

# The impact of Covid-19 on healthcare professionals.



# COVID-19: Voices from the front line

**The impact of COVID-19 on healthcare professionals  
Survey results**

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# Introduction

As COVID-19 sweeps across the globe at rapid pace, our healthcare professionals are on the frontline, having to quickly adapt how they work amidst the deadly virus.

And while most Australians are bunkering down in their homes, many in the healthcare sector are interacting with unwell patients daily. Most have limited to no supplies and are not only concerned for their own health but that of their families and the community as a whole.

But while some our healthcare professionals have increased their workload, there are others who have seen a dramatic reduction in patients and therefore income. Like many of us they are now concerned for their future financial wellbeing.

This current study into the impact of COVID-19 on Australia's healthcare professionals reveals the pressure this deadly virus has (and will continue to) place on our straining medical system. But beyond logistical pressures, COVID-19 is also having an unprecedented impact on the country's medical professionals grappling to adjust during this global crisis. A crisis causing stress, anxiety and frustration with a government considered too slow to act to get ahead of a pandemic that has devastated communities the world over.

# Executive summary

Australia's healthcare professionals are feeling the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. The key insights from our online survey of 433 HCPs were:

- **Stressed and anxious.** With 78% concerned about contracting the virus (and passing it on), work stress levels are high (71%). 49% have experienced anxiety and 43% tiredness since the outbreak.
- **Adapting to new working environments and meeting patient expectations.** Many HCPs are adjusting to new patient treatment procedures (especially around telehealth services). They are also worried not only about the increase in patient numbers but also how best to deal with them given many patients are scared, angry, misinformed and have expectations (e.g. around testing, prescriptions etc.) that often can't be met.
- **Overworked, underpaid.** 55% have experienced increased workloads since the outbreak (with the vast majority of these not seeing any increase in income). 52% are concerned about their future income.
- **PPE should be a priority.** The lack of available PPE is having a substantial impact on HCPs' ability to do their work, as well as further adding to their anxiety about contracting the virus and/or passing it on to others.
- **Personal hygiene and social distancing the key.** While HCPs believe a number of measures can be effective in slowing the spread of the virus, they see personal behaviours as the key. 26% said practising strict personal hygiene (e.g. thorough and frequent hand washing) was the most effective; 21% said social distancing (e.g. standing 1.5m from others), while 12% felt increased availability of testing would help slow the spread
- **Is it too little, too late?** HCPs were most critical of the speed of the government's response to COVID-19 (39%) and the level of measures implemented (13%). As such, confidence levels in the healthcare system's ability to control the spread is waning. Over half the HCP sample were either not that confident (41%) or not at all confident (15%) that Australia's healthcare system can deal with COVID-19.

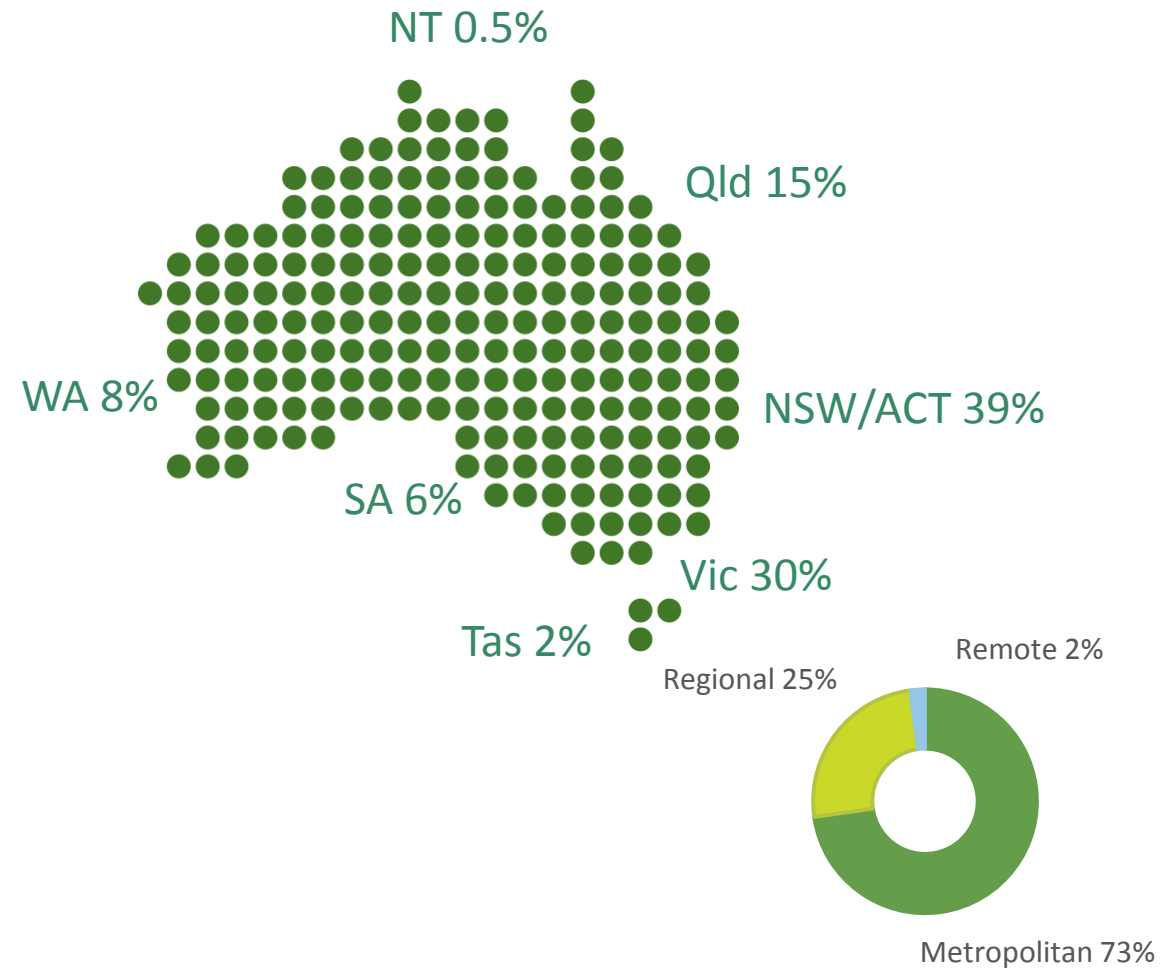
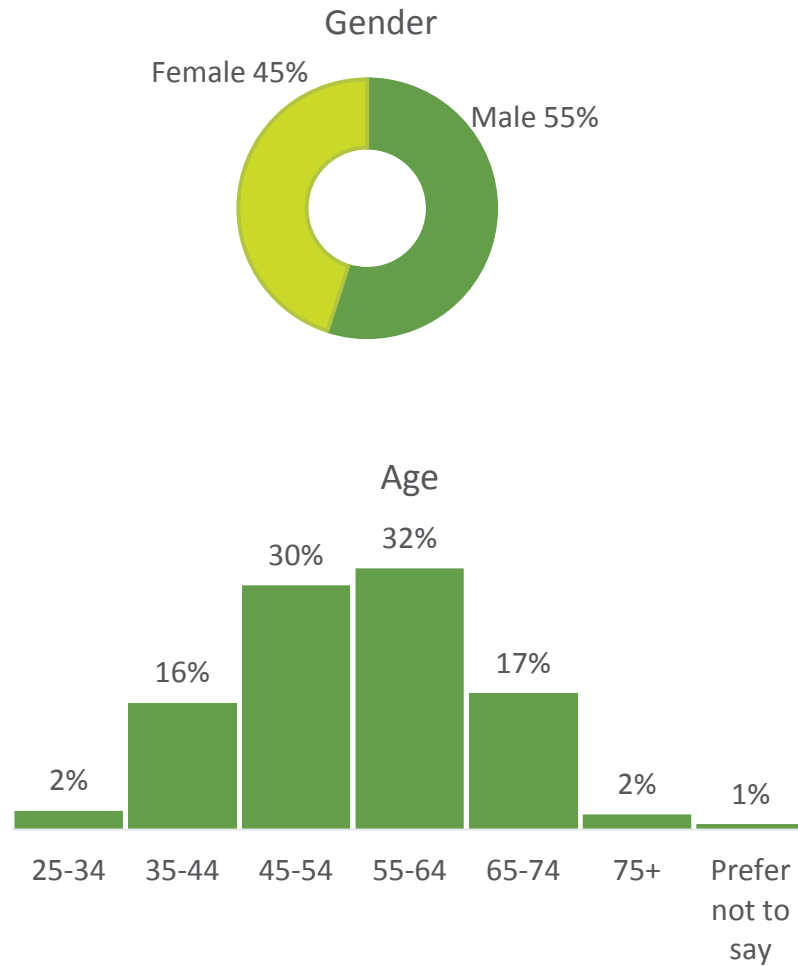
# Methodology

