

# Annual State of Nursing Report

AI Adoption Trends & Future Implications for Retention



# Nurses have entered the AI era. The employers with clear strategy and holistic implementation will lead on productivity, hiring, and retention.

**AI adoption is real and accelerating.** In a single year, nurses using AI nearly tripled, including charting, drug and clinical reference lookups, and finding their next job. However, adoption of AI among healthcare employers just started. Without a cohesive strategy, thoughtful rollout, and robust training, the productivity gains from that adoption remain minimal.

**Retention is the second risk.** Three out of four nurses have applied or seriously considered a new role in the past 3 years. Compensation matters, but it is far from the only lever to drive retention. Other solutions they're looking for include access to growth opportunities, broader scheduling options, improved staffing, and stronger managers.

## 4 Key Findings

### Adoption is outpacing implementation strategy.

Nurses' AI usage nearly tripled in a year, from 15% to 44%. Yet only 8% of nurses say their employer has set a clear AI strategy for how AI is to be applied to their work.

### Untrained AI usage is a tax, not a tool.

Nearly half of nurses say AI saved them little or no time. Training changes that: nurses who received training are far more likely to gain time back. Among nurses without proper training, only 16% reported saving over an hour per day with AI adoption. However, among nurses with proper training, 24% reported saving over an hour per day.

### Nurses job-search with AI, but healthcare employers don't hire with it.

39% of nurses now use AI in their job search, while only 4% of healthcare employers use it to screen or hire. Candidates are racing ahead with AI adoption, and the healthcare employers have only just started.

### Nurses are often looking for new roles, and pay is not the only lever to keep them.

75% of nurses have applied or seriously considered applying for a new job in the past 3 years, but only 20% search based on salary. In addition to a pay raise, the levers that would retain them include adequate staffing, career growth opportunities, flexible scheduling options, and great management or leadership. These levers are often more affordable than compensation changes, and they are in the healthcare employer's ability to execute and communicate to their workforce.

**Nurses are adopting AI faster than healthcare employers are setting a strategy for it.**

# Adoption of AI among nurses nearly tripled in a year.

AI adoption among nurses is speeding up. In one year, the share of nurses using AI nearly tripled to 44%. 86% of AI nurse users are satisfied or somewhat satisfied, and the more a nurse uses AI, the less they fear it.

That is a flywheel: comfort grows with use, and use grows with comfort. The nurses still on the sidelines are the most anxious, but more step in every month. For healthcare employers, this is evidence that AI in the workforce is not a wave to wait out, but a baseline that will continue to rise.

## Nurse AI use

44% of nurses now use AI at work, up from a 15% baseline a year ago. Adoption nearly tripled in the last 12 months.

# 86%

of AI users are satisfied with the experience (36% very, 50% somewhat).

**Only 3% are very dissatisfied.**

**The more nurses use AI, the less they fear it.**

Among regular users

## 37%

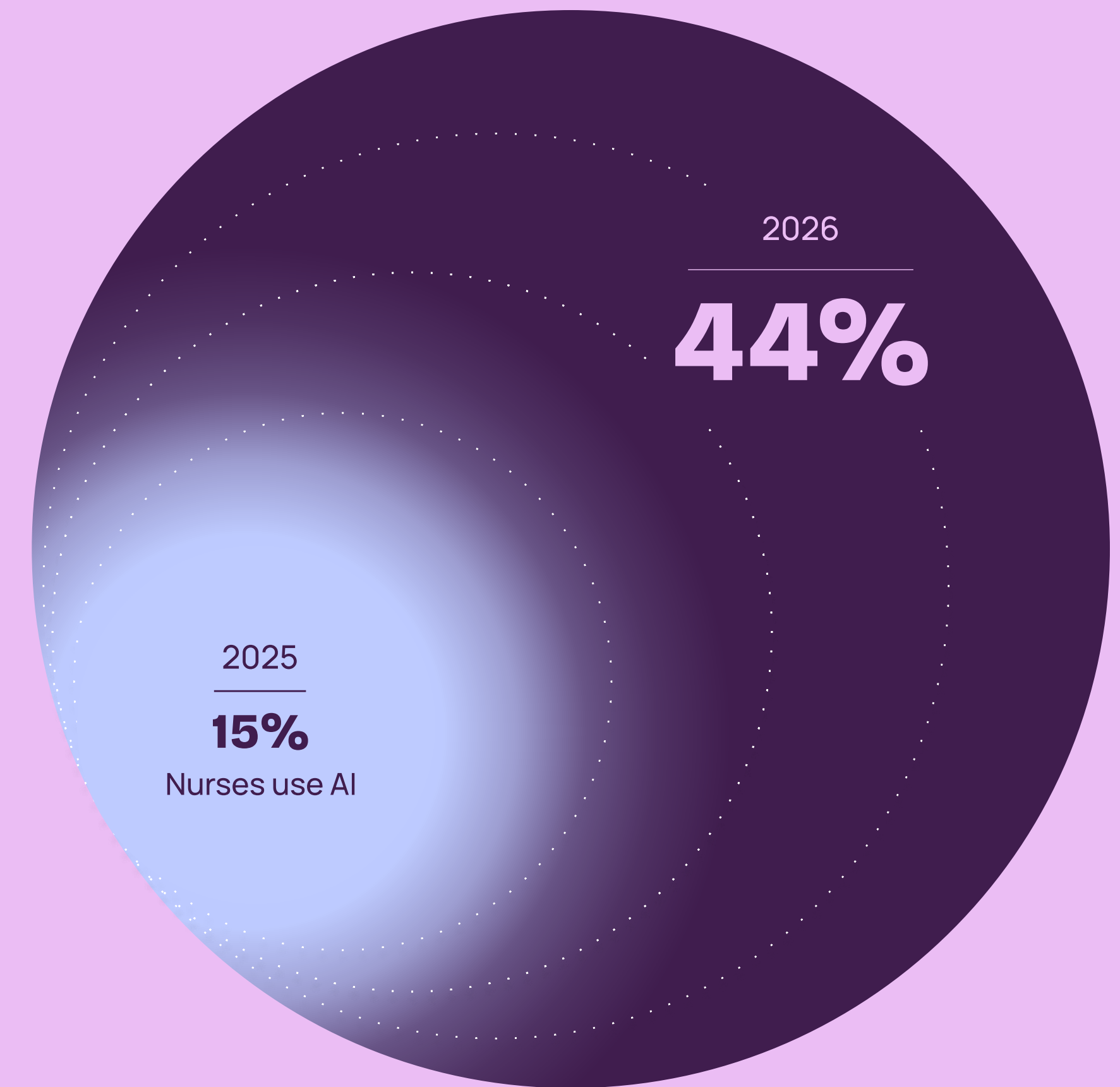
are less worried about AI taking their job than they were a year ago.

