

# The Mental Health Index™ report

Australia, January 2021



**LifeWorks**  
by Morneau Shepell





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## January highlights

**As Australians head into 2021, COVID-19 restrictions remain in place in most parts of the country. The ongoing impact of the pandemic continues to have a negative effect on the mental health of Australians, with January marking ten consecutive months of diminished mental health when compared to before the pandemic.**

After the initial significant decline measured in April 2020, there were increases in May and June. There was, however, a reversal of this trend with a decline in July and again in August, followed by a modest improvement in September, and further increases in October, November, and December. The mental health score in January has declined modestly from the prior month and remains concerning as it indicates that **the working population is currently as distressed as the most distressed three per cent of working Australians, prior to 2020.**

The proportion of individuals reporting more stress than the prior month (19 per cent) is nearly equal to the prior month, while the proportion of individuals reporting less mental stress is only 10 per cent. The majority (70 per cent) indicate the same level of stress when compared to the prior month, however, given the escalation in stress each month since the pandemic, this reflects an elevated level of cumulative stress for this group as well.

Regional mental health trends are similar across Australia. From April to June, regional mental health scores showed improvement; however, several regions showed declines from July to August. The trend reversed, with regions generally improving through December. In January, downward movement is observed in Victoria and Queensland while other regions have remained consistent with December scores.

**Full-time students have the lowest mental health score (-23.0)** when compared to individuals across all industry sectors. Further, **students have the most significant increase in mental stress (64.0).**

Eight per cent of respondents have steady employment and supplement their income with “gigs;” this group has a mental health score (-19.9) approaching full-time gig workers (-21.5).

Previous findings in June and August 2020 indicate that the most commonly reported emotions that individuals were experiencing were worry, calm and frustration. Nearly one year into the pandemic, the most commonly reported emotions continue to be calm (27 per cent), worry

A positive score on the Mental Health Index™ indicates better mental health in the overall working population, compared to the benchmark period of 2017 to 2019. A higher positive score reflects greater improvement. A negative Mental Health Index™ score indicates a decline in mental health compared to the benchmark period. The more negative the score, the greater the decline. A score of zero indicates mental health that is the same as it was in the benchmark period.

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(18 per cent), and frustration (14 per cent) and their proportions are largely the same as observed in prior months. **Women are fifty per cent more likely to report worry as their primary emotion and fifty per cent less likely to report calm when compared to men.**

As Australians continue to manage their daily lives in a time of global pandemic, thoughts of temporary adjustments are moving to what the “new normal” could look like. Many Australians are rethinking their priorities amid the ongoing impact of the pandemic on work, finances, social relationships, physical and mental health. The most commonly reported areas respondents would like to focus on are family (56 per cent), financial security (48 per cent), having fun/enjoying life (42 per cent), and physical health (41 per cent). **Over one-third of individuals report wanting to focus on their mental health. Individuals between the ages of 20 and 29 are nearly twice as likely to report wanting to focus on their mental health when compared to those over the age of 60.**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has touched Australians in different ways – restricted social lives, the shift to virtual work, illness, or death of loved ones, etc. At the same time, some Australians are reporting inspired changes or unseen benefits because of the pandemic. **The most commonly reported area of positive impact is personal relationships (15 per cent), followed by financial security (12 per cent), and physical health (9 per cent).** Respondents reporting a positive change in their physical health have the highest mental health score (-6.1).

As expected, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult on most Australians. The most commonly reported area of negative change is financial security (18 per cent), followed by social life (14 per cent), and mental health (12 per cent). The lowest mental health score is observed among individuals reporting that the most significant negative impact is to their mental health (-24.6), followed by those reporting a negative change to their personal relationships (-19.5), and those reporting a negative impact on their education (-18.3). **Individuals under the age of 60 are more than twice as likely to report the most significant negative impact on mental health when compared to individuals over 60 years old.**

As Australians focus on managing through the pandemic, employment remains a critical stabilizer. **Finances and isolation continue to be the strongest drivers of mental health** and stable employment is central to offsetting the risk of poor mental health. Over half (52 per cent) of respondents have no change in their hours or salary, whereas eighteen per cent report



working fewer hours, and ten per cent report reduced pay/salary. **Individuals reporting reduced pay/salary during the pandemic have a mental health score ten points below the national average;** those working fewer hours have a mental health score five points below the average.

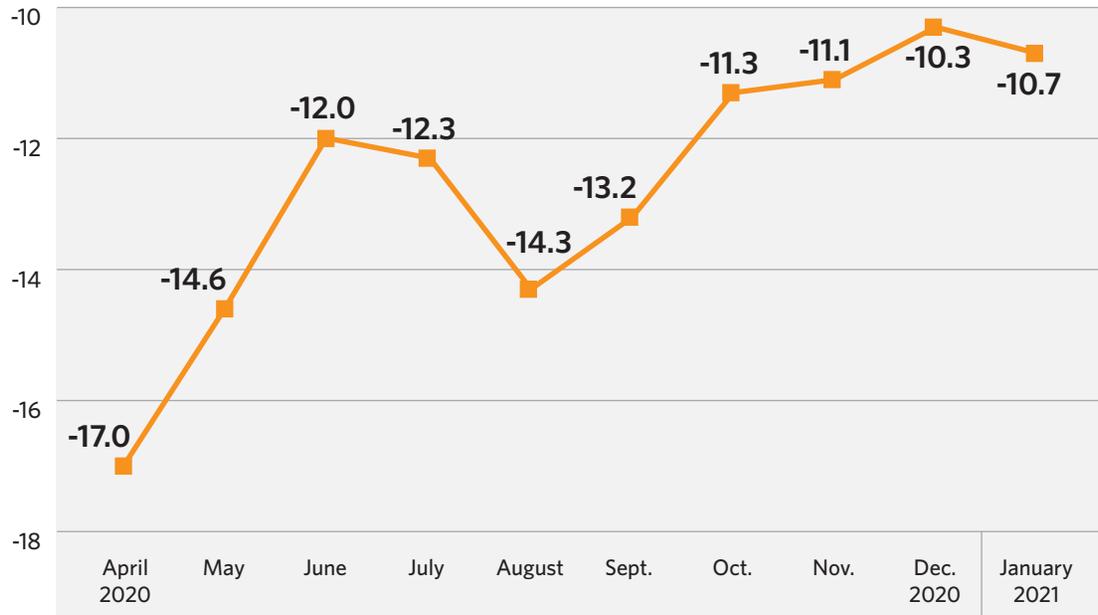
Previous findings (June 2020) indicate that one quarter of respondents are likely to return to their previous spending habits. Over six months later, nearly one-third (32 per cent) of individuals report that they will go back to prior spending habits. Among those who will not return to their prior spending habits, the most commonly reported reasons are worry about job/income security (27 per cent) and change in income (18 per cent).



# The Mental Health Index™

The Mental Health Index™ (MHI) is a measure of deviation from the benchmark<sup>1</sup> of mental health and risk. **The overall Mental Health Index™ for January 2021 is -11 points.** An 11-point decrease from the pre-COVID-19 benchmark reflects a population whose mental health is similar to the most distressed three per cent of the benchmark population.

