



THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SYSTEM

2025 Homeless Response Staff Survey



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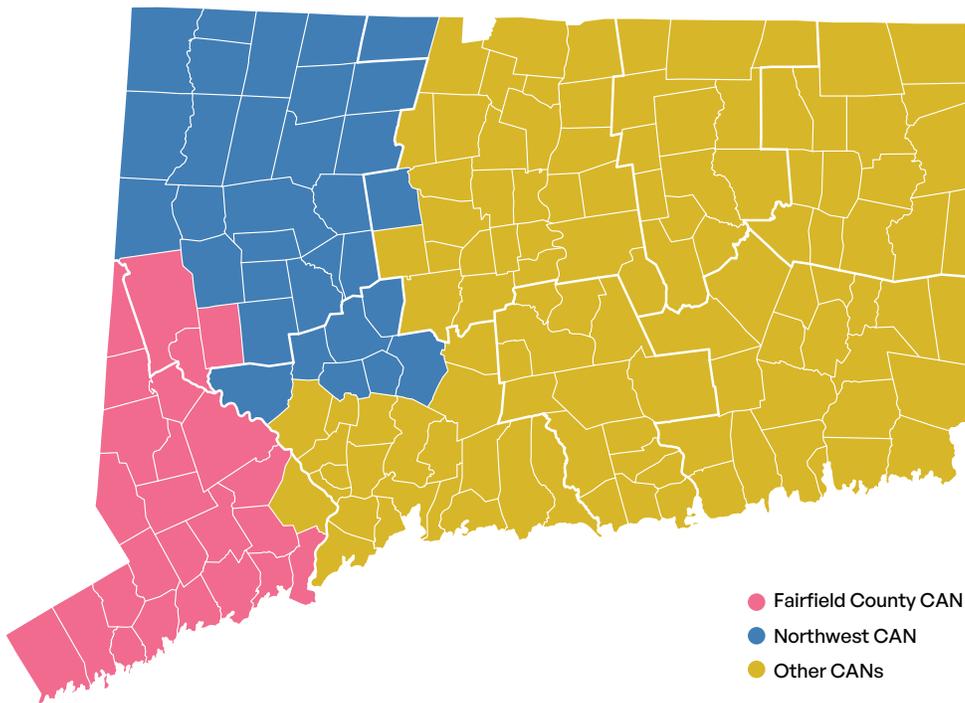
Executive Summary

The homelessness emergency response system in Connecticut is made up of more than a thousand dedicated frontline staff members across hundreds of organizations who run shelters, create housing plans with clients, conduct landlord outreach, and connect directly with clients on the street. In order to solve homelessness, Connecticut needs more homes—but it also needs an energized, engaged, well-trained, and well-equipped workforce in the homelessness response system. At a time when homelessness in Connecticut increased nearly 10% statewide between 2024 and 2025 Point-in-Time counts, frontline staff are more important than ever to support people experiencing homelessness and respond to rapidly growing needs. Unfortunately, many are struggling deeply across the state, while some are ending up like the clients they serve: homeless.

As part of its ongoing commitment to strengthen Connecticut’s housing and homelessness systems, the Housing Collective conducted a biannual statewide survey on the experiences of frontline staff in the homeless response system in October and November 2025. The survey, developed by the Housing Collective’s Housing Innovation Lab, is designed to better understand the experiences, needs, and working conditions of frontline staff across Connecticut’s homelessness response system. Its purpose is to provide system leaders, funders, and policymakers with actionable insights that can strengthen workforce stability and improve the state’s capacity to prevent and end homelessness. The survey was conducted in partnership with the Housing Collective’s Opening Doors Initiative (ODI), which manages the homelessness emergency response system throughout western Connecticut, including Fairfield County, Litchfield County, and greater Waterbury. This report provides statewide survey findings, including detailed analyses, alongside region-specific results for areas served by the Opening Doors Initiative: the Fairfield County Coordinated Access Network (CAN) and the Northwest CAN (Litchfield County and Greater Waterbury), shown in the map below.

The Housing Collective conducted a similar survey in 2023 examining workforce conditions in western Connecticut. Building on lessons from the prior survey, the 2025 survey focused more deeply on three core areas affecting staff wellbeing: workplace conditions, training needs, and material hardship (food insecurity, medical debt, utilities, and housing insecurity). Unlike the prior survey, the 2025 survey examines conditions across the entire state. Additional differences between the two workforce surveys, as well as a detailed methodology for the 2025 survey, are provided at the end of this report.

Western Connecticut Coordinated Access Networks



A Coordinated Access Network is a system of organizations spread across multiple towns, or one large metro area, that collectively responds to homelessness. The system is designed to help people experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness access housing and services in a coordinated, efficient, fair, and organized way. The Department of Housing and partner organizations developed the system of seven CANs in 2014.

The findings from this statewide survey reveal significant strain across the workforce. Across the state, 64% of respondents had considered leaving their job in the last year. 34% reported that they were running out of money between every paycheck, and 30% had experienced at least one material hardship. Most troubling for an industry that revolves around housing, 4% of respondents had to stay in a shelter or a location not suitable for housing.

Statewide, frontline staff described feeling connected to the mission of their work: 78% said they feel they are doing worthwhile work, underscoring that motivation and commitment are not the core challenges facing the workforce. Rather, many staff reported significant pressures in their daily roles. 54% experienced stress related to client needs, and 33% reported feeling overworked. Satisfaction was lowest in structural aspects of their jobs: only 16% were satisfied with their

salary. Given that more than six in ten respondents statewide considered leaving their job in the past year, these conditions clearly influence staff retention.

Training plays an essential role in supporting staff across the state and reflects workers' ongoing commitment to learn, grow, and strengthen their practice. Despite this, many workers reported barriers that limit their ability to participate in training opportunities. More than half (55%) cited lack of time prevented them from accessing training, while 27% said that not enough relevant training is offered. A similar share (27%) identified a lack of funding as a barrier. Despite these challenges, staff expressed a strong interest in additional preparation across many core practice areas, underscoring their continued investment in doing their work well.

When frontline staff are underpaid, overworked, and experiencing material hardship themselves, the homelessness response system functions less effectively.

High turnover disrupts client relationships, slows housing placements, increases provider costs, and undermines investments by funders and policymakers. A 2023 report from the Homelessness Research Institute, *Working in Homeless Services: A Survey of the Field*¹, finds that persistent staff turnover erodes institutional knowledge, strains remaining staff, and makes it harder for providers to meet service goals and contractual obligations. For clients, this instability often means losing trusted staff mid-process, slowing housing placements and fragmenting care. The Housing Innovation Lab's *Just Walk a Day in Our Shoes*² report further documents how service disruptions force people experiencing homelessness to repeatedly rebuild trust, retell deeply personal histories, and navigate delays at moments when continuity and stability are most critical.

“From December to February, I was waiting for help and kept getting different promises. Nothing happened and then the worker left and I had to start all over again.”

– PERSON WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS, *JUST WALK A DAY IN OUR SHOES*

In order to achieve Connecticut's broader goals around housing stability and homelessness reduction, we must stabilize the workforce that's being asked to help deliver on those goals.

¹ Joy Moses, *Working in Homeless Services: A Survey of the Field*, Homelessness Research Institute, December 5th, 2023.

² Housing Innovation Lab. (2024). *Just Walk a Day in Our Shoes: Lived Experiences of Homelessness and Behavioral Health in Connecticut*. The Housing Collective.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Connecticut's homelessness response system depends on a workforce that is currently underpaid, overworked, and at high risk of turnover.
- 2 Staff remain deeply committed to the mission, but financial hardship and job strain are undermining retention and system capacity.
- 3 Strengthening compensation, working conditions, and training access is essential to sustaining progress toward ending homelessness.

The findings reveal a stark contradiction at the heart of Connecticut's homelessness response system; staff are deeply committed to their work, yet the conditions under which they are asked to deliver it are not sustainable. Workers who help others navigate housing crises are themselves facing financial instability, burnout, limited opportunities for advancement, and, in some cases, homelessness. This disconnect places strain on individuals and threatens the delivery of services statewide.

Connecticut's workforce challenges mirror patterns documented across the country. A 2024 report from the Harvard Kennedy School³ described the homelessness response workforce as "strained, overworked, and underpaid," emphasizing that workforce instability has become a significant barrier to reducing homelessness nationwide. These national findings underscore the essential role frontline staff play, engaging clients, navigating complex housing systems, coordinating services, and providing crisis support every day. Without a stable, well-supported workforce performing these core functions, even well-designed housing and service systems cannot operate effectively.

Despite their commitment to their work, many staff report living on the brink themselves, worried that a single missed paycheck could require them to seek the same services they help provide. The homeless response system in Connecticut cannot achieve its goals of providing safe, affordable housing for all Connecticut residents if a majority of staff is considering leaving because of financial hardship. We encourage leaders, funders, and policymakers to consider the following conclusions and recommendations in this report, and invest in frontline staff so they can continue to invest in Connecticut's most vulnerable residents.

Recommendations

MATERIAL HARDSHIP

- **Increase staff wages across the region**, particularly for staff earning below the Federal Poverty Level.

3 Government Performance Lab. *Investing in the Homelessness Response Workforce*. Harvard Kennedy School, June 2024.

- **Consider additional financial employee assistance programs**, such as utility assistance or interest-free debt consolidation services.
- **Advocate for more workforce housing.**
- **Improve compensation and benefits**, as many respondents reported low satisfaction with their current pay and benefits packages. The Lab particularly recommends reviewing employee benefits in the Northwest CAN.
- **Consider region-specific supports**, such as housing-related resources in Fairfield County or travel-related accommodations in the Northwest region, in line with the distinct needs reported by workers.

WORKING CONDITIONS

- **Increase staffing levels or redistribute workloads**, given that substantial shares of workers statewide reported feeling overworked or understaffed.
- **Streamline administrative processes**, including reducing duplicative or burdensome paperwork, which many staff cited as a source of strain.
- **Expand access to training and professional development**, reflecting workers' stated desire for additional learning opportunities and support for career growth.
- **Provide more wellness and emotional support resources**, including counseling, peer support, or time to rest and recover, based on the number of respondents who reported needing these supports.
- **Develop clearer pathways for advancement**, as many workers indicated limited opportunities to advance in their careers.
- **Increase available resources for clients**, as this was the most common need identified and a major source of worker frustration.

TRAINING

- **Expand core training areas that workers rely on most.** Increase the availability and depth of training in trauma-informed care, harm reduction, mental health, crisis intervention, motivational interviewing, and case management.
- **Develop coordinated regional training pathways.** Create training calendars, competency frameworks, and recommended sequences, so staff across different agencies and CANs receive consistent preparation and advancement opportunities.

- **Reduce time-related barriers.** Work with providers to offer protected training hours, lighter caseload days during trainings, and access to asynchronous formats that better accommodate front-line schedules.
- **Address funding constraints.** Support agencies in reducing training-related costs through pooled resources, regional partnerships, and free or low-cost offerings led by subject-matter experts.
- **Improve communication of opportunities.** Ensure training invitations, schedules, and updates are delivered through reliable, centralized channels so workers do not miss opportunities simply due to inconsistent internal communication.
- **Match delivery formats to worker preferences.** Expand online and classroom-based trainings and offer more applied, skills-practice opportunities (e.g., coaching, peer learning) for workers who benefit from hands-on application.
- **Link training to career development and retention.** Build clearer progression pathways where advanced training aligns with promotion opportunities.

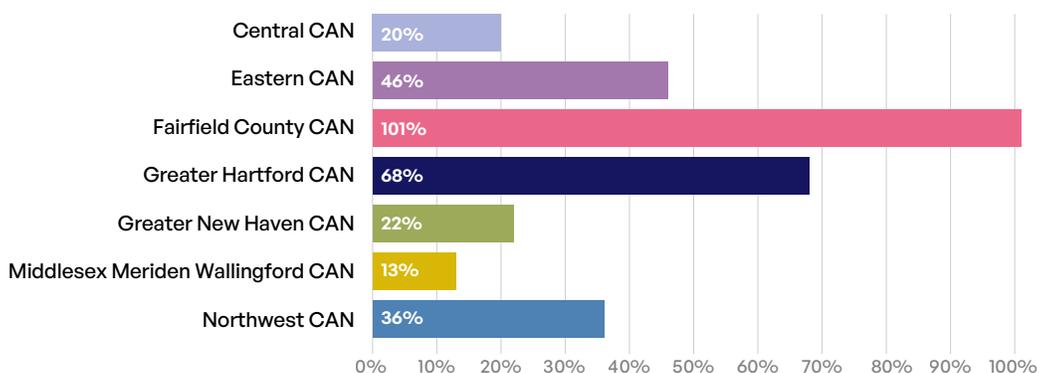
Respondent Backgrounds

STATEWIDE

Of the 309 respondents statewide, 91% of respondents worked as homeless services providers statewide. The remaining 13% were divided between parallel industries such as property management, employment assistance, healthcare, and law enforcement.

Of the total respondents, 33% (101) of respondents worked in the Fairfield County CAN, 22% (68) worked in the Greater Hartford CAN, 15% (46) worked in the Eastern CAN, and 12% (36) in the Northwest CAN. Smaller shares of respondents worked in the Greater New Haven CAN (7%, 22), the Central CAN (7%, 20), and the Middlesex Meriden Wallingford (MMW) CAN (4%, 13). In general, the CANs with smaller populations accounted for fewer responses; however, Greater New Haven CAN, one of the largest in the state, had a lower response rate than anticipated (Table 2).

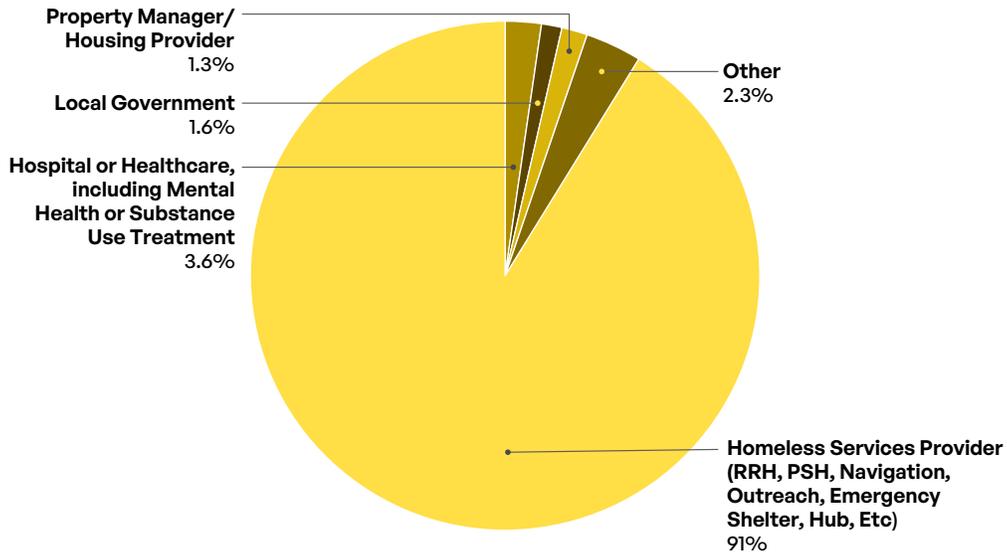
2. Please specify the community for which your organization provides services



Statewide, the vast majority of respondents worked as Homeless Services Providers. 91% reported working for organizations providing homelessness services, including rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, navigation, outreach, emergency shelter, and coordinated access functions. The remaining 9% were

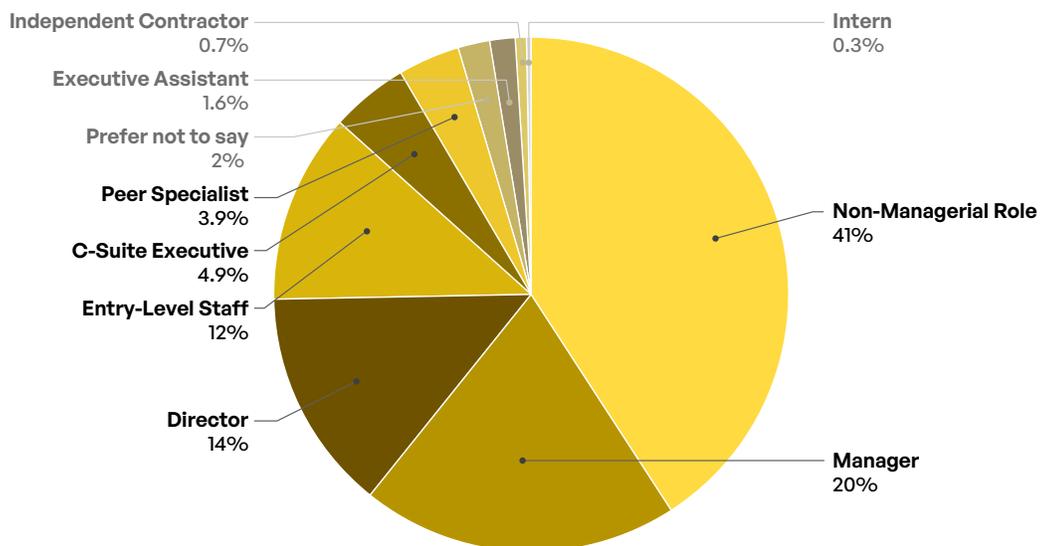
employed in parallel sectors, including healthcare (3.6%), local government (1.6%), property management or housing provision (1.3%), and other related fields (2.3%) (Table 1).

