Home & community support workers fuel cost impact survey

October 2026

Background

Despite a temporary increase to mileage rates in April, home support workers are feeling the impact of rising fuel costs following the war in Iran. This survey seeked to quantify the impact on home support workers of these fuel increases.

Methodology

The survey was issued by E tū union and PSA union to its members in home support. The survey period was 20 October to 27 October, 2026, and a total of 921 responses were received.

The survey was self-selecting in respect of participation, however the sample size represents approximately 4 per cent of the estimated home and community support workforce, so remains a credible guide on the sentiment of home support workers right now.

Survey results

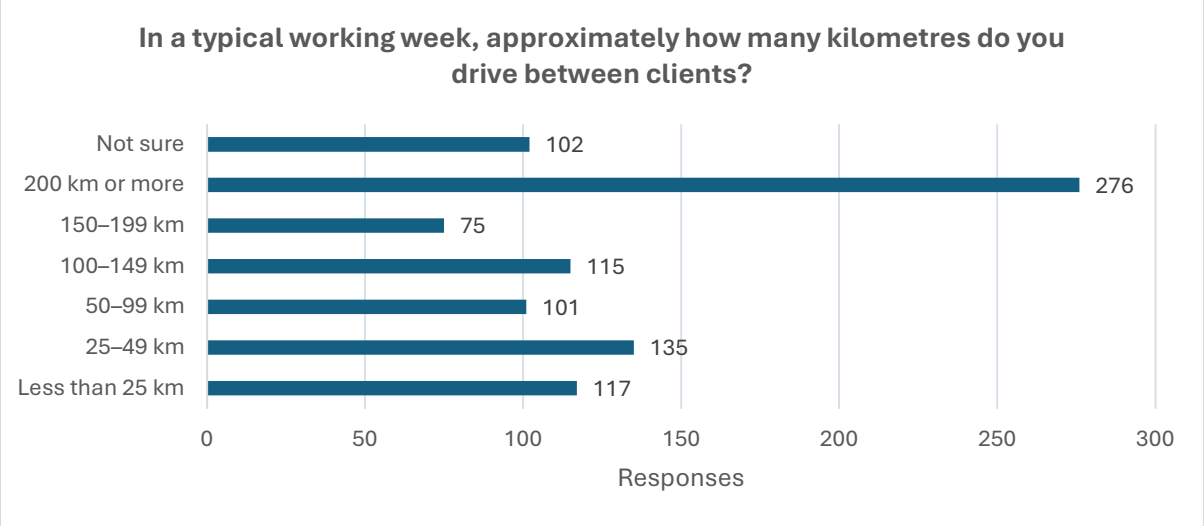
Survey questions and their results are presented below. This is followed by a selection of comments from home support workers on the impact of the fuel crisis for them and their family. We encourage you to read these compelling remarks from the frontline workforce of New Zealand's healthcare system.

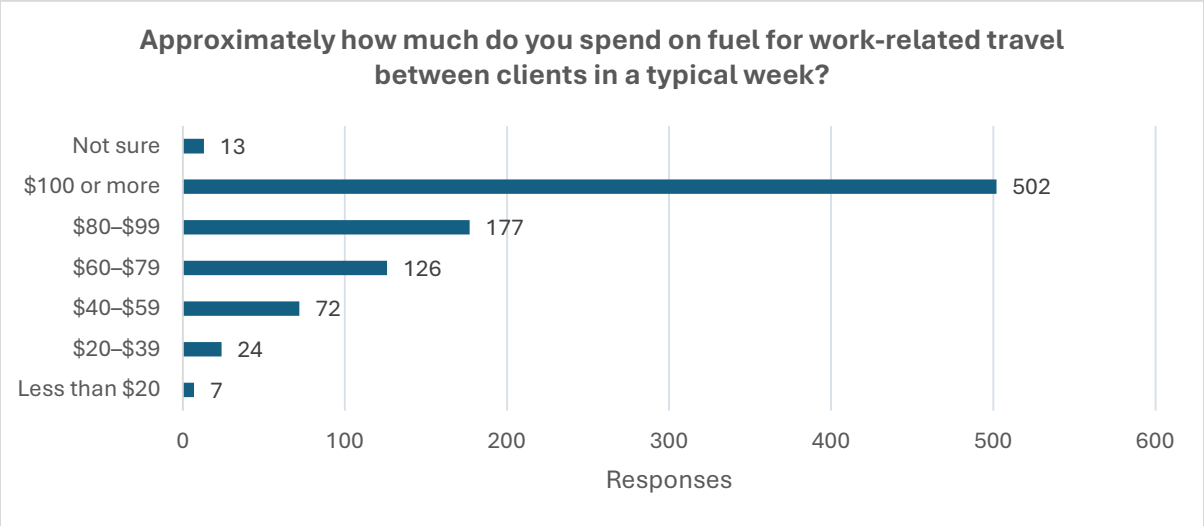
The information presented below is not new or a surprise to E tū and PSA. We have heard the feedback consistently, not only during the recent fuel crisis but in prior years also, about the inadequacy of payments for the use of private vehicles to deliver public health services. Only 4% of respondents to this survey either strongly agreed or agreed that the in-between travel payment adequately covered a fair share of the non-fuel costs of using a private vehicle for work such as maintenance, servicing, tires, WOF, registration and insurance.

