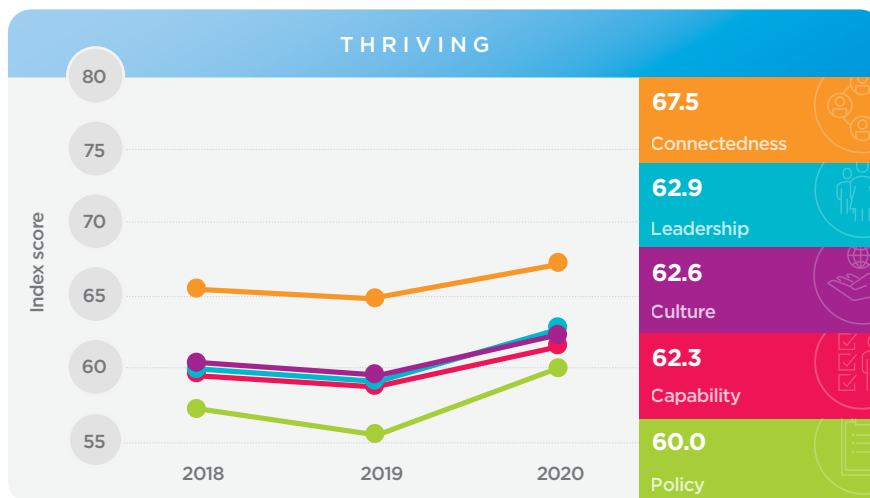


Spotlight on the Retail Industry 2020

A snapshot of mental health and wellbeing in the Australian retail workforce.

2020 has been a year of extremes for retailers, characterised by headlines about record sales, 'toilet paper wars'¹ and 'bottle shop bedlam'² while other retailers quietly folded amid empty shopping centres. Many 'essential' retailers boosted their workforces significantly, providing much-needed employment at a time when more than a million Australian workers were unemployed³.

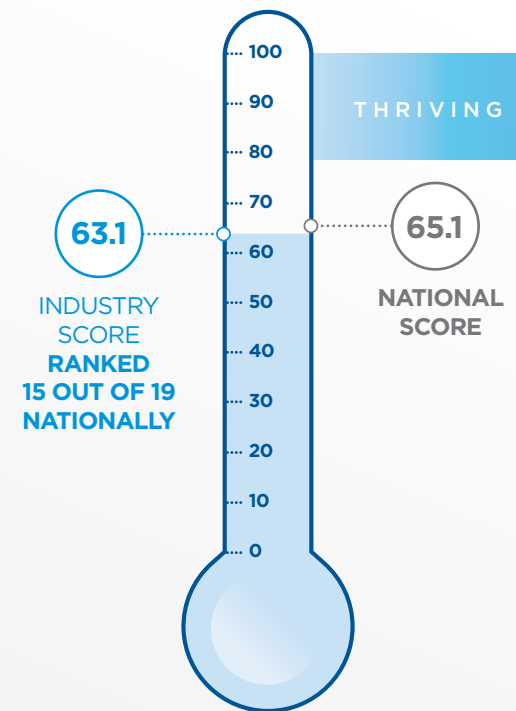
The workplace mental health and wellbeing index score for the retail trade industry increased in July 2020 to 63.1 out of 100 (80 - 100 represents a thriving workplace). This 3.6 point increase led the retail trade industry out of the bottom three for the first time in years. All five domain index scores improved, with the policy domain a stand-out (up 4.7 points to 60.0). Only 3 of the 40 indicators of a thriving workplace declined.



Key Findings

- The retail industry's overall thriving workplace score increased by 3.6 points to 63.1 out of 100, with declines recorded in only 3 of the 40 indicators of a thriving workplace
- Retail jobs have become more stressful than ever with 21.3% finding their jobs highly stressful. Victorian retail jobs have been the most stressful (26.6%)
- 45.8% of on-site retail workers experienced lower productivity due to worrying about COVID-19 transmission; higher than on-site workers in any other industry including health care and social assistance (40.6%).
- The retail industry has the second-highest proportion of workers who have experienced a mental health condition (66.4%), with casual workers hit hardest (68.9%)

The 2020 Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Report measures the current state against the desired state of a thriving or mentally healthy workplace, by asking people currently employed or receiving JobKeeper about their experiences in their workplace.



