Employee Engagement Survey

2021

From the Photographer:
Taking a walk on my lunch break on a perfect spring day. These trees in the parking lot provide beauty year-round.

– Julietta Davidson

Washington State
Department of Social & Health Services
Transforming lives

DSHS

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Department of Social and Health Services

Headquarters located at:
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Olympia, WA 98501

WASHINGTON STATE
Office of the Governor
Jay Inslee, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF
Social & Health Services
Jilma Meneses, Secretary

Facilities, Finance & Analytics Administration

Research & Data Analysis Division

RDA

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Title: 2021 DSHS Employee Engagement Survey

Abstract: The 2021 survey shows overall declines in employee engagement since the last major survey, much of which may be attributable to the extensive impact of COVID-19. Compared to 2019, there were statistically significant declines in positive responses to eight of the 17 comparable items in both surveys, and five statistically significant increases. The response rate in 2021 was 67% (10,170 responses). Areas of improvement include satisfaction with flexibility and mobility (among those with opportunities to telework), fair treatment in work groups, recognition for a job well done, and teamwork. Challenges include indications of burnout (issues with workload, staffing, feeling valued, and morale), substantial drops in job satisfaction and net promotion, dissatisfaction with change management, and unmet individual needs for autonomy and growth. Opportunities and challenges vary across administrations and work groups.

The Employee Engagement Survey is an important component of Governor Inslee's Results Washington initiative for performance management and continuous improvement. Results are used by DSHS to inform strategic planning and initiatives to improve employee engagement at every level of the organization.

THE SURVEY TEAM
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Authors: Sarah Allis, MA; Andrea Jamieson, MS; Deborah Macy; John Rogers, PhD
Statistical Analysis: Elizabeth Mancuso
Report Design and Format: Kevin White
Contributors: Michaela Beals, MA; Angelica Eldridge; Alice Huber, PhD; Nancy Raiha, PhD

From the photographer:
This picture was taken while on a family vacation. My granddaughters remind me of why I do and to uphold our recovery principals of restoration and personal growth as well as peer support and community life.

"Cousins by Fate, Friends by Choice" • Secretary's Choice
DSHS Photo Contest • By Brenda Baldwin, with permission

"It's my honor to select the DSHS Photo Contest Secretary's Choice Award for 2021. Every photo captures an emotion and a moment in time that tells a compelling story. The artistic responses were exceptional and I would like to recognize all artists for their creativity and their visual narrative. After much consideration, I chose "Cousins by Fate, Friends by Choice". This sweet image of two little girls sitting near the water shows what we are all about as people in this world: Despite our many differences, we come together to support each other – even when we're wearing our various floatation devices. This photo captures perfectly the beauty of an ordinary moment while also illustrating unity, humanity, love and inclusion. It is an example of finding "truth" and "reality". Congratulations to this photographer and all other artists who participated in this year's contest. I encourage you to see them all for yourselves!"

Jilma Meneses, Secretary
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
View the 2021 DSHS Photo Contest Winners here:
https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/research-and-data-analysis/2021-dshs-photo-contest-winners

"Special Moments" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Clients
By Kathy Lindsley, with permission

From the photographer:
Special moments with a little walk and talk along the wooded trail.
It's amazing the influence a child can have in the life of an adult.
Whether a child is in our lives for days or for months, we always feel
so blessed to be able to share our home and experiences with them.
Sure they bring their sorrows with them, but they also share their
smiles and their enthusiasm for life, bringing smiles and purpose to
our lives as well. They help keep us 60 year old's young both
physically and mentally!

"Bountiful Flowers"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Tricia Tavary, with permission

2021

DSHS Employee Engagement Survey

Appendices are available with this report on the RDA Website:
https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/rda/research-reports/

Background, Methods, and Response Rates ● Statistical Reports ● Coding Glossary ● Modeling Engagement

From the photographer:
This is truly a black stallion, named Onyx. He is a wild mustang. He lives in Nevada on BLM land.

"Proud Onyx" • Second Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Tami Boelter, with permission

Executive Summary

THE 2021 SURVEY RESULTS SHOW THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT DSHS. Of the 17 standard questions asked in the same format in 2019 and 2021, there were eight statistically significant decreases in positive responses and only five statistically significant increases. More than six of 10 DSHS employees (64%) said that they are generally satisfied with their jobs, and less than six of 10 (55%) said they would recommend their agency as a great place to work (also known as "net promotion"). Positive responses to each of these questions declined by 5 percentage points from 2019.

The 2021 survey was open to all DSHS employees from November 1 to December 17, 2021. Data collection began just after the vaccine mandate for all Executive Branch employees was implemented (October 18, 2021). Because the previous comprehensive survey in 2019 took place just before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington (October 1, 2019 – November 14, 2019), the changes in survey responses during this period reflect the cumulative impact of the pandemic as well as the public actions taken to protect the health of Washingtonians.

The Employee Engagement Survey is the principal method for DSHS to gather comprehensive feedback from all staff. The 10,170 DSHS employees who participated in the survey provided their insights about COVID-related changes and many other important issues. The response rate in 2021 was 67%.

Bright Spots

Responses in some areas remained positive ("Always or Almost Always" or "Usually"), and there were several important increases. Most employees continue to feel they are treated respectfully by their supervisors and in their work groups. For those with the opportunity to telework, there were large increases in satisfaction with mobility and flexibility.

RESPECT, FAIRNESS, AND TEAMWORK. The majority of employees report that their supervisor treats them with dignity and respect. More say that people are treated fairly in their work groups, that they receive recognition for a job well done, and that their teams are collaborative.

- 86% said "My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect." This is the highest rated standard question in the survey and is the highest percentage on record for this question.
- 69% said "People are treated fairly in my work group," 4 percentage points higher than in 2019.
- Only 59% said "I receive recognition for a job well done," but this is the highest percentage on record for this question and 3 percentage points higher than in 2019.
- 70% said "A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group," up 2 percentage points from 2019.

MOBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY. While not all employees had access to telework, those who did were highly satisfied with the successful transition to remote work across much of the agency.

- 65% said they were satisfied with their mobility (the ability to work remotely from a variety of locations), 17 percentage points higher than in 2019.
- 66% said they were satisfied with their flexibility (the ability to balance work and personal life, or to adjust scheduled hours as needed), up 6 percentage points from 2019.
- 1,486 employees (21% of those who made comments) made positive comments about flexible scheduling and/or telecommuting, an increase of 106% from 2019.

Opportunities for Improvement

Compared to 2019, there were statistically significant declines in positive responses to eight of the 17 comparable items included in both surveys. While employees felt respected by supervisors and welcomed in their work teams, some cited confusing communications about changing policies, many described difficult working conditions, and some feel that they are not valued as people.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT. Positive responses to questions about the agency's role in change management were low, fewer reported knowing how their agency measures success or what is expected of them at work, and more complained about management not listening to employees.

- Only 50% of employees said "My agency helps me navigate change." This question was the lowest-scoring item in the survey in 2021. It was not included in the 2019 survey.
- 58% of employees said "I receive helpful communication from my agency" (not included in the 2019 survey).
- 54% of employees said "I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work," the lowest number of positive responses for this item since 2013.
- 55% of employees said "I know how my agency measures its success," a significant decrease from 58% in 2017.
- 660 employees (9% of those who commented) made negative comments on management or supervisors listening to them, a 31% increase over 2019.

WORKING CONDITIONS. Survey results show fewer positive responses about resources and job-skills alignment. Written comments show increases in the number of employees making critical comments about pay, staffing, and workload.

- 66% of employees said "I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively," a 2 percentage point decline from 2019.
- 66% of employees said "At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills," a 2 percentage point decline from 2019.
- 458 employees (7% of those who made comments) complained about their pay, a 31% increase from 2019.
- 757 employees (11% of those who made comments) described problems with staffing, a 35% increase from 2019.
- 353 employees (5% of those who made comments) made negative comments about their workload, a 105% increase from 2019.

SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS. In addition to the decreases in job satisfaction and likelihood of recommending the agency, fewer employees reported having the opportunity to learn and grow or feeling personally valued. There were more negative comments about personal job satisfaction and employee morale in 2021 than in 2019.

- 64% of employees said "In general, I'm satisfied with my job," a 5 percentage point decrease from 2019, and the lowest percentage since 2011.
- 61% of employees said "I have opportunities at work to learn and grow," a significant decrease from 64% in 2019.
- 59% of employees said "At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person," a significant decrease from 62% in 2019.
- 477 employees (7% of those who commented) made negative comments about morale or overall satisfaction, a 27% increase from 2019.

TAKEN TOGETHER, RESULTS SHOW EVIDENCE OF BURNOUT. The term "Burnout" has been used since the 1950s to describe the effects of chronic workplace stress.[1] Burnout is characterized by feelings of exhaustion, negative feelings about one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. Burnout is associated with substantial costs for individuals and organizations due to health impacts, increased turnover, and reduced productivity. While burnout is experienced by individuals, the causes are often rooted in the workplace environment.[2] Many of these challenges can be seen in the survey results. Whether or not these more negative results can be attributed to the crisis environment of COVID, they must be addressed with urgency and in the most vulnerable work groups if the agency is to meet its strategic goals and operate in accordance with its values.

Predictors of Employee Engagement

In addition to measuring overall satisfaction levels, the survey also allows for analysis of which workplace factors are most associated with employee engagement outcomes, like general job satisfaction or likelihood of recommending the agency.[3]

FINDING MEANING IN WORK IS THE TOP PREDICTOR OF JOB SATISFACTION. While all topics included in the survey are important, the top predictor of general job satisfaction is finding meaning in work. Agency encouragement of inclusion is the top predictor of net promotion (I would recommend my agency as a great place to work).

- Employees who said they always or usually find meaning in their work were eight times more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, compared to those who said they find meaning in their work occasionally or less often.
- Employees who said they always or usually feel valued for who they are as a person were four times more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than employees who said they feel valued occasionally or less.

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[1] World Health Organization, 2019: Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases (who.int).
[2] Maslach, C, Shaufeli, WB, Leiter, MP (2001). Job Burnout. Annual Review of Psychology (52), 397-422.
[3] We calculated logistic regression models to predict the independent contributions of each survey question to employee engagement outcomes, while controlling for the effects of all other standard questions. See Appendix D for more detail.

- Employees who said that they have the opportunity to make good use of their skills, or that they know what is expected of them at work, were more than twice as likely to report general job satisfaction.
- The pattern is different for likelihood of recommending the agency as a great place to work, with agency encouragement of inclusion, finding meaning in work, and feeling valued emerging as the top three predictors.

About the Survey

The goal of the survey is to reach out to each of the more than 15,000 employees at DSHS, obtain candid feedback about their workplace experiences, and provide actionable results at every level of the organization. The 2021 Employee Engagement Survey was:

- Available to all employees from November 1 to December 17, 2021.
- Administered in conjunction with a survey of all state employees, sponsored by Governor Inslee.
- Standardized across the Department, with the option to add questions to meet specific needs of individual programs.
- Completed by 10,170 Department employees — a 67% response rate.
- Analyzed thoroughly. 374 detailed custom reports were prepared for work groups throughout the Department.
- Distributed widely. In addition to this comprehensive report and the many work group reports, the survey findings have been made available through presentations and individual consultations.
- A push for future improvements. As of this report's publication date, work groups at statewide, department, and division levels are reviewing results, gathering further information around key issues, and formulating plans to address employee concerns and capitalize on opportunities.
- An important component of action plans developed by the Department's Assistant Secretaries to guide the next two-year cycle of performance improvement.

Common Acronyms in Employee Comments

ALTSA – Aging and Long-term Support	ESA – Economic Services Administration
APS – Adult Protective Services (ALTSA)	ESH – Eastern State Hospital (BHA)
BHA – Behavioral Health Administration	FFA – Facilities, Finance and Analytics
CSD – Community Services Division (ESA)	HCS – Home and Community Services (ALTSA)
CSO – Community Services Office (ESA)	HRD – Human Resources Division
DCS – Division of Child Support (ESA)	REDI – Respect, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
DDA – Developmental Disabilities Administration	SCC – Special Commitment Center (BHA)
DVR – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	WFO – Workforce Optimization (ESA)
EDAI – Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion	WSH – Western State Hospital (BHA)

Changes from 2019 to 2021

Percent of employees answering "Always or Almost Always" or "Usually" (or "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied")

COMMUNICATION

I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	**54%** 56% (2019)
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	**58%** *New question in 2021.*
I am encouraged to come up with a better way of doing things.	**51%** 52%
I know what is expected of me at work. *	**85%** 87%
I know how my agency measures its success. *	**55%** 58%

SUPERVISOR/MANAGER SUPPORT

My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.	**76%** 72% (2019)
I receive recognition for a job well done. *	**59%** 56%
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	**86%** 85%

FAIRNESS/DIVERSITY

People are treated fairly in my work group. *	**69%** 64% (2019)
My agency responds effectively to bullying and harassment.	**61%**
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	**74%** 70%
My agency encourages inclusion in the workplace.	**66%** *New question in 2021.*

THE DAILY JOB

In general, I'm satisfied with my job. *	**64%** 69% (2019)
I find meaning in my work.	**79%** *New question in 2021.*
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work. *	**55%** 60%
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person. *	**59%** 62%
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow. *	**61%**
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills. *	**66%** 68%
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group. *	**70%** 68%

BUSINESS PRACTICES

I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively. *	**66%** 68% (2019)
Overall my agency supports me in living a healthier life.	**58%** 57%

COVID-RELATED CONTENT

Overall, I am satisfied with how my agency is responding to staff needs during the pandemic.	**55%** *New question in 2021.*
My agency helps me navigate change.	**50%** *New question in 2021.*
My agency clearly communicates the reasons for decisions it makes with reopening the workplace.	**51%** *New question in 2021.*
My agency listens to my needs for reopening the workplace.	**50%** *New question in 2021.*
In my current work environment, I am satisfied with the ability to develop and maintain relationships with coworkers.	**69%** *New question in 2021.*
How satisfied are you with your flexibility? (adjust scheduled hours as needed). *	**66%** 60%
How satisfied are you with your mobility? (work remotely from a variety of locations). *	**65%** 48%

*Change is significant at the .01 level. See Appendix B-9 and B-10 for long-term trends.

Major Comment Themes

COMMENTS WERE MADE IN RESPONSE TO THESE TWO QUESTIONS:

1. What do you like best about your current job?
2. What changes would you like to see in your workplace?

Percent of the 7,032 respondents who made comments in 2021

NEEDS WORK   NEUTRAL/MIXED   SATISFIED

Theme	Needs Work	Satisfied
Communication	19%	3%
Management	23%	14%
Personnel Issues	13%	1%
Job Characteristics	6%	59%
Co-Workers	7%	23%
Resources	23%	4%
General/Other	36%	7%
2021 Specific Topics *Return to Workplace/Vaccine Mandate/Other COVID-19*	8%	1%

Legend:
- Needs Work
- Neutral/Mixed
- Satisfied
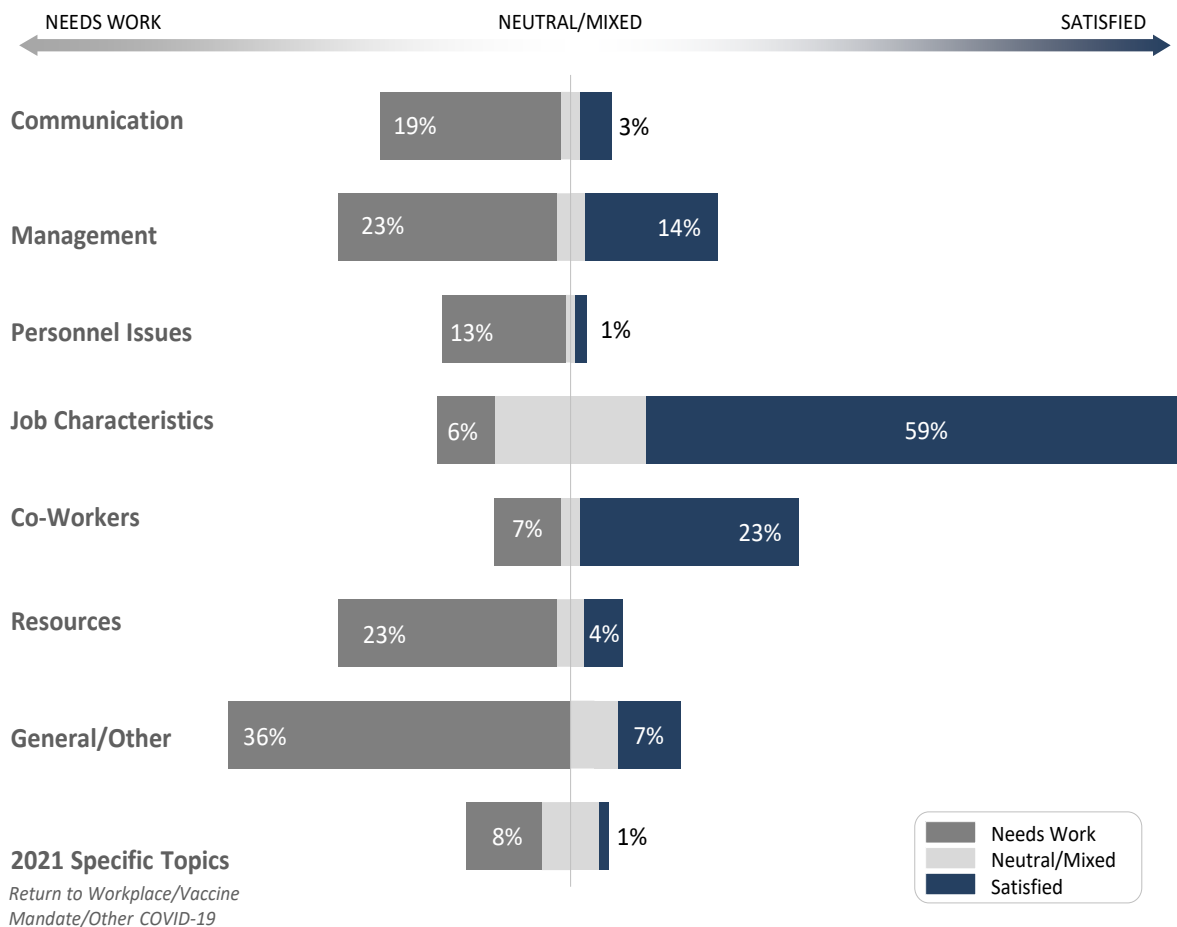
NOTE: Percentages show respondents who commented on this theme as a percentage of the total number of respondents who made narrative comments. Themes are discussed at a more detailed level in each chapter of the report. A summary of all themes including sub-categories of these major themes can be found in Appendix B-13, Table J.

"Change Comes Fast" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Clients
DSHS Photo Contest
By Cynthia Johnson, with permission

CHAPTER 1

Communication

COMMUNICATION PROVED TO BE CHALLENGING with the ongoing COVID pandemic in 2021. Compared to the 2019 survey, significantly fewer employees reported knowing what is expected of them at work or knowing how their agency measures success. As the pandemic continues, these decreases may be partly attributable to the ongoing environment of crisis management.

Despite a dip in measures of communication within the department from 2019 to 2021, more than eight of 10 respondents said they know what is expected of them at work (85%). Results from a new question indicate that a majority (58%) of employees agreed they receive helpful communication from their agency. In employee comments, communication challenges figure prominently: 1,692 employees (24% of those who commented) mentioned communication, with most of those comments (1,340) identifying areas that need work.

STAFF INPUT. Staff consistently reported that they want a stronger voice, especially with respect to changes that directly affect their work. Managers who value staff feedback and foster collaboration are appreciated. Employees want opportunities to share input without judgement and to see their ideas put into action.

- **Opportunities for input could be improved.** 54% of employees agreed that they have meaningful opportunities to provide input into decisions affecting their work, down from 56% in 2019.

- **Encouragement to innovate remains low.** 51% of employees who responded to the survey said they are encouraged to come up with better ways of approaching their work. While not statistically significant, this is a decrease from 52% in 2019.
- **More complaints about management not listening.** 660 employees (9% of those who made comments) criticized managers' attention to staff input, a 31% increase from 2019.

INFORMATION FROM MANAGEMENT. As in years past, most employees agreed there are clear job expectations. However, employees' perspectives on other aspects of communication from management decreased from 2019. Critical comments on this topic provide insight into situations where organizational and policy changes have led to many employees feeling that they were left out of the loop.

- **High awareness of job expectations.** 85% of employees said they know what is expected of them at work. Though high, the share of employees responding positively to this question is significantly lower than the 87% who said the same in 2019.
- **Employees find agency communication helpful.** 58% of employees agreed they receive helpful communication from their agency in this new survey question.
- **More complaints about information from management.** 658 employees (9% of those who made comments) made negative observations about the information they receive from supervisors or management, an 11% increase from 2019.

GOALS, GUIDELINES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES. The number of employees who agreed that they know how their agency measures success decreased four percent, a statistically significant change from 2019.

- **Decreased knowledge of how the agency measures success.** 55% of employees (down from 58% in 2019) said they know how their agency measures success.
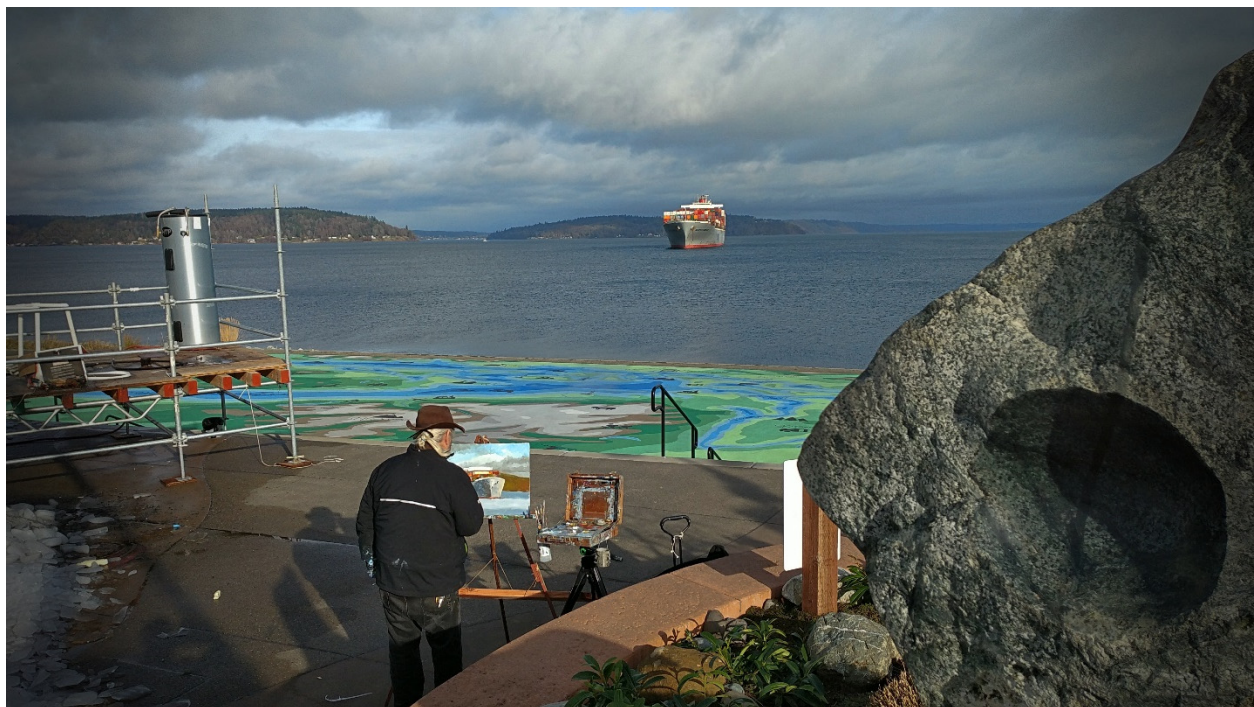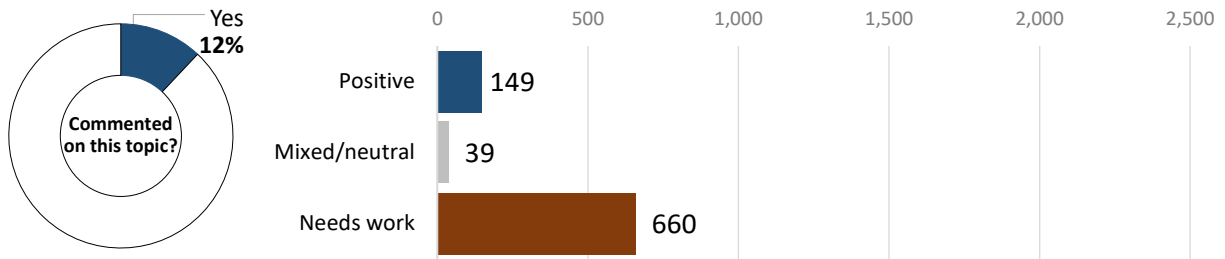

"The Painter"
DSHS Photo Contest • By Bruce Pearson, with permission

THEME. Listening to input from staff

848 of the 7,032 respondents who commented addressed the issue of managers listening to staff.

Of those who commented on this topic, 149 agreed that managers listen to them and encourage feedback. Many more (660) said that improvements are needed. Employees want managers to:

- Provide a safe and respectful space for sharing feedback
- Solicit the perspectives of those who will be affected by leadership decisions
- Actively incorporate input from those doing the work when making decisions

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees appreciate having an opportunity to share their opinions.

"I enjoy being able to provide feedback through work groups."

"We are encouraged to share our ideas."

"I feel that my opinion is valued."

"I like the ability to have input into how my work is done and truly feel my opinion is valued."

"They [leadership] solicit feedback from staff regularly and empower employees to identify solutions and improvements."

"I like that I am able to share my thoughts and opinions. It makes me feel like I have a voice within the organization."

"My team and organization values everyone's diverse perspectives which perpetuates creativity and innovation."

"I like that I have autonomy and that my professional opinion matters."

"Leadership has been doing a good job listening to the employees on what supports they need to perform their jobs at the highest level."

Respondents want management to seriously consider feedback from frontline staff when making decisions.

"[I want] ideas for changes from line staff used – usually asked but almost NEVER are the ideas used."

"We are the experts in our industries/fields and yet our plans for proper repairs are often overlooked."

"A lot of the time leadership makes decisions that impact us negatively and if they had talked with us and let us help in the decision process, time, money, and staff resources could have been saved."

"It seems that our voices are very seldom heard – management will ask for feedback but very, very infrequently will they consider the feedback."

"Too often it seems that decisions don't include the perspective of every affected group and decisions regarding system selection are made at such a high level that those 'doing the work' are left to work through the stress of issues that could have been avoided or addressed before implementation."

"Those that your decisions impact the most should have the largest voice."

"I'm given the opportunity to give ideas and feedback… but they are always shot down."

"When staff at different levels are asked to participate in work groups or decision making, often the end result or decision has already been made. Whether this is true, it is the perception of staff and needs to be addressed."

Staff want their input to have an impact on policies and processes.

"[I would like] better communication and understanding between non-technical policy makers and technical teams."

"There is a disconnect between the workers in the field and those at HQ. … HQ doesn't appear to be willing to discuss possible changes or change the things that REALLY need to happen."

"I would like the ability to be more open about things that need to change at WSH [Western State Hospital] and the ability to try and advocate for that change."

"The state also needs to listen to staff and employees about regulations and suggestions that they have, instead of making guidelines when they don't even know our job or what it really entails."

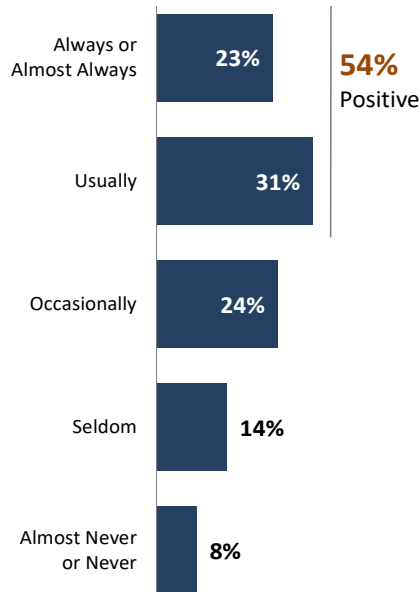"It would be helpful for the decision makers to have open conversations with staff."

"My ideas are not considered at all, making my work very frustrating."

QUESTION. I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.
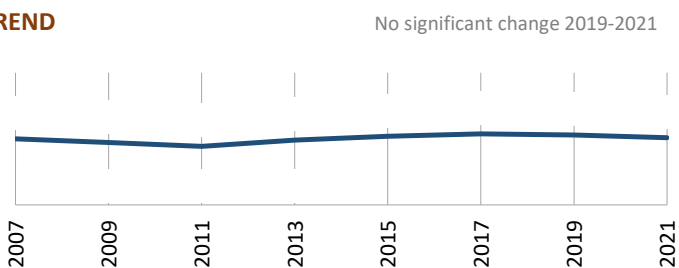
More than half of employees (54%) said they always or usually have a chance to give input on decisions in their workplace. Twenty-two percent said that they seldom or never have opportunities to give input.

In their comments, employees expressed appreciation for management that has created an environment where they feel comfortable sharing insights and opinions. Others are frustrated when they are not asked to provide input or when their feedback is not seriously considered, especially when it directly affects their work processes.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	23%
Usually	31%
Occasionally	24%
Seldom	14%
Almost Never or Never	8%

54% Positive

TREND   No significant change 2019-2021

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Many employees feel heard in their workplace.

"My ideas are taken into consideration when we are coming up with ways to solve problems or increase our efficiency."

"During the last year, I have felt encouraged by what felt like a momentum to be more progressive and responsive to staff concerns, input and ability to promote."

"I appreciate having a voice about how we do our work and what is important in the scope of work."

"[I appreciate] the opportunity to facilitate change to improve the organization and move it in a forward/positive direction."

"There is a lot of open communication and everyone is heard. When people disagree, it is always done respectfully and a compromise is reached, if possible."

"I can bring forward ideas that are considered and sometimes even implemented."

"Leadership engages staff in conversations that impact our work and encourages staff to propose solutions from the line level."

"I always feel able to express my concerns regarding my work."

"[I like] the ability to be heard by my leadership as well as peers and to be allowed to contribute to agency-wide initiatives."

"My assigned RN3 listens to my concerns and follows up."

"I have a supervisor that listens to me and has an open door policy."

Others express frustration that their input is not solicited, or appears to be quickly dismissed.

"Staff have little involvement in any decision making these days. Suggestions that are made through our supervisor are shared through the chain of command but there are no results or feedback provided."

"When we voice our concerns up the chain we rarely if ever hear back or even get an acknowledgement. … I see graphics on DCS News that 'your voice counts!' It doesn't feel that way in reality."

"Our experiences are NEVER asked for, or listened to when we complain."

"Let employees give ideas and not shoot them down as soon as they say something."

Staff want their input to be taken seriously and incorporated into the decision-making process.

"I would like to see management within our unit take a more inclusive approach to decision-making, instead of what feels like lip service."

"Please pilot actual policy changes and allow for staff feedback so we can work together and identify any unforeseen flaws in any new policies."

"I would also like to see the input of floor staff to be listened to and acted on more frequently."

"I would like to see opportunity given for the workers' voices to be heard. Not just in surveys, but in work groups and with policy changes."

QUESTION. I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.

Just over half of employees (51%) said they are always or usually encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things. Over one-quarter of respondents (29%) indicated they seldom or never receive such encouragement, an increase from 25% in 2019.

Many employees like being trusted to bring their experience and knowledge to creative approaches for improving client outcomes. Others express concern and frustration that the workplace culture discourages innovation and dismisses employee input in favor of the status quo.

ANSWERS

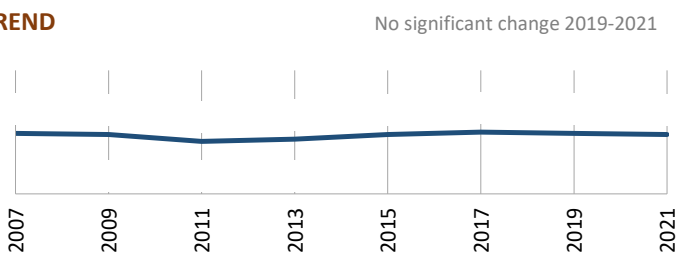| Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	24%
Usually	27%
Occasionally	21%
Seldom	16%
Almost Never or Never	13%

51% Positive

TREND — No significant change 2019-2021

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
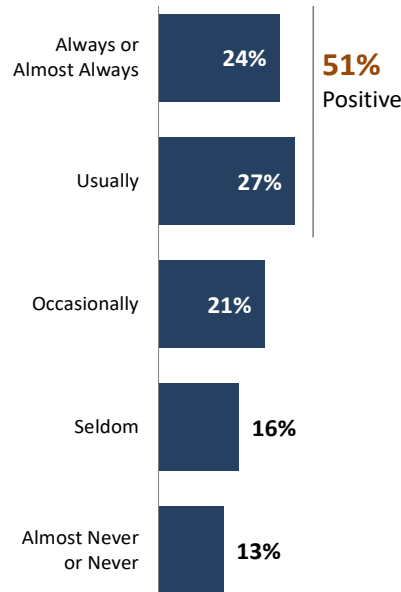
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees appreciate supervisors who encourage different ideas and perspectives.

"Our management group is very supportive and allows a good amount of creativity and collaboration on ideas."

"I have a lot of freedom to propose new ideas."

"My supervisor encourages input on the best ways to do my job."

"I love that I can give my input on a subject and feel heard."

"We share and innovate ideas. There is open communication and team respect and care."

"[I appreciate] my ability to effect change in the department."

"Staff are encouraged to speak up with ideas on things that would help investigators."

"I like that I have the ability to bring up new ideas and how I am encouraged to think about other ways to do the work."

"I love the ability to think about ways to improve process, my leader is amazing and encourages thinking outside the box."

"My work group is regularly able to share our thoughts about how to improve our work."

"I feel that I am supported and encouraged to express my opinions and ideas."

"I currently most enjoy being able to interact with my co-workers and talk with my field manager about making changes to our work processes to better navigate our working environment."

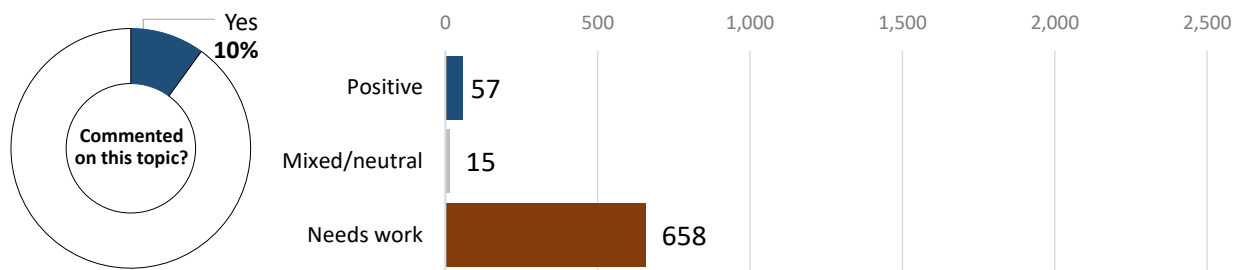**Staff who commented want ideas from all levels of the agency to be considered.**

"I would like to see people that do the work 'boots on the ground' be included. We are not just here doing the work but we understand how things work."

