



THE  
WELLBEING  
LAB 2020  
WORKPLACE  
REPORT

THE STATE OF WELLBEING IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

**AHRI**  
Australian HR Institute



CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE | STILLER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

David L. Cooperrider

CENTER FOR APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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# FROM THE AUSTRALIAN HR INSTITUTE

Amidst a global pandemic, it's unsurprising that the proportion of Australian workers who reported they were consistently thriving has dropped substantially since 2019. In last year's The Wellbeing Lab Workplace Report, 14.7% of Australian workers reported consistently thriving, as opposed to this year's 7.4% – that's a cut of almost half.

Naturally, the stressors that a pandemic like COVID-19 bring would have contributed to this fall: drastic change in circumstances, loss of 'traditional' support networks like friends and family, isolation and anxiety, unknown or increased workloads, and fear of job change or loss could all be drivers for this significant drop.

Surprisingly, there has been no increase in the number of Australian workplaces providing different kinds of wellbeing support, and only 37.6% of Australian workers reported their manager often expresses care for them. Considering the extent to which the pandemic has affected our whole community, it's disappointing workers perceive that they are not being supported or receiving empathy from their manager. In addition, only 32.1% of Australian workers feel safe sharing their struggles at work.

These findings lead to a call to action for leaders, managers, and work colleagues. Empathy and support can help teams open up to each other about their daily struggles, contributing to a reduction in stress. Ultimately, having more meaningful conversations and developing alternative and accessible forums can help alleviate some of the reluctance workers have towards voicing their struggles.

And perhaps by opening up this dialogue we can learn that there's more that we have in common when it comes to our mental wellbeing: that we're all in this together, and we don't have to suffer alone.



Sarah McCann-Bartlett  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian HR Institute

# ABOUT THIS STUDY

The Wellbeing Lab Workplace Survey was first conducted in September 2018, and repeated in December 2019. The survey was a variant of the PERMAH Wellbeing Survey ([www.permahsurvey.com](http://www.permahsurvey.com)) developed by **Dr. Peggy Kern** from the University of Melbourne, to help workplaces better understand the factors that support and undermine wellbeing. A sample of 1,002 in 2018 and 1,007 in 2019 randomly selected workers across Australia completed the survey. Results were consistent across the two years, adding validity to the original findings.

As the 2019 report was being finalised, bushfires swept across Australia and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. So in mid-March 2020 – just prior to non-essential workplaces being closed down – we created an additional set of questions to gauge the impact of these changes and asked another randomly selected sample of 1,019 Australian workers (352 who participated in December 2019) the updated questions. While some shifts occurred, the results continued to support the consistency and validity of the previous findings, while adding new insights on the impact of current events.

The year has continued to bring uncertainty and volatility. With hundreds of deaths, more than one million jobs lost and the greatest economic downturn since The Great Depression, in early August 2020, we surveyed 1,400 Australian workers, 401 who had previously participated, using the same questions. At the time, workers located in Victoria were under Stage 4 lock down restrictions, while workers in the rest of Australia were not. All respondents were employed at the time of the survey.

GENDER	
Men	679
Women	720
Other/Not reported	1

AGE GROUPS	
18 – 24 years	137
25 – 34 years	334
35 – 44 years	335
45 – 54 years	315
55 – 65 years	279

LOCATIONS	
New South Wales	446
Victoria	350
Queensland	290
South Australia	108
Western Australia	133
ACT	28
Tasmania	31
Northern Territory	14

JOB ROLES	
Owners	138
Directors	21
C-Suite/Managers	47
Professionals	369
Technical Experts	89
Coordinators	36
Administrative	206
Customer Service	134
Contractors	29
Other	82

Industries were representative of Australian workplaces including: Agriculture, Banking & Finance, Community & Social Services, Construction, Education, Government & Public Administration, Healthcare & Medical, Technology & Telecommunications, Manufacturing, Mining, Retail, Science, Tourism, and Transportation & Warehousing.

If you would like more information about this report or additional findings by gender, age, location, job role or industry (not reported), please contact [chelle@thewellbeinglab.com](mailto:chelle@thewellbeinglab.com).

# 1. CURRENT STATE: WELLBEING IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

As we have noted in previous reports, in its simplest form, wellbeing is the ability to feel good and function effectively as we navigate the inevitable highs and lows of work and life. Studies – including ours – find that how we feel (physically, mentally, and socially) and how we perform at work have a mutually reinforcing cycle. Work provides opportunities for ongoing learning and development, meaningful achievement, and connection with others, which nourish our wellbeing. And when we feel physically, mentally, and socially well, we are able to bring more energy, focus, and motivation to work and thus are more productive. Thriving occurs when we consistently feel and function well as we work. We might assume that thriving would only occur in good times. However, our findings have consistently demonstrated that it is possible to thrive despite struggle. Sustaining our levels of wellbeing at work is less dependent on the situation and more dependent on our abilities to effectively navigate both the good times and successes as well as the struggles and challenges that occur.



7.4%

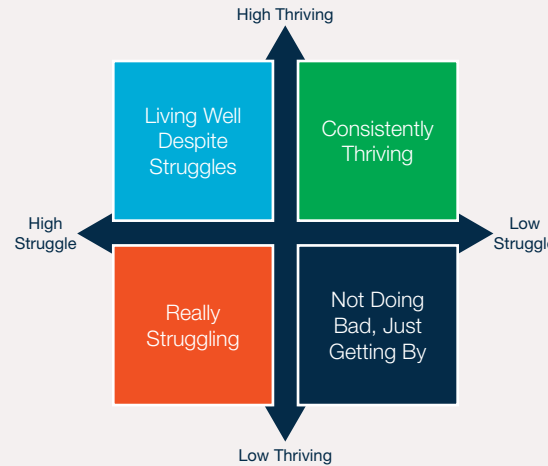
OF AUSTRALIAN WORKERS  
WERE CONSISTENTLY THRIVING,  
VERSUS 14.7% IN 2019.

# THRIVING ≠ PROBLEM FREE

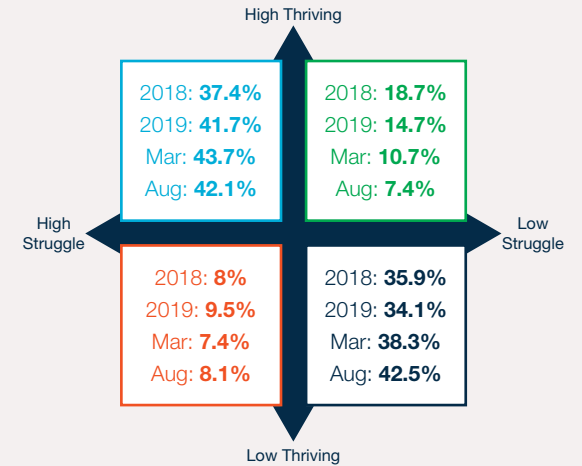
Wellbeing ranges from languishing (low levels of wellbeing) to thriving (high levels of wellbeing). Across five different surveys with thousands of Australian and American workers we have replicated the findings that workers who reported that they were *consistently thriving* as well as workers who reported that they were *living well, despite struggles* were statistically more likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction, better performance, and greater commitment to their organisation. They were also more likely to report higher levels of performance for their team and their organisation.

Even when facing bushfires, a global pandemic, and a significant economic downturn, it appears that it is possible to thrive despite struggle, and it is possible to *not* experience wellbeing even in the absence of struggle. Overall, however, as circumstances in Australia have changed the number of workers who have reported that they were *consistently thriving*, has halved from 14.7% to 7.4% and the number of workers who have reported that they are *not feeling bad, just getting by* has increased by 8.4% from December 2019 to August 2020. This might suggest that despite reporting high levels of thriving in good times, when struggles escalate, workers who lack the resilience to *live well, despite struggles* find their wellbeing and performance quickly diminishes.

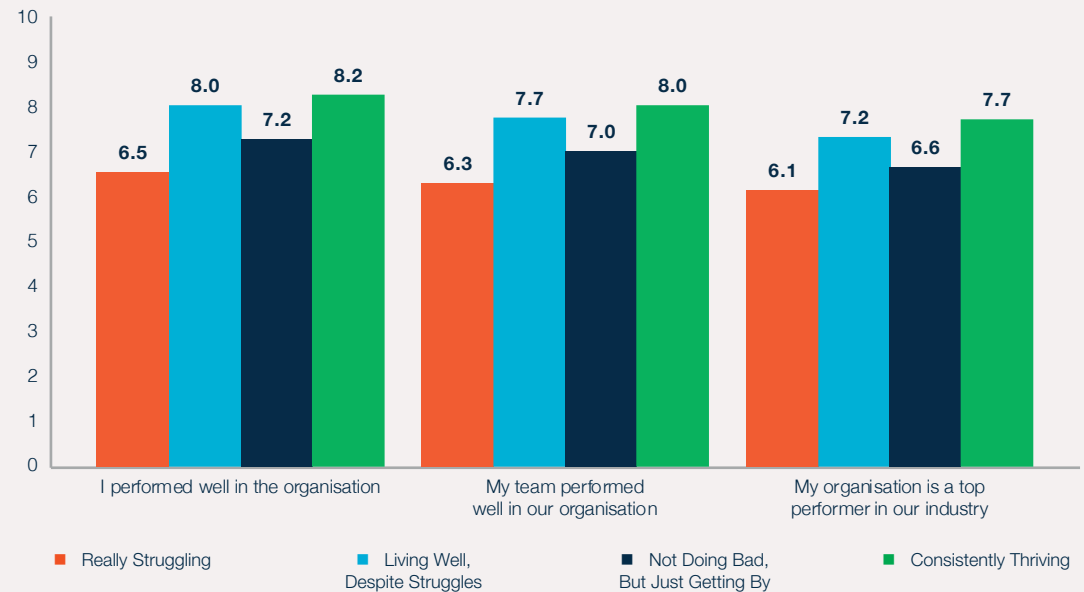
STATE OF WELLBEING



% STATES OF WELLBEING IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES



STATES OF WELLBEING FOR PERFORMANCE BY MEANS



# CONTEXT MATTERS

The decline in the percentage of workers who reported that they were *consistently thriving* and the increase in those *not feeling bad, just getting by* were similarly distributed across gender and younger age groups.