1. What best describes the work of your employer?



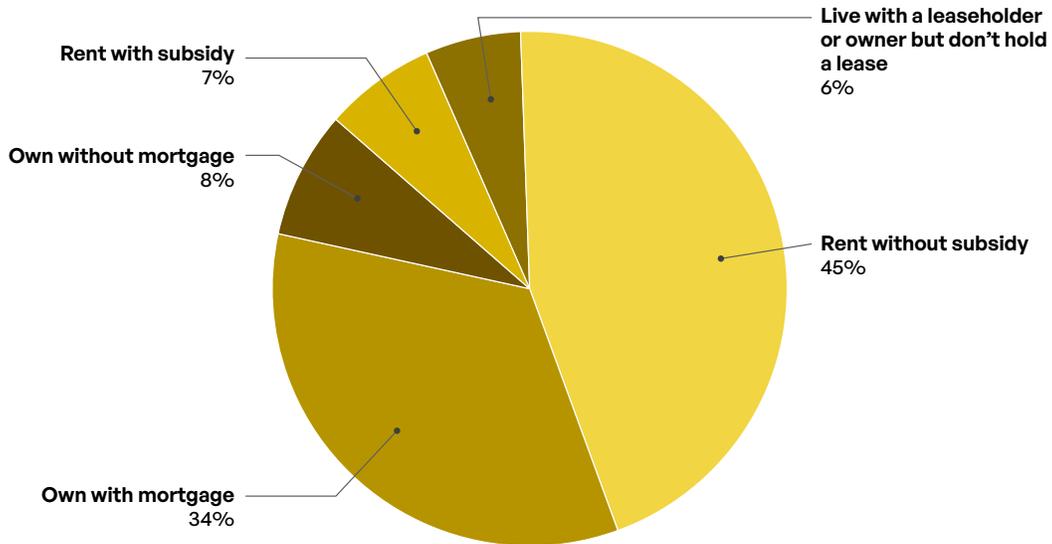
Respondents represented a range of roles within their organizations. The largest share worked in non-managerial roles (41%), followed by managers (20%) and directors (14%). Entry-level staff accounted for 12% of respondents, while 4.9% reported working in C-suite executive roles. Smaller shares identified as peer specialists (3.9%), executive assistants (1.6%), independent contractors (0.7%), interns (0.3%), or preferred not to state their role (2%). (Table 3).

3. What is your current position within your organization?



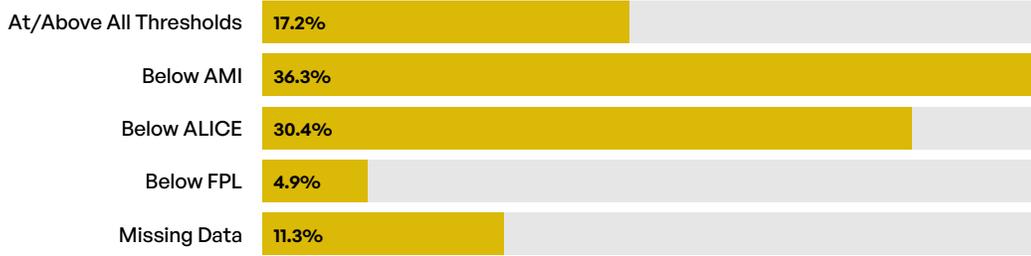
Housing arrangements among respondents varied, though a substantial share reported renting without assistance. Nearly half of respondents (45%) rented their housing without a subsidy, while 34% owned their home with a mortgage. Smaller shares reported owning without a mortgage (8%) or renting with a subsidy (7%). An additional 6% reported living with a leaseholder or owner without holding a lease themselves (Table 11).

11. Under what arrangements does your household occupy the unit where you live?



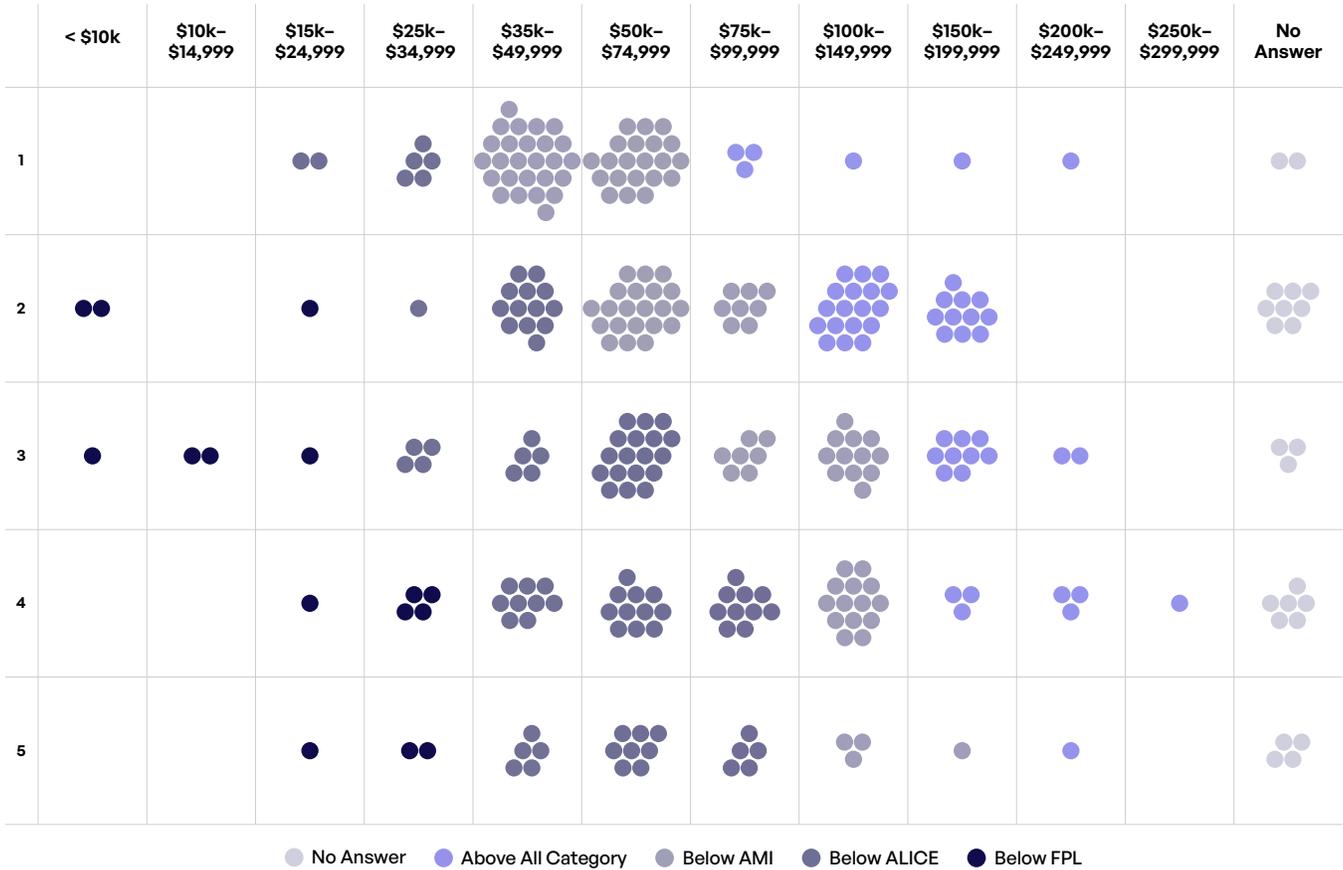
Respondents were asked to provide their household size and income, which the Housing Innovation Lab then mapped to three income eligibility thresholds: the Area Median Income (AMI) refers to the average household income for a geographic region; the United Way’s Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold describe households that earn income but struggle to meet essential needs; and the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) determines eligibility for federal, state, and local programs like Medicaid and CHIP. Using these brackets, respondents fell into three income categories: 36.3% of respondents fell below AMI, 30.4% fell below the ALICE threshold, and 4.9% were living below the Federal Poverty Level. An additional 17.2% were at or above all thresholds, while income data were missing for 11.3% of respondents. These categories reflect distinct respondents rather than overlapping income classifications (Table X).

X. Combined thresholds for mapping low income



In the following graph, each dot represents one respondent, illustrating how respondents are distributed across income ranges and household sizes, and highlighting variation within and across income thresholds.

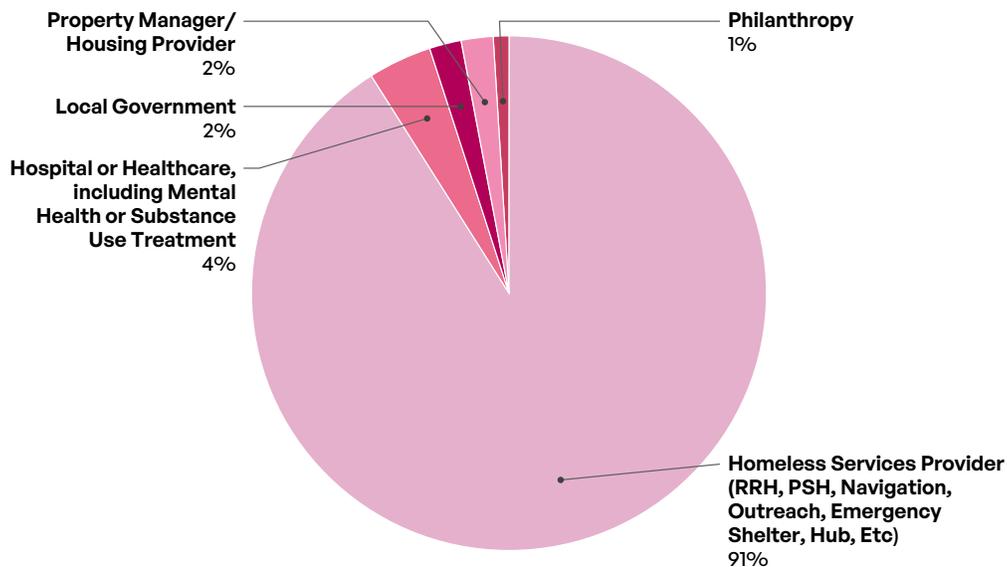
Household Size vs. Annual Household Income (Connecticut)



FAIRFIELD COUNTY

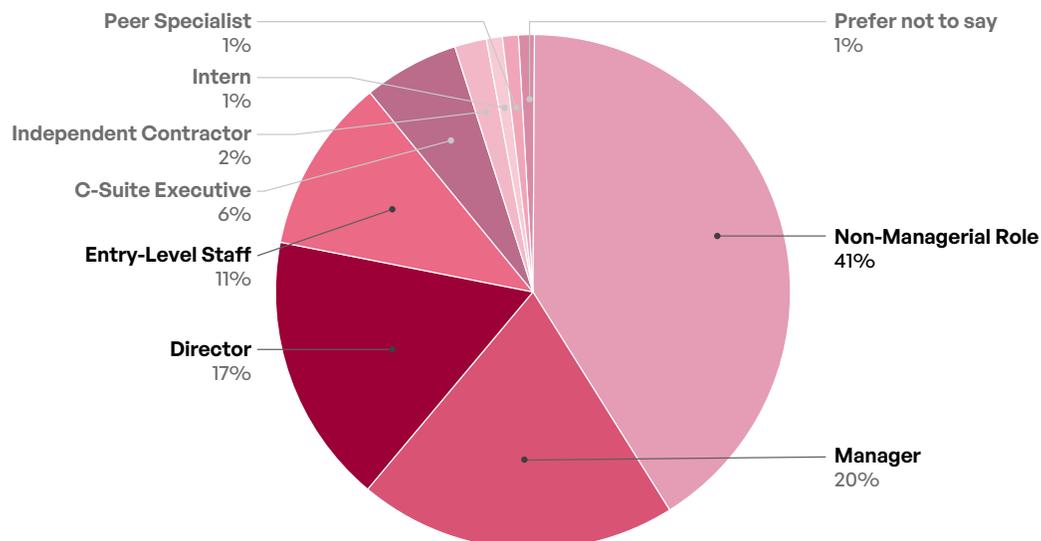
90% of respondents in Fairfield County worked as homeless services providers, with the other 10% divided among parallel fields (healthcare, local government, philanthropy, and property management) (Table 1).

1. What best describes the work of your employer?



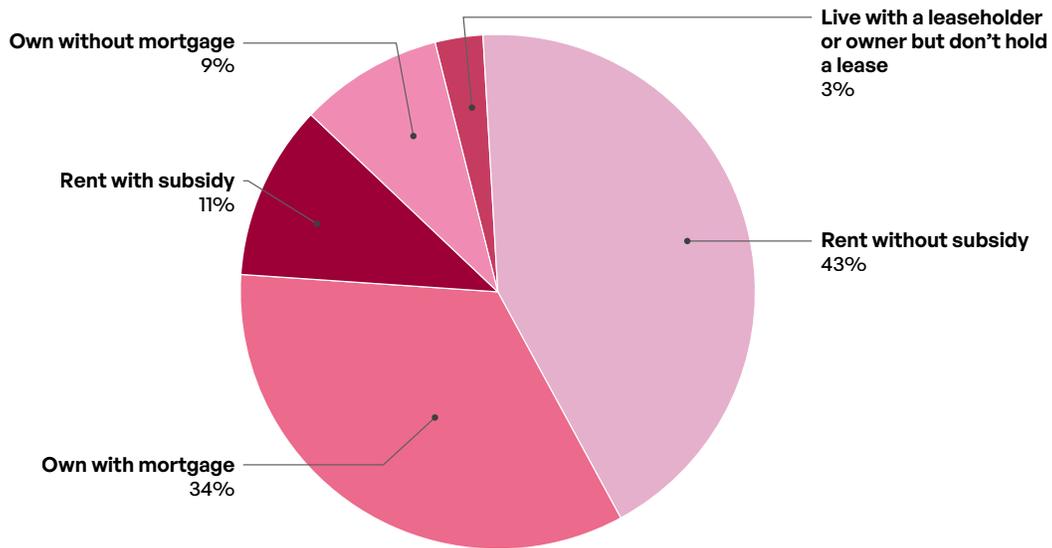
The most respondents were in non-managerial roles (41%), followed by managers (20%), directors (17%), entry-level staff (11%), and C-Suite executives (6%). Respondents who reported working as independent contractors, interns, and peer specialists were not statistically significant enough to provide anonymity (Table 3).

3. What is your current position within your organization?



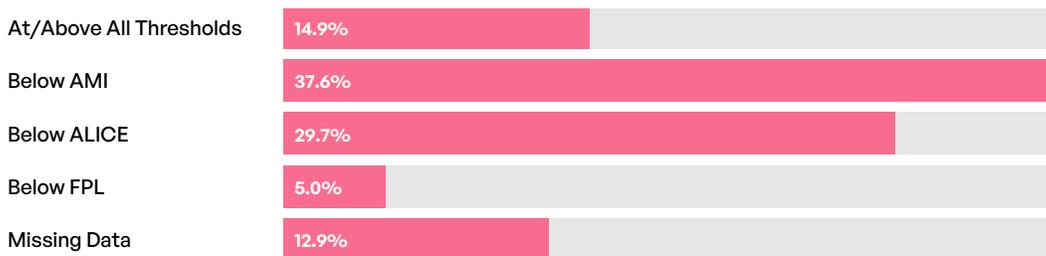
43% of respondents rented their living space without a subsidy, and 34% owned with a mortgage. 11% rented with a subsidy, and 9% owned without a mortgage (Table 11).

11. Under what arrangements does your household occupy the unit where you live?



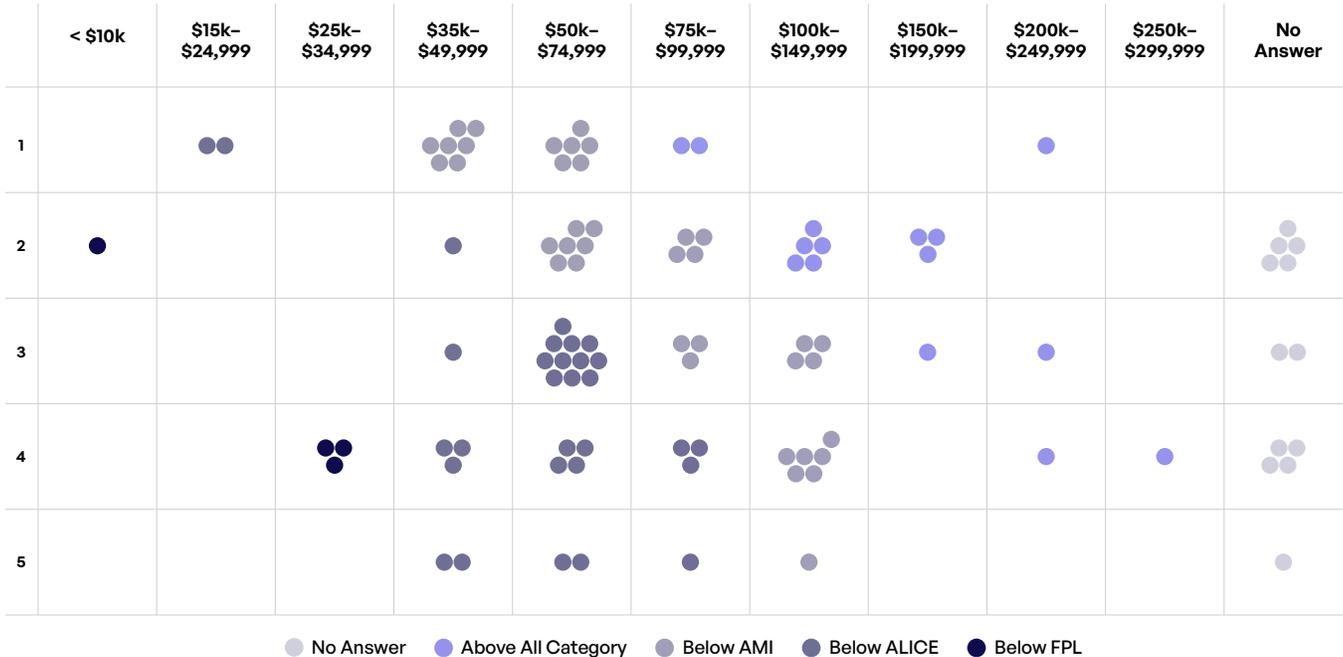
Respondents reported their household size and income, which were then mapped to the previously defined income thresholds. Based on this analysis, 38% of respondents fell below Area Median Income, 30% fell below the ALICE threshold, and 5% were living below the Federal Poverty Level. These figures represent distinct respondents rather than overlapping income categories (Table X).

X. Combined thresholds for mapping low income



In the following graph each dot represents one respondent, illustrating how respondents are distributed across income ranges and household sizes, highlighting variation within and across income thresholds.

