



Vital Signs

Health Workers Face a Mental Health Crisis

Workers Report Harassment, Burnout, and Poor Mental Health; Supportive Workplaces Can Help

[View All Topics](#)

Updated Oct. 24, 2023 | [Print](#)

2x

More than double the number of health workers reported harassment at work in 2022 than in 2018.

46%

Nearly half of health workers reported often feeling burned out in 2022, up from 32% in 2018.

44%

Nearly half of health workers intended to look for a new job in 2022, up from 33% in 2018.

The nation’s health workers need support

Health worker jobs in the U.S. involve demanding and sometimes dangerous duties, including exposure to infectious diseases and violence from patients and their families. The COVID-19 pandemic presented even more stressors. These included a surge of patients, longer working hours, and shortages of supplies and protective equipment. Health workers are reporting feeling fatigue, loss, and grief at levels higher than before the pandemic.

Study finds health worker mental health is suffering

This *Vital Signs* report contains an analysis from the CDC Quality of Worklife survey focused on well-being and working conditions, comparing data from 2018 to 2022. This timeline captures data before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also compared health workers with two other groups: essential workers and all other workers across industries.* Reports of poor mental health symptoms increased more for health workers than for other worker groups.

Supportive workplaces can help to promote well-being

Health workers reported fewer mental health issues when they said they work in supportive environments. Factors that may make workplaces more supportive include:

- Participation in workplace decisions
- Trust between management and workers
- Proactive and helpful supervisors that promote:
 - Stress prevention,
 - Psychological health,
 - Support for productivity,
 - A harassment-free workplace, and
 - Enough time to complete tasks.

[Read the full MMWR](#)

 [ASL video: English](#)

