COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability

Customer Research Insights Report Wave 4, Sep 2021



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Research Overview

Our methodology and outputs



Research methodology

The fourth wave of the COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability survey was administered between the 19th July – 2nd August, 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 3,035 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



What we've developed

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

Tableau Dashboard



Final Insights Report (focusing on hardship groups)



Top Line Responses





Wave 4 key insights

This report provides a synthesised view of insights and trends related to Wave 4 of the COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability survey.

Four main themes are emerging:

Recovery trajectory has been curbed by the widespread lockdowns that have occupied many of the eastern states of Australia

- A decrease of 4% in respondents who are optimistic about Australia's economic direction (compared to Wave 3)
- An increase of 4% in those who reported reduced working hours due to COVID-19 (compared to Wave 3)
- An increase of 2% and 6% respectively, amongst those reporting a reduction in individual and household income (compared to Wave 3)
- A decrease in 3% of respondents who believe that their lives will be better a year from now

COVID-19 related stress has worsened as the pandemic escalates around the country, particularly amongst older respondents and women

- 52% of respondents agreed that COVID-19 had increased their stress levels, an increase from the 45% recorded in Wave 3
- 43% of respondents are highly concerned about the risk of contracting COVID-19, 5% higher than in Wave 3
- 39% of respondents stated that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless, which is 7% higher than Wave 3 results
- 70% of women and 65% of bushfire impacted respondents (highest average age of all hardship groups) are concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19

Hardship groups that have relied on now non-existent income supplements have incurred the largest degree of financial hardship

- 17% of JobSeekers lost their job due to COVID-19, which is over 5x proportion of non-JobSeekers. A further 26% of JobSeekers have also had their hours reduced or have lost some of their job
- 24% of Young Adults (18-24) have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19, which is greater than the 16% in Wave 3
- 27% of Renters have experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months (May - Jul) compared to 19% of nonrenters.
- Without consistent financial support, the hardship gap between these three groups and the broader population will grow at an increasing rate

Reduction in spending is the most common alleviating measure that respondents are utilising. Adversely impacted groups are more likely to reduce household spending

- In the next 3 months, over a third (36%) of all respondents intend to reduce spending on non-essential items, whilst 24% stated they intend to reduce spending on essential items such as food and cleaning products
- These results however differ between hardship groups, with respondents suffering from greater hardship more likely to reduce their household spending.
- 46% of JobSeekers, 39% of Young People (18-24) and 42% of Renters intend to reduce spending on non-essential items
- 32% of JobSeekers, 29% of Young People (18-24) and 31% of Renters intend to reduce spending on essential items

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.



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	364
51%	Women	How do you describe your gender identity? Woman		1,539
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	1,035
31%	Mortgage Holders	Which of the following best describes your home ownership situation?	Own – paying mortgage	928
6%	JobSeeker	In the last 3 months (May - Jul), have you received any of the below supplements to your individual income?	JobSeeker	185
15%	Bushfire Impacted	What is your postcode?	Postcodes classified as having been impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires by the Australian Taxation Office	442



Survey timings

Wave 4 of the research was conducted during a period of widespread lockdown across the eastern states of Australia



VULNERABLE GROUP ANALYSIS





21

Average age

Employment conditions have worsened amongst Young Adults, with a quarter having their hours reduced due to COVID-19. Mental health metrics have yet to show signs of major improvement, particularly with COVID related stressors, which have worsened since Wave 3. This may be attributed to widespread lockdowns across many states

Winds	ets & attitudes
 41% of young adults felt that the last 3 months (May - Jul) have been difficult for them, compared to 29% of respondents aged 25+. This is a slight improvement from the 42% reported in Wave 3 43% of young adults are feeling burnt out from balancing everything in their lives, consistent with the results from Wave 3 	 31% of young adults are optimistic about Australia's economic direction, the same figure recorded by respondents aged 25+ 60% of young adults reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, much greater than the 51% recorded in Wave 3 46% of young adults reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel depressed, compared to 39% of respondents aged 25+.
COVID-19 &	household impacts
	•
 24% of young adults have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19, which is greater than the 16% in Wave 3 83% of young adults have spent 1 or more additional days at home per week over the last 3 months (May - Jul), compared to 67% of respondents aged 25+ 32% of young adults have experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months (May - Jul), which is 1.5x the number of respondents aged 25+ (21%) 	 14% of young adults have received JobSeeker payments in the last 3 months (May - Jul), which is close to triple the proportion of respondents aged 25+ (5%). Because of JobKeeper ending in March 2021, 23% of young adults who received the payment believe that they will lose work hours or their job