Progress towards the desired state of workplace mental health and wellbeing.

An index score of 100 represents the desired state of mental health and wellbeing in a workplace.

This research was conducted in July 2020 and this report is based on responses from 1,036 people working and/or receiving JobKeeper payments in the retail trade industry between March and June 2020 (inclusive). For more information about the research methodology, [download the national report](#).

¹ <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/coronavirus-toilet-paper-wars-at-woolworths-for-rich-people/news-story/2903e0a093e5066d9234f557216879f6>

² <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/bottle-shop-bedlam-melbourne-stocks-up-on-booze-20200322-p54csh.html>

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Labour Force, Australia, Jul 2020 [Internet]. Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics; 2020-08-13. Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Jul2020?OpenDocument>

The highs and lows of working in retail

Australia's retail environment has seen large swings in spending month by month, with huge differences in performance by industry and region⁴. Retail demand for grocery items skyrocketed once the pandemic emerged, with one major supermarket chain revealing that sales over a three week period were equivalent to three Christmases – the usual pinnacle of supermarket sales each year⁵. Parcel deliveries also boomed, with home and garden, food and liquor and variety/department store deliveries effectively doubling by mid-year⁶.

With so much volatility it's not surprising that retail jobs have become more stressful than ever before, with 21.3% finding their jobs highly stressful (up 4.8pp- from 2019). In fact, nearly 1 in 4 (23.4%) retail workers considered a career change in a different industry once the pandemic emerged.

Highly stressful jobs were most common in Victoria (26.6%), where metropolitan Melbourne experienced two extended periods in Stage 4 pandemic lockdown.

At a national level, high-stress jobs are far more common for full-time workers (30.5%) than for those working part-time or casually (15.7% and 9.8% respectively).

Anecdotal evidence revealed that the general public are a major source of stress, with many retail workers experiencing verbal and physical abuse from customers when COVID-19 emerged in Australia.

Despite improvements over the last year, retailers are less supportive of workers' mental health and wellbeing in 2020 than nearly every other industry, with only 45.5% of workers describing their workplace as 'highly supportive' (third lowest industry).

Casual workers are finding their workplaces less supportive than full-time and part-time workers, with only 41.1% having 'highly supportive' workplaces. Casual workers are finding their workplaces less mentally healthy across a number of key measures.

While the culture index improved for full-time and part-time workers this year (up 3.9 and 3.3 points respectively), it fell 1.1 points for casual workers. Similarly, casual retail workers are being treated with substantially less courtesy and respect in 2020 (down nearly 5pp from last year to 19.0%).

⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/media-releases/articles/retail-forecasts.html>
⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8132773/Australias-grocery-demand-right-amounts-three-Christmases-three-weeks.html>

⁶ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-01/australia-post-to-break-parcel-delivery-record/12614028>

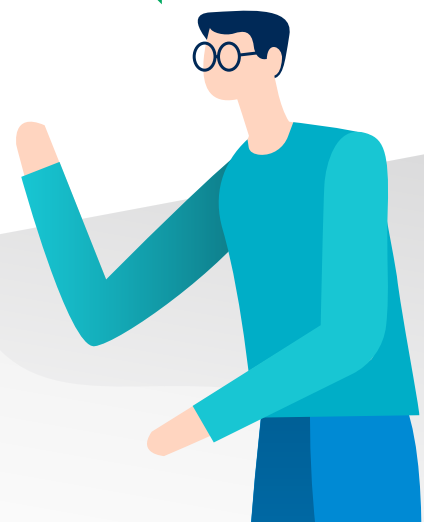
- denotes percentage points

Customers need to understand that service staff are HUMAN BEINGS not robots and mostly have no control over company policies. There is no need to become aggressive/rude towards staff but it seems there's no way to change it. On the other side it does help to work with a great team who support each other and can debrief together

Abuse from customers impacts retail workers' mental health

It's not always the management or colleagues that contribute to retail workers' mental health issues. It needs to be addressed more at a PUBLIC level as a lot of the time retail workers feel bullied/victimized/terrified due to the actions of CUSTOMERS especially over things that are beyond the employees' or even the company's control.

