

WELL-BEING AT WORK

**CREATING A WORKPLACE WHERE
EVERYONE CAN THRIVE**

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SUMMARY

Many organizations have launched new efforts to address employee well-being, yet there are many factors and perceptions surrounding this topic. In this research brief, we take a multi-year review of employee well-being in Australia using our Well-being at Work Index, comprising data from Great Place To Work®. This study highlights the rise and decline of employee well-being while noting differences by population demographics and industry sectors. We find meaningful differences by age, gender, and managerial level, suggesting that a more nuanced approach may be needed to address all groups in the workforce. Based on the results of this analysis, we outline suggested management actions that place well-being at the heart of the employee experience.



CONTEXT OF WELL-BEING

Over the years, attention to employee well-being has been gaining traction in organizations around the world. Many employers have been focused on the health and well-being of their workforce with various programs and incentives over the past two decades (Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz, 2006). Following the stressful period of the pandemic, employers quickly recognized a dramatic shift and need to support employee well-being and mental health.

Today, employee health and well-being is a top priority for human resource managers in organizations of all types as the focus on health and lifestyle continues to grow. In Australia, there has been an active trend toward minding well-being and we find evidence that shows that Australians are adopting healthier lifestyles. This focus has been reinforced by Australia's new Work Health and Safety (Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work) Code of Practice 2024, which legally requires employers to proactively identify and manage 17 specific psychosocial hazards including workplace bullying, excessive workloads, and poor organizational justice. Additionally, the Right to Disconnect legislation introduced in August 2024 grants employees legal protection from after-hours contact, addressing boundary-setting issues that directly impact workplace well-being.

Yet, there is more work to be done across all sectors in the country. Robert Half, a professional services firm, reported that up to 80% of Australian office workers are feeling burnt out due to heavy workloads and staff shortages (Robert Half, 2024). The Australia National Health Survey shows



a consistent rise in the number of workers reporting psychological distress (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). This is consistent with other studies focused on mental health around the world, showing that large percentages of employees are experiencing burnout (Brassey, et al, 2023).

While there has been an ongoing global campaign to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and increase access to mental health services, the challenge has been growing. Between 2019 and 2022, use of mental health services in many parts of the world increased by almost 40%. Meanwhile, almost a third of employees reported symptoms of anxiety and depression (Ducharme, 2023). The simultaneous increase in the use of services and decline in mental well-being suggests that part of the solution lies beyond the healthcare system.

The workplace has been identified as a key component in improving well-being. Many Australian employers have stepped up to this challenge by adopting holistic approaches that address mental, physical, and financial well-being through comprehensive support programs, neurodiversity inclusion initiatives, flexible work policies, and workplace culture initiatives recognizing that different employee demographics require tailored well-being strategies. These efforts have

expanded to include enhanced mental health support, dedicated mental health leave provisions, shorter workweeks, and innovative flexible work arrangements designed to improve work-life balance across multi-generational workforces.



While these new programs demonstrate organizational commitment to employee well-being, it is often unclear which specific interventions have the most positive impact and how employers might most effectively create a sustainable climate of well-being in their organization. This challenge is particularly complex given the diverse needs of different generational cohorts, varying industry requirements, and the ongoing economic pressures facing Australian workers. Understanding which approaches deliver meaningful results requires careful measurement and analysis of workplace well-being outcomes across different organizational contexts.

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Once relegated to sporadic seminars and occasional office bulletins, the discourse surrounding well-being and mental health in the workplace has surged in recent years, with substantial interest in the topic among organizational leaders. Research exploring the link between employee well-being and performance has provided leaders reasons to explore how maximizing these once-overlooked factors may be central to increasing productivity, engagement, and organizational success.

Historically, well-being and mental health support in the workplace was considered a personal issue that was channeled on a reactive basis to Employee Assistance Programs. This is akin to only providing employees with compensation when they are injured at work – rather than working to ensure a safe work environment. The good news is that many organizations are now

taking a proactive view of well-being and mental health – as many organizations now recognize that well-being in the workplace starts with the work environment!

Proactively addressing employee well-being makes good business sense. Poor mental and physical health in a workforce can erode profits through higher turnover, decreased engagement, reduced customer service, and increased healthcare costs. Yet, equally important to the potential ROI of well-being programs are employee perceptions of these programs, which can only be effective to the extent that employees embrace them. Workplace climate must provide the foundation for initiatives and programs related to well-being since the success of these programs is dependent on the strength of the workplace practices and norms.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Johns Hopkins University Carey Business School's Human Capital Development Lab, in partnership with Great Place To Work, continues to track trends related to well-being, organization culture, and human capital factors around the world. In this report, we take aim at uncovering unique insights to advance our understanding of organizational climate factors that influence employee well-being in Australia.

This report builds on our prior research in several countries over the last several years and leverages GPTW flagship data, gathered using a proprietary employee survey. The Trust Index™ Survey was administered

to over 500 organizations with over 80,000 survey respondents last year in Australia. In this study, we analyze various organizational and individual factors that may be linked to the climate of employee well-being. Given the heightened awareness of well-being and mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic, we examine the trends and patterns related to well-being between individual demographic groups as well as organizations over the last five years.



WELL-BEING AT WORK INDEX

A positive workplace climate for well-being has been identified as a significant factor associated with engagement and work outcomes. Research from a longitudinal study on workplace climate suggest that a positive work climate is linked to lower odds of diagnosed depression, increased overall well-being, mental health, physical health, social connectedness, and financial security (Weziak-Bialowolska, et. al., 2023). Moreover, researchers indicate that a positive climate can decrease distraction at work and increase productivity, potentially contributing to enhanced job satisfaction (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of fostering a positive organizational climate, which could be achieved through various initiatives aimed at building trust, recognition, and

supportive relationships among employees. Such interventions not only benefit employee health and well-being but also contribute to improved work-related outcomes, aligning with the principles of humanistic management and ethical caring in the workplace.

Providing an organizational climate that supports well-being may sound like a relatively straight-forward practice to implement, yet this involves several facets of work that are not easily controlled or manipulated in the short-term. Employee well-being is closely anchored to organization culture, management practices, and HR processes since it relates to how a member of the workforce experiences their life at work.





