

MEMO

To: Interested Parties
From: Emma White and Griffin Johnson
Re: Survey of Registered Nurses Living or Working in Michigan
Date: January 23, 2023

The staffing crisis in health care has made news across Michigan and the United States, though government data suggest the crisis in Michigan is not due to a shortage of qualified personnel. One-third of Michigan-licensed RNs (registered nurses) are not working in nursing: The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) records show 154,758 registered nurses with active Michigan licenses, yet the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics finds only 102,480 are working as RNs in Michigan¹. This survey, conducted on behalf of the Michigan Nurses Association², explores registered nurses' perceptions of working conditions, the staffing crisis, and potential solutions that might encourage them to stay in or return to bedside nursing. Some of the questions we asked match items asked in a 2016 survey of Michigan RNs³ so we can report change over time.

Highlights of the study include:

- **Seven in ten RNs** working in direct care say they are assigned an **unsafe patient load** in half or more of their shifts.
- Over **nine in ten RNs** say requiring nurses to care for too many patients at once is **affecting the quality of patient care**. The number who say they know of a patient death due to nurses being assigned too many patients nearly doubled from 22% in 2016 to 42% this year.
- Among **nurses who plan to leave the field within the next two years**, concern about staffing ratios is especially high.

¹ https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_mi.htm#29-0000

² N=400 interviews conducted via live interviewers (cell phone and landline) and text to web from January 2-8, 2023 among registered nurses living or working in Michigan, sampled from the list of RNs provided by Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. The interviews include 32 Michigan Nurses Association members. Margin of sampling error is +/- 4.90 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

³ N=401 Michigan registered nurses, conducted by phone by Anderson Robbins Research, March 2-14, 2016, margin of sampling error +/- 4.90 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

- The vast majority of RNs **blame working conditions for the staffing crisis**, rather than a shortage of qualified RNs.
- Over **nine in ten RNs support** the Safe Patient Care Act, pending **legislation to limit the number of patients a hospital RN can be assigned**, and most believe it would improve patient care if passed.
- Requiring set **nurse-to-patient ratios** could also make a difference in **retention and in returning qualified nurses to the field**. Three-quarters of nurses currently working in direct patient care say they would be more likely to stay if such legislation passes, while nearly four in ten of those who have left say they would be more likely to come back.
- Michigan RNs also say **eliminating mandatory overtime and offering retention pay** would help with recruitment and retention.

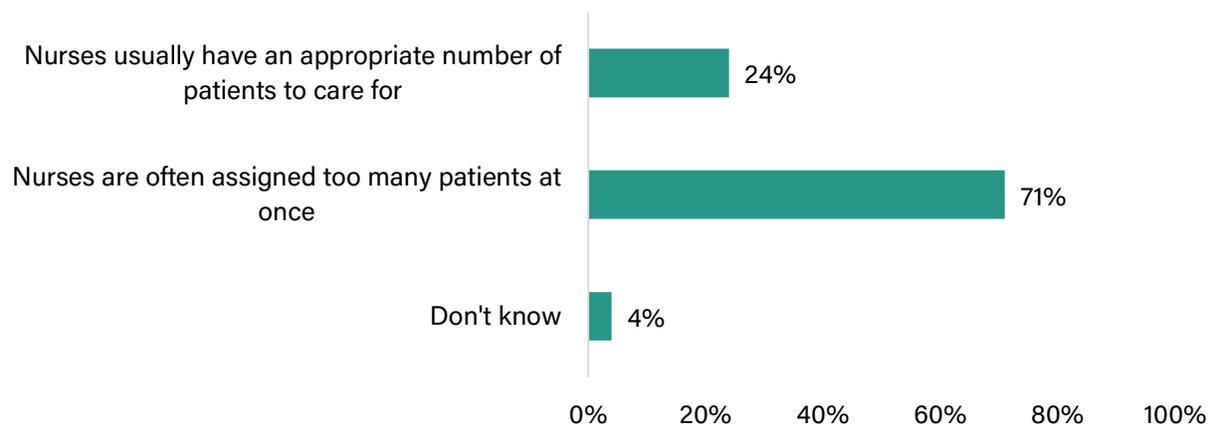
Key Findings

1. Most RNs who work in hospitals say nurses are assigned too many patients.

Over seven in ten RNs who currently work in a hospital say that nurses are often assigned too many patients at once (71%), while just 24% say that nurses usually have an appropriate number of patients to care for.

