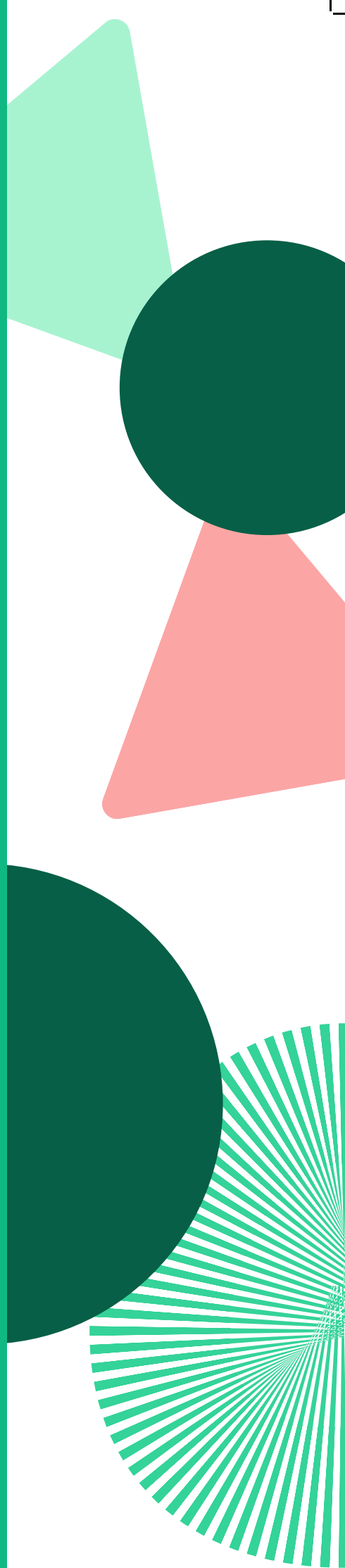


# Rethinking Retention

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What happiness at  
work really means  
to care staff.

Sona.





## Executive summary

**We surveyed 750 UK-based employees in the care sector to find out how they feel about their current work situations and what matters most to them when making job decisions.**

The results suggest the ongoing staffing challenge in care could worsen this year:

- 44% of respondents are considering leaving their employer this year
- 32% of those are thinking about leaving the sector entirely
- That equates to more than one in ten employees - approximately 216,000 roles in England

Yes, this is a worrying trend. But it also represents an opportunity for care organisations to rethink how they support, engage and motivate their staff. This report explores three standout themes from the survey data:

### **1. A more flexible approach to hours, shifts, and roles**

62% of respondents said that having more flexible hours would be highly influential in any decision to change jobs, and staff with less predictable working patterns are more likely to be thinking about leaving.

Providers have a clear incentive to explore new ways of working, such as introducing more flexible job roles and technology that gives staff greater visibility and control over their working hours.

### **2. Prioritising mental wellbeing**

Better mental health support is one of the most popular measures employers can introduce to improve staff satisfaction. 55% of respondents said it would have a very positive effect on their perception of their employer.

Leading organisations are addressing burnout with new health care, absence and sickness policies. A growing number of tech-enabled services are available to support staff wellbeing, too.

### **3. Creating a culture of recognition**

Greater appreciation from managers (92%) and better internal communication (91%) were the top two improvements respondents said would make them feel better about work. Creating a culture of staff recognition is one of the highest impact changes employers can make.