- TKW Research has a database of more than 80,000 healthcare professionals (HCPs), making it one of the largest such databases in Australia.
- The database is used exclusively for market research with specialists, GPs and allied health professionals to identify their views on a range of topics including their use and views on new drugs or medical devices, feedback on health trends and changes they would like to see to the healthcare system.
- The survey was designed, funded and administered by TKW Research.
- It was sent to a representative sample of 5,000 HCP's from the database.
- The survey is designed to give a truly representative voice to those on the front line; doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals.
- The survey was conducted across two and a half days last week - 25 to 27 March 2020.
- We achieved 433 completed surveys.
- The average interview length was between 12 to 14 minutes
- A breakdown of the responses by role is shown on the right.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No.</b>
GP's	35%	153
Specialists	31%	132
Nurses	10%	41
Healthcare Managers	7%	30
Allied Health Practitioners	7%	30
Surgeons	5%	23
Pharmacists	3%	14
Other	2%	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>433</b>

# HCP sample

- Further details of the sample are shown below



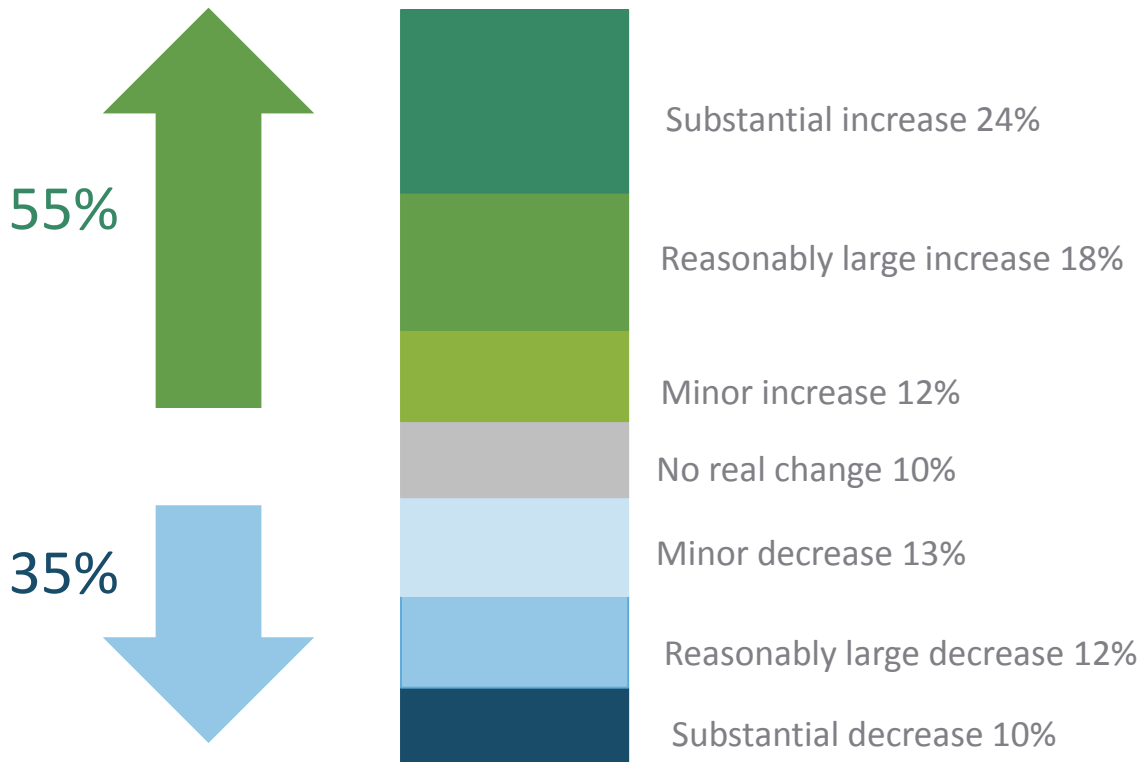
# DETAILED FINDINGS





# COVID-19 impact on workload

Since COVID-19 was first diagnosed in Australia in January 2020, what impact has it had on your workload as a healthcare professional? (n=433)

