2023 survey report). However, in 2024, social workers employed by health and NGOs have shifted up to match the peak of Oranga Tamariki at $100,001 – $110,000 (Figure 24). The increase for social workers employed in health is especially notable. This shift reflects the implementation of pay equity and pay parity settlements across the social services and health sector since 2023.

Figure 24. Salary distribution 2024 – by employer type

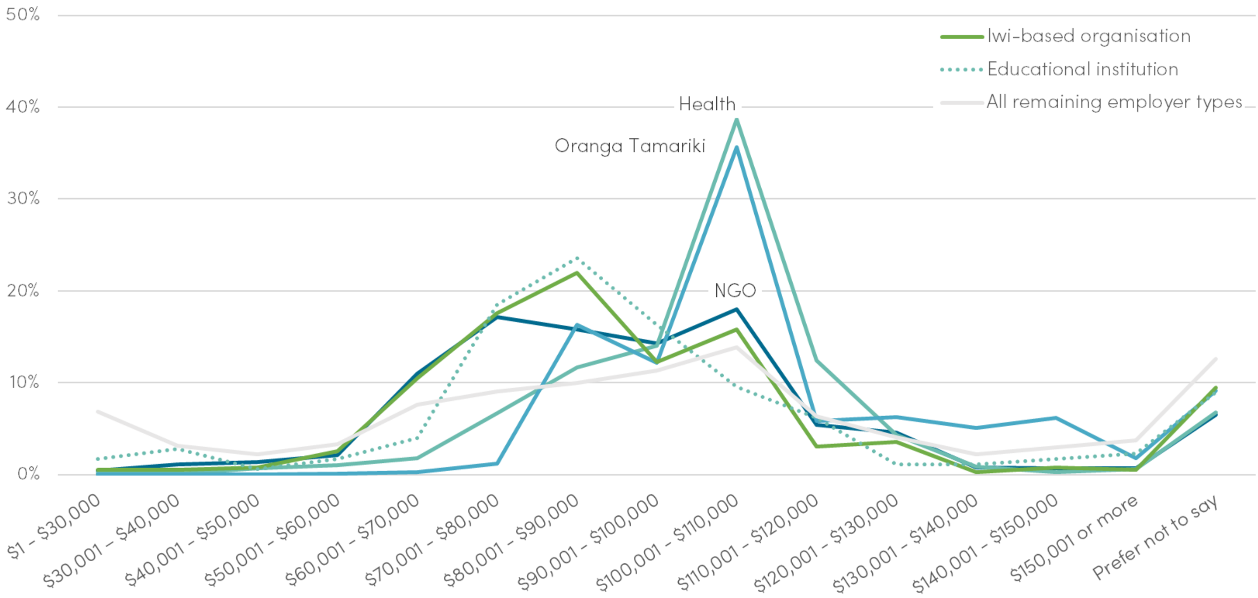
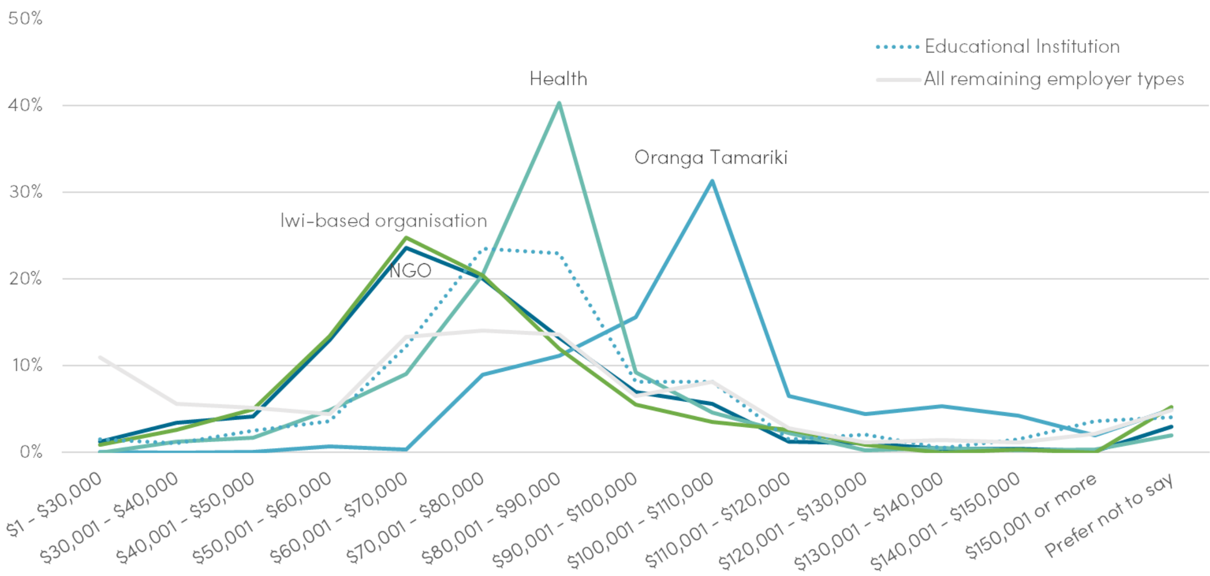
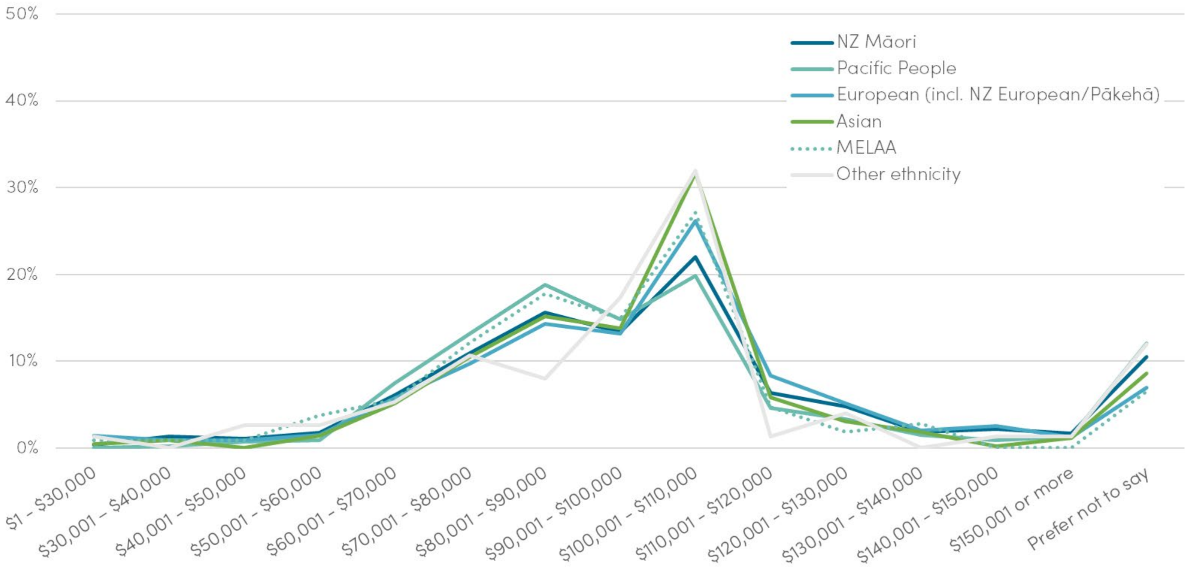