57% Employed full time, part time or casually





of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

VULNERABLE GROUP ANALYSIS









49%

Renters





57% Employed full time, part time or casually

household has a

mental illness



28% of respondents or someone in their Employment conditions have worsened amongst Young Adults, with a quarter having their hours reduced due to COVID-19. Mental health metrics have yet to show signs of major improvement, particularly with COVID related stressors, which have worsened since Wave 3. This may be attributed to widespread lockdowns across many states

Actions taken

•	In the next 3 months (Aug - Oct), 39% of young adults intend
	to reduce spending on non-essential items, compared to
	36% of respondents aged 25+.

- In line with Wave 3, on average, a smaller proportion (31%) of young adults are currently adopting energy saving behaviours than respondents aged 25+ (41%). More young adults however intend to adopt these behaviours (29% vs 19%).
- On average, the proportion of young adults currently adopting energy saving behaviours has increased from 28% in Wave 3 to 31% in Wave 4
- Energy bill priority amongst young adults decreased to 9%, an decrease from the 11% recorded in Wave 3

Offer/communication preferences

 The preferred communication model for young adults is offers for energy bill discounts, communicated fortnightly via email. The frequency of communication has shifted to fortnightly from weekly in Wave 3.

- 28% of young adults are not currently receiving energy bill support but may need it within the next 3 months (Aug -Oct). This is double the proportion of respondents aged 25+ who answered the same way (14%)
- The top reason for currently receiving energy bill support amongst young adults was that they needed help staying on top of money matters through COVID-19 (11%).
- The top reason (11%) young adults may need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct) (May – Jul) was also to stay on top of money matters through COVID-19

Energy investments¹

• On average, **12% of young adults have made an energy investment in the last 3 months (May - Jul)**, a much larger proportion than that of respondents aged 25+ (3%). 46

Average age

29%

Own a mortgage



Women

The hardship gap between women and men is minimal in terms of financial health, with fewer women experiencing employment hour and income reduction. Women are however more concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 and are less likely to be receiving energy bill support

Min	dsets	&	attitudes

- 32% of women felt that the last 3 months (May Jul) have been difficult for them, compared to 28% of men who responded in the same way. This is also an increase from Wave 3 (30%)
- 36% of women believe that their lives will be better one year from now, a slight decrease from Wave 3
- 27% of women are worried about being able to pay their bills, which is a reduction from Wave 3 (28%) and is also lower than men (34%)
- 57% of women reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, compared to 47% of male respondents
- 70% of women are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19, an increase from Wave 3 (62%)

COVID-19 & household impacts

- 15% of women have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19, an increase from 11% in Wave 3
- 20% of women have experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months (May Jul), representing a slight increase from Wave 3 (19%). Compared to men, a smaller proportion of women have experienced a decrease in individual income
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, 24% of women who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods







50% Employed full time, part time or casually





of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness



Women

The hardship gap between women and men is minimal in terms of financial health, with fewer women experiencing employment hour and income reduction. Women are however more concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 and are less likely to be receiving energy bill support

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46 Average age



29% Own a mortgage



50% Employed full time, part time or casually



23% of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

٠	Consistent with Wave 3, a larger proportion of women
	(28%) than men (21%) are considering to reduce spending
	on essential items where possible in the next 3 months
	(Aug - Oct).

 On average, more women (38%) are currently adopting energy saving behaviours than men (33%). This is consistent with results from Wave 3, however the gap between men and women has increased from 3% in Wave 3 to 5% in Wave 4

Actions taken

- **13% of women are receiving energy bill support**, compared to men, where 16% 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 Waves 1-3

Energy investments¹

 Consistent with Wave 3, on average, women (3%) are less likely to have made energy investments in the last 3 months when compared to men (6%). Similarly, a smaller proportion of women (7%) than men (10%) are considering/intending to make a purchase in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct).

