

# Australian Mental Wellbeing Index



Checking in on the everyday  
mental wellbeing of Australians

**REPORT 1** | JANUARY TO MARCH 2022

2022



# Smiling Mind and KPMG are launching an Australian Mental Wellbeing Index that will provide a snapshot insight into the everyday mental wellbeing of Australia on an ongoing basis.

## WHO WE ARE?

### Smiling Mind

Smiling Mind is a not-for-profit with a vision to help every mind thrive. The organisation’s goal is to create generational change in the mental wellbeing of Australians. Smiling Mind’s mission is to provide accessible life-long tools to support healthy minds.

Smiling Mind provides Australians with the opportunity to learn skills to not only survive but thrive – and aims to improve mental wellbeing through preventative action. Developing skills

such as emotional awareness and self-regulation, critical thinking, empathy, resilience, and compassion, which support life-long mental wellbeing.

In the 10 years since the launch of its free app, Smiling Mind has significantly grown its program offering and today, millions of people use Smiling Mind programs in their homes, schools, and workplaces.

### KPMG

KPMG Australia is a leading professional services firm providing services to organisations across a wide range of industry, government and civil society sectors. We are led by our Purpose – to inspire confidence and empower change.

KPMG is a workplace with wellbeing at its core where everyone can thrive. Our holistic wellbeing approach provides the programs, resources and tools for each person to achieve optimal health and sustainable performance.

Our focus on wellbeing as an employer translates into the community, where we seek to help achieve better outcomes for the wellbeing of all Australians. We are passionate about working with mental health and wellbeing providers and other stakeholders to

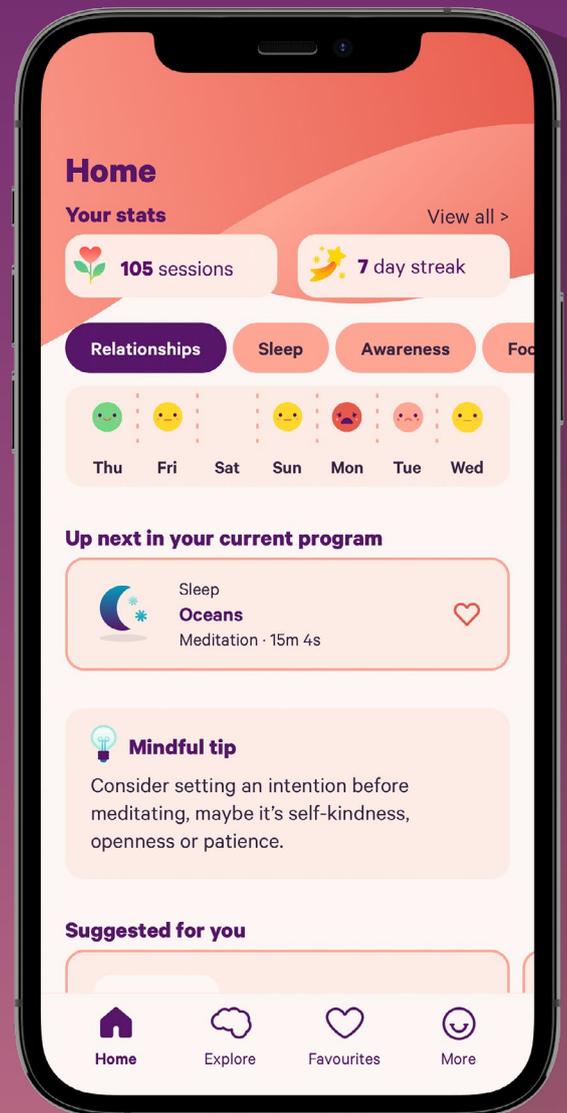
raise awareness of, better understand and practically improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians.

KPMG strongly believes that Australia should be at the forefront of providing innovative, high quality, world leading mental health and wellbeing services and we are dedicated to realising this ambition.

Through our Corporate Citizenship strategy, we have made community mental wellbeing a priority and aim to play a role, alongside community partners, in changing the narrative around mental health and suicide across Australia and to help create meaningful and lasting change to support life-long wellbeing.

# Smiling Mind app

The Smiling Mind app is a free evidence-based preventative mental wellbeing tool developed by psychologists and educators. Once downloaded, people are able to use the app anytime, anywhere with programs and courses tailored for people based on their age, areas of interest and needs. Programs are underpinned by mindfulness and positive psychology strategies and designed to build mental fitness and resilience; support good sleep, study and sports training; reduce stress and improve relationships; and promote the development of new social and emotional skills. The app has been downloaded by 7.2 million people to date. The data for the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index is collected via the Smiling Mind app.



For more information, visit:  
[smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app](https://smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app)



# What is the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index?

The Australian Mental Wellbeing Index is made up of six everyday mental wellbeing domains: emotional awareness, focus and concentration, emotional regulation, relationships & social connections, sleep, and stress. The Australian Mental Wellbeing Index aims to provide a consistent and reliable dataset to inform mental wellbeing policy and decision making; draw attention to changes in national trends in Australia’s mental wellbeing; and reframe how Australians consider mental wellbeing. The domains represent the following:

- 
**Emotional awareness**  
 The ability to notice emotions as they are experienced and to identify and differentiate between emotions.
- 
**Focus and concentration**  
 The ability to attend to a task with minimal distraction and for an extended period of time.
- 
**Emotional regulation**  
 The ability to manage emotions without reacting to them.
- 
**Relationships & social connections**  
 The experience of rewarding relationships, feeling connected and close with others.
- 
**Sleep**  
 The level of satisfaction with the quality of sleep.
- 
**Stress**  
 The experience of agitation, nervousness or stress.



