July 2026

2026 State of the Senior Living & Care Workforce

ZIEGLER *CFO HOTLINE*℠

Executive Summary

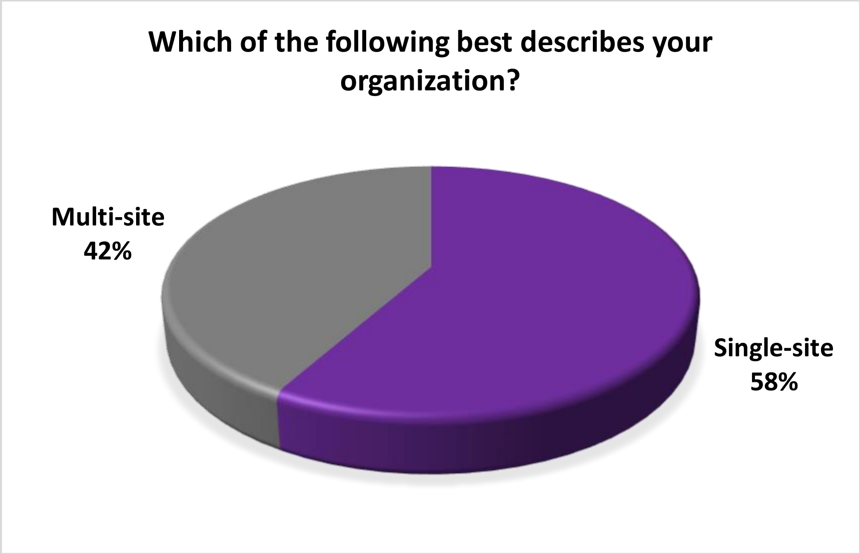
The senior living & care workforce remains one of the industry's defining strategic priorities, but the conversation is evolving. While many organizations report improved workforce stability compared with the height of the staffing crisis post-pandemic, workforce challenges have by no means completely disappeared. Instead, providers are navigating a more complex landscape that is characterized by persistent recruitment challenges in key clinical roles, continued wage and benefit pressures, and growing concerns about the long-term availability of qualified caregivers.

The findings from the 2026 *CFO Hotline*℠ survey suggest that many organizations have moved beyond short-term staffing tactics (i.e., wage increases, hiring bonuses) toward more sustainable workforce strategies. Investments in employee development, workplace culture, flexible scheduling, and technology have become commonplace, while providers continue to refine their use of agency staffing alongside longer-term workforce investments. At the same time, workforce-related expenses remain among the most significant pressures on operating budgets, and providers are increasingly evaluating how demographic shifts, immigration policy, and changing employee expectations will shape their labor strategies in the years ahead.

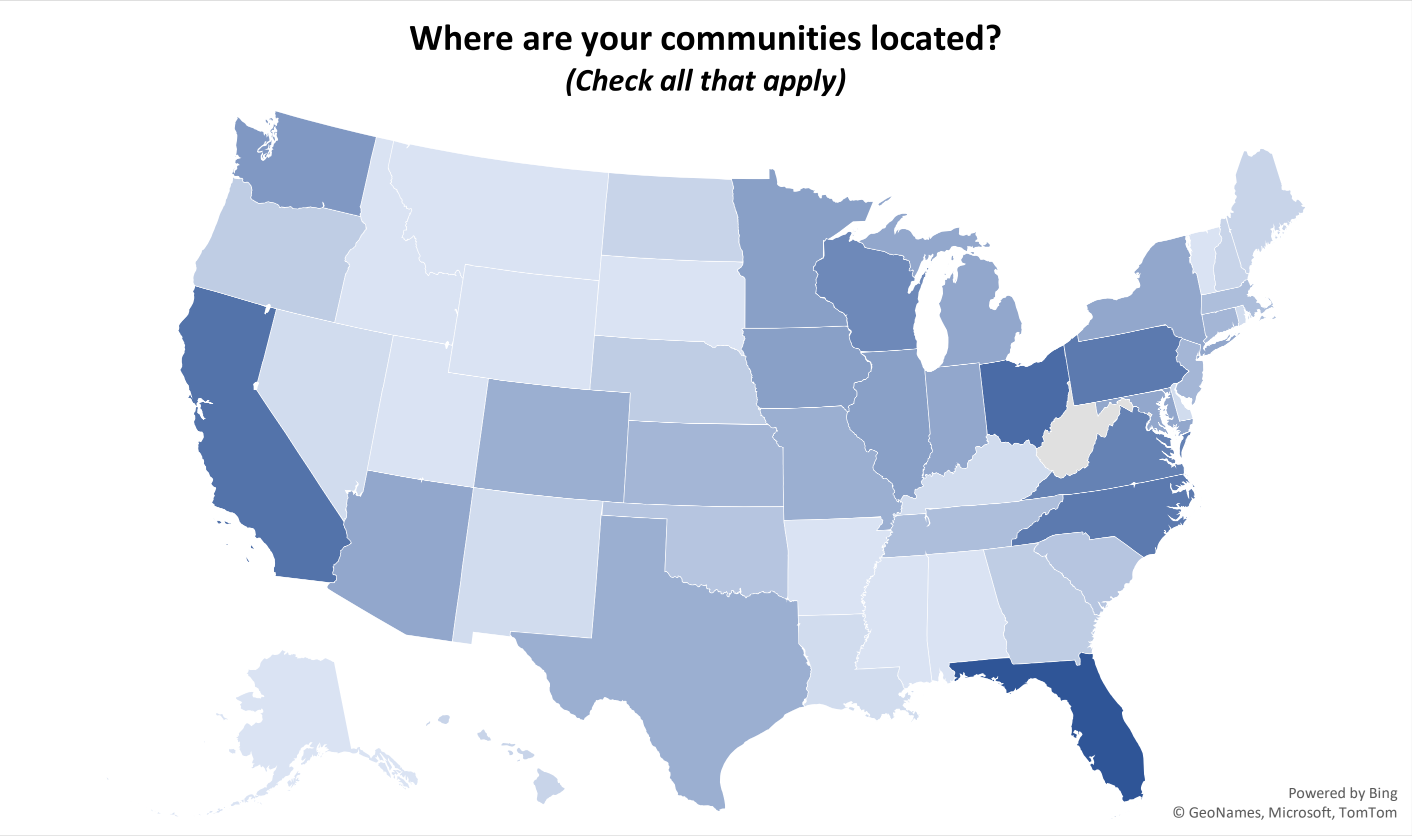
This report examines how senior living & care organizations are responding to these evolving workforce dynamics, providing benchmarks on vacancies, turnover, compensation, recruitment, staffing models, and the financial implications of maintaining a high-quality workforce in today's operating environment.

