

# The Mental Health Index™ report

Australia, August 2020



**LifeWorks**  
by Morneau Shepell

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## Executive summary

Heading into the month of August, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic remain front and centre across Australia. While Australia was among the earlier countries to flatten the COVID-19 case curve and ease social restrictions, a spike in coronavirus cases in the State of Victoria has led to a state of emergency and a Stage Four lockdown. COVID-19 cases have soared in the city of Melbourne with residents only able to leave their homes for essentials. Strict measures have been put in place to prevent further spread of the virus amidst high daily case counts including a return to remote learning, and closure of childcare centres. Masks are mandatory throughout Victoria.

The Australian economy continues to suffer as the country is going through a period of economic de-inflation<sup>1</sup>. Modest employment gains over the past couple of months continue to be overshadowed as over one million Australians remain out of work<sup>2</sup> or underemployed. As Australians continue to face economic pressures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers have depleted their savings and others are resorting to withdrawing retirement savings to weather the financial storm.<sup>3</sup>

Domestic travel restrictions are in place, varying from state to state, and tightening quarantine measures are commonplace particularly for people travelling from a COVID-19 hotspot. Australia's borders continue to be closed to foreign travellers.

For the fifth consecutive month, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to have an impact on the mental health of Australians, with a decline this month, reversing the trend toward improvement since April.

1 <https://www.news.com.au/finance/economy/australian-economy/consumer-price-index-falls-off-cliff-thrusting-australia-into-a-period-of-economic-deflation/news-story/b2eff0df2198170324ac071a272a3283>  
2 <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/more-than-one-million-out-of-work-july-unemployment-data/news-story/f409de8046a250a965ef10fe1b2029e6>  
3 <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/australianz/australians-likely-to-withdraw-billions-from-pensions-to-weather-coronavirus>



## Mental Health Index™

**The overall Mental Health Index™ for August 2020 is -14 points.** This index represents the deviation from pre-2020 benchmark. A negative score indicates poorer mental health relative to the benchmark, and a positive score indicates better mental health. The benchmark reflects mental health data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. A 14-point decrease from the pre COVID-19 benchmark<sup>4</sup> reflects a population whose mental health is similar to the most distressed one per cent of the benchmark population.

The lowest Mental Health Index™ sub-score is for the risk measure of optimism (-17.0), followed by depression (-16.2), anxiety (-15.7), work productivity (-14.3), and isolation (-13.3). The risk measure with the highest mental health score is financial (0.1), followed by general psychological health (-6.2). However, the latter has declined when compared with the prior month (-5.2).

- After a period of slow but steady improvement, the Mental Health Index™ score declined in Australia in August.
- All but the financial risk sub-score have worsened when compared to the prior month. Financial risk has remained nearly the same as the prior month (0.0 in July to 0.1 in August).
- Individuals without emergency savings continue to experience a lower score in mental health (-27.2) than the overall group. Those reporting an emergency fund have an average mental health score of -8.9.
- Females (-16.6) continue to have a lower mental health score than males (-11.6); and as observed in prior months, mental health scores improve with age.
- Respondents identifying as South Asian have the lowest mental health score (-27.0), followed by those identifying as East Asian (-13.4), those identifying as White (-13.3) and respondents identifying as South East Asian (-13.3).
- There is a 4.0 point variance in the mental health score between those with one child (-17.0) and those without children (-13.0), with a lower score for those with one child. The gap between these two groups has been evident since May.

The overall Mental Health Index™ for August 2020 is -14 points, down two points from the prior month

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<sup>4</sup> The raw score for the Mental Health Index™ benchmark is 75/100. The August 2020 score is 61/100.



From April to July, regional Mental Health Index™ scores have shown general improvement; however, all regions are showing declines in mental health from July to August. The largest decline in the mental health score is observed in Victoria (-5.0 points), where a spike in COVID-19 cases has prompted a return to lockdown restrictions. Declines in mental health are also observed in Western Australia (-1.9 points), followed by New South Wales (-0.8 points), Queensland (-0.3 points), and South Australia (-0.1 points).

Overall, 7 per cent of respondents are unemployed. While most individuals remain employed, 27 per cent report reduced hours or reduced salary since April 2020.

- Individuals reporting reduced salary when compared to the prior month have the lowest mental health score (-28.0), followed by individuals not currently employed (-21.7), and those reporting reduced hours when compared to the prior month (-19.2).
- Respondents who report working for companies with 51-100 employees have the lowest mental health score (-19.4). Individuals who report working for an organization with 1,001-5,000 employees have the highest mental health score (-8.8).

The highest mental health scores in August are observed among individuals employed in Finance and Insurance (-9.6), Transportation and Warehousing (-9.8), and Wholesale Trade (-11.0) industries.

- Respondents employed in Arts, Entertainment and Recreation have the lowest average mental health score (-20.0), followed by individuals in Food Services (-19.1), and Retail Trade (-18.7).
- Individuals employed in Construction, Wholesale Trade, and Transportation and Warehousing have seen the greatest improvement in mental health since last month.

For the fifth consecutive month, the two key drivers of the Mental Health Index™ are financial risk and isolation.

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## Mental Stress Change

**The Mental Stress Change score for August 2020 is 60.5.** This indicates that 28 per cent of the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with 7 per cent experiencing less. This is the fifth consecutive month where the Mental Stress Change score reflects increased mental stress in the population overall. Considering geography, the greatest increase in stress month over month was for respondents living in Victoria (66.5), followed by Western Australia (61.1). Respondents living in the states where the increase in mental stress was less still had significant increases. They include New South Wales (58.8), followed by South Australia (57.5), and Queensland (56.0).

- The greatest increase in mental stress is seen in employed people with reduced salary (72.4), followed by employed people with reduced hours (66.2) when compared to unemployed people (63.2) and employed people with no change to salary or hours (57.0).
- As was reported in prior months, and as evidenced again in August, younger respondents are experiencing a greater increase in mental stress when compared to older respondents.
- Further, since April 2020, females have larger increases in mental stress when compared with males.
- Respondents identifying as South Asian had the least favourable mental stress change score (66.7), followed by those identifying as White (60.4), and those identifying as East Asian (60.0).
- Individuals identifying as South East Asian had the most favourable mental stress change score (57.0).

Mental Stress Change scores for the Manufacturing, and Finance and Insurance industries are less steep compared to the prior month.

- Individuals employed in Professional, Scientific and Technical Services have the most significant increase in Mental Stress Change score (63.3) followed by individuals employed in Educational Services (62.1), and Food Services (61.6).



## Additional findings

### The impact of the ongoing pandemic on mental health

In June, individuals were asked to report the main emotion they were experiencing most often. The same question was repeated in August and similar to the June findings, worry (24 per cent), calm (21 per cent), and frustration (20 per cent) are the most commonly reported emotions.

