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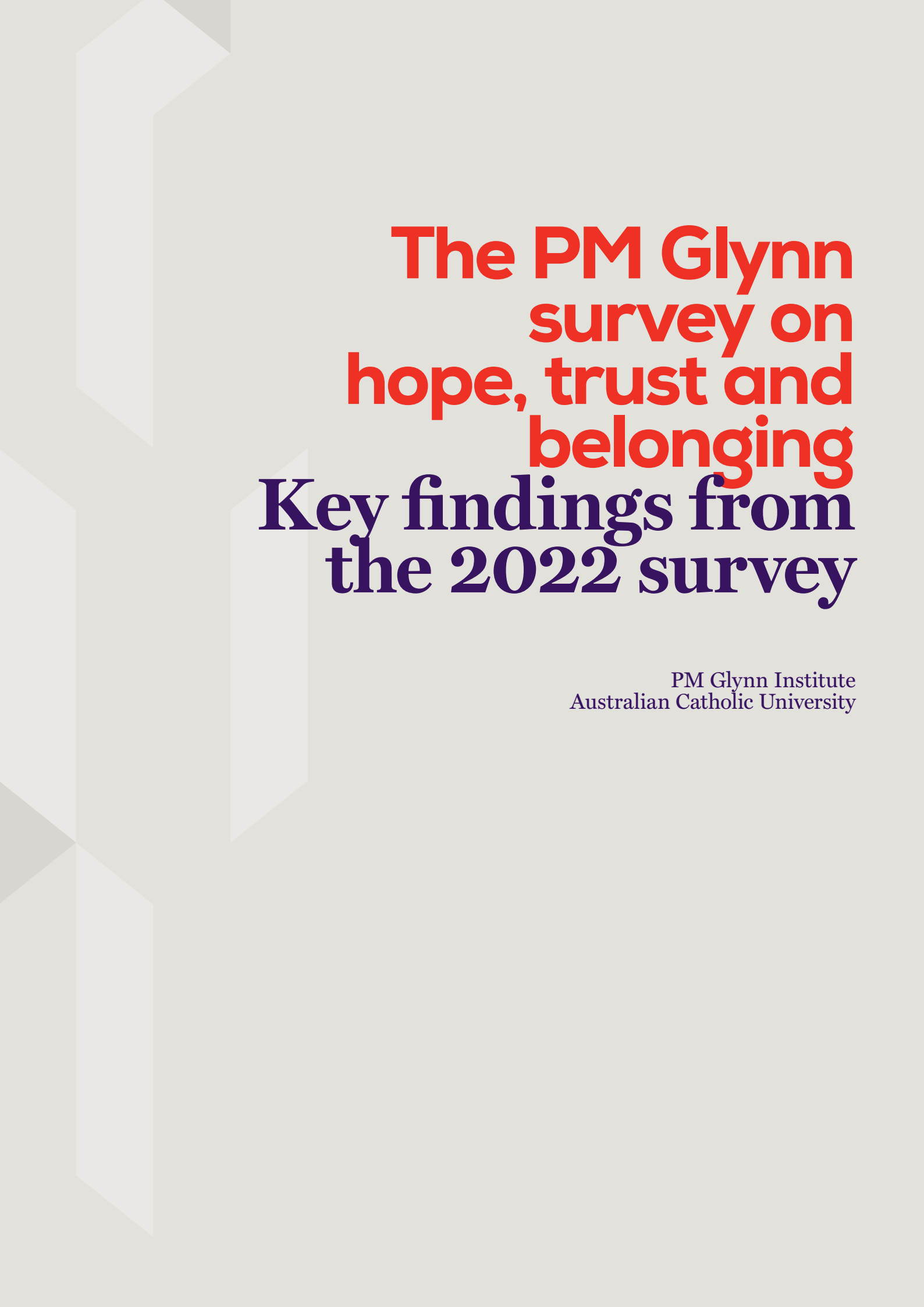
**Survey
on hope,
trust and
belonging**

**Key findings
from the
2022 survey**



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**The PM Glynn
survey on
hope, trust and
belonging**
**Key findings from
the 2022 survey**

PM Glynn Institute
Australian Catholic University

Preface

This paper provides a summary of some selected key findings from the 2022 PM Glynn Survey on Hope, Trust and Belonging.

The first PM Glynn Survey was conducted at the end of 2018. While it was not planned this way, the data set from the 2018 survey now serves as a baseline from the world before the COVID-19 pandemic, against which the results of the 2022 survey can be compared. The comparison of the 2018 and 2022 surveys provides an interesting and sometimes surprising picture of what has changed, and what has stayed the same, in Australians' attitudes about a number of important topics.

Some questions in the 2022 survey were new, but many were the same as those asked in 2018. Additions to the 2022 survey included questions about the impact of COVID-19, which was obviously not an issue in 2018, as well as questions drawn from Harvard University's Human Flourishing Measure.

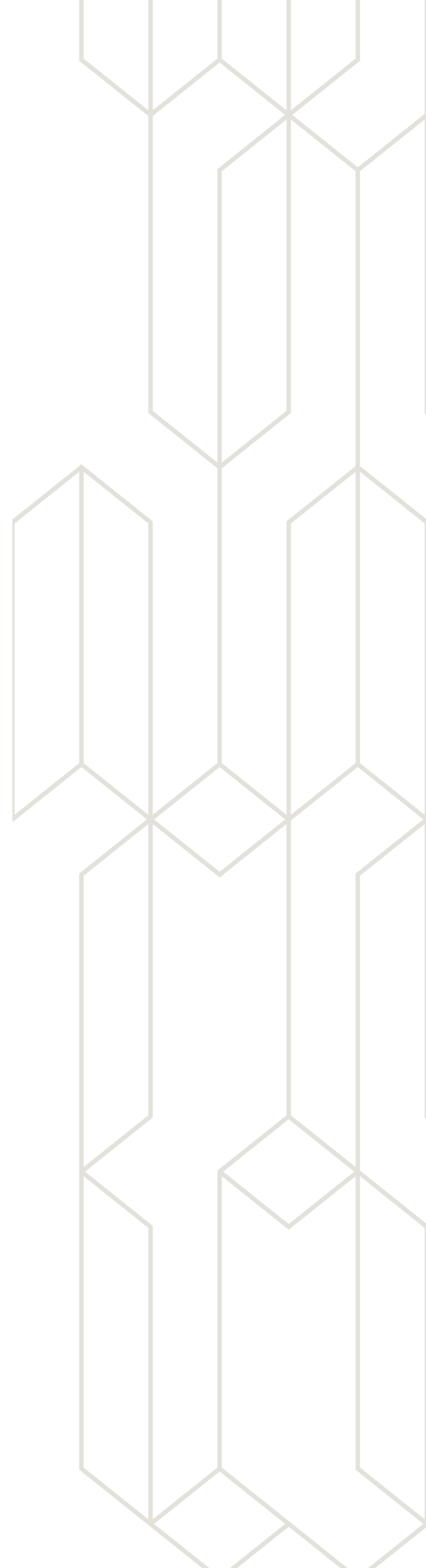
Apart from these two new topics, the 2022 survey explored the same terrain covered by the 2018 survey: attitudes towards religion; attitudes towards human rights; how Australians feel about democracy, our institutions, societal trends and the future; their current circumstances, their outlook on life, and their aspirations; and the values that are important to Australians.

This paper provides a summary of findings and comparisons for each of these areas of focus, often at a high level. More detailed papers on the findings for most of the major themes of the survey will be published over the course of 2023.

The purpose of the PM Glynn Survey on Hope, Trust and Belonging is to look below the tumult and the shouting that fills up so much of the public space at the moment, to try and glimpse something of the thoughts and concerns that shape Australians' attitudes to society and the future.

It is usually the noise that commands our attention, but it is not only the noise that shapes politics, society, culture and religion. We need also to look to what unfolds in the quiet, in the shifts and stability of feeling and thinking under the surface. The PM Glynn Survey is a contribution to understanding these quieter realms of our life in common, and what is required to sustain it.

Michael Casey | Director



About the survey

In 2018, the PM Glynn Institute conducted a nationally representative survey of 3,000 Australians, aged 18 years and older, to obtain a profile of Australians' attitudes, values, lifestyles and aspirations. A similar study, with a different sample but with substantially overlapping survey questions, was undertaken by the Institute in June 2022 to provide an updated profile.

The 2022 survey involved 3,000 Australians aged 18 years and above, also selected at random to be representative of the national Australian adult population in terms of age, gender, state and territory populations, and capital city versus regional populations. Statistical weighting was applied to ensure that the sample matched as closely as possible to the known population parameters of age, gender and geographic distribution, based on the recently released 2021 Australian Census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

For both the 2018 and 2022 surveys, the sample was recruited from Australia's largest and most respected survey panels, which include a large pool of survey panel registrants. Participation in the surveys was voluntary and anonymous using a self-completion questionnaire. The surveys were conducted in accordance with established public opinion survey standards. The 2022 survey questionnaire and methodology was approved by ACU's Research Ethics Committee.

Comparisons reported in this document are derived from a sample of participants aged 18 years and older in both 2018 and 2022. Where possible, comparisons were made on the results in the two surveys to determine changes (if any) in these measures over the intervening three-and-a-half year period.

The data was analysed using SPSS, Excel and Office Reports software. All results were recorded as whole number percentages. Hence, in this paper some of the percentages may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

The 2018 and 2022 surveys were commissioned by the PM Glynn Institute to an independent research company, SMR Global Pty Ltd led by Dr Mike Sexton, and its affiliate, Action Market Research Pty Ltd led by Luke Sexton MBA.

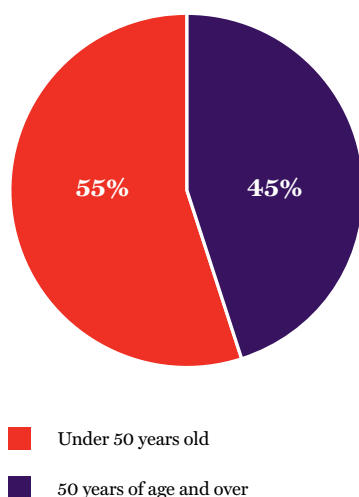
PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The samples for both surveys were statistically weighted to the latest ABS data available at the time of the survey. On many variables, the samples of the 2018 and 2022 surveys are closely matched. Overall, the statistical profile of the 2022 sample is a close match to the 2021 ABS Census population profile, and reflects an Australian population with the following characteristics:

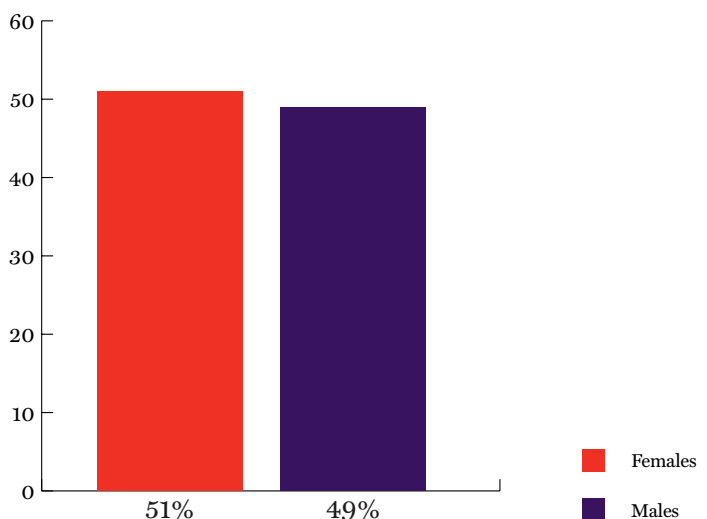
Age and gender

More than half (55%) of the respondents were under 50 years of age. Females comprised 51% of the total number of respondents.

AGE OF RESPONDENTS



GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

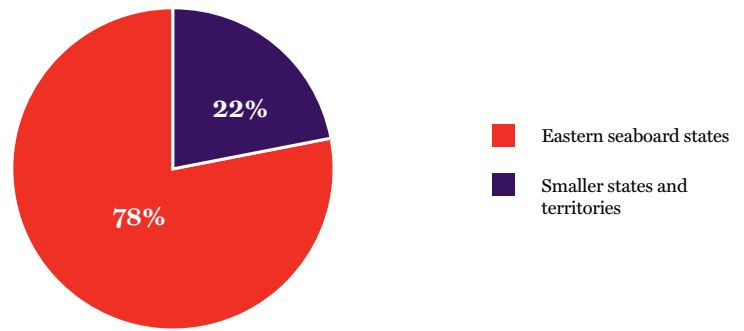


Place of residence

At the time of the survey, 78 percent were in smaller states and territories:

- 32 per cent living in NSW; 26 per cent in Victoria; 20 per cent in Queensland; 22 per cent living elsewhere
- 67 per cent capital city-based; 33 per cent living in regional areas.

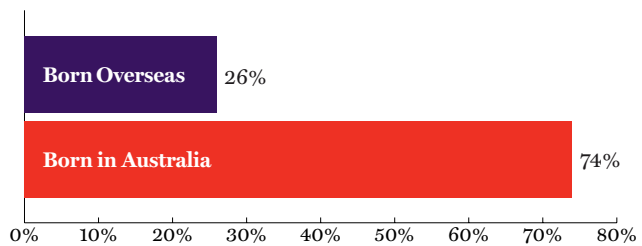
PLACE OF RESIDENCE



Where born and where parents were born

- 74 per cent born in Australia; 26 per cent born overseas
- 52 per cent with both parents born in Australia; 35 per cent with both parents born overseas
- 64 per cent with at least one Australian-born parent; 47 per cent with at least one overseas born parent.