"[I want] management seeking information from the field/ground before making decisions on high that they might not understand how they would be implemented/the effect it will have on the work we do."

"I would like to see more room for open communication and open-mindedness about different ways of doing things. I would also like to feel there is a willingness by management to listen or take feedback on patient care, the way we do business, even if they don't agree."

Some feel discouraged from sharing ideas due to lack of action and perceived dismissal.

"I find APS [Adult Protective Services] managers, administrators and directors have a tendency to deflect feedback and input immediately. They default to 'this has been asked/suggested before,' 'it's always been this way,' 'it's been worse,' or 'that is just how it is with State work.'"

"Often line staff feel if their opinion, questions, or desires are not in line with management, they go unheard or are minimized."

"Year after year of soliciting new ideas and/or ways of doing things yet rarely, if ever, seeing those ideas implemented, has demonstrated that leadership lacks interest in feedback from the field."

THEME. Information communicated from management to staff

730 of the 7,032 employees who commented mentioned how supervisors and managers provide information.

Yes **10%**

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	57					
Mixed/neutral	15					
Needs work	658					

Comments regarding information from management were overwhelmingly requests for improvement. A small number of employees (57) reported satisfaction with the way information is communicated by direct supervisors. Most employees who commented (658) see a need for improvements at all levels of the agency. They would like:

- Clear, direct, and honest communication
- Timely notice of changes that will affect employees
- Transparency from leadership to foster trust and understanding across the agency

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

A few employees expressed appreciation for managers who make an effort to communicate clearly.

"Communication is open and honest."

"I enjoy the communication that I have with my team and supervisor."

"I appreciate the respectful communication I receive."

"I feel over the last four years we have great, consistent communication from all roles within HCS [Home and Community Services]."

"I like how my boss and I have great communication within the workplace."

Others who commented on communication from supervisors and managers expressed dissatisfaction.

"[I want] less 'secrets' kept from the staff. There are too many times that staff are left to stress about situations that management could relieve but doesn't."

"I don't feel the agency has done a very good job communicating. My supervisor is oftentimes finding out news the same time staff is, and sadly there have been some things that I have heard on the news before it has been told to us."

"It feels like there are too many levels of mid-management that everything has to filter through before it reaches those who need the messaging."

"Whenever we try to ask questions we are pushed to the back and forgotten."

Some respondents provided ideas on how to improve.

"Be mindful that there's opportunities for growth to respond in a more empathic way that helps staff feel more validated, heard, and valued."

"Allow workers to attend unit/all staff meetings, even if they are scheduled to be on the phones that day."

"The quarterly town halls are an excellent way to communicate with line staff, but to increase participation the agency may need to provide more time options, so all shifts feel included."

"Everyone has different learning styles and my office doesn't permit or make the environment comfortable for people that are hands on learning, or visual as opposed to those who read and process."

Open communication and transparency from management are priorities for many employees.

"Changes get started from the top of the ladder and I feel like by the time the info moves all the way down the ladder, some pieces are dropping off."

"Additional information as to 'why' a change is happening can mitigate some of the frustrations and help staff to provide explanations to patients."

"Concealing information from employees, no matter how trivial, comes off as deceptive and lessens trust in the admin making decisions."

"There has been talk of transparency but seldom is there any. This increases stress and anxiety in the front line workers."

"A lot of times I don't feel like I have all the information so I don't understand decisions from management."

"I would like more communication regarding change, in general. Prior to the pandemic I felt upper management's communication with employees was fair to strong. Recently, within the past 3-6 months, communication has become scarce."

"With the multitude of changes related to COVID, promotions, mandate, etc., sometimes it doesn't feel as transparent."

QUESTION. I know what is expected of me at work.

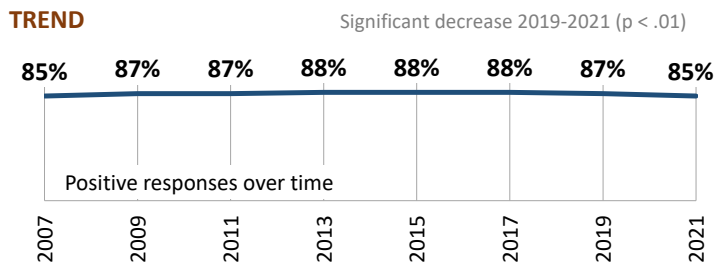**A majority of employees (85%)** said they always or usually understand their job expectations. Although this is the second-highest rated question in the 2021 survey, this question saw a statistically significant decrease from 87% in 2019.

In their comments, many employees expressed confidence in their understanding of job duties and guidance from upper management. Others recognize that times of change, including the COVID environment, make it difficult to know what to focus on. In these situations, staff want clearer instructions from management to achieve goals.

ANSWERS

Always or Almost Always	46%
Usually	39%
Occasionally	10%
Seldom	3%
Almost Never or Never	2%

85% Positive

TREND   Significant decrease 2019-2021 (p < .01)

85%   87%   87%   88%   88%   88%   87%   85%

Positive responses over time

2007   2009   2011   2013   2015   2017   2019   2021
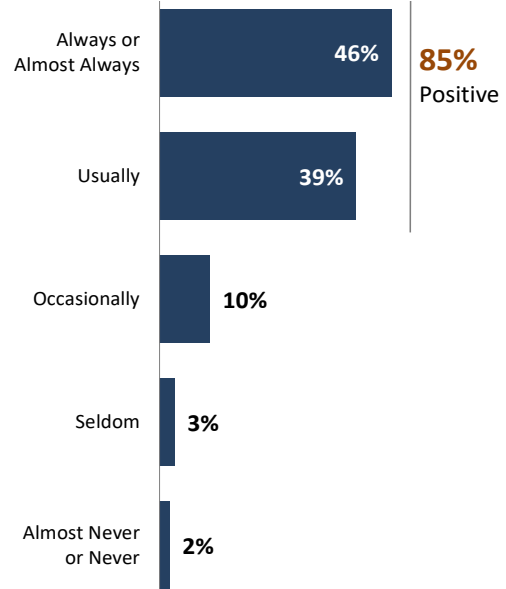
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Most employees know what is expected of them at work.

"I know what is expected of me and it's easy for me to ask for clarification or additional information if I need it."

"I like that I always know what is expected of me."

"The Team has a mission, set priorities and a list of expectations to work by."

"[There is] good training with clear expectations but room for individuality and use of staff strengths."

"I know what is expected of me when the work is routine."

"Our goal is safety and customer service to the patients, clients and staff that we serve."

Many staff noted the crucial role supervisors play in communicating expectations and providing support.

"I like that it is clear what is expected of me. I also like that my supervisor is always willing to take the time to answer any questions that I have and will check in to see if I need any help. I feel like my concerns and suggestions are always considered."

"Our supervisor makes a great effort for our office to stay connected through weekly team meetings and biweekly 1:1 meetings for us to stay on the same page and work on our own processional growth."

"My unit manager is great! Lets me know what the expectation is and lets me do it without being micromanaged."

"My manager is supportive, includes me in the decisions that impact my work when that's reasonable."

"I cannot express how much I appreciate Dr. Gruenewald's positive and realistic work expectations and influence on the culture in the clinical department."

"I have an amazing supervisor who is always open to listen and always gives me great feedback in a caring and respectful manner."

Some employees would appreciate additional guidance on priorities in their workplace.

"I love the work I was hired to do and could do better with clearer direction from management."

"I have been struggling with the inconsistencies with expectations in regards to the pandemic."

"[There is] too much change right now and everyone is 'winging it' differently."

"As the Western State Hospital changes its focus, there is not a clear goal of what needs to be done."

"I would appreciate clearer direction by my leaders so I can do the job right the first time instead of doing it multiple times because all of the information was not provided in the beginning (no one reads minds)."

"I would like to see an overall SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) with certain tasks or responsibilities that I must engage while performing my daily regimen. I, from time to time, receive different information depending on who I ask."

"Sometimes there is so much incoming information, that it contributes to making some days difficult to prioritize."

QUESTION. I receive helpful communication from my agency.

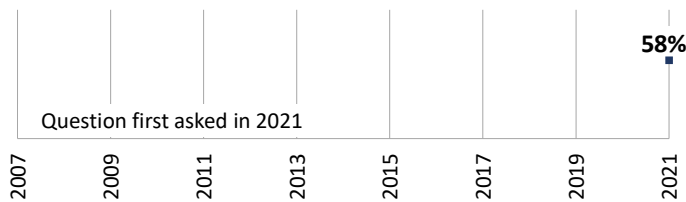**Almost six of 10 employees (58%)** indicated they always or usually receive helpful communication from their agency in response to this new survey question for 2021. Only 18% of employees said they seldom or never receive helpful communication from their agency.

Many respondents expressed appreciation for supervisors who keep their teams informed through regular communication. Others are frustrated when they don't receive timely updates regarding organizational or policy changes, particularly when there are many changes happening at once. Some believe methods need to change to ensure effective communication. Employees also want to know the "why" behind changes.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	19%
Usually	39%
Occasionally	24%
Seldom	12%
Almost Never or Never	6%

58% Positive

TREND

58%

Question first asked in 2021

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
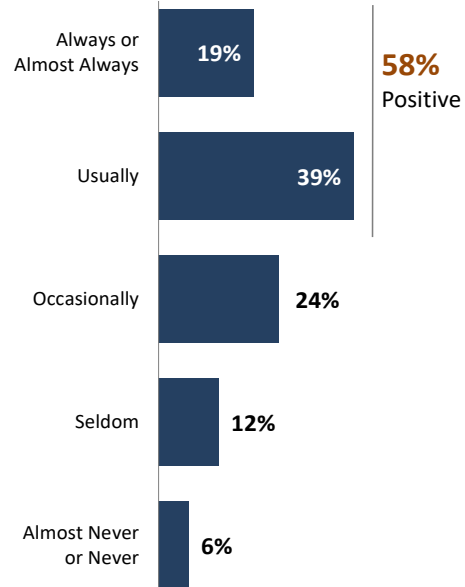
▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Employees are grateful for supervisors and managers who foster open, transparent communication.

"I love the communication and support from my supervisors and my team."

"What I appreciate the most about my current job is the communication I am given about the changes (and there have been many) that are happening."

"[I appreciate] how transparent leadership has been and their willingness to answer tough questions."

"Communication is shared early and often which allows me to give input into what is happening."

"I really like my director; she sends emails to us often with very uplifting languages and made me feel hopeful even when things looked and felt uncertain."

"My current supervisor meets with me weekly, keeps me informed on the outcomes of meetings that could in some way effect my work and I am treated with respect."

"I like how my supervisor is transparent with his team which makes it easier to work."

"We get excellent communication and transparency from our leaders … which empowers supervisors and CRMs [case resource managers] to understand changes in the workplace."

"I also like my management team. They are very effective in getting information to us and letting us know their reasoning behind decisions (transparency)."

"I absolutely love the transparency of my chain of command in explaining different policies and the reasons behind them."

**Others feel that the ways in which communication is disseminated could be improved.**

"There is a constant overwhelming flow of information that comes through the chain, and often times changes are retroactive and/or without advance notice. This makes it very difficult for everyone to stay on top of it all and still be proficient in what we do."

"Better communication from higher level staff so that what they say is not lost in translation through multiple supervisory levels."

"I really, strongly would prefer to see a return to putting ALL changes into written format. We have deviated from this practice over the past decade and that has created problems in communication."

"It seems like the department has been working on top-down communication but not between divisions or administrations. Communication with those outside of my unit continues to be a problem."

Employees want to understand the reasoning behind policies and decisions that affect their work.

"More thoughtful implementation of changes in business practices, including clear communication/explanation of why changes are needed."

"Leadership needs to explain the 'whys' better when making change. People need to understand what they are doing so they fully support the work."

"When decisions are made it would be helpful to know what went into the decision process."

THEME. Clear direction for the agency

93 of the 7,032 employees who commented addressed the presence or absence of a clear direction for the agency, administration, or program.
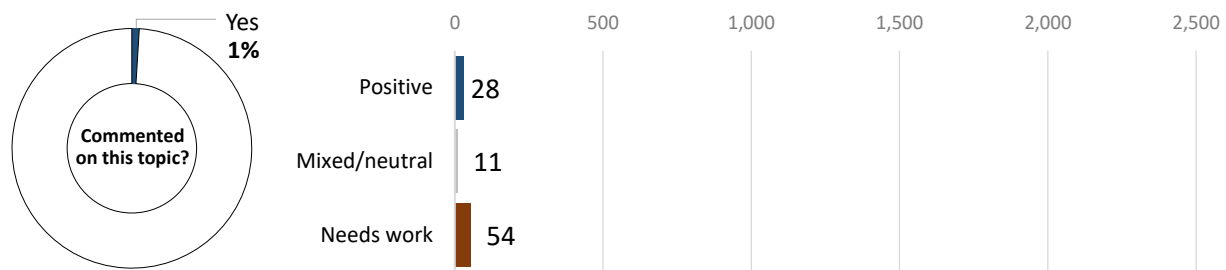
Comments about agency direction were more negative (54) than positive (28), a distinct change from the 2019 survey when responses were slightly more positive than negative. While many employees support the overall mission of the department, some expressed concern that their programs lack clear direction, or that the daily work feels disconnected from the goal of transforming lives.

►What DSHS employees said …

Many employees identify with the mission of the program or the agency.

"The values, mission statement, and culture of honor here is refreshing."

"I also really like DSHS/DVR's [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation] mission and values and the community we work with. Our work is meaningful and it makes a big and positive impact on the lives of our customers."

"I know how my work contributes to the agency and our administration's mission. I feel like I'm making a difference."

"My work feels directly connected to child support issues that are innovative, related to program goals and regulatory compliance, and connected to the general agency/ESA [Economic Services Administration] goals of poverty reduction."

"I like the mission, empowering others to transform their lives."

"HCS [Home and Community Services] administrations' stated values are authentic and lived out here… this is the place I want to work until retirement calls me home!"

"I'm doing work I believe I can grow in and even see opportunities to expand it to fit the mission and meet the vision of the division."

"My colleagues are passionate and committed to the mission of transforming lives."

Others see room for improvement in creating or communicating the agency's vision.

"[I would like to see] more strategic planning to let staff know the direction we are headed and why certain decisions are being made."

"We say that we want to be or become an employer of choice, but as a department it seems we aren't unified in what that means nor do our actions seem to consistently support that."

"This community has taken a huge blow, has become disorganized with no real direction of how to move forward, and we could really benefit from stronger leadership. I think even just having a meeting to talk about it may help jumpstart these problems we are facing because right now it feels as if our leaders have ignored the problems."

"I understand the mission statement and the goals of the agency. Where we differ is the path to reach those goals."

"I'd like for our division headquarters to come back together and understand what our main goal is again. I feel like this has been lost."

"Clarity on big-picture goals."

Some would like to see a stronger connection between the agency's mission and their daily work.

"The agency's mission does not add up to the actual job/work."

"[I want to see] better alignment between agency outcomes and daily work of the employees."

"I would like to be able to see more clearly how the work of each division, office, unit is connected to promote our administration M/V/V [Mission/Vision/Values]."

"One improvement, would be that we display and communicate our values and strategic objectives for staff to see and understand."

"[I] would like the mission statement to actually apply to what we do at SCTF [Secure Community Transition Facility]."

"While numbers are important, being efficient and serving the public with a healthy mindset is just as important."

"I dislike WFO [Workforce Optimization], it makes me feel like all my hard work is for nothing. I feel I am only tracked by my mouse movement and not the actual connections and service I give our customers."

QUESTION. I know how my agency measures its success.

Slightly over half of survey respondents (55%) said they understand how the agency measures success, a statistically significant decrease from 2019. Nearly one-quarter (24%) said they seldom or never know how success is measured.
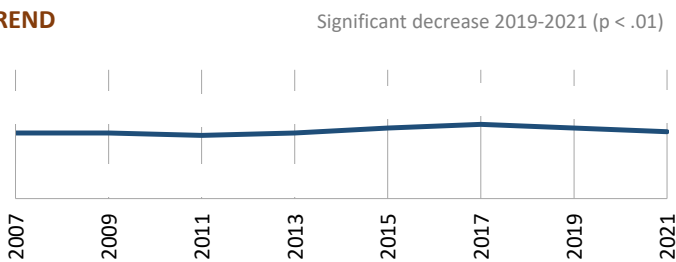
Many employees expressed appreciation for well-defined goals. Others acknowledge changing policies have led to confusion and want more clear guidance from leadership on priorities. Some comments on this topic focused on whether performance metrics are consistent with the program's purpose, and if these performance measures hinder the overall mission of transforming lives.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	22%
Usually	32%
Occasionally	21%
Seldom	13%
Almost Never or Never	11%

55% Positive

TREND   Significant decrease 2019-2021 (p < .01)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
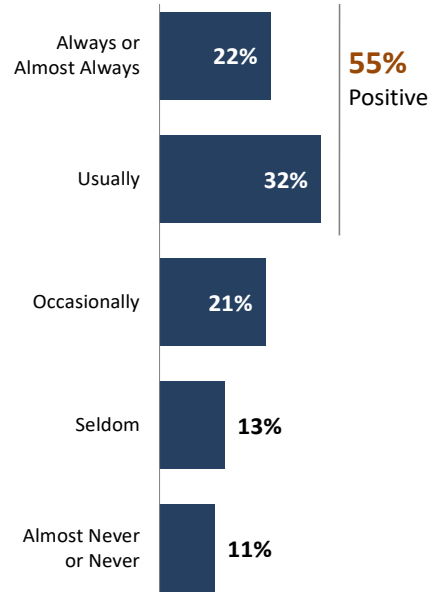
►**What DSHS employees said …**

**Overall, staff are satisfied with the success measures and ability to contribute to agency goals.**

"We have a clear and inspiring mission that everyone is working towards."

"I feel supported and am happy with the strategic direction."

"I like that we have a clearly defined mission, and are provided resources to accomplish that mission."

"I feel very much part of a team. We share our challenges, and we share our successes."

"I very much love that my agency truly believes in the mission of supporting individuals with Developmental Disabilities."

"[I appreciate] how that program aligns with the goals to reduce poverty and how, through a partnership with other agencies and community-based organizations, we provide the ways to help Washingtonians enhance their lives."

"[I like] feeling like I am accomplishing and fulfilling goals daily, and helping to move the agency in a forward direction in efficiency and productivity."

"[I like] the ability to assist those in my work group succeed in our mission, so that we are helping the overall organization succeed in its mission."

"I feel good about contributing to the mission of transforming lives."

"[I like] knowing that the work my department does has an impact to the Mission, Vision, and Values."

Some employees want more clarity from leadership on priorities, particularly in the midst of many changes.

"Leadership must be called upon to set clear and transparent priorities, acknowledging that some goals take precedence over others and giving staff at every level a sense of accomplishment when those top priorities are met."

"It's easy to forget our mission when staff are knee-deep in changes and policy/procedure."

"[Executive management] could use a little more work on explaining how they plan to execute that vision."

"Staff [are] feeling unsure of the direction or messaging when working with clientele where there's a churning of clients and confusion on priorities."

Others said performance measures hinder quality work and employee morale.

"One cannot measure empathy, compassion, and respect."

"There are too many things being measured at the same time making staff feel like robots and, in turn, making them feel unvalued."

"Phones seem to be the main focus rather than working with families."

"Everything is so fast paced, all the time, that it is very difficult to feel like you are completely up-to-date with what is happening. This hectic pace prevents thoughtful planning and participation in critical activities."
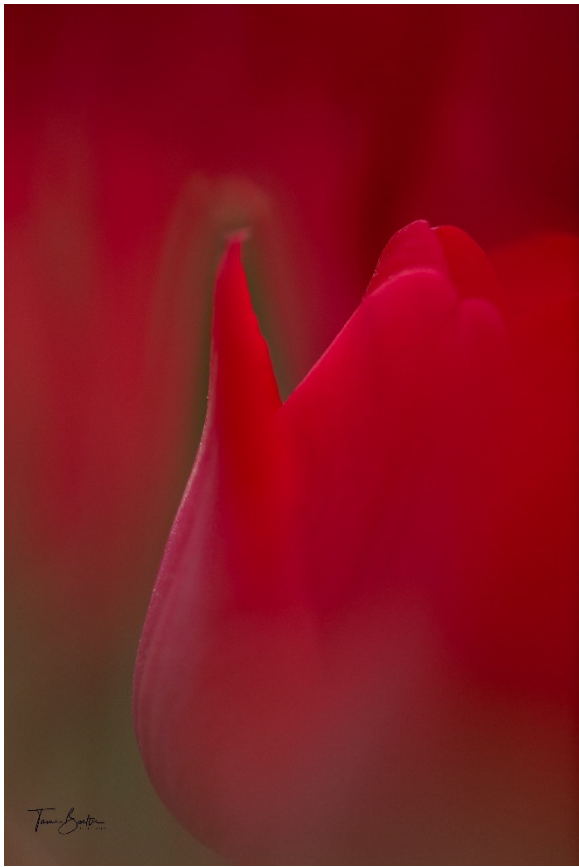
"Red Tulip"
DSHS Photo Contest • By: Tami Boelter, with permission

From the photographer:
Taken at the Skagit Valley Tulip festival. This is a tulip macro. Taken with a canon 180mm 1:1 lens.

"Fort Vancouver at Dusk"
DSHS Photo Contest • By Kim Karu, with permission

From the photographer:

What's the Value of a Blanket? I get to work with some most amazing people every day, with whom I laugh, cry, learn, and grow. In an engagement gathering on CFS ward F8 a couple weeks prior to Thanksgiving 2019, a Patient asked me to help him do a service project: He wanted to do something meaningful to contribute to the community that he had damaged and make a difference in the lives of the "homeless folks"…

View the rest of the story & the 2021 DSHS Photo Contest Winners here:
https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/research-and-data-analysis/2021-dshs-photo-contest-winners/

"200+ Blankets, Dozens of Patients" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action
By B. Sven Sluyter, with permission

"Blackbirds" • Second Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By Bruce Pearson, with permission

CHAPTER 2

Supervisor/Manager Support

CONFIDENCE IN MANAGER SUPPORT CONTINUES TO STEADILY INCREASE in 2021, even as employees navigate new workplace practices. Significantly more employees agreed ("Always or Almost Always" or "Usually") that they receive recognition for a job well done. Positive answers across all questions continue to rise and 2021 marks the greatest satisfaction with manager support through all survey years. Specifically, employees continue to affirm that they are being treated with dignity and respect by their supervisor, making it the highest-rated question in 2021.

Compared to 2019, the total number of comments and percentage of critical responses about management decreased. Despite this decrease, employees voiced more complaints in 2021 about lack of recognition (13% increase). Most of the comments about managers related to attributes other than support, recognition, and courtesy/respect. Employees were more likely to note manager personality, relational dynamics, interpersonal connection, knowledge of the daily work, and perceptions of accountability.

MENTORING, AVAILABILITY, AND FEEDBACK FROM SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS. A shifting work environment has played a role in the dynamics of how employees receive support and feedback.

- **Mixed responses about support, mentoring, and availability.** 501 respondents (7% of those who made comments) were grateful for supervisors who were available for questions, pitched in with high workloads, gave feedback and encouragement, and exhibited empathy. An equal number of respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the level of support they received.
- **Supervisors often give helpful feedback.** 76% of employees said they receive helpful feedback from their supervisor. While this is an increase in satisfaction, wording on this question changed slightly and therefore significance was not measured.

RECOGNITION FOR A JOB WELL DONE. Employees observe when and how recognition is distributed. They notice the different methods that managers use to recognize and appreciate employees. During a time of shifting work environments, personal recognition became a central theme.

- **Employee recognition continues to increase**. 59% of employees said they always or usually receive recognition for a job well done, up from 56% in 2019. Nearly a quarter (22%) said they seldom or never receive recognition.
- **Employees are redefining recognition**. The majority of comments indicated a lack of meaningful recognition or appreciation. There is a shift from 2019 to greater interest in being recognized for individual contribution rather than simply the outcome or work quality. While employees may agree that they receive recognition for the a job well done, many employees would like to see recognition for perseverance, ingenuity, collaboration, flexibility, and a variety of other personal attributes.

RESPECT AND TRUST. Employees continue to give positive answers to the question about dignity and respect. However, some comments describe an underlying experience of disrespectful treatment.

- **Respect from supervisors is the highest-rated question.** 86% of employees said their supervisor always or usually treats them with dignity and respect.
- **Some describe disrespectful treatment**. 319 employees (5% of all who made comments) made negative observations about how their supervisor treats them. Of these, many describe incidents of demeaning conduct.


From the photographer:
Posed with a headlamp under the Milky Way listening to elk bugling.

"Milky Way - McNary Refuge" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Robert Salsbury, with permission

THEME. Support and mentoring by managers and supervisors

1,056 of the 7,032 employees who made comments described supervisor/manager support and mentoring.
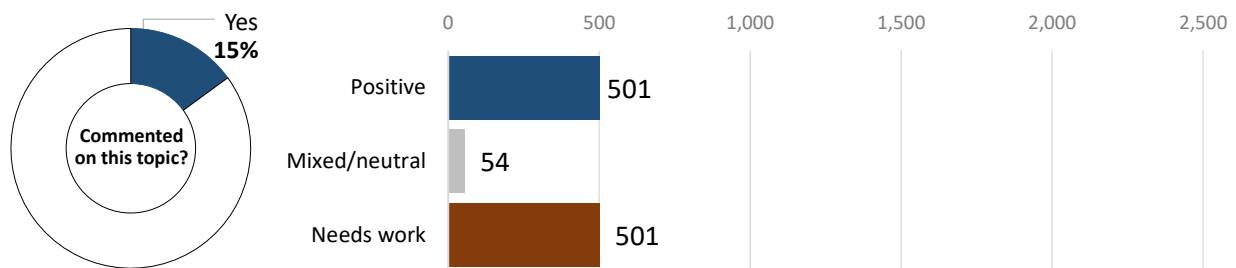
An equal number of employees praised or were challenged with attributes of management support, including availability, willingness to assist with the work, ability to answer questions or give feedback, caring and empathy, consistency, and encouragement. Many also mentioned flexibility and mentoring that fostered employee learning and growth. Employees praised supervisors that engage with them and believe in their potential. They want to experience meaningful support that expands opportunities for daily success and fosters future growth.

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees are grateful for supervisors who care.

"My supervisor approaches us with an employee first approach and truly cares about us."

"My supervisor is kind, supportive, and I believe they advocate for me."

"I have a very supportive supervisor who respects and believes in all of us in the division and is always encouraging us to be better."

"From the top down I feel they are following the mission and truly care for the employees."

They described a variety of supportive qualities.

"Supervisor is supporting me to work innovatively, push change, and work flexibly."

"My supervisor is a motivator and encourages intellectual discourse to gain clarity and understanding. He cares about his direct reports enabling the team to be self-directed, action-oriented, and highly engaged."

"When I do need something, my supervisor is very supportive and tries to help me resolve any issues I have."

"I like the support of my supervisor, and the positive approach that he has toward our unit. He helps out, is available for questions, and checks in with us regularly. This is important in a virtual work environment."

"My supervisor is fantastic and reaches out to me every day to ensure I am getting the support I need with my caseload."

"I appreciate my supervisor's supportive yet hands-off approach. She is, more often than not, available for questions and/or concerns; yet, does not micromanage the team."

"My supervisor is the best I've ever had. She is understanding, pulls from my strengths and is always available to discuss what I need to talk to her about."

Employees want assistance and answers to questions.

"We need someone compassionate and able to navigate adversity in a way that is more supportive of workers. I would also like to see a less punitive approach from some management and more support for the workers."

"Managers take a more leadership/mentoring role, especially for new hires or those they see potential or drive to advance their careers."

"Management needs to step up and help out with things when staff don't know how to do it, instead of shrugging it off and sighing when asked questions."

"Having a consistently supportive supervisor. I don't know if my requests for help will be met with support and direction, or if I am going to be given vague answers or 'I don't know,' with no follow up."

Some requested more visible and available management.

"You need to talk to the workers. And I mean really talk to them. Not a podcast of carefully scripted words. Not a memo, or video. Get down here with us. We are drowning. And you are nowhere to be seen. If you are drowning too, let us know that. We just don't want to feel alone and like we are being sacrificed like pawns on a chess board."

"I would like for the CEO to be more available and to be seen out in the yard as our previous CEO. I believe it makes a big difference when you see the bosses out and about and interacting with employees and talking to them, finding out how they are doing. A working boss is the best kind of boss."

"People higher than administrators, show your face and get to know the line staff – that is who you are trying to support. Get to know them, don't just come in for a meeting and then sprint out. Come see who they are and meet them and show us you actually care about them."

QUESTION. My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.

More than seven of 10 employees (76%) said their supervisor provides helpful feedback. Many fewer (11%) reported they seldom or never receive helpful feedback from their supervisors. Significance testing from 2019 was not conducted due to changes in the question wording.
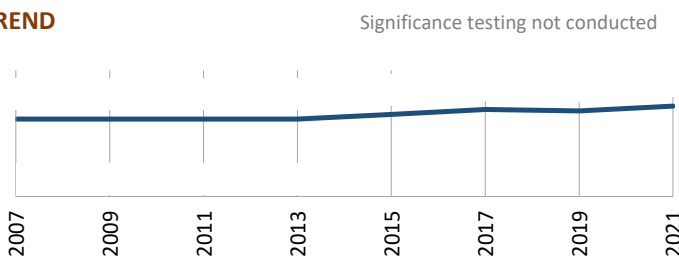
Employees said that supervisor feedback and guidance were valuable. They appreciate the growth opportunities that emerge from consistent, constructive feedback. Some employees want supervisors to offer more honest, informed guidance. They described challenges and confusion that resulted from not receiving feedback and how this created barriers in the workplace.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	52%
Usually	24%
Occasionally	12%
Seldom	6%
Almost Never or Never	5%

76% Positive

TREND Significance testing not conducted

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
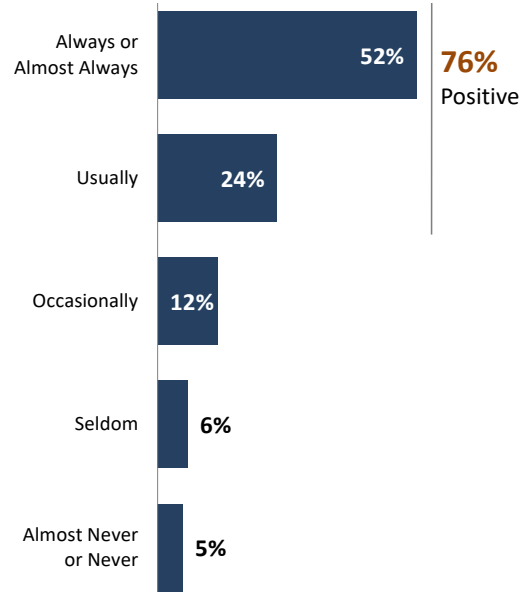
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees noted the importance of receiving feedback.

"My supervisor is great, provides the level of feedback and guidance that I need, without micromanaging my work."

"My supervisor provides me with the guidance and knowledge to enable me to improve my work."

"My new supervisor is incredibly supportive and is very responsive, approachable, and accessible. I really value this in a leader! It makes me more confident to know I have support and guidance available if I need it, so I can really lean into my new position."

"I have a wonderful supervisor that provides guidance and quick answers. Accommodates needs quickly."

"My supervisor gives good feedback regarding work tasks."

"My supervisor has done an incredible job upholding morale as much as she can. This last couple years would have been so much more trying without her support and understanding. The ability to be able to reach out for guidance on a variety of issues has been so needed."

"Getting consistent feedback, both good and bad, makes me feel like someone is noticing all the effort I make."

"My manager is the best mentor and I'm lucky to work under her."

"My supervisor provides valuable constructive feedback and is very supportive. He is providing the support I need to support my clients' needs well."

"My supervisor is very supportive, professional, and provides constructive feedback."

"[I like the] feedback on how to perform better."

"My supervisor is always available to address any concerns that I have whether it is related to the clients or staff."

"I feel like the supervisors are able to help workers and allow for mistakes to be fixed without making a big deal about it. The support in the line of work is important because it's hard work and if we had people who didn't support us or made us feel like we failed if we make a mistake then it would be extremely hard to continue."

"My supervisor and team do a good job of balancing growth opportunities while knowing that each enjoy playing to our strengths, and focusing our work in those areas. I feel like my supervisor has my back. She supports my interests and professional growth."

"My supervisor provides me with clear direction and gives me valuable feedback that I can take to improve my current position within HCS."

Some said feedback is lacking and want improvement.

"We need to have more 1 on 1s and receive feedback. We know the phone lines are busy but that is all that management is focused on. They don't care about line staff."

"I would like to see a more hands-on approach to managing the workforce."

"Without honest constructive feedback, we are left believing that what we are doing is good enough. Constructive feedback should not been seen as negative and discouraged, rather embraced as catalyst for positive change."

QUESTION. I receive recognition for a job well done.

Over half of employees (59%) reported they receive recognition for good work, which is a significant increase from 2019. Slightly more than two of 10 (22%) said they seldom or never receive recognition.

Employees had mixed responses to the recognition they received. Many described feeling valued by a supervisor or manager. Others noted that they sensed insincere attempts at recognition, including general emails and annual all-staff events. Employees want expressions of appreciation and recognition that are specific, personal, and acknowledge value in their unique, individual contribution.

ANSWERS

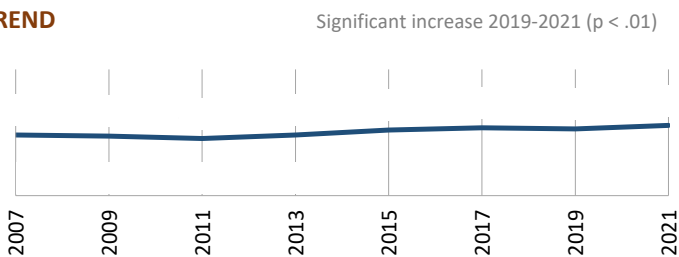|	
Always or Almost Always	34%
Usually	25%
Occasionally	19%
Seldom	12%
Almost Never or Never	10%

59% Positive

TREND Significant increase 2019-2021 (p < .01)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
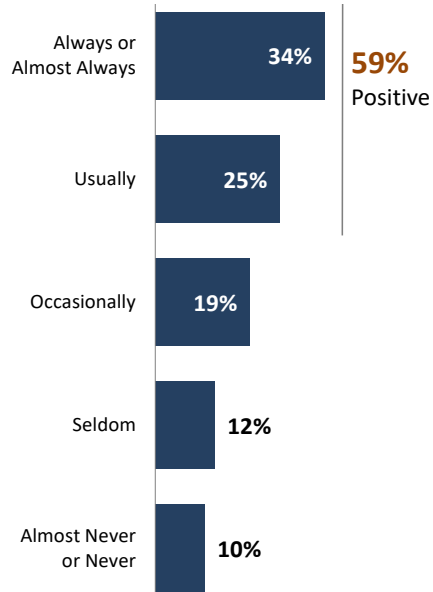
▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Many staff feel valued, appreciated, and recognized.

"I have a fantastic supervisor who demonstrates that he values us and our expertise."

"[I like] the value that is placed on me and my co-workers. I have worked in the private sector, and that value is not always found elsewhere."

