Your mental health at work during COVID-19

Summary report on the NSW Government Have Your Say digital community engagement

May 2021

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Context

Why?

- Most of us spend about a third or more of our waking lives at work. It's a huge part of what we do and can have a significant impact on our mental health in a positive or negative way
- COVID-19 brought about significant change in the workplace
- The NSW Government wanted to better understand and support this change by asking the community to have their say at haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/mentally-healthy-workplaces

Partnership approach

- Experts from across NSW Government partnered with the NSW Department of Customer Service to develop and promote this engagement

Supporting mentally healthy workplaces

- Customer feedback from this engagement has informed the refreshed the NSW Government's Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018-2022, and will continue to shape related policy across government

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What we told community and stakeholders

1. 2020 was a challenging year, COVID-19 changed the way we live and work
2. The NSW Government wanted to know how COVID-19 affected mental health in NSW workplaces
3. We asked about job security, working from home, workplace support and how government can help
4. Customer feedback is shaping government policy to support mentally healthy workplaces

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About this report

This report:

- Outlines findings from responses to an online engagement run by the NSW Government about the impacts of COVID-19 on mental health at work
- Summarises the main themes from the consultation for the NSW Government to consider

The engagement:

- Ran on the nsw.gov.au digital engagement platform from 7 October to 6 November 2020
- Was promoted via channels including a media release, electronic direct mail, social media, in Service NSW Service Centres and on nsw.gov.au
- Received 10,336 survey responses, 8,694 quick poll responses and 2,634 idea contributions

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Methodology

- The engagement was open to all members of the NSW community online to answer a survey, take a quick poll and submit ideas about what's been most helpful in managing mental health at work during COVID-19
- Respondents were asked a series of workforce, demographic and geographic questions
- Sentiment analysis was undertaken in addition to quantitative reporting of data

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Participation: the engagement numbers

We asked how COVID-19 has affected mental health in NSW workplaces and how government can help