- Consistent with the June findings, individuals reporting positive emotions (i.e. calm, happiness, hopefulness, or gratitude) have much higher Mental Health Index™ scores than individuals reporting negative emotions (i.e. anger, disbelief, frustration, helplessness, and worry).
- This further validates the position from June that an individual’s personal outlook contributes significantly to how well that individual is coping with the strain of the pandemic and that this effect is reflected in the Mental Health Index™ scores.
- In August, 59 per cent note negative emotions. The proportions are largely the same as in June, with the exception of a 4 per cent decrease among individuals indicating calm and a 4 per cent increase among those indicating worry.

Using text analysis when respondents were asked to explain their emotion, certain frequently occurring words appearing in the responses were selected and the average mental health score of individuals using each word was determined.

- Individuals using words and ideas such as calm or normal have an average mental health score above the pre-pandemic benchmark.
- Individuals using words and ideas such as worry, COVID, work, uncertainty, or financial have significantly lower mental health scores than the pre-pandemic benchmark.
- Those using the word financial have the lowest mental health score.

### Likelihood of a return to the pre-pandemic state

- Forty-five per cent of respondents feel that it is unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state, with 26 per cent undecided.
- The mental health score for individuals feeling that it is very unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state is the lowest (-24.4).

From April to July, regional Mental Health Index™ scores have shown general improvement; however, declines are observed in all states in August



- An increasing trend in mental health scores is observed from very unlikely (-24.4) to very likely (-5.3).

**Top of mind issues**

- The most commonly reported top of mind issue is the ongoing impact of the pandemic related to finances and the economy (57 per cent). This is followed by the ongoing impact of the pandemic not related to finances and the economy (24 per cent), other (9 per cent), change of plans for major life event (8 per cent), anti-racism (2 per cent), and the upcoming US election (1 per cent).
- The lowest mental health score is among individuals reporting that their top of mind issue is a change of plans for a major life event (-18.2).
- The mental health score for individuals reporting that their top of mind issue is the upcoming US election is considerably higher (-5.9) than the mental health scores of individuals reporting any of the other issues.
- Individuals that selected 'Other' as a top of mind issue were prompted to input a text response. Text analysis revealed that the most commonly reported other issues relate to COVID-19, work, climate change, health, and travel.

**Adaptation**

Respondents were asked to report how well they feel that they are adapting financially, to changes to their work life, and to changes to their personal life. The results suggest that where there is difficulty adapting, it is more likely to be in one's personal life or financial over work.

- Thirty-seven per cent of respondents are undecided or feel that they are adapting poorly to changes in their personal life or personal routine, and their mental health score is lower than other groups (-28.1) and significantly lower than the average (-14.0).
- Thirty-seven per cent of respondents are undecided or feel that they are adapting poorly to changes in their finances, and their mental health score is -26.7.
- Thirty-one per cent of respondents are undecided or feel that they are adapting poorly to changes in their work life or work routine, and their mental health score is -28.0.

Nearly sixty per cent of respondents indicate that their top of mind issue is the ongoing impact of the pandemic related to finances and the economy



- Sixty-three per cent of respondents feel that they are adapting well to changes in their finances, and these individuals have mental health scores averaging -7.2.
- Sixty-three per cent of respondents feel that they are adapting well to changes in their personal life or personal routine, and these individuals have mental health scores averaging -6.4.
- Sixty-nine per cent of respondents feel that they are adapting well to changes in their work life or work routine, and these individuals have mental health scores averaging -8.0.

### Additional data and analyses

Demographic breakdown of sub-scores, and specific cross-correlational and custom analyses are available upon request. Benchmarking against the national results or any sub-group, is available upon request. Contact [MHI@morneaushepell.com](mailto:MHI@morneaushepell.com)

Individuals who report adapting poorly to changes in their personal life have a mental health score nearly twenty-two points below individuals who report adapting well to change in this area

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# Overview of the Mental Health Index™

The mental health and wellbeing of a population is essential to overall health and work productivity. The Mental Health Index™ provides a measure of the current mental health status of employed adults in a given geography, compared to the benchmarks collected in the years of 2017, 2018 and 2019. The increases and decreases in the Index are intended to predict cost and productivity risks, and inform the need for investment in mental health supports by business and government.

## The Mental Health Index™ report has three main parts:

1. The overall Mental Health Index™ (MHI), which is a measure of change compared to the benchmark of mental health and risk.
2. A Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score, which measures the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.
3. A Spotlight section that reflects the specific impact of current issues in the community.

## Methodology

The data for this report was collected through an online survey of 1,000 Australians who are living in Australia and are currently employed or who were employed within the prior six months. Participants were selected to be representative of the age, gender, industry and geographic distribution in Australia. The same respondents participate each month to remove sampling bias. The respondents were asked to consider the prior two weeks when answering each question. The Mental Health Index™ is published monthly, starting in April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for the current report was collected between July 21 to Aug 4, 2020.

Collected through an online survey of 1,000 Australians

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## Calculations

To create the Mental Health Index™, the first step leverages a response scoring system turning individual responses to each question into a point value. Higher point values are associated with better mental health and less mental health risk. Each individual's scores are added and then divided by the total number of possible points to get a score out of 100. The raw score is the mathematical mean of the individual scores.

To demonstrate change, the current month's scores are then compared to the benchmark and the prior month. The benchmark is comprised of data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The change relative to the benchmark is the Mental Health Index™. A score of zero in the Mental Health Index™ reflects no change, positive scores reflect improvement, and negative scores reflect decline.**

A Mental Stress Change score is also reported given that increasing and prolonged mental stress is a potential contributor to changes in mental health. It is reported separately and is not part of the calculation of the Mental Health Index™. The Mental Stress Change score is  $(\text{percentage reporting less mental stress} + \text{percentage reporting the same level of mental stress} * 0.5) * -1 + 100$ . The data compares the current to the prior month. **A Mental Stress Change score of 50 reflects no change in mental stress from the prior month. Scores above 50 reflect an increase in mental stress, scores below 50 reflect a decrease in mental stress.** The range is from zero to 100. A succession of scores over 50, month over month, reflects high risk.

