


Employment & Workplace Survey

A national survey by MS Australia involving 1,748 Australian adults [including 525 living with MS (MS Community)] has examined, for the first time, workplace attitudes towards those with a physical or mental health condition – including flexible work practices, job prospects, stigma, and disclosure. The research was conducted as an online survey in February 2022.

Overall, the findings show many Australian workplaces are not keeping pace with community expectations towards supporting their employees living with physical or mental health conditions. While for many, conditions have significantly improved with flexible working practices and the ability to work from home, stigma and concerns with disclosure remain significant issues.



85%
of the general community believe workplaces are also more receptive now to adapting roles to better fit their employees



83%

of the general community believe people with health conditions are just as capable as they are when it comes to working



Half of those with MS

missed out on work opportunities due to their health condition



One in four

of those with MS were uncomfortable in the workplace as they felt people labelled them



One in five

with a health condition say employment was terminated after disclosure

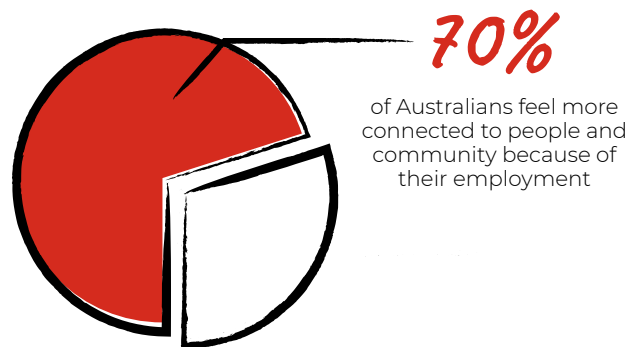


Workplaces aren't keeping up with community expectations

- The research found an overwhelming 83% of the general community believe people with a health condition are just as capable as they are when it comes to working.
- More than eight out of ten surveyed in the general community (85%), and a similar proportion of those living with MS (82%), believe workplaces are also more receptive now to adapting roles to better fit their employees.
- Four out of five with a health condition feel they are treated equally as a full team player and feel supported, and this was consistent between the general population (80%) and those with MS (81%).
- However, half of those living with MS (52%) stated they had missed out on opportunities at work due to their condition – compared to 42% of the general Australian community living with a health condition.
- Close to one in five (17%) of those living with MS felt the culture of the company they worked at didn't make them feel comfortable enough to disclose their condition.

Action in the workplace speaks louder than words

- Meaningful work is a critical component to a good quality of life and particularly for those with health conditions – and the findings reinforced this with three quarters of those living with MS (77%) feeling more connected to people and the community because of their employment.
- This positivity was held by a similar proportion of those in the general community with a health condition (69%).
- However, while four out of five (81%) living with MS felt they were treated equally as a full team player and supported in the workplace - the sentiment doesn't unfortunately translate into action for all:
 - 17% of those living with MS had their job description adjusted to accommodate their requirements after disclosure.
 - One third (32%) saw physical changes made to their work environment to support their condition.

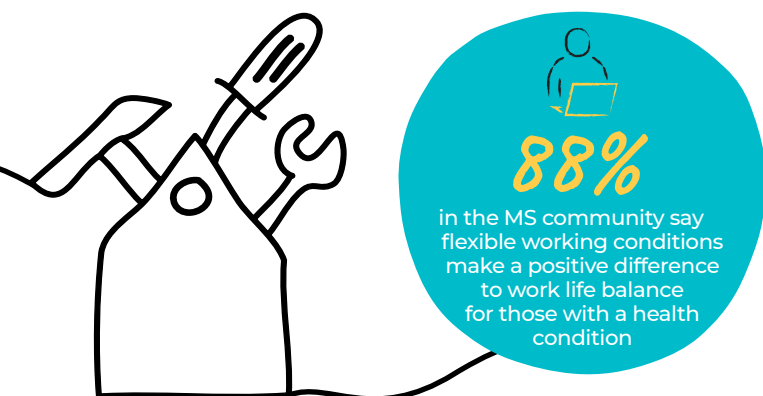


Flexible working practices are a major win

- New flexibility in the workplace has been welcomed by the MS community with the majority (88%) stating flexible working conditions, such as working from home and flexible hours, make a positive difference to the work-life balance for those with a health condition.
- Three quarters (75%) of those living with MS and four out of five in the general community (80%) agreed with the statement in the survey that said flexibility and working from home have introduced a more level playing field for everyone.
- The MS community firmly believe flexible working options (88%) and workplace infrastructure adjustments (71%) will make the working world a better place for those living with a health condition.