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

Renters continue to be comparatively more disadvantaged than other hardship groups, particularly from a financial perspective. As a group that relied heavily on income supplements over the last 12 months, the ending of many of these payments has removed many of the financial safeguards for this group.

Mindsets	& attitudes
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40 Average age



65% Renters intend to own their home later



14% Renters are unemployed



30% of respondents or someone in their household has a

mental illness

- 38% of renters felt that the last 3 months (May Jul) have been difficult for them, which continues to be significantly higher than the proportion of non-renters who felt the same way (26%). This is however an improvement from Wave 3 (42%)
- Renters are also slightly less optimistic, with 37% believing that their lives will be better one year from now, compared to 38% of non-renters
- 47% of renters reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel depressed, compared to 37% of non-renters. This figure has worsened since Wave 3 (40%)

- 31% of renters are worried about being able to pay their bills. This proportion of renters however continues to decrease (Wave 3 - 34%)
- 58% of renters reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, which is higher than Wave 3 results (50%). This figure is also higher than the 50% of non-renters who responded the same way

COVID-19 & household impacts

- 19% of renters have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19, which is higher than the 13% recorded in Wave 3
- 27% of renters have experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months (May - Jul) compared to 19% of nonrenters. Between Waves 3 & 4, the increase in the proportion of renters who experienced income loss has outpaced the proportion of non-renters who experienced income loss
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, 26% of renters who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods
- Because of JobKeeper ending in March 2021, 18% of renters who received the payment believe that they will now lose work hours or their job

40

Average age



Renters

Renters continue to be comparatively more disadvantaged than other hardship groups, particularly from a financial health perspective. As a group that relied heavily on income supplements over the last 12 months, the ending of many of these payments has removed many of the financial safeguards for this group.

Actions takon

Action	ns taken
 The proportion of renters ranking energy bills as their most important spending category has increased slightly from 9% in Wave 3 to 11% in Wave 4 Current housing costs (e.g. rent, repairs & maintenance) continue to be the most important household spending item The proportion of renters intending to reduce spending on non-essential items (42%) and essential items (31%) has remained consistent since Wave 3 	 19% of renters are currently receiving energy bills support, a slight decrease from Wave 3 (20%) The top reason (23%) renters may need hardship suppor in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct) is because they are finding household bills/finances difficult to afford. This proportion of renters has remained consistent since Wa 3. 16% of renters who received energy bill support are stistruggling. This is over double that or non-renters (7%)
Offer/communication preferences	Energy investments ¹
 The preferred communication model for renters is offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email. This is consistent with Waves 1-3 	 Very few (9%) of renters have made energy investments largely due to them living in rental properties.

65% Renters intend to own their home later



14% Renters are unemployed

mental illness

30% of respondents or someone in their household has a

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

VULNERABLE GROUP ANALYSIS



Mortgage Holders



44 Average age



59% Are couples with children



77% Employed full time, part time or casually



15%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness Whilst financial health amongst mortgage holders has slightly worsened, on average, they are in better financial positions than non mortgage holders. Their stress levels and optimism have however worsened since Wave 3

Mindsets & attitudes

- 30% of mortgage holders felt that the last 3 months (May -Jul) have been difficult for them, which is consistent with non-mortgage holders. This is also an increase from Wave 3 (27%)
- 43% of mortgage holders believe their life will be better one year from now, which is higher when compared to non-mortgage holders (35%)

32% of mortgage holders are optimistic about Australia's economic direction, showing a decrease in optimism from Wave 3 (36%)

- 56% of mortgage holders reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, which is higher than Wave 3 results (49%) and non-mortgage holders (52%)
- 42% of mortgage holders reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless, which is worse than the 37% recorded in Wave 3

COVID-19 & household impacts

- 22% of mortgage holders experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months (May - Jul), which is slightly greater than the 20% recorded in Wave 3
- 38% of mortgage holders have not had their job or employment status impacted by COVID-19, which is nearly double the proportion of non-mortgage holders (22%)
- The proportion of mortgage holders (27%) working in a hybrid home/office model (i.e. working from home during some hours and from the workplace during some hours) has increased since Wave 3 (23%)
- Because of JobKeeper ending in March 2021, 21% of mortgage holders who received the payment believe that they will now lose work hours or their job

