



COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability

Customer Research
Insights Report
Wave 3, Q2, June 2021

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The background features a city skyline at sunset with a large glowing lightbulb in the center, surrounded by a network of white lines and dots. In the top left corner, there are several overlapping circles in green, blue, and orange, with a dashed white line forming a larger circle around some of them. Two hands are shown in silhouette at the bottom, reaching up towards the lightbulb.

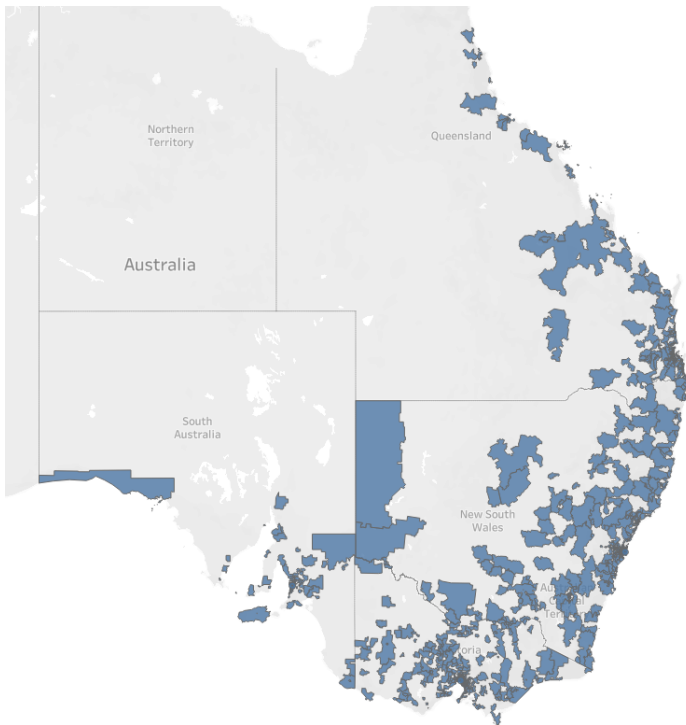
Research Overview

Our methodology and outputs

Research methodology

The third wave of the COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability survey was administered between the 28th April – 3rd May, in order to monitor changes in customer wellbeing and sentiment towards energy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondent locations

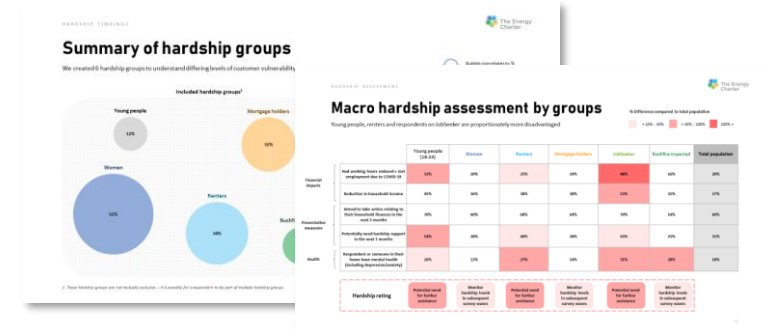


Method

- This survey used a **random sample of 3,012** respondents
- Respondents were **representative of the Australian population**, using controlled attributes across **Median age, Gender and State (VIC/NSW/QLD/SA/ACT)**
- **Respondents were qualified** to ensure they were both 'connected to electricity' and 'pay or have sight of their energy bill(s)'
- Respondents were asked a range of **questions covering the following topics**:
 - Demographics
 - Wellbeing and outlook
 - Individual & household impacts
 - Actions taken and hardship support
 - Communication preferences
 - Energy investments

Three key artefacts have been developed to enable research signatories to fully leverage the findings and data.

Final Insights Report (focusing on hardship groups)



HOUSEHOLD INCOME & EDUCATION LEVEL

Over half of all respondents earn below \$100,000 per annum

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Income Level	Percentage
Below \$10,000	11%
\$10,000 - \$19,999	17%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	15%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	13%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	16%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	14%
\$60,000 - \$69,999	12%
\$70,000 - \$79,999	10%
\$80,000 - \$89,999	8%
\$90,000 - \$99,999	6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	4%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	2%
\$200,000 - \$249,999	1%
\$250,000 - \$299,999	1%
\$300,000 - \$349,999	1%
\$350,000 - \$399,999	1%
\$400,000 - \$449,999	1%
\$450,000 - \$499,999	1%
\$500,000 - \$549,999	1%
\$550,000 - \$599,999	1%
\$600,000 - \$649,999	1%
\$650,000 - \$699,999	1%
\$700,000 - \$749,999	1%
\$750,000 - \$799,999	1%
\$800,000 - \$849,999	1%
\$850,000 - \$899,999	1%
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\$35,000,000 - \$35,499,999	1%
\$35,500,000 - \$35,999,999	1%
\$36,000,000 - \$36,499,999	1%
\$36,50	

Wave 3 key insights

This report provides a synthesised view of insights and trends related to Wave 3 of the COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability survey.

Four main themes are emerging:

Respondents wellbeing continue to trend upwards across the entire sample population, suggesting a continued trajectory of recovery

- An increase of 3% in respondents who are optimistic about Australia's economic direction (compared to Wave 1)
- A decrease of 5% in those who reported reduced working hours due to COVID-19 (compared to Wave 1)
- A decrease of 7% and 10% respectively, amongst those reporting a reduction in individual and household income (compared to Wave 1)
- For those categories where household spending had fallen, there has also been a turnaround. A 17% improvement in Recreation spend (e.g. entertainment or holidays), and a 20% improvement in Transport spend (compared to Wave 1)

Pandemic induced stress has improved as the COVID-19 situation becomes more manageable across the country, however figures remain high

- 45% of respondents agreed that COVID-19 had increased their stress levels, a reduction from the 51% recorded in Wave 2
- 61% of respondents are highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19, which is lower than the 69% recorded in Wave 2
- Bill related stress has restabilised down to Wave 1 numbers, as 26% stated that they were worried about being able to pay their bills (compared to 29% in Wave 2)
- 51% of young adults reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, a large improvement from Wave 2 (61% of respondents). This however still represents a large proportion of Young Adults.


Whilst JobSeekers have improved since Wave 2, the ending of income supplements may amplify their vulnerability over the coming months

- Young Adults (18-24), Renters and JobSeekers continue to be the 3 primary vulnerable groups as they are being impacted more significantly than the broader population. Whilst all three groups have shown improvement, the ending of Coronavirus and JobKeeper payments may lead to the gap between these groups and the broader population widening in Wave 4
- The need for hardship support was consistently higher amongst these vulnerable groups when compared to the broader population
- Respondents belonging to these three groups were also more likely to be experiencing financial stress

The proportion of respondents needing hardship support has persisted since Wave 2.

- Consistent with Wave 1, Energy Bills remain the category where household spending has increased the most, with 31% of respondents indicating they are spending more
- At 16%, energy bills and medical expenses are the household spending categories where the most respondents are receiving support. A further 15% stated that they may need energy bill support in the next 3 months (May - Jul), which is consistent with Wave 2 results

