



Built for connection, yet drifting apart. The connection deficit

| QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared for Mental Health Australia

4th of August 2026

About this poll

This report summarises the results of a monthly omnibus conducted by Essential Research with data provided by PureProfile. The survey was conducted online from 22nd to 27th July 2026 and is based on 1,060 respondents.

The sample has been weighted to ensure it is representative of the Australian population aged 18+ years. The weighting efficiency applied to the results is 76%, which gives an effective sample size of 802. The maximal margin of error at the overall sample size is $\pm 3.4\%$ (95% confidence level).

The full methodology used to carry out this research is described in the appendix at the end of the report.

Note that due to rounding, not all tables and charts necessarily total 100% and subtotals may also vary.

Overview

Mental Health Australia commissioned Essential Research to explore how connected Australians feel and how connection relates to mental health and wellbeing.

This report focuses on social connection, ahead of World Mental Health Day and Mental Health Month (October 2026) and this year's theme, *Together We Thrive*.

The findings reveal a 'connection gap': Australians overwhelmingly believe connection is vital to mental health, but far fewer are experiencing that connection in their daily lives – and most sense the country is drifting apart.

The research identifies where the gap is widest – younger Australians, workplaces and local communities – and the protective role connection plays for those who have it.

Key findings

64%

Nearly two-thirds of Australians agree it feels like people in general are becoming more disconnected from each other.

- The sense of drifting apart is national and crosses every generation.
- Only one in five (21%) Australians feel very connected to the people around them.

30%

of Australians say they themselves feel less connected than they did 10 years ago.

- Only 16% say they feel more connected.
- Disconnection isn't just an observation about others – people see it in their own lives.

64%

Nearly two-thirds agree that being part of something bigger has a positive impact on mental health.

- This finding highlights that there is strong recognition that connection affects wellbeing.
- At the same time less than half (47%) are confident in their local community support.
- **This is the connection gap. We know it matters but we're not feeling it.**

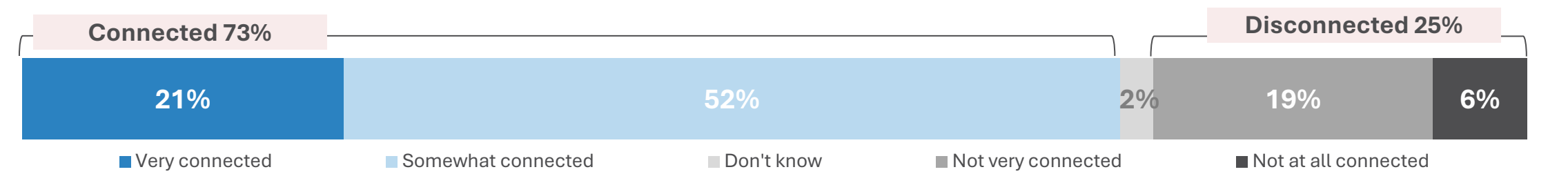
29%

- Less than a third of people feel comfortable telling their employer if they were struggling with their mental health.

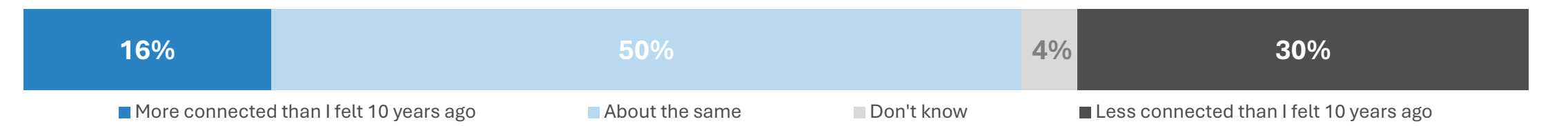
- Stigma remains a barrier to talking about or disclosing mental health challenges, especially in the workplace.
- Only 67% of people say they would feel comfortable telling friends they were struggling with their mental health.
- A slightly higher number (78%) would feel comfortable telling their health professional.