Profile of Respondents

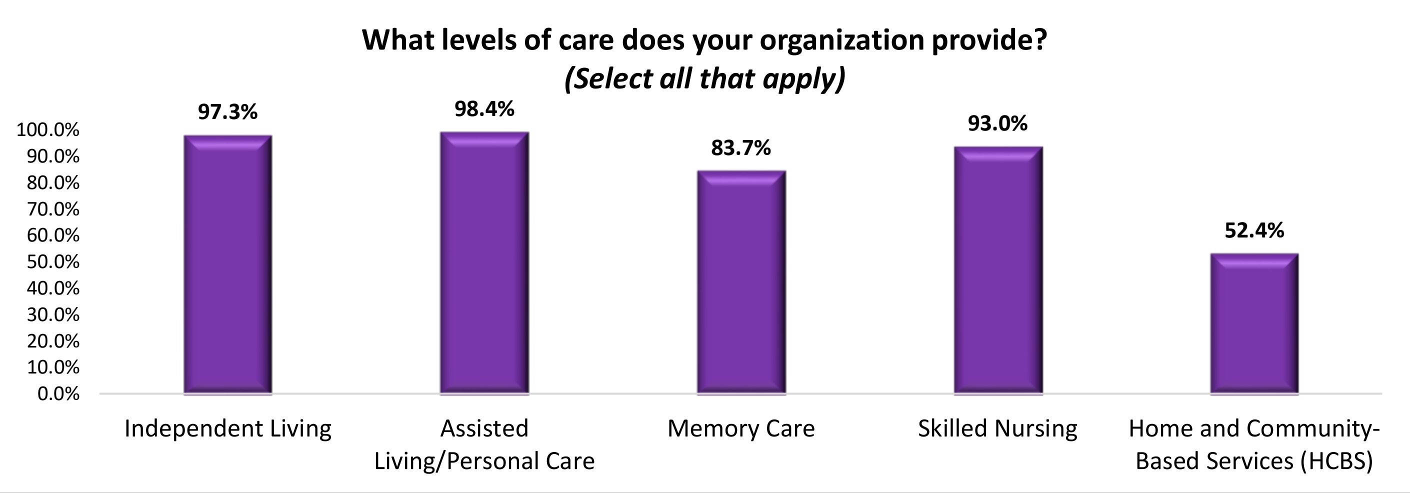
Roughly 60% of the primarily not-for-profit respondents to the survey were from single-site communities, while about 40% were from multi-site organizations.



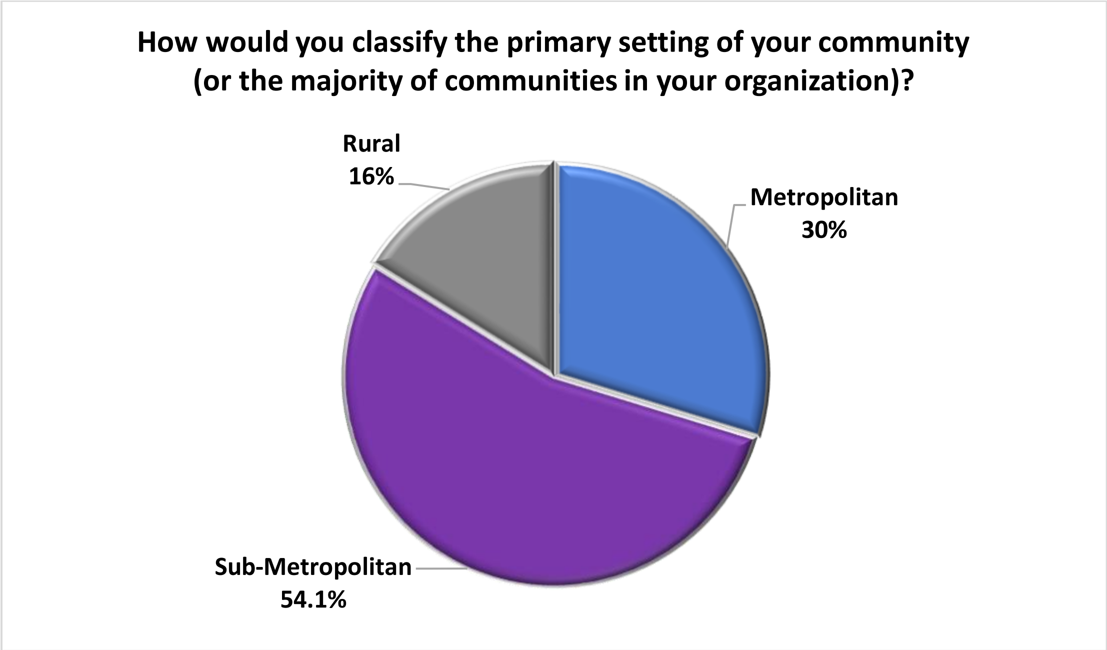
Respondents hailed from 40 states. The highest number of responses came from Florida, Ohio, California, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.



Nearly four out of five respondents (**78.9%)** represented organizations offering the full continuum of Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Care, and Skilled Nursing. Over half (**52.4%)** also provided Home & Community-Based Services (HCBS).



Respondents represented organizations serving a variety of market settings, with more than half (54.1%) identifying their primary communities as located in sub-metropolitan areas. Metropolitan providers accounted for 30.0% of respondents, while rural organizations represented 16.0%. This distribution reflects a broad cross-section of senior living & care providers operating across diverse geographic markets.



