

**FOUR WAYS  
TO GET  
ON POINT!**

**PRACTICE  
POINTS**

## **EDITION 5: Leadership impacts on LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace** INSIGHTS FROM THE 2023 AWEI EMPLOYEE SURVEY

The annual Australian Workplace Equality Index Employee Survey has been running for the past 12 years as part of the suite of offerings from Pride in Diversity.

In 2023, 178 organisations and 41,157 individuals took part in the survey. Of these, 40,331 respondents are Australian-based, and 826 work in overseas locations for Australian employers.

All organisations participating in the survey are working to increase and support LGBTQ+-inclusive practices within their organisations<sup>1</sup>.

Earlier Practice Points have covered other aspects of allyship in general terms including who are the allies, and their importance within organisations.

This practice point looks at the importance of visible executive allies and/or sponsors within organisations, the significant impacts they can have on culture, inclusion, and safety for all employees, particularly LGBTQ+ employees.

### **Who are our leadership allies and sponsors?**

The data in this edition looks at several factors. Initially, we look at respondents who selected level 1 or level 2 of the seniority hierarchy. We will also look more closely at the responses from respondents to the question *"I know of executive allies and/or sponsors within my organisation."*

Of all respondents, one third (n13,436) have advised their role fits within either level 1 or 2 in relation to organisational seniority<sup>2</sup>, and 12,574 responded to the question *"are you an ally?"*

Less than half have advised they are active allies<sup>i</sup> (46.2%), 51.0% are passive allies, and 2.8% not allies at all. This is a small percentage of respondents but equates to 323 employees in positions of leadership across 96 organisations.

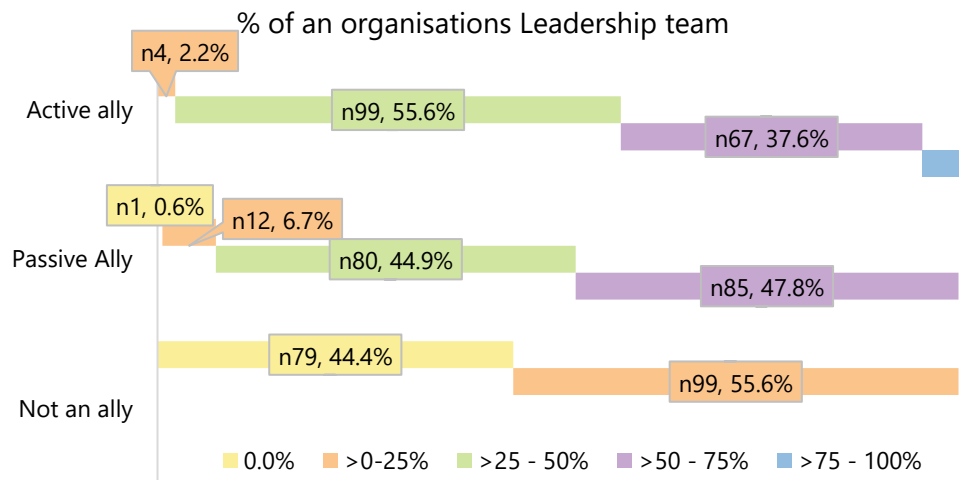
Looking at individual organisations, 46.1% had only active or passive allies within their respondents.

<sup>1</sup> Results reflect the attitudes and knowledge of respondents from organisations working in inclusive practices.

<sup>2</sup> Level 1. Leadership team - Leadership/executive team (CEO or equivalent and senior executives reporting to CEO not including EA/PA) & Level 2. Reporting to level 1 - Senior staff (including EA/PA to Executive team)

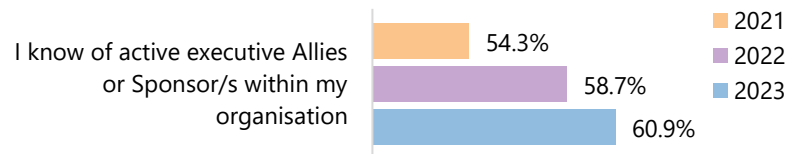
When looking individually at the percentage of level 1 & 2 employees and their allyship, 42.1% of organisations had over half of their leadership team identify as active allies, and 47.8% of organisations had over half of their leadership advise they were passive allies.

There was no organisation where more than 25% of their leadership employees were not allies at all.



