



How people working in public and community services are feeling about their jobs

January 2025

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What we did

2024 was a big year for people working in Aotearoa's public and community services, with widespread restructurings and job and funding cuts, and a cost-of-living crisis to contend with.

In December 2024 we surveyed PSA members working in public and community services around the country about how they were feeling about their job, and what their hopes were for their job in 2025. This report summarises the responses of the 4090 people who participated.

PSA members live in all parts of the country and work in all parts of public and community services we rely on, including for the public service agencies, crown entities, local councils and community organisations that support our: justice, security and safety services; immigration, social and housing services; health and disability services; environmental, cultural and recreation services; infrastructure and information services; business services; science, innovation and research; and democratic institutions.

This survey was voluntary, and the respondents self-selected. The responses were representative of the spread of the PSA membership across its sectors.

In summary

We asked people about their job satisfaction and wellbeing, whether they'd been affected by restructuring and their sense of job security, about their workload and work pressure. We also asked them about their hopes for their job in the coming year. Quotations used in this report are taken from these responses.

While workers are resilient and have strong commitment to the work they do, last year's cuts and the government's ongoing approach to public and community services are taking a toll on their wellbeing and their ability to deliver effective services to the public.

With over 9 out of 10 public and community services workers affected by restructuring, the survey shows it has been a year of uncertainty and disruption for many. Workloads and work pressure and stress are high. Many are feeling disempowered amidst ongoing organisational change and feeling unsupported and undervalued by their organisations. They are working additional unpaid hours and doing work in personal time. Some workers are concerned that this, along with reduced funding for services, is impacting on their ability to do a good job and deliver the services people need. This is damaging job satisfaction and wellbeing and increasing the risk of further burnout.

There are deep concerns about job security, with over half of people worried about becoming unemployed and not being able to find a job. They are experiencing this alongside cost-of-living pressures for themselves and their families, and in the context of clear signals from government that cuts will continue.

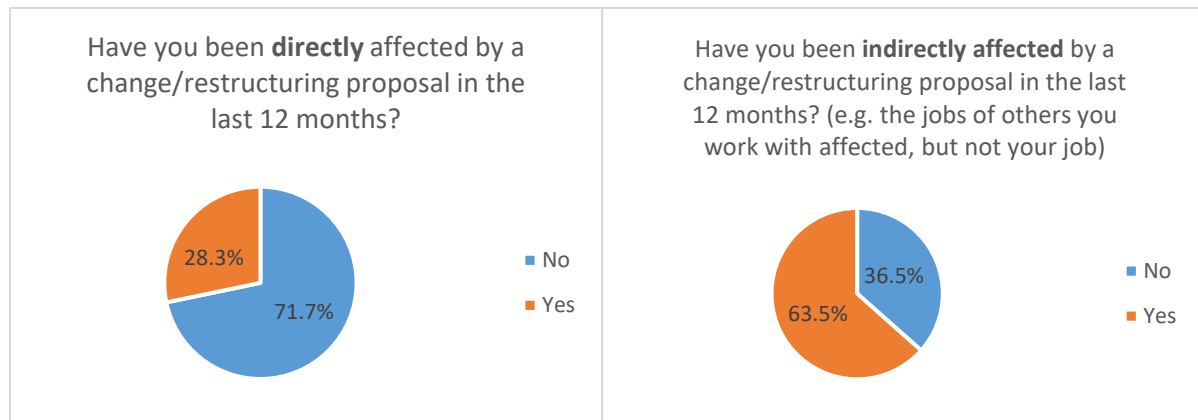
People want more certainty and better organisational approaches and better management support. They want fair treatment, better pay, career progression and to be valued, including by keeping the flexible working arrangements that are important to them meeting both their work and home responsibilities. Most of all, they want the restructuring and disruption to stop, to allow them to get on with the work of delivering what's needed.

The responses

It was a year of uncertainty and disruption

“I'd like to see a decrease in organisational restructures and sweeping systems changes that do nothing but create churn and extra work to adapt. This would allow us to increase our output of work we care about.”

