

An Examination of Social Work Practice in Primary Care Teams across Ontario

A Mixed-Methods Study

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BACKGROUND

As integral members of interprofessional primary care teams, social work's broad scope of practice contributes to patient care in areas related to prevention and health promotion, palliative care, chronic disease management, geriatrics, and mental health and addictions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario social workers saw changes to their practice such as increased client complexities, virtual care, adaptation of in-person services, and increased provider burden. Our study seeks to understand social work's role in primary care during the pandemic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the role of social workers in primary care across Ontario?
- How can social workers in primary care optimize their contribution to patient care?

METHODOLOGY

- **Survey (Completed):** Ontario-wide online survey asked about role of social work, current and optimal state of practice, and social work leadership. Contains a mixture of open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, and Likert scales.
- **Focus Group (In-Progress):** Qualitative, semi-structured focus groups will explore how social work practice has shifted during the pandemic.
- **Sample Population:** Social workers employed in a primary care setting within the province of Ontario.

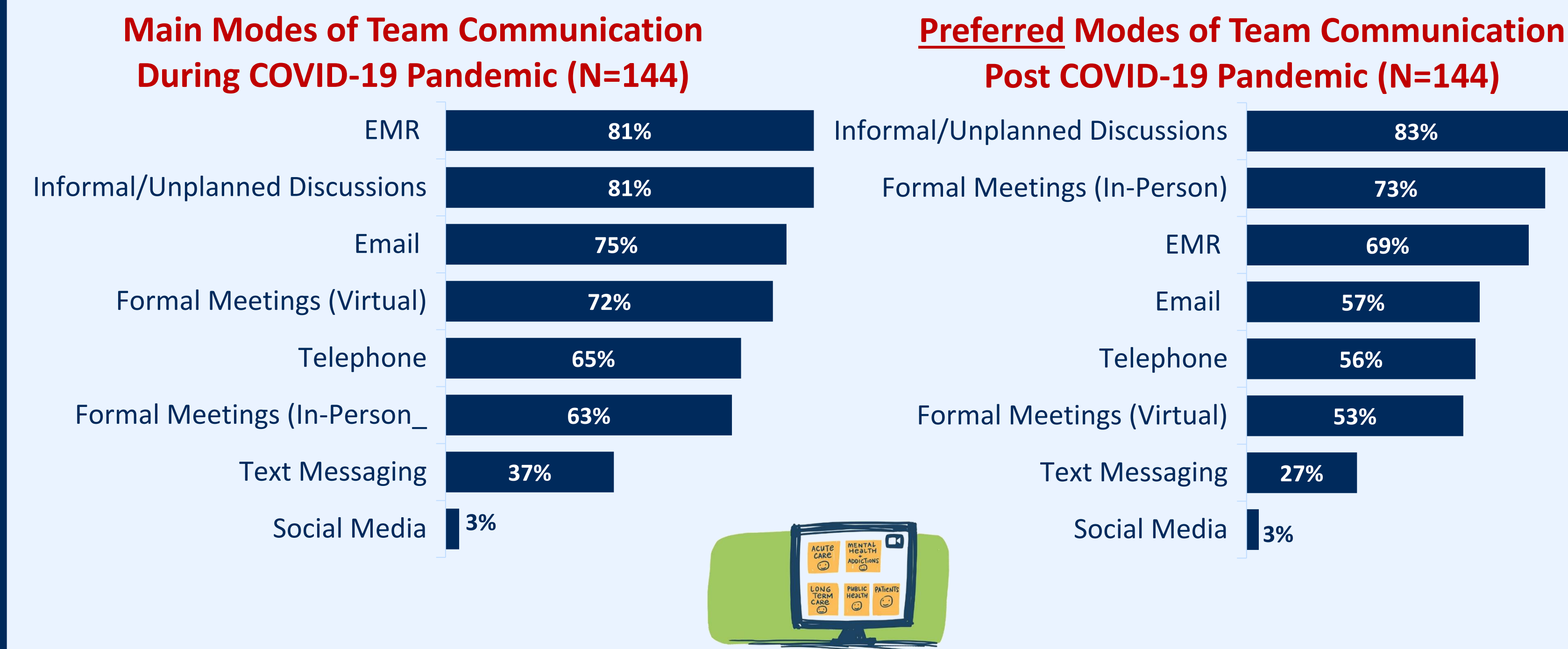
SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS (N=158)

