



England

# Social Prescribing Link Worker Survey 2023

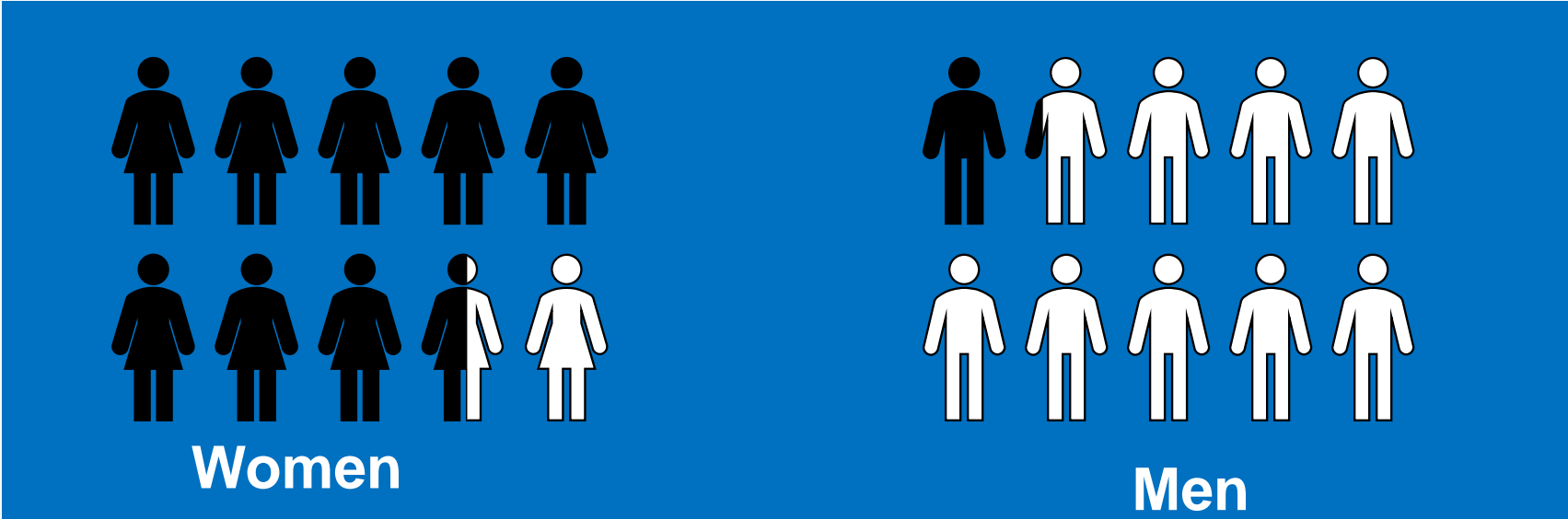
Report by NHS England Social  
Prescribing Team

March 2024



In Autumn 2023, NHS England ran a survey for Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs). The survey was open to all SPLWs, including those employed outside the NHS. The focus of the survey was to understand the experiences and perceptions of SPLWs working across all sectors including primary care and the VCSE sector, to inform workforce development.

- There were 777 responses to the survey
- Since the last survey, there has been an increase in the proportion of SPLWs currently on a permanent contract, rising from **69%** to **75%**
- The majority of SPLWs who responded to the survey entered their role from an **NHS** background, with a significant number of staff having experience in the **VCSE sector**
- Roughly **half** of SPLWs were employed by a **primary care network (PCN)**, and approximately 30% were employed by the VCSE sector. The third sector, secondary care and local authorities also acted as hosts
- Compared to last year's survey, the proportion of SPLWs employed by the **VCSE sector reduced** from 37% in 2022 to 30% in 2023
- **42%** of SPLWs indicated that they record social prescribing outcomes frequently, with **28%** of respondents indicating that they **never** record outcomes. **ONS4** was by far the most commonly used tool for recording social prescribing outcomes and case studies were also overwhelmingly utilised to determine impact
- **55%** of SPLWs indicated awareness of the recently published **Social Prescribing Information Standard**. Furthermore, **59%** of respondents were familiar with **SNOMED codes**, and **52%** felt confident in using local clinical systems to add SNOMED codes to patient records
- SPLWs would welcome greater **understanding** and increased **value** of the SPLW role by **clinicians and wider healthcare staff**, clarity about **career progression pathways** and **development** opportunities, as well as **additional staff** to help manage the demand of the role and greater **access** to **IT systems** with associated **training**.

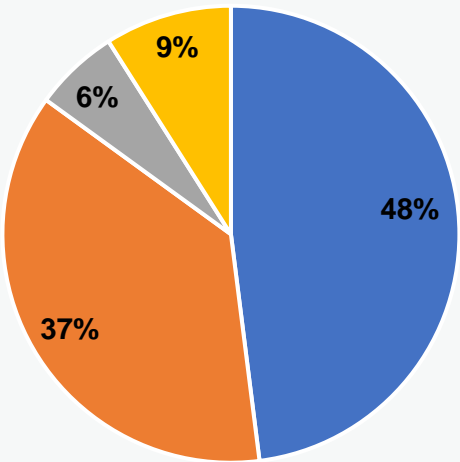


83% of survey participants were **women**, and 12% were **men**. 78% of participants were of a **White British** background, and 12% of respondents declared a **disability**.

# Which of the following best describes where you work?

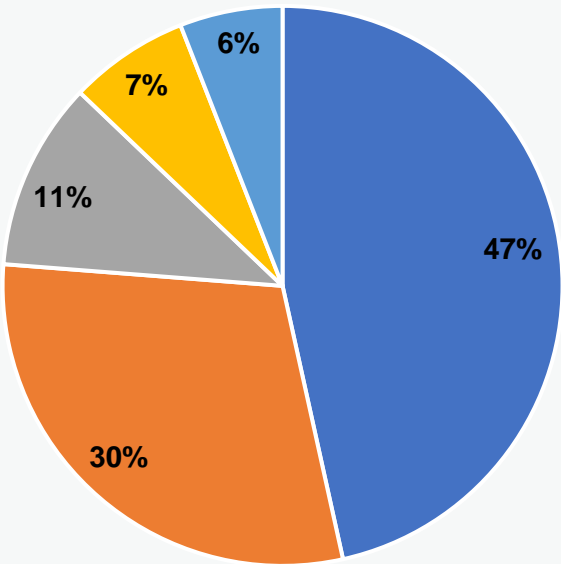


2022



- SPLW directly employed by a Primary Care Network
- SPLW employed by a Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisation
- SPLW employed by a local authority
- Other

2023



- SPLW directly employed by a Primary Care Network
- SPLW employed by a Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisation
- SPLW employed by a GP Federation
- SPLW employed by a local authority
- Other

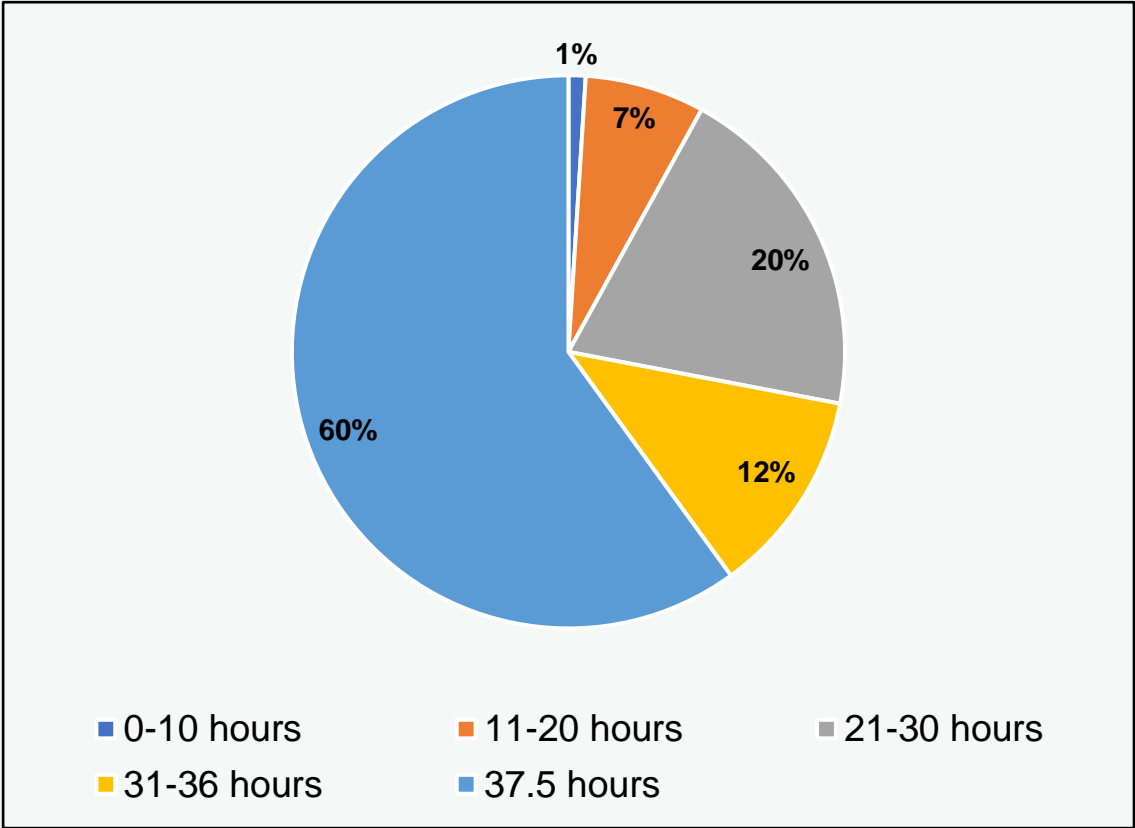
Responses indicate that the proportion of **SPLWs employed by a PCN** has remained **roughly unchanged** since last year, but there has been a **7% decrease** in the number of SPLWs employed by the **VCSE sector**.

Please note that the option to select employment by a GP Federation was new for the 2023 survey.

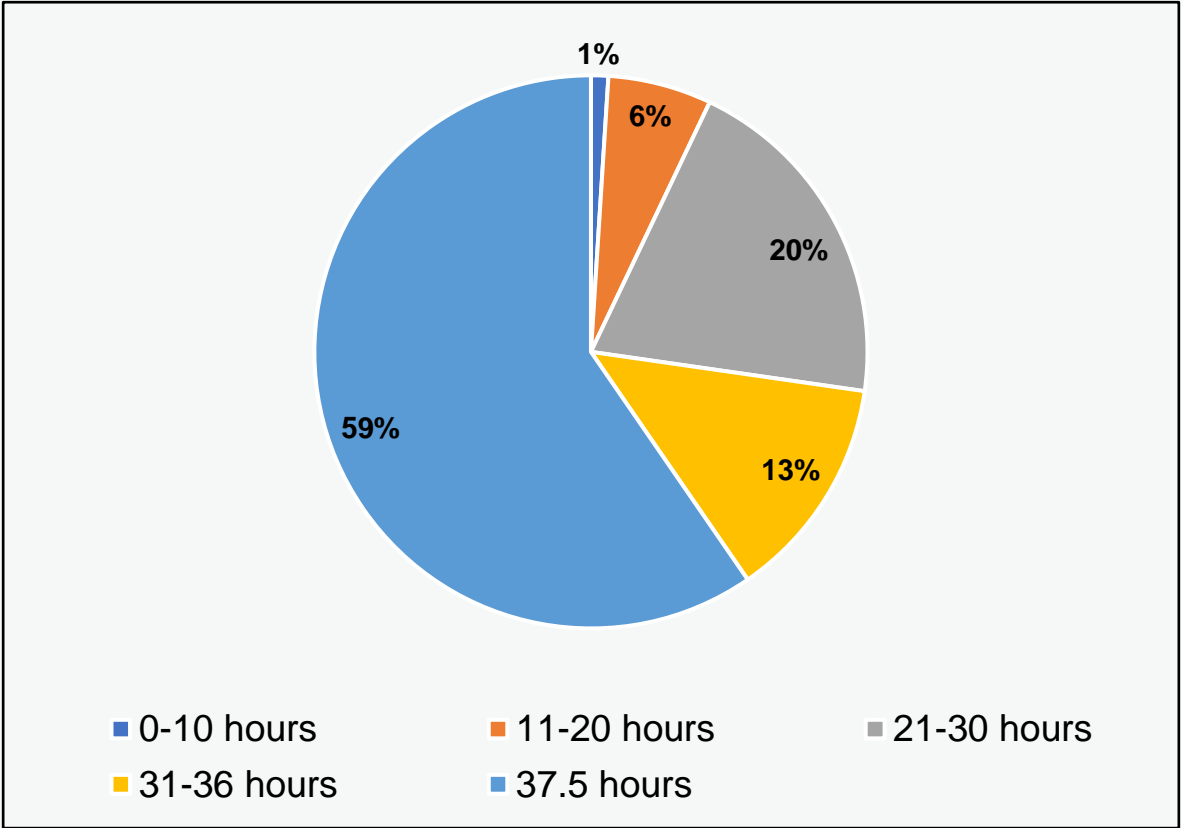
# How many hours per week are you employed as an SPLW?