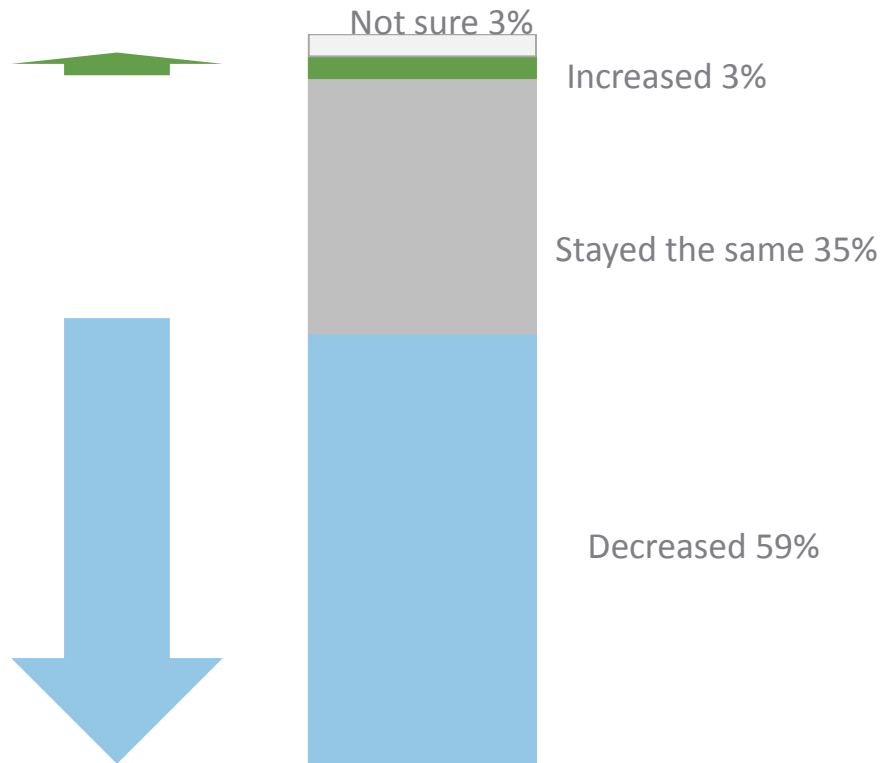


## Increase in HCP workload

- Over half of the HCPs (55%) have seen their workload increase since the COVID-19 outbreak
- 24% have seen substantial increases in their workload
- Around one third (35%) have experienced a decrease in workload

# COVID-19 impact on income

*What impact has COVID-19 had on the income you earn as a healthcare professional (whether through wages or your own practice/business)? (n=433)*



## Decreased income

- 59% have seen their income decrease during this period
- For 35%, their income has stayed the same
- Only 3% have seen an income increase

# COVID-19 impact on workload and income

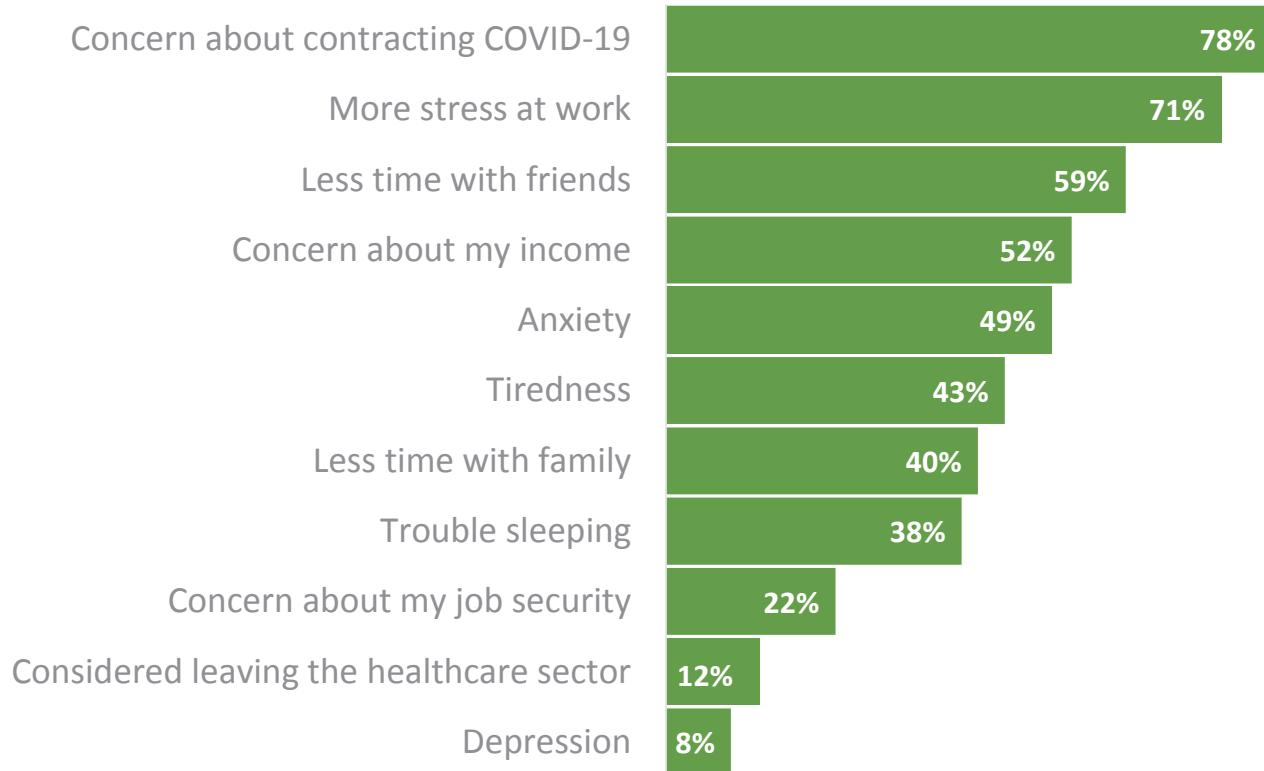
WORKLOAD	INCOME				Total
	Decrease	No change	Increase	Not sure	
Increase	24%	25%	3%	3%	55%
No change	4%	6%	0%	0%	10%
Decrease	31%	4%	0%	0%	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Extra workload not leading to increased income

- 24% have seen increased workload *but* decreased income. Most common amongst GPs (37%)
- 25% have seen increased workload and no change in income. Most common amongst pharmacists (79%), those in a management role (73%), nurses (49%) and those working in geriatrics (46%)
- 31% have seen decreased workload *and* income. This was most common amongst surgeons (78%) and specialists such as anaesthesiologists (53%)

# Other impacts

Which of the following have you personally experienced as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak? (n=433)



## HCPs are feeling numerous other impacts: contracting COVID-19 and work stress

- Around three quarters of HCPs are concerned about catching the virus (78%) and feeling more stressed at work (71%)
- Social/friends (59%) and family (40%) impacts are also being felt
- Reduction in income is a concern for 52%, while 22% are worried about their job security. Although only 12% are considering leaving the healthcare sector
- Anxiety (49%) and tiredness (43%) are also being felt by just under a half of HCPs

# Tales from the frontline

*What has been the biggest impact on you as a healthcare professional since the outbreak of COVID-19? (n=433)*

We asked the HCP sample to provide more details on the biggest impacts COVID-19 was having on their professional and personal life. Confirming the previous results, the response also highlighted the day-to-day impacts on their working lives and their broader concerns about the future and how successful we will be in controlling the virus.

