



Adult Protective Services: Higher Demand and Fewer Staff

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Executive Summary

Adult Protective Services (APS) is a state-mandated program intended to support individuals over 18 who cannot care for themselves. The guidelines are determined by State law but the City administers the program through the Human Resources Administration (HRA) within the Department of Social Services. Individuals receive services like cleaning and financial management through a referral process to HRA, which screens potential recipients through a multi-step process to determine eligibility.

There have been multiple indications that APS is struggling. After reports of an [increase in referrals and a growing rejection rate](#), the New York City Council Committee on Aging held a hearing in April 2025 on the impact of vacancies and the role of staffing in the eligibility determination process at APS. In October 2025, the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) published an [audit](#) of APS that found staffing shortages through October 2024 were leading to overworked caseworkers and underserved clients. IBO continues to add to public understanding of [APS](#) by presenting a multi-year analysis of staffing challenges for APS caseworkers. The goal of this report is to better understand the origins of these staffing challenges and how the program arrived at this point. This report builds on a series of previous IBO reports looking at [citywide staffing](#) and [specifically benefits processing](#).

Using City payroll data and program data from HRA, IBO found that trends uncovered by the OSC audit have only worsened:

-  Referrals fell during the pandemic but have since rebounded and surpassed pre-pandemic levels. In 2025, there were 14% more total referrals than the average from 2017 through 2019. At the same time, the share of all referrals found eligible by APS staff has fallen, from 20% in 2017 to just 10% in 2025.
-  Caseworkers in the APS work unit experienced a [wave of retirements in 2022](#), reflecting a citywide staffing trend. As the number of referrals has rebounded, there are fewer caseworkers to screen and assess them, leading to a higher per-caseworker workload.
-  HRA has hired new caseworkers to compensate for the surge in retirements. However, the agency has had difficulty retaining these new hires, with many leaving within one year of their start date.
-  High caseworker turnover has contributed to a decline in experience. In 2022, half of all caseworkers had 10 or more years of experience, but by the end of 2025, this had fallen to 29%.

Introduction

Adult Protective Services (APS) is a narrowly targeted program intended to support individuals over 18 who cannot care for themselves, do not have family or caregivers who are willing and/or able to assist them responsibly, and are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and/or other harm. The program was established in 1975 in Chapter 481 of the New York State Laws of 1975 as Protective Services for Adults and later renamed APS. It is a state-mandated program overseen by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) statewide. APS is run locally through the City’s Human Resources Administration (HRA). Like other programs in the City’s human services portfolio, APS has recently been challenged by two trends: 1) rebounding caseloads following a lull in applications during the pandemic and 2) an increase in staff exiting City service since 2022. Over the same period, rejection rates have substantially increased.

In response to an [increase in referrals and a growing rejection rate](#), the New York City Council Committee on Aging held a hearing in April 2025 on APS. According to HRA, the program is struggling with a simultaneous increase in referrals and decrease in staff levels, with 16% of positions vacant as of the hearing and higher caseloads for remaining staff. A subsequent [audit by the Office of the State Comptroller \(OSC\)](#) called the current combination of high caseloads and staffing challenges “a significant threat” to the ability of the program to serve clients. The audit covered referrals from April 2019 through August 2023 and staffing from April 2019 through October 2024.

Building on a series of previous reports looking at [citywide staffing](#) and [specifically benefits processing](#), IBO examines the composition of caseworkers within APS over a broader time period to better understand these staffing challenges. IBO does not examine the extent to which staff changes have contributed to the decline in accepted referrals, but instead how staff composition and turnover changed over time. Drawing on multiple data sources for City fiscal years 2017 through 2025, including the City’s payroll system (City Human Resource Management System), IBO finds that the APS program within HRA has faced significant challenges with employee retention. Although APS was able to hire after the citywide pandemic-era wave of staff exits, the program is now made up of a larger share of new employees who are not staying more than a year, leading to high turnover, decreased experience, and higher workloads for remaining staff compared with the pre-pandemic period.

Background

APS is authorized under [New York State law](#) to serve individuals, regardless of their financial assets, if they meet the following specific criteria:

1. Are unable to meet their essential needs for food, shelter, clothing, or medical care; secure entitlements due to them or protect themselves from physical, sexual or emotional abuse; active, passive, or self-neglect or financial exploitation; and
2. Require protection from actual or threatened harm due to any of that listed above, caused by the action or inaction of either themselves or other individuals; and
3. Have no one available who is willing and able to assist them responsibly.

