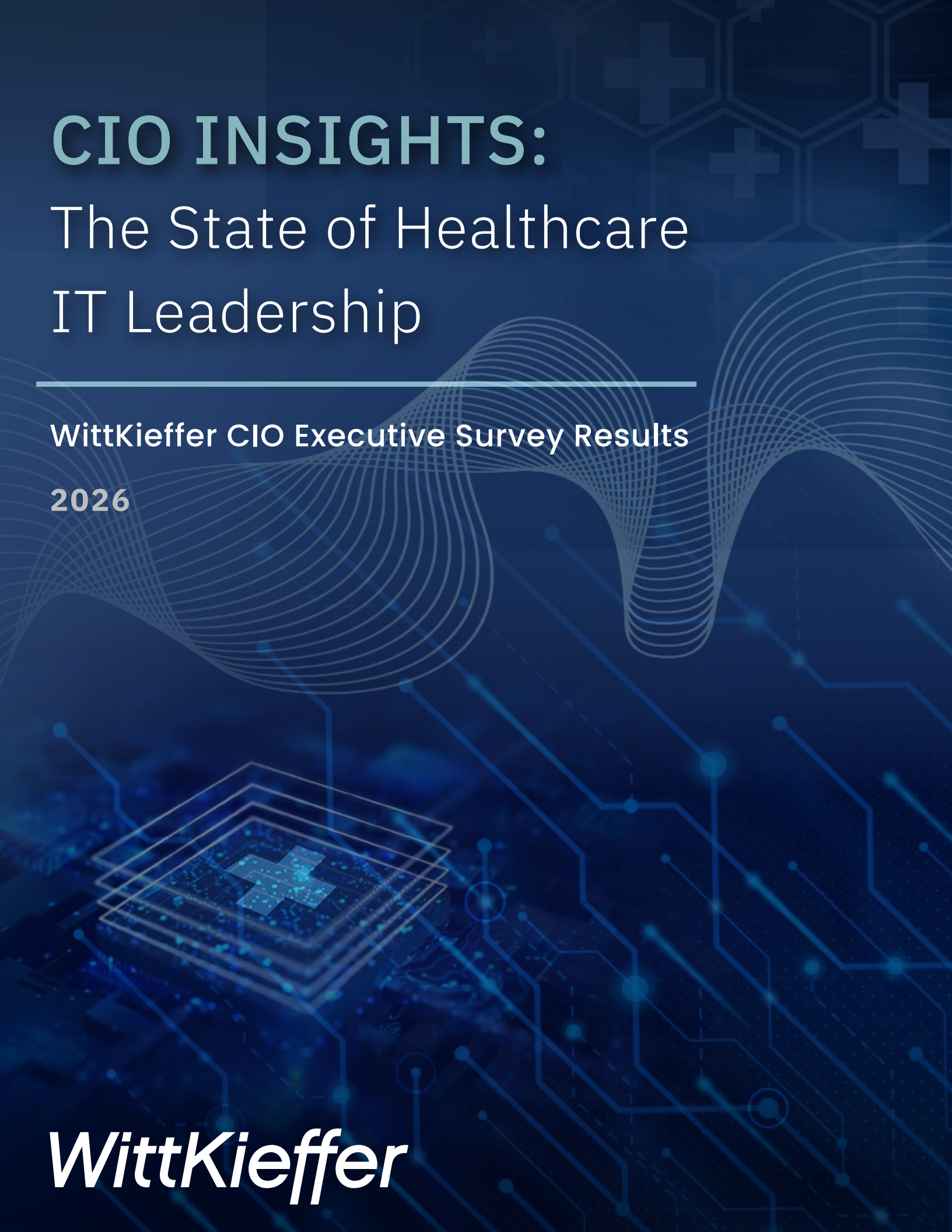
CIO INSIGHTS:

The State of Healthcare IT Leadership

WittKieffer CIO Executive Survey Results

2026



WittKieffer

Key Takeaways

- Healthcare CIOs have secured a stronger enterprise position just as their mandate has expanded to include enterprise-wide transformation.
- AI now sits at the center of the agenda, but CIOs must scale AI adoption alongside cybersecurity, modernization, digital transformation, and cost discipline.
- The result is a leadership role increasingly defined by orchestration: aligning the enterprise, proving value, redesigning talent, and creating capacity under constraint.
- As the CIO mandate expands, compensation increasingly reflects organizational scale and role complexity, while succession planning has not yet kept pace with the position's strategic importance.

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Executive Summary

ENTERPRISE LEADERSHIP, EXPANDING EXPECTATIONS

- CIOs have strong enterprise standing. 82% sit on the ELT, 56% report to the CEO, and 71% hold Chief, EVP, or SVP-level roles.
- That position supports a much broader mandate. More than eight in ten CIOs oversee AI, technology innovation, digital, data and analytics, and clinical informatics, alongside near-universal responsibility for infrastructure, applications, and cybersecurity.
- Influence, not title alone, shapes the experience. 82% of CIOs are satisfied or very satisfied, with executive relationships, strategic influence, organizational culture, and business alignment emerging as the leading factors among satisfied CIOs.

AI: FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO ENTERPRISE VALUE

- AI leads the agenda. AI is the leading priority across healthcare organizations of all sizes, but uncertainty around AI governance, scaling, and ROI is also among CIOs' most pressing challenges.
- The focus is increasingly practical. Organizations are prioritizing revenue cycle, operational efficiency, and provider experience through a broad mix of clinical, agentic, and generative AI.
- The next challenge is proving enterprise value. Clear strategy, executive sponsorship, and cross-functional collaboration lead the factors associated with successful AI deployment, yet 22% of organizations are not consistently measuring outcomes, and half report no formal board oversight.

DELIVERING TRANSFORMATION WITH MEASURED INVESTMENT

- Pressure is intensifying across the technology portfolio. Cost constraints lead the challenge list at 69%, cybersecurity remains a top-three concern, and modernization and transformation responsibilities have not receded.
- Investment is measured rather than expansive. 91% report stable or growing IT budgets, but only 10% saw a significant increase; two-thirds spend 3% to 4% of revenue on IT.
- External support remains targeted. Most organizations outsource some activity, but 64% outsource only 1% to 25% of the IT function, concentrating external support in cybersecurity, help desk, and infrastructure/cloud operations.

LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, AND REWARDS

- Capability change matters more than simple headcount movement. 59% anticipate a shift in skill mix, while organizations combine selective hiring, external partners, interim talent, and reorganization.
- The leadership model is increasingly specialized. The CIO now leads a team of specialized leaders. Yet 56% of organizations do not anticipate adding new leadership roles in 2026; where hiring is planned, data and AI lead.
- Compensation remains competitive. 55% report base salaries over $500k, and 95% are eligible for annual bonuses, with greater annual and long-term incentive opportunities at large organizations.
- Leadership continuity remains uneven. Only 36% of sitting CIOs have a formal succession plan, essentially unchanged from 2024.

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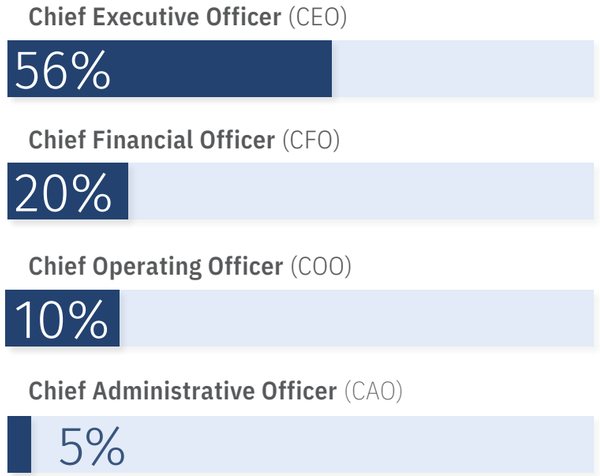
ENTERPRISE LEADERSHIP, EXPANDING EXPECTATIONS

The CIO role has become more senior, more influential, and substantially broader. Formal access to enterprise leadership is widespread, but a seat at the table alone does not guarantee influence. The ability to shape the agenda depends on executive relationships, strategic authority, and alignment with the business. At the same time, AI, data, digital transformation, and technology innovation are adding to, rather than replacing, the CIO's foundational technology responsibilities.

