The State of the Community Sector:

Findings from the 2021 Northern Territory Community Sector Workforce Survey

community-controlled
training
challenges
community
social
changes
work
workplace
experiences
sector
employer
workers
charities
wellbeing
services
improving
findings
organisations
survey
environment
stress
employees
issues
operating
advocacy
NTCOSS
NT

NTCOSS
Northern Territory
Council of Social Service

The State of the Community Sector: Findings from the 2021 Northern Territory Community Sector Workforce Survey, November 2021

This report was written by Marissa Pattison.
Published by the Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc.

CEO Foreword

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is an advocate for social justice, on behalf of people and communities in the Northern Territory (NT) who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

NTCOSS' vision is for a fair, inclusive and sustainable NT where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from all aspects of social, cultural and economic life. NTCOSS is the not-for-profit member-based peak body for the NT's community and social services sector (the community sector).

The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, family and community life.

NTCOSS is pleased to present the findings from the 2021 Northern Territory Community Sector Workforce Survey (the Workforce Survey). The Workforce Survey gives NTCOSS the opportunity to collect and analyse data on the community sector in the NT, providing a snapshot of the different organisations operating in the region and their staff.

The findings from the Workforce Survey will help NTCOSS to identify workforce trends and inform future sector support activities. Some of the key findings from the Workforce Survey include:

- The community sector has a highly qualified workforce, with 86% of employees and 97% of managers surveyed having completed either a tertiary or vocational qualification.

- 37% of both employees and managers indicated they are considering leaving their current role, emphasising that staff retention remains a priority issue for the community sector.

- A higher rate of pay, greater access to professional development, the opportunity to vary working hours and increased support such as supervision were identified by respondents as areas that could help improve retention.

- Difficulties recruiting appropriately trained staff and funding security were identified as the biggest issues facing community sector managers.

- 34% of employees experience barriers in accessing training and professional development.

- Community sector employers need to gain a better understanding of workforce wellbeing and the ways in which organisational leadership can build and maintain the wellbeing of their employees.

NTCOSS sincerely thanks the community sector workers who took the time to complete the survey and share it with their networks.

Deborah Di Natale

Deborah Di Natale

Chief Executive Officer
Northern Territory Council of Social Service

Contents

Key findings

Top issues facing community sector managers: **funding security and difficulties recruiting appropriately trained staff**

Training topics in high demand:

trauma-informed practice

cultural awareness

mental health

domestic & family violence

78% of the community sector workforce is female.

77% employees | 79% managers

for comparison, **39%** of managers in all other industries in Australia are female.

[1]

13% of employees and **6%** of managers **are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

18% of employees & 12% of managers identify as LGBTQIA+

9% of employees & **5%** of managers **have a disability**

37% of staff considering leaving their current role, top reasons: **stress & poor management practices**

What would help staff to stay in their position longer:

a higher rate of pay

greater access to professional development

improved management practices

opportunity to vary working hours

34% of employees experience barriers in accessing training and professional development

Top areas of service provision: **advocacy, children and families, domestic and family violence, youth services, mental health, disability**

The workforce is transient, but staff stay in the community sector for a long time

42% employees **31%** managers **have been in current role for <12months**

20% employees **43%** managers **have been in the community sector for over 15 years**

[1]ABS (2020), Gender Indicators, Australia

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the 2021 Workforce Survey. This report aims to elevate the voices and experiences of people working in the NT community sector, to establish priorities for improving the sector as an employer and to ensure that organisations and workers are best placed to deliver high quality services. The survey findings provide insight into the diversity of community sector employees as well as their experiences in providing community sector work, including highlighting common issues faced and gaps in areas such as training and professional development.

The community sector is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. NTCOSS represents 120 members, including peak bodies, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), large charities, small grassroots organisations and individual members.

The sector employs more than 10,300 people, and community services also play a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians.[3] In 2018, the community sector contributed $3.26 billion to the NT's total State Domestic Product of $26.2 billion. For comparison, the mining sector contributed $3.166 billion.[4]

Overall, the survey findings show that the community sector in the NT is full of highly qualified people who are drawn to the sector by passion, interest and the desire to make a difference in their community. This report contributes new information regarding the demographics of workers in the sector, and the challenges they face in the current operating environment, with special consideration of the recent changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey findings also speak to the challenges and pressures created by the current operating environment, including stress, burnout, vicarious trauma, demanding workloads and staff retention issues. This report also highlights the initiatives underway within the sector to address some of these challenges, such as organisational efforts to better address worker wellbeing by prioritising flexibility in the workplace and mental health days.

[3] *Gilchrist, D.J. and T. Emery, (2020), Value of the Not-for-profit Sector 2020.*
[4] *Gilchrist, D.J. and T. Emery, (2020).*

About the survey

The information in this report is based on the responses to the Workforce Survey, conducted by NTCOSS over a six-week period in June – July 2021. Previously, the Workforce Survey was conducted by NTCOSS in 2019 and 2012.

Overall, the survey was completed by 236 staff, made up of 171 employees and 65 managers. Two versions of the survey were made available, one for employees and one for managers (people responsible for the supervision of one or more employees). For further detail regarding the method for this survey, including discussion of the sample, scope and potential limitations, please refer to Appendix A.

Data analysis

The full sample for the survey was 236 staff, but for some questions the completion rate was slightly lower, due to respondents choosing to skip a question or to not leave a comment on open-ended questions. Despite this, the completion rate overall was very strong.

While many of the questions were asked in both versions of the survey, some additional questions were asked of managers to capture information on organisational-level issues such as funding arrangements, revenue sources and recruitment trends. As a result, data analysis in this report has been undertaken in various ways, sometimes using the full sample, and sometimes comparing the two main samples to demonstrate differences or similarities. When data analysis in this report relates to just one group of respondents (i.e., just employees) it is clearly specified.

Findings

About the respondents

The survey asked a range of demographic questions, to understand the profile of staff working in the community sector. Most of the survey respondents were female (78%). For comparison, the majority (86%) of the 2019 NT Workforce Survey respondents were also female and nationally the workforce for community and personal service workers is 70% female.[5] The 2021 survey also found that 77% of employees and 79% of managers were female (Figure 1). This consistency in gender representation at the management level is a significant and encouraging finding.

This finding is also consistent with the findings of the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey, which found that 79% of employees and 77% of community sector managers were female.[6] These findings demonstrate that the community sector is unique in this space though, as nationally roughly 61% of managers are men. [7]

The most common age group for employees was 25–34 (33%), while for managers it was 55–64 (31%) (Figure 2).

The Workforce Survey also asked a range of questions to gain an understanding of diversity in the NT community sector. Figure 3 shows that:

- the rate of respondents who speak a language other than English at home was similar for employees (12%) and managers (11%);

- 13% of employees were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, while this rate was lower for managers (6%); and

- 18% of employees and 12% of managers identified as LGBTQIA+.

Figure 1: Gender of survey respondents

Employees

Managers

[5] NTCOSS, (2019), Northern Territory Community Sector Workforce Survey 2019 and ABS, (2020), Gender Indicators, Australia.
[6] Cortis, N. and M. Blaxland, (2020), The profile and pulse of the sector: Findings from the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey.
[7] ABS, (2020), Gender Indicators, Australia.

Figure 2: Age of respondents

Legend:
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65+

Employees
- 18–24: 5%
- 25–34: 33%
- 35–44: 18%
- 45–54: 20%
- 55–64: 15%
- 65+: 9%

Managers
- 25–34: 15%
- 35–44: 23%
- 45–54: 26%
- 55–64: 31%
- 65+: 5%
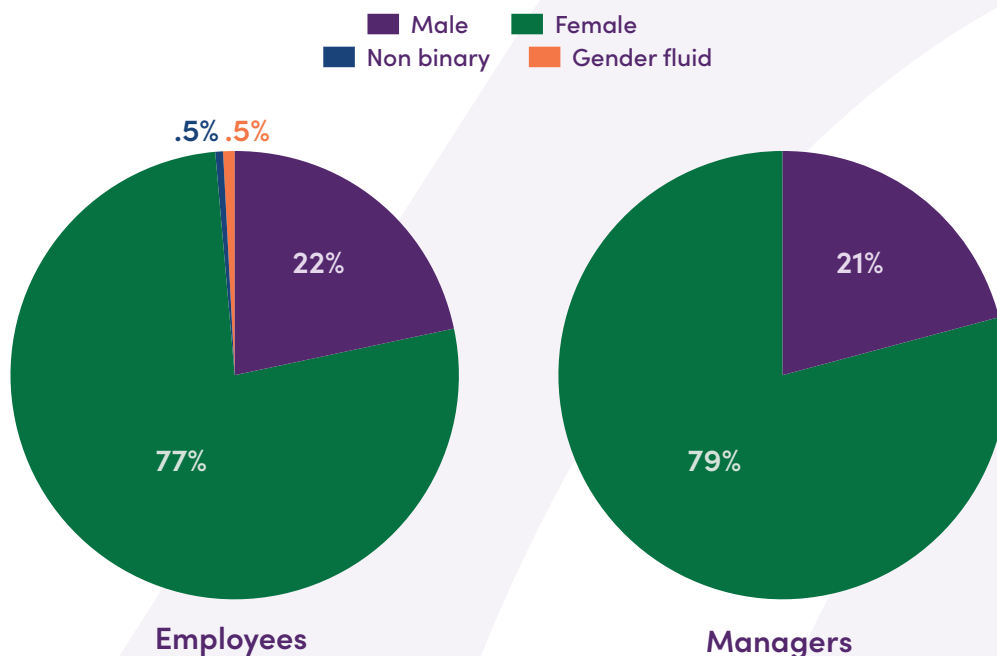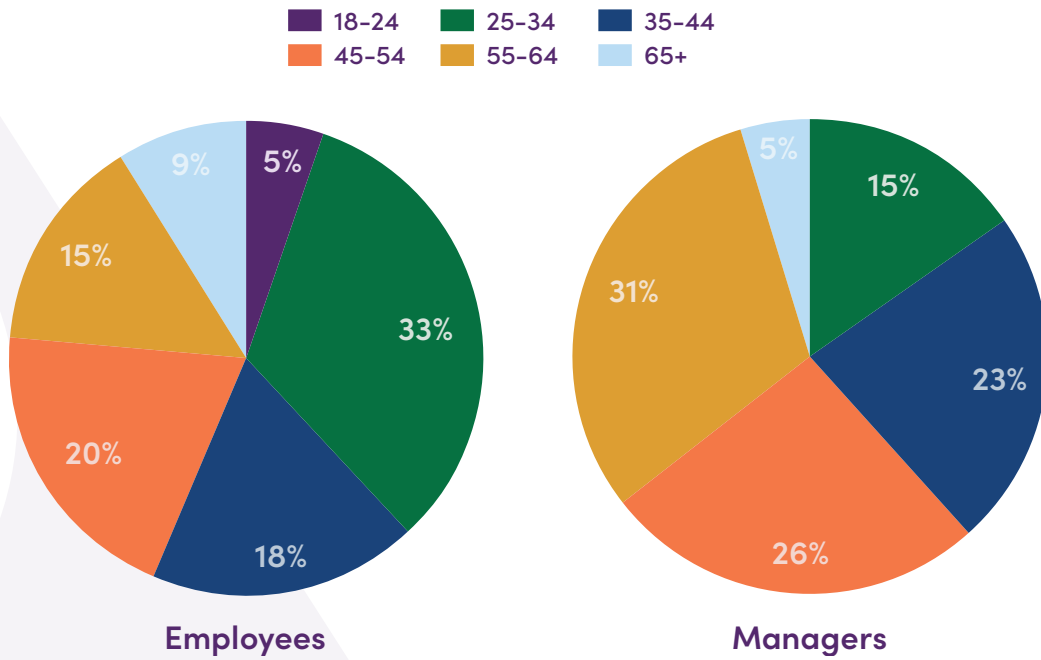
Figure 3: Proportion of respondents who identified as being from particular groups