According to HRA, from April 2019 through August 2023, the most common risk identified in referrals was the need for assistance in daily living (24%). Referrals can include more than one type of risk. Other common categories of risk in this same time frame included the inability to manage finances (13%), self-neglect (12%), financial exploitation (8%), and abuse (8%). According to OSC, in this same period, 25% of referrals listed mental illness as the reason for impairment.

While OCFS oversees APS statewide, HRA administers the program within New York City. HRA also coordinates with the Department for the Aging (NYC Aging) on service delivery for older adults, though clients are served primarily by APS.¹ APS is also part of the City's [Cabinet for Older New Yorkers](#), which focuses on improving service delivery for aging New Yorkers. Based on a [previous IBO report](#), about half of APS clients in 2018 were adults over 65, but many were younger: 9% were 18-46 and 41% were 46-65.

Once APS determines individuals are eligible, they can receive a range of services depending on their specific needs, including assistance with applications for rental assistance; Medicaid, and home care; referrals to medical services or legal services (to address allegations of neglect); financial management for social security benefits; and other supports like heavy-duty cleaning services.² Service delivery is a combination of direct service delivery or collaboration with community-based organizations to provide services.

APS is distinct from guardianship under the New York State Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Guardianship under OPWDD is intended for a different population and requires a different screening process than that described below. APS may help individuals petition housing court for a [Guardian Ad Litem](#) (to help prevent eviction). In cases where APS is unable to address the individual's risk, it may petition the Supreme Court for the appointment of a Community Guardian under Article 81 Guardianship proceedings.³

Individuals access APS through referrals to HRA. Referrals can be anonymous and come from many potential sources and by phone, online, or fax; individuals may also refer themselves. There are also two referral pathways specific to eviction at different points in the eviction process. Individuals facing eviction may be referred to APS by housing courts, advocates, landlords, or any other involved party, since being eligible for APS may [qualify](#) an individual for a CityFHEPS housing voucher. ([CityFHEPS](#) is a City-funded housing voucher available to eligible individuals who meet income and other criteria related to homelessness.) If the court issues an eviction warrant and the marshal sent to execute that warrant finds an individual potentially eligible for APS, they must notify the City's Department of Investigation, which then contacts HRA to begin the referral process.

All referrals go through two stages to determine eligibility. First, caseworkers at the APS Central Intake Unit within HRA make an initial eligibility determination (called a "presumptive eligibility determination"), which is then reviewed and finalized by a supervisor. If a referral passes this stage, the Central Intake Unit transfers it to one of seven HRA field offices or four APS vendor agencies, whose caseworkers will then conduct a home visit and complete a comprehensive assessment to make a final determination. If a referral passes this second stage, it will become a new case accepted into care and will be continually reassessed in

regular in-person interactions (“monthly reassessments”). According to HRA, APS also has a smaller number of social workers relative to caseworkers, but they do not make eligibility determinations. Final determinations are made by caseworkers based on their home visits and assessments and then finalized by supervisors. (Assessments made by vendor caseworkers are finalized by vendor supervisors.) According to State law, the City has 60 days from initial referral to determine eligibility.

HRA determines eligibility based on the state-mandated guidelines listed above. HRA conducts a home visit to complete eligibility determinations within 3 business days, or [within 24 hours](#) in emergencies. Referrals may be ineligible for multiple reasons, and the City publishes data on [denials](#). According to HRA, the most common reasons for rejection in 2025 were:

1. APS determined that the referred individual retained decision-making capacity (47%),
2. APS was unable to locate the individual (27%), and
3. APS determined that the individual was not at risk in the safety of their own home (14%).⁴

At a City Council hearing in April 2025, APS staff [testified](#) that only 5% of referrals were found eligible from January 2025 through March 2025, which it attributed to staff vacancies and increased educational outreach leading to more referrals that did not meet program requirements. Advocates testified that staffing could also impact the eligibility determination process itself. For example, newer staff may be less familiar with eligibility guidelines. Individuals may also face challenges contacting a caseworker after an attempted initial home visit if the caseworker has left and no longer has a working number, or their voicemail is full due to a high caseload, leading to rejections because the client is “unable to be located.” The OSC audit also documented multiple instances where referral decisions varied significantly by caseworker.