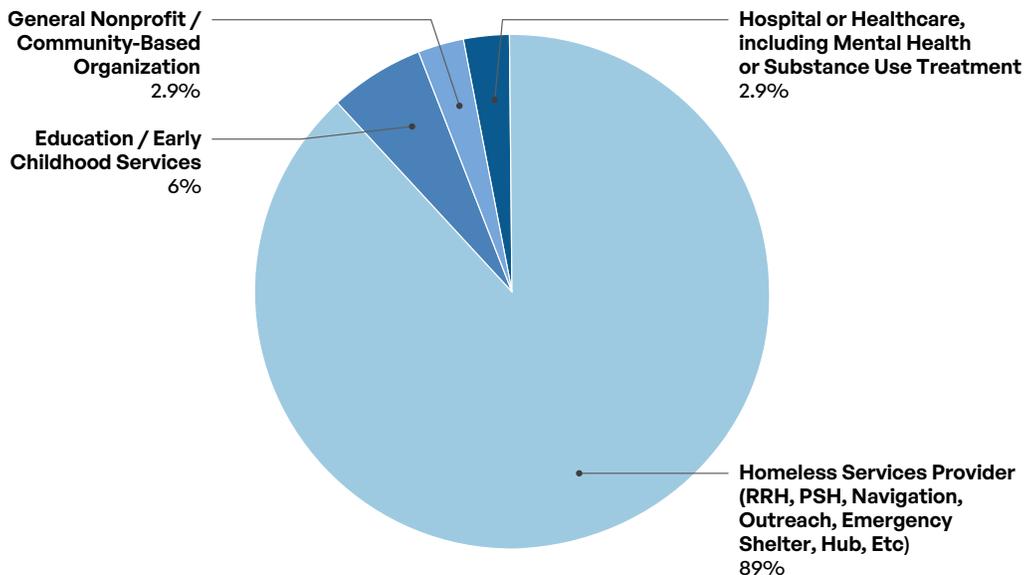
Household Size vs. Annual Household Income (Fairfield County)



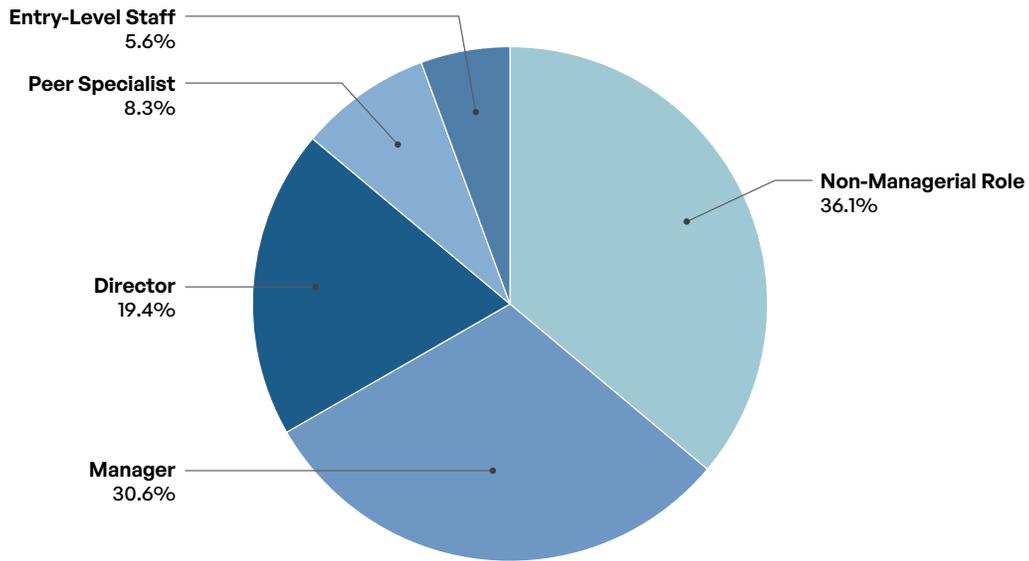
NORTHWEST CAN

89% of respondents in the Northwest CAN worked as a homeless services provider. The remaining 11% worked in parallel fields (education, community organization, and healthcare) (Table 1). The largest group was in non-managerial roles (36%), followed by managers (31%), directors (19%), entry-level staff (5%), and peer specialists (8%). No respondents reported working as an intern, C-Suite executive, or independent contractor (Table 3).

1. What best describes the work of your employer?

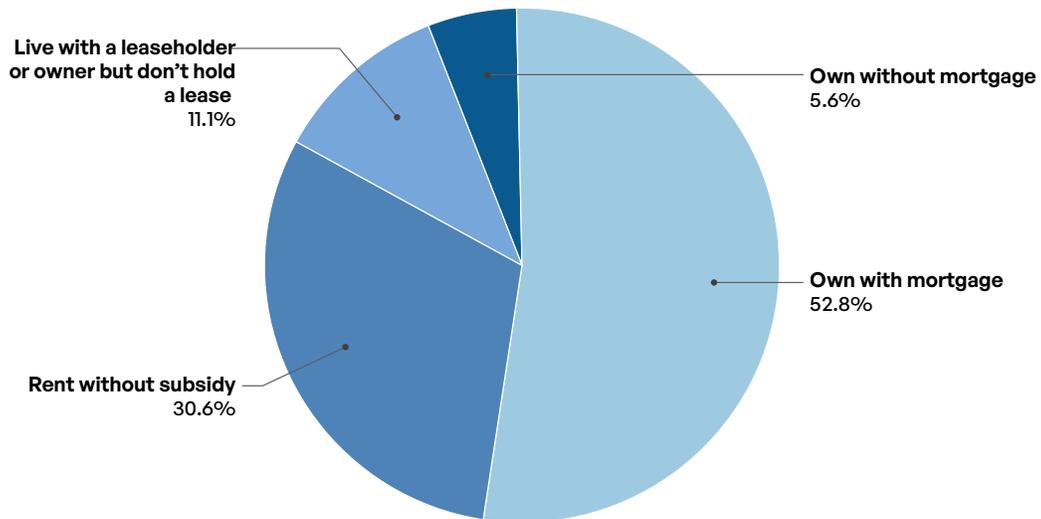


3. What is your current position within your organization?



53% of respondents owned their living space with a mortgage, and 5% owned without a mortgage. 31% rented without a subsidy. 11% lived with a leaseholder or owner but did not hold the lease themselves (Table 11).

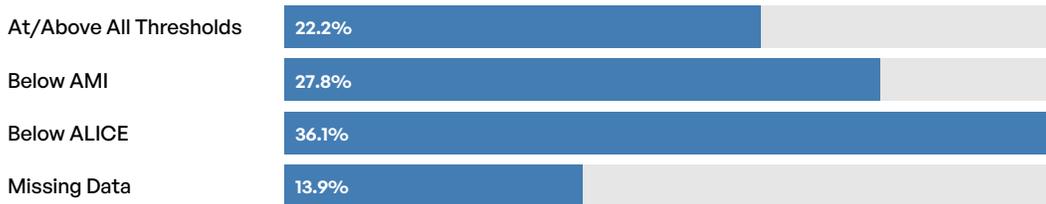
11. Under what arrangements does your household occupy the unit where you live?



Respondents were asked to provide their household size and income, which the Housing Innovation Lab then mapped to three income eligibility thresholds: the Area Median Income, the ALICE income threshold, and the Federal Poverty Level. Using these brackets, respondents fell into three income categories: 28%

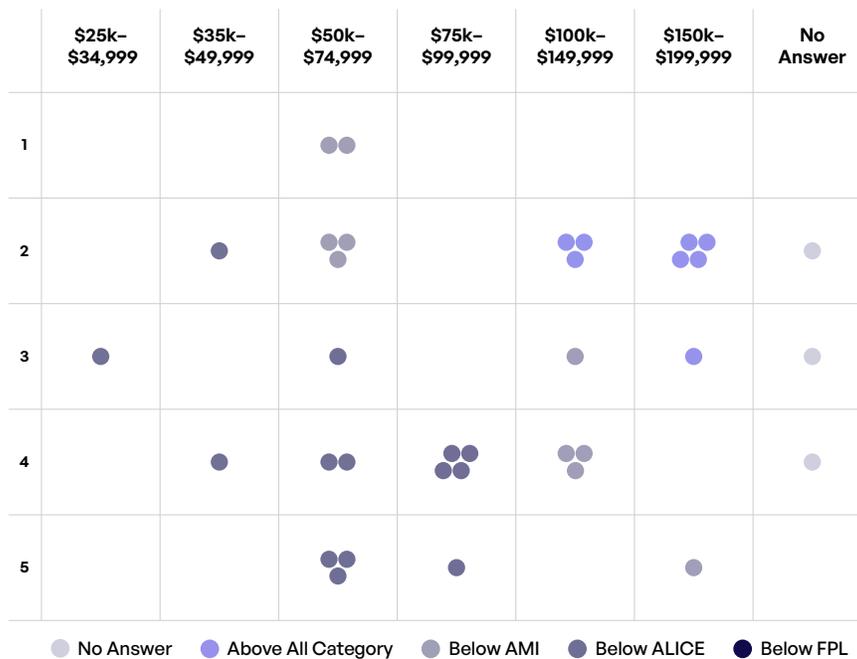
of respondents were living below the Area Median Income, and 36% lived below the ALICE threshold. No respondents in the Northwest reported living below the Federal Poverty Level. These percentages represent different respondents rather than overlapping income categories (Table X).

X. Combined thresholds for mapping low income



In the following graph each dot represents one respondent, illustrating how respondents are distributed across income ranges and household sizes, highlighting variation within and across income thresholds.

Household Size vs. Annual Household Income (Northwest)



Material Hardship

“This field does not pay enough. It’s impossible to live. I feel like I am going to need the same services as my clients.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

“I love my job and I love what I do. I love the people we serve and the people I work with. I care SO MUCH about what I do. But sometimes I feel like for all the hard work I put in, I still struggle financially. I both run a food pantry, and make appointments at others to fill my own fridge.”

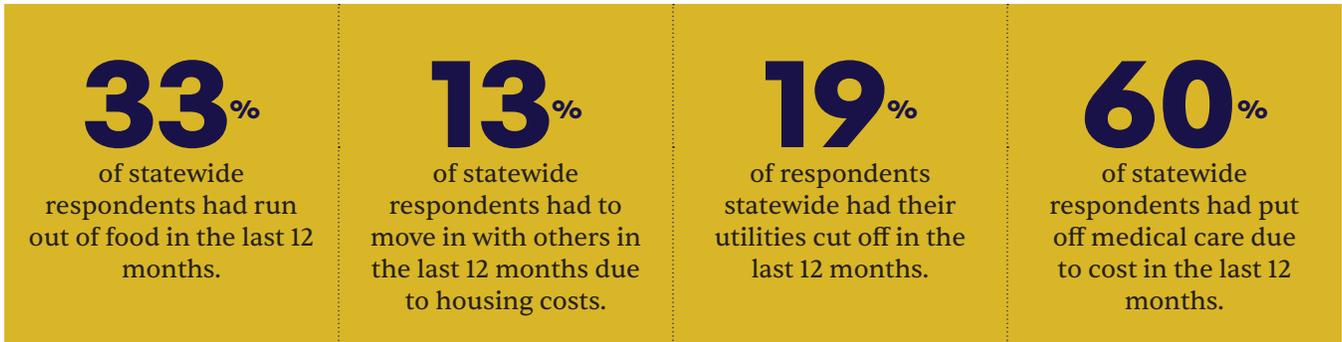
SURVEY RESPONDENT

STATEWIDE

Across the state, 30% of respondents had experienced at least one form of material hardship: food insecurity, housing instability, utilities being cut off, or putting off medical treatment. Most common were worries about food running out, which 33% of respondents had experienced, and putting off medical care, which 60% had experienced. 3% of staff reported having to stay in shelter or a place not suitable for permanent housing (Table 15). 13% had to move in with others due to costs (Table 16). 19% of respondents had their utilities cut off in the last 12 months (Table 17).

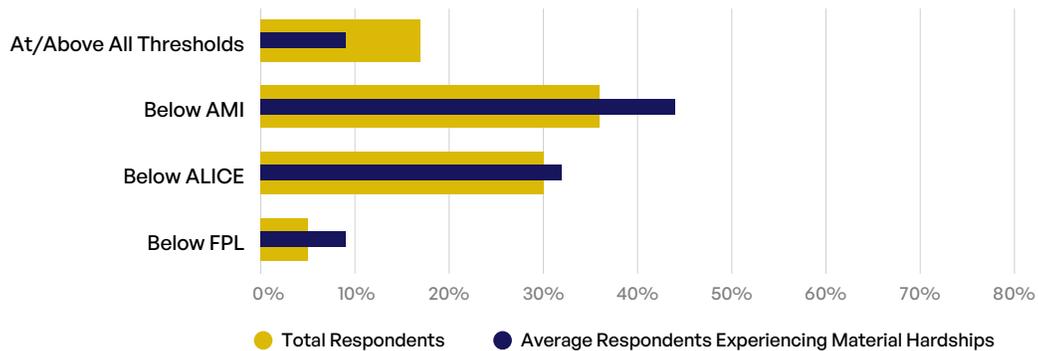
Respondents overall were distributed across income categories; however, among those who reported experiencing material hardship, 86% fell below at least

one of the defined income thresholds (Area Median Income, ALICE, or the Federal Poverty Level). On average, most (44%) of respondents who reported a material hardship were within the ALICE bracket across both CANs.



These numbers are overrepresentative of the population who responded to this survey—only 30% of respondents were below ALICE. 4% of total respondents were under the Federal Poverty Level, while 9% of respondents who experienced material hardship were under the poverty level (Table XI).

XI. Total Respondents v. Those Experiencing Material Hardship



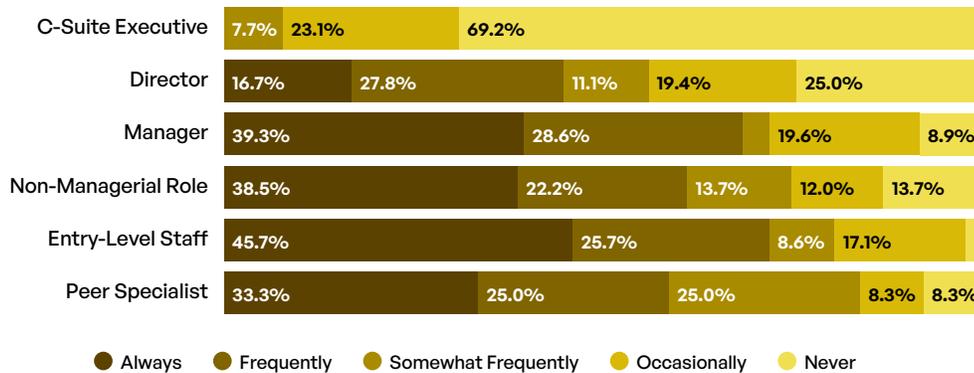
When asked how often they ran out of money between paychecks, 34% of respondents said they ran out between every paycheck, and 24% said they ran out around every other paycheck. Together, 58% of the respondents are running out of money frequently. This financial hardship was spread across the respondent’s job categories (Table 18).

18. How often do you find yourself running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles?



Experiences of running out of money between paychecks differed by role. Managers and non-managerial staff reported the highest levels of financial strain. Entry-level staff, managers, non-managerial staff, and peer specialists reported the highest levels of financial strain, with large shares in these roles indicating that they “Always” or “Frequently” run out of money between pay cycles. Nearly half of entry-level staff (46%) and managers (39%) reported “Always” running out of money, with similar substantial shares among non-managerial staff (38%) and peer specialists (33%). In contrast, directors were more likely to report running out of money “Occasionally” or “Never”, and no C-suite executives reported doing so “Always” or “Frequently” statewide. This aligns with our examination of the income brackets for respondents to these questions. Most—37% and 42% respectively—were below the AMI or ALICE income limits. This suggests that statewide, homeless service providers are experiencing the financial pressure of being employed without being able to meet or exceed their financial obligations (Table 18B).

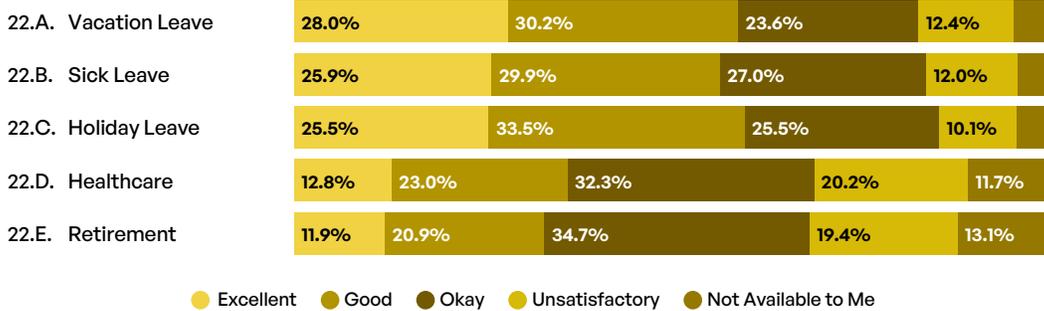
18B. How often do you find yourself running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles?



Note: Sample sizes varied across job roles, with responses ranging from 12 peer specialists to 117 non-managerial staff (C-Suite executives n=13, directors n=36, managers n=56, entry-level staff n=35). Percentages for roles with smaller sample sizes should be interpreted with caution, as results for these groups are more

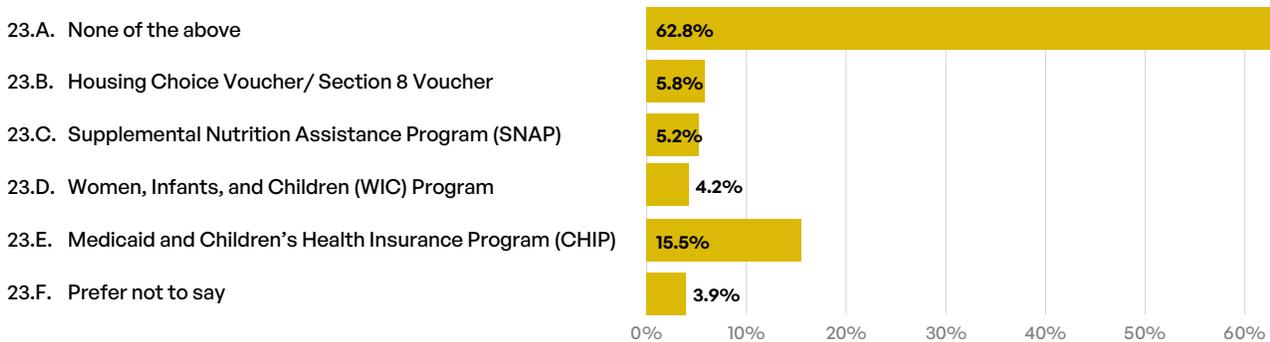
When asked to rate benefits outside of their paychecks, statewide respondents most often rated benefits as good or okay, rather than excellent. Vacation, sick, and holiday leave were most commonly rated as good (30–34%), with about one-quarter of respondents rating these benefits as excellent. In contrast, healthcare and retirement benefits were more frequently rated as okay (32% and 35%, respectively) and showed the highest levels of dissatisfaction: roughly one-third of respondents rated healthcare and retirement benefits as either unsatisfactory or not available (Table 22ABCDE).

