

# Employee Engagement Survey

# 2019

May 2020 | Report 11.252

**"Rural Sunset" • First Place**  
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical  
By Kristen Korvell, with permission

## DSHS

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*Jay Inslee, Governor*

  
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## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

**Title:** 2019 DSHS Employee Engagement Survey

**Abstract:** The 2019 survey shows overall declines in employee engagement since the last major survey. Compared to 2017, there were statistically significant declines in positive responses to nine of the 24 items included in both surveys and only one statistically significant increase. Although down compared to the record-high positivity seen in 2017, the current survey compares favorably to years prior to 2017. The response rate in 2019 was 81%, the highest level of participation since the survey began in 2002. Survey results show opportunities for positive change, and in some cases, important challenges. Many of the opportunities and challenges are specific to administrations and major units, and are the subject of action planning at every level of the organization.

The Employee Engagement Survey is an important component of Governor Inslee's Results Washington initiative for performance management and continuous improvement. Survey results are used as the primary outcome measure for the goal to "Increase Washington as an employer of choice" under Goal 5: Effective, efficient and accountable government.

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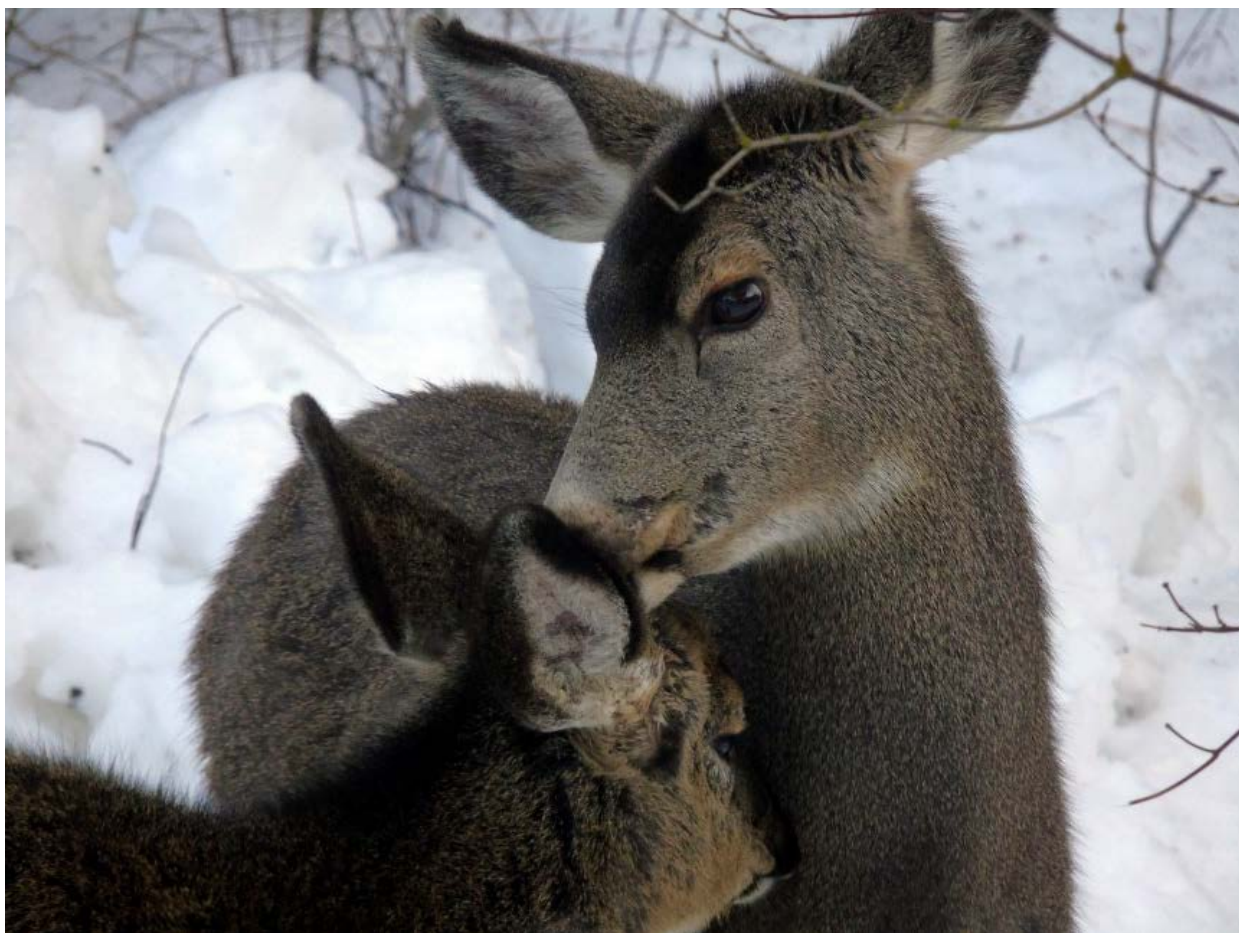
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**“What Money Can’t Buy” • Secretary’s Choice**  
DSHS Photo Contest  
By Cynthia Dodd, with permission

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“Money can’t buy duty, compassion, kindness, protection, and that is DSHS’s calling...”

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*Cheryl Strange, Secretary*  
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services



**“Picking Blueberries” • First Place (tie)**  
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Family  
By Morgan Stroh, with permission

**From the photographer:**  
*This is my daughter, who was the first baby born in the new year in Kittitas County! She loves picking (and eating) blueberries.*



**“Christine Falls” • Second Place (tie)**  
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Employees  
By Mark O'Donnell, with permission



# DSHS Employee Engagement Survey



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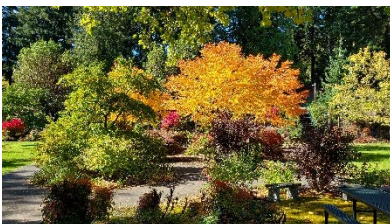
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Appendices are available with this report on the RDA Website:

<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/rda/research-reports>

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



***From the photographer:***

*Frozen morning, this aphid was actually frozen until the sunlight woke it up.*

***“Aphid on a Leaf” • First Place (tie)***

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical

By John Reindl, with permission





**“Tacoma Museum of Glass” • First Place**  
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic  
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## Executive Summary

**THE 2019 SURVEY SHOWS OVERALL DECLINES IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SINCE 2017.** Although down compared to the record-high positivity seen in 2017, the current survey year was the second most positive on record. Of the 24 standard questions asked in 2017 and 2019, 18 were at their highest or second-highest levels since the current version of the survey began in 2006.

Almost seven of 10 DSHS employees (69%) said that they are generally satisfied with their jobs, and six of 10 (60%) said they would recommend their agency as a great place to work. Mirroring overall survey trends, both questions declined by 2 percentage points from 2017.

The 2019 survey was open to all DSHS employees from October 1 to November 14, 2019. Though completed well before the unprecedented actions in response to COVID-19, the survey reflects a workforce already responding to change. Between the 2017 and 2019 surveys, large portions of the Department moved to other state agencies, and several administrations experienced internal reorganizations. Workplace renovations and increased telework continued in response to the state’s workplace strategy initiative, “Building a Modern Work Environment,” as directed by Governor Jay Inslee’s Executive Order 16-07. Secretary Cheryl Strange launched the Staff Idea Tour to hear from employees across the state, leading to several workplace initiatives, including an agency-wide workgroup to promote flextime. For some employees, a recent across-the-board personnel reclassification for Information Technology professionals was a major issue.

The Employee Engagement Survey is the principal method for DSHS to gather comprehensive feedback from all staff. The 13,105 DSHS employees who participated in the survey provided their insights about these changes and many other important issues. The response rate in 2019 was 81%, the highest level of participation to date.

### Bright Spots

Responses in some areas remained positive (“Always or Almost Always” or “Usually”), as they were in the last survey. Most employees continue to feel they are treated respectfully by their supervisors. A new statewide question shows that most employees also feel trusted by their supervisor. DSHS employees have also retained a strong sense of the agency’s mission, and their role in that mission.

**RESPECT AND TRUST.** The majority of employees report that their supervisor treats them with dignity and respect, and trusts them.

- 85% said “My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.” This is the second highest rated standard question in the survey and is the same percentage as in 2017.
- 76% said “My supervisor trusts me to make decisions or recommendations that affect my work.” Supervisor trust is an important driver of employee satisfaction.

**THE MISSION.** Employees continue to be proud of their contribution to “Transforming Lives.” DSHS scores higher than the state in several areas related to clarity of mission.

- 3,249 employees (34% of those who made comments) said that helping and working with clients and the community is a key component of their job satisfaction.
- 82% said “I know how my work contributes to the goals of my agency.” As in past years, this is one of the top three highest rated questions in the survey.
- DSHS scores higher than the state average in the percentage of employees who said they know how their work contributes to agency goals (82% positive, compared to 81% for the state overall) and how their agency measures success (58% positive, compared to 56% for the state overall).

### Opportunities for Improvement

Compared to 2017, there were statistically significant declines in positive responses to nine of the 24 items included in both surveys and only one statistically significant increase. Two related areas are of particular concern to employees: communication and perceptions of fairness. Many employees expressed frustration with the lack of information they received in the midst of significant organizational change. Some employees noted that an absence of clear communication about the reasons behind workplace changes created an atmosphere of uncertainty and assumption, contributing to perceptions of unfair treatment.

**COMMUNICATION.** An increase in concerns about communication appears to focus on employees’ access to information about changes, the quality of information they receive, and management listening to staff input.

- Only 49% of employees said “I receive clear information about changes being made within the agency.” This topic is in the bottom three of all standard questions and declined 2 percentage points from 2017.
- 58% of employees said “I know how my agency measures its success.” This is down from 61% in 2017.
- 796 employees (8% of all who commented) complained about the information they receive (or don’t) from management, representing a 47% increase in negative comments compared to 2017.
- 676 employees (7% of all who commented) made negative comments about management listening to staff input, a 25% increase compared to 2017.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**PERCEPTIONS OF FAIRNESS.** Survey results also show an increase in concerns about fairness in the agency. Significantly fewer employees reported that people are treated fairly in their work group. Written comments show increases in the number of employees critical of hiring/promotion practices, their manager's fairness, and diversity issues.

- 64% of employees said "People are treated fairly in my work group," a 2 percentage point decline from 2017.
- 1,111 employees (12% of those who made comments) complained about personnel issues. Many of the comments expressed frustration with hiring or promotion practices that don't seem to be fair or transparent. Some negative comments were related to the IT reclassification.
- 889 employees (9% of those who made comments) criticized manager/supervisor fairness, a 22% increase from 2017. Comments focused on bias and favoritism in policies, privileges, promotions, respectful treatment, and opportunities for alternative schedules and worksites.
- 368 employees (4% of those who made comments) made negative comments about diversity in DSHS, a 31% increase from 2017. Comments included reports of general discrimination, poor treatment of specific protected groups, and reverse discrimination.

## Workplace Flexibility

Even before the response to COVID-19 dramatically increased teleworking at DSHS, the agency was part of a nationwide trend away from the traditional environment where employees spend 8 hours a day in an individual cubicle. Implementation of the statewide "Building a Modern Work Environment" initiative and the agency-wide flextime initiative continued to generate interest about these issues. The survey results provide a snapshot of the pre-COVID agency. Those who already had flexible work schedules and telework opportunities appreciated it, and often wanted more. Those who didn't have flexible options generally wished they did. Some employees described practical challenges as offices transitioned to a more flexible and mobile workforce.

### **SATISFACTION WITH MOBILITY IS UP. SATISFACTION WITH SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY IS DOWN.**

- While only 48% of employees reported satisfaction with mobility (the ability to work remotely from a variety of locations), this question saw the largest (and only statistically significant) increase compared to 2017, when just 39% of employees said they were satisfied with telework options.
- 60% of employees reported satisfaction with flexibility (the ability to adjust scheduled hours as needed). Though higher than satisfaction with mobility, the percentage of employees satisfied with schedule flexibility is down 4 percentage points compared to 2017 — representing one of the largest decreases in the survey.

**EMPLOYEES HAVE A LOT TO SAY ABOUT FLEXIBILITY IN HOURS AND LOCATION.** More employees than ever before (2,722) commented on work hours or telecommuting, a 32% increase compared to 2017. There were increases in all types of comments: positive, negative, and neutral or mixed.

- 966 employees (10% of those who made comments) expressed gratitude for their flexibility, a 26% increase from 2017. Teleworking is on the rise at DSHS and many employees are happy with their ability to work from home, citing benefits to their productivity, work/life balance, and the environment. Others appreciate the option to have flexible work schedules, like compressed work weeks, or other alternative schedules.
- 1,456 employees (15% of those who made comments) made negative comments, a 31% increase from 2017. Employees expressed frustration with their shifts, rigid schedules, or inability to telework. Some mentioned unclear or unfair policies about eligibility.
- 300 employees (3% of those who made comments) made mixed or neutral comments, a 66% increase from 2017. These comments often included appreciation for current flexibility with requests for even more. Some employees requested more telework days, informal flexing, or the option to combine telework and alternative work schedules. Others said they support flexible options, but that their workplaces need better communication standards and tools for remote employees to accomplish their work.

### 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.<sup>1</sup>

**FEELING VALUED IS THE TOP PREDICTOR OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.** While all topics included in the survey are important, the top predictor of general job satisfaction and likelihood of recommending the agency is feeling valued as a person.

- Employees who said they always or usually feel valued for who they are as a person were *three times* more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than employees who said they feel valued occasionally or less.
- Similarly, employees who said that their supervisor trusts them or that their agency uses their time and talents well were *more than twice* as likely to report general job satisfaction.
- The pattern is similar for likelihood of recommending the agency as a great place to work, with feeling valued and good use of time and talents emerging as two of the top three predictors. Agency support for a healthy life is also strongly related to employees saying they would recommend the agency.

### About the Survey

The goal of the survey is to reach out to each of the more than 16,000 employees at DSHS, obtain candid feedback about their workplace experiences, and provide actionable results at every level of the organization. The 2019 Employee Engagement Survey was:

- Available to all employees from October 1 to November 14, 2019.
- 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 13,105 Department employees — an 81% response rate (based on headcount totals).
- Analyzed thoroughly. 489 detailed custom reports were prepared for workgroups throughout the Department.
- Distributed widely. In addition to this comprehensive report and the many workgroup 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, workgroups 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 Governor Inslee's Results Washington data-driven performance management and continuous improvement system. Survey results are used as the primary outcome measure for the goal to "Increase Washington as an employer of choice" under Results Washington Goal 5: Effective, efficient and accountable government. Action plans developed by the Department's Assistant Secretaries guide the next two-year cycle of performance improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 factors. See Appendix D for more detail.

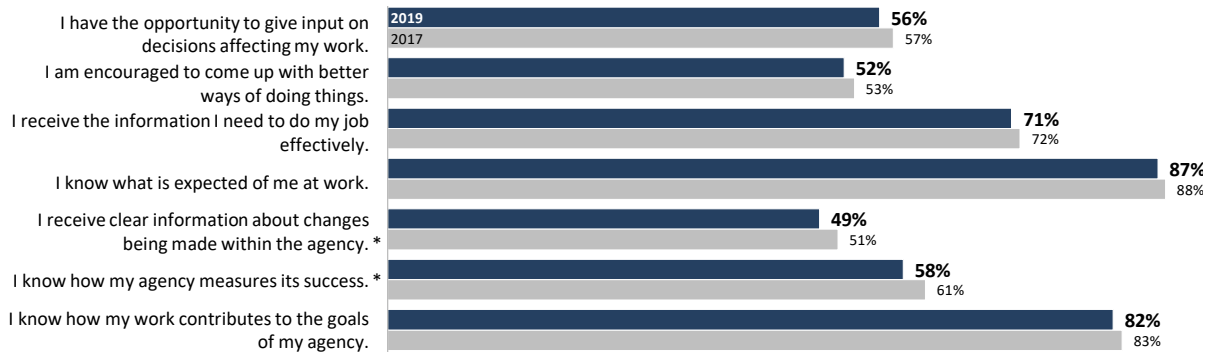


## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

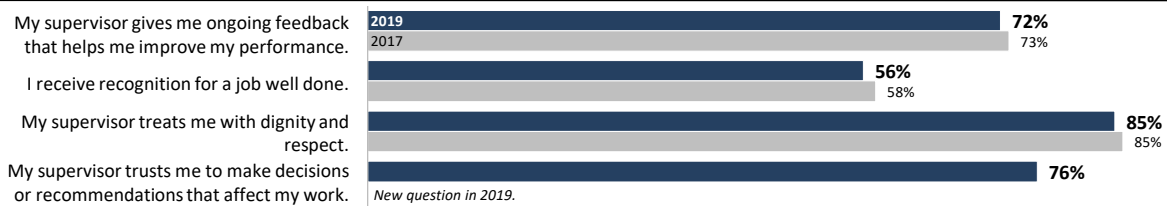
### Changes from 2017 to 2019

**Percent of employees answering “Always or Almost Always” or “Usually” (or “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”)**

#### COMMUNICATION



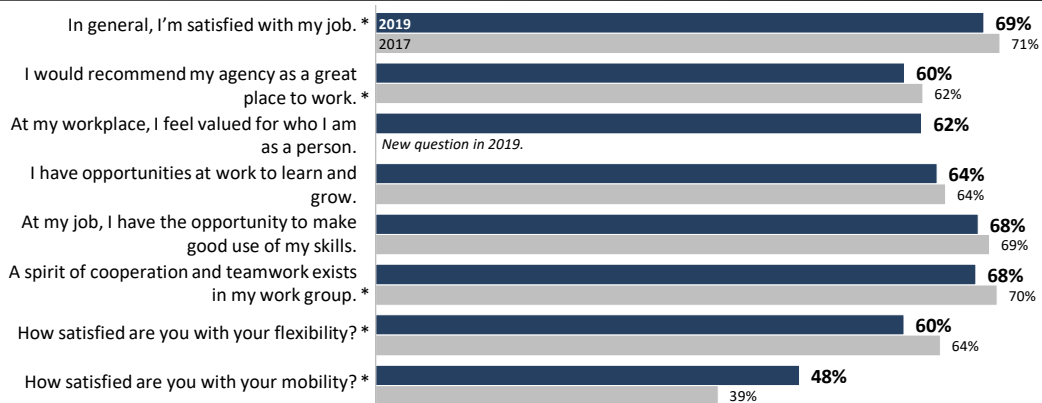
#### SUPERVISOR/MANAGER SUPPORT



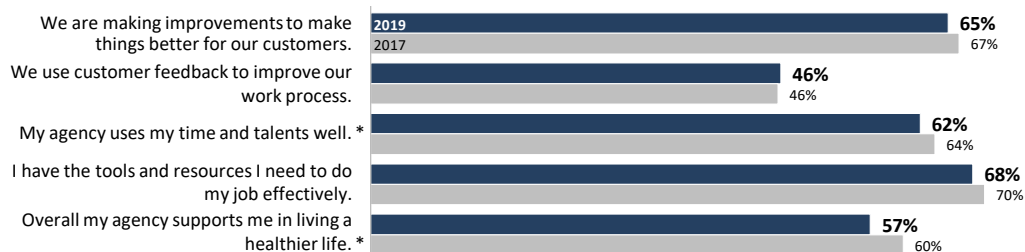
#### FAIRNESS/DIVERSITY



#### THE DAILY JOB



#### BUSINESS PRACTICES



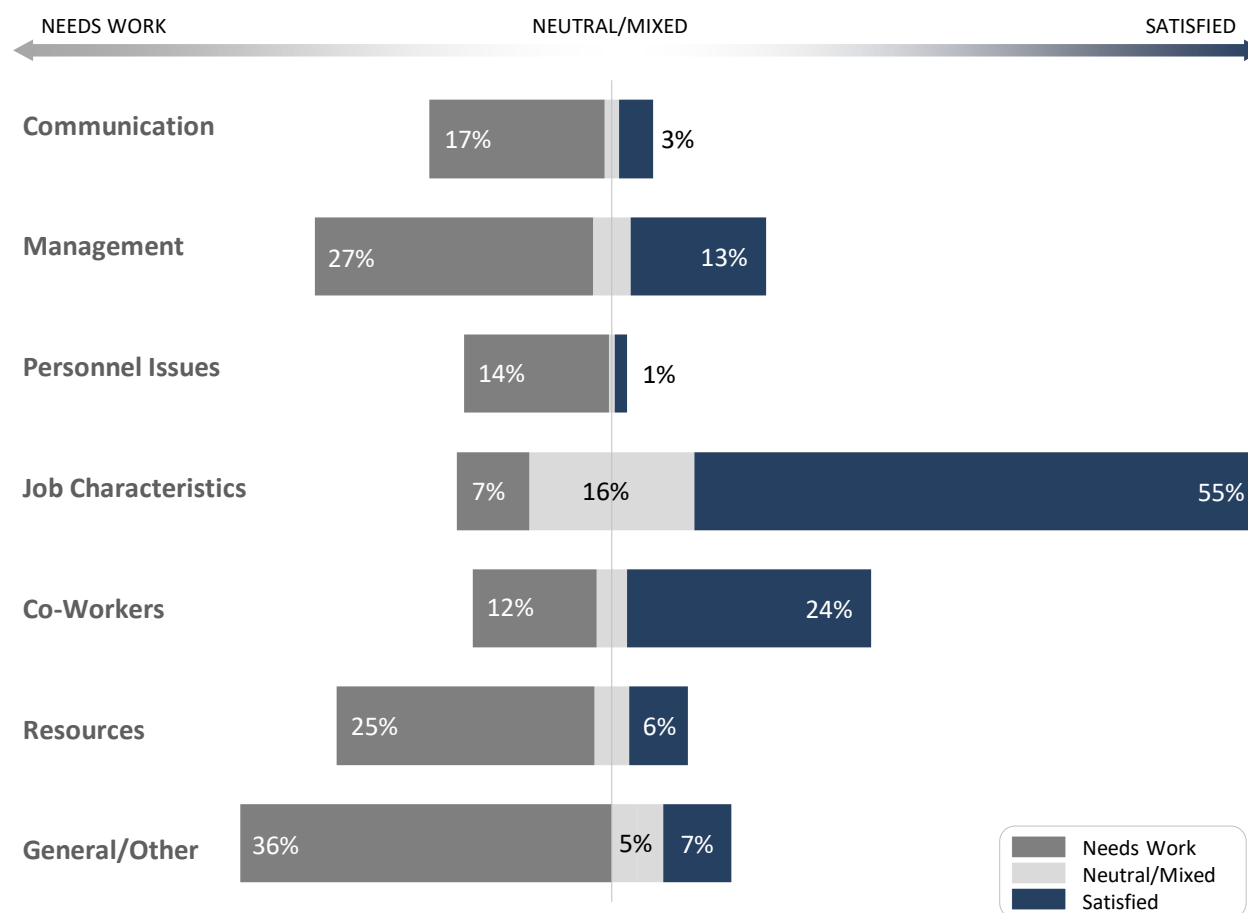
\*Change is significant at the .01 level. See Appendix B-9 and B-10 for long-term trends.

## Major Comment Themes

### COMMENTS WERE MADE IN RESPONSE TO THESE TWO QUESTIONS:

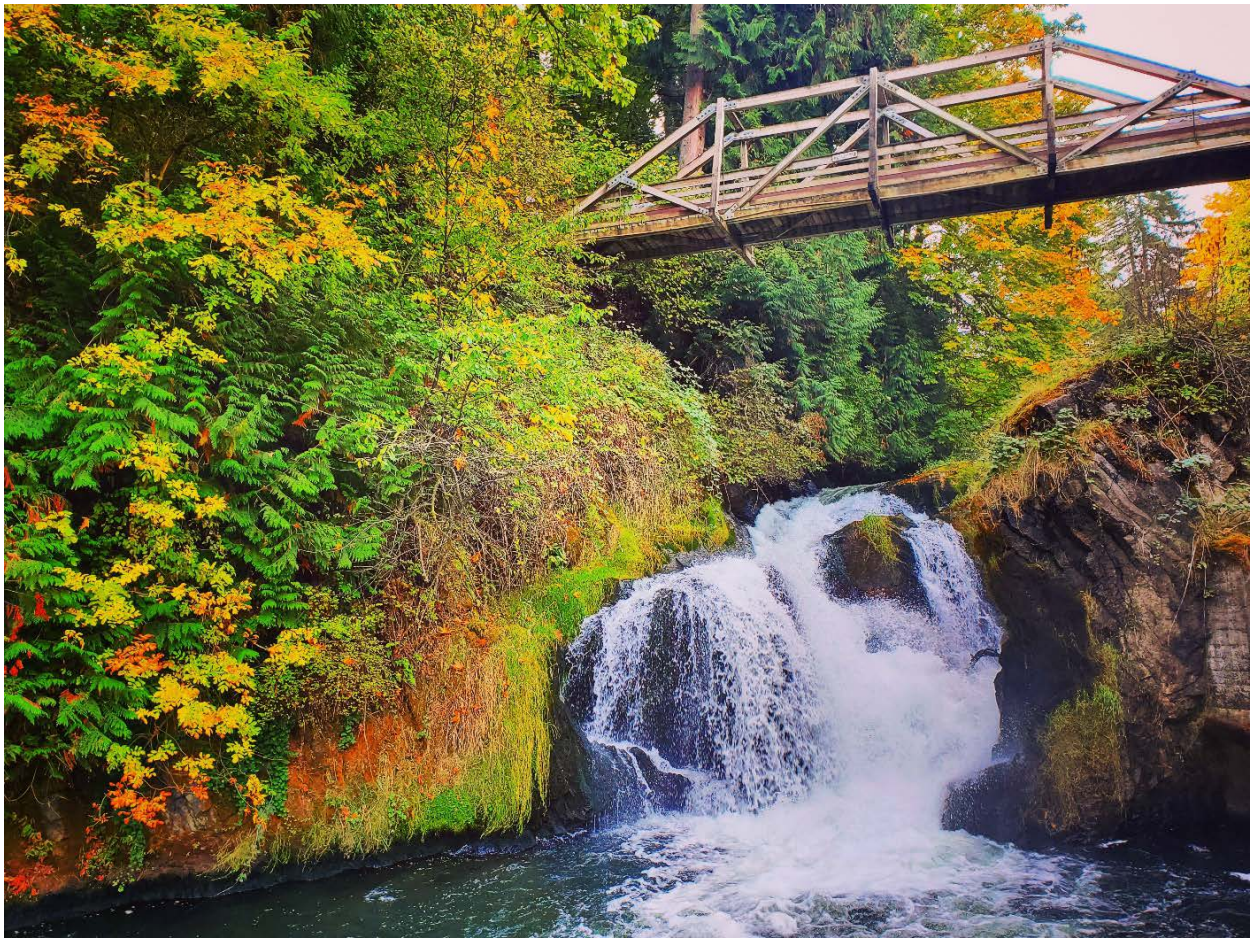
1. What do you like best about your current job?
2. What changes would you like to see in your workplace?

*Percent of the 9,444 respondents who made comments in 2019*



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.





*From the photographer:  
Weekend walk in Tumwater Falls Park. Tumwater, WA.*

**"Autumn in WA"**  
DSHS Photo Contest  
By Melissa Keser, with permission

## CHAPTER 1

# Communication

**COMMUNICATION ISSUES ARE A CONCERN** to staff in 2019. There were statistically significant decreases in positive responses ("Always or Almost Always" or "Usually") for two of the seven questions included in this chapter. Compared to the 2017 survey, significantly fewer employees reported they receive clear information about agency changes or know how their agency measures success. These decreases occurred within the context of large-scale organizational changes between the 2017 and 2019 surveys, including major parts of the Department moving to other state agencies and internal reorganizations within administrations.

Despite a dip in some measures, more than eight of 10 respondents said they know what is expected of them at work (87%) and how their work contributes to the goals of the agency (82%). Communication issues also figure prominently in employees' comments: 2,034 employees (22% of those who commented) mentioned communication. Most of those comments (1,596) identified areas that need work.

**STAFF INPUT.** Staff consistently report that they want a stronger voice, especially with respect to changes that directly affect their work. Managers who value staff input and encourage innovation are highly regarded. Employees want an opportunity to share input without judgement and want to see their ideas put into action.

- **Opportunities for input could be improved.** 56% of employees agreed that they have the opportunity to provide input into decisions affecting their work.

- **Encouragement to innovate remains low.** 52% of employees said they are encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.
- **More complaints about management listening.** 676 employees (7% of those who made comments) criticized managers' attention to staff input, a 25% increase from 2017.

**INFORMATION FROM MANAGEMENT.** As in years past, most employees said they have clear job expectations and receive the information necessary to perform their main duties. However, the percentage of employees who said they receive clear information about agency changes is down from 2017. Critical comments on this topic provide insight into situations where organizational and policy changes have left many employees feeling like they were left out of the loop.

- **Satisfaction with job-specific information remains moderate.** 71% of employees agreed that they receive needed information to do their job effectively.
- **High awareness of job expectations.** 87% of employees agreed that they know what is expected of them at work.
- **Decreased satisfaction with information about changes.** 49% of employees (down from 51% in 2017) agreed that they receive clear information about changes within the agency.
- **More complaints about information from management.** 796 employees (8% of those who made comments) made negative observations about the information they receive from supervisors or management, a 47% increase from 2017.

**GOALS, GUIDELINES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES.** The percentage of employees who agreed that they know how their agency measures success is down from 2017, but is higher than the years before 2017. Most employees continue to say that they know how their own work contributes to agency goals.

- **Decreased knowledge of how the agency measures success.** 58% of employees (down from 61% in 2017) said they know how their agency measures success.
- **Knowledge of how employee's own work contributes to agency goals remains high.** 82% of employees agreed that they know how their work contributes to the goals of the agency.



*From the photographer:*

*This is what my typical 45 minute drive in the Express Lanes to work from Lynnwood to my office on Cherry Street looks like on the Ship Canal Bridge.*

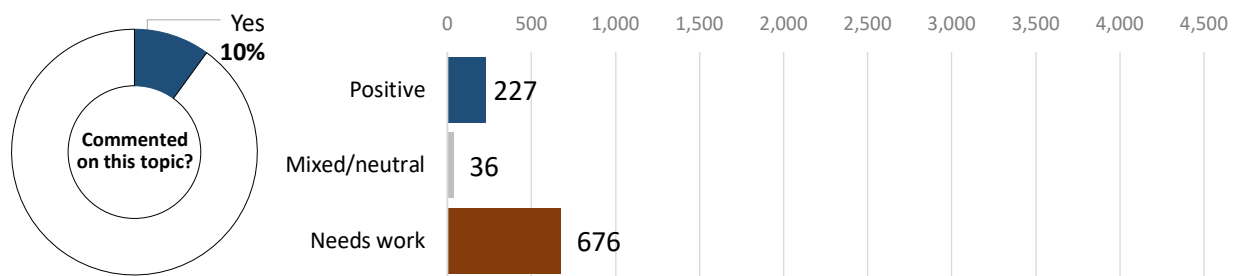
**"Morning Commute"**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Alan Sapalaran, with permission



**THEME.** Listening to input from staff

**939 of the 9,444 respondents who commented addressed the issue of managers listening to staff.**



Of those who commented on this topic, 227 said that managers listen to them and encourage feedback. Many more (676) said that improvements are needed. Employees want managers to:

- Provide a safe space for sharing feedback
- Ask for input from those actually doing the work before making decisions
- Act on the input they receive

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees appreciate having an opportunity to voice their opinions.

- “I love that I can share ideas without feeling degraded or dismissed.”
- “I love my supervisor! I love having the flexibility and ability to make decisions without fear. I love being able to learn (from both my successes and failures).”
- “I could not ask for a better team. Everyone has a voice and is able to let that voice be heard in a safe environment. We may disagree with each other one minute and be laughing or crying with each other the next.”
- “I appreciate the camaraderie among my team and the ability to speak my mind on therapy and life-based topics without judgment.”
- “I have a great field manager who listens to the team’s concerns and makes every effort to support me as an individual, as well as our team.”

#### Some respondents want management to consider feedback from frontline staff before making decisions.

- “I would like for management to listen to their frontline employees, not just supervisors and other managers. The frontline staff are the ones that actually know what is going on in the workplace and can give actual information on what will and won’t work for the patients and staff.”
- “Start listening to ALL staff, not just people who have been so separated from the actual job duties of the agencies that they barely know the goals anymore.”
- “Leaders should listen to their employees and include them in any changes because employees are the main foundation of the organization.”
- “Employees on the front lines are typically experts in process efficiencies. Recent modernization and process changes have not allowed for any worker feedback.”

“I would like to see more opportunity to give feedback to headquarters about conditions on the field. We are working hard out here to do a good job and help our clients, but changing demographics and limited resources can impact our caseload/workload, as can increased reporting and case management requirements.”

“I would like the people that make the rules to have a clue what it is like from the aspect of those of us working on the ward directly with the clients. It gets SO frustrating to continuously explain why a certain choice made simply will not work, only to get pushed back. Communication with the actual people doing the task should be fundamental before changes are put into effect. Work WITH us, not OVER us.”

“I very much appreciate the way my management structure relies on the people doing the work to provide input as to the best resolution of issues.”

#### Staff want their input to have an impact.

“I would like to see feedback really used to create change when we are given opportunity. I do not ever want to hear management tell me, ‘It’s the state, things move slow.’ We jump through fire to help our clients achieve their goals and I would like to see that same energy supporting the goals of their employees. We have a lot of talented, very bright people who are not given a voice.”

“With headquarters being so hyper-focused on Total Case Management, great ideas coming from the local level are ignored due to being considered ‘low priority.’ This is stifling innovation from the people who are connected with the clients and community partners.”

