2022 – First Nations workplace experiences

Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

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 response set specifically related to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations[1]) people in the workplace, and where possible compares this to all other respondents[2].

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

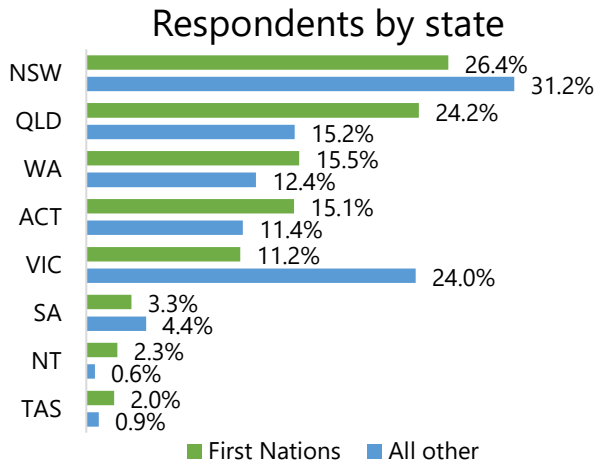
In 2022, 1.8% (n793) of respondents indicated they were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a slight reduction in the proportion from the previous two years (2021: 1.9% n842, 2020: 2.0% n670).

Location

The majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort are based in NSW (26.4%) and Queensland (24.2%).

These two states have had the largest proportionate representation for the past three years.

Queensland has the highest proportion of Aboriginal vs non-Aboriginal respondents, and state by state, proportionally, more respondents from the NT, TAS, QLD, ACT, WA identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander than the average population across the country.



[1] The term First Nations is used to identify any individual who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
[2] Please note: when referring to "all other respondents," we are referring to those who do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

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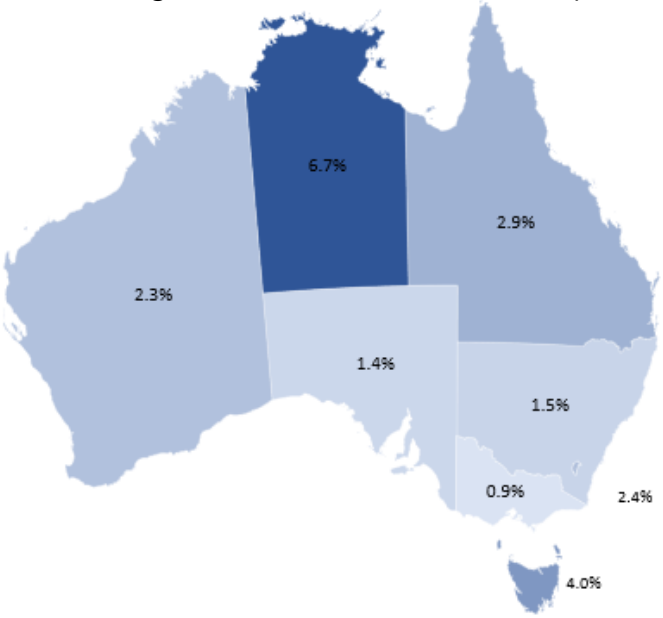
Victoria has the lowest proportion of Aboriginal vs non-Aboriginal respondents (11.2% vs 24.0% of total responses).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more likely to identify as working outside of metro areas.

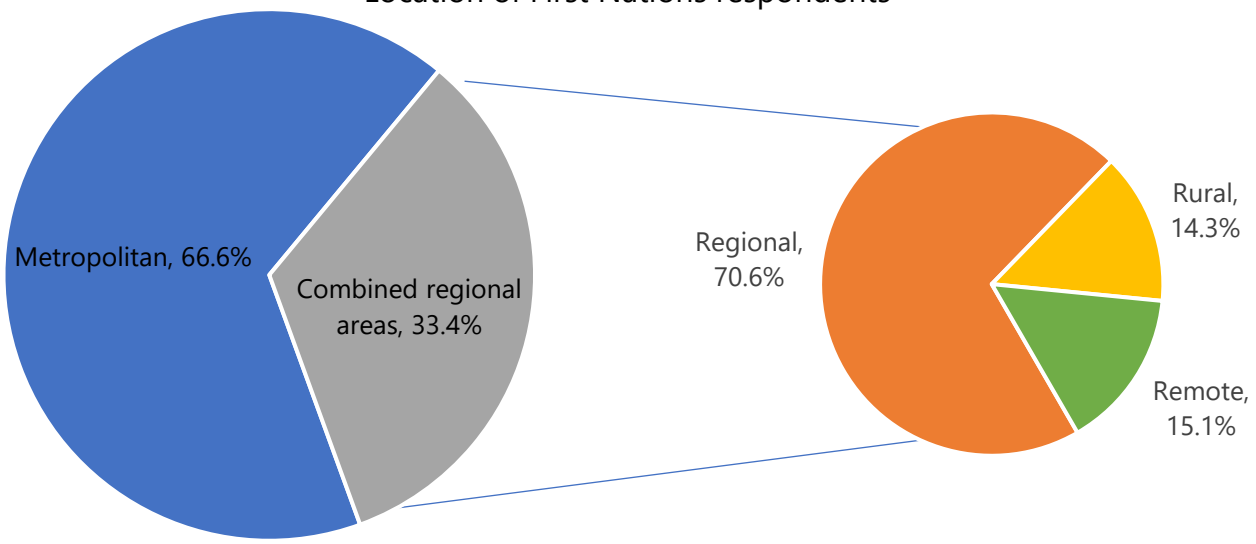
2 in 3 respondents (66.6%) advised they are working in metropolitan workplaces. Of those outside of the metro areas, 70.6% are in regional centres, 15.1% in rural settings and 14.3% in remote areas.

When we compare this to the total other responses, 82.7% work in metropolitan areas,

% of Aboriginal and/Torres Strait islander respondents



Location of First Nations respondents



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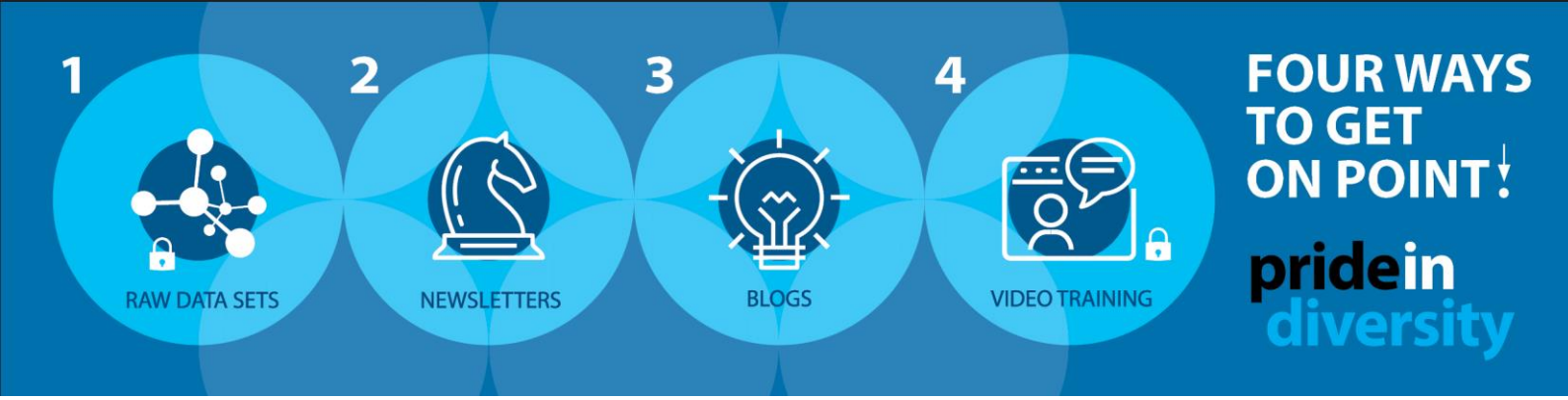


In the workplace

There is no significant difference in employment type (full time, part time etc) between the two cohorts, though compared to 2021, 82.4% of First Nations respondents are in a full time position, down 2.5% points (2021: 84.8%), and 9.2% are in a part time position up from 7.4% in 2021. Length of time with current employer is also similar, though 45% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents have worked with their current organisation under 3 years compared to 39.8% of others. 42% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents have worked with their organisation for more than 5 years.

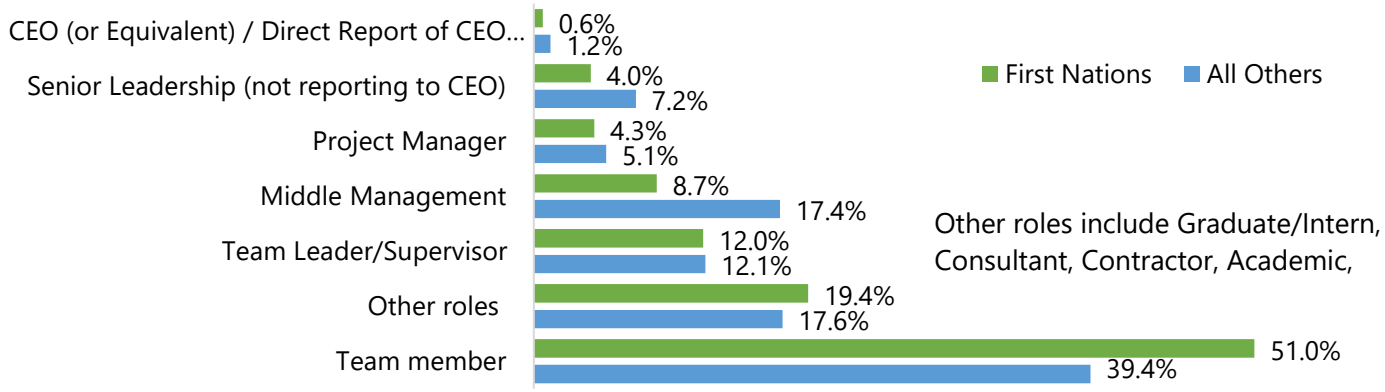
The sector population differs between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other respondents. Federal Government is the top-ranking employment sector for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at 43.3% (only 25.4% for other respondents) and only 31.0% work in the private sector compared to 51.2% of others.

Industry allocations are similar between the two cohorts. Public sector, Education, and Law enforcement come in the top 5 for both, though the Public Service has been selected by 32.9% vs 16.8% of others. Rounding out the top five for First Nations employees are Mining and Community Services, with almost double the respondents, while Banking and Professional Services take the final two places for the other respondents.

Top 5 industries

	Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander		All others	
Rank	Industry	%	%	Rank
1	Public Service	32.9%	16.8%	1
2	Mining	9.2%	5.5%	6
3	Education	8.3%	7.2%	3
4	Law Enforcement	6.9%	5.5%	5
5	Community Services	5.0%	2.6%	13

First Nations respondents are less likely to identifying working in management roles. 51% identify working in a team member position, and 29.6% have identified a supervisor or management role compared to 39.3% and 43.1% of other respondents.



