

A photograph of two women sitting at a desk, smiling and looking at a laptop. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a blue top. The woman on the right has short blonde hair, wears glasses, and a light blue shirt. The image is framed by a red curved border.

# The Australian Seniors Series: Ageing in the Workforce 2021

SEPTEMBER 2021

# Contents

<b>About the report</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>Retirement plans</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Key findings</b>	<b>04</b>	Planning retirement	24
		Attitude towards retirement	25
<b>Ageism in the workplace</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>Impact of COVID-19</b>	<b>26</b>
Ageism in the workplace is common	09	COVID-19 and 2020 has led to a shift in perceptions and attitudes	27
Seniors believe females are more impacted by ageism in the workplace	10	Returning to the workplace	28
Age discrimination is faced by many	11	COVID-19 and 2020 impacts on retirement	29
Feeling undervalued in the workplace	12		
Difficulty finding a job	13		
<b>Taking control</b>	<b>14</b>		
Seniors are taking control of their career	15		
Plans to reskill or seek further training	16		
Keeping up appearances	17		
Discussing 'pretirement' plans	18		
<b>Working longer</b>	<b>19</b>		
Staying in the workforce	20		
Flexible working conditions	21		
Re-entering the workforce	22		



## About the report

*Ageing in the Workforce 2021* builds on our previous study from 2016 ([Seniors in the Workplace](#)) and forms part of the Australian Seniors Research Series. In its latest instalment, this in-depth study explores the current experiences of seniors in the Australian workforce, the impact of 2020 and COVID-19, how they are taking control of their careers and how they feel about retirement.

The report is compiled based on research commissioned by Australian Seniors and conducted by CoreData between 22 June and 5 July 2021. The research was conducted via a quantitative online survey, gathering 5,030 responses from Australians aged 50 and above.

The sample is representative of the general senior population of Australians in terms of age, gender, wealth, and state/territory.

Previous report/s cited throughout the report and pertinent information:

- [Seniors in the Workplace \(November 2016\)](#) – 1,003 responses
- [2021 Mindset Shift](#) - 5,113 responses

### Important things to observe about the charts:

*Footnotes directly underneath the charts (e.g. Respondents with a bucket list) mainly refer to the sampling involved per question. This is to differentiate who was asked that particular question in the survey.*

*Charts without a specific note represent questions that were asked to all respondents.*

*The types of questions asked are also noted. For instance, 'Multiple answers allowed' appears when the question called for more than one answer from the respondent.*



## Key findings

## Key findings

### Many have experienced ageism in the workplace

- Most seniors believe that ageism in the workplace is reasonably (54.1%) or extremely (34.8%) prevalent these days. Only a small minority (11.1%) believe it is rare in their experience.
- Almost 2 in 3 believe they have definitely (20.7%) or possibly (39.6%) directly experienced age discrimination within their workplace (increasing significantly from 9.6% and 20.4% respectively in 2016).
- Over 4 in 10 have felt patronised at work because of their age (42.7%) (increasing significantly from 13.6% in 2016), and more than half (50.2%) agree that annoying assumptions are made about them at work due to their age (increasing significantly from 21.0% in 2016).
- Almost half (45.0%) said they have not applied for a job because they felt their chances would be negatively impacted by their age (increasing significantly from 36.1% in 2016).
- The majority believe that they have definitely (23.4%) or possibly (45.8%) been turned down for a job past the age of 40 based solely on their age (increased from 13.9% and 33.2% respectively in 2016).
- This made Australian seniors feel (above all else) disappointed (58.3%) and undervalued (51.7%), with some even left feeling depressed (30.8%).

### Seniors agree that ageism is a prevalent problem and most commonly seen in the workplace

- The majority believe that ageism is reasonably (52.4%) or extremely prevalent (36.5%) and most see it as a considerable (49.5%) or big (22.2%) problem in Australian society at large.
- 'Ageism' was most commonly seen in the workplace (39.0%). This was followed by treatment of the very elderly (23.2%), treatment of older people by the public (17.8%) and media/ad stereotypes (10.5%).
- Overall, over 1 in 2 (54.6%) think that females are more impacted by ageism in the workplace, with only 10.2% thinking that males are. While females were more likely to think this than males (70.5% vs. 37.2%), males were still twice as likely to think that females were more impacted than themselves (37.2% vs. 18.5%).

### Seniors feel that the older you get, the more challenges you may face in the workforce

- Almost all seniors agree (27.2%) or strongly agree (70.6%) that the older they get, the harder it is to find a job. Notably those strongly agreeing rose to 70.6% from 45.8% in our previous 2016 study.
- Almost all agree (44.4%) or strongly agree (48.8%) that older employees are often undervalued in the workplace.
- Over one quarter (25.1%) of seniors feel that employers start to look at employees differently between the ages of 40-49, a further half (47.3%) say that this occurs between the ages of 50-59.

# Key findings

## Taking control of their career

- Almost 3 in 4 (74.9%) are currently undertaking or planning efforts to take more control of their career now and into the future. This includes reskilling, training, self-driven learning, embracing technology and restoring a work-life balance.
- Close to 3 in 5 have plans to reskill or seek further career and/or job training or already have after the age of 50 years old (58.7%). Of these, over 1 in 2 are looking to reskill in a new area to their current and previous roles or have already done so since turning 50 years old (51.2%).
- Over 2 in 3 seniors (67.1%) feel discussing 'pretirement' plans with their employers is important. However, only just over 1 in 3 (36.0%) have yet to do so.
- These discussions typically include:
  - Working fewer days (16.9%)
  - Flexible hours (14.3%)
  - Planning to reduce hours over time (11.6%)

## Many have attempted or are considering re-entering the workforce

- Over 2 in 5 (45.4%) report attempting to re-enter the workforce after leaving for some time or attempting to make a career change since the age of 50.
- Almost all semi-retirees and fully retired seniors are considering re-entering the workforce (88.9%) or returning to full-time work after semi-retirement (8.7%).
- The most common reasons cited for re-entering the workforce include financial reasons by some margin (50.0%), followed by missing the job (18.7%), boredom (17.8%) and seeking social connection (16.8%).

## Key findings

### When is the right time to retire?

- Over 2 in 5 (41.4%) wished they worked longer before retiring and only 5.5% wished they had retired earlier.
- Over 3 in 4 (75.7%) would want to keep working indefinitely if they were well supported and had flexible working conditions.
- Many struggle to see themselves fully retiring, with 30.5% needing to continue earning an income, and 21.2% feeling that continuing to work keeps them sane.
- Only 1 in 5 (18.8%) have planned what age they would like to retire with a further 35.9% having vague plans. This leaves over 2 in 5 (45.3%) with no plans at all.
- Of those that have a definite plan, only 65.2% are expecting to execute it.
- Looking at those already retired, few (15.8%) planned and achieved the exact age they would retire and over 7 in 10 (72.8%) did not have any plans for this in place, suggesting many slip into retirement rather than actively determine this themselves.

### The events of COVID-19 and 2020 has impacted seniors' attitudes to working, job searching and retirement plans

- Over 1 in 4 (26.8%) seniors feel that the events on 2020 and COVID-19 have had an impact on how they feel towards work.
- Almost 1 in 10 (9.7%) want to work more, but a slightly higher proportion (12.1%) want to work less. 1 in 20 (5.0%) want to stop working completely and a further 9.3% are ending their job search due to being faced with difficulty finding work.

