

2026 LOCUM TENENS PHYSICIAN REPORT

key takeaways



The past few years have seen a sea-change in locum tenens trends, with widespread participation turning it into a respected, peer-validated career choice.

Locums is also mainstream in the sense that there is nothing unique or unusual demographically about the typical locum physician. At every career stage, physicians are turning to locums as a way to address challenges like decreasing professional autonomy, declining reimbursements, and an ever-growing administrative burden.

Locum tenens meets physicians where they are, giving them the right solution at just the right time.

Locum tenens is a peer-validated career choice

The majority of physicians now learn about locums organically from each other via word-of-mouth recommendations rather than through agency outreach, signaling greater professional legitimacy.^{1,2}

Interest in locums among physicians continues to grow. The percentage of the general physician population that said they were currently working locums grew from 5% in 2016 to 14% by 2025.³ More than a quarter of physicians without locum tenens experience are “very or extremely interested” in locums work, up 15 percentage points from 2017.³

Locum physicians mirror the profession

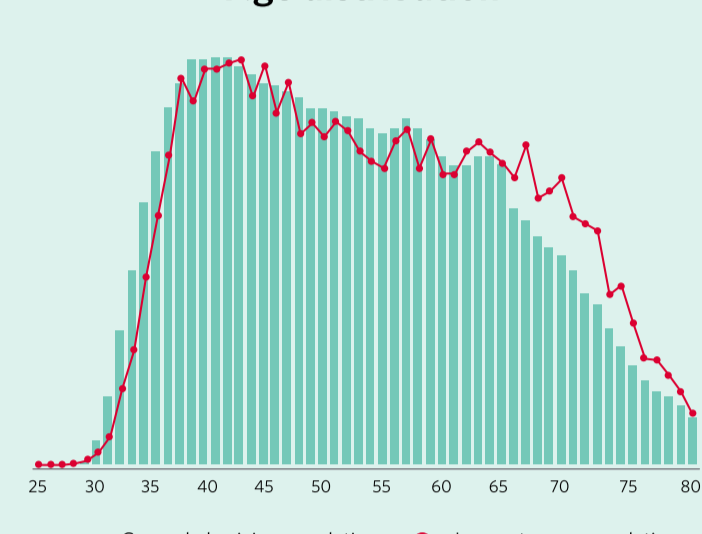
Locum physicians are not outliers—locums and the larger physician population largely share the same demographic profile, with only a slight skew toward male physicians and older physicians, likely due to pre-existing disparities among certain specialties and the wider physician population.⁴

Physicians with and without children participate in locums at virtually identical rates to non-locum physicians. Slightly more than half of each group (~53% vs. 54%) has no children under 18, while a nearly identical rate of locum physicians and non-locum physicians have 1-4+ children.⁷

Sources of locum tenens familiarity, 2025



Age distribution



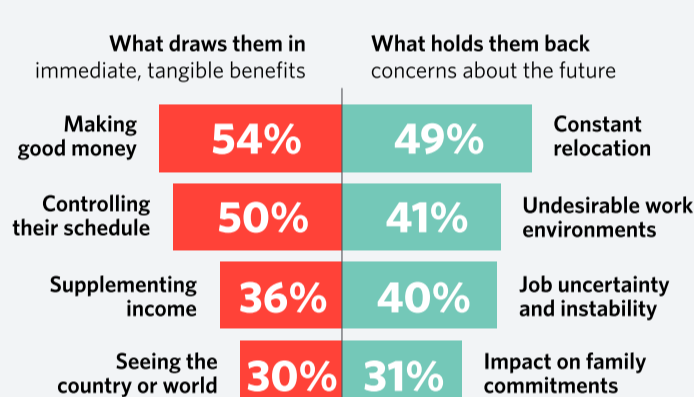
Research suggests that physicians use locums to address specific challenges at every career stage

Early career: Looking for financial relief

While only 13% of residents describe themselves as “extremely or very familiar” with locums, 25% are “very or extremely” interested in it.⁵ Much of this interest is driven by the immediate financial benefits of locums, like making good money and income supplementation. This financially focused interest is due to the tremendous educational debt that 70% of new graduates carry,⁶ heightened by recent federal student loan policy changes.