VULNERABLE GROUP ANALYSIS



Mortgage Holders



44 Average age



59% Are couples with children



77% Employed full time, part time or casually

household has a mental illness



15% of respondents or someone in their Whilst financial health amongst mortgage holders has slightly worsened, on average, they are in better financial positions than non mortgage holders. Their stress levels and optimism have however worsened since Wave 3

Actions taken

- 35% of mortgage holders ranked current housing costs (e.g. mortgages) as their top household spending item, consistent with Waves 1-3
- 9% of mortgage holders considered energy bills to be their most important household spending item, in line with Wave 3 results
- **9% of mortgage holders are re-mortgaging their home**, a reduction from the 12% recorded in Wave 3

- 26% of mortgage holders are intending to reduce spending on essential items compared to 24% 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 to 3

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 (49%)

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

56%

Renters

40%

Unemployed

Through all 4 waves of research, JobSeekers have been the most vulnerable group. Many of their financial and mental health improvements have been reversed in Wave 4, reflective of the removal of several income supplements that JobSeekers relied on, in addition to extended lockdowns

Mindsets & attitudes

- 47% of respondents on JobSeeker felt that the last 3 months (May - Jul) have been difficult for them, over 1.5x the proportion of respondents who didn't receive JobSeeker payments
- 29% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that financial stress keeps them up at night, compared to 20% of respondents not on JobSeeker payments. This is an improvement from Wave 3, where 35% of JobSeekers reported that they were experiencing financial stress
- 27% of those on JobSeeker are optimistic about Australia's economic direction, an increase from Wave 3 (25%). This is however lower than the proportion of non JobSeekers (31%) who feel the same way
- 40% of respondents on JobSeeker are worried about being able to pay bills, compared to 22% of respondents who are not on JobSeeker payments. This figure is slightly worse than Wave 3, where 39% of JobSeekers were worried about paying their bills
- 43% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless, compared to 38% of JobSeekers in Wave 3

COVID-19 & household impacts

- 17% of JobSeekers lost their job due to COVID-19, which is over 5x proportion of non JobSeekers. A further 26% of JobSeekers have also had their hours reduced or have lost some of their job
- 35% of respondents on JobSeeker are spending an additional 5 day or more at home per week, compared to 30% of respondents not on JobSeeker payments.
- 43% of respondents on Jobseeker experienced a decrease in individual income, over double the proportion of non JobSeekers (21%)
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, 33% of JobSeekers believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods









44% of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness



JobSeekers

38

Average age

56%

Renters

Through all 4 waves of research, JobSeekers have been the most vulnerable group. Many of their financial and mental health improvements have been reversed in Wave 4, reflective of the removal of several income supplements that JobSeekers relied on, in addition to extended lockdowns

Actions taken

- Current housing costs are the top household spending item for those on JobSeeker. Food and beverages was the most important category in Wave 3
- 46% of JobSeekers intend to reduce spending on nonessential items (e.g. clothes, entertainment), an improvement from 48% of respondents in Wave 3
- On average, the proportion of respondents on Jobseeker currently adopting energy saving behaviours (32%) is continuing to lower from Wave 3 (33%). Intention to adopt energy saving behaviours has remained stable at 21%

- 25% of respondents on JobSeeker are receiving support for their energy bills, the highest across all household finance categories. Only 14% of non JobSeekers were currently receiving energy bill support
- The top reason (22%) for **needing hardship support** amongst respondents was that they were finding their bills difficult to afford

40% Unemployed



44% of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Offer/communication preferences

 The preferred communication model for respondents on JobSeeker is offers for energy bill discounts, communicated weekly via email. In Wave 3, JobSeekers wished to receive information on a monthly basis

Energy investments¹

 Continuing the trend from Waves 1-3, 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 (Aug - Oct). 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

VULNERABLE GROUP ANALYSIS

Bushfire Impacted



50 Average age



38% Own their home outright

27%

Retired





27% 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 shifted materially across all 4 waves of research. Mental health amongst this group has however continued to suffer across the last 2 waves, with 65% reporting that they are highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19

