

# Workplace Wellness Report 2021



# About the authors

## Southern Cross Health Insurance

Southern Cross Health Insurance (SCHI) opened for business in 1961 as New Zealand's first health insurer. Today, the not-for-profit Friendly Society is New Zealand's largest health insurer with 887,000 members.

In the year ended 30 June 2021, for every \$1 received in premium, SCHI paid out 87c in claims. This compares to an industry average of 62 in the dollar.



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## BusinessNZ

BusinessNZ is New Zealand's largest business representation group, providing a wide range of services for member businesses.

BusinessNZ undertakes analysis and advocacy on behalf of the wider business, manufacturing, importing and exporting sectors, making representation to Government, local government and other decision makers on issues important to business.

BusinessNZ Network organisations EMA, BusinessCentral, Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Otago Southland Employers' Association provide services and advocacy on behalf of thousands of businesses in all parts of New Zealand.



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# Foreword



**Nick Astwick**

CEO, Southern Cross Health Insurance

Southern Cross Health Insurance is pleased to again partner with BusinessNZ to deliver New Zealand's most comprehensive study into workplace wellbeing, at a time when employee wellness has never been more important for New Zealand businesses.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the way many New Zealand businesses now operate, and that is reflected in the shift in challenges facing enterprises since the last survey two years ago. This report reveals that in the wake of COVID-19, the traditional single place of work no longer exists for many people, and businesses need to be aware of the impact this can have on employee health and wellbeing. Employers' health and wellbeing policies need to be up-to-date and fit-for-purpose to support a healthy new wave of hybrid workers.

Pleasingly, half of organisations surveyed believe their role in employee health and wellbeing increased in 2020, and we've seen a positive shift in the number of businesses noting a correlation between employee wellness and the productivity of their organisation.

Southern Cross is proud this year to celebrate 60 years. We're champions for the health and wellbeing of more than 887,000 New Zealanders, and we support almost 4,000 businesses in protecting and maintaining the health of their employees.

This report will enable businesses to better understand workforces across physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. It also shows the evolution that New Zealand's workplace wellness has undergone since this survey began in 2013, and the ways that Kiwi organisations have adapted to support their employees through the pandemic and beyond.



**Kirk Hope**

CEO, BusinessNZ

The Workplace Wellness Survey plays an important part in prompting ongoing improvement in New Zealand's health and safety landscape. The survey's findings over five editions have helped inform and motivate organisations towards better wellness outcomes.

This is clearly seen in this year's survey which reveals the huge changes brought by COVID-19. Working from home is a massive change for many organisations and employees. The survey's finding - that working from home is largely viewed as completely positive - is encouraging.

Another finding, that some employees feel isolated when working from home, provides valuable information on how organisations may better manage remote working in future.

This year's survey reveals a big increase in organisations with a culture of encouraging unwell employees to stay home. For employees already working from home, it is evident that many organisations are sending appropriate signals to employees about taking legitimate absences and breaks and taking time to recuperate if unwell.

This survey was completed just prior to legislative change to increase sick leave entitlements from five to 10 days per year, driven by concerns that Covid requirements could mean employees not having enough sick leave to cope with illness or isolation requirements. Data gathered this year, regarding the types of illness or issues causing sick leave to be taken, will form a useful base for comparison with data gathered in the next survey.

BusinessNZ appreciates the cooperation of member businesses and Southern Cross Health Insurance in providing this timely data towards the goal of healthy workplaces.

# Cut to the chase

## A picture of health in the workplace

The Southern Cross Health Insurance – BusinessNZ Workplace Wellness Survey is designed to provide a picture of where New Zealanders stand in terms of health and wellbeing in the workplace. The research can help employers in a number of ways, including benchmarking for workplace wellness, how businesses can provide better support and lift productivity for their employees, as well as improve the health and wellbeing of their people.

The Workplace Wellness Survey, now in its fifth edition, takes place on a biennial basis and provides a valuable time series for tracking New Zealand's progress towards an effective workplace health and safety system. It is also able to show how broad policy changes and one-off events can move the needle around workplace wellbeing.

The survey has previously shown how legislative changes, such as the 2015 Health and Safety at Work Act, have shown a gradual positive move by employers towards recognising the importance of addressing broader issues of health for their employees. Further, the sudden emergence of COVID-19 in 2020 culminated in a swift step change to the daily working life of many New Zealanders. It also resulted in businesses having to consider vastly different aspects of employee wellbeing and provide additional support.

As noted in previous years, the Workplace Wellness Survey is able to capture and track the journey that workplace wellness is taking in New Zealand, but also gives an opportunity to take an increasingly broader scope for how it can be measured. The 2020 survey retained a number of questions from previous iterations, because it is important to continue to identify the current

situation for absence rates, costs and drivers of absence in order to further build upon its time series.

However, COVID-19 has led to a number of new avenues for research in recognition of New Zealand's rapidly changing work environment. For instance, there is an entire chapter in this report dedicated to working from home, a theme that would have been unlikely before COVID-19 expedited this way of working globally.

These findings show that the impacts of working from home on enterprises have been two-fold. While some employees feel isolated, it has also largely been viewed as a positive move. Therefore, further steps towards making working from home more mainstream point towards a future that will need to be carefully managed by employers to ensure it remains a positive change on the whole.

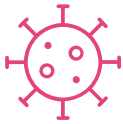
In previous years there has been some degree of disconnect between saying one thing yet showing another, such as employers being clear around staying at home if unwell but employees still coming into work. However, the 2020 results indicate a significant improvement of results with employers recognising the importance of sending the right signal to employees about taking legitimate absences and breaks and taking time to recuperate at home if unwell.

Lastly, while differences between small and large businesses will continue due to different levels of capability and resources, it is pleasing to see the latest results showing the broad business community generally moving in the same direction around improving employee wellbeing.



# Southern Cross Health Insurance – BusinessNZ

## Key findings from the Workplace Wellness Report 2021



# 35%

of businesses have changed their views on working from home and now offer it to employees since **COVID-19** began

Most common way for organisations to identify employee mental wellbeing



Larger businesses (>50)  
**Employee surveys**

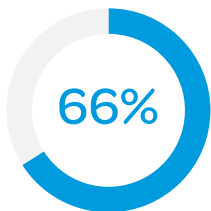


Smaller businesses (<50)  
**Training for managers**



# 76%

of businesses are very clear on having a 'if you're sick, stay home' policy – **up from 50% in 2016**



of businesses reported an increase in stress levels, with **91%** citing **COVID-19** as the partial reason why

The main impact on enterprises that previously never used to offer working from home



# 73%

Report some employees feel isolated



# 58%

Report that working from home has been positive and employees like the flexibility

Employees taking annual leave in 2020 compared to previous years:

# 56%



less annual leave

# 13%



more annual leave

# 29%



no noticeable change



Workload remains the biggest cause of work-related stress / anxiety for businesses

# 51%

Half of organisations believe their role in the health and wellbeing of employees increased in 2020

Research for the Southern Cross Health Insurance – BusinessNZ Workplace Wellness Report 2021 was carried out between March and June 2021. Respondents were asked to report on data for the period 1 January to 31 December 2020. In total, 116 enterprises responded, representing 95,488 employees (4.76 per cent of all NZ employees).

# 1. Background to the survey

## Purpose and overview

This is the fifth time the biennial Southern Cross Health Insurance – BusinessNZ Workplace Wellness Survey has been carried out in New Zealand.

This report outlines the main results of the 2021 Southern Cross Health Insurance – BusinessNZ Workplace Wellness Survey.

The research is designed to help employers benchmark employee absence levels in their organisations and identify ways to increase attendance and improve the health and wellbeing of their people. It also provides policy makers with data on occupational health practice and absence in the workplace.

The survey provides the business community with information on the overall health of New Zealand's workforce. This now has greater importance given recent changes in health and safety legislation (e.g. the increase of sick leave from five days per year to 10 days that came into effect on 24 July 2021).

The research for this report was conducted between March and June 2021. Fifteen business associations took part and also sent it to their membership, including BusinessNZ Network organisations, Business Central, Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Otago Southland Employers' Association. BusinessNZ also sent the questionnaire to Major Company and Gold Group members, as well as a number of Government departments. Respondents were asked to report their absence data for the 12-month period 1 January to 31 December 2020, and to provide details of their policies and practices for managing employee attendance.

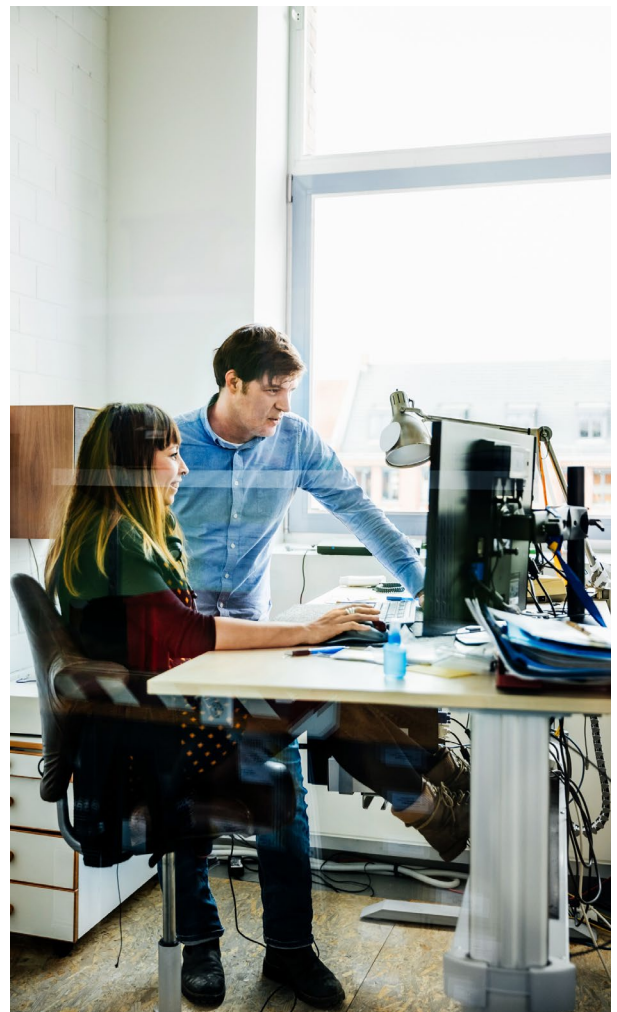
In total, 116 responses were received from entities across the private and public sectors - up from 99 responses in 2019. The respondent entities for 2021 employed a total of 95,488 people, including 77,238 permanent staff. This was down from 121,252 and 106,234 employees respectively in 2019. Over the history of the survey, the number of total employees represented has ranged from 93,000 to 121,252.