Current month January 2021:	<b>-11</b>	December 2020: -10
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January marks the tenth consecutive month where the Mental Health Index™ reflects strained mental health in the Australian population

<sup>1</sup> The benchmark reflects data collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019.



## Mental Health Index™ sub-scores

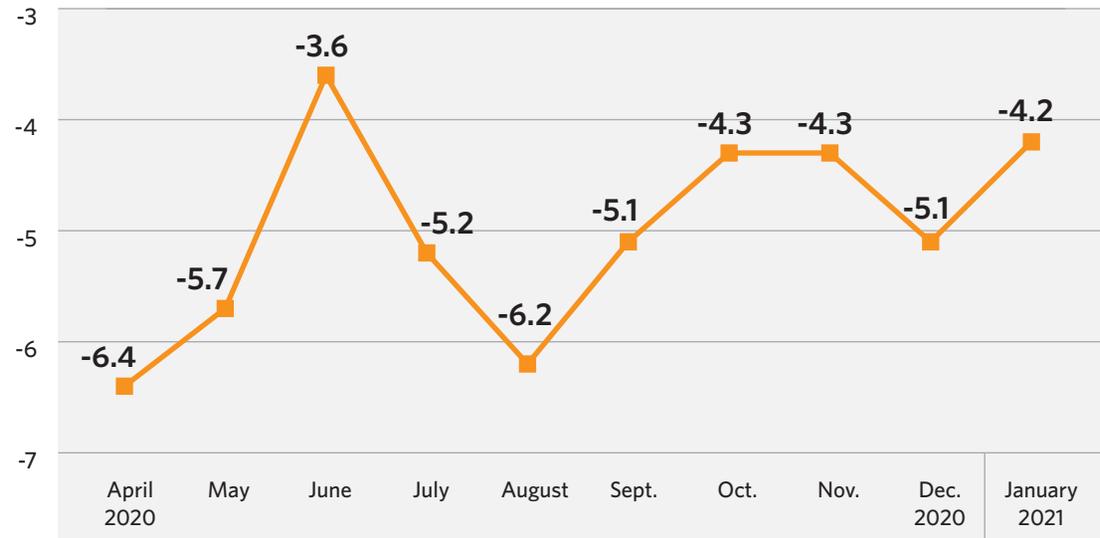
The lowest Mental Health Index™ sub-score is for the risk measure of isolation (-11.4), followed by work productivity (-11.0), anxiety (-10.9), depression (-10.9), optimism (-10.9), and general psychological health (-4.2). The risk measure with the best mental health score, and the only measure above benchmark, is financial risk (1.1).

MHI sub-scores <sup>2</sup>	January 2021	December 2020
Isolation	-11.4	-10.4
Work productivity	-11.0	-11.2
Depression	-10.9	-10.9
Anxiety	-10.9	-10.4
Optimism	-10.9	-10.6
Psychological health	-4.2	-5.1
Financial risk	1.1	3.0

<sup>2</sup> The demographic breakdown of sub-scores are available upon request.



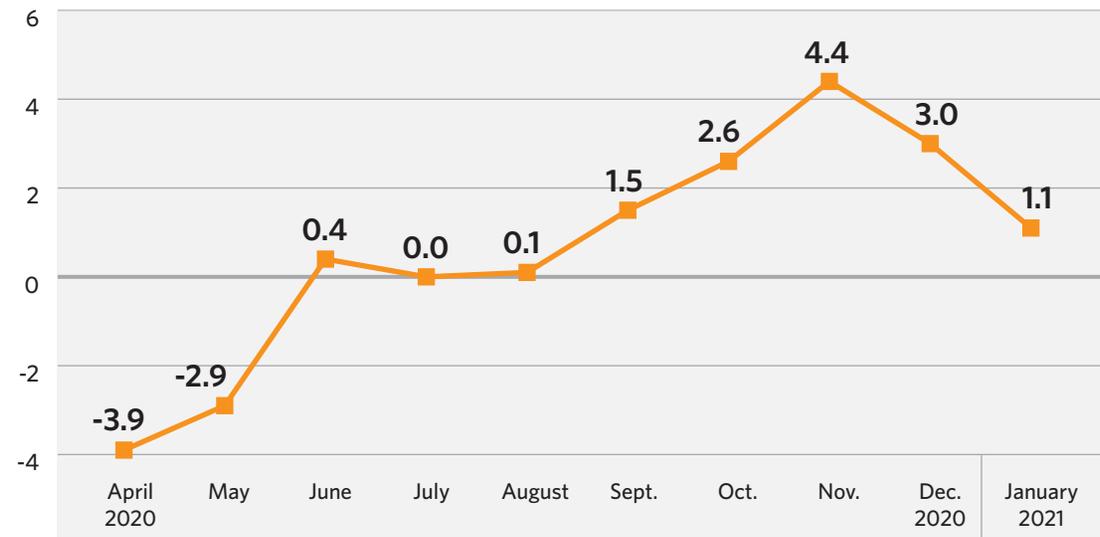
### General psychological health



### General psychological health

From April to June, general psychological health increased from -6.4 to its peak (-3.6). A sharp reversal in July and August brought the score down to near its lowest point in August. From September to November, improvements were observed; however, the general psychological health score fell again in December to a score of -5.1. In January, the general psychological health score is nearly equal to its October and November score of -4.3.

### Financial Risk



### Financial risk

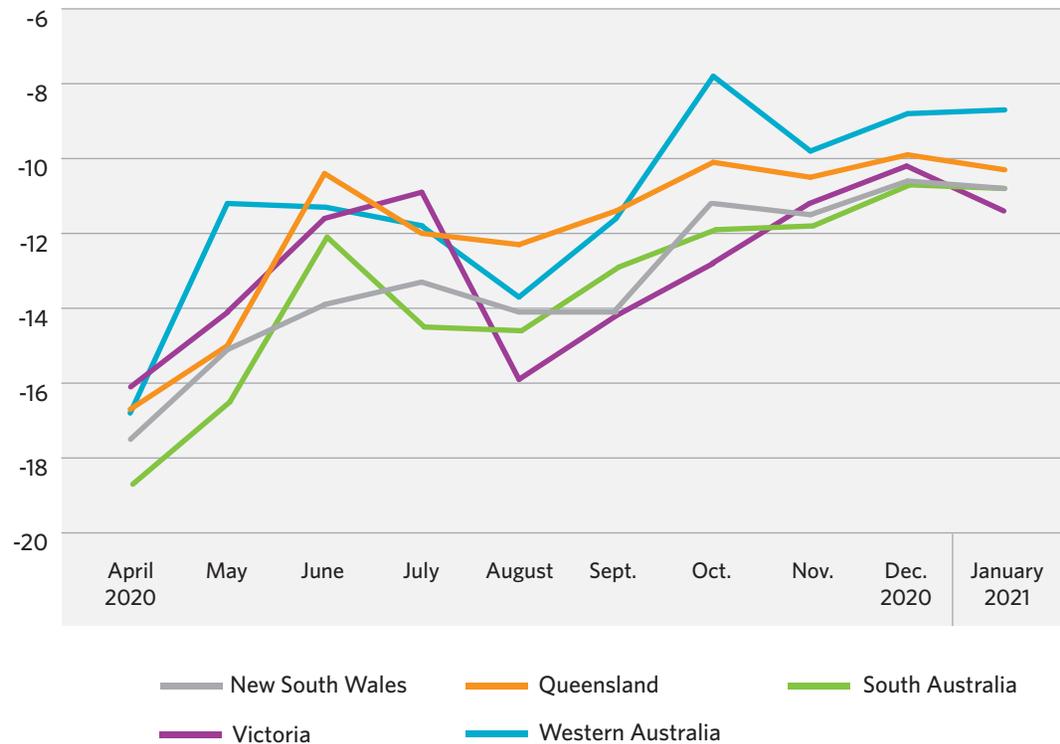
The financial risk score of Australians remains the strongest sub-scale since the inception of the Mental Health Index™ in April 2020. In April 2020, the financial risk score was at its lowest point (-3.9), however, the score had increased steadily over eight months through November to its peak of 4.4. In December, the financial risk score declined 1.4 points and has fallen a further 1.9 points in January to 1.1.



