

# The Mental Health Index™ report

Regional Comparison -  
Australia, Canada, United Kingdom  
and United States, February 2021



**LifeWorks**  
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## February highlights

**With reports of multiple highly contagious variants of the COVID-19 virus, and the threat of a third wave, Americans, Australians, Britons, and Canadians are navigating uncharted territory as their mental health continues to suffer. February marks 11 consecutive months of diminished mental health when compared to the pre-pandemic benchmark.**

Regional mental health scores have shown general improvement between April and July 2020 with all regions showing declines from July to August. From August to December 2020, scores have been inconsistent month-to-month. In January, declines in mental health were seen in the United Kingdom and Australia, whereas the mental health score in Canada remained equal to December and a modest improvement was observed in the United States. In February, declines in mental health are seen in the United Kingdom (-0.5), whereas a modest increase is seen in Canada (+0.2). Australia's mental health score remains nearly unchanged from the prior month and the mental health score in the United States improved 2.4 points over the prior month.

**The level of mental health in February continues to be a concern as it indicates that the working population in all four geographies is significantly distressed when compared to mental health scores prior to 2020.**

**Comparing January 2021 to February 2021, there is an increase in mental stress in all regions.**

The increase in mental stress is greatest in the United Kingdom (60.0), followed by Canada (59.0), the United States (54.8), and Australia (53.4).

Despite the increasing incidence of mental health issues due to the prolonged impact of the pandemic among people of all ages, backgrounds and socio-economic status, stigma is an issue. **In Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, approximately forty per cent report that they would feel more negatively about themselves if they have a mental health issue,** these individuals have the lowest mental health scores. **In all regions, younger individuals are more likely to report feeling negatively about themselves were they to have a mental health issue.**

**More than one third of respondents across all geographies report that they would be concerned that friends would treat them differently if they had a mental health issue.**

Younger respondents are considerably more likely to report concern about the impact of mental health on friendships compared to older respondents.

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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**In all geographies, respondents overwhelmingly report that their career options would be limited if the workplace were aware of a mental health issue.** In Australia, over half (52 per cent) believe that their career options would be limited, followed by forty-eight per cent in the United Kingdom, forty-four per cent in Canada and forty-one per cent in the United States.

With many employees working from home and others working under modified conditions, workplace interactions have changed dramatically since the pandemic began. Approximately eighty per cent report that the relationship with their supervisor has remained the same since the pandemic began; this group has the highest mental health score in all countries. The proportion of people with an improved relationship with their manager is nearly equal to the proportion of those with a deteriorated relationship in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. **The lowest mental health scores are seen among those reporting that their relationship with their supervisor has deteriorated.**

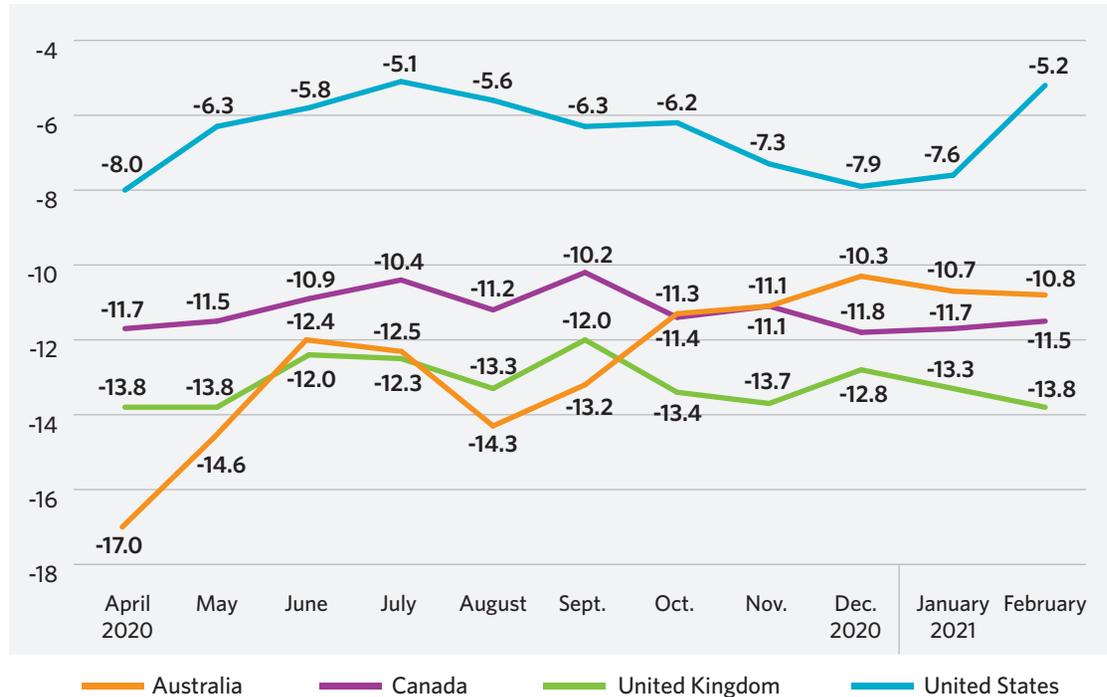
COVID-19's disruption to the mental, physical, social, and financial wellbeing of individuals has turned many to unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with cumulative stress and other effects of the prolonged pandemic. **An increase in alcohol use during the pandemic is seen in all geographies and the mental health scores of those who report an increase in alcohol use are lower** compared to people who did not drink more or who drank the same amount as before the pandemic.

