

State of Mind

AUSTRALIA'S MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION



Methodology



Digital Qualitative

A one week online qualitative community comprising 26 respondents spanning various generations.

 The process was designed to capture deep, diverse perspectives on mental wellbeing across different age groups.

Follow up in-depth discussions were facilitated through four 1.5-hour online focus group session with selected participants from the online community, allowing us to delve into the most significant insights and personal stories shared during the initial discussions.



Quantitative Survey

Following the qualitative exploration, a large-scale quantitative survey was conducted to validate and expand on the findings.

This survey engaged a nationally representative sample of 2,565 respondents aged 18 and older, ensuring a comprehensive view of the mental wellbeing landscape across Australia.

The survey, which lasted 20 minutes per participant, was fielded from the 11th to the 23rd of February 2025, providing robust, timely data on the state of mental wellbeing nationwide.





Acknowledgements

This study was conducted in collaboration with **Medibank Australia** and served as the cornerstone for Medibank's "*Can We Talk*" campaign, executed in partnership with News Australia in 2025.

The insights derived from this research have been enriched by the contributions of **Amanda Gordon AM**, former President & Honorary Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society. Ms

Gordon is currently the Principal Clinical Psychologist, Clinical Director, and Founder of Armchair Psychology in Sydney, Australia.





CHAPTER 1

The State of Play



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For many, navigating Australian life feels harder and more intense than ever before

We are living through a time of **constant information**, **pervasive uncertainty**, and **emotional overload**. From global crises and economic pressures to social comparison online, we're surrounded by inputs that amplify our stress and shape how we interpret our own emotional states.



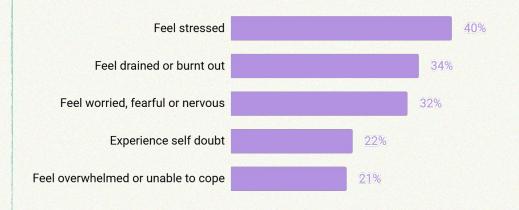
of Australians perceive that navigating life today involves **a wider and more intense set of challenges** than those faced by previous generations.





Australians are experiencing a high frequency of stress and emotional struggle

On a weekly basis (once a week or more often) Australians...







Younger Australians are particularly vulnerable

Young Australians, aged 18-35 years old, are the **least confident** in managing their mental wellbeing, with one in three (31%) saying they aren't confident, compared to 18% of over 35s.

They also report **higher rates of feeling unprepared** (31% vs 21% of over 35s) when approached by someone wanting to discuss mental health, citing a lack of knowledge about mental health issues as a primary barrier.





More awareness, more language, but also more noise.

Today, Australians are more attuned than ever to the signs of mental distress, having made significant strides in reducing stigma and improving awareness.

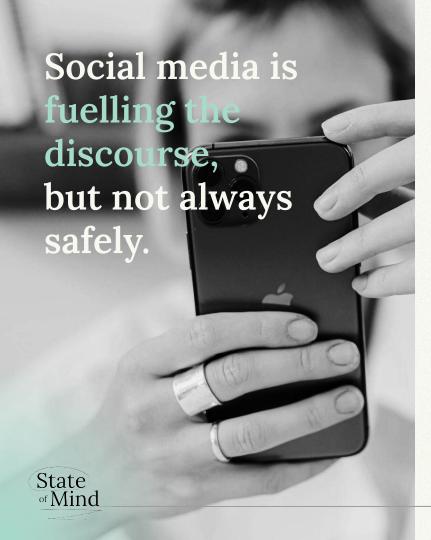
But with increased visibility comes unintended consequences.

We need to be careful not to pathologise every feeling. It's natural to have a bad day and fluctuate in mood. We need to be mindful we aren't talking ourselves into a crisis.

-Amanda Gordon AM, Clinical Psychologist









of Australians now rely on social media as a primary source for mental health information, outpacing healthcare professionals (31%). This is even higher among 18-35 year olds, with 74% claiming social media to be their primary source vs 21% health care professional.

And while access to information is empowering, it can also be overwhelming.