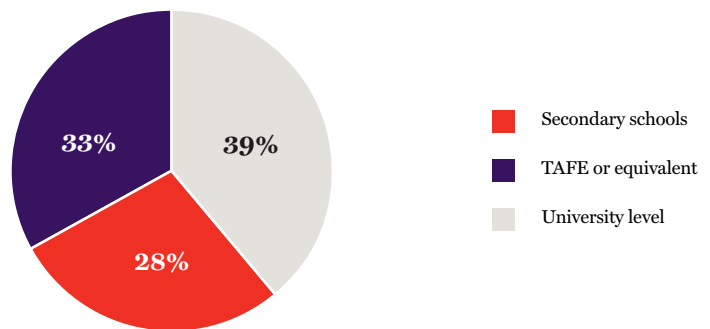
WHERE RESPONDENTS WERE BORN



Education

- 28 per cent educated to secondary school level only; 33 per cent educated to TAFE level or equivalent; 39 per cent educated to university level.

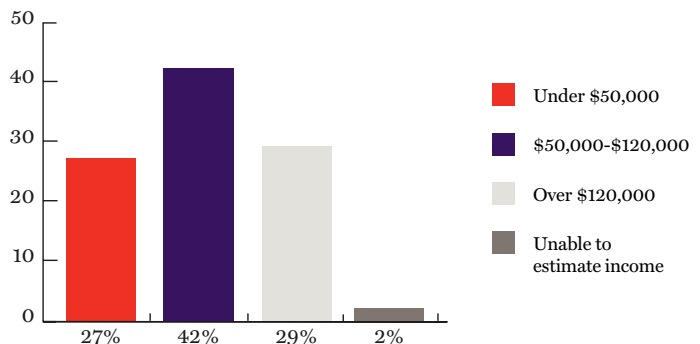
EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS



Income

- 27 per cent living in households with a total annual income under \$50,000 p.a.; 42 per cent with household incomes between \$50,000 and \$120,000 p.a.; 29 per cent with household incomes in excess of \$120,000 p.a.; two per cent unable to estimate their household incomes.

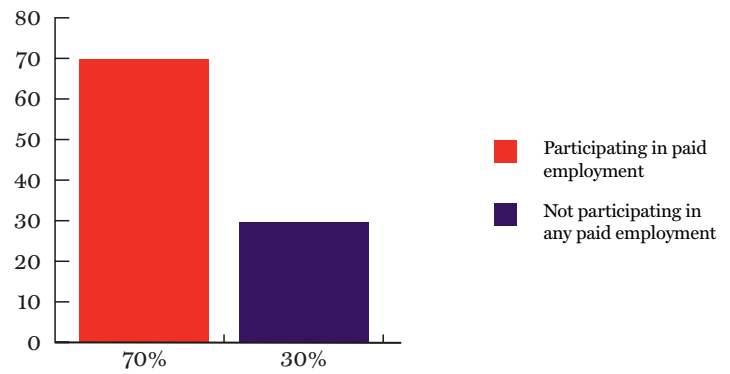
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Employment

- 70 per cent from households that participate in the paid workforce; 30 per cent from households that do not participate in the paid workforce
- 63 per cent of survey respondents in paid employment; 37 per cent not in paid employment.

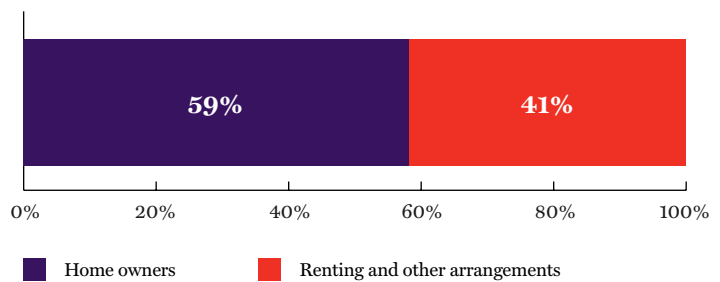
WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION



Home ownership

- 59 per cent are homeowners; 41 per cent are rental tenants or have other living arrangements where they do not pay rent.

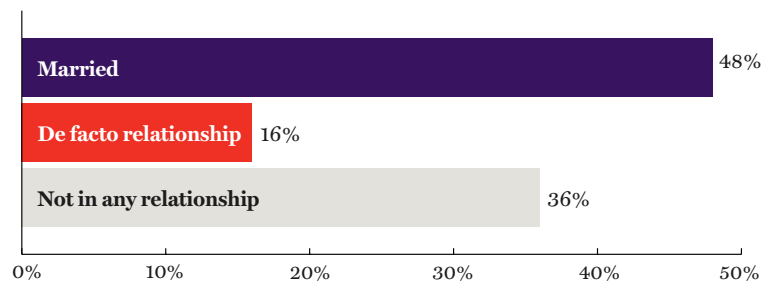
HOME OWNERSHIP



Marital and parental status

- 64 per cent are either married (48 per cent) or in a de facto relationship (16 per cent); 36 per cent are not in any relationship
- 32 per cent have no children; 68 per cent have children, including those whose children are now adults and living away from home. Based on the 2021 Census, 40 per cent have children living at home
- 27 per cent have grandchildren; 73 per cent have no grandchildren.

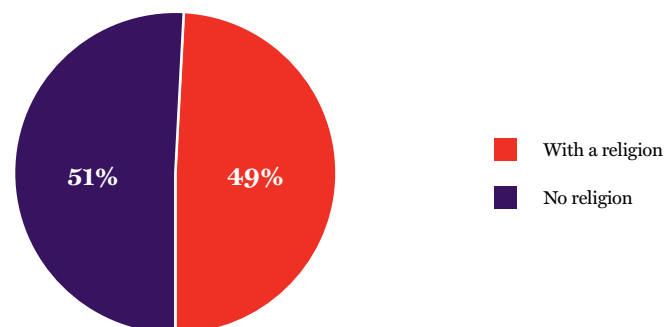
MARITAL STATUS



Religious affiliation

- 49 per cent identified themselves with a religion, compared to 54 per cent in the 2021 census
- 51 per cent said they had no religion or did not state their religion, compared to 46 per cent in the census
- 41 per cent identified with a Christian denomination, down from 43 per cent in the 2018 survey, and eight per cent identified with a non-Christian religion (seven per cent in 2018).

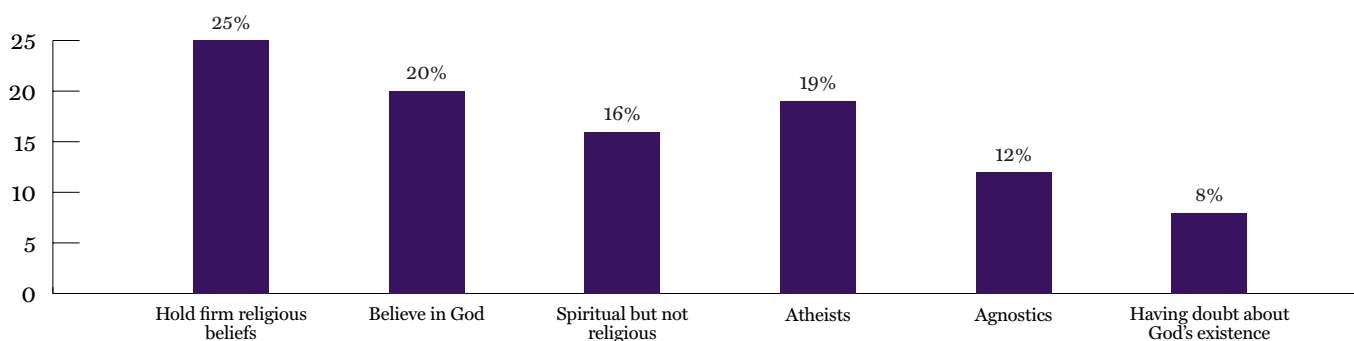
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



Religiosity

- 25 per cent described themselves as holding firm religious beliefs, with 12 per cent actively practising their beliefs daily
- 36 per cent described themselves as believing in God (20 per cent), or as spiritual (16 per cent) but not religious
- 39 per cent described themselves as having doubt about God's existence (eight per cent), as agnostics (12 per cent), or as atheists (19 per cent).

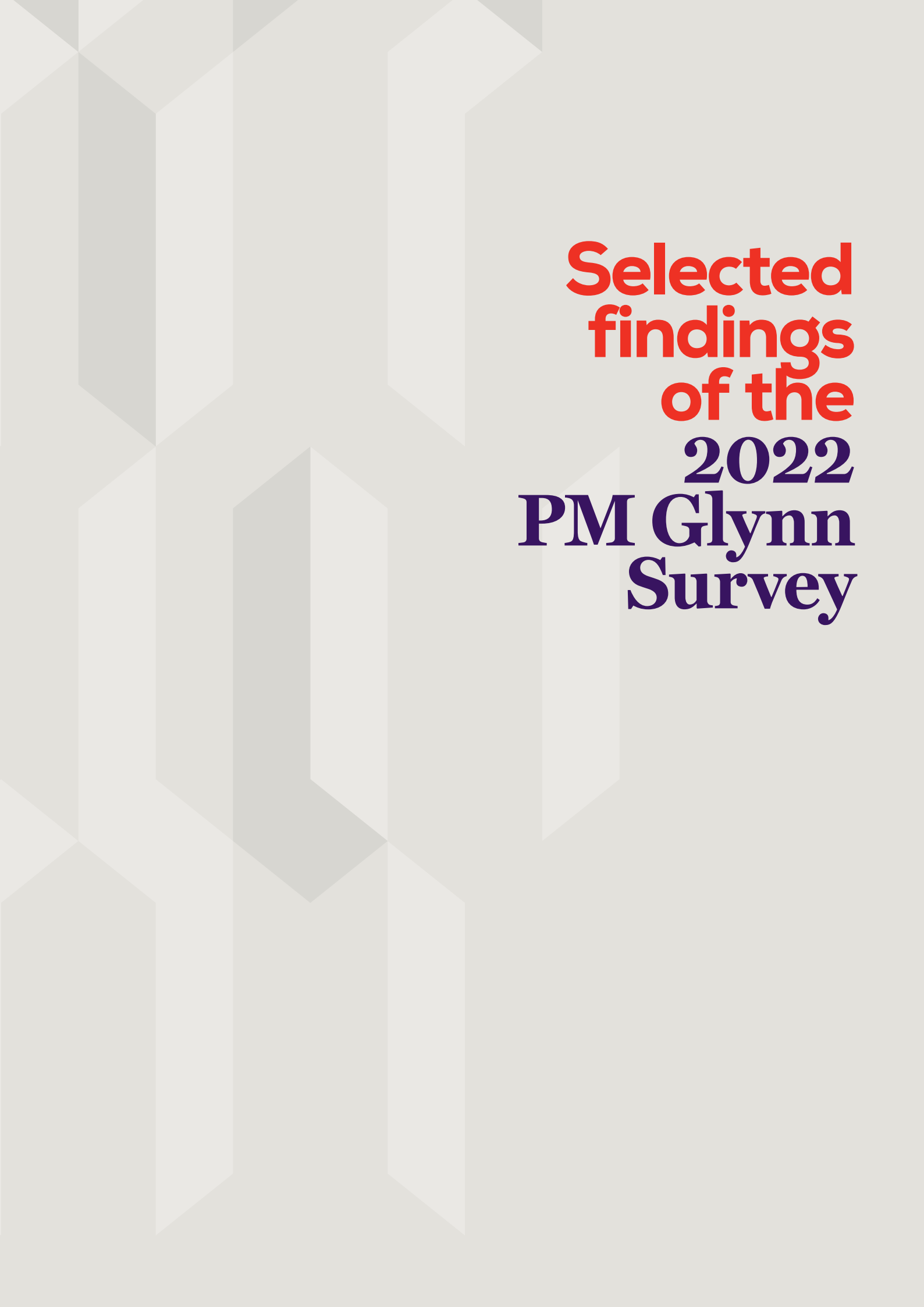
RELIGIOSITY



2022 SURVEY TOPICS

The 2022 survey asked questions which substantially overlapped with those of the 2018 survey. However, two important new sections were added to the 2022 survey: a section on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and a section on human flourishing and wellbeing, based on 12 questions designed to measure human flourishing, developed by Professor T J VanderWeele at Harvard University. Thus, the specific topics of interest in the 2022 survey were:

- the impact of COVID-19
 - human flourishing in 2022
 - attitudes towards religion
 - attitudes towards human rights
 - attitudes in relation to society, democracy, institutions, societal trends and what the future might hold
 - the current circumstances of Australians and their outlook on life and personal aspirations for the future
 - the values that are important to Australians in 2022.
-



**Selected
findings
of the
2022
PM Glynn
Survey**

Selected findings at a glance

1. COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has left significant economic, social and psychological consequences, and Australians view the pandemic and its impacts very seriously:

- 83 per cent of respondents see it as a major event in Australia's modern history, with impacts likely to be felt for a long time.

Seventy-nine per cent are worried about COVID-19's impact, with 70 per cent personally affected in a negative way by the disruptive changes that occurred in Australia in attempts to contain the virus. While 46 per cent of respondents praise the efforts by government and health authorities to contain the virus in 2020 and 2021, 54 per cent of Australians are critical of excessive government and health controls or failure to act quickly enough.