## **Adapting to changes in patient treatment and work environment**

20% of HCPs said that adjusting to new patient treatment procedures (especially around telehealth services) was a challenge in terms of learning the skills involved; how effective the treatment can be and its impact on their business (e.g. whether Medicare rebates are available).

This is also having impacts on management practices and the organisational structure of some operations, which adds to workload and associated stress.

*“Providing reliable and up to date information to patients and staff, to allow us to provide ongoing specialist care to our patients. Extraordinary efforts to write guidelines, protocols and dramatically change work practices as we convert to telehealth and zoom meetings and avoid face-to-face, as our families and our patients are going through the most stressful time of their lives.”*

Female, Neurologist, 55-64, Metropolitan Victoria

*“Working from home with telehealth and remote access to aged care facility. Reduced income. Feeling guilty at not providing usual level of service to clinic patients or residents of aged care facilities, particularly as clinic staff and facility staff remain on the front lines.”*

Male, GP, 65-74, Metropolitan Victoria

# Tales from the frontline

*What has been the biggest impact on you as a healthcare professional since the outbreak of COVID-19? (n=433)*

## **Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE)**

10% of the sample said the lack of available PPE was having a substantial impact on their ability to do their work as well as further adding to their anxiety about contracting the virus and/or passing it on to others.

There were also concerns about the availability of other equipment, but PPE was the priority for most.

## **Dealing with patients**

HCPs are also worried not only about the increase in patient numbers but also how best to deal with them given many are scared, misinformed and have expectations (e.g. around testing, prescriptions etc.) that often can't be met.

*“Patients demanding to be tested for Covid-19...and not accepting that we GPs do not control the testing and that the government has set the reasoning behind the requirements to be met for testing. Patients not respecting our clinic's requirement re spacing of people in waiting room. Demanding bulk scripts in case the world ends! Knowing which patient phone consultations meet the telehealth consult item. Staff concerns about safety and job security. General fatigue by all working in the building. The unknown!! Every day managing the deck chairs on the Titanic.”*

Female, Manager (General Practice), 55-64, Regional Qld

*“Pressure to see patients with cough and fever without the clear PPE protection provided, that even doctors around the globe have access to and are better protected. It's a lottery if you're going to catch it.”*

Male, Paediatrician, 45-54, Metropolitan NSW

*“Lack of supplies and back orders of supplies of PPE equipment. The introduction of new Clinell wipes which are now on back order already.”*

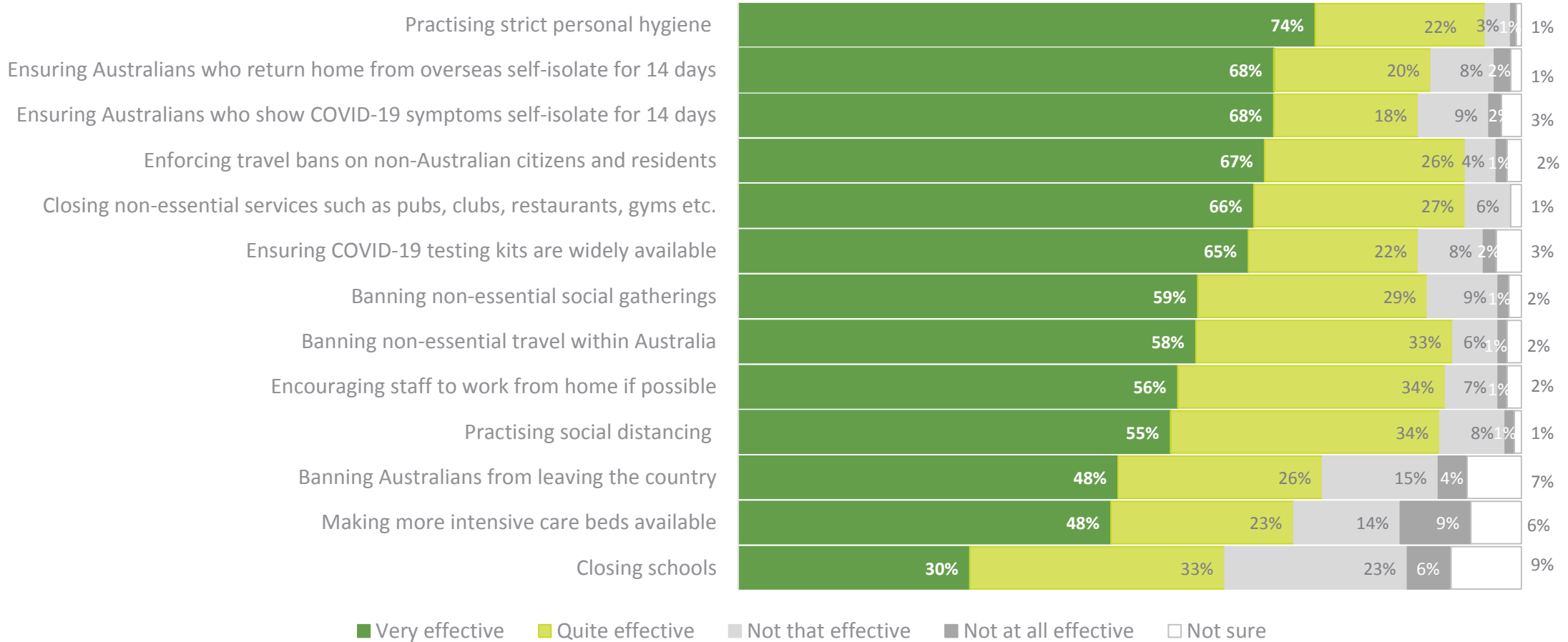
Female, Nurse (Surgery), 55-64, Regional NSW

*“The patients are scared and looking to us to provide them with answers. We can only tell them what we are being told and they aren't happy with what they are hearing.”*