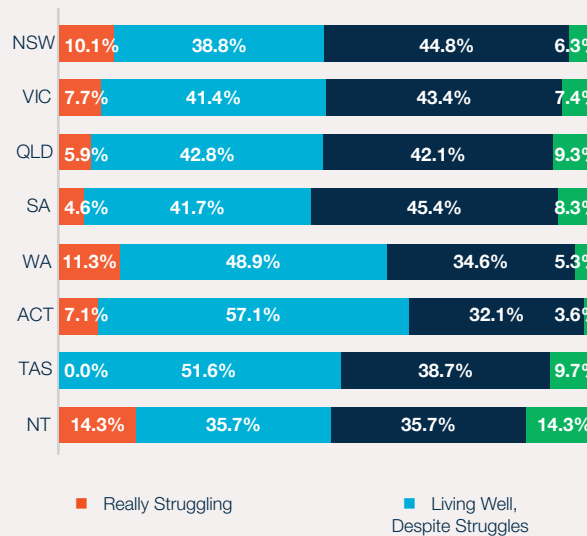
Workers in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia reported a decline in the number *consistently thriving* and an increase in those *not feeling bad, just getting by*. Notably, there was little difference across states, despite Victorian workers being under strict lockdown conditions.

It appeared that returning to work premises challenged workers more than strict lockdown. Returning workers were the most likely to be *not feeling bad, just getting by*.

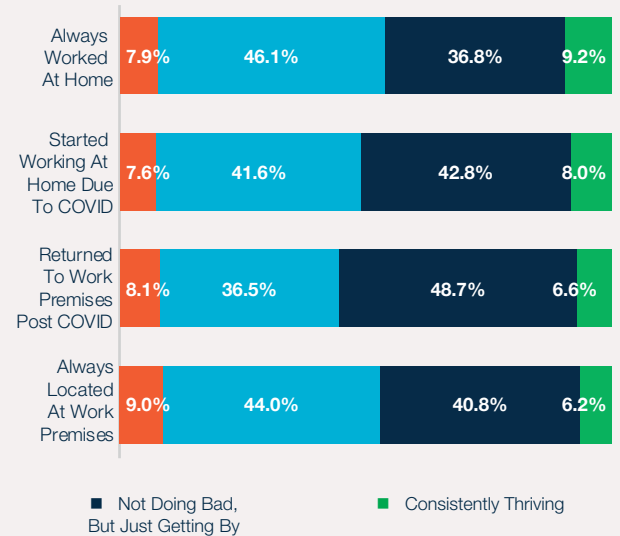
Workers in job roles with more autonomy (e.g., owners, directors, c-level/managers, and contractors) continued to be more likely to report they were *consistently thriving*. However, owners reported the biggest decline in the number of people *consistently thriving* and the biggest increase in the number of people *not feeling bad, just getting by*.

Workers in Community & Social Services, Healthcare, Government and Sciences & Technical Services were the most likely to be *living well, despite struggles*.

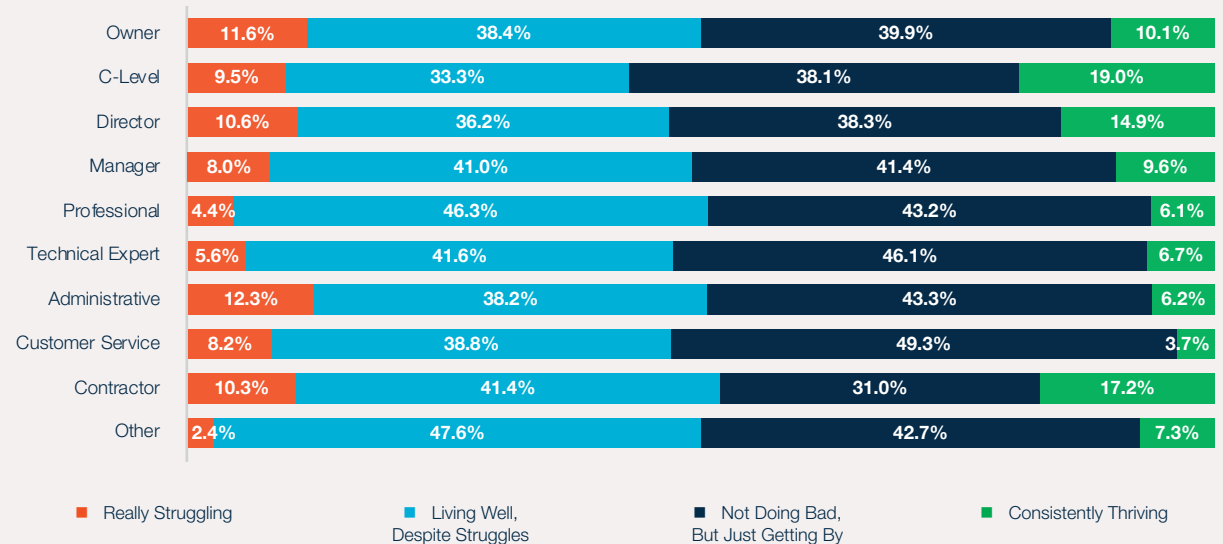
% STATES OF WELLBEING BY STATE



% STATES OF WELLBEING BY JOB LOCATION



% STATES OF WELLBEING BY JOB ROLE

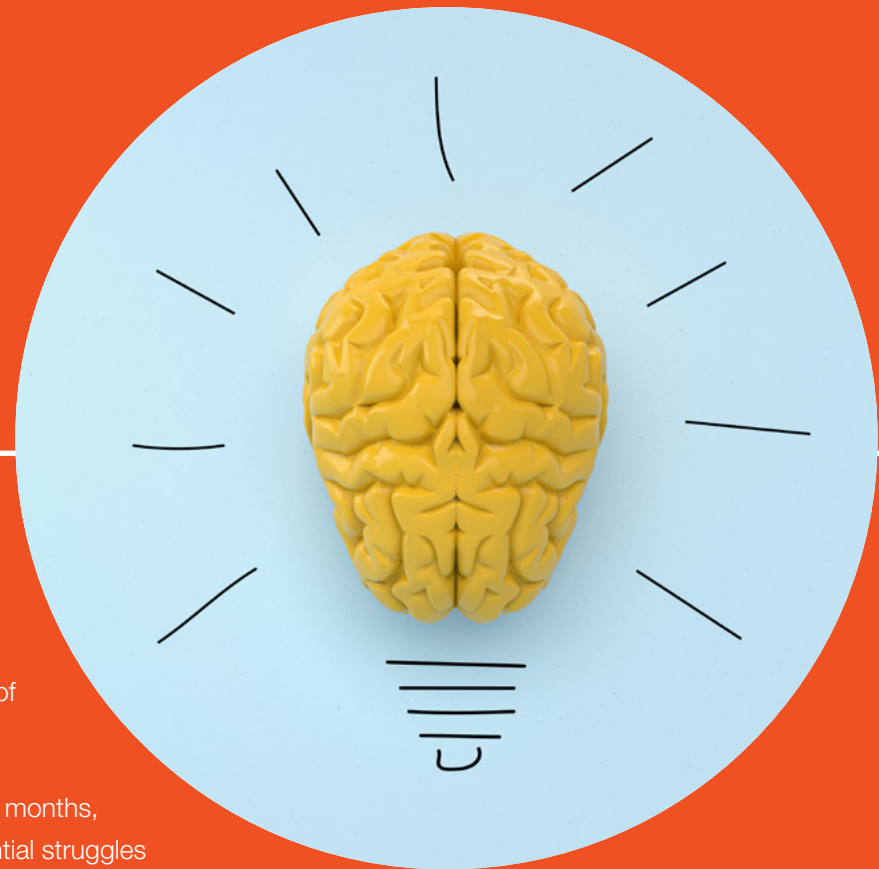


# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Our findings continue to make it clear that feelings of struggle and stress don't have to undermine workers' wellbeing or performance. In fact, provided workers know how to respond to these signs as opportunities for learning and growth, challenge might provide opportunities to demonstrate resilience in the midst of uncertainty and challenge.

As many workers will be required to return to their work premises over the coming months, HR need to consider how they can support their people's wellbeing and the potential struggles this may bring after months of working at home both during and beyond this transition period.

*Does your definition of workplace wellbeing give workers permission to struggle? Do you have formal and informal strategies in place to help workers navigate struggle during periods of transition?*





## 2. THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS: THE CONFIDENCE AMPLIFIERS

Our levels of wellbeing naturally ebb and flow as we experience the ups and downs of life. Thus, the goal is not to constantly achieve the highest amount of wellbeing. Rather it is to use indicators of our wellbeing to help ourselves and others to become more intelligent and active agents so that we can effectively engage and function well at work, regardless of what work or life throws at us. Our findings point to three key ingredients for amplifying our wellbeing: wellbeing ability (A), wellbeing motivation (M), and psychological safety (P).