- 32.2% of seniors feel it is a worse time to be working now than it was in 2019 vs. 16.6% who feel it is better.
- Seniors argue that the events of 2020 have made finding work much harder (27.6%) or at least somewhat harder (25.1%).
- They are now more wary about the risk factors of working over 50 years of age to some (39.5%) or a great (26.8%) extent.
- Close to 1 in 5 (18.6%) feel events of 2020 and COVID-19 have impacted their retirement plans and a further 8.8% are now unsure where they stand.

### Majority of working seniors are comfortable returning to their workplace following the events of 2020

- Most working seniors are somewhat (33.2%) or very (43.2%) comfortable returning to work in 2021.
- The ability to work remotely has also made the grey nomad lifestyle more appealing to over half (55.3%) of those surveyed (up from 46.2% earlier this year).

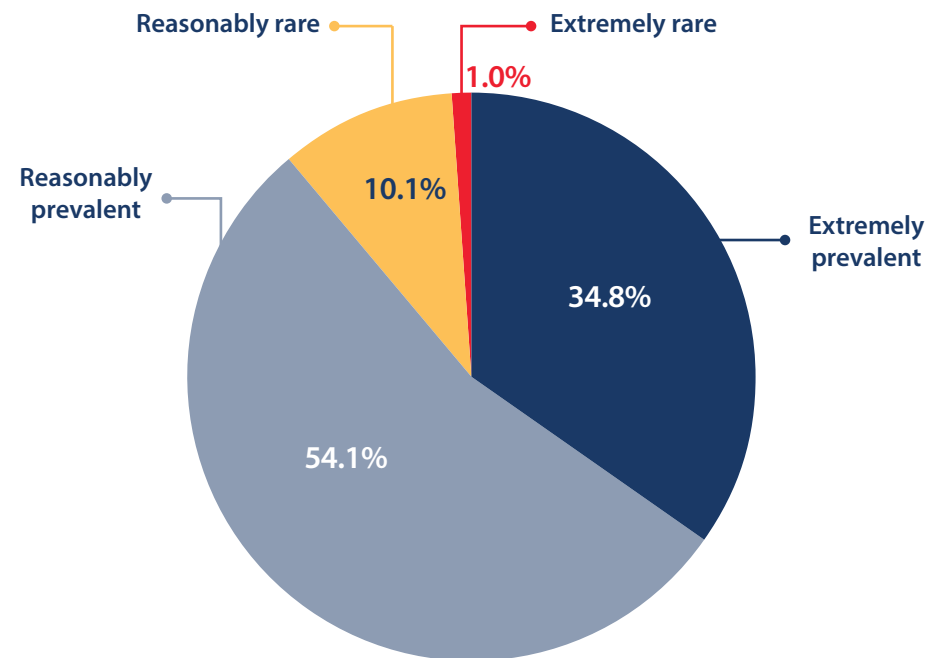


## **Ageism in the workplace**



## Ageism in the workplace is common

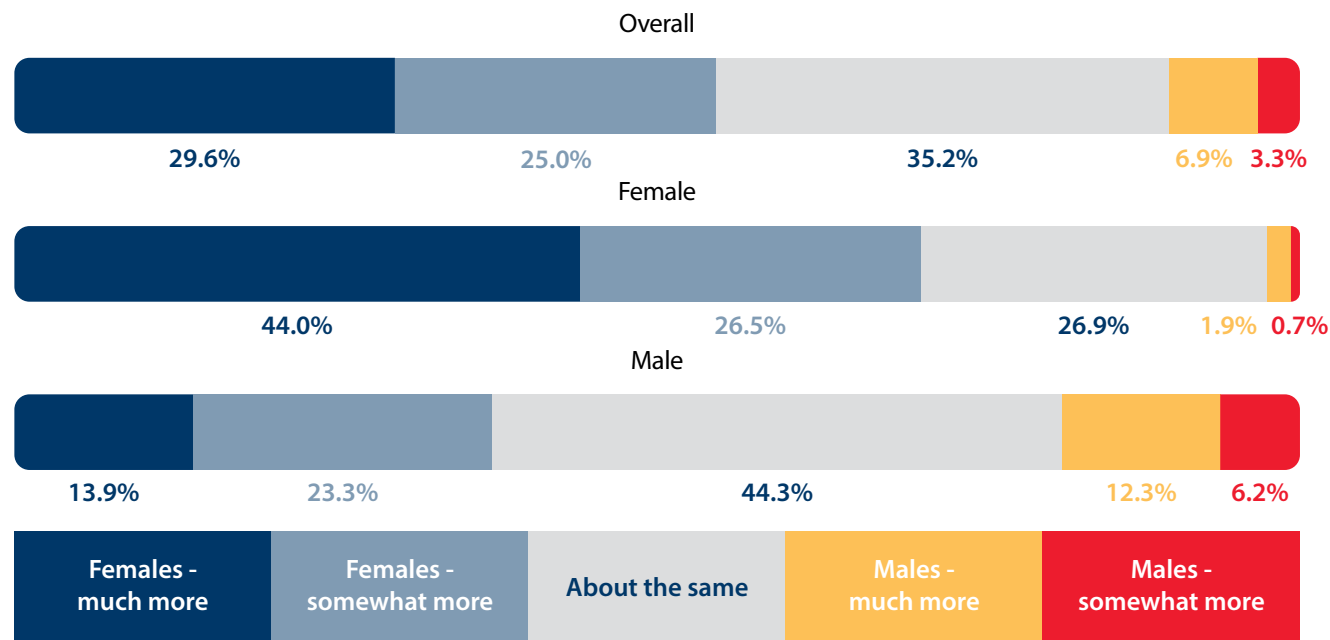
How common do you think 'ageism' is in the workplace these days (i.e. discrimination based on age)?



Most seniors believe that ageism in the workplace is reasonably (54.1%) or extremely (34.8%) prevalent these days. Only a small minority (11.1%) believe it is rare in their experience.

## Seniors believe females are more impacted by ageism in the workplace

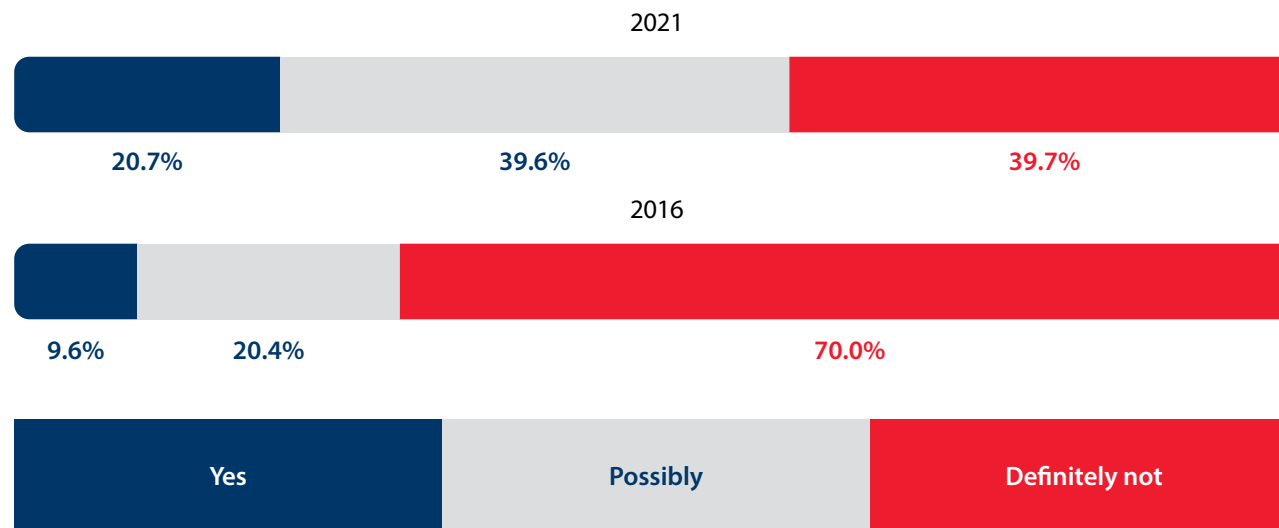
If you had to take a guess, do you think that females or males are more impacted by 'ageism' in the workplace?