40%

engagement rate

Four weeks

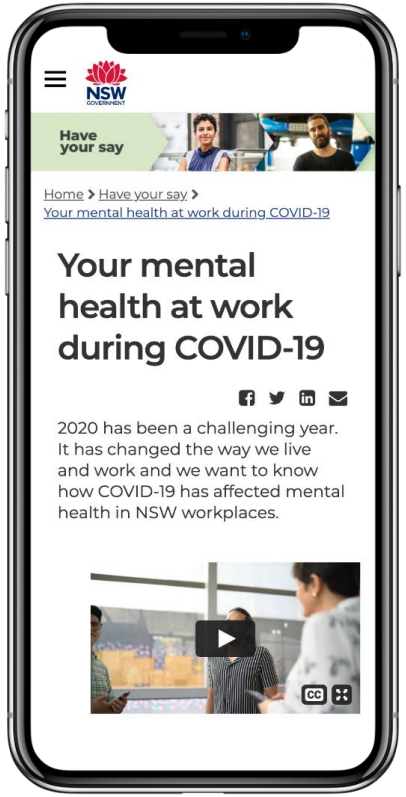
7 Oct – 6 Nov 2020

36.2K
Unique visitors

8,694
Contributions to quick polls

10,336
Surveys completed

2,634
Ideas and responses to ideas



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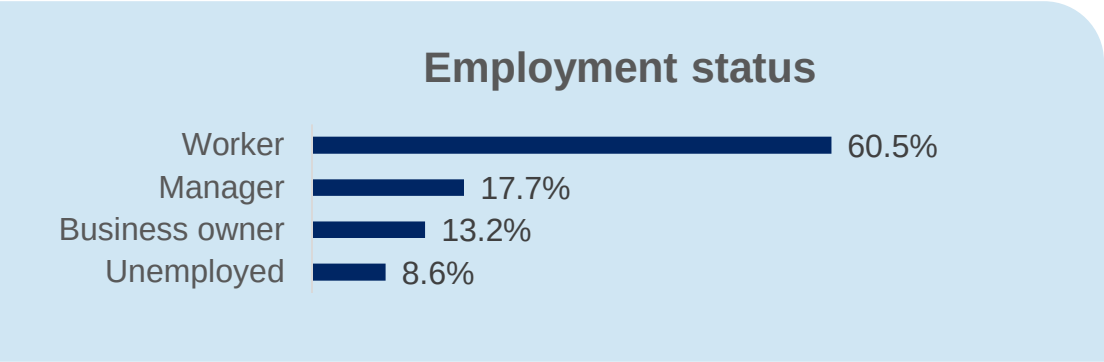
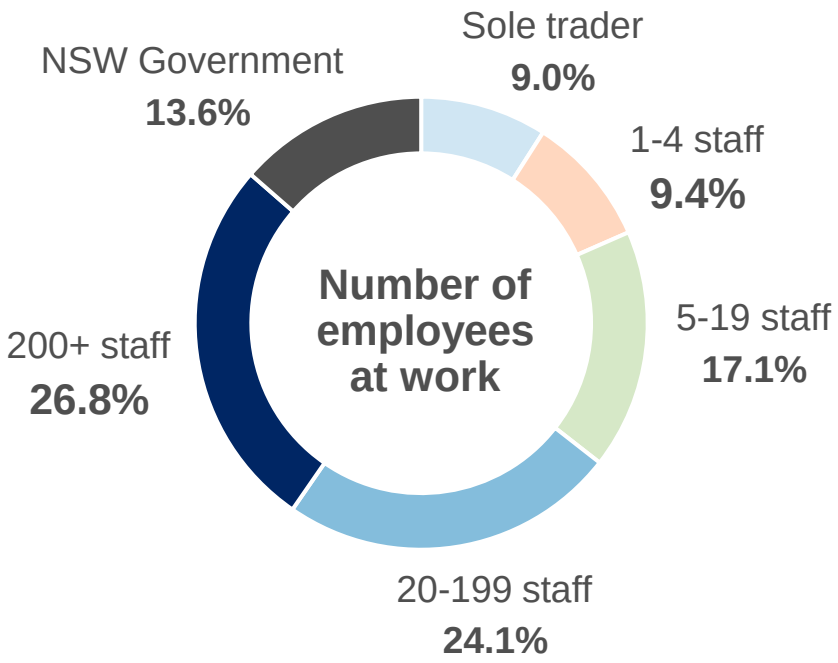
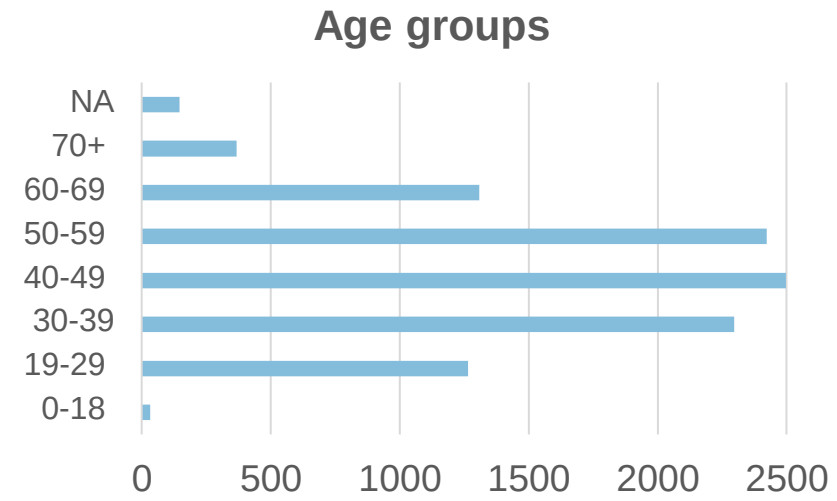
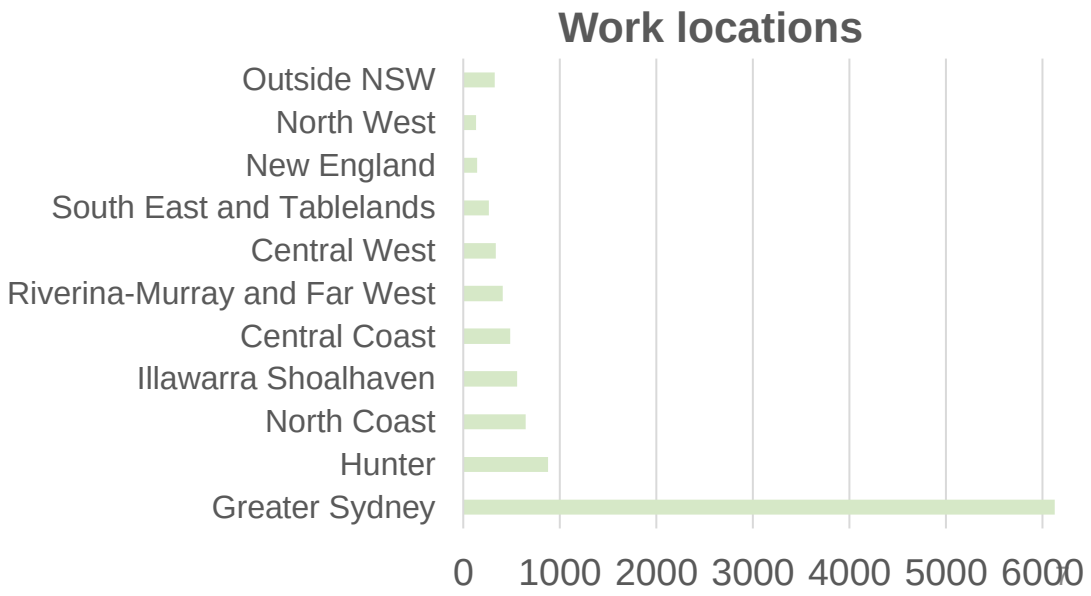
The engagement rate reflects the number of people who visited the consultation page **and** actively participated in the consultation

