

# Going Hybrid: Lessons from Ontario Immigrant-Serving Agencies During the Pandemic

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# Purpose

Health

## **Communities with low incomes, immigrants, essential workers hardest hit by COVID-19: study**



'Striking' trend seen in multiple provinces, says lead author of peer-reviewed paper



[Lauren Pelley](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 15, 2022 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: February 15

- How did immigrant-serving agencies use technology to deliver services during the pandemic?
- How did technology affect the workforce immigrant-serving agencies?
- How did technology affect the clients of immigrant-serving agencies?

# Ontario immigrant-serving agencies

ICS  
Centre for Immigrant & Community Services

Short-term case management

Newcomer Mental Health Program  
Let's take on this wellness journey together.

Wellness seminars and...

Volunteer...

Community...

Support Groups

Settlement Program  
Service Delivery Improvements (SDI)  
2017 FUNDING GUIDELINES

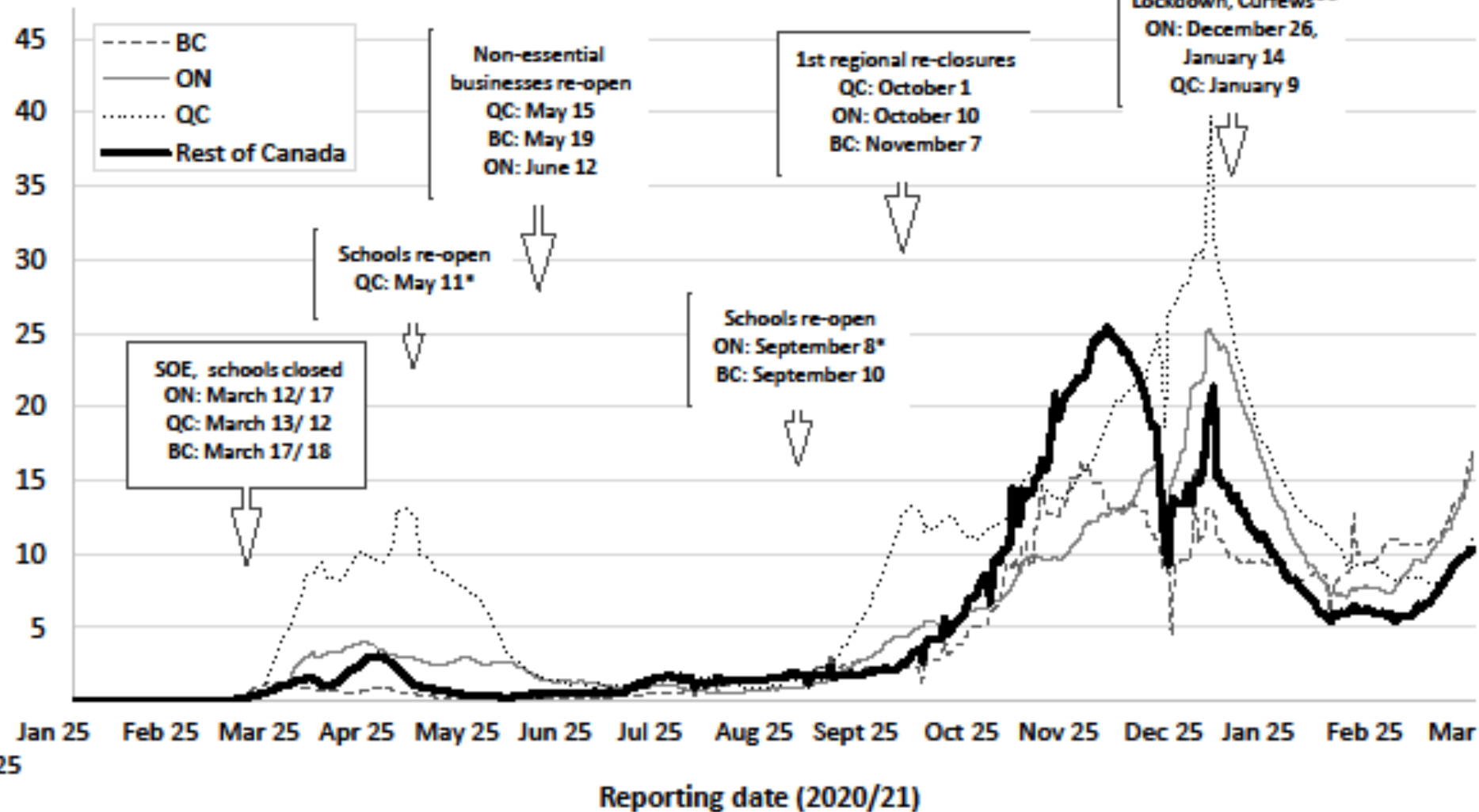
Canada



The New Canadians' Centre of Excellence  
Welcomes Afghans to Canada

- ISAs deliver government-funded integration and settlement services
- Mainly in-person services, funded by federal and provincial governments on a per service basis or per client basis
