

# Our workplaces

The behaviours we experience in our workplaces.

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Our people should thrive in our workplaces. The public sector will continue to evolve our workplaces to exemplify our values and create safe, healthy and flexible environments in which all employees can bring their best selves to work and serve the people of NSW. Bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment and racism will not be tolerated. The harmful consequences of negative workplace behaviours at the individual and organisational levels are well known and undermine efforts to create positive and productive workplaces.

## Wellbeing

‘Wellbeing’ means feeling good, functioning well and experiencing satisfaction and fulfilment in work and life. There is a strong connection between wellbeing and employee engagement, such that wellbeing influences how employees perceive their work and their level of commitment. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on wellbeing across the sector to increase employee engagement.

For the first time in the People Matter survey, we asked public sector employees if they were satisfied with current workplace practices to help them manage their wellbeing. This question ranked as the third highest driver of employee engagement, demonstrating the importance of effective workplace wellbeing programs

and initiatives in sustaining higher engagement levels. The most effective workplace wellbeing strategies are multi-dimensional and tailored to the workforce.

The wellbeing score is an aggregate of responses to 5 People Matter survey questions in 2023, which included, 'I feel burned out by my work'.



## Employee perceptions of wellbeing, 2023

53.5% favourable overall

### 54.5% favourable

The amount of stress in my job is manageable

### 57.8% favourable

In general my sense of wellbeing is...\*

-0.6pp from 2022

### 58.7% favourable

I am satisfied with current workplace practices to help me manage my wellbeing

### 63.8% favourable

There are effective resources in my organisation to support employee wellbeing

-0.4pp from 2022

### 39.2% unfavourable<sup>^</sup>

I feel burned out by my work<sup>^</sup>

1.4pp from 2022

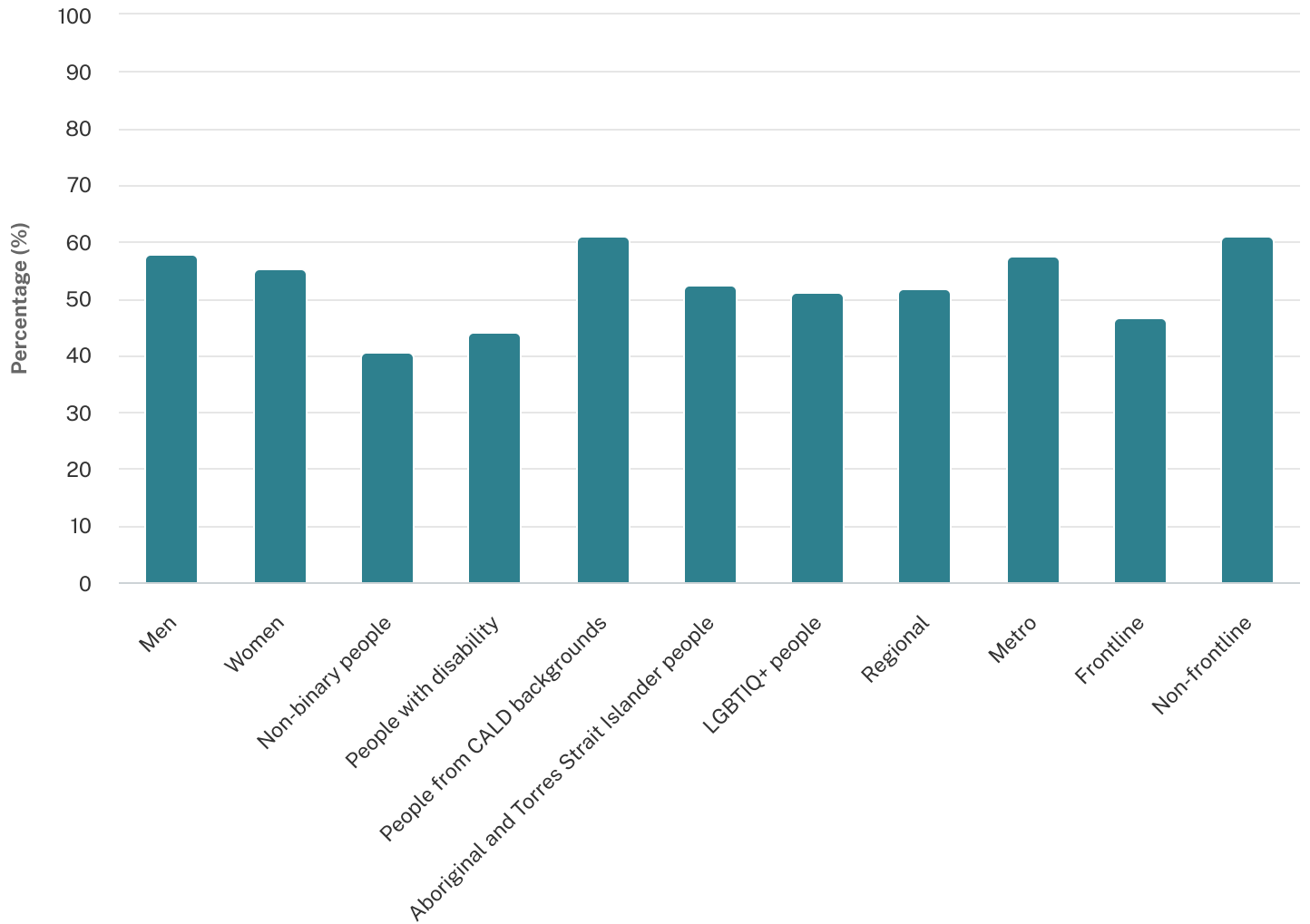
Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

