

2026 Laboratory Workforce Profile

Survey Summary Report



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About the 2024 Laboratory Workforce Profile Survey

The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) regularly surveys individuals from state, territorial and local public health laboratories to gain insight into the public health laboratory workforce in the United States.

Data collected include job satisfaction and factors influencing decisions to stay or leave their current position, which may be used to inform recruitment and retention efforts by laboratory leadership.

This is the fourth iteration of this survey, following the previous. Visit [APHL Public Health Laboratory Studies](#) to see data from all four surveys.



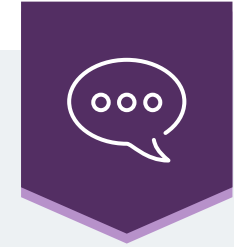
When?

- **Spring 2026**
- Previous editions fielded:
 - 2024
 - 2022
 - 2016



Who?

- **2,009** laboratory staff responded to survey.
- Respondents from **50 states, DC and three territories**.



How?

- This electronic survey was anonymous.
- All questions were optional.
- Data collected with convenience sampling.



Look for notes throughout this report comparing 2026 data to 2024 and 2022!

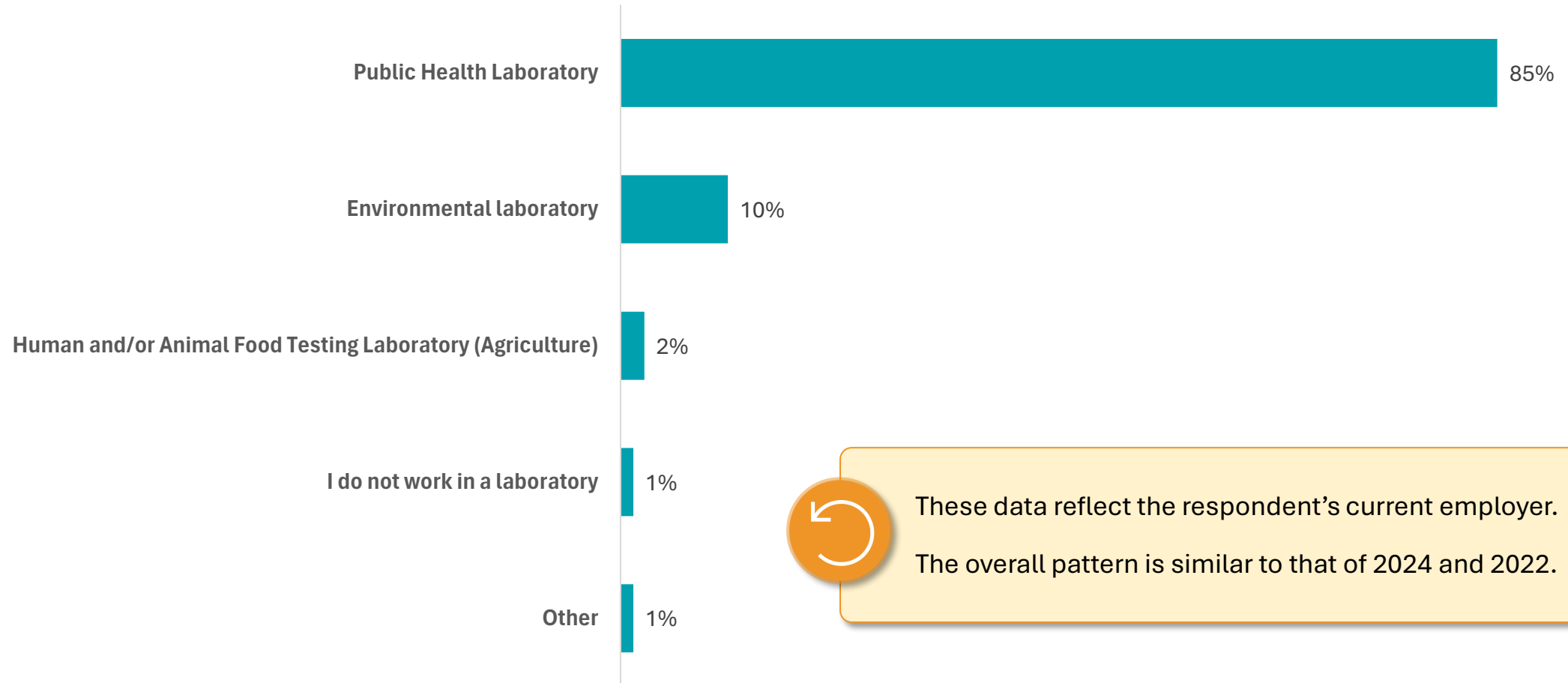


Work Environment

Type and Size of Laboratory, Overtime Requirements

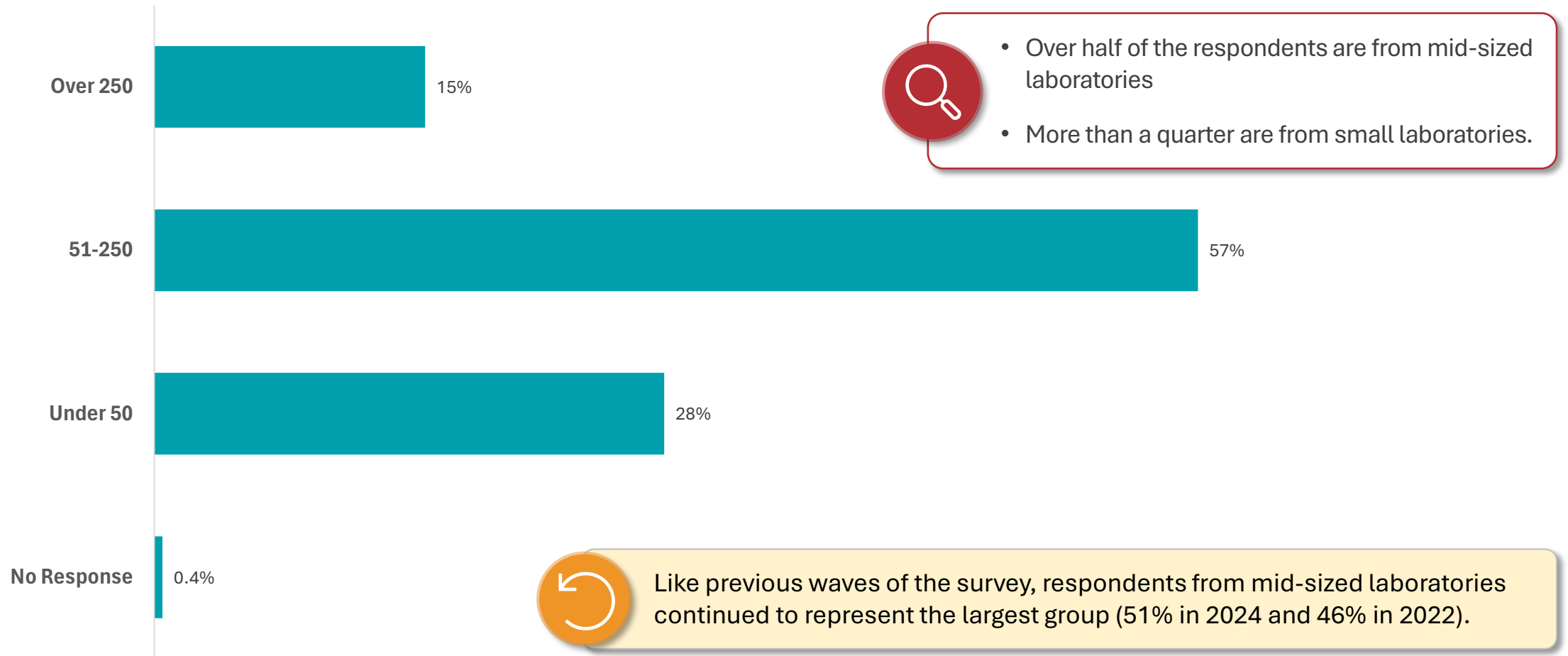
Laboratory Type

Respondents Currently Employed in _ Type of Laboratory

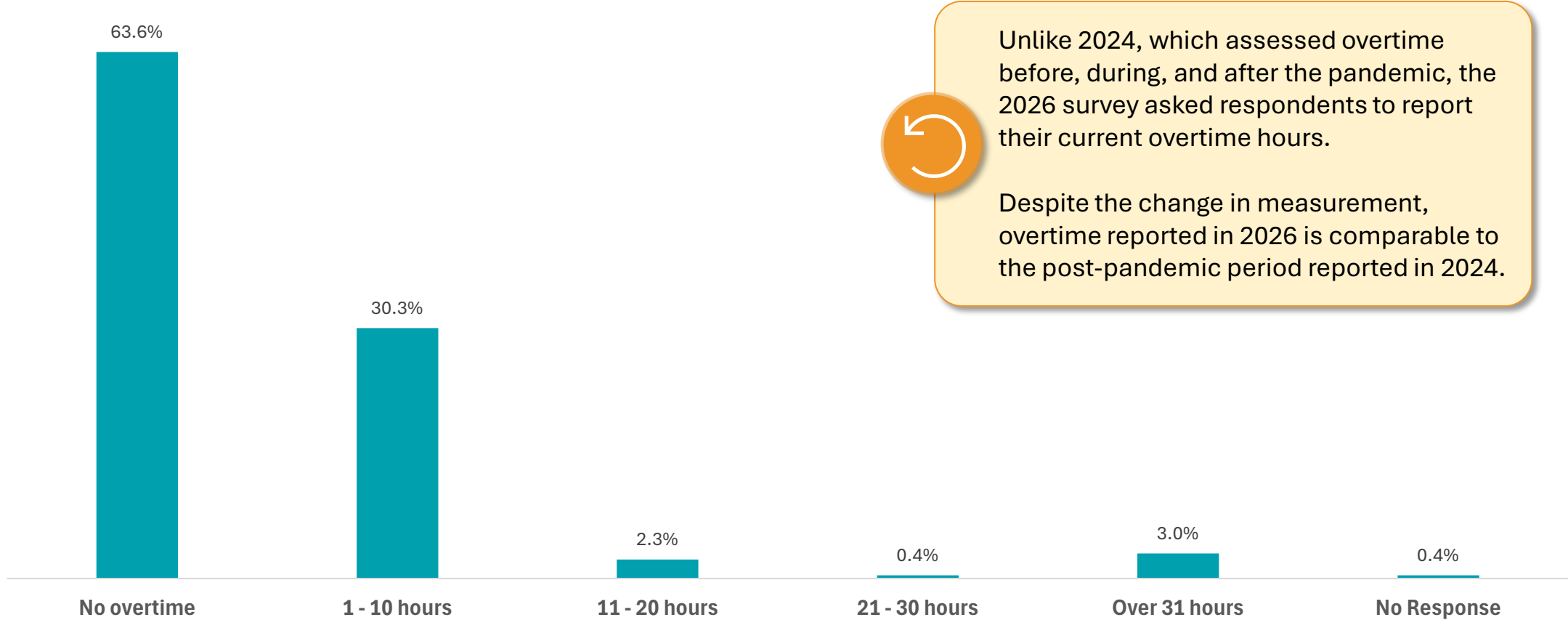


Laboratory Size

Number of Staff at Current Laboratory



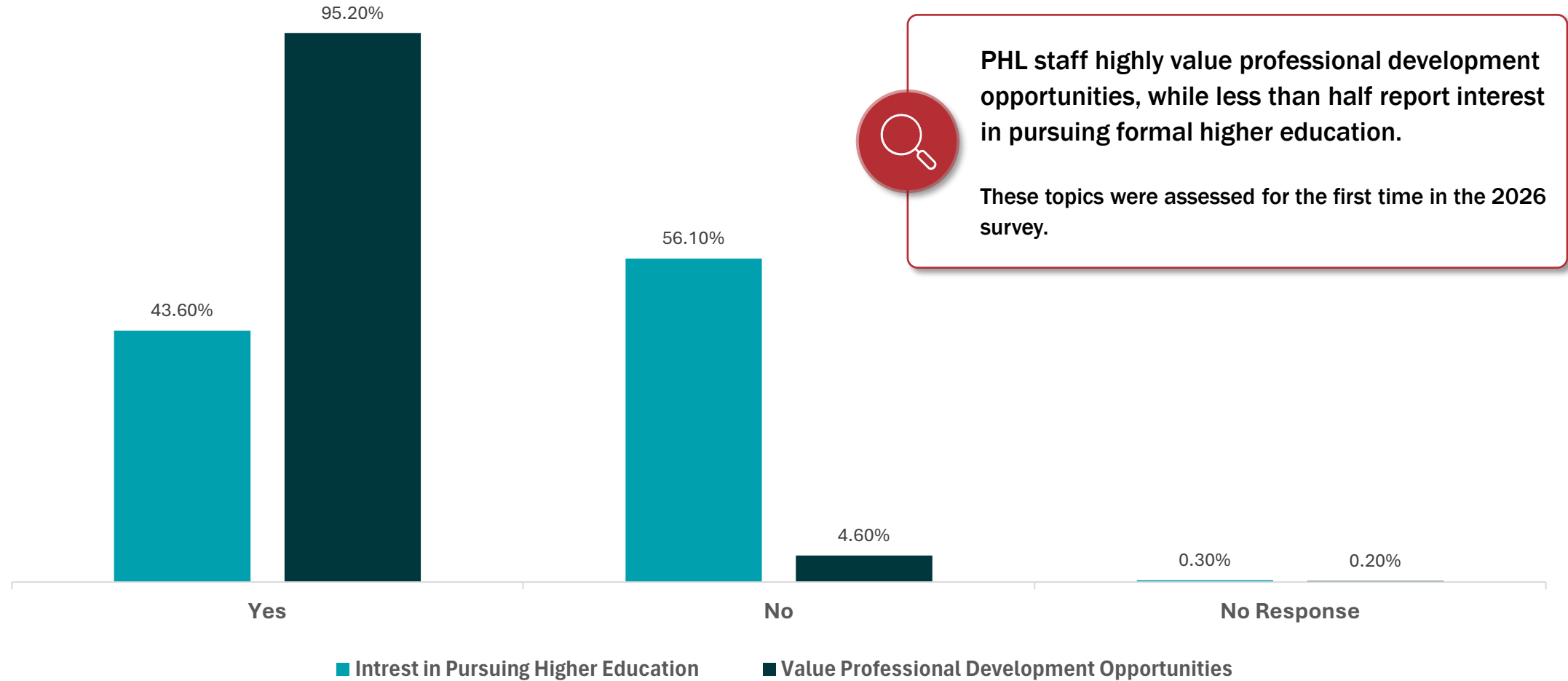
Overtime



Unlike 2024, which assessed overtime before, during, and after the pandemic, the 2026 survey asked respondents to report their current overtime hours.

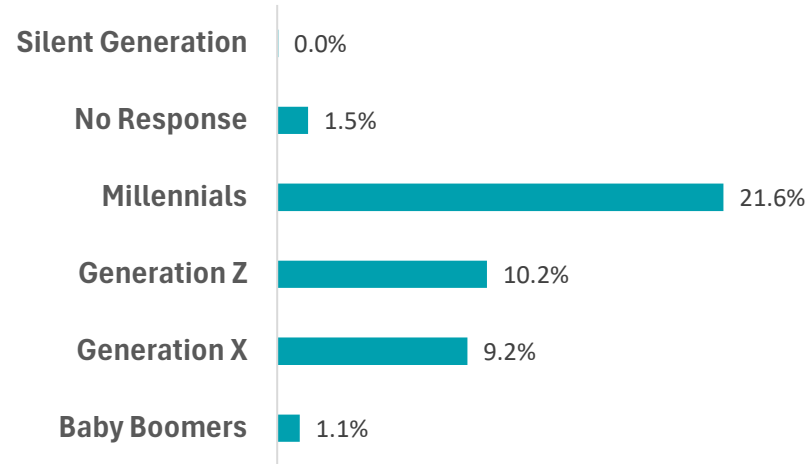
Despite the change in measurement, overtime reported in 2026 is comparable to the post-pandemic period reported in 2024.