# The Mental Health Index™ (regional)

Regional mental health trends are similar across Australia. From April to June, regional mental health scores showed improvement; however, several regions showed declines from July to August. The trend reversed, with regions generally improving through December. In January, downward movement is observed in Victoria and Queensland while other regions have remained consistent with December scores.

Australia state Mental Health Index™ scores





## Demographics

- For ten consecutive months, females (-12.5) have a lower mental health score than males (-7.9); we have also observed that mental health scores improve with age.
- The variance in the mental health score between those with and without children has been observed since April, and results in January continue this trend with a lower score for those with at least one child (-12.7) when compared to those without children (-9.6).

## Employment

- Overall, seven per cent of respondents are unemployed. While most individuals remain employed, eighteen per cent report reduced hours or reduced salary since April 2020.
- Individuals reporting reduced salary when compared to the prior month (-21.4) have the lowest mental health score, followed by those who report fewer hours when compared to the prior month (-19.5), and those not currently employed (-14.9).
- Managers have higher mental health scores (-9.3) when compared to non-managers (-10.5).
- Eighteen per cent of respondents participate in the gig economy; the mental health scores of individuals working full-time in the gig economy (-21.5), and those working part-time hours in the gig economy (-13.3) are lower than individuals who do not participate in the gig economy (-8.4).
- Individuals working for organizations with 5,000-10,000 employees have the highest mental health score (-6.1).
- Respondents who report working for companies with 501-1,000 employees have the lowest mental health score (-15.0), followed by self-employed/sole proprietors (-12.4).

## Emergency savings

- Individuals without emergency savings continue to experience a lower score in mental health (-23.8) than the overall group. Those reporting having an emergency fund have a mental health score of -5.0.



Employment status	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Employed</b> (no change in hours/salary)	<b>-8.0</b>	<b>-6.7</b>
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	-19.5	-19.6
<b>Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)</b>	<b>-21.4</b>	-17.4
Not currently employed	-14.9	<b>-23.8</b>

Age group	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Age 20-29</b>	<b>-17.7</b>	<b>-18.6</b>
Age 30-39	-13.6	-14.2
Age 40-49	-9.6	-8.9
Age 50-59	-7.7	-8.3
<b>Age 60-69</b>	<b>-3.1</b>	<b>-1.7</b>

Number of children	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
No children in household	-9.6	-9.9
<b>1 child</b>	<b>-12.7</b>	-10.6
2 children	-12.5	<b>-11.8</b>
<b>3 children or more</b>	<b>-8.5</b>	<b>-8.8</b>

Region	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
New South Wales	-10.5	-10.6
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>-11.4</b>	-10.2
Queensland	-10.3	-9.9
South Australia	-10.8	<b>-10.7</b>
<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>-8.7</b>	<b>-8.8</b>

Gender	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Male</b>	<b>-7.9</b>	<b>-8.0</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>-12.5</b>	<b>-12.1</b>

Income	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Household Income \$30K/annum</b>	<b>-25.1</b>	<b>-27.6</b>
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	-14.9	-13.5
\$60K to <\$100K	-11.5	-12.2
\$100K to <\$150K	-7.3	-7.6
<b>\$150K and over</b>	<b>-3.5</b>	<b>-1.3</b>

Employer size	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
Self-employed/sole proprietor	-12.4	-10.7
2-50 employees	-10.3	-9.2
51-100 employees	-11.6	-12.8
101-500 employees	-8.2	-10.9
<b>501-1,000 employees</b>	<b>-15.0</b>	<b>-13.3</b>
1,001-5,000 employees	-9.1	-5.4
<b>5,001-10,000 employees</b>	<b>-6.1</b>	<b>-1.7</b>
More than 10,000 employees	-8.9	-7.8

Manager	Jan. 2021
<b>Manager</b>	<b>-9.3</b>
<b>Non-manager</b>	<b>-10.5</b>

Gig economy	Jan. 2021
<b>Not part of the gig economy</b>	<b>-8.4</b>
Supplementing income from steady job	-19.9
<b>Full-time freelancer</b>	<b>-21.5</b>
Part-time freelancer	-13.3

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)

Full-time students have the lowest mental health score (-23.0), followed by individuals employed in Food Services and Other services (except Public Administration) (-16.5).

The highest mental health scores this month are observed among those employed in Finance and Insurance (-6.9), Manufacturing (-7.6), and Public Administration (-7.7) industries.

Individuals employed in Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Other, and Manufacturing have seen the greatest improvement in mental health since last month.