There is a decline in Australians' sense of community – 1 in 4 say they feel disconnected from other people; and just under a third say they are *less connected* than 10 years ago

Q. Thinking about your life right now, how connected do you feel to other people (such as friends, family, neighbours or your community)?
Base: All respondents (n=1,060)



Q. How does this compare to how connected you felt to other people (such as friends, family, neighbours or your community) 10 years ago?
Base: All respondents (n=1,060)



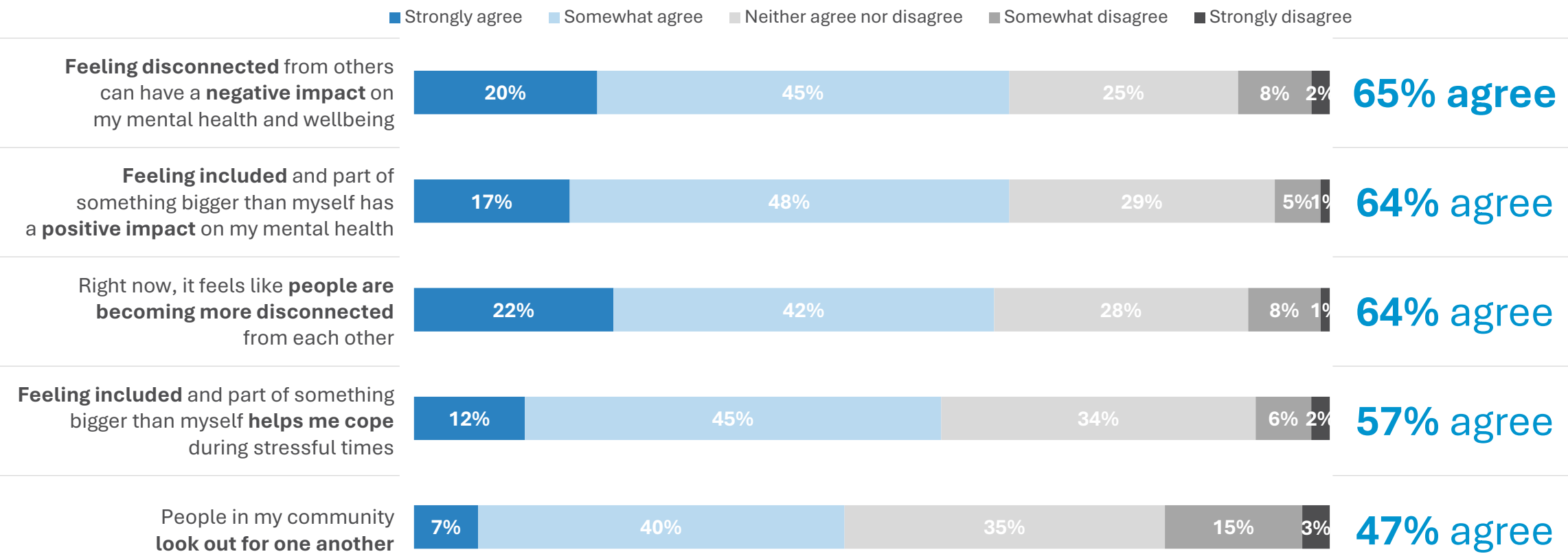
Young Australians and those not in paid employment are feeling the least connected

Q. Thinking about your life right now, how connected do you feel to other people (such as friends, family, neighbours or your community)?
 Base: All respondents (n=1060)

		Generations				Employment Status			Location		Feel more connected or less connected compared to 10 years ago		
	TOTAL	Gen Z	Millen-nials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	In paid employ-ment	Not in paid employ-ment	Retired	Capital city	Non-capital	More connected than I felt 10 years ago	Less connected than I felt 10 years ago	About the same
NET connected	73%	65%	71%	72%	80%	74%	62%	81%	71%	77%	88%	52%	83%
Very connected	21%	17%	12%	23%	32%	18%	17%	34%	22%	21%	35%	6%	28%
Somewhat connected	52%	48%	60%	49%	48%	56%	45%	47%	50%	56%	54%	46%	55%
Don't know	2%	3%	4%	3%	0%	2%	5%	0%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Not very connected	19%	24%	21%	14%	16%	20%	19%	15%	19%	17%	8%	35%	13%
Not at all connected	6%	8%	4%	11%	3%	5%	14%	3%	7%	6%	2%	12%	4%
NET not connected	25%	32%	25%	26%	20%	25%	33%	18%	26%	22%	11%	47%	16%