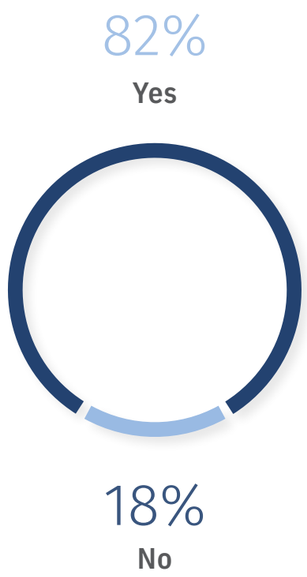
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CIO Enterprise Position

PRIMARY REPORTING LINE



EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM (ELT) MEMBERSHIP

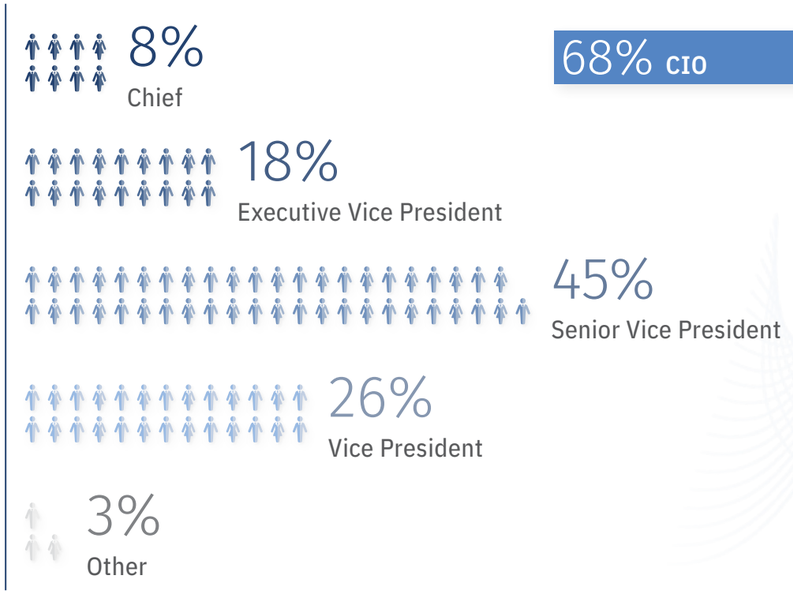


CIOs have strong enterprise access, influencing an increasingly broad agenda spanning technology, digital, data, AI, and transformation. This access extends to the highest levels of leadership, with **82%** of CIOs serving on the executive leadership team and **56%** reporting directly to the CEO.

That said, ELT representation varies by organization size: 89% of CIOs at small organizations and 87% at mid-sized organizations are ELT members, compared with 67% at large organizations. This points to less consistent CIO positioning within larger healthcare organizations.

Seniority and Title Evolution

ROLE LEVEL



CURRENT TITLE

The CIO role is firmly positioned at senior levels, with 71% holding Chief, EVP, or SVP status.

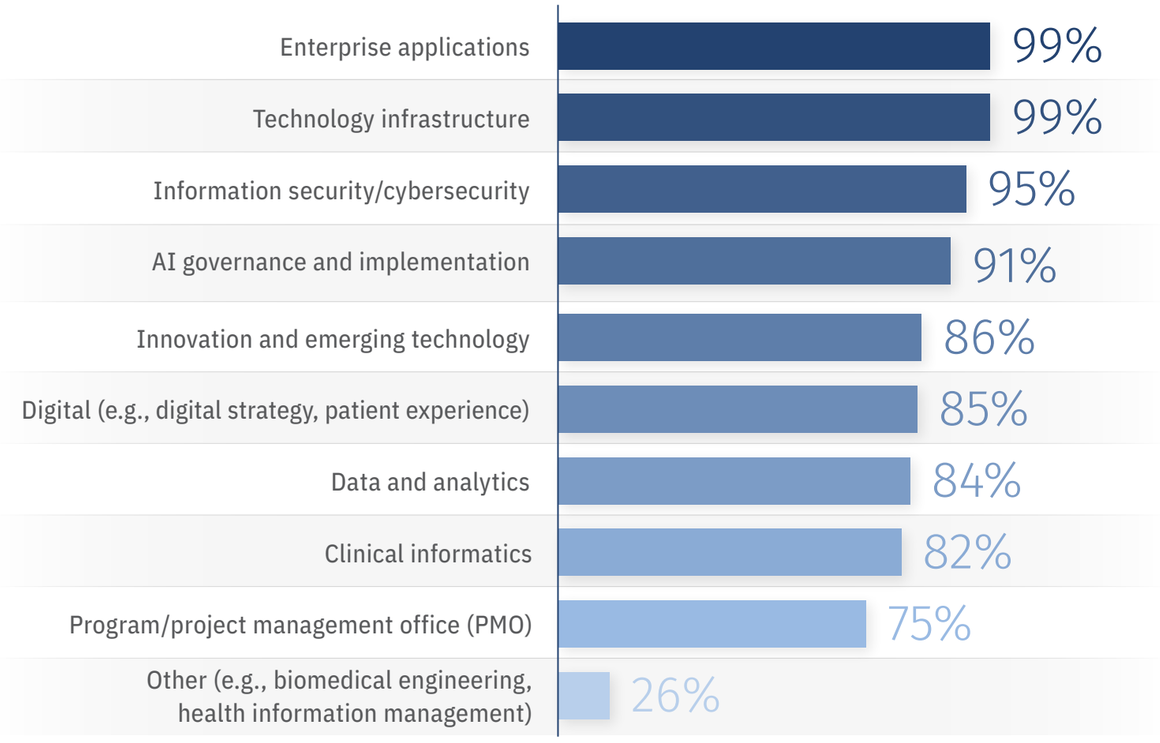
Traditional CIO titles remain dominant (68%), while more than one-quarter (26%) now hold a combined information and digital title. The shift appears relatively recent: **71%** of respondents with "digital" explicitly in their title were appointed to their current role within the past three years.

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Scope of Responsibility

FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE CIO REMIT

*Multiple responses permitted.



The CIO mandate continues to expand beyond traditional IT.

Enterprise applications and technology infrastructure remain nearly universal responsibilities, while cybersecurity also sits within the remit of almost all CIOs.

AI is now firmly part of that mandate, with 91% of CIOs responsible for AI governance and implementation. At the same time, more than eight in ten oversee innovation and emerging technology, digital, data and analytics, and clinical informatics, reinforcing the breadth of the role across both foundational technology and enterprise transformation.

What Shapes Role Satisfaction

OVERALL ROLE SATISFACTION



LEADING FACTORS AMONG SATISFIED CIOs

*Only respondents who are satisfied or very satisfied with their current role. Up to three responses permitted.



82% of CIOs are satisfied or very satisfied.

The CIO role derives its value not only from formal position and scope, but from the ability to translate that position into meaningful enterprise impact.

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AI: FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO ENTERPRISE VALUE