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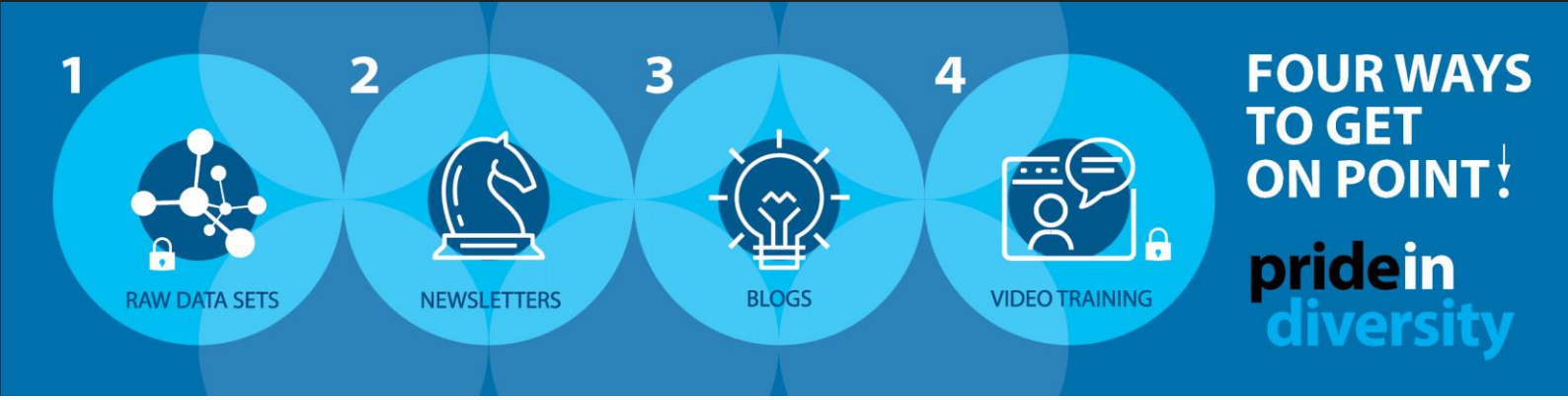
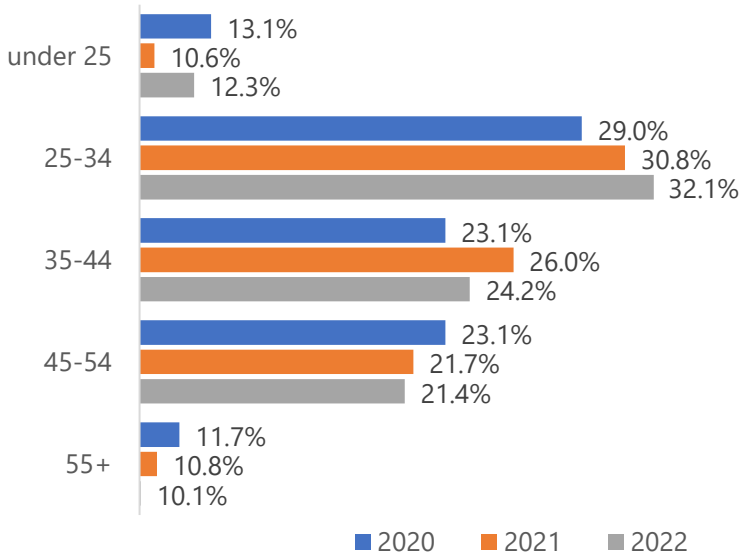
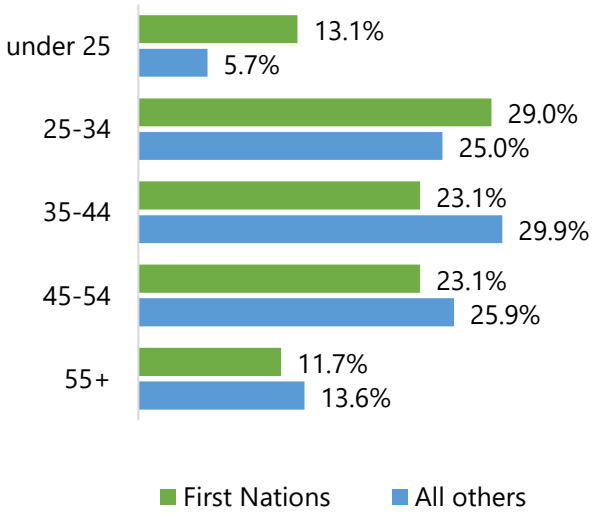


Age

Ages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents have shifted over the past three years, with a greater proportion advising being under 35.

When comparing age between the First Nations populations and all other respondents, First Nations respondents are twice as likely to be under 25 (13.1% vs 5.7%).

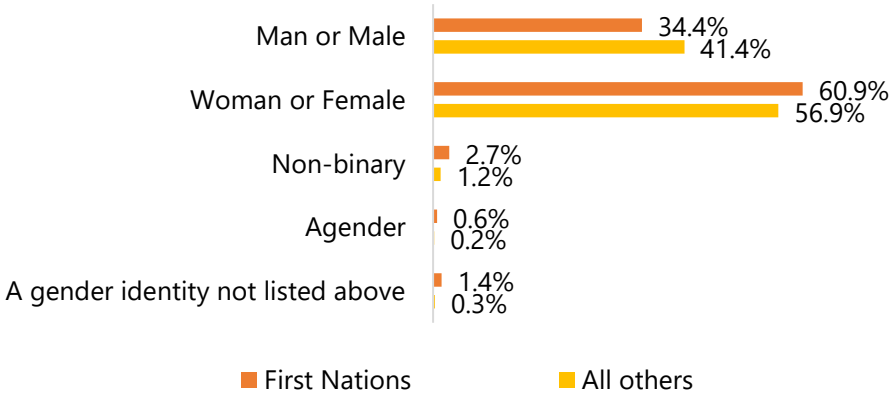




Gender Identity & Pronouns

Of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, 60.9% identify as ‘women or female’, and 34.4% as 'man or male’. This compared with 56.9%:41.4% for all other respondents.

Employees who identify with a gender other than man or woman have participated in the survey at a greater rate than the rest of the population, with double the proportion of non-binary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders providing responses.



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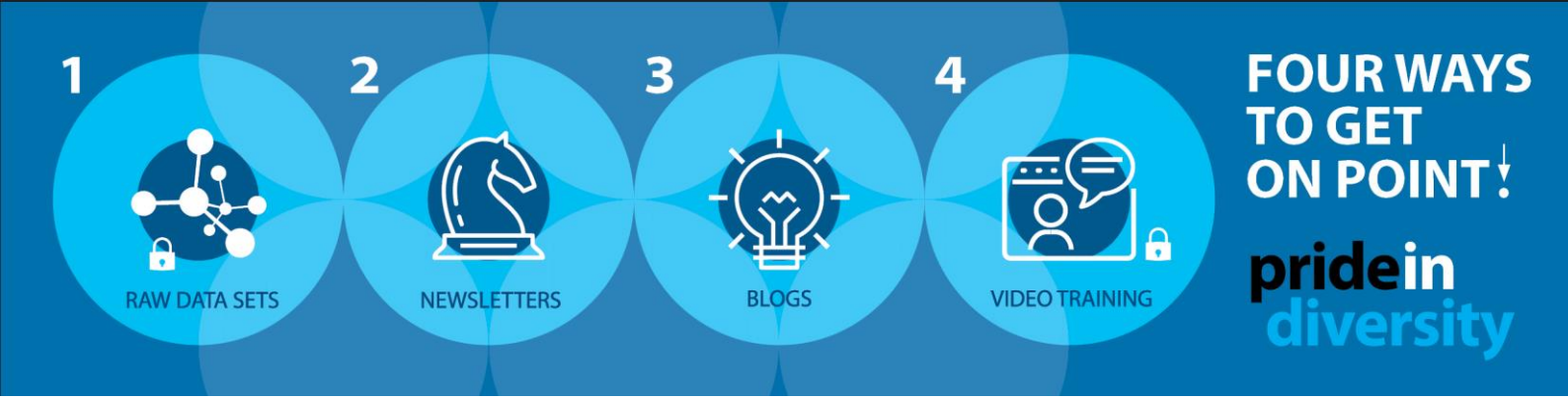
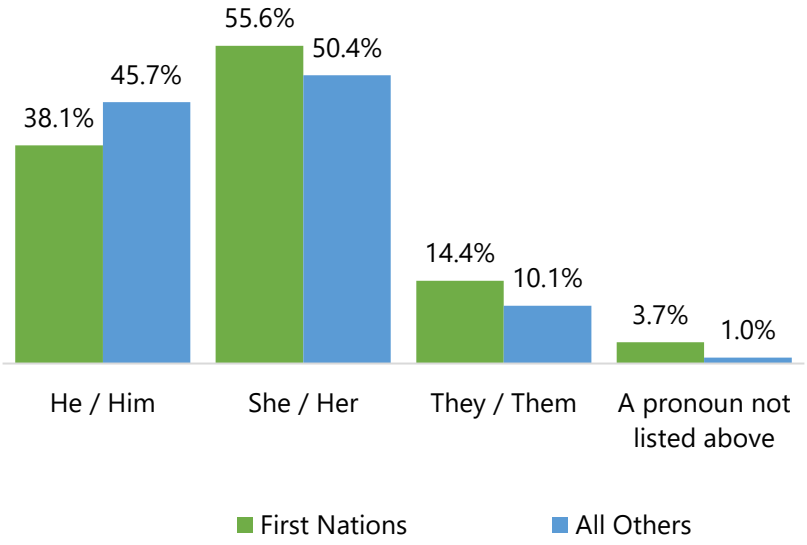
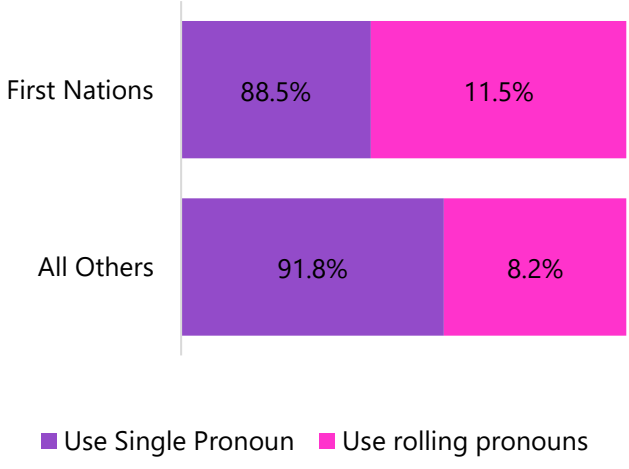


Use of gender-neutral pronouns is higher in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations when compared to all others. 14.4% vs 10.1% use they/them pronouns and 3.3% vs 1.0% use pronouns other than he/him, she/her or they/them. Individuals choosing to use rolling pronouns are also higher within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, with 11.5% advising they are using more than one set of pronouns (e.g. she/her & they/them) (all others: 8.2%).





General Views

When asked to consider personal beliefs and views on inclusion of people of diverse sexuality and/or gender in the workplace, in many areas support with statements is over 80%, though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents are slightly less likely to agree with:

- 4.3% points lower for "I personally support the work my organisation does for the inclusion employees of diverse sexuality and/or gender" (82.5% vs 86.8%)
- 3.9% points lower for "Work in this aspect of diversity & inclusion has a positive influence on organisational culture" (80.9% vs 84.8%)
- 2.7% points lower for agreement that "it is important that employers be active in this area of diversity & inclusion" (82.3% vs 85.0%)
- 1.5% points lower for agreement that "Romantic relationships between people of diverse sexuality and/or gender are just like any other" (87.5% vs 88.9%)

First Nations respondents were less likely to be raised in an environment where "same-sex relationships or gender diverse people were not easily accepted" (45.4% v 49.3%), and more likely to agree that their "organisation needs to put more effort into this aspect of diversity and inclusion" (52.4% vs 43.6%)

