



Hidden Identities: **The challenges of** **being LGBTIQ+ at** **work in Australia**

2021 Report



 **indeed**

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Questions?

We'd love to discuss your diversity, inclusion and belonging initiatives. Please email aumarketing@indeed.com or reach out to your Indeed account manager to arrange a meeting.

Research methodology

The research in this whitepaper was commissioned by ThatComms Co on behalf of Indeed and conducted by YouGov. The study was conducted online between 11 - 17 February 2021, involving 2,060 working age Australians (aged between 18-64) currently in either full or part-time employment, or actively looking for work.

Age, gender and location quotas were applied to the sample and following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and location to reflect the latest ABS Australian working age population estimates.

Sources

¹ Comscore, Total Visits, March 2020

² Google Analytics, Unique Visitors, February 2020

³ *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ young people in Australia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2021

⁴ *Perspectives on LGBTI+ inclusion in the workplace*, PwC Australia, 2017

⁵ *LGBTQ+ voices: Learning from lived experiences*, McKinsey & Company, 2020

What does diversity and inclusion in the workplace really mean?

The society we live in is made up of a broad spectrum of human demographics, so it makes sense that employers are becoming increasingly committed to supporting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. But what does it mean in practice and why is it so important?

As a common phrase that's becoming ingrained in many workplace cultures, it's easy to think of 'diversity and inclusion' as having one complete definition. But to ensure diversity and inclusion becomes a reality in an organisation and not just another buzzword, it's essential to understand what these two words mean independently and how they function together in the context of work.

Diversity is representation and hiring in such a way your organisation reflects the global communities in which we operate.

Inclusion in the workplace is about the actions and behaviours we take to create a culture in which employees feel valued, trusted and authentic.

At Indeed, we also recognise and prioritise a third term; belonging.

Belonging at work is a feeling of community with the people and environments that make us feel connected.

In collaboration with YouGov, Indeed has carried out one of the most comprehensive studies into diversity and inclusion issues within Australian workplaces. Based on our in-depth research, this whitepaper focuses on some of the issues and challenges currently faced by Australia's LGBTIQ+ people at work.

The Indeed/YouGov survey found the majority of working Australians (84%) recognise the importance of promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace, but only 60% say they work for an organisation that employs a diverse workforce. Almost one-in-ten (9%) workers in Australia think their workplace has become worse at promoting diversity and inclusion since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, while 62% of the working population say they hide parts of their identity at work, this rises to 71% among LGBTIQ+ workers.

State of play: Many LGBTIQ+ employees aren't comfortable being open at work

Nearly all (96%) LGBTIQ+ people in Australia have disclosed their sexuality or gender identity to friends and most (88%) have felt supported by their friends afterwards.³ But despite growing awareness around how diversity and inclusion can contribute to the overall health of an organisation, the Indeed/YouGov survey commissioned by Indeed found these feelings of openness, respect, and acceptance – crucial hallmarks of inclusion – aren't being reflected in our workplaces to the same extent. Seven-in-ten (71%) LGBTIQ+ workers surveyed feel unable to consistently be open at work, with

20%

White collar workers are nearly 20% less likely to hide their sexual orientation at work compared to blue collar workers.

60%

Six-in-ten (60%) LGBTIQ+ employees say they don't feel they can be open at work.

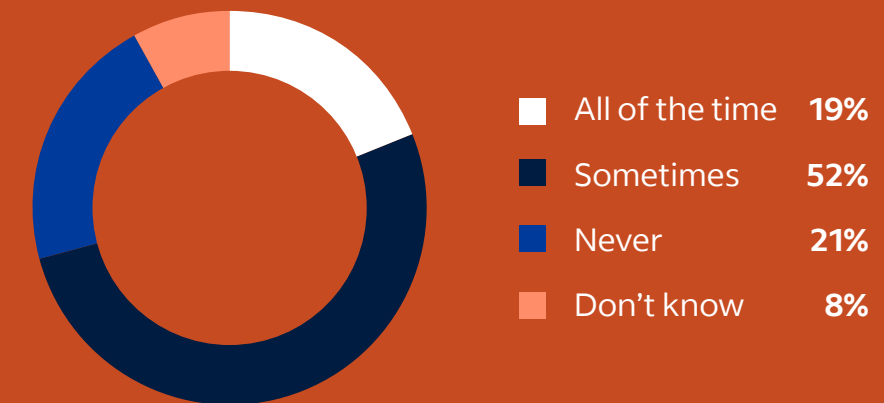
60% hiding their sexual orientation from their co-workers.

