

VALUING EVERY CONTRIBUTION

What a basic income would mean for Australians

AUSTRALIA FAIR SERIES
AUGUST 2021



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This is Anglicare Australia's second release in the Australia Fair series, first published in August 2020. This year's release is an exploration of what a permanent basic income would mean for Australians. The author is Maiy Azize.

This and previous reports are available on the Anglicare Australia website:
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About this report

This report is the second edition of Anglicare Australia's Australia Fair series. Projects released as part of the Australia Fair series are evidence-based, reflect the voices of Anglicare Australia clients, and are designed to set the policy agenda. This year's edition looks at the impact that a permanent basic income would have on the lives of Australians. It also explores the growing problems of income and work insecurity as the labour force changes.

Valuing every contribution: What a basic income would mean for Australians

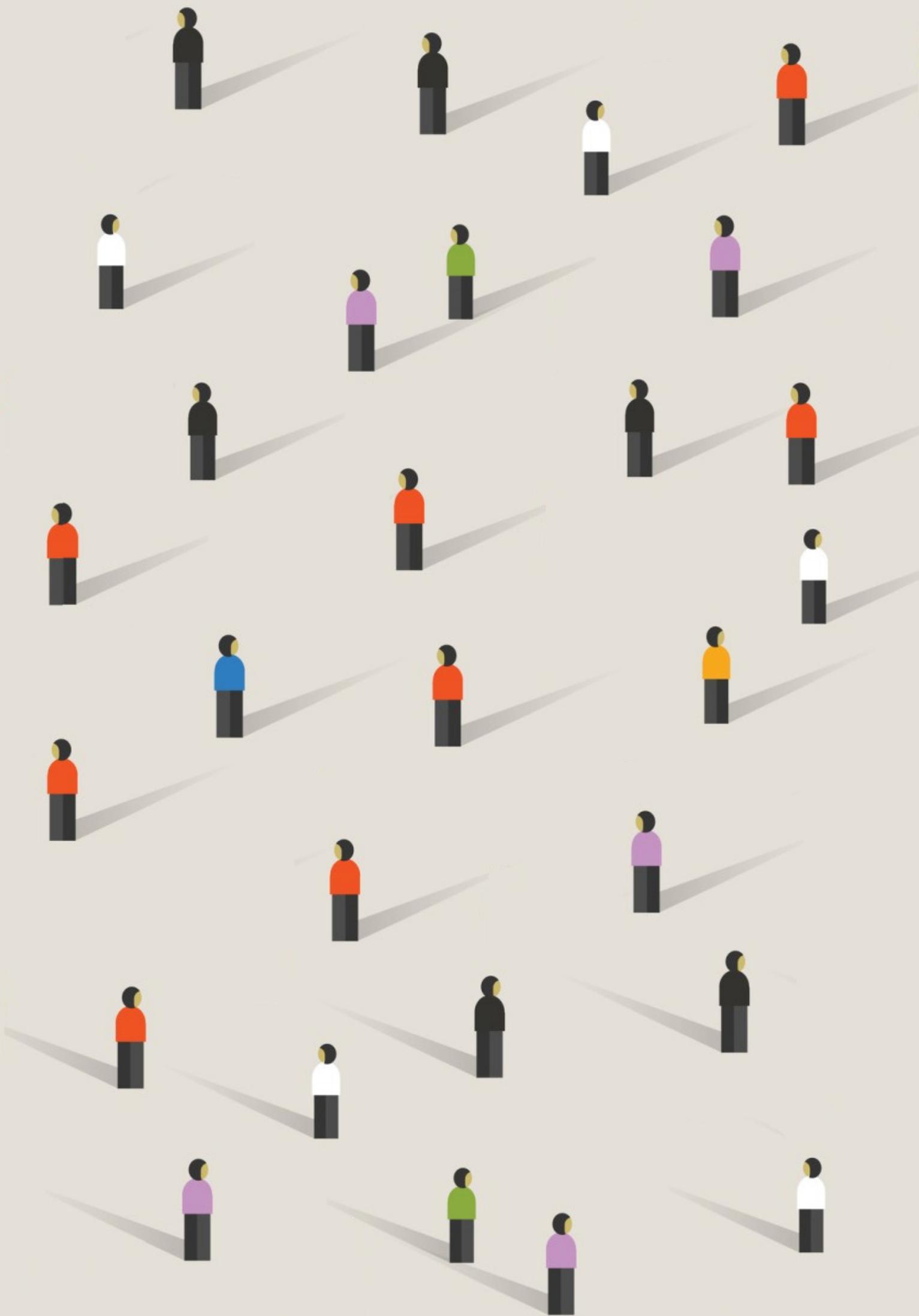
features an introduction to basic income schemes and different models. Part I then explores how a permanent basic income would change the way Australians spend their time, manage their finances, and organise their lives. Part II looks at Australians' experiences of work and income insecurity. In Part III, participants were asked about their support for a basic income above the poverty line.

The survey featured in this report was conducted by Ipsos, commissioned by Anglicare Australia.

Any study is confined by its methodology. The method used in this study was a representative survey. This method cannot answer every question, and in some cases this research has generated important questions that this project cannot directly answer. We are contributing this study to a growing body of research in the hope of working with others to more fully answer these questions.

We hope we can use these findings to change the conversation about income security and improve people's lives.





Valuing every contribution

Anglicare Australia has long called for all Australians to have an income above the poverty line. Decent incomes are vital to building a fair society. Yet changes to the labour force and a broken safety net have pushed more and more people into income insecurity and poverty. As a network that supports people in times of greatest need, we have seen first-hand the impact of poverty on people's lives. We have also seen the benefits that a secure income can bring.

For a short time, Australia's JobSeeker payment was doubled in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Obligations for those getting the payment were lifted. The JobKeeper wage subsidy was brought in to help workers, especially casuals, stay afloat if work dried up. This support package gave many Australians access to a form of basic income. Almost immediately, hundreds of thousands of people were lifted out of poverty – many for the first time. Research, including by Anglicare Australia, has documented the profound impact this had on poverty levels and on people's lives.