Increase in Referrals, Decrease in Eligibility

The demand for new APS services decreased during the pandemic and has since rebounded. The number of total referrals in 2021 dropped by 37% from the annual pre-pandemic average from 2017 through 2019 (approximately 18,700 vs. 27,900 total referrals) and has been steadily increasing since 2022. In 2024, the number of total referrals increased by 25% compared with the previous year, and then increased another 15% in 2025. Notably, the total number of referrals in 2025 surpassed pre-pandemic levels (14% higher than the pre-pandemic average from 2017 through 2019).

To look at how many referrals were found eligible, IBO considered both the total number of referrals and the total number of referrals that made it to the assessment stage of the eligibility process. By either metric, IBO found that the acceptance rate is lower.

Breaking down the eligibility process, the City is getting more APS referrals, and a higher share of these referrals are passing the presumptive eligibility screening. This results in more referrals that must be assessed with a home visit. Figures 1 and 2 show these trends over time, focusing on all referrals and then specifically how referrals compare with acceptance rates. In the pre-pandemic period, fewer referrals made it to the assessment stage but a larger

FIGURE 1

Trends in Adult Protective Services, 2017-2025

Fiscal Year	Total Referrals	Referrals Rejected at Initial Screening	Assessed Referrals	New Cases Accepted into Care	Referrals Passing Initial Screening (Percent)	Acceptance Rate - All Referrals (Percent)	Acceptance Rate - Assessed Referrals Only (Percent)
2017	27,900	4,800	22,200	5,600	83%	20%	25%
2018	30,300	4,400	25,500	5,200	85%	17%	20%
2019	31,000	3,400	27,400	4,700	89%	15%	17%
2020	25,000	2,500	22,700	3,900	90%	16%	17%
2021	18,700	2,000	16,700	2,700	89%	14%	16%
2022	19,400	2,500	16,900	2,800	87%	14%	17%
2023	23,500	2,100	20,600	3,300	91%	14%	16%
2024	29,400	2,700	26,500	3,100	91%	11%	12%
2025	33,900	3,200	29,900	3,300	91%	10%	11%

SOURCE: Human Resource Administration

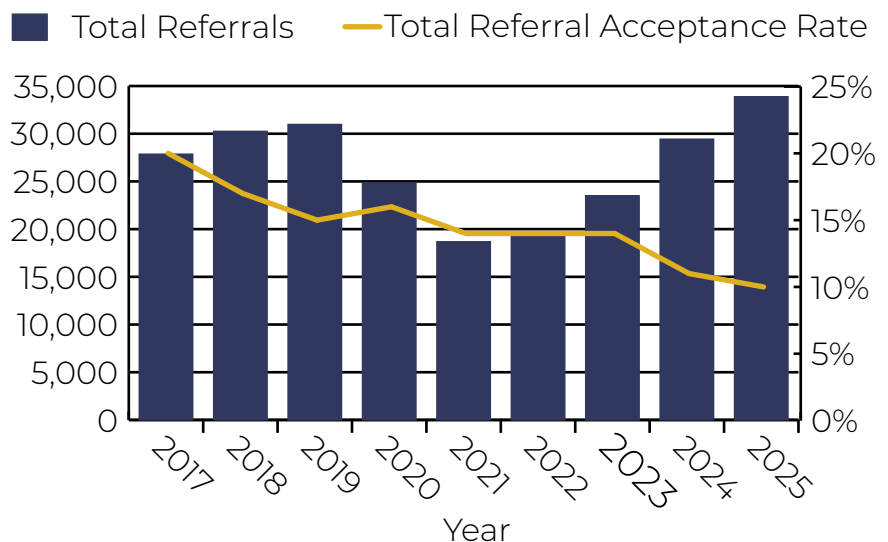
NOTES: All values rounded to the nearest hundred. The sum of assessed referrals and referrals rejected at initial screening does not always equal the total number of referrals each fiscal year due to end-of-year timing. Referrals received late in the fiscal year will be assessed in the following year, and the assessment and potential placement in care will be counted in this next year.

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share of those referrals that did make it to this second stage were found eligible. In the last three years, more referrals passed the initial stage, but fewer of these referrals were ultimately found eligible. Although this could indicate that there are more referrals that are a mismatch for the program, there are also fewer new cases accepted into care in recent years compared with pre-pandemic years. In 2025, there were 35% fewer new cases accepted into care compared with the pre-pandemic average from 2017

FIGURE 2

Total Referrals and Acceptance Rates, 2017-2025



SOURCE: New York City Human Resources Administration

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through 2019 (approximately 3,300 cases vs. 5,100 cases). The City is also taking longer to make final decisions, with the [share of decisions made within 60 days](#) falling from 99% in 2022 to 95% in 2025.