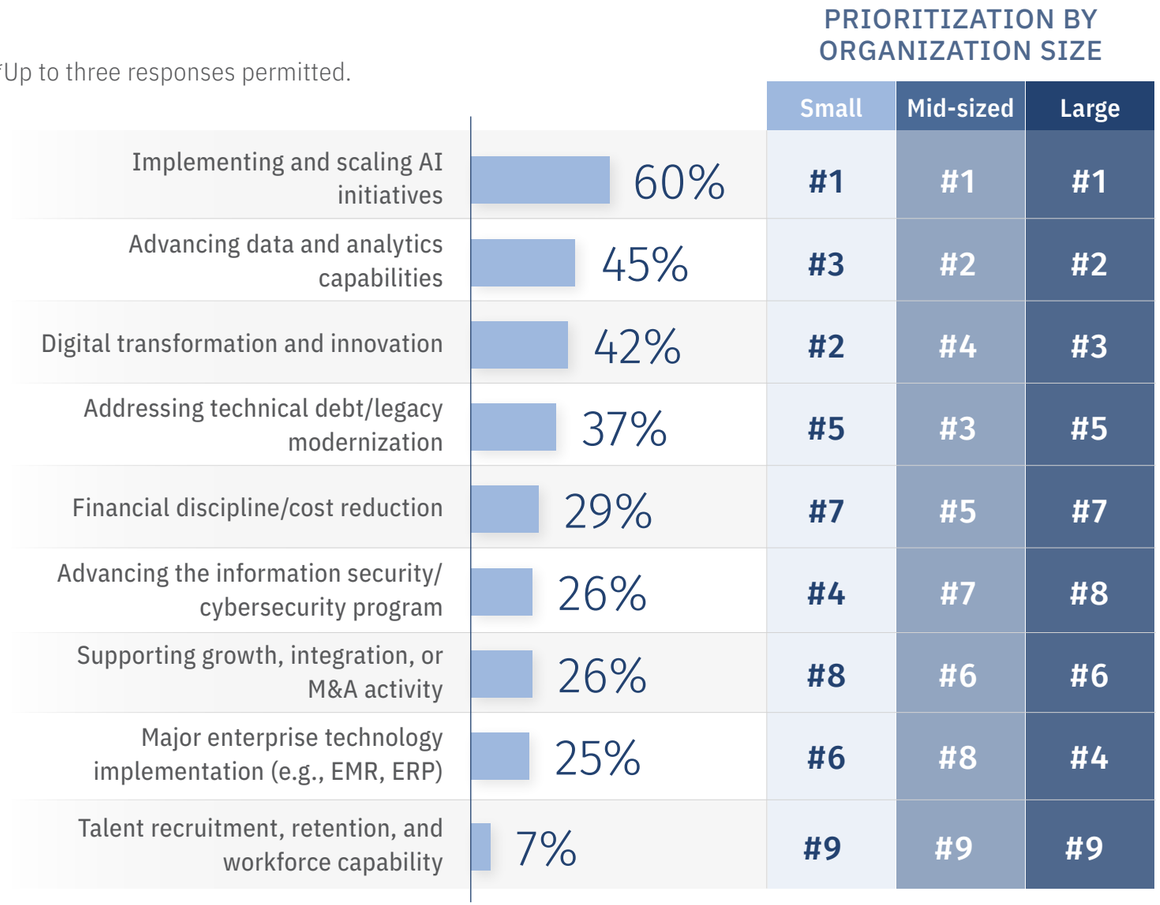
AI is no longer a discrete initiative; it has become an enterprise operating priority. Demand now extends across clinical, operational, and financial functions, requiring CIOs to coordinate expertise and decision-making across the organization. The challenge is shifting from adoption to disciplined execution: governing demand, selecting the right use cases, scaling what works, and demonstrating value across financial, operational, provider, patient, and clinical outcomes.

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AI Leads the IT Agenda

TOP IT PRIORITIES FOR 2026

*Up to three responses permitted.



IT priorities are notably consistent across organization sizes, with AI, data and analytics, and digital transformation leading the agenda.

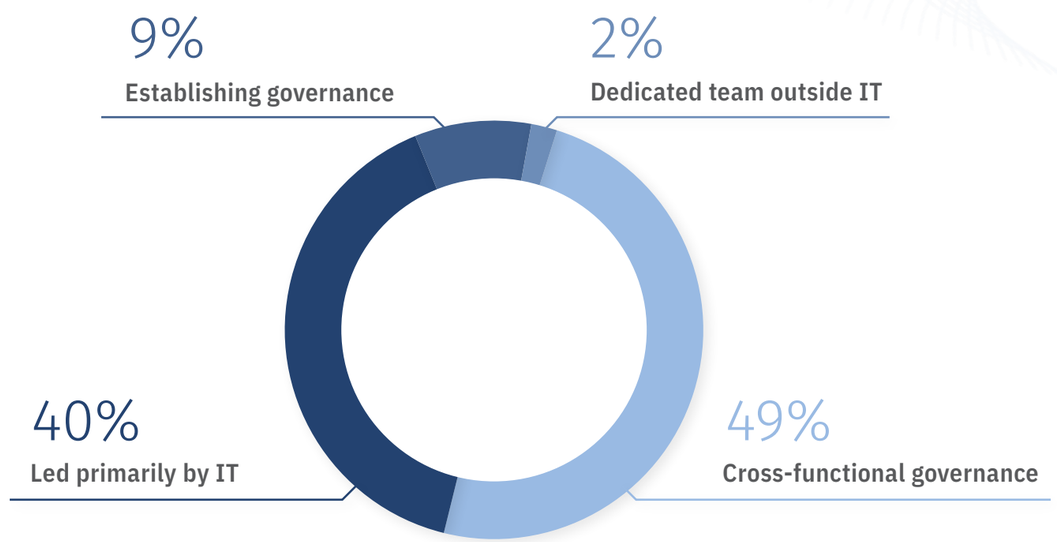
AI is broadening the CIO agenda alongside continued responsibility for modernization, cost, cybersecurity, and risk.

AI ranks first across all three size groups

and is particularly prominent among large organizations (77%).

AI Governance

PRIMARY AI GOVERNANCE MODEL



AI governance is predominantly shared across the enterprise or anchored in IT. Nearly half of CIOs (49%) report a cross-functional governance model, while 40% say AI is led primarily by IT. Dedicated leadership outside IT remains rare (2%).

Organization size appears to influence the model:

- **Large organizations are more likely to use shared governance.** 63% of large organizations use a cross-functional model versus 49% of mid-sized and 31% of small organizations.
- **Small organizations are more likely to rely primarily on IT leadership.** IT leads AI governance in 46% of small organizations, while nearly one-quarter (23%) are still establishing their governance approach.

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AI Moves from Deployment to Value

The AI agenda is moving from experimentation toward enterprise value: Organizations are concentrating on practical financial, operational, provider, and clinical applications, while success increasingly depends on clear use-case choices, executive sponsorship, and the ability to demonstrate measurable outcomes.

AI PRIORITIES FOCUS ON OPERATIONAL AND CLINICAL VALUE

AI priorities are centered on tangible operational and financial needs. Revenue cycle and financial performance lead at 68%, followed by administrative and operational efficiency at 61% and provider experience and wellbeing at 55%. Importantly, these same three areas lead across organizations of different sizes, suggesting a broadly shared focus on use cases with practical enterprise value.

The technology mix is broad rather than concentrated around a single form of AI. Clinical AI tools lead at 85%, followed by agentic or workflow-based AI at 76% and generative AI at 73%. This suggests that organizations are pursuing AI across both clinical and operational workflows rather than treating generative AI as the agenda in itself.

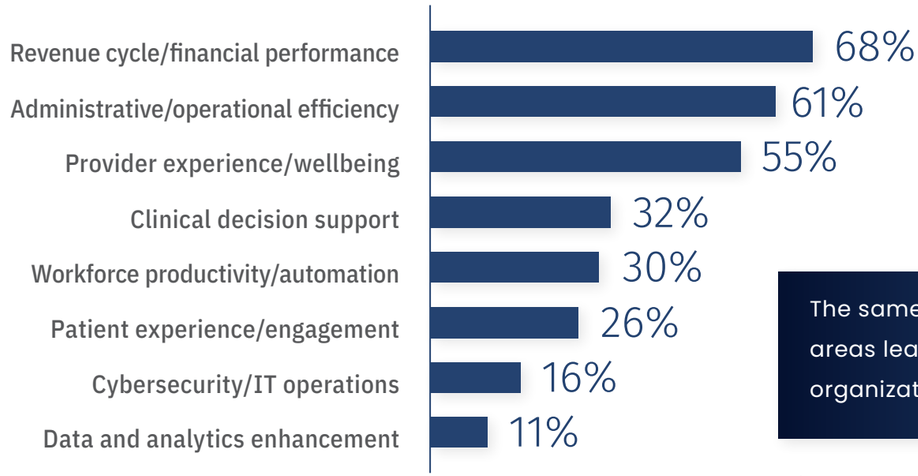
DEFINING AND DELIVERING AI VALUE

Organizations are looking beyond AI adoption to tangible outcomes. Productivity and efficiency gains are the most commonly used measures of success (70%), followed by provider workflow improvement (62%) and ROI or cost savings (61%). Clinical quality and patient outcomes also feature prominently at 50%, indicating that value is being considered across operational, financial, and clinical dimensions.

At the same time, measurement remains a work in progress. 22% are not yet consistently measuring AI success. Successful deployment appears to depend less on technology alone than on strategic and organizational conditions. Clear strategy and use-case prioritization (62%) and executive sponsorship (59%) lead the list of success factors, followed by cross-functional collaboration (45%).

