

# The Mental Health Index™ report

Regional Comparison -  
Australia, Canada, United Kingdom  
and United States, August 2020



**LifeWorks**  
by Morneau Shepell

**MORNEAU  
SHEPELL** 

# Table of contents

Executive Summary	1
The Mental Health Index™	1
Mental Stress Change	2
Additional findings	2
Additional data and analyses	4
Overview of The Mental Health Index™	5
Methodology	5
Calculations	6
Regional comparisons - Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States	7
The Mental Health Index™ by region	7
The Mental Stress Change score by region	8
Mental Stress Change (cumulative)	9
The impact of the ongoing pandemic on mental health	10
Main emotion felt most often right now	10
Likelihood of a return to the pre-pandemic state	12
Top of mind issues	13
Adaptation	14



## Executive Summary

Heading into the month of August, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic remain front and centre across Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. Among the four geographies, the United States stands apart for its continuing high daily COVID-19 case counts across the U.S. “Sunbelt” while Australia contends with a spike in coronavirus cases in the State of Victoria leading to a state of emergency and a Stage Four lockdown. In Canada and the United Kingdom, daily case counts remain at low levels heading into August with isolated outbreaks of COVID-19.

Across all jurisdictions, decision-makers and public health officials are continuing to grapple with the economic pressures of mounting deficits, high jobless numbers and the need to get people safely back to the workplace. In each region, a broad range of government programs continue to provide economic stimulus and financial support for citizens. Getting students back to school is top-of-mind in the U.S., UK and Canada. International travel continues to be significantly restricted.

For the fifth consecutive month, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on the mental health of Australians, Canadians, Britons, and Americans. August marks a decline in mental health in each of the four regions, reversing a trend toward modest improvement since April.

### The Mental Health Index™

Data from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States shows that the lowest Mental Health Index™ scores in the four regions are in:

- Australia (-14.3), followed by
- the United Kingdom (-13.3),
- Canada (-11.2), and then
- the United States (-5.6).

For the fifth consecutive month, the lowest Mental Health Index™ scores in the four regions are in Australia and the United Kingdom

---



While some differences are evident, the Index for each region shows significant decline in mental health from the benchmark data. The greatest decline in mental health since last month is observed in Australia (-2.0 points), followed by the United Kingdom (-0.8 points), Canada (-0.8 points) and the United States (-0.5 points).

## Mental Stress Change

Comparing July 2020 to August 2020, there was a significant increase in mental stress in all regions. The increase in mental stress was the greatest in:

- Australia (60.5), followed by
- the United Kingdom (57.8),
- Canada (57.7), and then
- the United States (56.1).

The country with the greatest accumulation of mental stress is Canada (118.2), followed by Australia (113.4), the United Kingdom (109.4), and the United States (105.7).

## 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 for all regions, the most commonly reported emotions are worry, frustration and calm.

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). The majority of individuals in all countries are feeling negative emotions, with Australia having the highest proportion of respondents reporting negative emotions (59%). In all regions but Australia, respondents reporting positive emotions have an average mental health score above the pre-pandemic benchmark.

This further validates the suggestion 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.



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

Individuals were also asked how likely it is that things will return to the pre-pandemic state. Across all regions, approximately 50 per cent of respondents feel that it is unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state, with approximately 25 per cent undecided.

The mental health scores for individuals feeling that it is very unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state are the lowest across all countries, ranging from -17.6 in Australia to -8.9 in the United States. An increasing trend in mental health scores is observed from very unlikely to very likely across all countries. The highest scores are among individuals responding that it is very likely/likely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state with scores ranging from -9.0 in Australia to 1.1 in the United States.

### Top of mind issues

In all regions, the most commonly reported top of mind issue is the ongoing impact of the pandemic related to finances and the economy; approximately half of respondents selected this issue. This is followed by the ongoing impact of the pandemic not related to finances and the economy with approximately one quarter of respondents selecting this issue. The region with the highest proportion of respondents picking the upcoming US election as a top of mind issue was the United States; however, the proportion itself (15 per cent) indicates that even in the United States, the pandemic is taking precedence in people's minds.

### 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 than either work or finances.

Across all regions, approximately two-thirds of the respondents feel that they are adapting well to the financial impacts of the pandemic and these individuals have significantly higher mental health scores than those who are undecided or feel that they are handling the financial impacts poorly.

Approximately half  
of respondents across  
all regions indicated that  
their top of mind issue  
is the ongoing impact  
of the pandemic related  
to finances and the economy

---



Over two thirds of the respondents feel they are adapting well to changes in their work life and work routines and these individuals have significantly higher mental health scores over those who are undecided or feel that they are handling the changes to work life or routine poorly. This effect is consistent among all regions.

Slightly fewer than two-thirds of the respondents in all regions feel that they are adapting well to changes in their personal life and personal routines and these individuals have significantly higher mental health scores over those who are undecided or feel that they are handling the personal life impacts of the pandemic poorly.