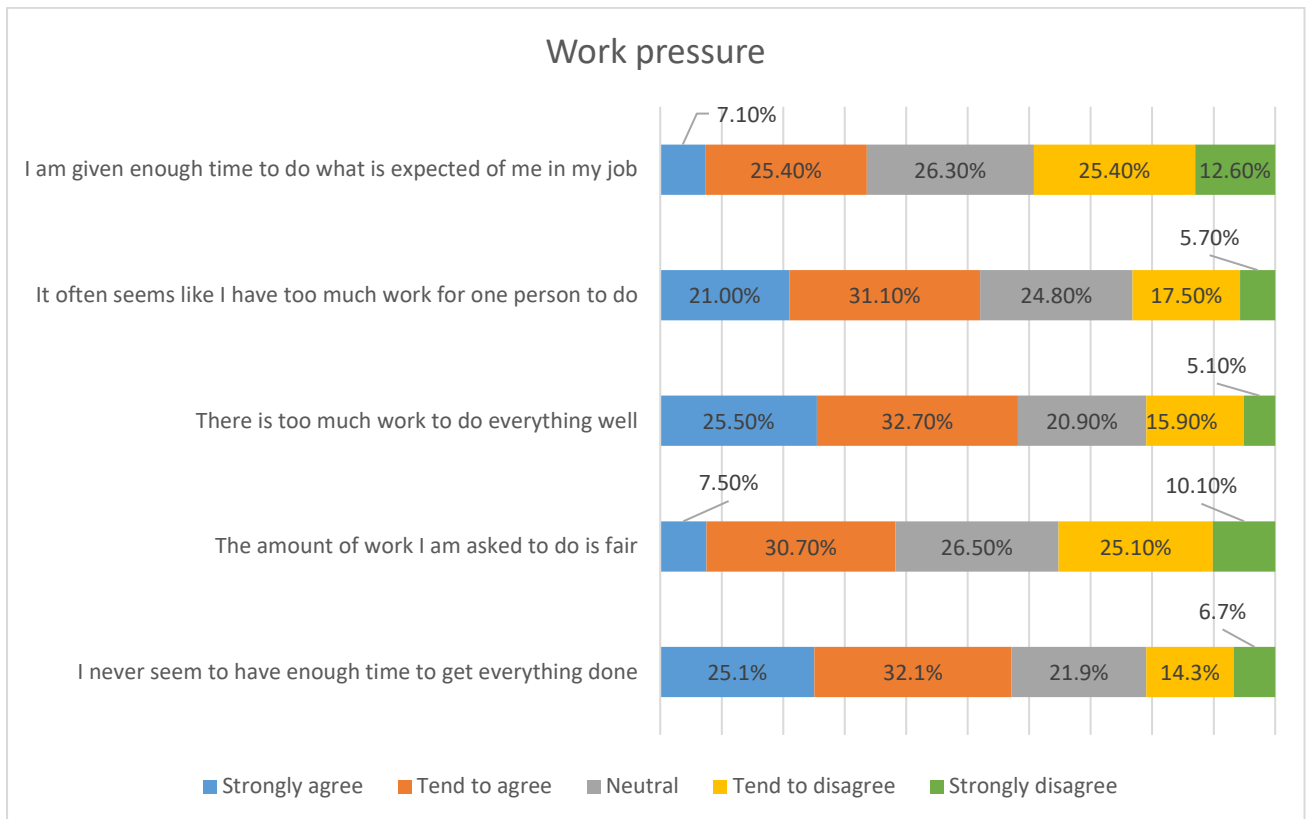
9 out of 10 have been affected by restructuring, with the jobs of over a quarter being directly at risk. In the comments provided, there is a pervasive sense of uncertainty and institutional instability, with workers feeling disempowered amid organisational changes.



There is concern about the impact of too much work pressure on services

“It is not so much about my job but feeling like you are doing a disservice to people in our community as we cannot deliver the health care that they need with our waitlist and restricted service provision. This has a massive impact on our mental health.”

