

# Head Start Professional Development Survey

JULY 2023



## PURPOSE

Head Start programs dedicate significant time and resources to ensuring their staff are engaging in professional development activities. The purpose of this survey was to identify the current most significant professional development needs of Head Start programs. The results will be used to ensure that professional development activities offered by the sponsoring associations are meeting the needs of member Head Start programs. A prior study was conducted in 2018.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted entirely via an Internet survey platform, Survey Monkey. It was distributed via email to various staff of Head Start programs in several states. For purposes of this report only data from respondents in California is considered. All responses were collected in July of 2023.

Of 140 California-based Head Start programs, 32 submitted full responses and an additional 19 partially responded. At a 90% confidence level, the 32 full responses yield a 13% margin of error.

## SPONSORS

This survey was developed as a joint project between Head Start California, a nonprofit association representing California-based Head Start programs, and the Region IX Head Start Association, a nonprofit association representing Head Start programs in the Western United States. Financial support was provided by the California Head Start State Collaboration Office.

## FINDINGS

### Staffing Challenges Dominate Training Needs

Head Start programs are facing significant staffing challenges with a myriad of causes, including: historically low pay for workers, which has been exacerbated by post-pandemic labor shortages; inflation driving price increases in everything from supplies to staff; and increased competition with California's K-12 school system as it introduces universal transitional kindergarten for four-year olds. When asked the open-ended question "what are the three biggest professional development challenges in your agency right now," the top responses were staffing shortages, staff, and staffing. This struggle is also reflected in the high priority placed on training related to staffing shortages, leadership development, staffing and culture, and staff wellness.

## The Covid-19 Pandemic Heavily Influenced Professional Development Needs

Several trends in professional development needs appear to be driven – or at least exacerbated by – the Covid-19 pandemic. Developing children were impacted by pandemic restrictions which limited (or entirely removed) their ability to socially interact with other children and adults outside the home. Families suffered from vastly increased stress and trauma, with causes ranging from financial hardships to loss of loved ones.

Many of the top professional development needs point to pandemic impacts: behavior management for teachers; staff wellness and mental health; families in crisis; and community service coordination. Disaster management training is also significantly higher in demand, perhaps a reflection of the pandemic and/or the increase in natural disasters. Child development, particularly for infants and toddlers, was also ranked significantly more important than in prior years; this is unsurprising given the pandemic's disruptions to normal child development. Greatly increased demand for training on family law, custody, and parental rights may be a further reflection of pandemic disruption to family life.



At least one drop in need also seems to be pandemic-related. Respondents indicated that technology and information systems were of less importance to the strategic growth of their agencies than pre-pandemic. This could be a result of the pandemic's forced shift to new technologies – as adults stayed home and learned to work (and teach their children) remotely, they learned new technologies. Agencies that were lacking in technology may have been forced to invest in both technology and training during the pandemic years, leading to less need now.

## Demand for Certain Topics Shifts Over Time

Comparing 2023 data to that gathered in 2018 reveals significant shifts in demand for certain topics which do not seem to have a clear connection to the pandemic.

- Program monitoring, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement ranked significantly lower in priority than previously.
- Data collection and analysis training is less in demand.