*Read on to find out what care employees say matters to them most at work and what questions and practical steps employers should be considering to boost staff retention rates.*

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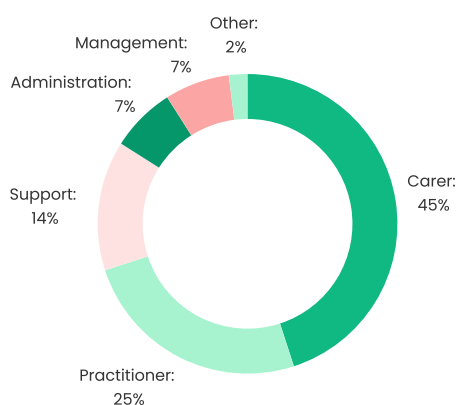
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## Methodology

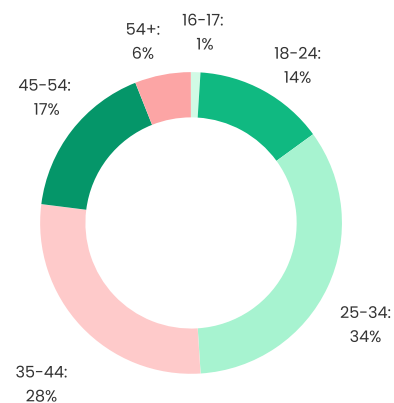
We surveyed 750 UK care sector employees between 22 and 29 November. All participants were pre-screened to confirm their employment in health and social care. The sample of 750 responded to all 11 questions via an online survey conducted by an independent third-party research company.

The findings in this report are based on their responses plus supporting third party sources (cited throughout).

**PARTICIPANTS BY JOB ROLE**



**PARTICIPANTS BY AGE**



# 04

## The perfect storm: why staff retention will be even more crucial in 2022

The staffing crisis in care may have made more headlines recently, but it's nothing new. According to CQC estimates, the baseline vacancy rate has remained above 6% for six years. In December 2021, the rate reached 12%.<sup>1</sup>

What has changed is the addition of uncontrollable factors - most notably the pandemic and Brexit - that have made it harder for providers to recruit and retain staff.

In November 2021, the Nuffield Trust reported that 70,000 adult social care workers had left the sector over the previous six months - 4% of the total adult care workforce.<sup>2</sup> Increasing churn in an industry with a long term recruitment challenge is a worrying trend. Unfortunately, our survey results suggest that things are likely to get worse at the start of 2022 before they get better.

	Changed jobs in the last 12 months	Could change jobs in the next 12 months	Percentage increase
Yes - to a different care organisation	24%	30%	25%
Yes - outside of the care sector	8%	14%	75%
Total	32%	44%	38%

14% of respondents said they are thinking about leaving the sector altogether. Hopefully, this level of intent will not convert into action, but it's a clear indicator that staffing levels are not yet close to stabilising.

With the overall labour market currently squeezed, care providers will be looking to ease the burden on their recruitment teams by doing everything in their power to retain their existing staff.

Skills for Care notes that, while the overall sector turnover rate is high (28.5% in 2020/21), turnover at the best performing employers doesn't exceed 10%.<sup>3</sup> For an operator with 2000 staff, going from average turnover to industry-leading would mean retaining 370 more staff each year - a potential saving of over £1m.

1. <https://thecareruk.com/vacancy-rate-in-care-home-staff-almost-doubled-in-six-months-says-report/>

2. <https://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/content/news/staffing-crisis-in-social-care-worsens>

3. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/The-State-of-the-Adult-Social-Care-Sector-and-Workforce-2021.pdf>

“Understaffed, overstretched, not paid enough”

FORMER CARE SUPPORT WORKER

# 05

## Preventing churn: what really matters to care staff?

How important are the following factors to you in any decision to change employer?

Very important

1. Relationships with residents/patients	63%
2. More flexible schedules/hours	62%
3. Salary	62%
4. Relationships with your colleagues	59%
5. Work location	58%
6. Opportunities for career progression	55%
7. Relationships with management	52%
8. Employer's reputation	52%
9. Availability of hours/overtime	48%
10. Benefits	41%

### Working patterns aren't always working

Hours in care can be long, anti-social, and change at short notice, making it more difficult for employees to achieve their desired work-life balance. The Living Wage Foundation found that nearly 2 in every 5 UK workers in full or part-time employment get less than a week's notice of their shift pattern.<sup>4</sup> Everyday tasks like picking up the kids from school or going for a health check-up fall victim to unpredictable schedules.

