Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey

Super*friend*®

Foreword

After two consecutive years of no change in our national thriving workplace score, I was surprised to learn that a global pandemic has nudged Australian workplaces closer to thriving.

While I was not expecting to see radical shifts in the 40 thriving workplace indicator scores, I am really pleased to see evidence that more workplaces are implementing practical action to better support the mental wellbeing of their staff, driving improved business practices. A 2.4 point rise since 2019 during a hugely challenging year is extremely positive.

From a human perspective, a deadly pandemic is something no one would ever sign up for. It has been described as the biggest global psychological experiment of all time! From SuperFriend's research perspective, it has provided insights into large-scale workplace disruption and rapid adaption, resulting in extremely interesting and enlightening findings.

The impact of 2020 on Australia's workplaces and workers has been profound.

It has forced us to pivot quickly and adapt our ways of working. In a year that has introduced 'social distancing' as both a behavioural norm and requirement, we have scored the highest national **connectedness** score ever recorded in this research's six-year history.

This year, we have experienced extensive health, economic and social impacts and it is particularly upsetting and concerning to see a greater number of our fellow Australians experiencing mental health problems. An increase in prevalence of mental health issues from 50.6% (2019) of the working population to 59.5% means that more workplaces will need to take practical action to better support their workforce, now and into the future.

Despite 2020's pressures, we have witnessed more focus on worker mental health than ever before. Excitingly, we have evidence of new initiatives being introduced and workers embracing them. We have also observed a greater number of workers rating their workplace more favourably, though the percentage of truly 'thriving' workplaces (rated by workers) has remained the same as 2019, at 5% overall.

It has been the information media and telecommunication industry's year to shine, taking out the top thriving workplace index score. Following close behind are financial and insurance services (up from sixth place in 2019) and construction.
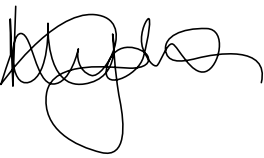
On the other end of the spectrum, those in transport, postal and warehousing, wholesale trade, and accommodation and food services are really doing it tough.

As some have said, existing cracks have become chasms due to COVID-19, and the challenges industries have faced, such as insecure employment and travel restrictions, are some of the many factors that have caused hardship, distress and negatively impacted on worker mental health.

This research is the largest study of its kind in Australia. Beginning as a discrete project in 2014 involving a global panel of workplace mental health experts and practitioners, it evolved to a longitudinal study of 40 thriving workplace indicators, validated by the University of Queensland.

We are committed to continuing to measure and track Australian workplaces progress toward thriving. This research enables us to share where we are excelling and shine a light in the dark corners that are contributing to worker ill-health.

I hope you find this report useful, and encourage you to apply these insights to help us achieve our vision of **an Australia where *all* workplaces are mentally healthy**.

Margo Lydon
CEO, SuperFriend

Contents

Executive summary

Australia's national workplace mental health and wellbeing index score **increased in 2020 to 65.1 out of 100** (80 – 100 represents a thriving workplace).

This is a 2.4 point increase after two consecutive years of remaining steady at 62.7 (2018 and 2019). This means that Australian workplaces have moved a little closer to thriving over the last 12 months, despite the unprecedented challenges to workplaces, work and our broader community.

All five thriving workplace domains improved over the last year. While this may seem counter-intuitive during such turbulent times, it infers two things: work is generally good for our social connections and mental health, and long-term sustained efforts to improve workplace mental health are starting to gain traction.

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Index score

	2018	2019	2020
Connectedness			69.5
Culture			65.4
Capability			64.7
Leadership			64.3
Policy			61.5

- Connectedness
- Culture
- Capability
- Leadership
- Policy

Overall thriving workplace index score (2020)

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Industry	Score
Information media and telecommunications	71.6
Financial and insurance services	67.6
Construction	67.2
Accommodation and food services	62.4
Wholesale trade	62.3
Transport, postal and warehousing	62.1
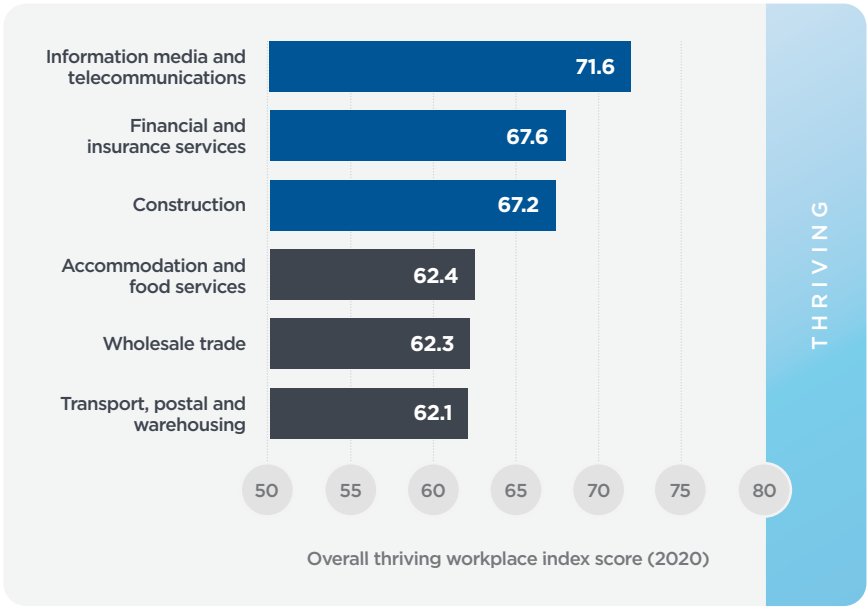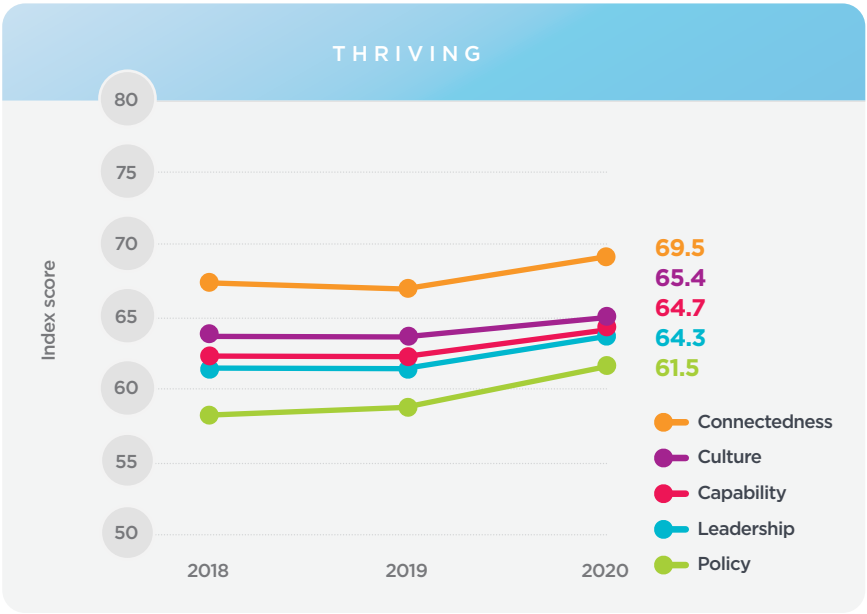
The **information media and telecommunications** industry has been the biggest winner, coming in as the industry closest to thriving in 2020 after strong year-on-year improvements. The **financial and insurance services** industry surged from sixth place in 2019 to secure the second-highest overall thriving workplace score this year. Only two industries declined overall compared with last year's results: **arts and recreation services** and **wholesale trade**. Both were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strangely enough, we're feeling more connected

Australian workers are feeling more connected than ever before. There has been a national surge in the sense of shared purpose, with workplaces increasingly feeling like communities where people support each other beyond getting the job done. The emergence of COVID-19 has certainly had an influence: **14.3% of workers report that the sense of workplace connection has improved since the pandemic emerged**.

People who worked remotely for at least a month (March–June) feel more connected than those who only worked on-site (71.0 vs 67.6). **Connectedness** was even higher when **everyone** in the organisation worked remotely (71.3). Business owners, senior managers and long-serving workers are more connected than their colleagues, and small businesses continue to show the strongest sense of workplace **connectedness**, which larger organisations typically find more difficult to achieve.

Investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing makes a difference, and is more important than ever with 3 in 5 workers experiencing a mental health condition this year (up 8.9pp* from last year to 59.5%). More than a quarter (27.8%) of those workers had their first experience during the pandemic, with numbers peaking in May. Encouragingly, the proportion of people with a lived experience who believe their current workplace caused or worsened their mental health condition fell from 21.8% in 2019 to 17.1% in 2020.

Nearly 1 in 3 workplaces (29.8%) implemented new initiatives to support workers' mental health and wellbeing once the pandemic emerged. These include paid mental health days off, sick pay for casual workers, meeting-free blocks and substantially longer break times. It's important to note that many workplaces did not provide new initiatives, as they already had a variety of initiatives in place prior to the pandemic.

We're staying in jobs, even if we're not loving them

This sense of connection is vital in the current economic environment, with many people staying in their jobs even if they don't enjoy them. In July 2020, more than a million people (seasonally adjusted) were unemployed in Australia; a 45.0% increase since February 2020 and the highest unemployment level since the Australian Bureau of Statistics' data collection started in 1978[1]. As unemployment increased following the emergence of COVID-19, so too did the share of workers planning to stay with their current employer for another year.

The pandemic also brought rising underemployment; the proportion of people working fewer than 20 hours a week rose from 15.3% in February to 24.8% in April, with only a minor recovery by June 2020. While some workers chose to work fewer hours than usual, nearly 1 in 4 workers (24.3%) were not given a choice. This was the case for half (50.3%) of the casual workforce, with part-time and full-time workers affected to a lesser extent (29.2% and 17.6% respectively).

The standout feature for several industries is that many workers chose to work more hours, often in 'essential' industries such as **health care and social assistance** (including aged care and childcare), **financial and insurance services**, and **construction**. Among the people who were required to work more hours due to the pandemic, it was more common for full-time workers or people working in **information, media and telecommunications, electricity, gas, water and waste**, and **education and training**.

Having no choice in working more hours is stressful though, with nearly half (46.6%) of these workers describing their job as 'very' or 'extremely' stressful.

* pp denotes percentage points

Stress and productivity

Fortunately, stress is not always bad for you. Positive stress, also known as 'eustress' or 'good stress' is a short-term motivator that focuses energy and actually **improves** performance and wellbeing[2]. However, negative stress, or 'distress', can be short- or long-term, **reduces** performance and can feel like you're not coping[3].

The **transport, postal and warehousing** industry has the highest proportion of distressed workers (40.3%), with people working in **public administration and safety** and **retail trade** rounding out the top 3.

Mental health concerns are the most common reason for lower productivity this year, affecting 3 in 5 workers (59.7%).

Productivity is down for some workers and up for others, with around 1 in 4 workers being less productive than normal since April. However, there has also been a surprising increase in the number of people who have become **more productive** throughout this period (up 4.0pp from February to 29.4% in June). Nearly every industry recorded **productivity gains** in June compared to February, particularly **financial and insurance services, public administration and safety** and **health care and social assistance**.

A large proportion of workers cited better health and wellbeing as beneficial to their productivity, although for some workers this was outweighed by factors that negatively impacted on their productivity. Mental health concerns are the most common reason for lower productivity this year, affecting 3 in 5 workers (59.7%), while physical health issues reduced productivity for less than 1 in 3 workers (29.8%). Overall, the pandemic has resulted in a **better work/ life balance for nearly half (48.5%) of Australia's workforce and a range of mental and physical health benefits (44.5%)**.

How has the economy impacted us?

Given the economic climate, it's surprising that 3 in 5 working Australians (61.0%) believe their workplace is in a good financial position. This perception is more common in **financial and insurance services** (76.9%), **information media and telecommunications** (70.5%) and **mining** (70.4%), and less apparent in **arts and recreation services** (42.6%) and **accommodation and food services** (50.5%). The strength of this perception is tied to an organisation's size and ability to weather challenging economic times, being more commonly held by those working in large organisations. The perception is far less common among those working in more junior positions and/or working in casual roles, however.

Nearly 1 in 3 workers aged under 35 years experienced job insecurity over the last year, with two industries bearing the brunt of job losses: **accommodation and food services** (40.7%), and **arts and recreation services** (33.0%). Approximately 1 in 3 workers in these industries have been looking to move away from their industry, which will make it more challenging for these workplaces to recover once pandemic-related restrictions are eased. Despite the high levels of job insecurity, 1 in 3 Australian workers report that their personal financial position has actually improved since the pandemic emerged, although a further 1 in 3 disagree that this is the case for them. Looking longer-term, only 11.8% of people are truly confident that they have enough superannuation and other resources to comfortably retire.

Leaders have stepped up

Faced with unprecedented workplace challenges, leaders have really stepped up in the last year, with the **leadership** domain accounting for the **top five most improved indicators**. In particular, leaders are being far more proactive in visibly promoting good mental health **policies and practices**. COVID-19 has definitely influenced this result as 12.5% of workers strongly agree that **leadership** has improved **since the pandemic emerged**. This is primarily driven by people who worked remotely for at least a month (15.0%) compared to 9.6% of people who did not work remotely at all. Age is also a factor: younger workers noticed the improvement more than any other age group.

Largest improvements (pp)		Largest (and only) declines (pp)	
Leaders can be seen to proactively encourage and promote good mental health polices and practices	+3.4	The talents, skills and competencies of the workforce are well used	-0.6
Leaders act as champions for their work teams	+2.5	People are motivated to work hard because their job is interesting and important to them personally	-0.5
Leaders are accessible when you need them and will listen	+2.3	People are generally highly engaged with their work	-0.3
Leaders create a sense of cohesion within work teams	+2.2	There is support to help people practice good work/family/life integration	-0.2
There is a clear expectation that all leaders should role model the values of the workplace	+1.9	People feel committed to their work team	-0.1

Barriers are tumbling

In the last year, nearly all of the perceived barriers preventing employers from investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing have tumbled. In particular, a lack of time and commitment at the top are far less common. The biggest perceived hurdle to investing in workplace mental health in 2020 is that businesses are facing more important issues, with many workplaces struggling to survive.

However, there's been a strong increase in supportiveness of employee mental health and wellbeing since last year (up 8.8pp), and a greater number of people are enjoying their jobs (up 3.2pp).

Although more than three quarters (78.4%) of Australian workers believe their workplace is highly committed to preventing the spread of COVID-19, 1 in 20 workers believe there is little to no commitment. Workplaces in the **health care and social assistance** and **financial and insurance services** industries are considered the most highly committed, and those in the **transport, postal and warehousing** and **wholesale trade** industries appear to be the least committed.

Tangible actions pay off

Workplace commitment to implementing tangible actions to improve workers' mental health and wellbeing has been particularly important this year. More than half (55.1%) of workers report that their workplace is still **not taking any tangible action**, despite a stronger national focus and additional funding. These workplaces are missing out on huge benefits to their workforce and their business more broadly.

The **greater number of tangible workplace mental health and wellbeing actions** a workplace takes:

- The more workers feel supported and enjoy their job
- The less people attribute their mental health condition to work-related injury (i.e. work caused or made their condition worse)
- The less mental health stigma experienced by the workforce
- The less people feel distressed in their workplace
- The more staff retention improves
- The greater the productivity gains
- **The higher the index score for each of the five domains** – connectedness, culture, capability, leadership and policy
- **The higher the overall thriving workplace score!**

Casual workers are (still) doing it tough

Casual workers have consistently been furthest from thriving in workplaces, and the gap is widening. It's particularly noticeable in workplace **culture** where full-time and part-time workers experienced strong improvement over the last year, while casual workers reported virtually no change. The sense of workplace **connectedness** has also suffered over time, with persistent declines in respect and inclusiveness toward casual workers over the last three years. This is hugely concerning, given the known benefits to wellbeing and the protective factor against suicide and mental ill-health that a sense of connectedness and belonging provides. Unsurprisingly, this aligns with a decrease in **culture**-based outcomes, with fewer casual workers reporting that workplace experiences make a positive contribution to their mental health.

About SuperFriend

SuperFriend's vision is an Australia where all workplaces are mentally healthy.

With the support of our industry Partners, we work towards this by:

- Helping organisations navigate their workplace wellbeing journey by providing practical, evidence-informed strategic support, workplace training and resource solutions
- Advocating for system change at a policy level and through strategic mental health and financial services alliances
- Providing insights to industry, government and workplaces by analysing industry trends and data and conducting Australia's largest annual national workplace mental health survey.

Our approach

With work having such a major impact on people's health, it's no surprise that investing in employee wellbeing creates higher returns than almost any other investment a business can make.

We find that, most of the time, organisations want to do the right thing by their employees. But with so many competing priorities, a lack of internal capability and an overwhelming amount of workplace wellbeing information to navigate – keeping a well-intentioned strategy alive can quickly feel like an insurmountable task.

The good news is that this stuff doesn't have to be complicated! SuperFriend meets you where you are and can support you in building and maintaining a thriving workplace. This includes increasing internal capability, and creating action plans and systems that spread the load across the business and create sustainable success.

Learn more at superfriend.com.au

About this survey

The aim of the Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey is to measure and track the current state against the desired state of a thriving or mentally healthy workplace, by asking employed people about their experience in their current workplace.

Conducted through an online research panel during July 2020, the survey was **completed by 10,338 Australians who worked and/or received a JobKeeper payment between March and June 2020** (inclusive) across a broad range of industries, role types and locations.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each of the **40 scientifically-validated characteristics** ('indicators') of mentally healthy workplaces are present in their current workplace using a 5-point Likert scale. Index scores are calculated using all scale responses from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' and exclude respondents who are unsure. All percentages relating to the indicators contained in this report reflect the proportion of respondents who **strongly agree**. The indicators have remained consistent for three consecutive years, enabling SuperFriend to assess change over time in **a dataset of more than 25,000 Australian workers**.

The survey also tracks people's broader perceptions, attitudes and experiences in relation to workplace mental health and wellbeing over time, while capturing information about new topics of interest at a national level. This year, there is a **strong focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**, with questions relating to work hours, productivity, job insecurity, financial health, stigma, 'post-isolation' planning and new ways of working.

Responses were weighted by location, industry, gender identity and age using recent workforce data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to ensure the findings are **representative of the Australian workforce**. Unless otherwise specified, all findings are based on the latest research.

Figures

10,338 PARTICIPANTS

47% IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE*

53% IDENTIFIED AS MALE*

3% ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS

Employment status
- 66% Full-time
- 21% Part-time
- 13% Casual

Organisation size
- 20% 2–19 people
- 27% 20–199 people
- 18% 200–999 people
- 12% 1,000–4,999 people
- 15% 5,000+ people
- 7% Don't know

Work role
- 7% Business owner
- 15% Senior manager
- 26% Junior/middle manager
- 52% Non-manager (employee)

Age group
- 10% 18–24
- 29% 25–34
- 22% 35–44
- 20% 45–54
- 15% 55–64
- 4% 65+

Note: some proportions may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Main workplace location

1%	NT
11%	WA
20%	QLD
7%	SA
32%	NSW
2%	ACT
27%	VIC
2%	TAS
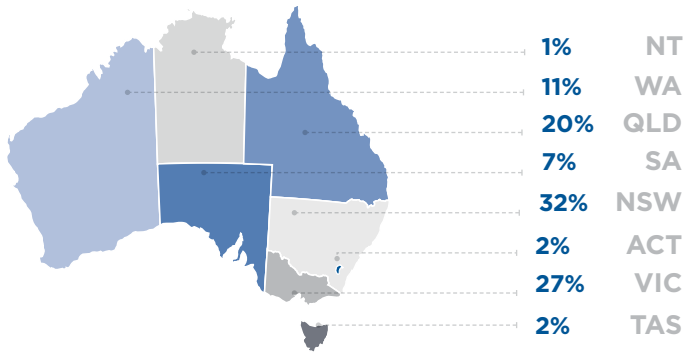
Main workplace industry

13%	Health care and social assistance	7%	Public administration and safety	2%	Arts and recreation services
10%	Retail trade	5%	Transport, postal and warehousing	2%	Mining
9%	Construction	3%	Financial and insurance services	2%	Information media and telecommunications
9%	Professional, scientific and technical services	3%	Administrative and support services	2%	Rental, hiring and real estate services
8%	Education and training	3%	Wholesale trade	1%	Electricity, gas, water and waste services
7%	Manufacturing	3%	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	4%	Other services
7%	Accommodation and food services				

* People who identify as female are referred to as women throughout this report, and self-identified males as men. Due to low numbers of people who identified as non-binary, gender diverse or agender, or whose gender identity was not stated, it was not possible to include detailed results for these groups.
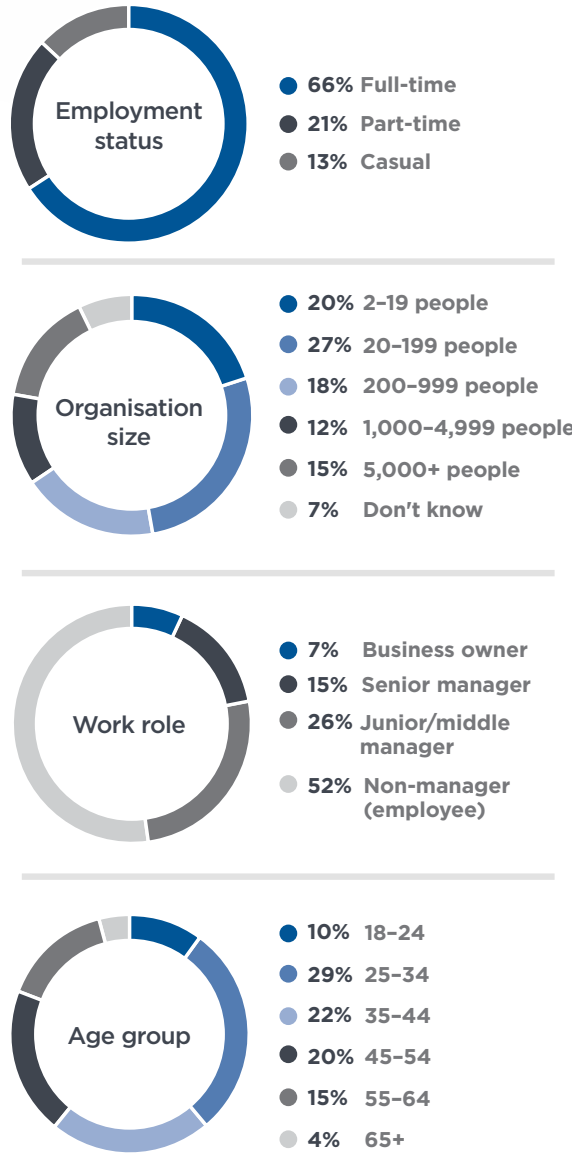
Year at a glance

Local and global disruption shaped a 2020 no one saw coming

Timeline:

- First cases of pneumonia with unknown cause reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO)
- Federal Government announces $2bn in bushfire relief funding
- WHO issues first guidance on COVID-19
- First cases of COVID-19 reported outside China
- Australia's first COVID-19 case recorded
- International public health emergency declared
- 2,700 passengers disembark the Ruby Princess, including 662 infected with COVID-19
- Victoria declares a State of Emergency
- Australian Governor General declares a human biosecurity emergency
- Australia goes into first lockdown
- Australia closes its borders to non-citizens and non-residents
- JobKeeper introduced
- Black Summer Royal Commission commences
- 600,000 jobs lost due to COVID-19 lockdown
- Victoria's second wave emerges

COVID-19 pandemic

Extreme Australian bushfire season: 'Black Summer'

Aug 2019 | Oct 2019 | Nov 2019 | Dec 2019 | Jan 2020 | Feb 2020 | Mar 2020 | Apr 2020 | May 2020 | Jun 2020 | Jul 2020

COVID-19 cases in Australia: 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700

Proportion of workers who experienced a mental health condition

Month	Experienced a mental health condition pre-pandemic (i.e. before March 2020)	Experienced a mental health condition for the first time during the pandemic
March	10.4%	3.7%
April	10.3%	5.1%
May	10.4%	5.3%
June	10.3%	4.6%

"Reduced pollution due to limited business [operations] and cars."

"[I can now] work from home without being judged."

What do thriving workplaces look like and feel like?

Thriving workplaces are mentally healthy workplaces where people are safe, can bring their best self and do good work that contributes to a better business.

The 40 indicators collectively are essential for building thriving workplaces. They are distributed across the following five domains, which have been validated by the University of Queensland. When workplaces are thriving, they are more productive, often resulting in improved financial performance. They also have more engaged employees, higher retention, and lower absenteeism. Most importantly, thriving workplaces are more likely to keep people psychologically safe and well.
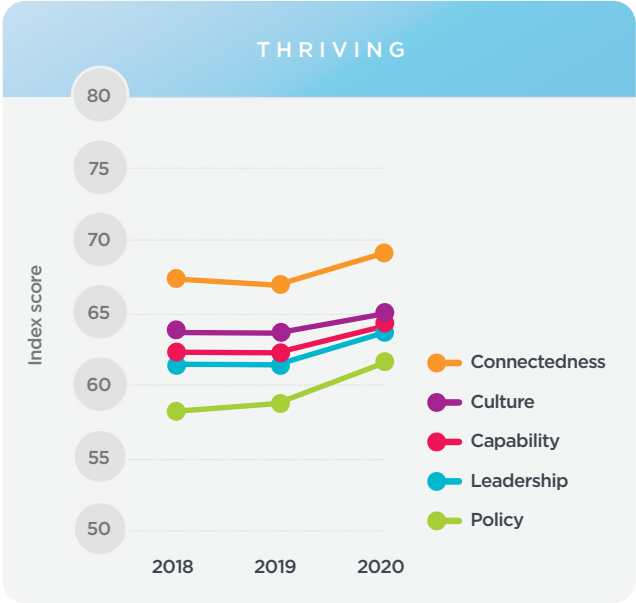
A surprising but welcome improvement

Australia's national workplace mental health and wellbeing index score increased in 2020 to 65.1 out of 100. This is a 2.4 point increase after two years (2018 and 2019) of remaining steady at 62.7.

This means that Australian workplaces have moved a little closer to thriving over the last 12 months, despite the unprecedented and challenging year it's been.

All five thriving workplace domains have increased, particularly **policy**, **leadership** and **connectedness**.

While this improvement may seem counter-intuitive during such turbulent times, it infers two things: work is generally good for our social connections and mental health, and long-term sustained efforts to improve workplace mental health are starting to gain traction.

It's also important to highlight that this study is designed to measure mental health and wellbeing in the context of work, rather than mental health solely at an individual, clinical level.

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Index score chart (2018–2020):
- Connectedness
- Culture
- Capability
- Leadership
- Policy

Connectedness — 69.5

Positive, high quality interpersonal connections are essential to maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing. They are the foundations of effective teamwork and collaboration. Having a shared vision and knowing how a person's role fits into the organisational framework can unite workers, creating purpose and meaningful work. Trust, psychological safety, fairness and social inclusiveness are outcomes where positive interpersonal connections occur.

Culture — 65.4

Positive organisational culture is essential to both individual and organisational performance. Organisational culture is the unwritten and unspoken behaviours for what is and what isn't acceptable within a workplace. An organisation's purpose, structure, unstated norms, values, rules and routines form foundations of culture. When organisational culture prioritises a strong people focus including their psychological safety, it creates a ripple effect for positive mental health and wellbeing and acknowledges that people are key to business success.

Capability — 64.7

Supporting positive mental health and wellbeing by building and applying workers' skills is an organisational asset. When organisational systems and processes promote the use of these skills, it's a visible demonstration of the organisation's culture and values. This can help differentiate business performance, employer brand and make a workplace desirable.

Leadership — 64.3

Leaders work with their teams using a strengths-based and coaching mindset. They are positive role models and set an example for healthy and productive workplace behaviours and interactions. Organisations should invest in the education, resources, time and tools to develop capable leaders.

Policy — 61.5

Organisational systems and formal processes drive the development of mental health-focused workplace policy. These policies are actively implemented across the whole workplace. A clear strategy and/or policy on mental health and wellbeing should exist, and be understood, visible and accessible to all workers.

Which industries are the most – and least – thriving?

Biggest gains

The **information media and telecommunications** industry has shown positive workplace mental health improvement year-on-year, coming in as the industry closest to thriving in 2020. The **financial and insurance services** industry surged from sixth place in 2019 to secure the second-highest overall thriving workplace score this year.

Only two industries declined overall compared with last year's results: **arts and recreation services** and **wholesale trade**. Both were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workplaces in the information media and telecommunications industry

Examples include:

- Internet service providers
- Telecommunications
- Newspaper, internet and other publishing
- Broadcasting
- Motion picture and sound recording distribution
- Data processing services.

