

What should the next Welsh Government do?

2026 Senedd election
RCN Wales member
survey report



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Nursing staff are the backbone of patient care and the largest health workforce. Many are members of the Royal College of Nursing. This survey of 1,156 RCN Wales members is a unique view of health and social care across Wales – from busy urban hospitals to remote rural communities.

In May 2026, Wales will elect a new Welsh Government under a new electoral system. Political parties will contest 16 new Senedd constituencies, each home to an average of 2000 RCN members.

Whichever political party (or parties) make up the next Welsh Government will be responsible for health, social care, education, and all other devolved matters.

They must earn the trust of nursing staff.



This survey asks one key question: What do nursing staff want from the next Welsh Government?

About this survey



Methodology

This report is based on the results of an online survey of 1,156 members of RCN Wales. Survey participants represented registered nurses, midwives, health care support workers, and nursing students from all five political regions of Wales. The online survey was active from 31 January 2025 to 31 March 2025.

In questions where participants ranked answers in order of preference, each rank was given a point score. Those scores were added up across all respondents and expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score. This is to enable a clearer comparison of member priorities regardless of how many options were available.

The survey was conducted by the Policy, Parliamentary and Public Affairs team at RCN Wales. For more information, please contact nicholas.unwin@rcn.org.uk.

About the Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing, representing over 500,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, health care support workers and nursing students, including over 30,500 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with National Boards in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in nursing practice and shapes health and social care policy.

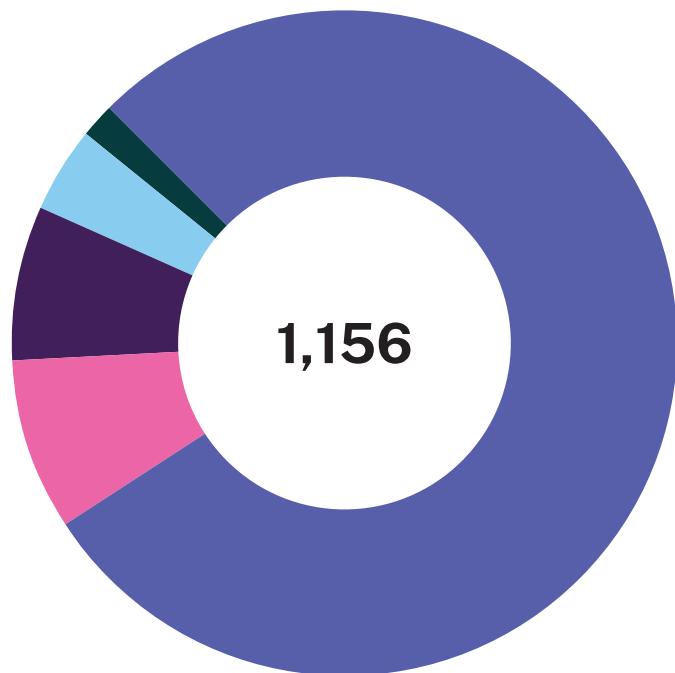




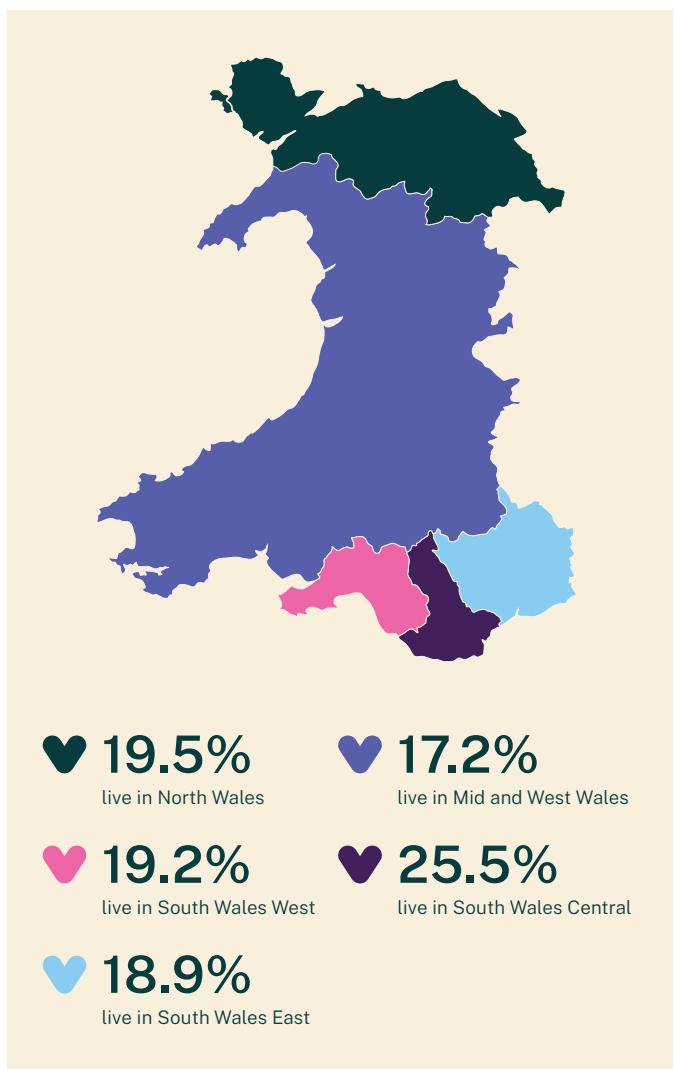
Our respondents

Our respondents represent the **whole nursing profession**, in every part of Wales.