Overall over 1 in 2 (54.6%) think that females are more impacted by ageism in the workplace, with only 10.2% thinking that males are. While females were more likely to think this than males (70.5% vs. 37.2%), males were still twice as likely to think that females were more impacted than themselves (37.2% vs. 18.5%).

## Age discrimination is faced by many

Have you ever experienced age discrimination within the workplace (e.g. treatment, pay and conditions, promotion opportunities, or specific adverse incidents)?

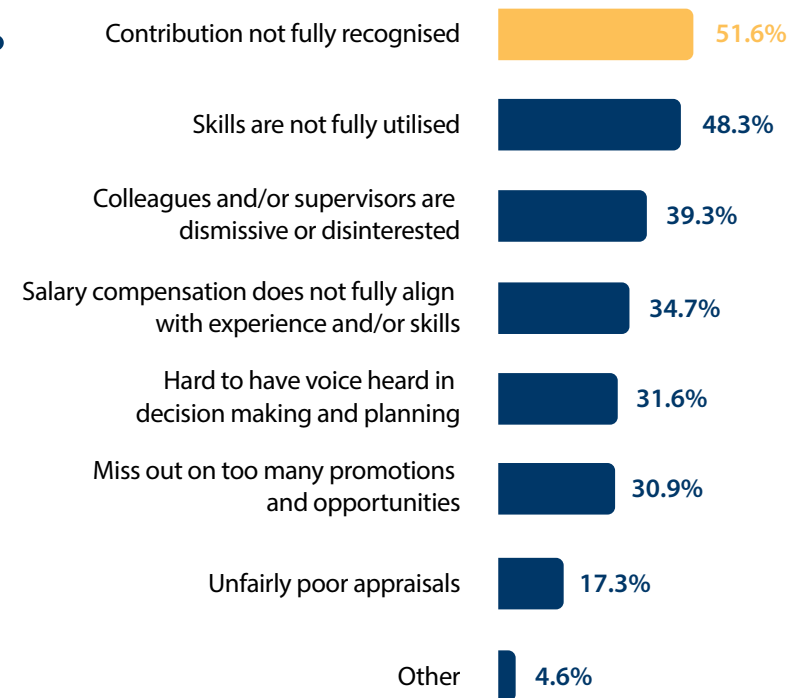


Almost 2 in 3 believe they have definitely (20.7%) or possibly (39.6%) directly experienced age discrimination at their workplace. Notably, this has increased significantly since our previous study in 2016 (up from 9.6% and 20.4% respectively).

# Feeling undervalued in the workplace



## Why do you feel undervalued in the workplace?

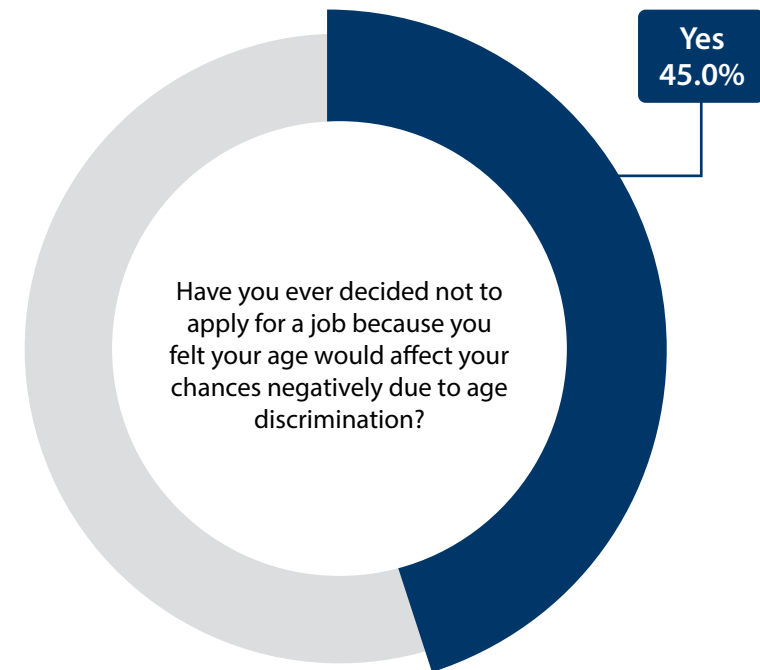
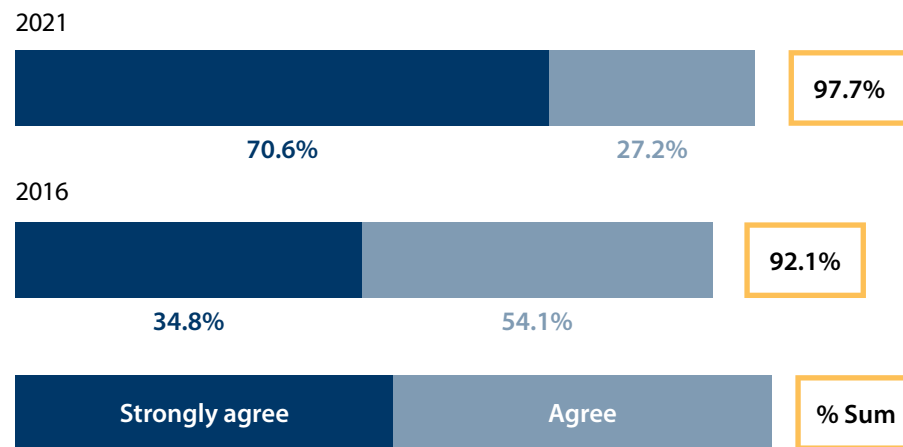


*Multiple answers allowed*

More than half of Australian seniors feel undervalued in the workplace (55.2%), with the top reasons being their contribution not being fully recognised (51.6%), their skills not being fully utilised (48.3%) and colleagues/supervisors being dismissive or disinterested (39.3%).

## Difficulty finding a job

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
*The older you get, the harder it is to find a job*