The changes were only temporary. Yet they confirmed what many have always known – poverty is not inevitable. It is a policy choice. The simple act of giving a liveable income to so many people, including those who were out of work or employed casually, all but eradicated the problem of poverty in Australia. Why, when a liveable income above the poverty line brought so many benefits to so many communities, shouldn't Australia have a permanent basic income?

This survey, part of Anglicare Australia's Australia Fair series, explores what a permanent basic income would mean for us as a nation. It surveys Australians to explore how a basic income would affect their lives, how they use their time, and how they engage with the workforce. The survey also sheds light on the growing problem of income and work insecurity, which is alarmingly high.

The findings show how a permanent basic income could not only change our workplaces for the better, but also our homes, families, and communities. Many people want to work less, which could benefit others who want to work more. Some would use their time and money to make more contributions to their communities. Others would spend more time with their children, or care for loved ones in need of help. And for so many Australians in hardship, a permanent basic income would finally allow them a measure of peace and security.

These aspirations should be valued and enabled by a system that is designed to truly help people. Our hope is that the insights from this survey can be used to help realise that vision.

Background

This study explores the impact that a basic income would have on the work, life, and finances of Australians. A *basic income* is a payment made to all adults, allowing them to meet their basic needs. It is made without any work or activity tests. Proposals for a basic income can take many forms including a Universal Basic Income, a Citizens' Income, and a Basic Income Guarantee schemes.

Basic income schemes have moved into the mainstream of public debate as a reaction to two trends. First, global recessions have led to deep and prolonged crises in many developed countries, causing job losses and suppressing wages. Second, many commentators are warning that automation could reduce demand for workers.¹ In the past this trend largely affected less skilled workers, with most policy analysts calling for greater investment in education and training. However, some commentators are now rethinking this approach, especially with technology now affecting higher-skilled, better-paid jobs. Here in Australia, for example, the Productivity Commission has included a discussion of basic income in its recent report on digital disruption.²

Basic income proposals usually share three features – universality, unconditionality, and adequacy.³

Most basic income proposals are *universal*. They would see an income paid to all adult citizens regardless of need. It would be paid at the same rate to people with and without paid jobs; to single and partnered people; to people with disabilities and people without. It would be paid at the same rate regardless of a person's income or assets. These features make basic incomes different to social assistance payments. In most countries, social assistance is means tested and targeted towards particular categories of people. Australia has the most targeted regime in the OECD, with heavily means-tested payments directed towards people who meet stringent conditions.⁴

Basic income proposals also tend to be *unconditional*. Currently, most countries attach behavioural conditions to income support payments. In Australia, most recipients are required to search for work, participate in training or mutual obligations, submit to drug tests, and vaccinate their children and send them to school. By contrast, most basic income proposals would see all adults receive a payment regardless of how they chose to live, in much the same way that age pensioners have a legal right to payments without conditions attached to their behaviour.

Finally, most basic income proposals are designed to be *adequate*. This usually means they would be paid at a high enough level so that an individual could meet their basic needs without additional income. However, this adequacy is not an essential feature of basic income. Some proposals envisage a scheme where universal basic income payments are topped up by targeted income support payments and social services. The end result is that all citizens would have an adequate income, though not necessarily through the basic income payment alone.

Methodology

To explore the impact of these proposals and the levels of support they might attract, Anglicare Australia developed a quantitative survey. Ipsos, a global leader in social research and reliable information, was commissioned to run the survey with a representative national sample. The data collection was conducted from 6 to 9 May 2021, with a total sample of 1,001 Australian respondents. The sample has been weighted to be representative of the Australian population by age, gender and location. The breakdown of participants in each State and Territory, as well as age, gender and regional demographics is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Breakdown of participants by region, state, gender and age

		Unweighted	Weighted
Region	Metropolitan	695	677
	Rural, regional or remote	306	325
State	NSW	288	321
	VIC	281	258
	SA	81	72
	ACT	19	17
	WA	104	105
	TAS	28	21
	NT	4	10
	QLD	196	198
Gender	Male	480	495
	Female	521	506
Age	18 to 29	153	219
	30 to 49	371	354
	50 +	477	428
Total	1001		

The aim of the survey was to understand how a basic income would affect the work and financial lives of Australians. There were three parts to the survey, and responses to each question appeared in a randomised order for each respondent to ensure there was no priming effect.

Participants were given a short summary of a basic income proposal, and were told that it would have three features:

- Universal: it is paid automatically to all adult citizens without a means test.
- Unconditional: it is paid without conditions (for example, no job search requirements).
- Adequate: it is set at a high enough level to protect citizens against poverty.

In Part I, participants were asked how a permanent basic income would change the way they spend their time or organise their life, with a wide variety of responses to choose from. The options they were offered were as follows:

- Reduce paid work hours
- Spend time volunteering
- Make charitable donations
- Take on additional domestic/household responsibilities
- Take on additional parenting responsibilities
- Dedicate more time to caring for friends or family members in need of help
- Improve or further my education
- Reduce debt/save more
- Spend more time on my hobbies or sports
- Change jobs or industries
- Pursue business ideas.

Respondents were also given the option to nominate their own changes, or the option not to make any changes at all. With the exception of those who elected not to make changes, participants were able to make multiple selections for all answers that applied to them.

In Part II, participants were asked about their own experiences of work and income insecurity. This was aimed at gauging who is most in need of a stable, basic income. It also tests how individuals' own experiences influence their views.

In Part III, participants were asked about their support for all Australians to have an income above the poverty line. Survey respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