"In all my years as a DSHS employee, I have never felt so very valued and supported to the level I am today, thanks to a most amazing division director."

"Our chief always tells us we're doing a good job and I know it helps the overall morale of our team. I feel like people work harder and better when they know it's being noticed and appreciated."

"I like that my supervisors appreciate and recognize my job being done well."

"Our supervisor is kind, and helpful, and frequently acknowledges our hard work."

"My current position promotes more value in my work, along with being rewarded for a job well done."

"I now feel valued as an employee with my new supervisor who currently is learning everything my unit does. She values everyone and our opinions regarding our work, and the part we play in our agency. The morale and production of our unit has increased 100%."

"[I like the] acknowledgment from supervisors."

"Although new, I am impressed with the leadership, communication and supervision. I feel like I can learn a lot and am valued as a person and professional."

Some asked for sincere or individual recognition.

"We get a lot of hollow 'thank yous' etc. from senior management that at times comes across as patronizing."

"I would like to see people actually appreciated, instead of just being told they are appreciated. Words mean nothing when they are just words, not action."

"More positive feedback/encouragement/recognition from management for hard work completed. Treat employees as valuable, not expendable (this should be viewed as a good business practice)."

"More individual recognition, appreciation and feeling valued. I feel my supervisor definitely appreciates and values me, but I don't feel this from the agency."

"The clients are the only reason to come to work. We are undervalued and overworked and are still demeaned despite our efforts."

"An insincere leader invites turnover because people have no faith in her to value the workforce and make positive change."

They want recognition that extends beyond events.

"Appreciation goes a long way. One day a year for staff appreciation where they serve a mediocre meal isn't really that supportive of the people who are doing the grinding every day and get everything dumped on them."

"I would like to see employees valued and not through potlucks or pizza parties."

"[They could be] actually working with employees to display appreciation instead of haphazard attempts to appease people with beverages and pins."

THEME. Employee recognition

477 of the 7,032 employees who made comments addressed supervisors and managers recognizing and praising employees.
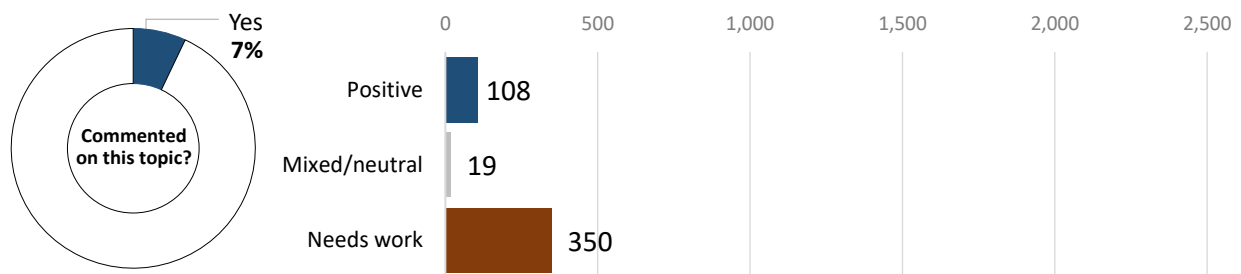
Employees are seeking individualized, personal recognition. Of those who made comments, the majority (350 of 477) pointed out challenges with their manager's approach or noted a lack of connection. Some referred to the gap they perceive between positive words of affirmation and tangible examples of appreciation, such as salary increases, workload shifts, and schedule flexibility. Employees who were satisfied often referred to their direct supervisor as the source of recognition and appreciation.

►What DSHS employees said …

Some praised supervisors who were appreciative.

"She [supervisor] makes me believe that my work and thoughts are not only valued but also needed to help the people that we serve."

"I feel very supported and appreciated by my manager and direct supervisor."

"I feel respected and valued by my supervisor."

"My supervisors respect and appreciate the work I do."

"My supervisor is awesome! Flexibility, positive encouragement, helpful understanding are a part of everyday experiences."

"Supervisors appreciate how hard we work."

Employees often feel overlooked.

"Our leadership is too disconnected to realize that many of them are just perpetuating the problems. We need change. We need to value employees, because they're human, and we ask them to value the humanity of patients."

"I lost my trust in management. Even though they constantly state they are thinking about us, they are proud of us, and so on - NO, they only think of how the agency looks and they DO NOT care about employees who make the agency look good."

"[I want] to be acknowledged more or told I am valued."

"I know my impact on the program, and am appreciated by (it seems like) everyone EXCEPT my chain of command (supervisor/manager). I am talked down to, in a condescending manner, on an almost daily basis."

"Staff that need the recognition are not necessarily the ones that are recognized. I myself have not been recognized publicly (or in an email) in my DSHS career in its entirety. A signed piece of paper or a note in an email that no one really reads is not valuable."

Employees had challenges with generic appreciation.

"Upper management will 'email' us thanking us for working so hard, but before and after the occasional 'good job' email (at this point being thanked for being overworked and underpaid, is a slap in the face) there are nonstop emails about changes; what we are not doing correctly; etc."

"Less of the overall 'you guys are doing a great job' directed at everyone. How about towards the ones that are doing their jobs well instead of a blanket compliment which isn't even true."

"We are tired/overworked/underpaid/underappreciated and receive zero respect except for an occasional 'good job' generic email."

Many see an absence of appreciative words or actions.

"There are times it feels like we are all replaceable and not valued, just simply a number."

"I am nothing but a number to the 'leadership' here. During COVID, many line staff worked 100's of hours a month while management was safe at home. Yet again, rarely a thank you from management."

"My supervisor is terrific. But above her, I rarely get a kind word. An email saying how well we do on reviews is about it."

"More recognition for a job well done. Often I only hear when I mess up. Very rarely do I hear appreciation."

"If you are a high performing worker, the agency will reward you with more work."

"When an employee's performance is consistently good, it becomes expected and may unknowingly be taken for granted. I have seen people in leadership positions manipulate high-performing employees (such as myself) to produce more, take on the burden of others."

QUESTION. My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.

More than eight of 10 employees (86%) answered that their supervisor treats them with dignity and respect, making this the highest-rated survey question. Less than one of 10 (8%) reported their supervisor seldom or never treats them respectfully.

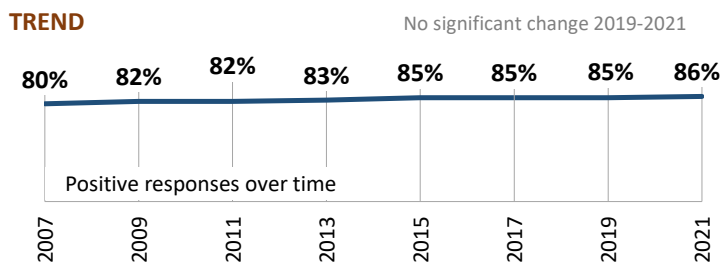Supervisors demonstrate appreciation when they treat employees with dignity and respect. Many employees said they are treated respectfully, and some highlighted additional positive attributes of their supervisor and how this treatment positively impacted other relationships. A few described supervisors who utilized their position or role poorly, calling them "authoritarian."

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	66%
Usually	20%
Occasionally	7%
Seldom	4%
Almost Never or Never	4%

86% Positive

TREND   No significant change 2019-2021

Positive responses over time

2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021
80%	82%	82%	83%	85%	85%	85%	86%
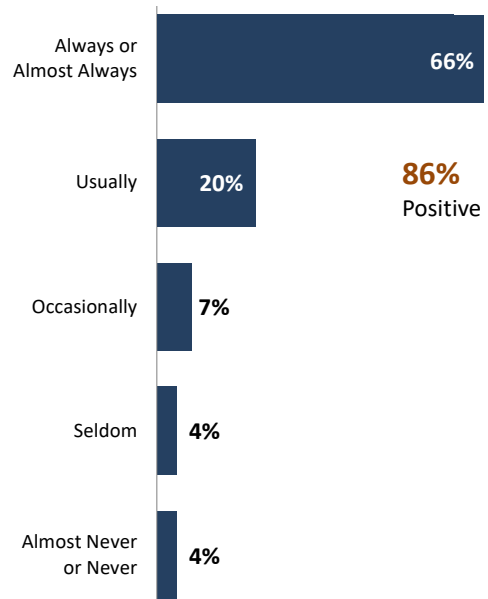
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Many employees mentioned the respect they receive from their supervisor.

"My supervisor shows respect to the workers in their region."

"I'm happy with my local management and workplace for the most part. They are respectful and seem to care."

"The staff and management in the FFA are great. I feel respected and treated like an adult."

"Supervisor treats me with courtesy and respect."

"My supervisor treats me like a professional."

They illustrated the continuing impact of receiving respect.

"I like the respect and support I get through my supervisors. As a supervisor myself, it's nice and makes my job a lot easier to have that communication between my staff."

"I really respect my current supervisor who is respectful and helpful to all his staff."

"My work group is great due to the fact that our management team supports us and treats us with respect."

"I can honestly say that my supervisor and Program Manager have been a breath of fresh air. I have been treated respectfully and treated like a professional adult which makes me want to go above and beyond expectations."

"We have a new acting Office Chief. She is doing a wonderful job. I respect her and she offers me respect right back."

**Some employees described additional characteristics of a respectful supervisor.**

"My supervisor is respectful, professional and kind. My supervisor shows compassion and treats me like a human being. The same can't be said for upper management."

"I have a kind and professional boss who knows how to treat staff in a fair and respectful manner."

"[I like the] ability of supervisors to respect and exhibit interpersonal skills and empathy in relating to supervisees."

"[I like] the honesty, patience and respect that I receive from my supervisor and leads."

"[I like] that I am heard and spoken to like an actual person and treated well. I am not talked down to."

"I like how my manager/supervisor respects me and treats me like a valuable team member and has done that from the very start."

Others said management did not engage respectfully.

"Management seems totally disconnected to those under them. More of a power trip than a support network."

"Make administrators accountable for toxic and authoritarian behavior."

"Current management is referred to as bullies because of the way they treat the people who are actually working with people. AC's [Attendant Counselors] have never been treated so poorly."

"Authoritarian style of management doesn't make for a good environment."

THEME. Courtesy and respect from supervisors/managers

421 of the 7,032 employees who made comments addressed manager courtesy and respect.
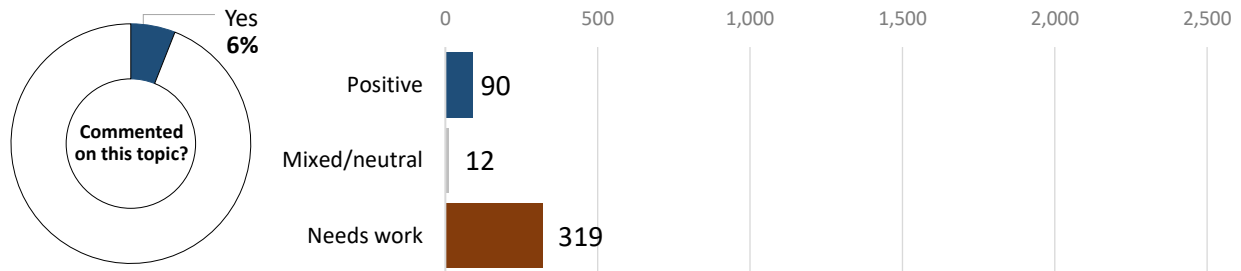
In contrast to the ratings on the question about courtesy/respect, the majority of those who made comments mentioned challenges. Although some said they were treated well, many noted disrespectful behavior, including:

- Demeaning conduct, including derogatory statements, outbursts of anger, and yelling
- Attempts at manipulation or use of the silent treatment
- Bullying (further discussion of bullying and harassment is presented in Chapter 3, page 33.)

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Some employees experienced respectful treatment.

"[I like] my supervisor and how she leads our team with respect and cooperation."

"I feel that I am taken seriously by my supervisor and by higher level administrators."

"I feel like upper leadership respects and values the work we do."

"Management is respectful and treats me like a person that matters."

Some gave examples of disrespectful behavior.

"The Director, in a meeting via Zoom or a webinar, says derogatory things about staff."

"Staff are not treated with respect and are referred to as bodies."

"My administrators are unable to lead or manage because they do so with fear, even telling staff to "F--- off" when they come to them with problems and concerns."

"Supervisors need to learn how to be professional without yelling at employees or writing negative emails when they could respond positively and stress the same message."

"'Silent treatment' is a form of bullying, not a leadership competency."

"Supervisors expect staff to do things that the Supervisor themselves would not do. Talk to staff with dignity and respect. Stop bullying and yelling at staff when they themselves are upset or mad. They need to clear their mind before trying to talk to staff. Not fun to get yelled at because they just received a bad email or text, phone call, etc."

"I used to work as a case manager. Now I'm with headquarters. The difference is stark, and frankly, sad. The way I'm treated, communicated with, valued for my opinions (not to mention, paid) is so much better than when I was just a drone bee."

Others defined current challenges or described how they want to be treated.

"The manipulation by supervisor is ridiculous. You can't step on people's heads to try and move up. We are all professionals and should be treated as such."

"The supervisors should not treat floor staff like crap."

"We need more understanding from the top down to what it really means to be a line staff worker. We are often treated like children. It is not a good feeling."

"Many supervisors treat other staff members poorly, angrily and don't support the jobs of those that work under them."

"Put people in leadership roles that would know how to connect and treat people with respect, with sincerity, and with honesty."

"Be management that people are proud to work for and not a bullying and disrespectful management team."

"The way line staff are treated by management/HQ has always been the most disappointing and discouraging part of employment with DSHS. This has been a point that I, and several others, have made on every survey or meeting but has never been addressed."

"I realize I am not a supervisor but I deserve respect as a person."

"Respect should come from the top down."

"Treat the staff with respect (the dictionary version of respect). It has been my experience with upper management and executive level managers that none believe in REDI [Respect, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion] or even practice it."

"Most of management at DDA treats Case Managers like children and it is insulting. Feedback has been given over the years with no changes."

"Supervisors do not treat their supervisees as human beings, with individual traits."

THEME. Other comments about managers

1,606 of the 7,032 employees who made comments addressed other aspects of supervisor/manager behavior.
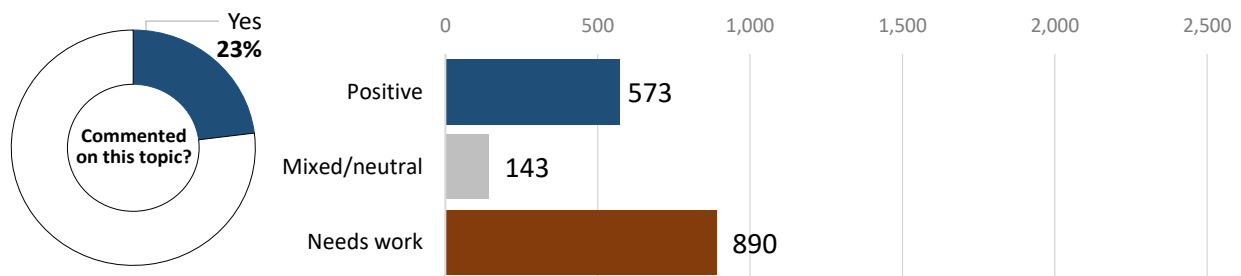
Employees described managerial attributes they appreciate or are dissatisfied with that fell outside the scope of the previously mentioned themes. Many employees voiced appreciation for a manager's personality or the relational dynamics. While employees gave some unique perspectives, there are a few common characteristics they want managers to demonstrate:

- The ability to make decisions and mentor from a depth of knowledge
- Interest in establishing and showing trust with employees
- Accountability for actions and personal development

▶**What DSHS employees said …**

Employees noted personal traits of supervisors they enjoy working with.

"My regional administrative team is kind, responsive, and all-around amazing. They understand the struggles of field work and go to bat for us to get the resources that we require, even if we don't get the resources."

"My direct supervisor is the best part of my job. He's communicative, supportive, knowledgeable, respectful, and truly the best manager anyone could have."

"The way in which I am supervised finally feels 'right'. I have felt micromanaged in previous jobs, which layered stress and dissatisfaction into my work day. My current supervisor has trust in my work quality and output and I finally feel recognized as a professional."

"[I have] a nice and intelligent supervisor."

Some feel supervisors lack knowledge of the work, which inhibits decision-making and instructing.

"I think there is a laughable disconnect between those who make decisions with lux salaries, and those on the frontline with hungry stomachs trying to help their community."

"Supervisors need to know the positions of their subordinates enough to be able to teach them, step-by-step."

"There is nothing more frustrating than seeing what needs/should be done to support the staff and to have the barrier be our own leadership. There is a resistance to change or evolve in processes here; from actual nursing practice, to human resources, to accountability practices. It is common to hear 'this is how we have always done it' from my own leaders."

They expressed a need for trust-building between employees and managers.

"I would like to be treated as if I am capable, dependable, and trustworthy. Like I am a fully formed adult, not as if I need to be closely monitored at all times. I should be able to communicate with others and not be mandated to include my supervisor in every single communication. It makes me feel like I am seen as incompetent and can't be trusted."

"More TRUST – not respect – TRUST for line staff. If you hear nothing else, hear that! Your respect is so fake. You can't fake trust."

"I have a manager that has a problem delegating anything. It is difficult to watch her be frustrated with her ability to complete tasks. She doesn't trust anyone to help."

"A QUALIFIED, EXPERIENCED Chief should be hired ASAP. Someone with emotional intelligence, the ability to build trust and handle competing priorities at the Office Chief level."

Others want managers held accountable for all aspects of their role, including becoming better leaders.

"Management should go through integrity and compassion training."

"I would like to see a little more professionalism from my administrator."

"Leaders visibly making themselves accountable to those they supposedly lead."

"I would like to see every level of leadership be held accountable in their role as a leader, to take ownership, to be a solution not a part of the problem, to be an example for their team."

"Puppy Love" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category:
DSHS Family
By Grace Campbell, with permission

From the photographer:
Our Grandson and Our Dog Bruce
bonded so strongly when we went
camping at the ocean. They are about
the same age and seemed to really love
and show such affection for each other.

"First Day of Fall"
DSHS Photo Contest • By Judi Stewart, with permission

From the photographer:
The photo was taken on Monday, 11/1/2021 as the sun was rising over the CSTC Admin Building. There are no filters – just fall nature and all of its beauty!

"Sunrise over the CSTC Admin Building" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action
By Amber Perez, with permission

CHAPTER 3

Fairness and Diversity

THE 2021 SURVEY SHOWED SOME SIGNS OF IMPROVED SATISFACTION WITH FAIRNESS AND DIVERSITY IN DSHS.
Since 2019, DSHS has prioritized equity, diversity, access, and inclusion (EDAI) as critical goals for the agency. Compared to 2019, there was a statistically significant increase in positive responses ("Always or Almost Always" or "Usually") to the question "People are treated fairly in my work group," suggesting that recent initiatives have had some success. Positive responses to "My agency supports a diverse workforce" also increased by four percentage points from 70% in 2019, though significance testing was not conducted due to a change in wording.

The number of comments about unfair treatment by management decreased from 2019, but comments on diversity and discrimination increased 39%. Some of these responses pointed out remaining barriers to equity, diversity, access, and inclusion. As in 2019, a small number of these comments appear to reflect the contentious national dialogue regarding EDAI efforts.

GENERAL FAIRNESS. Changes from 2019 show mixed results regarding agency fairness, with some improvements and some declines in different fairness measures.

- **Fair treatment.** 69% of employees (up from 64% in 2019) agreed that people are treated fairly in their work group. This is a statistically significant increase from 2019, and the highest percentage of employees who agreed since the question was first asked in 2017.

- **Comments about fairness.** Comments about management fairness decreased 30% from 2019. Of the 480 comments addressing management fairness, the majority (454) criticized approaches to hiring, workload distribution, and telework or flexible schedule options.
- **Bullying and harassment.** 61% of respondents agreed that the agency responds effectively to bullying and harassment. 23% said this is seldom or never true. The change in wording from 2019 may have contributed to the large decrease observed from the 2019 survey when employees were asked to assess how often the agency communicates that bullying and harassment are not acceptable.

DIVERSITY. The total number of comments about diversity increased from 2019. The pandemic response and vaccine mandate were also mentioned in comments on diversity within the department.

- **Support for a diverse workforce**. 74% of employees agreed the agency supports a diverse workforce. Although significance testing was not conducted, the increase from 70% in 2019 makes for the highest rating on the department's support for diversity.
- **Comments about diversity.** 366 respondents (5% of those making comments) expressed dissatisfaction about diversity in DSHS, a 33% increase from 2019. Many comments identified specific areas that need work, including requests for more equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.
- **Some controversial issues regarding diversity.** Some survey comments reflected the national conversation, with requests to include conservative viewpoints, as well as complaints about equity, diversity and inclusion efforts. Some employees felt that such initiatives, especially those addressing racism, have created divisions among colleagues. COVID and the Governor's vaccine mandate also elicited concerns about discrimination based on vaccination status.

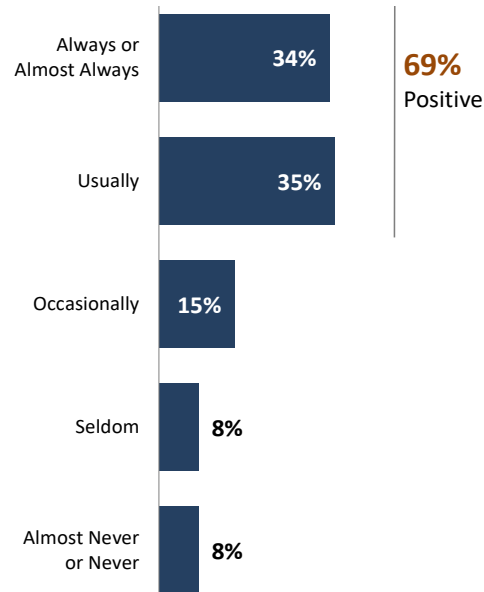*From the photographer:*
Taken at dawn near Silverdale.

"Awesome Sunrise" • Photographers' Choice
DSHS Photo Contest • By Judi Stewart, with permission

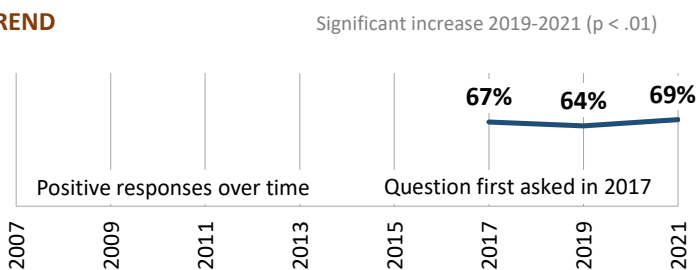# QUESTION. People are treated fairly in my work group.

Nearly seven of 10 respondents (69%) said they always or usually are treated fairly, making this the highest percentage of positive responses observed for this question.

Those who commented were more likely to talk about instances of unfairness observed in the workplace. Common complaints include disparities in workload assignments and policy enforcement; hiring and promotion processes that rely on relationships over qualifications and/or experience; and inconsistent application of telework and flexible work schedule policies.

ANSWERS

Always or Almost Always	34%
Usually	35%
Occasionally	15%
Seldom	8%
Almost Never or Never	8%

69% Positive

TREND Significant increase 2019-2021 (p < .01)

67%   64%   69%

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2017

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees praised the agency's fair, respectful environment.

"I'm treated fairly and with respect."

"I like how diverse our organization is and the treatment of equality giving everyone opportunity to promote and be heard."

"I love my team. We are all very supportive and respect each other. I think this starts at the top."

"Overall it is a fair place to work."

"People are treated fairly in my work group."

"My workplace has many options for schedules and is fair about offering those."

"People treat others with respect and no one is quick to judge."

"I enjoy working with my colleagues where we maintain a professional and respectful work environment."

"The work environment is friendly and staff are being respected, and there is no discrimination in my workplace."

"I feel I am treated fairly."

"My supervisor supports me and I feel as if I am an equal."

"I love my job. I am fortunate to finally have a good director that is fair and a good leader."

"I feel accepted, respected and valued at DSHS."

"I am treated fairly and my supervisor listens. He is fair and handles controversy well from other staff."

"There is fairness, and good coordination with my workmates."
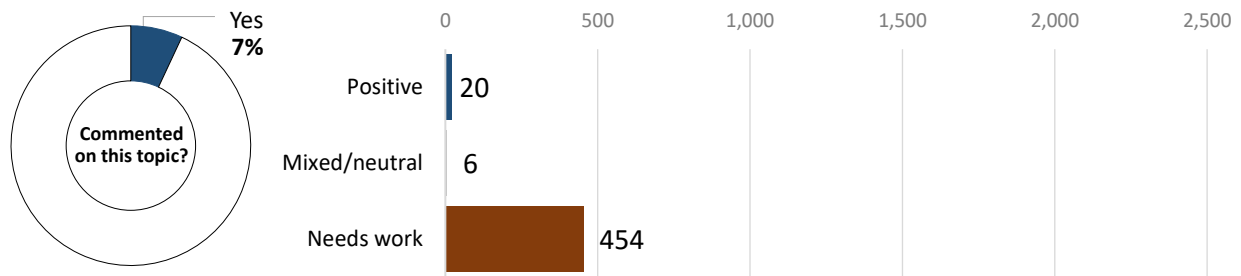
Others see inequity in the workplace.

"Hiring and promotions are strongly based on nepotism. It is not even worth applying anymore!"

"Some of the team members I work with don't do what is expected of them or care that it's done, which causes more work for others."

"More consistent telework opportunities – not everyone is treated fairly (in all job classes)."

"[I want to see] an even level of support for all disciplines."

"I really hate that they treat some employees 'less than' because of their job position."

Some employees specifically called out unequal application of COVID protocols and policies.

"I was also disheartened by the Central Office staff who worked from locations outside of their primary residence, and were very public about it. … It showed a lack of understanding of how that appeared, and unnecessarily created divisions between the Field and Central Office."

"Would like the vaccine mandates enforced with fairness. Some were let go or they resigned because they refused the vaccine. Others were not, some of whom are in leadership positions."

"I'd like to see everyone have the same rules. I got vaccinated and have been on the skeleton crew this entire pandemic. Other people choose not to get vaccinated and then they just get to telework. It hardly seems fair to everyone."

THEME. Management fairness

480 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned the fairness of management.

Yes
7%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	20					
Mixed/neutral	6					
Needs work	454					

The comments include those about the fairness of individual managers and of the larger agency (see p. 35).

Employee comments expressed frustration about the fairness of work distribution as well as options for telework and/or flexible schedules. These employees say that managers exhibit favoritism by giving preferential treatment to favored staff with special access to privileges, promotions, and assignments. Some think favorites have more input and opportunities, are treated with more respect, and don't have to meet the same performance standards.

Some said that managers and supervisors also target staff who raise concerns or who are not favorites with unequal expectations and retaliation.

►What DSHS employees said …

Staff appreciate fair supervisors.

"What I like best working here is I was treated fairly by my supervisors. I worked with supervisors with no favoritism which inspires me to do my job well."

"My new manager is awesome! She listens and helps problem-solve. She is fair and consistent."

"My immediate supervisor is fair and supports her team members. … It is a mostly positive area because [my] supervisor treats everyone the same and personal issues are not part of the decision-making."

"My supervisor is fair minded and easy to talk to."

"My bosses are very understanding of my needs and listen to everyone equally."

"My boss is very fair and cares that we are meeting the needs of our clients and taking care of ourselves."

Manager favoritism contributes to unfair treatment in the workplace.

"Supervisor only listens to one side of the story, mostly favors his friends at work."

"To use clichés, there is a Mean Girls club and the Good Old Boys, too."

"In my department there are some people who are favorites of our manager. They take advantage of that by selecting what work they want to do and pass off the jobs they don't want."

"There are individuals that are allowed to work remotely 100% and are given special circumstances while the rest are subjected to certain criteria."

"Not every person gets offered the same opportunities."

"It's clear that there are 'favorites' in the office, and the people that are the favorites are treated differently."

Many are frustrated by hiring practices that appear to favor friends and family members.

"I am tired of the 'friends and family plan' where it depends on who you know to get promoted instead of someone getting a job because they will do it well."

"You're not able to climb the ladder for success unless you're a friend of a friend with someone in management."

"It is discouraging to see position requirements change when they intend to hire a specific person."

"Would like to see people get promoted because of how they do the job, and not who they know."

"People (many) who are in the position to recruit, ignore the essential requirements for selected friends or family members for job openings."

Some employees shared concerns regarding harassment and retaliation.

"Often they [managers] enforce arbitrary rules on the staff they are targeting and ignore those same rules with other staff."

"It is hard to have honest conversations or opinions any more without there being some form of negative repercussion."

"Everyone should have the chance to be open and honest on how they are being treated, without the worry of getting in trouble or targeted which has happened too frequently."

"There is no safe way to express concerns of wrongful behavior that comes from our superiors. You only become targeted and this is meant to suppress any complaints."

"Patient abuse is happening and those who report it are bullied, harassed, and retaliated against."

QUESTION. My agency responds effectively to bullying and harassment.

Just over six of 10 (61%) believe the agency responds appropriately to bullying and harassment in the workplace. Due to the change in wording of this question from "My agency clearly communicates that bullying and harassment are unacceptable," significance testing from 2019 was not conducted.
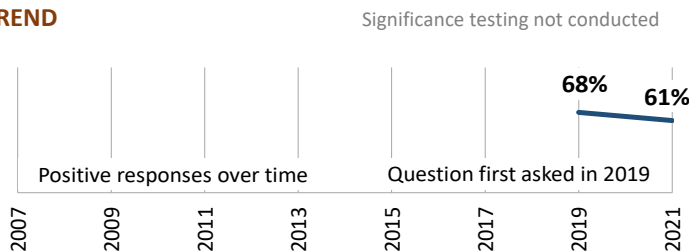
Responses from employees indicate that bullying and harassment continue to be problems, and staff want leadership to do more to prevent harassment and hold bullies accountable.

ANSWERS

Always or Almost Always	31%
Usually	30%
Occasionally	16%
Seldom	10%
Almost Never or Never	12%

61% Positive

TREND   Significance testing not conducted

68%   61%

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2019

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
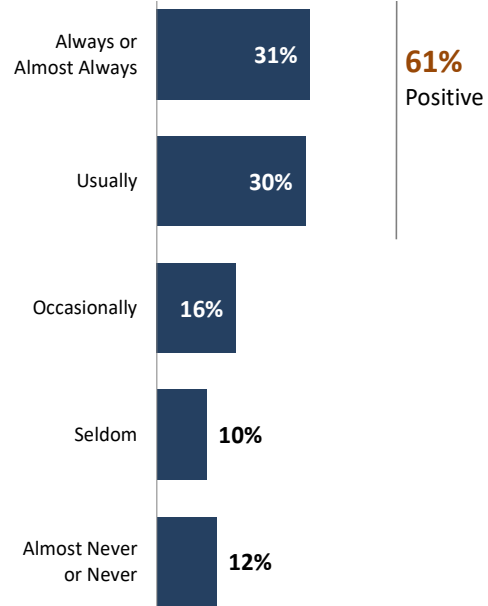
▶What DSHS employees said …

Some employees appreciate the agency's response to bullying and harassment in the workplace.

"I like how my agency responds effectively to bullying."

"I have not experienced harassment but have been given a hearing ear."

"[I appreciate] the effort that is being put forth to ensure all staff can be themselves without being discriminated or harassed."

"It's less toxic than in the recent past."

Bullying and sexual harassment continue to be problems that need to be addressed in parts of the agency.

"Bullying and harassment is a very common thing, but it is hard to overcome that when the administration staff are some of the worst offenders."

"I would like to see the agency take a more active/proactive stance on addressing bullying as well as mitigating toxic work environments. These environments exist even with staff working remotely."

"It appears that management doesn't respond to sexual harassment claims, harassment claims or domestic violence claims. It appears that SCC [Special Commitment Center] management allows those behaviors and then punishes those who report it."

"I would like to see sexual harassment and workplace bullying taken more seriously. Most people I talk to won't even report it because they feel like management doesn't ever do anything when it is reported."

"I am very sad to say that my department does not have good leadership and there is so much bullying among staff."

Some want harsher consequences for offenders, and think victims need to be protected from retaliation.

"Unprofessional and inappropriate behaviors, like bullying, are common among staff, however, due to how difficult corrective action is in state service, supervisors are left powerless to stop the behaviors."

"Individuals who intimidate and bully should be terminated."

"When someone is a bully, he/she should be disciplined, no matter their position or how long they have been in the position they are in."

"[I want] clear steps for reporting retaliation. As it is, when one reports or is involved in an investigation, they are ostracized."

"It seems the union protects the bully not the person being bullied."

"I would love to see managers and charges who like to bully their staff actually get some form of repercussion for their actions, not just a write up."

"I would also like to see staff that sexually harass other staff to be fired, not promoted."

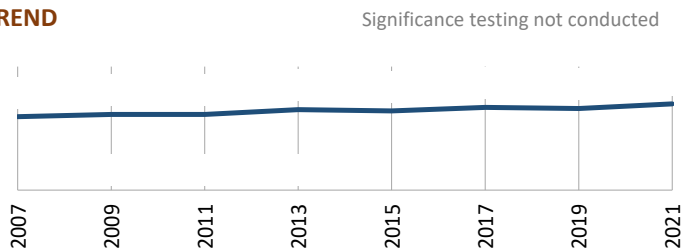**A few perceive the vaccine mandate as a form of bullying.**

"Being forced to take a vaccine [that] has not been medically tested for safety is the definition of bullying someone."

"We are being bullied and harassed into getting the vaccine."

"We are supposed to be protected from bullying, yet we are getting bullied into receiving the vaccine just to protect our livelihoods."

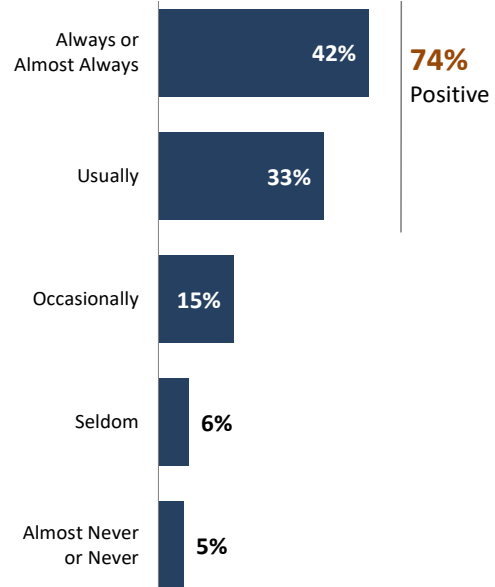# QUESTION. My agency supports a diverse workforce.

Nearly three of four employees (74%) agreed that DSHS shows support for a diverse workforce. Although significance testing was not conducted due to the wording change from 2019 ("My agency consistently demonstrates support for a diverse workforce"), the increase in positive responses indicates diversity efforts are recognized and appreciated by staff.

Many employees appreciate the diverse workforce and strides made in Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (EDAI). Others listed specific actions the department and agencies could take to further EDAI goals. A common request was for increased efforts to focus on building a diverse workforce that represents the populations we serve.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	42%
Usually	33%
Occasionally	15%
Seldom	6%
Almost Never or Never	5%

74% Positive

TREND   Significance testing not conducted

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

►What DSHS employees said …

Some employees applaud workforce diversity initiatives.

"I feel the department is very inclusive, welcoming and supportive of all individuals from various backgrounds."