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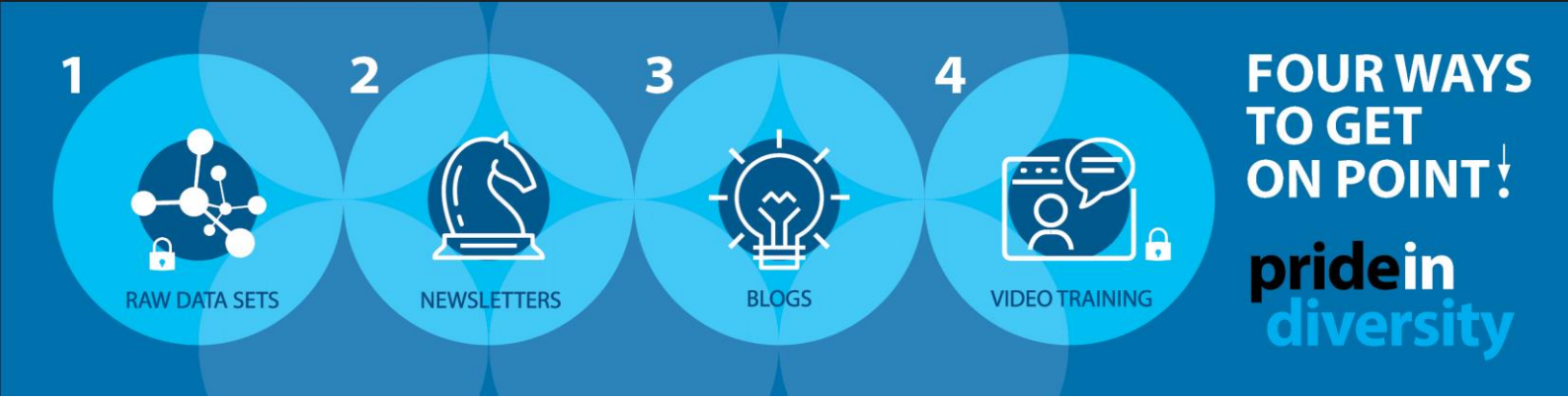
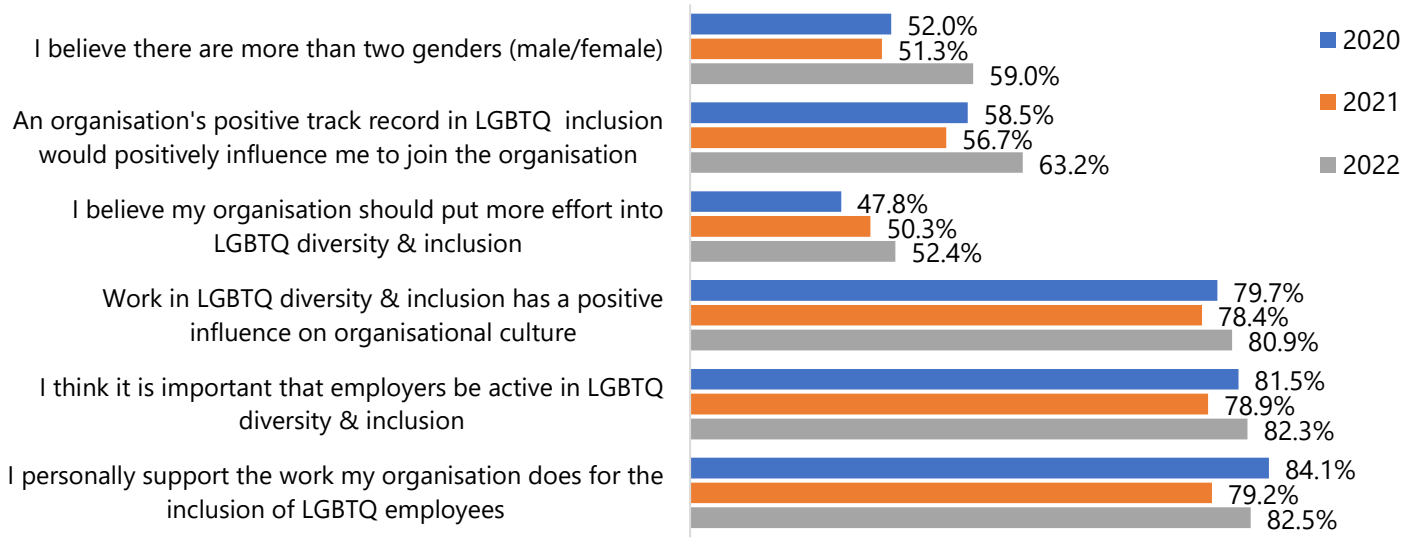


No difference is seen with agreement that there are more than two genders, (59.0% vs 58.9%), and First Nations respondents have increased their agreement over the past 3 years from 52% in 2020. Other positive movements over the past three years are the agreement that an organisation's positive track record in LGBTQ inclusion would influence them to join the organisation, and that inclusion has a positive influence on organisational culture.

Visible signs of inclusion



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents advise that they see organisational support for LGBTQ employees at lower rates than all other respondents.

- 63.2% agree that they have heard executive leaders speak about LGBTQ inclusion, 10% points lower than other respondents at 73.2%.
- Communication about work related initiatives is 8% points lower (70.1% vs 78.1)
- Visible signs of the organisation's support are identified by 73.1% vs 81.4% of all other respondents.

Identification that awareness training has been offered (55.9% vs 65.7%) and attendance at awareness or ally training (35.2% vs 40.6%) are also lower.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ employees are identifying these visible signs of inclusion at lower rates than the others, though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and are more likely to understand the importance of organisations putting work into this area of diversity and inclusion.

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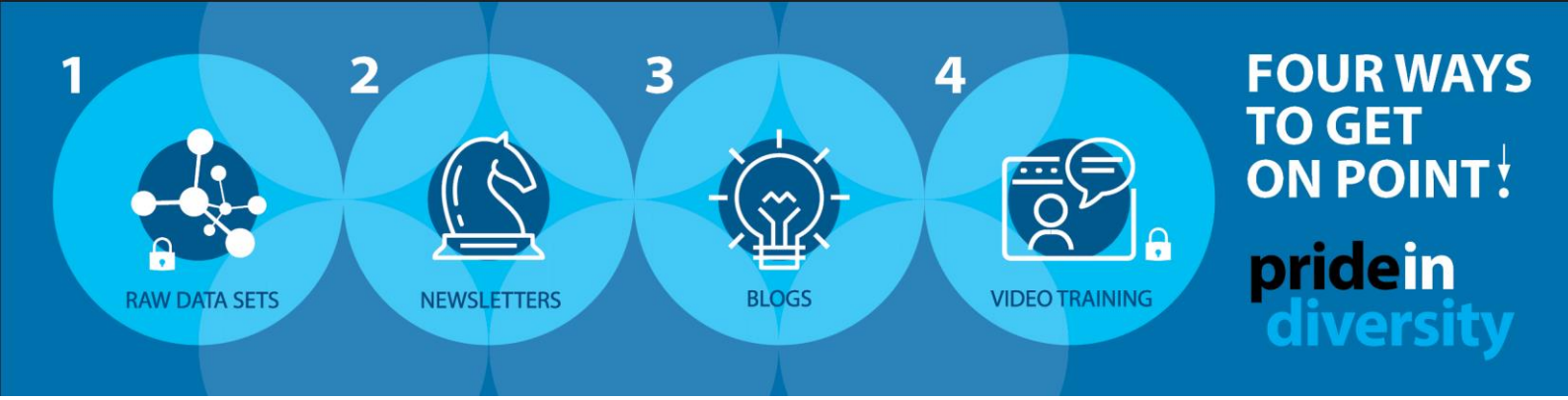

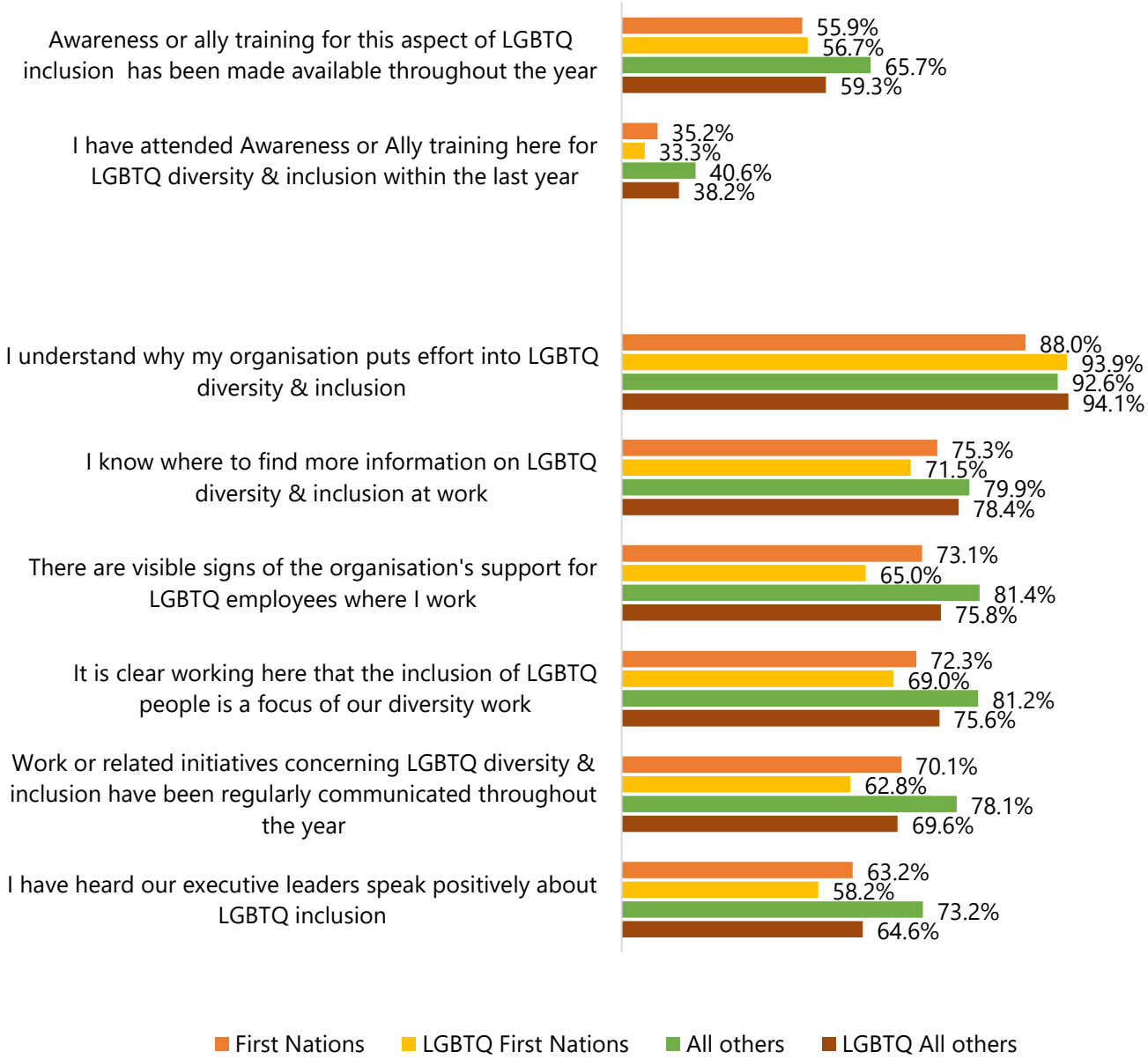

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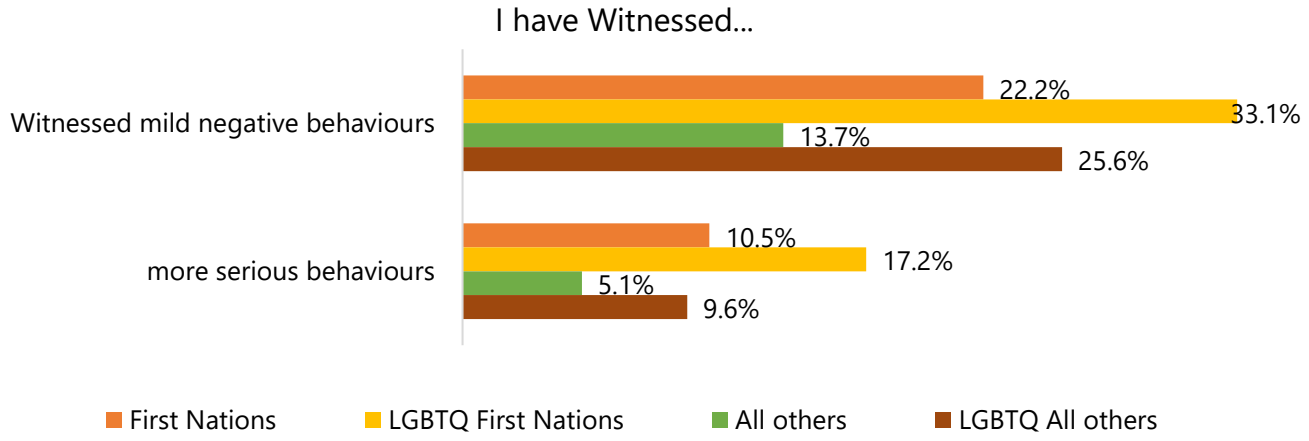
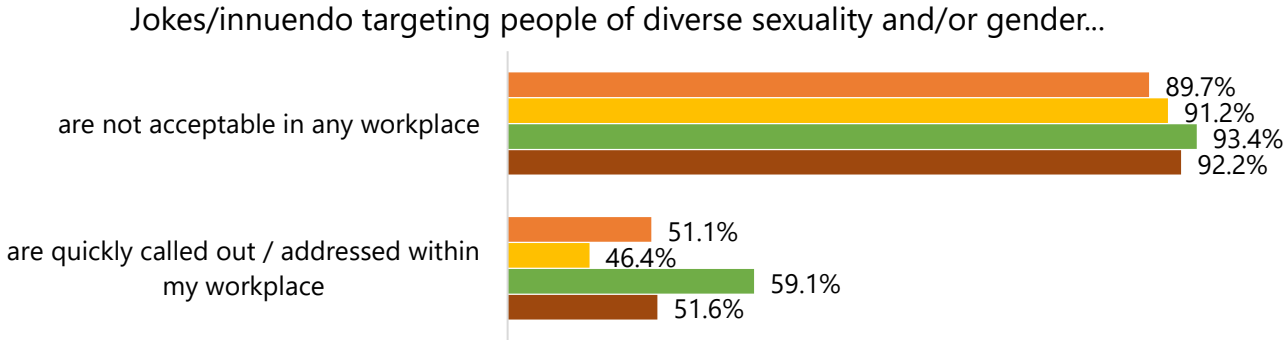
Bullying and harassment behaviours

Witnessing negative behaviours is higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, both when looking at the whole cohort or those that are LGBTQ, when compared to all other respondents.