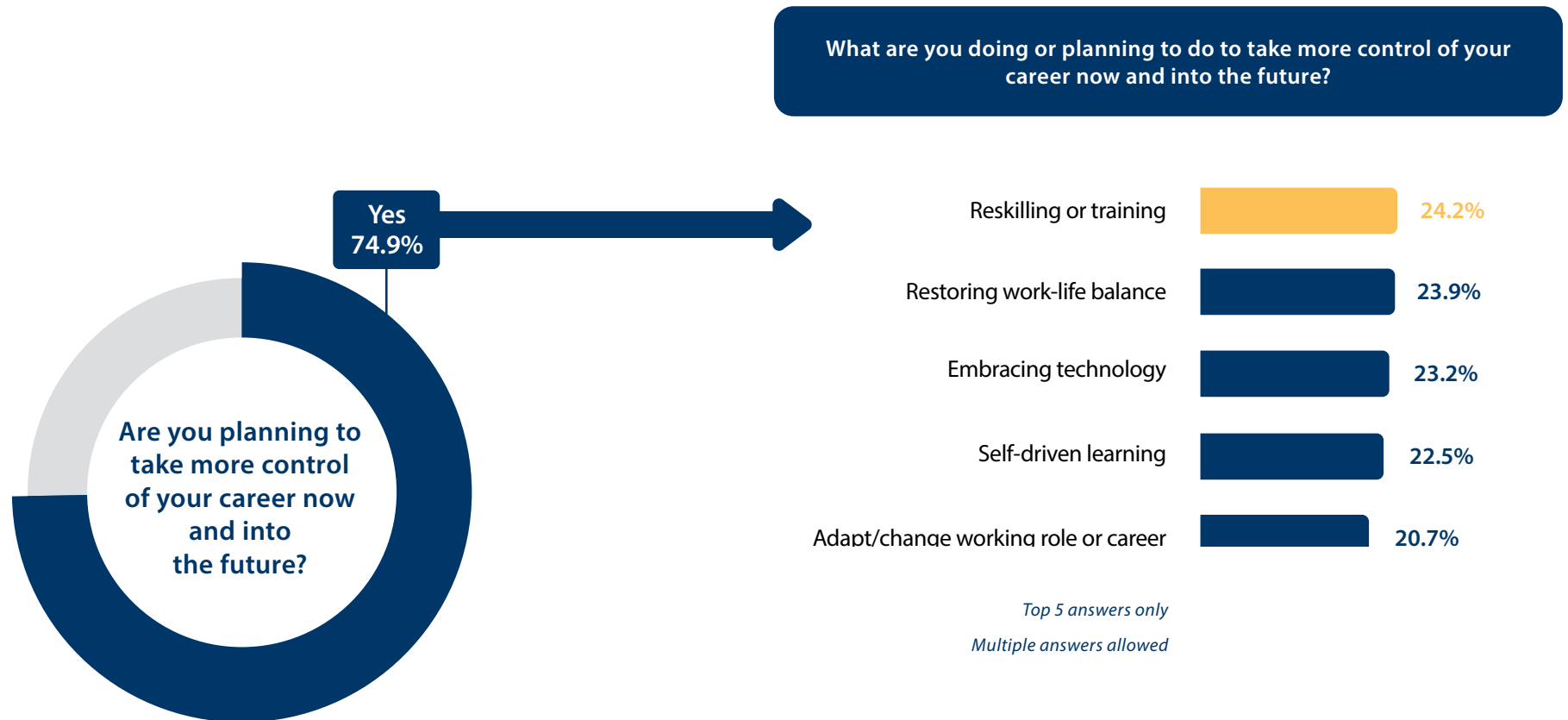
Almost all seniors agree (27.2%) or strongly agree (70.6%) that the older they get, the harder it is to find a job. Notably, those strongly agreeing rose to 70.6% from 34.8% in our previous 2016 study.

Almost half (45.0%) have decided not to apply for a job because they felt that their age would negatively impact their chances.



## Taking control

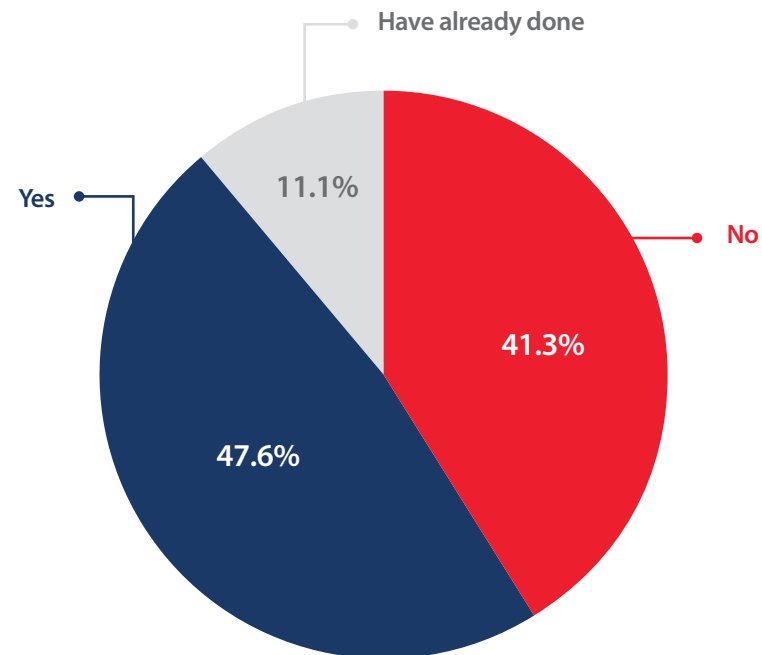
## Seniors are taking control of their career



Almost 3 in 4 seniors (74.9%) are currently undertaking or planning efforts to take more control of their career now and into the future. The most common ways in which they are doing this are reskilling or retraining (24.2%), restoring a work-life balance (23.9%), and embracing technology (23.2%).

## Plans to reskill or seek further training

Do you have any plans to reskill or seek further career/job training?

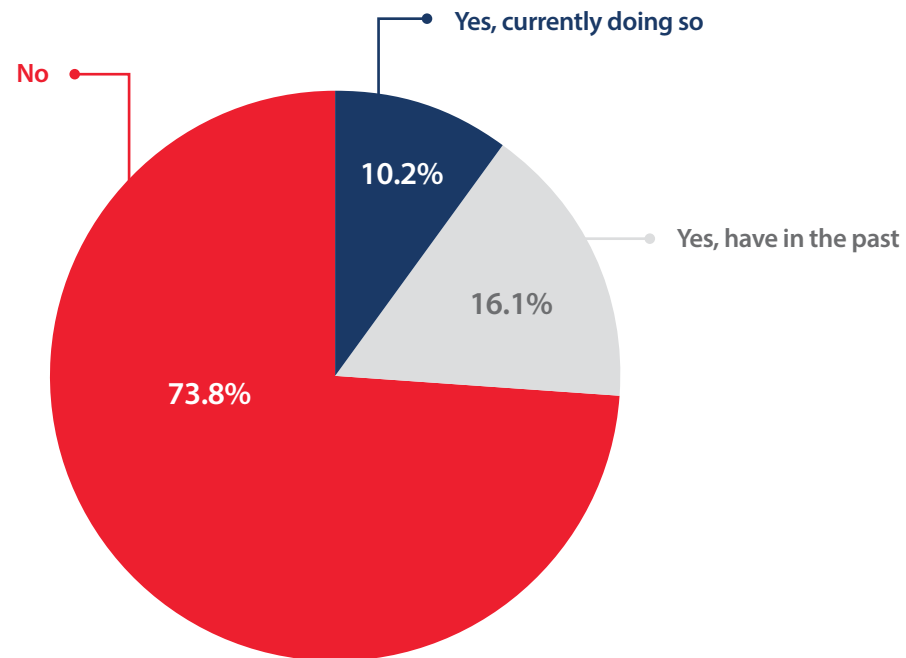


Overall, 58.7% have plans to reskill or seek further career/job training. This breaks down to 21.6% considering, 18.1% actively planning, 7.8% currently doing this and 11.1% having already done this. Interestingly, for over half (51.2%), this reskilling or training is in a new area/field to current or previous roles.



## Keeping up appearances

Past the age of 50 years old, have you ever tried to give the impression you are younger than your real age at your workplace or when applying for jobs?