For residents, the perceived drawbacks to locums point to fears about the future, including the challenges of frequent relocation, work environment, and job uncertainty.⁵

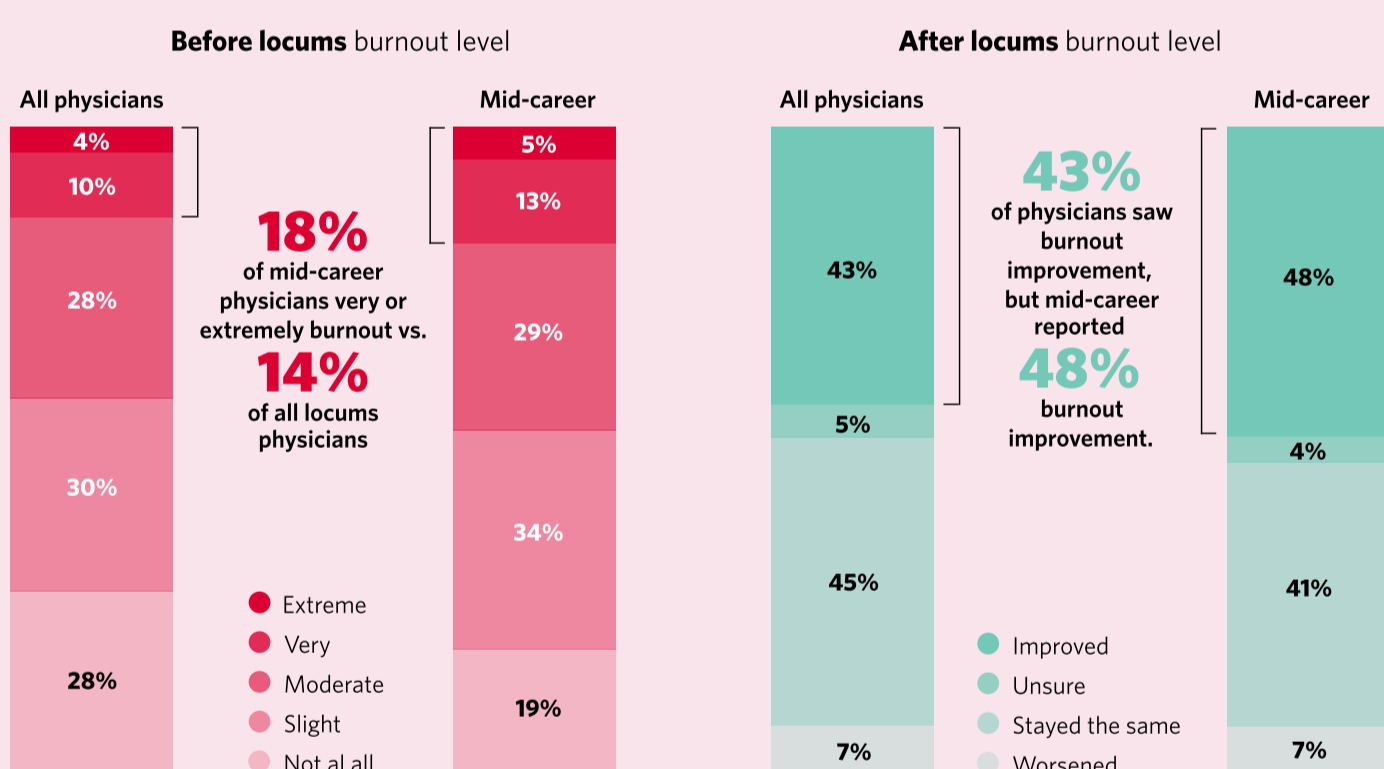
Early career physicians weigh locum tenens