Where AI Is Being Deployed

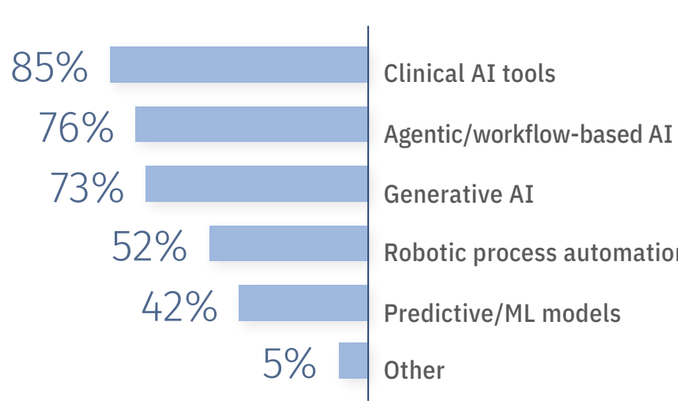
PRIORITY AI USE CASES



The same three priority areas lead across all organization sizes.

*Up to three responses permitted.

AI TECHNOLOGIES IN FOCUS



Other responses included research-focused LLMs, voice AI, and ambient technology.

*Multiple responses permitted.

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How Organizations Define AI Value

MEASURE OF AI SUCCESS



Productivity or efficiency gains
70%

Provider satisfaction/workflow improvement
62%

Return on investment (ROI)/cost savings
61%

Clinical quality/patient outcomes
50%

Patient experience improvement
39%

Risk reduction/compliance/governance performance
22%

Speed of implementation/scaling
17%

We are not yet consistently measuring AI success
22%

*Multiple responses permitted.

FACTORS SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL DEPLOYMENT

Clear AI strategy and use-case prioritization
62%

Executive sponsorship
59%

Cross-functional collaboration
45%

Strong governance and risk oversight
34%

Staff capability/training/change management
34%

Trusted vendor/external partner support
34%

Dedicated AI leadership/ownership
18%

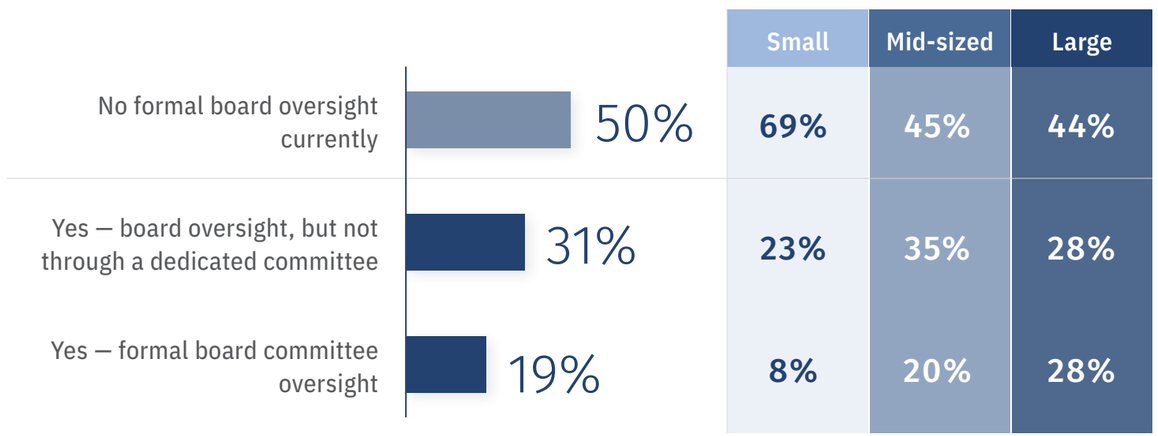
High-quality data and technical infrastructure
15%

*Up to three responses permitted.

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Board Oversight Remains Uneven

FORMAL BOARD OVERSIGHT OF AI, DIGITAL STRATEGY, OR TECHNOLOGY RISK



BOARD OVERSIGHT BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

	Small	Mid-sized	Large
No formal board oversight currently	69%	45%	44%
Yes — board oversight, but not through a dedicated committee	23%	35%	28%
Yes — formal board committee oversight	8%	20%	28%

50% Report no formal board oversight of AI, digital strategy, or technology risk.

Board oversight of AI, digital strategy, and technology risk remains uneven: half of CIOs report no formal board oversight, while 31% have board-level oversight without a dedicated committee and 19% report formal committee oversight.

Formal oversight becomes more common with organizational scale. Dedicated committee oversight rises from just 8% among small organizations to 20% among mid-sized and 28% among large organizations.



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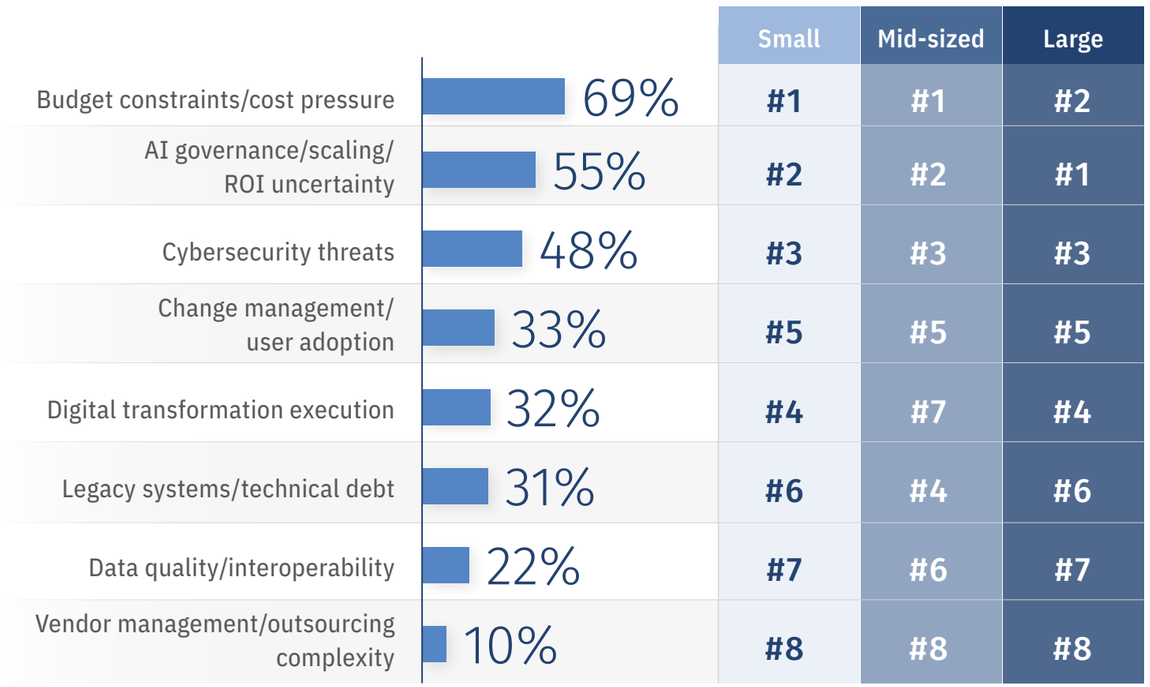
DELIVERING TRANSFORMATION WITH MEASURED INVESTMENT

The technology agenda is expanding faster than significant new investment is becoming available. CIOs must balance pressure to move quickly with the need for disciplined evaluation, enterprise standards, cybersecurity, integration, and a clear business case. Cost pressure is sharpening the need to prioritize and demonstrate value, while external partners are being used selectively to fill capability gaps rather than replace the internal IT model.

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Cost Pressure Leads the Challenge List

MOST PRESSING TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES



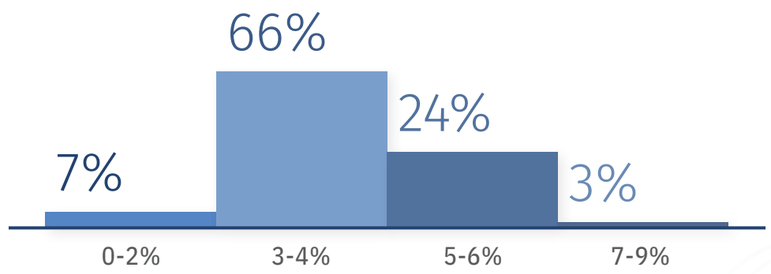
*Up to three responses permitted.

Budget constraints, uncertainty around AI governance, scaling and ROI, and cybersecurity emerge as the top three challenges across the board.

