



COVID-19 widens the equality gap
for people with disability





Key findings

This first of its kind research lays bare the impact of COVID-19 on people with disability (PwD), providing a unique view of how the pandemic has shifted the dial on workplace diversity and inclusion in Australia.

The powerful survey of more than 1,600 Australians living with disability, illness or injury conducted in May 2020 signals the extent to which PwD want to have their voice heard, as they navigate challenges such as job loss, job insecurity, reduced hours and mental health issues.

The research has uncovered some powerful insights:

- More than half of PwD in the workforce are in fragile employment, far higher than the general population
- The vast majority of casual or seasonal PwD employees were not eligible for Jobkeeper, leaving them more exposed to reduced hours or job loss
- COVID-19 related reduction in hours has been a common experience among PwD
- Jobseeking activity doubled among casually employed PwD and was 1.6 times higher among part-time PwD employees during COVID-19
- Desire for improved mental health and wellbeing is prompting jobseeking (35.5 per cent) among PwD, but employment is now less likely to provide this benefit (49.0 per cent)
- Employers have done a good job supporting PwD during COVID-19, but overall, fewer report that their place of work is equitable and inclusive



COVID-19 has amplified barriers to job seeking

With the country's headline unemployment rate forecast to top 10 per cent, many Australians have suffered reduced income or become unemployed as a result of the crisis.¹

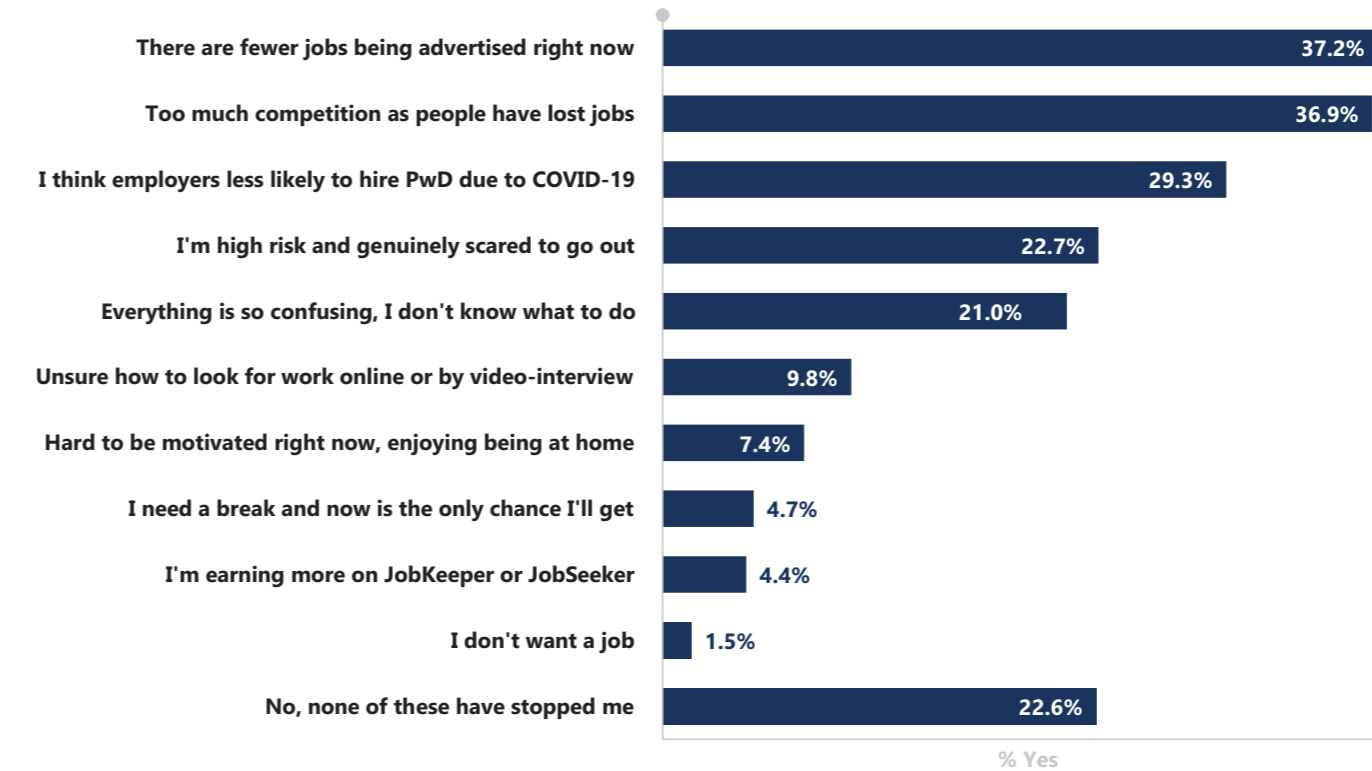
- More than two in five (42.8 per cent) employed PwD experienced a reduction in hours
- One in 12 (8.8 per cent) unemployed PwD lost their job as a direct result of COVID-19

COVID-19 related employment barriers have dwarfed traditional employment barriers, such as their disability, illness or injury. PwD seeking employment in the current environment report fewer job openings, and far greater competition for the roles on offer, while the number reporting more traditional disability related challenges has dropped sharply.