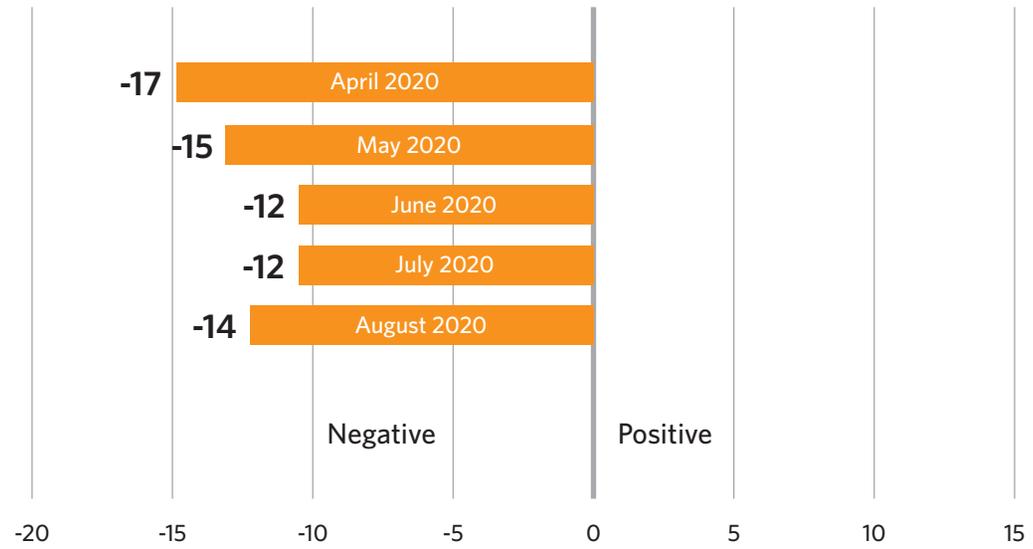


# The Mental Health Index™

The Mental Health Index™ (MHI) is a measure of deviation from the benchmark<sup>5</sup> of mental health and risk.

## MHI

<b>Current month</b> <b>August 2020</b>	<b>-14</b>	
July 2020	-12	
<b>MHI sub-scores<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>August</b>	<b>July</b>
Optimism	-17.0	-13.2
Depression	-16.2	-12.6
Anxiety	-15.7	-14.7
Work productivity	-14.3	-12.9
Isolation	-13.3	-11.2
Psychological health	-6.2	-5.2
Financial risk	0.1	0.0



The overall Mental Health Index™ is -14 and continues to reside below the benchmark for the fifth consecutive month. The current score of 61 is equivalent to the first percentile of the benchmark.

<sup>5</sup> The benchmark reflects data collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019.  
<sup>6</sup> The demographic breakdown of sub-scores are available upon request.



Employment status	August	July
<b>Employed</b> (no change in hours/salary)	<b>-10.4</b>	<b>-8.6</b>
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	-19.2	-20.5
<b>Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)</b>	<b>-28.0</b>	-18.8
Not currently employed	-21.7	-16.2

Age group	August	July
<b>Age 20-29</b>	<b>-19.7</b>	<b>-13.8</b>
Age 30-39	-15.9	-11.0
Age 40-49	-10.9	-6.6
Age 50-59	-9.4	-2.5
<b>Age 60-69</b>	<b>-6.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>

Number of children	August	July
No children in household	-13.0	-12.6
<b>1 child</b>	<b>-17.0</b>	<b>-13.1</b>
2 children	-16.5	-10.7
<b>3 children or more</b>	<b>-12.4</b>	-11.6

Province	August	July
New South Wales	-14.1	-13.3
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>-15.9</b>	<b>-10.9</b>
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>-12.3</b>	-12.0
South Australia	-14.6	-14.5
Western Australia	-13.7	-11.8

Gender	August	July
<b>Male</b>	<b>-11.6</b>	<b>-9.7</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>-16.6</b>	<b>-14.4</b>

Income	August	July
<b>Household Income &lt;\$30K/annum</b>	<b>-27.0</b>	<b>-27.7</b>
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	-18.6	-15.9
\$60k to <\$100K	-15.6	-14.7
\$100K to <\$150K	-11.5	-8.1
<b>\$150K and over</b>	<b>-6.6</b>	<b>-4.5</b>

Racial identification	August	July
East Asian	-13.4	-14.8
<b>South Asian</b>	<b>-27.0</b>	<b>-21.7</b>
<b>South East Asian</b>	<b>-13.3</b>	-10.8
<b>White</b>	<b>-13.3</b>	-11.7
Other*	-17.8	-13.0

\* Included in this category are Arab/Middle Eastern/West Asian, Black, Indigenous/Aboriginal, Latin, South or Central American, Pacific Islander, Mixed (Black and other), Mixed (Other), and Prefer not to answer, as the minimum threshold for reporting was not met for each group.

Employer size	August	July
Self-employed/sole proprietor	-13.5	-12.3
2-50 employees	-13.7	-10.6
<b>51-100 employees</b>	<b>-19.4</b>	<b>-15.4</b>
101-500 employees	-14.3	-14.6
501-1,000 employees	-14.8	-12.7
<b>1,001-5,000 employees</b>	<b>-8.8</b>	-11.7
5,001-10,000 employees	-14.1	<b>-6.5</b>
More than 10,000 employees	-10.9	-9.0

Numbers highlighted in **orange** are the most negative scores in the group.

Numbers highlighted in **green** are the least negative scores in the group.

**Available upon request:**

Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses



## The Mental Health Index™ (industry)

The mental health of individuals across industries can differ immensely depending upon market and societal conditions. The highest mental health scores are observed in Finance and Insurance (-9.6), Transportation and Warehousing (-9.8), and Wholesale Trade (-11.0). Individuals working in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (-20.0) have the lowest mental health score followed by Food Services (-19.1), and Retail Trade (-18.7). Improvements from the prior month are shown in the table below:

Industry	August 2020 MHI	July 2020 MHI	Improvement
Construction	-13.8	-17.3	3.4
Wholesale Trade	-11.0	-13.2	2.1
Transportation and Warehousing	-9.8	-10.7	0.9
Food Services	-19.1	-19.4	0.3
Retail Trade	-18.7	-18.2	-0.5
Health Care and Social Assistance	-12.1	-11.6	-0.6
Finance and Insurance	-9.6	-8.7	-0.9
Other	-13.1	-12.2	-0.9
Other services (except Public Administration)	-11.9	-10.3	-1.6
Educational Services	-15.8	-13.8	-2.0
Manufacturing	-12.4	-9.4	-3.0
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	-14.6	-11.5	-3.1
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	-20.0	-15.6	-4.4
Administrative and Support services	-15.3	-9.5	-5.9
Public Administration	-12.8	-5.1	-7.7