Mindsets & attitudes

- 32% of bushfire impacted respondents felt that the last 3 months (May - Jul) have been difficult for them. There hasn't been a material change between Wave 3 & 4 (34% vs. 33%)
- 32% of bushfire impacted respondents go without essentials like energy and food in order to afford bills. This is slightly higher than the proportion of respondents not impacted by bushfires (30%)

- 49% of bushfire impacted respondents reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, compared to 53% of respondents not impacted by the bushfires
- 65% of bushfire impacted respondents reported that they are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19. This is an increase from Wave 3 where only 58% of respondents felt this way

COVID-19 & household impacts

- 19% of bushfire impacted respondents experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months (May -Jul), compared to 20% of respondents in Wave 3
- The proportion of bushfire impacted respondents that experienced a decrease in household income has remained stable over all 4 waves of research (~30%)
- Because of the Coronavirus Supplement ending in March 2021, 22% of bushfire impacted respondents who received the payment believe that they will now have difficult affording essential goods

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VULNERABLE GROUP ANALYSIS

Bushfire Impacted



Average age

50



38% Own their home outright





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 shifted materially across all 4 waves of research. Mental health amongst this group has however continued to suffer across the last 2 waves, with 65% reporting that they are highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19

Actions taken

- Food and beverages was the household spending category that bushfire impacted respondents indicated as the most important
- 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 (27%) and non-essential (37%) items where possible.
- As was seen in Waves 1 3, bushfire impacted respondents are generally more likely to adopt energy saving behaviours than those not impacted.
- Compared to earlier research waves, a similar proportion bushfire impacted respondents in Wave 4 (17%) have accessed energy bill support. This proportion continues to be 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 quarterly via email. The most preferred communication cadence in Wave 3 was monthly.

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

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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 or my job (s) + I have lost all job(s) and am unemployed	
	Reduction in household income	In the last 3 months (May - Jul), how was your household income been affected? If at all?	Decreased a little + Decreased significantly	
Alleviating	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	Are you considering taking any of the following actions relating to your household finances in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	Respondent selected "Yes" to at least 1 action	
measures	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	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 (Aug - Oct)" to at least 1 household finance category	
	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	Financial stress keeps me up at night "Quite a bit like me" + "Very much like me"	
Health	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	each statement resonates with you.	I am worried about being able to pay my bills "Quite a bit like me" + "Very much like me"	
Health	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels		COVID-19 has increased my stress levels "Strongly agree" + "Agree"	
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed	In relation to the last 3 months (May - Jul), indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.*	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

% difference compared to total sample



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.

		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial	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	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	70%	60%	68%	64%	70%	54%	60%
measures	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	54%	28%	40%	28%	43%	25%	31%
	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	26%	22%	27%	14%	31%	28%	18%
Health -	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

% difference compared to total sample



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

		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	24%	18%	20%	17%	48%	14%	16%
impacts	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 (Aug - Oct)	60%	58%	67%	65%	75%	56%	59%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	44%	29%	41%	31%	46%	29%	32%
	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%
Health -	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	39%	30%	39%	25%	45%	28%	28%
	COVID-19 has increasedmy 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%



Wave 3 – Vulnerability heat map

% difference compared to total sample



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

		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	22%	14%	17%	25%	40%	11%	14%
impacts	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 (Aug - Oct)	63%	56%	64%	62%	67%	56%	57%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	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 4 – Vulnerability heat map

% difference compared to total sample



Although hardship has worsened across the entire population, the three primary vulnerable groups (Young Adults, Renters, JobSeekers) continue to stand out as having incurred higher degrees of hardship, particularly the JobSeekers

		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	33%	19%	24%	17%	44%	15%	19%
	Reduction in household income	41%	32%	37%	30%	56%	30%	33%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	66%	61%	67%	62%	69%	58%	59%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	55%	31%	42%	30%	63%	26%	30%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health problems (including depression/anxiety)	28%	23%	30%	15%	44%	27%	20%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	29%	21%	28%	22%	29%	23%	21%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	30%	25%	31%	25%	40%	26%	24%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels	60%	57%	58%	56%	57%	49%	52%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed	46%	43%	47%	42%	50%	36%	40%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless	46%	41%	43%	42%	43%	38%	39%



