

# The Mental Health Index™ report

Regional Comparison –

Australia, Canada, United Kingdom  
and United States, October 2020

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## October highlights

The mental health of Americans, Australians, Britons and Canadians continues to be much more at risk than prior to the pandemic. From September to October, the greatest improvement in mental health is observed in Australia, with an increase of 1.9 points, followed by the United States, 0.1 points. The United Kingdom shows the greatest decline in mental health, with a decrease of -1.4 points since September, followed by Canada, with a decrease of -1.1 points when compared to September 2020.

**The level of mental health in October remains concerning as it indicates that the working population in all four geographies is significantly distressed when compared to mental health scores prior to 2020.**

The proportion of individuals reporting more stress than the prior month is observed in all four geographies. The increase in mental stress in October is greatest in Canada (60.7), followed by the United Kingdom (59.3), the United States (56.0), and Australia (55.7).

**Across all geographies, approximately forty per cent of individuals indicate that they are putting in more effort at work.** Greater effort at work predicted lower mental health scores when compared to those who put in less.

**Between sixty and sixty-four per cent of individuals in all regions report that they are equally as productive as before the pandemic,** while between seventeen and twenty-two per cent indicate that they are less productive.

In terms of workplace strategies during the pandemic, employees were most likely to **indicate flexible work hours as helpful to their productivity**, followed by the use of technology, the ability to work from home and communications.

**Between thirty-eight and fifty-two per cent of respondents report needing some form of mental health support.** The most commonly reported source of mental health support is from family members, followed by support from friends or co-workers, and support from a mental health professional. **Between seven and ten per cent of individuals report needing support, but have not sought it. This group has, by far, the lowest mental health score in all geographies.**

A positive score on the Mental Health Index™ indicates better mental health in the overall working population, compared to the benchmark period of 2017 to 2019. A higher positive score reflects greater improvement.

A negative Mental Health Index™ score indicates a decline in mental health compared to the benchmark period. The more negative the score, the greater the decline.

A score of zero indicates mental health that is the same as it was in the benchmark period.

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With news of a second wave impacting parts of each of the four geographies, the seriousness of the pandemic is a dominant question in many parts of the country. **Eighty per cent, or more, agree that COVID-19 presents a serious public health risk while between six and ten per cent do not agree.**

**Nearly ninety per cent of individuals in all regions report handling the health and safety risk of COVID-19 well.** By comparison, approximately seventy-five per cent indicate that their workplaces are handling the risks well.

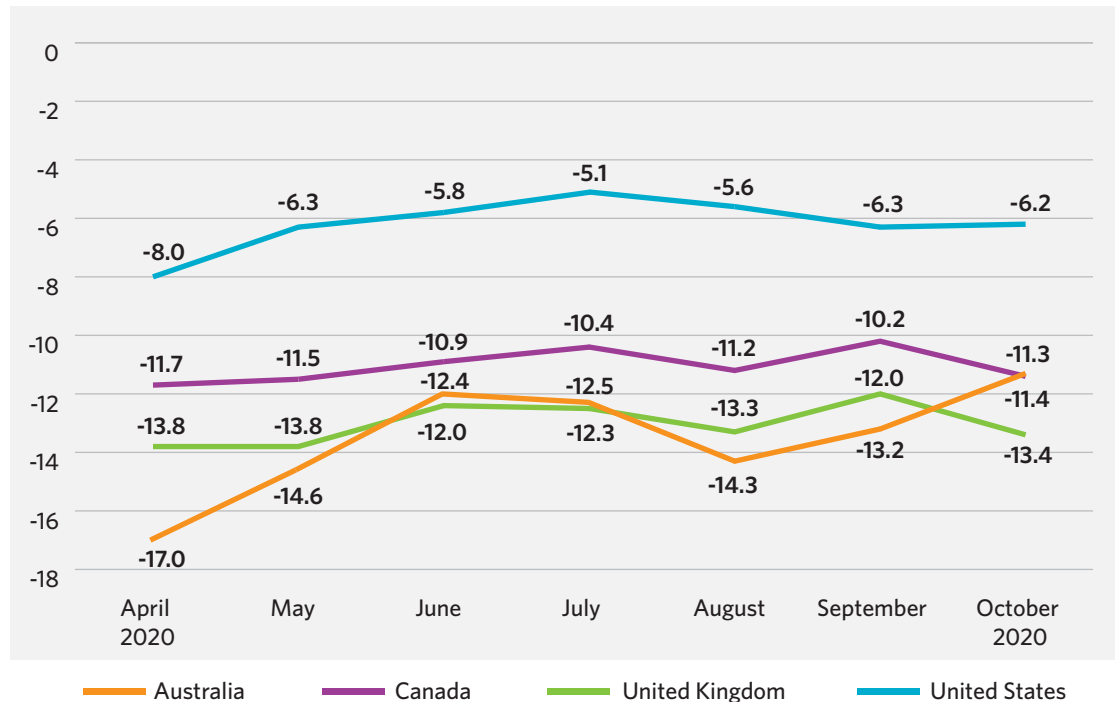
**The perceived handling of the health and safety risk of the pandemic varies when comparing local and federal government across regions.** Between sixty and seventy-two per cent of respondents in Australia, Canada, and the United States, report that their local governments are handling the pandemic risk well, while only fifty per cent of those in the United Kingdom report the same. In Australia, seventy-one per cent indicate that the federal government is handling the pandemic risk well, and in Canada, sixty-three per cent report the same. The results drop significantly in the United States and the United Kingdom, with thirty-eight and thirty-seven per cent, respectively, reporting the same.

