

The experience of Australian entertainment industry workers during COVID-19

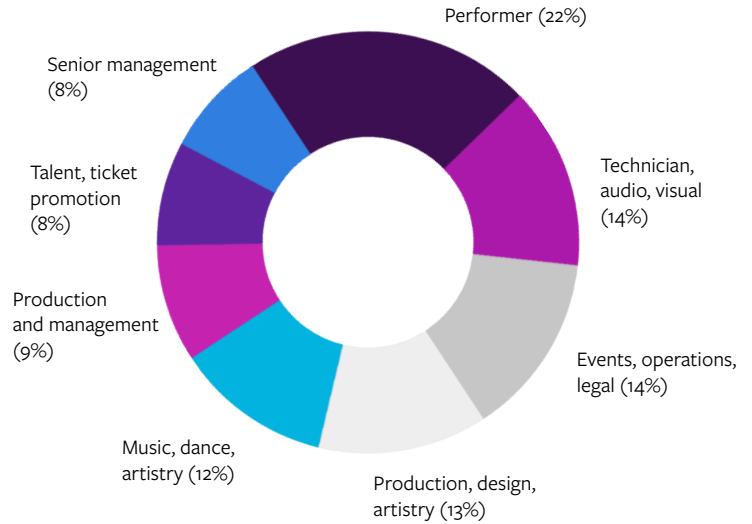
Background

Australian entertainment industry workers have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the first industries to shut down in March 2020. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people in the industry have lost work and have needed financial support from other means, including government support packages and welfare. With continuing lockdowns and restrictions, industry workers may also be among the last to recover. These circumstances have negatively impacted the entertainment industry and those who work in it, leaving many people with financial problems and lacking purpose.

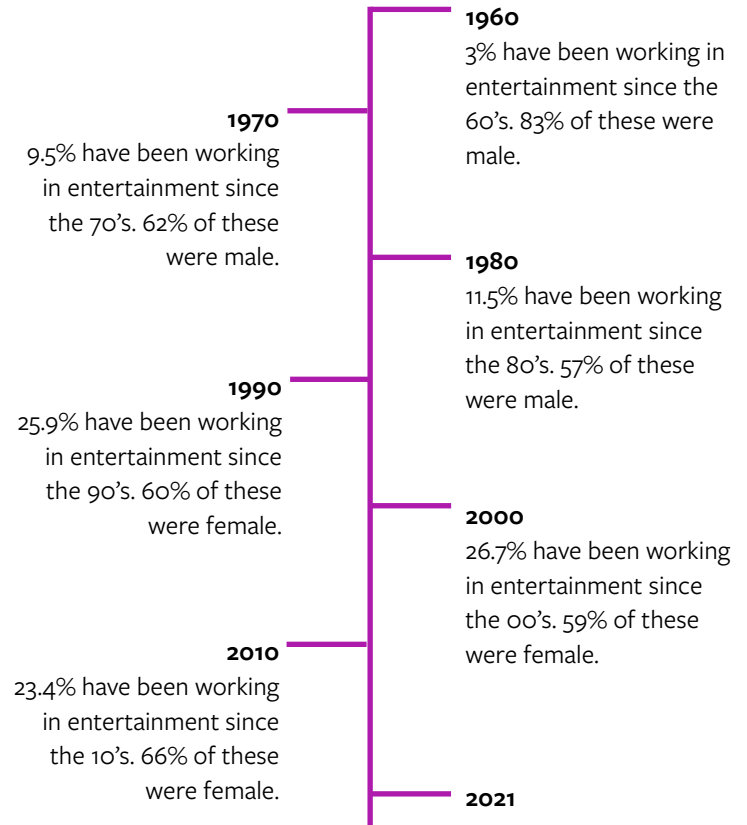
To capture the extent of industry fears and concerns around COVID-19, changes to work, finances, and emotional wellbeing, the Australian Alliance of Wellness in Entertainment and Everymind surveyed those in the entertainment industry. This survey was launched on 14 April 2021 and closed six days before New South Wales faced further extensive lockdowns. The survey captured more than **600 responses** and **15 participant interviews**. This sample size proves to be a robust reflection of the mental health impacts for Australian entertainment industry workers.

Participant roles in the industry

There were many diverse roles represented:



Years in the industry



About the participants



Gender

54% female, 42% male, 2% self-described, 1% prefer not to say.



Age

43% 25-44 years, 43% 45-64 years, 8% 65+ years, 6% under 24 years.



Location

44% VIC, 32% NSW, 12% QLD, 6% WA, 4% SA, 1.5% TAS, 0.5% ACT.
Nil responses for NT.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background

96% neither, 3% prefer not to say, 1% Aboriginal background.
Nil responses for Torres Strait Islander background or both.

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The typical participants

Female participants

- Has been in the industry for over 20 years.
- Works as a performer.
- Does not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Lives in Victoria.



Male participants

- Has been in the industry for over 26 years.
- Works as an actor.
- Does not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Lives in Victoria.



Findings at a glance

Almost all respondents experienced significant changes to their work situations, and many were suddenly unable to work at all. Consequently, most participants experienced financial distress, with many requiring access to government assistance to make ends meet. For one-quarter of participants, their financial situation meant they could not afford basic household items and essentials.