The 2021 sample represented 4.76 percent of all employees in New Zealand, down from 6.21 percent in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the dip in employee numbers from 2019, the 2021 survey still provides a sizeable number of employees, both from a number and percentage perspective. Overall, it still represents the largest number of employees for any such survey in New Zealand.

## Notes on survey comparisons

Previous iterations of the Workplace Wellness Report have been published in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and now 2021. However, for each corresponding survey, respondents were asked about their absence data for the years 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020. This means that for the purposes of this report, comparisons between the five surveys to date reference the year the data represents.



1. Based on 1,709,000, 1,781,300, 1,874,800, 1,953,100 and 2,005,100 filled jobs during the June 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020 quarters respectively (Quarterly Employment Survey, StatisticsNZ).

## 2. Respondent demographics

### Respondents by workforce size

While New Zealand has a large proportion of micro-small-sized enterprises, official data from StatisticsNZ show that employees are typically employed by relatively large-sized businesses (figure 1).

Therefore, given the make-up of New Zealand's enterprises by size and the types of questions asked, there was a stronger targeting of medium to large enterprises in order to cover a higher proportion of employees.

Figure 2 shows that the 2020 survey sample had a very similar breakdown of employees to the New Zealand workforce in relation to organisation size. The proportion of very large enterprises represented in the Workplace Wellness Survey was at its highest in 2020 (45 percent), compared with 44, 43, 33 and 41 percent in 2018, 2016, 2014 and 2012 respectively. It is important to note that any overarching hourly or monetary value changes between the various time periods should be treated with caution.

Table 1 shows the average and median number of workers by size of business that responded to the 2020 survey. While the average and median results for businesses with fewer than 50 staff were broadly similar to 2018, 2016 and 2014, there was not the same number of exceptionally large employers who responded to the 2020 survey. This means the average for those with greater than 50 staff was brought back to 2016 levels. The overall median number of 59 was up from 2018, but almost identical to 2016.



Figure 1: New Zealand workforce: Proportion of employees by organisation size (Feb 2020)

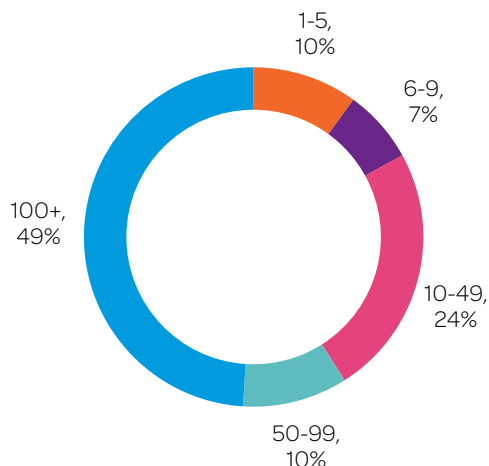


Figure 2: Workplace Wellness Survey: Proportion of employees by organisation size (2020)

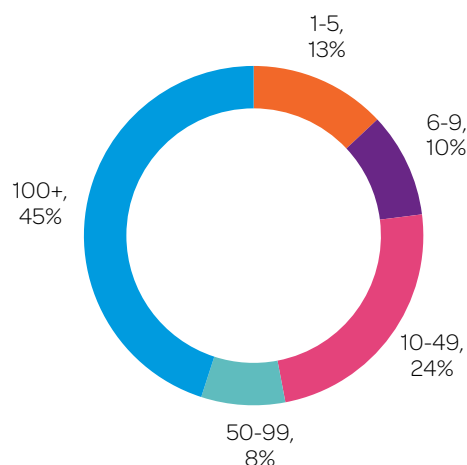


Table 1: Average and median count of employees by business size (2020)

Employee Count	Number	Average	Median
1-5	15	3.4	4.0
6-9	12	7.3	7.0
10-49	28	25.6	26.0
50-99	9	70.2	65.0
100+	52	1807.7	812.5
Fewer than 50	50	15.5	10.0
Great than 50	61	1551.4	700.0
<b>All</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>823.7</b>	<b>59.0</b>



## Respondents by industry

Figure 3 shows that those responding to the survey continue to represent a broad range of sectors. The largest proportion are from the business, finance and property sectors, followed by the manufacturing industry sector.

In addition to the 110 private sector enterprises represented, six large public sector departments also completed the survey (down from 12 in 2018) employing a total of 26,247 people, down slightly from 26,880 in 2018.

## Respondents by region

As the questionnaire was distributed by a number of nationwide and regional industry associations, responses represent all parts of the country (figure 4).

The greatest number of responses came from Auckland and Wellington, although there was still good representation from the South Island and from smaller regions.

Figure 3: Proportion of respondents by industry (2020)

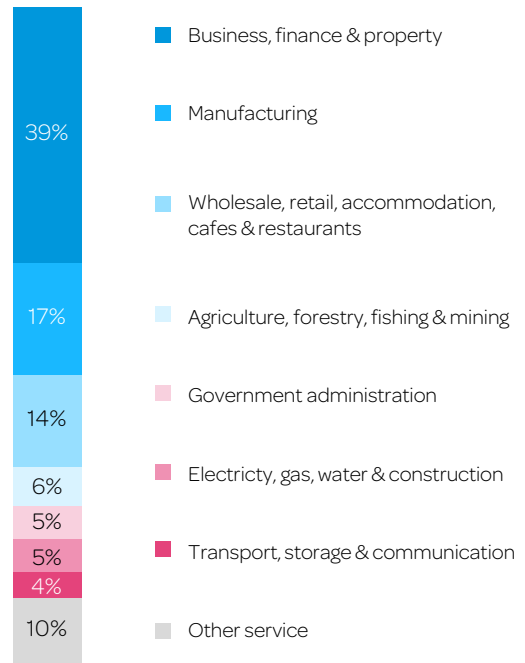
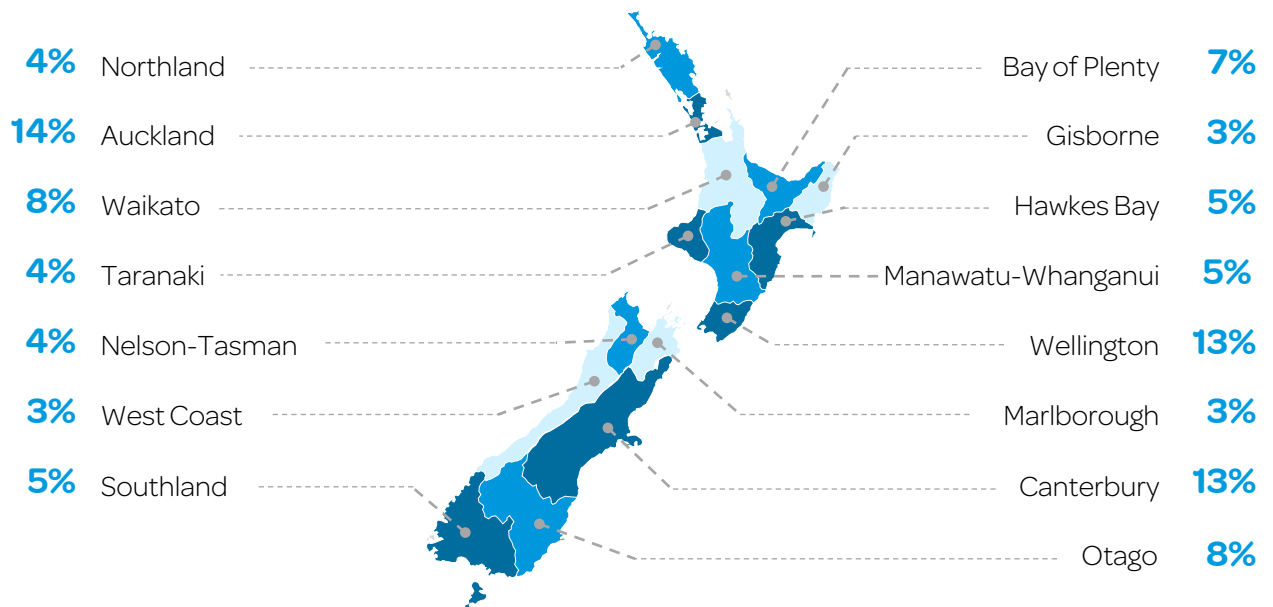


Figure 4: Proportion of respondents by region (2020)



# 3. Absence rates in 2020



COVID-19 was the most likely key factor influencing the 2020 results. Some of the absence results continue to show similar patterns to previous years. However, lockdowns, increased sickness-prevention measures and clarity around dealing with illness in the workplace have led to a sizeable shift in other values in comparison to previous results.



The average rate of absence in 2020 was the lowest ever at 4.2 days per employee. This compares with 4.7 days in 2018, 4.4 days in 2016, 4.7 days in 2014 and 4.5 days in 2012.



The difference in the average number of days off between manual workers (5.3 days) and non-manual workers (3.4 days) was 1.9 days, which was the highest difference for the survey to date.



When projected across the entire New Zealand workforce, the total number of days lost due to absence in 2020 was 7.3 million. This was down from 7.4 million working days in 2018.

## Time lost to absence averaged 4.2 days per employee in 2020

Employers were asked about the average number of days of absence per employee. Survey results in [table 2](#) show that overall absence was 4.2 days on average per employee in 2020. This was lower than all the previous years, including 2018 (4.7), 2016 (4.4), 2014 (4.7) and 2012 (4.5).

COVID-19 had a significant impact on these results in 2020. From March to May, the nation spent approximately seven weeks in lockdown at alert levels 4 and 3, forcing New Zealanders to stay home. Auckland went into an additional alert level 3 lockdown for two weeks in August.

Furthermore, increased measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as social distancing and staying home when unwell helped to reduce overall employee absence levels, as did increased numbers of employees working from home.