Regional mental health scores since April have shown general improvement through July; however, all regions showed declines from July to August. While there was an improvement in September in all regions, except for the United States, **October results show a reversal of mental health scores with decreases in Canada and the United Kingdom.**



## Regional comparisons – Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States

The Mental Health Index™ by region

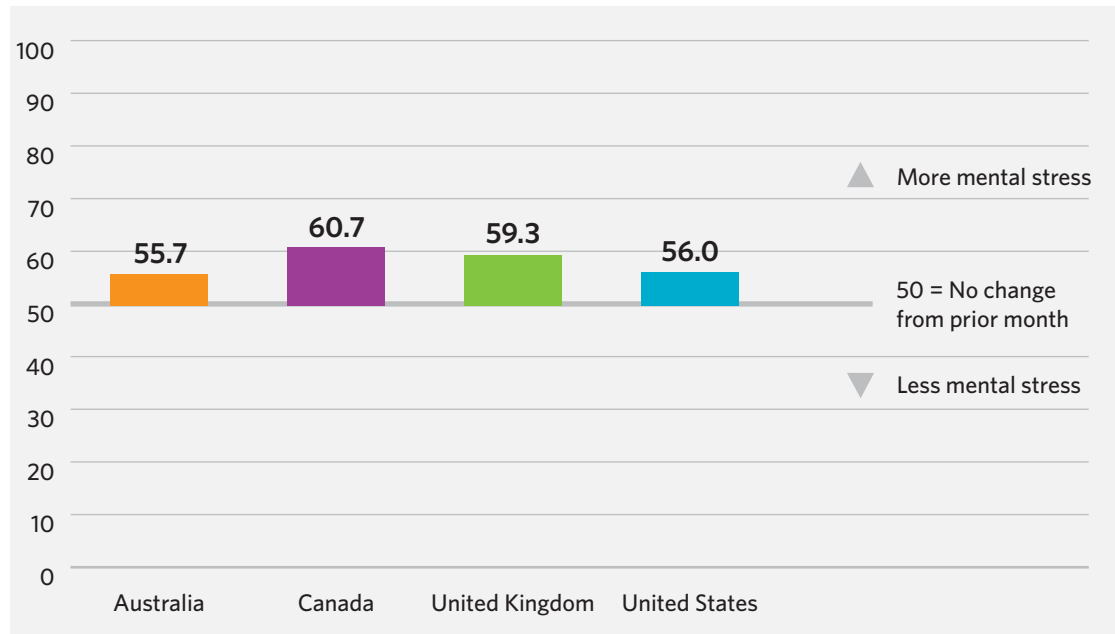


Overall, the Mental Health Index™ is lowest in the United Kingdom (-13.4), followed by Canada (-11.4), Australia (-11.3), and then the United States (-6.2). While some differences are evident, the Index for each region shows significant decline in mental health from the benchmark data.