As all geographies face one year of disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses have had to react, change, and adapt to new processes, threats, and opportunities. A boon for some while other organizations struggle. A swing in either direction could land a business in either a fortuitous or a grave scenario. **Looking ahead in 2021, over half of respondents believe that their employer will continue to be as successful in 2021 as before the pandemic.** In the United Kingdom thirty per cent believe that their employer will struggle, followed by twenty-four per cent in Canada, nineteen per cent in the United States and seventeen per cent in Australia.



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

The Mental Health Index™ by region

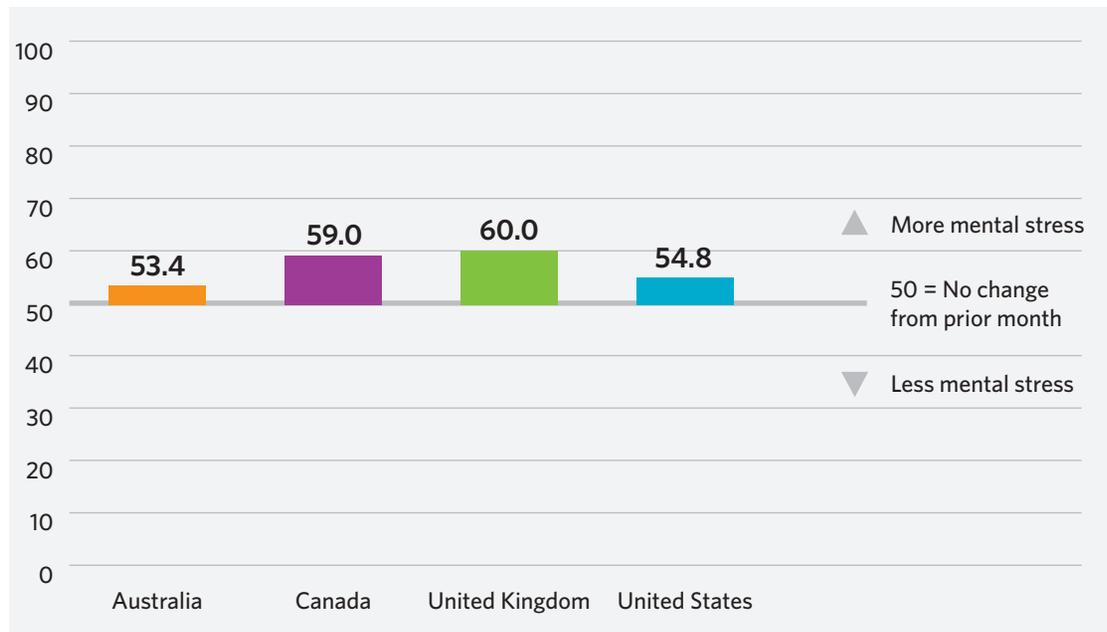


Overall, the Mental Health Index™ is lowest in the United Kingdom (-13.8), followed by Canada (-11.5), Australia (-10.8), and the United States (-5.2). Although mental health scores vary across regions, compared to the pre-2020 benchmark, all regions show a decline in mental health.

In February, declines in mental health are seen in the United Kingdom (-0.5), whereas a modest increase is seen in Canada (+0.2). Australia’s mental health score remains nearly unchanged from the prior month and the mental health score in the United States improved 2.4 points over the prior month.



### The Mental Stress Change score (region)



Comparing January 2021 to February 2021, there is an increase in mental stress in all regions. The increase in mental stress is greatest in the United Kingdom (60.0), followed by Canada (59.0), the United States (54.8), and Australia (53.4).



# Spotlight

## Mental health stigma

Approximately one in five people experience some form of mental illness. Despite the increasing incidence of mental health issues due to the prolonged impact of the pandemic among people of all ages, backgrounds and socio-economic status, stigma affects the way people perceive themselves as well as the way others perceive them. The resulting feelings can amplify an existing mental health issue and may become a barrier to seeking help.