Profile of survey respondents









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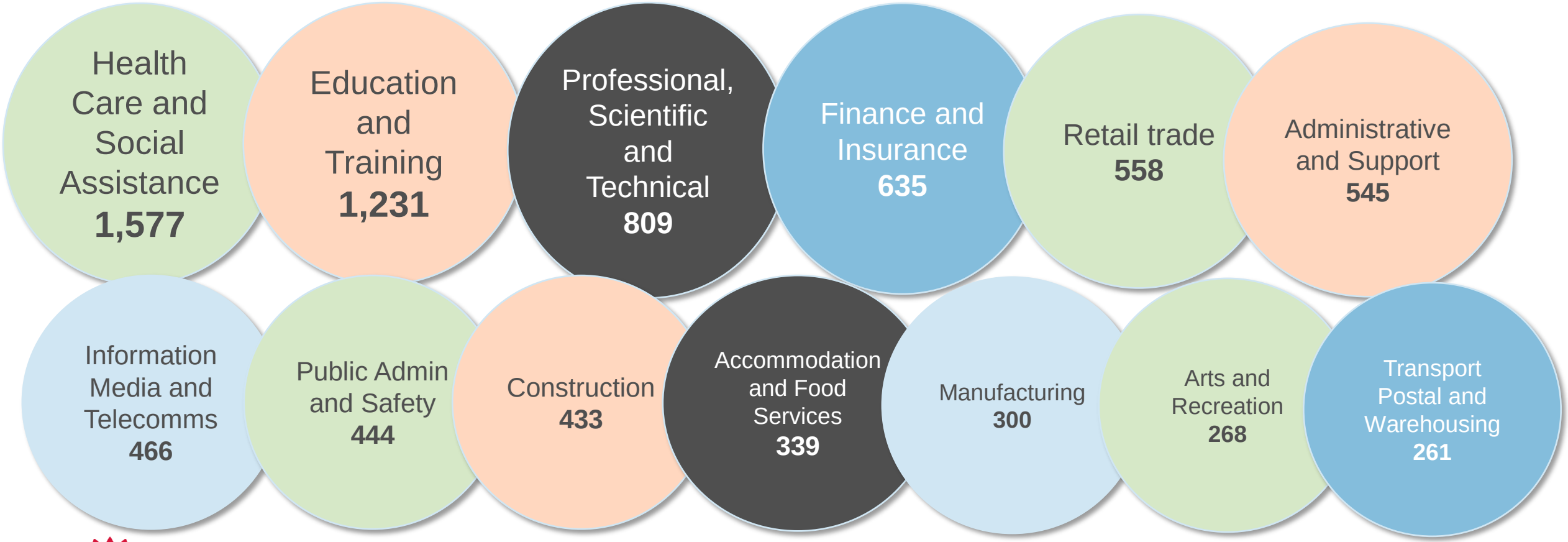
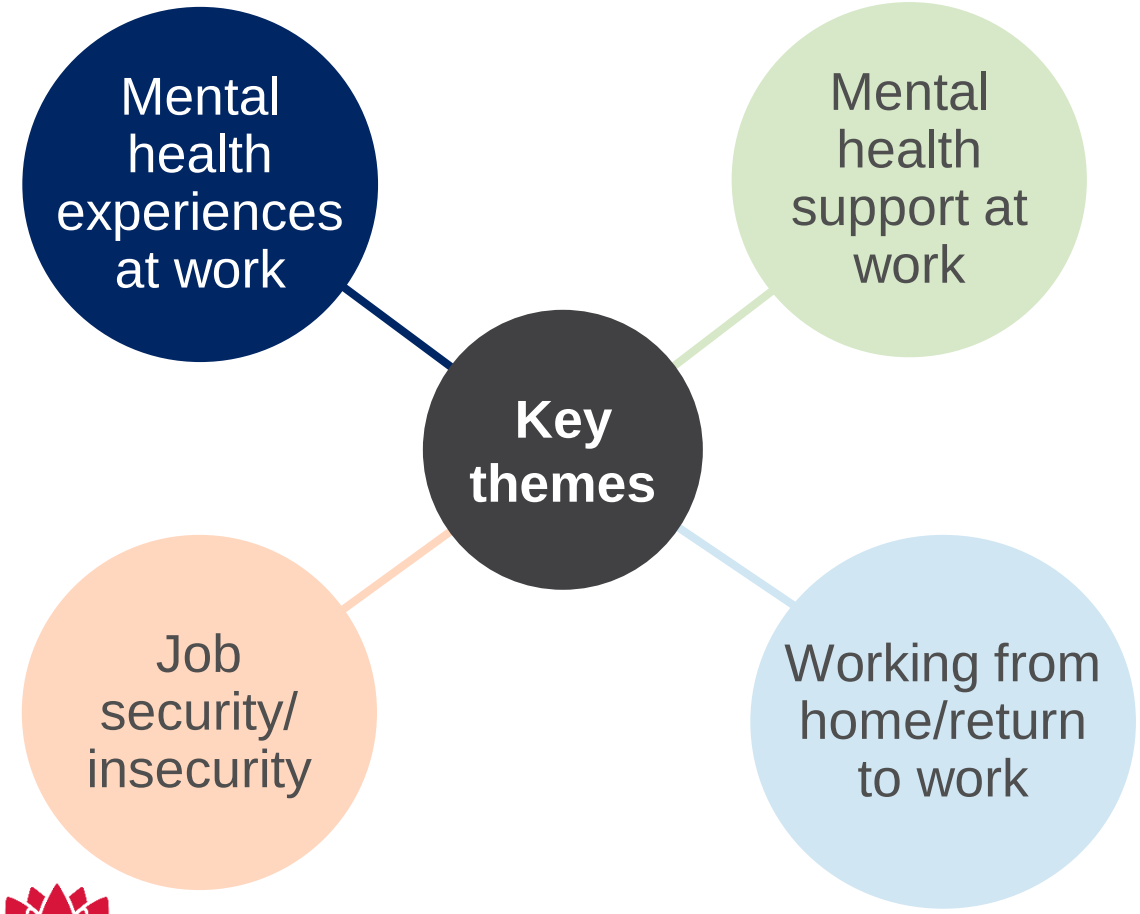
Customer profile