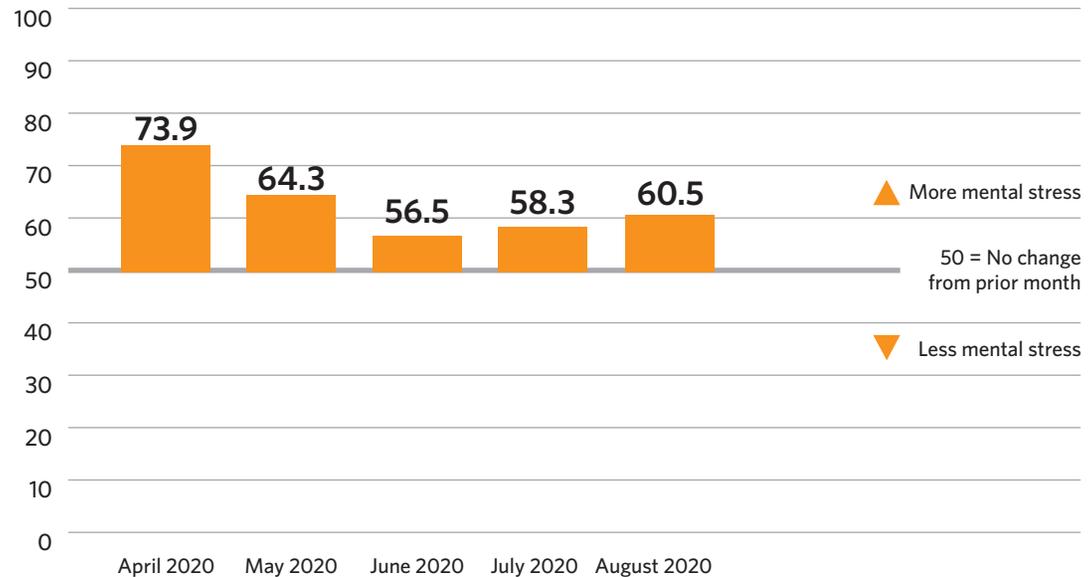


# The Mental Stress Change score

The Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score is a measure of the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.

MStress Chg	
Current month August 2020	<b>60.5</b>
July 2020	58.3

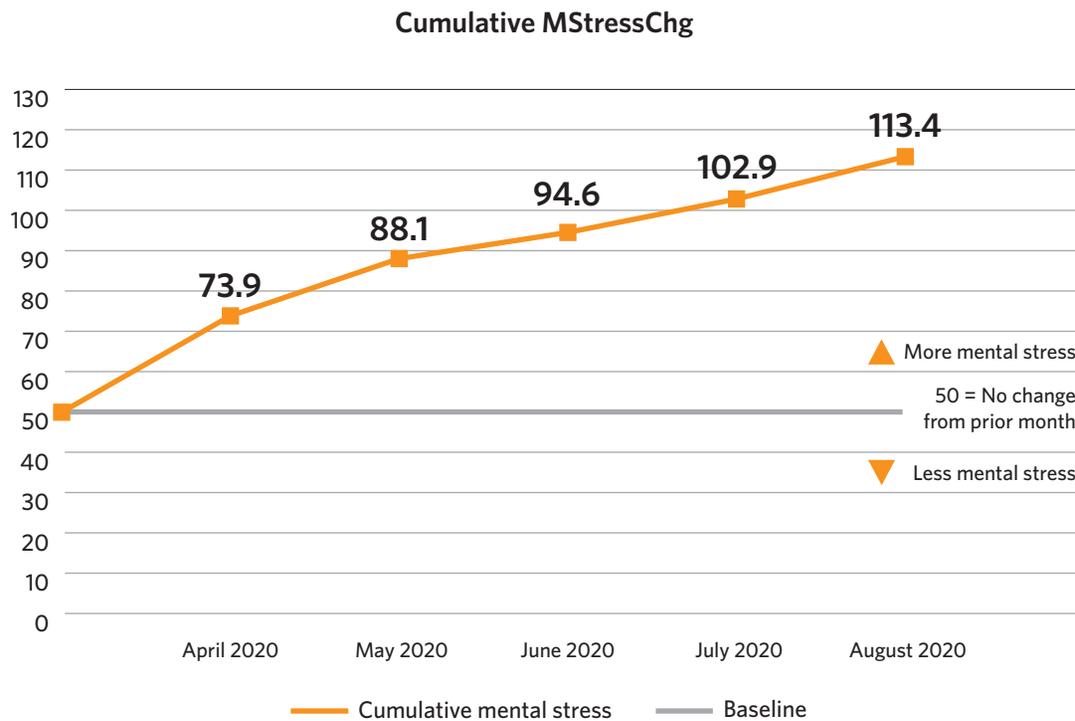
The Mental Stress Change score for August 2020 is 60.5. This reflects an increase in mental stress compared to the prior month. The steepness of the increase had been declining month-over-month since April; however, the trend no longer exists. The current score indicates that 28 per cent of the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with 7 per cent experiencing less. A continued increase in mental stress over the last five months, when compared to the benchmark, indicates a significant accumulation of strain in the population.





# The Mental Stress Change (cumulative)

The Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score is a measure of the level of reported mental stress compared to the prior month. The change is rooted against a value of 50 implying no net mental stress change from the previous month, while values above 50 indicate a net increase in mental stress and values below 50 indicate a net decrease in mental stress. The cumulative mental stress score is shown in the graph below:





Employment status	August	July
<b>Employed</b> (no change in hours/salary)	<b>57.0</b>	<b>55.1</b>
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	66.2	65.8
<b>Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>65.9</b>
Not currently employed	63.2	59.1

Age group	August	July
Age 20-29	62.9	<b>62.7</b>
<b>Age 30-39</b>	<b>64.1</b>	58.9
Age 40-49	59.5	58.8
Age 50-59	59.6	57.6
<b>Age 60-69</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>55.3</b>

Number of children	August	July
No children in household	59.0	58.2
<b>1 child</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>60.1</b>
2 children	63.0	57.2
<b>3 children or more</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>57.1</b>

Province	August	July
New South Wales	58.8	59.5
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>66.5</b>	<b>60.0</b>
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>56.0</b>	56.9
South Australia	57.5	55.9
Western Australia	61.1	<b>55.2</b>

Gender	August	July
<b>Male</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>55.5</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>61.3</b>	<b>60.6</b>

Income	August	July
Household Income <\$30K/annum	62.5	<b>67.9</b>
<b>\$30K to &lt;\$60K/annum</b>	<b>65.2</b>	59.0
\$60k to <\$100K	59.7	59.2
\$100K to <\$150K	60.2	<b>55.0</b>
<b>\$150K and over</b>	<b>55.7</b>	57.3

Racial identification	August	July
East Asian	60.0	<b>52.5</b>
<b>South Asian</b>	<b>66.7</b>	<b>59.1</b>
<b>South East Asian</b>	<b>57.3</b>	56.9
White	60.4	59.0
Other*	59.6	54.7

\* Included in this category are Arab/Middle Eastern/West Asian, Black, Indigenous/Aboriginal, Latin, South or Central American, Pacific Islander, Mixed (Black and other), Mixed (Other), and Prefer not to answer, as the minimum threshold for reporting was not met for each group.

Employer size	August	July
Self-employed/sole proprietor	61.4	58.0
2-50 employees	58.6	57.6
<b>51-100 employees</b>	<b>67.7</b>	57.6
101-500 employees	58.0	<b>63.5</b>
501-1,000 employees	60.6	<b>49.3</b>
1,001-5,000 employees	60.8	61.5
5,001-10,000 employees	60.8	55.9
<b>More than 10,000 employees</b>	<b>57.4</b>	59.2

Numbers highlighted in **orange** are the most negative scores in the group.

