PRACTICE POINTS

2021 DATA ANALYSIS FROM THE AWEI NATIONAL SURVEY

BEST PRACTICE FOR THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE OF DIVERSE GENDERS & SEXUALITIES IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The annual Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey had its largest response to-date this year, including 186 participating organisations. The 2021 Survey saw a response rate of 44,915 employees across Australia (with an additional 584 employees working for Australian organisations overseas). Of all respondents, 18.8% individuals (n7,930) identified as being of diverse sexuality and/or gender (LGBTQ).

All respondents worked in organisations active in LGBTQ inclusion, whether they be in the early or developmental stages of their inclusion journey or highly experienced in this aspect of diversity & inclusion.

We particularly investigated the engagement of the wider Australian workforce and also the diversity of experience across the intersectional demographics of the Australian employee community. As in previous years, this includes specifically looking at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, which is what this edition will focus on.

Please note: when referring to "all other respondents," we are referring to those who do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2021, 842 respondents indicated they were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, which provided a significant pool of data to compare with other demographics. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort was skewed toward being resident in Queensland, when compared with other cohorts (27.2% vs 14.8%).

They were also more likely to be located in regional (26.5% vs 12.8%); rural (4.9% vs 2.1%); or remote (6.7% vs 3.6%) areas. About 41% of the respondents were under 34 years of age (compared with 30% all other respondents).
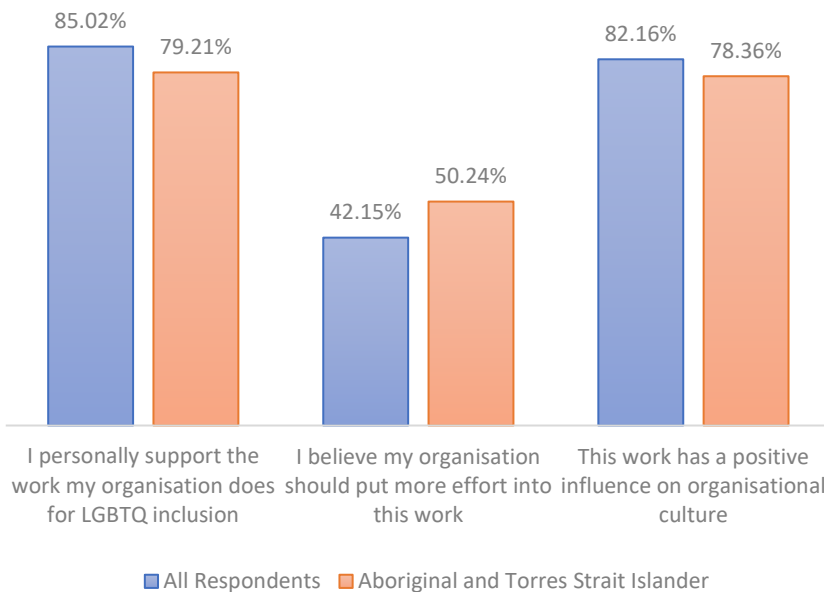
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (58%) were more likely to complete the Survey than men (34%). This compared with a 54% / 43% split between all other respondents.

Within the workplace, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce was more likely to have a shorter period of employment at their current organisation, with nearly 36% having worked there less than three years (34% all other respondents).

THE WIDER ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EMPLOYER COMMUNITY

Overall, the responses indicated less support for LGBTQ workplace inclusion from within the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, than from all respondents. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were somewhat less likely to be raised in an environment where same-sex relationship or gender diverse people were not accepted (43.5% vs 48.8%), nearly all other questions showed a less supportive response.

51.3% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents believed there were more than two genders (54.7% non-Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander). Only 79.2% personally supported their organisation work in inclusion (vs 85%), yet 50.24% felt more effort should made in these areas (42.6%). Moreover, 56.7% felt an organisation's track record would have an influence on whether to join that organisation (59.1%). 78.4% felt that this aspect of inclusion had a positive influence on organizational culture, which was 4% below non-Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander respondents.