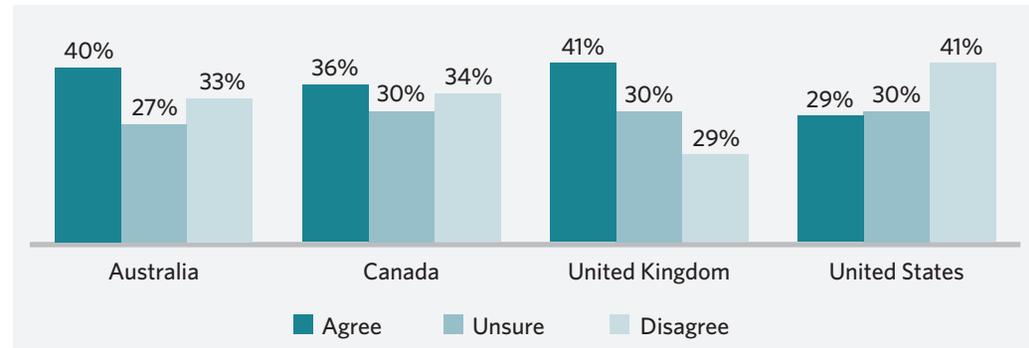
Individuals were asked about mental health self-stigma, how a mental health issue might affect their career, and the perceived effect of mental health on personal relationships.

### Self-stigma

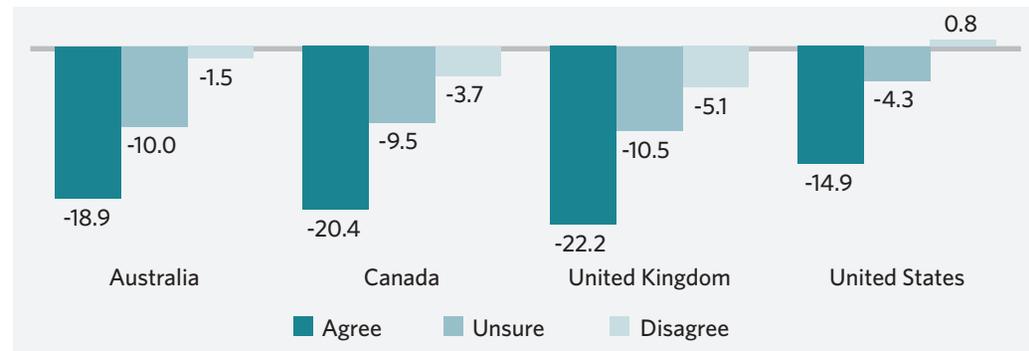
Individuals were asked whether they would feel more negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue.

- In Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, approximately forty per cent report that they would feel more negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue.
- Across all geographies, the lowest mental health scores are seen among individuals who report that they would feel more negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue.

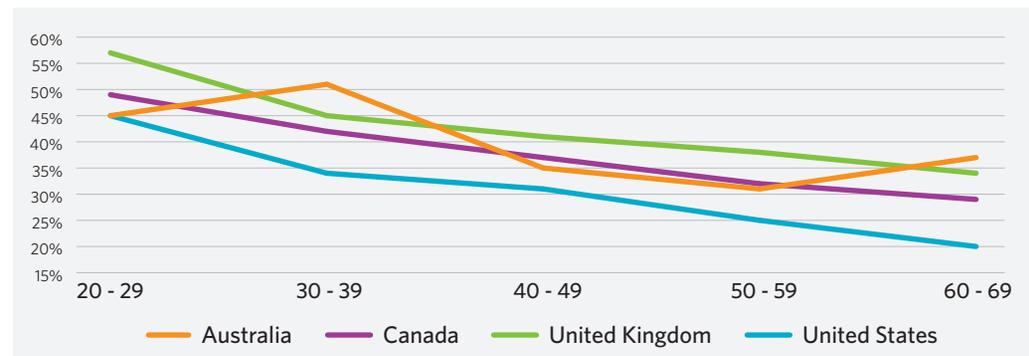
I would feel negatively about myself if I had a mental health issue



MHI scores by agreement about feeling negatively about oneself if a mental health issue exists



I would feel negatively about myself if I had a mental health issue





- In all regions, younger individuals are more likely to report feeling negatively about themselves were they to have a mental health issue.