Industry workers also experienced poorer mental health during the pandemic, displaying elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This increase in poorer mental health is true of the experiences of many industries during the pandemic; however, given the entertainment industry may be among the last to recover, this increased stress, anxiety, and depression may be longer-lasting.

While there were increased financial and emotional distress levels, most respondents reported low-moderate fear levels relating to the COVID-19 virus itself. Many respondents indicated engaging in positive coping strategies and prioritising their mental, physical, and social health throughout the pandemic.

The interviews conducted revealed that industry professionals who typically worked on 'gigs' (i.e., seasonal, contract, and audition work) were better equipped to navigate the impact of the restrictions and closures on employment and employment prospects as they were used to 'banking money' between jobs. Professionals who reported having diverse experience and expertise within the industry also seemed to cope better with restrictions than those who had long and established areas of expertise. However, with the extension of lockdowns, particularly in Victoria, supplementing income was not an option normally pursued by entertainment workers.

Male participants had been working in the industry for an average of six years longer than female participants.



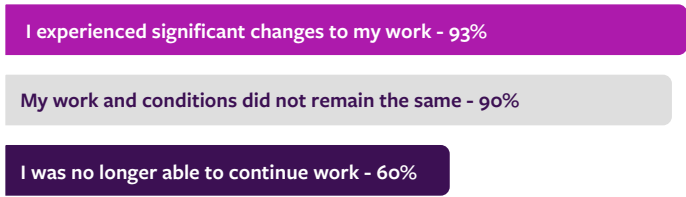
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Experiences of COVID-19

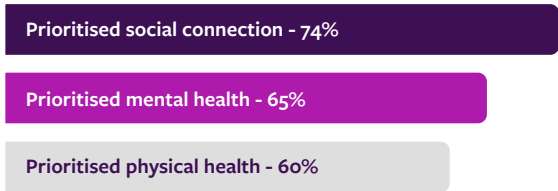
Many entertainment industry workers faced new financial situations, with the majority experiencing financial distress and requiring access to government support. One quarter could no longer afford household basics and essentials.



There were also extensive changes to work conditions, with around 60% no longer able to work and only 10% experiencing no changes.



During COVID-19, entertainment industry workers also engaged in several activities to help maintain mental health and wellbeing.

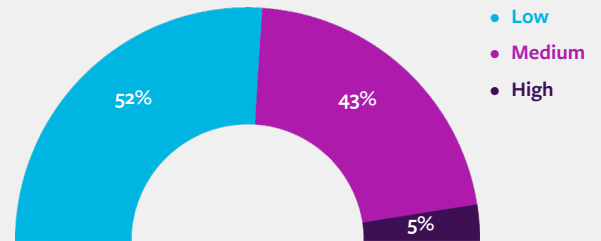


Mental health experiences

Industry workers also experienced poorer mental health during the pandemic, displaying elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This increase in poorer mental health is true of the experiences of many industries during the pandemic; however, given the entertainment industry may be among the last to recover, this increased stress, anxiety, and depression may be longer-lasting.

Pandemic-related fear

Generally, participants were not currently fearful of COVID-19, with only 5% indicating high fear. The factor most commonly rated as 'high fear' was watching news stories/social media about COVID-19, highlighting the role of the media in pandemic-related fear.



During the height of restrictions, more than half of all participants agreed that they were worried about:

	Worried	Not worried
Financial health	82%	18%
Loved one getting COVID-19	78%	22%
Own mental health	75%	25%
Social life	62%	38%
Physical health	54%	46%
Getting COVID-19	52%	48%



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Help-seeking and coping

Participants indicated they were most likely to turn to an intimate partner or a friend if they needed support, rather than accessing more formal services. The survey also found people were practicing more positive than negative coping strategies.



- Taking action to better the situation (85%).
- Trying to come up with a strategy about what to do (82%).
- Trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem positive (66%).




- Criticising myself (57%).
- Using alcohol or drugs to help get through it (35%).
- Given up the attempt to cope (14%).

Recommendations

This survey captures a single point in time and cannot conclusively say that COVID-19 was the cause of its results. However, given the timing of the study, its likely COVID-19 had a significant influence, and has had substantial negative impacts on those working in the entertainment industry particularly considering the levels of financial distress reported. Following these findings, and as we move into a post-pandemic environment, the below recommendations are made.

- **Foster the financial literacy and help-seeking behaviours** of entertainment industry workers, particularly as the industry will be slow to recover.
- Continue to provide **resources and information on financial assistance** and available government support.
- Promote opportunities to **help re-establish the professional and social networks** of entertainment industry workers.
- Consider the ways to **increase resilience, coping and help-seeking** amongst industry professionals.
- Support industry professionals' ability to **broaden their skill sets both within and outside the entertainment sector**, to increase resilience and adaptability to future events of industry downturn.
- Provide **career guidance and mental health and career-related upskilling opportunities** to future proof the industry against other large scale natural disasters or sudden changes to work opportunities.



48% of participants indicated drinking weekly (either 2-3 or 4+ times), but the majority (70%) had only 1-2 drinks in a sitting, in line with healthy drinking advice.