### Knowledge of executive allies and sponsors

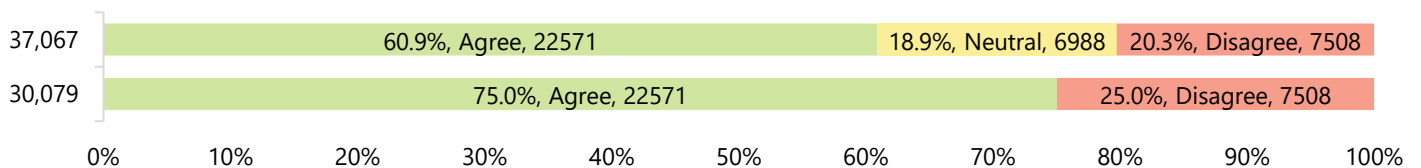
Over the past three years, there has been a 12.1% increase in respondents agreeing to this statement.



The presence of executives in leadership roles being allies is important; it enables employees to understand that the organisation is leading from the top and increases allyship comfort in others to be allies.

While 46.2% of respondents in level 1 & 2 roles feel they are active allies to the LGBTQ+ community in some way, this does not necessarily translate into respondents from those organisations being aware of them being active allies or sponsors.

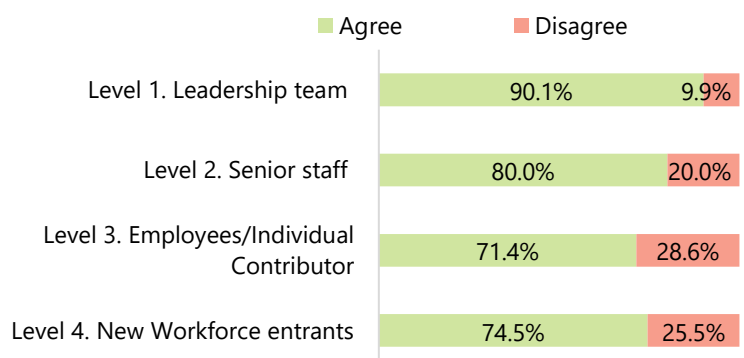
The remainder of this practice point focuses on the 30,079 respondents who either agreed or disagreed to knowing of executive allies or sponsors and removes those who were neutral in their response.



The further away from the leadership team, the less likely employees are to agree they know of active executive allies. Disregarding employees who were neutral in their answer, less than 10% of level 1, and 20% of level 2 employees are **not aware** of executive allies, but this increases to over 25% in level 3 and 4 employees.

Respondents who have one or more direct reports are 11.2% more likely than those who do not manage others to agree (79.7% vs 71.7%).

### I know of active executive allies or sponsor/s within my organisation



The most significant difference in knowledge is geographically between Capital City areas and regional areas, where there is a 28.5% difference. Those in Remote areas the least likely to know active allies at 61.4%, and those in City centre areas the most likely at 78.9%. This may be due to the location of organisation head offices more likely to be in City centre areas and therefore this statistic aligns with the “closeness” to the leadership. In organisations where staff are not all located in one office area, it is important that the presence of executive allies and sponsors is visible within communications, utilising newsletters, intranet, and meetings so employees not located in the same office as the leadership team are aware of this support.

Across Australia the split between those who know and those that do don't know is between 68.2% to 76.9%.