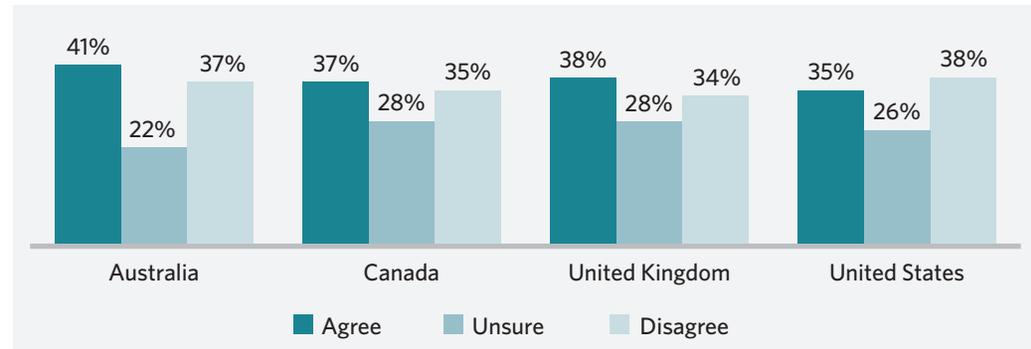
While it is widely assumed that younger individuals are more open about mental health issues, this openness does not preclude a high level of awareness of stigma, nor does it preclude self-judgment. As well, negative self-judgement may exist even though one's judgement of others with mental health issues might not be as negative.

**Perceived impact of mental health issue on friendships**

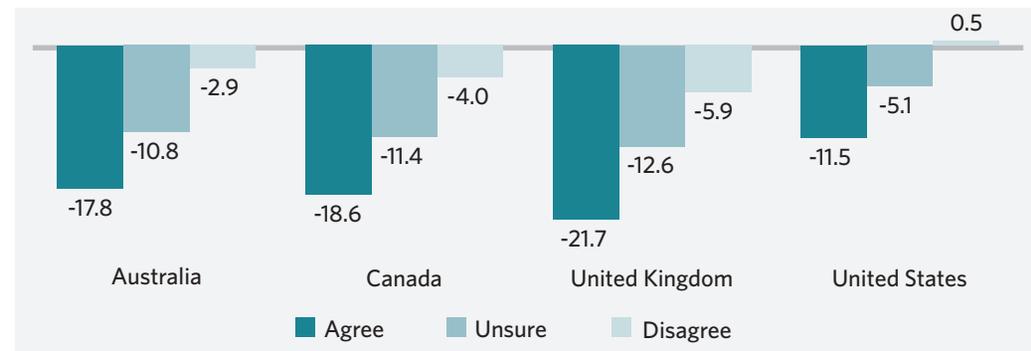
Individuals were asked whether they thought that their friends would treat them differently if they had a mental health issue.

- Between 35 and 41 per cent report that they would be concerned that friends would treat them differently if they had a mental health issue.
- Across all geographies, the lowest mental health scores are seen among individuals who report concern that friends would treat them differently if they had a mental health issue.
- Younger respondents are considerably more likely to report concern about the impact of mental health on friendships compared to older respondents.

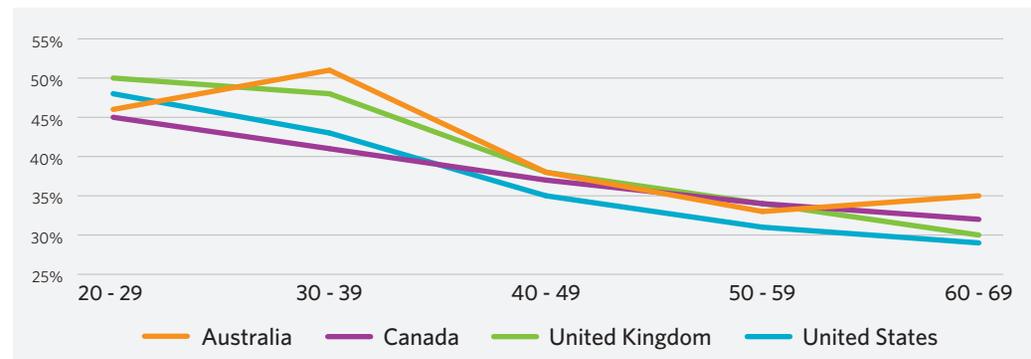
**I would be concerned that my friends would treat me differently if I had a mental health issue**