- In Ontario, ISAs
  - Had some experience with pre-arrival services provided on-line
  - Operate with project funding that does not readily fund adoption of new technology
  - Find funding is limited relative to the scope of their mission statements.
  - Hire many immigrant workers and pay low wages.
- What happens in a pandemic?

Reported Number of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases  
(per 100,000 population, 7-day Rolling Average)



# COVID-19 Study: Surveys and focus groups

## Surveys

- Managers and workers at immigrant-serving agencies
- On-line surveys:
  - Survey 1 – March to September 2020, Wave 1
  - Survey 2 – September 2020 to September 2021, Waves 2,3, and 4
- Manager survey
  - About 20 minutes
  - Demographics, impacts of pandemic on agency operations & concerns for future
  - 56 agencies in Survey 1 and 54 agencies in Survey 2
- Worker survey
  - About 15 minutes
  - Demographics, impacts of pandemic on working conditions & views about return to the office
  - 198 workers in Survey 1 and 185 workers in Survey 2

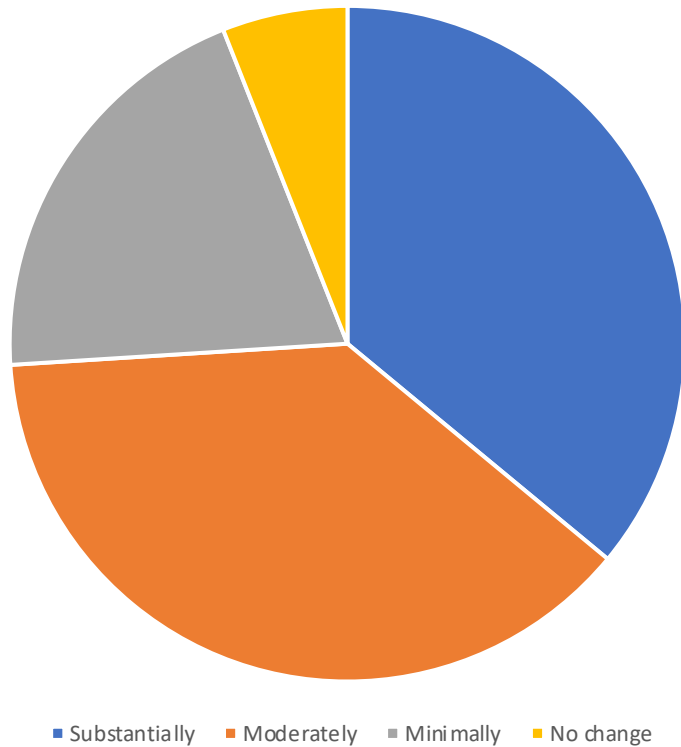
## Focus Groups

- Managers at:
  - Ontario immigrant-serving agencies
  - Local Immigration Partnerships (local planning tables that bring together agencies, other public institutions, and private sector representatives interested in immigration)