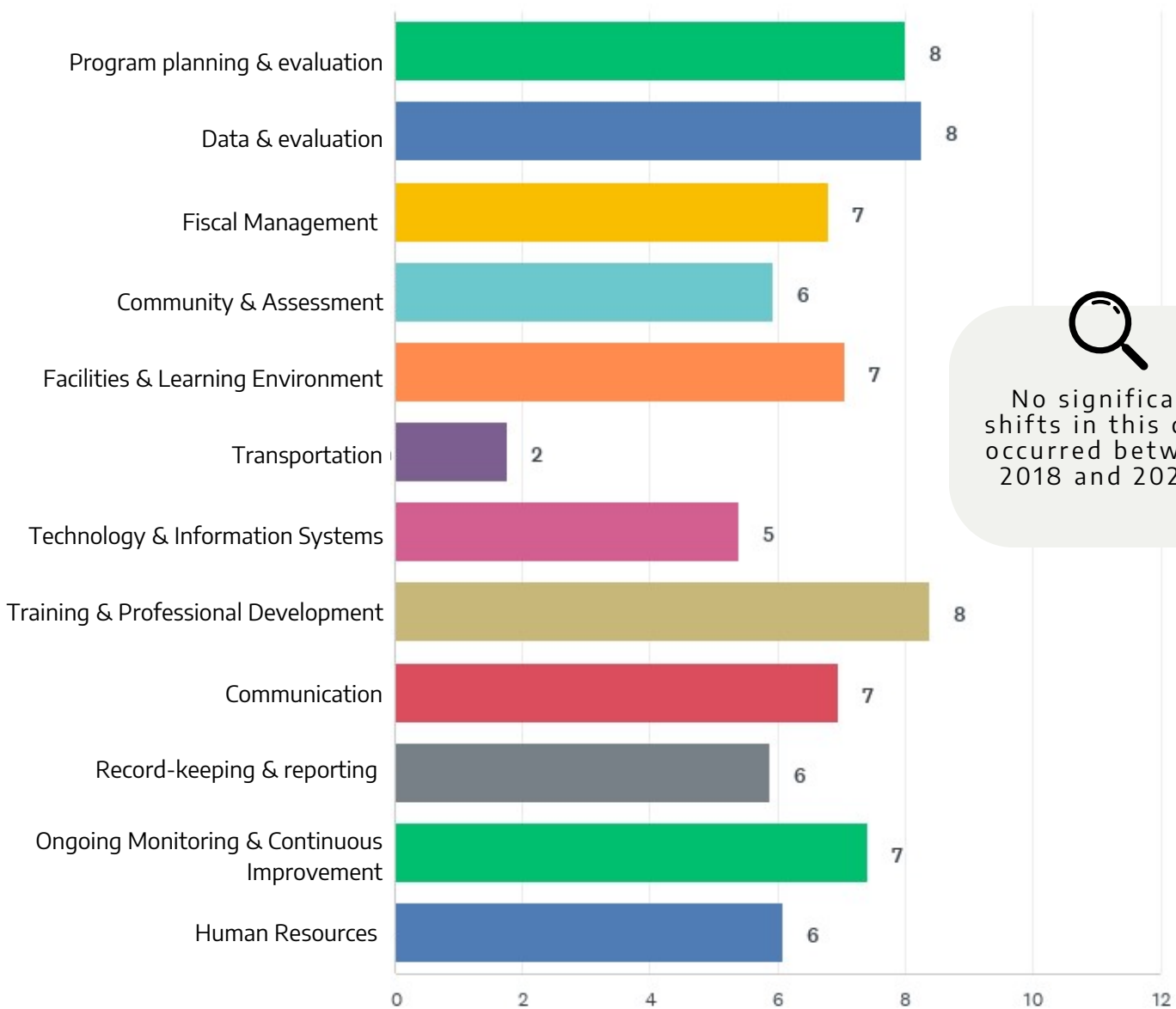
## Interactive Learning is Paramount

Pandemic closures disrupted the traditional in-person professional development models in exchange for web-based live and on-demand learning. While some demand remains for virtual offerings, survey data indicates that there is a high desire to return to in-person, interactive learning modalities. This is consistent with 2018 data, which prioritized in-person learning opportunities significantly above virtual.

## SUMMARY RESULTS

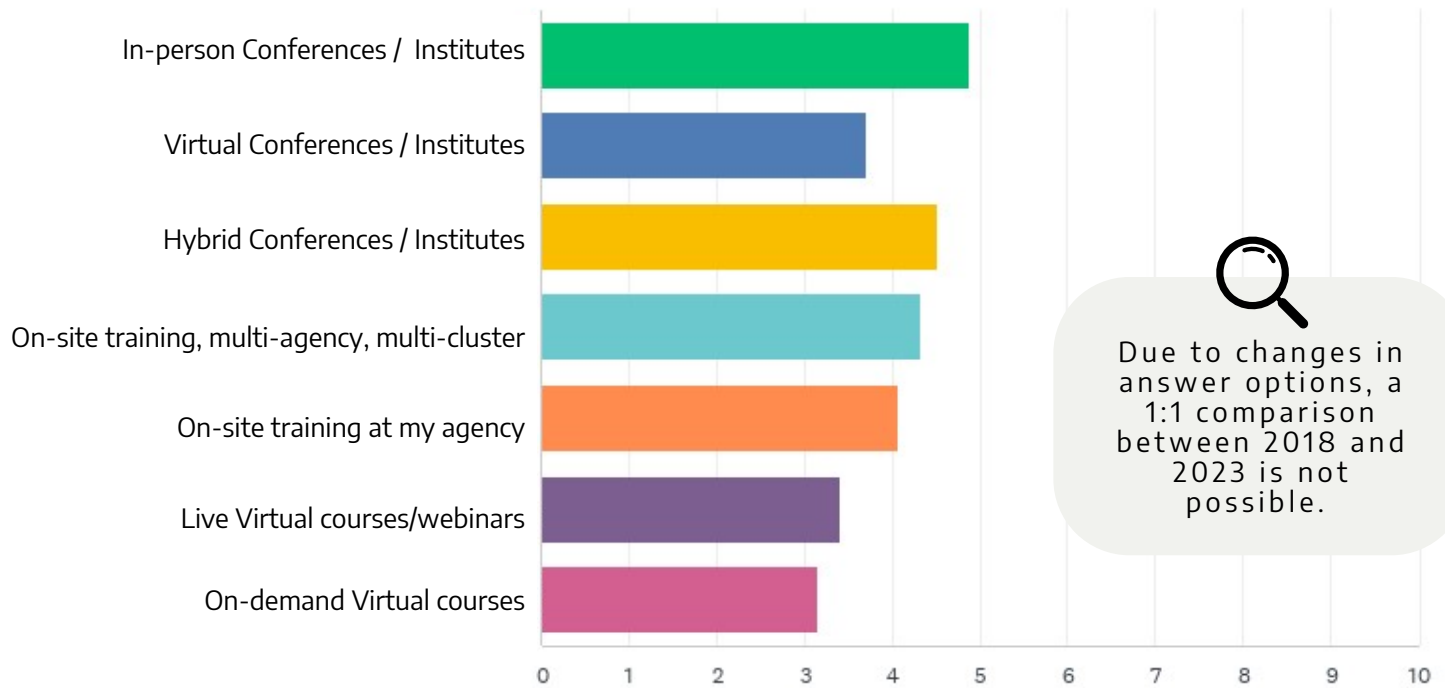
Data was compared to 2018 survey responses; shifts of more than three places are noted, less than three is considered insignificant.

