Social Workers Registration Board
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Social Worker Workforce Report 2025

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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 2025 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 2025 were invited to participate in the voluntary online survey. Responses were received from 4,257 out of a total of 8,066 practising social workers who renewed their PC in that period, representing a 53% response rate.

The survey sample closely resembled the demographic profile of practising social workers for the 2024/25 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 2025 survey included six key domains, closely following past surveys:
- workforce composition
- learning and skill development
- employer support
- safety and conduct in the social work profession
- standing of the social work profession
- workforce sustainability.

Tailoring certain domains each year allows for a deeper understanding of topical issues at the time of the survey. It helps the SWRB as a regulator to further our understanding of how registration supports public safety and supports our lead agency role for social worker workforce planning. Many of the survey questions invited social workers to give feedback or reasons for their answer. Verbatim comments are included in 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 social worker workforce planning.[1] This role was designated by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee in 2020. More information about this role can be found in Appendix 2.

1 https://swrb.govt.nz/workforce/workforce-reports/

Summary of findings

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

- Social workers who responded to the survey reflect the overall practising workforce of social workers, with a median age of 50 and 48% aged 50 or older.
- Social work is a predominantly female workforce (85% identify as female, 15% as male, less than 1% as another gender or unspecified).
- A quarter of social workers identify as Māori (24%) and 12% identify as Pacific peoples. The ethnicity of survey participants closely matches the practising workforce, with a higher proportion identifying as Māori and Pacific peoples compared to the general population.
- Most social workers in the survey registered through the New Zealand qualification pathway (85%), 12% with an overseas qualification and 3% through the experience pathway: S13.
- At the time of the survey, 63% of social workers that their highest qualification is a Bachelor's/ Honours qualification, and 23% have a Master's qualification. The majority of social workers' highest qualifications are specific to social work.
- In their current role, the four largest employer types reported by social workers include non-government organisations (NGOs) (32%), health-based organisations (26%), Oranga Tamariki (20%) and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations (7%).
- The most common fields of practice for social workers in the survey include mental health (39%), child/youth/family/whānau support (31%), family violence (27%) and statutory care/ protection (23%).
- Most social workers report working in frontline/client-facing roles (77%), and a quarter work part-time (25%).
- The highest reported salary category for social workers in 2025 is $100–110,000, and a combined total of 47% of social workers report earning more than $100,000 annually. The overall salary distribution has continued to increase since survey reporting in 2022. Social workers employed in educational institutions (from early childhood through to tertiary education) report lower salaries than for other large employers of social workers such as NGOs, health and Oranga Tamariki.

Social workers identify a range of areas where they would welcome additional knowledge and skills development for their social work practice, and additional training to respond to a range of emerging issues

- Social workers indicated that their highest continuing professional development (CPD) needs include managing complexity (45%), social work practice with Māori (42%), and social work practice with other ethnic/cultural groups (40%).
- The main barriers to accessing and completing CPD identified by social workers include a lack of protected time (37%) and lack of funding (28%).
- Social workers employed by health and Oranga Tamariki report more barriers to accessing and completing CPD than those employed by NGOs and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations.
- Social workers identified a range of emerging issues where they need additional training and skills development: use of technology, responding to online child and youth sexual exploitation, and supporting people with neurodiversity.

Social workers are supported by their employers in a range of ways, including payment of practising certificate fees

- Social workers report that their employer supports them through providing a supportive team environment (68%), protected time for supervision (68%), and relevant training/CPD (63%).
- Those employed by Oranga Tamariki and in health-based organisations report lower employer support across most of the categories surveyed.
- Almost all social workers report that their employer pays their practising certificate renewal fees (93%), and 86% had their registration fees paid in full or in part by their employer.
- All social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki report that their employer pays their practising certificate fees.

Most social workers have confidence in their employer's policies for dealing with social work practice/conduct issues, although there is variation by employer type

- 91% are confident in employer's policies for practice/conduct issues; confidence varies by employer type.
- 96% would raise concerns with the SWRB if not resolved by employer.
- Barriers to reporting concerns about another social worker include fear of repercussions, lack of trust in processes, and a lack of clarity about whether it is their own responsibility or that of their employer.

Social workers believe that mandatory registration has resulted in a more respected profession, however challenges with media coverage continue to impact public trust and confidence in the profession

- Two-thirds of social workers believe their profession is more respected since mandatory registration (67%, 21% of whom say 'in part').
- 81% of social workers believe media coverage has negatively impacted public trust or confidence in the social work profession.

Social workers continue to be motivated to make a positive difference and support whānau/communities under increasingly complex circumstances, while also experiencing high workloads and administrative burden.

- Consistent with past surveys, social workers report that the most rewarding factors about their work in the social work profession include making a positive difference (86%), supporting whānau/communities (83%) and social justice/advocacy (72%).
- The main barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession include the complexity of social work practice (57%), work–life balance (52%) and salary (34%).
- Most social workers report high workload/burnout (85%) and/or administrative burden (64%) as significant challenges in their own role and practice
- Social workers identified the biggest challenges for the profession now and in the immediate future as being recruitment/retention of social workers (61%), deepening social inequity (53%), public perception of social work (51%), and pay parity (48%). Concerns about a reliance on the unregulated support workforce are rising, especially in iwi-based organisations.
- 19% of social workers surveyed said they plan to leave the profession in the next five years, mainly due to retirement.
- Despite all of the challenges for this profession, 71% of social workers would recommend social work as a career. This is a significant and encouraging finding.

The SWRB wishes to thank all social workers who took part in the 2025 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

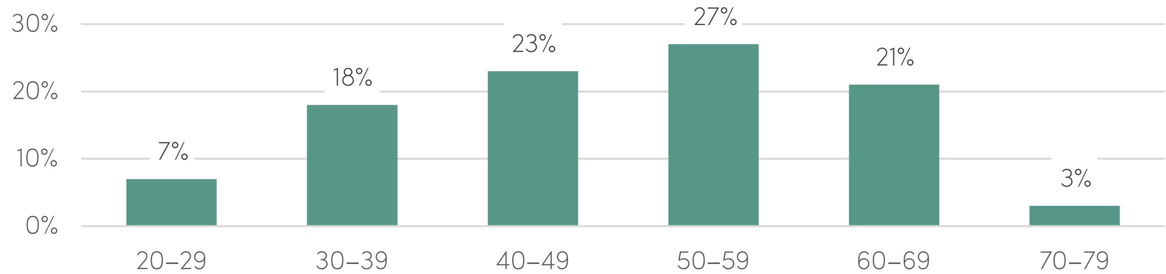
The demographic information provided by survey participants gives a picture of the current social worker workforce. This includes age distribution, gender, ethnicity, experience of disability and geographic region.

The 2025 survey sample closely resembled the demographic profile of the 'active' workforce of practising social workers for the 2024/25 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 (median) age of survey participants was 50 years old. The age distribution has not changed in the past four years of the survey, with the peak age group being 50–59 years (1163 participants, or 27% of the sample). Both the survey sample and the SRWB's Register data for practising social workers show that 1 in 5 social workers are aged 60 or above. This age profile signals that loss to retirement will continue to be an issue for workforce sustainability in the coming years.

Figure 1. Age group distribution 2025



1.2 Gender

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

Figure 2. Gender distribution 2025

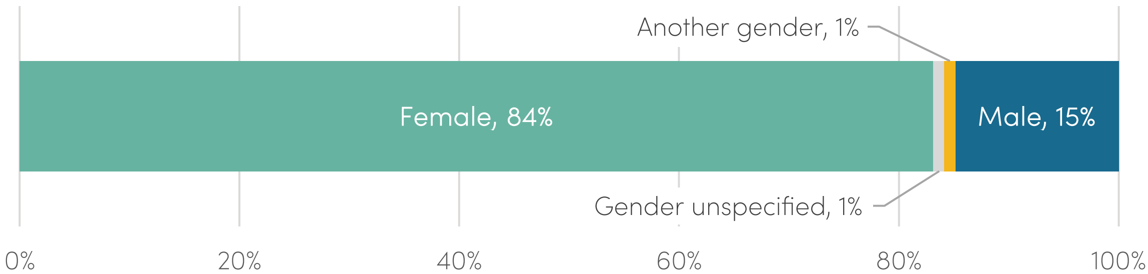


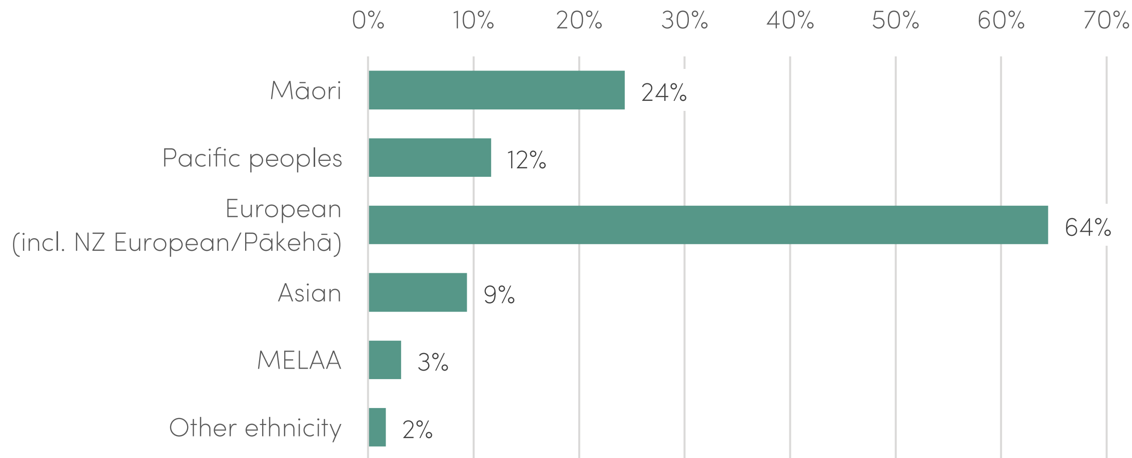
Table 1. Gender distribution 2025

Gender	Number	%
Female	3575	84%
Male	657	15%
Another gender	12	<1%
Unspecified	13	<1%

1.3 Ethnicity

The largest ethnic group identified by workforce survey participants was European (64%), which includes NZ European/Pākehā and other European ethnicities. Almost one quarter of participants identify as Māori (24%), an increase from 19% in 2022. 12% of social workers identify as Pacific peoples, which has also increased from 8% in 2022.

Figure 3. Ethnicity distribution 2025



Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

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.

Table 2 shows the 2025 survey and practising workforce distribution by ethnicity compared to the most recent census of the NZ population (2023).[2] This comparison shows that the 2025 workforce survey population and practising social worker workforce continue to have a higher proportion of Māori and Pacific peoples than the general population.

Table 2. Ethnicity distribution 2025

Ethnic group	2025 survey	2025 practising workforce	2023 Census
Māori	24%	25%	18%
Pacific peoples	12%	12%	9%
Total European (incl. NZ European/ Pākehā/other European)	64%	63%	68%
Asian	9%	10%	17%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	3%	3%	2%
Other ethnicity	2%	1%	1%

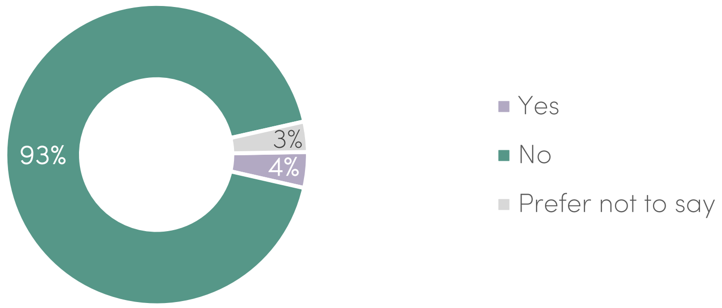
1.4 Disabilities

The SWRB has been asking social workers about disability since 2023. This helps build an understanding of how the workforce reflects the general population, and how those with specific needs might be better supported.

In the 2025 survey, 4% 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 153 participants and has increased from 2% reporting a permanent disability or long-term condition when it was first reported in the 2023 survey.

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

Figure 4. Disability experience 2025



1.5 Region

The geographic distribution of survey participants is shown in table 3. As shown in Appendix 1, these closely align with the geographic distribution of all practising social workers on the 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.[3]

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

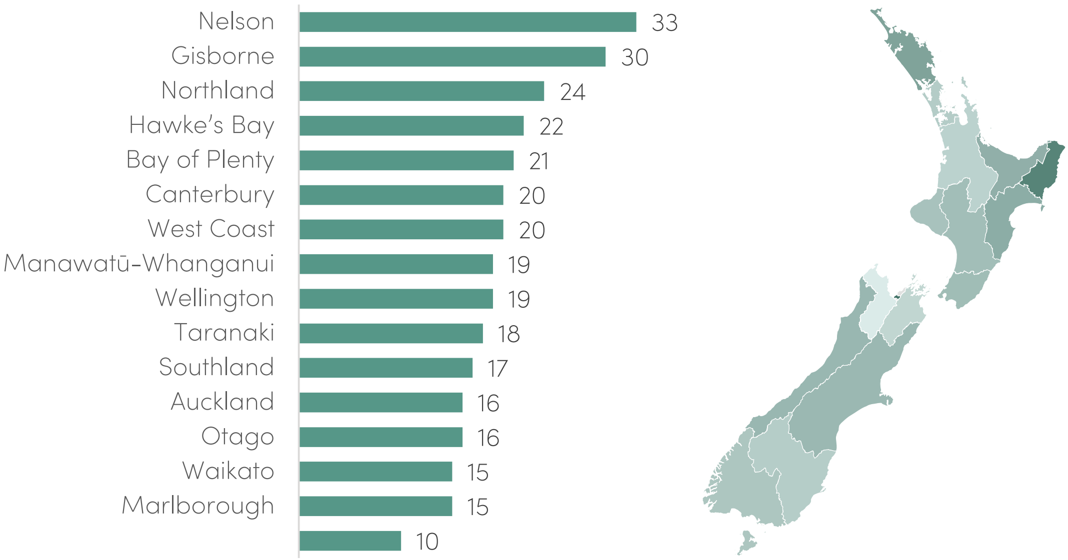
Table 3. Geographic distribution 2025

Region	Number (2025)	% (2025)	% (NZ population)
Northland	203	5%	4%
Auckland	1231	29%	33%
Waikato	347	8%	10%
Bay of Plenty	349	8%	7%
Gisborne	65	2%	1%
Hawkes Bay	171	4%	4%
Taranaki	97	2%	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	247	6%	5%
Wellington	437	10%	10%
Tasman	28	1%	1%
Nelson	87	2%	1%
Marlborough	37	1%	1%
West Coast	37	1%	1%
Canterbury	643	15%	13%
Otago	188	4%	5%
Southland	88	2%	2%
Unspecified/international	2	<1%	n/a
Total	**4257**		

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 and Hawke's Bay) and areas where there are a lower number of social workers per capita (Tasman, Marlborough and Waikato).