1. See *Topline Responses* for full detail.

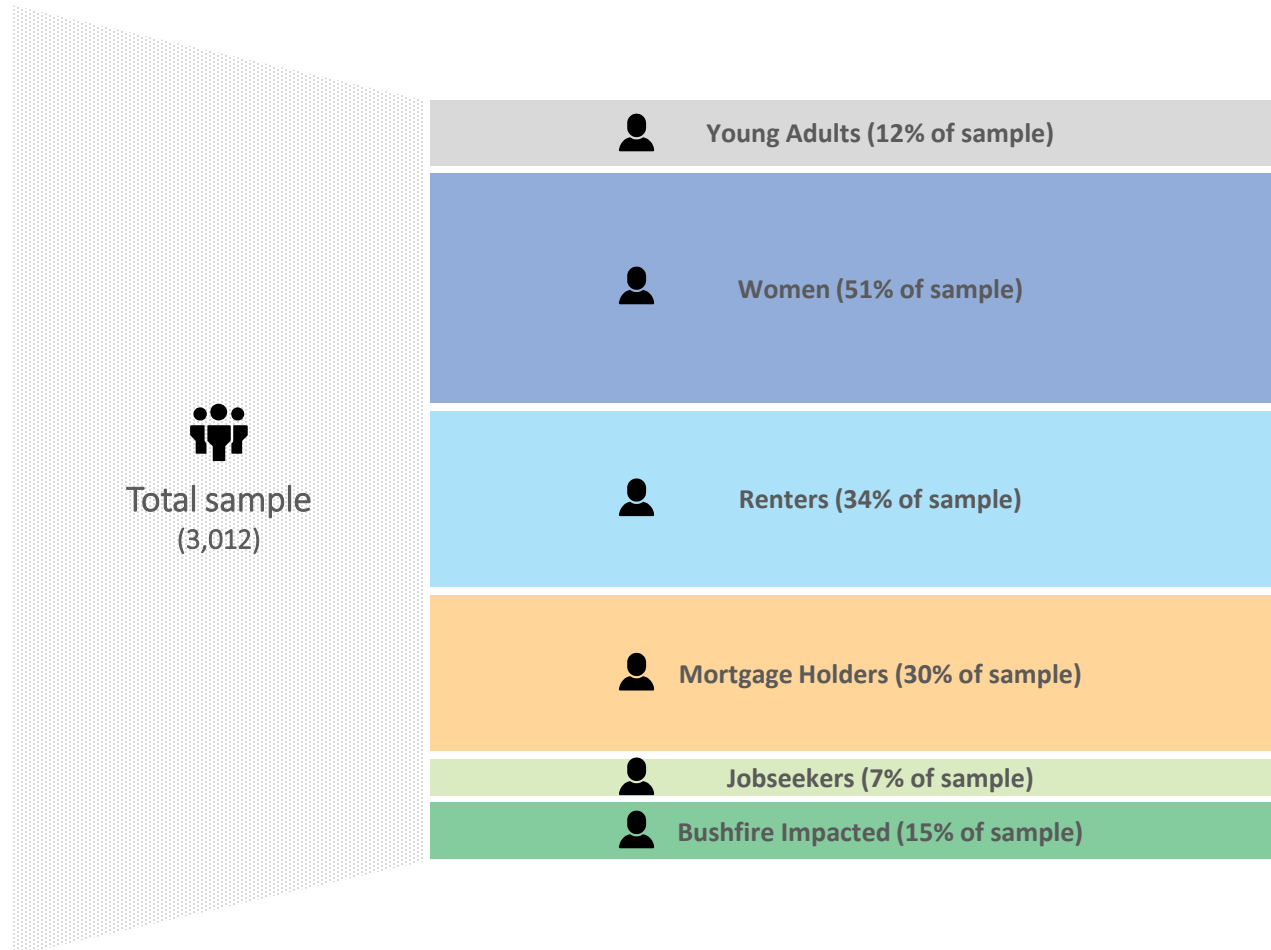


Vulnerable Group Analysis

For Wave 3, we have continued to anchor our analysis to a range of Vulnerable Groups

We're continuing to track 6 vulnerable groups

These groups were created to anchor our synthesis and understand differing levels of customer vulnerability.



1. These vulnerable groups are not mutually exclusive – it is possible for a respondent to be part of multiple groups

Vulnerable group framework

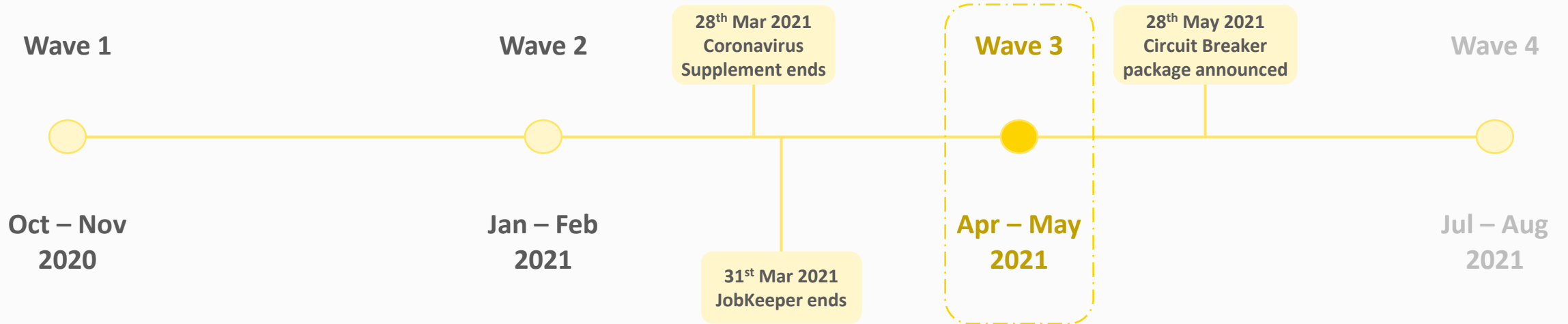
Groups were defined using the following criteria.

% of respondent population ¹	Vulnerable group	Qualifying question	Qualifying response	No. of qualified respondents
12%	Young Adults (18-24)	What is your age?	18-24	361
51%	Women	How do you describe your gender identity?	Woman	1,525
34%	Renters	Which of the following best describes your home ownership situation?	Rent – intend to own a home later + Rent – never intend to own a home	1,038
30%	Mortgage Holders	Which of the following best describes your home ownership situation?	Own – paying mortgage	907
7%	JobSeeker	In the last 3 months (Feb - Apr), have you received any of the below supplements to your individual income?	JobSeeker	198
15%	Bushfire Impacted	What is your postcode?	Postcodes classified as having been impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires by the Australian Taxation Office	449

1. These vulnerable groups are not mutually exclusive – it is possible for a respondent to be part of multiple groups

Survey timings

Wave 4 of the research will be crucial to understanding whether the removal of JobKeeper and the Coronavirus Supplement will amplify hardship amongst vulnerable groups



Young Adults (18-24)


22

Average age


59%

Renters


67%

 Employed full
time, part time or
casually

33%

 of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

Since Wave 2, financial health appears to be improving amongst Young Adults, however mental health metrics continue to fall in the high range despite improvements. It will be important to monitor hardship amongst this group as a large proportion were receiving the Coronavirus Supplement and JobKeeper payments, which have now ended

Mindsets & attitudes

- **42%** of young adults **felt that the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) have been difficult for them**, compared to 28% of respondents aged 25+. This was an improvement from 47% reported in Wave 2
- **44%** of young adults are **feeling burnt out from balancing everything in their lives**, consistent with the results from Wave 2
- **32%** of young adults are **optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, compared to 35% of respondents aged 25+. This is a slight improvement from the 30% reported in Wave 2
- **51%** of young adults reported that **COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, a large improvement from Wave 2 (61% of respondents)
- **40%** of young adults reported that **COVID-19 has caused them to feel depressed**, compared to 33% of respondents aged 25+.

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **16%** of young adults **have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19**, a slight improvement from Wave 2 (17%)
- **78%** of young adults have **spent 1 or more additional days at home per week** over the last 3 months (Feb - Apr), compared to 60% of respondents aged 25+
- **32%** of young adults have **experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) (Feb - Apr)**, nearly double that of respondents aged 25+ (18%)
- **15%** of young adults have received **JobSeeker** payments in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr), which is **triple the proportion of respondents aged 25+** (5%). It will be more important to monitor hardship now that the Coronavirus supplement has been removed.
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, **30% of young adults who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods**

Young Adults (18-24)


22

Average age


59%

Renters


67%

Employed full
time, part time or
casually

33%

of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

Since Wave 2, financial health appears to be improving amongst Young Adults, however mental health metrics continue to fall in the high range despite improvements. It will be important to monitor hardship amongst this group as a large proportion were receiving the Coronavirus Supplement and JobKeeper payments, which have now ended

Actions taken

- In the next 3 months (May - Jul), **44% of young adults intend to reduce spending on non-essential items**, compared to 34% of respondents aged 25+. This is lower than the Wave 2 figure of 50%
- In line with Wave 2, on average, a **smaller proportion (28%)** of young adults are **currently adopting energy saving behaviours** than respondents aged 25+ (34%). More **young adults however intend to adopt these behaviours** (27% vs 18%).
- On average, the proportion of young adults **currently adopting energy saving behaviours** continues to decrease from **30% in Wave 2 to 28% in Wave 3**
- **Energy bill priority amongst young adults** Increased to 11%, an increase from the **7% recorded in Wave 2**
- **29% of young adults are not currently receiving energy bill support but may need it within the next 3 months (May - Jul)**. This is over double the proportion of respondents aged 25+ who answered the same way (13%)
- The top reason for **currently receiving hardship support** amongst young adults was that they felt **uncertain about the future and want to make themselves as safe financially as possible** (13%). This differs from previous waves, where staying on top of money matters through COVID-19 was the key reason
- The top reason (13%) young adults **may need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)** (May - Jul) continues to be because they are **feeling uncertain about the future and to make themselves as safe financially as possible**

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for young adults is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated weekly via email**. This is consistent with Wave 2 results

Energy investments¹

- On average, **35% of young adults have made an energy investment in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr)**, a much larger proportion than that of respondents aged 25+ (17%).