Similarly to previous years, if we were to project the number of days lost on average across the New Zealand workforce as a whole, it means around 7.3 million days in total were lost to absence in 2020. This was slightly lower than the 7.4 million days recorded in 2018. While the total number of employees increased between those two time periods, the average days lost per employee more than compensated for this, leading to a lower overall value.

Table 2: Absence levels: average days lost per employee (2020)

	Total	Private sector	Public sector
Manual	5.3	5.2	6.9
Non-manual	3.4	3.2	7.8
All	4.2	4.1	7.9

# New Zealand lost around 7.3 million working days to absence in 2020

## The manual / non-manual gap

The 2020 results continue the trend seen in previous years where higher average levels of absence have been recorded for manual employees compared to non-manual employees. Given the often highly physical nature of manual work, especially in jobs involving lifting, injury can be more prevalent, offering an explanation for the higher rate of absence.

The results for 2020 (table 2) show that for manual employees, the average number of days lost per employee was 5.3, compared with 3.4 days for non-manual employees.

This is the highest average number of days of absence recorded for manual workers. In contrast, non-manual workers displayed the lowest overall average, dropping below four days for the third time. These two average scores represent the largest discrepancy between manual and non-manual employees. In 2020 it stood at 1.9 days compared to 0.8 (2018), 0.6 (2016), 1.2 (2014) and 1.5 days (2012).

While the 2020 results continue to highlight the disparity between manual and non-manual workers, COVID-19 could have played a part in inflating the difference. It may be the case that since non-manual workers could work from home, a higher proportion of them continued to work while unwell. In contrast, manual workers could simply not go into their place of work due to increased communications / policies among employers telling employees to stay home if unwell.

### Size of enterprise differentials

Table 3 shows average days of absence for manual / non-manual workers across those businesses with fewer or greater than 50 employees. Despite the presence of COVID-19, the 2020 findings continue two consistent trends that have been evident throughout the survey's history. First, manual workers working in large enterprises have the highest average amount of absence per year.

Second, non-manual workers in enterprises with fewer than 50 employees have the lowest average level of absence.

In terms of the individual results, the average days of absence for those with fewer than 50 staff (3.9) sat squarely in the middle of previous years' figures. However, the 2020 result for those greater than 50 (4.6) recorded the lowest average of days for the history of the survey.

While at face value this is encouraging to see, further results outlined in this report may help clarify why this was the case.

It should also be noted that the total average in table 3 does not include contract workers, though they are included in the breakdown of manual / non-manual workers. This means that the total average can end up slightly beyond the range of the manual / non-manual absence rate.

Table 3: Absence by size of business (2020)

Employee Count	AVERAGE DAYS OF ABSENCE		
	Total	Manual	Non-Manual
Fewer than 50	3.9	5.2	3.1
Greater than 50	4.6	5.4	3.6

### Ongoing private / public sector gap

The difference between private and public sector absence levels in table 2 shows that the public sector (both central and local) has more absences than the private sector for manual, non-manual and permanent staff. This is consistent with previous years' findings.

However, the average days of absence for the public sector was the highest at 7.9 days, following values ranging between 6.1 - 6.7 days for the previous years. In turn, this meant the overall difference between the two sectors was the largest at 3.8 days.



# 4. Costs, drivers and factors around absence

## Key findings



A typical employee's absence continues to cost their employer between \$600 to \$1,000 per year.



The direct costs of absence amounted to \$1.85 billion across the economy in 2020, up from \$1.79 billion in 2018. However, this represented a smaller increase compared with 2016 to 2018.



Non-work-related illness (which now includes COVID-19) is the most common cause of absence, followed by caring for an unwell family member or dependent.



There is now increased incidence of employees staying at home when sick. This corresponds with the fact that most businesses now encourage their people to stay home when they are ill.



Unwell employees were more likely to continue working at home rather than take a sick day, although this was more prevalent in larger businesses.

### Costs of absence

Since the Workplace Wellness Survey began, an absent employee has typically cost their employer \$600-\$1,000 per year.

The Workplace Wellness Survey has consistently asked respondents to quantify the total cost each absent employee represents to their business, including the salary cost of absent individuals and replacement costs (e.g. through temporary staff or overtime worked by other employees).

Results in [table 4](#) show each absent employee costs a median total of \$722, a figure indicative of the cost savings to be achieved if employers can reduce the extent and duration of employee absences.

The 2020 result is lower than the 2018 value of \$1,007, but not the lowest result recorded (\$616 in 2014). The overall median result over the history of the survey has been \$837. As has been pointed out in previous reports, it is important to take into account two factors when examining these figures.

First, the results are indicative, rather than substantive. This means changes to the make-up of respondents (particularly by size) will cause the figures to shift.

Second, the length of time the survey has now been running furnishes certain conclusions that can be drawn about typical costs of absence. Overall, these remain in the vicinity of \$600 to \$1,000 per absent employee.

Table 4: Absence costs by workforce size (\$) (2020)

Employee Count	Median cost per absent employee (\$)	Total median cost by size of business (\$)
1-5	481	1,500
6-9	1,607	9,000
10-49	722	14,600
50-99	567	33,954
100+	1,087	555,489
Fewer than 50	700	7,000
Greater than 50	895	367,753
<b>All</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>21,590</b>

## Absence costs rise above 50 staff

A consistent finding in all Workplace Wellness surveys since 2012 has been higher absence costs in larger organisations. Enterprises with more than 50 employees consistently bear higher costs per absent worker than smaller enterprises. Table 4 shows 2020 was no different. It found the average cost per absent employee is around 1.3 times greater in larger enterprises (it was 1.7 times greater in 2018).

Higher wages and higher absence levels are key factors in the greater cost of absences in larger enterprises.

## Costs across the economy

As in previous years, extrapolating the direct costs of absence over the entire economy provides a macroeconomic picture of the level of direct costs New Zealand faces due to absence.

For 2020, the average absence level per employee of 4.2 days amounts to a cost of around \$1.85 billion for the total economy<sup>2</sup>. This compares with \$1.79 billion in 2018, \$1.51 billion in 2016, \$1.45 billion in 2014 and \$1.26 billion in 2012. In part, New Zealand's increasing national cost is affected by an ever-increasing workforce and a natural rise in income. For example, New Zealand's workforce has increased by 30 percent since 2012, while income has increased by 21.4 percent over the same period. Therefore, any reduction or levelling out of that national cost would most likely come from a sustained decrease in average absence time lost.

## Main causes of absence

Respondents were asked to list the three main causes of absence during 2020 for manual and non-manual employees. Because of COVID-19, additional options were available, or were changed slightly to take into account related effects of COVID-19.

Figure 5 shows that once again, non-work-related illness (which now includes COVID-19) is the most common cause of absence. Caring for an unwell family member or dependent is the second most common cause of absence followed by injury (non-work-related).

Of the remaining drivers of absence, mental wellbeing / stress moved up one spot to fourth overall. This was followed by two COVID-19 related causes, namely caring for a family member or other dependent due to COVID-19 and isolating while waiting for COVID-19 test results.

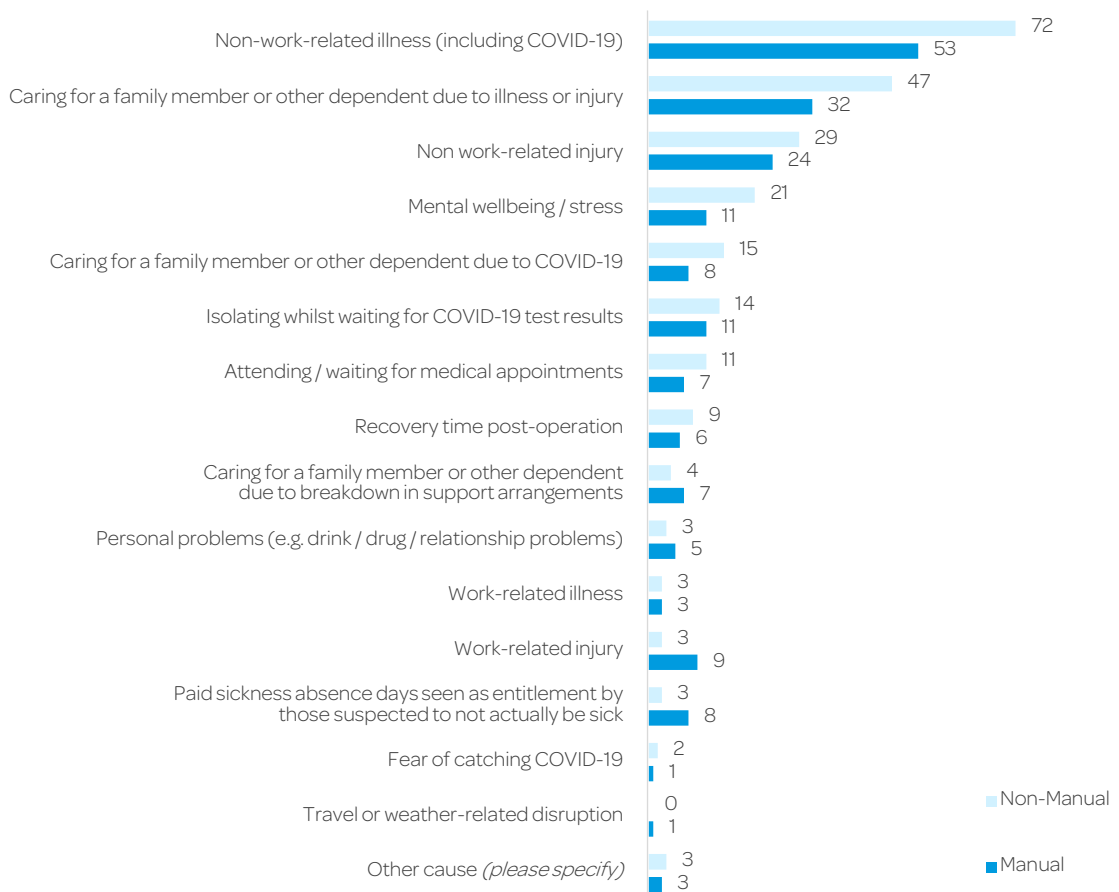
Differences between manual and non-manual occupations continue, with non-manual occupations showing higher absences for illness and caring for others. In contrast, manual workers are more likely to experience work-related injuries.