22.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents have witnessed mild, and 10.5% more serious behaviours, compared to 13.7% and 5.1% respectively for all other respondents. This increases to 33.1% &17.2% of LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents.



89.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees believe that jokes or innuendo targeting LGBTQ people are not acceptable in the workplace, but only 51.2% believe that their workplace calls out this behaviour. Only 46.4% of LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents believe organisations are addressing these actions.



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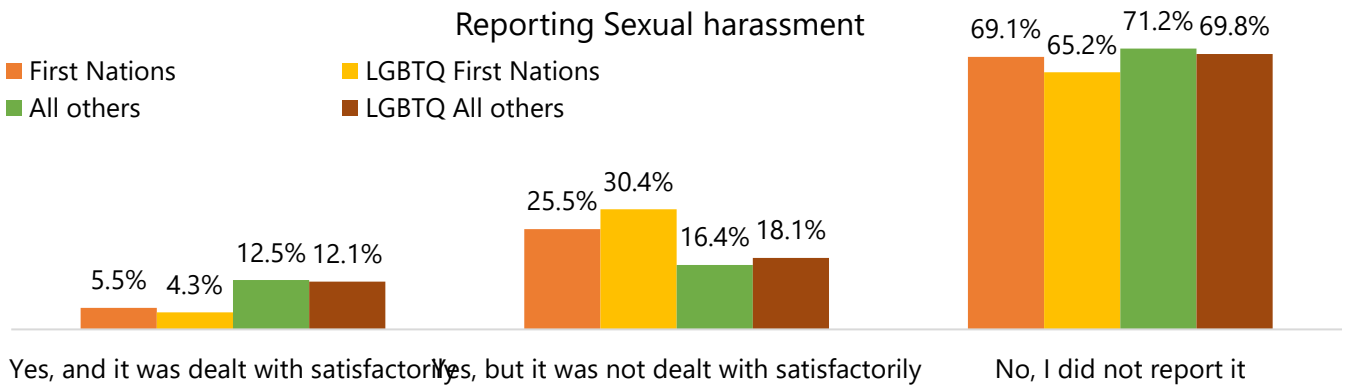
Regarding sexual harassment, 7.0% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents advised that they have experienced sexual harassment within the past 12 months compared to 2.5% of all other respondents. In the majority of cases (56.4%) this harassment has occurred more than once but less than monthly, with 15% advising daily or weekly harassment taking place.

For those who identify as LGBTQ this increases to 8.8%. with 52.2% experiencing this more than once but less than monthly and 17.2% experiencing it daily or weekly in the workplace.

69.1% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees advise that they did not report this behaviour, which is less than all other respondents at 71.2%. 25.5% advised they did report but that it was not delt with satisfactorily. For LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, 30.4% reported with unsatisfactory outcomes, and 65.2% did not report at all.



Health and Wellbeing

Feelings of Health and Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents have declined over the past three years. Most significantly, respondents are advising less agreement with feeling mentally well at work (2022: 65.9%, 2021: 66.9%), having a sense of belonging (2022: 67.4%, 2021: 70.0%), and being engaged with their organisation (2022: 71.3%, 2021: 76.8%)

These rates reduce even further when comparing the 2022 data between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and all others, and between the LGBTQ respondents of both cohorts.

- 61.7% of First Nations LGBTQ respondents advise they "feel mentally well at work", compared to 65.9% for the total population
- "feel a sense of belonging" 63.6% of the time vs 67.4% for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, and 72.9% for LGBTQ non-Aboriginal respondents.

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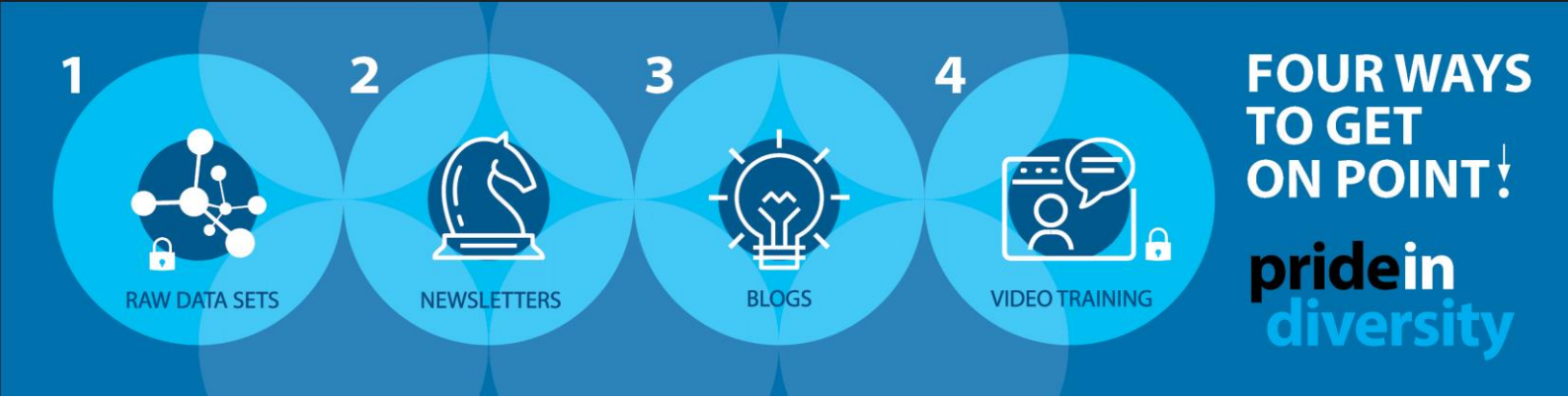
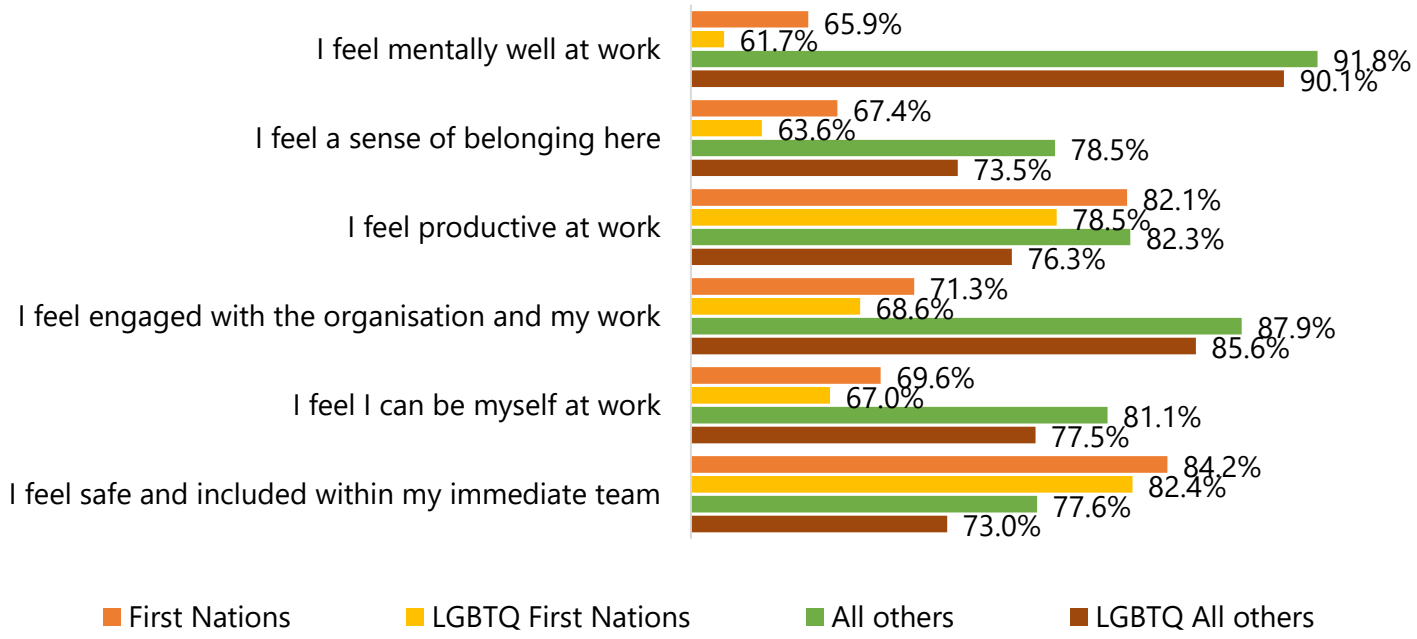
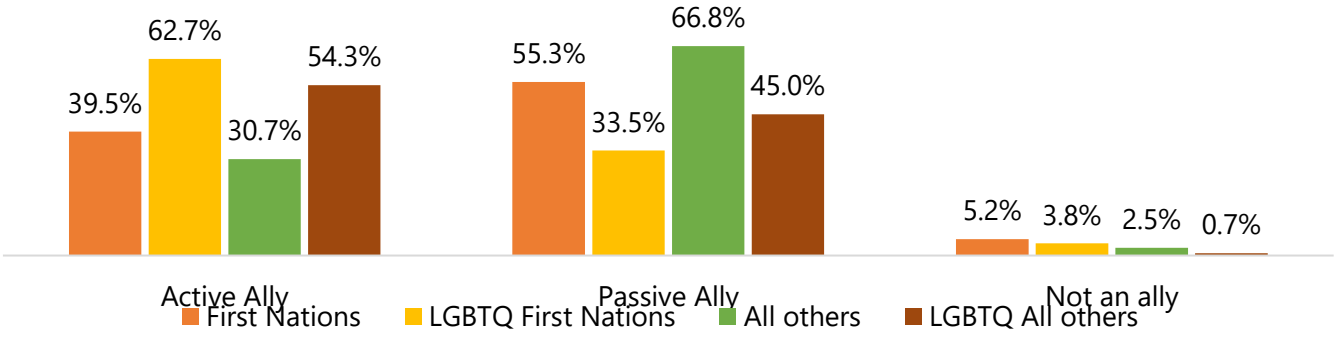




This trend of lower rates of health and wellbeing in the LGBTQ population is mirrored across all areas, whether the comparison is between regional or metropolitan, or by age. Those who identify as LGBTQ vs those who do not continue to have lower feelings of belonging and connection within their organisations.

Allies and their impact.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents are allies at greater rates than all other respondents, and this significant difference is still present between the two cohorts when looking at only LGBTQ folk. 62.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ employees advise they are active allies. Unfortunately, there is a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who are 'not an ally' than for all other respondents (5.2% vs 2.5%).



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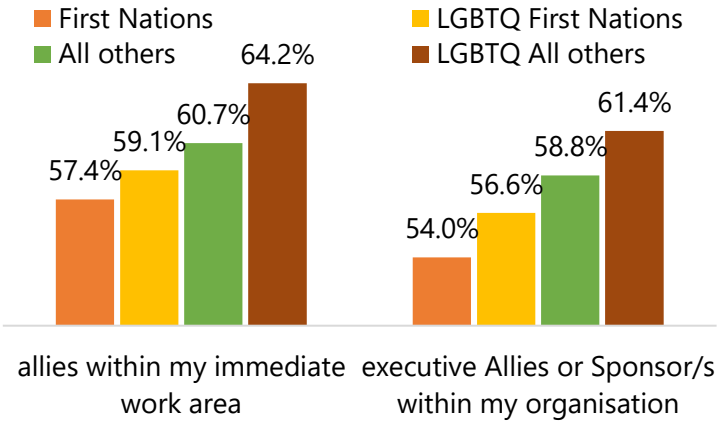
57.4% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents know of active allies within their immediate area, and 54.0% know of active executive allies or sponsors. For LGBTQ respondents that increases to 59.1% and 56.6% respectively. However, all other respondents are still aware if allies at greater rates.

