

# How work design shapes mental health in the Healthcare and Social Assistance industry



This research involved surveying over 1300 individuals and interviewing 78 of them across the Healthcare and Social Assistance (H&SA) industry over the past 18 months. These findings are currently informing the design of evidence-based interventions to address and prevent psychosocial risks across the five Design for Care organisations.

1 OF 5

people report high symptoms of work related burnout

1 OF 6

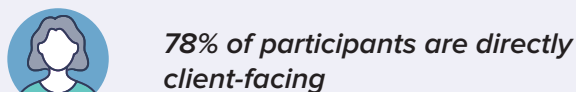
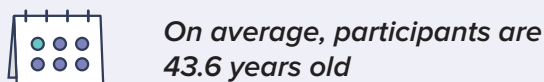
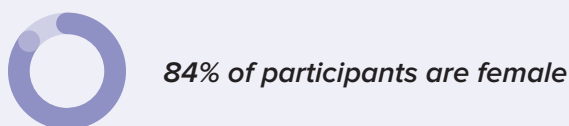
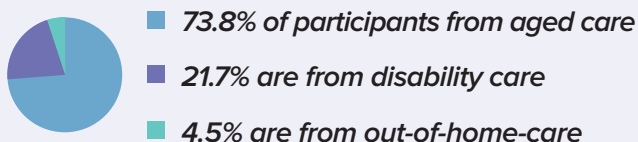
feel disengaged in their work

1 OF 12

are considering leaving their organisation within the next 12 months



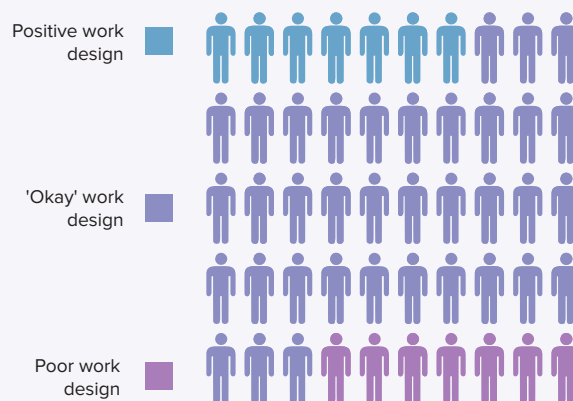
## ABOUT THE SAMPLE



## FIVE KEY MESSAGES

### 1. There are large differences in the design of work within the industry

Advanced statistical analyses<sup>3</sup> showed that there are three clusters of work designs in H&SA. Design for Care participants experience different levels of SMART work design



15% of participants reported positive levels of SMART work design, with very high levels of agency, good quality relationships at work, and relatively more tolerable work demands



70% of participants reported levels of SMART work design that are 'okay', with some strengths and some weaknesses



15% of participants reported poor levels of SMART work design, with very low levels of agency, poorer quality of relationships at work, and relatively less tolerable work demands

### Why does this matter?

People's work design has a huge influence on their well-being. For example, whereas **only 1 in 10 of the people in the positive SMART work design group have high burnout**, in the 'okay' SMART group this figure is 1 in 5.

And, most disturbing, **for those in the poor work design group, as many as 1 in 2 workers are experiencing burnout.**

<sup>3</sup> Latent profile analyses identified the number and content of work design profiles, using criteria for statistical significance.

## 2. SMART work and well-being differs across demographic groups



Younger workers (aged 16-24) are more likely to experience higher mental ill-health compared to all other age groups



Permanent full-time employees experience the highest level of work demands compared to casual workers



Client facing workers experienced lower agency and relational work design, and higher levels of burnout compared to non-client facing workers

## 3. The 5 SMART elements most important for mental health and well-being

Breaking down SMART into its subcomponents, we identified 5 major features of work that are important to manage for mental health and well-being:



### Time pressure:

37% of workers report that they do not have enough time to do their work



### Emotional demands:

40% of workers report that their jobs are very emotionally demanding



### Work-family conflict:

24% of workers report they do not have enough time for their family



### Role Clarity:

70% of workers report they have adequate role clarity at work – but the clarity is about tasks rather than relationships



### Opportunity for development:

90% of workers report that there are opportunities for development in their work – but workers may not have time to access it

## 4. A resource focus matters

It is critical to build and develop SMART work design for employees in the H&SA industry. As employees in this industry experience very high demands, which are likely to persist, some SMART resources can be leveraged to protect against job demands to improve mental health and well-being



When employees experience tolerable emotional demands and have high role clarity, they are less likely to report work-related burnout



When employees have tolerable emotional demands and have supportive leaders, they are more likely to report they are thriving at work

## 5. Work design is holistic

Work design takes a holistic view of how psychosocial risks in the workplace unfold. It's important to consider every aspect in the SMART work design model as it's the interplay across the dimensions that influence mental health and well-being. For example, workers in our interviews highlighted the importance of having quality appreciation from their clients, even when emotional demands were high



*"Even if [clients] are having a bad day... or they are a bit aggressive. They really do appreciate every absolutely everything you do... that's the **biggest reward** of the whole lot"*



*"We're always, always running at 110%"*



*"What's really good about our team is we all know we're there for each other."*



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[bit.ly/dfc-report](https://bit.ly/dfc-report)

Based on the 'How work design shapes mental health in the Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry' report by Curtin University's Centre for Transformative Work Design and the University of Sydney. Part of the Design for Care research project.  
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### What's next? >>

Redesigning work to make it SMARTer involves changing systems, roles and tasks in a way that improves well-being at work.

Research with our partnering organisations is ongoing as we codesign how work can best be redesigned in the H&SA industry. The findings from the Design for Care will inform a suite of guidance and recommendations that will be tailored for the H&SA industry to embed SMART work design into organisations as a preventative and sustainable strategy for mental ill-health and well-being.