The 2022 survey showed that the most negative personal impacts (as distinct from the national economic cost, damage to businesses and the substantial rise in government debt) included:

- financial stress and employment disruption
- disruption to studies, with studying at home being a poor substitute for classroom and campus learning for many students
- personal health impacts (both mental and physical)
- damage to psychological wellbeing, created by loss of freedoms and loss of personal control
- social withdrawal
- loss of a structured daily routine
- loss of confidence, and concerns about what the future might hold.

The adaptations made in response to the pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions delivered a few positives:

- more than 40 per cent of respondents shifted to working from home, and this gave flexibility and a better work-life balance to some
- families and close friends drew closer together in terms of contact (whether physical or electronically) and this strengthened family and friendship bonds for some
- the generous financial safety net support provided by JobKeeper gave financial security to young workers who otherwise would have lost their jobs and livelihoods.

Despite the level of concern about COVID-19, the pandemic has not deterred Australians from pursuing life goals such as getting married, having children or buying a home. If anything, those who are concerned about COVID-19 are more determined to achieve their life goals in spite of the disruptive nature of the pandemic.

2. HUMAN FLOURISHING

Applying the Harvard Flourishing Measure, the 2022 survey showed that Australians collectively have a flourishing score of 6.7 (on a 0 – 10 flourishing scale). This is in positive territory but a long way from the upper end of the scale.

The survey results showed that flourishing tended to be higher in the areas of:

- respondents trying to “do the right thing” in their lives
- the strength of their relationships with family and close friends.

This coincides with many Australians, while being unhappy with the loss of personal freedoms during COVID-19, being prepared to accept that trading off their own freedoms to support the common goal of containing the virus was the right thing to do.

Relationships with family and close friends also strengthened during COVID-19 as people close to each other pulled together for support.

Weaker flourishing measures were found for:

- a sense of meaning and purpose in one's life
- happiness and life satisfaction.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is obviously one factor in this, as Australians became dislocated from their jobs and normal routines and were unable to engage in normal social, shopping, sporting and community group activities.

The lowest flourishing measures were found to be in the areas of:

- mental and physical health
- financial and material stability.

The survey confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic damaged feelings of health and wellbeing, as well as creating financial stress.

Flourishing was also found to be higher among those who believe in God, relative to non-believers, and highest among those who actively practise their faith.

Weak flourishing measures were found for low-income households, with younger respondents (18 – 24-year-olds) also finding it difficult to flourish in a climate of restricted freedom and loss of social activity.

3. RELIGION

Although the 2022 survey found that religious affiliation is associated with more positive flourishing measures, the survey found that religion in Australia is seen as being in decline by 70 per cent of Australians. Fifty-one per cent of all Australians believe that this decline is creating negative outcomes for Australian society.

However, the survey found that the perceived decline in religion is the result of a decline in the visible “above the line” presence of religion in society, and a decline in Australians’ willingness to say that they follow a religion.

In reality, and the survey results confirm this, the extent to which Australians hold religious beliefs (as opposed to calling themselves “religious”) remains unchanged, and the public’s attitude towards the Christian churches (including the Catholic Church) has improved since last measured in 2018.

Further evidence from the 2022 survey that, across the whole community, religion is still alive and well is the finding that both total attendance at religious services and participation in prayer (at least occasionally) have not declined since the 2018 survey.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS

The 2022 survey shows a high level of in-principle support among Australians for the protection of basic human rights. Eighty six per cent of Australians believe this is important.

However, there is a high degree of “softness” in this support, with support for specific rights varying:

- as a function of the nature of the right itself
- when rights clash and only one can be supported over the other
- when a trade-off of a right might be needed to achieve a broader social or economic outcome.

The 2022 survey found that respondents are very supportive of free speech and a range of other rights. Implicit in these findings is strong support for the rights of the majority, especially when “the right to not be offended” is advanced against celebrating Christmas and Easter as religious festivals, or singing Christmas carols in schools.

Although a little weaker (relative to the right of free speech), a majority of respondents support the right of religious freedom, and the right of terminally ill people to have quality palliative care, in preference to legislating assisted suicide or a “right to die”.

Respondents are willing to trade off rights if the trade-off delivers a positive societal benefit, but are wary, in the light of the experience of COVID-19, of calls to give up their rights for the common good. In other respects, Australians’ views on rights also remain largely unchanged since 2018.

5. & 6. THE FUTURE AND CHANGES IN SOCIETY

The Westpac-Melbourne Institute’s consumer confidence index in mid-2022 was 86 points (100 index points reflects a balance between optimism and pessimism in the community), reflecting a very pessimistic sentiment, and well below the typical level of optimism that characterises the Australian public’s mood in better times.

The 2022 survey also confirmed this prevailing pessimism, with 90 per cent of Australians holding moderate to serious concerns about what the future might hold, revolving around climate change, the national economy (debt and inflation), cost of living pressures on households and concerns about the way in which Australian society is changing.

There are increasing levels of concern about a number of negative influences in society that survey respondents think have made Australian society worse than it was 10 years ago. These include:

- the depersonalisation of human contact created by digital devices, notwithstanding the many enabling benefits of technology
- a rise in domestic violence and disharmony, including family breakdowns
- the level of mental health issues and suicides
- financial pressures on the lowest income households, and a growing rich/poor divide.

Australians also see positive developments emerging in society in recent years, including greater social inclusion of minorities, as well as a greater level of caring and compassion, reflected in the strong financial safety net during COVID-19 and families coming closer together to support each other during the pandemic.

The overall picture emerging from the 2022 survey, however, is of a pessimistic Australian community, concerned about what the future might hold in a society that is changing on many fronts, with some of those changes not supporting the democratic ideals of freedom, equal opportunity and a high quality of life for all Australians.

7. DEMOCRACY AND INSTITUTIONS

While Australians believe that democracy remains strong in Australia, they worry about the health of many of the institutions that support democracy and our way of life, especially the public health and education systems.

Some institutions are seen as functioning better now compared with 2018, notably:

- the police and justice systems
- the welfare system
- big business, including banks
- traditional media (as sources of information and updates on events)
- the Christian churches and other religious communities
- unions.

Some institutions are rated as functioning less well in 2022 compared with 2018 (due in part to the added pressures created by COVID-19):

- the health and public hospital systems
- the public education system
- the main charity groups in Australia.

The 2022 survey showed that those who are least confident about Australia’s democracy and the institutions that support it are those with the lowest education attainments and those on the lowest incomes.

8. OUTLOOK AND CHALLENGES

The survey asked respondents about their perceptions of the prevalence and impact of a number of factors that might weaken hope, trust and a sense of belonging in Australian society.

The factors with the highest majorities for prevalence and negative consequences were:

- family breakdowns and domestic disharmony
- illicit drug use and alcohol abuse
- an increase in isolation and loneliness
- a growing rich-poor divide.

Large majorities also saw these factors as prevalent and with negative consequences for hope, trust and a sense of belonging:

- institutional wrong-doing and cover-ups
- lack of strong leadership in politics, business and society
- a decline in volunteering and community participation
- a decline in the role of religion in Australian society.

Two of these factors were perceived as having increased in both their prevalence and their negative impacts in Australian society since 2018:

- family breakdowns and domestic disharmony
- a growing rich-poor divide.

9. PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

When asked about how they see themselves in 2022 compared with 2018 Australians reported:

- no change in confidence about their own future
- feeling increased financial pressure now
- being closer to family and friends
- being less engaged with the broader community
- feeling safer
- feeling healthier.

Responses to questions about job satisfaction suggest that employment in 2022 is seen as more meaningful and satisfying than in 2018. This may be influenced by a sense of purpose that jobs acquire during a pandemic.

Home ownership among survey respondents remains at the same level in 2022 as it was in 2018 (59 per cent), but with a shift towards home ownership supported by mortgages, reflecting the availability of low interest loans up to the early months of 2022, and the significantly higher housing costs in 2022 compared with 2018.

The 2022 survey showed that younger respondents (18 – 24-year-olds) share the same aspirations as older respondents in terms of wanting to get ahead, own a home, get married, have children, improve their education and achieve financial independence.

An encouraging finding from the survey is that not only do younger respondents have the same aspirations as their parents and grandparents, but COVID-19 has not deterred them from pursuing their goals. There might be financial barriers to achieving home ownership, but the desire to own a home is very strong among young Australians.

Aspiration for a better life was found in the survey to be very prevalent in all age groups, but just over half of all respondents who aspire to a better life are confident that they will achieve their goals, and almost half are unsure or lack confidence about the prospect of achieving their goals.

10. BELIEFS AND VALUES

One of the important contributing factors to confidence about achieving one's life goals is having strong values. In the 2022 survey, respondents were asked to nominate the values that they believe are most important to them.

The value sets that were rated as extremely or very important by the highest percentage of Australians are:

- caring for family and friends – 89 per cent of respondents rated this as extremely or very important to them
- trying to be a good person (82 per cent)
- fairness and treating people equally (80 per cent)
- working hard and applying self-discipline (71 per cent).

The other value sets were rated as extremely or very important by a smaller majority of Australians, with the exception of “religion, God and prayer”:

- freedom to pursue goals and dreams (67 per cent)
- social and environmental responsibility (62 per cent)
- inclusion, social justice, tolerance, diversity (60 per cent)
- self-sacrifice for the sake of others (54 per cent)
- taking care of one's own needs (53 per cent)
- religion, God, prayer (27 per cent).

The 2022 results showed that the values of caring and equality were seen by respondents as the values that carried Australians through the worst of the pandemic lockdowns. More broadly, the survey showed that values drive the motivation to achieve one's life goals, and act as important guides to behaviour as citizens, parents and friends.

Parents were identified by younger adult Australians as the most important and influential people in their lives. So it is not surprising that young Australians hold the values of family, hard work and the pursuit of goals as strongly as their parents.

Selected findings in more detail

1. COVID-19

At the time of the survey (June 2022):

- according to the World Health Organisation, more than eight million Australians had contracted COVID-19, resulting in more than 10,000 deaths¹
- the COVID-19 pandemic was well into its third year, with many more cases in 2022 compared with 2020 and 2021.

The impact of COVID-19 has been widespread in Australia, driven by:

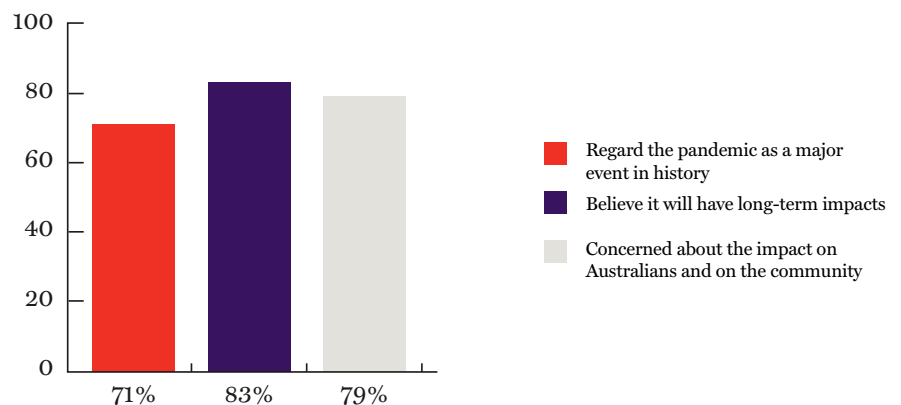
- the high infection rates across all states and territories and in all age and gender groups
- the actions taken by government and health authorities to contain the pandemic, which resulted in forced changes to the lives of most Australians.

The current survey measured public perceptions of the pandemic and the impact on people's lives. The key findings emerging from the questions on COVID-19 in the 2022 survey were:

Australians regard the COVID-19 pandemic as a major event in history with likely long-term impacts:

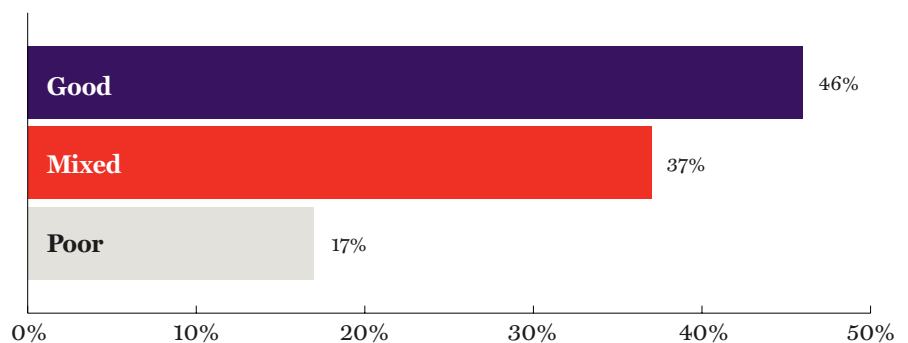
- 83 per cent of respondents see the pandemic as a major event in Australia's modern history, with impacts likely to be felt for a long time, and 79 per cent are worried about COVID-19's impact on Australian society.

