

# The Mental Burden of a Global Pandemic

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## Background

The SARS-CoV-2 global pandemic (COVID-19) has had a significant impact on the pharmacist workforce resulting in increased workplace demands, staff shortages and the requirement to remain frontline and accessible within a high risk environment. These factors have led to many impacts on mental health and wellbeing such as increased rates of burnout and an overall decrease in staff morale.

## Aim

To assess pharmacists' wellbeing, perceptions on organisational support and potential solutions to improve mental health and wellbeing.

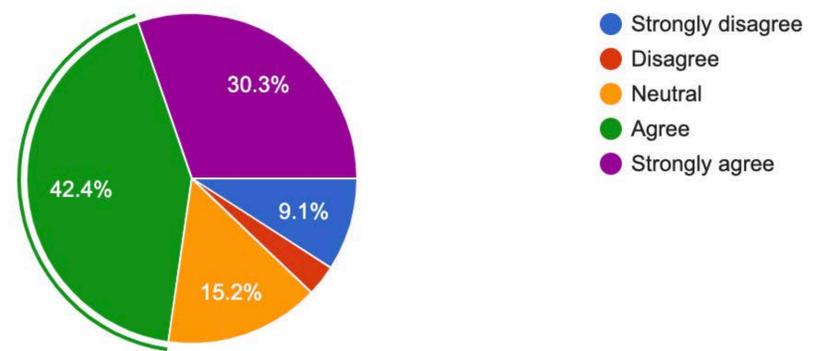
## Methods

An anonymous online survey was circulated to public hospital pharmacists across New South Wales and Queensland via social media and professional networks during July and August 2022. The survey consisted of 19 Likert scale questions and 3 short answers questions to prompt in-depth, honest feedback.

## Results

Of the 33 total survey responses, 72% agreed that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on mental health, wellbeing and workplace satisfaction. Of the total responders, 52% are considering a career break to improve their mental health. Regarding organisational support, 49% disagreed that their organisations had made notable changes to better support mental health and only 30% agreed that their line manager had created a culture that prioritised the mental health of the team.

The top three workplace factors contributing to poor mental health and higher burnout rates were staff shortages, increased workload expectations and dissatisfied patients due to reduced services. Recurrent themes that emerged regarding solutions included appropriate remuneration, flexible working arrangements, open discussion of mental health and increased opportunities for team bonding.



**Figure 1:** The working conditions of COVID – 19 have had a negative impact on your workplace satisfaction, mental health and wellbeing

**Table 1:** Top five workplace factors which have contributed to reduced staff wellbeing and mental health

Workplace factors	% of total responses
<b>Staff shortages</b>	94%
<b>Increased workload demands</b>	85%
<b>Unsatisfied patients</b>	40%
<b>Manager expectations</b>	24%
<b>PPE</b>	3%

**Table 2:** Top five potential solutions identified to improve reduced staff wellbeing and mental health

Potential solutions	No. of mentions
<b>Hiring more staff</b>	15
<b>Increased remuneration</b>	10
<b>Social incentives within the department</b>	9
<b>Flexible working arrangements</b>	9
<b>Proactive mental health check-in from line manager</b>	8

## Discussion

The survey results suggest that COVID-19 has negatively impacted pharmacists largely through ongoing staff shortages and increased workload demands. A lack of consistent and effective support from health organisations has been identified. There is scope for improvement from a department level to improve the mental health and wellbeing of pharmacists employed.