\* Respondents were asked to rate the statement, 'In general, my sense of wellbeing is ...', on a scale of 0 to 10. The results were grouped into % favourable (7-10), % neutral (4-6) and % unfavourable (0-3).

<sup>^</sup> The unfavourable score for burnout represents respondents that felt burnt out by their work.

Note: A comparison to the 2022 overall score was not possible because some of the questions that contributed to the 2023 overall score changed.

## Employee wellbeing by employee group 2023



Group	2023
Men	57.7
Women	55.3
Non-binary people	40.5
People with disability	44
People from CALD backgrounds	61

Group	2023
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	52.5
LGBTIQ+ people	51.1
Regional	51.7
Metro	57.4
Frontline	46.6
Non-frontline	61

Employee wellbeing by employee group 2023

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2023)

## Distribution of employees' general sense of wellbeing, 2023 vs 2022



Wellbeing score	2022	2023
0	2.3	2.3
1	1.4	1.5
2	2.7	2.7
3	4.8	5
4	5.6	5.5
5	11	11.1
6	13.9	14
7	23.1	23.3
8	20	19.6
9	8.1	8
10	7.2	6.9

*Distribution of employees' general sense of wellbeing, 2023 vs 2022*

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate the statement, 'In general, my sense of wellbeing is ...,' on a scale of 0 to 10.



### Employees who felt burnt out, 2023 vs 2022

**39.2% in 2023**

37.8% in 2022

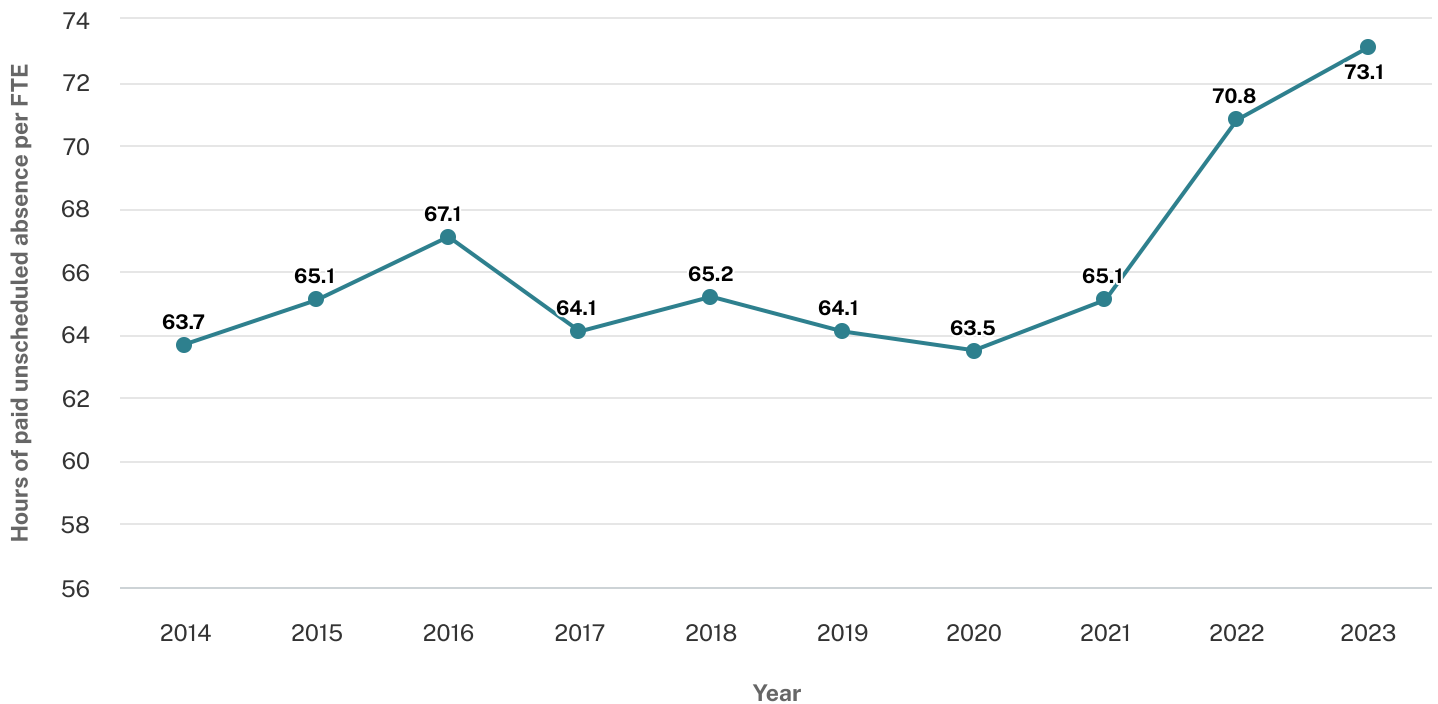
Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