# Tumultuous Times

## Service changes Sept. 2020-Sept. 2021

Changes in Service: Ontario Agencies



- Approximately three quarters of managers experienced substantial and moderate change
- Similar in all parts of the province
- Followed six months of crisis response

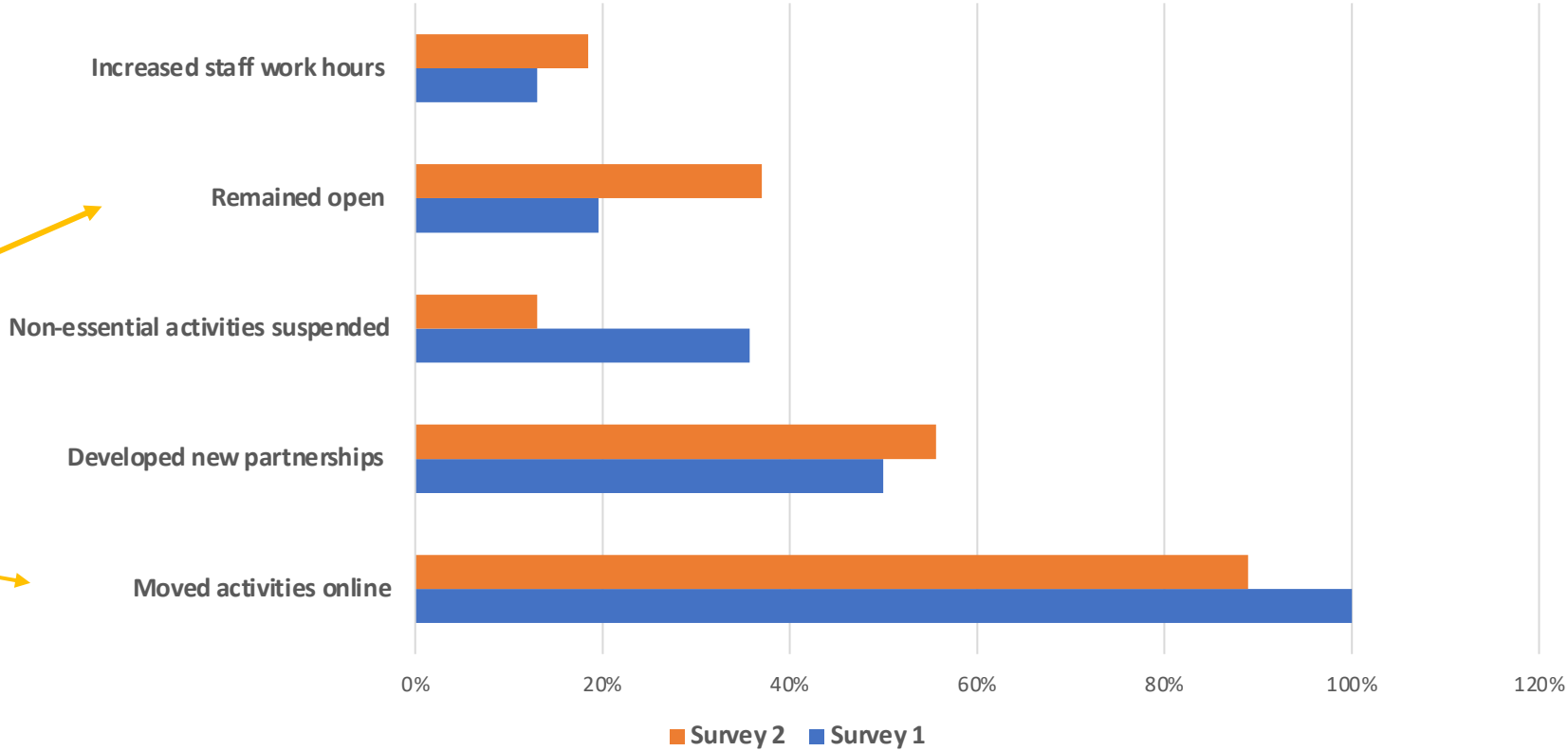
## QUESTION 1

How did immigrant-serving agencies use technology to deliver services?

