



Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey

2019 NATIONAL REPORT

Superfriend®

FOREWORD

SuperFriend is proud to present the 2019 Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey National Report, from our research involving over 10,000 Australian workers in a broad range of industries and occupations. The survey tracks the progress of workplace mental health and wellbeing across Australia against an ideal or desired state and is a representative sample of Australia's workforce.

Business owners, managers and workers in small, medium and large organisations from different industries across Australia participated in the survey. We've now captured insights from over 15,000 workers across the country using the same indicators over the last two years.

SuperFriend's vision is for an Australia where all workplaces are mentally healthy, and this work is a vital part of bringing that to life.

Within this report, you'll find an overview of the 40 scientifically-validated indicators which are known to be optimal for worker mental health and business success. The indicators cover the five key domains of thriving workplaces: leadership, connectedness, policy, capability and culture.

We hope you find our 2019 Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey National Report useful in helping your business understand and address mental health and wellbeing in your workplace and industry, and that it helps you work towards positive change.

Here's to a thriving and mentally healthy Australia!

Margo Lydon
CEO, SuperFriend



SUGGESTED CITATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's 2019 workplace mental health and wellbeing index score remains unchanged compared to 2018, coming in at 62.7 out of a possible 100. This means we are nearly two thirds of the way towards optimal workplace mental health and wellbeing, with connectedness rating slightly higher than the domains of culture, capability, policy and leadership.

Notably, we found that half (50.6%) of the Australian workforce has experienced a mental health condition, and 2 in 5 of those workers report that their workplace either caused their condition or made it worse. There is a heavy cost when this is the case, with approximately \$543 million of workers' compensation¹ and \$750 million in life insurance claims paid to Australians each year for work-related mental health conditions². The top 3 industries where workers reported that their workplace caused their mental health condition were manufacturing (28.1%), public administration and safety (27.9%) and construction (19.8%).

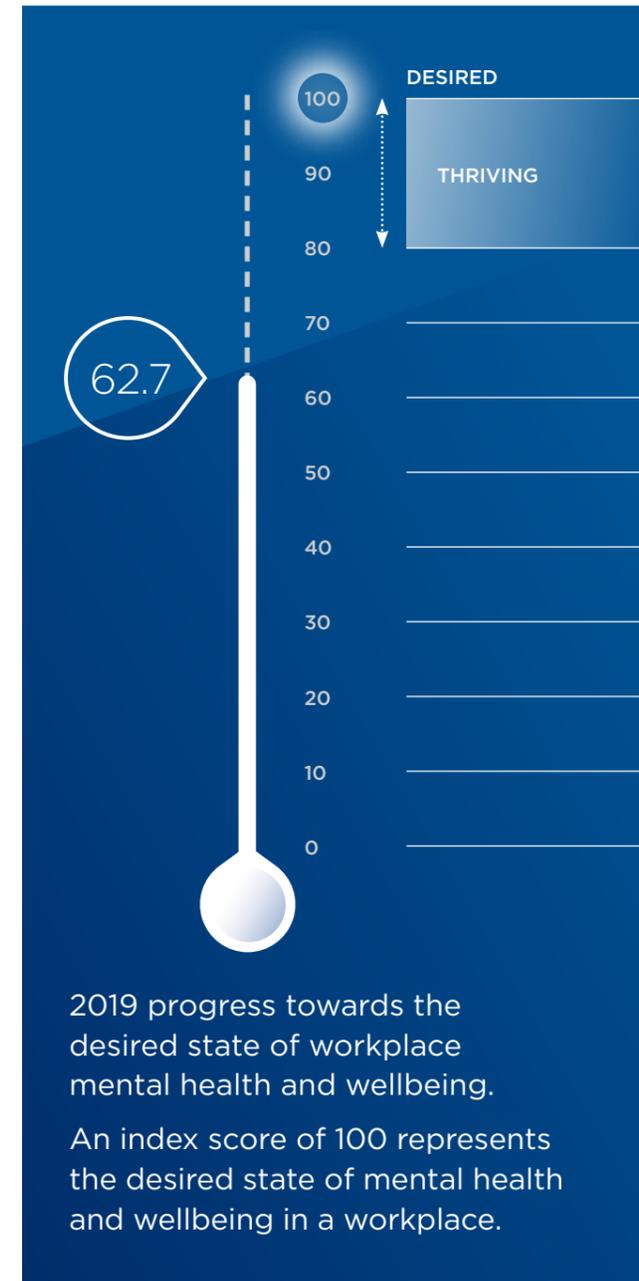
The survey identified 11 tangible ways that employers can improve worker wellbeing, but more than half of Australian workers (56.8%) don't believe their workplace has committed to **any** of these actions. The more actions that workplaces implement, the less common it is for their people to attribute their mental ill-health to their work. The majority (63.4%) of people who believe their workplace contributed to their mental health condition work in organisations that haven't implemented any actions.

This year's report features a special focus on stress. Workload and deadlines are the two biggest stressors across the nation, affecting approximately 1 in 5 workers. Women are more stressed by workload (24.2%) than men (20.8%), and men are more stressed by deadlines (19.1%) than women (16.5%). Customers and clients are the biggest cause of stress for casual workers (16.7%).



Thriving workplace indicators at a glance

Against the five domains essential for building a thriving workplace



Room for improvement



The top 3 industries where workers reported that their workplace caused their mental health condition



Workers who are stressed on a regular basis are leaving their jobs. Only 1 in 2 people who are stressed at least once a week enjoy their job (50.2%), and they hold little hope that workplace health and wellbeing will improve in the foreseeable future. Higher turnover is the result, with only 30.4% of these workers planning to stay with their employer over the next year compared to those who are stressed a few times a year (42.6%) or once a year (51.7%).

This year we also observed a broader drop in workers' level of commitment to staying with their employer. In 2018, more than three quarters (75.6%) of the workforce said that they would 'probably' or 'definitely' stay with their current employer over the next year, but this dropped to less than two thirds of workers (65.5%) this year, with a further 23.6% expressing they were unsure and waiting to see what happens.

Mentally healthy workplaces, which we also refer to as thriving workplaces, certainly help retain staff. In thriving workplaces, only 1 in 5 people (19.2%) were really stressed each week, compared to 1 in 3 people (32.8%) in workplaces that are not thriving. In fact, 1 in 3 people in thriving workplaces (33.8%) said that their job isn't stressful at all (vs 9.9% of other workplaces). More than three quarters (77.2%) of people in thriving workplaces are definitely planning to stay with their employer over the next year.

When people work in mentally healthy environments, they typically feel more valued and willing to contribute to the organisation. This year, there has been a sharp increase in recognition that mentally healthy workplaces enable people to leave work with energy to spare. Workers also believe that investing in workplace mental health and wellbeing would lead to a reduction in sickness, absence and presenteeism, along with increased productivity and higher retention.

Lack of job security continues to unsettle many Australian workers, along with work-related insomnia. Stigma around mental health issues has not improved at a national level over the last two years, with the latest research showing that 13.0% of Australian workers have experienced stigma in their current workplace.

These workers tend to find their jobs more stressful than those who have not (39.1% find their job highly stressful vs 19.4%). Our research suggests that education can help to alleviate stress through provision of mental health and wellbeing education or a policy to ensure that all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are having a much tougher time at work than other workers. Significantly higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers have personally experienced toxic behaviours and attitudes in their current workplace.

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers who believe their current workplace caused their mental health condition is double that of non-Indigenous workers (30.2% vs 15.7%).

The biggest perceived hurdle to achieving a thriving workplace is a lack of appropriate skills among managers. Our research suggests that education and training about mental health and wellbeing helps to break down many of these barriers, particularly those related to skill gaps, recognition of the importance of mentally healthy workplaces and managerial commitment and action.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers

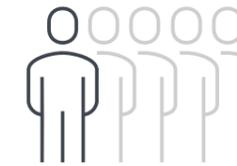
The incidence of violence and sexual assault/harassment is nearly **double** that of non-Indigenous workers



Instances of workplace **discrimination**



1 in 5 Indigenous workers have experienced stigma around mental health issues



Nearly **1 in 3** have been bullied at work



Job stress

Women are more stressed by **workload** than men



In **thriving workplaces**, only 1 in 5 people were really stressed every week



Men are more stressed by **deadlines** than women



In **non-thriving workplaces**, 1 in 3 people were really stressed each week



ABOUT SUPERFRIEND

SuperFriend is a workplace mental health and wellbeing organisation. We partner with profit-to-member superannuation funds and insurers to achieve mentally healthy workplaces for their staff and members.

Since 2007 we have walked alongside our Partners to reduce the incidence and impact of suicide and mental illness, evolving to focus on prevention, positive mental health and wellbeing—and helping workers and organisations thrive.

We do this through **solutions** (training, resources, programs, events), **advocacy** (through industry collaboration, national working groups, policy development), and **insights** (regular research analysing workplace mental health trends and outcomes).

Our work aims to increase awareness and behaviour change in workplace mental health and wellbeing, reduce stigma, and equip workplaces, people leaders and workers to look after each other and themselves.

Our vision is for **an Australia where all workplaces are mentally healthy.**



About this survey

The aim of the Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey is to measure 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.

The survey was completed by 10,028 working Australians across a broad range of industries, role types and locations through an online research panel during July and August 2019. This year's sample is double the previous year, providing even greater depth and weight to this research. Unless otherwise specified, all findings are based on the latest research.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each of the 40 scientifically-validated characteristics of mentally healthy workplaces are present in their current workplace using a 6-point scale: 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and 'don't know'.

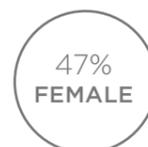
The survey also asked questions about people's perceptions, attitudes and experiences in relation to workplace mental health and wellbeing. Responses were weighted using recent data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to ensure the findings are representative of the Australian workforce.

The 40 indicator statements have remained the same for the last two surveys, enabling SuperFriend to assess change over time in a dataset of more than 15,000 Australian workers. While many of the other questions are unchanged, the 2019 survey also contains some new or revised questions to more effectively capture information about topics of interest at a national level, such as stress, stigma, and external factors influencing experiences at work.

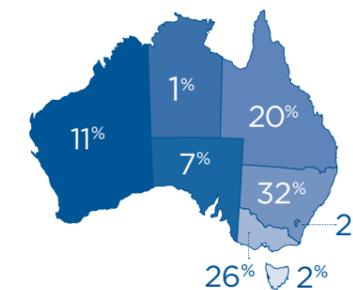
Participants



Gender identity



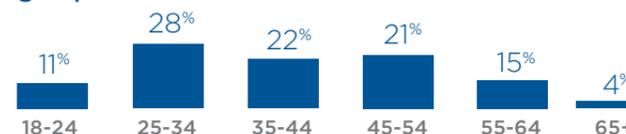
Main workplace location



Main workplace industry

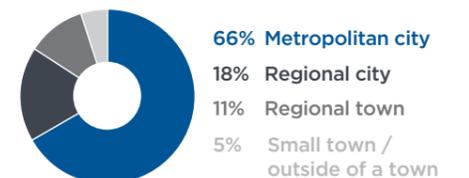


Age group

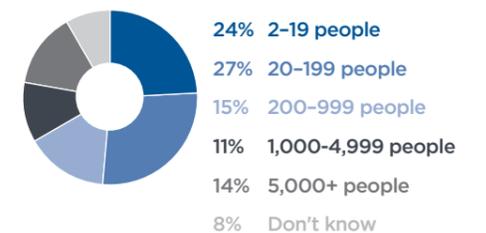


Note: some proportions may not add to 100% due to rounding.

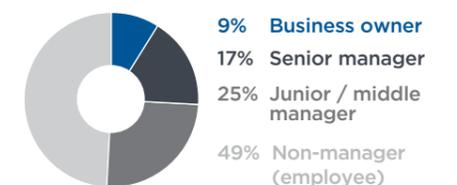
Workplace region



Organisation size (within Australia)



Work role



WHAT DO THRIVING WORKPLACES LOOK LIKE?

Thriving workplaces are mentally healthy workplaces where people can do and be their best. The thriving workplace indicators are presented across the following five domains, which are essential for building thriving workplaces.

CONNECTEDNESS

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

CULTURE

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 includes a strong people focus, it creates a ripple effect for positive mental health and wellbeing and acknowledges that people are key to success.

CAPABILITY

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, an employer brand and make a workplace desirable.

LEADERSHIP

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 understand the importance of education, resources, time and tools to develop capable leaders.

POLICY

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 or policy on mental health and wellbeing should exist, and be understood, visible and accessible to all workers.

