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2022 – Regional Australia

Workplace experiences of Regional employees

The annual Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey had its largest response to-date this year with 186 participating organisations and a response rate of 44,224 with an additional 746 employees working for Australian organisations overseas. Of all respondents, 21.87% individuals (n9,830) identified as being of diverse sexuality and/or gender (LGBTQ). This represents a significant increase in the number of LGBTQ responses from 2021 (n7,930, 18.84%) and 2020 (n 6,787, 21.71%)

All organisations participating in the survey were active in LGBTQ inclusion, whether they be in the early or developmental stages of their inclusion journey or leading practice.

This edition looks at some of the key findings within the 2022 data set, particularly looking at employees who work in regional, rural or remote locations within Australia.

For the purposes of this practice point, all respondents who identified working in non-metropolitan areas will be referred to as 'regional' employees.

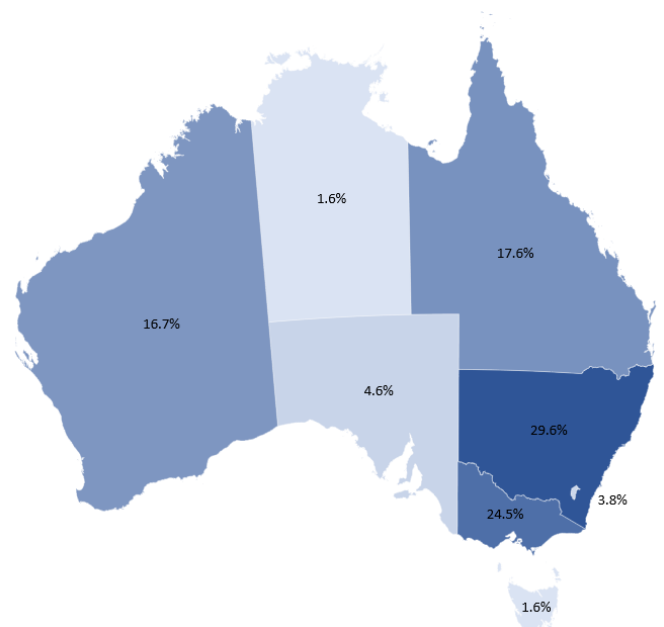
RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Location

In 2022, 7,755 responses were received from participants based outside of metropolitan areas, which equates to 17.5% of all Australian responses.

Similarly to last year, the greatest proportion of respondents came from NSW (29.6%, down from 34% in 2021), followed by Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, the ACT, South Australia Tasmania and finally the Northern Territory.

Of these, 65.4% identified working in regional areas, 11.3% in rural centres and 23.4% in remote locations.



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Sector & Industry

Sector responses between metro and regional australia differed slightly with proportionally more people working with state government, non profits and local government within the regions.

The top 10 industries represented by regional respondents remain consistent with previous years. Unsurprisingly the biggest difference between the metropolitan and regional areas is the proportion of respondents working in the mining industry, which comes in second for regional employees (with 16.1%) but 11th (with only 3%) for metropolitan respondents.

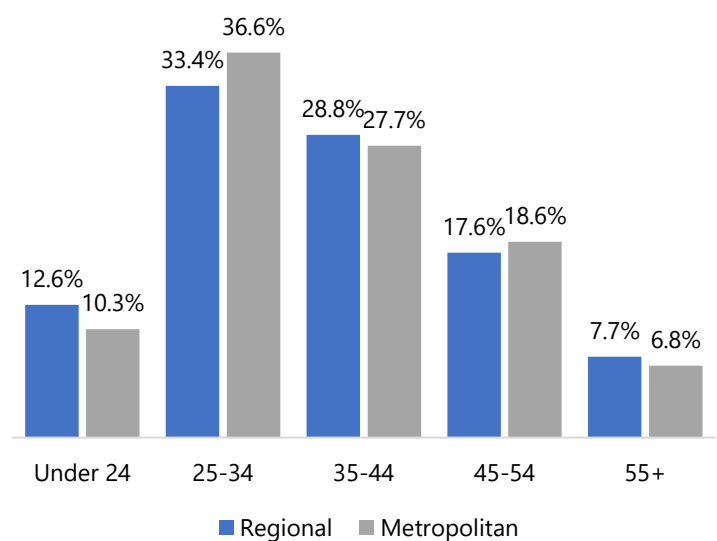
| Industry | Regional | Metro |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Public Service | 18.3% | 17.2% |
| Mining | 16.1% | 3.0% |
| Education | 7.7% | 7.2% |
| Banking & Financial Services | 7.0% | 11.7% |
| Energy / Utilities | 6.7% | 4.9% |
| Law Enforcement | 6.6% | 5.4% |
| Community Services | 4.5% | 2.3% |
| Technology / Telco | 3.6% | 4.4% |
| Professional Services / Consulting | 3.4% | 7.1 |
| Insurance | 3.2% | 3.7 |

Age & Position

The age demographic of regional respondents was slightly higher, with 43.9% aged 45+ compared to 38.5% of metropolitan respondents.

When looking at respondents who are of diverse gender and/or sexuality, there is less than 1 percentage point difference across most areas. The biggest gap is in the 25-34 age group, where respondents are more likely to work in metropolitan areas.

Work location of people of diverse gender and/or sexuality- by age



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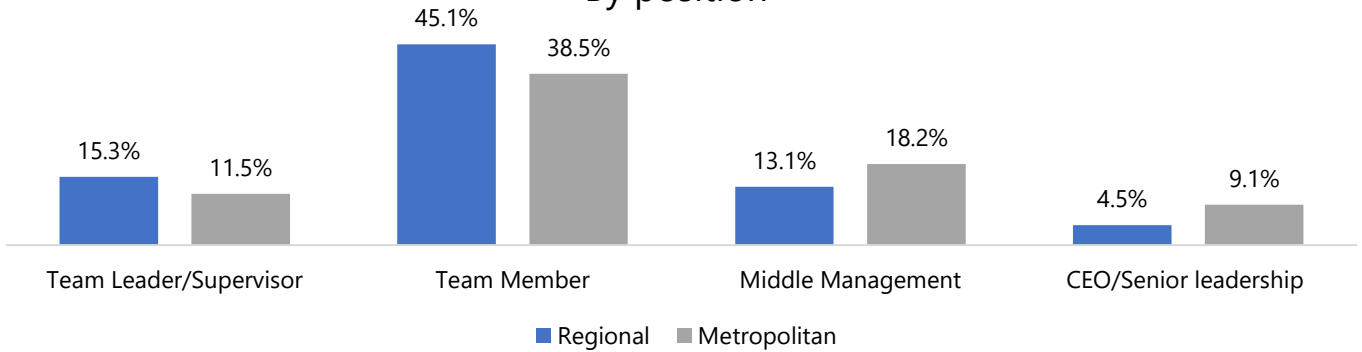
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Employees from regional Australia are more likely to be team leaders or team members, and less likely to be in senior leadership or CEO positions. Regional staff are less likely to be employed in full time positions, (80.5% vs. Metro:84.0%)