Legend: Employees, Managers

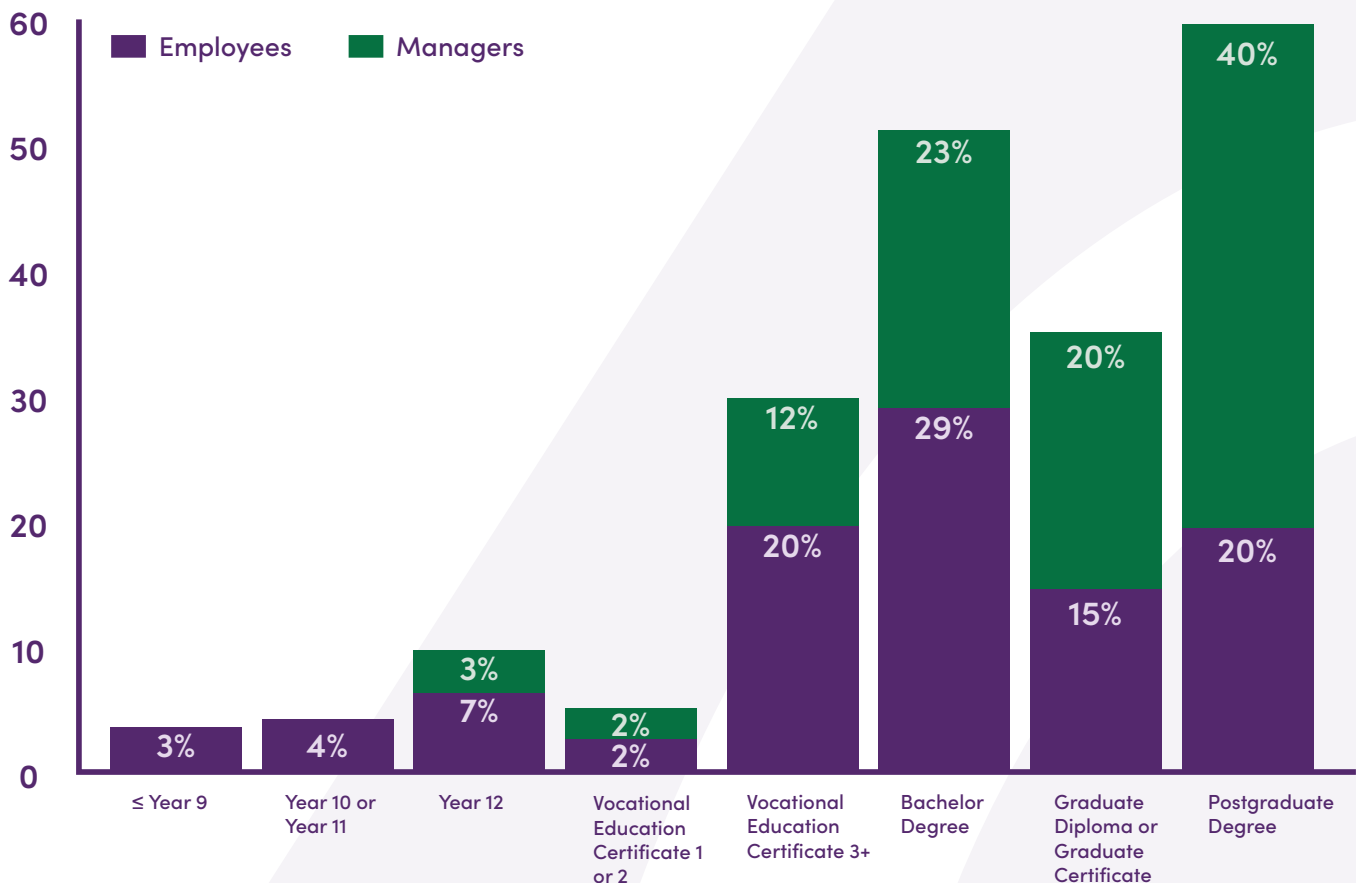| Group	Employees	Managers
Speak language other than English at home	12%	11%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	13%	6%
LGBTQIA+	18%	12%
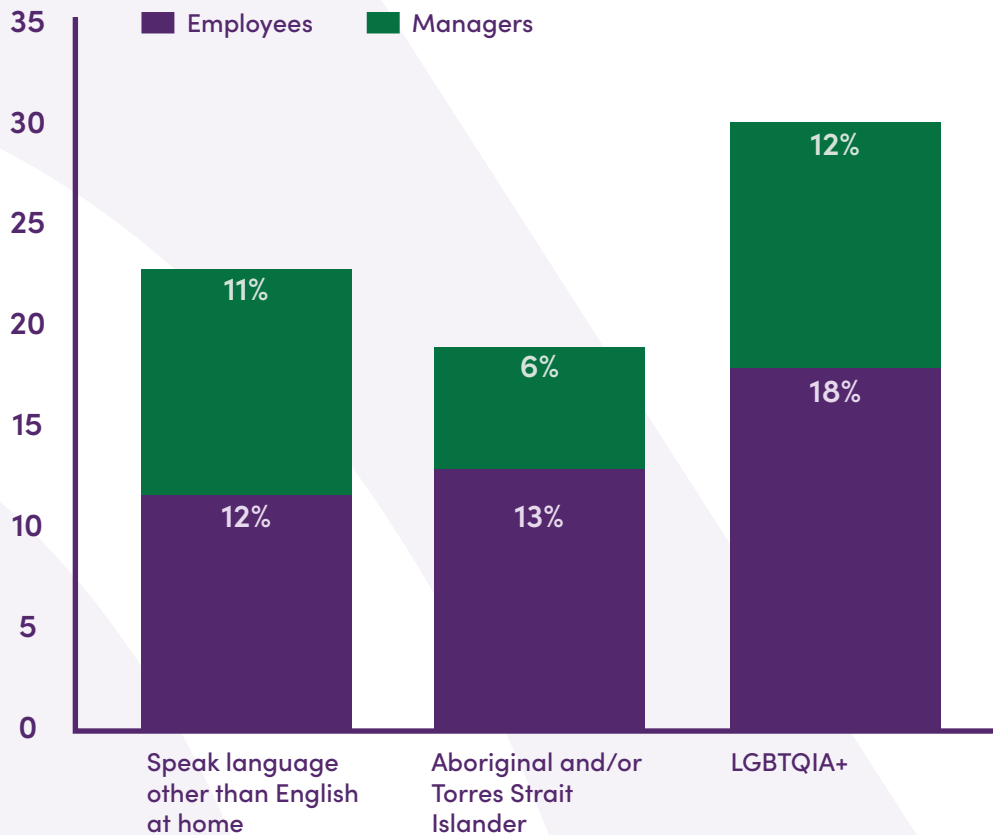
The survey also asked about disability, with 9% of employees and 5% of managers stating that they have a disability. A quarter of the employees with a disability identified that they require work–related adjustments. For comparison, people with disability represent 11% of the NT population.[8]

The survey found that 28% of managers have caring responsibilities, while this figure was 20% for employees. Out of the respondents with caring responsibilities, employees spent an average of 38 hours per week fulfilling their responsibilities, and managers spent an average of 33.2 hours per week. This figure is reasonably consistent with Deloitte's finding that informal carers in Australia spend an average of 35.2 hours per week providing care.[9]

The high caring demands of survey respondents is also likely related to the fact that most respondents are female. Deloitte found in 2020 that 60% of all carers in Australia are female, and this figure increases to 70% for primary carers.[10]

The majority of respondents, 86% of employees and 97% of managers, have attained either a tertiary or vocational qualification (Figure 4). This demonstrates that the community sector attracts and requires highly qualified workers. For comparison, the 2016 Census found that 41% of the NT population aged over 15 had completed either a tertiary or vocational qualification.[11]

Figure 4: Highest level of education completed

[8] Northern Territory Government, (2018), NTPS EmployAbility Strategy 2018 – 2022.
[9] Deloitte, (2020), The value of informal care in 2020: Carers Australia May 2020.
[10] Deloitte, (2020).
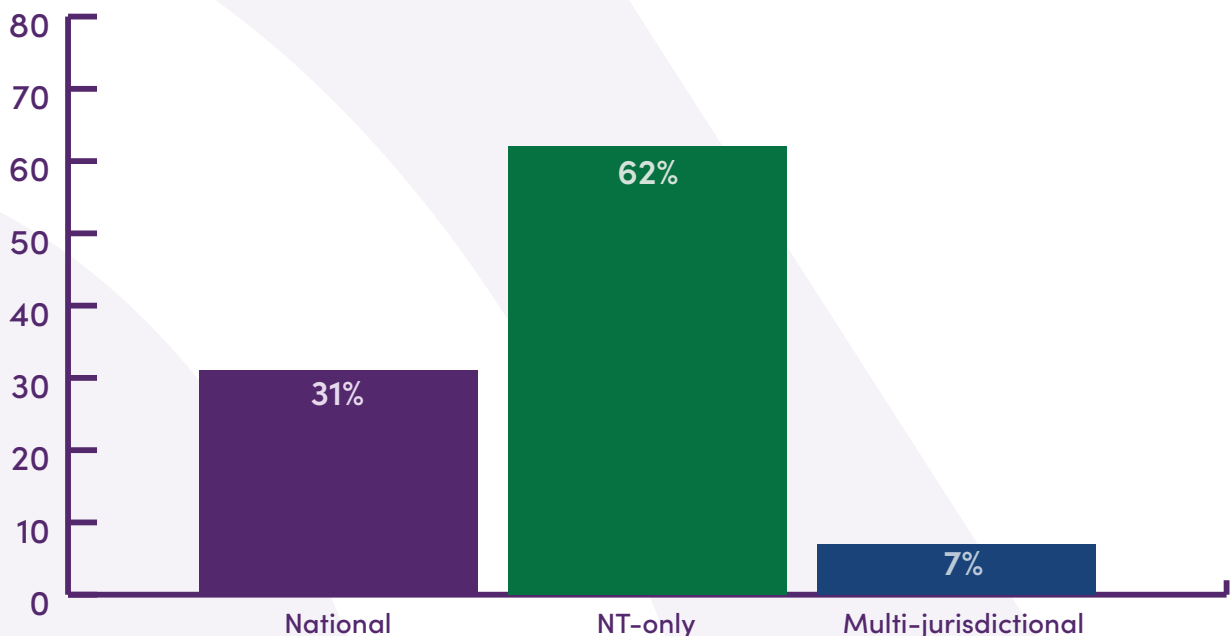[11] ABS, (2016), 2016 Census QuickStats: Northern Territory.

Location

Most survey respondents (80%) were from workplaces located in Darwin, Palmerston City and Alice Springs. This distribution correlates with the larger populations that live in these areas. However, this finding could also indicate greater effort is needed in the future to ensure that the Workforce Survey is completed by more staff from rural and remote areas of the NT. The remaining respondents were from workplaces located in the Barkly, East Arnhem, Katherine, Victoria Daly, West Daly and Roper Gulf.

While the head offices of workplaces are mostly located in the NT's main urban areas, the survey also asked a question regarding service delivery locations. The responses to this were more varied, demonstrating that many community sector workers in the NT travel throughout the jurisdiction to remote areas as part of their role. The survey also found that most managers were from NT-only organisations (62%), compared with national and multi-jurisdictional organisations (Figure 5).

Primary areas of service provision

Respondents were asked to specify the primary areas of service provision for their agency. The most common responses were:

- Advocacy

- Children and Families

- Domestic and Family Violence

- Youth Services

- Mental Health

- Disability

Due to the wide variety of services that are delivered in the NT, respondents could also select an 'Other' category for service delivery. This category captured further areas of service delivery covered by respondents' agencies including Financial Counselling and Support, Legal services, Healthcare, Community Development and Emergency Relief.

Figure 5: Organisation jurisdiction

Interestingly, 34% of both employees and managers surveyed stated that they work in the youth sector, reiterating that this is a key area of service provision in the community sector.

Type of employment and hours worked

The most held positions by employees surveyed were:

- Case Manager/ Direct Case Worker
- Frontline or Support Worker
- Administration Officer
- Program Coordinator

For managers, the most held positions were:

- CEO
- Operations Manager
- Team Leader
- Program Manager

Employees worked a wide range of hours, with responses ranging from 5 – 60 hours per week, but the average response was 31 hours per week. Managers reported an even wider range, with responses between 16 – 90 hours per week. On average, managers worked 45 hours per week. For employees, these results vary from the general population, with the Census finding that the majority of employed people in the NT worked 40 hours or more per week.[12]

Figure 6: Employment type

[12] ABS, (2016), 2016 Census QuickStats: Northern Territory.

As demonstrated in Figure 6, the survey found that managers are likely to enjoy a greater degree of job security than employees, with higher rates of managers being employed on an ongoing full-time basis (65%) than employees (49%), and a lower rate of managers being employed as casuals. These findings suggest that community sector employees in the NT are more likely to work on a part-time basis than the general population, as the 2016 Census found that 67% of employees in the NT were employed full-time.[13]

> For context, the responses from some employees in this section may also have been shaped by the number of jobs they have, as 15% of employees stated that they work at more than one workplace currently.

Trends within the workforce

As is the norm in the NT, the survey results demonstrate that the community sector workforce is quite transient. As shown in Figure 7, 42% of employees and 31% of managers had been in their current role for less than 12 months.