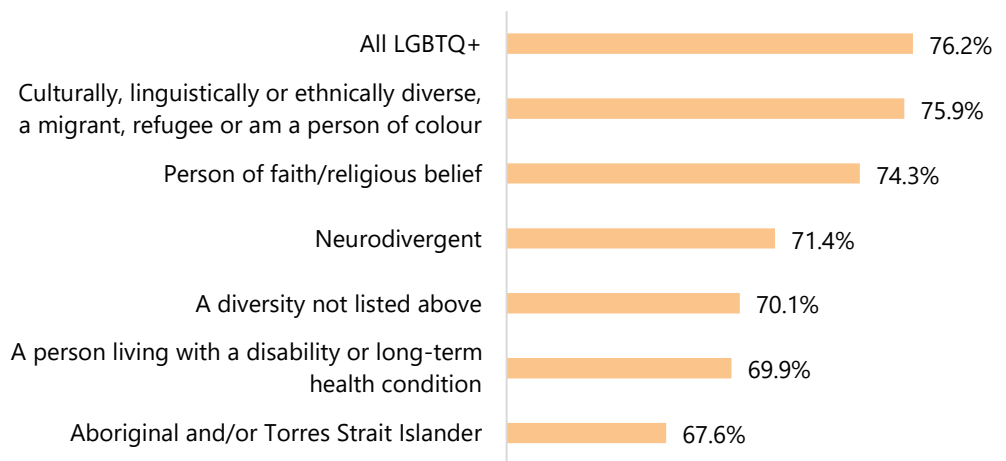
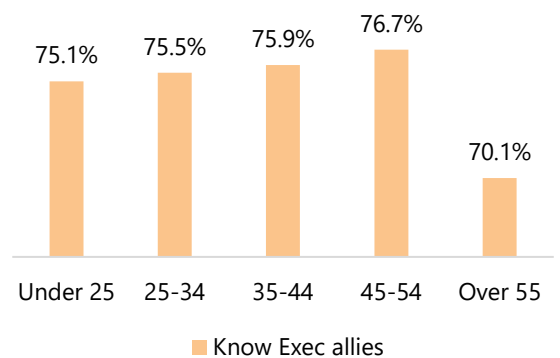
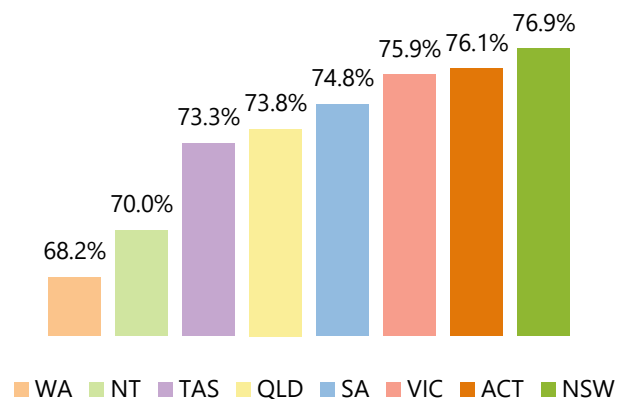
Age shows very little difference in knowledge other than a significant drop in employees over 55, the only demographic where knowledge is under the 75% average.

Full-time and part-time staff are the most likely to be aware of executive allies at 76.2% and 71.6% respectively. Only 63.9% of temporary staff and 65.3% of contracted staff agreed, equating to a 19.2% difference across employment types.

Time at the organisation does not have as significant effect on knowledge with only a 11.0% difference. Those under 1 year agree 70.4% of the time. The most likely to know are those who have been with the organisation between 3-5 years (78.2%), and 5-10 years (77.4%).

Looking at the personal demographics of respondents, there is little difference between LGBTQ+ respondents (76.2%) and cisgender heterosexual respondents (75.0%) knowing executive allies.

When considering respondents who identify with other diversities or backgrounds, we see that those who are of faith or religious belief, and those who identify as culturally, linguistically or ethnically diverse, a migrant, refugee or a person of colour are most likely to be able to identify executive allies and sponsors to the LGBTQ+ community, while those living with a disability or who are Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander are the least likely.

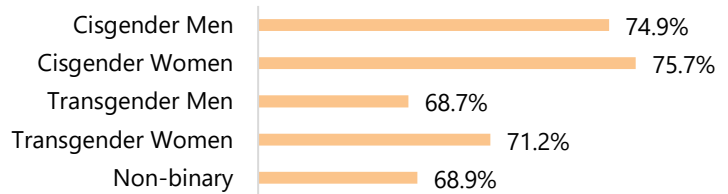


Looking further into gender experience, women are more likely to be aware than men. In particular transgender men are the least likely to agree to knowing executive allies or sponsors.

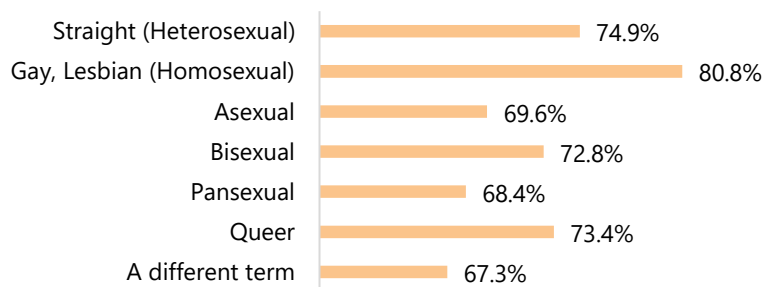
When looking at people of diverse sexuality, there are significant differences. Straight respondents know of executive allies at around the average, while those who identify as gay/lesbian are the most likely at 80.8%. Knowledge rates drop to 67.3% of respondents who identify with a different term.

This may be relative to the idea that the executive ally or sponsor within the organisation may for instance, identify as gay, and so respondents of other orientations may not feel as inclined to identify that person as an ally to themselves.