Some workplaces fare better than others for LGBTIQ+ workers. Eight-in-ten (81%) LGBTIQ+ workers in customer-facing roles like retail or hospitality say they hide their sexual orientation at work, followed by only six-in-ten (63%) LGBTIQ+ workers in office environments.

"I am concerned that I would experience negative outcomes by sharing that part of my identity."

– Female, 30, LGBTIQ+, VIC

Percentage of LGBTIQ+ employees who hide part of their identity 'sometimes' and 'all of the time'



Younger LGBTIQ+ workers are less likely to be their true selves than their older colleagues

20+%

18-34-year-old LGBTIQ+ employees are over 20% more likely to hide their sexual orientation at work than 35-49-year-olds.

Over the decades, Australia has taken huge strides towards recognising the issues and challenges faced by members of the LGBTIQ+ community and achieving equality. With this in mind, some might assume that a more progressive society means our younger generations find it easier to be open about themselves at work. Surprisingly however, the Indeed/YouGov survey reveals that 18-34-year-olds who identify as LGBTIQ+ are significantly more likely to hide their sexual orientation at work (69%) compared to those aged 35-49 (46%).

CASE STUDY

Craig Mack

Content and Social Media Strategist

Ambassador for R U OK? Day and Movember

The harmful effects of hiding the real you at work

**Q: In a nutshell, what do you do for work?**

I'm a freelance social media and content strategist, content creator, lecturer and speaker. I'm

also a model, and an Ambassador for suicide prevention charity R U OK? Day.

Q: The wide-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns around mental health in people who have never experienced issues before. Did you witness this in the work you do?

The pandemic disrupted the world and our lifestyles in so many ways—I think everyone has felt its impact to some degree. We've all had major changes to how we live, play and work. As the pandemic escalated, people living with a mental health condition needed additional support to minimise risk and harm. The true impact of the pandemic, and how essential mental health care and support services

are, is clear in the increasing number of people with no history of mental health experiencing conditions like anxiety and depression for the first time.

Q: Has there been less of a focus on D&I during COVID-19?

D&I is an important focus for all brands, however we know that in times of major crisis or change organisations scale back and focus on essential operations to minimise risk.

The pandemic does however provide the opportunity to consider challenges that may not have been previously thought of, and further improve D&I efforts. One example is the accessibility needs of people living with a disability, especially when working remotely.

Q: How do you define D&I?

D&I is about having the best mix of the right people at the table, actively participating in and influencing decision making. Because, even the most informed and open people have limits to their knowledge and understanding of the needs, challenges, and experiences of groups different to their own.

Q: Can you think of a good example of LGBTIQ+ inclusion in action in the workplace?

I worked at an organisation that genuinely valued and supported their people, and this was never more obvious than in the effort made to support a transgender colleague through their transition.

Before our colleague returned to work as herself, the HR team proactively invited LGBTIQ+ organisations like the Gender Centre to speak to the team, providing education

Each of the letters of the LGBTIQ+ alphabet is a different group of people... You can't look at the acronym as one thing.

on the transgender community and their needs. As a mandatory event, the intent was to break down stigma and mystery, answer questions, and create understanding and empathy. This made the colleague's return to work a welcoming, comfortable and accepting experience.



Q: According to our research many people feel the need to hide part of their identity at work. Why do you think this is the case?

When I was younger I felt that I would be treated differently or not be taken as seriously if people knew I was gay, or if I acted "too gay". Being the only gay person in the room can be challenging, as everyone – including us – has experiences, beliefs, and perceptions that influence how we treat each other.

Q: What are the broader consequences on employees' mental health and wellbeing of not being able to be themselves at work?

When you feel you can't be yourself at work, and that you have to fit someone's else's ideals of who you should be, choosing to participate automatically creates an inauthentic version of yourself. You build up barriers, relationships don't feel built in truth, and you know that you're not accepted for who you really are. Keeping up another persona also diverts energy and focus that should be given to the work, so performance can suffer as well.

Q: What advice can you give to businesses when considering their D&I strategies for the LGBTIQ+ community?