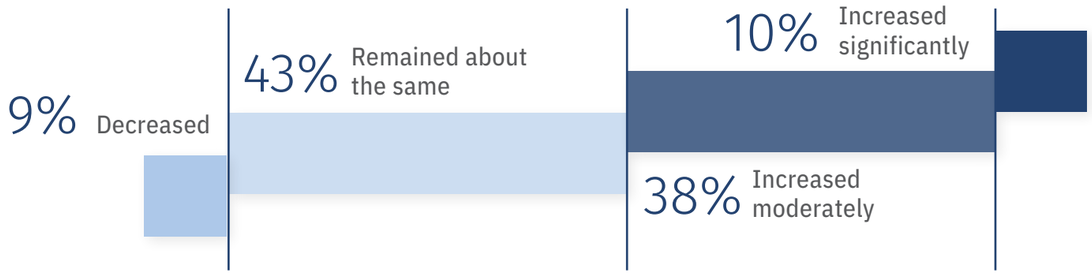
Cost pressure remains the most pervasive challenge overall (69%), highlighting the tension between an expanding technology agenda and the resources available to deliver it.

Measured IT Investment

IT SPENDING AS A SHARE OF REVENUE



IT BUDGET CHANGE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS



IT investment remains concentrated, with two-thirds of CIOs (66%) reporting technology spend of 3% to 4% of organizational revenue, compared with a cross-industry average of approximately 5% in Deloitte's 2025 Tech Spending Outlook. **Budgets are stable or growing for 91% of respondents, although significant increases remain uncommon (10%).**

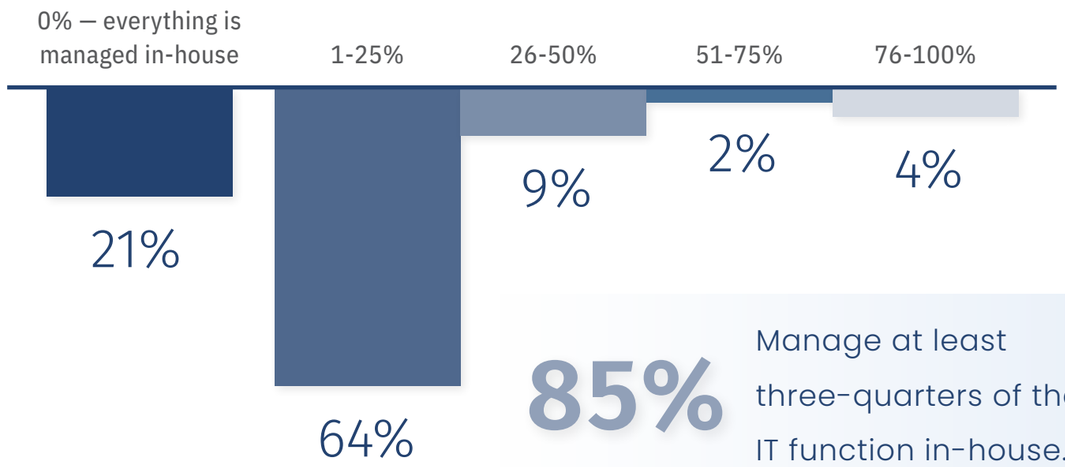
The broader picture is one of measured investment rather than rapid budget expansion, even as CIOs navigate a growing technology agenda.

*Source: Deloitte, Tech Spending Outlook, 2025, as reported in "Fueling Growth, Not Maintenance: How Tech Budgets Are Evolving," The Wall Street Journal, December 2, 2025.

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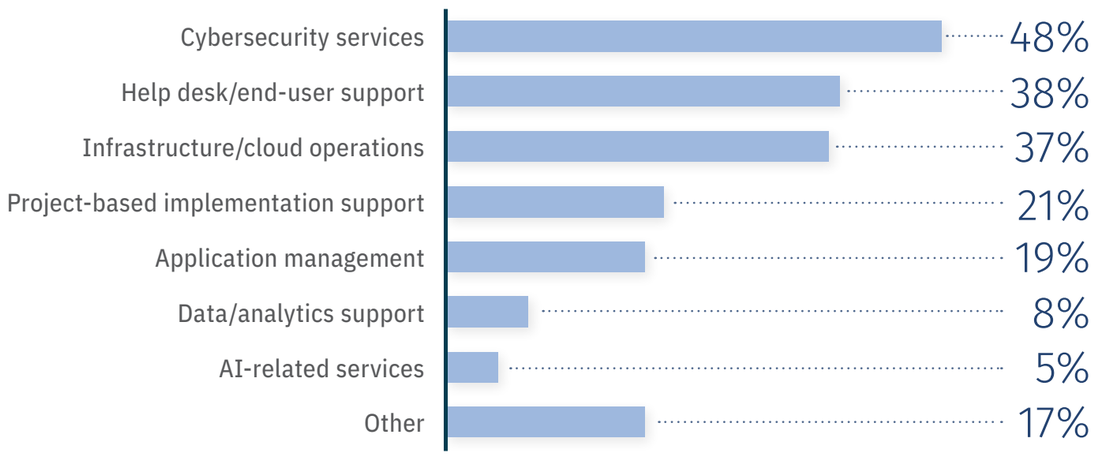
Targeted Outsourcing

SHARE OF IT FUNCTION OUTSOURCED TO A MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER (MSP) OR OTHER VENDOR PARTNER



85% Manage at least three-quarters of the IT function in-house.

SERVICES CURRENTLY OUTSOURCED



*Multiple responses permitted.

Healthcare IT organizations are using outsourcing as a targeted capability strategy rather than a wholesale operating model. While 79% outsource at least some IT activity, most keep the outsourced share below 25%, concentrating external support in cybersecurity, help desk, and infrastructure/cloud operations.

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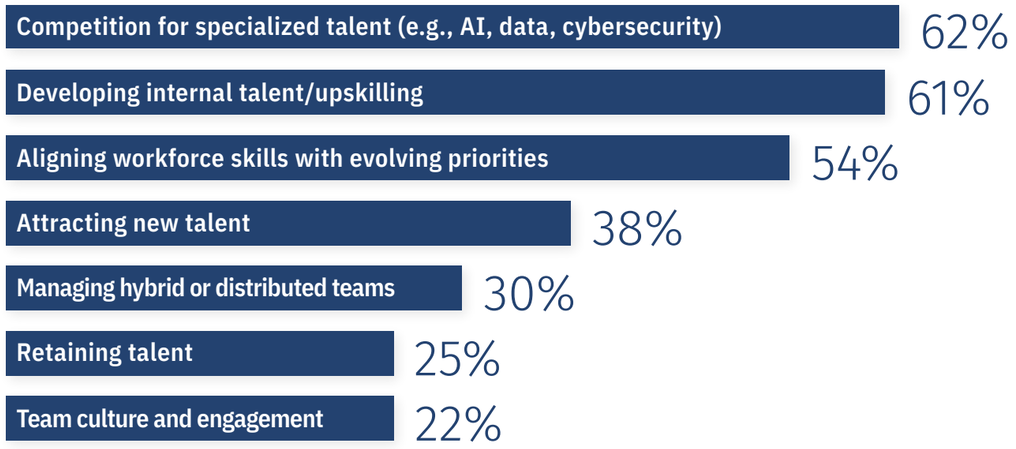
LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, AND REWARDS

The workforce challenge is shifting from headcount alone to skills, leadership capacity, and organizational flexibility. CIOs increasingly lead through teams of specialized leaders while combining internal development, selective hiring, distributed talent, and external expertise to address capability gaps. Compensation reflects the scale and complexity of the CIO mandate, yet succession planning has not kept pace with the strategic importance of the role.

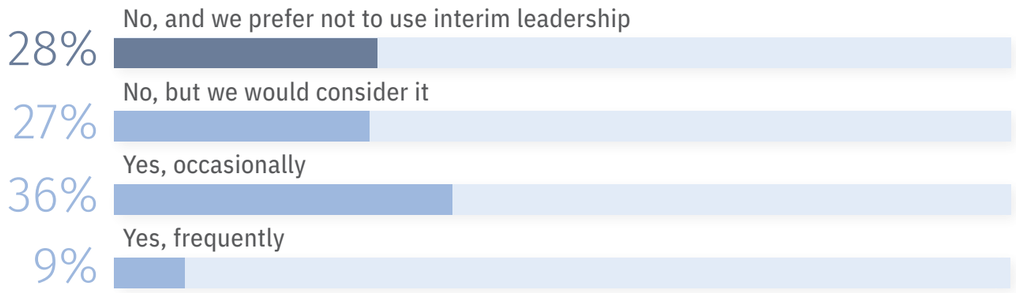
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Capability Gaps Drive the Talent Agenda

LEADING IT TALENT CHALLENGES



EXPERIENCE WITH INTERIM IT LEADERSHIP



The talent challenge is increasingly about capability, not simply recruitment or retention.