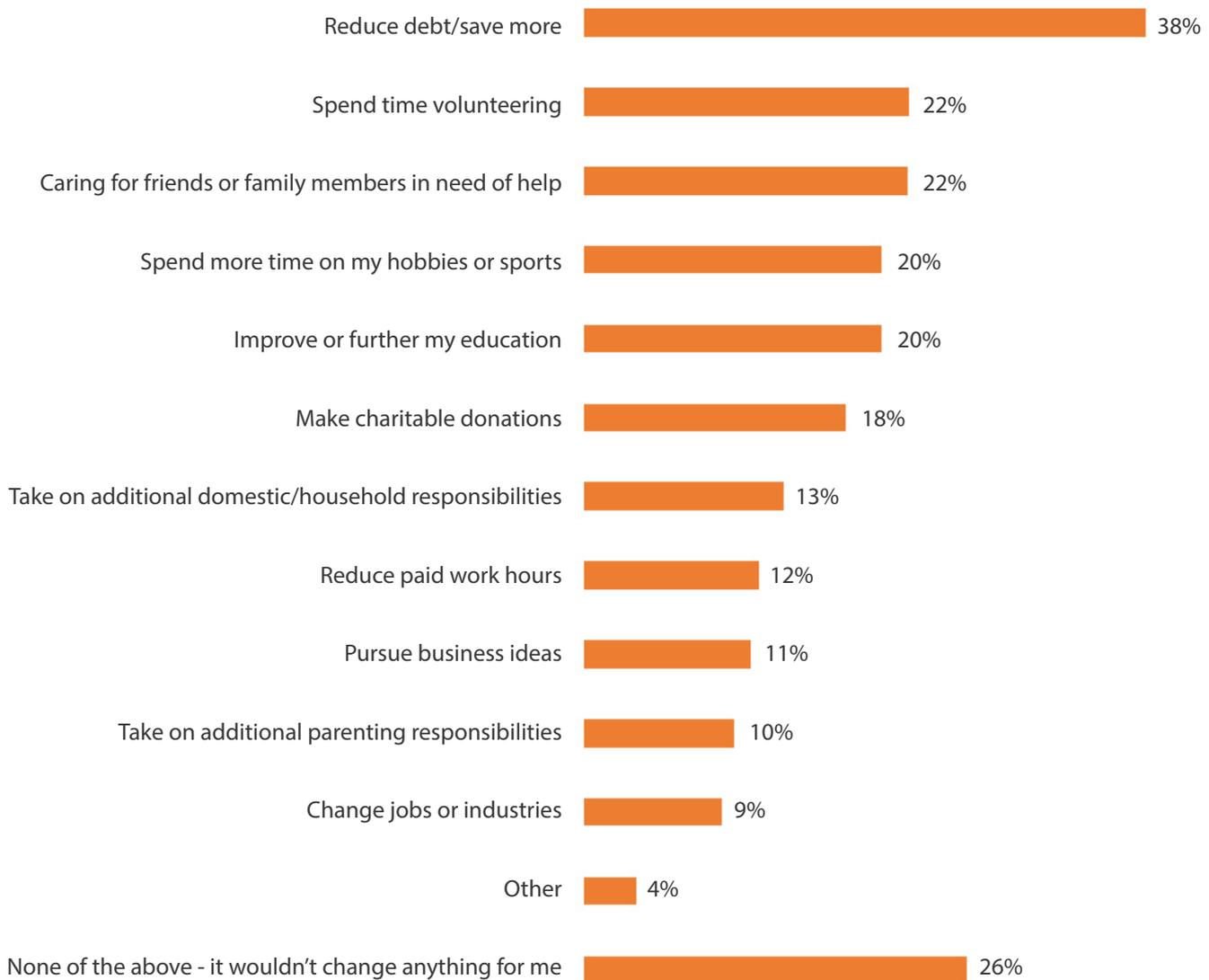
Except where there are significant trends, survey results are reported with a net 'agree' (combined 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) and net 'disagree' (combined 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' responses). Respondents were also given the option to answer 'I don't know.'

Impact of a permanent basic income

The first part of the survey explored how a permanent basic income would change the way Australians spend their time or organise their lives. The trends and overall data can be seen below in Figure 1.

For one in five respondents (26 percent), the introduction of a permanent basic income wouldn't change any aspect of their situation. This is not surprising, with other studies of basic income schemes showing that many people continue to live and work they did before. Other common responses and trends are explored in greater detail below.

Figure 1. The impact of a permanent basic income



Financial security for people in need

As shown above, by far the most popular option was to 'Reduce debt and save more', with 38 percent of respondents choosing this. The most likely demographics to select this option were people in part-time or casual work (47 percent), people with children under the age of 18 (44 percent), and women (41 percent). This reflects trends of greater income insecurity among women and people in casual work, as well as concern about wealth and security among people with dependent children.

Informal caring and domestic labour

Almost one in four respondents (22 percent) hoped to dedicate more time to caring for friends and family. This is an important finding, as the need for informal care labour is projected to increase in the coming decades. At present, 2.7 million provide unpaid care work, a third of whom are primary carers.⁵ Half of these provide care for more than 20 hours a week. This is outside of the core care work of raising children. The need for this care will grow as the population ages, with the demand for informal carers projected to surge by 23 percent in the coming decade.⁶ At the same time, rising living costs means that the pool of carers is likely to shrink as fewer people can afford to devote time to this essential work. Carers lose \$15.2 billion in foregone earnings each year, highlighting the importance of secure incomes to support informal care.⁷

Notably, 13 percent of respondents hoped to take on additional domestic and household responsibilities. 15 percent of those who gave this response were men, and 12 percent were women. 10 percent said they would take on additional parenting responsibilities, including 12 percent of men and 9 percent of women. The desire among men to take on additional domestic duties is modest in light of gender discrepancies. Across the average week, married mothers spend an extra three hours working, doing housework and caring for dependants compared to married fathers.⁸ For de facto parents, that gap is higher at four hours. Overall, men have an extra 99 hours a year when they are not working, doing housework, or caring for dependants compared to women.⁹ When respondents without dependent children are removed, a total of one in four parents responding to the survey said they would spend more time parenting and on domestic responsibilities (20 percent and 21 percent respectively).

Patterns of work and education

More than one in ten respondents said they would use their income to reduce their work hours and seek more flexible work arrangements. 12 percent of respondents said they would reduce their paid work hours. Those most likely to offer this response were at the peak of their earning potential, between the ages of 30 and 49. This cohort is also the most likely to have family obligations. Almost

one in five (17 percent) of these respondents hoped to reduce their hours, compared to rates between 8 and 11 percent for other age groups. Around 11 percent of respondents said they would change jobs or industries, and 9 percent said they would pursue business ideas. Coupled with findings showing that one in five respondents (20 percent) would use a basic income to further their education, the results offer the possibility of a more dynamic workforce with greater mobility for workers.

