



EXECUTIVE BULLETIN

Workforces at the Crossroads: Thriving Associations in a Changing Professional World

New realities have emerged across professions such as medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, and engineering, and a new generation of workers are challenging traditional approaches. Halmyre's research highlights how these macro issues manifest and differ across professions and segments and how professional associations can deliver valuable solutions.

Key insights

How do you respond to pressure?

The COVID-19 pandemic, high cost of living, student loan debt, and other challenges are stressing workers across North America. Young professionals are not willing to accept the status quo. And while the macro trends often sound similar, research demonstrates that they manifest in unique, complex ways for different professions.

Membership surveys about last year's programs and services no longer suffice. Associations require precise Voice of the Member research insights into what tomorrow's members need to succeed.

Imbalance in professional workforces

With an aging population, many industries are facing both a decline in workers joining their sector and an increase in the number leaving. Associations need extra intention to overcome the pull of what has been done in the past; they need future-focused solutions custom-built for their profession's unique circumstances.

Burnout and worker retention

Doctor shortages and workplace pressures are becoming especially urgent. Burnout is becoming more common, and traditional practice models may no longer be viable. In Halmyre's research with a provincial medical association:

- 94% reported that their work-life balance was affected
- 90% reported that workplace issues have negatively affected the number of patients they can see
- 70% have considered leaving or scaling back their services

In research conducted with members of a pharmacy association in the United States, staffing and human resources-related issues were identified as the number one challenge facing survey participants (58% agreed/strongly agreed), followed closely by burnout (53%) and reduced work-life balance (49%).

These pressures can be seen in Net Promoter Scores (NPS)¹ that vary significantly by age. Research participants with more than 25 years of experience in family medicine gave the family medicine profession an NPS of -55, compared to -72 from those with ten years or less. This is a profession under extreme duress.

1 NPS measures those who would recommend a company, product or service, minus those who would not recommend or are neutral, giving a score between +100 (all promoters) to -100 (all detractors). Halmyre uses NPS to measure member loyalty to both associations and professions.

“I’m feeling overwhelmed and unable to change the system to better help my patients.”

- DOCTOR



Demanding clients

Rising stress and declining work-life balance can't be resolved through traditional techniques. There is a decreasing tolerance for negative client interactions as work-life balance declines. There is also increasing stress from high-paced patient transactions. According to Halmyre's research with veterinarians:

- The lines are blurring between “work” and “home”
- Clients are demanding more
- There isn't enough support for mental health

For pharmacists, high-volume, highly transactional client interactions lead to exhaustion and burnout. One pharmacist interviewee noted, “I've seen the really hard struggles that pharmacists can go through, the stressful need to check 400 prescriptions on your own in a day and having the background phones going off.”

In family medicine, 92% of research participants find it challenging to manage high patient expectations. However, 98% reported that the healthcare system also places unnecessary or inappropriate burdens on their practice. Family medicine is being squeezed by the patients and the system.

Research also reveals discrepancies in professional satisfaction between different segments of the same profession. For example, in research conducted with an American state pharmacy professional association, members practising in chain retail pharmacy environments gave the profession an NPS of -44, compared to the dramatically different NPS of +2 from those in hospital pharmacy settings.

“Clients have unrealistic expectations and expect you to always be available.”

– VETERINARIAN





Declining value of professional designations

Additionally, Halmyre's interviews with pharmacists found that many aren't getting enough return on their professional memberships and designations:

- High-status roles now come with high debt, overwhelming stress, and a lack of clarity on how professional memberships provide support
- Corporatization of jobs can lead to declining independence.
- Pay may not be considered worth the time and effort required to succeed in a complex profession.

In medicine, human resource shortages, long hours, demanding patients, and poor compensation are leading to an exodus from traditional family practice. In research conducted with a family medicine association, 63% of those interviewed indicated a desire to reduce hours, move to a different medical role, or leave altogether. Only 20% stated comfort with their role or a desire to advance on their current career path within family medicine.

In research conducted with engineering graduates in Ontario, 43% of respondents were not employed as engineers (i.e., with a licence to practise engineering) but were working in related fields or had left the profession altogether. Only 55% of respondents felt that a P.Eng. was necessary to meet quality standards.

“The world of pharmacy is just changing, and I’ve heard people say, you’re fighting a race to the bottom of reimbursement, and that’s honestly true with what’s happening right now.”

– PHARMACIST

Value of diversity

Halmyre's research on women in engineering, conducted with a national engineering organization, found that women engineers seek flexibility to accommodate their unique goals and needs but face profound obstacles:

- 71% of women noted a lack of gender representation in engineering
- 35% noted systemic barriers

The same research found that 42% of international engineering graduates had concerns about a need for more cultural diversity in engineering. 43% of international graduates reported being employed as licensed engineers, compared to 61% of Canadian-trained graduates. Professional demographics are shifting, with a need for more women, BIPOC workers, and other underrepresented groups.

“I knew from a young age that I wanted to get into engineering. I loved playing with my brother’s LEGO, but there were rarely afterschool programs or summer camps designed for me to develop my skills. And the rare time when there was a woman role model, she seemed to be exhausted and wasn’t inspiring for me to join the sector.”

– ENGINEER



Evolving workforce roles and composition

Many professions experience shifts in scope of practice as technicians take on additional responsibilities or tasks previously done by a different profession.

The impact of scope change is often positive. As administrative, repetitive, or lower-risk tasks are transferred to lower-cost professionals, the cost of delivering care is lowered, and professional role satisfaction is improved. But it can also exert new pressures.

In Halmyre's qualitative research, family physicians expressed exhaustion from transferring straightforward care and positive patient interactions to pharmacists and nurse practitioners, leaving only the most complex, challenging cases in the family clinic.

Pharmacists noted the burden of increasing pharmacy technician-to-pharmacist ratios and a decline in the total number of pharmacists, increasing the demands on pharmacists who now work longer hours with more employees to supervise.

Implications for Association Value Delivery

Associations must bridge the gap between current member support and new workforce pressures. Dangerously low NPS numbers for both professions and associations, value proposition push-back, declining member numbers, and reduced volunteer contributions are common symptoms of associations failing to meet evolving needs. Our research shows that associations should:

- Support professionals differently and demonstrate long-term solutions.
- Use up-to-date technology to connect with members.
- Help members find solutions for their debt load and working conditions.
- Make it easier for their professionals to adapt to societal change.

These adjustments are necessary for calcified associations to meet the needs of fluid young professionals.

Three Solutions

ONE

Own the problem for your profession and be seen as a convenor of solutions.

- a** Collect data in an easy-to-process form — enumerate it!
- b** Understand and gain insights from the data — name it!
- c** Build services and solutions based on the data — own it!

TWO

Conduct regular empathy-mapping exercises with your board to deeply understand the needs and wants of many member personas. Use these maps and insights to establish strategic benchmarking and innovative new programs.

THREE

Engage market data specialists. Don't do the same old member benefits survey — examine your research strategy and insist it is forward-looking and focused on the trends impacting your profession and association.

Want to learn more?

Every profession has unique challenges. Halmyre's Voice of the Member research will help develop the solutions you need!

Contact Halmyre to transform your member research into a driver of insights and growth.

Talk to an [expert](#) about member research and insights.

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