Respondents worked in sectors including:



Other sectors: **2,470**

Key themes


Mental health experiences at work
Mental health support at work
Key themes
Job security/ insecurity
Working from home/return to work

Mental health experiences at work

The prevalence of mental health issues at work because of COVID-19 is high

78%

Workers, managers and business owners noticed an impact on their own mental health at work

59%

Noticed mental health impacts on **colleagues**

Some sectors – **accommodation and food services** – were more impacted than others

Impacts felt across **all regions** – sentiment was more negative in Regional NSW, particularly in North-West NSW and New England

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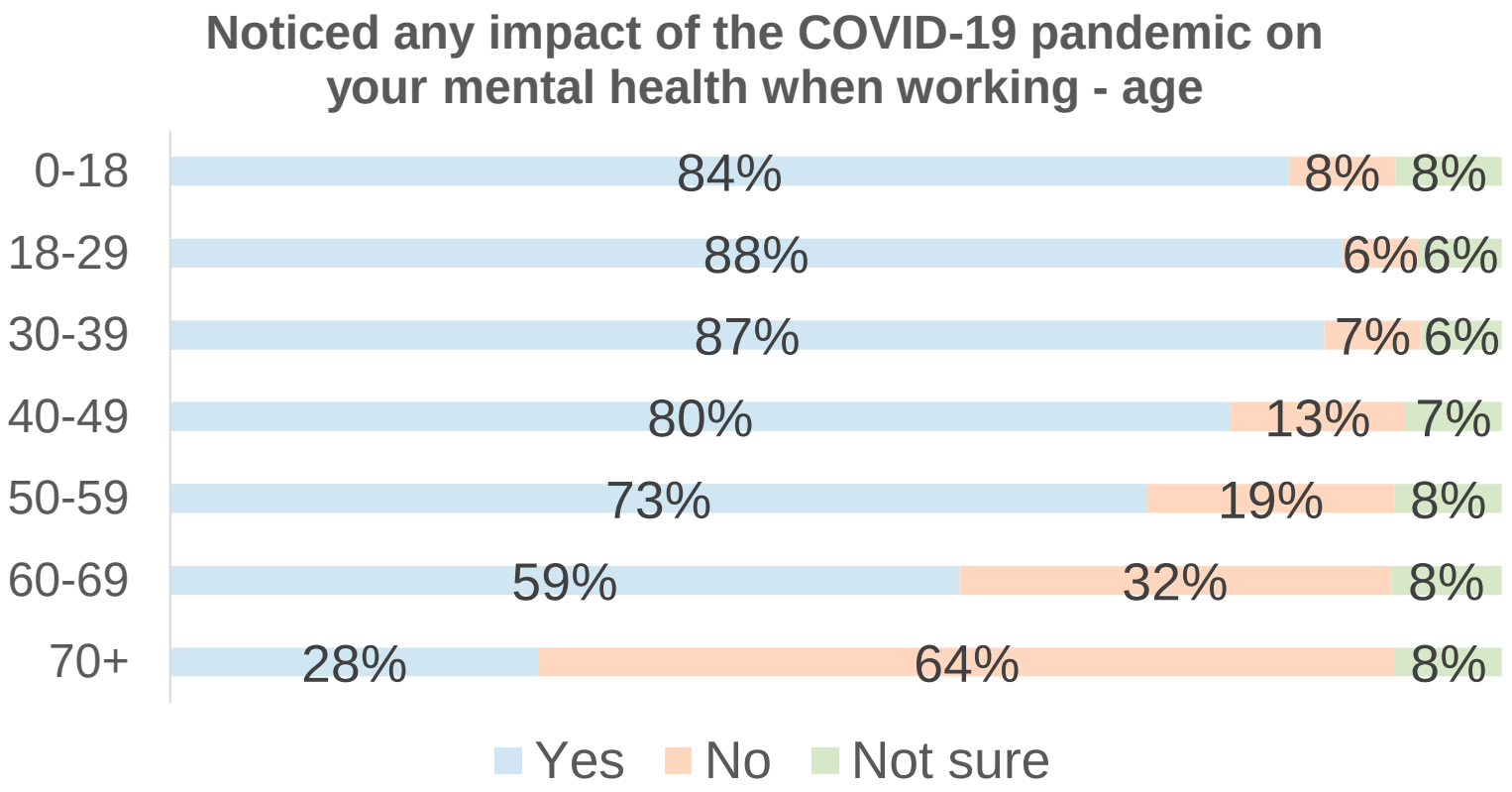
Mental health experiences at work