**Improvements from the prior month are shown in the table below:**

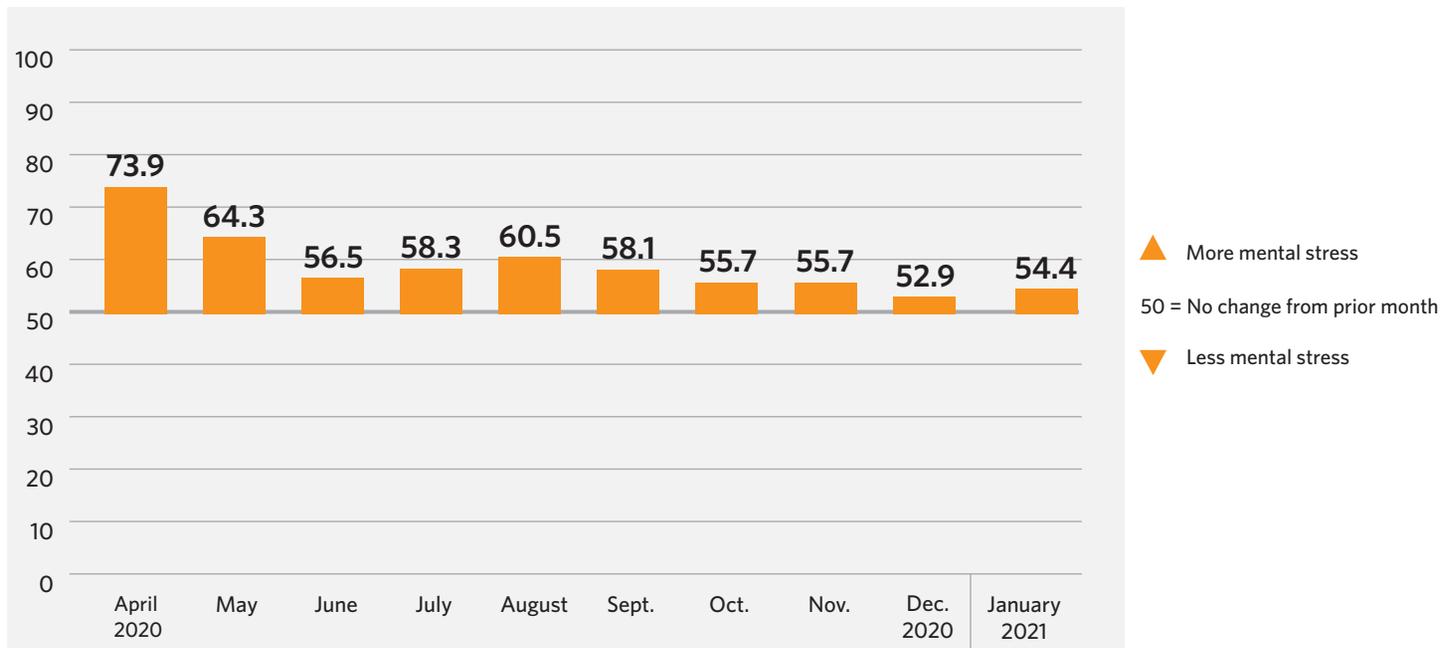
Industry	January 2021	December 2020	Improvement
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	-10.4	-14.5	4.1
Other	-8.0	-10.8	2.8
Manufacturing	-7.6	-8.9	1.4
Finance and Insurance	-6.9	-8.2	1.2
Food Services	-16.9	-18.1	1.2
Educational Services	-12.2	-12.8	0.6
Construction	-9.9	-10.4	0.5
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	-9.7	-10.0	0.3
Health Care and Social Assistance	-9.2	-8.5	-0.7
Public Administration	-7.7	-6.1	-1.5
Retail Trade	-13.9	-11.7	-2.2
Transportation and Warehousing	-12.6	-9.7	-2.9
Other services (except Public Administration)	-16.5	-12.4	-4.2
Administrative and Support services	-12.1	-7.9	-4.2
Wholesale Trade	-11.2	-5.8	-5.4
I am a student	-23.0	n/a	n/a



# The Mental Stress Change score

The Mental Stress Change Score (MStressChg) is a measure of the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month. **The Mental Stress Change score for January 2021 is 54.4.** This reflects a net increase in mental stress compared to the prior month. The steepness of the increase had been declining, month-over-month through September, then increased in October, declined moderately in November, and increased in December. The score in January remains nearly unchanged from the prior month. The current score indicates that 19 per cent of the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with 10 per cent experiencing less. A continued increase in mental stress over the last ten months indicates a significant accumulation of strain in the population.

Current month January 2021:	<b>54.4</b>	December 2020: 52.9
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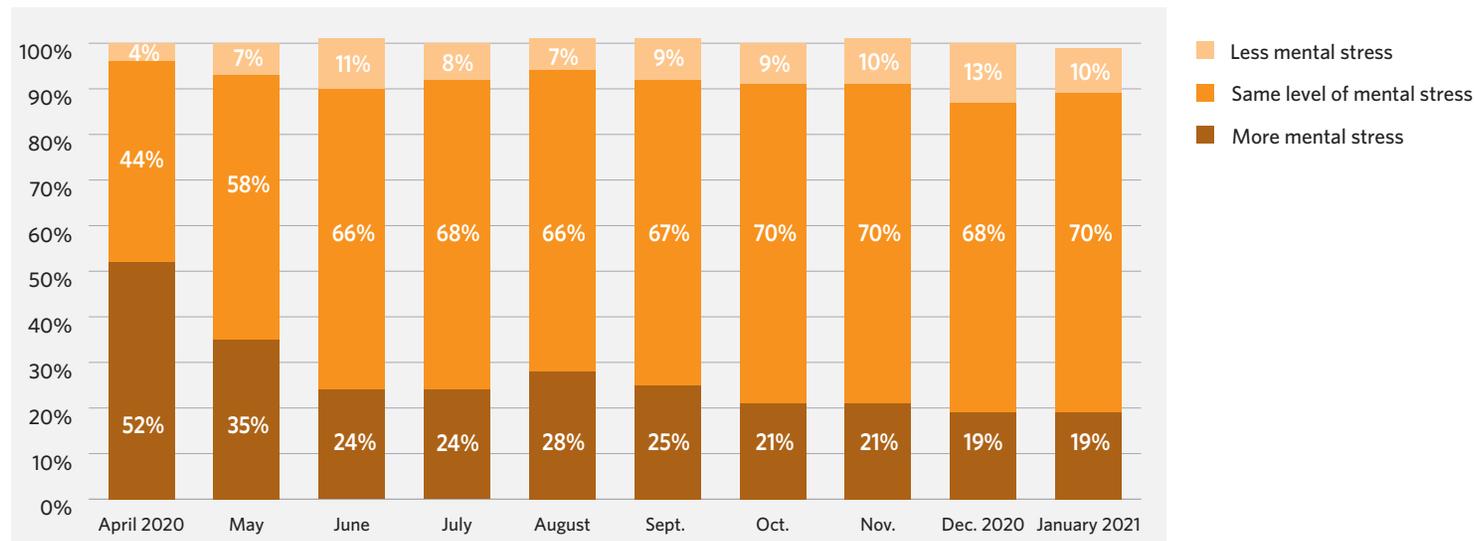
# Mental Stress Change (percentages)

Mental Stress Change tracks an individual’s stress changes each month. The percentages of those experiencing more stress, the same level of stress, and less stress for each month of the survey are shown in the graph below.

Over the last ten months, the percentage of those experiencing more mental stress than the previous month has steadily decreased; however, the data shows that those experiencing less mental stress are insufficient to lower the overall Mental Stress Change score to below 50 (the level at which stress is lower than the previous month). As the proportion of individuals reporting the same level of stress or more stress than the previous month continues to significantly outweigh the proportion reporting less mental stress, the population will continue to feel the effects of significantly increased stress and will not be able to reach a more sustainable and health level of stress.

In April, 52 per cent of individuals reported an increase in mental stress. While those reporting increased month-over-month mental stress has decreased to 19 per cent in January 2021, 70 per cent of respondents report the same level of mental stress and only 10 report a decrease in mental stress.

**Mental Stress Change by Month**





## Demographics

- As was reported in prior months, and as evidenced again in January, younger respondents are experiencing a greater increase in mental stress when compared to older respondents.
- Since April 2020, females have had larger increases in mental stress when compared with males.

## Geography

- Considering geography, the greatest increase in stress month-over-month is for respondents living in Queensland (57.6), followed by New South Wales (54.3), South Australia (53.6), and Victoria (53.6). Respondents living in Western Australia (51.8), where the increase in mental stress was less, still have a significant increase.

## Employment

- The greatest increase in mental stress is seen in employed people with reduced hours (61.6), followed by unemployed people (56.1), when compared to employed people with reduced salary (53.8) and employed people with no change to salary or hours (53.0).
- The greatest increase in mental stress is observed among managers (55.9) while non-managers have a more modest increase in mental stress (53.2).