Female, Manager (General Practice), 45-54, Metropolitan Qld

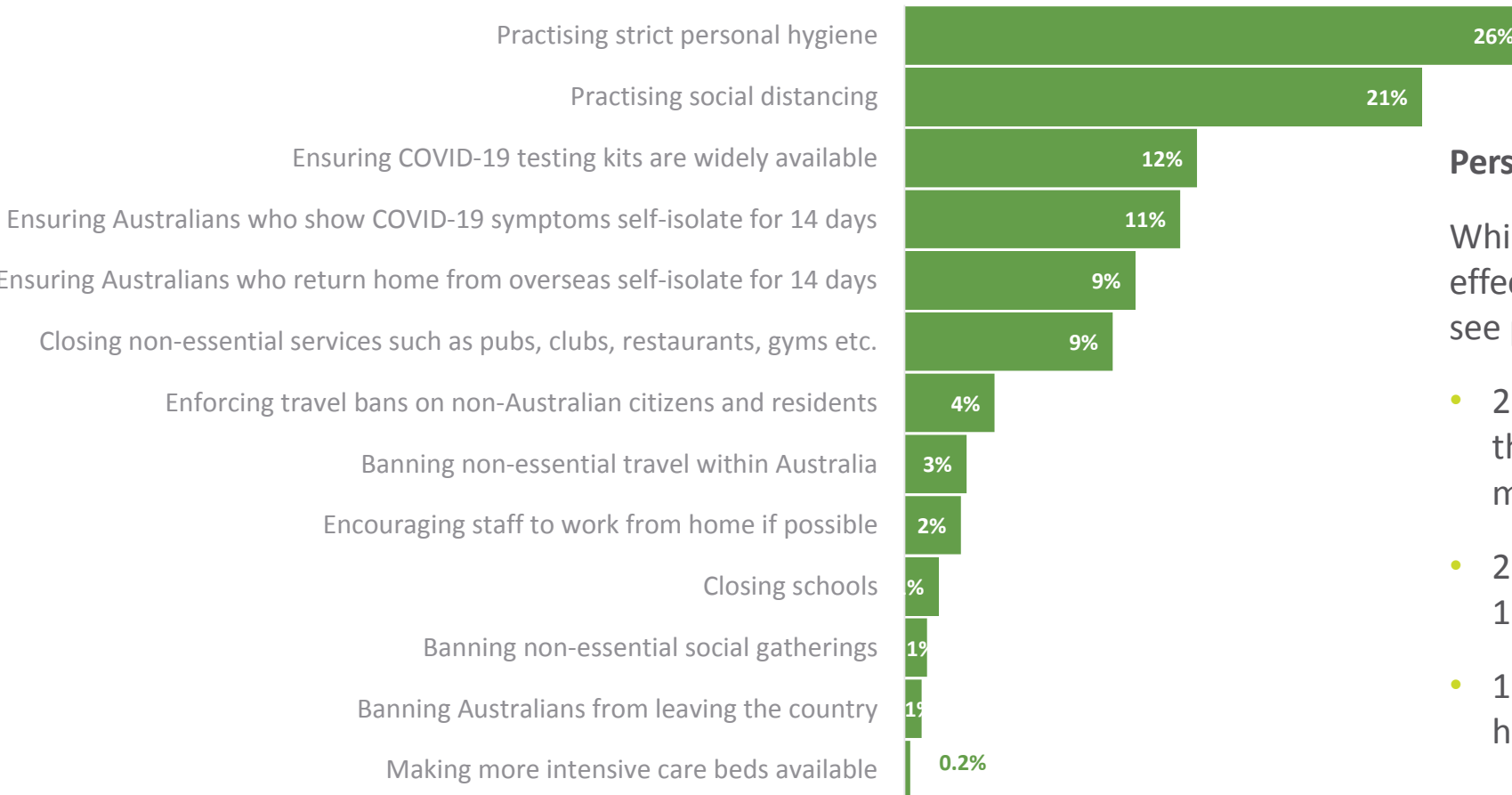
# Slowing the spread of COVID-19

How effective do you think the following measures are in slowing the spread of COVID-19?(n=433)



# The most effective response to COVID-19

Which of these measures do you think is the **most effective way** to slow the spread of COVID-19? (n=433)



## Personal hygiene and social distancing

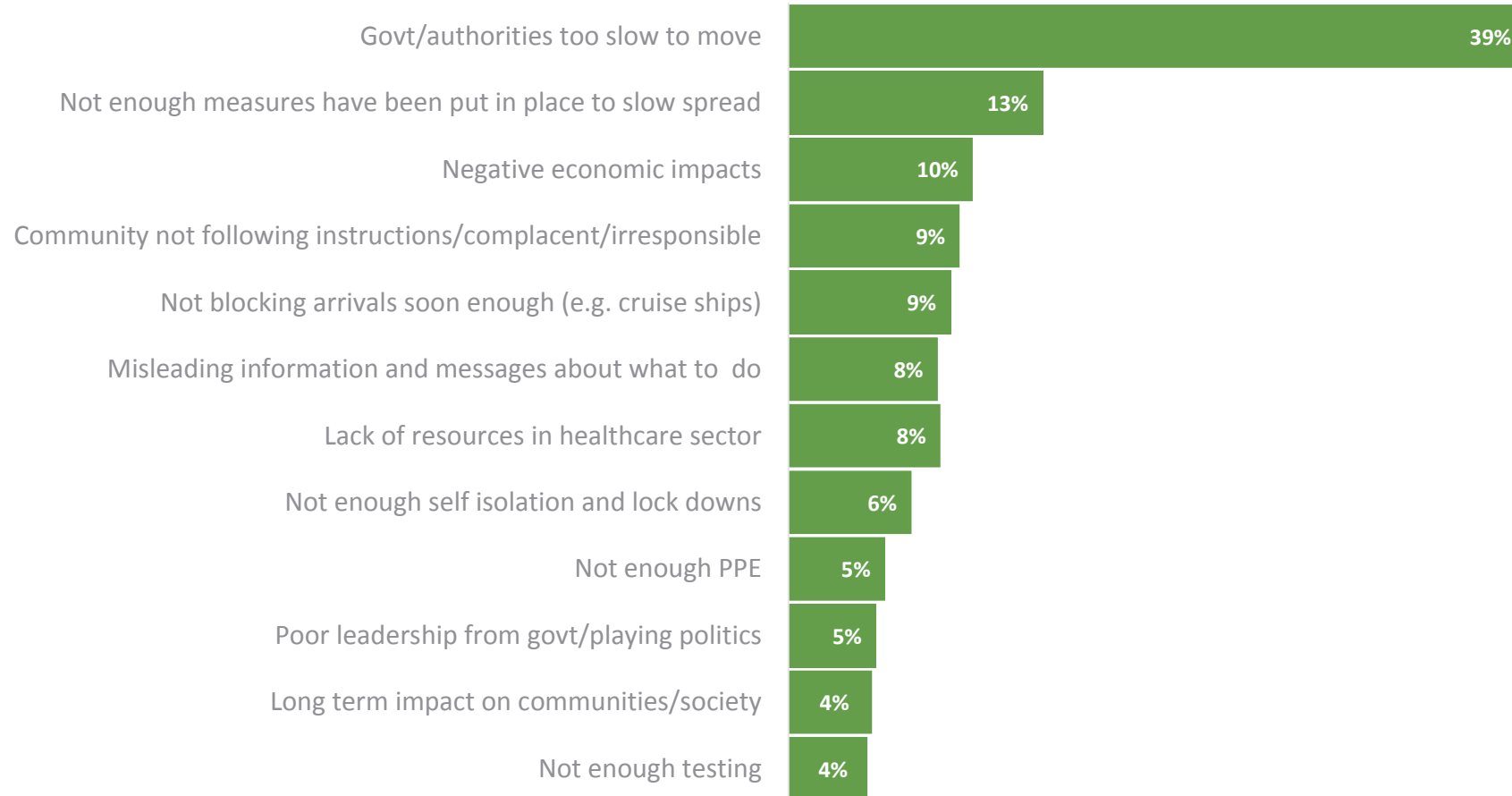
While HCPs believe a number of measures can be effective in slowing the spread of the virus, they see personal behaviours as the key.