**MHI scores by concern that friends would treat individuals differently if aware of a mental health issue**



**I would be concerned that my friends would treat me differently if I had a mental health issue**





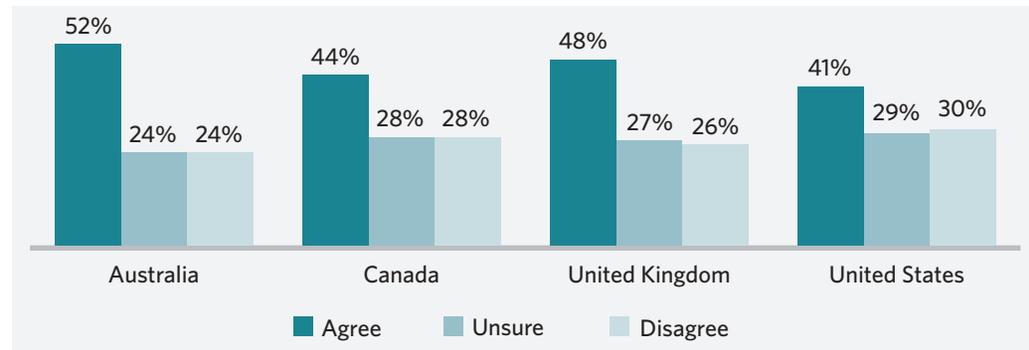
### Perceived impact of mental health issue on career

Individuals were asked whether they thought that career options would be limited if they had a mental health issue of which their workplace were aware.

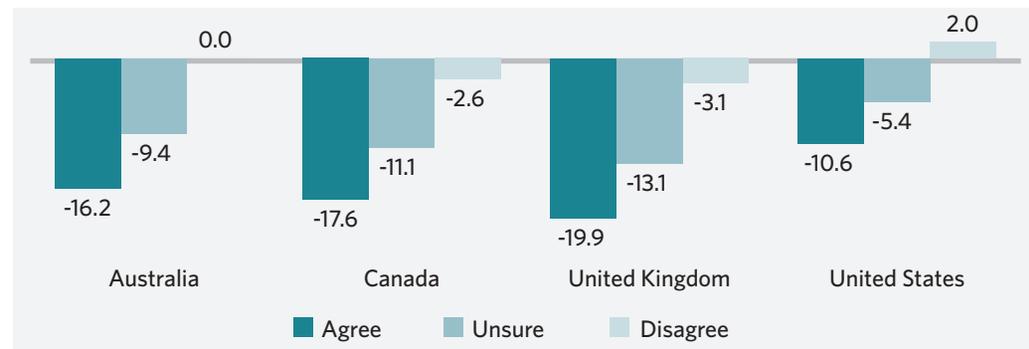
- In all geographies, respondents overwhelmingly report that their career options would be limited if the workplace were aware of a mental health issue.
- The lowest mental health scores are seen among those who report that their career options would be limited if their employer were aware of a mental health issue.
- Younger individuals are considerably more likely to believe that their career options would be limited if their employer were aware of a mental health issue.

Of the three types of stigma studied (self-stigma, workplace stigma, and social stigma) workplace stigma is perceived more prevalently.

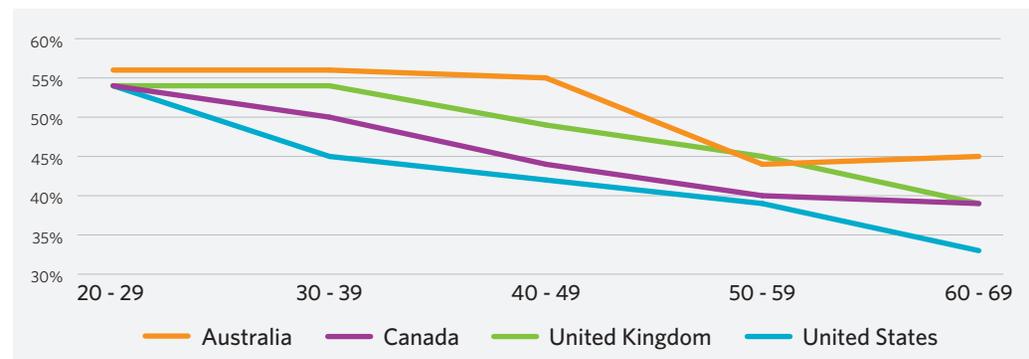
My career options would be limited if I had a mental health issue, and my workplace were aware



MHI scores by agreement that awareness of a mental health issue at work would limit career options



My career options would be limited if I had a mental health issue, and my workplace were aware