The disparity continues with the knowledge of why active allies are important, with a 5.1% point difference between LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and all others (88.3% v 93.4%)

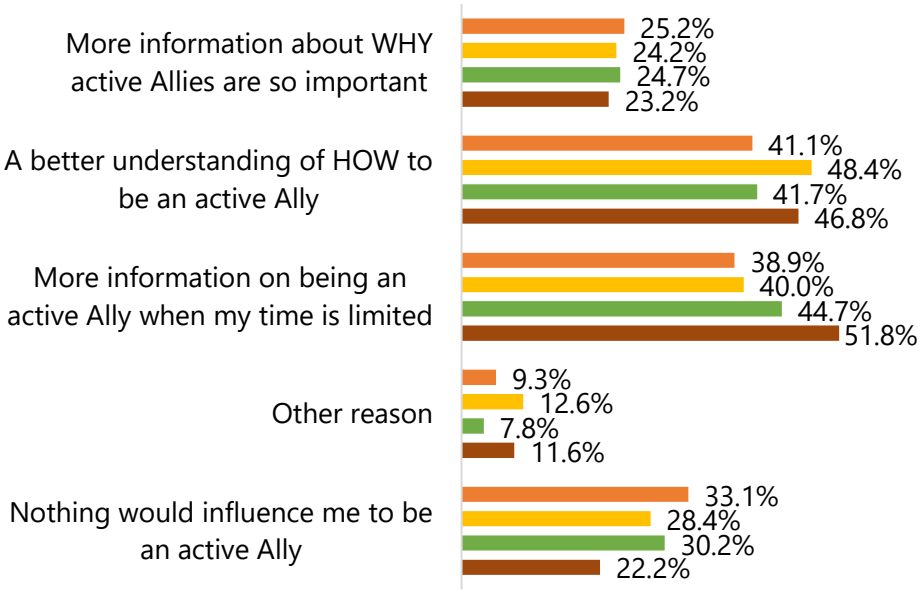


Regarding reasons why respondents are not an active ally, a greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents feel being active would be "in conflict with their personal beliefs" (13.1% vs 8.4%), and are "concerned about being the target of jokes" (8.6% vs 3.9%)

Feeling that being an active ally would be "frowned upon by someone with influence over their career" is more than double for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, with 7.1% agreeing compared to 3.8% of all other respondents. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ respondents this increases to 13.5% vs 10.8% for all other LGBTQ respondents.

20.2% of respondents agree they are not active because they do not have any personal interest in LGBTQ respondents, which drops to 9.4% of LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Being too busy is still the primary reason, though less so for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (35.5% vs 42.3%)

In order to influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to become active allies, 41.1% are asking for more information on how to be an active ally, and 38.9% would like more information on how to be active when busy.



Concerningly 28.4% of LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents believe there is nothing that could influence them to become an active ally.

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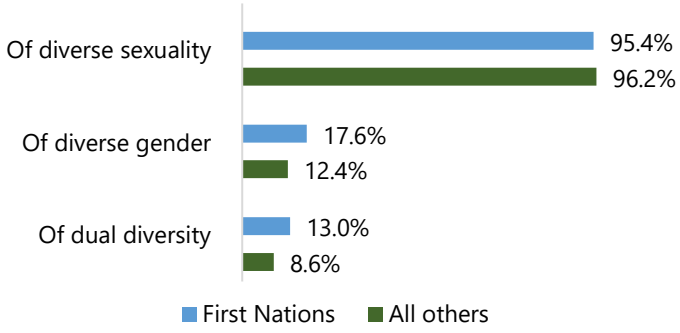
Aboriginal &/or Torres strait Islanders and LGBTQ Diversity

In 2022, 1 in 3 First Nations respondents (33.0%) identify as LGBTQ. Of these, 95.4% identified as being of diverse sexuality (n250), 17.6% of diverse gender (n46). Included in the total cohort, 13.0% identify with both a diverse sexuality and diverse gender or trans experience.[3]

In comparison, only 18.1% of all other responses employees are identified as LGBTQ. First Nations respondents are significantly more likely to identify with both diverse sexuality and gender (13.0% vs 8.6%).

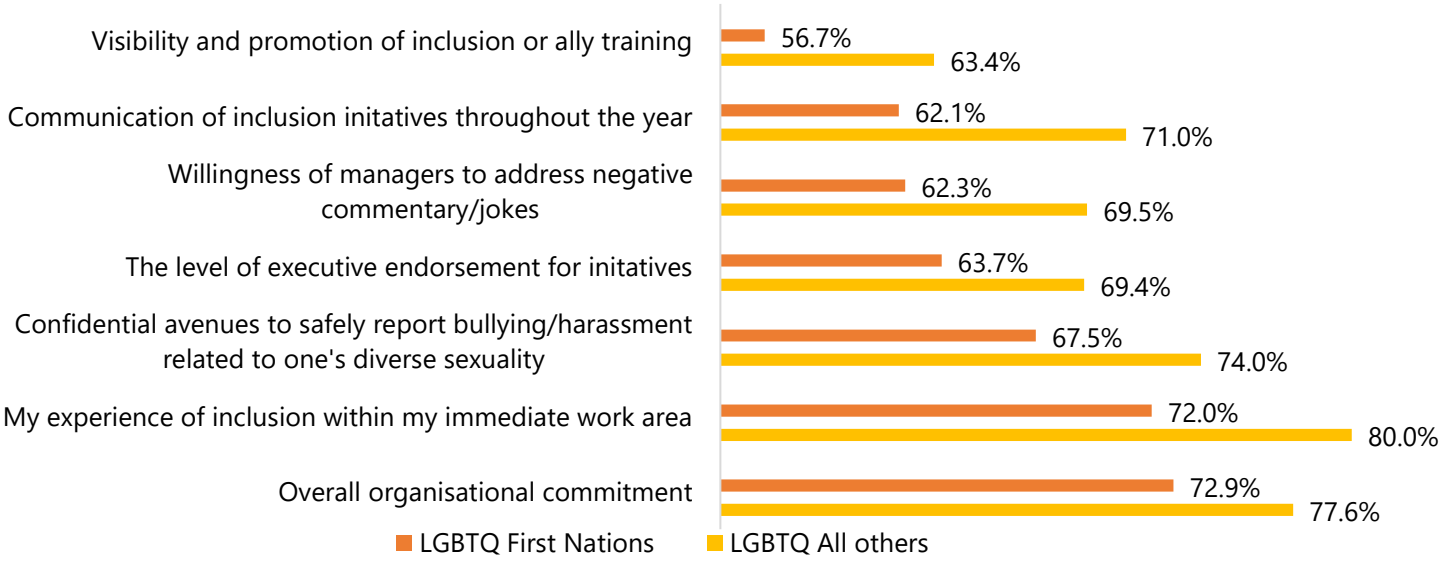


NOTE: dual diversity numbers are also included in diverse gender and diverse sexuality %

The experience of LGBTQ First Nations respondents when considering if the organisation met or exceeded their expectations with workplaces practices on inclusion is generally less favourable than all others.

Only 62.7% of LGBTQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents feel that the visibility & promotion of in employee network has met their expectations (all others 73.0%). Only 50.4% feel communication of inclusion initiatives during recruitment, and 59.1% that the visibility of active allies, met or exceeded expectations; this remains low at 56.8 & 62.4% for all other LGBTQ employees.

Workplace practices for LGBTQ inclusion



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

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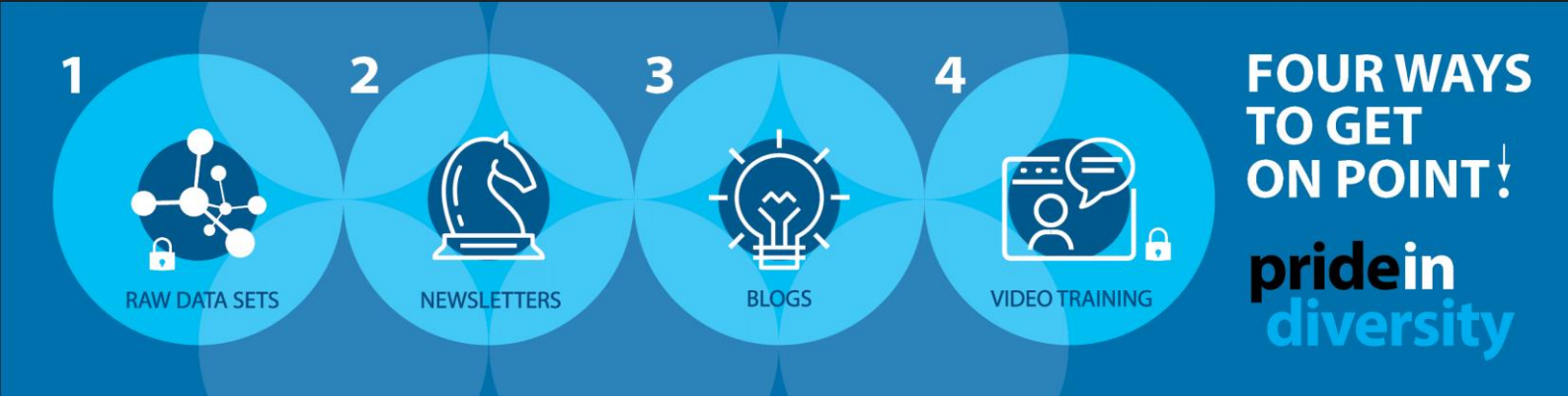
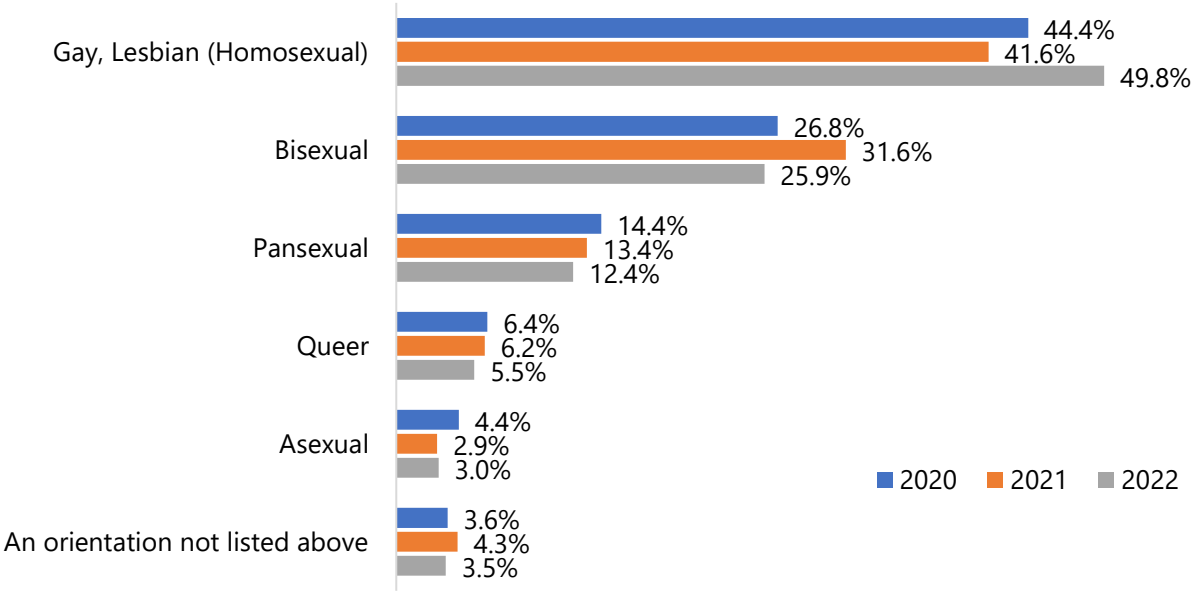
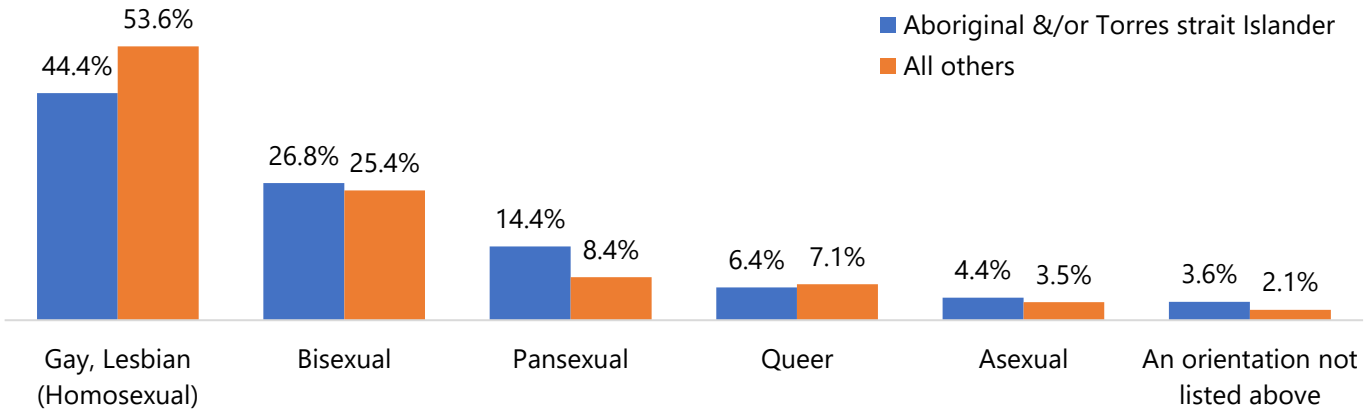


Diverse sexuality

In 2022, 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents advised their sexual orientation is other than straight, though respondents are not showing the same trend of declining proportions identifying as gay/lesbian and increasing numbers identifying as Bisexual and Pansexual across the past three years as we have seen in other sections of the data. After a drop last year, 49.8% of respondents have advised they are gay or lesbian. In 2022, 38.3% advise they are bisexual or pansexual, compared to 45.0% in 2021 and 40.8% in 2020.