By position

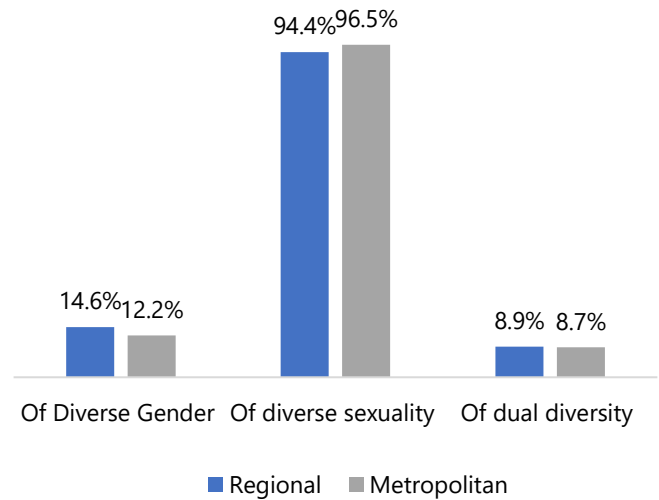


LGBTQ Diversity in Regional areas

16.2% of regional respondents (n1257) have identified as LGBTQ. Of these, 94.4% identified as being of diverse sexuality (n1186), 14.6% of diverse gender (n183). 8.9% identify with both a diverse sexuality and diverse gender or trans experience.¹

In comparison, 18.8% of metropolitan employees are of diverse sexuality, diverse gender or both. Percentage wise a very similar percentage of respondents in each area identify with both diversities (Regional:8.9% v metro:8.7%).

A higher percentage of regional respondents identify with being of diverse gender than metropolitan counterparts (12.2%) For those of diverse sexuality this comes in slightly lower than metro (94.4% v 96.5%).



NOTE: dual diversity numbers are also included in diverse gender and diverse sexuality %

¹ See Edition 2 & 3 practice points for definitions relating to diverse sexuality, and/or diverse gender and trans experience

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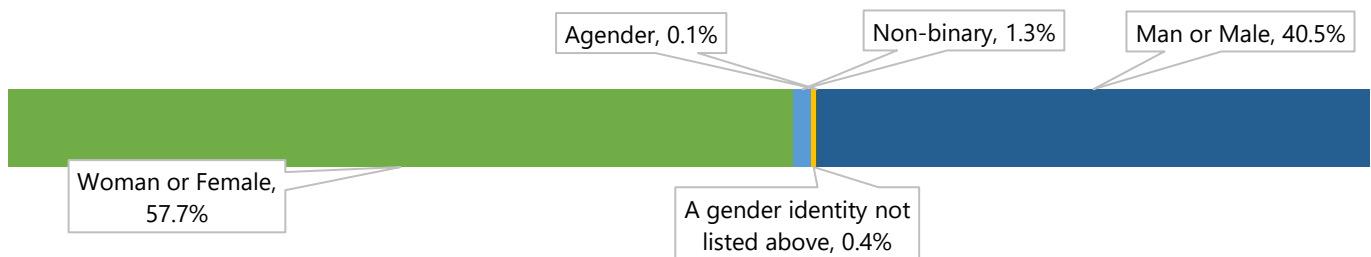
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Gender identity and Pronouns

There was no significant difference in gender identity between regional and metro respondents, nor the use of binary gendered or gender-neutral pronouns.

57.7% of regional respondents identify as 'women or female', 40.5% as 'men or male', with the remaining 1.3% identifying as non-binary, agender or another gender not described. This percentage split mimics that of the metropolitan employees.



GENERAL VIEWS

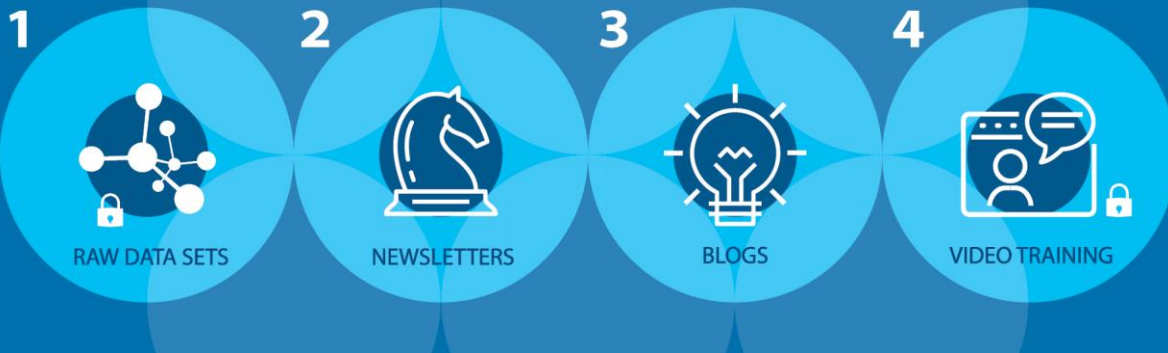
When asked to consider personal beliefs and views on inclusion of people of diverse sexuality and/or gender in the workplace, regional employees are less likely to agree with all statements. Significant differences are seen when comparing to metropolitan colleagues when considering the following:

- 11.4% points lower for both the belief "there are more than two genders (male/female)", (regional: 49.5% vs metro 60.9%)
- 11.4% points lower that "an organisation's positive track record in this aspect of inclusion would positively influence me to join the organisation " (regional: 54.6% vs. metro: 66.0%)
- 8.2 % points lower agreement with "Work in this aspect of diversity & inclusion has a positive influence on organisational culture" (regional:78.0% vs. metro: 86.2%)
- 7.4% points lower agreement that "it is important that employers be active in this area of diversity & inclusion" (regional:78.8% vs. metro: 86.2%)

