



# Centering the CPPA Workforce in WIC's Future

## About the National WIC Association

The National WIC Association (NWA) is the nonprofit education arm and advocacy voice of the WIC program, the nearly 6.9 million mothers and young children served by WIC, and the 12,000 service provider agencies, representing the front lines of WIC's public health nutrition services for the nation's nutritionally at-risk mothers and young children. NWA's efforts on behalf of WIC have been effective in gaining broad support for the program, including bipartisan support of the US Congress, successive administrations, advocacy groups and coalitions, the healthcare sector, religious organizations, and CEOs of Fortune 500 corporations.

NWA's mission is to provide its members with tools and leadership to expand and sustain effective nutrition services for mothers and young children. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to explore the landscape of competent paraprofessional authorities (CPPAs) while discussing recruitment and retention barriers for this vital category of WIC professionals.

## Defining Competent Paraprofessional Authority

According to the USDA's Nutrition Service Standards as well as their Breastfeeding Policy and Guidance, the current definition for competent paraprofessional authority (CPPA) is:

*an individual without extended professional training in health, nutrition, or clinical management who is trained and given ongoing supervision to provide a basic service or function.<sup>1,2</sup>*

With no definitions set in federal regulation and with job titles that fall under the term CPPAs varying from state to state, inconsistencies with the use of this term in the WIC world have resulted in confusion about what a CPPA is, unreliable data gathering regarding the CPPA workforce, including recruitment and retention, among a myriad of other issues. Therefore, it's possible for a state to have WIC staff who, based on the above definition, are CPPAs without actually using the term. For example, WIC intake specialists and certifiers count as CPPAs. In at least one state, IBCLCs are considered CPPAs if they are not designated breastfeeding experts (DBE), meaning that, despite having a professional credential, they are not recognized for their expertise in the WIC setting. Meanwhile, other states may not even hire CPPAs due to state legislation barring them from allowing CPPAs to perform certain job duties.

## History of WIC Workforce Development

For years, NWA has examined various aspects of the WIC workforce, initially focusing on registered dietitians (RD/RDN) and International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) before broadening the scope to include all aspects of the WIC workforce. The WIC Workforce Committee came together in 2023, combining three previous NWA committees and task forces to build a stronger, more robust committee with broader expertise, thus improving the committee's ability to accurately discuss and represent issues surrounding the WIC workforce. The three committees and task forces that were combined were:

1. RD Recruitment & Retention Task Force
2. Leadership Academy
3. Member Benefit & Program Management Committee

In late 2023, NWA received a \$1.2 million grant from the Walmart Foundation focused specifically on diversifying the WIC workforce. One of the 4 key objectives for this grant was to explore the landscape of CPPAs by conducting focus groups and surveys to understand barriers to recruitment, retention, and career growth for these professionals. As a result, a national survey that CPPAs could take to help assess the CPPA workforce was created and administered.

In the summer of 2024, NWA administered the National Assessment of the Competent Paraprofessional Authority (CPPA) Landscape survey. The CPPA Landscape Survey aimed to assess opportunities and barriers for the recruitment and retention of CPPAs on a national scale. The survey was created, administered, and analyzed by the WIC Workforce Development Committee.

### Survey Characteristics

Figure 1 displays a summary of the survey characteristics, including the total number of questions, the number of responding state WIC agencies, and the completion rate, among other details.

Figure 1. Survey Characteristics	
Total Number of Questions	57
Response Rate	192 respondents
State Respondents US State WIC Agency US Local WIC Agency Indian Tribal Organizations US Territories	14 (12%) State WIC Agency 98 (86%) Local WIC Agency 1 (0.9%) Indian Tribal Organization 1 (0.9%) US Territory
Completion Rate	94.3%
Partial Completion Rate	5.7% partial completion

Figure 2. Maximum number of questions possible based on role	
CPPA, Doesn't Hire CPPAs	~51
Not CPPA, Doesn't Hire CPPAs	~29

Figure 3. Demographics of Survey Participants	
CPPA	84 (44.2%)
CPPA Hiring/Supervisory Role	30 (28.6%)
Less than High School Education	1 (0.9%)
Graduated High School	4 (3.5%)
Some College/No Degree	20 (17.5%)
Trade/Technical/Associate's Degree	19 (17.2%)
Bachelor's Degree	40 (35.1%)
Advanced Degree (MD, Ph.D, Master's)	27 (23.7%)
Monthly Participation Caseload 0-500 Participants 501-5,000 Participants 5001-10,000 Participants More than 10,000 Participants	8 (8.2%) 59 (60.8%) 16 (16.5%) 14 (14.4%)

\*Response rate indicates the number of individuals who opened the survey.

## Methods

### Data Collection

Working collaboratively throughout 2024 to develop survey questions, the committee designed a 57-question survey to assess current issues within the CPPA workforce and gather qualitative and quantitative data. Topics covered a broad spectrum, including demographics, general staffing patterns, pay rates, job satisfaction, turnover, recruitment strategies and barriers, professional training opportunities and pathways, and support for the pursuit of credentials such as RD/RDN and IBCLC.

## Analysis

The WIC Workforce Committee created, administered, and analyzed the survey. The maximum number of questions a survey respondent could have answered was 57.<sup>3</sup> The dual goals of analysis were to:

1. Identify key factors that contribute to CPPA turnover and
2. Explore ways to improve recruitment and retention within WIC

This report presents the survey findings, based on statistical analyses performed by the committee and Alchemer. A total of 192 respondents took the survey, 84 of whom were CPPAs and 30 of whom were supervisors/managers of CPPAs. The survey had a 94.3% completion rate and a 5.7% partial completion rate.

## Limitations

The purpose of this one-time survey was to collect data and information on how CPPAs can be better retained and why they leave their employment in WIC. The findings revealed several areas where the questions could have been improved to elicit more precise responses and, in turn, findings.

Among the limitations of the survey is the subjectivity of responses. Furthermore, many respondents said their agency doesn't actually track CPPA turnover, thus making the survey ineffective on some level related to assessing contributing factors for why CPPA turnover may be so high. Another limitation was the number of responses received, as only 84 WIC CPPAs and 30 WIC managers completed the survey from across the nation. For future surveys administered on CPPAs, these limitations will be factored in to help build a more robust knowledge base regarding the national landscape of CPPAs in WIC.

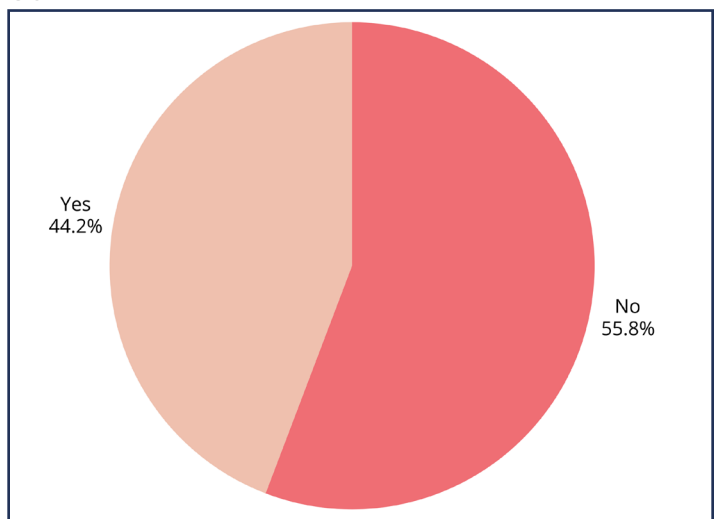
## Findings

Findings from the survey painted a detailed picture of the barriers related to CPPA recruitment and retention in WIC. This report highlights which questions were asked of WIC managers versus WIC CPPAs.

### Demographics

As noted earlier, roughly 94% of survey respondents completed the survey, and roughly 6% partially completed it.

**FIGURE 4.** NUMBER OF CPPAS COMPLETING THE SURVEY

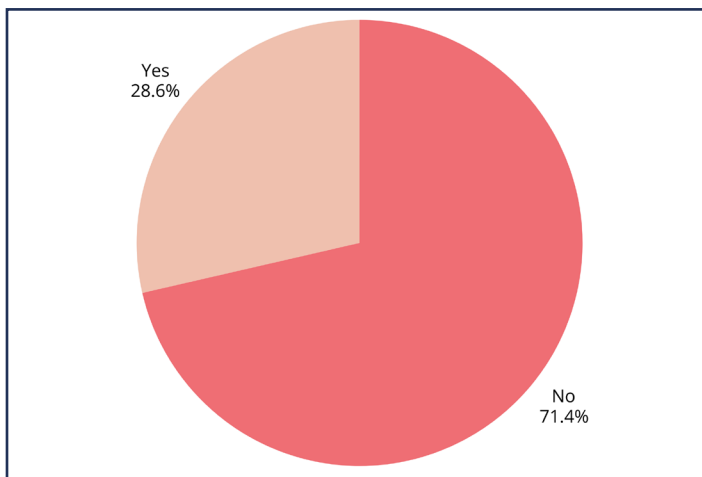


Total Responses: 190

**Survey Question 1:** Are you a competent paraprofessional authority (CPPA)? A term not universally utilized in WIC, CPPA is defined in USDA's Nutrition Service Standards as an individual without extended professional training in health, nutrition or clinical management who is trained and given ongoing supervision to provide a basic service or function.

Of those who completed the survey, 44.2% identified as a CPPA and 55.8% did not, indicating that this survey captures a landscape of different perspectives within WIC. With 190 responses, it's likely that many WIC staff who initially started the survey were neither a CPPA nor a supervisor/manager.

**FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO HIRE CPPAS**



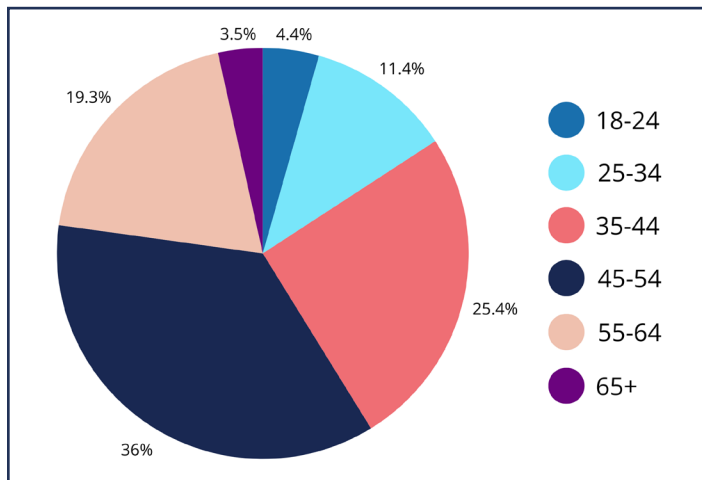
Total Responses: 105

**Survey Question 2:** In your role, are you responsible for supervising/hiring CPPAs?

Based on the responses, the majority of survey respondents (71.4%) are not in supervisory or hiring roles for CPPAs.

