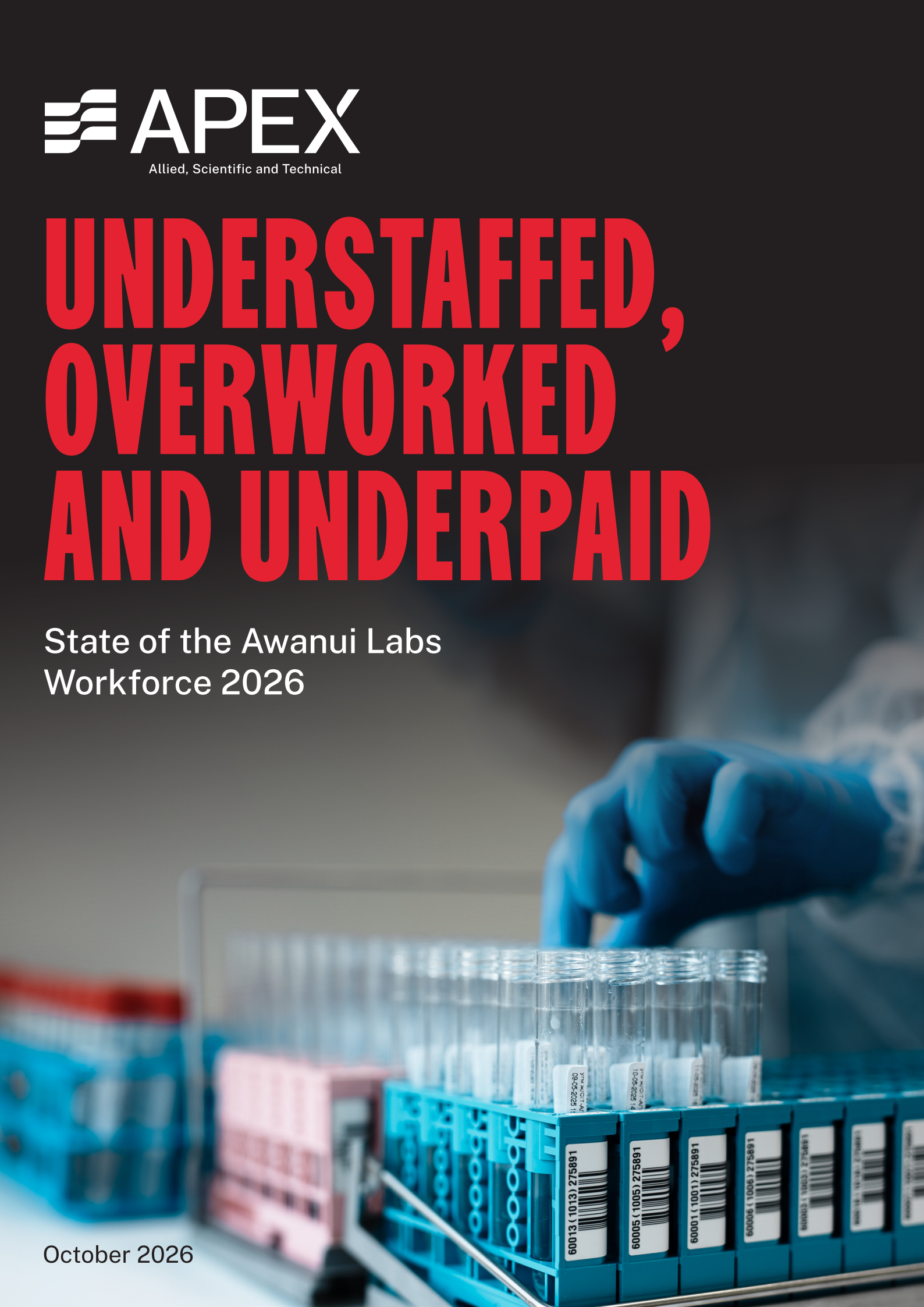
APEX
Allied, Scientific and Technical

UNDERSTAFFED, OVERWORKED AND UNDERPAID

State of the Awanui Labs Workforce 2026



October 2026

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State of the Awanui Labs Workforce 2026

In September 2026 APEX undertook a survey of 620 Medical Laboratory Workers employed by the largest corporate laboratory service provider in New Zealand, Awanui Labs.

We wanted to understand ahead of this year's collective bargaining the state of Awanui's laboratory services with regards to the impact of the ongoing pay disparity on staffing and the sustainability of these services.

What is a Medical Laboratory Worker?