In our study, we measure several key dimensions that comprise our Well-Being at Work Index. These factors have been shown to contribute to positive employee well-being in our studies across more than 30 countries with over five million survey respondents. The Well-Being at Work Index includes:

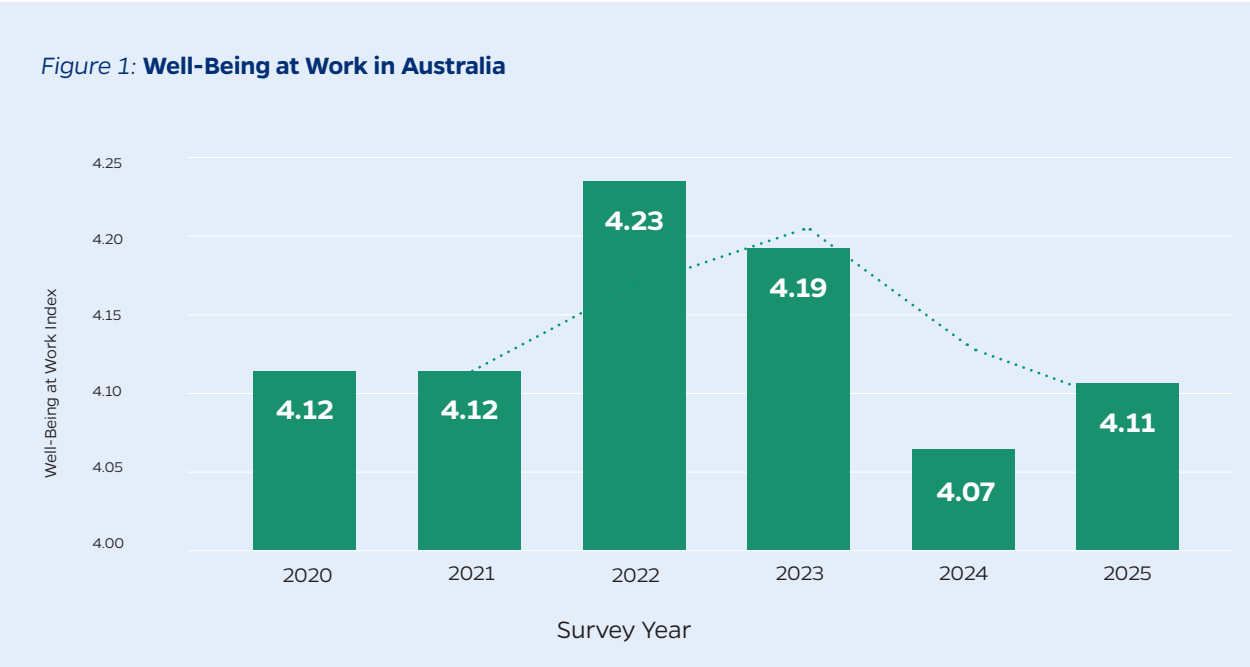
- **Mental and Emotional Support** – when employees sense that they have the mental support of others, they are more likely to have a positive or optimistic attribution, which can build energy, hope, and confidence.
- **Sense of Purpose** – when employees have a sense of meaning, progress, and fulfillment through their activities at work, they are more likely to have higher resilience and a positive view of their employer.
- **Personal Support** – when employees have the support of their manager regarding their unique personal situation, priorities, goals, and interests, they are more likely to have positive engagement and commitment to the employer.

- **Financial Health** – when employees have adequate financial means to feel stable and there is equity in the compensation (and promotion) practices, they can avoid anxiety and fear.
- **Meaningful Connections** – when employees are able to develop social relationships with others at work, they are more likely to feel a sense of teamwork and belonging, which can enhance the employment experience.

It is important to note that actual well-being of an individual requires a precise method of targeted questions that extend beyond the workplace. To provide this index at scale, we use factors to measure the organizational climate based on individual survey responses that reflect positive employee well-being. This approach is supported by other research studies seeking to measure employee well-being and thriving of individuals in the context of organizations (Su, Tay, Diener, 2014).

We examine employee well-being in Australia over the last six years, which provides unique insight on the changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Employee well-being over time is shown in Figure 1 using the Well-Being at Work Index.

The survey used to assess employee well-being was based on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Scores of 1 or 2 indicate a negative experience, a score of 3 indicates an inconsistent experience and scores of 4 and 5 indicate a positive experience.



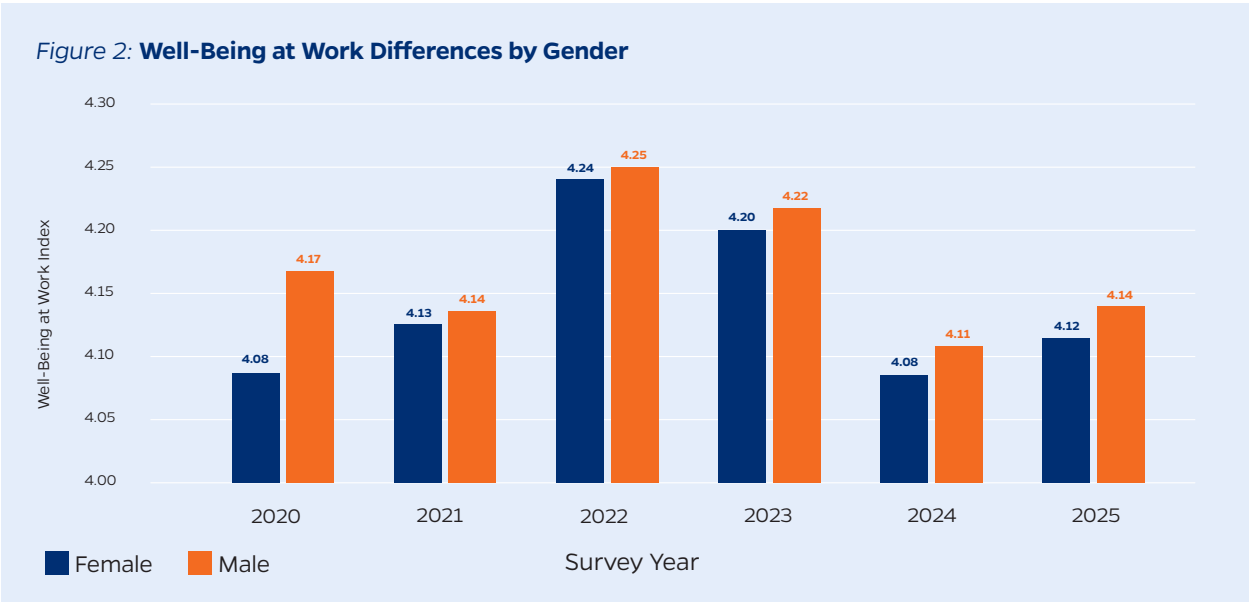
During the COVID-19 pandemic, various facets of employee well-being were adversely affected, including job security, mental health, and work-life balance. The pandemic years of 2020-2021 were generally consistent with this expectation. As workplaces transition back to pre-pandemic norms with less restrictions, we note a rise in Well-Being at Work in 2022-23. Yet, in 2024 we find a significant drop, which may reflect the return to physical office spaces. The 2024 decline may also reflect factors including the implementation of new psychosocial hazard regulations requiring

organizational adjustments, economic pressures from cost-of-living increases, and the introduction of Right to Disconnect laws that are reshaping workplace communication patterns. Organizations are navigating these regulatory changes while managing economic uncertainty, creating transitional impacts on workplace climate. Now in 2025, we find that employee well-being has returned to the same levels as the early days of the pandemic. In this report, we examine the factors that influence the climate of well-being as well as the impact on various sectors of the workforce.