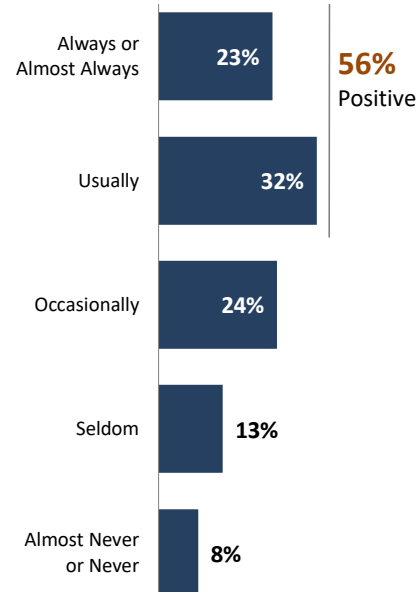
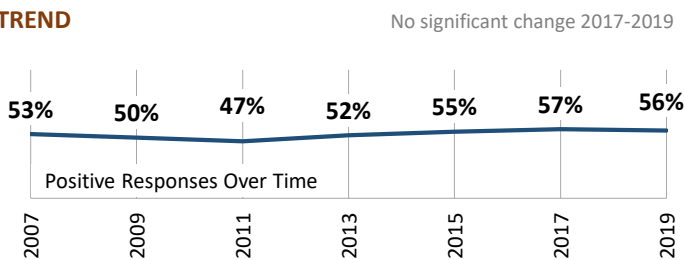
“It would be nice for management/administrators to listen and incorporate workers’ feedback. All the ideas I have shared so far are met with generic responses.”

“I love the staff idea tour but our leader is on that committee and I don’t see him implementing anything into our agency from the tour.”

**QUESTION.** I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.

**More than half of employees (56%)** said they always or usually have a chance to give input on decisions in their workplace. Two of 10 respondents (20%) said that they seldom or never have opportunities to give input.

In their comments, many employees expressed appreciation for supervisors who seek their input and explain why ideas can or cannot be implemented. Others are frustrated when they are not asked to provide input or when their feedback is not seriously considered.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Some employees feel heard in their workplace.**

"My ideas are taken seriously, and I am allowed to take initiative. There is a sense of mutual respect among my colleagues, and we work well as a unit. My supervisor appreciates that we are all on a path of self-improvement and gives us room to grow."

"I feel heard and our opinions matter."

"I enjoy being able to facilitate group meetings for my team, having the ability to provide input for my specialized hospital team, and having my supervisor listen to the concerns and things that need attention or improved."

"I feel supported and valued by my team, supervisor and administrator. When I have an idea, they actually listen to me and if possible, implement my suggestion. If my idea won't work, they follow up and tell me why. We are encouraged to speak up when we have something to say, and everyone is heard."

"I am able to provide input regarding my direct work, which I enjoy. This does not mean things are done my way or my suggestions are always approved. However, I always get the 'why' behind and know that I play a valuable role in our overarching goal to reduce poverty 50% by 2025."

**Others express frustration that their input is not solicited.**

"[I would like to be] able to give input before processes change, especially when it is something that makes a big impact on CRMs [Case Resource Managers] and makes their jobs more difficult rather than easier."

"People are NOT listened to when they speak up, so they have just stopped speaking. At least to the ones in authority. We have lots of ideas on how to change things for the better, but we are not listened to at all, as though we are stupid and not as smart as the ones in authority."

"I get it, everyone is busy, but if you're going to make a decision about something, can we at least get a conversation about how that decision will impact the end user? I understand that hard decisions need to be made but, personally, I am more likely to respect a decision of my superior when I know that my concerns were heard and my solutions were sincerely considered."

**Staff want their input to be taken seriously.**

"If you are going to ask for ideas, actually take our ideas into consideration instead of making us feel like you just asked because it seemed like the right thing to do but had no intentions of truly listening."

"They don't listen to our ideas, or they will ask for our ideas and then do what they want."

"I understand there are times when staff involvement is not needed or maybe even wanted. That's fine, just don't waste my time and patience by pretending I'm involved."

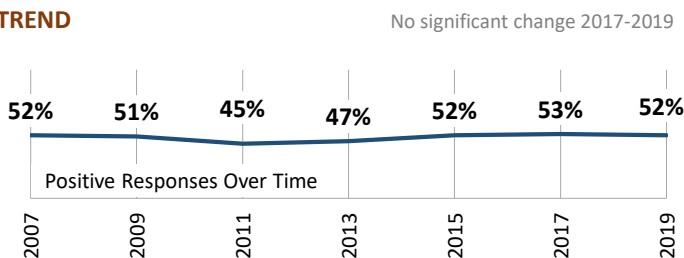
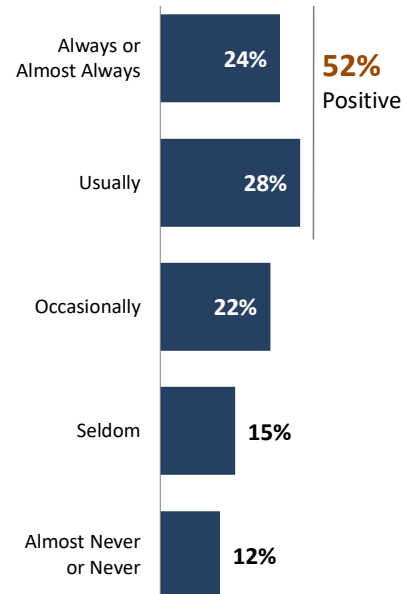
"Why do you make us take this survey when we never hear what will be different, based on our feedback? In my years here only one time was there an effort to make improvements based on this survey. The staff idea tour is a good effort."



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

**Just over half of employees (52%)** said they are always or usually encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things. Over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated they seldom, if ever, receive such encouragement.

Many employees like being trusted to think creatively and believe new approaches to their work will improve client outcomes. Some are concerned that the workplace culture discourages innovation in favor of the status quo.

**TREND****ANSWERS****► What DSHS employees said ...****Employees appreciate supervisors who encourage creativity.**

"In my new position, I get to be creative and think outside of the box. I love that! It feels like a big step in a more positive direction of DSHS work culture."

"[I like] the variety of work and the freedom I have to look for new and better ways of doing things."

"I love working with the diverse population of clients and having the opportunity to look outside the box for solutions to solve problems."

"I enjoy the ability to be creative while doing my job. Thinking outside the box is encouraged and this has helped me grow in many ways."

**Staff want to improve service delivery through innovation.**

"I like that our administration is not afraid to try new things or 'break the wheel.' It is nice to have a leadership team that is open to grassroots ideas and is active in advocating for the residents AND THE STAFF. I like the flexibility that my department boss gives me in problem solving. It allows us to come up with new and innovative approaches to helping our residents."

"Leadership creates an environment where employees are provided the guidance and tools to do their jobs effectively, while also being trusted and empowered to be innovative and truly transform the way clients receive ALTA services in Washington state."

"Positive encouragement for all staff to try new things (even if it fails) to eventually get to best practices through creative efforts."

"At our all staff, we just heard a presenter who shared that at Microsoft you can propose a 'crazy' idea and form a work group around your idea to make it happen. If we were able to have time together to problem solve and present new alternatives to administration, we could really impact our system in a positive way. There's a lot of wisdom that's untapped."

**Some feel that their workplace discourages innovation.**

"The culture prohibits innovative and progressive change, while promoting the status quo. At times, standard-of-care cannot even be achieved, which sacrifices patient care. Good ideas are stifled for institutional political reasons, or simply due to staff inability or unwillingness to embrace change."

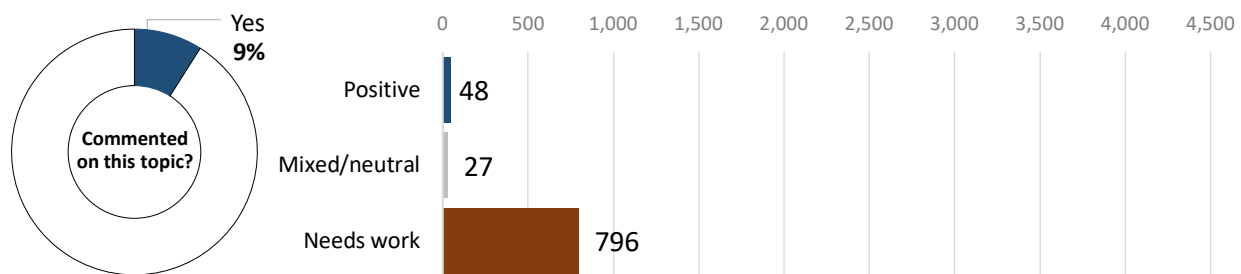
"Leaders should put more energy into consciously creating a more psychologically safe work environment. It currently is not conducive to taking risks, putting yourself out there, challenging the status quo, etc."

"My team members and I have made some really great suggestions on how we could be more efficient at our jobs. Each time, we have been made to feel like our ideas would be a waste of company time. 'It has always been this way' is a reasoning that I am often given, but that does not explain to me the 'whys.'"

"I would like to see a change to the entrenched 'we've always done it this way' mindset, which is a detriment to providing the best evidence-based treatment."

**THEME.** Information communicated from management to staff

**871 of the 9,444 employees who commented mentioned how supervisors and managers provide information.**



Comments about information from management were overwhelmingly requests for improvement. A small number of employees (48) reported satisfaction with the way information is communicated by supervisors and managers. Most employees who commented (796) see a need for improvements at all levels of the agency. They would like:

- Clear, direct, and honest communication
- Advance notice of changes that will affect employees
- More transparency from leadership, especially during times of uncertainty

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Most who commented on communication from supervisors and managers expressed dissatisfaction.

- “[I would like] better communications. A lot of communication is by overhearing conversations, not direct communications from management.”
- “There is an issue with information sharing and silos. There is not a lot of cross-administration sharing and that leads to duplication of efforts and sometimes, there are mixed messages given from the agency depending on what administration is doing the talking.”
- “I’d like to see better communication. I’m aware that a different unit in my program area is to be closing soon. The staff was only given a very short notice via email, not in person, which must have felt like a slap in the face.”
- “I would like all information shared. It feels as if I am fed only part of what I need to know to support my staff and that there are big secrets behind everything. I have personally seen really good staff leave because of this.”

#### Some made suggestions on how to improve.

- “I’d like to have more open lines of communication between management and line staff. More staff meetings are not the answer. Meeting notes being published timely (or at all) and emails communicating issues that impact our work environment are helpful.”
- “Improved communication about policy changes. Sometimes it feels like I hear things through an email chain from the top-down. Some agencies have listserv emails or webinars, but I have to get an email chain.”
- “[I’d like] the presence of region at local offices, perhaps a ‘Go-To’ person for questions. It is known we can utilize region for questions, but if one person was ‘assigned’ to an office this would feel more inviting for us to use the resource.”

#### Open communication and transparency from management are important to employees.

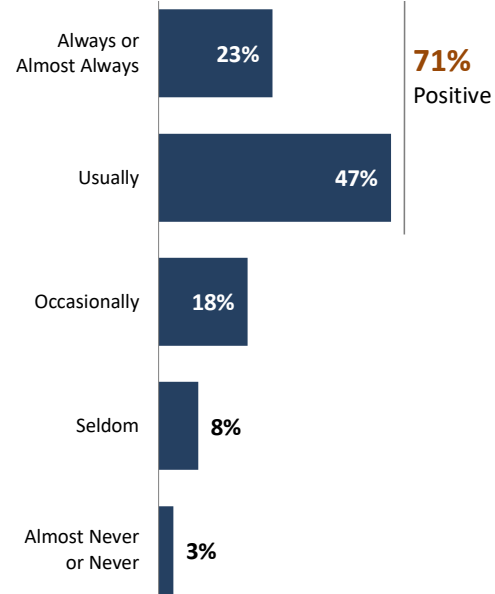
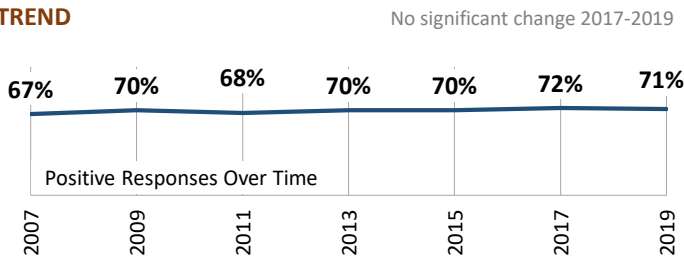
- “Currently I like the way my supervisor advocates for change, she listens to our ideas and actually follows through and gives updates. She is transparent and encourages us to be as well.”
- “We have a new superintendent that is very positive and optimistic about the future of our facility, especially as we are dealing with a poor survey and developing plans of correction. She sends out weekly emails to all staff with updates. These emails have improved morale because we are finally getting direct information.”
- “[I want] honest and open communication from management. Silence is not communication and so staff make guesses and assumptions, which may be wrong. If management is still in a process negotiating or planning or deciding on things, say so.”
- “I would like to see more communication and transparency from management, and for them to work hand in hand with staff when attempting to implement new employee benefits such as telework. If management communicated with staff and asked for staff input, implementation in certain areas would have been smoother and quicker.”
- “Keeping people in the dark about new changes until it directly impacts them is not a way to manage effectively because it creates a sense of exclusion, bias, and lack of trust and respect. Having open conversations so all staff, or at least managers, are aware of what is potentially coming is helpful.”
- “Actual transparency versus just the words. Real communication versus spin.”

**QUESTION.** I receive the information I need to do my job effectively.

**More than seven of 10 employees (71%)** said they get the information they need to do their job effectively. Only one of 10 (11%) reported they don't have the information needed to do their job well.

Responses to comment questions show that many employees appreciate having open communication with their direct supervisors. Others would like to see consistent, quality information provided in a timely manner.

Some employees noted that a lack of communication within and between teams can limit the ability to do their jobs effectively.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Many employees are happy with the information their supervisor provides.**

"I have a supervisor who is very supportive and understands any issues I may have. He keeps me well informed of changes and is very flexible if needed."

"I have a wonderful supervisor who is a great communicator."

"My supervisor is very communicative about what is occurring in the workplace and how this impacts our team."

"I really enjoy my supervisor and my team. There is a lot of open communication regarding policies and difficult cases, and different protective services."

"I really appreciate the open communication between my supervisor and myself."

**Some express frustration with the quality or quantity of information they receive.**

"Information that comes from headquarters is sent either too fast or too slow with serious details lacking. We are not given the tools to help our clients succeed."

"Consistent information. Too often time is wasted figuring out which answer is correct regarding a process."

"I can't do my job to the best of my ability if information is withheld."

"Headquarters and the field offices have struggled to properly communicate since the day I started working here. At times it's difficult to do my job simply because no one can produce a document stating actual policy."

"The job itself is fun. But there is no communication, no direction, no truth in what is being said. It's difficult to do a good job when you work in a dark tunnel and cannot see where it is heading."

**Employees want more timely information.**

"[I would like] to have more clear communication from administration at a pace that keeps up with our work so that we can know the information to provide our families and clients as they need it, rather than waiting a week."

"As a PBS [Public Benefits Specialist], we need to actually receive information on changes in a timely manner, not after they have happened or after we've received an incorrect audit for a change we were not aware of."

"When updates happen, getting that information out in a timely manner would be great instead of letting it trickle down the chain."

**Others want better communication between groups.**

"There seems to be silos between work groups and divisions that lead to communication issues, redundancy of work, gaps in work, and overall confusion."

"There is a lack of communication of what happens on campus and the houses don't communicate within the shift and with other shifts. Usually I don't find out information until it's over or right when it is happening."

"More opportunities to collaborate and communicate across units in the organization."

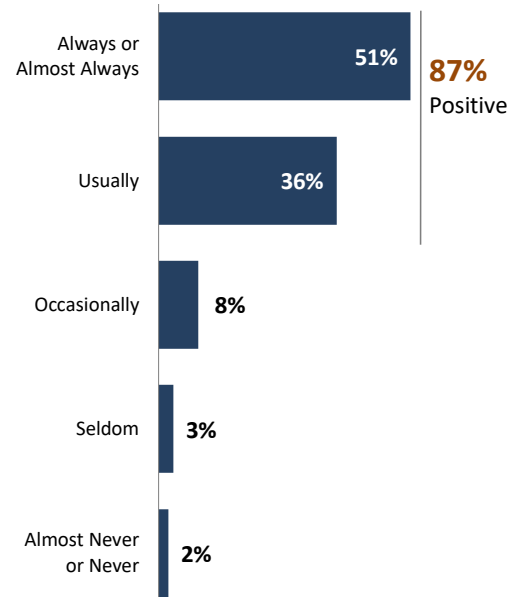
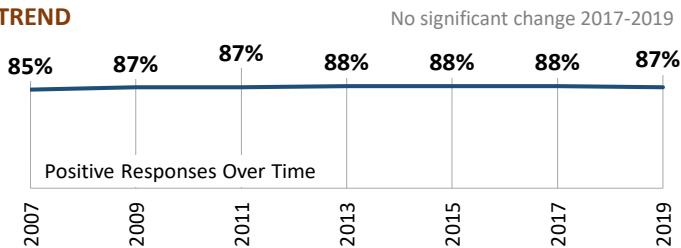
"Better communication between medical staff and registered nurses."



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

**Almost nine of 10 employees (87%)** said they always or usually understand their job expectations, making this the highest-rated question in the survey. A small number of employees (5%) said they seldom or never know what is expected of them.

In their comments, many employees expressed confidence in their understanding of job duties. But some are frustrated by unclear roles and responsibilities or changing expectations.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Most employees know what is expected of them at work.**

"I feel confident in what I do and what is expected."

"I really love my supervisor. She practices fair and consistent practices and I thrive on getting clear directives. My line of work has lots of high demands and stressful moments but approaching my supervisor is not one of my worries. Strong leaders give workers like me confidence, even in times of uncertainty."

"My job has clear expectations and deadlines."

"My supervisor is amazing, professional, and does not micromanage. I know what is expected of me."

"Expectations are clearly communicated and are typically based around furthering service delivery."

"I work well with my clients and co-workers. I know what is expected of me and I feel I do an excellent job at my current site!"

"My supervisor encourages me to always look for ways to improve my phone times, but also encourages me to continue showing empathy towards our clients. It's a win-win because I strive to meet my department's expectations but I also love helping other people."

"I know what is expected and I am able to make my own decisions as to the best way to accomplish them."

"[What I like best is] my current work crew. They support me and help me learn what the expectations of my position are, as well as contribute to a positive, structured, friendly, fun, effective environment."

"I like that expectations are clear, and that there is mutual trust between employees to be consistently productive."

**Some aren't sure what is expected of them or would appreciate more direction.**

"[I would like] clear job expectations to avoid role confusion."

"I would like to see management clearly define duties so that there is no redundancy and confusion on what duties belong to a particular department."

"[I would like to see] better written communication. We receive many verbal directives and it makes expectations unclear when these directives are opposite of what is written in our SOPs."

"[I would like] clear direction on how to do tasks related to [my] job. There are a lot of subtasks needed for each task with little training. A lot of training is given to new employees before there is context to apply this knowledge so retraining is often needed."

**Others are frustrated with changing expectations.**

"Overall the job duties are expanding and processes are becoming more complicated. For case managers, it is challenging to accurately complete duties with the increased workload."

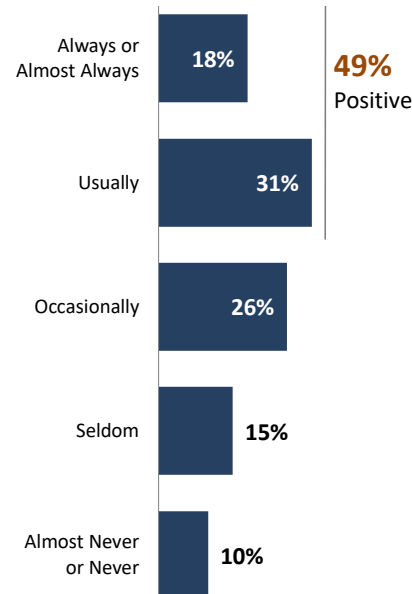
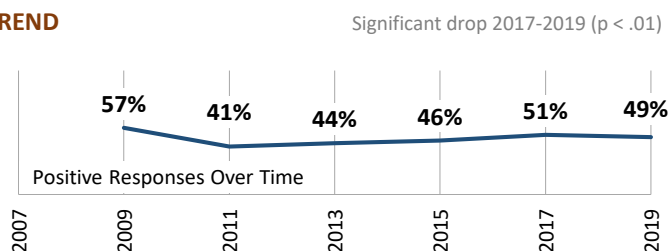
"[I want] better communication from very high up above with clear expectations that are not changed in the middle of the game."

"I would like to see better communication. Expectations continue to increase without any discussion of why or what to expect. It feels like you walk into work dreading what the new surprise for the day is going to be."

**QUESTION.** I receive clear information about changes being made within the agency.

**Less than half of employees (49%)** said they always or usually receive clear information about agency changes – a statistically significant decrease compared to the last survey. One of four employees (25%) said they seldom or never receive information about changes.

Some respondents expressed appreciation for supervisors who keep them informed about changes that affect their work. Many others are frustrated when they don't receive information about organizational or policy changes, resulting in increased anxiety and poor service delivery. Employees also want to know the reasons behind changes.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Employees are grateful for supervisors and managers who communicate in times of change.**

"[My] manager is easy to work with, always keeps us in the loop regarding any changes within our office and consistently will ask for feedback regarding any changes that may be made."

"In my current position I have incredible support from my direct supervisor who encourages professional development and growth, supports strong team morale, and maintains communication on the constant changes in CSD [Community Services Division]."

"[I like that] there is open and continuous communication regarding changes and updates throughout the agency."

**Others feel that changes have taken place without adequate communication.**

"Upper management doesn't consistently communicate changes within the agency with regard to processes or decisions."

"[I would like to see] better planning with a communication plan to alert field offices and workers about changes. When a letter goes out to the public, please make sure that the field offices are aware of what is being told to the public so we are prepared."

"There needs to be better communication disseminated down from upper management. Staff are not being informed of what's happening until they think staff will be impacted. I don't think anyone is objecting to the changes. Just that they are not being included and asked questions on how or why things work the way they do."

"My facility is going through a closing of a section where over 100 employees are displaced awaiting clarity on where we will be working. The communication and clarity of what to expect has been ambiguous. We have not gotten any communications or clarity from upper management. It has been a muddy process and many are very upset and confused over what is going on."

"I would encourage better communication at a leadership level about changes and how to communicate those to staff. Things happen so quickly that we often forget to communicate with all the stakeholders. As a supervisor I sometimes look stupid when a staff member asks me about something that occurs and I had no knowledge."

**Employees want to know the "why" behind changes.**

"[I would like to see] effective communication to staff on changes including the reasoning behind the changes."

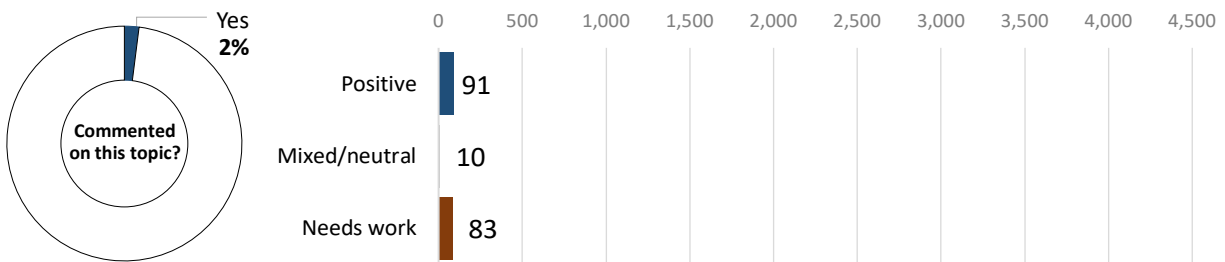
"I would like for management to listen instead of constantly dictating, especially when they accept work from other departments and expect us to do it without fully explaining how it is to be done and why."

"Better communication from management on organization changes with clear statements on the 'why.' Leadership with empathy and emotion. Sometimes you can't do anything, as with the IT reclassification, but you can have empathy and express that to your employees."

"Continued understanding about the reasons behind changes that affect our daily work. I embrace change better when I understand the 'why' behind [it]."

**THEME.** Clear direction for the agency

**184 of the 9,444 employees who commented addressed the presence or absence of a clear direction for the agency, administration, or program.**



Comments about agency direction were slightly more positive (91) than negative (83). The agency's vision of "Transforming Lives" is clearly recognized and appreciated by employees. Many respondents mentioned seeing direct application of this vision in their daily work, including person-centered care. Others are concerned that their program lacks clear direction or focuses on metrics that do not align with the mission of helping people.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Many employees are happy with the direction of their program or the agency.

- "I love our mission and vision. I relate to our values. I believe we give an incredible service to our families and enjoy being a piece of that delivery."
- "Agency values are truly valued and applied, not just for clients but also for employees."
- "I am grateful that the primary goal of the agency I work for is in alignment with my core values and beliefs regarding poverty. To work on something I believe in is important to me and makes for a healthier work and ultimately home life too."
- "I like what the department's mission statement says and what our goal is in working with the vulnerable adult populations. I am passionate about helping this population."
- "I love the emphasis of what I do makes a difference within my team, office, administration, and to the clients we serve. Person-centered planning and thinking is not only talked about, but team members' actions prove it is the base of what we do, and how we do it. Our mission, vision, and values are present every day."
- "I believe in the work we are doing to support individuals to live successfully in their community. I appreciate being a part of our mission of transforming lives!"
- "So far, I like the direction this agency is heading (its guiding values and seeing that those values are being implemented)."
- "I love the values of DDA. They are extremely supportive of clients, parents, stakeholders and employees."
- "The mission is clear that our clients come first. I'm proud to serve the public."
- "I know that what I do supports DSHS's mission of Transforming Lives. The Special Commitment Center is an ever-evolving program and I appreciate the opportunity to make an impact."

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

- "Have upper management have a plan and goal that is transparent and is not changing constantly."
- "I think we sometimes focus more on our past achievements rather than looking forward to new challenges."
- "[I'd like] leadership that has the ability to set a direction, make decisions and set deadlines. We have leadership that has great skills when it comes to tactical or operational work (being in the weeds), but cannot come up with a strategy or set a direction."
- "Recognize that culture change cannot come in the form of occasional leadership emails and must rather come through a shared vision of what this place should be."
- "A more data-driven approach to problem solving and strategic planning, but not just bean-counting measures of staff productivity."
- "More transparency with leadership. [I have] no idea what our Assistant Secretary's passions/dreams for our administration are."

#### Some employees think performance measures miss the main goal of helping people.

- "Less emphasis on quantitative growth as a department and more emphasis on ensuring that the growth we are experiencing is steady, thought-out, and in line with our overall mission."
- "Stop treating our clients as numbers, but as people who have a story they need to share, and that is why they are coming to us. Each call, like a snowflake, is different. If you want us to hit the reduce poverty by 2025 goal, we need to be able to encourage our clients, give them hope, and help give them the tools of empowerment so they realize they do not need us anymore."

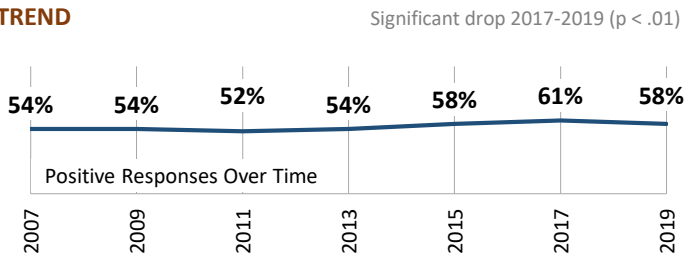


## QUESTION. I know how my agency measures its success.

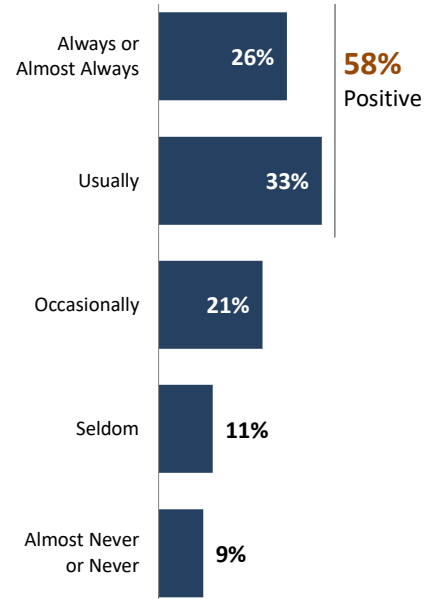
**Nearly six of 10 employees (58%)** said they understand how the agency measures success – a statistically significant decrease from the last survey. Two of 10 (20%) said they seldom or never know how success is measured.

Many employees expressed appreciation for clearly defined goals. Others said they don't know how – or if – their program measures the effectiveness of current processes. Many comments on this topic focused on whether performance metrics are consistent with the program's purpose. Some employees think there's too much focus on quantity over quality.

### TREND



### ANSWERS



### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Many staff are satisfied with the success measures used in their workplace.

"I just started a new position, but so far the sense of teamwork, the understanding of success measures, and how to achieve them is clear."

"Working with DCS [Division of Child Support] I have clearly measured goals and performance objectives and freedom to do what is needed to meet those objectives."

"In my department a high standard contributes to good professional growth and a healthy level of challenge. The mission is clear and everyone, including the residents, understands it."

"I love that we help people. I make meaningful connections with people every day. I am on the front lines, fighting poverty, and that is important to me. I look forward to TCM and the coach model. I look forward to offering our clients more intensive support and this being the expectation, not the exception to the rule."

"My boss is a very fair and great leader who possesses a clear vision of what she sees for the call center. She is courageous, has integrity, honesty, humility and clear focus that helps guide us in our strategic planning and all other endeavors."

#### Some employees said they don't know how their program measures success.

"I honestly do not know because management has never expressed nor given examples of how our agency measures success."

"We need to evaluate and attach metrics to the success of our current systems, REDI [Respect, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion] work, telework and team building. We have been working on several things for a few years and it feels ambiguous whether we have made any progress or how progress is tracked."

"Stop rebuilding the wheel or buying a new tool for every project. Finish what is started. Quit reorganizing and start setting solid goals with solid measures so we have something to aim at and something to measure."

"I would like to know exactly what is being used to measure performance. It seems that measures of performance change according to whatever the upper-management wants to measure at this time."

#### Others said performance measures hinder quality work.

"What is important, numbers or quality of programs?"

"I know that the mission is to reduce poverty in ways that matter for our citizens, but we appear to have mixed messaging. One hand says 'do what matters to help the customer,' while the other hand says 'we need to watch our wait times and production.' We need a clear message that doesn't contradict."

"Clear communication from HQ to line staff, ways of measuring success that is based on quality of work in addition to the numbers of assessments and discharges."

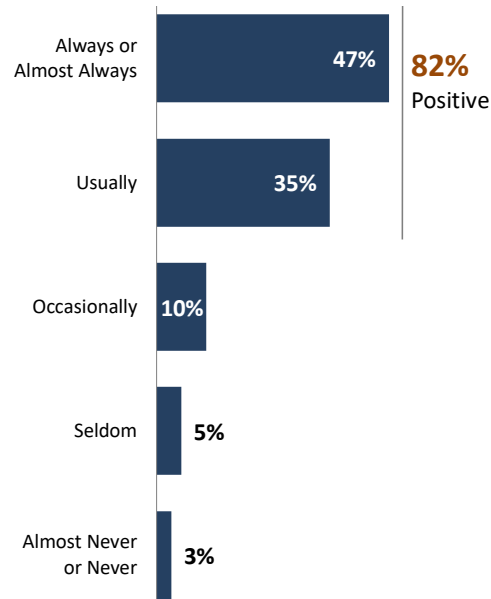
"The intense focus on meeting numbers is taking away my ability to attempt to transform lives and creating an environment with high production expectations rather than a focus of quality."

## QUESTION. I know how my work contributes to the goals of the agency.

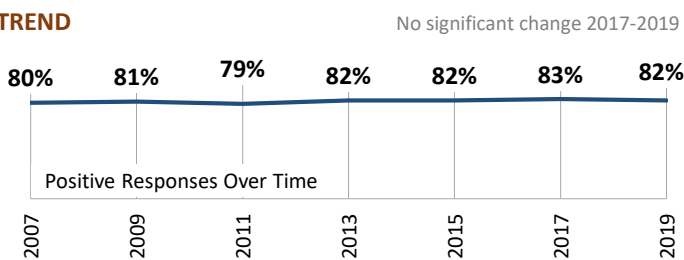
**More than eight of 10 employees (82%)** said they understand how their work contributes to agency goals. Less than one of 10 (8%) indicated they seldom or never know how their work supports the agency.

Some employees would like more clarity on agency goals, but comments show that employees generally believe their work is important. Many feel like they are making a difference in the lives of Washingtonians – through direct client care or agency support roles. Employees appreciate using their skills to make meaningful contributions towards “Transforming Lives.”

### ANSWERS



### TREND



Decrease between 2017 and 2019 is not statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Most employees understand how their work impacts program and agency goals.

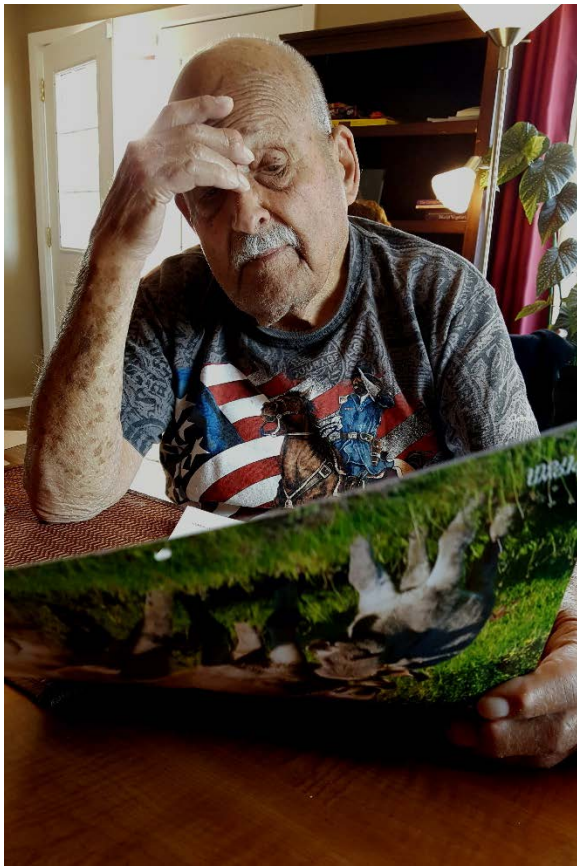
- “I like knowing my ‘why’ and here I do.”
- “[I like] the opportunity to be part of an agency that has such an amazing mission of helping individuals with disabilities to achieve independence and their potential in employment. What could be more rewarding than seeing this realized in the faces of our customers!”
- “I like what I am doing is contributing to our hospital’s mission.”
- “I like being a team member of a department whose goal is to protect vulnerable adults, a population that is frequently subject to abuse and neglect.”
- “I love that I can apply my skillset to helping teams improve, to better learn from our clients and frontline staff, and work to bring the department closer together and work less in silos. The mission is incredible. Our staff do the most noble work there is to do in our society.”
- “I am proud of our mission and that I have an important role in achieving it.”
- “I do meaningful work that improves the lives of our consumers. Even though our administration is small and our individual work varies greatly, everyone is engaged and interested in the work and shared mission.”
- “The work we do really supports the mission of the agency and helps inform policy decisions.”
- “I enjoy helping others understand what the goals of our department are and what their role might be for us to achieve those goals.”