Figure 1

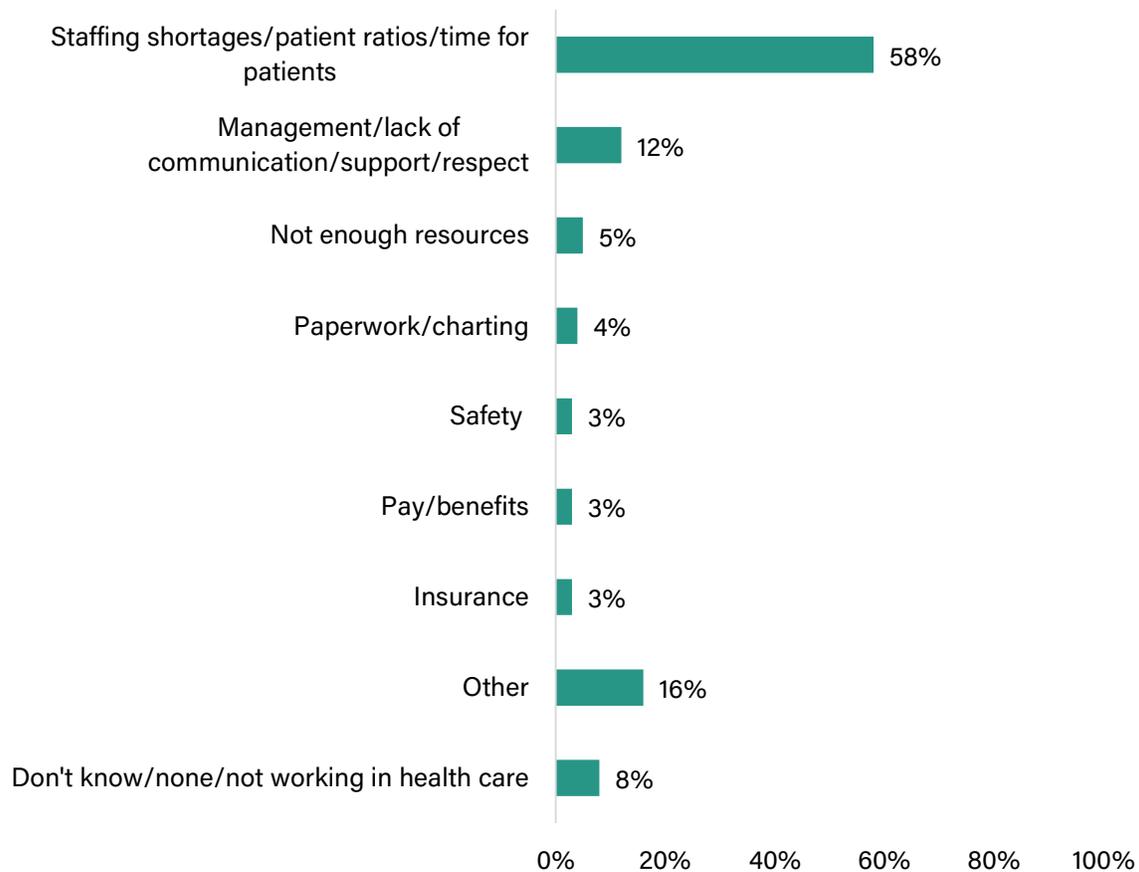
[If currently working in a hospital, N=228] At the hospital where you work, would you say:



A majority of nurses (58%) name patient ratios or the staffing situation as the biggest problem or obstacle to doing their jobs and delivering quality care to patients. For nurses working in direct patient care, 69% identify this as their top problem.

Figure 2

What is the biggest problem or obstacle you face in doing your job and delivering quality care to patients? (OPEN-END, CATEGORIZED, MULTIPLE RESPONSES).



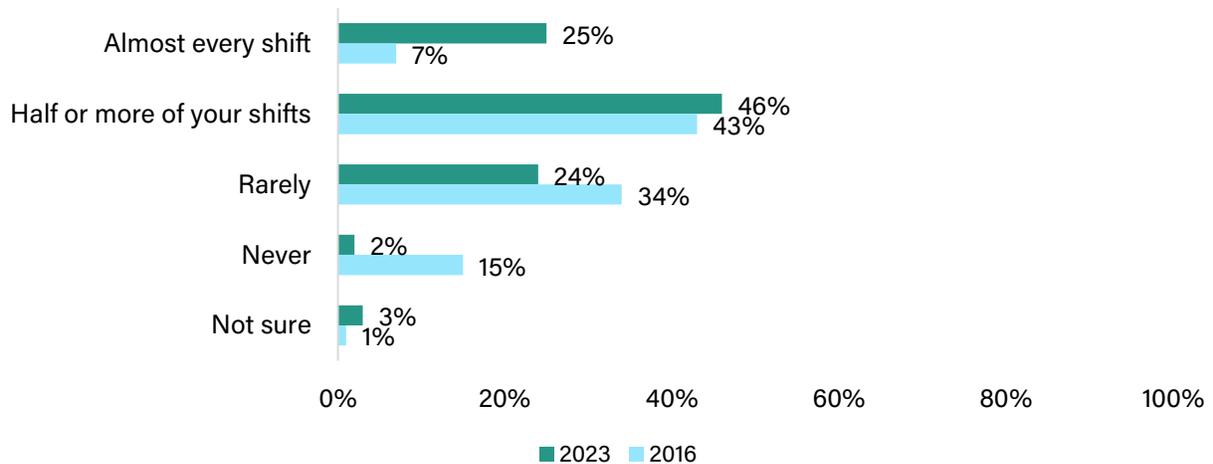
2. Comparing this year's data to that from 2016 shows the problem is worsening, with most RNs now saying they are assigned unsafe loads in at least half of their shifts.

Over 70% of nurses working in direct patient care say they are assigned an unsafe patient load half or more of their shifts (46%) or almost every shift (25%). The percentage saying their patient load is almost always unsafe has more than tripled from 7% in 2016. On the

other hand, only 2% of nurses say they are never assigned an unsafe patient load when they work, down from 15% of direct care nurses saying the same in 2016.

Figure 3

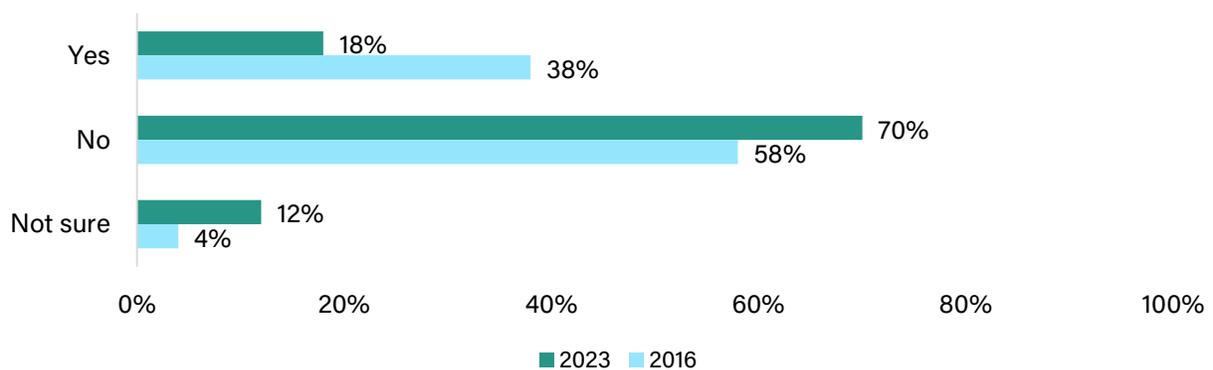
(If currently working in a hospital in direct patient care, N=202) How often are you assigned a patient workload that you believe is unsafe?