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

Figure 5. Geographic distribution 2025 – Practising social workers per 10,000 population



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 roles and employment situations, their primary client group and field of practice.

1.6 Pathway to registration and qualification level at registration

Most social workers who participated in the survey registered through the New Zealand social work qualification pathway (85%). 12% registered through the overseas social work qualification pathway. 3% of survey participants gained registration through the experience pathway: S13. The proportions match those of the full practising workforce (see table A7 in Appendix 1).

Table 4. Pathway to registration 2025

Registration pathway	Number	%
NZ social work qualification	3634	85%
Experience pathway: S13	115	3%
Overseas social work qualification	499	12%
Australian social work qualification	9	<1%

In 2025, social workers were asked about their highest qualification at the time of the survey, and whether that qualification was specific to social work. Table 5 shows that 63% of all survey participants had a Bachelor's/Honours (level 7–8) qualification at the time of the survey, and an additional 23% had a Master's (level 9) qualification. 1% reported a doctorate/PhD as their highest qualification. For almost all social workers, their highest qualification was specific to social work.

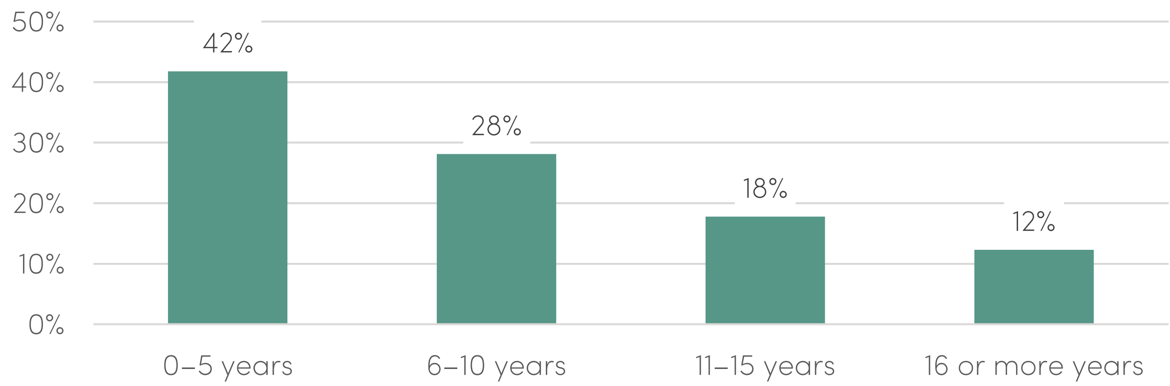
Table 5. Highest qualification at the time of survey 2025

Tertiary qualification level	Number	%	% of qualifications in social work
Secondary school (Bursary or NCEA)	5	<1%	–
Certificate or Diploma (levels 3-6)	287	8%	92%
Bachelor's degree/Honours (levels 7-8)	2297	63%	94%
Master's degree (level 9)	823	23%	89%
Doctorate/PhD (level 10)	53	1%	79%
Other (specify)	131	4%	–
Don't know/prefer not to say	27	1%	–

1.7 Years since joining the SWRB register

More than half of survey participants have been registered with the SWRB for six or more years (58%). The remainder (42%) 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.

Figure 6. Years since joining the SWRB Register 2025



1.8 Returning to practice

A new survey item was added in 2025 asking whether the social worker was returning to practice for the 2025/26 year, or if they were continuing to practice from 2024/25. Almost all of those who participated in the survey (99%) were practising in the previous year, 2024/25.

Table 6. Returning to practice 2025

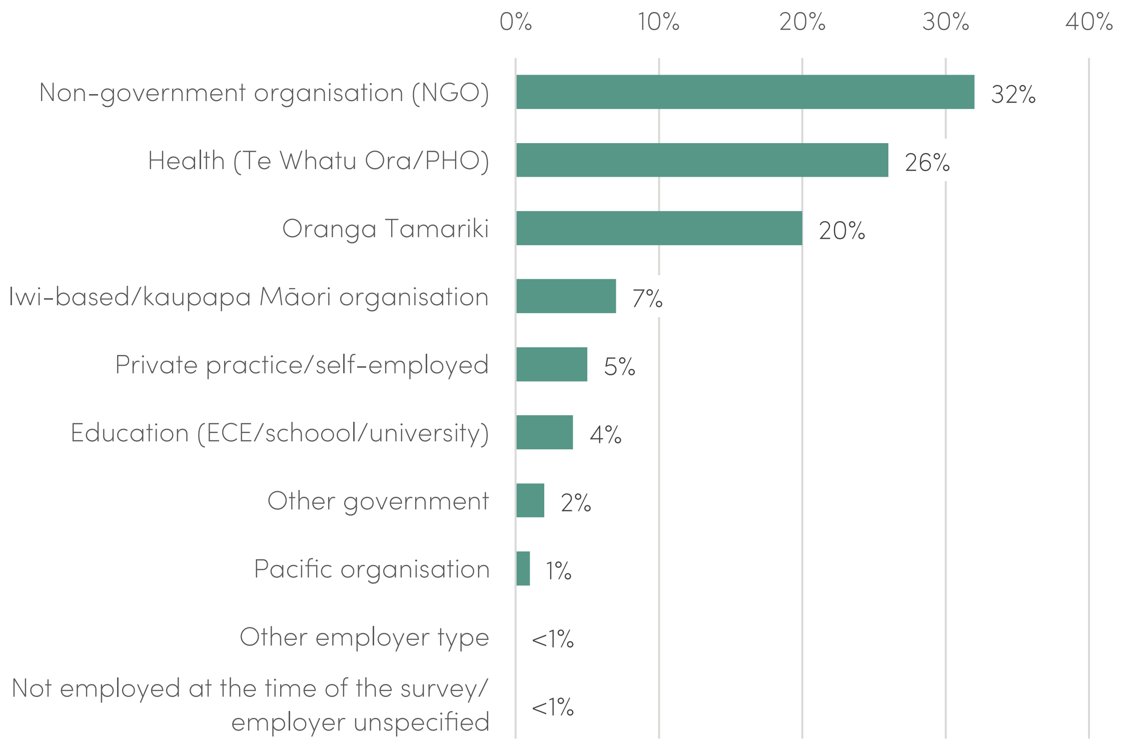
Returning to practice	Number	%
No – was practising in 2024/25	4052	99%
Yes – returning after 1-3 years not working as a social worker	28	1%
Yes – returning after 4-10 years	6	<1%
Yes – returning after more than 10 years	13	<1%

1.9 Employer type

In 2025, almost a third of survey participants reported that they work for an NGO (32%), slightly higher than the full practising workforce (29%). Just over a quarter of survey participants report that they are employed in health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHOs, 26%), and 20% report that they are employed by Oranga Tamariki. 7% of participants reported that they work for an iwi-based/ kaupapa Māori organisation. Table A6 in Appendix 1 compares the distribution of survey participants by employer type with the full practising Register of social workers.

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, to 20% in 2025.

Figure 7. Employer type 2025



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.

1.10 Setting of work

Social workers were asked specifically about the setting for the majority of their 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%). 16% of participants report working in hospital-based settings, and 7% work in iwi-based/kaupapa Māori health and/or social service settings, regional offices or residential sites. 4% of participants report working from home or remotely. The findings for work settings closely resemble what has been reported by social workers in previous years.

Table 7. Setting of current role 2025

Setting	Number	%
Community-based/NGO	1193	29%
Hospital-based	641	16%
Kaupapa Māori/iwi-based health and/or social services	303	7%
Regional office	296	7%
Residential site	281	7%
Primary health organisation	247	6%
Work from home/remotely	180	4%
ECE/primary/secondary school	122	3%
Tertiary education academic/educator	98	2%
Head/national office	80	2%
Pacific health and/or social services	69	2%
Tertiary education student well-being	36	1%
Other setting	519	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.

1.11 Field of practice

Survey participants were asked to indicate the fields of practice that they mainly work in and were invited to select up to three. Over a third of participants mainly work in mental health (39%), and a similar proportion in child, youth and whānau/family support work (31%). Over a quarter report that their main field of practice is whanau/family violence (27%), which has increased since 2024 (19%). Close to a quarter of social workers reporting that their main field of practice is statutory care and protection (23%), a decrease from 28% in 2024.

Table 8. Main field of practice 2025

Field of practice	Number (2025)	% (2025)	% (2024)
Mental health	1653	39%	36%
Child, youth and whānau/family support work	1336	31%	25%
Whānau/family violence	1160	27%	19%
Statutory care and protection	995	23%	28%
Physical health	705	17%	18%
Addictions	677	16%	10%
Professional supervision	619	15%	9%
Disability	401	9%	12%
Community housing and homelessness services	373	9%	6%
Criminal justice (including youth justice)	351	8%	7%
Aged care	329	8%	6%
Community development work	305	7%	5%
Social work education and research	286	7%	4%
Social work policy/advice	217	5%	4%
Emergency response	186	4%	3%
Migrant support	114	3%	2%
Other field(s)	364	9%	7%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

Figure 8. Main field of practice 2025

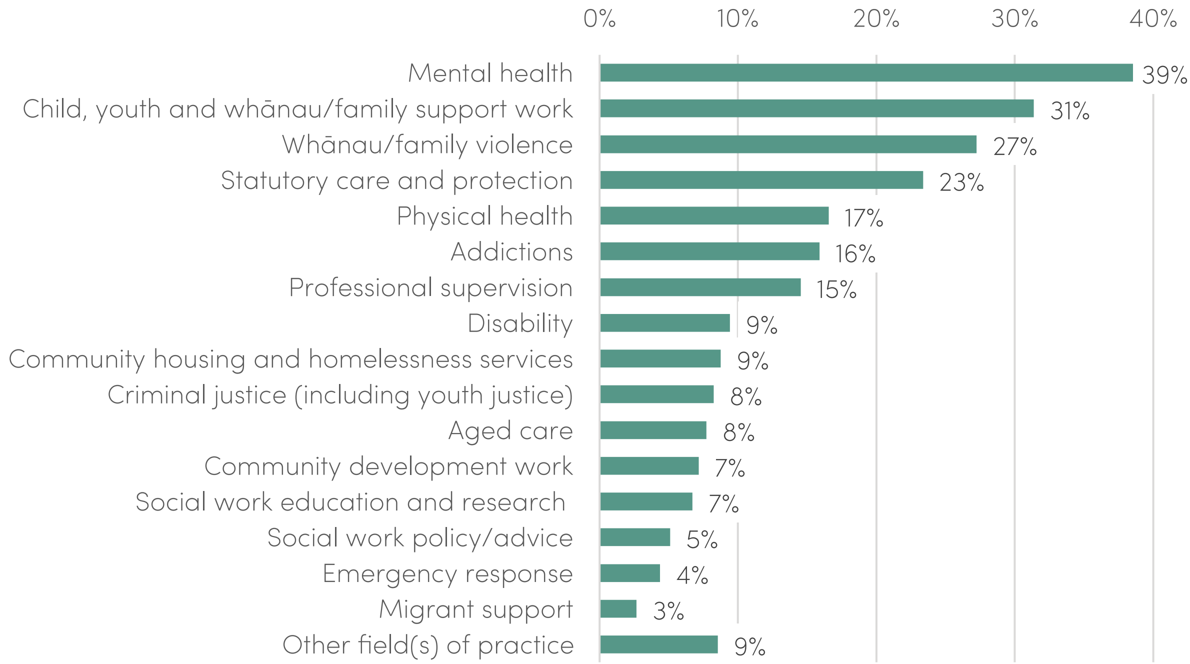
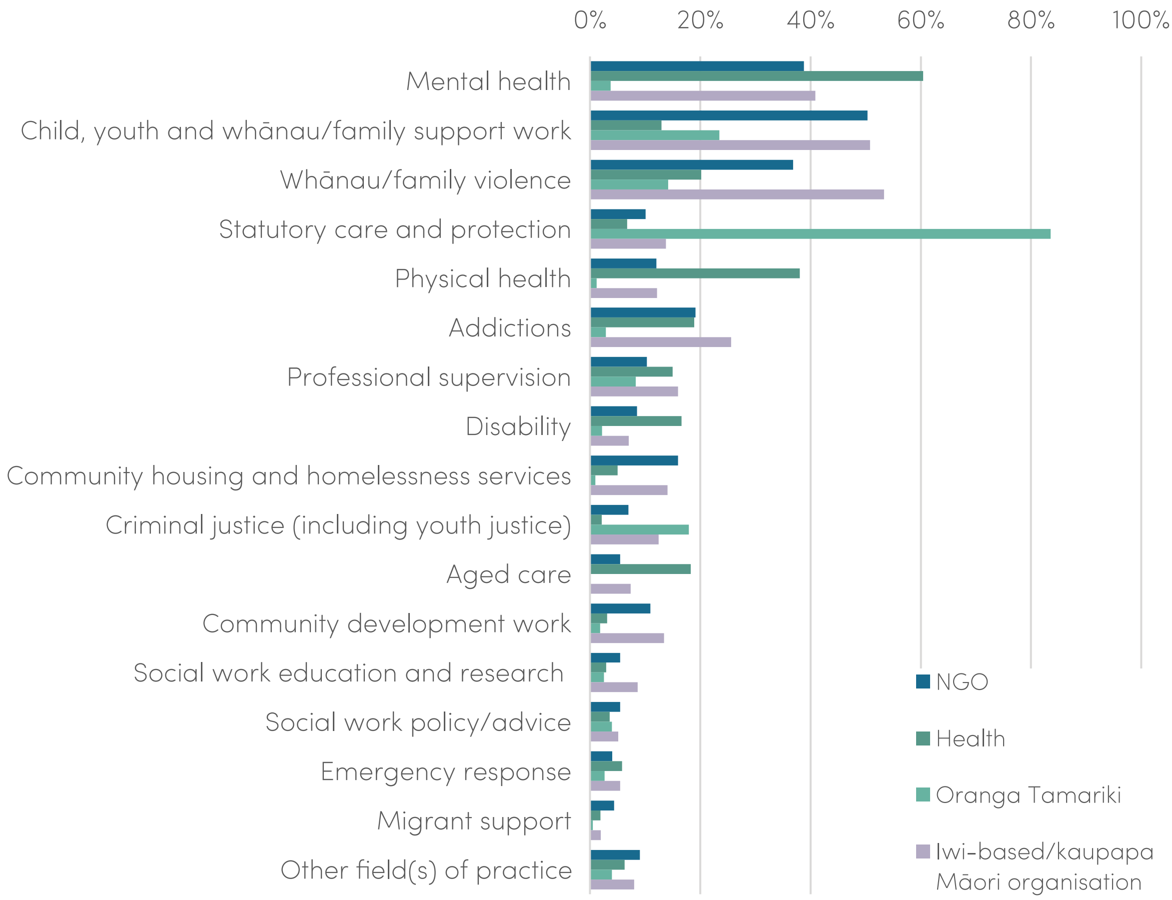


Figure 9 shows the responses for social workers employed by the four largest employer types (NGO, health, Oranga Tamariki and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations), and their reported main field(s) of practice. This shows that over 80% of social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki work mainly in statutory care, and over 60% of those employed in health work in mental health. Compared to the other two employer types, a higher proportion of social workers employed in NGOs and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations report that their main field of practice is child, youth and whanau/family support work.