However, other questions in the survey revealed some nuance to this. While the workforce is quite transient, this may apply mostly to location and position, because many respondents indicated that they have been working in the community sector for a long time. For example, 20% of employees stated they had been in the community sector for over 15 years, and this was even higher for managers at 43% (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Time in current role

Legend: Employees, Managers

	< 12 months	1–2 years	3–5 years	6–9 years	10–14 years	+15 years
Managers	31%	22%	34%	11%	1%	1%
Employees	42%	24%	23%	6%	4%	1%
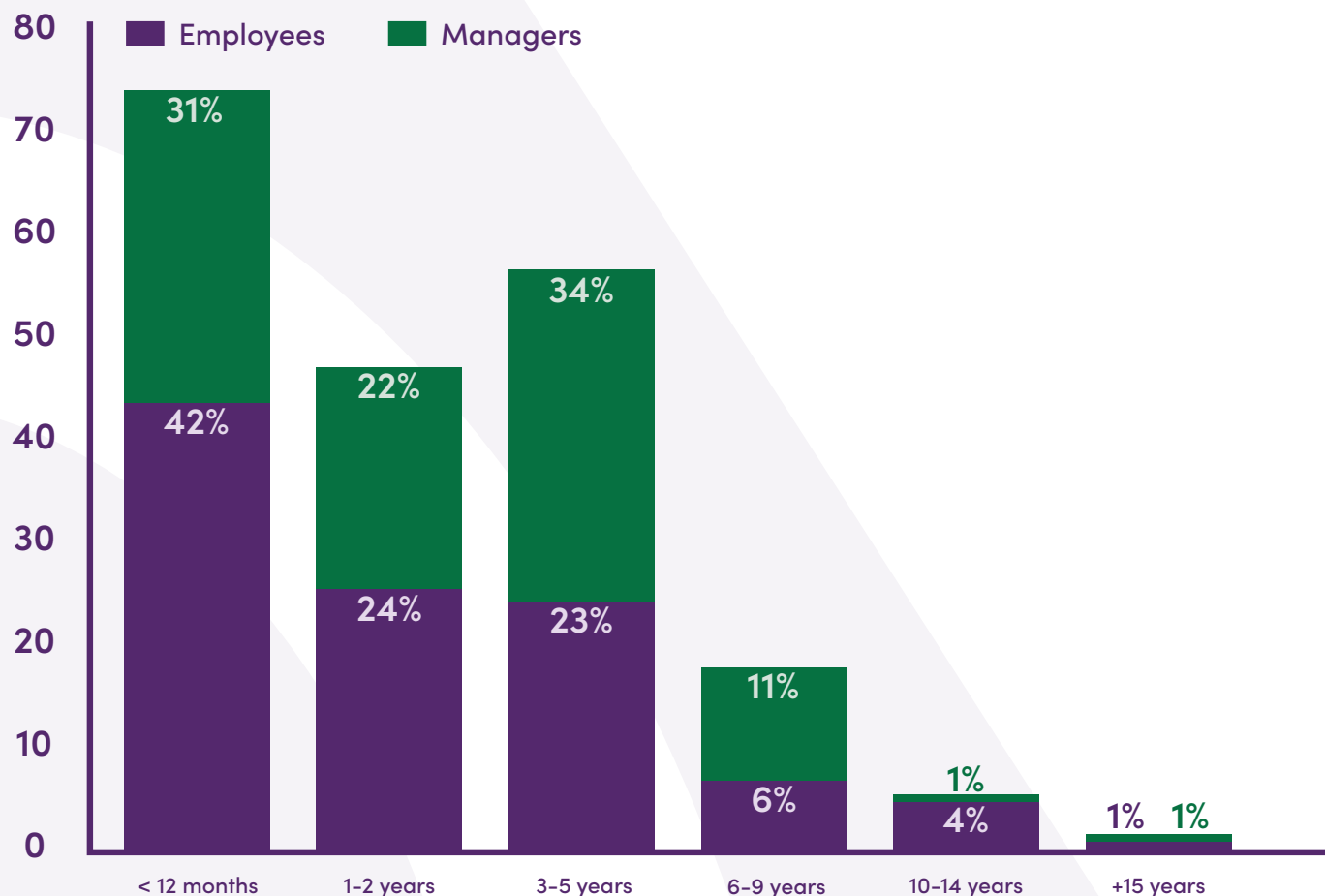
Figure 8: Length of service in the community sector

Legend: <12 months | 1–2 years | 3–5 years | 6–9 years | 10–14 years | + 15 years

Employees pie chart:
- 12% <12 months
- 12% 1–2 years
- 21% 3–5 years
- 18% 6–9 years
- 17% 10–14 years
- 20% + 15 years

Employees

Managers pie chart:
- 2% <12 months
- 9% 1–2 years
- 11% 3–5 years
- 18% 6–9 years
- 17% 10–14 years
- 43% + 15 years
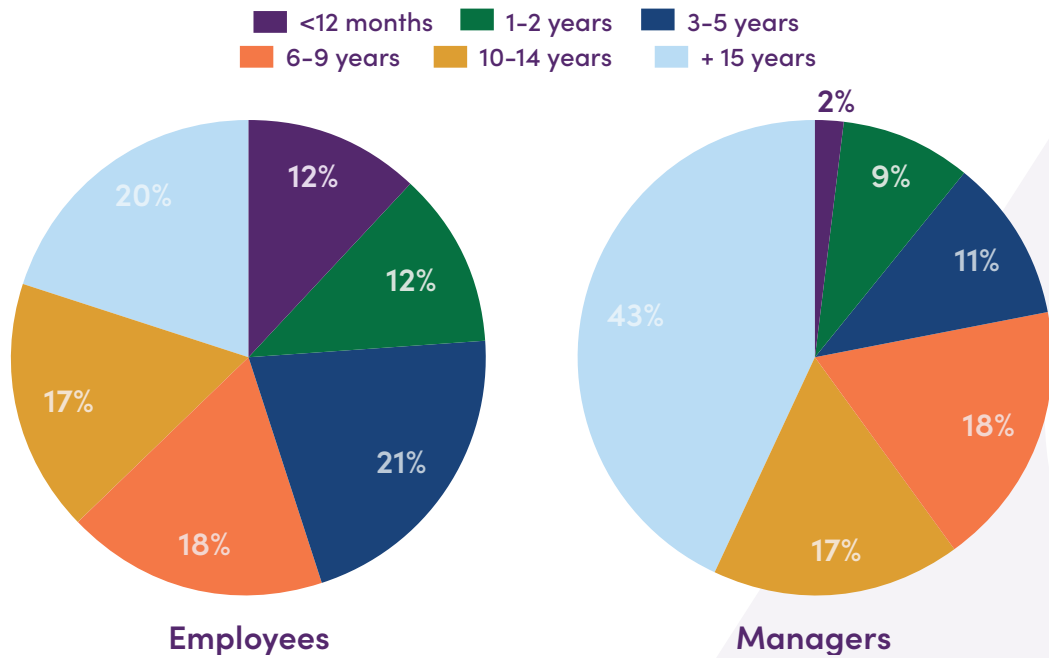
Managers

This movement of employees within the community sector is also demonstrated by the following graphs, which show that most employees (51%) and managers (45%) have worked for two to four organisations within the community sector (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Number of organisations worked for in the community sector

Legend: 1 org | 2–4 orgs | +5 orgs

Employees pie chart:
- 30% 1 org
- 51% 2–4 orgs
- 19% +5 orgs

Employees

Managers pie chart:
- 21% 1 org
- 45% 2–4 orgs
- 34% +5 orgs
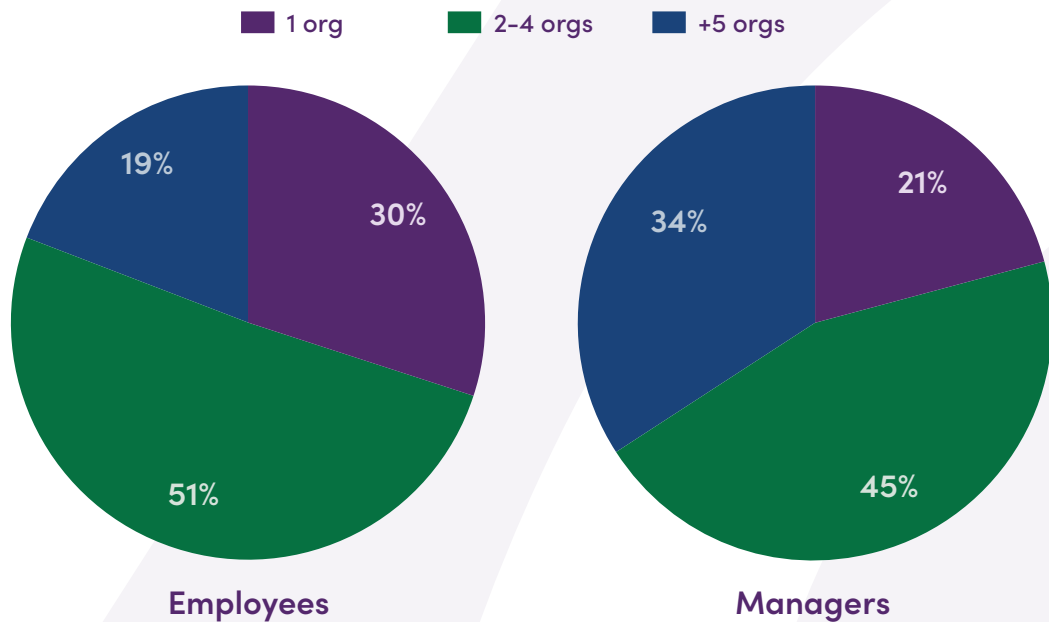
Managers

Issues facing managers in the community sector

To gain an understanding of areas where improvement is needed, managers were asked about key issues they face as managers in the community sector. The highest rated responses were:

- difficulties recruiting appropriately trained staff

- funding security

- areas of growing or unmet service need

- retention of staff

- length of funding contracts

Several managers also opted to provide an 'Other' response. Many mentioned challenges related to funding inadequacy and the pace of government reform. For example, one manager expressed frustration regarding implementation of five-year funding agreements:

> "I am very disappointed to see that 5 years post-election, the government has not delivered on widespread implementation of 5 year funding agreements. Whilst my organisation enjoys some, there are many contracts that are not 5 years. I am tired of hearing the excuses as to why this has not been achieved. It has such a tangible and immediate detrimental impact on service delivery".

Several managers also mentioned specific concerns regarding funding, such as:

> "Increase in annual fixed costs [is] not met in funding i.e. CPI not passed on adequately"

> "Money that should be outsourced to [the] sector being used to employ more public servants under the misnomer 'the sector doesn't have capacity'"

Some challenges relating to being a national organisation operating in the NT were also mentioned:

> "Managing national organisations' agendas that don't match local agendas and so much local funding being given to major national head offices when they don't even know who you are here"

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment, and specifically difficulties recruiting appropriately trained staff, was rated as one of the main issues facing community sector managers. When asked how often they can recruit candidates with appropriate skills, education and experience, only 1% of managers said all of the time and 9% said rarely or very rarely (Figure 10).

As Figure 11 shows, 40% of managers surveyed identified that they have ongoing unfilled job vacancies within their organisations. The average time identified for a vacant position to remain unfilled was 5.8 months.

Managers were asked to identify the three most consistently successful methods used to recruit staff within their organisation (Figure 12). The top responses were websites, social media and word of mouth. The websites mentioned most often were Seek and Ethical Jobs.

Managers were also specifically asked about the strategies their organisation uses to recruit, retain and train young people as staff (Figure 13).

The top responses were career development pathways, flexible employment and trainee and cadetship. Several managers acknowledged that their organisations do not actively employ strategies to recruit young people, and that it would be beneficial to develop such strategies.