Mental health scores declined in the United Kingdom (-1.4 points) and Canada (-1.1 points) when compared to September 2020. Improvements are observed in Australia (+1.9 points), followed by the United States (+0.1 points).



## The Mental Stress Change score (region)



Comparing September 2020 to October 2020, there is a significant increase in mental stress in all regions. The increase is greatest in Canada (60.7), followed by the United Kingdom (59.3), the United States (56.0), and Australia (55.7).

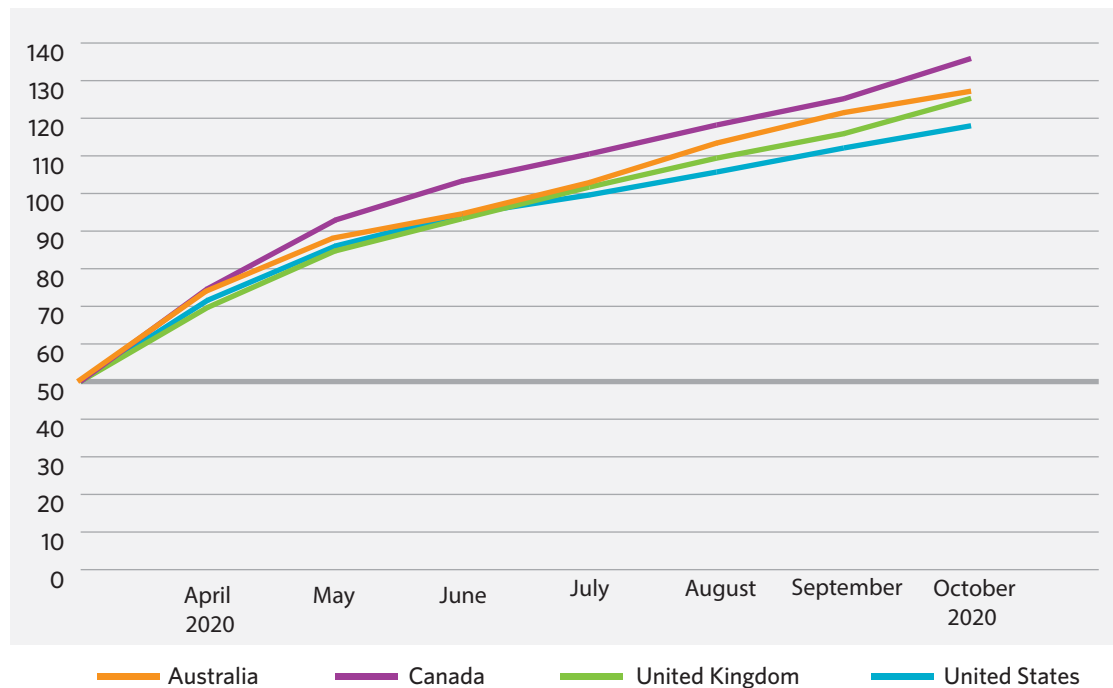


## Mental Stress Change (cumulative)

The Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score is a measure of the level of reported mental stress compared to the prior month. The change is rooted against a value of 50 implying no net mental stress change from the previous month, while values above 50 indicate a net increase in mental stress and values below 50 indicate a net decrease in mental stress. The graph below tracks the increases and decreases to account for the cumulative effect on mental stress.

The greatest accumulation of mental stress is observed in Canada (135.9), followed by Australia (127.2), the United Kingdom (125.3), and the United States (118.0).

The continual increase in mental stress demonstrates that respondents in all regions are reporting more mental stress month-over-month. In order to relieve this level of accumulated stress, a significant portion of the population must start regularly reporting lower stress.