## Alcohol use during the pandemic

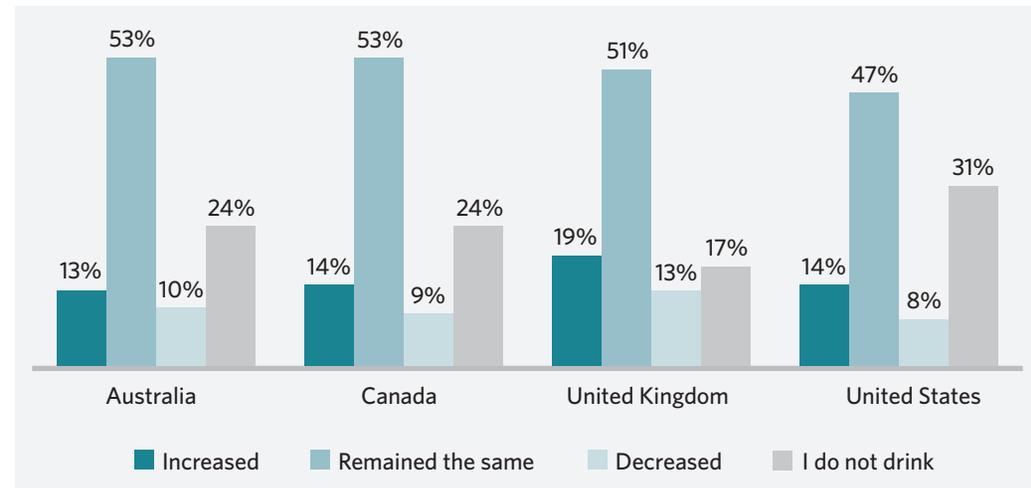
Since the inception of the Mental Health Index™ in April 2020, the mental health of Americans, Australians, Britons, and Canadians has been strained when compared to the pre-2020 benchmark. Further, the proportion of individuals reporting more stress than the prior month has persisted over eleven months. The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the physical, mental, social, and financial wellbeing of people to the extent that many have turned to unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with cumulative stress, feelings of isolation, loss, etc.

Individuals were asked to consider their use of alcohol at two stages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

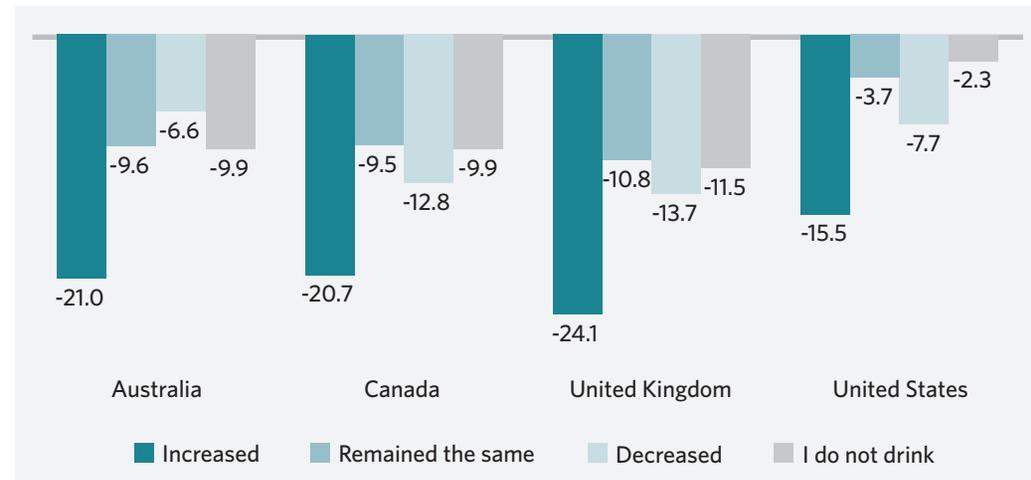
### Alcohol use early in the pandemic (March to May 2020)

- Between 13 and 19 per cent report an increase in their alcohol consumption from March to May 2020.
- The lowest mental health scores are seen among those reporting an increase in alcohol use.

Changes to alcohol consumption early in the pandemic (March to May 2020)