People are concerned work pressure and workload is getting in the way of them doing a good job. Over half said they had too much work to do everything well, they never seem to have enough time to get everything done and it often seems like they have too much work for one person to do well.

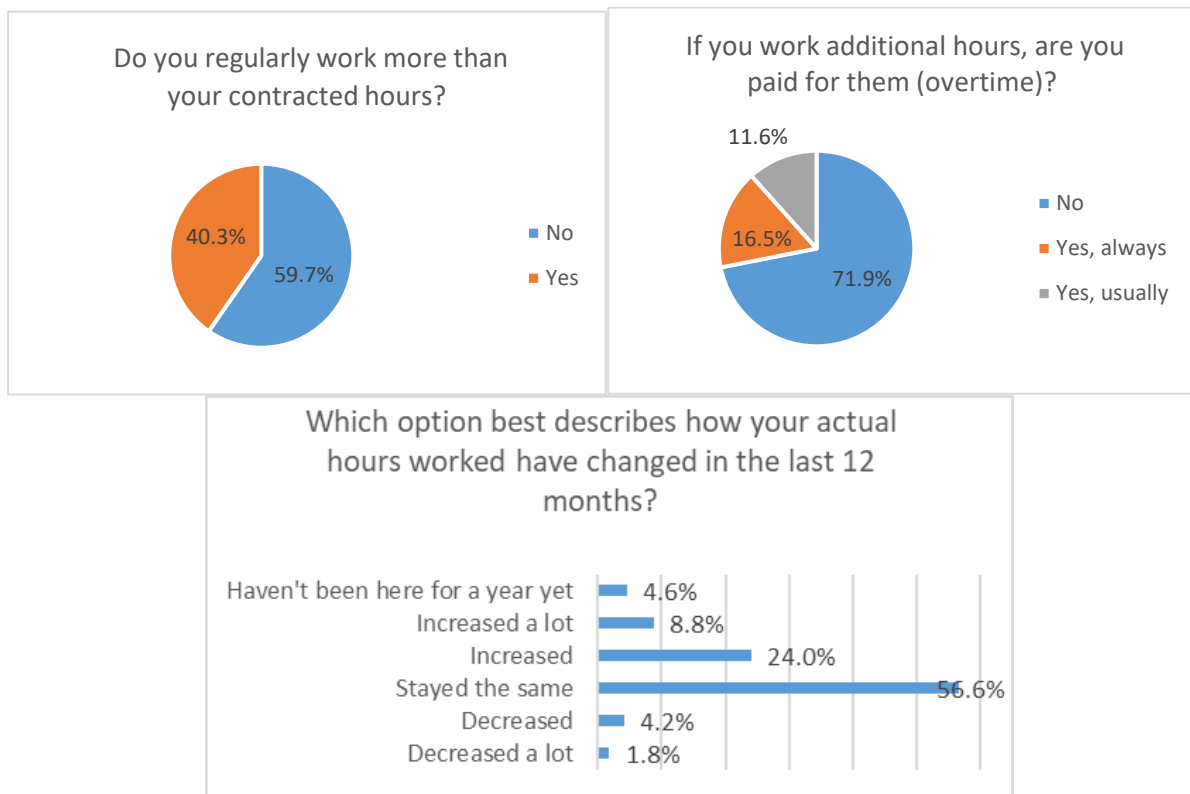


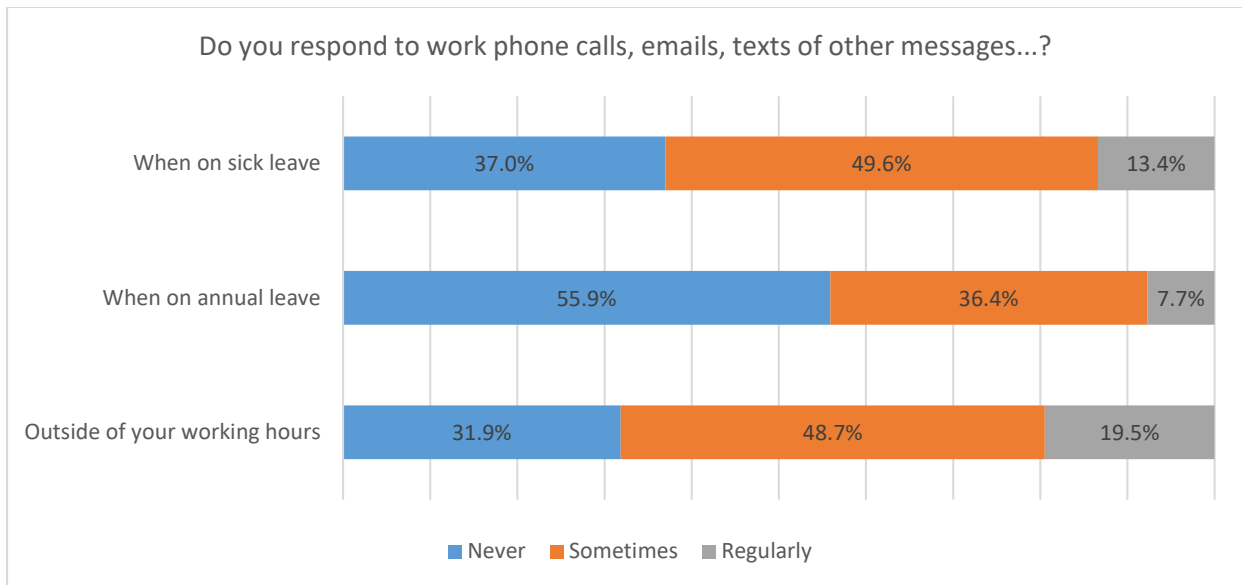
Workload is high and cutting into people’s personal time and time with families

“I would like better work life balance. Most weeks I feel like I am living to work instead of working to live. It feels like my job takes over my week days, and I have no time for myself at the end of it.”

Over 4 out of 10 regularly work more than the hours they were employed for to get their job done, and only a minority are paid for this extra work. A third of people said the number of hours they worked has increased over the last year.

7 out of 10 people said they respond to work phone calls, emails, texts and other messages outside of work hours, over 6 in 10 do this while on sick leave and over 4 in 10 while on annual leave.