Causes in groups include:

18-29: lack of social contact and stress around casual/entry level employment

40-49: anxiety around effects on family as well as new ways of working and financial changes

60+: high number of issues working externally due to lack of technological skills and social interactions

Young workers (<39 years) are most impacted with >80% reporting mental health issues at work

Mental health experiences at work

There was little mention about general fear of health regarding the virus itself

Almost all mental illness reported was caused by **work-related issues:**

Added pressure

High/low job demands

Financial stress

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Anxiety and depression were extremely common issues throughout all age groups, with many respondents experiencing this for the first time

Mental health experiences at work

59%

Noticed mental health **impacts on colleagues**

Consistent across age groups. However, those in middle age groups slightly more likely to notice an impact

75%

Three quarters of **managers** noticed an **impact on their staff**

Most impacted sectors

- Accommodation, retail and food
- Arts and recreation
- Education and training
- Health and social services

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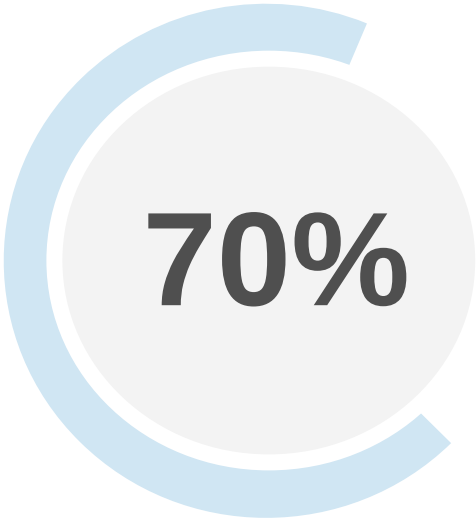
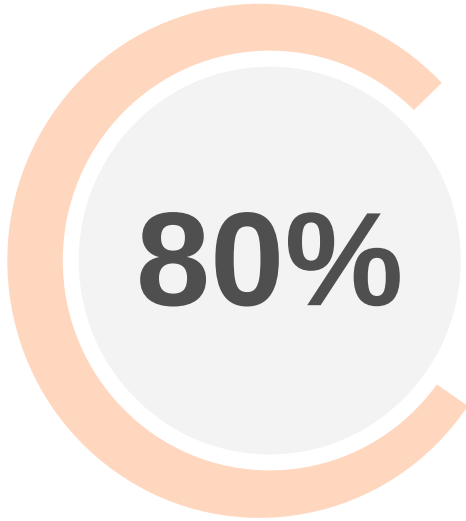
Support for mental health at work