MHI score by changes to alcohol consumption early in the pandemic

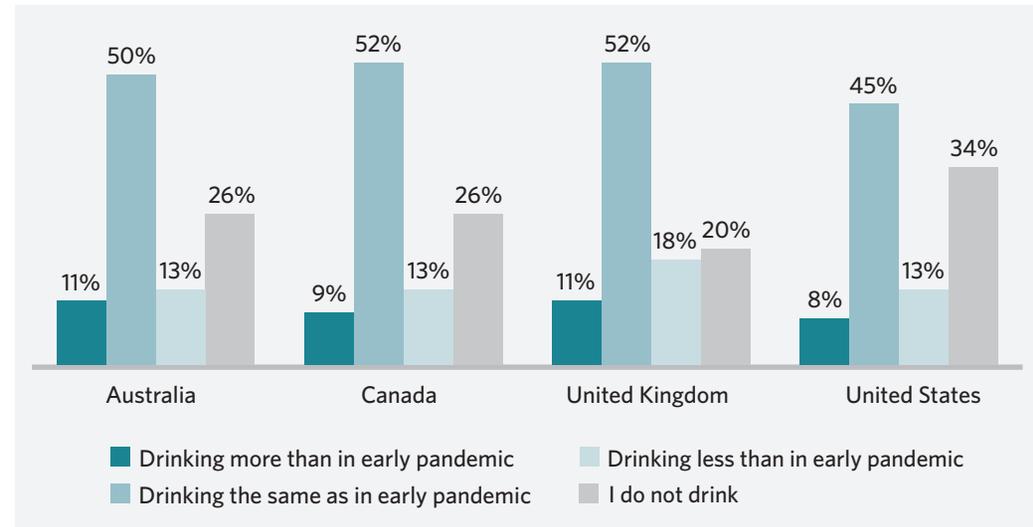




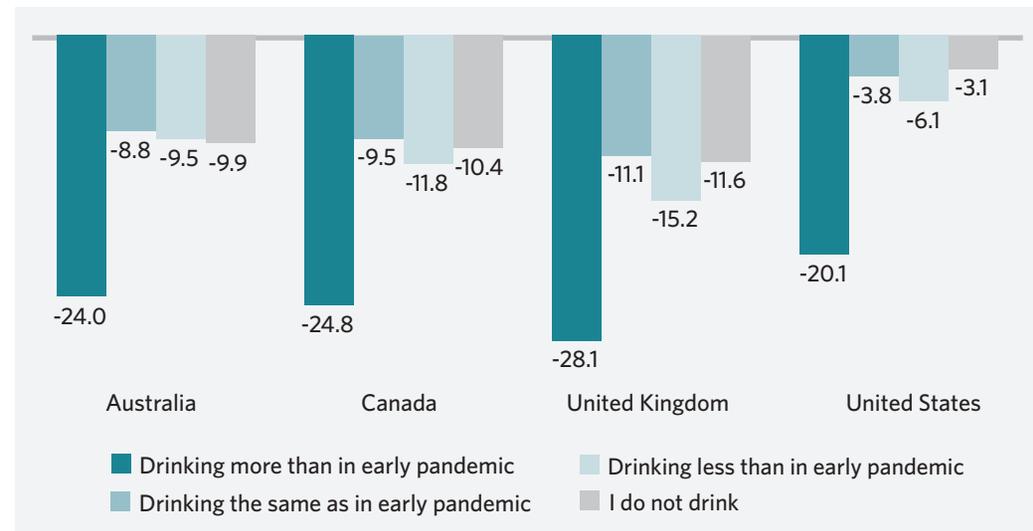
**Alcohol use later in the pandemic  
(October 2020 to present)**

- Approximately ten per cent of respondents increased their alcohol use from October 2020 to January 2021 compared to earlier in the pandemic.
- In all geographies, the lowest mental health scores are seen among those drinking reporting an increase in alcohol use.