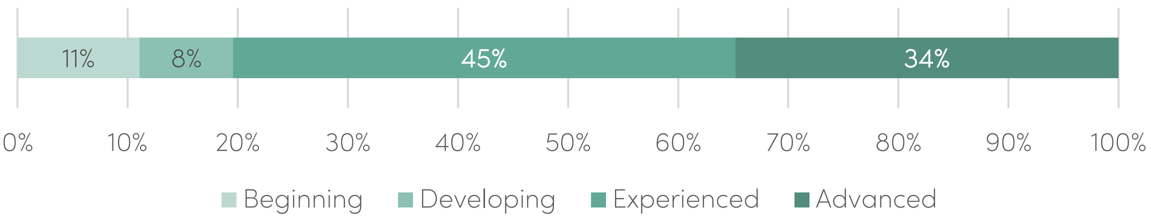
Figure 9. Main field of practice 2025 – top four employer types



1.12 Level of experience and responsibility in social work practice

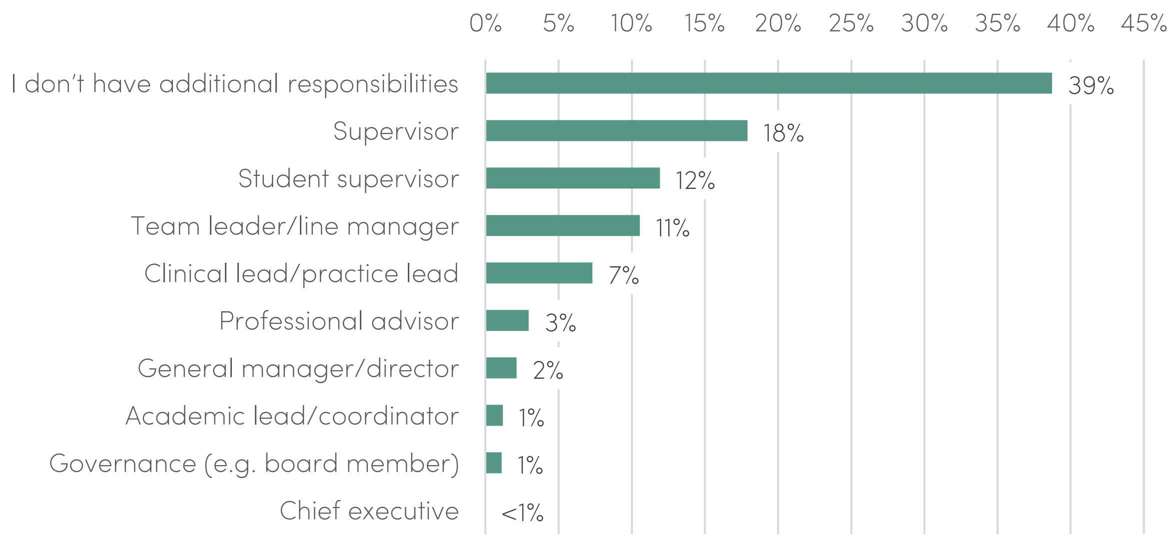
Social workers were asked which category best described their level of experience in social work practice. One in ten described themselves as 'beginning practitioners' with 1 to 3 years of experience (11%). Close to half described themselves as 'experienced' (45%), and a third 'advanced' (34%). The remaining 8% described themselves as 'developing'. While the response categories for this survey question changed slightly between 2023 and 2025, the proportion of social workers who described themselves as 'beginning practitioners' has remained the same since 2023.

Figure 10. Level of experience in social work practice 2025



Social workers were asked about their level of responsibility at the time of the survey. Over a third indicated that they don't have additional responsibilities over and above their own caseload (39%). Of those who did note additional responsibilities, 18% are supervisors, 12% report also being student supervisors, and 11% have team leader or line manager responsibilities.

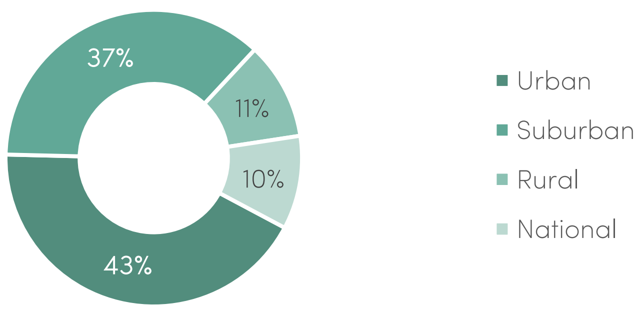
Figure 11. Level of responsibility 2025



1.13 Current role – rural/urban and primary client group

Most social workers reported working in urban (43%) or suburban areas (36%). One in ten reported working in rural areas (11%) and across the whole country (10%).

Figure 12. Population area of work 2025

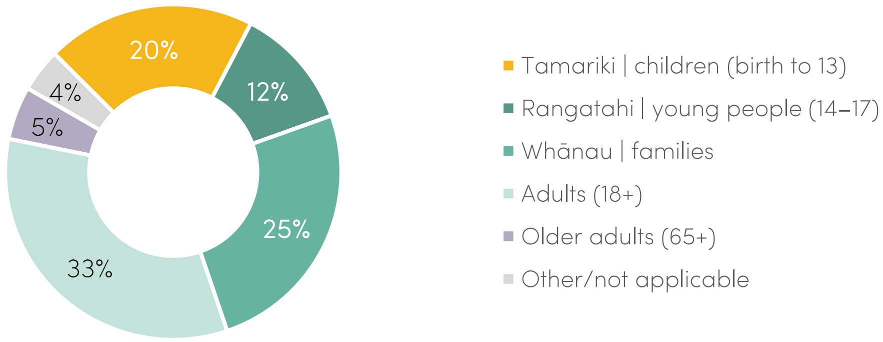


This distribution has not changed since 2022, highlighting a continued risk of a lower rural workforce (10%) compared to the New Zealand population who live in rural areas (19%).[4]

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

When asked about their primary client group or focus of their practice, the most common groups were adults aged 18 and over (33%) and whānau/families (25%). A third of participants report that their primary client group is tamariki/children or rangatahi/young people (20% and 12%, respectively). The distribution across primary client groups has not changed in the past three years of this survey.

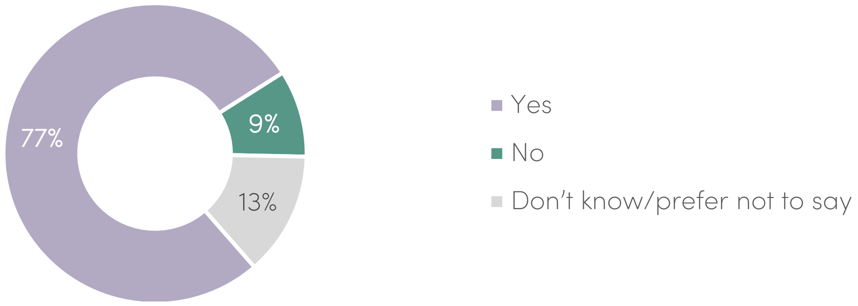
Figure 13. Primary client group 2025



1.14 Current role – frontline and full-time equivalent (FTE) level

Social workers were asked if their current role was frontline/client-facing. The majority said yes (77%). Those who are not frontline tend to be in professional advisor or team/clinical lead positions.

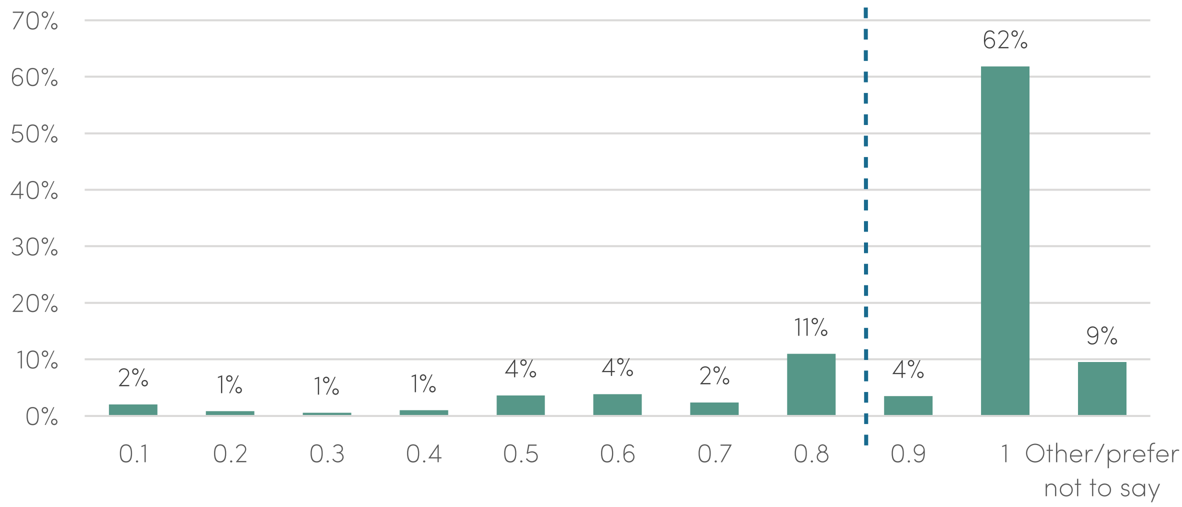
Figure 14. Current role frontline/client-facing 2025



In 2025, social workers were asked to indicate the FTE level of their current role. Two-thirds (66%) said that they work 0.9 or 1 FTE (considered full-time, or more than 30 hours a week, 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. 9% 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 and 2025.

Figure 15. Current work status (full-time equivalent level) 2025

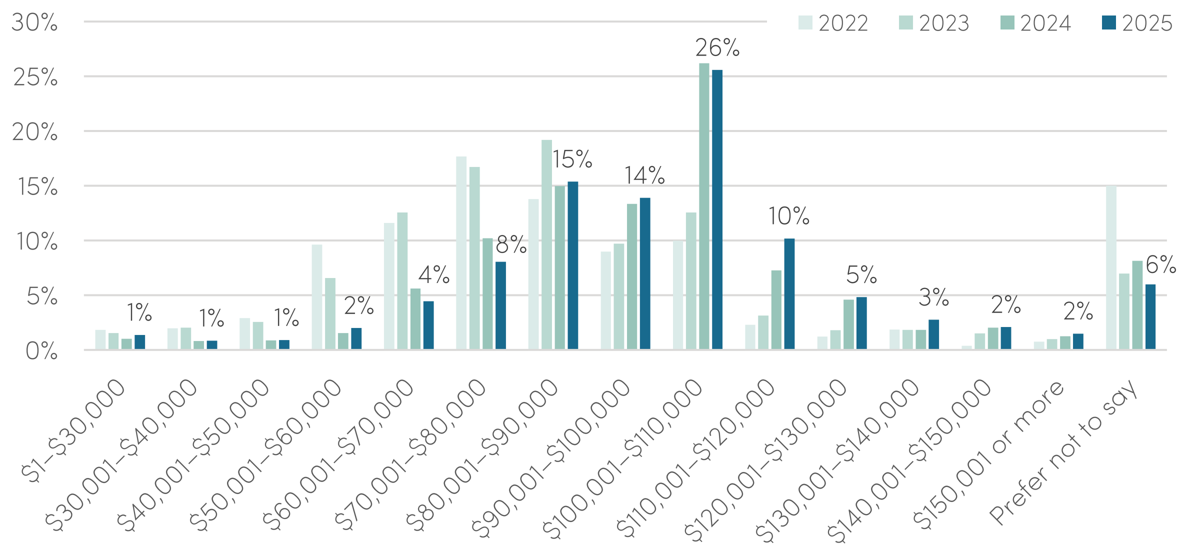


1.15 Salary distribution – overall, by employer type, and by ethnicity

The most common salary category selected by survey participants was $100,001 – 110,000 annually (26%). A combined total of 47% of social workers in the survey reported earning more than $100,000 annually, up from 43% in 2024. As shown in Figure 16, there is clear trend for increasing salary distribution over the past four years that this survey has been conducted.

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

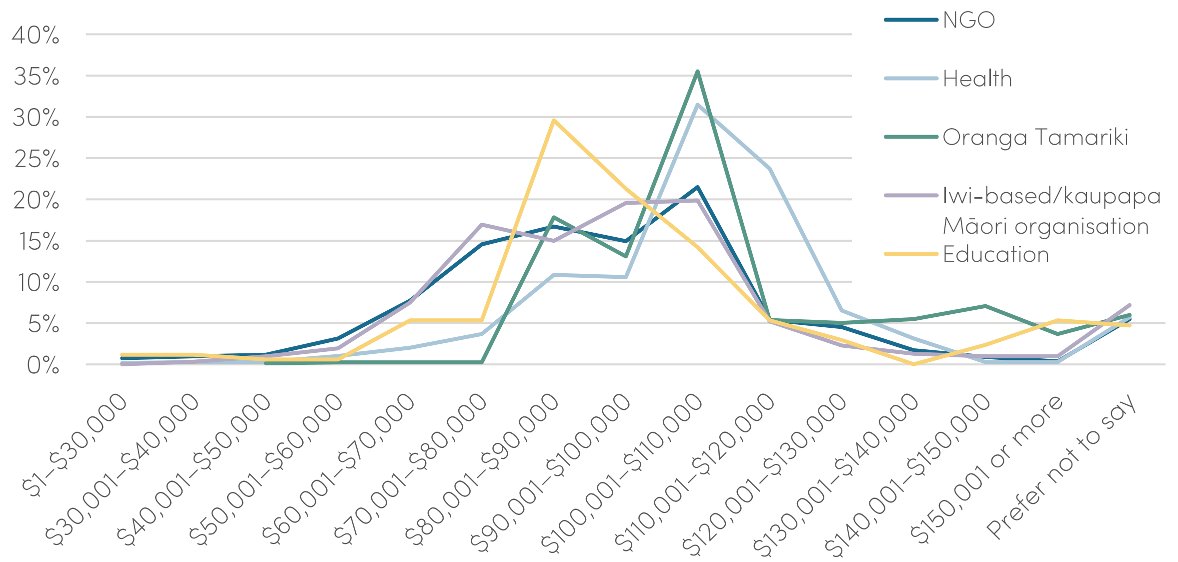
Figure 16. Salary distribution 2025 – comparing over time



There has been a noticeable shift in the distribution of salaries by employer type since past workforce surveys. Up until 2024, social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki reported a significantly higher 'peak' in salary distribution than other employer types. However, in 2024 and 2025, social workers employed by health and NGOs have moved up in salary to match the peak of Oranga Tamariki at $100,001–$110,000 (Figure 17).