VS

Among nurses who only watch colleagues use AI without using it themselves, only

## 12%

feel less worried, and nearly half feel more worried about AI taking their jobs.



# There is no clear consensus yet on AI's next biggest opportunities for nurses.

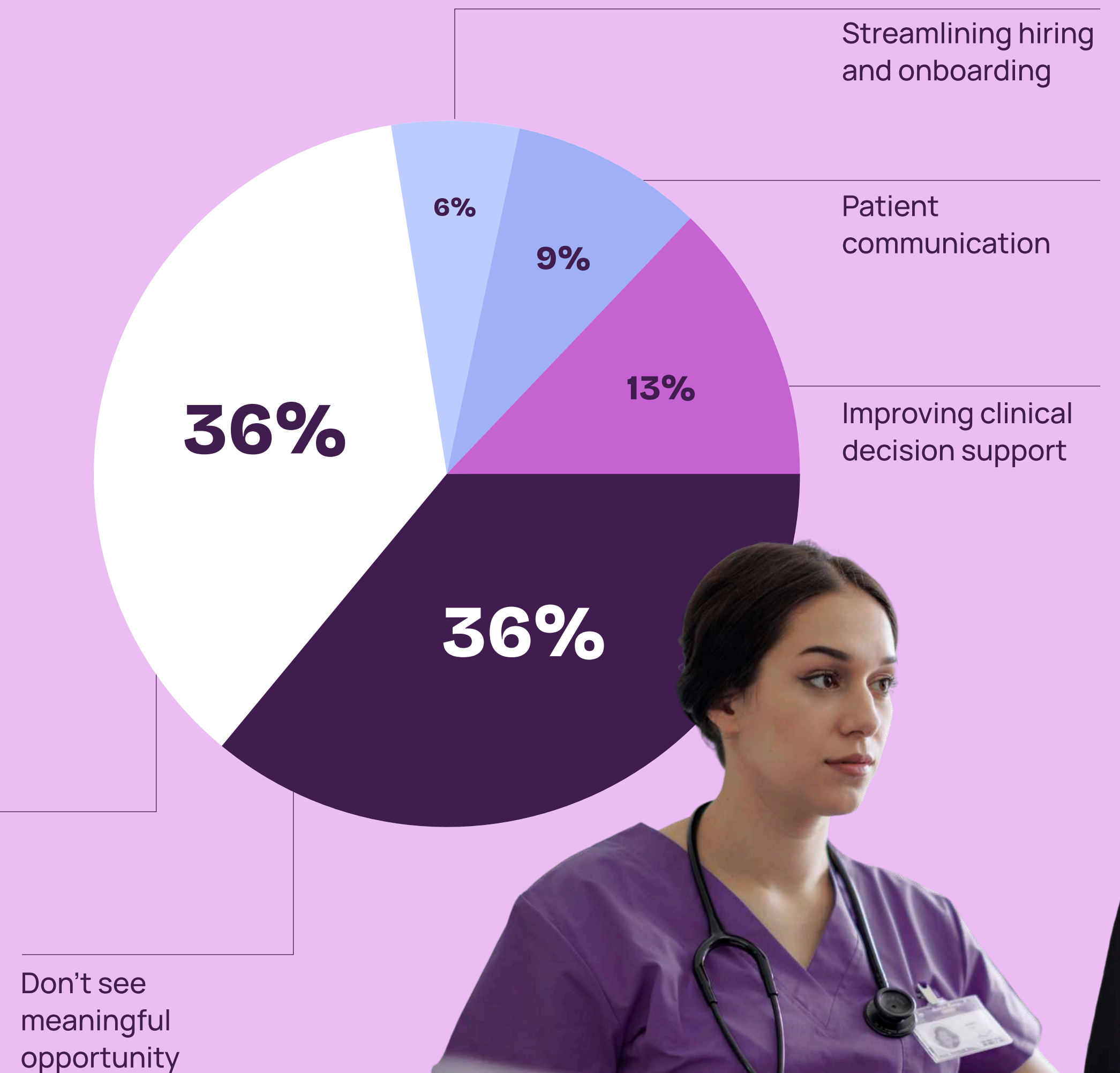
Today, nurses use AI mostly for administrative work: documentation, patient education, and reference lookups. Where the biggest opportunities lie next is unsettled.

Asked where AI's greatest opportunity is in their specialty, the top answer was reducing documentation burden (36%), but an equal share saw no meaningful opportunity at all. Nurses have adopted AI, but have not yet agreed on where its biggest opportunities lie ahead.

## Top AI use cases among users

Documentation and charting	37%
Patient education materials	37%
Drug or clinical reference lookups	32%
Drafting communications to patients, families, colleagues	27%
Job search, resume prep, interview practice	23%
Clinical decision support	13%
Patient communication	9%