22. Please rank each of the following benefits



Statewide, nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) reported that they did not qualify for any government assistance programs. Among those who did qualify, 16% reported eligibility for Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Smaller shares reported qualifying for housing assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 program (6%) or nutrition assistance through SNAP (5%), while 4% reported qualifying for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. An additional 4% of respondents preferred not to disclose whether they qualified for any programs (Table 23).

23. Which programs do you qualify for



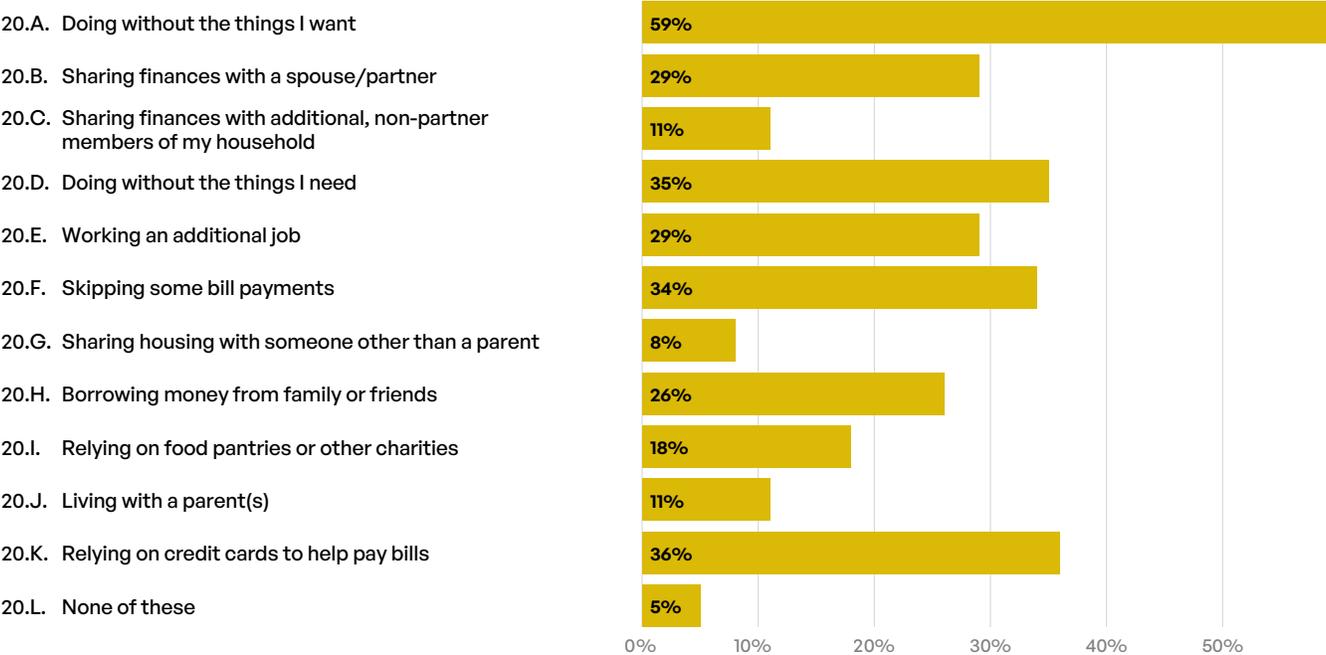
Staff worried the most about paying for savings for emergencies (54%), home or car repairs (54%), credit card payments (51%), and housing (47%) (Table 21).⁴ Because their income was not enough to cover all expenses, many respondents reported cutting back on nonessential spending or delaying optional purchases (59%) and relying on credit cards to help pay bills (39%). Notably, more than one-third of respondents (36%) reported going without basic necessities, indicating levels of financial strain that extend beyond typical cost-saving measures (Table 20).⁵

⁴ Respondents could select more than one option. Results do not add to 100%.

⁵ Respondents could select more than one option. Results do not add to 100%.

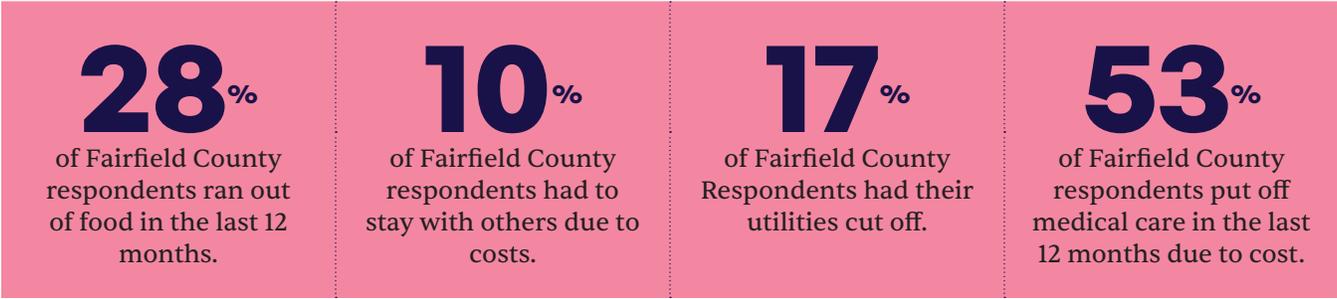


20. Which of the following allows you to make ends meet for your household?



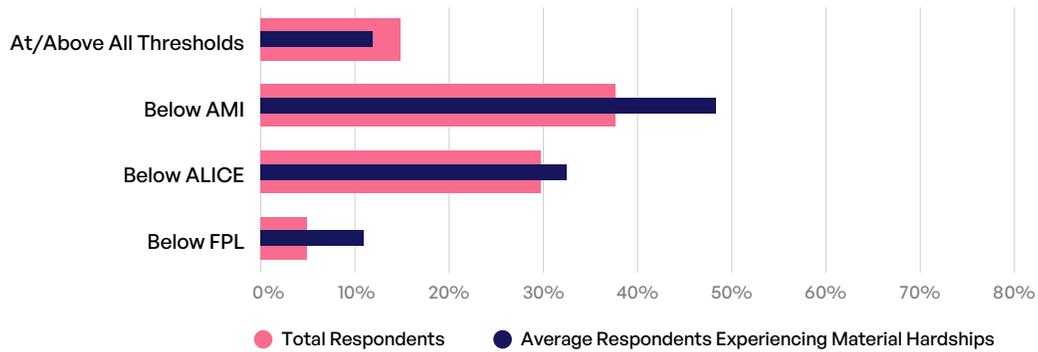
FAIRFIELD COUNTY

In Fairfield County, 44% of respondents had worried about running out of food in the past 12 months (Table 14), and 28% reported having run out of food (Table 13). 3% of staff reported having to stay in shelter or a place not suitable for permanent housing (Table 15). 10% had to move in with others due to costs (Table 16). 17% of respondents had their utilities cut off in the last 12 months (Table 17). More than half of respondents — 53% — reported putting off medical care for themselves or a member of their family.



Respondents overall were distributed across income categories; however, among those who reported experiencing material hardship, 90% fell below at least one of the defined income thresholds (Area Median Income, ALICE, or the Federal Poverty Level). On average, most (48%) of respondents who reported a material hardship were within the ALICE bracket across both CANs. These numbers are overrepresentative of the population who responded to this survey—only 30% of respondents were below ALICE. 4% of total respondents were under the Federal Poverty Level, while 11% of respondents who experienced material hardship were under the poverty line (Table XI).

XI. Total Respondents v. Those Experiencing Material Hardship



When asked how often they ran out of money between paychecks, 32% of Fairfield County respondents said they ran out between every paycheck, and 23% said they ran out around every other paycheck. Together, 55% of the respondents are running out of money frequently. This financial hardship was spread across the respondent’s job categories (Table 18).

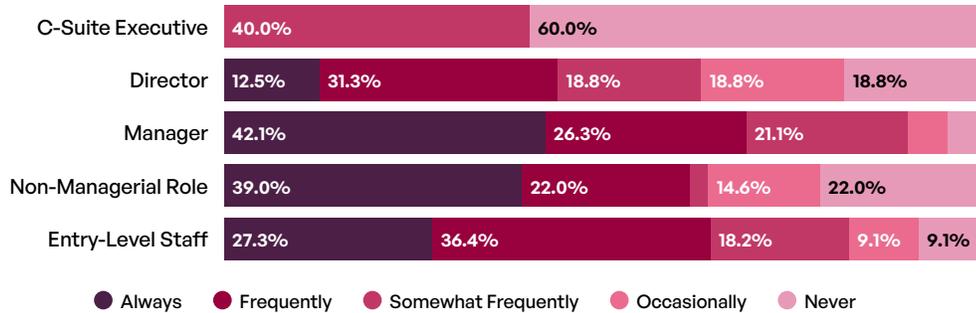
18. How often do you find yourself running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles?



Experiences of running out of money between paychecks differed by role. Managers and non-managerial staff reported the highest levels of financial strain, with 42% of managers and 39% of non-managerial staff indicating that they always ran out of money between pay cycles. Entry-level staff also experienced substantial strain, with 27% reporting that they always ran out of money and an additional 36% reporting that this occurred frequently. Nearly one-third of directors reported frequently running out of money, and comparable shares reported doing so occasionally and somewhat frequently. C-Suite executives reported the lowest levels

of financial strain overall, with 60% indicating that they never ran out of money between paychecks and 40% reporting that this occurred occasionally. Taken together, these findings suggest that paycheck pressures are most pronounced among non-managerial and managerial staff, while remaining present to varying degrees across all levels of the workforce (Table 18B).

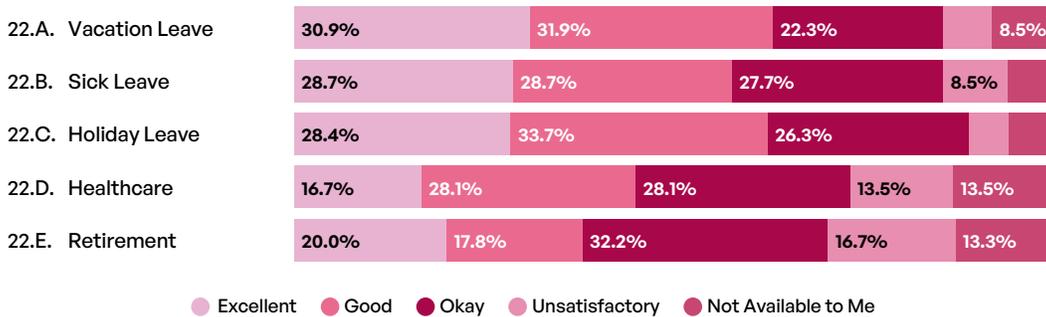
18B. How often do you find yourself running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles?



Note: Sample sizes varied across roles, with responses ranging from 5 C-Suite executives to 41 non-managerial staff (directors n=16, managers n=19, entry-level staff n=11). Percentages for smaller groups should be interpreted with caution, as they are more sensitive to individual responses.

When asked about benefits outside of their paychecks, respondents most often rated their benefits as good or excellent. Across benefit types, an average of 28% of respondents rated benefits as good, while approximately 25% rated them as excellent. Respondents expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction with sick leave (28% rated as unsatisfactory) and vacation leave (22% rated as unsatisfactory). Dissatisfaction was lower for retirement benefits (17%) and healthcare (14%) (Table 22ABCDE).

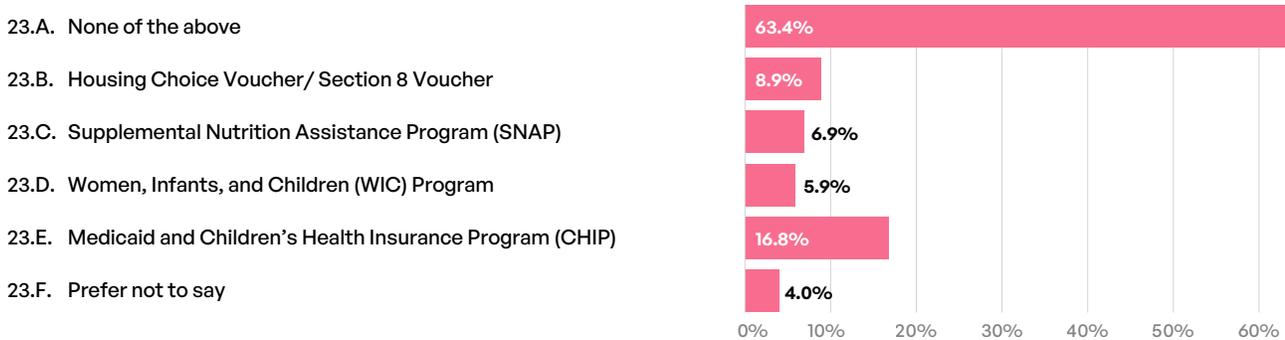
22. Please rank each of the following benefits



67% of Fairfield respondents reported that they did not qualify for any government assistance programs. 17% reported qualifying for Medicaid and CHIP, 9% reported qualifying for Housing Choice Vouchers, and 7% reported qualifying for

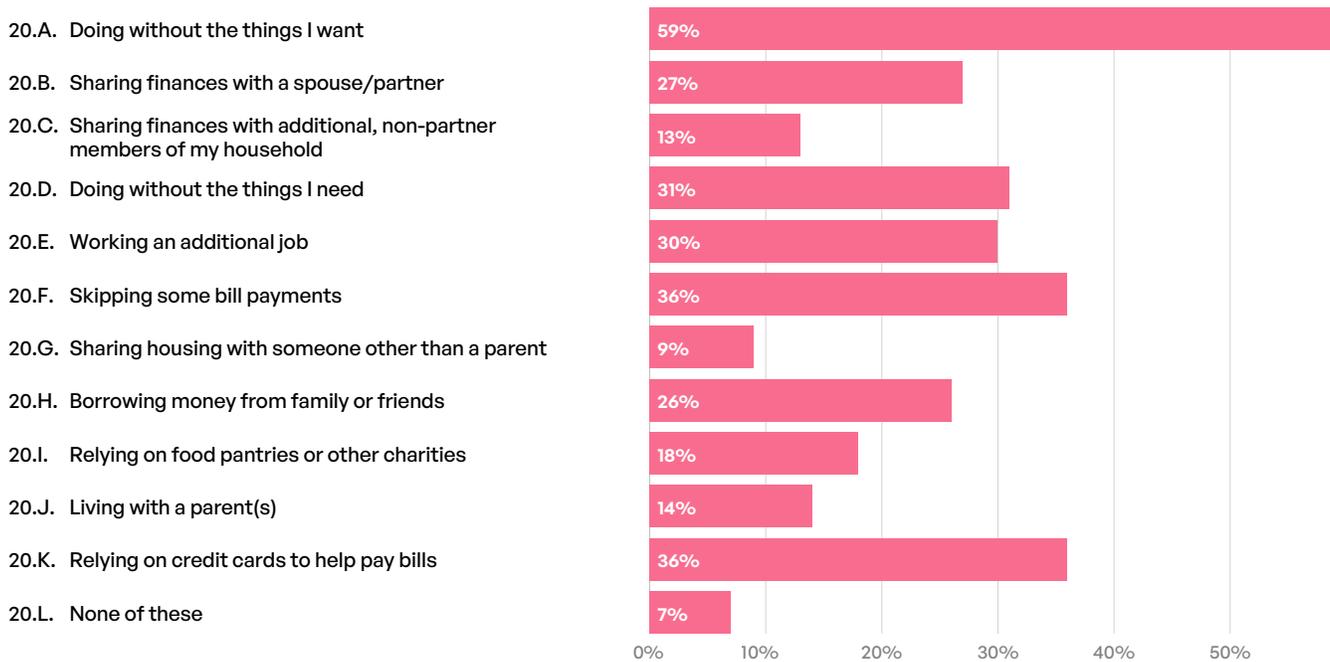
SNAP. 6% were qualified for WIC. Finally, 3% reported qualifying for a program that was not listed (Table 23).

23. Which programs do you qualify for



In Fairfield County, the most staff reported worries about paying for credit cards (63%), followed by savings for emergencies (56%), housing (50%), home or car repairs (49%), and savings for retirement (46%) (Table 21).⁶ To manage ongoing financial shortfalls, respondents reported doing without the things they want (61%), skipping bill payments (37%), and relying on credit cards (37%). 30% reported working an additional job, and 28% reported that they share finances with a spouse or partner to cover basic expenses. 18% reported that they rely on food pantries or other charities (Table 20).

20. Which of the following allows you to make ends meet for your household?



⁶ Responses do not add to 100%; participants were allowed to select multiple responses.

56%

of Fairfield County respondents worried about saving for emergencies.

63%

of Fairfield County residents worried about making credit card payments.

50%

of Fairfield County respondents worried about paying for housing.

49%

of Fairfield County respondents worried about paying for home or car repairs.

NORTHWEST CAN

In the Northwest CAN, 42% of respondents had worried about running out of food in the past 12 months (Table 14), and 27% reported having run out of food (Table 13). 3% of staff reported having to stay in shelter or a place not suitable for human habitation (Table 15). 6% had to move in with others due to costs (Table 16). 15% of respondents had their utilities cut off in the last 12 months (Table 17). More than half of respondents— 58% — reported putting off medical care for themselves or a member of their family (Table 19).

27%

of Northwest CAN respondents worried about running out of food in the last 12 months.

15%

of Northwest CAN respondents had their utilities cut off in the last 12 months.

6%

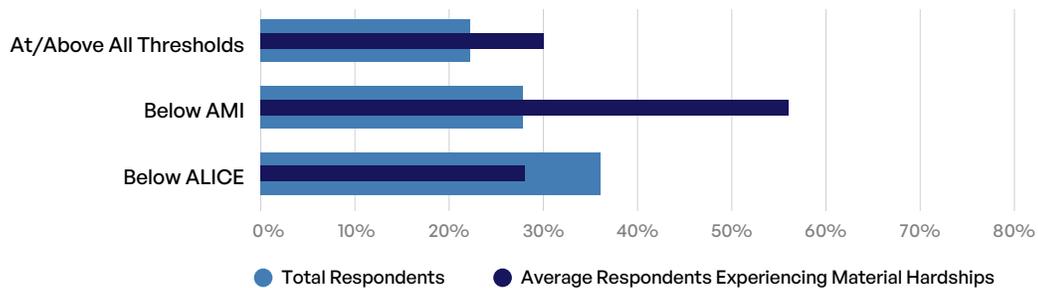
of Northwest CAN respondents had to move in with others due to costs in the last 12 months.