Social workers employed by iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations also show a positive shift in salary distribution, from a peak of $80,001–90,000 in 2024 to $100,001–110,00 in 2025. Social workers employed in education (including early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education) report a salary distribution that remains lower than other employer types.

Figure 17. Salary distribution 2025 – top five employer types



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. For the first time, social workers identified skills for managing complexity as the highest reported category for CPD needs (45%), followed by social work practice with Māori (42%) and with other ethnic and cultural groups (40%).

Table 9. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2025

CPD area	Number	%
Skills for managing complexity	1900	45%
Social work practice with Māori	1772	42%
Social work practice with other ethnic and cultural groups	1714	40%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practice	1703	40%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	1413	33%
Skills for conflict management	1358	32%
Working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse	1321	31%
Professional supervisor training	1255	29%
Working with whānau who have experienced family harm	1132	27%
Critical thinking	1130	27%
Decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi	1034	24%
Use of technology	830	19%
Quality improvement and project work	819	19%
Report writing	785	18%
Professional boundaries	751	18%
Supporting students on field placements	727	17%
Case management	692	16%
Working in partnerships	652	15%
Activity reporting and use of data	572	13%
Other CPD	135	3%

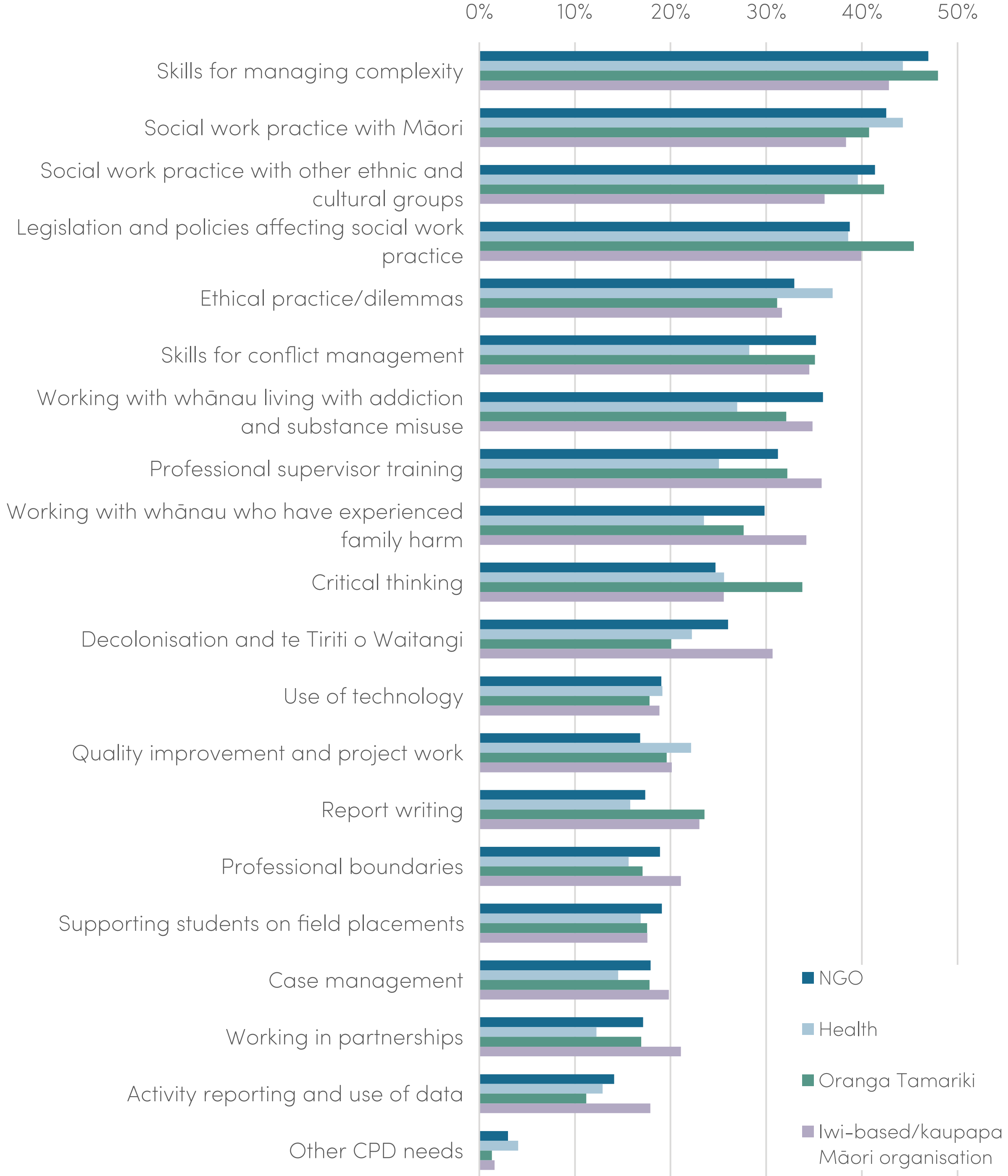
Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

2.2 Area of development for employer types

Figure 18 shows the areas of CPD identified by social workers across the four largest employer types (NGOs; health; Oranga Tamariki; iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations). In most areas of CPD, levels of reporting are similar. However, social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki indicated higher levels of interest in CPD relating to legislation and policies affecting social work practice, and critical thinking.

As also seen in 2023 and 2024, 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 18. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2025 – by top four employer types



2.3 Perceived barriers to CPD

In 2025, a new survey question was added to ask social workers if they experience significant barriers to accessing and completing CPD. Over a third of social workers reported that a lack of protected time is a barrier to accessing and completing CPD and training (37%), and over a quarter experience a lack of funding as a barrier (28%).

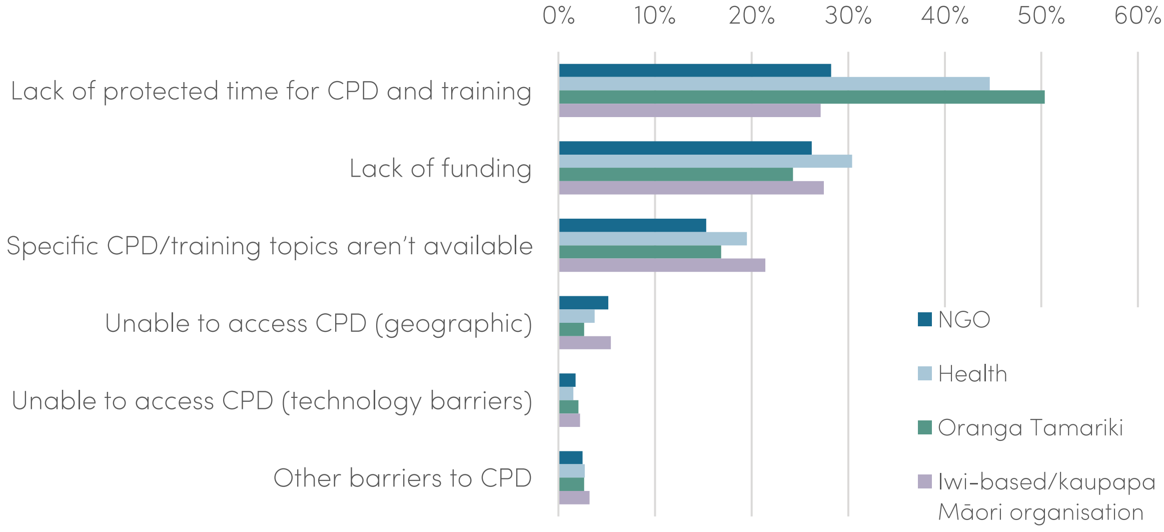
Table 10. Barriers to accessing and completing CPD 2025

Barriers to CPD	Number*	%*
Lack of protected time for CPD and training	1563	37%
Lack of funding	1182	28%
Specific CPD/training topics aren't available	731	17%
Unable to access CPD (geographic)	192	5%
Unable to access CPD (technology barriers)	85	2%
Other barriers	116	3%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

When analysed across the top four employer types (figure 19), a much higher proportion of social workers employed in health and by Oranga Tamariki reported a lack of protected time for CPD and training (45% and 50%, respectively), compared to those employed by NGOs and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations. The remaining barriers were relatively even across the four employer types.

Figure 19. Barriers to accessing and completing CPD 2025 – by top four employer type



Other barriers to accessing and completing CPD identified by social workers expanded on themes in the list of barriers, and include:

- time constraints (specifically, a lack of time due to high caseloads, staffing shortages, and competing priorities)
- financial limitations (high cost of training and public sector funding cuts affecting CPD opportunities)
- availability of training for advanced or specialised roles
- organisational barriers such as inability to release staff for training, and a lack of support from management for CPD in general.

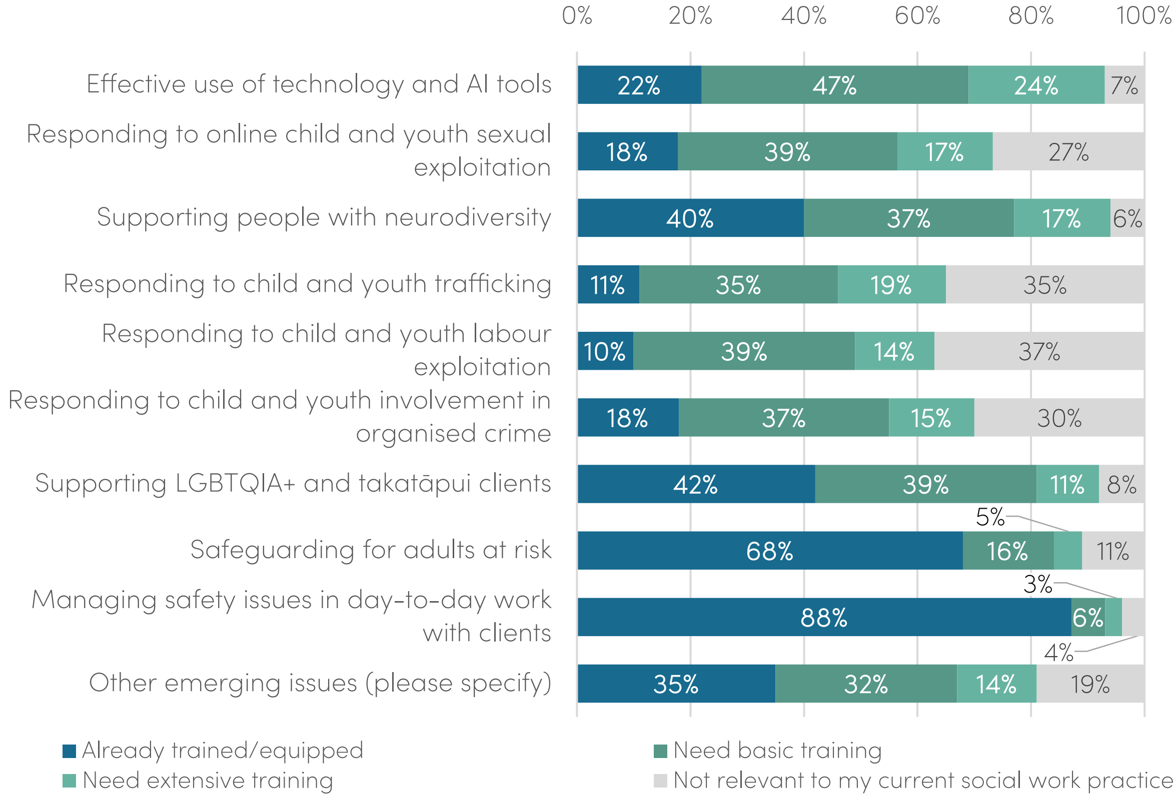
High demand from daily clinical work... makes it difficult to reserve time to attend extra training.

High cost of training – workplace gives us limited $$ and expect us to do free trainings, but those not always relevant.

2.4 Training to respond to emerging issues

A further new question for 2025 was whether social workers felt equipped to deal with a range of emerging issues for social work practice. The issues they were asked about have been identified by social workers in past workforce surveys, and through feedback from employers, as critical to delivering quality services. The effective use of technology and AI tools was the highest selected category, with 71% of social workers saying they need training in this area (47% basic, 24% extensive training). Social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki reported higher levels of need for training in emerging issues relating to children and young people (namely online sexual exploitation and trafficking and labour exploitation).

Figure 20. Training needed to respond to emerging issues 2025



Other emerging issues identified by social workers as areas where they need training include:

- Mental health and addictions services: responding to increasing complexity in cases, noting a growing need for skills in trauma-informed practice and advanced skills specific to mental health and addictions field of practice.
- Social and economic pressures: crisis response training to support homelessness, financial hardship and housing insecurity. Social workers noted cost of living impacts leading to increased stress and service demand, whilst funding cuts constrained community services availability including access to emergency housing.
- Cultural and equity challenges: skills to support refugee and migrant communities, an ageing population, and neurodiverse individuals. Overall equity gaps for certain ethnic groups and responding to racism and unconscious bias in practice.
- Family violence/sexual violence and safety: Social workers note rising demand for prevention and intervention services and the need for specialist skills, including safety training and conflict resolution skills for frontline workers facing aggression.
- Use of technology: a growing interest in the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in social work practice. Social workers noted minimal knowledge and training. They also noted the increased role of social media and harmful online behaviours impacting mental health, as well as technology misuse and abuse.
- System-level and policy issues: developing advocacy skills to achieve more equitable outcomes for certain population groups and improved service delivery, such as reduced waitlists for referrals.