Employment status	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Employed</b> (no change in hours/salary)	<b>53.0</b>	<b>51.3</b>
<b>Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)</b>	<b>61.6</b>	57.1
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	53.8	56.3
Not currently employed	56.1	<b>59.0</b>

Age group	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
Age 20-29	55.7	<b>60.3</b>
Age 30-39	55.5	52.0
<b>Age 40-49</b>	<b>56.4</b>	53.7
Age 50-59	53.6	52.2
<b>Age 60-69</b>	<b>48.3</b>	<b>47.0</b>

Number of children	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>No children in household</b>	<b>53.0</b>	52.7
<b>1 child</b>	<b>58.2</b>	52.1
2 children	53.6	<b>55.3</b>
3 children or more	57.0	<b>51.2</b>

Region	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
New South Wales	54.3	51.8
Victoria	53.6	52.8
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>51.3</b>
South Australia	53.6	<b>57.3</b>
<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>51.8</b>	53.7

Gender	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Male</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>51.6</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>54.0</b>

Income	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
<b>Household Income \$30K/annum</b>	<b>60.9</b>	<b>54.8</b>
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	54.9	53.9
\$60K to <\$100K	53.8	53.4
\$100K to <\$150K	54.1	52.0
<b>\$150K and over</b>	<b>51.8</b>	<b>51.2</b>

Employer size	Jan. 2021	Dec. 2020
Self-employed/sole proprietor	53.1	53.2
2-50 employees	54.9	51.5
51-100 employees	53.1	52.3
101-500 employees	52.6	53.2
<b>501-1,000 employees</b>	<b>57.1</b>	53.7
<b>1,001-5,000 employees</b>	<b>51.6</b>	51.2
5,001-10,000 employees	55.6	<b>51.0</b>
More than 10,000 employees	53.6	<b>55.3</b>

Manager	Jan. 2021
<b>Manager</b>	<b>55.9</b>
<b>Non-manager</b>	<b>53.2</b>

Gig economy	Jan. 2021
Not part of the gig economy	53.0
Supplementing income from steady job	61.0
<b>Full-time freelancer</b>	<b>68.1</b>
<b>Part-time freelancer</b>	<b>47.1</b>

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)

Mental Stress Change scores for Other services (except Public Administration), Administrative and Support services, and Manufacturing industries are less steep when compared to the prior month.

Full-time students have the most significant increase in mental stress (64.0), followed by individuals employed in Wholesale Trade, and those employed in Food Services (57.7).

**Mental Stress changes from the last two months are shown in the table below:**

Industry	January 2021	December 2020
Other services (except Public Administration)	48.3	52.6
Administrative and Support services	51.9	56.5
Manufacturing	52.0	48.5
Health Care and Social Assistance	52.1	53.0
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	52.4	58.3
Finance and Insurance	53.5	51.1
Construction	53.6	44.7
Public Administration	53.6	56.7
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	53.7	55.8
Retail Trade	54.2	50.0
Other	55.1	49.4
Transportation and Warehousing	55.6	56.1
Educational Services	55.7	56.1
Food Services	57.7	56.9
Wholesale Trade	63.2	51.2
I am a student	64.0	n/a



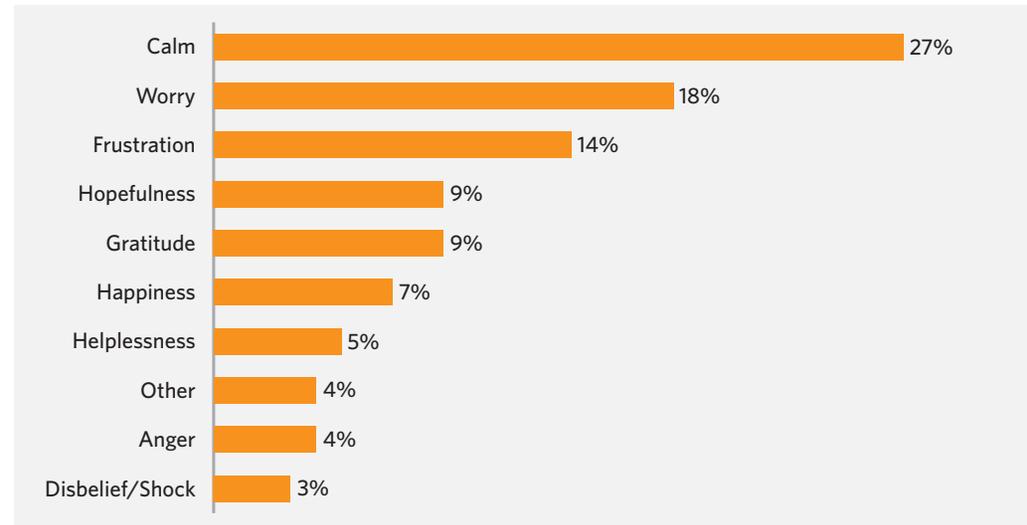
# Spotlight

## Emotional state

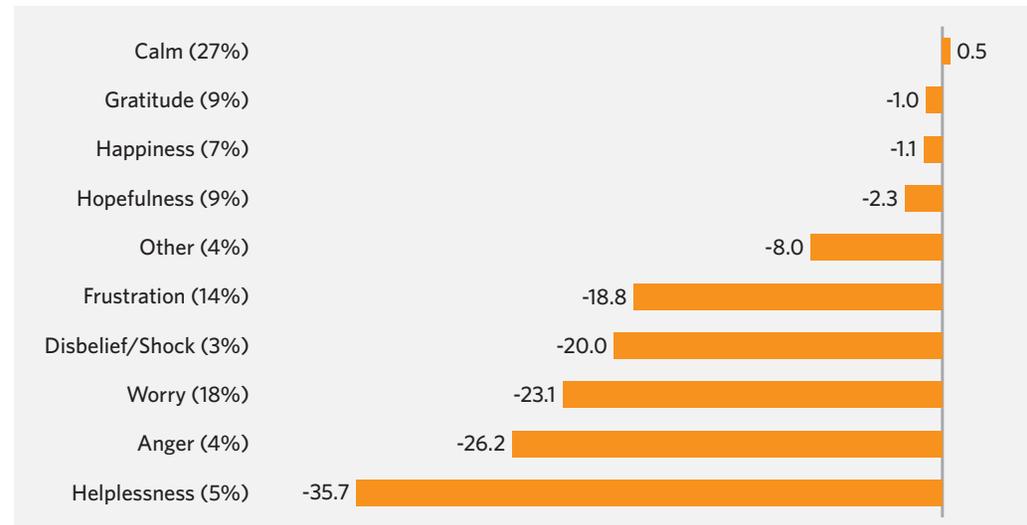
Previous findings in June and August 2020 indicate that the most commonly reported emotions that individuals were experiencing were worry, calm and frustration. Nearly one year into the pandemic, the most commonly reported emotions continue to be calm (27 per cent), worry (18 per cent), and frustration (14 per cent) and their proportions are largely the same as observed in prior months.

- Consistent with the June and August findings, individuals reporting positive emotions (gratitude, happiness, calm, and hopefulness) have significantly higher mental health scores when compared to individuals reporting negative emotions (frustration, worry, disbelief/shock, anger, and helplessness).
- Individuals reporting fewer hours at work or reduced salary are nearly twice as likely to report feeling worry when compared to those who are fully employed; those who are fully employed are twice as likely to report feeling calm when compared to individuals working fewer hours or with reduced salary.