2022



2023

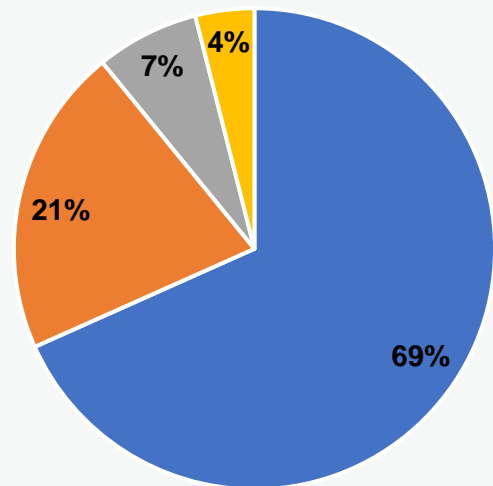


Responses indicate that the distribution of **hours worked** by SPLWs has remained **roughly unchanged** since last year, but these responses do indicate **flexible working opportunities**.

# Which of the following best describes your contract?

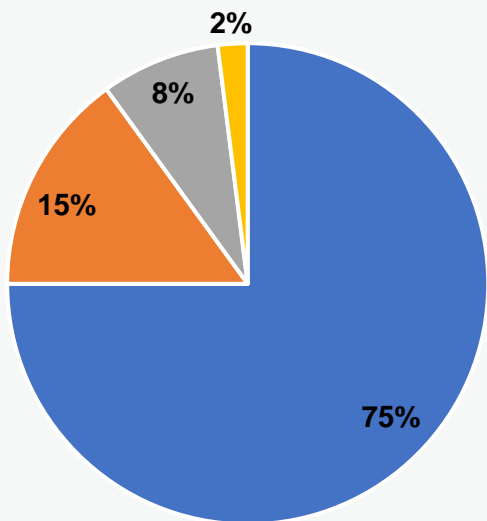


2022



- Permanent contract
- Fixed-term contract (> 12 months)
- Fixed-term contract (< 12 months)
- Other

2023



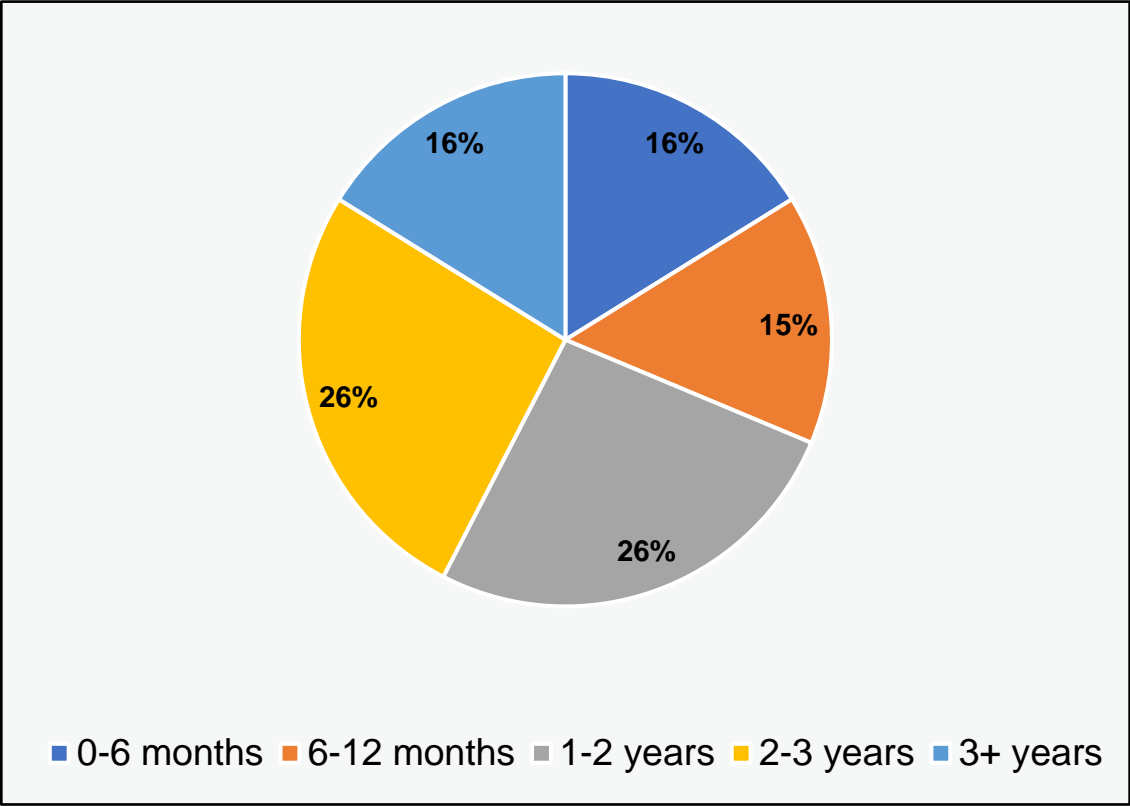
- Permanent contract
- Fixed-term contract (> 12 months)
- Fixed-term contract (< 12 months)
- Other

There has been an **increase** in the proportion of SPLWs on a permanent contract, from **69%** to **75%**, and fewer SPLWs on a fixed-term contract, indicating that **more** SPLWs are being offered **permanent contracts**.

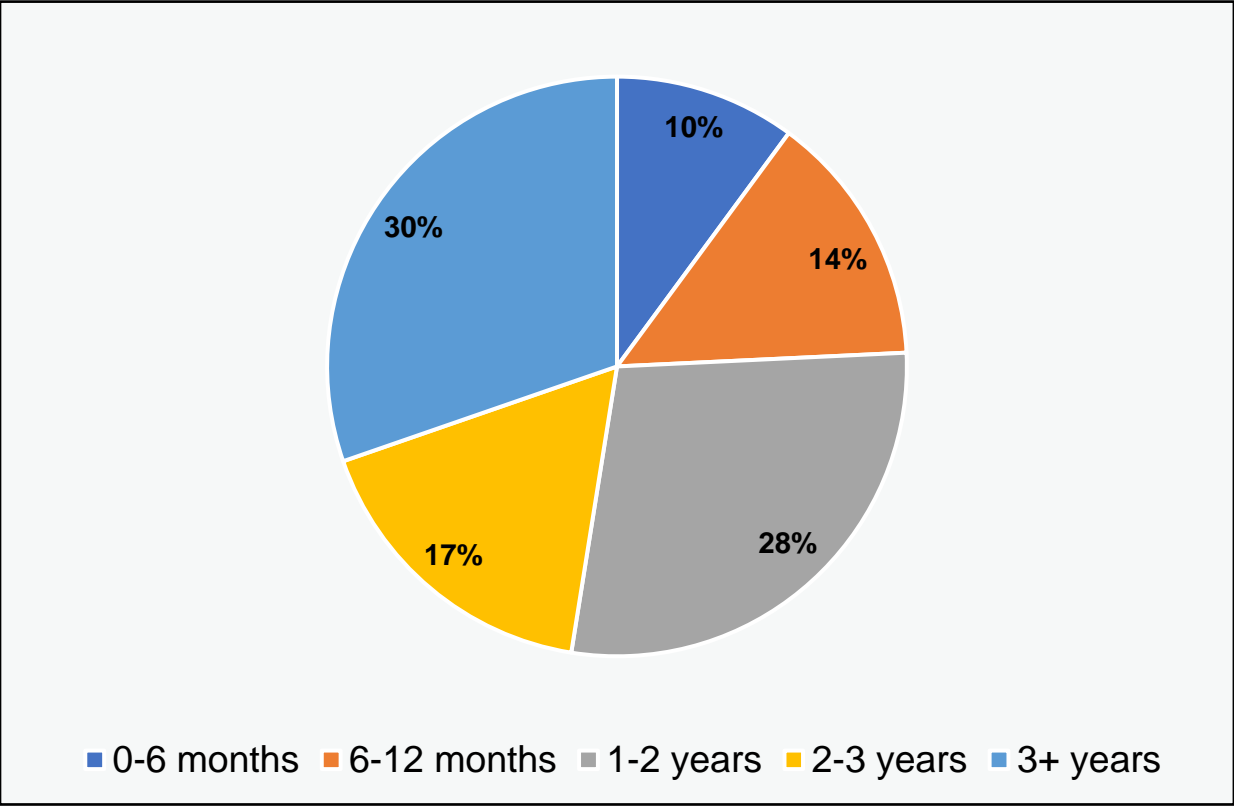
# How long have you been employed as an SPLW?