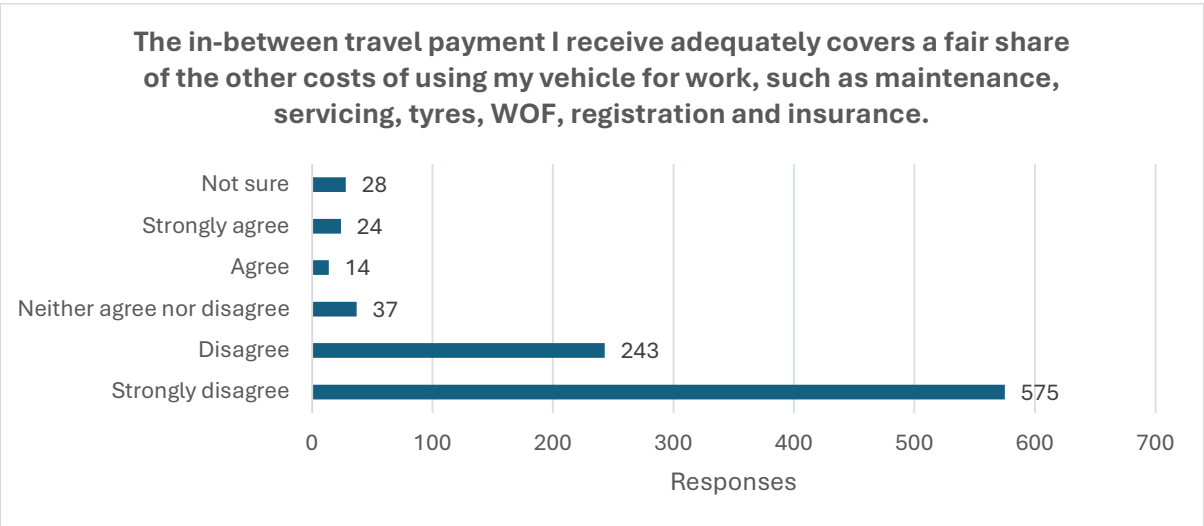
Of particular concern to E tū and PSA now is the impact on client care that is emerging in the responses to this survey.

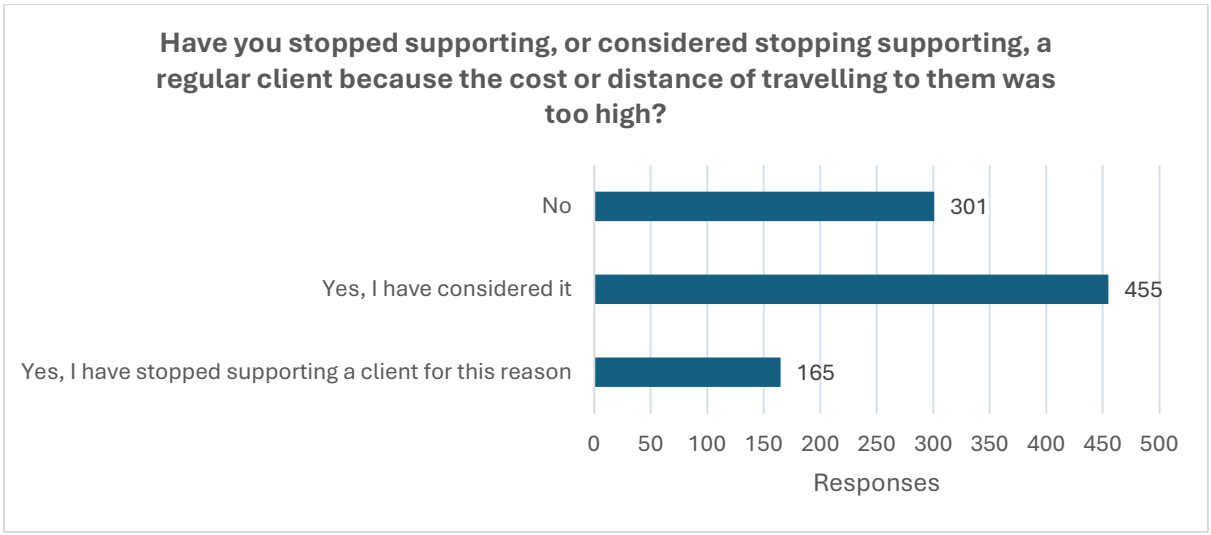
18% of respondents have stopped supporting a regular client because the cost or distance of travelling to them was too high.