As my employer is a large retail outlet, the staff on the floor have been much busier because it is one of the few places that people can come to with their families and spend lots of time. Our workload has therefore grown enormously impacting on our levels of fatigue. In addition, I have noticed customers are becoming increasingly more aggressive and feeling more entitled.



On the pandemic frontline

Around a quarter (24.3%) of retail workers believe their workplace is, at best, only moderately committed to preventing the spread of COVID-19.

With minimal personal protective equipment available due to a nation-wide shortage, it's perhaps unsurprising that 45.8% of on-site retail workers' experienced reduced productivity due to worrying about catching or spreading COVID-19.

Retail workers were affected more by this anxiety than any other on-site workers, including those in the health care and social assistance industry (40.6%).

Also, around 1 in 12 (8.3%) retail workers also experienced stigma around physical health issues in their workplace over the last 12 months.

Retailer size influences mental health

Job insecurity negatively impacted on workers' productivity to varying degrees. **The impact** was far less common among those working at very large retailers with at least 5,000 workers (19.3%) than among smaller retailers (ranging from 31.8% to 38.7%).

Larger organisations are perceived as better able to weather challenging economic times. In fact, 41.4% of people working in very large retailers (5,000+ workers) strongly agree that their workplace is in a good financial position; nearly double the proportion in smaller organisations (41.4%) where only between 15.3% and 21.1% shared this same degree of confidence.

The resources available within large retailers (5,000+ workers) mean that they are typically better equipped to establish mentally healthy workplace policies (with a policy index score of 62.8 compared to 56.4 for those with < 20 workers).

Conversely, large retailers fall short of small retailers when it comes to providing mentally healthy leadership (with a leadership index score of 60.1 vs 67.0 for small retailers with < 20 workers).

- denotes percentage points

Mental health conditions on the rise

2 in 3 (66.4%) retail workers have experienced a mental health condition; the second highest proportion of any industry behind the hard-hit accommodation and food services industry (68.1%). This includes workers who self-reported a mental health condition, and those who experienced anxiety or depression but did not classify it as a mental health condition.

The prevalence was highest among casual workers (68.9%).

Resources to help

The National Mental Health Commission, Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance and Ahead for Business recently released a range of well-considered resources to help smaller businesses implement mentally healthy workplace policies and practices.

The customers' responses to us as workers has been more positive, as I am in the forefront



It's not all doom and gloom

Most retail workers identified at least one positive work-related change that they would like to continue in the future. Many of these related to feeling more valued and respected as frontline workers, an improved sense of personal safety at work, stronger workplace relationships and more flexible approaches to working.

The company has a great support team and strategy in place to deal with this. They are very profitable and support the workers in all aspects of safety and wellbeing. I consider myself very lucky to work for them

The expectation of if you're sick you don't come in

People have become more considerate

Paid more for being on the frontline

Senior management have made a big effort to reward loyalty and work being achieved by front line staff. It would be nice if this continues.

Businesses realising they can be more flexible.

Later starting hours so you can begin work refreshed and happy

Care, kindness and looking out for one another. Walking in another person's shoes.

A general sense of better teamwork and solidarity

Being able to ask customers to please take a step back when I feel uncomfortable.

A focus on employee safety and health

I have liked all the initiatives that have been implemented to protect the safety of the staff. If these continue, then we will all feel a lot more protected and valued.

Better hygiene and cleaning practices. A sense of camaraderie. It's made us very tight knit.

More personal security ie: security guards, screens at registers

Being empowered to confront abusive customers and request that they follow the covid regulations or leave the store

Reinforcement of the value of the work team members are doing. Upfront support of team members suffering abuse from customers. A zero abuse policy

Implementing social distancing... people have no sense of personal space usually!

Working really closely together and creating new ways to expand the business and diversify.

Appreciative customers

Respect for the essential workers