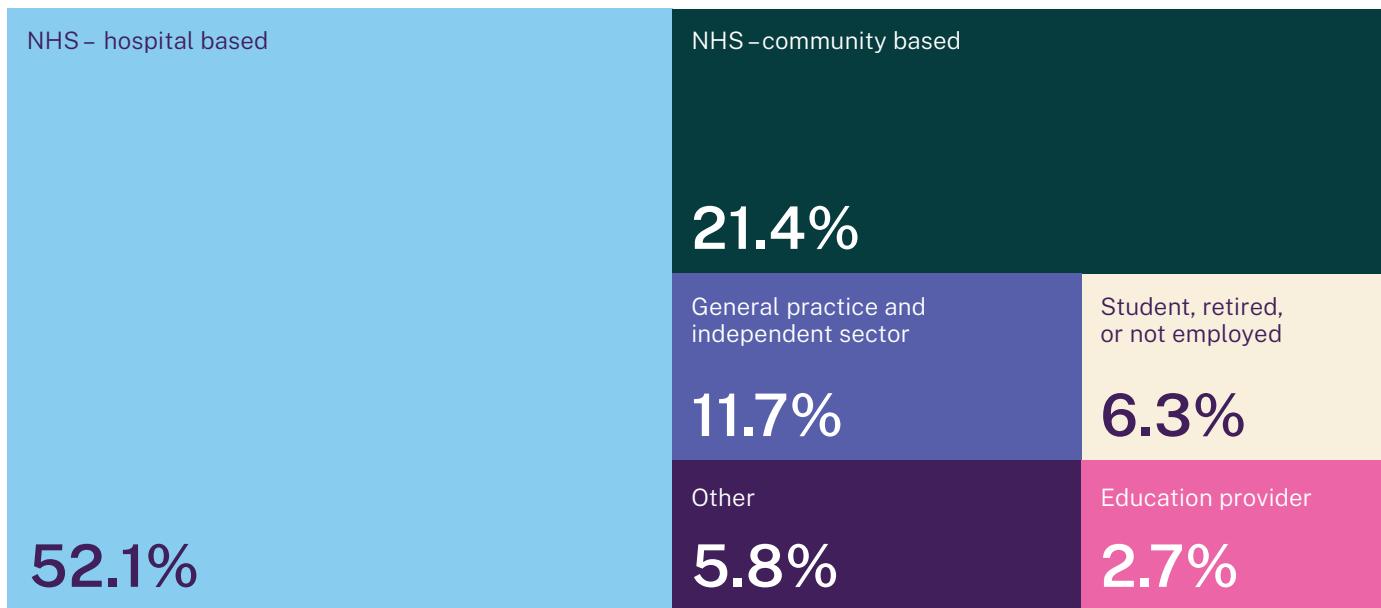
1,156 respondents, representing the full spectrum of our membership.



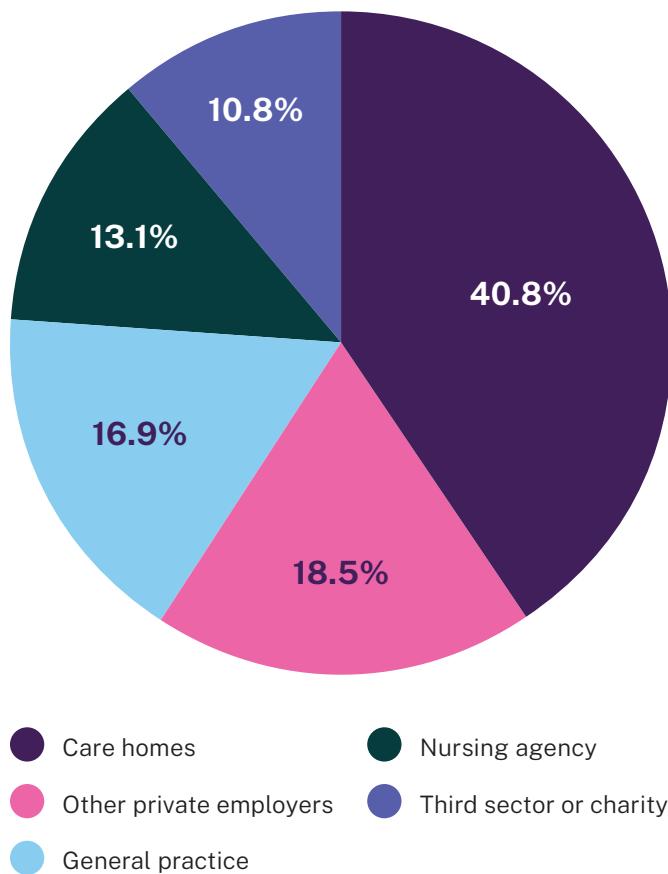
We had a **strong response from members** in every political region.



While just over half work in NHS hospitals, over a third are based in the community.



