

Retaining the general practice workforce

Research by Primary Care Taskforce in Waitaha | Canterbury

High rates of General Practitioners (GPs) and Practice Nurses (PNs) are planning to leave or retire from general practice in three to five years, according to more than 200 Waitaha | Canterbury general practice staff who completed a survey about general practice capacity (June 2023). To explore why, the CCN [Primary Care Taskforce](#) (PCTF) who initiated the survey, went on to conduct interviews and focus groups with more than 30 GPs and NPs. They also used these sessions to discuss what would enable them to continue or extend their time contributing to general practice.



UNDERSTANDING THEIR REASONS FOR LEAVING


The following issues are why many general practice staff are considering leaving or retiring early from general practice:

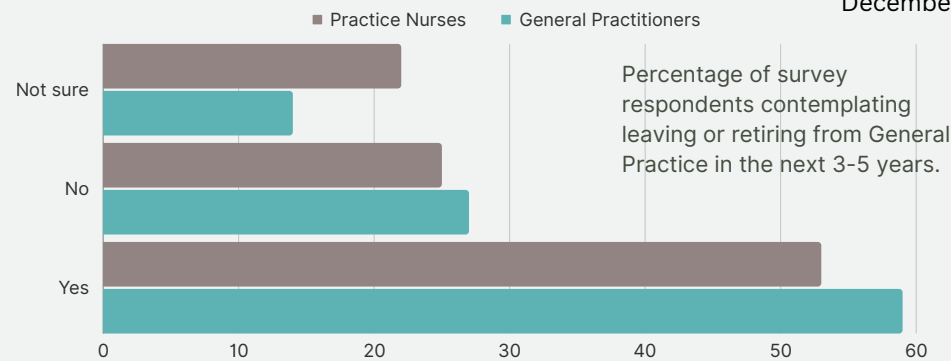
- Increased administration in general practice
- Lack of pay parity with secondary care colleagues
- High levels of stress and loneliness from increased workload and lack of clinical / collegial support, and the impact this is having on their wellbeing
- Insufficient clinical support, e.g. more time with experienced GPs to check in with
- More patients with complex needs
- Change in patients' expectations. e.g. patients attending appointments with multiple issues
- Negative information and media about general practice
- Practice ownership - GPs near retirement no longer wanting the responsibility and financial commitment; and early-mid career GPs see it as unattractive
- Added workload of doing shifts at urgent care clinics
- Feeling undervalued
- Lack of advancement and training opportunities

"The cost of living would make me think about going back to Te Whatu Ora, even though that is not where my clinical skills, knowledge and interests lie." PN

"The anxiety around the paperwork, particularly the never-ending inbox demands, the need to manage the emotional load of dealing with complex and challenging issues. The work is exhausting, and the intensity is unsustainable." GP

[View the full report here](#)

 Questions? Contact [Linda Wensley](#) or go to: [CCN website](#).



*Rural respondents indicated higher rates are looking to leave - 64% of GPs and 72% of PNs.



REASONS FOR STAYING

Respondents said they are encouraged to stay in general practice because:

- The joy of general practice - they enjoy the long standing relationships, collegiality, variety of work and problem solving aspects of the role.
- Working part time, so they can continue working in general practice in a sustainable way allowing them to have more balanced work / life.
- Ability to pursue an area of special interest, e.g. people with surgical experience doing minor surgeries.
- Their commitment to patients, practice team, vocation and community.



HOW TO SUPPORT STAFF TO STAY

The PCTF is working on the following:

- **Addressing the administration burden** - a kete (basket of knowledge) has been created to support practice teams employ a person or tasking an existing member of their team to manage clinical inboxes. The PCTF has also been working with their secondary care colleagues to discuss how to streamline pathways and processes.
- **Increase clinical support for early career GPs** - exploring and progressing what is needed to make clinical support available and accessible.
- **Increase access to wellbeing and resilience support** - looking at ways to increase access to support, counselling and supervision for the GP workforce with focus on early to mid career GPs.
- **Increase visibility of part-time options** - for example looking at ways to connect GPs wanting part-time work with practices, encourage practices to offer flexibility and advocate for changes to compliance costs for part-time GPs.
- **Addressing pay parity with secondary care colleagues** was the main action identified by PNs. Some GPs also identified this as a factor. This will be shared with organisations advocating for primary care.
- **Strengthen positive workplace culture** and adoption of a team approach in general practice.