LONG TERM IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Australians had a mixed reaction to the handling of the pandemic by government authorities:

RATING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE PANDEMIC



1. Source: <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/au>

Asked to explain in a few words the reasons for their rating of the government's response, perceptions on the positive side were:

"The end (containment) justified the means (restrictions etc)"	23%
"They tried their best"	15%
"They were responsive to the unfolding situation"	10%
"We did better than other countries"	6%

On the negative side, the perceptions were:

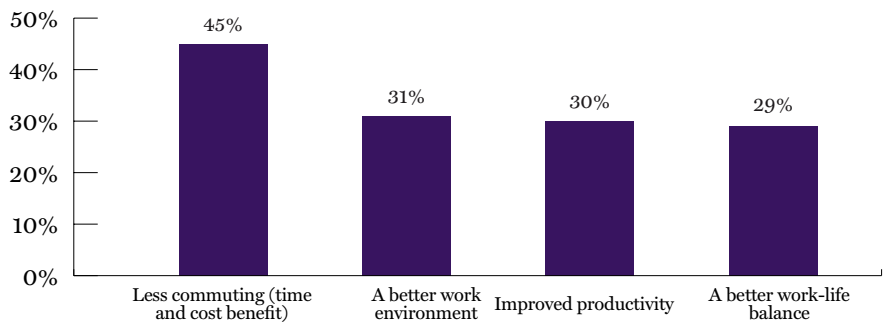
"The restrictions were 'over the top'"	41%
"Too slow to respond"	13%
"The social and economic impacts of the restrictions were damaging"	12%
"The lockdowns had a negative impact on people's lives"	4%

Work practices changed in Australia for many because of the pandemic:

- 41 per cent of respondents in paid employment shifted to working remotely or to working at home.
- among working households, the incidence of working at home shifted from seven per cent before the pandemic to 48 per cent during the pandemic.
- among working households, the 93 per cent working away from home before the pandemic fell to 52 per cent working away from home during the pandemic, with impacts on businesses that were reliant on trade from workers attending workplaces.

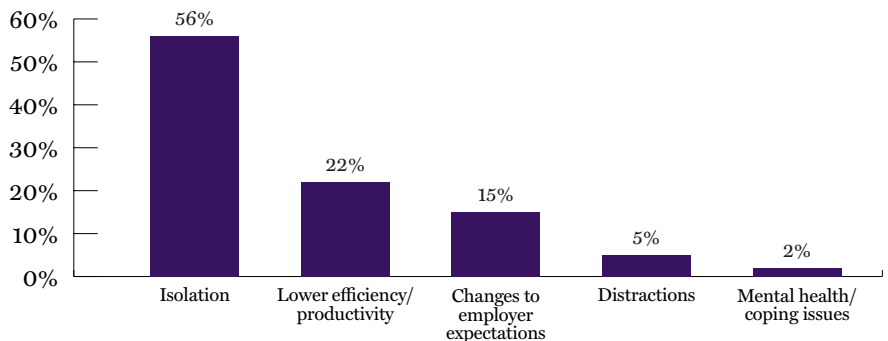
Respondents nominated a range of benefits and disadvantages to working at home.

BENEFITS OF WORKING FROM HOME*



*Multiple response question

DISADVANTAGES OF WORKING FROM HOME*

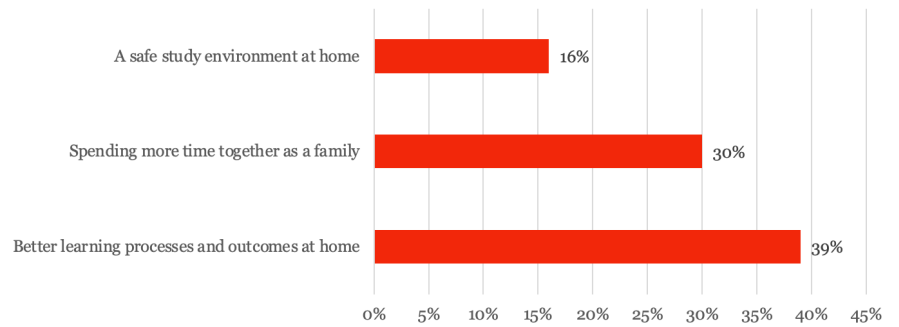


*Multiple response question

Study practices also changed significantly as school and tertiary students shifted to studying at home:

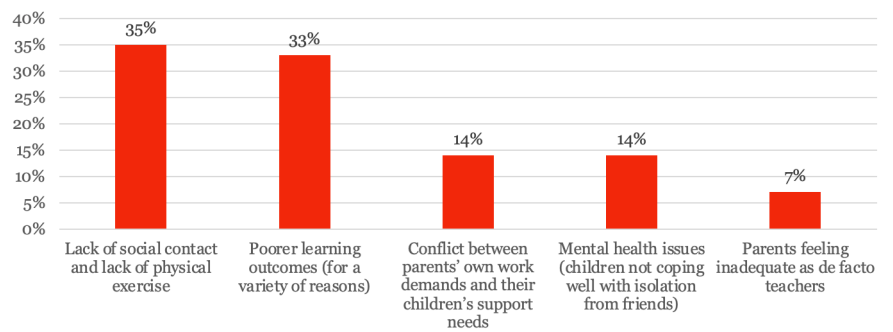
The parents of children studying at home reported a number of advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages of studying at home*



*Multiple response question

Disadvantages of studying at home*

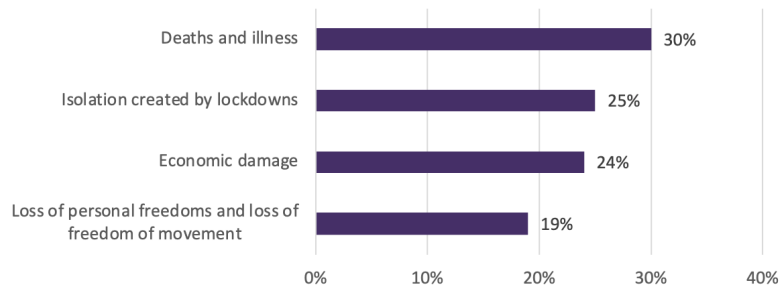


*Multiple response question

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic is regarded by Australians as a negative event overall, but not all outcomes of the pandemic have been negative:

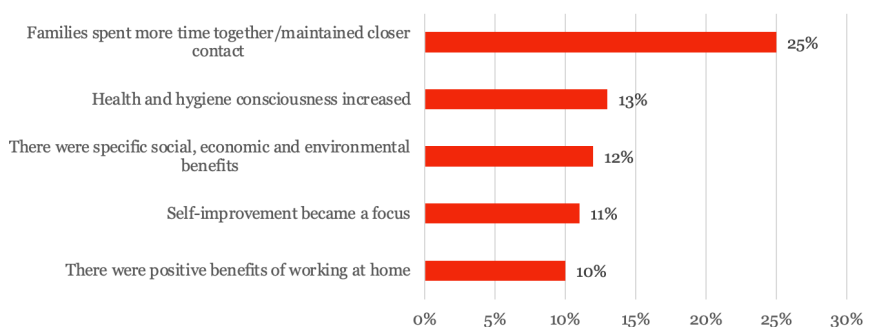
Respondents nominated a range of positive and negative outcomes. However, 32 per cent can see no positives from the pandemic.

Negative outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic



*Multiple response question

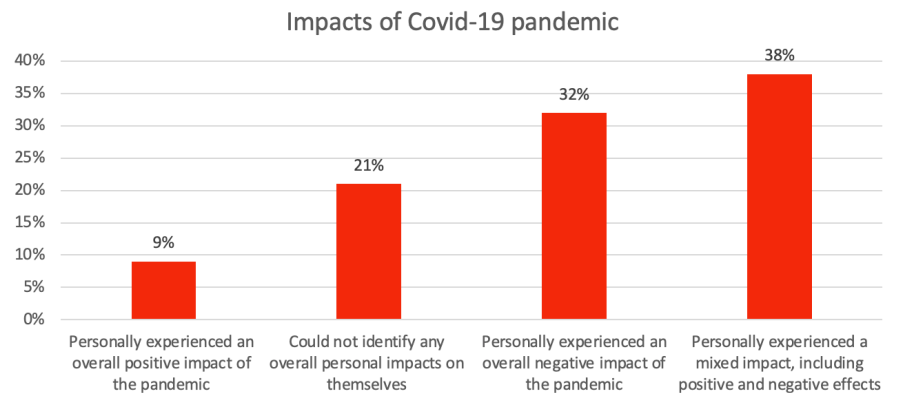
Positive outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic*



*Multiple response question

The impacts of COVID-19 were felt personally by individual respondents to differing degrees and with differing outcomes:

Seventy per cent of respondents felt at least some negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.



The specific negative impacts of COVID-19 personally were broad-ranging:

The main negative impacts were:

- damaged confidence
- reduced happiness and enjoyment
- negative changes to employment and/or financial circumstances
- negative impacts on personal health and wellbeing.

LIFE ASPECTS	EXPERIENCED A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE
Confidence about the world's future	53%
Confidence about Australia's future	41%
Self-confidence and feelings of being in control of one's life	31%
General outlook on life and what the future might hold	30%
Level of happiness, general optimism and ability to enjoy doing the things that one likes to do	26%
Financial and/or employment circumstances	26%
General health and wellbeing	24%
Confidence about one's own future	23%

The human response in Australia to the pandemic was to seek comfort and assurance from relationships (family and friends) and religion:

	CHANGED FOR THE BETTER	CHANGED FOR THE WORSE
Relationships with family and friends	31%	14%
Strength of religious beliefs	11%	6%

Despite the level of concern about COVID-19, the pandemic has not deterred Australians from pursuing their life goals:

If anything, those who are concerned about COVID-19 are more determined to achieve their life goals in spite of the disruptive nature of the pandemic.

	THOSE CONCERNED ABOUT COVID-19	THOSE NOT CONCERNED ABOUT COVID-19
Deferring marriage?		
Yes	14%	16%
No	86%	84%
Deferring having children?		
Yes	25%	30%
No	75%	70%
Deferring buying a home?		
Yes	37%	41%
No	63%	59%



OVERALL IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic is yet to fully play out, but the impact from the first two-and-a-half years of the pandemic has been largely negative, especially in the areas of:

- deaths and illness
- negative impacts on physical and mental health and well being
- employment disruption
- personal financial cost
- damaged confidence
- negative impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing
- reduced happiness, optimism and enjoyment of life
- a more pessimistic outlook about the future.

Australians have tried to adapt:

- family relationships and friendships strengthened (people pulling together)
- religious beliefs (for some) strengthened.

Changes to work arrangements and study arrangements affected many households with mixed outcomes, with work practices for some perhaps never returning to the way they were.

2. HUMAN FLOURISHING

The Human Flourishing Measure, developed by Harvard University's Professor T. J. VanderWeele in 2017², was included in the 2022 survey. Twelve standard questions, each requiring a 0 – 10 response rating scale, are paired into six “domains”, namely:

- Domain 1: happiness and life satisfaction (D1)
- Domain 2: mental and physical health (D2)
- Domain 3: meaning and purpose (D3)
- Domain 4: character and virtue (D4)
- Domain 5: close social relationships (D5)
- Domain 6: financial and material stability (D6).

Two related flourishing measures are derived from these domains – a Flourishing Index (FI) which is a composite of the first five domains, and a Secure Flourishing Index (SFI) which is a composite of all six domains.

The mean scores (and the standard deviations³) for the Australian survey sample are shown for each flourishing question, with a rank ordering from 1 (the highest mean score) to 12 (the lowest mean score).

Overall, the Flourishing Index (FI) (i.e. D1 – D5 combined) for the Australian survey sample is 6.71 and the Secure Flourishing Index (SFI) (D1 – D6 combined) is 6.59 – both in positive territory but a long way from the upper end of the scale.

HUMAN FLOURISHING INDEX STATEMENTS	RANK	MEAN	SD
		[Total sample]	
[D1] Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days? [Scale goes from 0 = “Not satisfied at all” up to 10 = “Completely satisfied”]	7	6.54	2.14
[D1] In general, how happy or unhappy do you feel? [Scale goes from 0 = “Extremely unhappy” up to 10 = “Extremely happy”]	8	6.51	2.15
[D2] In general, how would you rate your physical health? [Scale goes from 0 = “Poor” up to 10 = “Excellent”]	11	6.27	2.21
[D2] And on the same scale, how would you rate your overall mental health? [Scale goes from 0 = “Poor” up to 10 = “Excellent”]	6	6.60	2.44
[D3] Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? [Scale goes from 0 = “Not at all worthwhile” up to 10 = “Completely worthwhile”]	3	6.92	2.21
[D3] Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement about yourself: “I understand my purpose in life”. [Scale goes from 0 = “Strongly disagree” up to 10 = “Strongly agree”]	9	6.42	2.58
[D4] Rate yourself on this statement: “I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations”. [Scale goes from 0 = “Not true of me” up to 10 = “Completely true of me”]	1	7.29	1.90
[D4] And on the same scale rate yourself on this one: “I am always able to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later”. [Scale goes from 0 = “Not true of me” up to 10 = “Completely true of me”]	5	6.69	2.07
[D5] To what extent does the following statement describe you: “I am content with my friendships and relationships”. [Scale goes from 0 = “Strongly disagree” up to 10 = “Strongly agree”]	2	7.10	2.31
[D5] And how do you rate yourself on this one: “My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be”. [Scale goes from 0 = “Strongly disagree” up to 10 = “Strongly agree”]	4	6.75	2.46
[D6] How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses? [Scale goes from 0 = “Worry all of the time” up to 10 = “Do not ever worry”]	12	5.64	2.96
[D6] How often do you worry about safety, food or housing? [Scale goes from 0 = Worry all of the time” up to 10 = “Do not ever worry”]	10	6.33	2.78

2. VanderWeele, T.J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, U.S.A.*, 31:8148-8156.

3. The standard deviation (SD) is a measure of the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of the sample's ratings on each survey measure. A smaller SD reflects more homogeneous (or common) ratings in the sample, clustered more closely around the mean. A larger SD reflects a wider range or more diverse set of responses, indicating greater variability of responses between individuals.

