

# Beyond Burnout

Report #1 • February 2022

## Nurses Suffer From PTSD as Spiraling Work Demands Force Them to Sacrifice Their Mental Well-Being

Exhausted by long shifts on understaffed floors, America's nurses are suffering moral injury from working the frontlines of the pandemic. **56% of nursing professionals are now putting their job before their own well-being.** In this report from the IntelyCare Research Group, we examine how the working conditions during COVID have impacted the mental health of nursing professionals as part of a study that found that **41% are considering leaving the profession for good.**

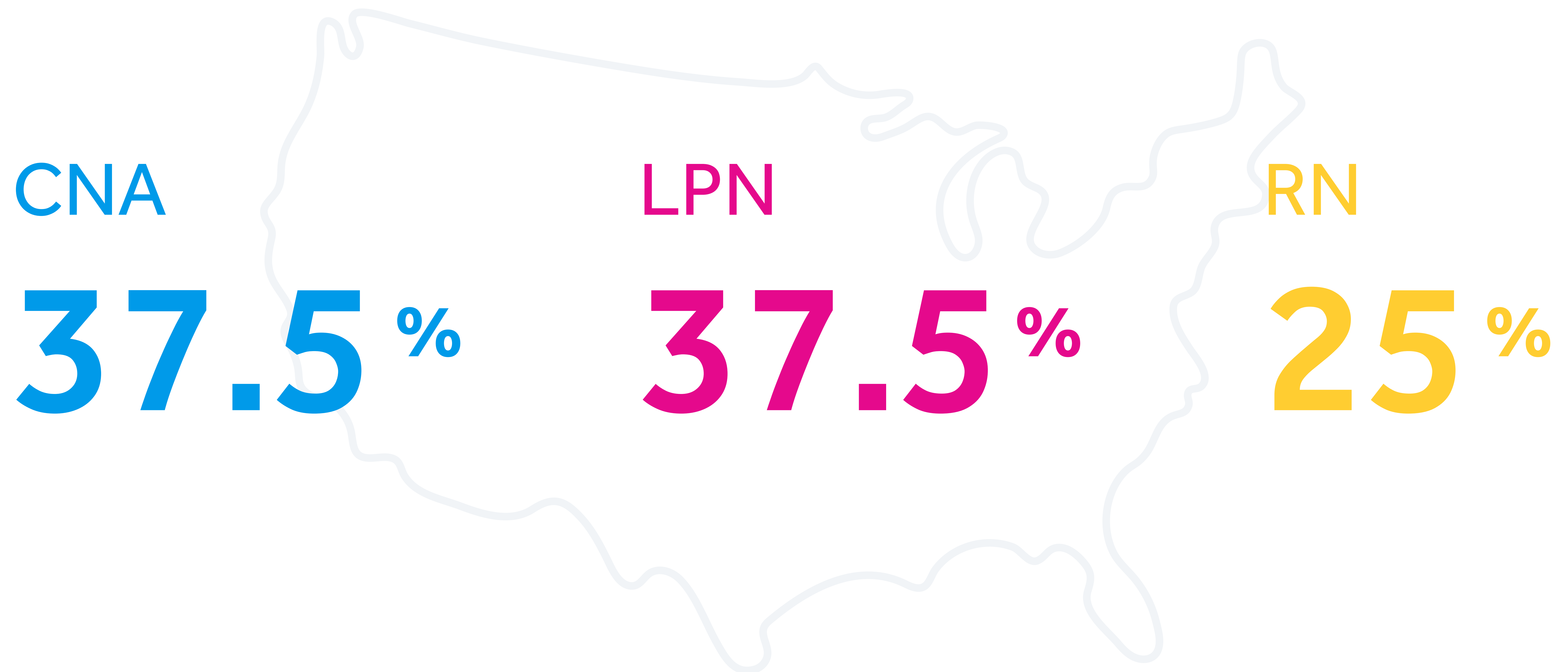




# Abstract

The IntelyCare Research Group found that high levels of acuity and patient deaths, long working hours, and shortages of staff have combined with the inherent risks of treating COVID-19 infections to cause significant mental and physical harm to nurses. Large portions of the nursing population feel unsupported in their mental health at work, lack overall support from their system's senior management, and are not regularly offered grief counseling. The mounting pressure of understaffing amplifies the burden on nurses and further denies them the time or ability to find care or a break to process and heal. Many did not take a vacation in 2021 and had not taken a day or weekend off in over a month, prioritizing their job above friends, family, marriages, finances, and their own health.