Burnout is a specific type of work-related stress that results from chronic exposure to stressful work conditions. It is characterised by feelings of exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy.

Taking a proactive approach to preventing and responding to burnout benefits both employees and agencies and is crucial to cultivating healthier and more sustainable workplaces. In this year’s People Matter survey, 39.2% of respondents reported feeling burnt out by their work, an increase of 1.4pp from 2022. The rate of burnout in the NSW public sector is comparable to those in other jurisdictions. The Australian Public Service Commission reported a burnout rate of 33% in 2023, noting it has a significantly lower percentage of frontline workers than NSW.<sup>1</sup>

The PSC has designed a program to understand the key drivers of workplace burnout in the NSW public sector, and how to respond and prevent or reduce the likelihood of burnout. By analysing the 2022 People Matter survey results, the research found three universal key drivers of burnout: time to do my job well, support to do my job well, and access to effective wellbeing resources. The PSC has developed resources to support agencies in addressing burnout, including the [Understanding burnout in the NSW public sector report](#) and an [Organisational risk factors for burnout guide](#).

## Hours of paid unscheduled absence per full-time equivalent employee, 2014–23



Year	Hours per FTE (non casual)
2014	63.7
2015	65.1
2016	67.1
2017	64.1
2018	65.2
2019	64.1
2020	63.5
2021	65.1
2022	70.8
2023	73.1

*Hours of paid unscheduled absence per full-time equivalent employee, 2014–23*

Source: *Workforce Profile (2014–23)*

Hours of paid unscheduled absences have increased over time, which may be linked to burnout. Research has consistently shown that burnout is associated with higher rates of absenteeism, with one study revealing that 60% of work absenteeism can be attributed to psychological stress and burnout.<sup>2</sup> This presents a significant risk to the sector’s workforce, particularly in the context of projected workforce shortages. It highlights the need to implement effective strategies to mitigate burnout and enhance employee wellbeing.

In 2023, 23.3% of employees had recreation leave balances of 30 days or more, a decrease of 2.4pp from 2022 (25.7%). Encouraging the use of excess leave can improve work–life balance and help reduce the risk of burnout.

## Workplace health and safety

Managing work health and safety (WHS) involves mitigating risks to the health and safety of everyone in a workplace. ‘Health’ refers to physical and psychological health. The NSW public sector is committed to providing a physically and mentally healthy workplace for all employees.

It is important for employers to address psychosocial hazards by promoting a healthy work environment and implementing strategies to manage and reduce workplace stress. Several recent amendments to the Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation (2022) give effect to the national model WHS Regulations. Employers now have a more explicit duty to manage psychosocial hazards at work.

SafeWork NSW has developed a Code of Practice for managing psychosocial hazards at work. It is an approved Code of Practice under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth). The code provides the sector with practical guidance on how to comply with the new standards.

## Employee perceptions of health and safety, 2023 vs 2022



### Employees with favourable perceptions of workplace health and safety

**66.3% in 2023**

69.3% in 2022

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
I am confident WHS issues will be addressed promptly	74.4	68.8
There are effective resources in my organisation to support employee wellbeing	64.2	63.8

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

There has been a 3pp decrease in employees’ favourable perceptions of WHS compared to last year. This may reflect an increased awareness of WHS, as agencies are implementing strategies to improve WHS. Confidence that WHS issues raised will be addressed promptly decreased by 6pp from 2022 to 2023. This result presents an opportunity for agencies to understand why and find ways to improve employee confidence during People Matter survey results action planning.