2019 Results

According to the 2019 results, Australia's national workplace mental health and wellbeing score is **62.7**. This means we are nearly two thirds of the way towards optimal workplace mental health and wellbeing, with **Connectedness** rating slightly higher than the domains of **Culture**, **Capability**, **Policy** and **Leadership**.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The index methodology was revised in early 2019 to provide a more robust view of workplace mental health and wellbeing and is based on all responses from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The national index scores for 2018 shown later in this report have been recalculated to ensure ongoing comparability with profile-specific index scores.



THE IMPACT OF WORK ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Half (50.6%) of Australian workers have experienced a mental health condition, and 2 in 5 of those workers believe their workplace either caused the condition or made it worse.

While more women have experienced mental health conditions (55.4%) than men (46.5%), a higher proportion of men believe that their workplace caused their mental health condition (20.5% vs 12.7%).

Age also appears to be a factor in this equation, with older workers experiencing a higher incidence of workplace-related mental health conditions. Workplaces are reported to be responsible for 10.0% of conditions in the 18-24 age group, rising progressively through the age groups to 25.6% of conditions for workers aged 55-64 years.

Many mental health insurance claims look at whether the person on claim's condition has been caused or worsened by the workplace.

Each year approximately \$543 million of workers' compensation is paid to 7,200 Australians for work-related mental health conditions¹, and \$750 million through life insurance, according to recent research by the Financial Services Council and KPMG².



\$1,293m
total paid for workplace mental health conditions (\$543m workers' compensation¹ and \$750m in life insurance claims)²



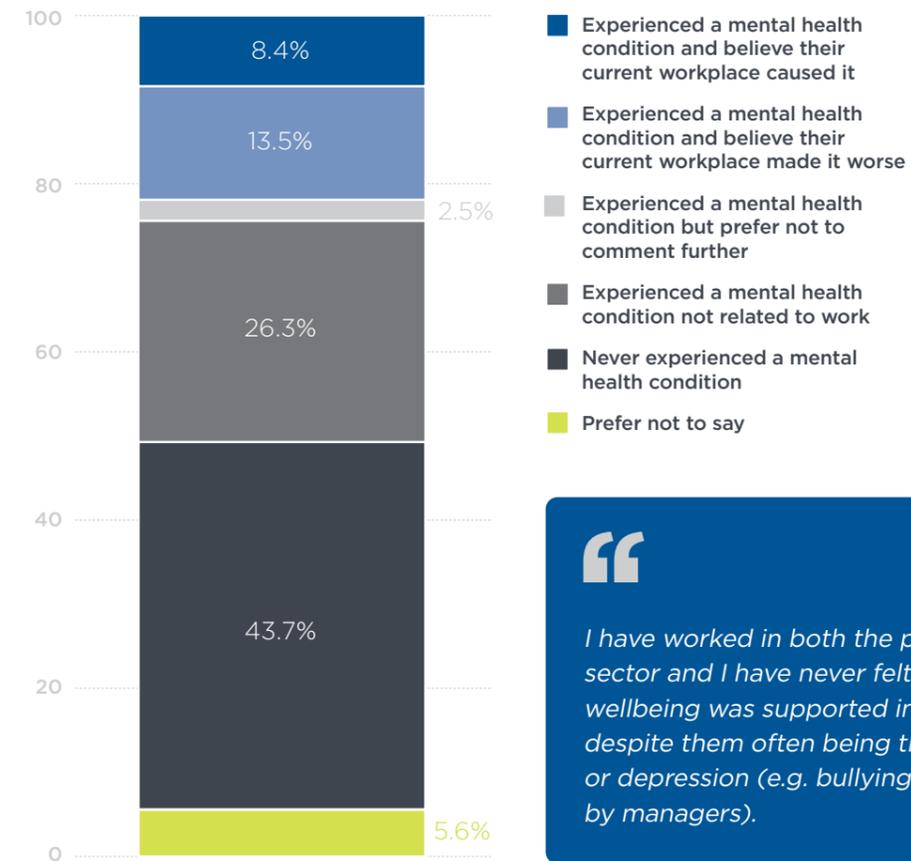
Close to 18,000
Australian workers compensated



Connecting workers to the help they need

Workers can be impacted by a range of work-related and/or personal issues that can impact their work performance and overall mental wellbeing. Ensuring they have access to confidential counselling services, often called Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), provides workers with assistance when they need it most. This type of support offers a range of benefits including positive mental health outcomes, increased work engagement, reductions in presenteeism and overall greater satisfaction with life³.

Impact of workplaces on mental health conditions



I have worked in both the public sector and private sector and I have never felt that mental health and wellbeing was supported in either environment... despite them often being the 'trigger' for my stress or depression (e.g. bullying that was not addressed by managers).

Top 5 industries where workers with experience of a mental health condition reported their workplace caused it



Manufacturing
28.1%



Public administration and safety
27.9%



Construction
19.8%



Wholesale trade
18.1%



Transport, postal and warehousing
17.0%

11 WAYS TO IMPROVE WORKER WELLBEING

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.

1

Actively provide professional development opportunities

2

Recognise people who do good work and reward them appropriately

3

Let people see the mental health policy, strategy or action plan in action

4

Implement effective policies and practices against workplace bullying and harassment

5

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

6

Develop good return to work policies and practices for people who have had time off work with mental health conditions

7

Make sure that all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training by making it an organisation-wide policy

8

Put clear structures in place so that decision making is transparent

9

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

10

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

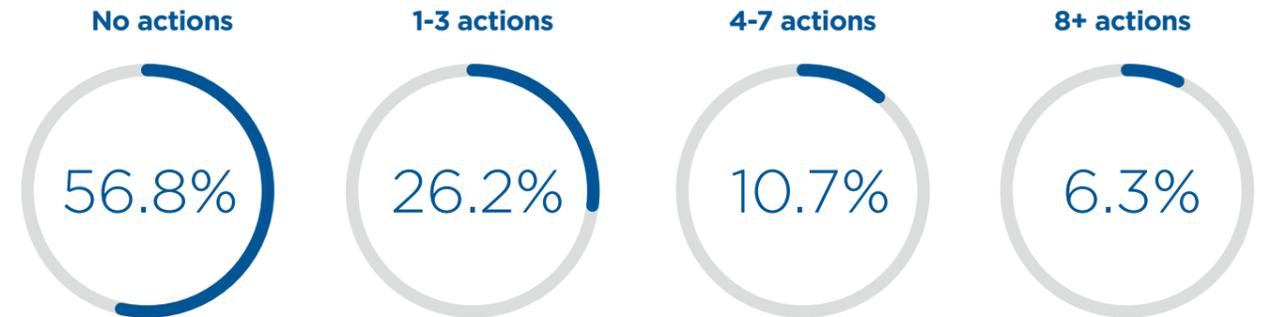
11

Help people to practice good work/family/life integration



Thriving workplaces generally demonstrate at least **eight** of these best practice activities shown to improve worker mental health and wellbeing

How many workplaces are demonstrating these actions?

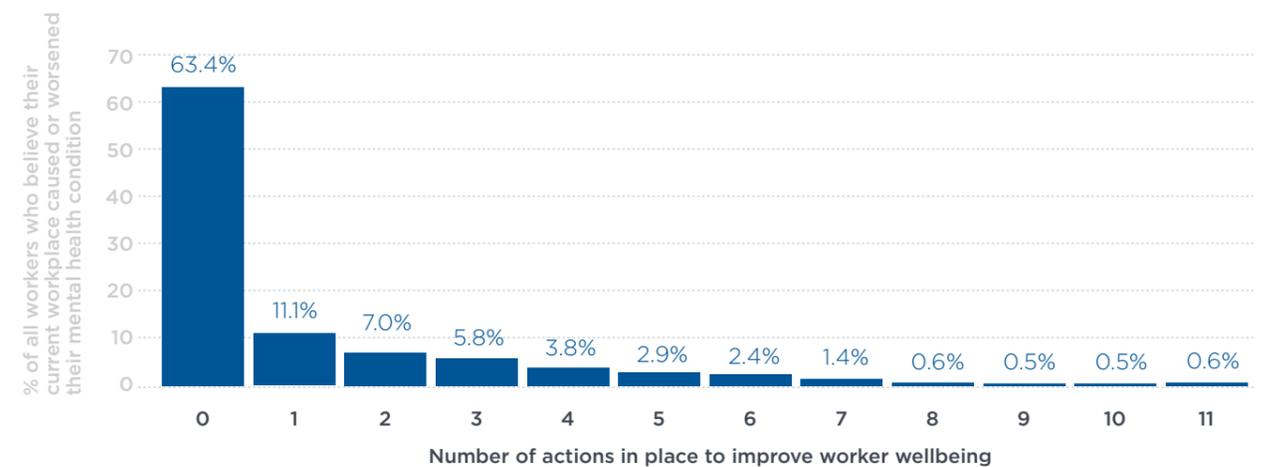


Over 40% of Australian workers believe their workplace has committed to some of these tangible actions to improve mental health and wellbeing, though more than half (56.8%) are not convinced that their workplace has committed to any. Only 6.3% believe their workplace has committed to at least eight of these actions.

The more actions that workplaces implement, the less common it is for their people to attribute their mental ill-health to their work. The majority (63.4%) of people who believe their workplace contributed to their mental health condition work in organisations that have not implemented any of these actions.

This finding is consistent with research suggesting that organisations can create greater economic and social benefit by moving away from a compliance-based approach to worker wellbeing, and move towards one that also looks at prevention and resilience-building⁴. This integrated approach entails not only managing mental ill-health but also building employee engagement and resilience through creating strengths-oriented work environments where workers can flourish⁵.

% of all workers who believe their current workplace caused or worsened their mental health condition compared with the number of actions workplaces have implemented



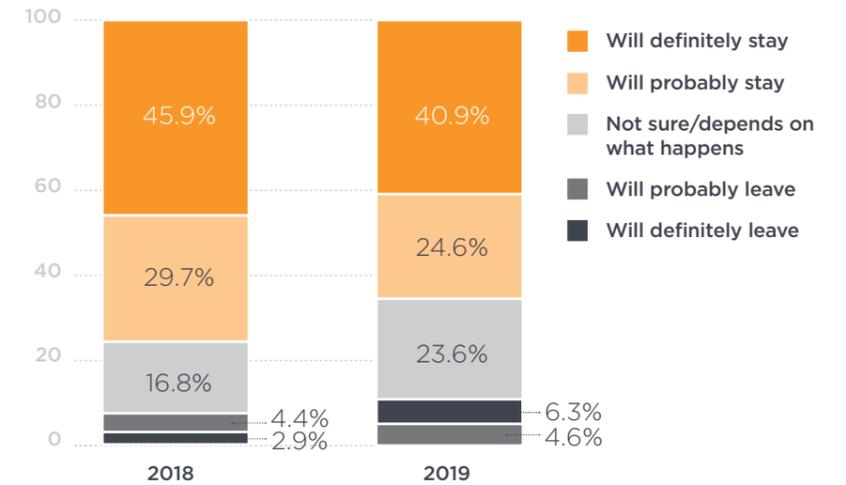
LET'S TALK ABOUT STRESS

Workers who feel stressed on a regular basis are leaving their jobs. Only 1 in 2 people (50.2%) who feel stressed most days (or at least once a week) enjoy their job. They are less hopeful that workplace mental health and wellbeing will improve in the foreseeable future. Higher turnover is the result, with only 30.4% planning to stay with their employer over the next year compared to those who are stressed a few times a year (42.6%) or once a year (51.7%).



Over the last year there's been a substantial drop in workers' level of commitment to staying with their employer. In 2018, 75.6% of the workforce said that they would 'probably' or 'definitely' stay with their current employer over the next year, which dropped to 65.5% this year. There's a much higher degree of uncertainty in 2019, with a further 23.6% expressing they were unsure and waiting to see what happens.