Section 3: 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 practising certificate renewal fees.

3.1 Employer support for social work practice

The most common forms of employer support for social work practice are a supportive team environment (68%), enabling professional supervision through protected time (68%), and with relevant training and skills development (63%).

It is 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.

Response categories changed from 2024 to 2025 to better reflect what we were hearing from social workers responding to the survey, and the different types of support received from employers. This has affected our ability to compare to results from previous years; however, our reporting can now distinguish between financial support and protected time as forms of employer support for social work practice.

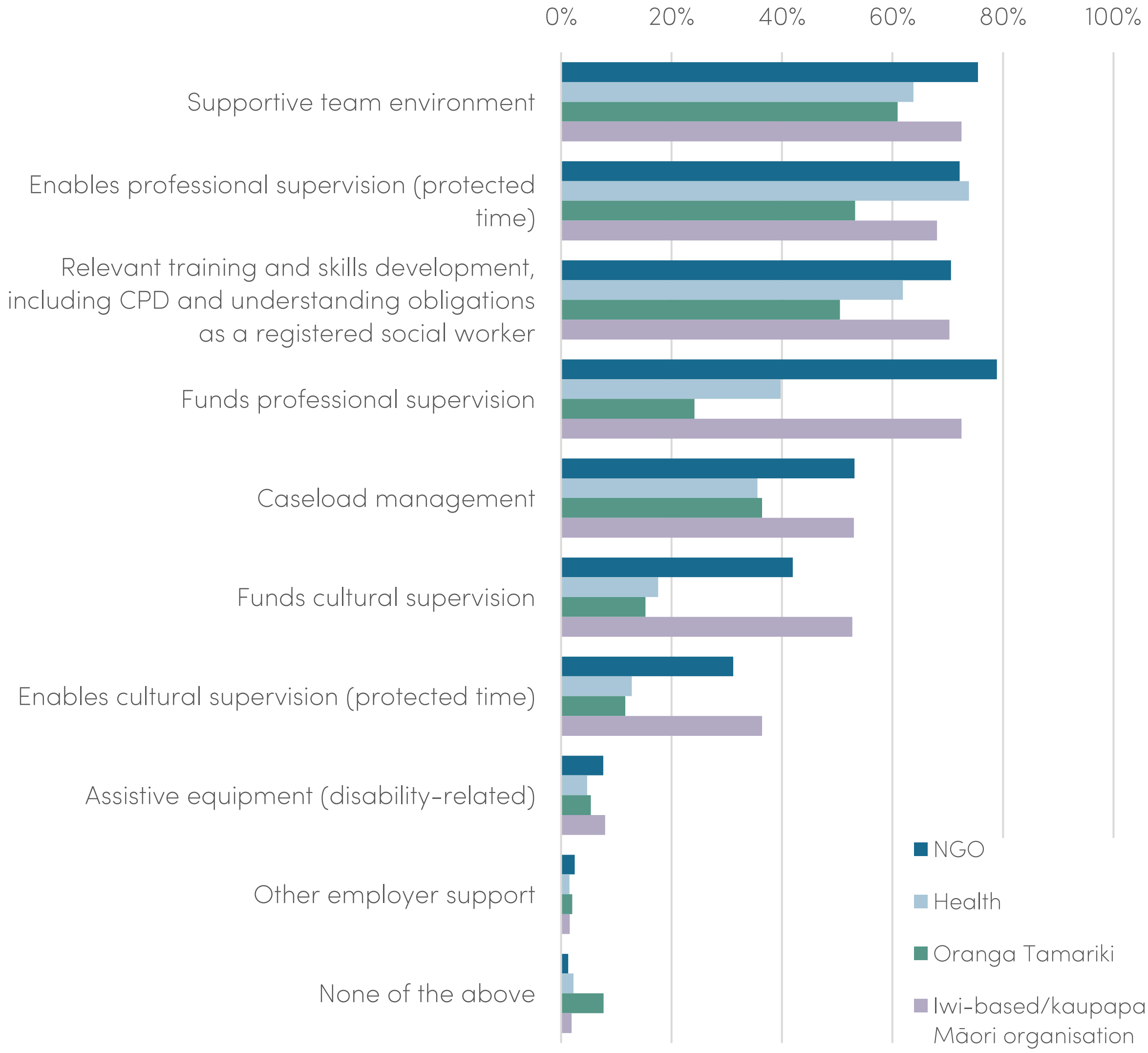
Table 11. Employer support for social work practice 2025

Employer support	Number	%
Supportive team environment	2464	68%
Enables professional supervision (protected time)	2452	68%
Relevant training and skills development, including CPD and understanding your obligations as a registered social worker	2283	63%
Funds professional supervision	1940	54%
Caseload management	1584	44%
Funds cultural supervision	1057	29%
Enables cultural supervision (protected time)	776	22%
Assistive equipment (disability-related)	226	6%
Other employer support	73	2%
None of the above	113	3%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

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 21). This is consistent with what was reported in 2024.

Figure 21. Employer support for social work practice 2025 – by top four employer types



3.2 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.

More than eight in ten participants reported that their employer paid their registration fees in full or in part (86%), and 93% reported that their employer pays their PC renewal fees in full or in part. This is consistent with 2024 results. The two years prior showed an increase in employers paying the full cost of PCs (90–91% in 2024 compared to 83% in 2022).

Figure 22. Employer support for registration and PC fees 2025

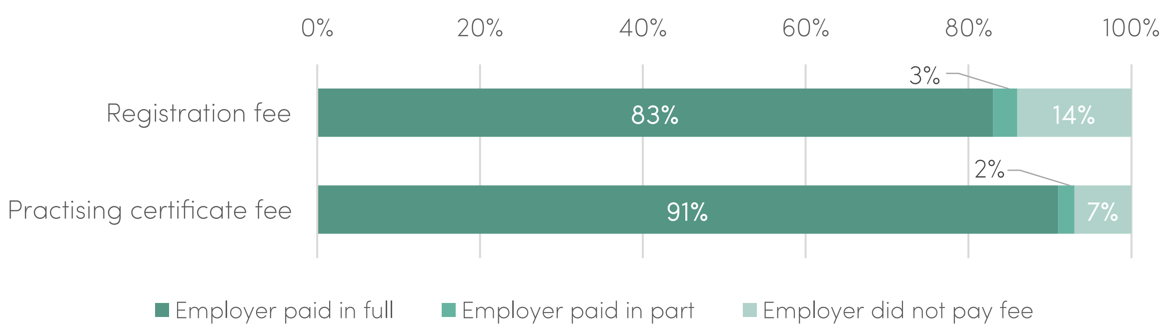
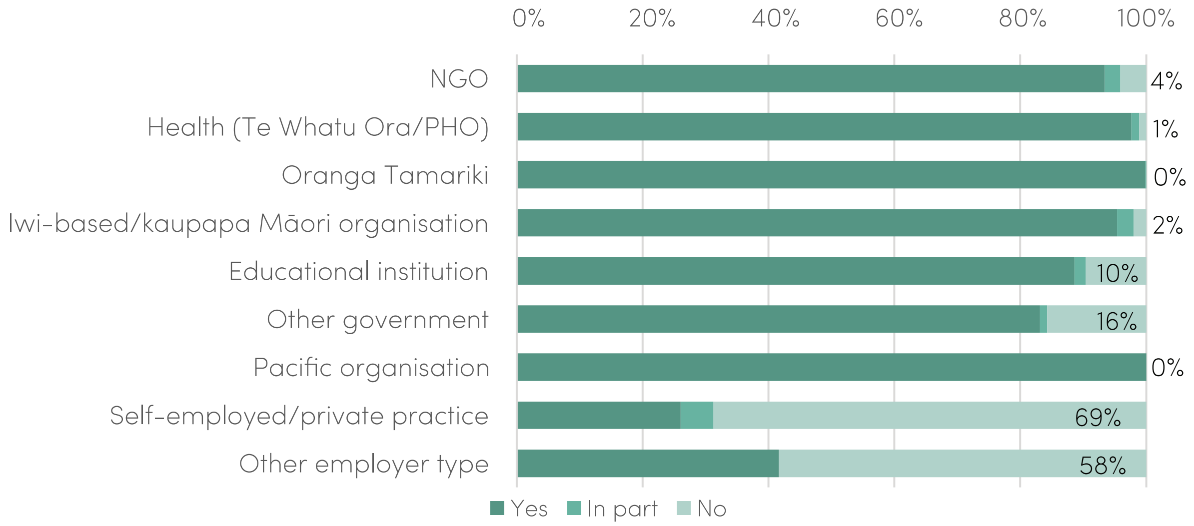


Table 12. Employer support for registration and PC fees 2025

Fees paid by employer	2025 survey		2024 survey	
	Registration fee	PC renewal fee	Registration fees	PC renewal fees
Fees paid in full	83%	91%	83%	91%
Fees paid in part	3%	2%	3%	2%
Employer did not pay fees	14%	7%	15%	7%

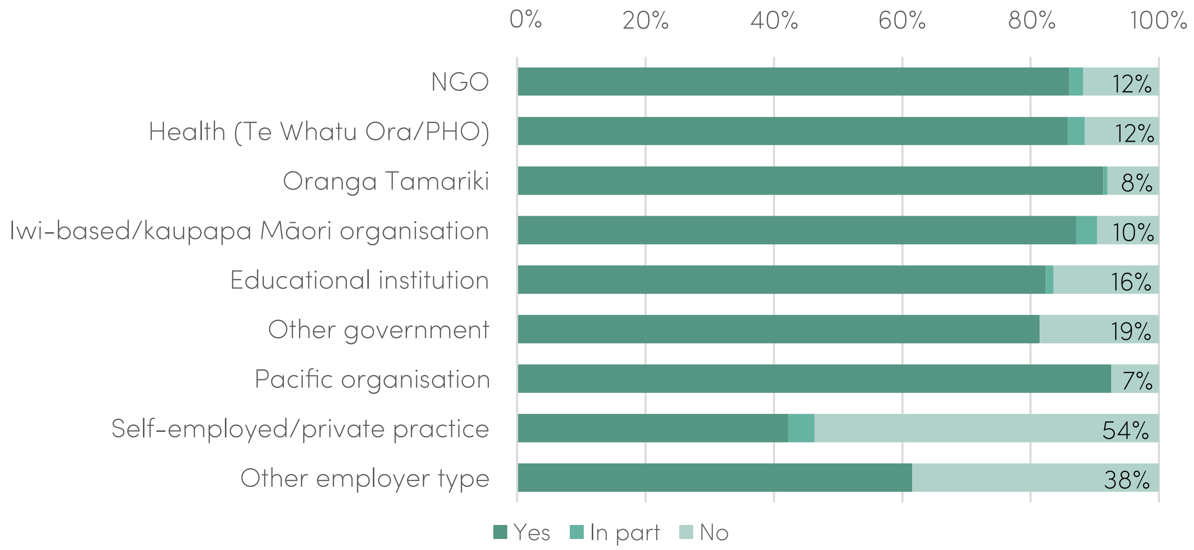
Almost all social workers employed by the four largest employer types report that their employer pays the PC fees (96% to 100%; figure 23), and this is stable from 2024. All social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki reported that their practising certificate fees were paid in full by their employer.

Figure 23. Employer support for PC fees 2025 – by employer type



While social workers may apply for and gain registration with the SWRB before they become employed as a social worker, it is still useful to report on employer payment of registration fees over time, and by employer type. The majority of social workers report that their employer pays their registration fees, and this is consistent across the larger employer types.

Figure 24. Employer support for registration fees 2025 – by employer type



Section 4: Safety and conduct

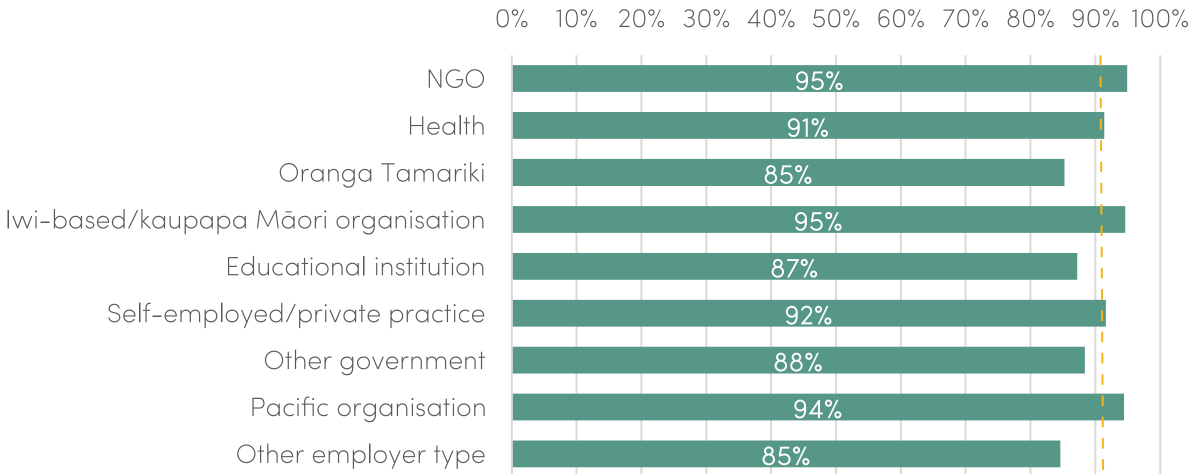
A focus for the workforce survey in the past two years has been on safety and conduct for social workers. Specifically, social workers were asked about their confidence in their employer's policies and processes for dealing with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct, and whether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

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

91% of participants 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 (dashed line in figure 25).

There was some variation by employer type, as shown in figure 25 (descending order of size of the employer type). Social workers employed by NGOs, iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations and Pacific organisations have the highest level of confidence in their employer's policies and processes. Social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki, educational institutions and other government agencies had lower levels of confidence in their employer's policies and processes to deal with serious practice and/or conduct.

Figure 25. Confidence in employer to deal with serious practice/conduct issues – by employer type 2025



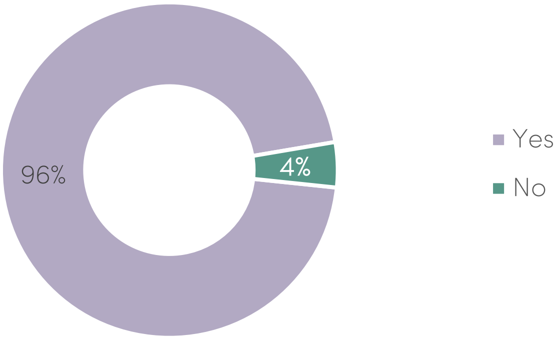
For the small number of social workers (9%) who did not feel confident in their employer's ability to deal with serious practice or conduct issues, many felt that their employer was not aware of the specific requirements for the social work profession. Respondents' comments included that existing policies are either inadequate, not specific to social work, or not consistently followed, or that they had past experience in raising practice or conduct issues that was not addressed by their employer. Additionally, concerns were raised about their employer's poor understanding of social work. This was noted particularly for employers with diverse professional workforces such as health or education.