The high rate of respondents hoping to pursue further education is interesting, but unsurprising in light of the demand for skilled labour. Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot has shown that the proportion of jobs requiring advancing skills and education has been growing. Jobs which do not require education or advanced skills have been drying up. Just 12 percent of vacancies were at the entry-level in 2020, compared to 20 percent in 2006. In the month of our most recent Snapshot, a staggering 39 percent of vacancies called for an undergraduate degree.¹⁰

Volunteering and donations

Almost one in four respondents (22 percent) said they would use a basic income to spend more time volunteering. This may seem high, but it is unsurprising. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, nearly six million Australians formally volunteer through organisations.¹¹ This is around one third of Australian adults. Although all demographics volunteer their time, those most likely to volunteer are on higher incomes. The results of this survey suggest that even more Australians would volunteer if they had more disposable and time, a finding that is supported by the results of Anglicare Australia's recent Asking Those Who Know survey. It found that people out of work and relying on income support wanted to volunteer more, but that their low incomes and stringent time obligations got in the way.¹² Australians also donate at high rates, and this is borne out by the survey findings. 18 percent said they would spend income from their basic income payments on donations. This would build on existing rates of giving, with more than two thirds of Australians donating money each year (68 percent).¹³ This includes by giving money directly to a charity, giving to a church or religious organisation, or by sponsoring someone.

Income-based trends

Some of the most interesting trends in responses were income-based, as seen at Table 2. It is difficult to judge from these results how higher income earners would use their additional time. Indeed, people on the highest incomes were the least likely to say that a basic income would not change their lives (16 percent for those earning over \$150,000, compared to 28 percent for other respondents).

Table 2. The impact of a permanent basic income by income

	Under \$15,000	\$15,000 - \$49,999	\$50,000 - \$74,999	\$75,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$149,999	\$150,000 and over
Reduce paid work hours	11%	6%	11%	12%	17%	18%
Spend time volunteering	27%	22%	23%	33%	19%	18%
Make charitable donations	22%	19%	12%	23%	17%	18%
Take on additional domestic/household responsibilities	30%	11%	10%	16%	16%	13%
Take on additional parenting responsibilities	10%	8%	5%	12%	16%	12%
Caring for friends or family members in need of help	23%	20%	17%	25%	28%	20%
Improve or further my education	37%	16%	15%	22%	25%	24%
Reduce debt/save more	32%	41%	31%	43%	34%	44%
Spend more time on my hobbies or sports	14%	20%	17%	23%	23%	22%
Pursue business ideas	16%	8%	11%	13%	13%	12%
Change jobs or industries	9%	6%	7%	14%	14%	10%
Other	5%	8%	1%	2%	3%	1%
It would not change anything for me	30%	30%	33%	16%	25%	16%

Respondents on the highest incomes were the most likely to reduce their paid work hours, at 18 percent compared to an average of 11 percent for those earning less than \$150,000. Yet they were the least likely to spend time volunteering. 18 percent of those earning over \$150,000 said they would spend more time volunteering, compared to a combined total of 24 percent for those in the other income brackets. They were also among the least likely to take on additional parenting responsibilities, domestic duties, or informal caring work. It is therefore difficult to judge how higher income earners would use the time they gain from reducing paid work hours.

Higher income earners were the most likely to spend their additional income on saving and reducing debt, with 44 percent of people earning over \$150,000 choosing this option. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it does align with patterns of household debt. Increasingly, higher-income earners are more highly-leveraged and most are servicing debts that are three or more times their income.¹⁴

On the other end of the spectrum, people on lower incomes were much less likely to reduce their work hours. 7 percent of respondents earning less than \$50,000 would reduce their work hours, compared with 15 percent for those earning more than \$50,000. This not a surprising finding, as these respondents are earning below-average incomes. Their preferences are likely to be a reflection of material need.

Gender-based trends

While all figures are relatively similar across the board, there are some significant gender-based differences in the responses, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The impact of a permanent basic income by gender

	Male	Female
Reduce paid work hours	12%	12%
Spend time volunteering	20%	24%
Make charitable donations	16%	19%
Take on additional domestic/household responsibilities	15%	12%
Take on additional parenting responsibilities	12%	9%
Caring for friends or family members in need of help	20%	24%
Improve or further my education	20%	20%
Reduce debt/save more	35%	41%
Spend more time on my hobbies or sports	21%	19%
Pursue business ideas	13%	9%
Change jobs or industries	11%	8%
Other	3%	4%
It would not change anything for me	27%	25%

On the whole, women were more likely to favour prosocial responses compared to men. For example, women are more likely to make charitable donations (19 percent) and spend time volunteering (24 percent) than men, 16 percent and 20 percent respectively. This trend can also be observed elsewhere in Part III.

Both men and women said they were equally likely to reduce paid work hours with the introduction of a permanent basic income (12 percent). There were similar responses for those that would improve or further their education for men and women (20 percent for both genders), and those that would make no changes to their current life (27 percent and 25 percent respectively). Interestingly, women are significantly more likely to reduce debt and save than men (41 percent compared to 35 percent).

Men were, on average, more likely to pursue business ideas or change jobs or industries (13 percent and 11 percent respectively) than women (9 percent and 8 percent) with a permanent basic income. They were also slightly more likely to take on additional responsibilities at home, both in additional domestic and household duties (15 percent) and additional parenting responsibilities (12 percent).

Age-based trends

Some of the starkest discrepancies in responses are on the basis of age. Table 4 shows the impact of a permanent basic income on people by age, between groups 18-29, 30-49 and over the age of 50.

Table 4. The impact of a permanent basic income by age

	18-29	30-49	50+
Reduce paid work hours	11%	17%	8%
Spend time volunteering	23%	21%	22%
Make charitable donations	19%	17%	17%
Take on additional domestic/household responsibilities	25%	14%	7%
Take on additional parenting responsibilities	17%	14%	4%
Caring for friends or family members in need of help	20%	22%	22%
Improve or further my education	34%	26%	8%
Reduce debt/save more	40%	45%	31%
Spend more time on my hobbies or sports	26%	22%	16%
Pursue business ideas	17%	15%	5%
Change jobs or industries	19%	12%	2%
Other	0%	2%	6%
It would not change anything for me	14%	17%	39%

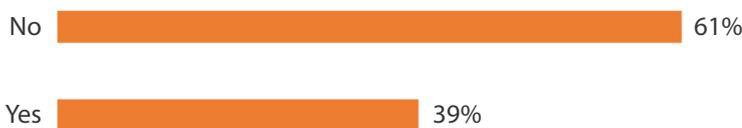
On average, individuals aged 18-49 were much more likely to make changes to their life than those aged over 50. Around 15 percent would make no changes to their life compared to 39 percent for those aged over 50. This discrepancy is unsurprising. By most measures, younger people are materially worse off than older people, are more time-poor, and are more likely to more likely to experience insecure work and income. These issues are explored in greater detail in Part II.