Workforce Volatility

Caseworkers and Referrals

In addition to these changes in referrals, there has also been substantial change in the composition of APS staff, particularly regarding “caseworkers,” the title tasked with determining referral eligibility.

From 2020 through 2022, concurrent with a 22% decrease in total annual referrals (from 24,800 to 19,400), the number of caseworkers in APS decreased by 23% (from 242 to 187). Over the same period, the average acceptance rate of all referrals was 15%, approximately two percentage points lower than average from 2017 through 2019 (when the number of caseworkers ranged from 255 to 261).

As seen in Figure 3, from 2023 through 2025, the total number of referrals increased 44% (from 23,500 to 33,900) and the number of caseworkers in APS increased by 49% (from 166 to 247). In this span, APS averaged 133 referrals per City caseworker—more than the 115 referrals per City caseworker averaged from 2017 through 2019 (not including vendor caseworkers). At the same time, the acceptance rate for all referrals decreased to 10%, its lowest over the period examined.

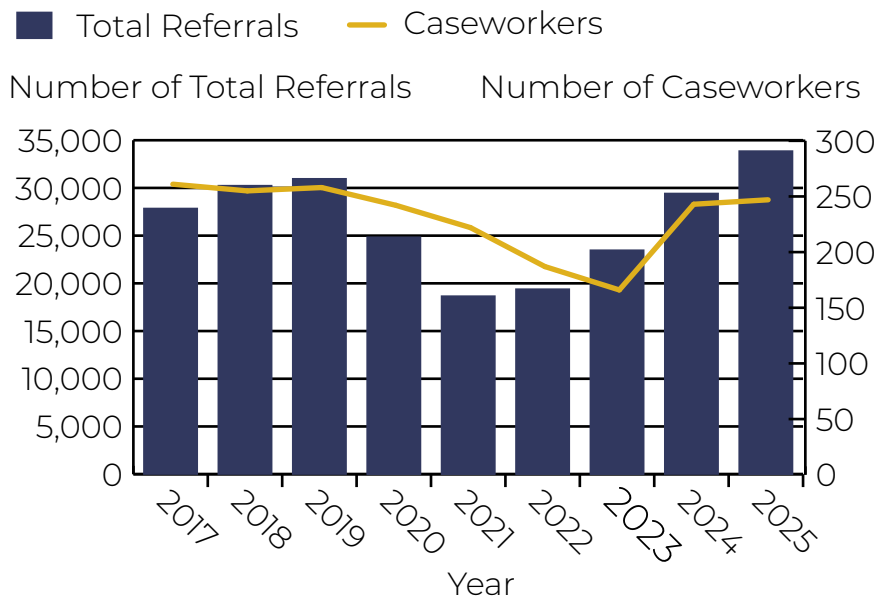
Turnover in Caseworkers

Variability in staffing during the study period can be partially attributed to elevated rates of retirements and resignations (see Figure 4). The resignation rate ticked up from 3% in 2019 to 5% in 2020, perhaps due to health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, as these positions required in-person work when large swaths of the City workforce were allowed to work remotely. Meanwhile, the retirement rate was relatively stable during that period but increased to 8% in 2022, a substantial increase from 2021’s 5% rate. This retirement surge was similar to a trend that occurred citywide, following collective bargaining agreements for the City’s unions resulting in substantial retroactive payments.

In the subsequent years, as retirement rates reverted to their previous level, resignations