More than one in ten respondents work primarily for a **GP practice or independent sector employer** like a care home, nursing agency, or in the third sector.





Corridor care is a national crisis

“Corridor care” has become widespread and entrenched in NHS Wales, presenting a serious new risk to patients’ lives.

What is corridor care?

- Patients treated in unsafe, inappropriate spaces — corridors, storage areas, waiting rooms, even toilets
- Used by health boards to manage emergency department pressure

Why is it unsafe?

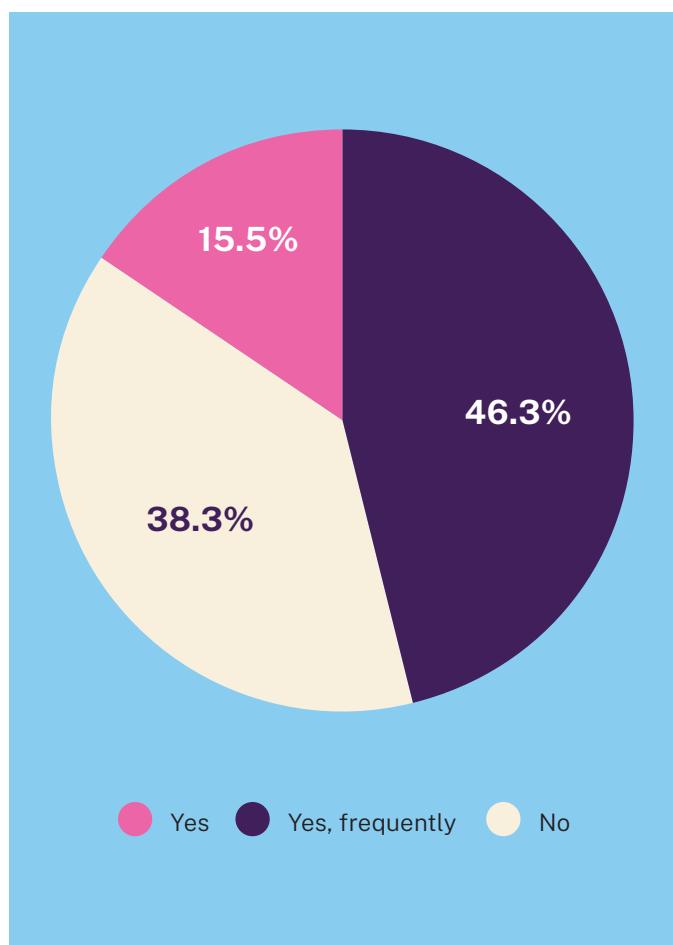
- Shared oxygen/suction equipment may delay urgent care
- Insufficient space for emergency interventions
- Too few nurses to monitor patients safely
- No privacy during intimate examinations
- Overcrowding blocks cleaning, hygiene, and fire exits



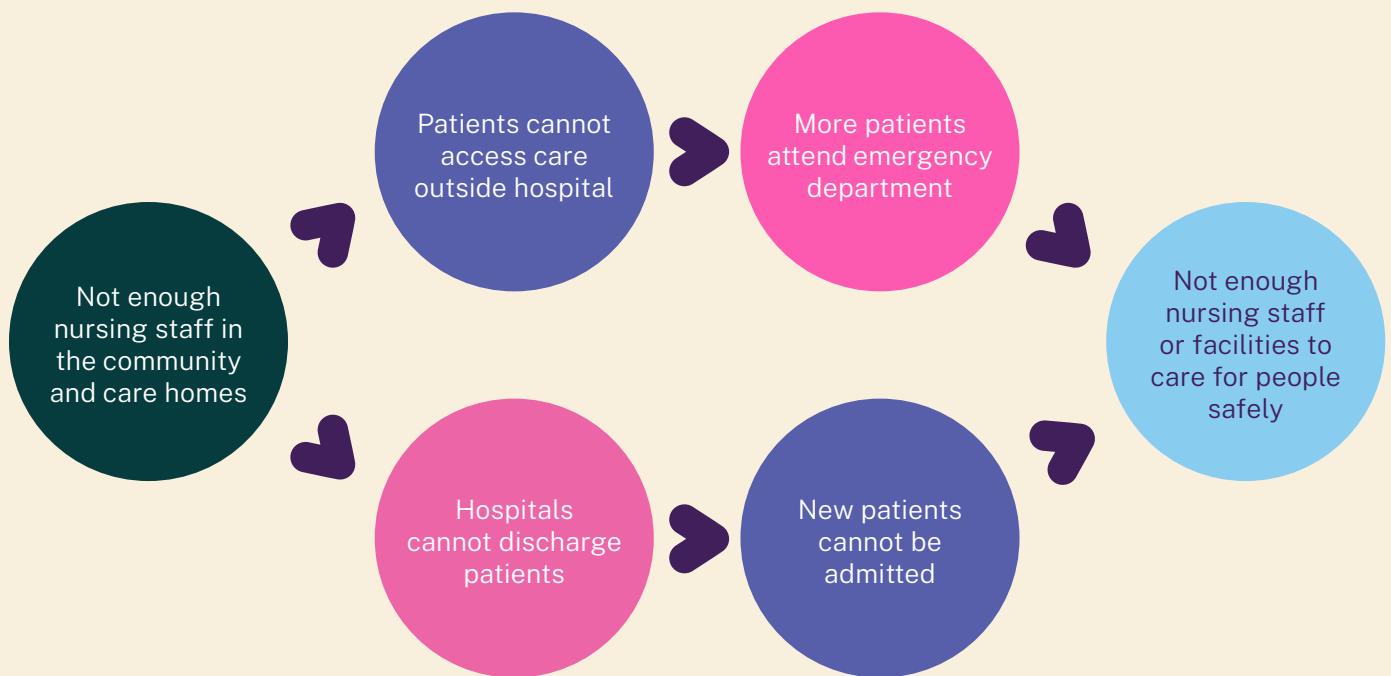
This crisis is almost as bad as the pandemic.