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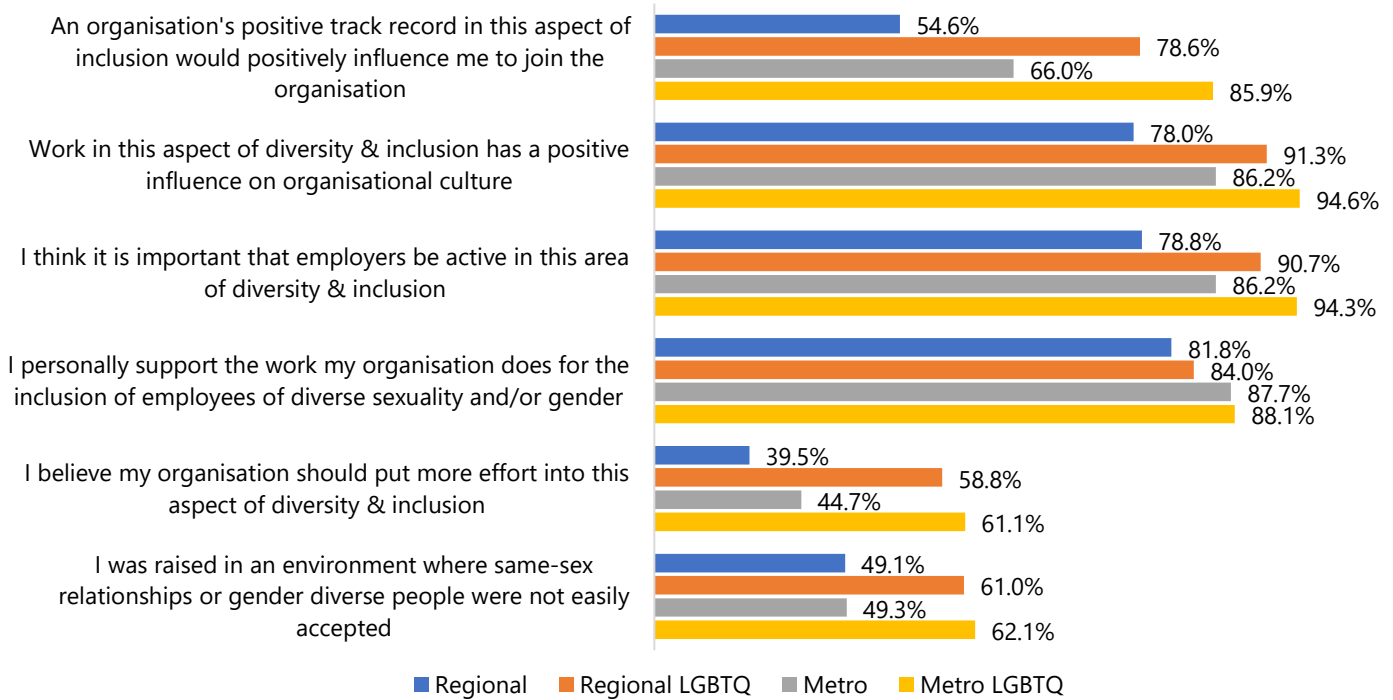
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There have been some increases from last year, with support for this area of inclusion moving from 80% in 2021 to 81.8% in 2022, and the belief that it is an important aspect of diversity and inclusion increasing from 76.0% to 78.8%. When comparing the total regional responses to those of LGBTQ regional respondents, we see that in all areas, higher proportions of LGBTQ respondents agree with all statements.



Visible signs of inclusion

When we come to visible signs of inclusion, there has been an increase in agreement from regional respondents that there are signs within the workplace (2021: 71%, 2022 76.2%).

76.6% of regional employees agree that "It is clear working here that the inclusion of people of diverse sexuality and/or gender is a focus of our diversity work", though only 69.4% of LGBTQ regional employees agree.

Regarding training:

- 60.6% of regional respondents have agreed that LGBTQ ally and awareness training was available to them in 2022.
- 36.7% attended some level of training in the with the year.
- 76.9% believe that this training should be mandatory for people managers within their organisation.

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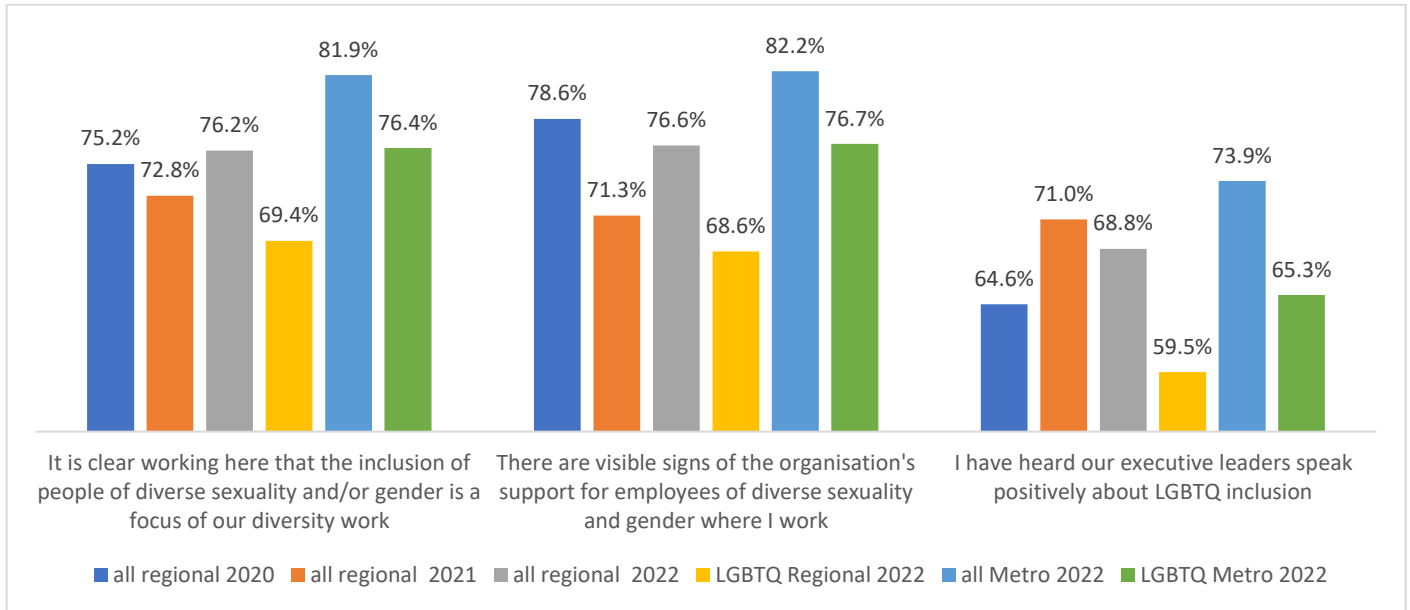