% difference compared to Wave 1

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	Improvement	0-9%	10% +
vulnerability gap is widening. Consistent across all three groups is a decline in the financial stress metric.	Decline	0-9%	10% +

		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	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	-10%	-1%	+5%
measures	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	-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



% difference compared to Wave 1

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	Improvement	0-9%		10% +
Adults or someone in their home suffering from mental health problems has however strongly increased	Decline	0-9%		10% +

		Young Adults (18-24)	Renters	JobSeeker
Financial	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	-2%	-3%	-8%
	Reduction in household income	-0%	-2%	+6%
Alleviating	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (May - Jul)	+3%	-3%	-8%
measures	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%



% difference compared to Wave 1

Wave 4 vs 3 – Improvements and declines

The table below visualises improvements/declines in vulnerability metrics for the three primary groups.			_
Many of the improvements in hardship metrics over the Waves 2 and 3 have been reversed, particularly	Improvement	0-9%	10% +
financial health amongst Young Adults and JobSeekers	Decline	0 – 9%	10% +

		Young Adults (18-24)	Renters	JobSeeker
Financial	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	+11%	+7%	+4%
	Reduction in household income	+2%	+5%	0%
Alleviating	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	+3%	+3%	+2%
measures	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months (Aug - Oct)	+8%	+4%	+15%
	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health (including depression/anxiety)	-4%	+3%	+9%
Health –	Financial stress keeps me up at night	-6%	-3%	-6%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	-5%	-3%	+1%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels	+9%	+7%	+7%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed	+6%	+6%	+8%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless	+3%	+7%	+5%

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. This proportion of respondents has increased to its highest point since Wave 1

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

Qualifying response: Spending a little more + Spending significantly more





Top 3 most important household spending categories

Key trends in top spending categories



(rent, mortgages)

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



Consumer intentions/actions

Key trends in intended action



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



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 (Aug - Oct)

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 (Aug - Oct)





No border = *Current*

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

form of support **Total sample** Young Adults (18-24) Wave 1 Wave 2 Wave 3 Wave 4 Wave 1 Wave 2 Wave 3 Wave 4 21% 20% 19% Young Adults currently 17% 26% 26% 15% 14% 12% 14% receiving payment extensions 23% ^{24%} 11% 11% 11% has grown by over 1.5x since 8% Wave 1 Payment plan Payment extension Bill subsidy 14% 14% 13% 14% 14% Wave 1 Wave 2 Wave 3 Wave 4 12% 12% Renters 11% Although concessions remain 27% 26% 25% 23% the most common form of energy bill support, the 18% 14% _{13%} **15%** proportion of Renters 16% 13% **14% 14%** receiving concessions has decreased Concession Payment extension Payment plan Concession Payment plan Payment extension Wave 1 Wave 2 Wave 3 Wave 4 JobSeeker The most common form of support currently being received continues to 34% 34% 31% be concessions. The proportion of respondents receiving support through Payment extensions were the 26% payment extensions has also continued to increase 20% form of energy bill support 16% **14%** ^{16%} **13%** ^{15%} that increased the most

Concession

10%

Payment extension

Bill subsidy

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 ?

Key trends in the top forms of energy bill support

between Waves 1 and 4

purchase

(Wave 3)

(Wave 4)



Consumer actions/intentions: *Energy investments*

Key trends in how intention is converting into action Darker = Have purchased in the last *Lighter* = *Considering/intending* to purchase in Wave 3 3 months (May - Jul) (Wave 4) **Total sample** Young Adults (18-24) 18% 17% 12% The proportion of young 14% 13% 11% adults that purchased solar 10% 11% panels in the last 3 months 10% exceeded the proportion that indicated they intended to in Wave 3 Considering or Energy efficient appliances Solar panels on roof Solar hot water intending to 7% Renters Have purchased 5% 5% 13% The primary barrier to 9% 8% 8% purchasing energy products 5% 4% continues to be the inability to easily do so in rented properties, 44% of renters Solar panels on roof Energy efficient appliances Energy efficient indicated that this was a architectural appliances barrier Energy efficient appliances Solar panels on roof Battery storage system JobSeeker Between Waves 3 and 4, conversion to purchasing energy products sat at 16% The proportion of JobSeekers 11% around 50% with the exception of energy efficient appliances, where the 7% who purchased energy 5% 6% 5% conversion rate sat at approximately 55% efficient appliances in the last 3 months (May - Jul) is the Energy efficient appliances Energy efficient Access community battery lowest when compared to other customer groups architectural appliances or virtual power plant Question: Indicate which of the following you own, have recently purchased or are considering

purchasing.