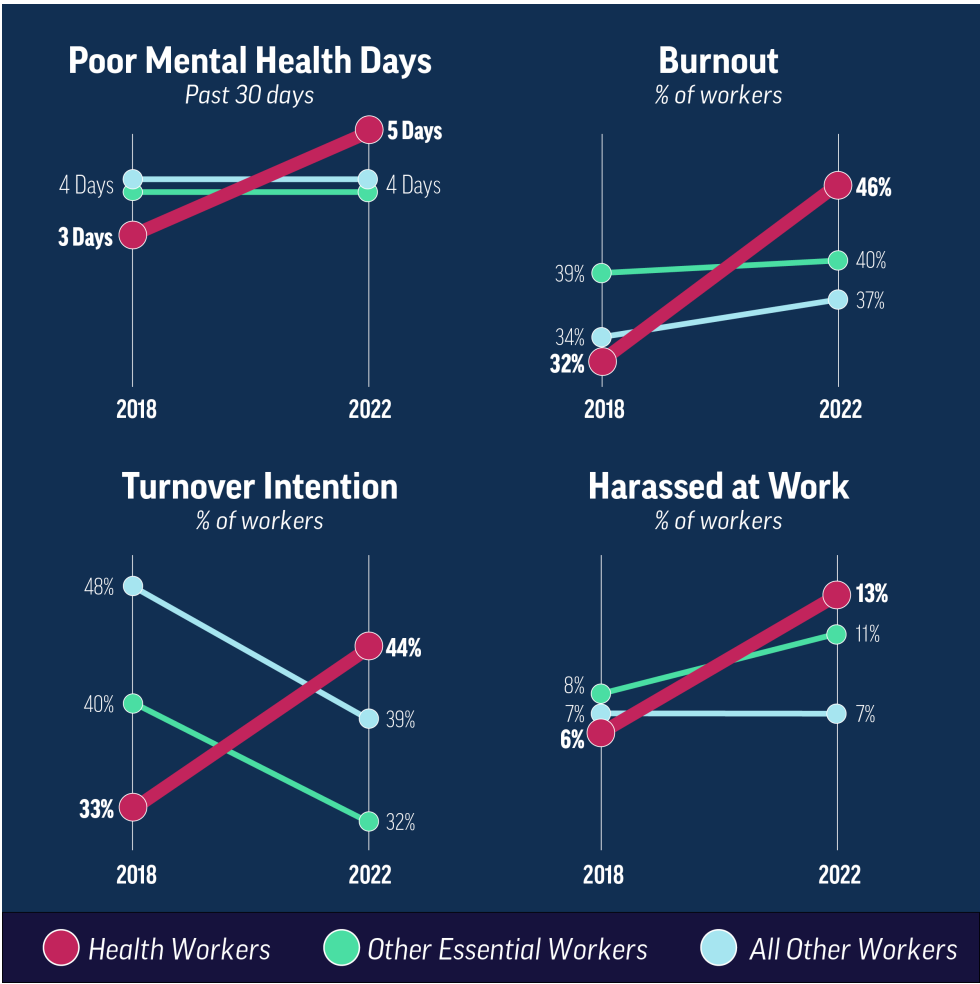
Challenges

Health workers were more likely than workers in other sectors to report poor working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific aspects of health work added to this disparity. The study showed how symptoms of poor mental health and negative workplace conditions increased among health workers from 2018 to 2022 compared to other worker groups:

- **Burnout:** In 2022, 46% of health workers reported feeling burned out often or very often compared to 32% in 2018. The percentage of other essential workers and all other workers reporting burnout was similar in the two years.
- **Harassment:** The percentage of health workers who reported experiencing harassment more than doubled, going from 6% in 2018 to 13% in 2022. Other essential workers also reported an increase, from 8% in 2018 to 11% in 2022.
- **Trust in management:** In 2022, 78% of health workers agreed or strongly agreed that they trusted management, compared to 84% in 2018. Other essential workers reported a smaller drop in trust in management—down to 77% in 2022 from 81% in 2018.
- **Workplace productivity:** In 2022, 82% of health workers reported that their workplace conditions supported productivity, down from 91% in 2018. Other essential workers reported a smaller decrease—down to 77% in 2022 from 84% in 2018.
- **Turnover intention:** In 2022, the percentage of health workers who intended to look for a new job increased to 44%, up from 33% in 2018. The percentage of other essential workers and all other workers who intended to look for a new job decreased.