Figure 25. Salary distribution from 2023 for comparison – by employer type



When analysed by ethnic group, the salary distribution is very similar across subgroups (Figure 26 below) – all groups have a peak around $100,001 – $110,000. Compared to 2023 survey results, the peak for social workers who identify as Pacific Peoples now matches other ethnic groups (in 2023 it was lower than other ethnic groups).

Figure 26. Salary distribution 2024 – by ethnicity



3.7 Biggest challenges for the profession

Social workers were asked what they think the biggest challenges for the social work profession are now, and in the immediate future. As seen in 2022 and 2023, close to two thirds thought that the recruitment and retention of social workers are the biggest challenges (63%). The deepening of social inequity was the next highest challenge noted by social workers (44%), followed by the public perception of social workers (42%).

Compared to 2023, pay parity is seen as less of a challenge (identified by 31% of participants in 2024 compared to 56% in 2023), and a higher proportion identified the increasing reliance on an unregulated support workforce as a challenge for the profession (30% in 2024, compared to 18% in 2023).

Table 12. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2024

Challenges	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %*	2023 %	2022 %
Recruitment and retention of social workers	3166	63%	67%	66%
Deepening of social inequity	2183	44%	51%	53%
Public perception of social workers	2107	42%	45%	46%
Not enough time spent with people using the services	1967	39%	44%	44%
Pay parity	1529	31%	56%	63%
Increasing reliance on unregulated support workforce	1482	30%	18%	–
Other regulated professions replacing social work roles	1187	24%	23%	–
Lack of visibility of social work profession to funders	1179	24%	27%	–
Other	220	4%	4%	6%

* Participants can select more than one challenge, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

The increasing complexity and quantity of social need, which is often met by NGOs, with limited funding and resources to provide the social work and depth of intervention needed. Also the interagency coordination and intervention often needed to wrap around the whanau.

(Pākehā female)

Funding decreasing to the point services are no longer providing the service they were originally funded to provide. Insufficient resources to do the job we need to do in a world where our clients also have strained resources due to cost of living, etc.

(wahine Māori)

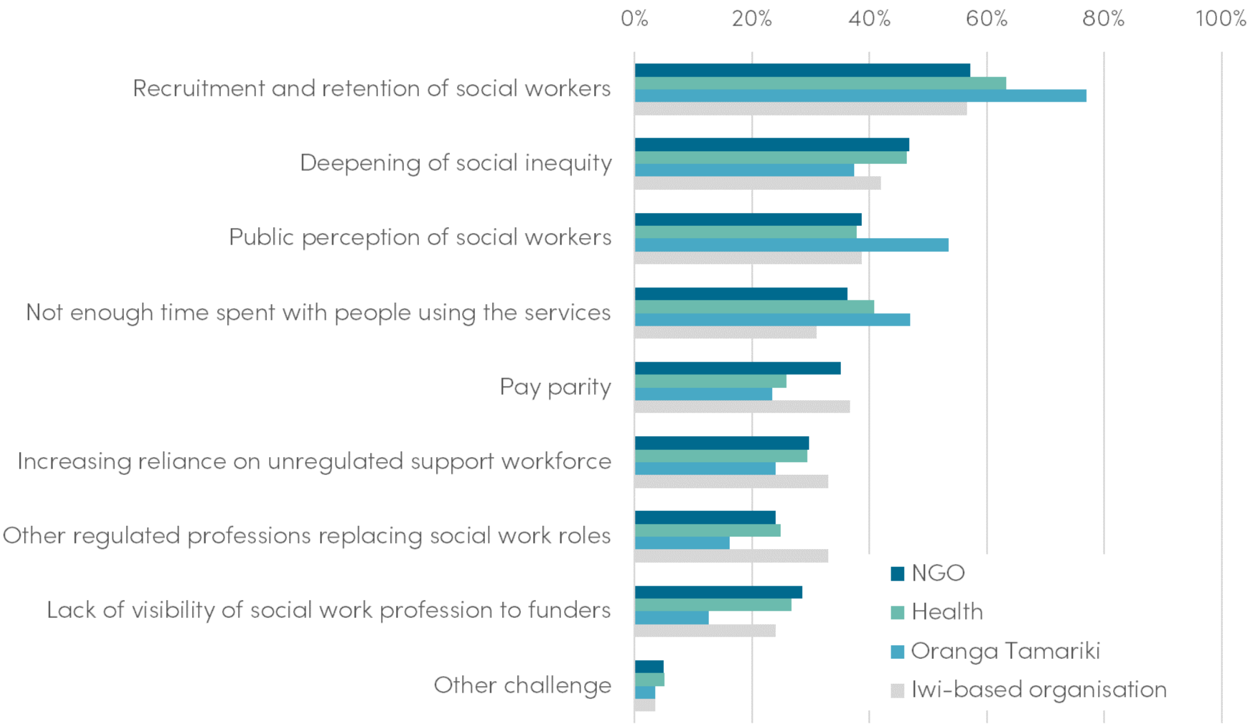
Social complexity and population is increasing rapidly. My service has had a 30% increase in 'clients' in the last year. Social work FTE is not keeping up with this. Therefore, I increasingly find that I'm sprinting to try and provide quality social work supports. This limits my ability to do the best job I can, and means I often feel behind and scrambling in my work. This reduces job satisfaction.

(Pākehā female)

When grouped by employer type, social workers from Oranga Tamariki were more likely to identify the recruitment and retention of social workers, the public perception of social workers and not enough time spent with people using the services as the biggest challenges for the profession now and in the immediate future (Figure 27). The deepening of social inequity was identified at similar levels across all employer types.