#### The agency’s vision of “Transforming Lives” is important to employees.

- “[I’m] excited about the potential to help deliver technology solutions that support and are in alignment with agency strategic goals, which helps fulfill the mission of transforming lives of Washington state citizens.”
- “I like the work that I do and the teams that I have the opportunity to connect with. I enjoy the variety of work and how meaningful our work is and that it contributes toward the DSHS vision of Transforming Lives.”
- “As a manager in MOD [Maintenance and Operations Division] I have the opportunity to work at all of our facilities in some capacity. With that in mind, I feel that I am contributing to our overall mission in Transforming Lives. The opportunity to help others who cannot help themselves is very gratifying.”

#### Some aren’t clear about agency goals.

- “We have constant churn and reorg after reorg, and it can be extremely frustrating when no one ever even attempts to figure out what the goal is of the change.”
- “I would like my workplace to have common goals and language across campus. It would create a healthier work environment as well as give staff tools to use when working with youth.”
- “I would like to see a concerted effort to sit with higher level guidance and map out the future of our unit with a clear understanding of scope, goals and support.”



### **“Planning for 2020”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By: Linda Marvel, with permission

#### **From the photographer:**

*Fritz is an adult family home resident who in the past has raised several donkeys and mules. For many years he provided donkey rides for the children of his community. He is reviewing his new 2020 "donkey" calendar.*

### **“Seattle Scene”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Mai Yang, with permission

#### **From the photographer:**

*My family was riding the Seattle ferris wheel and I looked down and saw this scene below. I grew up in north Seattle and my family still sells flowers at the Pike Place Market. When I was growing up, we were poor and never had any opportunity to ride a ferris wheel. I was reflecting how my life has changed so much since coming to the U.S. in 1980 as a Hmong refugee.*





**“Waterfall”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Julia Vance, with permission



**“Soar”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Tami Christensen, with permission





**“Palouse Storm” • Third Place (tie)**  
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical  
By Kim Karu, with permission

## CHAPTER 2

# Supervisor/Manager Support

**EMPLOYEES’ POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGER SUPPORT STABILIZED** in 2019 after years of increase. There were no statistically significant changes in positive responses (“Always or Almost Always” or “Usually”) for any of the questions in this chapter. The percentages of employees who agreed that they receive ongoing feedback from their supervisor and that they receive recognition for a job well done decreased slightly compared to 2017, but remain higher than all prior years. A high percentage of employees continue to say that they are treated with dignity and respect, and results from a new question show that most employees think their supervisor trusts them to make decisions about their work. More than 4,100 employees (44% of all who made comments) discussed how they are treated by managers and supervisors. Most comments (2,563) were suggestions for improvement, representing a 16% increase in negative comments, and offering some insight as to why question scores have flattened after years of improvement. Compared to 2017, there were more complaints about lack of support and lack of respect from management.

**MENTORING, AVAILABILITY, AND FEEDBACK FROM SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS.** In the midst of significant organizational change, most employees reported that they receive helpful feedback from their supervisor, but comments indicate some employees want more support.

- **More complaints about support, mentoring and availability.** 663 respondents (7% of those who made comments) praised the availability and willingness of supervisors and managers to provide support in the form of mentoring, guidance, and constructive input. 831 respondents (9% of commenters) made more critical comments about these topics, a 25% increase compared to 2017.
- **Supervisor feedback remains high.** 72% of employees said they receive ongoing feedback from their supervisor that helps them improve their performance.



**RECOGNITION FOR A JOB WELL DONE.** Employees are grateful when supervisors acknowledge their good work. Some prefer informal recognition of their contributions, while others would like to see more formal recognition of their efforts. Most agree that employee appreciation is important to employee engagement.

- **Employee recognition remains low.** 56% of employees said they always or usually receive recognition for a job well done. Nearly a quarter (24%) said they seldom or never receive recognition.
- **Preferences for recognition vary, but employees want to feel appreciated.** Many comments indicate that recognition for quality work and dedication to the job is greatly appreciated when offered, and sorely missed when absent.

**RESPECT AND TRUST.** A large majority of employees said their supervisor treats them with dignity and respect. But those who do not feel respected are often deeply dissatisfied. A new question asked employees if they think their supervisor trusts them to make decisions or recommendations that affect their work. This one-time question in 2019 provides additional information about an important element of the employee-supervisor relationship.

- **High rates of respect.** 85% of employees said their supervisor always or usually treats them with dignity and respect.
- **But more complaints about disrespect.** 596 employees (6% of all who made comments) made negative observations about how their supervisor treats them, a 29% increase from 2017.
- **High rates of trust.** 76% of employees said that their supervisors trust them to make decisions or recommendations that affect their own work.



**“Wild Horses Monument”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Michael Midkiff, with permission

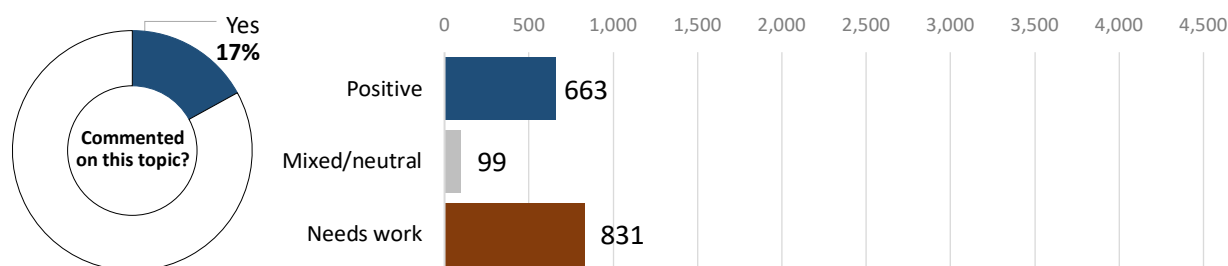
**From the photographer:**

Near Vantage on I-90 there is a wonderful metal sculpture monument to wild horses. I managed to get some pictures during a rain storm.



**THEME.** Support and mentoring by managers and supervisors

**1,593 of the 9,444 respondents commenting addressed the issue of supervisor/manager support and mentoring, including availability, helpfulness, and feedback.**



A large number of employees commented about the support they receive from their supervisors and managers, both positive and negative. Many expressed gratitude for supervisors who trust employees to complete work independently, but are available and approachable when guidance is needed. They also appreciate supervisors who support both personal well-being and professional growth. Others wish their supervisors were more available or had better mentoring skills. Some noted a difference in the level of support they receive from direct supervisors compared to upper management.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Staff appreciate supervisors and managers who are available when questions or concerns arise.

"My supervisor is very supportive. As a new employee, I have a lot of questions. He makes time for me whenever I stand in his doorway and responds to emails quickly."

"My supervisor trusts me to do good work and leaves me alone to do it, but is also available when needed to provide support and answers."

"My supervisor is easily approachable and consistently works to help the staff resolve concerns."

"I feel comfortable going to [my supervisor] any time I have a question or if I'm needing additional support. She always makes me feel that I matter and is able to give me her undivided attention."

"It would be nice if my manager was more accessible to me, but she is always gone or unavailable."

"Leadership could better model time management skills by asking themselves: Do we ALL need to attend this meeting? Does my schedule demonstrate I am available, interested and open to staff? Be available. Be human."

"Upper management being more available and more supportive of each shops' challenges. Supervisors are great but it seems to stop there. Upper management is not very supportive when difficult situations arise."

#### They also like supervisors who support them personally and professionally.

"[I like the] support from my current supervisor to attend to health and work/life balance."

"I like my supervisor because she supports me and helps me achieve my goals."

"I enjoy the support I receive from my manager for growth and development opportunities. I feel supported in my career."

#### Others want more mentorship opportunities.

"Managers need to help mentor everyone in regards to personal and professional development."

"Everyone seems so busy it does not feel that we get coaching to move forward."

"I would like the supervisors to have more extensive training to better prepare them in dealing with staff conflict, personnel issues, and mentoring/coaching."

"[I would like] mentorship opportunities for newly-hired employees and for those who want to develop areas of specialization."

"More peer mentoring when folks are promoted. The sink or swim technique is a terrifying, horrible experience for both those promoted and those being managed by newly promoted individuals."

#### Employees want support so they can better serve clients.

"[I would like] an environment where we take care of each other and feel supported so we can take care of our clients."

"We need more support from the top. We hear 'take care of yourself,' but it would be nice for our agency to step up and help take care of us as well. My direct supervisor is great, but after that I think the bureaucracy takes over and we lose most, if not all, of the personal touch. This is what social worker are providing for our clients and our communities. Our agency needs to provide that same care to its employees."

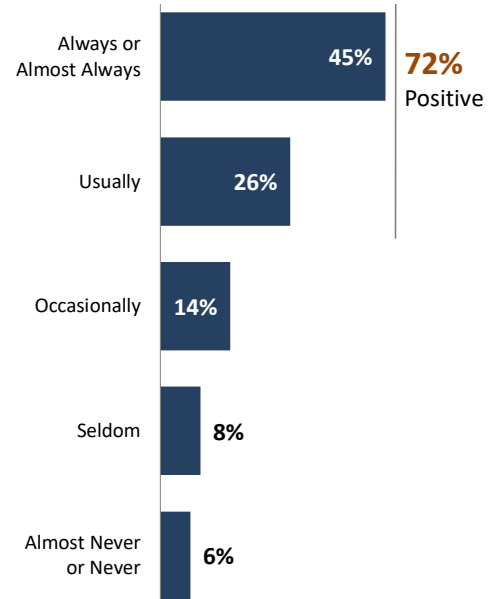
"[My supervisor] helps me be a better CRM [Case Resource Manager] which allows me to provide better customer service to our clients and families. I feel very supported and it is a big part of why I continue to work at DDA [Developmental Disabilities Administration]."

## QUESTION. My supervisor gives me ongoing feedback that helps me improve my job performance.

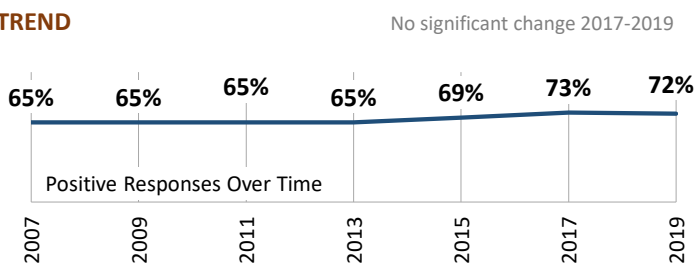
Nearly three of four employees (72%) said their supervisor provides regular feedback that helps them improve. However, 14% of employees reported they seldom or never receive feedback from their supervisors.

Employees like managers who can provide useful feedback based on knowledge and experience. They want to hear what they are doing well, as well as areas where they can improve. They especially appreciate supervisors who can provide critical feedback in a constructive way. Some employees express frustration with a lack of feedback that causes them to question how their supervisor views their job performance.

### ANSWERS



### TREND



### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees praise supervisors who give them helpful feedback.

- "My supervisor appreciates what I can bring to the team and provides feedback often, which is very helpful."
- "Current supervisors value our opinions and provide consistent feedback."
- "My supervisor supports me and provides helpful feedback."
- "I receive great feedback on my job."
- "I very much appreciate the support, coaching and appreciation from my supervisor and team members."
- "My supervisor is the best ever. He gives awesome feedback and never rushes to judgement."
- "My supervisor is great to work with, easily approachable, and gives me good feedback and direction."

#### They appreciate receiving negative feedback in a constructive manner.

- "My supervisor is very supportive and just plain amazing. Although they are a working administrator, they are always there when I need them, setting realistic expectations, letting me know in a constructive way when I can improve on something, and giving me kudos when I go above and beyond."
- "[I like] my supervisor's willingness to give feedback on my progress and what I need to better myself in."

"My supervisor works with me and encourages me to do well and lets me know when I am doing well, and is gentle when giving constructive criticism."

"[My supervisor] gives great feedback and constructive criticism when needed. Having a great supervisor makes going to work every day a little bit easier."

"[I have] great mentors and great people to work for. I feel I am able to confide in them, as well as get positive, constructive feedback and criticism."

"When a mistake is made, I like to see the management use it as a teachable moment. It sometimes feels punitive (through poor feedback or harsh comments), due to some overreacting or not understanding the problem."

"More positive feedback would be welcomed. Currently, I rarely receive feedback for anything other than things I have done wrong."

#### A lack of feedback can leave employees wondering if they are meeting job expectations.

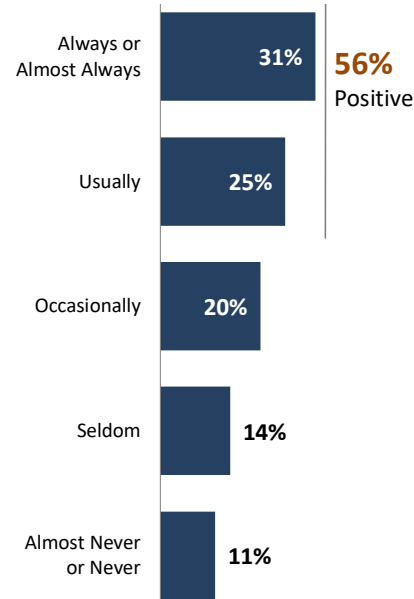
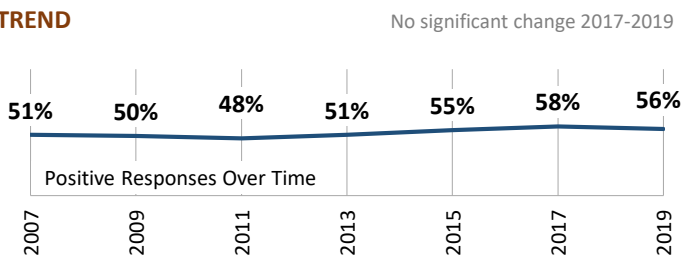
"I don't get feedback on the quality of my work, so I'm not sure if it is meeting expectations. I assume that no feedback means that I'm doing well, but it would help me to have either confirmation or constructive feedback to guide me in areas that I can improve."

"I personally get a one-on-one once every few months with my supervisor and if I think things are going well but they really aren't, I wouldn't know about it until a few months later."

**QUESTION.** I receive recognition for a job well done.

**More than half of employees (56%)** reported they receive recognition for good work. Nearly a quarter (24%) said they seldom or never receive recognition.

Many employees praised supervisors who acknowledge hard work and recognize the specific contributions of each team member. Some think their leaders should focus on authentic appreciation of staff, as demonstrated through on-going actions, instead of one-time recognition events. Others described a general lack of employee appreciation resulting in decreased motivation and morale.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Many staff feel their good work is recognized.**

"My supervisor motivates and supports me, provides consistent feedback, and recognizes quality work. She is the first to acknowledge a job well done."

"I like that my supervisor recognizes my hard work."

"I have NEVER felt as supported, appreciated, valued as I do right now. I love that my leaders model positive behavior and they challenge me to do better."

"I have an amazing supervisor who does not believe in 'everyone gets a trophy,' but rather recognizes the achievements of each individual member of the team."

"With our new director I feel much more appreciated. I will work harder for him because he treats me with respect and sees my potential."

"[My] supervisor appreciates my contributions verbally and by his/her actions."

"Supervisors are gracious with errors and take time to acknowledge great performance."

"I feel that I am a valued team member and that my supervisor values my opinions and my work."

"I like that I am appreciated every day for not only coming to work but working hard."

"[I like the] support from executive level in stating they value my contributions and input."

"I love that I'm recognized for doing a good job and that the staff and patients enjoy my presence on the ward."

"It is rewarding to operate within a structure that recognizes each employee's skills and how they provide value to the team as a whole."

**Others feel unappreciated.**

"I can't remember the last time a supervisor told me I was doing a good job, outside of numbers. I can't remember really feeling appreciated as an employee."

"It makes no sense to go above and beyond for this facility when there is zero gratitude for doing such."

"It takes time to see and reward good behavior and instances where they go the extra mile to take care of a client/customer. Supervisors are so busy getting the required tasks done that the extra support suffers. People want to work where they are cared about and their efforts are seen and rewarded. Great pay and benefits are a must and will keep people, but will not lead to satisfaction with the job."

"I was introduced to a member of management who I have known for over 6 years. However, this member of management had no idea who I was. This is the kind of thing that makes us as employees feel like we are not appreciated."

**Staff want employee appreciation to be authentic.**

"[I want] to know that what you do matters and people care if you are there to make the work happen. Just tired of the fluffy words with no real meaning or value!"

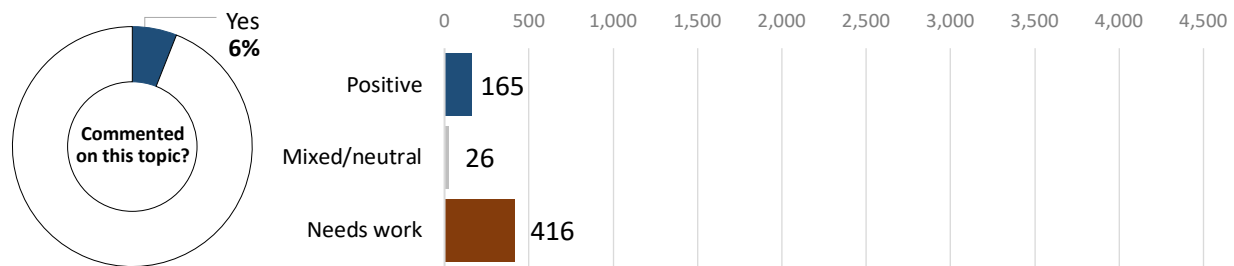
"More authentic employee appreciation. Not just once a year, but throughout their employment journey."

"Actual appreciation of staff, versus a couple of days that management try to make it look like they appreciate the work, but ongoing doesn't feel like they do."



**THEME.** Employee recognition

**607 of the 9,444 employees who made comments addressed the importance of supervisors and managers recognizing and praising the good work of employees.**



In addition to answering the standard question about recognition, some employees provided comments on the topic. Comments about employee recognition were more negative than positive. Some employees are satisfied with the recognition they receive (165), but many more (416) see a need for improvement. Employees enjoy recognition through personal and public praise from those they respect at work, given in a timely, specific, and sincere way. The way employees want to be recognized varies, so understanding individual preferences is important. Many employees who commented would like to see more acknowledgment for quality work and dedication to the job, noting that morale suffers when employees do not feel appreciated.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees described a variety of ways to recognize staff.

"I like Gold Star and I appreciate all of the work they do for employee recognition."

"For awards given publicly (e.g., staff meetings), read out the names of all who were nominated and then the winner for that category."

"I would like to see hard work rewarded. People who do not deserve it or are not qualified are promoted or given raises and those who do deserve it or have the qualifications are passed over."

"Show appreciation to those that come up with a great idea by name."

"Consistently have ways to recognize staff for a job well done. Specifically for employees that are reliable, demonstrate integrity, safety, and accountability. Incentives for seniority, higher workloads, and work performance."

"I would like to see our pay catch up to cost-of-living increases and stay caught up. I would like to see dedicated employees be shown appreciation for their loyalty and years given to the state."

"I've seen more than once a staff [member] that is retiring after over 30 years and not so much as even an e-mail is sent out congratulating them. Can you imagine working that long for an employer and when you finally retire ... that's it ... you're just retired?"

"I would like more verbal praise from my boss. Compliments and praise mean a lot and go a long way."

"The workplace is very good, however it could benefit from a more robust employee recognition program."

"[I like] receiving positive recognition for my efforts and contributions."

#### Many feel that hard work is not recognized.

"Recognize hard work, not just 'flashy' work."

"I don't think we do a very good job of showing appreciation. I would like to see more people recognized for the outstanding work and effort they put in."

"I would really like to see people get recognized for all their hard work and dedication to their job. It seems that only those that are in constant contact with those in central office are receiving kudos for a project, an activity, an idea, or proposal. Let's start showing appreciation to people outside of just the administration level."

"Acknowledge and praise social workers more for all their hard work."

#### Some said that management focuses on the negative and fails to acknowledge the positive.

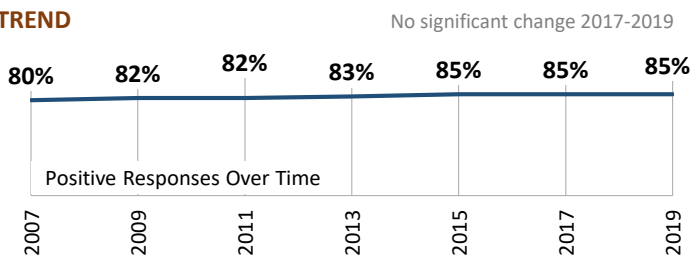
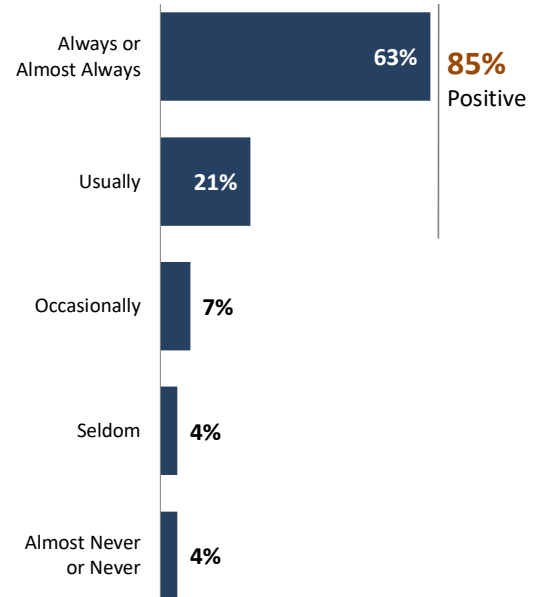
"At the end of the week a negative email goes out to staff; instead of some appreciative or affirmative statement, it is almost always us doing something wrong (acting too busy, being late). It is really demoralizing. They rarely praise or acknowledge the incredible work that staff do. Just the other day, I saw staff running to and from the parking lot in pouring rain to head out to some of the most congested roads in the country to go and see clients."

"We are frequently the last to hear when we do something well, but the first to be told when something went wrong. Metaphorically, you may enjoy 364 days of sunshine in areas under your control, but it is that one day of rain that seems to define everything about you. I wish that would change."

**QUESTION.** My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.

**More than eight of 10 employees (85%)** agreed that their supervisor treats them with dignity and respect, making this the second-highest rated survey question. Less than one of 10 (8%) reported their supervisor seldom or never treats them respectfully.

Treating people with dignity and respect is the foundation of all relationships, including that of supervisor and employee. The good news is that a large majority of employees think their supervisor respects them personally and professionally. But the small number of staff who feel mistreated described troubling situations, including supervisors who are rude, accusatory, or belittling to staff.

**TREND****ANSWERS****► What DSHS employees said ...****Employees like supervisors and managers who are courteous and respectful.**

- "I like my supervisor. She is very respectful. She talks to me like a person."
- "I have a lot of respect for my leads and supervisors, and feel it is mutual."
- "I like that I am treated with respect and consideration by my supervisor and co-workers."
- "My supervisor is courteous and approachable, respects my work/life balance and my unique ethnic and cultural background."
- "I have always felt respected by my supervisor."
- "My supervisor and manager are amazing and inspire me daily to be happier in the workplace by respecting me."
- "[I like] the fact that I am highly respected by people that I also respect."

**They also appreciate being treated as professionals.**

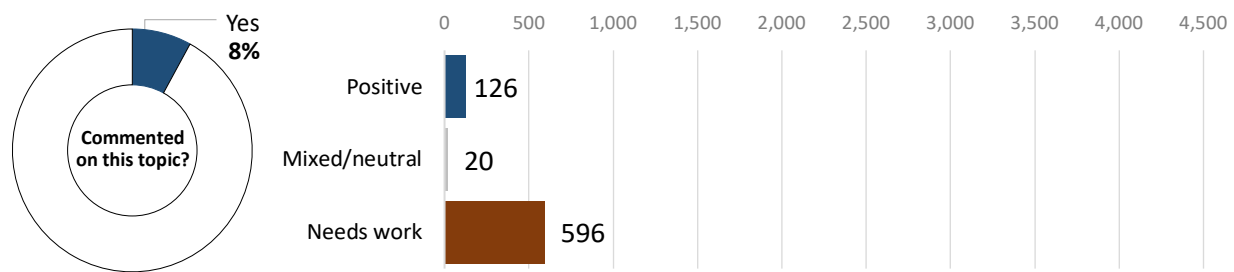
- "I like my direct manager. She's pretty amazing because she leads and guides a group of adult professionals and treats them as such."
- "I feel that I am respected as a professional and supported by my manager."
- "[I like] that I am trusted and respected as an independent worker to get my job done."
- "I feel treated like a responsible adult."
- "[I like] that my supervisor treats me with respect and allows me to do my job and doesn't micromanage me."

**Some employees described behaviors that communicate respect.**

- "I really appreciate the efforts that my agency and supervisor made to allow me to work from home one day a week. I feel like my voice was heard and that I'm really valued and respected as an employee."
- "I like that I get treated with respect and my opinion counts."
- "I have the respect, freedom and confidence from my manager to go above my normal scope of work to resolve issues and problems."
- "My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect, and listens to what I say."
- "I like that my supervisor treats me with respect and allows me to flex my time as needed."
- "Show staff that they are valued and respected by involving them in decisions, soliciting their input, and communicating critical information with them."

**Others consider their supervisor's behavior to be disrespectful.**

- "[I would like] a boss that doesn't yell and insult people."
- "I would like for my boss to stop insulting me, especially in front of my co-workers."
- "[I would like] a supervisor who is not a bully and not controlling."
- "There is great disorganization (which is to be expected with a new program), however that is no excuse to be rude and belittling to staff."

**THEME.** Courtesy and respect from supervisors/managers**742 of the 9,444 employees who made comments addressed manager courtesy and respect.**

While responses to the dignity and respect question indicate that most employees believe their supervisor treats them respectfully, the comments shed light on the experiences of those who do not feel respected. Comments about courtesy and respect were much more likely to describe negative situations than positive. In addition, positive comments tended to be shorter than those that described – sometimes in great detail – negative experiences. Employees want workplace cultures that promote respect, adherence to existing policies, and an end to damaging behaviors such as gossiping and bullying. (Further discussion of bullying and harassment is presented in Chapter 3, page 37.)

**► What DSHS employees said ...****Employees want their workplaces to have a culture of respect.**

"I am new to DSHS. I have been met with nothing other than helpfulness, encouragement, clear direction, and respect from my supervisor and my team. What a culture change and a great place to work!"

"There is a culture of respect and teamwork here, regardless of someone's unit."

"My recent supervisor is a pleasure to work for. He makes me feel validated, respected and supported. He shows respect for everyone around him. This makes for a great environment to come to work."

"We need to work on creating a culture of respect and safety when everybody feels free to express their concerns."

**Some staff commented about workplace programs or policies related to respect.**

"The RESPECT idea is great but will never work as long as there are disrespectful leads, supervisors, and upper management. When you have rude, condescending, and disrespectful upper management, the philosophy of respect doesn't hold true."

"That incivility, gossip, and disrespect would not be tolerated on any ward, in any department, by anyone. The policy has been assigned to gain awareness but it has not become reality yet."

"We can send out all the REDI [Respect, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion] information we want, it does little good if there is no time to read it and without an environment that encourages and allows talking to each other. We have an overreliance on technology at the expense of human interaction."

**Others described managers and senior leaders who demonstrate or tolerate disrespectful practices.**

"I think that there is still a 'bully' mentality with supervisors in some of the lower ranks (line staff). Wish that could be dealt with better than grievances that don't go any place."

"A safer and better environment to work where staff feel they are as valued as the clientele that we care for instead of being treated like a Styrofoam cup to be used and discarded."

"Bullying, hostility and harassment are accepted and seemingly condoned here."

"There is wide-based discrimination based on nursing license. I have lost count on how many times I have been told, 'You are not a nurse.' Disrespected. If you are not a nurse, your work is endlessly picked apart."

"It would benefit all if the workplace operated less like a junior high and policies were followed in the intended manner. I constantly walk on eggshells because I never know where the next attack is going to come from."

"[I would like] leadership to show respect and compassion while working with employees that may be experiencing challenges at home or work."

"In the short time I have been with this agency, I have observed first-hand multiple instances of micro-aggression, bias, flagrant favoritism and prejudices by a senior manager that goes unchecked due to fear of repercussions."

"Leadership needs to value their employees with more pay and respect. I am tired of not being heard when discussing the safety of staff. My professional opinions are not being taken seriously."

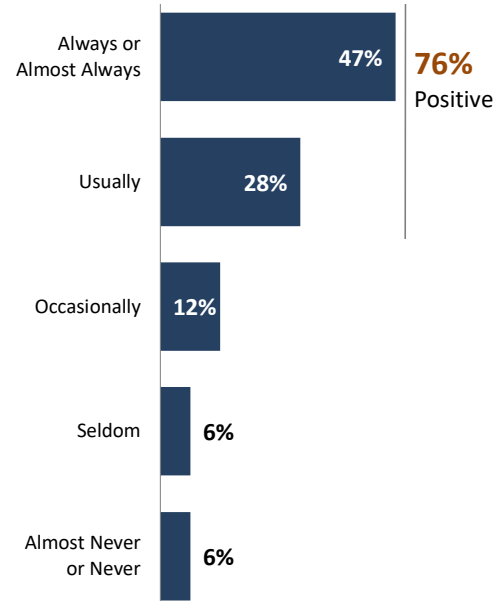


## QUESTION. My supervisor trusts me to make decisions or recommendations that affect my work.

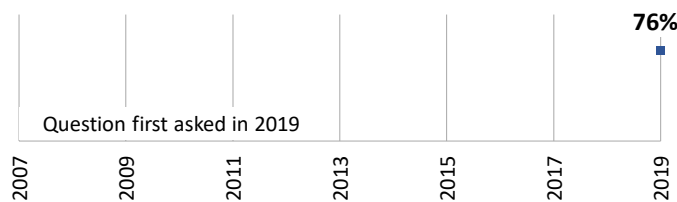
**More than three of four employees (76%)** said their supervisor always or usually trusts them to make decisions about their work. Just over one in 10 (13%) said their supervisor seldom or never trusts them to do so.

Employees praise supervisors who demonstrate trust and give staff appropriate autonomy in how (and where) they accomplish their work. (See further discussion of autonomy in Chapter 4, page 51.) Some said that feeling trusted is motivating and helps them grow. Others expressed frustration with supervisors who micromanage, making employees feel that their professional judgement is not trusted.

### ANSWERS



### TREND



### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees appreciate supervisors who trust them to do their jobs.

"I enjoy the trust put in me to run my team the way I see fit. I appreciate my manager only intervening when necessary, but always having my back."

"My supervisor is engaged with the work my colleagues and I do, gives good feedback and direction, when needed, but also demonstrates a lot of trust in our professional skills and judgment."

"I have a supportive supervisor who enables me to do what I think is necessary and important."

"I like that my immediate supervisor trusts the team to get our work done, doesn't micromanage us, and supports us individually and as a team."

"I enjoy the level of trust and independence I get at this job. My manager has faith in my abilities and my work product demonstrates it is not misplaced."

#### Some said it makes them a better employee.

"To have the trust and support from our supervisor to carry ourselves professionally with regard to case management and time management takes a great deal of pressure off myself and, I believe, the rest of our team. Trust and limited micromanagement has made me more confident and a stronger employee."

"I believe [my supervisor] trusts me to make good decisions and produce quality deliverables. I have experienced tremendous growth in the past five months."

"My boss trusts me and empowers me to make decisions. Her belief in me strengthens me as an employee and heightens my desire to be the best that I can be."

#### Many employees think the opportunity to work flexibly is a sign of trust.

"I came from an agency where employees were not supported. It was fear based and line workers were not trusted. I am extremely appreciative to work for an agency where I feel supported and encouraged, where there is real leadership, and staff feel trusted to do their jobs with flexible schedules and the ability to telework."

"I would like to see staff trusted to work schedules and at locations that meet their family and personal needs."

"Teleworking is a great idea, especially for APS [Adult Protective Services] where we are in the field often. This also creates trust, which is supportive to being autonomous within our work."

#### Others feel being micromanaged is a sign of distrust.

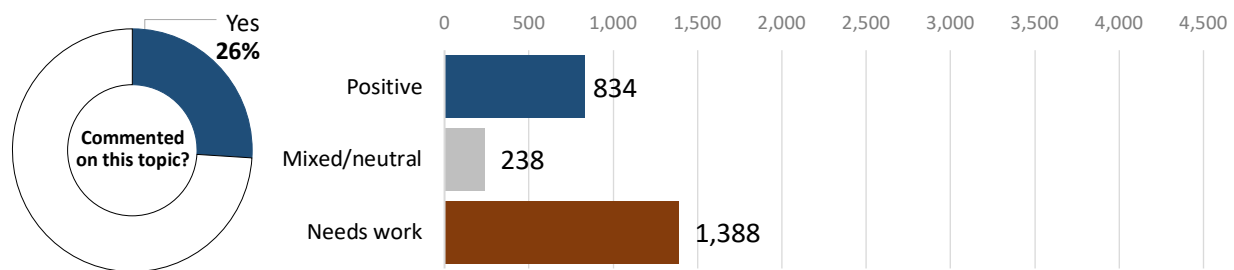
"I would like to see less micromanaging and more trust that we are professionals."