Learning Preference



Who is Interested in Learning?

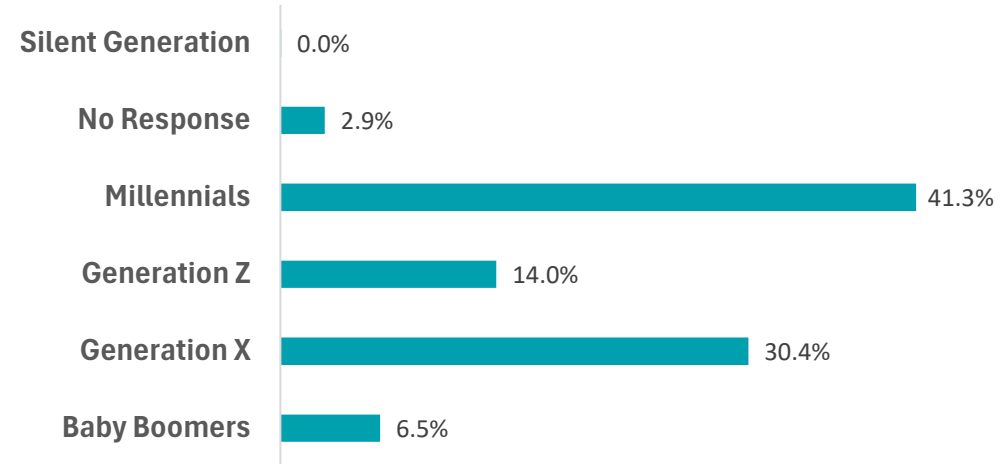
Interested in Pursuing Higher Education



Leading job categories:

- Laboratory Scientists (17.3%)
- Laboratory Scientist-Supervisors (4.2%)
- Laboratory Technicians (4.0%)

Interested in Professional Development Opportunities



Leading job categories:

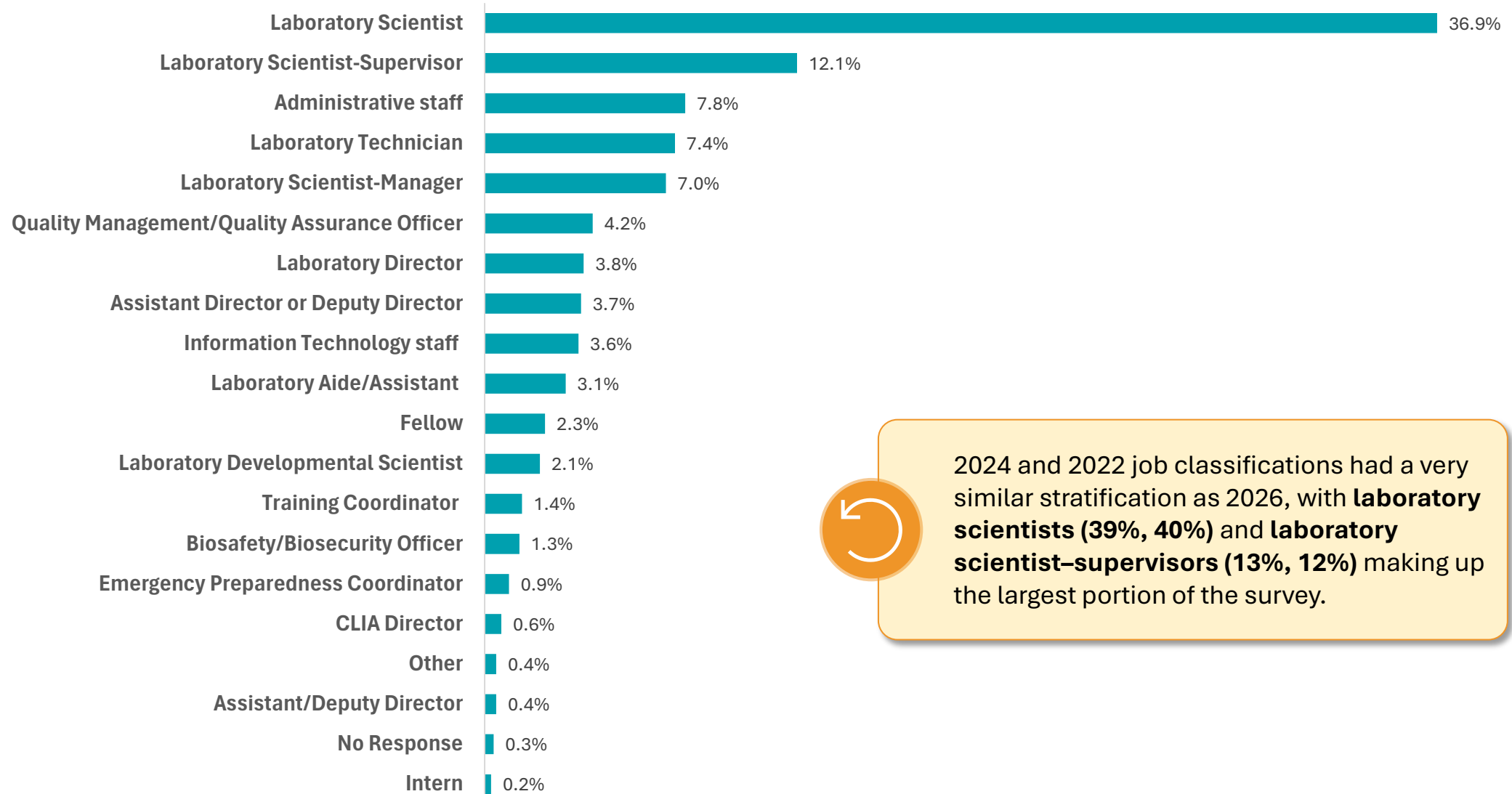
- Laboratory Scientists (34.6%)
- Laboratory Scientist-Supervisors (11.8%)
- Administrative Staff (7.2%)
- Laboratory Technicians (6.7%)