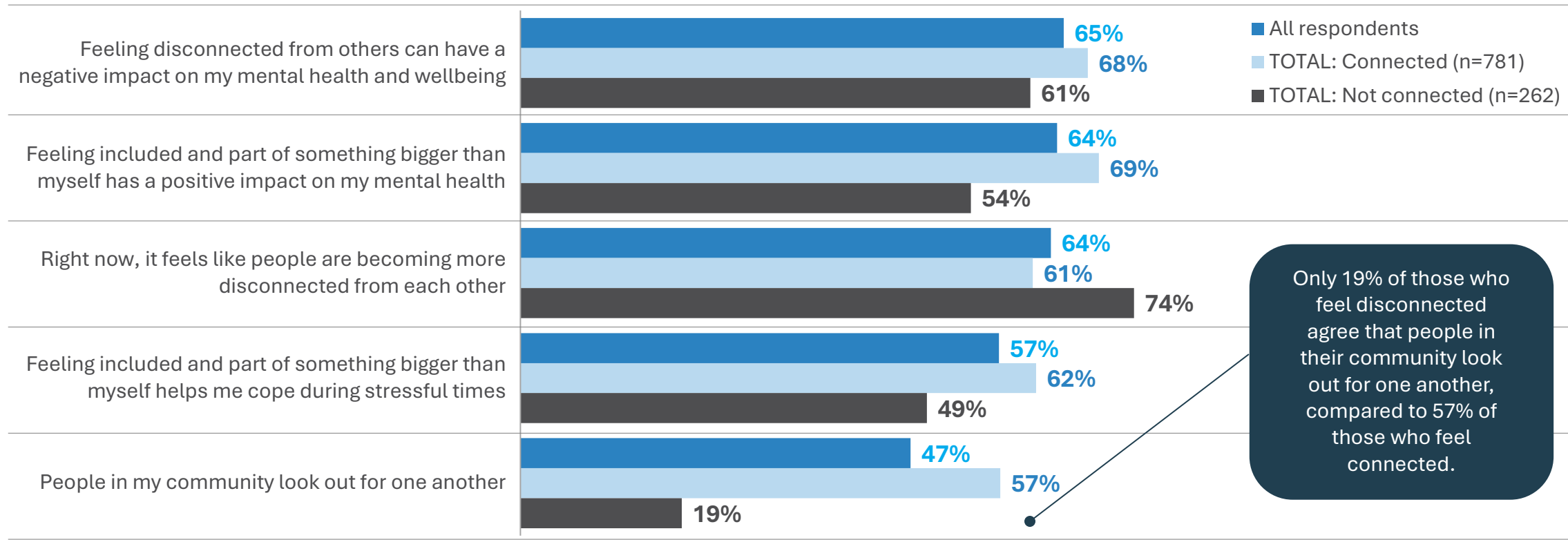
There is strong recognition that connection affects wellbeing – at the same time *less than half* are confident in their local community support

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
Base: All Australians n=1,060



Disconnected Australians haven't stopped believing in the value of connection – they've *stopped experiencing it*

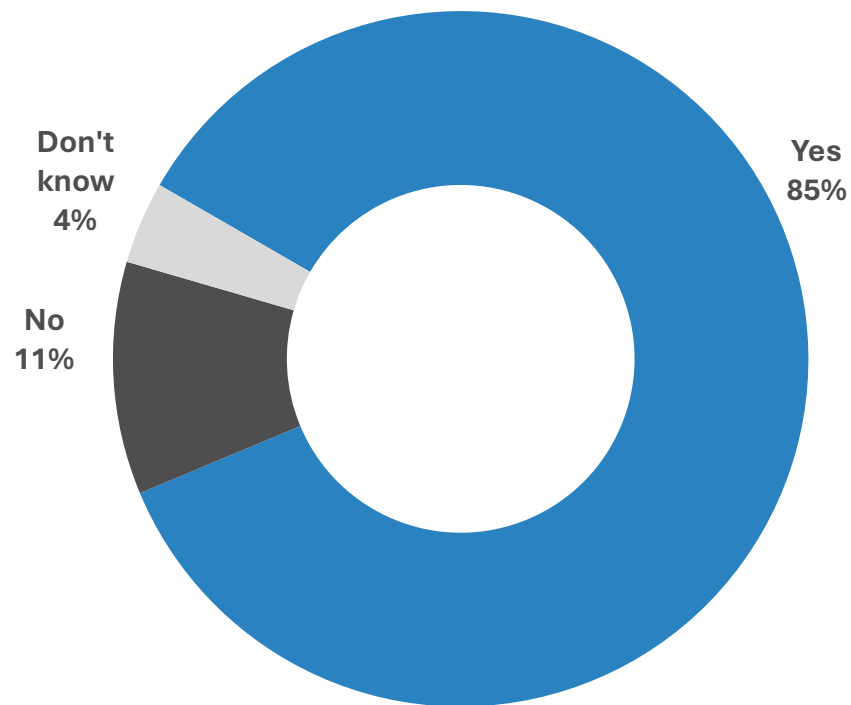
Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: All respondents (n=1060)