# Flexible working arrangements

The NSW public sector aims to be a world class employer that offers employees flexible working opportunities. Since 2016, the sector has had a policy of providing flexible working arrangements on an ‘if not, why not?’ basis, implemented in a way that maintains or improves service delivery.

The top 3 flexible working arrangements in 2023 are:

- flexible start and finish times
- working from home
- working from different locations.

Employees’ use of flexible working arrangements decreased by 2pp from 2022 to 2023. This reflected a 6% decrease in working from home as employees continued to return to the office.

Satisfaction with flexible working arrangements remained steady this year. Offering flexible working arrangements can boost the productivity and retention of key staff. There is a strong link between satisfaction with flexible working arrangements and engagement. Employees using flexible working arrangements reported an overall engagement score of 67.3, while those not offered such arrangements scored only 57.5.

It is important for agencies to consider flexibility broadly and recognise that a flexible working arrangement may go beyond where work is done, as demonstrated by the examples in the following table.

Being flexible about ...	Consideration
When work is done	How work is spread over days, weeks or even years
Continuity of work	Providing opportunities for career breaks, carer’s leave and other types of leave
Work location	Enabling working from home, in the office, or a hybrid arrangement
Job types	The mix of job types, including full time, part time and casual
Balancing interests and benefits	Offering flexible working arrangements that are mutually beneficial to employer and employee

Frontline employees were less able to access flexible work. Only 45% of frontline employees who responded to the survey were satisfied with their ability to access and use flexible working arrangements, compared to 75% of non-frontline employees. A concerted focus on uplifting frontline satisfaction with

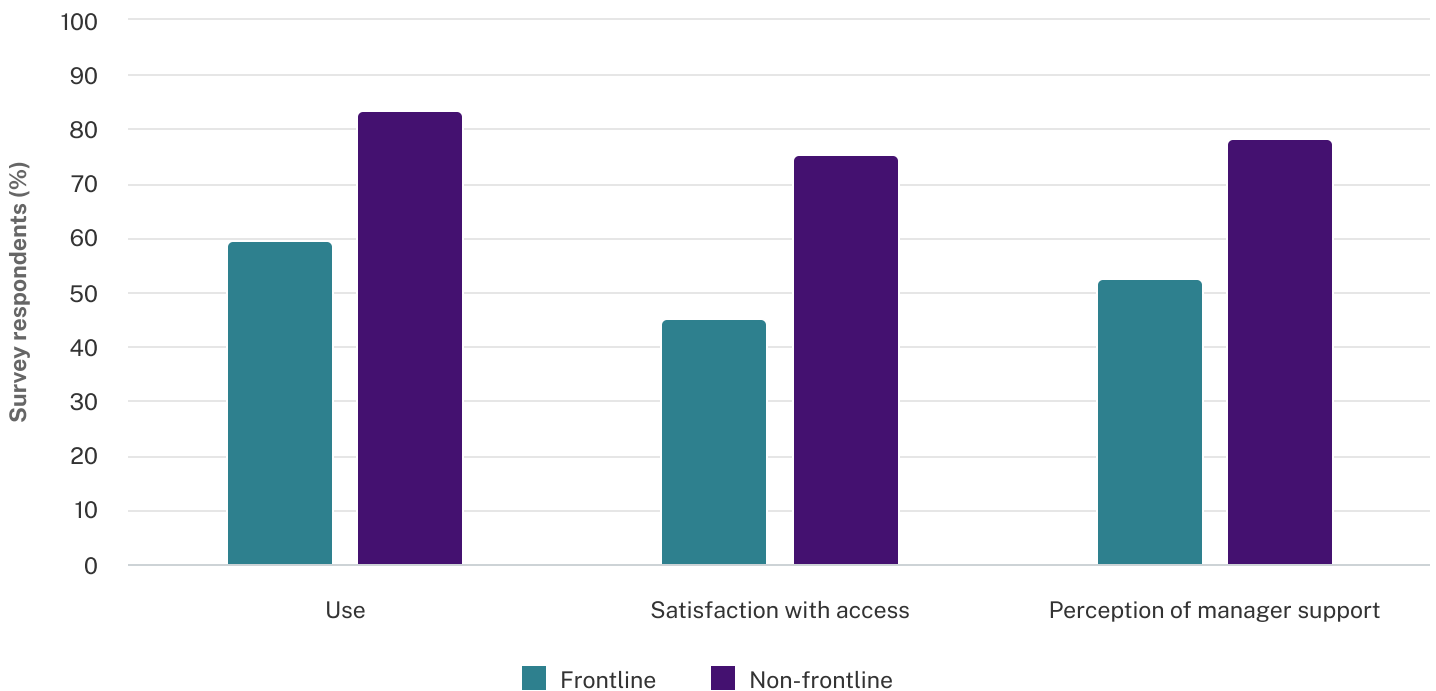
flexible working arrangements may contribute to gender equality, particularly for employees with caring responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