Industry leader board

Industry	2020
Information media and telecommunications	71.6
Financial and insurance services	67.6
Construction	67.2
Professional, scientific and technical services	67.1
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	66.9
Health care and social assistance	66.7
Education and training	66.5
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	65.9
Other services	65.5
Mining	64.8
Rental, hiring and real estate services	64.4
Administrative and support services	64.4
Arts and recreation services	63.8
Manufacturing	63.4
Retail trade	63.1
Public administration and safety	62.9
Accommodation and food services	62.4
Wholesale trade	62.3
Transport, postal and warehousing	62.1

■ 2020 ◆ 2019 ▶ 2018

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Overall thriving workplace index score

People are sticking with their jobs, but not necessarily loving them

In July 2020, more than a million people (seasonally adjusted) were unemployed in Australia; a 45.0% increase since February 2020 and the **highest unemployment level** since data collection started in 1978[6].

As unemployment increased following the emergence of COVID-19, so too did the share of workers planning to stay with their current employer for another year. People working in **public administration and safety, education and training** and **health care and social assistance** have the highest planned retention, with 1 in 2 workers in these three industries definitely intending to stay with their employer over the next 12 months.

Unemployment rate

— Seasonally adjusted

Proportion of workforce %
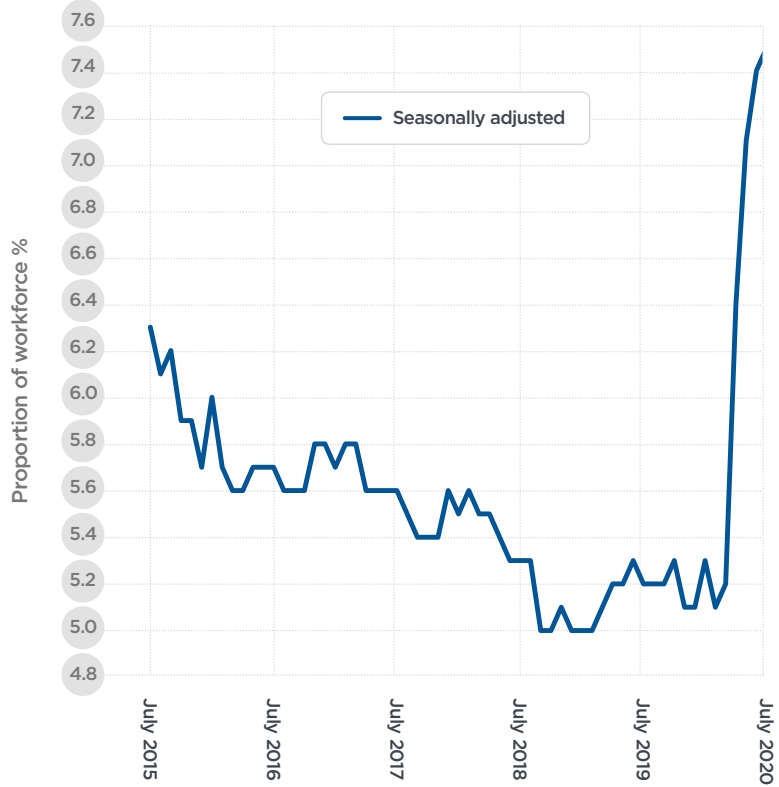
More people intend to stay with their employer over the next 12 months

	2018	2019	2020
Will definitely stay	45.9%	40.9%	41.7%
Will probably stay	29.7%	24.6%	28.4%
I haven't decided	16.8%	23.6%	15.9%
Will probably leave	4.4%	6.3%	8.4%
Will definitely leave	2.9%	4.6%	5.6%

Proportion of workforce
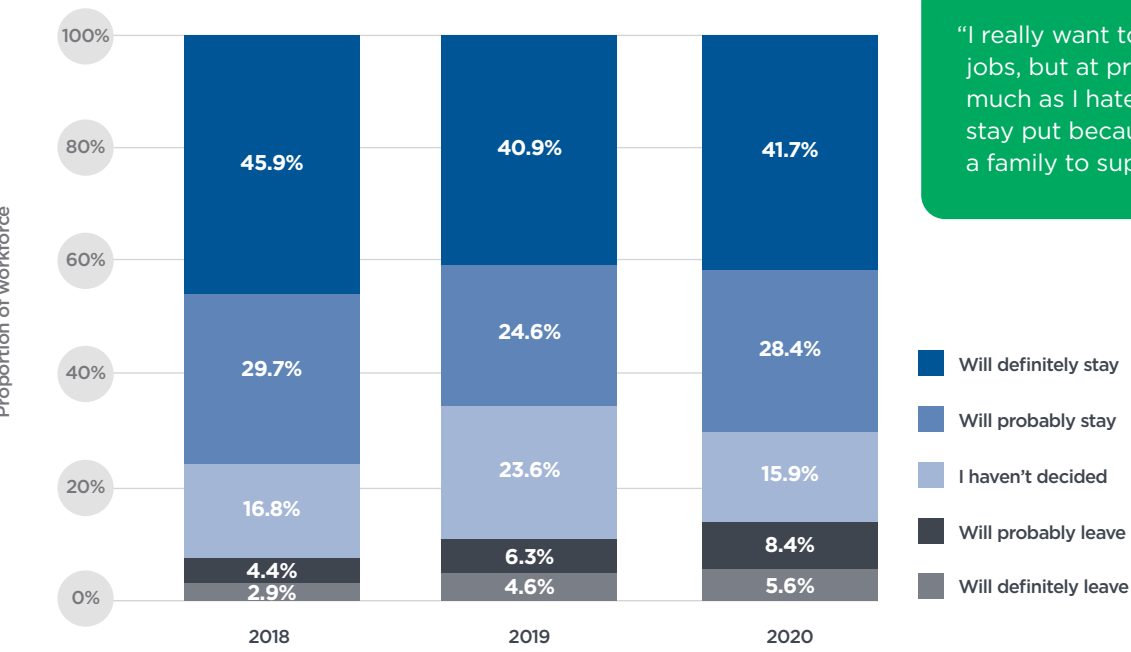
"I really want to change jobs, but at present, as much as I hate it, I will stay put because I have a family to support."

Job motivation is lower but intention to stay is on the rise

Proportion of workforce

- 25%
- 24%
- 23%
- 22%
- 21%
- 20%

2018 2019 2020

24.4%
20.4%

- People would be happy to continue working in their workplace for as long as they can
- People are motivated to work hard because their job is interesting and important to them

Intention to stay with your employer increases with tenure

Proportion of workforce definitely intending to stay with their employer over the next 12 months

Years worked at organisation	
<1 year	32.6%
1-2 years	33.4%
3-4 years	36.4%
5-9 years	39.6%
10-14 years	45.6%
15-19 years	50.3%
20+ years	61.7%

The 2017 World Happiness Report provides additional insights and context, noting that job security and social capital are positively correlated with happiness[8]. With job security and consistent job-related social connections becoming less commonplace in Australia as the pandemic has unfolded, it makes sense that those fortunate to still have these would appreciate their value more.

"...The pandemic has taught me that we should appreciate what we've got, especially since other people are desperate to find a job but I'm still lucky enough to have one."

Similarly, there was a distinct upswing in people being happy to continue working in their workplace for as long as possible (up 1.2pp from 2019 to 24.4%), despite a downturn in people finding their jobs particularly interesting or motivating (down 0.5pp from 2019 to 20.4%). Only five industries bucked the trend, with people working in the **mining** and **arts and recreation services** industries indicating they are less keen to pursue long-term careers in their workplace.

Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Participation, Job Search and Mobility studies over time show similar patterns during previous economic downturns: people stay in their job because they need the work, but satisfaction with the work drops. This was evident during both the 1990 recession and 2008 Global Financial Crisis[7].

In the current economic environment, the findings correlate the commitment to staying with an employer with how long people have worked there: the longer the tenure, the stronger the commitment to staying.

Several factors appear to be driving this, including:

- An increased appetite to change organisations sooner amongst younger generations, and
- Reluctance to leave workplaces after investing a lot of time in them.

Further, the longer a person has served in their workplace, the more likely they are to move towards 'mastery' of their role and expertise, and experience the many professional and wellbeing benefits that go hand-in-hand.

Who'd have thought a pandemic would make us feel more connected at work?

Australian workers are feeling more connected than ever before, particularly those working in information media and telecommunications, construction, and health care and social assistance.
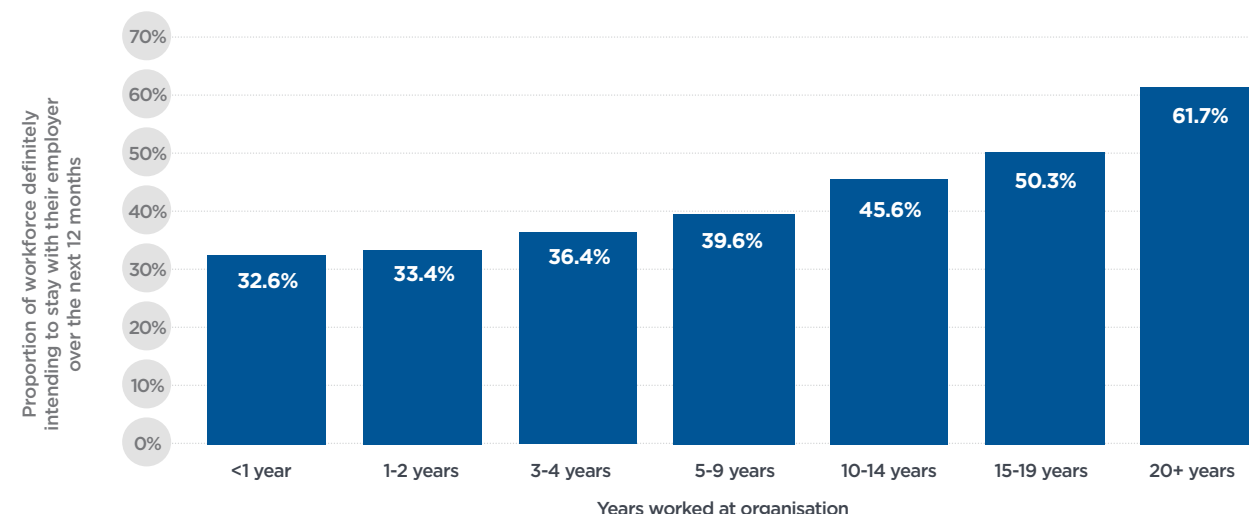
Although the **arts and recreation** and **manufacturing** industries recorded their lowest ever connectedness scores this year, at a national level there has been a surge in the sense of shared purpose, with workplaces increasingly feeling like communities where people support each other beyond getting the job done. The emergence of COVID-19 has certainly had an influence: **14.3% of workers strongly agree that the sense of workplace connection has improved since the pandemic emerged.**

Information media and telecommunications is the most connected industry

Industry	Connectedness index
Information media and telecommunications	74.4
Construction	71.5
Health care and social assistance	71.5
Education and training	71.3
Professional, scientific and technical services	71.1
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	71.0
Financial and insurance services	70.6
Arts and recreation services	69.6
Administrative and support services	69.6
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	69.3
Mining	68.9
Rental, hiring and real estate services	68.2
Accommodation and food services	67.9
Retail trade	67.5
Public administration and safety	67.2
Wholesale trade	67.2
Manufacturing	66.5
Transport, postal and warehousing	66.4

Connectedness index

"More openess between colleagues [with] everyone working together and no management vs employee situation. Everyone is valued for what they do."

"Helping fellow employees with the struggles of the times by talking, listening [and] sharing stories. [We've become] a closer team."

"The general sense of better team work and solidarity."

Note: These respondent comments also reflect the connectedness-related changes people most want to continue in future.

Increasing sense of shared purpose and workplaces feeling more like communities

Proportion of workforce

28%		
26%		25.4% / 25.3%
24%		
22%		21.4% / 21.3%
20%		20.7% / 20.2% / 20.0% / 19.4%
18%		
16%		

2018 · 2019 · 2020

- People feel that they are part of a team
- People are courteous and treat me with respect
- There is a strong sense that people have a shared purpose
- Relationships are built on trust
- Everyone works together effectively, particularly when trying to accomplish difficult goals
- People identify with the workplace
- Work feels like a community where people support each other beyond just getting the work done
- People care about each other

Pioneers in preparing for this moment

In September 1994, 32,000 employees of US-based telecommunications company AT&T trialled a radical new experiment: bringing work to the workers, instead of workers to work[a]. In one of the first trials of this kind, this mass group of employees pioneered 'telecommuting' at scale, and the results were surprisingly positive. As well as reducing the overhead costs that come with fixed offices, the experiment found that productivity increased, as well as 'personal effectiveness' on the job. IBM followed suit with similar trials, and working remotely became increasingly normalised and accepted in this industry.

It does, however, open a divide. Remote work is really only practical for "informational" workers, and not "industrial" workers, who need access to specific equipment, materials, locations or people in order to successfully complete their roles.

Compared to people who usually worked on-site (pre-pandemic), people who worked remotely for at least a month between March and June have higher index scores for every domain and an overall index score of 67.4 (5.0pp higher than the score of 62.4 for on-site workers). Connectedness was even higher when **everyone** in the organisation worked remotely for longer than a month (71.3).

"My boss has been so helpful with me and my family's wellbeing during this pandemic, he has even taken my mum to a doctor's appointment."

People who worked remotely are closer to thriving

Domain	Worked remotely	No remote work
Leadership	67.3	61.2
Connectedness	71.0	67.6
Policy	64.6	58.3
Capability	66.6	62.5
Culture	67.7	62.6

Index score

THRIVING

- Worked remotely for at least a month (March–June)
- No remote work
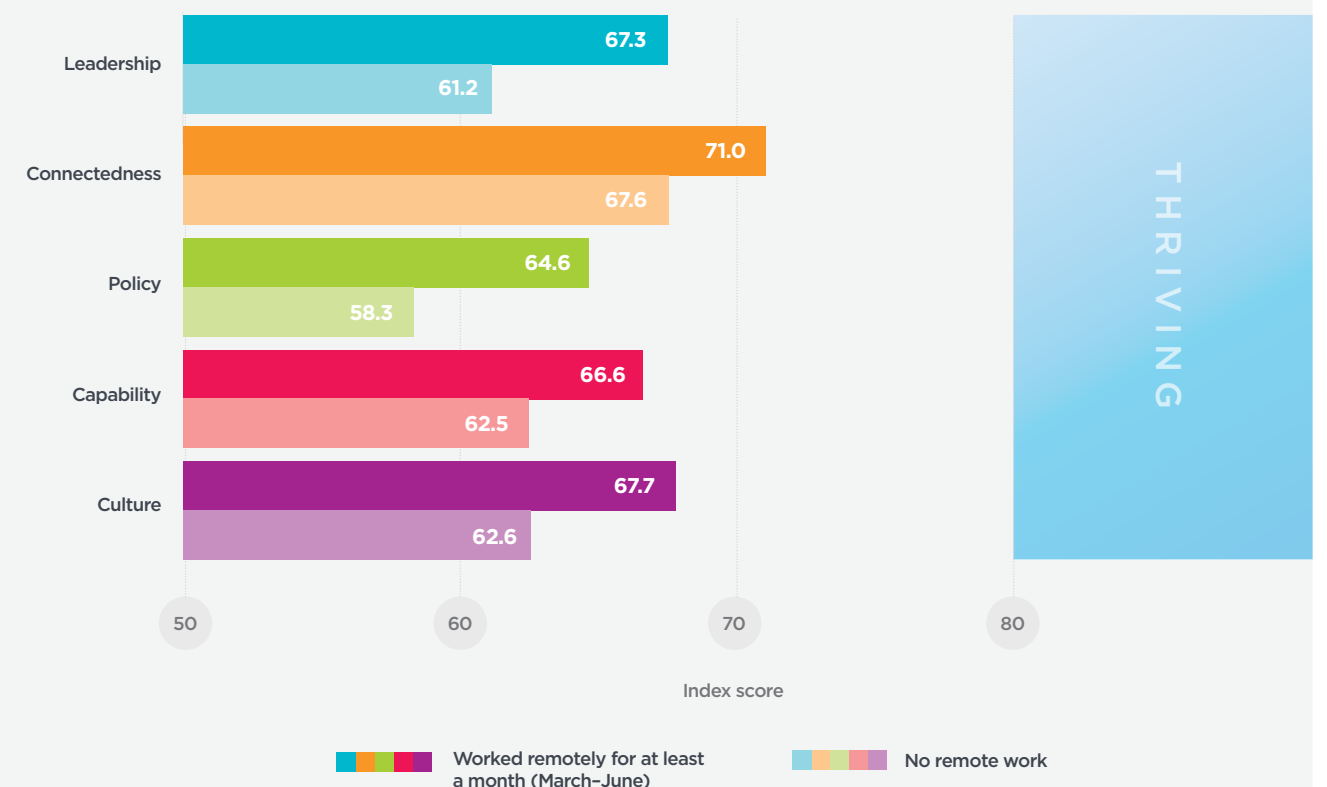
Business owners, managers and long-serving workers are more connected right now

Small businesses continue to show the strongest sense of workplace **connectedness**, which larger organisations typically find more difficult to achieve.

Hierarchical seniority is related to workers' sense of connection, with business owners consistently recording the highest **connectedness** scores, and non-managers the lowest. However, every organisational level has experienced a similar increase in **connectedness** over the last year.

Tenure also has a role to play in feeling connected in the workplace. People who have been working with their organisation for less than a year are actually **more connected** than those who have been there longer, as the sense of connection recedes. When workers are new to an industry it takes a little longer to establish a sense of **connectedness**, with people feeling most connected after working in an industry for a full year.

What are the benefits of connectedness at work?

Research shows that high quality personal connections at work deliver a broad range of benefits, including:

- Supporting personal development and growth[10]
- Creating moments of learning during organisational change[11]
- Higher levels of psychological safety and trust, contributing to learning from failure and increasing cooperation and trustworthiness[12], and
- Positive workplace behaviours such as helping and sharing resources[13].

Small businesses feel more connected

Connectedness index. Number of people in organisation (within Australia). Values: 2–19: 72.7; 20–199: 69.5; 200–999: 68.1; 1,000–4,999: 69.5; 5,000+: 68.3

Senior staff feel a stronger sense of connection

Connectedness index by year (2018, 2019, 2020). Business owner: 78.0; Senior manager: 73.6; Junior/middle manager: 69.1; Non-manager: 67.3

Connectedness is high for new workers with industry experience

Connectedness index by Tenure (years). Organisation / Industry: <1: 69.3 / 68.1; 1: 68.3 / 69.1; 2: 68.2 / 68.5; 3: 68.1 / 67.8; 4: 68.7 / 68.2; 5: 69.7 / 67.2

More physical work = less connection

People working in highly physical jobs feel **most connected** when they've worked with an organisation for 1-2 years, while those working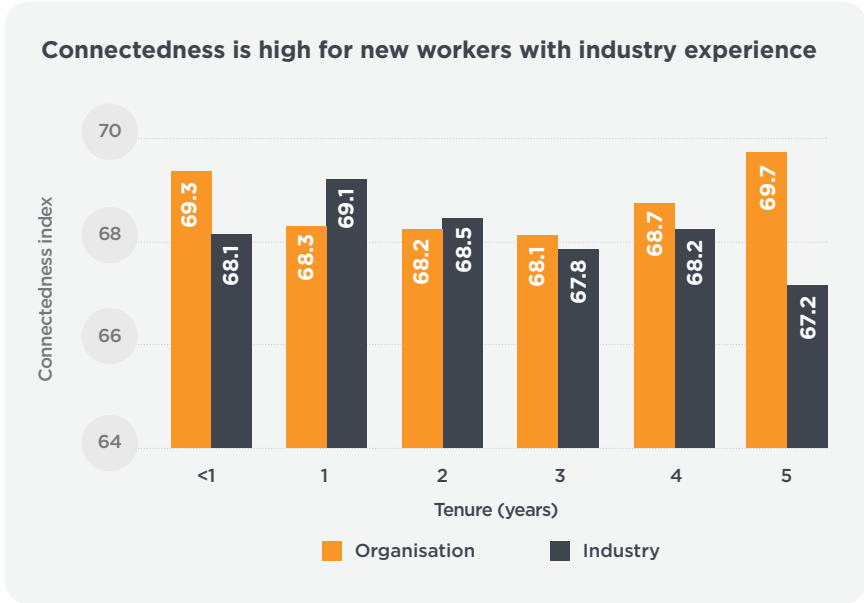 in roles with minimal physical activity feel most connected when they first join their organisation. Howe ver, those in physical jobs are less connected regardless of how long they have worked at an organisation.

People in physically active jobs feel less connected regardless of tenure

Connectedness index by Years worked at organisation. Job involves minimal physical activity / Job involves substantial physical activity: <1: 70.4 / 67.3; 1: 68.3 / 68.1; 2: 68.3 / 68.0; 3: 69.1 / 65.7; 4: 70.1 / 65.4; 5: 70.7 / 67.2

"I have started work recently and have experienced feeling more connected being in the workforce."

"I wish a regular check in and chat one-to-one with your line manager was offered during these uncertain times."

Action ideas for building high quality connections[14]

Simple ways to foster high quality connections and promote interpersonal civility include:

- Including time on meeting agendas to check in with how people are feeling, offering space for stories or narratives
- Stopping to say hello or check in with a worker after a long day

- Enabling leaders to actively support others and model positive and respectful relationships
- Bringing workers from different teams or workplaces together to work on initiatives
- If possible, maximising team opportunities for discussion and minimising reliance on each meeting member looking at their device.

Many are working fewer hours, but not by choice

As well as rising unemployment, the pandemic has also brought rising underemployment, with the proportion of people working fewer than 20 hours a week rising from 15.3% in February to 24.8% in April, with only a minor recovery by June 2020.

Many people have worked less hours since the pandemic emerged

Hours per week	February (pre-pandemic)	March	April	May	June
Don't know	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
50+ hours	6.6%	6.4%	6.1%	6.3%	6.4%
40–49 hours	24.6%	23.5%	20.3%	20.5%	20.6%
30–39 hours	40.5%	37.5%	33.5%	33.5%	34.6%
20–29 hours	12.8%	14.3%	14.9%	15.5%	15.6%
10–19 hours	8.7%	9.9%	10.4%	10.1%	10.4%
1–9 hours	4.1%	5.4%	5.5%	5.7%	6.2%
0 hours	2.4%	2.8%	8.9%	8.1%	5.8%

Proportion of workforce
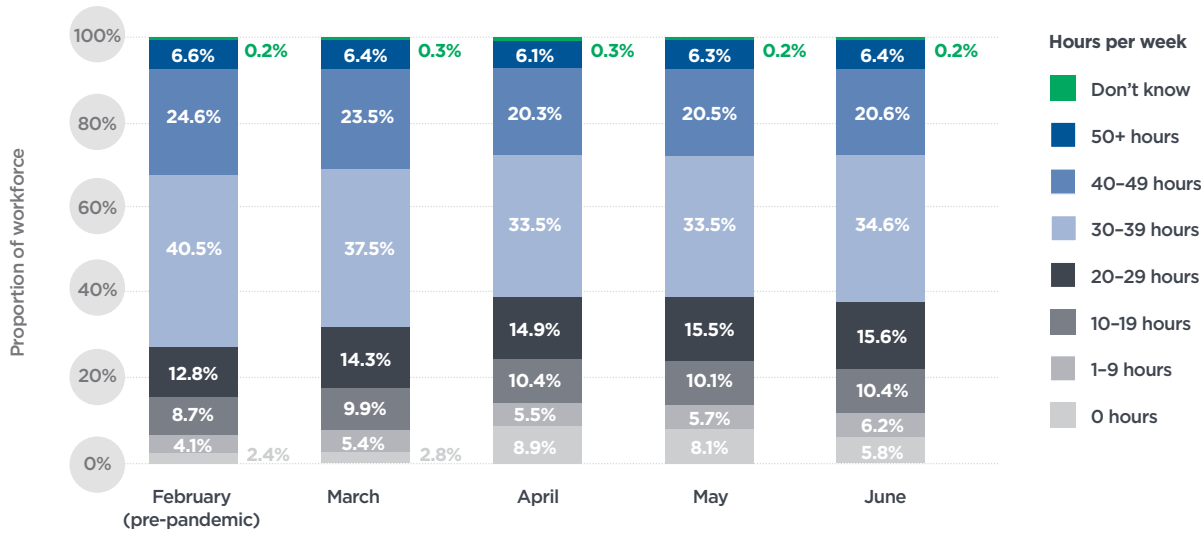
Work hours changed following the pandemic, and many workers considered a career change

	Proportion of workforce
Worked less	31.8%
Considered a career change	25.8%
Worked more	21.5%
Upskilled	12.9%
Changed job tasks	12.0%
Volunteered	6.9%
Paused retirement	2.1%

At a national level, nearly 1 in 3 workers (31.8%) said they worked less due to the pandemic, while 1 in 5 (21.5%) worked more. 1 in 4 workers (25.8%) considered a career change as a result.

> "I've welcomed the change to no late-night trading. I find that I am not as tired. Working fewer days has been a little stressful financially but because I am not going out anymore, I have cut down on many costs there. I have rediscovered hobbies and have been able to implement self-care."

While some workers chose to work fewer hours than usual, nearly 1 in 4 workers (24.3%) were not given a choice. This was the case for half (50.3%) of the casual workforce, although part-time and full-time workers were also affected (29.2% and 17.6% respectively).

Unsurprisingly, more than a third (34.8%) of casual workers considered a career change due to the pandemic, compared to approximately a quarter of part-time and full-time workers. Among the people who were required to work more hours due to the pandemic, it was more common for full-time workers (13.1%) than those working part-time or casually (7.4% and 6.4% respectively).

> "Reduced hours and a permanent contract with no meaning during this pandemic left me stranded. It seems like JobKeeper and free money is beneficial for businesses, not staff."
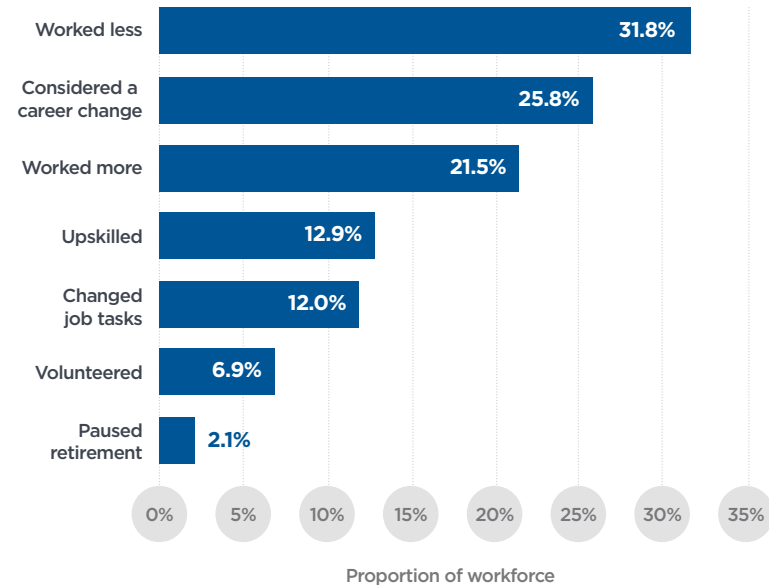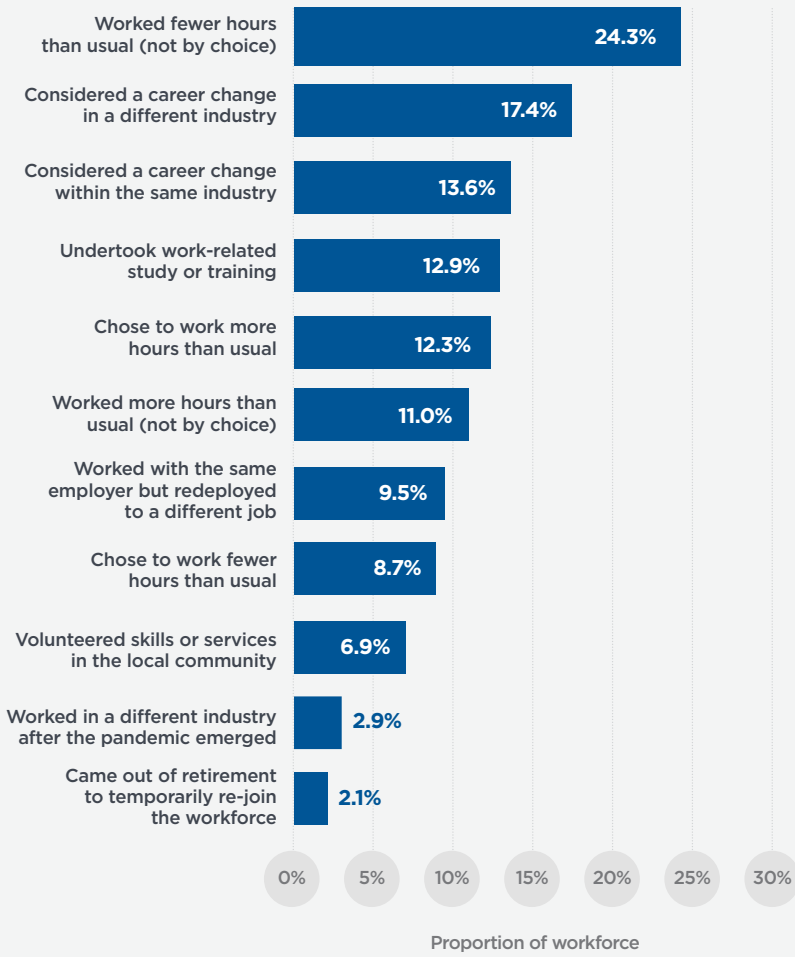
Workers often had no choice in their reduced work hours

	Proportion of workforce
Worked fewer hours than usual (not by choice)	24.3%
Considered a career change in a different industry	17.4%
Considered a career change within the same industry	13.6%
Undertook work-related study or training	12.9%
Chose to work more hours than usual	12.3%
Worked more hours than usual (not by choice)	11.0%
Worked with the same employer but redeployed to a different job	9.5%
Chose to work fewer hours than usual	8.7%
Volunteered skills or services in the local community	6.9%
Worked in a different industry after the pandemic emerged	2.9%
Came out of retirement to temporarily re-join the workforce	2.1%

Top 5 industries where people worked fewer hours

	Worked less not by choice	Combination of both	Worked less by choice
Arts and recreation services	50.6%	1.5%	7.8%
Accommodation and food services	49.7%	2.0%	8.2%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	28.9%	4.0%	10.4%
Wholesale trade	31.7%	1.1%	6.9%
Retail trade	26.6%	2.1%	10.0%

Proportion of workforce

Where people worked fewer hours, it was predominantly not their choice, with **arts and recreation** and **accommodation and food services** hit hardest. The economic climate and decimation of the tourist industry also hit **rental, hiring and real estate services** hard, with commercial real estate (restaurants, bars, retail outlets, entertainment venues and office buildings) most impacted[15].