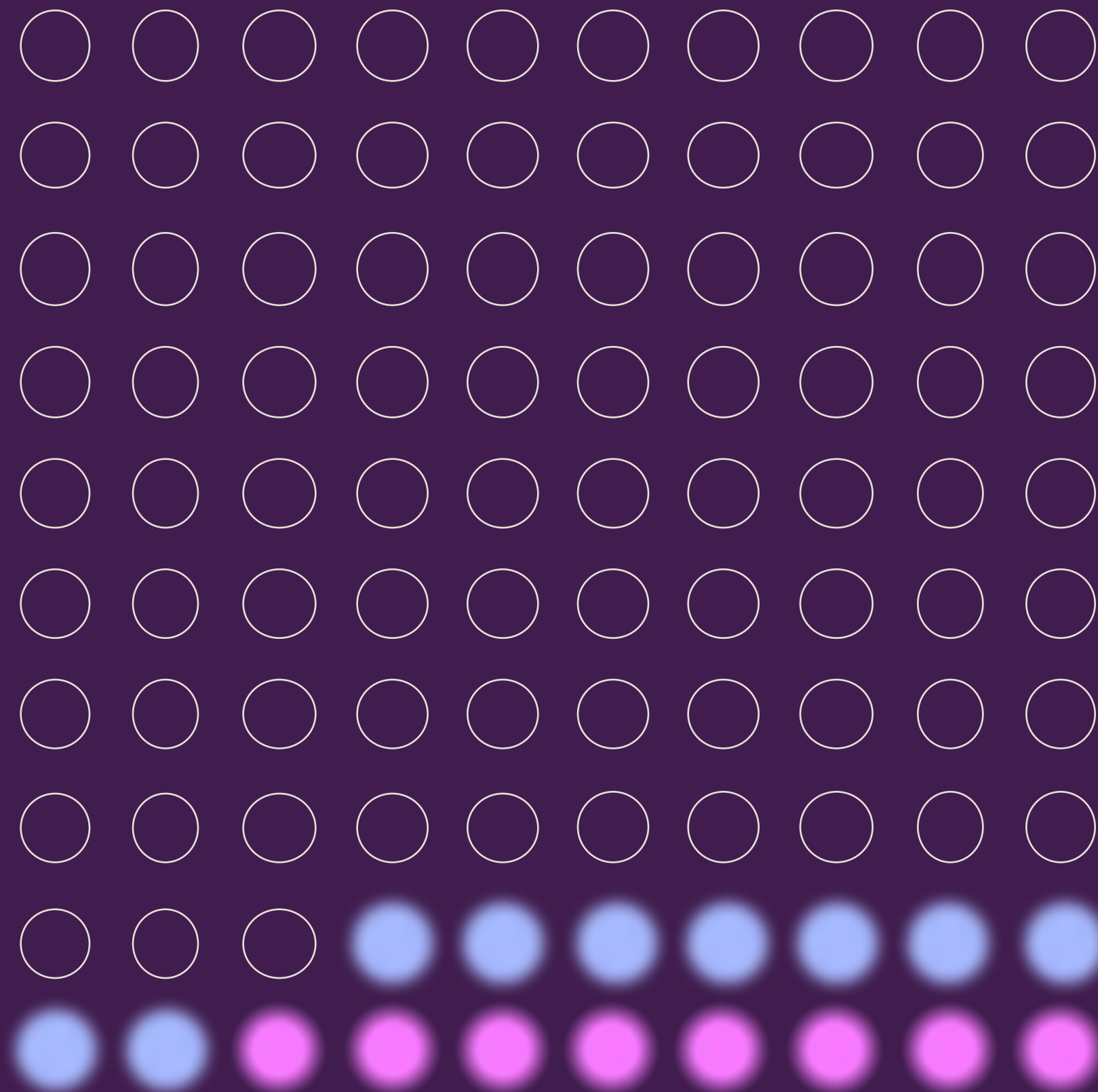
When asked where AI's greatest opportunity lies, nurses offer no clear consensus:



**AI works when healthcare employers train and involve frontline workers. Most are doing neither.**

# Nurses adopted AI on their own. Leadership rarely sets a direction.

Nurses brought AI into their work, but leadership has not set a strategy for when and how to use AI. Only 8% of nurses say their employer has communicated a clear AI plan for their role. One in five say AI tools simply appear with no explanation. Even where AI is already available, only 17% of nurses say the strategy is clear. Adoption is racing ahead of strategy from leadership, and that gap puts AI's impact and outcomes at risk.



● **8%**  
of nurses say their employer has communicated a clear AI strategy for their role.

● **17%**  
say the strategy is clear, even where AI is already in use.



**1 in 5** nurses say AI tools "just appear" with no plan or explanation.

# Nurses are left out at every step, from choosing the tools to learning to use them.

AI rollouts skip the workers who use the tools. Nurses are rarely asked which AI tool their employer should introduce. They are also rarely trained on the tool once it arrives. Only 8% of nurses say frontline staff is always included in the decision, and nearly half get no training at all.

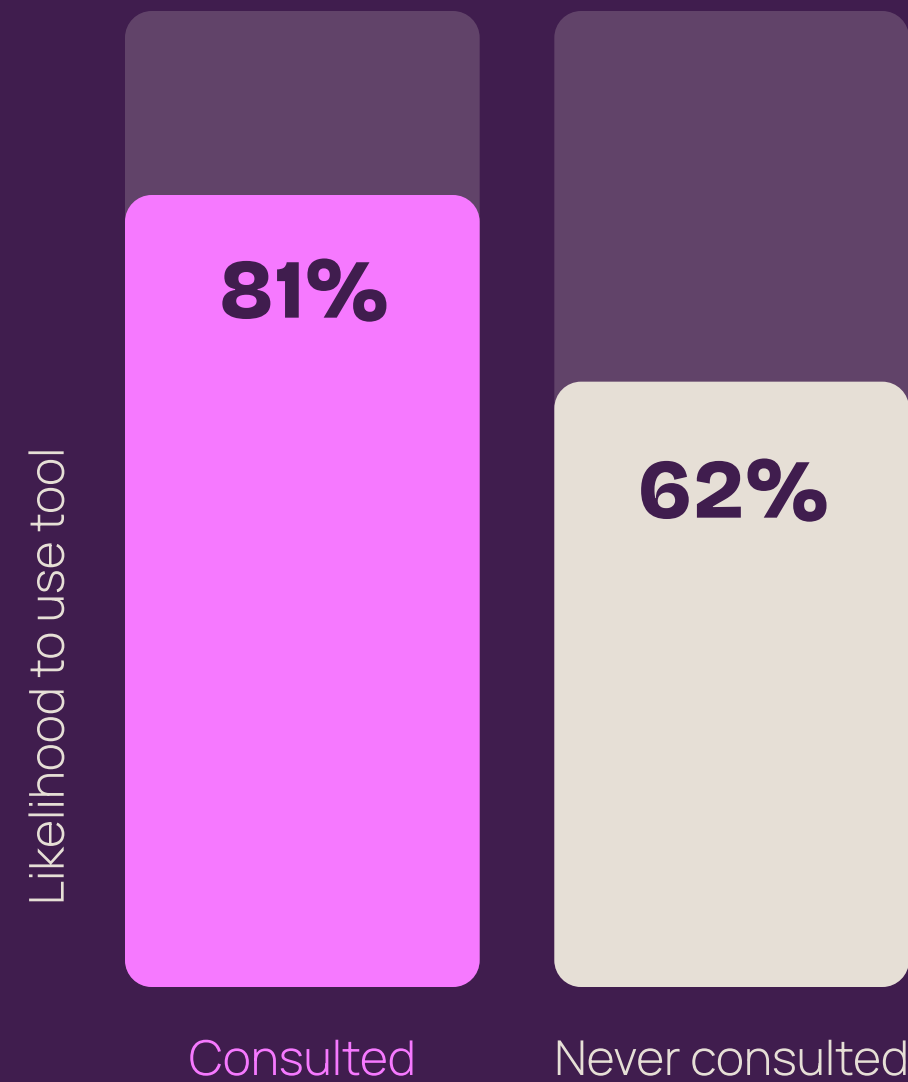
Nurses who are involved in tool selection tend to trust and use them more. Leaving the frontline out of the decision and the rollout limits adoption and impact on productivity gains.