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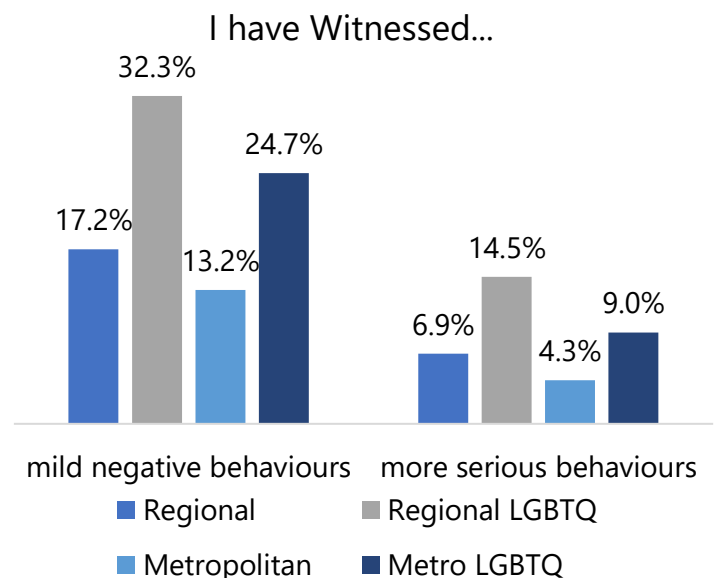
Overall 68.8% of regional respondents have heard executive leaders speak positively on LGBTQ inclusion, compared to 73.9% of metropolitan respondents. Agreement to all areas of visibility are lower in regional areas than in the city/metropolitan workplaces, and lower again for LGBTQ respondents..



Bullying and harassment behaviours

Witnessing negative behaviours is higher in regional areas, for both all respondents and when specifically looking at LGBTQ respondents, with 1 in 3 regional LGBTQ employees witnessing mild negative behaviours and 1 in 7 witnessing more serious behaviours.

90.8% of regional employees believe that jokes or innuendo targeting LGBTQ people are not acceptable in the workplace, but only 57.2% believe that their workplace calls out this behaviour. These are similar rates to metropolitan workplaces and show that more effort in addressing these behaviours is necessary.



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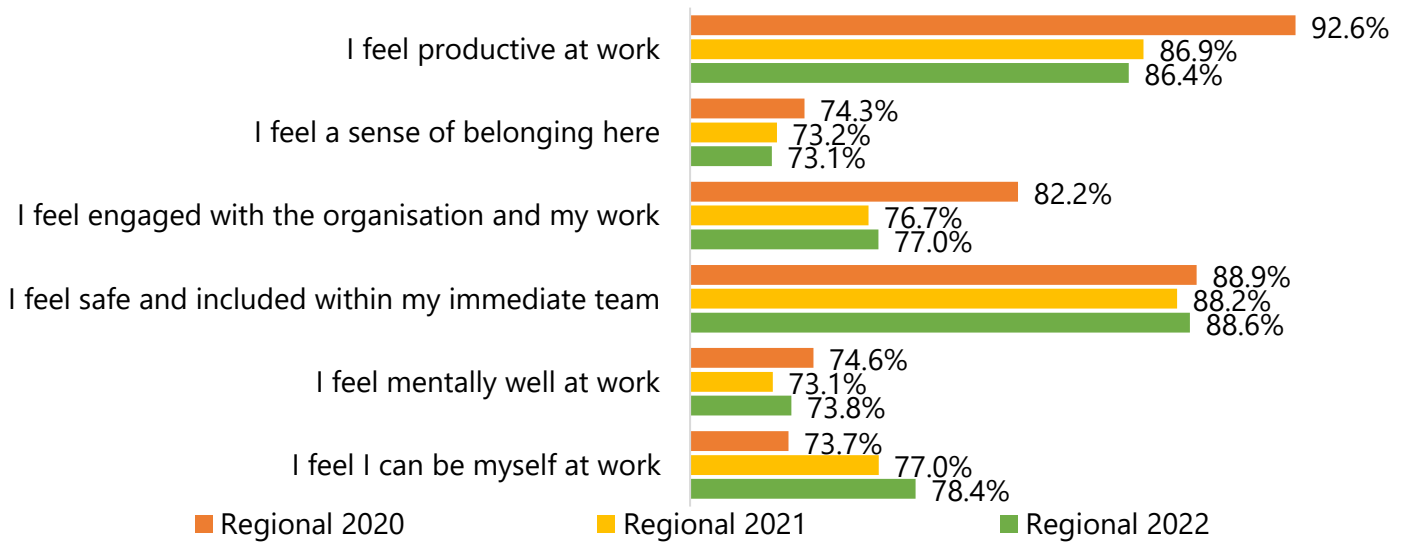
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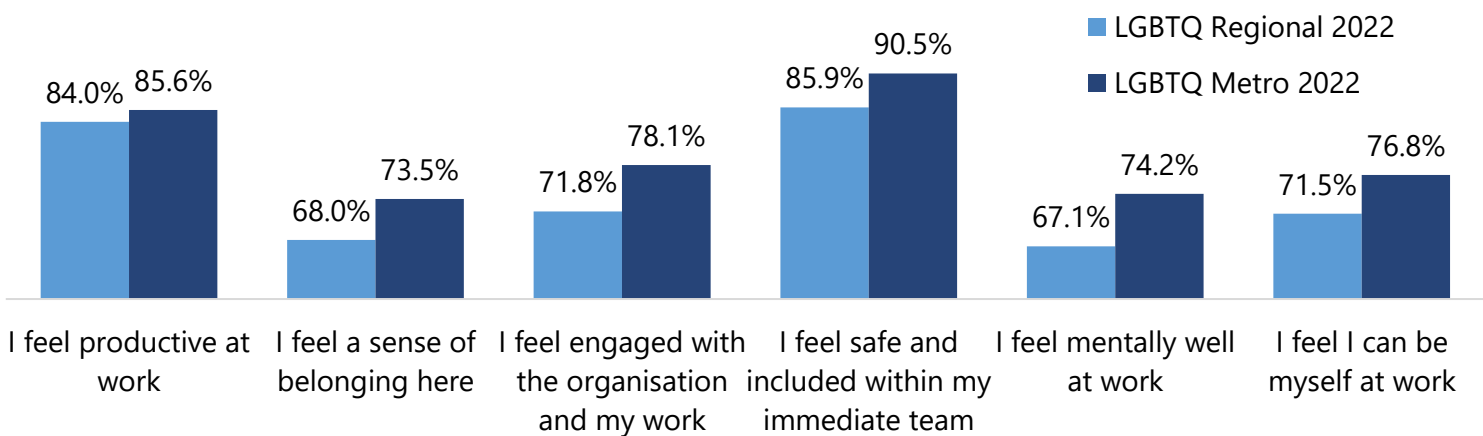
Health and Wellbeing

Over the past three years there has been a decline in most aspects of health and wellbeing in regional areas. Across the board agreement rates dropped in 2021 and this year, feeling productive at work and feeling a sense of belonging have continued to decline. Feeling productive has had the most significant drop in agreement levels from 92.6% in 2020 to 86.4% in 2022.