Finding or keeping a job is the challenge

- While flexible work practices are generating a more 'even playing field' in the workplace and Australia's unemployment rates remain at an all-time low, nine out of ten surveyed (88% of the general community and 89% of those living with MS) believe it is harder for those who have a physical or mental health condition to find a job.
- The findings also uncovered two thirds of the general population (68%) and a similar proportion of those living with MS (66%) believe people who have a health condition are limited in the work they can do.
- Four out of five Australians (79%) believe those with a physical or mental health condition have issues retaining a job – 80% of those living with MS agree with this.



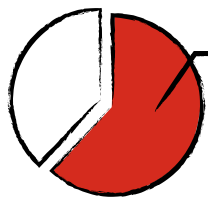
in the MS Community feel workplace infrastructure adjustments will also make a positive difference



of general population believe exposure of health conditions is important so there is less stigma

There's a sense of feeling different

- Overall, two thirds of the general community (68%) believe people with a health condition are limited in the type of work they can do. A similar proportion of the MS community (66%) agreed with this.
- Amongst workers, the survey found close to half (47%) of those with MS felt different to their co-workers because of their condition.
- Amongst workers, more than one quarter (28%) of those living with MS were uncomfortable in the workplace because they felt people label them.
- Addressing this through education and information was reinforced with a significant proportion of the general community (82%) and those living with MS (84%) in agreement that knowing more about a person's health condition would make it easier to work with them.



62%

of the MS community do not want to be viewed as likely to take more sick days

Upsides and downsides of disclosure continue

- Disclosure of a health condition in the workplace remains challenging with more than two out of five (41%) living with MS choosing not to disclose to everyone in their workplace as they felt it would change people's opinion of them.
- One in four (25%) of those with MS who did not disclose their condition at work felt it would jeopardise their career prospects and two out of five (41%) felt it was a private matter.
- On the plus side, a significant proportion of those living with MS who disclosed their condition at work (88%) had something positive happen following disclosure, with three in four (76%) feeling more able to be their authentic self at work.
- However, on the downside, one in four (24%) of those living with MS who disclosed their condition at work said people's opinion of them changed with disclosure.

This was even higher at two in five (41%) of the general Australians with a health condition.

- Concerningly, 3% of those living with MS who disclosed their condition at work had their position terminated. Over one million Australians who disclosed their condition had to leave their job as it made working there no longer sustainable.

Speaking up is challenging – the stigma remains

- Nine out of ten of those living with MS (97%) believe it's hard for those with a health condition to speak up about how their condition affects them in the workplace. The main reasons are:
 - Half believe there is a stigma (those living with MS 56%/general community 54%).
 - There's concern they will be viewed as unable to cope with pressure (those living with MS 69%/general community 54%).
- The findings also showed nearly two thirds of the MS community worry they will be seen as a weaker link (65%) and do not want to be viewed as likely to take more sick days (62%).
- In addition, half of those with MS (48%) stated it is difficult to speak about a health condition because they want to be seen as a long-term team member to invest in and promote. This finding was twice that of the general community (23%).

Flexibility and education provides a path forward

- There is a resounding view among those living with MS (88%) that flexible working options would improve the workplace for those living with a physical or mental health condition. Almost two thirds of the general community (63%) agreed with this.
- For those living with MS, this was followed closely by workplace infrastructure adjustments (71%).
- Half of the general population (48%) believe exposure of health conditions is important so there is less of a stigma. Almost two thirds of those with MS agreed with this (64%).
- More of a focus on diversity in employment was also seen as a priority by the general community (45%) and those living with MS (60%).

Each state and territory MS Member Organisation offers specialist MS employment services, advice and support to people with MS and their employers. This primarily includes a tailored approach to individuals living and working with MS to find the right solutions within the workplace and address barriers, to help people with MS retain employment. Specialist employment staff can assist with the adjustment of workplaces to suit the physical abilities of individuals with MS or discuss flexible work practices that will meet the needs of the person with MS and the business needs of the employer.

To find the service nearest you, please visit www.msaustralia.org.au/supports-and-services/

MS Australia, is Australia's national multiple sclerosis (MS) not-for-profit organisation that empowers researchers to identify ways to treat, prevent and cure MS, seeks sustained and systemic policy change via advocacy, and acts as the champion for Australia's community of people affected by MS.