"I do not feel that I am trusted to make professional decisions regarding my caseload without the constant involvement of my supervisor. I don't feel that I am trusted to do my job effectively though I have given no reason to not be trusted."

"[I want] trust. Right now it feels we are watched constantly."

## THEME. Other comments about managers

**2,460 of the 9,444 employees who made comments addressed other aspects of supervisor/manager behavior.**



Employees had a lot to say about managers, including many topics that do not directly relate to existing survey questions or are too varied to group into one thematic area. These comments include descriptions of managers' personal characteristics that employees do or do not like, evaluations of managers' competence or knowledge of the field, and stories about specific managers. Though comments were varied, some common themes emerged. Employees want managers who demonstrate patience, honesty, and a willingness to pitch in to help the team. They also want managers who hold co-workers accountable for poor performance, and remain accountable themselves. They are frustrated when supervisors lack the skills to do their job, including technical or managerial skills, and when upper management fosters an "us vs. them" mentality.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees who praised supervisors often remarked on management style and personal attitudes.

"My supervisor is encouraging, real, and supportive. She admits when she needs to look something up and is confident in being able to have the difficult conversations with customers and supporting me when I need to have those with customers."

"Our supervisor is amazing! She is so kind and patient with a 'teach a man how to fish' kind of attitude."

"My supervisor is a natural leader – she cares so much about people and I really feel like I am encouraged to do my best. She is conscientious, empathetic, a phenomenally hard worker, who would never ask something of someone she wasn't willing to do or is already doing."

"I currently have a very supportive, respectful and honest supervisor who is not above assisting her unit, by going out into the field when workload issues arise. Her supervisory skills and integrity are exemplary."

#### Negative comments often mentioned a lack of accountability for managers or employees.

"I would like to see more accountability for supervisors and upper level management when inappropriate behavior is demonstrated. Sometimes it seems like the expectations only apply to line level staff."

"I would like to see higher expectations and employees being held accountable for their actions and lack of work ethic."

"[I want] accountability at all levels and follow through when something could be improved upon (instead of sweeping under the rug or excusing)."

#### Employees want leaders who have relevant experience, and know how to manage people.

"I would like to see more people in upper management who have moved up through the ranks of DSHS with a knowledge of our business. There have been too many new folks who come from varying backgrounds and know nothing or very little about DSHS and the programs and systems they are overseeing."

"It is painful and frustrating to work with a supervisor/manager who knows little to nothing about aging/residential, has no empathy, and is not willing to learn to do the job."

"[I would like] managers that have some knowledge of how to manage people. Line staff are promoted to supervisors, without any knowledge or experience in managing people."

#### Some employees described a lack of connection between staff and management.

"The culture in the office, and throughout the agency, is 'us vs. them' which is very divisive and destructive."

"I would like to see more upper management coming out of the office once in a while and truly be part of the team, be leaders, and get to know us ground staff as people and learn what we do and why we do it the way we do."

"I would like to see transparency in the management and to stop having the attitude of intimidation and retaliation. There is a clearly divided line of us and them in our division. A clique of family members and friends that are often used to bully the others that work there."



**"A Tyrannosaurus Kind of Day"**

**• First Place**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category:

DSHS Employees

By Ravenna Dexter, with permission

***From the photographer:***

*I was conducting training on Oct 31 and this tyrannosaurus showed up in my class. I loved it! We had so much fun with it!*



**"Washington Wonder"**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Mai Yang, with permission

***From the photographer:***

*This was taken during a family hiking trip to Mount Rainier. The scene was breathtaking and I was thinking to myself "I have a great life!"*



**“Capitol Cake Pop” • Honorable Mention (tie)**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic

By Levon Gibson, with permission

***From the photographer:***

*While on a lunch break from a training on Project Management, I walked down Capitol Blvd. and grabbed a bite to eat. On my way back my sweet tooth kicked in and I stopped for something tasty at Wagner's European Bakery. This picture represents a balance of work and play as I headed back to my training, walking by the Capitol building enjoying a great treat.*



***From the photographer:***

*I took this photo one morning after getting off of my night shift.*

**“Medical Lake Forest in Fog” • First Place**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action

By Dawn Ray Fifer, with permission



*From the photographer:*

*I took this picture the day after it was announced the Pride flag had been raised to honor and support the LGBTQ community. It was a proud moment for me to be a part of a family that supports my community.*

**“Celebration of Pride” • Honorable Mention (tie)**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action

By Darrelyn Nuesca, with permission

## CHAPTER 3

# Fairness and Diversity

**THE 2019 SURVEY SHOWED SOME SIGNS OF DECREASED SATISFACTION WITH FAIRNESS AND DIVERSITY IN DSHS.** Compared to 2017, there was a statistically significant decrease in positive responses (“Always or Almost Always” or “Usually”) to the question “People are treated fairly in my work group.” Answers to “My agency consistently demonstrates support for a diverse workforce” dipped slightly from 2017, but were still higher than all previous years. The number of critical comments about both fairness and diversity increased markedly from 2017. A portion of the increased dissatisfaction appears to reflect the increasing national dialogue between liberal and conservative viewpoints, and the variation in agency efforts to increase options for work location and scheduling.

**GENERAL FAIRNESS.** Changes from 2017 indicate an increase in concerns about fairness in the agency. The 2019 survey asked a new question about bullying and harassment. Over time, trends in answers to this new question will add to the ongoing analysis of fairness and diversity in DSHS.

- **Fair treatment.** 64% of employees (down from 67% in 2017) agreed that people are treated fairly in their work group. This question was first asked in 2017. 19% said people are seldom or never treated fairly.
- **Comments about fairness.** 889 employees (9% of those who made comments) criticized manager/supervisor fairness, a 22% increase from 2017. Comments focused on inequities and favoritism in policies, privileges, promotions, respectful treatment, and opportunities for alternative schedules and worksites.



- **Bullying and harassment.** 68% of respondents agreed that the agency clearly communicates that bullying and harassment are not acceptable. 19% said this is seldom or never true.

**DIVERSITY.** The number of comments about diversity increased from 2017, including the number critical of diversity initiatives.

- **Support for a diverse workforce.** 70% of employees agreed the agency consistently demonstrates support for a diverse workforce. This was not a significant change from 2017, and was higher than in all surveys before 2017.
- **Comments about diversity.** 368 respondents (4% of those making comments) made negative comments about diversity in DSHS, a 31% increase from 2017. This increase was seen across all categories of critical comments: reports of general discrimination, poor treatment of specific protected groups, and reverse discrimination, as well as requests for more training.
- **Some controversial issues regarding diversity.** One group of respondents emphasized that a diversity of beliefs should be honored. Survey comments reflect the national conversation in some requests to include conservative viewpoints. A number of employees feel that diversity initiatives, especially those embracing LGBTQ issues, have “gone too far.” Amid the calls for more diversity training, some believe such training to be divisive or a distraction from the primary mission.



**“Creek at Marine Reserve Ferndale”**

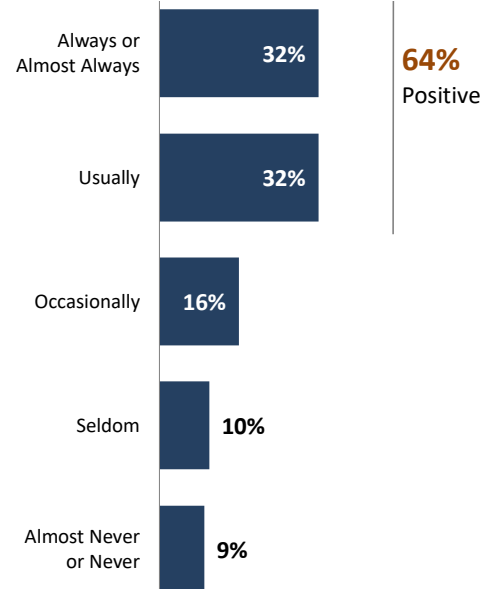
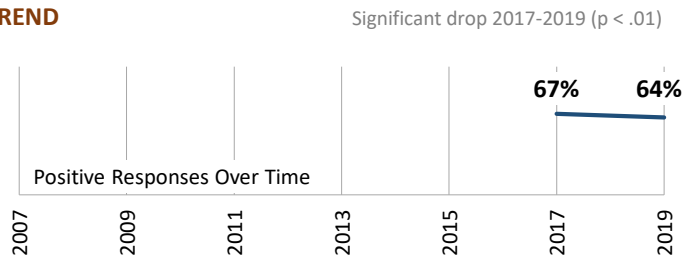
DSHS Photo Contest • By Wendy Jones Pitsch, with permission



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

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) said they always or usually are treated fairly – a 2 percentage point drop from 2017.

Almost two of 10 respondents (19%) said that fairness is seldom or never seen in their workplace. Those who commented were more likely to cite unfairness in the system. They mentioned unwarranted variation in who is allowed flexible work schedules and work sites; disparities in policy enforcement, pay for equal work, training opportunities, and parking fees; and hiring and promotion processes that are not transparent and don't provide equal opportunity.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****A few employees specifically praised the agency's fair atmosphere.**

"I like the fact that everybody is valued and given equal opportunity. There are also strong rules that govern the independence of everyone, and therefore providing a favorable working environment for all."

"What I like about my current job is that we are treated as equals and we are all involved in making changes to make our work environment a more enjoyable place to work."

"Management is fair for every one of us, and they respect each of us equally."

"The agency in general promotes a good working environment for all. It supports and encourages all staff to communicate their concerns or grievances without the fear of retaliation."

**Some see inequity in the workplace.**

"Policy is for all employees. Executives and leaders choosing which policies they wish to observe and enforce is unethical, unprofessional, and shameful."

"I would like to be able to know that all of us are treated the same and the rules are the same for everyone, not just the select few."

"I would like to see supervisors treat staff equally, (i.e. same standards as to workload, attendance expectations, unacceptable behavior toward co-workers, etc.)."

"The division as a whole needs to be more consistent in their treatment of employees. It seems like the worse your behavior, the less you have to adhere to the agency's rules."

"The rules are applied differently depending on who you are ... this leads to decreased morale as well as reducing feelings of value within the agency."

**Opportunities for promotions, flexible work schedules, and alternative work sites are often felt to be unfair.**

"I think staff should be promoted on their skills, not who you know."

"People treated with respect. Fair, unbiased hiring and the end to cronyism."

"I would also like to see people promote because of the work they have done and their expertise, not because they are liked more."

"It is very hard to move up here without cozying up to the right people – even if you have the skills and knowledge to do the job."

"Equal and fair treatment of all staff. Some staff are 'favored' and given special projects and flexible schedules while others are not."

"If you are going to offer teleworking and adjusted work-weeks to the staff, it must include all staff who qualify."

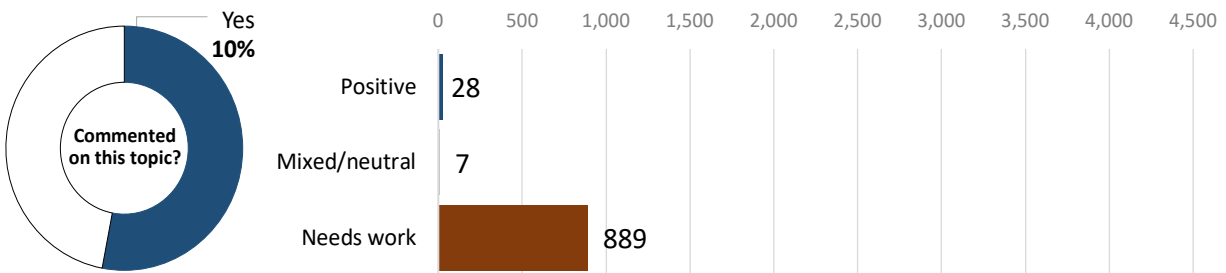
"It decreases morale when one manager or unit allows more telework than what is in policy and others follow the policy or don't allow telework at all."

"In my unit, we are not given the opportunity for any flexibility in our schedule. However, a unit similar to ours, is. That's biased and unfair."

"Equal pay for equal jobs. Equal telecommuting schedules."

**THEME.** Management fairness

**924 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned the fairness of management.**



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

Employee comments about the fairness of specific managers and supervisors frequently mention favoritism. Favorites are perceived as getting special access to privileges, promotions, training, assignments, and information. Some think favorites are treated with more respect, have more input, and don't have to meet the same standards.

Managers and supervisors also can be seen to target individuals and groups with anger, ridicule, unfair expectations, unreasonable caseloads, and retaliation.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Fair supervisors are appreciated.

"My current supervisor conveys a level a trust amongst my team, is open to questions, and treats everyone on the team with respect. He does not micromanage and promotes success with the team by treating all as equals."

"My supervisor is fair, unbiased in every sense. There are no favorites and I have never seen anyone singled out."

"My immediate supervisor is what I call a servant-leader. Not only is he a good example for us, he also is also very fair to all of us and no room for favoritism."

"My direct supervisor – knowledgeable, fair, grounded, thinks before speaking, open-minded."

"My current supervisor is fair and treats me with respect and trust."

#### Favorites can get preferential treatment.

"If you are a favorite, you are treated with impunity. You speak up ... time to saddle up."

"Some staff get treated better because they are more liked by supervisors."

"I would like to see more professionalism amongst the higher-ups. I see a lot of cliques and favoritism. I know you can't stop people from liking who they like, but they need to be more professional how they show it."

"If you are related to or if you are a close friend of someone who works at headquarters, don't worry, because you are invincible and can get away with anything!!!!!! If you assault a patient, if you are horrible to your peers, if you are caught having sex during work, if you sexually harass people, if you abuse state time, no matter what you do, you are protected because you are favored! Same rules don't apply to family and friends of anyone in upper management and the big guys at headquarters."

"Upper management have created a hostile work environment in the culture of leadership based on friendship/favoritism, cronyism, and incompetence."

"LOL. Maybe some respect for all employees not just the favorites, would be a good place to start."

"I believe people on my team are held to different standards. Favorites can be late, make personal phone calls and miss deadlines, while others cannot."

"Hard to shake the perception that there is a definite 'favored' group in the office (not talking about management) that are included in a lot of decision-making when the office at large is not asked for feedback."

#### Harassment and retaliation do occur.

"I would like to see supervisors held accountable. Some are supportive and encouraging. Others are bullies. Some talk about staff to staff, announce their favorite staff, belittle other workers, and use their position to harass."

"There is an atmosphere of intimidation, favoritism and bullying in my region. Some administrators and supervisors are disrespectful and hostile, and they get away with it. I would like to see this atmosphere change."

"Just because we all smile, doesn't mean we don't work in an office where there is favoritism and bad treatment from managers. We work in a climate where we know there is retaliation, though hard to prove."

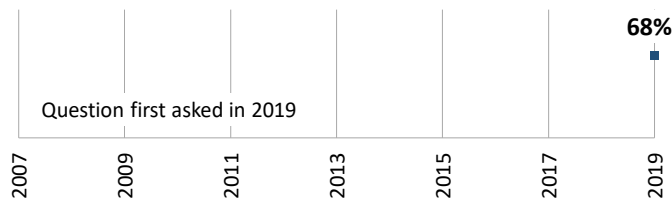
"Supervisors have been involved in spreading gossip and defaming the characters of specific direct reports of theirs. I have been treated, and have seen others treated, in ways that I never believed could happen in a workplace. If anybody makes a mistake, they are made fun of, ridiculed, and gossiped about how stupid or incompetent they are."

## QUESTION. My agency clearly communicates that bullying and harassment are not acceptable.

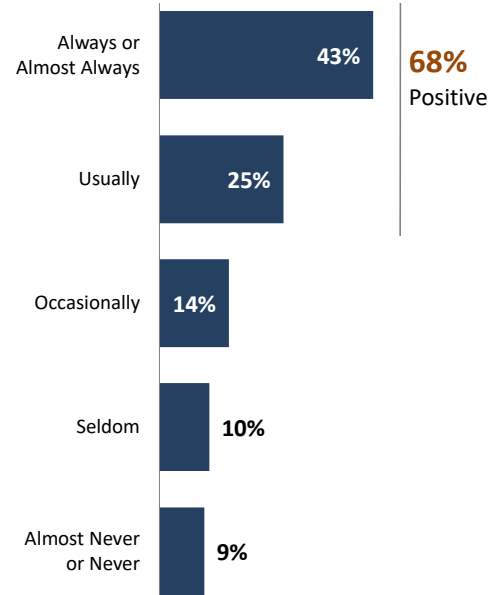
**More than two-thirds of respondents (68%)** said that DSHS clearly communicates that bullying and harassment are unacceptable. 255 comments included “bully” or “harass” or some variation of these words.

Comments about bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment usually addressed instances in the workplace or reactions from management. Employees said that all levels of staff – managers, supervisors, or co-workers – can be guilty of bullying and harassment. Some pointed out that bullying may go hand-in-hand with racial discrimination. Reports of sexual harassment show a particularly distressing form of bullying.

### TREND



### ANSWERS



### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Bullying continues in parts of the agency.

“Yes the agency communicates that bullying and harassment are not acceptable. However, in my experience, some supervisors thrive on bullying.”

“Bullying is alive and well. When you report it you are blacklisted.”

“Yes, they clearly communicate that bullying and harassment are not acceptable. However, they do nothing when it happens and it happens every day.”

“I feel bullied at work every day. Badly behaved co-workers get protection from the union and that makes my environment worse. What you are doing is not working.”

“Some staff are allowed to repeatedly act in an unprofessional, abusive manner, engaging in sometimes flagrant bullying of other staff.”

“I’d like to see the end of racial discrimination, harassment, and bullying.”

#### There should be more consequences for offenders and less retaliation against victims.

“I think that ALL BULLYING SHOULD BE STOPPED. The agencies SAY that bullying is not allowed, but the fact is that it is allowed to continue, and so is retaliation when someone reports things.”

“I see and hear of repeated instances of bullying or sexual harassment, yet management does not create a culture of safety and respect that people feel comfortable reporting these concerns. Retaliation continues to occur and often the perpetrator is rewarded with greater trust than those they are victimizing.”

“Management does not hold bullies, racists, harassers, and intimidators accountable. There will NEVER be a culture change if these people are allowed to maintain their employment with just a slap on the hand and a gentle conversation from our leaders.”

“There are no consequences for bullying.”

“A safe environment created where the office culture takes harassment and bullying issues seriously and resolves them with a positive, no retribution outcome.”

“Zero bullying or favoritism. I believe it is getting better but there should be a zero tolerance and serious consequences.”

#### Sexual harassment is also a problem.

“Sexual harassment is a very real thing. A supervisor should never be allowed to engage in sexual harassment and when it is brought to the attention of management, they are given a free pass. This needs to be stopped.”

“Apparently it is okay to sexually harass people, get moved, and then promoted.”

“When people sexually harass, harass and retaliate, it would be nice if something was done. Several other women and I have made a complaint and it is continually ignored and we are forced to work with the perpetrator.”

“I would love to see reduced tolerance at all levels for wildly inappropriate and often highly sexualized commentary from male co-workers regarding not only the women they encounter outside of work, but also regarding their female co-workers and supervisors.”

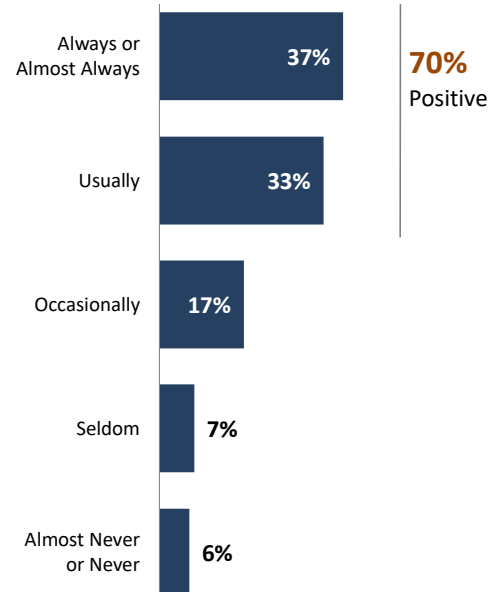
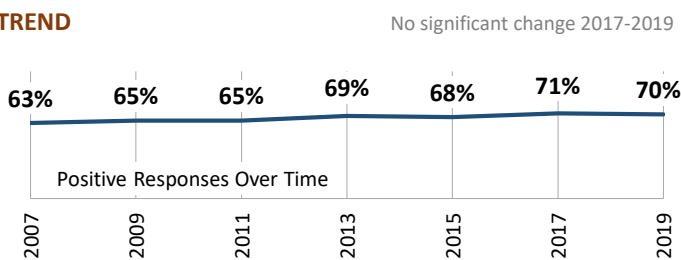
“I would like sexual harassment to be less frequent.”



**QUESTION.** My agency consistently demonstrates support for a diverse workforce.

**Seven of 10 employees (70%)** agreed that DSHS shows support for a diverse workforce, while 13% disagreed. It is difficult to tell if answers to this question were based primarily on perceptions of support for diversity or of more general support for employees.

Many employees appreciate the diverse workforce and strides made in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Others feel that the DSHS workforce and management should better reflect the diversity of those it serves. They call on the agency to ensure fair and equal treatment regardless of age, race, gender, disability, or belief.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Some employees applaud workforce diversity and agency initiatives.**

"The employees are starting to get involved in issues that matter such as respect, equity, diversity and inclusion (REDI), because our leaders are leading the way. I am excited and will commit to my role."

"The agency is moving in a direction I am excited to see. EDI and Transforming Case Management (TCM) are the big focus. It's an inside-out metamorphosis, and I envision the butterfly that will emerge."

"I love the diversity and inclusion at my work place. Feels like home away from home."

"Continuously growing within an organization that appreciates my diversity and knows that when one succeeds, we all succeed."

"I'm very lucky to have found a job that is so supportive and flexible regarding my disabilities and needs."

"The team treats all staff with respect ... equal and fair job opportunity regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion."

**Others feel that more diversity efforts are needed.**

"Continue to do more with EDI, make it a bigger part of our work and make it clear as a bell that equity, inclusion, and social justice IS the work of DSHS."

"Would like to see my agency be a leader when it comes to diversity. Not just talk about it, but actually practice it in ALL of the aspects of diversity – not just race or gender."

"Eliminate racism and bias in the hiring, promoting, and workplace. It has gone on long enough."

"Leaders that lead by example, not managers that are racists, and that discriminate against employees based on race, sex, sexual preference and union activities."

"The acceptance of homophobia, racism, poor treatment of women and minorities is widespread among some that have been here for years."

**Staff and leadership should reflect the population we serve.**

"We are missing out on hiring exceptional talent that represent the communities we serve, and that have the passion and skills required to achieve the DSHS goals. Somehow we need to improve our outreach and begin to attract and welcome diversity in hiring. Headquarters being role models, should be a forerunner."

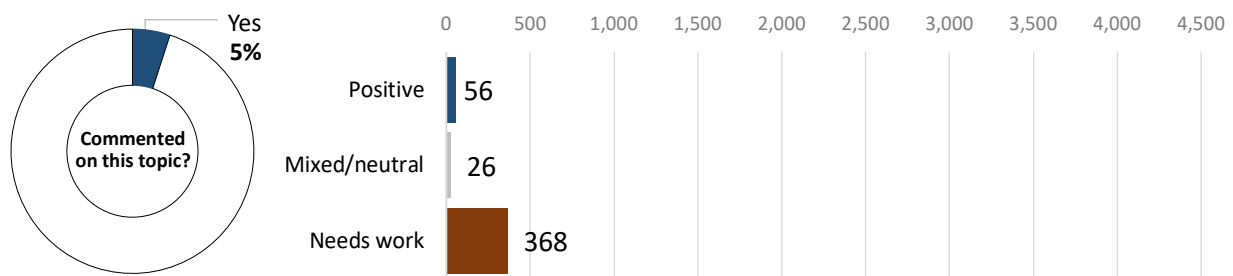
"Diverse workforce that better reflects the people we serve (more racial, AI/AN, and LGBTQ diversity)."

"Currently, are there any secretaries or assistant secretaries of color? A big barrier to diversity is that we tend to promote people who we feel comfortable with, and often that is people who are like us."

"Our customers are diverse. Our workforce should reflect that and be able to serve customers more effectively."

"Diversity across management ... Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, LGBTQ, Native American and the like are not represented. Most supervisors, middle and upper management are all white and mostly white women."

"More diversity and more people of color in management. Representation is essential for government agencies."

**THEME.** Favoritism or discrimination involving diversity issues**450 of the 9,444 employees who made comments addressed diversity issues.**

In addition to more general comments about diversity and discrimination discussed on page 38, a number of commenters noted unfair treatment of specific protected groups:

- 96 pointed to poor treatment based on race, ethnicity, culture, and language.
- 38 commented on gender disparity; and another 11 addressed treatment of LGBTQ employees. (Numbers don't include comments about sexual harassment, addressed on page 37.)
- 33 spoke about ageism; 19 of these specified poor treatment of older workers, while 6 specified younger.
- 26 indicated that employees with disabilities are not always treated well.

**► What DSHS employees said ...****Race and ethnicity can be a basis for inequitable treatment.**

"Stop racial discrimination and harassment of staff to staff or from supervisors."

"Heavier emphasis on 'walking our talk' in terms of hiring people of color, uplifting marginalized and oppressed communities, and really committing to the principles of Respect, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI)."

"Our division in particular is very white-washed. It's disheartening to see very few people of color in leadership positions."

"I have seen people of color treated unfairly in my current work environment with no accountability."

"The eastern part of the state puts on a false appearance of how much they are dedicated to inclusion. It's extremely shameful to see how little representation people of color have in operations and management."

"I would like to see less bias or subtle racist comments."

**Gender and sexual orientation can also be diversity issues.**

"I feel that there is a lot of sexism. For such a diverse clientele we need to be accepting of our co-workers."

"I would like to see people advancing due to merit rather than favoritism or bias, especially sexual bias."

"My supervisor has grown greatly, but he still treats women as if we need a paternal guide to help us with our decisions in work and scheduling."

"Supervisor and management staff are almost all male while the staff is majority female."

"Supervisor shows clear favorites that are always men."

"If you're openly gay in this facility you had better watch your back and keep your mouth closed, you're talked about in many circles and not taken seriously."

"The LGBTQs are often ignored as being a 'problem.'"

**Age and disability status can limit opportunity.**

"There seem to be issues with ageism and generational differences. More experienced staff, older staff, newer staff and younger staff all have contributions to make."

"Others overlook my work and don't offer me opportunities because they assume I am an old paperweight."

"Less targeting of the older age working population. Allow people to work their last few years into retirement, without constantly threatening them with job loss."

"Typically anyone over the age of 50 is ignored, while folks under 30 are encouraged to spread their wings. Us older folks may have droopy wings but we can still fly and are a valuable asset to the agency too."

"Ageism in an agency that has seniors as a target demographic is pretty ironic, and yet I see instances of it."

"Management goal is to hire young people as supervisors. This is age discrimination!"

"More diversity, hiring more employees with disabilities, such as blind, deaf, blind-deaf, and physical disabilities."

"Bias by management doesn't just happen to minorities, race, sex, etc. If your supervisor doesn't like you, due to missing work for your health needs, they can put pressure on you through means of unfair requirements."

"While the workforce is diverse in terms of racial/ethnic groups and is accepting of people with different sexual orientations or gender identification, I live in fear that my hidden disability (a mental illness) will be uncovered. I see nothing that acknowledges hidden disabilities and I see very few employees with physical limitations of any sort."

"I have seen a pattern of 'black balling' people who have serious and chronic medical conditions that work for us."

"I asked my supervisors to address accessible accommodations for my disability needs ... nothing has been done."

## THEME (continued). Controversial issues regarding diversity

Most employees agree that support for diversity is a positive goal. However, echoing the national dialogue, several issues related to diversity spark controversy.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

**42 respondents indicated that diversity initiatives have gone “too far” – leading to reverse discrimination, and lack of accountability for members of protected groups.**

“Sometimes it feels like there is a reverse discrimination culture. A bad apple is a bad apple no matter what group they fit into, and our culture makes it hard to hold some individuals accountable for their actions.”

“I am tired of the race card being played at each and every turn. If the employee is incapable of doing the job, terminate them.”

“I feel that the system is bending so far over to be inclusive that it is inadvertently creating a specialized class. While sensitivity training is most certainly worthy of our time, too much attention to any one sector of employees is biased against anyone outside that class.”

“I would like to see less of an emphasis on our differences and more on what unites us. I would like to see an end to the use of the term ‘white privilege.’ It is used to make people feel bad simply because of their race. How is that any different than racism?”

“I would like to see the co-worker that bullies other co-workers on a regular basis, get talked to and warned and if it does not stop, to be let go. But instead they get special treatment, and I believe it’s ‘reverse’ racial discrimination. It is not okay.”

“My skin color is white, and even though I have outscored and been recommended for the position, the person with a brown skin tone gets the job.”

**Initiatives for LGBTQ recognition provoke criticism.**

“Stop cramming LGBTQ values and agency BIAS down our throats! I don’t care what sex someone is or if they haven’t accepted the way they were born. Get over it. EDI only seems to mean to the State of WA, protect the LGBTQ community at ALL COSTS.”

“Stop promoting a person’s sexuality in the name of equity, diversity and inclusion, and promote professionalism in the workplace. This would stop the silencing of those who respectfully do not support the LGBTQ agenda and eliminate the division that emphasizing sexuality creates in the workplace.”

“Less focus on diversity and inclusiveness. I think too much attention is placed on LGBTQ ... equal time is not given to the straight community, and I think continual emphasis on the former creates divisiveness.”

“We are so focused on LGBTQ diversity, yet other diverse groups don’t have month long recognitions. It’s time to stop making such a big deal in our workplace out of the LGBTQ community. People are people; can we just go to work without having this thrown in our face constantly?”

“Remove all the rainbows, etc. unless conservative ideals will also be promoted in this workplace.”

**45 employees said they appreciate trainings and discussions focusing on diversity and would like more. But eight criticized these efforts.**

“Managers and staff are continually going through trainings on discrimination, diversity, and good work conduct which is greatly improving my work relationship with co-workers and management.”

“I would like to see more trainings and awareness on diversity and cultural awareness.”

“More equity, diversity, and inclusion training ... we really need it at this agency.”

“I feel we are spending too much time recently on diversity, between committees, online trainings, meetings, and conversation on the floor. It has consumed so much time that is taken away from our actual job.”

“The equality, diversity, and inclusion movement within DSHS is little more than political indoctrination disguised as training and education. In particular, the underlying message of ‘privilege’ demonizes and singles out a particular group of employees based entirely on skin color, which, by definition is discriminatory.”

“I don’t appreciate EDI being shoved down my throat nor all of the money spent on it and EDI trainings.”

“I think we have had an overabundance of EDI-related training. Our office shows more respect for these subjects than any other I experience. There certainly must be other subject areas that we can focus on to better our employees’ skills.”

“The state pushes an agenda that is left-leaning which was clearly seen at the cultural competency training. A participant was left crying after she was identified as having white privilege yet had grown up in poverty.”

**Some believe that diverse views should be honored.**

“There are plenty of instances of bias towards people with different political views.”

“More tolerance/respect for people who value religious beliefs. The comments are outrageous.”

“DSHS spends so much effort shoving liberal political correctness down our throats, when they should be practicing RESPECT FOR ALL.”

“I have witnessed and personally experienced an overt bias against and even hostility towards those who have a Christian worldview and to those who do not support or align with the political left. Much effort is made for ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ but it has been obvious that it is not about inclusion of all perspectives and viewpoints.”

“We hear nothing but complaining and whining about Republican beliefs, automatically assuming we are racist bigots. We respect your right to your own beliefs. Please respect our beliefs and STOP slandering the rest of us.”





**“Centenarian” • First Place**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Clients

By Mai Yang, with permission

***From the photographer:***

*This picture is of my grandmother at age 100, proudly dressed in her traditional Hmong clothes. The picture was later printed on canvas and given to her at her 100th birthday banquet that was attended by over 200 people. She was also a DSHS client in the last years of her life and was moved into an adult family home in Snohomish County just a couple months before her death from cancer in 2015. She was almost 102 years old then. I wanted to share that DSHS was good to her during her life.*

**“A Beautiful Ending” • Second Place**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic

By Yadira Hammond, with permission



**“Lilac-Breasted Roller”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Alan Sapalaran, with permission

***From the photographer***

*During my visit to South Africa, a keen-eyed tour guide on my safari allowed me the opportunity to capture this beautiful bird as it perched briefly on a branch. As a DSHS employee, play is important to me whether it be in my backyard...or beyond to the shores of another country on my bucket list.*



**“So They CAN Play” • Second Place**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Family

By Jeffrey Petruso, with permission







**From the photographer:**

*Our campus is beautiful. The area featured in the photo is especially amazing during the fall season. This area is between the resident cottages, and gardens near the center of campus.*

**"Fircrest in the Fall" • First Place (tie)**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action  
By Scott Alexander, with permission

## CHAPTER 4

# The Daily Job

**EMPLOYEES REPORT THAT THEIR OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION HAS DECREASED.** The percentage of employees who said they are generally satisfied with their jobs declined from 71% in 2017 to 69% in 2019. There were also statistically significant decreases in positive responses ("Always or Almost Always" or "Usually") for cooperation and teamwork in the work group, and decreases in the likelihood of recommending the agency as a great place to work. Employee comments noted several sources of dissatisfaction, including an inability to adjust schedules and a lack of teamwork and support in the work group. Bright spots include the increase in staff satisfaction with mobility (the only increase in the survey), and, as always, the overwhelming number of positive comments about transforming the lives of clients.

**OVERALL SATISFACTION.** Fewer employees reported general satisfaction in 2019 compared to 2017, and fewer said they would recommend the department as a great place to work. A new question shows that most employees feel valued as a person, which is a strong predictor of job satisfaction.

- **Decreased job satisfaction.** 69% of employees (down from 71% in 2017) said they are satisfied with their job.
- **Fewer would recommend the agency.** 60% of employees (down from 62% in 2017) said they would recommend the agency as a great place to work.
- **Feeling valued as a person.** This was a new question in 2019, with 62% of employees responding positively to the question: "At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person."



**JOB CHARACTERISTICS.** As always, staff speak positively about their interaction with clients and how much they like the various aspects of the work they do. They want autonomy and growth opportunities in their work, and especially dislike being micromanaged.