- Almost a third think employers are less likely to employ PwD due to COVID-19, and say this is stopping them securing their desired job
- Almost a quarter are high risk and therefore afraid to go out
- Almost one in 10 lack confidence jobseeking and interviewing online
- The number reporting more traditional disability related challenges has dropped sharply from nearly all jobseekers to just eight in 10

BARRIERS TO JOB-SEEKING DURING COVID-19

Have any of the following stopped you from getting the job you want during the COVID-19 crisis?



¹ www.treasury.gov.au
 *Multiple responses allowed
 *Top 10 responses only excluding "I don't want a job" and "None"
 n = 1,470, employed who are jobseekers or unemployed (PwD2020)

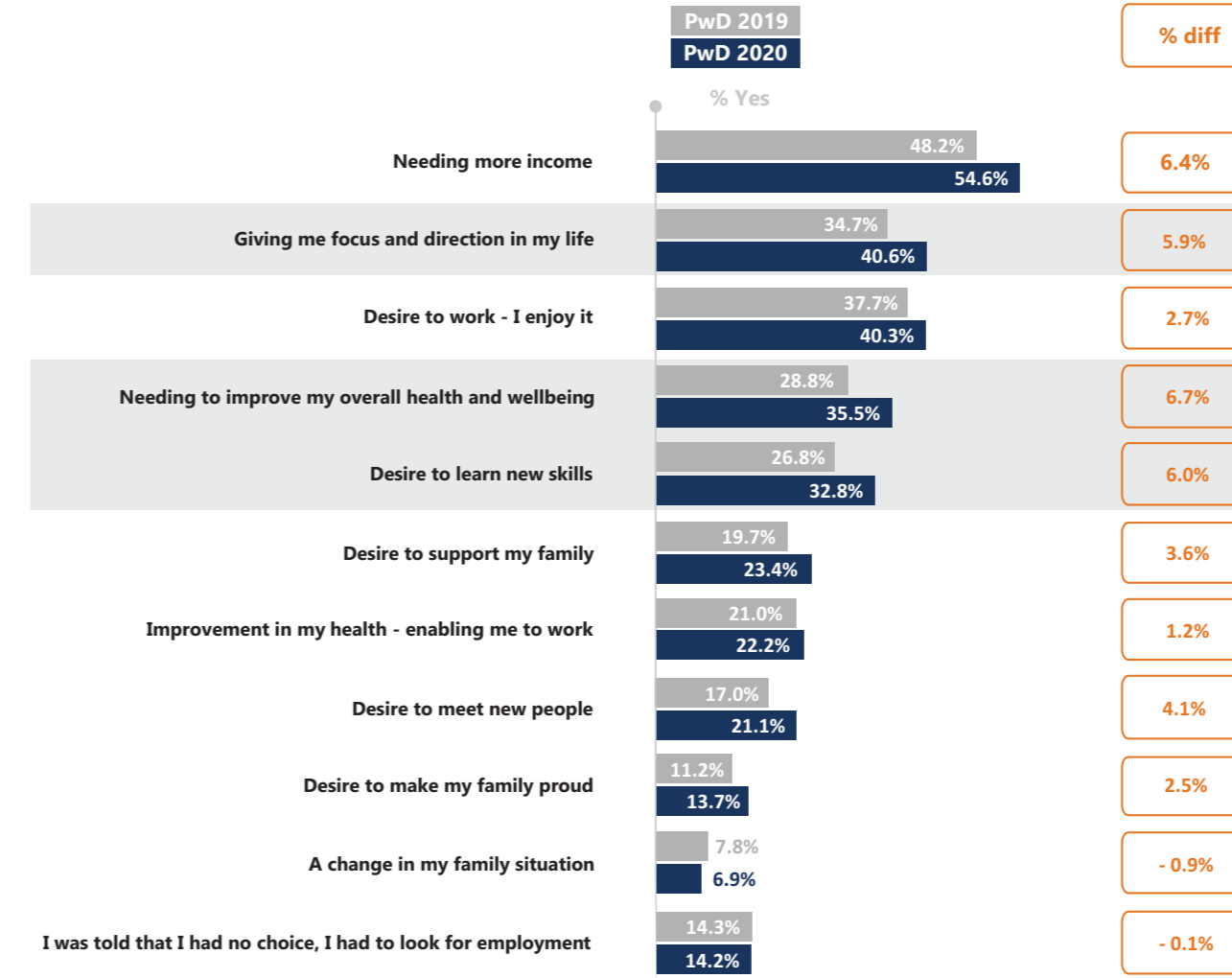


More people with disability now seeking work to benefit mental health

For PwD, the need to improve mental health and wellbeing is one of the leading motivations to secure employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen this jump to 35.5 per cent of jobseekers (up from 28.8 per cent in 2019). However, the number of employed PwD telling us employment has created this positive change in their lives has fallen, from 58.3 per cent last year to just under half this year (49.0 per cent). Given there's been no shift in employment type, occupation or industries among PwD, this suggests the pandemic has taken a toll on their mental health and wellbeing.