When compared to all other respondents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are less likely to be gay/lesbian and more likely to be pansexual. All other orientations show around 1% point difference.



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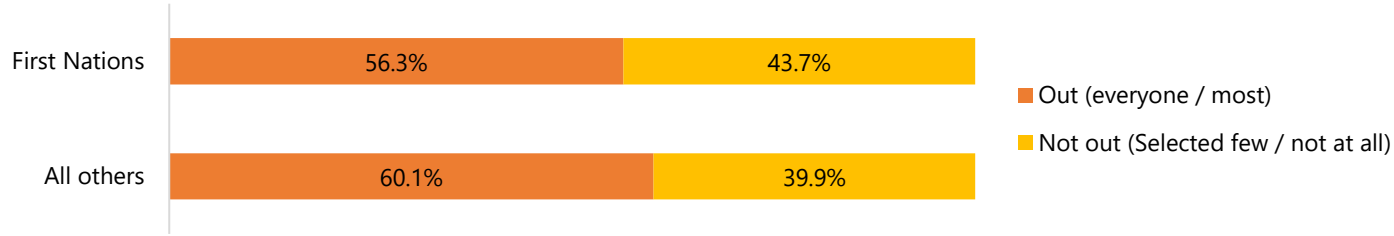
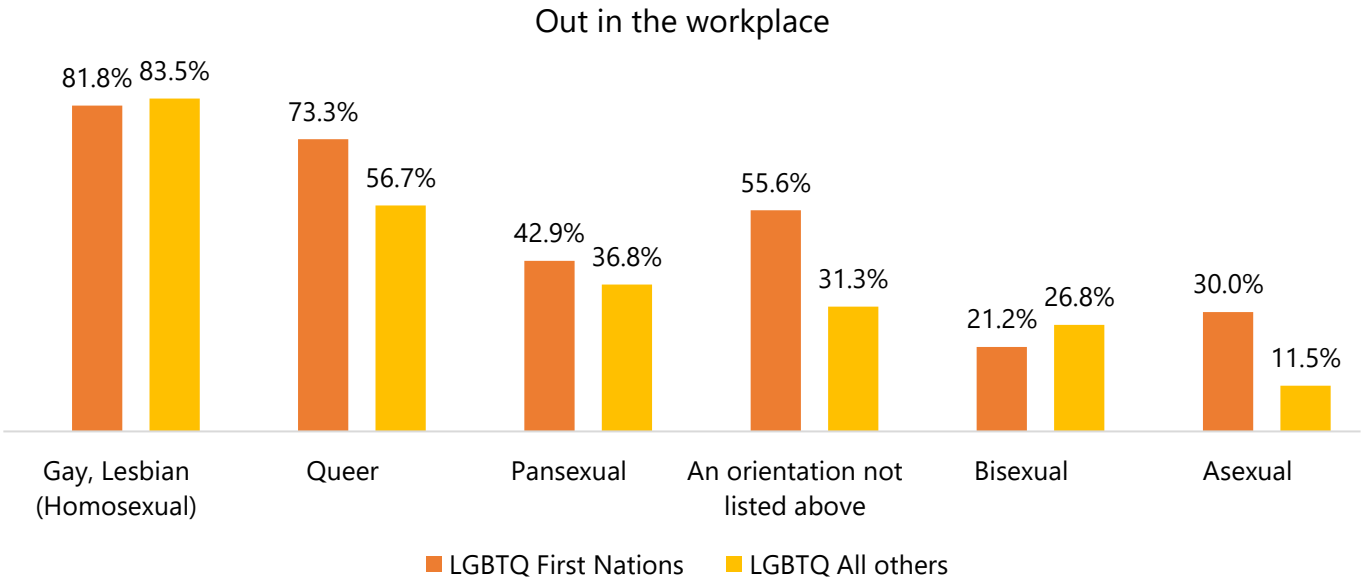
Being out at work



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents are less likely to be out regarding their diverse sexuality than all others. 81.8% of gay or lesbian identifying respondents are out in the workplace, while bisexual respondents are least likely to be out (21.2%). This differs from the all other responses, where the least likely to be out are those who identify as asexual.



Regarding gender identity and diverse sexuality, those identifying as non-binary are most likely to also be out about their diverse sexuality (83.3%), followed by Man/male, (75.6%), Agender (66.7%) and woman or female (41.1%). Those identifying with a gender not listed are out only 37.5% of the time.

When looking at age, those 18-24, 35-44 and 55-64 are all out 60.0% of the time. The least likely to be out at work are those in the 45-54 age group (44.1%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents in metropolitan areas are out at slightly higher rates than those in regional/rural and remote areas (57.0% vs 54.8%)

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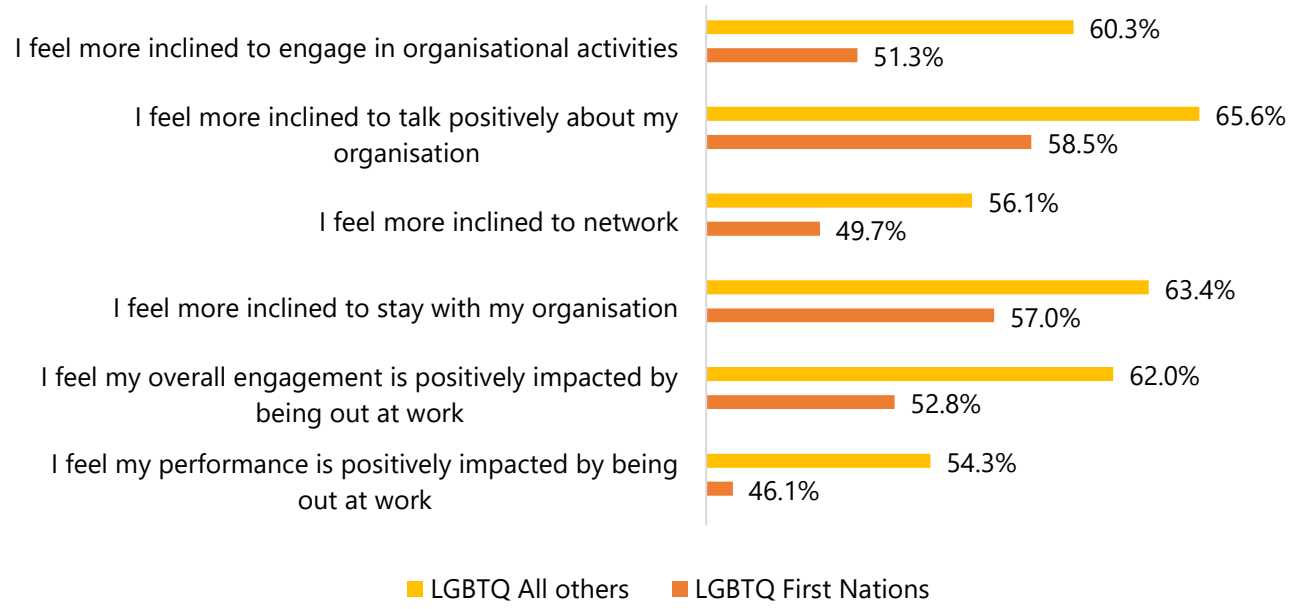
Experiences of being Out in the workplace

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents out in the workplace, performance and engagement is not as high as the all other respondents.

46.1% agree that their performance is positively impacted by being out at work (All others: 54.3%), Overall engagement being positively impacted is 52.9% vs 62.0%, and feeling inclined to engage in organisational activities is 9% points lower (51.3% vs 60.3%).



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees out in the workplace are also advising that they have been the target of unwanted jokes and innuendo as a result of their sexuality at higher rates (18.6% vs 10.6% of all other respondents of diverse sexuality), and 8.8% vs 4.8% have been the target of more serious bullying/sexual harassment targeting their diverse sexuality.

Feeling safe to report these incidents is lower in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. For mild behaviours 71.1% agree they would report to their manager, 10% points lower than all respondents, and for more serious behaviours reporting to HR the difference is 8.3% points, (70.6% vs 78.9%).

Those not out in the workplace agree that not being comfortable within themselves is the top reason (38.7%), with 33.0% advising they do not feel that it would be accepted by some members of their team. These are similar percentages to the all other response cohort. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are less likely to cite the current social /political sphere as an impact on their willingness to be out (26.4% agree vs 31.7% of all others).

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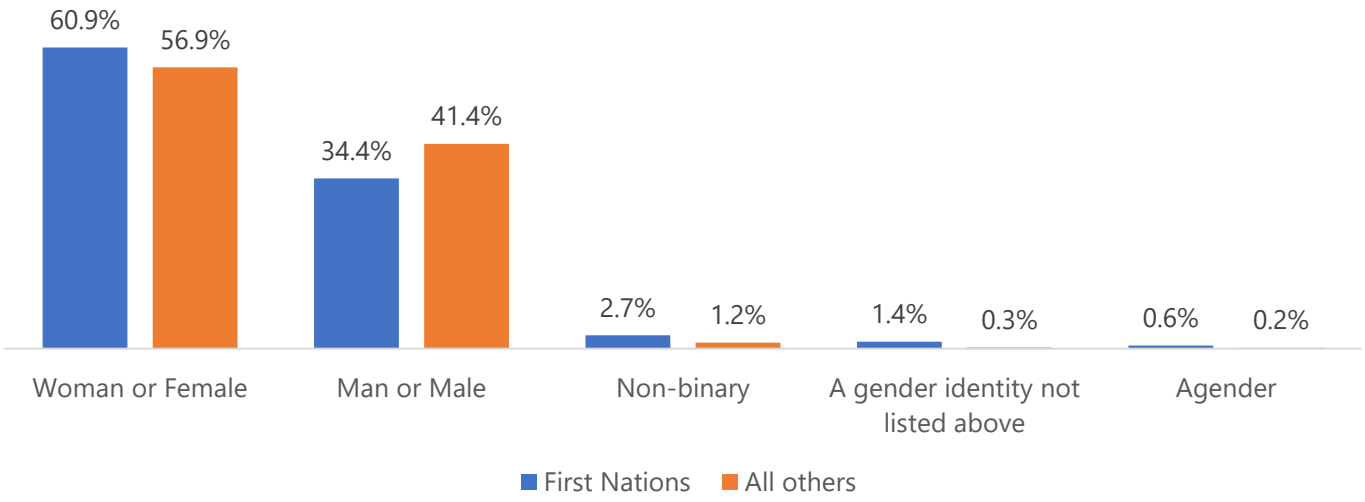
Diverse gender and/or trans experience

17.6% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents have been identified to be of diverse gender; they are more likely to identify with non-binary identities (4.7% vs 1.7%) and were proportionally more women respondents (60.9% vs 56.9%) than all other respondents.