"I also have the opportunity to work with my peers on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion monthly which I also very much appreciate."

"I also like the new focus on self-interrogation into our policies and procedures for disparate actions on a variety of communities. Self-reflection is the first step to real change."

"I like that my agency encourages self-growth and that REDI [Respect, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion] is the foundation for how the agency conducts business."

"I'm so happy to work in a diverse, respectful workplace and with a supportive team."

"I also appreciate the declarations about becoming an employer of choice committed to diversity, equity and inclusion of all individuals."

"I know DSHS is working very hard creating a work environment ideal for employees' growth and success, respect diversity and inclusion, and open for change."

"I feel like the agency is truly committed to equity, diversity and inclusion in a meaningful way. It makes me proud to work for an agency that seeks to address the root causes of suffering."

"I love that my Division director and boss take Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion seriously and have demonstrated this in their own learning journey and actions toward staff."

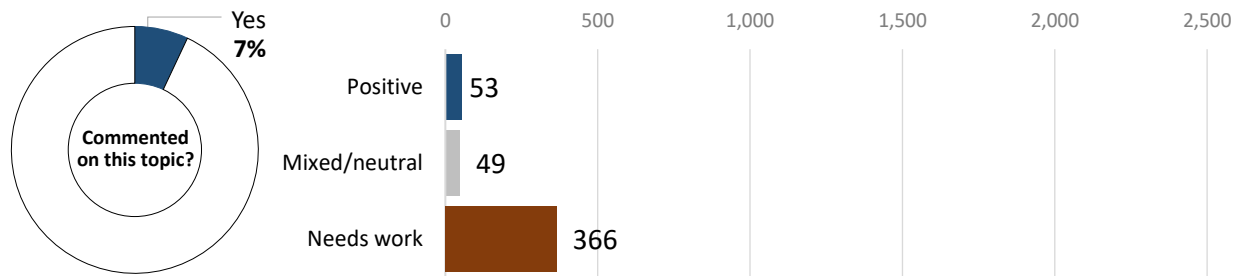**Others feel that diversity efforts could be more intentional.**

"An agency can't preach about diversity and inclusion, when promotions are given to people who do not foster that type of environment."

"I'd like to see division leadership develop a plan for becoming a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace."

"Honestly, if there were to be less nepotism, there could be room for more diverse employees."

"Our Agency talks plenty about diversity and inclusion but I don't see that reflected in my agency."

"We are making progress building an EDI/DEI presence in our agency, but it's slow and it feels like it's more focused around individual efforts."

Some asked for a focus on strategic recruitment so that staff and leadership reflect the population we serve.

"In order to have a more diverse workforce we need to be able to reach diverse candidates and currently Talent Acquisition doesn't offer ways to do so."

"[I want] active, intentional recruitment and hiring of underrepresented populations."

"I truly believe that my employer supports a diverse workforce but the employees that I see don't reflect it. If we are going to support this, it has to be seen."

"A strong mandate [is needed] to enable and recruit mid-level and executive positions as full-time teleworking positions. That way a wider diversity of qualified BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, people of color] candidates can apply from and continue to live in diverse communities outside of the Olympia area."

THEME. Favoritism or discrimination involving protected groups

468 of the 7,032 employees who made comments addressed protected groups.

Commented on this topic? Yes 7%

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	53					
Mixed/neutral	49					
Needs work	366					

In addition to more general comments about diversity and discrimination discussed on page 34, a number of respondents noted unfair treatment of specific protected groups:

- 90 pointed to poor treatment based on race, ethnicity, culture, and language.
- 43 indicated that employees with disabilities are not always treated well.
- 33 commented on gender disparity; and another 12 addressed treatment of LGBTQ employees. (Numbers do not include comments about sexual harassment, addressed on page 33.)
- 18 spoke about ageism; eight of these specified poor treatment of older workers.

▶What DSHS employees said …

Some employees expressed appreciation for diversity within their work groups.

"[I like] my team and working with such a wonderfully diverse group of individuals."

"I love that I get to work with all 29 federally recognized tribes."

"My ability and opportunity to be involved in REDI [Respect, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion] and other department projects and teams is what I like most about my current job."

"My actual team is very supportive and actually applies and uses EDI [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion] principles in our work."

Others pointed out continued instances of discrimination.

"[There are] wage disparities between men and women working in the same job class."

"There is a lot of discrimination for the immigrants."

"Black monkeys are hung on doors with nooses and nasty stickers are put on staffs' desks and nothing is done."

"Many non-trans staff engage in covert/overt discrimination against LGBTQ+ staff."

"When a co-worker says racist comments they are slapped on the wrist, they keep their job and they still continue being a racist person."

"A manager sent out an email kudo praising two employees. One of these employees is a male the other a female. When the replies to all went out, every manager recognized and praised the male employee only."

"There are no paths to promotion if you are older or disabled in my workplace."

"I've noticed its common for co-workers and supervisors to use language the disability community finds harmful/offensive."

Some employees gave suggestions on how to improve equity, diversity, access and inclusion initiatives within the agency.

"Inclusiveness for persons with disabilities such as: working part-time schedules, giving job duties that help the employee flourish, changing the 'it's always been done this way' attitude for accommodating the person with the disability while getting the most out of the person's work."

"[I want] more dedication to EDI, such as an FTE dedicated to EDI initiatives exclusively."

"[DSHS should] hire individuals that think, look and act differently to allow diversity."

"Increase investment in time to work with DVR staff to be more aware of their own hidden biases and becoming more inclusive. Understand disability etiquettes."
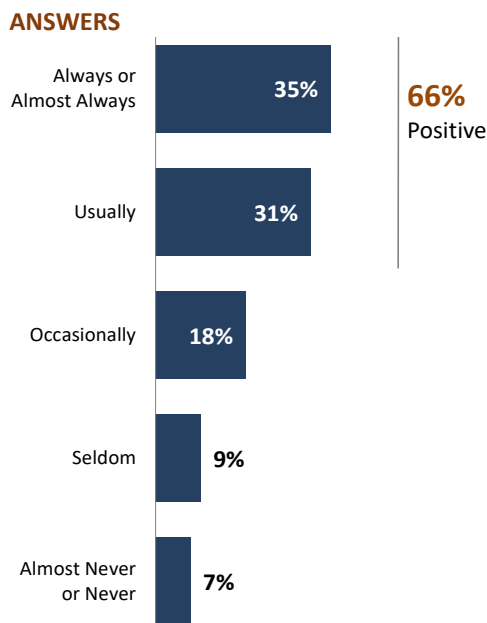
A small number of comments criticized diversity efforts, invoking reverse discrimination.

"The current culture creates fear of reprisal for anyone who disagrees with the overemphasis of sexual identity and woke culture in the workplace."

"Trying to create unity while marginalizing an entire group of people who make up the majority of both the population and work force is counterintuitive."

"Could we just do our jobs without having critical race theory forced upon us."

"Assuming I'm privileged because of my race and gender is in and of itself racial and highly offensive."

"Scale back the EDI emphasis. This has turned into a B [black] v. W [white] campaign with no inclusion for other races. I am tired of being told of my 'Micro Aggressions' to a particular race, but when I try to bring up my issues with this I'm told to 'Deal with it.'"
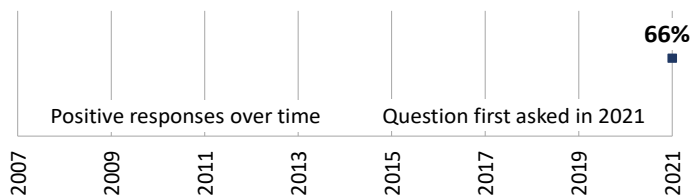
QUESTION. My agency encourages inclusion in the workplace.

Two of three employees (66%) agreed that DSHS encourages inclusion in the workplace. Most inclusion comments were about employee input on decision-making and projects, though some respondents connected inclusion to diversity initiatives within the department.

Many employees appreciate the inclusive environment within their teams. Some believe that active inclusion of groups across the department would be beneficial. Others called out a lack of inclusion of people in certain job groups, focusing on frontline, direct care, and administrative staff.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	35%
Usually	31%
Occasionally	18%
Seldom	9%
Almost Never or Never	7%

66% Positive

TREND

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2021

66% (2021)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees appreciate teams that work to include every person and their perspectives.

"[I like] being included in team decisions."

"I love that my supervisor and my manager have my back, encourage me to be involved, take trainings, and listen to ideas and suggestions that I have."

"I enjoy the culture of inclusion."

"My supervisor is receptive to ideas and allows me to pursue new connections for the agency."

"Diversity and inclusiveness is evident here."

"My Administrator makes me feel supported and included in the daily decisions that affect my work."

"[I like the] teamwork and inclusiveness."

"I like the inclusion and freedom to be myself."

"I'm empowered to do the work and am included in decision-making regarding the work."

"Inclusion and respect from co-workers, supervisors and senior management."

"Current position is very supportive, innovative, and inclusive. Diversity of ideas and perspectives are valued."

"I'm included in decision making that was out of scope in my previous position."

"We have a great team that is led by a wonderful, supportive and inclusive supervisor!"

"I feel honored, valued, supported and included here."

"[I like] making the workplace better for our staff members that have not always felt included or heard."

Others indicated that inclusivity in their work groups and across the department could improve.

"We are not included in meetings and/or changes that are proposed."

"Inclusion in the work group. But, it has to come naturally or it will be forced and the members that are responsible for non-inclusion make derogatory comments regarding the staff that are not included."

"Seems that they only support inclusion and diversity when it fits their narrative."

"End the practice of some to ignore or 'forget' to include people that have been assigned duties when they want to retain control of a project and retain recognition for themselves."

"More departments [should be] included in decisions [regarding] changes related to clients."

Multiple responses mentioned a lack of inclusion for people in certain positions.

"They [direct care workers] are the most essential voice in terms of equity, diversity and inclusion and they are the most un-included staff and under-supported staff."

"If you are a weekend staff member, you are left out of the loop on everything."

"Decisions regarding operations, maintenance, and capital improvements [should] include more input from those with practical knowledge and experience."

"Many admins are treated as lesser individuals because they may lack degrees or types of job experience."

"Happy Face in Harvest Season" • Second Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Family
By Yun Su, with permission

From the photographer:
I took this picture this October while my daughter was picking up the apples in our backyard. She was so excited about choosing apples from the apple tree. I would love to capture each of her happy moments. So I took this picture.

"Sunrise at Midnight" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By Tami Boelter, with permission

From the photographer:
It was about midnight one night. It was also a full moon. I walked about 1/2 mile up the trail from the Sunrise visitor center parking area and saw this. It took my breath away! I was able to capture the awe I felt on my camera.

"A Girl and Her Cat" • Third Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Family
By Grace Campbell, with permission

From the photographer:
My Granddaughter has always been artistic, She loves to be creative, loves Anime and she loves her cat Princess Pumpkin who also feels right at home on her lap.

"Moulton Falls Park" • Honorable Mention
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Photographers' Choice
By Kim Karu, with permission

"In Memory Of" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Employees
By Tonia Howe, with permission

CHAPTER 4

The Daily Job

JOB SATISFACTION CONTINUES TO DECLINE. In 2021, fewer employees said they are satisfied with their jobs. Complaints about the job often centered on high workloads, inability to learn and grow, worsening morale, and not feeling valued. As in past years, the bright spots mentioned usually include helping clients, interacting with co-workers, and staff satisfaction with flexibility and mobility.

GENERAL SATISFACTION. Overall job satisfaction declined in 2021, along with morale and feeling valued. As can be expected with this dissatisfaction, fewer were willing to recommend DSHS as a great place to work. A new question shows that most employees find meaning in their work, a finding consistent with the many comments about employees finding fulfilment in helping people.

- **Fewer are satisfied with their job.** 64% of employees (down from 69% in 2019) said they are satisfied with their job. This is a statistically significant decrease for the second time in a row (71% in 2017) and only slightly better than the all-time low in 2011 of 62%.
- **Morale is down.** 477 employees who commented said that morale in the workplace needs work. Positive morale comments were down 22% from 2019, while complaints increased 27% over the same period.
- **In response to the new question** "I find meaning in my work," 79% of employees said the work they do is meaningful to them.
- **Fewer said the agency is a great place to work.** 55% of employees (down from 60% in 2019 and 62% in 2017) said they would recommend DSHS as a great place to work. This the lowest percentage of positive responses since the question was first asked in 2017.

- **Fewer are feeling valued.** 59% of employees (a statistically significant decrease from 62% in 2019 – the first year this question was asked) say they feel valued in the workplace for who they are as a person.

JOB CHARACTERISTICS. More employees complained about the need for autonomy and growth opportunities in their workplace, and especially mentioned their dislike of being micromanaged by their supervisor and by systems like Workforce Optimization (WFO). There were also more negative comments or suggestions for improvement about workload and job-skills alignment. Fewer employees commented about autonomy and growth in 2021.

- **Fewer have opportunities to learn and grow.** 61% of employees (down from 64% in both 2019 and 2017) said they grow and learn on their job – a statistically significant decrease from 2019.
- **Fewer get to use their skills.** 66% of employees (a statistically significant decrease from 68% in 2019, and an all-time low) said their job makes good use of their skills. This may be linked to staffing challenges.
- **More are unhappy with their workload.** 353 employees who commented mentioned how unhappy they are with the current workload, a 105% increase in complaints from 2019. Only 13 employees had something positive to say about their workload. Total comments on this topic were up 92% from 2019.
- **Autonomy and growth were less of a focus this year.** The 667 comments about autonomy and growth were mostly positive, but fewer employees mentioned this subject (23% fewer than in 2019).

CO-WORKERS. Questions and comments about co-workers showed more positivity in 2021 than in 2019. Employee satisfaction with cooperation and teamwork was very high, while overall complaints about co-workers declined.

- **More cooperation and teamwork from co-workers.** 70% of employees (up from 68% in 2019) said that a spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in their work group. This is a statistically significant increase from 2019, and matches 2017's all-time high.
- **Fewer mentions of co-worker competence.** Even though most of the 498 comments about co-worker competency were negative, fewer employees mentioned this subject (33% less than in 2019).
- **Fewer negative comments about co-workers** in 2021. There were 44% fewer negative comments about co-workers compared to 2019.

WORK ENVIRONMENT. With the increase in flexibility and mobility options in response to the COVID pandemic, it's not surprising that these topics showed the most positive results – more positive comments, fewer negative comments, and more neutral comments asking for flexibility to continue as the standard.

- **More job satisfaction with flexibility**. 66% of employees (up from 60% in 2019) said they are satisfied with their flexibility (the ability to adjust their scheduled hours as needed). This is a statistically significant increase from 2019, and an all-time high for this topic.
- **More job satisfaction with mobility**. 65% of employees (up from 48% in 2019) said they are satisfied with their mobility (the ability to work remotely from a variety of locations). This is a statistically significant increase from 2019, and an all-time high for this topic.
- **More are talking about flexible schedules and mobility**. Of the 2,741 comments on this topic, there were 106% more positive comments, 36% fewer negative comments, and 152% more mixed or neutral comments. Most of these comments expressed appreciation for added flexibility and mobility during the COVID pandemic and mentioned employee desire for these options to stay in place.

THEME. General satisfaction

696 of the 7,032 employees who made comments described things in the workplace that affected their level of satisfaction.
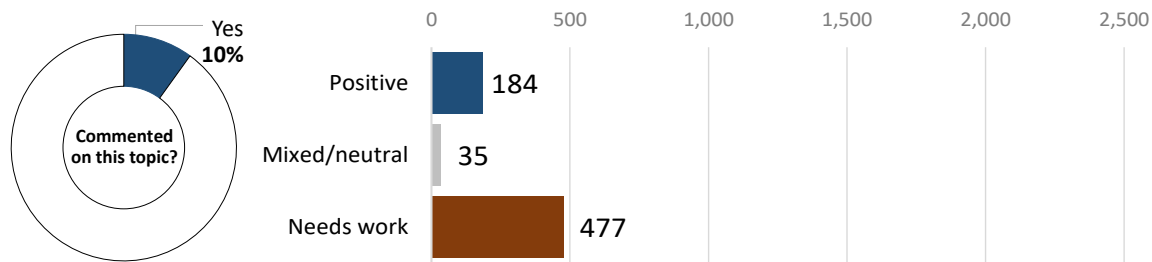
Most of the comments (477) mentioned things employees thought were wrong in their workplace and should be changed. Some staff (184) said they were pleased with their work environment.

General satisfaction comments often contain a one-word response. For example:

- What do you like best about your current job? *"Nothing."* (A negative answer)
- What changes would you like to see in your workplace? *"None."* (A positive answer)

►What DSHS employees said …

Many said they are content with the way things are.

"I am satisfied with my workplace."

"Workplace itself is really great. Happy with the way things are right now and don't really see need for much change."

"I am very satisfied with my office and the quality of our work."

"I am happy with my workplace."

"I'm completely satisfied. No changes are needed. As they say, 'don't fix it if it isn't broke.'"

"I am very happy where I am at currently."

"Feeling satisfied that I am contributing to an agency that has a significant, positive impact on Washingtonians."

"I am happy with the way things are run."

"I'm very content and my needs as an employee are currently being met."

"I feel very humbled and satisfied."

"I am very satisfied with my workplace."

"Overall, I am happy with the changes already in place."

Others said stress and low morale are a cause for concern.

"Staff concerns are not being listened to and there is a decline in staff morale."

"DDA [Developmental Disabilities Administration] seems to forget about happiness and morale in the workplace."

"We do so much to understand trauma-related response with our customers; well what about the ones on the frontlines daily: feeling and hurting from the stress that is put on us to help them? Just some food for thought."

"There is no regard to how actions affect the morale."

"We are all stressed out, unhappy with our job and the direction our office is going."

"Not much else to like. Office morale is at an all-time low."

They complained about dissatisfaction in the workplace.

"My workplace has a very toxic environment. Employees are just numbers who are not valued beyond what they can do for the employer."

"Staff are subjected to a toxic work environment maintained by an uncaring administration."

"This place has potential to be a place where people look forward to work, but right now, the environment is intense as those that are on the floor feel not heard when it comes to their needs being met."

"I really have nothing good to say about this job."

"I leave work with a headache every day and I wake up with a headache almost every day. Most of the peers I talk with say they are also becoming quickly unsatisfied with the work, but they don't say anything."

"I am very dissatisfied with my job currently."

"I just want to see satisfaction with staff instead of stress and discontent."

"I used to be passionate about my work, but the toxic work environment makes it impossible to focus on anything but survival."

"I am not satisfied with returning to the office I have to work in. It is a very negative environment and is very draining and difficult for me emotionally and physically."

"Oh boy. There are A LOT of issues that make the workplace toxic, unpleasant, and uncomfortable."

"I feel looked over, looked through, and unheard. I am very frustrated and unsatisfied."

"More focus on employees. Employees are burnt out. The agency is more focused on giving clients money, when our employees are left in the dust."
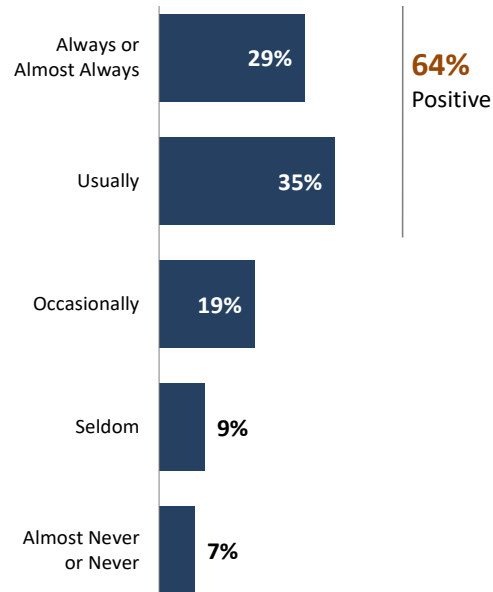
"The current environment is hostile and toxic."

QUESTION. In general, I'm satisfied with my job.

More than six of 10 employees (64%) said they are generally satisfied with their job. Fewer than two of 10 respondents (16%) said they do not get satisfaction from their job.
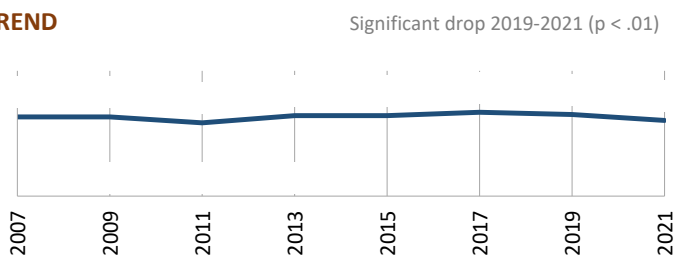
For the second time in a row, fewer employees said they are satisfied with their job – both times a statistically significant decrease from the prior survey.

Employees satisfied with their jobs often say they like the work they do and they like the people they work with. Those who are dissatisfied are more likely to elaborate on the variety of things that make them unhappy.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	29%
Usually	35%
Occasionally	19%
Seldom	9%
Almost Never or Never	7%

64% Positive

TREND Significant drop 2019-2021 (p < .01)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Most staff express that they are satisfied with their job.

"I am satisfied with my line of work and what I do"

"I get satisfaction knowing I have helped someone, even if it is in a small way and not necessarily what is considered a part of my normal role."

"It is fulfilling work, a sense of accomplishment."

"A majority of the time I get job satisfaction."

"I find a lot of personal satisfaction in the quality of work I do."

"I am happy, satisfied, and proud of my job."

"The work is challenging, satisfying, and different every day."

"I am satisfied with my work/my position."

"My work fulfills my personal purpose in life. I have a lot of gratitude for my work and people I work with and for."

"Very satisfied with my job as a whole."

"I find satisfaction in the work itself."

"My job gives me satisfaction and accomplishment."

"I have a sense of satisfaction from my job and what I do matters."

"To me this is very rewarding and fulfilling."

"I am doing what I love to do."

"I find my work is meaningful and I enjoy working with my team. I have no complaints."

"I get satisfaction from my job."

"Challenging and satisfying 'work.'"

"I find much satisfaction doing the work that I do."

They say they love the work and the people.

"I love what I do and the teams I am assigned to."

"I love everything about my job."

"I love the work I do and my co-workers."

"I love, love, love my job."

"I love the mix of personal contact and concrete job tasks."

"All in all I love my job."

Some mentioned problems causing dissatisfaction.

"I am currently very dissatisfied with my employer and feel lied to."

"I find nothing satisfying about my job anymore. The way that changes have been handled have been horrific and have resulted in the worst stress of my life."

"At this time I am truly dissatisfied. We say we want to reduce poverty and yet we continue to put programs in place that encourage people to remain dependent on governmental assistance."

"I used to like a lot more about my job, but then the roles were split out, so now it's a lot more grind than satisfaction."

"I currently have an ineffective supervisor which detracts from job satisfaction."

"The relentless changes, specifically over the past several years that has led to job dissatisfaction."

"I don't like anything about my job anymore. If I wanted to work in a call center, I would have applied for a call center position."

QUESTION. I find meaning in my work.

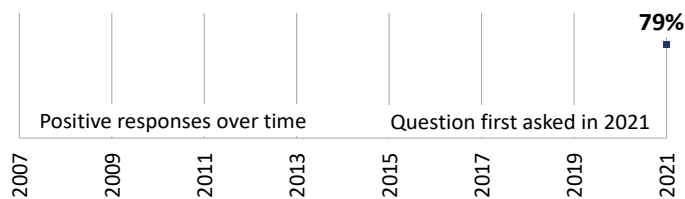**Nearly eight of 10 employees (79%)** said they find meaning in their work in response to a new survey question. Fewer than one of 10 (8%) said that their job is rarely meaningful to them.

Staff that commented often mentioned their appreciation for having a job that has meaning to them and aligns with their values. They like that their work contributes to the greater good. Some said they resent when their time and energy is spent on meaningless tasks.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	43%
Usually	36%
Occasionally	13%
Seldom	5%
Almost Never or Never	3%

79% Positive

TREND

79%

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2021

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
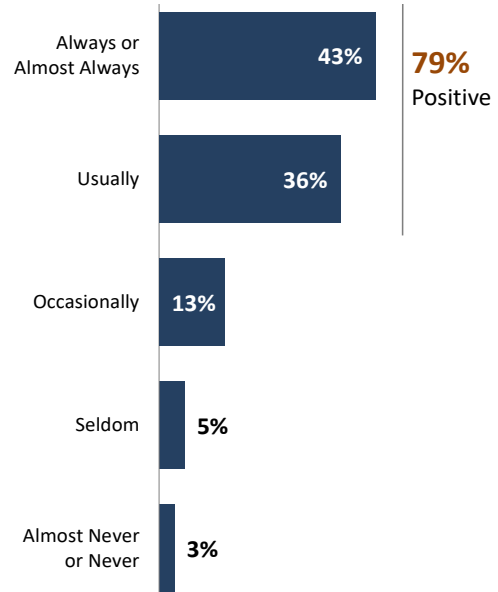
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Staff like it when their work is meaningful.

"I love that I have creative, meaningful work."

"I believe that my job is important and I find meaning in what I do."

"There is meaning to the work that we do."

"I love the highly meaningful purpose of my job."

"I feel my job is meaningful and I have a purpose at work."

"I like that my work has meaning and contributes in a meaningful way."

"Love the opportunity to do something meaningful during the work day."

"My job has meaning, I feel we can make a difference in residents' lives."

"I like working on projects that meaningfully impact the lives of clients and employees."

"I love what I do. It has a lot of meaning for me."

"The work we do is meaningful and rewarding."

"I find a lot of meaning in what we do at DSHS and feel we make a difference."

"Overall I like the work I am doing and feel it is meaningful/important."

"My job has meaning."

"Working with people to help them work towards their goal of receiving care in a dignified and compassionate manner is meaningful."

"I like being able to help others in a meaningful way**.**"

"I do meaningful work protecting Washington state's most vulnerable."

They can see the positive impacts from their work.

"I appreciate the sense of purpose and ability to make a meaningful impact on the lives of clients and co-workers."

"The work has practical and good outcomes, and meaning for the people we serve."

"I'm proud of the work we do and I can see the benefits in individual lives."

"I like that the work we do has meaningful outcomes which literally change people's lives for the better."

"Knowing I am making a meaningful difference to the patients in my care."

"I'm getting to do meaningful things that I can see have an impact."

"I best like that I can use my skills and experience to do work I find to be meaningful and that has a significant and direct impact to the communities and families we serve."

"I love knowing that I can have a meaningful impact on people's lives."

Staff want to feel like what they do is important.

"I feel stunted and stagnant in my role and powerless sometimes to really effect change."

"I love what my job is supposed to be. I am very unhappy."

"Implement necessary changes to make our work more meaningful and less like we're chasing our tails for no good reason and wasting our resources."

"Not micromanaging or giving out meaningless tasks."

"I would like to see less wasted time and money for cases that have no meaningful outcome."

QUESTION. I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.

More than five of 10 employees (55%) said they would recommend the agency as a great place to work. Almost three of 10 employees (26%) said that they are not likely to recommend their agency.

For the second time in a row, fewer employees said they would recommend the agency as a great place to work – both times a statistically significant decrease from the prior survey. But more than half of employees said they worked in a great place with great people. The others said their workplace could be, or used to be, better.

ANSWERS

Always or Almost Always	27%
Usually	28%
Occasionally	20%
Seldom	12%
Almost Never or Never	14%

55% Positive

TREND   Significant drop 2019-2021 (p < .01)

62%   60%   55%

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2017

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
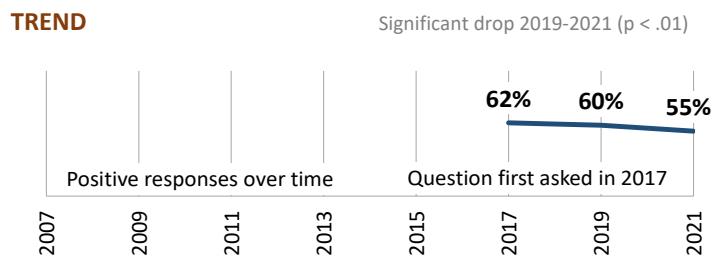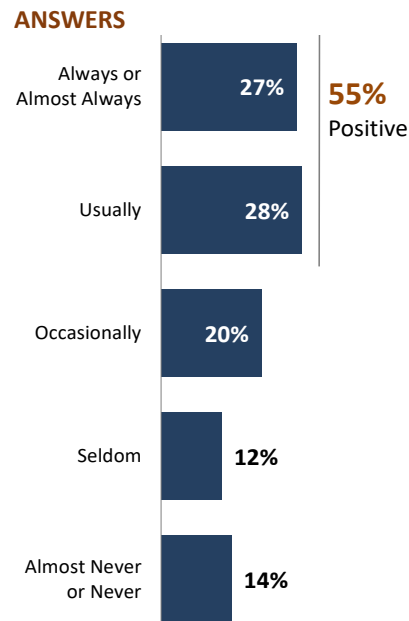
►What DSHS employees said …

Many staff said DSHS is a great place to work.

"It's just a damn good place to work."

"I love working here."

"We work for an amazing agency that offers opportunities for employees to learn, grow and feel confident."

"I love working for DSHS."

"Best place I have been in 15 years of State service."

"I am oh so grateful to get to work here."

"I love what our agency is about and the programs that we administer!"

"The best place, the best job I have had."

"I love this job, this agency."

Some mentioned specific locations within DSHS.

"I am proud to work at WSH [Western State Hospital]! I feel like I am part of making a difference."

"ESH [Eastern State Hospital] is a good place to work."

"I'm proud to be a member of RDA [Research and Data Analysis]; proud of the high quality work we do and its impact on the citizens of Washington State."

"I love working in FFA [Facilities, Finance and Analytics Administration]."

Others said it's the people that make the agency great.

"The great bunch of people I work with. Makes the job a great place to work."

"I enjoy my job because of the individuals I work with."

"I love the people and the agency."

"I have worked for the state for years and this is my favorite group so far."

"The peers I have are the best thing about my job."

"My workplace is a great place to work in and has a bunch of caring people."
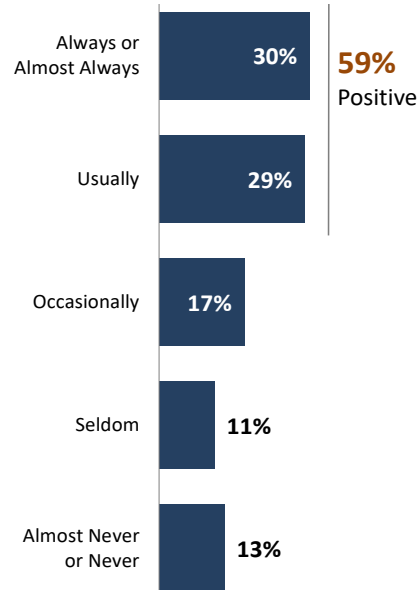
Some do not consider DSHS an employer of choice.

"Very hard sell to convince job seekers that we are an employer of choice when we are getting priced out of the market by burger joints. Our customers suffer because of it."

"I would not recommend this job to my enemies."

"I used to say 'how lucky am I to have a job I love?' I no longer feel that way and at times barely recognize this department and the good work we used to do."

"We are no longer an employer of choice."

"I never encourage someone to apply for a job at DSHS."

"Lip service breeds mistrust and skepticism, which leads to DSHS not being an employer of choice."

"I would not recommend my agency as a place to work because the overall culture has been so stressed and at times, toxic."

"I used to be proud to say I work for the Government/State/DSHS. Now, I am ashamed."

"This place is not, in my opinion, an employer of choice."

"With the exception of a few offices, nobody wants to work here anymore."

"I would not recommend this place as an employer of choice, not even to a person I do not like."

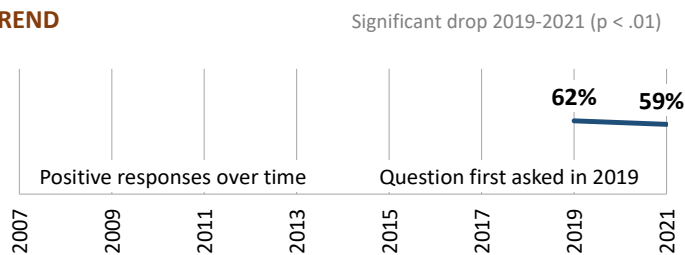## QUESTION. At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.

Almost six of 10 employees (59%) said they always or usually feel valued in the workplace for who they are as a person. More than two of 10 employees (24%) said they do not always feel recognized for the value they bring to the job.

Most employees said that feeling valued and respected by the people they work with was encouraging. They appreciate when their efforts on tasks are noticed and supported. Some staff said they do not enjoy coming to work because of poor treatment from others.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	30%
Usually	29%
Occasionally	17%
Seldom	11%
Almost Never or Never	13%

59% Positive

TREND   Significant drop 2019-2021 (p < .01)

62%   59%

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2019

2007   2009   2011   2013   2015   2017   2019   2021

▶What DSHS employees said …

Most staff say they feel valued as an individual.

"I feel valued and appreciated as an employee."

"I love it. I am treated like a human being. I feel valued as a person."

"I do feel valued and important."

"The people I work with are respectful and value my contribution."

"We are valued by our supervisor for who we are, in addition to the work we do."

"The value of the work I do is clear to me. My co-workers value my contributions."

"I love that I feel valued in my current department."

"The staff I work with right now are the best people outside of my family that I have ever known. They treat each other and myself beyond respectfully and make me feel more valued than I have otherwise in my existence."

"I'm feeling valued and appreciated for who I am and what I bring."

"I feel valued, appreciated, and like my suggestions and opinions are taken into account."

"I'm feeling valued, that my contributions matter, that my work supports a mission that I find meaning in."

"I feel valued and accepted - even wanted."

"I'm valued and supported by my leadership and co-workers."

"It is very appreciated to feel valued at my job and makes me want to give 100% each and every day I come to work."

**Their experience and expertise are recognized.**

"I am treated as a credible and trusted source of information, expertise, and advice. I feel valued."

"My current supervisor appreciates what I bring to my job (attitude, consistency, integrity)."

"My leaders care about me, they appreciate my talents and skills."

"My experience is valued and respected."

"I appreciate how my supervisor gives me space to use my talent and training to complete my job tasks."

"There's a recognition of what skills, knowledge and abilities I can bring to work products."

They want their value noticed and acknowledged.

"There is a difference between being appreciated and feeling valued. I do not feel valued at all."

"Staff do not feel valued or empowered. It does not feel that you can bring your authentic self to work. We are now puppets."

"I believe that if you really value staff, then walk the talk."

"I would like to feel valued for the work I do."

"What this Agency says to the field is 'You don't care about me as an individual and you don't care about the quality of my work.'"

"I do not feel valued as an individual or that my experience and technical expertise are appreciated."

"I do not feel valued for all the work that I do."

"Believe it or not, employees need to GENUINELY feel valued, cared for, and appreciated by the agency."