About the Public Health Laboratory Workforce

Job Types, Experience and Other Demographics

Job Classification

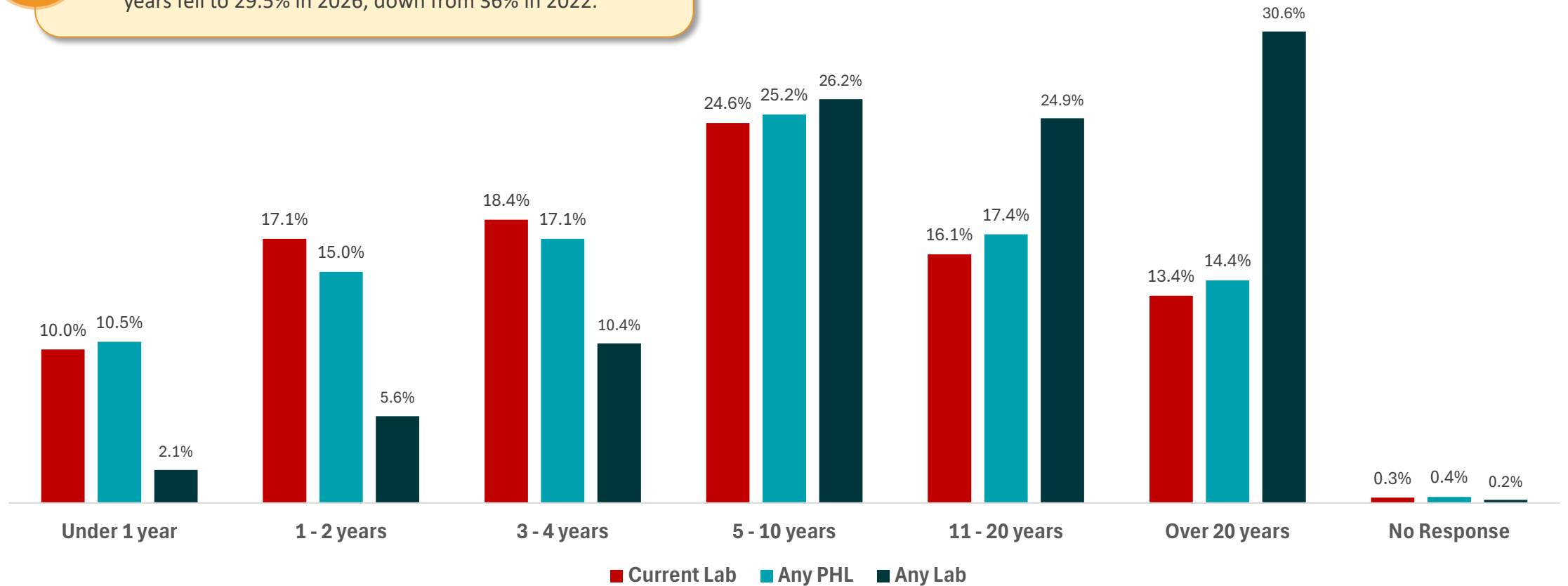


2024 and 2022 job classifications had a very similar stratification as 2026, with **laboratory scientists (39%, 40%)** and **laboratory scientist-supervisors (13%, 12%)** making up the largest portion of the survey.

Years of Experience



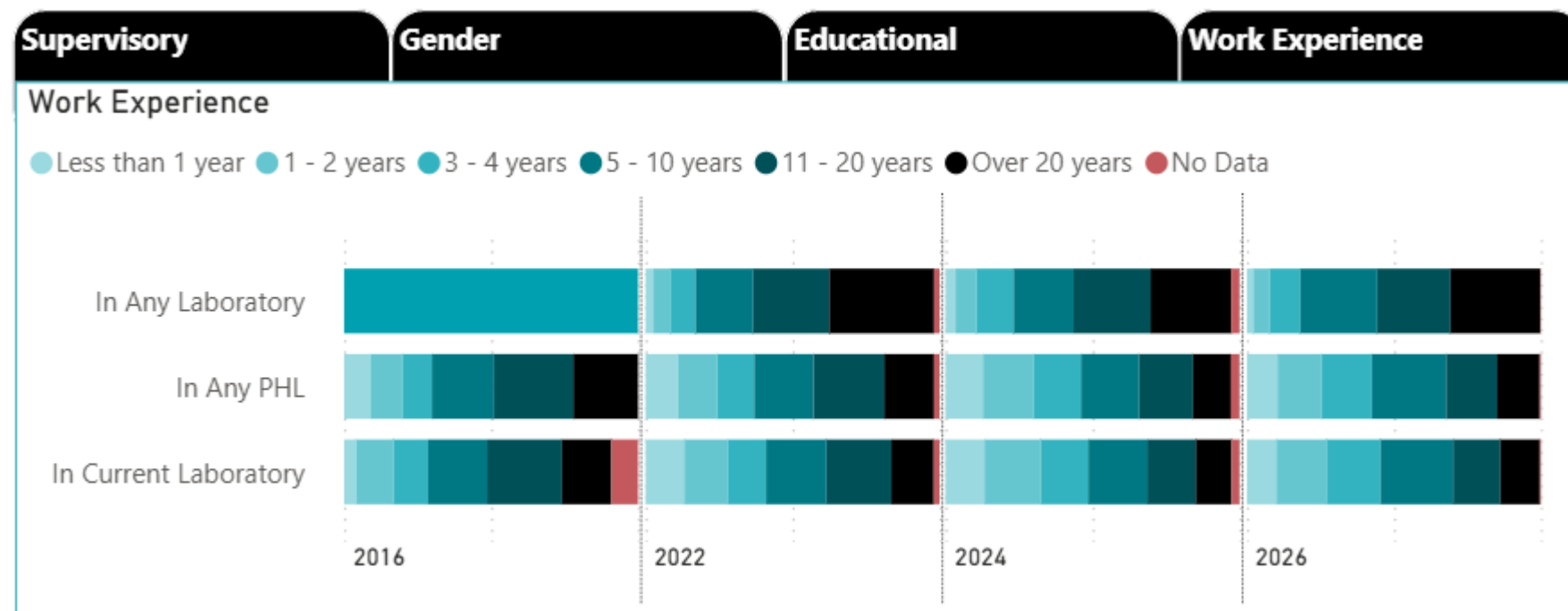
Long-term laboratory tenure declined in 2026: After reaching 54% in 2024, the proportion of respondents who had worked at their current laboratory for more than 10 years fell to 29.5% in 2026, down from 36% in 2022.



Work Experience

- Experience within PHLs helps support institutional knowledge.
- **Tenure is declining**

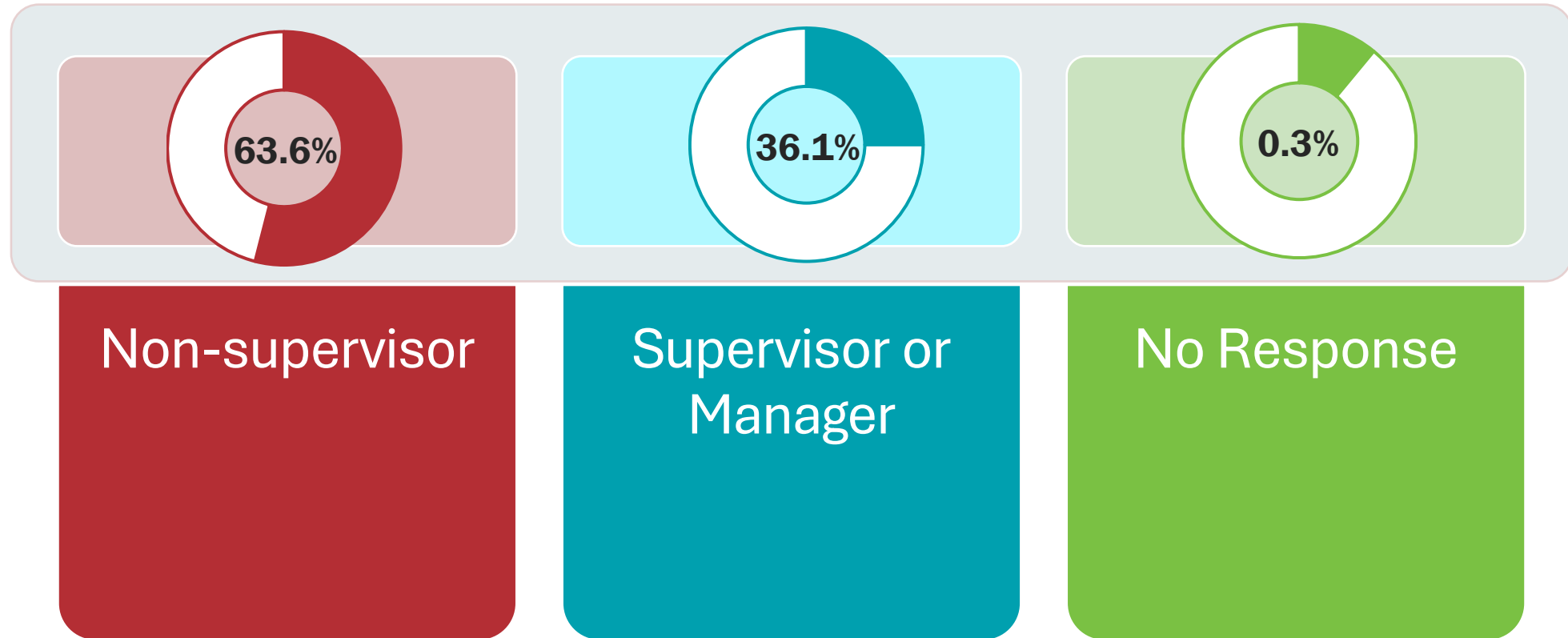
In 2026, 45.5% of the workforce had 4 years or less of work experience in the current PHL; 42.6% in any PHL. It declines from 2024 (49% in the current lab and 46% in any PHL.)