FIGURE 3

Trend in Number of Total Referrals and Number of Caseworkers, 2017-2025



SOURCE: IBO analysis of City Human Resource Management System data and Human Resources Administration data
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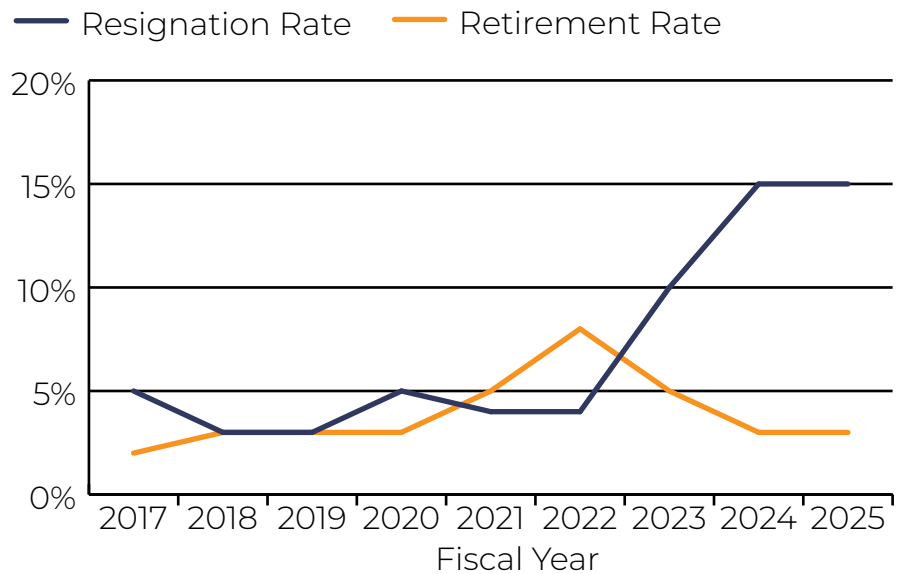
escalated. From 2022 through 2025, the rate of resignations among caseworkers increased more than four-fold, from 4% to 15%. In fact, 90 caseworkers have resigned since 2023—1.6 times more than the previous six years combined. To that end, the audit by OSC contained the results of a questionnaire that was sent by OSC to all active APS caseworkers in May of 2024, where respondents detailed some of the challenges that may have contributed to the increase in resignations. The most common issue mentioned was concern for personal safety, which 44% of respondents cited. Other prevalent reasons included travel (38%), lack of management support (17%), and insufficient training (15%).

New Caseworkers

Following the uptick in caseworker separation rates, the City hired more new caseworkers, resulting in a much larger share of new caseworkers than in prior years. IBO defines a new caseworker as someone with 1 year or less of experience in the title. In 2024 and 2025, APS’s roster contained 144 total new caseworkers—more than the preceding seven years combined (see Figure 5). Despite having more new staff, the total number of caseworkers in 2024 and 2025 remained below pre-pandemic levels. In 2024 and 2025, new caseworkers represented 39% and 20% of all caseworkers in

FIGURE 4

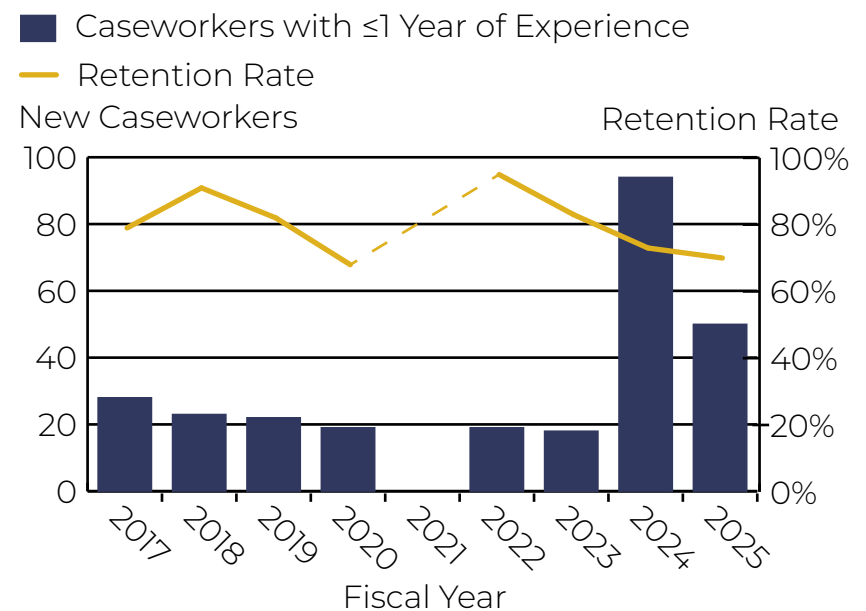
Caseworker Annual Rates of Retirement and Resignation, 2017-2025



SOURCE: IBO analysis of City Human Resource Management System data
New York City Independent Budget Office

FIGURE 5

Number of New Caseworkers and Their Retention Rate One Year Later, 2017-2025



SOURCE: IBO analysis of City Human Resource Management System data
NOTE: There were no new caseworkers in 2021
New York City Independent Budget Office

APS, respectively. These years starkly contrast with the seven years prior, where new caseworkers accounted for an average of 10% of all caseworkers in APS, peaking at 11% in 2023.