The only area which has moved positively year on year is the feeling that an employee can be themselves at work.



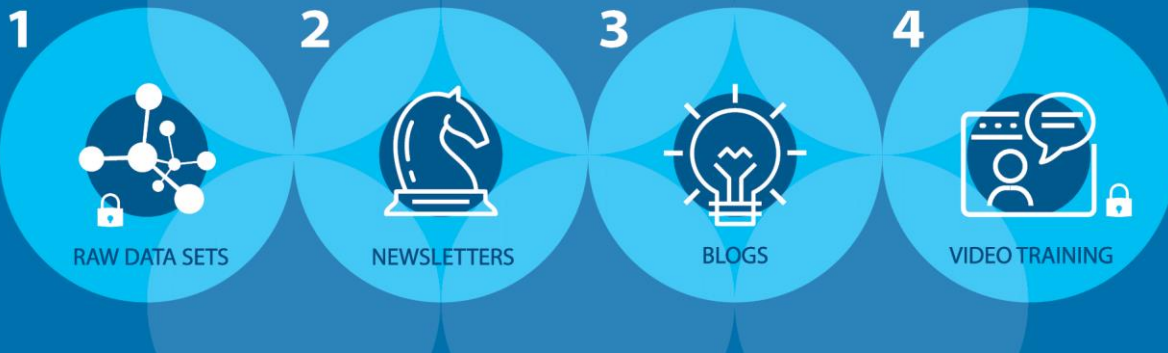
Regional LGBTQ folk, advise even lower levels of health and wellbeing agreement than the total cohort, and less than metro LGBTQ respondents.



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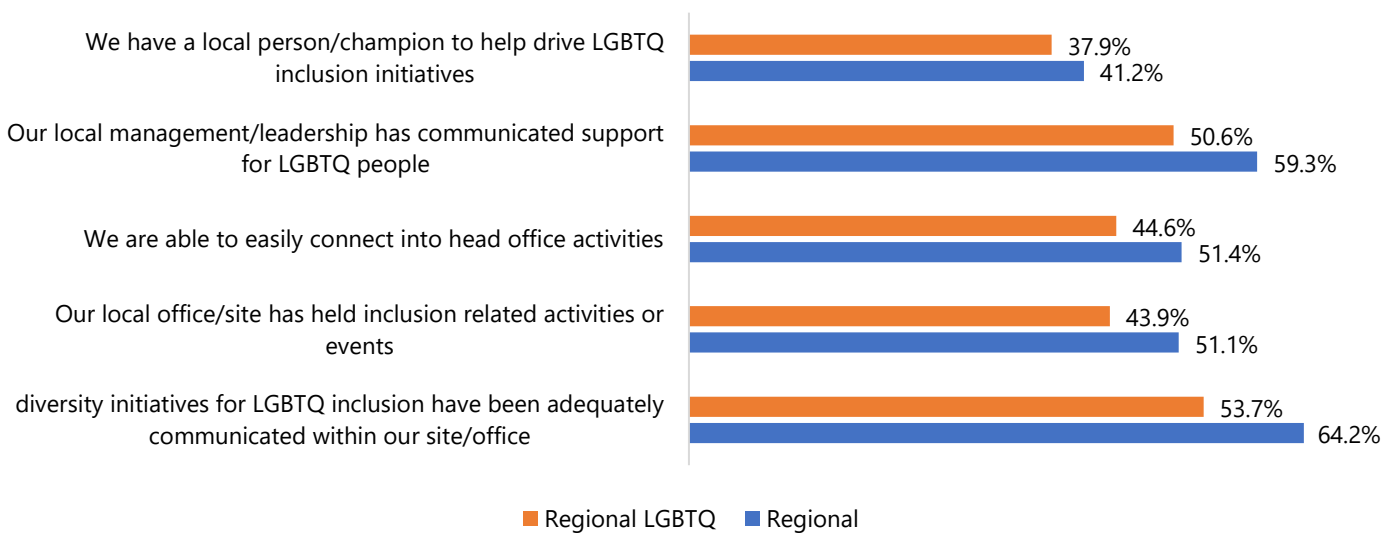
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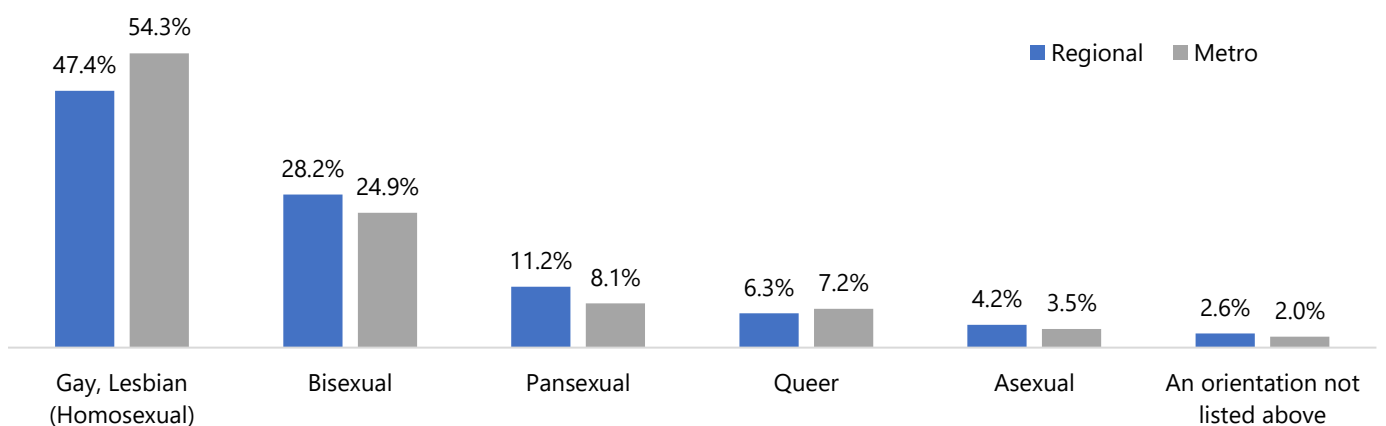
Initiatives in regional areas

Regional employees were asked to consider the way in which city-based initiatives have carried through to their workplace. Overall, agreement with the statements was similar between metro and regional responses though there were some significant differences between the whole regional response rate, compared to regional LGBTQ employees.