Only 4 in 5 Gen Z Australians (80%) say they have friends or family they can count on, the lowest of any generation

Q. Do you have friends or family you can count on when needed?

Base: All respondents (n=1060)



Those **more** likely to say that they have friends or family they can count on when needed:

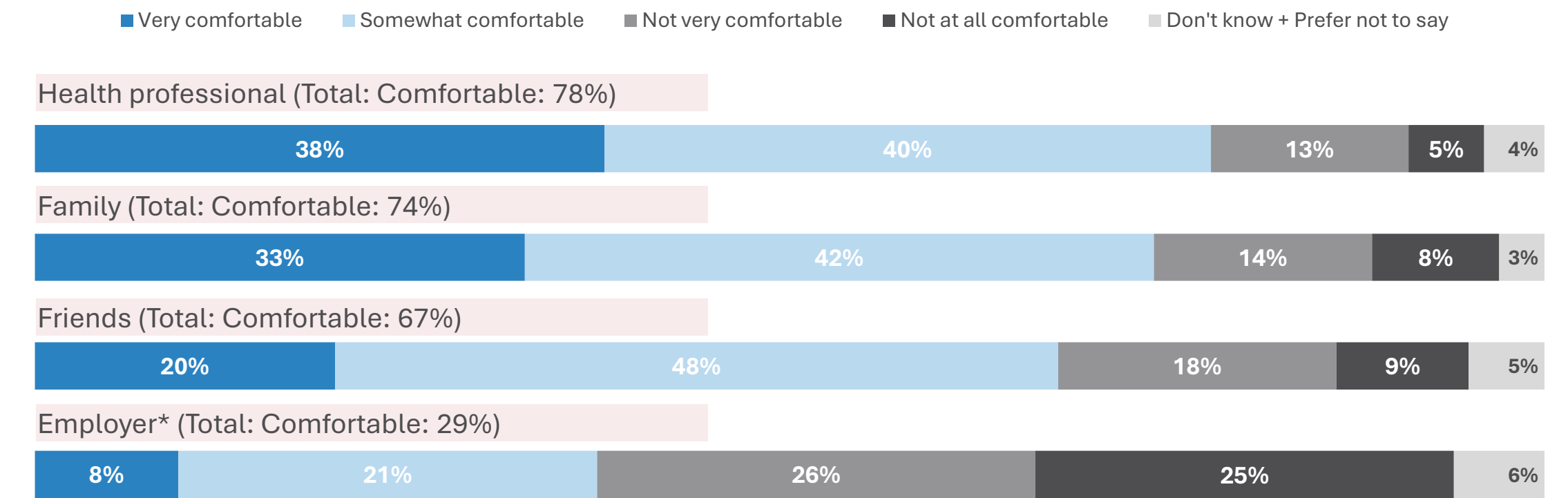
- Baby boomers (92%)
- Those who are retired (94%)
- Those who feel connected (93%)

Those **less** likely to say that they have friends or family they can count on when needed:

- Gen Z (80%)
- Unemployed (79%)
- Those who do not feel connected (65%)

Stigma remains a barrier to talking about mental health challenges – especially in the workplace

Q. How comfortable would you feel telling the following people that you were struggling with your mental health?
Base: All respondents (n=1060)

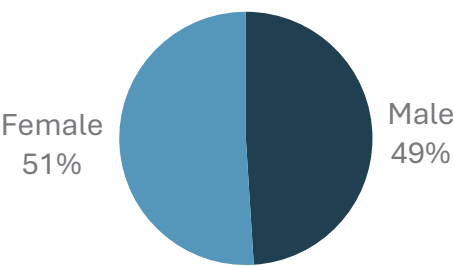


*Excludes those who are not employed or retired (n=685)