Numbers highlighted in **green** are the least negative scores in the group.

**Available upon request:**

Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses



## The Mental Stress Change (industry)

The mental health of individuals across industries can differ immensely depending upon market and societal conditions. The most favourable mental stress changes are observed in Manufacturing (54.2), and Finance and Insurance (58.7). The least favourable mental stress changes are observed among individuals in Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (63.3), Educational Services (62.1), and Food Services (61.6) industries. Mental Stress changes from the last two months are shown in the table below:

Industry	August 2020 MStress Chg	July 2020 MStress Chg
Manufacturing	54.2	53.2
Other	57.6	53.4
Finance and Insurance	58.7	53.3
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	59.1	65.2
Other services (except Public Administration)	59.2	52.8
Public Administration	59.3	56.6
Retail Trade	59.5	64.4
Construction	59.6	61.5
Wholesale Trade	59.8	58.3
Health Care and Social Assistance	60.4	58.9
Transportation and Warehousing	61.3	53.2
Administrative and Support services	61.5	56.7
Food Services	61.6	58.1
Educational Services	62.1	63.3
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	63.3	63.3

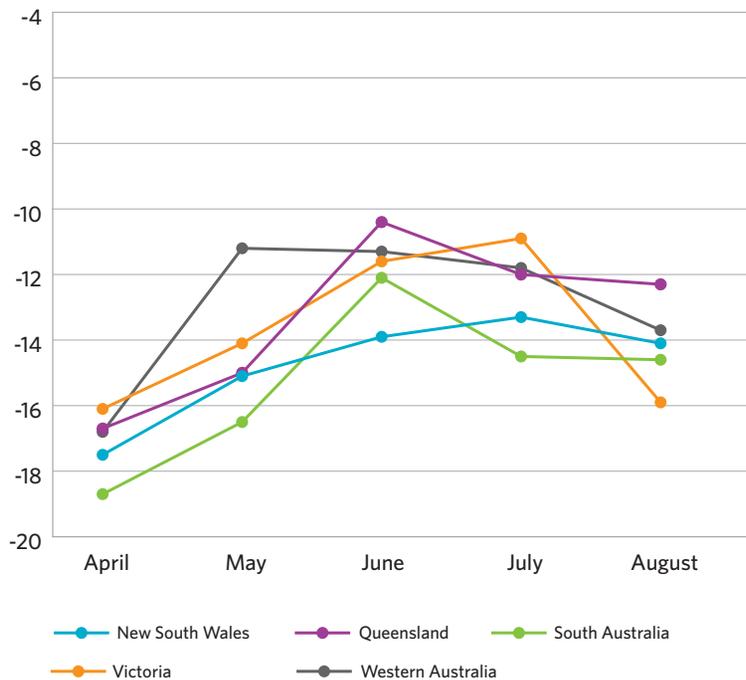


# Mental health trends by region

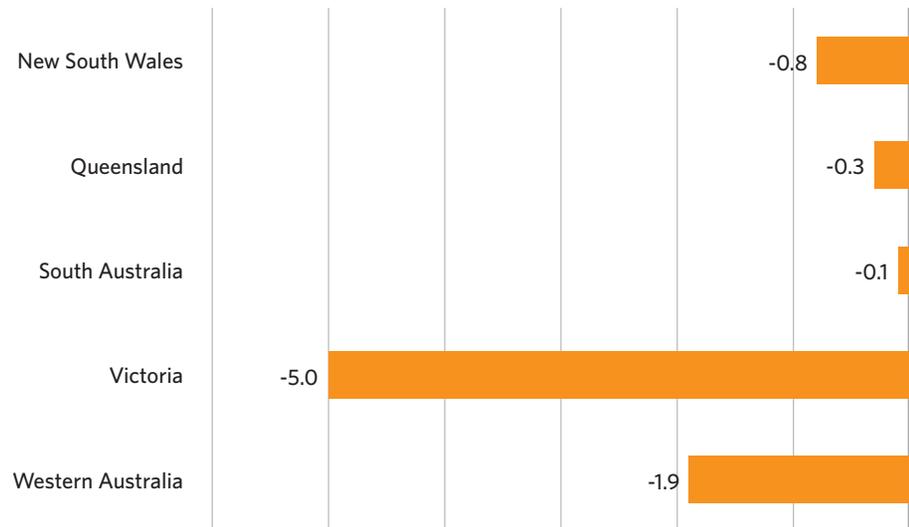
From April to July, regional Mental Health Index™ scores have shown general improvement through June or July; however, all regions are showing declines in score from July to August.

The largest decline in the mental health score is observed in Victoria (-5.0 points), where a spike in COVID-19 cases has prompted a return to lockdown restrictions. Declines in mental health are also observed in Western Australia (-1.9 points), followed by New South Wales (-0.8 points), Queensland (-0.3 points), and South Australia (-0.1 points).

Australian state Mental Health Index™ scores



July to August change





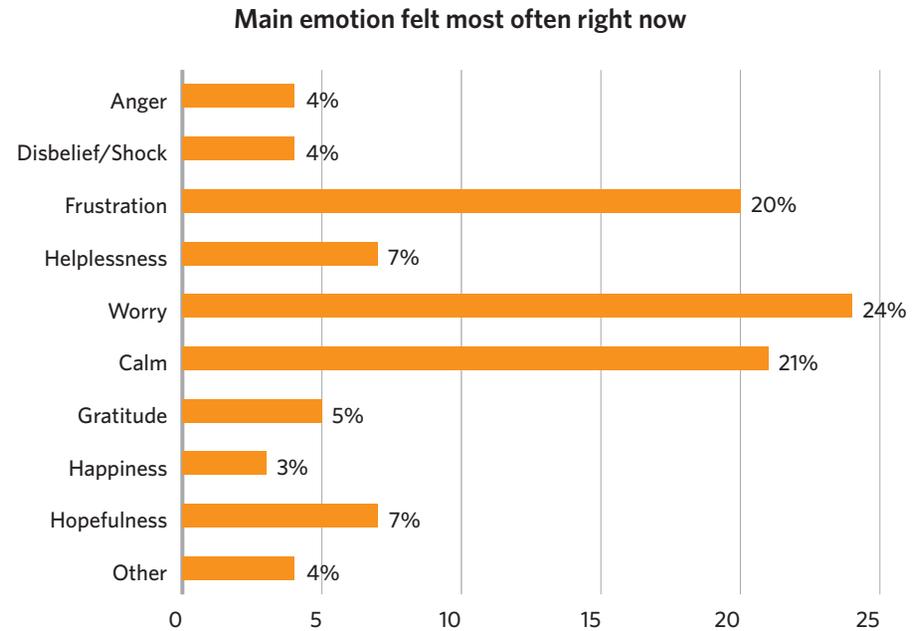
# The impact of the ongoing pandemic on mental health