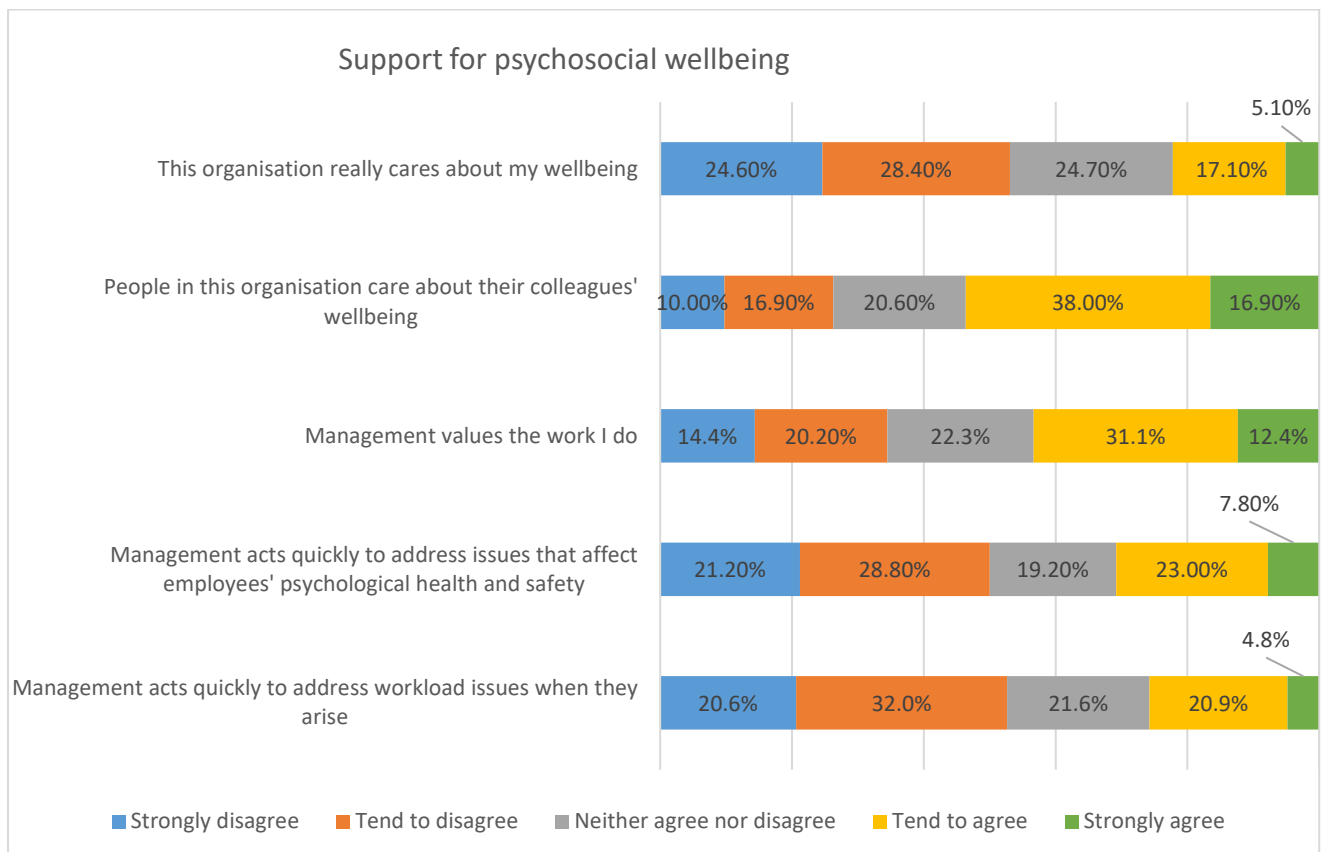


Most people do not feel supported by their organisation

“It would be nice only be doing my own job instead of covering for other people for extended periods. My workload has been about 150% since April due to covering extra tasks for two other people.”

For people to do a good job, and to have good mental and physical health, they need to feel supported and valued by the organisation they work for and the people around them. They need to have confidence that their organisation will act to address issues. This is particularly important at times of change and disruption – and it’s important if that change is to be effective.

Only a minority of people agree that the organisation they work for cares about their wellbeing or values the work they do. Less than a third agree that management acts quickly to address issues that affect workers’ psychological health and safety, and less than a quarter agree that management acts quickly to address workload issues when they arise.