### Additional data and analyses

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

Where there is difficulty adapting, it is more likely to be in one's personal life than either work or finances

---



# 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 action by individuals, business and government.

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

1. The overall Mental Health Index™ (MHI), which is a measure of deviation from the benchmark of mental health and risk.
2. A Mental Stress Change score (MStressChg), 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 online surveys of representative groups of 5,000 residents of the United States, 3,000 residents in Canada, 2,000 residents of the United Kingdom, and 1,000 residents in Australia. All of those surveyed are currently employed or were employed within the prior six months. 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 April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for August 2020 was collected from July 21 to August 4, 2020 for all regions.



## Calculations

To create The Mental Health Index™, the first step leverages a response scoring system that turns 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.

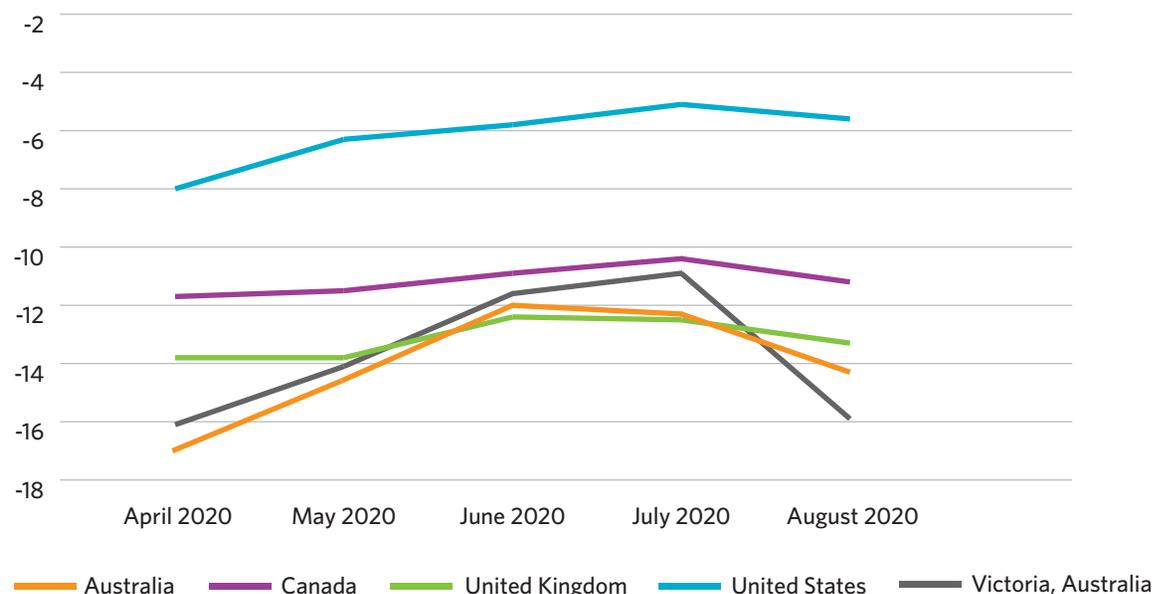
To demonstrate change, the current month's scores are then compared to the benchmark and the prior month. The benchmark is comprised of data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The deviation relative to the benchmark is the Mental Health 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 calculated as (percentage reporting less mental stress + 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 and 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.



# Regional comparisons – Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States

The Mental Health Index™ by region

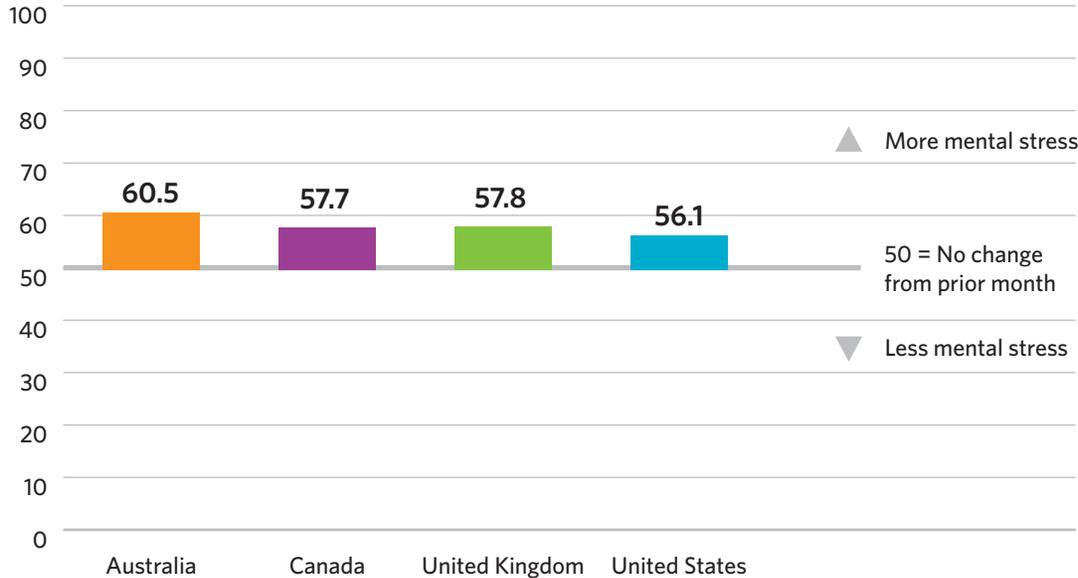


Overall, the Mental Health Index™ is lowest in Australia, followed by the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. While some differences are evident, the Index for each region shows significant decline in mental health from the benchmark data. All countries show a decline in mental health over the last month.