39.1%

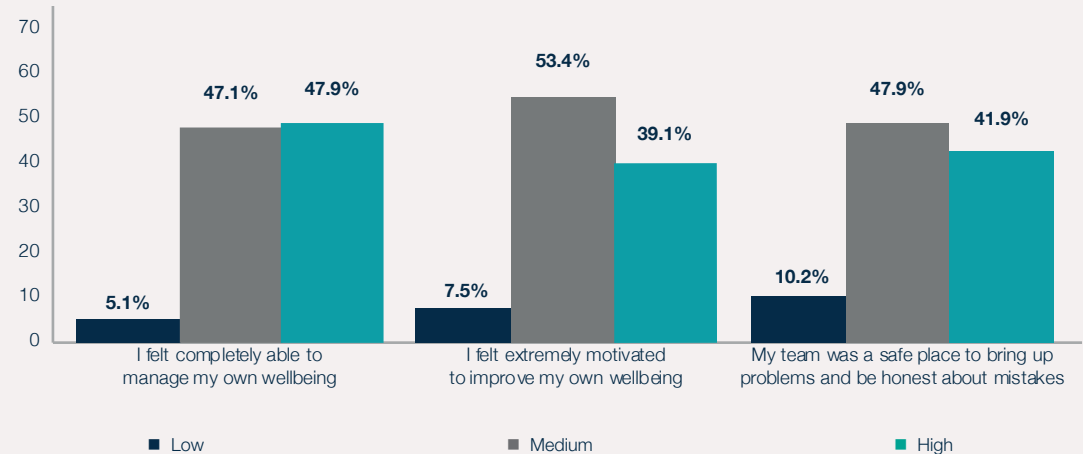
OF AUSTRALIAN WORKERS  
FELT VERY MOTIVATED TO  
IMPROVE THEIR WELLBEING,  
VERSUS 47% IN 2019.

# THE WELLBEING CONFIDENCE AMPLIFIERS

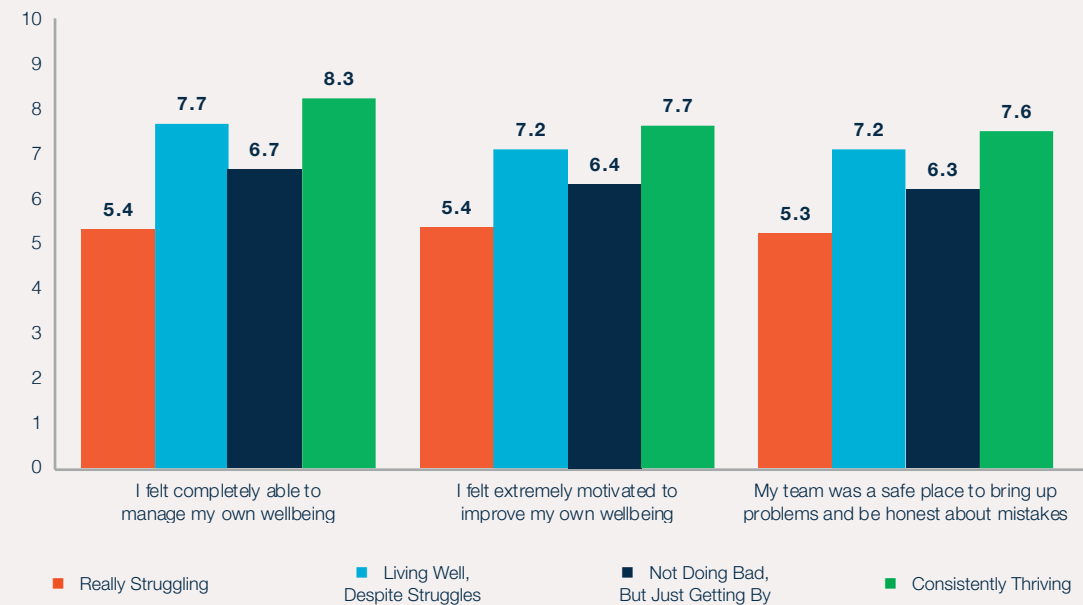
47.9% of workers felt completely able to manage their own wellbeing, and 39.1% of workers felt extremely motivated to improve their wellbeing. Statistically – as we have seen in the past surveys – these workers were significantly more likely to report that they were *consistently thriving* or *living well, despite struggles* when it came to their wellbeing.

As we have observed in the past however, ability and motivation are necessary but not sufficient for supporting workers' wellbeing. Thriving in the face of ongoing struggle not only requires skills and ongoing effort, but also requires support from the organisation, evidenced through psychologically safe spaces for workers to experiment, learn and grow amidst the ups and downs we all experience at work and in life. Notably, 41.9% of workers felt that their team was a safe place to bring up problems and talk about mistakes. Statistically these workers were significantly more likely to report that they were *consistently thriving* or *living well, despite struggles*.

% WELLBEING ABILITY, WELLBEING MOTIVATION & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



STATE OF WELLBEING BY ABILITY, MOTIVATION, & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY BY MEANS



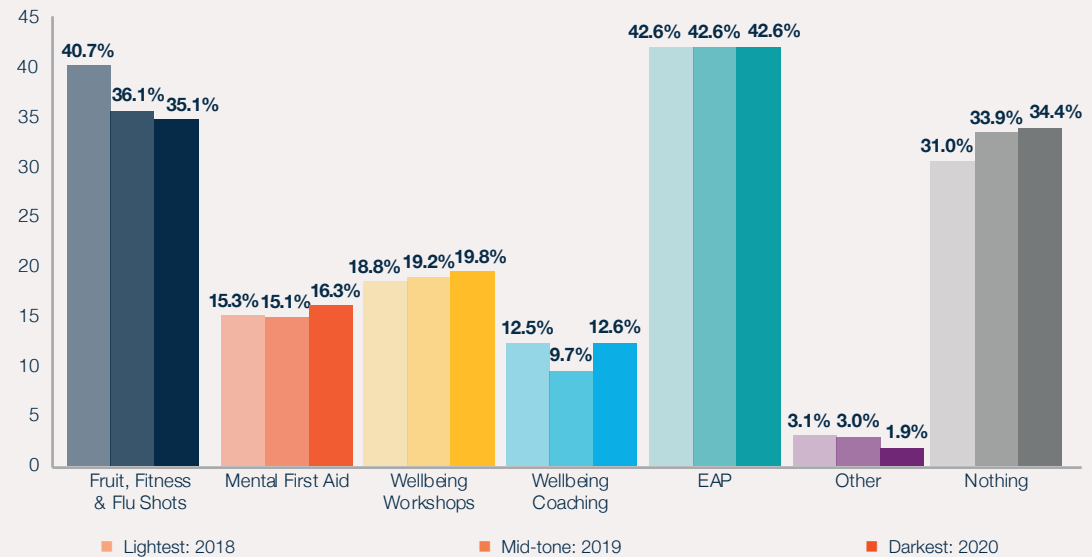
# WORKPLACE WELLBEING SUPPORT

Despite the obvious challenges most people are facing due to the sweeping changes the COVID-19 pandemic has created, we found that over a third of workplaces continue to provide no support for their people's wellbeing. Workers who were **not feeling bad but just getting by** or **really struggling** remained statistically more likely to report no support being available in their workplace.

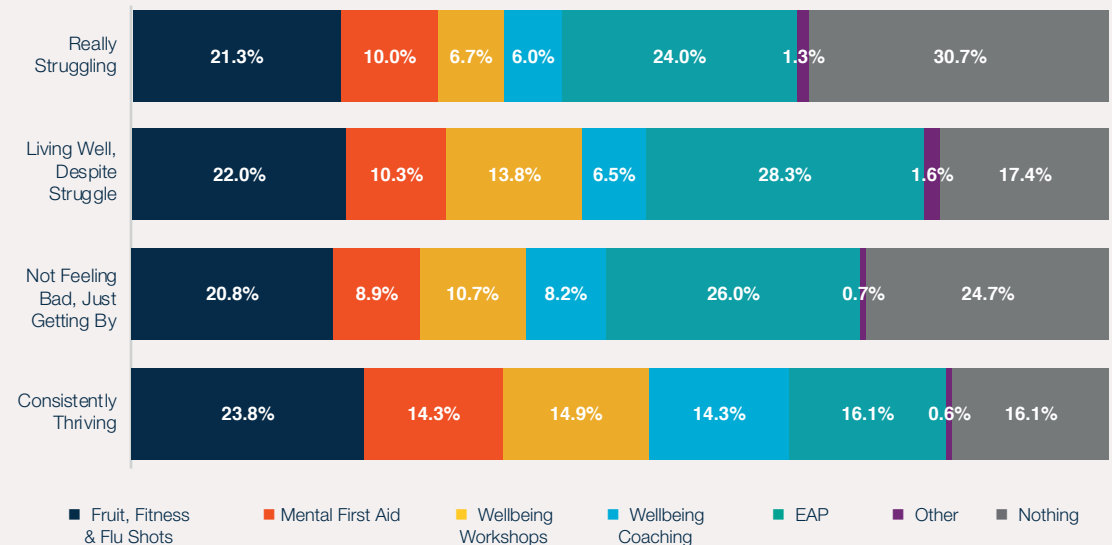
Workers who were **consistently thriving** or **living well, despite struggles** statistically remained more likely to be provided with a variety of wellbeing workplace support including: fruit, fitness and flu shots, wellbeing workshops, mental first aid training, wellbeing coaching and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). However, despite COVID-19 escalating wellbeing challenges for many workers and changes in workplace legislation when it comes to caring for worker wellbeing, there have been no significant changes in the number of Australian workplaces providing different kinds of wellbeing support.

While EAPs remained the most common form of wellbeing workplace support provided in Australian workplaces, workers who were **consistently thriving** reported a statistical decline in EAP services and an increase in workplace coaching.

% WELLBEING WORKPLACE SUPPORT



STATE OF WELLBEING BY % WORKPLACE SUPPORT



# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Amplifying our wellbeing is more likely when we have higher levels of wellbeing ability (A), wellbeing motivation (M), and psychological safety (P). Rather than targeting wellbeing itself, workplaces might benefit from focusing on AMPLifiers, which provide capabilities for and pathways to feeling and functioning well. To support thriving, workplaces need to prioritise providing the training, tools, and support that can help workers to feel confident, committed and connected.

HR needs to explore how they can diversify the forms of support they are providing to improve workers' wellbeing capabilities, rather than expecting the ad-hoc use of EAP services alone to meet these needs.

*Have you provided your workers with the support they need to improve their wellbeing capabilities?*



# 3. BOOSTING THRIVING: TAKING A SYSTEMS APPROACH

Caring for our wellbeing is not a solo endeavour. Associate Professor Aaron Jardon notes that our wellbeing perceptions, experiences, and behaviours are diverse and spread through a complicated web of social connections at the *Me* (individual workers), *We* (teams), and the *Us* Level (the entire workplaces and the communities that surround them). While each person in the organisation impacts upon their team and workplace, leaders play a particularly significant role in nurturing or impairing this web.