This influx in new caseworkers was accompanied by a decrease in new caseworker retention rates and during a time when, starting in 2024, HRA began using recruitment and retention bonuses to try to retain staff. Here, retention rate refers to the percentage of new caseworkers that remain in APS beyond the first fiscal year they are active in the title. While APS retained an average of 83% of new caseworkers from 2017 through 2023, this fell to 72% from 2024 through 2025.

OSC’s audit looked the potential implications of staffing challenges in its review of a sample of case files and identified multiple challenges related to case management. The most common of these were missing documentation, which impacts the ability for cases to be properly handled throughout APS’s internal processes, and failing to visit clients in the required timeframe, which delays assessments of client progress. OSC stated that these deficiencies could “likely be attributed to staffing shortages and turnover that resulted in inexperienced and potentially overworked caseworkers.”

In 2025, IBO found that retention was the lowest it has been over the examined period (70%) aside from 2020, which was the onset of the pandemic and involved far fewer new caseworkers (see Figure 5). Additionally, the median base salary of new caseworkers in 2025 was \$48,200—up 2% from 2024, but 6% lower than it had been from 2017 through 2020 after adjusting for inflation.⁵

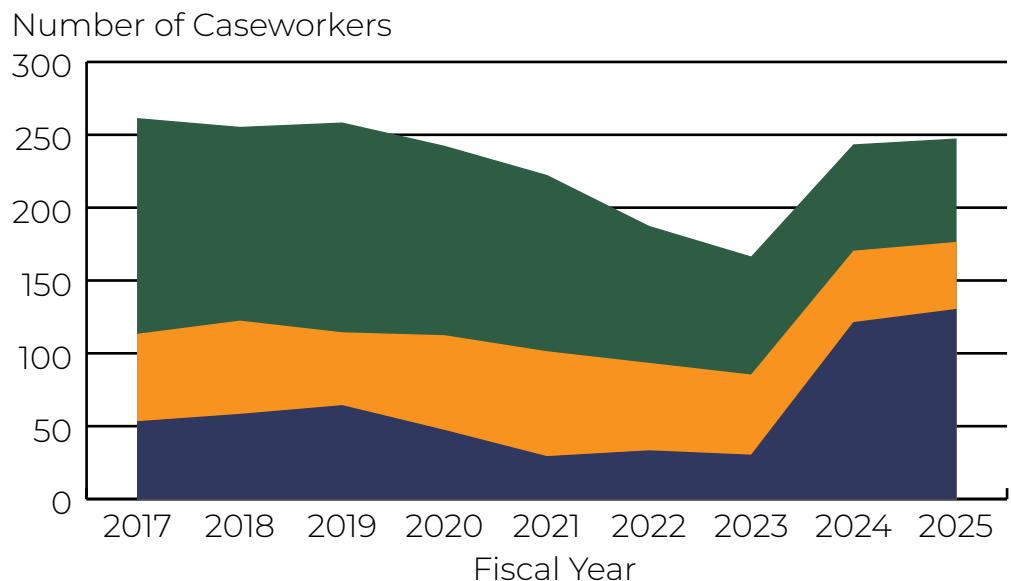
Workforce Experience Decreasing Over Time

This combination of hires, retirements, and resignations has changed the experience level of the caseworker workforce over time. From 2017 through 2022, more than half of caseworkers (54% on average) had more than 10 years of experience. Notably, the wave

FIGURE 6

Caseworker Experience Distribution, 2017-2025

0 to 3 years 3+ to 10 years 10+ years



SOURCE: IBO analysis of City Human Resource Management System data
New York City Independent Budget Office

of retirements in 2022 decreased the share caseworkers with experience in this range to a six-year low of 50%. Over the next few years, this share continued to fall, declining to 29% by 2025. Over this same time frame, the share of caseworkers with 3 or fewer years of experience increased almost three-fold, from 18% in 2022 to 53% in 2025.⁶ Figure 6 illustrates this shift in workforce composition, with each year showing the distribution of staff experience in that year.