2022

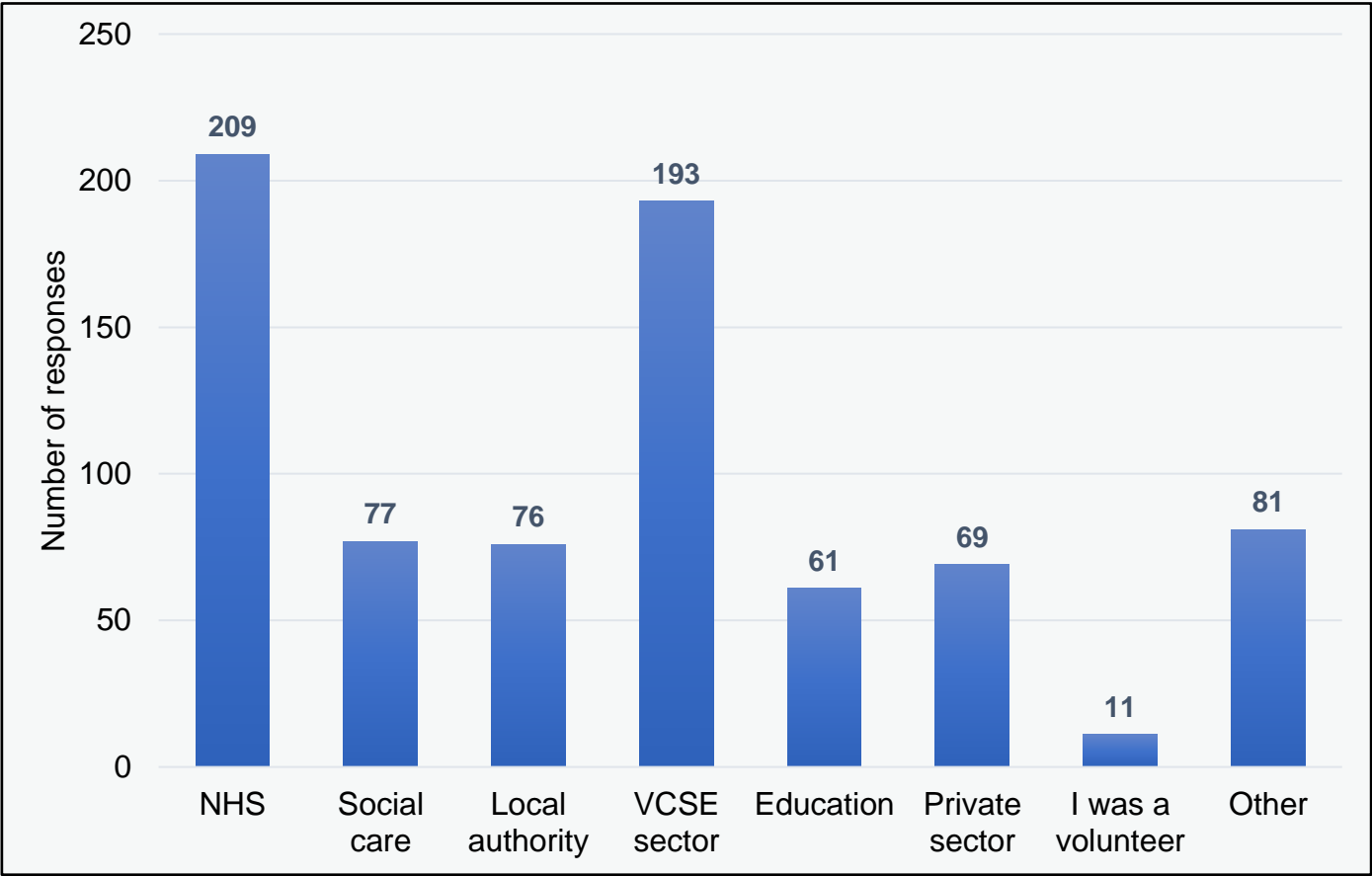


2023



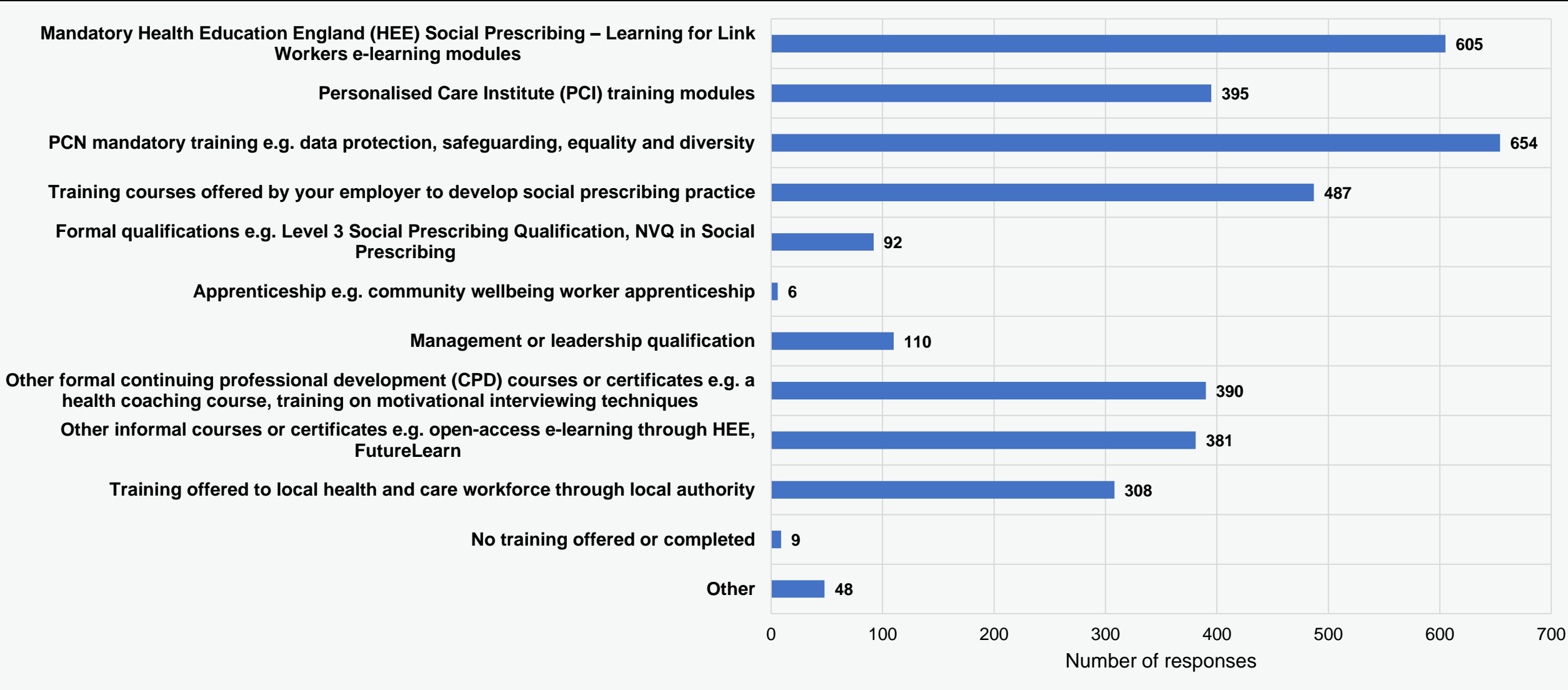
Responses demonstrate that a significant proportion of SPLWs have been recruited in the last **12 months**, highlighting the success of recruitment efforts.

# Where did you work, prior to becoming an SPLW?



Responses indicate that the majority of SPLWs entered social prescribing from an **NHS** or **voluntary sector** background, though other areas of experience also included the **police service**, the **third sector** and **private healthcare organisations**, as well as **students**.

From the following list, which training courses have you completed, or are in the process of completing?

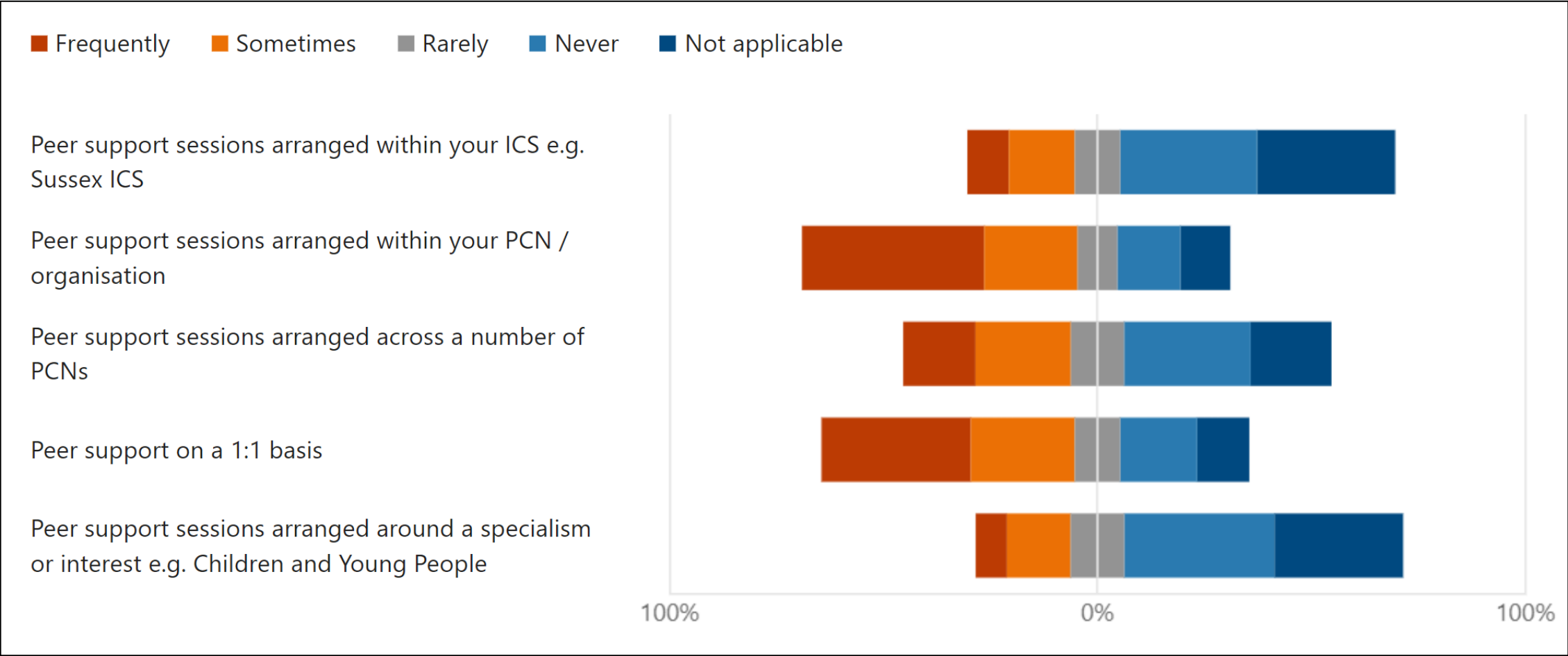


The mandatory **NHS elearning modules** and **PCN mandatory training**, such as data protection and safeguarding, remained the most accessed forms of training by SPLWs.

# Which forms of peer support have you accessed in the last 12 months and how frequently do you attend sessions?

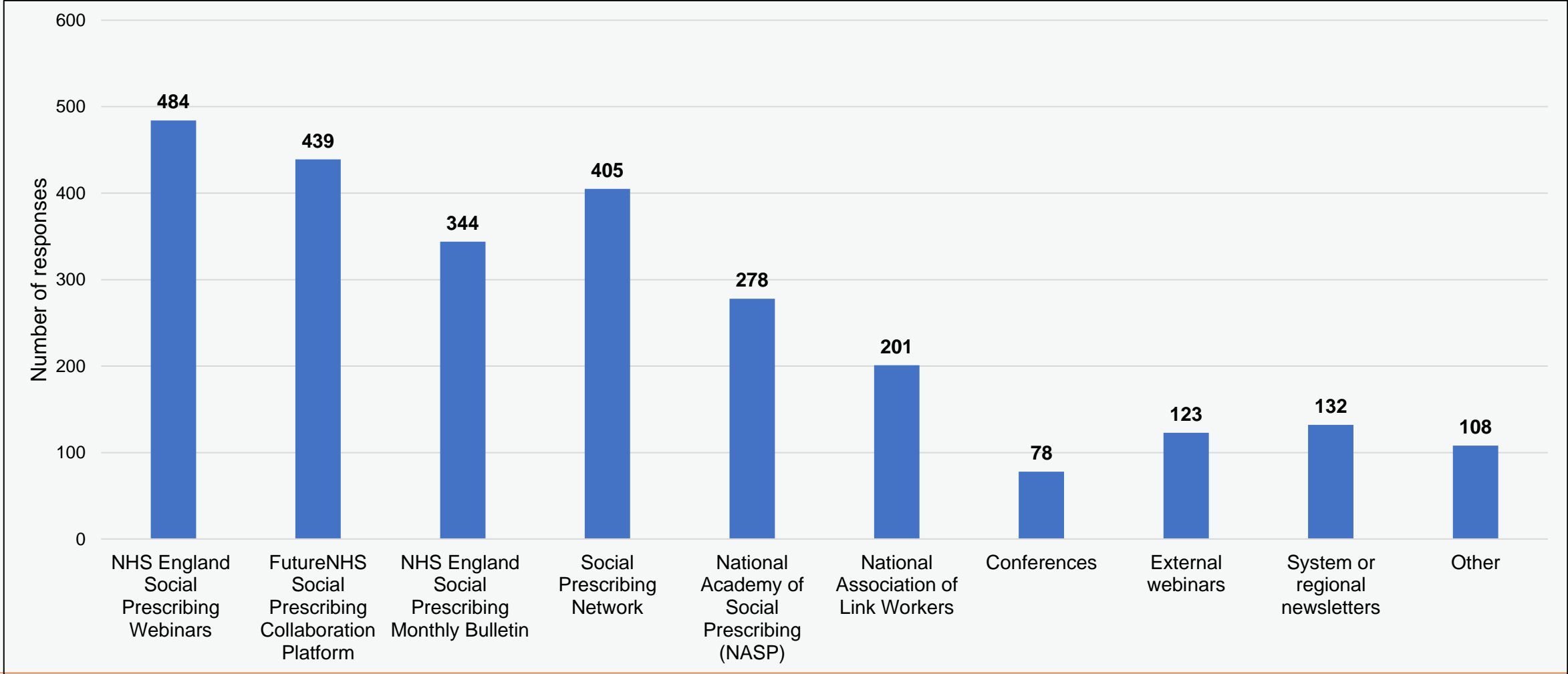


82% of respondents indicated that they had accessed peer support in the last 12 months, with responses indicating that there has been an overall **increase** in the proportion of SPLWs accessing peer support across ICSs, PCNs and in relation to a specific interest