- 26% said practising strict personal hygiene (e.g. thorough and frequent hand washing) was the most effective
- 21% said that social distancing (e.g. standing 1.5m from others) was the most effective
- 12% felt increased availability of testing would help slow the spread



# Australia's response to COVID-19

What are your main concerns about Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic? (n=433)

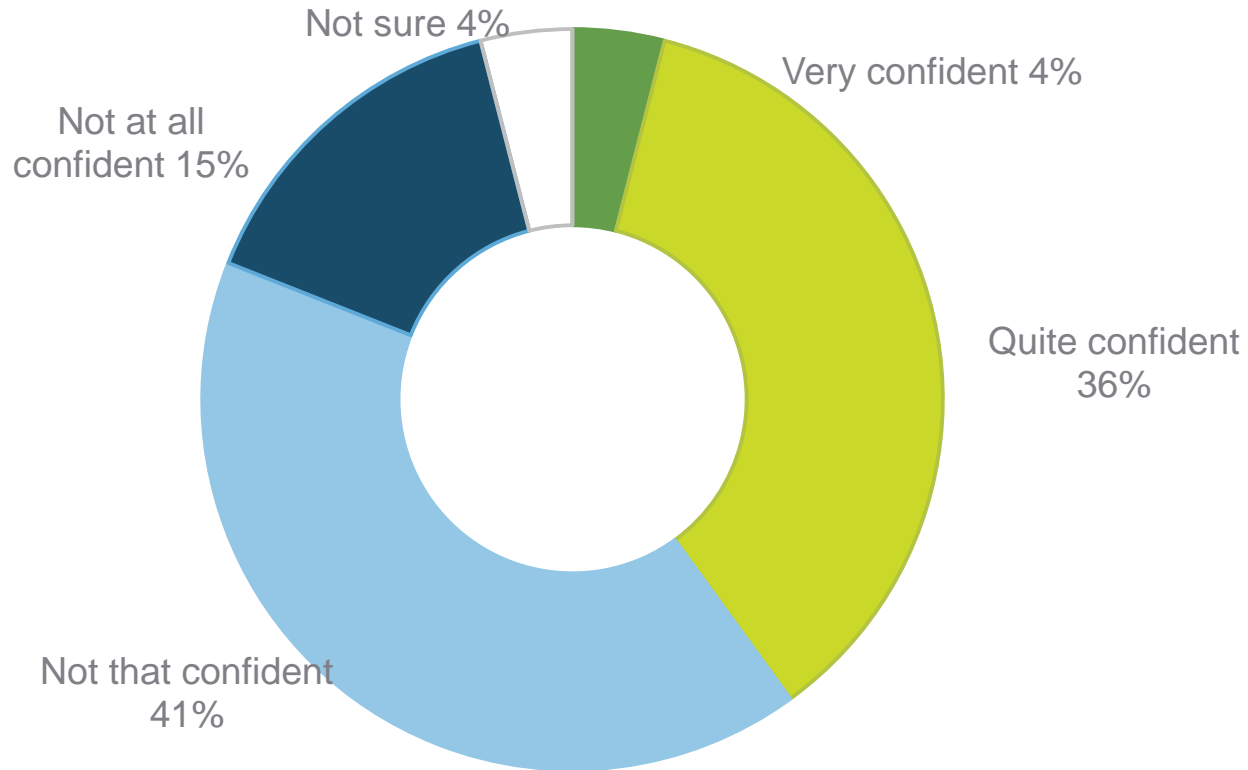


## Too little, too late

The most common concern about Australia's response to COVID-19 was that the government and other authorities were too late in introducing measure to contain the spread of the virus (39%) and that these measure were not strong enough (13%)

# Confidence in the healthcare system

*How confident are you that Australia's healthcare system can deal with COVID-19? (n=433)*



## Confidence flagging

- Over half the HCP sample were either not that confident (41%) or not at all confident (15%) that Australia's healthcare system can deal with COVID-19
- Although 36% were quite confident (only 4% were very confident)

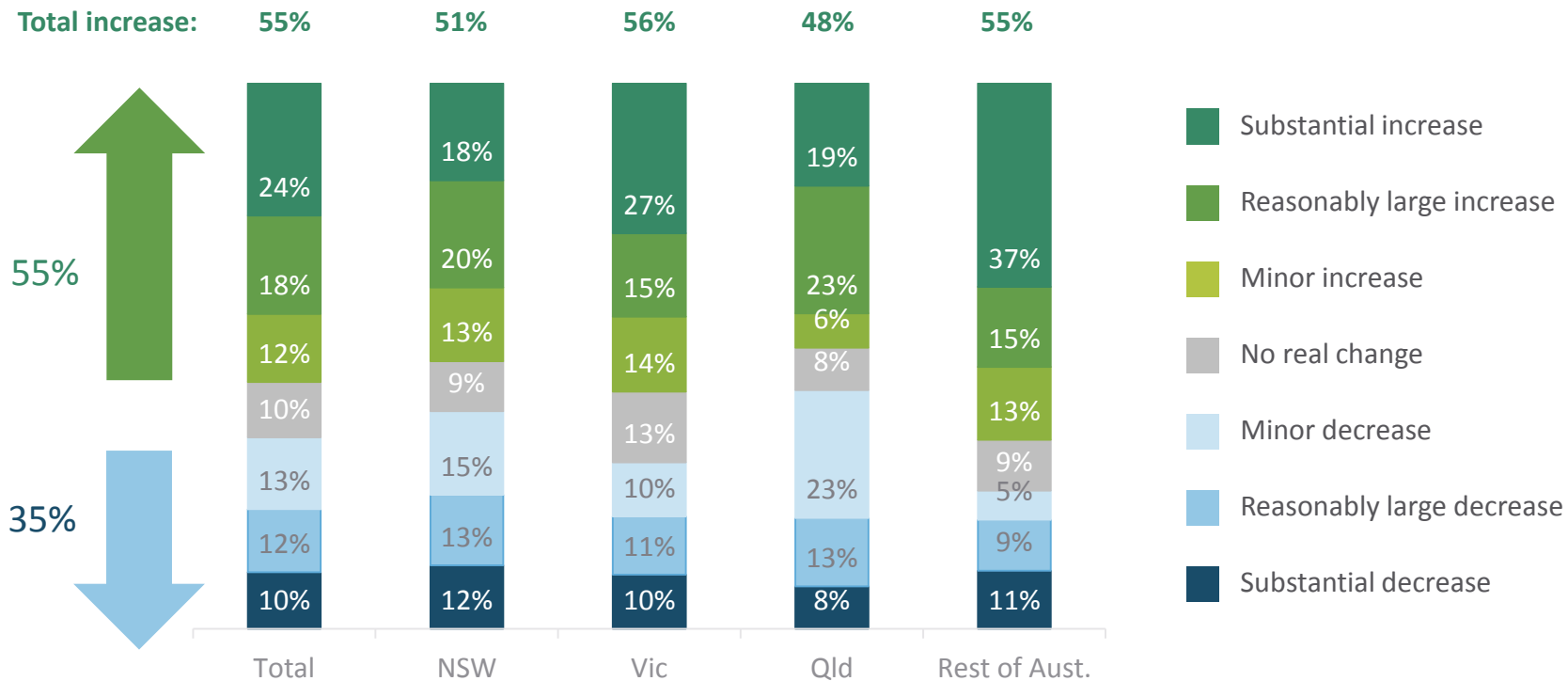
A common sentiment amongst the sample was that they were very proud of the Australian healthcare system and they considered it one of the best in the world. However, for the majority they feel it is at capacity as is (i.e. before COVID-19) and that the spread of the virus will only bring further stress to the system.