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**FIGURE 6. AGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

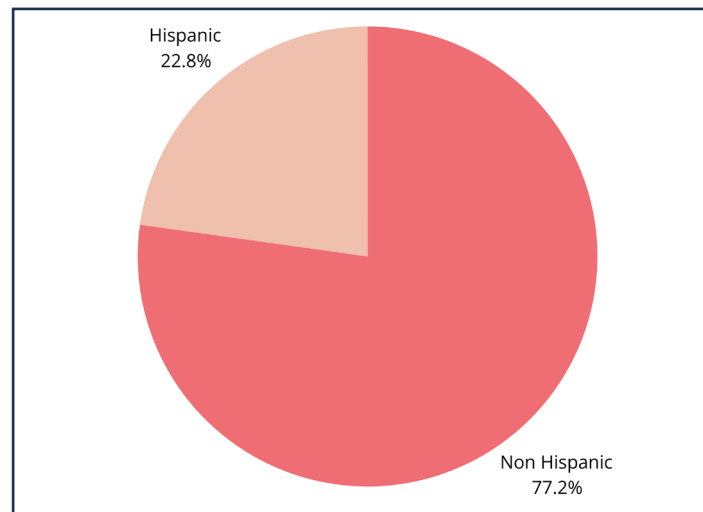


Total Responses: 114

**Survey Question 3:** What is your age?

The largest age group represented was 45-54 years of age (36%), followed by 35-44 years of age (25.4%), and 55-64 years of age (19.3%). This suggests that a significant portion of survey respondents are in the latter half of their careers. A trend noted by the committee from previous surveys, such as the RD Recruitment & Retention survey, an aging workforce appears to be characteristic across WIC.

**FIGURE 7. ETHNICITY**



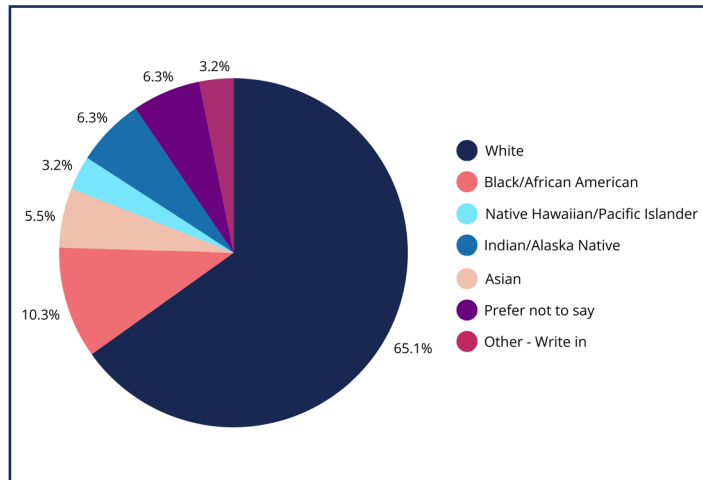
Total Responses: 114

**Survey Question 4:** What is your ethnicity?

Based on survey responses, 23% identified as Hispanic and 77% identified as non-Hispanic.

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**FIGURE 8. RACE**

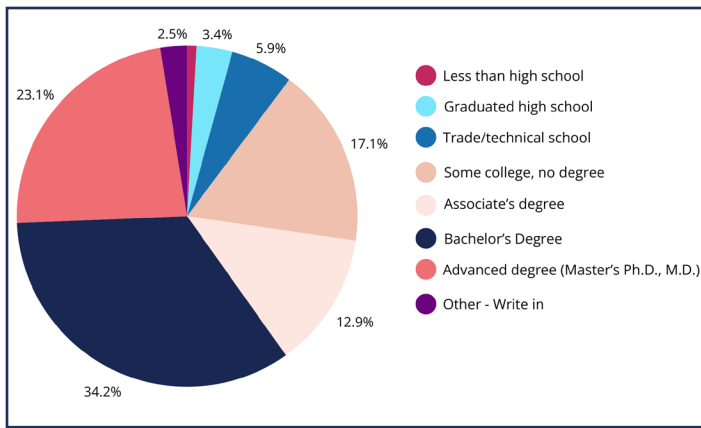


Total Responses: 126

**Survey Question 5:** What is your race? Select all that apply.

By a significant margin, the largest racial group was White at 71.9%. Black/African American made up 11.4%, Asian 6.1%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 3.5% and American Indian/Alaska Native 7.0%. Additionally, 7% of survey respondents preferred not to answer, and 3.5% wrote in a response.

**FIGURE 9. EDUCATION LEVEL**



**Survey Question 6: What is your education level?**

The most common education levels were Bachelor's degree at 35.1% and Advanced degrees at 23.7%. These two accounted for nearly 60% of respondents, suggesting a highly educated pool of respondents. However, once broken down by CPPA versus supervisor/manager, we see the following:

Total Responses: 114

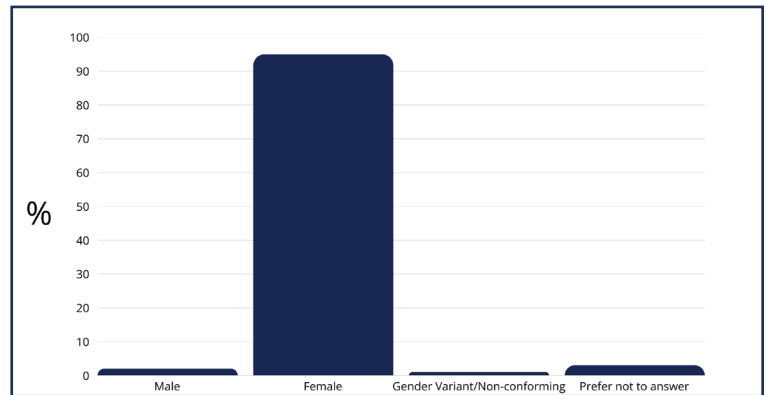
Figure 10: Education Level by Job Title	
Education Level of CPPAs	Education Level of Supervisors/Managers
Less than High School: 1.2% Graduated High School: 4.8% Trade/Technical School: 4.8% Some College, No Degree: 23.8% Associate's Degree: 17.9% Bachelor's Degree: 31% Advanced Degree (Master's, Ph.D., M.D.): 16.7%	Bachelor's Degree: 46.7% Advanced Degree (Master's, Ph.D., M.D.): 43.3% Other - Write in: 10.0%

**Survey Question 7: What is your sex?**

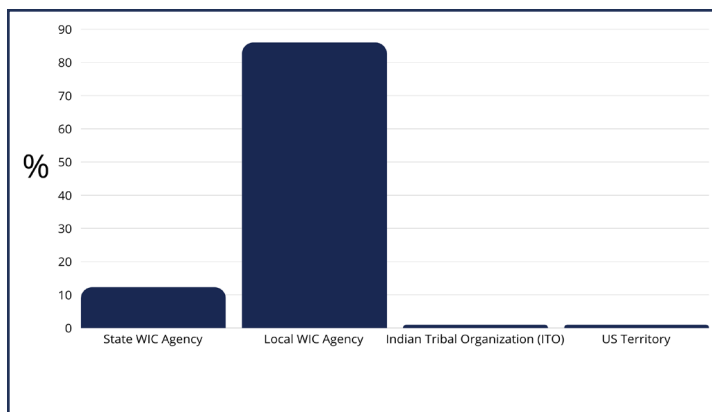
Of survey respondents, 94.7% were female, which in alignment with previous workforce surveys, further demonstrates that the majority of the WIC workforce is female.

Total Responses: 114

**FIGURE 11. SEX**



**FIGURE 12. TYPE OF AGENCY IN WHICH THE RESPONDENT WORKED**

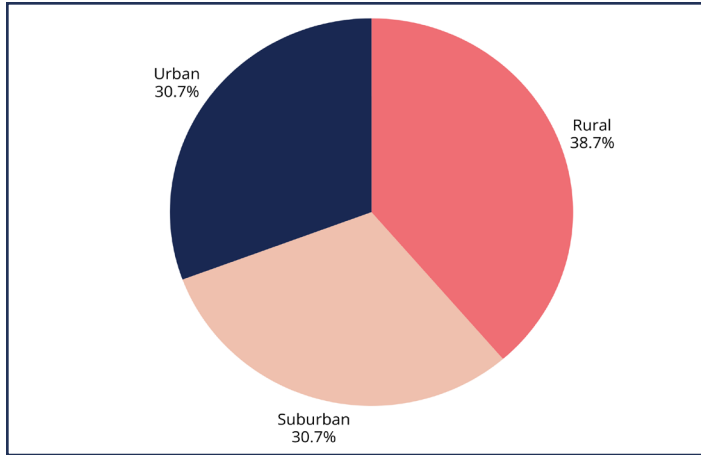


**Survey Question 8: What type of WIC agency do you work for?**

This survey primarily reflects individuals working in local WIC agencies, making up 86% of respondents. 12.3% of respondents were from state agencies, 0.9% were from US territories, and 0.9% were from ITOs.