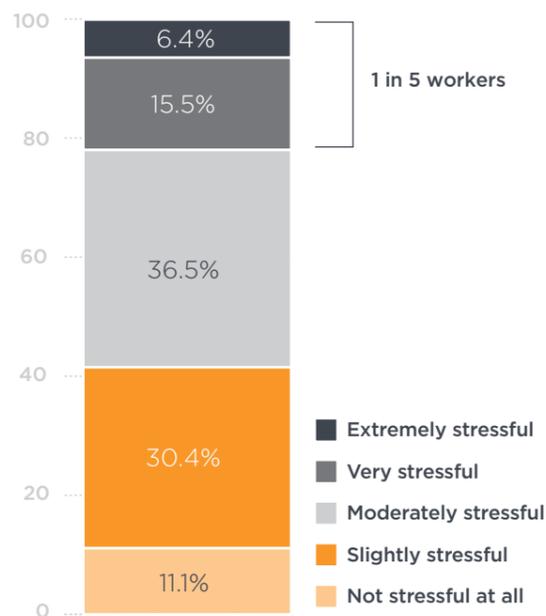
Likelihood of staying with current employer over the next 12 months



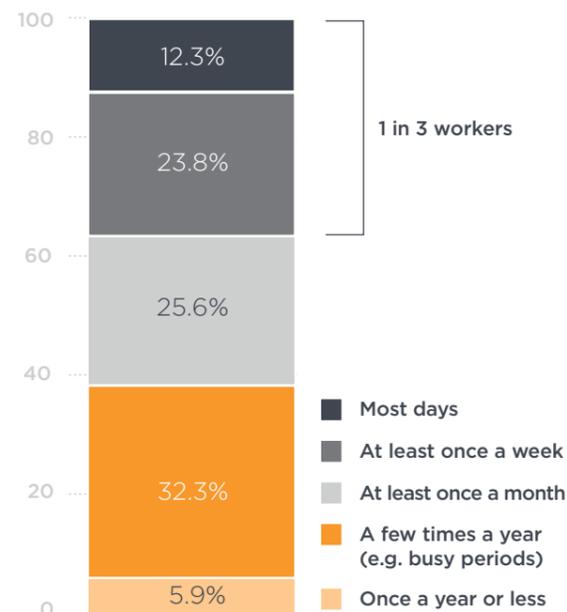
The future with their current employer is looking less certain for people working in:



Stress level of current job



Frequency of job being very/extremely stressful over the last 12 months



Stress is not always bad for you

Positive stress is a short-term motivator that focuses energy and improves performance. It feels exciting! Examples of positive stressors include starting a new job, receiving a promotion or buying a home⁶.

Negative stress can be short- or long-term, and causes anxiety and reduced performance because it feels like you can't cope with the situation. This type of stress can lead to a decline in mental and physical health. Examples of external negative stressors include excessive job demands, job insecurity, commuting, and conflict with colleagues and managers. Negative stress can also be generated internally or through habitual behaviour patterns, such as a fear of public speaking, perfectionist expectations, worrying about the future and procrastinating⁶.

“My workplace does impact my mental health negatively, but not in a long-term sense, more for shorter periods when highly stressful situations occur.”



If somebody were to raise that they are stressed they would be seen as incompetent, so people don't speak up, they just leave.

What helps with retention?

Mentally healthy workplaces certainly help with retention. Only 1 in 5 people in thriving workplaces (19.2%) were really stressed on a weekly basis compared to 1 in 3 people (32.8%) in workplaces that are not thriving. In fact, 1 in 3 people in thriving workplaces (33.8%) said that their job isn't stressful at all (vs 9.9% of other workplaces)! These factors have an impact on retention, with more than three quarters (77.2%) of people in thriving workplaces definitely planning to stay with their employer over the next year, versus only 39% in other workplaces.

Stress in different industries



Frontline health workers need more protection

- Nearly 1 in 3 people (30.0%) working in health care and social assistance find their jobs highly stressful, making it the most stressful industry in Australia
- They are also stressed more often than those in any other industry. Among those with stressful jobs, 41.8% experience high levels of stress week in, week out (i.e. at least once a week)
- Health care and social assistance workers experience the highest levels of workplace violence (16.8% of workers), and the second highest levels of bullying (28.5%) and work-related insomnia (29.3%)
- Despite this, these workers are fairly committed to staying with their employer over the next year (42.7% definitely plan to stay) and have one of the highest levels of job enjoyment (75.5% like or love their job).



Financial industry workers have high levels of job insecurity

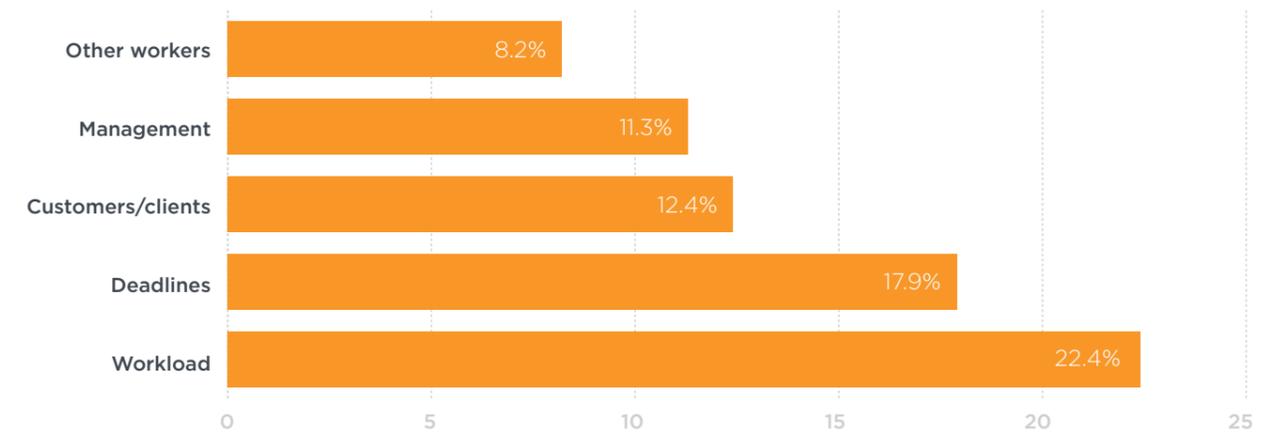
- Workers in this industry continue to face some of the highest levels of job insecurity (31.1%), work-related insomnia (25.8%) and sexual assault/harassment (7.1%)
- Nearly a quarter (23.4%) of financial and insurance services workers describe their job as highly stressful; the seventh-highest stress result across all industries
- However, workers experience high levels of stress less frequently than those in most other industries (34.6% are highly stressed on a weekly basis)
- 2 in 5 workers (40.1%) are committed to definitely staying with their employer in the next 12 months, slightly lower than the previous year (41.5%).



Public sector jobs are not 'safe as houses'

- Despite the lingering perceptions to the contrary, the public administration and safety industry has the second highest stress levels with more than a quarter (28.1%) of people working in highly stressful jobs
- 38.0% of workers in this industry with stressful jobs are stressed at least once a week, often more frequently, ranking third in the frequency of high stress levels
- Industry workers, including those in government departments, emergency services, community care and correctional services, admittedly benefit from one of the highest levels of job security. However, they are also suffering from the highest levels of work-related insomnia (30.7%), bullying (29.0%), discrimination (25.0%) and stigma regarding mental health issues (20.8%).

What's causing our stress?



Workload and deadlines are the top two stressors for most industries, with the following exceptions:

Workload is no. 1, but dealing with customers and clients are more stressful than deadlines in people-facing roles such as:

After workload, management issues cause the most stress if you work in:



Education and training

21.9%



Health care and social assistance

19.4%



Retail trade

19.1%



Accommodation and food services

14.1%



Public administration and safety

18.1%



There are lots of people who talk the talk of supporting people with health issues, either mental or physical, but few walk the walk of support. People from upper management to those under their management often fail to follow through with support, as it is seen as unproductive and wasting time. If managers do give good support, they seem to be left without support themselves. These people then leave the organisation because of the lack of support and another vicious cycle begins.

The larger the organisation, the more common it is to be stressed by management issues and a lack of staff.



Women are more stressed by workload than men



Men are more stressed by deadlines than women



The biggest causes of stress for casual workers



I told my current manager that I was overwhelmed because I had worked all weekend to catch up on my workload and he told me that even though I had mental health issues, we still had a job to do!



Leave reduces the chance of leaving

Despite the lure of beaches and bush, Australians aren't that great at taking holiday leave. In fact, the majority of us fail to take our full annual leave entitlements^{7,8}. However, holidays provide an important circuit breaker to the build-up of stress and exhaustion. While on leave, wellbeing improves and feelings of stress and burnout decrease⁹. It is important to encourage workers to take leave and fully disconnect from work during that time. The ability to detach psychologically, or switch off, from work is a key factor in realising the wellbeing benefits of taking leave⁹.

WHAT'S IMPACTING OUR WORKERS?

Lack of job security continues to unsettle many Australian workers, along with work-related insomnia. Although there is some evidence of downward movement in several areas, stigma around mental health issues has not improved at a national level over the last two years.

Personal experiences at their current workplace



The stigma of mental illness is still strong and is used as a weapon against anyone brave enough to mention difficulties.

Spotlight on stigma

13.0% of Australian workers have experienced the stigma of mental illness in their current workplace. These workers tend to find their jobs more stressful than those who have not (39.1% find their job very/extremely stressful vs 19.4%). They are also highly stressed more often, with nearly 1 in 4 feeling really stressed for the majority of their working week (22.7% feel very/extremely stressed most days vs 9.2%) compared to less than 1 in 10 workers who have not experienced this type of stigma. Workplaces can reduce stigma by building knowledge and understanding of mental health and illness⁴.

This is supported by our research which also suggests that education can help to alleviate stress through provision of mental health and wellbeing education or a policy to make sure that all leaders regularly participate in [mental health and wellbeing training](#).

Compared to workplaces that do not offer either of these education opportunities, the organisations that do show a smaller proportion of:

- Workers experiencing stigma around mental health issues (11.5% vs 13.3%)
- Highly stressed people in their workforce (19.1% vs 22.6%) and their workers are highly stressed less often (29.3% are stressed at least once a week vs 32.8%).

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' EXPERIENCES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are having a much tougher time at work compared with other Australians

Significantly higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers are employed in workplaces where they have personally experienced toxic behaviours and attitudes:

Nearly **1 in 3** have been bullied at work



Instances of workplace **discrimination**

23.8%

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers who believe their current workplace caused their mental health condition is **double** that of non-Indigenous workers

30.2%

15.7%

The incidence of workplace violence and sexual assault/harassment is nearly **double** that of non-Indigenous workers

x2

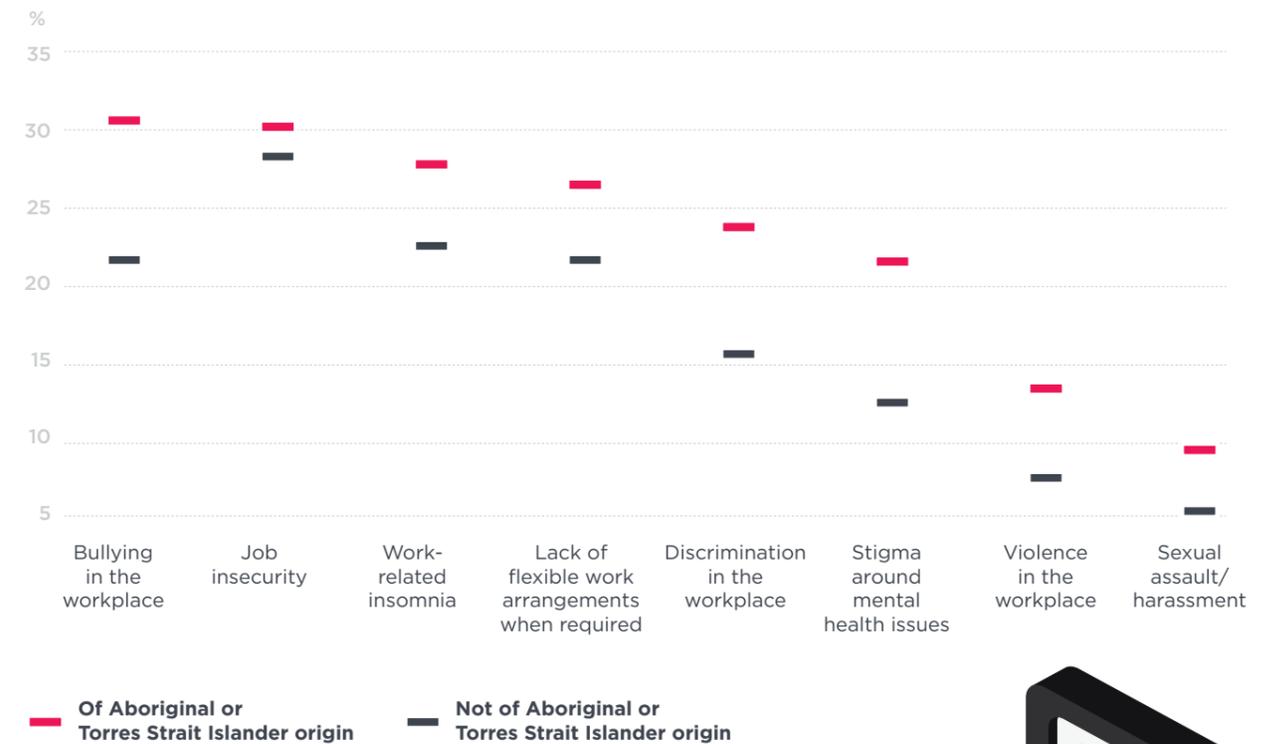
1 in 5 Indigenous workers have experienced stigma around mental health issues



Compared with non-Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Australians are **2.7 times** as likely to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress¹⁰, and almost 30% live with a mental health condition¹¹, compared with 20.1% of non-Indigenous Australians.