**Question #1: Below are the 12 dimensions of the Head Start Management Systems Wheel. Please rank these professional development needs in the order of importance for your agency in the next year.**



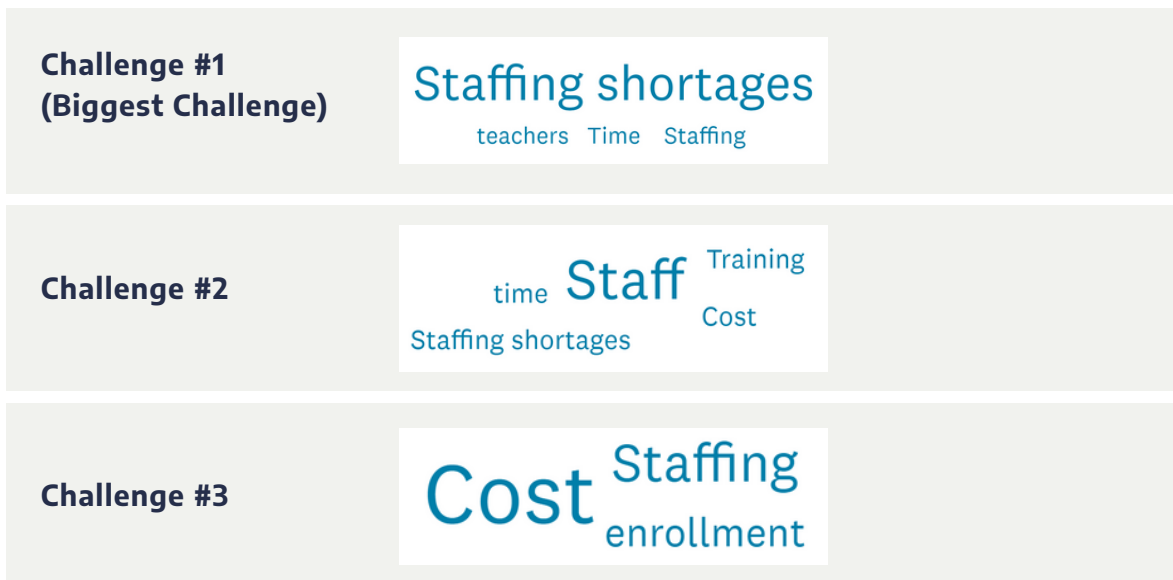
**Question #2: What type of professional development delivery modes should our associations develop further, that you or your staff would participate in? Rank in order of preference.**

Weighted averages are shown:

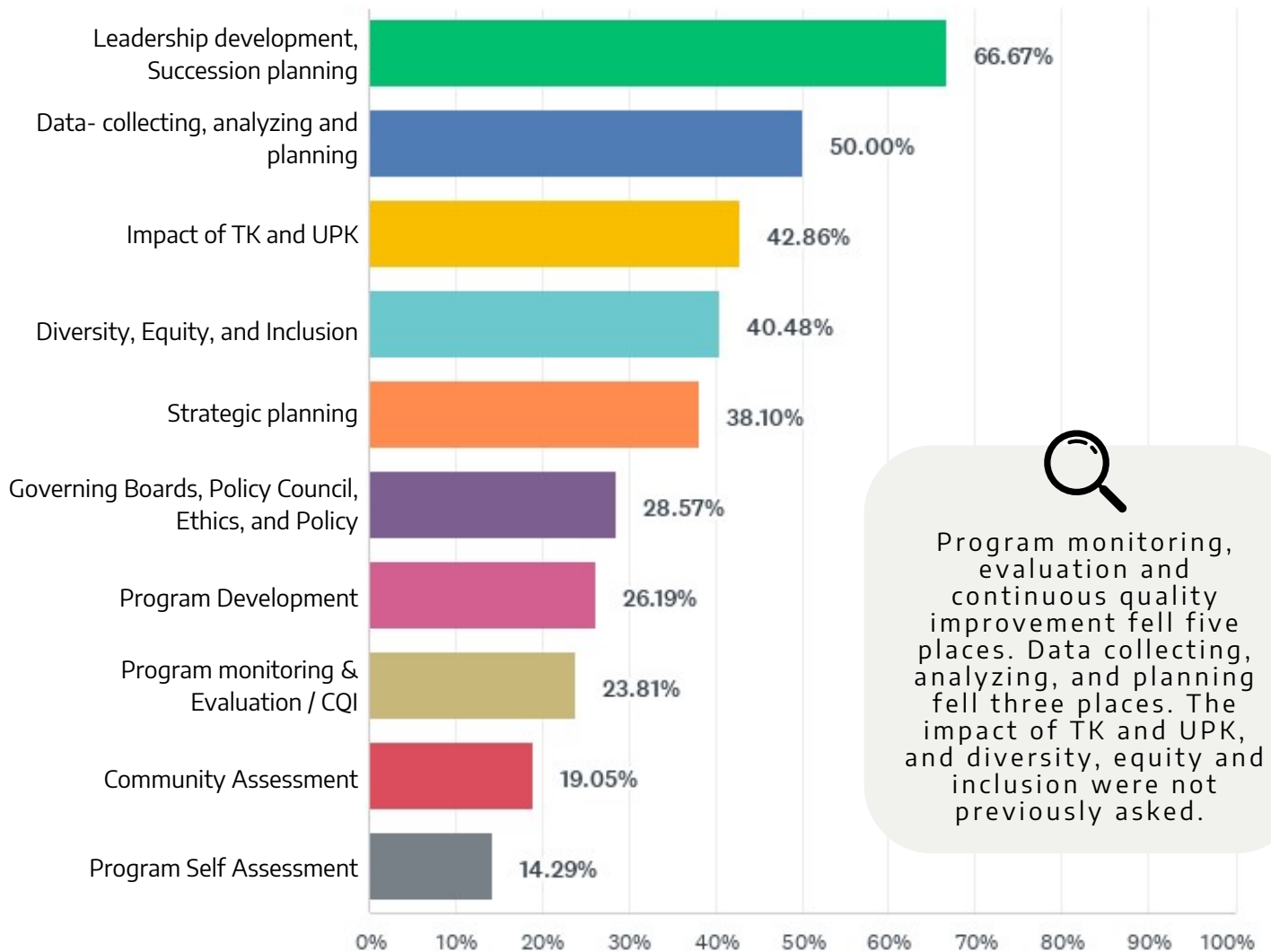


**Question #3: What are the biggest professional development challenges in your agency right now?**

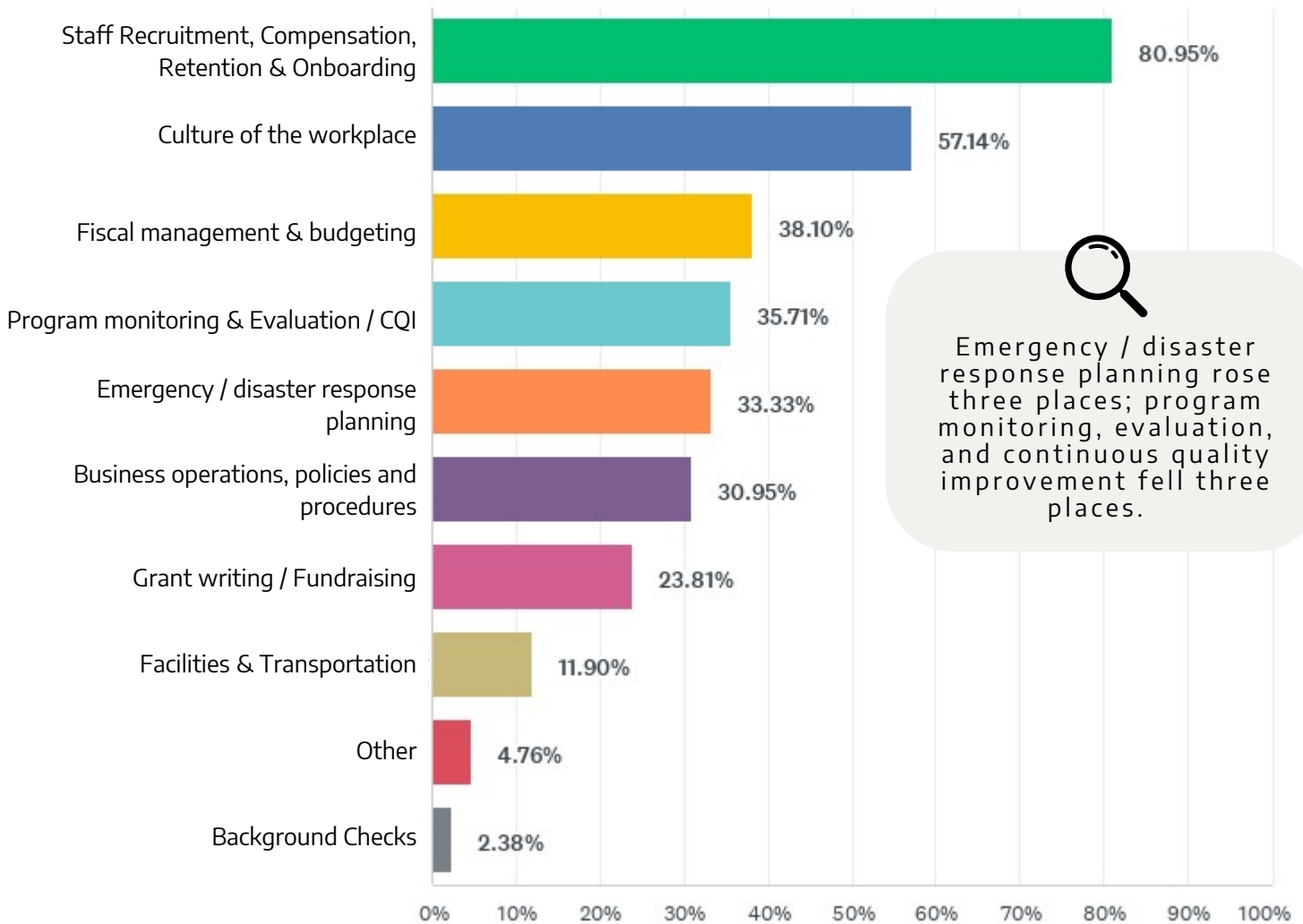
Answers are displayed below in word clouds