Regional employees of diverse sexuality

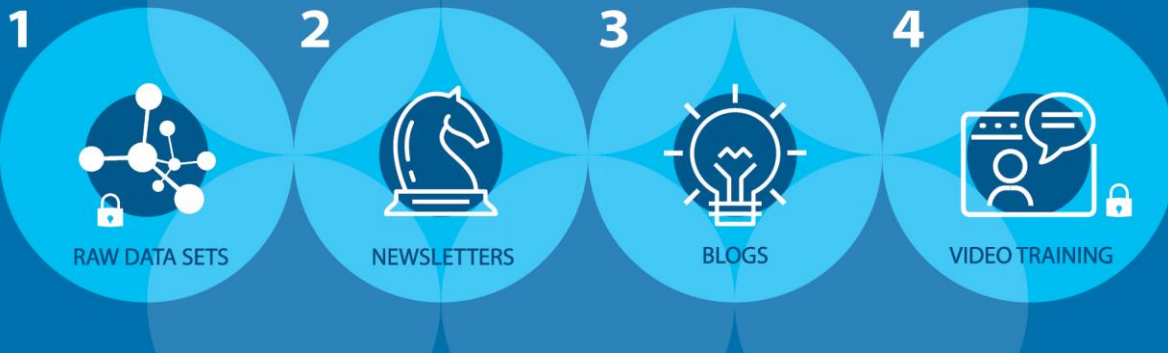
In 2021, 49% of regional respondents identified as Gay/Lesbian, this has reduced to 47.4% this year. Continuing the trend from last year, regional employees are more likely to identify as Bisexual, Pansexual or asexual than metropolitan respondents.



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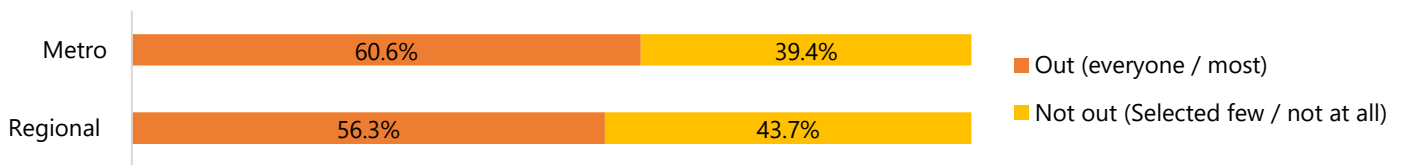


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Being out at work

56.3% of regional employees of diverse sexuality are out to all or most of their colleagues, just less than 5% points lower than metropolitan employees.

Being out at work?



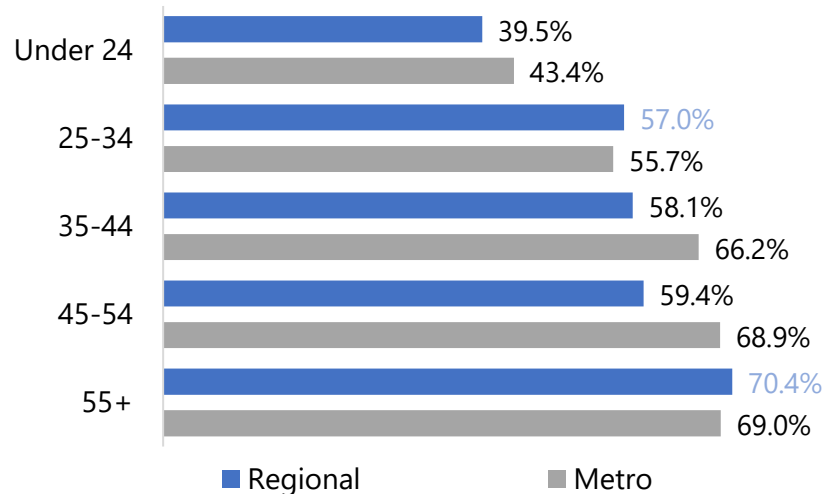
When looking at the percentage of a particular age group being out in the workplace, most age groups are less likely to be out in regional areas. Most significantly we see this in the 35-54 year group.

The proportion of regional employees in the 25-34 and over 55 age groups is slightly more likely to be out than within the metro regions.

Regional employees out in the workforce are advising lower levels of agreement that being out is positively impacting their performance, engagement or inclination stay with the organisation

Regional employees advise lower levels of positive experiences within their organisation in comparison to metro respondents, though 75.3% of out regional employees feel their sexuality would not have an impact on their career and 73.9% have not encountered any exclusion based on their sexuality with their current organisation.

Being out - by age



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Regarding bullying and harassment behaviours, regional respondents:

- advise having been the target of unwanted jokes, innuendo, commentary directed at their diverse sexuality at higher levels (regional:15.5% vs metro:10.1%).
- are less likely to be comfortable reporting this to their manager (regional:77.9% vs metro: 81.6%)
- even less likely to report more serious bullying/sexual harassment (regional 74.5% vs metro: 79.1%)

For those not out in the workplace, the top three ranked reasons are the same for both regional and metro, but there are significant percentage point differences between the regional and metro responses. Feeling it would not be accepted by some members of their team (regional:39.1% vs metro:32.4%), is the top reason, and the one with the greatest difference between locations.

Regional employees are agreeing at lower rates that the current social/political sphere is having an impact of their willingness to be out.

I feel....