**Changes to alcohol consumption early in the pandemic (October to present)**



**MHI score by changes to alcohol consumption (more recently)**



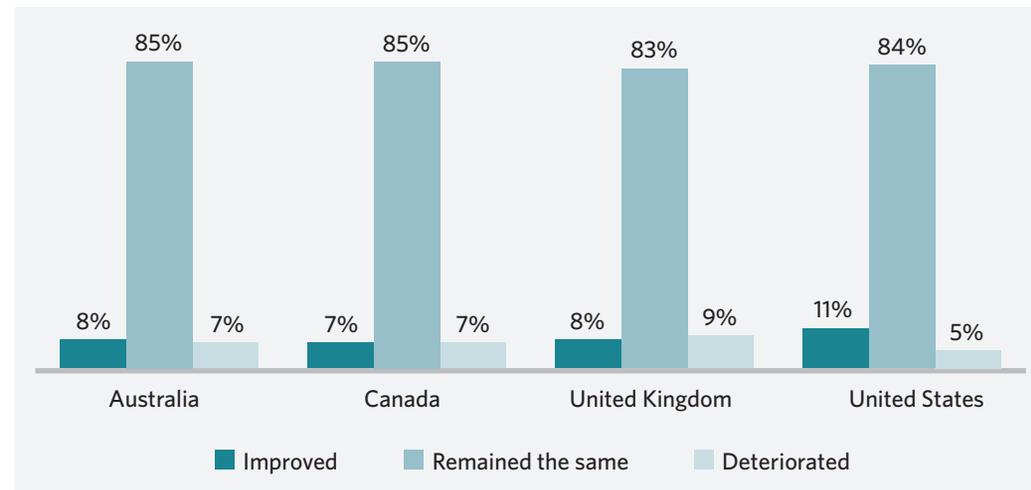


## Employee - manager relationship

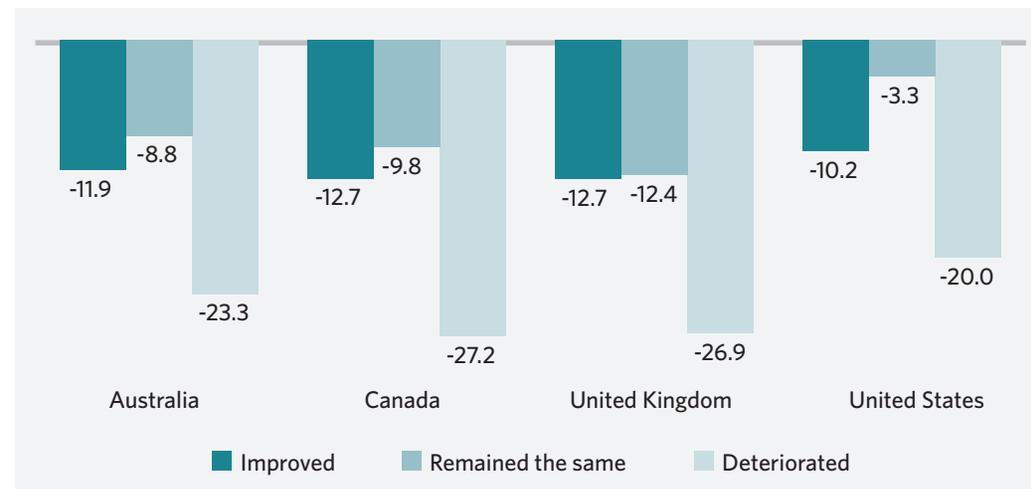
With many employees working from home and others working under modified conditions, workplace interactions have changed dramatically since the pandemic began. Employees were asked how the relationship with their supervisor has changed.

- Approximately eighty per cent report that the relationship with their supervisor has remained the same since the pandemic began; this group has the highest mental health score in all countries.
- The proportion of people with an improved relationship with their manager is nearly equal to the proportion of those with a deteriorated relationship in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.
- In the United States, the percentage reporting an improved relationship (11 per cent) is more than twice that of those reporting a deteriorated relationship (5 per cent).
- The lowest mental health scores are seen among those reporting that their relationship with their supervisor has deteriorated.

Changes to relationship with supervisor since the pandemic began



MHI score by changes to relationship with supervisor since the pandemic began





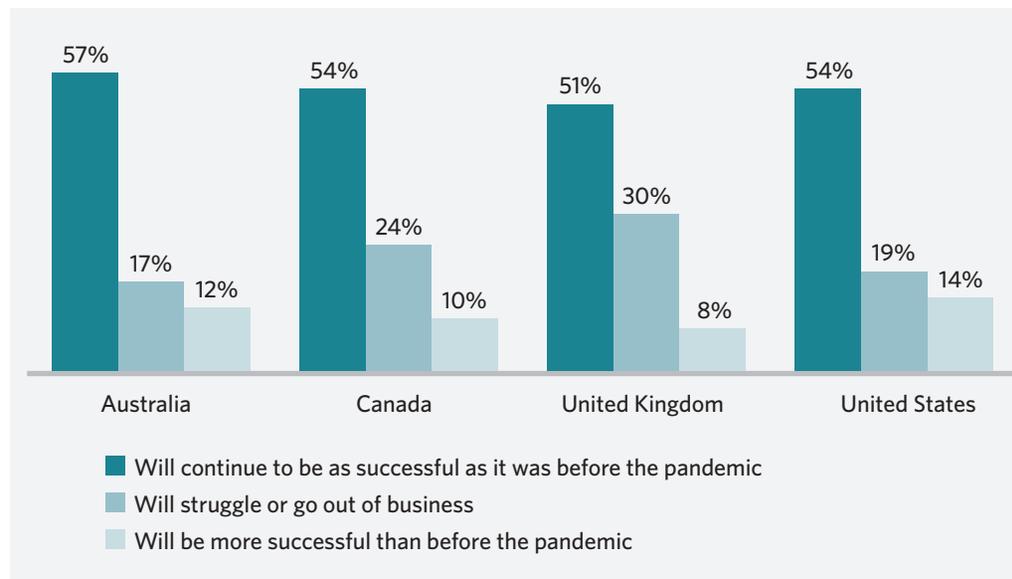
## Organizational stability

As the world faces one year of disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses have had to react, change, and adapt to new processes, threats, and opportunities. A boon for some while other organizations struggle; a swing in either direction could land a business in either a fortuitous or a grave situation.

Looking ahead in 2021, employees were asked about the stability of their employer.

- In all geographies, over half believe that their employer will continue to be as successful in 2021 as before the pandemic.
- Between 17 and 30 per cent believe that their employer will struggle or go out of business; thirty per cent of respondents in the United Kingdom believe that their employer will struggle in 2021 (30 per cent).

Top three employee expected trends of their employer through 2021





# 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 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 of 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 in April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for the current report was collected between January 15 to January 25, 2021.

## 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)

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