**Gender Identity & knowledge of executive allies and/ sponsors**



**Sexual orientation & knowledge of executive allies and/ sponsors**

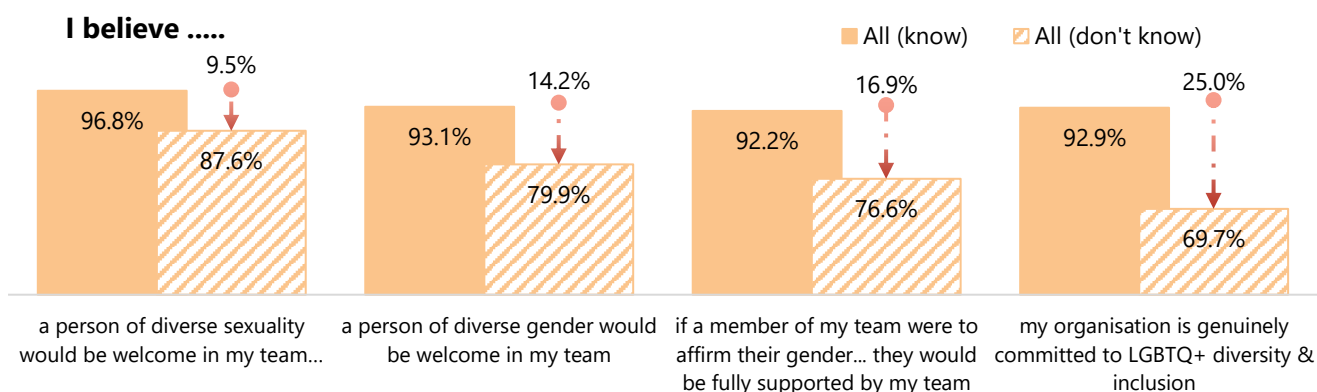


**Impact of active executive allies & sponsors**

While we can identify from the respondents who is more likely to be aware or know of executive allies, what is more important is the differences in responses from those who are in organisations with or without known executive allies and/sponsors.

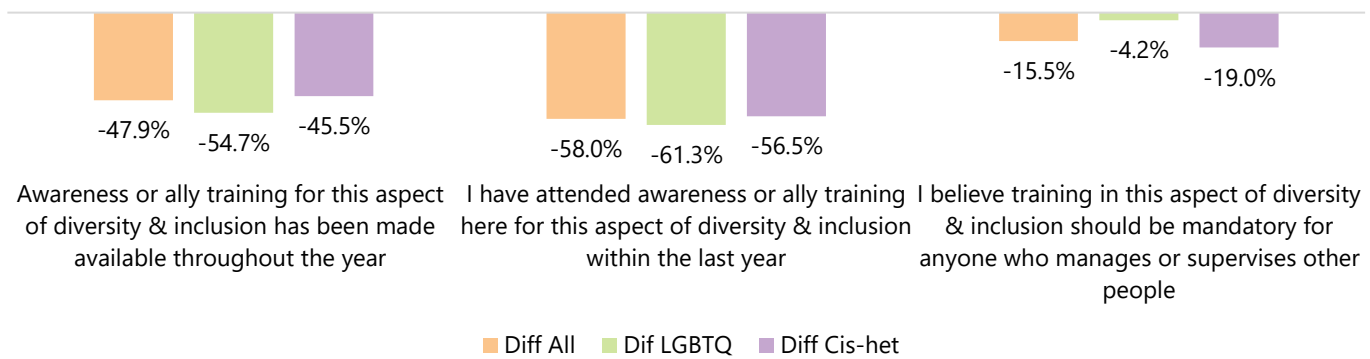
For these purposes we are looking at not only the impact on all employees, but also specifically the impacts for LGBTQ+ employees.

When we look at all responses around employee beliefs focusing on the inclusion of people of diverse sexuality and gender in the workplace, we see up to 25% more respondents agreeing with statements when they know of active allies. Separating out the LGBTQ+ population, for those who do don't know of these leadership allies, the difference increases to between 19.9% and 36.0% less likely to agree with these belief statements, and even within the cis-het population there is a 7.7% to 20.6% reduction in agreement.



The availability and attendance of LGBTQ+ training significantly increases for respondents who know. In all areas, those who do not have leadership allies are less likely to know about or attend training than respondents who have these allies.