The greatest decline in mental health since last month is observed in Australia (-2.0 points), followed by the United Kingdom (-0.8 points), Canada (-0.8 points) and the United States (-0.5 points). The state of Victoria, Australia is shown given the extent of decline.



### The Mental Stress Change score by region



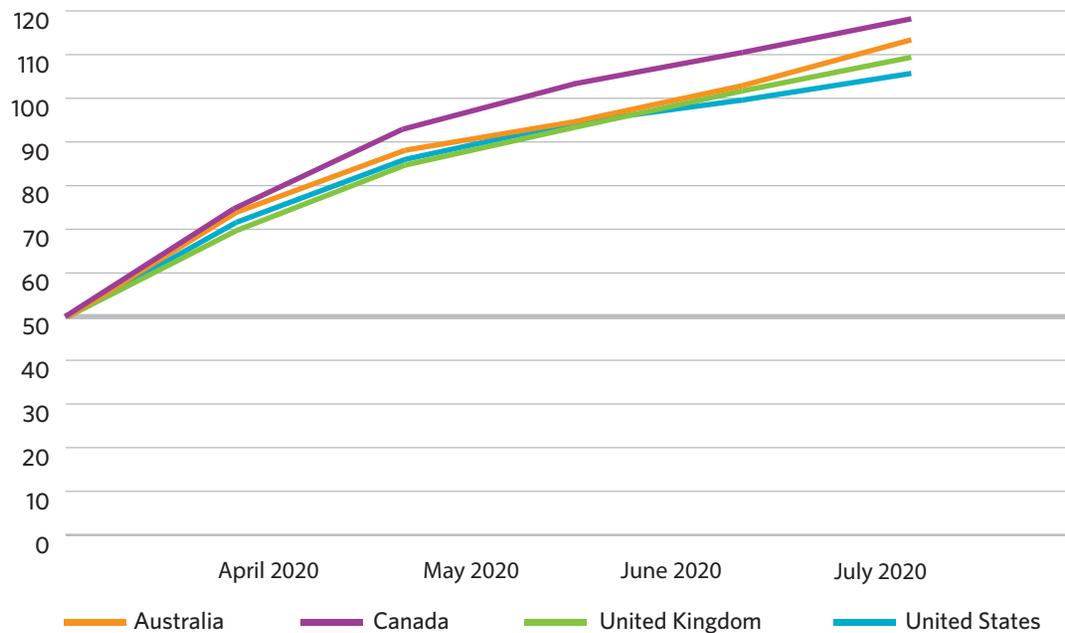
Comparing July 2020 to August 2020, there is a significant increase in mental stress in all regions. The increase is greatest in Australia, followed by the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.



## Mental Stress Change (cumulative)

The Mental Stress Change Score (MStressChg) 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 graph below tracks the increases and decreases to account for the cumulative effect on mental stress.

The country with the greatest accumulation of mental stress is Canada (118.2), followed by Australia (113.4), the United Kingdom (105.7), and the United States (105.7).