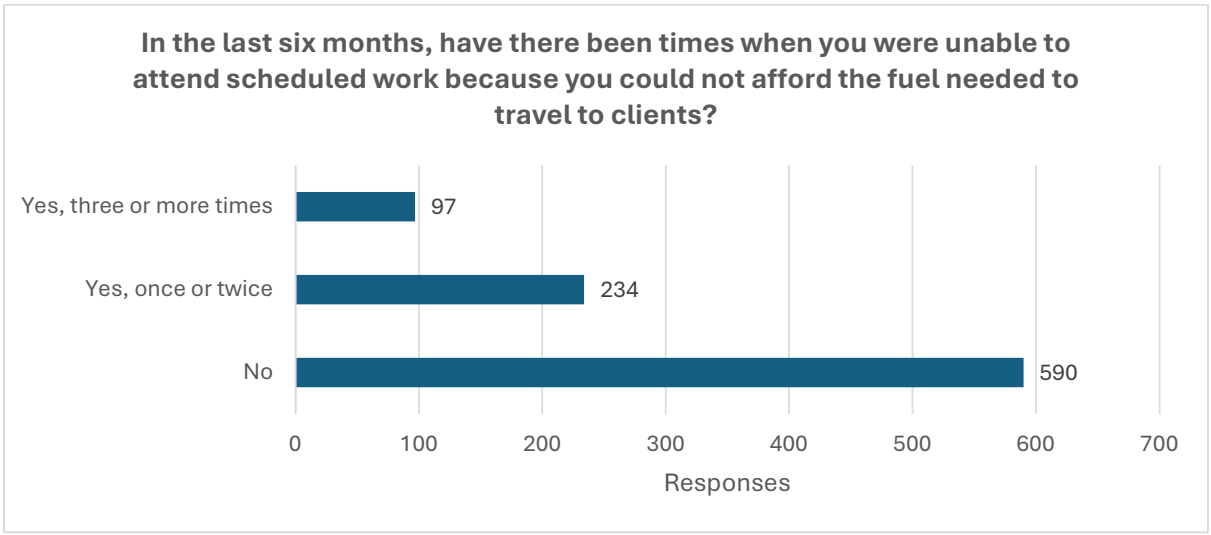
36% of respondents have had times in the last six months when they were unable to attend scheduled work because they could not afford the fuel needed to travel to clients; for 10% of respondents this was three times or more.