THEME. Helping and interacting with clients

2,143 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned working with and helping clients.
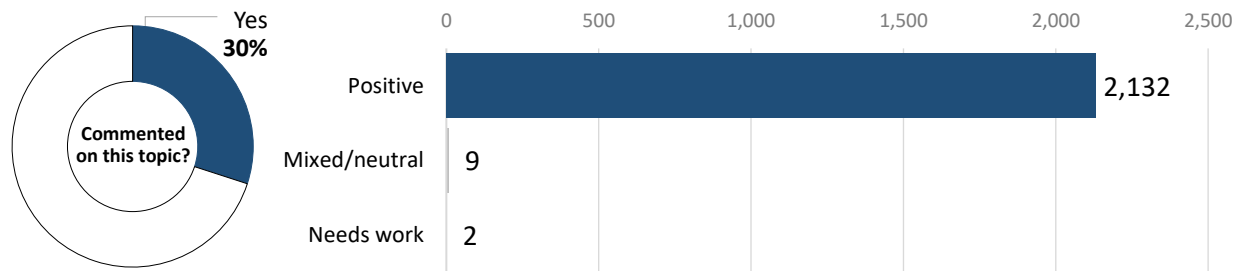
Nearly all of the employees who commented on this topic said that helping and interacting with clients is a highlight of their job. Staff comments indicate they find gratification in:

- Watching their clients get better and make positive changes in their lives
- Helping clients overcome difficulties and meet their goals
- Having a job that is client-focused and Transforming Lives

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees like assisting clients to get the help they need.

"I know the impact I have on people's lives every day that I come to work. My job has purpose and honor."

"I appreciate the ability to listen to people's stories, find out what they need the most, and then be able to help them achieve that goal or support."

"I love helping people navigate our system and connecting them to other services… I feel like a Sherpa at times. Helping people connect to services and benefits is worth any bad day I have had working here."

"What I like best is that I can reach the end of my day knowing that I made a positive change in someone's life."

"My goal with every participant that I work with is not only to sustain their lives but to make their lives better and more full. I feel as if I do that every day that I work."

"I appreciate the opportunity to serve others and to help make others' lives more rich and productive."

"I get to try and make people's lives a little bit easier by helping them to navigate through the giant government machine that is Washington State, so their lives don't come out too 'transformed' on the other side of our involvement."

Spending time with clients enriches staff lives.

"I am grateful to be able to share the lives of the clients I work for and hope I am able to improve the quality of our mutual time together."

"I like being able to lay eyes on people, who are typically forgotten about. I really enjoy seeing their faces light up when they see someone notices them."

"I enjoy being with my residents and contributing to the quality of their life."

"I hear the tone in our clients' voices. I love this position. I feel like I am making a HUGE difference in their life, which makes one in mine. Thank you."

Client success stories are rewarding for staff.

"I love seeing the progress we make with our patients. Getting to see the changes throughout the months from when I first met them, to discharge, is an incredible privilege and an honor to witness."

"I love seeing patients who came to the ward in a very bad state of mental illness and after treatment and care, they change for the better. I love to see them back to themselves. That's what makes me enjoy coming to work. Making a change for the better."

"It is rewarding when people see success or are finally able to access something they benefit from."

"I enjoy working with the patients. It's great when you see someone whom you have put a lot of time and effort into, when they are successfully discharged."

"I love seeing success and growth for the people on my caseload."

"I continue to like working with my clients, and helping them achieve their goals, celebrate their successes, and learn from difficult experiences."

"I feel that we can and do make our patients' lives a little better. I know this because I hear many patients voice their gratitude and in many cases, these are patients who rarely vocalize such things. Hearing their gratitude tells me that we are making a difference in their existence."

Some encountered difficulties in working with clients.

"Good days with staff and residents can be sparse."

"I do not feel I have the time to assist my clients and make them successful."

"Clients have become entitled, and we are being verbally and emotionally abused day after day."

"Not sure how much longer I plan to still work here with the RUDE treatment staff have to endure from the public."

THEME. Workload

378 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned issues with workload.
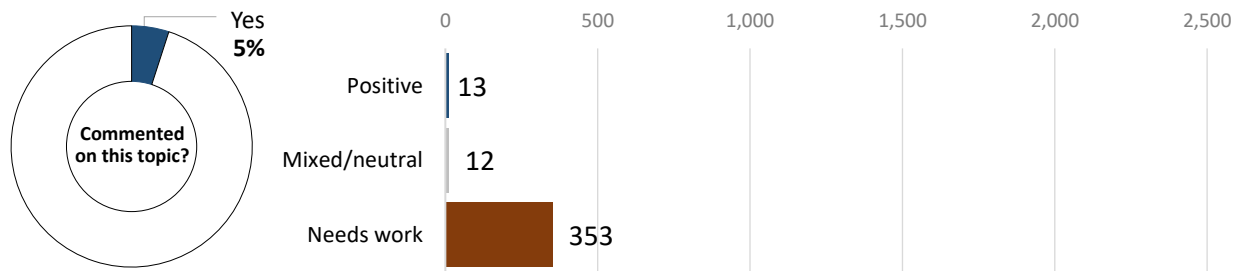
Nearly all of the comments about workload (353 out of 378) said there was room for improvement. Very few (13) of those commenting said they were okay with current expectations. Employees were critical that high workloads:

- Are unmanageable and make quality of work suffer
- Make them feel devalued, unappreciated, and unheard
- Cause unnecessary stress and burnout
- Hurt their ability to provide good customer service

►What DSHS employees said …

A few staff said the workload is manageable.

"Expectations do not exceed work capacity."

"The workload is manageable."

"I like that I'm not so overwhelmed with jobs to do that I can spend time with my residents and see them smile and make them happy."

"The workload (so far) is manageable even on heavy days."

They wish management would listen and pitch in to help.

"We are overworked and it feels like no one is listening or willing to do anything to actually help us. Headquarters continues to come up with new requirements that only add more work for us."

"I would like to see more (some! ANY!) acknowledgement of the unrealistic and overwhelming expectations that we are laboring under at this time."

"Upper management [is] putting extra work on others while they sit in meetings all day. They could help us instead of bogging us down."

"There has been no actual help from management as the workload increases."

"Would be nice to have the higher ups jumping on phones or doing batch to show solidarity, rather than just sending SOS all hands emails."

Many employees said they feel overloaded.

"We are all being worked to the bone."

"Most people in my unit must consistently work overtime to try to keep up with daily email, programs and projects."

"The caseloads are unmanageable, especially for those of us who would like to do the job correctly."

"Over and over, in my unit, we have expressed that we were drowning and could not keep up with the work."

"Our workload has increased significantly and we don't deserve to be treated like slaves."

"The workload is outrageous and the expectations are not achievable."

"We need lighter caseloads imperatively and as soon as possible. I am often exhausted and unable to function at the end of the work day."

"I feel exhausted and brain dead by the end of the day."

They worry about how heavy workloads impact clients.

"Caseload is too high - unable to provide the attention needed to assist our DDA clients."

"We feel like we are in a pressure cooker, clients are unhappy with the long wait times and we are being pushed for our times."

"At times it is not possible to respond to everyone who needs timely attention, which can be concerning."

"I have too much work to effectively do quality work, which causes extra unnecessary errors and stress. I have too many clients to really get to know them and to know what they need."

"Smaller caseload. It's simply not possible to properly serve all of my clients and providers with a caseload of 130 people. It's unfair and unreasonable."

"Very challenging to handle the workload and give time to each client."

"The amount I have to do takes away from me being able to really advocate and connect my clients to services because I'm so overwhelmed."

"The work demands are strenuous and unsustainable due to the critical nature of some client needs."

"It can be very overwhelming and creates guilt when I cannot meet client needs or have to ask to end a call as I have so many other things to work on. This job feels like it has doubled in workload in the last several years."

THEME. Autonomy and growth opportunities

667 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned autonomy and growth opportunities in the workplace.

Positive: 503
Mixed/neutral: 22
Needs work: 142

Yes **9%**
Commented on this topic?
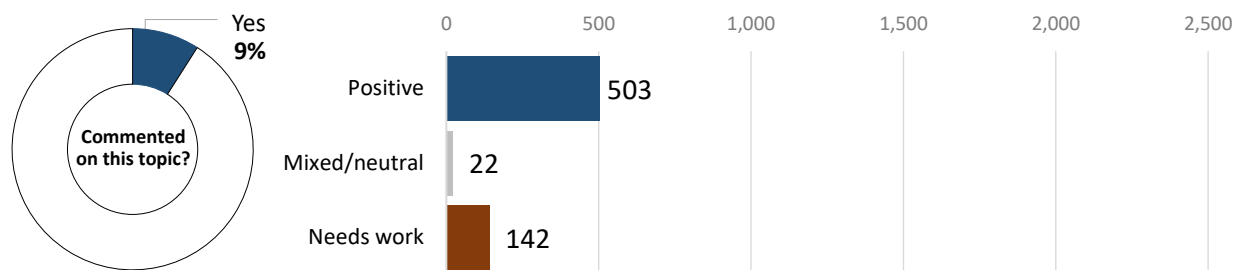
Most employees (503) said that they are allowed to be creative and make decisions about their work. Some (142) said there was room for improvement. Employees mention that they prefer an environment where they have:

- Autonomy to be creative and learn, so they can bring their best to the work every day
- Freedom to use the tools provided, while still making the job their own
- Leaders that do not micromanage and treat them as professionals that know the job

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Staff like having independence when completing tasks.

"I really love the independence we have to do our jobs."

"This work fulfills my need for autonomy, mastery and purpose."

"I like the freedom to do my work without much micromanaging."

"I really appreciate the autonomy and flexibility."

"Overall I have independence and freedom to make decisions about how I function in my role. I am not micromanaged."

"I love that I am trusted to work independently with minimal direct supervision."

"I appreciate having a degree of control and freedom within my job."

"My autonomy given to me and trust from my supervisor to do my work independently and efficiently."

"I am confident in my skills and abilities and am able to work independently."

"I treasure the autonomy I have to conduct my work."

"I get to apply my skill set in various ways. No day is the same. Quite a bit of autonomy."

"I like having the ability to steer my own work with supervisor check-ins as needed."

"I have freedom to do my job in a way that is efficient and effective without being micromanaged."

"[I like] the autonomy I have to complete my tasks in a way that maximizes my skill set and works well for me."

"I enjoy that I am not micromanaged and that I am in charge of my own time."

"I like the ability to work independently but still have a team to use as a resource."

"The flexibility of just doing my job with little oversight because I work best independently."

Challenges and creativity are associated with growth and improvement.

"The work challenges me to learn and grow."

"Being able to work relatively independently. The job is challenging me to try new ways of accomplishing the assigned tasks."

"The openness to listen to new ideas and explore creative ways to improve workload."

"I like the freedom to make improvements in my work."

"Creative autonomy, mix of projects, the team and management are responsive to new ideas."

"It can be interesting at times. I like thinking of ways to make improvements."

"It challenges me mentally and helps with overall growth."

"I like that I can be creative and have room to grow into my job and the ability to find ways to complete my work in a way that works for me."

Micromanagement by leaders and systems is unwelcome.

"My supervisor micromanages, squelches our input. We do not have enough say in how we do our work."

"WFO [Workforce Optimization] is insane. It will be the reason for leaving this job. I have never been under such strict oversight. I am not a robot."

"I would like to have less micromanaging and more trust to do the work I do best."

"This job is tough enough on its own – but to be micro-managed and poorly supervised is too much to bear."

"No more WFO. More autonomy."

"Stop micromanaging us and adding pressure. We are doing the best we can."
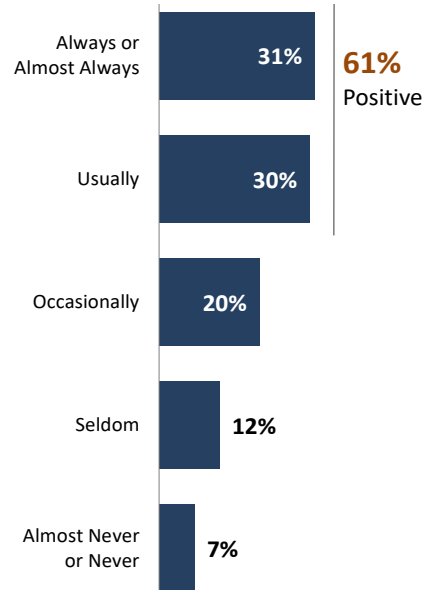
"My supervisor to not micromanage to the nth degree."

"The micromanagement of WFO has brought my job satisfaction down to a 0%."

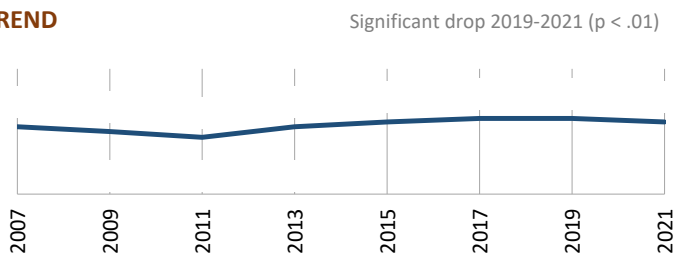# QUESTION. I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Just over six of 10 employees (61%) said they have opportunities at work to learn and grow. Almost two of 10 respondents (19%) said those occasions are lacking.

Most of the staff that commented on this topic expressed an appreciation for opportunities at work that allow them to be creative and learn new skills that expand their knowledge and improve work processes. Some mentioned that they want to be able to grow professionally, but feel stifled from doing so.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	31%
Usually	30%
Occasionally	20%
Seldom	12%
Almost Never or Never	7%

61% Positive

TREND   Significant drop 2019-2021 (p < .01)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Most said their job allows them to learn and grow.

"I have opportunities to grow. When something is not working as planned, we are able to reevaluate the situation and make adjustments."

"I'm able to continue to learn and grow professionally."

"I also like that staff have the chance to grow and learn in their jobs. It's important for them to build their professional skills and knowledge and there are a lot of opportunities for staff."

"Learning new things in every ward helps me to be more productive and efficient."

"I love how there are so many ways to develop skills within my division."

"I am able to explore growth opportunities and my strengths are capitalized upon."

"I love the ability to continue to learn and grow and develop mastery of my skills."

"The opportunity to learn and grow is a normal part of each day."

"I am encouraged to grow and collaborate with my team."

"I like that my job allows for growth of knowledge."

"I can see how educational the place is and how everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed."

"Love the variety of tasks and opportunity for learning new/expanding skill-set and growth."

"I have a lot of opportunities for learning and growth."

"I feel like I have the opportunity to learn, grow, and be challenged."

They say problem-solving is a result of that growth.

"In my current position I am allowed to think outside the box and find solutions to problems before they arise. My position keeps me on my toes and I truly enjoy that."

"I like being able to problem solve, help develop new skills."

"Ability to grow and think outside the box. Be a problem solver. I am not micromanaged and have freedom to make choices in how to do good work in my position."

"The ability to utilize creativity to problem solve and find alternative solutions to problems that arise."

"I like best that I am able to learn and grow and use my skills to solve problems and help others."

Others want more opportunities for growth and learning.

"When I have presented my supervisor with my interest to learn more and grow, he just suggested I get another job, which was discouraging."

"It is hard to learn and grow when the phones are so very busy."

"No opportunities to grow within my position."

"People's ability to learn and grow their skills should be recognized. And give them the chance to build new skills. At this time, I am not seeing much of this happening in my department."

"Need more avenues for growth and learning/upskilling."

"I would like to see more opportunity for learning and growth."

QUESTION. At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.

More than six of 10 employees (66%) said they always or usually have the opportunity to make good use of their skills at work. Fewer than two of 10 (17%) said that their skills are not utilized enough on the job.

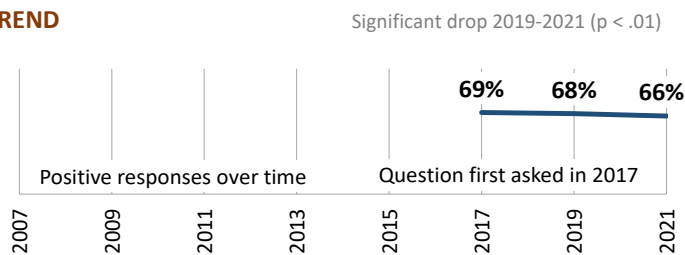In their comments, many employees said they like that their skills and training are being put to use at work. They often mention that applying their skills helps others and leads to improvements. They don't appreciate when they are not allowed to work at their skill level or do tasks they were hired and trained to do.

ANSWERS

Always or Almost Always — 31%

Usually — 35%

Occasionally — 17%

Seldom — 10%

Almost Never or Never — 7%

66% Positive

TREND

Significant drop 2019-2021 (p < .01)

69%   68%   66%

Positive responses over time   Question first asked in 2017

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
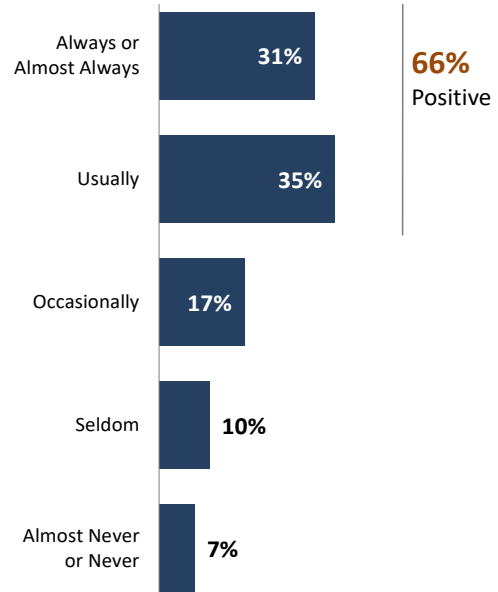
▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Most staff said their job makes good use of their skillset.

"I enjoy what I do. My job makes good use of my skillset and I find the work interesting."

"My current position allows me the diversity to apply every aspect of my training and education."

"I appreciate that I get to use my knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience every day. The work I am doing is what I have been training to do my whole career."

"Makes good use of my skills."

"I am trusted to tackle my assignments using the skills I've acquired over my career."

"My current job is a great fit for my skillset."

"I love my job! I love that I get to use my skills, knowledge, and experience."

"My current team seeks out an individual's specialties and uses them to their full potential."

"I'm able to use most of my strengths daily in my work."

"Good fit for my skillset."

"Autonomy and is perfect for my skillset."

"I enjoy that I get to do something that I am well adapted to do and utilize the years of experience I gained in the private sector before coming to work for the state."

"It fits my skillset well."

"Good match with my skills and interests."

"It uses my skills to assist customers and co-workers."

"I believe I get to use my skills to provide good treatment and care to the patients."

"It's a great use of my passion and skillset."

**Using their skills and training makes a positive difference.**

"I love that it works my problem solving skills. I'm doing something that is quite specialized and I feel like I'm an asset to the entire Region with the work I do."

"My skills are put to great use to benefit the employees and communities I serve."

"I am making a difference, utilizing my strengths and skills."

"I use my skills and higher education to improve the work my agency promotes in the field."

"Helping people with my skillset and providing a positive experience for people."

"It is indeed a noble job for me: taking care of clients with my best abilities and skills, to improve and develop a person's way of good living."

Employees do not want to work below their skill level.

"Required to do work that is not in my job description that would be better suited for people of lower skill levels/education"

"My supervisor's manager micromanaged us so much that we were severely restricted in what we could do, without good reason. This manager appeared not to respect the individual skills of the people in my department, and tried to fit us into a small 'box' of expertise."

"We need duties fitting the strengths of the workers."

"Our skills are being allowed to rot."

"Currently I am extremely dissatisfied. I am waiting for the opportunity to grow and use my education the way I intended."

THEME. Other important aspects of the job

2,588 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned other aspects of their job they consider important.
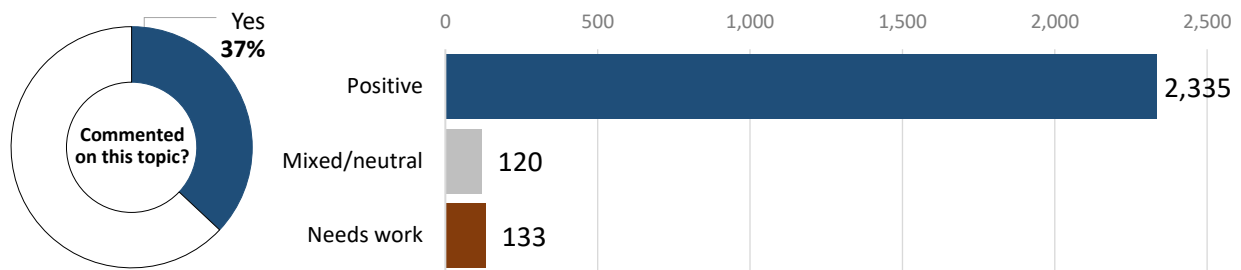
Most employees that made comments (2,335) said they were pleased with numerous aspects of their job. A few (133) thought they should be doing something else with their time at work. Employees like having:

- Varied tasks that make work interesting and keep them busy
- Opportunities to utilize their skills, training, and experience
- The feeling of fulfillment that comes from helping others

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees are happy with the work they are doing.

"I love what I actually do. I actually get a LOT of fulfillment from my job (hence why I've stayed here so long)."

"The people I work with directly and the tasks I have. I feel like I make a difference in my department and have a reason to be here."

"I love that I get to put my skills and education to use."

"My job tasks do vary somedays with special projects so the workload does not become mundane."

"I really do love what I do."

"I usually find the work interesting, and I enjoy the challenge of it."

"I feel valued, respected and that my skills contribute to the agency in a way that benefits the agency and social services."

"I like that I have the ability to ensure my team has the tools they need to thrive and grow in their careers. I like working together with my team to make a difference."

"The work is meaningful. I find inspiration in my job every day."

"I enjoy being able to support individuals make life choices that will change their lives for the better and be able to support themselves."

"I'm doing important work."

"It is fulfilling, I do work that matters."

"I like the fast pace, challenging intellectual puzzles, and feeling that I am making the world a better place."

"I feel my work tangibly and directly improves the lives of people who are struggling in our state."

"I can honestly say that what we do brings me joy."

"The job challenges make our team feel like super heroes, and our bosses are amazing. Every day is a new learning experience."

Helping people brings staff a sense of accomplishment.

"I like that I am a part of a team who is helping the community and transforming lives. When working with clients I am fulfilled knowing that I made a difference in someone's everyday needs."

"The people that I get to work with and the relationships you build, the fulfillment you feel when you believe that you may have reached/helped a patient, or even a co-worker in some positive way."

"Helping people, I love being the positive change in someone's day."

"I enjoy building people up, be it co-workers, patients, or direct reports. I enjoy helping people reach their potential."

"I have always found meaning and value serving underserved populations."

"The best part about my job is reflected in its purest function - as a counselor. Working with DVR customers who are serious about getting into meaningful occupations is a fulfilling and noble pursuit that I am happy to do."

Some say their job is far from perfect.

"I am sad to say that I don't think I like anything about my job anymore."

"The workload has gotten intense and the clients have gotten progressively meaner. If I could not work from home I would try and find another job."

"I do not like my current job much. I do not feel like I am being utilized in a way that allows me to use my talents and strengths."

"I have come to really dislike my job. I dread coming to work every day now. I used to love it but so much has changed that I don't know how much longer I can work here."

THEME. Teamwork and support

996 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned teamwork and co-worker support.
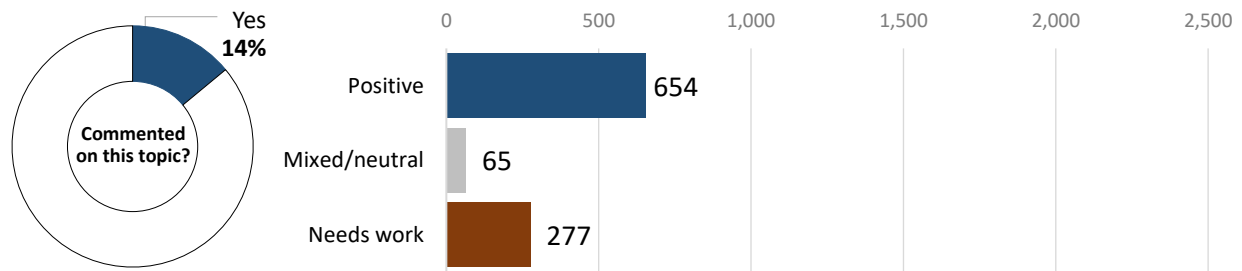
The majority of employees who commented on teamwork and support (654) spoke favorably about the way their team works together to get things done. Some (277) expressed ways their team could improve. They want co-workers that:

- They can count on for consistent support
- Have excellent work ethic and contribute to a positive atmosphere
- Are cohesive team players and get along with each other

►What DSHS employees said …

Staff value being part of a supportive team.

"We listen, help each other out, give suggestions and feedback, and overall make an amazing team."

"What I like best about my current job is my co-workers, those I work closely with and those in the department. The sense of support and teamwork in invaluable."

"I enjoy having the opportunity to build relationships with my colleagues. I feel as though most people I work with are genuinely interested in seeing others succeed. People are almost always eager to lend a helping hand to others."

"Everyone I work with is very nice and supportive. They want to help you, rather than let you fail."

"I have good support from my peers."

"Helpfulness of others and constantly being offered support with any questions or need I may have."

"I LOVE MY TEAM!! They are such a wonderfully supportive team!"

"We are all supporting and work well together."

"I work with a good group of people who help and support one another to get our jobs done to the best of our abilities."

"My team and supervisor are supportive and help me do my job better."

"I feel incredibly supported within my office."

"Our team helps one another."

"I feel like there is a lot of support. If I ever have a question, there is someone who is willing to help me."

"My local team is really great, everyone is very supportive of one another."

"You can count on others for support and help whenever necessary."

"I enjoy the comradery in my office."

They work together to get the job done.

"We are short staffed often and all pull together to get the work done and care properly for our patients."

"I like that there is a comradery amongst the licensed nurses and caregivers as they support each other in the most important task here--caring for the residents. It feels good to be able to speak about the amazing care that is given here, knowing it is the absolute truth."

"I like the teamwork between us on my ward. We help each other, back each other up and work together to create the safest ward possible with the tools we have."

"Teamwork atmosphere exists, especially when we are short of help."

"My current job is team oriented. We work together well and support each other."

Some felt that teamwork and support were lacking.

"Don't like hearing, 'It's not my job.' We all need to work together to come to solutions for problems."

"I would like for us to figure out a way to have more of a team feeling. Everyone is being self-centered and we lost that team feeling."

"More efforts of inclusion and teamwork rather than attempting to separate employees."

"There are not many cohesive relationships in the office. There are never any exercises in team-building."

"I would like to see more collaboration between team members, instead of creating animosity."

"Better team environment, look out for one another."

"There is NO sense of a team here."

"Bunch of co-workers, with whom workspace gets shared, are not supportive."

"There isn't a lot of teamwork or community in place. I would like to see more group participation."

QUESTION. A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.

Seven of 10 employees (70%) said they always or usually experience a spirit of cooperation and teamwork in their work group – a statistically significant increase from 2019. Many fewer (14%) expressed that there were problems in this area.
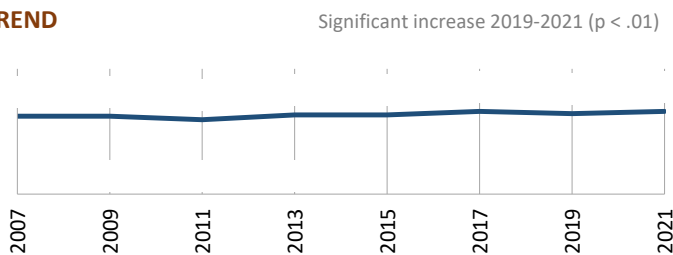
Most employees speak highly of co-workers that are caring and collaborative. They often say relationships with co-workers are a large part of what they enjoy about their job. Some are critical of co-workers that seem to cause conflict and are unhelpful to teammates.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	38%
Usually	31%
Occasionally	16%
Seldom	8%
Almost Never or Never	6%

70% Positive

TREND   Significant increase 2019-2021 (p < .01)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
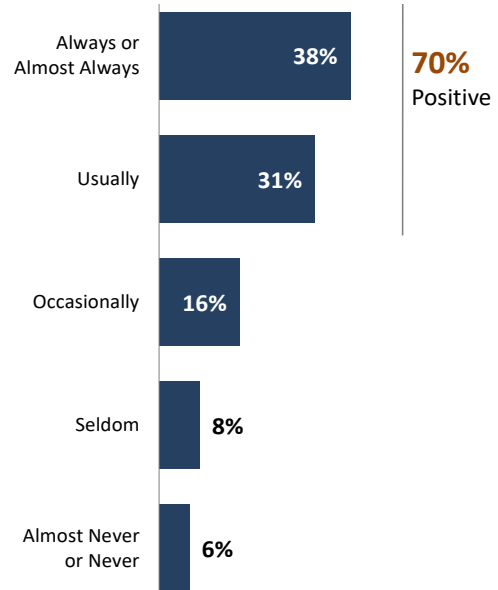
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Most teams are a close group that work well together.

"I like my team and how we work together to help each other out. When one area is struggling with increased case assignments the other groups jump in to help."

"So many things. The team I work with is really great, supportive, friendly, and collaborative."

"I work with great people who are supportive and willing to cover each other's shifts when needed."

"We have a great team that all work hard together to get the job done."

"Effective team who works well together."

"Our unit, they are very supportive and are always willing to lend a helping hand."

"I enjoy the camaraderie of my teammates."

"As peers, we work together to achieve good outcomes for the public we serve."

"I have a great team that works well together."

"Unit staff work well together helping each other and supporting each other."

"I like the way we support each other on a daily, if not weekly, basis. When one of us has to be out for an extended period of time, everyone steps up and assists with that person's caseload."

"I have a great unit. We help each other wherever needed. We're a team!"

"My team is very close, supportive, collaborative and passionate about the work supporting those we serve."

"I like that my team works well together."

Staff like co-workers that create a pleasant environment.

"I'm part of a gifted, dedicated, competent team whose individuals respect one another, play well together, and are passionate about doing the work they do - and about doing it even better."

"I like the positive environment, the teamwork."

"That it feels like a family; that we are all here to support each other."

"I love my co-workers. They are an amazing group of people that motivate and support me."

"I like the people that I work with. We work well together and the team always has others' best interest in mind."

Some would like to see better teamwork and cooperation.

"I feel alone on an island waiting to be rescued. More teamwork, shared responsibilities, camaraderie…we don't have fun anymore."

"Increasing teamwork and collaboration."

"I would like to see more of a teamwork environment with the areas we support, instead of such a separation between roles."

"Teamwork is a thing of the past. I am just hoping things get better."

"I would love to see staff working together."

"I would like to see more cooperation and teamwork."

"I would like to see more teamwork in the area I work in."

"More collaborative effort from staff members that want to be part of the change. We need people who actually want to make things better to help with that effort."

THEME. Co-worker competence

498 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned the competence of their co-workers.
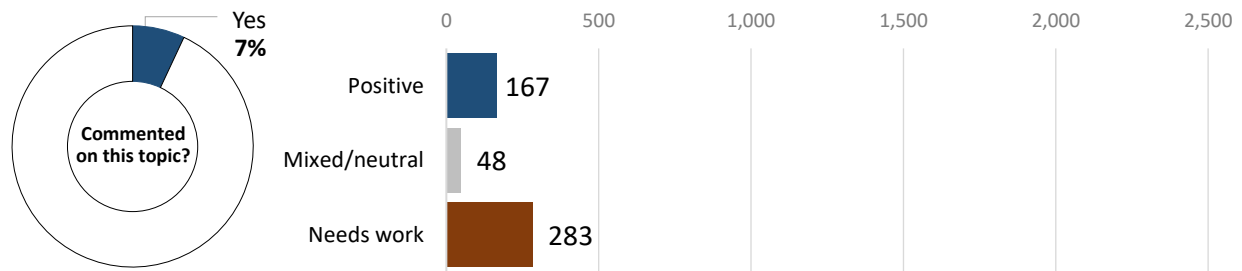
The majority of staff (283) that commented on this topic mentioned problems they saw in co-worker job performance. Fewer (167) praised the the people they work with. Employees want co-workers who:

- Are knowledgeable and take pride in their work
- Put their full effort into producing quality work that helps co-workers and clients
- Behave in a professional and ethical manner

▶**What DSHS employees said …**

Many staff said they work with a great team of hardworking and dedicated professionals.

"I like the people in my unit. They are all hard workers and behave professionally."

"My current group of co-workers are the most professional I have ever worked with in my long career."

"I like my co-workers. They put forth a lot of effort and good teamwork so we can try to effectively get things done together."

"I am surrounded by highly capable, passionate, well-educated professionals."

"My immediate work group is committed to helping each other do the best work possible for DSHS and our clients."

"I have a smart and hardworking team that evenly distributes tasks and needs."

"There are fantastic dedicated and experienced staff who work very hard."

"I love the caring committed professionals at my workplace and how we work together to make a difference."

They resent covering for workers that abuse leave time.

"The slackers slack and laugh at those of us with real work ethics, while we kill ourselves covering for their apathetic performance and incompetence."

"There are way too many people abusing their leave or taking LWOP [leave without pay]."

"People who never show up to work seem to be babied, rewarded. [It would take] an act of God to get them to be on a time program or held accountable for their lack of work ethic. All the others are expected to pick up the slack."

"Reduce time fraud (there are employees who come to work late (1-3 hours) and leave early (1-3 hours) every day. The Washington taxpayer would be appalled at the amount of wasted time by state employees."

**Staff expressed resentment toward co-workers that don't pull their weight.**

"I'd like to feel part of a team, and all staff to be committed, because some do not apply themselves and pull their weight leaving me to do most of the work."

"Quite often, we are paired with a co-worker who does not pull their weight. I feel I am quite often taken advantage of by my co-staff. I work hard. I do my job and then some. I work with people who spend time on their phones or they sit around."

"We should be able to expect more from staff, but in general, the bar seems to be set really low and it's beyond frustrating to me."

"Lazy people get paid as much as the people who work hard. The people who work hard just get more work."

They want troublesome co-workers dealt with.

"I would like to have more control over being able to terminate employees who do not perform up to standards. We are often 'stuck' with low performers and it really impacts the morale of teams and the work that has to be done."

"It would be great if when someone does something inappropriate or just plain wrong, they face consequences for their actions."

"I would like to see the managers hold people accountable for their attendance and work performance, to make it fair to those who show up and work hard."

"It doesn't seem like there are any consequences for bad employees. For laziness or attitudes. Would like to see standards applied to everyone across the board."

"People are not held accountable. The standing joke is 'you would have to commit murder' to be disciplined. Underperforming or problem employees are simply overlooked or traded to another location."

THEME. Other comments about co-workers

1,220 of the 7,032 employees who made comments made other comments about co-workers.
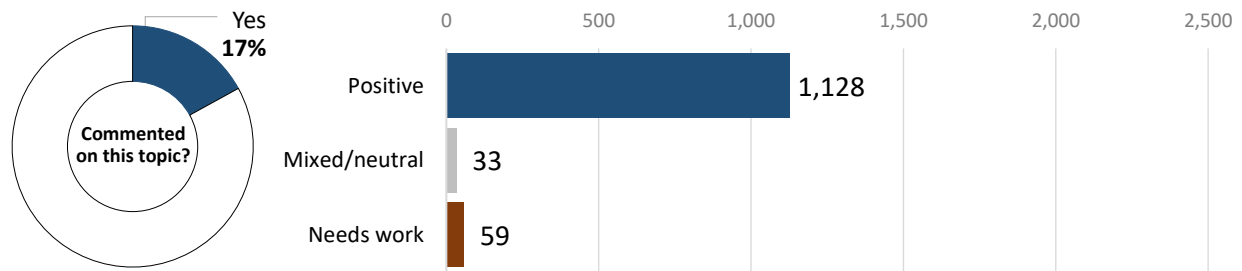
Employees made other comments about co-workers that were often expressed as general feelings. Most of them (1,128) said they like their co-workers because of their positive qualities. Others (59) had concerns about behavior and attitude in the office. Employees spoke highly of co-workers who:

- Maintain a positive, respectful attitude while at work
- Create a sense of unity and friendship in the workplace
- Truly care about their work, their teammates, and the clients

►What DSHS employees said …

Staff often mention positive attributes of co-workers.