For the Australian sample, the highest mean scores (and their associated rankings) are for:

MOST POSITIVE MEAN RATINGS AND RANKINGS	MEAN	RANK
“I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations”.	7.29	1
“I am content with my friendships and relationships”.	7.10	2
“Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?”	6.92	3

The lowest ranked flourishing scores are for:

LEAST POSITIVE MEAN RATINGS AND ASSOCIATED RANKINGS	MEAN	RANK
“How often do you worry about safety, food or housing?”	6.33	10
“In general, how would you rate your physical health?”	6.27	11
“How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses?”	5.64	12

The highest mean scores are for:

- the first D4 “character and virtue” measure (“always acting to promote good”)
- the first D5 “close social relationships” measure (“content with my friendships and relationships”)
- the first D3 “meaning and purpose” measure (“the things you do in your life are worthwhile”).

The lowest ratings are for:

- the second D6 “financial and material stability” measure (“concerns about safety, food or housing”)
- the second D2 “mental and physical health” measure (“physical health”)
- the first D6 “financial and material stability” measure (“ability to meet normal monthly living expenses”).

These ratings paint an overall picture of the Australian adult population as:

- trying to promote goodness and pursue worthwhile causes
- maintaining positive and close social relationships
- concerned about meeting basic security needs, staying healthy and managing day to day cost of living pressures.

With the twelve statements paired into their respective domains, the mean scores for each domain (and their ranks) are shown below, together with the overall Flourishing Index (FI) (D1 – D5 combined) and the Securing Flourishing Index (SFI) (D1 – D6 combined) also shown.

DOMAIN	MEAN	RANK
D1 Happiness and life satisfaction	6.53	4
D2 Mental and physical health	6.44	5
D3 Meaning and purpose	6.67	3
D4 Character and virtue	6.99	1
D5 Close social relationships	6.93	2
D6 Financial and material stability	5.99	6
FI The Flourishing Index [D1 - D5]		6.71
SFI The Secure Flourishing Index (SFI) [D1 - D6]		6.59

The domain-level results show that the Australian sample ranks highest in terms of flourishing on:

- “Character and virtue”, followed by
- “Close social relationships”.

There are middle-order rankings in the domain-level results for:

- “Meaning and purpose”, and
- “Happiness and life satisfaction”.

The lowest rankings in the domain-level results are for:

- “Mental and physical health”, and
- “Financial and material stability”.

It is noteworthy that on a 0 – 10 scale, all of the D1 – D6 measures cluster closely in the 6 – 7 range. The overall FI measure at 6.71 is a reflection of a moderately positive level of flourishing i.e. above the mid-point of 5 on the flourishing scale, but not reflective of strong flourishing (i.e. not in the 8 – 10 range). This suggests that the level of flourishing in Australia is positive but could be improved, across all domains, but especially in the areas of health, happiness, meaning, and financial and material stability.

Flourishing measures and COVID-19 pandemic

The flourishing results align with the COVID-19 experience in Australia. The survey findings show that close social relationships were vital during the COVID-19 period, which is also the strongest flourishing index domain. Australians also tried to do the right things during the COVID-19 period to help to contain the spread of the virus, acting for the common good, which aligns with the other strongest flourishing domain of *“character and virtue”*. The financial stresses caused for many by the pandemic as well as the impact on physical and mental health coincide with the weakest flourishing domain measures (*“mental and physical health”* and *“financial and material stability”*).

There is a clear relationship between the flourishing measures and the best and worst aspects of the COVID-19 experience.

Demographic-socioeconomic factors and flourishing

Relative to other age groups, the 18 – 24-year-old age group recorded the lowest flourishing scores (6.2 average score), while the 65+ age group recorded the highest flourishing scores (7.3) out of all age groups.

There was a substantially lower score for the 18 – 24 year old age group relative to other age groups on the *“mental health”* measure; the *“my life is worthwhile”* measure; and the *“sense of purpose”* measure.

Females recorded lower flourishing scores overall compared with males (6.6 to 6.8).

The lowest household income groups (under \$50,000 p.a.) recorded the lowest flourishing scores relative to other income groups, with flourishing scores increasing directly with increasing household income (to 7.2 for the highest income groups).

Religious beliefs, human values and flourishing

Those who both follow and practise a religious faith scored the highest flourishing scores (7.3 average score), followed by those who follow but do not practise their faith (6.8), with the lowest flourishing scores recorded by doubters, agnostics and atheists (6.4). Respondents who are Catholics and who practise their faith showed higher flourishing scores (7.7) than other religious followers who practise their faith (7.3).

A strong correlation was also found between better flourishing and having a more positive self-perception and outlook on life, as measured by other questions in the 2022 survey. Flourishing scores were found to be significantly higher among those who place greater importance on human values.

The demographic, religious and values correlates of flourishing reported above refer to the FI Flourishing Index (domains 1 – 5), but the SFI Secure Flourishing Index (domains 1 – 6) showed very similar relationship to the demographics, religion and values measures.

3. RELIGION

Following a religion and practising a religion

The much publicised decline in the role of religion, backed by ABS Census trends, is only partially borne out by the current survey findings.

The percentage of Australians who “identify with / follow a religion” has declined only slightly since 2018:

	2018	2022
Identify with / follow a religion	50%	49%
No religion	50%	51%

There is no significant change since 2018 in the importance Australians place on holding religious beliefs, or how they describe the strength of the beliefs they hold:

	2018	2022
I have firm religious beliefs and practise those beliefs in my daily life	12%	12%
I have firm religious beliefs, but I don't practise them as much as I could	12%	13%
I believe in God but I'm not what you'd call a religious person	20%	20%
I am a spiritual person, but I don't follow any organised religion	16%	16%
I'm a doubter about whether God exists or not, and I don't follow any religion	8%	8%
I'm an agnostic – I don't know whether God exists or not	10%	12%
I'm an atheist – I don't believe there is a God	21%	19%
TOTAL	100%	100%
Religious beliefs are very important to me	26%	27%

Religious practices such as attending religious services and praying remain largely unchanged:

	2018	2022
Weekly attendance at religious services	10%	8%
Attend religious services regularly	15%	15%
Attend religious services at least occasionally	45%	46%
Daily prayer	16%	14%
Regular prayer but not daily	25%	26%
Pray at least occasionally	45%	49%

Perceptions of the role of religion in Australian society

The perceptions of the role of religion in Australian society have not changed significantly since the last survey in 2018. However, there is broad agreement that the role of religion is in decline. There is no change in the belief that this decline is having a negative impact on Australian society. There has also been a decline among those who see religion's contribution to society as positive, and a rise in those who see its contribution as negative:

	2018	2022
Believe that the role of religion is in decline in Australia	69%	70%
Believe that this decline is having a negative impact	51%	51%
Believe that religion makes a positive contribution	54%	49%
Believe that religion makes a negative contribution	20%	23%

Attitudes towards religious institutions are either unchanged or slightly more favourable than they were in 2018:

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES	2018	2022
Perceived as “working well”	26%	28%
Perceived as “not working well”	28%	22%

There is a small positive shift in how the Catholic Church is perceived, although no significant change overall.

	FAVOURABLE PERCEPTION		UNFAVOURABLE PERCEPTION	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
Christianity	33%	33%	20%	21%
The Catholic Church	17%	18%	40%	38%
The Anglican Church	20%	20%	22%	22%

Support for the religious rights of individuals remains largely unchanged and there is no evidence that support for religious freedom for individuals in Australia is weakening:

PERCENTAGE WHO SUPPORT THESE RIGHTS	2018	2022
Freedom of conscience and religion	71%	70%
The right to not be forced to act against one’s religious beliefs	51%	52%
The right to be protected from religious discrimination	70%	72%
The right to celebrate Christmas and Easter as religious festivals	79%	81%



OVERALL FINDING ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELIGION

Religious belief in Australia (in strength, practice and the number of people holding those beliefs) has not changed (ie weakened) since 2018, despite evidence of fewer Australians willing to self-describe as “having a religion”.

At the same time, there is a prevailing view (as there was in 2018) that religion’s role and influence in society is weakening (70 per cent of Australians believe this) and 51 per cent of Australians are concerned about the negative impacts of this.

These perceptions reflect that the influence of religion as an institution in Australian society is not highly visible. Among the factors which may explain this perception are the way religion is often crowded out by competing social influences, the appeal of overlapping secular ideas, and substantial negative publicity, particularly from the handling of historical sexual abuse among the Catholic and other Christian churches. Current “conflict of rights” issues around religious freedom and discrimination contribute to this situation as well, given that these issues tend to be resolved in favour of civil rights that clash with religious beliefs.

However, despite the less visible role of religion:

- the prevalence and strength of personally held religious beliefs, and the practice of those beliefs, remains unchanged since 2018
- support for the religious rights of individuals, and the upholding of religious traditions like Christmas and Easter, remain just as strong
- attitudes towards specific religious institutions (eg the Catholic Church) are either unchanged or slightly more favourable (or less unfavourable) than they were in 2018.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS

The topic of human rights can be a contentious topic because of issues that arise when there is a clash of rights.

The COVID-19 period has also had an impact on civil liberties, with governments using emergency powers to restrict movement, gatherings, business operations and the right to attend normal workplaces.

The 2022 survey addressed the topic of human rights from several perspectives:

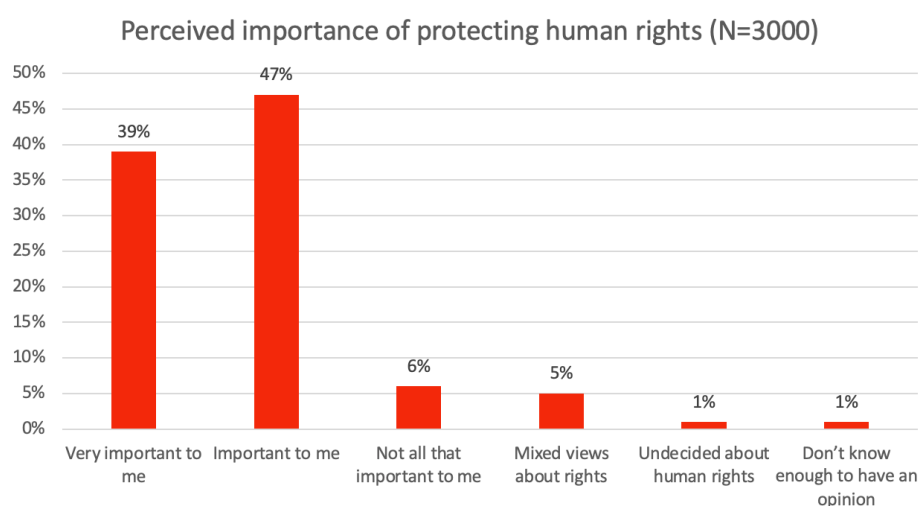
1. Do Australians believe it is important to protect human rights?
2. If so, which specific rights are supported?
3. Do Australians accept trade-offs between individual rights and achieving broader social or economic objectives?
4. Have attitudes in relation to rights shifted since 2018?

These results show that:

- 86 per cent of Australians believe that protecting basic human rights is at least somewhat important
- 14 per cent are more ambivalent about the importance of protecting human rights.

Of the 86 per cent who rate the protection of human rights as important:

- 39 per cent rate the protection of human rights as very important to them
- 47 per cent rate the protection of human rights as important, but not “very important”.



* Totals may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding of percentages to whole numbers

Not all individual rights are equally supported, with some rights supported more strongly than others:

The strongest support is for:

- free speech (83 per cent support)
- protection from religious discrimination (72 per cent support)
- freedom of conscience and religion (70 per cent support).

These are followed by:

- an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (65 per cent support)
- the right to access quality palliative care (63 per cent support).

Support is lower for:

- treating people who contribute less through disadvantage the same as those who contribute more (55 per cent support)
- the right to not be forced by law to act against one's religious or ethical beliefs (52 per cent support)
- the rights of parents to say no to schools teaching gender fluidity (51 per cent support).

There is only minority support for:

- limiting speech or writing that might cause offense (34 per cent support)
- young children and teens accessing gender change treatments without parental consent (22 per cent support).