Notable concerns include lack of formal training and inconsistent or avoidant approaches to addressing conduct or practice issues. Responses indicate there is a recurring perception that unsafe practice, bullying, and misconduct are frequently ignored or inadequately resolved. Processes relating to people and culture (human resources/HR) were also referenced as being slow, complex, and a barrier to managing poor performance or misconduct, resulting in prolonged unresolved issues.

4.2 Raising concerns with the SWRB

Almost all participants (96%) say they would raise concerns about another social worker's practice and/or conduct with the SWRB (where it was not possible to resolve the issue with the employer).

Figure 26. Raising concerns of practice and/or conduct with the SWRB 2025



For the small number of participants who would not raise concerns with the SWRB, their reasons often centred around not feeling safe to do so for fear of repercussions, including retaliation and bullying. Some referred to an unsafe workplace culture or the possibility of negative impacts on their own career. The comments reflect workplaces where raising concerns is perceived as risky for 'whistleblowers'. Others expressed a lack of trust in both internal and external reporting mechanisms, and that their concerns would be handled in a confidential way.

There is a perception that it is the employer's responsibility to address concerns first, and that reporting to the SWRB should be a last resort. Many social workers shared that they do not feel safe to speak up without negative impacts on their working relationship with colleagues and their employer.

These themes have continued strongly from previous years. Respondents frequently mention that processes for raising and resolving concerns are unclear, inconsistent, or ineffective. There is confusion about what steps to take, and by whom. A small number of social workers were not aware that raising concerns with the SWRB was an option available to them.

> I did not see this as an option previously, as a new practitioner you look to guidance from clinical leads and service managers to facilitate disciplinary or auditing processes. If anything was to arise again and not go addressed, I now know I can [report it to the SWRB].

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. Close to half of those who answered this question said that they thought the profession is more respected (46%), and a further fifth said it was 'in part' (21%).

The proportion of social workers who do not think the profession is more respected since mandatory registration (18%) continues to be lower in 2025. By comparison this figure in the 2022 survey soon after registration became mandatory was 30%. This change signals a shift in understanding of the benefit of registration as a profession.

In response to the question about the effect of mandatory registration on respect for the profession, many referenced client/public safety and the increase in accountability for safe and effective practice. Respondents noted that registration upholds the integrity and mana of the profession, as well as protecting the mana of clients.

Figure 27. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2025

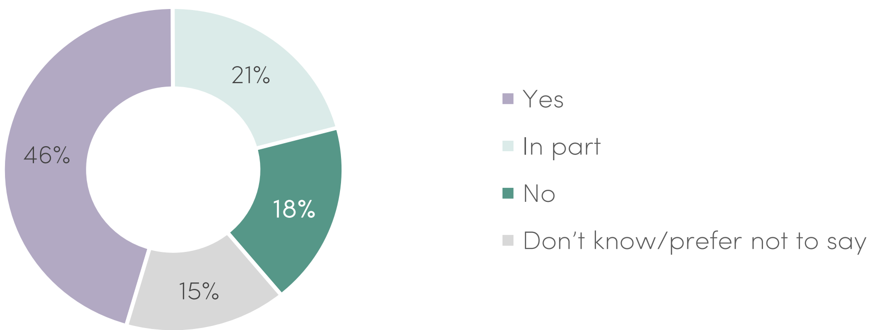


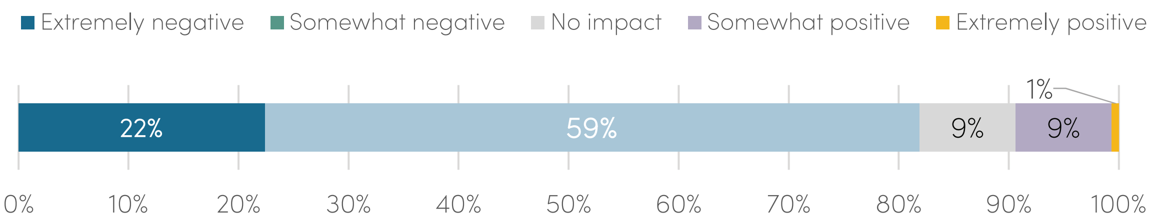
Table 13. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2025

Profession is more respected since mandatory registration	Number (2025)	% (2025)	% (2024)
Yes	1853	46%	49%
In part	851	21%	33%
No	741	18%	17%
Don't know/prefer not to say	627	15%	

> I don't necessarily think it changes public perception especially due to what media put out about the social work profession. I think this has the biggest impact on whether the profession is respected. Unfortunately, I also still regularly hear of workers being described or labelled as 'social workers' when they are untrained and not registered.

> Social workers registration has definitely introduced a mindset of professionalism and sense of urgency regarding accountability throughout the mahi.

Figure 28. Beliefs about impact of media on public trust and confidence in social work profession 2025



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. Around eight in ten participants thought it had a negative impact (22% extremely; 59% somewhat negative), and this matches what was seen in the past two years of survey results.

> While those who understand social workers roles have more respect for those practising, others without understanding and media continue to undermine or devalue the role.

> I think that media continues to taint the social work profession. Quite often when I tell people what I do, I get a funny look. It is not until I share success stories that friends and family understand that it is a valuable role. It can be difficult to perform a role if your community doesn't understand the impact of your work.

Section 6: Workforce sustainability

This section explores factors related to the sustainability of the social worker workforce. Social workers were invited to share what they find most rewarding about social work as a profession, barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession, challenges they face in their current role, and what they believe are the greatest challenges for the profession now and in the immediate future. The survey included questions about social workers' plans for the next five years, and whether they plan to leave the social worker workforce. Lastly, this section reports on whether social workers would recommend social work as a career, which is a useful indicator of job satisfaction and workforce sustainability.

6.1 Most rewarding factors about the social work profession

The three most selected factors identified as being most rewarding about the social work profession were: making a positive difference to people's lives (86%); serving/working with/supporting whānau and community (83%); and contributing to social justice, advocacy and social welfare (72%). Two questions from past surveys were combined for efficiency into this new question, as there were two similar questions about reasons for entering and reasons for staying in the profession. This does affect our ability to compare to findings from previous years.

Table 14. Most rewarding factors about social work profession 2025

Reason	Number	%
Making a positive difference to people's lives	3678	86%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	3516	83%
Contributing to social justice, advocacy, and social welfare	3078	72%
Positive client relationships	2824	66%
Varied nature of the role	2543	60%
Continuous professional development/learning opportunities	2115	50%
Being part of a registered profession	2111	50%
Using my own personal/lived experience to help others	1980	47%
Positive working environment	1923	45%
A known need for social workers	1636	38%
Career opportunities	1449	34%
Flexible working arrangements	1285	30%
Salary	1217	29%
Other factor(s)	37	1%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

I love this work. I spent my twenties in dead end jobs before finally studying. I feel as though I was born to do this

Seeing whānau strengthen and gain their wings of independence.

6.2 Barriers to entering the profession

In 2025, this survey question was revised slightly to better reflect what we were hearing from social workers in past surveys. A single category about the 'complexity of social work practice' was separated out into two categories to allow for a better understanding of specific components of social work practice. The most commonly cited barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession were the complexity of clients/cases, personal stress and emotional toll of social work (48%) and balancing work and personal life (48%). The proportion indicating that balancing work and personal life is a barrier remains higher than previous years (up from 38% in 2022 to 48% this year).

The proportion who indicated salary is a barrier to entering or re-entering the profession (41%) has increased from 34% in 2024, as has the public perception of social work (41%, up from 31% in 2024). Those who reported other barriers to entering or re-entering the profession (4%) noted the increased cost of registration and PCs, and a lack of consistent and sustainable funding for services, among other barriers.

Table 15. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2025

Barriers to entering or re-entering profession	2025 survey		2024	2023
	Number	%	%	%
Complexity of clients/cases, personal stress and emotional toll of the work†	1720	48%	n/a	n/a
Balancing work and personal life	1718	48%	52%	41%
Salary	1490	41%	34%	42%
Public perception of social work	1466	41%	31%	35%
Complexity in navigating systems/structural complexity (organisational, administrative, financial)*	1029	29%	n/a	n/a
Lack of career progression	1002	28%	20%	23%
Hours of work	984	27%	21%	19%
Concerns about meeting fit and proper requirements (such as having previous convictions)	511	14%	5%	11%
Concerns about meeting other entry requirements (such as for overseas-qualified social workers)	388	11%	5%	7%
Other barrier(s)	127	4%	4%	3%
I do not see any barriers	419	12%	n/a	n/a

*Category was updated in 2025 to better reflect what we were hearing from social workers about the different types of complexity (change from single category about complexity of social work practice to two questions: about complexity of client/cases, and about complexity of systems)

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

> Under resourcing within my workplace for an additional social worker, unrealistic expectations for case management given the complexity of the clients.

> Already the impact of reduced funding is being seen in increased reports of concern, increased numbers of children experiencing poverty and reduction in child wellbeing.

> No caseload protections, and often caseloads are too high, leading to professional burnout and some of the other options selected above. [The] caseloads are often not reflected in salary, even with the pay equity agreement.

Other barriers cited by participants include:

- personal barriers specific to social work, often referencing the complexity of social work and balancing work and personal life, including high caseloads and workload leading to burnout, and vicarious trauma and ethical challenges in practice
- system-level barriers including public sector cuts to funding and services affecting social work
- financial barriers including pay equity issues compared to other professions, and the cost of study and ongoing training, compounded by unpaid placements and limited financial support for ākonga/students. The cost of registration, PCs, and association fees were also mentioned.

More social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki identified balancing work and personal life and hours of work as barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession. However, fewer social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki said that salary was a barrier to the social work profession. This is likely to relate to past findings where social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki earned higher salaries than social workers from other large employers up until 2024. A 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. All of these trends by employer type are the same as has been reported from this survey over the past three years.

6.3 Challenges affecting own role and practice in the workplace

In 2025, a new question was added to the survey asking social workers to rate the impact of specific challenges on their roles and social work practice. The challenges were based on what had been identified by social workers in past surveys.

The challenge identified by most social workers as affecting them 'somewhat', 'a lot' or 'enough to make me want to leave the profession' was high workload/burnout (a total of 85% affected in some way). The next most cited challenge was an imbalance of administrative duties and contact time with clients (64% affected in some way).

Figure 29. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2025 – by top four employer types

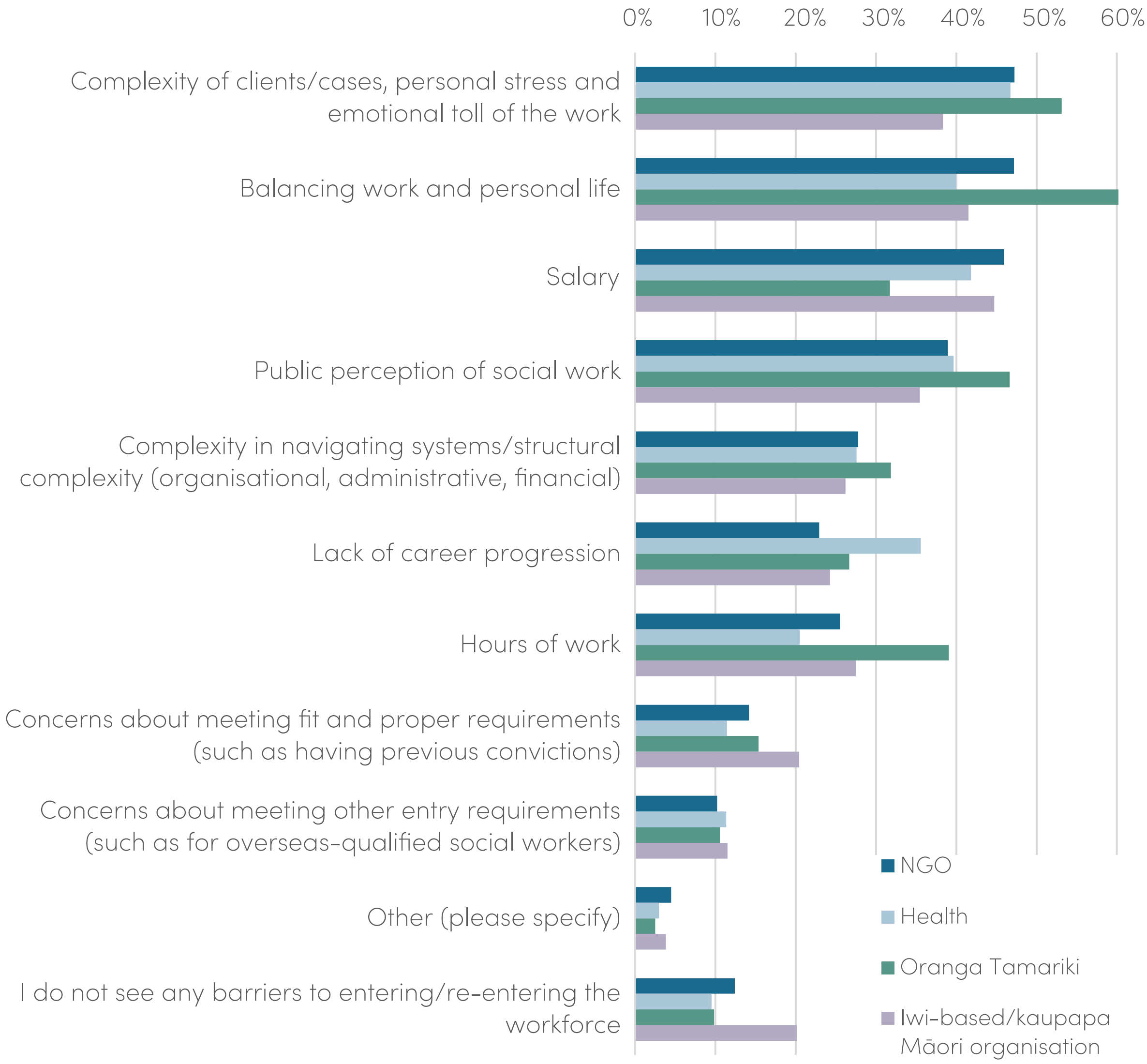
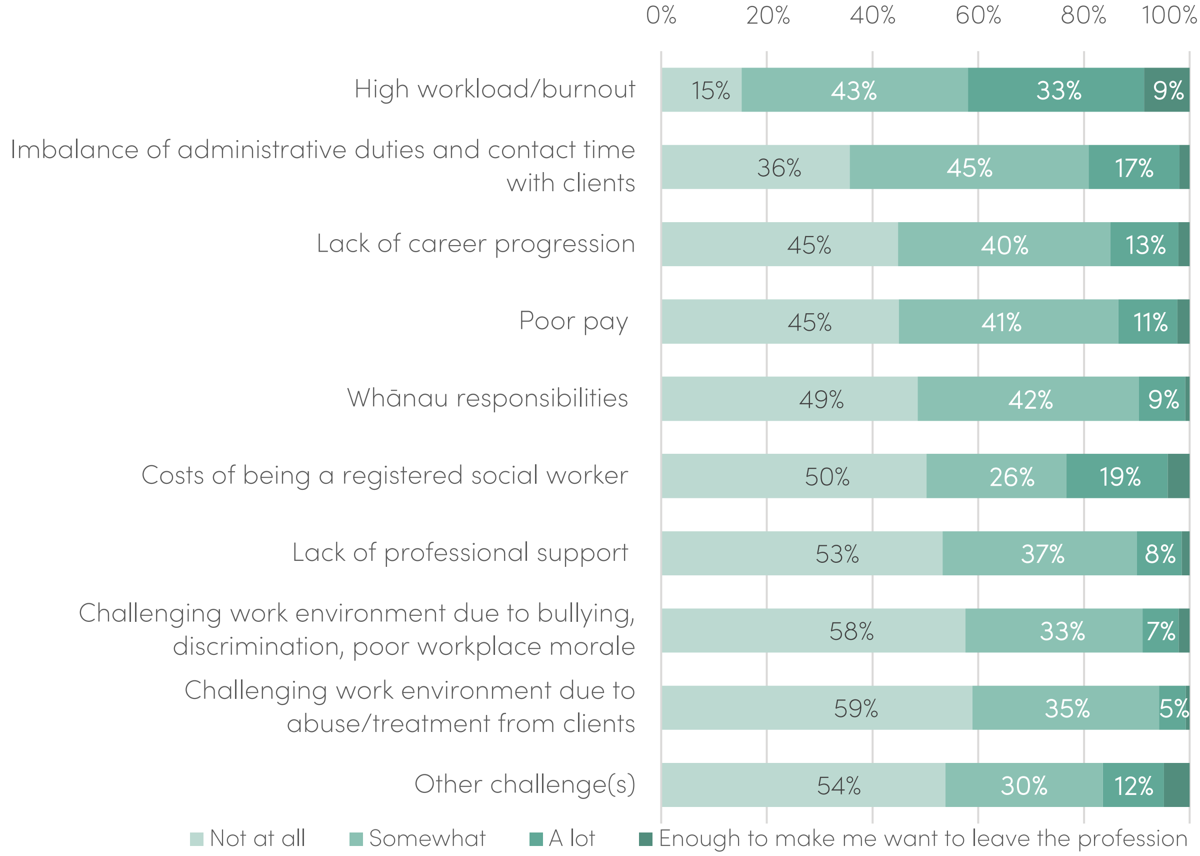