11+ years of Work Experience: 2022 vs. 2024 vs. 2026

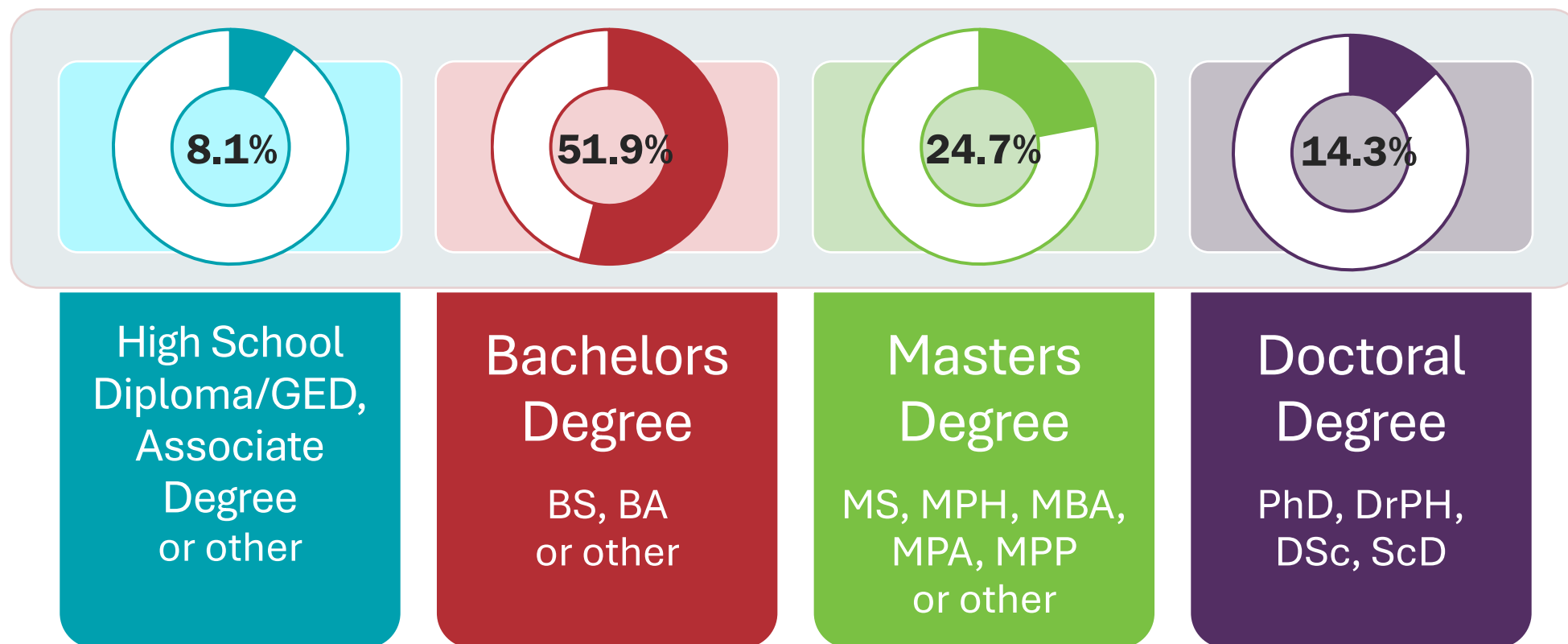
- Current Laboratory: **42%** vs. 29% vs. 29.5%
- Any PHL: **41%** vs. 31% vs. 31.8%
- Any Laboratory: **61%** vs. 54% vs. 56.5%

Supervisory Roles



 In 2026, **63.6% were in non-supervisory roles and 36.1% in supervisory or managerial positions, 0.3% did not respond.** Earlier surveys broke this out further: **54%, 53% non-supervisory, 25%, 28% supervisor or manager, 11%, 13% team leader and 7%, 4% executive (2024, 2022).**

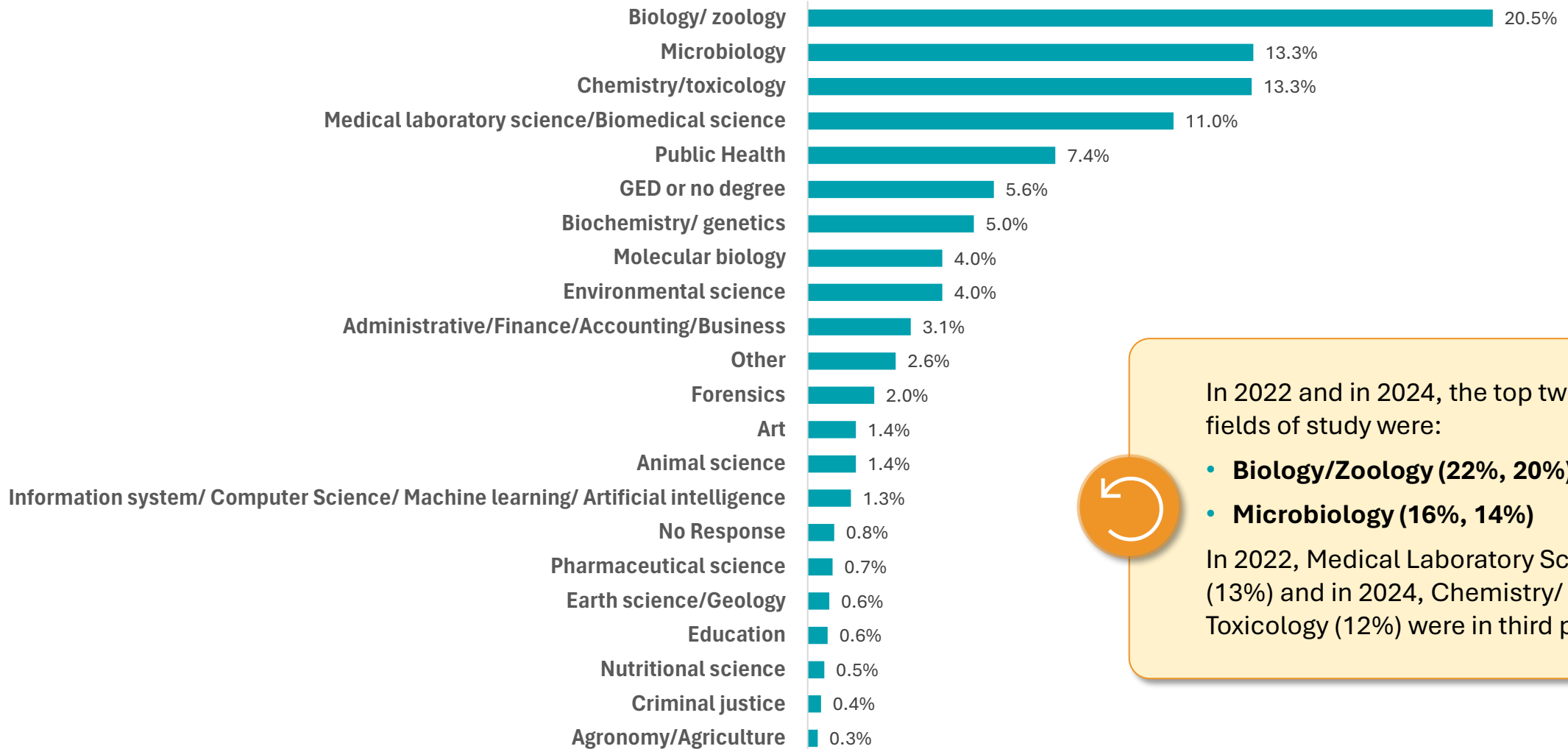
Highest Education Level Achieved



Education levels continue to shift upward across survey years:

- **Bachelor's degrees keep declining** (58% to 54% to 51.9%).
- **Master's degrees keep rising** (21% to 24% to 24.7%).
- **Doctoral degrees edged up** (13% in 2022 and 2024 to 14.3%).
- **GEDs and associate degrees continue to decline** (8.1%).