Employers were a key resource for respondents in tackling mental health issues

~ 70% of workers received some mental health support at work



> 80% of managers received some assistance at work



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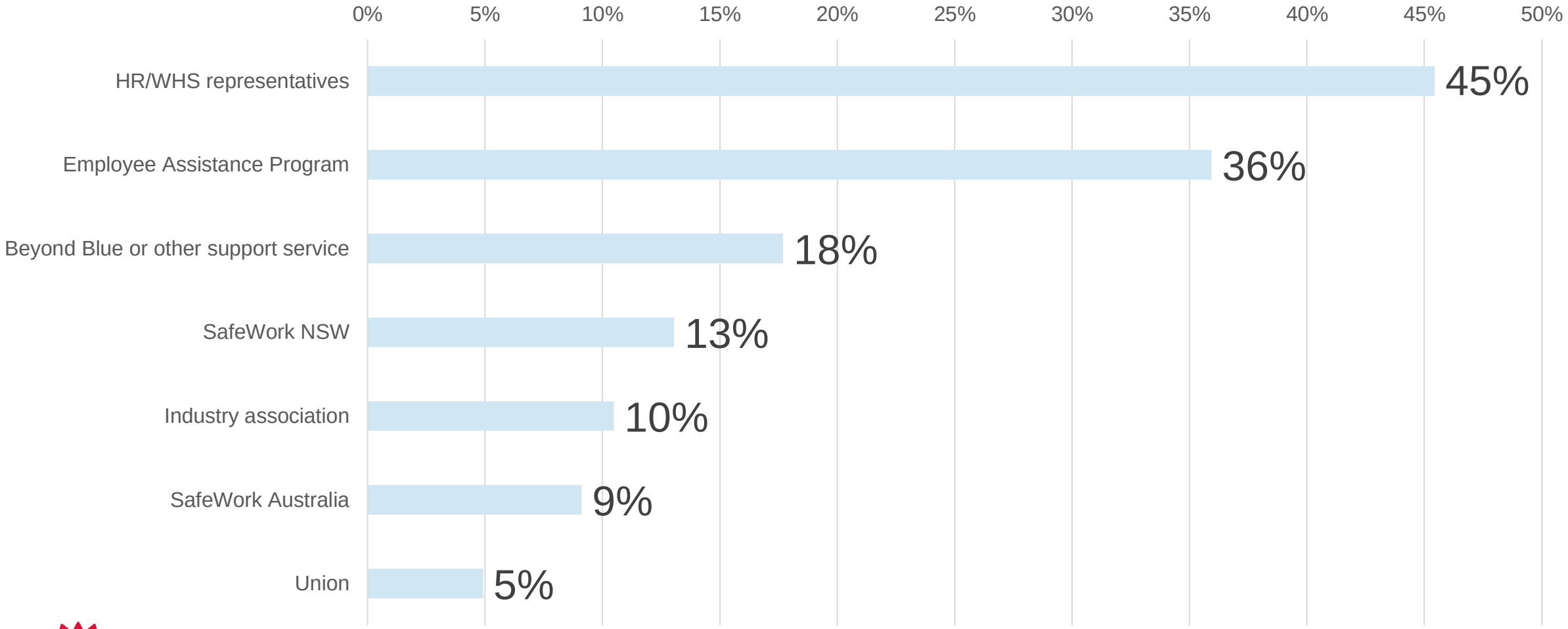
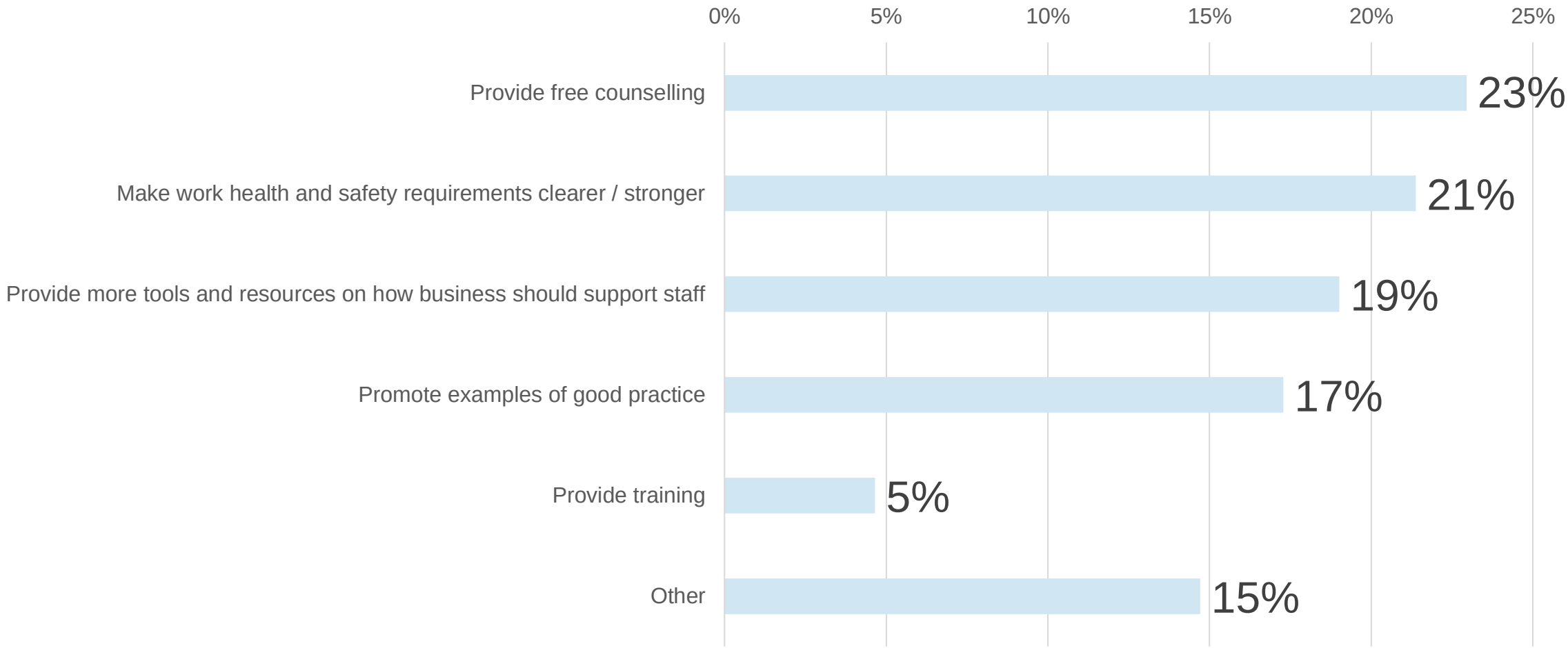
Sources of support information for managers