Additionally, 70% of nurses who are currently working in direct patient care say they do not have enough time to provide their patients with the care and attention they need. Only 18% of nurses in direct patient care say they do have enough time. In 2016, 58% said they did not have enough time to effectively care for patients.

Figure 4

(If currently working in a hospital in direct patient care, N=202) Considering the current RN patient loads and staffing levels at your hospital, do you feel you have enough time to provide your patients with the care and attention each one needs?

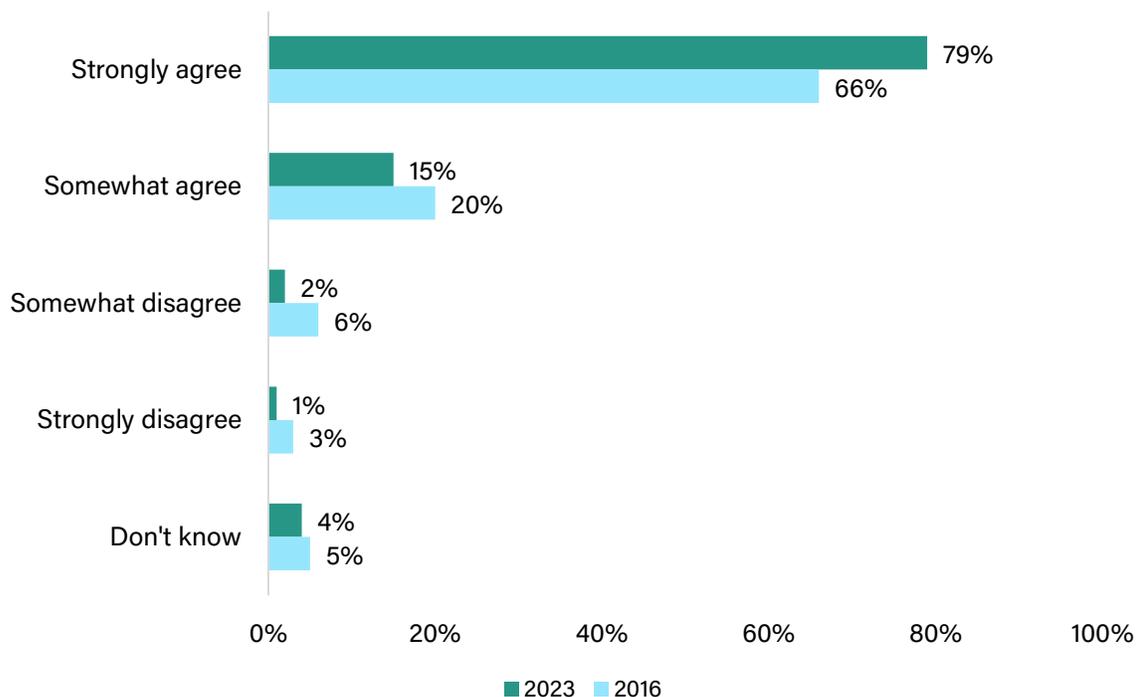


3. Nearly all nurses say high patient loads are impacting quality of care.

Ninety-four percent of nurses agree that the quality of patient care in Michigan hospitals is suffering because hospitals are requiring registered nurses to care for too many patients at once, including 79% who “strongly” agree. Strong agreement is up 13 points from the 2016 survey, when 66% of nurses said the same. In all, only 3% of nurses disagree with the statement, compared to 9% in 2016.

Figure 5

Some people say that the quality of patient care in Michigan hospitals is suffering because hospitals are requiring registered nurses to care for too many patients at once. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement?



4. Reports of specific negative patient outcomes are worse since 2016.

Majorities of Michigan nurses report negative patient outcomes occurring in hospitals due to high patient loads. For example, 92% of nurses are aware of an instance where nurses lack time to properly comfort and assist patients and families due to RNs having to care for too many patients at one time. Forty-two percent of nurses report that they are aware