## Employees' use and perceptions of flexible working arrangements, 2023 vs 2022

	2022 %	2023 %
Use	73.5	71.4
Satisfaction with access	60.4	60.4
Perception of manager support	65.2	65.4

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

## Employees' use and perceptions of flexible working arrangements, frontline vs non-frontline, 2023



	Frontline	Non-frontline
Use	59.4	83.4
Satisfaction with access	45.4	75.4
Perception of manager support	52.5	78.4

Employees' use and perceptions of flexible working arrangements, frontline vs non-frontline, 2023

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2023)

### Case study: Transport for NSW leads the way in hybrid working

Transport for NSW (Transport) is giving employees more flexibility and choice in where and when they work. Transport’s hybrid working campaign, *The way we work at Transport*, empowers employees to work in a way that supports them personally and professionally – whether that’s in the office, onsite, at home or on the go – while continuing to deliver for NSW.

[Read more](#) →

## Misconduct

Misconduct refers to behaviour that is unethical or illegal, or that constitutes a serious offence or a breach of an agency’s code of conduct. The government sector core values provide a clear framework to help employees understand what ‘misconduct’ is and what it means in practice in their day-to-day work.

The People Matter survey asks employees about their experience of misconduct at work. While the overall level of misconduct encountered in 2023 was low and the reporting robust, there were several reasons why people did not report misconduct. The top three reasons were:

- I thought there would be negative consequences for me (48.7%)
- I didn’t think it would make a difference (44.9%)
- I didn’t think it would be confidential (40.0%).



### Employees who experienced pressure to engage in misconduct

**2.7% in 2023**

2.8% in 2022

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

## Proportion of employees who were aware of misconduct, who reported it and who had their report satisfactorily resolved, 2023 vs 2022



**Aware of misconduct: 14.3%**

15.2% in 2022



**Misconduct reported: 53.6%**

57.7% in 2022



**Complaint resolved to satisfaction: 39.2%**

34.7% in 2022

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

## Bullying

Reducing negative behaviours such as bullying will help build positive workplace environments and boost inclusion. Bullying in the sector has reduced over time; however, it remains a problem that requires continued attention.

In the People Matter survey, bullying is defined as ‘repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers’. Examples of bullying include shouting, spreading rumours and deliberately excluding someone from work activities. Reasonable feedback on work performance, delivered in an appropriate manner, is not bullying.

People Matter survey results remained stable in 2023, with 21% of respondents witnessing bullying and 13% experiencing bullying –down 1pp from 2022. Almost one in 2 respondents reported their experience of bullying, of which 25% indicated their complaint was resolved to their satisfaction.

## Employees who witnessed or experienced bullying, who reported it and who had their report satisfactorily resolved, 2023 vs 2022