**880,954 surveys** were completed by 226,103 unique users over the last 12 months.

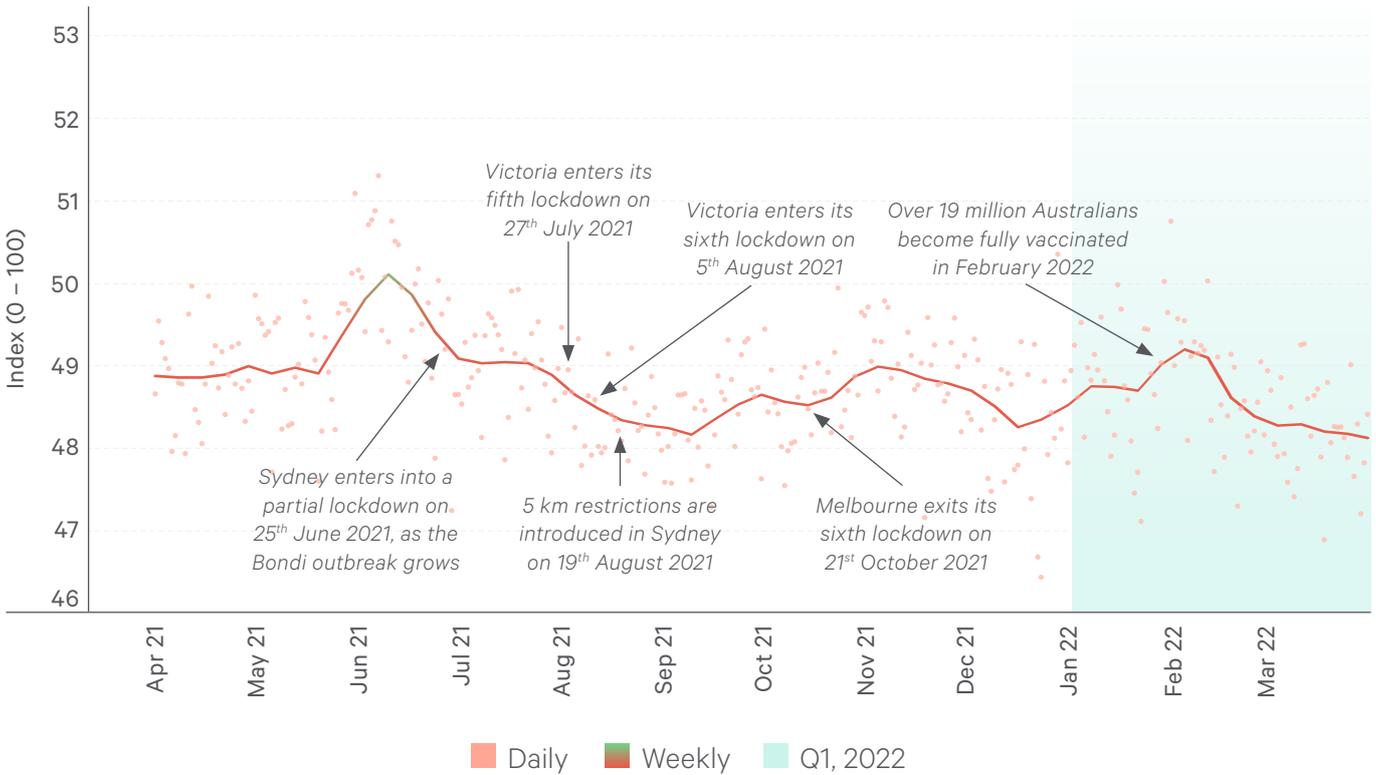
On average, there were approximately 8,700 user responses and 16,750 survey responses completed each week.

*For further information on the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index, refer to Appendix: Data and Methods.*

# Australian Mental Wellbeing Index

12-month data insights  
2021–2022

# Australian Mental Wellbeing Index 2021-2022



## Over the past year

### The mental wellbeing of Australians has remained consistently low

The index has been relatively low over the last year. This trend is not surprising with Australians grappling through not just their own daily challenges, but also the uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic, floods, global politics, climate change as well as other national and global events. The mental wellbeing of Australians may have also been impacted by nationwide COVID-19 restrictions throughout 2021, as well as the long-term, residual impacts of earlier lockdowns in 2020.

### The mental wellbeing of Australians peaked in June 2021

There was a sharp rise in the overall net score of the index from May to June 2021. This rise may have been impacted by growing optimism during the early stages of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout across the nation, when Phase 1b of the rollout was announced at the end of March 2021.

### The mental wellbeing of Australians is trending down

After peaking in June 2021, the index has been lower in subsequent months. While resilience can protect against emotional exhaustion and burnout, the ongoing impact of extensive lockdowns, border closures and uncertainty may have contributed to the subsequent decline in mental wellbeing.

# Australian Mental Wellbeing Index

Quarterly data insights  
Q1, 2022 (Jan–March 2022)

## Australian Mental Wellbeing Index Score

(Q1, 2022)

**48.6**

Out of a total max score of 100

**↓ 0.9%**

Compared to Q1, 2021

**25%** of Australians report good wellbeing

**29%** of Australians report poor wellbeing

## Summary of Insights

### Overall

The Australian Mental Wellbeing Index was 48.6 in Q1 2022 (January 2022 – March 2022) quarter which is lower than the index for the same quarter in the previous year (-0.9%).

### Domains

Key life domains contributing to an overall low index include a higher proportion of Australians experiencing challenges with *stress* (40%), *focus and concentration* (43%) and *sleep* (34%).

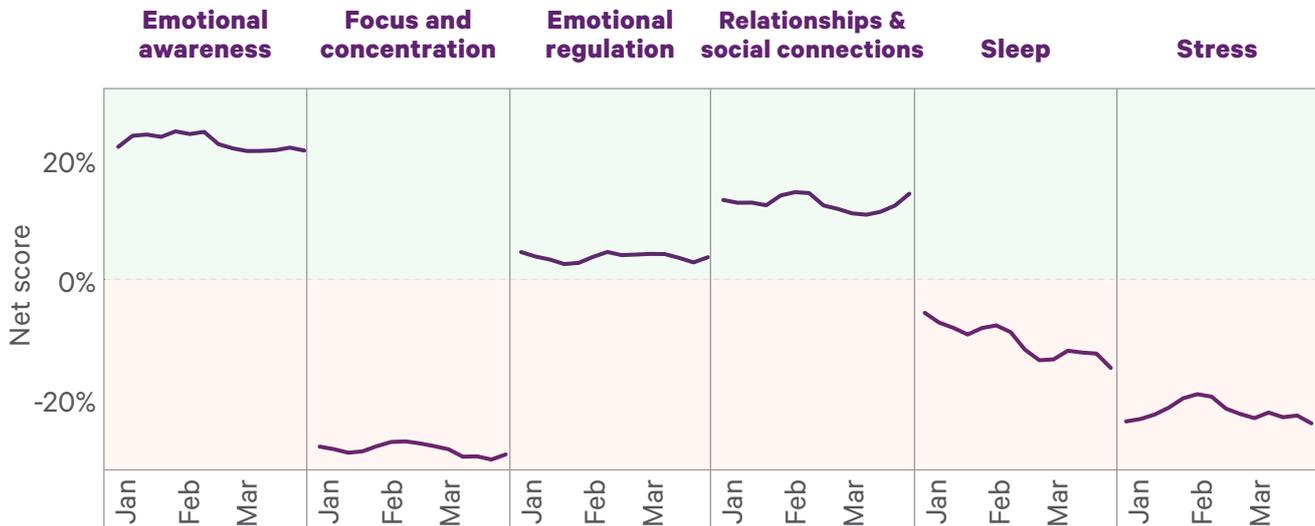
*Emotional regulation* and *relationships & social connections* were both lower relative to the previous year, but remain more positive contributors to overall mental wellbeing.

One in four (25%) Australians reported high levels of *emotional regulation* and one in three (33%) Australians reported positive *relationships & social connections*.