## Spotlight

### Productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic

#### Comparing work productivity to before the pandemic

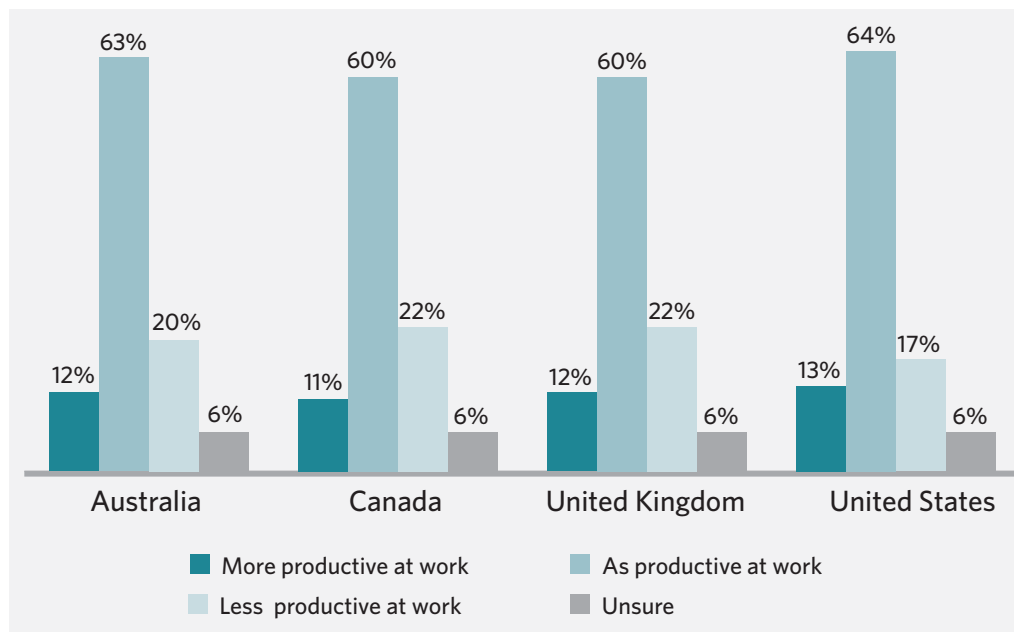
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought considerable changes to many workplaces. Individuals were asked to consider their work productivity when compared to prior the pandemic.

- Across all regions, between 17 and 22 per cent of those who are currently employed indicate that they are less productive at work when compared to before the pandemic.
- Between 11 and 13 per cent of those who are currently employed indicate that they are more productive at work.

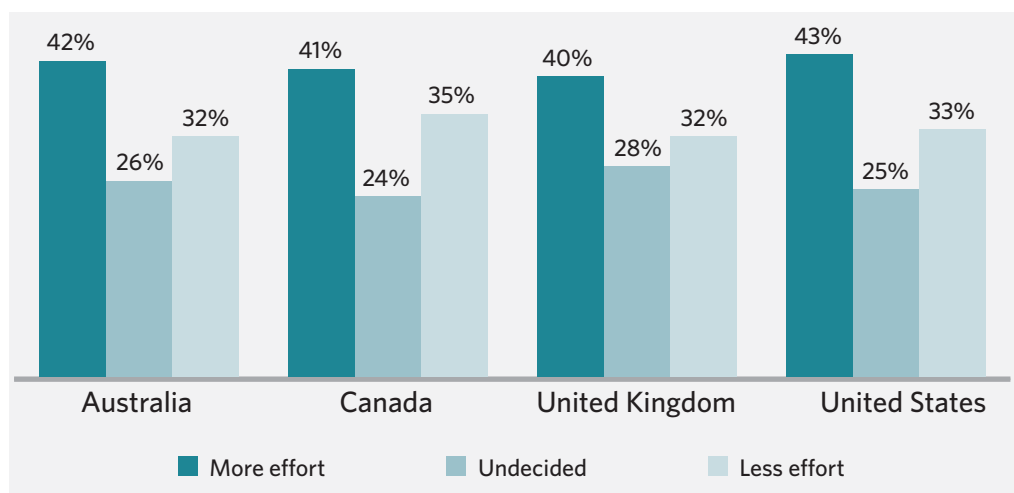
#### Comparing effort at work to before the pandemic

In all regions, among those currently employed, approximately 40 per cent are putting in more effort at work and more than 30 per cent report putting in less effort at work.