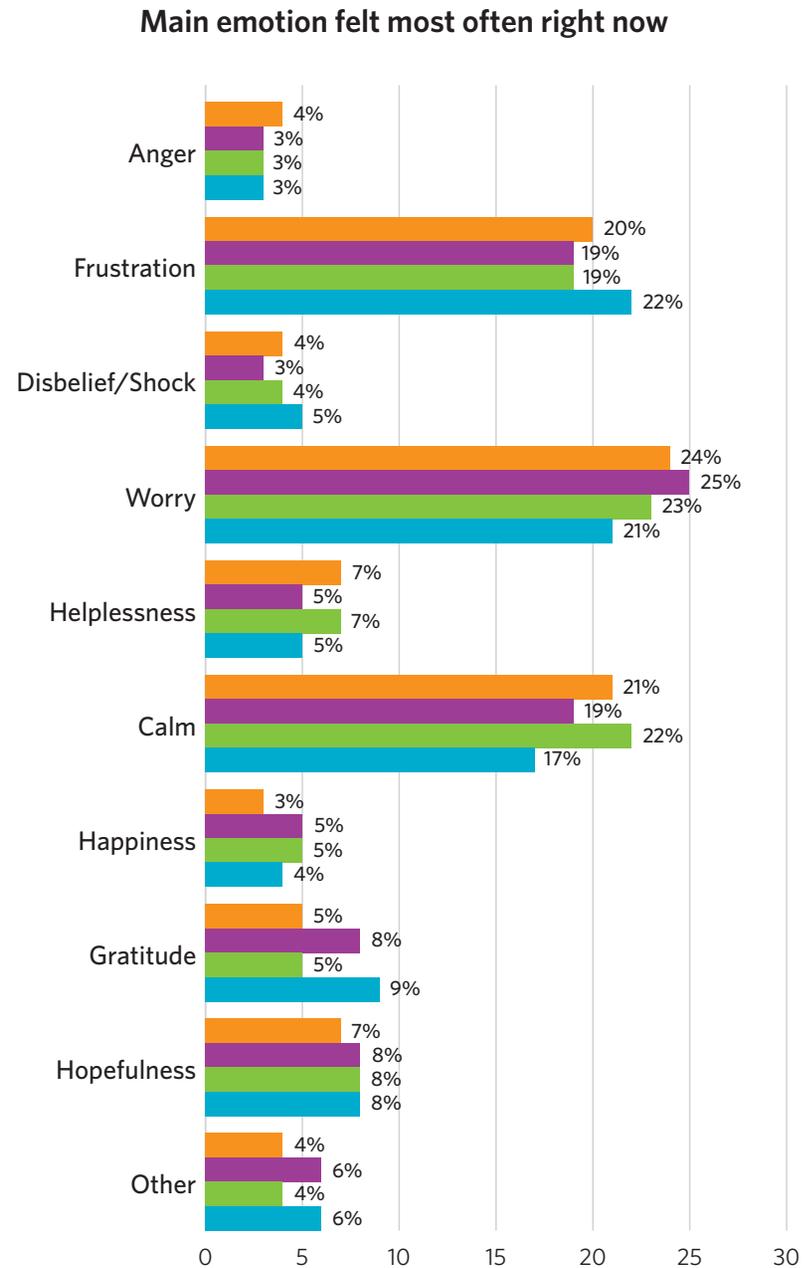




# The impact of the ongoing pandemic on mental health

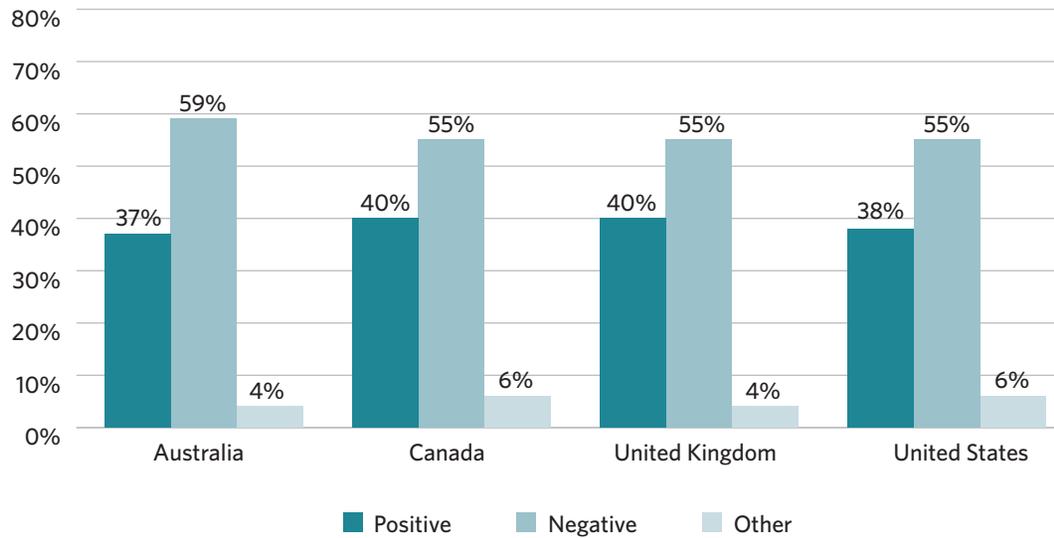
## Main emotion felt most often right now

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, frustration, and calm are the most commonly reported emotions.





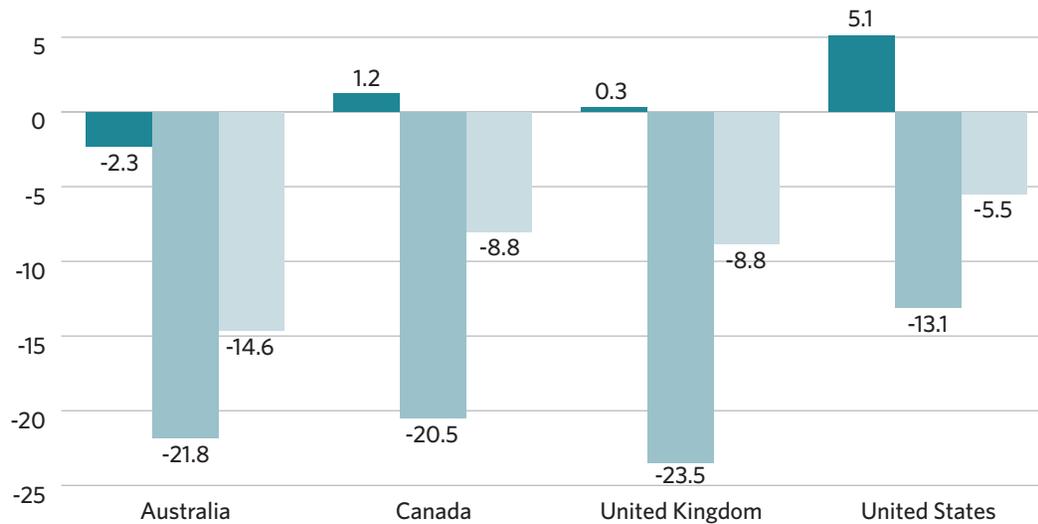
**Main emotion felt most often right now**



Each emotion is classified into positive (e.g. calm, happiness, gratitude, and hopefulness) or negative (e.g. anger, frustration, disbelief/shock, worry, and helplessness). The majority of individuals in all countries are feeling negative emotions, with Australia having the highest proportion of respondents reporting negative emotions (59%).