SPECIFIC RIGHTS	STRONGLY SUPPORT	SOMEWHAT SUPPORT	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT OPPOSE	STRONGLY OPPOSE	CAN'T SAY	TOTAL SUPPORT	TOTAL OPPOSE	"NET" SUPPORT*
The right to free speech and not being silenced by threats or intimidation by others who don't agree with you	50%	33%	12%	2%	1%	1%	83%	3%	+80%
The right to freedom of conscience and religion, and to be able to freely express and act on your beliefs	36%	34%	22%	5%	2%	2%	70%	7%	+63%
The right of parents to say no to schools teaching their children that they can change their gender	35%	16%	23%	11%	11%	4%	51%	22%	+29%
Treating people who contribute less to society through disadvantage equally to those who are more advantaged and contribute more	29%	26%	26%	9%	5%	5%	55%	14%	+41%
The right of terminally ill people to receive high quality palliative care and pain control in preference to legalising assisted suicide or a "right to die"	42%	21%	18%	8%	8%	3%	63%	16%	+47%
The right to not be forced by law to act against one's religious or ethical beliefs	29%	23%	29%	9%	6%	5%	52%	15%	+37%
Giving children and young teenagers the right to seek treatment to change their gender without parental approval	9%	13%	21%	18%	36%	4%	22%	54%	-32%
The right for people to be protected from discrimination based on their religion	40%	32%	18%	4%	3%	2%	72%	7%	+65%
Protecting people from views they find offensive by restricting what others can say or write	12%	22%	27%	17%	18%	4%	34%	35%	-1%
Giving Indigenous Australians a voice that advises the Federal Parliament on issues affecting their communities, and enshrining this in the Australian Constitution	38%	27%	21%	5%	7%	2%	65%	12%	+53%

* "Net Support" is the difference between the "Total support" and "Total oppose" percentages, producing a single measure of strength of support (or opposition) by taking into account differing views in the population.

Australians are willing to accept some rights trade-offs, but it depends on the benefit and the certainty with which that benefit will be delivered by trading off individual rights:

SPECIFIC TRADE-OFFS	SUPPORT THIS TRADE-OFF	NEUTRAL/ UNDECIDED	OPPOSE THIS TRADE-OFF	CAN'T SAY
Restricting the right to strike if the strike will cause significant economic loss or disruption	26%	42%	25%	7%
Giving government stronger powers and controls ahead of human rights and individual freedoms, if this delivers stronger economic growth and a higher standard of living	15%	34%	47%	4%
Banning Easter and Christmas celebrations as religious festivals because some people find them offensive	4%	13%	81%	3%
Shifting Australia Day to a different date to better include Indigenous Australians	32%	26%	39%	3%
Restricting the freedom of movement of people in Australia, including State border closures and large crowd gatherings, if the health advice is that this will reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading	40%	28%	30%	3%

Broadly, the survey findings suggest that a restriction of rights on economic or social grounds is not well supported in a society that has been built on an established balance between individual rights and social responsibilities. Shifting the balance in favour of government power is not well supported.

Have attitudes in relation to rights shifted since 2018?

For most rights, and for the overall issue of the importance of protecting basic human rights, there has been very little movement of public attitudes in support of, or against, various rights between 2018 and 2022.

The exceptions are:

- a shift to be less opposed to changing Australia Day
- lower support for parents in 2022 who want to say no to their children being taught gender fluidity in schools
- a little less sympathy for the idea that disadvantaged people who contribute less to society (as a result of their disadvantage) should receive the same treatment as those who contribute more
- more support for the right of terminally ill people to receive high-quality palliative care, in preference to legalising assisted suicide or a “right to die”
- more support for an Indigenous Voice
- less support for banning speech and writing that causes offence to some.

Overall, attitudes towards rights appear to be quite stable in relation to most rights, although there is an indication of a shift in support of some rights, perhaps implying that public support can be shifted over time with campaigns, debate and dialogue. This is because, while 86 per cent of respondents say that protecting basic human rights is important:

- only 39 per cent feel strongly about this
- not all rights are afforded the same status or receive the same level of support from them
- at least some respondents are willing to accept trade-offs of individual rights if that serves a broader social agenda or fixes a temporary social or economic issue.

5. THE FUTURE

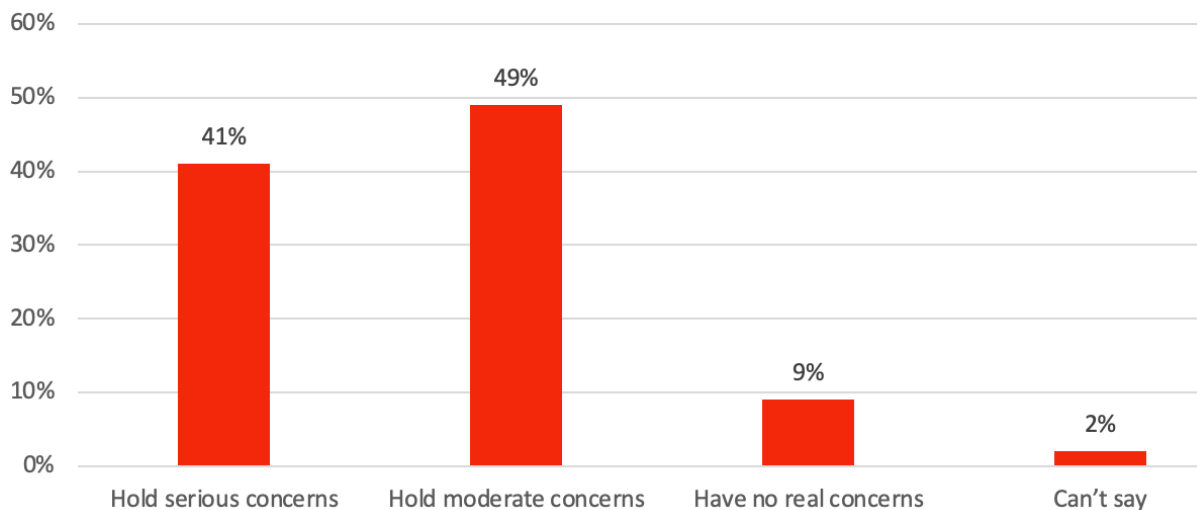
In the context of the worst pandemic in modern Australian history, rising inflation adding to cost-of-living pressures, and historically low consumer sentiment, the 2022 survey sought to measure the perceptions and attitudes of 3,000 Australians in terms of their confidence about the future, about changes occurring in Australian society, and about the strength of Australia's democracy and the institutions that support it.

Concerns about the future

The 2022 survey showed a high level of concern held by Australians about the future:

- 90 per cent of Australians hold concerns about the future (41 per cent hold serious concerns; 49 per cent hold moderate concerns)
- more than 85 per cent of Australians in all age groups hold concerns about the future (86 per cent of 18 – 24-year-olds hold concerns about the future, ranging up to 94 per cent of 65-and-overs)
- the extent of concerns held about the future is similar (close to 90 per cent) in all household income groups, from the lowest income households to the highest income households
- similar high levels of concern are found in the 2022 survey across all states, all education levels and all segments regardless of marital status, parental status, religious affiliation, employment status or political affiliation.

Level of concern about the future



These results are consistent with the independent reporting from the Westpac-Melbourne Institute of historically low consumer confidence levels in mid-2022 – at 86 points (100 index points reflects a balance between optimism and pessimism in the community) – reflecting a prevailing pessimism among Australians about what the future might hold.

Given that this pessimism is broad-based, rather than being particular to specific income groups or specific states or specific age groups, it reflects a commonly held view that the future will bring challenges for Australian society and for all Australians regardless of their age, income, location or other lifestyle circumstances.

Specific issues driving high levels of concern about the future

The 2022 survey tested a number of possible factors that might be driving these concerns about the future.

These issues include:

- the extent of mental health issues and suicides in Australia – 88 per cent of respondents are concerned about this
- the exposure of young children and young teens to inappropriate online content – 83 per cent of respondents (whether they have children or grandchildren or not) are concerned about this
- fake news and media bias – 80 per cent of respondents see this as a concerning development
- COVID-19’s impact on Australians and on Australian society – 79 per cent of respondents are concerned about this and the long term impacts
- climate change and global warming – 77 per cent of respondents worry about the impacts of this now and for the future
- loss of personal face-to-face contact, replaced by more impersonal online interactions – 74 per cent of respondents see this as a concerning development
- political correctness increasingly limiting free speech – 66 per cent of respondents think this is a concerning development
- the risk of terrorist attacks in Australia – while perhaps less “top of mind” now than in the past, 60 per cent of respondents believe this is still a risk for the future.

SPECIFIC ISSUES	VERY CONCERNED	SOMEWHAT CONCERNED	NOT CONCERNED	CAN'T SAY	TOTAL CONCERNED
Climate change and global warming	38%	39%	22%	1%	77%
The risk of terrorist attacks in Australia	15%	45%	39%	2%	60%
Political correctness limiting free speech	30%	36%	31%	3%	66%
Exposure of children and young teens to inappropriate content online	41%	42%	14%	2%	83%
Less face to face people contact, replaced by more impersonal online interaction	31%	43%	25%	1%	74%
The incidence of mental health problems and suicides in Australia	46%	42%	10%	2%	88%
Fake news and media bias	39%	41%	18%	2%	80%
The impact of COVID-19 on Australia / Australian society	29%	50%	19%	1%	79%

Changes in levels of concern about the future since 2018

Not only do the majority of Australians show concerns about these developments and what they mean for the future, but some of these concerns have intensified in recent years, compared with the level of concern expressed in the 2018 survey. Concerns about:

- climate change are greater now (70 per cent concerned in 2018 has risen to 77 per cent concerned in 2022)
- exposure of children and teens to inappropriate online content have increased (71 per cent to 83 per cent)
- depersonalisation of human contact as a result of technology have increased (62 per cent to 74 per cent)
- the incidence of mental health and suicides have increased (80 per cent to 88 per cent)
- fake news and media bias have also increased (62 per cent to 80 per cent).

These factors might not fully explain the broad-ranging concerns held by the respondents about the future, but contributing factors certainly include concerns about climate change, specific technology impacts, fake news and political correctness clouding debate and the search for truth, and evidence of growing mental health issues among Australians.

6. CHANGES IN SOCIETY

The 2022 survey gave the opportunity to respondents to nominate both the positive and negative changes that they believe are occurring in Australian society.

POSITIVE CHANGES IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY*

Socially progressive changes	28%
Environmental awareness and action	6%
Technology as an enabler	5%
Greater focus on health	5%
Strong values and culture	21%
Economic changes	4%
Other-miscellaneous	32%
Can't say	0%
Total	102%

*multiple response

NEGATIVE CHANGES IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY*

Negative influence of social media and technology	13%
People behaving badly	35%
Social changes	27%
Economic changes	10%
Government	5%
Climate response	4%
Can't say	14%
Total	107%

*multiple response

The positive changes nominated by the total 2022 sample (summarised in this table) were:

- a perceived increase in social inclusion and acceptance of diversity – driven in part by the legalisation of same-sex marriage
- a perception that Australian society has become a more caring society – evidenced by the advent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and an increased social welfare investment by government during the COVID-19 pandemic
- greater environmental awareness and action
- the “enabling” aspects of technology, especially the internet and internet-connected devices
- Australians now being more health conscious, driven in part by an increased health and hygiene focus as a result of COVID-19, but also driven by greater awareness and open discussion of mental health as an issue
- the shift for some employees to work from home, the benefits it has delivered for them.

On the negative side, the concerning changes in Australian society (summarised in this table):

- people deliberately acting against the interests of others, or failing to fulfill their responsibilities properly:
 - violence and aggression, including crime and domestic violence
 - the “cancel culture”
 - the creation and dissemination of fake news
 - poor performance from politicians
 - some media channels and sources delivering poor-quality information
- societal changes regarded as negative:
 - drug and alcohol abuse
 - the rise of political correctness
 - increased social isolation (driven in part by COVID-19 restrictions)
- the impact of too much or too little immigration (Australians differ in their views on how much immigration is appropriate)
- the rise of mental health problems and suicides
- the negative impacts of social media and technology:
 - screen addiction
 - scams, trolls and predators
 - online bullying
 - exposure of minors to inappropriate online content
- negative economic changes
 - rising national (government and household) debt
 - welfare cost increases
 - inflation and cost of living increases
- negative consequences of too much power in the hands of government and health authorities during COVID-19:
 - loss of freedom of movement and loss of other democratic rights
 - other controls and imposts that shifted the balance of power towards a more autocratic (not democratic) style of government.

Broad agreement on the positive and negative changes in Australian society

While the 2022 survey showed that there are some differences of opinion on these changes – for example, younger respondents are more supportive than older respondents of some of the socially progressive changes – there is broad agreement among them that:

- the positive changes in Australian society have been driven by a stronger application of the core values of equality and caring
- the negative changes have been driven by causes such as:
 - technology
 - bad behaviour
 - poor leadership
 - economic pressures
- the things that divide, isolate or separate Australians from each other.

Concerns about the general direction in which Australian society is heading

The 2022 survey tried to quantify at least some of the factors that concern Australians about the direction in which Australian society is heading, with the following results:

- 90 per cent are concerned about the pressures created by cost of living increases, and with inflation increasing they worry about the impact of this on their future
- 80 per cent worry about the incidence of poverty, homelessness and economic disadvantage in Australia, created by low household incomes for some, and cost of living pressures that lead to poverty and even homelessness – a concern in a modern, relatively wealthy society
- 64 per cent worry about the amount and security of their personal details being held by government and big business
- 59 per cent worry about political correctness limiting free speech
- 55 per cent worry that the influence of social media on public opinion is not necessarily positive
- 54 per cent worry about the effectiveness of the police and courts in keeping communities safe
- 49 per cent worry about the polarisation of public opinion on divisive issues – sometimes remaining unresolved and deepening divisions.

While this is not a comprehensive list of possible factors driving concerns about Australian society and concerns about the future, it is indicative of the types of issues that concern Australians about where society is heading.

Australians' overall perception of whether Australian society, on balance, is a better or worse society now compared with 10 years ago:

- 15 per cent think that Australian society is a better society now
- 36 per cent think that Australian society has changed for the worse.