85.3% of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders understood why their organisation was active in this work (vs 91.6%); 69% thought LGBTQ inclusion was a focus for diversity work in their organisation (vs 79%); 63.2% felt initiatives in this area had been communicated (vs 74.9%); 58% had seen executives speak positively on this subject (vs 71%); 69% saw visible signs of inclusion support (vs 78%); and only 49.2% knew that Awareness or Allied training had been made available (vs 59.6%)

Only 85.2% of Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander employees felt that LGBTQ targeted jokes and innuendo were not acceptable (compared to 92.8% all other respondents). They were less comfortable talking about same-sex or gender diverse partners (89.9% vs 92.9%); LGBTQ peoples bringing partners at work related events (91.6% vs 95.5%). It was felt that both persons of diverse sexuality (89.9% vs 94.3%) and diverse gender (88.04% vs 92.5%) would be less welcome in their team

19.2% had witnessed negative behaviours and/or mild harassment against people of diverse sexuality or gender at work (compared to 14.3%), and more serious bullying (9.8% vs 5.2%).

In terms of engagement and wellbeing, these indicators for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community were less positive. For example, 66.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees felt mentally well at work (vs 77.9%); 81% felt productive (vs 88.2%); and 72.7% felt engaged with their organisation and work (vs 80.9%).

ALLYSHIP

Although more members of the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community (35%) felt they were Active Allies (vs 28%), they were less likely to know of Active Allies in their work area (58% vs 56%) and they had a lesser understanding of why Active Allies were important (80% vs 85%). Knowledge of Executive Allies was also weaker (58% vs 54%).

When asked why they would not be Active Allies, 13.04% indicated it would conflict with their personal beliefs or values; compared to 8.9%. Likewise, a large proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (37%) indicated that nothing would influence them becoming an Active Ally (32% all other respondents).

PEOPLE OF DIVERSE SEXUALITY

"I FEEL IT IS MORE WIDELY ACCEPTED TO IDENTIFY AS ABORIGINAL THAN IT IS TO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ."

Overall, the Survey responses indicated that LGBTQ Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander employees lived experience with workplace inclusion was less positive than their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues.

71.5% had had their expectations met/exceeded regarding workplace inclusion (vs 78.8%). Communication expectations were met/exceeded according to 61% of this group (vs 69.7%). Overall organisational commitment, executive endorsement, visibility of the employee network, promotion of training, management willingness to address negative commentary and so on, were all below the national average of expectations met/exceeded. Confidence in avenues to safely report bullying and harassment was also at a low 63.3% vs 71.9%. As such, only 68.6% would recommend their organisation as an inclusive place to work, as opposed to 78% of others recommending the same.

The gap between the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ employees when compared with other colleagues was significant. Only 57.7% were not aware of jokes or innuendo based on diverse sexuality (vs 70.6%) and 59.6% were not aware of jokes or innuendo based on diverse genders (vs 69.5%). Active Allies have only positively impacted 42.8% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ employee community (vs 60%).

14.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees had been the target of unwanted jokes (12.3% all other respondents) and, 14.02% had been the target of more serious bullying/sexual harassment based on their sexuality – which was nearly triple the lived experience of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at 5.3%).

37.8% of Aboriginal Torres Strait Island people were **out to all at work**, as opposed to 40.63% of non-Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ people. Further, they were slightly more likely to be **not out at** all at work (16.7% vs 15.87%).

52.4% of the group felt workplace inclusion initiatives in the LGBTQ area had had a positive experience on how they felt about their sexuality; compared to 60.4% of non-Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ employees.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Only 39.6% saw visible out women role models (43.6% all other respondents). There was even less visibility to like women in senior roles (25.6% vs 29.4%) or seeing similar women in the employee network (41.5% vs 50.7%).

Interestingly, less than half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ women felt women of trans history or non-binary people who identify as diverse sexuality share common challenges (49% vs 57). Only 47% felt non-binary women faced the same challenges in the workplace as those of women of diverse sexuality.

"I FEEL SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS BEING AN OLDER PERSON, OF ABORIGINAL DESCENT, WHO IS BISEXUAL."

GENDER DIVERSE EMPLOYEES

Unlike respondents with a diverse sexuality, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents with a diverse gender (n61) tended to have more positive experiences than the wider gender diverse community. In particular, they found the recruitment processes a better experience than others; and only 4.9% felt disadvantaged by the process (5.7% all other respondents).

Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander employees were more content with the visibility or organisational inclusion for gender diverse employees (62.3% vs 57.7%); more likely to have all-gender bathrooms available (31% vs 27%) and able to freely use gendered toilets without opposition (27.9% vs 25.8%). 47.5% claimed they had not experienced any exclusion based on gender diversity; compared to 37.26%. More Aboriginal Torres Strait Island gender diverse employees were happier with their gender affirmation process; their network inclusivity toward gender diverse folk; and felt that their gender diversity had NOT impacted their career progression (41% vs 36.7%).