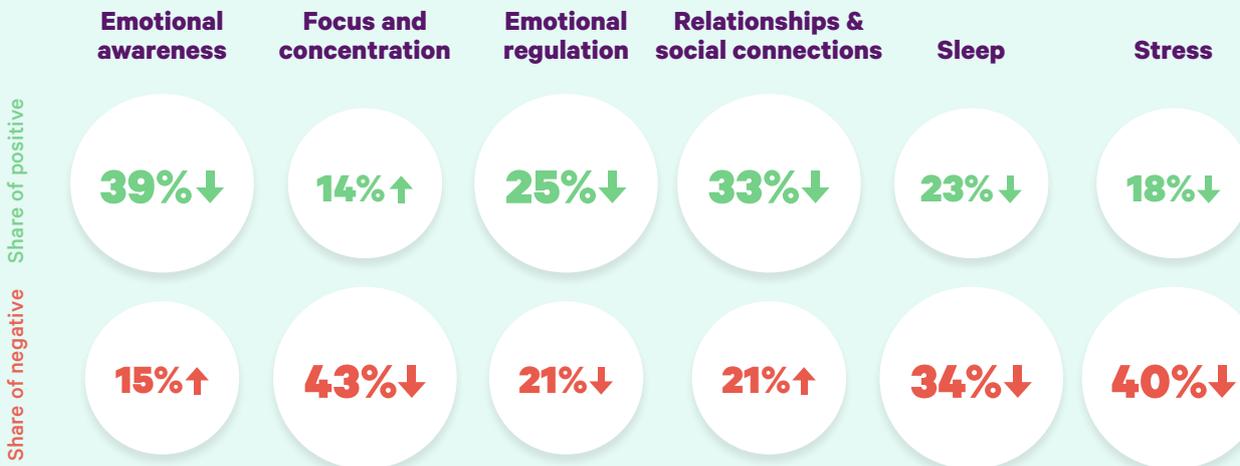
### Wellbeing by location across Australia

Mental wellbeing has been consistently low across all States, and may have been impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns and recent floods.

# The six life domains contributing to mental wellbeing (Q1, 2022)



Net score is defined as the difference between the proportion of positive and negative responses



The arrows indicate the direction of change for Jan 2022 – Mar 2022 compared to Jan 2021 – Mar 2021.

## In the past quarter

**Australians experienced relatively poor levels of stress, sleep quality, and focus and concentration.** These domains should therefore be priority areas for Australians to improve their mental wellbeing.

**Australians generally have positive emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and relationships & social connections,** and they should continue to build on these domains.

# The six domains over the past year, compared to the previous 12 months

## Over the past year

**Australians have experienced a decline in their social connections, compared to the previous year.**

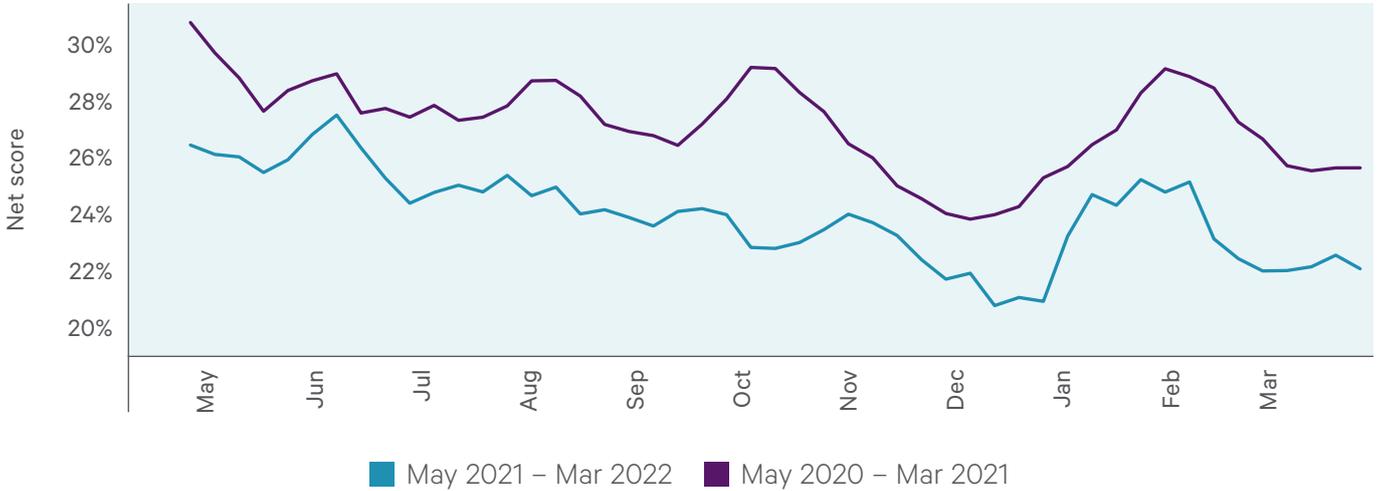
This trend could indicate that Australians may be becoming more isolated and less connected with their social networks, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

**Australian's level of emotional awareness has been consistently high, but has dropped in the last year compared to the previous year.**

This trend indicates that Australians may be paying less attention to their emotions than during the periods of time where lockdowns were most significant as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Domain 1: Emotional awareness

**While emotional awareness showed some seasonality, it was consistently lower throughout the most recent period.**



- The net score for emotional awareness has been consistently high relative to other domains. However, over the May 2021 to March 2022 period, it is lower by an average of 3.2 percentage points relative to the prior year.
- This trend indicates that whilst Australians are generally good at recognising and noticing their emotions, this has been declining over time.
- Emotional awareness appears to reach its lowest point at the end of each year.

