



Methods Report

Housing Work & Income Survey Report

Part 1, January 2022

UNIONS**WA**

wacoss wa council of
social service

"Being on the disability pension and having to rent privately, I'm not able to save up to even afford a new mattress."

Overview

Affordable housing, its suitability, location and related access to jobs, transportation or community and other services has a powerful impact on quality of life. Housing costs typically comprise the single greatest component for an individual or household budget.

The inadequacy of our social safety net means income from paid employment is a key factor in the adequacy of housing. For those reliant on income support, their options for housing are severely limited.

The pandemic, and public policy responses to it, have had a dramatic and changing impact on housing access and affordability. In response to the pandemic, many Western Australians have been required or have sought to work from home. For some this highlighted the inadequacy of their housing.

Housing costs have risen steeply while labour and skill shortages have yet to drive wages up sufficiently to compensate. Together with border closures, this has impaired housing and workforce mobility.

This was the context for this online survey on Housing, Work and Income conducted over the period 26 July to 7 December 2021.

The survey is not based on a random sample although the demographic and other information collected suggests that the survey population is broadly representative. Nevertheless, given the speed with which circumstances were and are changing results might be viewed as a useful snapshot for a range of important issues facing many in our community.

This is the first of two reports on a joint Housing Work and Income Survey initiated by UnionsWA and WACOSS, respectively the peak bodies in Western Australia for unions and the community service sector. It aims to shed light on some of these fundamental issues.

This first report outlines the methods used to conduct the survey and outlines the nature of respondents to the survey. It provides an indication of the representativeness of findings, most of which will be the subject of a second, forthcoming second report.

Methods

In advance of the distribution of this survey, a pilot online survey was developed and distributed in early July 2021 to a sample of respondents to test the questions and categories for responses. The full survey was launched in late July 2021. This report presents responses up to December 2021¹.

Responses were collected in several ways. The primary mode of collection was through emails sent to a 15,000-entry email list managed by UnionsWA. The UnionsWA list is mostly of working people and mostly of union members. Other sources included some completions through Facebook posts and advertisements as well as through distribution by WACOSS. As this survey did not draw on a random sample the demography is discussed below.

In total there were a maximum of 938 respondents, though not all respondents replied to all questions. In charts and figures used here the number of respondents for the relevant questions are provided (denoted as n =). At Appendix A to this report are the questions posed through the survey. Appendix B provides the results of email tests undertaken during the pilot phase of the survey. Those tests were conducted to identify the most effective email subject lines as well as the most effective key phrase that motivated recipients to complete the survey. Those findings provide some useful basic research on communication about housing, work and income issues.

Survey Respondents

In this section we compare several key characteristics of survey respondents with population wide data to assess the overall representativeness or otherwise of the survey respondent population. These characteristics include the geographic location of respondents, housing tenure, household type and employment status.

Geographic Location

Question 6 (Appendix A) of the survey asked respondents to provide their location. Those with a WA postcode are represented in Table 1, which compares the proportion of respondents in WA living in the wider Perth metropolitan area and regional WA with data from the ABS.

Table 1: Perth Metropolitan & Regional WA, Survey Respondents and ABS 2020, (%) [n=893]

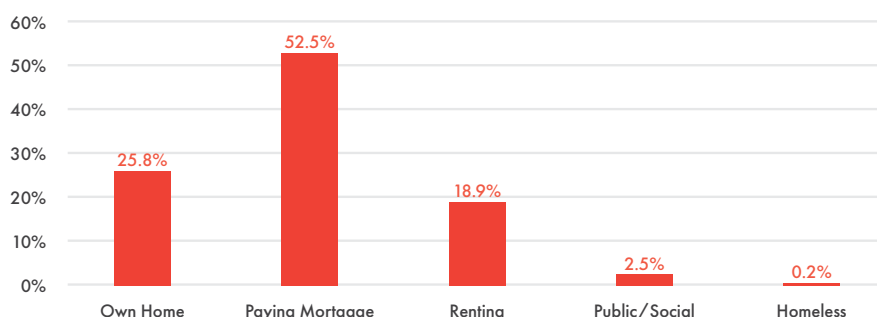
	Perth Metro	Regional WA
Survey Respondents	84.8%	15.1%
ABS 2020 ²	79.8%	20.2%

There were about a quarter fewer survey respondents from regional WA than would be expected from this comparison.

Housing Tenure

Question 1 (Appendix A) asked respondents the tenure of their housing i.e., whether owned, mortgaged, rented etc and the proportions for each are presented in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Who owns your house (%) [n=938]



These results compare favourably with data reported in a study by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare for 2017-18, albeit for Australia as a whole³. The AIHW found that 29.5% owned their home outright (compared with 25.8% of survey respondents), 36.7% have a mortgage (compared 52.5% of respondents), 27.1% were renters (18.9%) and 3.1% were in public housing (compared with 2.5% of respondent, noting this also includes community housing).

Overall, the survey respondent population broadly reflect the housing tenure types in the wider community.

¹ The online survey can be viewed here www.unionswa.com.au/housing_work_and_income_survey

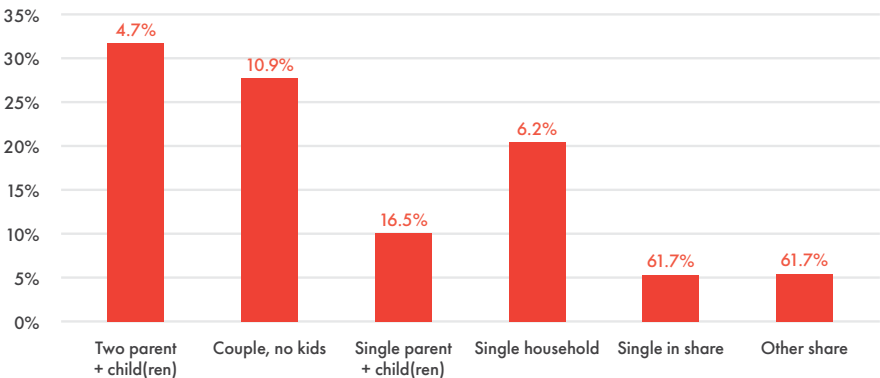
² ABS (September 2020) Population - states and territories, www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2020#states-and-territories

³ AIHW Home ownership: Household tenure www.housingdata.gov.au/visualisation/home-ownership/household-tenure

Household Type

Chart 2 below presents the household type characteristics of our survey population based on responses to Question 5 in Appendix A.