61.8% of our members working in NHS Wales hospitals say **corridor care is a problem** where they work.

Percentage of all respondents reporting that corridor care is a problem in their team or workplace:



How corridor care happens:



“

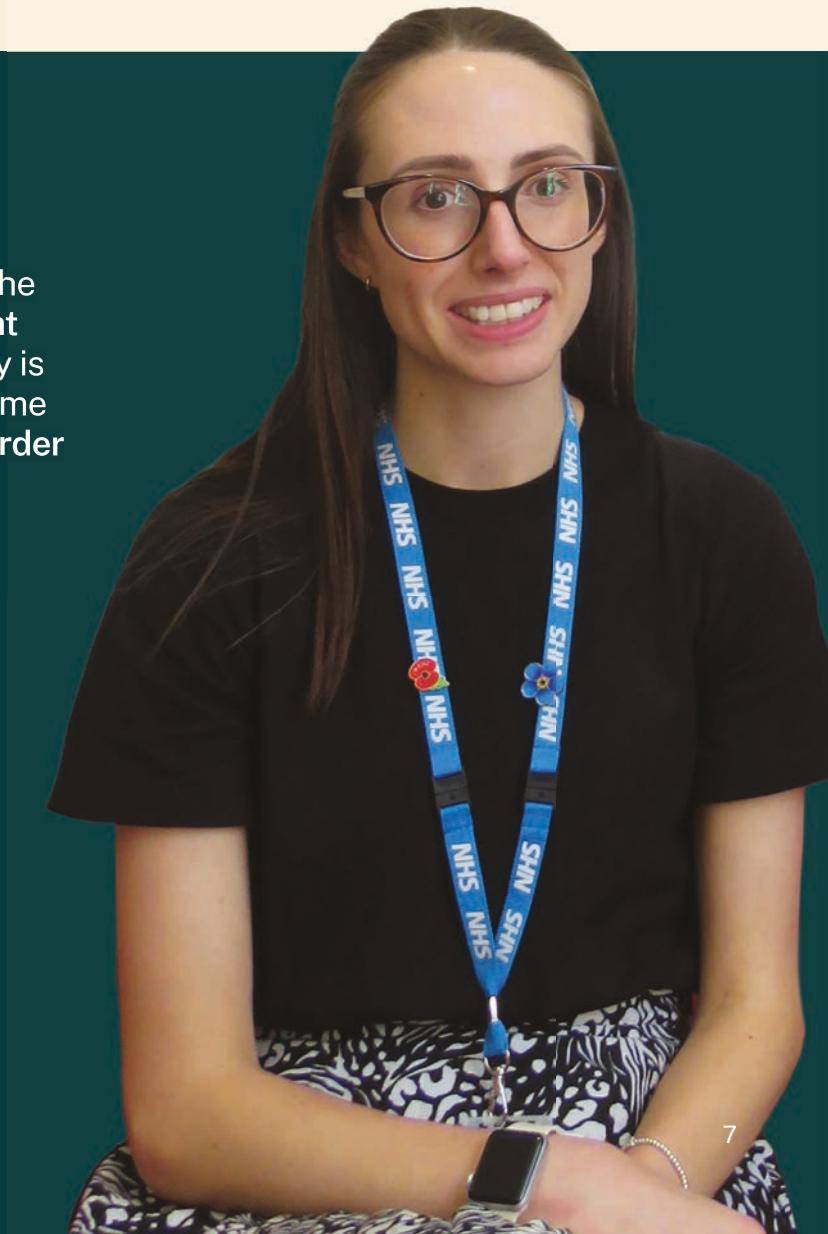
The worst thing about nursing BY FAR is the issue of corridor care. It has made me **want to leave the profession**. The lack of dignity is disgusting, and I feel like a failure every time I go to work, even though I am **working harder than ever** for my patients.

“

We are at breaking point. Emergency departments are no longer able to function and we are causing harm to patients. **Corridor care must stop!**

“

The whole picture is bleak... the government **need to take responsibility accountability**.



Majorities of RCN members in every region of Wales report seeing corridor care where they work.

No region of Wales escapes corridor care.

The situation in North Wales is especially acute. Over two thirds of RCN members in North Wales said that corridor care was a problem in their workplace. **That's 28.0% more than in South Wales Central.**

Below: percentages of respondents working primarily in NHS Wales hospitals who responded either "yes" or "yes, frequently" when asked whether corridor care was a problem in their team or workplace.