Vulnerability summary

Wave 4 was categorised by backtracking in progress due to multiple lockdowns across the country. In addition to JobSeekers, Young Adults may also require further assistance due to the absence of income supplements supporting them during lockdown periods where they are unable to work

Vulnerable group	Overall hardship assessment - Wave 4	Wave 3	Wave 4
Young Adults (18-24)	Improvements in financial health amongst Young Adults over previous waves of research have been offset in the last 3 months. Many Young Adults have relied on income supplements to support themselves, and now find themselves in difficult situations due to the absence of JobKeeper and Coronavirus Supplement payments. COVID-19 related stressors have also worsened since Wave 3, resulting in a further deterioration of mental health.	Potential need for further assistance	Further assistance required
Women	Despite the impact of lockdowns, women continue to not be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 compared to other vulnerable groups and the total population. The hardship gap between women and men is minimal, with more men experiencing reductions in working hours and income. Although financial stress is comparatively better, women continue to be more likely to take preventative measures to safeguard themselves financially.	Monitor hardship levels	Monitor hardship levels
Renters	Renters have remained a comparatively vulnerable group, however the negative impacts of newly implemented lockdowns has impacted the financial and mental health of this group less compared to Young Adults and JobSeekers. This group has however relied heavily on now non-existent income supplements, which may result in hardship worsening due to the absence of safeguards and worsening economic conditions	Potential need for further assistance	Potential need for further assistance
Mortgage holders	Mortgage Holders continue to be one of the least impacted groups. Although Wave 4 results indicated a slight worsening of financial health, the degree of decline is comparatively less than respondents who don't have a mortgage. Stress levels and optimism about the economy amongst this group have however declined.	Monitor hardship levels	Monitor hardship levels
JobSeeker	JobSeekers have remained the most disadvantaged group across all periods of research. Their financial and health metrics have declined the most since Wave 3, reflecting the volatility of their wellbeing and their difficulty in preventing further hardship when broader economic conditions worsen.	Further assistance required	Further assistance required
Bushfire impacted	Vulnerability levels amongst bushfire impacted respondents have not showed any material change between waves. Mental health amongst these respondents, particularly COVID related stress has continued to decline, with 65% reporting a high concern regarding the lasting impacts of COVID-19	Monitor hardship levels	Monitor hardship levels

Segmentation Analysis

Understanding hardship from an alternate angle



Hardship group analysis vs. Segmentation analysis

The key difference between the hardship group analysis and the segmentation analysis is that the hardship groups were determined based on stakeholder input, whilst the segments were defined by the data itself





Segmentation overview

We undertook a segmentation exercise in order to understand hardship through a different lens

	Retired & Unphased	Comfortably Middle Class	Homemakers	Young & Troubled	Strugglers
Description	retired, living as couples with children who have already left home Majority own their home outright and have experienced minimal financial impact from COVID-19 Stress levels are low with minimal	majority have incurred minimal financial impact	with a large proportion of forever renters. Low to medium degree of financial impact Above average stress levels, particularly in relation to the pandemic	Young individuals in early stage careers or employed part- time/casually Varied household composition mix with many renting their properties. Respondents have relied on now non-existent income supplements over the last 12 months, and are now experiencing financial constraints. High stress levels associated with their financial health and COVID-19	Majority renting and have experienced high levels of financial impact, particularly income and job loss High stress levels and high levels of concern about the impacts of COVID-19
Segmentation Criteria	 A2 - In relation to the last 3 i B4 - In the last 3 months, hai C2 - Are you considering take 	ents below, indicate how much or I months, indicate how strongly you we you received any of the below s ing any of the following actions rel are receiving support for your energy	agree or disagree with each of t supplements to your individual in lating to your household finances	he statements below. come? in the next 3 months?	oport?



Segment Summary

A simplified view of the segmentation can be summarised in the classification tree below



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