- **Employees like their jobs!** Despite decreases in general satisfaction, staff who commented on specific job characteristics were overwhelmingly positive, with 3,998 employees (42% of respondents who made comments) saying they like their jobs and find what they do fulfilling and a good fit with their skills and talents.
- **Interacting with and helping clients is always a source of great satisfaction.** 3,242 employees (34% of those who commented) said working with clients is a very gratifying part of their job.
- **Negative comments about autonomy and growth.** 290 employees (3% of those who made comments) criticized their opportunities for growth and autonomy, a 29% increase from 2017. Many complained about being micromanaged, with 101 of the 290 negative comments related to use of Workforce Optimization (WFO), a system at the Economic Services Administration (ESA) that focuses on employee efficiency.

**CO-WORKERS.** Questions and comments about co-workers in 2019 showed more negativity than in 2017. Most of the negativity was directed at a lack of teamwork and support. But there were also a number of employees who remarked on incompetent co-workers and their desire for these staff members to be held accountable for bad work habits.

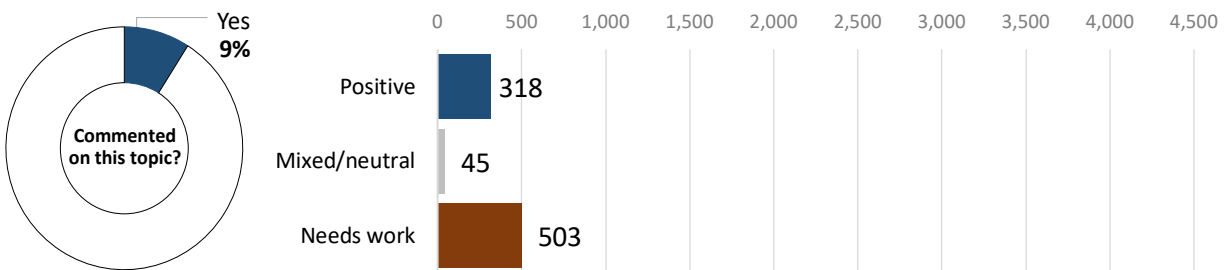
- **Less cooperation and teamwork.** 68% of employees (down from 70% in 2017) agreed that a spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in their work group. Though significantly lower than 2017's all-time high, the current percentage closely matches the levels of positivity seen in prior years.
- **Changes in comments about co-workers were more negative than positive** in 2019. Even though most comments about co-workers were positive, there was a 29% increase in negative comments, and 14% fewer positive comments about co-workers compared to 2017.

**WORK ENVIRONMENT.** The large increase in comments about flexible schedules and telecommuting (32% overall) indicates a lot of interest on this subject. With the Governor's mandate to increase telework in the workplace and many changes happening throughout the agency, it's not surprising that staff awareness of flexibility and mobility are heightened.

- **Less satisfaction with flexibility.** 60% of employees (down from 64% in 2017) said they are satisfied with their flexibility (the ability to adjust their scheduled hours as needed).
- **More satisfaction with mobility.** 48% of employees (up from 39% in 2017) said they are satisfied with their mobility (the ability to work remotely from a variety of locations).
- **Flexible schedules and mobility were hot topics.** More employees than ever commented on these issues, with 26% more positive comments, 31% more negative comments, and 66% more mixed or neutral comments. Those who have flexible work schedules and telework opportunities appreciate it, and often want more. Those who don't have flexible options generally wish they did. Some employees think that frequent telework can disrupt productivity.

**THEME.** General satisfaction

**866 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned overall satisfaction, workplace atmosphere, and worker morale.**



The majority of comments (503) about general satisfaction were critical or said there was room for improvement. Some (318) spoke positively about the overall atmosphere of their work setting.

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 ...

#### Staff are vocal about wanting improved morale and less burnout in the workplace.

"It is discouraging seeing the decline in the morale of the staff and the increase in the staff leaving their positions. There is no longer a balance as we struggle to keep up, feeling like a hamster in a wheel while our health is being impacted by the additional stress we are dealing with."

"I am observing substantial burnout of front line staff that's clearly impacting the quality of work with clients."

"This office is super toxic compared to another office I worked in (same agency)."

"I would like morale to improve in my work area where we could openly discuss issues and feel safe doing so."

"I see many people sick and broken down by demanding jobs, before they can even retire. I see a lot of burnout."

"The morale has gone way down and people are now looking for new jobs."

"People burn out faster here than anywhere I've ever worked. Instead of being an awesome place to work, it's one of the hardest."

"It is uncomfortable to be working in that toxic environment."

"I would like management to take responsibility for the horrible morale in the office. I want them to take the time to build our team in a positive manner."

"Fatigue, burnout, and secondary trauma should not be allowed to drive decision making and interactions between people."

"I would love to see a few very serious changes happen that would improve the entire office's morale, respect, team atmosphere and the office as a whole."

"The environment in the office has become toxic and morale is so low."

#### Some said their work environment is positive.

"My leadership truly cares about creating a positive workplace culture and to provide for staff growth, resulting in increased retention and feelings of value."

"I like the welcoming and positive work environment."

"I love the atmosphere of our office, very friendly and supportive."

"Very positive agency. Very supportive and professional."

"Working environment and conditions are very satisfying and fulfilling. Appreciated for my work by fellow co-workers and all staff, as I appreciate their daily efforts toward a common goal to make our clients feel comfortable and well attended."

"I love the Department I work in. It is a positive environment to work in."

"A positive place to work with lots of areas of growth."

"I love the work environment that my office has created. I look forward to coming to work most days."

#### A negative or stressful work atmosphere can cause dissatisfaction.

"Negativity impacts morale and the desire to stay at DSHS."

"Eventually people get stressed, exhausted, no work life balance and then they leave."

"Alleviate the main source of stress and dissatisfaction that I experience on a daily basis."

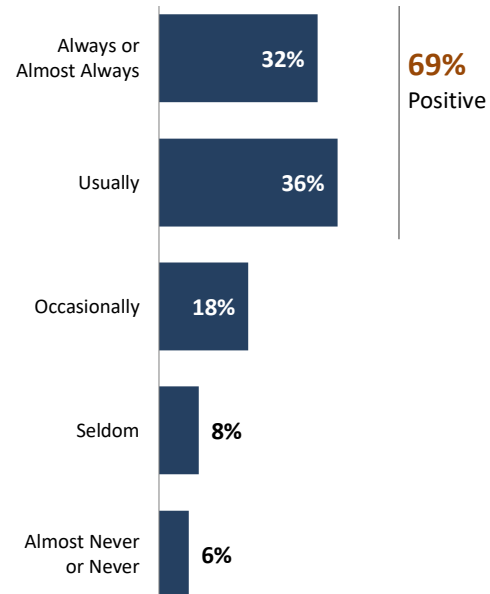
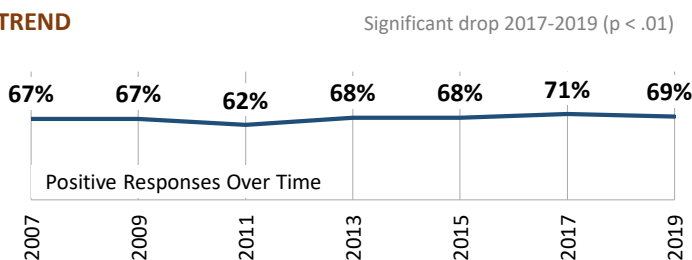
"I don't feel this agency allows for stress relief in the work place. I only see a lot of pressures of deadlines, timelines, reports that remain the priority which in turn impacts staff to only focus on work priorities and not ways to prevent burnout in the work place."

"We feel like we are mushrooms. It does not make for a good feeling of security, or self-value."

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

**Close to seven of 10 employees (69%)** said they are generally satisfied with their job – a statistically significant decrease in job satisfaction from 2017. Just over one of 10 respondents (14%) said they seldom, if ever, are satisfied with their job.

Employees expressing job satisfaction often mention how much they like helping people and how well their job fits them. Those who are dissatisfied are more likely to comment on job stress, tasks that don't challenge them, and supervisors who don't support them.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Most staff said that they are happy with their job.**

- "I honestly LOVE my job!"
- "I enjoy working in fast paced environments where there's always something to do. My position suits me that way."
- "I love what I do protecting the vulnerable. I have an amazing office and team. I have flexibility and my time is respected. I feel supported and valued by my supervisor. I work with a strong team with the same vision. My wage and benefits are unbelievable. I could not be happier!"
- "I love my job. It's not perfect, but it's the best job I have ever had."
- "I like my job. I enjoy coming in and doing my job and being able to help my team where needed. That's what it takes to do my part, to be that difference in the lives we are around on a daily basis, whether it be staff or patients. That's what I like about my current job."
- "I feel fortunate to have a job that I can do well and feel successful at and still grow in and be challenged by. I work with good people."
- "I love that I get to work in the area of my passion."
- "I like the work I do and the people I work with. I like that I have opportunities to do work that benefits the entire administration, and by proxy the customers we serve."
- "I'm pretty satisfied with my job, my team, my supervisor, and my work environment."
- "I enjoy the work and how we help families."
- "I appreciate the complexity of my position and how there's always something going on to keep me busy."
- "All I can say is I love my job."

**Some elaborated on what they like about their job.**

- "I do love my job. I feel I make a difference in others' lives and show them kindness and compassion that they may not have experienced in their lives before."
- "I enjoy troubleshooting and solving problems."
- "I love that every day is different, and I am constantly gaining new skills."
- "I love my job because it's like being at home, just not YOUR home, but the atmosphere is home-like and I enjoy learning and teaching new things with the clients."
- "I greatly enjoy being able to learn more about services and how they might be used as tools to Transform Lives."
- "I love my job for several reasons but the main reason is that I get to help people in my field of work daily."
- "I really enjoy being busy and this job rocks that!"

**Others find their jobs unsatisfactory.**

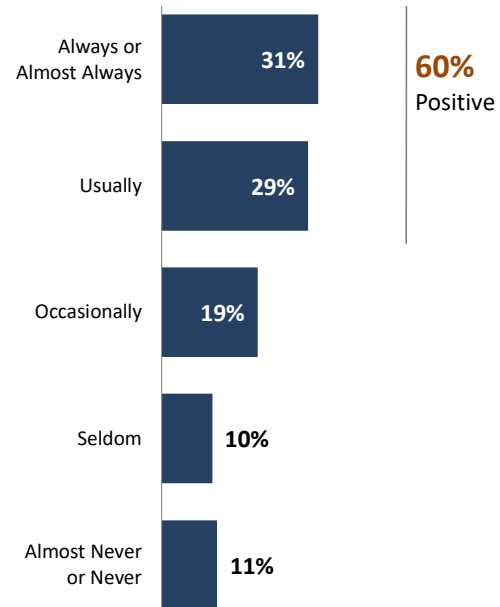
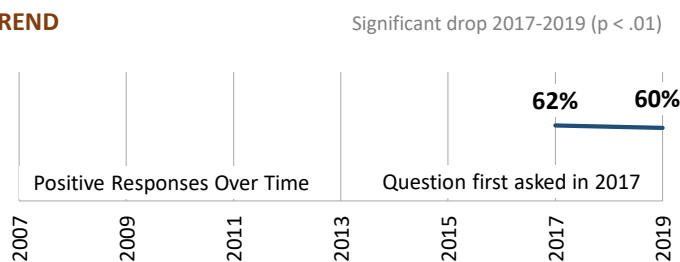
- "I am not sure if there is anything. I used to love my job when I felt we were heard."
- "When I took this job, no one explained that I would have to travel to Spokane from Colville once or twice a week in order to meet job expectations. I feel like I have been set up for failure."
- "I am in total work burnout. I would like to do something different but don't know what that would be."
- "Would love to love my job, not just my clients. So sad."
- "I used to enjoy coming to work. I currently like NOTHING about my job."
- "I cannot wait until I find another job."



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

**Six of 10 employees (60%)** said they would recommend the agency as a great place to work – a statistically significant decrease from 2017. Two of 10 employees (21%) said that they would not be inclined to recommend the agency as a great place.

Fewer people in 2019 said they would recommend the agency as a great place to work. Still, the majority of employees praise DSHS as a great place to work and build a career.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Several employees praised their workplace.**

"This is a great place!"

"I love my co-workers and I really feel appreciated by my immediate supervisor. I like that I get to walk around a beautiful campus; that it's close to home and has a somewhat flexible schedule."

"This is a great place for growth and development."

"This is the best place I have worked in my career."

"I enjoy my team and my manager. I like that everyone is willing to help and learn. We always celebrate big and little things. I constantly feel validated and appreciated."

"DSHS is a great place to work."

"It is a great place to work. More teamwork, not cliques."

"Overall, I think this is a great place to work."

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

"I am very lucky to work in a great place, and great people."

**Many called out their specific work location or division.**

"The **Bremerton CSO** is a great place to work."

"The clients are amazing and challenging, which makes **Fircrest** a great place to work."

"**DCS** is a great place to work."

"We have the **BEST Unit in HCS** with the **BEST employees!** Great place to work!"

"**OAS** is a great place to be!"

"I love working for **ESA**. I am proud of the work we do in **CSD** to help those in need."

**They appreciate bringing value to the community.**

"I feel I am contributing to the greater good of society by helping others."

"We are changing the world. The state of Washington has become a beacon to other states as it has begun the process of transforming lives...I like that."

"Most importantly the fact that I am helping contribute to the betterment of the public, my fellow citizens and my community as a whole, it makes me feel proud and accomplished."

"In a general sense, I feel that the work we do as an agency is in service to the public good."

**A few employees stressed that their workplace could be, or used to be, a great place to work.**

"We try to make it a great place to work."

"Our agency should practice what the secretary of DSHS is saying our agency is, and that is an employer of choice."

"This past year has been an epic fail for this agency and it will continue to do so unless there is accountability. It's called 'leadership,' not 'like-ership.'"

"This used to be a great place to work."

"I would like to be able to confidently recommend DSHS as a great place to work."

"Sad. DSHS used to be an employer of choice."

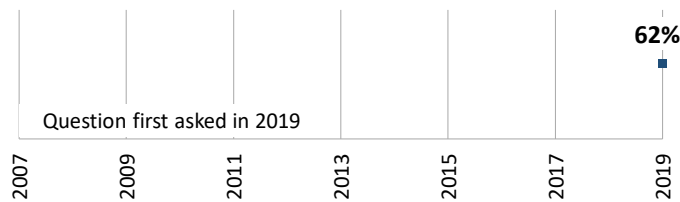
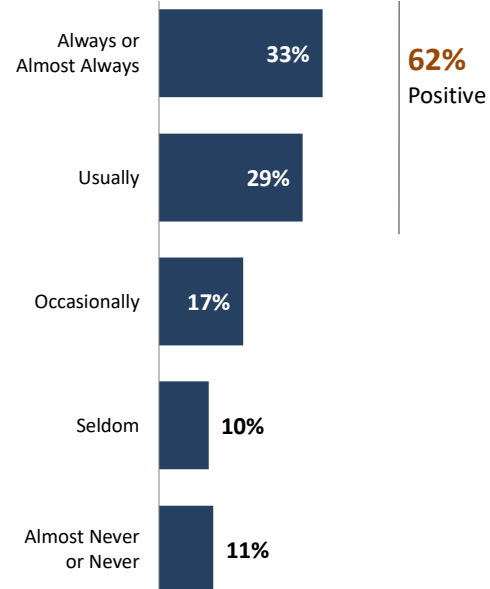
"There's much to do here to make it a worthwhile place to work, and unfortunately hope is in short supply."

"It used to be a great place to work. No longer."

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

**More than six of 10 employees (62%)** said they always or usually feel valued in the workplace for who they are as a person. Two of 10 employees (21%) said that they rarely, if ever, feel valued in the workplace.

This is the first year this question has been asked. Although most employees said they feel valued and appreciated in the workplace, some said leadership treats them more like a number than a person. They are vocal about wanting to be treated better.

**TREND****ANSWERS****► What DSHS employees said ...****Most staff said they feel valued.**

"I feel valued as a person, not just a robot working a job."

"The level of support and encouragement that I receive from other staff and supervisors is amazing. I truly feel that I'm a valued member of a team. That is something I've never experienced in the workplace before."

"I feel valued and encouraged every day."

"The job I am in is supportive and a good place to work. I feel valued in my current position."

"Management and other team members have gone above and beyond to be supportive of me as a person."

"I feel valued as a person and my talents are appreciated."

"I like the culture of acceptance and people who make you feel valued and needed."

"I like how much I feel valued and the level of appreciation for the work I do."

"I am valued for my job performance. I am also valued for being part of a team as well as individually."

"I feel valued as an employee and as a person, more so than at past jobs."

"I feel seen and valued as an individual. I feel noticed for my work and commitment to performing the tasks well."

"I feel my experience and expertise are recognized as valuable."

"My boss and peers care about me as a person and about my professional growth."

"They appreciate when you come to work and do your job. It's nice to be appreciated."

**They appreciate supervisors that recognize staff value.**

"I feel valued and appreciated. The administrator acknowledges my potential and is helping me to grow."

"My boss is extremely supportive and makes me feel valued."

"My supervisor is supportive, kind, knowledgeable, patient, and appreciates each of [us] for who we are."

"Supervisors in some wards respect me for who I am and appreciate my work."

"I'm respected by my supervisors, I know my hard work is appreciated."

**Some were vocal about needing to feel more valued.**

"I do not feel valued. I feel as if staff are treated poorly."

"I don't feel that administration/management has helped at all to create a workplace that is a safe from retaliation, trustworthy, a workplace where employees feel valued. It is very apparent that we are only a number."

"I don't feel valued when I come to work. Often times I don't want to come to work. Sometimes I just feel like, 'What's the point?'"

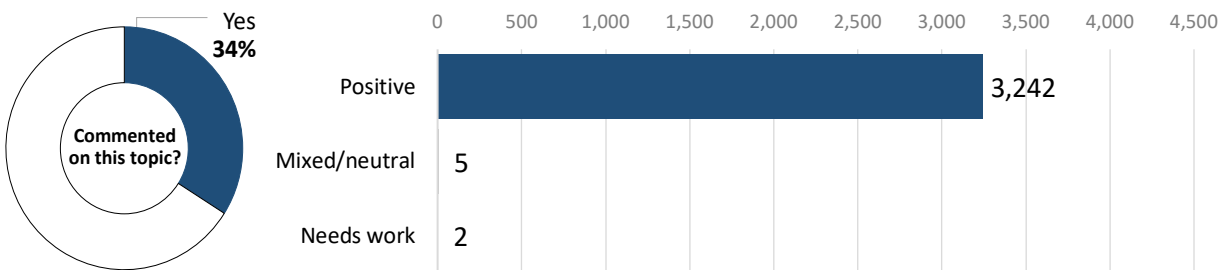
"Less of everyone trying to cover their own butts and more effort in building the 'team' atmosphere where staff feel valued and appreciated."

"My supervisor and CSO administrator don't even know my name. It is hard to feel valued as an individual when the people you report to don't even know your name."

"I no longer feel valued and I dread coming to work most days."

**THEME.** Helping and interacting with clients

**3,249 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned interacting with clients and Transforming Lives.**



More than one of three respondents who made comments said that helping clients is a major source of job satisfaction. The 3,242 employees who feel that helping clients is the best part of their job appreciate:

- Connecting clients and families to services they need
- Watching clients make improvements and succeed
- Having a part in positively impacting clients to “Transform Lives”

► **What DSHS employees said ...**

**Employees like to provide clients and their families the help they need.**

“Being able to impact the lives of others and truly help transform their lives, by offering and setting up the fabulous services we offer in WA state.”

“I derive the most job satisfaction from helping those in need within my community.”

“It is so rewarding to know offering a simple smile, resource, bus pass, words of encouragement can be the difference of someone picking up a drug or drink, attempting to end their life ... giving up. You never know the memory you’re making or the gravity of the impact you’re making in people’s lives.”

“I love that I can provide a service to people who would not otherwise have access to these services.”

“I like working with our customers, helping get services they are eligible for and referring them to local agencies for assistance. Seeing customers succeed in the program they’re in.”

“The best thing about my job is my ability to help others to the best of my ability.”

“It is also a rewarding job when I am able to connect clients with the help they need.”

“The best part of my job is being able to be a part of the process of providing our least fortunate dignity, respect, self-worth, knowledge and a caring human touch.”

“I like the opportunity to interact with my clients and figuring out how I can help them get the services they need.”

“It is wonderful that we can help people to live the lives they choose and provide enhancements for their lives.”

**They find it gratifying to see positive changes in clients’ lives.**

“We have the opportunity to help change people’s lives.”

“We change people’s lives for the better and that’s the most satisfying outcome we could hope for.”

“I feel good about the positive impact my work has on the day-to-day life of the residents.”

“Helping others is a passion of mine and to be able to provide the support and means necessary for individuals to have a successful and fulfilled life is very important to me and the work I do.”

“I love witnessing client success stories.”

“I like helping transform the lives of our customers and knowing in my heart that I can make a difference.”

“Witnessing firsthand the positive outcomes our agency can make in an individual’s life.”

“I’m grateful for the chance to make a positive impact on the lives of our clients and to encourage them to move towards making improvements in their own lives.”

“The ability to make positive changes in our client’s lives.”

“I love to see the success stories with our clients and the amazing work we do every day provides change that matters. This is what keeps us going.”

“I like finding ways to better support and help the clients I work with. Seeing a positive overall outcome.”

**Interacting with clients can be challenging.**

“I have no ability to assist homeless, mentally ill, violent and drug addicts in a meaningful way.”

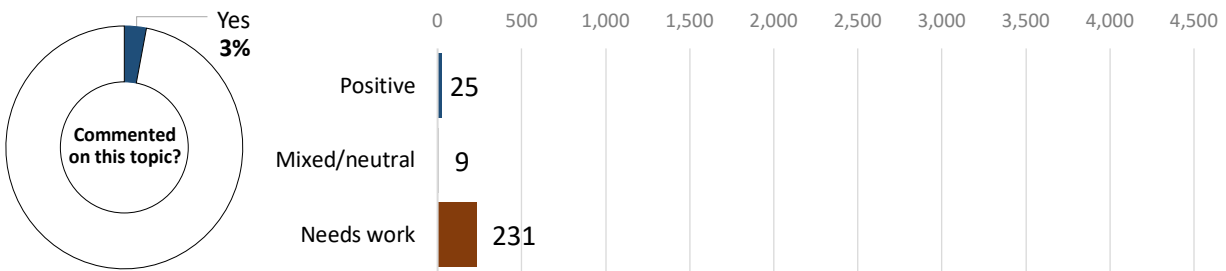
“I’d like to transfer to a position that has less customer interaction.”

“Having to now serve this population with almost zero success is demoralizing. A ‘morale injury.’”



## THEME. Workload

265 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned issues with workload.



A few respondents (25) indicated that workloads are manageable and don't cause a burden. Nearly all comments about workloads (231 out of 265) were critical or suggested improvements. Employees observed that high workloads:

- Reduce ability to provide attention needed for good customer service
- Increase staff burnout rate and turnover – often resulting in staff shortages
- Harm employee mental and physical health
- Increase errors, while decreasing quality of work

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Most comments addressed the need to reduce workloads.

"I am often told do not work more hours and then when I can't get the work done, it reflects on my performance evaluation and affects me personally. It is like being told to fill a quart jar with a gallon of water and if you spill any it's your fault."

"Caseload is overwhelming at times. Reduced caseload perhaps?"

"We are overworked for little pay and expected to do the work of two people daily."

"I would like to see our workload be more manageable. It is overwhelming currently."

"The stress that is caused from watching my caseload go up drives me nuts."

"I think we sometimes take on too many tasks and create additional projects. The consequence is that we can't always keep up and the quality of the work and responsiveness to others suffer. Staff need more say in whether we have the capacity to take on more work."

"The workload is insanely high."

"Caseloads are continuing to grow while staff are being reduced or reassigned. If workers do not have manageable caseloads, the quality of work will drop."

"We have too much work. There is not enough staff to keep up with the work."

"Our staff have caseloads that are beyond the standard size they should be expected to process."

"The work being done in this office is overwhelming at times."

"You are constantly updating or creating new Management Bulletins that always end up putting more work on us and expect us to do it all in 40 hours a week. It is absolutely ridiculous!"

#### Staff ability to help clients is disrupted by high workloads.

"Caseloads are too high for the amount of tedious, redundant work we have to do. I spend way too much work on jot and tittle than on meeting client needs."

"Need smaller caseloads and more time with clients."

"I would like to see lower caseloads so that more time to work with clients and families can be done."

"Difficult to be person-centered when you don't have the time needed to focus on a person and their services."

"We are burnt out, and residents are not receiving our full attention because we have so many people and tasks to attend to."

"I think the expectation to do quality work and provide good customer service with huge caseloads is unrealistic."

"I would like to see caseload reductions that might give employees more time to actually help customers, instead of just trying to do the bare minimum so they can keep up with their caseload."

"Smaller caseloads to be able to do even better quality work for my clients."

"I would like to see the workload change, FOR REAL, so that I can quit sneaking into the office and working extra hours so that my clients' health and welfare needs are met timely."

#### A few staff said the demands of their job are manageable.

"I can do my job within the work hours."

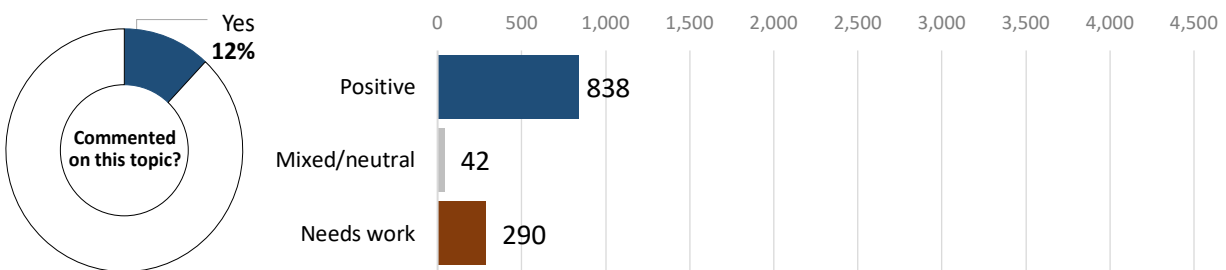
"I usually feel as though I have adequate time and resources to do a good and thorough job."

"The work load is maintainable and completion of duties are obtainable."

"The current caseload and work standards are manageable."

**THEME.** Autonomy and growth opportunities

**1,170 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned whether they have autonomy and growth opportunities in the workplace.**



Most employees who commented on autonomy (838) said that they are able to work independently and increase their skills. However, some comments (290) were requests for improvement. Employees prefer when they can:

- Process their own workload without being micromanaged
- Be creative about their approach to tasks and make improvements
- Have opportunities that challenge them to expand their skillset

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Staff like having autonomy to use their own judgement when completing tasks.

- "The flexibility of my work and the autonomy to do my work in a way that gives me balance and makes me feel valuable."
- "I like the independence I have in my work place and how I perform my job duties."
- "I love the independent nature of the job."
- "I like the flexibility of my position and the autonomy I am often afforded to complete my work efficiently and effectively for the benefit of the agency."
- "I like the flexibility and trust that I know what I am doing. I do not feel micromanaged, but rather empowered. This in turn makes me work harder and be a great employee. It's a win-win."
- "I like that I can work independently and feel like I know what I need to do each day."
- "I have been provided independence to manage my work as it relates to meeting quality standards and deadlines."
- "I like that when you tackle a task, mostly there isn't someone there telling you exactly how to do it. More so it's just you and the task."
- "I am given the freedom to do my job and not be micromanaged."
- "I love that my supervisor treats me like an adult and gives me the freedom to work independently as well as collaboratively with our community partners when necessary."
- "I am able to work independently without micromanagement!"
- "Being able to do my job independently gives me time to reflect on what differences I make for other employees and the community."

#### Staff grow when given challenging opportunities.

- "We are always striving to improve and grow while making positive impact on the lives of our patients."
- "My job allows me to grow professionally and personally, and in the long run will benefit me and add added value in return to the clients and customers we serve."
- "I always have new opportunities to continue my growth and often get tasks to keep improving my skills."
- "Knowing you are entrusted to use sound judgment and discretion provides a strong sense of value and instills a sense of purpose/responsibility to carry out the goals."
- "I'm challenged to think outside the box and not accept things at face value and shown different perspectives. I'm also given time to take advantage of trainings and opportunities that help further my growth."
- "I love the nature of my work, ability to use my skills and grow/expand, flexibility and support."

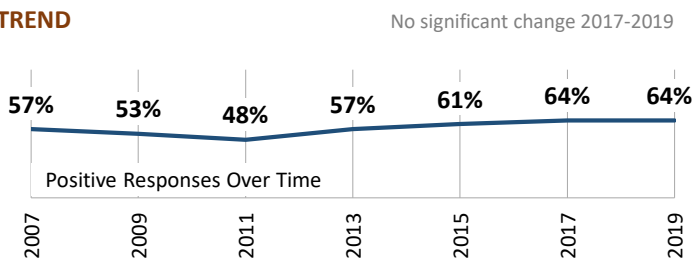
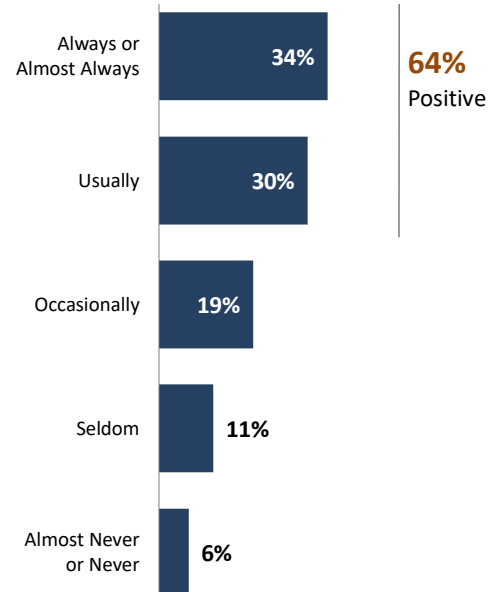
#### Most complaints were about being micromanaged.

- "Supervisor needs to quit micromanaging and trust workers to do their job."
- "I would like to feel like I have responsibilities and can problem-solve without someone constantly looking over my shoulder. I hate feeling micromanaged and currently it feels like I do not have the ability to make a single decision for myself."
- "So micromanaged in this group, everyone is so uncomfortable every minute that we are here daily."
- "The micromanagement of all staff is like telling us we don't do a good enough job and management does not trust us to do so."
- "Less micromanaging by upper administrators who don't know what they're doing and create more problems."

**QUESTION.** I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.

**More than six of 10 employees (64%)** said they have opportunities at work to learn and grow. Almost two of 10 respondents (17%) said those opportunities are rare or never happen.

Many employees said they like that their job allows them to be continuously learning and gaining new skills that help them be more productive and better able to assist clients. Some expressed concern about being stifled and stuck in a job that bores them or that doesn't allow them the training needed to improve.

**TREND****ANSWERS****► What DSHS employees said ...****Most staff said they have the opportunity to learn and grow at work.**

- "I have the freedom to grow as an employee and bring my strengths to the table. I can work on my areas of weakness and turn them around."
- "I absolutely love my job! I have lots of opportunity to learn and grow which keeps me from being bored."
- "I've been given ample opportunities to grow and utilize my talents."
- "I have opportunities to learn and grow as a professional and as a person."
- "Being given opportunity to learn and grow with each new project."
- "I appreciate being able to learn new programs and add tools to my professional toolbox as well as being able to use my creativity at work."
- "So many opportunities to learn and grow."
- "I enjoy that I am able to learn and have a variety of work to do."
- "It gives me flexibility to learn and grow in my position – I am very grateful and lucky for this!"
- "I also enjoy learning from others and growing within my role."
- "I love the multiple areas of challenges to continue to learn and grow in."
- "I enjoy the work that I do in my current job and I appreciate the frequent opportunities that I receive to learn and grow."

**They like having the freedom to be creative with how tasks are done.**

- "I am afforded the opportunity to be creative and use my skills to enhance and create a work product that impacts all of the various customers that we work with."
- "It is different every day and I have the ability to think creatively and problem solve throughout the day."
- "The flexibility to do what needs to be done in a way that makes sense for the situation. Not being limited by preconceived notions of how a task should be done."
- "I am encouraged to think creatively and innovate to improve outcomes."

**Some said learning and growth opportunities are stifled.**

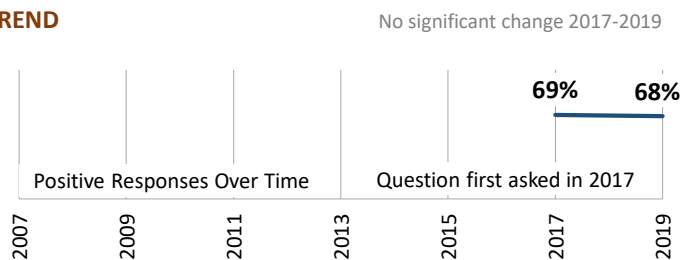
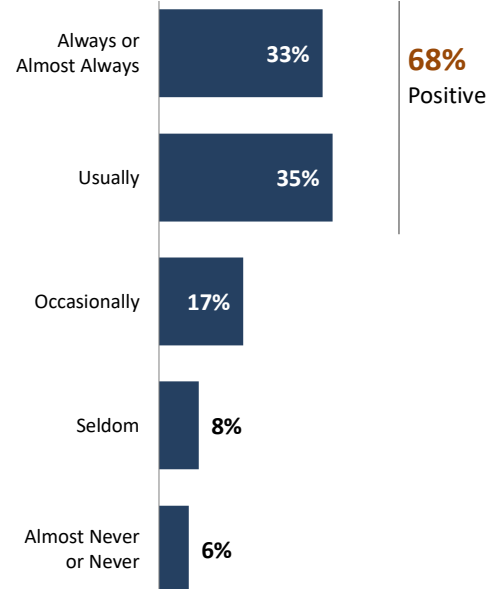
- "I do not have opportunities at work to learn and grow."
- "Motivate employees with opportunities to learn and grow."
- "I would like to see more opportunities that will allow me to continue to build my skills."
- "Need room for growth. Areas to practice and extend skills."
- "I would like to grow and get better at what I do."
- "More growth opportunities for those who are interested in growing."
- "I would like to see more learning and growth opportunities."
- "I feel that growth is not really encouraged."
- "More opportunities for growth based on interests."