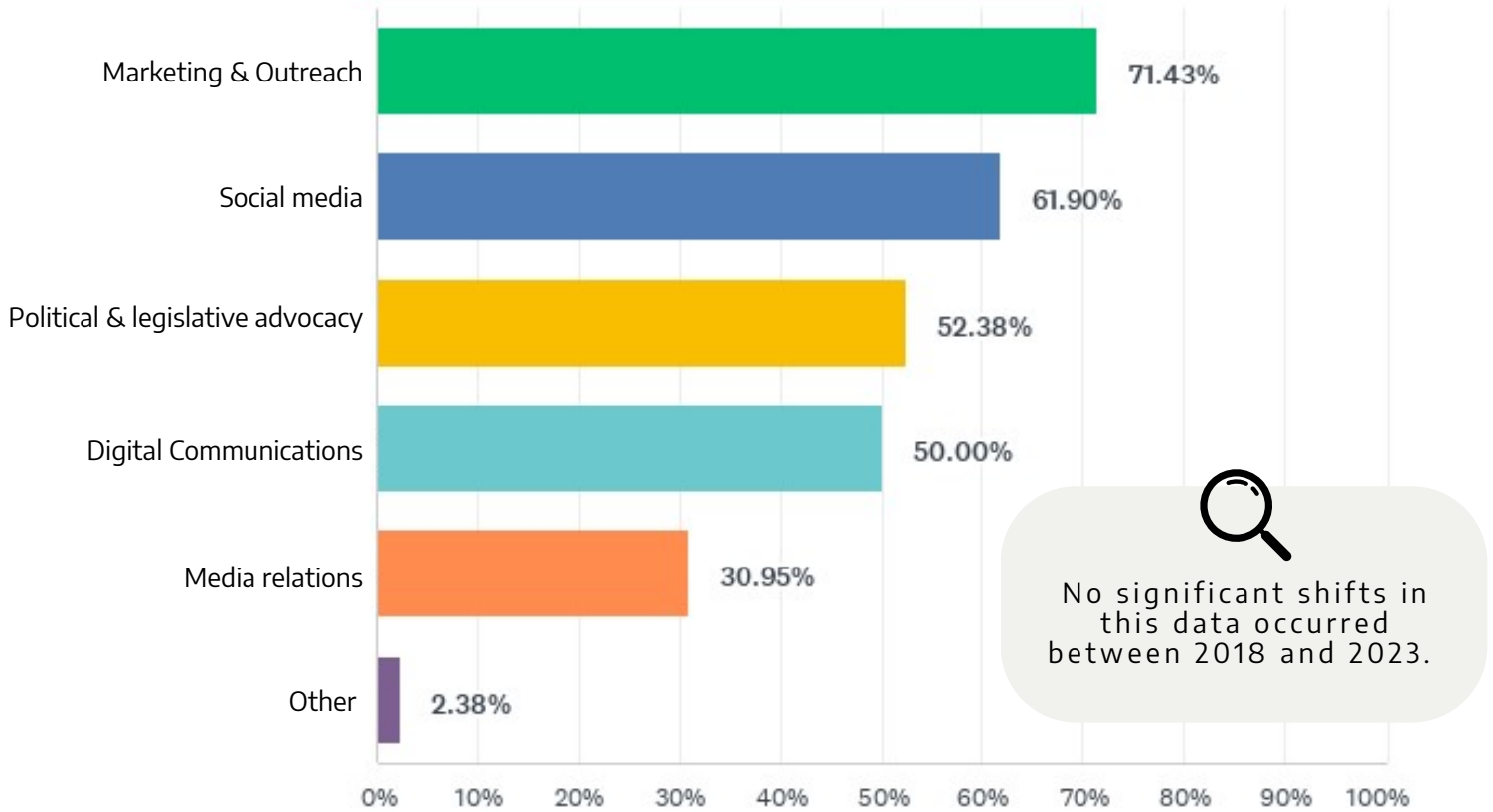
## Question #4: Governance and Leadership: What training is most needed in the next year?