## Main emotion felt most often right now

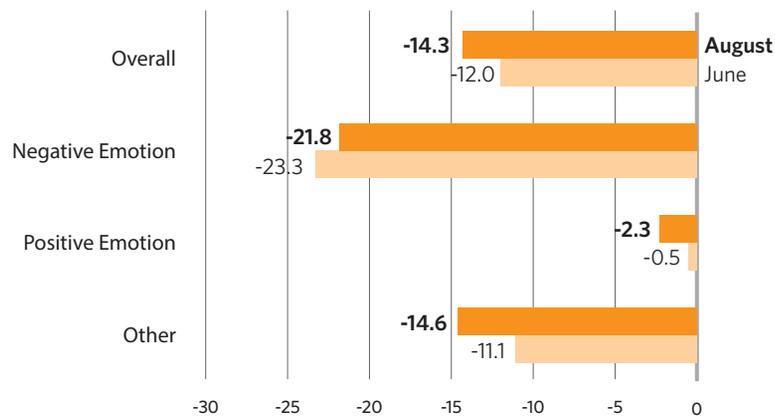
In June, individuals were asked what the main emotion they were experiencing most often. The same question was repeated in August and similar to the June findings, worry (24 per cent), calm (21 per cent), and frustration (20 per cent) were the most commonly reported emotions.

Consistent with the June findings, individuals reporting positive emotions (i.e. calm, happiness, hopefulness, or gratitude) have much higher Mental Health Index™ scores than individuals reporting negative emotions (i.e. anger, disbelief, frustration, helplessness, and worry).

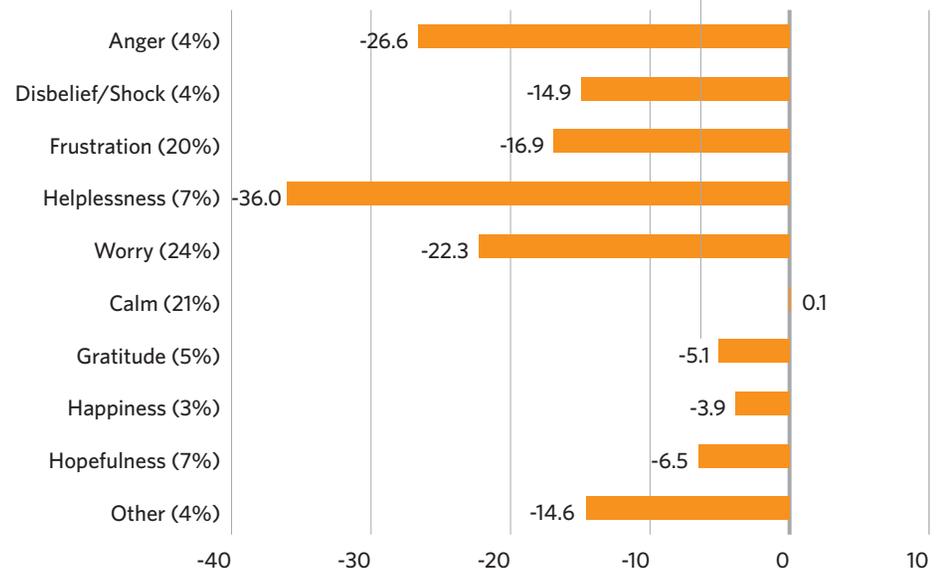
When comparing the overall positive and negative emotions from June and August, similar Mental Health Index™ scores are observed.



## Comparison of emotion type and MHI score from June to August



## Main emotion felt most often right now and MHI score

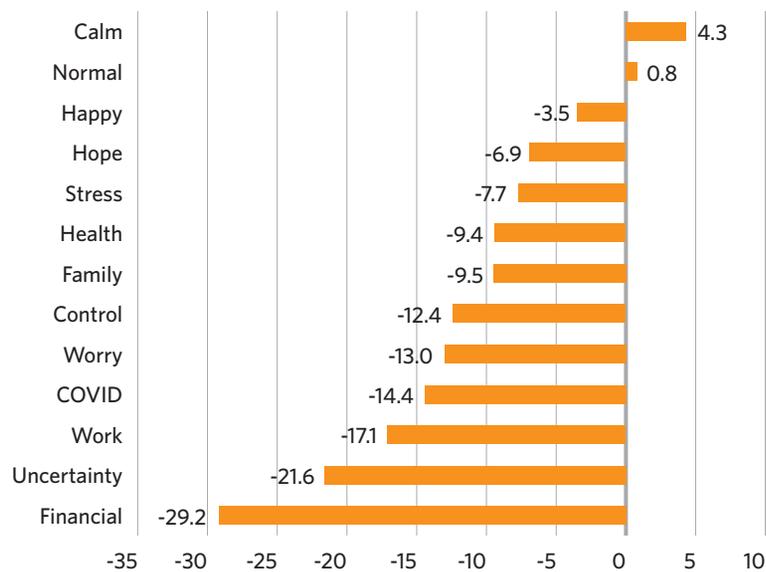




In August, a follow-up question was included asking respondents to express the reason for selecting the main emotion they reported feeling. Using text analysis, certain frequently occurring words appearing in the responses were selected and the average mental health score of individuals using each word was determined.

Individuals using words and ideas such as calm or normal have an average mental health score above the pre-pandemic benchmark. Individuals using words and ideas such as worry, COVID, work, uncertainty, or financial have significantly lower mental health scores than the pre-pandemic benchmark. Those using the word financial have the lowest mental health score.

Word usage and Mental Health Index™ scores



“I am in a constant state of uncertainty regarding my job and caring for elderly relatives.”

“The uncertainty of the present and the future is what makes me worry most.”

“The rapid and constant change, the uncertainty and the erratic work nature.”

“This is something we will overcome in time and meanwhile people just have to stay calm but vigilant.”

“Uncertainty about what will happen with work. Homeschooling and trying to stay positive for the kids.”