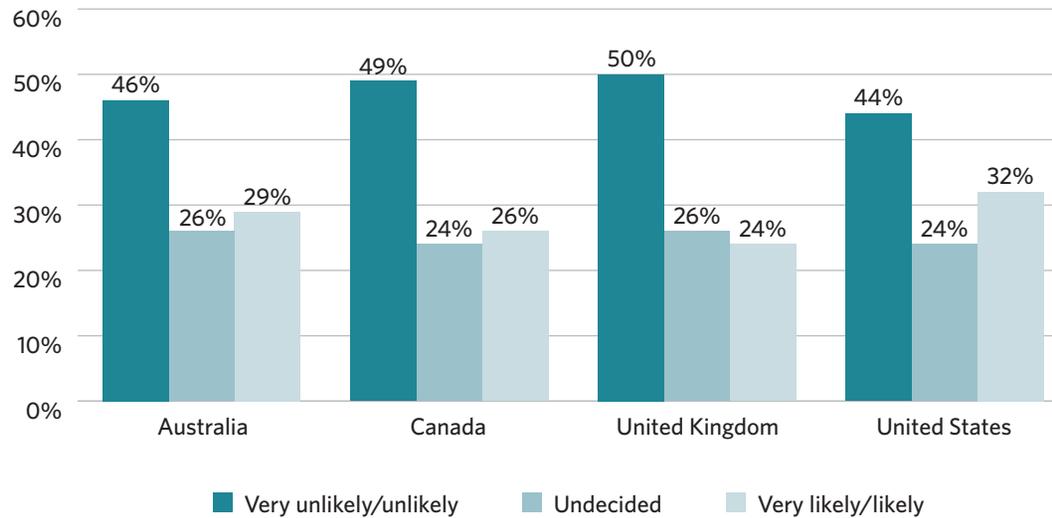
Across all regions, individuals experiencing positive emotions have significantly higher mental health scores than those reporting negative emotions. In all regions but Australia, respondents reporting positive emotions have an average mental health score above the pre-pandemic benchmark.

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

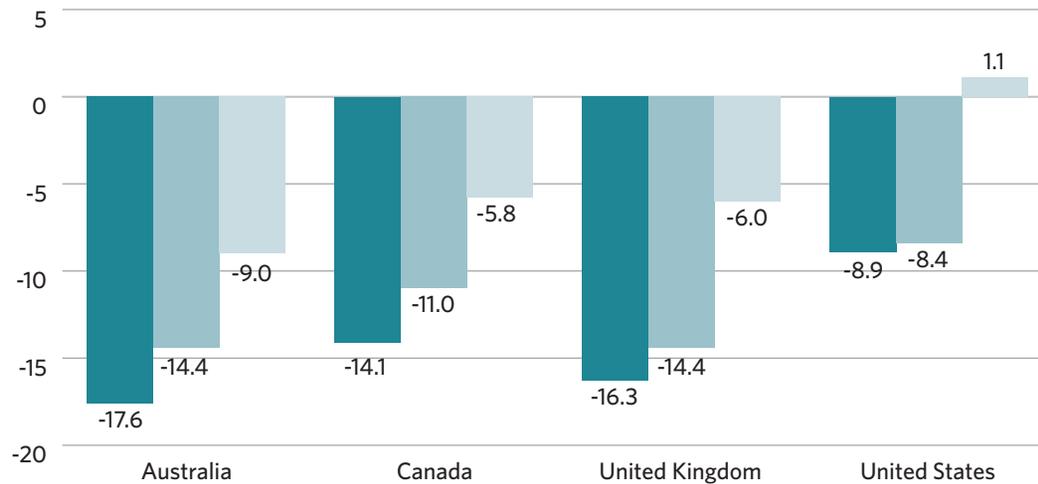




**Likelihood things will return to a pre-pandemic state**



**MHI score by likelihood things will return to a pre-pandemic state**



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

Individuals were also asked how likely it is that things will return to the pre-pandemic state. Across all regions, approximately 50 per cent of respondents feel that it is unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state, with approximately 25 per cent undecided.