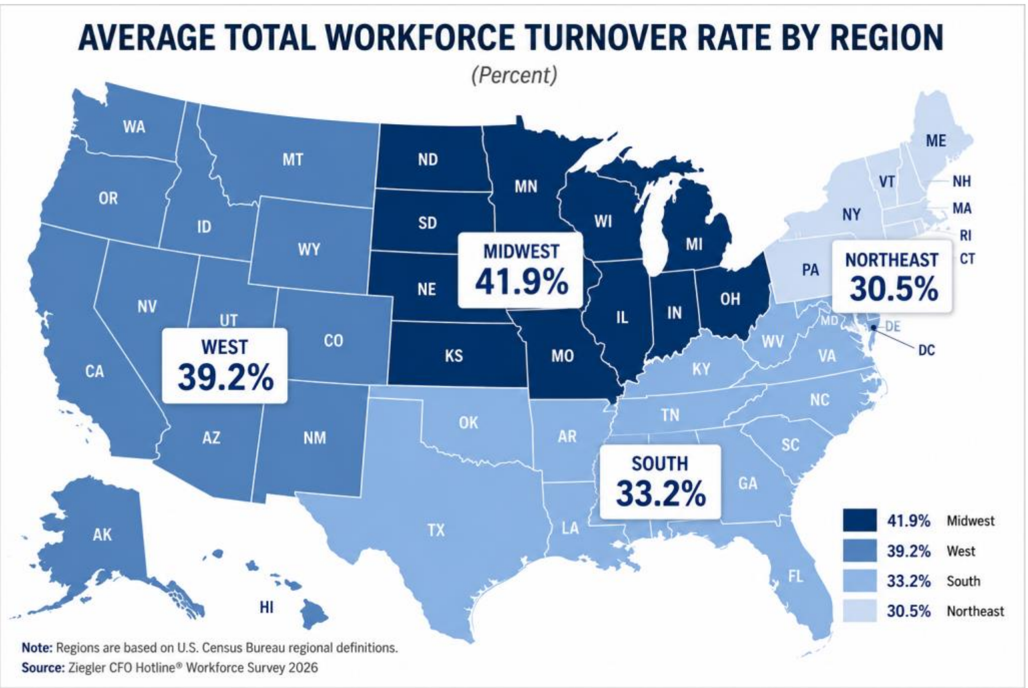
Survey Results

While workforce conditions have improved compared with the height of the pandemic, employee retention remains a significant challenge for senior living & care providers. Survey respondents reported an average total workforce turnover rate of 35.4%, meaning the typical organization replaces more than one-third of its workforce annually.

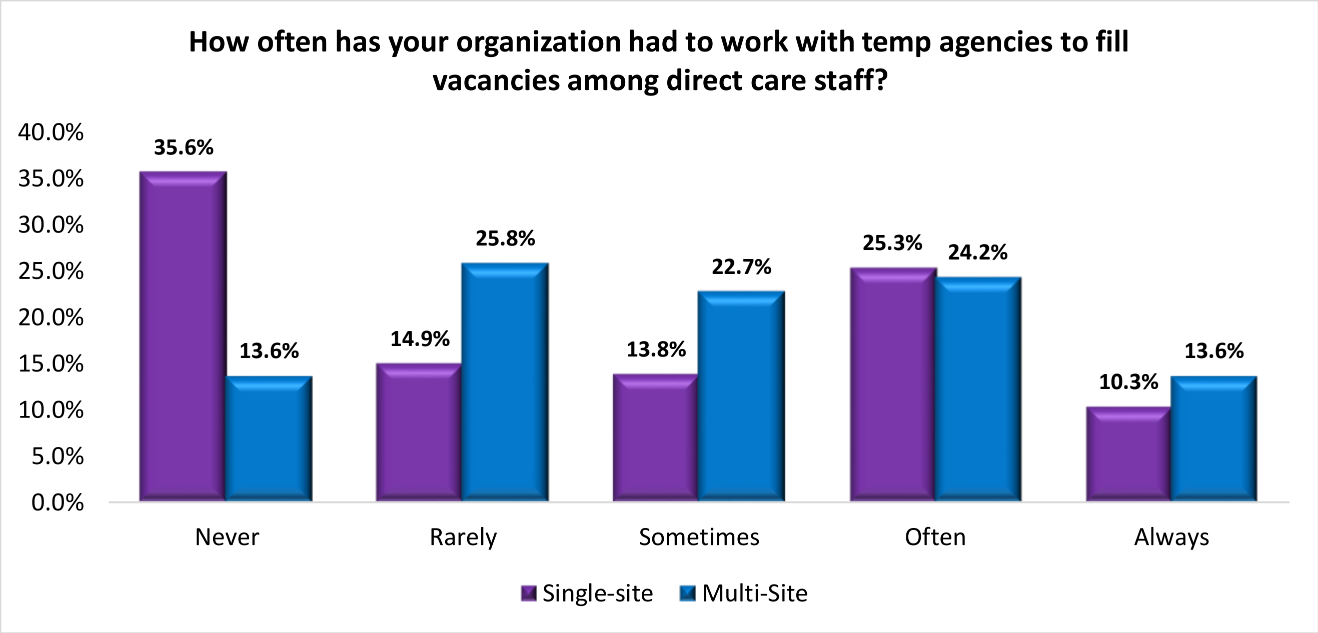
Among the positions surveyed, Registered Nurses (40.8%), Dining Services staff (40.0%), and Certified Nursing Assistants (39.0%) reported the highest average turnover rates. Housekeeping/Environmental Services (26.9%) and Maintenance (24.4%) experienced comparatively lower turnover, though retention challenges remain across nearly every department. Overall workforce turnover declined slightly from 36.3% in 2025 to 35.4% in 2026, though Registered Nurses continued to report the highest turnover among licensed clinical staff.