All age groups were relatively evenly inclined to make charitable donations and spend time volunteering, with no significant variations amongst age groups for these categories. There are also very similar responses for dedicating more time to caring for friends or family member in need of help. The 18-29 age group were the most likely to spend time improving or furthering their education, with 34 percent expressing a desire to further their education compared to 26 percent between the ages of 30-49, and only 8 percent for those aged over 50. Those aged 30-49 were the most likely to spend time reducing debt and saving more (45 percent), compared to those aged 18-29 and those over 50 (40 percent and 32 percent respectively). This reflects trends surrounding debt and family formation. People in the 30-49 age bracket are much more likely to have debts, mortgages, financial obligations, and dependent children.¹⁵

Experiences of income insecurity

The second part of the survey explored whether participants had experienced insecure income in the past twelve months. This was aimed to gauge recent experiences of income insecurity among the respondents, and to explore whether these experiences influenced responses in other parts of the survey. The results at Figure 2 show that two in five (39 percent) of Australians have experienced income insecurity in the previous year.

Figure 2. Experiences of income insecurity

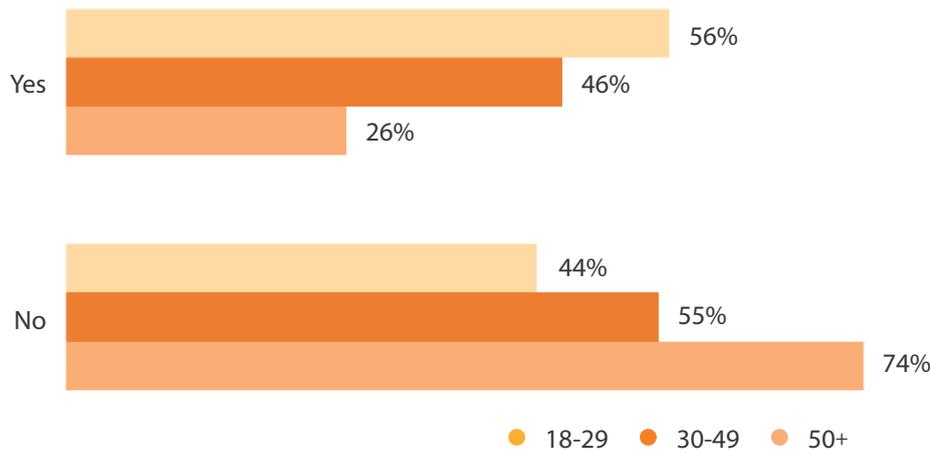


These results reflect known trends in the labour market as the nature of employment has become more insecure and more casualised. Less than half of Australians now hold a permanent full-time paid job with leave entitlements,¹⁶ with the insecurity of work receiving greater attention in the past year as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Underemployment also remains a growing problem, with 1.7 million Australians underemployed at the time of Anglicare Australia’s most recent Jobs Availability Snapshot.¹⁷

The respondents who had not recently experienced income insecurity were the least likely to change anything about their lives with the introduction of a permanent basic income. Those who were most likely to have experienced an insecure income were most likely to spend a permanent base income on saving and reducing debt, furthering study, and changing their career. This is unsurprising, confirming that a basic income would generate benefits and opportunities for people who do not have secure incomes.

Figure 3 shows income insecurity by age. Young Australians have been most affected by trends surrounding insecure income and work, with more than half (56 percent) of those aged 18-29 experiencing income insecurity in the last 12 months, compared to 45 percent of those 30-49 and 26 percent of those aged over 50.

Figure 3. Income insecurity by age



These results help explain the findings of other recent Anglicare Australia surveys, which have repeatedly shown that younger people are materially worse off than other cohorts. In 2018, another nationally representative survey conducted by Anglicare Australia found that 16 percent of people had personally experienced a situation where they could not afford to buy basic necessities such as food or shelter in the previous year.¹⁸ When looking at age differences, those aged 18 to 29 (20 percent) were significantly more likely to have experienced poverty than those who were aged 50 years or older (10 percent).

These findings were echoed by our Asking Those Who Know survey, conducted in 2020, which polled Centrelink clients. It found that younger people were more likely to have couch-surfed or lived in insecure accommodation, more likely to skip meals to save money, and more likely to skip these meals more often than their older counterparts.¹⁹ They were also the most likely to report skipping one or more meals per day.

These worrying trends are likely to be driven by the greater likelihood that young people are working casually or part-time, coupled with the unliveable rate of Youth Allowance payments. With 56 percent of younger respondents to this survey reporting recent experiences of income insecurity, it seems that this is a growing problem which could drive further hardship in the coming years.

The experiences of income insecurity by gender are reasonably consistent, as shown in Table 5. Almost two in five (39 percent) men and women have experienced income insecurity in the last 12 months. Men were slightly more likely to have experienced an insecure income in the last 12 months than women (40 percent and 38 percent respectively). It is important to note that these responses only relate to experiences of income insecurity, not income inequality or hardship, where the disparities between men and women are much more pronounced and well understood.²⁰

Table 5. Income insecurity by gender

	Male	Female
Yes	40%	38%
No	60%	62%

There are, however, real differences in income insecurity by location. Table 6 shows the breakdown of income security by state. Respondents from the ACT and NSW were the most likely to have experienced income insecurity in the previous year (42 percent and 41 percent respectively), followed by South Australia (38 percent), Queensland (38 percent), Tasmania (35 percent), Victoria and Western Australia (32 percent), and finally Northern Territory (25 percent).