The **wholesale trade** sector was impacted by logistical challenges caused by international and interstate border closures and restrictions on various activities, as well as reduced production of and demand for various source materials and goods around the globe[16].

Being forced to work more hours is stressful

Around 13% of people in the following industries worked more hours but not by choice:

- **Information, media and telecommunications**
- **Electricity, gas, water and waste,** and
- **Education and training.**

However, the standout feature for many of these industries is that many workers also chose to work more hours. Along with **information, media and telecommunications** and **electricity, gas, water and waste**, the following round out the top five industries where people chose to work longer hours:

- **Financial and insurance services**
- **Health care and social assistance** (including aged care and childcare), and
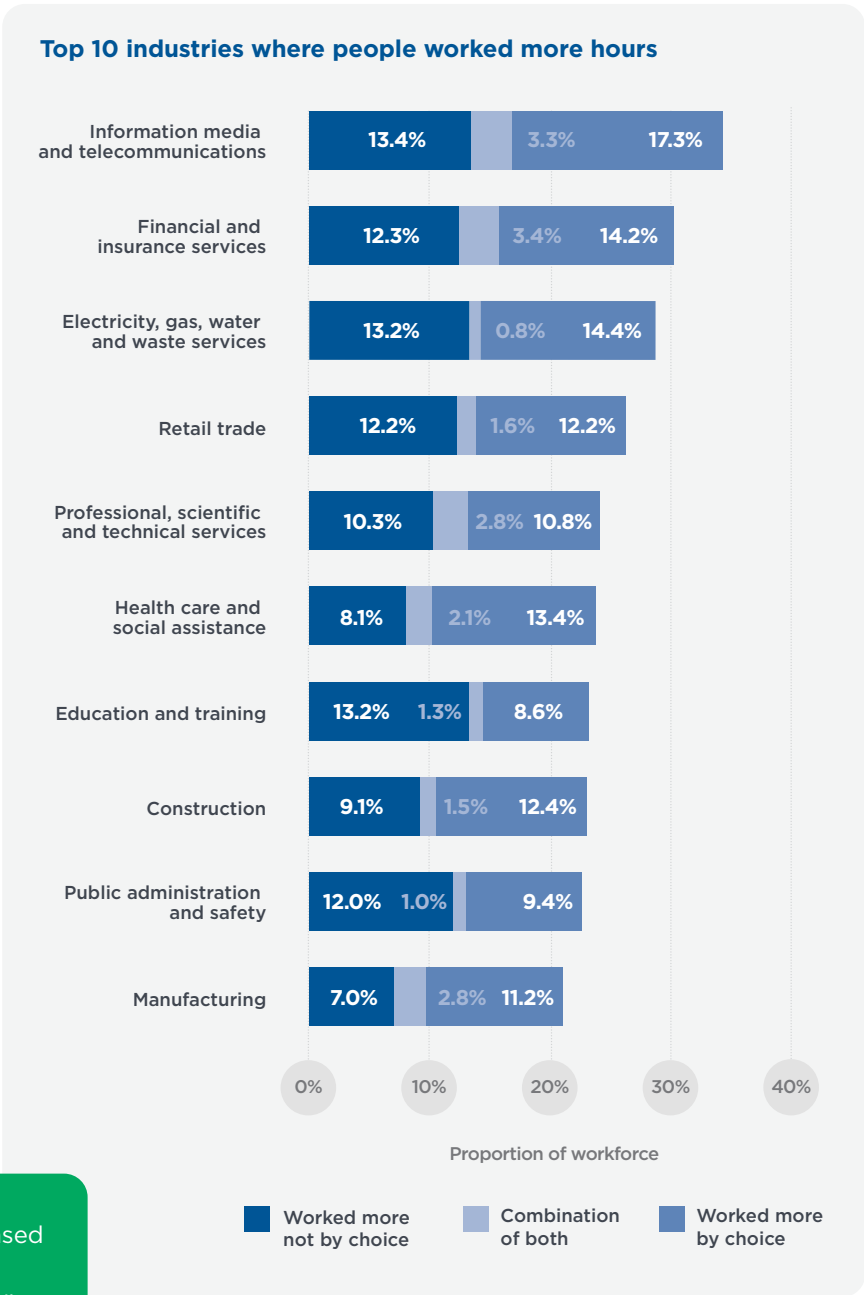- **Construction.**

Top 10 industries where people worked more hours

Industry	Worked more not by choice	Combination of both	Worked more by choice
Information media and telecommunications	13.4%	3.3%	17.3%
Financial and insurance services	12.3%	3.4%	14.2%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	13.2%	0.8%	14.4%
Retail trade	12.2%	1.6%	12.2%
Professional, scientific and technical services	10.3%	2.8%	10.8%
Health care and social assistance	8.1%	2.1%	13.4%
Education and training	13.2%	1.3%	8.6%
Construction	9.1%	1.5%	12.4%
Public administration and safety	12.0%	1.0%	9.4%
Manufacturing	7.0%	2.8%	11.2%

Proportion of workforce

Legend: Worked more not by choice | Combination of both | Worked more by choice

"Demand for our services has increased and the general community places higher value on what we do. Further positive recognition for our industry would help our business to continue to grow, providing financial security for our family, job security for current employees and create future jobs."
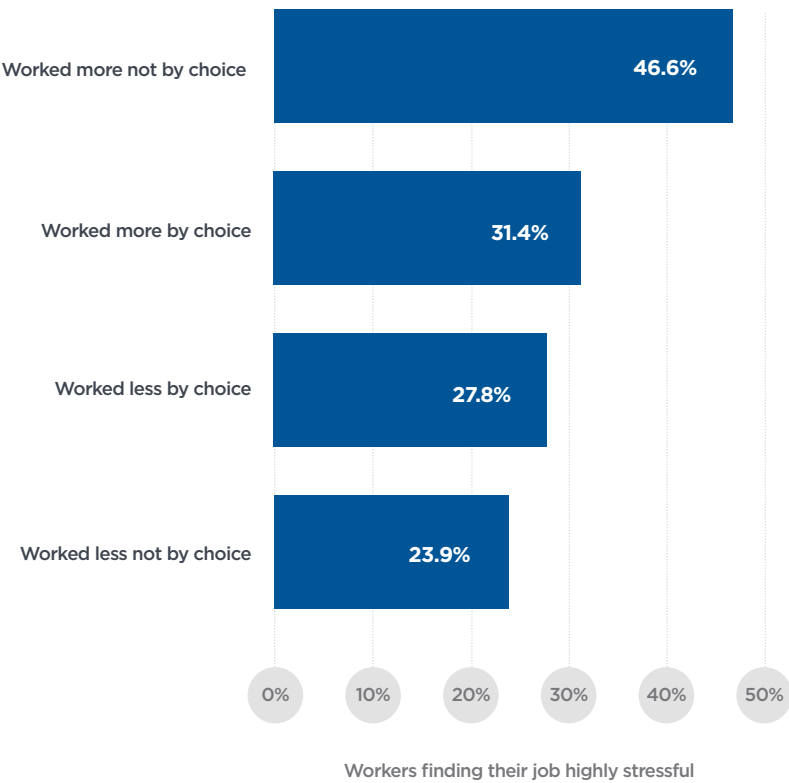
There's a lot to be said for feeling essential

Several of the industries where workers chose to work more hours by choice were also the most thriving. They were also the industries deemed 'essential' or experiencing increased demand throughout the pandemic.

The massive collective shift to remote work saw a spike in demand for home internet and technology support, and in-home utility use also increased substantially, with workers using their own heating, cooling, power[17] and water during work hours, rather than their employer's.

Our health care workers have also been in demand like no other time in recent history, as have those in childcare and aged care. Health care saw increased demand for frontline workers, including those working in COVID-19 testing and treatment, and changed ways of patient care, with the rise of Telehealth and other remote consultation and treatment options. Demand has not been consistent across all health care sectors, however, with elective surgery workers and many general practitioners (especially those in private practice) experiencing a marked downturn in their work, with elective surgeries cancelled, and shutdowns deterring people from seeking medical care[18].

Job stress is highest when workers are forced to work more hours

Worked more not by choice	46.6%
Worked more by choice	31.4%
Worked less by choice	27.8%
Worked less not by choice	23.9%

Workers finding their job highly stressful

"I am an essential worker [and] I was happy with how we were valued at work."

"[The best part of the pandemic is] being essential and needed by many."

During most challenging times in recent human history, people have rallied together, and COVID-19 is no different. Those who are rallying seem to be deriving greater satisfaction and a sense of purpose from their work, supporting research[19] showing the importance of 'self-transcendence' in relation to meaningful work. In short, knowing that your work is contributing to the greater good and helping others allows you to rise above your own personal concerns, bringing your own life greater meaning.

Despite these benefits, many people who worked more than usual tended to find their jobs more highly stressful than those who were working less. This is particularly true for people working more hours but not by choice, with nearly half (46.6%) describing their job as 'very' or 'extremely' stressful.
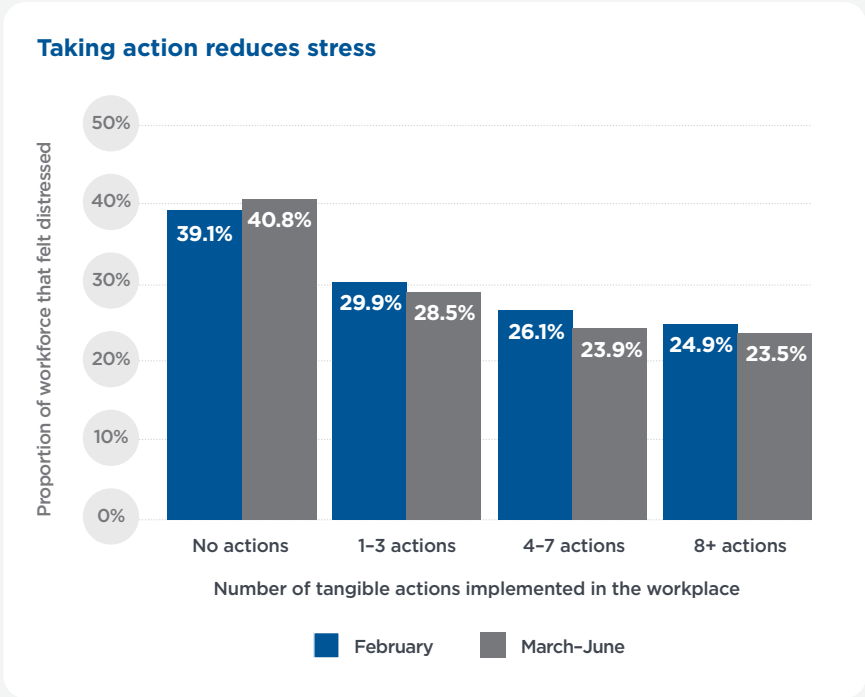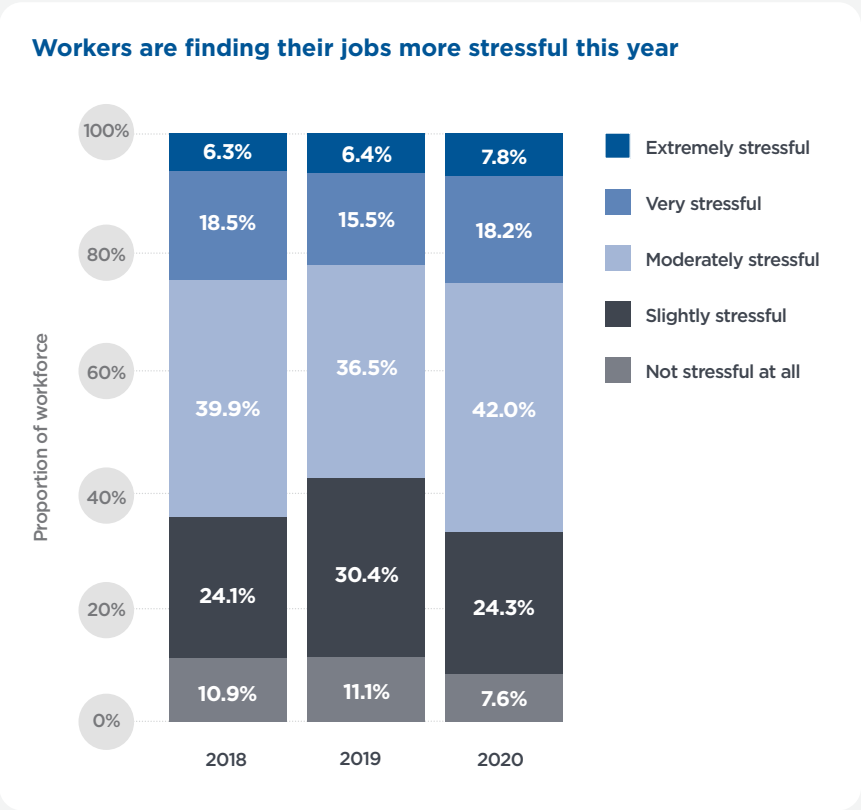
More people are experiencing extreme stress at work

Unsurprisingly, there are more people experiencing moderate to extreme job stress this year.

On some level, we have all witnessed and experienced many pandemic-related stressors, from health fears and financial challenges, to job insecurities, adapting to new ways of working and changed home environments. Fortunately, though, stress is not always bad for you!
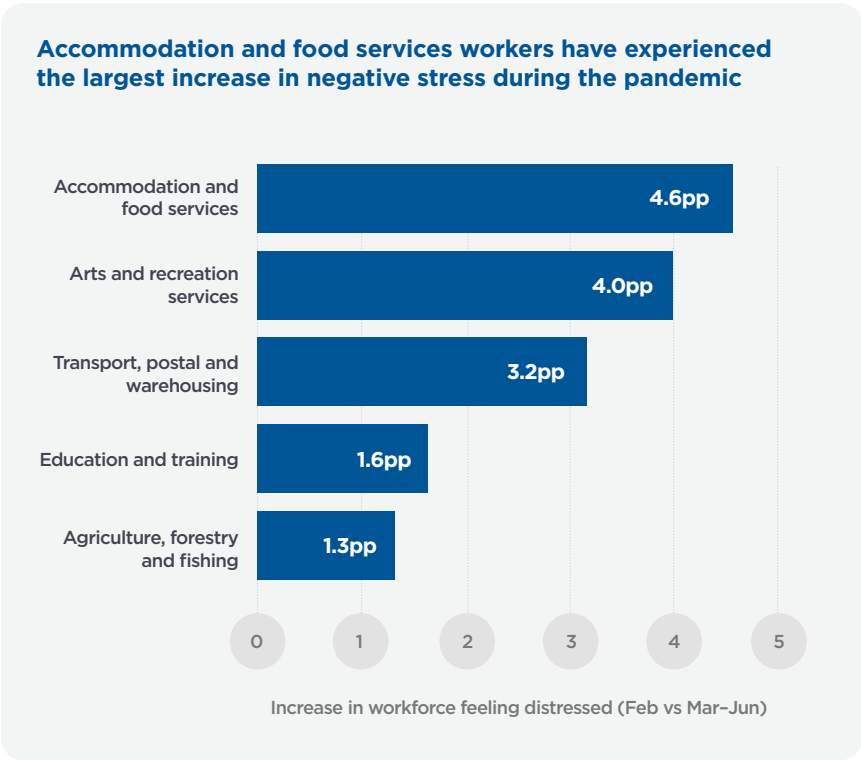
- Positive stress, also known as 'eustress' (which translates to 'good stress') is a short-term motivator that focuses energy and actually **improves** performance and wellbeing[20]
- Negative stress, or 'distress', can be short- or long-term, **reduces** performance and can feel like you're not coping[21].

Although there hasn't been a notable shift from positive to negative stress overall, it's a different story at the industry level.

Workers are finding their jobs more stressful this year

Legend:
- Extremely stressful
- Very stressful
- Moderately stressful
- Slightly stressful
- Not stressful at all

2018: 6.3%, 18.5%, 39.9%, 24.1%, 10.9%
2019: 6.4%, 15.5%, 36.5%, 30.4%, 11.1%
2020: 7.8%, 18.2%, 42.0%, 24.3%, 7.6%

Taking action reduces stress

Proportion of workforce that felt distressed

Number of tangible actions	February	March–June
No actions	39.1%	40.8%
1–3 actions	29.9%	28.5%
4–7 actions	26.1%	23.9%
8+ actions	24.9%	23.5%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

## Some workers are feeling more distressed than others during the pandemic

The proportion of workers experiencing distress **decreased** during the pandemic for those whose workplaces have taken tangible action to improve workers' mental health and wellbeing, and **increased** for those in workplaces that have not taken any action.

Accommodation and food services workers have experienced the largest increase in negative stress during the pandemic

Industry	Increase
Accommodation and food services	4.6pp
Arts and recreation services	4.0pp
Transport, postal and warehousing	3.2pp
Education and training	1.6pp
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.3pp

Increase in workforce feeling distressed (Feb vs Mar–Jun)

Transport, postal and warehousing workers report the highest overall level of negative stress during the pandemic

Industry	Proportion
Transport, postal and warehousing	40.3%
Public administration and safety	37.9%
Retail trade	37.7%
Arts and recreation services	37.1%
Accommodation and food services	36.5%

Proportion of workforce feeling distressed (Mar–Jun)

In the **accommodation and food services, arts and recreation services** and **transport, postal and warehousing** industries, substantially higher proportions of workers felt distressed once the pandemic emerged.

Overall, **transport, postal and warehousing** has the highest proportion of distressed workers since the pandemic emerged (40.3%), with people working in **public administration and safety** and **retail trade** rounding out the top 3.

> "We put too much pressure on people. Especially in hospitality. Everyone is expected to work very long and hard days with very low income. Mental health should be supported."
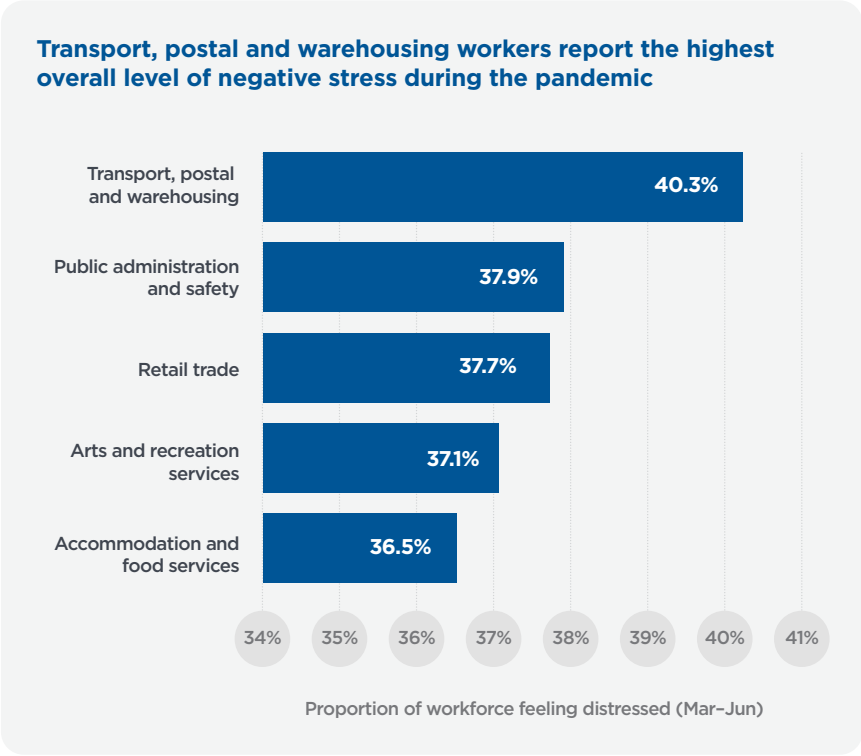
Within the **health care and social assistance** industry, which includes hospitals, other medical services, residential aged care and childcare, there was a difference in distress levels for the two largest states. While the balance between positive and negative stress remained fairly stable in New South Wales when the pandemic emerged, there was a shift toward workers feeling distressed in Victoria (up 5.7pp from February to 33.6% during March–June).

> "Since younger children have little knowledge of social distancing and proper hand washing, it has been very stressful to be a teacher and have the responsibility of checking multiple times a day that the students are washing hands and/or using hand sanitiser. Also, parents sending their children to school when they are unwell has been so stressful. I became unwell two days after teaching a class with sick students. Because of this I had to self-isolate while I waited for the results of a COVID-19 test, and therefore lost three days' work."
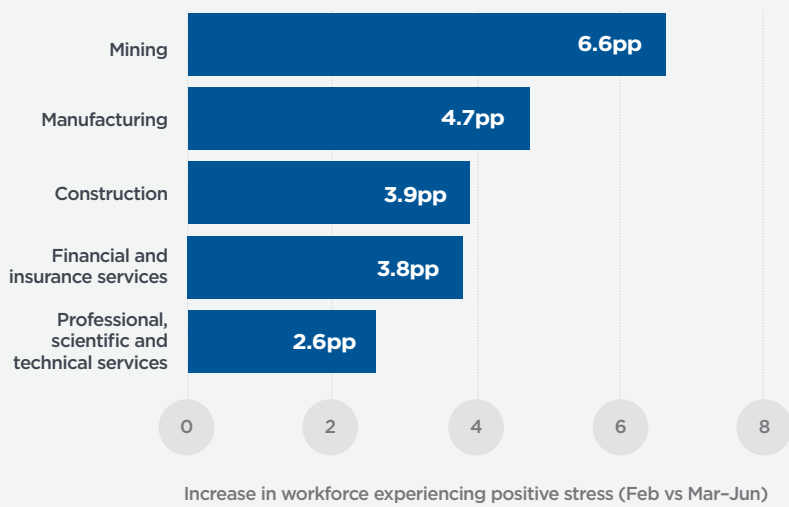
Positive stress

The **mining, manufacturing, construction** and **financial and insurance services** industries have seen a substantial increase in workers experiencing *positive stress*.
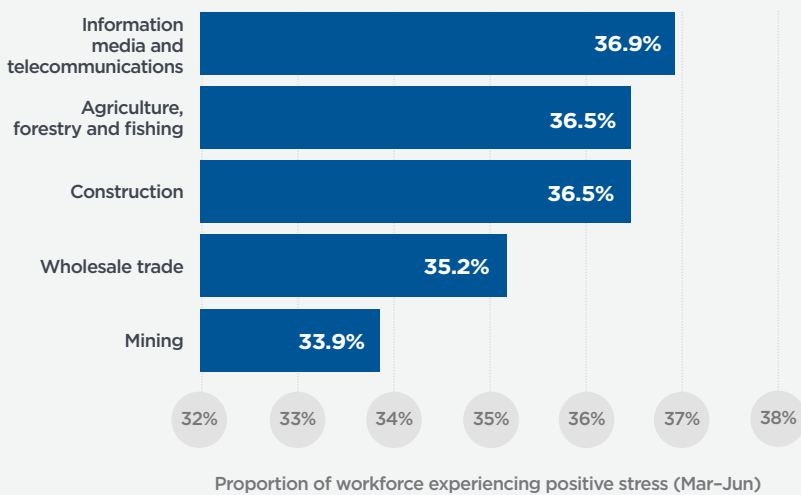
The **mining** industry's result may be influenced by less disruption than initially anticipated. Metallurgical coal, for example, has continued production with limited disruptions during the pandemic, which has buoyed the industry as Australia accounts for more than 70% of the seaborne supply[22].

The **information, media and telecommunications** industry has the highest proportion of workers experiencing positive stress (36.9%), while people working in the **agriculture, forestry and fishing**[23] and **construction** industries are close behind. Interestingly, each of these industries has experienced sustained or increased demands for its products and services throughout the pandemic, likely contributing to an increased sense of purpose.

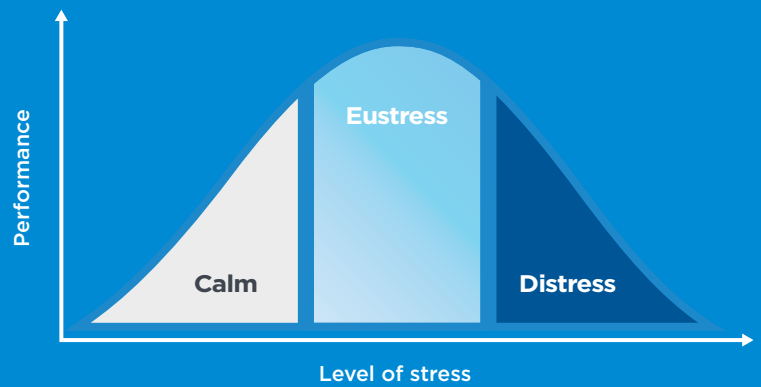### Mining workers have experienced the largest increase in positive stress during the pandemic

Mining	6.6pp
Manufacturing	4.7pp
Construction	3.9pp
Financial and insurance services	3.8pp
Professional, scientific and technical services	2.6pp

Increase in workforce experiencing positive stress (Feb vs Mar–Jun)

Information media and telecommunications workers reported the highest overall level of positive stress during the pandemic

Information media and telecommunications	36.9%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	36.5%
Construction	36.5%
Wholesale trade	35.2%
Mining	33.9%

Proportion of workforce experiencing positive stress (Mar–Jun)

Compared to February, a larger proportion of men have experienced positive stress, while women have experienced little change. A similar pattern is also evident for full-time workers, while the proportion has dropped substantially within the casual workforce. Although some positive stress gains were experienced by those who worked purely on-site, a larger spike was evident for people who worked remotely for at least a month between March and June.

Tenure and positive stress

People who have been working with their organisation for less than a year have the highest level of positive stress, although this declined following the emergence of COVID-19, at which time more established workers experienced an increase.