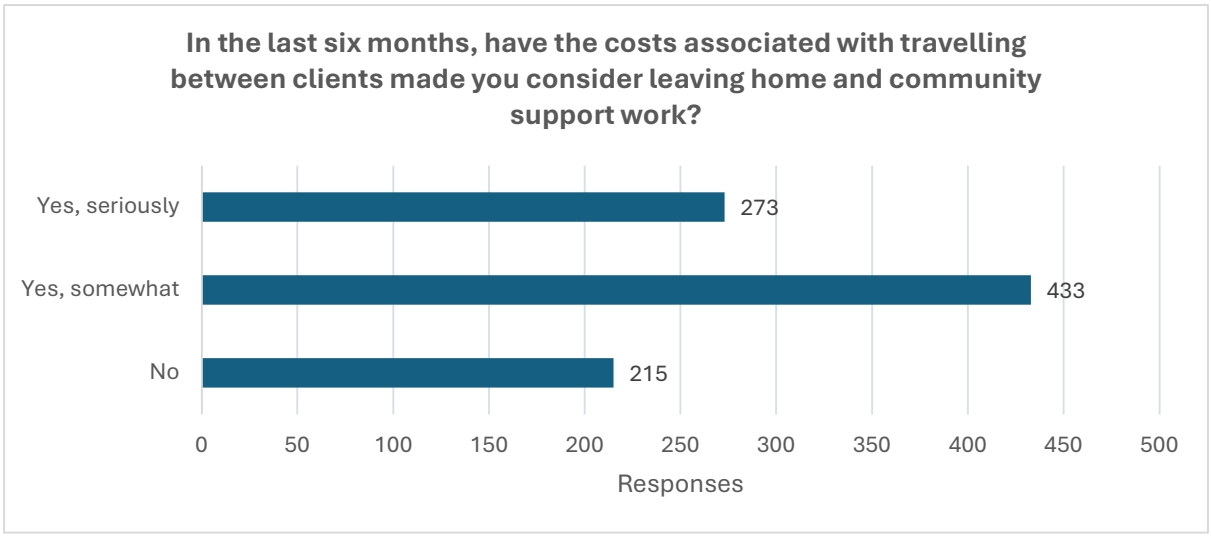

In a typical working week, approximately how many kilometres do you drive between clients?
Not sure
200 km or more
150–199 km
100–149 km
50–99 km
25–49 km
Less than 25 km
102
276
75
115
101
135
117
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
Responses

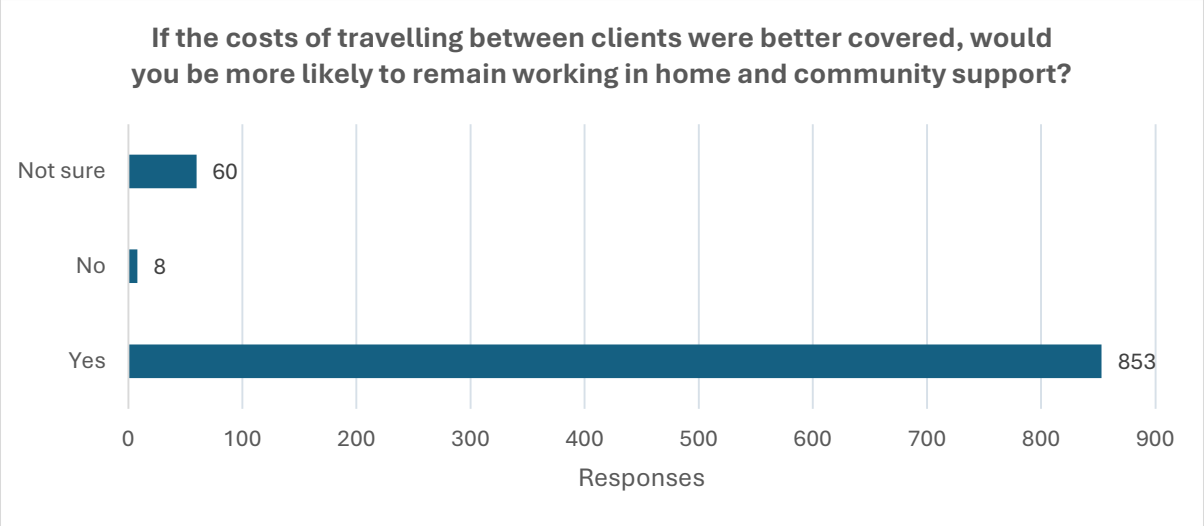

Approximately how much do you spend on fuel for work-related travel between clients in a typical week?
Not sure
$100 or more
$80–$99
$60–$79
$40–$59
$20–$39
Less than $20
13
502
177
126
72
24
7
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
Responses


The in-between travel payment I receive adequately covers a fair share of the other costs of using my vehicle for work, such as maintenance, servicing, tyres, WOF, registration and insurance.
Not sure
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
28
24
14
37
243
575
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
700
Responses


Have you stopped supporting, or considered stopping supporting, a regular client because the cost or distance of travelling to them was too high?
No
301
Yes, I have considered it
455
Yes, I have stopped supporting a client for this reason
165
0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450 500
Responses


In the last six months, have there been times when you were unable to attend scheduled work because you could not afford the fuel needed to travel to clients?
Yes, three or more times
97
Yes, once or twice
234
No
590
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700
Responses


In the last six months, have the costs associated with travelling between clients made you consider leaving home and community support work?
Yes, seriously
273
Yes, somewhat
433
No
215
0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450 500
Responses



Views from home support workers

We asked home support workers to describe in their own words the challenges they have faced due to increased travel costs this year. Here is a selection of their comments.