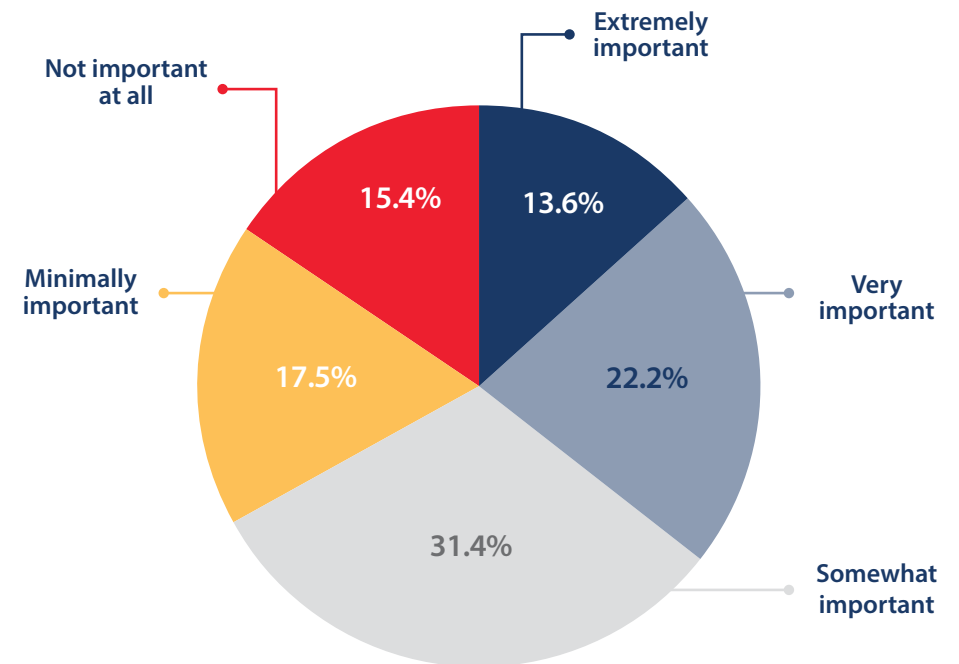


Over 1 in 4 seniors (26.1%) admitted that they have tried to give the impression they are younger than their real age at their workplace or when applying for jobs past the age of 50 years old.

## Discussing 'pretirement' plans



How important do you think it is to discuss 'pretirement' plans with your employer?



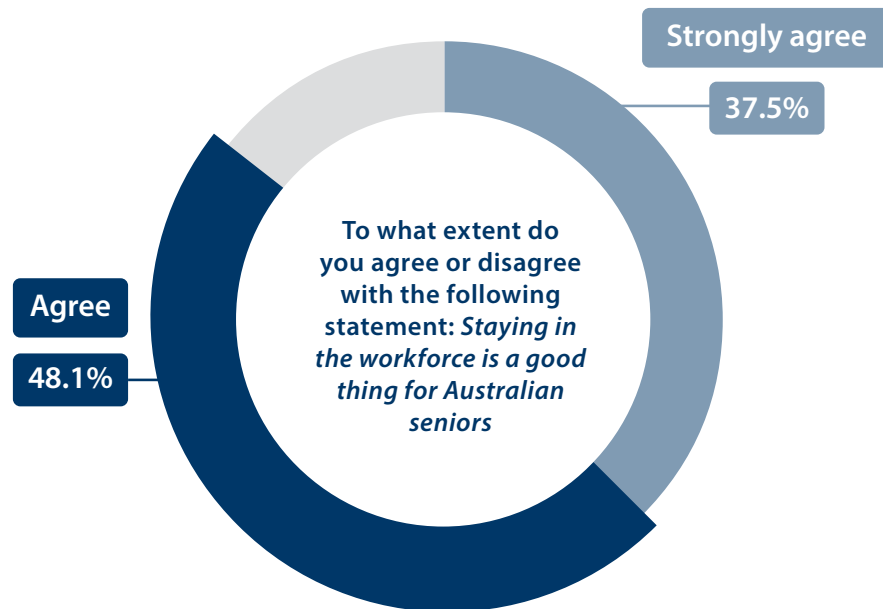
Just over 1 in 3 (36.0%) have discussed 'pretirement' plans with their employer. However 2 in 3 (67.1%) feel this is important to do. These discussions typically include: working fewer days (16.9%), flexible hours (14.3%) and planning to reduce hours over time (11.6%).



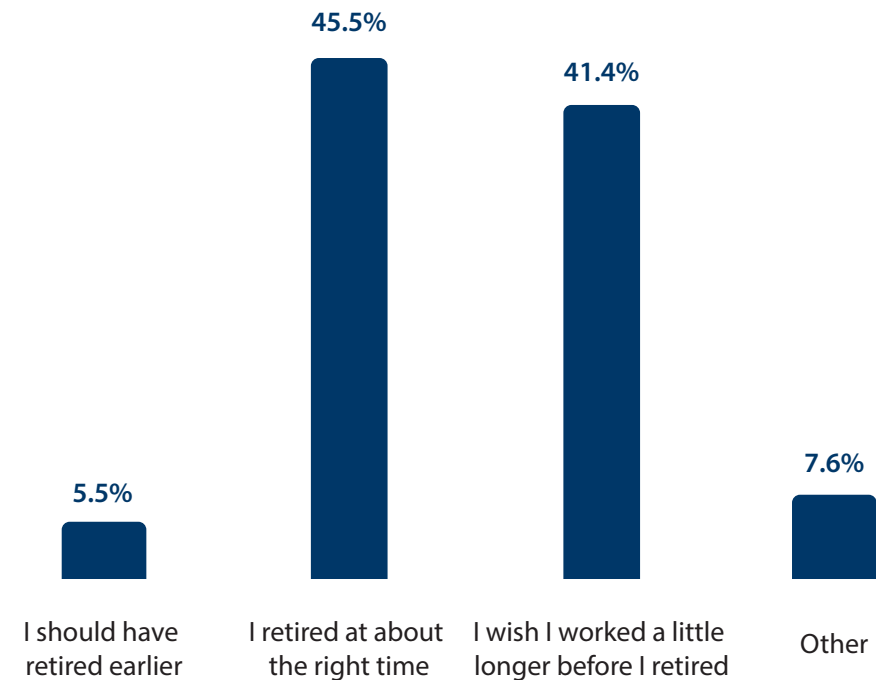
**Working longer**



## Staying in the workforce

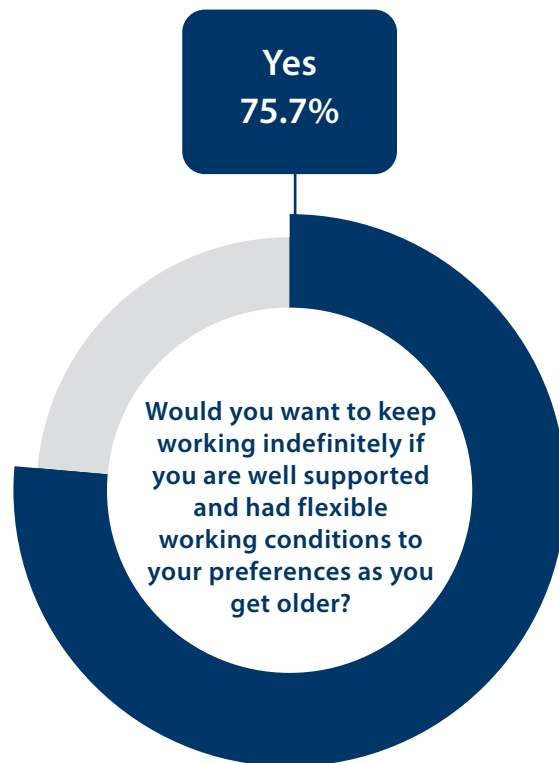


Which of the following statements best represents your thoughts on the time at which you fully retired?