**Bullying witnessed: 20.6%**

20.9% in 2022



**Bullying experienced: 13.2%**

13.6% in 2022



**Bullying reported: 49.2%**

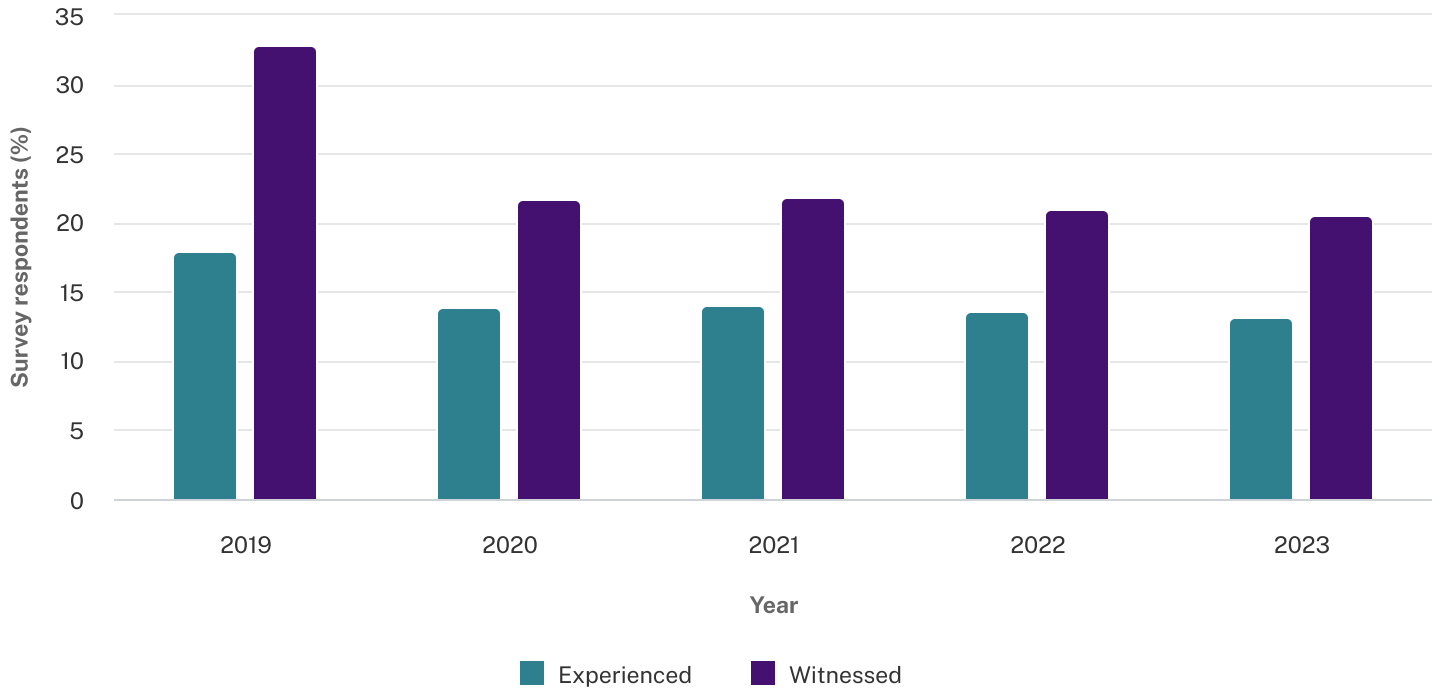


**Complaint resolved to satisfaction:  
25.5%**

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

Note: Employees who experienced bullying were subsequently asked to say whether they reported any bullying they had experienced.

## Rates of self-reported experienced and witnessed bullying, 2019–23



Year	Experienced	Witnessed
2019	17.9	32.9
2020	13.9	21.7
2021	14.1	21.8
2022	13.6	20.9
2023	13.2	20.6

Rates of self-reported experienced and witnessed bullying, 2019–23

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019–23)