Total Responses: 114

**FIGURE 13. TYPE OF LOCAL AGENCY**

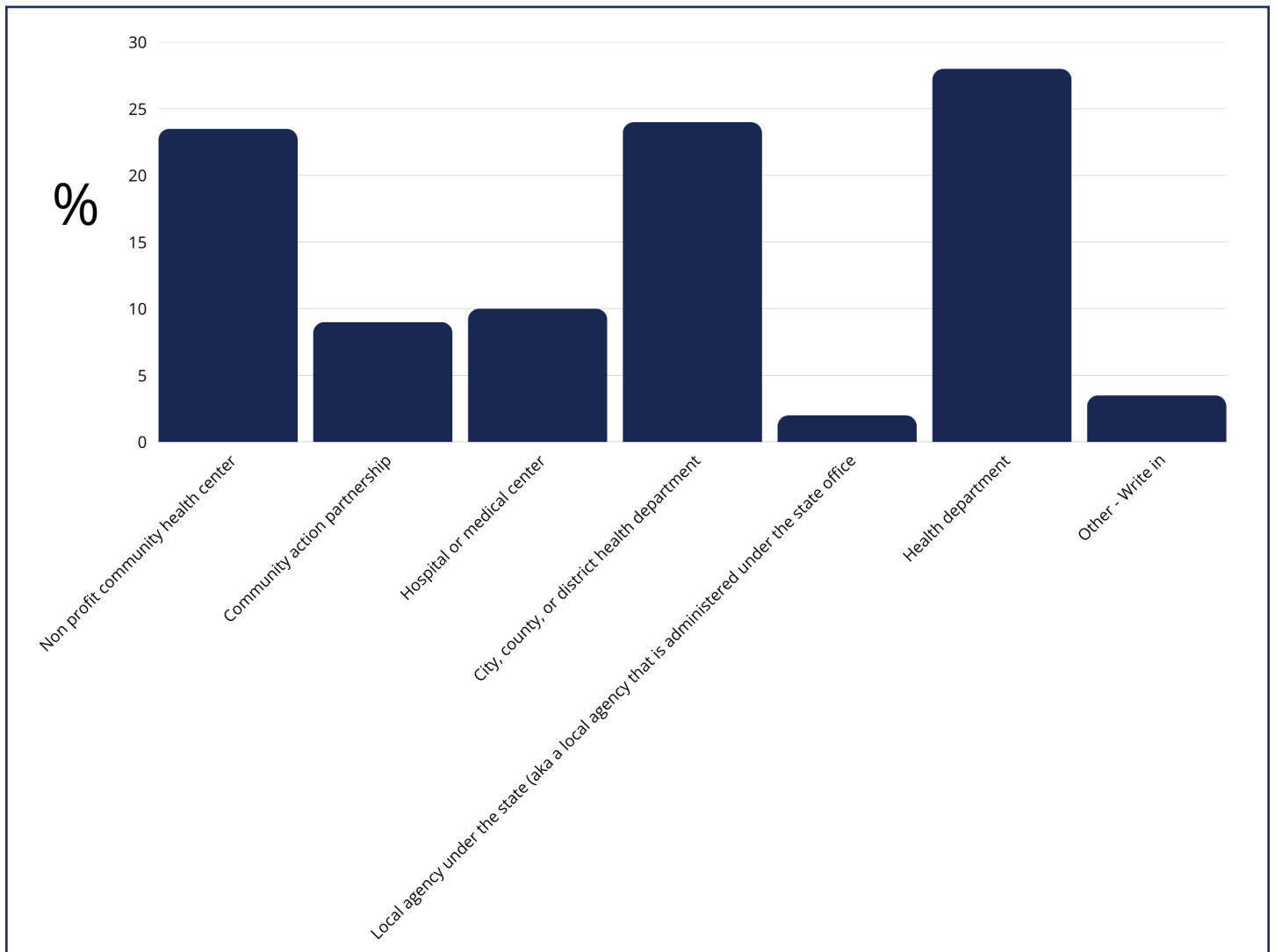


**Survey Question 9:** How would you characterize your Local WIC Agency?

Rural agencies were the most commonly represented at 44.3%, followed by urban agencies at 35.1%, and suburban agencies at 20.6%

Total Responses: 97

**FIGURE 14. LOCAL AGENCY STRUCTURE**

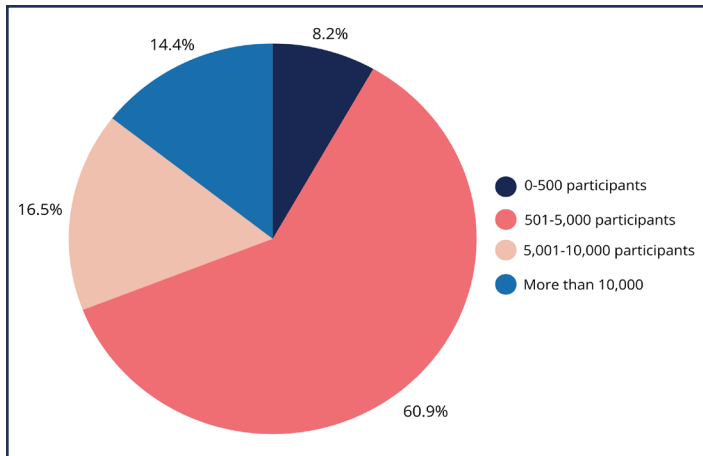


Total Responses: 98

**Survey Question 10:** What type of local agency structure do you work in?

The most common local agency structures, based on survey respondents, are Health departments at 28.6% followed by city, county, or district health departments at 24.5%. This indicates that over half of local agency respondents work within public health structures. Other agency types included non-profit community health centers at 22.4%, hospitals or medical centers at 10.2%, and community action partnerships (9%).

**FIGURE 15. MONTHLY CASELOAD**



Total Responses: 97

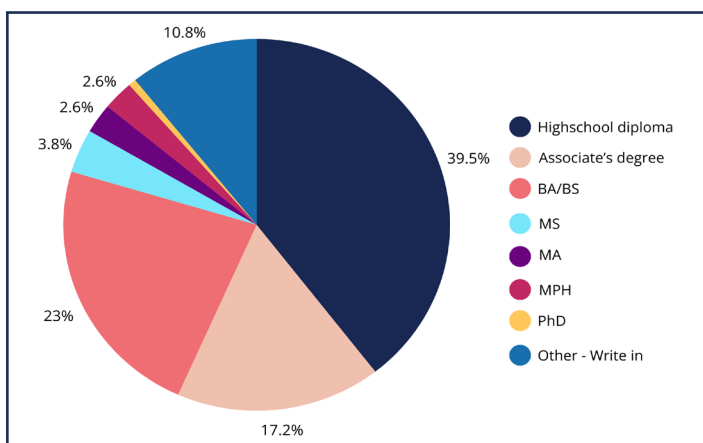
**Survey Question 11:** What is the monthly participation caseload of your local agency?

The majority of local agencies represented have a caseload between 501 and 5,000 participants—60.8%. Some respondents reported higher caseloads at their agency, with 16.5% having 5,001-10,000 participants and 14.4% having more than 10,000 participants.

**Survey question 12:** Which state agency/US territory/ Indian Tribal Organization (ITO)/local agency do you work for?

A total of 15 state agencies, or 17% of all state WIC agencies, responded to the survey. 1 US territory (20% of all US territories), 2 ITOs (6% of all ITOs), and 22 local agencies responded to this question representing agencies across. Geographic diversity of survey responses was well represented, with respondents coming from all 7 USDA regions.

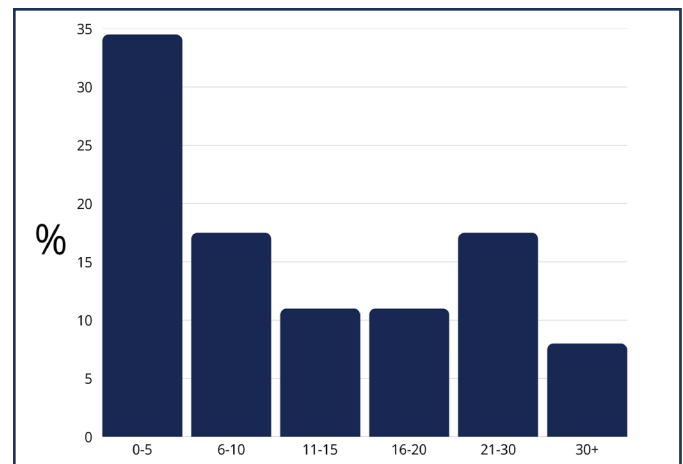
**FIGURE 16. CPPA QUALIFICATIONS**



**Survey Question 13:** Check all the qualifications that apply.

Only CPPAs taking the survey were asked to check all the qualifications that applied to them. While a high school diploma is the most common qualification at 73.8%, a significant number of respondents also held BA/BS degrees (42.9%) and Associate’s degrees (32.1%). The “Other” category reveals additional relevant certifications and degrees such as CLC, BSN, IBCLC, RD, and MPH, indicating a range of professional backgrounds among respondents.

**FIGURE 17. NUMBER OF YEARS WORKED IN WIC**

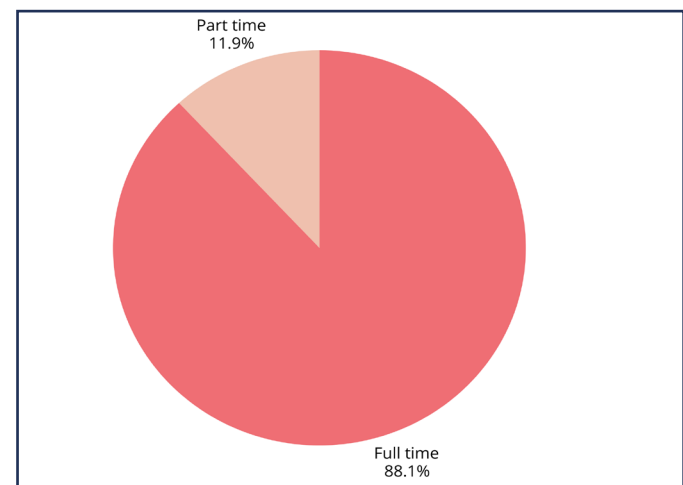


Total Responses: 84

**Survey Question 14:** Indicate the number of years you’ve worked in WIC.

Asked only of WIC CPPAs, the largest group of respondents (34.5%) has worked in WIC for a relatively short time (0-5 years), but a significant portion (26.2%) also has extensive experience (21+ years), thus indicating a mix of new and long-term staff.

**FIGURE 18. FULL TIME VS. PART TIME**

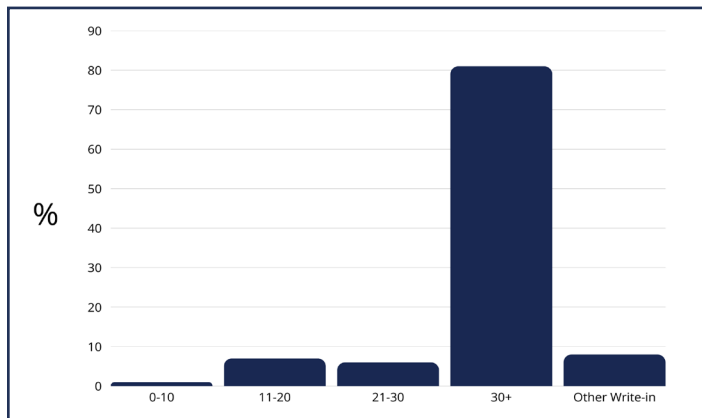


Total Responses: 84

**Survey Question 15:** Is your position full-time or part-time?

Asked only of WIC CPPAs, most respondents hold full-time positions (88.1%). NOTE: The lack of ability to move from part time to full time was mentioned as a difficult aspect of working for WIC by one respondent when answering question 41.

**FIGURE 19.** NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED EACH WEEK BY CPPAS

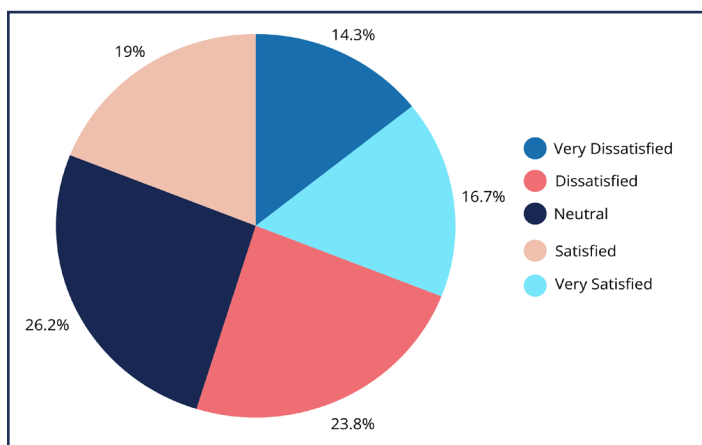


Total Responses: 84

**Survey question 16:** Check the number of hours you work each week.

Asked only of WIC CPPAs, the vast majority of respondents work 30 or more hours per week (81%), aligning with the high percentage of full-time employees. Please note that some agencies consider staff full-time after 30 hours/week.

**FIGURE 20.** CAREER SATISFACTION



Total Responses: 84

**Survey Question 17:** On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with opportunities to advance your career in WIC?