What is your organization’s annual staff turnover rate for each of the following roles (%)?		
	Average Turnover Rate 2026	**Average Turnover Rate 2025**
Registered Nurses (RNs)	**40.8%**	**36.4%**
Dining Staff	**40.0%**	**40.0%**
Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs)	**39.0%**	**44.2%**
Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)	**31.6%**	**31.1%**
Housekeeping/Environmental Services	**26.9%**	**29.2%**
Maintenance	**24.4%**	**16.7%**
Total Workforce	**35.4%**	**36.3%**

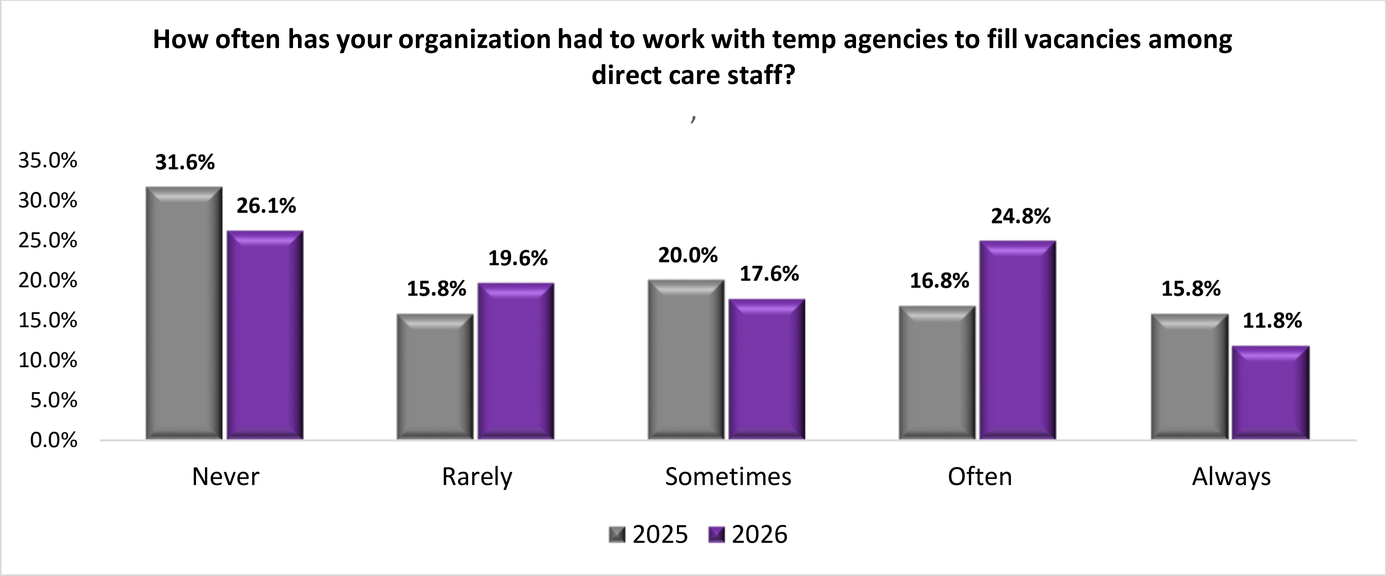
Workforce turnover varied more by geography than by organization type. Respondents in the Midwest reported the highest average workforce turnover (41.9%), followed by the West (39.2%), while organizations in the South (33.2%) and Northeast (30.5%) reported lower turnover. By comparison, turnover differed only modestly between multi-site (36.6%) and single-site (34.5%) providers, suggesting that geographic differences may have a greater influence on workforce turnover than organization type.



Reliance on temporary staffing varied by organization type. More than one-third of single-site providers (35.6%) reported never using agencies to fill direct care vacancies, compared with just 13.6% of multi-site organizations. Multi-site providers, by contrast, were more likely to report using temporary staffing either sometimes (22.7%) or often (24.2%).



Compared with the 2025 survey, respondents reported modest changes in their use of temporary staffing to fill direct care vacancies. The percentage that selected they never rely on agency staff declined from 31.6% to 26.1%, while the share that reported they often use temporary agencies increased from 16.8% to 24.8%. Although the respondent base expanded in 2026, the findings suggest that agency staffing continues to play an important role in workforce management for many providers.



Responses regarding staff-to-resident ratios highlighted the diversity of staffing models across senior living. Organizations reported staffing using caregiver-to-resident ratios, hours per resident day, role-specific staffing (e.g., separate CNA and licensed nurse ratios), and shift-based coverage, making direct comparisons difficult.

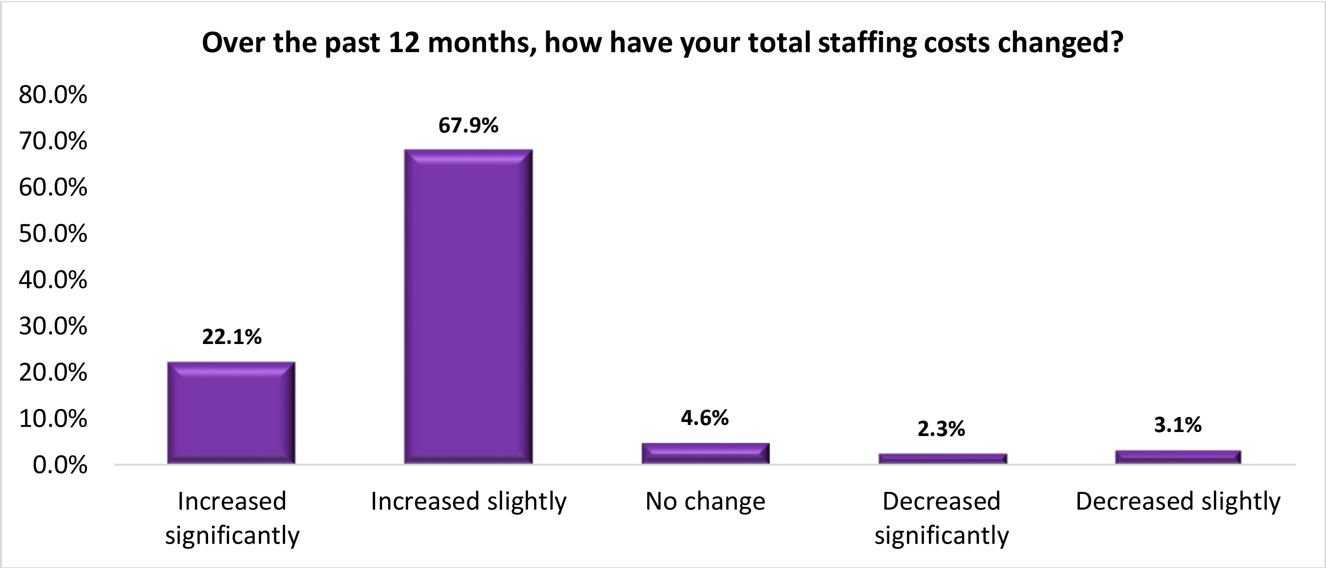
Respondents generally reported assisted living staffing ratios of approximately one caregiver per 10–15 residents, compared with one caregiver per 5–8 residents in memory care and one caregiver per 6–10 residents in skilled nursing. These findings should be interpreted as general benchmarks, as staffing models vary based on resident acuity, organizational practices, and state regulatory requirements.