IntelyCare and Reputation Leaders surveyed over 500 U.S. nursing professionals to better understand how they view the profession in the wake of the pandemic. The mix of Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Certified Nursing Assistants shed light on both the positives and negatives of nursing over the last two years.





At a time when the country faces a potential shortfall of 1.1 million nurses, the pandemic has brought the demand on nurses to a whole other level. Yet over a third of nurses do not feel their mental health is supported at work and feel that they lack overall support from their system's senior management. "Our nurses are not experiencing fatigue or burnout, they are experiencing significant moral injury and critical distress to their emotional foundation," said Rebecca Love, IntelyCare's chief clinical officer. "We know that most of what is being offered to the frontlines in terms of whole-person support does not address the moral injury that nurses are experiencing."

# 37%



of nurses do not feel supported in their mental health at work

# 41%



feel that they lack overall support from their system's senior management



Nurses are actively seeing dead patients in their waking hours, experiencing nightmares while they sleep, and are suffering from constant flashbacks triggered by their places of employment. **The majority of nurses do have some form of access to mental healthcare through their employer but are not using it.** "The question we should all be asking is 'Why aren't they using it?,'" said Love. "Is there a stigma we need to address to get our nursing workforce the help they need to process the post-traumatic stress of what can only be summarized as witnessing the wars of a pandemic on the frontlines of our health system?"

72%

have some form of access  
to mental healthcare

90%

who have access to mental  
healthcare never use it



With the dramatic increase in deaths that have occurred throughout COVID, nurses have at times had to manage more death in a single day than they had typically dealt with over multiple months prior to COVID. Nurses are the primary factor affecting patient outcomes. In the acute care setting, they spend more time bedside with patients than the attending physician. In long-term care, they are the healthcare providers who are with patients, day in and day out. **When a loved one dies, it is often the nurses that share the devastating news with the bereaved family.** While patient death is the most stressful part of nursing for nearly a third of nurses, more than half of nurses are not offered any form of therapy to deal with the traumas of counseling patients' families or processing the losses for themselves.

32%

cite the death of patients as  
the job's biggest stressor

58%

report they are not regularly  
offered grief counseling



The mounting pressure of understaffing is amplifying the burden on nurses, further denying them the time or ability to find care or even a break to process and heal. Nurses are dealing with the constant pressure of always needing to be on for patients, supportive of colleagues, and the knowledge that when they are not at the bedside, there is an increased risk to patients. "Five patients per nurse is the optimal ratio for general medicine floors in the U.S., but we're seeing one-to-12 at some of our rural hospitals," according to Love. **On top of the long shift hours and repeated overtime demands, the pressure follows nurses outside of hospital and facility walls, as they are routinely phoned on days off with questions and requests to come back in.** "When nurses are not by the bedside, they feel as if they are failing their colleagues, resulting in nurses sacrificing themselves and their mental-well being to care for others before caring for themselves," said Love.