18-35 year olds say the mental health content on these platforms makes them feel worse (the majority or some of the time)



THE RESULT?

We're consuming more, but not always coping better.

This paradox leaves a generation **overexposed**, feeling under-supported, and unsure how to act.

We are better than ever at recognising the signals, but we need to get better at knowing the appropriate response.





Talking helps, but silence is common.



of Australians say they **feel better** after discussing their mental wellbeing.

A culture of casual, consistent check ins builds trust and resilience. Those who **talk regularly** are up to...



less likely to experience frequent feelings of stress, burnout, loneliness, or self-doubt



Have wanted to reach out to talk to someone but didn't



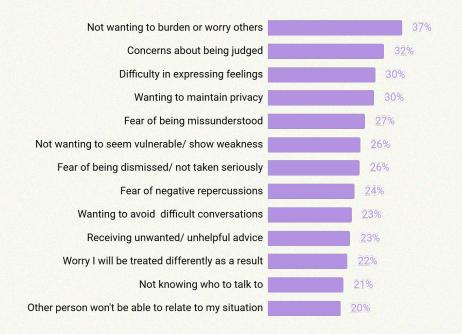


Despite the clear benefits of talking, there are many perceived barriers.

Many Australians still stay silent due to concerns about burdening others, not knowing what to say, or fearing judgment.

Many of the most prominent barriers to conversation are based on the response or reaction of others.

Q. What are the barriers to talking about mental wellbeing?







Stigma and scepticism continue to make mental wellbeing harder to talk about, even as awareness grows.



Of Australians believe that society is becoming less resilient.



Of Australians agree that mental health issues can still be perceived as a sign of weakness or failure by others.

This sentiment is consistent across all ages and demographics.



Believe that some people use mental wellbeing as an excuse to avoid tasks, reflecting a level of misunderstanding and scepticism regarding the legitimacy of mental wellbeing challenges.





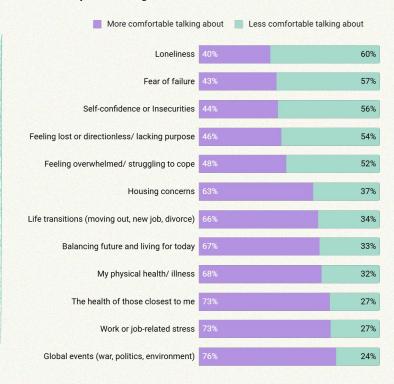
Silent struggles are real yet sit below the surface

There's a hierarchy to what we feel safe discussing. Tangible issues like work stress, physical health, or major life events are openly acknowledged. But deeper, quieter struggles, like low self-confidence, fear of failure, loneliness, or a lack of purpose, often go unspoken.

We call these "silent struggles" and they are just as real.

These internal battles don't always look like crisis, but they can chip away at resilience. And because they're harder to name, they're harder to raise.

Thinking about your own mental wellbeing, which topics are you more or less comfortable talking about?







Yet, these silent struggles aren't new

Our parents, our grandparents, our peers, many have navigated these same emotional landscapes.

What's missing is a **shared language** and **permission to talk**. By initiating those conversations, we create opportunities for connection and the sharing of collective wisdom.





Turning awareness into action starts close to home.

We don't need to wait for systems to catch up; change begins with us. The gap isn't just in services or support; it's in everyday moments we let pass by.

When we create space to listen, to check in often, and to speak openly, we make mental wellbeing a shared responsibility, not a silent struggle

So what can we do about it, at home, at work and in our social circles?





CHAPTER 2

Home

Our safest space and sometimes our strangest silence





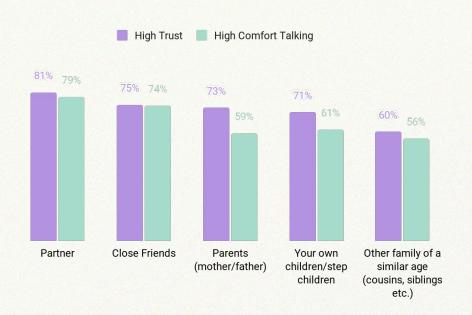
Home is our emotional anchor

Home is the place we return to for comfort, safety, and support. For many Australians, this is true.