37.6%

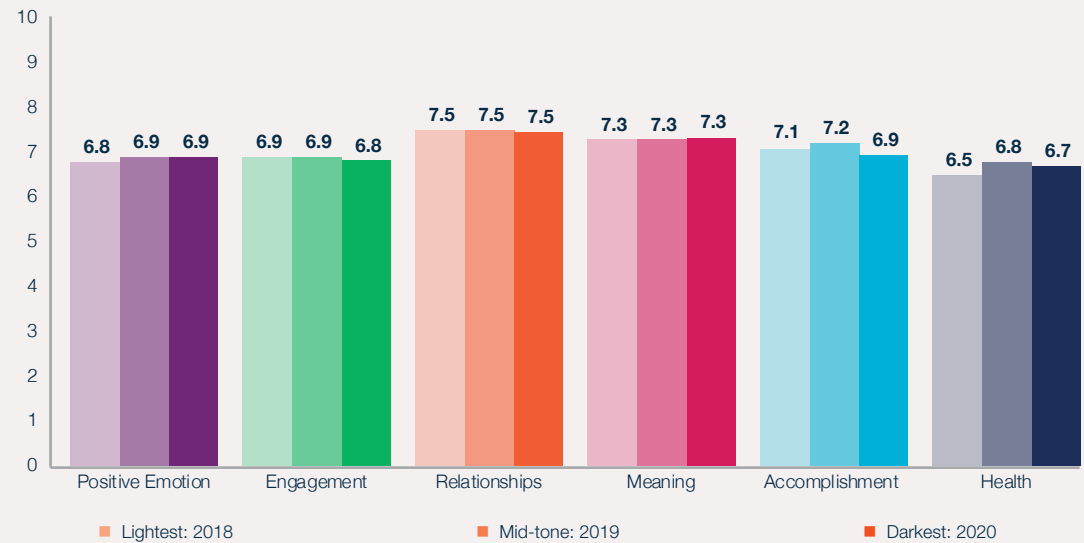
OF AUSTRALIAN WORKERS  
REPORTED THAT THEIR  
MANAGER OFTEN EXPRESSES  
CARE FOR THEM.

# ME LEVEL: WELLBEING IS MULTI-FACETED

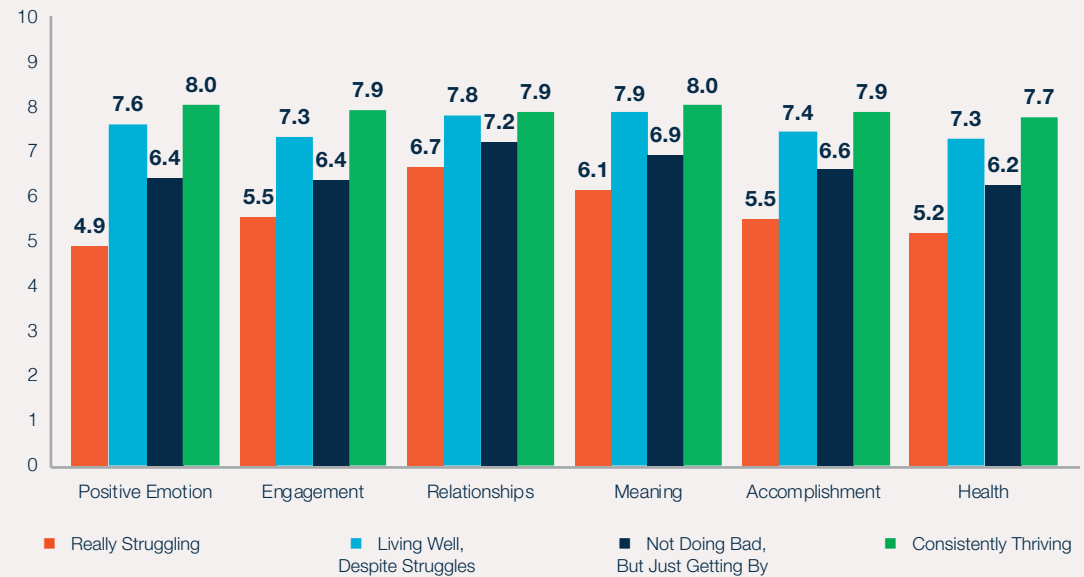
One way to understand, measure, and action evidence-based approaches for improving wellbeing is by drawing on Professor Martin Seligman's PERMAH Framework, which points to six dimensions of feeling and functioning: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, and Health. Different domains might be more important for different people, but feeling poorly in one often results in feeling poorly in other areas as well. How we feel and function across these domains varies across time, situations, and experiences. Still, on average, wellbeing has remained relatively stable over time, again pointing to many people's ability to maintain wellbeing despite challenging circumstances.

Yet that ability varies across individuals. Workers who were *consistently thriving* or *living well, despite struggles* again reported statistically higher scores on all PERMAH factors than other workers. Notably, workers who were *consistently thriving*, while still scoring high across the PERMAH domains, reported statistically significant declines for Engagement, Relationships, Accomplishment and physical Health since 2019, highlighting potential areas of growing struggle. Workers who were *really struggling* were still lower across all factors than other workers, but they also reported statistically significant improvements in Engagement, Meaning, and physical Health. Workers who were *living well, despite struggles* and those *not feeling bad, just getting by* reported no significant changes in the PERMAH factors.

PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS BY MEAN



STATE OF WELLBEING BY PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS BY MEAN



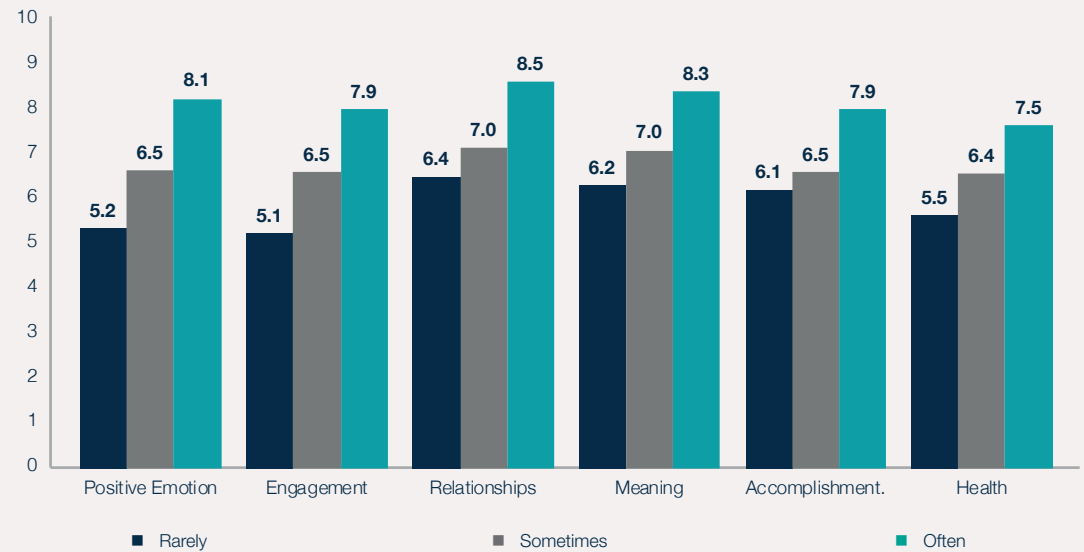
# WE LEVEL: LEADERS HAVE A BIG IMPACT

Previous studies by Associate Professor Mandy O’Neill at George Mason University and her colleagues have found that leaders have a significant impact on workers’ wellbeing. Our data again confirmed these findings, with workers who reported that their managers regularly expressed care, compassion, gratitude, and appreciation towards them showing significantly higher scores across the PERMAH domains.

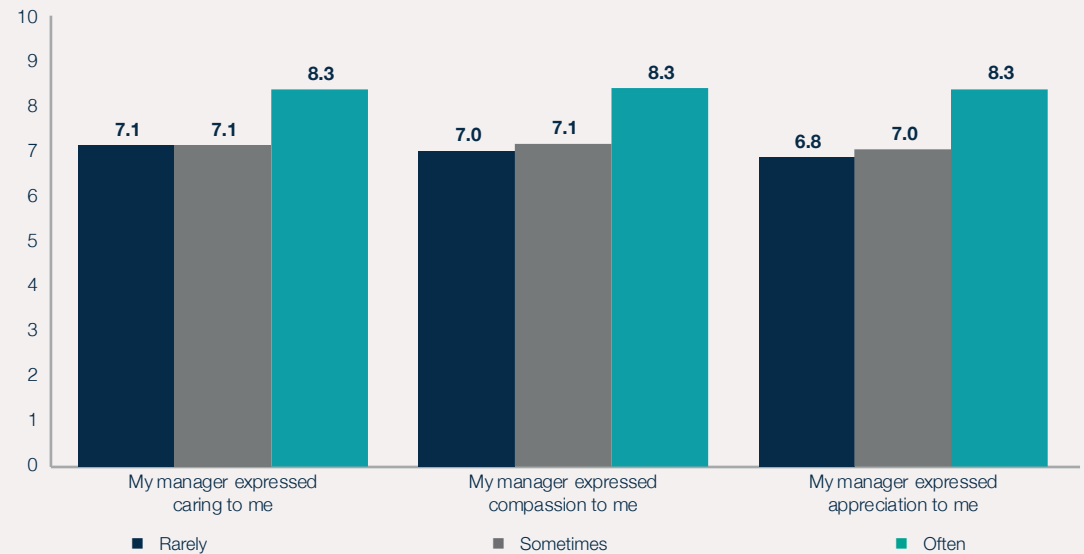
In addition, workers who reported that their managers often expressed care, compassion, gratitude, and appreciation towards them were statistically more likely to be able to manage their wellbeing, and reported higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and commitment to their organisations. They also reported significantly higher levels of productivity over the past month compared to their pre-COVID-19 productivity levels.