Recruitment experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents of diverse gender have worsened from last year. Those facing barriers around background/criminal checks rose from 4.9% in 2021 to 7.1% in 2022. Only 28.6% agreed that the recruitment process was inclusive of diverse gender applicants, down from 36.6% last year.

Fears of being discriminated against rose from 27.9% to 33.3%, and feeling disadvantaged during the recruitment process almost doubled from 4.9% to 9.5% this year.

When compared to the rest of the responses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents are:

- less likely to feel that applications forms are inclusive, (21.4% vs 28.4%)
- Less likely to feel the recruitment process was inclusive (28.6% v 34.0%)
- less likely to disclose their gender diversity during the application process (11.9% v 19.3%)
- more likely to feel disadvantaged during the recruitment process (9.5% vs 7.1%).

On the positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents are:

- less likely to fear being discriminated against due because of their gender identity (33.3% vs 45.8%)
- less likely to fear being outed during the recruitment process (16.7% vs 19.0%)
- less likely to have faced barriers with background (7.1% vs 8.4%) or reference checks (7.1% vs 7.4)

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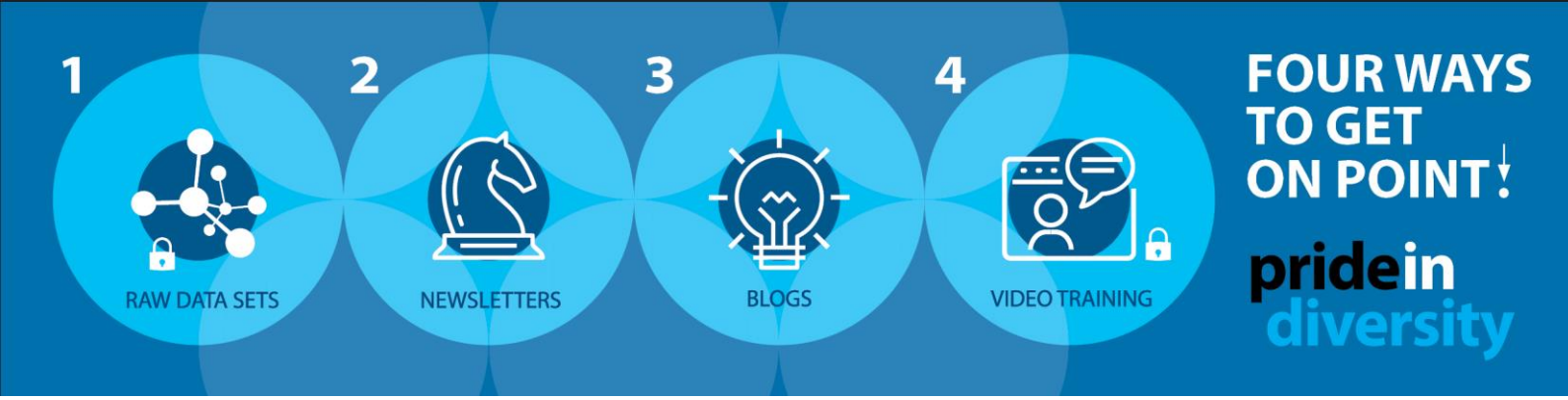
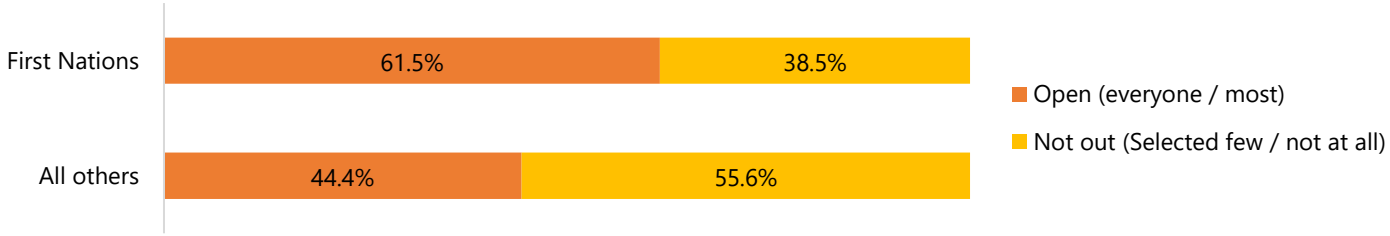


Being Open at work

In 2022, 37 respondents provided information regarding their experiences of being out or not out in the workplace regarding their diverse gender or trans experience.

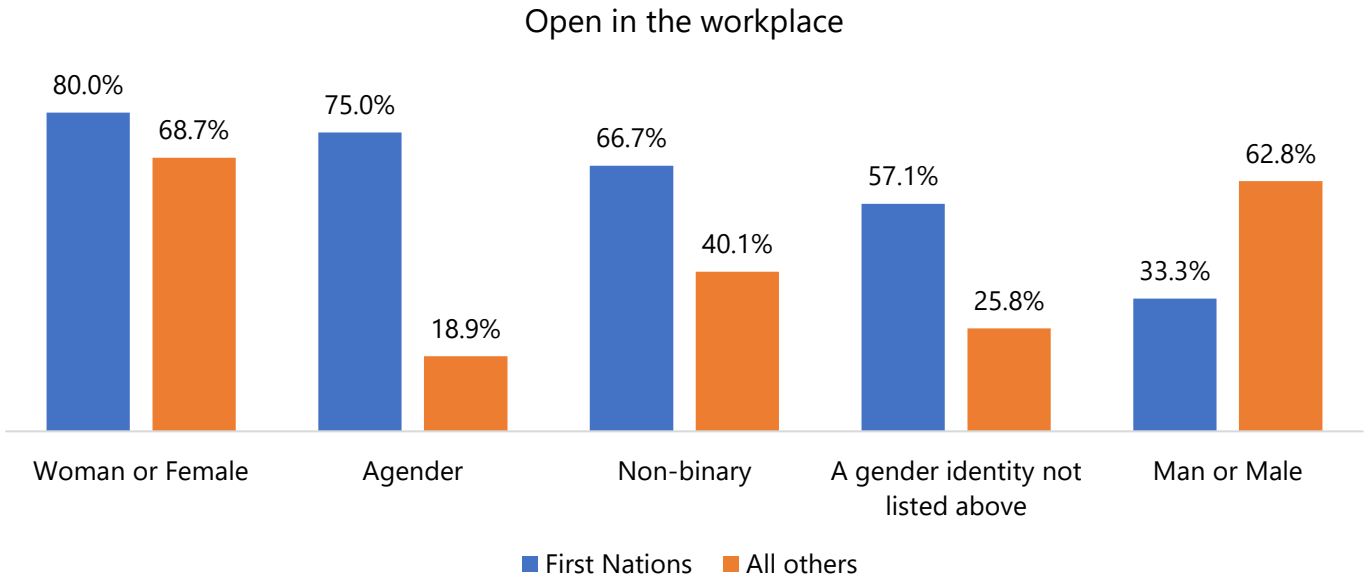


The proportion of those open to everyone or most in the workplace increased by 19% points to 64.5% from 42.5% in 2021.

First Nations respondents are more likely to be open in the workplace regarding their diverse gender and/or trans experience with a 17.3% point difference between First Nations and other respondents.

Of the 37 First Nations respondents, those identifying as 'woman or female' are more likely to be open in the workplace than any other gender identity, with those identifying as 'man or male' the least likely to be open.

66.7% of those in city areas are open, while only 57.1% of those in regional areas are open.



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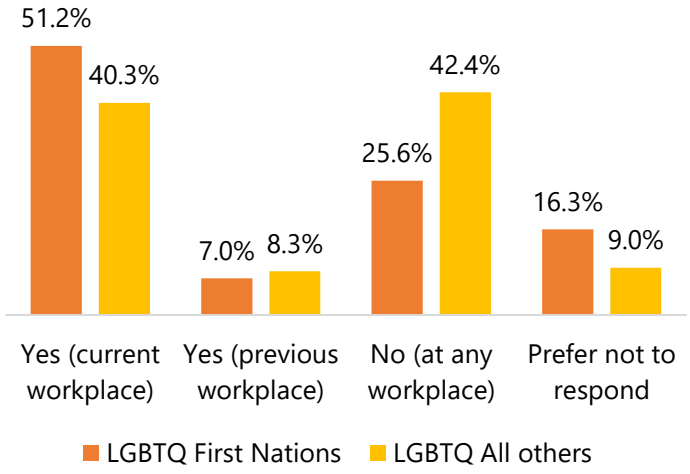
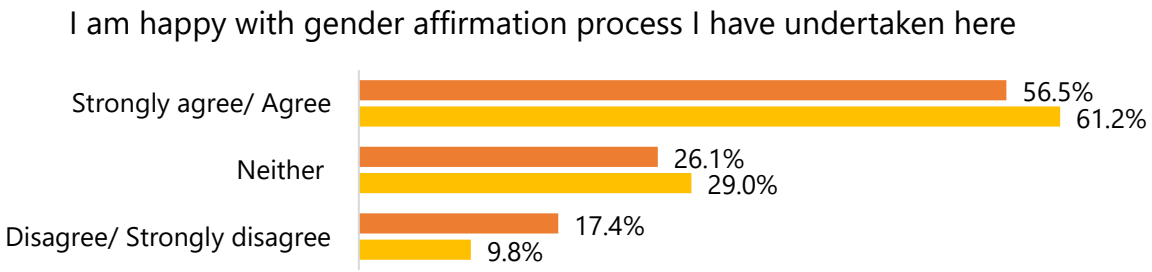
Gender affirmation in the workplace

In 2022, 51.2% of First Nations respondents of diverse gender or trans experience advise that they have affirmed their gender in some way (legally/medically/socially) in the workplace.

For those who have affirmed their gender in their current workplace, 56.5% are happy with the process that they have undertaken in the current workplace, while 17.4% are not happy with the process.

This differs from the all other LGBTQ population with only 9.8% being unhappy with the process.





Experiences of being out or not out in the workplace

First Nations people who are open in the workplace, do not feel that colleagues are making an effort to use their personal pronouns at the same rate as all other respondents (54.2% vs 64.3%), and for both cohorts, just over 20% feel that colleagues have deliberately misgendered them in the past 12 months.

Workplace initiatives are also not having the same level of positive impact on personal feeling towards their own gender diversity.

Interestingly, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islanders are advising experiencing less exclusion based on their gender diversity than all other respondents (70.8% vs 6.5%)

In all other areas First Nations and all other respondents are advising similar levels of support, comfort and inclusivity.