**Only 8%**

of nurses say frontline staff is always included when AI tools are selected.

**Only 5%**

got formal training that prepared them well.



Nurses who help choose the tools are more likely to use them.

**46%**

of nurses received no AI training in the past year.



# Without training and trust, AI becomes a tax, not a tool.

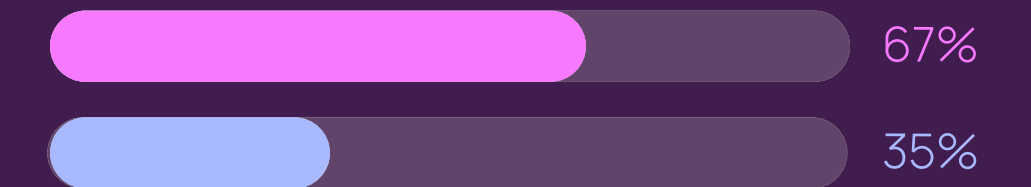
AI does not guarantee a productivity gain for nurses. Half of regular users say their last use saved little or no time. The difference comes down to implementation, and training is the top factor: 24% of trained users save over an hour a day, versus 16% of those left untrained.

Trust and frequency matter too, and they compound. The more nurses trust AI, the more they use it, and the more they use it, the more time it saves. Trust also eases the fear that AI will erode the workforce, and the easiest way to build trust is to involve frontline workers early, especially in the tool selection phase, and offer training during rollouts.

## Using AI melts resistance:

● Regular AI users ● Non-users

Believe AI will **help** the workforce



Believe AI will **hurt** the workforce



**Training pays off in time saved: nurses with some AI training are far more likely to save over an hour with it.**

**24%**  
of nurses who got training saved time.

**16%**  
of nurses who got no training saved time.

**Regular usage of AI improves efficiency and productivity.**

**68%**  
of healthcare workers who regularly use AI reported saving more than 15 minutes per day.

**46%**  
of healthcare workers who only occasionally use AI reported saving a similar amount of time.

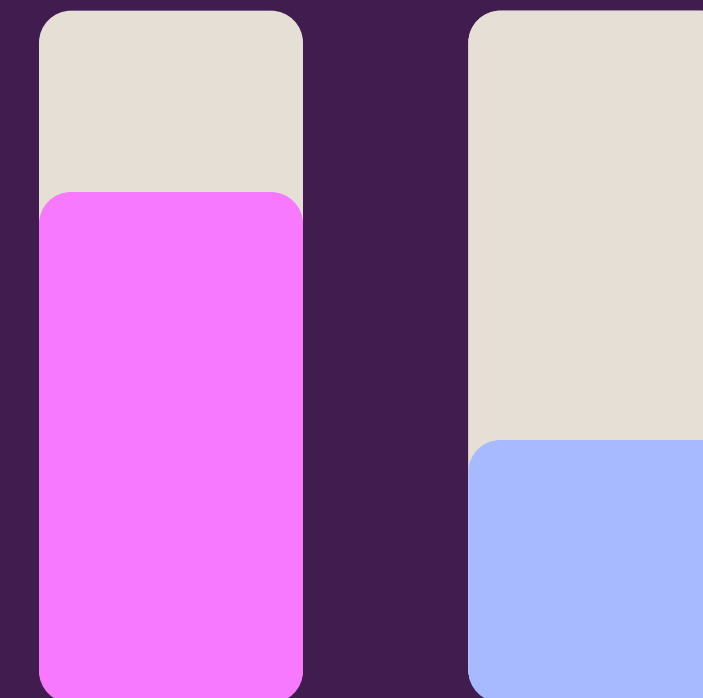
**83%**

of nurses say AI output is rarely or only sometimes accurate enough to act on without checking it first.

**50%**

of AI users say their last use saved little or no time.

**Involving nurses early builds trust.**



**74%**  
Trust from those consulted when tools are chosen.

**38%**  
Trust from those never consulted.

**Nurses are using AI to find their next job.  
Healthcare employers are not using AI to find their next nurse.**

# Nurses job-search at AI speed. Healthcare employers still hire with outdated workflows and approaches.

59% of nurses now use or have considered using AI to find roles, polish resumes, and prepare for interviews. While AI helps nurses apply for roles faster and interview better, nurses are still frustrated with the current interview process. 65% of nurses accept, or come close to accepting a job they had doubts about, just to end the search.

The hiring side has barely moved: of all nurses who use AI, only 4% used it during the hiring, screening or interview process. This gap is a key opportunity: healthcare employers that screen more candidates with speed have a faster hiring process, connect with more candidates, and win the best talent, especially in highly competitive markets.

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# 55%

of nurses feel they are evaluated on things other than clinical skills.

## 59%

Nurses have used or considered using AI for their job search.

59% of nurses now use or have considered using AI to find roles, polish resumes, and prep for interviews.

## 4%

Healthcare employers are using AI for recruiting.

The employer side has just started: only 4% of healthcare systems use AI in hiring.