58%

of Northwest CAN respondents put off medical care due to cost in the last 12 months.

Respondents were split among the income brackets, but 80% were below all income brackets. Over half (56%) of respondents who reported a material hardship were within the ALICE bracket. These numbers are overrepresentative of the population who responded to this survey—only 36% of Northwest respondents were below ALICE (Table Xi).

XI. Total Respondents v. Those Experiencing Material Hardship



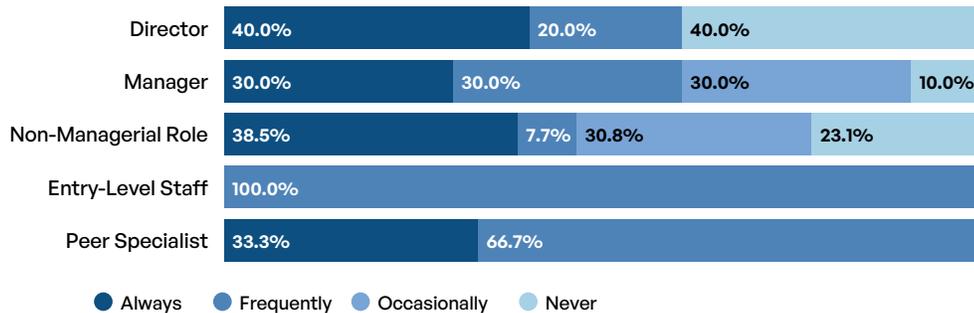
When asked how often they ran out of money between paychecks, 33% of Northwest respondents said they ran out between every paycheck, and 27% said they ran out around every other paycheck. Together, 60% of the respondents in the Northwest are running out of money frequently. This financial hardship was spread across the respondent’s job categories (Table 18).

18. How often do you find yourself running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles?



In the Northwest, experiences of running out of money between paychecks varied by role. Directors and non-managerial staff reported the highest levels of persistent financial strain, with 40% of directors and 38% of non-managerial staff indicating that they always ran out of money. 30% of managers indicated that they always ran out of money, and another 30% reported doing so frequently. Peer specialists also reported recurring financial strain, with all respondents indicating that they either always or frequently ran out of money. Entry-level staff reported a different pattern, with all respondents indicating that they frequently ran out of money. As noted previously, no C-Suite executives from the Northwest responded to the survey (Table 18B).

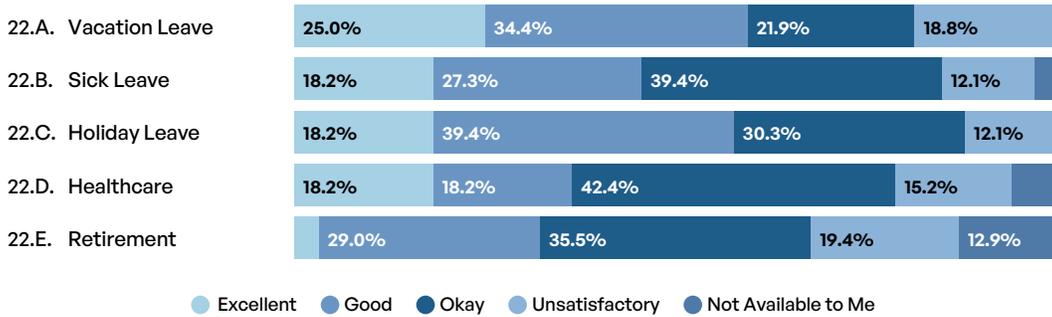
18B. How often do you find yourself running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles?



Note: Sample sizes varied across roles, with responses ranging from 2 entry-level staff to 13 non-managerial staff (directors n=5, managers n=10, non-managerial staff n=13, entry-level staff n=2, peer specialists n=3). Percentages for smaller groups should be interpreted with caution, as they are more sensitive to individual

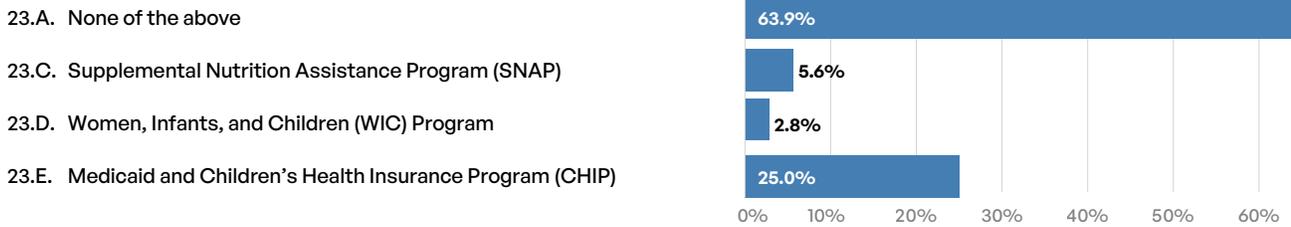
Respondents in the Northwest most often expressed neutral views of their benefits, with an average of approximately 34% of responses ranking benefits as “Okay,” followed closely by “Good” ratings (about 30% on average). Respondents were least satisfied with healthcare, with 42% rating it as “Okay,” followed by sick leave (39%) and retirement benefits (36%). Ratings of vacation leave were more positive by comparison, with a smaller share of respondents indicating neutral satisfaction (Table 22).

22. Please rank each of the following benefits



70% of respondents in the Northwest did not qualify for any government assistance programs. Of the programs staff qualified for, 25% reported being qualified for Medicaid and CHIP, 6% for SNAP, and 3% for WIC. 3% reported they were qualified for a program not listed (Table 23).

23. Which programs do you qualify for



In the Northwest CAN, most staff worried about paying for savings for emergencies (67%), home or car repairs (64%), credit card payments (61%), utilities (55%), and housing (48%) (Table 21).

67%

of Northwest CAN respondents worried about saving for emergencies.

61%

of Northwest CAN respondents worried about making credit card payments.

64%

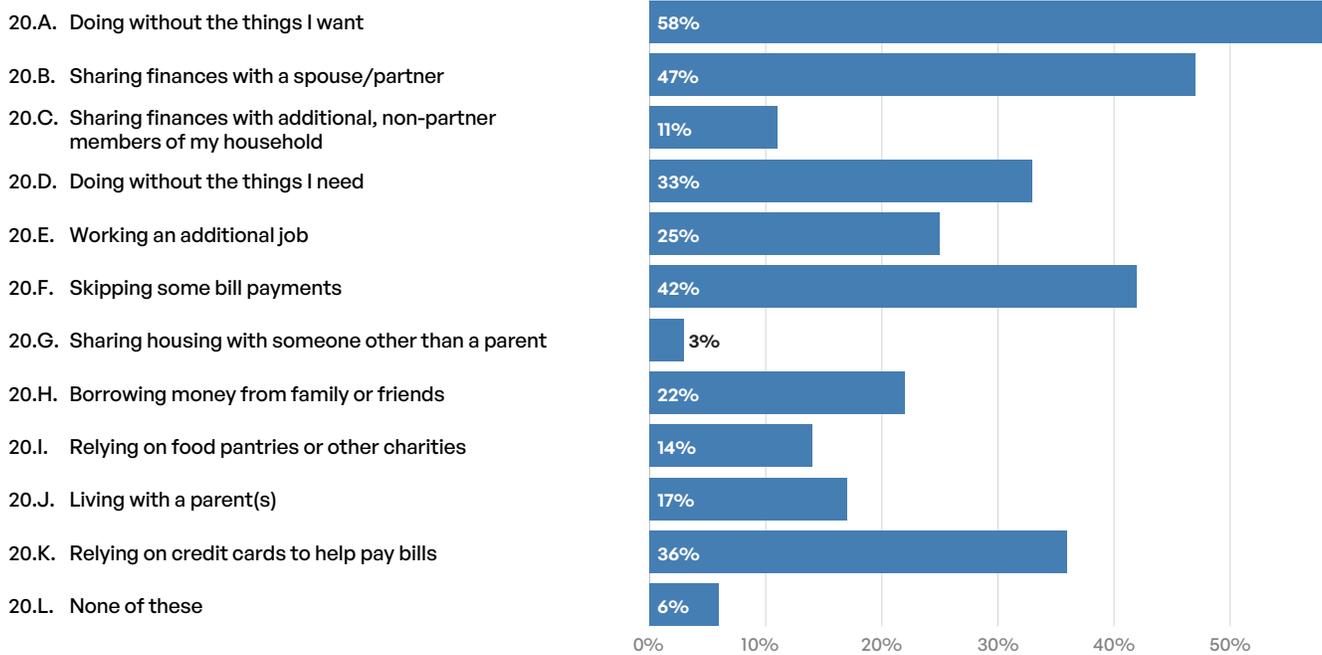
of Northwest CAN respondents worried about paying for home or car repairs.

55%

of Northwest CAN respondents worried about paying for utilities.

To manage ongoing financial shortfalls, staff reported doing without the things they want (58%), sharing finances with a spouse or partner (47%), skipping bill payments (42%), and relying on credit cards (36%) (Table 20). 25% reported working a second job, and 22% borrowed money from family or friends to cover basic expenses. Finally, 14% reported relying on food pantries or other charities.

20. Which of the following allows you to make ends meet for your household?



Conclusions

The findings of the Material Hardships section of the 2025 Workforce survey provide more insight into a key theme from the previous report: that staff are not making enough money to survive, let alone thrive, in the communities where they work. With more targeted questioning and a wider respondent base, the Innovation Lab can demonstrate that staff across Western Connecticut are experiencing severe material hardship. This hardship is experienced across salary brackets and job titles, although it is more severe for those working lower-paying frontline jobs.

Staff frequently reported feeling trapped between qualifying for government assistance and making enough money to thrive. Respondents⁷ expressed this concern in open-ended responses:

“My current salary does not adequately meet my cost of living needs, yet it is also above the eligibility threshold for many government assistance programs. This leaves me in a financial gap where I am unable to afford basic necessities such as housing, childcare, and healthcare, while also not qualifying for support services.”

⁷ Responses are state-wide.

“We are in a dual income household and do not qualify for assistance. It would be helpful to have assistance in the winter for our oil bill, but we are over income when you combine our salaries.”

“I received a raise . . . and they took my Husky A from me.”

Troublingly, across Western CT, staff reported relying on credit cards to cover basic expenses for their households (37% of respondents across both CANS) at the same time as they worried about paying for their credit card bills (63%). In addition, 38% reported skipping some bill payments due to ongoing financial shortfalls, a pattern that likely led to the 16% of respondents across the region who reported having their utilities cut off. One respondent described this cycle in an open-ended response:

“Over worked ... underpaid CT is expensive. As a manager I should not be struggling the way I am to survive. one paycheck away from need[ing] the same services I provide.”

Of particular concern are the reports of housing insecurity across the staff in Western Connecticut. 3% of respondents across Western CT had to stay in shelter-respondents who are working in the housing system themselves—and 10% had to move in with others to afford housing. 50% of respondents across the region worried about paying for housing in the last 12 months. A housing response system cannot be considered sustainable when staff delivering services are experiencing housing insecurity themselves. This reflects structural gaps in compensation, cost-of-living alignment, and system supports—and it requires immediate, coordinated action.

“In order for people not to worry about their bills and housing their pay must match the cost of living.”

“Make more units available for affordable housing, or workforce housing for 60% and 80% AMI.”

Recommendations on Material Hardship

- **Increase staff wages across the region**, particularly for staff earning below the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Consider additional financial employee assistance programs**, such as utility assistance or interest-free debt consolidation services.
- **Advocate for more workforce housing.**
- **Improve compensation and benefits**, as many respondents reported low satisfaction with their current pay and benefits packages. The Lab particularly recommends reviewing employee benefits in the Northwest CAN.
- **Consider region-specific supports**, such as housing-related resources in Fairfield County or travel-related accommodations in the Northwest region, in line with the distinct needs reported by workers.

Working Conditions

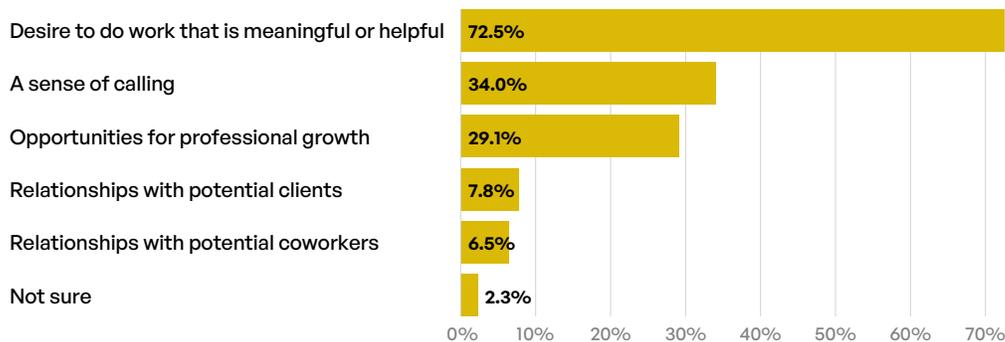
“I like the fact that my work is helping to reduce homelessness and fill societal voids.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

STATEWIDE

Across Connecticut, frontline workers enter the homelessness response system with a strong sense of purpose. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) indicated that they began working in homelessness because they wanted to do meaningful or helpful work, and more than one-third (34%) described their entry into the field as driven by a sense of calling. Opportunities for professional growth were cited by 29% of respondents as a motivating factor, while a small percentage pointed to relationships with potential clients (8%) or coworkers (7%) as influencing their decision to enter the field (Table 25).

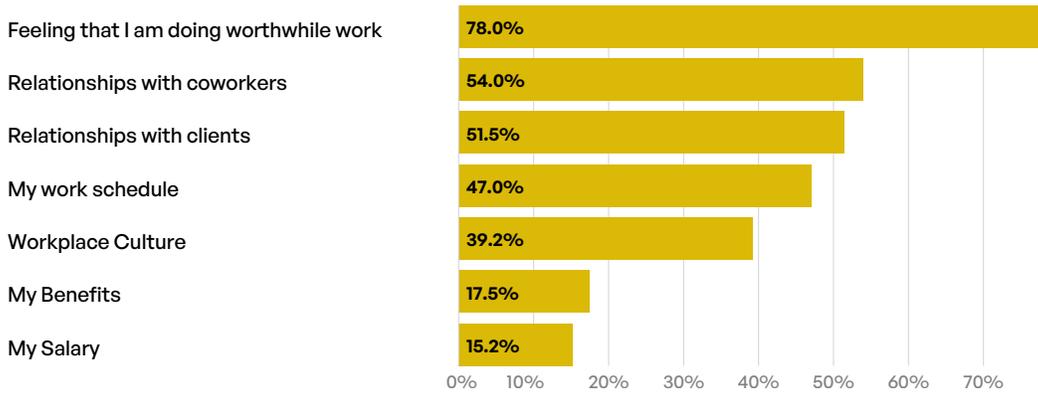
25. Why did you start working in homelessness?



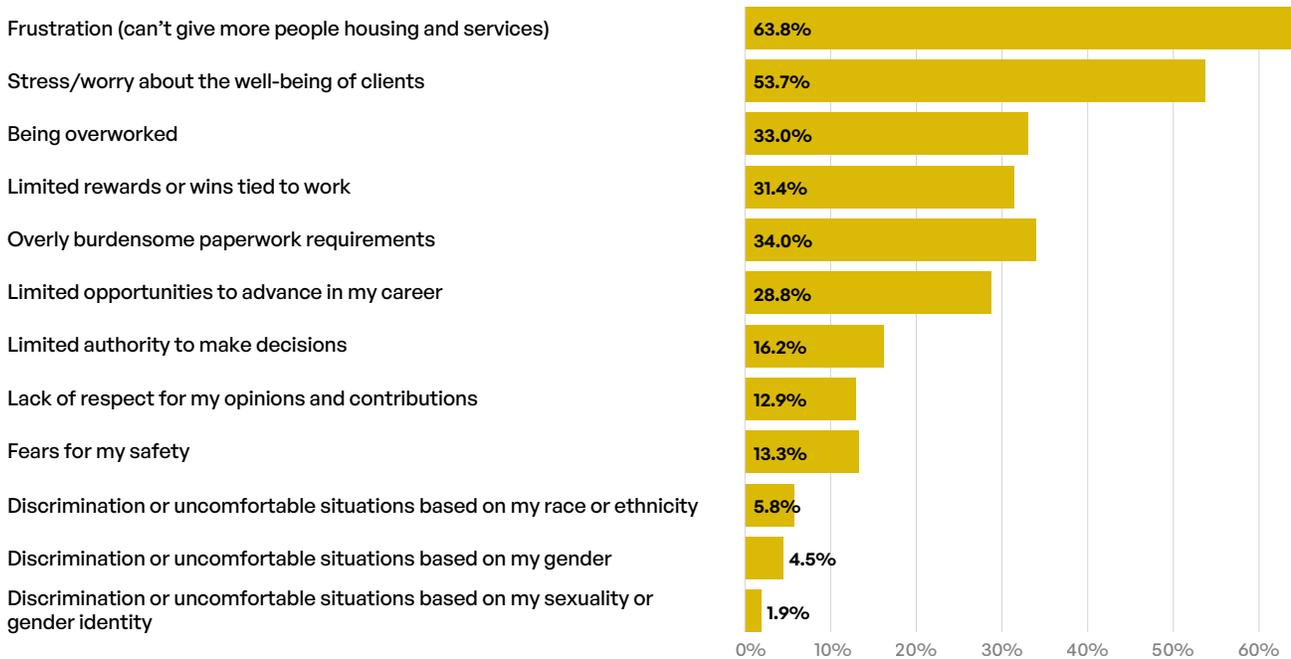
This sense of purpose remains as a defining feature of statewide job satisfaction. A large majority of respondents (78%) reported that they currently feel they are doing worthwhile work. Many also identified relational and workplace factors as

positive aspects of their jobs, including relationships with coworkers (54%) and clients (52%). Nearly half (47%) cited satisfaction with their work schedule. In contrast, relatively few respondents reported compensation as a source of satisfaction: only 18% expressed satisfaction with their benefits and 15% with their salary (Table 28).