**QUESTION.** At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.

**Almost seven of 10 employees (68%)** said they always or usually have the opportunity to make good use of their skills at work. Many fewer (15%) said that they seldom or never get to use their skills.

In their comments, many employees said they feel more valuable at work when their skills and talents are utilized. Some said they are frustrated with barriers that interfere with reaching their potential.

**TREND****ANSWERS****► What DSHS employees said ...****Most staff said they are making good use of their skills at work.**

- "I like being able to use my skills to do great work."
- "I am able to use my skills to help make the workplace better."
- "My skills are utilized and I'm encouraged to think outside the box for improvements."
- "I like the satisfaction of using my skills and feeling valued."
- "My position is well defined and utilizes my skills well."
- "I have the ability to make good use of my skills."
- "For the most part, I am allowed and encouraged to use my skills to make decisions."
- "I am given the chance to utilize the majority of my skills, instead of pigeonholing me."
- "My position is perfectly suited for my skill set."
- "I get to fully use my skills I gained from my previous jobs for this job. It's rewarding from that standpoint."
- "I appreciated the inclusiveness and the opportunity to utilize my skills."
- "It uses many of my skills."
- "Being trusted in my skill set and experience to do the work I was hired for."
- "I feel that my work is valued and my skills are utilized well."
- "Great use of my skills and abilities."
- "I like that I am able to put my skills to good use and that my co-workers appreciate and trust what I can offer."

**They like being able to use their skills to help others.**

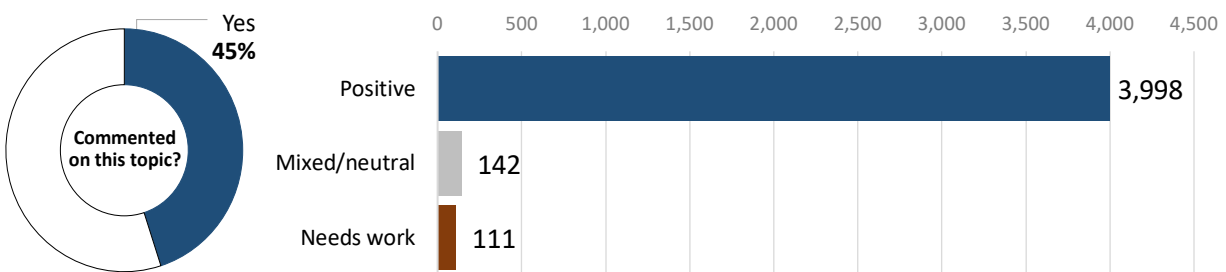
- "I am grateful to be able to use my skills to help patients."
- "Using my skills, helping people and making a difference."
- "I use my skills to help my co-workers and the DSHS clients."
- "I have the ability to apply my skills to help people."
- "I like that I use my skills every day and that what I am doing directly affects the work of the people around me and the patients. I can see the impact I make."
- "I am regularly given opportunities to use my skills and knowledge to benefit others."
- "I like being able to utilize my skills to make a difference."
- "I have the opportunity to use my skills and abilities to make the world a better place for children and families."

**Some experience barriers to using their skills.**

- "Stop being a barrier to their entire 'office' and allow staff to do the jobs that they were hired to do."
- "I do not work at my skill level nor for what I was hired. Routinely assigned to tasks below level."
- "My greatest needs or desires as a human worker with skills and abilities not being utilized. Even feeling like my skills are suppressed intentionally and atrophy in this environment."
- "I need a way to utilize more of my skills."
- "I wish the facility allowed for more opportunities to utilize more of my skills. I have skills that are being disregarded/not being incorporated, and I have seen others' skills/experience being disregarded as well."

## THEME. Other important aspects of the job

**4,251 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned other characteristics of the job they like or dislike.**



While some employees were unhappy with certain aspects of their job, the vast majority of employees who commented on this topic were positive about what they do at work. Employees are happy with:

- Job tasks they enjoy; that match their training and experience
- How their work aligns with their own personal values of helping others
- Work expectations that value quality over quantity

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees said loud and clear that they like their job.

"My own life has been transformed in the time I have spent working here."

"I like the work that we do here."

"I could not be happier than doing the job I am now."

"The fact that I come into work every day and get to witness actual change occurring before my eyes."

"I enjoy the variety of work I get to do on a consistent basis."

"I love the clients and families I get to work with every day. They make me a better person. They make me realize the little things going on in my life are nothing compared to what they face every single day."

"I'm always engaging with the work I do."

"Being part of transforming lives. It is an honor to be part of."

"I love all of the opportunities I've been given since starting my position."

"I like the work I do, I'm good at what I do, and that in turn makes me feel like I'm adding value to the agency and the administration, which is important to me."

"Even though I am 'behind' the scenes I know what I do is very important."

"I am never bored and I am always challenged."

"I love that every day is different."

"All in all I am very satisfied with my job."

"I enjoy all the ups and downs and the stress to get to the end goal of helping the patients become successful."

"I truly feel like my work makes a difference, and I love it!"

"That it seems like I was created to do the very job that I'm doing."

"I know – not just feel – that I make a positive difference."

#### They often mention that they find their work fulfilling.

"I appreciate helping the clients get what they want. It is such a fulfilling feeling – in general I like helping people."

"No day is the same. Each day bring a new challenges, and professional fulfillment knowing I have helped a customer or customers in some way!"

"I like that the work we do is fulfilling."

"People call DSHS at times of struggle and need and to be the helping hand on the other end of the line is fulfilling."

"I enjoy working with our agency clients and feel fulfilled with the services and supports we have to offer."

"I feel fulfilled by my current job and believe that it is an excellent match for my experience, skills and strengths."

"It's a wonderful job and very fulfilling."

"I think working with this patient population is extremely fulfilling, and I love helping out in any possible way I can."

"It is fulfilling to help clients understand processes and options so that working together becomes the positive result."

#### Some had complaints about specific aspects of their job.

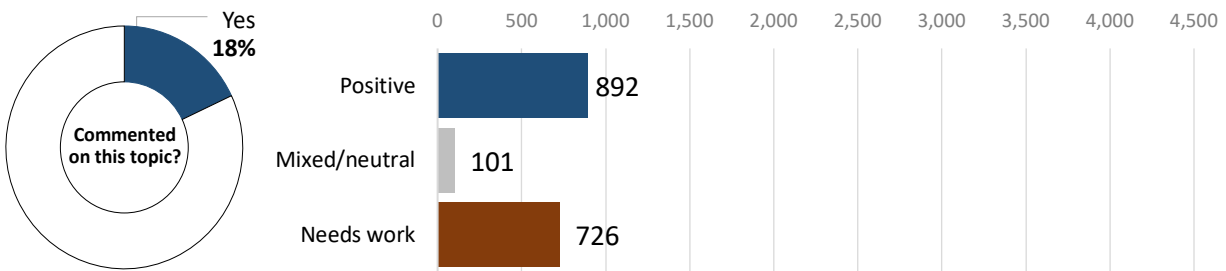
"I have had to work extra hours and figure many work-arounds for items that would be easy fixes for IT."

"Getting penalized for doing good customer service by being on the phone too long with the client is just disappointing. How quick I can take a call is not why I got into this line of work. It was for people."

"I secretly hope my clients' families do not send copies of my assessments to the courts because they do not look professional and I'm embarrassed that a court would even be able to look at the document that I was responsible for writing since we don't have time to collect accurate data and professionally write it up."

**THEME.** Teamwork and support

**1,719 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned teamwork and co-worker support.**



Comments about teamwork and support were slightly more positive than negative. While it's clear that employees like it when their team works well with and supports each other, many commented on what their team could do to improve their working relationship. They want co-workers who:

- Are encouraging and supportive of each other
- Do their share, but also jump in to help teammates when needed
- Avoid gossiping, backbiting, and other disrespectful actions
- Create a sense of connectedness in the office

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Staff like camaraderie and support within their team.

- "I like that I have the support of most of my co-workers and that I don't feel alone in the decisions I make."
- "My office has a wonderful sense of camaraderie, which contributes to teamwork towards our shared mission and values."
- "I love how we as a team work together and can learn from each other."
- "I like the camaraderie (including support) within my work group and generally within the office."
- "My immediate work group is like a fine-tuned machine. We intuitively know what needs to be done, how we can most effectively optimize our staff and time to accomplish it, and support each other in our activities."
- "I get to work with an awesome and supportive team."
- "The camaraderie of my team. We all get along and the office feels more like a group of friends and family than co-workers. We support each other and help each other without complaining. When we learn something, we share with each other so we all learn to do things better. It's a great place to work."
- "I know that no matter what, if I need help with something, there isn't one person on my team that wouldn't jump in to help me."
- "I appreciate the very supportive team and work environment."
- "Our team has an amazing collective team atmosphere and we have each other's backs."
- "We are a constant source of support for each other. This camaraderie makes it so much more enjoyable to come to work."
- "The team support is positive and healthy. This is what makes the sun shine within me and in our office."

#### They expect co-workers to treat each other well and do their share.

- "Team environment instead of a blame environment."
- "Stop sticking your nose in the air and offer a friendly hand with compassion and without expectations. The better we treat each other, the better we will treat the patients."
- "How about people who do not pull their weight in their teams get more training on how to do their job."
- "Less cliques, gossip, backstabbing about everyone, everything that isn't their business in the first place. Just do your job! New generation has very different work ethics."
- "People who work hard get asked to do more and the people who slack off are just known to be slackers and that's that."

#### Some request additional team-building activities.

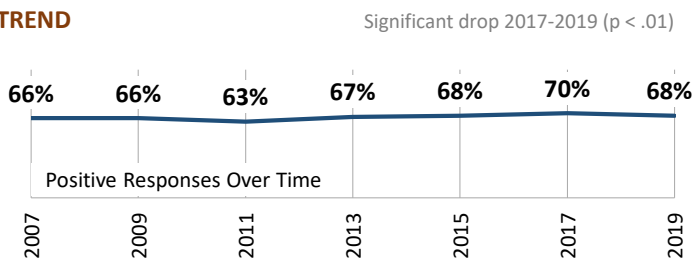
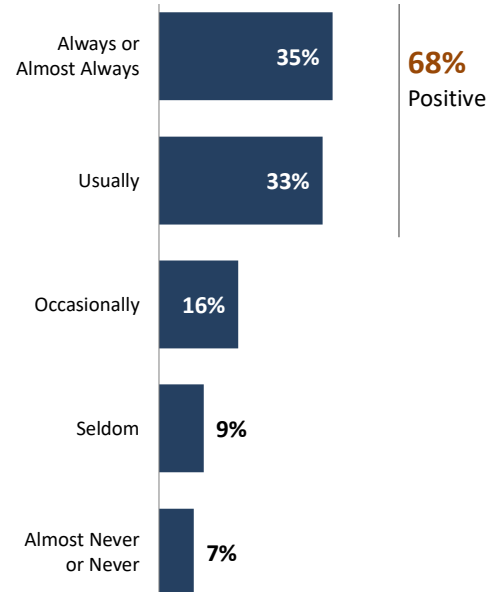
- "There is a lack of cohesion between many workers. I feel this is due to a lack of teambuilding and direction."
- "I would like to see some more team bonding activities. I work in an office full of unique individuals and I think if we were brought together on the same page with work, we could encourage and support each other to be accurate and more entrusting of the work we do."
- "Team building needs to increase."
- "More teamwork, team building exercises, and a higher sense of morale. Everyone is out for themselves here. The lack of teamwork is embarrassing and frustrating. I understand 'see something, say something' but there should still be a sense of team. A certain amount of morale. I feel there is NONE."
- "Encourage activities to bring our teams together to foster positive relationships and morale."
- "More team building exercises or activities that unify us."



**QUESTION.** A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.

**Almost seven of 10 employees (68%)** said they always or usually experience a spirit of cooperation and teamwork in their work group – a statistically significant decrease from 2017. 16% said that their work group needs better cooperation and teamwork.

Most employees expressed that there is a strong sense of collaboration in their work group. It's very common to see comments praising relationships between co-workers. Some employees said they disapprove of team members who undermine the cohesiveness of the group, often because they are treating other members of the team badly.

**TREND****ANSWERS****► What DSHS employees said ...****Staff said team unity is strong in their work group.**

- "It's like pressing the refresh button. Teamwork among staff has clearly soared."
- "The team always works together well."
- "There is a genuine spirit of cooperation and shared goals, all revolving around helping the customers."
- "Our team works hard, we work well together, and we support each other to provide the best service possible."
- "My team and my supervisor, as we do have a spirit of cooperation and respect."
- "We are a close group that works well together."
- "There is a spirit of teamwork within my team and between other teams."
- "The strong sense of camaraderie amongst all staff, including supervisors/leads, is refreshing and motivating. There is a sincere show of care and consideration for fellow employees, regardless of position."
- "The camaraderie. Everyone works as a team which make the unit run very smooth and clients happy."
- "I love my co-workers and the office morale and team unity we have."
- "I work with wonderful people and everybody is always ready to pitch in when we need to solve a problem or work together."
- "I love that I get to work with a team that likes to work together."
- "The co-workers in my unit love their jobs too, so together we are a good team."

**They like the positive interaction with their co-workers.**

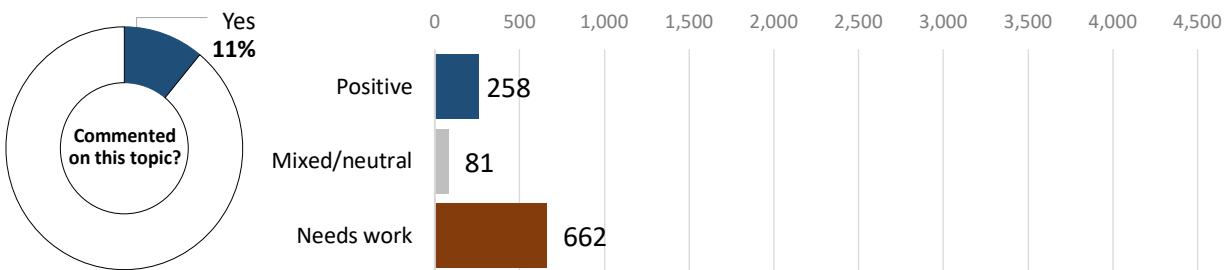
- "I like working in an environment when everyone is an active teammate. We work and flow together effortlessly, making the job and the day a place you look forward to returning to."
- "I have an amazing team of co-workers that are supportive and encouraging."
- "Good co-workers make work more enjoyable."
- "My team has an amazing relationship and I can feel the culture across the office growing into a wonderful space."

**Some wish their team worked better together.**

- "I would like to see more cooperation amongst my teammates and myself. Working as one would make the work flow much more efficiently."
- "I'd like to see all staff work together better."
- "I have issues with staff working together as a team and getting along with others. They have not developed these skills."
- "I would like to see co-workers that can work as a group."
- "We need to have a more team-like office atmosphere in this office, it seems that everyone is just worried about their own thing."
- "I'd like to see people treat each other more kindly. Our work is hard and demanding and our team could do a better job at listening to one another and supporting one another."
- "I like to see staff working together as a team. Stop complaining, and do your job."

**THEME.** Co-worker competence

**1,001 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned the competence and professionalism of their co-workers.**



Some employees made positive comments about the work habits of their co-workers (258), but many more (662) expressed displeasure at the behavior and lack of competence exhibited by teammates. They said they prefer to work with co-workers who:

- Act in ways that are professional and make the entire team look good
- Are held accountable for abuse of sick leave and for not doing their share
- Consistently try to do their best and are helpful to both clients and teammates

► **What DSHS employees said ...****Staff appreciate when co-workers are knowledgeable, dedicated, and take pride in their work.**

- “The best thing, by pure luck, is that everyone on my team is top-notch skill-wise, and friendly to work with.”
- “The skills, education, and professionalism among DSHS workers is extremely high.”
- “It sounds disingenuous, but I really do feel that most of my peers and my team of staff are committed to ‘Transforming Lives,’ just like the DSHS mission says.”
- “I get to work with really talented, passionate professionals who really believe in their mission and contribute to the well-being of their clients.”
- “My team members are dedicated professionals.”
- “The kindness that my co-workers treat our clientele with is exemplary.”
- “It’s nice to work with people who all work hard and take pride in their work.”
- “I work with an exceptional group of people. I can’t say enough good things about them. Supportive, friendly and strong minded. The dedication to our clients is usually always present.”

**Sometimes professional skills are perceived as lacking.**

- “Staff should be held to a standard of professionalism in the office.”
- “I would like to see my co-workers be professional.”
- “We need a workforce who are trained, professional and have high standards for ethic to meet the agency’s mission.”
- “I would also like everyone held to the same standards of professionalism.”
- “I would like to see more professional behavior demonstrated during the work day.”

**They want co-workers held accountable for bad work habits.**

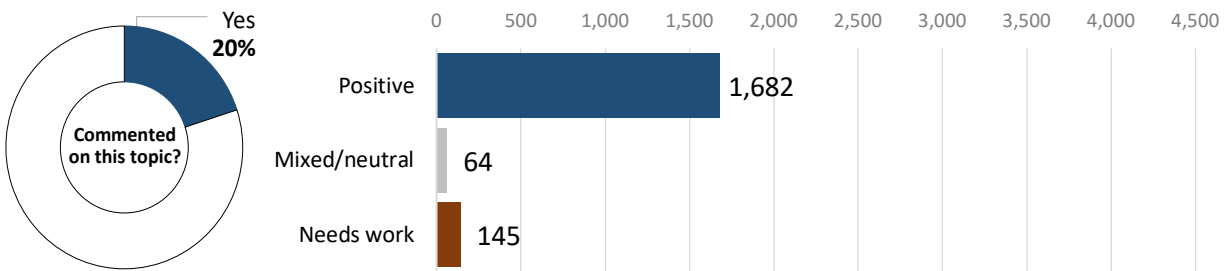
- “Update the processes for discipline, demotion, or replacing employees who do not actually come to work and WORK – when they actually show up.”
- “Our office and agency as a whole is scared to discipline those who cannot/will not do their jobs as an adult should.”
- “Supervisors continually lean on the few good employees to make up the work of those who refuse to do even the minimal amount of their job.”
- “Management needs to stop putting Band-Aids on difficult people ... those that go out of their way to cause chaos for chaos’ sake.”
- “Several people need to be babysat because they can’t be trusted to keep up with their work, but they also don’t have any disciplinary action taken against them because the powers that be are afraid of any reciprocated backlash/lawsuits/tantrums.”
- “If someone is unable to perform at this job they should be let go instead of wasting time and resources and repeatedly having one-on-ones, accommodations, extra assistance.”

**Many plead with supervisors to end the abuse of sick leave.**

- “I constantly see people abuse their sick leave for a ‘day off’ which in turn leaves staffing short.”
- “Deal with abuse of sick leave...remind people it is a job and that they are paid to do a job.”
- “I believe the current policy encourages employees to abuse sick leave. There are no consequences for abuse and no praise or recognition for superior attendance.”
- “What needs to be offered is additional solutions to prevent sick call-ins, plus boost morale.”

**THEME.** Other comments about co-workers

**1,891 of the 9,444 employees who made comments made other comments about co-workers.**



The other comments about co-workers often included general feelings toward fellow workers and the attitudes of those workers. A few said work was needed to improve attitude or work habits of co-workers. Many more had positive things to say about the people they work with. Employees said they like when co-workers:

- Keep politics and drama out of the office
- Treat each other like friends and family
- Maintain a positive attitude and are considerate of others

► **What DSHS employees said ...**

**Staff are often expressive with their appreciation of co-workers.**

"I love my co-workers and the community of friends I have made here...I feel like I can go and connect with them and it feels very genuine."

"Did I say I love my team and they are the best? They are, wouldn't trade them for the world."

"The amazing team of people I work with has made this the best job I have had."

"I really like the team I have on my unit. If it wasn't for my team I would not have stayed on the job long."

"I love my co-workers. I am part of the best crew I have ever worked with."

"I think we have incredible work teams at all levels. I admire and respect my co-workers."

"My co-workers are fabulous!"

"My team is awesome, and filled with great individuals."

"There are staff that always go above and beyond and those staff are what make the foundation of the program stronger in the long run."

"I love my team! We all get along great and respect each other's gifts and help each other grow."

"My co-workers/team is great, super supportive of each other and fun to work with."

"I am blessed to have amazing co-workers."

"I appreciate the individuals that come to work with a positive attitude and are ready to work as a team to serve vulnerable populations."

"I enjoy my team specifically in my office and enjoy collaborating and working with them daily."

"I love my team. We really gel well together."

"When I think about the people I work with and the environment in the office it makes me want to come to work in the morning."

**Cohesive teams help create a feeling of family at work.**

"I also love my supervisor and team very much, they are all so supportive and so kind. They help me achieve my best and help me see my strengths in a way that I have never seen it before. I would definitely call my team a family to me."

"What I like about my current job is teamwork and we're like family helping each other."

"I like that I can come to work and everyone is friendly and we all have each other's back. We are like a big family and that is comforting."

"I enjoy the 'work family' atmosphere."

"My supervisor and team are easily the best part of my current job. We are a cohesive group that feels like a family unit and I feel we all contribute and are valued as individuals and what we each bring to the team."

"I love the family feeling within the group of people that I work with. I am excited to come to work every day and continue to work with my team."

"Our team works so well together, I honestly think of them as a second family."

"My co-workers, who are now my friends and family."

**Rumors, cliques, and drama can upset the team environment.**

"It would be great to abolish the cliques and focus our energy on the residents and the job that is in front of us, while leaving the immaturity at home."

"The office politics are god-awful. Always rumors and hearsay and distrust."

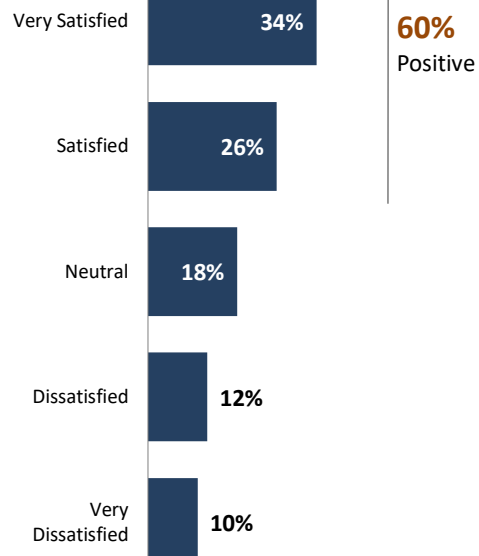
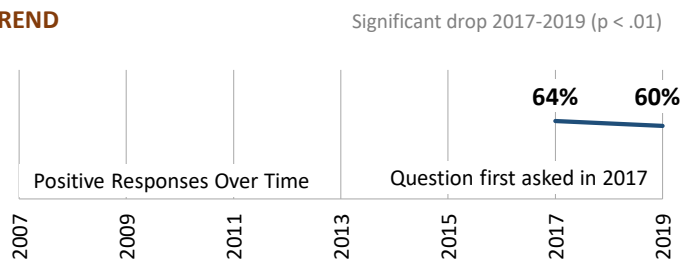
"Perhaps staff would be more productive and reliable in their attendance, if there were less back-biting, verbal attacks, rumors and mobbing."

"Employee issues and drama make us work harder and accomplish less than we should."

**QUESTION.** How satisfied are you with your flexibility?

**Six of 10 employees (60%)** said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their flexibility (the ability to adjust their scheduled hours as needed) – a statistically significant decrease from 2017. Two of 10 employees (22%) expressed dissatisfaction.

Employees said they appreciate having control over their work schedules to better meet personal time demands and client availability. Those that are unable to flex their schedules are vocal about how it negatively affects them. Many of these complaints are from ESA staff affected by the use of Workforce Optimization (WFO) in their workplace.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Employees appreciate being able to flex their work hours.**

- "I am pleased with the agency's efforts to be more flexible around work schedules and flex time."
- "It is highly flexible and allows me to control my schedule."
- "Flexibility of our work hours within the work week and that fact that we can work four, ten-hour days giving us a long weekend. That is a major perk to this job."
- "I appreciate the ability to flex my schedule for start and end times of the day and to attend appointments in the middle of the day."
- "[I like the] flexibility of work schedule and flexibility in being able to take leave when needed."
- "I like the flexibility that I have to work later one day so that I can leave early on a different day."
- "We are able to adjust our work schedules as needed when 'life happens.'"
- "I enjoy the ability to schedule my own appointments and can flex hours as needed."
- "Our agency is pretty flexible with work schedules, which I appreciate. I have had medical issues this year, and I have been able to take time off work for appointments, tests, procedures, etc. as needed, which has been very helpful."
- "The flexibility in my work schedule is what I value most in my current job."
- "I enjoy the opportunity to have a flex schedule one day."
- "The flexible hours and ability to plan how to do my work as long as I achieve desired goals and meet deadlines."
- "I appreciate the flexibility in my schedule."

**Being allowed to adjust schedules helps staff feel valued and trusted.**

- "I enjoy that I am trusted and can adjust my schedule if/when it is needed. Such a great work/life balance!"
- "I appreciate the trust and ability to not only flex hours, but telework. I have a clear path to my purpose and the work I do."
- "Flexibility/mobility. I appreciate the trust that I'm a salaried worker and I will get my work done even if it's not within my scheduled hours exactly every day."

**It's common to see complaints from staff who want flexible schedules and from those affected by WFO.**

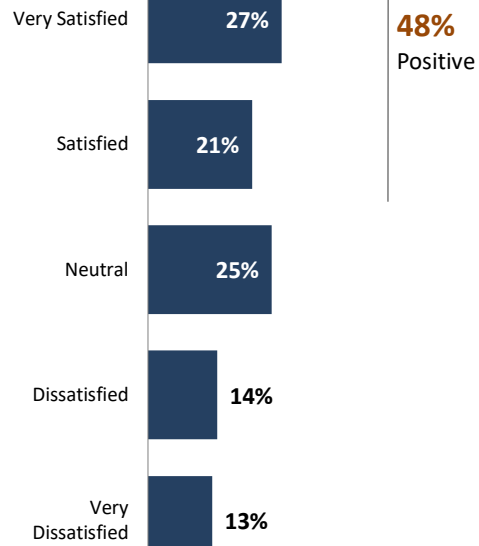
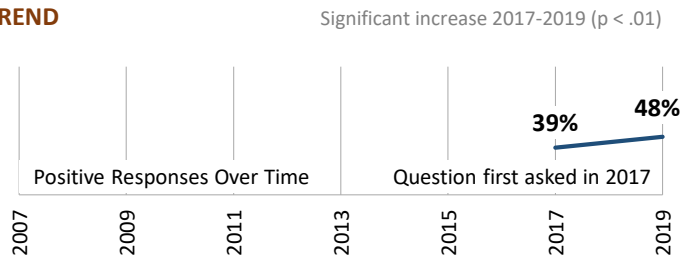
- "Flexibility with WFO. I am required to take a lunch at 11 even if I'm off at 1pm, and unable to switch my shift with others due to 45 min lunch."
- "If the work is getting done and the customers served well, why can't I work a flexible schedule?"
- "Having WFO tell you when you can take lunch or a break is not just bad for our health but not great for the customers."
- "The schedule could be not so brutal."
- "I feel like we cannot flex time like we used to since WFO. We used to be able to make up time and that is not allowed."
- "Allowing schedule changes, to have the ability to move my day off if I need it on another day."
- "Get rid of WFO, I feel like I can't even go to the bathroom."



**QUESTION.** How satisfied are you with your mobility?

**About half of employees (48%)** said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their mobility (the ability to work remotely from a variety of locations, such as their home or alternate work site) – the only statistically significant increase in the survey and the highest ever for DSHS. Over one of four respondents (27%) said that they are dissatisfied with their lack of mobility options.

Employees who are unhappy said they want better policies in place about who can telework and for how many days, along with improvements on what work spaces look like when in the office. Those employees without mobility restrictions said they are enjoying the opportunity to work remotely.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Those staff allowed to work remotely are glad to have the opportunity.**

"Telework is the best thing ever. It makes me want to work harder and go above and beyond. I haven't ever been happier because of the ability to telework. Everyone should have the option. It is amazing!"

"I was approved to work remotely/telework and it has been life-changing! I am more productive at home with less distractions and spending less time on the road in commuter traffic."

"So for me, my favorite thing is being able to telework while being able to provide even better customer service to our clients. I am able to find the support I need while not having to be in the office."

**Some stated that they need more mobility options.**

"Expand the work from home and/or alternate work sites options."

"If there is no need to be physically present in the office, it would be nice to be given the option of teleworking and just be in the office when needed, like meetings, training, printing documents, etc."

"I would like to occasionally work from home. For example, when I do not feel well, but can still work from home."

"More ability to work remotely (nearest Community Services Office or home)."

"With new remote communication and working capabilities there is no reason any position should be physically tied to one location."

**Some said they think teleworking has a positive impact on their health and wellness.**

"Being able to telework has made a huge impact in my overall physical and mental health. I am a more productive and happy employee. Please keep telework alive!"

"I like that I have the opportunity to work from home, and that I am able to take a walk for health and wellness."

"We have the option to telework at home 3 days per week, and this allowed more focus during work hours."

"Continue to find ways for employees to work from home or creative solutions for those who may have a longer commute than others. The agency has been open with myself and my staff for teleworking and it has created a happier, healthier team as they feel appreciated."

**Others complained that teleworking was causing problems in their workplace.**

"It makes the teleworking from home experience feel like a burden for the team."

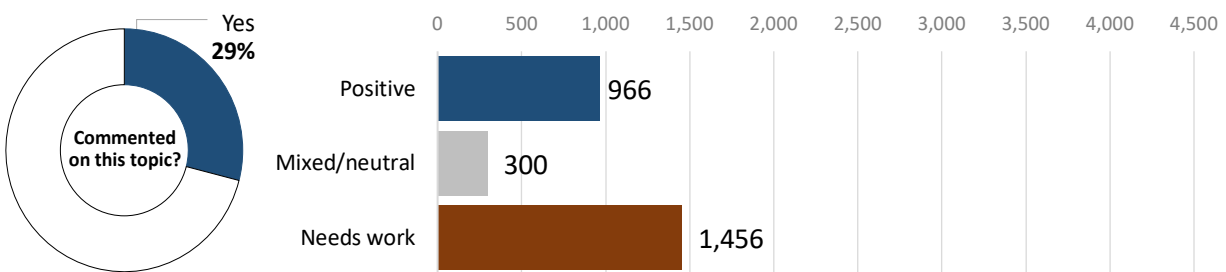
"I believe teleworking has diluted the ability to resolve technical questions in a timely fashion. They prefer the request or question be put in an IM, IOC or email. Therefore, the main means of communication resulting in going back and forth and at times, is totally off base. A simple face-to-face dialogue could be more productive."

"Telework participants have zero accountability."

"Case Resource Managers are teleworking 5 days a week with no office needs accountability; it is increasing workloads for those who don't telework."

**THEME.** Flexible schedules and telecommuting

**2,722 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned flexibility of work schedules and the ability to work from alternate locations (an increase in comments of 32% over 2017).**



Many employees commenting on this topic had positive things to say, but the majority said they see a need for change in how schedules and mobility are dealt with in the workplace. Most said they would prefer:

- The ability to reduce their commute by working out-stationed or remotely at home
- Control over their work hours and days off, and a choice in whether to work overtime or not

► **What DSHS employees said ...****Staff like having a good work/life balance.**

- “I like the flexibility and work/life balance, being able to work reduced hours and telework from home.”
- “I have flexibility and relative autonomy on my hours and schedule, in order to both get the job done and support a work/life balance.”
- “It is challenging, and the flexible hours including off days help me to meet my personal needs.”
- “The pros of my job are the flexibility of workday schedule (work/life balance is supported) and the ability to work remotely (improves efficiency).”
- “Teleworking and flex scheduling make it easy to have a good work/life balance and allows me to be a supportive father/husband.”
- “The ability to work remotely/teleworking and flex schedule. It allows for a great work/life balance.”
- “I appreciate the flexibility and mobility of my position. I like the attention to maintaining the ‘work/life balance’ that we enjoy.”

**A few mentioned that flex schedules and telecommuting help with self-care and the environment.**

- “I would like to see more schedule options, telecommuting, and general flexibility for everyone. It seem that we should be able to use more technology and travel less which would save the State money and contribute to employee wellness and satisfaction.”
- “Ability to work from home has been helpful in easing stress from traffic.”
- “Traveling at peak traffic times on days I work from the office creates more congestion, which creates pollution because it takes longer to get home, which means cars are running and creating exhaust for longer periods of time. It seems counter-productive.”

**Some teleworkers feel cheated on office space.**

- “The current touchdown spaces do not offer any noise buffering, which is needed to make telephone calls.”
- “I am also frustrated that I have to give up my cube when I am still in the office 60 percent of the time.”
- “The ‘visitor cubes’ are the ones no one wants. This means I am spending the majority of my work time in work spaces that are unpleasant.”
- “If you work from home for 2 days a week you lose your cube. For the three days that you are in the office you only have use of a shared cube. Not comfortable.”
- “Office space is an issue. When they get to the office, they have a ‘touchdown space’ which may be the same as where they were before, or have to search for one. This inconvenience doesn’t give value to the worker.”
- “Teleworkers who are in the office 3 days per week, should be able to have a designated cubicle to include a place to leave their belongings.”

**Others resent some having flexibility, while they are denied.**

- “The hot button issue now is flex time. Certain areas have it and some do not. I think it needs to be inclusive to all.”
- “Flexible schedules for ALL positions.”
- “More flexibility to work at home or alternate work schedule. The measurement for who was eligible for this was inaccurate so several were denied.”
- “Permit more people to work from home or work alternate schedules. It should be an option open to all within specified criteria, not just doled out to a few.”
- “Management should not treat a group of teleworkers differently and not account for them and should require them to have the same responsibilities as other teleworkers. This creates animosity among workers and has created a divide, fracturing the work atmosphere.”