ANALYSIS BY GENDER

To understand the sense of well-being in Australia, we take a closer look at the differences by gender. As shown in Figure 2, we find a significant difference between male and female respondents in the area of well-being. These gaps have been recognized in Australia by recent

Great Place To Work analyses (Moulynox, 2025), which show scores among women dropping by four points from 2023 to 2025, with significant erosions in fairness and leadership credibility—patterns that align with our gender analysis showing persistent disparities in workplace experiences.



The gender gap in these areas suggests that there is more work to be done to address how women experience their workplace. We do note that the gap between male and female responses has narrowed significantly since the

2020 levels. These findings suggest that incorporating measures to address disparities between perceptions and experiences of well-being in the workplace is a crucial part of developing a positive climate of well-being for all employees.

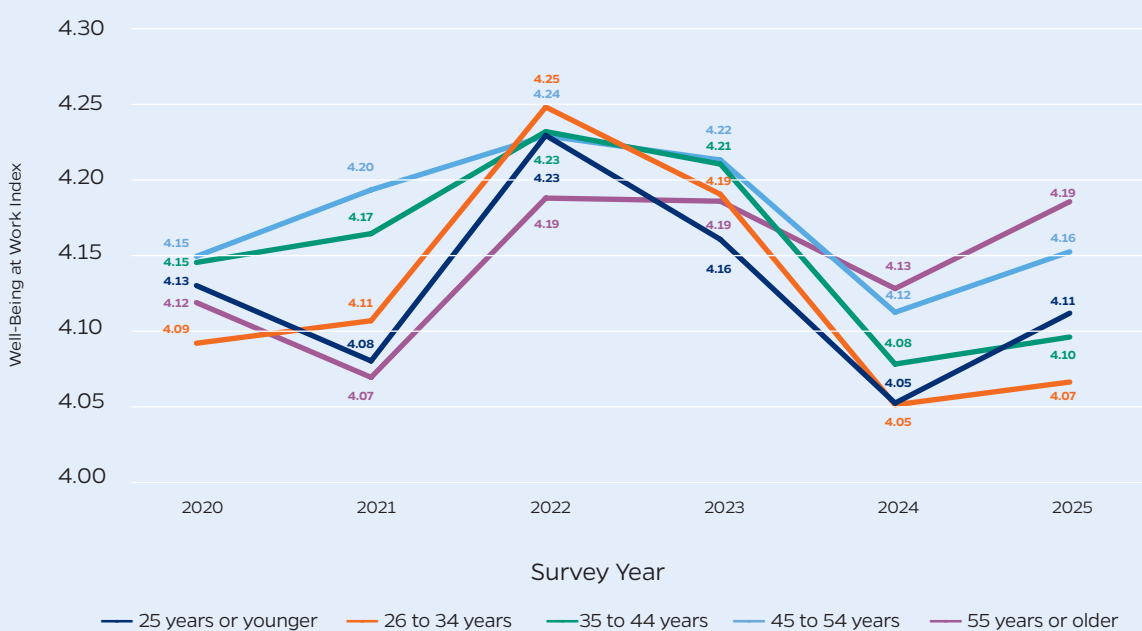


ANALYSIS BY AGE AND TENURE

Upon review of the data trends by age, we quickly note the fluctuations by age group over the years as shown in Figure 3. Notably, younger age groups, such as those aged 25 and younger and 26 to 34 years, displayed more significant fluctuations in well-being scores over the years compared to older age groups. The well-being scores

of 45-54 years age group, show high scores pre and post pandemic. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding of well-being trends across different age categories and underscore the importance of considering age-related variations in well-being assessments and analysis.

Figure 3: **Well-Being by Age**



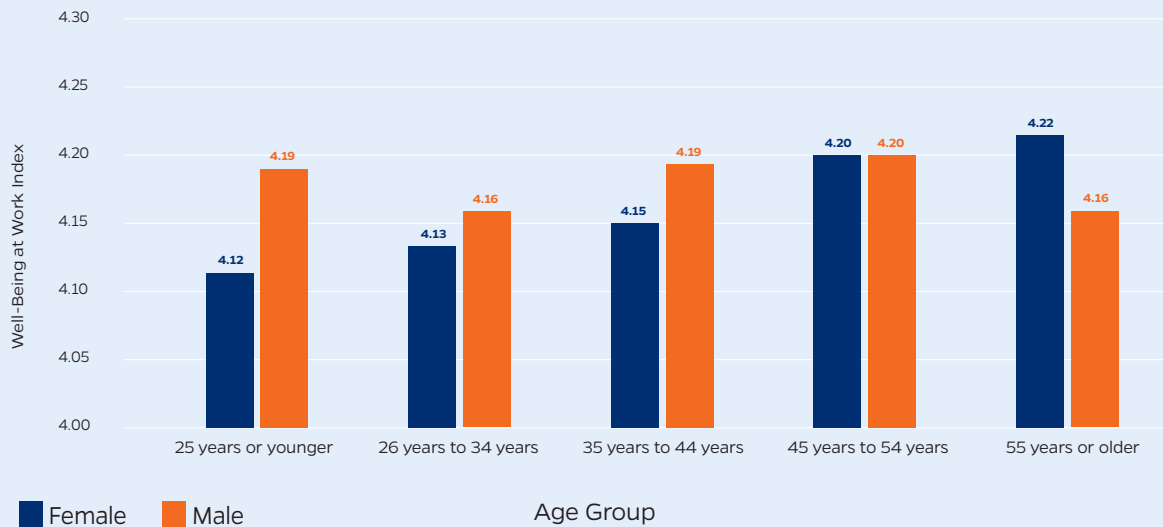
To better understand the differences by age, we further reviewed the gender differences over the six-year period. While there were fluctuations across the years, we find some distinct differences between the gender scores across the age groups as shown in Figure 4, which shows the average for the period of our study. We find a pronounced difference in both the 25 years and younger group as well as the 55 years and older group consistently over the six-year period. Notably, the data

shows that women over the age of 55 have higher well-being than men of the same age - this is the only age bracket where women demonstrate higher well-being than men, and this pattern has uniquely emerged in Australian data. The cause of this well-being spike for women over 55 could stem from multiple factors, but one potential explanation is that women in this age group typically have older children and no longer bear the same level of family responsibilities and mental load that characterized their

earlier years. Additional contributing factors may include increased financial security and career advancement, greater freedom to pursue personal interests and social

connections, and the development of stronger social networks and community involvement that often emerges during this life stage.