1. Energy investments include: Natural gas, solar panels (roof), battery storage system, community battery/virtual power plant, electric vehicle, energy efficient architectural appliance, energy efficient household appliance, solar hot water, heat pump, off-grid generator

Women



46

Average age



27%

Own a mortgage



51%

Employed full time, part time or casually



21%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

The vulnerability gap between women and men has reduced between Waves 2 and 3, with fewer women experiencing employment hour and income reduction. Women however are less likely to be receiving energy bill support and continue to be more likely in their adoption of cost saving behaviours

Mindsets & attitudes

- **30% of women felt that the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) have been difficult for them**, equal to the proportion of men who responded in the same way. This is also a decrease from Wave 2 (34%)
- **38% of women believe that their lives will be better one year from now**, a slight decrease from Wave 2
- **28% of women are worried about being able to pay their bills**, which is a reduction from Wave 2 (30%) but still higher than men (25%)
- **48% of women reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, compared to 42% of male respondents
- **62% of women are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19**, a decrease from Wave 2 (71%), and now on par with men (61%)

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **11% of women have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19**, a continued **improvement** from 13% in Wave 1
- **19% of women have experienced a decrease in individual income** in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr), a **continued improvement** from 23% in Wave 1. For the first time, a smaller proportion of women have experienced a decrease in individual income compared to men
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, **32% of women who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods**

Women



46

Average age



27%

Own a mortgage



51%

Employed full time, part time or casually



21%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

The vulnerability gap between women and men has reduced between Waves 2 and 3, with fewer women experiencing employment hour and income reduction. Women however are less likely to be receiving energy bill support and continue to be more likely in their adoption of cost saving behaviours

Actions taken

- Consistent with wave 2, a **larger proportion of women (38%)** than men (33%) are considering to **reduce spending on essential items where possible in the next 3 months (May - Jul)**. Since Wave 1, this group of women has increased from 27% to 38%
- On average, **more women (35%)** are currently adopting **energy saving behaviours** than men (32%). This is consistent with results from Wave 2, **however the gap between men and women has fallen from 6% in Wave 2 to 3% in Wave 3**
- 13% of women are receiving energy bill support**, compared to men, where 20% are currently receiving energy bill support
- The top reason (23%) for **needing energy bill support** amongst women was that it was that they were finding their energy bills difficult to afford

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for women is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email**. This is consistent with both Waves 1 & 2

Energy investments¹

- Consistent with Wave 1**, on average, **women (13%)** are less likely to have already made energy investments when compared to men (16%). Similarly, a smaller proportion of women (6%) than men (10%) are considering/intending to make a purchase in the next 3 months (May - Jul).

1. Energy investments include: Natural gas, solar panels (roof), battery storage system, community battery/virtual power plant, electric vehicle, energy efficient architectural appliance, energy efficient household appliance, solar hot water, heat pump, off-grid generator

Renters



40

Average age



67%

Renters intend to own their home later



13%

Renters are unemployed



27%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Although hardship remains high amongst Renters, their vulnerability continues to decrease, showing both financial and mental health improvements. Much like Young Adults, a large proportion of Renters were receiving JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments, therefore it is important to track the impact of those supplements disappearing

Mindsets & attitudes

- **42% of renters felt that the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) have been difficult for them**, which continues to be significantly more than the proportion of non-renters who felt the same way (24%). This is a **slight improvement from Wave 2 (43%)**
- **Renters are however more optimistic**, with 44% believing that their lives will be better one year from now, compared to 37% of non-renters
- **40% of renters reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel depressed**, compared to 31% of non-renters. This figure is an improvement from Wave 2 (47%)
- **34% of renters are worried about being able to pay their bills**. This proportion of renters has however **decreased since Wave 1 (39%)**
- **50% of renters reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, which is lower than Wave 2 results (57%). This figure remains higher than the 42% of non-renters who responded the same way

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **13% of renters have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19**, which is consistent with the results found in Wave 2
- **26% of renters have experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr)** compared to 17% of non-renters. Whilst the proportion of non-renters has decreased (21% vs.17%), renter results have shown no change
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, **27% of renters who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods**
- Because of JobKeeper ending in March 2021, **25% of renters who received the payment believe that they will now lose work hours or their job**

Renters



40

Average age



67%

Renters intend to own their home later



13%

Renters are unemployed



27%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Although hardship remains high amongst Renters, their vulnerability continues to decrease, showing both financial and mental health improvements. Much like Young Adults, a large proportion of Renters were receiving JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments, therefore it is important to track the impact of those supplements disappearing

Actions taken

- The proportion of renters ranking energy bills as their most important spending category has continued to drop, **falling from 13% in Wave 1 to 9% in Wave 3**
- **Current housing costs** (e.g. rent, repairs & maintenance) continue to be the **most important household spending item** ranking
- **12% of renters intend to access rent relief**, which is double the proportion of non-renters
- **The proportion of renters intending to reduce spending on non-essential items (43%) and essential items (31%)** has fallen since Wave 2
- **20% of renters are currently receiving energy bills support**, a slight decrease from Wave 2 (18%)
- The top reason (24%) renters **may need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)** is because they are **finding household bills/finances difficult to afford**. This proportion of renters has increased since Wave 2 (20%).
- **15% of renters who received energy bill support are still struggling**. This is over double that of non-renters (7%)

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for renters is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email**. This is consistent with Wave 2

Energy investments¹

- Very few (9%) of renters have made energy investments, **largely due to them living in rental properties**. The proportion of renters considering/intending to make an energy investment (8%) is however consistent with non-renters

1. Energy investments include: Natural gas, solar panels (roof), battery storage system, community battery/virtual power plant, electric vehicle, energy efficient architectural appliance, energy efficient household appliance, solar hot water, heat pump, off-grid generator

Mortgage Holders


44

Average age


53%

 Are couples with
children

78%

 Employed full
time, part time or
casually

13%

 of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

Mortgage holders have continued to show signs of improvement, particularly in terms of financial health. Noticeable improvement include fewer respondents experiencing income decrease or job loss.

Mindsets & attitudes

- **27% of mortgage holders felt that the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) have been difficult for them**, which continues to be lower than the proportion of non-mortgage holders who felt the same way (31%). This is also a reduction from Wave 2 (30%)
- **41% of mortgage holders believe their life will be better one year from now**, which is higher when compared to non-mortgage holders (39%)
- **36% of mortgage holders are optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, showing an increase in optimism from Wave 2 (30%)
- **49% of mortgage holders reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, which is lower than Wave 2 results (53%) but higher than non-mortgage holders (44%)
- **34% of mortgage holders reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless**, an improvement from the 41% recorded in Wave 2

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **20% of mortgage holders experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr)**, representing a 33% improvement since Wave 1 (30%)
- **37% of mortgage holders have not had their job or employment status impacted by COVID-19**, which is over 1.5 x the proportion of non-mortgage holders (22%)
- The proportion of mortgage holders **working in a hybrid home/office model (i.e. working from home during some hours and from the workplace during some hours) has stayed consistent since Wave 2 (23%)**
- Because of JobKeeper ending in March 2021, **19% of mortgage holders who received the payment believe that they will now lose work hours or their job**

Mortgage Holders



44

Average age



53%

Are couples with children



78%

Employed full time, part time or casually



13%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Mortgage holders have continued to show signs of improvement, particularly in terms of financial health. Noticeable improvement include fewer respondents experiencing income decrease or job loss.