Change continued between Sept. 2020 and Sept. 2021

Hybrid service model begins

### Changes in Service Delivery, Survey 1 & Survey 2





# Technology Restored Service Volumes

## **Agencies achieved pre-COVID service volumes by September 2021**

- 59.9% of workers stated that their agency had achieved pre-COVID levels of service in the previous 12 months.
- 30.3% of workers stated that their agency was close to pre-COVID levels of service.
- 59.0% of managers said their agency had actually increased services beyond pre-COVID levels during Waves 2,3, and 4.

# Continuing Issues: Outreach and Promotion

## Agencies tried to use virtual technology to address lockdown challenges of community outreach and promotion

### Workers

- 38.6% said that community outreach and promotion was difficult during Waves 2,3, and 4;
- 33.1% said that their agency used virtual technologies for community outreach and promotion;
- 21.5% pointed to specific technologies, webinars, and virtual learning opportunities as ways to enhance outreach.

### Managers

- Still concerned about community outreach and promotion during Waves 2,3, and 4.
- Loss of volunteers continued with one third of managers reporting their agency had lost volunteers in Waves 2, 3, and 4, after 41.1% lost volunteers in Wave 1.

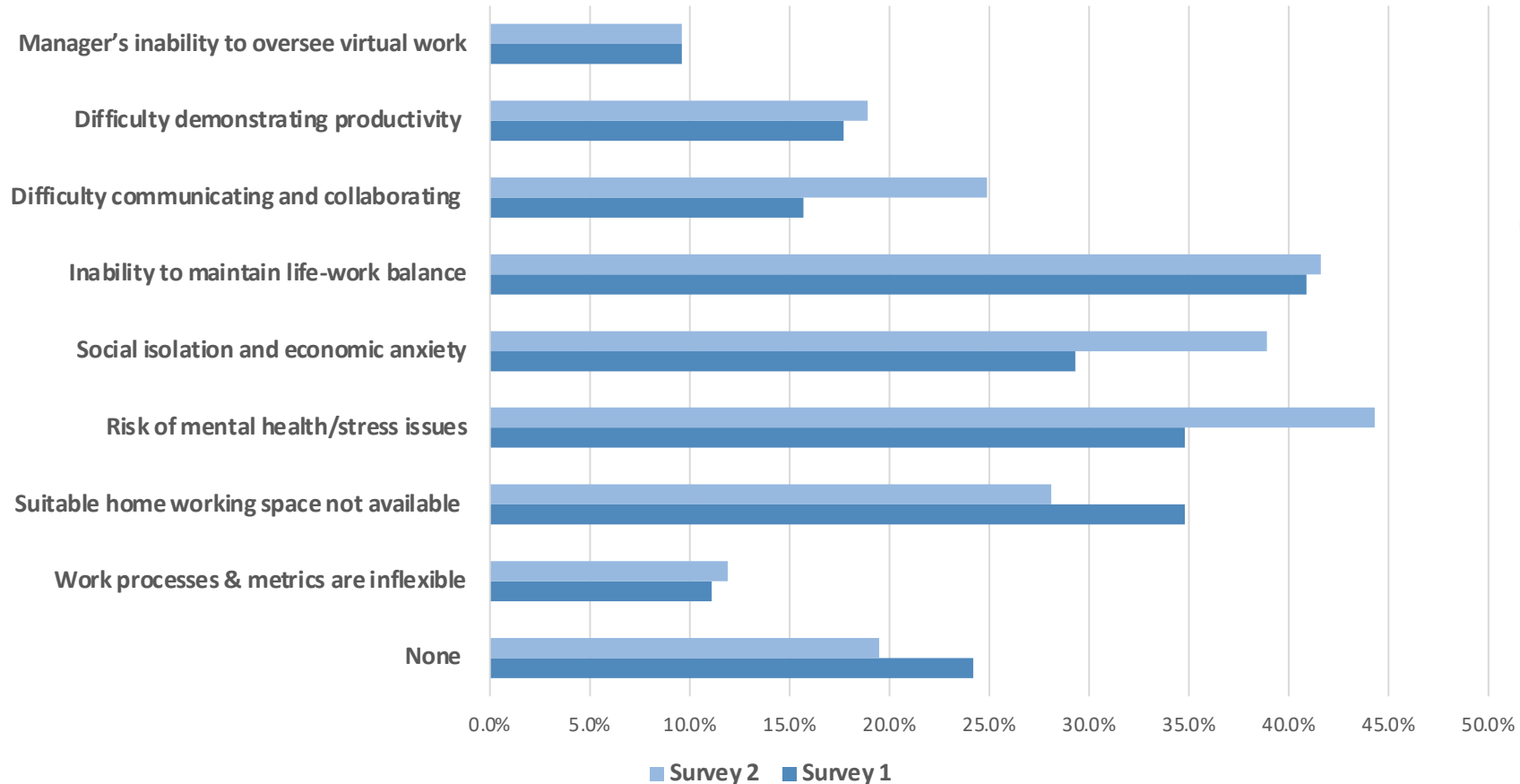
## QUESTION 2

How did technology affect the workforce in immigrant-serving agencies?