- Family and relationships are critical as a positive impact on our overall mental wellbeing, having the biggest impact overall.
- Home is overwhelmingly seen as the safest space to discuss mental wellbeing, with 74% of Australians agreeing with this sentiment.







Inside these walls, our partners and family members often become our lifelines.

Our closest relationships within the home are our biggest support pillars.

- Partners, children, parents, or other family of a similar age are the people we are most comfortable talking to about mental wellbeing. With close friends the only other relationship that comes close.
- A significant 49% of Australians talk to their partners about mental wellbeing at least once a week, with 19% doing so daily, the most frequent of any relationship.
- Trust in these same relationships underscores the vital role family plays in emotional support.





But home isn't always a haven.

Sometimes, even those closest to us don't know how to respond. It's often not about a lack of care, but about needing the right tools and language to support.

1in3

(32%) say their parents have responded unhelpfully when they've opened up. 1in4

(28%) say their partners have responded unhelpfully when they've opened up.





And when stress enters a household, it doesn't always stay contained.

We often absorb each other's moods and

mirror each other's struggles.



Report a **partner's bad day** as a personal stressor, highlighting how closely linked wellbeing can be within a household. This rises to **one in four** for Millennials.

And when things get hard, many retreat inward

Individuals who are feeling stressed or have poorer mental wellbeing, are significantly more likely to **withdraw and stay at home**, potentially concentrating negative emotional states within the household and increasing the likelihood or intensity of emotional contagion.





This is the quiet crisis happening behind closed doors.

Home is the place where conversations about mental wellbeing are wanted most, but don't always happen. Not because we don't care, but because we're afraid. Afraid to burden. Afraid to be misunderstood. Afraid to be judged.

But this silence can be broken, and the home returned to a haven.

So what can we do?





1. Strengthen conversations at home

Consistency is key

Foster a culture of casual, consistent check ins. Talk about your day, share highs and lows. This "prepares the ground rules" for deeper, more significant discussions as and when they arise.

- 73% say casual chats make deeper conversations easier
- Ask. Open-ended questions are twice as effective.

Build emotional safety

Emotional safety means people feel safe to speak without fear of judgment or dismissal. It starts with how we respond. Listen before you speak. Validate before you solve. Meet feelings with empathy.

- Listening (60%) without judgment (57%) are the top priority responses for all Australians.
- Show empathy (55%) and validate feelings (51%).

Don't jump to solve

While some, particularly young people, appreciate advice, it lands better when it's invited. Solutions are a lower priority when compared to listening and understanding.

- Shifting the mindset towards being present rather than solving problems can reduce the perceived burden of conversations
- Foster an environment where all individuals are "stakeholders" in finding their solutions.





2. Recognise the early signs

Don't wait for a crisis, tuning into the small shifts can help know when real support is needed.

Fatigue or trouble sleeping

If someone's running on empty, always tired, low on energy, or finding it hard to get out of bed, it could be more than just a busy week.

- 41% of Australians say low energy is one of the first signs something's not right.
- 40% report trouble sleeping.
- 16% find it hard to even get out of bed when their mental wellbeing dips.

Emotional volatility

Big emotions bubbling to the surface can be a sign someone's struggling, especially if they're not usually this reactive.

- 35% of Australians report being more irritable when their mental health is low.
- Others notice feeling unusually emotional (33%), angry or frustrated (31%), or caught in sudden mood swings (26%).
- This is especially common among Millennials and Gen Z.

Pulling away or going quiet

Withdrawal isn't always about wanting space sometimes, for many, especially younger Australians, it's a coping mechanism.

- Gen Z is more than twice as likely as older generations to retreat and stay home when they're struggling.
- You might notice someone cancelling plans, going quiet in group chats, or spending more time alone than usual.,

Cognitive fatigue

When mental fatigue sets in, things that used to be simple suddenly feel hard.