**“The Falls in Utah”**

DSHS Photo Contest • By Seth Groth, with permission

***From the photographer:***

*This is Kanaraville falls in Utah over half of the hike in was through water up to waist deep in a slot canyon.*

**“Telework Heaven” • Honorable Mention (tie)**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Employees

By Alli Smith, with permission

***From the photographer:***

*The view from my desk at home, taken the first week I was teleworking.*







**From the photographer:**

*Milky Way just as the clouds separated over rolling hills of the Palouse. There is something so elemental and archetypal about standing on a brisk autumn evening and seeing the Milky Way appear through night clouds. It bridges over all the artifices of modern humanity and connects us at a very basic and profound level - we are all here on this planet together and under the stars at night.*

**“Milky Way Over the Palouse”**

DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Photographers Choice  
By Robert E. Salsbury, with permission

## CHAPTER 5

# Business Practices

**EMPLOYEE VIEWS OF BUSINESS PRACTICES ARE LESS POSITIVE THAN THE LAST SURVEY.** There were statistically significant decreases in positive responses (“Always or Almost Always” or “Usually”) for two of the five structured questions included in this chapter. Compared to the 2017 survey, significantly fewer employees agreed that their agency uses their time and talents well, or that their agency supports them in living a healthier life. At the same time, there were fewer negative comments (and fewer comments overall) about the physical work environment. Open-ended responses suggest that the effective use of employee talents and support for a healthy life are important because they provide a signal of how much the agency values individual employees.

**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.** The positive trends reported in the 2017 and 2015 surveys have levelled off or decreased. As always, there were many suggestions for improving business practices.

- **Less satisfaction with work roles.** 62% of employees (down from 64% in 2017) agreed that their agency uses their time and talents well.
- **Many suggestions for improvement.** 2,860 (30% of those making comments) made suggestions for improvement in work processes or policies, and 1,111 made suggestions for personnel practices. These comments included requests for a focus on customer service over quantitative performance metrics, better information technology processes, and electronic health records. Personnel comments were mostly about fairness and transparency in hiring and advancement opportunities. Some employees criticized the reclassification of information technology positions.



**RESOURCES.** Compared to the 2017 survey, there were fewer negative comments about resources, and fewer comments about resources overall. There was no significant change in the percentage of employees who feel that they have sufficient resources to do their jobs.

- **Fewer comments.** 2,376 employees (25% of those making comments) complained about resources, a 17% decrease compared to 2017. Comments included:
  - Requests for better training of managers and supervisors
  - Requests for more comprehensive training opportunities
  - Challenges managing confidential communications in open work environments
  - Concerns that staffing shortfalls harm quality of care, safety, and employee retention
- **No change in available resources.** 68% of employees said they have the tools and resources needed to do their jobs.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY.** Employees were less likely in 2019 to agree that their agency supports them in living a healthier life. There were fewer comments about wellness in 2019.

- **Less perceived support.** 57% of employees (down from 60% in 2017) agreed that their agency supports them in living a healthier life.
- **Staff safety concerns.** 305 employees (3% of those making comments) noted safety concerns. Comments about safety show that some employees have serious and important concerns about the risk of physical assault, and the need for better post-incident support. Employees who do not feel that their safety or wellness is supported also express concerns that they are not valued by their employer.
- **Wellness and mental health.** 217 employees (2% of those making comments) made suggestions to improve staff wellness. Mental health is an important part of wellness, and some employees believe it needs more attention. Employees also value access to healthy food, clean air, and clean water.

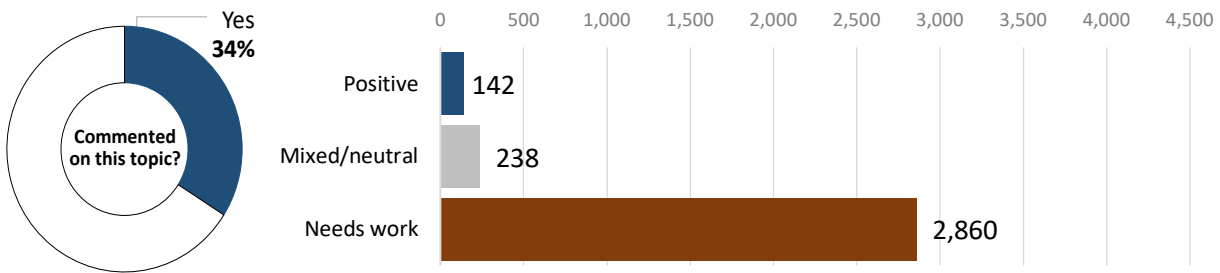


*From the photographer:*  
*I noticed Rainier framed perfectly by trees while driving to a trailhead.*  
*I had to stop and photograph it.*

**“Rainier Framed by Evergreen”**  
DSHS Photo Contest  
By Edward Thomas, with permission

**THEME.** Work processes and policies

**3,240 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned work processes and policies.**



Employees contributed a wide variety of suggestions for change, and what has worked well. Nearly nine of 10 staff commenting on process or policy were critical or suggested improvements. Topics of greatest interest included:

- Focus on customer care
- Flexible or alternative work schedules (discussed in Chapter 4)
- Information technology systems
- Electronic health records

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Many feel that policies and procedures should prioritize customer service and client care.

"I would like to see that the patients get more freedom. Over the years their lives have been getting smaller and smaller here. There are no 'fun' things that they can actually do or go anywhere. They are miserable being locked up with the same people every day, over and over."

"I am happy that we are becoming more treatment focused as a team in general throughout the Special Commitment Center."

"Instead of living by the numbers, it'd be nice to see us pay attention to the healing process for individual patients rather than try to rush them along (for instance, out of seclusion or off of a one-on-one or two-on-one) before they are ready. I believe this would significantly reduce injury to staff, thus reducing a need for extra staffing of people not acclimated to wards and patients. A lot of times patients are pushed out of something that they need more time with, solely based on the time they have spent in that position."

"Get back to the good old days when customer service was a priority."

"Concern that time is being spent more on gathering computer data than with customers."

"Changing metrics for performance. As an APS [Adult Protective Services] worker, there is too much focus on substantiations and not enough on protective services."

"Not every need can be determined by surveys, or Excel spreadsheets. This is my biggest concern: We have lost focus on the client. Sure we have new programs introduced to help them all the time. However, there is not enough time to learn or implement these programs and thus staff don't use them."

#### Information technology systems and policies matter.

"[I like] the ability to telework and have a full team that teleworks as well. I like to see the use of new technology to enhance our job and ability to serve our clients."

"I would like to see improved computer systems that ease the data entry process, so that more time can be spent directly working with customers instead of just entering information."

"Having to do multiple screens, systems, steps, sometimes just to complete one task can be a major headache."

"We spend all this time and money on IT systems that are duplicative in other areas; we should be working as one in these areas and leverage existing systems, sharing knowledge about IT vendors and solutions."

#### There were many requests for electronic records.

"Our number one priority needs to be EMR [Electronic Medical Records], it would improve communication, safety, compliance, and improve patient outcomes."

"It is very hard to complete my job without others doing their jobs first. We have a terrible system for record keeping and are well behind other agencies without an electronic medical records system. This sort of record keeping would greatly improve the ability of many people to complete their jobs."

"Electronic health record implementation to improve communication between departments, eliminate silos, and improve care of the residents."

"Move away from copies and paper documents as the primary source of information. We should be utilizing electronic methods of recording, disseminating, and updating, like the rest of the 21st century in large industries such as healthcare, schools, and local government."

**THEME.** Specific work processes and policies

*Many comments refer to practices specific to certain workplaces or services.*

► **What DSHS employees said ...**

**Some said they appreciate the ‘Infants at Work’ program, but not all are supportive.**

“Extend infant at work policy to 9 months!”

“Day care in the workplace, instead of infants at work (in a cube). Why have infants in cubes for line-level jobs exposed to the germs in our environment and not being played with? I’m concerned babies could end up with development delays, because they were ‘at work’ instead of getting the important play and interaction they need from birth.”

“The babies I’ve seen in the office bring joy and increased morale. Haven’t seen any negatives.”

“It is also great to see the ‘Infants in the Workplace’ program happening. This is so supportive of families.”

“The bring your infant to work program that recently started, I just see that as making a parent do two jobs at once. In-house day care, where a parent can break and spend meals with their child, that is something that sounds helpful.”

**Some are concerned by processes they see as excessive oversight or micromanaging.**

“State-level people need to stop micromanaging and allow people who have the education, training, and experience make the changes that are needed.”

“Get rid of all the oversight mechanisms in place. You make us feel like children and thieves.”

“I think there is low morale because in the Public Benefit Specialist and WorkFirst positions, those folks are so tightly monitored in their work within WFO [Workforce Optimization].”

**Process improvement initiatives are appreciated when carried out.**

“I think the improvement work HR is currently doing to ‘transform’ is very exciting. My thoughts and ideas are solicited and heard. I am hopeful for the new chapter.”

“The use of Skype in staffing cases, meetings, and trainings has been the best LEAN addition as far as tools to be able to do our work.”

“More thorough process analysis and true application of lean principles to decrease waste and improve efficiency.”

“I love that we are moving to transforming case management, so all of our clients will have the resources they need to be successful.”

“I’m a huge supporter of Transforming Case Management and hope we continue to evolve to provide the best services to customers and the best support to our staff.”

“I’d like to see less bureaucracy, faster improvements in processes with less waste. We have a lot of focus on being lean, but I haven’t seen it practiced or much improvements in increasing efficiencies in workflow.”

**Employees appreciate efforts to share ideas.**

“I loved the staff idea gathering tour – what a great way to find out what employees want and make our job more attractive to potential future employees.”

“There are so many barriers to making changes. It would be great to establish a real marketplace of process improvement ideas.”

“More brainstorming about how to improve our systems and process. We rarely get time to all gather as a team and engage in exploring new ideas.”

**Many comments were unique, but valuable.**

“The co-location of my team with other social service providers/Community Services Offices.”

“LOVE the Make Work More Human meetings/workshops/gatherings. We need more of that.”

“If an employee is assaulted they shouldn’t have to worry about filling out paperwork and should be fully covered as far as their time from the point it happens.”

“I like how we change our monthly stations so that way no one is burnt-out by doing the same station every single day like Groundhog Day.”

“When a staff is assaulted the state agency should charge the patient so that they and their peers know that there is a consequence.”

“Let customers be able to pay child support over the phone with a debit/credit card, like Puget Sound Energy. I think we lose a lot of money because the person is willing/able to pay that day, but can’t.”

“Statewide office statistics would be fun to know. Community Services Division regularly posts those monthly posters to ESA news about ‘poverty statistics’ or ‘actual demographics of TANF recipients.’ We should do the same for staff for a real bird’s eye view of things.”

“Why do we use vendors that haven’t delivered as promised to other agencies and DSHS administrations? Shouldn’t we share this information internally?”

“ALISA’s constant innovation means a rapid pace of change that can sometimes be overwhelming and exhausting. However, it’s our greatest strength, as the consistent high quality and low cost of services are recognized year after year by AARP, state Medicaid directors, and other organizations outside of Washington state.”

“Training prior to policies or procedures being implemented.”

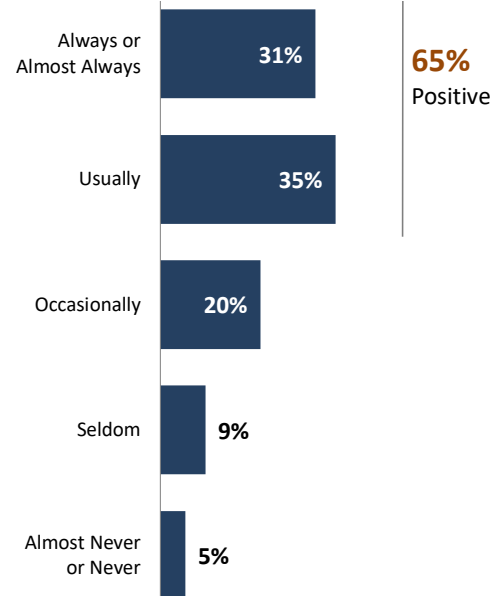
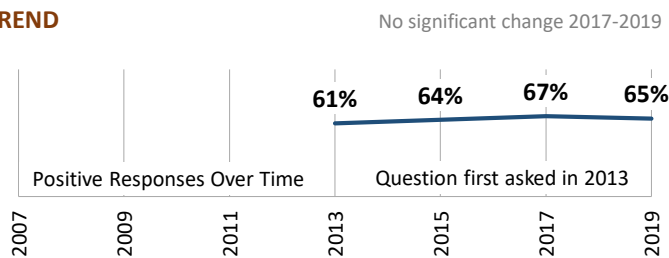
“Make it mandatory that staff keep their personal phone usage at a minimum. It makes it hard to feel motivated while you constantly see your co-workers and supervisor on their personal phones.”

“Maybe a little bit of slowdown time on the changes, in order to catch up. Coming at us fast and furiously.”

**QUESTION.** We are making improvements to make things better for our customers.

**More than six of 10 employees (65%)** said improvements to make things better for customers happen always or usually. Less than two of 10 respondents (14%) said that they seldom or never see customer-focused improvements.

Employees are enthusiastic about customer-centered initiatives like Person-Centered Culture (in all residential facilities) and Transforming Case Management (in ESA). Respondents also pointed out many other opportunities to improve the customer experience.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****DSHS employees value improvements to customer services.**

"I'd like all employees, who have it in them, to see themselves as change agents, for the people we serve inside our organization and the citizens of Washington. We are civil servants and have tremendous opportunities every day to show up for one another and to look for ways to improve the services we provide."

"Eastern State is open to bringing in new ways of doing things to help improve safety among staff and patients."

"I like that we're improving how we do our work for our customers. I love that our customers are recognizing the changes and are happy that we're doing our work for them, helping them to succeed, transition and still provide for their families."

"I really like that I constantly observe and hear how Western State Hospital is working to make things safer and more conducive to effectively treating our clients."

"[I like] that the agency is focused on changing the culture of our work and improving customer service."

**Some feel that more improvements are needed.**

"This hospital has great potential to be the innovator and leader in behavioral health standards across the state and could improve outcomes for all its patients in the community if only it would stop being reactive and focusing on evidence based, which is useless. Institute best practices, along with a drive for cutting-edge services, research, and education."

"More emphasis on customer service, not make them wait or give them the run around."

**Many described specific improvements needed or made.**

"We REALLY need to better serve our homeless population. At this time our intake model actively screens them out."

"I am ashamed of how extreme measurement and tracking has diluted one-on-one service to clients."

"I am looking forward to seeing what Transforming Case Management will bring. As a Public Benefits Specialist 3 at a call center, I often feel like I'm limited in assisting my clients. I would love to assist them in job development/affordable housing/ childcare and balancing all that comes along with it; as well to help get them off assistance and reduce poverty."

"The agency at headquarters has been more involved with expressing what our customers' needs are and how our performance is working."

"I do not like the hours I am scheduled. I am not here early enough for my customer base. In some instances they are ready to leave when I am getting to my workplace. It's added stress and allows for mistakes to be made and steps to be missed during resident releases."

"Get to know the client and their strengths rather than the 'treat them and street them' attitude."

"I think as an agency we need to be reminded that treating each customer with dignity, respect and fairness is a requirement, no matter our position in the agency."

"I love that we are shifting to a more customer service based approach and actually emphasizing that we should be treating our customers with respect and care."

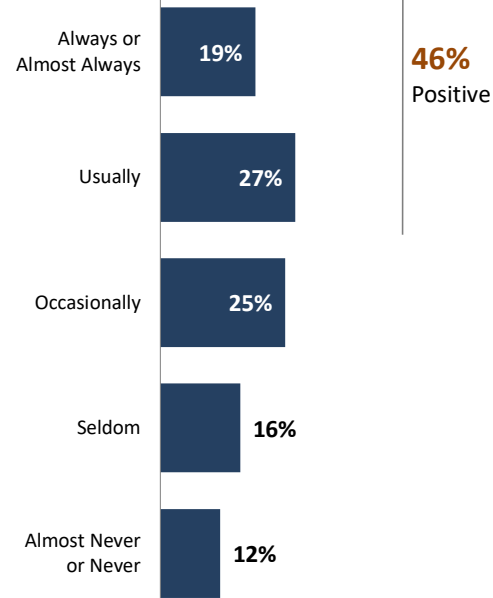
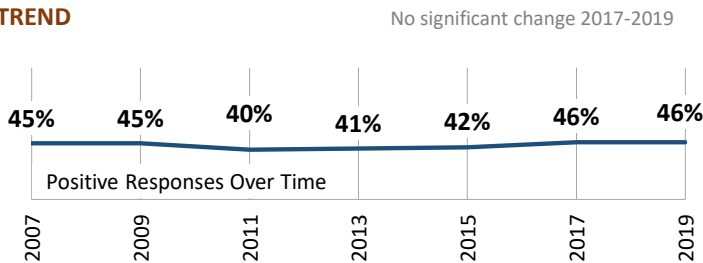


**QUESTION.** We use customer feedback to improve our processes.

**Less than half of employees (46%)** said customer feedback is always or usually used to improve processes. More than one of four respondents (28%) said that customer feedback is seldom or never used to improve processes.

Only a small number of employees made comments about customer feedback. These comments addressed the value of obtaining feedback from customers, and interest in specific actions in response to customer feedback. (These issues are addressed in depth in the 2019 DSHS Client Survey report, available on the RDA website:

<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/rda/research-reports/2019-social-and-health-services-client-survey>.)

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Some employees appreciate receiving direct feedback from customers.**

"I enjoy working with the customers. They provide me feedback about how I am doing in my job. It is always appreciated when a customer comes to me, gives me a hug and says 'thank you for what you do.'"

"[I like] being a partner in change and encouragement in parents' lives. DSHS partnership with the Employment Security Department offering strategies for success and financial capabilities - such AWESOME feedback from parents!"

**Many are not aware of the customer feedback that is collected.**

"Would like more opportunity for positive changes to the job, and more feedback being truly heard from clients and staff."

"I have never heard any comments or commentary from my supervisors concerning customer feedback."

"There is a disconnect between how we are asked to provide the services and how our customers experience the service. I would like to see a mechanism where the decision makers at the executive, legislative and federal level could get feedback from customers and their families so that some things could be clarified down the chain of command that would improve the customer's experience."

"True customer feedback, not only highlighting the times when people are praised."

**Some described specific situations where customer feedback could improve processes.**

"With the elimination of some positions, our window hours are shorter. Feedback from clients indicates that they think we don't care that this makes it harder for them. Not all clients can come in the middle of the day. It would be great to have the positions necessary to help the clients in the ways that matter to them."

"More customer involvement in change planning."

"It is difficult to perform my job optimally when I don't know what the experience is like from the customer point of view. Knowing what the customer has to go through will provide me with the information on how to direct the customer in the right direction."

"I feel that clients who can advocate for themselves are able to dictate the direction of services."

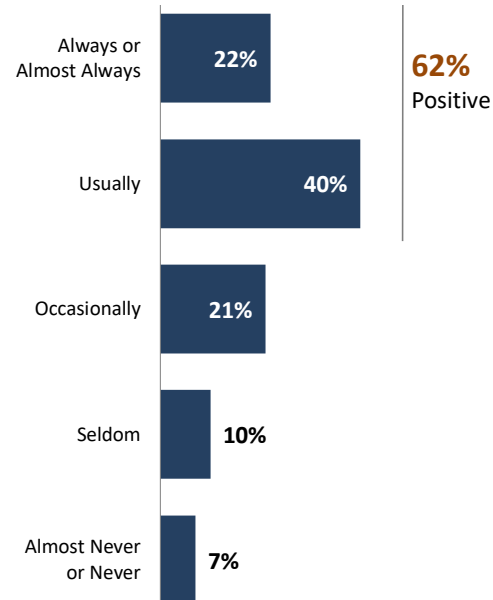
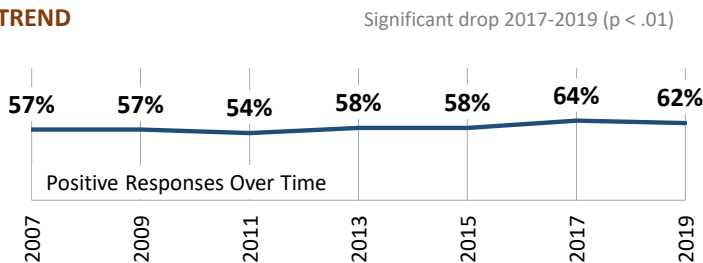
**Customer feedback should not replace employee input.**

"Current HRD [Human Resources Division] leadership allows the customer to dictate HR work processes and results (tail wagging the dog). There is an extent to which customer feedback can inform how HRD improves service delivery and crafts efficiency measures to achieve those targeted improvements, but leadership too often serve as advocates for the administrations against the guidance and expertise provided by their own HR staff."

**QUESTION.** My agency uses my time and talents well.

More than six of 10 employees (62%) said that their agency uses their time and talents well, a statistically significant decrease from 2017. Less than two of 10 respondents (17%) said that their time and talents are seldom or never used well.

Effective use of employees' time and talents is important for job satisfaction. Employees who are able to fully engage in their work feel that they belong and make a difference. Those who feel their skills are not being used effectively often say that they could contribute more to the mission of DSHS, and may believe that they are not valued in their workplace.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Employees are motivated by opportunities to contribute.**

"I changed roles recently into a job that uses my skills and allows me to collaborate across the agency."

"My job uses my skills, experience and knowledge to further the agency's mission through completion of complex work products that fund critical services for participants."

"[I like] working for a caring supervisor who understands where the team can depend upon me the most and capitalizes on those talents."

"I get to continually learn new information and use my talents to help not just people individually, but the agency as a whole to achieve the goals to best serve the agency and people as well."

"I feel that I am thriving here, that my skills are appreciated and well used."

"My time and talents are being utilized well, in the goal of improving service delivery."

**Full use of employee skills is linked to feelings of respect and trust.**

"The administrator has worked hard to build a positive, respectful work environment where staff know what is expected of them, and they are allowed to use their unique skills/talents in the office. This makes us a strong, efficient, and unified team."

"[I would like] upper management to move away from micromanaging and trust their employees to use their skills and knowledge to do their jobs."

**Many who commented don't feel their skills are fully used.**

"It would be nice if the agency used my time and talents well. Not so sure my supervisor even knows my talents."

"[I would like] more structure so that I am being better utilized as there are days when I have too much time and not enough to do."

"I would like to see people's specific skills and strengths be utilized better. I have peers that seem to have a very specific set of skills or strengths that I feel often goes unrecognized or underappreciated. For example, second languages are under-utilized. It would be of great benefit to case managers and clients if we used case managers as interpreters or assigned native speakers to clients who do not speak English as their first language."

"While I am fairly new, I have been feeling underemployed. I do have skills that are not being utilized. Who can help me figure out how I can make the biggest impact on my department?"

"Use staff's talents more effectively. Nurses should be used as nurses, not always as social workers."

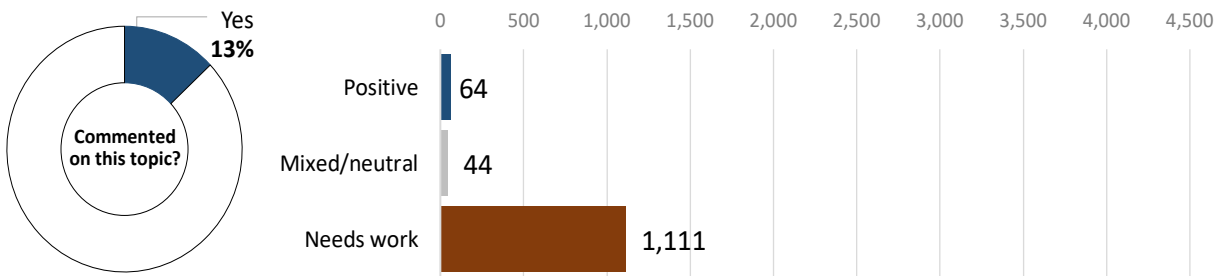
"Actively seek out the talents and skills of all employees, not just what they're hired to do, because people are more than just their jobs."

"I enjoy the skills that I have been given to work with the residents. I do not think they give us a chance to always apply those skills, but they are good to know."

"I will be looking to leave this agency and go somewhere within the state that will appreciate my talents, and my actions will be judged on how I help people."

**THEME.** Personnel issues

**1,219 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned personnel issues.**



The most commonly discussed personnel issue was advancement. Most positive comments expressed thanks for advancement opportunities. Many of those who commented believe that personnel processes such as hiring, promotion, and selection for permanent status can be unfair, rigged, or lacking in transparency. In the era of telecommuting, a number of employees requested more promotion opportunities outside Olympia and Seattle.

Other personnel concerns included responsiveness of HR staff, difficulty in dealing with problem employees, disruptions due to investigations, and timeliness of filling positions. Multiple IT employees complained about the recent reclassification.

► **What DSHS employees said ...**

**Employees appreciate a fair chance at advancement.**

- "I like that our boss helps us to grow and that they give us the tools to promote within. It's amazing."
- "I like that I was given the opportunity to grow into a new position and that I feel supported in this new endeavor."
- "There is room for growth. If you are not happy where you are, you can just work towards another position in the same agency."
- "I like that my office has a cohesive environment that encourages growth and promotion within the agency."
- "I like that we are able to be promoted into different career paths within the State. I like that we have the flexibility of being able to try out different positions."
- "Like the opportunities to advance and continue training."

**Many feel that promotion opportunities are not fair.**

- "Opportunities to grow need to be equal. This office picks and chooses who they want to promote. There's a lot of talent that is going to waste."
- "More fairness in promotions and advancement opportunities. Favoritism plays a huge role currently."
- "A fairer way for temporary and permanent promotion and lateral moves. Not just 'the good old boy' network, or 'it's not what you know, it's who you know.'"
- "Jobs/promotions here are given to people who have been groomed for them. Several people in the office have been groomed by management to put them in position for the next new job or promotion. That's great, except that not everyone gets that opportunity and people trying to promote without that help are passed over."
- "More opportunities for advancement for all employees that qualify. Not just promotions for elected officials' friends and associates because they are buddies."

**Hiring practices provoke a good deal of criticism.**

- "Hiring practice needs to change before a lawsuit. The agency is far from Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). There are individuals promised promotional positions before they even apply and get hired."
- "Better, more intentional hiring. Ensuring that people hired into positions are truly experienced enough and competent enough to do the level of work."
- "Fair hiring practices where administration has to show how they scored the application packet, experience, references, and interview to come to their decision."
- "More transparency in hiring practices. If you apply for a job someone should be able to give you useful feedback on either why you did not get an interview or why you did not get hired."
- "Stop hiring relatives and friends of employees."
- "It seems that sometimes supervisors hire who they like over who is most qualified, and I don't see oversight when this occurs."
- "Management to stop deciding who they like for a job and then creating a job post to fit who they want."

**Some want promotions available throughout the state.**

- "More opportunities for advancement without having to move to Olympia or Tumwater."
- "Continue to expand job opportunities in places other than Olympia. We have started this, but can still improve."
- "Most Washingtonians don't live in or near Olympia so DSHS is ending up with leadership that is based mostly on geography. Expanding leadership opportunities to outside Olympia would be the best way to increase diversity."
- "I would like to have more job opportunities to be offered for teleworkers instead of all the interesting jobs only being offered in Olympia."

**THEME.** Personnel issues (continued)

## ► What DSHS employees said ...

**Staff want timely services from knowledgeable HR experts.**

"The hiring process can be made less cumbersome. It takes way too much time to get positions filled."

"I would like to see more rapid response to personnel issues; an HR department well-versed and trained to deal with complex personnel issues."

"Need to get positions filled quicker. We have had two spots open for months."

"I need more concrete assistance/direction as a supervisor from HR and my management, in dealing with personnel issues that do not follow the 'happy path' described in trainings I have taken."

"More support for supervisors. HR takes forever to respond to questions/needs. Responses from HR differ from staff to staff, so supervisors rarely get consistent information to do the job effectively. HR training tends to be sparse unless you travel to the west side of the state."

"The problem is we seem to have way too much 'red tape' in hiring/promoting and we're always short-staffed because of it."

"I never know who our current HR person is, or the best way to contact them."

"Our HR department is often an obstacle to achieving the goals and missions of the hospital. They will give different answers to the same question on different days, they often attempt to make decisions that are outside of their purview, and they are frequently unresponsive."

"I would like to see personnel issues dealt with in a more timely manner. There are a very few very negative staff, they make the environment very difficult for their peers and at times our clients."

**It can be difficult to discipline or remove poor performers.**

"There need to be more repercussions for poor performance in the workplace. It is a private joke among state workers that it is impossible to get fired."

"Inability to remove/fire for chronic performance issues."

"Getting rid of problem employees faster. It takes way too long to get rid of people that have proven that they should not be in a certain position."

"It is frustrating to see other staff not being held accountable and know there is not much a supervisor or administrator can do about it."

"I wish the sick leave laws would change to stop protecting employees who abuse the system."

"When staff are reassigned and investigated, this process is extremely slow (we are talking sometimes over a year) and leads to inconsistent staffing and increased overtime. They need to investigate staff quicker and either get them back to work or terminate them."

"If a person is insubordinate, uncooperative and generally not a team player, they should be sent home to think about it and without pay."

**Staff from residential facilities find that employee investigations are often lengthy and disruptive.**

"Allowing investigations to DRAG ON for months into years is ridiculous. You don't need to take an excessively long time just to make it look like you're doing 'due diligence.'"

"Seriously, the waste of time and money on investigations is embarrassing! When someone is reassigned off their ward why does it take months and months to investigate? We all agree they are necessary, but the slow-mo process makes this hospital seem so incompetent, unprofessional, and backwards!"

"I would like to see investigations cut back and supervisors more involved with their staff. Upper-management doesn't understand how they affect and hurt people and the unit, when the investigation is a minor issue that the supervisor can work out. It really causes friction in the unit."

"Less employee investigations; complete them quicker."

"When an investigation is going on, can we please shorten the time because staff is away from their work area."

**Many Information Technology (IT) workers are unhappy with the recent statewide position reallocations.**

"We have lost many very good people due to the mismanagement of the IT reclassification."

"The IT Reclassification was a total joke and not handled well at all. We went from a system that made sense, to a system that was based on my supervisor's ability to write a position description and the subjective opinion of a reviewer who does not have expertise in all IT job families. The IT Reclassification has caused the most qualified staff to leave."

"I would have changed the way the reclassification was done. I have heard so many negative remarks how the state has done the reclassification just to save money, and it has demoralized employees to a point they have left."

**A variety of other personnel issues were mentioned.**

"I would like to see more support when we are short staffed, whether it be someone on maternity/paternity/sick/annual leave or until a position is filled."

"I would like to see more part-time positions available."

"I think on-call positions need to go away – everyone needs to be permanent."

"Less of a probationary period – one year is way too long."

"Give hardworking staff permanent positions and not just hold them as non-permanent."

"Being required to do employee evaluations essentially all at once is a poor use of my time, encourages 'cut & paste,' and isn't meaningful to staff."

"Keep the train moving forward on HR Transformation and get the Secretary to open the purse strings to support the areas where there will be FTE shortfalls."

"I understand that some things needed to change, but the Transform HR is too drastic and a lot of it is unnecessary."

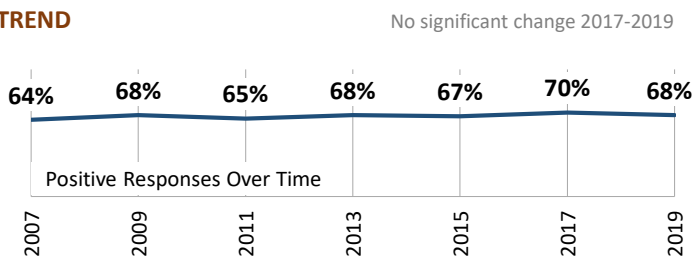


## QUESTION. I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.

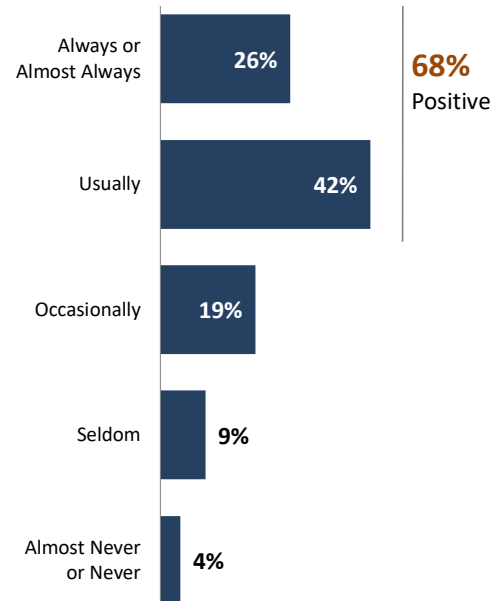
**Nearly seven of 10 employees (68%)** said they always or usually have access to the tools and resources needed for their job.

Open-ended comments about resources cover a wide variety of topics, including the physical work environment, tools to perform job duties, access to resources for clients, and opportunities for growth through training and continuing education. Employees also expressed desire for more equity in resource distribution. Though answers to this question were positive, most of those who commented about resources found them lacking.

### TREND



### ANSWERS



### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Many commented on resource deficits.

"I would like to be able to get office supplies when I need them. I shouldn't have to bring in my own supplies."

"Additional state vehicles. We do not have enough to go around."

"Every employee that is expected to use a computer should have easy access to a computer and workspace to organize work materials. In areas where computers are shared, there are never enough computers. Therefore, the current atmosphere is one in which employees are possessive of their work areas and do not welcome new employees who need computers to do documentation. I would like to see more computers now and a better system which requires everyone to share an office. Many individuals have private offices even though there are not enough to go around."

#### Employees want resources that allow them to better serve clients.

"I would like more resources to be given to provide adequate treatment (such as electronic recordkeeping, a budget for a token economy for the high acuity program, laptops with remote access for all clinicians)."

"Due to our client base and geographical location, a vehicle with 4x4 capabilities would be nice. We have many clients who live in very rural areas and a 4x4 just makes sense – at least one."

"[I would like to be] provided a better environment for interviewing with confidentiality."