Level of Care	Typical Reported Staffing Range
Assisted Living	Approximately **1 caregiver per 10–15 residents**
Memory Care	Approximately **1 caregiver per 5–8 residents**
Skilled Nursing	Approximately **1 caregiver per 6–10 residents**

Employee compensation continued to account for more than half of senior living organizations' operating budgets in 2026, averaging 56.2% across all respondents, virtually unchanged from 56.1% in 2025. Despite ongoing wage pressures and workforce challenges, labor's share of organizational budgets remained remarkably stable year-over-year. Differences by organization type were also minimal, with single-site providers reporting an average of 56.7% of their budgets devoted to employee compensation, compared with 55.5% among multi-site organizations. These findings reinforce that labor remains the industry's largest operating expense, regardless of organizational size.

What percentage (%) of your overall budget is devoted to employee compensation (wages, incentives, and benefits)? (Includes all staff compensation, not just direct care staff)		
	2026	**2025**
Single-site Average	56.7%	55.5%
Multi-site Average	55.5%	57.1%
Total Average	56.2%	56.1%

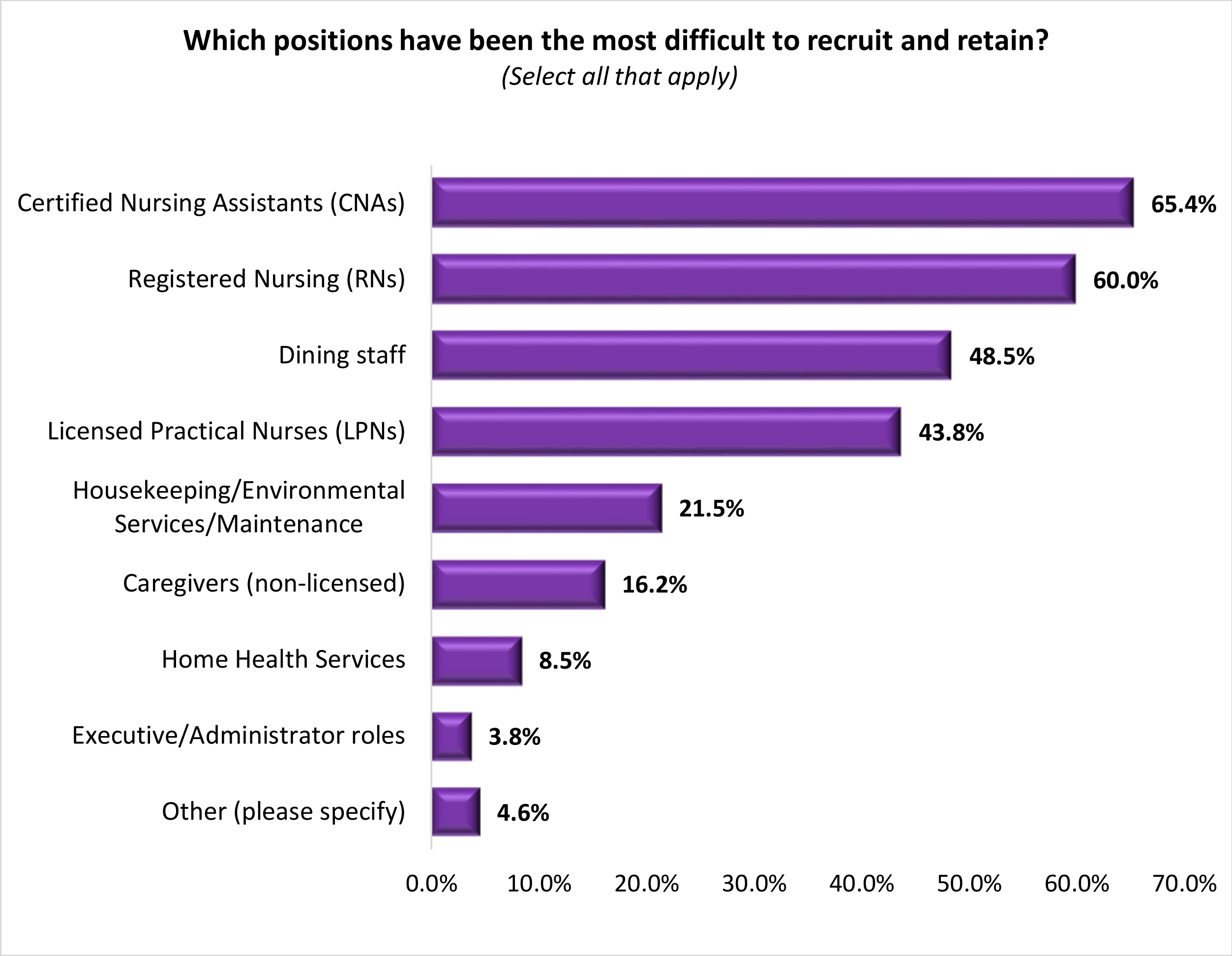
While the share of organizational budgets devoted to employee compensation remained relatively stable, most providers continued to experience rising staffing costs. Nearly seven in ten respondents (67.9%) reported that total staffing costs increased slightly over the past 12 months, while an additional 22.1% experienced significant increases. In total, 90.0% of respondents reported higher staffing costs, with one in ten indicating costs remained flat or declined. These findings suggest that organizations continue to absorb upward pressure on labor expenses through a combination of wage increases, benefits, recruitment and retention investments, and other workforce-related costs.