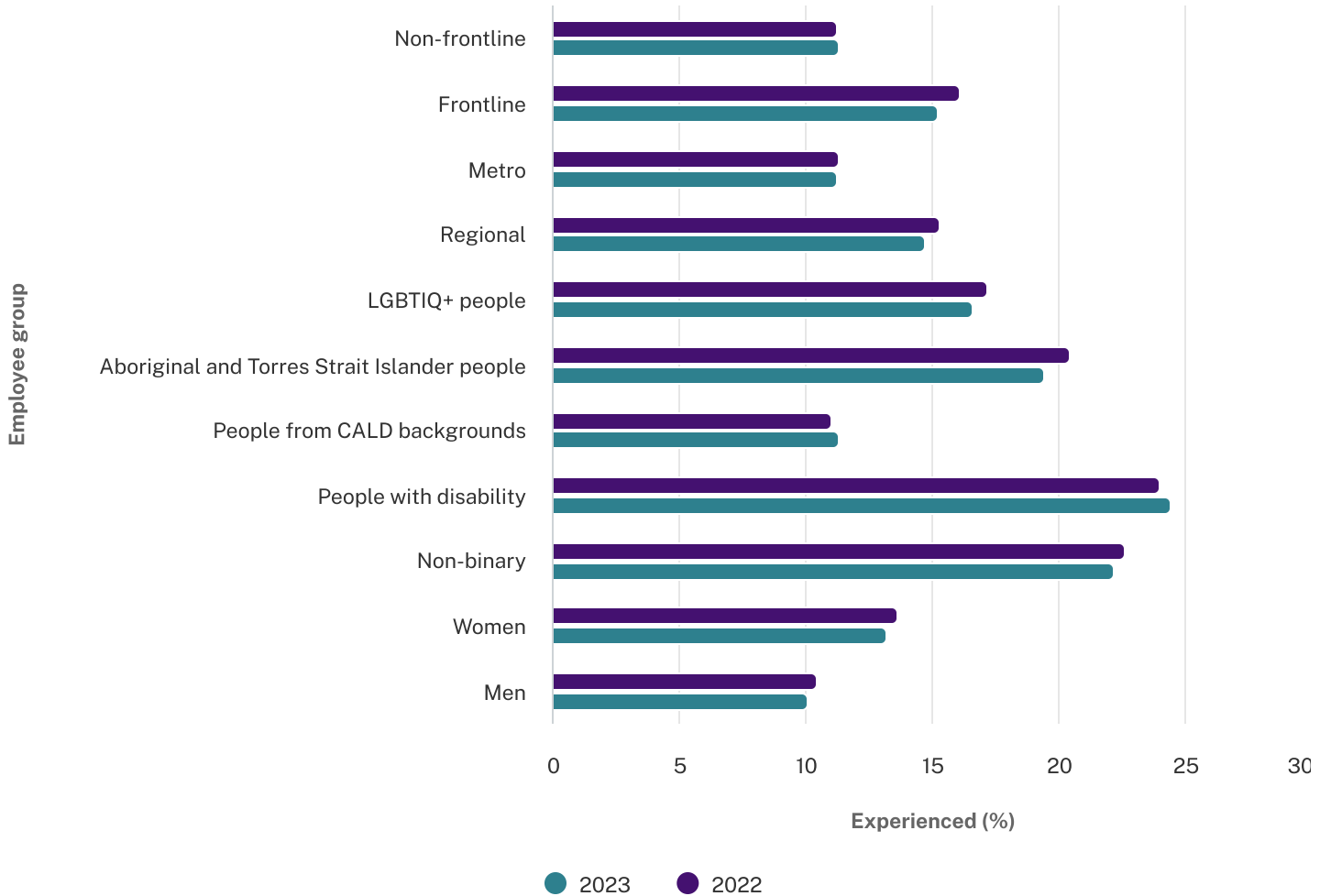
## Sources of self-reported bullying incidents, 2023

Group	Incidents (%)
A fellow worker at your level	38.6
Your immediate manager or supervisor	29.1
A senior manager	25.5
Another manager	13.8
A subordinate	10.7
A customer	9.1
A member of the public other than a customer	4.4
Other	5.0
Prefer not to say	10.9

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2023)

Note: Respondents were able to select multiple responses, so the sum of percentages in this table may be greater than 100%.

## Rates of self-reported experienced bullying, by different employee groups, 2023 vs 2022



Employee group	2023	2022
Men	10.1	10.4
Women	13.2	13.6
Non-binary	22.2	22.6
People with disability	24.4	24
People from CALD backgrounds	11.3	11
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	19.4	20.4



Employee group	2023	2022
LGBTIQ+ people	16.6	17.2
Regional	14.7	15.3
Metro	11.2	11.3
Frontline	15.2	16.1
Non-frontline	11.3	11.2

*Rates of self-reported experienced bullying, by different employee groups, 2023 vs 2022*

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

Frontline employees generally experience higher rates of bullying than non-frontline employees, though the gap between their results narrowed this year. In this year’s People Matter survey, 15.2% of frontline employees reported that they experienced bullying, a decrease of 0.9pp from last year. Non-frontline employees’ experiences of bullying remained stable.

As shown in the graph above, bullying disproportionately affects individuals with certain demographic characteristics. People with disability report a high rate of bullying, with 24.4% of respondents reporting they experienced bullying in 2023. The rates of bullying reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees decreased by 1pp in 2023, though it is still too high at 19.4%.

Zero tolerance of bullying is more likely to be achieved where a proactive, systemic approach is taken to a range of workforce management and workplace culture factors. Bullying can cause both psychological and physical harm, making it a risk to employee health and safety.<sup>4</sup> The recent changes to the Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation (2022) means employers now have a more explicit duty to manage psychosocial hazards, including bullying and other harmful behaviours, at work.

The PSC’s Respectful Workplace Foundations pilot project in 2022 provided a structured opportunity for employees in 4 public sector agencies to plan and implement changes to work design and practices. The pilot evaluation identified key features for building a more supportive workplace to reduce bullying and promote positive workplace behaviours. The PSC published a case study in its Belonging and Inclusion Library outlining the key features that are associated with positive outcomes, to enable other NSW public sector agencies to minimise psychosocial risks.

## Discrimination and racism

The People Matter survey asked employees about their experiences of discrimination and racism.