Shift toward male, full-time workers feeling more positively stressed during the pandemic, especially remote workers

Change in the proportion of workforce experiencing positive stress since the pandemic emerged (pp)

Gender identity	Employment status	Remote working arrangements
Male 1.6pp / Female 0.2pp	Full-time 1.8pp / Part-time 0.0pp / Casual -2.0pp	No remote work 0.4pp / Worked remotely for at least a month 1.9pp

- Male
- Female
- Full-time
- Part-time
- Casual
- No remote work
- Worked remotely for at least a month

New starters' positive stress levels dipped during the pandemic while established workers experienced an increase

Proportion of workforce experiencing positive stress

Years worked at organisation	Feb 2020	Mar–Jun 2020
<1 year	32.3%	31.3%
1-2 years	26.7%	26.3%
3-4 years	27.4%	28.8%
5-9 years	27.1%	29.5%
10-14 years	26.5%	27.1%
15-19 years	27.5%	28.8%
20+ years	29.8%	31.0%

Years worked at organisation

- Feb 2020
- Mar–Jun 2020
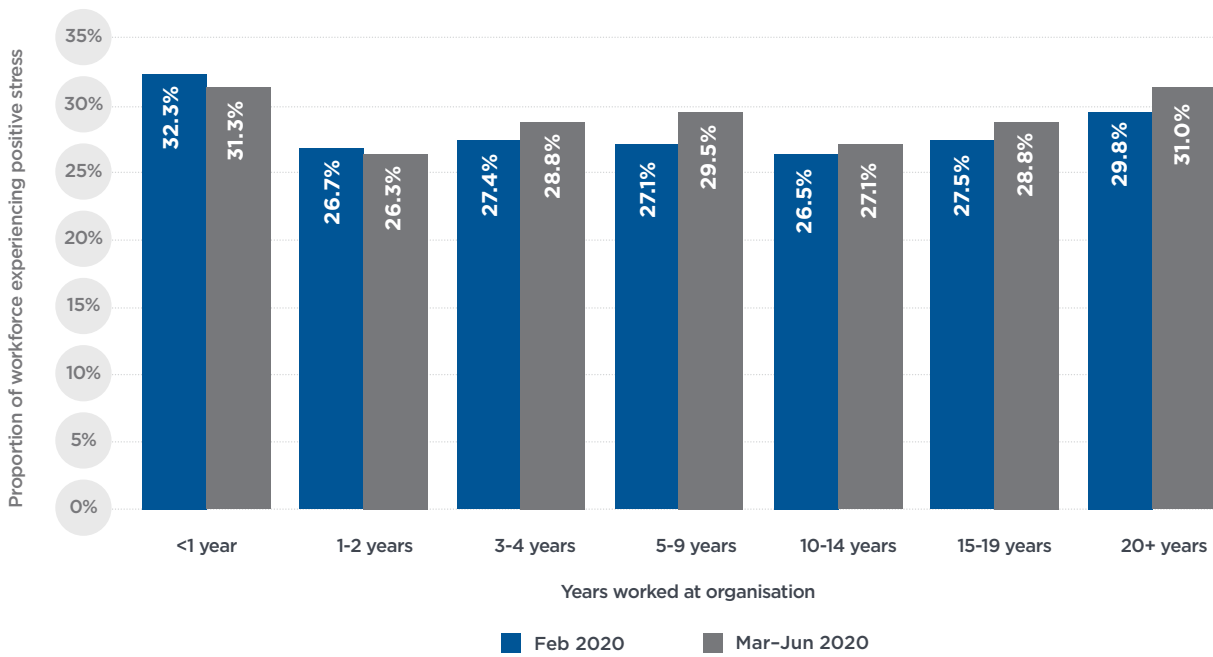
Productivity is down for some and up for others

Around 1 in 4 workers have been less productive than normal since April (up 15.6pp compared to February).

This is not surprising given the unprecedented uncertainty many were experiencing, and anxiety and depression being the biggest contributors to **presenteeism** (being at work when not feeling well).

A recent pre-COVID report from Deloitte UK[24] estimated that mental health-related presenteeism cost UK employers £26-29 billion in 2019, equating to an average cost of around £1,000 per employee. Young people, a cohort particularly impacted by the pandemic, were found to be particularly affected. Furthermore, the report found that employees experiencing financial concerns were half as productive.

However, there has also been a surprising increase in the number of people who have become **more productive** throughout this period (up 4.0pp from February to 29.4% in June).

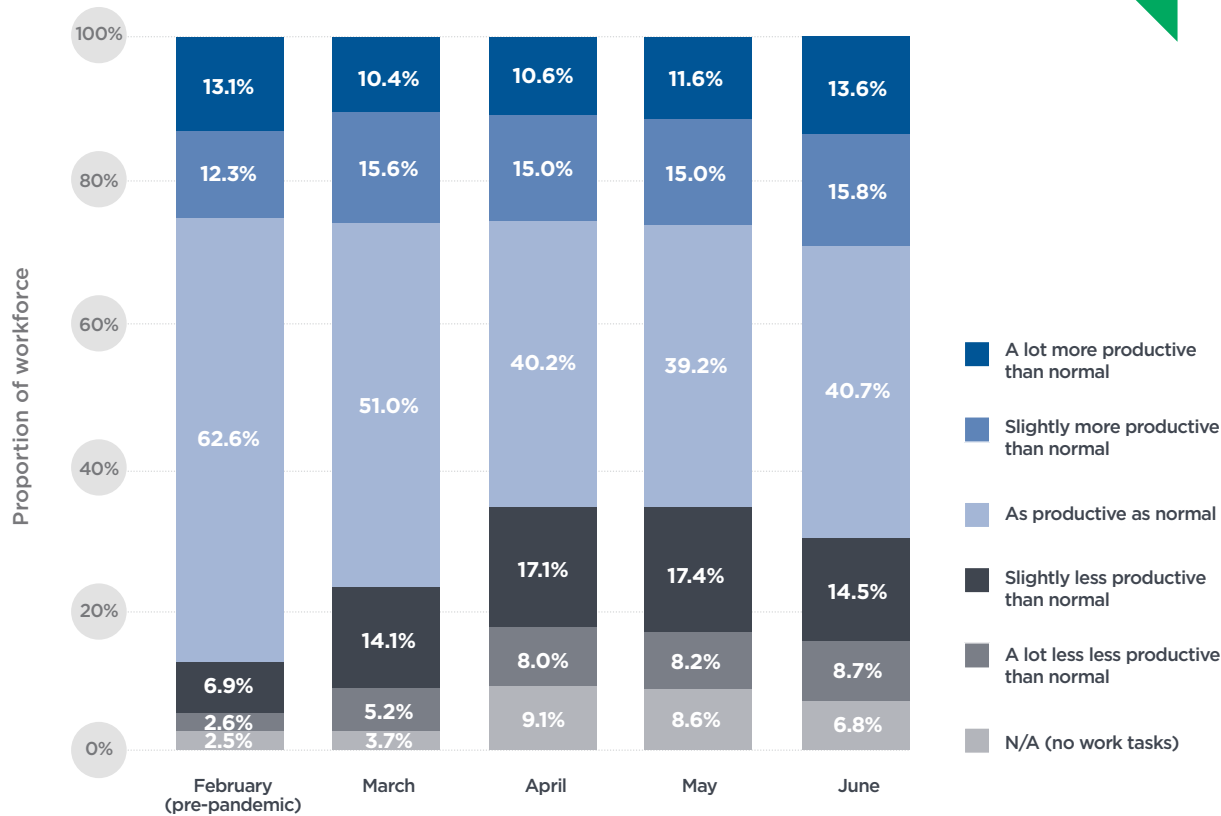Regardless of their perceived overall productivity compared to normal, most workers identified a variety of factors that helped or hindered over the last few months. A large proportion of workers cited better health and wellbeing as beneficial to their productivity, although for some workers this was outweighed by factors that negatively impacted on their productivity.

Overall, **the pandemic has resulted in a better work/life balance for nearly half (48.5%) of Australia's workforce and a range of mental and physical health benefits (44.5%).**

> "Working from home allows more time to attend to family and home needs and home improvements whilst still being very productive at work. I love this."

Productivity fell for many but surprisingly increased for some

	A lot more productive than normal
	Slightly more productive than normal
	As productive as normal
	Slightly less productive than normal
	A lot less less productive than normal
	N/A (no work tasks)

Saving time is the biggest boost to pandemic productivity

Proportion of workforce that reported a factor increased their productivity during the pandemic
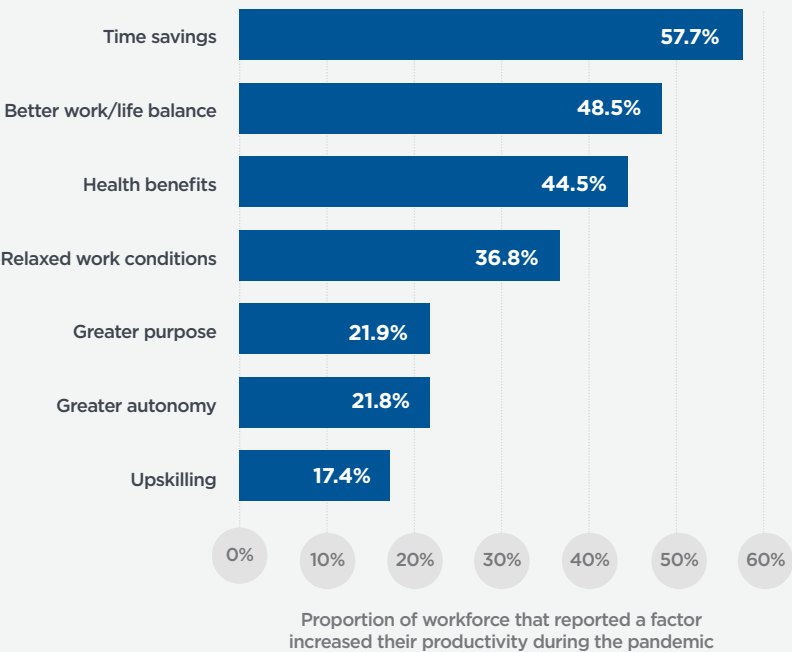
Saving time has been the biggest productivity boost (57.7%), and it seems this is not just about putting in more work hours. Time usually spent getting ready for work, commuting and attending unnecessary meetings is instead spent with loved ones, exercising, pursuing personal interests or getting more sleep – all known factors to improve wellbeing.

> "Office workers are working from home as much as possible so... people who have to be on job sites, like construction, can get to work quicker and more easily."

> "[I want] the balance I have regained [to continue in the future]. For example, less time commuting to work each morning and night gives me an extra 1.5 hrs in my day now. I have been using this time to exercise more and cook, which is something I do that makes me happy."

The most common way to improve productivity was reducing the commute to work through reduced traffic and public transport passenger volume, or in the case of remote workers, cutting out the commute altogether. Interestingly, more comfortable clothing also rated highly as a factor to improve productivity!

Reduced time spent commuting was the most common way to improve productivity

Proportion of workforce that reported a factor increased their productivity during the pandemic

In recent years, men were twice as likely as women to have proposed flexible work arrangements rejected[25]. However, with similar proportions of men and women (46.6% and 43.9%) working remotely for at least a month, it is hopeful that equal access to flexible work will be a positive outcome from the pandemic.
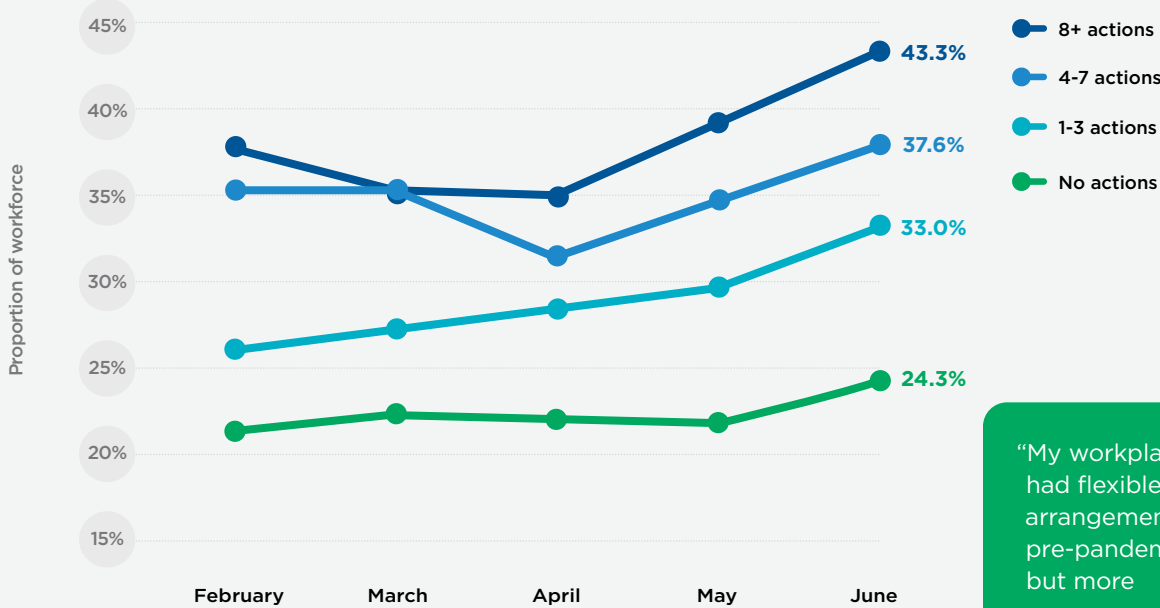
Nearly every industry recorded productivity gains in June compared to February, among those people with work-related tasks to complete. More than a third (35.6%) of people working in the **financial and insurance services** industry were more productive than normal in June (up 9.8pp since February). **Public administration and safety** and **health care and social assistance** also recorded strong productivity gains during this period (up 9.8pp and 7.7pp respectively).

More actions = more productivity

Heightened productivity levels are related to how action-oriented workplaces* are. Workplaces that have implemented at least eight tangible actions to improve workers' mental health and wellbeing have **consistently higher proportions of workers being more productive than normal**.

* 'action-oriented workplaces' refers to workplaces that have implemented at least eight tangible actions

"Everyone would work while they were sick [before the pandemic] but now we have to stay home, so it's like we are forced to look after ourselves better."

"I really enjoy not having to commute to the office every day and suffer through banal conversations with colleagues."

"I love working from home [and] not having to work with the workplace bullies."

"My workplace had flexible work arrangements pre-pandemic, but more managers are happy with [these arrangements] now after seeing them in action."

Increased action to improve workplace mental health improves productivity

- 8+ actions — 43.3%
- 4-7 actions — 37.6%
- 1-3 actions — 33.0%
- No actions — 24.3%

Y-axis: Proportion of workforce (15%–45%)
X-axis: February, March, April, May, June

Mental health concerns have lowered productivity

Mental health concerns are the most common reason for lower productivity this year, affecting 3 in 5 workers (59.7%). Physical health issues during the pandemic affected productivity for less than 1 in 3 workers (29.8%).

Mental health concerns are the most common reason for reduced pandemic productivity

Factor	%
Mental health concerns	59.7%
Distractions	43.4%
Financial concerns	41.8%
Changing/increased work	36.8%
Physical health issues	29.8%
Looking after others	25.0%
Blurred boundaries	23.8%
Resource gaps	22.0%
Communication issues	21.9%

Proportion of workforce that reported a factor reduced their productivity during the pandemic
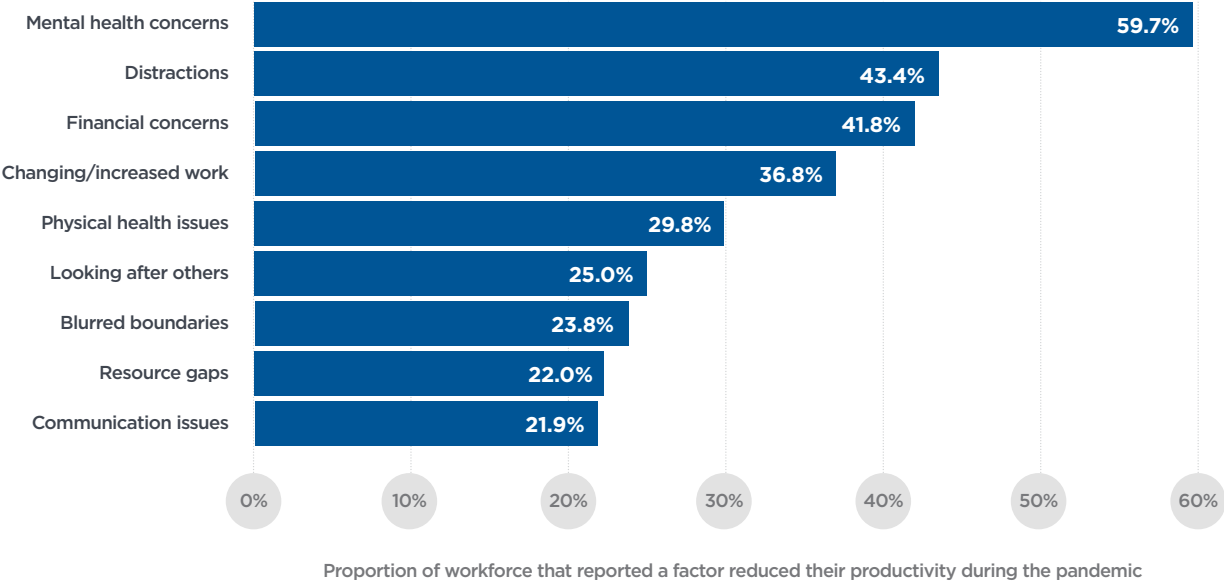
"I suffer from anxiety disorder and since COVID-19... customers (in my supermarket) not social distancing have made me extremely anxious; people get quite aggressive when asked to stand back."

"Lots of staff are anxious and it impacts on work."

General and COVID-related anxiety and job insecurity topped the list of specific factors that reduced productivity. 1 in 3 workers (33.2%) who live alone and worked remotely reported a sense of isolation that reduced their productivity, which was less common among multi-person households (30.5%). This difference is reflected in their **connectedness** index scores, with remote workers in multi-person households feeling a stronger sense of workplace connection than those who live alone (71.4 vs 68.5 respectively). **Connectedness** index scores also show a similar difference between single and multi-person households. Illness related to diagnosed COVID-19 impacted only 4.5% of workers.

Feeling anxious and uncertain about job security was the most common reason for reduced productivity

Factor	Percentage
Feeling anxious	36.4%
Uncertainty about own job security	31.2%
Worrying about catching or spreading COVID-19	30.5%
Feeling isolated	25.4%
Increased workload	24.8%
Feeling unhappy or depressed	24.7%
Household financial pressures	24.6%
Media reports or social media	21.4%
Lack of sleep	19.9%
Difficulty concentrating	19.6%
Difficulty separating home and work life	19.1%
Changing job requirements	18.5%
Caring for family members	18.0%
Noise/interruptions	15.5%
Difficulty contacting colleagues or managers	15.5%
Lack of appropiate tools or resources (i.e. furniture)	14.1%
Household chores	13.5%
Inadequate internet connection	11.1%
Illness not related to COVID-19	10.9%
Supervising remote home learning	10.5%
Lack of a home office with a door	9.6%
Difficulty contacting customers	9.1%
Illness related to diagnosed COVID-19	4.5%

Proportion of workforce that reported a factor reduced their productivity during the pandemic

"Remote working and isolation are the cause of my depression."

"I'd like to do more 'working from home' rather than 'living at work' – which is how it feels currently. My workplace has saved a lot of money from employees working from home for 4+ months, it would be nice to see more respect for work/life balance and understanding that staff are real people with real lives outside of their jobs."
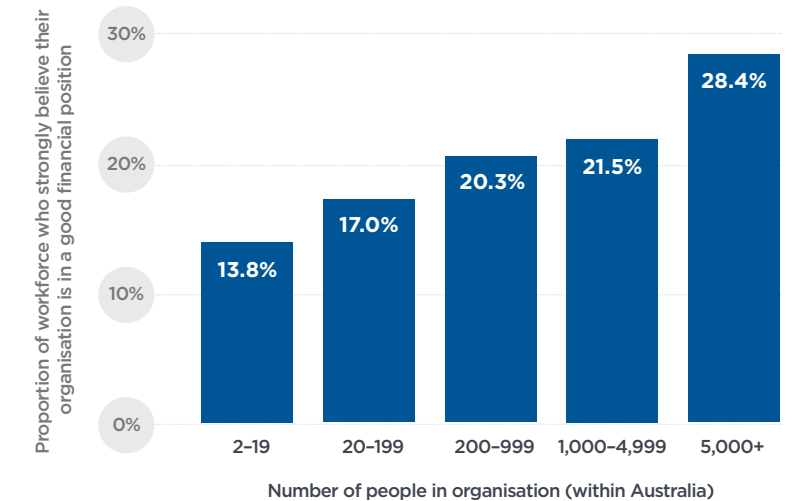
Money, money, money

Surprisingly, 3 in 5 working Australians (61.0%) believe their workplace is in a good financial position. This perception is more common in **financial and insurance services** (76.9%), **information media and telecommunications** (70.5%) and **mining** (70.4%), and less apparent in **arts and recreation services** (42.6%) and **accommodation and food services** (50.5%). The strength of this perception is tied to an organisation's size and ability to weather challenging economic times. More than a quarter (28.4%) of people working in large organisations strongly agree that their workplace is in a good financial position; more than double the proportion in organisations with less than 20 people (13.8%).

A higher proportion of full-time workers strongly agree with this perception than casual workers (20.7% vs 13.6%). Similarly, there is greater confidence in the strength of an organisation's financial position among those at the top of the hierarchy than those in more junior positions.

Job insecurity

Nearly 1 in 3 workers aged under 35 years experienced job insecurity over the last year, with older workers experiencing this to a lesser extent. Job insecurity has been highest for people working in two industries: **accommodation and food services** (40.7%), and **arts and recreation services** (33.0%).

Workers believe large organisations are in a better financial position

Proportion of workforce who strongly believe their organisation is in a good financial position

Number of people in organisation (within Australia)	Percentage
2–19	13.8%
20–199	17.0%
200–999	20.3%
1,000–4,999	21.5%
5,000+	28.4%

Job insecurity is worse for younger workers

Proportion of workforce who experienced job insecurity over the last 12 months

Age (years)	Percentage
18–24	29.7%
25–34	30.2%
35–44	26.5%
45–54	25.8%
55–64	20.2%
65+	14.9%
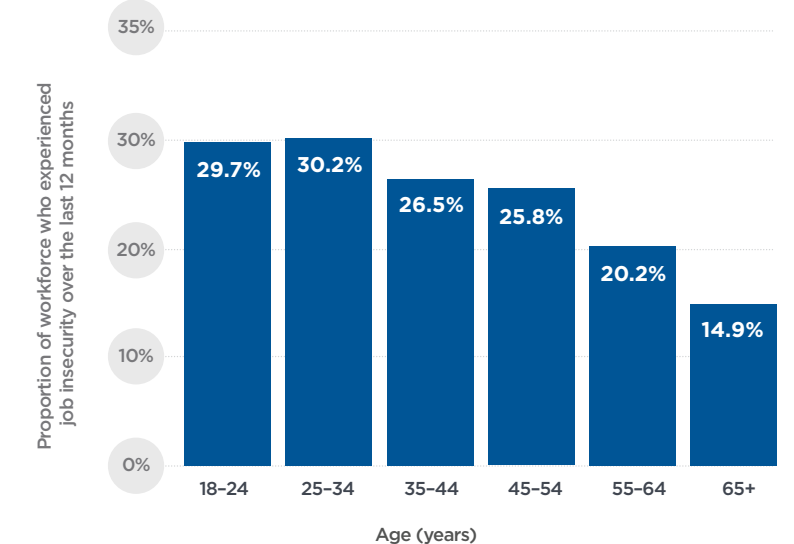
"The arts and entertainment industry is historically terrible at supporting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace."

"Overall, most people are not happy with their job. Work knows there are not many jobs out there, so they make changes to bring staff morale down and increase productivity."

Personal finances

Despite the high levels of job insecurity, 1 in 3 workers report that their personal financial position has actually improved since the pandemic emerged, although a further 1 in 3 disagree that this is the case.

People working **in information media and telecommunications, financial and insurance services** and **electricity, gas, water and waste s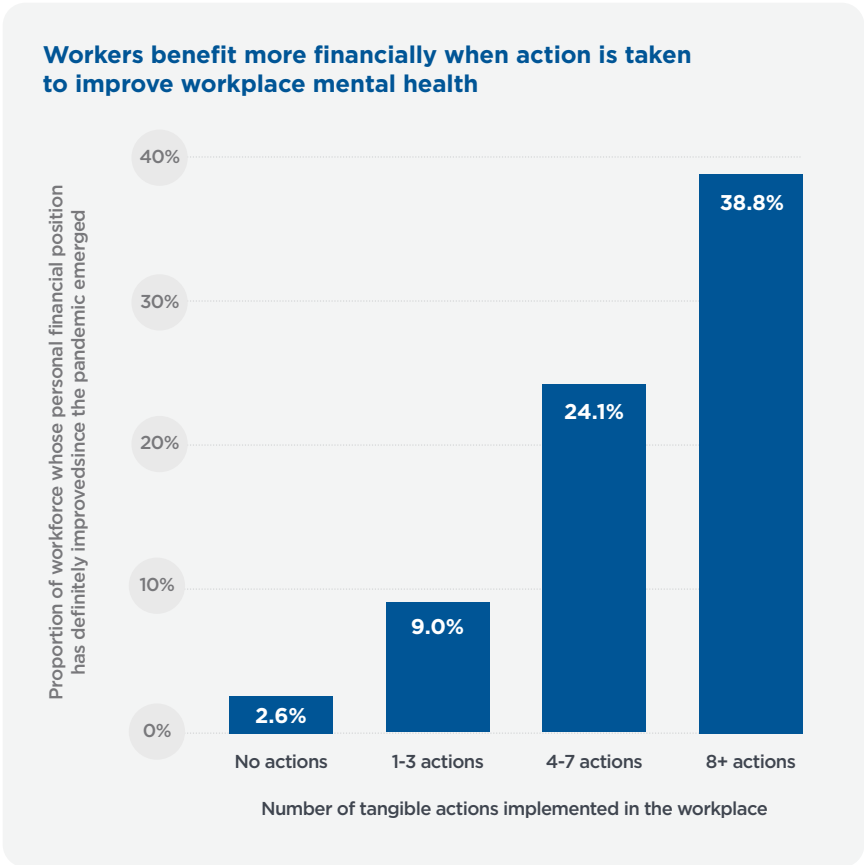ervices** tend to be better off financially, along with those working full-time and workers aged 18–24 years who are supported by the JobKeeper supplement.
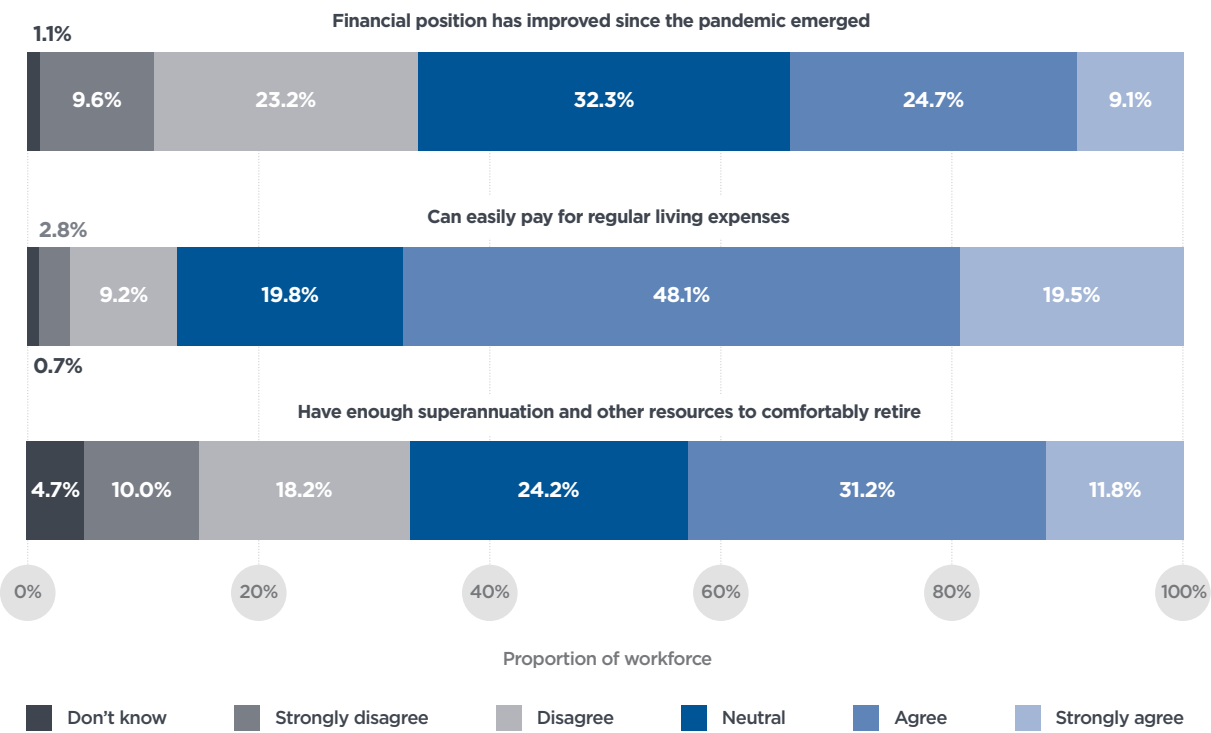
> "JobKeeper saved me."