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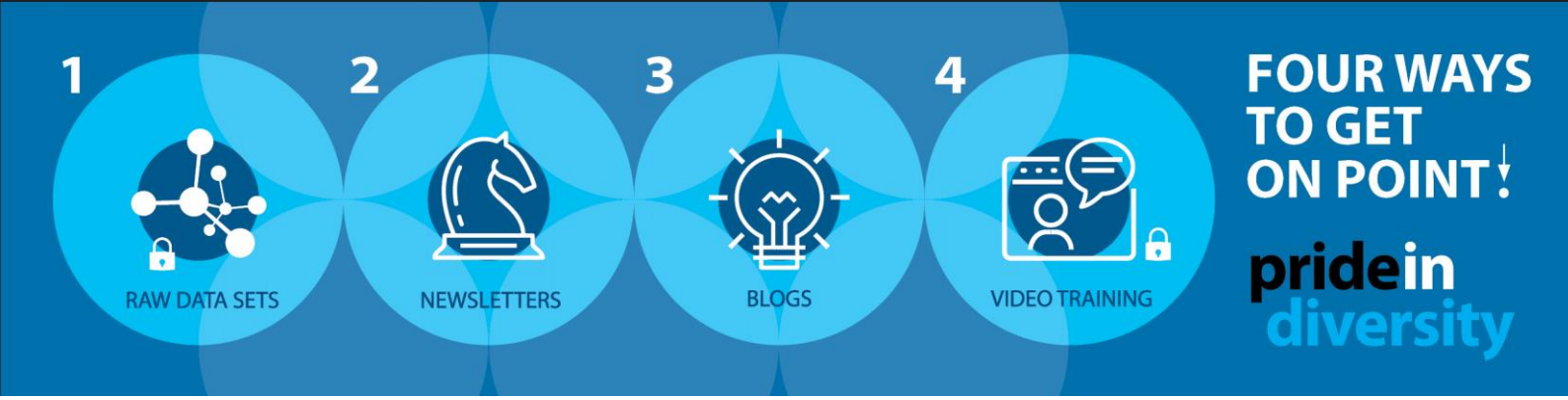

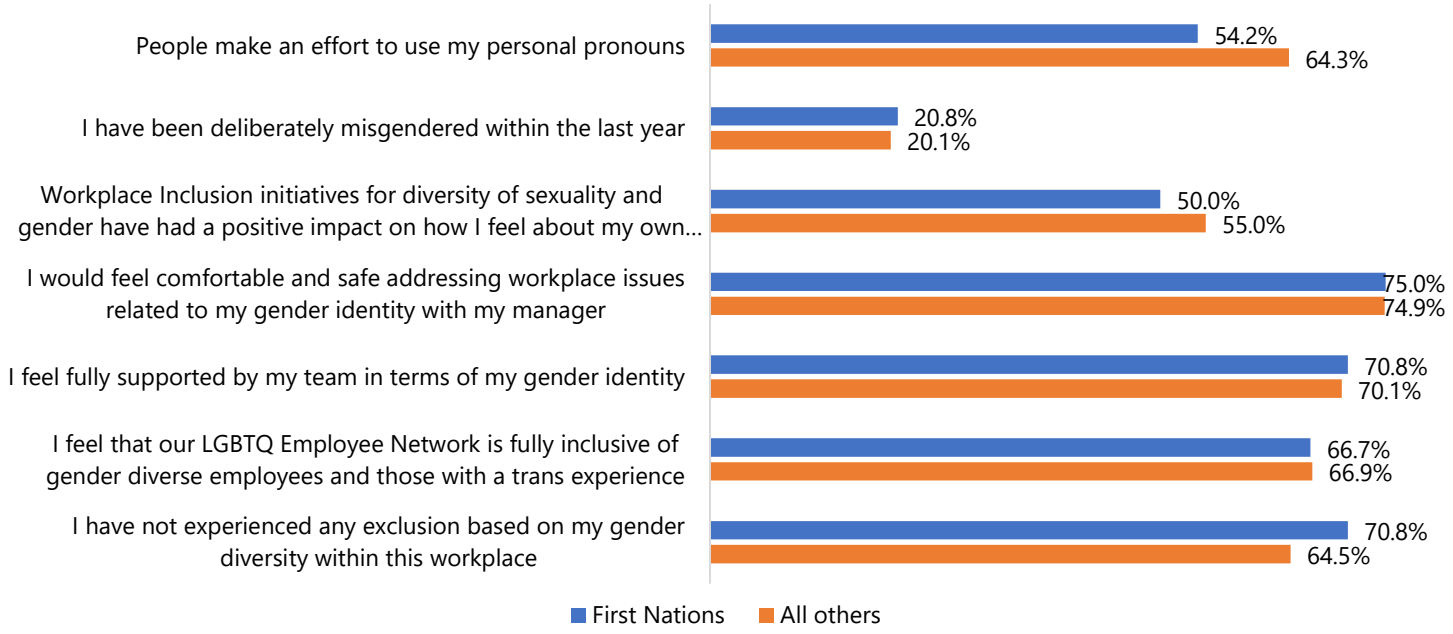

First Nations respondents not open in the workplace feel that being open would be detrimental to their workplace experiences more so than all others (57.1% vs 47.9%), and there is a 15.1% point difference with feeling it would negatively impact their career progression (50.0% vs 34.9%)

Positively, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders are significantly less likely to advise that they are "not comfortable enough within myself". A similar percentage of both First Nations and all others advise they feel team members would not be accepting as the reason for not being open in their workplace.

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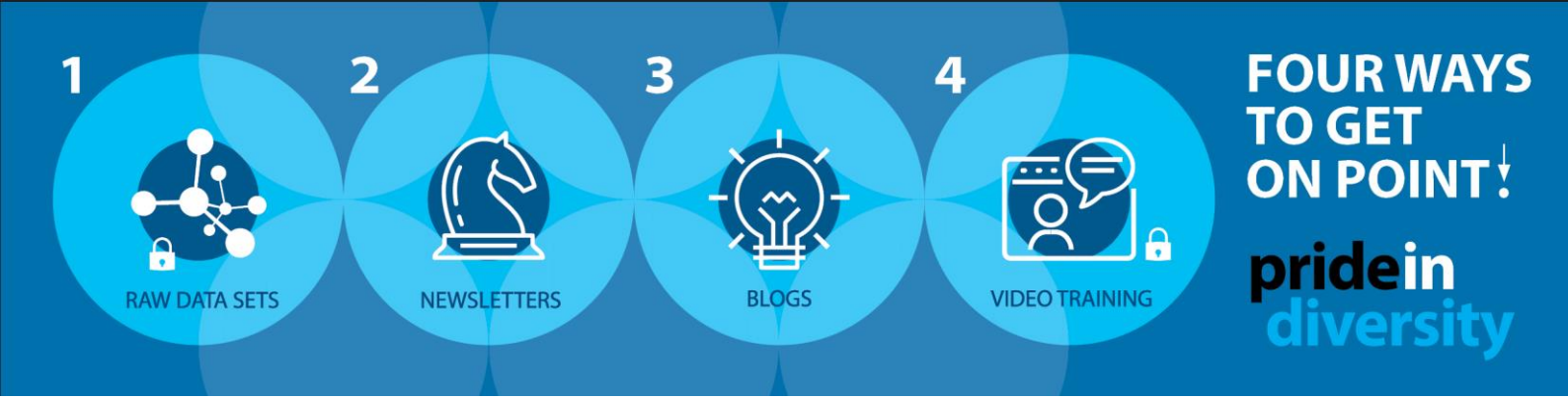
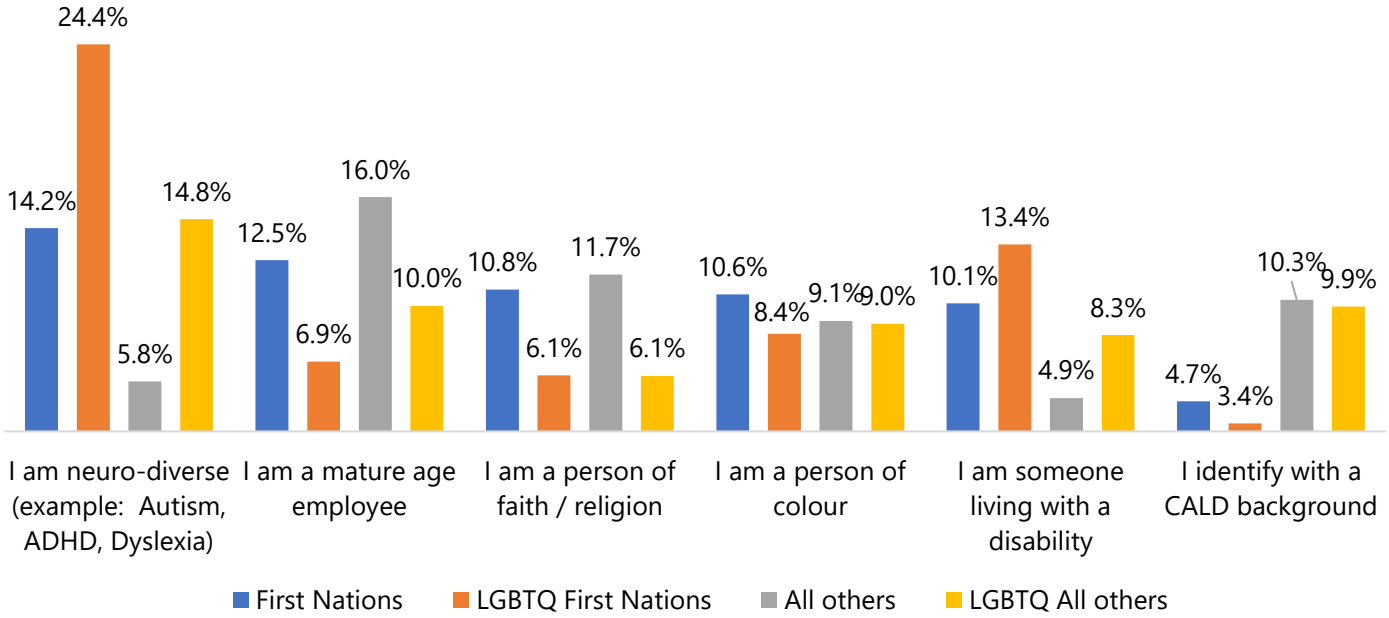


Intersectionality

Of all Australian respondents to the 2022 survey (n43,431), 84.6% (n36,754) have provided insight into intersectional diversities outside of gender and sexuality.

First Nations, respondents are most likely to also identity with a lived experience of neuro-diversity (14.2%), which rises to 24.4% in the LGBTQ First Nations population.

In comparison the most likely diversity for non-First Nations employees is considering themselves a mature age employee followed by being of faith /religion.



IN CONCLUSION

As with all previous years' Surveys and other research, the responses from the 2021 AWEI Employee Survey reaffirms that we have much work to do to provide safe and inclusive workplaces for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders who identify as someone of diverse sexuality and/or gender.

These results also underline the absolute need for a holistic and interconnecting diversity and inclusion approach within each employer. LGBTQ inclusion must specifically reach out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, and organisational Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) must also specifically reference the LGBTQ community within.

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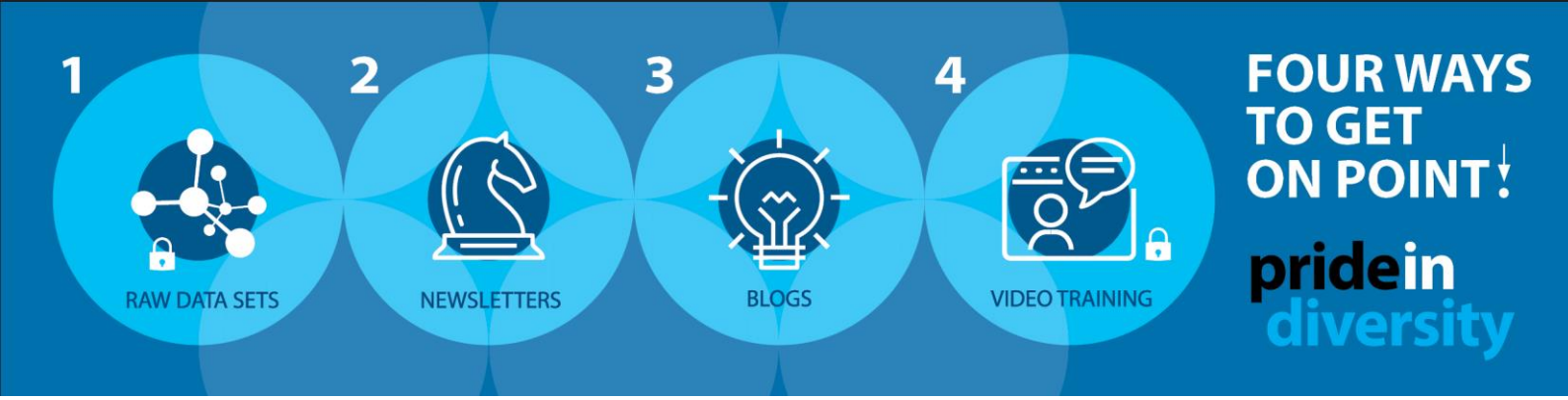

ACTION POINTS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

It is essential to understand the dual impacts and unique experiences of being both LGBTQ and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander within the workplace. Here are a few things to consider:

- Are you capturing these demographics within your *broader diversity and inclusion* work?
- Does your Reconciliation Action Plan (RAPs) specifically include those in the community who identify as LGBTQ?
- Do you have Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participation and representation within your LGBTQ *employee network* leadership?
- Expand your *workplace experience storytelling* by including internal or external experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- In celebrating *LGBTQ Days of Significance*, have you highlighted the experiences of LGBTQ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

Recognising that *regional workplaces* may have higher representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders, ensure your LGBTQ inclusion enablement and other initiatives are reaching locations outside of metropolitan areas.

Doing any of the above will aid in curating an accepting and respectful atmosphere for LGBTQ First Nations people, and thus creating better working environments.

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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