❤ 68.5%

North Wales

❤ 62.2%

Mid and West Wales

❤ 62.6%

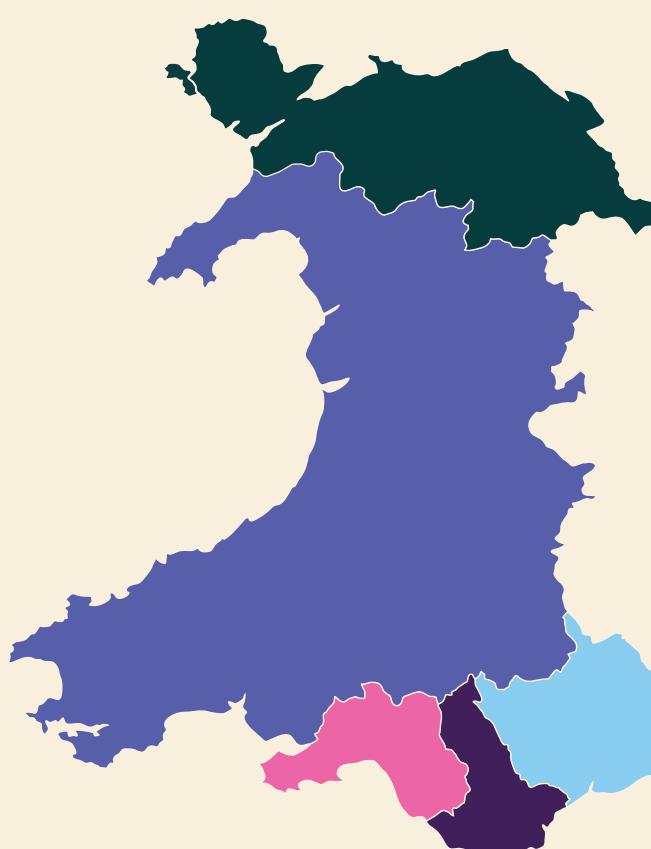
South Wales West

❤ 53.5%

South Wales Central

❤ 64.2%

South Wales East



“ Everyone is **utterly exhausted** from the nurses and doctors to the cleaners and porters in the NHS in North Wales.

It's disgraceful and shameful how many elderly or very sick and vulnerable people are treated in corridors or left to wait for 24 hours before they get onto a ward.

To end corridor care, our members say invest in community care.

To end corridor care, RCN Wales members say these actions for the next Welsh Government matter most:

(Ranked scores as % of maximum possible points)



52.1% of our respondents are based in hospitals – yet they say **investment outside hospital** is essential.

“

Everyone seems to know that the way to resolve it is to increase discharges of medically fit patients on wards to the community. This is still not happening.

Support care homes as an essential part of community care.

When care homes employ registered nurses, residents who would otherwise need hospital can be treated where they live. This is better for everybody.

To **support nursing in care homes**, our respondents said these three Welsh Government actions matter most:

(Ranked scores as % of maximum possible points)

1. Promote registered nursing in care homes with a national campaign.

Score

76.4%

2. Finance the care sector in Wales fairly and sustainably.

Score

72.8%

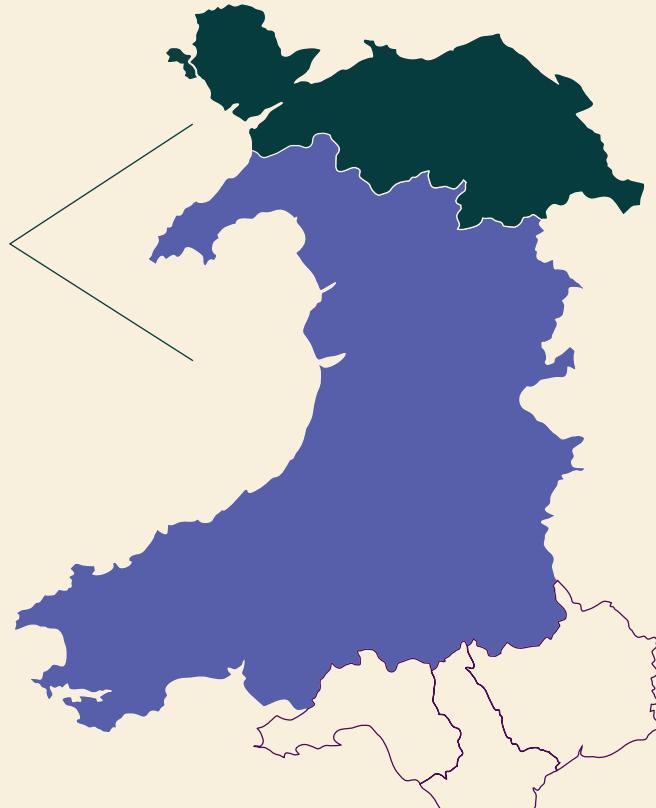
3. Ensure all nursing staff in the independent sector have pay and benefits on a par with the NHS.

Score

71.9%

Members in **North Wales** and in **Mid and West Wales** are especially concerned about making sure that pay and benefits in the independent sector match those in the NHS.

In these regions, this issue ranked as the second most important priority, compared to third place at the national level.