61% of our respondents said they usually work predictable shift patterns, the remaining 39% work less predictable hours. This difference had a clear impact on how they felt about work:

- Those with predictable hours were much more likely to say they were very happy with their working patterns (42% vs 23%)
- Those with unpredictable schedules were more likely to have changed jobs in the last 12 months (41% vs 27%)
- They are also more likely to consider changing jobs this year (54% vs 39%)
- Almost 20% of respondents who work unpredictable hours are thinking about leaving the sector

4. <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/almost-two-fifths-working-given-less-weeks-notice-working-hours>

“My working hours are often erratic”

CARER

# 06

What united both groups was a strong belief that having more control over their working patterns and greater visibility over their upcoming schedules would improve their work experience.

	Mostly predictable working patterns	Mostly unpredictable working patterns
“Having more freedom to choose my working patterns would have a positive impact on how I feel about my employer”	92%	87%
“Greater visibility of my upcoming schedule/hours would have a positive impact on how I feel about my employer”	90%	90%

## It’s not just about pay

Salary (61.7%) ranked third in the list of factors our respondents consider to be ‘very important’ to any decision to change employers. Their relationships with patients/residents (62.9%) and greater flexibility/better work-life balance (62.2%) both ranked higher.

Although the government’s public sector pay freeze is over, even bringing care wages into line with the higher cost of living feels out of reach in the short term. As a result, improving the overall employee experience becomes even more critical.

That’s not to say employers shouldn’t be doing all they can to offer attractive rates of pay. Skills for Care identified a close correlation between employers with lower churn and pay rates above local minimums.

However, providers can control the quality of the jobs and work environments they offer. Many people are drawn to a career in care by the opportunity to work closely with other people.

The ability to make a real difference is a compelling selling point for careers in care. That sense of purpose and meaning needs to carry through to the employee experience:

- Greater appreciation from managers (92%) and better internal communication (91%) were the top improvements respondents said would make them feel better about work.
- At least 90% of respondents said that relationships with colleagues and management are influential factors when making job decisions.
- 63% of nurses and 50% of carers said that the opportunity for personal development is very important to them.

“ I love the support and appreciation I get from management ”

CARER

# 07

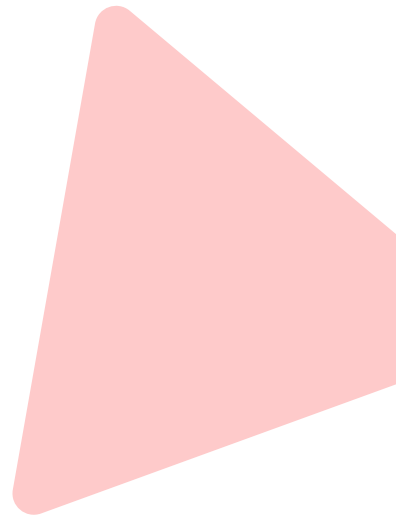
## Prioritising mental wellbeing

Staffing challenges are also contributing to a higher risk of burnout and an increased focus on mental wellbeing. Although benefits were the least influential factor on staff attitudes towards work, there was a stronger indication that additional benefits and support would be very welcome in mental health.

55% of respondents felt that better mental health support would have a very positive impact on how they think about working for their current employer.

“Staff are becoming worn out, tired and feel under-appreciated”

CARE TEAM LEADER





# 08

## Rethinking retention: Actions to take to increase retention

Would the following factors have a positive impact on how you feel about working for your current employer?

Agree

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. More recognition from management                         | 92% |
| 2. Better internal communication                            | 91% |
| 3. Having more freedom to choose your working patterns      | 90% |
| 4. Better mental health support for employees               | 90% |
| 5. Greater visibility of my upcoming schedule/hours/holiday | 90% |

The industry is unlikely to overcome its ongoing, and increasing, staffing challenges by maintaining the status quo. Employers should see this as permission to critically evaluate the entire employee experience and explore how to give staff more of what they care about most. Here are some questions you may want to consider.