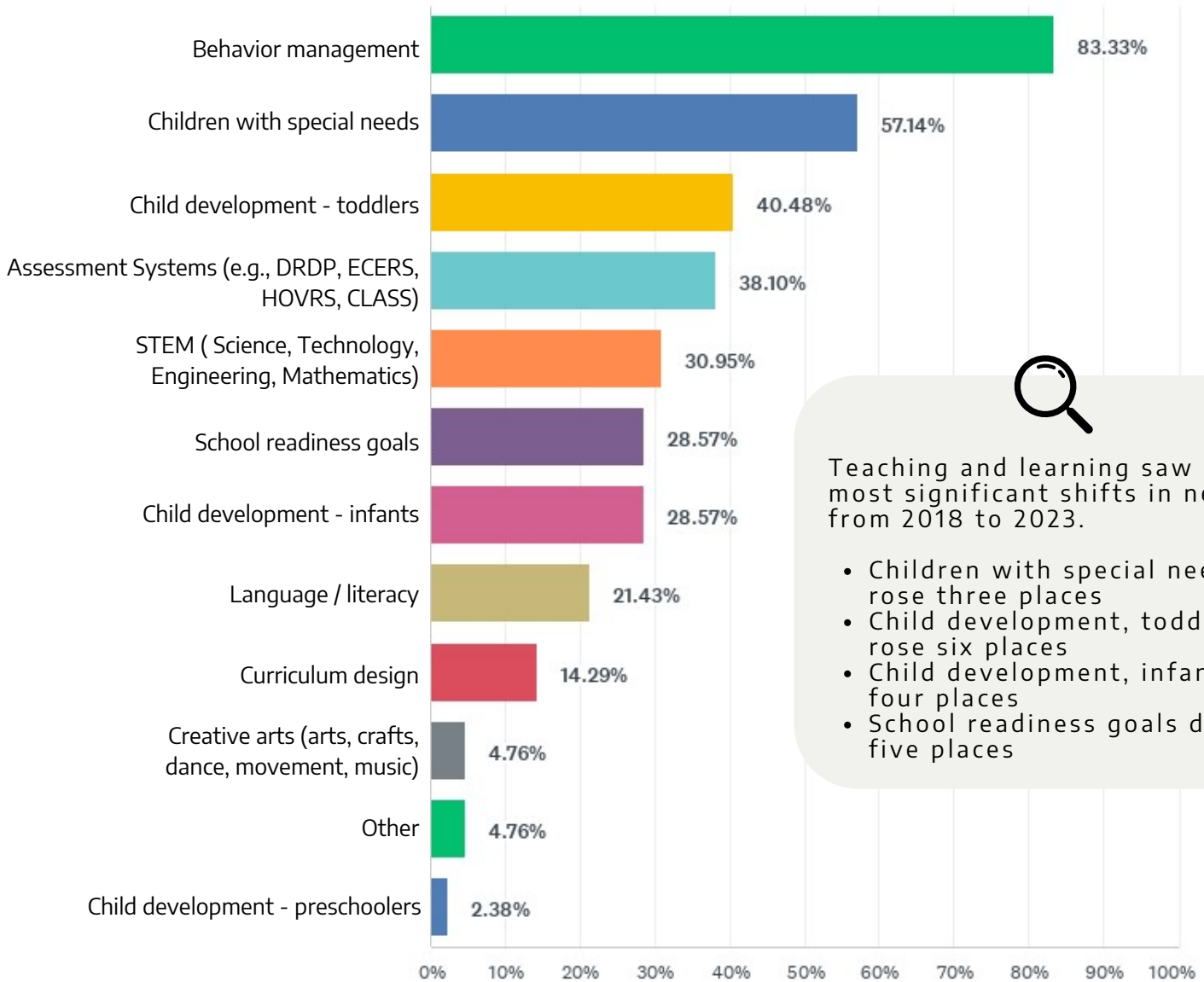
## Question #5: Operations: What training is most needed in the next year?