Medical Laboratory Workers are registered health professionals who run laboratories and test, interpret and report laboratory results. They are trained to identify disease and abnormalities through studying blood, tissue and other bodily samples. Laboratory Workers work 'behind the scenes' but remain an integral part of the health system whose work is vital to patient treatment. An estimated 70% of medical decisions and 100% of cancer diagnoses rely on laboratory diagnostics.

The Medical Laboratory workforce consists of Medical Laboratory Scientists who interpret and report on laboratory results, Medical Laboratory Technicians who prepare and process specimens and Phlebotomists who collect specimens from patients in the community and in hospitals.

Medical Laboratory Service Delivery Model

Medical laboratory services in Aotearoa are delivered by a combination of crown health entities like Te Whatu Ora and New Zealand Blood Service, as well as private corporations like Awanui Labs, Pathlab and Medlab Central. Private laboratory providers are largely funded by Health New Zealand and account for 98% of community laboratory services and 35% of hospital laboratory services across the country.

Awanui provides laboratory services to:

Location	Community Services	Hospital Services
Auckland	✓	
Wellington	✓	✓
Whangārei	✓	
Taranaki	✓	
Hawke's Bay	✓	
Nelson	✓	✓
Wairau	✓	✓
Christchurch	✓	
Timaru	✓	✓
Ōamaru	✓	✓
Dunedin	✓	✓
Queenstown	✓	✓
Clyde	✓	✓
Invercargill	✓	✓

Despite the vital role of laboratory services in acute clinical diagnosis, and the direct line of funding between government and private providers, companies with profit-centric interests like Awanui Labs are entrusted to deliver effective and safe laboratory services to the people of New Zealand with, as far as we can tell, **few safeguards**.

Background and History

2023

In mid-2023 the Te Whatu Ora pay equity claim covering public sector laboratory workers was settled which propelled Te Whatu Ora Laboratory Worker wages ahead of the private sector by approximately 30%.

Since that time, APEX and its members have been negotiating to close this wage disparity by achieving parity with Te Whatu Ora rates of pay.

2025

In 2025 after a significant dispute whereby over 200 strike notices were issued to Awanui Labs, a settlement was reached that provided members with a 9.2% average increase in wages, taking them roughly one-third of the way to pay parity.

2026

In 2026 APEX has settled negotiations with another private laboratory provider, Pathlab Limited, for a pay increase of between 10% to 15% over the next two years.

Sep 2026

In early September APEX initiated for the next round of bargaining with Awanui Labs and will be seeking this next portion of pay parity.

What this report details

This report outlines feedback collected from 372 Medical Laboratory Workers employed by Awanui Labs relating to the state of their laboratory services.