"For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, good health is holistic—it includes physical, social, emotional, cultural, spiritual and ecological wellbeing, for individuals and for the community."¹⁰

Indigenous workers are having a tough time in the workplace



“It would be great if the stigma around mental health issues did not exist. In my workplace, it is seen as bludging or being over-sensitive/ unable to perform your job if you are struggling with stress, anxiety or depression.**”**



How does stigma impact people?

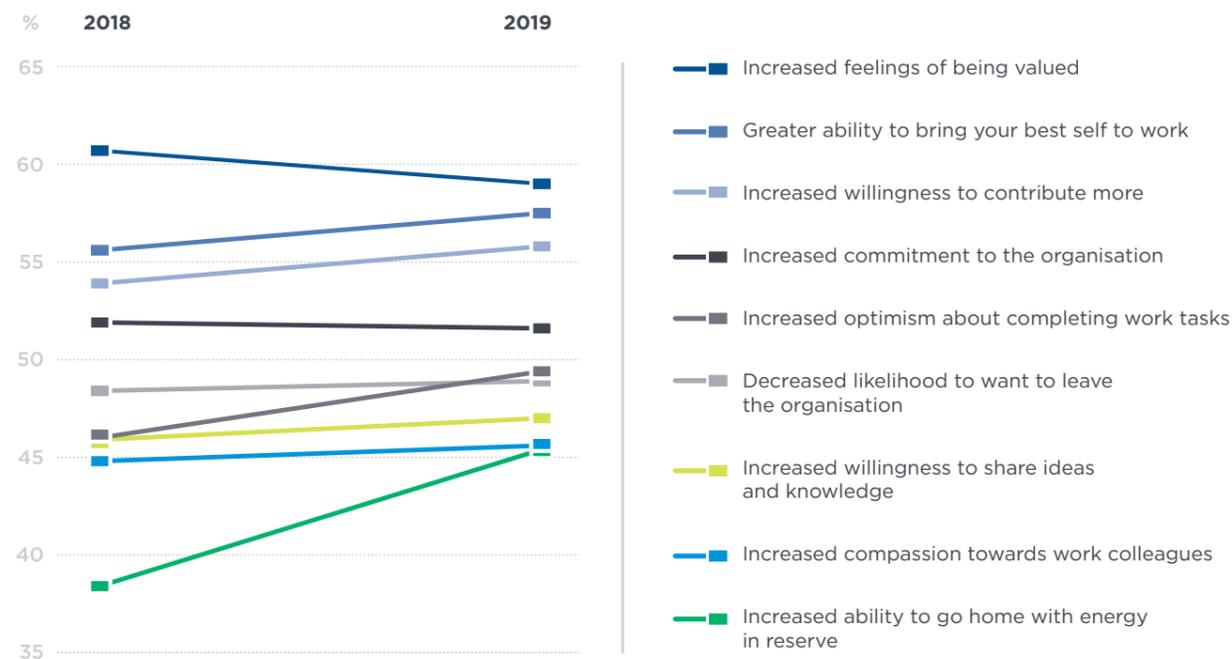
Societal stigma (widely-held negative stereotypes about a group of people), is particularly common for mental illness¹². Stigma then leads to discrimination, isolation and a general lack of empathy, which makes recovery more difficult and discourages people from seeking help¹³.

This is particularly the case for people who have internalised stigma by accepting and applying those negative stereotypes to themselves¹². This type of stigma damages self-image, feelings of worth and hope for the future¹³.

HEALTHY WORKPLACES MEAN MORE ENERGY

When people work in mentally healthy environments, they typically feel more valued and willing to contribute to the organisation, and are able to bring their best selves to work. This is consistent with the 2018 results. Interestingly, this year there's been a sharp increase in recognition that mentally healthy workplaces enable people to leave work with energy to spare.

Main benefits employees experience when working in a mentally healthy workplace



Are you running on empty?

Having energy at the end of the workday means people have enough 'fuel in the tank' to fulfil the other important roles in their life as partners, family members, friends and members of the community. This energy is also essential for undertaking activities to boost wellbeing. In particular, post-work activities that help workers 'switch off' such as social engagements, learning something new or relaxing, help workers rebuild the physical and mental energy required to be effective at work the next day¹⁴.

Having energy to spare is seen as a key benefit of mentally healthy workplaces for people working in the following industries, which include those where jobs are most frequently stressful for workers:



Women tend to recognise having energy to spare after work as a benefit (49.6%) more often than men (41.7%), but recognition among both genders has risen equally over the last year.

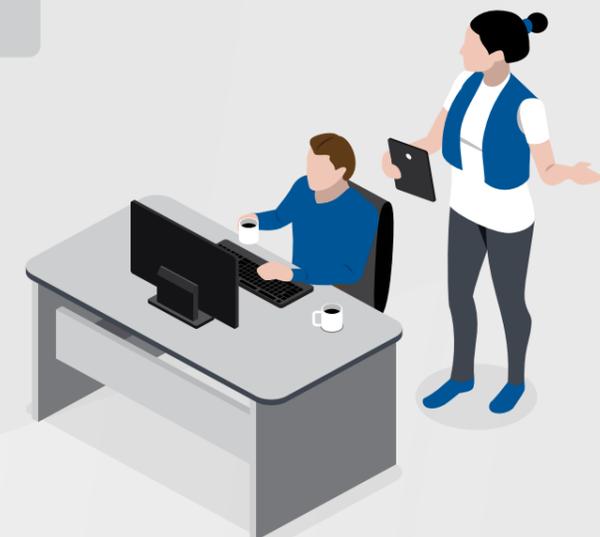
It's more common for people working in large organisations (1,000+ employees) to recognise having energy to spare after work as a benefit than for those working in small organisations (2-19 employees) (51.3% vs 40.5%).

“

My workplace is collaborative and mature about my mental health issues and I have felt completely appreciated for my skills and talents.

“

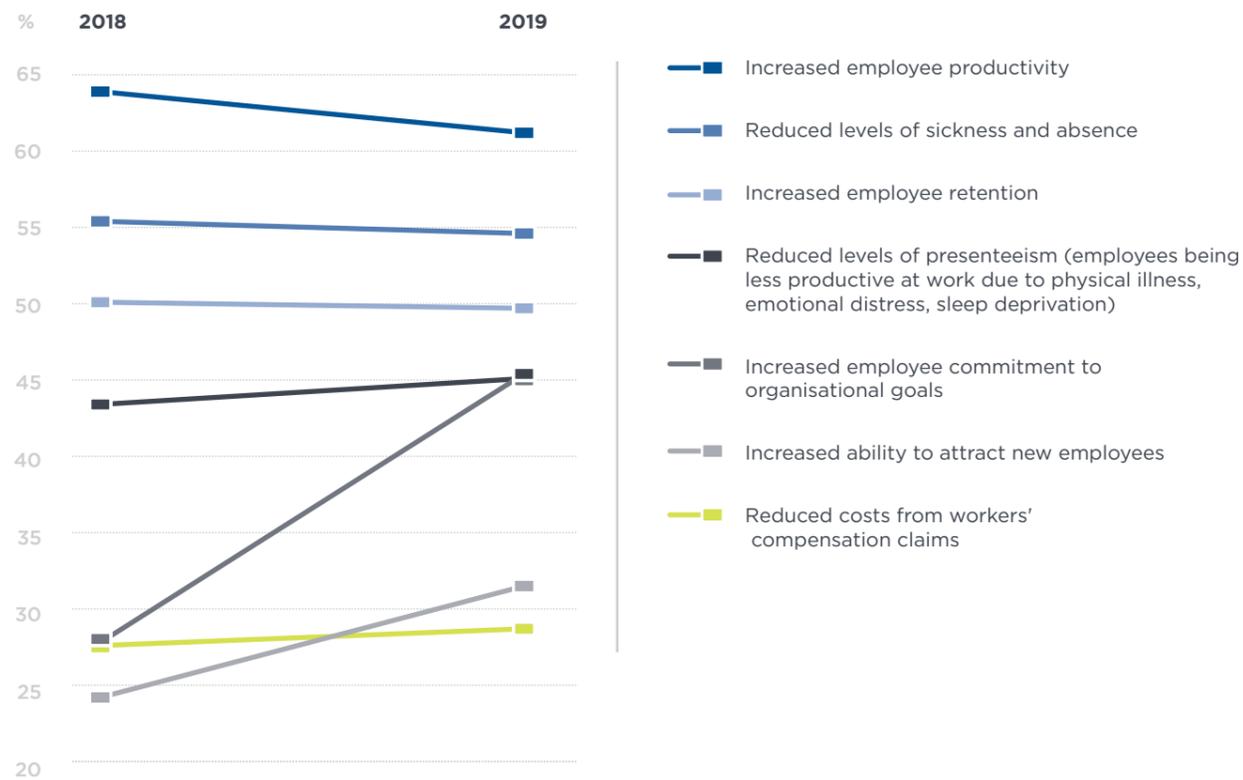
Frontline workers are all under pressure to meet their KPIs in order for managers to receive their bonuses. In my workplace, this has led to a situation where many people no longer feel as though they are valued members of staff and have become disengaged.



THE BENEFITS OF INVESTING

It's not just individual employees who stand to benefit from mentally healthy workplaces. Our research shows that employers who invest in mentally healthy workplaces would see a reduction in sickness and absence, along with increased productivity and higher retention.

Main benefits for employers to invest in workplace mental health and wellbeing



Don't be like Zeus!

According to Greek mythology, Zeus punished Sisyphus by giving him one job: rolling a boulder up a hill for eternity. While Sisyphus managed to cheat death by taking on this task, being condemned to meaningless work with no end in sight was almost as bad.

When people feel they are making a meaningful contribution they are more engaged, motivated, fulfilled and perform better – the polar opposite of presenteeism¹⁵. Leaders can create more meaningful work by talking about how each person's tasks contribute to the organisation's goals and the wellbeing of others.

Alongside the human benefits, the economic benefits are also clear, with research indicating a \$4.20 return for every \$1 invested in workplace mental health¹⁶. This is stronger when the focus is on organisation-wide, preventative activities, rather than reactive, individual-focused activities.

Compared to last year, substantially more workers now believe that investment in workplace mental health and wellbeing would lead to a reduction in presenteeism. While this increase could potentially be due to a definition change¹, a reduction in presenteeism is now considered the fourth most likely benefit (45.4%) of mentally healthy workplaces.



We need to educate all companies more about mental health. Just because a company offers a psychologist, it doesn't forgive the fact that they put money before mental health. The state of your workers' mental health benefits both the company and each individual, lowering stress and allowing everyone to work at their full capacity.

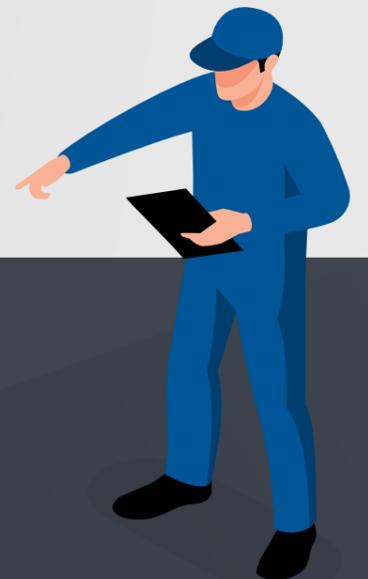
¹ In 2018 presenteeism was described as 'coming to work when sick', whereas in the 2019 survey it was defined as 'employees being less productive at work due to physical illness, emotional distress, sleep deprivation'. Similarly, 'increased ability to attract new talent' was reworded in 2019 to replace 'talent' with 'employees'.



We need to raise awareness of how people can live with mental illness AND be productive.