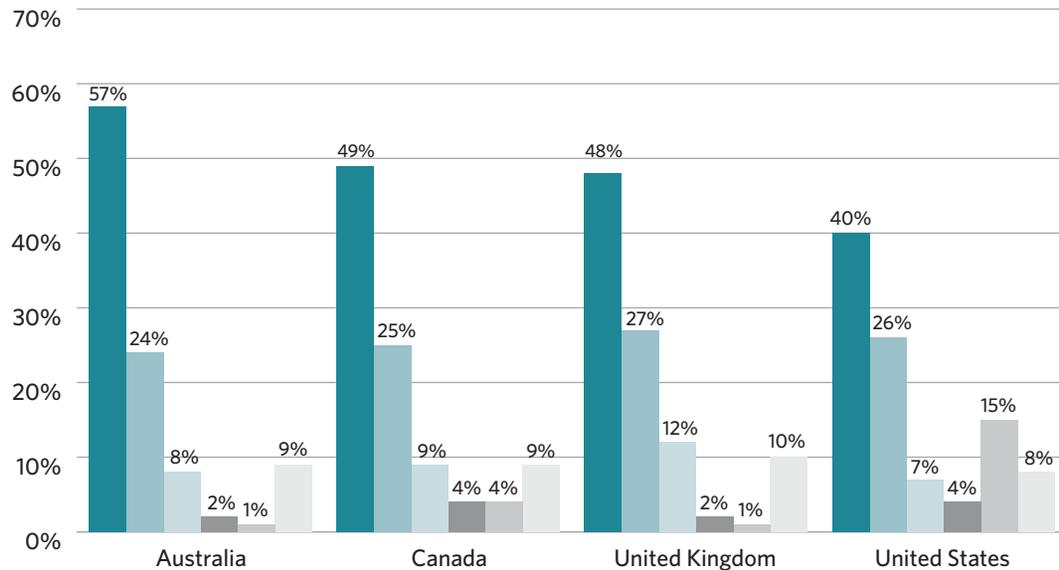
The mental health scores for individuals feeling that it is very unlikely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state are the lowest across all countries, ranging from -17.6 in Australia to -8.9 in the United States. An increasing trend in mental health scores is observed from very unlikely to very likely across all countries. The highest scores are among individuals responding that it is very likely/likely that things will return to the pre-pandemic state with scores ranging from -9.0 in Australia to 1.1 in the United States.



## Top of mind issues

In all regions, the most commonly reported top of mind issue is the ongoing impact of the pandemic related to finances and the economy; approximately half of respondents selected this issue. This is followed by the ongoing impact of the pandemic not related to finances and the economy with approximately one quarter of respondents selecting this issue. The region with the highest proportion of respondents picking the upcoming US election as a top of mind issue was the United States; however, the proportion itself (15 per cent) indicates that even in the United States, the pandemic is taking precedence in people’s minds.

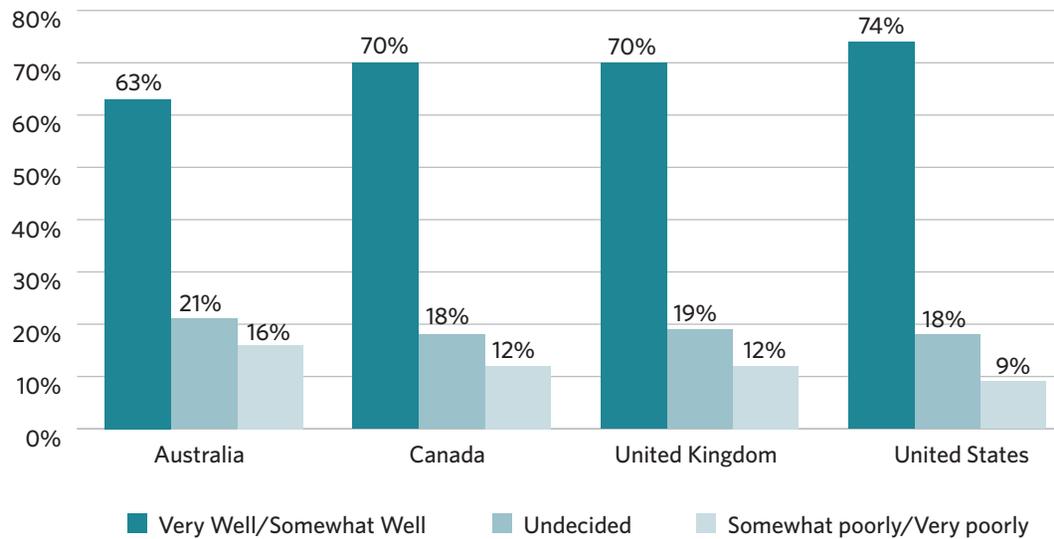
Top of mind issue



- Ongoing impact of the pandemic related to finances and the economy
- Ongoing impact of the pandemic not related to finances and the economy (e.g. education of children or self, career options, etc.)
- Change of plans for major life event (e.g. marriage, divorce, buying a home, having a baby, etc.)
- Anti-racism
- Upcoming US election
- Other