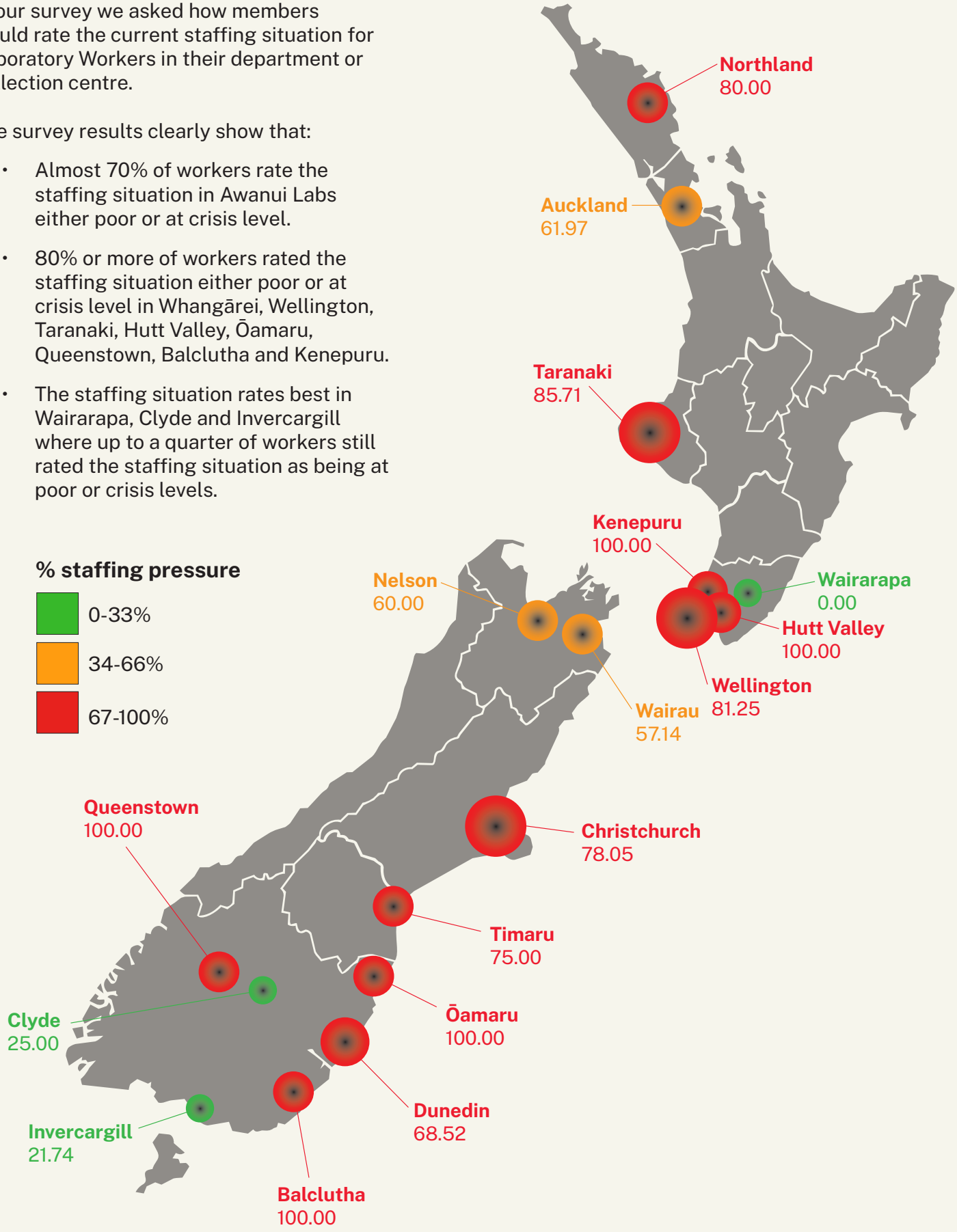
The APEX workforce survey shows that Awanui laboratories are critically understaffed and providing subpar services to New Zealand communities. Workers in these laboratories are chronically fatigued and working unsafely to keep up with relentless workload demands. The situation has become untenable in Awanui Labs laboratories and APEX is sounding the alarm that services are in crisis.

Staffing in Awanui Laboratories

In our survey we asked how members would rate the current staffing situation for Laboratory Workers in their department or collection centre.

The survey results clearly show that:

- Almost 70% of workers rate the staffing situation in Awanui Labs either poor or at crisis level.
- 80% or more of workers rated the staffing situation either poor or at crisis level in Whangārei, Wellington, Taranaki, Hutt Valley, Ōamaru, Queenstown, Balclutha and Kenepuru.
- The staffing situation rates best in Wairarapa, Clyde and Invercargill where up to a quarter of workers still rated the staffing situation as being at poor or crisis levels.



The impacts on Laboratory Staff

Over 300 laboratory workers commented on the impact of the staffing situation on workers. The key themes from members responses were:

Members are stressed, fatigued and burnout is prevalent.

Workloads are unmanageable and resulting in staff working in 'crisis mode' to complete test results and collect patient specimens.

Staff do not have the time or resources to adequately train the next generation of laboratory workers.

Members are exhausted and frequently sick and feel that even being short one worker on benches or in collection centres significantly compounds workload stresses.

The poor working conditions are precipitating the resignation of staff, further exacerbating these issues.

Impact on health

As part of our survey, we asked members what impact their employment at Awanui labs had on their health and over 60% of members responded a 'mainly negative impact', 31% responded 'no impact' and a mere 7.5% responded a 'mainly positive impact'.



Quotes from members

> *Critical low staffing levels are causing significant strain on frontline staff. We are carrying workloads that are unsafe, unsustainable, and far beyond what is reasonable for the number of people rostered. Staff are experiencing burnout, emotional fatigue, increased sick leave, and a constant sense of pressure. The lack of adequate staffing means rushed procedures, reduced recovery time between patients, compromised training for new staff, and increased risk of errors. Senior staff are forced to cover multiple roles, and morale has dropped sharply. Overall, critical understaffing is directly impacting staff wellbeing, patient experience, and the quality and safety of services we provide."*

> *Workers work when they are unwell because they know the lab won't cope without them, workers don't take annual leave because* [the lab is] *too short staffed. Workers are exhausted and fed up. Trying to make a roster work with so few staff is a nightmare."*

> *Some staff have had breakdowns while trying to complete daily tasks/ maintenance. Constantly under pressure and always asked to do more and more because of lack of staff."*

The impact on patients

In our survey we asked if members believe that Awanui is running a safe laboratory service in their area.