## Question #6: External Affairs: What training is most needed in the next year?



## Question #7: Teaching and Learning: What training is most needed in the next year?

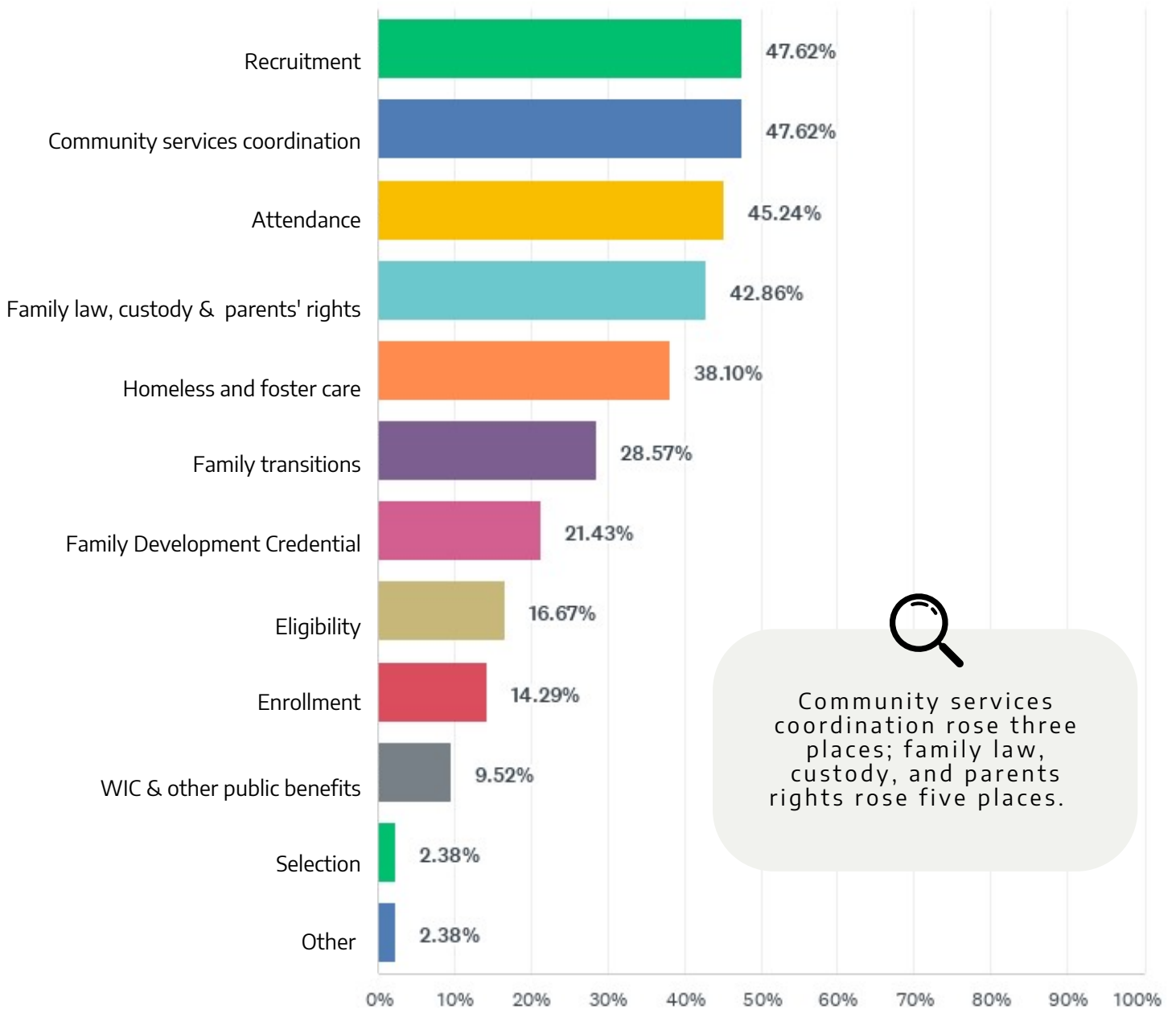


Teaching and learning saw the most significant shifts in needs from 2018 to 2023.

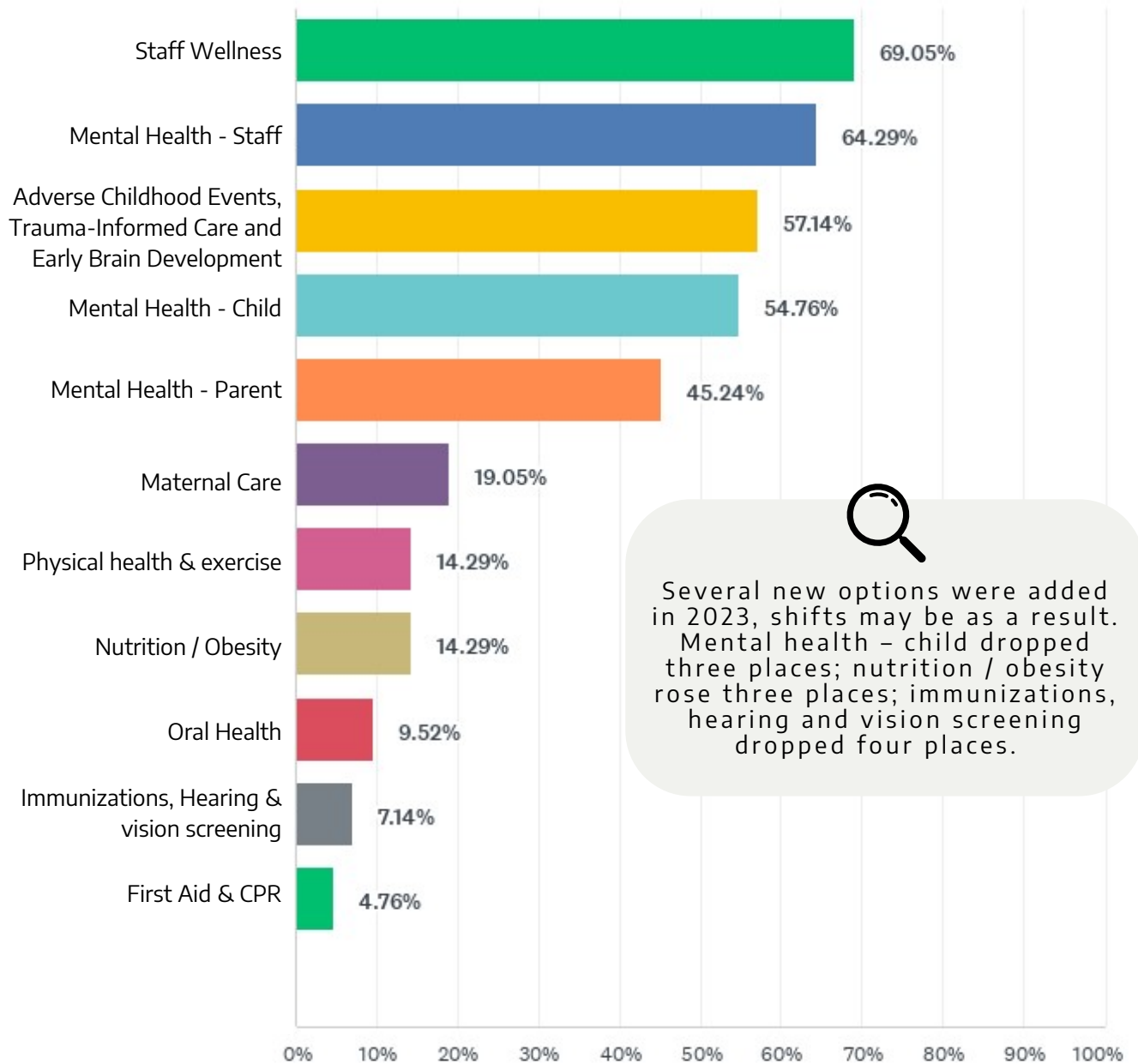
- Children with special needs rose three places
- Child development, toddlers rose six places
- Child development, infants rose four places
- School readiness goals dropped five places