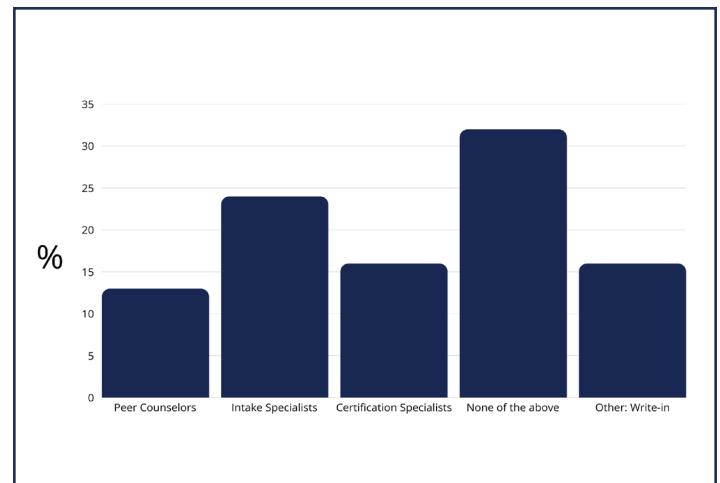
Asked only of WIC CPPAs, satisfaction with career advancement opportunities was mixed, with 38.1% expressing dissatisfaction (Very Dissatisfied or Dissatisfied) and 35.7% expressing satisfaction (Satisfied or Very Satisfied), thus suggesting career advancement as a notable area for improvement.

**Survey question 18:** How many full-time CPPAs do you have in your agency?

Total Responses: 28

Asked only of supervisors/managers, the number of full-time CPPAs per agency varies widely, from 0 to as many as 40. Some agencies mentioned having no CPPAs, while others mentioned a strong opposition from nutrition professionals in their agency to the CPPA role performing RD/Nutritionist functions due to minimal education and training, and a general feeling that it diminishes the value of nutrition professionals in WIC.

**FIGURE 21.** CPPA JOB TITLE



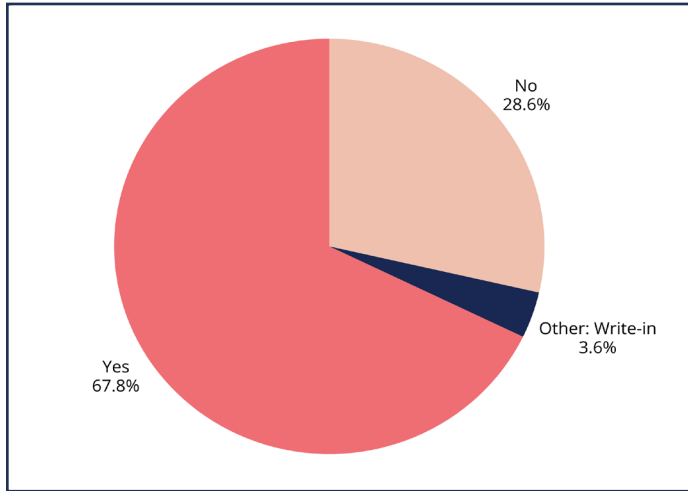
Total Responses: 25

**Survey Question 19:** Of those full-time CPPAs, how many are:

Peer Counselors, Intake Specialists, Certification Specialists, None of the Above, & Other – Write in

Asked only of supervisors/managers, “None of the above” was most frequently selected at 32.0%, followed by Intake Specialists at 24.0%. This suggests CPPAs fulfill a variety of roles beyond standard categories. Write-in responses confirm mixed roles and other titles like “Nutrition Associate.”

**FIGURE 22. CPPA TURNOVER**

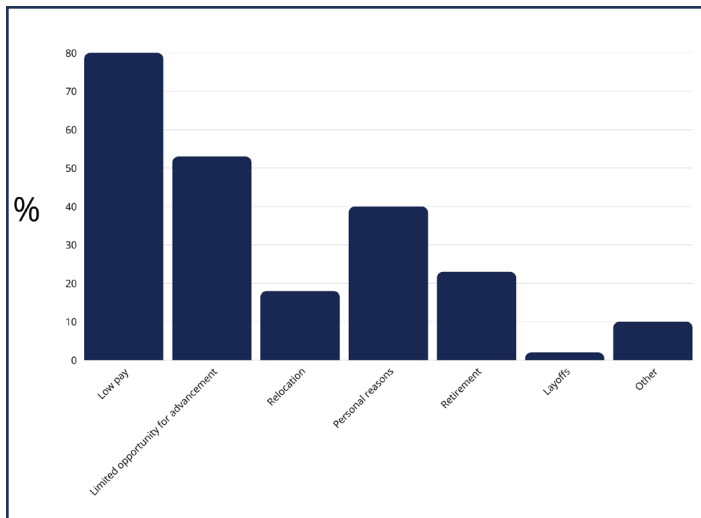


Total Responses: 84

**Survey Question 20:** Do you know other CPPAs who have left your agency in the last year?

Asked only of CPPAs, a large majority of respondents (67.9%) know of CPPAs who have left their agency in the past year, indicating significant turnover or mobility in these roles

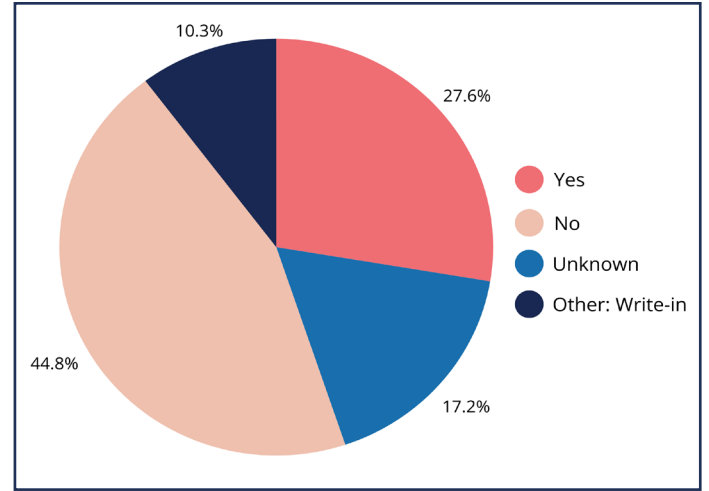
**FIGURE 23. REASONS CPPAS LEFT**



**Survey question 39:** What was the reason they left? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, 80.7% of respondents indicated low pay as the reason why CPPAs were leaving. 52.6% noted limited advancement opportunities, 40.4% noted personal reasons, and 22.8% noted retirement.

**FIGURE 24. TRACKING CPPA TURNOVER**

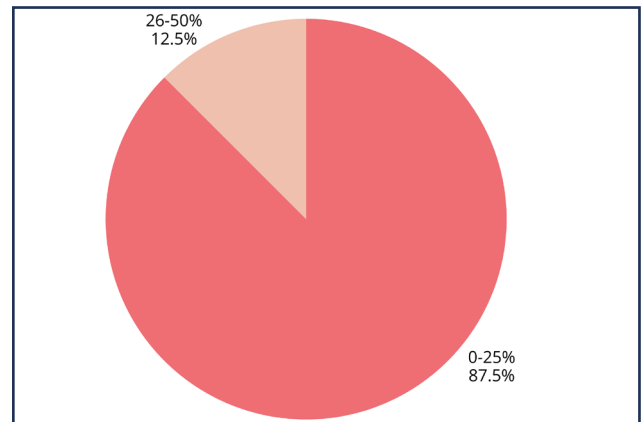


Total Responses: 29

**Survey Question 21:** Does your agency track annual CPPA turnover (i.e., the number of CPPAs that leave your office)?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, most agencies do not formally track CPPA turnover (44.8%), while 27.6% do. One director noted an informal awareness of high turnover due to uncompetitive salaries. This lack of formal tracking may make it difficult for agencies to fully understand the scope of the turnover issue.

**FIGURE 25. 2023 CPPA TURNOVER**

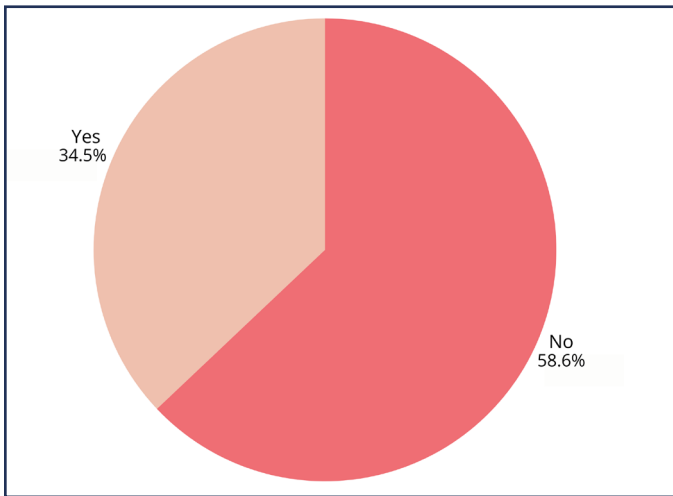


Total Responses: 8

**Survey Question 22:** What was the turnover of CPPAs in your office during 2023?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, of the 8 respondents who completed this question, 87.5% reported a turnover of 0-25%, while 12.5% (one respondent) reported a turnover of 26-50%. The small number of responses makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions about overall CPPA turnover rates.

**FIGURE 26. CONCERNS REGARDING CPPA TURNOVER**



Total Responses: 29

**Survey Question 23:** Are you concerned about the level of CPPA turnover in your agency?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, the majority (58.6%) are not concerned about current turnover. However, a notable portion (34.5%) is concerned.

**Survey question 24:** How are you addressing this issue?

Agencies are attempting various strategies to address CPPA turnover, including increasing pay with one agency increasing pay by \$1.50/hour – this was a similar theme noted in the committee’s RD Recruitment & Retention Survey administered in 2018.<sup>4</sup> Other strategies included offering flexibility/remote options, team building, and recruiting candidates from colleges. However, others indicated their concerns are not being addressed or that current strategies, such as increased pay, are insufficient to abate turnover. The uncompetitive salary base is highlighted as a core issue driving the problem.

One respondent expressed their concern regarding their ability to hire and train staff as CPPAs, noting that CPPAs have been a great addition for certification processes. Another respondent mentioned concerns regarding turnover but felt their manager had not addressed the issue.

**FIGURE 27. FACTORS INFLUENCING CPPA TURNOVER**

	1. No influence	2. Little influence	3. Same influence	4. A lot of influence	Not applicable	Total Checks
<b>Low pay</b> Checks Row Check %	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 20.0%	7 70.0%	1 10.0%	10
<b>Lack of career advancement</b> Checks Row Check %	0 0.0%	2 20.0%	3 30.0%	4 40.0%	1 10.0%	10
<b>Burnout</b> Checks Row Check %	0 0.0%	1 10.0%	3 30.0%	5 50.0%	1 10.0%	10
<b>Not enough hours</b> Checks Row Check %	7 63.6%	0 0.0%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	3 27.3%	11
<b>Too many hours</b> Checks Row Check %	6 54.5%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	3 27.3%	11
<b>Unsure/do not know</b> Checks Row Check %	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	0 0.0%	7 70.0%	10
<b>Other</b> Checks Row Check %	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	6 60.0%	10
<b>Total Checks</b> Checks % of Total Checks	15 20.8%	6 8.3%	12 16.7%	17 23.6%	22 30.6%	72

Total Responses: 72

**Survey Question 25:** Please rate on a scale of 1 to 4 which factors most influence CPPA turnover in your agency. 1 being a factor that has little to no influence, 5 being a factor that has strong influence. Select all that apply.