Clinical positions continue to present the greatest recruitment and retention challenges for senior living & care providers. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65.4%) identified Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) as among the most difficult positions to recruit and retain, followed closely by Registered Nurses (60.0%). Licensed Practical Nurses (43.8%) also remained a significant workforce challenge, underscoring the continued difficulty in attracting and retaining licensed clinical staff.

Workforce pressures also extend beyond direct care roles. Nearly half of respondents (48.5%) identified Dining Services staff as difficult to recruit and retain, highlighting the competitive labor market for non-clinical, service-oriented positions. By comparison, fewer organizations reported persistent challenges recruiting Housekeeping, Environmental Services, Maintenance (21.5%), Caregivers (16.2%), Home Health Services (8.5%), or Executive and Administrator roles (3.8%). Others noted that therapists, dietitians, electricians, MD reimbursement administrators, and personal care administrators were challenging to recruit and retain.

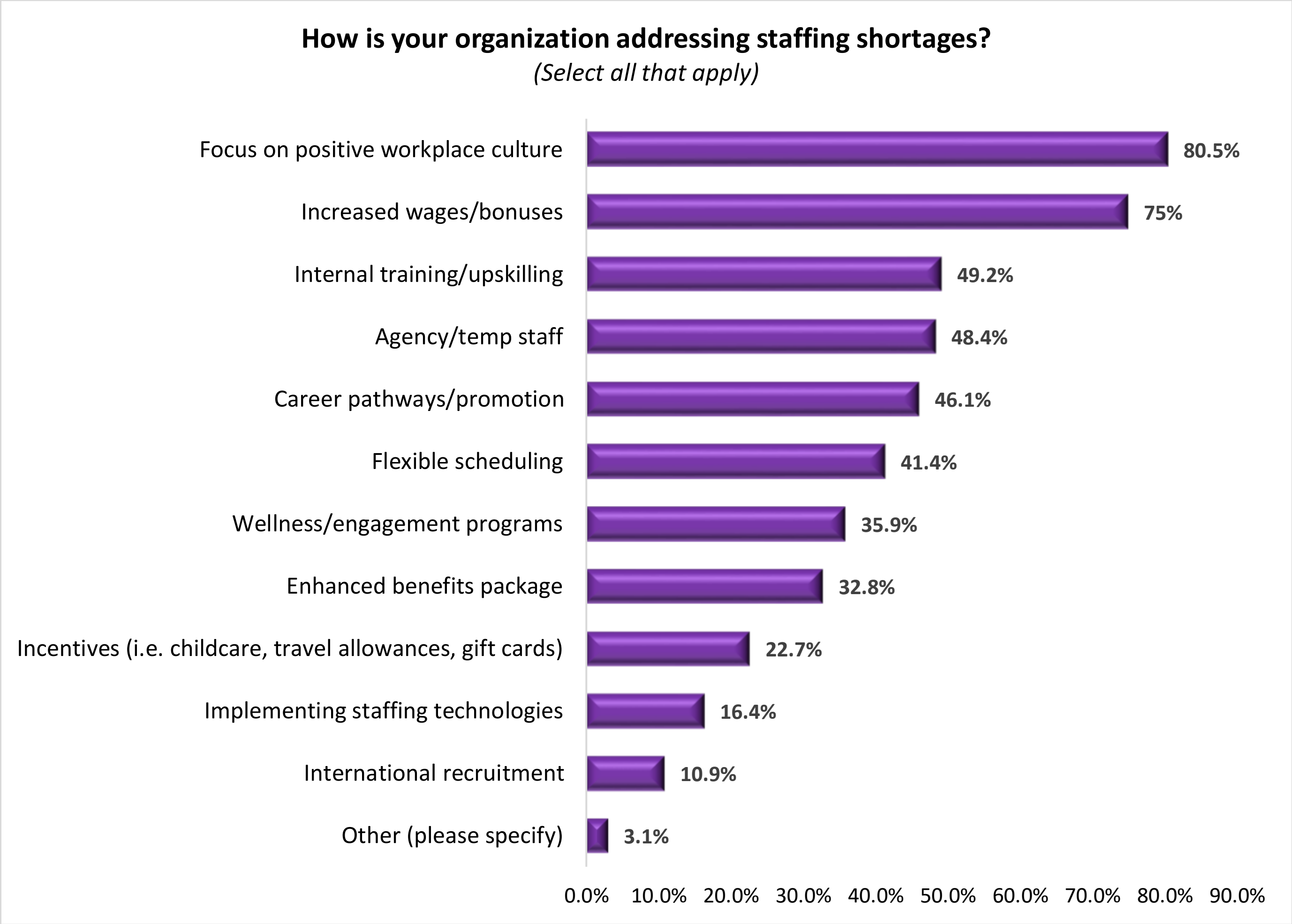
Notably, the positions identified as the most difficult to recruit and retain closely mirror those reporting the highest turnover rates, suggesting that organizations continue to face persistent staffing challenges in the same critical workforce segments.



Organizations are employing a broad range of strategies to address ongoing staffing shortages, with a clear emphasis on employee retention and workplace experience. More than four out of five respondents (80.5%) reported focusing on cultivating a positive workplace culture, making it the most common workforce strategy. Increased wages and bonuses (75.0%) ranked second, reflecting the continued importance of competitive compensation in attracting and retaining employees. Interestingly, workplace culture was cited slightly more frequently than wage increases, suggesting that providers increasingly recognize that retention depends on more than compensation alone. It may also reflect the financial reality that many organizations have limited capacity to continue increasing wages after several years of sustained labor cost growth.

Many providers are investing in longer-term workforce development. Approximately half of respondents reported expanding internal training and upskilling programs (49.2%), utilizing agency staffing when needed (48.4%), or creating career pathways and promotion opportunities (46.1%). Flexible scheduling (41.4%), wellness and employee engagement initiatives (35.9%), and enhanced benefits packages (32.8%) were also commonly cited, illustrating that organizations are taking a multifaceted approach to strengthening workforce stability. Less frequently reported strategies included targeted incentives such as childcare assistance or travel allowances (22.7%), staffing technologies (16.4%), and international recruitment (10.9%). Other responses included helping create a path to US Citizenship and internal staffing pools.