"I get to work with good people who care a lot about their jobs."

"I'm so grateful for our team; everyone is intelligent and collaborative and they all know how to do their job well."

"The team I work with are an outstanding group of people."

"I get to work with people who really care and find fulfillment in what they do."

"I really appreciate my co-workers and how hard they work."

"The staff in the department are kind and knowledgeable."

"I think we have a solid team, there are no more weak links. Everyone gets along and everyone is equally talented in general skills as well as offering their own specialties."

"I love my team at work. Very supportive and always helping each other out."

"The positive atmosphere and teamwork within the office. Everybody truly gets along and is respectful."

"I have a fantastic team! We all get along well, and our strengths and weaknesses complement each other."

"The team I work with is passionate about doing good work for our client base, and are bright and caring people."

"Co-workers are very positive and unified."

"People in my team are the best."

"Great people to work with. They are by and large some of the smartest and most talented folks I know."

"I love the relationship I have built with my peers and other co-workers. Having a positive relationship means a lot to me."

"My team is super supportive and wants to see each other succeed."

Caring, kind staff make it a pleasure to work as a team.

"We have a great team on my unit which is very encouraging and feels welcoming every day."

"I love the care team! Shout out - toot toot."

"The people on my team are passionate about what they do and that shows every day. They are a pleasure to work with."

"My current team and immediate supervisor (RN3) are awesome to work with. We learn, we teach, we care about each other. I am motivated to come to work just because of my co-workers and RN3 on my shift."

"I really enjoy my unit and how well we work as a team."

"My co-workers are wonderful, skilled, kind people; they are the best part of my job!"

"The best part is staff and how much they care about what they do."

"I feel my ward on day shift has great teamwork. We all get along and we take care of each other."

"My team is a caring, intelligent, motivated group of people and I enjoy working with them."

"This staff makes me want to be here and do my best because it's such a positive environment."

Some co-workers don't behave as well as they should.

"Staff can be extremely hostile toward one another."

"It would be nice to see staff treating each other with dignity and respect. After all, isn't that what we preach for the residents we serve."

"I would just like to see people in the workplace behave like reasonable and compassionate human beings."

"Employees can't be expected to like all of their co-workers, but civility should be a requirement. And a little more kindness wouldn't hurt."

"I would like to see a kinder, friendlier place to work."

QUESTION. How satisfied are you with your flexibility?

Almost seven of 10 employees (66%) said they are satisfied with their ability to balance work and personal life, and adjust scheduled hours, as needed – a statistically significant increase from 2019. Fewer than two of 10 employees (18%) said they saw room for improvement.

Most employees expressed gratitude for the ability to flex their work schedule to fit around what is happening in their personal lives – picking up kids, medical appointments, etc. Those that complained usually mention office hours that don't fit their clients' needs and being monitored by managers and systems like Workforce Optimization [WFO]. They do not appreciate seeing peers allowed flexibility that they are not given.
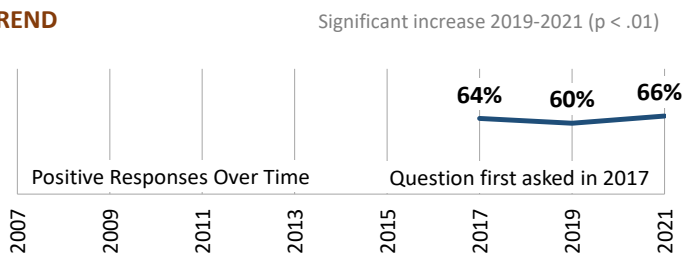
ANSWERS

Answer	%
Very Satisfied	40%
Satisfied	26%
Neutral	17%
Dissatisfied	10%
Very Dissatisfied	8%

66% Positive

TREND   Significant increase 2019-2021 (p < .01)

64%   60%   66%

Positive Responses Over Time   Question first asked in 2017

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
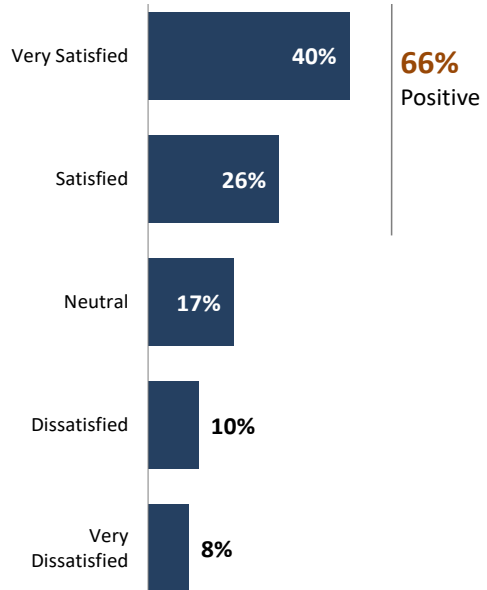
▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Employees like a balance between work and personal life.

"I appreciate the trust between me and my supervisor. I am allowed to flex my time accordingly to balance home/work life."

"The flexibility it offers to balance work and home."

"I am able to balance my work and personal life a lot better without exhaustion on a daily basis."

"Flexibility with hours which gives me a good work/family life balance."

"My work-life balance has never been better."

"I like the flexibility that my supervisor provides with regards to family, sick and work, It's well balanced."

"I love that I'm able to do mission-driven work with a team that values work-life balance. Amazing!"

"I love that I can choose my hours and that I feel supported while doing that. This allows me to have a healthy work and home balance."

"I like the flexibility. Work-life balance strategies."

"The best work-life balance I've had my entire life."

"I enjoy the work-life balance and flexibility."

"I like the flexibility in taking time off and supporting a work-life balance."

"The flexibility and support of work-life balance."

"I love the flexibility to balance home-work life, when needed."

"Flexible schedule that supports a healthy work-life balance."

"I enjoy the work-life balance."

The ability to adjust work hours is helpful to staff.

"I hope that the flexibilities extended to staff during the pandemic, to adjust their daily work schedule around childcare or other needs, is able to be continued."

"I appreciate that there is a flexibility of schedule."

"Flexibility is helpful with kids' schedule and having flexibility helps with staff taking time off work to meet family needs."

"I like the flexibility of work hours, the balance between work and non-work."

"Having a flexible schedule is very helpful."

Some staff feel flex time rules are unfair.

"I would like to have more flexibility with my schedule such as trading a shift during the week. Now if I have to have a day off I have no option but to call in sick."

"Equality of flexibility in all job positions. Some staff do not have the option to have a condensed schedule, flex schedule, or telework and it seems rather unfair."

"I would like to be treated like an adult, and given the flexibility to manage my own schedule to meet my customer needs while still balancing my own."

"I find it unreasonable that I am expected to flex my schedule to accommodate a customer that can't or won't come in during my scheduled work shift, when I am then expected to take leave to go to a doctor's appointment (versus flexing my time for that). Either my schedule is flexible or it isn't, and it's unfair that flexibility only seems to apply to suit customer or partner preferences."

QUESTION. How satisfied are you with your mobility?

More than six of 10 employees (65%) said they are satisfied with their ability to work remotely from a variety of locations, such as home or alternate work sites. This is the second time in a row that the perc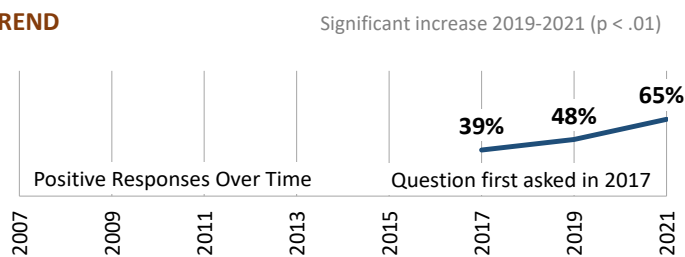entage of staff satisfied with their mobility has increased compared to the prior survey. Most of these employees praised leadership for allowing them to work from home, especially during the COVID pandemic. They are hopeful the telework option continues since they feel they have proven it can be done successfully.

Fewer than two of 10 employees (18%) said they are dissatisfied with current arrangements, usually saying they want to telework like their peers.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Very Satisfied	45%
Satisfied	20%
Neutral	17%
Dissatisfied	8%
Very Dissatisfied	10%

65% Positive

TREND   Significant increase 2019-2021 (p < .01)

Positive Responses Over Time — Question first asked in 2017

39%   48%   65%

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021
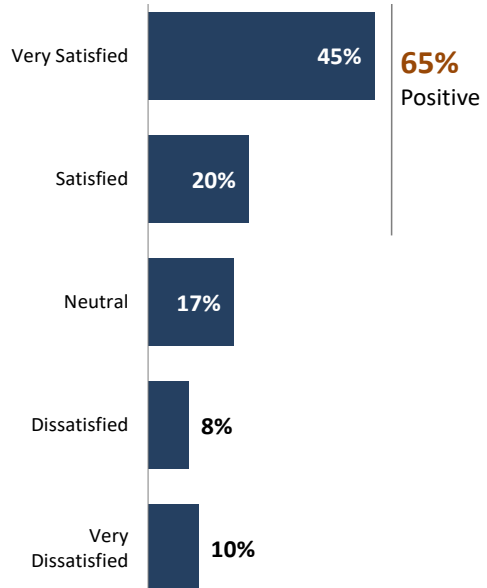
►What DSHS employees said …

Staff say they are productive when teleworking.

"I truly enjoy the fact that I am teleworking and can accomplish the same or greater amount of work daily."

"I like the ability to work from home as it has been proven that this CAN be done successfully."

"I, and most of my peers, have been productive and have been effective in our roles while working remotely."

"I enjoy the freedom to work from home. At home, I am able to think for long periods of time without constant distractions of the office. I am able to produce better quality work, faster."

"I'm more productive working from home and have more time without having to commute to work."

They were grateful to work remotely during COVID.

"I appreciate the flexibility afforded to me through the authorization of telework. While I previously teleworked on occasion pre-pandemic, the pandemic has opened my eyes as to how effective full-time telework can be, and how much it has improved my work-life balance."

"The option and flexibility to remain working remotely. That for me has been the best change over the course of the pandemic. I feel that I am more efficient."

"The ability to work from home. It was a difficult transition when the pandemic first started, but I've grown to appreciate the opportunity to spend the day with my family and remain in my community. It's been one of the few good things to have come out of the health crisis."

"I liked the ability to work remotely 5 days per week during the pandemic."
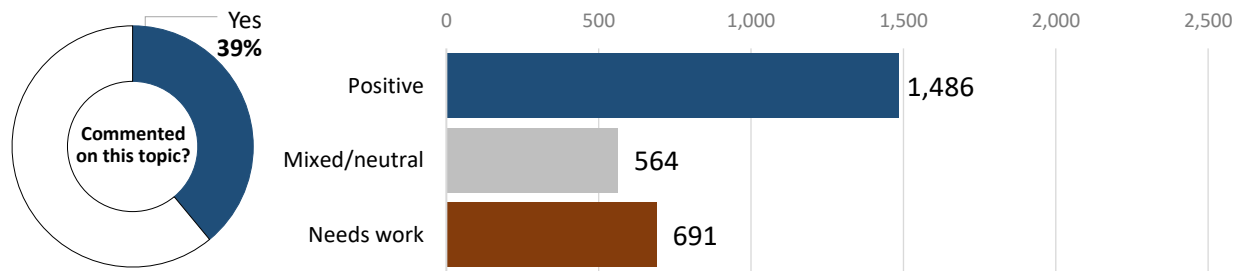
Many expressed desire for telework to continue.

"The ability to work from home. I never imagined it would be a good fit for me, but now I can't see returning to an office setting. That would be a deal breaker for me."

"I wish we could continue to work from home full-time."

"Continue to allow staff to telework as long as their job duties are achieved."

"I would like to see continued support for full-time telework for those jobs for which it makes business sense to do so."

"The flexibility to continue working remotely. My job does not require an 'in-office' setting to be productive.'

Others say they want more mobility options.

'I was told that the job I accepted would be remote and that I could choose to remain remote after the pandemic subsides. That does not seem to be the case.'

'Being in the office five days a week, while other staff only have to report for two days simply because they have a better setup at home, feels unfair.'

'I would choose to telework from now on, if it was offered.'

'I want to stay working remotely and only go into the office when it is absolutely necessary and we are not being allowed to do that.'

'I would like to see a more concerted effort towards the option to work from home, such as issuing of laptops to teleworking staff, rather than having to haul their PC back and forth.'

THEME. Flexible schedules and telecommuting

2,741 of the 7,032 employees who commented addressed flexible schedules and telecommuting.

Yes
39%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive				1,486		
Mixed/neutral	564					
Needs work	691					

Employees were overwhelmingly positive when making comments about this topic – a reversal from comments made in 2019. This is largely a result of the increase in ability to flex hours and work from home because of the COVID pandemic. Their comments typically expressed a desire to continue this kind of flexibility.

►What DSHS employees said …

Many employees are happy with their flexibility.

'Working from home full-time greatly improved my health, job satisfaction and work-life balance.'

'I love the flexibility and ability to work from home. It has greatly helped out during this pandemic and would be a major factor for wanting to continue with the agency.'

'Teleworking and flex schedules are great for employees.'

'It's being able to work remotely and to have the option to flex my schedule that will keep me at my job for a long time to come. Those are huge plusses to me.'

'I have deeply appreciated the opportunity to continue teleworking as well. I never thought I would like it honestly, but after the last year and a half I realized how helpful it is with my work/home life balance and stress management. Getting to work in my garden on a lunch break helps release any secondary traumatic stress potentially built up in the day.'

'I love having the ability to telework and working 4-10's.'

'Keep the remote work as it is, give employees flexibility in their work and hours and remote work options. Modern life and workplace culture has shifted and this is the new normal.'

'I find working remotely from home gives me a sense of happiness and fulfillment that I never felt before. I feel I can balance family, work and life a lot easier.'

'Love having the flexibility of teleworking and being able to adjust work hours.'

'The ability to work from home and have flexibility in my schedule. This work-life balance is very important to me.'

'Currently I am happy that we are working from home. I am happy that there is some flexibility.'

'I love having the flexibility to work from home and feel I get more accomplished teleworking.'

'Telework has been a total game changer when it comes to work-life balance, so more of that please!'

'I also flipping LOVE teleworking! My work life balance has been changed forever, and my productivity is something about which I am very proud, secondarily.'

They feel teleworking is a proven success and should continue.

'I believe that over the past year plus, field staff have shown they are capable of working remotely full-time. Being forced to go back into the office, to sit in a cubicle and continue to do Zoom meetings is highly unnecessary.'

'Don't force us back into the office. We have proven over the years that we work effectively and faster at home.'

'On telework/WFH [work from home]: we staff have collectively shown that we can work remotely and get our jobs done, and also be on flexible schedules, alternate schedules, 4 10's.'

'I'm glad that DSHS has finally listened to reason and is letting lots of people continue teleworking on a majority or full-time basis. It's been well established by now that everyone can get the mission done without having to be under the physical thumb of someone in an office environment.'

Others want more 'flex' choices available to all employees.

'It is time to tackle the next step in work-life balance. One size does not fit all for work schedules and flexibility.'

'Let us work at home permanently with the flexibility to come to the office when necessary.'

'It's ridiculous that everyone has to work the same hours, take scheduled breaks etc. We are all adults and should be treated as such.'

'Unfortunately with the state there is this old school, stale mentality that you need to have people in an office to be productive. This is complete nonsense. If staff want to return to the office they should be allowed to. If staff want to continue working from home they should have that choice.'

'More understanding that some people work better at home, while others in an office setting. Some people found working at home depressing, while others appreciated the time it takes to commute back into their family lives. For certain positions, leave it a choice.'

"Honey 🖐 Maker"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Tricia Tavary, with permission

Business Practices

EMPLOYEES ARE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT BUSINESS PRACTICES. Compared to the 2019 survey, significantly fewer employees agreed that they have the tools and resources to do their job effectively (66%, down from 68% in 2019). Although overall comments about resources and policies/processes decreased, employees were more likely to mention staffing and pay in 2021. The pandemic affected nearly every area of business practices, and many noted the changes in flexibility and hybrid workplace options. Employees also described safety concerns related to COVID precautions and offices reopening.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES. Comments about policies and processes remained consistent with 2019. The changes associated with the pandemic response played a major role in suggestions for process improvements.

- **Many requested changes.** 2,108 (30% of those making comments) were suggestions for improvement in work processes or policies, and 670 made suggestions for improving personnel practices. Many were responses to the changes associated with the pandemic, including telework and office reopening policies. Employees continue to advocate for a client-centered approach to their work and are divided between remote and in-person options for providing the best service. Recruiting is a significant concern and some want priority placed on recruiting in order to assist with low staffing levels. Others asked for more emphasis on experience in hiring and advancement.

RESOURCES. There was a small but statistically significant decrease in the percentage of employees who felt that they have sufficient resources to do their jobs. Employees made fewer comments about resources compared to 2019. Of those who commented, many were interested in resources that allow for greater flexibility.

- **Comment increases in specific areas.** 2,096 employees (30% of those making comments) discussed resources, down from 34% in 2019. Areas of interest included:
  - Comments about pay increased, with 32% more critical comments than in 2019.
  - Comments about staffing increased, with 35% more critical comments than in 2019.
  - Many mentioned improvements to wellness and mental health due to flexibility and mobility.
  - Several requested resources for telework or hybrid work environments.
- **Decrease in available resources.** 66% of employees said they have the tools and resources needed to do their jobs, a significant decrease from 2019.

HEALTH AND SAFETY. Employees made more comments in 2021 about safety and fewer about wellness and mental health. More than half continue to agree that the agency supports them in living a healthier life.

- **Consistent perception of support.** Similar to 2019, 58% of employees say that their agency supports them in living a healthier life.
- **Increase in staff safety comments.** 302 employees (4% of those making comments) mentioned safety, a 19% increase from 2019. While most comments were critical, there is a growing number of positive responses about safety. Many were satisfied with safety of telework during the pandemic. Those who expressed concerns noted physical assault, unsafe or unclean facilities, and COVID precautions.
- **Wellness and mental health**. Of the 135 employees who made comments about wellness and mental health, 110 were suggestions for improvement. Compared to 2019, this represents a 31% decrease in negative comments. Many employees cited the positive mental health effects of telework and flexibility, and asked for more opportunities.

"TEAMS conference with the boss" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Employees
By JD Selby, with permission

THEME. Work processes and policies

2,355 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned work processes and policies.

Yes **33%**

Commented on this topic?

Positive	106
Mixed/neutral	141
Needs work	2,108
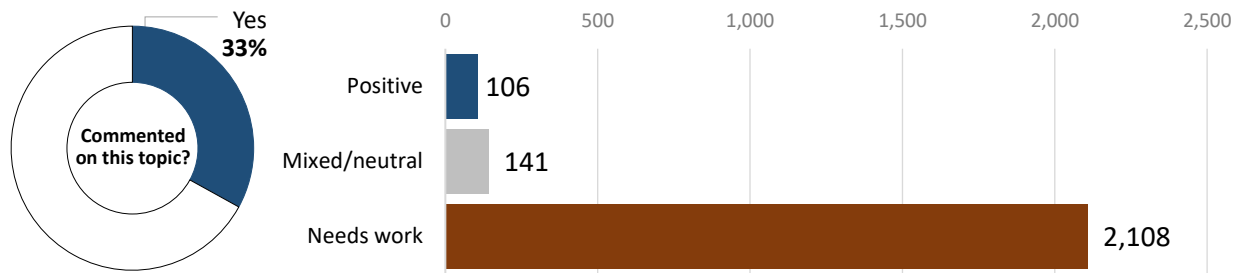
Employees described the effects of a changing work environment on policies and processes. Nearly nine of 10 staff who commented were dissatisfied or requested improvement. Many comments focused on:

- Use of metrics and indicators on job performance
- Collaborative options for work processes
- Client-centered approaches
- Impact of reopening offices on employees and service delivery

►What DSHS employees said …

Many cited challenges with policy and process changes.

"I look forward to a work culture that is more comfortable and capable of embracing its own transformation."

"The phrase that has brought so much hurt to our offices and teams is, 'based on business need', when it should be 'based on staff needs.' When staff needs are met, the service delivery to our customers is met, but with a strong engagement and with great success, it has been done! Times are changing and we live in a time where shift and change is needed."

"Big changes were made all at once. That was a little chaotic."

"Stop expecting staff to make drastic changes without consultation or be given enough time to figure it out and do it properly. Stop being REACTIVE!!!"

"It seems that most policy decisions are 'reactive', i.e., a limiting of latitude resulting from litigation or public spectacle."

"Work smarter, not harder. Looking at what is expected, eliminating processes that aren't required by law, policy, etc. Also, look at eliminating processes that are being done because 'that's the way we've always done things'."

"Quit making changes when you don't even know if the changes you made are working."

They are interested in more collaborative options.

"More cooperation across departments and a mentality of one team, one goal."

"Open discussions with other departments on needs that haven't been met."

"Options for approaching issues that include multi-disciplinary expertise."

"I feel the pandemic assisted with less 'silo' mentality with the staff I worked with, but after we start to reopen, we'll return to that silo mentally."

Employees want a client-centered approach to their work.

"Our business model has become very impersonal in client help and interaction. If the overall state goal is to reduce poverty, then our model must reflect and be sensitive to the needs of those in poverty."

"I wish that the statement 'Quality over quantity' actually meant that. I know numbers matter but is it not more important to get the right decision the first time rather than just get a decision out the door, since these are people's lives we are making decisions on?"

"[I don't like] the emphasis on looking good on paperwork versus what residents actually need."

"Continued schedule flexibility to work the hours that make sense for clients/agencies and our own families. Not a typical 9-5 schedule."

"I would like to see extended hours for client customer service, whether that be once per week in the morning or evening."

Some offered perspectives on COVID impacts.

"More acknowledgement of how Covid has changed our work and some of the lessons that we should be taking into the future. Lots of talk about 'going back' back to how things were pre-Covid but that isn't really the direction we should be headed."

"There has been a theme of constant change, through a pandemic. It has become challenging to know how to be supported through a variety of changes. The work we do now has changed exponentially since February 2020 and continues to change at a rapid pace. Having some sense of constant/stability would be helpful – instead of constant change."

"I would like to see more emphasis on supporting staff in addressing the trauma that we have experienced during Covid."

THEME. Specific work processes and policies

Many comments refer to practices specific to certain workplaces or services.

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Some employees want remote work to continue.

"The agency has done a poor job in protecting frontline workers. When we reopened in July, we were told we had to go into facilities with active COVID outbreaks."

"My customers show up to their Zoom meetings more often than they show up to in-person meetings. I feel that customers most benefit from us working remotely in many ways."

"I would like to see us be more adaptable and use what we learned during the COVID-19 PHE [public health emergency]. We have all learned including our customers and families, that we can do our work remotely."

Others feel they can serve clients better in person.

"Opening our offices is a big step toward the changes I'd like to see. Remote contracting sessions make it hard to gauge the comprehension level of the people we are contracting."

"Open the lobby! The phone calls keep rising. We cannot truly help the people who need us the most (i.e., no phone/internet). Coming into the lobby and sitting on the red phones for 2 hours is ridiculous when we can help them in person quickly. We can help someone on the computers and be next to them but we can't do an interview behind the Plexiglas?"

"[I want] the ability to serve our clients in other ways not just over the phone. For example being able to do interviews in an out station with a community partner or at a pop-up, mobile CSO [Community Services Office]."

Several employees dislike the methods and metrics used to measure job performance.

"I enjoy helping people but hate the time restrictions. Everything I do is measured in seconds."

"Not to provide metrics that are impossible to reach."

"Stop with the numbers game already. My value is not measured by the number of discharges I achieve or assessments I complete. There is a better way to measure our efforts and achievements."

"The work has turned into a set of timed procedures and appear closely tracked by managers with little thought to the actual work being done."

"Drop the quotas, they have no place in social work and are demoralizing to social workers."

Some continue to request digital records.

"Switching to electronic file keeping, or utilizing programs to get electronic signatures from clients and their families."

"I'd love to see all of our files become digital."

"Electronic charting, greater use of technology overall."

"Tired of being promised electronic medical records, just do it!"

A few want information to be more accessible.

"Written 'how to' guides regarding conversations with clients/advocates, how to incorporate program-specific details needed for client service plans. The detailed information is available but not always readily available."

"SharePoint, while effective, is terribly inefficient to use because it is very difficult to navigate. A tab for 'frequently used' info would be great, or even one just for paperwork and forms to find right away. I spend a lot of time looking for things there."

"I would like to see a manual for my specific position, because when training, everyone has a different idea of how to do certain things. While that can be beneficial at times, it would also be nice to have a standard and consistency."

Many mentioned specific issues they face.

"I know it isn't an easy ask but I would love to see changes to the income [limits] for food and cash assistance, to be more reflective of the poverty level for our state rather than our country. Washington is expensive and I wish we could help more people."

"More of a medical model for oversight of therapy professionals."

"I have had several clients tell me that they would rather use food banks and not have food benefits because they cannot wait on hold for hours. If the number of clients we are serving drops, it's not because we are reducing poverty, it's because we are creating barriers. Clients should be able to submit App/ER/MCR without logging in, as online log-in can be a massive barrier."

"Develop a way to objectively and accurately evaluate caseloads. There needs to be an awareness and willingness at headquarters level on down to address this."

"TEMS being updated to be intuitive and useful rather than clunky and anger-making."

"Allow ward staff to see camera history immediately after a patient falls so details are available for patient care."

"Less complicated assessments."

"WFO [Workforce Optimization] is casually stripping the human dignity from Public Benefits Specialists."

"Completely overwhelmed with call volumes these days. No end in sight and no solution on how it will be fixed."

"I would like to see the opportunity to actually let clients use Fircrest or Rainier for stays as an option."

"Less intakes that get screened in – re-look at the screening processes for allegations."

"Updated integrated systems. One main login for all our systems needed."

THEME. Personnel issues

734 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned personnel issues.

Positive 25
Mixed/neutral 39
Needs work 670

Yes **10%**

Commented on this topic?
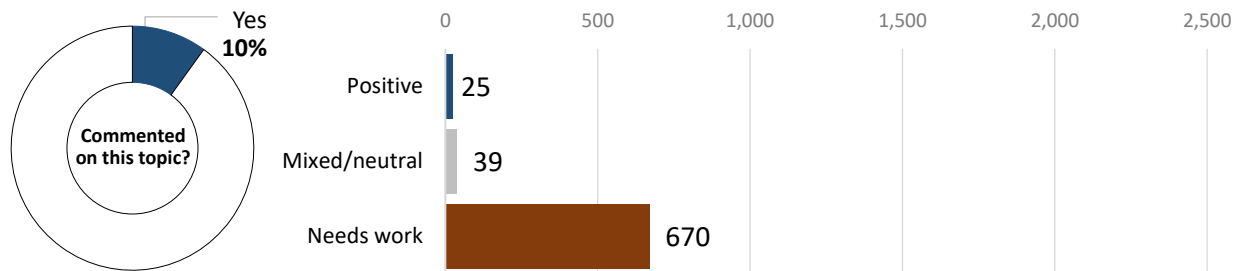
Most employees who made comments want to see improvement in personnel practices. Employees want:

- Fair hiring practices that include a broader scope of candidates
- Increased recruiting efforts to help with staffing challenges
- Clear pathways toward career growth and advancement

Staff also described difficulty with onboarding processes, HR contact, disciplinary measures, and investigations.

►What DSHS employees said …

Fair and clear hiring practices are important to employees.

"There has to be a change to how we hire staff. WSH has a hire one, hire all practice. We hire for quantity not quality. Minus those with credentials, there are no attainable standards enforced, no one is expected to meet even a basic competency standard for working with the mentally ill."

"Hire people who can do the job and not those we like."

"Establish simple metrics around the selection process to hold hiring managers accountable (or at least measure improvement) to assist building their team. Plan proactively for workforce changes, and close the gap on time to fill."

"Obvious favoritism in the hiring practices. Leadership hiring their friends and firing people they don't like and not because they are incompetent."

"Hey, let's hire people who are qualified! In maintenance, we have so many people in positions that are NOT qualified for their positions, starting with management."

Some want education requirements modified or replaced.

"Less emphasis on educational requirements to fill positions. There are so many seasoned staff that do not get the opportunity to advance in the agency because they don't have a degree, but they have the learned skills and abilities from years of service."

"By leading with 'you must have an Associates or Bachelor's degree' you rob yourselves of great candidates who don't have degrees."

"I think the hiring requirements to do my job are too strict, and it's preventing us from finding workers to do my job. Specifically, it seems that it's an unspoken policy to not hire people without college degrees, or experience in government work from another agency."

Many see recruiting as an urgent need.

"More competitive recruitments for management and executive level leaders. Fewer direct appointments. Increase the opportunities and possibilities of a more inclusive process and ultimately, a more diverse organization."

"I would love to see a change in how we hire. I know great people with years of experience providing direct care in dynamic workplaces, disqualified because of the Bachelors requirement; on the flip side, many people we get with degrees are missing direct or relatable work experience."

"Better recruitment for new hires from HR or creating a position specific to recruitment."

"I would like to see more incentivizing to acquire new staff. With the shortage of workforce in our current situation, there needs to be swift action taken to entice new workers."

"Need to be able to see recruitments for positions broadened to other private entities if possible."

"Better hiring practices – meaning actively recruiting for all positions and not stretching the hiring out 2-3+ months."

"Better recruitment of diverse candidates."

"I would like to see a focus on recruitment as our numbers are dwindling."

Employees are more focused on remote work options.

"HR [could be] updating all position descriptions to a more accurate remote work ratio."

"More opportunities for career advancement while teleworking."

"There have been a lot of job listings posted. It would be lovely if I could apply and work from home and if I need to come to an office, report to the nearest one."

THEME. Personnel issues (continued)

►What DSHS employees said …

Many asked for growth and advancement opportunities.

"I would like to see opportunities for professional growth and advancement for employees who hold graduate degrees."

"I am upset that the work I do now has no reflection on the original PDP and due to that, I am continually overlooked for salary increase. My job classification needs to be addressed and compensated."

"I need clearer expectations on promotions."

"What do I need to do to develop and promote into a higher level and more fulfilling role? That path is not clear and I think it should be."

"Equal and more opportunities for advancement."

"I would like more opportunity for growth/promotion. Due to staffing shortages, there does not seem to be much opportunity to move forward."

"Pathways for advancement. There is no good/clear pathway from working in the field to working in HQ and then really no good pathway for advancing either in HQ or up and out to other agencies."

"I'd like more assistance in career development because many of us would like to advance at some point, but we don't really have those opportunities."

"More sincere and intentional employee career development."

"[I would like] a supervisor and management promotion program (Including learning experiences, training, shadowing and mentoring)."

"More opportunities for advancement that aren't based in Lacey/Olympia."

"It is very discouraging to apply for promotional opportunities and being encouraged to do so by upper management, only to be filtered out by the recruitment process. Existing employees should have a different avenue of being able to apply and be considered for promotional opportunities."

Some had challenges with the onboarding process.

"We need to come up with a better process around onboarding new employees. It is ridiculous that we are hiring new employees and we are expected to come up with stuff for them to do (busy work) until their core training starts 2 months out."

"As a new employee during the pandemic, I felt completely unsupported with the onboarding process. I had to navigate all of the paperwork, etc. myself. Every time I reached out to HR staff, they acted annoyed and treated me like I was a burden."

"Better consistency in HR and their response times. Onboarding and hiring of candidates takes far too long."

"Onboarding and the process currently does not lead to retention or a teamwork setting."

"The onboarding process needs to be easier to manage. There is a lot of information thrown at you."

Several were critical about their experiences with HR.

"More HR support to manage hiring process, transition process, to answer questions in a timely manner, or to work through difficult issues with staff. Sometimes feels like supervisor has to 'do it wrong' and get chastised before receiving help from HR to do it right."

"I wish that the HR process was digital instead of having to fill out paper copies."

"I would like to see some of our partners, especially HR, be more responsive to the needs of the facility by being more available to us as a resource. I have had instances where I needed HR assistance or information to complete duties and they were not available in a timely manner (or provided incorrect information)."

"You cannot get an entire picture of a situation from HR no matter what you do. It is always routing to someone else or they only hold part of the information and reach out to supervisors for information that is held by HR. HR needs to be on site."

"I believe that some in the HR role have forgotten that the HR personnel are there to support the employees."

"HR needs improvement in its systems and communication."

"I would like to see/hear from HR. I felt as though I was playing detective trying to find things out for myself."

"How is reassignment due to the vaccine mandate a reasonable accommodation? If already working from home, how can you possibly find me another job that has a greater benefit than that? How is this the only reasonable accommodation when I already have been accommodated by working from home permanently."

A few described issues with the investigation process.

"Investigations are being weaponized and that needs to be addressed. People that lie, just to get staff in trouble whom they don't like, need to be stopped. And those individuals need to be held accountable."

"Investigative team should give feedback when a case is reported to them, especially if it involves bullying and racism."

"[Change] the way investigations are handled. People are accused with no ability to confront the accusations or the accuser."

Others made suggestions on disciplinary measures.

"To end the practice of terminating employment of workers who make private and personal decisions based on their paradigm of individual health, safety, and conscience."

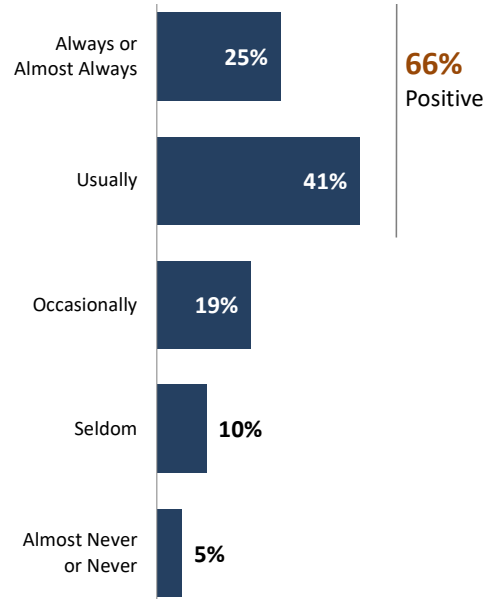"Implement a progressive discipline system that leads to termination."

"The disciplinary process here needs to be completely overhauled. Someone's personal opinion or hearsay comments can drastically have serious effects on one's emotional wellness."

QUESTION. I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.
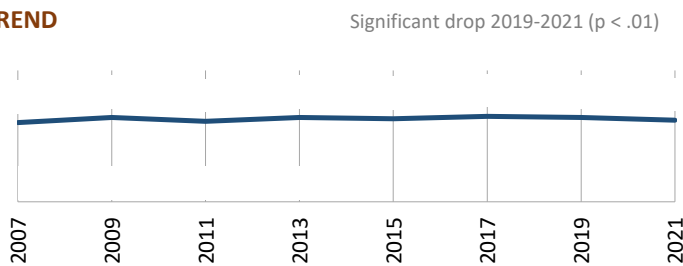
More than six of 10 employees (66%) said they always or usually have access to the tools and resources needed for their job.