### Main emotion felt most often right now



### MHI score by the main emotion felt most often right now





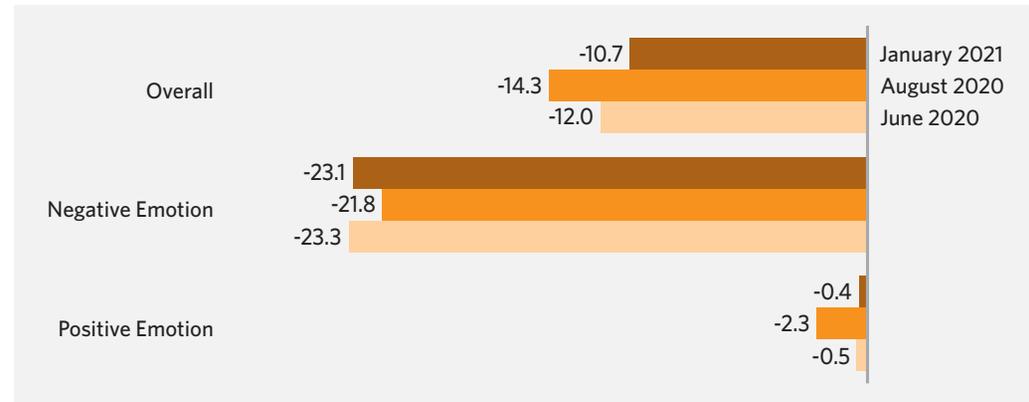
- Females are twice as likely to report worry as their primary emotion and fifty per cent less likely to report calm when compared to males.

### Changing priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic

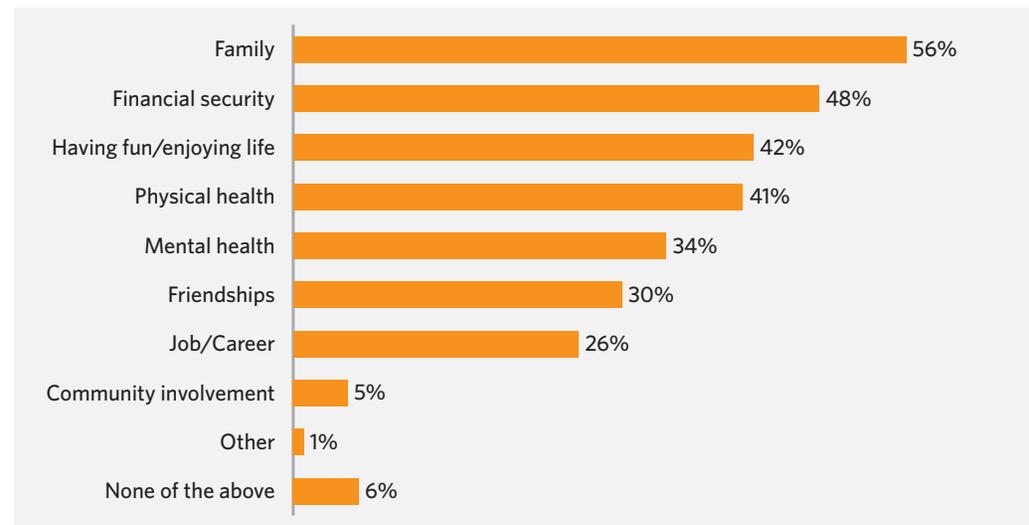
As Australians continue to manage their daily lives in a time of global pandemic, thoughts of temporary adjustments are moving to what the “new normal” could look like. Many Australians are rethinking their priorities amid the ongoing impact of the pandemic on work, finances, social relationships, physical and mental health. Respondents were asked to select three areas they would like to focus on when compared to before the pandemic.

- The most commonly reported areas respondents would like to focus on are family (56 per cent), financial security (48 per cent), having fun/enjoying life (42 per cent), and physical health (41 per cent).
- Over one-third (34 per cent) of individuals report wanting to focus on their mental health; this group has the lowest mental health score (-18.7).
- Individuals between the ages of 20 and 29 are nearly twice as likely to report wanting to focus on their mental health when compared to those over the age of 60.

### Longitudinal comparison of emotion type and MHI score



### Areas individuals would like to focus on when compared to before the pandemic





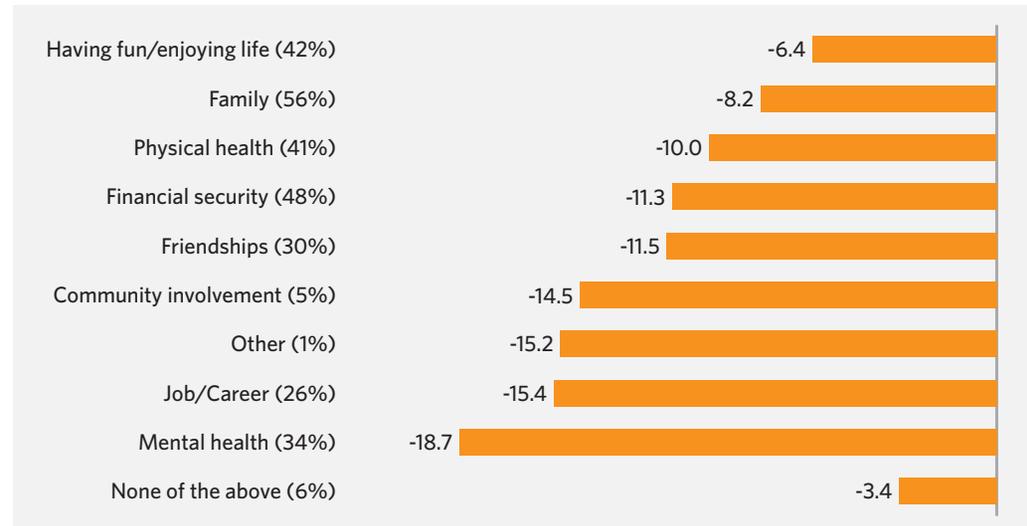
- Younger individuals are significantly more likely to want to focus on their job/career (46 per cent).

### Positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

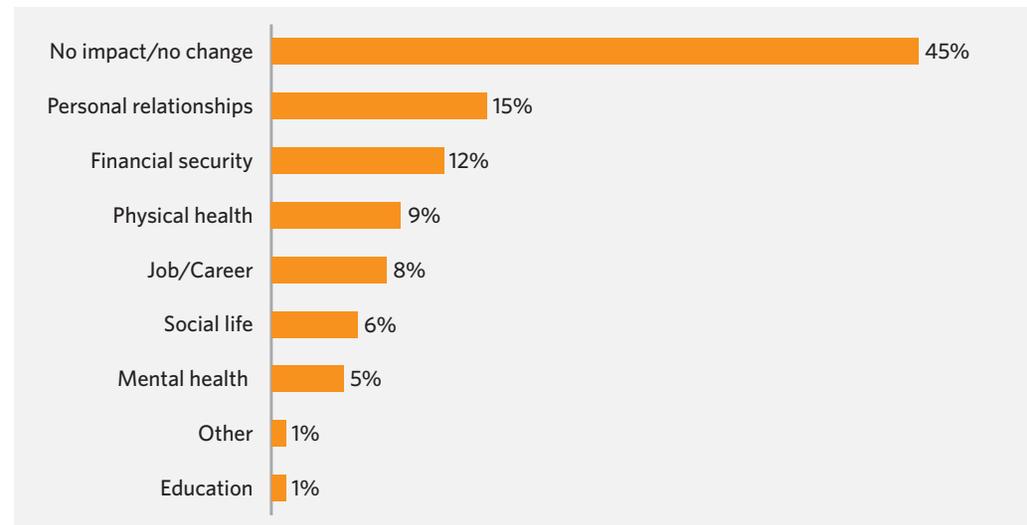
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has touched Australians in different ways - restricted social lives, the shift to virtual work, illness, or death of loved ones, etc. At the same time, some Australians are reporting inspired changes or unseen benefits because of the pandemic. Respondents were asked to indicate the areas that have changed positively because of the pandemic.