Don't lead with generalisations. Understand that yes, there's a community, but that each of the letters of the LGBTIQ+ alphabet is a different group of people with different needs, different wants, experiences, challenges and perspectives. You can't look at the acronym as one thing. Each is a different group with unique needs. And within each group, you're dealing with individuals. While you're thinking about how to build representation, it needs to be done with the respect that not everyone is going to resonate with what you're doing. Your policies won't speak to everyone.

Q: How can businesses improve their D&I programs?

So often organisations develop and launch an internal program, campaign and comms to engage employees in a desired message and change. After the launch it's never really spoken about again, and a few months later nothing has changed.

Engaging D&I experts, or credible voices from the community your work is designed to support, is integral to developing appropriate programs and resources. We know that change takes work and focus, and never happens overnight. Develop a plan that recognises this and tools to measure success along the way.

A fear of discrimination?

So, what could be causing the generational gap in how comfortable LGBTIQ+ employees feel being open at work? Although not always the case, it's fair to say professional experience and seniority often correlate with a person's age; this could mean older workers who are established in their field feel more confident about being judged for their skill and ability over their personal characteristics. In contrast, younger and more junior workers might fear discrimination which could harm their career progression at an early stage.

In another study by PwC⁴, it was discovered that almost half (47%) of LGBTIQ+ employees who are not 'out at work' think there would be a negative impact on future promotions if they were. Meanwhile, a worldwide McKinsey study⁵ found 40% of LGBTIQ+ women feel they need to provide extra evidence of competence for career advancement compared to their peers.

"I feel uncomfortable sharing those intimate details as I fear the judgement that would follow."

– Female, 23, LGBTIQ+, QLD

Beyond Blue, one of Australia's leading mental health and wellbeing support organisations, recognises that obvious acts of discrimination at work, such as refusing a promotion to a LGBTIQ+ employee, is still the lived experience of many who are open about themselves in the workforce. With discrimination having the potential to lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and depression, the organisation calls for all Australians to better understand the hallmarks of discriminatory behaviour while respecting people who are different.



What's holding back our workplaces?

There are many reasons why employees might develop a poor perception of how their organisation treats minority groups such as people's personal experiences, the experiences of others, or even a lack of communication and awareness around the values, behaviours, and practices which

support diversity and inclusion. According to the Indeed/YouGov survey, more than one-in-ten LGBTIQ+ employees don't think they're treated equally at work, while nearly twice as many aren't confident action would be taken if discrimination occurred. That's something to be concerned about.

13%

More than one-in-ten (13%) LGBTIQ+ people feel that they are not treated equally where they work.

"I feel like I'll only be putting myself in danger of bullying and harassment."