Figure 10: How often organisation can recruit suitable candidates

Legend:
- All of the time
- Most of the time
- 50% of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Very rarely

1% 1%
8%
22%
57%
11%

Managers
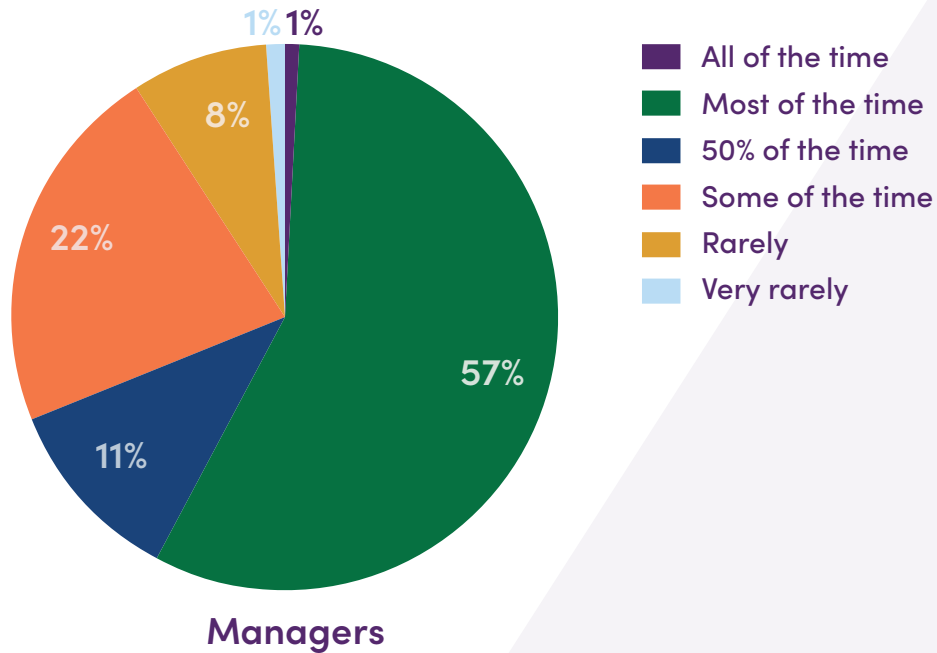
Figure 11: Ongoing unfilled job vacancies

Legend:
- No
- Yes

40%
60%

Managers

Figure 12: Three most successful methods for recruiting staff

Method	Percentage
Advertisement in a national newsletter	12%
Advertisement in a local newsletter	25%
A recruiting firm	12%
Word of mouth	55%
Websites	88%
Social media	60%
NTCOSS jobs board	34%
Other	17%

Figure 13: Strategies to recruit, retain and train young people

Legend:
- Trainee and Cadetship
- Targeted roles and positions
- Advertising in local communities
- Flexible employment
- Buddy system
- Career development pathways
- Other

Strategy	Percentage
Trainee and Cadetship	39%
Targeted roles and positions	38%
Advertising in local communities	31%
Flexible employment	41%
Buddy system	30%
Career development pathways	46%
Other	18%
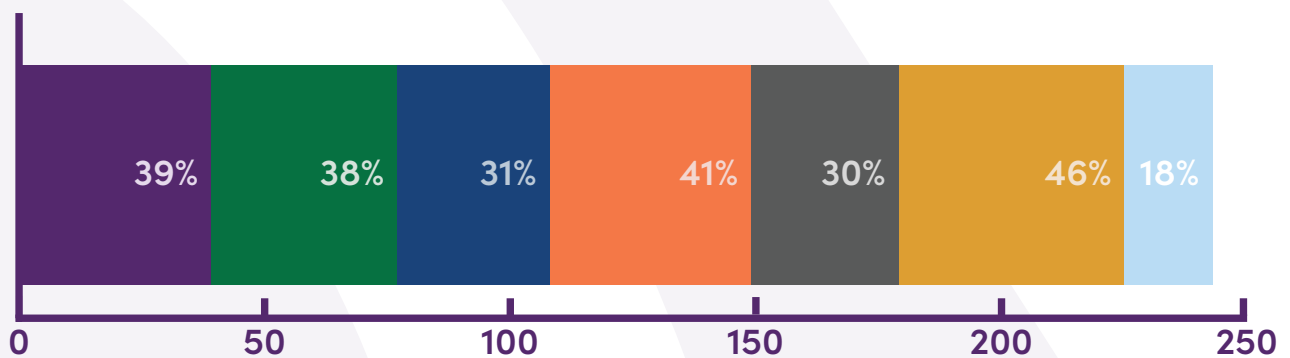
Recruitment of Aboriginal staff

Managers were asked to identify the percentage of their organisation's workforce that identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and the average response was 21%. For context, Aboriginal people make up roughly 30% of the NT's population.[14] According to the Census, the top occupation held by Aboriginal people in the NT in 2016 was Community and Personal Service Workers (21%).[15]

While the majority of managers identified that their workplaces have strategies to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff (Figure 14), many identified that further targeted effort is needed in this area in the NT and at the national level. Figure 14 shows that the top strategies used by surveyed organisations to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff were targeted roles and positions, flexible employment, career development pathways and advertising in local communities.

To increase retention and recruitment of Aboriginal staff, workplaces also need to be culturally safe, actively recognise and value Aboriginal culture, support the needs of Aboriginal people to enter and stay in the workforce and offer flexible work practices. Several managers also mentioned the importance of already having Aboriginal team leaders and mentors in the workplace.
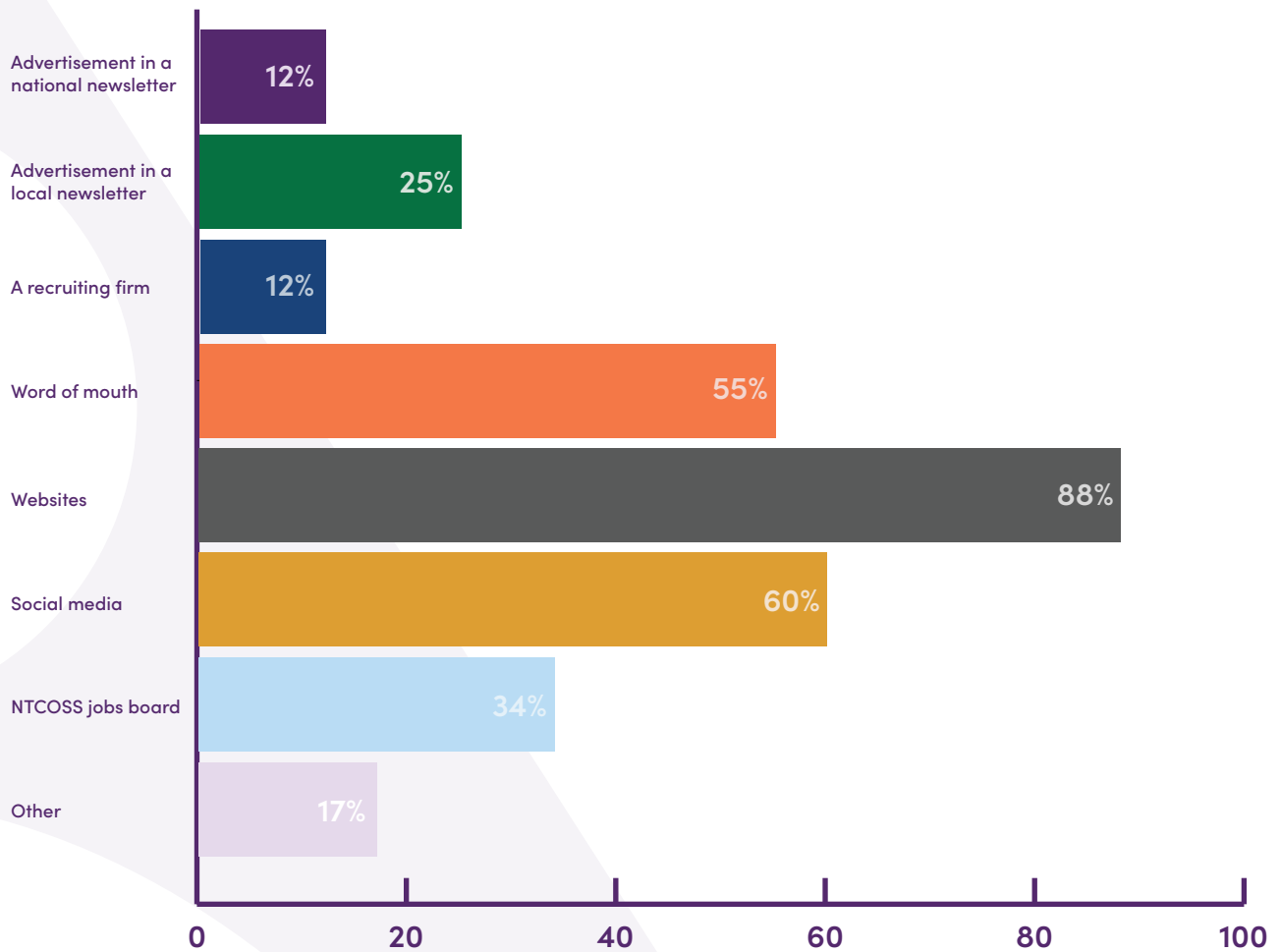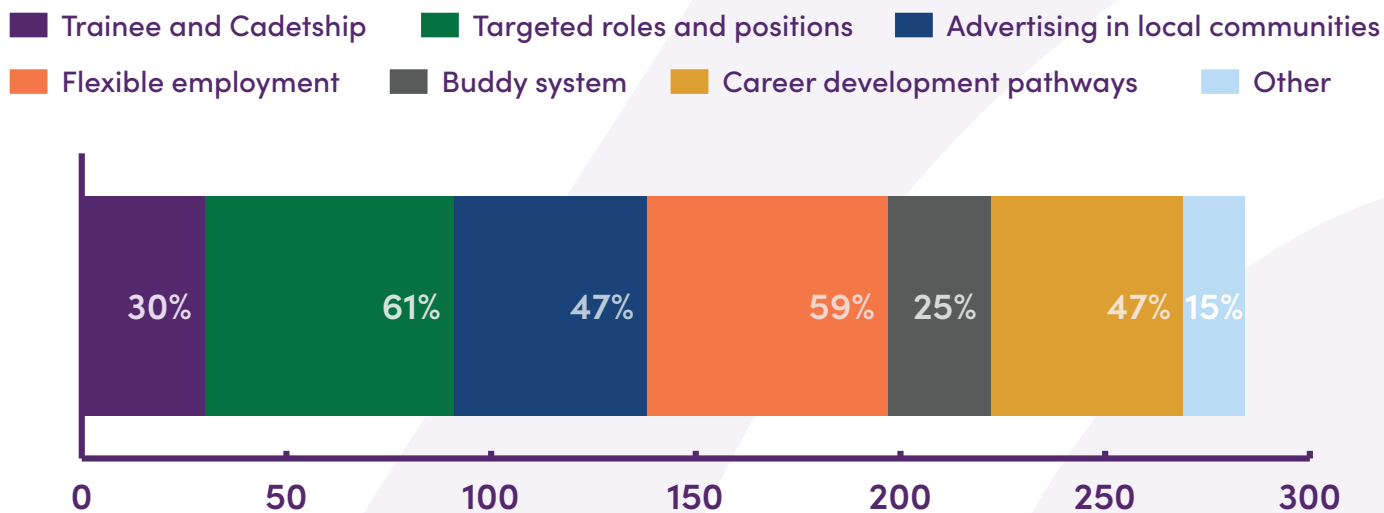
Figure 14: Strategies to recruit, retain and train Aboriginal staff