# Impact of Technology on the Workforce

## Challenges of Remote Work for Workers

More struggle with social impacts & mental health



Remote work continues to have challenges, even after 18 months

# Impact of Technology on Managing the Workforce

## Agencies took steps to support workforce during technology transition

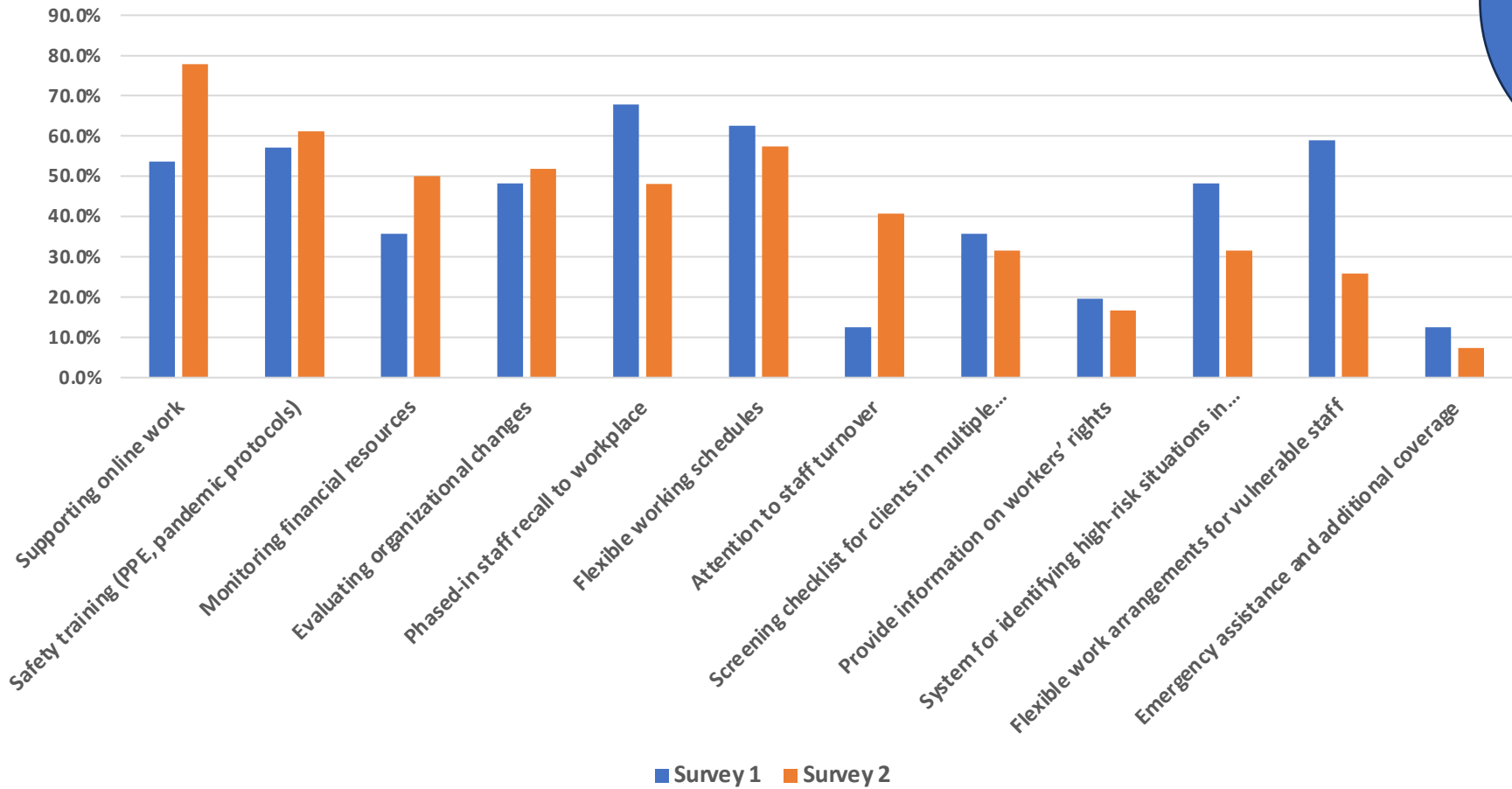
### Managers in Survey 2

- 85.1% said providing employees with