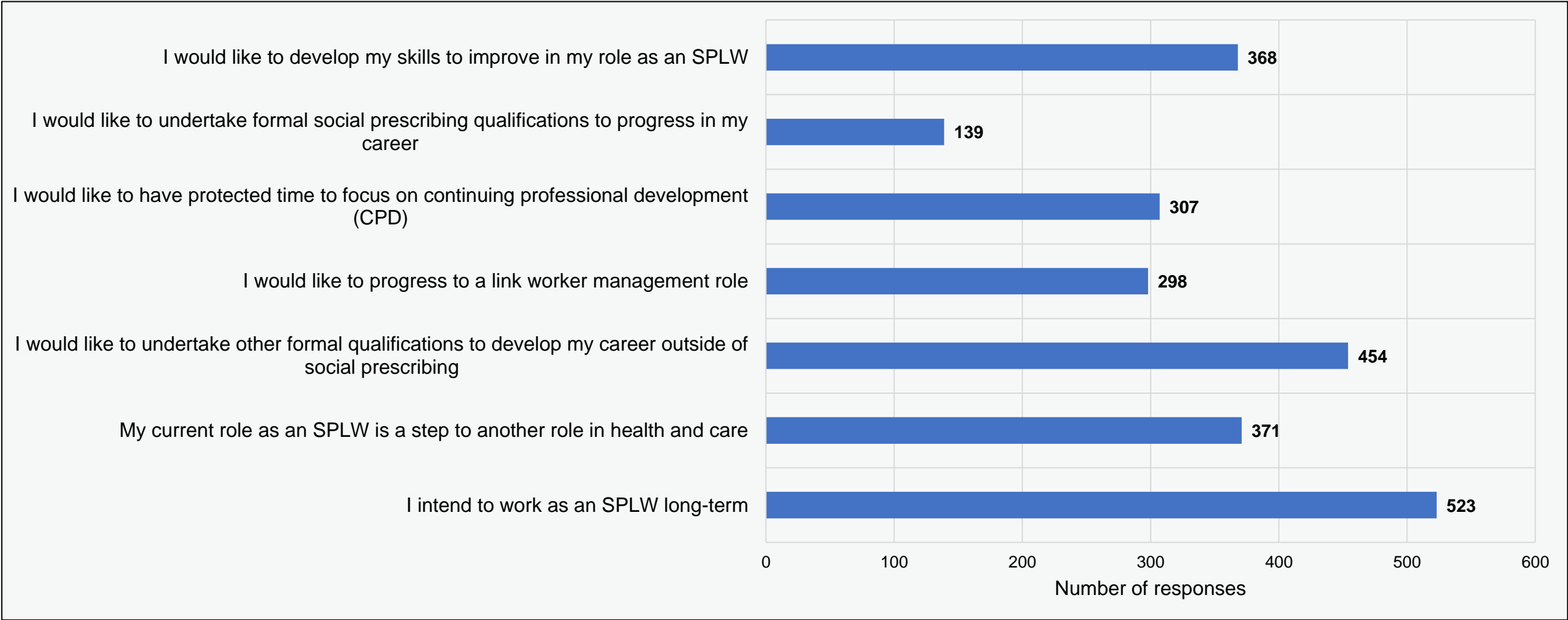


# How do you stay up to date with social prescribing updates and developments?

**NHS England Social Prescribing webinars** remain the most accessed form of social prescribing news and updates, closely followed by the **FutureNHS Social Prescribing Collaboration Platform** and the **Social Prescribing Network**. Other sources of information include the Internet, other publications and networking events.



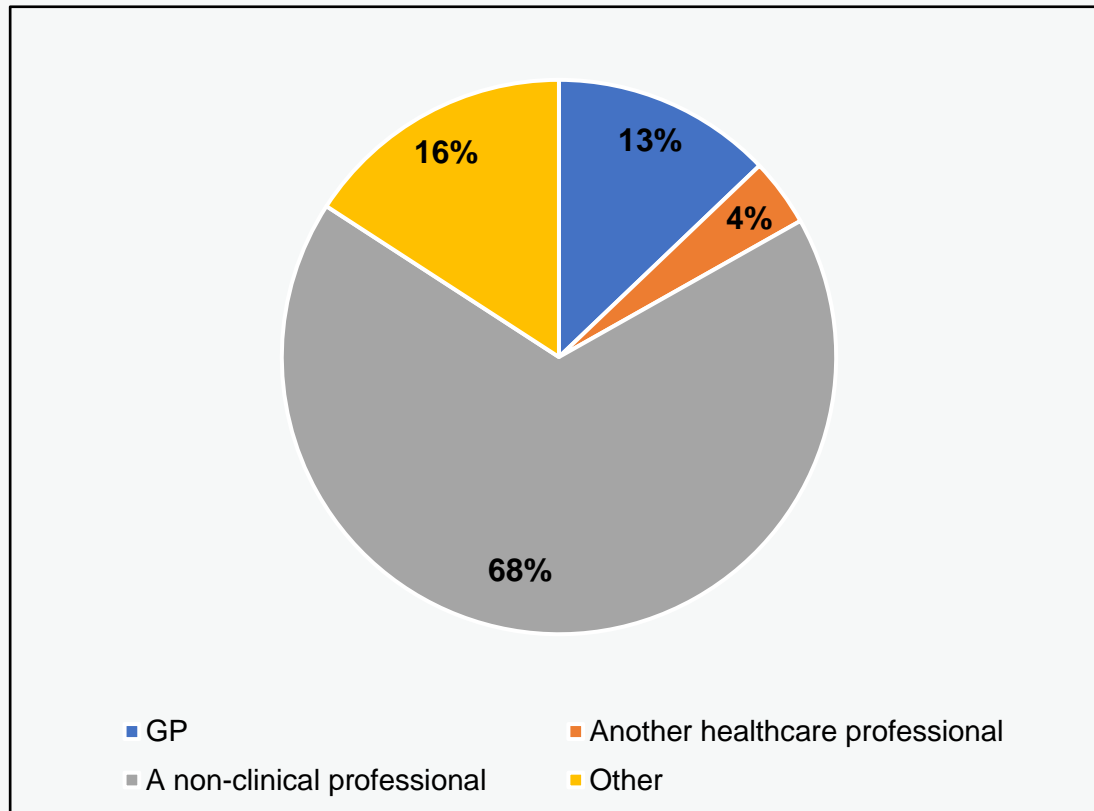
With regards to career progression and professional development, please select all the following statements that apply



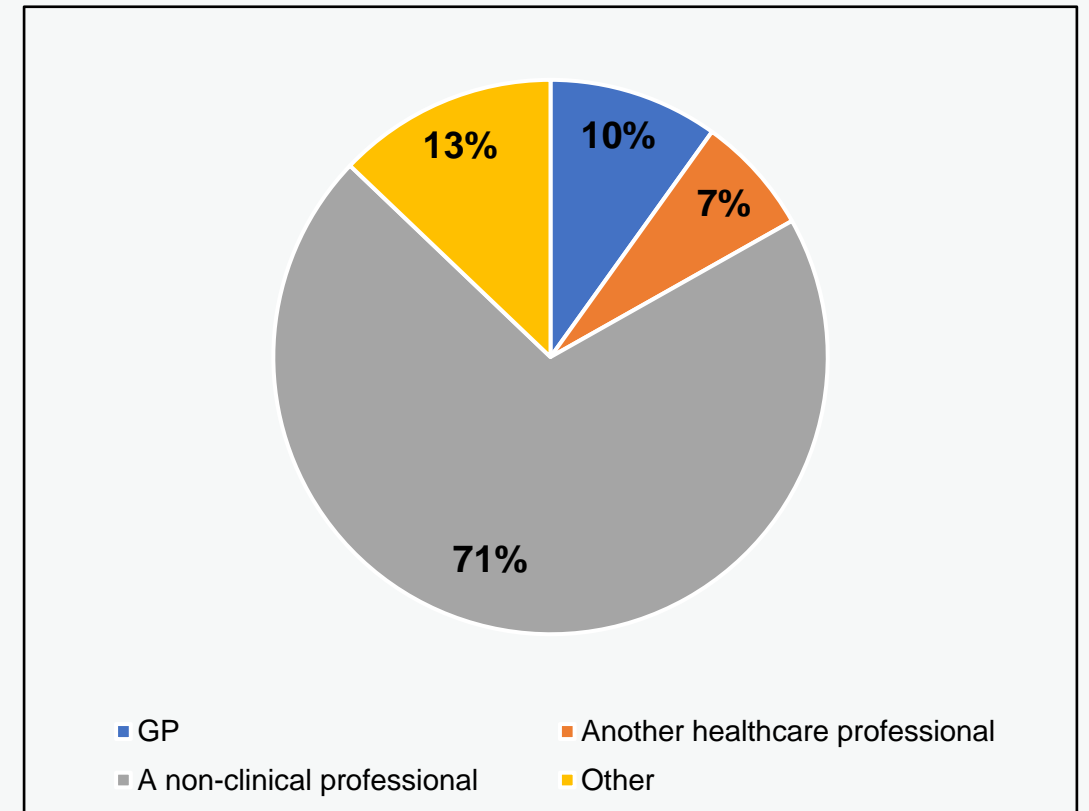
Out of those who had expressed an interest in undertaking other formal qualifications and progressing their career beyond social prescribing, the majority of respondents had considered roles in **mental health** or **public health**. Other areas of interest included **health and fitness, nutrition, coaching** and **research**.