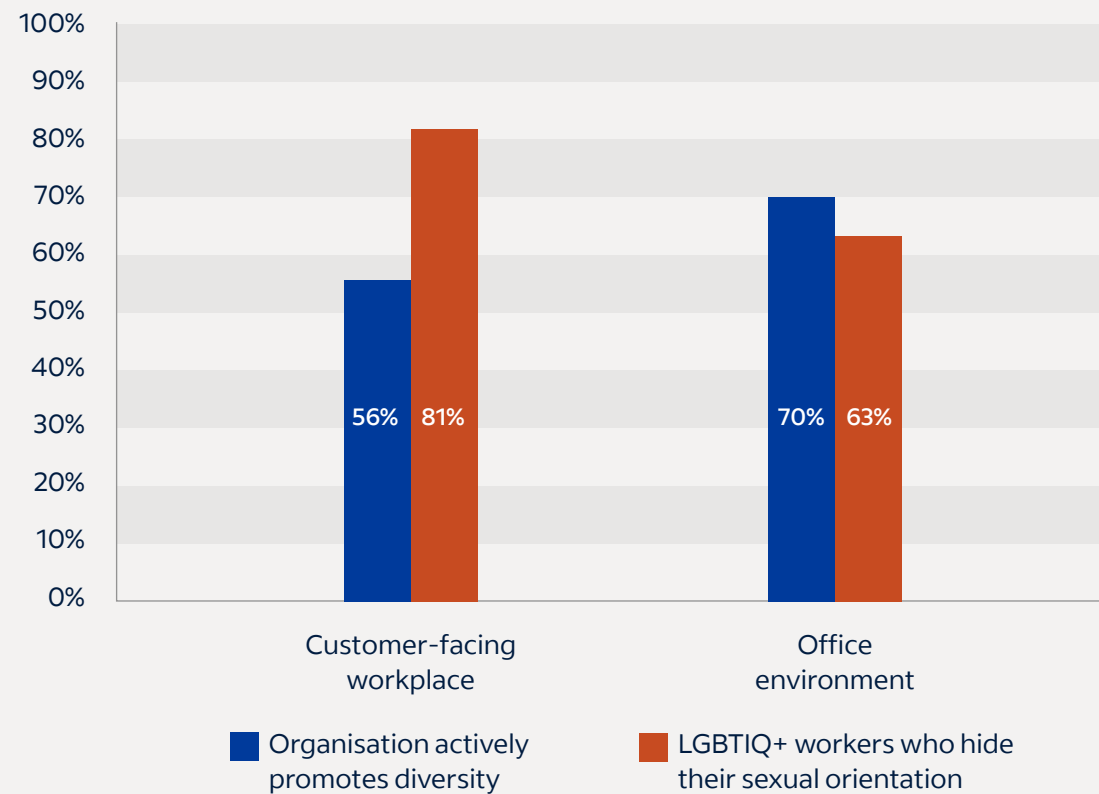
– Male, 25, LGBTIQ+, NSW

"I'm afraid that once the secret is revealed, there will be a shift in being treated differently."

– Male, 26, LGBTIQ+, VIC

20%

One-in-five LGBTIQ+ people (20%), work in places where they are not confident action would be taken in response to discrimination.