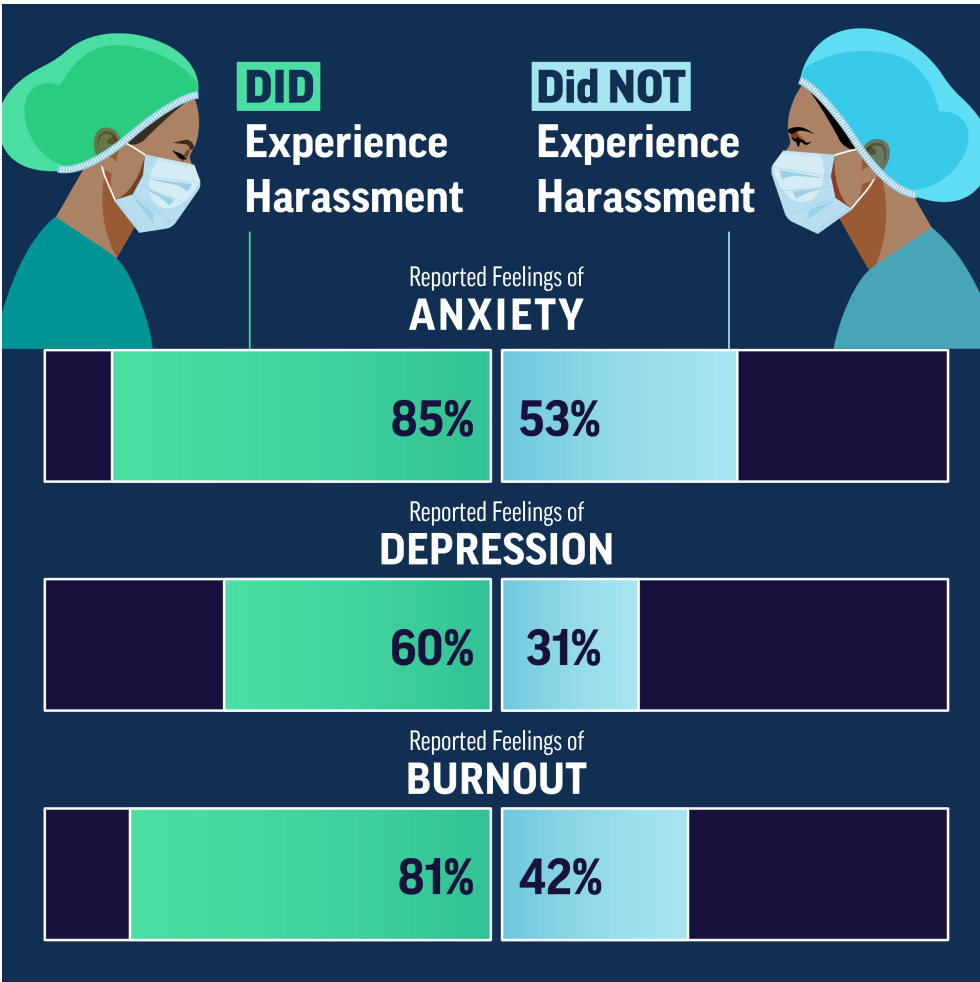


Health Workers Had Worse Outcomes in 2022 Compared to 2018
Health workers reported higher levels of poor mental health days, burnout, intent to change jobs (turnover intention) and being harassed at work in 2022 compared to 2018.



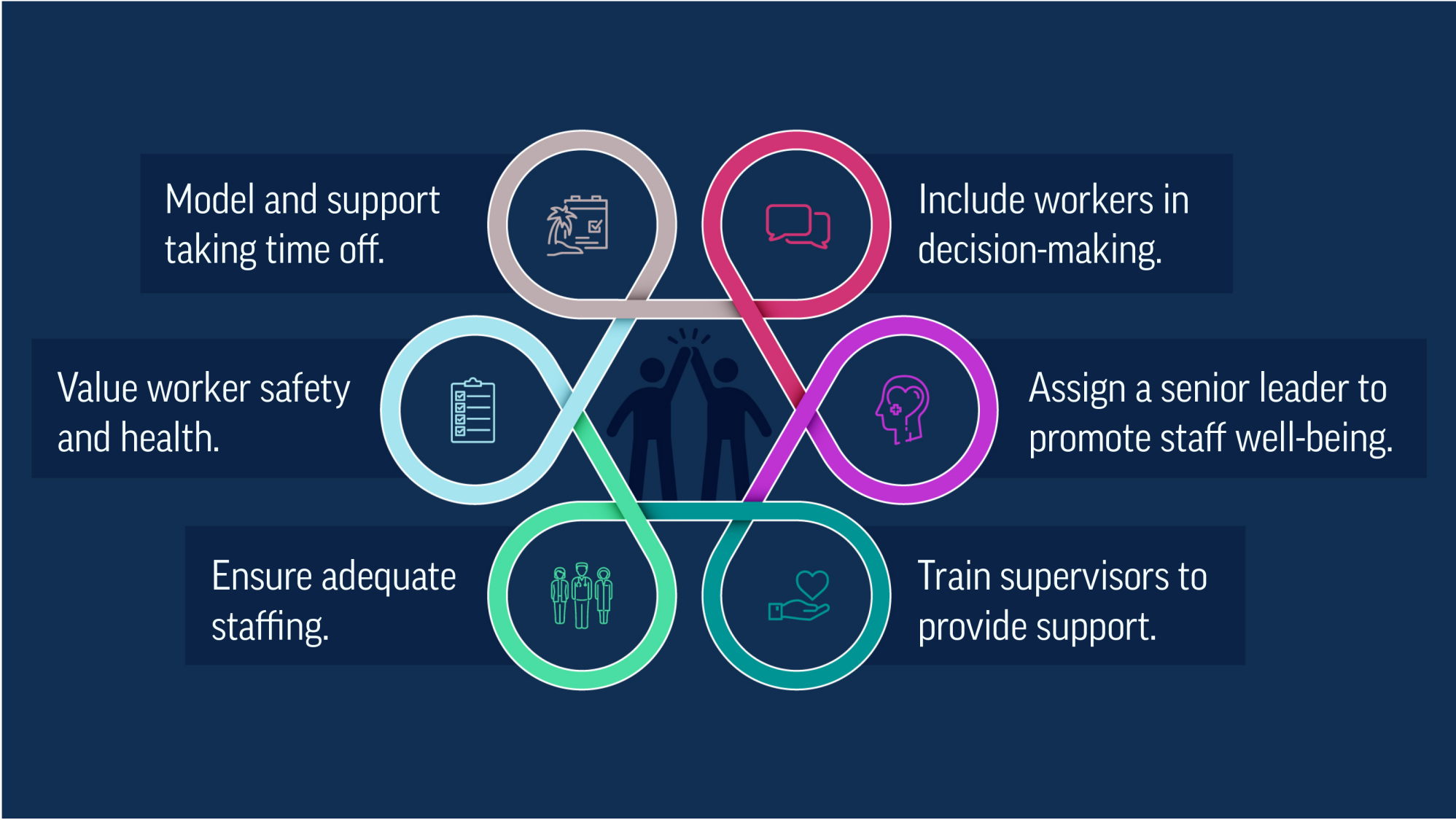
[View Larger](#)