- **N = 158 respondents**, from April 14 to September 14, 2022

Practice Type (N=158)	# (%)	Region (N=158)	# (%)
Family Health Team (FHT)	81 (51%)	North	19 (12%)
Community Health Centre (CHC)	56 (35%)	East	32 (20%)
Nurse Practitioner Led Clinic (NPLC)	9 (6%)	West	57 (36%)
Other	12 (5%)	Central	26 (16%)
		Toronto	23 (15%)
		No response	1 (1%)

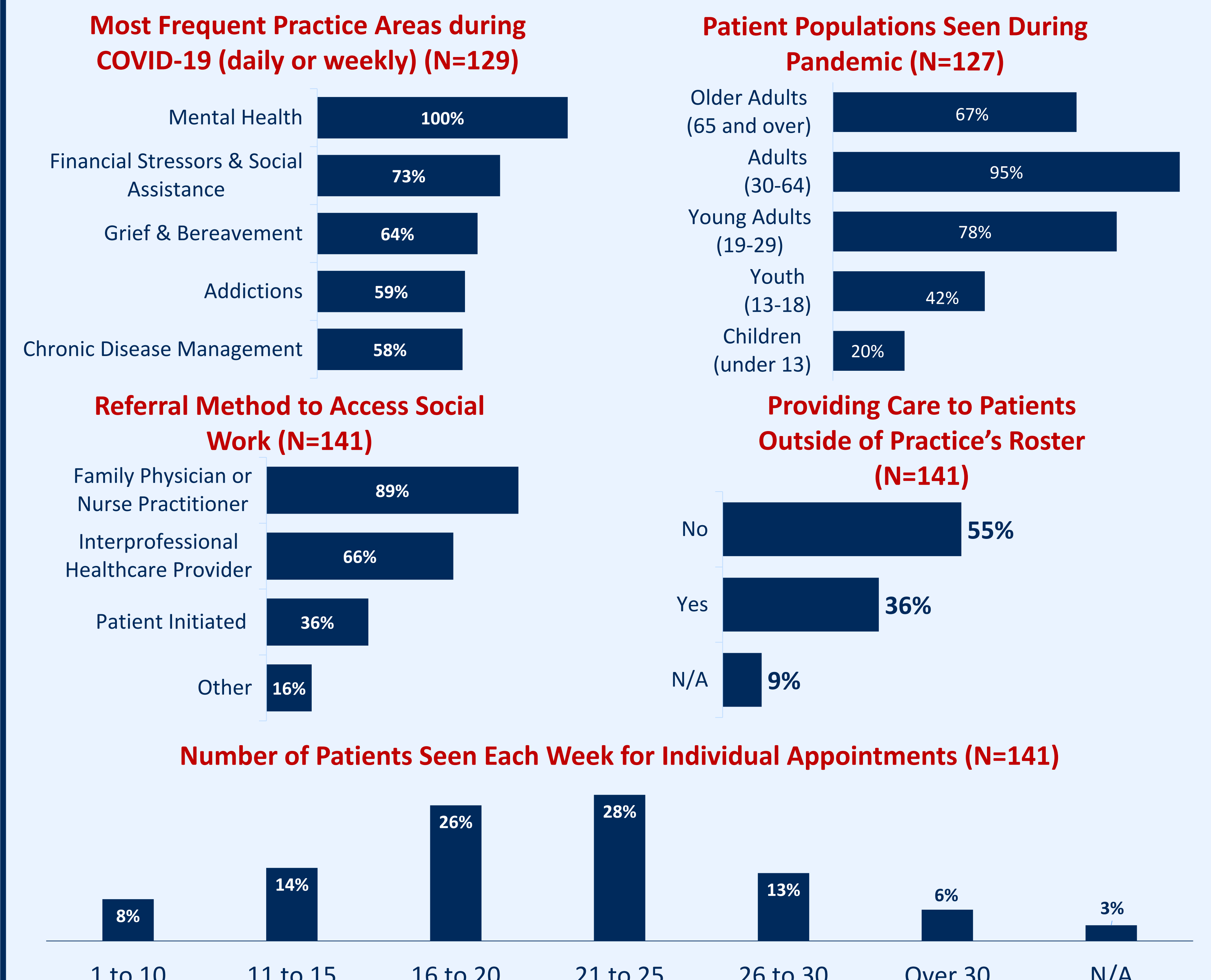
SURVEY RESULTS:

Modes of Team Communication



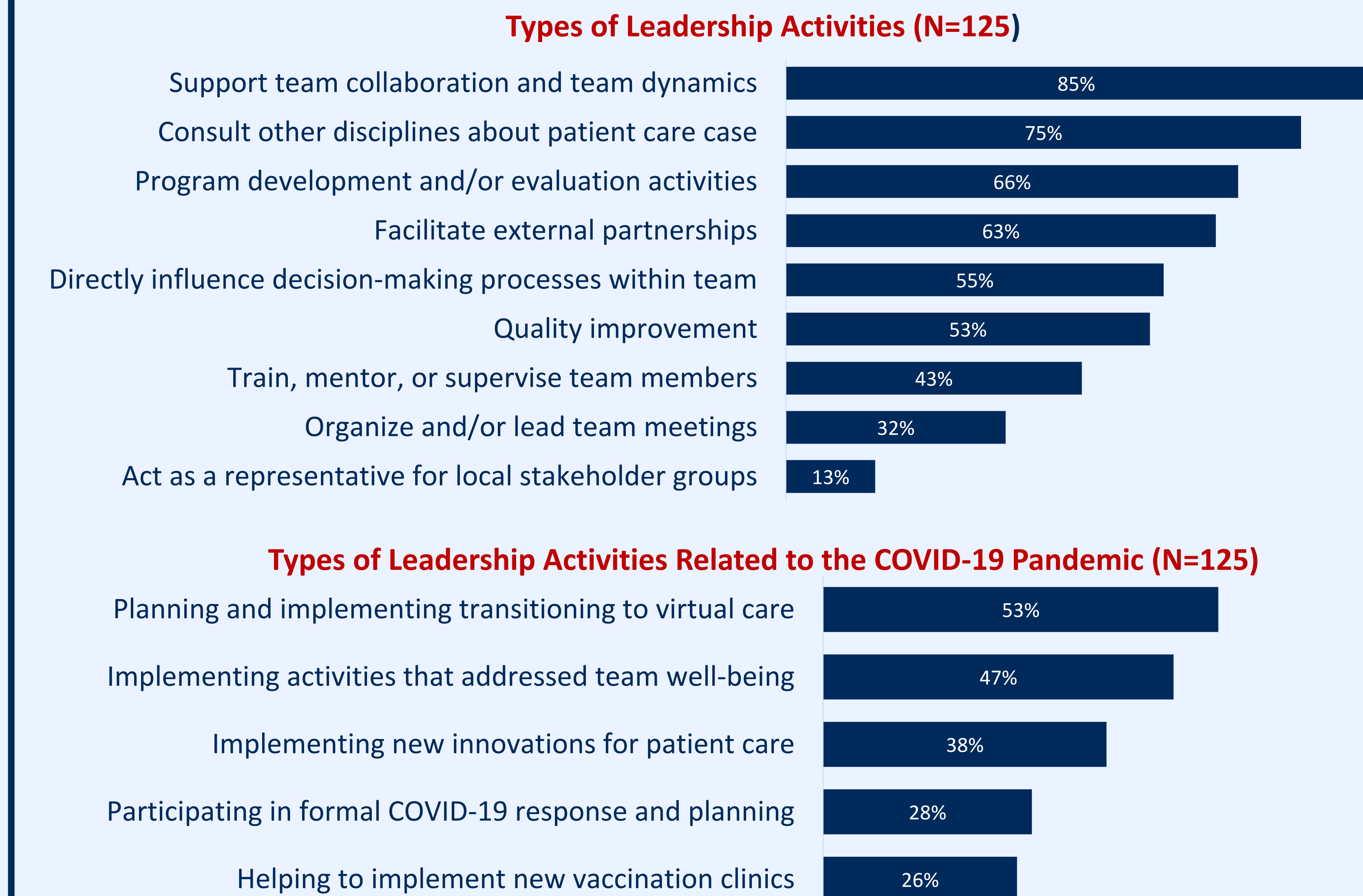
SURVEY RESULTS:

Key Features of Social Work's Role in Primary Care



SURVEY RESULTS:

Leadership as a Component of Social Work's Role



NEXT STEPS

Social workers in primary care have engaged in various activities during the COVID-19 pandemic for a wide range of age groups, with a focus on mental health supports. In addition, social workers have offered important leadership in supporting patients, improving the well-being of their primary care team, and connecting with external partners. We are conducting focus groups with social workers in primary care across Ontario to determine how best to optimize the structure of social work practice post-pandemic.

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