# Who is your primary supervisor?

2022

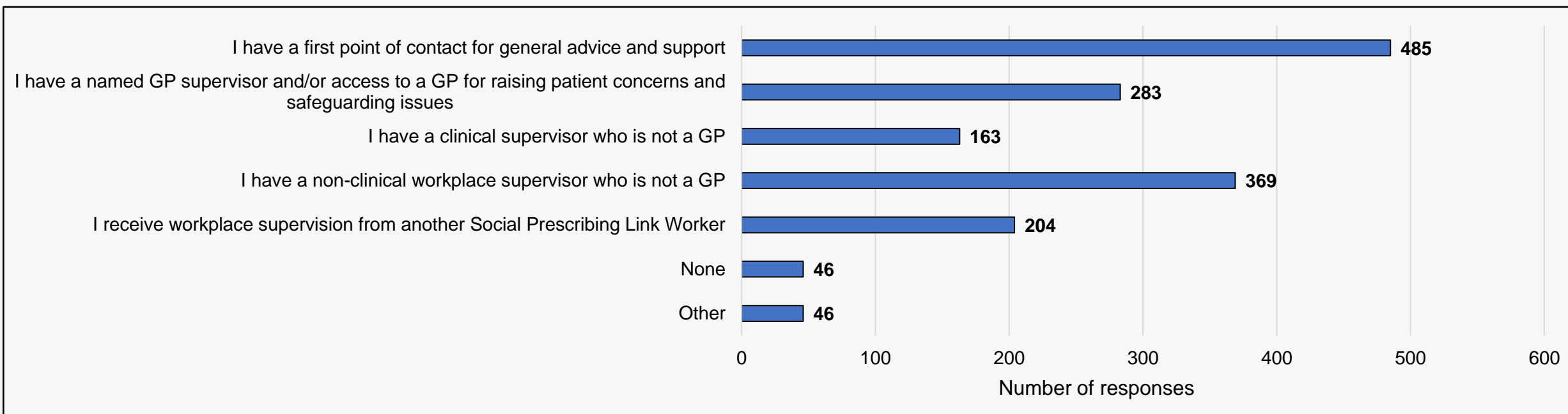


2023

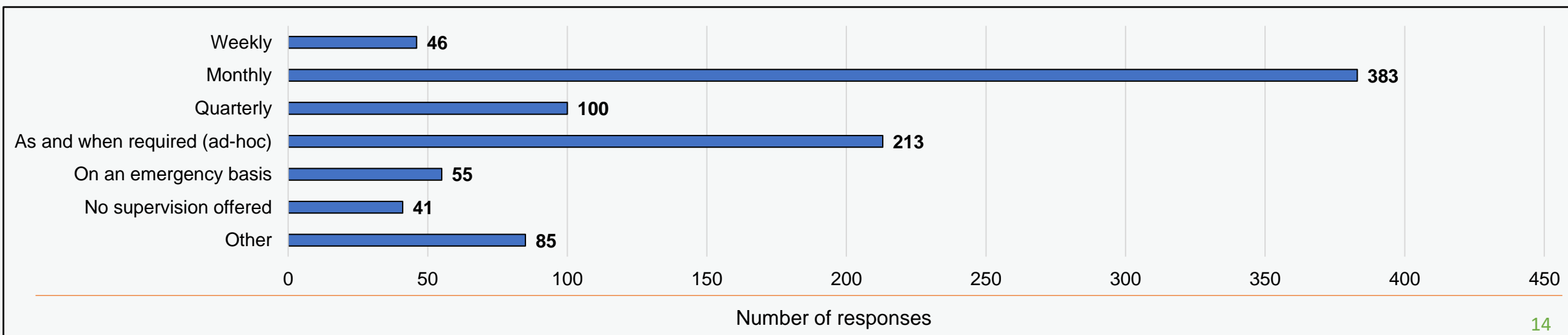


The proportion of SPLWs with a **non-clinical professional** as their primary supervisor **increased** from 68% in 2022 to 71% in 2023, while the proportion with a **GP supervisor** as their primary supervisor **decreased** from 13% in 2022 to 10% in 2023.

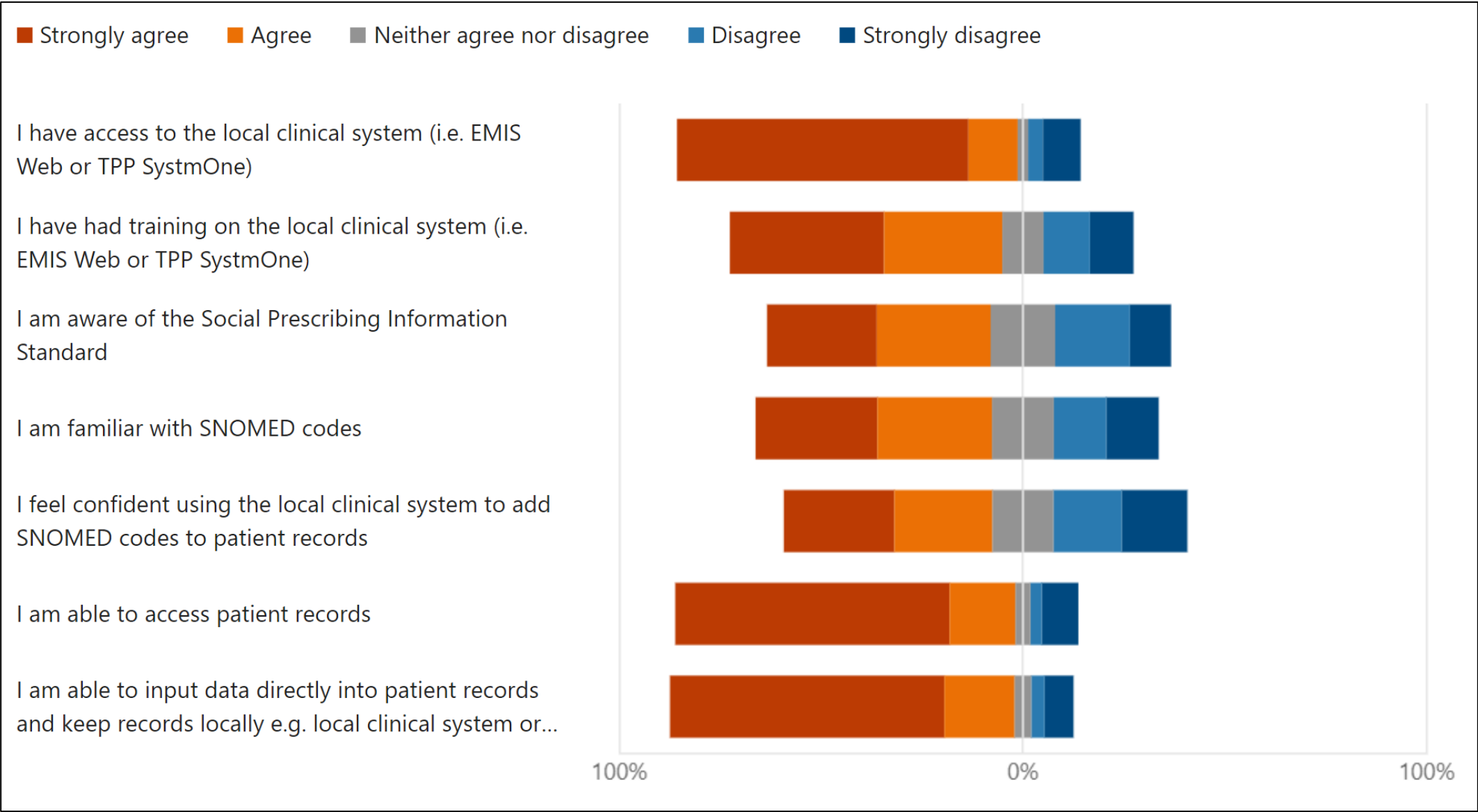
## Which form of supervision do you receive in your role?



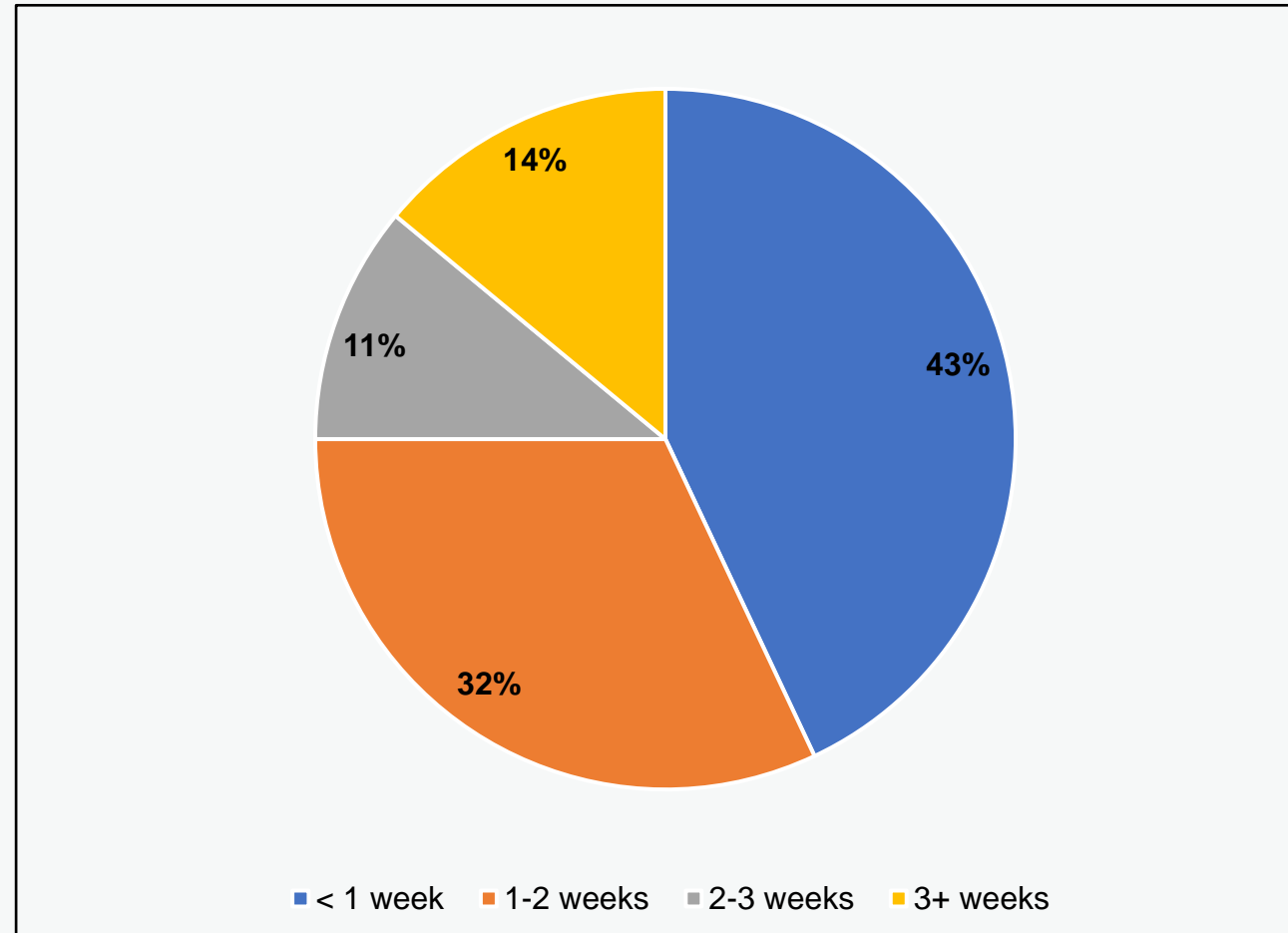
## How often do you have 1:1 meetings with your supervisor?



# To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding IT and clinical systems?



From the point of referral, how long on average does it take for you to contact a patient?

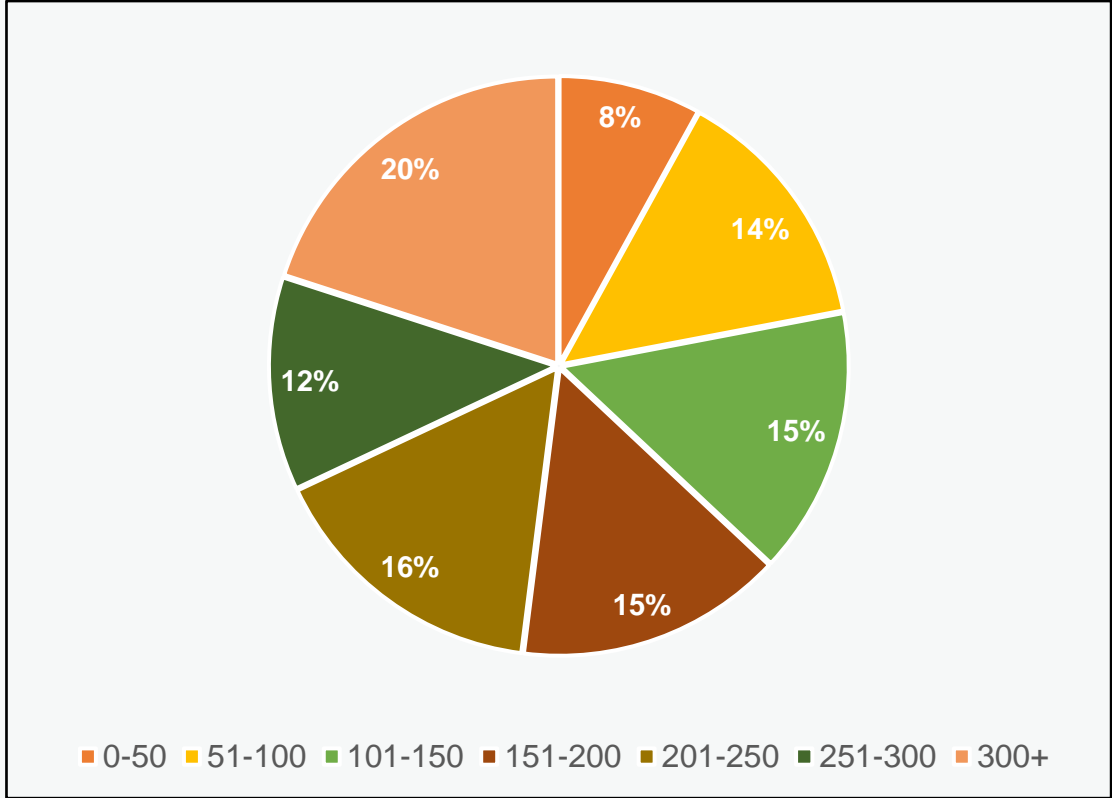


The responses indicate that **43%** of SPLWs contact patients **within a week**, but the majority of SPLWs contacts patients after a week with a **quarter** of SPLWs contacting patients after **two weeks or longer**.