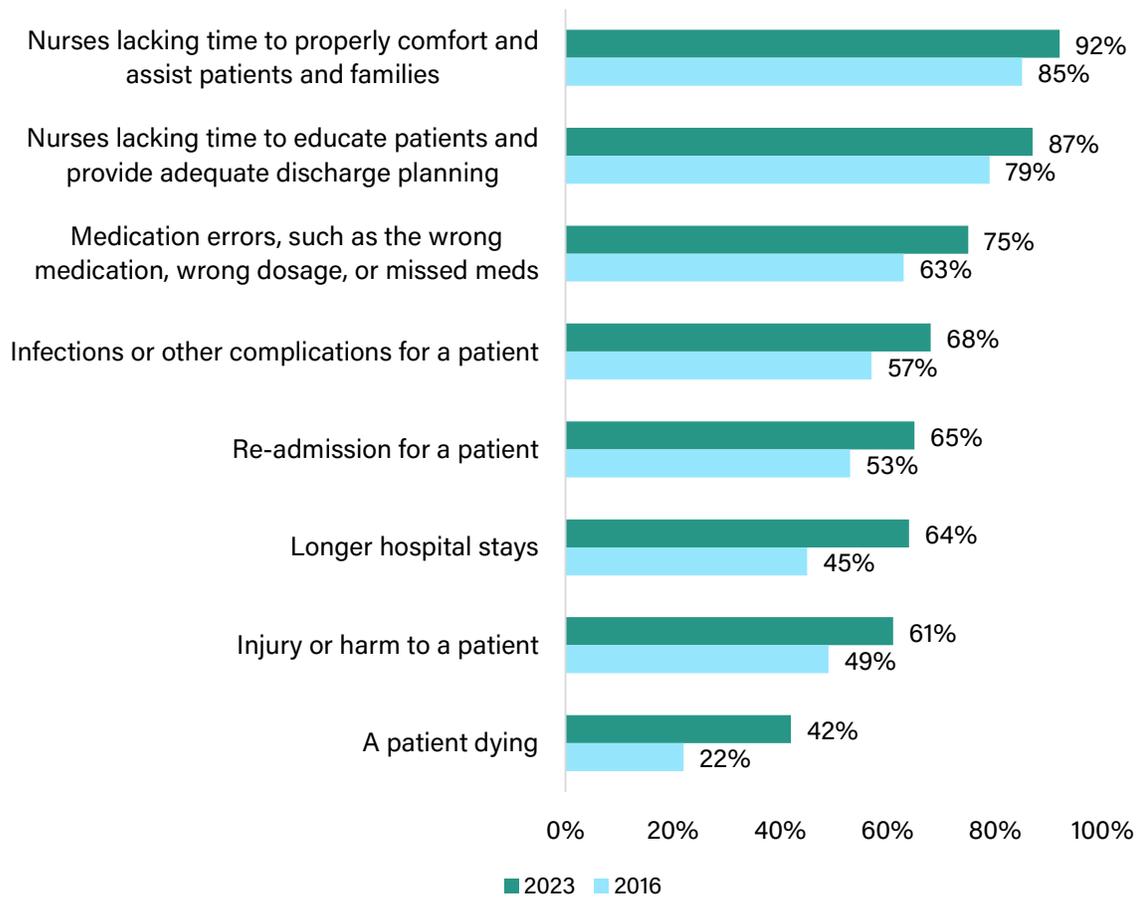
of a patient dying due to nurses having to care for too many patients at once, almost double the 22% of nurses who said so in 2016.

Other negative patient outcomes nurses report include:

- Nurses lacking time to educate patients and provide adequate discharge planning (87% aware)
- Medication errors, such as the wrong medication, wrong dosage, or missed meds (75%)
- Infections or other complications for a patient (68%)
- Re-admission for a patient (65%)
- Longer hospital stays (64%)
- Injury or harm to a patient (61%)

Figure 6

Are you aware of any instances in Michigan in which a registered nurse having to care for too many patients has led to...? (% answering “aware”)

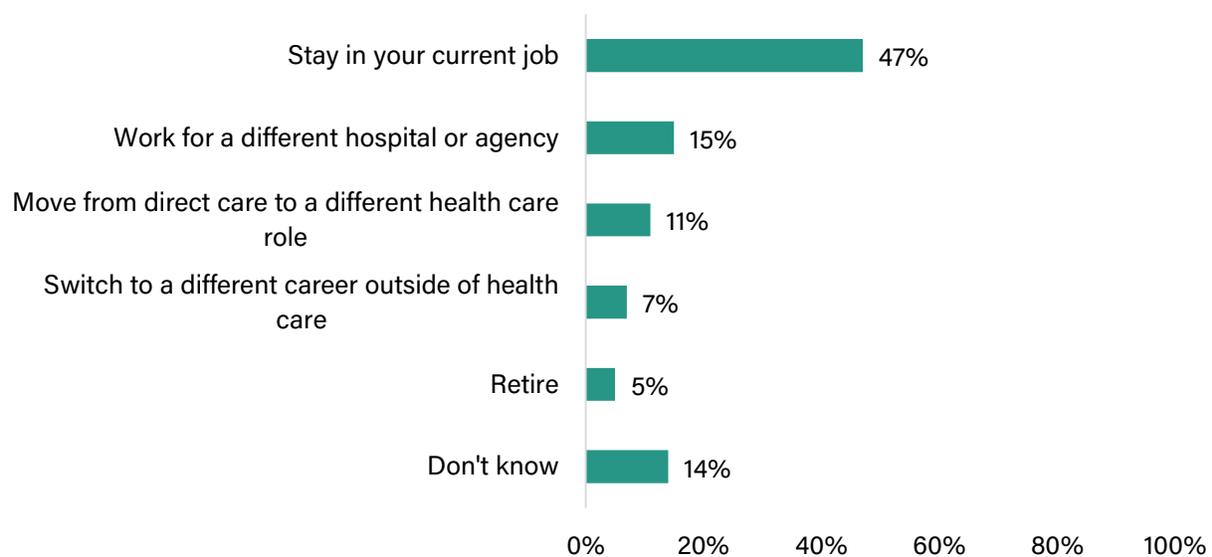


5. The staffing crisis and nurse-to-patient ratios are driving nurses from the field, potentially making the problem worse.

Only 47% of nurses currently working in direct patient care report that they plan on staying in their current position over the next two years. Twenty-four percent plan on leaving direct patient care entirely in the next two years.