**37%**

feel unable to take a  
vacation

**29%**

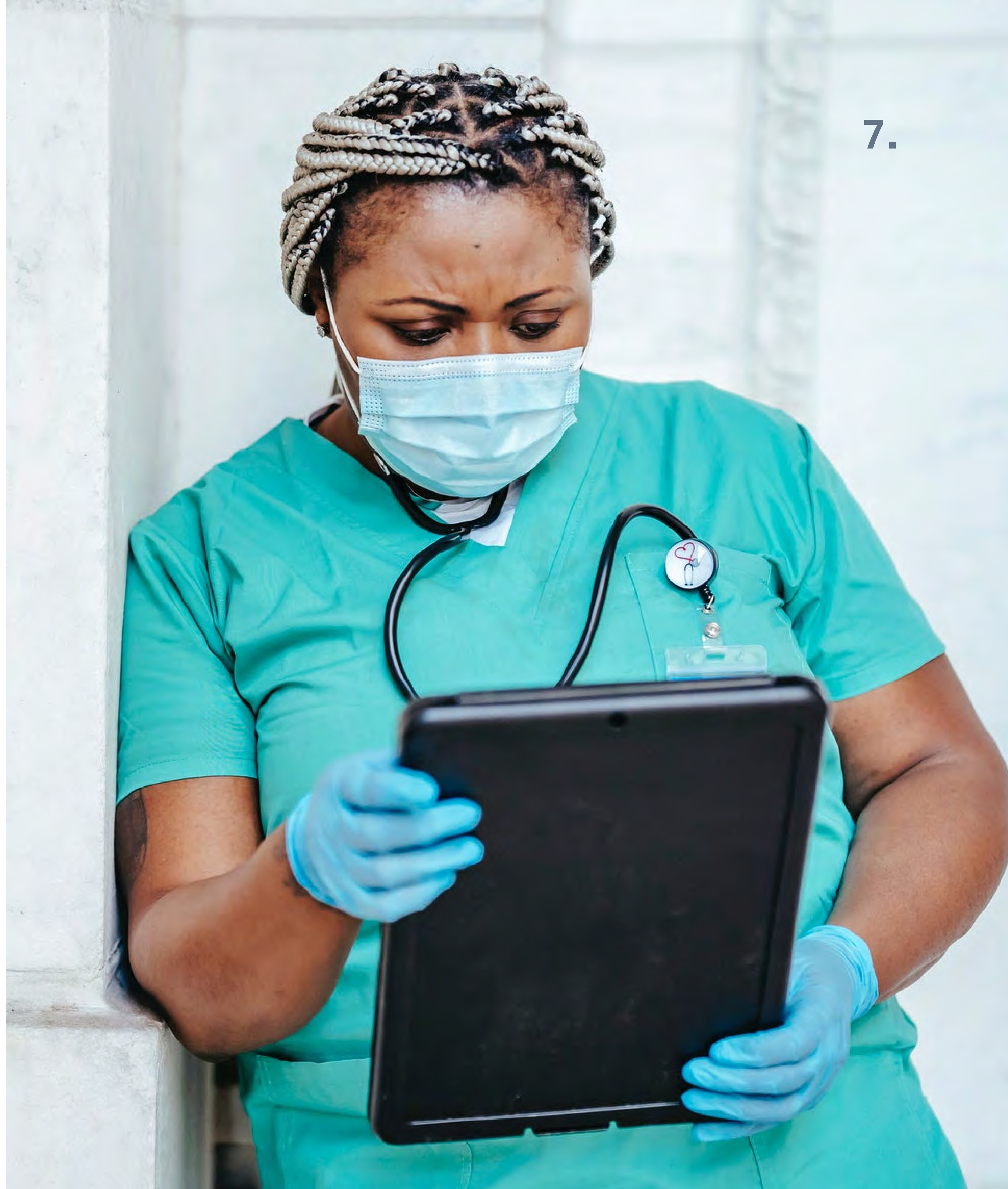
haven't had a vacation in  
the last year

**27%**

haven't had a day/weekend  
off in the last month



Nearly three-quarters (74%) of nurses came into the role to simply just help others. But for many, their profession is causing them to sacrifice their personal lives and time with their families. **More than a third (39%) said they prioritize their job over everything else in life — before friends, family, marriages, finances, and their own health.** “Healthcare administrators owe it to nurses and to patients to empower and invest in the nursing profession,” said David Coppins, IntelyCare CEO. “We need to seek out new tools and systems. We need to reinvent reimbursement and scheduling models around work-life balance, career paths, and education. The challenges nurses face are built into the system; to facilitate real change we have to begin with that understanding.”

**61%**

have had been told by a family member or friend that they work too much

**44%**

miss important family milestones to be a nurse

**68%**

have missed social events for work in the last month



## Methodology

Reputation Leaders surveyed 500 nurses in late Q4 2021 from across the U.S to discuss opinions, thoughts, and trends in the nursing industry, covering both acute and post-acute workplaces, and including Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), and Registered Nurses (RNs).

## About IntelyCare

IntelyCare is the largest digital nurse staffing platform in the United States. Through advanced machine learning and behavioral science, IntelyCare's easy-to-use app matches nursing professionals with open assignments at its post-acute partners. In doing so, IntelyCare is leading the work evolution for nurses, empowering them with the freedom to choose when, where, and how often they work, for the wages and benefits they deserve.

## About Reputation Leaders

Reputation Leaders is a global thought leadership consultancy that causes people to think about your brand differently and positively. We specialize in global reputation studies that help our clients lead on important issues, shape brand strategy, and earn media headlines.