## Domain 2: Focus and concentration

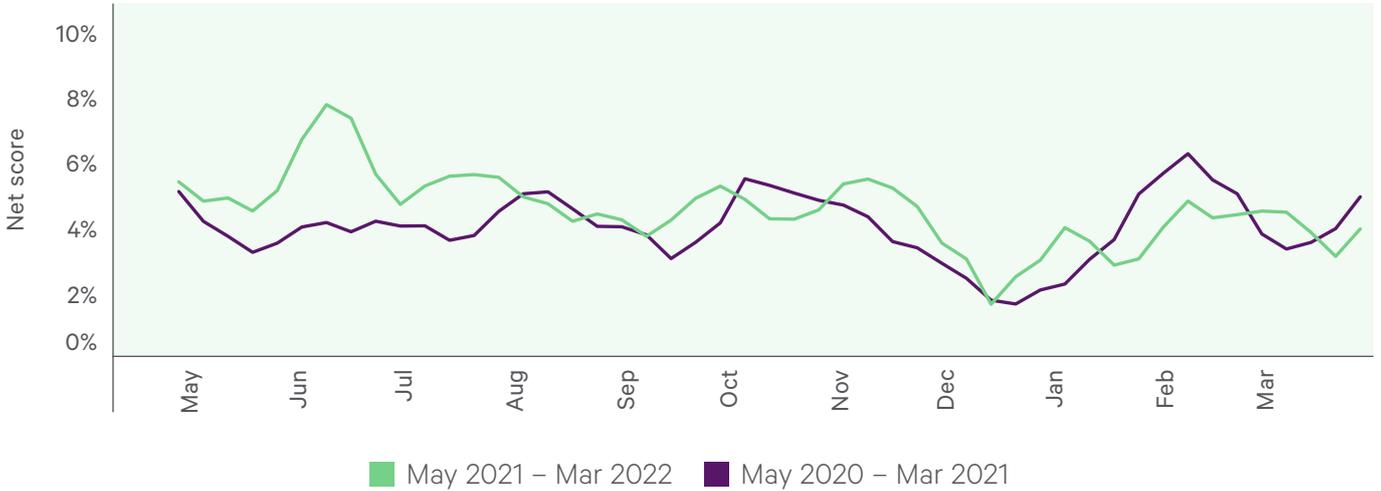
**Year on year, focus and concentration poses the greatest challenge for Australians.**



- The net score for focus and concentration has been consistently low relative to other domains. However, this result is higher over the last year relative to the year before.
- This trend indicates that the ability to attend to a task with minimal distraction for an extended period of time is an ongoing challenge for many Australians. The net score for focus and concentration is relatively low in September of both years.

### Domain 3: Emotional regulation

**Emotional regulation remains relatively stable across the year, with Australians experiencing some end of year challenges.**



- The net score for emotional regulation was highest in June 2021, but seems to have declined since then. There has also been a sharp fall in emotional regulation during the end of year holiday period across both years.
- In general, the net score for emotional regulation is relatively high compared to the other domains, with no clear differences between the last year (May 2021 to March 2022) and the prior year (May 2020 to March 2021).
- This trend indicates that the ability of Australians to manage their emotions, has been relatively positive and stable over time.

### Domain 4: Relationships & social connections

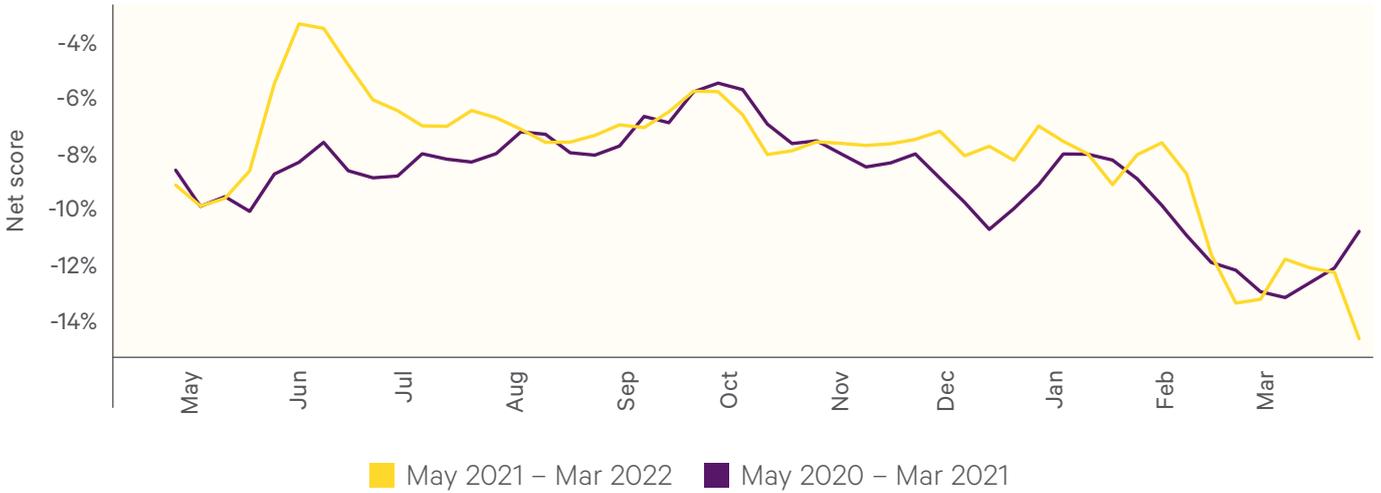
**The second year of COVID-19 saw a decline in social connections compared to previous year.**



- The net score for relationships & social connections has deteriorated in the last year relative to the year before. On average, it is 2.8 percentage points lower than the year before.
- This decline likely reflects the long-term impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns and many Australians working and/or studying from home. This trend supports the notion that Australians may be becoming more isolated and less connected with their social networks, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Domain 5: Sleep

**Year round, sleep remains an issue for Australians.**



- The net score for sleep has been consistently low, indicating that satisfaction with the quality of sleep is a key challenge for many Australians.
- The net score appears to decline from October onwards in both of the past two years, suggesting that daylight savings may have some impact on quality and amount of sleep, as clocks are moved forward in October.
- The net score has fallen rapidly from February to March in both of the last two years, which provides evidence of a seasonal trend, and that satisfaction with the quality of sleep is lowest during the earlier months of the year.