**Difference between "know" and "don't know" executive allies - by respondent cohort**

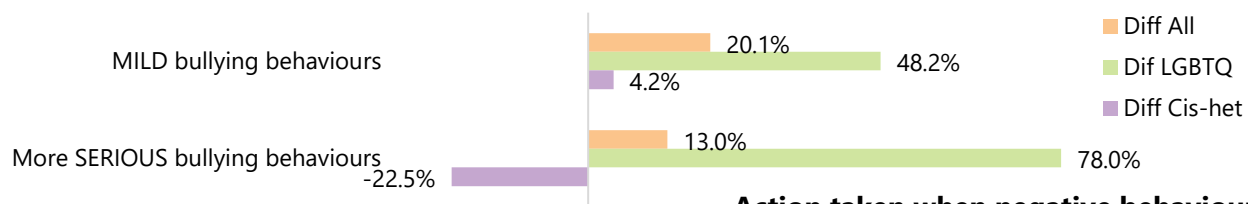


The response to negative behaviours including workplace incivility (mild bullying and harassment) and more serious behaviours is also significant.

Respondents in organisations without leadership allies, are between:

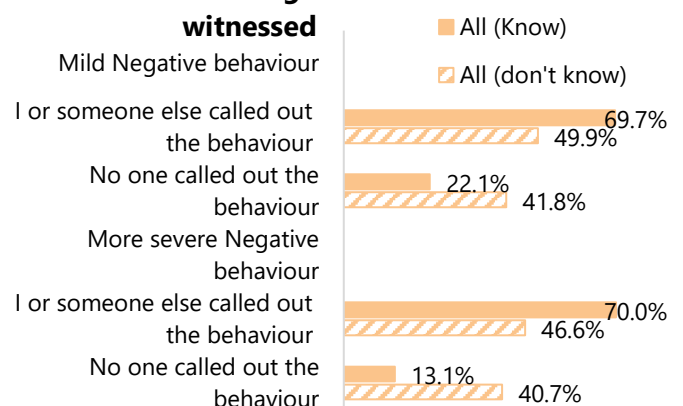
- 40.5% (cis-het) and 55.1% (LGBTQ+) less likely to feel that *negative commentary targeting people of diverse sexuality and/or gender is acted upon quickly*,
- 33.7% (cis-het) and 46.9% (LGBTQ+) less likely to feel *managers are willing to address mild bullying behaviours targeting diverse sexuality and*
- 34.1% (cis-het) and 49.3% (LGBTQ+) less likely to feel *managers are willing to address mild bullying behaviours targeting a person's diverse gender*.

Witnessing bullying behaviours is also increased in organisations without leadership allies in most cases though the cis-het population reported seeing less serious bullying.



Employees who know of executive allies are more likely to agree they or someone else called out the behaviour when witnessed and are half as likely to advise that no one called out the behaviour in either case of mild or more severe behaviours. There is no significant difference between the LGBTQ+ and cis-het cohorts in this area.

**Action taken when negative behaviour witnessed**



Experiences of health and wellbeing, engagement and productivity are increased within the cohort of respondents who know of executive allies. While the increase is more pronounced within the LGBTQ+ cohort, all respondents do benefit. LGBTQ+ respondents are 63.7% more likely to feel *a sense of belonging*, and 47.0% more likely to *feel mentally well*.

On average, respondents with executive allies are 84.7% more likely to also be an active ally, and 68.0% more likely to be passive allies. Within the cis-het population the prevalence of active allies is 136.4% more likely when executive allies and sponsors are available.

For those who are not active allies, the reason why is 52.9% less likely to be because it *would be frowned upon by someone with influence* over their career. On average this agreement is 3.3% of all respondents with known and 7.0% of those who do don't know executive allies.

### Benefits for LGBTQ+ Employees

Feelings of inclusion within the organisation are significantly different between the two cohorts. Those with known executive allies are:

- 142.8% more likely to agree that *executive endorsement of sexuality and/or gender diverse inclusion initiatives has been positive* (know: 85.5% vs don't know: 35.2%)
- 139.9% more likely to agree that active allies have a positive impact on their *sense of inclusion within the organisation* (know: 76.9% vs don't know: 32.0%)
- 66.1% more likely to feel the organisations *commitment to people of diverse sexuality and/or gender has been positive*, (know: 90.3% vs don't know: 54.4%), and&
- 56.0% more likely to have had a *positive experience of inclusion within their immediate work area* (know: 82.9% vs don't know: 53.1%)

Importantly, they are 40.5% **less** likely to feel they *spend time editing conversations or hiding who they are* (know: 25.7% vs don't know: 43.2%)

### Benefits of knowing Executive Allies/sponsors



### Being 'out' or 'open'

81.9% of respondents of diverse sexuality who are 'out' in their organisation are also in organisations where they know executive leadership allies. Only one third of respondents who know executive allies are 'not out' in their organisation compared to just over half of those in organisations without visible leadership support.