Actions taken

- **35% of mortgage holders ranked current housing costs (e.g. mortgages) as their top household spending item**, consistent with Wave 2
- **10% of mortgage holders considered energy bills to be their most important household spending item**, a slight increase from Wave 2 (9%)
- **12% of mortgage holders are re-mortgaging their home**, compared to 11% in Wave 2
- **26% of mortgage holders are intending to reduce spending on essential items** compared to 23% of non-mortgage holders
- **14% of mortgage holders are currently receiving energy bill support**. The most popular reason for receiving support was to assist with staying on top of money matters through COVID-19

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for mortgage holders is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated weekly via email**. This is consistent with Waves 1 & 2

Energy investments¹

- Mortgage Holders are the vulnerable group with the **highest ownership of energy efficient appliances (45%)**
- **Saving money remains the biggest driver for purchasing energy investments** amongst mortgage holders (46%)

1. Energy investments include: Natural gas, solar panels (roof), battery storage system, community battery/virtual power plant, electric vehicle, energy efficient architectural appliance, energy efficient household appliance, solar hot water, heat pump, off-grid generator

JobSeekers



38

Average age



65%

Renters



46%

Unemployed



35%

of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

JobSeekers remain the most vulnerable group. Although they've shown signs of improvement, hardship is anticipated to increase over the next 3 months (May – Jul) with the Coronavirus Supplement ending, with over half estimating that they will not have difficulty affording essential goods

Mindsets & attitudes

- **47% of respondents on JobSeeker felt that the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) have been difficult for them**, over 1.5x the proportion of respondents who didn't receive JobSeeker payments
- **35% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that financial stress keeps them up at night**, compared to 23% of respondents not on JobSeeker payments. This is an improvement from Wave 2, where 43% of JobSeekers reported that they were experiencing financial stress
- **25% of those on JobSeeker are optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, a decrease compared to Wave 2 (29%). This is also lower the proportion of non JobSeekers who feel the same way
- **39% of respondents on JobSeeker are worried about being able to pay bills**, compared to 25% of respondents who are not on JobSeeker payments. This figure is however an improvement on Wave 2, where 45% of JobSeekers were worried about paying their bills
- **38% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless**, compared to 48% of JobSeekers in Wave 2

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **14% of JobSeekers lost their job due to COVID-19**, which is 7x proportion of non JobSeekers. A further 26% of JobSeekers have also had their hours reduced or have lost some of their job
- **32% of respondents on JobSeeker are spending an additional 5 day or more at home per week**, compared to 20% of respondents not on JobSeeker payments.
- **57% of respondents on Jobseeker experienced a decrease in individual income**, over 3x the proportion of non JobSeekers (17%), and also represents a worsening result from Wave 2 (47%)
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, **53% of JobSeekers believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods**

JobSeekers



38

Average age



65%

Renters



46%

Unemployed



35%

of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

JobSeekers remain the most vulnerable group. Although they've shown signs of improvement, hardship is anticipated to increase over the next 3 months (May - Jul) with the Coronavirus Supplement ending, with over half estimating that they will not have difficulty affording essential goods

Actions taken

- **Food and beverages are now the top household spending item** for those on JobSeeker. In Waves 1 & 2, current housing costs were the top category
- **48% of JobSeekers intend to reduce spending on non-essential items** (e.g. clothes, entertainment), an improvement from 57% of respondents in Wave 2
- On average, the proportion of respondents on Jobseeker **currently adopting energy saving behaviours** (33%) continuing to **lower in Wave 2** (36%). Intention is also declining with **21% of JobSeekers intending to adopt these behaviours, compared to 25% in Wave 2**
- **25% of respondents on JobSeeker are receiving support for their energy bills**, the highest across all household finance categories. Only 16% of non JobSeekers were currently receiving energy bill support
- The top reason (27%) for **needing hardship support** amongst respondents was that they were finding their bills difficult to afford.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for respondents on JobSeeker is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email**. This is consistent with Wave 2 results

Energy investments¹

- As was seen in Waves 1 & 2, on average, respondents on JobSeeker are **less likely to invest in energy saving devices in their home** and are also **less likely to purchase them in the next 3 months (May - Jul)**. This is due to a large proportion of JobSeekers also being renters, and as such are unable to install energy products

1. Energy investments include: Natural gas, solar panels (roof), battery storage system, community battery/virtual power plant, electric vehicle, energy efficient architectural appliance, energy efficient household appliance, solar hot water, heat pump, off-grid generator

Bushfire Impacted



49

Average age



32%

Own their home
outright



26%

Retired



24%

of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

The proportion of bushfire impacted respondents who are suffering from financial hardship has not dramatically improved or worsened. Mental health amongst this group has however suffered, with 58% reporting that they are highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19

Mindsets & attitudes

- **34% of bushfire impacted respondents felt that the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) have been difficult for them.** There hasn't been a material change between Wave 2 & 3 (32% vs. 34%)
- **34% of bushfire impacted respondents go without essentials like energy and food in order to afford bills.** This is higher than the proportion of respondents not impacted by bushfires (29%)
- **40% of bushfire impacted respondents reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels,** compared to 46% of respondents not impacted by the bushfires
- **58% of bushfire impacted respondents reported that they are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19.** This is a significant increase from Wave 2 where only 38% of respondents felt this way

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **20% of bushfire impacted respondents experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr),** compared to 21% of respondents in Wave 2
- The proportion of bushfire impacted respondents that experienced a **decrease in household income** in Wave 3 has not changed (29%)
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, **29% of bushfire impacted respondents who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods**

Bushfire Impacted



49

Average age



32%

Own their home outright



26%

Retired



24%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

The proportion of bushfire impacted respondents who are suffering from financial hardship has not dramatically improved or worsened. Mental health amongst this group has however suffered, with 58% reporting that they are highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19

Actions taken

- The proportion of bushfire impacted respondents that prioritised medical care and health expenses as their most important household spending item has continued to increase in Wave 3 (10% to 12%). This may be due to this hardship group being older in age
- Bushfire impacted respondents in Wave 3 continue to be more likely to take action to manage their household finances when compared to respondents not impacted by bushfires. This most common forms of actions are reducing spending on essential (22%) and non-essential (38%) items where possible.
- As was seen in Waves 1 & 2, bushfire impacted respondents are generally more likely to adopt energy saving behaviours than those not impacted.
- On average, more bushfire impacted respondents in Wave 2 (18%) have accessed energy bill support than in Wave 2 (17%). This proportion is also slightly bigger than respondents not impacted by bushfires

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for bushfire impacted respondents is offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email. The most preferred communication cadence in Wave 2 was quarterly.

Energy investments¹

- Bushfire impacted respondents are more likely to already own energy products within their home, but are less likely to purchase them in the future when compared to respondents not impacted by bushfires.

1. Energy investments include: Natural gas, solar panels (roof), battery storage system, community battery/virtual power plant, electric vehicle, energy efficient architectural appliance, energy efficient household appliance, solar hot water, heat pump, off-grid generator



Primary Vulnerable Groups

Analysis and convergence on priority groups

Vulnerability framework overview

A framework was created in order to converge focus and track respondent vulnerability over subsequent research waves.

In order to track respondent vulnerability, **3 sets of metrics** were utilised to understand how respondents have been impacted by COVID-19:

- **Financial impacts** – To understand the degree to which respondents’ household finances have been adversely affected.
- **Alleviating measures** – To understand the proportion of respondents taking actions to mitigate hardship.
- **Health** – To understand the proportion of respondents suffering from stress, mental health and wellbeing challenges.

Metric grouping	Vulnerability metric	Qualifying question	Qualifying response
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced/lost employment due to COVID-19	How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your employment status?	I have had hours reduced at my current job(s) or I have lost some of my job (s) + I have lost all job(s) and am unemployed
	Reduction in household income	In the last 3 months (Feb - Apr), how was your household income been affected? If at all?	Decreased a little + Decreased significantly
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	Are you considering taking any of the following actions relating to your household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	Respondent selected “Yes” to at least 1 action
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	Are you currently receiving support for any of the following household finance categories?	Respondent selected “No I am not, but I may need to within the next 3 months (May - Jul)” to at least 1 household finance category
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	Do you or someone in your household have any of the following?	Medical illness (including depression/anxiety)
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	For each of the statements below, indicate how much or how little each statement resonates with you.	Financial stress keeps me up at night “Quite a bit like me” + “Very much like me”
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills		I am worried about being able to pay my bills “Quite a bit like me” + “Very much like me”
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels	In relation to the last 3 months (Feb - Apr), indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.*	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels “Strongly agree” + “Agree”
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed		COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed “Strongly agree” + “Agree”
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless		COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless “Strongly agree” + “Agree”

Wave 1 – Vulnerability heatmap

The table below provides a visual representation of the gap or delta between vulnerable group responses and the total sample. It highlights three primary vulnerable groups – i.e. Young Adults, Renters and those on JobSeeker.

% difference compared to total sample



		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	32%	20%	25%	19%	48%	16%	20%
	Reduction in household income	45%	36%	38%	38%	53%	31%	37%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	70%	60%	68%	64%	70%	54%	60%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	54%	28%	40%	28%	43%	25%	31%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	26%	22%	27%	14%	31%	28%	18%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	35%	24%	31%	26%	29%	24%	24%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	40%	27%	36%	25%	44%	28%	26%

Wave 2 – Vulnerability heat map

The three primary vulnerable groups (Young Adults, Renters, JobSeekers) persist in Wave 2 responses, however the impacts being experienced by JobSeekers are more pronounced.