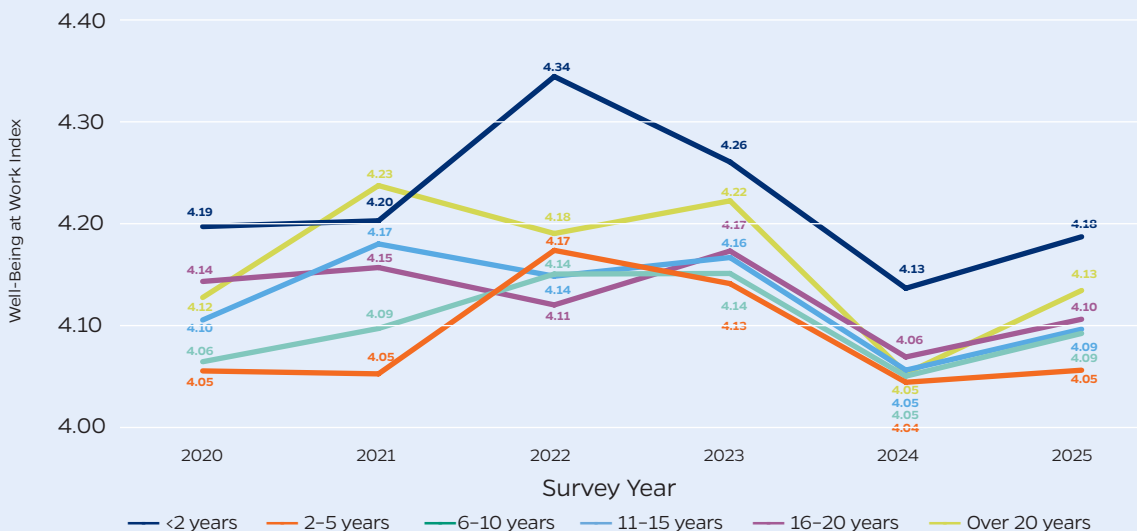
Figure 4: Well-Being by Age and Gender (2020-2025)



When considering scores for employee sentiment on things such as well-being, we often find similar scores for both age and tenure, since these tend to be correlated. However, we find a consistent pattern over the years, which highlights a higher score for employees with two years or less of experience with their employer followed

by a significant drop in the following years with a steady improvement over time as shown in Figure 5. The increase over time may reflect a similar pattern that we see by age group, yet the “honeymoon period” of the first two years may be experienced by people of any age group.

Figure 5: Well-Being at Work by Employee Tenure

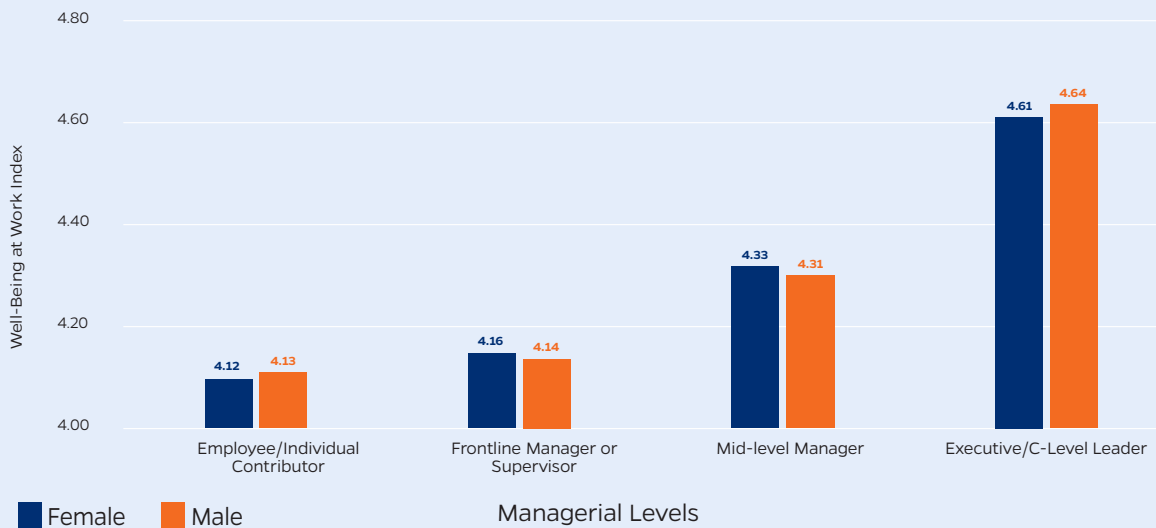


ANALYSIS BY MANAGEMENT LEVEL AND CONFIDENCE

We investigated variations in well-being across managerial tiers. Employees were classified into four categories: Individual Contributors, Front-line Managers, Mid-

level managers, and Executive-level Leaders. Increasing well-being scores corresponded to higher management levels as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: **Well-Being at Work by Managerial Level**