For trans and diverse gender respondents, this decreases slightly to 79.8% of all respondents who are 'open' belonging to visible leadership ally organisations. Those with active leadership allies are 36.6% less likely to be 'not open'.

93.5% of respondents of diverse sexuality in 'know' organisations would recommend their organisation, compared to 68.0% of 'don't know' employees. Trans and gender diverse respondents in know organisations are 68.4% more likely to recommend their organisation to others (know: 78.5% vs don't know: 46.6%)

The benefits of being 'out' also increases. Employees in 'know' organisations, are more likely to feel positive about their career, safety, and support within the organisation. They are:

- 110.5% more likely to know of *visible out role models with the same or similar sexuality as themselves*. (know: 77.9% vs don't know: 37.0%)
- 108.0% more likely to feel *Inclusion initiatives here for people of diverse sexuality have had a positive impact* on how they feel about their own sexuality (know: 80.9% vs don't know: 40.0%)
- 83.7% more likely to feel their *performance is positively impacted by being out*, (know: 69.7% vs don't know: 38.1%), and
- 66.7% more likely to be *inclined to stay with the organisation*. (know: 81.5% vs don't know: 48.9%)

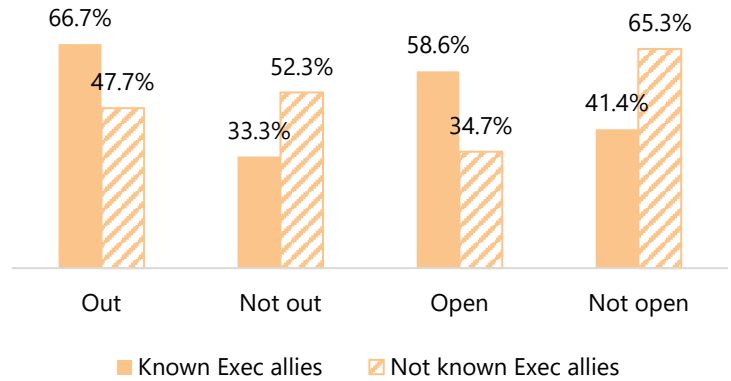
Even for those 'not out' they are generally less likely to agree to the negative repercussions:

- 49.5% less likely to feel being out *would negatively impact their career progression* (know: 17.5% vs don't know: 34.7%)
- 48.9% less likely to *fear being the target of discrimination*. (know: 18.2% vs don't know: 35.7%)
- 48.5% less likely to be *concerned about becoming the target of sexualised jokes or innuendo*. (know: 18.1% vs don't know: 35.2%)

For trans and gender diverse respondents, in organisations with known executive allies, they are 39.1% less likely to feel they have been deliberately misgendered. The positive benefits include:

- 103.8% more likely to know of *visible out role models with the same or similar gender as themselves*. (know: 52.8% vs don't know: 25.9%)
- 83.2% more likely to feel *Inclusion initiatives here for people of diverse sexuality have had a positive impact* on how they feel about their own gender diversity (know: 73.7% vs don't know: 39.0%)
- 73.3% more likely to feel their *performance is positively impacted by being open*, (know: 71.0% vs don't know: 41.0%) and

Being out or open



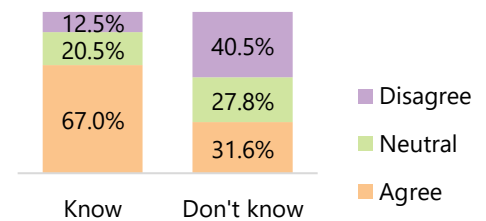
- 86.4% more likely to be *inclined to stay with the organisation*. (know: 77.8% vs don't know: 41.8%)

They are also 28.8% more likely to feel *comfortable discussing any issues* with their manager.

Even those 'not open' are generally less likely to agree to the negative repercussions:

- 44.8% less likely to feel being open *would negatively impact career progression* (know: 34.1% vs don't know: 61.7%)
- 35.2% less likely to *fear being the target of discrimination* (know: 38.9% vs don't know: 60.1%)
- 31.0% less likely to feel it would *not be accepted by some members of the team* (know: 48.7% vs don't know: 70.6%)
- 26.1% less likely to be *concerned about becoming the target of sexualised jokes or innuendo* (know: 39.8% vs don't know: 53.9%)

I am happy with the affirmation processes i have undertaken here



49.3% more individuals have undertaken affirmation processes within their current organisation, and those who have said they know executive allies have agreed 111.8% more that they are happy with the processes they have undertaken (know: 67.0% vs don't know: 31.6%).