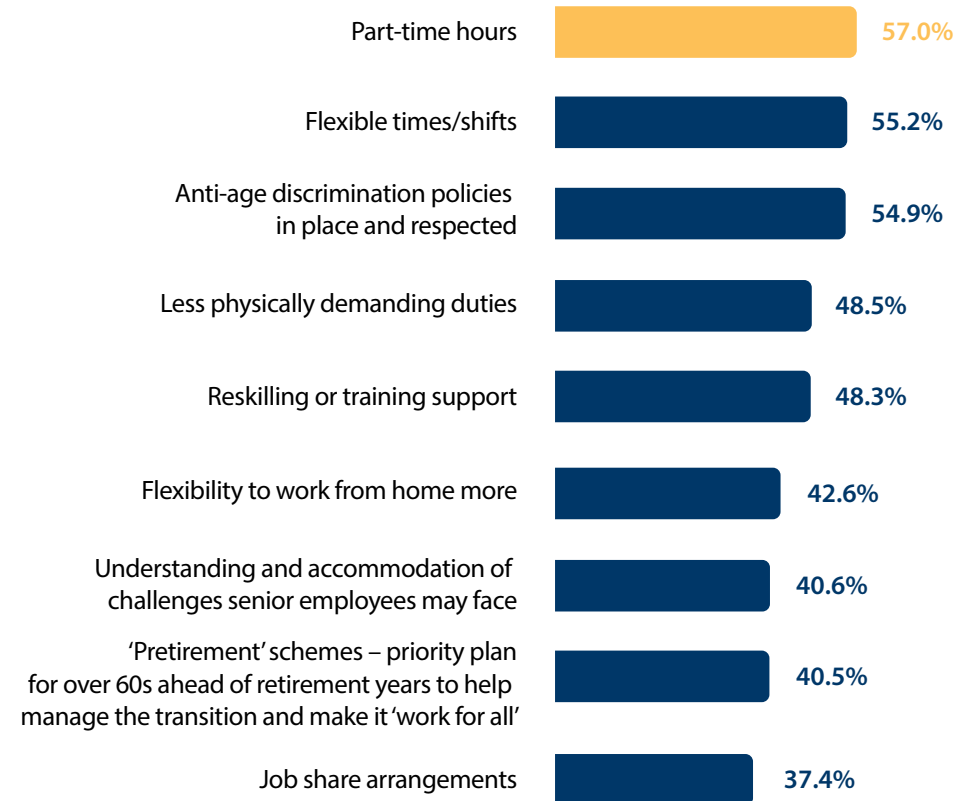


The vast majority of seniors (85.6%) feel staying in the workforce longer is a good thing for Australian seniors (37.5% strongly agree and 48.1% agree). Over 2 in 5 seniors (41.4%) wished they worked longer before retiring while only 5.5% wished they had retired earlier.

# Flexible working conditions



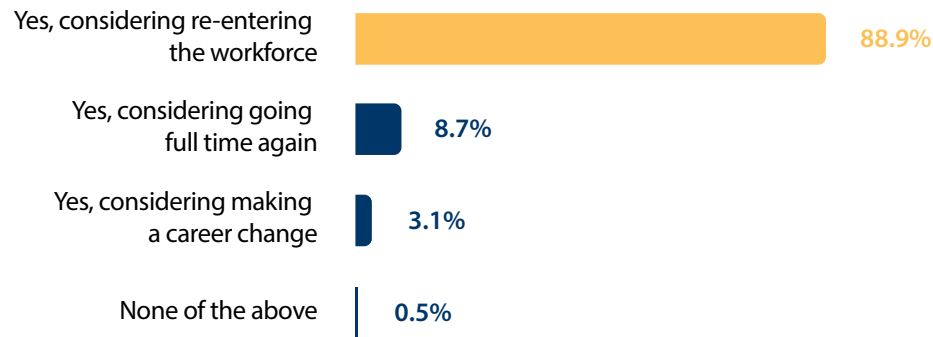
What kind of conditions do you think there should be in an ideal workplace for seniors and those transitioning into retirement?



Over 3 in 4 (75.7%) would want to keep working indefinitely if they were well supported and had flexible working conditions.

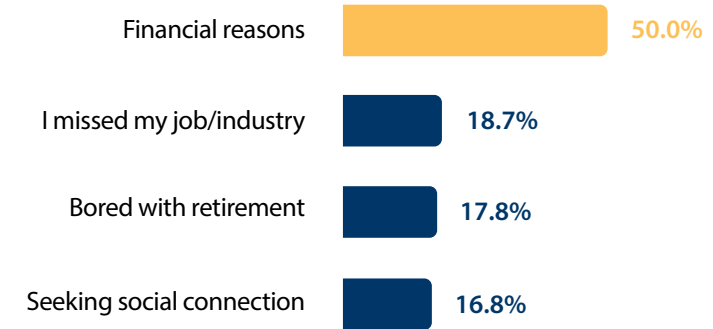
## Re-entering the workforce

Are you considering re-entering the workforce now that you have retired (or returning to full-time work after semi-retirement)?



*Multiple answers allowed*

Which of the following reasons best reflect your motivations to consider re-entering the workforce or returning to full-time work?



*Top 4 answers only  
Multiple answers allowed*

Almost all semi-retirees and fully retired seniors are now at least considering re-entering the workforce or returning to full-time work after semi-retirement (99.5%).

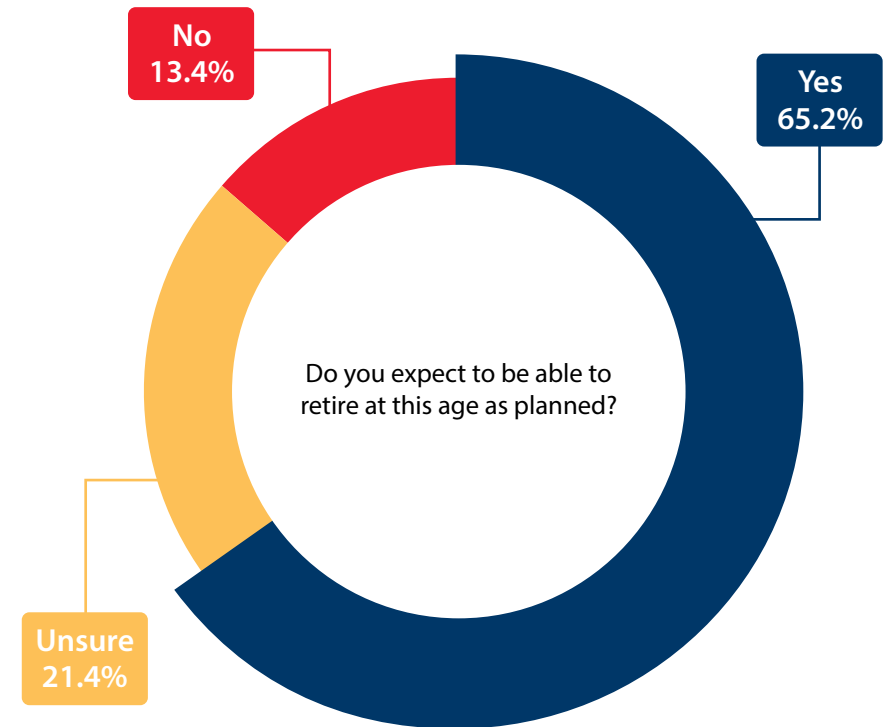
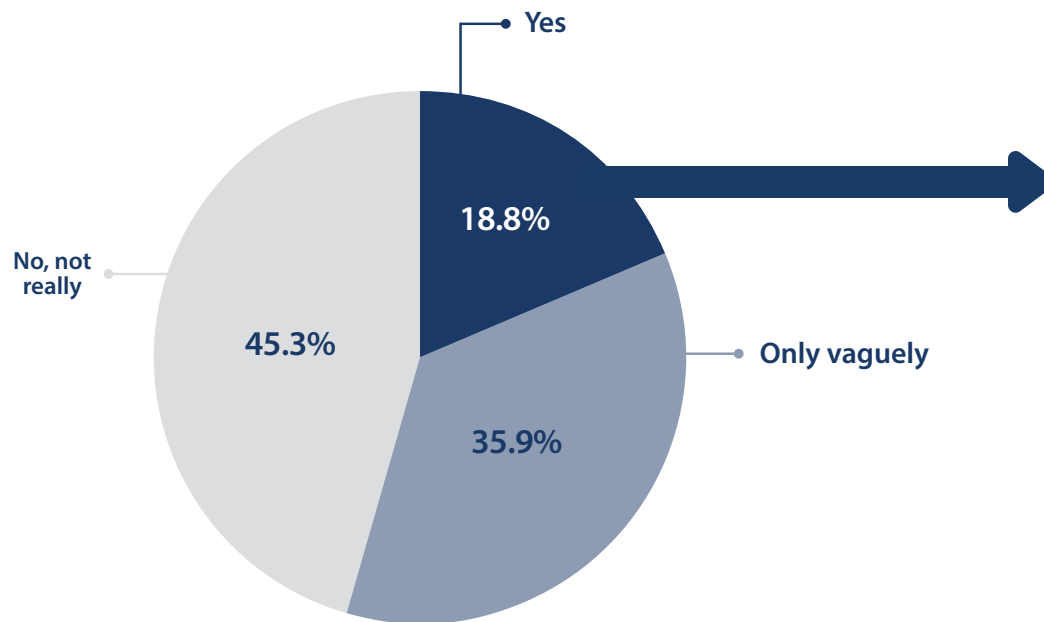
The reasons cited that best reflect their motivations to re-enter include financial reasons by some margin (50.0%), followed by missing job (18.7%), boredom (17.8%) and seeking social connection (16.8%).