Chart 2: Which best describes your current household? (%) [n=893]



The closest comparative source for community-wide measures are non-identical questions included in the ABS Census 2016⁴. Australia-wide in 2016 44.7% of household were couples with children (compared with 31.5% of survey respondents), couples without children were at 37.8% (compared with 27.5% from the survey), 15.8% were sole parent households (compared with 10.0% of respondents) and 22.8% were single person households (compared with 20.3%). The 2016 Census found that 4.0% of household were share households (5.3%).

Overall, the survey respondents were of a mix of household types like those known to be the case in the wider community.

Employment Status

Question 11 (Appendix A) asked respondents about their typical travel time to work as well as providing the option of “not in work”. Table 2 below presents the proportion of survey respondents in work and those not in work comparing these with the relevant ABS data.

Table 2: In Work & Not in Work, Survey Respondents and ABS 2021, (%) [n=814]

	In Work	Not in Work
Survey Respondents	91.7%	9.3%
ABS 2021 ⁵	81.0%	19.0%

Compared with the broader population, survey respondents were disproportionately in work. There is a notably lower proportion of those not in work for survey respondents, which is about half of what would be expected.

Conclusions

This survey instrument is acknowledged to lack a random sampling basis, and there are some evident biases reflecting the core group of working people used to solicit responses. However, on a range of geographic, employment status, housing tenure and household type indicators, the survey respondent population reflects the wider community. This suggests a degree of relevance for related findings that will be reported in the second report of this survey that will discuss factors related to housing including workforce mobility, adequacy of house and employment.

4 ABS Census 2016 Understanding Family Composition www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2900.0~2016~Main%20Features~Family%20Composition~10148

5 ABS (November 2021) Labour Force, Australia: www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#states-and-territories. For the purpose of calculating “not in work”, the number of unemployed West Australians was added to the number not in the labour force, this latter figure calculated from the participation rate and number in work.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Who owns the house in which you live at present?
2. Which best describes your current housing?
3. How long have you been living in your current home?
4. In total how many people, adult and/or children) live in your current housing?
5. Which best describes your current household?
6. What is your postcode?
7. In terms of space for your household, which best describes your current housing?
8. In \$ per week how much do you pay in rent or mortgage?
9. Over the past year how much, if at all, has your weekly housing cost (rent, mortgage) increased?
10. What is your household (you and your partner's, if relevant) total take-home (that is, after tax) income each week?
11. If you work, how long does it normally take for you to travel to work one-way?
12. If you were to look for or find a new job, which of the following best describes how long would you be prepared to travel to work or relocate for work?
13. Please add here in your own word any other details about housing, work, or income you feel are important.

Appendix B: Test email results

As part of the rollout for the pilot survey a series of test emails were prepared to identify the most effective email subject lines as well as the most effective key phrase that motivated recipients to go onto the survey (measured as click-through rates for the online survey link). The template email is provided below. Three different subject lines and three key phrases were tests using just over 1,000 emails in each combination. The results for these nine test sets are provided in the table below.

These findings provide some useful basic research on communication about housing, work and income issues. The subject line 'A right for all...' combined with a key phrase about housing as 'a basic need essential to holding down a job and keeping in good health' was found to result in the best overall click-through rate to the online survey at 4.5%, almost twice as good as the lowest click-through rate across these tests.

Key Theory of Change phrases (across) Subject lines (below)	"because to put the case for wage rises to keep pace with costs of living, for most there is no greater cost than housing."	"because housing is a basic right that should be extended to us all."	"because housing is a basic need essential to holding down a job and keeping in good health."
Stronger with knowledge...	CTR*: 2.8% Open rate** 34.7	CTR: 3.8% Open Rate: 36.6	CTR: 3.0% Open Rate: 36.9%
A right for all...	CTR: 3.4% Open Rate: 36.3%	CTR: 3.6% Open Rate: 39.9%	CTR: 4.5% Open Rate: 38.9%
As basic as it gets...	CTR: 3.7% Open Rate: 37.8%	CTR: 3.3% Open Rate: 36.4%	CTR: 3.7% Open Rate: 42.1%

*CTR = Click Through Rate i.e. to the online survey link; ** Open Rate = the % of those that fully opened the email

Template email with the highlighted phrase that was the only text that changed in the body of the email.



Philip --

Even thinking about a mortgage is frightening. I've lived in rental accommodation for some years now putting up with high rents, waiting months for fixes to odd jobs, housing insecurity and being unable do those things that make a house (or in my case, an apartment) a home

So, I'm writing to ask you to [complete our Housing, Work and Income survey](#) because housing is a basic need essential to holding down a job and keeping in good health. Your sharing, in confidence, information about your circumstances will help to make our advocacy stronger. Survey completions will also go into a draw for the chance to win a \$100 gift voucher.

This survey is a joint initiative between UnionsWA and the WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS), the peak body in WA of community and social service agencies.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Doyle

p.s. please do think to share our survey online here with others, the more we collect, the stronger will be our case for good wages and housing policies.

UNIONSWA



www.unionswa.com.au