Social workers employed by iwi-based organisations were more likely than those from other employers to identify other regulated professions replacing social work roles as a challenge for the profession.

Figure 27. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2024 – by top four employer types



Participants can select more than one challenge, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

3.8 Social worker roles changed or removed

Since 2022, social workers have been asked if they are aware of roles in their organisation being changed to not require a registered social worker (for example, a social worker's role now being called something else, or job descriptions being changed and no longer requiring a registered social worker to fill them). In 2024, twelve percent of social workers surveyed said they were aware of roles in their organisation that had changed in this way, which was similar to the results from 2023 and 2022 (12% and 11%, respectively).

Section 4 – Employer support

This section describes results from survey questions about the support provided to social workers by their employers, for their social work practice, and financial support for the payment of registration and annual Practising Certificate (PC) renewal fees.

4.1 Employer support for social work practice

The most common categories of employer support that survey participants say they receive for their social work practice are professional reflective supervision (73%) and training and skills development (65%). Whilst these figures are encouraging, it is also important to note that both reflective professional supervision and CPD are a mandatory requirement for a registered social work professional, and therefore an obligation for employers to meet.

Just over half (52%) report that their employer provides a supportive and safe working environment, which is up slightly since the 2022 and 2023 surveys. Many social workers commented about highly complex caseloads and abuse from clients as contributing to an 'unsafe' working environment.

Table 13. Employer support for social work practice 2024

Employer support	Number of survey participants	2024 Survey %*	2023 %
Professional Reflective Supervision	3659	73%	70%
Relevant training and skills development, including CPD and understanding obligations as a registered social worker	3240	65%	67%
Supportive and safe working environment	2584	52%	51%
Space and time for reflective practice	2501	50%	48%
Cultural supervision	1524	30%	29%
Assistive equipment	542	11%	6%
Other	125	2%	3%
None of the above	236	5%	-

* Participants can select more than one area of employer support, so totals exceed the sample of 5002

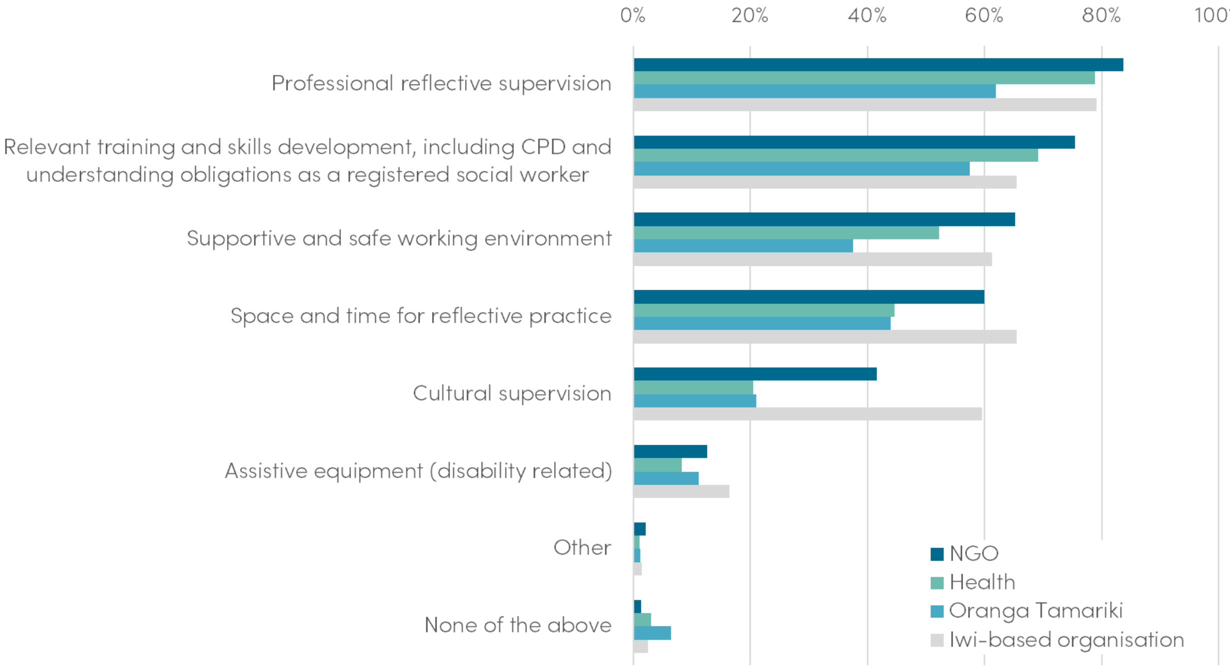
I think the employer is lacking in some of these areas, but individuals, teams, colleagues and supervisors make up for this. The employer needs to do more around a safe and manageable workload for care and protection social workers in particular. (Female of another ethnicity)

There seems to be a circle of responsibility (and rightly so in some cases) where high caseloads can lead to stress, burnout, and poor or unsafe practice (even after the caseload has been lowered), which goes back to management placing too much responsibility on individuals... then management will refer back to the individual doing the mahi as the person who needs to change.

(Pākehā Female)

Across the top four employer types, survey participants from Oranga Tamariki and health reported lower levels of employer support across almost all the categories (Figure 28) – 62% of social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki reported that they have professional reflective supervision (compared to 73% overall), and 38% of said they have a supportive and safe working environment (compared to 52% overall).

Figure 28. Employer support for social work practice 2024 – by top four employer types



4.2 Employer support with fee payment

Registration with the SWRB requires payment of registration application fee(s). Practising social workers must also have a valid Practising Certificate (PC) which is renewed annually. The survey asked social workers if their employer pays these fees in full, in part, or not at all, and whether the employers pay the SWRB directly or reimburse the social worker. Additional categories were added in 2024 for self-employed social workers to indicate how (if at all) they recover the cost of fees.

Over eight out of ten participants reported that their employer paid their registration fees in full or in part (85%), and 93% reported that their employer pays their annual practising certificate renewal fees in full or in part. The last two years of the survey have shown an increase in employers paying the full cost of practising certificates (90-91% compared to 83% in 2022).