- The most commonly reported area of positive impact is personal relationships (15 per cent), followed by financial security (12 per cent), and physical health (9 per cent).
- Respondents reporting a positive change in their physical health (9 per cent) have the highest mental health score (-6.1).
- Respondents between 20 and 29 years of age are more than two times more likely to report some positive impact when compared to those over the age of 60.

### MHI by areas individuals would like to focus on when compared to before the pandemic



### Areas that have changed positively due to the pandemic



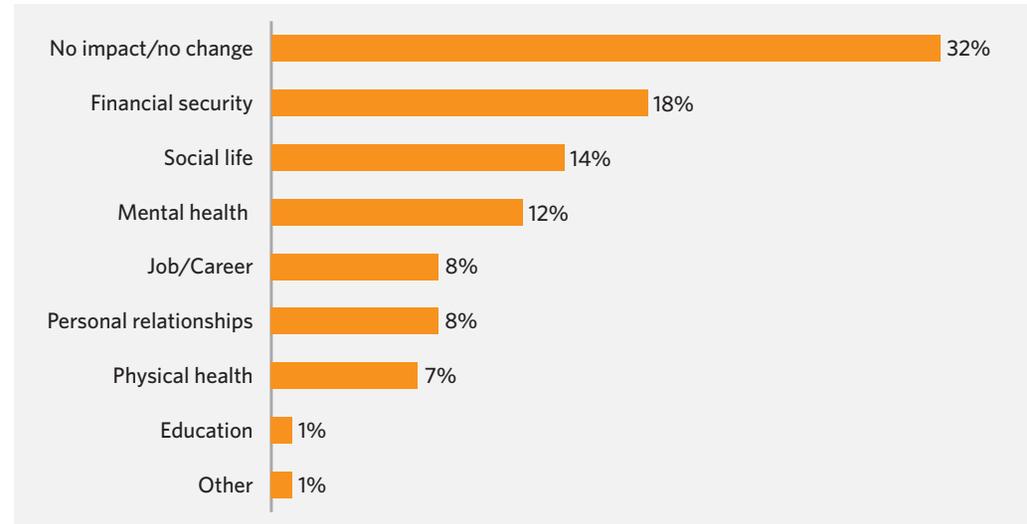


## Negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

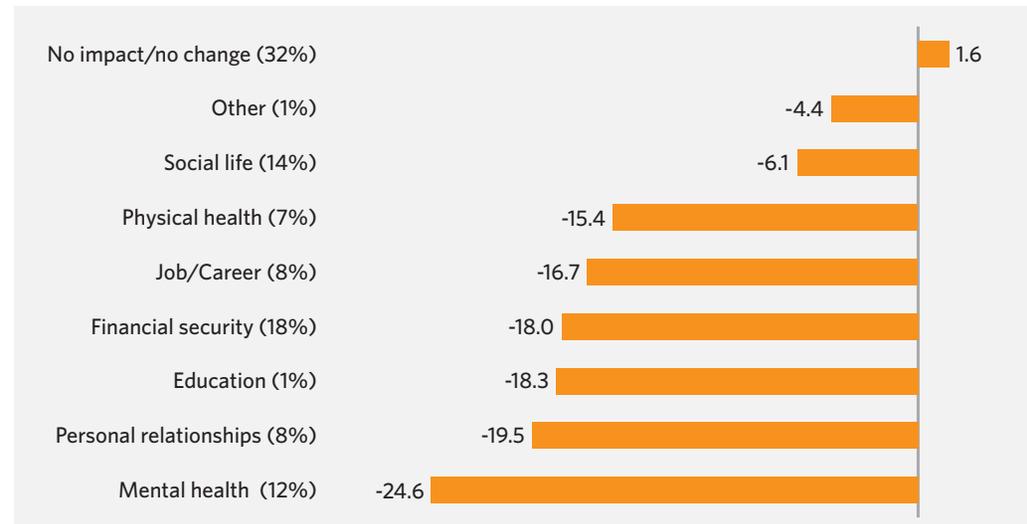
As expected, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult on most Australians. Respondents were asked to indicate the area of their lives that has changed most negatively because of the pandemic.

- The most commonly reported area of negative change is financial security (18 per cent), followed by social life (14 per cent), and mental health (12 per cent).
- The lowest mental health score is observed among individuals reporting that the most significant negative impact is to their mental health (-24.6), followed by those reporting a negative change to their personal relationships (-19.5), and those reporting a negative impact on their education (-18.3).
- Individuals under the age of 60 are more than twice as likely to report the most significant negative impact on mental health when compared to individuals over 60 years old.
- Individuals working fewer hours or with reduced pay/salary are more than twice as likely to report that the most significant negative change is financial security when compared to those with no change in employment.