● North Wales

● Mid and West Wales

Invest more in people's health as well as their care.



Registered nurses help people stay healthier at every age.



Health visitors help children get the healthiest start in life.



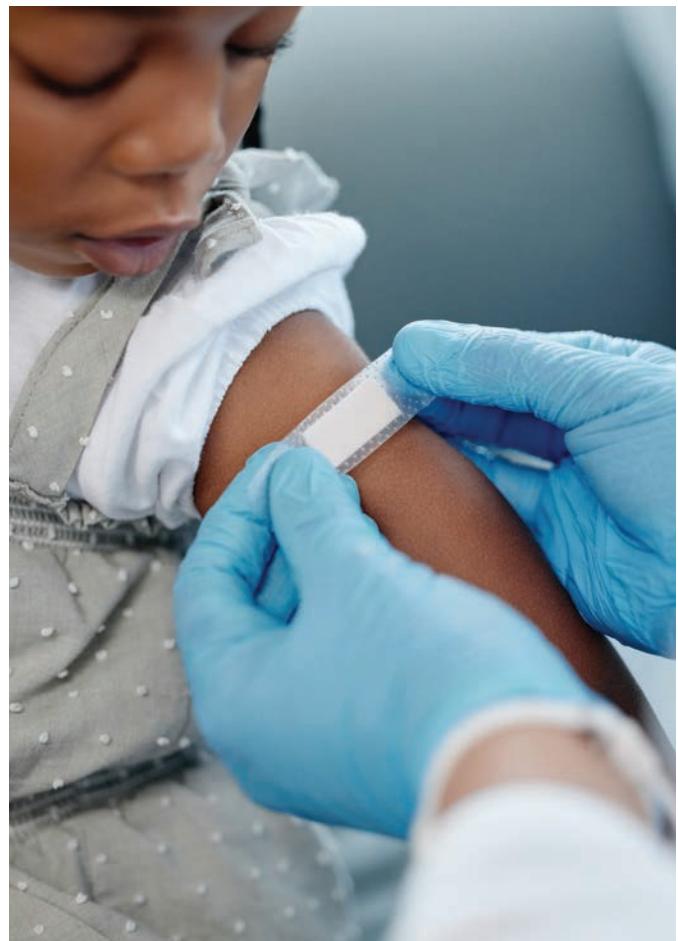
School nurses support children's health as they grow.



Occupational health nurses help people stay well at work. Nurses working in the community (including general practice and primary care) help people of all ages with learning disabilities, or chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes.

“

The funding and resources being put into preventative methods is **not enough**. We're currently working in a reactive manner ... If we invest in tackling issues early we can stop them becoming unmanageable. This can be done by working on our primary care.



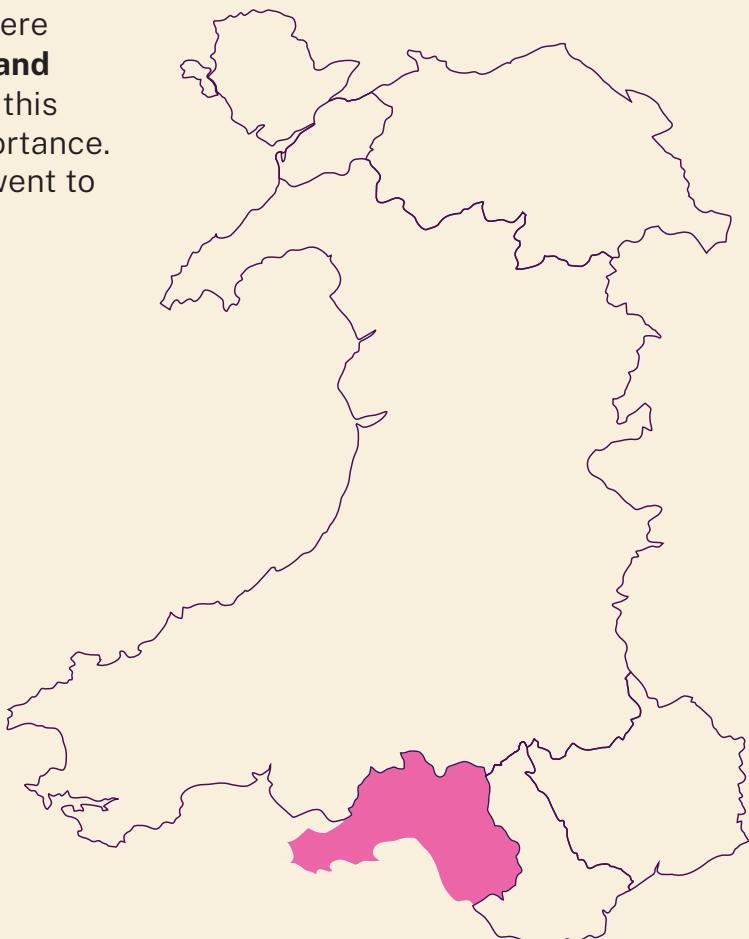
To improve public health, our respondents said these three Welsh Government actions matter most:

(Ranked scores as % of maximum possible points)



In **South Wales West**, members were especially worried about **alcohol and substance misuse services**. Only this region ranked them fourth in importance. In all other regions, fourth place went to smoking cessation services.