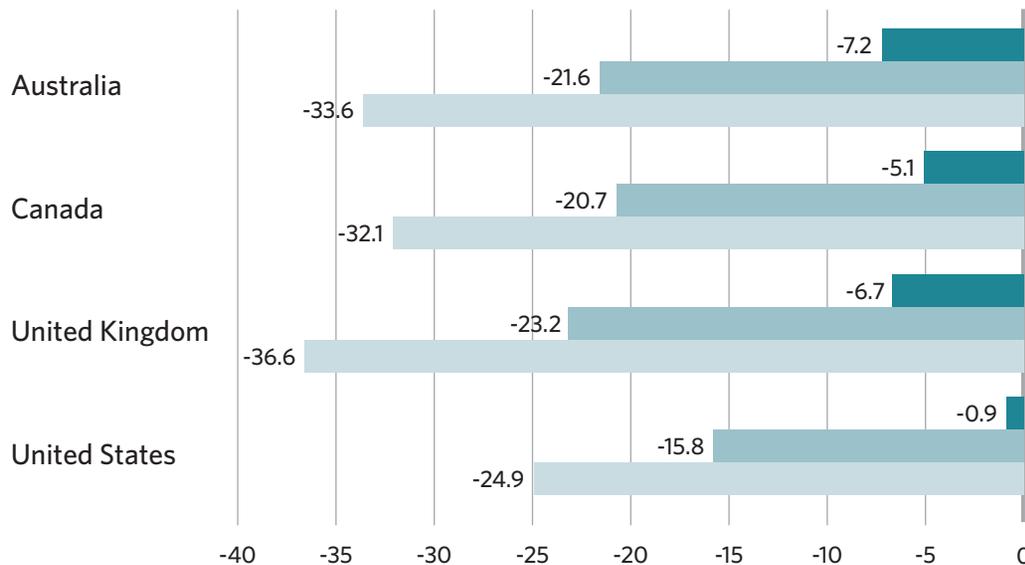
### Financial adaptation



### Adaptation

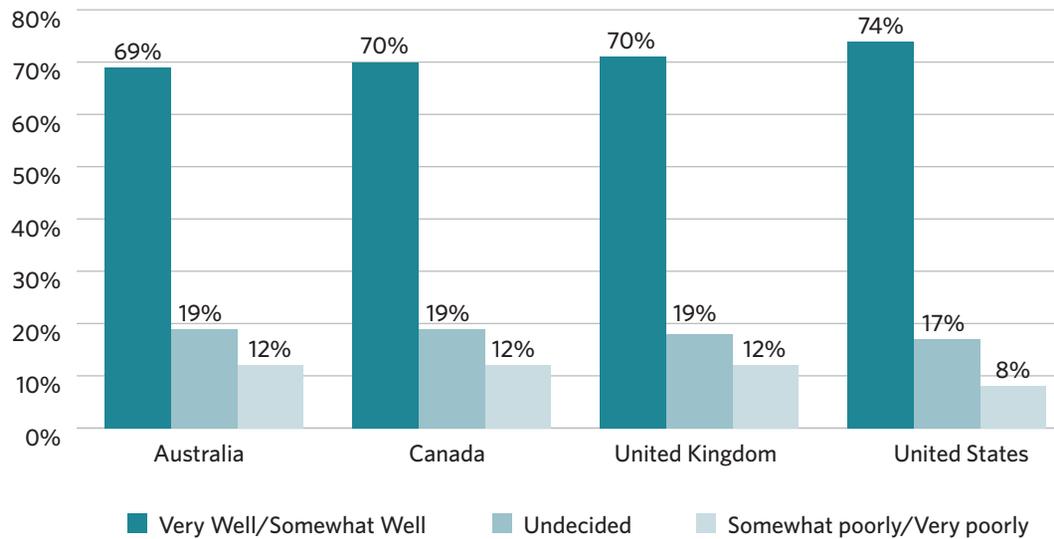
Across all regions, approximately two-thirds of the respondents feel that they are adapting well to the financial impacts of the pandemic and these individuals have significantly higher mental health scores than those who are undecided or feel that they are handling the financial impacts poorly.