It seems I am subsidising the costs of working in community support.

I need 2 tyres in order to obtain my WoF, but cannot afford them.

Have had to decline clients as they are too far to travel due to petrol cost - such as 1 on other side of town from regular clients.

Had to take clients or days off due to not having enough petrol. Paying for the up keep of my vehicle or putting petrol in becomes a decision on what to do first.

Only take clients in the area.

With the increase of travel costs I have both had to stop going to clients and turn down work as I cannot afford to travel long distances when the travel costs barely cover my fuel expenses. I spent $400 on petrol over the last 14 days and I have a $2000 car bill for a new cv and rotors and brakes as well as tyres which my travel costs do not pay for what so ever. We should have at least an amount we receive for this stuff as we use our own vehicles

It is getting a LOT harder to afford fuel with the increasing costs. We as a family can't go out and do things in weekends off etc, can't afford to visit my son who lives 2 hours away.

Not accepting relief clients due to fuel, especially,15 min, 30 min clients that are further away.

I have been paying my petrol from my savings money in order to reach and provide services to my clients on time and with accuracy. Which is affecting my savings a lot at this point I have bills and payments to be done and normal home expenses after that I have very less money left behind

I rarely visit my sick Mum now as my petrol is used up going to work!

I now ask about where clients are living before I commit and say yes to cover or except new clients. If they live to far out then I say No. Also I wont travel on rough roads because of the wear and tear on my vehicle.

Due to the high cost of fuel, I sold one of my diesel cars and started using a more economical one. The car used now is smaller and not that comfortable and it cannot go somewhere where we used to be able to go with gravel roads.

I have stopped supporting clients in some areas because of the traffic and the distance which significantly exceeds what I receive in travel reimbursements. Because the in-between travel payments don't cover these rising fuel costs, let alone basic wear and tear, tyres, and vehicle maintenance. I am effectively subsidising my work travel out of my own pocket. This financial strain directly impacts my personal household budget and makes taking on widespread or last-minute client visits increasingly difficult

I always check to see how far away any new or reliving clients live and whether I would get paid travel and time $ for my time, if its between 8-14km then I think twice about accepting it as the base fee we get isn't enough to cover the trip and therefore not worth my time and travel costs. I also check my roster to make sure I am not running backwards and forwards unnecessarily.

Rising petrol prices frequently, almost weekly is a challenge, but do like my job and clients I support. Have been working for home support north for 16 years and thinking, is it worthwhile anymore. Don't want to be another number on the unemployment benefit.

It cost a lot for fuel, instead for grocery I used some of our budget for the petrol. Too many bills to pay, nothing left or hard to save this time

Asking my partner for a small loan to get fuel as fortnightly pay is a bit hard especially making sure you have enough for at least 2 and a half weeks

I skimp on groceries so I have enough fuel in my car. I watch every cent I spend. I don't spend money on myself. I try get everything at the doctors so I don't have to go very often. I have extra problems with my vehicle because of how many k's I do.

Weekly fuel bill has almost doubled. Fitness warrant, insurances & maintenance all are paid out of my pocket. I had to replace 3 bald tyres yesterday which cost $550 & I only use my car 95% of the time for work but no compensation for that expense either

Stressing about if I can seriously afford to go to work due to increasing petrol prices. Considering looking for work closer to home.

We have other carers that refuse to go out of town, so that puts pressure on a few carers that go and are not reimbursed for travel costs at a realistic rate.

I have considered leaving if price keeps rising over the next 6-12 months.

I've said no to traveling longer distances to some relief clients.

Some days l have to pick one client only and use the bus , which is time consuming.

I turn down extra work due to not have enough petrol.

Used food money to cover petrol so gone without food.

I have stopped the gym as the extra petrol cost i need to be able to work. I now only use my car for work because I cant afford to put extra petrol /cost for my own life/hobbies. Its a crap situation to be in.

Credit card maxed.

Huge cost impacts family, have to cut back on groceries and kids sports as can't afford fees.