Figure 29. Employer support for registration and PC fees 2024

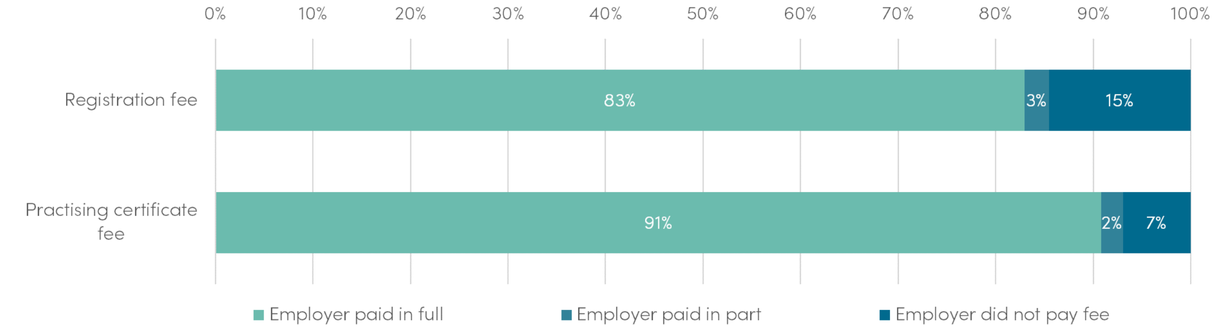
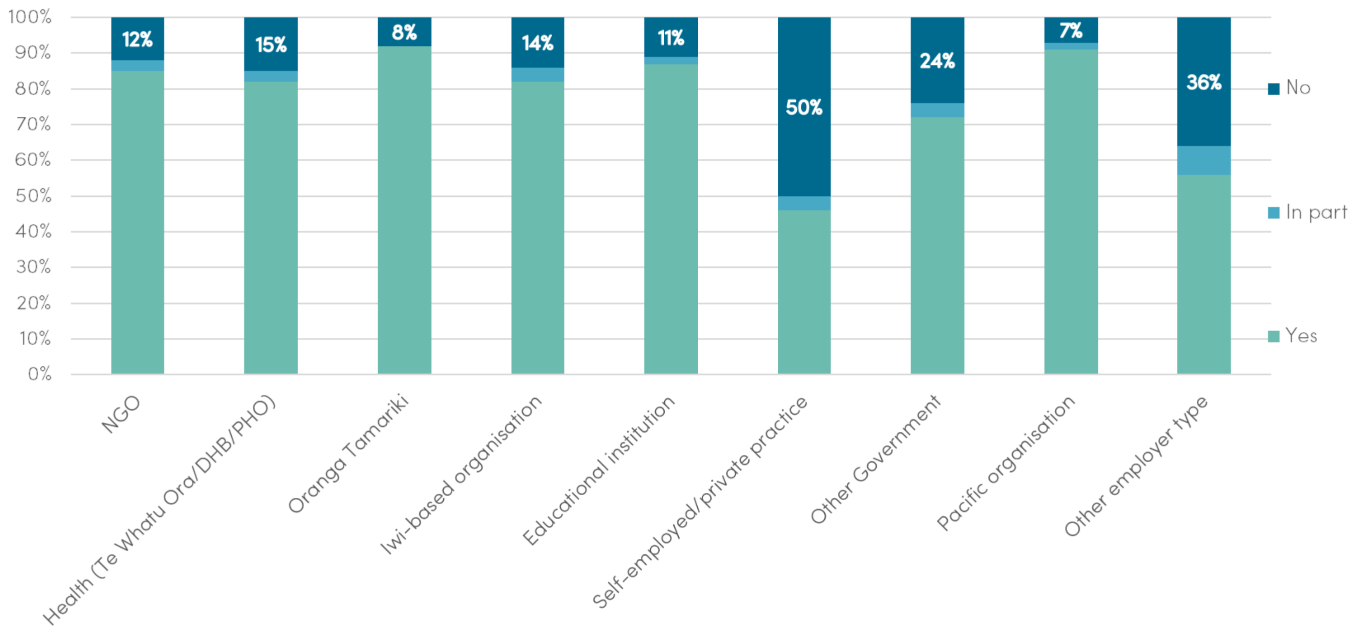


Table 14. Employer support for registration and PC fees 2024

Fees paid by employer	2024 Registration fee	2024 Practising certificate renewal fee	2023 Registration fees	2023 PC renewal fees
Fees paid in full	83%	91%	82%	90%
Fees paid in part	3%	2%	2%	2%
Employer did not pay fees	15%	7%	16%	8%

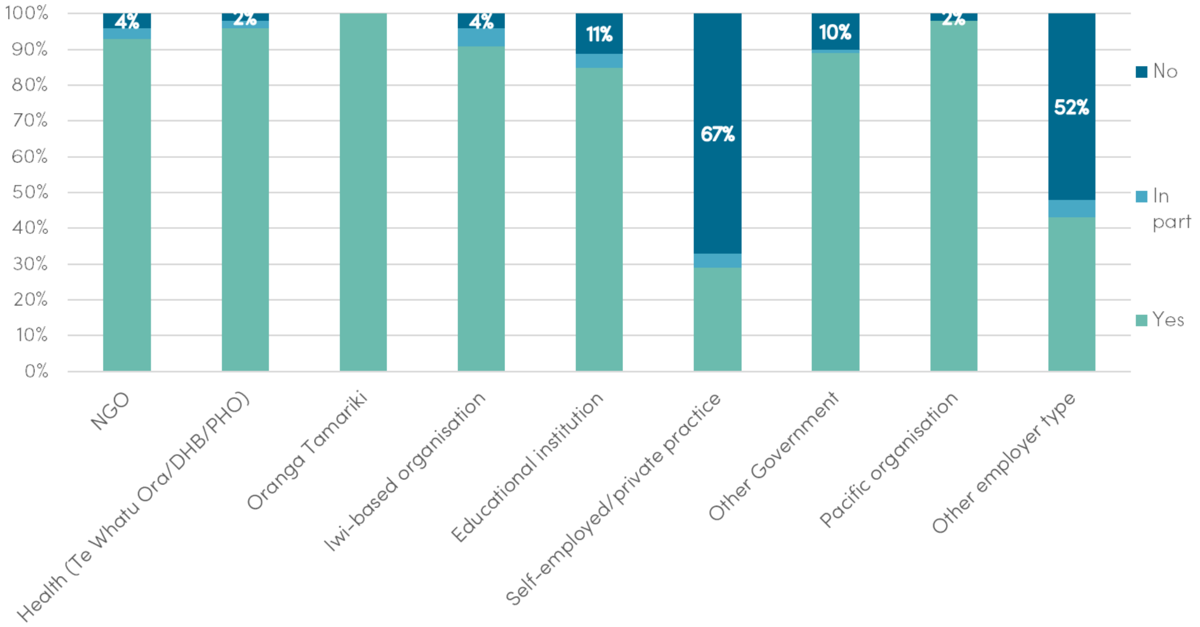
Across the top four employer types, social workers from Oranga Tamariki and Pacific organisations reported the highest level for their employer paying their registration fees (92-93% in part or full). Those with lower levels of employer support for registration fees fall into the smaller employer type categories such as self-employed/private practice, other Government and other employer types.