The following response rates regarding bullying and harassment for Aboriginal and Torres Stair Islander gender diverse people were almost double that of the non-Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander employees:

- 13.1% felt they had been deliberately misgendered in the workplace (vs 7.6%)
- 29% had been the target of unwanted jokes, innuendo and commentary based on their gender diversity (vs 8.1%)
- 10% had been the target of more serious bullying/sexual harassment (vs 5.65%).

As a result of these experiences, only 28.3% of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander gender diverse employees felt workplace initiatives in LGBTQ inclusion have had a positive impact on how they feel about their own gender diversity (vs 34.3%).

REGIONAL INCLUSION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who completed the survey were twice as likely to be located in regional, rural or remote Australia. Lived experiences generally for all demographics were not as positive in regional Australia.

LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents further confirmed this reality.
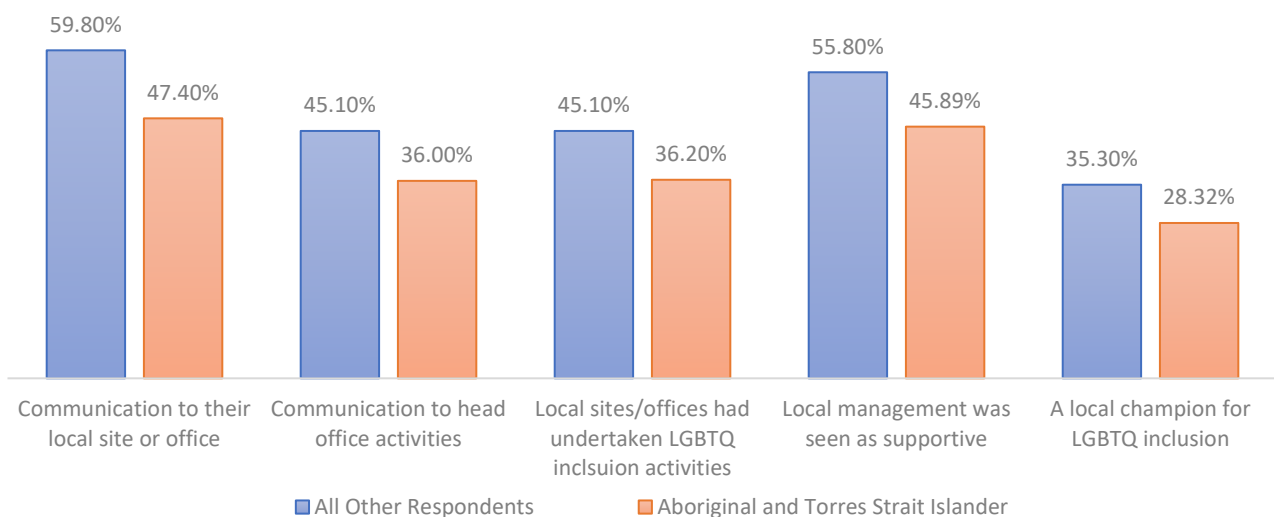
In many cases the negative experience was significantly worse for this group when compared to the regional population who do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

IN CONCLUSION

As with all previous years' Surveys and other research, the responses from the 2021 AWEI Employee Survey reaffirms that we have much work to do to provide safe and inclusive workplaces for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders who identify as someone of diverse sexuality and/or gender.

These results also underline the absolute need for a holistic and interconnecting diversity and inclusion approach within each employer. LGBTQ inclusion must specifically reach out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, and organisational Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) must also specifically reference the LGBTQ community within.

ACTION POINTS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

It is essential to understand the dual impacts and unique experiences of being both LGBTQ and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander within the workplace. Here are a few things to consider:

Are you capturing these demographics within your *broader diversity and inclusion* work?

Does your Reconciliation Action Plan (RAPs) specifically include those in the community who identify as LGBTQ?

Do you have Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participation and representation within your LGBTQ *employee network* leadership?

Expand your *workplace experience storytelling* by including internal or external experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

In celebrating *LGBTQ Days of Significance*, have you highlighted the experiences of LGBTQ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

Recognising that *regional workplaces* may have higher representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders, ensure your LGBTQ inclusion enablement and other initiatives are reaching locations outside of metropolitan areas.

Doing any of the above will aid in curating an accepting and respectful atmosphere for LGBTQ First Nations people, and thus creating better working environments.