#### Some of the needed resources affect the quality of the physical work environment.

"Proper tools for the maintenance department to complete repairs around the hospital."

"Cleaner air in the workplace and the restrooms. Please order better disinfecting wipes for us to use and more of them, so it isn't a chore to track one down to dust."

"The conditions in this building are shocking. Some offices are unbearably hot in the summer, cold in the fall/winter. You can't drink the water straight from the taps, it needs to be purified. The PA [public address] system is unintelligible. You can't have air conditioning units as the electrical system can't handle it. Chairs are broken and can't be adjusted so that they provide ergonomic support. It's shameful that people are working in these conditions."

"We need more meeting rooms. We also need bathroom stall doors that don't have half-inch gaps so you don't have to make awkward eye contact in the mirror with the guy washing his hands while you're on the john."

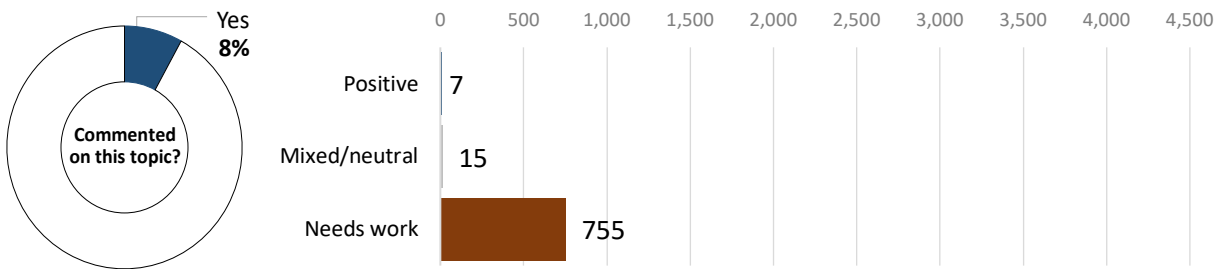
#### Personnel and intangible resources are also valuable.

"Paperless! It would also be nice to have a coffee or food cart on the island. The training is mostly on-the-job which puts a strain on the person training the new people. It would be nice to have written standards or guidelines showing procedures step-by-step."

"More support staff to improve timely, efficient and quality customer service."

**THEME.** Staffing

**777 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned staffing.**



Employees value the quality of care/customer service they are able to provide and see staffing levels as directly connected to their ability to deliver. Nearly all of the remarks on staffing offered suggestions for improvement or expressed concerns. The 775 who made negative comments or suggestions for improvement would like to see:

- A safer environment with adequate staffing levels
- A more efficient way to hire needed staff
- Fewer managers and more staff in positions with client contact
- Retention efforts to help with turnover issues

► **What DSHS employees said ...**

**Employees noted that staffing levels affect the quality of client care.**

"With cuts beyond our control, we are doing more with less personnel and it is coming to a breaking point where we are spread so thin that our customer service and quality of work is affected."

"Staffing is somewhat depleted. And it feels like we are stretched to our limits a lot of the time, and seems we do not get time to do our duties to full capacity."

"More staffing to allow each client more quality time with staff, so we don't have to run back and forth between clients during busy times."

"More staff on the floor to provide better care to our residents."

"More relief staff since there is always a gap if a member of staff (in my department) is off or takes leave."

"I believe we are understaffed and it is hard to improve when you are just maintaining. We only have time to keep up with the work, and do not have resources to address problem areas."

"I would love to see the implementation of more undergrad and graduate level social workers. I think that Adult Protective Services can create a division within it, where students are recruited for various levels of work that can aid and source various aspects of an investigation. These positions can be managed by a Master of Social Work in the department, and can be used as a pipeline to replenish and renew the APS workforce by offering direct hiring opportunities for students that qualify."

"We ask for more staffing and it seems to fall on deaf ears. We complain that the clients are not safe due to short staffing, and they do not raise the minimum staff per cottage."

**Employee retention is an important part of staffing.**

"[I would like to see] an employee retention program. I'm fairly new at DSHS, but it appears we have folks that jump from agency to agency due to a pay increase for the same job duties or [they are] unhappy with their co-workers."

"More leadership, less management. Take a risk; no improvements come without some risk. Don't forget there is a generation of long term employees under the age of 55 that could help modernize the workplace and improve recruitment and retention, if their knowledge, skills, and abilities were actually valued."

"Take care of your staff, keep them safe, and there won't be such a big staffing issue. Hire more competent and prepared staff to keep retention higher."

"I would also like to see us keep workers, we seem to spend a lot of time hiring only to see them get fired because they don't meet the unrealistic expectations. It's absolute craziness. We need to encourage the people that are hired; you chose them for a reason so let's try to keep them. We have always been short people since I started. This isn't good and it's a disservice to the population we serve and the employees who have to pick up the slack because we're short people."

**Some employees offered specific suggestions for how to improve.**

"Hire someone to provide front desk coverage."

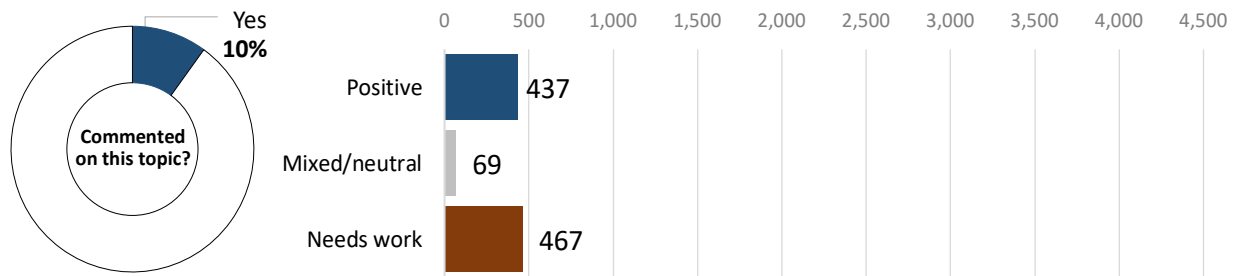
"More support such as clerical, records or IT staff to support investigators and assist with duties."

"Fill empty positions on the wards so we don't float as much."

"We have multiple people in interim positions that should be filled permanently, which would help us get some stability."

## THEME. Pay and benefits

973 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned pay and benefits.



Employee pay and benefits is a category that has historically been more negative than positive. This year, the percent of respondents commenting about pay is similar to 2017, but there was a nearly even split of comments expressing satisfaction and those asking for improvement. The positive comments tended to be more general in nature, but their presence is notable. The 467 employees who made comments about improvement suggested:

- A pay structure that matches the level of risk or specialization required for their work duties
- More equity with pay raises across job classes and positions with similar expectations
- Additional focus toward issues involving overtime eligibility

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Positive comments often expressed general satisfaction.

- “[I like] getting paid a living wage to make a positive impact on the lives of people we serve.”
- “My current pay is very competitive for this area.”
- “[I like the] defined benefit retirement account; option for deferred compensation; relatively low cost medical insurance.”
- “Although the compensation isn't that great, I do like the benefits that come with the job.”
- “[I like] getting 16 hours of annual leave a month.”
- “[I like the] predictable pay and benefits.”
- “Good benefits. Region pay is very important, please keep this up and raise the region pay annually.”

#### Employees want the pay structure to reflect their qualifications and performance.

- “Wages that reflect the requirement for a graduate degree, when compared to similar jobs at other DSHS agencies which don't require a graduate degree. This makes it hard to retain qualified employees.”
- “I also don't understand how the state doesn't give better pay to employees with better performance. I've realized that working for the state, once you show your capability and strengths, everyone wants you to be the one who does the arrangements for meetings, or scheduling, or ordering, or registering for conferences. The employee who has the same position title as me and brings their iPad to work to play games on, makes more than me because she has seniority. This doesn't seem fair to me at all.”
- “I don't feel that we are fairly compensated for the amount of knowledge we need in order to accurately complete the complex work we do.”

#### Many mentioned specific job classes and positions.

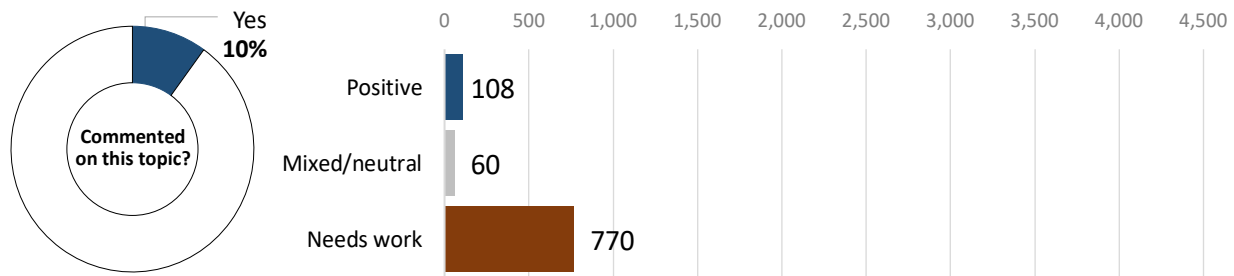
- “Compensate employees with specialized skills.”
- “The pay needs to be increased for the Mental Health Technicians. They are on the front line and deserve to be paid fairly for their hard work.”
- “I would like to see our agency to continue to increase the pay rate for field office Responsible Support Enforcement Officers, because the job has gotten steadily more overwhelming, and retention of staff has been difficult.”
- “Higher compensation for the Attendant Counselor Manager job class.”
- “Managers have not received any pay raises, yet they are constantly asked to do more work.”
- “There should be more of a difference in pay between Residential Rehabilitation Counselor 2 and RRC4. Currently it is only four pay ranges. This means that a maxed out RRC4 makes only \$1.70/hour more than a maxed out RRC2. If that RRC2 gets shift differential and the RRC4 does not, it is only \$0.70/hour more. The RRC2 is two positions removed from the RRC4, there should be a greater pay differential.”
- “Bilingual pay increase for all certified translators, not just a special designated language caseload with a certain percentage of the language. That's not fair.”

#### Employees want to see overtime issues addressed.

- “Our office has supervisors telling us that we have to take flex time for overtime due to classes, travel, seminars, etc. They argue when we say that we want to claim monetary overtime – which means the ‘company’ not only doesn't have to pay that extra money out, but they are getting around the 1.5 for the extra time worked.”
- “You can do overtime on a weekly basis and still get mandatory overtime which leads to burnout.”

## THEME. Training

938 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned training.



Employees value training opportunities and included many suggestions for improvement. While flexibility remains a priority, there were mixed comments about conducting training online versus in person. The 770 who made negative comments described the importance of:

- Offering continuous training in order to enhance job skills and abilities
- Finding a different or more thorough approach to training for managers and new hires
- Establishing broader educational opportunities, such as tuition assistance, cross-training, and training plans that lead to promotions

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Training availability was a point of appreciation.

- “I like that there are many trainings offered to continue both professional and personal development.”
- “I have the tools and training to do my job on a daily basis. There is always training available.”
- “I had excellent core training and ongoing training opportunities that help me do my job effectively and well.”

#### Employees suggested that managers receive more training.

- “More hands-on leadership training and oversight for new supervisors and lead staff.”
- “Supervisors need additional training/tools to supervise properly.”
- “Properly train supervisors on how to supervise and require them to take responsibility for their actions.”
- “[I would like to see] training for middle management on supporting staff, no bullying.”
- “I would like to see people in leadership positions have to go through a specialized leadership training.”

#### Employees seek a variety of training opportunities.

- “I would like to see more trainings on how to do outings or collaborative workshops on active treatment and sensory items.”
- “I would like to see more training for specialized caseloads, especially when a case manager changes from a ‘typical’ caseload to a specialized one.”
- “More cultural humility/racial equity training opportunities and learning sessions.”
- “I would love more training geared specifically around things of interest. Not just things that pertain to the specific job that are not relevant for everyone.”

#### They requested improvement of training procedures and timeframes.

- “Consistent training to everyone on strengths using the Clifton Strengths tool and constant training on handling crucial conversations.”
- “New people are not getting trained by supervisors as the supervisors really don't have the time to do it, so the training and mentoring falls on the existing employees.”
- “I would like to have training PRIOR to new programs that are implemented. Usually we have training AFTER programs have been rolled out. The cart before the horse is a common standard.”
- “Training prior to the start date of new policies.”
- “I would like the training processes for new hires to be more consistent from office to office.”

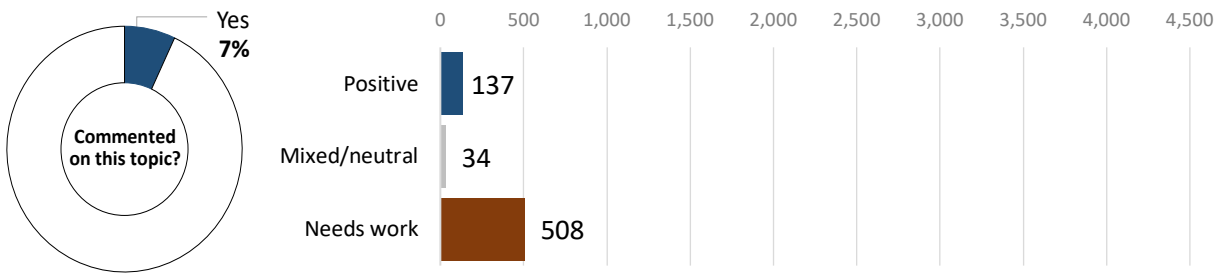
#### There was interest in exploring continued education and career growth through training.

- “[I like the] ability to go to trainings that better myself and can help me advance in my career within DDA.”
- “The ability to take classes that would help promote me within HRD [Human Resources Division].”
- “I would like to see more value and incentives placed on pursuing higher levels of education such as a master's degree. I think that the state should provide student loan forgiveness and pay incentives for education that is used to serve our clients better.”
- “I would like to see more opportunity for education loan reimbursement.”
- “I would love to have the opportunity to attend at least one educational conference in my field of expertise so that I can continue to improve my work.”



**THEME.** Facilities and environment

**679 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned their physical work environment.**



Employees conveyed the important role their physical work environment plays in their productivity, outlook, and ability to collaborate effectively. Most of those commenting were critical or suggested improvements.

- Some requested updated spaces, while others described issues with modernized workspaces.
- Some want a brighter, open atmosphere (including natural light or fresh paint), while others want privacy.
- Some are grateful for the ability to work from home, away from cramped workplaces with concerns about noise and lack of confidentiality for client conversations.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Teamwork and work flow are affected by physical space.

“Workspaces that allow for collaboration, yet don't make you feel like you can't help but be up in people's business.”

“Cubicle life, traffic and a poor office environment, makes the office cubicle a hard to utilize space.”

“Having my team working in close proximity to one another when they are in the office. Right now everyone is spread out and it makes it difficult to collaborate and support each other.”

“I would like to have better access to my team by placing the members of the same team in a common place of the building.”

#### Employees are concerned about noise level and confidentiality.

“I am not a fan of the new remodels. There is no privacy for a private conversation. Everybody can hear everything around you. At times it makes it really hard to work with all the noise and everyone around. I am happy that I have options to work from home when needed.”

“I know we are moving in the modernization direction, but in some office areas, modernization sets the stage for confidential information to be heard. The office areas that are supposed to be ‘private’ are not private.”

“Fewer cube walls. DSHS buildings are like rat mazes.”

“I would NOT like to see my work area shrink or become even less private (i.e., shorter cube walls, smaller cubes). We already work in close quarters and having our personal space reduced even more is not appealing.”

“I would like to see employees have control over their workspaces. If we want high or lower walls, we should be able to have them. If we want dim lighting above our desk just because, we should be able to have it.”

#### Some employees feel uncomfortable in the environment.

“The office décor is too dark and drab. Update facility to allow natural light in or use a different lighting source. Lighter, brighter office cubicle walls.”

“The office environment is horrible. Half the office is freezing while the other half is hot, and the quality of air is worse. I begin sneezing when I walk in the door and don't stop until I leave. I am a happier person in my home office. I get much more done and am far more comfortable.”

“A building that is comfortable to work in. Temperature and no places to park are a problem.”

“Windows are always closed (the blinds). It is different for every CSO [Community Services Office] but the ones with natural lighting appear to be better spirited and not going through the motions.”

“More natural lighting, real plants, less harsh LED lighting.”

“Facilities aren't always clean, lights dim/missing. I do not like the idea of the ‘modern workspace’ where we open teams up and cubicles up.”

“Our office is depressing and dark. Would like to see a different work environment.”

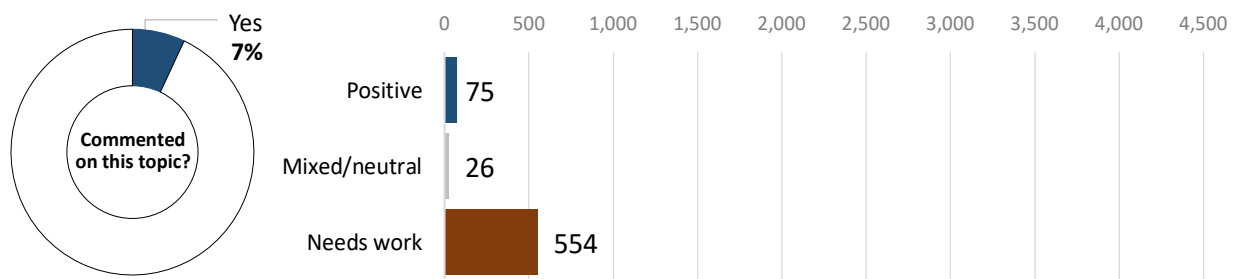
#### There could be more strategic planning around general space layout.

“I think the workplace could be improved physically – better layout of space, neater common areas, pull out areas and more conference rooms, separation of kitchen space, better safety designs (routes of evacuation aligned with cube design/placement; including something bolted into the floor to grab onto in the event of an earthquake).”

“More attention to infrastructure and building resources. The physical layout and condition of a workplace has a big impact on one's sense of pride in that workplace.”

**THEME.** Resources for clients, and other resources

**655 of the 9,444 employees who made comments mentioned general and client resource issues.**



Helping clients access appropriate resources is a key component of social services work. Most employees who commented on this topic want to see improvement in staff and client resources. The 554 who addressed needs for improvement want:

- More comprehensive resources to address the core needs of clients
- Expanded and updated technology that allows for growth in mobile work environments
- Access to basic and essential physical resources required to do their jobs efficiently, such as photocopiers and software applications

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees gave suggestions for additional client resources.

- “We need more mental health and behavioral health resources for our clients, but I think that is a statewide issue for all of DSHS, not just DDA.”
- “Expansion of programs for people who fall through the cracks; more community connection and outreach; more client education that worked (like a basic budget and things of that nature).”
- “Easier way to get clients adaptive equipment. Too much red tape.”
- “More active treatment for our clients. Commissary for our clients or increase snacks.”
- “There are not enough memory care facilities (specialized dementia care) or Adult Family Homes that specialize in people with mental health problems or behavioral problems. There are not enough AFHs that accept people who are independent and that have low daily rates.”
- “Emergency services/funding for our clients in a crisis situation. This could be a safe place for our clients to go when their behaviors can't be controlled by family or funds to assist a client when they become homeless.”
- “[I would like to see] more facilities like Maple Lane Restoration Treatment Facility to assist patients with dealing with criminal activities coupled with incorporating teaching tools about their mental illness and medication needs.”
- “Respect means asking the CLIENTS what they need, not dictating to them what their needs are. I cannot tell you how many people ask me DAILY for HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION. Those are the biggest asks I hear and yet they are not being met. The programs we provide are not assisting clients with what they need most.”

#### Employees want technology that supports mobility and expanded telework capabilities.

- “State of the art tools – or even standard industry tools and processes to make work more lean.”
- “I need more ergonomic equipment provided by the department, to work remotely.”
- “Better resources for remote staff.”
- “Provide staff who like working from home 1-2 days a week laptops, not just provide them for certain units.”
- “Desk cameras to support videoconferencing and Skype which is a regular part of our work, because it's too difficult to schedule a meeting room on short notice.”
- “Up-to-date electronic communication: smart phones, iPads or laptops to assist staff to work more efficiently AND AN ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORD!”

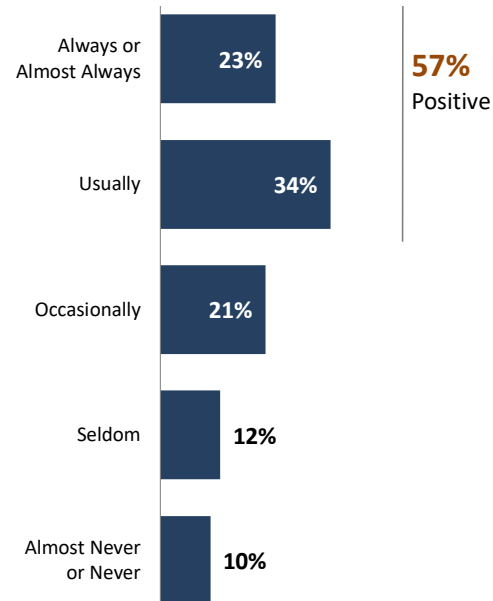
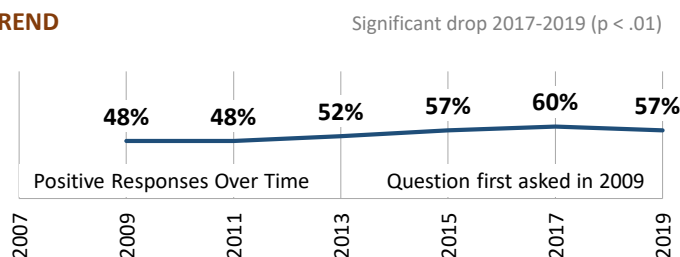
#### Process and location-specific items were mentioned.

- “Electric car chargers in the parking lot would be nice. I noticed that security is getting new cars which is great, but the state would save money on gas and maintenance by buying electric cars whenever an upgrade is in order.”
- “I don't believe we have the resources to do our job well. We don't have Adobe Pro, which precludes my team from finishing projects. It makes it difficult when we can't compile documents and send multiple attachments.”
- “Water fountains with a bottle fill station at bathroom areas would be nice. Increasing the wireless signal strength to allow for music streaming on phones while at my desk would be fantastic!”
- “Copier that doesn't keep breaking down every week.”
- “A fax machine that can send the fax directly into the system. Currently it prints out then the documents have to be scanned into the system. What a waste of employee time.”

**QUESTION.** Overall, my agency supports me in living a healthier life.

Nearly six of 10 employees (57%) said their agency supports them in living a healthier life – a statistically significant decrease from 2017.

Over two of 10 respondents (22%) said that their agency seldom or never supports them in healthy living. As described in the following pages, most comments related to safety and health were negative or suggestions for improvement. Support for the health of employees sends a strong message that they are valued. This is a key component of job satisfaction.

**ANSWERS****TREND****► What DSHS employees said ...****Work stress can have a serious impact on employee health.**

"I have watched several people go to seek Employee Assistance Program services due to the work environment."

"Staying calm and collected impacts staff's ability to organically move through trauma that has happened during the shift. Stuffing these emotions leads to burnout and finding other ways to cope. I would like to see outreach for staff's emotional health become a priority."

"The micromanaging has made me hate my job. The stress that is caused has created health issues for me and is making my personal life suffer as well."

**Employees value physical accommodations, such as ergonomic equipment and break rooms.**

"Easier opportunity to obtain ergonomic desks for computer as long sit times do take a toll on my back and legs. It seems I have to look ergonomic items at the inventory control office or ask. This usually leads to no money available or other such road blocks."

"I would like to see management act decisively and appropriately to staff complaints about the work environment (clean air, reasonable temperature in buildings)."

"I would like building maintenance to be more responsible for workers/tenants needs. Such as temperature inside, cleanliness of the lobby."

"[I would like] that we would all have the option of a sit stand desk/workstation."

**Employees want to feel supported in living a healthier life.**

"Top leadership modeling healthy behaviors, including taking time during the work day to take breaks and engage in wellness activities. Our work is very important, we get that - but staff should understand that they can't pour from an empty cup: they have to take care of themselves to perform their work at peak effectiveness."

"I wish OB2 was more supportive of active lifestyles, such as: covered bike parking instead of covered smoking shelters on the plaza in-between Office Building 2 and the Highways and Licensing Building, and showers and a locker room for bike commuters and/or people who go running or work out at lunch time."

"There is very little focus on health and wellness in the workplace. Health and wellness practices lend themselves to greater productivity and that has never been a focus for our agency."

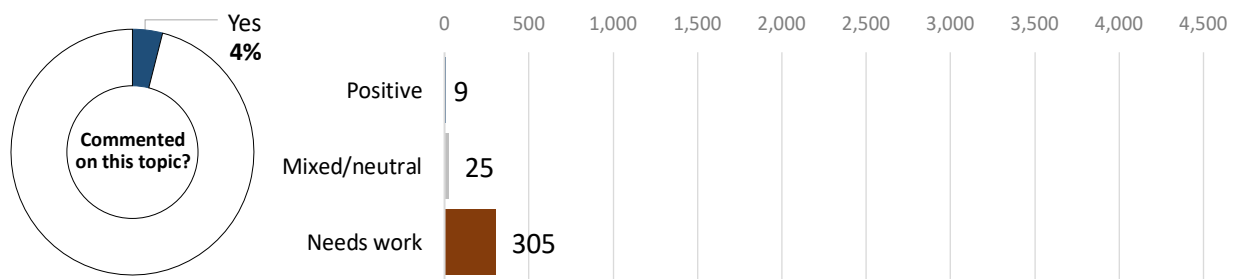
"When we are healthier, our performance increases as an employee. And we can stay more focused with our personal and, most importantly, our work goals."

"We are great at supporting our staff when they are hurting on the outside (illness, injury), but we don't know what to do when we see someone struggling/hurting on the inside, other than to avoid them. Please work harder to eliminate the stigma of the 'mental health day' and encourage staff to use their time to help them be well physically, mentally and spiritually. A mental health day is a very good reason to take a sick day."

"More support for work-life balance and flexibility to incorporate daily health and wellness activities."

**THEME.** Safety issues

**339 of the 9,444 employees who made comments addressed staff safety issues.**



Although less than one in 20 respondents commented on staff safety, these concerns are extremely important to those who feel unsafe. Nine of 10 of those commenting on safety were critical or suggested improvements. Employees working in residential care facilities must balance their own safety with the safety of patients, and sometimes feel that they need more support. Some link safety to staffing levels, and some would like more support when an incident occurs. Some don't feel safe coming to work in bad weather.

► **What DSHS employees said ...**

**Employees at risk for assault express the most serious concerns.**

- "There need to be more expectations with how new employees will deal with aggressive behaviors and whether or not they can handle that or any violent displays from patients. I need to be able to count on the fact that my co-worker won't run and hide while I am being beaten."
- "Last night an RN on my ward was punched in the face by a man who has been refusing medication for nearly three months."
- "Employees are not safe enough from potentially dangerous customers. Employees do not have a way to protect themselves in case someone becomes physically violent."
- "I would like to have face shields for spit and blood."
- "Better training on how to defend ourselves when we are attacked."
- "Western State Hospital staff who work on the ward should get hazard pay. We are at risk everyday of being assaulted by the patients. We don't know if at the end of the day we will go home safe, be injured, or go home in a body bag."

**Some are concerned about the safety of parking lots and facilities.**

- "We need a security guard to patrol the parking lots, etc., as cars get broken into, and even stolen."
- "The pathway to the Center for Forensic Services is not 100% lit and it is extremely dark/dangerous when walking over to CFS while it is dark."
- "Security cameras in the common areas (hallways, entrances) to all state buildings that house ESA offices."
- "I would like to see the desk and nurses area off limits to the residents due to lack of safety for residents and staff."

**Several employees are concerned about policies that make them feel less safe.**

- "If it's snowing, you shouldn't be required to come in and risk your life."
- "We still do not have safety measures in place to protect front line workers if we get hurt while out doing a home visit. Only specific agencies are covered, not Home and Community Services or Residential Care Services."
- "The defensive tactics we are taking at this time are useless for Residential Rehabilitation Counselors because the tactics they teach are actually offensive and designed for security staff to use to take residents down. RRC staff need to learn how to break away from being grabbed, to block, kick, and strike in order to defend themselves."
- "I personally have nearly had my fingers bitten multiple times when trying to place someone in restraints because we are not allowed to use a simple joint manipulation technique that would limit range of motion but not hurt the patient unless they are causing themselves pain. The perception would be that security or staff are trying to hurt the patients as opposed to what is actually happening, which is, preventing harm or injury."
- "We sometimes work understaffed which compromises the safety of staff and patients."

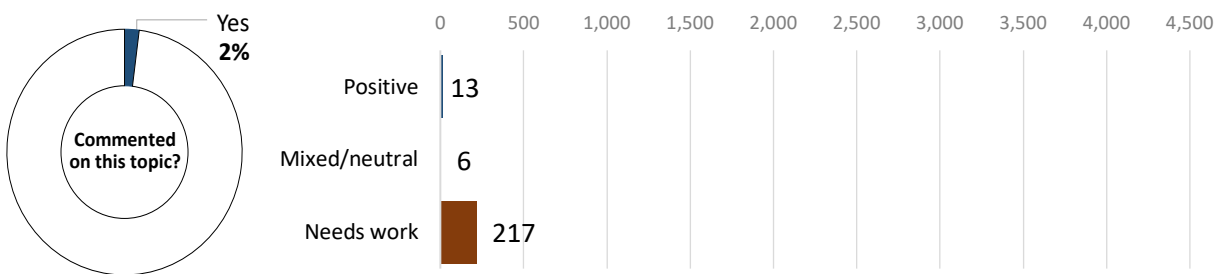
**Several employees said their work environment is safe, or that they appreciate efforts to improve safety.**

- "My work hours and the ward I work on is fairly safe. I don't have to worry about being assaulted by patients as some of the other wards in forensics."
- "I feel safe walking around campus."
- "My supervisor is REALLY into staff safety. She looks out for her staff and always has their back if it is appropriate."
- "DSHS is trying to help make it a safer place to work."
- "A good portion of the staff have a general concern for each other's safety."



**THEME.** Wellness and mental health

**236 of the 9,444 employees who made comments addressed wellness or mental health.**



As with safety, the number of comments about wellness and mental health was small but included serious issues. More than nine of 10 staff commenting on wellness and mental health were critical or suggested improvements. Some of these employees described challenges dealing with physical assault and its aftermath, heavy workloads, unrealistic expectations, and problems with supervisors and co-workers. Employees continue to be interested in wellness facilities, a healthy work environment, and access to high quality food and water.

### ► What DSHS employees said ...

#### Employees facing dangerous or stressful working conditions would like to see more support.

"There needs to be more support for the direct care staff. They endure emotional and physical abuse on a daily basis and there are not nearly enough resources for them to realistically deal with it in a healthy way."

"It is really hard to balance the volume of work with wellness. We do an awful lot of work, with not enough staff, and this weighs heavy on them."

"Check-ins with staff members who have been assaulted."

"It's a toxic and hostile work environment in my group, which contributes to poor emotional and physical health."

"Make it easy for assaulted staff to recover and feel supported. Mostly I hear staff complaining that few of the assaulted staff get a follow up call from their supervisors."

"More support when you get hurt at work. You get treated badly when you do, and it's not a good feeling".

"Tools for self-improvement and ways to release stress so it doesn't feel like you're failing all the time."

"A healthy work environment - this doesn't just mean physically (sit/stand desk, ergo equipment, etc.), this also means a mentally healthy work environment."

#### Some would like access to additional wellness facilities.

"I think setting up 'wellness centers' in offices, (i.e., basketball hoops, elliptical, exercise equipment, soccer balls, football, etc.) would be a great way to promote fun, wellness, camaraderie, and a new look to our offices."

"[I would like] a safe place to keep our bicycles inside the building that is out of the way and kept in a secured area."

"Reduced membership fees to local gym, yoga, etc."

#### There were many comments about the work environment.

"I would also like to see all of our fluorescent lights changed into LEDs. While it may be expensive initially, it would be more energy efficient and less damaging to employees' eyesight/headache issues, especially since we are constantly in front of screens."

"When I walk outside the building to go to meetings or exercise, I have to walk through clouds of smoke and vape. This is a real problem for all staff, especially those who are asthmatic or pregnant. A smoke-free campus would be more supportive of our health and wellness."

"I'd like to see air quality in this building improve."

"It would be helpful if management could do a bit more to discourage work place 'presentee-ism' for employees who are ill/contagious. It's inconsiderate to expose coworkers and/or clients to illness unnecessarily."

"Going into homes with bedbugs is a major concern."

#### Employees want access to healthy food and water.

"Would be great to have a fridge vending machine with fruits and vegetables, yogurts, and other healthy items."

"Snacks, treats, and agency provided perks, are a lot more thoughtful than some other state agencies. But please continue to remind decision makers that exclusively sweet, 'junk food' and carb loaded offerings aren't inclusive. We have many workers with diabetes, gluten sensitivity, and other medical conditions or diet preferences."

"[I would like] a drinking fountain with a filtered water bottle filler built into it (similar to the one in the DNR [Department of Natural Resources] building)."

"The placement of water coolers around the grounds for staff was an excellent idea. May seem simple, but it means the world to the staff!"



**“Mr. and Mrs. Fungi take the kids to the forest” • Third Place (tie)**  
 DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Artistic  
 By Patric Hayes, with permission



**“Blood Moon”**  
 DSHS Photo Contest • By Tami Christensen, with permission

**“Hmong Girl” • First Place (tie)**  
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Family  
By Mai Yang, with permission

**From the photographer:**  
*I'm proud to be Hmong and try to instill in my kids the importance of keeping our culture alive. DSHS serves people of all backgrounds and each has a unique story. DSHS values diversity.*

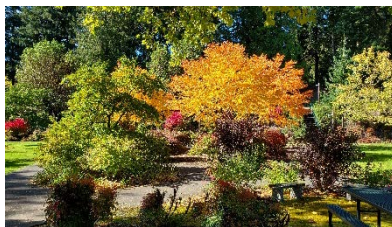


**“Sunrise Joy”**  
DSHS Photo Contest  
By Nikki Rymer, with permission





## Employee Engagement Survey 2019



*Transforming lives*

Research and Data Analysis Division