### Hours, shift patterns and work-life balance

#### ***Where can we find opportunities to give staff more flexibility?***

Think about the when, the where and the what. Is there scope to give every employee some guaranteed hours each month at predictable times? Could more staff be offered the choice to work in more locations (when conditions allow)? Can more staff be cross-trained, so they get a more varied workload each week or month?

Modern workforce software makes this much more achievable by empowering staff to work more flexibly and making it much easier for managers to accommodate this in schedules and track their teams' working patterns.

The same technology can also enable staff to pick up shifts and check their schedules, giving them greater visibility and certainty about when they're working. Leading providers like [Praxis Care](#) make this a differentiating feature in their recruitment (see Spotlight on page 9).

## SPOTLIGHT



Praxis Care supports 1,500 adults and children with mental ill-health, learning disabilities, autism and dementia. It is the largest provider of its kind on the island of Ireland, operating across more than 80 locations in Northern Ireland, Ireland, Great Britain and the Isle of Man.

Praxis recently launched a new package of benefits, rewards and health and wellbeing support for its 1,800 staff, gaining recognition from the GMB union as one of the sector's top employers.

One of the features of Praxis' new employee offer is [Sona's app-based rota management](#) and vacant shifts platform. Employees can sign up for vacant shifts on their phones, giving them the flexibility to decide where and when they want to work.

Other new measures to acknowledge the contributions of its existing team and attract great new hires include:

- One-off Covid recognition payments for all current staff and early pay increases for many
- A fully funded healthcare programme
- Salary advance software
- A new programme of professional development training and qualifications

### ***Are we exploring new ways of working?***

Consider how you could create new roles, contracts and shifts that enable greater flexibility for the organisation and the individual. That could include arrangements like split shifts, job shares, term-time working, and flexi/annualised hours based contracts. Workforce software can significantly improve oversight and minimise the admin needed to accommodate more role types.

### ***Can we make the physical workplace more accommodating?***

Long and atypical hours are sometimes necessary. Staff working these shifts usually stay on-site the whole time. Can you improve existing facilities or create new areas for staff – such as sleep pods, meditation and exercise rooms – so they can rest and relax during downtime?

## **Mental health and burnout**

### ***Are we doing enough to promote positive mental health at work?***

A simple first step could be naming Wellbeing Champions across all levels of the organisation. Organisations including [Mind](#) and [Mental Health First Aid](#) are excellent sources of advice and training. There is also a growing list of no- and low-cost mental health apps and tools staff can access to manage their mental health on an ongoing basis (see Spotlight: wellbeing tech).

### ***Can we create more opportunities for staff to step away?***

Burnt out employees are more likely to call in sick or quit. Preventing burnout starts with implementing the right systems and processes to monitor sickness patterns and ensure staff use their available holiday. Providers might also want to make it easier for employees to take extended time away to recover, such as taking a mini-sabbatical or asking for a temporary voluntary reduction in hours.

### ***How can we help staff with their financial wellbeing?***

There is a strong correlation between mental and financial wellbeing.

Employers could consider:

- Mitigating rising living costs by helping staff save on travel (cycle to work, season ticket loans, fuel allowances), food, drink, and other consumables (free/subsidised meals at work, employee discount schemes)
- Enabling early or instant access to earned wages
- Providing budgeting, debt management and other financial wellbeing support.

### **SPOTLIGHT: WELLBEING TECHNOLOGY FOR CARE**

The market for wellbeing apps is booming. Here are eight employee-centric options:

#### **MENTAL HEALTH**

##### **Fika**

Mental fitness skills development platform focused on mental health literacy.

##### **Unmind**

Workplace mental health platform that helps employees proactively measure, understand, and improve their mental wellbeing.

##### **Calm for Business**

One of the world's leading mindfulness apps, Calm offers guided meditations and breathing exercises.