Figure 30. Employer support for registration fees 2024 – by employer type



The four largest employer types pay the annual practising certificate fees for 96% to 100% of their employed social workers (Figure 31), and this has increased from 2023. All social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki reported that their practising certificate fees were paid in full by their employer. For self-employed social workers, any fixed costs related to employment should be recovered through fees charged.

Figure 31. Employer support for Practising Certificate (PC) fees 2024 – by employer type



Section 5 – Standing of the profession

This section explores social workers' views on how mandatory registration and media coverage have impacted the respect, trust and confidence in their profession.

5.1 Impact of mandatory registration on profession

Mandatory registration for social workers in New Zealand came into effect in February 2021. In the years since, the SWRB's workforce survey has asked social workers if they think the profession is more respected now that all social workers must be registered. Almost half of those who answered this question said that they thought the profession is more respected (49%), and a further third said it was 'in part' (33%).

The proportion of social workers who do not think the profession is more respected since mandatory registration (18%) is lower in 2024 than in 2022 when it was 30%, signalling a shift in understanding of the

importance of registration. Participants were asked to give their reason for this answer. Many referred to the increase in accountability for safe and effective practice and that registration upholds the integrity and mana of the profession, as well as protecting the mana of clients.

Figure 32. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2024

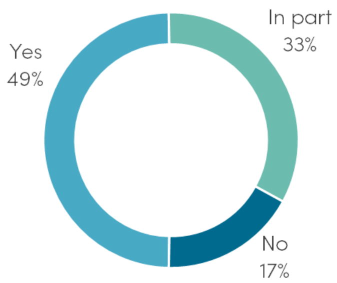


Table 15. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2024

Profession is more respected since mandatory registration	Number of survey participants	Survey %	2023 %
Yes	2037	49%	46%
In part	1371	33%	36%
No	713	17%	18%

> *The public are aware we are now a registered profession, and they are able to complain about a social worker, should they have concerns about their practice. This is an avenue to be heard, and the matter investigated. This instils trust.*
>
> (wāhine Māori)

> *We have a solid identity as professionals and a recognised body to keep social work safe and respectful for all. I have more mana in my mahi knowing I'm registered.*
>
> (Pacific male)

Registration reflects that social workers are required to undertake a 4-year degree or 2-year postgraduate Masters to do this work. This reflects the complex nature of social work and the need for people who can think critically, be curious and act in ways that is mana-enhancing and respectful to the people we work alongside and support.

(Pākehā female)

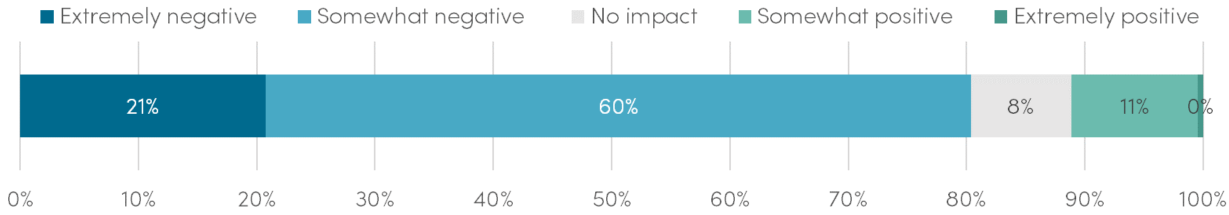
The public may feel safer knowing that the social worker is registered and that they are accountable for their actions.

(Pākehā male)

5.2 Impact of media on public trust and confidence in profession

Survey participants were asked about the impact that media coverage relating to social work has had on public trust and confidence in the social work profession. Eight out of ten participants thought it had a negative impact (21% extremely; 60% somewhat negative), and this matches what was seen in the 2023 survey results.

Figure 33. Beliefs about impact of media on public trust and confidence in social work profession 2024



The public perception of social workers via the media for Oranga Tamariki continually reports when there are tragedies, it does not report the positive engagements and work of social worker, high complex workloads and the abuse received in the position... despite these factors, lots of positive changes for tamariki and their whanau are achieved.

(wāhine Māori)

Section 6 – Safety and conduct

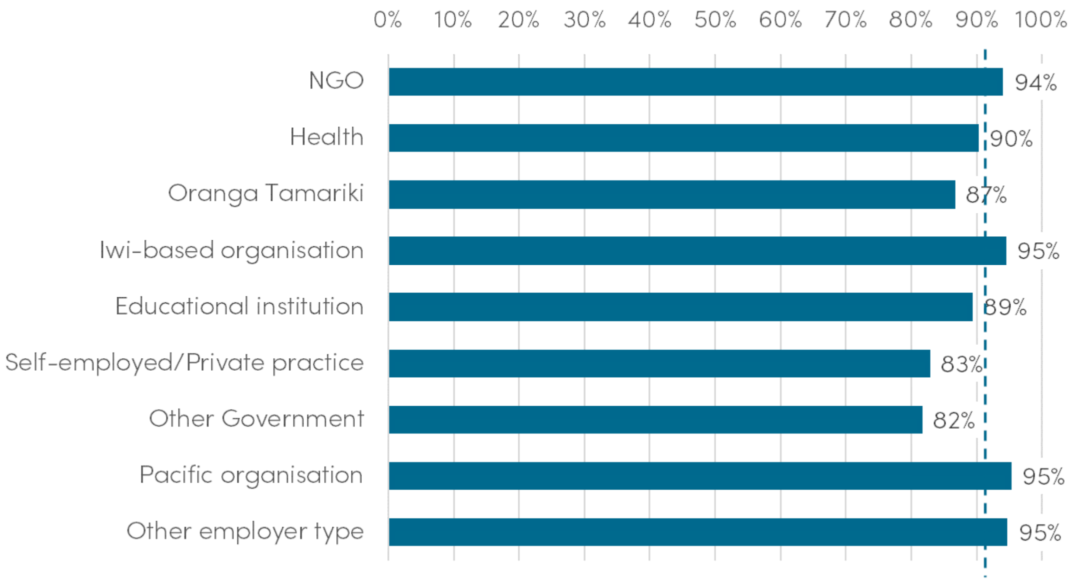
A focus for the workforce survey in the past two years has been on safety and conduct for social workers. Specifically, social workers were asked about their confidence in their employer's policies and processes for dealing with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct, and whether they would report practice and conduct issues to the SWRB.