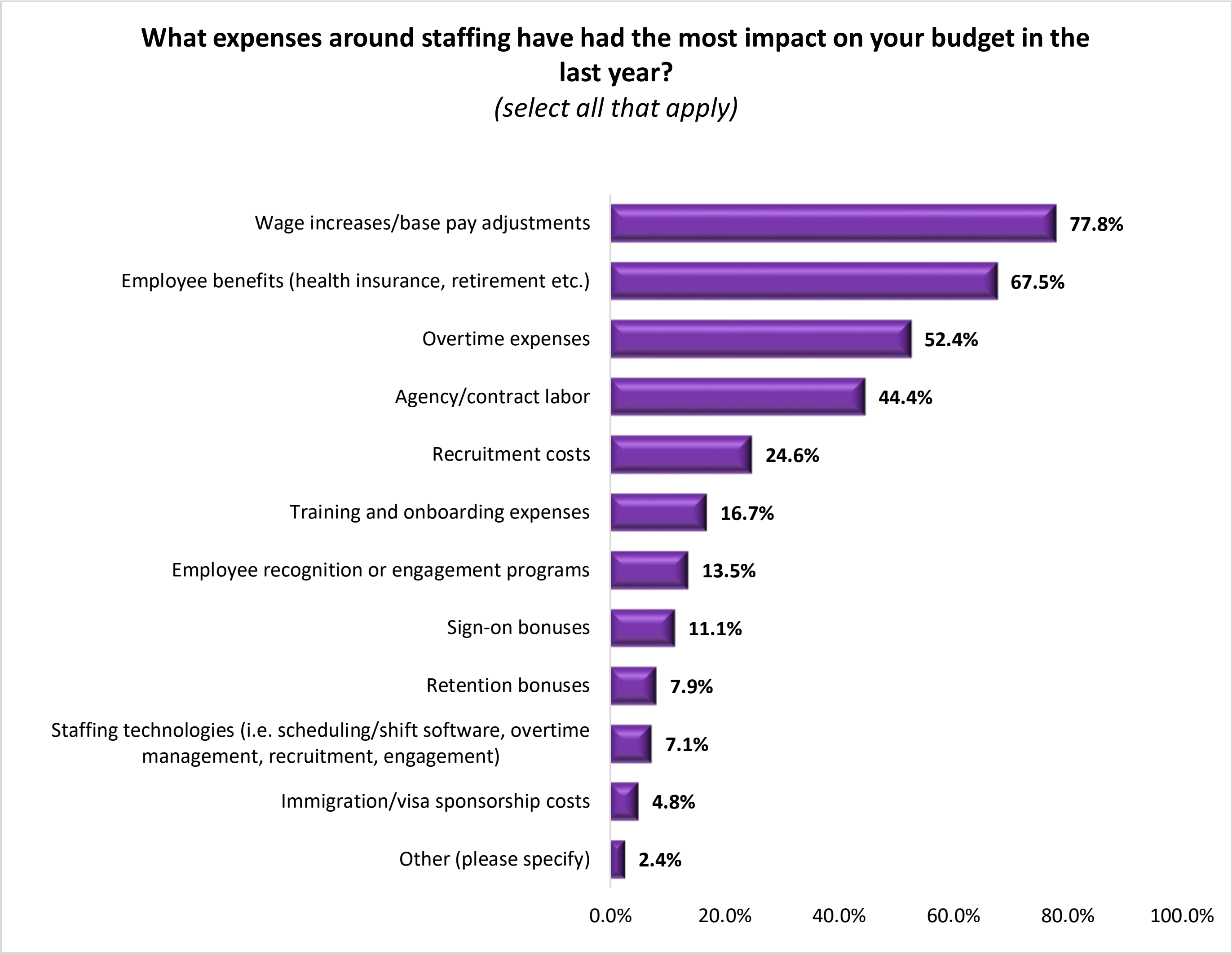
While organizations of all sizes are pursuing many of the same workforce priorities, their approaches increasingly reflect their organizational capabilities. Multi-site providers appear more likely to invest in scalable, system-wide initiatives such as career pathways, workforce technology, international recruitment, and internal staffing resources. Single-site organizations, by contrast, more often emphasize localized strategies centered on workplace culture, employee engagement, flexible scheduling, and partnerships within their communities. Collectively, these findings suggest that while workforce priorities have become increasingly consistent across the sector, organizations continue to tailor their strategies to the resources and scale available to them.



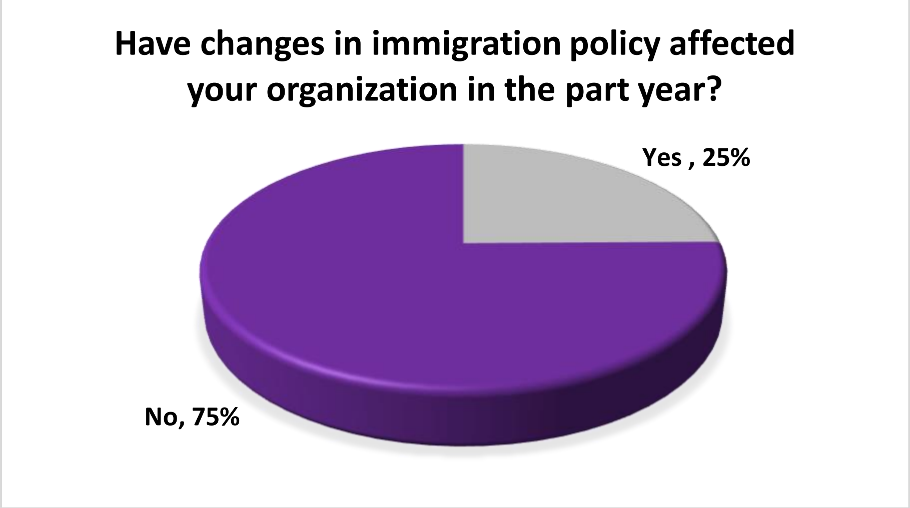
Compensation-related expenses continue to have the greatest impact on senior living operating budgets. More than three-quarters of respondents (77.8%) identified wage increases and base pay adjustments as the most significant staffing-related expense over the past year, followed by employee benefits (67.5%) and overtime costs (52.4%). Together, these findings reinforce that the financial pressures associated with maintaining a competitive workforce extend well beyond wages alone.