*Impact on discrimination, bullying and harassment.*

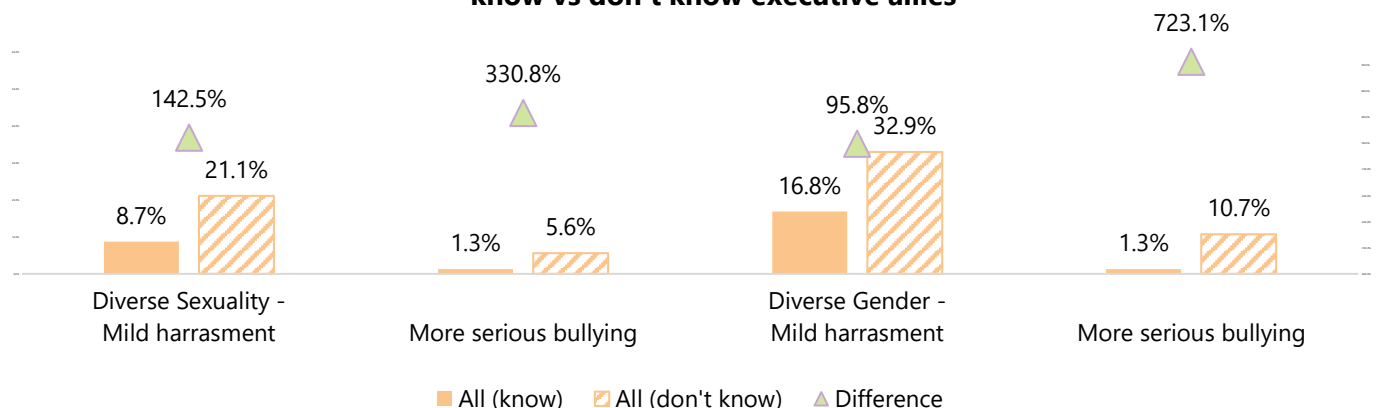
All LGBTQ+ respondents were asked if they had experienced discrimination in the past due to their diverse sexuality and/or gender within their current organisation. Those with executive allies only agreed 17.6% of the time, compared to 23.7% of those without known executive allies, a 25.6% reduction.

Incidents of experiencing mild (workplace incivility) or more serious bullying behaviours is significantly affected by the presence of executive allies and sponsors.

Those who do don't know, and are LGBTQ+, are reporting experiencing some level of bullying and harassment at a minimum of double the rate of the respondents with known executive allies.

The most significant impact is for trans and gender diverse respondents. Those without executive allies are 723.1% more likely to advise having been the target of more serious bullying and harassment.

Experiencing Bullying & Harrasment in organisations know vs don't know executive allies





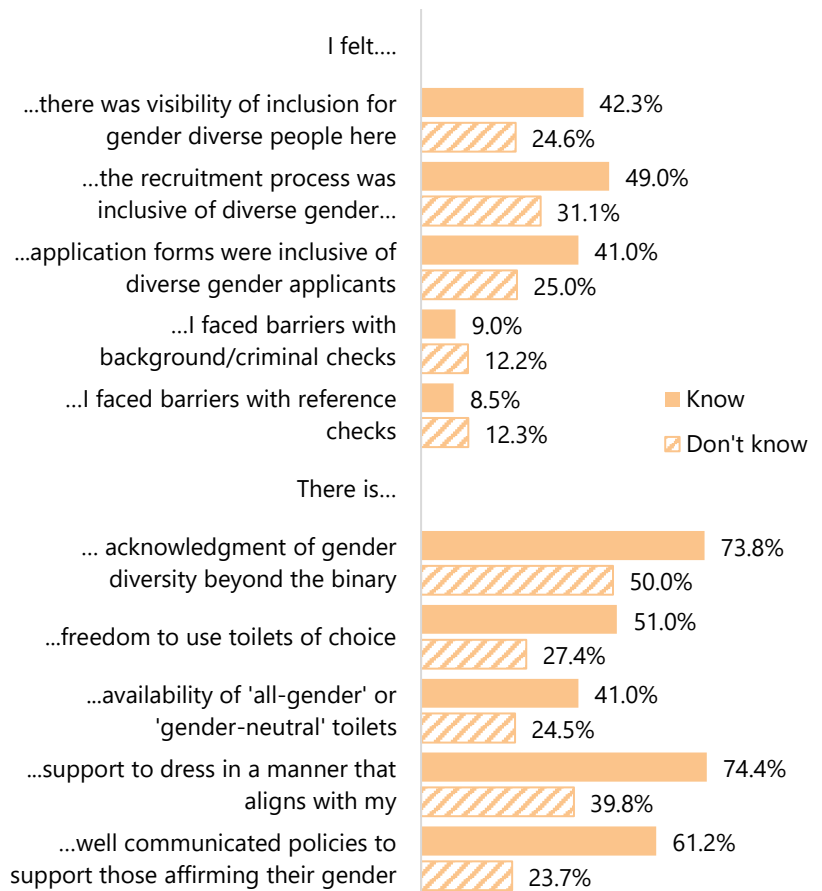
*Impact on trans and gender diverse recruitment experiences*