#### **FINANCIAL WELLBEING**

##### **Wagestream**

Salary management platform. Staff can instantly access, track, and save their pay and get advice from qualified financial coaches.

##### **Salary Finance**

As well as pay advances, Salary Finance enables employers to provide financial products directly to staff, such as saving schemes and lower interest rate loans.

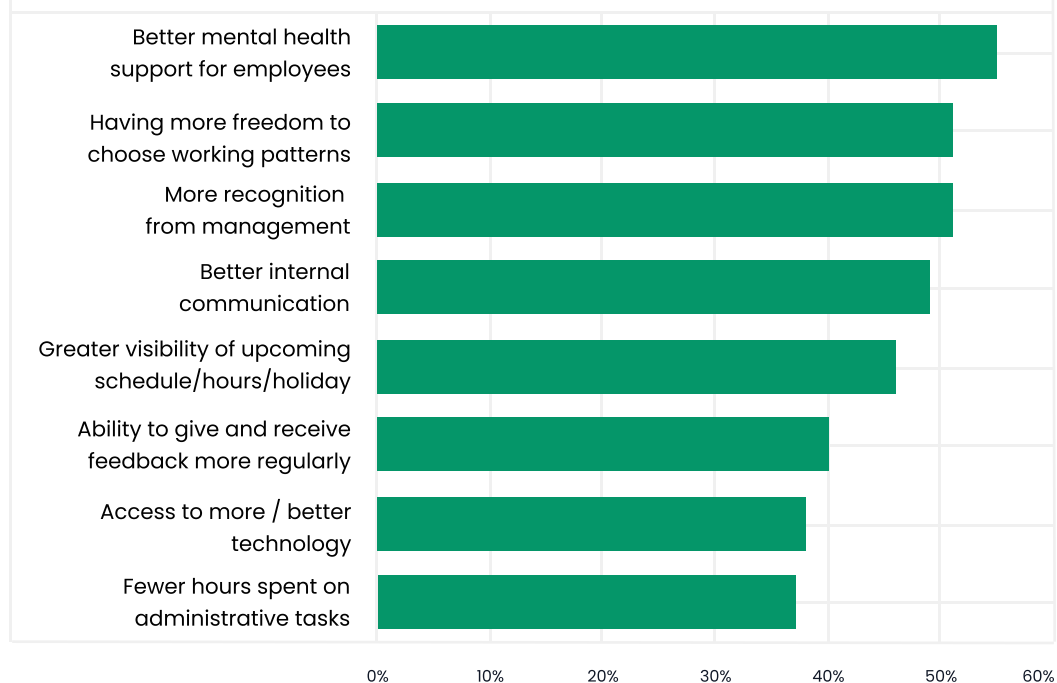
##### **PayCaptain**

Payroll platform enabling flexible payments for staff, budget planning and integrated payroll giving.

##### **Nudge**

Financial education platform, drawing on behavioural psychology and data to give staff access to personalised financial knowledge and skill development.

### Which of the following factors have a very positive impact on how you feel about working for your current employer?



## Communication and recognition

### ***How can we improve internal communication and encourage regular feedback?***

Poor communication doesn't just hinder their day to day work. Feeling 'out of the loop' often contributes to lower morale. For many providers, the priority should be making staff feel that their views matter, not just by asking them for regular feedback but by being transparent about how that feedback will be taken forward (or not). Effective communication at scale has never been easier, thanks to smartphones. Apps like [Sona](#) can help organisations connect to every employee instantly.

### ***Can we do more to recognise the contributions of our front line staff?***

Appreciation may be the most cost-effective retention method of them all. The key is to embed recognition as a cultural habit, rather than relying on individual managers to remember to thank their teams for their efforts.

Again, this is where employee apps such as Sona can help make encouraging and rewarding praise a cultural norm. For example, an all-company social newsfeed is a quick and effective way to recognise colleagues and share successes.

Adding in rewards doesn't need to break the bank, either. A new wave of providers is simplifying large scale staff incentive schemes and making them more affordable, too (see page 12).