## Retirement plans

# Planning retirement

Have you planned what age you would like to retire?

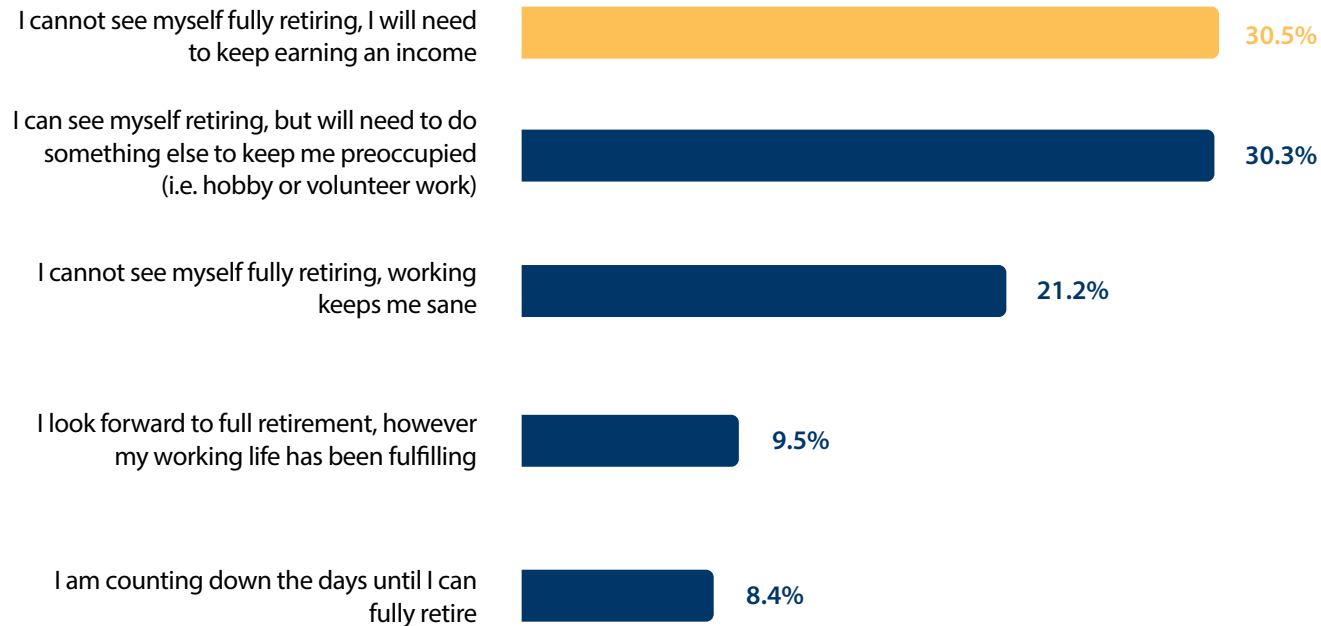


Only 1 in 5 (18.8%) have actually planned what age they would like to retire with a further 35.9% having vague plans. This leaves over 2 in 5 (45.3%) with no plans at all. Of those that have a definite plan, only 65.2% are expecting to be able to execute it.



# Attitude towards retirement

Which of the following statements best represents your attitude to retirement?



Over half (51.8%) struggle to see themselves fully retiring due to the need of earning an income or to continue working as a way to keep occupied. Almost a third (30.3%) say they need to do something else like a hobby or volunteer work to take over the gap that retiring could leave.

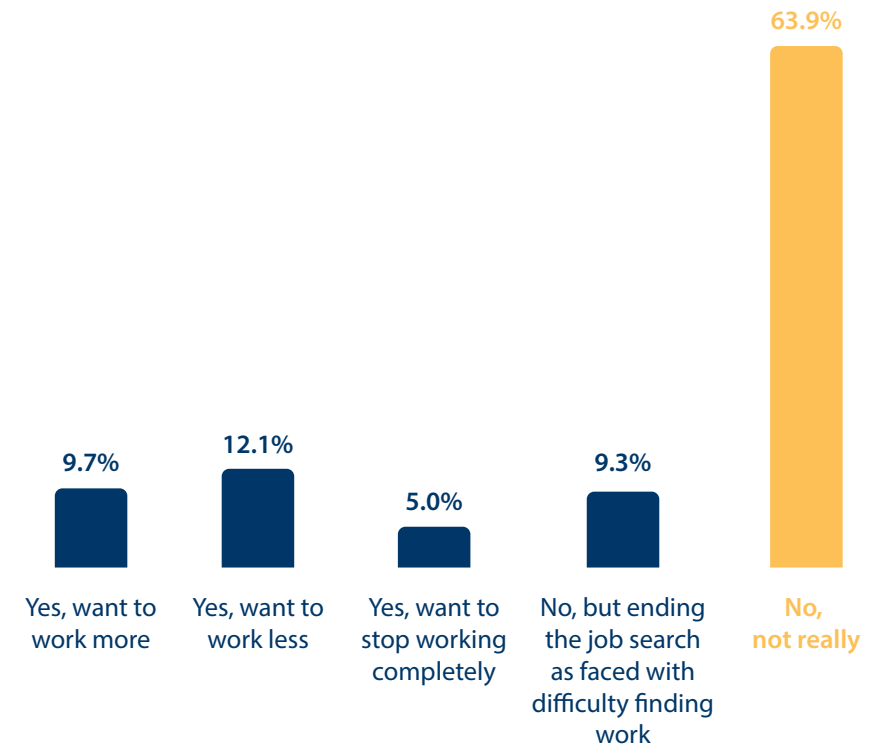
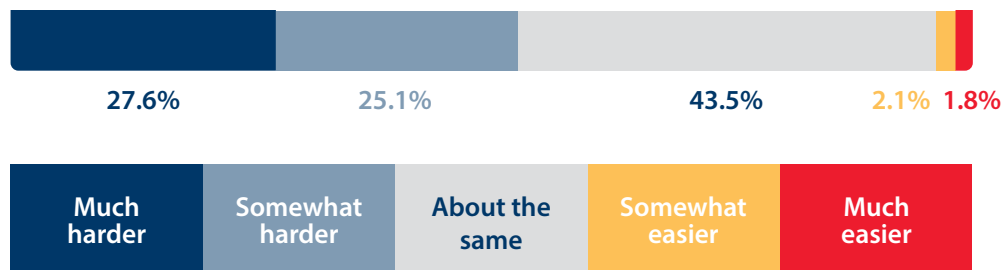


## **Impact of COVID-19**

## COVID-19 and 2020 has led to a shift in perceptions and attitudes

Have the events of 2020 and COVID-19 changed your perceptions of the difficulty of getting work at your age?