Competition for specialized talent leads at 62%, closely followed by internal development and upskilling (61%) and aligning workforce skills with evolving priorities (54%).

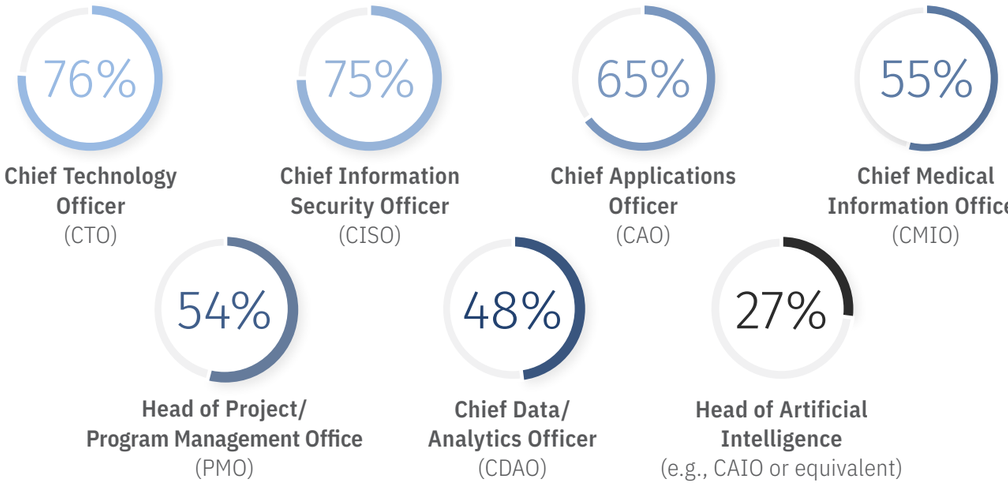
Flexible leadership support is already familiar to many organizations: 45% have used interim IT leaders, while another 27% would consider doing so.

The CIO Leadership Team

The CIO increasingly operates as a leader of specialized leaders. Technology, cybersecurity, applications, clinical informatics, program management, and data leadership commonly report directly to the CIO, reflecting the scope and complexity of the modern IT portfolio.

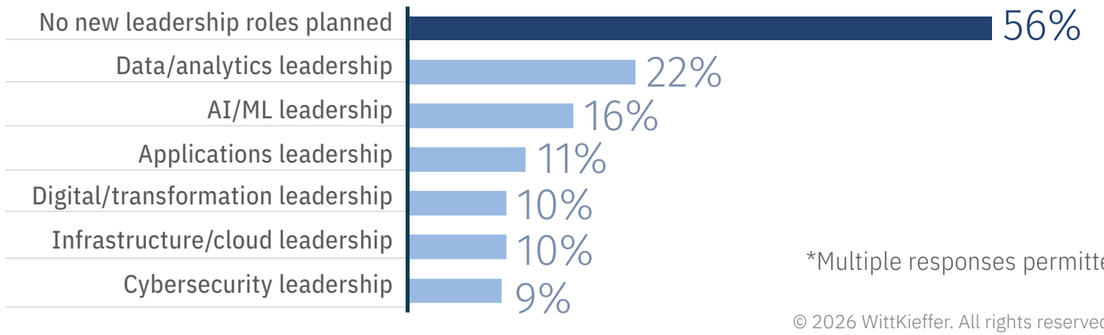
Near-term leadership expansion remains selective. 56% anticipate no new leadership hires in 2026. Where hiring is planned, data and analytics leadership (22%) and AI/ML leadership (16%) lead, suggesting that new investment is concentrated in emerging capability areas.

FUNCTIONAL LEADERS REPORTING DIRECTLY TO THE CIO



*Core CIO/CDIO respondents only. Multiple responses permitted.

LEADERSHIP HIRING ANTICIPATED IN 2026

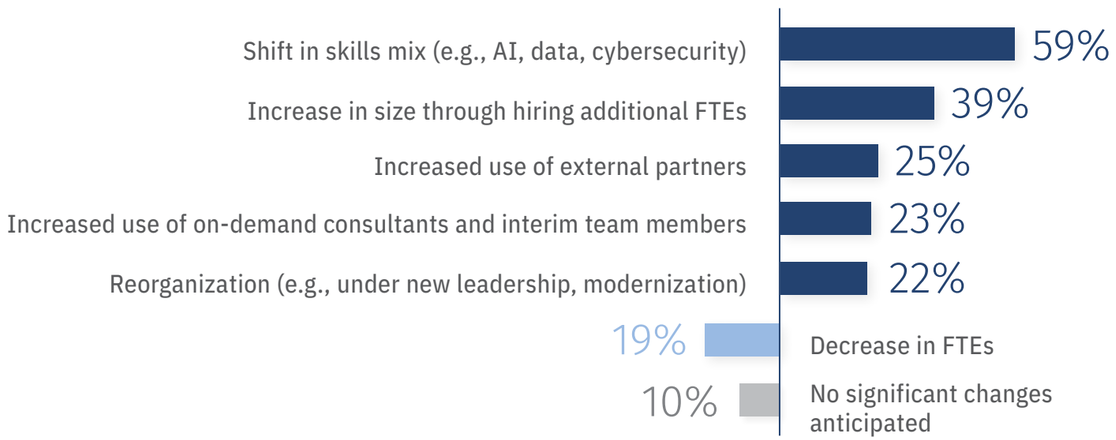


*Multiple responses permitted.

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Workforce Transformation, Not Simple Expansion

EXPECTED IT WORKFORCE CHANGES OVER THE NEXT 12–24 MONTHS



*Multiple responses permitted.

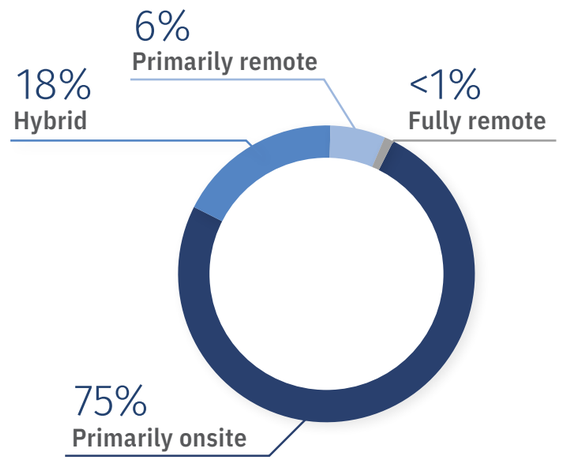
Looking at the next 12–24 months, the dominant expectation is workforce transformation rather than straightforward expansion or contraction. Healthcare IT organizations are preparing to reshape their workforces, with nearly six in ten CIOs expecting a shift in skill mix and organizations pursuing flexible talent strategies, including selective hiring, external partnerships, and the use of interim and on-demand talent.

The path differs by organizational context. Small and standalone organizations are more likely to expect FTE growth, while large organizations place greater emphasis on skills shifts and reorganization.

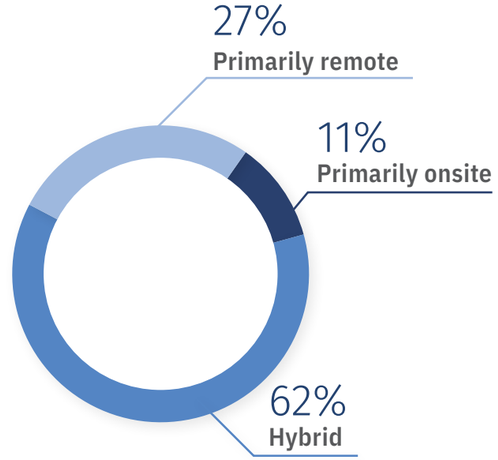
59% Expect the IT workforce skill mix to change over the next 12–24 months.

CIO and Team Work Models Diverge

CIO WORK ARRANGEMENT



IT TEAM WORK ARRANGEMENT



Primarily onsite: 4-5 days per week onsite

Primarily remote: remote with periodic onsite presence

Hybrid: typically onsite 2-3 days per week

Fully remote: remote with no regular onsite presence

The leadership and team operating models are notably different. Three-quarters of CIOs remain primarily onsite, while 89% of IT teams work in hybrid or primarily remote arrangements. Leading a distributed function has therefore become a defining feature of the role, even when the CIO's own position remains office-based.

CIO work arrangements become somewhat more flexible with organizational scale: 36% of CIOs at large organizations work in a hybrid arrangement, compared with 22% at mid-sized and 15% at small organizations.