- Trainee and Cadetship
- Targeted roles and positions
- Advertising in local communities
- Flexible employment
- Buddy system
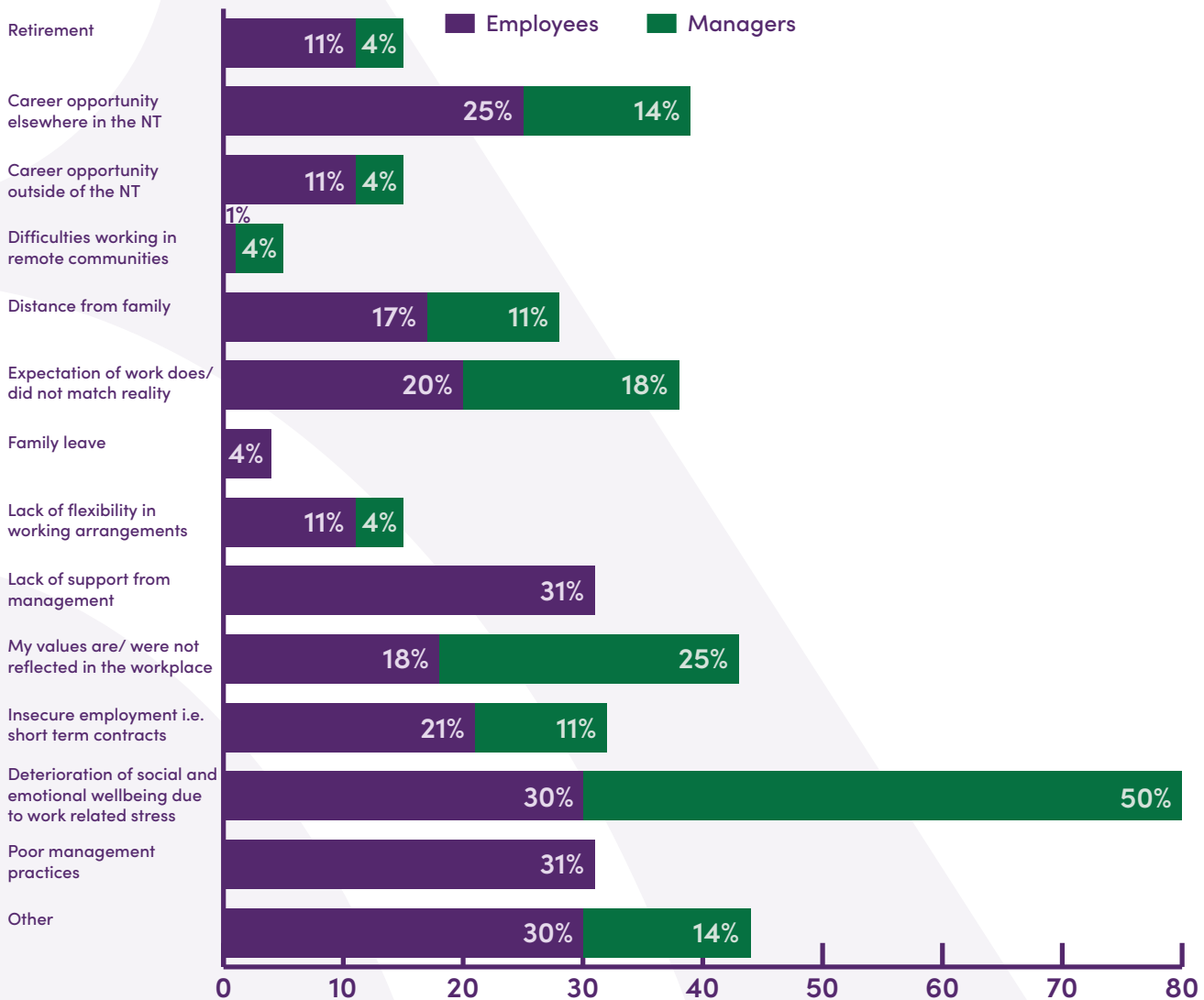- Career development pathways
- Other

Retention

Retention of staff also rated quite highly as an issue affecting managers in the community sector. This is further supported by the survey data, as 37% of both employees and managers indicated that they are considering leaving their current role. As Figure 15 shows, the top reasons why managers were considering leaving were 'deterioration of social and emotional wellbeing due to work related stress' (50%) and 'my values are/ were not reflected in the workplace' (25%). Meanwhile for employees, the most common reasons were 'lack of support from management' (31%) and 'poor management practices' (31%). Some other reasons mentioned by employees included 'feeling burnt out', 'lack of professional development and career progression opportunities' and 'vicarious trauma'.

High staff turnover, while quite common in the NT due to the transient population, can be majorly disruptive, draining organisational knowledge and resources and potentially affecting the quality of services provided.

Figure 15: Reasons for considering leaving current role

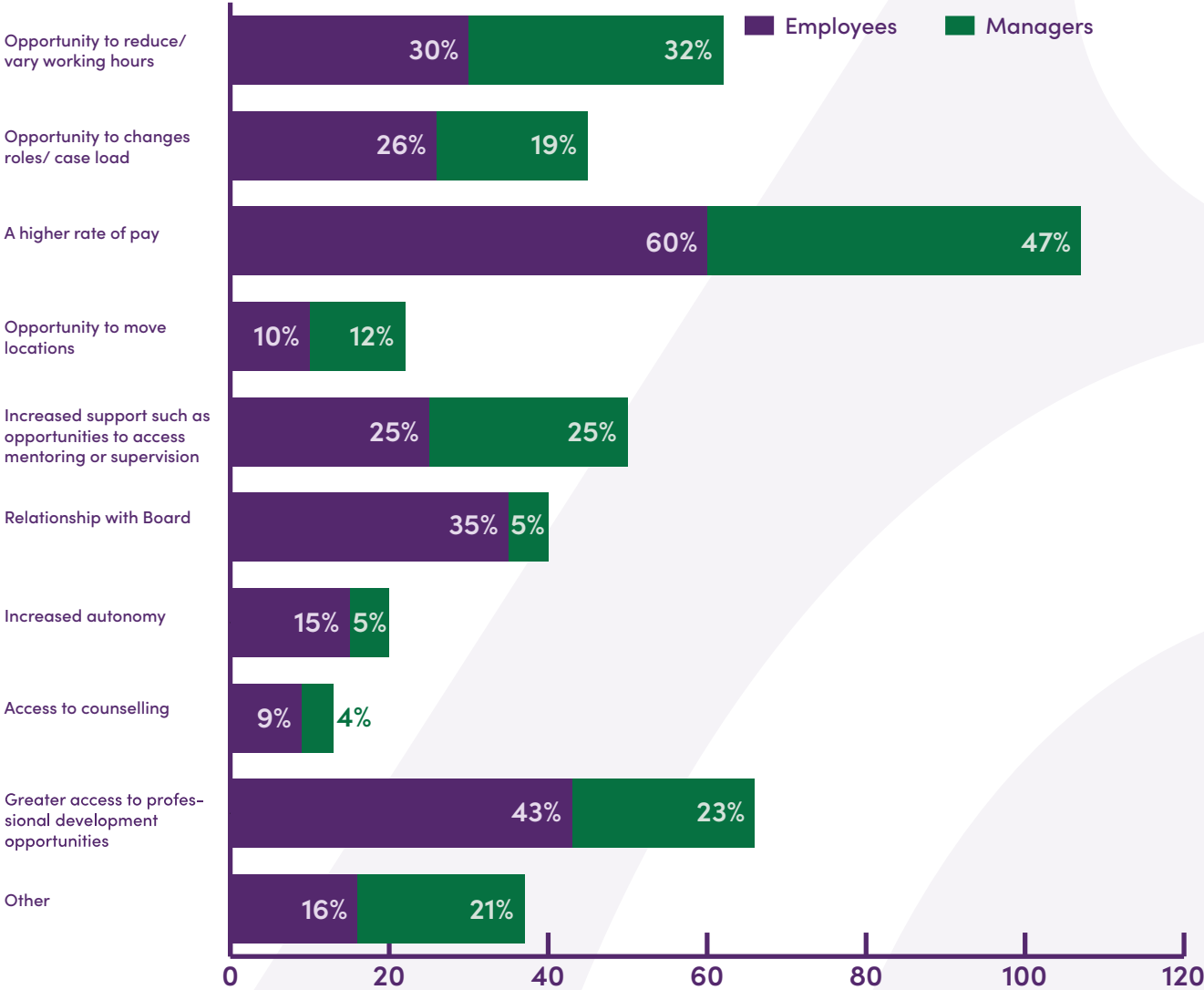| Reason	Employees	Managers
Retirement	11%	4%
Career opportunity elsewhere in the NT	25%	14%
Career opportunity outside of the NT	11%	4%
Difficulties working in remote communities	1%	4%
Distance from family	17%	11%
Expectation of work does/ did not match reality	20%	18%
Family leave	4%	
Lack of flexibility in working arrangements	11%	4%
Lack of support from management	31%	
My values are/ were not reflected in the workplace	18%	25%
Insecure employment i.e. short term contracts	21%	11%
Deterioration of social and emotional wellbeing due to work related stress	30%	50%
Poor management practices	31%	
Other	30%	14%

Addressing the issues that impact staff morale and satisfaction such as management practices could help organisations to improve retention.

Respondents were also asked to identify what would assist them in staying in their role for a further 12 months (Figure 16). For both employees and managers, a higher rate of pay was clearly identified as a factor that would help with staff retention.

For employees, the second and third factors were 'greater access to professional development' and 'improved management practices'. In the 'Other' section, several employees indicated the opportunity to work less hours (3 or 4 days a week) would help them stay, along with better organisational management of risks related to trauma exposure, longer contracts, more opportunities to work from home and a more manageable workload.

Figure 16: What would assist staff in staying for another 12 months if they were considering leaving

Factor	Employees	Managers
Opportunity to reduce/ vary working hours	30%	32%
Opportunity to changes roles/ case load	26%	19%
A higher rate of pay	60%	47%
Opportunity to move locations	10%	12%
Increased support such as opportunities to access mentoring or supervision	25%	25%
Relationship with Board	35%	5%
Increased autonomy	15%	5%
Access to counselling	9%	4%
Greater access to professional development opportunities	43%	23%
Other	16%	21%

For managers, the second and third factors were 'opportunity to vary working hours' and 'increased support (such as opportunities to access mentoring or supervision)'. 'Other' responses included change of organisational culture, funding stability and greater internal resources and support.

Survey responses also indicated that most staff in the sector are driven by passion and interest. When asked about what attracted them to their current role, the top responses for both employees and managers were 'role/ program/ type of work' and 'opportunity to make a difference'. 'Organisation's reputation', 'location' and 'flexible working arrangements' were also important.

Training, supervision and professional development

Along with being essential for developing the workforce and providing quality services, training, supervision and professional development can also have implications for factors such as staff retention. As referenced previously in Figure 15, some employees were considering leaving their positions due to inadequate professional development. Managers also stated that further opportunities such as mentoring or supervision would assist them in staying in their position if they were considering leaving (Figure 16).

When asked if their organisation has a specific budget per employee for professional development (Figure 17), 33% of managers said no. Additionally, when asked if their organisation has a specific budget per employee for supervision (Figure 18), only 30% of managers said yes. These responses reveal room for significant improvement in these areas within organisations.

Figure 17: Proportion of organisations which dedicate a budget per employee for professional development
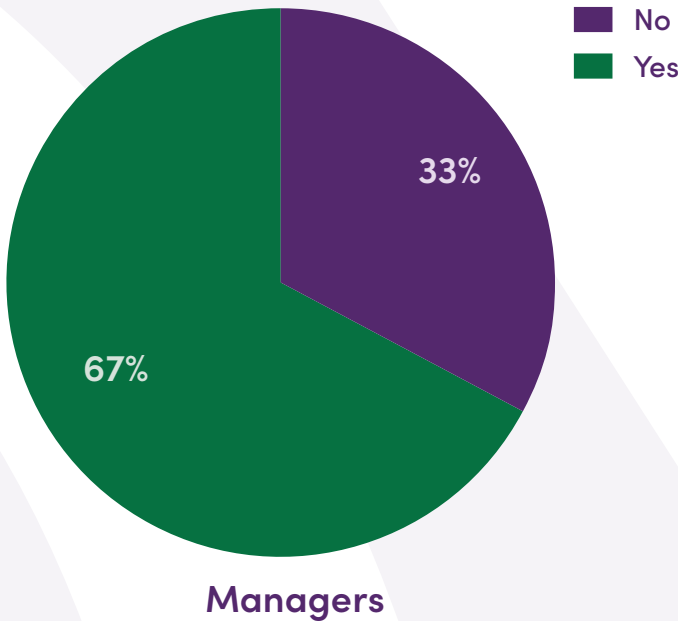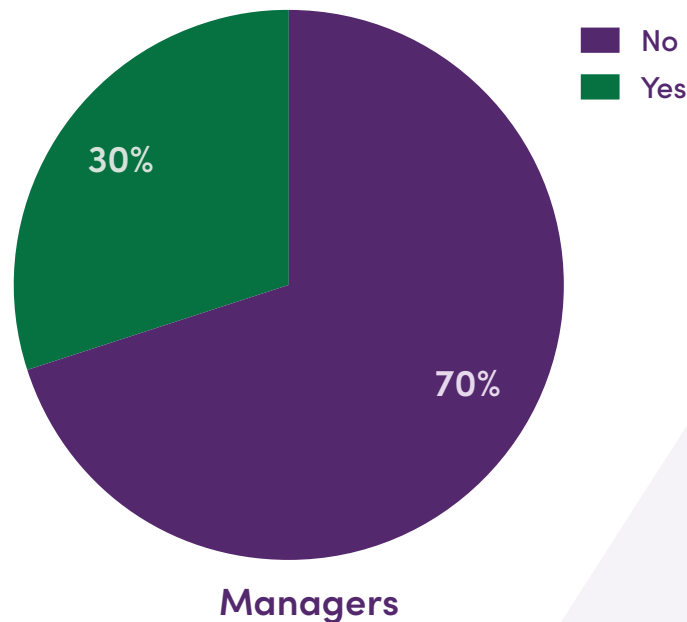

No
Yes

33%

67%

Managers

Figure 18: Proportion of organisations which dedicate a budget per employee for supervision

Managers

Legend:
- No (purple)
- Yes (green)

70% No, 30% Yes

Barriers in accessing training and professional development

The Workforce Survey found that 34% of employees experience barriers in accessing training and professional development (Figure 19).

Respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on the barriers they face in accessing training. The most common responses were:

- lack of availability of training in Alice Springs

- no or limited budget for external training

- not being able to access training for the first year at your organisation

- lack of internal training offered at organisation

- being limited by a $1000 training budget (in the NT this barely covers travel for staff in remote areas)

- reluctance from management to pay for training, especially professional development that is not mandatory

- being limited by remote location of workplace (travel costs)

- understaffed and under-supported workplaces making employees feel that they cannot take time away to attend training or professional development

Planning for future training and professional development

To inform future planning efforts for relevant training and professional development for the community sector in the NT, respondents were asked about the way they prefer to engage with training and events. As shown in Figure 20, most of both employees and managers would like to engage with training that is a mix of both face-to-face and online delivery.

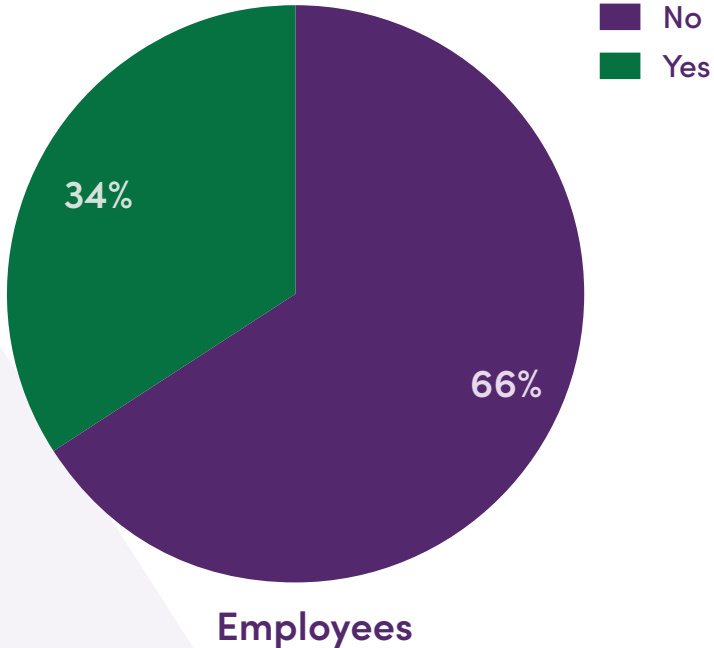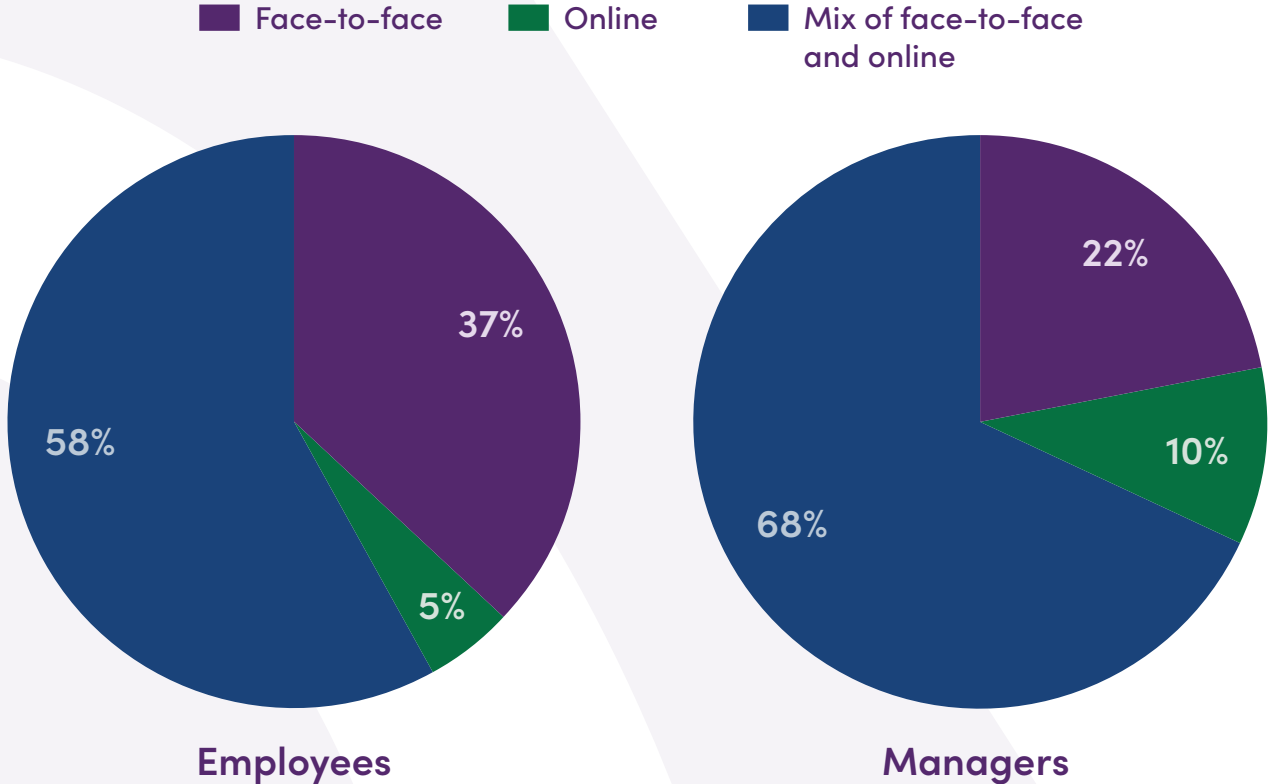**Figure 19: Proportion of employees who experience barriers in accessing training and professional development**

Legend:
- No (purple)
- Yes (green)

Pie chart (Employees):
- 66% (No)
- 34% (Yes)

Employees

Figure 20: Preference for training and events delivery

Legend:
- Face-to-face (purple)
- Online (green)
- Mix of face-to-face and online (blue)

Pie chart (Employees):
- 37% (Face-to-face)
- 5% (Online)
- 58% (Mix of face-to-face and online)

Employees

Pie chart (Managers):
- 22% (Face-to-face)
- 10% (Online)
- 68% (Mix of face-to-face and online)

Managers

Respondents were asked to provide reasoning for their preference. Most respondents stated that face-to-face delivery is better for learning, engaging and networking, but online delivery is better for affordability, accessibility and convenience. Online delivery of training is particularly beneficial for staff who work in remote areas and would benefit from saving time and resources that would otherwise have to be spent on travel, accommodation and flights. Several managers also observed that online training works better for small workplaces which can struggle with allowing staff to take time away from regular responsibilities.

Employees were asked about training topics they would like to see provided for the community sector in the future. The most suggested topics were:

- trauma-informed practice and education/ awareness raising about trauma

- cultural awareness/ safety

- mental health, mental health first aid and how to speak about mental health in a culturally sensitive way with Aboriginal communities

- domestic and family violence, particularly with focus on cultural safety for Aboriginal clients

- networking opportunities within the sector

- mediation and de-escalation

Several respondents noted that training on cultural awareness, mental health and domestic and family violence should be delivered by local practitioners and should be locally specific in order to be effective. Other potential training topics raised repeatedly by

respondents included basic counselling skills, alcohol and other drugs and training relating to LGBTQIA+ people (particularly Aboriginal LGBTQIA+ clients).

Managers were also asked about training topics they felt would be useful for their organisation. The top-rated topics were:

- staff management and supervision

- evaluations

- recruitment/ retention strategies

- funding/ grant application
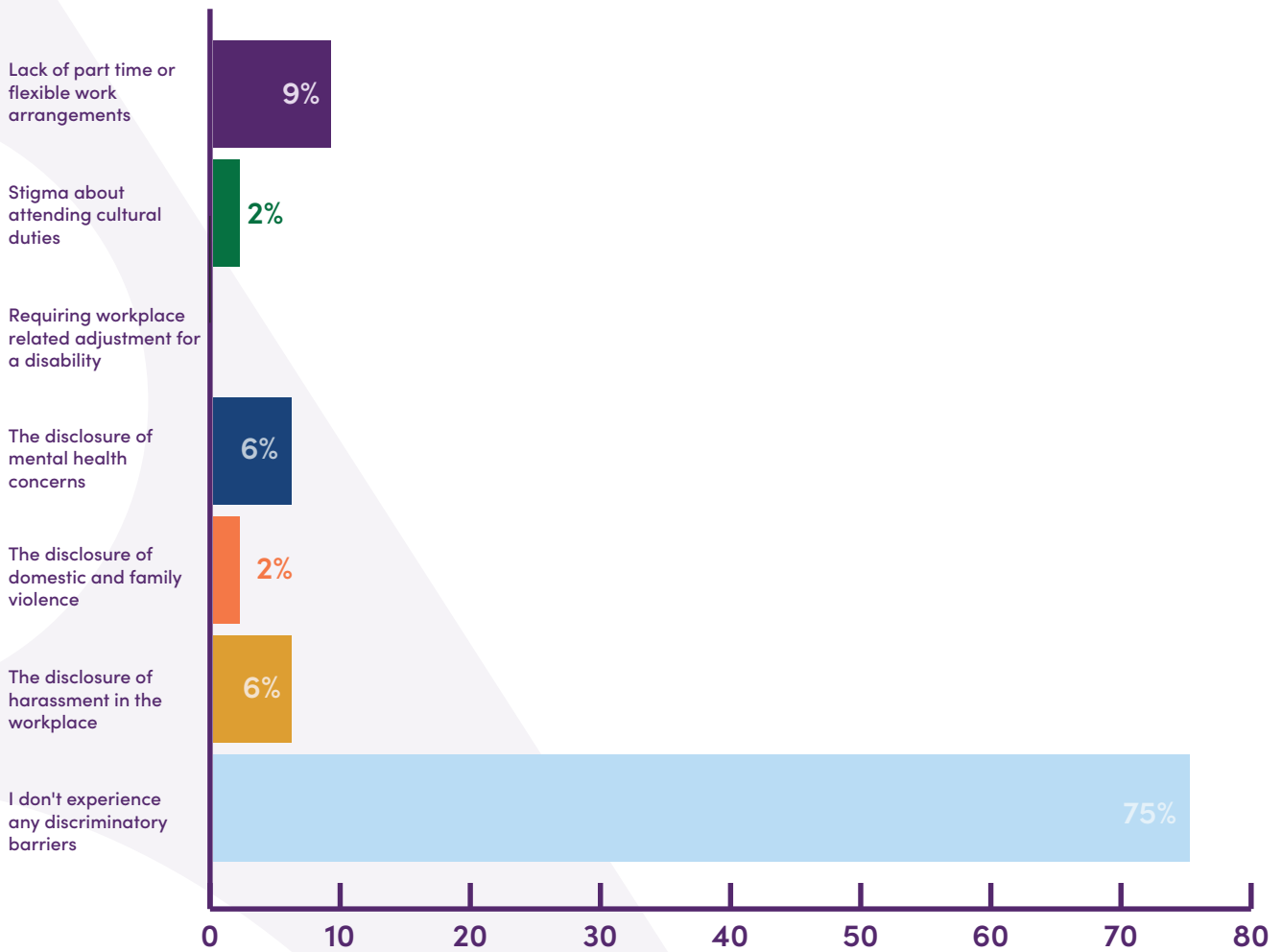
- strategic planning

Other topics raised by managers included organising/ activism, the Northern Territory Government Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework (RAMF training), working with trauma, case worker skills, coercive control, supervision and mentoring for young leaders and professional development for social workers.