Figure 30. Challenges affecting own role and practice in the workplace 2025



6.4 Biggest challenges for the social work 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 since 2022, the biggest challenge is the recruitment and retention of social workers (61%). The deepening of social inequity was the next highest challenge noted by social workers (53%), which has increased since 2024 (44%). The public perception of social workers as a challenge for the profession has also increased to 51%, from 42% in 2024.

While pay parity was seen as less of a challenge for the profession at the time of last year's 2024 survey (31% of participants), it has increased again to 48% in 2025, and an increasing reliance on the unregulated support workforce continues to be identified by more social workers as a challenge, reported by 38% of social workers in 2025, compared to 18% in 2023.

Table 16. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2025

Challenges	2025 survey		2024	2023
	Number	%*	%	%
Recruitment and retention of social workers	2618	61%	63%	67%
Deepening of social inequity	2254	53%	44%	51%
Public perception of social workers	2182	51%	42%	45%
Pay parity	2037	48%	31%	56%
Not enough time spent with people using the services	1763	41%	39%	44%
Increasing reliance on unregulated support workforce	1614	38%	30%	18%
Lack of visibility of social work profession to funders	1554	37%	24%	27%
Emerging practice challenges	1349	32%	N/A	N/A
Other regulated professions replacing social work roles	1282	30%	24%	23%
Other	270	6%	4%	4%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

When grouped by employer type, more social workers from Oranga Tamariki identified 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 compared to the other three large employer types (figure 31).

Figure 31. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2025 – by top four employer types

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

6.5 Five-year plan for staying in the workforce

Two-thirds of survey participants plan to remain in the social work profession over the next five years (65%), down from 73% in 2024. 19% of participants plan to leave in the next five years, which has increased from 13% in 2024.

This survey finding represents a loss of over 800 social workers from the profession, and if the proportion is extrapolated out to the full practising workforce (a total of 8,066 at the time of the survey closing), it would indicate a loss of over 1,500 social workers across New Zealand.

For context, in the 2024/25 period, a total of 583 social workers became registered with the SWRB. As of 30 June 2025, 433 of these newly registered social workers obtained a practising certificate and joined the social worker workforce. The SWRB maintains the Register of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand and relies on social workers keeping their registration records up to date. However, social workers do not always notify the Registrar when they 'leave' the social work profession as they may choose to remain registered and declare themselves non-practising. In the 2024/25 year, 82 social workers were removed from the Register. 56 of these social workers had passed away. 16 were removed at the social worker's request, usually for retirement. The remainder were removed by the SWRB as part of disciplinary proceedings or because they had not met conditions of their registration.

Figure 32. Plans to leave social work profession in next five years 2025

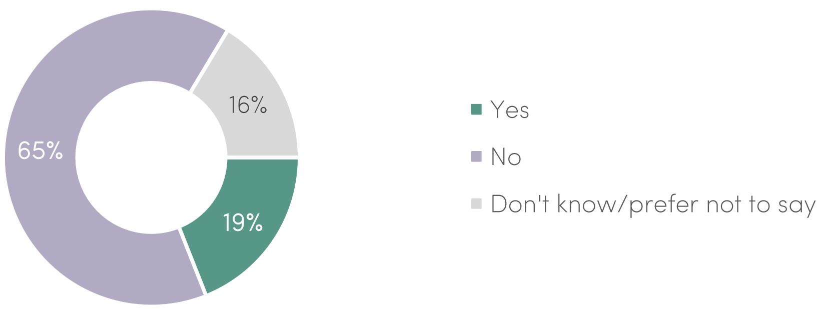
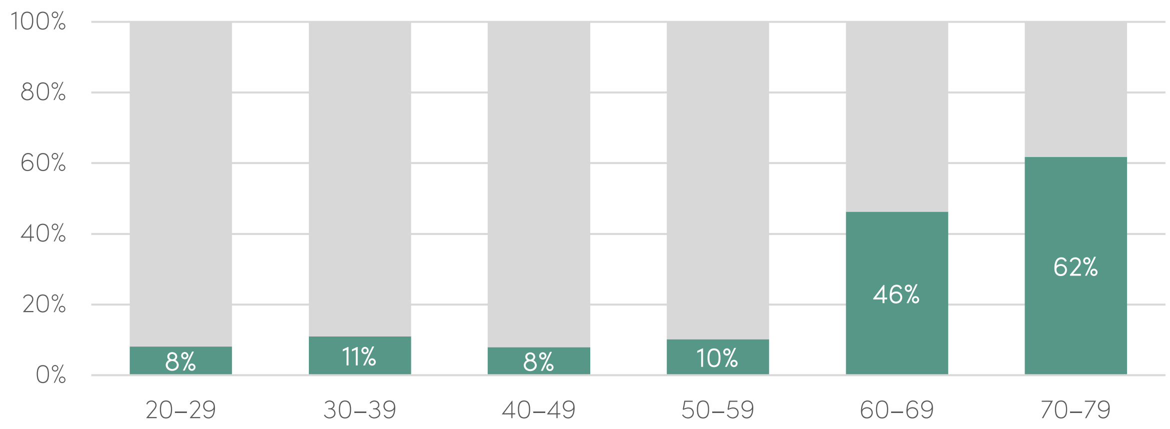


Table 17. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2025

	Number (2025)	% (2025)	% (2024)	% (2023)
No	2516	65%	73%	74%
Yes	738	19%	13%	16%
Don't know/prefer not to say	636	16%	13%	10%

Figure 33 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 figure 34.

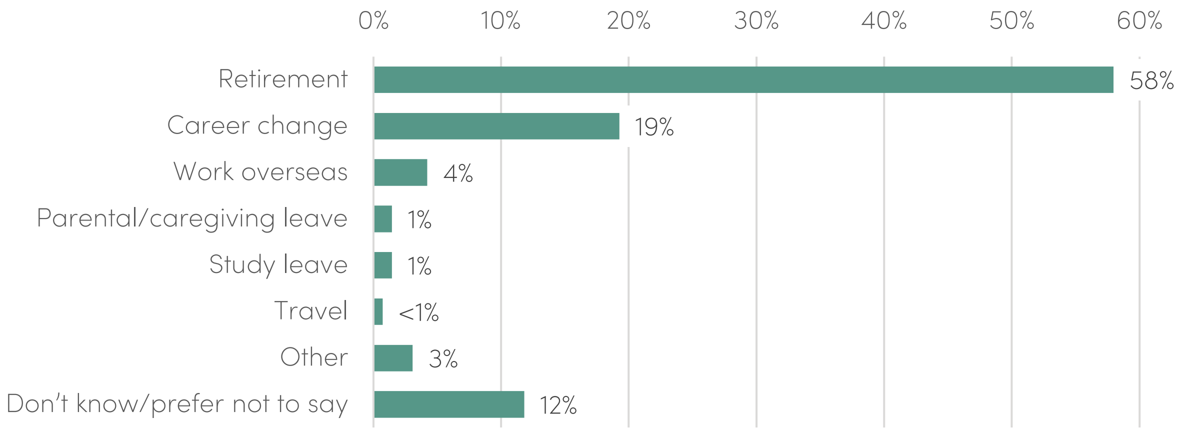
Figure 33. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2025 – by age group



6.6 Reason for leaving the profession – overall, and by employer type

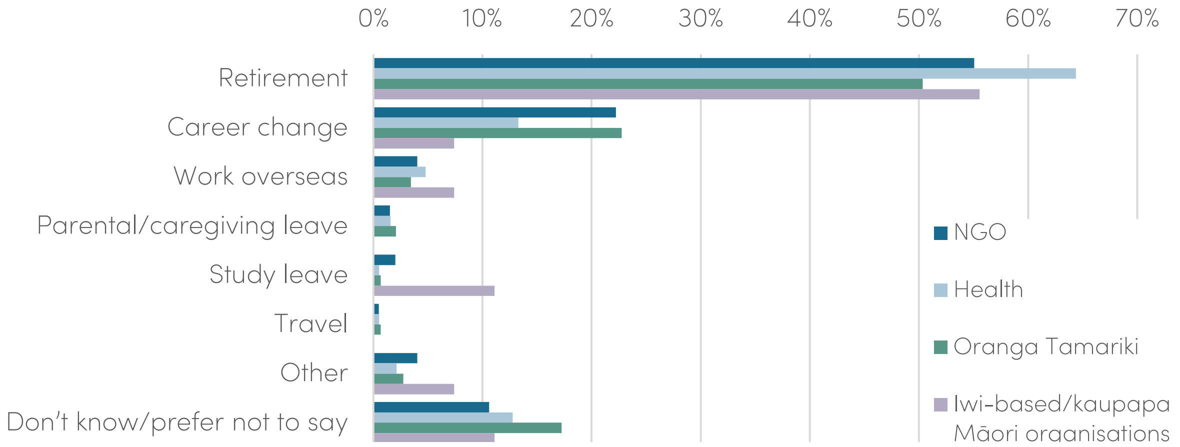
Of the 19% (or 738 survey participants) who indicated that they plan to leave the social work profession in the next five years, most gave retirement as their reason (58%). This is a continually increasing trend since 2023 when retirement was the main reason cited by 46% of those planning to leave and confirms that increasing numbers of social workers retiring will be an ongoing challenge to workforce sustainability in the coming years.

Figure 34. Reason for those who plan to leave the profession in the next five years 2025



For the top four employer types, more social workers employed in health planned to leave for retirement compared to other reasons. More social workers employed by NGOs and Oranga Tamariki were planning to leave for a career change compared to the other top four employer types. More social workers employed by iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations planned to take work overseas or take study leave, however the numbers for this group are small and should be interpreted with caution.

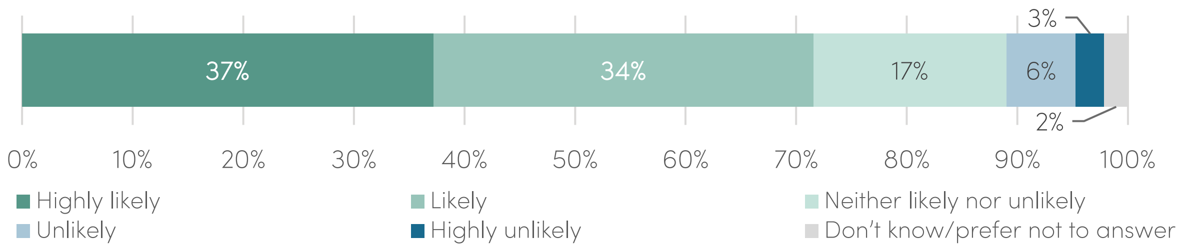
Figure 35. Reason for those who plan to leave the profession in the next five years 2025 – by top four employer types



6.7 Likelihood of recommending social work as a career

In 2025, a new survey question was added asking how likely respondents would be to recommend becoming a social worker as a career. Most respondents would recommend social work as a career (71% highly likely or likely to recommend).

Figure 36. Likelihood of recommending social work as a career 2025



Closing comments

The SWRB extends their gratitude to the social workers who took the time to share their responses and feedback through the 2025 workforce survey. Over half of the practising workforce participated, and those who took part in the survey match 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. It enables the SWRB to continue building the evidence base to support planning and decision-making in the social work sector. These data help the SWRB, as a regulator, to further our understanding of how registration enhances social worker professionalism and upholds public safety.