26% of business owners and 22% of managers get information from SafeWork NSW and SafeWork Australia

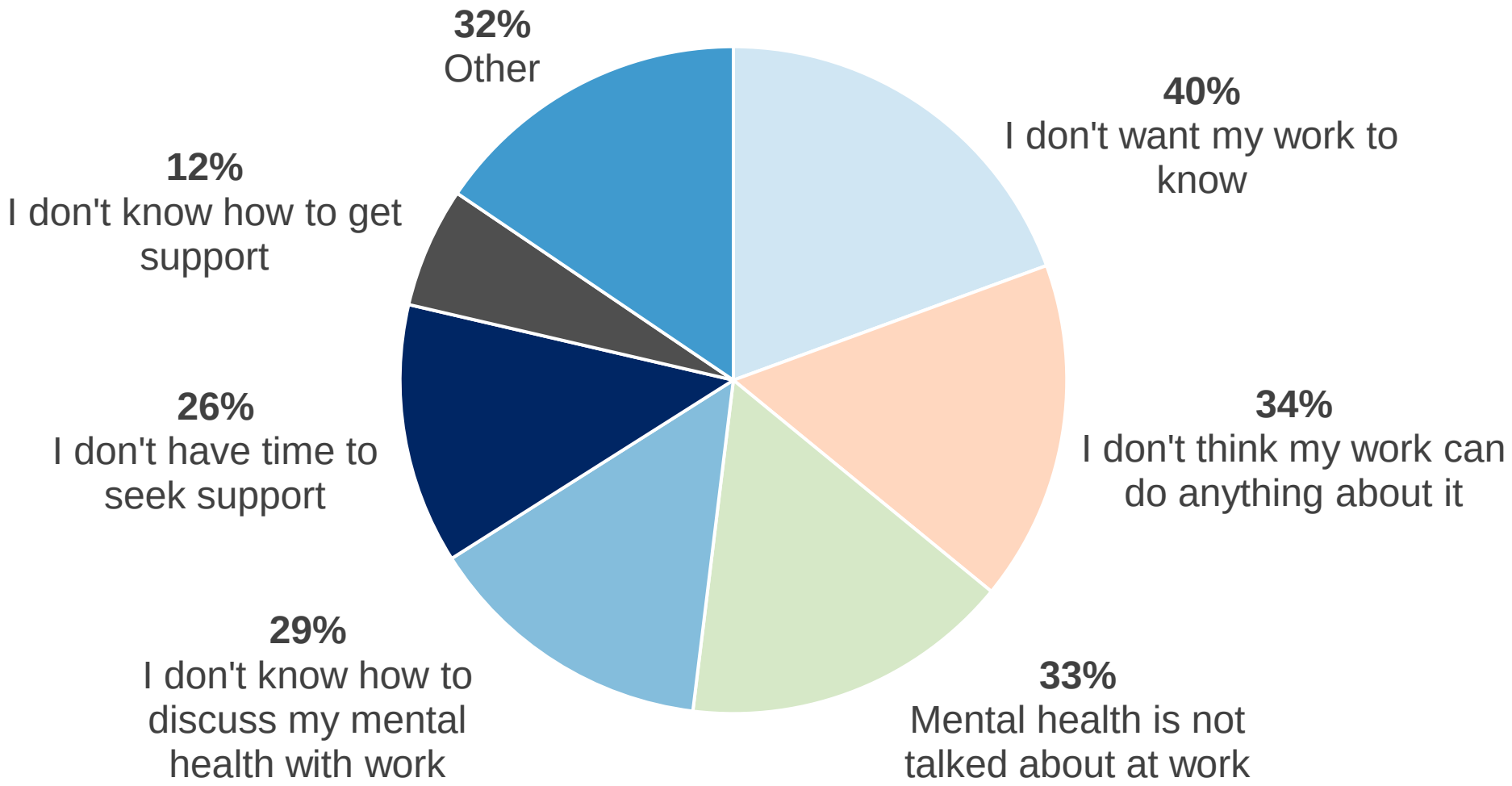
Support that workers want from NSW government



Respondents who were unemployed said financial assistance was the most important help the NSW Government could give

Support for mental health at work

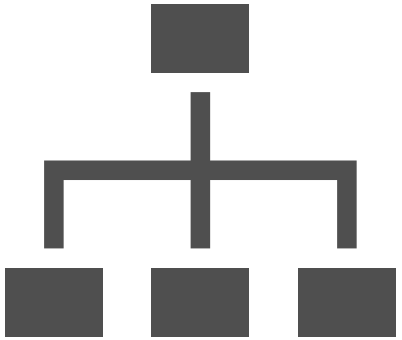
Barriers for workers when seeking mental health support at work



Support for mental health at work

33%

Of **workers** reported that they experienced **barriers** to accessing support at work



Managers experience fewer **barriers**, but the challenges were similar in nature

Younger age groups were more likely to say they had experienced barriers in asking for support