While COVID-19 has had some effect on the 2020 causes of absence, it is important to remember that the key reasons for absence remain firmly in place, especially given non-work-related illness was already the main culprit for absence.



2. Based on Quarterly Employment Survey (SNZ) average weekly earnings for FTEs at \$1,259.71 and total employed of FTEs of 1,748,100. All figures were taken from the June quarter 2020 results.

Figure 5: Main drivers of absence (2020) – %



## Rolling sick days

For the second time, 2020 respondents were asked what their most common approach was to sick days.

Table 5 shows that of the options available to select, the most common approach remained five days per year (rolled over if unused) at 44.8 percent, which was a similar result in 2018 (47.5 percent). This was followed by over a quarter selecting more than five days per year (25.9 percent).

Of those that put ‘Other’ (13.8 percent), half of them indicated 10 days as the most common approach. Those that selected ‘unlimited leave’ rose from 4 percent in 2018 to 9.5 percent in 2020.

From 24 July, New Zealand’s minimum employee sick leave entitlement increased from five days to 10 days per year.

Given we do not know how many of those who selected ‘more than five days per year’ in the Workplace Wellness

Survey provided 10 or more days, we cannot ascertain an approximate percentage of those organisations affected by the entitlement change. However, the results do indicate that over 60 percent of employers will need to cater for increased sick leave as a result of the legislative changes.

Table 5: Common approach to sick days (2020)

Approach	%
Five days per year (rolled over if unused)	44.8
More than five days per year	25.9
Other	13.8
Unlimited leave	9.5
Five days per year (not rolled over if unused)	6.0

## Decline in annual leave taken

Respondents were also asked what impact COVID-19 had on annual leave taken by employees during 2020. Fifty six percent said that their employees had taken less annual leave, while only 12.9 percent had taken more. Just under 30 percent did not see any noticeable change. The high proportion of employees who had not taken annual leave may have been due to myriad COVID-19 related reasons, including a lack of travel options, uncertainty about job security, fear of getting COVID-19, and not wanting to use up leave staying home.

## Attitude shift

Enterprises were again asked on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), to what degree their staff typically turned up for work with some form of illness, when they should have stayed at home.

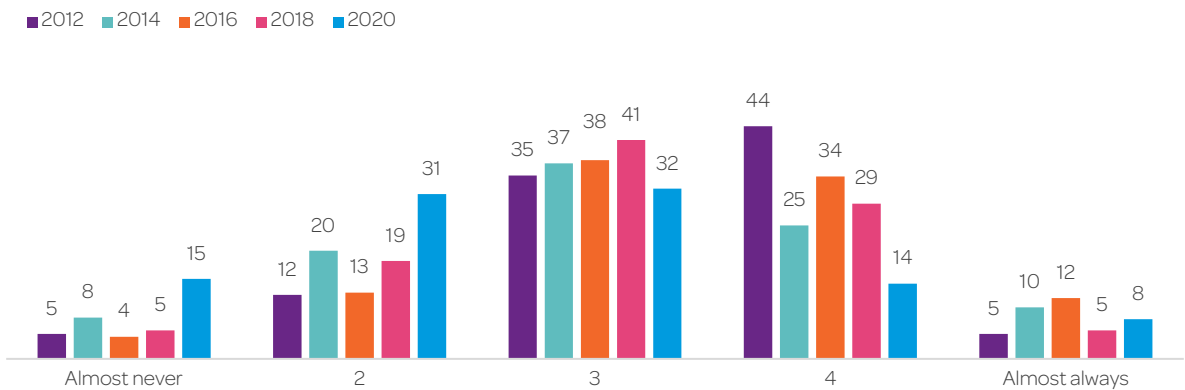
The 2020 results indicate a much clearer message from enterprises to their people. The mean value for 2020 was 2.68, compared with 3.11, 3.36, 3.09 and 3.32 for 2018, 2016, 2014 and 2012 respectively. The median value remained at 3.

Figure 6 provides a number of insights into the change in behaviour. Firstly, the combined proportion of employees who typically stay at home stands at 46 percent. The next closest result was 28 percent in 2014. Secondly, those who responded with a value of '4' decreased dramatically, standing at 14 percent in 2020 (this was as high as 44 percent in 2012). Third, for the first time there was a decrease in the proportion of those who waver between turning up or not, reducing to 32 percent in 2020.

Although there remains a proportion of employees who almost always turn up to work despite being sick, the overall proportion of those people is now at its lowest point at 22 percent (compared to a high of 49 percent in 2012).

By size of enterprise, table 6 shows that smaller-sized businesses continue to see more employees coming to work who should be at home. However, there has been an overall improvement in the results for 2020, with the overall mean value now at 2.85 - the first time below 3.0. Larger sized firms also recorded their lowest mean value at 2.5.

Figure 6: Degree to which staff typically turn up for work, even though they should stay home due to illness - % (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 & 2020)



**Table 6:** Degree to which staff typically turn up to work even though they should stay home with some form of illness (2020)

Size of enterprise	Mean	Median
1-5	3.60	4
6-9	3.09	3
10-49	2.36	2
50-99	3.11	3
100+	2.37	2
<50 staff	2.85	3
>50 staff	2.50	3
<b>All</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>3</b>

### COVID-19's influence

Enterprises were asked how much COVID-19 influenced their response around the degree to which their staff typically turned up for work, even though they should most likely stay at home.

Table 7 shows that on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (significantly), there is a clear difference by size of business. The larger the business, the more COVID-19 had an impact on their response.

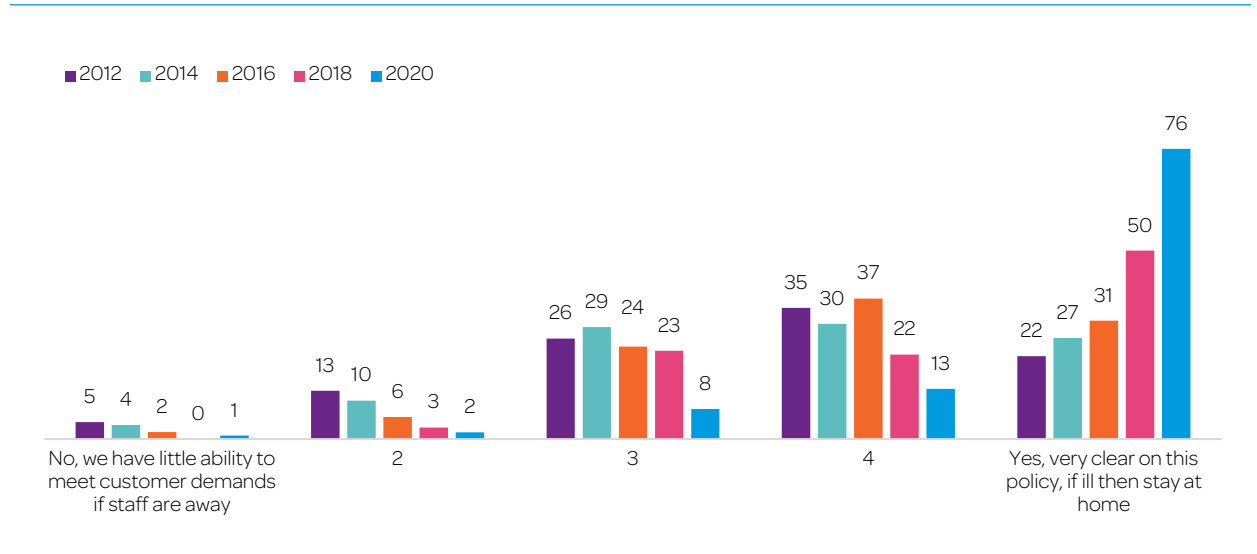
**Table 7:** COVID-19's influence on staff who typically turn up to work even though they should stay home with some form of illness (2020)

Size of enterprise	Mean	Median
1-5	2.15	1
6-9	2.64	2
10-49	2.79	2.5
50-99	3.67	4
100+	3.89	4
<50 staff	2.60	2
>50 staff	3.86	4
<b>All</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>4</b>

### Clear encouragement to stay home

Enterprises were again asked whether they thought the culture of their business encouraged employees to stay home when they were ill. Figure 7 shows the overall result for the five years observed, with a significant shift in culture. The average result increased to 4.62, compared with 4.21, 3.89, 3.66 and 3.32 for 2018, 2016, 2014 and 2012 respectively. The increase in the average score from 2018 to 2020 was the largest recorded, assisted by a sizeable increase in those being very transparent on this policy.

**Figure 7:** Culture of respondent business encouraging employees to remain away from work if they are ill – % (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 & 2020)





It is now the case that over three quarters of organisations are very clear that employees should stay home when unwell, while almost 90 percent ensure at least some proactive steps are taken towards a clear culture to stay home.

Given the dramatic decline in the overall proportion of people who turned up to work when sick, the 2020 results show a very clear and positive link between expectation and reality around employees heeding the message from employers about staying home if unwell.

**Table 8:** Culture of respondent businesses encouraging employees to stay at home if they are unwell (2020)

Size of enterprise	Mean	Median
1-5	4.43	5.00
6-9	3.67	4.00
10-49	4.74	5.00
50-99	4.78	5.00
100+	4.81	5.00
<50 staff	4.42	5.00
>50 staff	4.80	5.00
Private sector	4.64	5.00
Public sector	4.33	5.00
<b>All</b>	<b>4.62</b>	<b>5.00</b>

Table 8 shows that the culture of businesses encouraging employees to stay at home when unwell is evident throughout all sizes of business, albeit stronger for larger enterprises.

### Types of illness / injury when coming to work

The 2020 survey asked what forms of illness / injury employees typically had when turning up to work. Table 9 shows mainly minor illnesses as the key type of illness, followed by physical pain. Work and non- work related anxiety / stress / depression round out the top four spots. It is very uncommon for employees to turn up to work with major illness or injury.

### Home, sick and working

Enterprises were asked if unwell employees were more likely to continue working at home rather than take a sick day.

Figure 8 shows that this tends to be the case for around 60% of employees across all enterprises, although it is more prevalent in larger businesses.