For trans and gender diverse respondents, even prior to beginning to work for an organisation, the impacts executive allies have is significant.

Where respondents are reporting they do not have executive allies, they are also advising that they experienced more recruitment barriers with background/criminal (35.6% more likely) and reference checks (44.7% more likely).

This cohort is also advising that they felt there was less inclusion within the recruitment phase regarding visibility inclusion initiatives, application processes and forms.

Respondents with known executive allies and sponsors are also more likely to agree that *there is freedom to dress* according to their gender identity and expression, *freedom to use the toilet of choice*, and **158.1%** more likely to agree there are *well communicated polices to support those affirming their gender*.



*Impact of leadership allies above area allies.*

It is important to recognise that whether allies are within the respondents immediate area, or are leadership allies within the organisation, the presence of allies contributes to more positive experiences for employees.

In many cases those who agree to having area allies are also within the leadership level 1 & 2, so it is difficult to determine exactly what impact is being had on respondents who are not within these seniority levels.

68.2% of respondents (n27491) agreed to being aware of either area, executive or both levels of allies. Slightly more respondents were aware of area allies (60.0%, n24192) than those aware of executive allies and/sponsors (56.0%, n22571).

When looking at respondents who **only** know area allies vs **only** executive allies vs knowing **both** we can see that area allies make a slightly greater impact on team inclusion, such as welcoming someone of diverse gender or sexuality and treating them no differently to anyone else, or providing support for someone affirming their gender in the team.

For respondents where only executive allies are known, the impact is greater in relation to more formal elements including policy and procedures, the presence of training and, most significantly, demonstrated fewer respondents experiencing discrimination, bullying and harassment behaviours within the workplace.

The positive impacts are even more significant when both area allies and executive allies are known to respondent. Out of 39 statements which are provided to all respondents, 16 were agreed to more by those who knew of executive allies. Comparing those who knew of only one or the other, against respondents who knew of both, 38 out of 39 statements were agreed to higher by those who were aware of both types of allies within their organisation.

## Conclusion

The presence of active executive allies and/sponsors within the workplace can be considered one of the most important factors in improving organisation culture and inclusion for employees.

Executive allies and champions need to be visible not just on days of significance, but every day.

It is executive allies and champions who use and speak about pronouns, who wear a visible pin or lanyard, who are ready with their ally story and who speak with their peers internally and externally about their commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion who make a significant contribution to a culture that supports people being able to bring their whole selves to work.

Leadership in LGBTQ+ inclusion casts a rainbow shadow. Ensuring that executive allies and sponsors are visible to employees outside of the office or floor where that executive works is imperative to ensure that the impact is felt throughout the organisations, and not just for employees within the leadership and higher management areas.

Continuing to increase active allyship within organisations requires positive leadership, active engagement with days of significance and a concerted effort to implement policies and strategies that reinforce positive inclusion and behaviours.

## Actions

1. Ensure that executive teams and all managers are educated in LGBTQ+ inclusion and know how to be active visible allies.
2. Help executives understand the impact that their visibility as allies has on the wider LGBTQ+ employee base.
3. Have executives allies advocate for more LGBTQ+ diversity in senior recruitment and talent programs.

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<sup>i</sup> Definition of Ally: someone who supports LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace.

Respondents define themselves as an:

- Active ally (active in their support)
- Passive ally (supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion but wouldn't consider themselves active)
- Not at all (do not support LGBTQ+ inclusion)