Figure 7

(If currently working in a hospital in direct patient care, N=202) Over the next two years, do you plan to:



The nurses who say they plan to leave direct patient care in the next two years are more likely to report concerns about safe staffing:

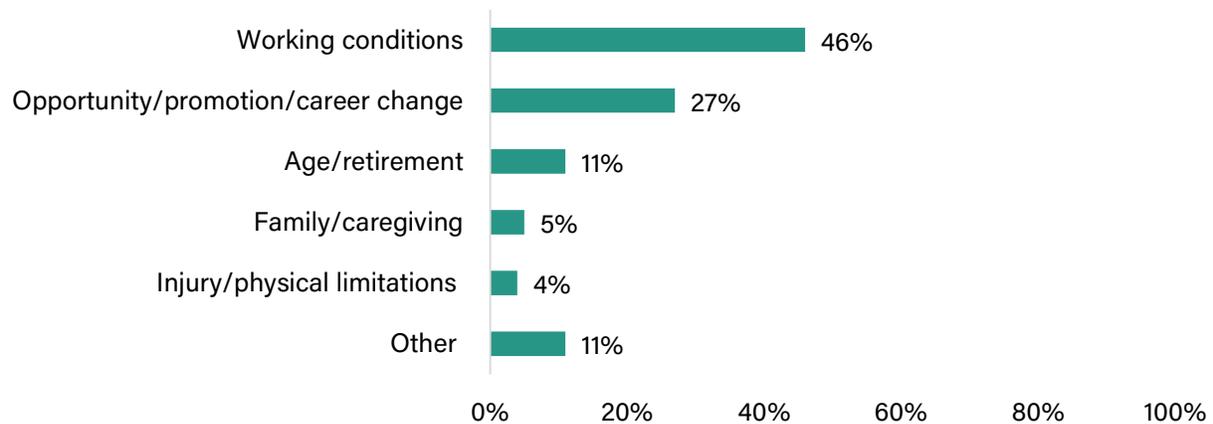
- 75% (compared to 58% overall) say staffing/nurse-to-patient ratios are the biggest problem in their job.
- 85% (compared to 71% overall) say that nurses are assigned too many patients at once.
- 58% (compared to 42% overall) say they know of a patient who died due to insufficient staffing.

Of the nurses who do *not* currently work in a hospital providing direct care to patients, nearly all (95%) say that they had at one time worked in bedside nursing. For these nurses, the most common reason for leaving is poor working conditions (46%). When describing

the working conditions that caused them to leave, staffing/patient ratios (17%) are the most common issues, followed by hours/schedule (15%), safety (9%), relationship with administration/lack of respect" (9%), and pay (5%).

Figure 8

(If nurse worked in bedside nursing in the past, N=189) Why did you leave bedside nursing? (OPEN-END, CATEGORIZED, MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

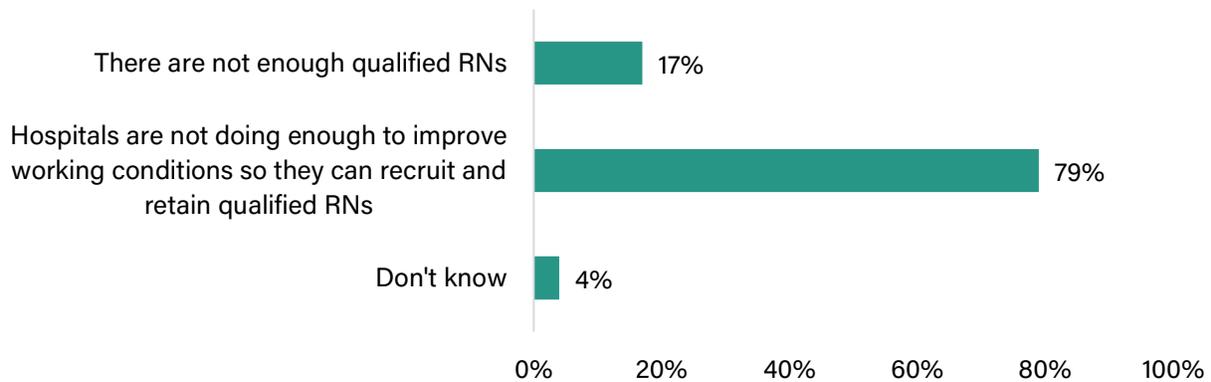


6. Nurses blame the staffing crisis on hospitals not improving working conditions, rather than a shortage of qualified RNs.

A large majority of Michigan nurses say staffing problems at Michigan hospitals are due more to hospitals not doing enough to improve working conditions so they can recruit and retain qualified RNs (79%), rather than to there not being enough qualified RNs (17%).

Figure 9

Which of the following do you think is more responsible for staffing problems at Michigan hospitals?

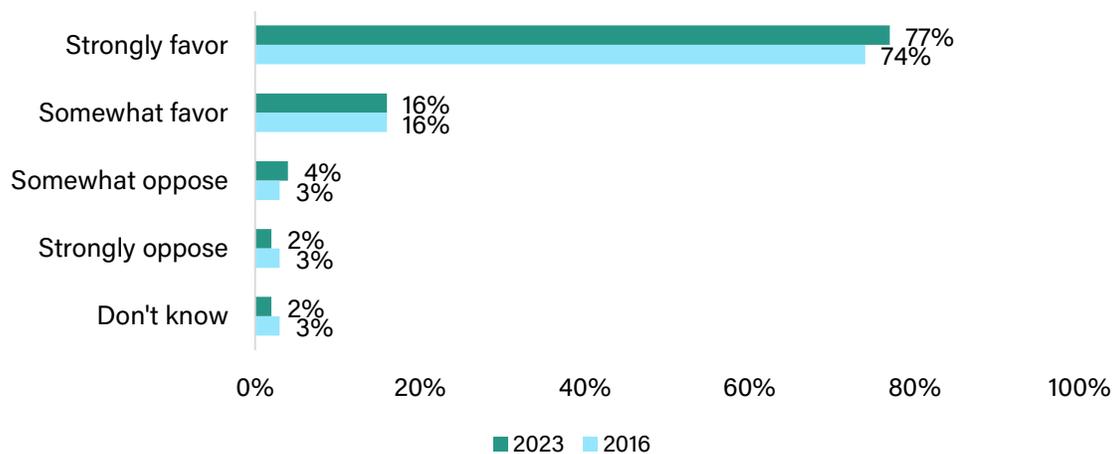


7. The Safe Patient Care Act, which would set nurse-to-patient ratios, finds strong support from Michigan nurses.

Michigan nurses strongly support the Safe Patient Care Act when they hear it would establish a limit on the number of patients a nurse is assigned at one time. Seventy-seven percent strongly favor the proposal, and another 16% somewhat favor it. Among those working in direct patient, care strong support for the proposal rises to 82%.