Harassment Is Linked to Poorer Mental Health
Health workers who experienced harassment were more likely to report burnout, depression, and anxiety, compared with those who did not.



[View Larger](#)

Employers Can Take Steps to Address These Problems Now
Improving workplace policies and practices may also improve worker well-being. Here are 6 tips to get started.



[View Larger](#)

What Can Be Done

How health workers viewed their workplace had a big impact on their stress from the COVID-19 pandemic. When they reported trusting their management, health workers had fewer symptoms of burnout. This shows that positive, supportive workplaces may act as a buffer and lessen the mental distress health workers experience.

Health workers' mental health, under unprecedented strain from the pandemic, demands immediate attention and decisive action. The *Vital Signs* study is a wake-up call to the pressing need to support the mental health of health workers. By understanding which working conditions harm mental health, employers can address these work-related factors and promote worker well-being.

Employers can:

- Improve workplace conditions that foster trust in management and prevent health worker burnout. Working conditions to focus on include:
 - Supporting adequate staff levels,
 - Providing helpful supervision, and
 - Preventing harassment of employees.
- Encourage worker participation and two-way communication in decision-making.
- Reduce stigma related to seeking help by eliminating intrusive questions for credentialing.
- Provide and encourage use of paid leave for illness, family needs, and rest.

Supervisors and workers can:

- Talk together about how to improve workplace conditions.
- Use this study to show the importance of improving these working conditions in health occupations.
- Discuss the benefits of better workplaces for everyone's health and well-being.

Everyone can:

- Support health workers by expressing appreciation for their essential work.
- Treat them with understanding and respect as they care for us and our families.




[View Larger](#)

Footnotes and References

*Health workers include registered nurses, home health and personal care aides, licensed practical nurses and licensed vocational nurses, nursing assistants and orderlies, physicians and surgeons, pharmacy technicians, dental and vision staff, and many other types of workers. Worker classifications were adapted from categories and industries defined by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP; Interim List of Categories of Essential Workers Mapped to Standardized Industry Codes and Titles). North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, published by CDC, were cross-referenced with industry codes for respondents' employment provided in the General Social Survey. Health workers include those in the health occupations described above; other essential workers include frontline, non-healthcare workers; "all other workers" include all remaining workers.

Related Pages and Resources

- *Vital Signs*: Media Statement – Health Workers Report Harassment, Symptoms of Poor Mental Health, and Difficult Working Conditions [English]
- *Vital Signs*: Comunicado de Prensa – Trabajadores de la salud reportan acoso, síntomas de mala salud mental y condiciones de trabajo difíciles [Spanish]
- *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR): Vital Signs*: Health Worker Perceived Working Conditions and Symptoms of Poor Mental Health—Quality of Worklife Survey, United States, 2018-2022
- Healthcare Worker Wellbeing
- Understanding and Preventing Burnout among Public Health Workers: Guidance for Public Health Leaders
- Workplace Violence Prevention for Nurses
- Addressing Health Worker Burnout: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Building a Thriving Health Workforce [↗](#)

 **Vital Signs Update**

Get email updates about Vital Signs

What's this?

Submit

VITAL SIGNS RESOURCES

Digital Media Tools