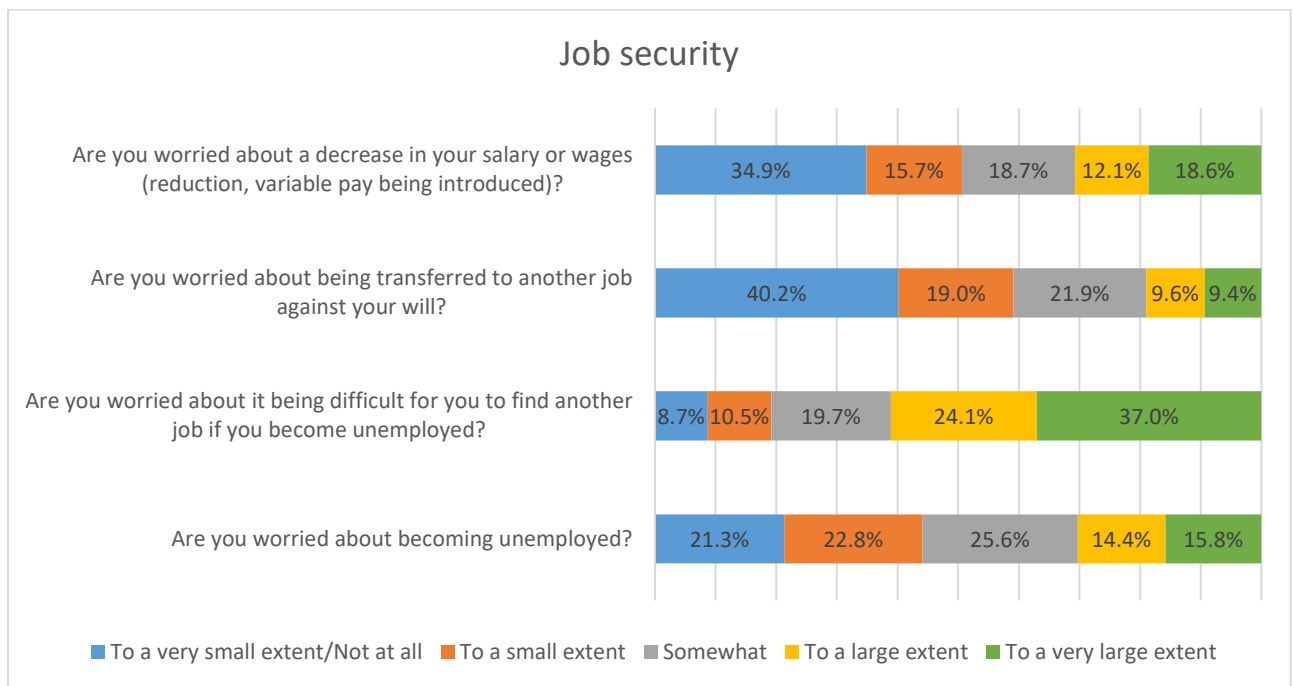


Over half are worried about becoming unemployed

"I've recently had to shift to a job at a lower band than the one I was in to keep the money coming in and pay my mortgage....It doesn't feel great, particularly when we have been shedding jobs elsewhere, and it is pretty terrible for my wellbeing."

A sense of job security is important for people's mental and emotional wellbeing and for their economic stability – we all need to know we can meet our basic needs and those of our families. It's also important for workplace performance and productivity and has a big impact on turnover.

Over half of these public and community services workers said they are either somewhat, or to a large or very large extent worried about becoming unemployed and being able to find another job or worried about a decrease in wages. 4 in 10 are either somewhat, or to a large or very large extent worried about being transferred into another job against their will.



Less than half are satisfied with their job

“Ability to WFH. More respect and time to do work. Less stress. Change pay scales upwards.”

Job satisfaction is important for people’s commitment and engagement with their work, and for their mental and emotional health. It’s also important for productivity, performance and people’s intentions to stay or go.

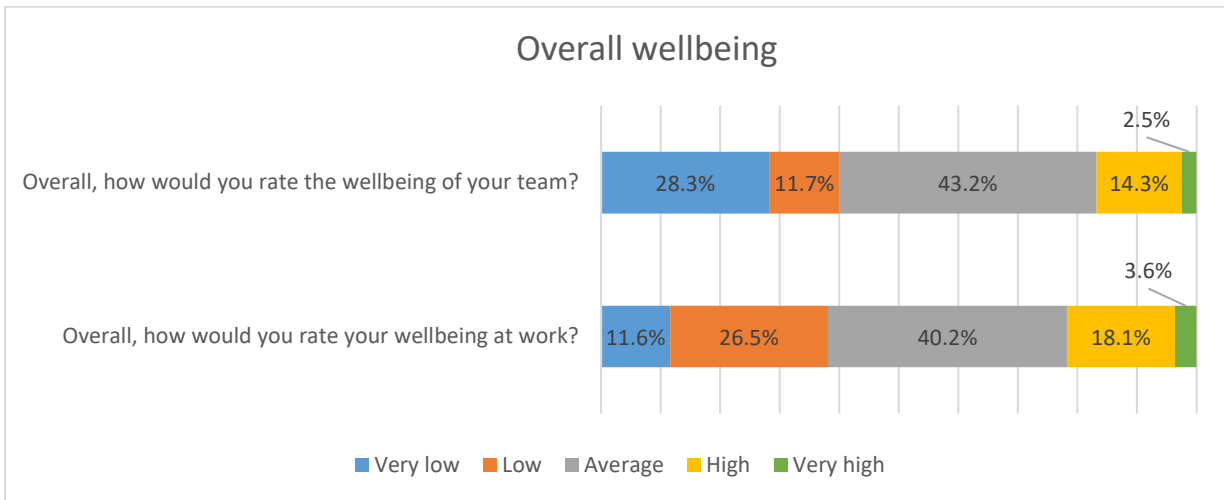
Less than half of the public and community service workers who responded to the survey are satisfied with their jobs, with 4 in 10 being actively dissatisfied with their pay and future prospects. In the comments provided, people also indicated they wanted more of a say at work and to retain the flexible working arrangements that help them manage their work and home commitments and mental health.