Asked only of supervisors/managers, low pay is overwhelmingly seen as a strong influence on CPPA turnover (70% with a lot of influence). Burnout (50% with a lot of influence) and lack of career advancement (40% with a lot of influence) are also considered significant factors. Factors related to the number of hours (too few or too many) are generally seen as having little influence. This reinforces the qualitative feedback identifying low pay and lack of advancement as major concerns.

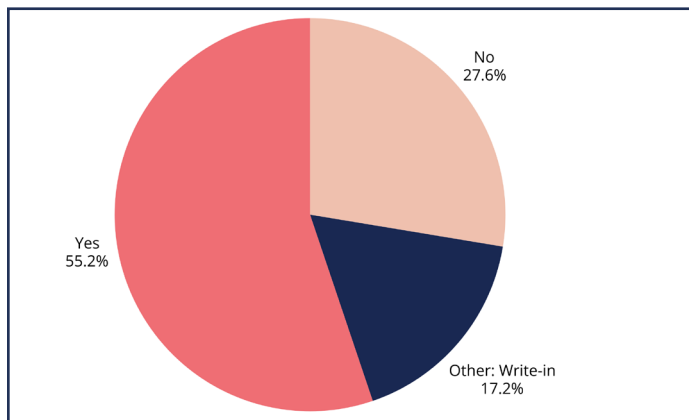
**Survey Question 26:** What is the minimum hourly rate for the CPPA position in your agency?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, the minimum hourly rates reported for CPPA positions show a wide range, from under \$15/hour to over \$30/hour. This variability across agencies likely contributes to feelings of uncompetitive pay for some. The average pay amounted to \$19.32/hour.

**Survey question 27:** What is the maximum hourly rate for the CPPA position in your agency?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, the maximum hourly rates also show significant variation, ranging from the mid-teens to nearly \$50/hour. One agency reported no maximum. The average pay amounted to \$26.19/hour.

**FIGURE 28. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

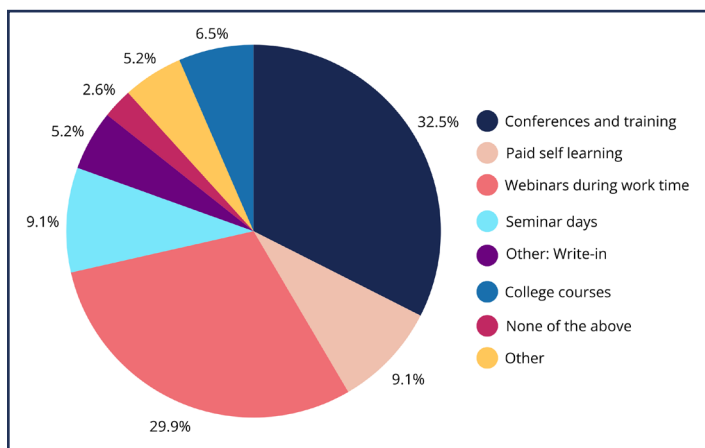


Total Responses: 77

**Survey Question 28:** What professional development opportunities do you offer your CPPAs? Select all that apply.

Asked only of supervisors/managers, the most opportunities are conferences or training (86.2%) and webinars during work time (79.3%). Fewer agencies offer paid self-learning (24.1%), Seminar days (24.1%), or college courses (17.2%). A small percentage report no opportunities offered (6.9%).

**FIGURE 29. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

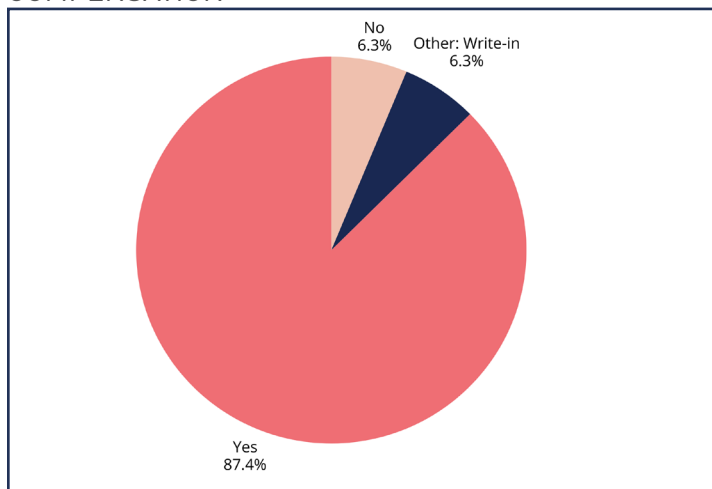


Total Responses: 29

**Survey Question 29:** For professional development, does your agency cover fees or registration for CPPAs?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, a majority of agencies (55.2%) cover fees or registration for professional development. However, a significant portion (27.6%) do not, and the “Other” responses highlight that even when fees are covered, it’s often dependent on budget or grant availability.

**FIGURE 30. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPENSATION**



Total Responses: 16

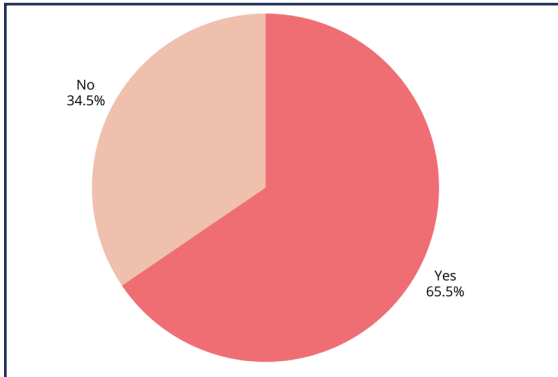
**Survey Question 30:** Is the time of your CPPAs compensated for professional development?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, the time spent on professional development is largely compensated (87.5%). Because this question was linked to survey question 29, only 16 responses were gathered for this question.

**Survey Question 31:** What licensure/membership fees are paid for by your agency for CPPAs?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, many agencies report covering none of these fees. Some agencies covered specific certifications like CLC, NDTR, or IBCLC, depending on funding. One agency stated they pay for fees that “are pertinent to performing WIC roles.”

**FIGURE 31. RECRUITING BARRIERS**



Total Response: 29

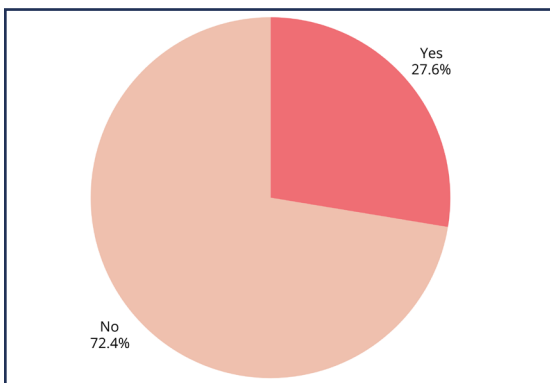
**Survey question 32:** Are there barriers to recruiting CPPAs for your agency?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, 65.5% of respondents indicate that their agency faces barriers to recruiting CPPAs.

**Survey Question 33:** What are the barriers?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, pay was the largest barrier for recruitment, followed by training requirements, lack of knowledge about CPPAs, and limited candidate pool.

**FIGURE 32. STRATEGY FOR RECRUITING CPPAS**



Total responses: 29

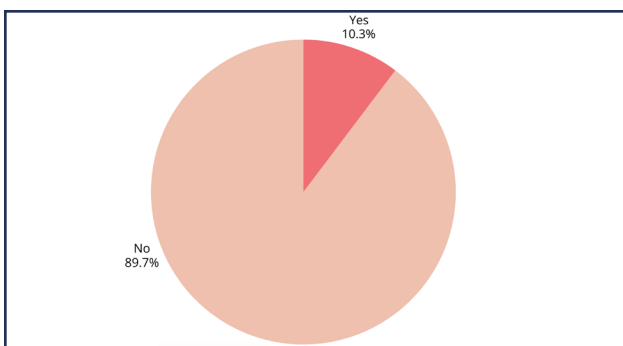
**Survey question 34:** Does your agency currently have a strategy for recruiting CPPAs?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, only 27.6% of agencies reported having a strategy in place for recruiting CPPAs, while 72.4% had no strategy in place.

**Survey question 35:** What are the strategies?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, only 8 respondents identified specific strategies for recruiting CPPAs, which ranged from outreach to local colleges to advertising among WIC participants and utilizing hiring services and social media.

**FIGURE 33. PATHWAYS FOR CPPA TO RD/RDN**

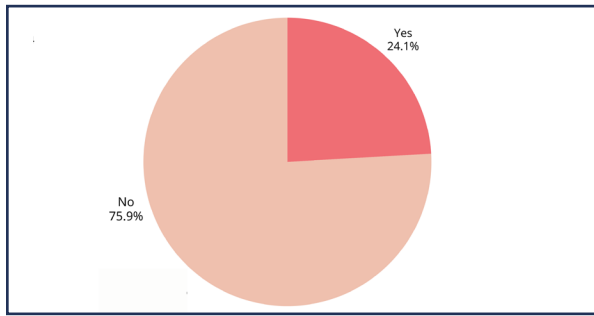


Total responses: 29

**Survey question 36:** In your agency, is there a clear pathway for CPPAs to pursue registered dietitian (RD/RDN) credential?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, 10.3% of respondents said there was a clear pathway for CPPAs to pursue their RD/RDN credential. The remaining 89.7% stated there was no clear pathway.

**FIGURE 34. PATHWAYS FOR CPPA TO IBCLC**



Total responses: 29

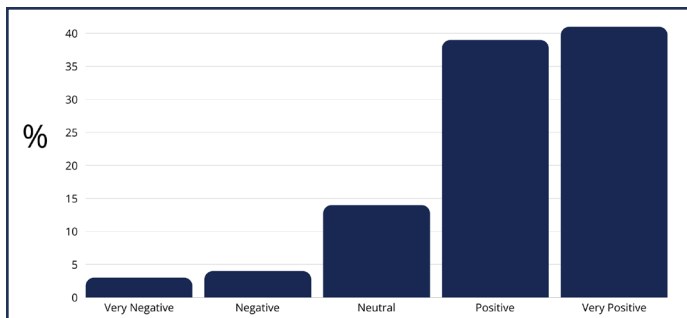
**Survey question 37:** In your agency, is there a clear pathway for CPPAs to pursue their International Board Certified Lactation Credential (IBCLC)?

Asked only of supervisors/managers, 24.1% stated there is a clear pathway for CPPAs to pursue their IBCLC credential, whereas 75.9% stated there was no clear pathway.