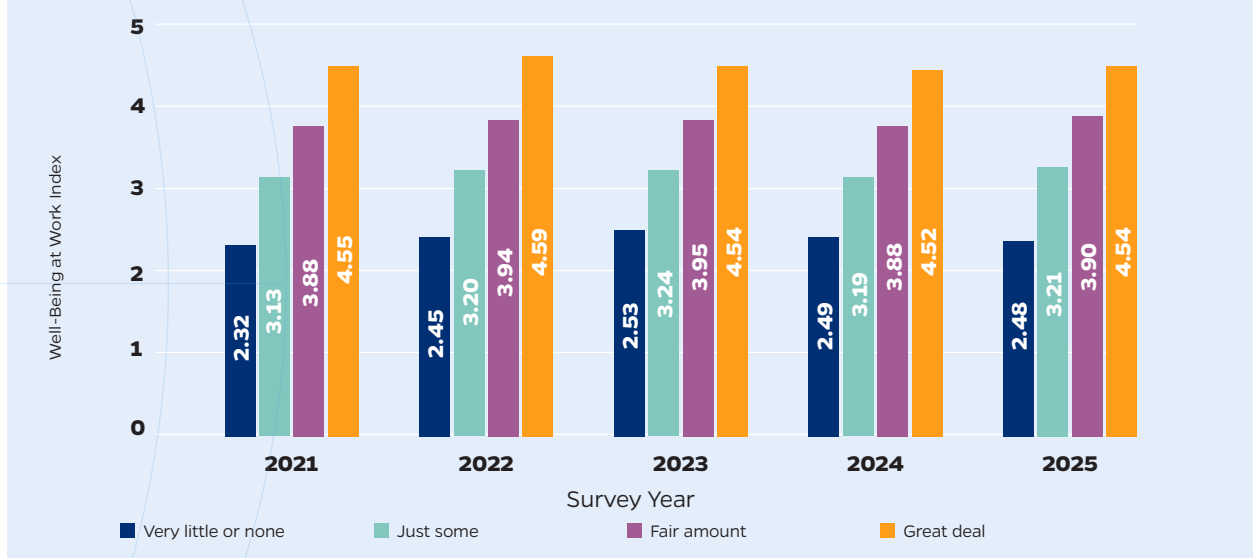


Our analysis is consistent with prior research that shows that senior level managers typically encounter lower stress levels than their subordinates (Skakon, et. al. 2011). While these managers contend with heightened job demands and conflicts, they also benefit from increased autonomy, superior management quality, and more avenues for personal growth. These factors, alongside elements like social support, influence, and the significance attached to work, contribute to the diminished stress levels observed among these senior level managers. Our

analysis highlights the potential risk of these managers being out of touch with their employees. The ones that are able to continue to relate and earn trust with their workforce, must do so by recognizing that their own experiences are not representative of those of their employees.

To illustrate the importance of earning trust with employees, respondents were asked to rate their confidence in management. We find a very clear linear relationship between the degree of confidence and well-being score as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Well-Being at Work by Confidence Level in Management



Overall, the country-level patterns we see with employee well-being for Australia are somewhat consistent with global findings. There is a difference when employees have high confidence in management and people in managerial roles report a higher level of well-being. The pattern of seeing

an overall rise in well-being scores during the pandemic followed by a decline is also reflective of other countries. In Australia however, we do see a rise in 2025 which may be indicative of the focused efforts in the country to address the employee work environment and well-being.



AUSTRALIA ORGANIZATIONS TAKING POSITIVE ACTIONS

Leading Practice Example: Integrated Well-being Approach

McNab Construction demonstrates how organizations can address multiple dimensions of the Well-Being at Work Index through an integrated approach that goes beyond traditional Employee Assistance Programs. Their well-being strategy addresses all five dimensions identified in our research:

Mental and Emotional Support: The company provides 24/7 access to confidential support through both traditional EAP services and the TELUS Health One app, while their CareFactor training program equips senior leaders to create psychologically safe environments where employees feel supported to speak up and perform without fear.

Personal Support: McNab recognizes individual circumstances through flexible work arrangements, birthday leave, and leave-purchasing programs, while establishing explicit boundaries around after-hours contact to protect personal time.

Financial Health: Beyond competitive compensation, the company provides health and fitness subsidies and comprehensive benefits that reduce out-of-pocket healthcare expenses for employees.

Meaningful Connections: Regular company-wide initiatives like “Tools Down for Safety” days and seasonal campaigns create shared experiences that build team cohesion, while leadership visibility through regular site visits reinforces connection between management and frontline workers.

Preventive Health Focus: Rather than only responding to health issues, McNab proactively offers free flu shots, health checks, skin cancer screenings, and heat-stress prevention measures tailored to their industry context.

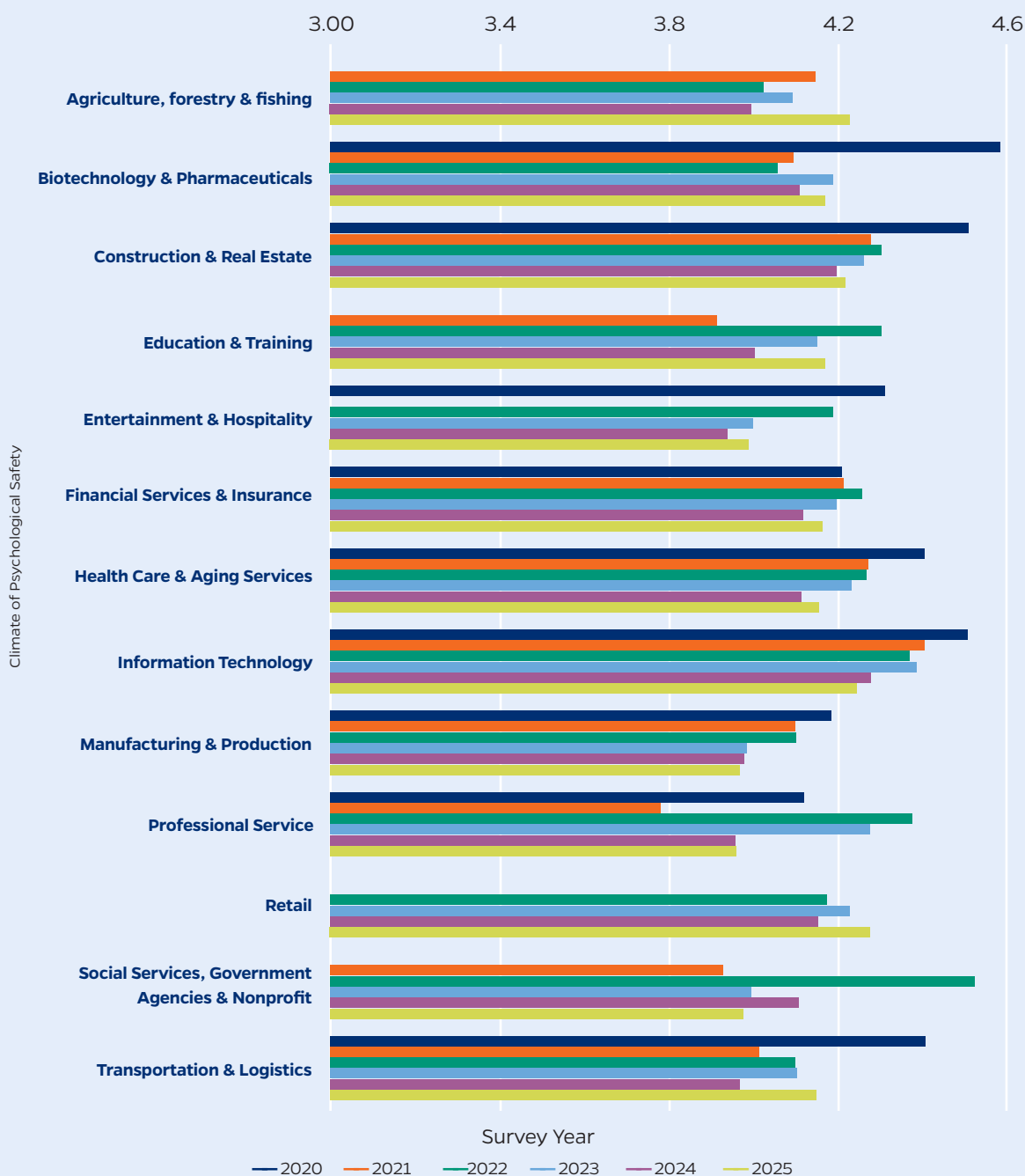
The integration of these elements - from practical health measures to cultural initiatives - demonstrates how organizations can create sustainable well-being programs that address the complex, interconnected nature of employee needs while maintaining strong business outcomes. Their approach shows that effective well-being strategies require both systematic support and visible leadership commitment to creating a culture where employee welfare is genuinely prioritized.