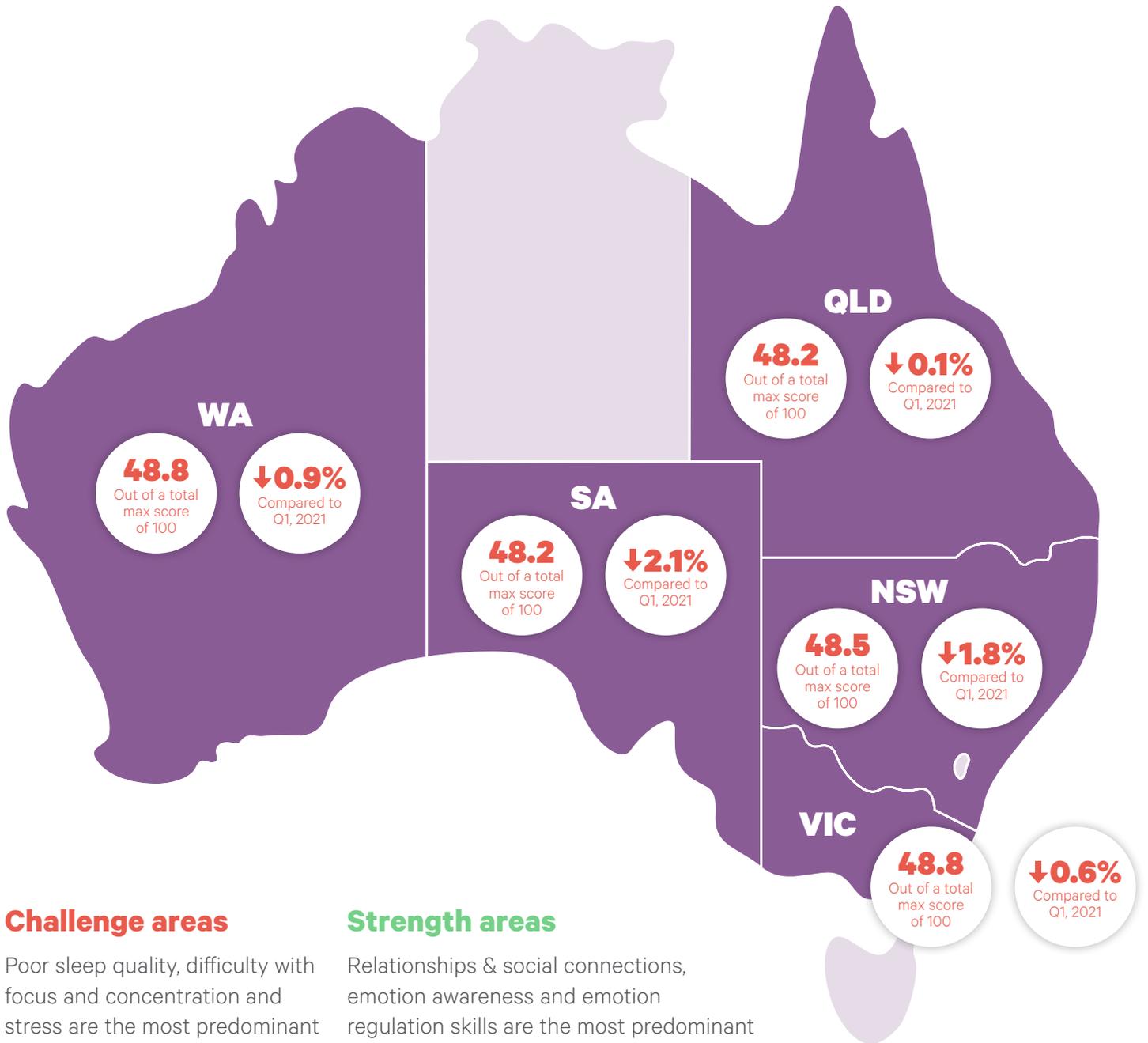
## Domain 6: Stress

**While stress remains an issue, the most recent period saw consistent strides to improvement.**



- The net score for stress has been consistently low but has improved in the last year. The result is 2.2 percentage points higher on average than the year before.
- This trend indicates that stress is an ongoing challenge for Australians but has improved in recent times. The net score for stress rose sharply between June to July 2021, and has fluctuated since then.

# Australian Mental Wellbeing Index Scores by region across Australia, Q1 2022



## Challenge areas

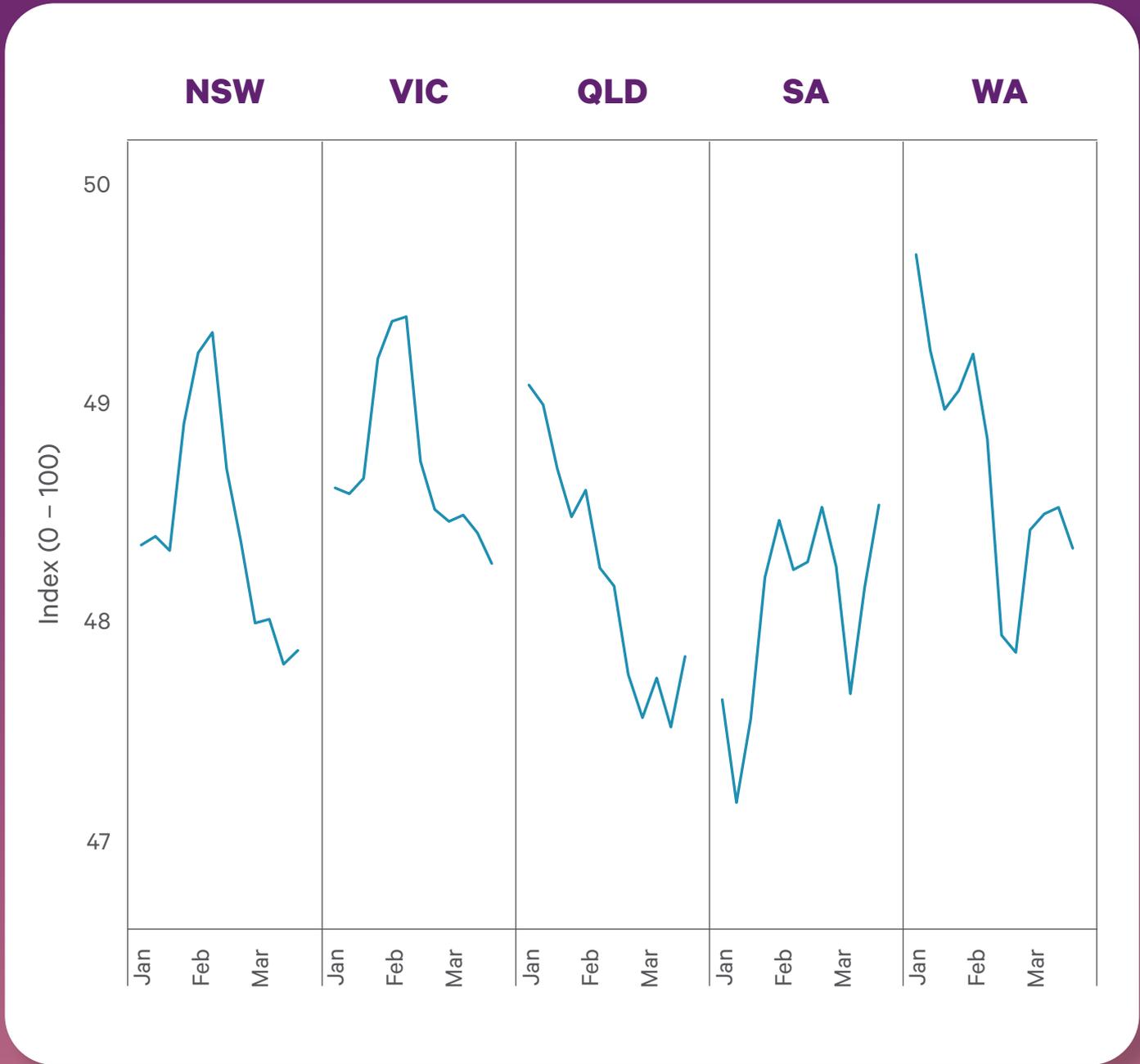
Poor sleep quality, difficulty with focus and concentration and stress are the most predominant challenge areas across all states.