EMPLOYMENT MOTIVATORS

What is currently prompting you to look for work?



* Multiple responses allowed
 *Top 10 responses only excluding "no choice"
 n = 1,162, jobseekers (PwD 2020); 1,248 (PwD 2019)



Fragile employment leaves people with disability vulnerable

Permanent and secure employment provides protection from the financial and social strains of an economic crisis and domestic recession. However, only one in 10 (9.6 per cent) employed PwD are in full-time work compared to 68.7 per cent of the employed general population, and nearly a third (32.6 per cent) are working part-time, up from one in four (25.6 per cent) the same time last year.

With the majority of employed PwD in casual or seasonal employment, COVID-19 has had a significant negative impact.

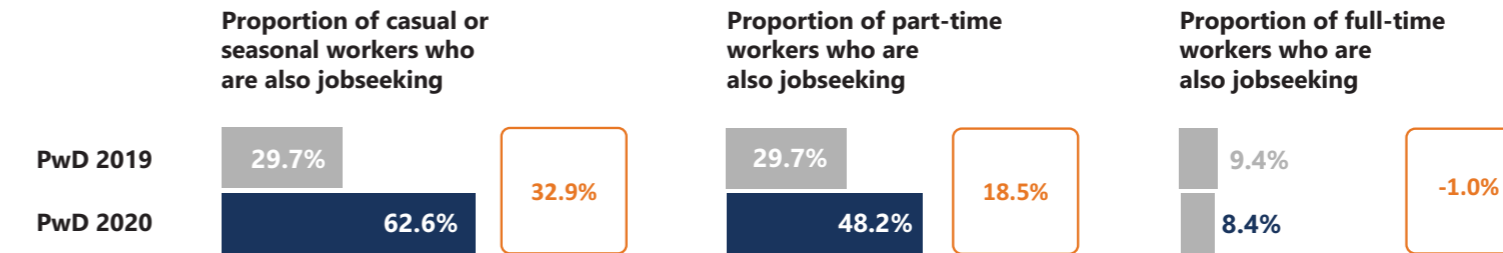
- Nearly three quarters (72.9 per cent) have been with their employer less than 12 months, making them ineligible for JobKeeper payments

This may have left them more at risk of reduced hours or termination, as Australian businesses battled to weather the social distancing and trading restrictions imposed to flatten the curve.

PwD in less secure employment are disproportionately exposed to the adverse impacts of an economic downturn. Casual PwD employees are more likely to have had their hours reduced (49.5 per cent) than part-time (37.9 per cent) or full-time (20.1 per cent) employees, and APM has seen a huge jump in job seeking among those in casual employment, possibly as a result of needing more hours.

EMPLOYED PwD WHO ARE ALSO JOB SEEKING

Which of the following best describes your situation right now?



n = 216, casual/seasonal, 132, part-time, 43, full time (PwD 2020); 239, casual/seasonal, 118, part-time, 64, full time (PwD 2019)



Employers have supported people with disability well, but there is more work to do

COVID-19 has increased the support needs of many Australians, and employers of PwD have responded well.

- **More than two thirds** (70.1 per cent) of employed PwD say their employer has made an effort to understand their personal needs and concerns, and helped them feel safe and valued
- **More than two thirds** (68.4 per cent) of employed PwD say their employer has offered them some form of COVID-19-related support
- **Overall, less than one in ten** (9.1 per cent) of PwD said they had been supported with the option to work from home during COVID-19. While this increased to 26.0 per cent among PwD in full-time employment, it is still well short of the 53.2 per cent of the general population who report working from home during the pandemic.

However, despite employer support, the research highlights a decline in equity and inclusion within workplaces, with perceptions of parity in career progression, education and training, fair and equitable treatment, accessibility and inclusivity all falling since 2019.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY

	Accessible workplace	Inclusive workplace	Fair and equitable treatment	Same opportunities for education and training	Same promotion and career progression opportunities
2019 (pre-COVID)	82.7%	82.1%	80.8%	79.5%	71.3%
2020 (COVID-19)	80.6%	74.0%	72.8%	70.3%	56.3%
% difference	-2.1% ▼	-8.2% ▼	-8.0% ▼	-9.2% ▼	-15.0% ▼

At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of PwD citing personal development as a driver of job seeking. Specifically, more are looking for direction and focus in their lives (40.6 per cent, compared to 34.7 per cent last year), and seeking to learn new skills (32.8 per cent, up from 26.8 per cent). Much like mental health and wellbeing, however, fewer employed PwD say they are experiencing these benefits.

COVID-19 IMPACT PROMPTING EMPLOYED PWD TO JOBSEEK

	Prompted to job seek by:		Securing employment has meant:		
	More focus and direction in life	Desire to learn new skills	Improvement in how I feel about myself	Less reliance on others	Increased skills and knowledge
2019 (pre-COVID)	34.7%	26.8%	61.2%	37.0%	51.1%
2020 (COVID-19)	40.6%	32.8%	48.9%	30.2%	45.5%
% difference	5.9% ▲	6.0% ▲	-9.5% ▼	-6.8% ▼	-5.6% ▼

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or visit apm.net.au