CLOSER LOOK BY INDUSTRY

There are many industry variations due to the nature of the work, demands on the workforce, and conditions during the pandemic. To highlight some of these unique situations, we highlight the healthcare, retail, and financial services industry sectors.



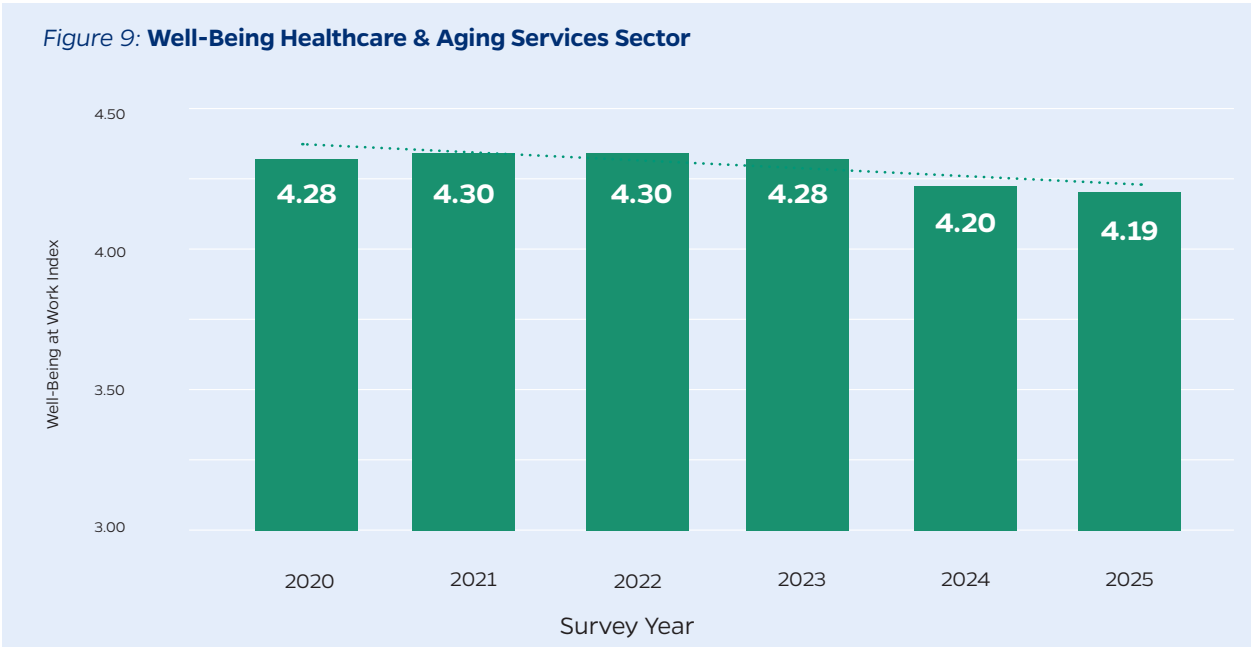
Figure 8: Well-being by Work by Industry Segment



The healthcare and aging services industry sector includes hospital systems and health related businesses. The well-being at work scores in this sector have declined somewhat in recent years as shown in Figure 9. This is a different pattern from other countries where healthcare workers reported low scores during the pandemic (2020 and 2021) and higher scores in subsequent years. The Australian findings show a generally consistent and high level of employee well-being over the years followed by a decline in 2024-2025. We find this decline to be consistent across both men and women and those workers with less than 15 years of tenure.

These lower scores in recent years may be reflective of ongoing workforce pressures following significant pandemic-related stress and attrition. A longitudinal study of Victorian health and age care workers found that intention to leave their profession increased from 32% in mid-2021 to 54% by mid-2022 (McGuinness et al., 2023). Additionally, burnout rates among healthcare professionals remained

consistently elevated throughout the pandemic period, with 84% reporting burnout in 2022, 86% in 2021, and 80% in 2020, and half of health professionals surveyed reporting they had left their job due to COVID-19-related workplace issues (Mental Health Australia, 2023). Government workforce data confirms that during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022, the annual growth rate in medical practitioners declined to 3.2%, compared to 3.6% growth experienced between 2013 and 2019 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). The healthcare sector’s declining scores observed in this study echo the ongoing retention pressures and burnout rates in a recent GPTW study with Macquarie University (Chua, et. al., 2025), which documents ongoing retention pressures and burnout rates, reinforcing our findings that this sector faces unique well-being challenges following what had been generally consistent well-being levels in previous years. This persistent workforce strain creates ongoing challenges for remaining staff, contributing to the declining well-being scores observed in our data.



AUSTRALIA ORGANIZATIONS TAKING POSITIVE ACTIONS

Leading Practice Example: Life-Stage and Crisis-Responsive Well-being

Hilton's approach to team member well-being demonstrates how hospitality organizations can create comprehensive support systems that address the full spectrum of employee life experiences and challenges across all dimensions of the Well-Being at Work Index:

Mental and Emotional Support: The company provides comprehensive mental health resources through Employee Assistance Programs, Crisis Concierge services for bereavement support, and substance use disorder resources. This multi-layered approach recognizes that mental health needs vary significantly across different life circumstances and provides specialized support during critical moments.

Sense of Purpose: Hilton's Thrive Sabbatical program allows team members to pursue meaningful projects with paid time off and financial support, enabling life-changing initiatives such as establishing sustainable farms for special needs schools. This demonstrates organizational commitment to supporting individual purpose beyond immediate work roles.

Personal Support: The company addresses diverse personal circumstances through comprehensive parental leave policies (12 weeks paid leave for birthing parents globally, with adoption assistance), flexible scheduling options including nine-day

fortnights that provide an extra day off every two weeks, and specialized support for women's health including performance-flex uniforms and wellness rooms for pregnant and menopausal team members.