While all workers appear to perform better and be more engaged with managers who express care and compassion, lack of care and compassion appears to be particularly problematic for workers with moderate to high levels of anxiety about COVID-19. Caring and compassionate managers may be able to buffer the negative effects of anxiety that workers may experience during challenging times.

MANAGER EXPRESSED CARE IMPACT ON PERMAH MEANS



MANAGER EXPRESSIONS IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

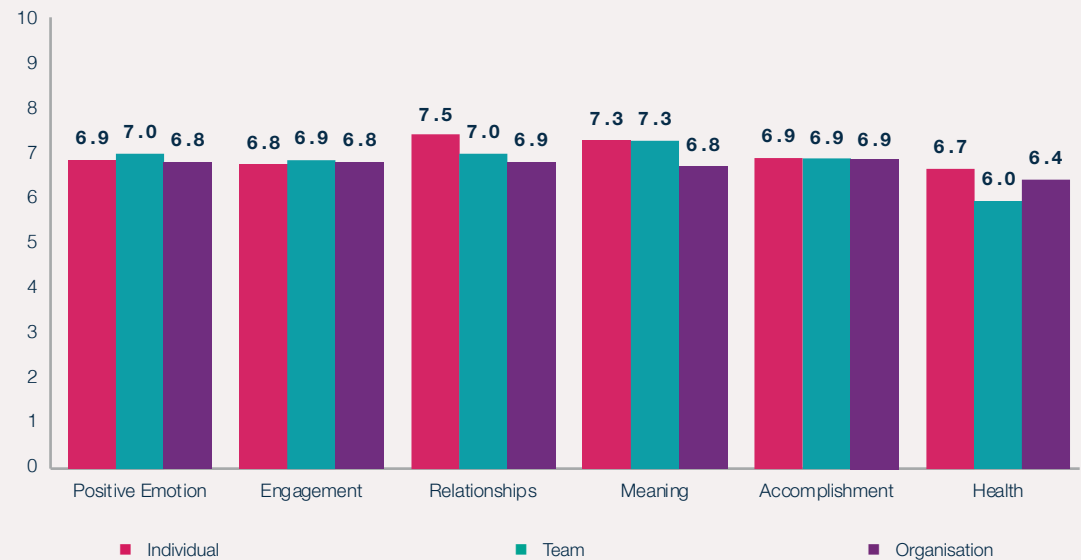


# US LEVEL: WELLBEING IS SYSTEMIC

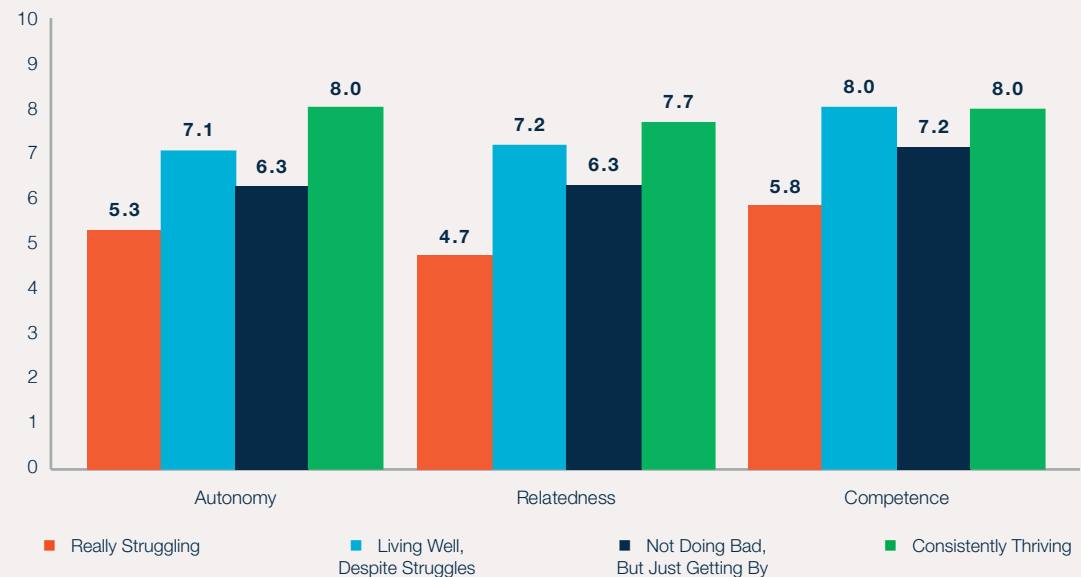
Respondents rated their own wellbeing, along with their perceptions of the wellbeing of their team and organisation. In this survey, workers reported significantly higher levels of individual Relationships and physical Health than their teams, and higher levels of Relationships and Meaning than their organisations. Notably, one of the unexpected benefits of the COVID-19 changes in workplaces was the significant improvement in Relationships and Health that has occurred in organisations since the 2019 survey.

The team and organisation scores represent workplace norms, attitudes and actions that undermine or amplify individual experiences of wellbeing. Given studies find these factors can be contagious, it is important for workplaces to be mindful of the impact their choices might have on workers. For example, workplaces that support people's basic psychological needs of autonomy (having a sense of freedom of choice), competence (able to do one's work, learn, and grow) and relatedness (connecting deeply with others) make it easier for people to thrive consistently. The extent to which these needs were being met continued to help distinguish those who were *consistently thriving* and *living well, despite struggles* from other workers. Notably, since 2019, workers who were *consistently thriving* have reported a significant decline in their levels of competence and relatedness.

COLLECTIVE PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS BY MEANS



WORKPLACE SELF-DETERMINATION WELLBEING NUTRIENTS MEANS BY STATE OF WELLBEING





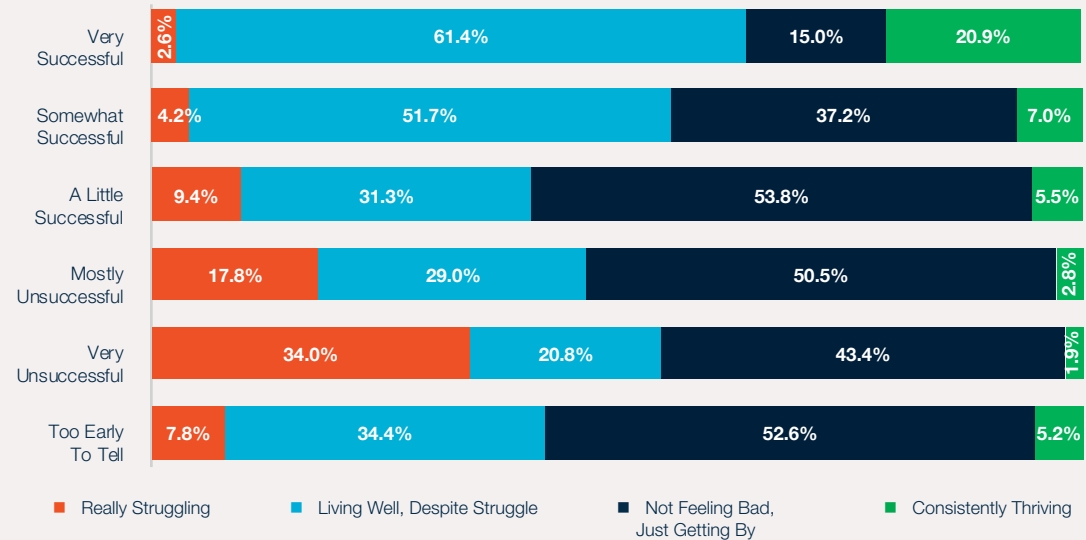
# THE WORKPLACE CHANGE CONNECTION

Our previous research found that workers' wellbeing, the change approach taken by leaders, and the success of organisational change endeavours were intricately interconnected. Workers were more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing when workplace changes were successful and changes were more likely to be successful when workers had higher levels of wellbeing. This same pattern emerged in the current data.

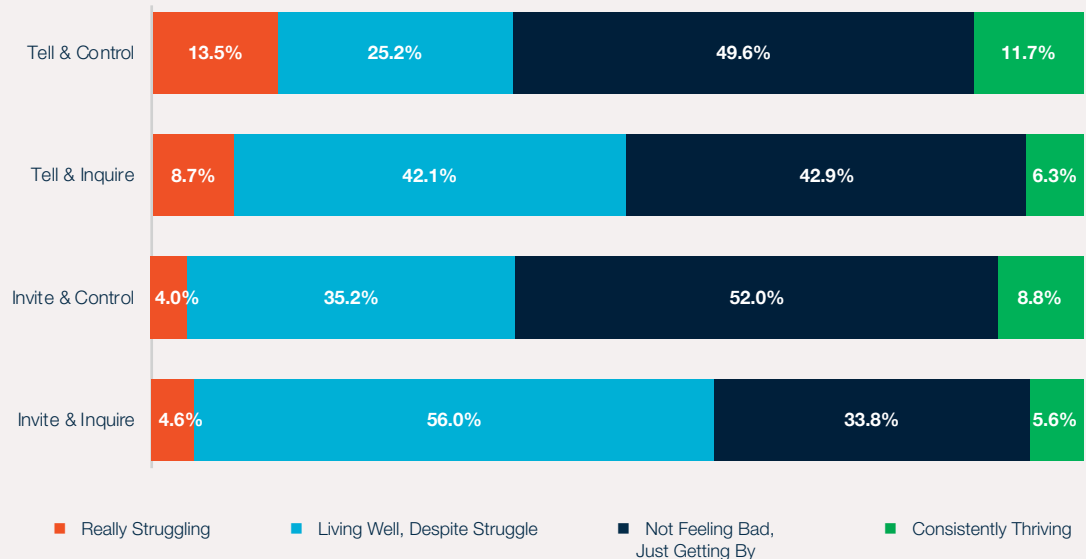
We are not claiming that these elements alone determine worker's levels of wellbeing or how successful change will be; rather, they are an additional element that impact upon how workers feel and function. The data in this report alone also suggests that worker's overall levels of wellbeing ability, wellbeing motivation, psychological safety, and PERMAH scores at an individual, team and organisational level all play a role in wellbeing.