## Strength areas

Relationships & social connections, emotion awareness and emotion regulation skills are the most predominant strength areas across all states.

\*Only states with a large enough sample size have been included.

# Australian Mental Wellbeing insights by state Q1, 2022



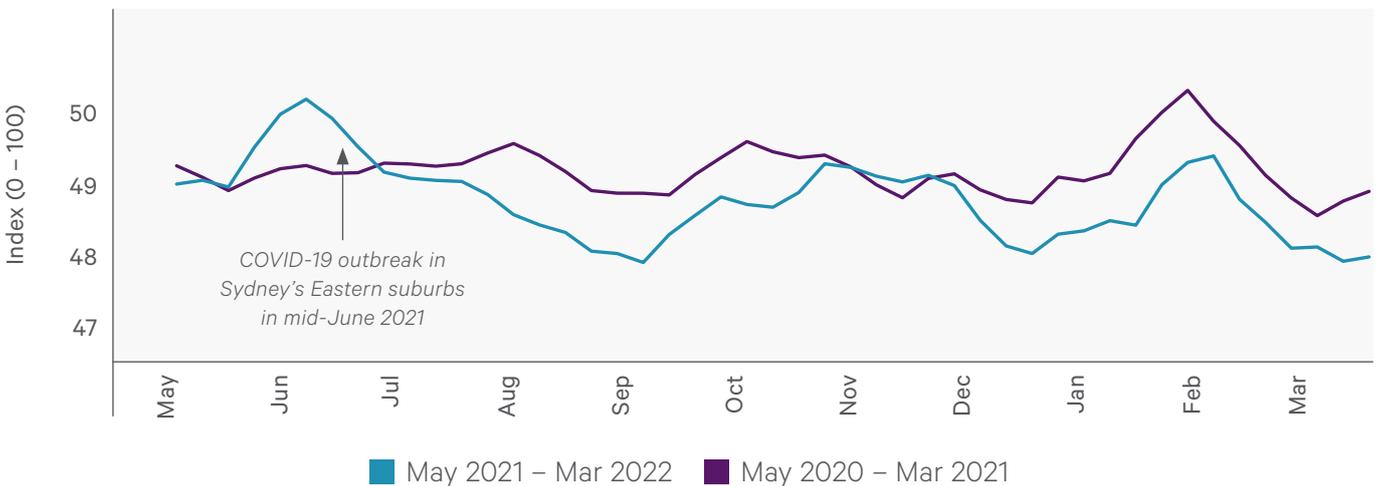
Tasmania, Northern Territory, and the Australian Capital Territory have not been included in this report due to low user and survey response sample sizes.

## Over the past year

**The mental wellbeing of Australians has been low.** This finding is not surprising given Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia have all experienced various COVID-19 lockdowns throughout the last two years.

**The mental wellbeing of Australians falls from June to September across most states,** which coincides with Winter and the start of Spring.

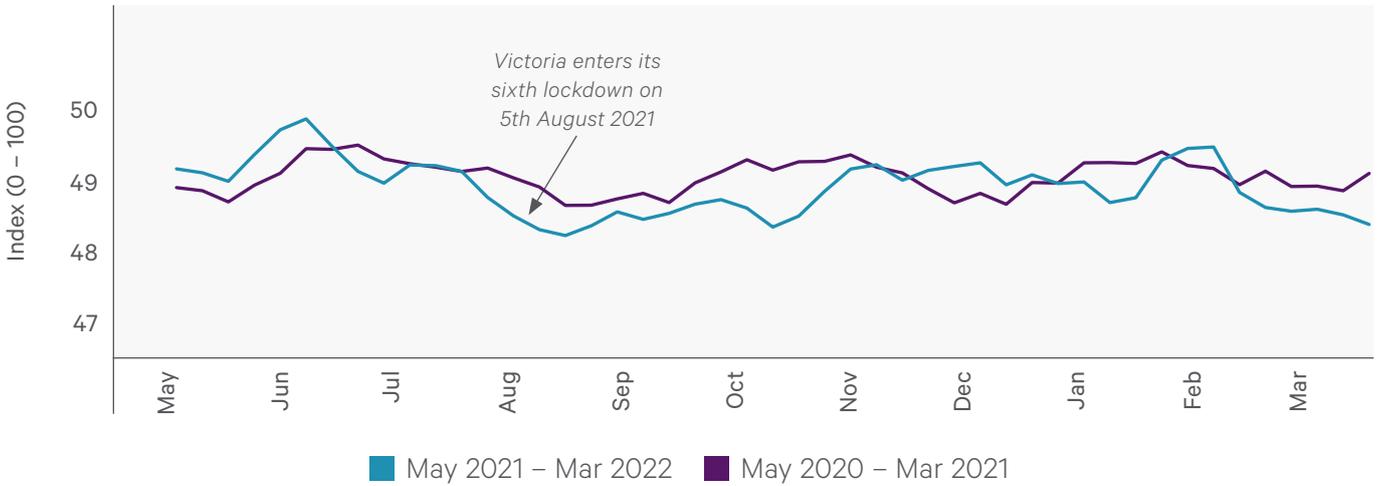
### New South Wales



**In response to recent challenges in New South Wales, its residents saw a decline in their mental wellbeing.**

- The index for New South Wales has generally been lower in the last year (May 2021 to March 2022), when compared to the prior year (May 2020 to March 2021).
- This trend indicates that the everyday mental wellbeing of New South Wales residents may have been negatively impacted by the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as recent floods across the state. Additionally, the index for New South Wales has been slowly falling since June 2021. The downward trend may have been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak in Sydney’s Eastern suburbs in mid-June 2021, where clusters developed across New South Wales; and a lockdown was imposed until October 2021.

