

The Better Place Project

Albury's Workforce Wellbeing



Executive Summary

Overview

Mental Health Month is celebrated each year in the month of October in NSW. It encourages all of us to think about our mental health and wellbeing, regardless of whether we may have a lived experience of mental illness or not. It also gives us the opportunity to understand the importance of good mental health in our everyday lives and encourages help-seeking behaviours when needed.

In 2020, the community of Albury (and Wodonga) experienced significant social, personal, and business impacts due to Covid-19 and the decision by the NSW Government to close the border between NSW and Victoria. The border closure occurred between Albury and Wodonga, which operates as one community, for a period of 137 days (between the 8th of July 2020 and the 22nd November 2020).

Albury Border Connect and The Personnel Group collaborated to undertake a survey of the mental condition of the Albury business community. This survey was named "The Better Place Project" and it was an important initiative to gauge the current sentiment of businesses and employees regarding their mental health and wellbeing during 2020.

The results of the survey were to be provided to AlburyCity Council and other Government agencies, to assist in advocacy for support and recovery for our community – a community which is/was one of the hardest hit communities due to the Border Closure. The survey also provided an opportunity to provide real-time support and guidance to Business Owners, Managers, and employees on where and how to seek local help for their mental health and wellbeing. Ultimately, the survey would also help us to understand the capacity the business community has to undergo the task of economic recovery for the region.

Project Delivery

The Survey took place within the Albury LGA and aimed to have 400 responses from 600 approaches. The survey was to take place across the five weeks of October 2020. The Personnel Group would provide two staff daily (male and female) to physically walk into businesses and survey them as well as provide supporting resources. Albury Business Connect would conduct an electronic campaign using a survey link and provide electronic resources to their membership of approx. 400 businesses (approx. 7,000 employees).

Environmental Conditions

At the time of conducting the survey, the Border Closure was in place and had only just been relaxed to allow residents to commute freely between Albury and Wodonga. The recognised Border Resident zone ('Border Bubble') was (approx.) 50km north and south of the Border. The Bubble had been extended to include the towns of Bright, Porepunkah, and Falls Creek. Due to the relaxed restrictions to enter NSW, plus the fact that mandatory mask wearing was only applicable in Victoria, Albury was experiencing an increase in interstate visitors. This had a positive impact, particularly on retail and hospitality in Albury.

Findings

A total of 335 responses were collected, and the results of the survey were to be expected. Covid-19 and the Border Closure had a significant impact on businesses and its people. The results can be found in the attached document, along with an infographic, which highlights the key results. Further to the key results, anecdotal feedback was provided by respondents, clinicians, and medical professionals, indicating the wait times for mental health services (psychiatry/psychology/counselling) are dangerously long – in many instances, up to 6 months.

Conclusion

The results have identified that Albury businesses have struggled, and will continue to struggle, as a result of the Border Closure and broader Covid-19 impacts. Whilst future sentiment was positive, many people felt hopeless. Early intervention is the key to recovery, and the community cannot rely on getting through without accessing personal and financial support.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the NSW Government assist in the recovery of the region by providing a comprehensive support package that assists businesses in their individual recoveries, both emotionally and financially. This assistance should be in the form of 'on-the-ground' Support Officers for the Albury business community, who can work with businesses independently to access resources and support for mental health and for access to financial grants which are currently available, but not being utilised.

**The Better Place Project
A Workforce Wellbeing Initiative**



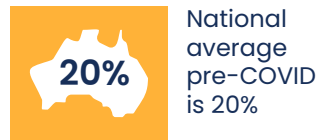
The Better Place Project

Albury's Workforce Wellbeing

From the Albury businesses surveyed...

47%

of respondents said they sometimes to always did not feel in control of **their mental health**



During the data collection process for this project, respondents were given mental health support material. For a list of support services available in Albury Wodonga, [click here](#).



Impact on businesses

81% of respondents said **COVID-19** had impacted their business/job

85% of respondents said the **Border Closure** had impacted their business/job



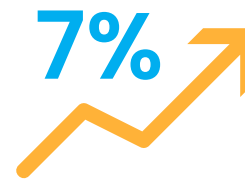
Over the last 30 days...

70% of respondents said their worries sometimes to always **overwhelmed** them

71% of respondents said they sometimes to always had trouble **staying focused**



- of respondents feel **hopeless** about work
- of respondents have found their workplace settings **upsetting**



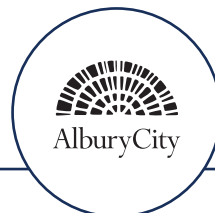
increase in feeling **hopeless often or always** at work

compared with feeling hopeless in general.

a joint initiative by



supported by



Source: Data has been sourced from The Better Place Project Survey, conducted by Albury Business Connect and The Personnel Group with responses from 335 businesses based in Albury. The survey was conducted in October 2020 while the NSW/Vic border was closed. 20% of Australians aged between 16-85 experience mental illness every year. Source: Black Dog Institute