> "My employer was not eligible to claim JobKeeper for me and other casual employees. We had severely reduced hours/no work for a month, so the financial insecurity was stressful."

Job insecurity is clearly aligned with workers finding themselves in a worsening financial situation in the **accommodation and food services, arts and recreation services** and **rental, hiring and real estate services** industries. A sub-optimal financial situation is also more common for those working in small businesses or casual roles that are not supported by JobKeeper. These workers are typically the ones who are struggling to pay for their regular living expenses, particularly workers under 25 years who are early in their careers.

There is a positive relationship between the number of tangible actions taken in the workplace and workers' personal financial position since March, **with workers benefitting more financially when action is taken to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing.**

Perceptions of personal finances

Financial position has improved since the pandemic emerged

| 1.1% | 9.6% | 23.2% | 32.3% | 24.7% | 9.1% |

Can easily pay for regular living expenses

| 2.8% | 9.2% | 19.8% | 48.1% | 19.5% |

Have enough superannuation and other resources to comfortably retire

| 0.7% | 4.7% | 10.0% | 18.2% | 24.2% | 31.2% | 11.8% |

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Proportion of workforce

■ Don't know ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Workers benefit more financially when action is taken to improve workplace mental health

Proportion of workforce whose personal financial position has definitely improvedsince the pandemic emerged

No actions	1-3 actions	4-7 actions	8+ actions
2.6%	9.0%	24.1%	38.8%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

Did you know?

This research has identified 11 actions found to tangibly improve worker mental health. To learn more, including details of how many of these actions most Australian workplaces have taken, see page 44.

Retirement savings impacted

Looking longer-term, only 11.8% of people are truly confident that they have enough superannuation and other resources to comfortably retire. Workers who have benefited financially since the pandemic emerged are typically the most confident, and vice versa.

Over 2.9 million people have applied to access their super early through the Government's COVID-19 early release of superannuation scheme[26], equating to more than $28 billion in payments made since April (as at July 2020) and total withdrawals expected to reach $42 billion[27].

Many have withdrawn their entire super account balances through the scheme.

This has been more common for people under the age of 34, many of whom have experienced job insecurity or struggled to save deposits to invest in the property market.

While many have used their withdrawn super for the scheme's intended purpose of topping up income and getting through tough financial times, not all appears to have been well spent, with reports that up to two-thirds of withdrawals have been spent on discretionary purchases including gambling, alcohol, clothes and furniture[28].
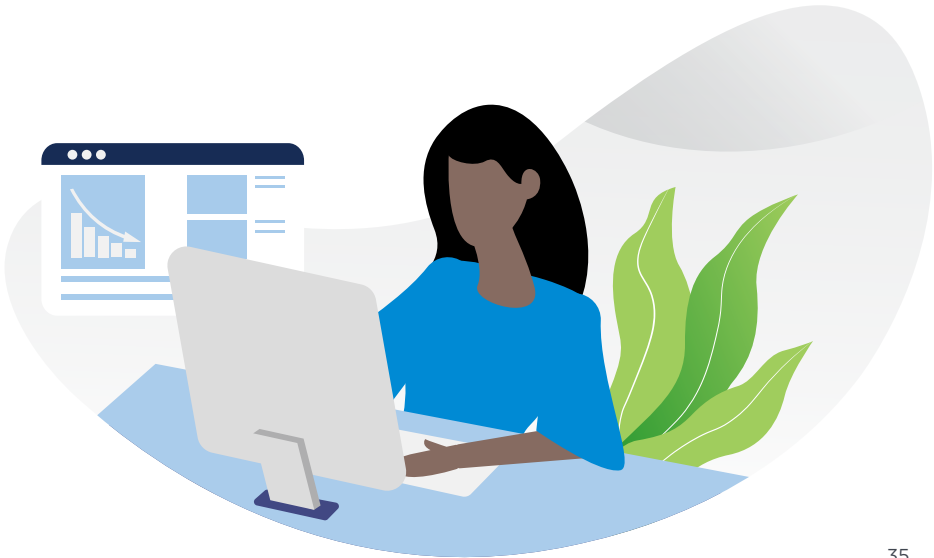
Time for a change?

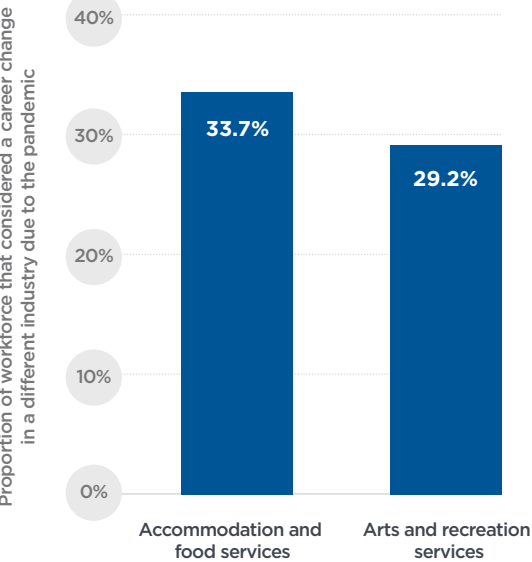We found that workers in the hard-hit **accommodation and food services** and **arts and recreation services** industries, which both have large casualised workforces, were most commonly considering a career change once the pandemic emerged (39.3% and 34.9% respectively). Approximately 1 in 3 workers in these industries were looking to move away from their industry, which will make it even more difficult for these workplaces to recover once pandemic-related restrictions are eased.
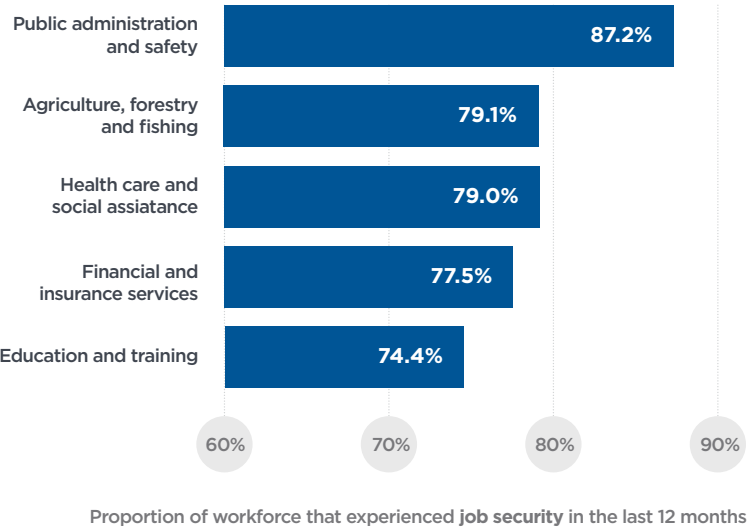
"My workplace is a restaurant and therefore mental health services aren't something they consider. Their employees are only casual and aren't too invested in the business, therefore the leaders don't feel like they have responsibility for the mental health of staff."

"...changing careers for now as travel will not come back for at least 3 years; completely devastating."

Many hospitality, arts and recreation workers considered exiting their industries completely

Proportion of workforce that considered a career change in a different industry due to the pandemic

- Accommodation and food services: 33.7%
- Arts and recreation services: 29.2%

The public sector offers the most job security

- Public administration and safety: 87.2%
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing: 79.1%
- Health care and social assistance: 79.0%
- Financial and insurance services: 77.5%
- Education and training: 74.4%

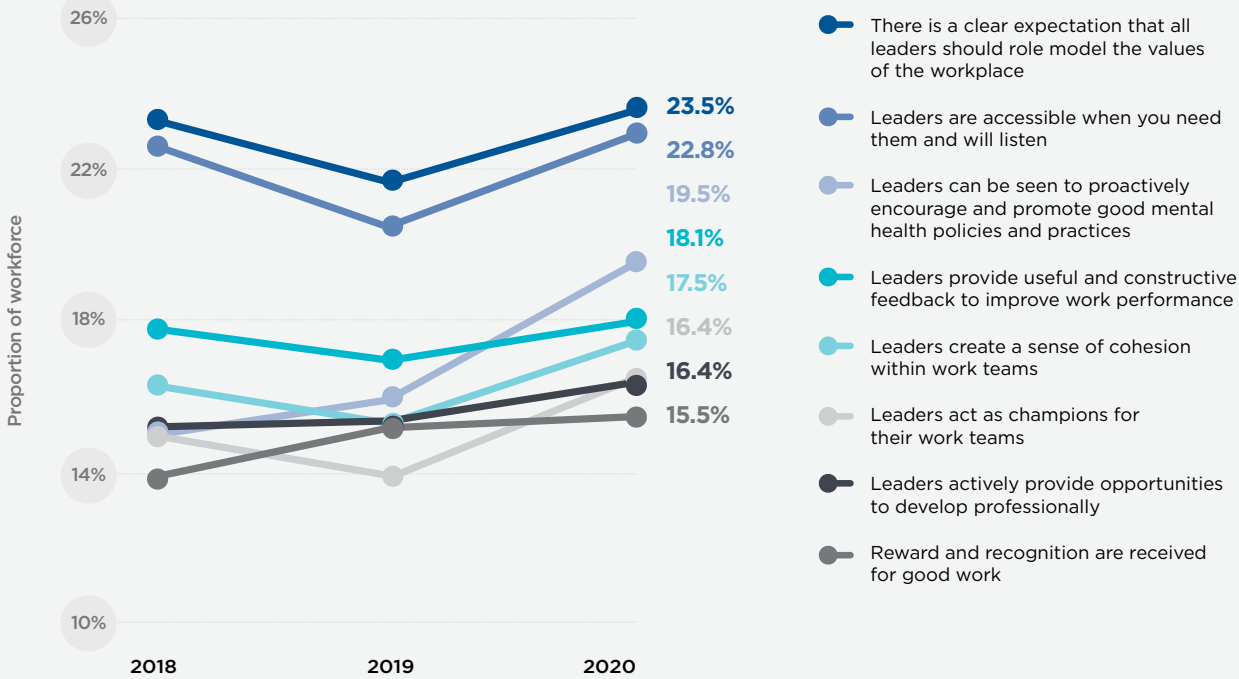Proportion of workforce that experienced **job security** in the last 12 months

The industries offering the greatest **job security** over the last year are all essential services, which have experienced a spike in demand since the pandemic emerged.

Demand also spiked in the **information media and telecommunications** industry, where work hours increased for a third (34.0%) of the workforce. Skill diversification through changing job tasks and upskilling were more common in this industry than any other (23.7% and 22.3% respectively), reflecting the increased and changing demands on this sector as media appetites grew and workplaces shifted to remote work and service delivery en masse.

Leaders have stepped up

Workplace leaders really stepped up in the last year, with the **leadership** domain accounting for **the top five most improved indicators**. In particular, leaders are being far more proactive in visibly encouraging and promoting **good mental health policies and practices** (up 3.4pp to 19.5%).

Leaders have stepped up in all areas and are proactively encouraging good mental health policies and practices

Proportion of workforce

- 23.5% — There is a clear expectation that all leaders should role model the values of the workplace
- 22.8% — Leaders are accessible when you need them and will listen
- 19.5% — Leaders can be seen to proactively encourage and promote good mental health policies and practices
- 18.1% — Leaders provide useful and constructive feedback to improve work performance
- 17.5% — Leaders create a sense of cohesion within work teams
- 16.4% — Leaders act as champions for their work teams
- 16.4% — Leaders actively provide opportunities to develop professionally
- 15.5% — Reward and recognition are received for good work

12.5% of workers report that **leadership** has improved since the pandemic emerged. This is primarily driven by people who worked remotely for at least a month (15.0%) reported an improvement compared to people who did not work remotely at all (9.6%). Age is also a factor: the youngest members of the workforce noticed the improvement more than any other age group (17.3% for those aged 18-24), with smaller proportions progressively reported for older age groups to a low of 9.0% in the 55-64 age group.

"A high level of civility and supportive leadership behaviour is expected, especially at such grave times."

Organisations that are taking tangible action to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing have widened the **leadership** gap further since the pandemic emerged. **3 in 5 people (58.9%) working in the most action-oriented workplaces* confirmed that leadership has improved since March, whereas only 1.7% of people in less committed workplaces have seen improvement.**

* 'action-oriented workplaces' refers to workplaces that have implemented at least eight tangible actions
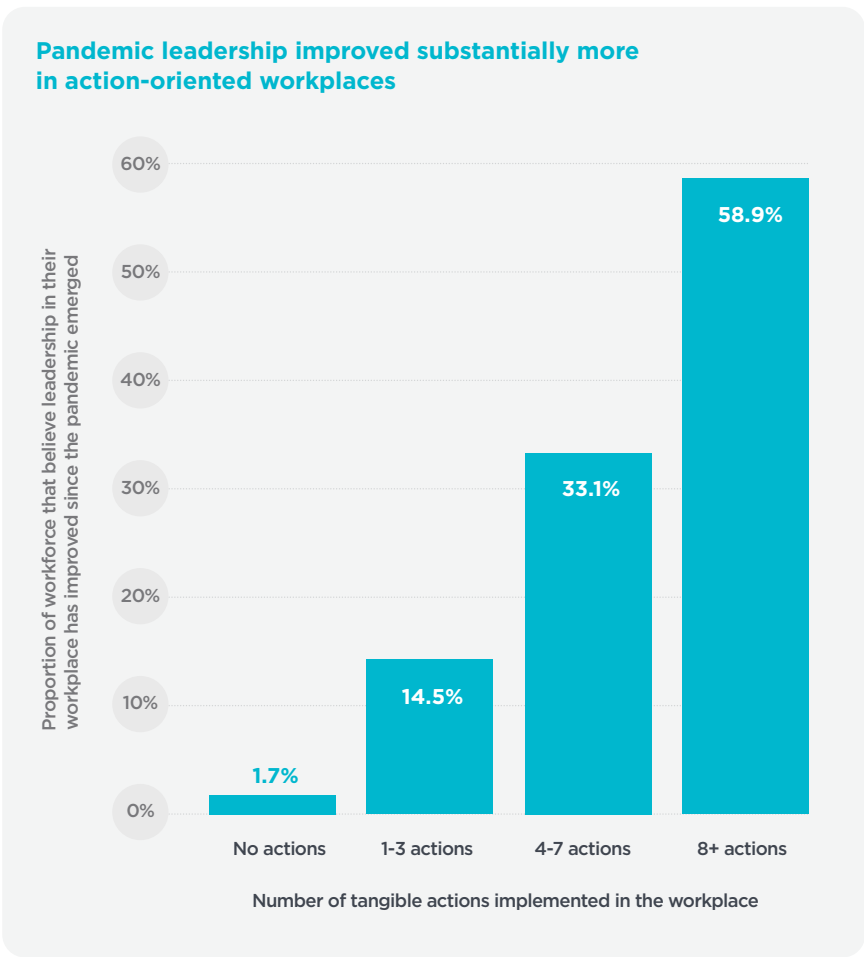
> "More one-on-one time with leaders and managers. Little gifts to make people smile. Acknowledgement of workloads."

Why are leaders important for building thriving workplaces?

Leaders who are open and approachable, practice self-reflection and act with integrity and balanced judgement are more likely to foster higher levels of inclusiveness, engagement, commitment, performance and wellbeing in their organisations[29].

Effective **leadership** increases worker morale, resilience and trust, and decreases worker frustration and conflict. Under good **leadership**, workers have higher wellbeing and reduced sick leave.

A leader who demonstrates commitment to maintaining their own physical and psychological health can influence the health of workers (sickness, presenteeism, absenteeism), and the health of the organisation as a whole[30].

Pandemic leadership improved substantially more in action-oriented workplaces

Proportion of workforce that believe leadership in their workplace has improved since the pandemic emerged

- No actions: 1.7%
- 1-3 actions: 14.5%
- 4-7 actions: 33.1%
- 8+ actions: 58.9%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

> "A business can have all the policies, programs, and external companies to assist, however at the end of the day the most important thing of all is the relationship and support and openness that you have with your direct manager. If they do not have the skills in this area, the whole process set up by the company fails and may as well not even exist. They often just exist for companies just to satisfy compliance issues."
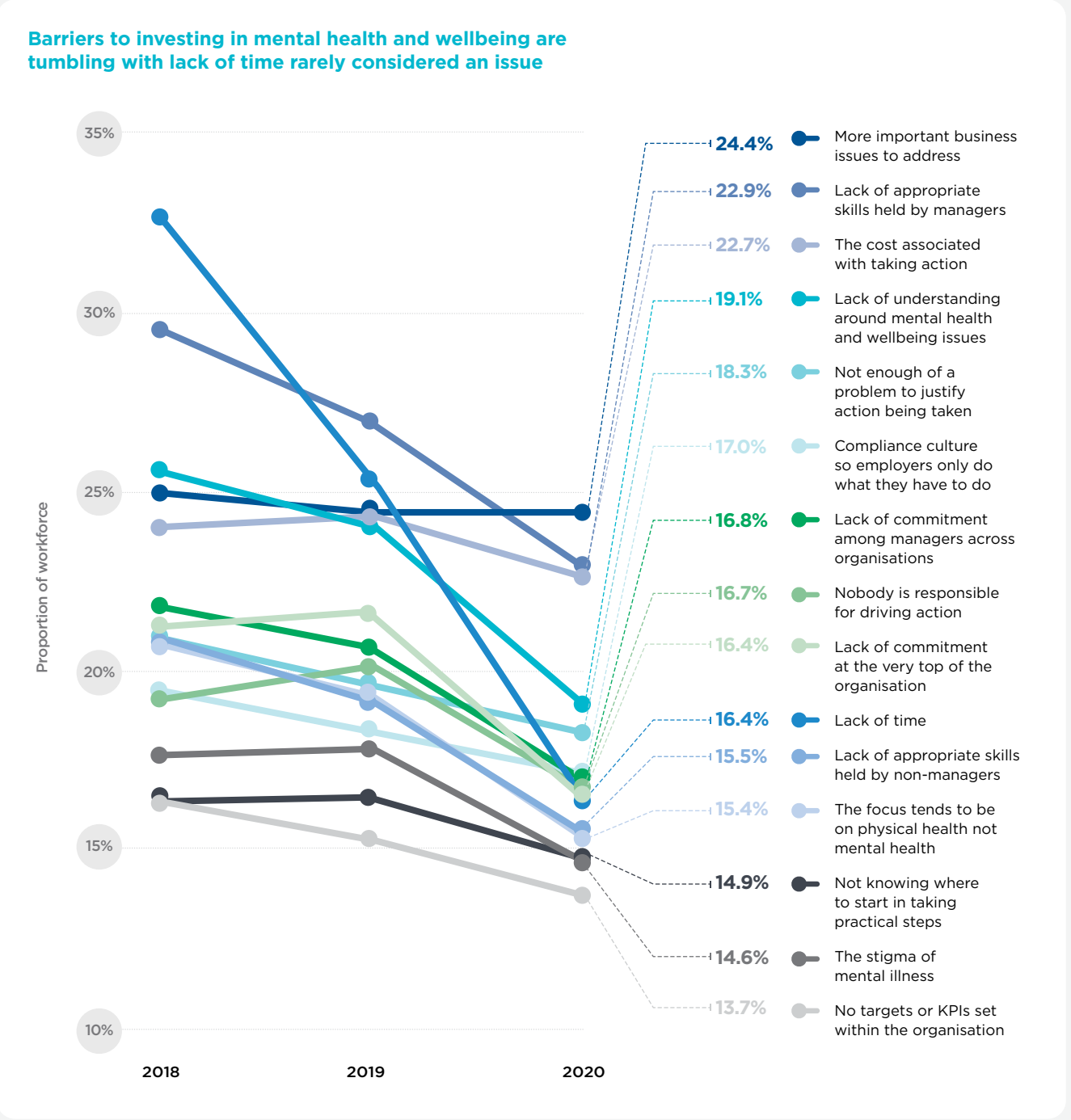
> "My manager is always checking on me, to see if I'm okay professionally and personally, HR sends us messages to help us through this period, there's free counselling with psychologists available."

Barriers? What barriers?

In the last year, nearly all of the perceived barriers preventing employers from investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing have tumbled. In particular, a lack of time, commitment at the top, understanding around mental health issues and appropriate skills among managers are far less common this year. People are just not seeing these as barriers any longer, or are seeing their workplace take action to address them. This may be in part due to mental health being much more openly discussed at work, especially throughout the pandemic, as well as the positive changes many workplaces are making.

The biggest hurdle to investing in workplace mental health in 2020 is that businesses are facing more important issues, with many workplaces struggling to survive.

> "My workplace tries to take good care of my mental health and wellbeing but [a] few barriers are still there."

Barriers to investing in mental health and wellbeing are tumbling with lack of time rarely considered an issue

Proportion of workforce

- **24.4%** More important business issues to address
- **22.9%** Lack of appropriate skills held by managers
- **22.7%** The cost associated with taking action
- **19.1%** Lack of understanding around mental health and wellbeing issues
- **18.3%** Not enough of a problem to justify action being taken
- **17.0%** Compliance culture so employers only do what they have to do
- **16.8%** Lack of commitment among managers across organisations
- **16.7%** Nobody is responsible for driving action
- **16.4%** Lack of commitment at the very top of the organisation
- **16.4%** Lack of time
- **15.5%** Lack of appropriate skills held by non-managers
- **15.4%** The focus tends to be on physical health not mental health
- **14.9%** Not knowing where to start in taking practical steps
- **14.6%** The stigma of mental illness
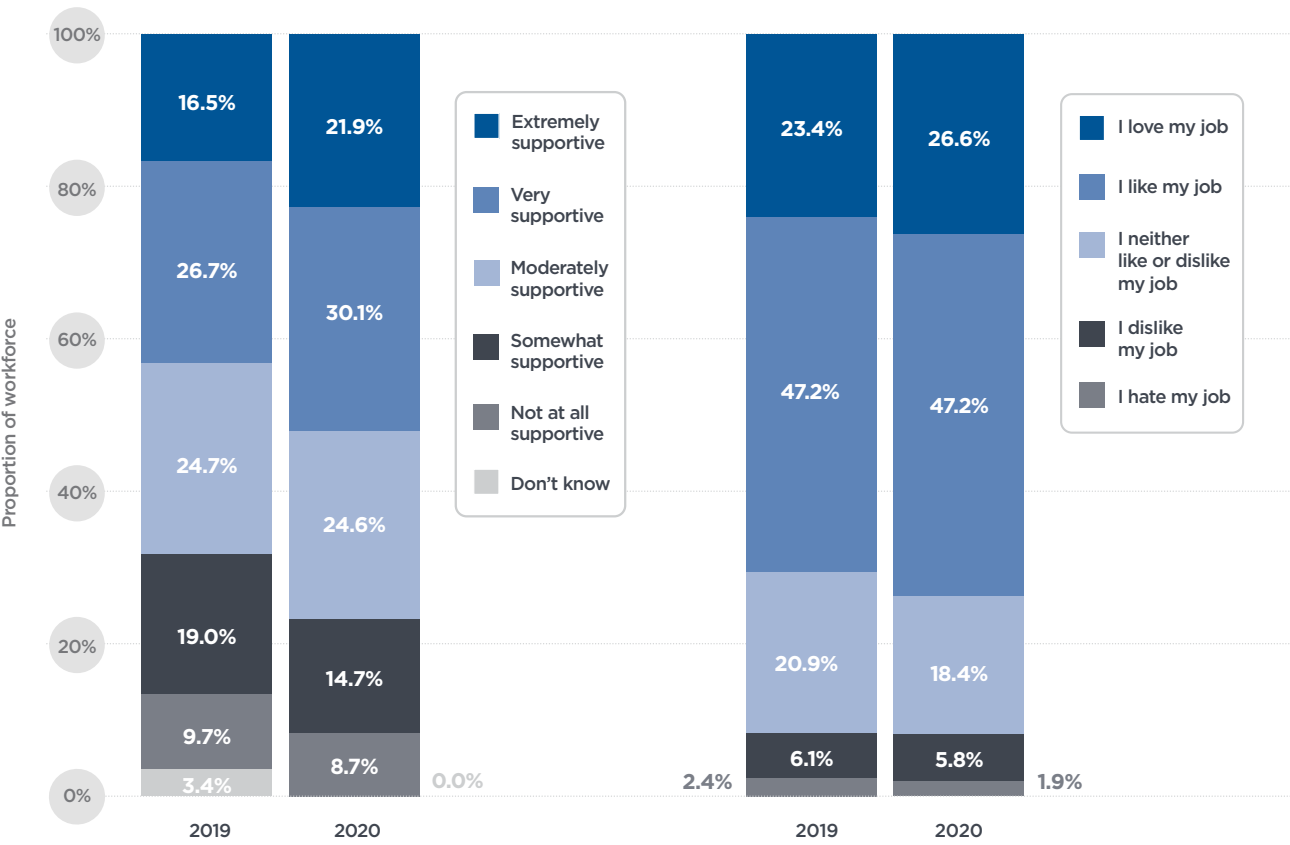- **13.7%** No targets or KPIs set within the organisation

There's more support for workplace mental health, and more workers are enjoying their jobs

Organisational supportiveness of employee mental health and wellbeing has improved since last year (up 8.8pp to 51.9% being highly supportive), and a greater number of people are enjoying their jobs (up 3.2pp to 73.8%).

While these are pleasing positive shifts, they may be partly due to an increased public dialogue about mental health and wellbeing since the beginning of the pandemic, and the elevated role work has played in people's lives while other activities have been restricted.

"I feel closer to my colleagues and I've enjoyed the increased collaboration."

"I love my workplace, it is so friendly and welcoming."

Supportiveness of employee mental health and wellbeing, and job enjoyment, is on the rise

Supportiveness (Proportion of workforce)

	2019	2020
Extremely supportive	16.5%	21.9%
Very supportive	26.7%	30.1%
Moderately supportive	24.7%	24.6%
Somewhat supportive	19.0%	14.7%
Not at all supportive	9.7%	8.7%
Don't know	3.4%	0.0%

Job enjoyment

	2019	2020
I love my job	23.4%	26.6%
I like my job	47.2%	47.2%
I neither like or dislike my job	20.9%	18.4%
I dislike my job	6.1%	5.8%
I hate my job	2.4%	1.9%

Note: some proportions may not add to 100% due to rounding.

- **Information media and telecommunications** and **financial and insurance services** (61.4%)
- **Construction** (56.5%)
- **Professional, scientific and technical services** (55.4%)

The least supportive industries (i.e. low proportion of workers rating 'extremely' or 'very' supportive) are:

- **Accommodation and food services** (40.2%)
- **Wholesale trade** (43.3%)
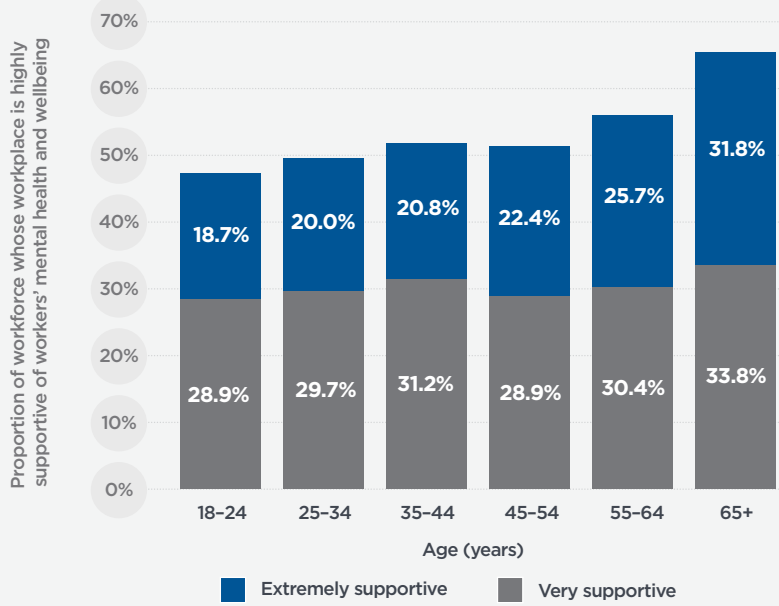- **Retail trade** (45.5%)

People who had the opportunity to work remotely for at least a month rated their workplaces as more supportive than those who did not work remotely at all (56.4% and 46.4% respectively rated their workplaces as highly supportive). Supportiveness of workers' mental health and wellbeing is also higher for those whose job primarily involves mental activity (54.5%) compared to those whose job involves substantial physical activity (46.2%).