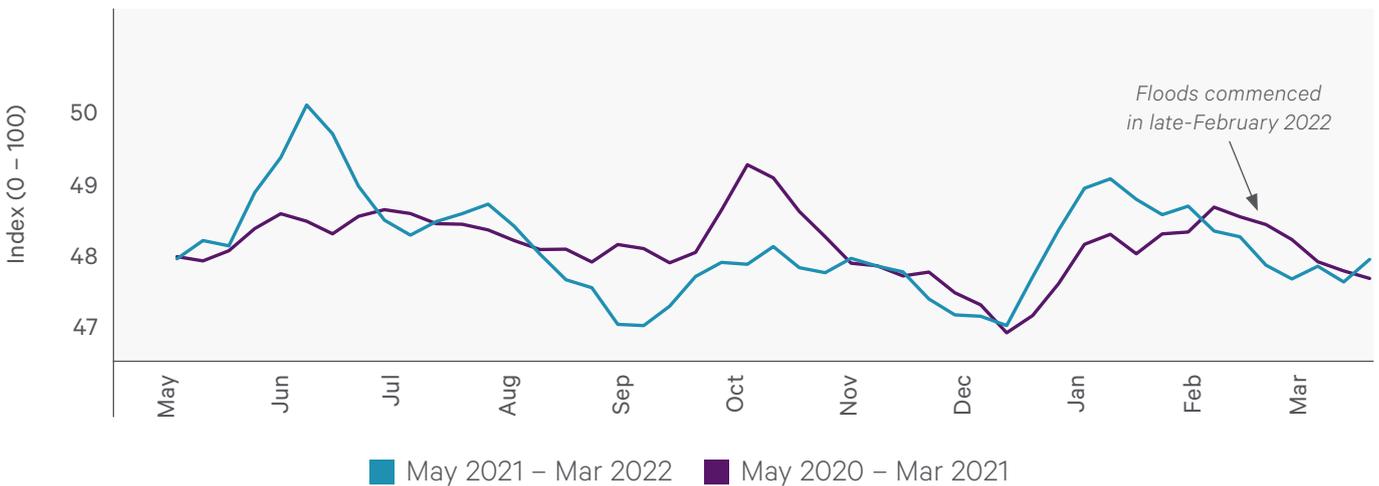
## Victoria



**The mental wellbeing of Victorians was consistently low, with declines occurring during the winter months.**

- The index for Victoria has been consistently low over the past few years, but has not been significantly lower than other states. This is despite Victorians having faced over 200 cumulative days of COVID-19 lockdowns, which is the most by any Australian state or territory.
- The index for Victoria has fluctuated over time, with no clear trends emerging over the past few years. However, there appears to be a sharp fall in index from June to September in both years, suggesting that the everyday mental wellbeing of Victorians may be impacted by the colder months of Winter.

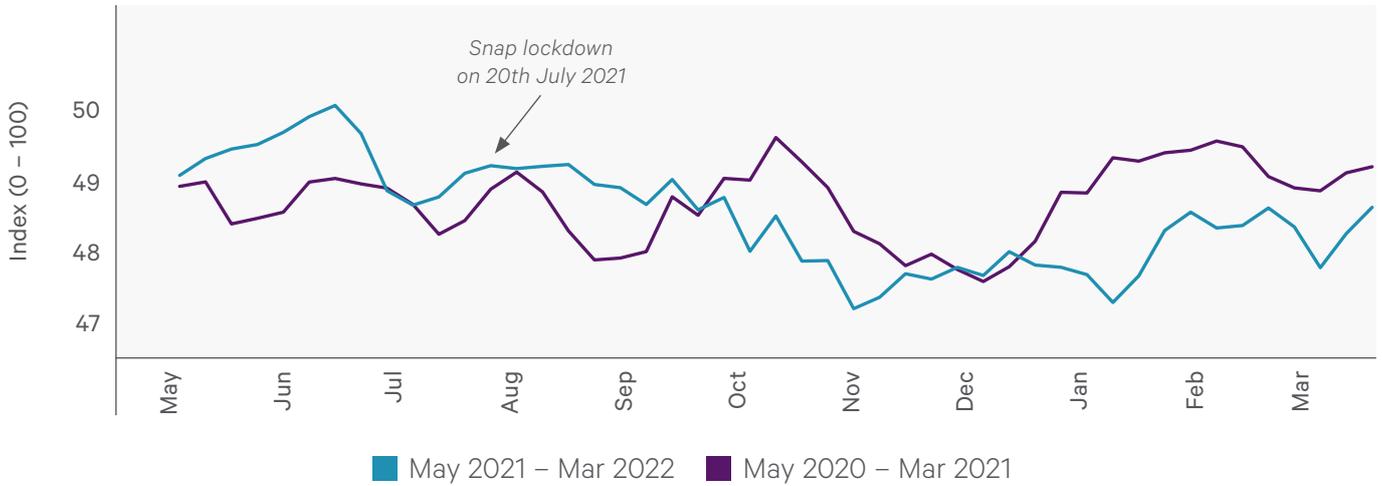
## Queensland



**Queenslanders demonstrated resilience in their mental wellbeing despite hardships in early 2022.**

- The index for Queensland was highest in July 2021, but has fluctuated since then.
- These changes in the index have been consistent over the past two years, suggesting that Queenslanders are resilient and that their general mental wellbeing may not have been considerably impacted by the recent floods which devastated parts of Queensland during early 2022.
- Future monitoring of any changes to the overall index will uncover any potential long-term impacts from the floods on the general everyday mental wellbeing of Queenslanders.

## South Australia



**The mental wellbeing of South Australians saw a sharp decline over the most recent period.**

- The index for South Australia has been consistently low, and appears to be declining over the past year from June 2021.
- This decline may have been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions which were reintroduced in mid-2021 with a snap lockdown on 20th July 2021, after new cases were identified in the state.
- The everyday mental wellbeing of South Australians may be deteriorating over time, due to the lasting impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Western Australia



**The mental wellbeing of Western Australians remained relatively high, with a decline in response to COVID-19 rates toward the end of 2021.**

- The index for Western Australia has been relatively high, when compared to the other states. This may be explained by Western Australia having fewer COVID-19 outbreaks and lockdowns than other states.
- The index however declined from November to December 2021, which may have been due to rising rates of the Omicron COVID-19 variant. The growing Omicron COVID-19 wave led to uncertainty around interstate borders re-opening which were originally set for early 2022 once the state reached a 90% double vaccination rate.
- Western Australians may have therefore experienced heightening feelings of pessimism during this time, having not been able to see loved ones from other parts of Australia since 5th April 2020.

# What's next?

This first report of the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index has provided a preliminary view of changes in the overall mental wellbeing of Australians over time. The report has also identified changes in net scores for individual domains, as well as the similarities and differences in mental wellbeing across Australian regions. Future reports of the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index will focus on other population variables of interest such as gender, age, parents and educators, to allow a better understanding of the mental wellbeing of the diverse cohorts and communities that make up Australia.



**There are six domains of interest in the survey. The following questions were used to capture responses in each of these domains:**



**Emotional awareness:**

When someone asked how I was feeling, I could identify my emotions easily



**Relationships & social connections:**

I've been feeling close to other people



**Focus & concentration:**

I've been easily distracted



**Sleep:**

I've been satisfied with my sleep



**Emotional regulation:**

I've noticed my emotions without having to react to them



**Stress:**

I've been feeling agitated

Survey respondents are asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 5. Responses are standardised such that 1 refers to the most negative response and 5 refers to the most positive response.

**How are the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index results results measured?**

The index involved transforming individual survey responses into point values, with a higher point value associated with good mental health. All scores were added and divided by the total number of possible points to obtain a score out of 100.

The net score used for the domains is defined as the difference between the proportion of users who report a positive response and the proportion of users to report a negative response. On a scale of 1 to 5, a response of 4 or 5 is defined as a positive response while a response of 1 or 2 is defined as a negative response. The net score metric is similar to a net promoter score and is meant to capture the sentiment of users for a given domain.