Figure 10

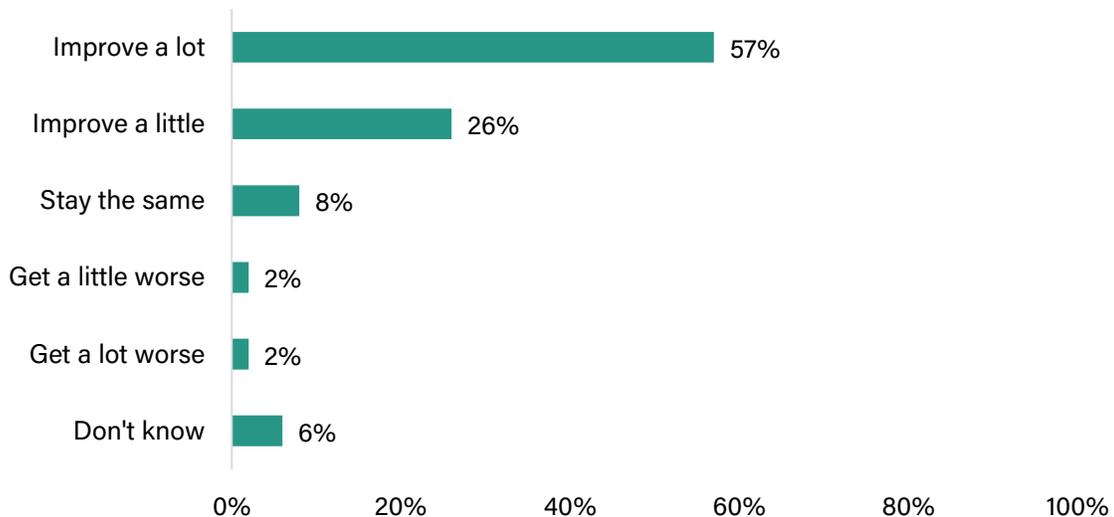
As you may know, there have been proposals to pass a law in Michigan called the Safe Patient Care Act that would establish a limit on the number of patients a nurse is assigned at one time. Do you favor or oppose passing a law that would limit the number of patients that a hospital could assign to one RN at a time?



A large majority of nurses also agree that quality of care for patients would improve with the passage of the Safe Patient Care Act. Eighty-three percent say that care for patients would improve at least a little, with 57% saying that it would improve a lot.

Figure 11

If this proposed law passes, do you think the quality of care for the patients you see will improve, stay the same, or get worse?

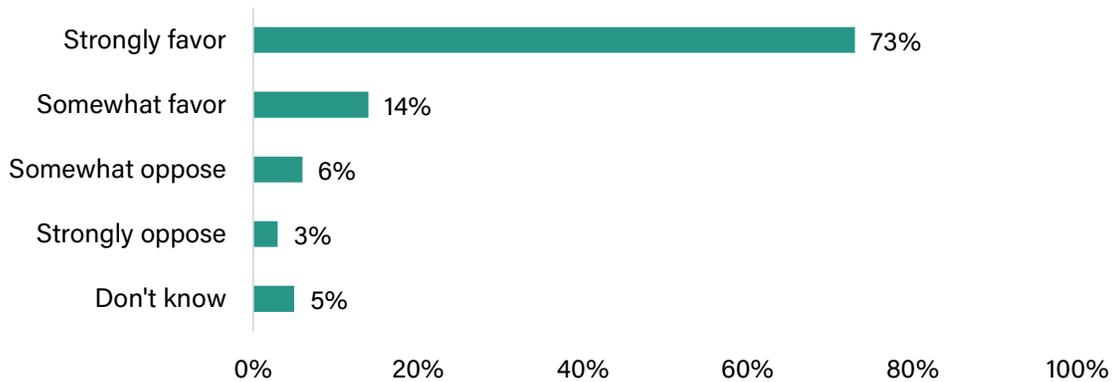


8. A proposal to eliminate mandatory overtime for RNs also has strong support.

Nurses view a proposal to eliminate mandatory overtime for RNs favorably as well. A large majority (73%) strongly favor the proposal that would mean RNs could still choose to do overtime but could no longer be forced to do so, while another 14% are somewhat in favor.