Retail is a very stressful industry with little support when time off is needed, even for emergencies and sickness. I have been told I cannot call in sick, even [when I have] a doctor's certificate and have [been medically advised] not to work. My employer told me 'too bad, you have to come to work'.



Presenteeism costs more than not turning up

Mental health-related presenteeism is estimated to cost employers up to **three times more** than mental health-related absenteeism¹⁶. Presenteeism costs have also been increasing at a faster rate than those related to absenteeism, partly due to a rise in perceived job insecurity and uptake of remote working arrangements.

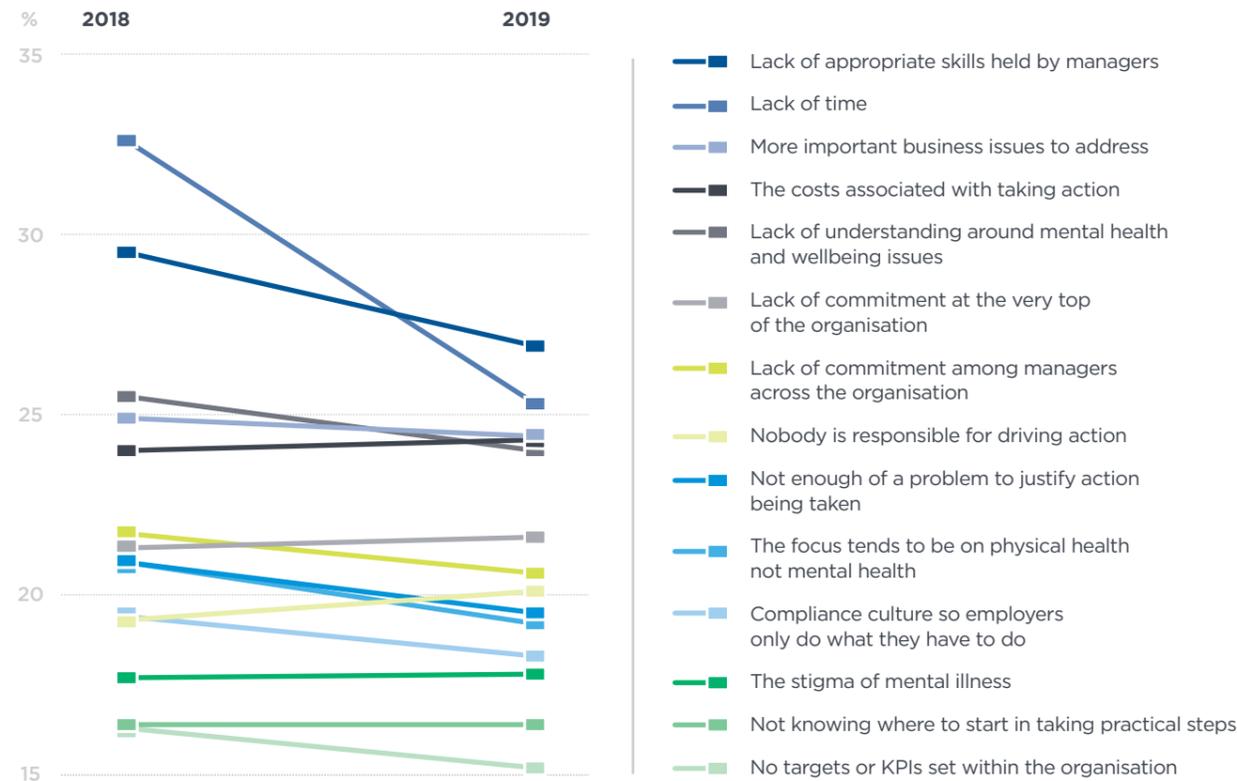
WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

There's been a startling reduction in workers' belief that 'busyness' is a genuine barrier to improving workplace mental health and wellbeing (lack of time dropped from 32.6% to 25.3% in the last year)[#].

People in large workplaces (200+ employees), casual roles, and in wholesale trade or public administration and safety see this as far less of a barrier this year, compared with 2018.

The largest perceived barrier to improving workplace mental health is now the lack of appropriate skills among managers (26.9%). Our research suggests that education and training about mental health and wellbeing helps to break down many of these barriers, particularly those related to skill gaps, recognition of the importance of mentally healthy workplaces and manager buy-in.

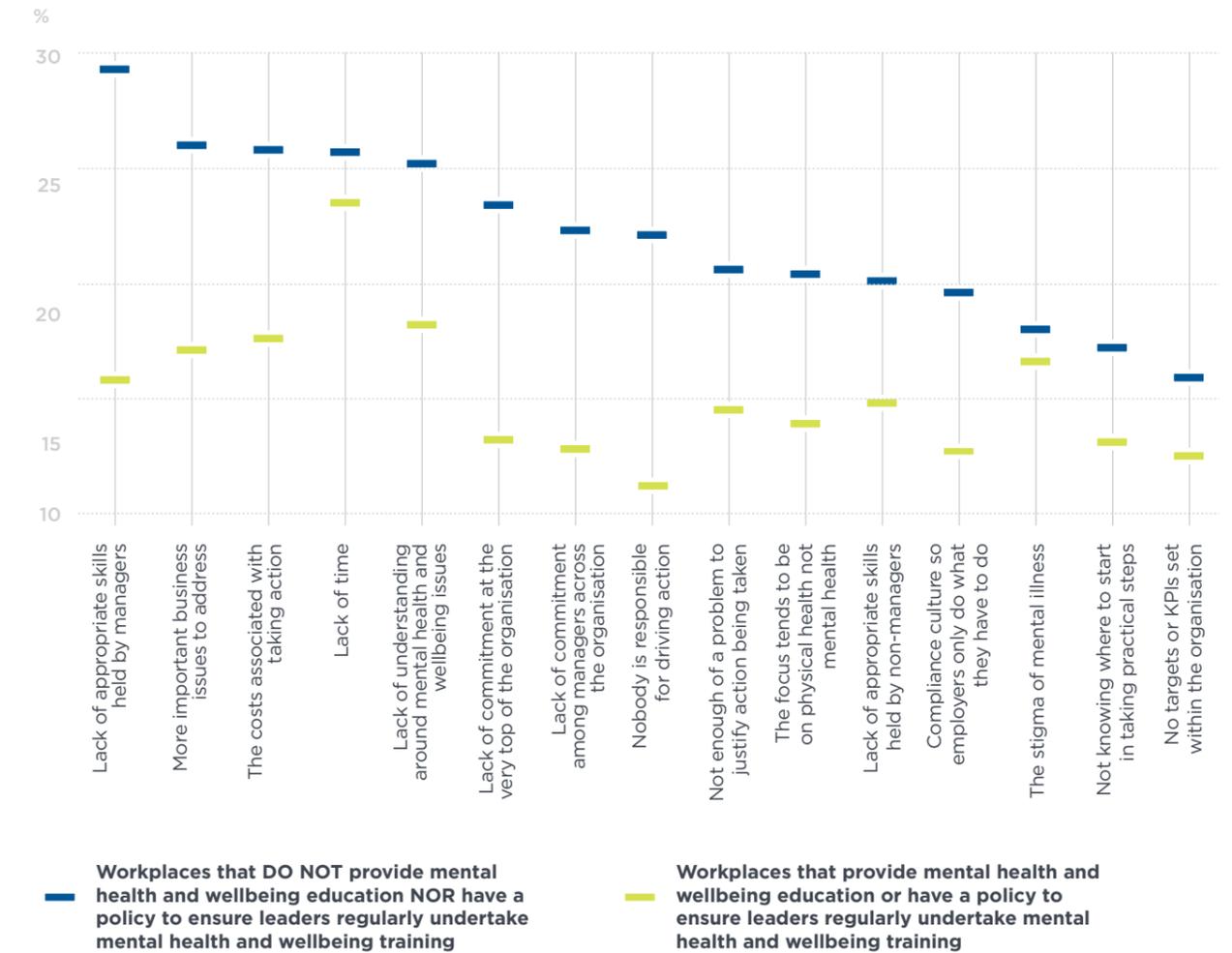
Main barriers preventing employers from doing more to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing



[#] Note that the response option changed from 'Lack of time, everyone's so busy' in 2018 to 'Lack of time' in 2019

Fortunately, access to mental health and wellbeing education appears to be on the rise in workplaces.

Education helps to break down barriers to improving workplace mental health and wellbeing



“ Managers need to be better educated about mental health and actively engage this information and training [with] staff to ensure stigma around [mental] illness is reduced. **”**

SuperFriend has a wide range of [training programs](#) and [resources](#) available to help organisations across Australia create mentally healthy workplaces.

THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

The stigma of mental illness is considered one of the main barriers to improving mental health and wellbeing in 17.8% of Australian workplaces. This perception progressively declines through the older age groups, and is not limited to those who have personally experienced stigma around mental health issues at work.

Top 5 industries facing stigma barriers



25.4%

Public administration and safety



22.2%

Mining



21.4%

Electricity, gas, water and waste services



20.1%

Manufacturing



19.6%

Construction

The stigma barrier is more common in large organisations



21.8%

5,000+ employees



14.7%

2-19 employees

Men believe stigma is a bigger barrier to mentally healthy workplaces than women



18.9%



16.5%

Industries that managed to substantially reduce stigma over the last year



↓ 5.7pp

Accommodation and food services



↓ 4.0pp

Transport, postal and warehousing



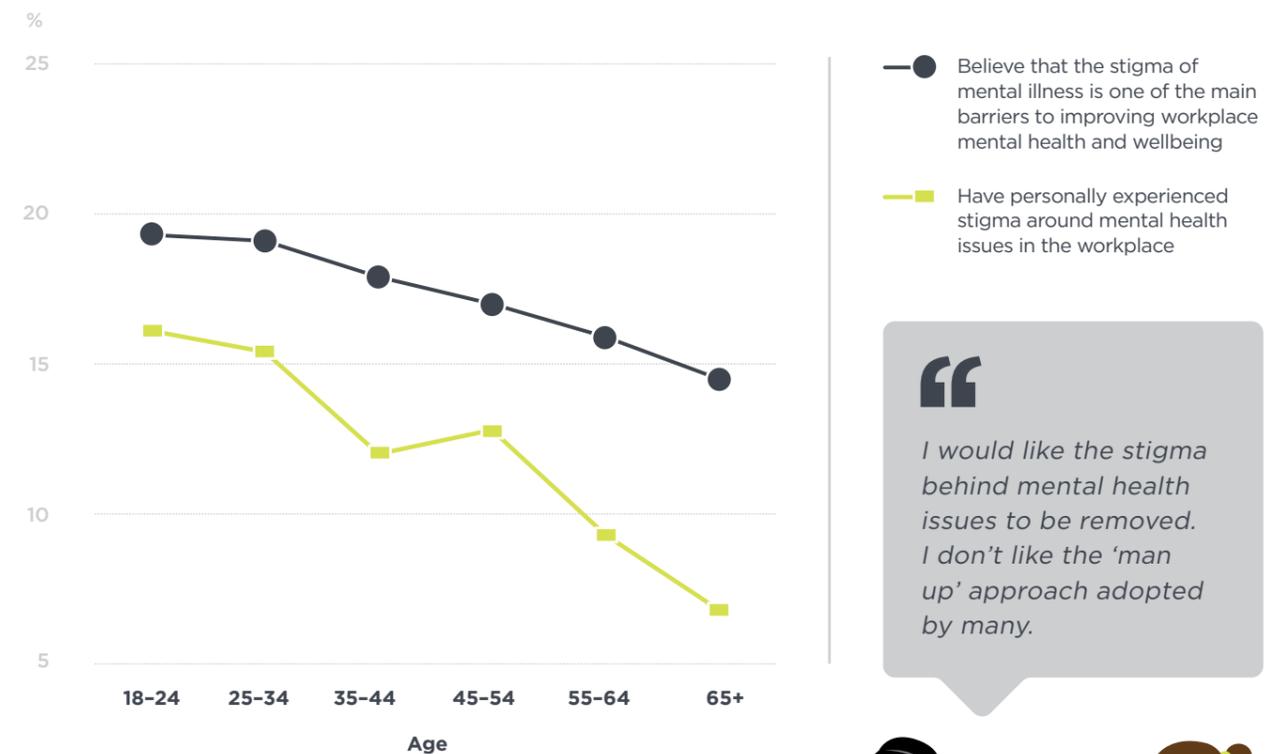
↓ 2.6pp

Agriculture, forestry and fishing



Unfortunately, there is still stigma and joking about people with mental health conditions although outwardly they focus on whatever their organisation says they have to do.