**Survey question 38:** In your agency, what type of career pathways are available for CPPAs?

An open text question asked only of supervisors/managers, a number of pathways were mentioned, ranging from management and other jobs within the hospital system to highlighting specific pathways that begin as WIC CPPA, then progress to WIC lab tech to WIC customer service coordinator.

**FIGURE 35. PERCEPTION OF WORKING IN WIC**



Total Responses: 84

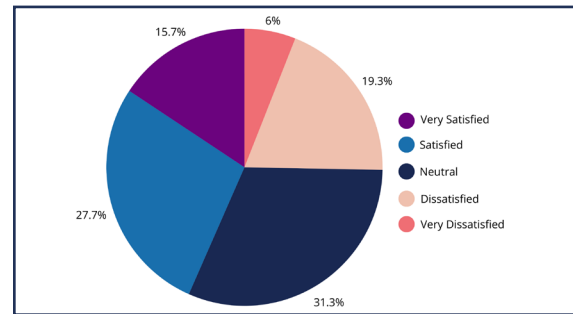
**Survey Question 40:** On a scale of 1 to 5, what is your perception of working for WIC? (1 very negative, 5 very positive)

Asked only of CPPAs, 40.5% stated that they had a very positive perception of working for WIC, followed by 39.3% having a positive perception. 14.3% had a neutral perception, and 3.6% and 2.4% had a negative and very negative perception, respectively.

**Survey question 41:** Please explain in more detail what your perception is.

Overall, many stated that they enjoyed and were fulfilled by helping mothers and babies in vulnerable populations and building client relationships. However, they noted that low pay relative to training and experience, lack of advancement opportunities, staffing shortages, and high responsibility/case load were major negatives for WIC employees.

**FIGURE 36. SATISFACTION WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

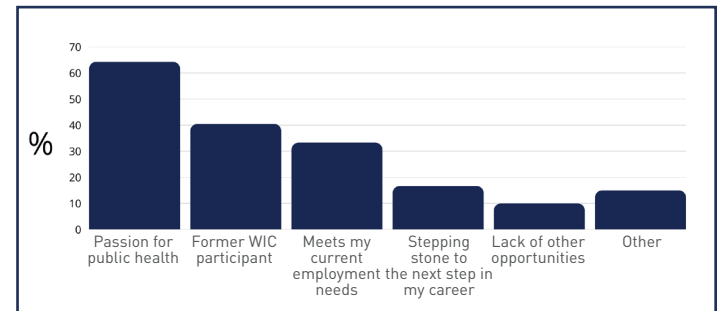


Total responses: 83

**Survey question 42:** How satisfied are you with the professional development opportunities provided by your WIC agency?

Asked only of CPPAs, 31.3% of respondents rated their satisfaction as neutral. 27.7% were satisfied, and 15.7% very satisfied. 19.3% and 6.0% were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied, respectively.

**FIGURE 37. REASONS FOR WORKING IN WIC**



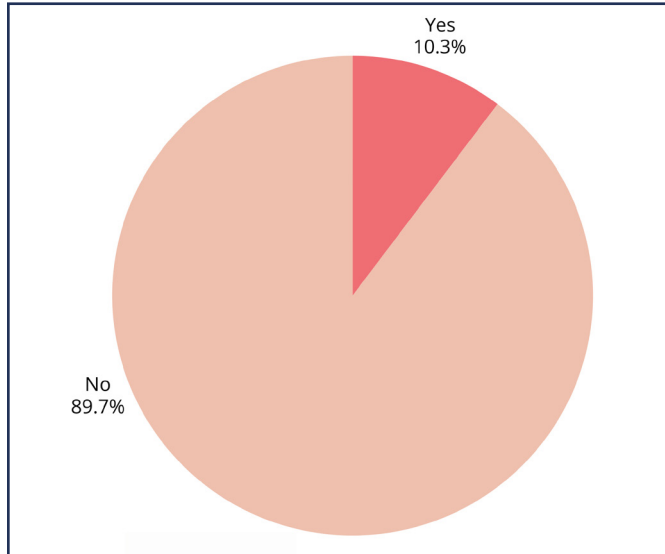
**Survey question 43:** Why did you choose to work in WIC? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, the majority of survey respondents noted that their passion for public health was why they chose to work in WIC (64.3%), followed by having been a former WIC participant (40.5%). 33.3% noted that their job met their current employment needs 16.7% viewed it as a stepping stone in their career.

**Survey question 44:** What is your hourly salary rate?

Asked only of CPPAs, the hourly rate for CPPAs varied greatly, with the lowest rate at \$12/hour and the highest rate at \$54/hour. The average hourly rate was \$24.73/hour.

**FIGURE 38. COMPETITIVENESS OF HOURLY SALARY**



Total responses: 84

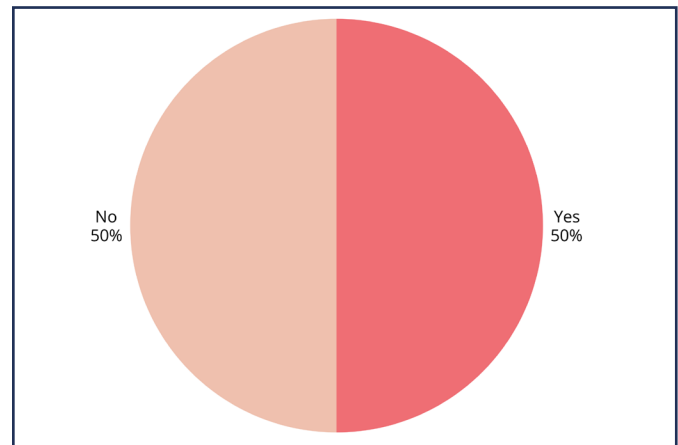
**Survey question 45:** Do you feel your current salary is competitive?

Asked only of CPPAs, 28.6% stated they felt their current salary was competitive, and 71.4% stated they didn't feel it was competitive.

**Survey question 46:** Why do you feel that your current salary is not competitive?

Asked only of CPPAs, many noted that private sector and food service/fast food jobs pay more and require less knowledge and training than their WIC positions. They mentioned that wages are not keeping pace with the cost of living and level of experience, and some respondents noticed that new employees were making similar salaries to long-time employees. Additionally, a few respondents discussed how parent organizations prevented raise increases for Local WIC Agencies, whereas State WIC Agencies had slightly higher pay.

**FIGURE 39. PERFORMANCE-RELATED PAY RAISE**

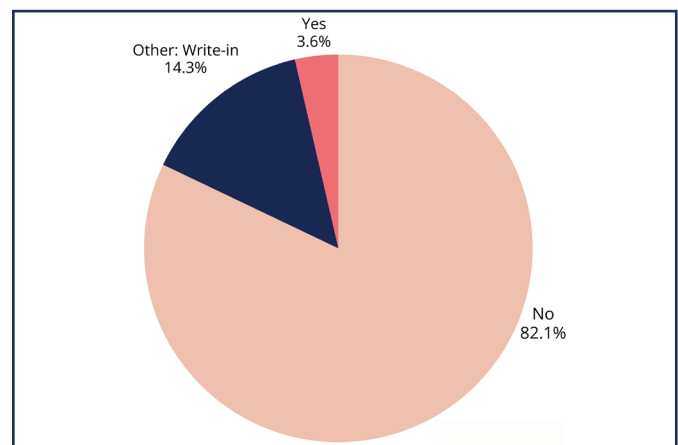


Total responses: 84

**Survey question 47:** Have you ever received a performance-related pay raise?

Asked only of CPPAs, there was a 50/50 split in response to this question.

**FIGURE 40. PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM**

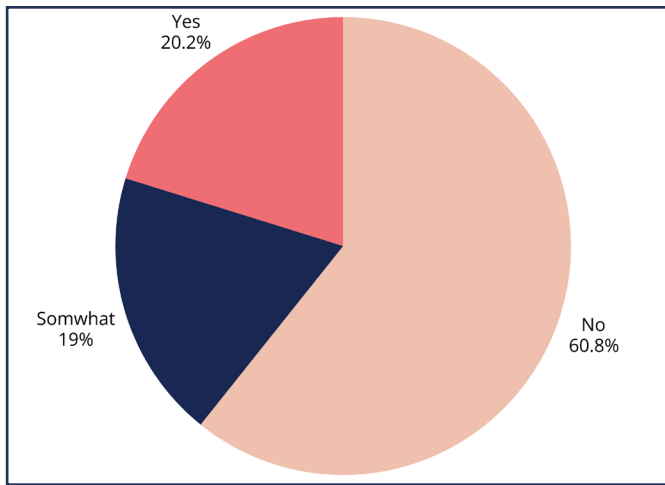


**Survey question 48:** Do you participate in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF)?

Asked only of CPPAs, 82% of survey respondents stated that they didn't participate, while 4% stated that they did. The 14% who wrote in responses stated factors such as not participating in PSFL but having paid off their loans, they do not participate due to their part-time employment status in WIC, and that they are about to apply for PSLF.

Total responses: 84

**FIGURE 41. PAY RAISE EMPOWERMENT**

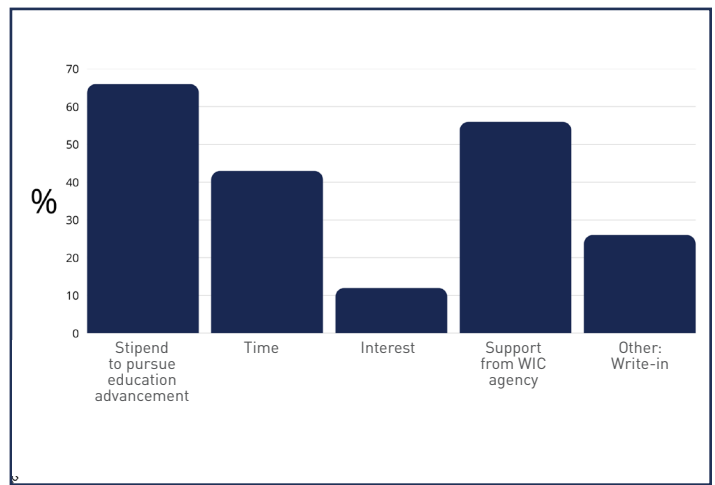


Total responses: 84

**Survey question 49:** Do you feel empowered to ask for pay increases?

Asked only of CPPAs, 60.7% of respondents said they do not feel empowered, while 19% reported feeling somewhat empowered and 20.2% stating that they do feel empowered to ask for a pay increase.