The 2025 workforce survey results show continuing trends of social worker workforce that is ageing, experienced, qualified, female-dominated, with a high representation of Māori and Pacific peoples. One in five practising social workers aged 60 or over and a median age of 50 years. The proportion of social workers working part-time has more than doubled since 2022, rising from 12% to 25%.

Social workers identify a range of areas where they would welcome additional knowledge and skills development for their social work practice, and training to respond to a range of emerging issues. For the first time, 'managing complexity' topped the list of professional development needs at 45%, suggesting practitioners are experiencing their work as increasingly complex and seeking support to navigate this shift. Other CPD priorities include social work practice with Māori (42%) and with other ethnic and cultural groups (40%). Social workers employed by NGO and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations generally report higher levels of employer support through protected time for CPD, and fewer barriers to CPD, compared to social workers employed by health and Oranga Tamariki.

Social workers are supported by their employers in a range of ways, including payment of practising certificate fees. Most social workers have confidence in their employer's policies for dealing with social work practice/conduct issues, although there is variation by employer type. Social workers report that their employers do not always understand the requirements and standards required of the social work profession.

Social workers believe that mandatory registration has resulted in a more respected profession, however challenges with media coverage continue to impact public trust and confidence in the profession. Registration appears to be strengthening professional identity, with half of practitioners (50%) citing 'being part of a registered profession' as rewarding, and 66% believing the profession is more respected since mandatory registration (when including those who answered 'in part') – representing growth from 30% who saw no benefit in 2022. However, public perception presents ongoing challenges, with 51% identifying it as a major issue (up from 42% in 2024) and 81% feeling media coverage negatively impacts public trust. This creates an interesting dynamic where internal professional identity is strengthening while external perception remains difficult.

Social workers continue to be motivated to make a positive difference and support whānau/communities under increasingly complex circumstances, while also experiencing high workloads and administrative burden. Workload and burnout emerge as significant workforce sustainability concerns, with 85% of social workers affected to some degree. An imbalance between administrative duties and client contact time was identified by more than half of social workers surveyed. Departure intentions have increased notably, with 19% of practitioners planning to leave within five years — up from 13% in 2024. This represents a potential loss of approximately 1,500 social workers in the next five years. Retirement accounts for 58% of planned departures, and career change represents another 19%, indicating that retention challenges extend beyond succession planning to include mid-career social workers actively choosing to leave the profession. Notably, 71% would still recommend social work as a career despite workload pressures and other challenges. The critical question for the sector is ensuring organisational structures and resources support this commitment over sustainable long-term careers, rather than relying on individual resilience to bridge the gap between values and working conditions.

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. 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 build on our suite of workforce survey reports, including 'spotlight' reports focusing on subsets of the social worker workforce such as those employed by Oranga Tamariki, in health and NGOs (2023), and social workers employed by iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations and those employed in TEOs (2024). We continue to gather and report data on the education pathway into social work through our Annual Education Survey reports, and in 2025 we reported on our inaugural Social Work Employer Survey.

In the SWRB's role as lead agency for social worker workforce planning, we continue to collect evidence and share insights on the voices of the social work profession. We collect and analyse social worker workforce data and information and share with others to use in their workforce planning and development activities. Along with this knowledge base, 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 are taking a dual approach (cross-government and cross-sector) to encourage to collaborate on a system-wide and integrated social worker workforce strategy and associated action planning. We 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. Our insights have highlighted opportunities for decision-makers on coordinated approaches to resolving known workforce challenges and have fed into the development of a cross-sector workforce strategy and action plan that is a key priority over the next 2-3 years.

Appendix 1: Survey sample and data representativeness

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 Register with an active practising certificate (PC) as of 30 June 2025 (the end of the financial year in which the survey was conducted).

Table A1. Age distribution: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25

Age group	Survey participants		Practising workforce	
	Number	%	Number	%
20–29	298	7%	733	8%
30–39	776	18%	1907	21%
40–49	980	23%	2153	24%
50–59	1163	27%	2336	26%
60–69	909	21%	1656	18%
70–79	128	3%	266	3%
80 or older	2	<1%	12	<1%
Unspecified	1	<1%	2	<1%
Total	**4257**		**9065**	

Figure A1. Age distribution: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25

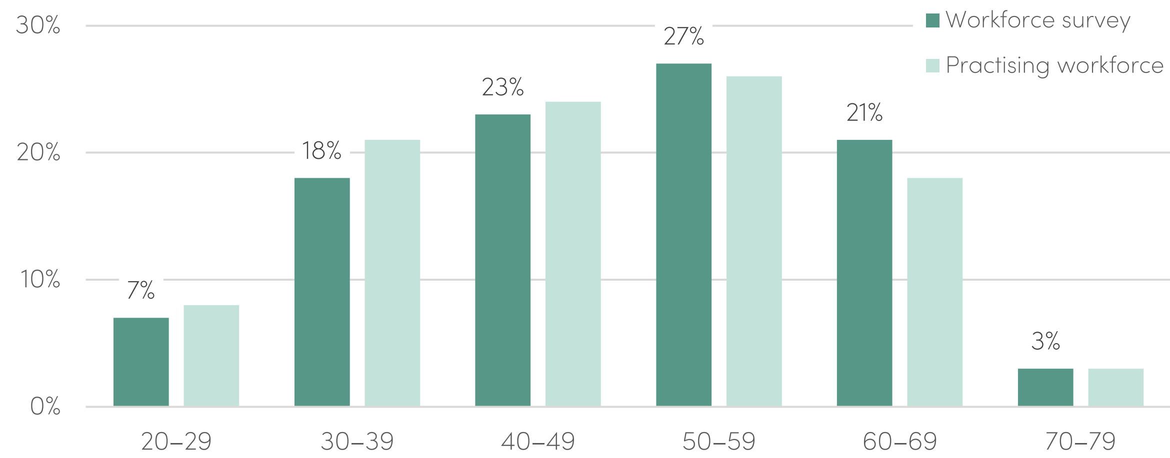


Table A2. Gender distribution: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25

Gender	Survey participants		Practising workforce	
	Number	%	Number	%
Female	3575	84%	7646	84%
Male	657	15%	1362	15%
Another gender	12	<1%	25	<1%
Unspecified	13	<1%	32	<1%
Total	**4257**		**9065**	

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).[5] The 2025 survey sample and practising workforce of social workers have a higher representation of Māori and Pacific peoples than the general population.

Table A3. Ethnicity: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25 and 2023 Census

Ethnicity	Survey participants		Practising workforce		2023 Census
	Number	%	Number	%	%
NZ Māori	1036	24%	2278	25%	18%
Pacific Peoples	497	12%	1129	12%	9%
European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā/ other European)	2744	64%	5741	63%	68%
Asian	399	9%	887	10%	17%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	133	3%	267	3%	2%
Other	72	2%	133	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%.

Figure A2. Ethnicity: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25 and NZ population (Census 2023)

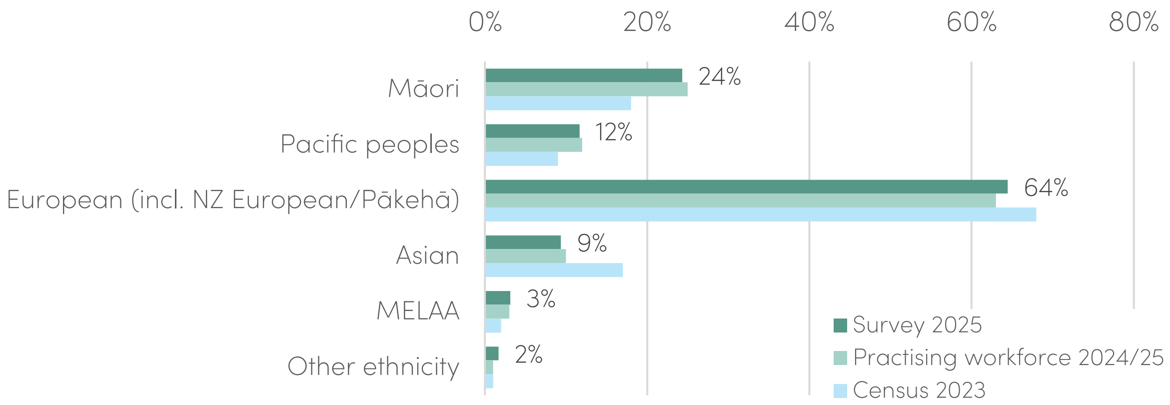


Table A4. Geographic distribution: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25 and NZ population (Census 2023)

Region	Survey participants		Practising workforce		2023 Census
	Number	%	Number	%	%
Northland	203	5%	466	5%	4%
Auckland	1231	29%	2669	29%	33%
Waikato	347	8%	751	8%	10%
Bay of Plenty	349	8%	714	8%	7%
Gisborne	65	2%	153	2%	1%
Hawke's Bay	171	4%	383	4%	4%
Taranaki	97	2%	226	2%	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	247	6%	474	5%	5%
Wellington	437	10%	995	11%	10%
Tasman	28	1%	60	1%	1%
Nelson	87	2%	175	2%	1%
Marlborough	37	1%	72	1%	1%
West Coast	37	1%	67	1%	1%
Canterbury	643	15%	1293	14%	13%
Otago	188	4%	384	4%	5%
Southland	88	2%	174	2%	2%
Unspecified/international	2	<1%	9	<1%	–
Total	**4257**	–	**9065**	–	–

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

Figure A3. Geographic distribution: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25

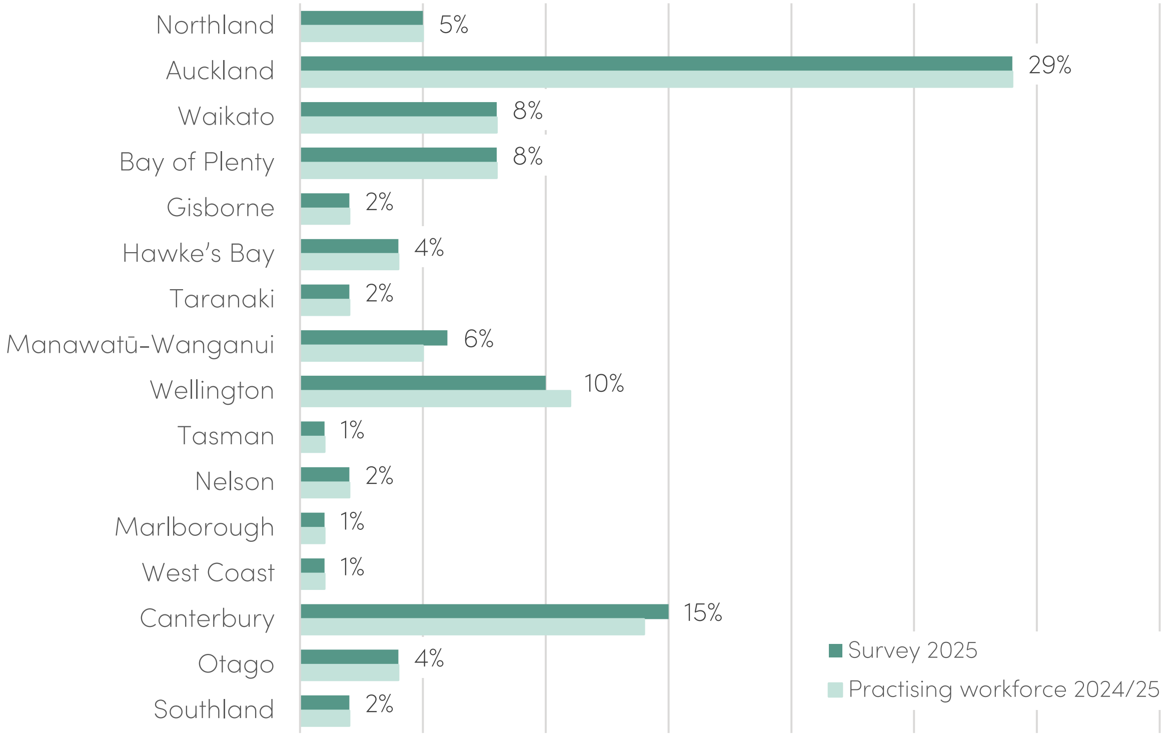


Table A5. Geographic distribution: social workers per 10,000 population 2025

Region	2023 Census	Practising social workers		Survey participants	
	Number	Number	Per 10,000	Number	Per 10,000
Northland	194,007	466	24	203	10
Auckland	1,656,486	2669	16	1231	7
Waikato	498,771	751	15	347	7
Bay of Plenty	334,140	714	21	349	10
Gisborne	51,135	153	30	65	13
Hawke's Bay	175,074	383	22	171	10
Taranaki	126,015	226	18	97	8
Manawatū-Wanganui	251,412	474	19	247	10
Wellington	520,971	995	19	437	8
Tasman	57,807	60	10	28	5
Nelson	52,584	175	33	87	17
Marlborough	49,431	72	15	37	7
West Coast	33,390	67	20	37	11
Canterbury	651,027	1293	20	643	10
Otago	240,900	384	16	188	8
Southland	100,143	174	17	88	9
Unspecified/international	633	9	–	2	–
Total	**4,993,923**	**9065**	**National average: 20**	**4257**	**Survey participant average: 9**

Table A6. Employer type: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25

Employer type	Survey participants		Practising workforce	
	Number	%	Number	%
Non-government organisation (NGO)	1361	32%	2663	29%
Health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHO)	1102	26%	1947	21%
Oranga Tamariki	832	20%	2170	24%
Iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisation (incl. iwi-based health)	313	7%	703	8%
Educational institution (school; university)	173	4%	340	4%
Self-employed/private practice	208	5%	435	5%
Other government	89	2%	188	2%
Pacific organisation	56	1%	106	1%
Other	15	<1%	31	<1%
Unspecified/not currently employed	108	3%	482	5%
Total	**4257**		**9065**	

Table A7. Pathway to registration: 2025 survey participants compared to practising workforce 2024/25

Pathway to qualification	Survey participants		Practising workforce	
	Number	%	Number	%
NZ social work qualification	3634	85%	7773	86%
Experience pathway: S13	115	3%	249	3%
Overseas qualification	499	12%	1018	11%
Australian social work qualification	9	<1%	25	<1%

Appendix 2: The SWRB's role as lead agency for social worker workforce planning

The SWRB's 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 over the next 2–3 years. In addition, within the SWRB, we are seeking to build the connection between workforce planning and our regulatory activities. They are increasingly complementary to each other.