Field of Study for Respondents' Highest Degree



In 2022 and in 2024, the top two fields of study were:

- **Biology/Zoology (22%, 20%)**
- **Microbiology (16%, 14%)**

In 2022, Medical Laboratory Science (13%) and in 2024, Chemistry/ Toxicology (12%) were in third place.



Turnover and Intention to Leave

Respondents are asked how long they planned to work in their laboratory. Those with the intention to leave within two years provided reasons for leaving, while those planning to stay longer shared reasons for staying. This informs our analysis of retention and early departures.

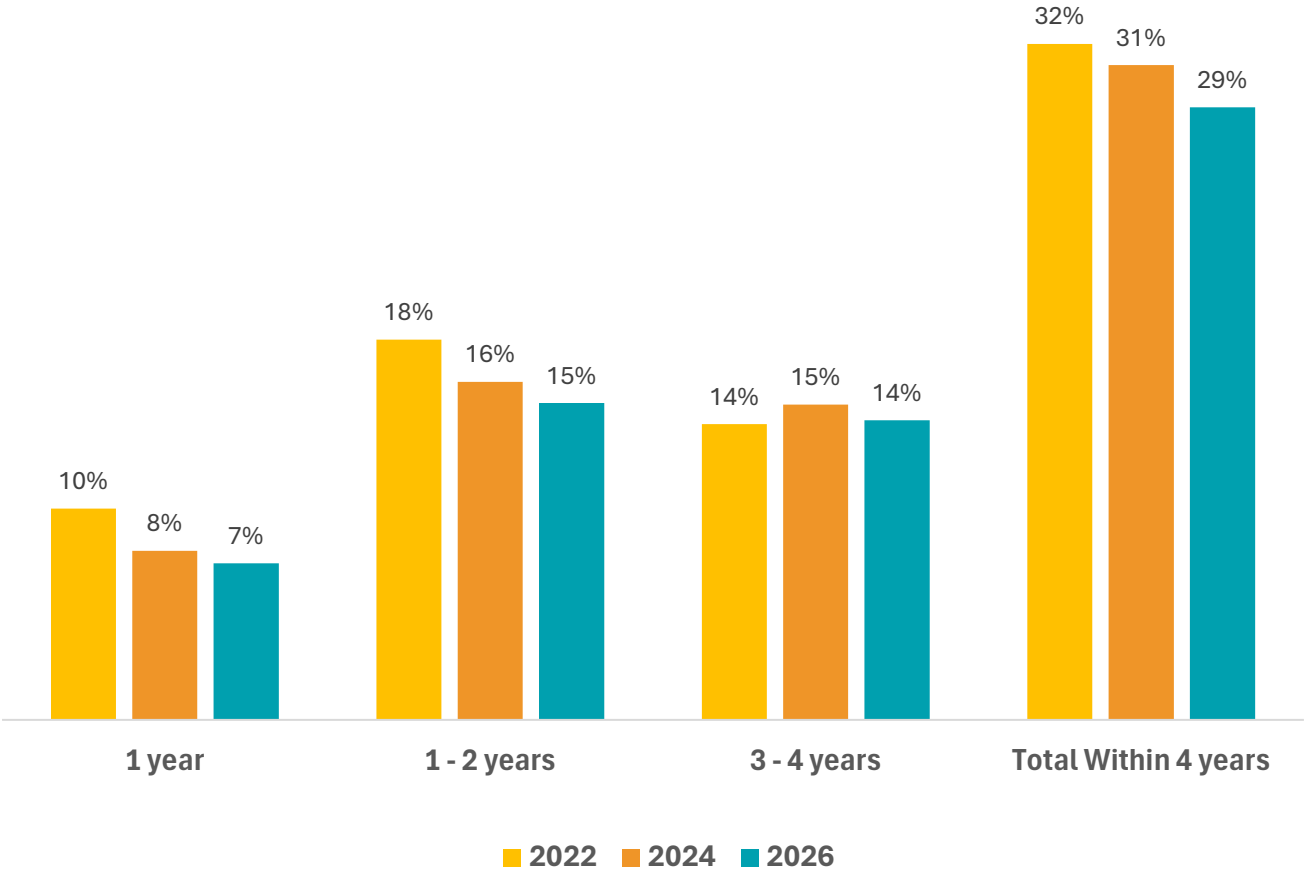
Intention to Leave: Trends Over Time

Intention to Leave Current Laboratory	2022	2024	2026
Within 4 years	42%	39%	37%
Within 1 year	10%	8%	7%
Within 1–2 years	18%	16%	15%
Within 3–4 years	14%	15%	14%

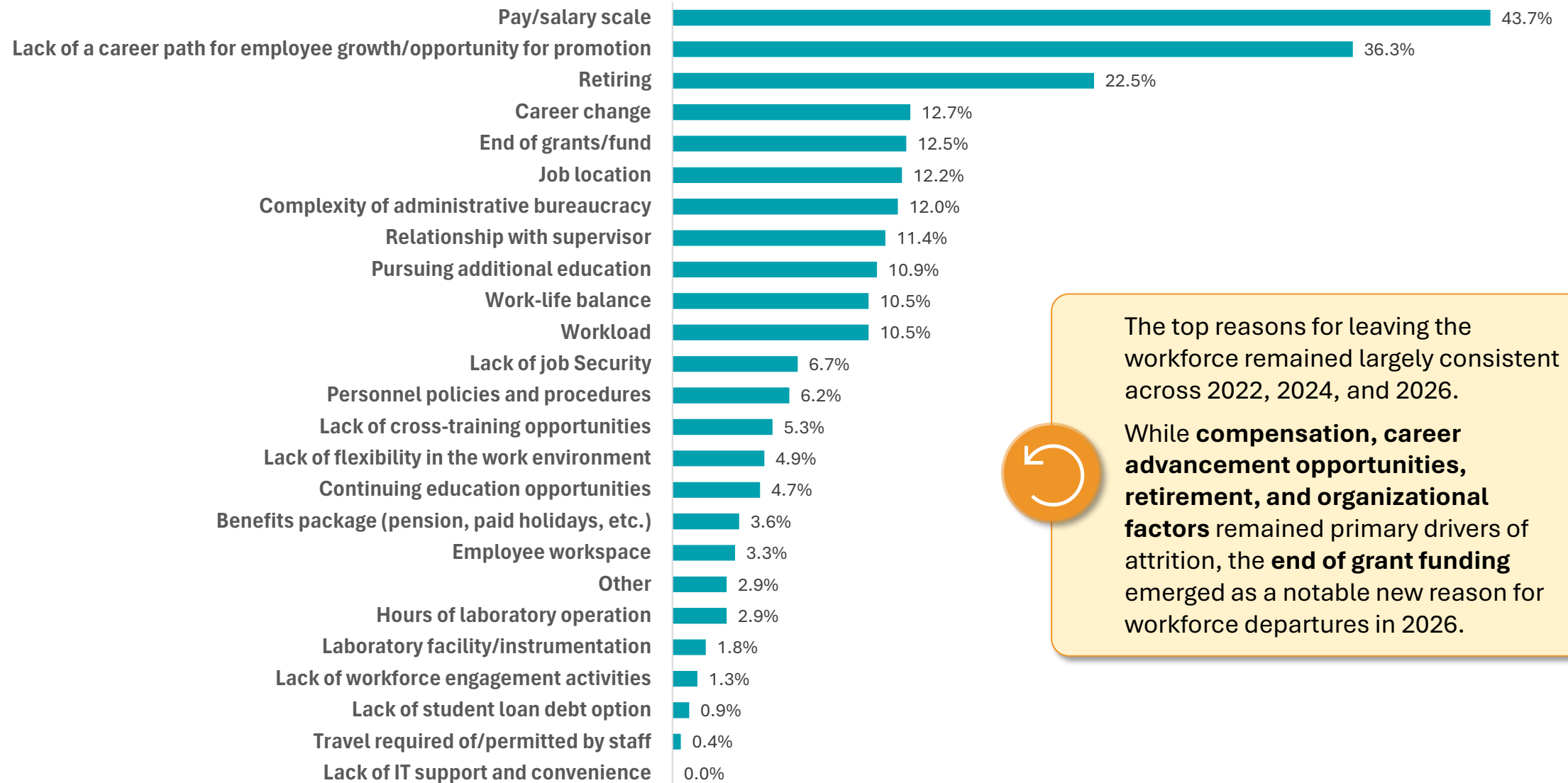
The data shows a slight drop in those intending to leave within four years, from 42% in 2022 to 38.6% in 2024 to 37% in 2026.