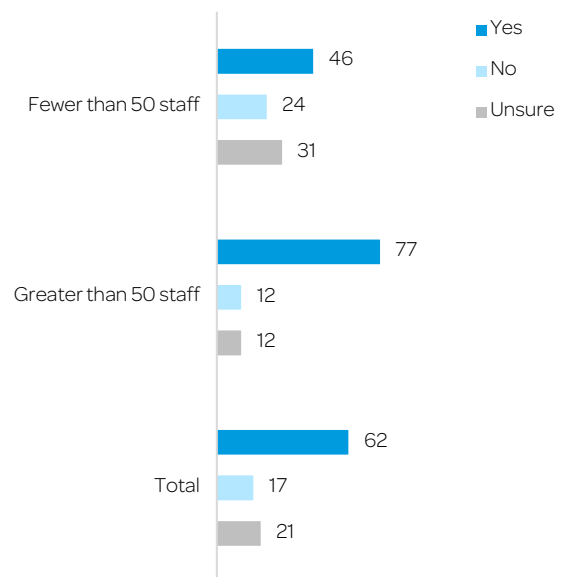
It should be pointed out that not all illness prevents someone from working (i.e. a minor cold). Therefore, a message from employers to stay home if unwell can mean someone can continue to work, however doing so from home ensures the illness does not spread to other employees.

For many, the key point is knowing when to draw the line between working from home if slightly unwell to ensuring a proper sick day is taken to fully rest and recover.

**Table 9:** Types of illness / injury that staff typically have when they are turning up to work (2020)

Type	2020 (%)
Mainly minor illness (e.g. cold, flu, tummy bug, headache)	85.3
Physical pain (e.g. sore back, neck, knee, arthritis, musculoskeletal disorders)	47.4
Non work-related anxiety / stress / depression	23.3
Work-related anxiety / stress / depression	23.3
More major illness (e.g. heart, blood pressure, respiratory, cancer, bowel problems)	1.7
Injury	0.9
Other	0.9

**Figure 8:** Are employees now more likely to continue working rather than take a sick day when unwell and working from home? – % (2020)



## Productivity matters

On a scale of 1-5 where 1 = almost no effect and 5 = significant impact, [table 10](#) shows that businesses of all sizes say wellness impacts the productivity of their employees.

The wellness of staff continues to play a sizeable role in the productivity of enterprises. The overall score of 3.91 for 2020 was noticeably up on 3.80 for 2018 and 3.82 for 2016. Interestingly, there was a higher productivity impact on larger enterprises (greater than 50 staff) than those with fewer than 50 staff for 2020. This was even more evident when just examining those with 100+ staff.

**Table 10:** Wellness of staff impacting the productivity of organisations (2020)

Size of enterprise	Mean	Median
1-5	3.87	4.00
6-9	3.42	4.00
10-49	3.93	4.00
50-99	3.78	4.00
100+	4.06	4.00
<50 staff	3.80	4.00
>50 staff	4.02	4.00
<b>All</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>4.00</b>

## Looking ahead



Analysing five separate years' worth of data shows a significant shift in key employee absence metrics relating to costs, drivers and factors. In previous years there has been some degree of disconnect between employers saying one thing while doing another. However, the 2020 results indicate a significant alignment of results with employers recognising the importance of sending the right signal to employees about taking legitimate absences and breaks and taking time to recuperate at home if unwell.



While the next chapter provides greater details around challenges relating to working from home, employers will need to be mindful of ensuring clear policies around not coming to work if unwell are equally observed when unwell and working from home.



# 5. Working from home

## Key findings



Over half of enterprises have introduced more formal policies to support working from home since the outbreak of COVID-19.



While one to two days per week is the most common option for working from home across all enterprises, there are key differences when looking at the size of business.



Many small enterprises are simply unable to offer working from home.



The impacts of working from home on enterprises have been twofold. While some employees feel isolated, it has also largely been viewed as a positive move.



Around 40 percent of larger enterprises anticipate more of their people working from home over the next year.



Enterprises of all sizes invested in standard electronic equipment to support employees working from home, including laptops, monitors and keyboards.

## Formalising working from home

Working from home has been increasingly offered to employees across various enterprises in recent years, but the COVID-19 enforced lockdowns meant a large proportion of organisations were forced to enable their people to work from home if they wanted to continue operations. Many employers now see working from home as a fundamental part of their organisation's operations, and many employees have come to expect it. However, this new way of working poses unique challenges around employee management and team morale.

Enterprises were asked whether COVID-19 has been the driver for introducing more formal policies around employees working from home. [Table 11](#) shows that this was the case for over half of respondents with formal policies more evident in larger enterprises.

The reason for 'size of business' differences can be seen in [figure 9](#), which looks at the degree to which enterprises have changed their views on employees working from home. Larger enterprises have a much stronger capacity to provide this option, while a significant proportion of smaller enterprises are simply unable to offer working from home. Subsequently, for many small enterprises it is simply not worth having a formal policy in place if the option is not available to begin with.

Of those who had previously not offered some capacity for working at home but now do so, respondents were asked how this had impacted their operations. [Figure 10](#) shows that employees feeling isolated is a key concern for all sizes of enterprise. However, this is balanced by over 50 percent of enterprises finding it to be a positive move.

**Table 11:** Introduced more formal policies towards staff working from home because of COVID-19

Employee Count	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
1-5	6.7	93.3	0.0
6-9	8.3	83.3	8.3
10-49	53.6	46.4	0.0
50-99	66.7	33.3	0.0
100+	82.7	17.3	0.0
<50	30.9	67.3	1.8
>50	80.3	19.7	0.0
<b>All</b>	<b>56.9</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>

Figure 9: Degree to which enterprises have changed their view on employees working from home as a result of COVID-19 – %

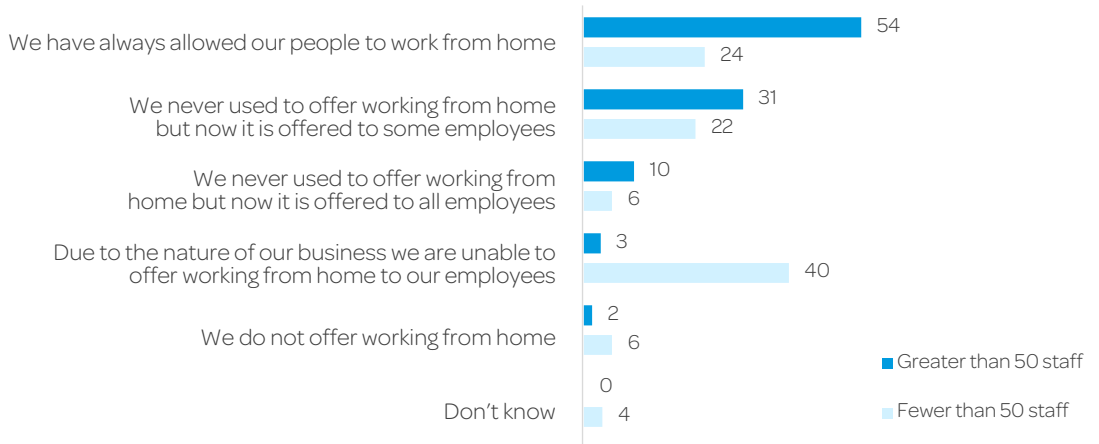
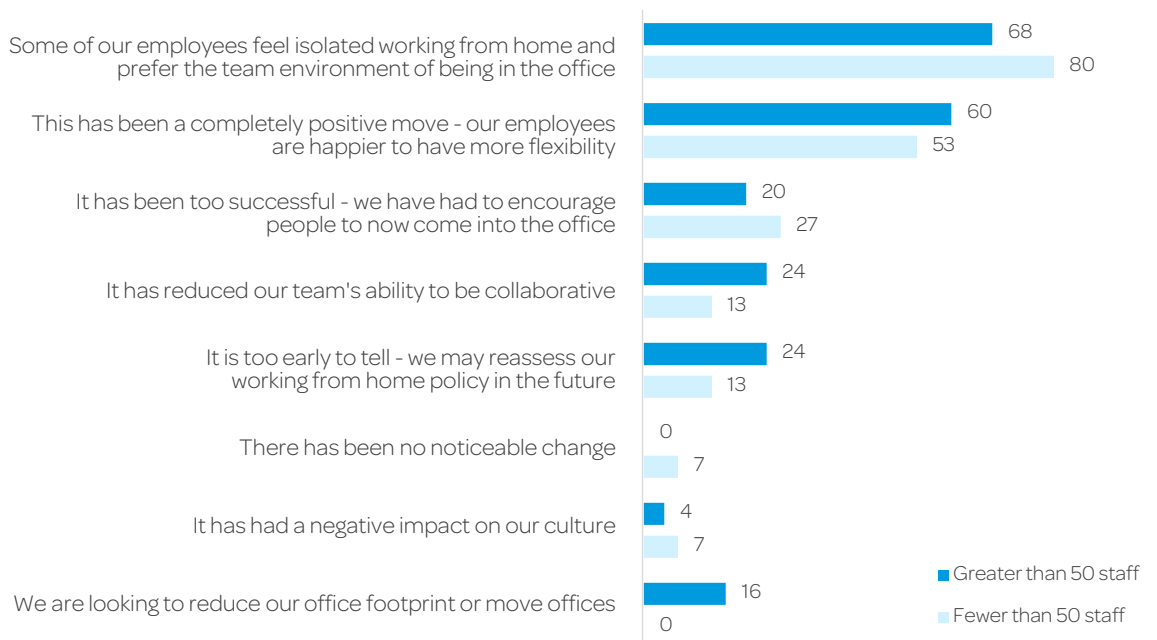


Figure 10: The main impact on enterprises that previously never used to offer working from home – %



## Days working from home

Table 12 shows that one to two days a week is the most common frequency for working at home since the nationwide lockdown in 2020. However, around half of smaller enterprises do not provide any days working from home, compared with only 8.3 percent of larger enterprises that do not provide for working from home.