**How is the overall index constructed?**

The overall index is a simple average (equal weights) of the individual index across the six domains. In other words, each of the six domains equally contributes to the overall index.

**What frequency are the results being reported on?**

Results are reported on a weekly basis. There was minimal variation when aggregated on a monthly basis, however, there was too much noise when reported on a daily basis. Daily results are still included in the overall index to provide an indication of the daily variation underpinning the weekly results.

**Are the results reported on by survey or by user? Can users have multiple survey responses? How do you handle this?**

The results are reported per user in a given period. Reporting on a per-user basis provides a more intuitive way of understanding the results. As each user is able to complete multiple surveys in a week or day, only the first survey completed per user in a given period is used. This helps to avoid any treatment effects of going through a meditation or mindfulness program.

**Why do the domains appear to have a different baseline?**

Differences may be accounted for by a mix of positively and negatively worded items. Domains which were negatively worded were more likely to return a higher proportion of negative responses. It is also worth noting that the negatively worded items, on average, returned more 'extreme' responses than the positively worded items, which may be due to a greater influence of negativity bias among the population.

**Have you done any analysis to assess how well the questions reflect each of the domains?**

The individual scores for each domain were tested against the total scores of relevant validated scales. Each item demonstrated between medium to high correlations with the total score of their respective validated scale. The following table describes the correlation between each item and the total score of a concurrent scale.

| Domain   | Index Item  | Validated Scale                | Correlation (Pearson's R) |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
|  Emotional awareness                | When someone asked how I was feeling, I could identify my emotions easily | FFMQ (Awareness)               | 0.68                      |
|  Focus & concentration              | I've been easily distracted   | Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale | 0.32*                     |
|  Emotional regulation               | I've noticed my emotions without having to react to them                  | Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale | 0.51*                     |
|  Relationships & social connections | I've been feeling close to other people                                   | Perceived Community Scale      | 0.47                      |
|  Sleep                             | I've been satisfied with my sleep   | Sleep Disturbance Scale        | -0.74                     |
|  Stress                           | I've been feeling agitated  | Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)   | 0.67                      |

\*Due to insufficient scales seeking to measure focus and concentration, and emotional regulation, these items were tested against total mindfulness.

**How valid is the index as a measure of wellbeing?**

Bivariate correlations with existing scales showed support for the validity of the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index.

The Australian Mental Wellbeing Index was tested for concurrent validity against two validated scales, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and the WHO-5. The analysis showed high positive correlations with both the WEMWBS (r=0.74) and the WHO-5 (r=0.68). Similarly, the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index showed adequate convergent validity with the K-10 measure for psychological distress (r=-0.59).

**Have the results been adjusted in any way?**

The results are based on raw data that have not been adjusted or re-weighted. We will continue to monitor and assess the need for adjustments or weights, noting that without the right variables, any additional manipulation or re-weighting may induce further bias in the results.

**Why is there only data available from May 2020 onwards?**

Survey data was only collected from April 2020 onwards. Data in the first few weeks of April had low collection numbers as it reflects small scale testing prior to the wider release. As such, analysis commences only from May 2020 onwards.

**References:**

WEMWBS: Tennant, R., Hiller, L., Fishwick, R., Platt, S., Joseph, S., Weich, S., Parkinson, J., Secker, J., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2007). The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS): Development and UK validation. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 5, Article 63. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-5-63>

WHO-5: Topp C.W., Østergaard S.D., Søndergaard S., & Bech P. (2015). The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 84, 167-176.

K-10: Kessler RC, Barker PR, Colpe LJ, Epstein JF, Gfroerer JC, Hiripi E, et al. Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2003 Feb;60(2):184-9.

# Expert Advisory Group

We would like to acknowledge the input and guidance of our expert advisory group in the development of the Australian Mental Wellbeing Index.



## **Professor Nicola Reavley**

*Principal Research Fellow, Mental Health Literacy Program; Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne*

Prof Reavley is Deputy Director of the Centre for Mental Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on the population monitoring and interventions to improve population mental health and mental health literacy and reduce stigma and discrimination.



## **Professor Lindsay Oades**

*Director, Centre For Wellbeing Science; Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne*

Dr Lindsay G. Oades PhD is an internationally acclaimed wellbeing science researcher, educator and author. As Director and Professor at the Centre for Wellbeing Science, at the University of Melbourne, he leads a growing and dynamic team of researchers and educators who promote and investigate how people learn to improve wellbeing, in education, health, organisations and communities. Currently he is a coordinating lead author with a UNESCO assignment examining the relationship between education and human flourishing. With over 150 refereed journal articles and book chapters related to wellbeing, recovery and coaching and five books with esteemed publishers including Cambridge University Press, Wiley-Blackwell, Routledge and SAGE, he is a scientific reviewer for the Australian Research Council. Lindsay has consulted to multiple organisations including the NSW Department of Education, NSW Mental Health Commission, Beyond Blue and the Australian Mental Health Commission. Lindsay's work highlights the differences between mental health approaches drawn from a medical and natural science paradigm compared to wellbeing approaches drawn from an educational and cultural learning paradigm.



## **Professor Peter Butterworth**

*Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Wellbeing  
in the Research School of Population Health,  
Australian National University*

Peter Butterworth is a Professor at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) at the Australian National University. He also holds an honorary Professorial appointment in the Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. His background and training is in the areas of psychology, biostatistics and psychiatric epidemiology. Peter's broad research interests are in the social causes and social consequences of common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, and his research focuses on how economic and social policy can improve population mental health.



## **Dr Chris Schilling**

*Research Director (Demographics and Data),  
Australian Institute of Family Studies*

Dr Chris Schilling is an accomplished health economist with more than 15 years of experience in economic modelling and research across academia, government and consultancy. Chris is currently the Research Director, Demographics and Data at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), where he leads AIFS longitudinal studies, including the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the Longitudinal Study of Male Health (Ten to Men). Previously Chris worked as a Director at KPMG where he led the Health Economics practice responsible for a range of large-scale economic evaluation and modelling engagements using linked and longitudinal data. His work has influenced key policy debates around palliative care, mental health and wellbeing, productivity and low-value care. Chris has a double degree in Engineering (Hons)/Commerce (Hons) from the University of Melbourne and an MSc in Agricultural Economics from the University of Hohenheim, Germany. He completed his PhD in Health Economics at the University of Melbourne where his thesis included a range of publications using individual-level observational data. Chris maintains a link with the University of Melbourne where he continues to conduct research, guest lecture and supervise PhD students.

More information can be found on the Smiling Mind website [smilingmind.com.au](https://smilingmind.com.au).



**Smiling Mind**

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**Smiling Mind is a not for profit organisation here to help every mind thrive with digital-first tools, resources and education.**