- 39% of people say they lose motivation when their mental health dips.
- Others struggle with focus (22%) or find themselves procrastinating more.
- 17% say even small decisions feel overwhelming.

Physical and behavioural signs

Mental health doesn't just affect the mind, it can show up physically, too.

- 22% (particularly Gen X)
 experience more
 headaches, muscle tension,
 or other stress-related
 symptoms.
- 15% of younger Australians say their eating habits change.
- 17% report putting less effort into their appearance or letting daily routines (like tidying up) slide.





3. Take positive action together

Encourage habits that support wellbeing

Helpful behaviours: These behaviours are common among people who report above-average mental wellbeing

- Movement & nature Walking, driving (35%), and exercise (35%) and being outdoors in nature (31%) are the most common actions taken with those who report better mental wellbeing.
- Healthy eating & sleep 22% Strong predictors of better wellbeing. Avoid comfort eating, instead focus on healthy choices to feel better mentally and physically.
- Reduce withdrawal Staying connected and active improves resilience, don't leave connections until their needed.
- Do something you enjoy Spending time on a hobby or passion (24%) or even watching a favourite film or tv show (23%) can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing.
- Be present Mindfully, engage with your surroundings. Being present can quiet anxiety and build emotional clarity.

Lead by example, especially as a parent

Younger generations want to talk, but they often wait for permission. There are some powerful parent cues to harness:

- 80% believe parents should initiate the conversation.
- When parents share their own vulnerabilities, children are more likely to open up.
- 47% of young people wish they could talk to their parents more, and 1 in 3 parents feel the same.





CHAPTER 3

Work

From pressure to support





Just as home can be both a haven and a source of strain, so too is the workplace.

For many Australians, work is more than a paycheck. Work is where we show up every day, where purpose is shaped, identity is formed, and, increasingly, where stress takes hold.





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For many the weight of work has an impact on their mental wellbeing

For some, the structure of work provides stability. But for many others, the workplace has become a source of sustained pressure, performance anxiety, and emotional exhaustion.



Over half of Australians (54%) who face **intense workloads and deadline**s say it has a significant impact on their mental health.



And these pressures are anything but rare, more than half **experience them frequently**.



One in three full time workers say they **feel burnt out** on a weekly basis, 43% say they feel **stressed.**





While the demands of work can feel universal, they're far from evenly distributed.

Higher-income workers are disproportionately affected

- 36% report work or job related stress as a significant impact (vs 16% lower income).
- 28% report feeling overburdened or lacking downtime (vs 12% lower-income).
- **25%** cite high pressure from **deadlines** and **workload** (vs 5% lower-income).
- 43% feel stressed weekly (vs 35% lower income).

Younger Australians at the start of their careers are also more impacted

42% of Gen Z and **35**% of Millennials say that work, study or job-related stress have a significant negative impact on their mental wellbeing (compared 27% of Gen X and 11% Boomers).







Even when work isn't overwhelming, financial stress is a constant undercurrent impacting how people feel, focus, and perform.

For many employees, especially younger or lower-income workers, the stress of bills, rent, or financial goals is carried silently into every meeting, shift, or screen.

48%

of Australians say money and financial concerns have the most significant impact on their mental wellbeing. The number one concern overall. 48%

The same percentage, 48% say that **financial security** positively influences their mental health



While we're learning to open up at home, many Australians still hesitate in the workplace.

Work environments can make some of the barriers to discussing mental health feel more acute.

- 25% of high income earners say that wanting to appear in control is a barrier to talking about mental wellbeing.
- 37% express concerns about being judged.
- 25% worry they will be treated differently as a result.





This discomfort reveals something deeper, that workplace culture is still catching up to the reality of modern mental wellbeing.



of Australians believe that **businesses are doing enough** to support the mental wellbeing
of Australians.

So what can we do?





1. Create culture not policy

While most workplaces now have mental health policies in place, they're often undermined by the day to day culture.