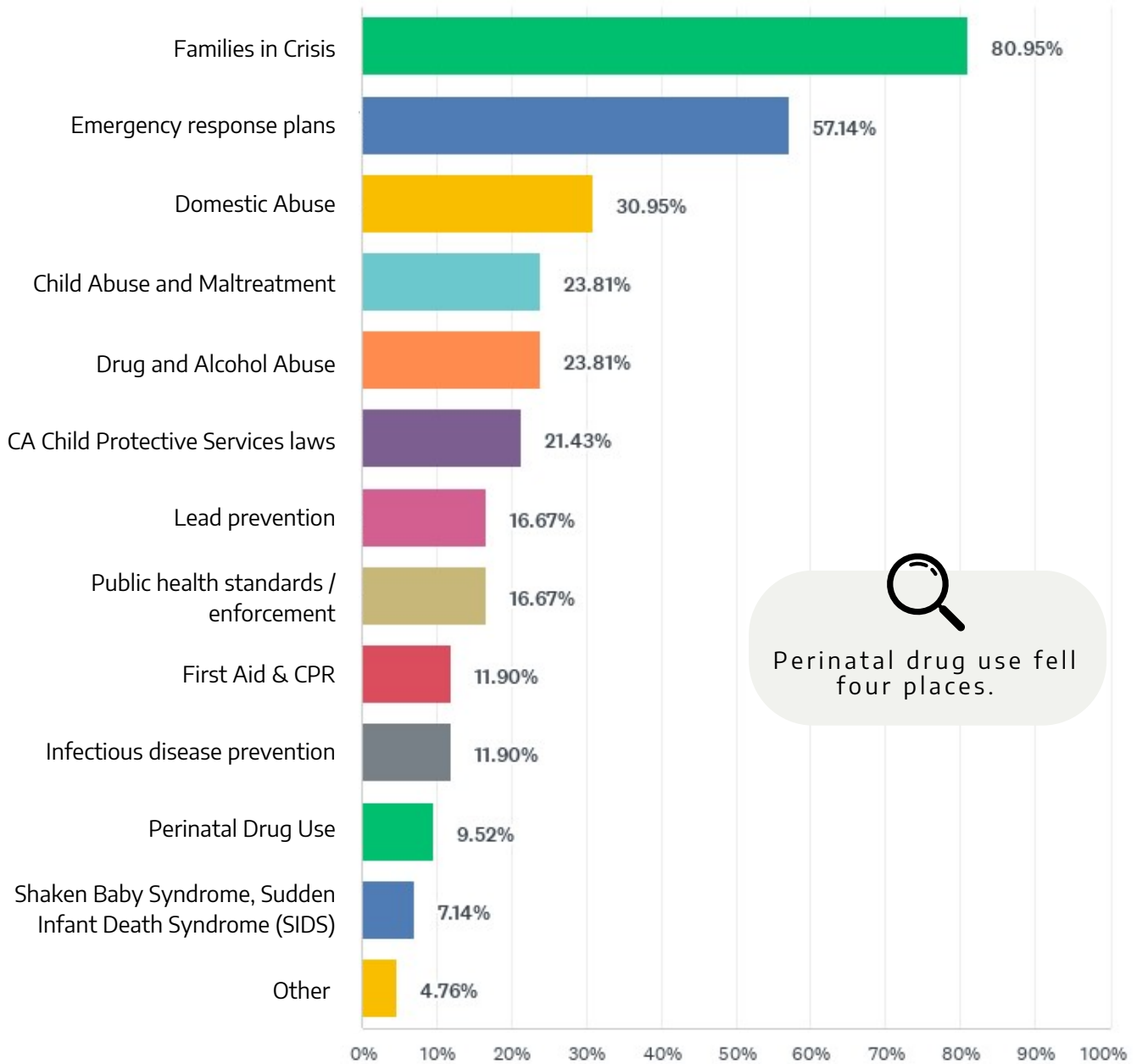
## Question #8: Social Services: What training is most needed in the next year?



## Question #9: Health: What training is most needed in the next year?



## Question #10: Safety: What training is most needed in the next year?



## Question #11: Family Engagement: What training is most needed in the next year?