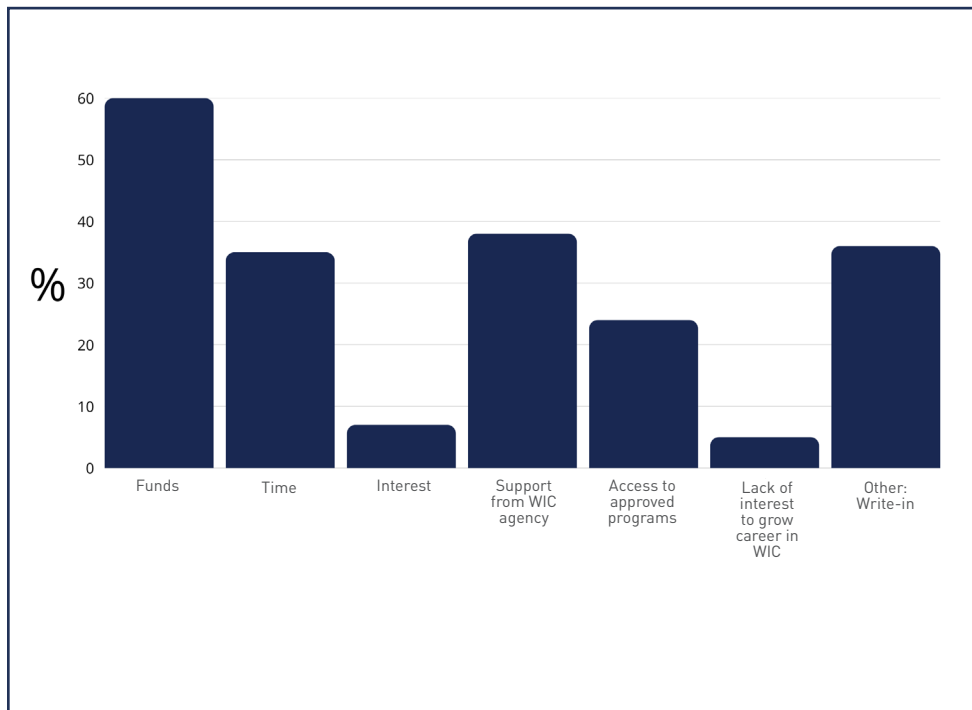
**FIGURE 42. BARRIERS TO ADVANCING CAREER**



**Survey question 50:** What barriers are preventing you from pursuing/advancing your career in WIC? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, most respondents reported funding as the biggest barrier, with funding(59.5%), support from WIC agency (38.1%), time (34.5%), and access to approved programs (23.8%) following. When asking this question, the survey did not specify the type of funding for respondents (i.e., personal funds to attain course credits versus agency/employer ability to fund).

**FIGURE 43. ADVANCING CAREER IN WIC**

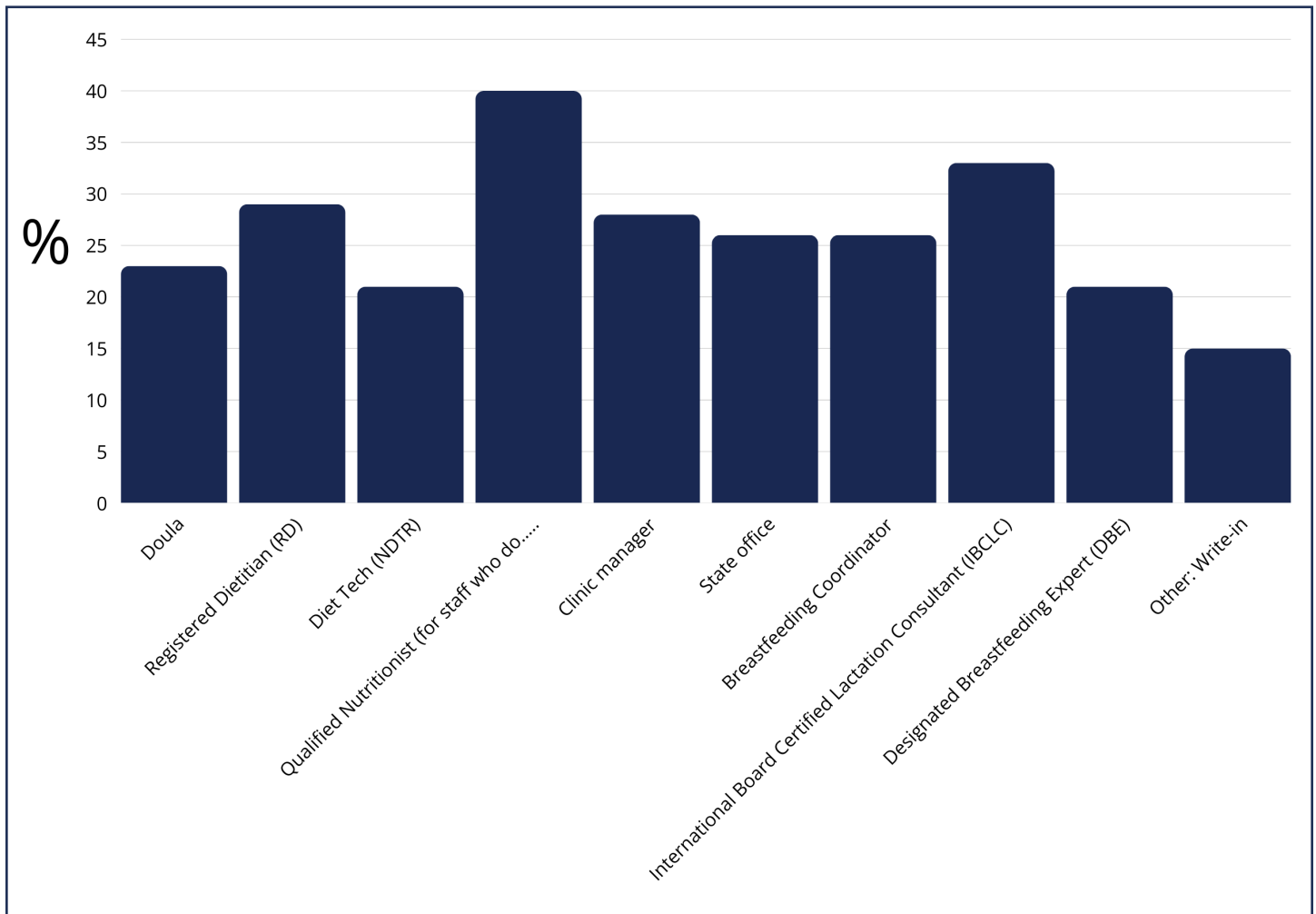


Total responses: 84

**Survey question 51:** What would help you pursue/advance your career in WIC? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, 65.5% stated that a stipend to pursue advancement would help, 56.0% stated support from their agency would help, and 44.0% stated time would help.

**FIGURE 44. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**



Total responses: 84

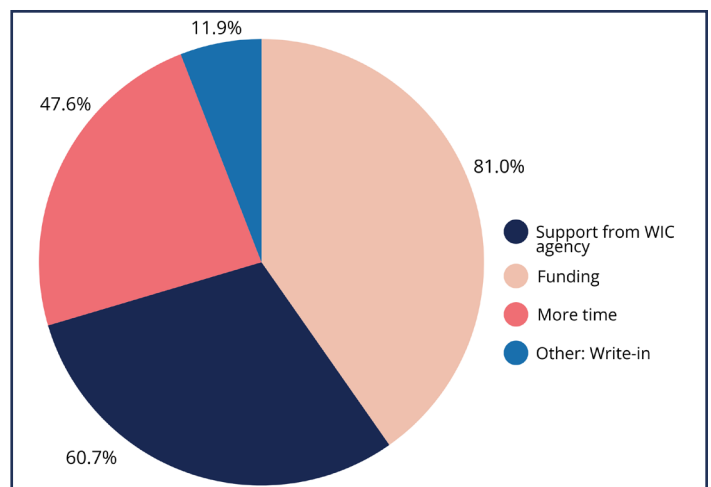
**Survey question 52:** What types of career opportunities would you be interested in if you were to move up in WIC? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, 40.2% stated interest in becoming a qualified nutritionist, 32.9% stated IBCLC, 29.3% stated RD/RDN, 28.0% stated clinic manager, 25.6% stated state office, 25.6% stated breastfeeding coordinator, and 23.2% stated doula.

**FIGURE 45. PURSUING ADVANCED CREDENTIALS**

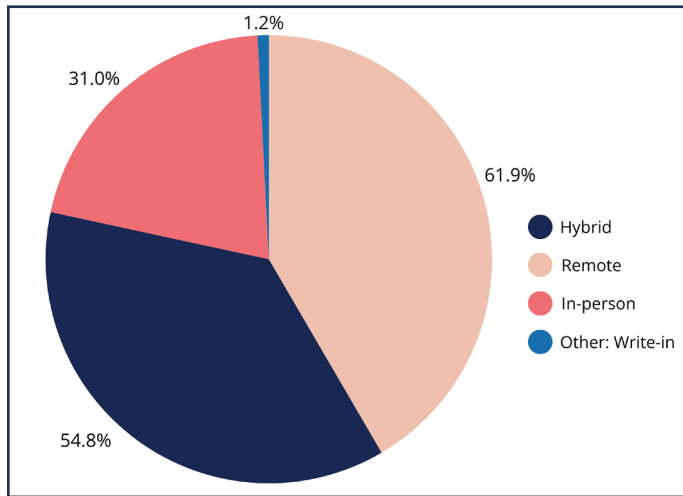
**Survey question 53:** What would make it the most realistic for you to pursue a more advanced credential in WIC? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, 81.0% stated funding, 60.7% stated more time, 47.6% stated support from their WIC agency, and 11.9% wrote in a response.



Total responses: 84

**FIGURE 46. PREFERRED METHOD FOR EDUCATION**



Total responses: 84

**Survey question 54:** What would be your preferred method for completing education/requirements? Select all that apply.

Asked only of CPPAs, the vast majority of respondents stated remote as their preference (61.9%). Hybrid was the second most popular at 54.8% and in-person was the least popular at 31%.

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**Survey question 56:** What would you like NWA to do to address your agency's issues with CPPA recruitment and retention?

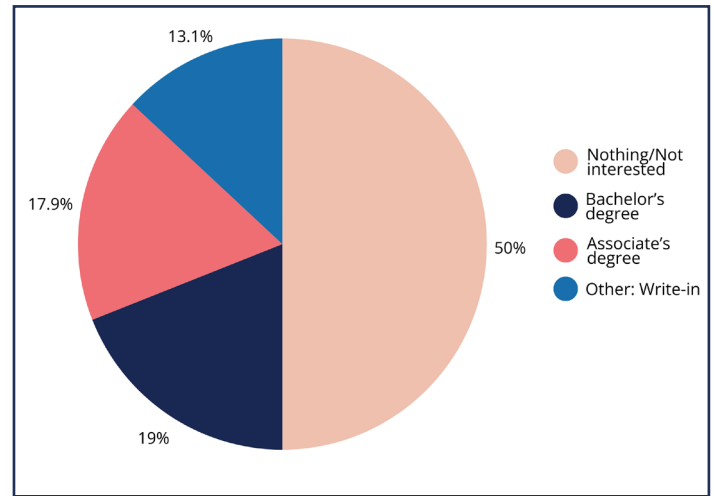
Most responses discussed higher salaries and more career advancement opportunities as ways to encourage retention. Many respondents also mentioned more education/training opportunities and specifically a path to help CPPAs become dietitians or lactation consultants. They also noted that more funding across the board would be helpful as well. Additionally, many noted that more clarity about job titles and the responsibilities of each job is needed to streamline hiring and prevent burnout. Some respondents also felt like a remote work option would be beneficial. In terms of recruitment, suggested ideas included social media marketing and promoting WIC to high school and college students.