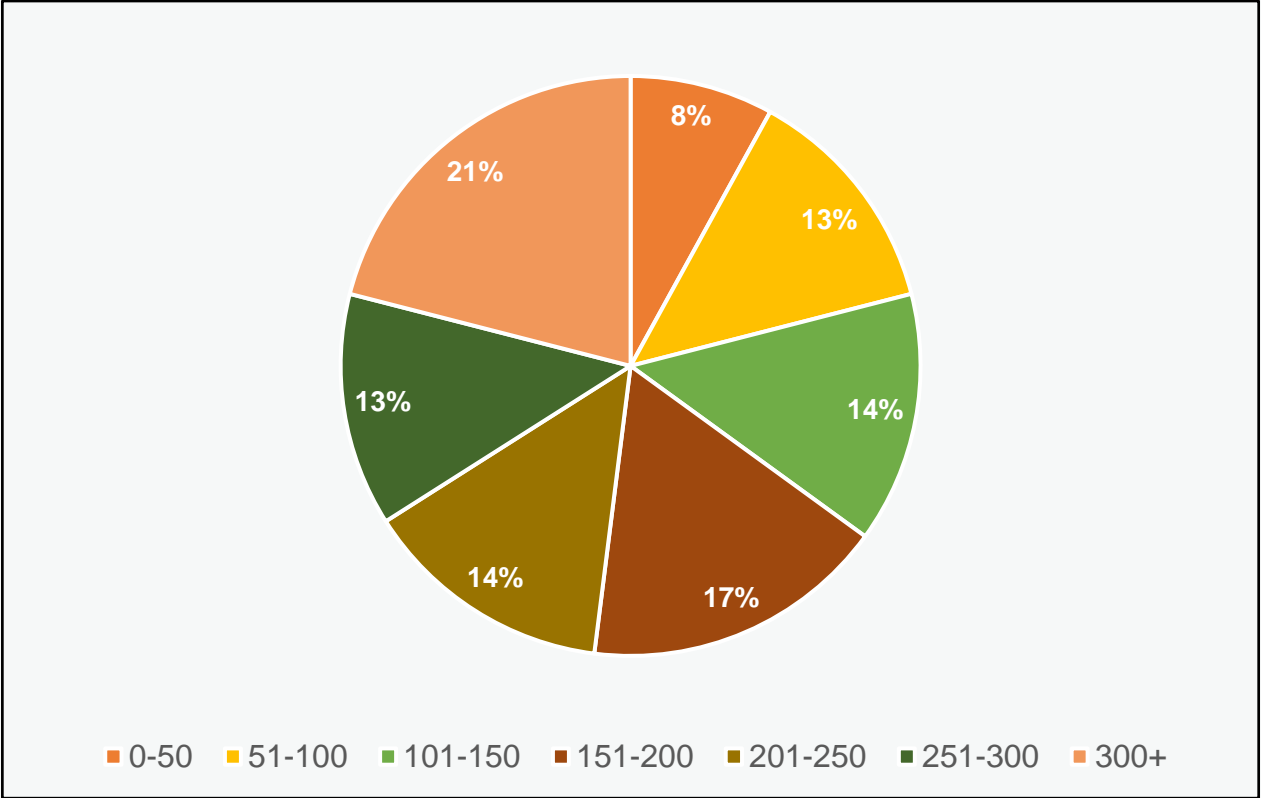
# What is your average caseload over the course of a year?



2022

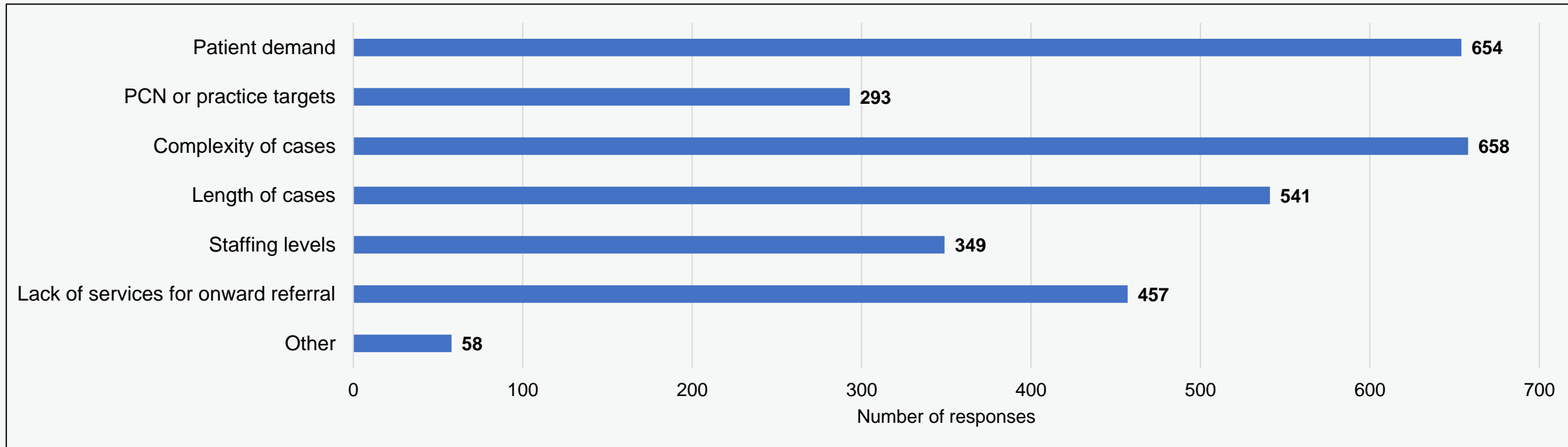


2023



The caseload distribution has remained largely unchanged year-on-year, however the proportion of SPLWs with an average of more than 300 cases per year remains the highest.

# What factors influence your caseload?

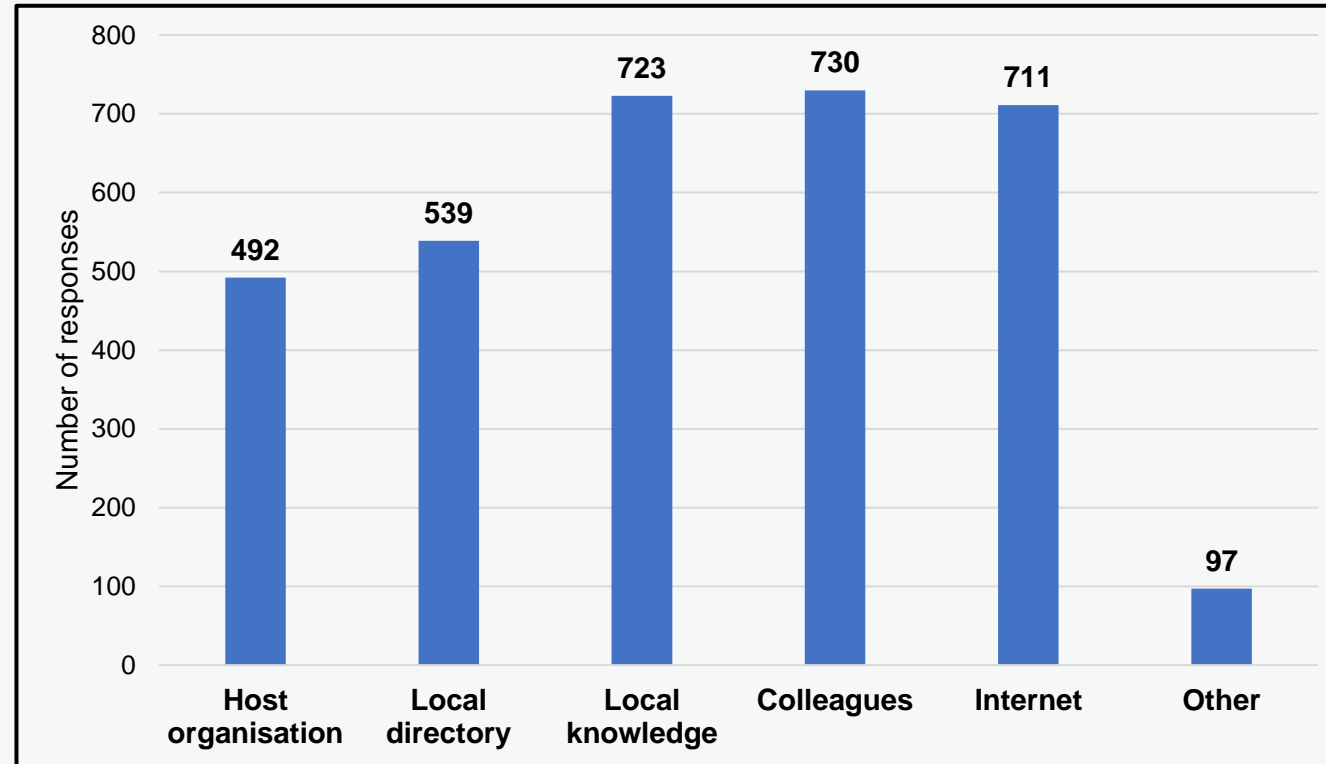


## Additional factors include:

- Lack of support from GPs and other health professionals in referring appropriately
- Lack of capacity from services
- Long waiting lists
- Seasonal factors
- Demand of additional tasks and responsibilities
- Lack of clear referral processes
- Lack of understanding by other professionals