In addition to the larger share of new caseworkers, there has been a noteworthy decrease in the percentage of caseworkers with between 3 and 10 years of experience. While these caseworkers accounted for 33% of all APS caseworkers in 2023—their highest share over the examined period—they represented just 19% of caseworkers in 2025. As this group shrinks and new caseworker turnover remains elevated, it will become harder for APS to build long-term staff. This may pose challenges related to training, supporting new caseworkers, and retaining institutional memory for general operational functions. OSC’s audit noted that, among the sample of APS case files it reviewed, “even though overall staffing levels have rebounded, [caseworkers’] actual capacity to protect vulnerable adults remains compromised due to the loss of institutional knowledge and overall lack of experience among staff.”

Conclusion

IBO’s analysis of long-term trends in APS staffing from fiscal years 2017 through 2025 shows the importance of looking not just at overall staffing levels, but also turnover of employees with varying levels of experience. A recent OSC audit of APS documented how increased staff turnover led to challenges in processing referrals. IBO’s report shows how turnover increased over time and continued into 2025.

APS experienced a wave in retirements in 2022, reflecting a citywide trend. Though the overall number of caseworkers is lower than it was pre-pandemic, APS staffing rebounded, albeit with a larger share of new staff than previous years. However, HRA is struggling to retain new caseworkers, with many of them leaving in less than one year and a current 12% vacancy rate for the position. When staff turn over at this rate, there are also functionally fewer staff each year when accounting for time onboarding, training, and then transitioning out. There are now fewer caseworkers at APS as referrals rise, leading to higher caseloads for remaining staff. Salary bands for new caseworkers are also low, especially considering these higher caseloads, and even lower than the salary was pre-pandemic in inflation-adjusted terms. Although HRA began using recruitment and retention bonuses, APS is still struggling to retain caseworkers.

Beyond new hires, APS is losing staff of all levels at higher rates in recent years. Challenges with retaining new hires will be exacerbated by the need to replace this churning workforce. Previous analysis on staffing trends has focused on [vacancies](#) and retirements, and APS staff testified about these two issues at City Council. However, this analysis demonstrates that retention issues are also important to understand staffing dynamics and may be a contributing factor to operational challenges.

Appendix: Methodology

To assess the roster details of Adult Protective Services (APS), IBO compiled data from the City Human Resources Management System, including information on the APS work units provided to IBO by the Human Resource Administration (HRA). IBO utilized *EC07 – Detail Title Roster* reports to assess APS’s roster as of the end of each fiscal year, incorporating employees on payroll at that point. Information on resignations and retirements was assessed via *AC03 – Separation Details* reports, including separations from the beginning to end of each fiscal year. Experience was calculated as the time between the end of each fiscal year and an employee’s Title Entry Date. Caseworker data pertains strictly to caseworkers within APS work units. Caseworkers on HRA’s payroll who are not in APS work units are not included in this analysis.

Endnotes

- 1 According to NYC Aging, once a client is referred to APS, they are first served by APS and Aging does not have authority to make decisions on behalf of that client. APS serves all adults, not just those over 60, and often covers needs beyond services provided by NYC Aging. APS is one of multiple programs that benefit older adults that are not run through NYC Aging; other examples include Medicare/Medicaid and Managed Long-Term Care.
- 2 For a full list of services, see [the Adult Protect Services brochure](#) for a publicly available list of services.
- 3 Guardianship for individuals who are 18 and older with intellectual or developmental disabilities and who cannot manage tasks related to day-to-day living or financial management is known as [17-A](#) because of the 17-A portion of the Surrogate’s Court Procedure Act. This form of guardianship gives complete decision-making power and requires a more intense screening process by two healthcare providers (physicians and/or licensed psychologists). APS, through the Office of Legal Affairs, can petition for [Article 81](#) guardianship, which is more limited and based on the specific needs of an individual. In Housing Court, individuals can also receive a [Guardian Ad Litem](#), which is focused only on preventing eviction.
- 4 For more on historical trends on referrals, assessments, and cases receiving care, see [previous IBO work on APS](#).
- 5 Dollars are expressed in real terms, adjusted by City fiscal year using the [Consumer Price Index for the New York-Newark-Jersey City area](#).
- 6 In Figure 6, each year shows the experience distribution based on staffing in that year. IBO chose 0-3 as an experience band to capture staff added beginning in 2023, after the pandemic and related staff changes. In 2020, the 0-3 cohort would be staff that began between 2017 and 2020. In 2025, the 0-3 group would be staff that began between 2023 and 2025.

IBO's mission is to enhance understanding of New York City's budget, public policy, and economy through independent analysis.

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