While our research continues to explore these relationships, our data to date emphasise that a reinforcing relationship exists between workplace wellbeing and workplace change, which should be reflected and incorporated into organisational change strategies, implementation, and measurement.

CHANGE SUCCESS BY % STATE OF WELLBEING



LEADERS CHANGE APPROACH BY % STATES OF WELLBEING



# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Caring for workers' wellbeing requires a systems approach that provides support at the *Me* Level by empowering workers to invest in small daily practices that positively impact their PERMAH levels; at the *We* Level by helping leaders to express care, compassion and appreciation for workers; and at the *Us* Level by creating safe and healthy environments in which workers levels of autonomy, competence and relatedness are prioritised.

HR needs to ensure workplace strategies provide a systems-wide approach to caring for wellbeing by providing workers, leaders and their organisation with an evidence-based wellbeing framework that is easy to understand and measure and encourage small daily actions that can be incorporated into the way people work.

*Does your workplace support take a system-wide approach at the Me, We, and Us Levels when it comes to caring for wellbeing?*



# 4. REDUCING STRUGGLE: MAKING IT SAFE TO STRUGGLE

Feelings of struggle, anxiety, and stress are signs that something important for us is unfolding that needs our attention and action. When we have the confidence to navigate struggle, rather than undermining thriving it fuels learning, growth and resilience. But when struggle is perceived to be a sign of failure, is ignored or is avoided for too long, it can create stress and pressures that place people at risk for exhaustion and breakdown. To unnecessarily avoid prolonged struggle, we must feel safe talking about the challenges we are experiencing with each other – particularly during uncertain and disruptive periods.



32.1%

OF AUSTRALIAN WORKERS  
FEEL SAFE SHARING  
THEIR STRUGGLES AT WORK.

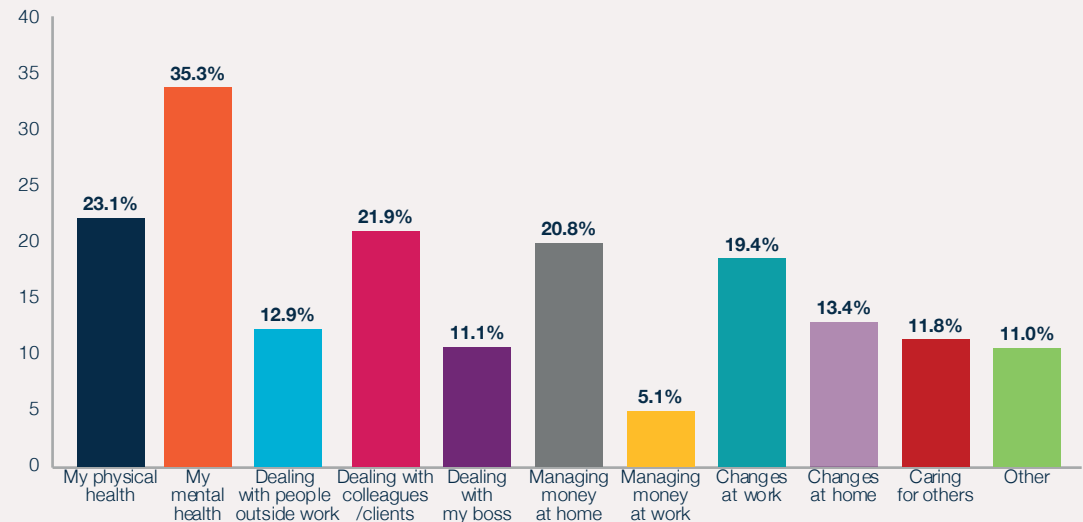
# ME LEVEL: BIGGEST CAUSES OF STRUGGLE

81% of participants reported that their levels of struggle have increased during 2020. This is consistent with our data in March 2020. Feeling anxious is a natural reaction to uncertainty, and can be an important motivator for taking helpful action. It becomes more important to consider what people are worried about, and the extent to which that anxiety is adaptive versus maladaptive.

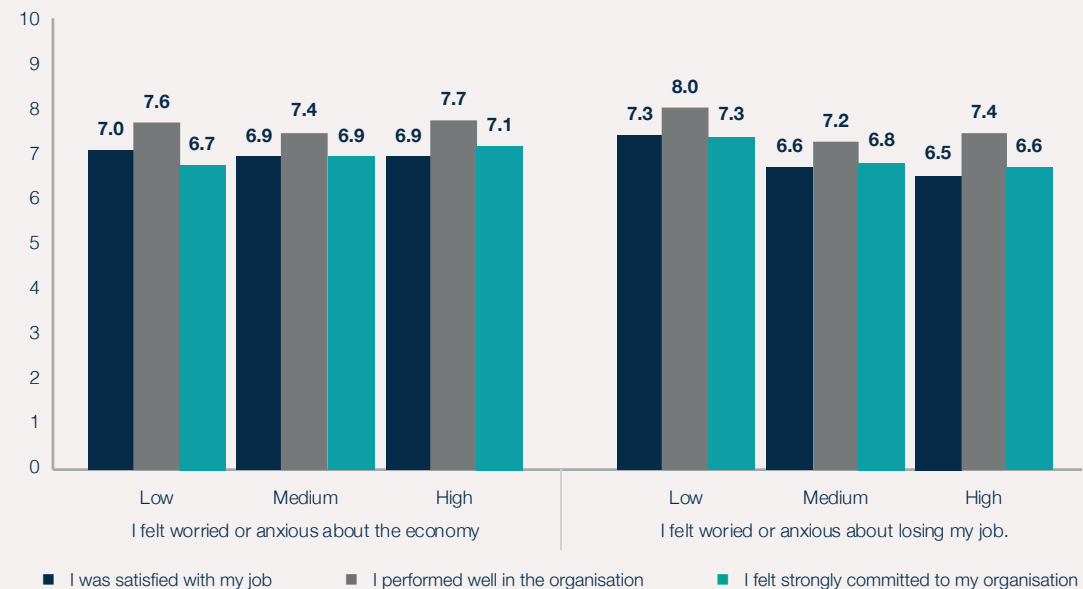
It is concerning that mental health was the leading cause of struggle (35.3%), especially for those who were *not feeling bad, just getting by* or *really struggling*. This was followed by physical health (23.1%), dealing with colleagues and clients (21.9%), managing money at home (20.8%) and changes at work (19.4%).

89% of Australian workers reported feeling worried and anxious about the economy, and 60.3% of workers felt worried and anxious about losing their jobs. While workers who reported high, medium or low levels of anxiety had no statistically significant differences when it came to their job satisfaction or performance, workers who reported high or medium levels of anxiety about losing their job were statistically likely to also report lower levels of job satisfaction, performance and organisational commitment. This points to the personal nature of one's work, which impacts upon daily living, more than general economic conditions.

TOP THREE STRUGGLES AT WORK BY % FREQUENCY



MANAGER EXPRESSIONS IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

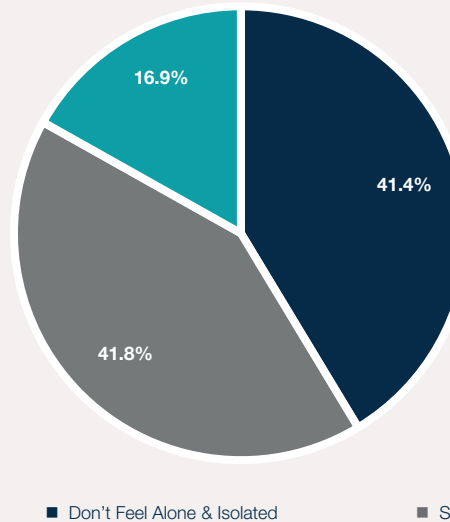


# WE LEVEL: SHARING OUR STRUGGLES WITH OTHERS

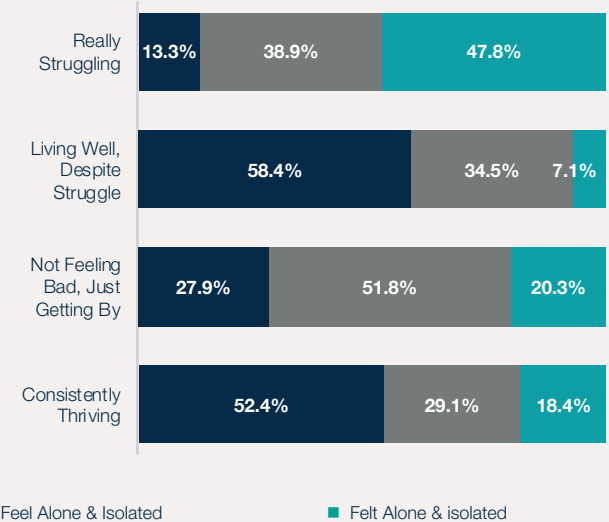
Studies have consistently found that feeling lonely at work relates to lower levels of engagement, productivity, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and wellbeing. Worryingly, six out of every ten Australian workers reported feeling lonely and isolated at work. This was particularly true for workers who have started working at home due to COVID-19. Workers who were *really struggling* were statistically more likely to feel alone and isolated at work, while those who were *not feeling bad, just getting by* were more likely to sometimes feel alone and isolated at work.

Studies have also found that feeling safe to share struggles with others relates to greater levels of engagement, performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and wellbeing. Unfortunately, eight out of every ten Australian workers reported feeling unsafe sharing their struggles at work. This remained particularly true for workers who had high levels of anxiety and worry about COVID-19 and job losses and for those who were *really struggling* or *not feeling bad, just getting by*, suggesting that those who would benefit most from sharing are the least likely to feel safe doing so. These findings highlight the importance of normalising struggle as a part of wellbeing and creating opportunities for people to talk about struggle in appropriate ways.