% difference compared to total sample



		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	24%	18%	20%	17%	48%	14%	16%
	Reduction in household income	39%	33%	34%	31%	50%	29%	31%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	60%	58%	67%	65%	75%	56%	59%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	44%	29%	41%	31%	46%	29%	32%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	21%	22%	25%	14%	33%	20%	18%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	38%	26%	34%	25%	41%	24%	26%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	39%	30%	39%	25%	45%	28%	28%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels*	61%	55%	57%	53%	49%	42%	51%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed*	49%	40%	47%	39%	49%	35%	39%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless*	40%	39%	44%	41%	48%	34%	39%

* New metric included in Wave 2

Wave 3 – Vulnerability heat map

The three primary vulnerable groups (Young Adults, Renters, JobSeekers) persist in Wave 3 responses. Although financial health has improved, mental health amongst vulnerability groups continues to fall into high ranges

% difference compared to total sample



		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	22%	14%	17%	25%	40%	11%	14%
	Reduction in household income	39%	28%	32%	31%	56%	29%	27%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	63%	56%	64%	62%	67%	56%	57%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	47%	26%	38%	28%	48%	26%	29%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	33%	21%	27%	13%	35%	24%	18%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	35%	23%	31%	23%	35%	21%	23%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	35%	26%	34%	26%	39%	27%	26%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels	51%	48%	51%	49%	50%	40%	45%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed	40%	35%	41%	36%	42%	32%	34%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless	43%	32%	36%	34%	38%	30%	32%

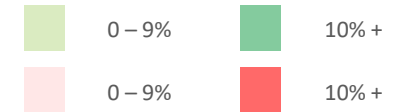
Wave 2 vs 1 – Improvements and declines

The table below visualises improvements/declines in vulnerability metrics for the three primary groups. While the broader theme of recovery is being reflected here, that can't be said for JobSeekers where the *vulnerability gap* is widening. Consistent across all three groups is a decline in the financial stress metric.

Improvement

Decline

% difference compared to Wave 1



		Young Adults (18-24)	Renters	JobSeeker
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	-8%	-5%	0%
	Reduction in household income	-6%	-4%	-3%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	-10%	-1%	+5%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	-10%	+1%	+3%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	-5%	-2%	+2%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	+4%	+3%	+12%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	-1%	+3%	+1%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Wave 3 vs 2 – Improvements and declines

The table below visualises improvements/declines in vulnerability metrics for the three primary groups.

Renters and JobSeekers have shown improvements across most hardship metrics. The proportion of Young

Adults or someone in their home suffering from mental health problems has however strongly increased

Improvement

Decline

% difference compared to Wave 1



0 – 9%



10% +



0 – 9%



10% +

		Young Adults (18-24)	Renters	JobSeeker
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	-2%	-3%	-8%
	Reduction in household income	-0%	-2%	6%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	3%	-3%	-8%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	3%	-3%	2%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health (including depression/anxiety)	12%	2%	2%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	-3%	-3%	-6%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	-4%	-5%	-6%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels*	-10%	-6%	1%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed*	-9%	-6%	-7%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless*	3%	-8%	-10%

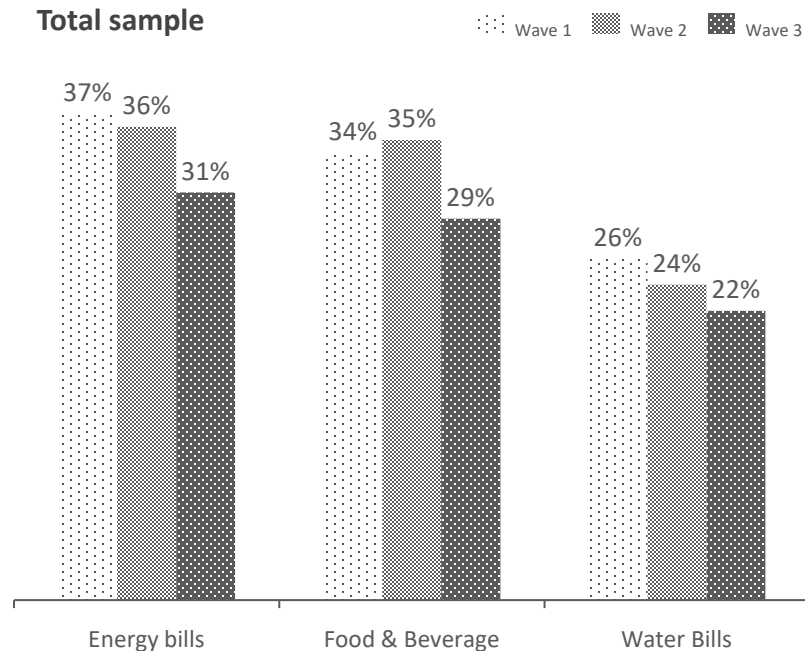


Detailed Analysis of Primary Vulnerable Groups

*A detailed view of Wave 1-3 trends in Young Adults,
Renters and JobSeekers*

Categories where household spending increased the most

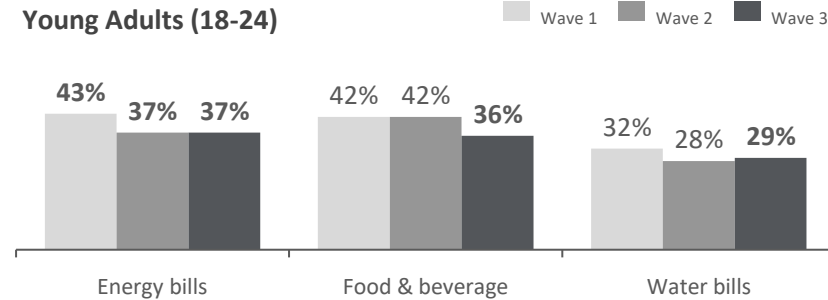
Key trends in 'spending more' categories



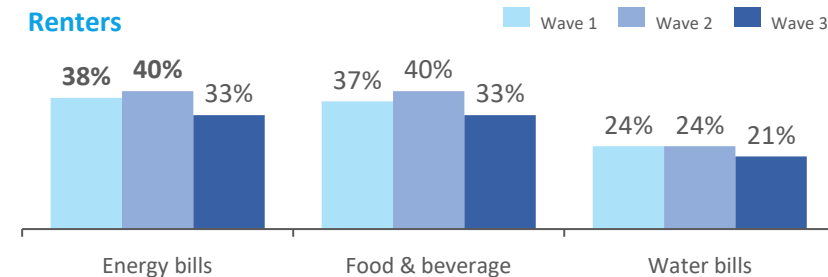
Energy bills remain the category where household spending has increased the most, however this proportion of respondents has decreased since Wave 1

Question: For the following spending categories, how has your household's spending changed in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr)?

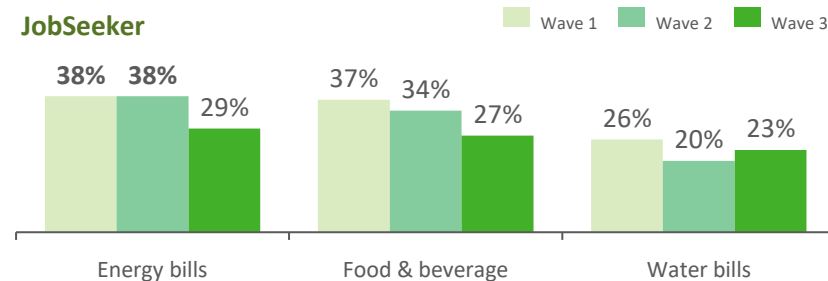
Qualifying response: Spending a little more + Spending significantly more



Young Adults who reported spending more on food and beverage fell by 6%



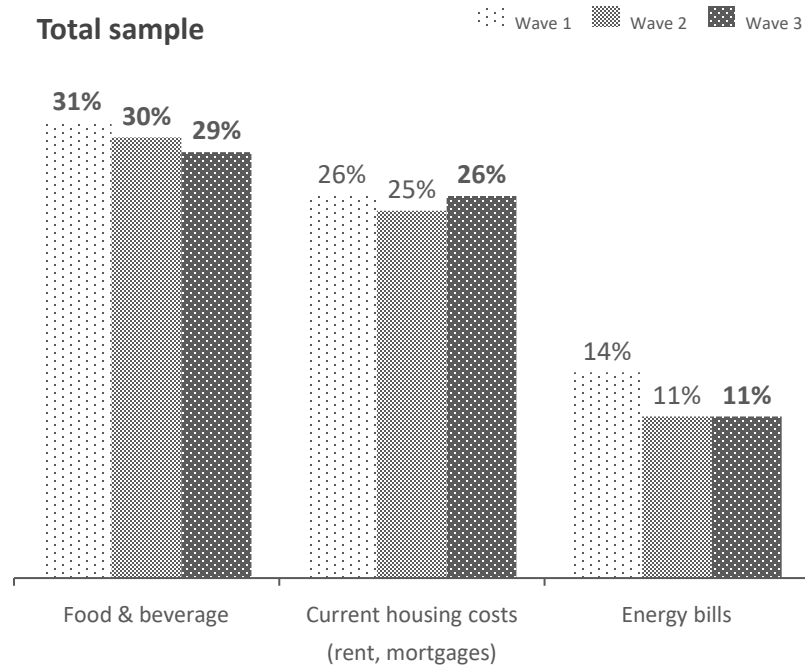
Renters indicated a decrease in spending on energy bills, water bills and food & beverage