Figure 12

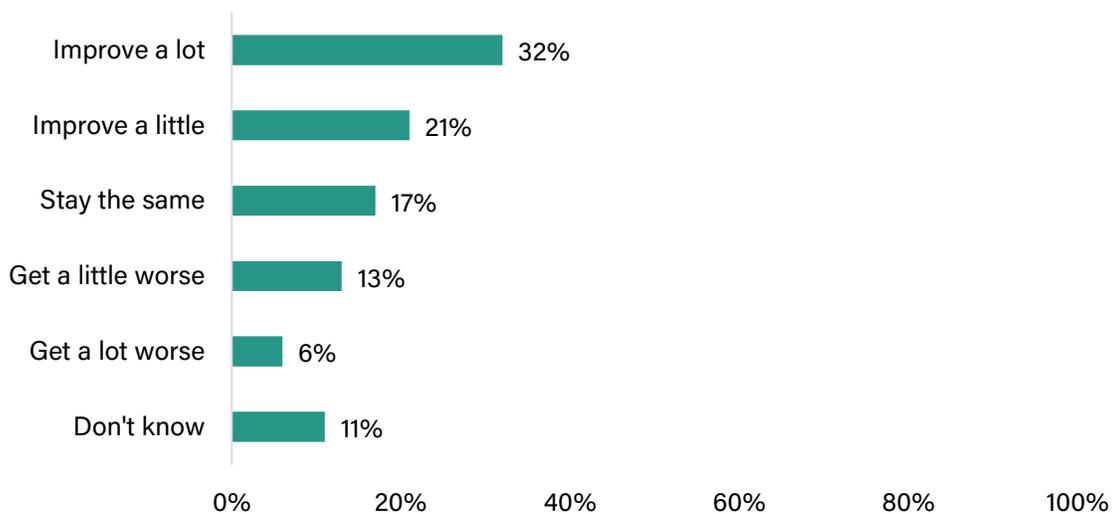
As you may know, there has also been a proposal to pass a law in Michigan that would eliminate mandatory overtime for nurses in Michigan. This would mean that RN's could still choose to do overtime, but could no longer be forced to do so. Do you favor or oppose eliminating mandatory overtime for nurses in Michigan?



Over half (53%) of nurses say that quality of care for patients will improve at least a little with the elimination of mandatory overtime, with 32% saying that the quality of care would improve a lot. Among those nurses who currently work in direct patient care but plan to leave the field in the next two years, 42% say that it would improve patients' quality of care a lot.

Figure 13

If mandatory overtime is eliminated, do you think the quality of care for the patients you see will improve, stay the same, or get worse?



9. Both policies, especially establishing RN-to-patient ratios, would make an impact in keeping nurses in the field, as would retention pay.

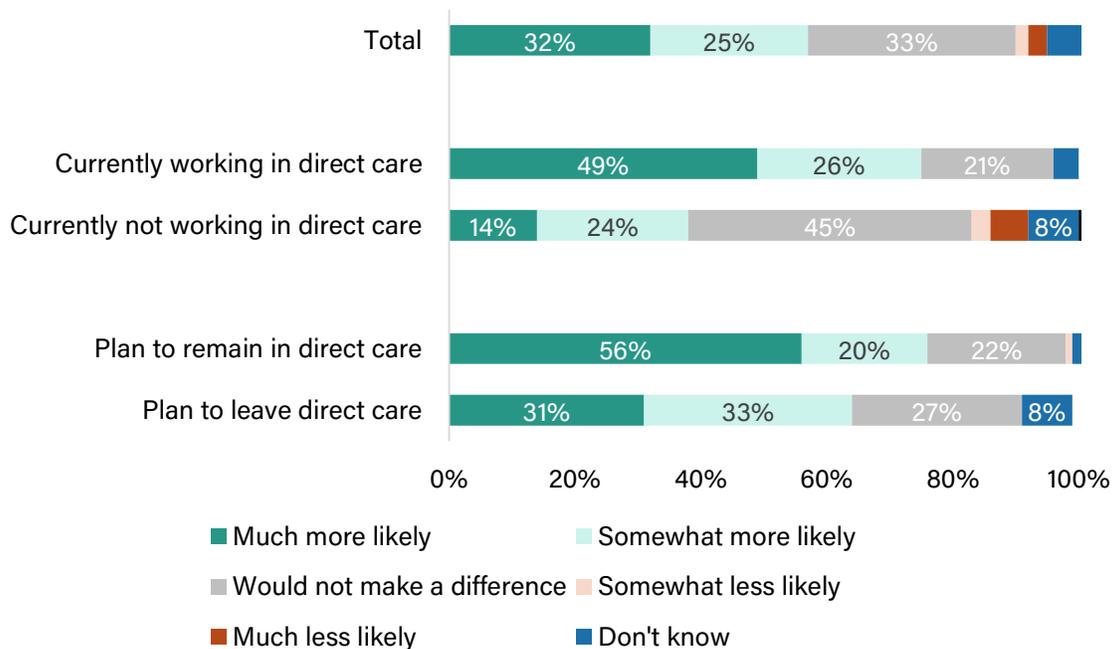
Fifty-seven percent of nurses are at least somewhat more likely to continue/return to/start working in direct care if a ratio law is enacted, including 32% who would be much more likely.

- Of those nurses currently working in direct patient care, 75% are at least somewhat more likely to remain.
 - Of those already planning to stay in direct care, 75% say a ratio law will make it at least somewhat more likely that they stay.
 - Among those who plan on leaving direct patient care in the next two years, 65% say a ratio law makes it at least somewhat more likely that they remain.

- Of those not currently working in direct patient care, 38% are at least somewhat more likely to return to/start working in acute care.

Figure 14

If the Safe Patient Care Act passes and hospitals have to follow safe nurse-to-patient ratios, would you be much more likely to (KEEP WORKING/COME BACK TO WORKING/START WORKING) in direct care, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely, much less likely, or would it not make a difference?