The top three were the same in every region of Wales.





Pay and the future of nursing in Wales

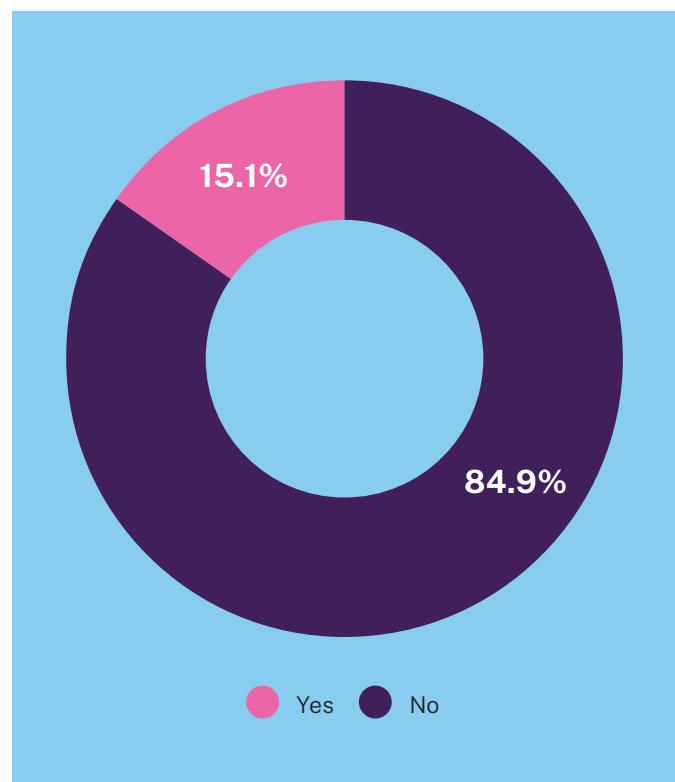
84.9% of members in Wales feel their pay **doesn't reflect their worth.**

In the latest RCN employment survey, published in 2023, 74% of respondents in Wales reported working overtime at least once a week. Of these, more than 40% said this work usually went unpaid.

If 74% of NHS Wales nurses work an additional four hours a week, that means NHS Wales benefits from an extra 73,651 hours of nursing labour every week.

That's equivalent to employing an extra 1,964 full time nurses.

Asked whether their current pay fairly reflects their level of education, skills and experience, our respondents answered:



You wonder why nurses are leaving. We are over-worked, do not get flexible working hours and, if we do discuss these vital issues, we are seen as the argumentative ones.