Table 6. Income insecurity by state

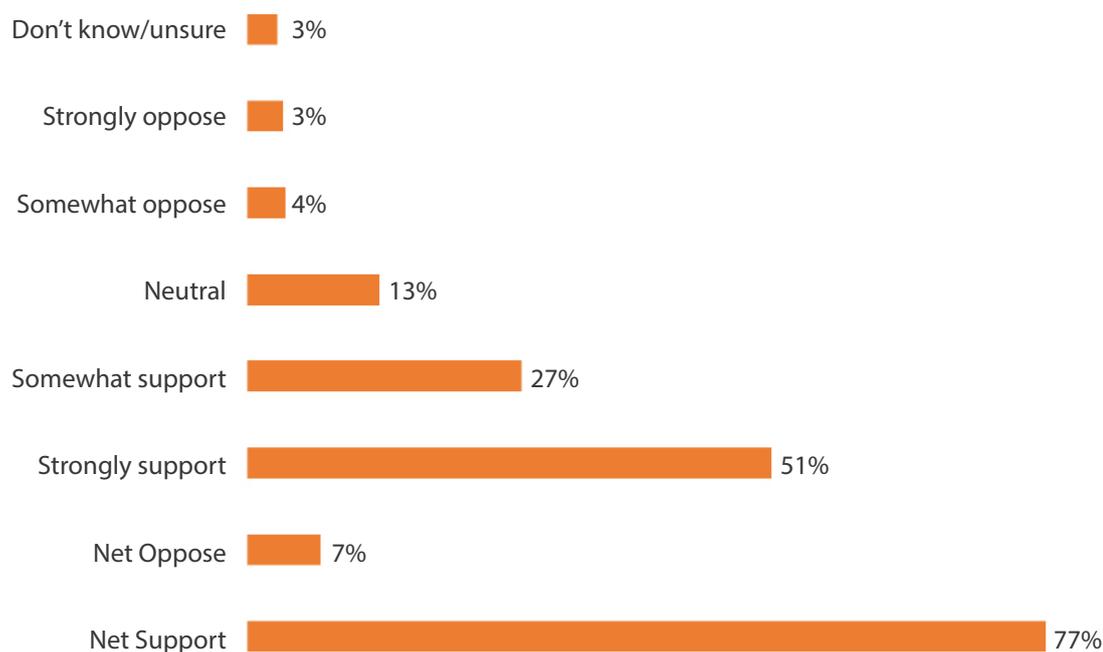
	NSW	VIC	SA	ACT	WA	TAS	NT	QLD
Yes	41%	32%	38%	42%	32%	35%	25%	38%
No	59%	68%	62%	58%	68%	65%	75%	62%

At the time of Anglicare Australia's survey in May, employment in Australia had recovered to pre-pandemic levels as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics,²¹ although some jurisdictions are known to have taken longer to recover than others over the preceding year. Last year's national lockdown saw more than 850,000 jobs disappear between March and May, representing 6.6 percent of the workforce. Victoria has so far been the hardest hit by lockdowns, recession, and rates of infection, yet this does not seem to correlate to income insecurity. Their rates of income insecurity are the second-lowest nationally. On the other hand the ACT, which reported the highest rate of income insecurity in the survey, had a modest 'soft lockdown' and emerged from the recession relatively unscathed. It seems that these results reflect more permanent trends in income insecurity, rather than pandemic-specific impacts.

Support for a guaranteed livable income

The final part of the survey measured support for all Australians to receive an income above the poverty line. As shown in Figure 4, a very strong majority of respondents supported the creation of a permanent basic income, with 77 percent in agreement overall. Just 7 percent of respondents opposed the proposal, 3 percent were unsure, and 13 percent were neutral.

Figure 4. Support for all Australians to receive an income above the poverty line



This echoes the findings of Anglicare Australia’s 2018 nationally representative survey. To explore perceptions of deservingness in relation to poverty and income, that study asked participants whether they agreed with the statement that “nobody who works full-time should live in poverty.” Almost nine in ten of all surveyed respondents (84 per cent) agreed that nobody who works full-time should live in poverty.²² Survey respondents were also asked whether they agreed with a less equivocal statement, that nobody deserves to live in poverty. Again, an overwhelming majority (86 per cent) of those surveyed agreed with this statement. In fact this statement drew as much agreement, or slightly more, than the statement referencing people in full-time work.²³

Support for this proposition was generally consistent, however across the board men were more likely to oppose the proposal than women. 54 percent of women were in strong support, compared to only 47 percent of men. Just 5 percent of women opposed the proposal, compared with 10 percent of men. The breakdown by gender is shown at Figure 5.

Figure 5. Support for all Australians to receive an income above the poverty line, by gender