#### Reported productivity of respondents currently employed compared to pre-pandemic productivity



#### Effort at work of respondents currently employed compared to pre-pandemic productivity





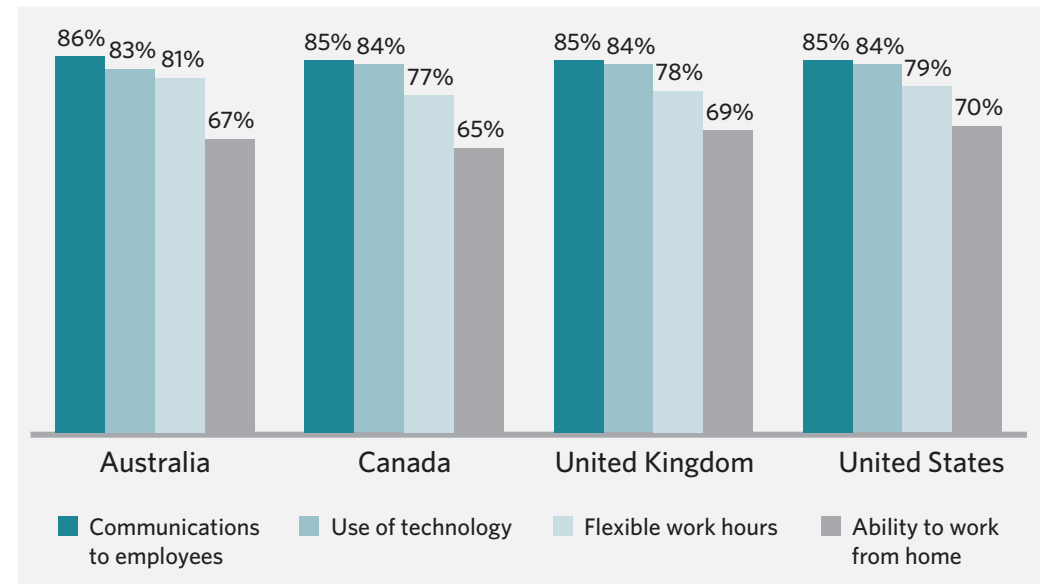


## Effect of organizational activities on productivity

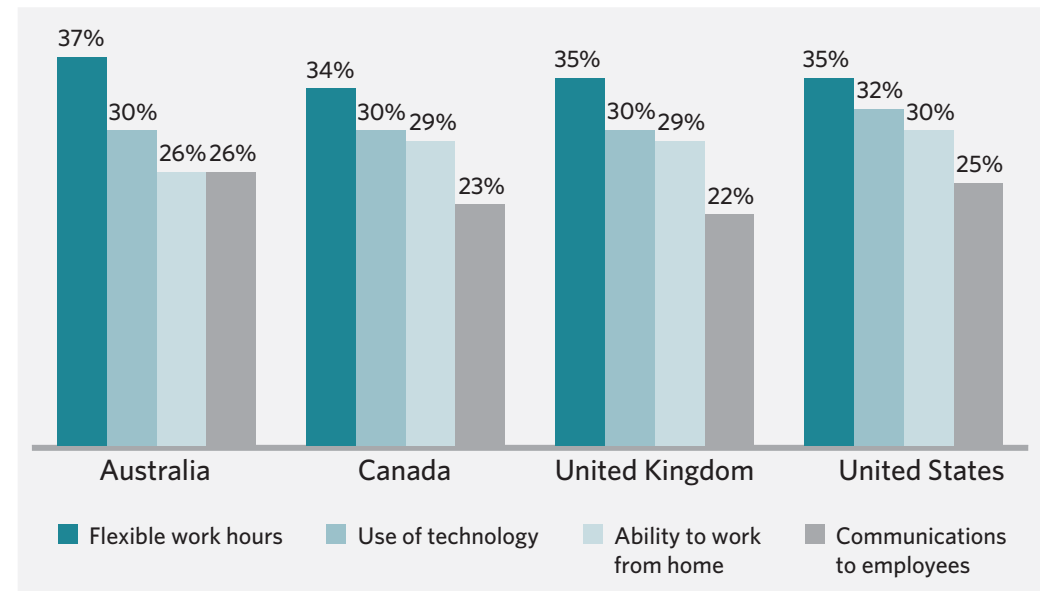
In terms of workplace strategies during the pandemic, employer communications and the use of technology are relevant to over 80 per cent of the respondents in all countries. Flexible work hours are applicable to between 77 and 81 per cent of employees, and, between 65 and 70 per cent report the ability to work from home.