***Are our managers being empowered to create positive work environments?***

Finding ways to reduce their administrative workloads can free up more time to focus on their teams. Ensuring their professional development isn't just focused on managing performance will help them improve key leadership skills like communication, motivation, and coaching. Rewarding them for meeting staff turnover targets ensures they make retention a priority.

**3 WAYS TO REWARD STAFF CONTRIBUTIONS****1 huggg**

Huggg is a 'micro-gifting' platform that lets you send a treat direct to a colleague's phone. For example, when a manager 'buys' a team member a coffee on Huggg, that person receives a personalised text message with a code they can redeem at Caffè Nero.

**2 each person**

Through Each Person, managers get a pool of reward points that they can then use to reward their teams. Staff can choose whether to spend the points straight away or save up for bigger rewards. Many options are available - "from Apple and Amazon to Nike and Nandos".

**3 Care Friends**

The Care Friends app is changing how providers incentivise their teams for making employee referrals. Staff can earn rewards for every action they take to support recruitment, not just when a person they referred gets hired.

## Three steps to get started

### 1. Engage

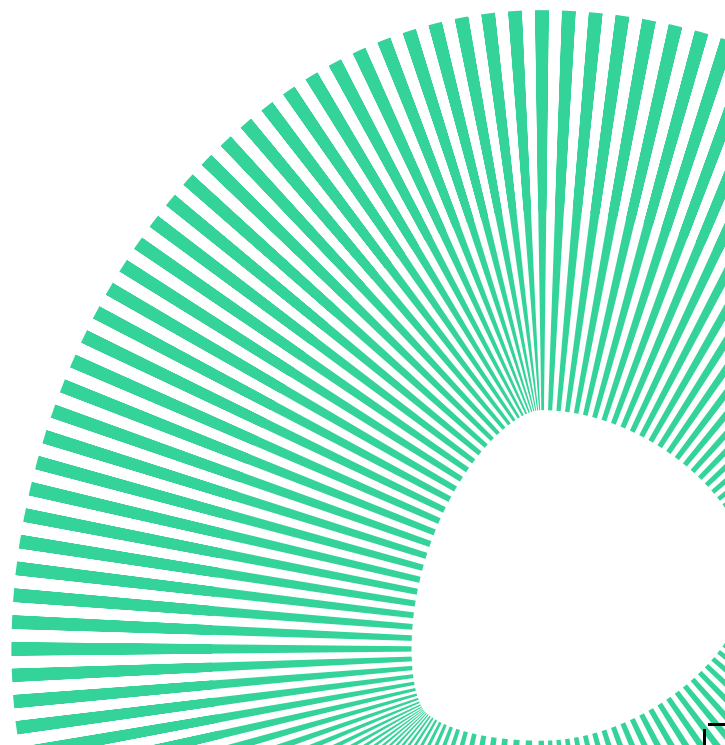
Every organisation and workforce will have different needs. Aim to collect as much feedback from your staff as possible. Surveys, 1-1s, open forums – the format doesn't matter as much as getting a high volume of feedback as quickly as possible.

### 2. Evaluate

Hopefully, that exercise will identify some obvious areas to investigate further. Which are no brainers? Are there any quick wins? How will you measure the impact of any changes and new initiatives? You may also want to benchmark your offer against your peers.

### 3. Experiment

Significant organisational and cultural changes require a lot of time and effort and are costly when they go wrong. Create the space for experimentation by running smaller pilots and trials first. Use the feedback process to identify early adopters to champion these projects.