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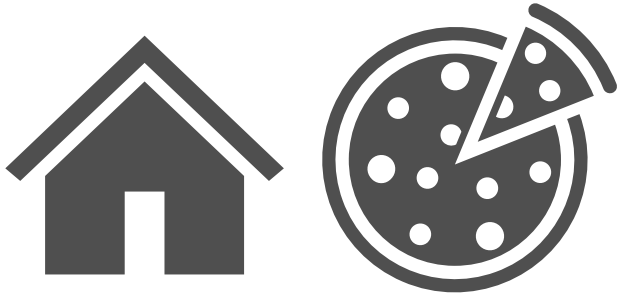
Support for mental health at work

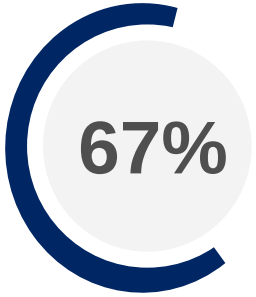


Those working in **accommodation** and **food services** are least likely to get help and **70%** report they get **no support from their work**

Construction workers also reported **barriers** to accessing support

Respondents report that support is less available the further away you live from the inner city, which may suggest a lack of awareness of support or where to get it

Working from home



Of **managers encouraged** people to **work from home**

Of respondents **spent some time working time at home**

Retail, education, accommodation and food services workers are **least likely to work from home**

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Workers in regional NSW were less likely to work from home

Working from home and return to work

Work from home is:

37% positive

56% a bit of both

7% negative

Pros

- Increased family time
- More time for hobbies
- Avoiding the commute

Cons

- Isolation
- Increased pressure
- Lack of socialising

More than 50% of respondents had concerns about returning to work, particularly around public transport and maintaining social distancing

Working from home/return to work and public transport

50-59 years

Generally more concerned about **public transport** because of issues to do with **social distancing**

View **working from home** much more **positively** due to **flexibility**

18-29 years

More positive about returning to work

Those who rely on public transport to get to work are more likely to want to work from home and those in the inner city are more willing to make the short trip to the office

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Returning to work was most likely to be a concern for office workers, for example in public administration, professional services and IT

Job security/insecurity

40% of workers, and **36% of managers worry about their job security**

40% of business owners had to reduce staff
28% reduced staff by more than 80%

40% of **unemployed** said their work status was **due to COVID-19**

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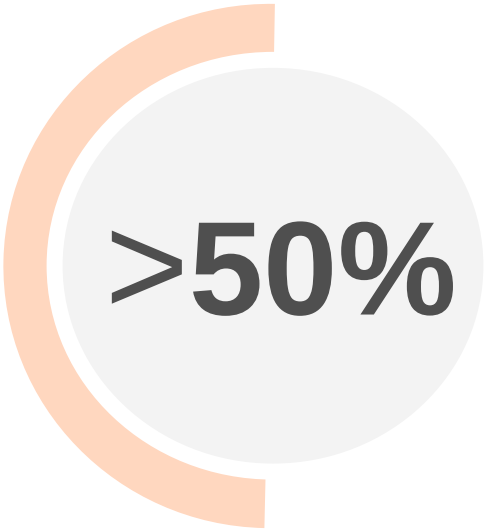
Job security/insecurity



Business owners that have retained staff because of **JobKeeper**

JobKeeper mostly helped to retain workers in:

- Accommodation and food services
- Information Media and Telecommunications
- Education and training

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High-risk mental health concerns

251

251 individual responses related to high-risk mental health concerns around self-harm and/or suicidal behaviour

Most high-risk mental health concerns came from people aged 30-39 years old

Given the nature of the subject matter, moderation and outreach formed part of the approach to support any respondents deemed at risk during the consultation

What is the NSW Government doing?

Visit **mentalhealthatwork.nsw.gov.au** for resources to assist businesses create a mentally healthy workplace:

- the refreshed NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018-2022 following COVID-19, feedback and expert advice
- one on one tailored Direct Practical Coaching from psychologists for private workplaces (>200 staff) and not for profits
- information about free mental health training for managers, workers and business leaders
- ambassador program and video case studies sharing business experiences towards a mentally healthy workplace

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A new **Code of Practice for managing psychosocial risks in the workplace** was published in May 2021

Support services

Lifeline Australia
Visit lifeline.org.au
or call 13 11 14

Kids Helpline (for under 25's)
Visit kidshelpline.com.au
or call 1800 55 1800

Mens Line Australia
Visit mensline.org.au
or call 1800 55 1800

Suicide Call Back Service
Visit suicidecallbackservice.org.au
or call 1300 659 467

BeyondBlue
Visit beyondblue.org.au
or call 1800 512 348

BEING Supported - Mental Health Peer Support
Visit beingsupported.org.au
or call 1800 151 151

Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service
Visit openarms.gov.au
or call 1 800 011 046

NSW Health Mental Health Line
Visit
health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-line.aspx
or call 1800 011 511

SafeWork NSW

To report a work, health or safety concern
Contact SafeWork NSW on 13 10 50 or raise your concerns anonymously on the Speak Up platform

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Report details

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