Wellbeing has been damaged and there is risk of further burnout

“I’m leaving and start a new job in 2025. The restructure process was too long, I got a job, have been acting on that with unrealistic expectations. For the first time in my life I’ve gone to the doctor to be medicated against my will due to burn out.”

People’s sense of wellbeing at work, and their sense of their team’s wellbeing is important for productivity and performance and for their mental and physical health. More than 4 out of 10 people are ambivalent about this, saying their wellbeing is “average” and around 4 in 10 rated their own wellbeing and that of their team as low or very low.



People's hopes for their jobs in the coming year

People were given the opportunity to comment about what their hopes are for their jobs in the coming year. Just over 4000 people contributed comments.

Taken as a whole, the comments show a workforce experiencing significant stress from multiple directions. This points to widespread risk of further burnout. There are deep concerns about job security and workload, cost pressures for individuals and families, and the stability of and funding for the organisations where people work, particularly in the context of government decisions about funding and public and community services.

People want more certainty and better organisational approaches and better management support. They want fair treatment, better pay, career progression and to be valued, including by keeping the flexible working arrangements that are important to them meeting both their work and home responsibilities.

The comments also highlight that while workers are resilient and have strong commitment to the work they do, last year's cuts and the government's ongoing approach to public and community services is taking a toll on their wellbeing and their ability to deliver effective services to the public.

A selection of unedited quotations about people's hopes for their jobs in 2025

"Just really hoping to stay in work. I love my job and it's very meaningful to me but I am not confident it will stay that way. But at least I'm still employed at the moment. Lots of my colleagues are not. 18% reduction at my work so far, despite the government's minimising rhetoric!"

"Just to keep my job. Another round of restructuring is coming and as a member of a marginalised community, I'm worried that I won't be able to keep my job, and finding a new one will be difficult as I work in a specialist field."

"Job security as this Government continues to make huge changes to the public sector and the ongoing expectation of change to the public sector to save \$\$ at whose expense? Us the Workers, Māori and those less fortunate."

"I work at a community organisation and we've had significant funding reductions from the Coalition Government's cost saving goals. So the main bit is hoping to be able to plug those gaps through alternative funding sources (although that is rather more work on the funding side that gets in the way of helping people than I want to be doing!)."

"I can keep my wfh arrangements which are imperative to my mental health. also that we get permission to replace the 2 empty FTEs we have which are placing pressure on our team."

"More flexibility to juggle family/work, especially WFH."

"Less chaotic organizational change and work environment stabilizes. Workload is manageable and strong health and well-being rather than feeling like there is never enough time to do a good job alongside a negative impact on health and well-being and negative flow on impact to family."

"Less micro management and more strategic ideas considered. A change in culture."

"Less stress, reduced/realistic workload, guilt free breaks, management listening more to the needs of their staff from those in the roles not what they think, more appreciation & acknowledgement for a job well done."

"I'd like to see a decrease in organisational restructures and sweeping systems changes that do nothing but create churn and extra work to adapt. This would allow us to increase our output of work we care about."



"I'm in my 30s and will be leaving New Zealand next year to work overseas, so I won't be in this job next year - I am worried about public services and infrastructure as a whole in New Zealand as the Government looks to continue to cut jobs and worsen the NZ economy."