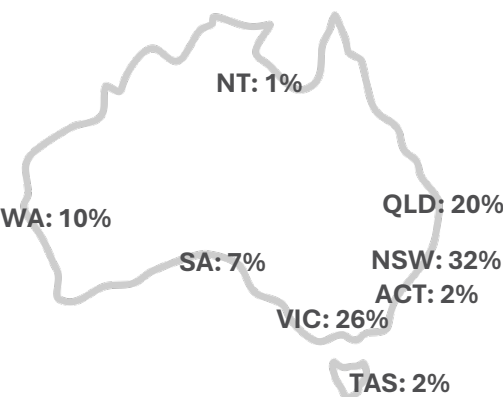
Appendix

Sample composition

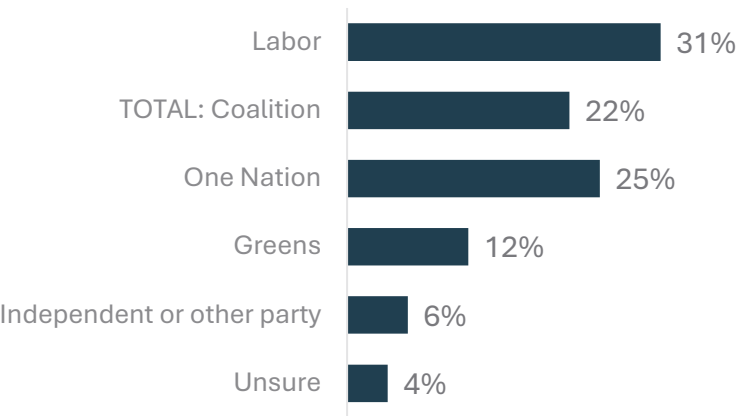
Gender



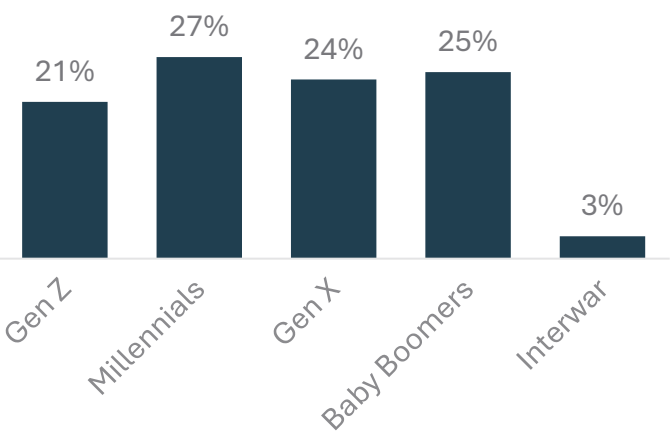
Location



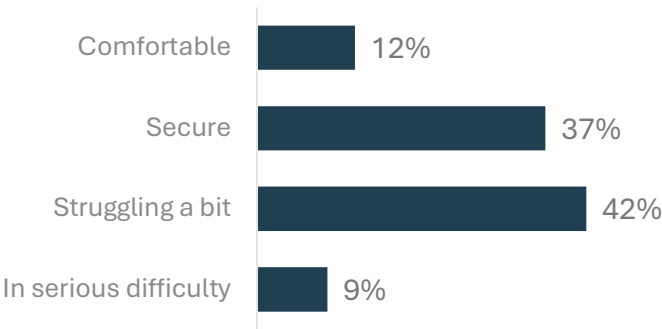
Voting intention



Generation



Financial situation



Methodology, margin of error and professional standards

The data gathered for this report is gathered from a monthly online omnibus run by Essential Research with sample provided by PureProfile from online panels.

The online omnibus is active from the Wednesday night of each week and closed on the following Sunday. The target population is all Australian residents aged 18+. Participants were invited to participate and completed the survey online without an interviewer present and incentives were offered for participation.

The response rate varies each month, but usually delivers 1000+ interviews. Quotas are applied to be representative of the target population by age, gender and location.

RIM weighting is applied to the data using information sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The factors used in the weighting are age, gender, location and party ID.

Information for the weighting efficiency, effective sample size and margin of error for each poll (from June 2021) can be found here:

<https://essentialreport.com.au/methodology>

Each fortnight, the team at Essential Media Communications discusses issues that are topical and a series of questions are devised to put to the Australian public. Some questions are repeated regularly (such as political preference and leadership approval), while others are unique to each week and reflect current media and social issues. Full text for standard voting and regular political preferences can be found in the link above. No questions were asked prior to these questions which have material influence on results.

Participants not eligible to vote in federal elections (either for age, residency or other reasons) are excluded from voting intention. Eligible participants are able to select 'Unsure' for voting intention. They were then asked a 'leaner' question which also included an 'Unsure' option. Participants answering 'Unsure' are NOT excluded from published results, or any subsequent questions. 2 party preferred (2PP) calculations use stated preference. Preference flows from previous federal and state elections are only used for participants answering 'Unsure' for stated preference.

All Essential Research staff hold Research Society membership and are bound by professional codes of behaviour. This research is compliant with the Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards.



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