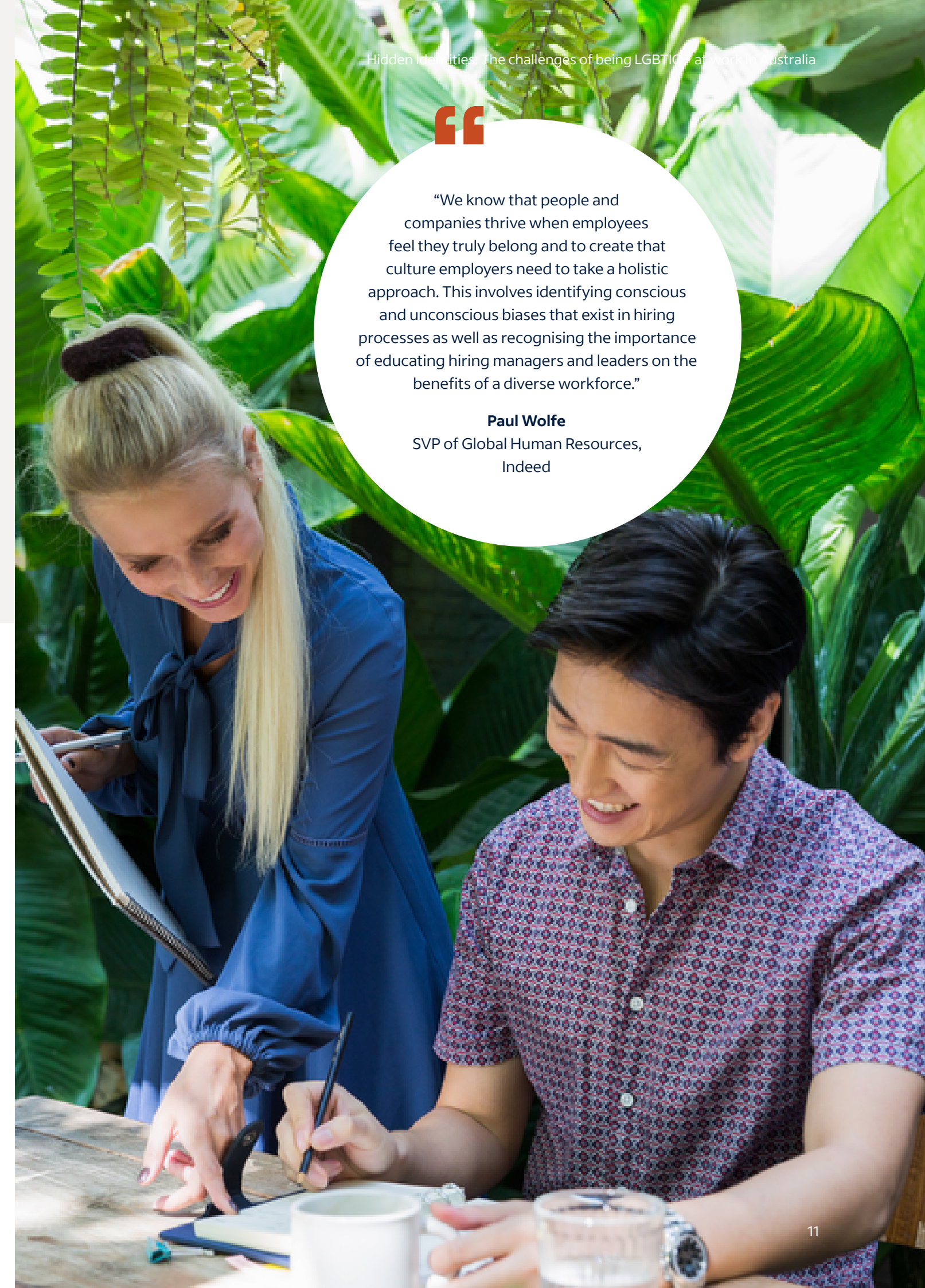


The link between leadership and feelings of inclusion

Interestingly, the Indeed/YouGov survey shows that 70% of LGBTIQ+ employees in office settings think their organisation actively promotes diversity while only just over half (56%) in the retail sector think their employer promotes diversity.

Eight-in-ten (81%) LGBTIQ+ workers in customer-facing roles like retail or food, say they hide their sexual orientation at work, followed by only six-in-ten (63%) LGBTIQ+ workers in office environments.

The correlation between the comfortability of LGBTIQ+ workers being their true selves at work and the perception that their workplace supports diversity emphasises the crucial role leaders can play in promoting the type of inclusive workplace cultures that gives confidence to LGBTIQ+ employees. A [study](#)⁴ into LGBTIQ+ inclusion in the workplace by PwC shows nearly three-quarters (72%) of LGBTIQ+ workers who feel genuinely supported are comfortably 'out at work'.



"We know that people and companies thrive when employees feel they truly belong and to create that culture employers need to take a holistic approach. This involves identifying conscious and unconscious biases that exist in hiring processes as well as recognising the importance of educating hiring managers and leaders on the benefits of a diverse workforce."

Paul Wolfe

SVP of Global Human Resources,
Indeed

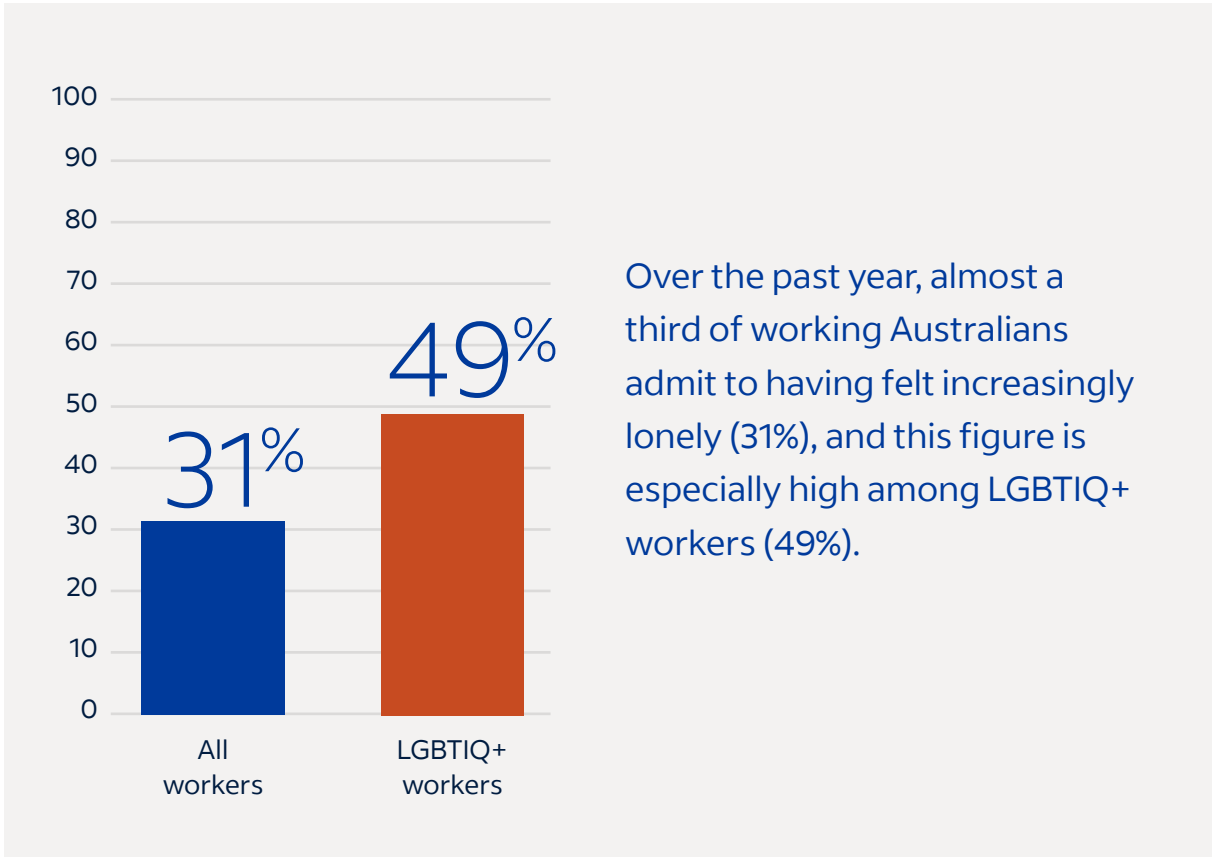
The impact of COVID-19 on LGBTIQ+ workers