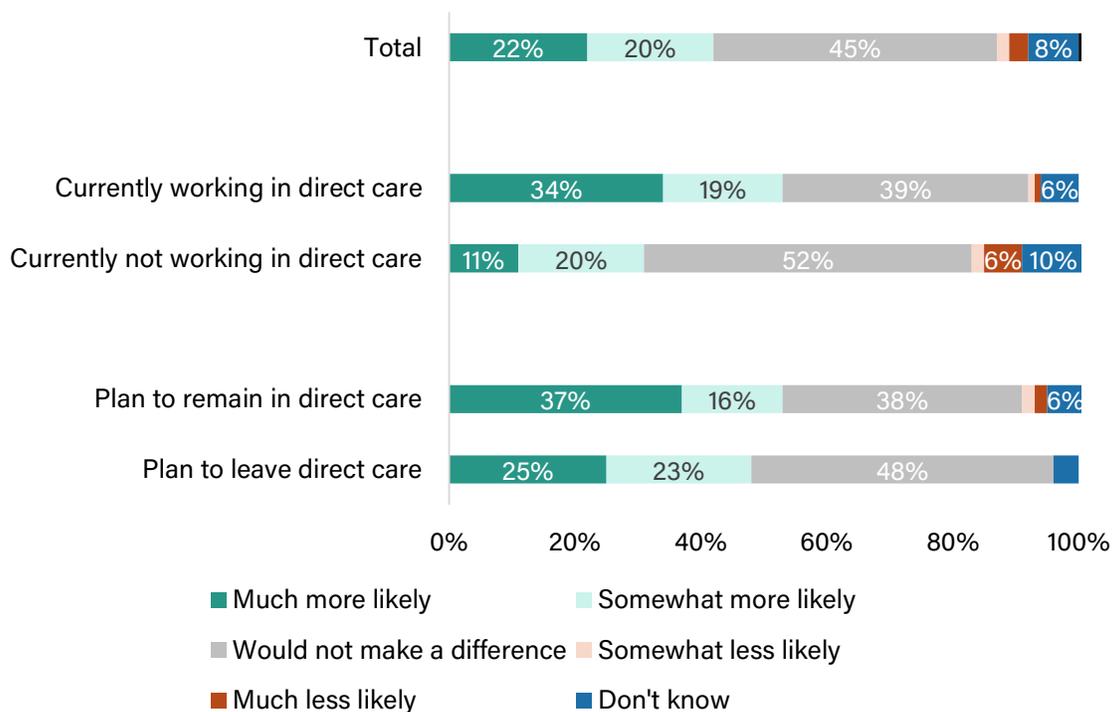
The impact of removing mandatory overtime on retention would also be positive, though smaller than a ratio law. Forty-two percent of nurses are at least somewhat more likely to continue/return to/start working in direct care if mandatory overtime is eliminated, including 22% who would be much more likely.

- Of those nurses currently working in direct patient care, 52% are at least somewhat more likely to remain.
 - Of those already planning to stay in direct care, 52% say the elimination of mandatory overtime will make it at least somewhat more likely that they stay.
 - Among those who plan on leaving a direct care setting in the next two years, 48% say the potential legislation makes it at least somewhat more likely they remain.

- Of those not currently working in direct care, 31% are at least somewhat more likely to return to/start working in direct care.

Figure 15

If mandatory overtime is eliminated, would you be much more likely to (KEEP WORKING/COME BACK TO WORKING/START WORKING) in direct care, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely, much less likely, or would it not make a difference?

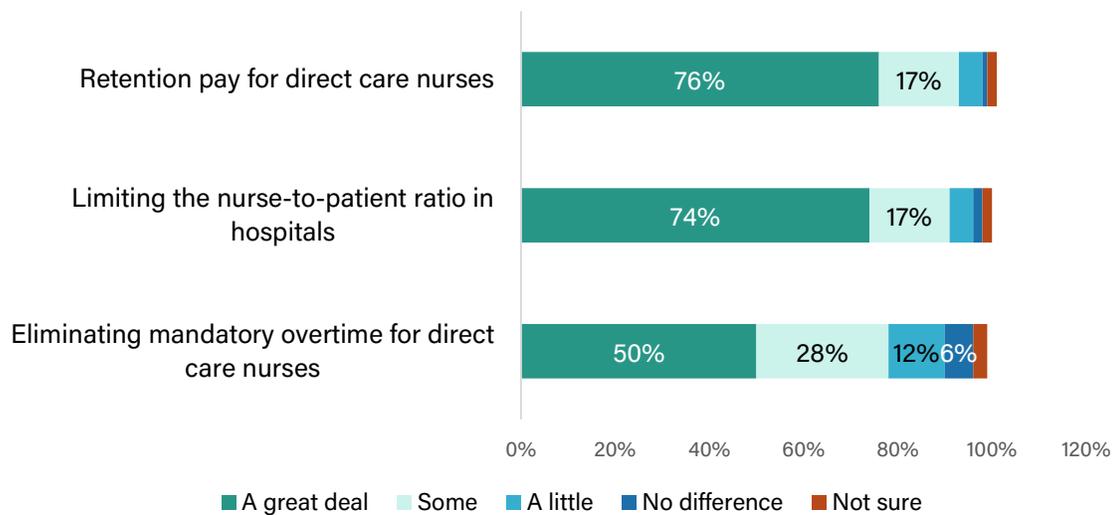


Large majorities of nurses say that retention pay, requiring set nurse-to-patient ratios, and eliminating mandatory overtime would make a difference in retaining nurses at hospitals in Michigan:

- Retention pay for direct care nurses (92% at least “some” difference; 76% a “great deal” of difference)
- Limiting RNs’ patient assignments in hospitals (91% at least “some” difference; 74% a “great deal” of difference)
- Eliminating mandatory overtime for direct care nurses (79% at least “some” difference; 50% a “great deal” of difference)

Figure 16

I am going to mention some potential actions that could be taken. For each one I mention, please tell me how much of a difference you believe it would make in helping to retain nurses at hospitals across the state of Michigan: a great deal of difference, some difference, a little difference, or no difference?



Of the nurses who plan on leaving direct care in the next two years, 83% say retention pay would make a great deal of difference, 81% say the same about limiting the nurse-to-patient ratio, and 58% say the same of eliminating mandatory overtime.

Of those nurses who *used to* work in direct care, 70% say retention pay would make a great deal of difference, 67% say the same about establishing safe nurse-to-patient ratios, and 44% say the same of eliminating mandatory overtime.