Workplaces appear to be more supportive of full-time workers than part-time or casual workers (54.5%, 50.0% and 41.8% respectively), with supportiveness also typically higher for older age groups.
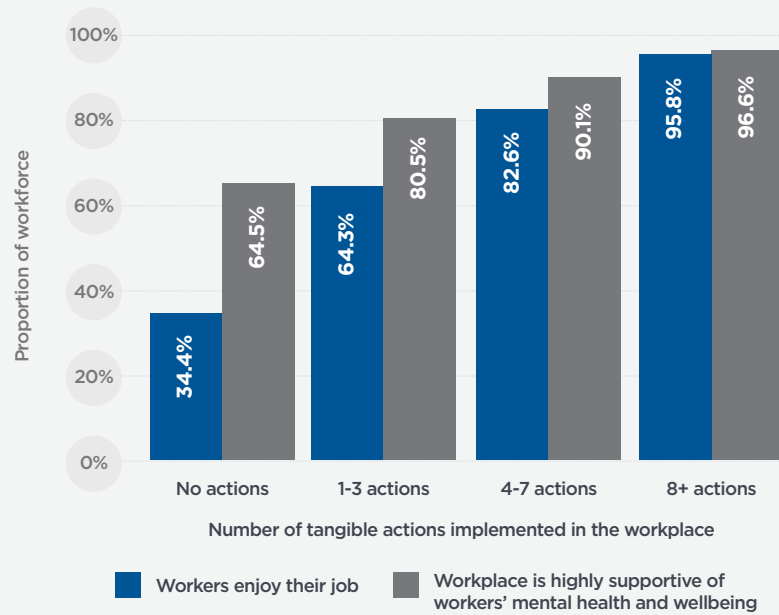
The more committed organisations are to improving workplace mental health and wellbeing through tangible action, the more workers feel supported and enjoy their job. Learn more about these actions on page 44.

"...you feel supported generally and that the organisation is aware that they have a responsibility in caring for their workers' mental health and wellbeing."

Workplaces are more supportive of older workers' mental health and wellbeing

Proportion of workforce whose workplace is highly supportive of workers' mental health and wellbeing

Age (years)	Very supportive	Extremely supportive
18–24	28.9%	18.7%
25–34	29.7%	20.0%
35–44	31.2%	20.8%
45–54	28.9%	22.4%
55–64	30.4%	25.7%
65+	33.8%	31.8%

Workers in action-oriented workplaces enjoy their job more and feel more supported

Proportion of workforce — Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

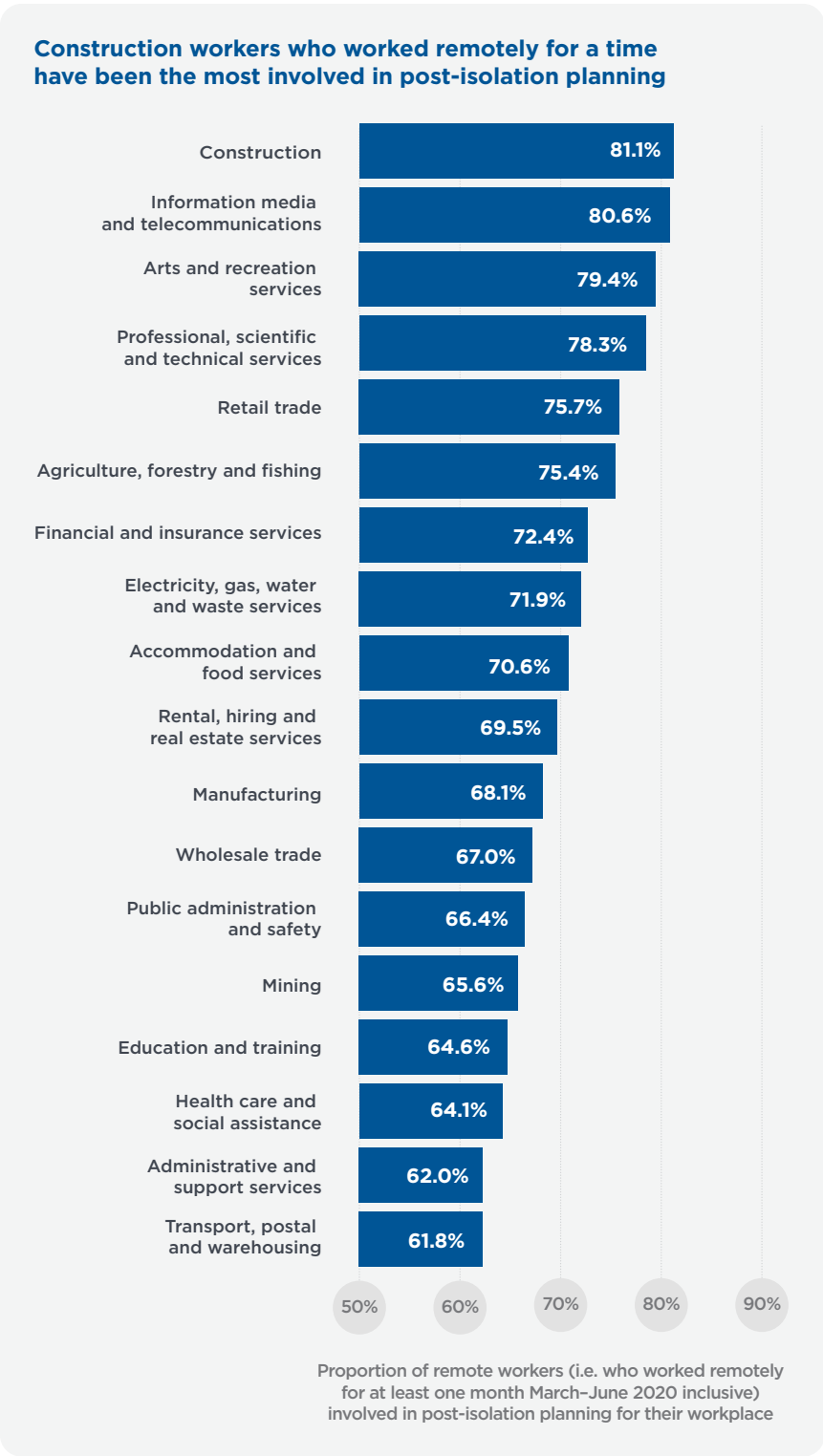|	Workers enjoy their job	Workplace is highly supportive of workers' mental health and wellbeing
No actions	34.4%	64.5%
1-3 actions	64.3%	80.5%
4-7 actions	82.6%	90.1%
8+ actions	95.8%	96.6%

Planning for the next phase

A quarter of workers (25.8%) who worked remotely for at least a month between March and June 2020 have felt highly involved in their workplace's post-isolation planning process.

However, nearly 1 in 3 workers (29.6%) have not been involved at all or not aware of any post-isolation planning. This is potentially due to workplaces in Victoria, which have experienced more protracted periods of lockdown, not having conducted extensive post-isolation planning at the time of the research.

4 in every 5 people in the **construction** and **information media and telecommunications** industries (who have worked off-site at some point during the pandemic) have been involved to some degree in their organisation's post-isolation planning. However, only 3 in 5 people working in the **transport, postal and warehousing** industry, Australia's least thriving industry, have been involved.

Among the larger states, people working in New South Wales (who have worked remotely at least once between March and June) have been far more involved in post-isolation planning than workers in other locations. Involvement in post-isolation planning is strongest among business owners and senior managers, then appears to decline with lower seniority of workers.

People working in large organisations (i.e. 5,000+ employees) are substantially less involved in post-isolation planning than those in organisations with less than 200 employees. This is potentially due to large organisations having a far smaller proportion of workers in very senior roles, where most of the planning is undertaken.

Construction workers who worked remotely for a time have been the most involved in post-isolation planning

Industry	%
Construction	81.1%
Information media and telecommunications	80.6%
Arts and recreation services	79.4%
Professional, scientific and technical services	78.3%
Retail trade	75.7%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	75.4%
Financial and insurance services	72.4%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	71.9%
Accommodation and food services	70.6%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	69.5%
Manufacturing	68.1%
Wholesale trade	67.0%
Public administration and safety	66.4%
Mining	65.6%
Education and training	64.6%
Health care and social assistance	64.1%
Administrative and support services	62.0%
Transport, postal and warehousing	61.8%

Proportion of remote workers (i.e. who worked remotely for at least one month March–June 2020 inclusive) involved in post-isolation planning for their workplace

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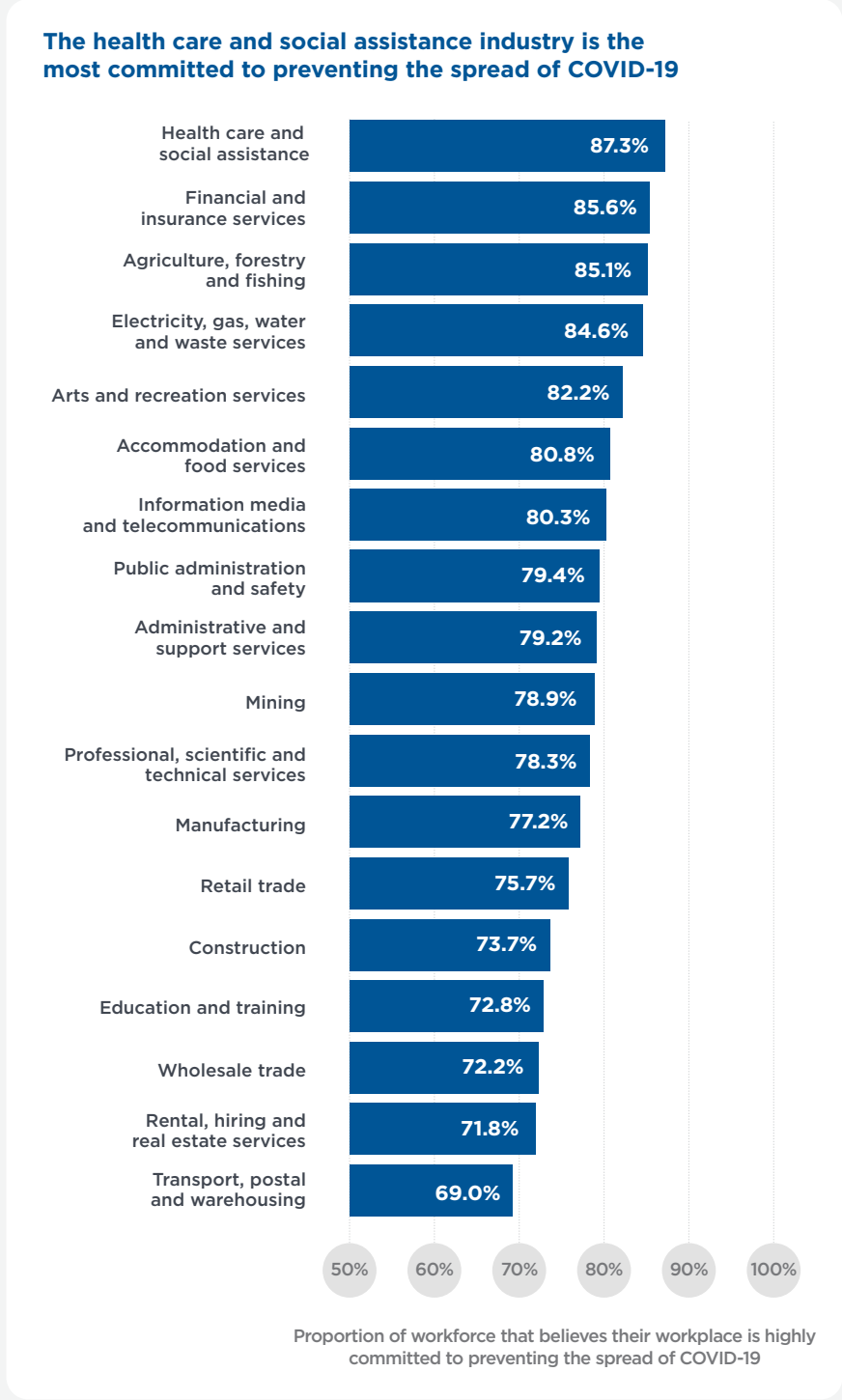# Most are committed to preventing the pandemic's spread

Although more than three quarters (78.4%) of Australian workers believe their workplace is highly committed to preventing the spread of COVID-19, 1 in 20 workers believe there is little to no commitment.

Who is most committed?

Health care and social assistance workplaces are considered the most highly committed (87.3%), particularly the hospital and residential aged care sectors (87.7% and 82.6% respectively). The next most committed industry is **financial and insurance services** (85.6%), possibly reflecting this industry's inherently lower risk appetite. Workplaces in the **transport, postal and warehousing** and **wholesale trade** industries appear to be the least committed, as well as those in **education and training**, reflecting the many challenges and uncertainties that early childhood, primary and secondary educators have navigated since March.

Commitment to workplace mental health and wellbeing appears to be linked to the effort made to prevent the spread of COVID-19, with three quarters (74.8%) of action-oriented workplaces* considered to be extremely committed to physical workplace safety in relation to the virus. Learn more about these actions on page 44.

* 'action-oriented workplaces' refers to workplaces that have implemented at least eight tangible actions

The health care and social assistance industry is the most committed to preventing the spread of COVID-19

Industry	%
Health care and social assistance	87.3%
Financial and insurance services	85.6%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	85.1%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	84.6%
Arts and recreation services	82.2%
Accommodation and food services	80.8%
Information media and telecommunications	80.3%
Public administration and safety	79.4%
Administrative and support services	79.2%
Mining	78.9%
Professional, scientific and technical services	78.3%
Manufacturing	77.2%
Retail trade	75.7%
Construction	73.7%
Education and training	72.8%
Wholesale trade	72.2%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	71.8%
Transport, postal and warehousing	69.0%

Proportion of workforce that believes their workplace is highly committed to preventing the spread of COVID-19

More organisations are taking action, but more than half are still doing nothing

Over the last 12 months there's been a slight increase in both the number of workers reporting their workplace is implementing tangible actions shown to improve worker mental health, and the number of actions taken. However, at a national level more than half of workers (55.1%) report that no action is being taken in their workplace.

These 11 activities are based on the 40 scientifically-validated indicators shown to improve worker wellbeing. Implementing even one of these actions can make a huge difference to worker mental health.

Thriving workplaces generally demonstrate at least 8 of these best practice activities.

1 Ensure all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training

2 Provide access to mental health and wellbeing education (i.e. training and information)

3 Actively provide professional development opportunities

4 Let people see the mental health policy and processes in action

5 Implement effective policies and practices against workplace bullying and harassment

6 Develop good return to work policies and practices for people who have had time off work with mental health conditions
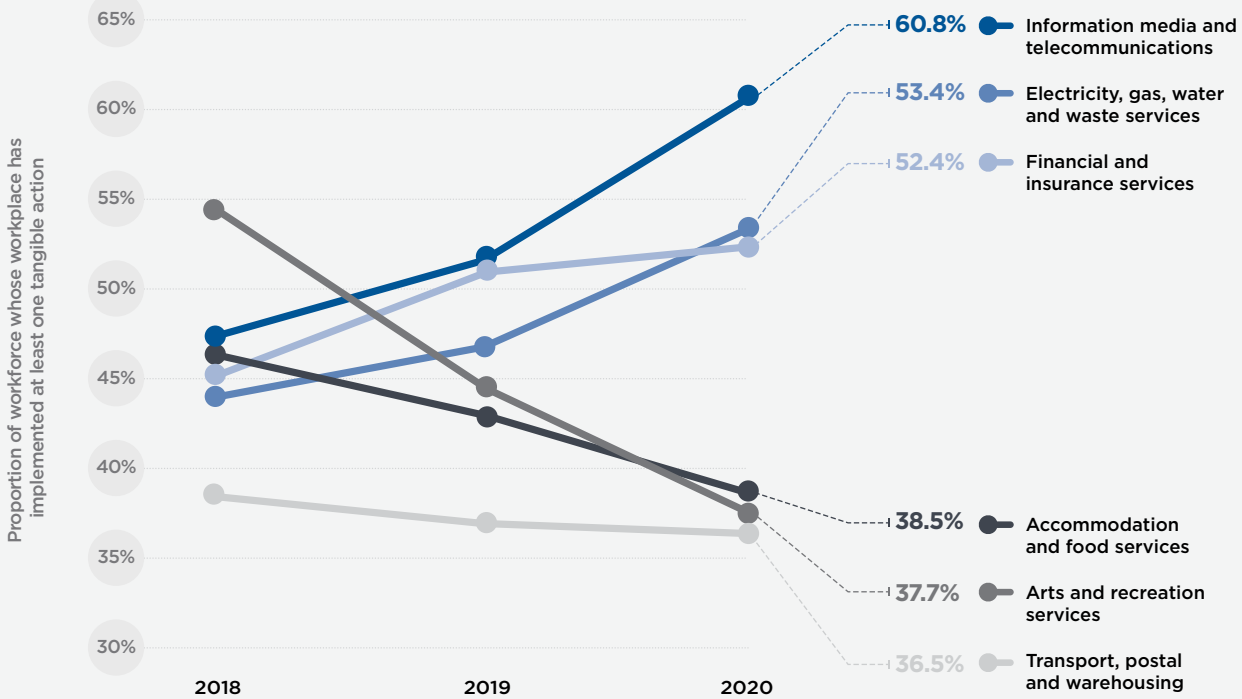
7 Recognise people who do good work and reward them appropriately

8 Put clear structures in place for transparent decision-making

9 Develop policies to ensure that changes are managed in clear, supportive and positive ways

10 Help people to practice good work/family/life integration

11 Make it easy for everyone to access confidential counselling or support services.

Learn more about how these actions can help on page 48.

More workplaces are taking tangible action

Proportion of workforce

	No actions	1-3 actions	4-7 actions	8+ actions
2018	54.4%	28.6%	11.3%	5.7%
2019	56.8%	26.2%	10.7%	6.3%
2020	55.1%	27.0%	11.2%	6.6%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace
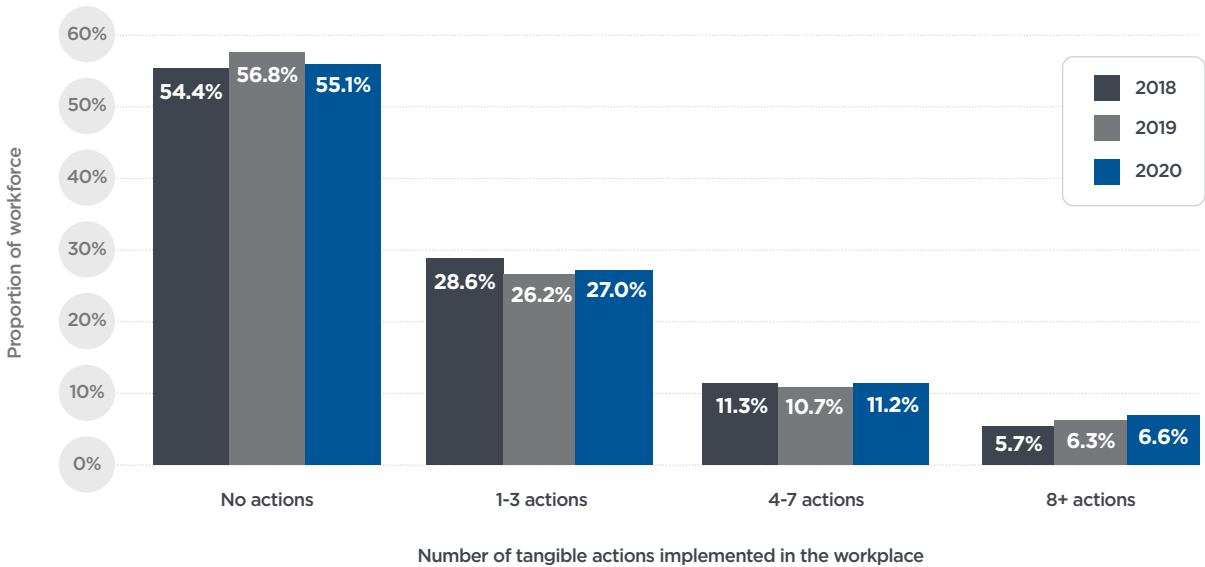
Best and worst industries at taking action

Proportion of workforce whose workplace has implemented at least one tangible action

- **60.8%** Information media and telecommunications
- **53.4%** Electricity, gas, water and waste services
- **52.4%** Financial and insurance services
- **38.5%** Accommodation and food services
- **37.7%** Arts and recreation services
- **36.5%** Transport, postal and warehousing

(2018, 2019, 2020)

The top 3 industries where workers report their workplace is implementing tangible actions have been continuous annual improvers since 2018, with the **information media and telecommunications** industry leading the way. The reverse is also true for the bottom 3 industries where 3 in 5 workers (ranging from 61.5% to 63.5%) report no action is being taken.

"I think there's an underclass of people delivering food, and the system has so much potential for positive change in terms of treatment, conditions and environmentally-oriented transport. If companies were less hell bent on profiting off the backs of what is essentially slave labour, they could develop a far better model of business where everyone benefits economically and mentally, and where the environment is also considered."
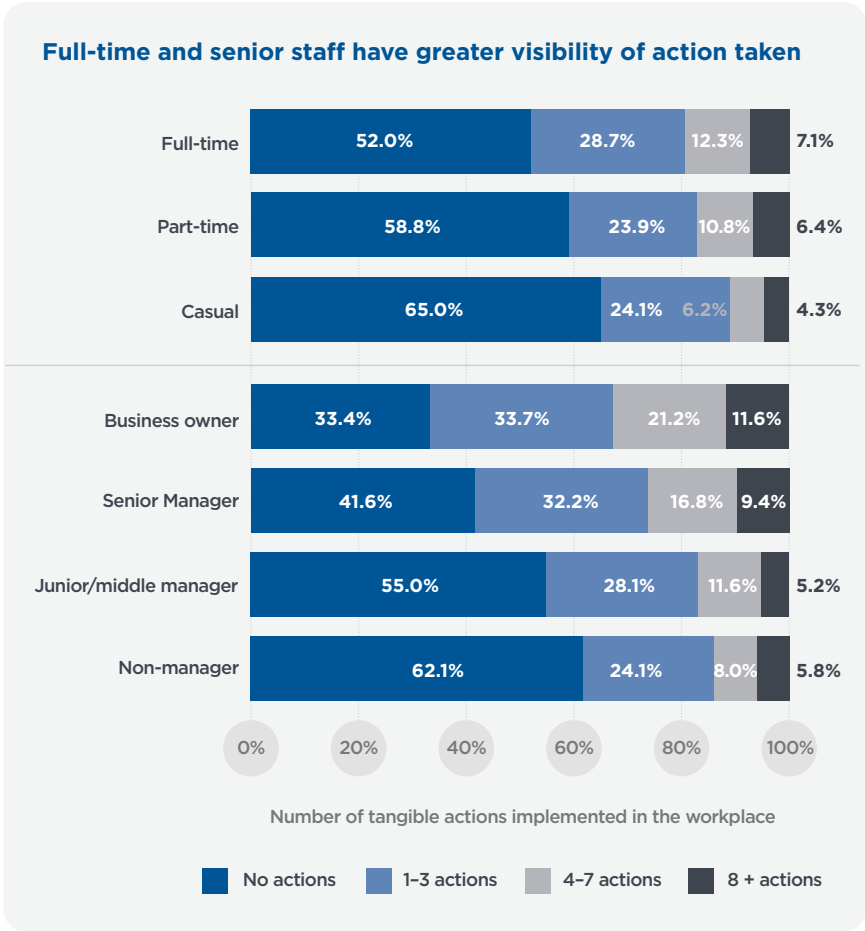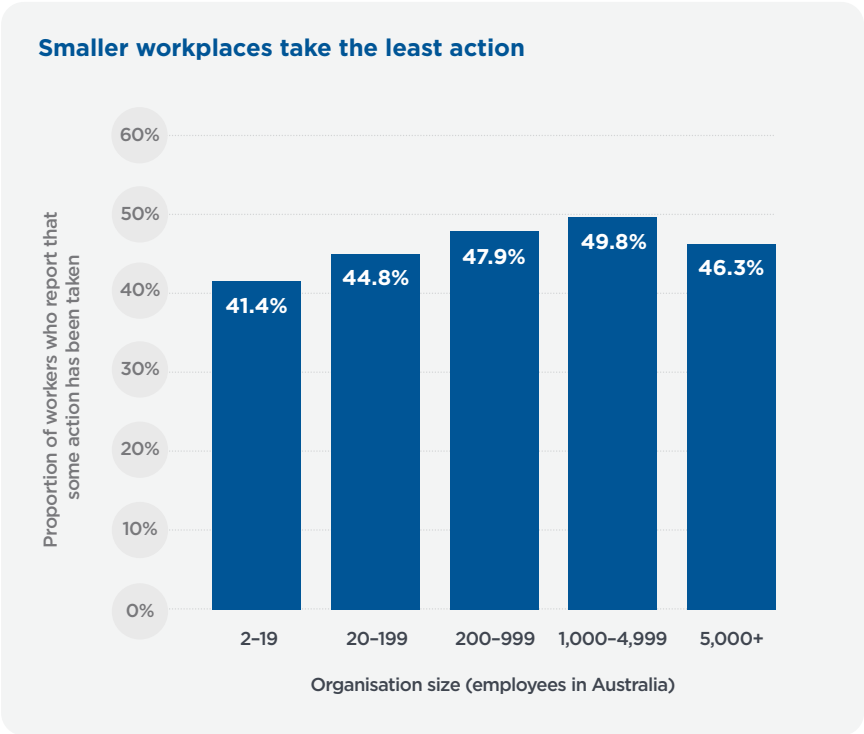
"[I've worked] in a restaurant for the last 30 years; it is very stressful, and we don't have any of this mental health support. People just leave the industry."

"In not-for-profit organisations, there is not enough money available to spend on any meaningful mental health initiatives. There is so much compliance focus and pressure to meet service delivery."

Bigger is not always better

Smaller workplaces are the least likely to take action, but this rises incrementally to organisations with between 1,000 and 4,999 employees where 1 in 2 workplaces implement actions to improve worker mental health. There is a drop-off for very large (5,000+) organisations, though, possibly reflecting the greater structural and cultural complexities faced by these organisations.

> "…being a small business, there isn't a lot of room for the business to invest in mental health services."

Smaller workplaces take the least action

Proportion of workers who report that some action has been taken

Organisation size	%
2–19	41.4%
20–199	44.8%
200–999	47.9%
1,000–4,999	49.8%
5,000+	46.3%

Organisation size (employees in Australia)

Full-time and senior staff have greater visibility of action taken

	No actions	1–3 actions	4–7 actions	8 + actions
Full-time	52.0%	28.7%	12.3%	7.1%
Part-time	58.8%	23.9%	10.8%	6.4%
Casual	65.0%	24.1%	6.2%	4.3%
Business owner	33.4%	33.7%	21.2%	11.6%
Senior Manager	41.6%	32.2%	16.8%	9.4%
Junior/middle manager	55.0%	28.1%	11.6%	5.2%
Non-manager	62.1%	24.1%	8.0%	5.8%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

■ No actions ■ 1–3 actions ■ 4–7 actions ■ 8 + actions

Casual workers are still having a rough time, and life's better at the top

Across organisations of all sizes, casual workers report fewer actions are being implemented in the workplace than part-time workers, who in turn report fewer actions than full-time workers. This is particularly the case for people aged 45-64 years who are working casually.

Hierarchical seniority is also related to reporting of actions implemented, with business owners reporting the most, and non-managers (employees) reporting the least. This has been congruent across the many years of this study, supporting the adage that life is, indeed, better at the top.

Where there's action, there's retention

The more tangible actions workplaces implement to improve workers' mental health and wellbeing, the more their workplace thrives. Taking action to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing also improves staff retention. Less than a third (31.7%) of workers whose workplaces are not taking action intend to definitely stay with their employer over the next year, compared to more than three quarters (77.5%) of workers whose workplaces have implemented at least 8 actions.

Action-oriented workplaces are closer to thriving with higher retention

Overall thriving workplace score / Proportion of workforce intending to definitely stay with their employer over the next year

Number of tangible actions	Overall thriving workplace score	Proportion of workforce intending to stay
No actions	55.3	31.7%
1–3 actions	70.5	46.8%
4–7 actions	82.5	57.2%
8+ actions	94.7	77.5%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

■ Proportion of workforce intending to stay
■ Overall thriving workplace score

> "As I work casually across 2 worksites, I'm not always aware of policies."