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Compensation and Incentives

CIO base salaries span a wide range, reflecting variation in organizational scale and role scope across healthcare. More than half of respondents (55%) report base salaries over $500,000, while 17% earn over $700,000.

Role transitions are strongly associated with higher compensation: 89% report an increase in total compensation following their most recent move. The most common increase was 11–20% (35%), while more than one-third (36%) saw increases exceeding 20%.

Annual incentives are a significant component of CIO compensation, with eligibility and target levels increasing with organization size. Nearly all respondents (95%) are eligible for a bonus, ranging from 82% at small organizations to 97% at mid-sized and 100% at large organizations. Higher target bonuses are particularly prevalent at large organizations, where 61% exceed 30% of base salary.

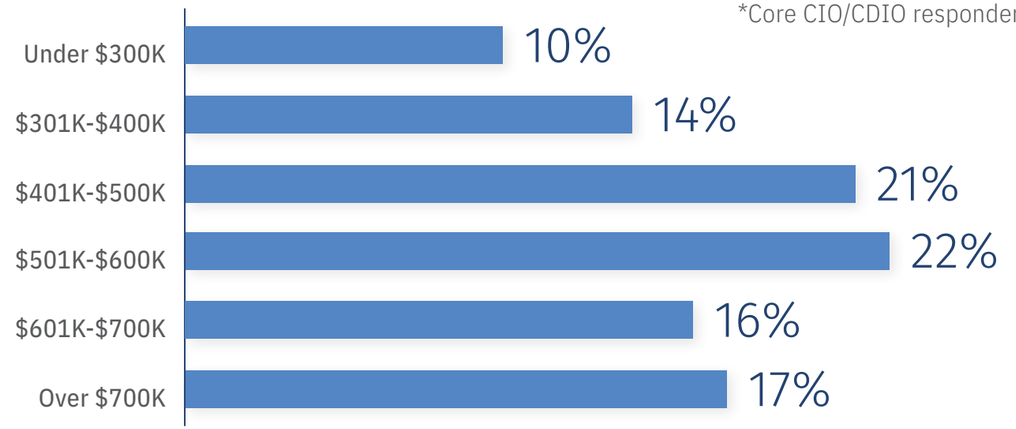
Long-term incentives (LTI) and supplemental executive retirement plans (SERPs) are less universal, with eligibility and value also varying considerably by organization size. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of CIOs are not eligible overall, rising to 41% at small organizations, compared with 22% at mid-sized and 13% at large organizations. Higher-value incentives are also more prevalent at large organizations: 29% report LTI/SERP values above 20% of base salary.

Overall, organization size shapes not only base compensation but the structure and value of the total reward package, with larger organizations offering materially greater annual and long-term incentive opportunities.

Base Salary and the Transition Premium

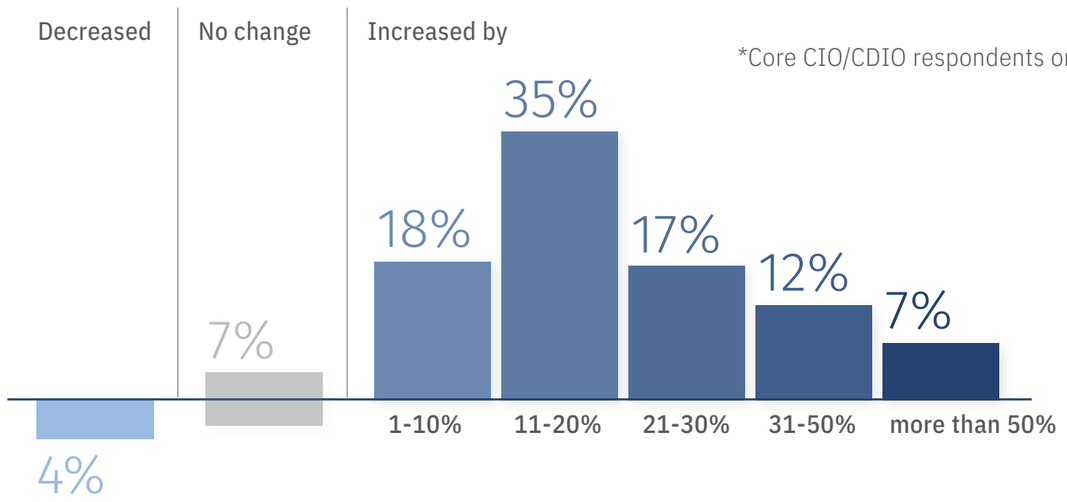
2026 ANNUAL BASE SALARY

*Core CIO/CDIO respondents only.



COMPENSATION CHANGE AFTER MOST RECENT ROLE TRANSITION

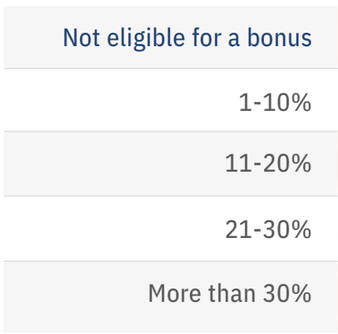
*Core CIO/CDIO respondents only.



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Annual Incentives

TARGET ANNUAL BONUS AS A PERCENTAGE OF BASE SALARY



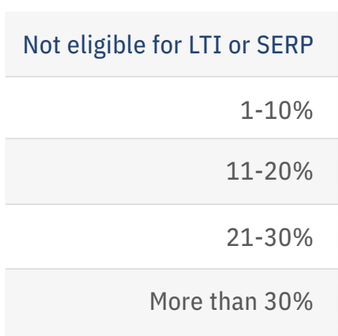
TARGET BONUS BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

	Small	Mid-sized	Large
Not eligible for a bonus	18%	3%	0%
1-10%	14%	8%	0%
11-20%	27%	40%	7%
21-30%	27%	32%	32%
More than 30%	14%	17%	61%

*Core CIO/CDIO respondents only. Not eligible shown as a category.

Long-Term Incentives and SERP

ANNUAL LTI/SERP VALUE AS A PERCENTAGE OF BASE SALARY



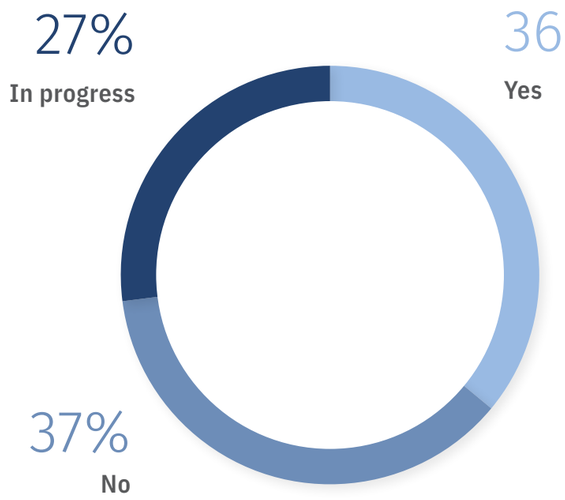
LTI/SERP BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

	Small	Mid-sized	Large
Not eligible for LTI or SERP	41%	22%	13%
1-10%	36%	37%	16%
11-20%	14%	35%	42%
21-30%	5%	5%	16%
More than 30%	4%	1%	13%

*Core CIO/CDIO respondents only. Not eligible shown as a category.
LTI: long-term incentives. SERP: supplemental executive retirement plan.

Succession Planning Remains Uneven

STATUS OF FORMAL CIO SUCCESSION PLANNING



*Core CIO/CDIO respondents only.

36%

Have a formal CIO succession plan.

Nearly two-thirds of CIOs (63%) report that succession planning is either established or underway. However, results show no progress since 2024, with formal succession planning remaining largely unchanged (39% in 2024 vs. 36% in 2026).

Succession planning remains inconsistent across the sector. Large organizations are more likely to have a formal plan in place (45%), but differences by organization size and type are otherwise limited.

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Recommendations for Leaders



Match CIO influence to enterprise accountability

- Ensure the CIO's authority keeps pace with the expanding scope and risk of the role.
- Establish clear decision rights, strengthen relationships across the C-suite, and align technology priorities with enterprise strategy.

Govern AI for value, not activity

- Move from a list of AI initiatives to an enterprise portfolio with defined ownership, prioritized use cases, and agreed measures of value.
- Ensure board oversight addresses value, risk, and accountability, not technology alone, and evolves as AI becomes embedded in clinical and operational workflows.