Not surprisingly, job insecurity has been a major contributor to Australians' health and wellbeing issues over the past year. Overall, more than half of working Australians have experienced stress and anxiety (51%), with around six in 10 of LGBTIQ+ (62%) experiencing stress and anxiety over the past year.

While the personal impacts of COVID-19 have been widely reported, experiences of loneliness and feeling unsupported have been less widely reported. Over the past year, almost a third of working Australians admit to having felt increasingly lonely (31%), and this figure is especially high among those who identify as LGBTIQ+ (49%).

The events of 2020 shone a spotlight on the importance of diversity, inclusion and belonging and the need to remove barriers to create more equal workplaces and opportunities for all.

While our research shows some employers are prioritising these issues, others may be falling short of giving them the attention they need by failing to support environments that enable everyone to bring their true selves to work. With many people in the LGBTIQ+ community already experiencing challenges outside the workplace, employers have a huge opportunity to help improve the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ workers which, in turn, supports greater productivity and innovation.



Building a workplace that includes everyone

Here are four tips for building a workplace where everyone feels welcome.

1. Educate your employees

It's important to train recruiters and hiring managers to recognise unconscious bias and how to act against it. Unconscious bias is a social stereotype that a person may hold outside of their own awareness, about another person or group.

To limit the role of unconscious bias in your company's hiring process, consider enlisting professional trainers to help educate your employees on common blind spots that can be difficult to spot on your own.

2. Make job descriptions gender neutral

Keeping [gendered language](#) out of job descriptions may help job seekers to see possibilities they may not have considered before. Certain words, such as “dominant,” “competitive” and “driven” are commonly associated with masculinity. Meanwhile, words such as “interpersonal” and “support” are often associated with being feminine.

Using gender-coded terms like these in your job ads can impact whether a job seeker feels like they belong at your company, and may even deter certain candidates from applying.

3. Tell good stories

People love a good story, and good employee stories can do wonders to demonstrate your company's inclusive and welcoming culture. Stories can take the form of articles, videos, a social campaign, or even reviews—just make sure you promote them.

If you have a page for sharing company news such as an Indeed Company Page, you could spotlight employee stories there. Claim your free Indeed Company Page at: au.indeed.com/hire/company-pages

4. Start an inclusion resource group (IRG)

One great way to support diversity and inclusion in the workplace all year round is to start an Inclusion Resource Group. IRGs are voluntary, employee-led groups that serve traditionally marginalised or underrepresented employees via both formal and informal events (like structured meetings to address complex issues impacting the community, or virtual coffee chats) so members can casually connect.

At Indeed, employees have formed groups including iPride, Women at Indeed, Parents and Caregivers, and the Access group for people with a disability. Any employee interested in supporting their aims and efforts can join. With ongoing support and resources, IRGs can help contribute to a culture of inclusion and belonging in the workplace.