> "As a casual employer they care little about the workforce as you are easily replaced."

> "Staff mental health is irrelevant. The owners/managers want profit, nothing more, and if the staff have a problem, they replace the staff. [That's] the real world of employment. End of story."

> "What a shame that in 2020 a large workplace still doesn't get it."

Actions making a difference

Here's what the Australian workforce in 2020 is saying about 11 of the 40 scientifically-validated indicators shown to tangibly improve worker wellbeing:

To improve worker wellbeing, workplaces should...	Workers are saying they need...
1 Make sure that all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training by making it an organisation-wide policy	"Training for all people leaders around managing [their] own mental health, when being the first point of contact for others, and... how to support [others] safely and appropriately." "Training around reducing stigma of mental health issues." "Training for management on how best to support their staff."
2 Provide access to mental health and wellbeing education (i.e. information, training)	"Online training opportunity to attend workshops." "...a mental health training section has been lodged on our work portal for employees to complete."
3 Actively provide professional development opportunities	"Development and training in different roles." "Allowing time for professional development."
4 Let people see the mental health policy, strategy or action plan in action	"Having a policy, procedure or provider in place is not enough; the senior managers need to act as though mental health and wellbeing is important to them and actually influences their decision making."
5 Implement effective policies and practices against workplace bullying and harassment	"Take the stigma out of mental health and have appropriate bullying policies in place that are USED and enforced!" "I wish that... bullying could be called out and stopped without such a big effort. The bullies at my work threaten to sue you if you complain about them."
6 Develop good return to work policies and practices for people who have had time off work with mental health conditions	"My workplace were exceptional when I returned from a major mental health related incident. I had regular check-ins from HR, my manager and team leader. I was able to alter my duties to suit my moods and leave the office whenever required." "Do not expect [people] to return to the location where the perpetrator of workplace harm still works."

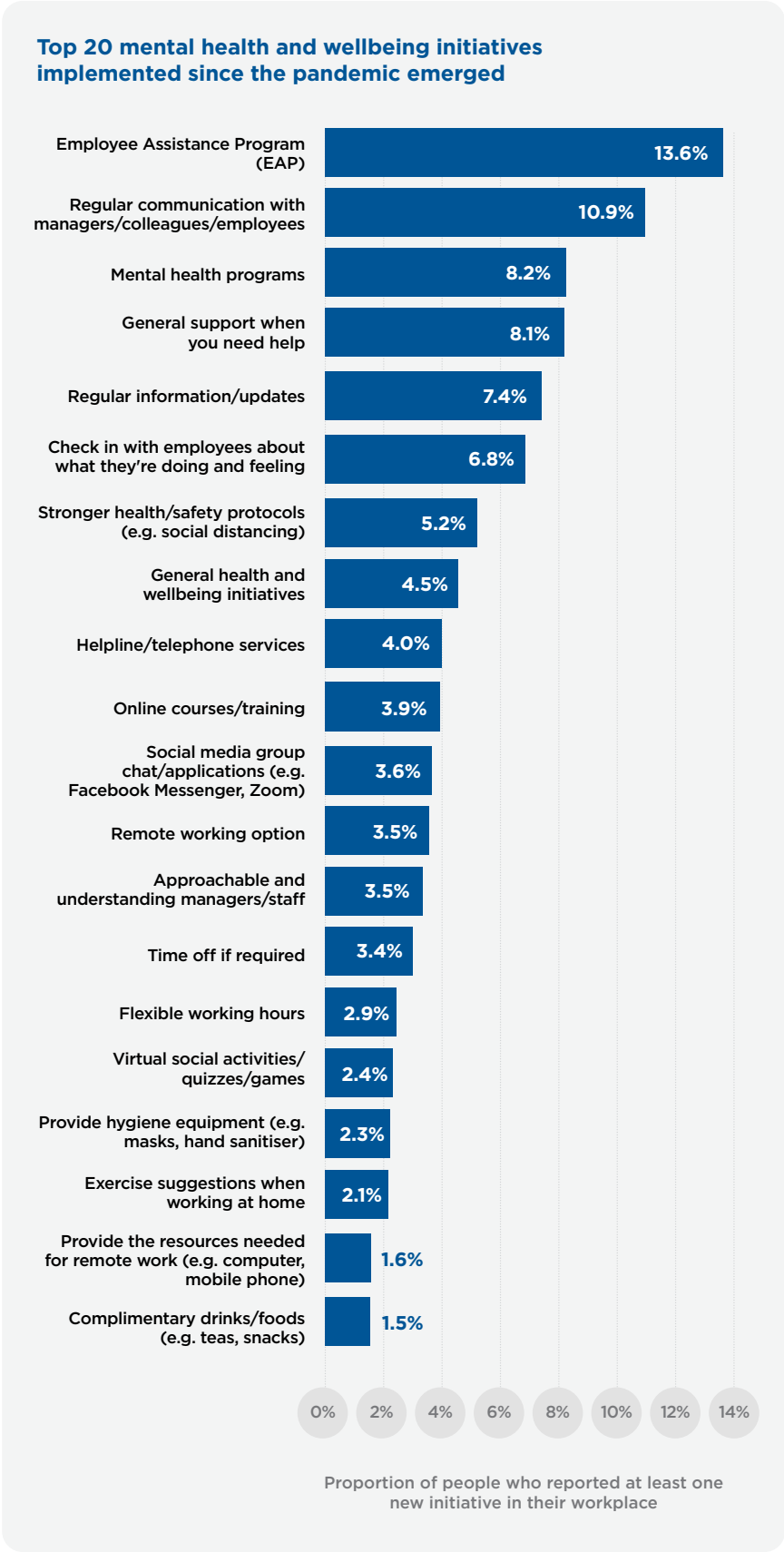| To improve worker wellbeing, workplaces should...	Workers are saying they need...
7 Recognise people who do good work and reward them appropriately	"Recognition of skills and contribution." "As a small company the ability to implement any significant programs is limited [but] some reward and recognition would be useful. We have none of that!" "They could offer rewards and incentives for people who are doing a great job. This would increase morale within the company."
8 Put clear structures in place so that decision making is transparent	"I would like to be included more in decisions, not necessarily making them, but being told about them would be nice..." "Upper management have checked in with staff members that they are OK and [there have] been open discussions about decisions that are made." "They've shut down all management meetings [so] that all decisions are now made at the very top with no consultation. They need to bring back team meetings and a consultative approach."
9 Develop policies to ensure that changes are managed in clear, supportive and positive ways	"Weekly surveys for all employees asking how they are coping with the changes." "Clear and concise communication about changes."
10 Help people to practice good work/family/life integration	"Time in lieu or more flexibility [around] start and finish times and opportunities to swap working days and hours with other members of the team." "Opportunity to work from home being the norm rather than having to demonstrate a reason." "Given shifts... so that I can give time to my family as well." "...I have time to walk my dogs at lunch time [and] I eat better when I am at home."
11 Make it easy for everyone to access confidential counselling or support services	"Opportunities [to improve] mental health and wellbeing are offered to full-time and casual workers... But as an on-call worker we cannot access any of the services... even though most of us are there five days a week... I think if companies set up initiatives, they should make them accessible to everyone on site regardless of their contract specifications." "We have a company chaplain, psychologists, mental health training, [and my] employer helps with fatigue and stress management. Since [the] pandemic, we have been reminded where to get help for mental, stress and fatigue issues."

New initiatives supporting workers

Nearly 1 in 3 workplaces (29.8%) implemented **new** initiatives to support workers' mental health and wellbeing once the pandemic emerged. It's important to note that many workplaces did not provide new initiatives, as they already had a variety of initiatives in place prior to the pandemic.

> "[We now] hold team meetings which we never had before."

> "We have a counsellor joining our company-wide huddles [and my workplace is] sponsoring one-on-one and team meetings with her."

> "I have access to the EAP for the first time ever due to the pandemic."

> "We now hold more regular meetings to check in with each other. Our staff are usually scattered around... on job sites, each of us working alone, so holding regular get togethers means that we can all talk about how things are going for us."

Top 20 mental health and wellbeing initiatives implemented since the pandemic emerged

Initiative	%
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	13.6%
Regular communication with managers/colleagues/employees	10.9%
Mental health programs	8.2%
General support when you need help	8.1%
Regular information/updates	7.4%
Check in with employees about what they're doing and feeling	6.8%
Stronger health/safety protocols (e.g. social distancing)	5.2%
General health and wellbeing initiatives	4.5%
Helpline/telephone services	4.0%
Online courses/training	3.9%
Social media group chat/applications (e.g. Facebook Messenger, Zoom)	3.6%
Remote working option	3.5%
Approachable and understanding managers/staff	3.5%
Time off if required	3.4%
Flexible working hours	2.9%
Virtual social activities/quizzes/games	2.4%
Provide hygiene equipment (e.g. masks, hand sanitiser)	2.3%
Exercise suggestions when working at home	2.1%
Provide the resources needed for remote work (e.g. computer, mobile phone)	1.6%
Complimentary drinks/foods (e.g. teas, snacks)	1.5%

Proportion of people who reported at least one new initiative in their workplace

Examples of new initiatives workplaces have implemented:

Monthly online Skype meetings within our team.

Better benefits (e.g. employee bonus scheme) if we meet KPIs.

Daily team meetings to check in with everyone, weekly catch ups with a different member of the team and a weekly fitness competition.

Recognition board where you write positive comments about a work colleague.

Allocated a special area at work for employees to use for rest and relaxation where free beverages and refreshments are provided. The area is lovely and comfortable with lounges to relax on.

Employees who live alone have the option of working from the office.

Internal wellbeing check-in emails are being sent bi-weekly.

Someone in HR is specifically available to deal with anyone feeling down or depressed.

Financial support to meet work-related expenses, e.g. internet.

Our CEO posts weekly YouTube videos discussing how the week went and sends out texts to the whole company to thank us and keep us informed.

Counselling services by an industrial psychologist.

Daily team meetings to check in with everyone, weekly catch ups with a different member of the team and a weekly fitness competition.

10,000 steps challenge.

Paid mental health day off.

Staff wellness tips have been emailed to all the staff members, along with a free subscription to LinkedIn Learning in order to keep upgrading skills.

Extra paid leave for isolation to remove stress about lost money/leave days.

Directors are calling staff daily as general welfare checks.

Internal chatrooms with constant 'at home' hints and tips for mental health.

Recognition board where you write positive comments about a work colleague.

Sick pay for casual workers diagnosed with COVID-19 [which] provides peace of mind.

Substantially longer break times when working.

Allow people to leave early or start late if feeling fatigued.

Note that these initiatives have been reported by workers in a broad range of industries, roles and locations, with varying degrees of COVID-related restrictions.

More of Australia's workforce has been impacted by a mental health condition in 2020

And investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing makes a material difference.

Over the last year, the proportion of workers who experienced a mental health condition increased by 8.9pp to 59.5%. This includes workers who self-reported a mental health condition, and another 16.3% of the workforce who experienced anxiety or depression but did not classify it as a mental health condition.

While it is still more common for women to experience mental health conditions (65.3%) compared to men (52.1%), the proportions have increased over the last year for both groups (up 9.9pp and 5.6pp respectively). In contrast, the proportion of people with a lived experience who believe their current workplace **caused** or **worsened their mental health condition** fell from 21.8% in 2019 to 17.1% in 2020. Although this is an encouraging downward trend, it is still a concerning insight into the prevalence of perceived mental injury in Australian workplaces.

"Working from home has helped me to manage my social anxiety and PTSD. I used to be scared of talking to higher ranking staff but working from home moves the focus from how you look [and] act to the quality of your work and I really appreciate that change."

"Mental health is so important, sometimes so many things get you down. This year has been such a s**t year for me. From losing my job, to having an operation, to struggling financially. I'm trying to keep happy for my kids – I don't want them to see me down."

"After being laid off I felt worse… I miss the job I loved."

Fewer full-time workers reported experiencing a mental health condition, but made up a greater proportion of those whose condition was caused by work.

A smaller proportion of full-time workers (40.0%) reported experiencing a mental health condition than part-time or casual workers (45.5% and 46.3% respectively). However, a much larger proportion (44.1%) of those full-time workers who reported a mental health condition believe their current workplace **caused it** or **made it worse** (35.3% for part-time workers and 25.9% for casual workers).
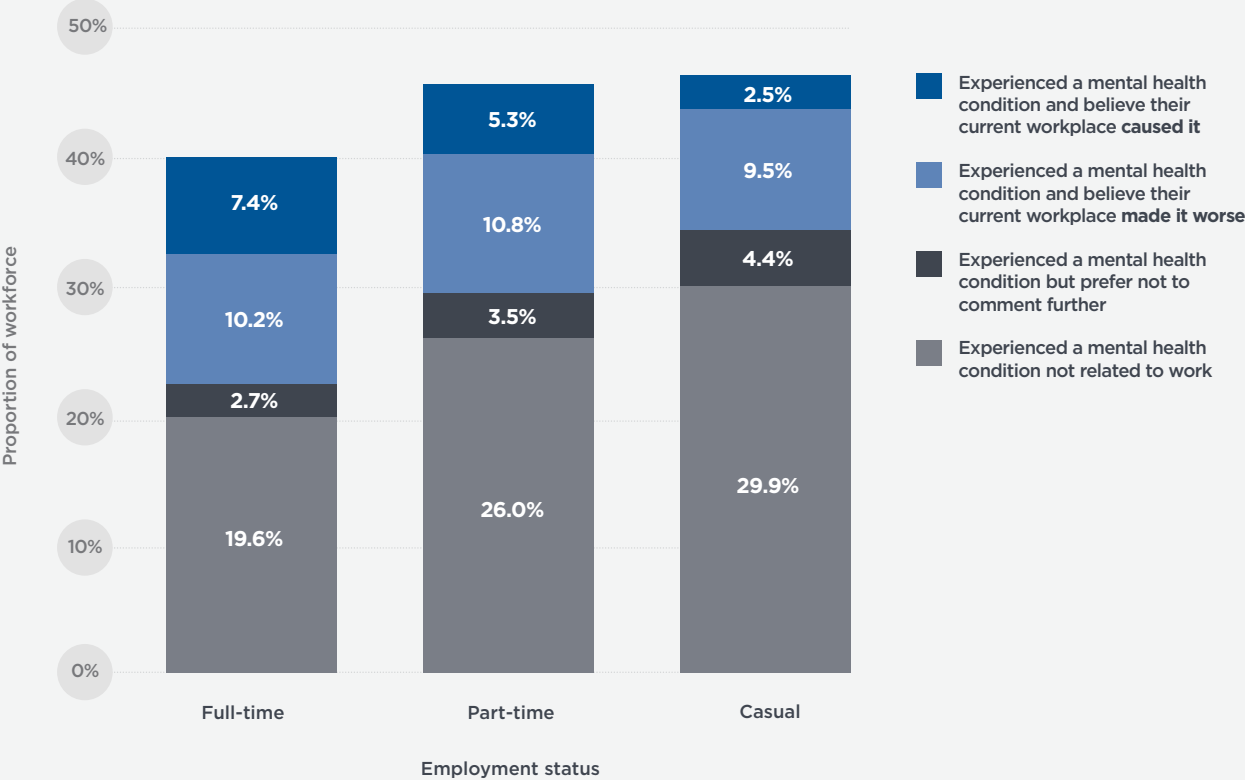
Compared to February, a quarter of workers (24.6%) believe their mental health and wellbeing is better, while another quarter (24.0%) believe the opposite. The remaining half of the workforce reported no change.

More workers have experienced a mental health condition in 2020

Legend:
- Experienced a mental health condition and believe their current workplace **caused it**
- Experienced a mental health condition and believe their current workplace made **it worse**
- Experienced a mental health condition but prefer not to comment further
- Experienced a mental health condition not related to work
- Experienced anxiety or depression, but do not classify it as a mental health condition
- Never experienced a mental health condition
- Prefer not to say

2019: 8.4%, 13.5%, 2.5%, 26.3%, 43.7%, 5.6%
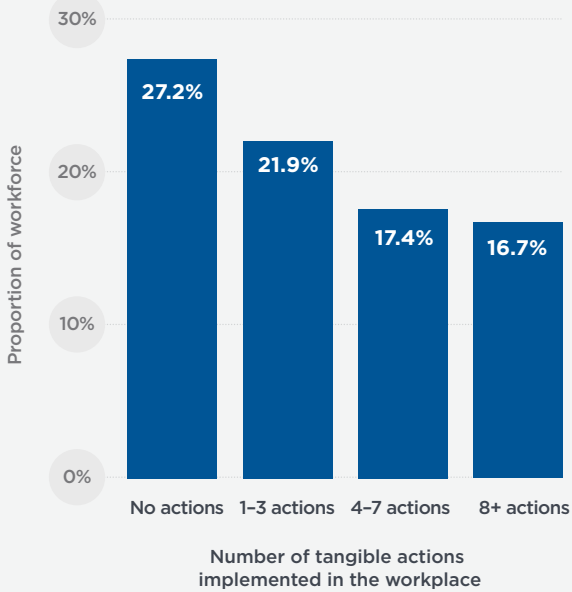**2020:** 6.6%, 10.5%, 3.2%, 23.0%, 16.3%, 37.1%, 4.8%

Full-time workers have less experience with mental health conditions, but those with experience often believe it's work-related

Legend:
- Experienced a mental health condition and believe their current workplace **caused it**
- Experienced a mental health condition and believe their current workplace made **it worse**
- Experienced a mental health condition but prefer not to comment further
- Experienced a mental health condition not related to work

Employment status	caused it	made it worse	prefer not to comment	not related to work
Full-time	7.4%	10.2%	2.7%	19.6%
Part-time	5.3%	10.8%	3.5%	26.0%
Casual	2.5%	9.5%	4.4%	29.9%

Workplace action protects workers' mental health

Taking action protects workers from declining mental health

Proportion of workforce

- 30%
- 20%
- 10%
- 0%

No actions	1–3 actions	4–7 actions	8+ actions
27.2%	21.9%	17.4%	16.7%

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

The number of positive actions that workplaces implement is related to workers' mental health and wellbeing in two ways. 27.2% of workers in organisations that have taken **no action** experienced a decline in their mental health and wellbeing since February, compared to 16.7% of people whose workplaces had implemented at least eight actions.

Investing in workplace mental health by taking positive action not only **improves** workers' health outcomes, it also appears to be a **protective** factor[31] that helps people deal more effectively with stressful events such as a global pandemic.

Working fewer hours also appears to make a difference to mental health, but more so when people feel they have a choice in the matter.

- Of people who worked fewer hours by choice, 35.8% saw an improvement in their mental health
- Of people who worked fewer hours but not by choice, only 24.2% saw an improvement in their mental health.

Learn more about the actions that make a difference to worker mental health on page 44.

These workers reported better mental health:

- **Information media and telecommunications** (40.3%), **accommodation and food services** (30.8%) and **professional, scientific and technical services** (28.4%)
- People who worked remotely for at least a month (28.8% vs those who did not work remotely at all at 21.7%)
- People who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (41.1% vs non-Indigenous Australians at 24.1%).

These workers reported a decline in mental health:

- **Accommodation and food services** (31.5%), **administrative and support services** (28.5% – this includes recruitment, labour supply, commercial cleaning and call centres) and **education and training** (26.3%)
- People who worked casually (29.2% vs 25.0% or 22.6% for part-time and full-time workers respectively)
- Workers in Victoria (30.2% vs workers in Western Australia at 18.8% – the lowest for the large states).

First experiences with mental health conditions

Many workers experienced a mental health condition for the first time during the pandemic

Proportion of workers who experienced a mental health condition

	March	April	May	June
Experienced a mental health condition for the first time during the pandemic	3.7%	5.1%	5.3%	4.6%
Experienced a mental health condition pre-pandemic (i.e. before March 2020)	10.4%	10.3%	10.4%	10.3%

■ Experienced a mental health condition for the first time during the pandemic
■ Experienced a mental health condition pre-pandemic (i.e. before March 2020)
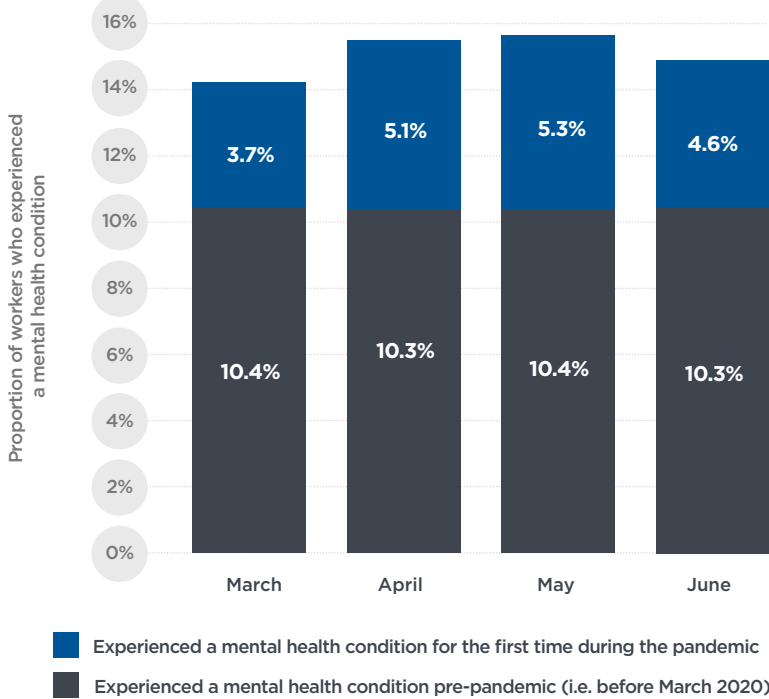
More than a quarter (27.8%) of workers who have experienced a mental health condition had their first experience during the pandemic, with numbers peaking in May. This includes cases where people experienced a mental health condition for a limited period of time (e.g. for several weeks in a particular month), rather than cumulative, rolling totals.

Hot spots

Based on the distribution and characteristics of the Australian workforce, a higher than expected proportion of these groups experienced a mental health condition for the first time:

- People working in **information media and telecommunications** (26.3% of their workforce), **professional, scientific and technical services** (15.8%) and **accommodation and food services** and (15.6%)
- Younger workers, aged 18-34 years (16.7%)
- People who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (30.4%)
- Business owners (24.0%)
- People working in small-to-medium-sized organisations (20–199 employees) (16.3%)
- People on fixed-term or seasonal contracts (21.9%).

Where did people turn for help?

People who experienced a mental health condition for the first time during the pandemic most commonly sought support from friends or family (34.6%), and/or from health care professionals outside of work (21.4%).

More than half (52.8%) of people who experienced a mental health condition for the first time believe their workplace caused their condition or made it worse.
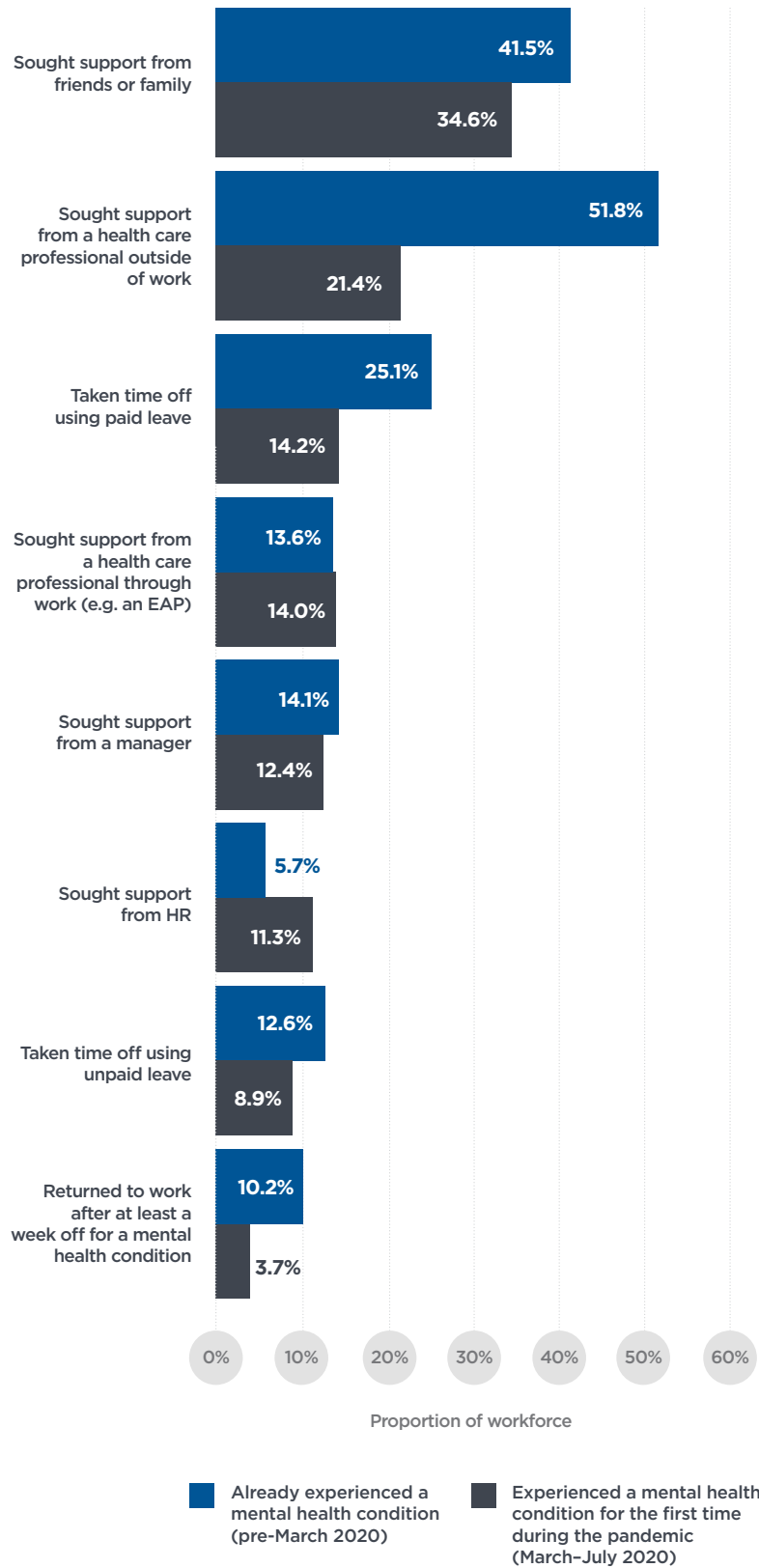
People with a lived experience prior to the pandemic (March 2020), with time to take appropriate action and no movement restrictions, most commonly sought support from family and friends (41.5%) and/or health care professionals outside work (51.8%) and/or took paid leave (25.1%).

> "Seeing my doctor and getting the help I needed, because my workplace didn't help at all."

> "I talked to my manager about [my] mental health and took an afternoon off work."

> "My company signed on with an HR firm and since (then) the mood has been a lot better, being able to go to someone and talk things through has helped."

Workers who experienced a mental health condition for the first time often sought support from friends, family and external health care professionals

Category	Already experienced (pre-March 2020)	First time (March–July 2020)
Sought support from friends or family	41.5%	34.6%
Sought support from a health care professional outside of work	51.8%	21.4%
Taken time off using paid leave	25.1%	14.2%
Sought support from a health care professional through work (e.g. an EAP)	13.6%	14.0%
Sought support from a manager	14.1%	12.4%
Sought support from HR	5.7%	11.3%
Taken time off using unpaid leave	12.6%	8.9%
Returned to work after at least a week off for a mental health condition	10.2%	3.7%

Proportion of workforce

- Already experienced a mental health condition (pre-March 2020)
- Experienced a mental health condition for the first time during the pandemic (March–July 2020)

A culture of casual dismissal

Casual workers have consistently been furthest from thriving in workplaces, and the gap is widening.

It's particularly noticeable in workplace **culture** where full-time and part-time workers experienced strong improvement over the last year, while casual workers reported virtually no change. Casual workers aged 18-34 years or who work in organisations employing at least 5,000 people recorded the lowest **culture** index scores this year.