Experiences of working in the community sector

Most employees (75%) stated that they do not experience any discriminatory barriers at their workplace. However, some employees reported experiencing discriminatory barriers relating to lack of part time or flexible working arrangements (9%), disclosure of mental health concerns (6%), disclosure of harassment in the workplace (6%), disclosure of domestic and family violence (2%) and stigma about attending cultural duties (2%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Discriminatory barriers experienced by employees at work

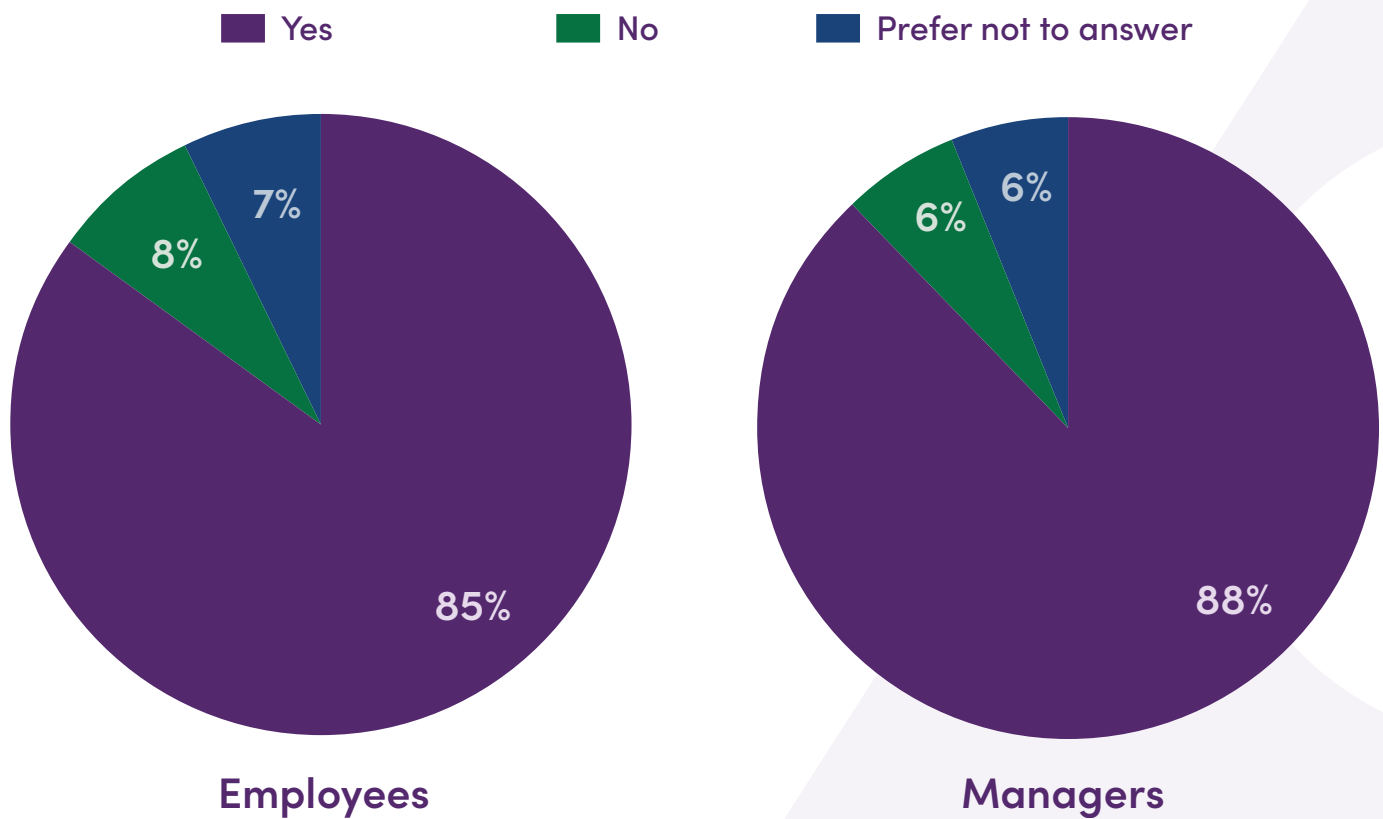| Barrier	Percentage
Lack of part time or flexible work arrangements	9%
Stigma about attending cultural duties	2%
Requiring workplace related adjustment for a disability	
The disclosure of mental health concerns	6%
The disclosure of domestic and family violence	2%
The disclosure of harassment in the workplace	6%
I don't experience any discriminatory barriers	75%

From the 'Other' responses, some employees also mentioned the following experiences:

- cultural and racial bias

- sexism

- ageism

- assertiveness in women being treated as being bossy or difficult by organisational leadership

- discrimination on the basis of being LGBTQIA+

- discrimination on the basis of disclosing experiences of burnout and vicarious trauma to management

Respondents were also asked about whether they feel safe and included at their workplace (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Do respondents feel safe and included at their workplace?

Legend: ■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Prefer not to answer

Employees

Yes: 85%
No: 8%
Prefer not to answer: 7%

Managers

Yes: 88%
No: 6%
Prefer not to answer: 6%

While most respondents did feel safe and included at their workplace, the respondents who answered no were asked to provide reasoning. Most responses related to workplace culture, not feeling heard by management or lack of trust in management:

'No acknowledgement from management about stress and why work is stressful'

'Not asking for my input into something I'd been doing for years'

'I do not trust leadership/ management to have my best interest or to advocate for me'

'Don't feel safe if putting in a complaint about staff or disclosing personal information'

'Workplace culture very negative, not much cohesion, competitiveness, judgement'

'My organisation does not bother to train or encourage management to actually understand the frameworks they insist on using, so if I try to do so and ask questions there's no one actually qualified to answer'

Changes in the workplace due to COVID-19 pandemic

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has had broad implications for workplaces, worker wellbeing and service demand, the survey asked respondents to describe the changes they have experienced in their workplaces because of the pandemic. The main changes observed by respondents were:

- implementation of social distancing and increased hygiene protocols at work

- increase in working from home and flexible working practices

- inability to see certain vulnerable clients and clients in remote areas due to restrictions

- increase in no-shows from clients

- impacts on face-to-face service delivery

- switch to online program delivery

- increase in online meetings, training and service delivery

- equipping staff to be able to work from home for the first time

- difficulty recruiting from interstate

- staff loss/ staff retention issues (particularly for staff with family interstate)

- increase in spending on personal protective equipment

Workforce Wellbeing

As established earlier in this report, workforce wellbeing is a theme that has emerged in the data from the Workforce Survey, with 'deterioration of social and emotional wellbeing due to work related stress' being a common reason for staff considering leaving their current positions. Understanding workforce wellbeing and the ways in which organisational leadership can better address this issue, is an essential challenge for the community sector, especially given the extra pressure everyone is currently under due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications this has for mental health and wellbeing at a societal level.

Respondents were asked to rate several statements regarding workplace culture and factors which influence their wellbeing in the workplace. Using a scale of 1 – 100, employees rated both their satisfaction with contracted hours of work per week and their employment status as an average of 84, and rate of pay and financial incentives as an average of 73 out of 100.

Both managers and employees were asked to rate factors which are important to them in the workplace. The top factors for employees were:

- supportive workplace

- work satisfaction

- flexible working arrangements

- access to professional development

- manageable workload

For managers, the top factors which are important to them in the workplace were:
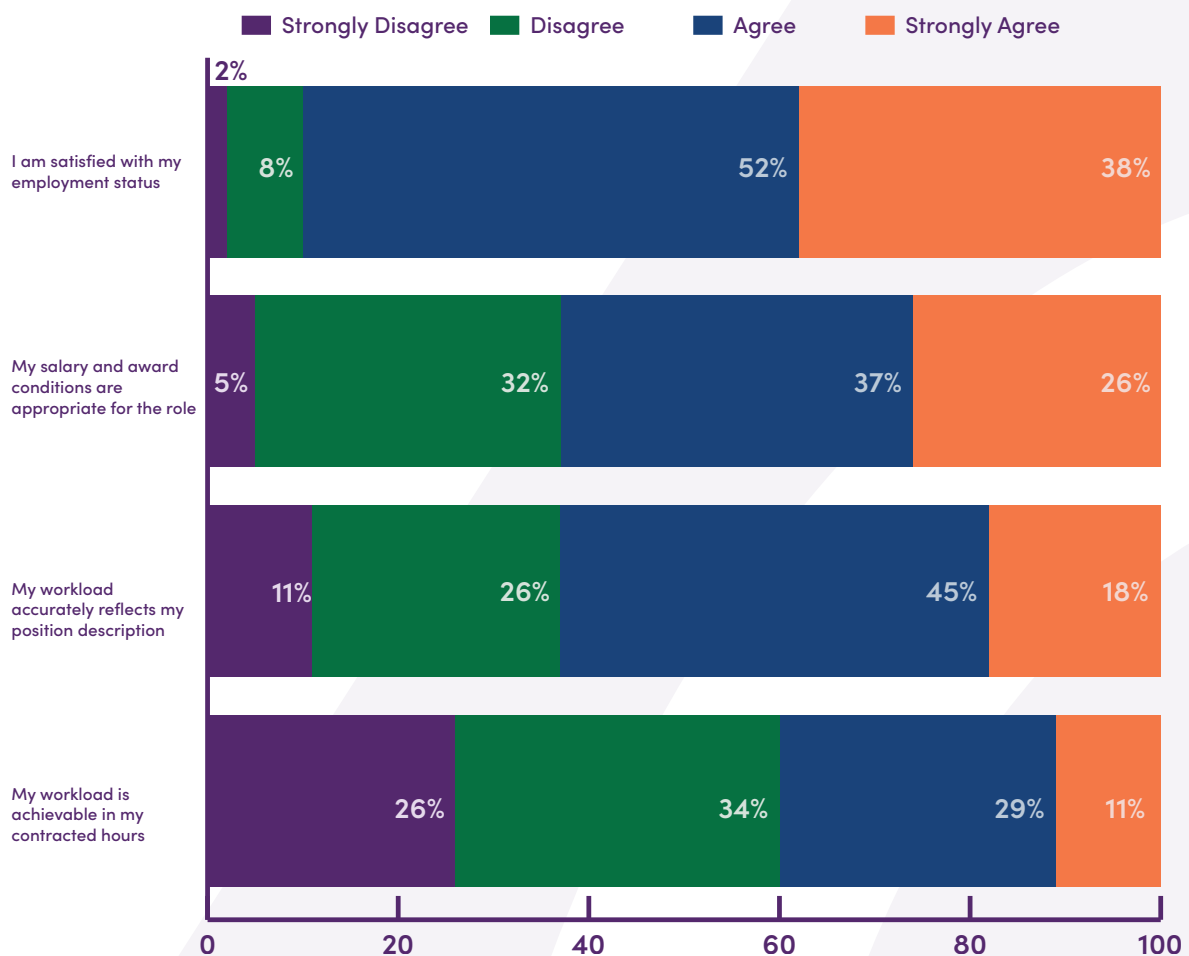
- work satisfaction

- flexible working arrangements

- manageable workload

- supportive workplace

When asked to what extent they agree or disagree with statements regarding workplace culture (Figure 23), there were mixed responses from managers, with a high number of managers disagreeing with the statements 'my workload is achievable in my contracted
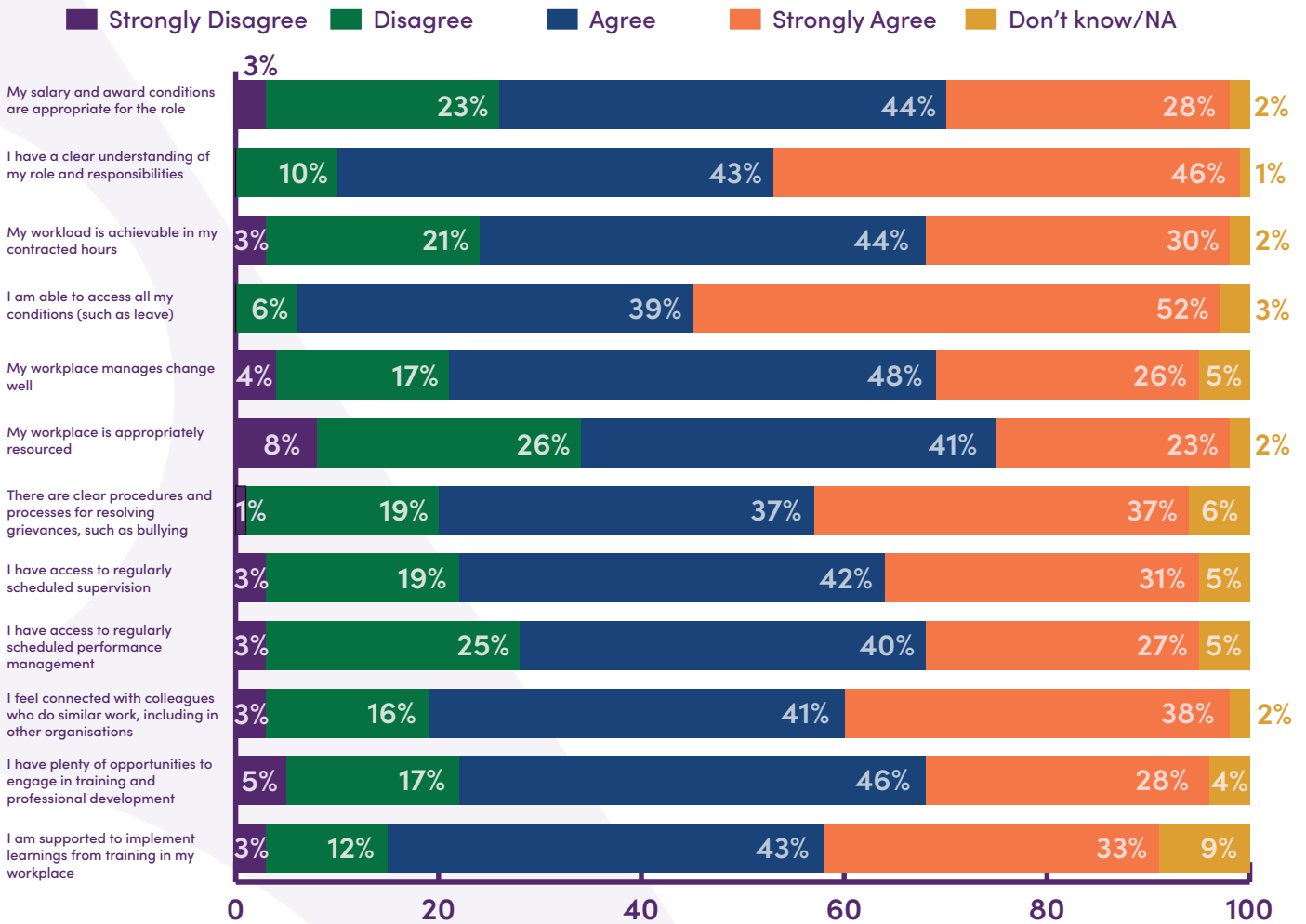
hours' and 'my salary and award conditions are appropriate for the role'.