28. What do you like about your job currently?



29. Within my current job, I am experiencing the following challenges:

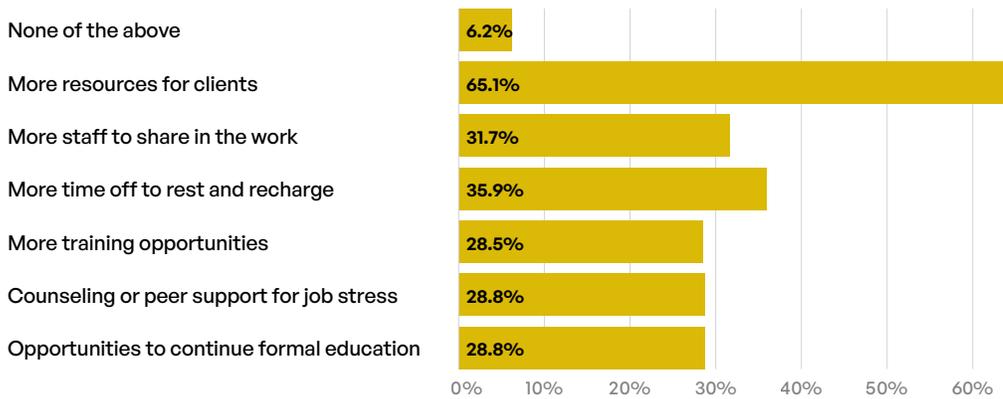


At the same time, workers across the state described substantial challenges in their daily roles. The most widespread concern was frustration at being unable to secure the housing or services clients need (64%), followed by stress or worry about clients' well-being (54%). About 33% reported feeling overworked, and a similar share (34%) said paperwork requirements were overly burdensome. Additional challenges included limited rewards or recognition tied to work (31%), limited

opportunities to advance in their careers (29%), and limited authority to make decisions (16%). Smaller shares reported concerns related to respect (13%) and personal safety (13%). Reports of discrimination or uncomfortable situations were comparatively low statewide, with 5.8% reporting such experiences based on race or ethnicity, 4.5% based on gender, and 1.9% based on sexuality or gender identity (Table 29).

When asked what they felt was lacking in their current jobs in order to do their work well, respondents most frequently identified the need for additional resources for clients (65%). More than one-third (36%) said they needed more time off to rest and recharge, while 32% said they needed more staff to help share the workload. Substantial shares (29%) also expressed a desire for more training opportunities, greater access to counseling or peer support for job-related stress, and opportunities to continue formal education (Table 30).

28. What do you like about your job currently?

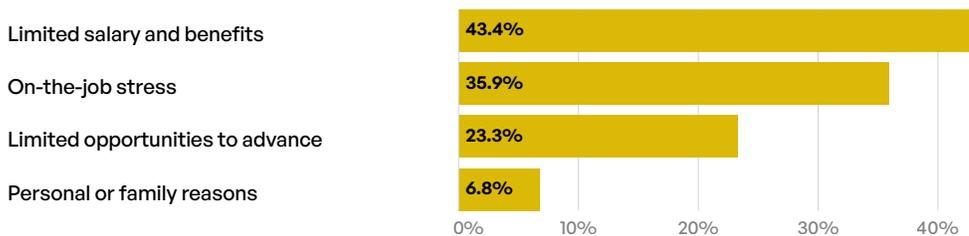


These pressures are closely reflected in statewide retention patterns. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) have considered leaving their job in the past 12 months (Table 26). Among those who considered leaving, the most commonly cited reason was limited salary and benefits (43%), followed by on-the-job stress (40%), and limited opportunities to advance (23%). Personal or family reasons were cited by 7% of respondents (Table 27).

26. In the past 12 months, have you considered leaving your job?



27. If so, why?

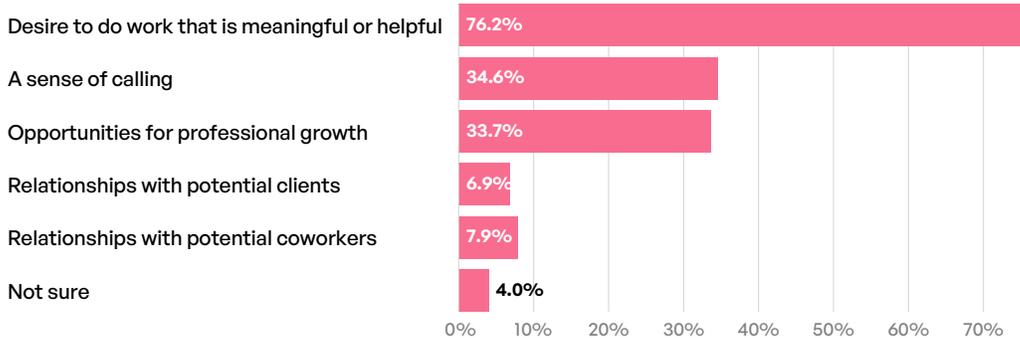


Overall, the statewide findings depict a workforce that remains deeply committed to the mission of homelessness response but is operating under conditions that strain sustainability. High levels of purpose coexist with challenges related to compensation, workload, administrative burden, and limited advancement opportunities. These pressures contribute to elevated turnover risk even among workers who value their jobs.

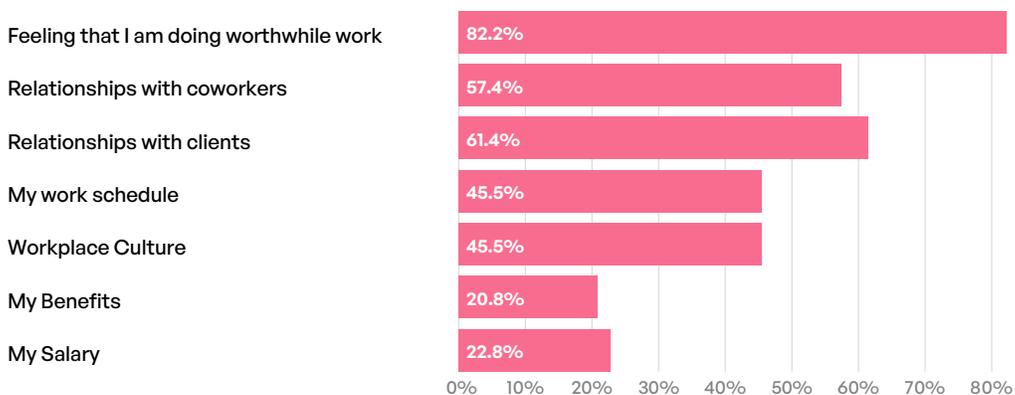
FAIRFIELD COUNTY

Frontline workers in Fairfield County mostly say they entered homelessness services because the work is meaningful and aligned with their values. More than three-quarters (76%) report that they were motivated by a desire to do work that is meaningful or helpful, and over a third (35%) say they entered the field due to a sense of calling. Opportunities for professional growth were a motivating factor for about one-third (34%) of respondents, while only small percentages noted that relationships with potential clients (7%) or coworkers (8%) influenced their decision (Table 25).

25. Why did you start working in homelessness?



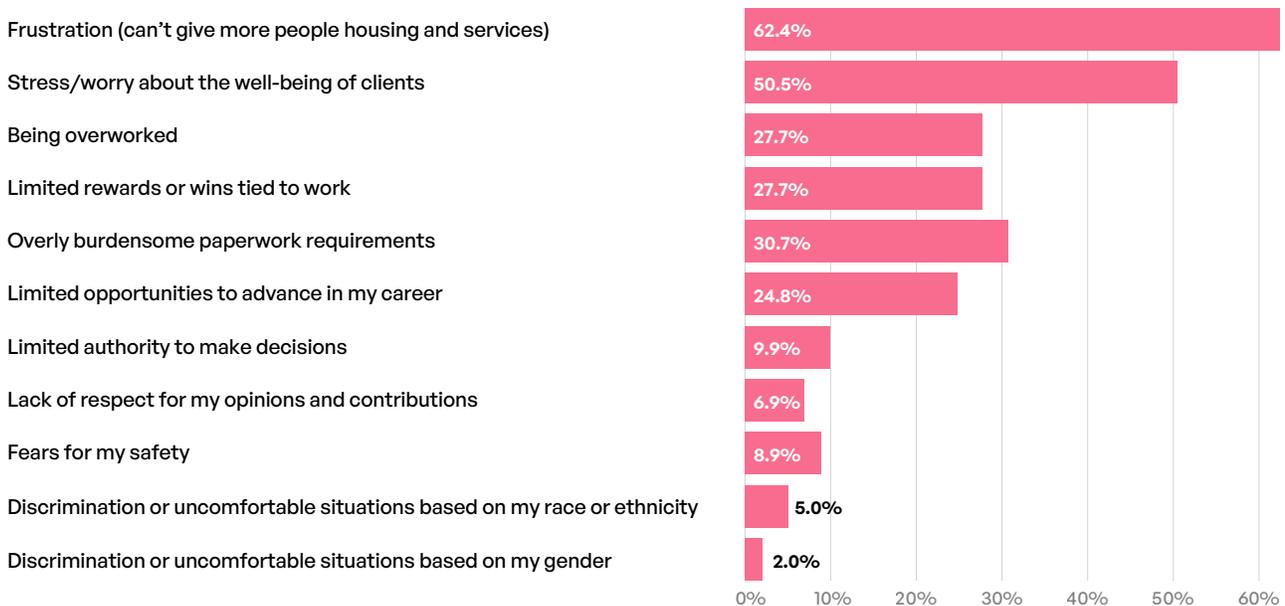
28. What do you like about your job currently?



A large majority of FC respondents (82%) report that they currently feel they are doing worthwhile work, and strong relational ties remain a defining part of job satisfaction. More than half (57%) identify their relationships with coworkers and 61% with clients as aspects they appreciate about their jobs. Forty-six percent report being satisfied with their work schedule, and the same share view their workplace culture favorably (Table 28).

Despite these meaningful and relational aspects of the work, FC staff report substantial day-to-day challenges. Nearly two-thirds (62%) experience frustration at their inability to secure housing or services for clients due to the region’s extremely limited supply of affordable units. About half (51%) report stress or worry about the well-being of clients, and about 28% say they frequently feel overworked. Many staff feel discouraged by the lack of rewards tied to their work, with 28% reporting limited recognition, and 31% cite overly burdensome paperwork requirements as a significant strain. Opportunities for advancement are also limited, with 25% reporting a lack of pathways to move forward in their careers. Concerns about respect and safety are less common but present: 7% feel their opinions are not respected, and 9% report feeling unsafe in the workplace. Reports of discrimination are comparatively low, with about 4–5% indicating experiences of uncomfortable or discriminatory situations based on race, gender, or sexual orientation (Table 29).

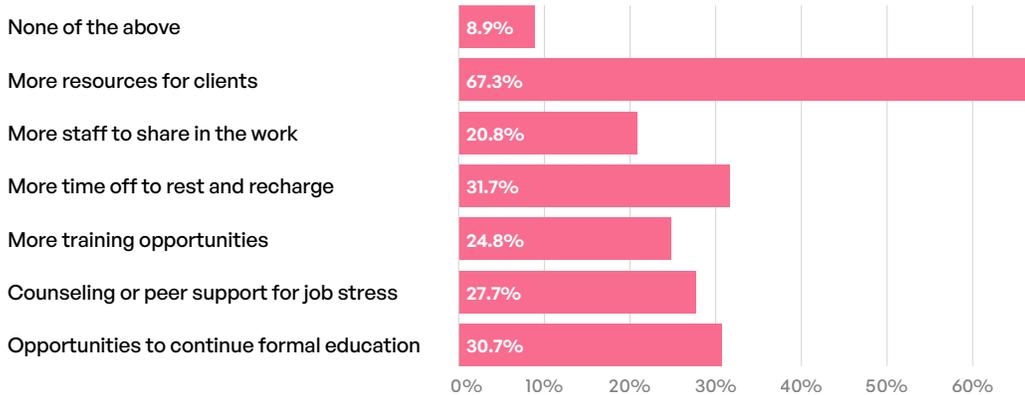
29. Within my current job, I am experiencing the following challenges:



When asked what they feel is lacking in their jobs, FC staff highlight several needs. More than two-thirds (67%) want additional resources for clients, underscoring the region’s acute shortage of affordable housing and supportive services. Nearly one-third (30%) say they need more staff to share the workload, and a similar

share (32%) report needing more time to rest and recharge. Many also express a desire for more training opportunities (25%), greater access to counseling or peer support (28%), and additional opportunities to continue formal education (31%) (Table 30).

30. What do you feel is lacking in your current job that you need to do your job well?

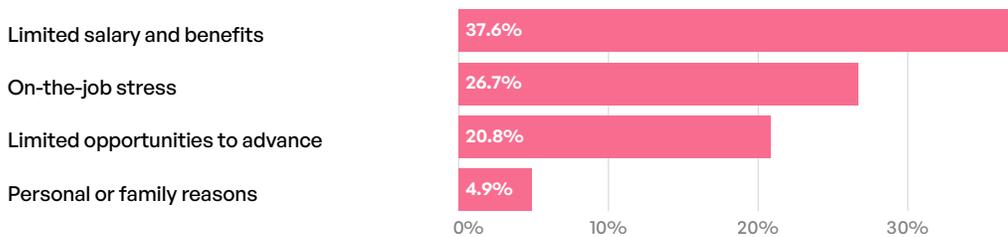


These stressors align closely with FC’s retention patterns. When asked whether they had considered leaving their job in the past 12 months, 56% of staff said yes (54 of 97 respondents) (Table 26). Among those who considered leaving, the most common reasons include limited salary and benefits (38%), on-the-job stress (27%), and limited opportunities to advance (21%). Personal or family reasons accounted for 5% of responses (Table 27).

26. In the past 12 months, have you considered leaving your job?



27. If so, why?

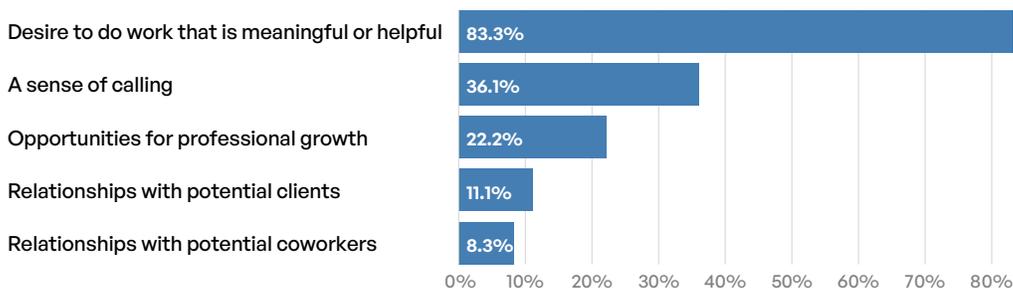


Taken together, the Fairfield County findings show a workforce that is deeply connected to its mission but consistently strained by structural barriers: a severe housing shortage, insufficient compensation, heavy workloads, and limited professional growth. These pressures undermine retention even among highly motivated staff and pose clear risks to the long-term stability of the region’s homelessness response system.

NORTHWEST CAN

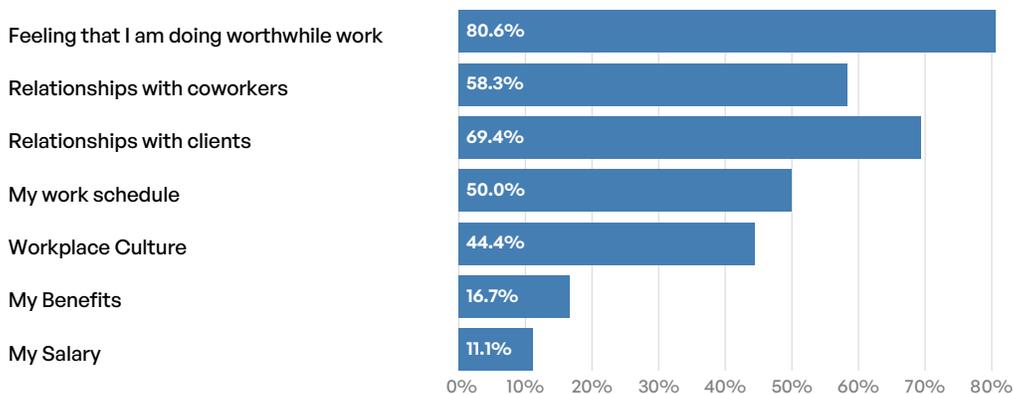
Staff in the Northwest region report entering the homelessness services field for many of the same personal reasons seen elsewhere in the state, though the intensity of these motivations varies. More than four in five workers (83%) say they were initially drawn to the work because it felt meaningful or helpful, and over one-third (36%) describe a sense of calling as a deciding factor. Opportunities for professional growth were a motivating influence for about 22% of NW respondents. Only a small number indicated that relationships with potential clients (11%) or coworkers (8%) shaped their decision to join the field (Table 25).

25. Why did you start working in homelessness?



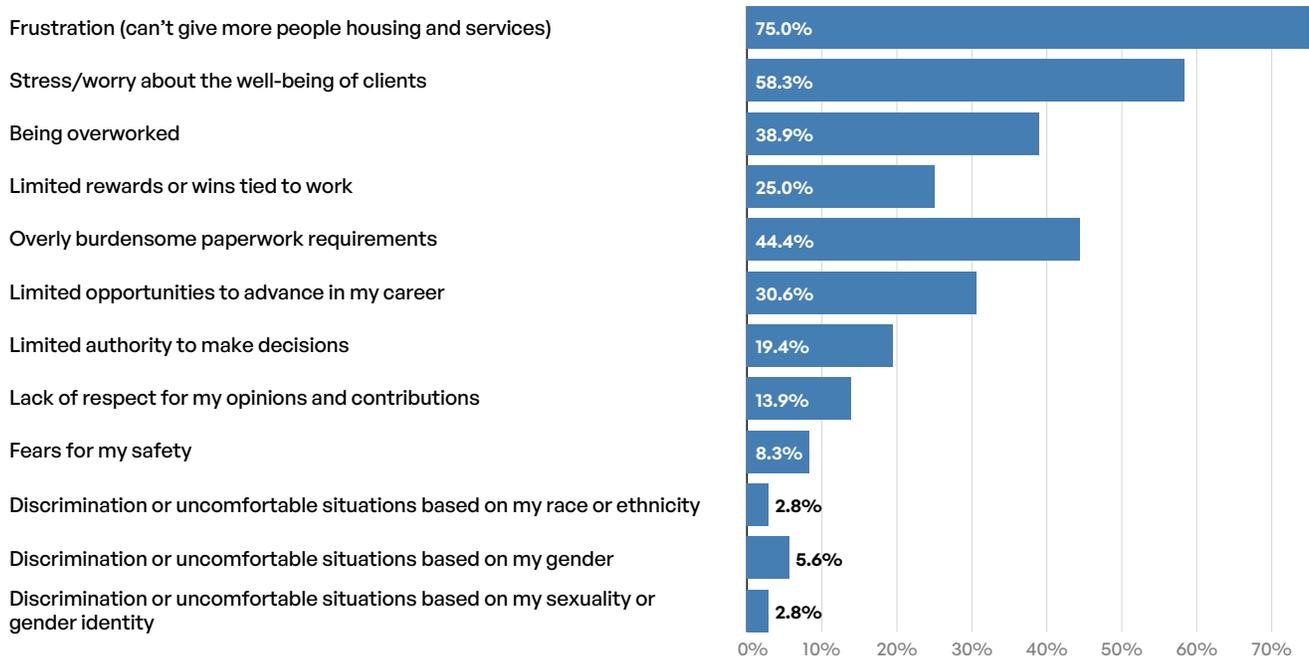
Even with the pressures of their day-to-day responsibilities, most NW workers continue to feel that their work holds personal value. Eighty-one percent report that they are currently doing work they consider worthwhile. Relationships remain a central source of satisfaction: 58% say they appreciate their connections with coworkers, and nearly 69% value their relationships with clients. Half of respondents (50%) express satisfaction with their work schedule, and 44% feel positively about their organization's workplace culture. Far fewer workers, however, feel content with compensation-related elements of the job: only 17% are satisfied with their benefits, and just 11% view their salary favorably (Table 28).