Have the events of 2020 and COVID-19 changed your attitudes towards wanting to work?

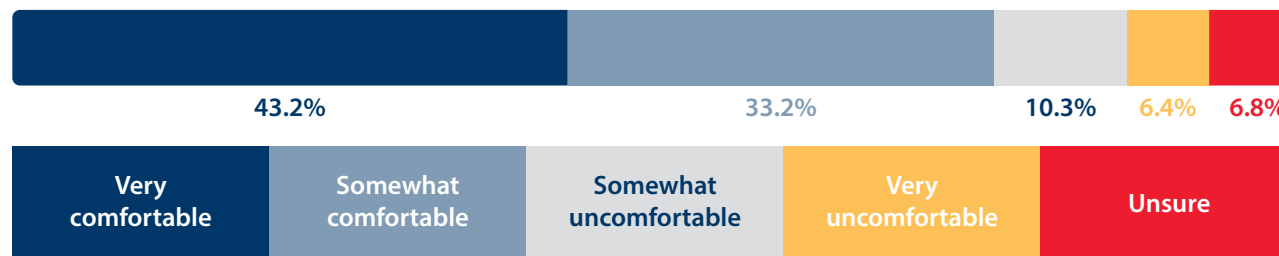


Seniors argue that the events of 2020 and COVID-19 have made finding work much harder (27.6%) or at least somewhat harder (25.1%).

The events of 2020, COVID-19 and other crises have had an impact on older Australians' attitudes towards work (over 1 in 4). Almost 1 in 10 (9.7%) want to work more, but a slightly higher proportion (12.1%) want to work less. 1 in 20 (5.0%) want to stop working completely. A further 9.3% are ending their job search due to being faced with difficulty finding work.

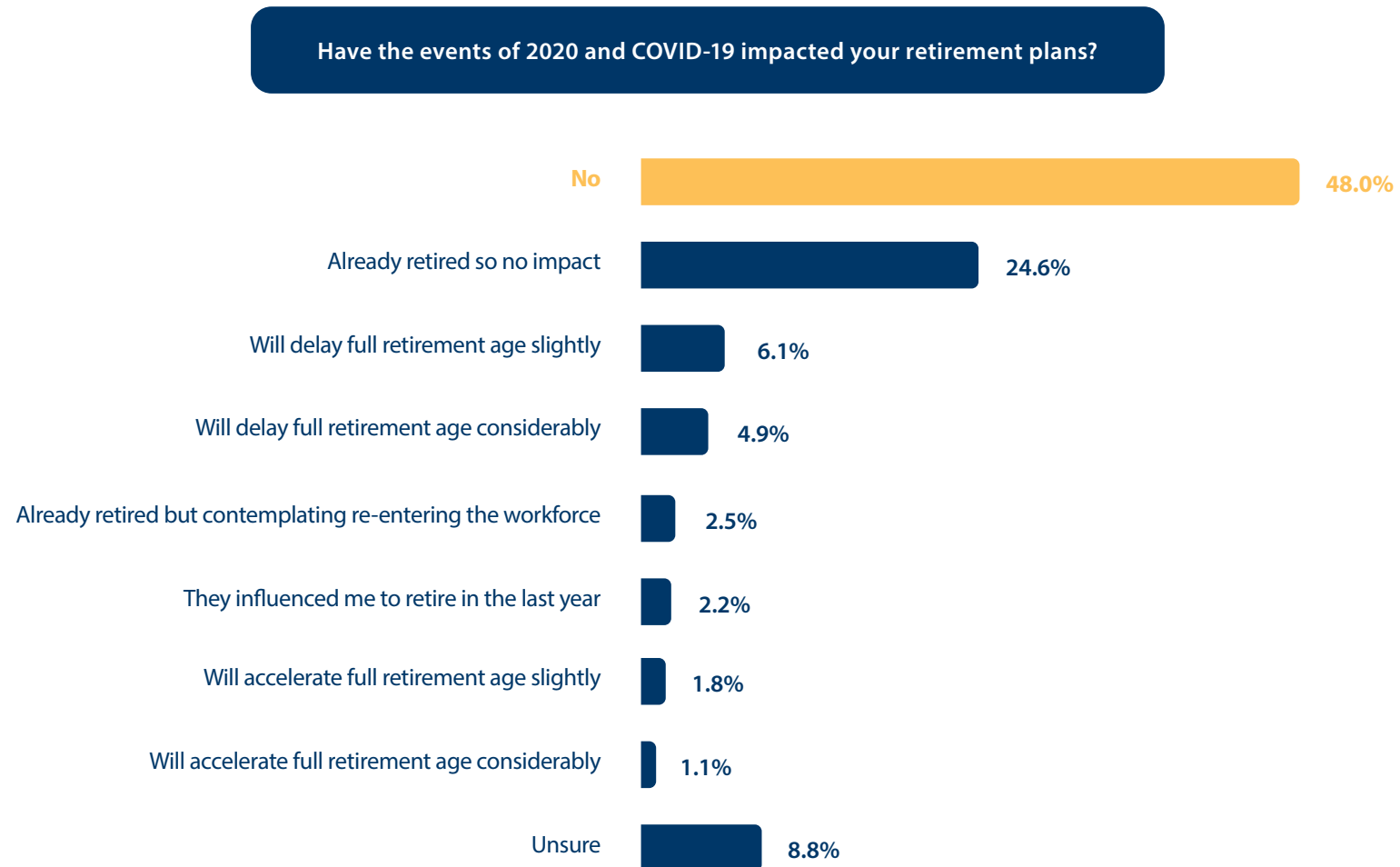
## Returning to the workplace

How comfortable are you returning to the workplace at least part time or full time in 2021?



Most working seniors are somewhat (33.2%) or very (43.2%) comfortable returning to work in 2021. The ability to work remotely has also made the grey nomad lifestyle more appealing to over half (55.3%) of those surveyed (up from 43% earlier this year).

## COVID-19 and 2020 impacts on retirement



Close to 1 in 5 (18.6%) feel the events of 2020 and COVID-19 have impacted their retirement plans for various reasons and a further 8.8% are now unsure where they stand.



**More of the Australian Seniors Series coming soon...**

#### **About Australian Seniors**

Australian Seniors launched in 1998 to meet the needs of the often-ignored over 50s market. Since then, we've helped countless Australians protect the most important things in life — whether it's their family's future, valuable assets, or even their long-planned retirement.

We strive to be different through the diverse offering of our life, funeral, car, home & contents, landlords, pet, and travel insurance products by carefully selecting underwriters that share our vision of providing insurance that's simple, easy to understand, and cost-effective. That's why our policies have helped everyone from hard-working over 50s to self-funded retirees take control of the things that matter most.