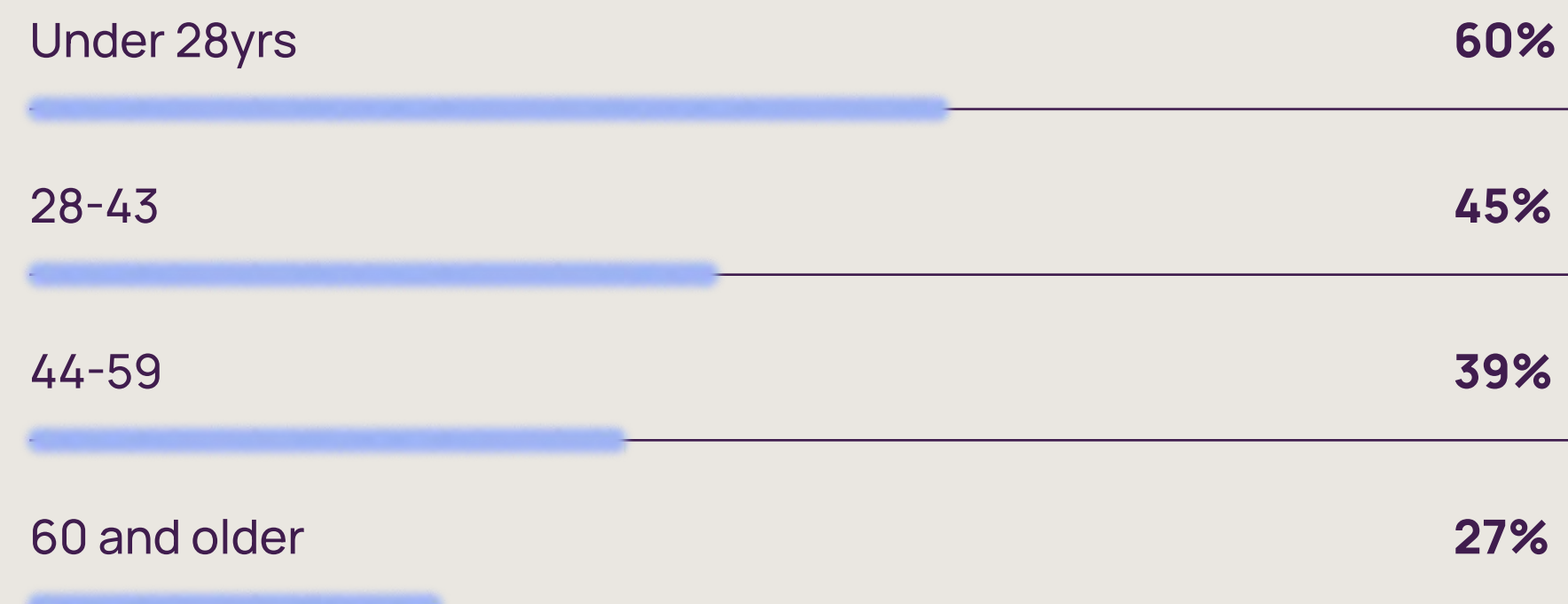
# AI job search is common now, and both the younger and older generations make it standard.

Using AI for job-searching is not only a fringe activity of tech-forward nurses, but now represents nearly half of nurses. Among nurses who recently applied for a role, 44% used AI in their search, a share that continues to rise year over year.

So far, most nurses are using general-purpose tools like ChatGPT and Copilot, not tools specialized for healthcare. The general-purpose tools help a nurse apply faster and to more places, but are not guides for which roles are the best fit. As application volume grows, so does the screening burden on employers trying to surface the best fit.

## AI job-search use is higher among younger generations of nurses.

Demographics that have used AI in their job search in the past year:



## Nurses reach for generic tools, not healthcare specialized ones.

The breakdown of tool usage amongst nurse AI users:

65%

use a general-purpose assistant

40% Microsoft Copilot

37% ChatGPT

24% Gemini

34%

use a healthcare-specific tool

28% Epic AI

8% Ambient documentation

4% OpenEvidence

**Retention is about more than pay, and retention risk runs deeper than turnover reports show.**

# Pay matters to nurses, but a raise alone will not make them stay.

Nurses are continually on the lookout for a new job. Three in four nurses have applied to a new role in the past three years or seriously considered it. Most do not feel fairly paid, and a raise is the single change they ask for most frequently. However, it is rarely the only reason that makes them stay. Only one in five rank pay as the single most important factor.

For most, it sits alongside adequate staffing, flexible schedules, career growth opportunities and great management and leadership. Healthcare employers cannot always win on salary, but the other levers are often easier and faster to execute, and often more affordable than widespread and frequent compensation changes.



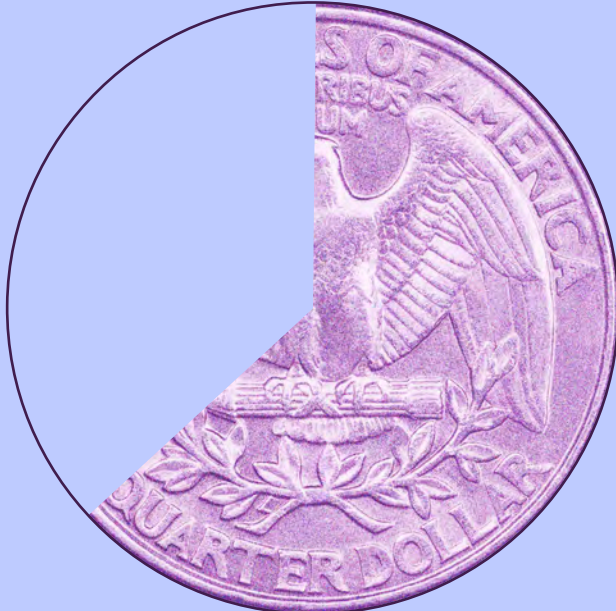
of nurses have been in the job market or seriously considered it in the past three years.



have applied to a new role in the past three years.



have seriously considered it.



## Pay is a real grievance



of nurses feel they are not fairly paid.

54% among them say it would take a **raise above 15%** to feel fairly compensated.

