

Research Insights

Taking the Pulse of the Nation

Despite concerns that the impact of the pandemic is not quite over, the proportion of Australians satisfied with government policies to support jobs ticked up substantially, with less people reporting being financially stressed and/or being mentally distressed.

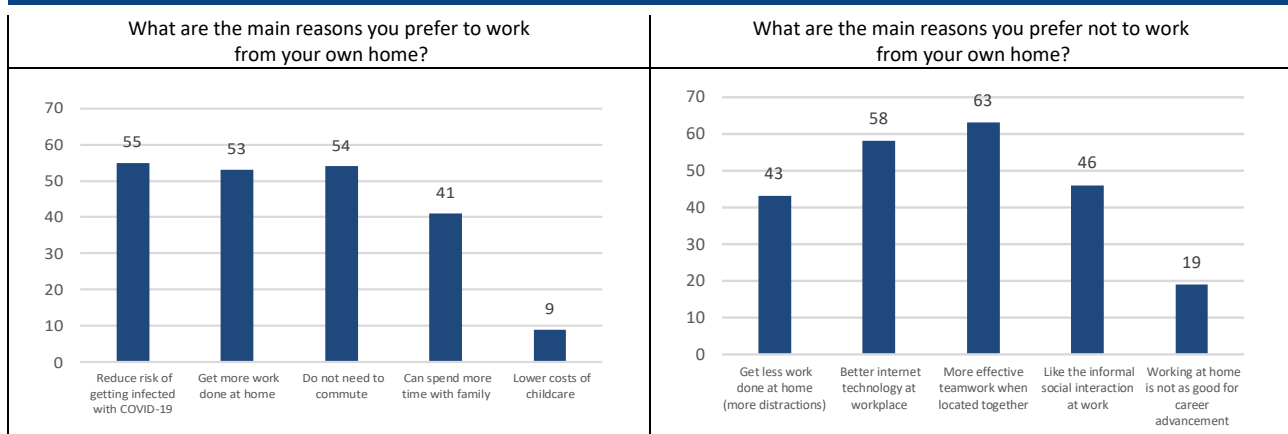
Melbourne Institute's Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia

Survey Results*: Wave 23 (16-20 November 2020)

Despite concerns that the impact of the pandemic is not quite over, the proportion of Australians satisfied with government policies to support jobs ticked up substantially, with less people reporting being financially stressed and/or being mentally distressed.

- The proportion of Australians satisfied with government policies to support jobs ticked up to 60% in wave 23 from 53% in wave 22. Conversely, the proportion dissatisfied, ticked down by 7 percentage points (ppts) between the two waves (from 23% to 16%). There are, however, differences between the states. For NSW and VIC, the increase in the proportions satisfied were greater than the fall in the proportions dissatisfied. To be precise, for NSW and VIC, the ppts increase in the proportion satisfied were 11 and 10 respectively compared to the 7 and 9 ppts fall in proportions dissatisfied. For QLD, there was a 6 ppts increase in the proportion satisfied which was exactly offset by a 6 ppts fall in the proportion dissatisfied. For SA satisfaction rose by a negligible 2 ppts, but dissatisfaction fell by a huge 20 ppts, while for WA satisfaction fell by 4 ppts and dissatisfaction rose by a negligible 1 ppt.
- The proportion of Australians reporting being financially stressed (i.e. having difficulties paying for essential goods and services) fell by 5 ppts from 26% in wave 22 to 21% in wave 23. This was across the states; specifically the ppts change are: NSW (–3 ppts), VIC (–3 ppts), QLD (–13 ppts), SA (–9 ppts) and WA (–9 ppts).
- The proportion of Australians reporting being mentally distressed (i.e. feeling anxious or depressed most of the time during the past week) fell by 8 ppts from 23% in wave 22 to 15% in wave 23. This was also across the states and the ppts change in proportions were: NSW (–4 ppts), VIC (–10 ppts), QLD (–5 ppts), SA (–22 ppts) and WA (–11 ppts).
- However, despite the easing of restrictions, 58% of Australians still expect the pandemic to affect their normal activities for longer than 6 months. There was a discernible shift in perception in early September when the proportion expecting the duration of the pandemic to be less than 6 months jumped by 10 ppts. Since then, perceptions have hardly changed.
- The special question in this wave is about working from home. This question was last asked in wave 19, 2 months ago. The proportion reporting that they were working mostly from home fell from 50% to 43%, reflecting the easing of business restrictions. However the preference to continue working from home is stronger for females (an increase from 67% to 84%) compared to males (a decrease from 72% to 68%).**
- For those who preferred to continue working from home, the three top reasons were: it reduced the risk of getting infected, no need to commute and to get more work done. For those who prefer to go back to the workplace the top two reasons were: there is more effective teamwork when people are in the same workplace, followed by there is better internet technology at the workplace. Surprisingly only a small percentage felt the need for visibility at the work place for advancement.

Figure 1: Reasons for preferring to work from home and reasons for preferring to return to the work-place



* The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

** For more on how the pandemic has affected women and men differently, see "The Ups and Downs of the COVID-19 Crisis: A Gender Divide?" By G.Kalb, M.Guillou and J.Meeke; Research Insight 32/20.

Figure 2: How are Australians coping with COVID-19?
23 waves of surveys from April 6 to November 20 (Proportions, %)*



+ The proportion in the "don't know/refused" category, is very small and has been excluded from the figures.

++ Financial stress refers to the situation of having difficulties paying for essential goods and services while financial vulnerability refers to being in financial stress or making ends meet.

+++ The question about feeling depressed is about assessing symptoms/experiences and not about assessing the presence of a clinical diagnosis or disorder.

Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research

The Melbourne Institute applies cutting-edge statistical and econometric methodologies to develop primary and secondary user-ready data sets, and conducts research to inform government, education, business and community organisations. For more information, see: melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au.

About the survey

These results have been drawn from *Taking the Pulse of the Nation* - Melbourne Institute's survey of the impact of COVID-19. The aim of the weekly survey is to track changes in the economic and social wellbeing of Australians living through the effects of the coronavirus pandemic whilst adapting to various changes in Federal and State government policies.

The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over each week. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

Disclaimer

The University of Melbourne and the Melbourne Institute give no representation, make no warranty, nor take any responsibility as to the accuracy or completeness of any information contained herein and will not be liable in contract tort, for negligence or for any loss or damage arising from reliance on any such information.

©The University of Melbourne, Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research.

This report is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced without written permission. Taking the Pulse of the Nation: Melbourne Institute Survey of the impact of COVID-19 presents the professional analysis and views of the Melbourne Institute.