Given the opportunity to consider both positive and negative changes occurring in Australian society, the 2022 survey respondents gave an overall assessment of whether they think that Australian society overall is changing for the better or for the worse:

Better now	15%
Changing but not overall positive or negative	38%
Worse now	36%
No real change – the fundamentals are the same	6%
Can't say	5%
Total	100%

7. DEMOCRACY AND INSTITUTIONS

The survey asked a series of questions to gauge respondents' opinions about the strength of the system of democracy in Australia, and whether or not it is seen as having weakened.

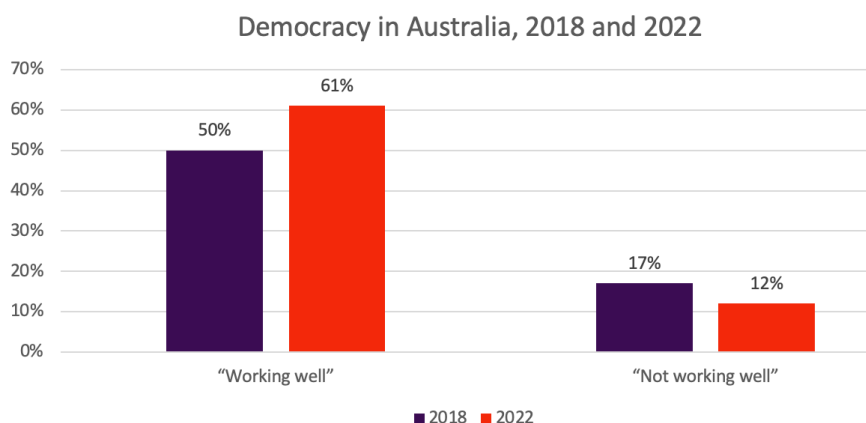
In its simplest form, democracy in Australia today refers to the ability of the people to participate freely in fair elections to decide who will form government.

At a broader level, democracy in Australia aims to foster a society that delivers freedom of choice, equal opportunity and quality of life, supported by key institutions in the areas of health care, education, aged care, welfare, justice and policing, and in the running of private businesses that create and sustain employment and incomes.

Australia's democracy is still seen as working well:

The survey results confirmed that:

- 61 per cent of respondents believe that democracy is “working well” in Australia, with only 12 per cent who believe it is “not working well”, and 27 per cent having mixed views or being unable to say
- this is a more positive view of the health of democracy in Australia in 2022 compared with the same measure taken in the 2018 survey.



Variable performance among the institutions that support democracy in Australia:

The institutions that support democracy in Australia are seen as working well or not working well to varying degrees.

The institutions seen to be working well by the largest percentages of Australians are:

- big business in Australia (48 per cent “working well”; 13 per cent “not working well”)
- the main charity groups (47 per cent “working well”; 14 per cent “not working well”)
- banks and other financial institutions (46 per cent “working well”; 19 per cent “not working well”)
- the public education system (40 per cent “working well”; 26 per cent “not working well”)
- the police, justice and courts systems (39 per cent “working well”; 29 per cent “not working well”).

Those institutions that are seen as working only moderately well are:

- the media (35 per cent “working well”; 32 per cent “not working well”)
- the Christian churches (28 per cent “working well”; 22 per cent “not working well”)
- other religious communities (25 per cent “working well”; 18 per cent “not working well”)
- unions in Australia (29 per cent “working well”; 20 per cent “not working well”).

Those institutions that do not receive a net positive rating are:

- the Australian welfare system (32 per cent “working well”; 32 per cent “not working well”)
- the public health and public hospital system (33 per cent “working well”; 40 per cent “not working well”).

Democracy is seen as still performing well, but with signs of weakening over time:

In the 2022 survey:

- 23 per cent of respondents believe that Australia’s democracy and some of the institutions that support it are weaker now than in the past
- however, nine per cent think it is stronger now, and 58 per cent think it is as strong now as in the past
- nine per cent could not offer an opinion on this.

A weakening of the institutions that support democracy can weaken democracy itself. While the prevailing view is that Australia’s democracy is alive and well with no evidence of decline, 23 per cent of respondents disagree and can see evidence of decline (for example, in problems in the health, education and welfare systems).

8. OUTLOOK AND CHALLENGES

Factors that challenge hope, trust and belonging

A healthy democracy fosters and depends on hope, trust and a sense of belonging in society. The 2022 survey tested whether these democratic ideals are being realised in Australian society by measuring the perceived prevalence and impact of factors that might challenge them.

A substantial majority of Australians believe that there is a range of prevalent negative influences on hope, trust and a sense of belonging, including:

- family breakdowns and domestic disharmony – 96 per cent believe this is prevalent, and 94 per cent believe it has negative outcomes
- illicit drug use and alcohol abuse is seen as prevalent by 94 per cent with 91 per cent seeing negative impacts
- isolation and loneliness are seen as prevalent by 94 per cent, with 90 per cent seeing negative impacts from this
- a growing rich/poor divide is also recognised by 92 per cent as prevalent, with 88 per cent seeing negative consequences from this divide.

To a lesser extent, but still by a large majority, other factors seen as prevalent and damaging to hope, trust and a sense of belonging were:

- institutional wrong-doing (88 per cent prevalent; 86 per cent negative impact)

- poor leadership in politics, business and society (87 per cent prevalent; 83 per cent negative impact)
- a decline in volunteering and community participation (85 per cent prevalent; 79 per cent negative impact)
- a decline in the role of religion in Australian society (70 per cent prevalent; 51 per cent negative impact).

Changes in the prevalence and impact of factors affecting hope, trust and a sense of belonging since 2018

Two factors showed an increase from 2018 to 2022 in their perceived prevalence in Australian society:

- family breakdowns and domestic disharmony (from 94 to 96 per cent)
- a growing rich/poor divide (from 90 to 92 per cent).

Of particular note is the finding that three factors recorded higher ratings (in 2022 compared with 2018) in terms of being seen as “very prevalent with big negative impacts”:

- family breakdowns and domestic disharmony (from 37 per cent to 42 per cent).
- a decline in volunteering (from 13 per cent to 16 per cent).
- a growing rich-poor divide (from 35 per cent to 45 per cent).

There were corresponding decreases for these factors in their “no impact” ratings, highlighting a growing public concern about families, community participation and a wealth divide – all factors that potentially can weaken community cohesion.



IN SUMMARY: THE FUTURE, CHANGES IN SOCIETY, DEMOCRACY AND INSTITUTIONS, OUTLOOK AND CHALLENGES

Overall, the findings show that:

- Australians are broadly pessimistic about the future, with 90 per cent holding concerns
- the concerns about the future range from global concerns (eg climate change), to national concerns (eg debt and inflation), to household concerns (eg cost of living) as well as concerns about how Australian society itself is changing in some ways.

While the respondents feel that some widely held values have come to the fore in recent years, in particular the values of equality and caring driving positive change to the benefit of minorities and socially disadvantaged Australians, there are significant concerns held about changes to Australian society driven by factors including some technology impacts, some of the impacts of social media, a growing rich/poor divide, fake news, political correctness and the problem of mental health issues in the community.

A further concern is that, while Australia’s democracy has asserted its functional effectiveness in recent years in the form of elections, some of the institutions that support Australia’s democratic way of life (the health, education and welfare systems) have been under pressure, due in part to COVID-19 – but pressures that go beyond that.

Twenty-three per cent of respondents believe that Australia’s democratic system and the institutions that support it are weaker now than in the past, facing pressures from factors that damage hope, trust and a sense of belonging. In particular, family breakdowns and a growing rich/poor divide are seen as contributing factors to a weakening of the society that democracy in Australia has tried to deliver.

9. PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The 2018 and 2022 surveys asked respondents about their personal circumstances, their current outlook and their aspirations.

Employment and job satisfaction

Among the respondents to the 2022 survey:

- 69 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women are in paid employment
- 78 per cent of working men have full-time jobs, and 22 per cent of working men are in part-time or casual jobs
- 60 per cent of working women are in full-time jobs, with 40 per cent of working women in part-time or casual jobs.

Workforce participation peaks in the 25 – 34-year-old age group and then declines.

	TOTAL WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION	PERCENTAGE OF FULL-TIME	PERCENTAGE OF PART-TIME OR CASUAL
18 – 24	83%	51%	49%
25 – 34	89%	79%	21%
35 – 49	80%	78%	22%
50 – 64	60%	72%	28%
65+	16%	69%	31%

The 2022 survey showed that:

- 67 per cent of those in paid employment find their employment to be satisfying, rewarding and meaningful. This compares with 58 per cent in 2018 who rated their employment that way
- 44 per cent see their jobs as “just a job to pay the bills, nothing more”, but this is down from 47 per cent who felt this way about their job in 2018
- job satisfaction is highest for full-time workers (70 per cent), followed by part-time workers (63 per cent) and lowest for casuals (54 per cent)
- job satisfaction increases with increasing age, from 62 per cent among 18 – 24s, ranging up to 77 per cent in the 65-and-over age group
- men show slightly higher job satisfaction (68 per cent) compared with women (66 per cent) but this is not a statistically significant difference
- job satisfaction is lowest (54 per cent) in the lowest household income group (under \$50,000 p.a.), higher in the middle-income groups from \$50,000 – \$200,000 p.a. (68 per cent – 69 per cent), and highest (72 per cent) in the highest income group (\$200,000+ p.a.)
- job satisfaction also varies somewhat according to education level, being lowest (65 per cent) among those with no post-secondary education, slightly higher among TAFE and university first degree graduates (67 per cent) and highest among higher degree holders (69 per cent).

Overall, the job satisfaction findings suggest that employment in 2022 is seen as more meaningful and satisfying than in 2018. This may be influenced by a sense of purpose that jobs acquire during a pandemic.

Job satisfaction clearly correlates with whether the work is full-time, part-time or casual. Job satisfaction also correlates with age (increases with age) and is higher if incomes are higher.

Home ownership status

The 2022 survey shows that:

- 59 per cent of respondents own their own home – no change from home ownership incidence in 2018 (59 per cent)
- there has been a shift towards more people needing (or opting to use) a mortgage to own a home.

	2018	2022
Own their home with a mortgage	29%	34%
Own their home freehold	30%	25%
Total home ownership	59%	59%

The incidence of home ownership in Australia shows the following pattern in the 2022 survey:

- increasing with age, from 19 per cent among 18 – 24-year-olds, to 73 per cent among those aged 65 and over
- no differences between males and females
- increasing with increasing household incomes, from 47 per cent in the lowest income group (under \$50,000 p.a.) to 78 per cent in the highest income group (\$200,000+ p.a.)
- increasing as a function of education level, from 49 per cent among those with no post-secondary education, to 72 per cent among those with higher university degrees
- highest among married couples (81 per cent), followed by de facto couples (45 per cent) and lowest among singles (never married) (25 per cent)
- higher among those with children (70 per cent) compared with those with no children (37 per cent)
- highest among full-time employees (64 per cent), followed by part-time employees (55 per cent), and lowest among casuals (38 per cent).

Australians have taken advantage of the low interest rates that were in place up until the earlier part of the 2022 year to buy property. This is evidenced by the fact that (based on the 2018 and 2022 survey results):

- 10 per cent of 18 – 24-year-olds in 2018 had a mortgage, but this has increased to 15 per cent of 18 – 24-year-olds with a mortgage in 2022
- there are similar increases in those with a mortgage between 2018 and 2022 among 25 – 34-year-olds (38 per cent → 43 per cent), 35 – 49-year-olds (45 per cent → 50 per cent) and 50–64-year-olds (29 per cent → 39 per cent).

Despite this, the percentage of Australians able to afford a home sits at 59 per cent, unchanged since 2018 even after a period of record low interest rates on home loans.

The factors that correlate with housing affordability (as measured by those who own a home versus those who do not) include: age, income, education level, and the nature of employment (full time versus part-time/casual).

Aspirations for the future

The 2022 survey shows that respondents have high aspirations for their future:

- **On home ownership:**
 - 41 per cent of current owners of freehold homes would like to buy a better home
 - 100 per cent of current homeowners with a mortgage would like to be mortgage-free
 - 91 per cent of those who do not own a home would like to own a home one day.
- **On marriage:**
 - 66 per cent of those who are not currently married or in a de facto relationship would like to get married or at least have a steady partner at some point in their future
 - 78 per cent of those who are single and have never been in a relationship would like this
 - 55 per cent of those who are “single again” would like a new relationship.
- **On having children:**
 - 62 per cent of those without children would like to have children at some stage in the future
 - 27 per cent of those who already have children would like to have more children
 - these figures combine to produce a total of 88 per cent of respondents who hold the aspiration of having children or more children.
- **On gaining new skills through education or training:**
 - 68 per cent of respondents would like to receive further training, education or skills development.
- **On getting a better job:**
 - 62 per cent of respondents aspire to get a better job.
- **On achieving financial independence** – an almost universal aspiration among the respondents, with 94 per cent aspiring to achieve this:
 - 97 per cent among respondents aged 18 – 49
 - 94 per cent among those aged 50 – 64
 - 85 per cent among those aged over 65.

Different aspiration levels as a function of demographic variables

- **The aspiration to own a better home among existing homeowners:**
 - decreases with increasing age, from 93 per cent among 18 – 24-year-olds to 29 per cent among those aged 65 and over
 - increases with increasing income, from 34 per cent among those on household incomes under \$50,000 p.a., up to 49 – 52 per cent among those with household incomes of \$120,000 – \$200,000 p.a. and above
 - is not statistically significantly different between males (43 per cent) and females (41 per cent).