Table 12: Approximate number of days per week that employees now work from home since the 2020 nationwide COVID-19 lockdown

Number	All (%)	Fewer than 50 staff (%)	50+
1-2 days a week	59.3	37.7	78.3
3-4 days a week	7.1	5.7	8.3
Full-time	1.8	3.8	0
Never	27.4	49.1	8.3
Don't know	4.4	3.8	5

For those enterprises that provided an approximate number of days per week that employees now work from home, an overwhelming number of them (88.3 percent) saw an increase. Only 11.7 percent said it was roughly the same, and no enterprises said there was a decrease. Of the businesses experiencing an increase, it was more prevalent amongst those with greater than 50 staff (94.2 percent) than for those with fewer than 50 staff (76.0 percent).

## Changing home work

Table 13 shows that the majority of enterprises do not expect a higher proportion of staff working from home over the next year. However, there are clear differences between sizes of business. While 69.1 percent of

smaller enterprises do not anticipate an increased proportion of staff working from home, only 36.1 percent of larger enterprises thought similarly. Around four out of every 10 larger enterprises anticipate more staff working from home over the next year.

Table 13: Anticipate a higher proportion of staff working from home over the next year

Number	All (%)	Fewer than 50 staff (%)	50+
1-2 days a week	59.3	37.7	78.3
3-4 days a week	7.1	5.7	8.3
Full-time	1.8	3.8	0
Never	27.4	49.1	8.3
Don't know	4.4	3.8	5

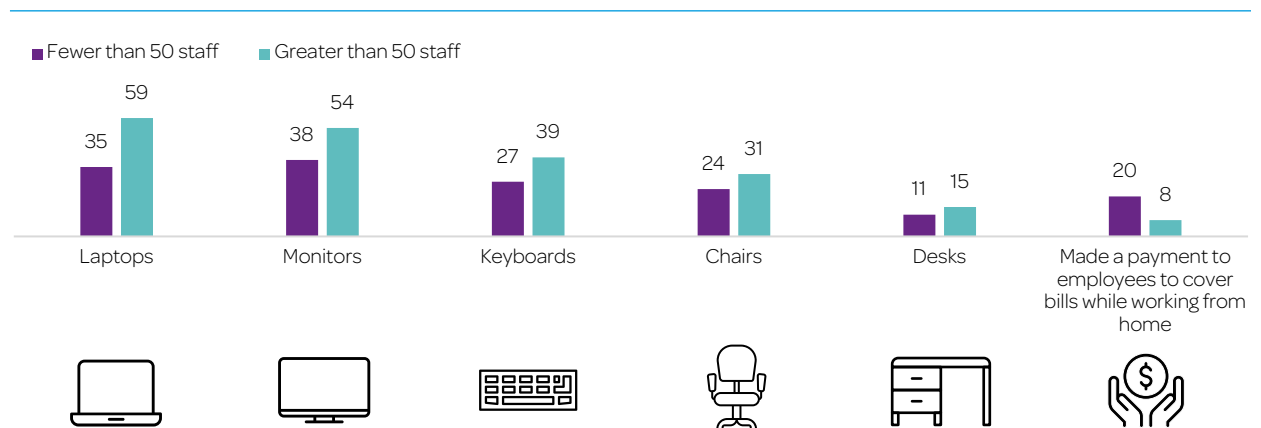
## Office equipment

Employers were asked whether they had invested in office equipment or provided other support to enable their employees to work from home.

Survey results in figure 11 show that electronic equipment including laptops, monitors and keyboards were key investments for all sizes of enterprise. However, the comfort of staff was also important, with chairs also provided by 27.6 percent of all enterprises.

While making a payment to employees to cover bills while working from home was uncommon for larger enterprises, it was more than twice as likely for small enterprises. Given, on balance, smaller enterprises have a greater ability to know their staff on an individual basis, such payments may be an easier discussion between the two parties.

Figure 11: Office equipment or support provided to enable employees to work from home – %



## Looking ahead



The outbreak of COVID-19 rapidly changed the way many New Zealanders were able to work. Offering working from home became a requirement for enterprises to remain operational during the lockdowns, but this new way of working has since become well ingrained and many employees continue to, and expect to continue to, work from home.



It is pleasing to see many businesses embracing working from home as an option through more formalised mechanisms. However, it is important to point out that not all enterprises can provide this option due to the nature of their business. This is especially true when the size of the enterprise is taken into account.



The main impacts of working from home point towards a future that will need to be carefully managed by employers. Overall, it has been viewed as a positive step as it has provided flexibility for many. However, some staff feel isolated and miss the team environment.



# 6. Stress, fatigue and mental health in the workplace

## Key findings



Overall stress and anxiety levels for all enterprises remain more on the moderate than the high side, with 2020 levels similar to 2018. However, the 2020 result shows the largest proportion of enterprises reporting greater general stress / anxiety levels among their staff.



When asked about the change in direction of general stress levels, a net 64.7 percent of firms observed an increase. This was significantly up on previous years, with 91 percent of enterprises surveyed reporting that COVID-19 was the partial reason for this increase.



General workload remained the biggest work-related issue reported by businesses of all sizes, while relationships outside work were reported to be the key feature of non-work-related stress. A noticeable increase regarding financial concerns was also reported.



Smaller businesses are now much more likely to have formal practices in place to identify stress among staff.

## Stress and fatigue in the workplace

While implementing workplace health and safety practices to prevent injuries is commonplace, safeguarding the overall wellbeing of employees has traditionally been of lesser concern. While there has been an increase in recent years among enterprises offering health and wellbeing programmes to reduce stress and fatigue in the workplace, businesses surveyed reported that the outbreak of COVID-19 has increased stress levels for many employees in both their personal and professional lives.

Table 14 shows on a scale of 1 (almost never stressful for most staff) to 5 (highly stressful for most staff) the current stress / anxiety levels among employees. Overall, the 2020 figure of 3.09 was all but identical to 2018 (3.08). Similarly to previous years, the larger the business, the greater the stress levels reported.

In recent years, the overall mean score for stress / anxiety has stayed relatively the same with the 2016 figure standing at 3.02. But over the history of the survey it has crept up – in 2014 the figure was lower at 2.69.

However, when it comes to the 2020 views around stress, fatigue and anxiety, COVID-19 certainly played a part. Figure 12 shows that a key shift in the 2020 results has been a lower proportion of respondents sitting on the fence around rating the general stress / anxiety levels of staff. In turn, this saw ratings of '2' and '4' increase.

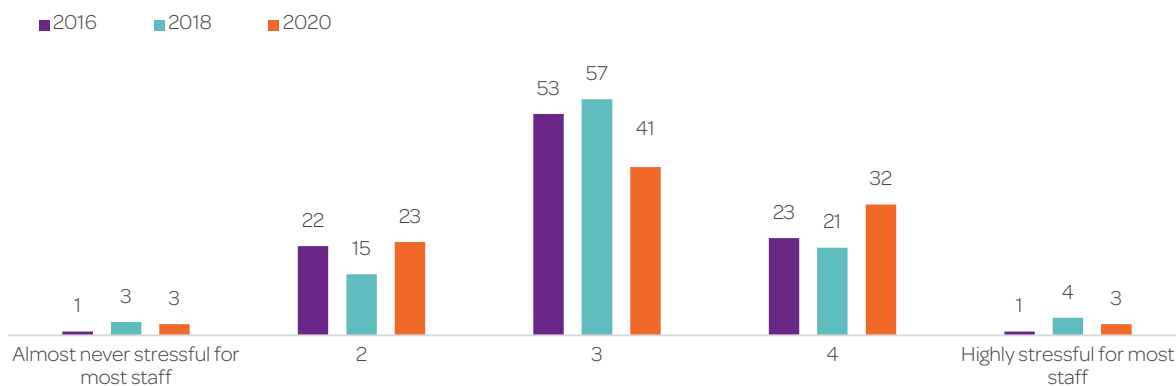
Therefore, despite an almost matching overall score to 2018, the 2020 result shows the largest proportion of enterprises reporting greater general stress / anxiety levels among their staff.

Table 14: Rating general stress / anxiety levels amongst staff (2020)

Employee Count	Stress / anxiety levels amongst staff (mean)
1-5	2.80
6-9	2.83
10-49	3.00
50-99	3.22
100+	3.27
<50	2.91
>50	3.26
<b>All</b>	<b>3.09</b>



Figure 12: Rating the general stress / anxiety levels amongst staff (2016, 2018 & 2020) – %



When asked about the change in direction of general stress levels, results in table 15 are broken down by determining a positive or negative direction, with a net +64.7 percent of firms noting an increase. This was significantly up from +23.5 percent in 2018, +22.9 percent in 2016 and +14.3 percent in 2014. The table also shows that for those with 50+ staff, the net result was +77.1 percent, compared with +31.3 percent in 2018 and +30.5 percent in 2016. For those with fewer than 50 staff, it stood at +50.9 percent in 2020, compared with +16.0 in 2018 and +14.0 percent in 2016.

Unsurprisingly, table 16 shows that COVID-19 was perceived to have been at least partially responsible for those who noted an increase in general stress levels during 2020, no matter what size of enterprise.

Table 15: Change in direction of general stress levels staff experienced (2020)

Option	All (%)	Fewer than 50 staff (%)	50+staff (%)
Increased	66.4	52.7	78.7
Stayed roughly the same	28.4	43.6	14.8
Decreased	1.7	1.8	1.6
<b>Net result</b>	<b>+64.7</b>	<b>+50.9</b>	<b>+77.1</b>

Table 16: COVID-19 as a partial reason for an increase in general stress levels (2020)

Option	All (%)	Fewer than 50 staff (%)	50+ staff (%)
Yes	90.9	86.2	93.8
No	1.3	3.4	0
Unsure	7.8	10.3	6.3



### WHAT IS MENTAL WELLBEING?

Mental wellbeing is a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.



Figure 13 outlines the main causes of stress in the workplace for those businesses surveyed. ‘General workload’ remains the leading cause of stress / anxiety reported by all businesses. However, while ‘change at work’ was the second most common reported cause of stress for businesses with 50+ employees, for those with fewer than 50 staff ‘long hours’ and ‘job uncertainties / redundancies’ were at similar levels. It was also interesting to note that ‘fear of getting sick / catching COVID-19’ was reported as being a main cause of work stress for over 20 percent of enterprises, and on par with ‘relationships at work’.