66% of Awanui staff do not believe the company are running safe laboratory services.

When asked what factors were impacting safety in their laboratories, an overwhelming number of members referred to a lack of adequate staffing as one of the main factors.

Commonly used metrics to assess the effectiveness of service delivery in laboratories include: the time it takes to prepare, process and report diagnostic tests (aka turn-around-times or TATs); and in collection centres and hospital wards, the time a patient has to wait for specimen collection.

When members were asked what impact the staffing situation was having on TATs, patient wait times and outcomes, the common themes from members were:

Laboratory workers are finding it difficult to keep up with TATs, and in some areas, TATs are not being met resulting in delays in test results for patients.

Phlebotomists are reporting regular delay's in collecting specimens from patients.

Members report that there is increased risk of errors in laboratories and collection centres due to understaffing.

66%

of Awanui staff do not believe the company are running safe laboratory services.

To understand how our front-line Phlebotomist members are coping in this environment, we asked how many patients they are expected to bleed per hour and how many patients they can safely bleed per hour.

Of the 106 Phlebotomists that responded, the median number of patients that members reported as being **expected to bleed per hour is 10 patients**, while the median number that members believe is **safe to bleed, is 8 patients per hour.**

EXPECTED to bleed per hour	**SAFE** to bleed per hour
10	**8**

This data indicates that APEX Phlebotomists are expected to bleed about **25% more patients than is safe**, each hour.

And even when working flat out, APEX members are reporting that patients are waiting a median of **30 minutes** for sample collection**,** but wait times frequently get **as high as one hour.**

Quotes from members.

> *Due to the amount of work and less staffing, people are left to cope and keep up with the TATs. These have greatly impacted patient wait times and outcomes as samples that were collected earlier would have had to wait as urgent samples are triaged as a priority. There is always a steady amount of urgents coming through the lab. Sometimes there is only one person in reception while others deal with the workload on the technical benches."*
>
> –Hutt Valley

> *Critical low staffing levels significantly increase patient wait times, slow down turnaround times, and negatively impact patient outcomes. With too few staff, collections are rushed, queues grow, and urgent samples are delayed. This leads to slower diagnosis, reduced accuracy, compromised patient experience, and increased risk for vulnerable patients. Staff cannot provide safe, timely, or compassionate care under current conditions."*
>
> –Taranaki

> *Because some of our work comes in from outlying rural areas and from Wairau lab - there is an extra 24 hours before reports are complete. Meaning suitable antibiotic options are a day later for doctors to prescribe."*
>
> –Nelson Marlborough

Responsiveness from Awanui

As part of our survey, we also asked members if, were they to raise concerns directly with Awanui, would they feel they would be adequately responded to...

89%

of Awanui staff do not believe that concerns will be adequately addressed by their employer.