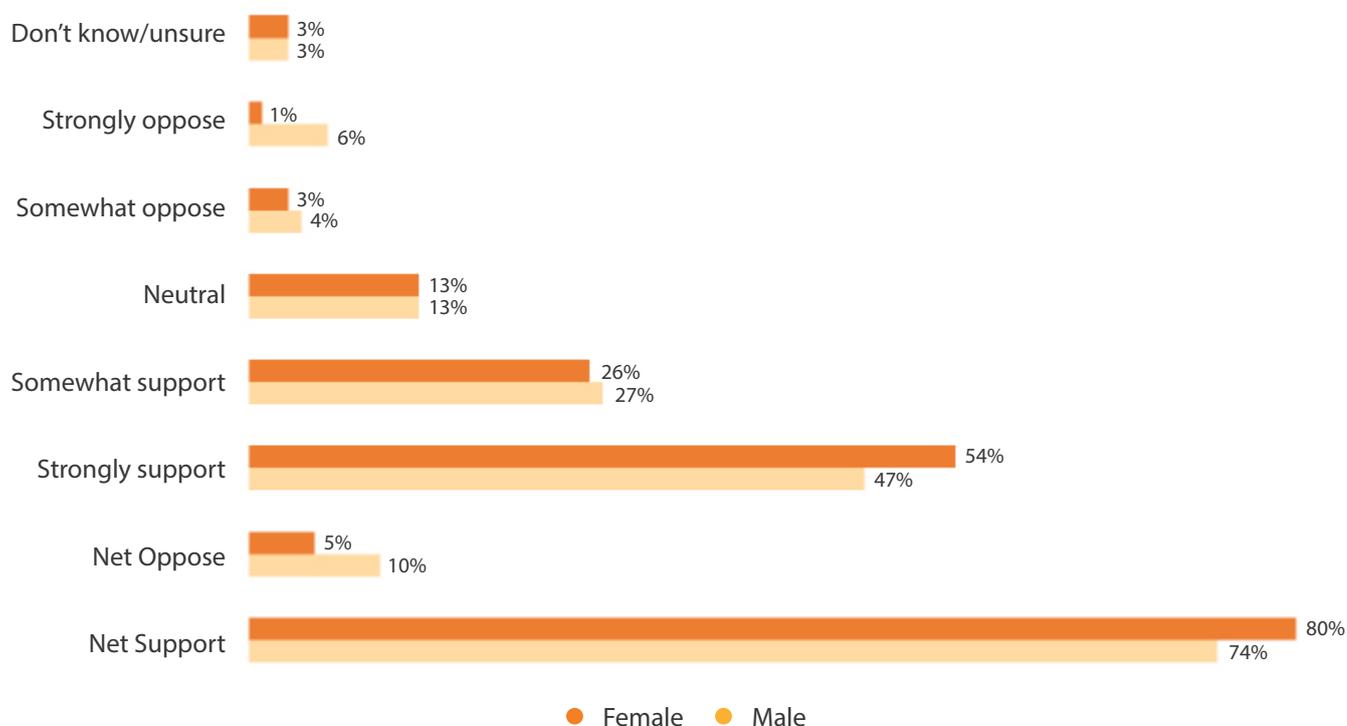


Table 7 shows support for the proposal by age. There is a clear disparity between the three age groups, with more respondents over the age of 50 likely to support the statement (86 percent) than those aged 30-49 (73 percent) and those aged 18-29 (68 percent). There were almost identical responses for the 'strongly support' option for those aged 18-29 and those aged 30-49 (46 percent and 46 percent respectively) compared to 58 percent for those over the age of 50. Only 1 percent of those over the age of 50 strongly oppose the statement, compared to 3 percent of those aged 30-49, and 8 percent of those aged 18-29.

Table 7. Support for all Australians to receive an income above the poverty line, by age

	18-29	30-49	50+
Net support	68%	73%	86%
Net oppose	12%	9%	3%
Strongly support	46%	46%	58%
Somewhat support	22%	27%	28%
Neutral	17%	13%	10%
Somewhat oppose	4%	6%	2%
Strongly oppose	8%	3%	1%

It is interesting, and noteworthy, that younger people are the least likely to support this proposition. They are much more likely to benefit from a stable income above the poverty line than their older counterparts. They are also more likely to experience insecure income and use their payments to advance their work and savings goals, as explored in Parts I and II. It is difficult to explain this anomaly, although it is worth noting that many older Australians receive an age pension with no activity tests. This may drive an appreciation for the benefits of such a payment, although it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions without further research.

Finally, Table 8 reflects support for the proposal by region, for both rural and metropolitan regions. While the results are relatively similar across the regions, across the board rural participants were more likely to support the statement (82 percent) than those in metropolitan areas (77 percent). Most noticeably, 57 percent of rural participants were in strong support of the statement compared to 45 percent of metro respondents from metropolitan areas.

Table 8. Support for all Australians to receive an income above the poverty line, by region

	Rural	Metro
Net support	82%	77%
Net oppose	5%	7%
Strongly support	57%	45%
Somewhat support	25%	33%
Neutral	9%	13%
Somewhat oppose	2%	3%
Strongly oppose	3%	5%

Analysing major trends

Although the responses in this survey were broadly consistent among different demographics and cohorts, there were some significant trends. Clear impacts could also be observed among groups with greater material needs. These trends are explored below.

A changing labour market with high rates of income insecurity

The results of the survey show very high levels of income insecurity. 39 percent of respondents had experienced income insecurity in the previous year. In spite of national lockdowns in 2020, the numbers do not necessarily correlate with the regions that were worst affected by the recession. Instead it appears that the results reflect more permanent trends in income insecurity, which are hitting younger people especially badly. A staggering 56 percent of respondents aged 18-29 had experienced income insecurity in the past year.

Unsurprisingly, those who were most likely to have experienced an insecure income were most likely to spend a permanent base income on saving and reducing debt, furthering study, and changing their career. For many proponents of a basic income, this is at the core of the case for the payment – with greater demand for high-skilled work, and with automation hurting jobseekers looking for entry-level work, it is critical to assist people to adapt to a changing labour force. As past Anglicare Australia research has shown, it is very difficult to take these important steps while living well below the poverty line.

A desire to work, in a more responsive workforce

Experiments and trials of basic income around the world show that most people continue to undertake paid work when they receive a basic income. This is supported by the findings of the survey, although many would use their income to reduce their hours and seek more flexible arrangements. More than one in ten respondents said they would reduce their paid work hours, with those most likely to offer this response at the peak of their earning potential and job security.

Surveys and studies of Australian workers repeatedly show a contradiction at the heart of the Australian workforce. Large numbers of people want to work less and reduce their hours, while a growing number of people are underemployed and actively trying to work more. The latter is especially true of younger people and those trying to establish themselves in the workforce. The results of this survey offer the possibility of a more dynamic workforce that meets people's needs.

Strong support for a guaranteed income above the poverty

A very strong majority of respondents supported all Australians receiving an income above the poverty line, with 77 percent in agreement overall. Just 7 percent of respondents opposed the proposal. The proposition is most strongly supported by older respondents, women, and people from regional and rural areas. These results build on the findings of previous Anglicare Australia surveys on poverty. They also echo other recent surveys of Australian attitudes towards a basic income. For example, a poll conducted by YouGov in 2020 found that a strong majority of Australians would support a “guaranteed living wage being introduced in Australia.”²⁴

Prosocial benefits from a basic income

The results of the survey suggest that a permanent basic income would promote informal caring, volunteering, and charitable giving across most demographics. It could also contribute to greater gender equality in domestic and parenting responsibilities, albeit a modest one.

Almost one in four respondents said they would use a basic income to spend more time volunteering, while one in five said they would spend income from their basic income payments on donations. Australians on high incomes already donate and volunteer in large numbers, and these results suggest that a basic income would broaden this opportunity to more people.