Mid-career: A generation under pressure

Mid-career physicians face competing demands for their time and attention, balancing work and family life, all while reimbursements and regulatory moves add financial pressure to their practices. Of mid-career physicians, 18% report extreme levels of occupational strain, compared to 14% overall.⁹ However, these physicians are the most likely to say their well-being improved after starting locums (48% vs. 43% overall).⁷

Burnout before and after locums among physicians with 11 to 20 years experience



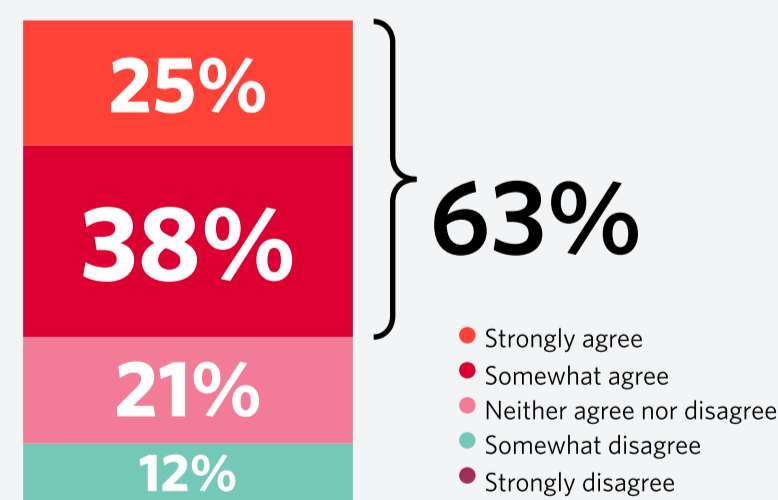
Once mid-career physicians gain experience with locums, they are the most likely of any career cohort to continue or resume working locums.⁷

Late career: Staying engaged on their own terms

Late-career physicians may not be ready to embrace full retirement, and locums allows them to continue practicing on their own terms. As they near retirement, 63% of late-career physicians say they would prefer to work less rather than not work at all.⁸

The most important aspects in a locum role for late-career physicians include procedures and skills required, worksite location, and active state license requirements—considerations that point to a desire to minimize administrative and logistic hurdles.⁸

As I near retirement, I would prefer to work less than not at all



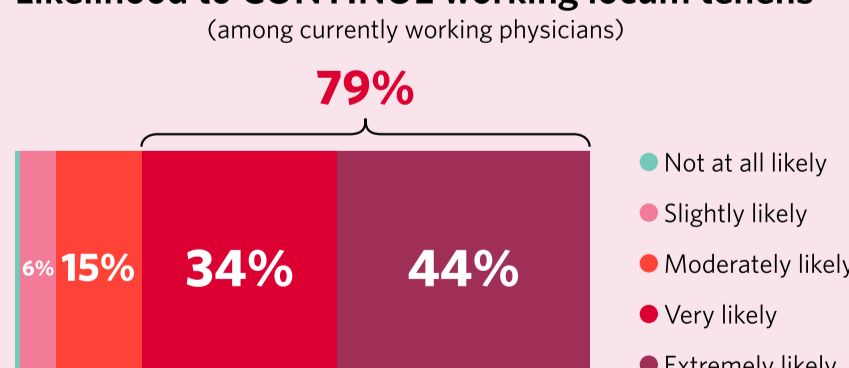
A strategic tool—not for everyone, not forever

Physicians have different pressures and concerns at every stage of their career. Locums isn’t the right fit for every physician in every situation, but the physicians who are currently working locums express strong satisfaction—79% say they are very or extremely likely to continue.⁷

A full 69% say they don’t wish they’d started working locums sooner, which means locums became the exact right solution at the right time for them.⁷

Read the entire 2026 Physicians in Locums Report at weatherbyhealthcare.com/physician-locum-report

Likelihood to CONTINUE working locum tenens



References

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- Resident Career Planning Survey, October 2023
- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Medical School Graduation Questionnaire (GQ): All Schools Summary Report. AAMC, 2025.
- Locum Tenens Experience Survey — Physicians, January 2025
- Late Career Physician Survey, June 2024