Undervalued • Stressful, infuriating, negative • Overworked and underpaid • Indifferent, cheap, factory • Depressing, unappreciated, stressful• It sucks • STRESSFUL • Fast, lonely, isolated • Should improve • Love the patients • Terrible! Unfulfilling. Careless. • Just okay • Busy and underpaid • Lonely • Soul crushing • Staff are getting stressed out. • Stressful • Overwhelming • pays the bills •Poor management • Stressful, unfulfilling, frustrating. • Overwork • No other choice. • Engaging, chaotic, underperforming • Awful • Not happy • Underpaid, Unappreciated, Stress • Demanding, stressful, rewarding • Underpaid • Taking its toll • Pressure • Very average • Depressing, disillusioned, unfair • Uncoordinated • Physical emotional stress • Stressful, draining, interesting • Underpaid • Soul sucking • Lots of work • Tiring • Tired, no help, boring • Bring on retirement • Underpaid, overworked • Overworked. Undervalued. Unsafe. • Pay better wages • Money matters • Its average • Low wages • Stressful • Tiring unhappy stressful • Poorly paid drudgery • Could be better • Soul draining, Stressful • Work to survive • Disillusioned • Pays bills barely • Not valued • Overworked, underpaid, tired • Busy, stressful and exhausting • Money orientated • Rewarding but Undervalued • Overworked, underpaid and understaffed, demanding and suffocating • Stressful, underpaid, undervalued • Busy, repetitive, incomplete • Frustrating, thankless, stressful • Hopeless • Stressful • Understaffed • Staff Are Forgotten • Underpaid • Understaffed • Demanding • Exhausting, unpredictable, slavery • Work, unpredictable, present • Stressed, underpaid!!! • Exhausting • Staff are wonderful • They don't care • Busy tiring • Tiring • Stressful • Never right balance • Horrendous • Distrustful, boring, hopeless • Over worked • Time pressure. Rewarding • Challenging • Stressful, non-incentivised, exhausting • Rewarding but exhausting • Unsafe and unreasonable • Stressful, unhappy • Exhausting, demoralizing, unsustainable • Unrealistic Workhouse • Last choice • Unappreciated, underpaid, exhausting• Unappreciated • Corporate Greed • Ruthless don't care for their staff • Uncertainty, fight, unfair. • Physically mentally exhausting • Not enough pay • Stressful, tiring, unhappy • Stressful • Frustrating, stressful. Demoralizing • Stressful • Like I'm invisible • Soul destroying exercise • Very hard work • Stressful • Unnecessarily stressful • Broken, Defeated, Self-destructive • stressed out • Not great • Stressful and underpaid • Exhausting yet underpaid • Noncaring, unfair, profit before people • Disappointing, frustration, sad • Demanding. Always adapting. Intense • Stressful • Undervalued • Room for improvement • Love my job • Soul-destroying, stressful, unappreciated (by top management) • Underpaid, hard work, burn out. • overworked • Overworked less paid • Underpaid, overworked, toxic • Downgrading, tiring, unfulfilling • Detrimental to health • Rewarding but tiring • Downhill slope sadly • Stressful, concerning, hopeful • worst job ever • Busy, Rewarding, underpaid • Underpaid. Undervalued. Overworked. • Staff are tired • Depressing, not valued, exhausting • Hard challenging unappreciated • Stuck, stressful and not appreciated, • Unappreciated Corrupt Unhealthy • Not feeling appreciated • Stressful, under pressure, under rating • Undervalued and stressful • Satisfying, rewarding, challenging • Hard, unsatisfying, stressful • Frustrating, demoralising environment • Frustrating • Exhausting, understaffed, underpaid • Stressed, ignored, dismissed • Underappreciated! • Exhausting, frustrating, disappointing • Tiring • Stressful, unhappy • Undervalued, understaffed, exploited • Peak corporate dysfunction • Thrifty • Mentally and physically exhausting • No longer satisfying.• Embarrassing • Undervalued, underpaid • Honestly working hard • I'm quitting soon • Awanui must go • Terrible • Draining, Pressure, Unhealthy • It's a job • Stressful and exhausting. • Continual stressed environment • Tiring frustrating battling • no fair pay • Ok. • Getting sucked dry • Depressing. Underpaid. Underappreciated. • Mentally draining, overworked, underpaid. • Unappreciated, not valued • Stressful, unpaid and undervalued • Unsatisfying, stressful, unappreciated • underpaid understaff • Expectation without recognition • Hard, draining • Mentally draining • Stressful frustrating unfair • Could do better • Stress-full, understaffed, overworked • Busier than ever • Overworked and underpaid • Undervalued, exploited workforce • Tiring Demanding Exhausting • Brick wall • GOD help us! OR give me strength! • Lord help me • Stress, fatigue, worthless • Unhappy workforce • Don't feel valued • Undervalued, staff can't suggest for improvement. • Low pay • Very stressful and disappointing • High pressure environment • Embarrassing, depressive, fatiguing • Stressful and busy • Always under pressure • Unheard, unappreciated, undervalued • Taking the piss • Awesome team locally. • Teammates amazing • exhausting, limiting, unrewarding • No good • Alright • Stress • Demanding • Stressful, Exhausting & Unpredictable • What's being cut • Tough, exhausting, unappreciated • Not very enjoyable • Unsafe and exhausting • very busy • Very hard work! • Ok • Predatory, Exploitive, profit-driven • Underpaid, bureaucratic, demanding. • Disappointed at negotiations • Exhausting, Surviving & Thriving • Stressful, rewarding, challenging. • Unsafe, lack of training especially. • Good and bad • Exhausting, intensely frustrating • It's a joke • depressing, embarrassing, broke • Production line • Disappointing, disrespected, and undervalued • Always busy • Pays the bills • Burnout • It has become unbearable • Broken promises. Groundhog Day. • Conflicting, exhausting• Good • Forgotten. Tired. Angry. • heavy workload • Tiring and exhausting • Low morale • Fluctuating workload • They're slavedrivers

DESCRIBE AWANUI IN ABOUT 3 WORDS

Published by APEX
October 2026
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