28. What do you like about your job currently?



Many NW staff report that the realities of their work environment create significant strain. Three-quarters (75%) say they feel frustrated when they cannot help clients access the housing or services they need, an unsurprising finding given the region’s limited rental stock and geographically dispersed resources. A majority (58%) report stress related to clients’ well-being, and 39% say they regularly feel overworked. About a quarter of respondents identify limited recognition (25%) and excessive paperwork (44%) as notable stressors. Pathways for growth remain narrow: 31% feel they have restricted opportunities to advance, and nearly one in five (19%) believe they have limited authority to influence decisions within their organization. Concerns about safety and respect were reported less frequently but remain important; 14% feel their opinions are not respected, and 8% report safety-related fears. Reports of discrimination are relatively rare, with only 3–6% of respondents (just one or two people) identifying uncomfortable or discriminatory situations related to race, gender, or sexual orientation (Table 29).

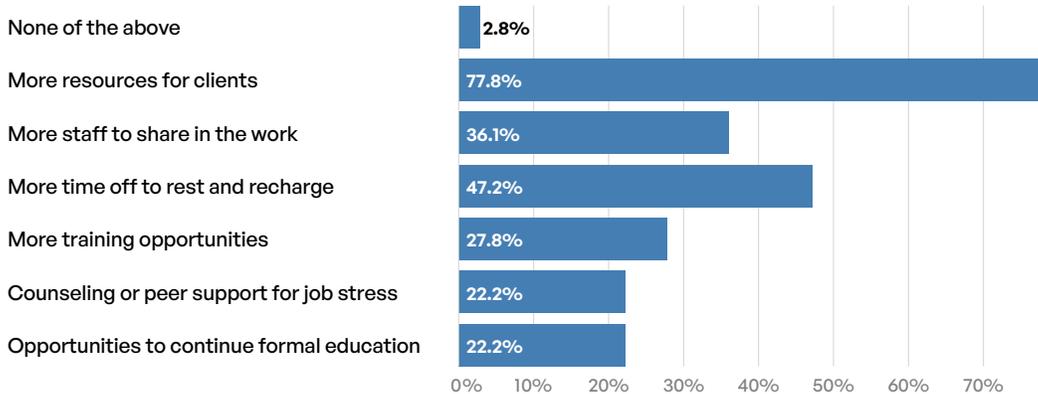
29. Within my current job, I am experiencing the following challenges:



When asked what would help them perform their roles more effectively, NW workers point to a set of consistent needs. More than three-quarters (78%) say they require additional resources for clients, reflecting the resource scarcity that defines service delivery in the region. About 36% believe that more staff are needed to distribute the workload, and 47% say they need more time to rest and recharge. Opportunities for growth and support also emerge as key themes: 28% want more training, and about one in five (22%) would benefit from counseling or peer support

to manage job stress or would like expanded access to formal educational opportunities (Table 30).

30. What do you feel is lacking in your current job that you need to do your job well?

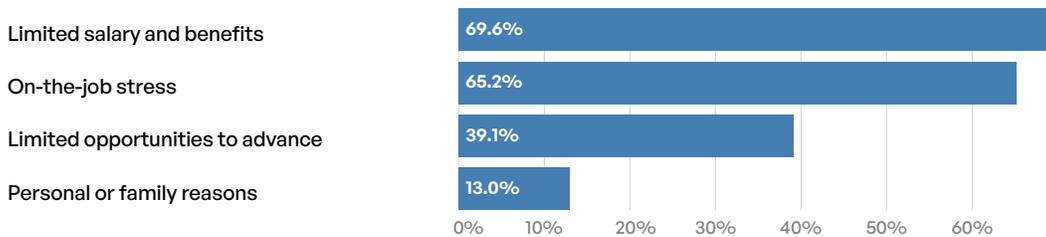


These pressures appear clearly in NW’s retention patterns. Nearly seven in ten workers (70%, or 23 out of 33 respondents) report having considered leaving their job within the past year—the highest proportion across the regions reviewed (Table 26). Among those who have considered leaving, 70% cite limited salary and benefits, 65% point to on-the-job stress as a major factor, and 39% mention limited opportunities to advance. Personal and family reasons were given by 13% of those considering departure (Table 27).

26. In the past 12 months, have you considered leaving your job?



27. If so, why?



Viewed together, the NW findings depict a workforce that is deeply mission-driven but operating in a context that intensifies workload and emotional strain. Geographic distance, scarce housing options, and a shortage of resources contribute to chronic pressure for staff who remain committed to their clients but face limited structural support. These conditions place the NW workforce at

heightened risk of turnover and underscore the critical need for targeted investment in staffing, compensation, and the infrastructure required to serve a wide and resource-constrained region.

Conclusions

Across Connecticut, frontline workers consistently report that meaningful and client-centered work motivates them to enter and remain in the homelessness services field. Many emphasized the personal meaning and community connection they find in their roles. *“My role makes me a part of my community,”* one respondent wrote, while another shared simply, *“self-rewarding as I help those in need.”* These statements align with the statewide quantitative data, which shows that mission-driven motivation remains one of the strongest anchors keeping staff in homelessness services.

At the same time, survey responses make clear that the daily realities of the job are testing this deep commitment across the state. Workers reported high levels of stress related to client needs, feeling overworked, and dissatisfaction with pay and benefits. Statewide, the dominant themes were frustration with securing housing and services, stress related to client well-being, administrative burden, and limited compensation. In Fairfield County, frustration was most acute around the lack of available housing or services for clients, which many workers experience as a direct barrier to doing their jobs well. In the Northwest, workers similarly named gaps in resources, along with pronounced concerns about overwork and administrative burden. Some respondents described the emotional toll of these conditions with striking clarity:

“These positions have us working the job of 2–3 people at a time while getting paid less than those working at Target.”

The statewide patterns are reflected—and in some cases intensified—at the regional level. Many workers expressed a need for more staffing, more time to rest and recover, and clearer pathways for growth. Despite these pressures, their dedication to clients remained evident, yet so did the risk of burnout. Nearly two-thirds of respondents statewide reported having considered leaving their job within the past year, alongside more than half the respondents in Fairfield County. In the Northwest, this share rose to approximately 70%, the highest proportion reported across the regions. Across all geographies, the most commonly cited reasons for considering departure included stress, compensation concerns, or limited advancement.

Taken together, these findings point to a workforce that is profoundly mission-driven but operating under conditions that may jeopardize long-term retention unless structural supports improve.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges and needs identified by frontline workers statewide and both regions, the survey results point to several areas for improvement:

- 1 Increase staffing levels or redistribute workloads**, given that substantial shares of workers statewide reported feeling overworked or understaffed.
- 2 Streamline administrative processes**, including reducing duplicative or burdensome paperwork, which many staff cited as a source of strain.
- 3 Expand access to training and professional development**, reflecting workers' stated desire for additional learning opportunities and support for career growth.
- 4 Provide more wellness and emotional support resources**, including counseling, peer support, or time to rest and recover, based on the number of respondents who reported needing these supports.
- 5 Develop clearer pathways for advancement**, as many workers indicated limited opportunities to advance in their careers.
- 6 Increase available resources for clients**, as this was the most common need identified and a major source of worker frustration.

Training

“All the trainings I did help me better understand how to talk about it with others.”

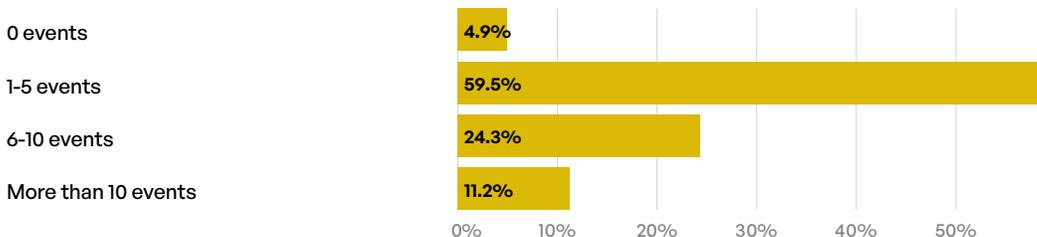
STATEWIDE

Across Connecticut, most frontline workers reported receiving formal training related to their roles in the homeless response system. More than three-quarters of respondents (76%) indicated they had received formal training, while 16% reported that they had not and 8% were unsure (Table 31). Participation in ongoing training over the past year was also common: nearly 60% of respondents said they had attended between one and five training events, while 24% participated in six to ten events and 11% attended more than ten. Only a small share (5%) reported no training participation in the past year (Table 34).

31. Have you received any formal training related to your role in the homeless response system?

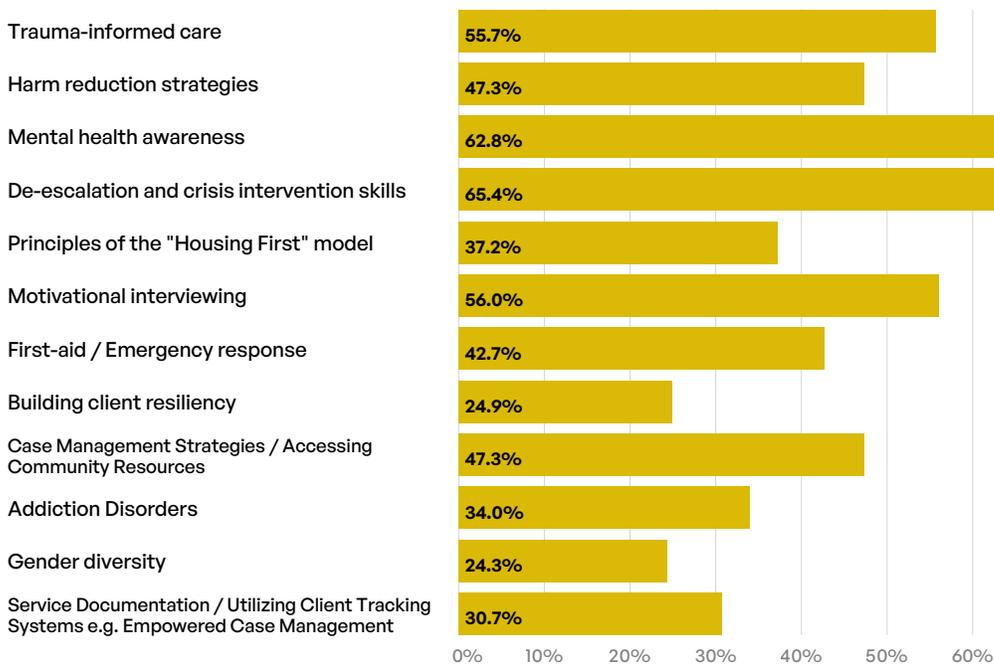


34. In the past year, how many training events have you participated in? e.g. training workshops, conferences, and training consultations.



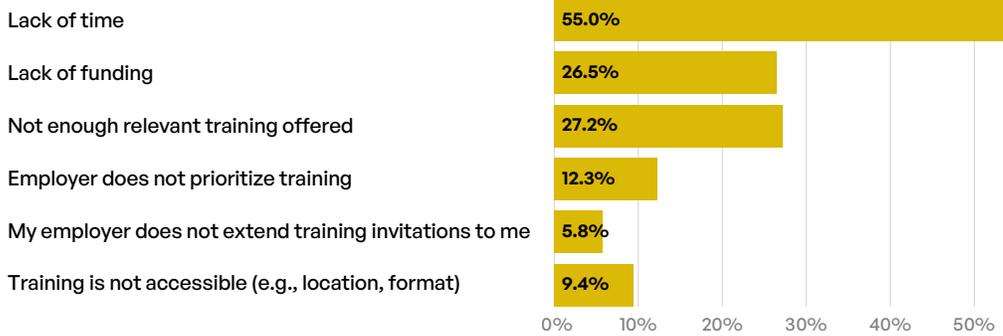
When asked which types of training they found most useful in their work, statewide respondents most often identified de-escalation and crisis intervention skills (65%), followed by mental health awareness (63%). Motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care were also frequently (56%) cited as valuable. Nearly half of respondents identified both harm reduction strategies and case management approaches, including accessing community resources (47%), as helpful in their roles. First aid and emergency response training was cited by 43% of respondents, followed by the principles of the Housing First model (37%). Smaller shares identified addiction disorders (34%), service documentation and client tracking systems (31%), building client resiliency (25%), and gender diversity (24%) as among the most useful training topics (Table 32).

32. Which types of training have you found most useful in your work?



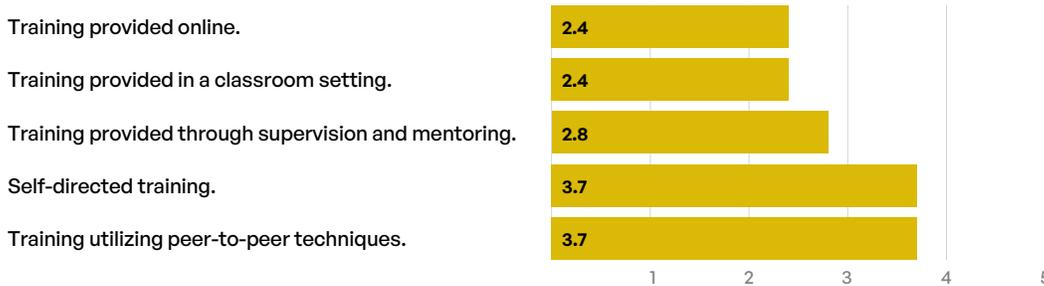
Despite the wide range of training topics used in their work, many statewide respondents reported barriers that limit their ability to participate fully in training opportunities. Lack of time emerged as the most significant obstacle, cited by 55% of respondents. Approximately one-quarter identified a lack of relevant training or insufficient funding (27%) as barriers. Smaller shares reported that training is not prioritized by their employer (12%), that training is not accessible due to location or format (9%), or that opportunities are not consistently communicated (6%) (Table 36).

36. What are the biggest barriers to accessing training?



When asked to rank their preferred formats for receiving training, statewide respondents expressed a clear preference for more structured and facilitated approaches. Online training and classroom-based instruction were ranked highest, each receiving an average preference score of 2.4 on a scale where 1 indicates most preferred and 5 least preferred. Training delivered through supervision and mentoring ranked in the middle (2.8), suggesting moderate interest in more embedded learning approaches. In contrast, self-directed training (3.7) and peer-to-peer training formats (3.7) were ranked lowest overall, indicating that respondents generally favor guided and organized training opportunities over independent or informal models (Table 35).

35. Please rank your preference for the way training is provided by ranking the following training formats from Most Preferred (1) to Least Preferred (5).



Taken together, the statewide training findings reflect a workforce that is broadly engaged in professional development and places a high value on skill-building related to crisis response, mental health, and client-centered practice. At the same time, time constraints, funding limitations, and uneven access continue to restrict participation in additional training that workers report would strengthen their ability to do their jobs effectively.

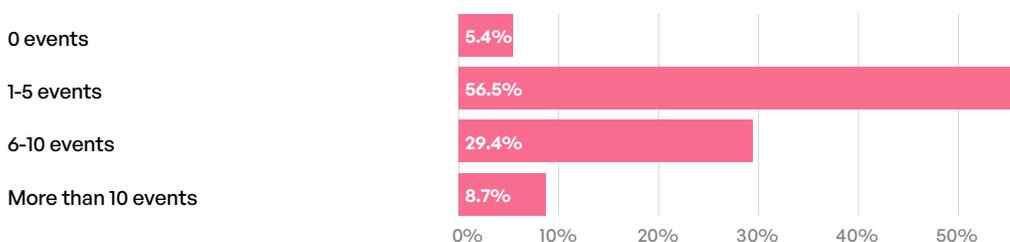
FAIRFIELD COUNTY

Most Fairfield County respondents reported having some formal preparation for their roles: 76% said they had received formal training related to their work in the homeless response system, while 16% said they had not, and 8% were unsure (Table 31). Training exposure over the past year was also relatively high. A majority of respondents (57%) reported attending one to five training events, while 29% participated in 6–10, 9% attended more than ten, and only 5% reported no training participation at all (Table 34).