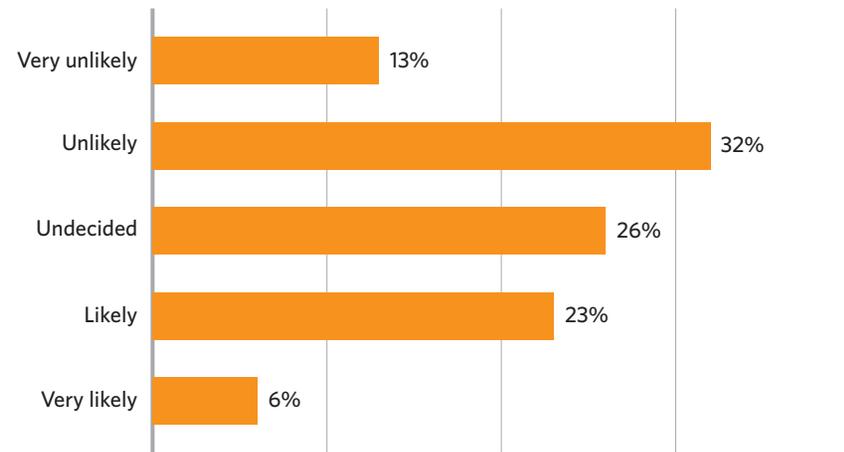


### Likelihood of a return to the pre-pandemic state

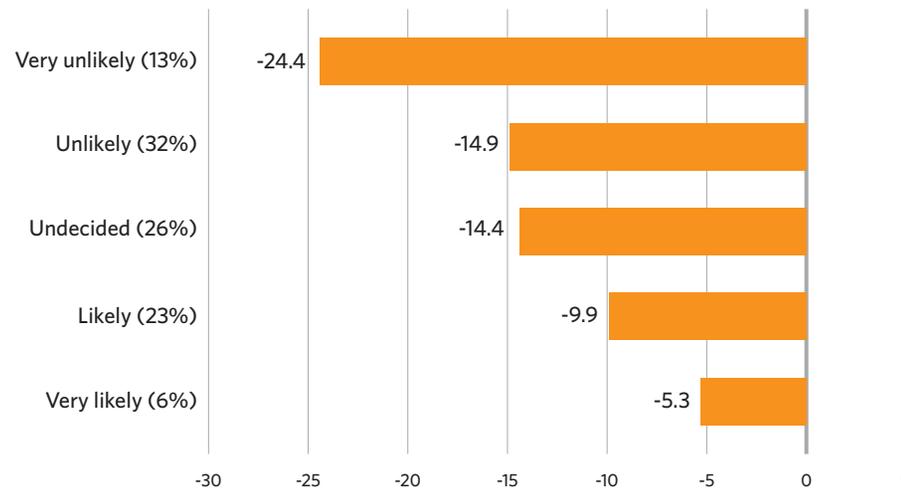
Individuals were also asked how likely it is that things will return to a pre-pandemic state. Forty-five per cent feel that it is unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state, with 26 per cent undecided.

The mental health score for individuals feeling that it is very unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state is the lowest (-24.4). An increasing trend in mental health scores is observed from very unlikely (-24.4) to very likely (-5.3).

Likelihood of return to pre-pandemic state



Likelihood of return to pre-pandemic state: MHI scores



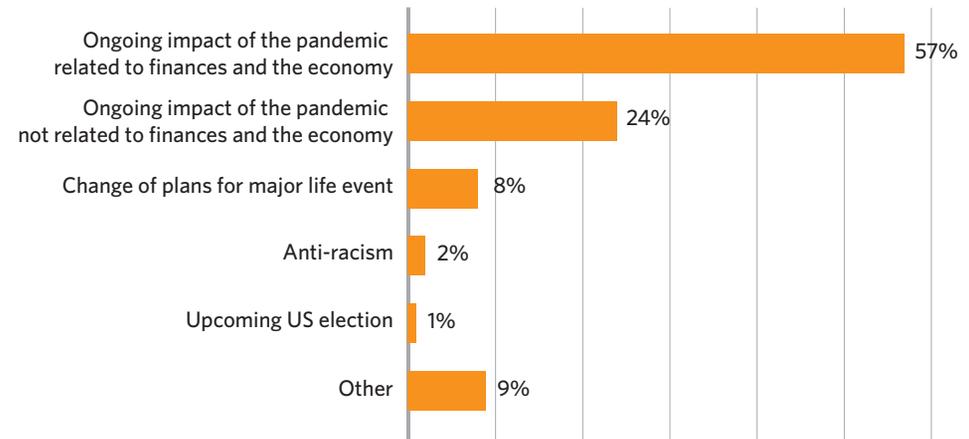


### Top of mind issues

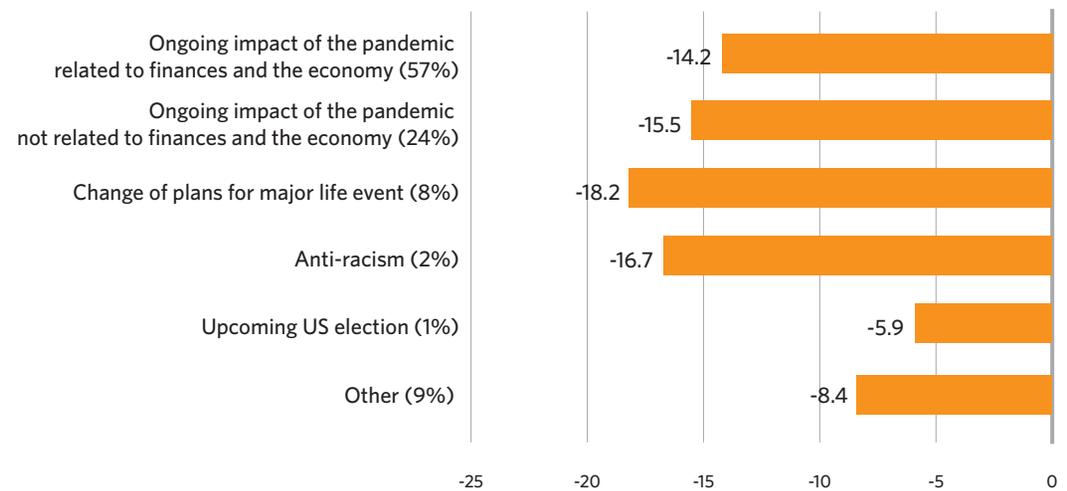
The most commonly reported top of mind issue is the ongoing impact of the pandemic related to finances and the economy (57 per cent), followed by the ongoing impact of the pandemic not related to finances and the economy (24 per cent). The next most common responses are: other (9 per cent), change of plans for major life events (8 per cent), anti-racism (2 per cent), and upcoming US election (1 per cent).

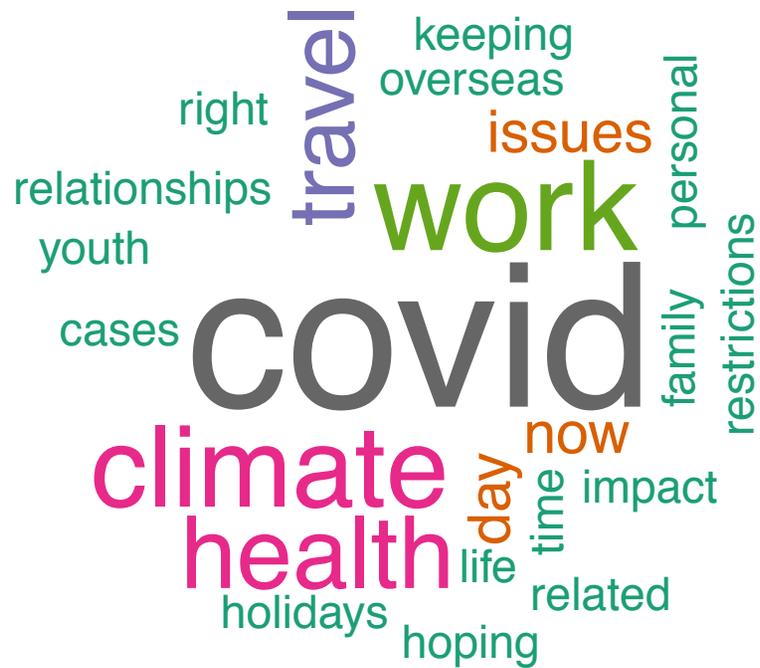
The lowest mental health score is among individuals reporting that their top of mind issue is a change of plans for a major life event (-18.2).