While JobSeekers indicated a decrease in spend on food & beverage and energy bills, water bill expenditure increased

Top 3 most important household spending categories

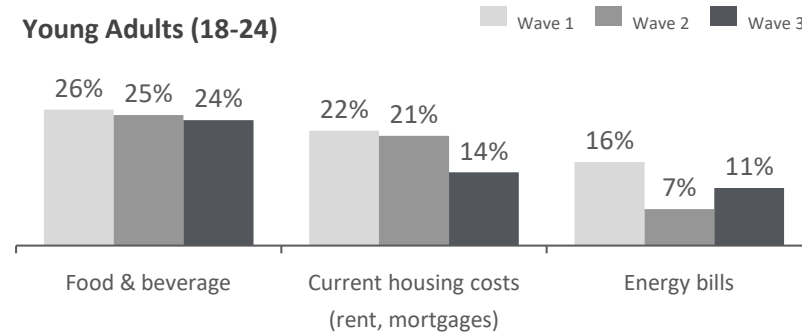
Key trends in top spending categories



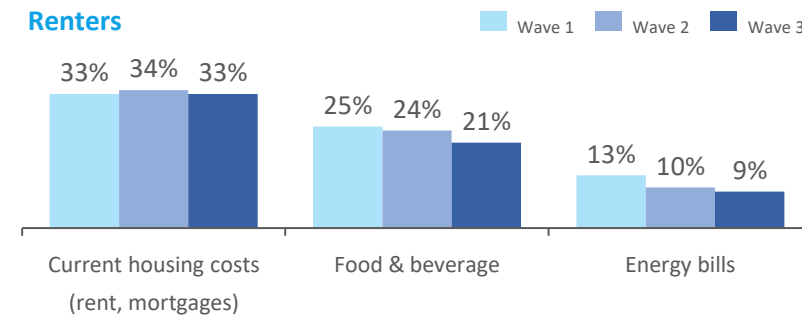
The priority of energy bills continues to be proportionately less than food & beverage and housing costs, despite being in the top 3 most important household spending categories for respondents

1. Proportion of respondents that selected each household spending category as their **most important**

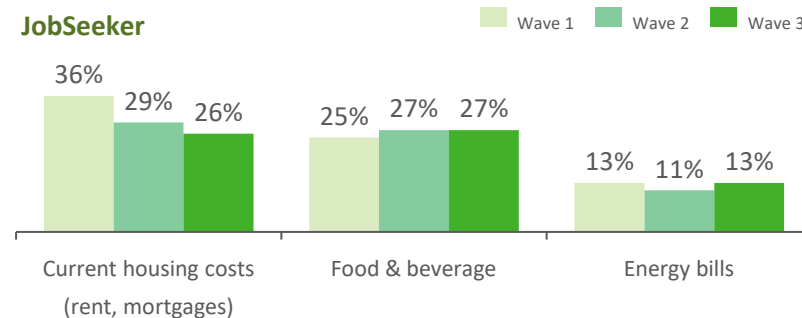
Question: Below are categories of household spending items. Please select the top 5 categories according to your preference, where 1 = most important.



Compared to Wave 2, there has been a large reduction in importance placed on current housing costs



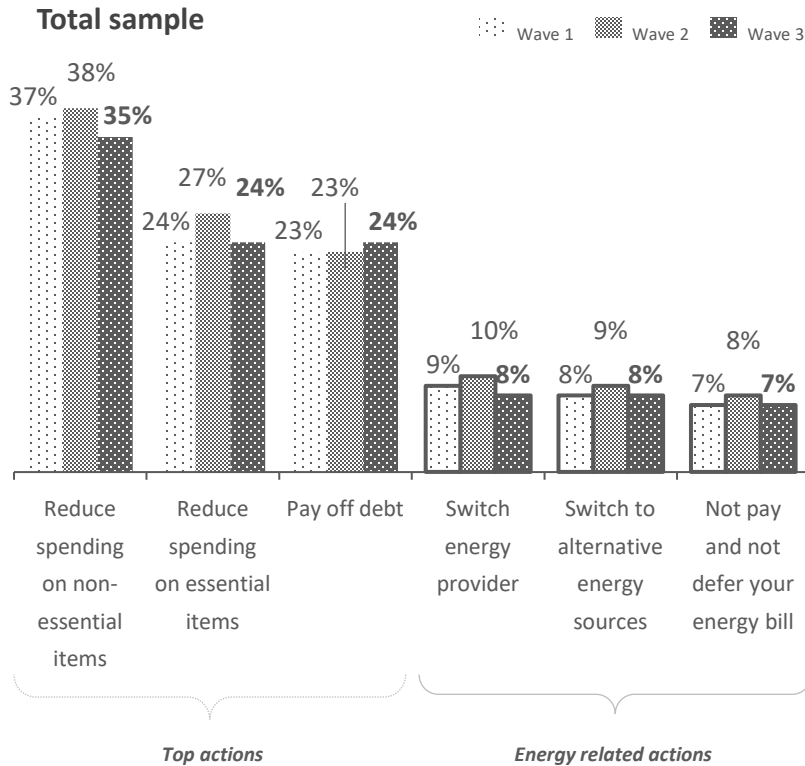
The importance of energy bills amongst Renters has continued to fall in Wave 3



Importance on current housing costs has fallen by 28% since Wave 1

Consumer intentions/actions

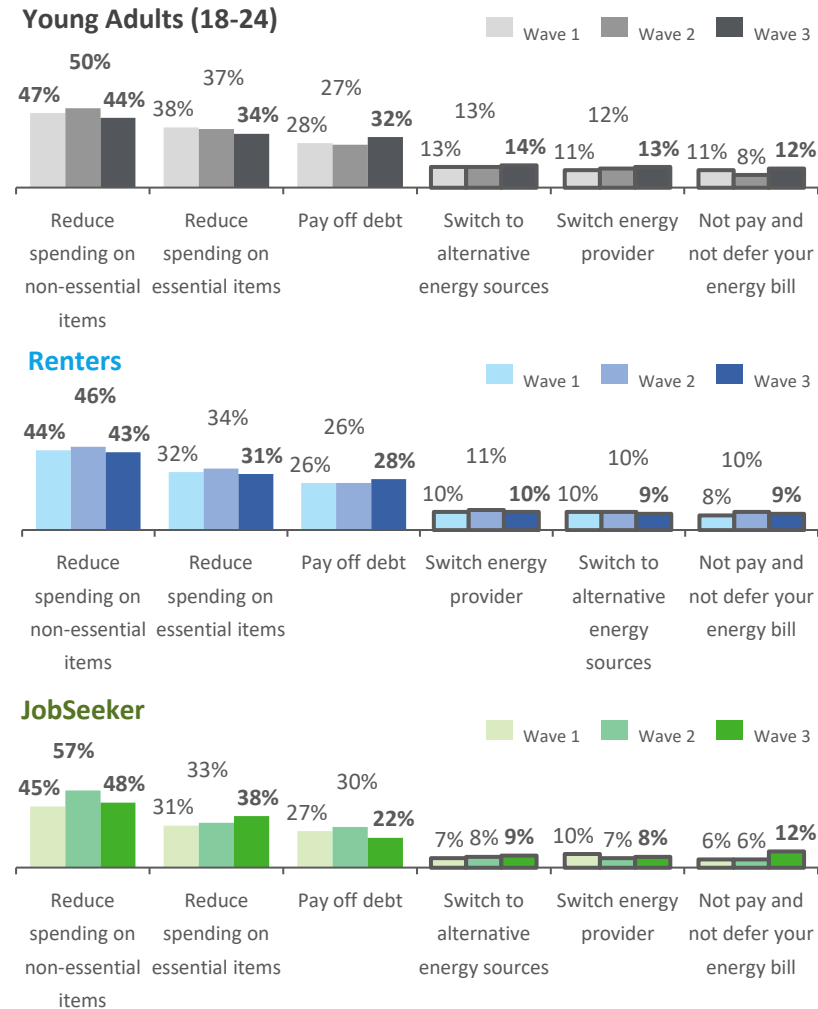
Key trends in intended action




Intent to take action relating to household finances has remained steady since Wave 2, with the exception of reducing spending on non-essential items

Question: Are you considering taking any of the following actions relating to your household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)?