Employees were most likely to indicate flexible work hours as helpful to their productivity, (between 34 and 37 per cent), followed by the use of technology, the ability to work from home, and communications.

Percentage for whom each policy/method is applicable



Percentage reporting that each policy/method helps productivity



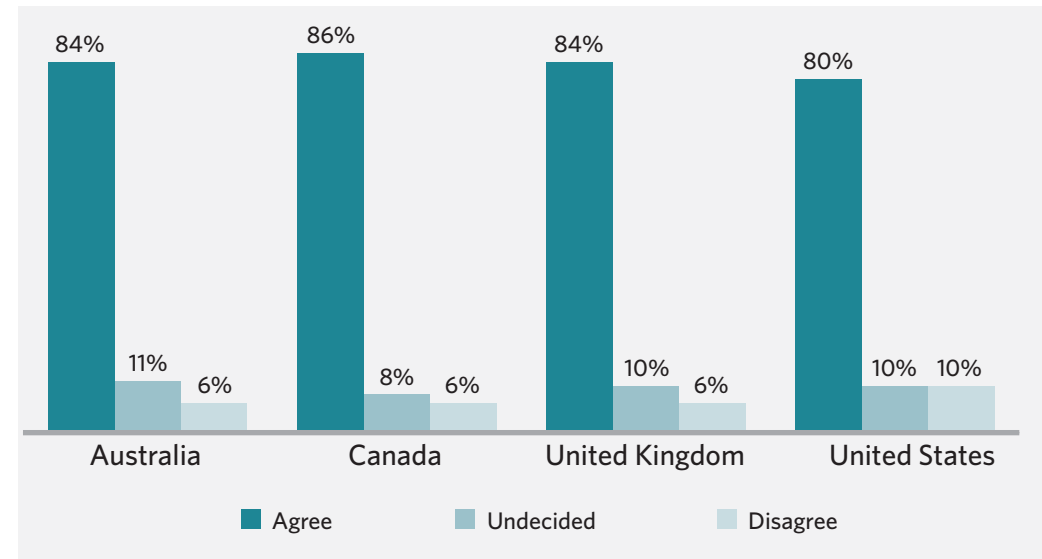


## The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

With news of a second wave in parts of all regions, the seriousness of the pandemic is a persistent media item. Respondents were asked whether they feel that COVID-19 presents a serious public health risk.

- In all regions, 80 per cent or more agreed that COVID-19 presents a serious public health risk.
- In Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, 6 per cent do not agree that COVID-19 presents a serious public health risk; while in the United States, nearly double (10 per cent) do not agree that COVID-19 presents a serious public health risk.

### COVID-19 presents a serious public health risk





## Handling of the health and safety risk of the pandemic

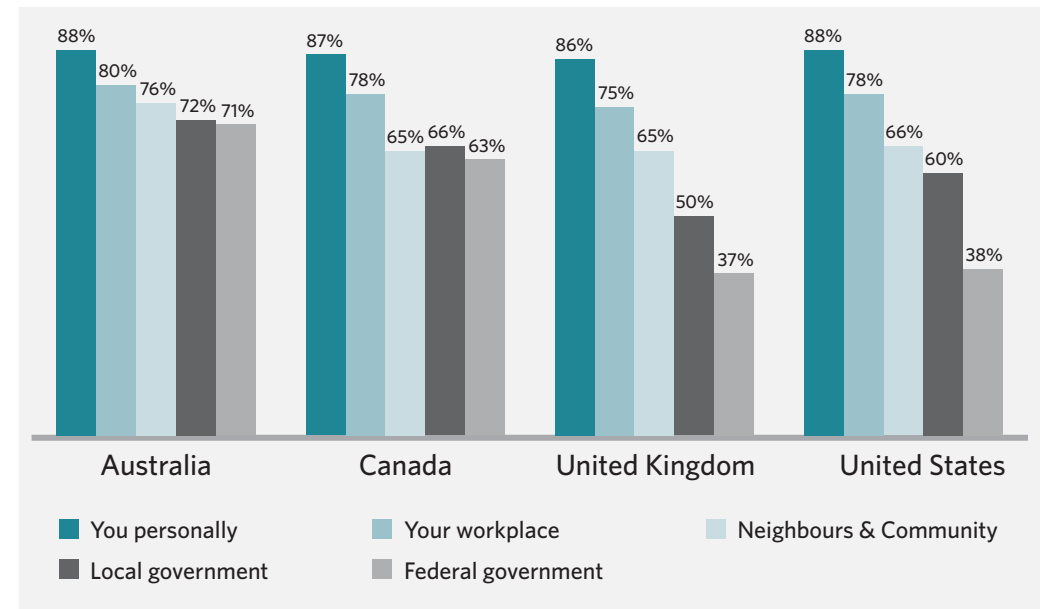
Individuals across all regions are adapting their day-to-day lives within the context of the pandemic.