Top of Mind Issues



Top of Mind Issues: MHI scores

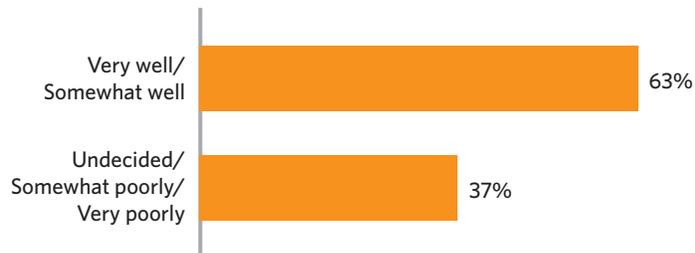




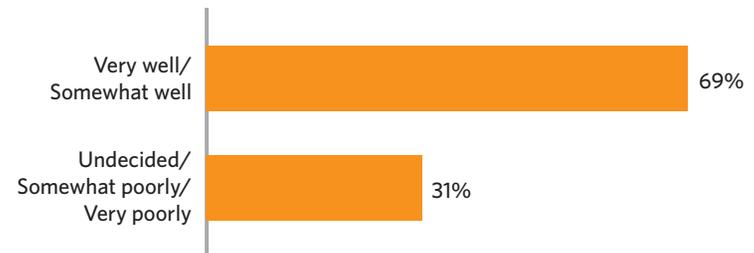
Individuals that selected 'Other' as a top of mind issue were prompted to input a text response. Text analysis revealed that the most commonly reported other issues relate to COVID-19, work, climate change, health, and travel.



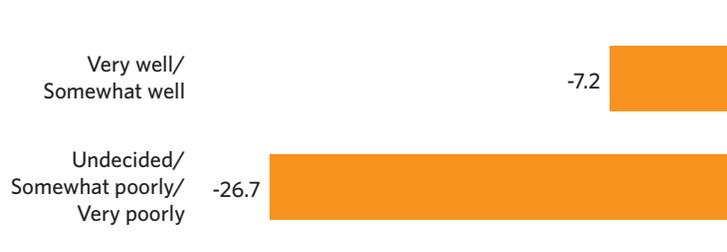
### Financial adaptation



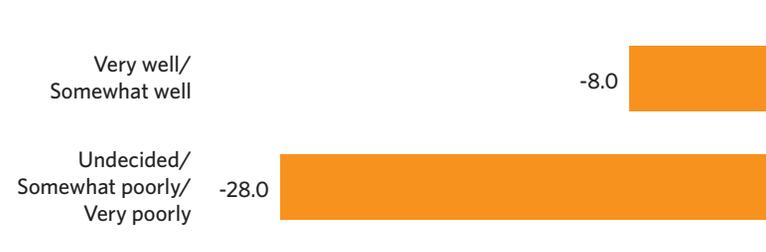
### Change to my work life/routine adaptation



### Financial adaptation: MHI scores



### Change to my work life/routine adaptation: MHI scores



## Adaptation

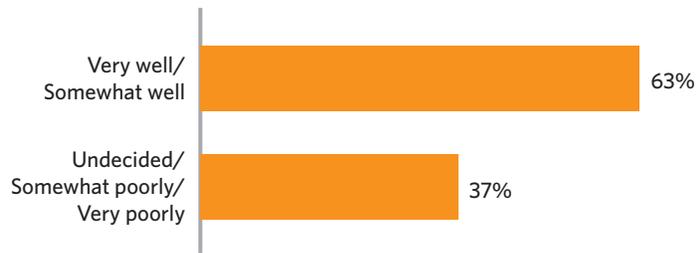
Respondents were asked to report how well they feel that they are adapting financially, to changes to their work life, and to changes to their personal life.

Sixty-three per cent of respondents feel that they are adapting well to changes in their finances, and these have mental health scores averaging -7.2, whereas thirty-seven per cent of respondents are undecided or feel that they are adapting poorly to changes in their finances, and their mental health score is -26.7.

Sixty-nine per cent of respondents feel that they are adapting well to changes in their work life or work routine, and these individuals have mental health scores averaging -8.0, whereas thirty-one per cent of respondents are undecided or feel that they are adapting poorly to changes in their work life or work routine, and their mental health score is -28.0.



### Change to my personal life/routine adaptation



### Change to my personal life/routine adaptation: MHI scores



Sixty-three per cent of respondents feel that they are adapting well to changes in their personal life or personal routine, and these individuals have mental health scores averaging -6.4, whereas thirty-seven per cent of respondents are undecided or feel that they are adapting poorly to changes in their personal life or personal routine, and their mental health score is lower than other groups (-28.1) and significantly lower than the average (-14.0).



## Implications

The current scores for the Mental Health Index™ are a clear warning regarding the mental health impact of the pandemic. The Index shows a significant decrease in the mental health in Australia. We also see a significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month and a definitive link to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the physical health risk of COVID-19 is the focus of much attention, the mental health impact requires similar attention and action. Well after the risk of infection reduces, the mental health impact may remain. This has implications for the quality of life of individuals, the stability of families, the risk of health and disability costs for organizations as well as the level of participation in the economy, which is a concern for government, given its impact on the speed of economic recovery.

### To address this situation, action is required on at least three levels:

1. **Individuals** need to attend to the impact of the pandemic on their mental health. While some strain would be expected as a result of such a massive change, feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, or feeling stuck and unable to adapt, are clear warning signs requiring support from a trusted confidant or a counselling professional.
2. **Businesses** need to attend to the risk among employees. The Mental Health Index™ measures the mental health risk and status of the working population. The current scores suggest a risk to the longer-term wellbeing of employees, which may impact business productivity, health costs and disability absence. Business would do well to increase the focus on mental health through communication that increases the awareness of mental health warning signs, campaigns to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health support, and the promotion of health plans and public resources.
3. **Governments** need to attend to the mental health of the population. A population under strain is less likely to participate fully in the economy. The current focus on health and safety needs to expand to include a significant focus on mental health. This should include clear messages regarding coping strategies and the promotion of public resources.

The Mental Health Index™ is published monthly, and measures trends over time.

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