Figure 14 shows that for the main causes of non-work related stress, ‘relationships outside work’ remains the key contributor of stress, with 57.8 percent selecting this option when surveyed. However, ‘financial concerns’ increased from 41.4 percent in 2018 to 54.3 percent in 2020, and this climbed to 60.0 percent for those with fewer than 50 staff. COVID-19 was reported as a main cause for 38.8 percent of all enterprises, although higher for those with more than 50 employees.

Figure 15 outlines the main practices businesses have in place to identify mental wellbeing / stress. For those with greater than 50 employees, the top two spots were again ‘staff surveys’ and ‘training for managers’, with the former increasing from 63.3 percent in 2018 to 82 percent in 2020.

Businesses with fewer than 50 staff showed another large and encouraging shift. In previous years, the proportion of enterprises that did not have any practices in place to identify stress ranged anywhere between 36.0 to 53.2 percent. In 2020 this stood at 27 percent. Also, ‘training for managers’ increased at 40.0 percent- the highest proportion since the survey began.

It is still evident that larger businesses are more likely to have processes in place to identify stress and fatigue, given their ability to implement such processes. However, the 2020 results show the gap between smaller and larger business has shrunk. Bigger organisations are typically less able to have a close relationship with their larger number of workers, which means more formal processes are required. Therefore, it would not be realistic to expect matching outcomes. However, an increased effort by smaller enterprises to provide more formal practices, combined with informal discussions, helps overall identification of stress and fatigue.

Regarding approaches to support mental wellbeing of employees in figure 16, ‘employee assistance programmes’ and ‘flexible working’ were tied for the most common approach across all enterprises at 65.5 percent. Also, ‘mental wellbeing seminars’ have overtaken ‘diversity and inclusion policies and practices’ to slip into third spot.

The addition of ‘support for parents juggling working from home and caring for children (during the lockdowns)’ saw the same number select that as ‘diversity and inclusion policies’ (both at 38.8 percent). It was also encouraging to note that the proportion of smaller enterprises that had no wellbeing approaches in place decreased to 15 percent in 2020, compared with 24.0 percent in 2018.

Table 17: Rating organisation role in the health and wellbeing of staff (2020)

Employee Count	Role in health / wellbeing of staff (mean)
<50	3.73
>50	3.75
All	3.74

Table 17 shows on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (significantly) the rating organisations give to their role in the health and wellbeing of their people. There appears to be no difference between small and large enterprises, with all taking an active role.

Enterprises were further asked how this had changed in the past year. Overall, 50.9 percent mentioned an increase, while 48.3 percent indicated it had stayed roughly the same.



Figure 13: Main causes of work-related stress (2020)

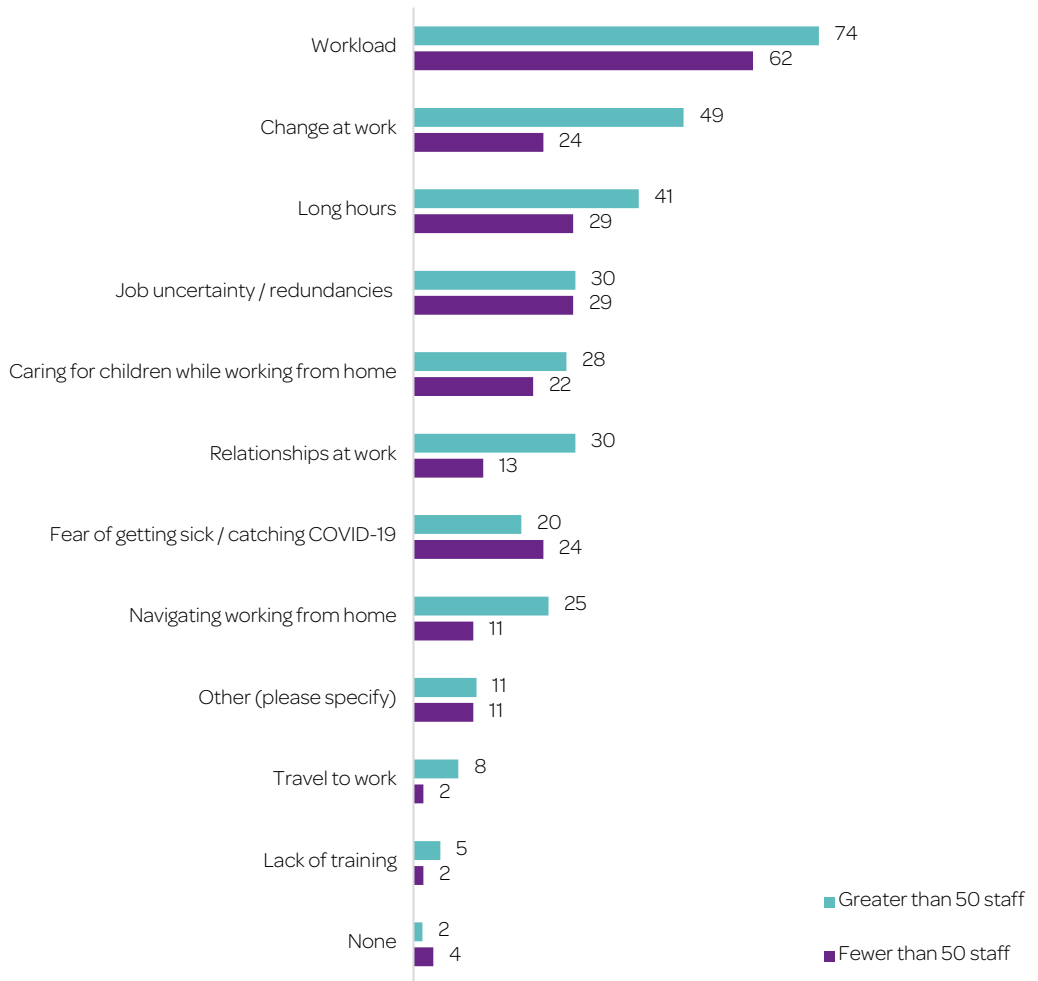


Figure 14: Main causes of non-work-related stress (2020)

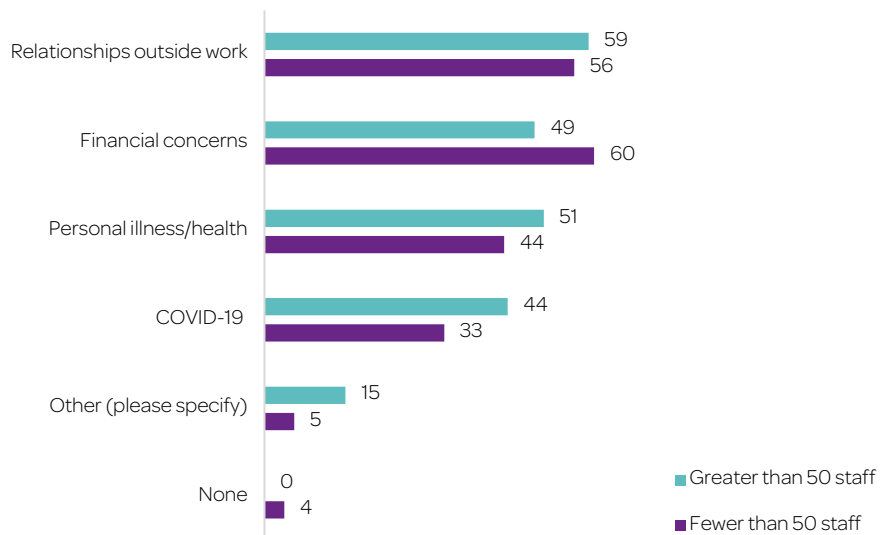


Figure 15: Practices in place to identify mental wellbeing / stress (2020)

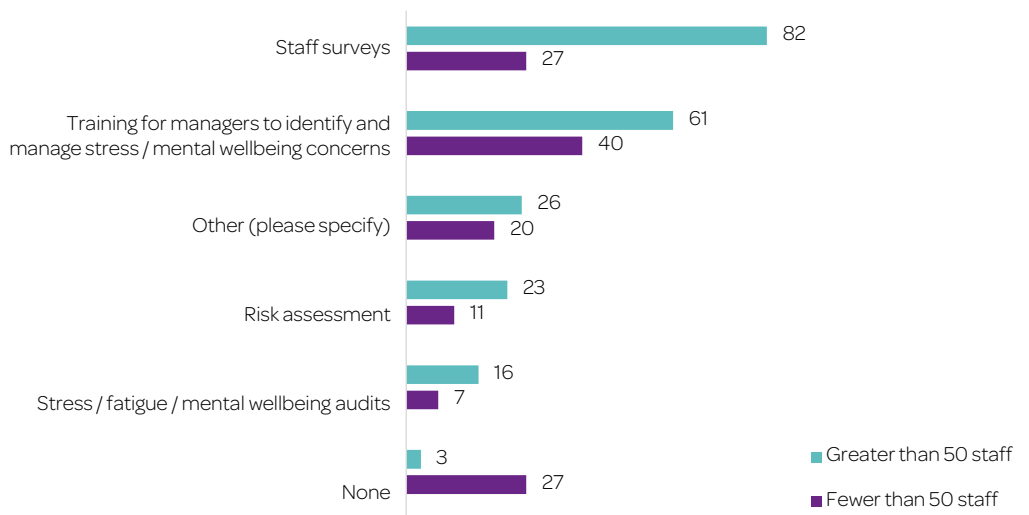
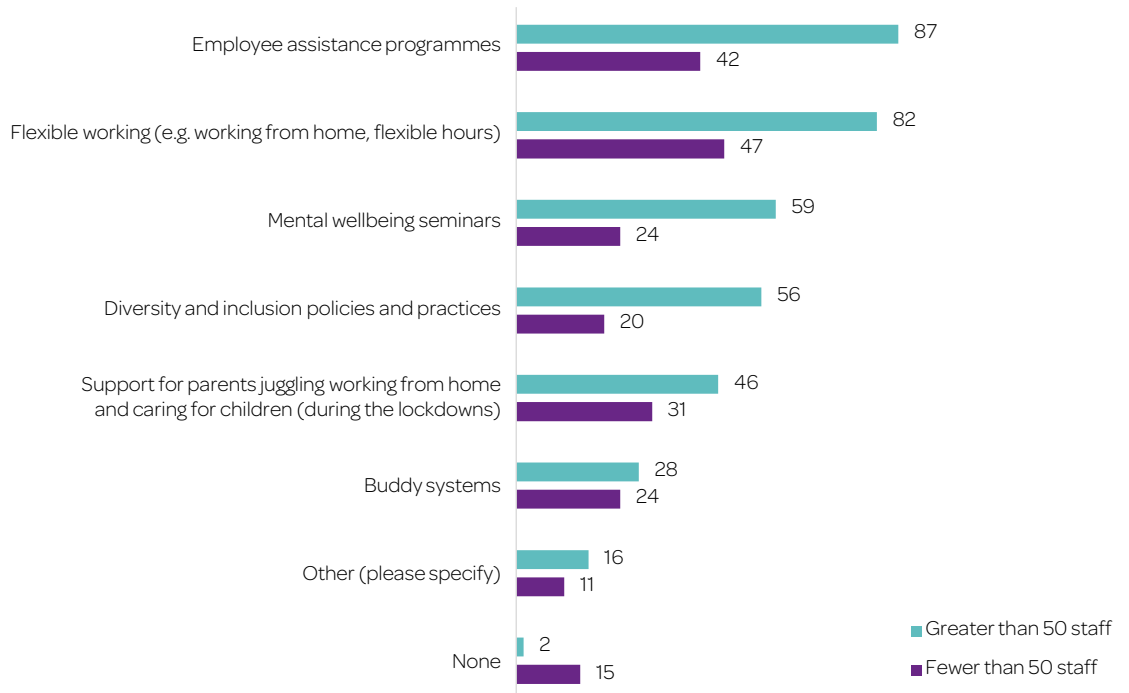