- Although 62% of Australians feel comfortable taking a mental health day, this comfort drops among Gen Z (60%) and Boomers (53%), the very groups who may need different types of support.
- Furthermore, 15% of full time workers say they
 have received a negative response from a
 colleague when discussing their mental wellbeing.

This suggests that policies may exist, but they're not always modelled or embraced in practice.

What can be done

Work towards a workplace where emotional safety is not a poster on the wall, but a daily, visible behaviour.

- Encourage leaders to model the right behaviours: speak openly, go first, and take time off.
- Shift from reactive support to prevention: embed regular casual check ins, not just EAPs.
- Build emotionally safe cultures where vulnerability isn't penalised, but respected and normalised.
- Establish a culture of casual, ordinary
 conversations: These aren't necessarily "deep"
 conversations about mental health, but rather regular,
 organic interactions that allow colleagues to gauge
 when something may be wrong.





2. Address the mental load at the desk and beyond

Workplace stress isn't always about the workload. It's the pressure to perform, the constant availability, and the mental residue that follows us home.

- 1 in 10 (11%) full-time workers say commuting alone negatively impacts their mental wellbeing.
- 1 in 5 (21%) of full-time workers say they feel lost, directionaless or lacking in purpose. This rises to 1 in 3 (35%) for casual or contract workers.

What can be done

Shift the focus from performance to presence. Recognise that wellbeing isn't just about workload, it's about how people feel at work.

- Expand the view of wellbeing beyond hours and output: consider hybrid stress, commuting strain, and always on expectations.
- Measure wellbeing beyond KPIs: factor in emotional energy, fatigue, and burnout risk.
- Acknowledge that people don't just want balance, they want meaning. Work is life, not a break from it.
- Offer flexibility and recovery time to offset emotional fatigue.





3. Recognise and reward without burnout

Work can boost wellbeing when it feels meaningful, offering a balance of recognition and rest. Feeling valued and having space to recharge both play a vital role in positively impacting mental wellbeing.

- 32% say achievement and recognition positively impact mental health,
- 49% of workers say holidays positively impact mental health, rising to 54% among high-income earners.

What can be done

Reward in ways that replenish, not deplete and build daily engagement through purpose, connection and recognition.

- Don't just chase the paycheck: Higher pay often brings higher pressure. Before saying yes, weigh the lifestyle cost, not just the salary boost
- Upweight the value of meaningful engagement: Work should not just be about a paycheck; it needs to offer meaningful engagement purpose, learning, and connection.
- Treat time off (including holidays) as essential, not earned or optional
- Redefine success as sustainable contribution, not constant hustle. Reward effort in ways that fuel pride, not pressure.





CHAPTER 4

Social Circles

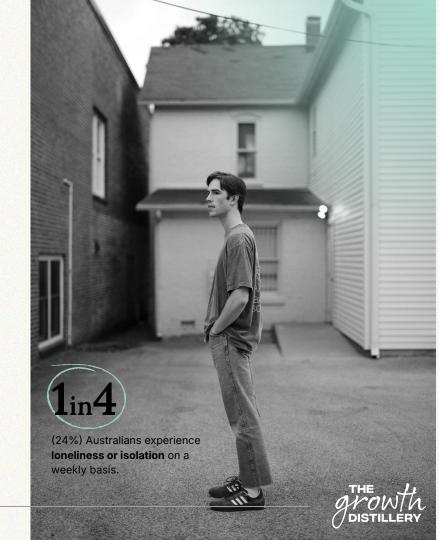
Connected but now always close.



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We're more connected than ever, yet many of us still feel alone.

While many Australians feel supported by friends and family, the conversations that truly support our mental health happen less often, and with fewer people than we think. Despite our digitally connected lives, loneliness and emotional disconnection remains widespread in Australia.





Emotional support networks are smaller than they seem

We may have people around us, but far fewer we feel comfortable enough to open up to. Australians have more people they can rely on for support, but fewer they feel comfortable opening up to about mental health.

 Worryingly, nearly half (45%) of those with poorer mental wellbeing say their support networks have shrunk in the last five years.



4.3 is the average number of people Aussies **turn to for support** in times of need.