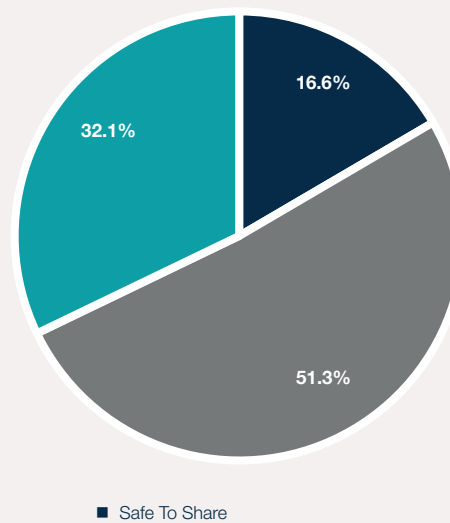
% LONELINESS AT WORK



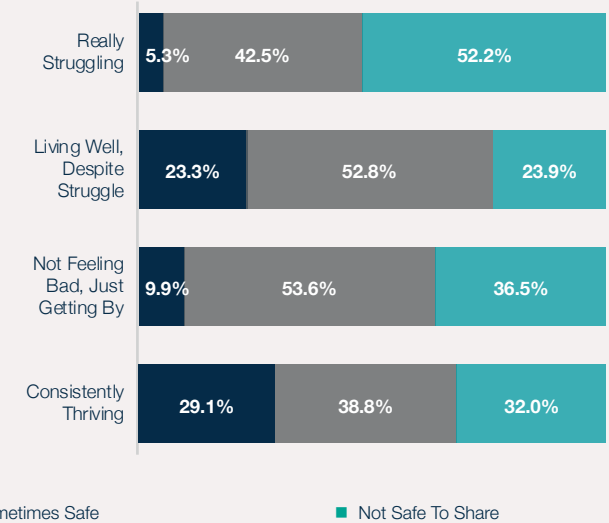
% LONELINESS BY STATE OF WELLBEING



% UNSAFE TO SHARE STRUGGLES AT WORK



% UNSAFE TO SHARE STRUGGLES BY STATE OF WELLBEING



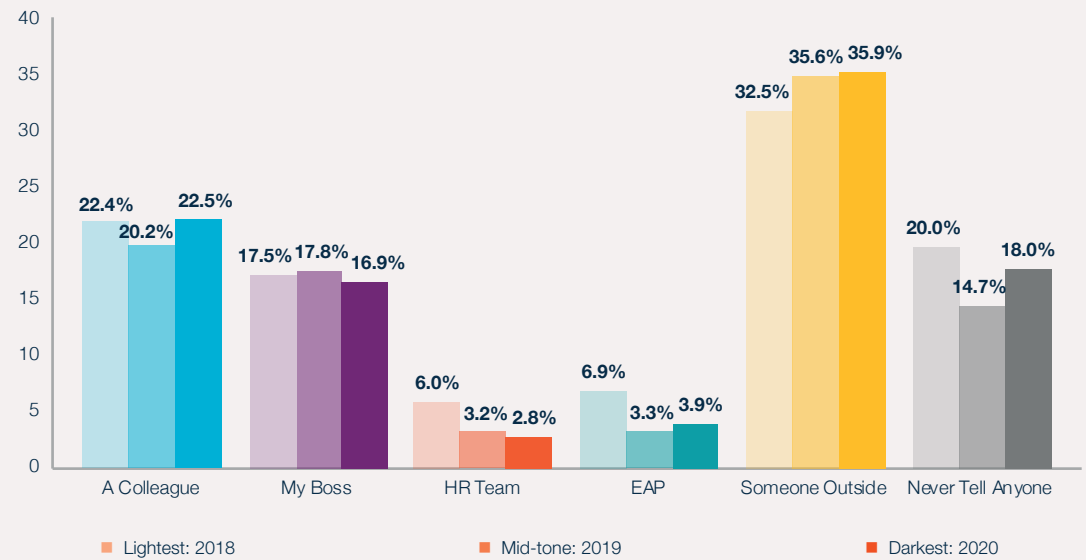
# US LEVEL: SEEKING HELP IN WORKPLACES

Almost one in five workers indicated they would never tell anyone they were struggling with their wellbeing, with workers who were *really struggling* less likely than other workers to seek help. Workers who spoke to no-one were statistically more likely to report lower levels of wellbeing ability, wellbeing motivation and psychological safety.

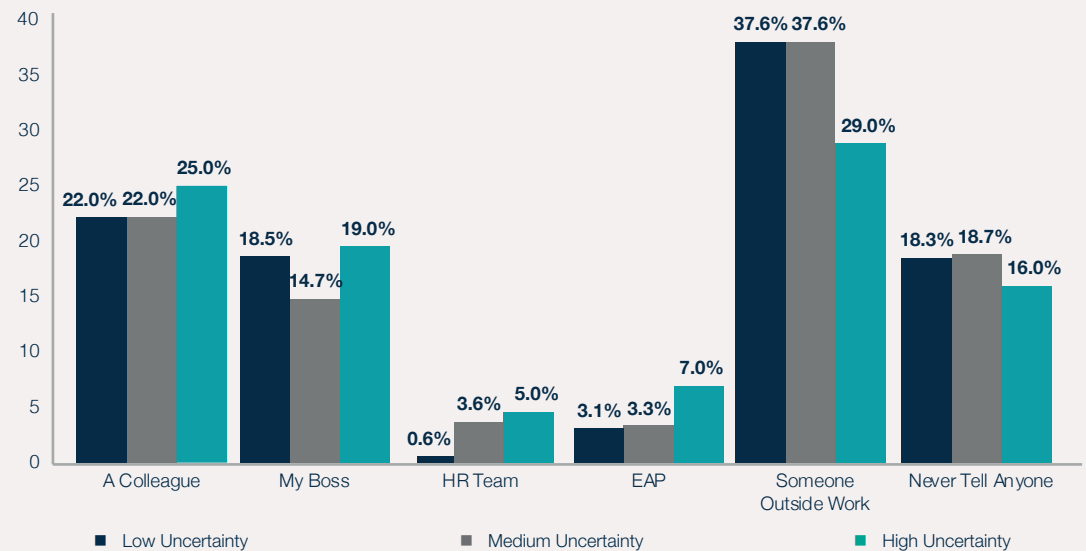
While most continued to seek help when they were struggling with their wellbeing from someone outside of work, this was only slightly better than speaking to no-one when it came to worker's levels of wellbeing ability, wellbeing motivation and psychological safety. In contrast, while their boss, EAP service or HR team were the least likely people workers sought help from – even when they were highly anxious about losing their jobs – they were the most effective options for amplifying workers confidence to care for their wellbeing.

It is worth noting that 65.6% of workers reported still being uncertain what actions to take in response to COVID-19. Those with high levels of uncertainty (18.5%) were more likely to ask for help inside their workplace. Given the economic importance of managing COVID-19 infections, workplaces should continue to prioritise clear messages about the actions they need workers to take to minimise spread of the virus.

% FIRST PERSON I ASK FOR HELP WHEN STRUGGLING WITH MY WELLBEING AT WORK



% FIRST PERSON I ASK FOR HELP BY UNCERTAINTY ABOUT COVID ACTIONS

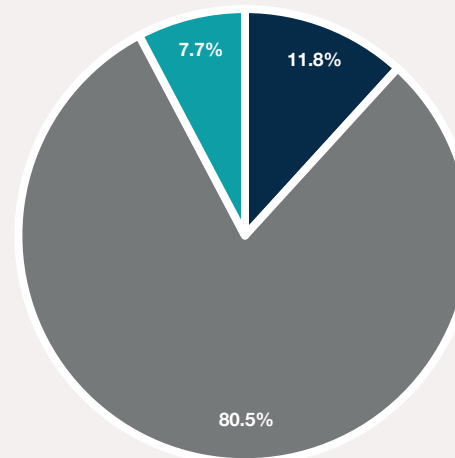


# TRANSITIONING TO POST COVID-19 WORKPLACES

Gartner's HR Survey reported in March 2020 that 88% of Australian workplaces had encouraged or required their workers to work from home due to COVID-19, representing the largest and fastest change to working conditions ever encountered. Despite the sudden changes, 88.2% of workers reported feeling satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their current working from home arrangements. This was particularly true for workers who were *consistently thriving* and those *living well, despite struggles*.

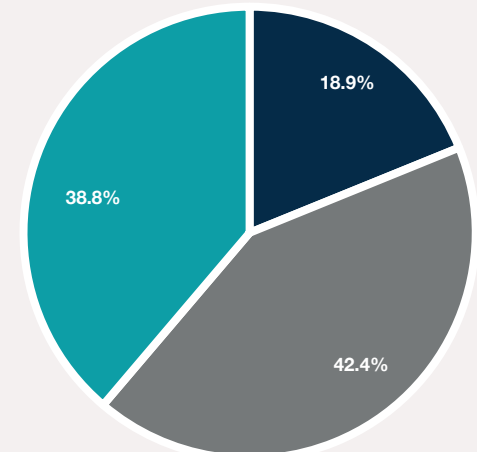
With restrictions lifted in all Australian states (with the exception of Victoria), workers have begun returning to their work premises. Unfortunately, only 38.8% of workers feel positive about this transition, with workers who were *consistently thriving* and *living well, despite struggles* and those who have often been returning to visit their workplace (42.1% of workers) significantly more likely to feel positive about this change.