adequate support for online work was their most pressing concern by September 2021;
- 76.6% of managers stated support for online work had increased during Waves 2,3, and 4;
- Evaluating the impacts of online services on workforce was important for 59.8% of managers.

# Technology and Changes in Workforce Management

Adapted to pandemic

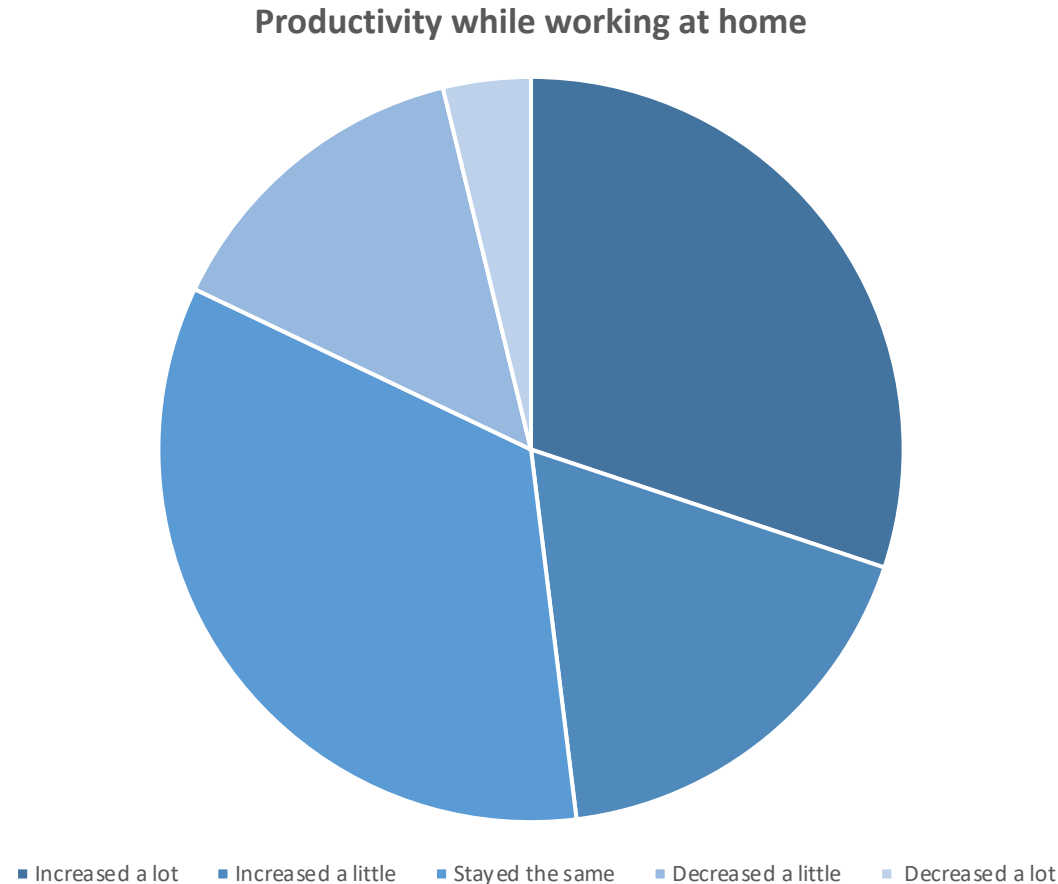
### Workforce Management, Survey 1 and Survey 2