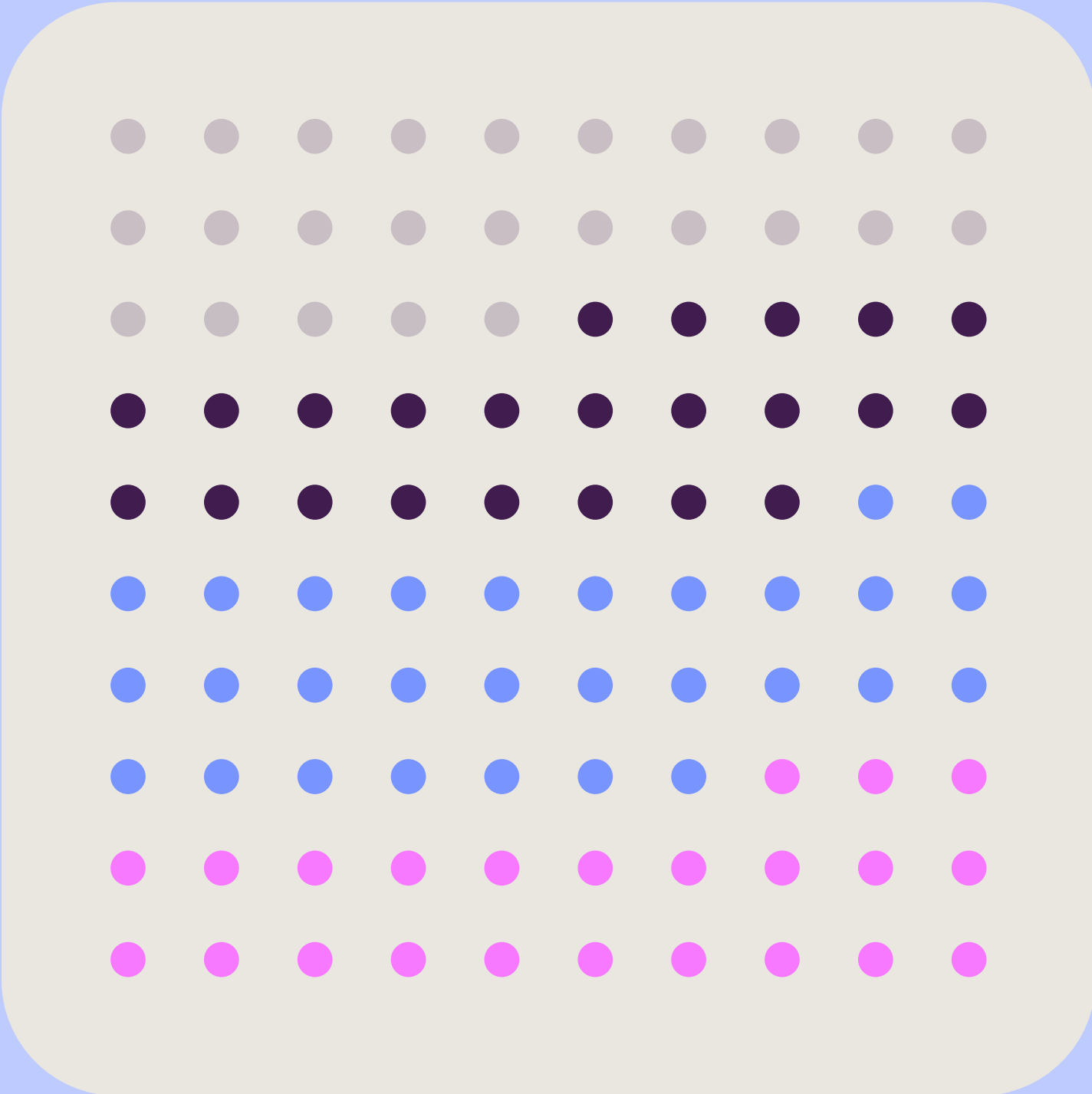
## Pay is not the sole lever that drives job satisfaction.



of nurses rank it as the single most important factor in their search for a new job. For most, it sits alongside adequate staffing, flexible schedules, career growth opportunities, and great management and leadership.

After a raise, the changes nurses want most are within a healthcare employer's control.

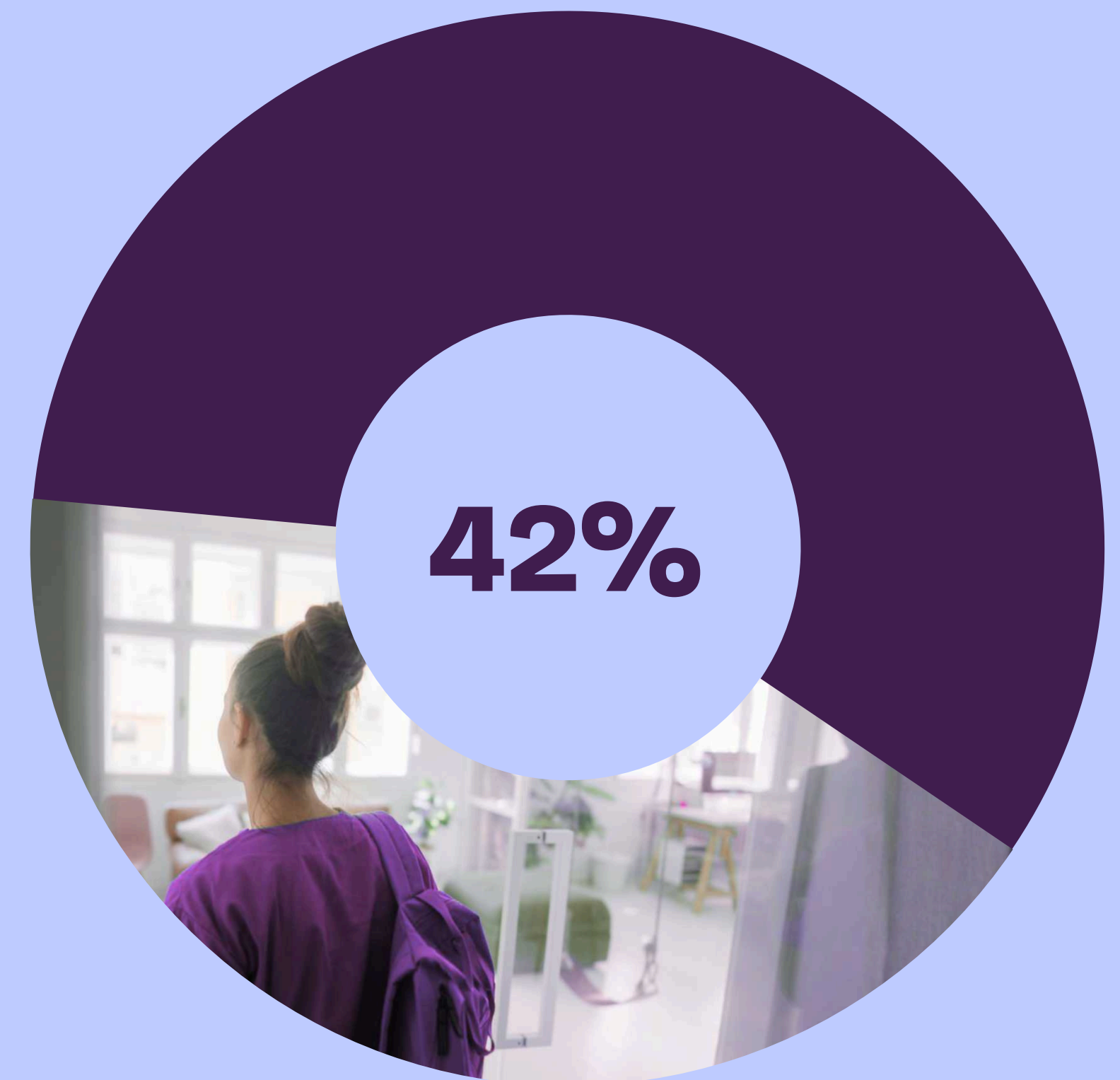
- Higher staffing on shift **15%**
- A manager or leadership change **8%**
- More predictable scheduling **5%**