In their comments, employees praised physical resources that allowed for continuing flexibility in their work environment. They also mentioned the availability of software that makes meetings and staying in contact easier. Some employees asked for tools to enhance their remote work. Others were interested in finding more resources for clients. Employees also described the importance of training, wellness and mental health, and in-office resources.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	25%
Usually	41%
Occasionally	19%
Seldom	10%
Almost Never or Never	5%

66% Positive

TREND   Significant drop 2019-2021 (p < .01)

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees enjoy flexible meetings and a hybrid workplace.

"[I like] having Teams and other remote tools to allow remote working."

"I love that even though we are all working remotely, we still take time to stay in contact with each other via MS Teams."

"We are grateful for Zoom and Microsoft Teams… however, it is not the same and some staff are needing more connection."

"Continuation of online tools for zoom, skype, MS Teams as they promote efficient, easy communication almost better than face to face with online sharing of screens."

Many said the current resources are helpful.

"I appreciate the state cars for conducting state business."

"I LOVE being able to work from home every day. The equipment I was able to take home has made work seamless and highly efficient."

"I think my job acknowledges both burnout and the hard things we deal with on a daily basis and they try to make the tools available to reduce that struggle."

"[I like] the ability to telework. Having all the tools needed to be successful, laptop, screens etc."

"I just received a laptop to work remotely which is great."

"I enjoy being able to help clients over the phone and feel that I'm able to help more people with the new phone system."

"I really like that there is an actual training course; we're not just thrown to learn by observing others."
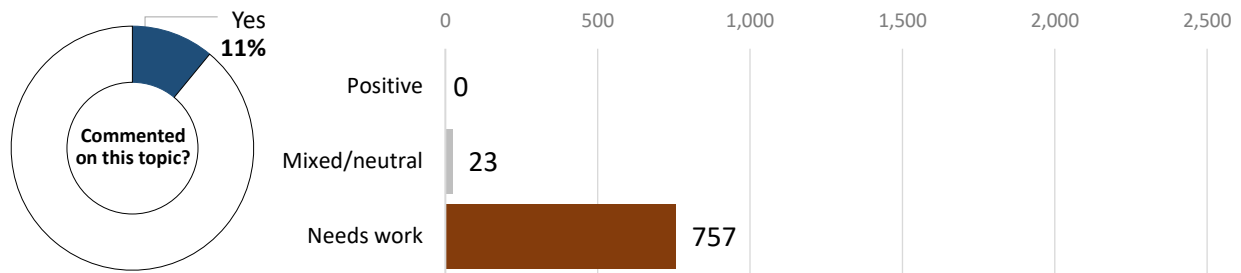
Many asked for mobile tools to increase efficiency.

"I believe our team could use some better technology, since we are all going to be working from home, it would be nice to have laptops so we can move around from work to the office if necessary."

"My only need that would improve my efficiency is the ability to scan/print from my home work station."

"It would be very helpful if there were a way to allow teleworkers to print work-related forms from home. Even if we needed to use very basic printers that can't store information or require a direct connection to be able to print, this would be very helpful."

"I would like to see less paper in the workplace. Tablets would be efficient to open a better line of communication and reduce our carbon footprint."

They want more options for clients.

"I would like to see more outreach services provided to community partners. Specifically, there is an existing need in the community, especially amongst those experiencing homelessness and living on the street, for assistance through the process of applying for, and in some cases, maintaining the ABD [Aged, Blind, Disabled] program."

"I like being able to see results with helping vulnerable adults. This seldom occurs because there are no resources to provide."

"Create more learning opportunities for our patients, bringing experts in, or allowing the patients to share their experiences with others."

THEME. Staffing

780 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned staffing.

Yes **11%**

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	0					
Mixed/neutral	23					
Needs work	757					

Staffing and retention continue to be areas of concern. Employees were more likely to comment about staffing than in 2019, and nearly all expressed dissatisfaction. The 757 who made negative comments or suggestions for improvement asked to:

- Address safety concerns that arise from understaffing
- Prioritize employee retention and find key areas to focus improvement
- Decrease workload and lower stress on current employees
- Assess staff quality as well as quantity

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees expressed concerns about understaffing.

"More staff. More staff. More staff. Been dangerously short for years and years. It's going to cost someone their life. This is your forewarning."

"It would be really nice if we could staff the other five positions in my team so that my team wasn't overburdened with keeping the lights on and could mature our services."

"[I would like] staffing levels increased to meet the needs being experienced by clients."

"The pandemic has brought about an unprecedented staffing shortage. We can either move to get ahead of it or suffer regress in much of the forward progress that has been made."

"We need more staffing on the wards. It is not safe and we are losing people in mass numbers. I am very worried about it."

"I am currently doing two jobs due to lack of staff and poor planning. We need help. No one can continue to be worked like this and remain healthy."

"We need a safe staffing ratio. Staff and patients get hurt all the time for working short-staffed."

"We are short-staffed and put in illegal and dangerous situations daily and no one cares."

"Staffed adequately, less floating all over."

"Everyone is working so short-staffed that no one is getting anything productive done. Just putting on band aids, not solving the problem."

"We are working critically short all the time and it does not feel like we are getting any help or support."

"The agency holds on to staff even if they are not good employees just because we are in such a staffing crisis."

Many want more focus on employee retention.

"[I would like] better effort in staffing this facility and actually retaining staff."

"Popcorn days, and prizes for a contest do nothing for retention."

"More efforts for retention of new and existing staff."

"Given the apparent problem with staff retention and high turnover, it seems necessary to promote some sort of incentives (telecommute options, alternative work schedules) or some other ideas to encourage retention."

"We need to do something about retention. It puts so much stress on the region and units when staff leave."

"Retention of staff has been tough and will only continue to get more competitive."

"More attention paid by the department to meeting the needs of existing employees, so there is less turnover and staffing shortages."

"Given the apparent retention problems and high turnover rate, prioritizing incentives to stay would be important."

"Turnover is constant and hiring is slow. Direct more focus and resources towards hiring and retention."

Several tried to pinpoint a cause of retention issues.

"I'm losing great employees due to low wages and am having problems recruiting qualified employees to replace them."

"Employee incentives to help retain staff. One big issue at this time is child care for many working families."

"There are positions that are not paid well. I would like to see these positions receive greater pay. This may prevent the turnover that we currently have."

"To retain employees. Too many quit due to the way they're treated."

THEME. Pay and benefits

741 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned pay and benefits.
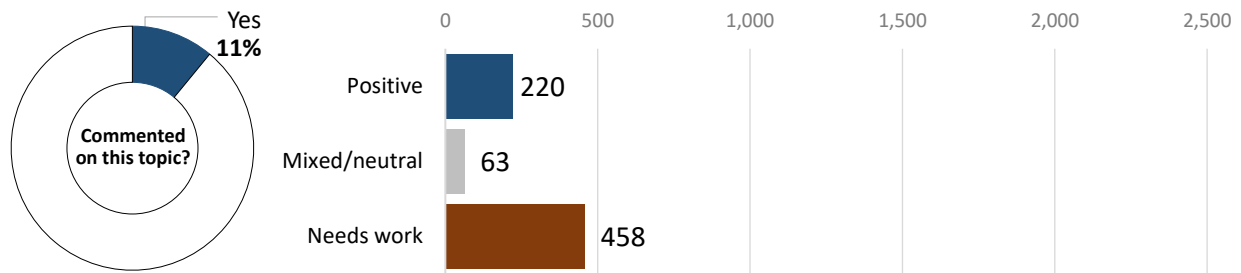
Pay and benefits are important to employees. The pandemic brought a new layer of responses, some asked for hazard pay or incentives for working in dangerous conditions. Employees continue to make positive references to job security and benefits. Suggestions for improvement came in a few key areas:

- Pay increases related to pandemic work, including hazard pay
- Raises that keep pace with the cost of living
- Bonuses or incentives that assist with recruitment and retention

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees are grateful for job security, pay, and benefits.

"At this point, [I like] that I have a job."

"[I like] the ability to receive health insurance."

"The benefits are good."

"What I like the best is job security."

"[I like] that I get a paycheck at this point."

"[I like the] retirement package."

"[I like] the benefits of annual time off and sick leave."

"[I like] the security of having it.

Many want pay increases related to COVID impact.

"Since the Covid- 19 pandemic started, other organizations have increased pay for their workers. If DSHS would give this a thoughtful consideration."

"You are paying those who work with our most vulnerable adults, barely a living wage. We were the frontline staff during Covid and not once was a pay raise even brought to the table."

"I would like to see my administration offer hazard pay to our workers going into the field during this pandemic. And even a hiring bonus to gain and retain talent. Even Burger King has a hiring bonus. I truly believe we can do better."

"[I would like] some incentives for those of us who have been standing strong and being here for our clients through this Covid mess."

"Hazard pay in regards to dangers with fulfilling the job, especially during the pandemic."

"I would like to see compensation for working in a hazardous field of work, if it's mandated that I need to be vaccinated due to potential work place exposure, along with being mandated to wear PPE, then there should be some acknowledgement of this hazard and compensation for such."

**Several asked for raises and incentives.**

"A cost of living adjustment, so I can afford to live."

"We all need raises. The legislature and higher management gets raises, and we are barely a step away from poverty and being clients ourselves."

"Offer hire-on bonus and incentives for those of us that are left."

"More money to those of us who actually physically interact with clients."

"Better compensation so I do not need to have multiple jobs."

Some said current wages need to be more competitive.

"I would like to see more competitive wages. Currently you can work at Panda Express starting at $20.50 an hour plus a bonus. The work is not as dangerous as working with some of our clients, there is no feces being thrown, and you aren't mandated to work every day."

"The pay within DSHS, especially for hands-on, essential, direct care workers should be looked as an embarrassment to the agency in whole. When employees can work way less and get paid more at almost any company, including fast food, there is something wrong."

"Equity in the compensation among peers and other agencies – seems we are always at the bottom."

"A little wage increase because the private sector has a competitive edge. It affects the guys we refer to be part of our team. They say they can get better pay out there."

"Offer competitive pay so we can retain our most talented employees. The gap between the ever-rising minimum wage and our salaries is shrinking and it is difficult to attract good candidates."

"I would like to see salaries be more competitive with the private sector."

THEME. Training

495 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned training.
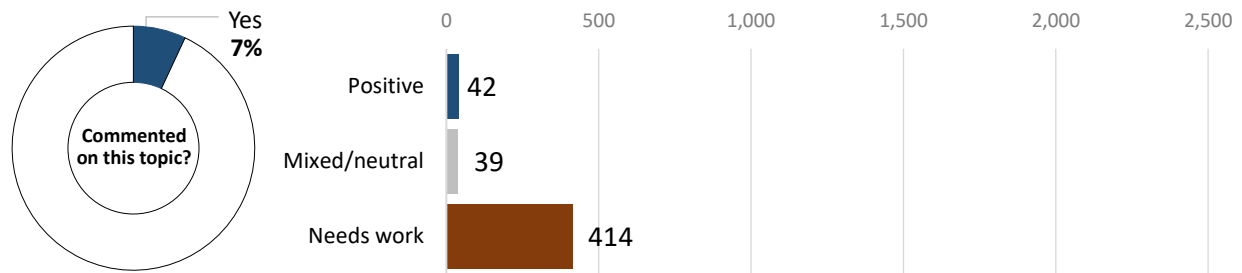
Employees voiced many concerns about training. Some described difficulty with adequate training in the midst of staffing fluctuations and retention challenges. While some were appreciative of the training they had received, 414 made requests in these areas:

- Flexible training options that reflect the new hybrid work environment
- Quality training offered at the onset of employment and continuing periodically
- Focus on collaborative training options, including cross-training and job shadowing

►What DSHS employees said …

A few expressed appreciation for training.

"So far it has provided excellent training/learning opportunities."

"I truly appreciate the opportunities for excellent training and continuing education that my job at OFMHS [Office of Forensic Mental Health Services] provides me."

"I love all the upfront training as a new employee."

Employees have mixed thoughts on remote training.

"I would like to see more training on how to train staff remotely, as well as the opportunity to train more remotely."

"I would like to see further modernization of trainings."

"[I would like to] participate in trainings and/or meetings remotely."

"Face to face interactions, such as meetings, work groups, trainings, etc. needs to start. Virtual meetings and trainings are not effective for learning. Creates disconnect and less engagement."

"More adjustments based on our new virtual reality and telework environment. Specifically, training can't be done 'the way it's always been done.'"

Many had issues with training quality.

"The fact that staff spend 18 months in training and still are not confident in performing their job functions is the key bottleneck."

"Turnover rate in this field is tremendous and a lack of quality training plays into that. I did not feel well prepared for my role, which isn't beneficial for me or my clients."

"A more streamlined, effective way to train."

"I am fairly new to my agency and I think the trainings could be a little bit more organized with clear, expected outcomes."

They would like training in specific areas.

"Trainings that support respectful communication."

"More development training for non-management staff."

"Train supervisors on how to lead."

"I would like to see better training in the supervisor-level staff."

"Better classes on how to protect yourself from the mentally disabled clients."

"I would like to see more de-escalation training as well as trauma training. I think more training would help us do our job better. We need training for the mental health portion, especially with our new clientele."

**Some are interested in job shadowing, cross-training, and collaborative learning.**

"More peer-to-peer group learning opportunities and make those groups official and ongoing. For example: monthly OneNote Group with peer experts, or SQL Group with peer experts that meet monthly."

"More cross-training."

"I would like to see more opportunities to job-shadow and advance in my career."

"I think there needs to be more cross-training so things don't get siloed with one team or person."

"Better opportunities for all staff who are interested to have developmental job assignments."

Several requested continuing or refresher training.

"I would like refresher training, especially as things are changing rapidly."

"There needs to be regular training provided to line staff."

"It's hard to get everyone trained. Once we get trained on something, it seems as if something changes once again."

THEME. Facilities and environment

297 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned their physical work environment.
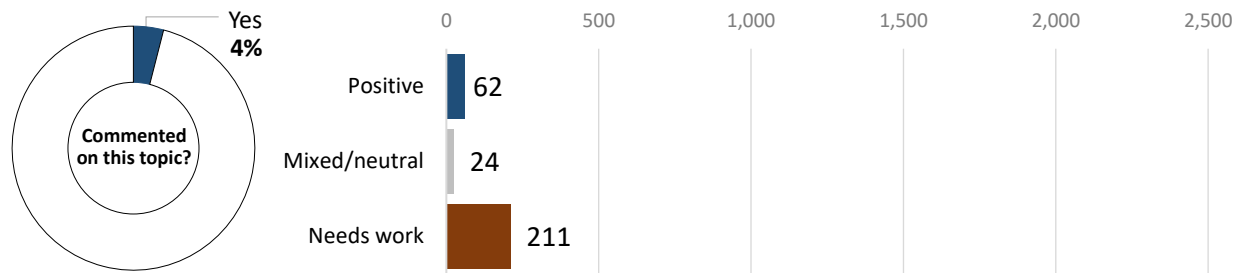
The physical work environment has changed dramatically for many, and the outlook on physical workspace reflects that. Most comments were challenges or suggestions for improvement.

- Employees often referred to hybrid workspaces, requesting a different approach to in-office days.
- Some want a cleaner building and more attention to keeping employees healthy.
- Others are concerned about lighting and noise levels in the office and asked for changes to their cubicle.

►What DSHS employees said …

Many staff would like improvements to their hybrid work environment.

"If I am required to come to an office during a pandemic, I don't find it to be fitting to be forced to share a space."

"More touchdown stations that are fully functional in the office."

"Continue teleworking but not take away desk space for when we need to go to the office last minute. Having my own space at the office makes me feel more like part of the team rather than a 'guest' in my own office."

"Downsize the office space into a fully realized modern, hybrid-remote work environment. There is currently a lot of superfluous space."

"I would like to come into the office only 2 days per week and be able not to share a cubicle."

"Combine workspaces with other divisions and/or agencies to consolidate space and reduce rents. Five or six years ago, our facilities director showed a video of the Governor's direction with workspace – that we would have pods or not come into the office at all. While I don't necessarily agree with that vision, it appears to me that it's here and should be followed through on."

Employees had mixed responses about commuting.

"The commute (i.e., ferry and bus ride) results in an enormous degree of strain on the work-life balance, which is one of the major reasons why there has been a large turnover rate."

"I'm commuting opposite directions from traffic jams. I have my very own desk area."

"It's close to where I live. Short commute."

"[I like that] it is close to home for me."

"Some of us commute quite a few miles when we have to go into the office. Hence the draw to telework."

Some are concerned about their health and building cleanliness.

"Coming back to a clean sterile building would have been preferred."

"Ensuring cleanliness and health are most important when not telecommuting, when using a shared workspace/restrooms/elevators/stairs, etc."

"[I would like] a healthier building to work in. The building is physically toxic for me and makes it impossible to work full-time on site. And there are no alternative sites available that would be less toxic."

"I would like to have all of the garbage picked up, including the dead rats, used condoms and needles."

"Hire a company that actually cleans the building, not just vacuums the open areas. NOTHING is disinfected, despite a deadly virus that many have tested positive for and been in the office carrying it."

Others had issues with cubicle lighting and noise.

"Less overhead lighting – enhance lighting with desktop/level lighting. Higher cube walls (my standing desk requires that I wear a mask all the time because my walls aren't high enough for me to stand unmasked). Given the masking requirements from the pandemic, I feel that all the cubes should be increased in height. This would also help to reduce noise."

"More privacy in office cubicles."

"Adjusting the cubicles at the CSO [Community Services Office] to allow for more natural light into workspaces to reduce eye-strain and eye-fatigue."

"Working from home has allowed me to have a nice work area with a window. At work, my cubicle is dark and dreary."

"Better design of the cubicle space to cut down the noise."

THEME. Resources for clients, and other resources

326 of the 7,032 employees who made comments mentioned general and client resource issues.
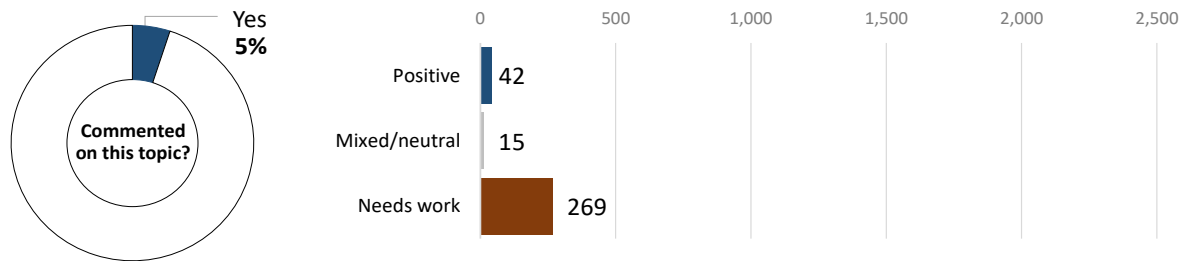
Many employees expressed dissatisfaction with the resources that are available for their work and also for clients. Common areas of suggested improvement include:

- More facilities, education, and community resources for clients
- Widely available laptops, cell phones, and equipment needed to work remotely
- In-office improvements, including new vehicles, charging stations, touchless doors/handles, Wi-Fi, and updated technology and software

►What DSHS employees said …

Employees would like to offer clients more resources.

"I would like to see more dementia care facilities and education."

"Opening up more opportunities for community outings. Bringing animal assisted therapies back."

"The kitchen was built two years ago, and yet our patients are eating canned vegetables?? I would like to see the money put into the kitchen be reflected in the quality of the meals sent out to the wards."

"More resources available (providers and vendors for services). I think there needs to be a big effort to make communication connections to get more providers to provide services locally."

"More services available for seniors."

"Having additional resources to be able to help people; more funding for Long Term Care services as well as housing subsidies."

"More resources in the community for DD [developmentally disabled] people to participate in."

"I would love to see more efforts to increase partnerships with community entities (to provide more staffing/caregiving services) and contractors (to select for behavioral supports and specialized residential options for clients). Presently there are not enough caregivers and service providers to fill the need and clients are waiting far too long to have services begin, due to a lack of resources."

"More resources for placement and in-home care."

"DCS [Division of Child Support] needs a more educational platform for clients."

"When a resident is punching a block wall, for instance, and we suspect that bones may be broken, we have no way of knowing for sure without an X-ray. It would be nice and convenient to be able to X-ray in our clinic."

Many requested equipment that increases flexibility.

"I'd like to see more equipment available to take home."

"Given that telework is the new 'normal', it would be nice to have laptops for staff that don't have access to secure information, so that while working remotely they can say work in a library for more productivity. Cellphones are also more efficient than desk phones at this point."

"Laptops available for all teleworking employees. Having a desktop computer prevents flexibility in working in alternate locations."

"I would like to use a state laptop and a state cell phone when working remotely. Or I would like reimbursement/allowance to purchase additional equipment to be used for work."

"Better remote/teleworking equipment; small printers for teleworkers. The time wasted to travel just to print is ridiculous."
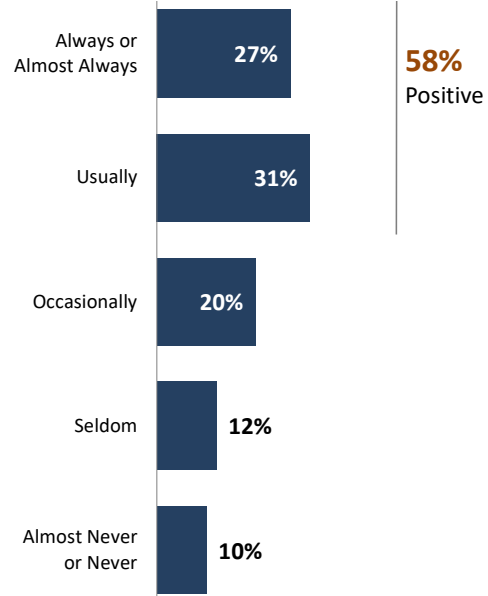
Others asked for resources related to in-office work.

"New state vehicles to use for clients for community building. Some state vans are outdated."

"I would like to see touchless faucets and flush meters. What good is an automatic door if you still have to touch the toilet handle and faucet handle to shut it off?"

"We are using aging mainframe systems and limited resources in too many places, forcing front line workers to manage more work manually."

"ELECTRIC CAR CHARGERS ON EAST CAMPUS. There are only 3 or 4 on the whole campus, on the west side (and at least one of those is reserved for handicapped), for 2500 employees!"

"Wi-Fi available for staff/public use."

"I work on antiquated equipment using outdated software."

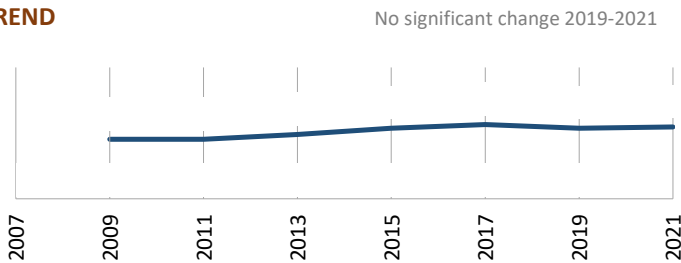## QUESTION. Overall, my agency supports me in living a healthier life.

Nearly six of 10 employees (58%) said the agency supports them in living a healthier life. More than two of 10 (22%) disagreed.

Many noted that telework had a positive impact on their mental health and attributed agency support for a healthier life to their flexible work environment. Employees are interested in wellness events and initiatives. They often requested more time to attend to mental health needs.

ANSWERS

Answer	%
Always or Almost Always	27%
Usually	31%
Occasionally	20%
Seldom	12%
Almost Never or Never	10%

58% Positive

TREND   No significant change 2019-2021

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Employees praised efforts to promote health and wellness.

"I DO appreciate our Regional Admin for allowing the purchase of multiple HEPA filters!!!"

"I also love how this agency supports living a healthier lifestyle. These are not things that every agency values."

"[I like] how we receive constant support for self-care and information on topics that make employees know they are valued."

"Our leaders are working diligently to make sure that the hospital is a healthy and safe place to work in."

"[I like the] clean and healthy environment."

"[I like my] supervisor's support for self-care."

Some relate their wellness with the ability to telework.

"[I like] the new telework program that allows me to apply to telework for a better work/home life and wellness balance."

"The ability to work remotely. It helps with my anxiety, and I don't have to worry about exposure to COVID. Also, I have other health issues and working from home allows me to work around my health issues."

"[I like] the flexibility to work from home. It allows me to have time to do things to promote my well-being."

"Teleworking has been a huge blessing. Being out of the office drama and not having to walk on eggshells is so good for your mental health."

"Flexibility to work from home affords me better health and access to proper foods without extra cost; exercise during breaks."

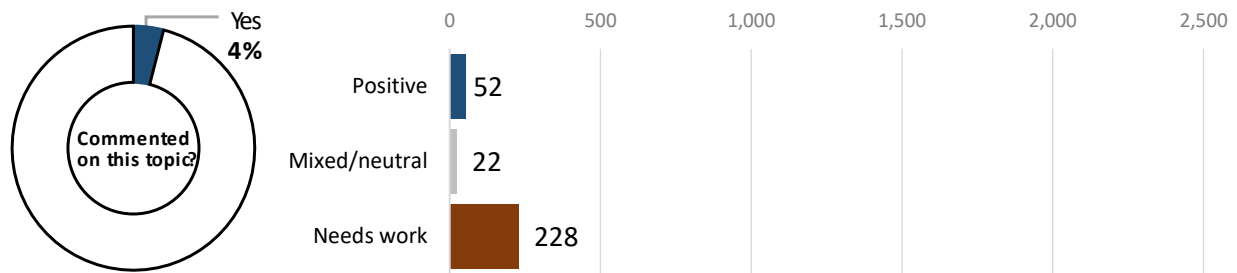**Employees requested wellness events and incentives.**

"Some government agencies provide a 'wellness hour' to employees. The time is used for either mental or physical well-being and is included in the employee's schedule, unlike lunch. If DSHS were serious about employees living a healthier life, it should consider something like this."

"Wellness Events for staff are also very large on the OB campuses but never anywhere around the state."

"Wellness Wednesday is appreciated, but there needs to be more of a push on health and wellness."

"I think that DSHS should extend CTR [commute trip reduction] subsidies to bicyclists and walkers. This helps employee health, wellness, and the environment."

They want prioritized time for mental health.

"We are all here to serve the clients, but we cannot do this to the best of our abilities if we cannot take the time for our own mental health."

"Employee wellness is critical – we need more recharge time. Angry client after angry client. Through no fault of my own, I am yelled at daily, sometimes even personally attacked by strangers who haven't had their basic needs met. We need more time for our mental health to be able to take care of others."

"The horses in the glue factories had more break time than us. Do you guys forget that we are taking care of vulnerable adults and the job itself is mentally and physically draining for the 8 hours we are already supposed to be here?"

THEME. Safety issues

302 of the 7,032 employees who made comments addressed staff safety issues.

Yes
4%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	52					
Mixed/neutral	22					
Needs work	228					

Staff raised concerns about their physical safety. Some noted potential health risks from returning to the workplace and interacting with clients. Others in residential care facilities described encounters with patient assaults. Several noted security issues with the building, parking lot, and general location. A few praised remote work, connecting it with their sense of safety.

►What DSHS employees said …

Several said remote work helped them feel safe.

"I love telecommuting. I feel very safe and calm when I work from home."

"The ability to telework during this pandemic so that everyone can take precautions and be safe. While DSHS transforms lives, teleworking is saving lives (of DDA staff) since over 800,000 people have died due to COVID."

"I liked that originally my employer valued my life and allowed me to work from home instead of dying from the pandemic as I am a high risk individual."

Employees would like safety improvements through staffing levels and improved client contact.

"Better support for handling dangerous clients. Stop letting us get assaulted."

"They are asking too much from the staff that have stayed since March of 2020. We are being worked to a point of safety issues for the staff and clients."

"Better physical barriers between clients and staff to protect us better from infectious diseases, physical aggression, etc."

"Staff need to be protected from injury from residents."

"SECURITY for nurses. It is severely lacking to the point of negligence."

"There are signs posted about not tolerating violence, assaults, and how the hospital works with staff who press charges. Management blames staff for being assaulted. Blames co-workers, implying they are incompetent and focuses all resources on 1% of the population, ignoring 99% of the population. Patients, assault peers, assaulter does not get moved. Victim does not get moved. They continue to reside on the same ward. Patients assault numerous staff, nothing happens by WSH management until L&I [Labor and Industries] comes and suddenly bully patient is transferred to CFS [Center for Forensic Services]."

Some feel unsafe in their physical work location.

"The neighborhood around the office is dangerous. There is no security and we are mandated to keep our office door open even though we do not serve the public. I feel very unsafe and vulnerable."

"Need to improve workplace/environmental safety - bats/wild animals are found within hospital campus."

"I would like to have exterior cameras installed, so that maybe we might know who shot our office full of bullets this week."

"Our office is in an unsafe neighborhood and staff retention is low. We have a large homeless population who leave drug paraphernalia outside our doors and next to our vehicles. Not safe for clients or staff and brings down morale. We would like to move to a business complex like all of our sister programs in the region."

"I think the parking garage is very unsafe."

"More sidewalks for staff to safely walk on."

"The office I work in is in an unsafe neighborhood. HQ personnel would not be thrilled if they had to work in the environment and surroundings that some of us have to endure. If we must return to the physical office, I would like to see us relocate to a safer area."

Some noted safety concerns of returning to the workplace.

"Many staff in our office have raised safety concerns with the lobby reopening."

"More safety measures for staff during the Covid-19 crisis."

"We're coming in to work when COVID cases and deaths are still high. Our safety is being placed after politics."

"With the Covid-19 virus going on, I don't feel it is safe to see clients face to face."

"Since returning to the office there have been safety concerns which are not being fully addressed by supervisors and leadership, since they are not there."

THEME. Wellness and mental health

135 of the 7,032 employees who made comments addressed wellness or mental health.
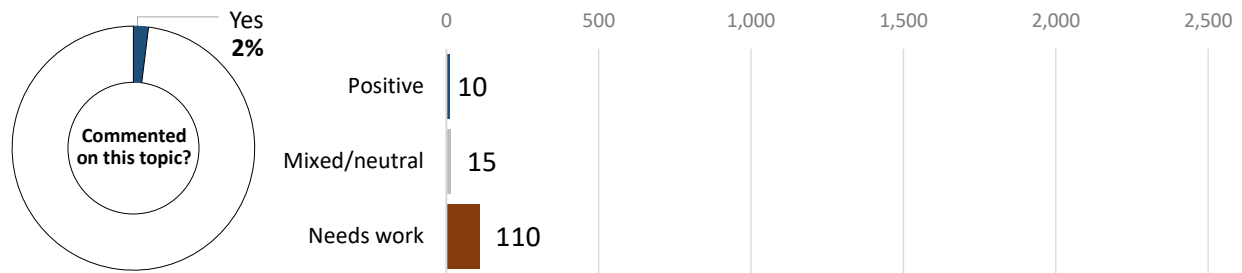
Wellness and mental health are important to employees, specifically regarding telework and workplace reopening. More than eight of 10 staff commenting on wellness and mental health were critical or suggested improvements. Many focused on mental health and requested resources and time to prioritize their wellness. Some asked for physical spaces, including break rooms and exercise spaces. Others want fresh water and healthier food options. Ergonomic equipment continues to be a priority, for in-office and teleworking employees.

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees want time allotted for mental health.

"Greater encouragement to take 'mental health days' and a greater focus on burnout."

"I'd like the DSHS organization to fully support and allow employees who work directly with the public to be allowed to use their sick leave for mental health days."

"Authorized time for WMR (Welfare, Motivation and Recreation) group of your choice at least an hour a month."

"Implement staff mental health days or trainings. I think sometimes our agency is so focused on meeting certain requirements that they forget about their actual employees."

Some asked for wellness spaces, fresh food and water options, and better air quality.

"A relaxation room for the clinical department to facilitate self-care."

"An employee lounge or quiet room when needed."

"I would like to see a designated wellness space. Some place for people to relax, read, nap, etc. Not just a coat closet but an actual space for people to have some much-needed time to regroup and relax."

"I would like something done to improve the air quality inside the office, which has always been atrocious."

"[I would like] activities where we can participate physically. For example, a 10 minute yoga session during lunch or in the morning … or a group walk around the facility during lunch."

"Provide exercise programs when the pandemic ends to encourage a healthier lifestyle."

"More fitness ideas and encouragement to stay healthy."

"Fresh water in the break room/lunch room on in-person work days."

"Fresh food options on campus."

Ergonomic equipment is requested across workplaces.

"Management to provide the necessary equipment, at NO cost to the employee, to allow working from home at an ergonomic workstation."

"Ergonomic support for at-home office."

"More ergonomic options for working at home."

"I would also love to see teleworkers get the opportunity to get an ergo desk at home."

"Ergonomic equipment in the office for employees. There is much information on the state website on why it is needed, but the office only has 2 stand up desks and the chairs do not work for everyone."

They would like more focus on self-care and wellness.

"Administration continues to make decisions that directly affect our job without taking into consideration the safety and mental well-being of all the staff and residents."

"I will eventually not be able to telework at all and be required to be in the office 100% of the time. This is not 'equitable' or 'inclusive.' This will ultimately force me into a potential health hazard due to my sensitivities and allergies to all the cleaning chemicals and sanitizers now being used in excess in the office buildings."

"Instead of preaching to employees to practice self-care, there needs to be an organizational push to teach, encourage, and model self-care behaviors."

"More time for our own mental health."

"[I would like to] address anxiety caused by work."

"I don't feel the agency's concern towards my mental and emotional health."

"Better support for staff mental health."

"More discussion on how managers can support staff dealing with burnout or Covid fatigue. This past year has been extremely difficult for staff, and the types of conversations they are having with clients, and balancing their own personal mental health."

"Pumpkin, The Blue-eyed Corgi Pup"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Lance Garcia, with permission

"Spouses Promotion 6/1/2021" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Family
By Amber Perez, with permission

From the photographer:
Photo from my husband's promotion ceremony over the summer. DSHS is an inclusive employer who celebrates diversity and people from all walks of life, including myself as a military spouse. Thanks to DSHS being open and accepting, I was able to take time off to attend this monumental event and celebrate my spouse.

CHAPTER 6

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

THE 2021 SURVEY RESULTS SHOW THE PROFOUND IMPACT OF COVID on employee engagement across all parts of DSHS. Changes since the last comprehensive survey in 2019 correspond almost exactly with the first two years of the pandemic. The experience of COVID is reflected in all parts of the report, but the current chapter is primarily concerned with the agency response as experienced by the DSHS workforce.

The agency response to COVID includes remarkable successes that are documented in the preceding chapters. However, the survey results also show that DSHS employees have endured a prolonged period of stress, uncertainty, and in some cases, hardship. Agency-wide employee engagement is substantially lower in 2021 than in 2019. Turnover has been high and staffing is still low in some critical areas. Many are still experiencing burnout and the long term effects of trauma. Some employees feel that their contributions have come at the expense of their individual needs, and that their sacrifices have not been adequately recognized. Many are concerned that their positive experience with telework may be short-lived if they are required to return to their workplaces on a full-time basis. These and other challenges must be recognized and addressed if DSHS is to realize the goal of becoming an employer of choice.