- Over 80 per cent of the individuals in all regions agree that COVID-19 is a serious public health risk.
- Between 86 and 88 per cent of individuals believe that they are personally handling the pandemic health and safety risk well in each of the countries.
- Between 75 and 80 per cent of respondents believe that their workplaces are handling the risks well.
- In Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, approximately 65 per cent of individuals believe that their neighbours and the community are handling the risk well; in Australia this percentage is greater, at 76 per cent.

There is a division of opinion regarding policies and practices on the handling of the health and safety risk of the COVID-19 between local and federal government.

- Between 60 and 72 per cent of respondents in Australia, Canada, and the United States, report that their local governments are handling the pandemic risk well, while only 50 per cent of those in the United Kingdom report the same.
- In Australia, 71 per cent indicate that the federal government is handling the pandemic risk well, and in Canada, 63 per cent report the same. The results drop significantly in the United States and the United Kingdom, with 38 and 37 per cent, respectively, reporting the same.

## Percentage feeling each group is handling the health & safety risk of the pandemic well



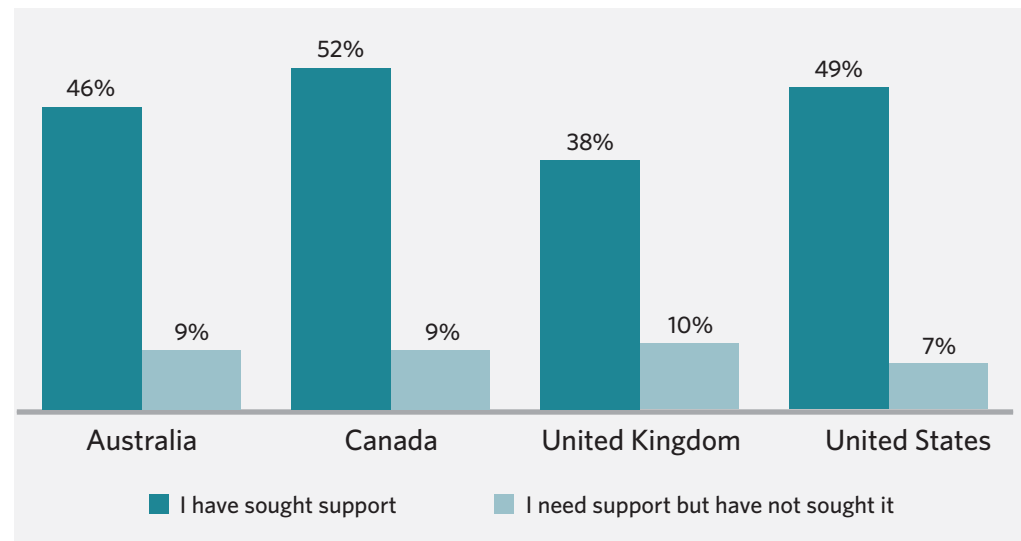


## Mental Health Support

Since April, the mental health of individuals in all 4 regions has been strained when compared to the 3-year period prior to the pandemic.