Figure 16: Approaches to support mental wellbeing of staff (2020)



# 7. Relationships and communication with staff

## Key findings



The 2020 results saw the largest proportion of enterprises taking a formal approach to gathering non-work-related data. Meanwhile, the number of organisations that did not take a formal approach to gathering non-work-related data was still not the lowest over the history of the survey.



The proportion of larger businesses which did take a formal approach more than doubled from 18.4 percent in 2018 to 39.3 percent in 2020.



Unsurprisingly, 'COVID-19 governance' was the most popular benefit to improve wellbeing of staff across all sizes of business. However, for larger businesses an 'employee assistance programme' was on par with 'COVID-19 governance' (both at 93.4 percent).



A higher proportion of smaller businesses now provide some form of benefit to improve the wellbeing of their employees with 'flexible hours / working from home' showing a sizeable lift.

## Data to improve wellbeing

Enterprises typically collect a variety of work-related data on their employees, including bank account details, home address and emergency contact numbers. However, operating in a COVID-19 affected world, combined with ongoing changes to ways of working, means a clearly defined and coordinated approach to collecting non-work wellbeing-related information may be increasingly important.

Table 18 shows that in 2020, 27.6 percent of enterprises took a formal approach to gathering non-work data. This was up from 17.2 percent in 2018, 22.9 percent in 2016 and 19.5 percent in 2014. In contrast, the proportion of organisations that said they did not take a formal approach to gathering non-work-related data decreased a further 7.3 percentage points, on top of the 1.6 percentage point decrease for 2016 (although still not as low as the 23.9 percent recorded in 2014).

When broken down by size of enterprise, the results showed differing movements in comparison with 2018. The proportion of larger businesses who did take a formal approach more than doubled from 18.4 percent in 2018 to 39.3 percent in 2020. Correspondingly, those who do not take a formal approach fell from 36.7 percent to 23.0 percent. For smaller businesses, those that had a formal approach fell slightly from 16.0 percent to 14.5 percent, although there was still a slight drop for those that did not (from 28.0 percent to 27.3 percent).

For those with some form of clearly defined and coordinated approach, on balance, results were positive for 2020. Table 19 shows that on a scale of 1-5 where 5 is 'very proactive' and 1 is 'hardly ever used', the mean value in 2020 was 3.11. This was the highest value since 2016, and well above the 2.79 score in 2018. It was also the first result where both small and large enterprises had a mean score above 3.0 at the same time.

Table 18: Enterprises having a clearly defined and coordinated approach to collecting non-work-related information of staff (2020)

Type	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
<50 staff	14.5	54.5	27.3	3.6
>50 staff	39.3	34.4	23	3.3
<b>All</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3.4</b>

Table 19: How proactive are those that collect non-work-related data in improving the wellbeing of their staff (2020)

Type	Mean	Median
<50 staff	3.16	3.0
>50 staff	3.07	3.0
<b>All</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>3.0</b>

## Benefits to improve wellbeing

Larger organisations are more likely than smaller ones to use other options alongside 'flexible hours' as part of their family friendly policies.

In terms of general benefits enterprises provide to improve the wellbeing of their staff, [figure 17](#) shows broadly similar patterns to previous years. However, COVID-19 has seen some shifts and some strengthening around priorities for 2020.

Unsurprisingly, 'COVID-19 governance' was the most popular option across all sizes of business, although for larger businesses an 'employee assistance programme' was on par with 'COVID-19 governance' (both at 93 percent). This was followed by 'vaccinations' (92 percent) and 'flexible hours / working from home' (85 percent).

For those with fewer than 50 staff, the priority of options was again different for 2020. This is not unexpected given that the larger the business, the more resources it can direct to various initiatives. However, what was different to previous results was that there were a higher proportion of smaller businesses providing benefits.

To illustrate this, of the top five listed benefits in 2018, only one was listed by more than half (education / training at 64.0 percent). In contrast, the top six options for 2020 were all undertaken by more than half of smaller businesses.

Looking at the results of smaller businesses more specifically, there was a big shift in 'flexible hours / working at home', which rose from 38.0 percent in 2018 to 58 percent in 2020.

## Clear break

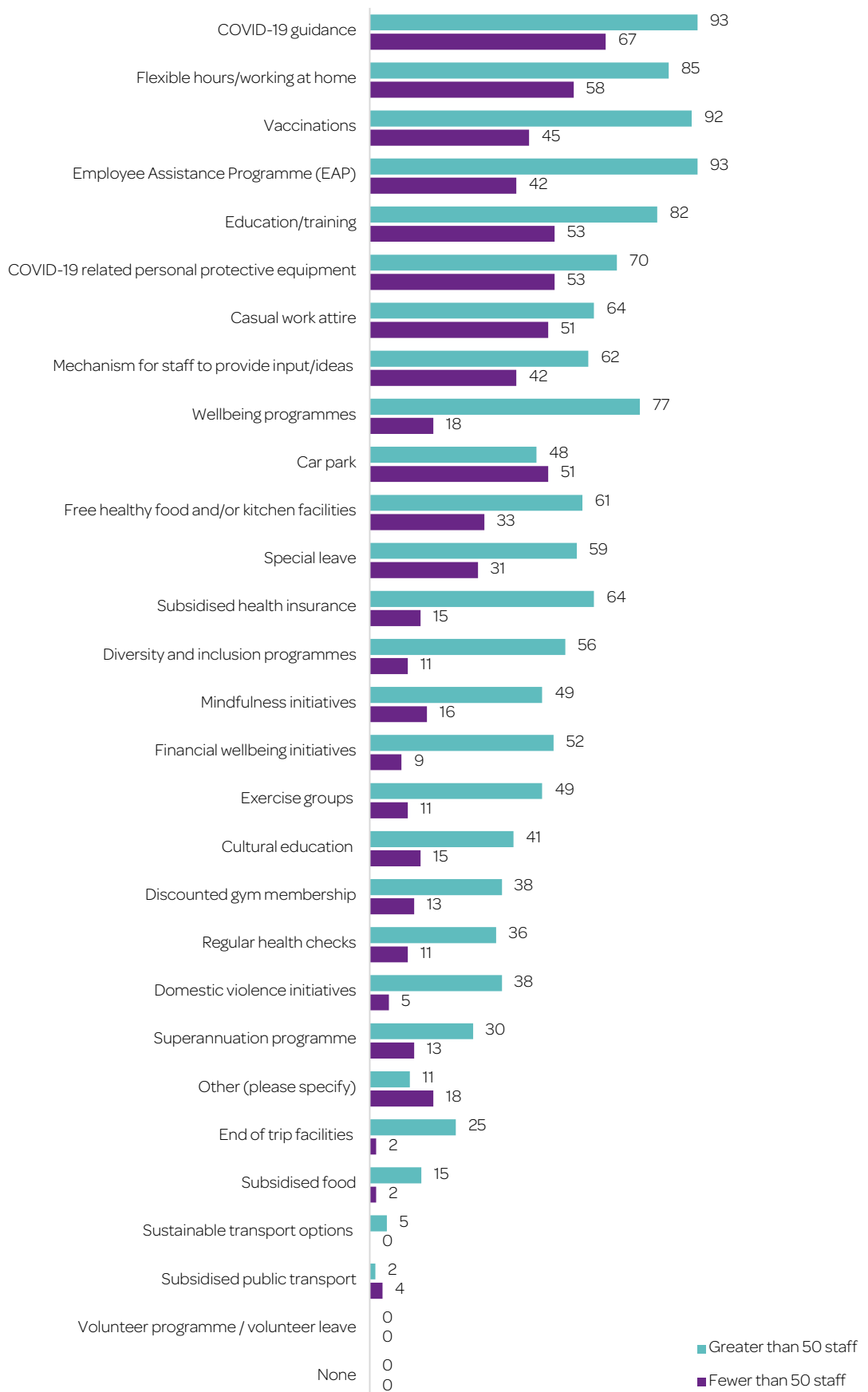
Respondents were again asked whether they actively encourage staff to take breaks. The 2020 results in [table 20](#) show a slight drop in encouragement from 2018, although the combined options of 'every day' and 'most days' was almost identical between the two years. Also, other factors such as working from home and flexible hours may have had an influence on the extent to which businesses specifically mention this to staff.

**Table 20:** Extent to which business actively encourages staff to take breaks (2020)

Option	All (%)	Fewer than 50 staff (%)	50+ Staff (%)
Every day	63.8	58.2	68.9
Most days	20.7	27.3	14.8
Some days	9.5	7.3	11.5
Never	4.3	5.5	3.3
Don't know	1.7	1.8	1.6



Figure 17: Benefits provided to improve the wellbeing of staff (2020)





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