Make transformation trade-offs explicit

- Distinguish essential modernization, resilience, and cybersecurity investments from more discretionary initiatives, particularly under sustained cost pressure.
- Tie technology funding decisions to measurable financial, clinical, operational, workforce, and patient outcomes.

Build capability and leadership continuity together

- Translate the technology roadmap into the skills and leadership capabilities needed to deliver it.
- Combine internal development, selective hiring, interim leadership, and external partners to build capacity without creating permanent dependency.
- Treat CIO succession planning as an enterprise risk and continuity priority.

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Appendix A
Health System CIOs: A 2026 Portrait

Health system CIOs are experienced technology leaders, but the route to the role is varied: 66% arrived from another chief-level technology position, 29% progressed through senior IT leadership roles, and external appointments slightly outnumber internal promotions.

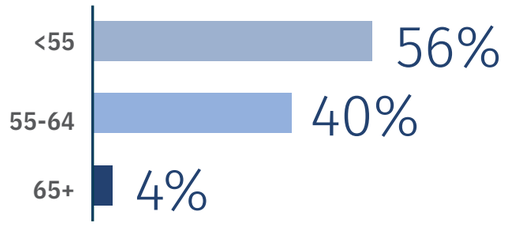
DEMOGRAPHICS

24%
Gender diversity, female

53
Current age, on average

19%
Racial/ethnic diversity

AGE DISTRIBUTION



EDUCATION

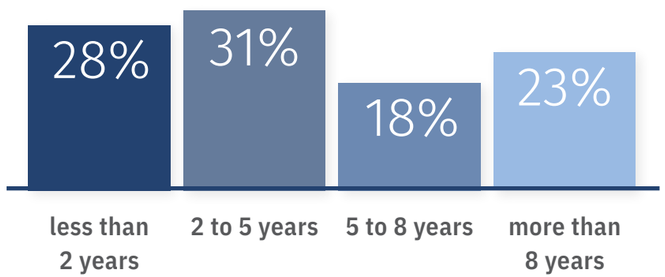
HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED

67%
Master's degree (M.B.A., M.H.A.)

12%
Doctoral degree (M.D., Ph.D.)

TENURE IN CURRENT ROLE

5.3y **Average tenure**



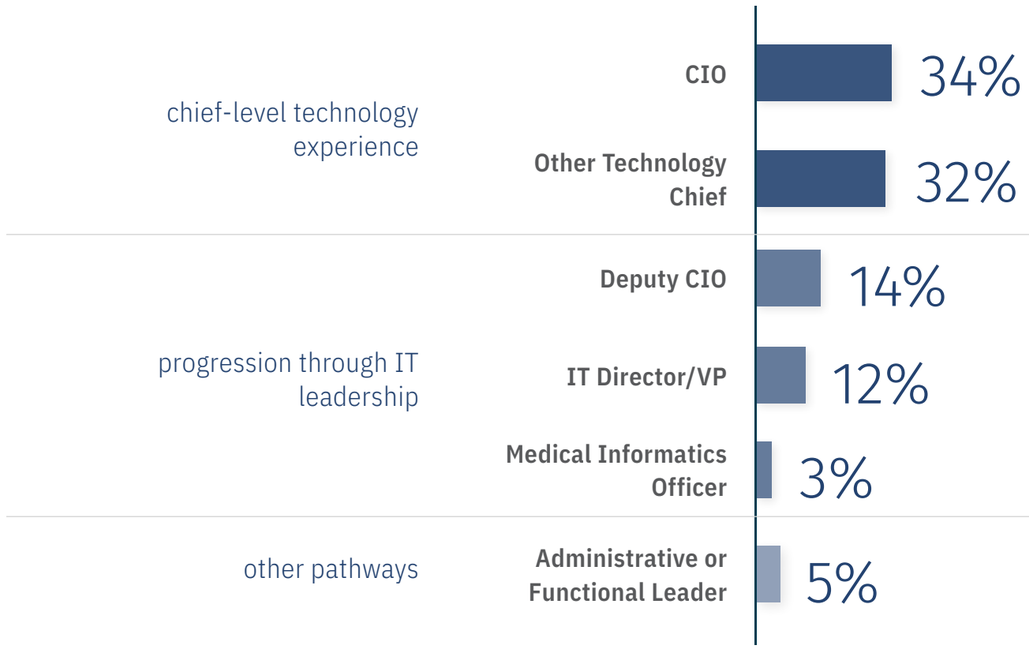
CURRENT APPOINTMENT

45%
Internally promoted

55%
Externally appointed

ROUTE TO THE TOP

Immediate previous role before the current CIO role



*Source: WittKieffer proprietary research on system-level CIOs, CDIOs, and equivalent executives at 180+ leading health systems, 2026.

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Appendix B
About the Research and Respondent Profile

About the Research

Building on WittKieffer inaugural 2024 study, the 2026 survey examines the evolving role of the healthcare CIO, including enterprise positioning, AI, technology investment, workforce strategy, compensation, and succession planning.

WittKieffer surveyed 130 enterprise IT leaders at healthcare organizations between July and August 2026. Respondents represented organizations of different types and revenue levels.

The survey and research report were developed with support from WittKieffer Commercial Strategy & Insights team.

Gender	Share of respondents
Male	76%
Female	24%

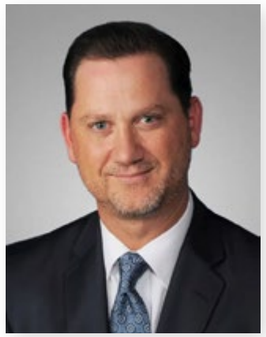
Race/ethnicity	Share of respondents
White	77%
Asian	9%
Middle Eastern or North African	3%
Black or African American	2%
Hispanic or Latino	2%
Multi-racial	2%
Prefer not to answer	5%

Organization type	Share of respondents
Multi-hospital systems and IDNs	
Multi-hospital system	33%
Integrated delivery network (IDN)	23%
Standalone and other organizations	
Community hospital	18%
Children's or specialty hospital	9%
Other	1%
Academic medical centers	
Academic medical center	16%

Organization annual gross revenue	Share of respondents
Small	
Less than $100M	1%
$100M-$499.9M	12%
$500M-$999.9M	8%
Mid-sized	
$1B-$2.9B	33%
$3B-$4.9B	21%
Large	
$5B-$6.9B	5%
$7B-$8.9B	5%
$9B and more	15%

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About the Authors



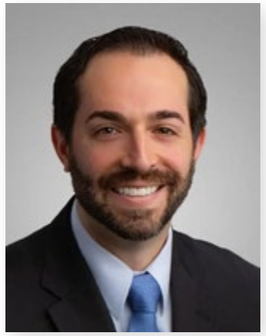
JEFFREY STURMAN

Managing Partner of WittKieffer Information Technology and Digital Leadership Practice, Jeff brings more than 30 years of experience in technology leadership, digital transformation, and organizational change. Before joining WittKieffer in 2025, Jeff served as Senior Vice President and Chief Digital Information Officer at Memorial Healthcare System, where he led a multidisciplinary team of more than 1,000 professionals and managed a $200 million annual operating budget. His experience gives him a distinctive perspective on the evolving role of healthcare technology leaders.

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NICHOLAS GIANNAS

A Senior Partner at WittKieffer, Nick identifies leaders for traditional and emerging technology roles across healthcare and higher education, including CIO, CTO, CISO, digital, and analytics positions. A member of WittKieffer Information Technology and Digital Leadership Practice since 2006, Nick has participated in more than 300 leadership search assignments. He brings deep market knowledge and longstanding relationships with clients and candidates, with particular expertise in the evolution of technology leadership roles and the capabilities required to lead increasingly complex organizations.



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ZACHARY DURST

A Principal at WittKieffer, Zach is a recognized expert in recruiting healthcare CIOs and digital leaders, as well as executives in information security, biomedical informatics, and data analytics. Since joining WittKieffer in 2013, he has led and supported searches for more than 180 clients across the United States. Zach brings extensive knowledge of the healthcare technology leadership market and is a frequent writer and speaker on the changing roles, capabilities, and talent priorities shaping the sector.

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WittKieffer is the premier executive search and leadership advisory firm developing impactful leadership teams for organizations that improve quality of life. We work exclusively with organizations in healthcare, science, and education — the Quality of Life Ecosystem — and provide essential knowledge, analysis, and perspective that produce effective leaders and inclusive cultures. Through our executive search, interim leadership, and leadership advisory solutions, we strengthen organizations that make the world better. WittKieffer is proud to be 100 percent employee-owned.

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