# Healthcare employers are investing in retention, but most nurses don't see it.

Healthcare employers and nurses have the same desires. 67% of executives consider retention their top priority (Incredible Health's 2026 Executive Report: AI and the Future of the Healthcare Workforce), and the levers they name include manageable workloads, better scheduling, and career growth.

Nurses are looking for the same solutions, yet 42% see no retention investment, and 90% say nothing has changed in the past year. Some of that is real underinvestment, but much of it is a communication gap: the retention work happens, but nurses never see it. The fix is concrete: invest in the levers nurses and executives care about, and ensure it's clearly communicated.



42% of nurses say their employer is not visibly investing in retention at all.

## What nurses want and what they see rarely match.

The two key changes nurses want vs. how often they see them:

A substantial raise

46% want it

10% see it

Higher staffing on shift

15% want it

8% see it

90%

of nurses say retention support has not meaningfully changed in the past year.

24%

say it has gotten worse.

# Stability is an illusion. At any moment, three in four nurses are looking.

At any given time, three in four nurses are looking for other opportunities. Most who stay are not staying because of genuine satisfaction: 56% stay out of financial necessity or a lack of better options, and only 24% out of genuine satisfaction.

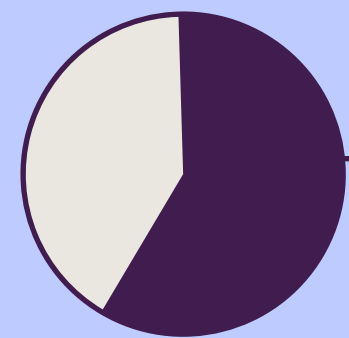
The risk is highest at the bedside. Only 41% of nurses expect to be in a patient-facing role in five years. The good news is that most who plan to leave the bedside want to stay within healthcare. They hope to move into non-bedside or administrative roles, highlighting another opportunity for retaining experienced staff.

**3 in 4**

nurses are looking at other opportunities at any given moment.

**Only 41%**

expect to be at the bedside in five years.



Most who plan to leave the bedside want to stay in healthcare:

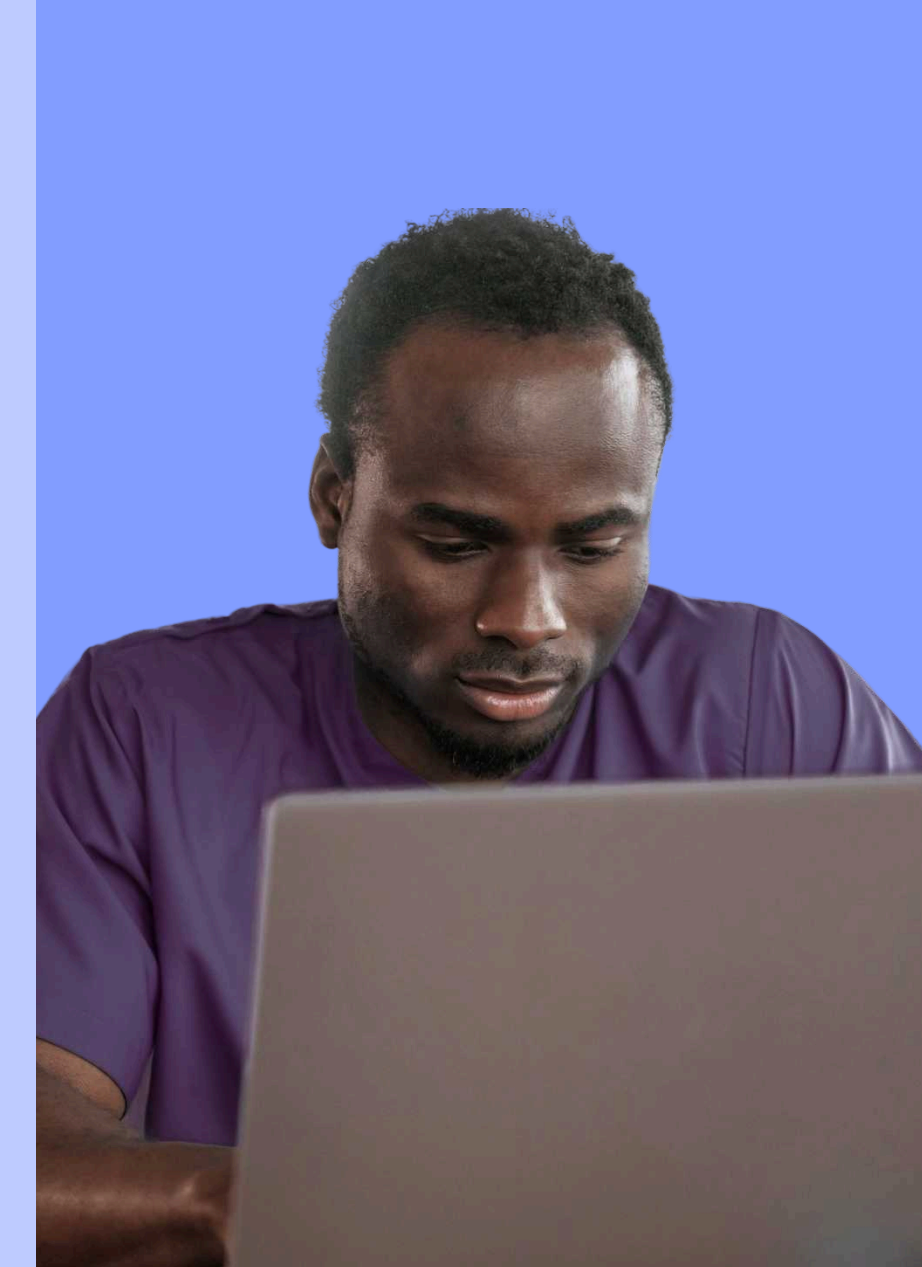
**46%** non-bedside clinical role

**15%** healthcare tech, insurance, or administration

**11%** leave healthcare entirely

**56%** stay out of financial necessity or lack of alternatives.

Only **24%** of nurses who stay do so out of genuine satisfaction.