Casual workers often find the culture of their workplace less mentally healthy than their colleagues

Culture index score out of 100

- Full-time: 66.0%
- Part-time: 65.4%
- Casual: 62.0%

2018 • 2019 • 2020
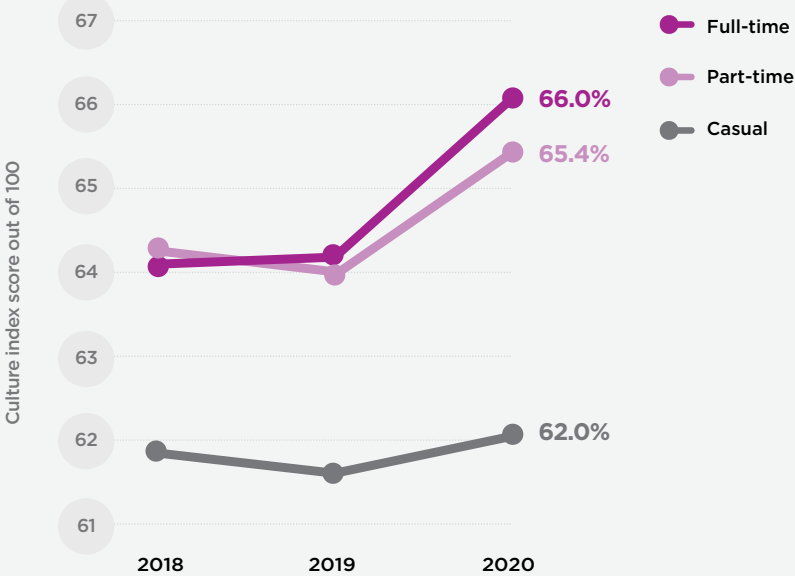
Workplace experiences are contributing less positively to casual workers' mental health each year
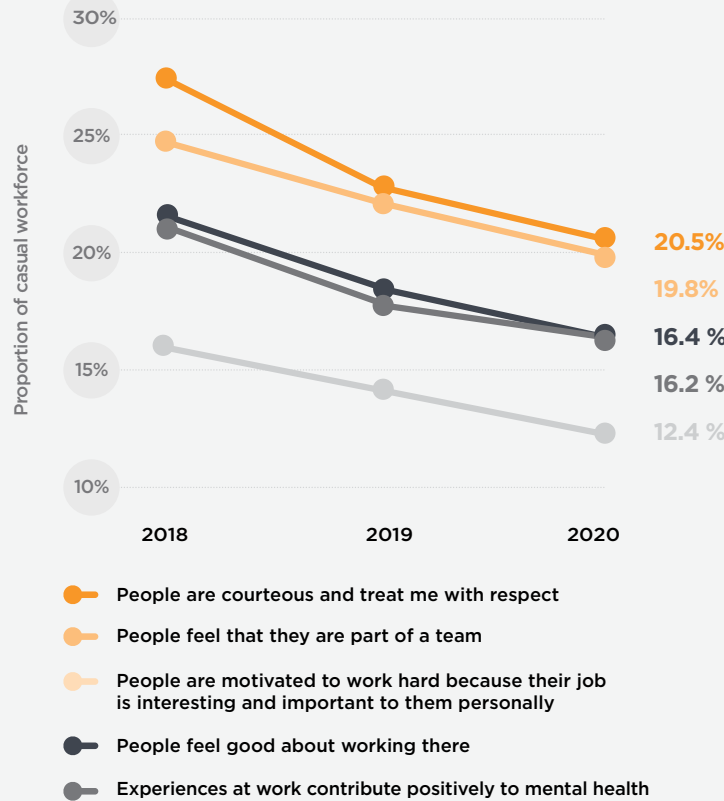
Proportion of casual workforce

- People are courteous and treat me with respect: 20.5%
- People feel that they are part of a team: 19.8%
- People feel good about working there: 16.4%
- People are motivated to work hard because their job is interesting and important to them personally: 16.2%
- Experiences at work contribute positively to mental health: 12.4%
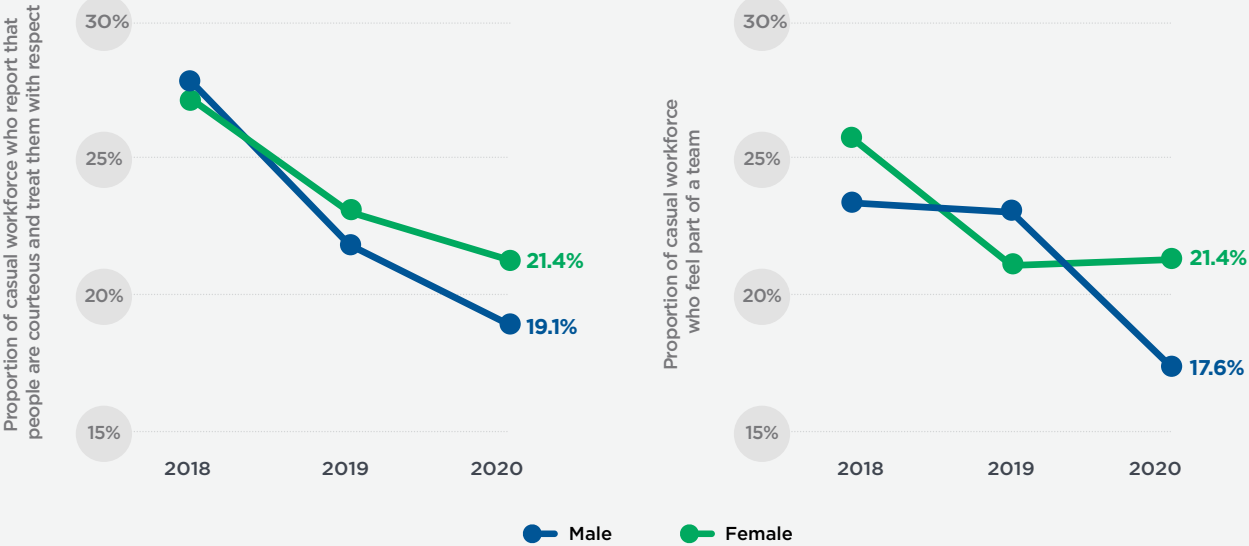
2018 • 2019 • 2020

The sense of workplace **connectedness** has also suffered over time, with persistent declines in respect and inclusiveness toward casual workers over the last three years. This is hugely concerning, given the known benefits to wellbeing and the protective factor against suicide and mental ill-health that a sense of **connectedness** and belonging provides. Unsurprisingly, this aligns with a decrease in **culture**-based outcomes with fewer casual workers reporting that workplace experiences make a positive contribution to their mental health.
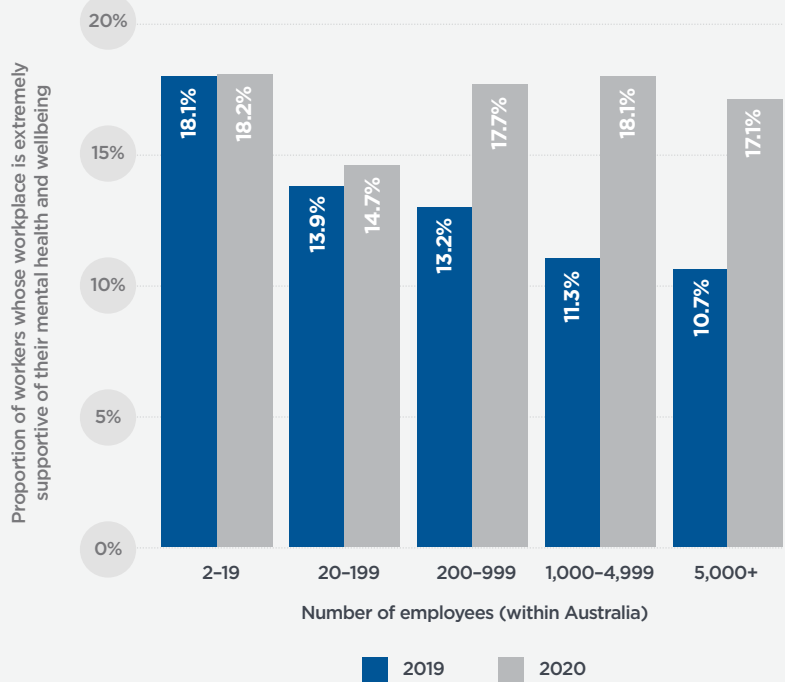
> "Casual staff need to have representation – if we so much as spoke about unions, we just wouldn't get shifts."

While both men and women in casual roles have experienced a downturn in respect and inclusiveness, it has been more pronounced for men across the last three years.

Male workers have experienced larger declines in respect and inclusiveness

Proportion of casual workforce who report that people are courteous and treat them with respect

Male: 2020 — 19.1%
Female: 2020 — 21.4%

Proportion of casual workforce who feel part of a team

Male: 2020 — 17.6%
Female: 2020 — 21.4%

● Male   ● Female

Mid-sized organisations are lagging behind in supporting casual workers' mental health and wellbeing

Proportion of workers whose workplace is extremely supportive of their mental health and wellbeing

Number of employees (within Australia)	2019	2020
2–19	18.1%	18.2%
20–199	13.9%	14.7%
200–999	13.2%	17.7%
1,000–4,999	11.3%	18.1%
5,000+	10.7%	17.1%

■ 2019   ■ 2020

Compared to 2019, organisations employing at least 200 people are now far more supportive of casual workers' mental health and wellbeing and have largely levelled the field. However, workplaces employing 20-199 workers missed the groundswell of support and are lagging behind.

"Within the industry, there's always a token management staff member who nominally is supposed to take care of staff mental health and wellbeing, but since the whole industry is casualised and everyone has the 'you can easily be replaced' attitude, this tends to be perfunctory and not proactive. The isolation of [working from home] puts all onus on employees to take care of themselves, without anyone to check in on them. Which is good for the trust level, but if something goes wrong, nobody would know for weeks."

Most workers think their workplace would benefit from investing in mental health

93.9% of workers believe their workplace would benefit from investing in mental health and wellbeing.

They also articulated a broad range of benefits they anticipated would flow from this investment.

Interestingly, the small proportion of workers (6.1%) who don't see any benefits tend to be least 45 years old, working in a small business, and/or have never experienced a mental health condition.

"[Workplace mental health and wellbeing] should really be promoted as 'Happy workers work better'."

"It would reduce suicide. Too many suicides from stress."

"It would encourage stronger and more supportive teams."

"Invest in reducing the stigma of mental illness [long-term]. I am in a position where I will likely not be able to return to my workplace due to the terrible stigma colleagues have [towards] mental illness and have had to accept a career change is inevitable."

Many think stigma would reduce if their workplace invested in mental health – and stigma is a problem.

2 in 5 workers (38.3%) believe that investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing will reduce the stigma around mental health issues. This is important given nearly 1 in 10 workers (8.2%) have personally experienced stigma around mental health issues in their current workplace over the last 12 months.

Australia's younger workers aged 18-35 years have experienced the most stigma associated with mental health issues. People who have experienced stigma at work have a substantially lower overall thriving workplace score (53.1 out of 100) than the national average (65.1 out of 100).
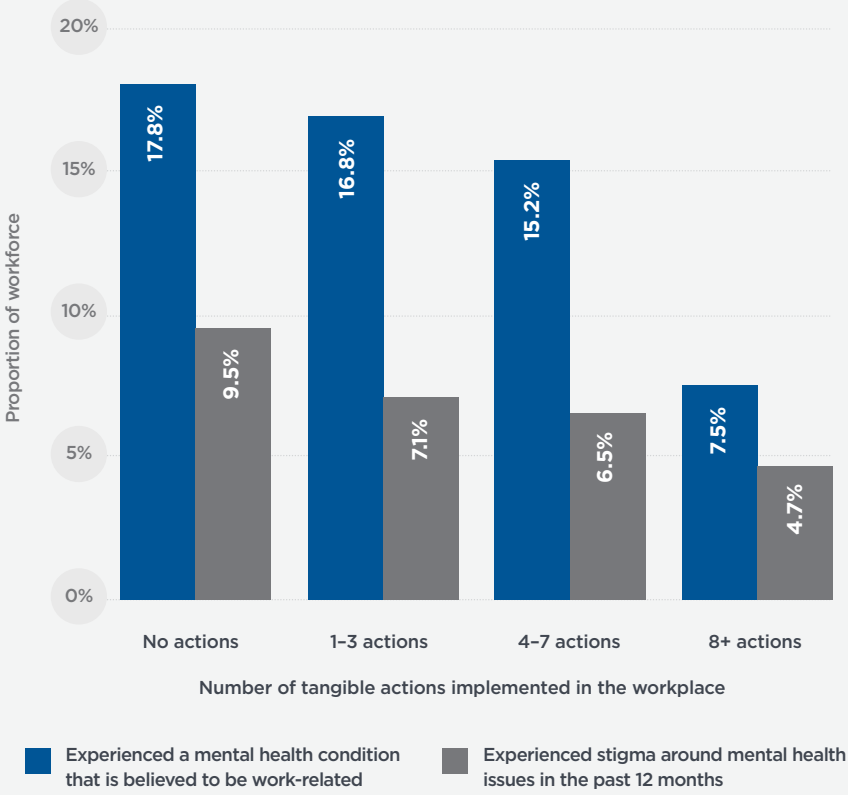
"It feels very difficult to talk about in the workplace. Taking time off if you don't have a physical illness feels like you're just being lazy for calling [in sick]. Even though I can be physically present at work the mental illness episodes can happen through the day unplanned and it can be difficult when it's hard to concentrate and hard to explain to a manager without the inference that you may not be capable to take on tasks or responsibility in a broader sense and potentially affect your opportunities in the future."

Stigma around other issues also emerged in 2020: physical health and racism

6.6% of workers reported that they have experienced stigma around physical health issues in the last year, and 5.1% experienced racism in the workplace. These workers also have overall thriving workplace scores that are well below the national average of 65.1 out of 100 (54.7 out of 100 and 56.6 out of 100, respectively). It is worth noting that between March and July 2020 in Australia:

- People were verbally harassed if they displayed any cold and flu symptoms[32]
- Physical and verbal racial abuse was directed at people who appeared to be of Chinese or Asian heritage[33]
- COVID-19 was referred to in racially derogatory ways in the media, such as 'China virus' or 'Wu Flu' due to the first large-scale outbreak occurring in Wuhan, China[34]
- Large-scale protest marches were organised to raise awareness of unequal treatment for people of colour through the Black Lives Matter movement[35].

Actions reduce stigma and mental injury in the workplace

Number of tangible actions implemented in the workplace

■ Experienced a mental health condition that is believed to be work-related
■ Experienced stigma around mental health issues in the past 12 months

Investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing reduces stigma and injury to workers

It's clear that the more action taken by employers to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing, the better the outcome is for workers. It is far less common for people working at action-oriented workplaces* to experience a mental health condition that they believe is work-related, or to experience stigma around mental health issues.

*   'action-oriented workplaces' refers to workplaces that have implemented at least eight tangible actions

"My workplace has well defined policies and external companies for employees to contact. However, there is a stigma around mental health issues. Staff always think if they mention this topic to their direct manager that they will be treated differently, in a negative sense. I know as this has affected me. Managers need to have training to be able to openly talk to staff about it. Like, it is OK to be not OK."

Quick reference longitudinal items

		2018	2019	2020
Thriving workplace index scores	Leadership	61.5	61.5	64.3
	Connectedness	67.3	67.0	69.5
	Policy	58.2	58.6	61.5
	Capability	62.4	62.5	64.7
	Culture	63.8	63.8	65.4
	OVERALL	62.7	62.7	65.1

		No timeframe specified*		In the last 12 months
Personal experiences at current workplace	Job insecurity	29.4%	28.4%	26.3%
	Work-related insomnia	21.9%	22.8%	17.1%
	Bullying in the workplace	23.7%	22.0%	13.3%
	Lack of flexible work arrangements when required	21.6%	21.9%	14.1%
	Discrimination in the workplace	17.4%	16.0%	9.3%
	Stigma around mental health issues	12.8%	13.0%	8.2%
	Violence in the workplace	7.0%	8.0%	3.5%
	Sexual assault/harassment	6.5%	5.4%	2.8%
	Racism	-	-	5.1%
	Stigma around physical health issues	-	-	6.6%
Benefits of investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing	Increased employee productivity			50.3%
	Increased feelings of being valued			47.7%
	Increased ability to bring your best self to work			41.5%
	Increased willingness to contribute more			37.1%
	Reduced sickness and absence	In 2018 and 2019 two questions captured the benefits employees experience when working in a mentally healthy workplace separately from the perceived benefits employers experience from investing in mental health and wellbeing. 2020 represents the start of a new data series.		49.1%
	Increased employee retention			37.7%
	Increased optimism about completing work tasks			32.7%
	Increased compassion towards work colleagues			38.6%
	Reduced presenteeism			41.7%
	Increased ability to go home with energy in reserve			31.4%
	Increased employee commitment to organisational goals			30.8%
	Increased ability to attract new employees			22.9%
	Reduced costs from workers compensation claims			23.2%
	Reduced stigma around mental health issues			38.3%
Main barriers preventing employers from doing more to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing	More important business issues to address	24.9%	24.4%	24.4%
	Lack of appropriate skills held by managers	29.5%	26.9%	22.9%
	The costs associated with taking action	24.0%	24.3%	22.7%
	Lack of understanding around mental health and wellbeing issues	25.5%	24.0%	19.1%
	The workforce is scattered across different locations	-	-	19.0%
	Not enough of a problem to justify action being taken	20.9%	19.5%	18.3%
	Compliance culture so employers only do what they have to do	19.4%	18.3%	17.0%
	Lack of commitment among managers across the organisation	21.7%	20.6%	16.8%
	Nobody is responsible for driving action	19.3%	20.1%	16.7%
	Lack of commitment at the very top of the organisation	21.3%	21.6%	16.4%
	Lack of time	32.6%	25.3%	16.4%
	Lack of appropriate skills held by non-managers	-	19.2%	15.5%
	The focus tends to be on physical health not mental health	20.9%	19.2%	15.4%
	Not knowing where to start in taking practical steps	16.4%	16.4%	14.9%
	The stigma of mental illness	17.7%	17.8%	14.6%
	No targets or KPIs set within the organisation	16.3%	15.2%	13.7%

*   In 2018 and 2019 the research captured personal experiences at current workplace without a timeframe specified. This changed in 2020 to only capture experiences that occurred at current workplace within the last year.

40 indicators with 3 years of data

	2018	2019	2020
Leadership			
There is a clear expectation that all leaders should role model the values of the workplace	23.2%	21.6%	23.5%
Leaders are accessible when you need them and will listen	22.7%	20.5%	22.8%
Leaders can be seen to proactively encourage and promote good mental health policies and practices	15.1%	16.1%	19.5%
Leaders provide useful and constructive feedback to improve work performance	17.7%	16.9%	18.1%
Leaders create a sense of cohesion within work teams	16.3%	15.3%	17.5%
Leaders act as champions for their work teams	14.8%	13.9%	16.4%
Leaders actively provide opportunities to develop professionally	15.2%	15.4%	16.4%
Reward and recognition are received for good work	13.9%	15.1%	15.5%
Connectedness			
People feel that they are part of a team	24.9%	24.8%	25.4%
People are courteous and treat me with respect	26.2%	24.7%	25.3%
There is a strong sense that people have a shared purpose	19.5%	19.7%	21.4%
Relationships are built on trust	20.5%	20.5%	21.3%
Everyone works together effectively, particularly when trying to accomplish difficult goals	19.5%	19.1%	20.7%
People identify with the workplace	19.6%	18.6%	20.2%
Work feels like a community where people support each other beyond just getting the work done	17.9%	18.1%	20.0%
People care about each other	18.3%	17.7%	19.4%
Policy			
There are effective policies and practices against workplace bullying and harassment	21.3%	20.2%	21.0%
There is easy access to confidential counselling or support services	19.0%	18.6%	19.5%
There are good return to work policies and practices for those who have had time off work with mental health conditions	13.9%	14.0%	14.9%
There are policies to ensure that any changes are managed in a clear, supportive and positive way	13.5%	13.5%	14.5%
There is a good mental health policy, strategy or action plan	13.3%	13.3%	14.4%
There are clear structures in place to ensure transparent decision making	14.0%	13.6%	13.8%
The mental health policy, strategy or action plan can be seen in action	11.1%	11.9%	12.9%
There is a policy to ensure that all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training	10.8%	11.3%	11.7%
Capability			
People are able to successfully overcome most of the challenges they face	19.2%	18.7%	18.9%
People rarely feel bored and disengaged	19.4%	18.0%	18.3%
People are generally highly engaged with their work	18.9%	18.1%	17.8%
People are comfortable voicing concerns about their job or things that might affect their job	17.4%	16.9%	17.6%
The talents, skills and competencies of the workforce are well used	17.6%	17.7%	17.2%
Team leaders make sure workers have the resources to do the job	16.7%	16.6%	16.6%
There is access to mental health and wellbeing education (i.e. information, training)	12.2%	13.4%	14.2%
People have the skills and expertise to support other's mental health and wellbeing	10.5%	11.5%	12.1%
Culture			
People would be happy to continue working in their workplace for as long as they can	24.2%	23.3%	24.4%
People feel committed to their work team	23.1%	22.7%	22.6%
People feel good about working there	21.1%	20.7%	21.0%
People are motivated to work hard because their job is interesting and important to them personally	22.1%	20.9%	20.4%
Experiences at work contribute positively to mental health	16.1%	15.4%	15.6%
There is support to help people practice good work/family/life integration	15.6%	15.0%	14.9%
The culture encourages open discussion about issues that affect mental health and wellbeing	12.0%	13.1%	13.8%
Efforts are made to help people find purpose and meaning in their work	12.8%	13.5%	13.8%

Industry definitions and index scores

Industry	Examples	Overall thriving workplace index scores		
		2018	2019	2020
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Crop growing, livestock farming, aquaculture, logging, fishing, hunting, shearing services	64.9	60.8	65.9
Mining	Coal and metal ore mining, oil and gas extraction, petroleum exploration, sand quarrying, mineral exploration	62.2	62.2	64.8
Manufacturing	Manufacturing of food, beverages, tobacco, textiles, clothing, wood products, paper, jewellery, machinery, equipment, rubber, metals and chemicals, printing, reproduction of recorded media	61.9	62.8	63.4
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	Electricity, gas or water supply, waste collection or treatment	66.2	64.4	66.9
Construction	Construction of buildings, bridges or roads, site preparation, bricklaying, roofing, electrical, carpentry or painting services	63.6	65.3	67.2
Wholesale trade	Agricultural, timber, equipment, motor vehicle, grocery, clothing, furniture or pharmaceutical wholesaling	62.2	62.8	62.3
Retail trade	Motor vehicle, fuel, food, furniture, sporting goods, hardware, clothing or pharmaceutical retailing	60.7	59.5	63.1
Accommodation and food services	Hotels, hostels, cafes, catering services, pubs, bars or clubs	61.0	61.6	62.4
Transport, postal and warehousing	Road, rail, water or air transport, couriers, stevedoring, airports, freight forwarding, customs services	59.3	58.9	62.1
Information media and telecommunications	Newspaper, magazine, book, software or internet publishing, motion picture and sound recording or distribution, telecommunications, internet service providers, data processing services, libraries	61.6	66.3	71.6
Financial and insurance services	Banking, building society, health or life insurance, superannuation	63.3	64.2	67.6
Rental, hiring and real estate services	Motor vehicle or equipment rental, farm animal or copyright leasing, property operators, real estate agencies	64.5	62.8	64.4
Professional, scientific and technical services	Scientific research, architectural, engineering, legal, accounting, advertising, market research, consulting, veterinary or computer system design services	65.4	65.0	67.1
Administrative and support services	Recruitment, labour supply, office administration, call centre, debt collection, pest control, building cleaning or packaging services	61.5	60.0	64.4
Public administration and safety	Government administration or representation, justice, defence, correctional, police or fire protection services	58.9	59.4	62.9
Education and training	Preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary, adult, community, sport, art or special education	64.7	62.5	66.5
Health care and social assistance	Hospitals, general practice, specialist, pathology, dental, optometry, physiotherapy, chiropractic, ambulance, aged care or childcare services	63.2	64.0	66.7
Arts and recreation services	Museum or park operation, creative and performing arts, sports and physical recreation, horse and dog racing, amusement parks, gambling operations	65.2	65.7	63.8
Other services	Repair and maintenance of cars, machinery, equipment and clothing, hairdressing, weight loss, funeral, dry-cleaning or religious services, professional and labour association services	60.8	60.4	65.5

Taking action

We often hear from organisations that the hardest part of embarking on a journey towards a well workforce is knowing where to start! The sheer amount of information out there can be very overwhelming – even for those who have been responsible for the wellbeing of workers for some time.

SuperFriend's workplace wellbeing consultants are here to help to identify your organisation's unique needs and where to focus your efforts to give you your best start - wherever you are on the journey.

Doing something is better than nothing

No organisation is going to be able to achieve everything they want to straight away – it takes time and a real, long-term commitment to build and maintain a truly thriving workplace. The most important thing to do is start somewhere, anywhere, and build from there!

What we offer

- **Presentations**

  Start off by raising awareness and educating your people to reduce stigma and boost mental wellbeing know-how with our short, engaging 'lunch and learn' style presentations.

- **Strategic support**

  Our experts can help you to navigate your organisation's unique workplace wellbeing journey from end to end, including assessment, and strategy and policy development.

- **Workplace training**

  Build the mental health and wellbeing capability of your employees and leaders with online and face-to-face training, including courses for specialised roles.

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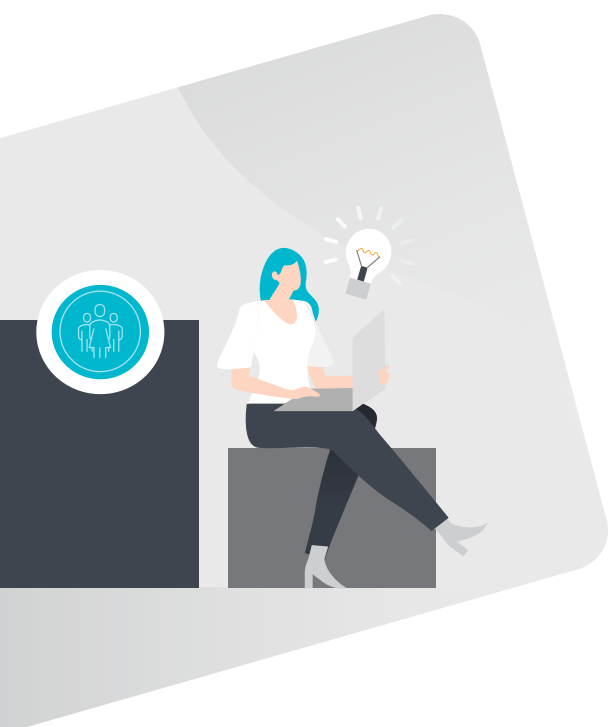
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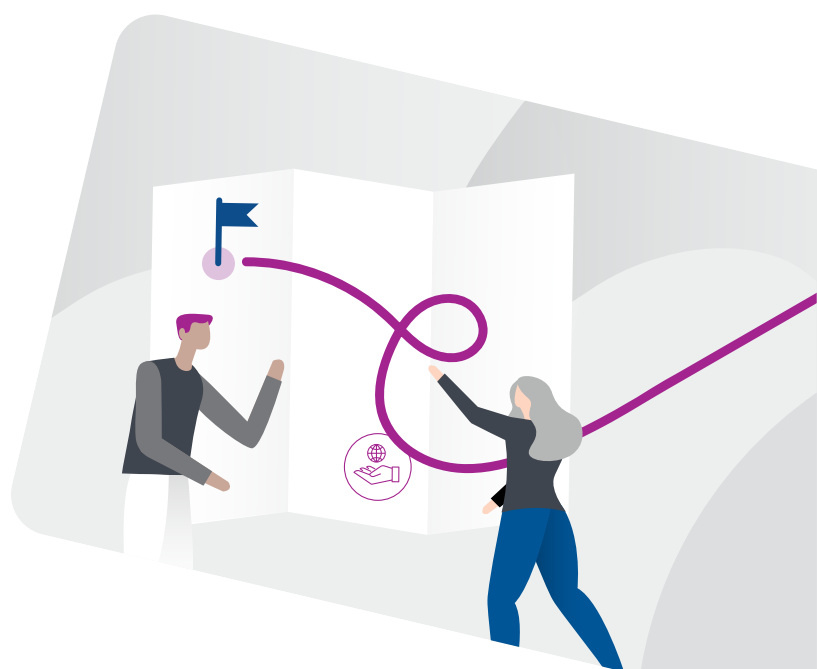32 BBC News. Coronavirus Australia: 'Did you cough at me?' row on Sydney train [Internet]. London. British Broadcasting Corporation; 2020-03-09. Available from: https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-australia-51797751 Norman, J. ABC News, Politics. Early access superannuation scheme estimated to hit $42 billion in coronavirus support [Internet]. Australia. Australian Broadcasting Corporation; 2020-07-30. Available from: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-30/early-access-superannuation-estimate-double-coronavirus-payment/12505984

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