Financial Health: Beyond traditional compensation, Hilton provides earned wage access through programs that allow employees to access wages as earned, and digital tipping platforms that increase recognition and financial well-being for service staff. These programs address both immediate financial stress and recognition needs.

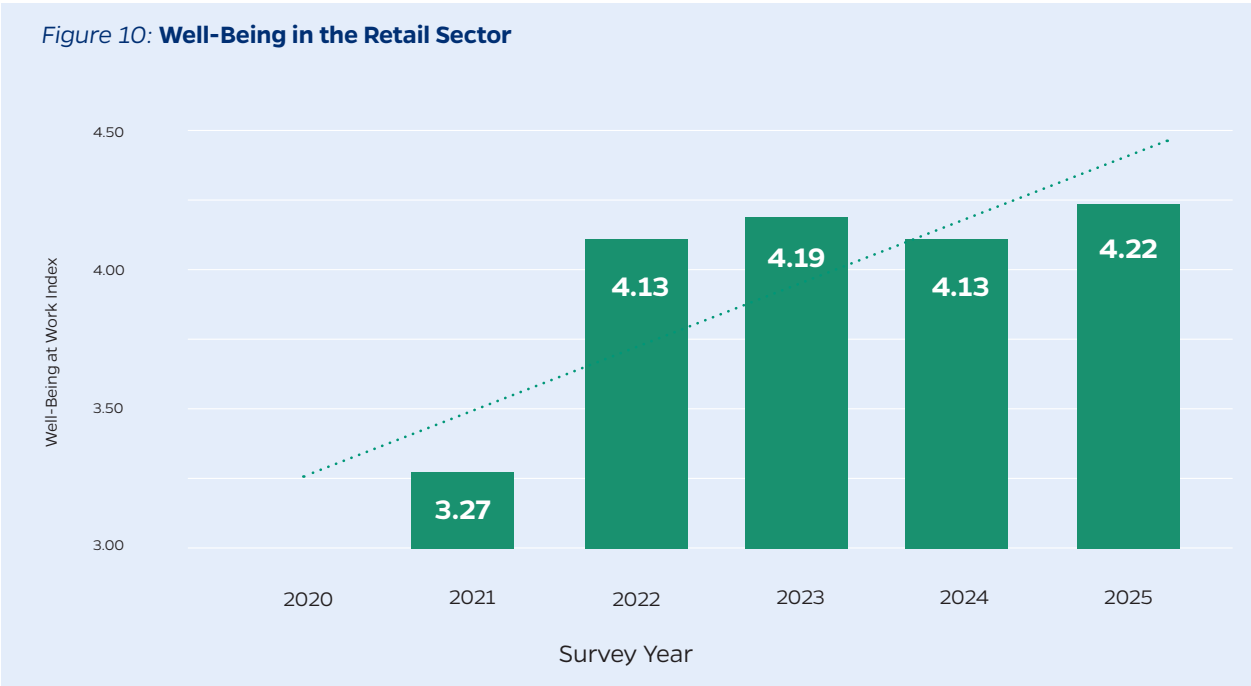
Meaningful Connections: Heart of House spaces create dedicated environments for team member relaxation and connection, with 89% of hotel team members reporting these spaces feel comfortable and welcoming. The company also provides global resources for new parents, creating community support networks for major life transitions.

Hilton's model illustrates how effective well-being strategies must be responsive to the diverse life stages and circumstances of a modern workforce. Their approach moves beyond one-size-fits-all benefits to provide targeted support for new parents, those experiencing crisis, and employees pursuing personal growth, demonstrating that sustainable well-being programs require both breadth of offerings and depth of support for specific employee populations.

Another sector that was affected by the pandemic along with consumer purchasing changes is retail. A closer look at retail sector shows quite a low score during the pandemic followed by a rapid rise in 2022 as businesses and society opened up across Australia. Due to the curtailed retail business operations in 2020, we do not have sufficient data to report an overall score for that year. Over the past few years, we see consistent scores with 2025 showing even higher scores of employee well-being.



Figure 10: Well-Being in the Retail Sector



A sector that has seen significant changes in work modality is financial services. The financial services sector includes banking, insurance, and other financial services businesses. We note the well-being scores for this sector reflect the pattern of other industries as shown in Figure 11. We see a rise in employee well-being in 2021-2022, as managers worked hard to provide individualized attention and provide flexibility as needed. In recent years, the overall well-being scores have declined in this sector. This decline coincides with major shifts in workplace

culture across Australia’s financial services industry, particularly around flexible work arrangements. Many organizations in the sector have moved away from pandemic-era flexibility, implementing stricter return-to-office mandates that require employees to spend a minimum number of days in physical workplaces. Some institutions have gone further by linking office attendance directly to remuneration, with policies that can impact salary increases and bonus payments for employees who don’t meet attendance requirements. The reversal of supportive workplace policies, combined

with what some employees perceive as punitive attendance measures, represents a cultural shift away from the individualized, flexible approaches that characterized the 2021-2022 period when well-being scores were higher. This transition from employee-

centric policies to more traditional, office-based expectations may be contributing to the declining well-being scores observed in the sector as organizations prioritize physical presence over the workplace flexibility that many employees had come to value.

Figure 11: **Well-Being in the Financial Services Sector**



The differences across industries may also reflect important generational preferences and work arrangement impacts that organizations should consider when developing well-being strategies. Healthcare and retail sectors, which require significant onsite presence, may actually provide better well-being outcomes for younger employees who benefit from direct mentoring, immediate feedback, and the social connections that combat isolation. Younger workers, in particular, show higher engagement when they have regular face-to-face interactions with supervisors and colleagues, which naturally occurs in these customer-facing and care-providing environments. The structured nature of these roles also provides the clear expectations and learning opportunities that younger workers often seek.



AUSTRALIA ORGANIZATIONS TAKING POSITIVE ACTIONS

Leading Practice Example: Systematic and Culturally Embedded Well-being

REA Group's well-being strategy demonstrates how technology organizations can create systematic, culturally embedded support that addresses the Well-Being at Work Index dimensions through both enterprise-wide and targeted interventions:

Mental and Emotional Support: The company has established a comprehensive Mental Health First Aiders network with 92 trained employees (a 27% year-on-year increase), supported by dedicated well-being sites, Slack channels for peer support, and embedded mental health leave policies. Annual Mental Health Month campaigns and well-being weeks create organization-wide conversations that normalize mental health discussions and increase openness.