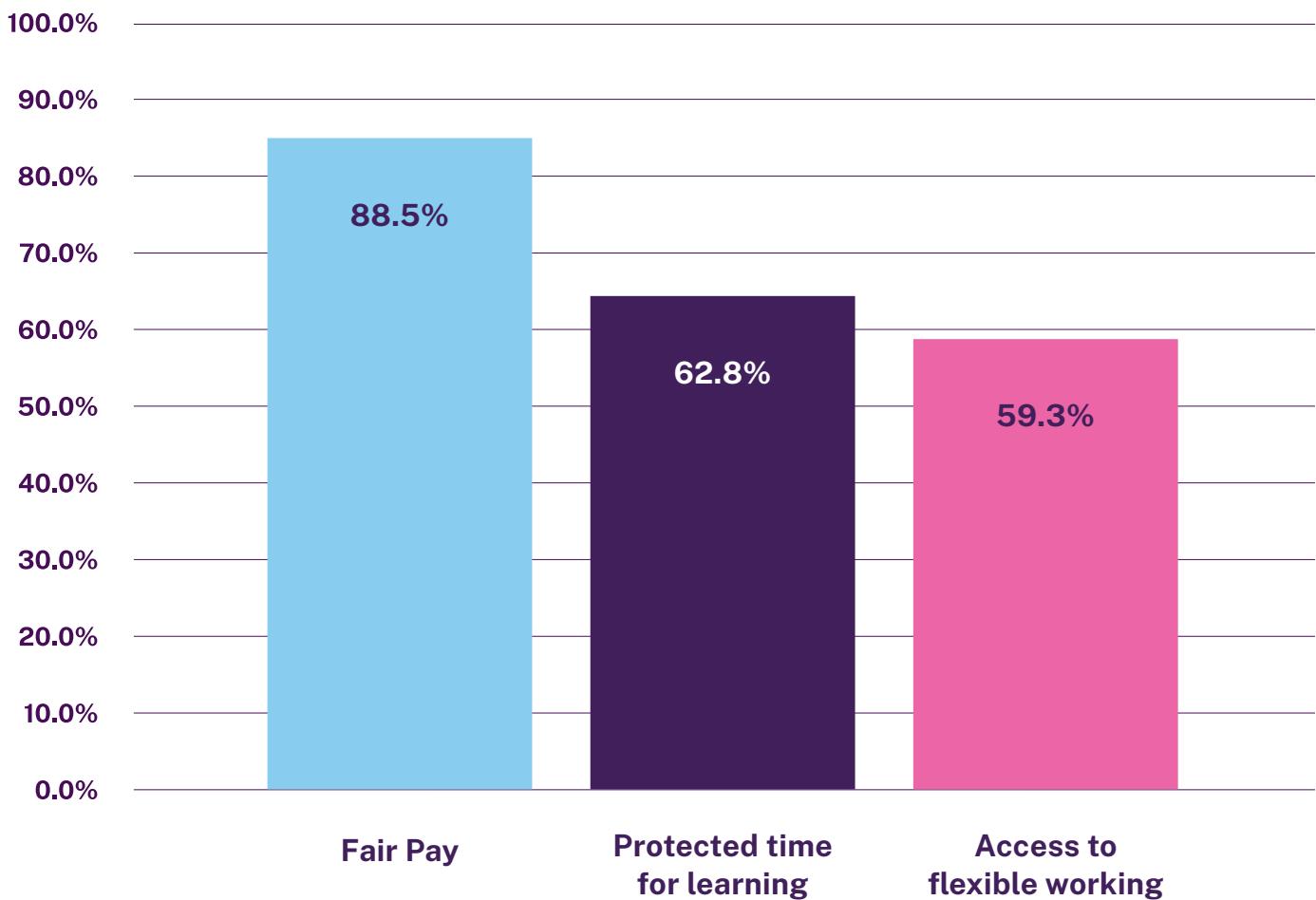


I have only been a nurse for three years, and I'm already considering moving onto a completely different career path for the same pay and significantly less stress.

In every region, our members say **pay is the number one barrier to recruiting and keeping nursing staff.**

Our respondents say that, to **attract and retain enough nursing staff**, employers must prioritise:

(Ranked scores as % of maximum possible points)



 Pay

Our members ranked pay as the most important issue by far when it comes to attracting and retaining nurses. **NHS nursing pay in Wales remains well below the levels seen before 2011** –even though demand for nursing skill has only grown. NHS pay acts as an anchor for the independent sector, too.

 Flexible working

Difficulty accessing flexible working is one thing **driving nursing staff away from inflexible NHS employment** and towards agencies, which offer more control –and frequently better pay. For many other professions, flexible working is the norm. Why shouldn't it be for nursing?

 Professional development

Just like any other regulated profession, registered nurses need to keep their skills up to date. This is called “continuing professional development”, or CPD. Not only does CPD keep patients safe, but it’s also **a prerequisite for nurses to practice at all**. Yet many employers –even within NHS Wales –won’t support their nurses to do any CPD in work time.



To grow the nursing workforce, support students with the NHS bursary –and protect courses from closure.

To support **educating the next generation of nurses**, our respondents say the next Welsh Government should:

(Ranked scores as % of maximum possible points)

1. Increase the NHS Student bursary.

Score
75.6%

2. Support universities to prevent the closure of nursing departments.

Score
60.5%

3. Expand nursing degree apprenticeships nationally.

Score
56.8%



The NHS Wales bursary has not increased in ten years

The Welsh Government pays nursing students' tuition fees directly to universities and gives them a modest bursary to support their studies. But the bursary is not enough to prevent a significant number from facing financial hardship.



The nursing degree

Becoming a registered nurse takes time. Becoming an experienced registered nurse takes even longer. The first step is a demanding undergraduate degree consisting of 2,300 hours of study and 2,300 hours of clinical practice. The program leaves little room for part-time work – but it's essential for developing the key clinical and intellectual skills nurses need. And the payoff is safer care. Every 10% increase in the number of degree-educated registered nurses in a hospital is linked to 7% lower mortality.



The pipeline of future nurses in Wales is in real jeopardy... make the degree a financially viable option for students.

Our members' concerns over threats to nursing higher education reached far beyond Cardiff.

Our members are also still clearly concerned by Cardiff University's proposal in 2025 to discontinue nursing education. For our members in South Wales Central, their second-highest priority is for the next Welsh Government to support universities to prevent nursing department closures.



Importantly, this is a **significant concern for our members across Wales**, coming in second place nationally. In **North Wales** and in **South Wales West**, second place went to expansion of the degree apprenticeship route into the nursing profession.

How respondents say the Welsh Government should support nursing education:

(Ranked scores as % of maximum possible points)

- Increase the NHS bursary
- Expand degree apprenticeships
- Support universities to prevent nursing department closures



Our members have the last word...



Please invest in nursing. It isn't working as things are. Think of the bigger picture and how it affects the whole of society. It needs money and it needs huge change.

Nursing is an evidence-based, safety critical profession that is continuously let down and underfunded by the government... Patient safety is being put at risk, this cannot continue.

It is essential that nurses have a progression pathway. Nurses should be recognised for the professionals they are.

Help us before it's too late. The system isn't at breaking point, it's already broken. But there's still time to change it.

Invest more in primary care. Acute hospitals are for acutely ill people, not patients waiting for care packages.

Increase pay and support for registered nurses and student nurses. Right now, there is little incentive for people to join or remain in the profession.

The lack of social care services is failing nurses and their patients, who wait weeks or months for social worker allocation and packages of care.

Don't erode nurse education and keep graduate entry to the profession.

Thank you



Coleg Nyrdd Brenhinol
Cymru
Royal College of Nursing
Wales



**STRONGER
NURSING,
STRONGER
NATION**