# APPENDIX: STATE RESULTS



# COVID-19 impact on workload

Since COVID-19 was first diagnosed in Australia in January 2020, what impact has it had on your workload as a healthcare professional? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)

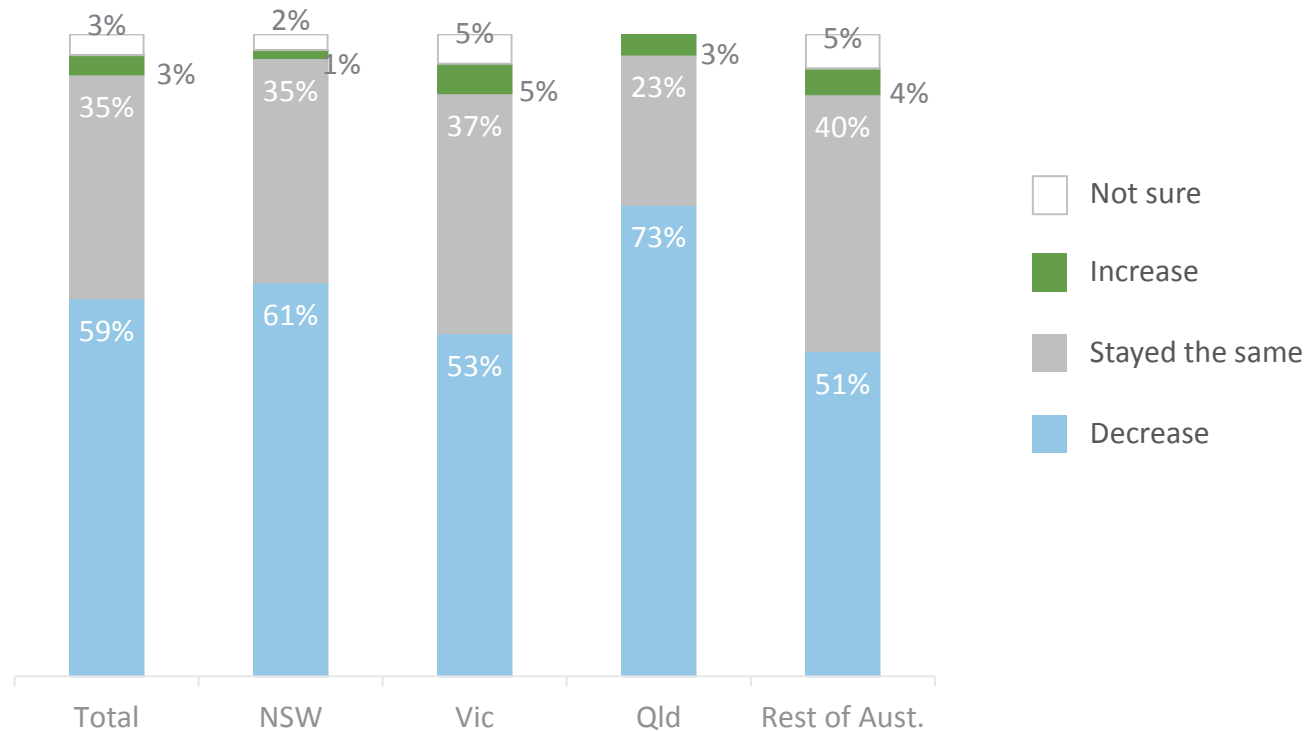


## Increase in HCP workload

- Over half of the HCPs (55%) have seen their workload increase since the COVID-19 outbreak
- Reasonably similar changes in workload across the states, with Qld HCPs more likely to have experienced a decrease (44%)

# COVID-19 impact on income

What impact has COVID-19 had on the income you earn as a healthcare professional (whether through wages or your own practice/business)? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)



## Decreased income

- 59% have seen their income decrease during this period
- Qld HCPs the most likely to be earning less money (73%)

# Other impacts

Which of the following have you personally experienced as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)  
 State with highest figure has been highlighted

HAVE EXPERIENCED	Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	Rest of Aust.
Concern about contracting COVID-19	78%	80%	78%	78%	71%
More stress at work	71%	74%	72%	61%	73%
Less time with friends	59%	58%	66%	50%	56%
Concern about my income	52%	53%	49%	61%	47%
Anxiety	49%	50%	50%	44%	51%
Tiredness	43%	38%	43%	47%	53%
Less time with family	40%	39%	40%	42%	40%
Trouble sleeping	38%	30%	41%	41%	47%
Concern about my job security	22%	26%	21%	20%	15%
Considered leaving the healthcare sector	12%	13%	11%	5%	17%
Depression	8%	7%	7%	13%	9%

## HCPs are feeling numerous other impacts: contracting COVID-19 and work stress

- Around three quarters of HCPs are concerned about catching the virus (78%) and feeling more stressed at work (71%)
- Reasonably consistent across the states (no statistically significant differences)
- NSW HCPs concerned about contracting the virus, experience more stress and concerned about job security
- Vic HCPs spending less time with friends
- Qld HCPs concerned about income, time with family and depression
- Rest of of Aust feeling anxious, tired, sleepless and considering leaving the healthcare sector

# Slowing the spread of COVID-19

*How effective do you think the following measures are in slowing the spread of COVID-19? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)  
State with highest figure has been highlighted*