Sense of Purpose: REA integrates well-being into their Employee Value Proposition and performance frameworks, ensuring well-being considerations are embedded in recognition programs and leadership development. This systematic approach demonstrates that well-being is central to organizational values rather than a peripheral benefit.

Personal Support: The company addresses diverse life circumstances through floating leave for religious and cultural events, comprehensive menopause support

including specialized leave, extended parental support with superannuation contributions during leave, and flexible policies that recognize different cultural and personal needs across their workforce.

Work-Life Integration: REA implements structural changes to support balance, including daily Zoom-free periods to reduce digital fatigue, Summer Fridays that provide weekly time back for health focus, and extended personal leave options. These policies achieved 87% positive sentiment for "REA Group enables me to balance work and personal life."

Targeted Interventions: Recognizing that different teams face unique pressures, REA provides specialized well-being support for sales teams during high-stress periods, including pulse surveys, prevention training, targeted interventions, and additional leave days. This demonstrates sophisticated understanding that well-being needs vary across organizational functions.

REA's approach showcases how well-being can be systematically embedded into organizational culture through dedicated staffing (a specific well-being role within Organizational Development), measurable outcomes (91% positive sentiment for creating safe working environments), and employee-led initiatives that build community. Their model illustrates that effective well-being strategies require both top-down structural support and bottom-up employee engagement to create sustainable cultural change.



In contrast, financial services and professional services sectors that have embraced hybrid and remote arrangements may experience notable generational disparities in well-being outcomes. While established workers with mature professional networks often thrive with the flexibility and autonomy that remote work provides, younger employees may struggle with reduced informal learning opportunities, limited mentoring access, and fewer chances to build the workplace relationships that contribute to career development and job satisfaction. This digital divide in workplace experience suggests that the same flexible arrangements praised by senior employees may inadvertently disadvantage early-career workers who rely more heavily on observational learning and social integration for professional growth.

These patterns highlight the importance of industry-specific, generation-conscious approaches to workplace well-being. Organizations in remote-capable sectors may need to implement additional structures to support younger workers, such as mandatory in-person mentoring sessions, structured peer interaction opportunities, and enhanced virtual engagement programs. Meanwhile, traditionally onsite industries should leverage their natural advantages in providing face-to-face support while also offering the flexibility that all generations increasingly value. Understanding these generational-industry intersections allows organizations to tailor their well-being strategies more effectively rather than applying one-size-fits-all solutions that may benefit some age groups while disadvantaging others.

SUMMARY AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This research provides a comprehensive view of the trends in employee well-being observed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the adverse impacts of the pandemic on various facets of employee well-being, including job security and work-life balance, our analysis of organizational and employee data revealed a temporary spike in employee well-being during this unprecedented period. As this analysis has shown, when leaders make people a priority in the organization (such as during the pandemic), the results can be rather striking. Unfortunately, this focus on the employees and their well-being has not continued, which is evidenced by the data trends.

Prior Australia-based studies by Great Place To Work show similar results and suggest that sustainable work-life balance depends on trust-based organizational cultures rather than “always on” expectations, a principle reflected in our data showing that when leaders prioritized employee support during the pandemic, well-being scores improved markedly (Elliot, 2024). The importance of caring leadership emerges as a consistent theme across employee well-being studies. In prior Australian reviews, employees indicate that when leaders genuinely care about employees’ experiences both inside and outside work, it directly unlocks performance, echoing our finding that organizations maintaining people-first approaches during the pandemic achieved superior outcomes (Lee & Kitterman, 2024). Our research from around the world consistently shows that when organizations make employee well-being a genuine priority through caring leadership, flexible policies, and trust-based cultures, the positive impact on workplace climate is measurable and sustained. For managers of workforces, we find several important implications for the future. Rather than a prescription for success, we focus on first steps toward building a trusting culture and a healthy climate of well-being in organizations.

1. **Boundary Spanning** – (look beyond your own patch) – Don’t just benchmark against your closest competitors. Borrow ideas from Australian workplaces with similar risks and rhythms, even if they’re in different industries, and adapt them to your context. With psychosocial hazard duties and the Right to Disconnect now part of the landscape, trial new practices locally, measure the impact, and keep what works.

2. **Level Skipping** – (go where the work happens) – Get out from behind the desk and hear it first hand. Join a store walk, a ward huddle, a toolbox talk, or a branch stand up, especially in regional sites and shifts that leaders rarely see. Share a short “you said / we did” note afterwards so people know their input changed something.
3. **Trust Building** – (make boundaries and credibility visible) – Trust is at the heart of well-being in Australian workplaces. It’s not just about saying the right things, it’s about showing it in everyday actions. Set clear expectations for after-hours contact and stick to them, so your team knows when it’s okay to switch off. Use tools like “schedule send” to respect personal time and be upfront about how quickly people should expect replies. Most importantly, when your team gives feedback, let them know what’s changing as a result. These simple steps help build genuine trust and show your team you’re listening and acting on what matters to them.
4. **Active Listening** – (make it easy, and safe, to speak up) – Check in with your team regularly and ask open questions about what’s working and what could be better. Listen without judgement and encourage everyone to share their thoughts, even if it’s just a quick chat or a pulse survey. Always follow up by letting people know what you’re doing with their feedback. When people see their voices lead to real changes, trust and well-being naturally grow.
5. **Internal Reflecting** – (start with yourself) – Ask for quick feedback on your own habits, then pick one behavior to improve each quarter and tell your team what you’re working on. Model healthy boundaries and weave in fun done well, simple, inclusive rituals and small celebrations tied to moments that matter. Connection and care fuel well being more than any single program.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a world-wide crisis, yet organizational leaders proved to the world that they can do better in taking care of their workforces. While this focus has waned in recent years, the bar has been raised. As organizations navigate the evolving landscape of work, let these findings serve as a roadmap for fostering resilience, equity, and well-being in the workplace of tomorrow.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study is based on data gathered by Great Place To Work as part of their work with organizations interested in certification and ranking. While the data and process of analysis are robust for this study, there are limitations with this sample since organizations must choose to participate in the Great Place To Work process. This self-selection likely provides a sample that has higher scores than the average employer in Australia. While we have the benefit of a normative sample in Australia to compare with employees at great workplaces, the sample sizes are limited, and caution should be used to avoid generalizing to all organizations in the country.

As we consider future directions, we recognize that more work is needed to understand differences across gender and cultural background in workplace regarding perceptions and experiences. Also worthy of further exploration is the linkage between voluntary employee turnover with well-being, along with a closer look at flexible and remote work arrangements. With more interest in work modalities, alternative work weeks, and flexible work arrangements, we wish to further test ideas and hypotheses related to future designs of work.

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