New Concerns with hybrid model

# Impact of Technology on the Workforce

## Workers' Views



- Almost half, 49% feel productivity increased
- Approximately one third, 34%, feel it has stayed the same
- For a minority, 17%, productivity has declined

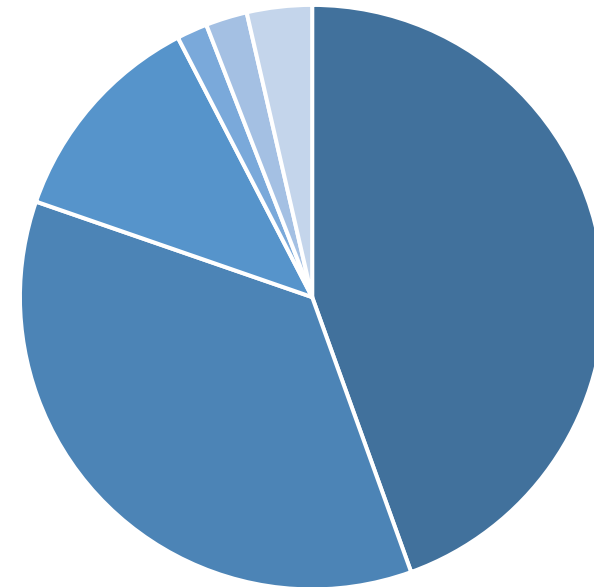
# Satisfaction with Pandemic Responses

## Managers

- Between Sept. 2020 and Sept. 2021, staff-management relations:
  - Improved – 36.6%
  - Stayed the same – 55.7%
  - Deteriorated – 7.7%

## Workers

Organization has taken appropriate actions



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Missing



## QUESTION 3

How did technology use affect clients?

# Impact of Technology on Clients

## **Agencies used technology innovatively to support clients**

Workers identified three actions by many agencies to support clients during Waves 2,3, and 4:

- A hybrid model with online and in-person services was introduced (67.1%);
- New virtual platforms to access services were available to clients (62.2%);
- Virtual guidelines and webinars were developed to provide information to clients (56.1%).

# Impact of Technology on Clients

**There was a strong perception that clients were satisfied with online service in Survey 2**

Workers agreed that clients were satisfied with online services.

- 34.6% said clients were pleased;
- 30.3% indicated that clients were equally pleased as pre-pandemic levels of satisfaction;
- 3.6% indicated clients were discontented with the quality of services

# Conclusions

- A story of tremendous success, ISAs successfully adapted.
  - Technology facilitated the successful operation of ISAs during the pandemic.
- After Wave 1, adaptation continued between September 2020-2021:
  - Additional services moved online, some in-person services restored, mix of services changed
  - Managers tried innovative technological responses to worker concerns
  - Clients were perceived as satisfied despite continuing problems getting online
- What happens next?
  - Funding and staffing questions
- What about diversity of agencies, managers, and workers?

SO...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE?

Thank you

Questions/Comments

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