**56%**

**24%**

# Workplace violence and burnout are pushing nurses out.

Healthcare employers track turnover, but the forces behind it rarely show up in the numbers. Half of nurses faced workplace violence in the past year. Most said it impacts their decisions to stay or leave, yet most of such violence goes unreported. In addition, 70% of nurses reported they are physically and emotionally exhausted.

Many also describe something deeper than standard fatigue: 43% call their hardest days 'moral injury', being asked to give care below the standard they believe in. In response to these, retention tactics include making it safer and easier to report and respond to workplace violence. In addition, it is equally important to address the staffing and workload conditions that are the root cause of moral injury.

**43%**

describe their experience as moral injury, being asked to provide care below the standard they believe is right, not simple burnout.

**70%**

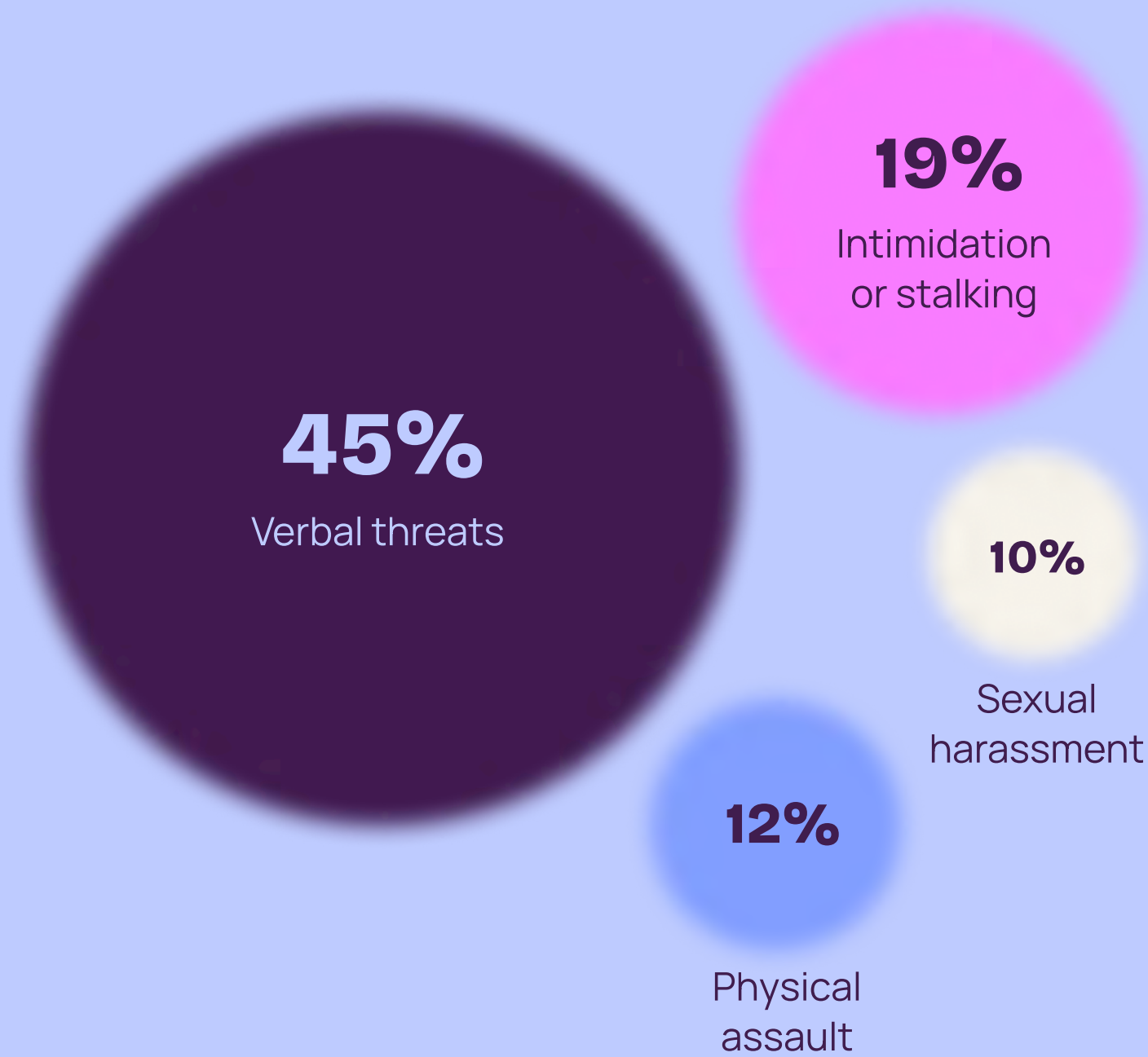
are physically and emotionally exhausted.

**52%**

of nurses experienced workplace violence in the past year.

**69%**

say workplace violence factors into whether they stay or leave.



**Most cases of violence stay hidden. Among nurses who faced it:**

**70%** did not report every incident  
**39%** reported none



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## About this report

The 2026 Annual State of Nursing report draws on a national survey of 2,240 U.S. nurses, combined with platform data from Incredible Health's network of 1.5M U.S. healthcare professionals, the largest career marketplace for permanent nurses. This is Incredible Health's 7th Annual State of Nursing report.

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## About Incredible Health

Incredible Health is the intelligent ecosystem for the healthcare workforce: the largest network of healthcare professionals, employers, and AI agents. Connecting 1,500+ US healthcare employers and 1.5M US healthcare professionals through three healthcare-native products (Marketplace, Lyn, Gale), we're redefining how the industry hires, prepares, and retains its workforce.

Whether you're a healthcare employer looking to improve hiring outcomes or a healthcare professional seeking your next opportunity, Incredible Health is built to support your goals.

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