The perceived stigma barrier vs personal experiences in the workplace



“
I would like the stigma behind mental health issues to be removed. I don't like the 'man up' approach adopted by many.”

“
Mental health in the workplace is still stigmatised, and workers are penalised and shunned when they try to seek help. It prevents promotion and always leads to productive, capable workers being forced out of the workforce.”



Watch your language

Language and culture are intimately connected. As culture shifts and changes so does the language, but which comes first? Consider the shift from 'maternity leave' to 'parental leave'. Not only does this reflect the changing attitudes about gender roles and same-sex relationships, we can also see that it is an enabler. Parental leave opens the door for all parents, not just those who give birth to a child, to take time to welcome a new child into the home.

Now consider our language around mental ill-health and suicide. Does our language reflect our changing attitudes and open up doors rather than closing them? [Mindframe](#) provides clear guidelines for communicating about mental ill-health and suicide. Be mindful of your language to reduce stigma, myths and stereotypes in your workplace.

Can you imagine a life without stigma? Watch: <https://youtu.be/kYoi9RAxzvQ>

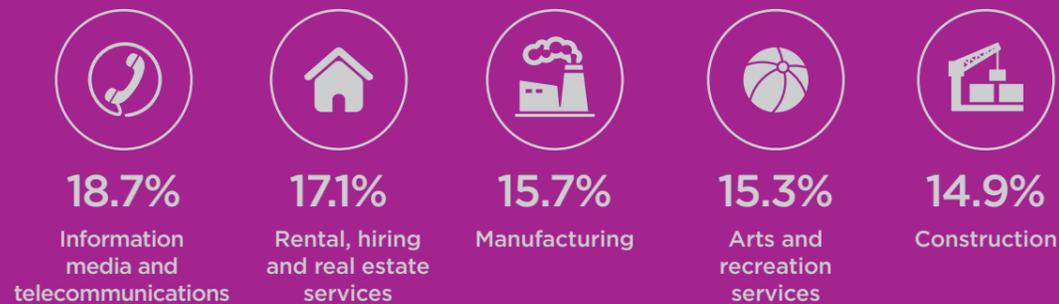
CULTURE REMAINS CRITICAL

Around 1 in 5 Australian workers feel committed to their work team (22.7%) and are motivated to work hard because their jobs are interesting and important to them on a personal level (20.9%). While only 1 in 8 people (13.1%) have a workplace culture that encourages open discussion about issues that affect mental health and wellbeing, there are indications this may be improving.



My workplace is fully aware of my mental illness and supports me where needed. I am able to be open with my needs around my illness, which assists me to rest or receive support where needed.

Top 5 industries encouraging open conversations about mental health and wellbeing issues

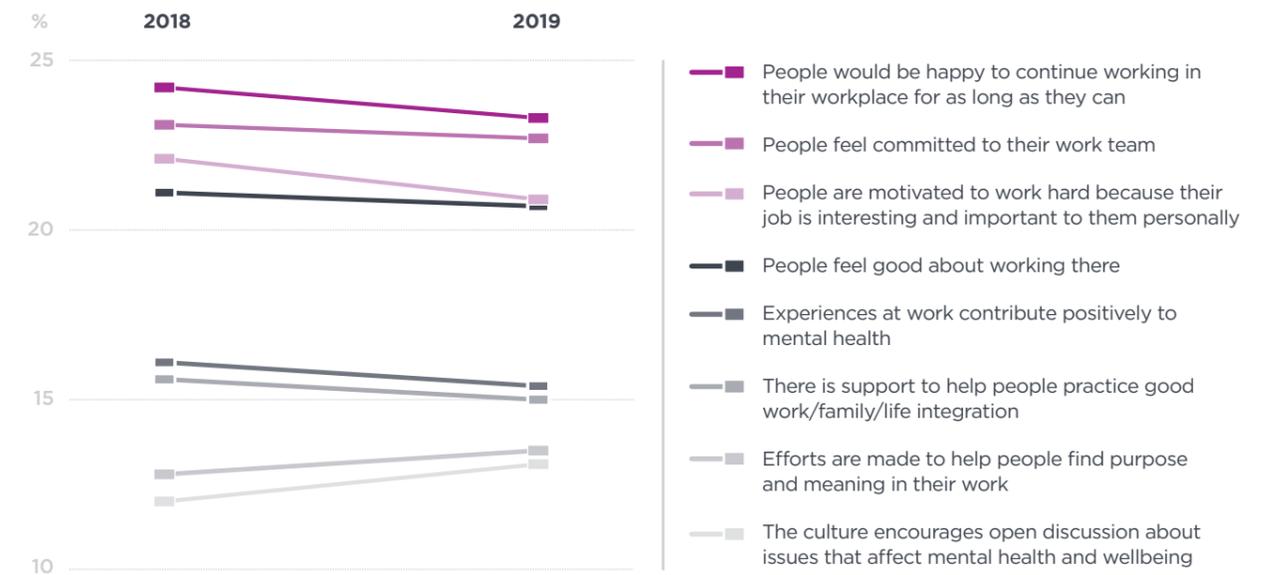


The more senior someone's role type is, the more common it is for them to report that their culture encourages open discussion about mental health and wellbeing issues



Our research suggests that education can shift cultural norms to heighten open discussion about mental health and wellbeing issues. This type of cultural openness is **ten times** more common in organisations where people are educated* in mental health and wellbeing (49.5%) compared to organisations where they are not (5.1%).

Culture in the workplace



My boss is the most supportive and flexible leader ever! Family always comes first for both the boss and her employees. There is no holding back with how you are feeling, everything can be discussed openly. I have the best boss in the world.



My organisation has policies to deal with workplace health and wellbeing but its compliance culture means that there is nothing done in practice other than the bare minimum [for] appearances.

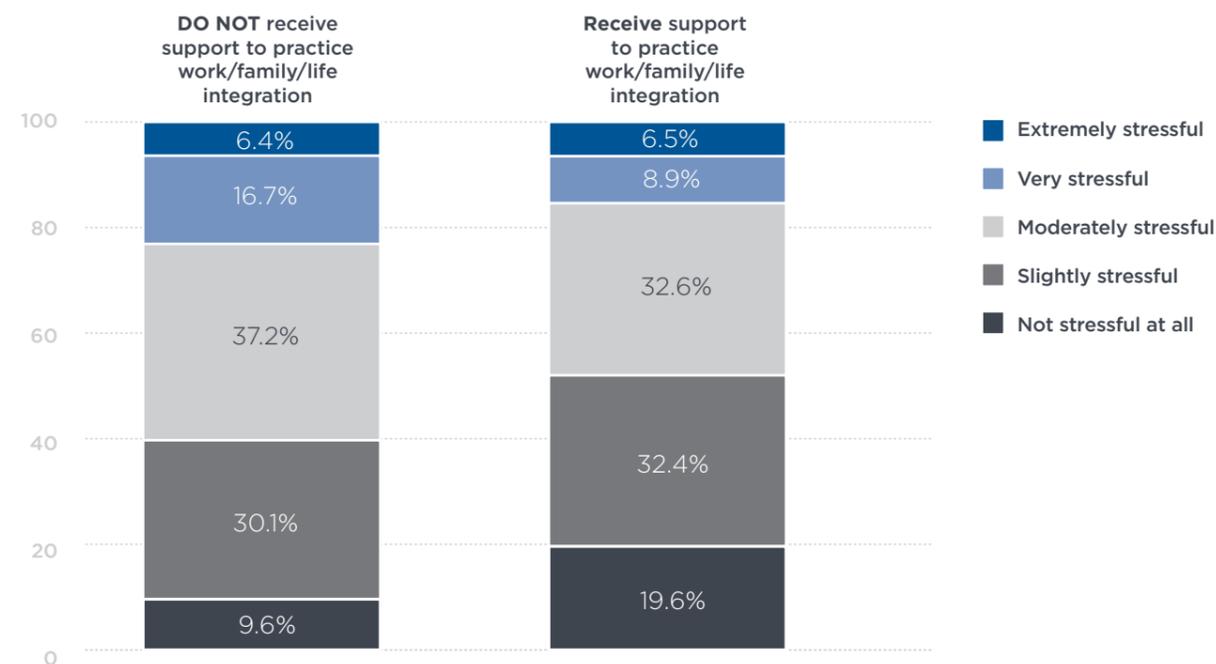


* Education is defined as employers providing access to mental health or wellbeing education or having a policy to make sure that all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training

BALANCING WORK AND LIFE

Our research shows that only 15.0% of the workforce is receiving solid workplace support to effectively integrate work, family and general life commitments. People working in professional, scientific and technical services receive the most support (18.5%), however, this is still a relatively low level of support given that lack of flexibility is one of the most common negative workplace experiences.

How workplace support to practice work/family/life integration relates to how stressful workers find their jobs



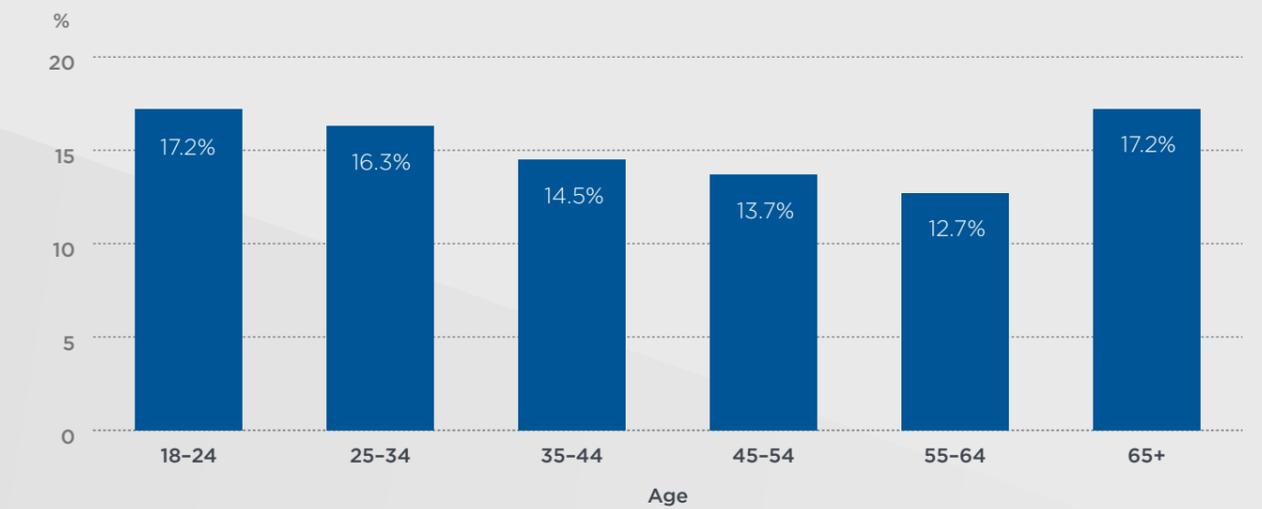
Nearly a quarter (23.1%) of workers who don't receive this support find their jobs really stressful, compared to 15.4% of workers who are supported to practice work/family/life integration.

Struggling to juggle work and the rest of your life? You're not alone.

'Work life balance' is the second most popular search phrase on Google for Australian workers looking to reduce stress.¹⁷

Adult workers under 25 years feel most supported, but that support progressively declines as workers age and responsibilities inevitably increase. However, from age 65 onwards, workers appear to receive the same level of support as the youngest members of the workforce.

Workplaces provide support to help people practice good work/family/life integration



Blurred boundaries can hamper health

The boundaries between work and life are shifting. Advancements in technology, changing work patterns and cultural shifts mean the lines between work and life are becoming increasingly blurred¹⁸.