% SATISFIED WITH WORKING FROM HOME



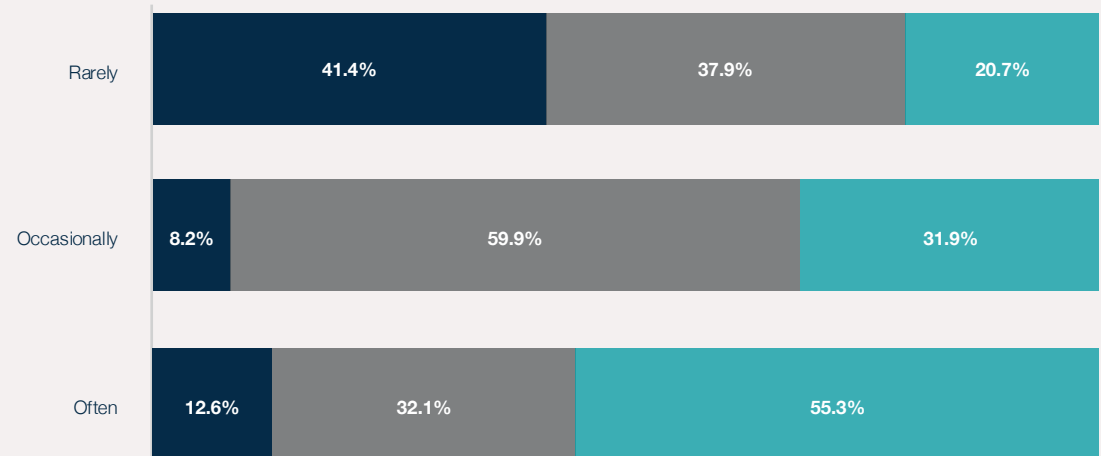
■ Not Satisfied ■ Somewhat Satisfied ■ Satisfied

% FEELING POSITIVE ABOUT RETURNING TO WORK



■ Not Positive ■ Somewhat Positive ■ Positive

% FEELING POSITIVE BASED ON FREQUENCY WORK VISITS



■ Not Positive ■ Somewhat Positive ■ Positive

# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Making it acceptable to talk about struggle, anxiety and worry can help workers feel less lonely and isolated – particularly as they navigate the ongoing economic and COVID-19 challenges ahead of workplaces. Workers need to know that there is no shame in struggling; rather it is a neurological, physical and social invitation for learning and growth.

HR need to work on being seen as a trusted source for support for workers when it comes to navigating struggle and caring for wellbeing, particularly as the economic downturn and COVID-19 create ongoing uncertainty and change.

*How are you helping your workers feel safer to share their struggles at work?*





# HOW CAN YOU HELP WORKERS THRIVE AS THEY RETURN TO WORK?

With only 38.8% of workers reporting that they feel positive about returning to work, in addition to the physical measures that need to be put in place to care for workers' wellbeing, we recommend workplaces also prioritise:

- **GAUGE WORKERS' MENTAL TEMPERATURE** – Understand how workers are feeling about returning to the workplace. Are they relieved at the idea of getting out of their house or are they worried about caring for their health and finding new ways of safely working together? Make it safe for workers to speak openly and honestly about their concerns and their hopes for creating new norms for working safely and productively together. Think about and discuss 'graded' returns to work, where possible.
- **OFFER FREE WELLBEING TESTING** – Encourage your workers to measure their wellbeing so they understand what's working, where they're struggling and what they want to prioritise when it comes to caring for the mental, social, and physical wellbeing. Free tools like the PERMAH Wellbeing Survey ([www.permahsurvey.com](http://www.permahsurvey.com)) provide confidential testing in just 5 minutes.
- **RECOGNISE THE SYMPTOMS OF STRUGGLE** – Educate your workers that feelings of stress and struggle are not signs that their wellbeing is breaking, but rather reflect internal and external challenges. Some struggles are within a person's control, others are not. Make it safe to talk about the struggles that people are experiencing. For struggles that can be controlled, help workers identify actions they can take to address concerns. Consider whether adjustments can be made in the workplace to support people well. And for struggles that cannot be controlled, encourage workers to practice self-compassion and compassion towards each other as they adjust to the ongoing uncertainty and changes required of them.
- **ENCOURAGE PERSONAL WELLBEING PRACTICES** – Give your workers access to short, simple, wellbeing training sessions and small group coaching check-ins that put simple, evidence-based, daily practices to care for their wellbeing at their fingertips. Help workers to support and celebrate each other's efforts as they prioritise caring for their mental and physical wellbeing.
- **RECOMMEND A DAILY DOSE OF LEADER CARE** – Teach leaders the skills to genuinely connect and coach their people through this challenging time. Encourage leaders to deliver daily doses of care, compassion, and appreciation for their team members. Help your leaders understand that this it is more important to care for workers well than to manage performance during this time.
- **PLAN REGULAR STAFF CHECK UPS** – Invite your people to provide feedback and feed forward in their teams and across your workplace to continue co-creating a new working reality as circumstances continue to unfold.

**These steps will help workers more successfully return to work, providing simple actions that can help your workers to thrive.**

# WANT MORE?



## TAKE THE FREE PERMAH WELLBEING SURVEY

Measure your wellbeing and see how you're doing when it comes to your levels of thriving and struggle and your abilities and motivation to care for your wellbeing at [www.permahsurvey.com](http://www.permahsurvey.com). You can even create a free personal wellbeing plan, drawing on more than 200 evidence-based wellbeing actions. You can also use this tool for teams or entire workplaces.



## BOOK A WORKPLACE WELLBEING STRATEGY BRIEFING

Take a deeper dive into the workplace wellbeing research and accelerate your HR or Leadership team's understanding of how to improve workplace wellbeing and assess how your workplace is currently performing. Drawing on an appreciative human centered design process and tailored to meet the needs of your team, this briefing is designed to give you the confidence, support and actions you need to improve wellbeing across your workplace. **Click here to book your session.**



## GRAB OUR FASTTRACKS SERIES

Put the latest research and practises for improving wellbeing at your workers fingertips. 91% of participants in our workplace wellbeing training programs are confident they can apply the knowledge and skills they learned, and 98% recommend our programs to others. Tailored for the needs of your workplace, upskilling internal wellbeing champions – be they leaders, your HR team or staff – is an affordable and effective way to care for your workers' wellbeing. **Click here to learn more.**

# ABOUT THE WELLBEING LAB RESEARCHERS



## DR. PEGGY KERN

Dr Peggy Kern is an associate professor at the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education. Her research is collaborative in nature and draws on a variety of methodologies to examine questions around who thrives in life and why, including understanding and measuring healthy functioning, identifying individual and social factors impacting life trajectories, and systems informed approaches to wellbeing. She has published 3 books and over 85 peer-reviewed articles and chapters. You can find out more about Peggy's work at [www.peggykern.org](http://www.peggykern.org)



## DR. MICHELLE MCQUAID

Dr. Michelle McQuaid is a best-selling author, workplace wellbeing teacher and playful change activator. An honorary fellow at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education, in addition to hosting the highly acclaimed weekly podcast, Making Positive Psychology Work, which features leading researchers and practitioners from around the world. Michelle blogs for Psychology Today, The Huffington Post and Thrive Global, and her work has been featured in Forbes, The Harvard Business Review, The Wall Street Journal, Boss Magazine, The Age and more. You can find more of Michelle's work at [www.michellemcquaid.com](http://www.michellemcquaid.com)



## DANIELLE JACOBS

Danielle Jacobs is a registered psychologist and wellbeing specialist, speaker, trainer and coach. Danielle uses evidence-based organizational scholarship and positive psychology practises within businesses across Australia to help their people flourish, improve their mental and physical health and achieve peak performance at the individual, team and organisational levels. She is a Certified and Licensed Tiny Habits® Coach, and an affiliate member of APS College of Organisational Psychologists. You can find more about Danielle's work at [www.daniellejacobs.com.au](http://www.daniellejacobs.com.au)

# ABOUT THE AHRI RESEARCHERS



## **SARAH MCCANN-BARTLETT MAHRI**

Sarah McCann-Barlett is CEO and Managing Director of the Australian HR Institute. She has extensive, global experience in membership and trade bodies and has held senior roles across a variety of sectors in Australia, the UK, and the USA. Sarah was Director General (CEO) of the British Constructional Steelwork Association from September 2011 to December 2019. In this role, she established a new sector apprenticeship program, created a new market development program to drive market share gains for constructional steelwork, and drove rapid growth of the group's certification arm. Sarah holds Commerce and Arts degrees from the University of Melbourne, an MBA from Monash University, and postgraduate qualifications in marketing. She is a Fellow of the UK Institute of Directors. Sarah lives in Melbourne with her husband and 12-year-old son, and their three dogs.



## **SAMANTHA SMITH**

Samantha has been working as the Research Coordinator at AHRI for the last year, and is skilled in research design, writing and data analysis. She has recently completed her Masters of Arts in Psychology, specialising in Social Cognition and Religious Belief, from the University of Otago in New Zealand. Samantha's current research interests are cultural change in relation to HR and metrics, the future of work and AI and automation.

*For HR tools and resources on wellbeing, please visit [www.ahri.com.au/wellbeing2020/](http://www.ahri.com.au/wellbeing2020/)*

# ABOUT OUR ADDITIONAL RESEARCHERS



## DR. LINDSEY GODWIN

A professor, practitioner, and possibilitiser, Dr. Lindsey Godwin has a passion for helping individuals and organisations leverage their potential through strength-based change. She holds the Robert P. Stiller Endowed Chair of Management in the Stiller School of Business at Champlain College (Vermont, USA), where she serves as the Academic Director of the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry (AI). An international speaker, consultant and facilitator, her work has been published in a variety of journals and books and she is currently a managing editor for the AI Practitioner Journal. You can find out more about Lindsey's work at: [www.lindseygodwin.com](http://www.lindseygodwin.com)



## DONALD E. FREDERICK (PH.D.)

Donald is a data science consultant, technologist and entrepreneur focused on the future of technology, work and flourishing. He completed his postdoctoral research on the psychology of work and flourishing at The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University's Institute for Quantitative Social Science. He holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from The University of Chicago. He also holds master's degrees in computer science and divinity, also from Chicago. You can find out more on his website [www.neurofoo.com](http://www.neurofoo.com)



## DR. MANDY O'NEILL

Dr. Olivia (Mandy) O'Neill is an Associate Professor of Management at the George Mason University School of Business and Senior Scientist at the university's Center for the Advancement of Well-Being. She holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from Stanford University. Mandy is a passionate about researching and (co)creating positive organizational cultures and has worked with a wide range of organizations in that pursuit. Her work has been published in a variety of scholarly and practitioner journals. You can find out more about Mandy's work at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~ooneill>