Similarly, a high rate (20–25%) of employees indicated dissatisfaction with their salary and their workload, along with their access to performance management and the resources available at their workplace (Figure 24). Encouragingly, many employees agreed that they can access all their conditions (such as leave), and that they have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Figure 23: Workplace values – agree/ disagree (Managers)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my employment status	2%	8%	52%	38%
My salary and award conditions are appropriate for the role	5%	32%	37%	26%
My workload accurately reflects my position description	11%	26%	45%	18%
My workload is achievable in my contracted hours	26%	34%	29%	11%

Figure 24: Workplace values – agree/ disagree (Employees)

Legend: Strongly Disagree · Disagree · Agree · Strongly Agree · Don't know/NA

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know/NA
My salary and award conditions are appropriate for the role	3%	23%	44%	28%	2%
I have a clear understanding of my role and responsibilities		10%	43%	46%	1%
My workload is achievable in my contracted hours	3%	21%	44%	30%	2%
I am able to access all my conditions (such as leave)		6%	39%	52%	3%
My workplace manages change well	4%	17%	48%	26%	5%
My workplace is appropriately resourced	8%	26%	41%	23%	2%
There are clear procedures and processes for resolving grievances, such as bullying	1%	19%	37%	37%	6%
I have access to regularly scheduled supervision	3%	19%	42%	31%	5%
I have access to regularly scheduled performance management	3%	25%	40%	27%	5%
I feel connected with colleagues who do similar work, including in other organisations	3%	16%	41%	38%	2%
I have plenty of opportunities to engage in training and professional development	5%	17%	46%	28%	4%
I am supported to implement learnings from training in my workplace	3%	12%	43%	33%	9%

Social and emotional wellbeing at work

Using a scale of 1 – 100, respondents rated their social and emotional wellbeing at work. Both managers and employees had an average rating of 76 out of 100. Respondents were also asked to rate factors which enhance their wellbeing at work. For employees, the factors that were rated the highest were:

- supportive management

- safety and comfort at work

- a supportive environment that accepts that the effects of stress and trauma are normal and should not be stigmatised

- flexible working arrangements

For managers, the factors which rated the highest for enhancing wellbeing at work were:

- positive relationships with staff/ board

- opportunity to engage in diverse work

- safety and comfort at work

- a supportive environment that normalises the effects of stress and trauma

It is worth noting that additional factors including a higher rate of pay and access to counselling were rated as more important to employees than managers.

Ways organisations can support staff wellbeing

The majority (89%) of managers indicated that their organisation supports staff to access counselling if required (Figure 25).

Managers were also asked about other ways in which their organisation supports staff wellbeing. Responses included:

- office social club
- group lunches and team building/ team social outings
- wellbeing allowance of $400 per annum
- access to leave for health and lifestyle, family violence and mental health reasons
- self-care hour every fortnight for staff

- supporting working from home arrangements
- monthly health and wellbeing days
- having psychological safety as a key management principle
- establishment of workplace health and wellbeing committee
- two wellness vouchers per annum for staff
- art therapy for professionals
- encouraging staff to use sick leave for mental health days
- recognition of stress by management

Many managers also mentioned that their organisation supports staff wellbeing through flexibility, individual work plans, a vicarious trauma framework, regular supervision, access to professional development, prioritising having a culturally safe workplace and time off in lieu. While these factors certainly contribute to worker wellbeing, it should be noted that these are not strategies specifically targeting worker wellbeing, but rather practices that should already be being implemented by community sector organisations.

Figure 25: Access to counselling for staff

Legend:
- Organisation provides an Employee Assistance Program
- Organisation provides employees with details of free counselling services
- Organisation does not support staff to access counselling
- Other

89% 6% 3% 2%

Aspirations for the sector

Analysis of the survey findings throughout this report has shown that certain strategies would help strengthen the community sector workforce in the future. These include:

1.
Developing targeted strategies to recruit, retain and train Aboriginal staff into the community sector.

2.
Developing and implementing strategies to recruit, retain and train young people as staff.

3.
Prioritising a specific budget per employee for supervision as well as training.

4.
Upskilling community sector managers and organisational leadership in identifying and implementing strategies to improve workforce wellbeing.

5.
Focusing additional support from the community sector and peak bodies to source affordable training and professional development, informed by the need identified in this report for training on certain topics.

Conclusion

This report has presented the findings of the 2021 Northern Territory Community Sector Workforce Survey.

Overall, the survey provided an insight into the diversity of community sector staff and what they value in their workplaces. The survey findings also highlighted the current challenges faced by the sector and its employees, demonstrating that access to training and professional development and worker wellbeing need to be a focus for the sector to work towards a happier and healthier workforce, that can deliver high quality services consistently.

The survey also provided an insight into the ways in which the sector could work to address challenges such as worker wellbeing and staff recruitment and retention. These findings have informed the development of recommendations to inform potential change and improvement for the community sector. NTCOSS hopes that the findings presented in this report prove to be a useful resource for the sector, to inform workforce planning and workforce related advocacy.
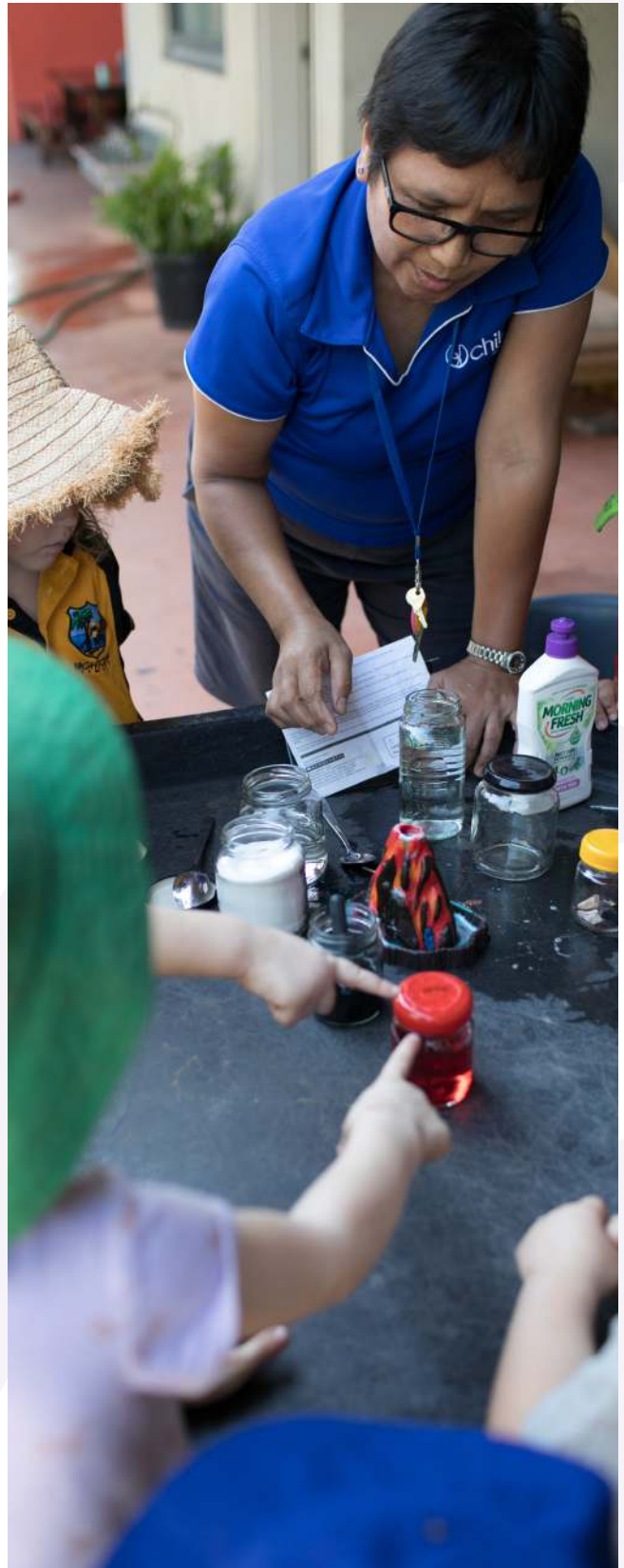
References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2020), Gender Indicators, Australia. Available from https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/gender-indicators-australia/latest-release

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2016), 2016 Census QuickStats: Northern Territory. Available from: https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/7?opendocument

Cortis, N. and M. Blaxland, (2020), The profile and pulse of the sector: Findings from the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey. Sydney: ACOSS.

Deloitte, (2020), The value of informal care in 2020: Carers Australia May 2020. Available from: https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL-Value-of-Informal-Care-22-May-2020_No-CIC.pdf

Gilchrist, D.J. and T. Emery, (2020), Value of the Not-for-profit Sector 2020: The Second Examination of the Economic Contribution of the Not-for-profit Human Services Sector in the Northern Territory. A report for the Northern Territory Council of Social Service, Darwin, Australia.

Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), (2019), Northern Territory Community Sector Workforce Survey 2019. Available from: https://ntcoss.org.au/news/northern-territory-community-sector-workforce-survey-2019/

Northern Territory Government, (2018), NTPS EmployAbility Strategy 2018 – 2022: Valuing an Inclusive Workforce. Available from: https://ocpe.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/246255/NTPS-EmployAbility-Strategy-2018-2022-Booklet-nohands-web.pdf

List of figures

Appendix 1

Method

The design of this survey was shaped by the previous NTCOSS workforce surveys, produced in 2012 and 2019. The content of the survey was also informed by input from the community sector and NTCOSS staff regarding information gaps and priority issues for the sector. The survey used a mixed method approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, and used a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions.

Sample

The survey was open for all people working within the NT community sector and was available to be completed online via SurveyMonkey. To reach the desired sample groups, the survey was promoted on several online platforms (e-bulletins, newsletters, social media and email) and numerous networks across the NT. To ensure the widest possible reach, NTCOSS members and relevant organisations and their staff were also encouraged to share the survey with their professional networks. As a result of this approach, the responses received were not collated from a specific sample size, and so the response rate for this survey cannot be measured.

Scope

The Workforce Survey was designed to capture data about the NT's community sector workforce, to help build a profile of the demographics of this workforce and to learn about respondents' experiences of working in the sector. The survey aims to fill a gap in current data from employees of the NT community sector and collect information that is more NT-specific than the data from other similar data sources such as the Australian Community Sector Survey, produced by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

Some related topics are not in scope for this Workforce Survey. For example, this survey did not aim to gather data on rates of service use or demand. For more information on topics such as service demand, please refer to the findings from the 2021 ACOSS Australian Community Sector Survey, which should be released in December 2021. Another commonly requested topic is data on the economic contribution of the NT community sector. This data was not measured by the Workforce Survey but can be found in the NTCOSS Value of the Not-for-profit Sector Report 2020.

Limitations

Certain potential limitations should be considered when reading the findings from the survey. In particular, while this trend does reflect the distribution of the NT's population in some ways, most survey respondents were from Darwin and Alice Springs. As a result, the survey results may be limited in that they may not accurately represent the voices of community sector workers in remote and rural areas of the NT.

NTCOSS
Northern Territory
Council of Social Service

NTCOSS acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout the Northern Territory and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. Aboriginal sovereignty has not been ceded.