Importantly, almost one in five respondents hoped to dedicate more time to caring for friends and family. 13 percent of respondents hoped to take on additional domestic and household responsibilities, with men slightly more likely to offer this response. The benefits of this could be profound, with carers losing \$15.2 billion in foregone earnings each year, contributing to a projected growth in demand for informal care work.

Recommendations

Australia's social security system has been designed around the labour market. It is based on the assumption that every working age household will be supported by income from paid work. This assumption has led to a system which treats unemployment as an individual problem rather than a structural one, while also approaching disability, illness, single parenthood, and major life disruptions as outlier issues.

This system assumes that most working-age individuals will be able to find full-time, full-year work. While some individuals may combine part-time or intermittent work with income support, the expectation is that reliance on income support will be temporary. Payments are designed to support people through temporary spells of joblessness, while problems such as poverty and social exclusion are addressed by moving people into the labour market.

In truth, this approach has never worked. Many people lack the skills or experience to compete for available jobs, while others find themselves trapped in a system that cannot accommodate the circumstances of their lives. With the value of income support payments deteriorating over time, they are caught in a poverty trap as they navigate a system which is not equipped to help them. The failures of the system have been easy to hide because most Australians have not had to rely on it.

As the labour market changes and people's lives grow more complex, the system is coming under growing pressure. It was designed on the assumption that only small numbers of people would be unemployed, and that work would provide people with enough income to live. The past year has upended those assumptions. When large numbers of people lost work, it became clear that stringent obligations and activity tests were futile in the face of systemic barriers. More recently, as shorter lockdowns have been introduced in response to ongoing outbreaks, casual workers have found that the system automatically assumes that their work leads to an adequate income, excluding them from support. Major features of the system had to be suspended and re-worked to stop it from collapsing.

The findings of this survey speak to these failures. It also contains vital insights on how to create a fair society where everyone can live a dignified life and nobody lives in poverty. Anglicare Australia calls for action in the following areas.

A permanent basic income

Australia has entered a period of historically high living costs, stagnant wage growth, and insecure work. With record-high levels of debt, people are working more to keep up with the demands. Yet as this survey shows, many would rather reduce their hours, contribute time to their communities, and spend time with their family. Another cohort of people are underemployed or stuck in insecure work, trying but failing to gain more work and more security. This contradiction is the symptom of a system that is failing. A permanent basic income offers a reprieve, and hope.

Some argue that a basic income would undermine paid work, but like other studies, this survey refutes that notion. Most people would continue to work, although some may seek to reduce their hours and work more flexibly. Indeed, the findings suggest that it could allow people to adjust to a changing labour force, living and working more securely as they adapt their skills to changing needs. Australia has previously sought to adapt to these changes by moving towards increasingly tough punishments and activity tests, but this approach is failing. Unemployment continues to rise. People subjected to these obligations and activity tests actually take longer to find work. By contrast, financial security and better access to education, training, and childcare have all been shown to promote employability. A permanent basic income would help make all of this possible.

There is increasing interest in a basic income in Australia. Detailed analysis has been carried out on possible models for its introduction, including examining the socio-economic benefits for particular cohorts such as mothers.²⁵ Another Australian example is an income-tested model that includes a \$300 per week universal income floor with payment reduced for higher income earners, at an estimated cost of \$100 billion a year.²⁶ Various forms of basic income are being or have been trialled in countries as diverse as Finland, Namibia, the Netherlands, India, Scotland, Kenya, Canada, and the United States. In Australia, there has been a small-scale trial of a guaranteed basic income by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, from 1972-75 as part of the Family Action Centre project.²⁷

Whether it is achieved through a universal payment or a guaranteed adequate income for every Australian over the poverty line, it is clear that such a scheme would tackle poverty and income insecurity across Australia. With public support and early research into possible models, it appears that policy makers are lagging behind civil society and public opinion by dismissing its potential.

Valuing every contribution

The survey shows that it is time for governments to align their notions of participation in society with those of the community. Government systems value participation solely in terms of paid employment. Yet these narrow definitions do not reflect the reality of the ways people contribute, or wish to contribute, to their communities. That includes many who participated in this survey, who hope to find meaning through unpaid and under-recognised contributions to society.

The support for volunteerism in our survey is high, but it also aligns with broader trends across society. Most Australian adults already volunteer, and those who don't want to be enabled to contribute. Anglicare Australia can attest to the value of these volunteers. They play a vital role in our aged care work, op shops, disaster recovery work, and countless other areas. Some are out of work or no longer in the labour force, but it would be an insult not to describe their contributions as real work.

We must move to a system where these efforts are rewarded and enabled. They offer enormous benefits to society as a whole, and deserve a secure income.

A way forward

This study was designed to learn how a permanent basic income would affect the lives of Australians. Parts of this survey may come as a surprise to some – many people want to work less, while others are likely to work more. Some would use their time and money to make more contributions to their communities. Others would spend more time with their children, or care for loved ones in need of help.

Other parts of this report will confirm what many of us already know. Poverty is a choice, not an inevitability. Providing a liveable income above the poverty line would help countless people and communities, lifting people out of hardship.

As this survey shows, a permanent basic income also offers an opportunity to rethink our systems and formally recognise participation. There is no need for this recognition to be conditional. People contribute to the making of communities and the resilience of our society in many ways. Recognising their contributions means ensuring that they have a decent income, instead of forcing them to live in poverty and search for jobs that, in many cases, simply aren't there.

We must redesign our systems to include everyone. This is the most important lesson we can take from this survey. This principle must inform how we take the next steps, both to look after those enduring hardship now, and to build a system that supports everyone into the future. We must reimagine how we support each other and demand that governments reorganise its systems to make this happen.

This is not a question of funding, because supporting people to contribute and live well benefits all of us. It is a matter of what our collective dream for a better society looks like. Surely it is one that values the contribution of every person, supports us all to build our capabilities, and ensures the strength of our communities by helping everyone participate.

Further information

This survey was conducted by Anglicare Australia as part of our Australia Fair series. It is the second report in the series.

Anglicare Australia has been producing a flagship annual research project since 2000. This was previously called the State of the Family report, and was renamed the Australia Fair series in 2020.

Projects released as part of the Australia Fair series are evidence-based, reflect the voices of Anglicare Australia clients, and are designed to set the policy agenda.

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