### Areas that have changed negatively due to the pandemic



### MHI score by areas that have changed negatively due to the pandemic



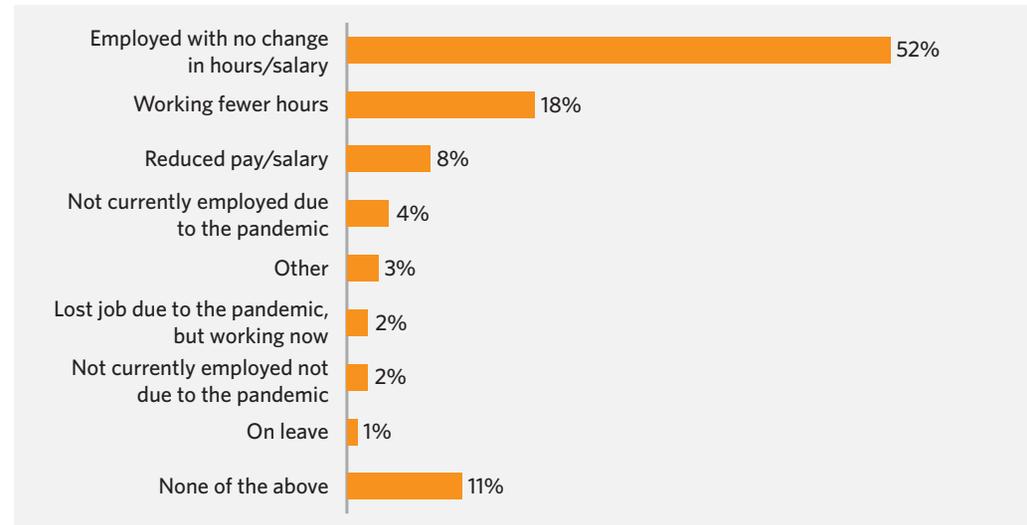


### Employment during the pandemic

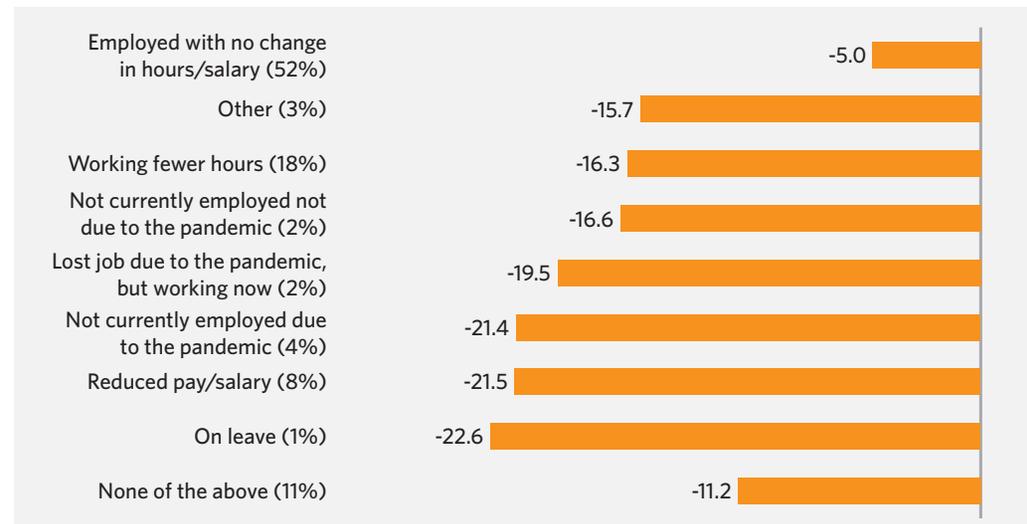
As Australians focus on managing through the pandemic, employment remains a critical stabilizer. Finances and isolation continue to be the strongest drivers of mental health and employment is central to offsetting the risk of poor mental health. Respondents were asked about their employment situation during the pandemic.

- Just over half (52 per cent) of respondents have no change in their hours or salary, whereas eighteen per cent report working fewer hours, and ten per cent report reduced pay/salary.
- Individuals reporting reduced pay/salary during the pandemic have a mental health score ten points below the national average; those working fewer hours have a mental health score five points below the average.
- Individuals working for employers with less than 1,000 employees or who are self-employed are twice as likely to report working fewer hours compared to before the pandemic.

### Employment situation during the pandemic



### MHI score by employment situation during the pandemic



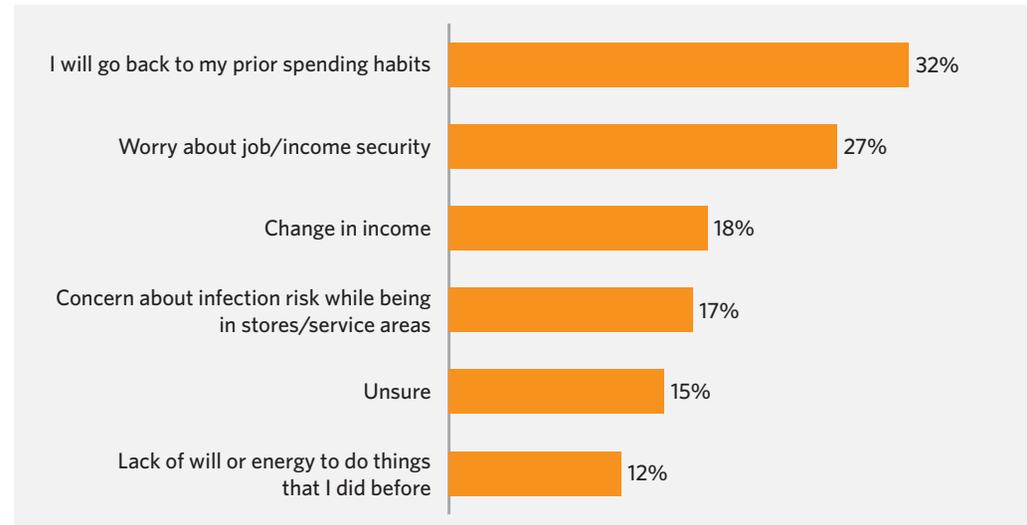


## Spending habits

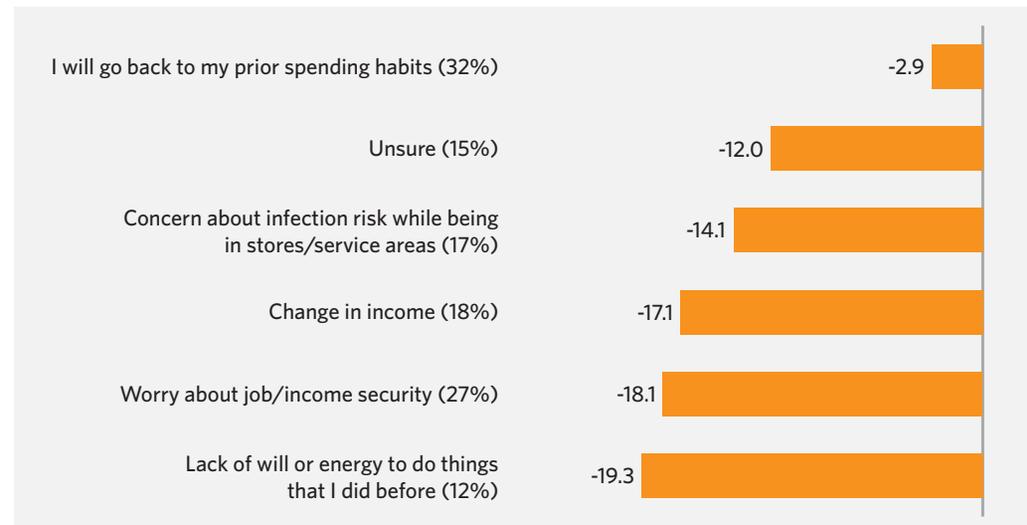
Previous findings (June 2020) indicate that one-quarter of respondents are likely to return to their previous spending habits. Over six months later, nearly one-third (32 per cent) of individuals report that they will go back to prior spending habits.

- Among those who will not return to their prior spending habits, the most commonly reported reasons are worry about job/income security (27 per cent) and change in income (18 per cent).
- Respondents reporting a lack of will or energy to do things they did prior to the pandemic have the lowest optimism score (-19.3), followed by those worried about job/income security (-18.1), and those with a change in income (-17.1).
- Respondents over the age of 60 are fifty per cent more likely to report that they would go back to their prior spending habits when compared to those under 40 years old.

## Reasons individuals will not return to prior spending habits once stores and businesses re-open



## Optimism score by reasons individuals will not return to prior spending habits once stores and businesses re-open





## 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 December 14 to December 23, 2020.

### 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 (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, 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.

### 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)

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](http://morneaushepell.com).



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