Short-term retention has improved, with fewer respondents planning to leave the laboratory within two years, but the three- to four-year range remains steady.

Intention to Leave Current Laboratory Within...



Reasons for Leaving the Laboratory



The top reasons for leaving the workforce remained largely consistent across 2022, 2024, and 2026.

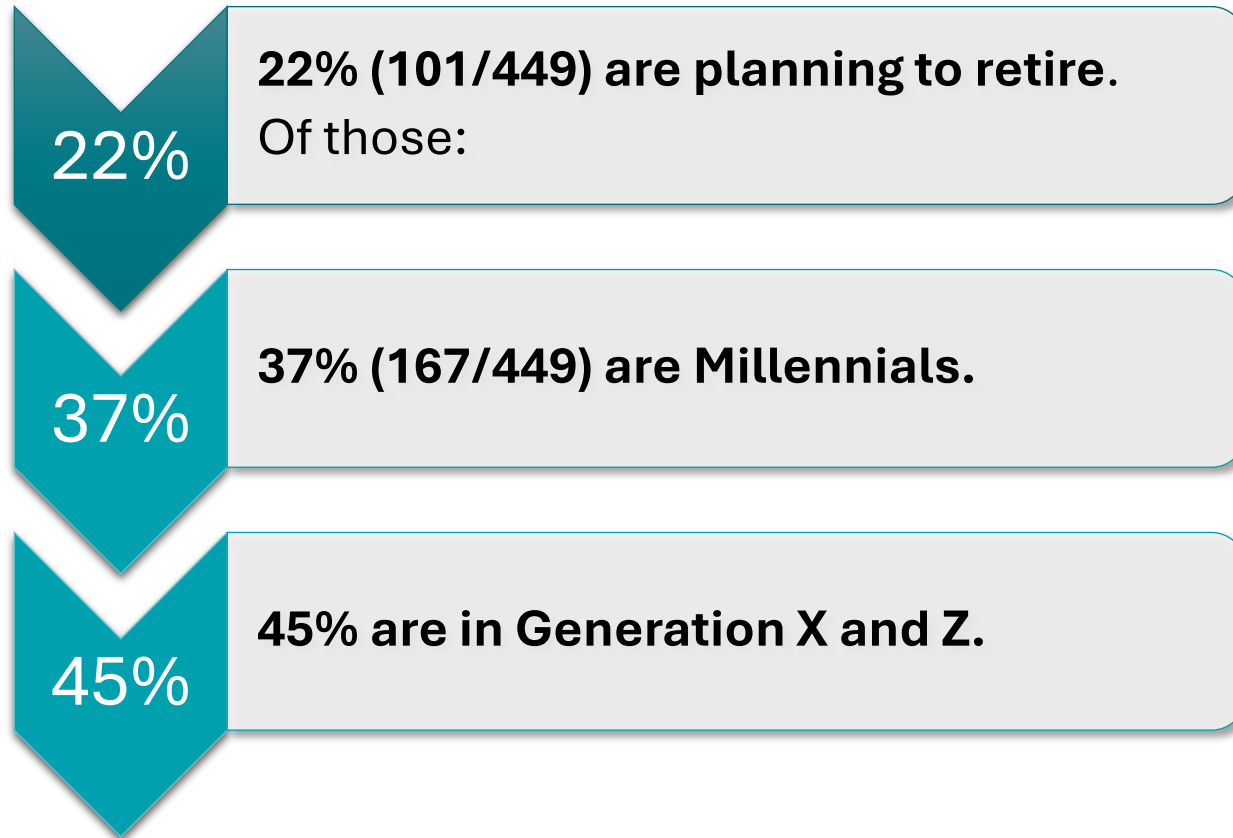
While **compensation, career advancement opportunities, retirement, and organizational factors** remained primary drivers of attrition, the **end of grant funding** emerged as a notable new reason for workforce departures in 2026.

Trend in Reasons for Leaving

Rank: Reasons for LEAVING within 2 yrs	2016	2022	2024	2026
Pay/salary scale	25%	52%	49%	44%
Lack of opportunity for promotion	8%	42%	36%	36%
Retiring	49%	29%	16%	22%
Other	6%	22%	27%	3%
Complexity of administrative bureaucracy	2%	21%	16%	12%
Career change	14%	3%	15%	13%

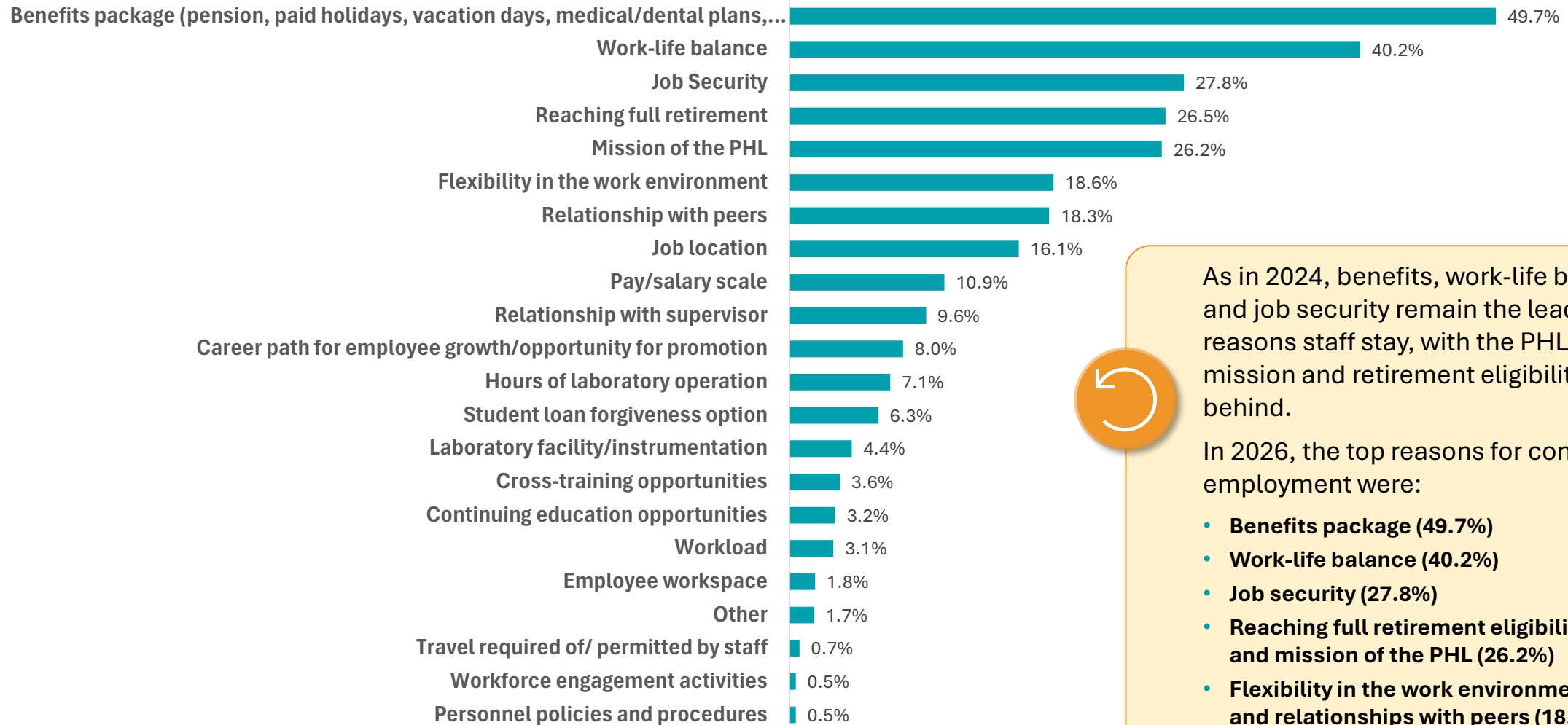
Generational trend: A Reason for Leaving the Workforce

Of those planning to leave their laboratory within the next two years:



While retirement intentions increased from 16% in 2024 to 22% in 2026, they remain lower than the 29% reported in 2022.