6.1 Confidence in employer's policies and processes for practice/conduct issues

When asked if they were confident that their employer has adequate policies and procedures in place to deal with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct appropriately and safely, 91% of participants said yes (dashed line on the chart below).

There was some variation by employer type, with social workers employed by Pacific organisations, iwi-based organisations and NGOs having the highest level of confidence in their employer's policies and processes. Social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki, and other Government agencies had the lowest levels of confidence in their employer's policies and processes to deal with serious practice and/or conduct.

Figure 34. Confidence in employer to deal with serious practice/conduct issues – by employer type 2024



For those who did not feel confident in their employer's ability to deal with serious practice or conduct issues, many felt that their employer was not aware of the specific requirements for the social work profession, or that they had past experience in raising practice or conduct issues that was not addressed by their employer.

> *I don't believe my employer has a sound understanding of social work nor would understand what unsafe practice looks like. Different standards are held for different employees.*
>
> (Pākehā female)

> *I have seen time and time again practice and conduct issues, however this is very rarely dealt with and people just sweep it under the mat and carry on.*
>
> (wāhine Māori)

6.2 Raising concerns with the SWRB

When asked if they would raise concerns about another social worker's practice and/or conduct with SWRB (where it was not possible to resolve the issue with the employer), almost all participants said yes (95%).

Figure 35. Raising concerns of practice and/or conduct with the SWRB 2024

For the small number of participants who would not raise concerns with the SWRB, their reasons often centred around fear of retribution, and not feeling safe to speak up without negative impacts on their working relationship with colleagues and their employer. These themes have continued strongly from previous years. A small number were also not aware that raising concerns with the SWRB was an option available to them, or were not sure of the process to raise a concern.

> *Reporting such a thing has such a big impact on your own career because your relationship with the social worker and that side will be jeopardised no matter what. The culture within the organisation is, from my experience, not safe enough to do so...*
> (European female)

Closing comments

The SWRB appreciates and acknowledges the social workers who shared their time and feedback in 2024, achieving the highest response rate since the survey began (60%), and a sample that matches the demographic profile of the full practising workforce. This gives us high confidence that the results in this report reflect the reality and diversity of all practising social workers across New Zealand, and enables us to add to the evidence vase to support planning and decision-making in the social work sector.

Combining our data and information sources we aim to better understand the social worker 'pipeline' from attraction and training pathways to becoming a registered social worker, and beyond to ensure we have enough qualified, fit to practise social workers to meet population needs across Aotearoa New Zealand. Social workers are invited to give feedback and reasons for their survey answers, reflecting the social worker voice alongside statistical findings. These data help the SWRB, as an occupational regulator, to further our understanding of how registration enhances social worker professionalism, and upholding public safety. We welcome feedback, comments and suggestions on ways to improve this survey or specific topics that might be useful to explore in the future.

We continue to supplement our Annual Social Worker Workforce Reports with 'spotlight' reports examining sections of the workforce by employer groupings in 2023 (social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki, in Health organisations and in the NGO sector), and more spotlight reports on specific subsets of the social worker workforce will be made available in 2025. We continue to gather evidence about the education pathway into social work through our Annual Education Survey reports, and in 2024 we conducted our inaugural Social Work Employer Survey which will be shared in 2025.

Having been assigned the role of lead agency for workforce planning for all social workers (announced in 2021), we have built on our initial work in this area which focused on gathering evidence and sharing insights. We collect and analyse social worker workforce data and information and provide insights and evidence for others to use in their workforce planning and development activities. Although developing this knowledge base remains key to understanding the pressures facing the workforce, this year we have made substantial progress in strengthening our networks and making connections for key agencies and employers to share their priorities for tackling workforce issues.

We continue to look for areas where we can work across the system to support meaningful action and encourage change. Drawing on our existing relationships we are taking a dual approach (cross government agency and cross sector) to encourage agencies across government and sector to collaborate on a system-wide and integrated social worker workforce strategy and associated action plan. We will also continue to build our links with other agencies that have a workforce function including the Ministries of Health and Education, Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Based on their advice and our suite of workforce data, we will provide the Minister with updates on cross-sector engagement. Our insights will highlight opportunities for decision-makers on coordinated approaches to resolving known workforce challenges, and feed into the development of a cross-sector workforce strategy and action plan that is a key priority in the next 2-3 years.

Appendix 1: Survey sample and data representativeness – comparing participants to the full practising register of social workers

This appendix compares survey participant demographics with the full practising social worker workforce to better understand representativeness of the results.

In every demographic category shown in the tables below, the survey subset matches the profile of the full social worker workforce to within 1-2%, which gives high confidence that the survey results can be generalised to the wider workforce.

The 'practising' workforce refers to all social workers on the SWRB's register with an active practising certificate (PC) as of 30 June 2024 (the end of the financial year in which the survey was conducted).

Table A1. Age distribution of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24

Age group	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
20 - 29	8%	9%	399	796
30 - 39	18%	21%	904	1947
40 - 49	24%	24%	1212	2184
50 - 59	27%	25%	1369	2310
60 - 69	20%	18%	980	1646
70 - 79	3%	3%	131	239
80 or older	0%	0%	1	5
Unspecified	0%	0.1%	6	8
Total			5002	9135

Figure A1. Age distribution of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24

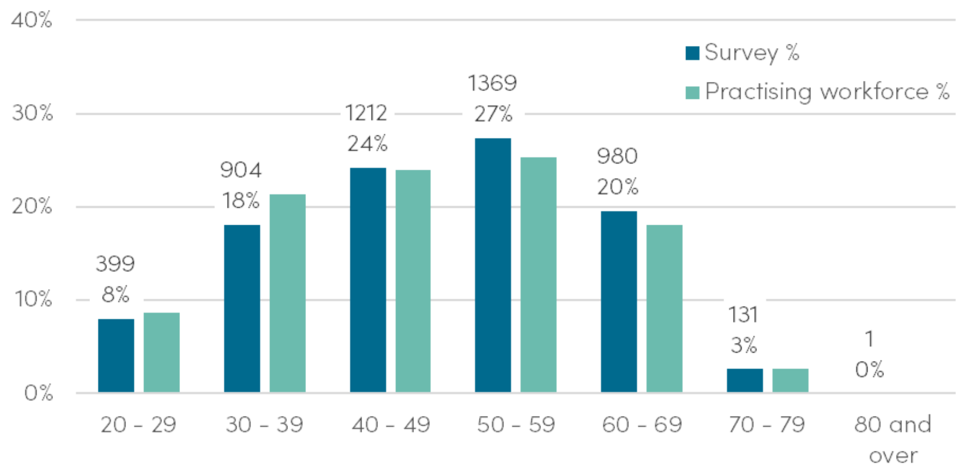


Table A2. Gender distribution of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24