### MHI score by financial adaptation



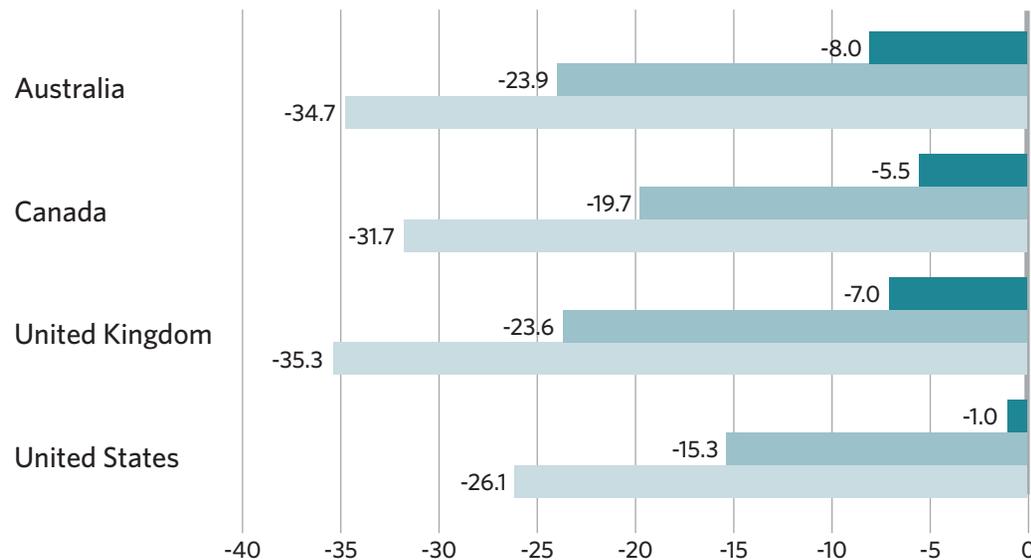


### Adaptation to changes in work life/routine



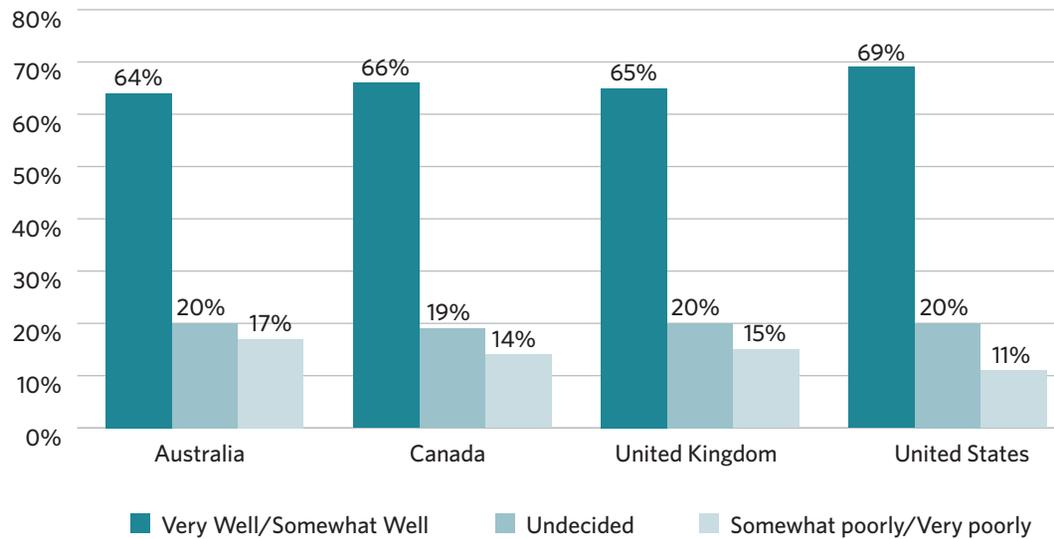
Over two thirds of the respondents feel they are adapting well to changes in their work life and work routines and these individuals have significantly higher mental health scores over those who are undecided or feel that they are handling the changes to work life or routine poorly. This effect is consistent among all regions.

### MHI score by Adaptation to changes in work life/routine



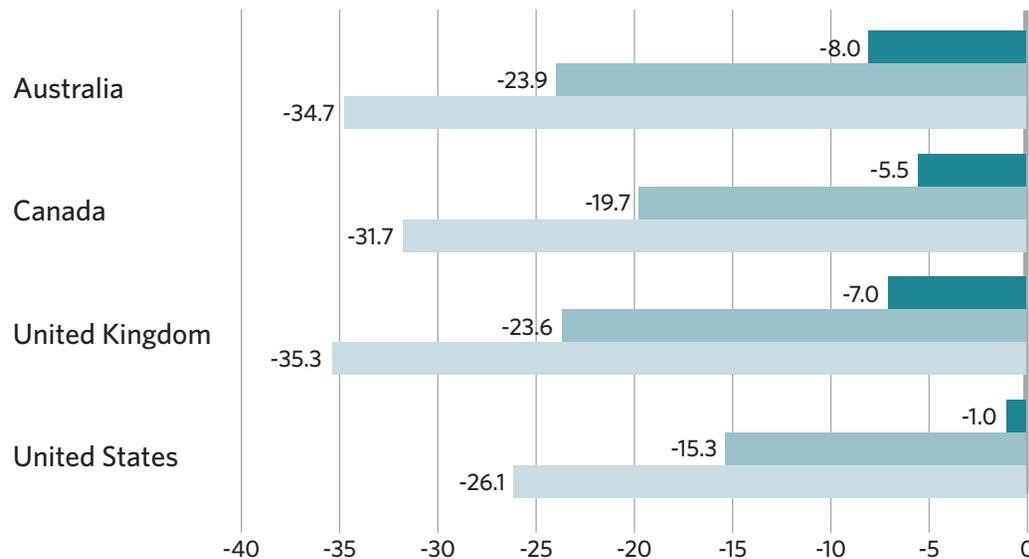


**Adaptation to changes in personal life/routine**



Slightly fewer than two-thirds of the respondents in all regions feel that they are adapting well to changes in their personal life and personal routines and these individuals have significantly higher mental health scores over those who are undecided or feel that they are handling the personal life impacts of the pandemic poorly.

**MHI score by Adaptation to changes in personal life/routine**



Morneau Shepell is a leading provider of technology-enabled HR services that deliver an integrated approach to employee wellbeing through our cloud-based platform. Our focus is providing world-class solutions to our clients to support the mental, physical, social and financial wellbeing of their people. By improving lives, we improve business. Our approach spans services in employee and family assistance, health and wellness, recognition, pension and benefits administration, retirement consulting, actuarial and investment services. Morneau Shepell employs approximately 6,000 employees who work with some 24,000 client organizations that use our services in 162 countries. Morneau Shepell inc. is a publicly traded company on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX: MSI). For more information, visit [morneaushepell.com](https://morneaushepell.com).



@Morneau\_Shepell



Morneau Shepell