Reasons for Staying at the Laboratory



As in 2024, benefits, work-life balance and job security remain the leading reasons staff stay, with the PHL's mission and retirement eligibility close behind.

In 2026, the top reasons for continuing employment were:

- **Benefits package (49.7%)**
- **Work-life balance (40.2%)**
- **Job security (27.8%)**
- **Reaching full retirement eligibility (26.5%) and mission of the PHL (26.2%)**
- **Flexibility in the work environment (18.6%) and relationships with peers (18.3%)**

Key Factors Influencing PHL Career Decisions



For individuals being **recruited to join a laboratory**, the most important factors are **job security (94.7%)**, **benefits (94%)**, a **safe/secure work environment (93.8%)**, and **work/life balance (93.4%)**. For those deciding whether to **remain at their laboratory**, the top factors are **job security (99%)**, **work/life balance (98.9%)**, and a **safe/secure work environment (98.5%)**. Security and balance lead at both stages, though flexible schedules and public service weigh more heavily in retention than in recruitment.

The **least important factors** for both recruitment and retention include **student loan forgiveness**, **opportunities for applied research or teaching**, **joint academic appointments** and **onsite childcare**. These 2026 patterns are consistent with 2022 and 2024.

Recruitment Factors

Reasons to Join a Laboratory	% Agreed
Job security	94.7%
Benefits package	94%
Safe/secure work environment	93.8%
Appropriate life/work balance	93.4%
Pay/salary scale	92.3%
Providing public service	82.6%
Flexible workdays/work times	78.6%

Retention Factors

Reason to Stay at Laboratory	% Agreed
Job security	99%
Appropriate life/work balance	98.9%
Safe/secure work environment	98.5%
Benefits package	98.3%
Competitive salary	97.6%
Flexible workdays/work times	92.8%
Providing public service	90.8%



Workforce Satisfaction Trends

Workplace, Engagement and Development

Please note that the wording of some satisfaction questions was slightly revised compared to prior surveys to clarify their meaning.

Laboratory Workplace Satisfaction

Laboratory Workplace Factors	2022	2024	2026
My co-workers and I have a good working relationship.	96%	95%	96%
I know how my work relates to my laboratory's goals and priorities.	95%	93%	95.8%
My supervisor and I have a good working relationship.	91%	90%	90.8%
I have sufficient training to fully utilize technology needed for my work.	80%	82%	86%
My workload is reasonable.	73%	78%	79.3%
Communication between senior leadership and employees is good in my laboratory.	50%	59%	63.9%
Creativity and innovation are rewarded at my laboratory.	53%	53%	65.3%
My laboratory's set of job classifications provide career advancement options, including supervisory and career development paths.	31%	47%	53.9%
My laboratory's current technical and professional job classifications support employee retention and succession planning.	36%	40%	49.2%
My laboratory provides enough pay-grade levels within the job classifications.	29%	41%	44.3%



Satisfaction Improvements

Every workplace factor improved in 2026, with the largest gains again in the lowest-scoring areas:

- “Creativity and innovation are rewarded” jumped 12 points (53 to 65.3%) after holding flat in 2024.
- “Job classifications support retention and succession planning” rose 9 points (40 to 49.2%).
- “Career advancement options” rose 7 points (47 to 53.9%), up 23 since 2022.

Areas to Watch

- Pay-grade levels remain the lowest-rated factor at 44.3%, despite steady gains since 2022.

Laboratory Engagement Satisfaction

Laboratory Engagement Factors	2022	2024	2026
The work I do is important.	98%	97%	98.1%
I am determined to give my best effort at work every day.	93%	95%	95.7%
Providing public service is an important reason why I continue to work in this career.	93%	90%	93.2%
My work is compatible with my goals.	83%	88%	93%
My work is compatible with the level of knowledge and experience I have.	81%	87%	89.3%
I am inspired to meet my goals at work.	78%	86%	88.3%
I recommend my laboratory as a good place to work.	78%	79%	83.7%



Engagement Improvements

Every factor improved in 2026, with the largest gains in the areas that had previously scored lowest:

- “Work is compatible with my goals” rose 5 points (88 to 93%).
- “Recommend my laboratory as a good place to work” rose nearly 5 points (79 to 83.7%).
- “Providing public service” rebounded 3 points (90 to 93.2%).

Four-Year Trends

No measure declined this wave of the survey, and every factor now sits at or above its 2022 level:

- “Inspired to meet my goals” is up 10 points since 2022 (78 to 88.3%).
- “Work is compatible with my goals” is up 10 points since 2022 (83 to 93%).

Laboratory Development Satisfaction

Laboratory Development Factors	2022	2024	2026
I am provided with opportunities to apply my talents and expertise.	78%	75%	81.8%
I feel supported in my work development.	81%	71%	75.9%
I am provided with opportunities to demonstrate my leadership skills.	76%	70%	66.8%
My training needs are assessed.	68%	68%	73%
I would pursue additional education with tuition support.	70%	66%	68.8%
I have a desire to become a laboratory director. ¹	78%	63%	26.6%
I am provided with opportunities to participate in leadership and management training.	59%	55%	66.4%



Development Gains

Most factors rebounded from their 2024 dip, led by training and support:

- “Opportunities for leadership and management training” rose 11 points (55 to 66.4%).
- “Opportunities to apply my talents and expertise” rose 7 points (75 to 81.8%).
- “My training needs are assessed” rose 5 points (68 to 73%), a new high.

Areas to Watch

- “Opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills” fell again, to 66.8%, down 9 points since 2022.
- Interest in becoming a laboratory director sits at 26.6%; reworded in 2026, so trend comparison is limited.

1. The factor language has been modified in 2026. It was previously worded: I have a desire to either be promoted to a management position or continue working in a management position. It also has a built-in logic and only appears to non-laboratory directors



Learn More & Acknowledgments

Learn More

Data Analysis

For more information about the survey or the data analysis, please email Sudaba Parnian, senior manager, Monitoring & Evaluation at sudaba.parnian@aphl.org, or Lorelei Kurimski, Senior Director, Quality Systems and Analytics at lorelei.kurimski@aphl.org.

Related Resources

- [Public Health Laboratory Salary Dashboard](#)

Compare salary data from 2022, 2024 and 2026 across several categories with interactive tables and maps. The dashboard provides essential benchmarking data for leaders and policymakers to advocate for equitable and competitive salaries, directly impacting laboratories' ability to recruit and retain staff.

- [Public Health Workforce Profiles Webpage](#)

Find reports from the 2024, 2022 and 2016 editions of this survey, as well as an interactive dashboard with state-by-state participation in 2024 survey.

Acknowledgments

Thank You!

Thank you to all survey respondents for their valuable contributions to the Workforce Profiles Survey. Your input plays a crucial role in helping us understand and shape the future of the public health workforce.

Contributors

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The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) works to strengthen laboratory systems serving the public's health in the US and globally. APHL's member laboratories protect the public's health by monitoring and detecting infectious and foodborne diseases, environmental contaminants, terrorist agents, genetic disorders in newborns and other diverse health threats.

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