Gender	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
Female	85%	85%	4251	7721
Male	15%	15%	728	1362
Another gender	0.2%	0.3%	11	23
Unspecified	0.2%	0.3%	12	29
Total			5002	9135

Figure A2. Gender distribution of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24

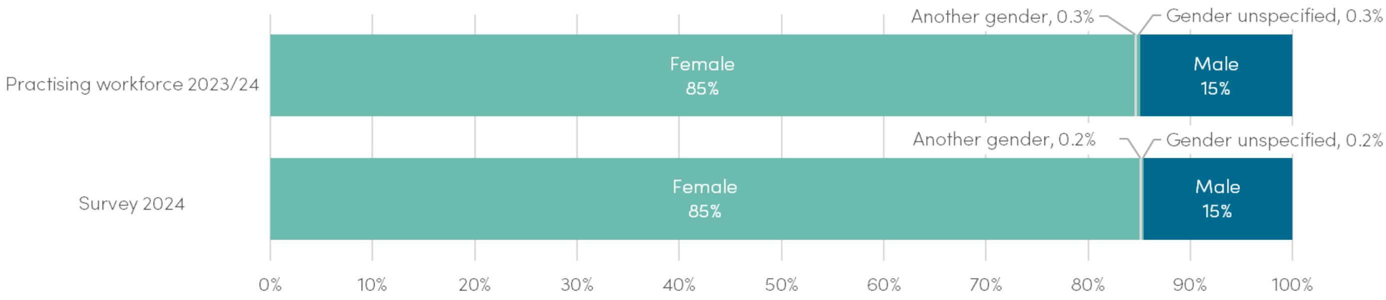


Table A3. Ethnicity of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24

Ethnicity	Survey sample %*	Practising workforce %*	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
NZ Māori	24%	25%	1218	2272
Pacific Peoples	11%	12%	570	1128
European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā/other European)	66%	63%	3280	5791
Asian	9%	10%	459	889
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2%	3%	118	257
Other	2%	1%	80	128

*Social workers can identify with more than one ethnic group, so totals exceed 100%

The chart and table below compare the workforce survey and practising workforce distribution by ethnicity to the most recent census of the NZ population (2023). The 2024 survey sample and practising workforce of social workers have a higher representation of Māori and Pacific peoples than the general population.

Figure A3. Ethnicity of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24 and NZ population (Census 2023)

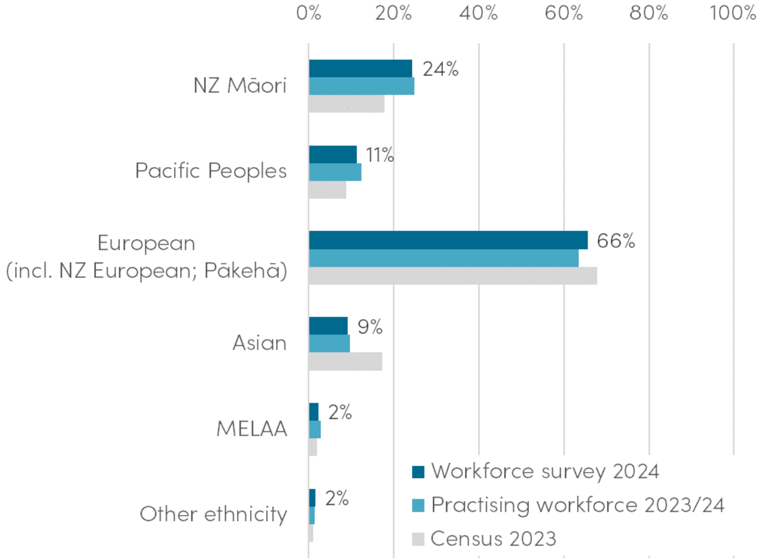


Table A4. Ethnicity of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24 and NZ population (Census 2023)

Ethnicity	2024 survey %	2024 practising workforce %	2023 Census[8] %
Māori	24%	25%	18%
Pacific Peoples	11%	12%	9%
Total European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā/other European)	66%	63%	68%
Asian	9%	10%	17%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2%	3%	2%
Other ethnicity	2%	1%	1%

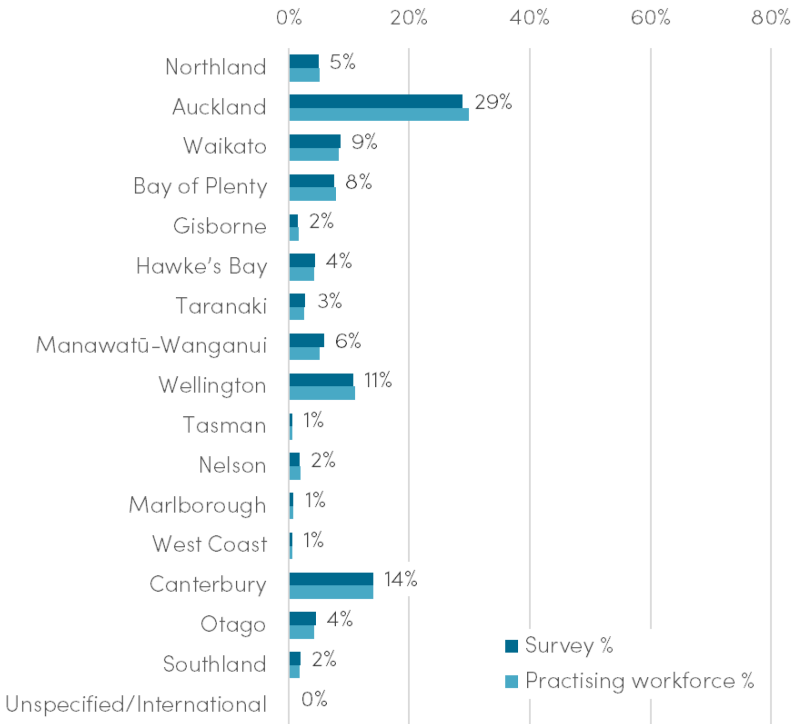
* Both Census and workforce survey use 'total response' ethnicity calculations, allowing participants to identify more than one ethnic group. Totals will add to more than 100%.