Qualifying response: Yes



 Border = Energy related actions

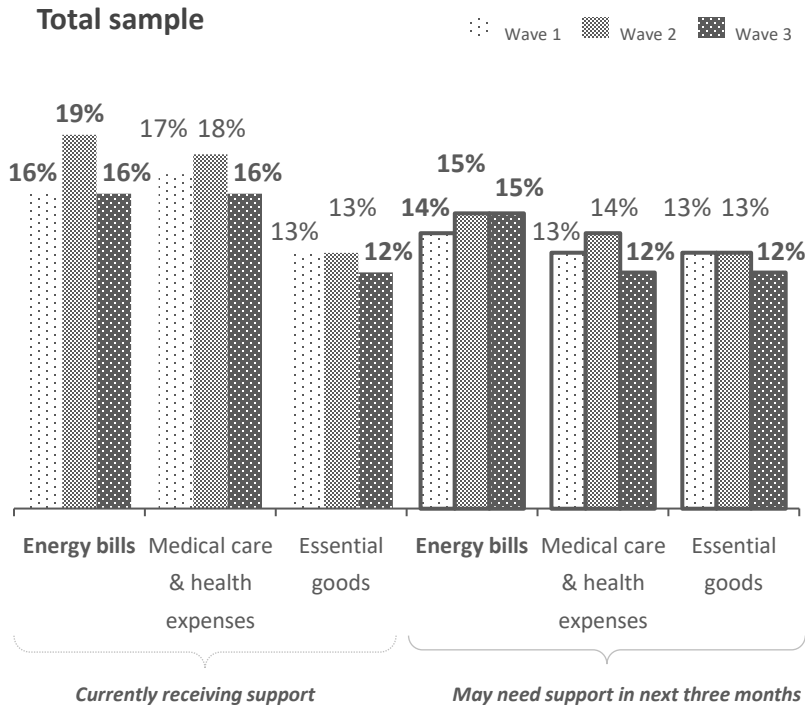
Young Adults considering energy related actions have increased since Wave 2

Intent to take action amongst Renters has remained steady

Whilst the proportion of JobSeekers intending to reduce non-essential spending has decreased, there was a 15% increase in intent to reduce essential spending

Consumer actions/intentions: *Hardship support*

Key trends in hardship support

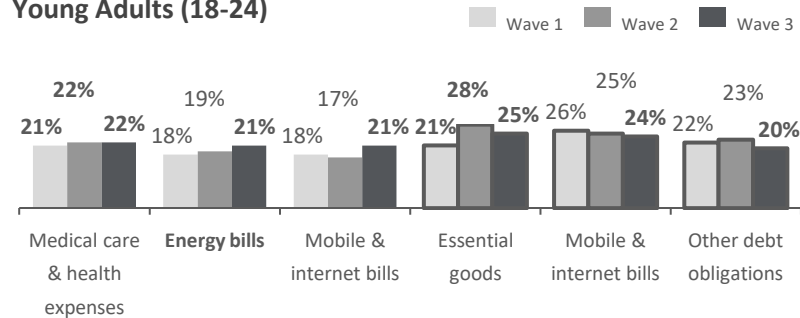


Energy bills remains the category where the most respondents are either currently receiving support for or may need support in the next 3 months (May - Jul)

Question: Are you currently receiving support for any of the following household finance categories?

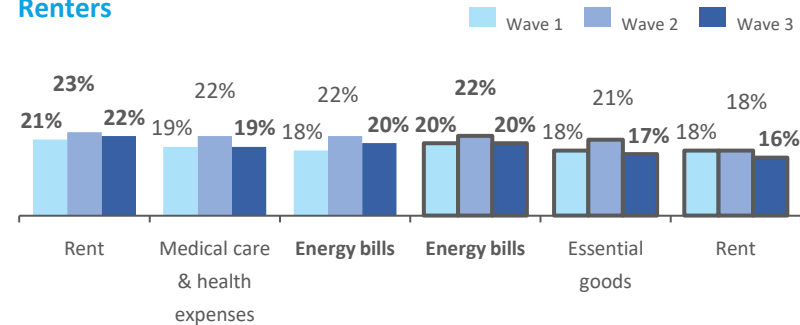
Qualifying response: Yes I am ; No I am not, but I may need to within the next 3 months (May - Jul)

Young Adults (18-24)



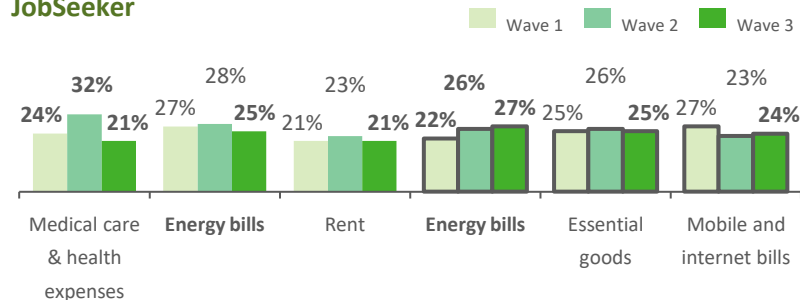
The proportion of Young Adults currently receiving energy bill support has trended upward since Wave 1

Renters



Less Renters are receiving or potentially need future support across all categories.

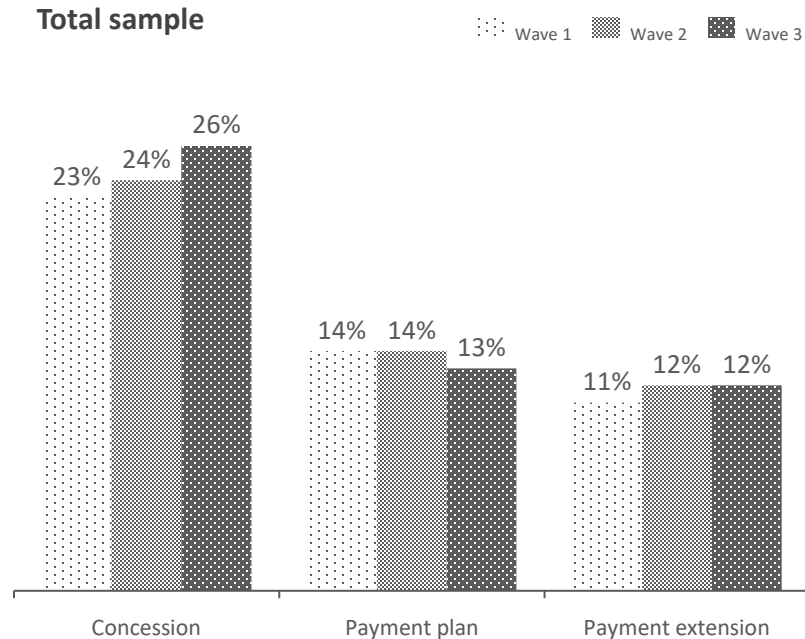
JobSeeker



11% less JobSeekers reported receiving support for medical & health expenses. Future financial support has also been steady

Consumer actions/intentions: *Forms of energy bill support*

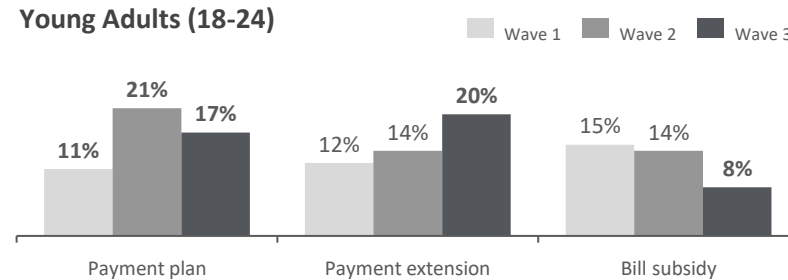
Key trends in the top forms of energy bill support