Discrimination is when a person or group of people is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics. Racism is prejudice, discrimination or hatred directed at someone because of their colour, ethnicity or national origin.

Racism and unlawful discrimination are never acceptable. It is important to understand employee experiences in this area to reduce the incidence of these harmful workplace behaviours.

In this year's People Matter survey, 10.1% of employees reported experiencing discrimination, of which race-based discrimination is the most common type, at 27.8%. Discrimination disproportionately affects individuals based on employee attributes, with 19.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees reporting that they experienced discrimination based on one or more attributes, compared to 10.1% of the overall public sector.

Experiences of racism were also disproportionately high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, at 17.0%, compared to 5.0% for the sector.

Achieving zero tolerance towards racism is a high priority in the sector and is linked to Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3 (PR3): *Transforming government organisations* and the Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019–2025. The PSC is developing anti-racism guidelines and resources for the sector in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD employees.

## Employees who experienced discrimination, who reported it and who had their report satisfactorily resolved, 2023 vs 2022



**Discrimination experienced: 10.1%**

10.1% in 2022



**Discrimination reported: 25.4%**

25.8% in 2022



**Complaint resolved to satisfaction: 20.5%**

18.4% in 2022

Source: *People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)*

## Employees who experienced racism, who reported it and who had their report satisfactorily resolved, 2023 vs 2022



**Racism experienced: 5.0%**

4.7% in 2022



**Racism reported: 27.2%**

26.9% in 2022



**Resolved to satisfaction: 38.0%**

34.7% in 2022

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

### Employee attributes on which discrimination was based, 2023 vs 2022

Attribute	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Race	27.1	27.8
Age	22.8	23.5
Employment activity*	18.8	18.6
Gender identity	n/a	17.0
Parent or carer status	8.9	9.1
Religious belief or activity	7.2	7.7
Physical features	7.3	7.6
Disability	6.7	7.1
Industrial and/or political activity	6.9	6.3
Gender expression	n/a	6.0

Attribute	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Personal association with someone who has any of the above attributes	7.4	5.8
Sexual orientation	n/a	5.2
Marital status	4.4	4.0
Transgender status	n/a	0.8
Intersex status	n/a	0.4
Other	26.1	24.9

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2023)

\* Such as making a reasonable request for information about employment entitlements or communicating concerns about the provision of these entitlements.

Note: Respondents were able to select multiple responses, so the sum of percentages in this table may be greater than 100%.

## Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature that makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. This kind of behaviour is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated in any form. Examples of sexual harassment include unwelcome touching, sexually suggestive comments and inappropriate staring that may make someone feel intimidated. Unfortunately, this year the number of employees experiencing sexual harassment increased slightly.

The PSC developed an Equity and Respect Framework that supports the sector to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. A key element of the framework is the implementation of a sexual harassment prevention policy that meets minimum standards by 1 March 2024. The PSC is developing sexual harassment prevention training, and launched a digital information assistant that provides individuals with support and education on sexual harassment in the workplace. To facilitate ongoing consultation and engagement to assist agencies in meeting these requirements, the PSC established a sector-wide Equity and Respect Working Group, with representatives from Women NSW, Anti-Discrimination NSW, SafeWork NSW and selected portfolios.

## Employees who experienced sexual harassment, who reported it and who had their report satisfactorily resolved, 2023 vs 2022



**Sexual harassment experienced: 5.1%**

4.8% in 2022



**Sexual harassment reported: 22.8%**

22.7% in 2022



**Complaint resolved to satisfaction: 45.9%**

43.1% in 2022

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

## Employees who experienced sexual harassment, by gender, 2023 vs 2022



**Women: 5.6%**

5.5% in 2022



**Men: 3.3%**

3.0% in 2022



**Non-binary people: 12.2%**

13.7% in 2022

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2022, 2023)

### **Case study: App transforms interactions with people experiencing homelessness**

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) runs the Assertive Outreach (AO) program, through which its employees actively look for and engage with people who are experiencing street homelessness.

[Read more](#) →

### **Case study: Rebuilding relationships and deepening understanding between central office and schools**

The Department of Education launched the School Experience Program in Term 3, 2023. As part of the program, all new central office employees are required to spend a week in a local primary or high school at the start of their employment. The department's senior executives also spend a week in schools during Education Week.

[Read more](#) →

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Australian Public Service Commission, 2023

<sup>2</sup> LaMontagne, Shaw and Louie (2006)

<sup>3</sup> Cooper and Hill (2021)

<sup>4</sup> [Bullying | Safe Work Australia](#)

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### **Next section: Our leaders**

Who they are and how we view them.