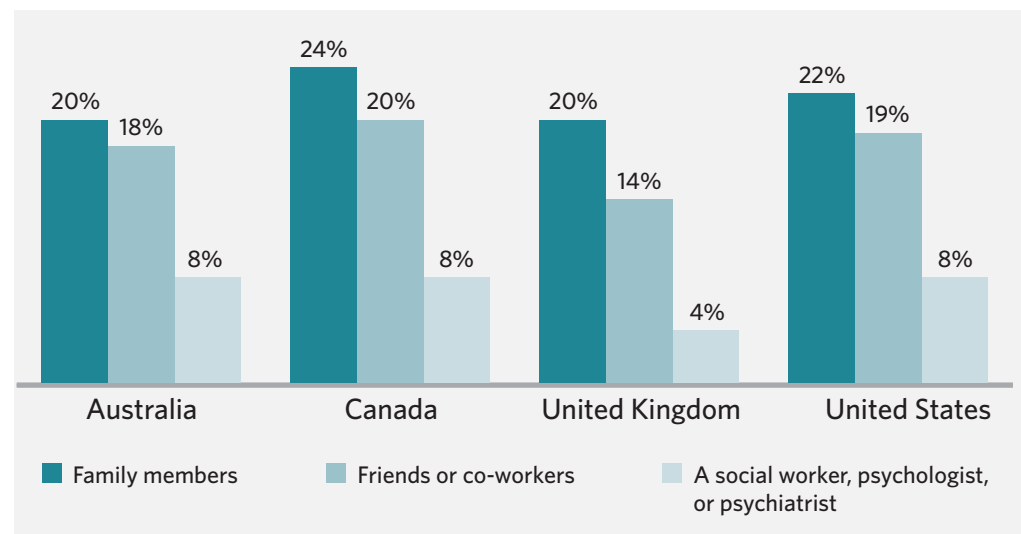
- Across all regions, between 38 and 52 per cent of individuals report seeking mental health support.
- Between 7 and 10 per cent of respondents report needing mental health support but have not sought support.

### Individuals reporting a need for mental health support



The top three reported sources of mental health support were the same across all regions. The most commonly reported support mechanism is from family members, followed by friends and co-workers, and then mental health professionals.

### Top three reported sources of mental health support





# Overview of the Mental Health Index™

The mental health and wellbeing of a population is essential to overall health and work productivity. The Mental Health Index™ provides a measure of the current mental health status of employed adults in each geography, compared to the benchmarks collected in the years of 2017, 2018 and 2019. The increases and decreases in the Index are intended to predict cost and productivity risks, and inform the need for action by individuals, business and government.

## **The Mental Health Index™ report has three main parts:**

1. The overall Mental Health Index™ (MHI), which is a measure of change compared to the benchmark of mental health and risk.
2. A Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score, which measures the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.
3. A spotlight section that reflects the specific impact of current issues in the community.

## Methodology

The data for this report was collected through online surveys of representative groups of 5,000 residents of the United States, 3,000 residents in Canada, 2,000 residents of the United Kingdom, and 1,000 residents in Australia. All those surveyed are currently employed or were employed within the prior six months. The same respondents participate each month to remove sampling bias. The respondents were asked to consider the prior two weeks when answering each question. The Mental Health Index™ is published monthly, starting April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for October 2020 was collected from September 28 to October 19, 2020 for all regions.

## Calculations

To create the Mental Health Index™, the first step leverages a response scoring system turning individual responses to each question into a point value. Higher point values are associated with better mental health and less mental health risk. Each individual's scores are added and then divided by the total number of possible points to get a score out of 100. The raw score is the mathematical mean of the individual scores.



To demonstrate change, the current month's scores are then compared to the benchmark and the prior month. The benchmark is comprised of data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The change relative to the benchmark is the Mental Health Index™. A score of zero in the Mental Health Index™ reflects no change, positive scores reflect improvement, and negative scores reflect decline.**

A Mental Stress Change score is also reported given that increasing and prolonged mental stress is a potential contributor to changes in mental health. It is reported separately and is not part of the calculation of the Mental Health Index™. The Mental Stress Change score is (percentage reporting less mental stress + percentage reporting the same level of mental stress \* 0.5) \* -1 + 100. The data compares the current to the prior month. **A Mental Stress Change score of 50 reflects no change in mental stress from the prior month. Scores above 50 reflect an increase in mental stress; scores below 50 reflect a decrease in mental stress.** The range is from zero to 100. A succession of scores over 50, month over month, reflects high risk.

## Additional data and analyses

Industry scores, demographic breakdown of sub-scores, and specific cross-correlational and custom analyses as well as benchmarking against the national results or any sub-group, are available upon request. Contact [MHI@morneaushepell.com](mailto:MHI@morneaushepell.com)

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