Agency and contract labor (44.4%) also remained a significant budgetary pressure, though it ranked behind core compensation costs. Recruitment (24.6%), training and onboarding (16.7%) were cited less frequently, suggesting that organizations are spending more to retain and support existing employees than to attract new ones.

By comparison, relatively few respondents identified sign-on bonuses, retention bonuses, staffing technologies, immigration and visa sponsorship, shift differentials, or compliance with new state staffing requirements as major drivers of staffing costs. While these initiatives remain important components of workforce strategy for some providers, the findings suggest they represent targeted investments rather than the primary financial pressures facing most organizations.



One-quarter of respondents (25%) reported that changes in immigration policy affected their organization over the past year. While most providers indicated no direct impact, those that did describe workforce disruptions, resulting from changes to work authorization, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and visa availability.



The most common impacts included the loss of existing employees, delays in recruiting international workers, a smaller pool of available candidates, and increased administrative complexity surrounding employment authorization. Several respondents noted that these challenges were particularly evident among frontline positions, including nursing, caregiving, housekeeping, and dining services. Others also cited heightened uncertainty and anxiety among affected employees and their families. The responses highlight the important role international workers play in supporting frontline staffing for many senior living organizations.

Notable Responses:

> *"3% of our staff are under the Haitian TPS program — mostly housekeepers and caregivers. Losing them will be a drain on service, care, and recruitment."*
>
> *"Recruiting international RNs. Expected arrival dates have been delayed a year plus."*
>
> *"Staff have left out of fear, and we have been unable to recruit internationally"*
>
> *"We have had several employees leave due to deportation and others who have not been able to get their work visas re-approved."*
>
> *"We have been forced to let go of multiple team members due to changes in immigration. Our team members, who come from dozens of countries around the world, are concerned for their status and the status of their loved ones. We are deeply committed to supporting our team members."*

When asked about their greatest staffing concerns over the next 12 to 18 months, respondents consistently pointed to the ongoing challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified employees, particularly Registered Nurses (RNs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), and other frontline caregivers. Many also expressed concerns about maintaining adequate staffing levels while reducing reliance on agency labor and preserving quality of care.

Beyond staffing availability, respondents frequently cited wage inflation, rising employee benefit costs, and wage compression as growing financial pressures. Several noted that continued increases in compensation are becoming more difficult to sustain, even as competition for talent remains strong. Others pointed to broader demographic challenges: an aging workforce, fewer individuals entering healthcare professions, and a shrinking labor pool as long-term concerns that may further constrain workforce availability. Immigration policy, international recruitment delays, and uncertainty surrounding work authorization were also identified by some providers as emerging risks to future staffing stability.

Taken together, the responses reflected a shift in concern from immediate staffing shortages toward the long-term sustainability of the workforce. While recruitment and retention remain top priorities, respondents increasingly focused on the financial pressures of maintaining competitive compensation, demographic changes affecting the labor supply, and ensuring a stable pipeline of future caregivers.

Notable Responses:

> *"Workforce shortages have turned around, and finding staff is materially easier than it was 3 years ago. Inflation is now the primary worry as it pertains to required wage increases to keep our staff secure."*
>
> *"Will costs increase faster than our ability to increase rates?"*
>
> *"We are up to date with our employment authorizations but concerned as the immigration picture can change so quickly."*
>
> *"The quality of applicants has significantly declined and with that the ability to fill open shifts with quality staff who are able to work scheduled shifts (without call-ins, tardiness) and interact with residents and co-workers."*
>
> *"That our federal and state governments are failing to incent people to pursue nursing as a profession on a grander scale to meet the demand."*

"Pool of available help considering we compete with other local CCRCs, hospitals, and universities, as well as larger manufacturing/processing facilities for lower paid roles."

"Nursing shortages due to retiring boomers and lack of new nursing graduates and CNAs. We need to increase our overall compensation budget if we want to be more competitive in the market."

"It's a numbers game that's only going to get more challenging. Few workers, higher wages, and higher service expectations by the residents add up to a perfect storm."

"Continuing to fill open LPN, RN, and cook roles. Also, replacing top level management positions as senior leadership begins to retire."

Workforce Evolutions Over the Past Year

Compared to last year's *CFO Hotline*SM workforce survey, this year's findings suggest an evolution in how organizations are thinking about workforce challenges. While recruitment and retention remain top concerns, the conversation has expanded beyond simply filling open positions. Respondents continue to identify clinical staffing, particularly RNs, LPNs, and CNAs, as the most difficult positions to recruit and retain, but written comments indicate growing concern about the long-term sustainability of the workforce. Wage inflation, benefit costs, wage compression, competition for talent across the broader labor market, an aging workforce, and leadership succession were recurring themes throughout the survey, reflecting a broader shift from managing immediate staffing shortages to building a resilient workforce for the future.

The workforce strategies providers are pursuing also appear to be evolving. Last year's survey highlighted competitive wages, positive workplace culture, and agency staffing as the primary responses to workforce shortages. This year, while those approaches remain important, written responses placed greater emphasis on longer-term investments such as career pathways, apprenticeship programs, leadership development, technology, AI-enabled workforce solutions, and partnerships with educational institutions. Rather than relying solely on short-term hiring initiatives, many organizations appear to be investing in workforce development strategies designed to strengthen recruitment pipelines, improve retention, and reduce dependence on agency labor over time. Many of these initiatives focus on organizational development rather than direct compensation, suggesting providers are seeking sustainable ways to strengthen workforce stability while managing continued pressure on labor costs.

Another key development is the growing prominence of external workforce pressures. Compared with last year's survey, written comments placed greater emphasis on immigration policy, work authorization uncertainty, and the retirement of experienced nurses and leaders as factors affecting organizations' ability to maintain adequate staffing. At the same time, organizations continue to devote more than half of their operating budgets to employee compensation, an average that remained consistent year-over-year, underscoring that workforce challenges now extend beyond labor availability to the financial and strategic investments required to attract, retain, and develop talent in an increasingly competitive labor market.

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