Unsurprisingly, the aspiration (among those with a mortgage) to own a home mortgage-free is universal in all age groups and in all other segments.

- **The aspiration to own a home one day (among non-owners):**
 - is high in all age groups, but decreases with increasing age from 99 per cent among 18 – 24-year-olds to 75 per cent among 65-and-overs
 - is similar for males (90 per cent) and females (92 per cent)
 - is high in all income groups, but a little lower in the lowest income group (85 per cent) and highest in the highest income group (100 per cent).
- **The aspiration to have more children (among those who already have children):**
 - decreases with increasing age, from 84 per cent in the 18 – 24 age group to four per cent in the 65-and-over age group
 - is higher among males (30 per cent) than females (24 per cent) although, in the youngest age groups, 91 per cent of females aged 18 – 24 with children would like more children, and 69 per cent of females aged 25 – 34 with children would like to have more
 - increases as a function of household income, from 12 per cent in the lowest income households to 38 per cent in the \$120,000 – \$200,000 p.a. income range

- is higher among those who actively practise a faith (34 per cent), relative to those who follow a faith but not actively (28 per cent) and non-religious people (22 per cent).
- **The aspiration to gain new skills:**
 - decreases with increasing age, from 94 per cent among 18 – 24-year-olds to 29 per cent among those aged 65 and over
 - is a little higher among males (70 per cent) than females (65 per cent)
 - increases with household income up to \$200,000 p.a., from 51 per cent in the lowest income group to 75 – 78 per cent in the middle-to-upper income groups
 - increases as a function of education level already achieved, from 58 per cent among those with no post-secondary education, to 74 – 75 per cent for university graduates
 - is highest among those in full-time employment (83 per cent), then part-time and casual (75 – 76 per cent), and lowest among non-working respondents (44 per cent).
- **The aspiration to get a better job:**
 - is higher for those in full-time employment (81 per cent) or in casual employment (79 per cent), a little lower for part-time workers (73 per cent), and much lower among those not in employment (32 per cent)
 - decreases with increasing age, from 94 per cent among 18 – 24-year-olds, to 11 per cent among 65-and-overs
 - is a little higher for males (64 per cent) compared with females (60 per cent)
 - increases with increasing household income, from 17 per cent in the lowest income group to 45 per cent in the highest income group.
- **The aspiration of achieving financial independence:**
 - is highest among 18 – 49-year-olds (97 per cent), but is lower among 50 – 64-year-olds (94 per cent) and those aged over 65 (85 per cent)
 - is a little higher among males (95 per cent) than females (92 per cent)
 - is higher in all income groups but a little lower in the lowest income group (89 per cent), increasing with increasing income to 97 per cent in the highest income group.

Confidence that these aspirations will be achieved

An important finding from the 2022 survey is that not all respondents who aspire to certain goals are confident that they will achieve their goals, as summarised in the table below:

SPECIFIC ASPIRATION	ASPIRE TO THIS	CONFIDENT THAT IT WILL BE ACHIEVED	NOT CONFIDENT THAT IT WILL BE ACHIEVED
Current freehold home owners wanting a better home	41%	34%	66%
Current mortgage holders wanting to be mortgage free	100%	74%	26%
Current non home owners wanting their first home	91%	47%	53%
Those not married or de facto wanting marriage or a steady relationship	66%	38%	62%
The desire to have children among those with no children	62%	55%	45%
The desire to have more children, among those with children	27%	35%	65%
Gaining new skills	67%	45%	55%
Getting a better job	62%	50%	50%
Achieving financial independence	94%	45%	55%

The level of confidence about achieving these aspirations differs as a function of age, education level and income.

Deferring marriage, having children or buying a home

A key finding from the 2022 survey is that, while some respondents who aspire to get married, have children or buy a home are deferring them, the incidence of deferral is no greater in 2022 than it was in 2018.

The aim of including this topic in the 2022 survey was to determine whether COVID-19 or other issues emerging between 2018 and 2022 were having an impact on Australians' pursuit of their goals. The results clearly show that Australians are not deferring the pursuit of their goals in the current climate, any more than was the case in 2018.

The personal outlook of Australians in 2022

The table below shows how Australians see themselves in 2022 compared with 2018.

PERCENTAGE OF "DESCRIBES ME VERY WELL OR QUITE WELL"	2018	2022
I feel that the best days in my life lie ahead of me, not behind me	41%	42%
I feel financially secure	39%	33%
Strong family ties are very important to me	73%	76%
My relationships with the people I care about are strong and positive	71%	77%
Belonging to a community group, sporting group or interest group is very important to me	34%	27%
I feel safe where I live	62%	79%
I am usually in good health	51%	62%



In summary, respondents reported:

- no change in confidence about their own future
- feeling increased financial pressure now
- being closer to family and friends
- being less engaged with the broader community
- feeling safer
- feeling healthier.

While the causes of these changes were not explored in the survey directly, it is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic drew friends and family together for security, companionship, support and re-assurance, with a commensurate withdrawal from broader social engagement due to both the mandated restrictions on social movement and activities, and the perceived health risks of mixing with strangers in crowded settings.

An important finding here is that the family emerged in the COVID-19 pandemic as an extremely important source of friendship, company, support, confidence and security.

In the 2022 survey, the most influential people in Australians' lives were identified as:

- parents (65 per cent)
- spouses (37 per cent)
- grandparents (18 per cent)
- siblings (12 per cent).

Close friends (15 per cent) feature as well, but the influential people list is dominated by the important role of family members.



OVERALL COMMENT ON THE PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND ASPIRATIONS OF AUSTRALIANS IN 2022

Summarising the findings on the personal circumstances, current outlook and aspirations of Australians, the survey results show that:

- the institution of the family not only came to the fore in the COVID-19 period, as a source of security, support, comfort and company at a time when people were not allowed to (or chose not to) engage in broader social contact. Other results show that a high proportion of young Australians share the aspirations of older cohorts and want to get married, have children and own a home (ie start a family)
- despite a number of concerns, including concerns about COVID-19 and its impacts being here to stay for the long term, Australians hold strong aspirations and are pushing ahead with their attempts to achieve their goals. The 2022 survey shows that the incidence of deferring marriage, having children or buying a home is no greater in 2022 than it was in 2018
- although aspirations are high, many Australians are not confident that they will achieve their goals. For some respondents, low levels of income and education can be barriers to achieving their goals.

10. BELIEFS AND VALUES

Respondents were asked to nominate the values that they believe are most important to them. Topics covered under this heading in the 2022 survey included:

- How important are different value sets to Australians in 2022, and which are the most important value sets?
- Do Australians share the same values, and do the most important values endure over time?
- Do the values held correlate with religious affiliation or with the number of children that Australians have?

How important are different value sets to Australians in 2022?

The value sets tested in the 2022 survey were:

- caring for family and friends
- being socially and environmentally responsible
- religious values, belief in God and the power of prayer
- living a moral life and trying to be a good person
- working hard and applying self-discipline to achieve goals
- self-sacrifice and putting the needs of others ahead of one's own self-interest
- freedom to pursue one's own goals and dreams
- inclusion, social justice, tolerance and diversity
- fairness and treating people equally
- looking after oneself first, because others can't be relied upon to look after one's own interests.

The value sets that were rated as extremely or very important by the highest percentage of Australians are:

- caring for family and friends (89 per cent of respondents rated this as extremely or very important to them)
- trying to be a good person (82 per cent)
- fairness and treating people equally (80 per cent)
- working hard and applying self-discipline (71 per cent).

The other value sets were rated as extremely or very important by a smaller majority of Australians, with the exception of "religion, God and prayer":

- freedom to pursue goals and dreams (67 per cent)
- social and environmental responsibility (62 per cent)
- inclusion, social justice, tolerance, diversity (60 per cent)
- self-sacrifice for the sake of others (54 per cent)
- taking care of one's own needs (53 per cent)
- religion, God, prayer (27 per cent).

These findings reinforce findings in the survey on other topics showing that:

- positive changes in Australian society in recent years are seen by Australians as having been driven by the application of the values of caring and equality
- the findings on the importance of value sets also confirm that having a strong work ethic is regarded by a majority of Australians as an important value. Confirmation that this value is enduring in Australian society is that it is rated as more important by the youngest Australians (18 – 24-year-olds) compared with all other age groups.

Do religious people or people with children hold different values or place relatively more or less importance on specific values?

Broadly, the value sets tested received higher importance ratings (extremely or very important) from those who actively practise a religious faith.

Those who actively practise their religious faith tend to hold stronger values (relative to those who do not practise their faith or have no religion) in the following areas:

- caring for family and friends
- social and environmental responsibility
- religion, God, prayer
- morality and living a good life
- working hard and self-discipline
- inclusion, social justice, tolerance, diversity
- fairness and equality.

For those who follow no religion, the value sets that were rated most highly (extremely or very important) were (in order of priority):

- caring for family and friends
- fairness and equality
- morality and living a good life.

Those with children (compared with those with no children) hold stronger values in the areas of:

- caring for family and friends
- religion, God, prayer
- morality and living a good life
- self-sacrifice.

Do Australians share the same values to the same degree, and do the important values endure over time?

The fact that a majority of Australians share the most important values supports the idea that Australian society is founded on “shared values”. However, there are differences and similarities amongst respondents in terms of the importance that they place on different value sets.

In broad terms:

- some values, especially values relating to caring for family and friends, a strong work ethic, and equality and freedom, are all enduring values that are regarded as important across all age groups
- values that drive self-interest and the pursuit of personal goals tend to assume a higher priority among young single respondents but are lower in priority once marriage and children come along, with caring for family, self-sacrifice and promoting morality increasing in importance for those with children.

The enduring nature of the most important values in Australian society is also demonstrated by the fact that the 2018 and 2022 surveys recorded little difference in the importance of the values tested in both surveys, with one exception: an increase in the importance of the value of self-sacrifice for the common good – something that Australians were asked to do during the COVID-19 pandemic to try to contain its spread.

The survey results on this topic also confirm the central place of family to Australian society in 2022, as shown by the importance that respondents place upon it, and the role that families coming closer together played during COVID-19 to provide support, friendship, comfort and assurance.

Conclusion

A key observation from the survey results is the enduring nature of the values that underpin Australian society, including values such as caring for family and friends, trying to live a moral life and being a good person, treating others fairly and equitably, and hard work and self-discipline. Despite many challenges to hope, trust and a sense of belonging, and despite the proliferation of ideas and opinions in mainstream and social media that question traditional values, the core values held by Australians remain strong, across all age groups.

The 2022 survey presents a picture of Australians who were “shaken but not broken” by COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns, turning to their core values of family and caring in order to cope, but a little unsettled by their loss of freedoms and the lost opportunities over two years, and worried about what the future might hold.

The results of the questions using the Harvard Flourishing Measure confirm other results in the 2022 survey, namely that the highest level of flourishing is based on close relationships and acting morally (trying to promote good even in difficult circumstances), but the lowest level of flourishing is in the areas of personal health and financial and material stability.

Despite the findings of the ABS census data and common assumptions to the contrary, religious belief still remains strong, and religious practices like attendance at religious services and prayer are holding up. However, the visibility of religion as an “above the line” institution in Australian society is low; in part because of other competing social influences and the appeal of secular ideas, in part because of the historical response of the Catholic and other Christian churches to sexual abuse, and in part because of various “conflict of rights” issues that tend to be resolved in favour of civil rights that clash with religious beliefs.

Human rights continue to enjoy high levels of in-principle support, and there has been very little movement in the level of support for various rights between 2018 and 2022. This suggests that Australians’ support for rights is quite enduring over time, notwithstanding the “softness” that can lead to the level of support for rights changing depending on the particular issue and the circumstances in which questions of rights – and the conflict between them – arise.

Confidence about democracy in Australia is stronger in 2022 than it was in 2018, but some of the institutions which support it are seen as weakening over time. While Australians see the positive changes of recent years arising from the importance of caring and equality as key social values, they are also concerned about a number of negative changes and how these are diminishing hope, trust and a sense of belonging for many people.

The aspiration of Australians to achieve a range of life goals remains strong, with evidence from the 2022 survey that young Australians continue to aspire to the same goals as their parents and grandparents (marriage, having children, home ownership, financial independence, secure and satisfying full-time employment). COVID-19 has not deterred Australians from pursuing their goals, but confidence that they will achieve them is not shared by all.

Despite concerns about the public face and influence of religion being in decline, those who follow a religion – especially those who practise their faith – produce the most positive and optimistic results in the survey, with their religious values giving their lives clear behavioural guidelines, and their belief in God giving them greater confidence and a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

Overall, the survey findings paint an important picture of enduring human qualities in the values, aspirations and beliefs which Australians share. These qualities help to sustain hope, trust and a sense of belonging in a diverse and complex society navigating rapid change and many challenges. We should be encouraged by this, but not take it for granted. A life in common which enables everyone to flourish is the work of generations. To achieve this, we need not only to see clearly the problems confronting us. We also need to own the good things in our society as strengths, and build on them with confidence.

The PM Glynn Institute was established by Australian Catholic University (ACU) in 2016 as a public policy think tank to analyse issues of concern to the Catholic Church and the wider Australian community. Its focus is public policy for the common good.
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