—

**Survey question 57:** Any additional suggestions regarding CPPA recruitment and retention in WIC?

Remote work options, flexible work schedules, pay increases/retention bonuses, and better training opportunities were the most common suggestions. More specifically, one respondent suggested that pay increases should align with the increasing benefits that clients receive through their WIC packages. A few respondents also mentioned reimbursement for education and more standardization and clarity regarding position titles. In terms of advancement opportunities, a few people suggested that there should be more advancement tiers available for those with associate's degrees in health-related fields or significant experience as Breastfeeding Peer Counselors. Additionally, one respondent expressed an interest in more networking opportunities to meet other WIC employees across the state and across the country.

**FIGURE 47. NTDR CREDENTIAL**



Total responses: 84

**Survey question 55:** What would make it more likely for you to apply to a Nutrition and Dietetics Technician, Registered (NDTR) program?

Asked only of CPPAs, 19% stated that a Bachelor's degree would make it more likely for them to apply for an NDTR program, 17.9% stated an Associate's Degree would, and 50% stated that they simply weren't interested in pursuing the credential.

# Opportunities

Based on the aforementioned data, there are many opportunities for recruitment and retention of CPPAs in the WIC workforce. Top themes such as continued remote service options, increasing pay, and pathways for growth in WIC remain primary opportunities for recruitment and retention. This section outlines opportunities identified by the CPPA landscape survey and WIC Workforce Development that WIC agencies nationwide can employ to help increase recruitment and retention of CPPAs. Opportunities for which retention of CPPAs can be improved include:

## ***Continued Remote Service Options***

NWA continues to prioritize the establishment of permanent remote service options in its policy agenda. Modernization waivers from USDA have allowed WIC agencies to take huge strides in advancing service delivery and better meeting the needs of busy families. Most significantly, many State and Local Agencies have used these waivers to create virtual service options, allowing participants to be certified by phone or video appointment, akin to modern telehealth options, while protecting the quality of service and program integrity.

Since the establishment of virtual appointments, WIC participation has grown significantly, and research by the National WIC Association and the Nutrition Policy Institute found that 80% of participants surveyed indicated that remote services reduced preexisting barriers like transportation.<sup>5</sup> However, absent Congressional action, these flexibilities will expire on September 30, 2026.

While the benefits of remote service delivery are clear as it relates to WIC participants and program delivery, the benefits to WIC staff are lesser known. Remote service delivery has helped countless rural agencies provide much-needed services to WIC participants nationwide. Therefore, offering remote service options not only provides flexibility for program participants but for staff as well. The removal of these flexibilities could add undue pressure on professionals and paraprofessionals alike and could negatively impact agency hiring, budgets, etc.

## ***Increasing Salary***

Increasing pay is one of the primary factors by which agencies nationwide could increase recruitment and retention of CPPAs in WIC. Low pay not only impacts CPPAs but other professionals as well, including RDs and IBCLCs. WIC staff across the board are often paid

less than professionals with similar skillsets in other fields, thus reducing morale and motivation. Both the WIC Workforce Development Committee and NWA remain committed to exploring avenues by which pay can be increased, including updating the WIC funding formula and highlighting creative avenues other agencies have employed to increase pay for their staff.

## ***Increasing CPPA use Among all Agencies to Diversify the WIC Workforce***

It's the experience of the WIC Workforce Committee that CPPAs are used more often in rural areas and by smaller agencies out of need and necessity. However, because CPPAs may also be hired as a means to diversify staff to more reflect the community served and improve service delivery, the committee would expect that CPPAs be used more in urban settings instead. The WIC Workforce Development Committee will dive deeper into this topic in future publications, but currently recommends increasing the utilization of CPPAs in all WIC agencies - urban, suburban, and rural, as not only a recruitment and retention effort but as a means to diversify the WIC workforce as well.

## ***Passion for WIC***

Another opportunity regards staff who work in WIC, not for the salary, but out of passion also known as intrinsic motivation. Defined as the desire to engage in an activity out of personal satisfaction and not out of any external reward or pressure, the committee believes that the majority of WIC CPPAs are intrinsically motivated, hence why staff choose to stay despite low pay, limited opportunities for growth, etc. While research on the link between intrinsic motivation and retention among WIC staff does not exist, research shows that intrinsic motivation plays a critical role in employee retention.<sup>6</sup> Whether staff stay out of a desire to make an impact, the rapport they build with the participants, or because they're less salary-sensitive, creating work environments that foster intrinsic motivators can help improve recruitment and retention of CPPAs in WIC.

## ***Pathways for Growth: Expanding the Nutrition and Breastfeeding Workforce***

Utilizing CPPAs to expand the nutrition and breastfeeding workforce through the avenues of encouraging CPPAs to obtain their NDTR or pursuing lactation consultant credentials, either as IBCLCs or CLCs, is a means by which the WIC community can increase recruitment and retention of these vital professionals.

## Barriers

While there are numerous opportunities that can help increase recruitment and retention of CPPAs in WIC, there are several barriers as discussed below:

### *Low Salary*

As mentioned in the Opportunities section above, low pay remains a significant issue for all jobs in WIC, not just for CPPAs. All professionals, including dietitians, International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs), managers, CPPAs, etc., face systemic challenges with earning a livable wage. As the WIC Workforce Development Committee continues its work, it will explore ways through which staff salaries can be increased.

### *Turnover*

Another common problem in WIC is staff turnover. And while CPPA turnover is high, it's not clear if the turnover is higher or lower compared to other positions in WIC such as IBCLCs.<sup>7, 8</sup> Moving forward, the WIC Workforce Development Committee will explore avenues through which turnover rates among various professional categories in WIC can be examined, including CPPAs, as well as the most effective means for reducing staff turnover.

### *State Laws*

There are states that are unable to use CPPAs in their WIC clinics due to licensure laws. For those states, it would be particularly helpful to know what other states are barred from using CPPAs and if they've found workarounds or other creative solutions to employ them in WIC. It would also be helpful to explore ways in which these states can modify and update the verbiage of their laws so that they can hire CPPAs.

### *Changing Priorities*

Given the current political dynamic, there may be limited progress as the Committee works to strengthen the WIC workforce under the current Administration. With cuts to the current federal workforce, freezing of federal funds, and planned reorganization of the USDA, progress in further developing the WIC workforce has slowed at the federal level. For example, there were numerous grants funded through USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) regarding WIC workforce development that have since been cancelled as part of the current Administration's efforts to decrease federal spending.

## Recommendations

NWA's WIC Workforce Committee recommends the following:

### *Update the Term and for CPPA*

Currently, the only definition for CPPA exists in the USDA's Nutrition Service Standards (NSS), as seen below:

An individual without extended professional training in health, nutrition, or clinical management who is trained and given ongoing supervision to provide a basic service or function.

Although the NSS sets the definition for CPPA, this term is not universally utilized in WIC. Furthermore, the term can be viewed as derogatory through its use of 'paraprofessional,' thus inadvertently referencing a professional who is 'lesser than.' However, CPPAs are a vital resource both for WIC staff and participants, filling various roles within the program, such as intake specialist, WIC certifier, etc. Without CPPAs, many WIC agencies wouldn't be able to operate, so it's imperative that the term CPPA be revised to hold a more dignified meaning.

### *Future Analyses*

Future workforce analyses could explore which states use the CPPA title compared to states that don't. They should also explore in more detail what the CPPA term means, given that the job titles that fall under the CPPA umbrella vary from state to state.

### *Explore the Benefits of Remote Services on Employee Satisfaction*

In WIC agencies across the country, there's been a shift to remote services since COVID-19. While the offering of remote services has certainly decreased the no-show rate among WIC participants to their appointments, not much is known on the impacts of remote services related to employee satisfaction. Therefore, the WIC Workforce Development Committee recommends exploring the impact of shifting to remote work on workplace satisfaction and staff turnover.

### *Career Ladders*

State and local agencies should implement career ladders and avenues through which CPPAs can grow and expand within the WIC workforce. The Committee has engaged in past conversations with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) and the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) to discuss offering a course that WIC CPPAs would be able to take that would get them a WIC-specific nutrition credential. Although it wouldn't equate to higher pay, this is one possible option for creating ladders and stepping stones for higher positions in WIC.

## Conclusion

Looking forward, NWA and the WIC Workforce Development Committee intend to use these survey findings to direct its CPPA-related work. CPPAs are a vital part of the WIC workforce, performing crucial tasks that are imperative not only for certifying WIC participants into the program but for maintaining WIC service delivery. Therefore, exploring avenues for improving recruitment and retention efforts for this category of essential WIC staff is a high priority for the organization's workforce development portfolio. By increasing the amount of support and attention provided to WIC CPPAs, NWA is also improving workforce equity by ensuring a more equitable focus on all categories of WIC professionals, whereas previously, more attention was paid to degreed and credentialed staff. In doing so, program stability and the overall WIC participant experience can be improved.



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## Endnotes

- 1) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Breastfeeding Policy and Guidance United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2016). Available at: [https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/WIC-Breastfeeding-Policy-and-Guidance\\_1.pdf](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/WIC-Breastfeeding-Policy-and-Guidance_1.pdf). [Accessed 13 Nov. 2025].
- 2) U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (August 2013) Nutrition Services Standards. Available at: [https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/wic-nutrition-services-standards\\_0...](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/wic-nutrition-services-standards_0...) [Accessed: November 18, 2025].
- 3) Alchemer.com. (2023). National Assessment of the Competent Paraprofessional Authority (CPPA) Landscape. [online] Available at: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7767152/CPPA-Survey-Questions> [Accessed 13 Nov. 2025].
- 4) The National WIC Association. (2021). RD Recruitment & Retention Survey Report. [https://media.nwica.org/fy21\\_nwa\\_factsheet\\_rd-recruitment-retention-survey-report\\_interactive.pdf](https://media.nwica.org/fy21_nwa_factsheet_rd-recruitment-retention-survey-report_interactive.pdf). [Accessed 13 Nov. 2025].
- 5) Striking the Right Balance: Modernizing WIC Access with Remote Service Modes NWA Recommends. (2024). Available at: <https://media.nwica.org/remote-services.pdf> [Accessed 13 Nov. 2025].
- 6) Tyagi, A., Verma, M. and Rana, G. (2025) (PDF) intrinsic motivation and employee attrition: An analysis of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391437029\\_Intrinsic\\_Motivation\\_and\\_Employee\\_Attrition\\_An\\_A...](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391437029_Intrinsic_Motivation_and_Employee_Attrition_An_A...) [Accessed: 19 November 2025].
- 7) Alchemer.com. (2023). National Assessment of the Competent Paraprofessional Authority (CPPA) Landscape. [online] Available at: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7767152/CPPA-Survey-Questions> [Accessed 13 Nov. 2025].
- 8) The National WIC Association. (2021). RD Recruitment & Retention Survey Report. [https://media.nwica.org/fy21\\_nwa\\_factsheet\\_rd-recruitment-retention-survey-report\\_interactive.pdf](https://media.nwica.org/fy21_nwa_factsheet_rd-recruitment-retention-survey-report_interactive.pdf). [Accessed 13 Nov. 2025].