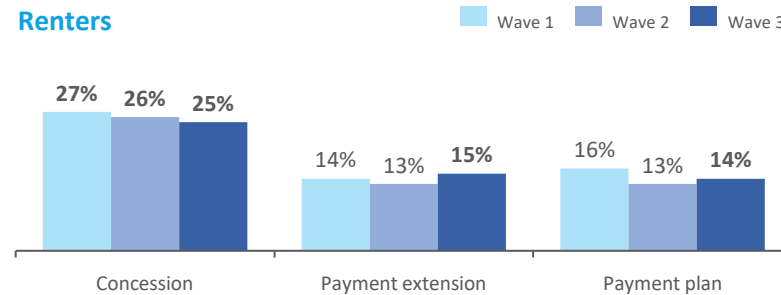
The most common form of support currently being received remains concessions. The proportion of respondents receiving support through concessions has continued to increase

1. Statistics only for respondents who indicated they were receiving energy bill support

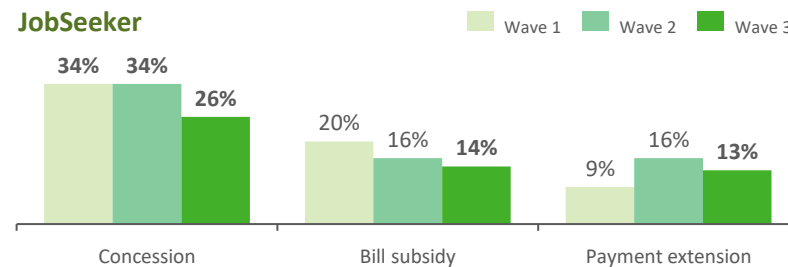
Question: You indicated that you are currently receiving support for your energy bill(s). What forms of support do you ?



Young Adults currently receiving payment extensions has nearly doubled since Wave 1



Although concessions remain the most common form of energy bill support, the proportion of Renters receiving concessions has decreased



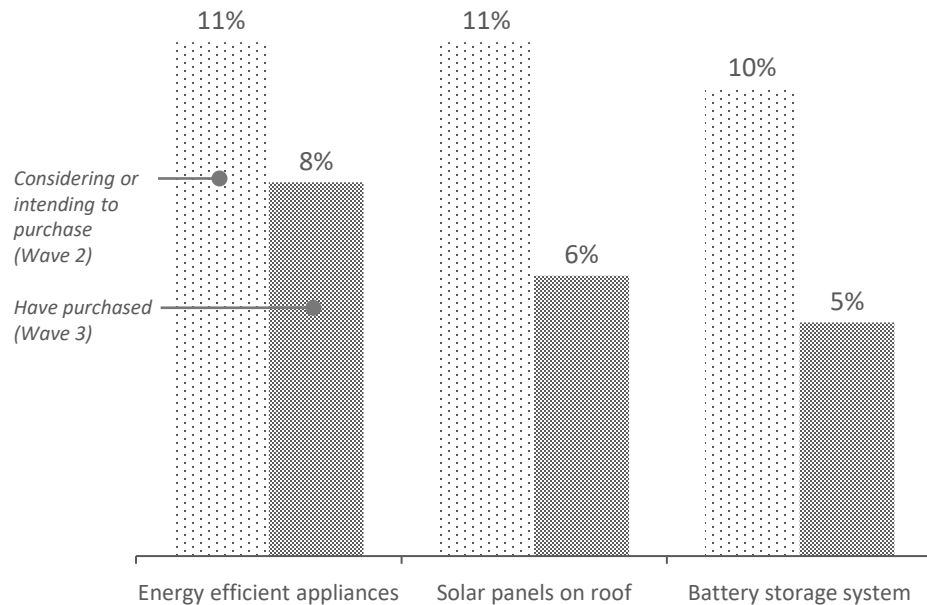
The proportion of JobSeekers receiving energy bill support has decreased, particularly those receiving concessions

Consumer actions/intentions: *Energy investments*

Key trends in how intention is converting into action

Lighter = Considering/intending to purchase in Wave 2
Darker = Have purchased in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) (Wave 3)

Total sample

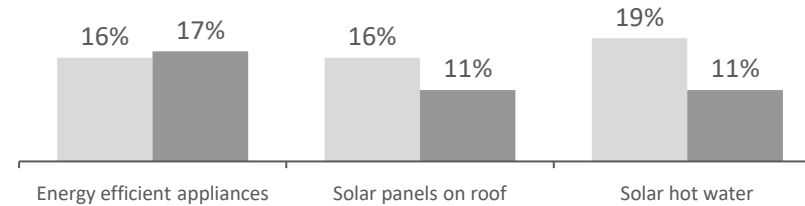


Between Waves 2 and 3, conversion to purchasing products sat at around 50% with the exception of energy efficient appliances. A higher conversion rate for energy efficient appliances is likely due to a relatively lower cost barrier.

Question: Indicate which of the following you own, have recently purchased or are considering purchasing.

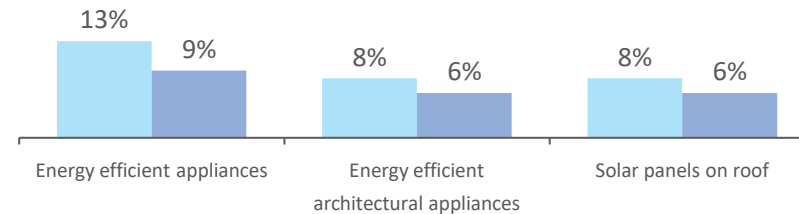
Qualifying responses: Considering or intend to purchase in the next 3 months (May - Jul) (Wave 2); Have purchased in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) (Wave 3)

Young Adults (18-24)



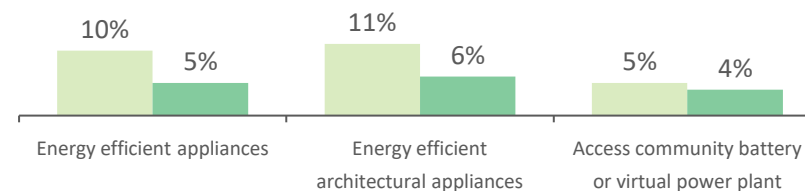
The proportion of respondents who purchased energy efficient appliances in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) exceeded those that intended to purchase in Wave 2.

Renters



The primary barrier to purchasing energy products continues to be the inability to easily do so in rented properties. 41% of renters indicated stated this was a barrier.

JobSeeker



The proportion of JobSeekers who purchased energy efficient appliances in the last 3 months (Feb - Apr) is the lowest when compared to other customer groups.

Vulnerability summary

JobSeeker vulnerability has stabilised since Wave 2. However, moving forward, it will be crucial to monitor groups that had large proportions of respondents receiving income supplements as many of these payments have now ended.

Vulnerable group	Overall hardship assessment - Wave 3	Wave 2	Wave 3
Young Adults (18-24)	Hardship amongst Young adults has continued to improve, particularly in terms of financial wellbeing. Despite showing signs of improvement, poor mental health continues to persist amongst this hardship group. It is important that this group is monitored moving forward as a large proportion were relying on the Coronavirus Supplement and JobKeeper payments, which have now ended.	Potential need for further assistance	Potential need for further assistance
Women	Women continue to not be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 compared to other vulnerable groups and the total population. Additionally, the hardship gap between women and men has continued to narrow, with fewer women experiencing reduction in working hours and income. Although financial stress has reduced, women continue to be more likely to take preventative measures to safeguard themselves financially.	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves
Renters	Renters continue to be a comparatively vulnerable group, however their hardship levels have improved the most when compared to Young Adults and JobSeekers. The greatest improvements were seen in mental health, particularly COVID-19 generated stress. With that being said, much like Young Adults and JobSeekers, a large proportion of Renters were receiving income supplements that have now disappeared, so their hardship levels should continue to be monitored.	Potential need for further assistance	Potential need for further assistance
Mortgage holders	In terms of hardship, Mortgage Holders continue to be one of the least impacted groups. In line with the total sample, Mortgage Holders have continued to improve in terms of vulnerability, particularly in relation to financial health. Of note, the proportion of Mortgage Holders who experienced a decrease in individual income reduced by a third since Wave 2.	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves
JobSeeker	Although vulnerability amongst JobSeekers has improved, they still remain the most vulnerable group. As income conditions improve for the total population, JobSeekers continue to experience reductions in both household and individual incomes. Over half of all respondents stated that as a result of the Coronavirus Supplement ending, they may now have difficulty affording essential goods.	Further assistance required	Further assistance required
Bushfire impacted	Vulnerability levels amongst bushfire impacted respondents have not shifted significantly between waves, and they continue to be amongst the least impacted respondents. As recovery continues in bushfire impacted areas, hardship levels are expected to continue falling. It is worth however noting that mental health conditions have deteriorated amongst this group, with many fearing the lasting impacts of COVID-19	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves



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