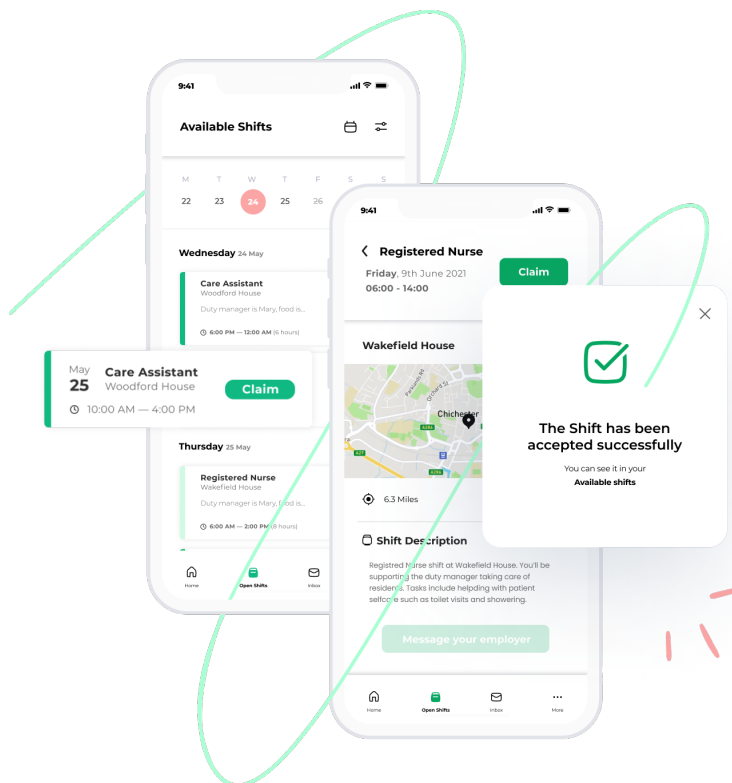
# Built to boost retention

# Sona.

Sona is a Google-backed modern workforce management company committed to helping health and social care providers address many of the staffing challenges covered in Rethinking Retention. Our employee 'super app' and desktop platform are transforming how care providers organise, engage and optimise their teams. The results: happier staff, better quality care, and healthier bottom lines!

We've helped our customers, including Advinia Healthcare & Praxis Care:

- **Decrease staffing agency usage by 38%** by optimising how their staff books overtime shifts.
- **Save managers more than 5 hours every week** each as they no longer had to manage time-consuming manual rotas and rota changes.
- **Increase staff engagement** as staff felt much more connected with the company
- **Streamline payroll operations** by making it much easier for managers and finance team to reconcile hours across systems.



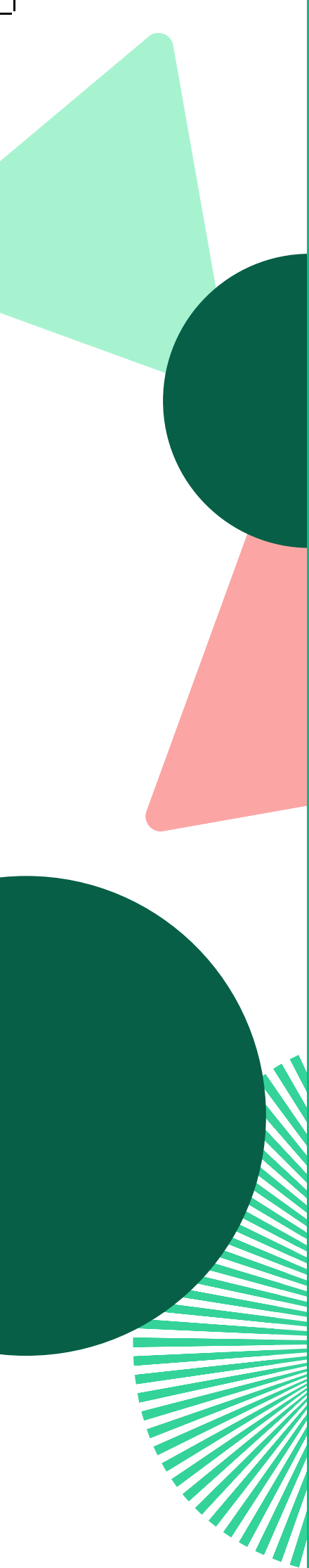
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