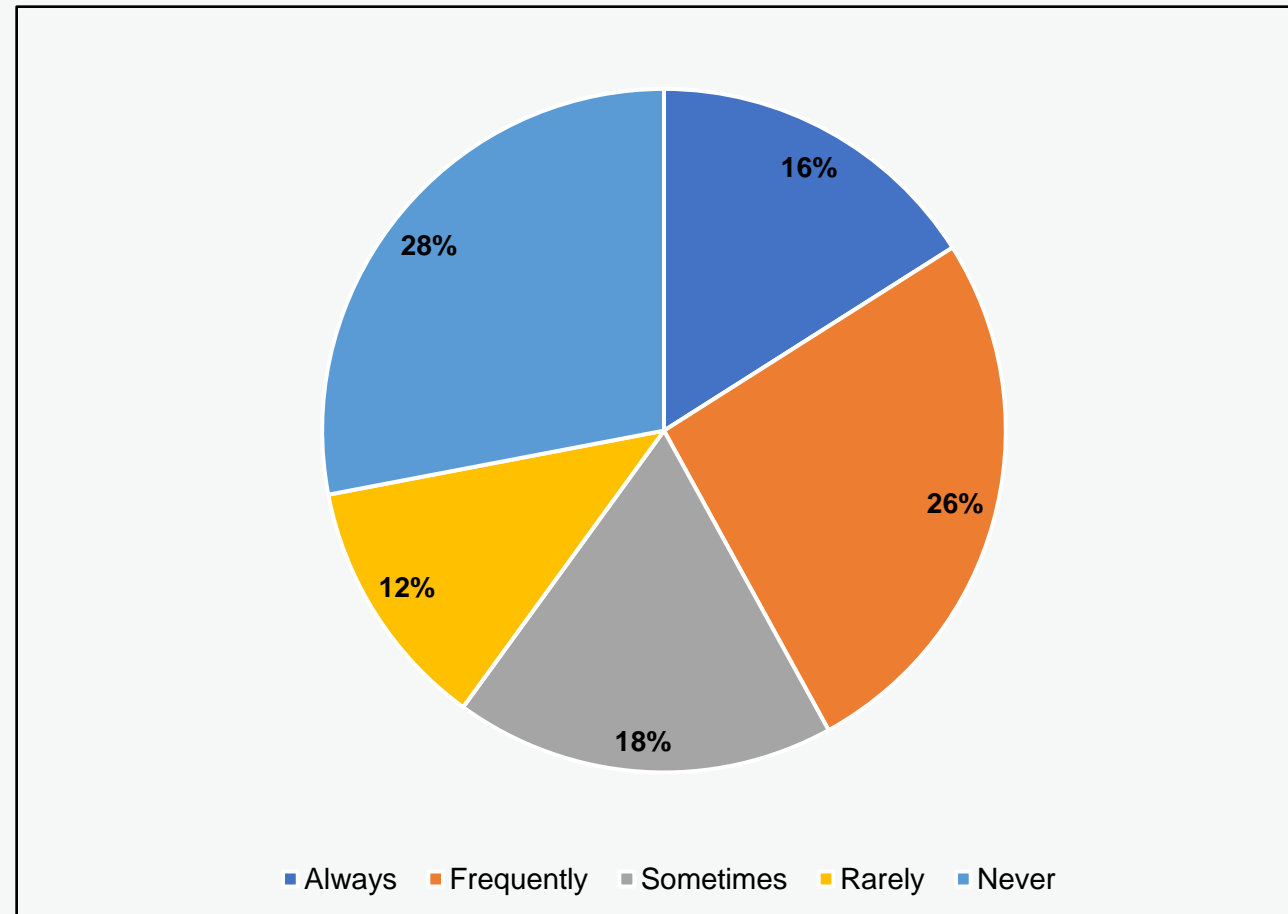
# How do you receive information about local services and community-based support?

New Question



SPLWs most commonly used **local knowledge** to support patients with accessing local services and community-based support, though they are also reliant on knowledge and information from **other colleagues** and the **Internet**.

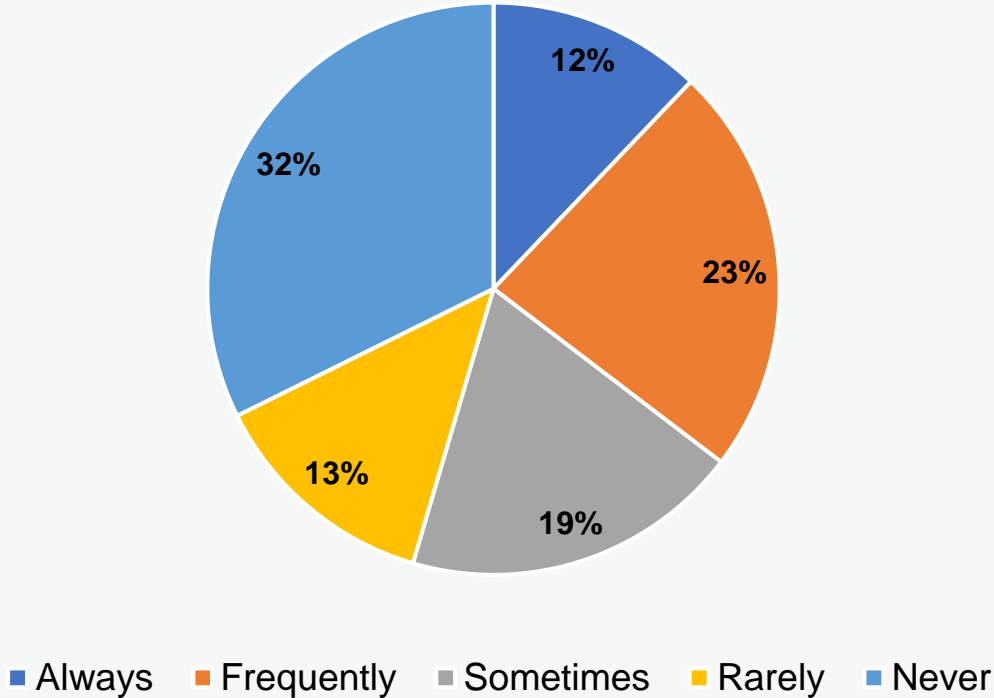
How often do you record patient outcome measures e.g. ONS4?



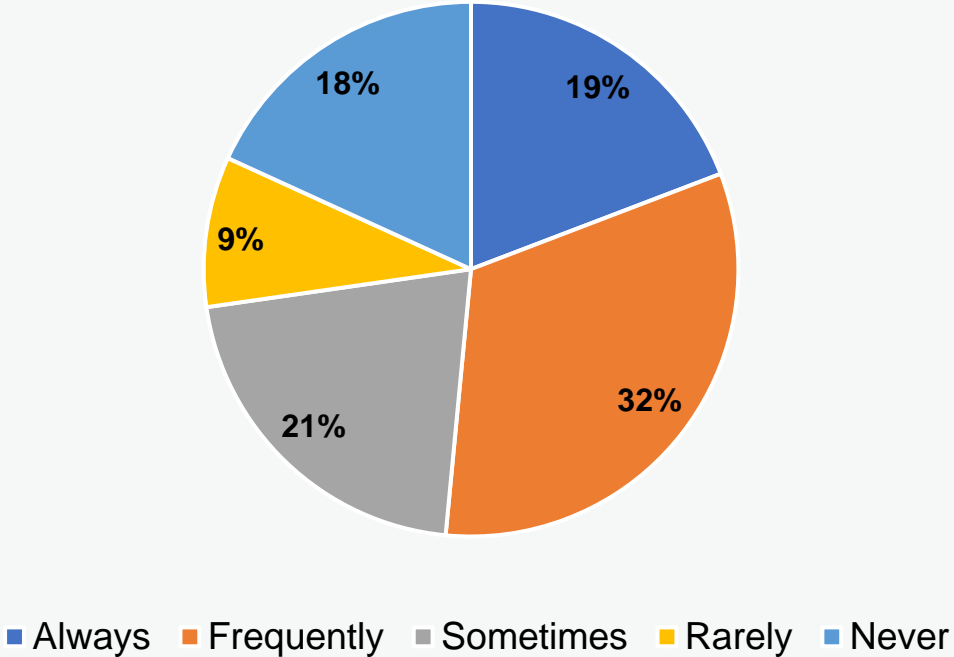
**42%** of SPLWs indicated that they record social prescribing outcomes 'always' or 'frequently', with **12%** rarely recording outcomes and a further **28%** of respondents indicating that they **never** record outcomes.



Outcome measures recorded by PCN-employed SPLWs



Outcome measures recorded by VCSE-employed SPLWs

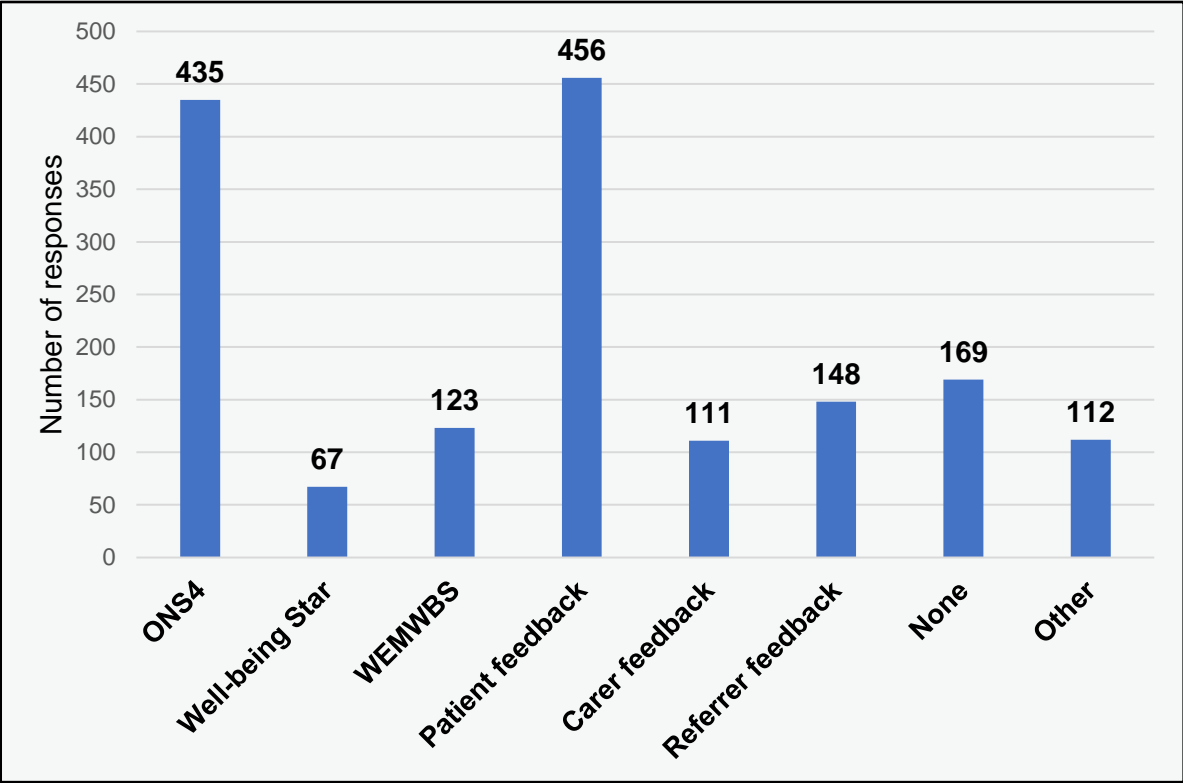


These responses indicate that **VCSE-based SPLWs** were **more likely** to record social prescribing outcomes than SPLWs based in PCNs.