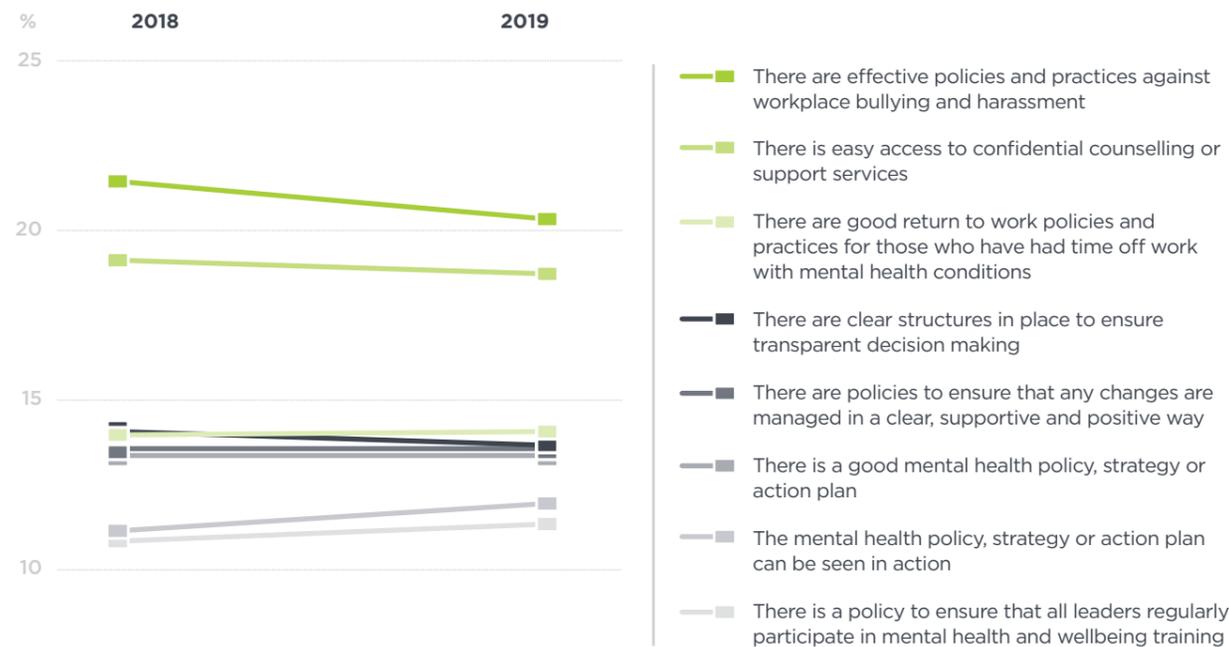
Key considerations for workplace wellbeing are two-fold. First, workers need recovery time. Increased integration between work and life is associated with reduced recovery activities, which ultimately impairs wellbeing and increases the risk of exhaustion and burnout¹⁹. Workers also have individual preferences, and their needs change over time. Respect for workers' boundaries supports long-term wellbeing and commitment to the workplace²⁰.



POLICIES MUST BE PRACTICED

1 in 5 workers (20.2%) believe that there are effective policies and practices against bullying and harassment in their workplace. Broader policies and support mechanisms that underpin a thriving workplace are less common.

Policy in the workplace



“ We have had training courses but nothing really comes out of it, the organisation just gets to tick the box that everyone has attended.

“ We have a culture of mediocre leadership, where lip service is paid to policies and people are ultimately replaceable.

“ Workplaces should have a transparent mental health policy which will help employees feel better about approaching someone if needed.

Number of employees in organisation (within Australia)

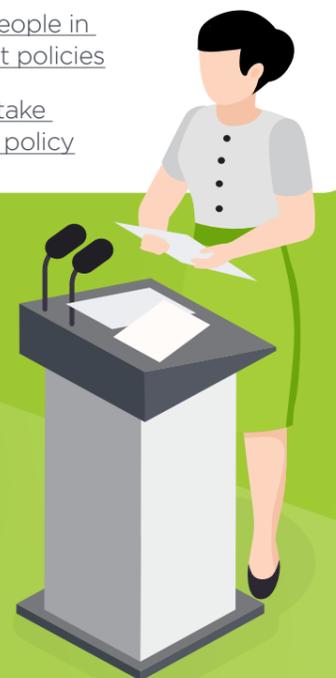


It's important to have the right policies in place for workers' mental health and wellbeing but they need to be visibly actioned throughout organisations rather than developed with a risk and compliance mindset. Large organisations with at least 5,000 workers appear to particularly struggle with this, having one of the highest policy index scores but the lowest scores for leadership, connectedness, capability and culture.

While large organisations are among the most likely to have effective bullying and harassment prevention policies (21.5%) and easy access to confidential counselling or support services (25.6%), they are the least likely to have clear, supportive and positive change management policies (12.5%) or structures in place to ensure transparent decision making (12.0%).

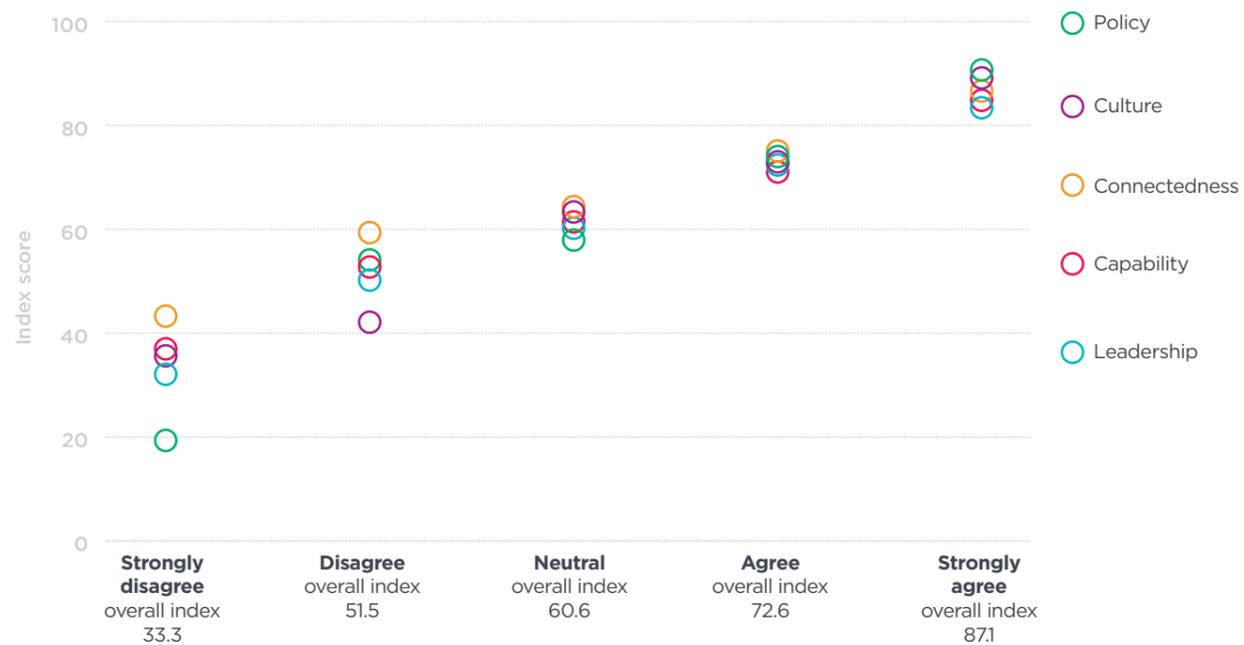
Make policies great again! Try these resources:

- [Policies rely on leaders to succeed](#)
- [How to keep people in the know about policies](#)
- [Three ways to take the pain out of policy](#)



One of the most important steps an organisation can take towards becoming a truly thriving workplace is to move beyond the expectation that leaders should regularly undertake mental health and wellbeing training and actually formalise it in an organisation-wide policy. Only 11.3% of workplaces have taken this step, but they have much higher index scores across **all five** thriving workplace domains than organisations who don't have this type of policy. This is also reflected in their overall thriving workplace index score, coming in at 87.1 out of 100 (compared to the national average of 62.7).

There is a policy to ensure that all leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training



“

Mental health in [a] workplace is the hidden disability and needs to be addressed from top to bottom of any organisation.

“

I haven't experienced a mental health issue, but one of the team members I manage has. I have been really impressed by the support my organisation has provided for this person (and for others in a similar position). However, I think more support and training should be provided to managers to allow them to best support these [people with a mental health condition].

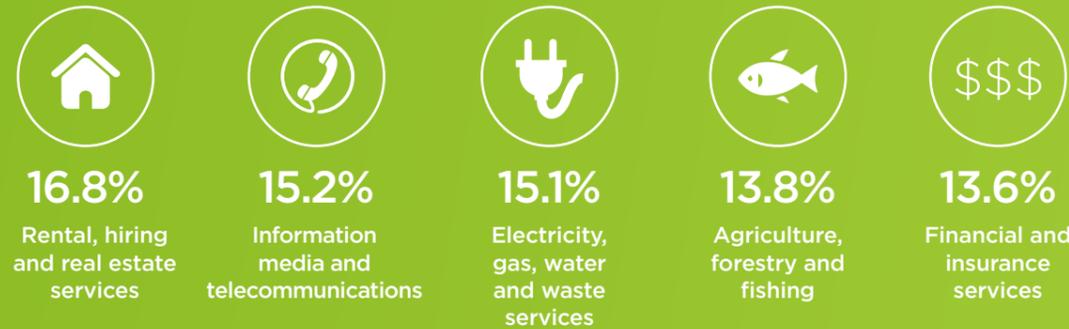
“

There are policies and procedures available, but these are generic to the company and do not factor in all aspects of the workplace such as working in the city as opposed to a small country town. The impression I have is that the company puts more emphasis on being SEEN to do the right thing, not putting it into practice.

“

Mental health should be a KPI, or [made a] law for all businesses to implement regular [mental health] training.

Top 5 industries with workplace policies to ensure leaders regularly participate in mental health and wellbeing training



Superfriend®

SuperFriend's training programs and resources are evidence-based and help organisations to build thriving environments where everyone has the opportunity to be their best.

LEADERS NEED TO LEAD THE WAY

Our research suggests that leaders have become significantly less accessible and willing to listen in the last 12 months, particularly for casual workers.

Industries experiencing the biggest declines in leaders' accessibility and willingness to listen



↓ 9.0pp
Rental, hiring and real estate services



↓ 8.2pp
Agriculture, forestry and fishing



↓ 6.6pp
Education and training



↓ 6.3pp
Arts and recreation services



↓ 4.8pp
Retail trade

“

Being a casual employee, I take responsibility for my own issues. However, my employer is very understanding about me taking time off, if needed.

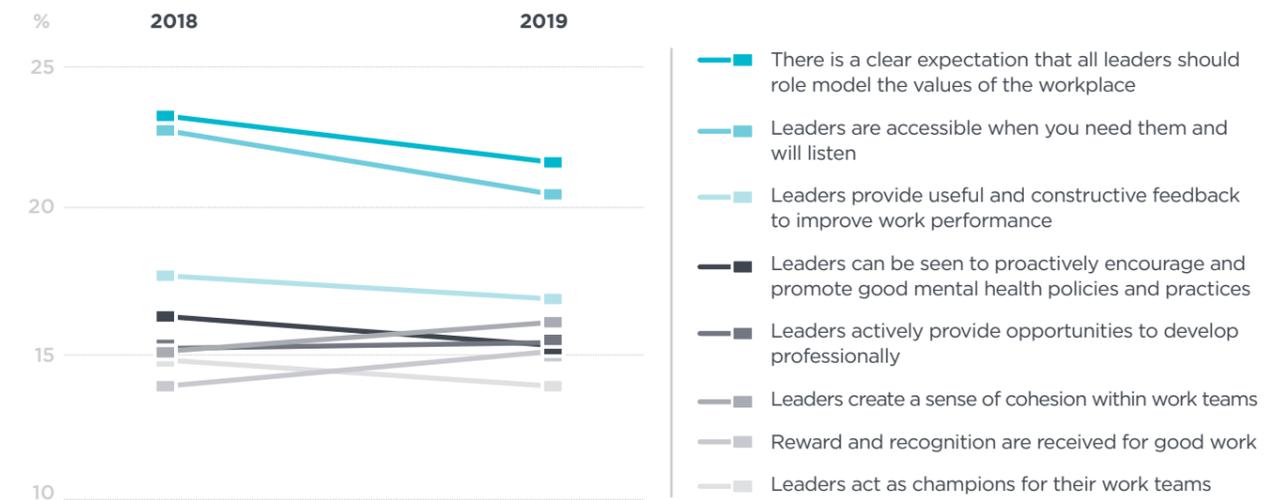
“

[My large workplace has] little capacity to monitor the mental health of its many casual employees who do not work on-site.