VACCINE MANDATE. The delayed survey start date (November 1, 2021) meant that only employees who were vaccinated or working under an accommodation were eligible to participate. Still, 287 employees (4% of those who commented) referenced the mandate in their open-ended comments.

- **Most comments were negative or suggestions for improvement** (227, or 3% of all who commented in the survey). Some employees made mixed or neutral comments (54, 1% of respondents who commented), and only six respondents made positive comments about the mandate.
- **Concerns about the mandate.** Concerns included statements that the mandate was not needed for employees who work from home; that the mandate did not respect the personal values, religious commitments, or political views of some employees; and objections to being "forced" to submit to unwanted medical procedures.

AGENCY RESPONSE. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) introduced four new questions on the response to COVID. One of these questions regarding reopening and a new question about navigating change address the agency response in general.

- **Many feel that their needs are not often considered.** Slightly more than half of responding employees (55%) indicated satisfaction with how the agency is responding to staff needs during the pandemic.
- **More help is needed in navigating change.** Only half of respondents (50%) said that their agency always or usually helps them navigate change.

REOPENING THE WORKPLACE. Employees reported low satisfaction with communications and decisions around returning to DSHS offices for work.
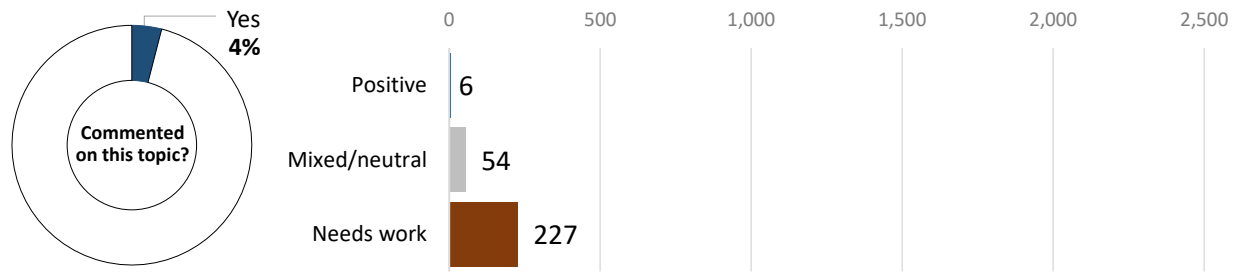
- **Communications have not always been clear.** Only 51% of employees said that their agency clearly communicates the reasons for decisions on reopening the workplace.
- **Some feel they are not listened to.** Only 50% of employees said their agency listens to their needs for reopening the workplace.
- **Concerns about returning to the workplace.** 789 employees (11% of those who made comments) commented on this topic, sharing concerns about:
    - Inconsistent or inadequate communication
    - Fairness in decisions about who can continue to telework and who must return in person
    - Losing the ability to telework

OTHER ISSUES RELEVANT TO COVID. Satisfaction with work relationships appears stable. A variety of additional topics related to COVID appeared in open-ended comments. Increases in negative comments about workload, staffing, diversity/discrimination, management listening, and morale all seem linked to concerns about staff loss due to the vaccine mandate and other COVID-related policy decisions. Attention to these issues may have led to a decrease in comments in other areas where criticism has been common in previous surveys, such as management courtesy and fairness, co-workers, training, and facilities.

- **Employees are mostly satisfied with their ability to develop and maintain relationships with co-workers.** More than two of three respondents said they were always or usually satisfied with their ability to develop and maintain relationships with co-workers (69%).
- **Employees described many issues relating to COVID (some of these are addressed in other chapters):**
    - Many expressed satisfaction with their co-workers, teams, and the ability to telework.
    - There were many positive comments about work-life balance among teleworkers.
    - Some expressed concerns for the impact of the pandemic on client care.
    - There were a number of concerns or suggestions on prevention protocols and the health concerns of individual employees.
    - Many believe their sacrifices during COVID should be recognized as salary increases or other compensation.
    - There were many complaints of stress, fatigue, and burnout.

THEME. Vaccine mandate

287 of the 7,032 employees who commented mentioned the vaccine mandate.

Commented on this topic?
- Yes **4%**

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	6					
Mixed/neutral	54					
Needs work	227					

The vaccine mandate was fully implemented less than two weeks before the survey began, but relatively few employees (287) mentioned it in their comments. Only six of these discussed the mandate in positive terms. Most of the comments were negative or suggestions for improvement (227). Common topics among these were:

- Lack of respect for employees' personal values, religious commitments, or political views
- Attribution of staffing problems to the mandate
- Comments that the mandate was not needed for employees who work from home

►What DSHS employees said …

A few spoke positively about the mandate.

"I also am very happy that DSHS and the Governor value my health & the health of others during this pandemic and I'm grateful for the vaccine mandates."

"I LOVE mandating vaccinations - it is selfish for people to only think about themselves and not wanting to help protect the clients, co-workers, family."

"I also appreciate that we are following the vaccine mandate and doing our best to avoid spreading COVID-19. I know some people were angry about that but I feel that it is important to keep our patients and our fellow employees as safe and healthy as we can and I agree that vaccines are a good way to help with that."

Some said the mandate was discriminatory.

"Embracing true diversity and inclusion to include acceptance and value of individuals who have worldviews, personal values, and medical needs that do not align with the directives/decisions of Washington State elected officials."

"It was wrong to fire people for religious beliefs. This was terrible!"

"For an agency to claim or boast about its forward progress in accepting diversity and equality, etc., they have not demonstrated fairness or equality to those who do not share the same opinions or values. Because Washington is a Liberal state, DSHS … now discriminates against individuals with a more conservative value system."

"I recovered from COVID, and am no more likely to spread or infect others than anyone else. I cannot help my permanent medical condition, and discrimination based on that is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act! Shame on you!"

Many linked the vaccine mandate to staffing problems.

"If we could not lose any more staff over their ability or desire to be vaccinated, that would be nice."

"The Governor fired people during a staffing crisis. And this is OK? Morale has never been so low."

"Due to forcing the vaccination we have lost highly skilled employees. This affects our ability to serve clients efficiently, creating delays in services that are pertinent to our community."

"I completely disagree with the vaccine mandate. We've lost employees even though they are teleworking full-time already and were denied reasonable accommodation/exception/exclusion. It doesn't make sense."

"Dedicated, knowledgeable state employees with several years of work experience (some 20+ years) have been fired or forced to retire. This has caused a mountain of work for employees that are already buried with their own work!"

Some mandate concerns were related to telework.

"There is absolutely no reason why we should return to the office if working remotely works for us and our superiors."

"This vaccine mandate has left me feeling broken. I was so sick and depressed to find out that my management would not accept what I have already been doing for over a year (teleworking)."
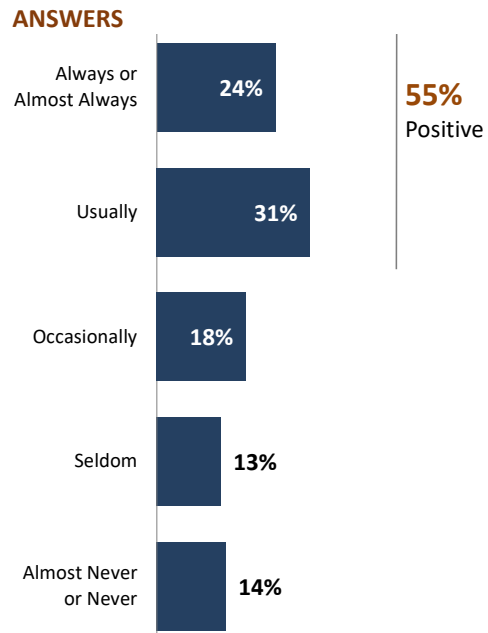
"I am unhappy that those who are unvaccinated are now allowed to only work from home over those of us who have seniority and would also like to work from home. It's as if I am now punished for following state mandates/requirements and getting vaccinated."

QUESTION. Overall, I am satisfied with how my agency is responding to staff needs during the pandemic.

Slightly more than half of employees (55%) said they are always or usually satisfied with the agency response to staff needs during the pandemic. Less than three of 10 respondents (27%) said that they are seldom or never satisfied.

A majority of employees were satisfied with the agency's response to their needs. Comments show that employees appreciate the ability to work remotely, flexibility in scheduling, and adapting work processes to fit new circumstances.

Those who were not satisfied mentioned high workloads and associated turnover, lack of compensation for risks taken, and leaders and managers who did not understand the impact of policies on frontline staff.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	24%
Usually	31%
Occasionally	18%
Seldom	13%
Almost Never or Never	14%

55% Positive

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Many were satisfied with the agency's response, especially with respect to telework.

"I appreciate the flexibility we had during COVID."

"The flexibility to work remotely with state resources has been a blessing in the midst of the pandemic."

"The flexibility with the hybrid work from home/return to office model we are working on and the ability to work on meaningful projects related to the pandemic."

"Management quickly responded during the pandemic to keep employees safe by sending most everyone to work from home, purchasing PPE, and additional disinfection to the offices in our part of the region."

"Overall, pandemic response has been good—managing Center for Forensic Services admissions from jail, for example. The availability asap of vaccines and boosters, plan for testing employees from lockdown wards etc… very important to me and to the health of employees and the organization."

"I like that the agency is doing its best in this transition period and in coping with Covid while still serving customers."

"I like that we adapted the service delivery model during the pandemic. I didn't honestly think that a government agency could adapt so quickly and embrace the change without tripping over itsself."

"I have been so pleased with the support provided to all during the pandemic from all layers of management."

Some feel that work expectations have been unreasonable, leading to burnout and increased turnover.

"Most of us are feeling burned out and it does not feel like we are appreciated by our employers/customers. Working through the pandemic has been horrible and the job is unappealing more than ever."

"It is unacceptable how much pressure has been put on Public Benefit Specialist staff this last 20 months. Constant changes, angry customers, pandemic-related concerns/uncertainty, etc., and yet the message from the top has felt like staff still are not doing enough."
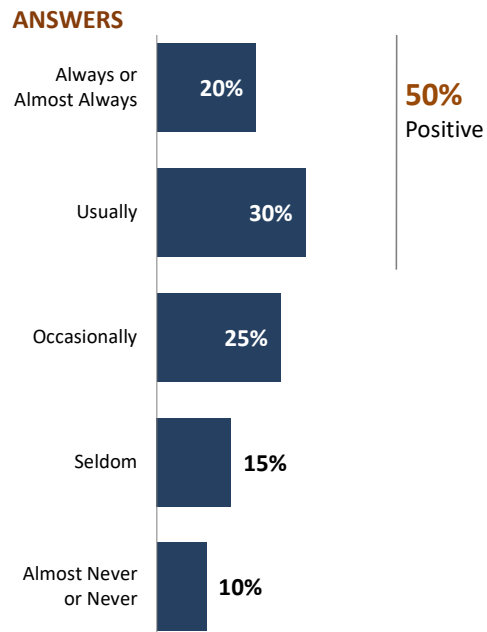
Employees discussed a variety of other needs.

"I would like to see a raise or hazard pay. It seems all DSHS contractors received higher wages during these last two years except field services staff."

"Training has been limited for the last two years due to the pandemic."

"Not having to go into the field until COVID-19 is over. Providers don't tell you that someone is exposed until after you've been there."

"It would be beneficial to accommodate employees who either manage or have family members who are managing grave illness or disability during this difficult time. It is not helpful to relay that they will lose their position if not able to conduct health and safety visits."

"More staff appreciation for staff that have worked through the pandemic and not left."

QUESTION. My agency helps me navigate change.

Only half of employees (50%) said their agency always or usually helps them navigate change. A quarter of respondents (25%) indicated they seldom, if ever, receive such help.

While half of respondents indicated satisfaction with agency change management, few explicitly referred to this in their comments. It was more common for satisfied employees to say that they appreciated opportunities to help themselves, teammates, or clients.

Many employees expressed frustration with leaders working from home when their staff were required to be in the office, poor communication about changes, too many changes happening too quickly, and insufficient time or effort devoted to change management.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percentage
Always or Almost Always	20%
Usually	30%
Occasionally	25%
Seldom	15%
Almost Never or Never	10%

50% Positive

►What DSHS employees said …

Some employees said their supervisors and teammates help them navigate change.

"When we hit an obstacle; my supervisor is always available to assist us in navigating around the obstacle. The one thing that makes it great: my supervisor doesn't give us the answer, we work through a solution as a collaborative group."

"[I like] the people I work with and my immediate supervisors who are trying to help us navigate change."

"[I like] that my boss works with his staff and all the changes we are dealing with and always steps in to help cover as needed."

"[I like] the supervisors who recognize changes make for more work in the beginning and help to fill the void!"

"My Field Manager and unit staff makes my day so much better and easier to cope with especially considering this pandemic that has been going on for two years now."

Several referred to agency or management support.

"I greatly appreciate agency support during times of change."

"Management listens to my concerns and effectively manages changes. If I'm ever feeling overwhelmed I am VERY comfortable talking with management because I know they will listen and do whatever they can to make things better."

"Management was proactive about teleworking, flexible and alternative schedules, and genuinely seemed to take action to ensure staff had a smooth transition to teleworking."

Some feel that the agency has not helped enough.

"Change starts from the top down… so unless your high ups change their attitude and behaviors, nothing is going to change!"

"Nursing leaders not present during pandemic. We have to navigate the crisis by ourselves."

"I would like to see better change management. It feels like, at times, decisions are made erratically… It takes a long time for clear communication about changes to happen and then when it comes time for the change to be implemented, the shifts come WAY too quickly."

"Community Services Division is great at starting new things, coming up with wonderful ideas, and being visionary but lacks proper follow-through. I wish CSD HQ team spent more time in change management."

Some feel that their leadership has made change more difficult.

"I am overwhelmed with the volume of changes with little clarification."

"At the beginning of the pandemic our leaders did everything they could to try and circumnavigate and avoid the need to work from home for the safety of our staff."
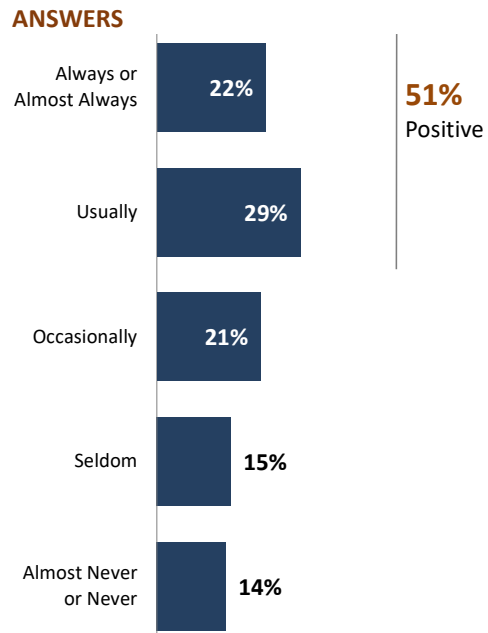
"Case Managers have been overwhelmed with sickness and death yet our administration has taken this opportunity to force us to use new tools that take way too much time and energy."

"Let's try an honest answer: My agency forces me to navigate change."

QUESTION. My agency clearly communicates the reasons for decisions it makes with reopening the workplace.

About half (51%) of the respondents said the agency always or usually communicates the reasons for decisions it makes with reopening the workplace. Nearly three of 10 (29%) said that reasons are seldom or never communicated clearly.

Only a few employees provided positive comments about the agency's communication of reopening decisions. Some of those who were dissatisfied on this issue described a lack of consistency in communication, not enough communication in general, and disappointment about returning to the workplace prematurely, often without explanation of the reasons.

ANSWERS

Always or Almost Always — **22%**

Usually — **29%**

Occasionally — **21%**

Seldom — **15%**

Almost Never or Never — **14%**

51% Positive

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Few made positive comments about this issue.

"ALTSA leadership is doing a great job communicating with staff and keeping us as up to date on what is happening as they can."

"Management in our division has been very flexible and kind in the way they have handled working from home and coming back to work. I so appreciate that everyone is treated with respect."

Some described inconsistent communication.

"We were told that the agency was moving forward with ideas to serve our clients on the phones, or via video conferencing, and yet our management now tells us we have to all go back to the office with a short period of time to transition."

"You cannot have many different pieces of info sent out and no one knows what they are supposed to do."

"The last minute changes of requirements for telework do not support a healthy work environment, but only promote stress and uncertainty. One upper management person says everyone has to fill out the telework forms and another says only people that are identified as being allowed to stay teleworking. Then at the last minute [they] send out a new telework application a few days before the deadline so everyone has to start over filling it out."

Many feel that there was not enough communication.

"I would like to see more support in helping people during the return to the office, and have more concrete instructions on the return to the office from higher ups."

"I really don't like how information is passed down from headquarters and the lack of reasoning behind actions taken."

"Would have liked to have seen much more advanced planning for the reopening efforts, given the amount of time we have had to plan since closing down offices. Preparation/planning was put off to the last minute and is now being rushed, with very limited communication and detail provided to local management and staff."

"I feel like we have been left in the dark and were sent to the office WAY before any actual plans were developed. We need rules about when it is appropriate to telework and flexibility around illness and child care."

Some feel that reasons were not explained at all.

"I think staff would benefit from more communication regarding the business need of reopening and requiring staff to be in office, as a lot of individuals communicate that there is no need or reason behind it."
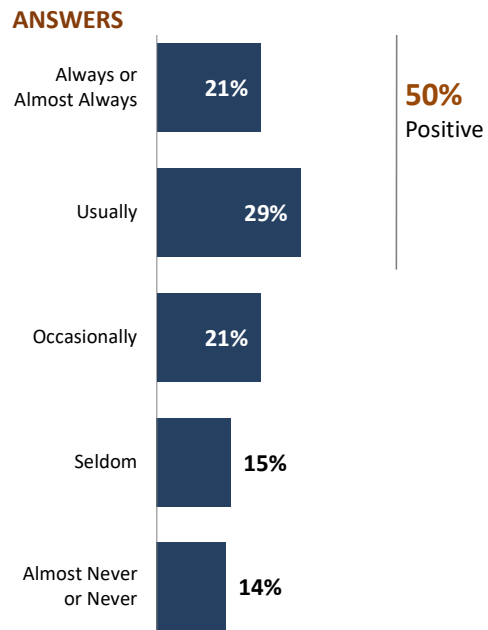
"I am being made to work full-time back in the office without a reason while my peers are all working one day a week in the office. I have been unsuccessful in getting my supervisor to give me a reason."

QUESTION. My agency listens to my needs for reopening the workplace.

Half of employees (50%) said the agency always or usually listens to their needs for reopening the workplace. Nearly three of 10 employees (29%) said the agency seldom or never listens to their needs.

Similar to the previous questions, few employees provided detailed comments about the agency listening to their needs for reopening the workplace. Employees often credited positive experiences to their manager's flexibility and willingness to listen.

Most comments on this topic were negative or suggestions for improvement. Some felt that their concerns about returning to the workplace were not heeded and wanted the agency to request more feedback.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	21%
Usually	29%
Occasionally	21%
Seldom	15%
Almost Never or Never	14%

50% Positive

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Some employees felt that their concerns were heard.

"I really appreciate that staff opinions regarding remote working/telework were listened to."

"[I like] that management takes employee's concerns about returning to work in the office and devising a plan to help with that transition."

"The transitioning of opening our office was a little bumpy on how we were going to operate but the team is always communicating and working together to get things running as smoothly as possible."

"I am glad that I was approved to keep my teleworking schedule at this time, but also be allowed to go into the office more frequently."

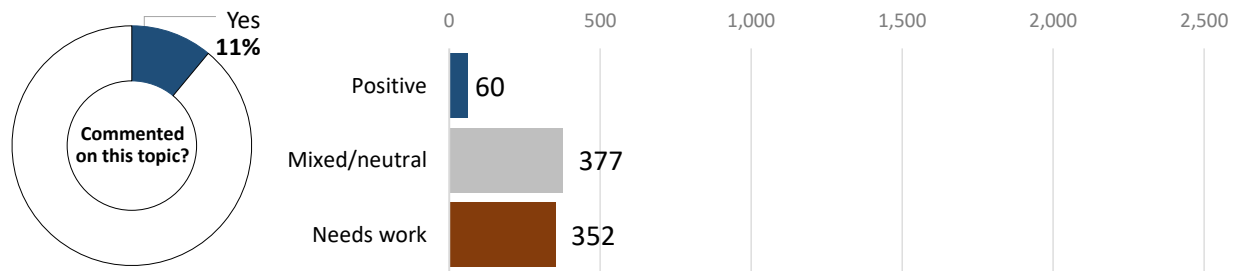**Some employees wish their agency would ask for more feedback.**

"I would like to see Infection Control policies that are tailored to our workplaces and that either take reasonably prudent actions to prevent emerging issues or at least respond quickly to clear issues. I would like these policies to seek input of frontline staff."

"It would be helpful if regional staff were included more in statewide program/policy changes. Regional staff have a certain perspective on decisions being made that headquarters staff often cannot know without asking for feedback."

"Another example is return to work. There were many work groups that met for weeks. Not a lot was shared to us, nor were we asked for input."

Many felt that their needs were ignored.

"We would get a 'Yes, it's hard. We know there's too much work. Just do your best.' But we were still held responsible for all the metrics and completion of tasks as if we had manageable caseloads."

"It's very sad to be given surveys and see nothing come from them. So many of us have said this is affecting our health, sleep, anxiety, depression… well, we're short staffed so there is more to cover. I am scared."

"Management to stop pretending they are interested in what staff have to say if it's not true. We were able to make teleworking happen in weeks when they'd been dragging their heels for years. We get there and now they want us back even though the majority don't want to be back and we've done better during this period."

"Actually care what line staff is saying and not ignore it or tell them to be quiet."

"We had meetings with our Regional Administrator where she was to address our concerns. She asked that the questions be sent by email prior to the meeting. My questions were ignored."

"If 'our voice matters' why aren't you listening to Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) staff, who have been very clear about letting DVR know they don't need to be in 3 days per week?"

"Our needs are not being met, nor are our concerns being listened to. We are moving forward with reopening when the pandemic is worse than ever. This is a complete disregard to our health and safety and that of our families."

THEME. Return to workplace policies/procedures

789 of the 7,032 employees who commented addressed return to workplace policies/procedures.

Yes
11%

Commented
on this topic?

	0	500	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500
Positive	60					
Mixed/neutral	377					
Needs work	352					

There were many comments about returning to the workplace, and many opinions were expressed. Many of those who were able to work remotely would like to continue. But employees also described a variety of challenges:

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

A few employees expressed satisfaction with policies or procedures on returning to the workplace.

"Agency has handled returning to the office well – hybrid between in-the-office and telework is great."

"What I like most about my job is my ability to help fellow Washingtonians in their time of need, and having an employer that understands the importance of keeping their employees safe, and continuing to allow staff to work from home during this pandemic."

Some employees feel that telework policies are unfair for those who want to work remotely.

"My job is able to be done fully remotely. But I am currently being forced to provide for coverage in the office for walk-ins which do NOT occur at my job location."

"Because I opted to telework TWO DAYS per week prior to the pandemic, I lost my personal office space the other three days I was there and had to hunt for a 'touchdown' space to work."

Several feel that telework created burdens for on-site employees, or noted benefits of on-site work.

"It seems like working from home for some people is an excuse to hardly work."

"I would like to see more individuals return to the office. I understand these individuals like remote working and although most of them put out a satisfactory work product, in my opinion, Teams does not allow space for an optimal work product."

"I would like to see in-person eligibility return to the Community Services Office. My client base is impaired and computers and phone present a real barrier for them to access services."

"Telework staff back in the office 100% of the time. I believe staff who telework are taking advantage and are being paid to do laundry, cook and take care of family— Those of us who have to come into the office, and have not failed to since the pandemic started, are not afforded this luxury."

Some emphasized health issues associated with returning to the workplace.

"I have health issues which make it difficult to return to an office and yet, I am going in because I will get fired if I don't."

"I would like the state's telework policy to specifically mention workers who are breastfeeding/pumping and acknowledge that these workers should be able to continue teleworking after most employees return to the office."

"Reopening offices at this time feels like a misguided decision, and leaves me with little faith in our management's concern for employee health."

"I like the shorter home visits in person and assessments done via electronic/phone/Teams. I'm not exposed to COVID or other illnesses."

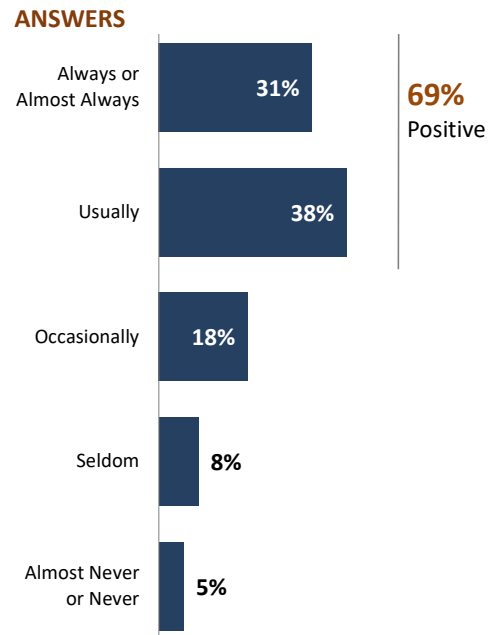**Many said that they would like telework to continue for the long term.**

"With the pandemic and future ones, I hope the agency will let people work from home. Our clients are aged, blind and disabled and they should not be coming to the office as we can help them via phone, letters, emails."

"If anything, the pandemic has taught us is that there is more than one way to get the work done. There is often push back with teleworking. However it has been effectively done in our work group for the past 2 years, and some management staff think now it's time to go back to the old way of doing business."

"As the labor pool continues to decrease, as the boomers retire, management MUST find ways to make working at the Division of Child Support attractive such as schedule flexing and full-time teleworking."

"We would limit congestion on our highways, minimize office drama, and increase efficiency (I haven't seen co-workers chatting for hours on end since the start of telework). Just allow full telework and rid ourselves of some office space."

"Allow everyone continued flexibility even after returning to the workplace."

QUESTION. In my current work environment, I am satisfied with my ability to develop and maintain relationships with co-workers.

Almost seven of 10 employees (69%) said they are always or usually satisfied with their ability to develop and maintain relationships with co-workers. Most of these were comments on remote work or plans for employees to return to the office. A small number of employees (13%) said they are seldom or never satisfied.

This question was included in the survey because responses to the 2020 "spot check" survey suggested concerns about maintaining relationships while many employees were transitioning to remote work. In that year, a similar question ("I find meaningful ways to stay connected to co-workers during the COVID-19 pandemic") had only 63% positive responses, suggesting improvements as employees have become more familiar with remote work.

In the comments, some said their relationships had improved and some felt there was no difference. Others said they missed direct contact with co-workers, or that more attention is needed on team-building or training – especially for new hires.

ANSWERS

Answer	Percent
Always or Almost Always	31%
Usually	38%
Occasionally	18%
Seldom	8%
Almost Never or Never	5%

69% Positive

► What DSHS employees said …

Some said that they can still connect well enough with co-workers.

"My duties are such that I really don't need to be in the office. I get the social interaction I need via emails and phone calls."

"I am a computer programmer and I am very used to working remotely. The connection I have with my co-workers does not diminish from teleworking as we interact in exactly the same way as we did before COVID."

"Having the ability to work from home and have an alternative schedule has helped me feel more productive and connected to other workmates."

"I love learning the technology that allows me to still feel connected to staff/co-workers."

"Telework helps improve the work/home balance which I think is part of the successful outcomes with work duties and positive attitudes at work."

"My team is spread across the state, so having to return to the office, will not allow me to get any closer to my team, as it will still be virtual togetherness."

"I value my work-life balance over socialization with co-workers. I believe I am more than able to connect with co-workers effectively through the various tech tools available."

"I enjoy full-time teleworking and finding new ways to stay connected with my team daily."

Some said that relationships have suffered as a result of the pandemic.

"I think it's difficult with the pandemic to connect with co-workers. It's not the fault of the agency as it is the current situation. I think our unit does pretty well with weekly meetings to connect us, but as whole I think people need more connections with others in the agency."

"I think it would be nice if we could go back to having potlucks and those kind of social connections for workplace 'Team Building' opportunities. Everyone feels so distanced from everyone since the pandemic has really restricted socialization."

"I hope that post-pandemic, leadership considers team building/connecting in person on occasion."

"I am a new employee since the pandemic started and feel disconnected at times from co-workers and also like I didn't receive the training that I would have gotten had the offices been open."

"The worst thing about the job now, is that we never see each other, the inter-personal relationships are pretty much non-existent nowadays. Meeting via video just isn't the same as doing it in person. An important part of the job, no matter how small it is, is the relationships we build among our co-workers."

"Starting this job during a pandemic and everyone being virtual has made it harder to reach out and make personal connections with my co-workers."

THEME. Other COVID-related issues

564 of the 7,032 employees who commented mentioned other COVID-related issues.
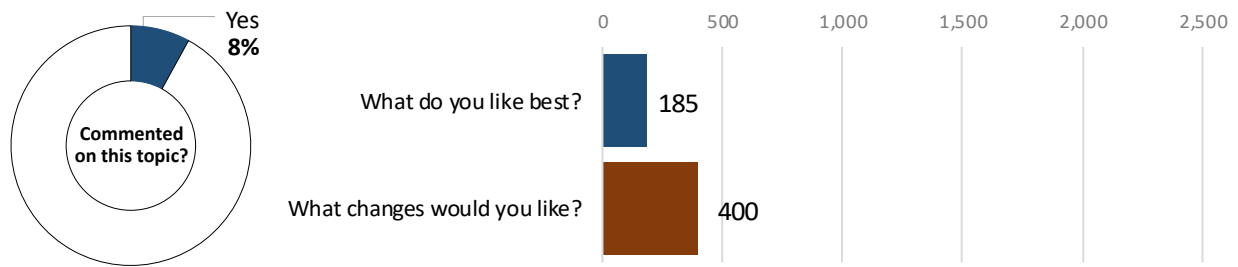
Comments that explicitly mentioned the vaccine mandate or workplace reopening policies were coded as such, but employee comments often included references to the pandemic as additional context for other engagement topics. The most numerous of these expressed satisfaction with telework and ensuing work-life balance. There were also expressions of concern over stress, fatigue, and burnout. These comments were not coded for sentiment, so the question context is shown above.

►What DSHS employees said …

There were many expressions of satisfaction with telework or with their teams.

"I like that our work group focuses on how we can make things better during the pandemic instead of focusing on the negative."

"I also like the home environment where it is quiet and I feel safe in my own home. I don't worry about contamination from another person or place of work."

"I loved being able to work from home, feel safe and appreciated."

"If the pandemic has proven nothing else, it's proven that telework can work effectively."

Work-life balance was also a common theme.

"Definitely enjoying this new work-life balance due to the telework option."

"I like the flexibility that teleworking allows for work-life balance in general and during the pandemic specifically."

"I appreciated the flexibility we were given during the pandemic to work from home and the ability to be able to parent my children while still working from home."

Some discussed impacts on the quality of care.

"Being able to help/provide service is what I like best about my job. It could be challenging due to the pandemic but we still manage to make it work for our clients."

"Everyone at the facility has demonstrated great strength throughout the pandemic to provide the best possible care to the clients."

"I feel like we often fall short in serving our customers, primarily because of the COVID policies we have in place. I fully appreciate these are necessary to maintain public health and safety, however, I think simple and safe measures could be taken to help reduce clients' barriers to receiving our services."

**Some commented on prevention protocols or health concerns.**

"Supervisor acknowledges/recognizes staff's mental health with the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Better enforcement of pandemic protocols."

"Keep the lobby closed to walk-ins and just have clients in that have appointments with their workers. Just until this pandemic is a little more in control."

Some believe they deserve more compensation.

"We have showed up every day during this pandemic, we didn't get to sit safely at home and collect a check. We are still putting not only our health at risk, but our family's health at risk and the state still doesn't think we deserve. A pathetic little payout next July isn't good enough."

"I'd love to be paid more to accommodate working through such an extreme staff shortage."

"Show appreciation for staff who have worked through the pandemic and the increased workload by providing wage increases."

Many shared concerns over burnout.

"The job has grown to be more stressful and tiresome since the start of the pandemic."

"Nothing is good since the pandemic hit and EVERYTHING we do became an impersonal wasteland."

"The last 20 months have been HARD and we know the next year will be hard too. We are burning out really excellent workers, our future leads, supervisors, and other leaders."

"Most of our workers are giving over 100% every day, and we are still asking for more from them; there are not enough words of encouragement a supervisor or leader can come up with before exhaustion sets in."
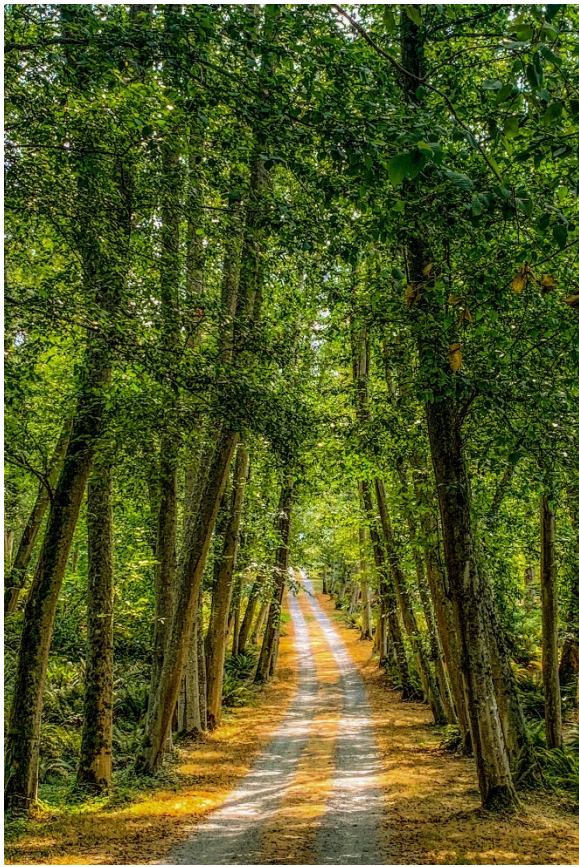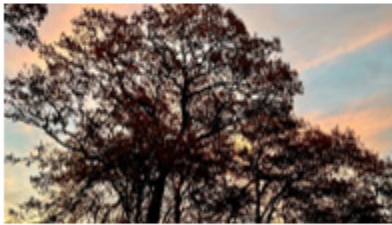
"Long and Winding Road" • Honorable Mention
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By: Kristin Korvell, with permission

"Garden Guardian" • DSHS Photo Contest • By Max Gibbs-Ruby, with permission

From the photographer:
This is a Pacific Tree Frog/Pacific Chorus Frog that I discovered in my garden while picking blackberries. As you can see in the photo, the blackberries are as big as they are! My spouse and I bought a micro homestead in south Renton, and these are one of the many species of wildlife we're becoming acquainted with. The frogs are a joy to listen to in the evening and help provide natural pest/insect control. What I particularly like about this shot is the level of detail I managed to capture on the frog itself, as well as the juxtaposition against the darker green and the even darker blackberries. In addition, I think the shot is really well composed all around.

**Employee Engagement
Survey 2021**

Washington State
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