3.7 is the average number of people they feel comfortable talking to about their mental wellbeing.



This drops to **2.8** people for those with **below average mental wellbeing.**





A significant number of Australians feel they have no one to talk to.



Half (51%) of Australians have wanted to reach out to someone to discuss their mental health or wellbeing but didn't

1in10

Almost one in ten Australians say they have no one they feel comfortable talking to about their mental wellbeing.

1in4

Among those who describe their mental health as "very poor," only one in four feel they can **speak openly** about it.



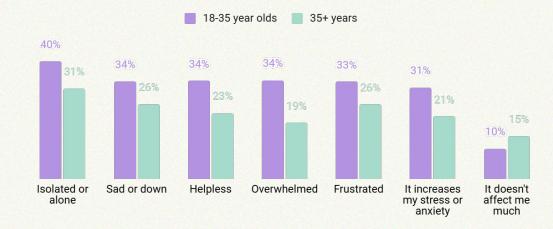


When we can't talk, the emotional toll is real, particularly for younger Australians.

When people want to, but can't talk about their mental wellbeing, the emotional impact is clearly felt, with younger generations particularly likely to experience a negative impact. Only 10% of young people say it doesn't affect them.

Younger CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) Australians are even more likely to feel frustrated (40%) and helpless (38%).

Q. How does it make you feel when you aren't able to talk to someone about your mental wellbeing?

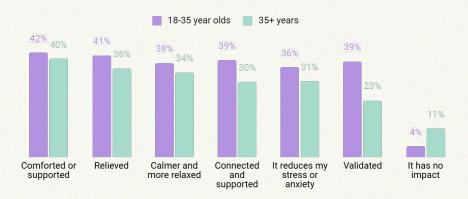






When Australians do talk the vast majority feel better afterward.

Q. How does it make you feel when you are able to talk to someone about your mental wellbeing?



Talking makes a measurable difference. All people feel better when they connect and are able to talk to someone about their mental wellbeing.



of 18-35 year olds say they **feel better** after discussing their mental wellbeing.



of 35+ year olds say they **feel better** after discussing their mental wellbeing.

Even those with lower wellbeing report feeling less anxious (38%) and more validated (33%) after speaking up.





Too often, the conversations that could make a difference aren't happen.

The gap between who we rely on and who we feel safe opening up to about our mental well being is significant. But when people do talk, the impact is often powerful and immediate.

So what can we do?





Normalise the full spectrum of mental wellbeing conversations

Make emotional conversations feel as normal as physical ones

We speak freely about colds, sprains, and stomach bugs, emotional wellbeing should be no different.

Yet almost half of Australians (44%) acknowledge they lacked the necessary tools or knowledge to effectively engage in conversation when approached by someone to discuss their mental wellbeing.

Start by asking simple, open questions like "How are you, really?" and be ready to listen, not fix.

Start small, it doesn't have to be deep and meaningful

Conversations don't need to be heavy to be helpful.

More than half (53%) of Australians believe that "conversations about emotions or mental wellbeing can often become unnecessarily escalated or intense.

Check in over coffee, during a walk, or while doing the dishes. Normalising little moments makes space for the bigger ones.

The act of listening carries more weight than you think.

The most important action in a conversation, for all Australians, is to be listened to attentively, without interruption or judgment.

Boomers value attentive listening the most, but it's the top priority for every age group

In these conversations listening isn't passive, it's powerful. You don't need the answers, just your presence.





A few final words to leave you with

Transforming awareness into action begins at home, and that change starts by creating space to listen, consistent casual check ins, and speaking openly. Chatting casually - at home, at work and at play - enhances connections, adds to your enjoyment and means there will be a safe place for each of you to talk about more important things when you need to.

-Amanda Gordon AM, Clinical Psychologist





State of Mind Australia's Mental Health Conversation

Want to know more?

Get in touch, at www.thegrowthdistillery.com.au

The Growth Distillery pulls marketers out of chaos and cuts through the clutter, providing the 'need to know' of consumer behaviour.