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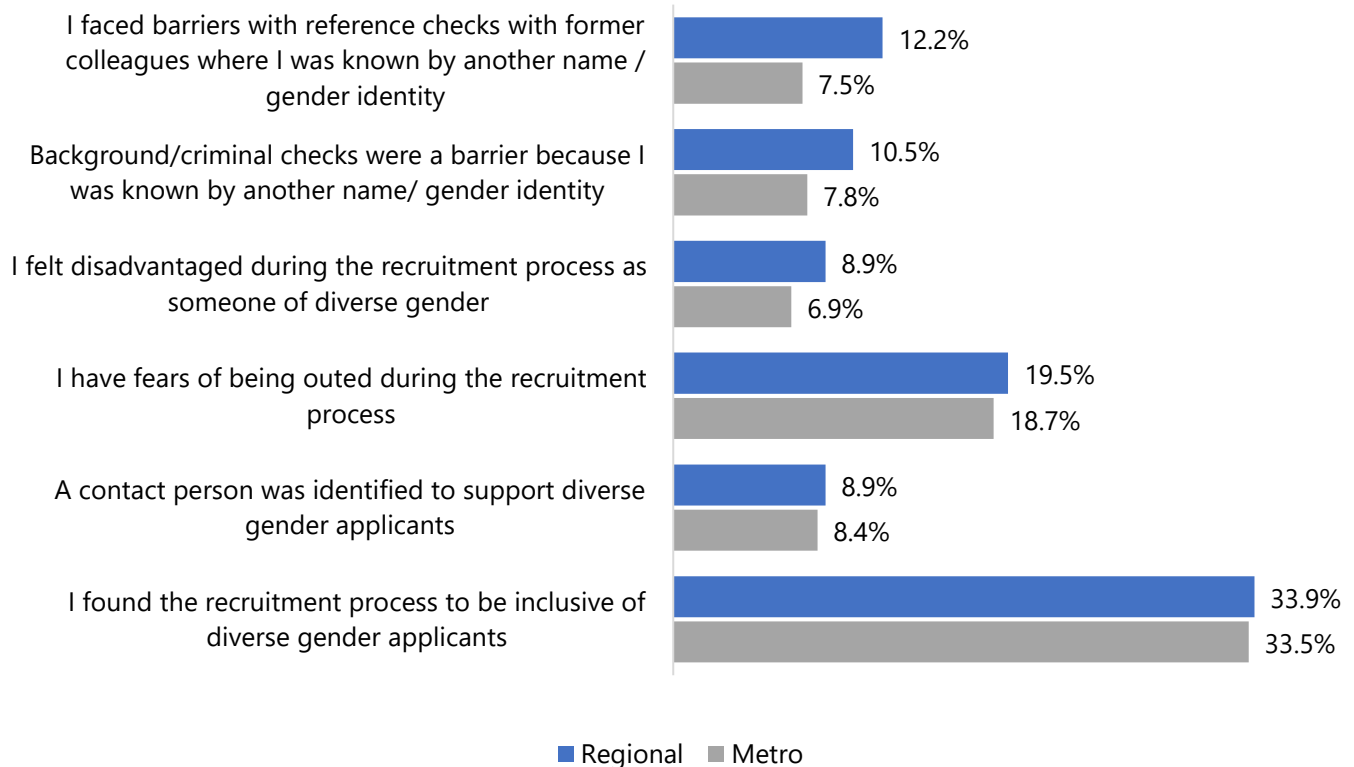
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Regional employees of diverse gender and/or trans experience

Experiences of recruitment

Regional employees were 26% more likely to disclose their gender diversity during the application process, (regional 24.2% vs Metro:17.8%), however they are more likely to agree that forms were inclusion of diverse gender applicants (32.3% vs 27.1%)

43.6% of gender diverse regional employees fear being discriminated against because of their gender identity. (vs metro: 45.2%). Positively, more regional gender diverse respondents were able to identify a support person during their application process, however the number of people who could find this contact person was low, regardless of location.



49.2% of regional respondents felt their organisation met or exceeded their expectations regarding availability of non-gendered uniforms or dress codes, and 46% felt they had the freedom to use their toilet of choice, though only 24.2% advised their expectations were met regarding all-gender facilities.

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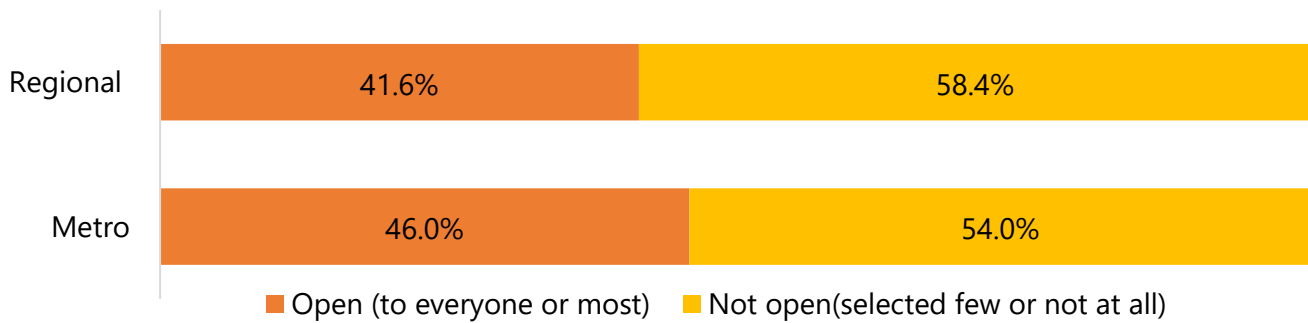
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Being open at work.

Regional employees of diverse gender or trans experience, are 10.6% less likely to be open at work than in metro areas, with 41.6% agreeing to being out to everyone or most in their workplace.

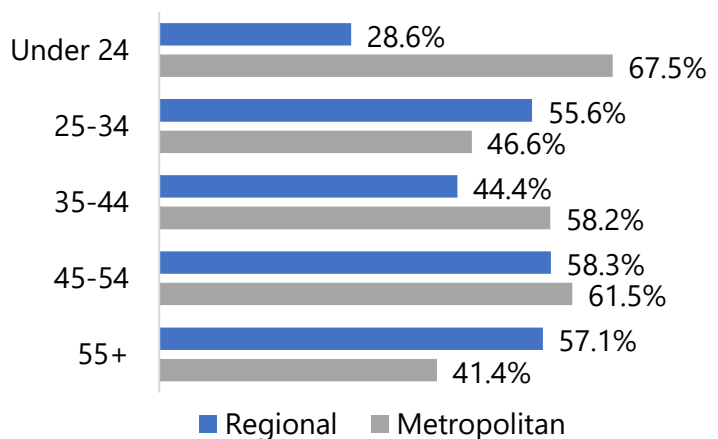


When looking at age of respondents, we see greater differences between the likelihood of regional and metro respondents being open regarding their diverse gender or trans experience.

Those aged 25 - 34 are more likely to be open about their gender diversity in the regions, as are those over 55.