[8] https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

Table A5. Geographic distribution of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24 and NZ population (Census 2023)

Region	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n	NZ population[9] %
Northland	5%	5%	252	464	4%
Auckland	29%	30%	1445	2733	33%
Waikato	9%	8%	433	755	10%
Bay of Plenty	8%	8%	380	719	7%
Gisborne	2%	2%	78	160	1%
Hawke’s Bay	4%	4%	218	387	4%
Taranaki	3%	3%	140	232	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	6%	5%	294	471	5%
Wellington	11%	11%	538	1004	10%
Tasman	1%	1%	30	55	1%
Nelson	2%	2%	91	175	1%
Marlborough	1%	1%	42	68	1%
West Coast	1%	1%	32	60	1%
Canterbury	14%	14%	704	1287	13%
Otago	4%	4%	225	388	5%
Southland	2%	2%	97	167	2%
Unspecified/International	0%	0%	3	10	
Total			**5002**	**9135**	

Figure A5. Geographic distribution of 2024 survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023/24



[9] https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

Table A6. Geographic distribution of social workers per 10,000 population 2024

Region	2023 population[10]	Practising social workers (as of 30 Jun 2024)	Practising social workers per 10,000 population 2024	Survey participants from region 2024	Survey sample per 10,000 population 2024
Northland	194,007	464	24	252	13
Auckland	1,656,486	2,733	16	1445	9
Waikato	498,771	755	15	433	9
Bay of Plenty	334,140	719	22	380	11
Gisborne	51,135	160	31	78	15
Hawke's Bay	175,074	387	22	218	12
Taranaki	126,015	232	18	140	11
Manawatū-Wanganui	251,412	471	19	294	12
Wellington	520,971	1,004	19	538	10
Tasman	57,807	55	10	30	5
Nelson	52,584	175	33	91	17
Marlborough	49,431	68	14	42	8
West Coast	33,390	60	18	32	10
Canterbury	651,027	1,287	20	704	11
Otago	240,900	388	16	225	9
Southland	100,143	167	17	97	10
Unspecified/International	633	10	-	3	-
Total	4,993,923	**9,135**	National average: 20	**5,002**	Survey sample average: 11

[10] https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

Table A7. Employer type of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2024

Employer type	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
Non-Government organisation (NGO)	29%	29%	1473	2622
Health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHO)	26%	21%	1282	1961
Oranga Tamariki	22%	22%	1081	2045
Iwi-based organisation (incl. iwi-based health)	8%	8%	403	786
Educational Institution (school; university)	4%	4%	188	356
Self-employed/private practice	4%	2%	183	306
Other Government	2%	3%	97	192
Pacific organisation	1%	1%	43	82
Other	1%	2%	66	135
Unspecified	4%	5%	186	650
Total			5002	9135

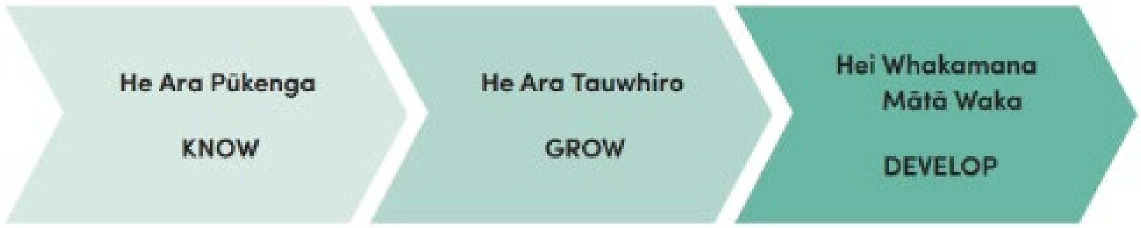
Table A8. Pathway to registration of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2024

Pathway to qualification	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
NZ social work qualification	86%	86%	4292	7849
Experience pathway: S13	2%	2%	124	217
Overseas qualification	11%	11%	570	1044
Australian social work qualification	0.3%	0.3%	16	25

Appendix 2: The SWRB's role as Lead Agency for Workforce Planning for all social workers

The SWRB vision for its lead agency function is to support the health and social care system to have the right social workers with the right skills, knowledge, and competencies in the right place, at the right time to support and enhance the wellbeing of New Zealanders. We work together and in collaboration with employers, sector organisations, government agencies, funders, education and training providers, taking a cross sectoral, strategic and collaborative approach. We collect and analyse social worker workforce data and information and provide insights and evidence for others to use in their workforce planning and development activities. With an emphasis on being data driven and evidence based, we developed a 'know, grow, develop' strategic approach to embedding our social worker workforce planning role since it was assigned to us three years ago.

We developed an approach to articulate what the lead agency role means focusing on three components of work - KNOW, GROW, DEVELOP.



KNOW

The 'know' phase is about knowing our workforce. The Register of social workers provides us with valuable demographic information about the workforce. We build on this through our annual workforce survey by capturing responses from practising social workers to feed into our 'Annual Social Worker Workforce Report'. Our evidence base is further supplemented with other data, surveys and reports such as our 'Annual Social Work Education Report'. Combining our data and information sources we aim to better understand the social worker 'pipeline' from attraction and training pathways to becoming a registered social worker, and beyond to ensure we have enough qualified, fit to practise social workers to meet population needs across Aotearoa New Zealand.

GROW

The 'grow' phase is about growing the evidence base and building connections. We continue to strengthen our relationships with a range of stakeholders who have responsibilities for social worker workforce planning and development, whether they are government agencies, employers of social workers or others with a connection to the workforce. We have supplemented our Annual Social Worker Workforce Report with 'spotlight' reports examining sections of the workforce by employer groupings, including those social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki, in Health organisations and in the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) sector.

DEVELOP

Finally, as we enter the 'develop' phase of our approach, we move from building the evidence base and growing connections, to strategic pieces of work that bring these together. We continue to look for areas where we can work across the system to support meaningful action and encourage change. Providing additional insights to decision makers on opportunities for coordinated approaches to resolving known workforce challenges will complement our existing and planned regular workforce reports. Developing a cross-sector workforce strategy and action plan is a key priority in the next 2-3 years. In addition, within SWRB, we are seeking to build the connection between workforce planning and our occupational regulatory activities. They are increasingly complementary to each other.