31. Have you received any formal training related to your role in the homeless response system?



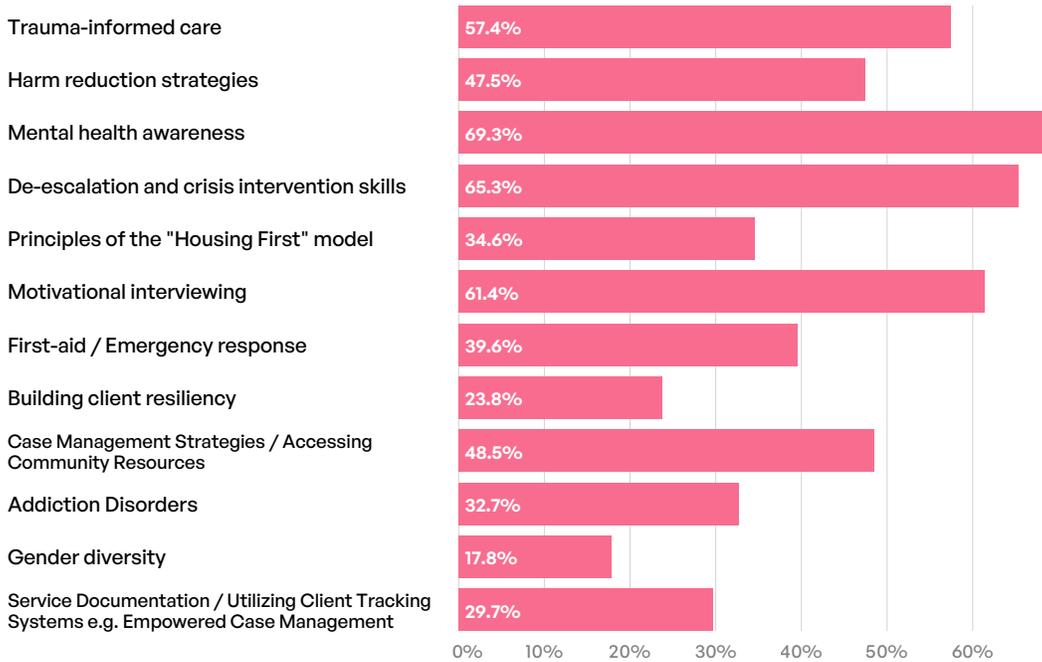
34. In the past year, how many training events have you participated in? e.g. training workshops, conferences, and training consultations.



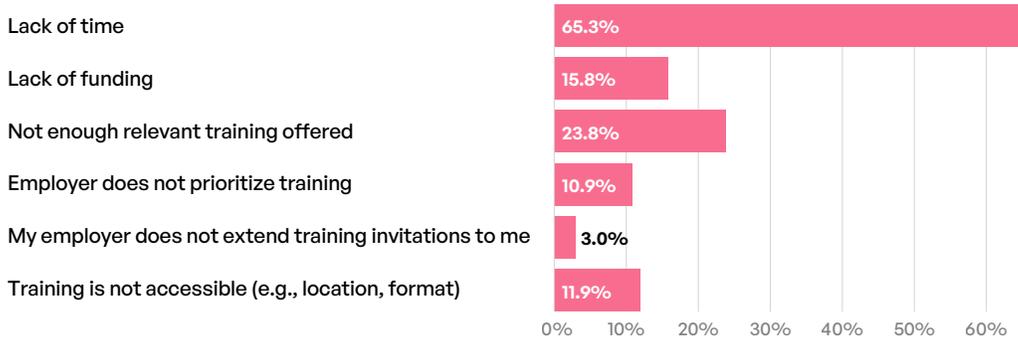
When asked which types of training they found most useful in their work, respondents pointed most frequently to mental health awareness (69%), de-escalation and crisis intervention skills (65%), and trauma-informed care (57%). More than half also identified motivational interviewing (61%) and nearly half pointed to case management strategies and accessing community resources (49%) as especially valuable. Other topics, such as harm reduction strategies (48%), first-aid and emergency response (40%), and the Housing First model (35%) were also noted by meaningful shares of respondents. Smaller proportions identified building client resiliency (24%), addiction disorders (33%), gender diversity (18%), or service documentation and client tracking systems (30%) as among the most useful training topics (Table 32).

Despite this interest in expanding their skills, many FC staff face obstacles to accessing training. Sixty-five percent cited lack of time as a barrier, and 24% said that not enough relevant training is offered. Additional barriers included lack of funding (16%), training that is not easily accessible due to location or format (12%), and perceptions that their employer does not prioritize training (11%). Very few respondents (3%) indicated they do not receive training invitations (Table 36).

32. Which types of training have you found most useful in your work?



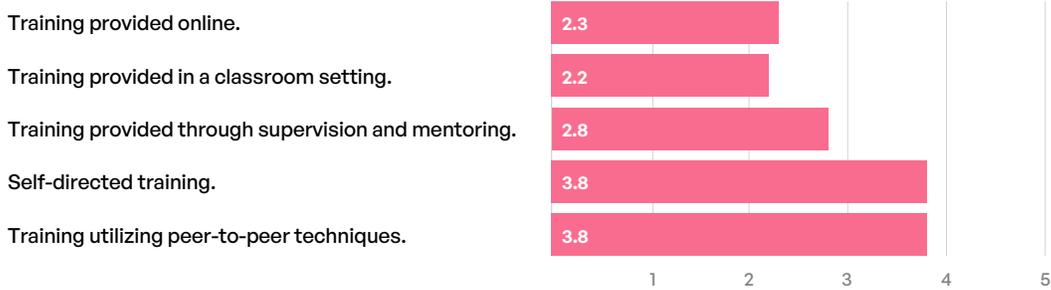
36. What are the biggest barriers to accessing training?



Regarding how workers prefer to receive training, respondents rated classroom-based instruction and online training as their top choices. Classroom-based training received an average preference ranking of 2.22, and online training 2.33 on a scale where 1 is most preferred and 5 is least preferred. Training through supervision and mentoring fell in the middle (2.81). Self-directed training (3.81) and peer-to-peer approaches (3.83) were rated least favorably (Table 35).

Overall, the FC training data suggest a workforce that is well-exposed to formal training opportunities and finds mental-health- and crisis-related content especially helpful, but also experiences time constraints, resource limitations, and access challenges that can restrict participation in additional training they say would better prepare them for their roles.

35. Please rank your preference for the way training is provided by ranking the following training formats from Most Preferred (1) to Least Preferred (5).



NORTHWEST CAN

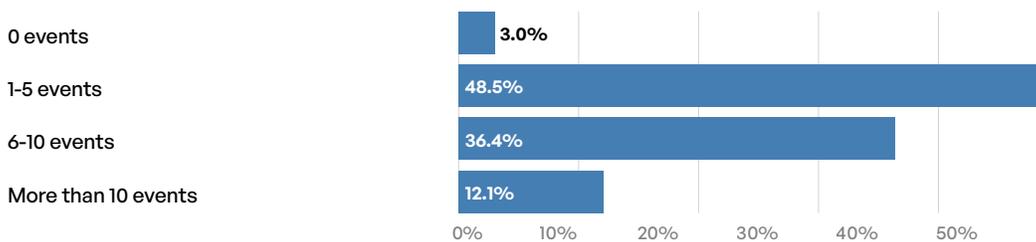
Nearly all Northwest respondents reported entering their roles with some form of structured preparation. 94% said they had received formal training related to their work in the homeless response system, while only 3% said they had not and another 3% were unsure (Table 31).

31. Have you received any formal training related to your role in the homeless response system?



Participation in ongoing training was also common: over the past year, 49% of respondents attended one to five training events, 36% took part in six to ten, and 12% engaged in more than ten. Only 3% reported no participation in training at all (Table 34).

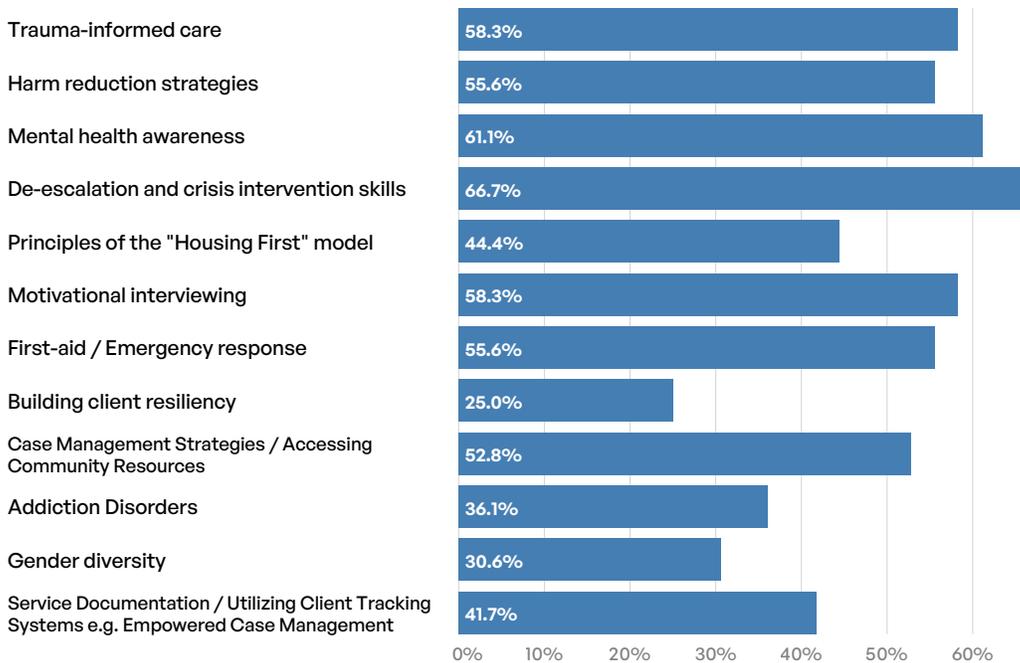
34. In the past year, how many training events have you participated in? e.g. training workshops, conferences, and training consultations.



When asked which types of training they found most beneficial in their day-to-day work, Northwest staff identified a strong cluster of core topics, with harm

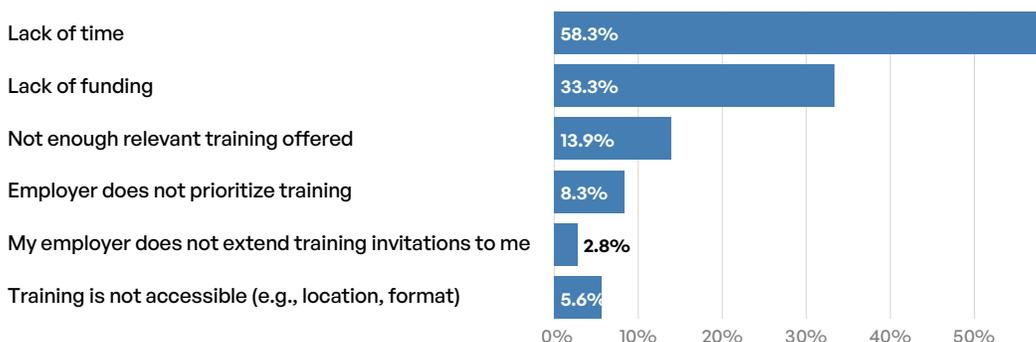
reduction strategies standing out prominently, in comparison to FC, 56% of respondents highlighted it as useful. Workers also frequently pointed to de-escalation and crisis intervention skills (67%), mental health awareness (61%), trauma-informed care (58%), and motivational interviewing (58%) as highly relevant to their roles. Several additional areas were seen as valuable by notable portions of staff, including first-aid and emergency response (56%), case management and accessing community resources (53%), and the principles of the Housing First model (44%). Smaller shares identified addiction disorders (36%), gender diversity (31%), and service documentation or client tracking systems (42%) as useful, while 25% pointed to building client resiliency as helpful (Table 32).

32. Which types of training have you found most useful in your work?



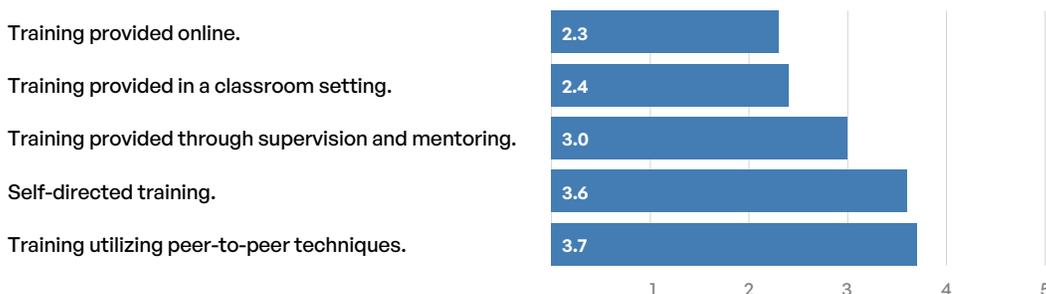
Although most Northwest staff reported regular participation in training, many also described barriers that limit their ability to fully access the opportunities available to them. Lack of time was the most frequently reported obstacle, cited by 58% of respondents. Another substantial share (33%) identified a lack of funding as a barrier. Smaller but still meaningful proportions noted that not enough relevant training is offered (14%) or that their employer does not prioritize training (8%). Only a few respondents reported issues such as not receiving training invitations (3%) or finding that training is not accessible due to location or format (6%) (Table 36).

36. What are the biggest barriers to accessing training?



In terms of preferred formats for training delivery, NW respondents expressed a fairly balanced set of preferences. On a scale where 1 indicates most preferred and 5 least preferred, online training (2.3) and classroom-based instruction (2.43) ranked highest. Training through supervision or mentoring received a moderate score (3.03), while self-directed learning (3.57) and peer-to-peer approaches (3.67) were rated lower (Table 35).

35. Please rank your preference for the way training is provided by ranking the following training formats from Most Preferred (1) to Least Preferred (5).



Taken together, the NW training results depict a workforce that engages actively in professional development and finds crisis-response, mental-health, and harm-reduction content especially relevant. At the same time, NW staff report that time constraints, limited relevant offerings, and funding shortages can impede access to the training they need to remain fully prepared for their roles.

Conclusions

Across Connecticut, frontline workers rely on training to navigate the complex and often urgent needs of clients. Statewide findings show strong alignment across regions: Staff identified many of the same areas as essential to their work: trauma-informed care, harm reduction, mental health awareness, motivational interviewing, de-escalation, and case management. Staff expressed that training, while widely valued, does not operate in isolation from the broader conditions shaping

frontline work. Many described the pace and volume of daily responsibilities as a primary constraint, as one respondent put it:

“[The] amount of clients served in one day require all staff present at times.”

Even with trainings available, the realities of understaffing, heavy caseloads, and constant crises often prevent workers from being able to participate. Others stressed the need for sustained, rather than one-off, support:

“Trainings should be ongoing, we need all training to do our job well.”

At the same time, several respondents underscored that the issue is not simply the absence of training opportunities.

“All of these are available to me. Training isn’t the problem. Again, make the field lucrative enough for people to want to go to college for humans services/ social work again.”

Workers also pointed to gaps that existing trainings do not fully address, especially the need for more precise coordination across the system. As one respondent explained, “*interconnections between agencies and roles*” remain unclear, limiting their ability to navigate housing pathways and support clients effectively. Together, these insights suggest that while ongoing, high-quality training is essential across Connecticut, workforce sustainability statewide and in Western Connecticut hinges just as much on manageable workloads, system clarity, and compensation that reflects the complexity of the work.

Recommendations

- **Expand core training areas that workers rely on most.** Increase the availability and depth of training in trauma-informed care, harm reduction, mental health, crisis intervention, motivational interviewing, and case management.

- **Develop coordinated regional training pathways.** Create training calendars, competency frameworks, and recommended sequences, so staff across different agencies and CANs receive consistent preparation and advancement opportunities.
- **Reduce time-related barriers.** Work with providers to offer protected training hours, lighter caseload days during trainings, and access to asynchronous formats that better accommodate front-line schedules.
- **Address funding constraints.** Support agencies in reducing training-related costs through pooled resources, regional partnerships, and free or low-cost offerings led by subject-matter experts.
- **Improve communication of opportunities.** Ensure training invitations, schedules, and updates are delivered through reliable, centralized channels so workers do not miss opportunities simply due to inconsistent internal communication.
- **Match delivery formats to worker preferences.** Expand online and classroom-based trainings and offer more applied, skills-practice opportunities (e.g., coaching, peer learning) for workers who benefit from hands-on application.
- **Link training to career development and retention.** Build clearer progression pathways where advanced training aligns with promotion opportunities.

Methodology

The Housing Innovation Lab, an initiative of the Housing Collective, provides data, analytics, technology, and training resources to enhance the collective response to homelessness and housing affordability in Connecticut. To develop this survey, the Lab took inspiration from similar surveys that have been conducted by the National Alliance to End Homelessness⁸ and the Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University.⁹ They did this in partnership with the Housing Collective’s Opening Doors Initiative (ODI). ODI manages the homelessness emergency response system throughout western Connecticut, including Fairfield County, Litchfield County, and greater Waterbury. Through the Opening Doors Initiative, the Housing Collective serves as the designated backbone organization for the homeless response system in Western Connecticut. This means we provide dedicated staff and administrative support to align, coordinate, and measure the impact

8 Joy Moses, *Working in Homeless Services: A Survey of the Field*, Homelessness Research Institute, December 5th, 2023.

9 Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University (2024). *The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City, Volume 6*. Robin Hood.

of more than 150 individual partners within the system like shelters, landlords, and social service providers.

The resulting survey included 36 multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. It was distributed digitally to all seven Coordinated Access Networks in the state from October 6th until November 7th, 2025. Responses reflect self-reported data from 309 individuals across a range of frontline roles. Because participation varied by region, results should be interpreted as reflective of respondent experiences rather than a full census of the workforce.

As a voluntary survey, results may be influenced by self-selection, and some job categories or regions may be under- or over-represented. The streamlined 2025 design means many items are not directly comparable to 2023, and reduced demographic questions limit subgroup analysis. Even with these limitations, the survey provides meaningful insight into workforce experiences across Western Connecticut.

Building on lessons from the 2023 Workforce Survey, the 2025 survey focused more deeply on three core areas affecting staff sustainability: material hardship, workplace conditions, and training needs. The survey design was streamlined to reduce respondent burden, clarify key questions, and concentrate on issues that emerged as urgent and actionable in the prior survey. The revised structure allowed the Lab to gather more detailed and actionable information.

The Housing Innovation Lab made many changes between the 2023 and 2025 surveys. While these changes were driven by the results of the 2023 survey, many of the specific questions asked in each survey are not directly comparable. However, the themes of both surveys remain similar. In 2023, staff were asked about their general working conditions as well as racial equity, working with people with lived experience, and training needs. When reviewing the results of this survey, the Lab identified ongoing questions related to staff's financial health and working conditions, as well as limitations in the geographic scope of the data, which focused on Western Connecticut. These findings informed the decision to collect more comprehensive, statewide workforce data in order to support policy analysis, advocacy, and system-level planning across Connecticut. The 2025 survey was therefore streamlined to ask staff more focused questions on three specific areas: their experiences of material hardship, their working conditions, and their training needs.

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