# Which tools do you use to measure social prescribing outcomes?

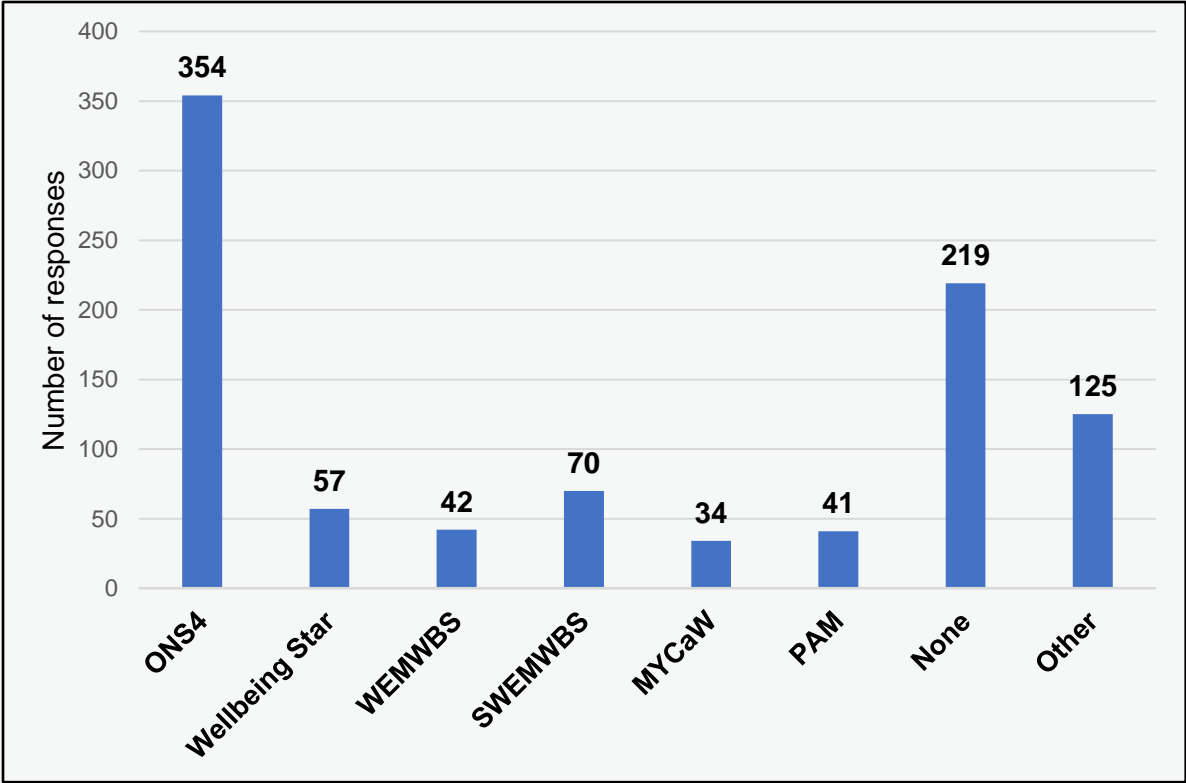


2022



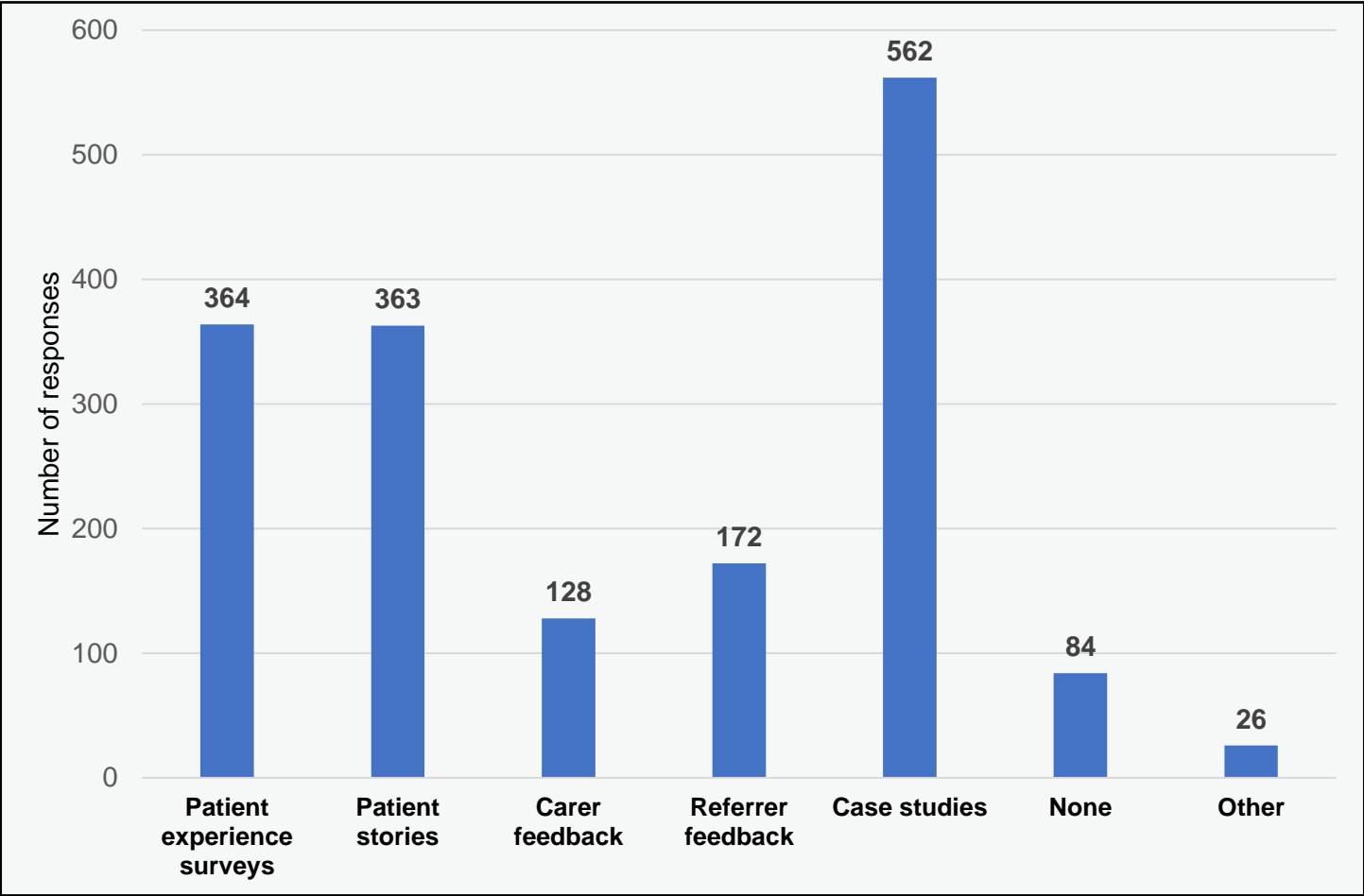
Based on 947 responses

2023



Based on 777 responses

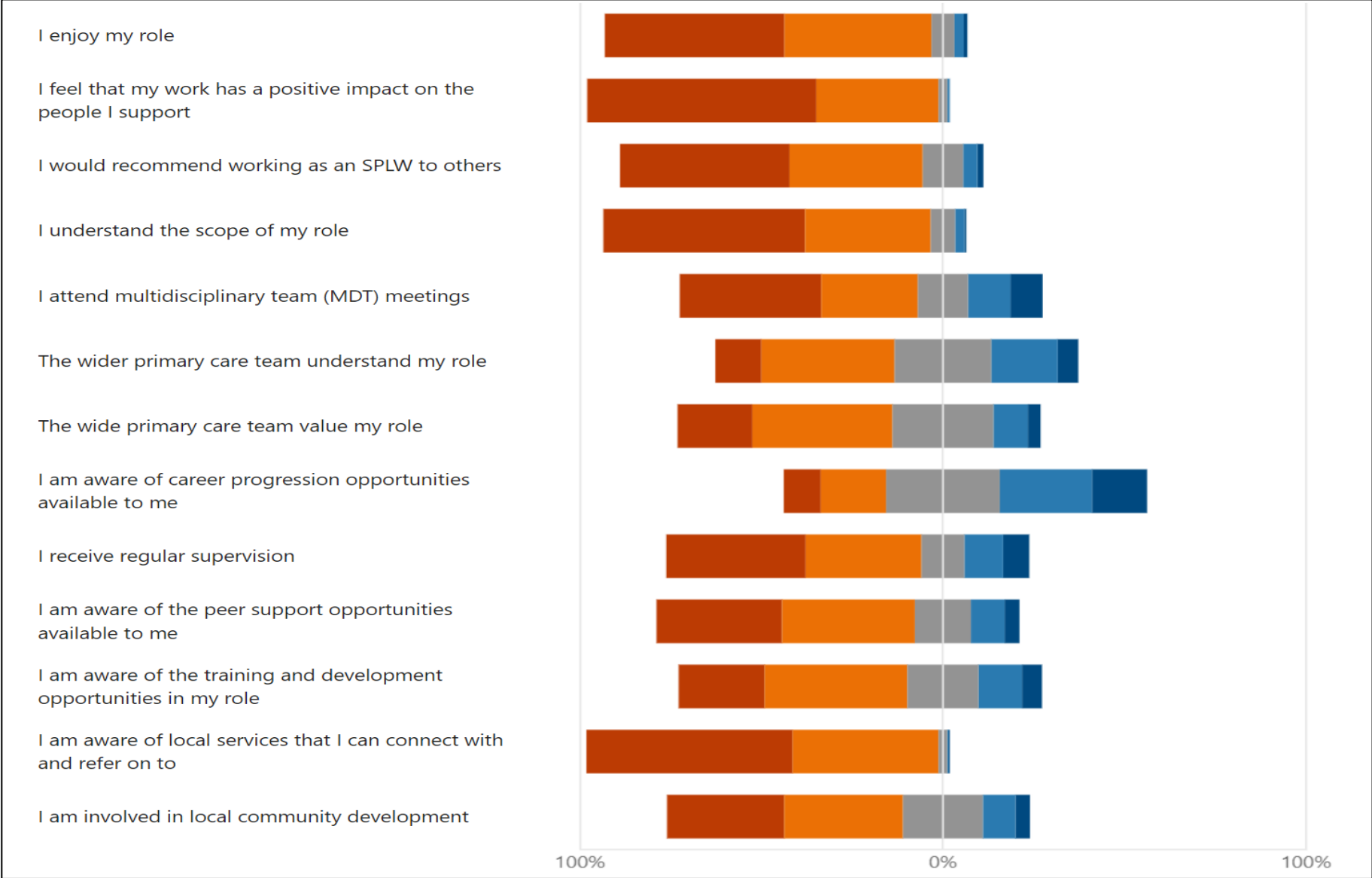
**ONS4** remained the **most commonly used tool** to record social prescribing outcomes, by an overwhelming margin



**Case studies** were the most popular form of capturing social prescribing outcomes in order to determine the impact of interventions on patients, though **patient stories** and **surveys** were also widely used



# To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



- The proportion of respondents who would recommend working as an SPLW to others increased from **76.5%** to **83.4%**
- The proportion of respondents who felt that the wider primary care team understood their role increased from **37.8%** to **49.4%**
- The proportion of respondents who were aware of career progression opportunities increase from **16.8%** to **28.2%**
- The proportion of respondents who were aware of training and development opportunities increased from **55%** to **63%**

# What do you enjoy most in your role as an SPLW?

Being able to make a difference

Supporting positive lifestyle changes

I enjoy the patient contact

I love the fact I actually help people start to finish

Working with my other social prescribing colleagues

Helping people connect with each other

Linking with other agencies and working closely with individuals

The diversity of the caseload

Being able to have time to focus on what the patient wants

Connecting patients with activities and services to benefit their health

Every day is different, and every story is different

I love strengthening our local community-based assets and bridging the gap between health care and the wider community

The fact that I am able to support and empower people take control of their wellbeing

Social prescribing is a superpower and small interventions can make a huge difference!

Ability to support clients with their mental health

The client expressing their appreciation

# If you could change 3 things about your role, what would they be?



## Common Themes

- Increased **acknowledgement** and **understanding** of the SPLW role by **clinicians** and **wider PCN colleagues**, as well as greater value given to the SPLWs and their role; this may help reduce **inappropriate referrals**
- **Salary** that reflects the **level of responsibility** and **demand** of the SPLW role
- Guaranteed **office space** for staff to feel integrated within organisations and to forge stronger relationships with colleagues
- **Additional staff** to help manage the demand of the role
- Scope for **relationship-building** with local community organisations and supporting **community development**
- Greater clarity on **career progression** pathways and more opportunities for **personal development**, including opportunities to pursue **professional qualifications** and role-specific **training**, with **protected time** to undertake these
- **Reduced caseload** to enable more time and support to be offered to individual patients
- Greater access to **IT systems** with training offered on the use of the systems; additionally, consistent and sustainable methods of **data collection**

# If you could change 3 things about your role, what would they be?



## Additional Comments

- Greater specific support and training for **housing and mental health** referrals due to demand
- More of a focus on **proactive** work and **innovation**
- **Mental health and wellbeing support** for SPLWs
- **Support** with **administrative tasks**
- Greater **peer support** opportunities
- Preference to work in **one practice/location**
- Availability of a **directory** of **local services**
- More **networking** opportunities with **SPLW peers** and **local community projects**
- Delivery of **face-to-face training**
- Greater clarity of the **scope** of the role and the associated **processes**
- Improved **induction processes** including **training** and provision of **resources**
- **Additional funding** for **local services**
- More **joined-up working** across the **system**