VERY EFFECTIVE	Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	Rest of Aust.
Practising strict personal hygiene	74%	72%	74%	72%	79%
Ensuring Australians who return home from OS self-isolate for 14 days	68%	67%	69%	59%	77%
Ensuring Australians who show COVID-19 symptoms to self-isolate for 14 days	68%	67%	69%	56%	81%
Enforcing travel bans on non-Australian citizens and residents	67%	66%	65%	67%	73%
Ensuring COVID-19 testing kits are widely available	65%	64%	66%	63%	68%
Banning non-essential social gatherings	59%	62%	60%	47%	60%
Banning non-essential travel within Australia	58%	56%	58%	56%	65%
Encouraging staff to work from home if possible	56%	56%	59%	41%	64%
Practising social distancing	55%	55%	54%	52%	60%
Banning Australians from leaving the country	48%	48%	50%	44%	51%
Making more intensive care beds available	48%	49%	46%	42%	52%
Closing schools	30%	34%	26%	25%	31%

# The most effective response to COVID-19

Which of these measures do you think is the **most effective way** to slow the spread of COVID-19? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)  
 State with highest figure has been highlighted

MOST EFFECTIVE	Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	Rest of Aust.
Practising strict personal hygiene	26%	23%	26%	27%	29%
Practising social distancing	21%	21%	23%	14%	24%
Ensuring COVID-19 testing kits are widely available	12%	9%	13%	14%	16%
Ensuring Australians who show COVID-19 symptoms to self-isolate for 14 days	11%	12%	11%	13%	9%
Ensuring Australians who return home from overseas self-isolate for 14 days	9%	10%	9%	8%	11%
Closing non-essential services such as pubs, clubs, restaurants, gyms etc.	9%	11%	7%	11%	4%
Enforcing travel bans on non-Australian citizens and residents	4%	3%	6%	5%	0%
Banning non-essential travel within Australia	3%	4%	2%	3%	1%
Encouraging staff to work from home if possible	2%	2%	2%	5%	1%
Closing schools	1%	2%	0%	2%	3%
Banning non-essential social gatherings	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%
Banning Australians from leaving the country	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Making more intensive care beds available	0.2%	1%	0%	0%	0%

## Personal hygiene and social distancing

While HCPs believe a number of measures can be effective in slowing the spread of the virus, they see personal behaviours (strict hygiene and social distancing) as the key.

This was consistent across the states (no statistically significant differences).



# Australia's response to COVID-19

What are your main concerns about Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)  
 State with highest figure has been highlighted

RESPONSE	Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	Rest of Aust.
Too slow to move	39%	40%	37%	28%	47%
Not enough measures have been put in place to slow the spread	13%	16%	13%	11%	11%
Economic impact	10%	7%	12%	8%	12%
Community not following instructions/complacent/irresponsible	9%	10%	5%	16%	7%
Not blocking arrivals	9%	9%	8%	6%	9%
Poor/incorrect info	8%	7%	8%	6%	12%
Not enough self isolation	6%	5%	7%	5%	11%
Not enough PPE	5%	7%	3%	6%	3%
Poor leadership	5%	7%	4%	0%	5%
Community health/deaths	4%	6%	5%	3%	3%
Lack of resources	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%
Not enough testing	4%	4%	3%	3%	7%

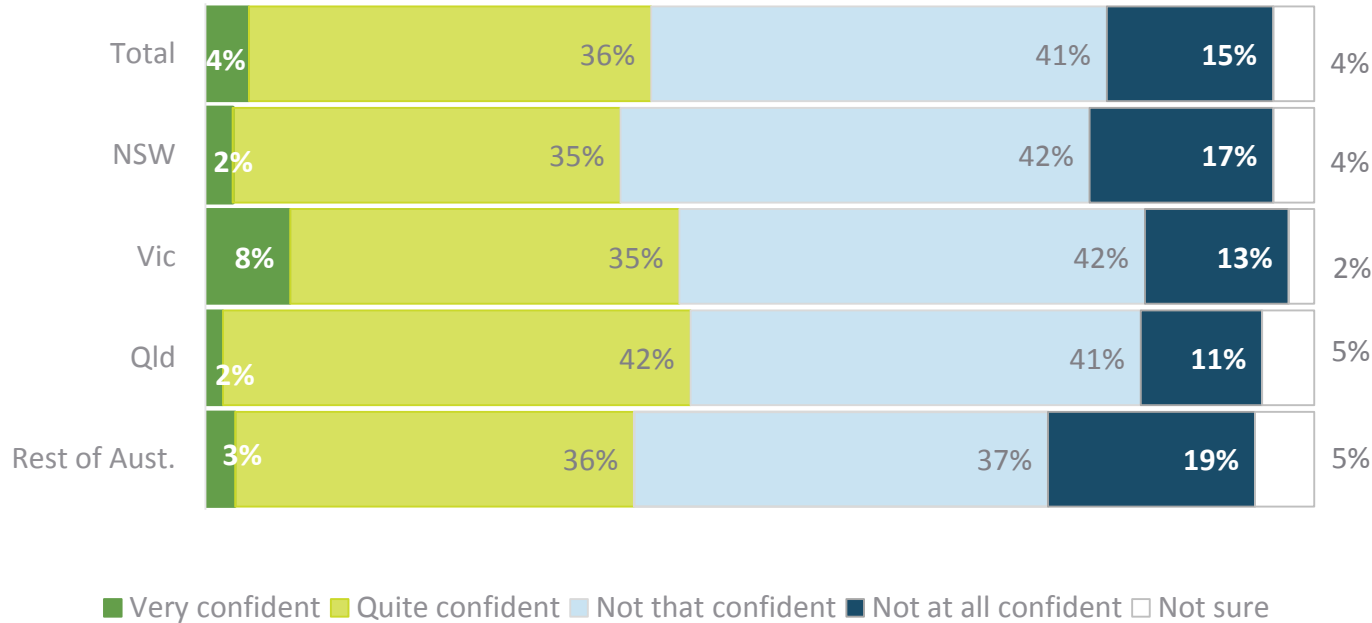
## Too little, too late

The most common concern about Australia's response to COVID-19 was that the government and other authorities were too late in introducing measure to contain the spread of the virus (39%) and that these measure were not strong enough (13%).

This was consistent across the states (no statistically significant differences).

# Confidence in the healthcare system

How confident are you that Australia's healthcare system can deal with COVID-19? (n=433, 163, 131, 64, 75)



## Confidence flagging

- Over half the HCP sample were either not that confident (41%) or not at all confident (15%) that Australia's healthcare system can deal with COVID-19
- Although 36% were quite confident (only 4% were very confident)
- Confidence was slightly higher amongst Vic (43%) and Qld HCPs (44%)

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