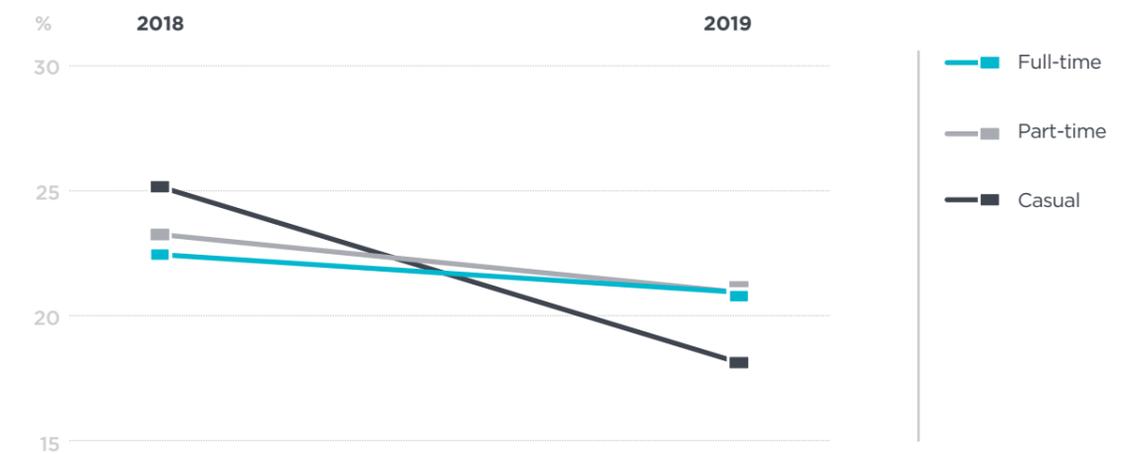


- pp denotes percentage points

Leadership in the workplace



Leaders are accessible when needed and willing to listen



Leaders need to walk the talk

Workers are more likely to thrive in workplaces where they feel seen and heard by leadership²¹. Conversely, leaders also need to be seen modelling what is expected in the workplace.

This includes leaders who take care of their own wellbeing, who 'walk the talk', build belief in the importance of wellbeing and give workers permission to undertake activities to support their own wellbeing²².

Looking for some pointers?

For targeted ideas to improve leadership within your workplace, see SuperFriend's [Building Thriving Workplaces resource](#).

SPOTLIGHT ON CASUAL WORKERS

Over the last 12 months, we have observed a decline in workers being treated with courtesy and respect, with casual workers experiencing this most frequently.

Industries experiencing the biggest declines in courtesy and respect:



↓ 9.6pp

Agriculture, forestry and fishing



↓ 7.5pp

Electricity, gas, water and waste services



↓ 6.8pp

Construction



↓ 5.2pp

Education and training



↓ 4.9pp

Health care and social assistance

Compared to full-time and part-time workers, casuals have the lowest scores for **39 of the 40** indicators of a thriving workplace

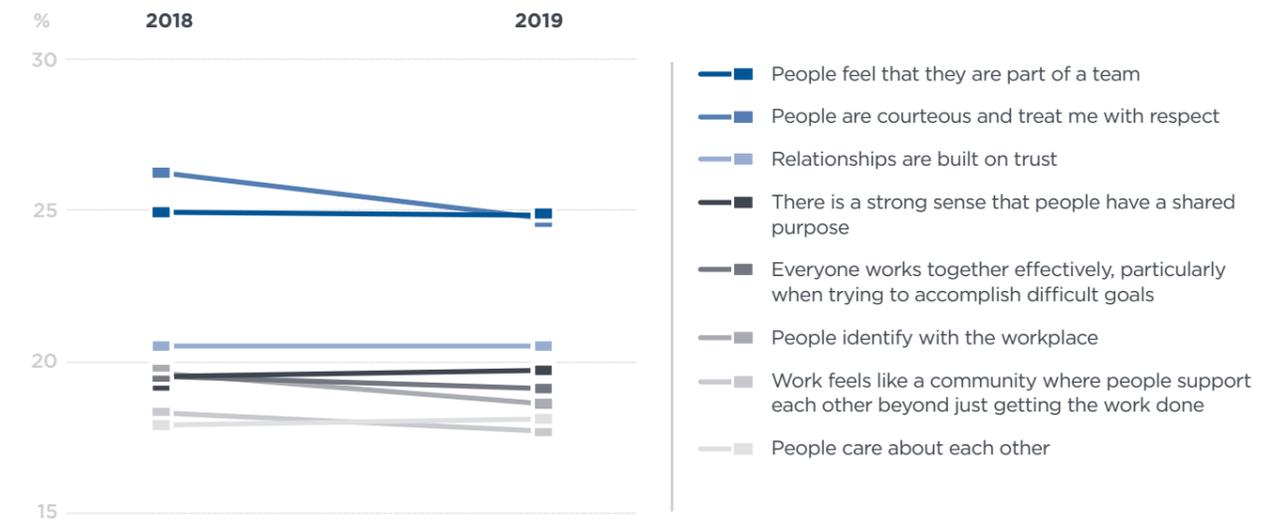


Keeping things casual?

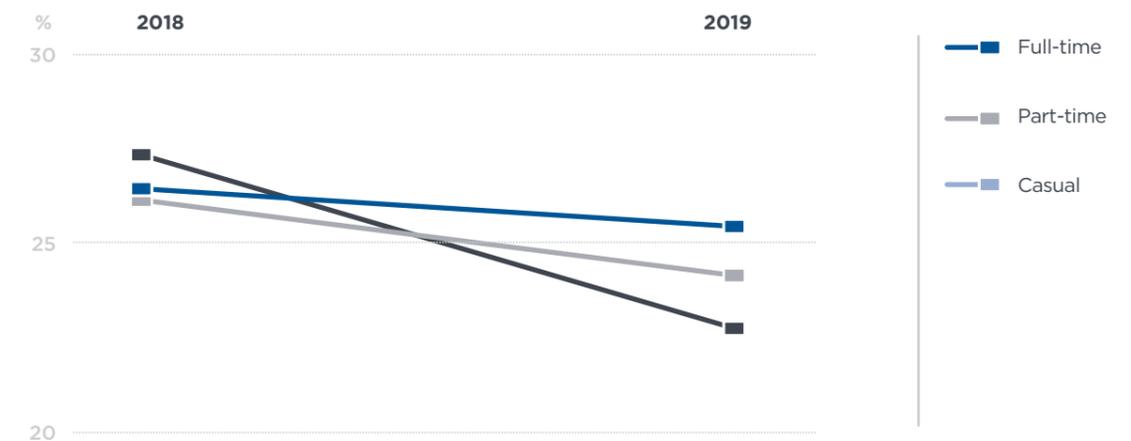
On the whole, employment is good for people's wellbeing²³; however, casual workers and workers in the gig economy often find it more difficult to realise the wellbeing benefits of work. Workers who find themselves underemployed, working fewer hours than they'd like, are at greater risk of poor mental health outcomes due to financial stress²³.

Casual workers can also find it difficult to feel a strong sense of social connection and meaning at work²⁴. Leaders play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of casual workers by deliberately fostering greater connection between workers, explaining tasks clearly including how they contribute to the organisation, and inviting casual workers into the social life of the workplace wherever possible.

Connectedness in the workplace



Workers are treated with courtesy and respect



“

It's the type of place where if you speak up or even ask about it, you risk your position. Being casual, they just won't put you on a shift if you open your mouth.

Quick reference

	2018	2019	
Thriving workplace index scores*	Leadership index	61.5	61.5
	Connectedness index	67.3	67.0
	Policy index	58.2	58.6
	Capability index	62.4	62.5
	Culture index	63.8	63.8
	OVERALL INDEX	62.7	62.7
Personal experiences at current workplace	Job insecurity	29.4%	28.4%
	Work-related insomnia	21.9%	22.8%
	Bullying in the workplace	23.7%	22.0%
	Lack of flexible work arrangements when required	21.6%	21.9%
	Discrimination in the workplace	17.4%	16.0%
	Stigma around mental health issues	12.8%	13.0%
	Violence in the workplace	7.0%	8.0%
	Sexual assault/harassment	6.5%	5.4%
Main benefits employees experience when working in a mentally healthy workplace	Increased feelings of being valued	60.7%	59.0%
	Greater ability to bring your best self to work	55.6%	57.5%
	Increased willingness to contribute more	53.9%	55.8%
	Increased commitment to the organisation	51.9%	51.6%
	Increased optimism about completing work tasks	46.0%	49.4%
	Decreased likelihood to want to leave the organisation	48.4%	48.9%
	Increased willingness to share ideas and knowledge	45.9%	47.0%
	Increased compassion towards work colleagues	44.8%	45.6%
Main benefits for employers to invest in workplace mental health and wellbeing	Increased ability to go home with energy in reserve	38.4%	45.4%
	Increased employee productivity	63.9%	61.2%
	Reduced levels of sickness and absence	55.4%	54.6%
	Increased employee retention	50.1%	49.7%
	Reduced levels of presenteeism (employees being less productive at work due to physical illness, emotional distress, sleep deprivation)	27.8%	45.4%
	Increased employee commitment to organisational goals	43.4%	45.1%
	Increased ability to attract new employees	24.2%	31.5%
	Reduced costs from workers compensation claims	27.6%	28.7%
Main barriers preventing employers from doing more to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing	Lack of appropriate skills held by managers	29.5%	26.9%
	Lack of time	32.6%	25.3%
	More important business issues to address	24.9%	24.4%
	The costs associated with taking action	24.0%	24.3%
	Lack of understanding around mental health and wellbeing issues	25.5%	24.0%
	Lack of commitment at the very top of the organisation	21.3%	21.6%
	Lack of commitment among managers across the organisation	21.7%	20.6%
	Nobody is responsible for driving action	19.3%	20.1%
	Not enough of a problem to justify action being taken	20.9%	19.5%
	The focus tends to be on physical health not mental health	20.9%	19.2%
	Compliance culture so employers only do what they have to do	19.4%	18.3%
	The stigma of mental illness	17.7%	17.8%
	Not knowing where to start in taking practical steps	16.4%	16.4%
	No targets or KPIs set within the organisation	16.3%	15.2%

***IMPORTANT NOTE:** The index methodology was revised in early 2019 to provide a more robust view of workplace mental health and wellbeing and is based on all responses from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The national index scores for 2018 shown later in this report have been recalculated to ensure ongoing comparability with profile-specific index scores.

40 indicators of a thriving workplace*

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

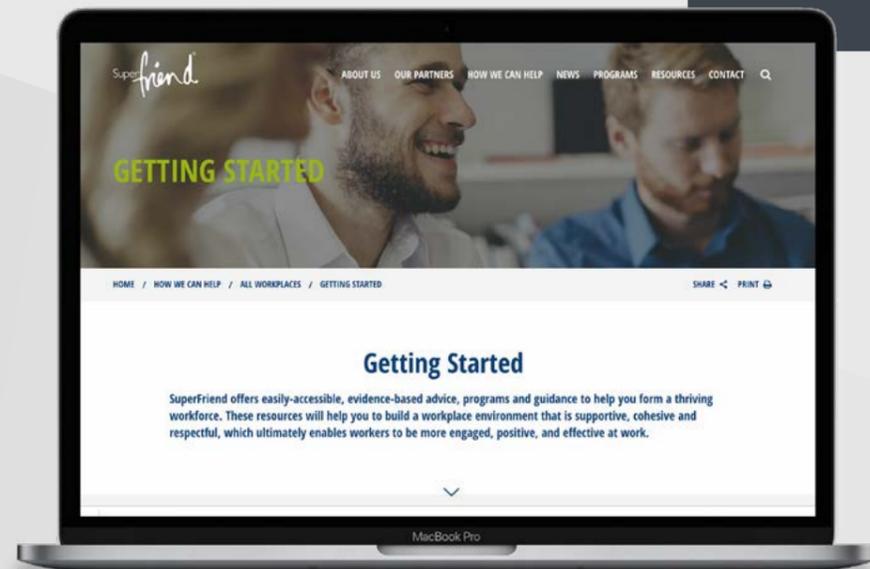
*Most important indicator for each domain

TAKING ACTION IN YOUR WORKPLACE

The [Getting Started](#) section of SuperFriend's website tells you everything you need to know if you're keen to improve your workplace's mental health and wellbeing.

These brief articles also give you a few initial ideas if you're short on time:

- [Getting the wellbeing ball rolling](#)
- [Improving workplace mental wellbeing: where do you start?](#)



Doing something is better than nothing

Many organisations find that knowing where to start is the most difficult part of building a thriving workplace. However, not everything needs to be done all at once – the most effective approach is to start with one or two small actions and build from there.

Further resources

SuperFriend offers a range of further resources to provide simple and practical solutions for workplaces to improve mental health and wellbeing.

You can access these at superfriend.com.au/resources

Your industry's results

If you are interested in how mentally healthy your industry is, SuperFriend offers a range of [profile reports](#) which are periodically updated as new data and insights are available.

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