Gender identity also seems to play a part in being open in the regions, with those who identify as male, being open 65.0% of the time, compared to 52.9% of women, and 36.6% of non-binary identifying respondents.

Open at work by age



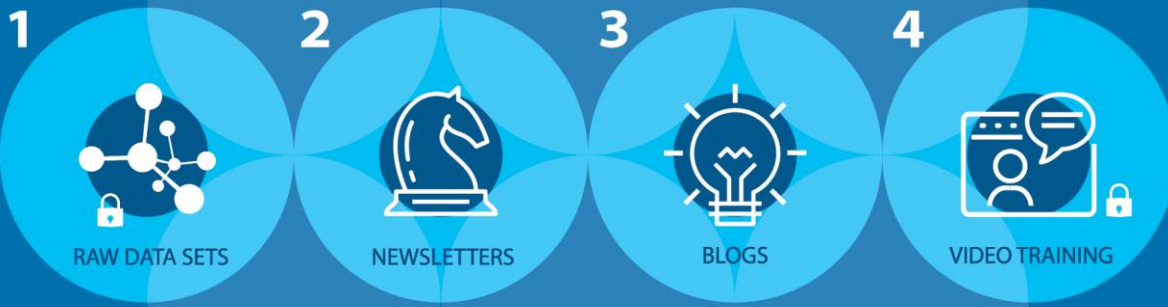
Gender affirmation in the workplace

42.5% of regional respondents have affirmed their gender in some way (legally/medically/socially) in their current workplace, with a further 7.1% in a previous workplace. This is similar to metro respondents (40.5% and 8.5% respectively).

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Regional Allies

Allyship across the country is similar regardless of location.

This year the proportion of 'active allies' in the regions has increased from 19.0% to 29.7%.

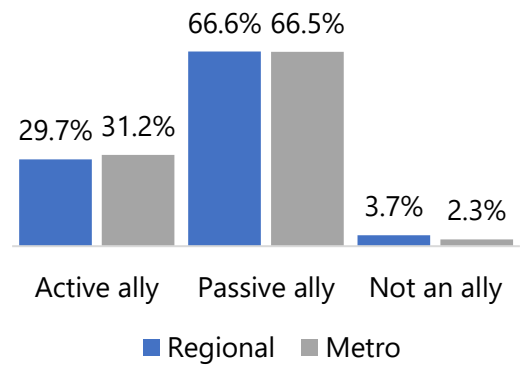
The proportion of 'passive allies' is the same for regional and metro respondents, but regional employees are more likely to be 'not an ally' than those in the metro areas.

However, when we drill down into the visibility of active allies only 53.8% of regional respondents knew of active allies in their immediate work area, compared with 62.0% in metropolitan areas.

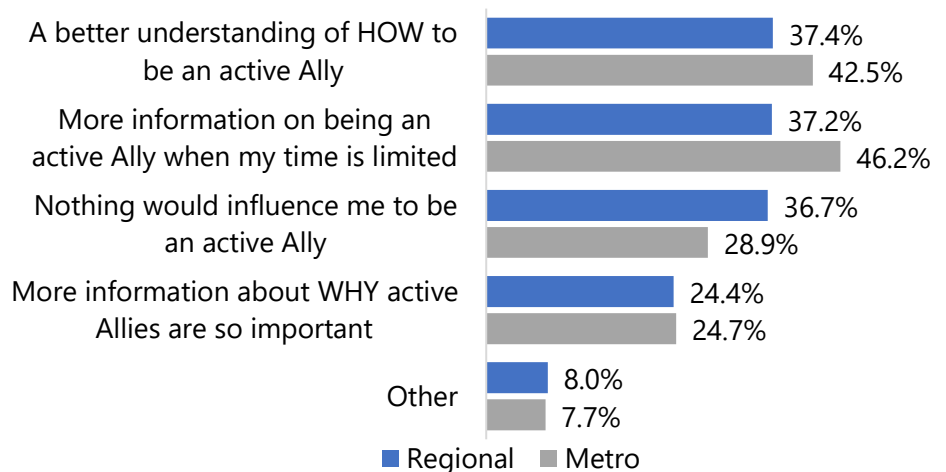
Similarly, only 50.4% of regional respondents knew of executive allies within their organisation, whereas in metro locations, 60.4% expressed that they knew executive allies.

When we come to reasons that people are not active allies, 27.3% of regional respondents say they do not have any personal interest in LGBTQ inclusion, higher than for metro respondents at 21.5%. As we have seen in previous years, and in alignment with the total Australian data, the most common reason for not being an active ally, was that people were too busy; this has increased from last year (2022:38.8 vs 2021:37.0%), though it is less for regional than metro employees (2022:42.9% vs 2021: 43.0%). Agreement that concern they would be ridiculed or the target of jokes is a reason for 5.1% of regional respondents compared to 3.8% of metro employees.

When regional respondents were asked what could influence them to become an active ally, a better understanding of how to be an ally came in as the top reason this year (37.4%), up from 36.0% in 2021. Agreement that more information on being an active ally when there is limited time, achieved 37.2% (from 35% in 2021). These



Influence active allyship



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percentages are 5% and 9% points lower than their metropolitan counterparts.

36.7% of regional respondents agreed that nothing would influence them to become an ally. This has decreased from 2021, but still sits 7.8% points higher than metro respondents (2021: regional: 40.0% vs Metro: 30%)

IN CONCLUSION

We have seen the dial shift, and we are closing the gap between experiences, opinions and beliefs of people between regional and metro staff.

Organisations are acutely aware that LGBTQ inclusion does not just live in the cities. Regional inclusion initiatives are receiving equal attention as metropolitan initiatives, while maintaining local focus and relationships.

Focus on education, involvement in the Pride in Diversity Regional Reach strategic initiative, and an increase in local LGBTQ events has enabled increased participation and awareness for regional staff.

However, it should be noted that, while the number of active allies has increased and is in line with metropolitan locations, significantly fewer LGBTQ employees are aware of the existence of these allies, particularly of executive allies.

ACTION POINTS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Visible signs of inclusion in the office don't need to be expensive, stickers, lanyards, pronoun badges and email signatures all have a big impact
2. Integrate the Pride in Diversity eLearning module into employee training programs, to increase staff understanding of allyship (20 mins)
3. Review promotional materials for inclusive language
4. Ensure there is an accessible executive ally available for direct support of regional employees
5. Ensure LGBTQ initiatives are available to regional employees

Please speak to your Relationship Manager regarding how to use this information to influence your activities and promote a more inclusive workplace for LGBTQ employees.

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