



Australian Government  
Australian Public Service Commission

# Neurodiversity in the Australian Public Service

## Understanding our workforce

People Insights Branch  
Research Note 09-23



# Key findings

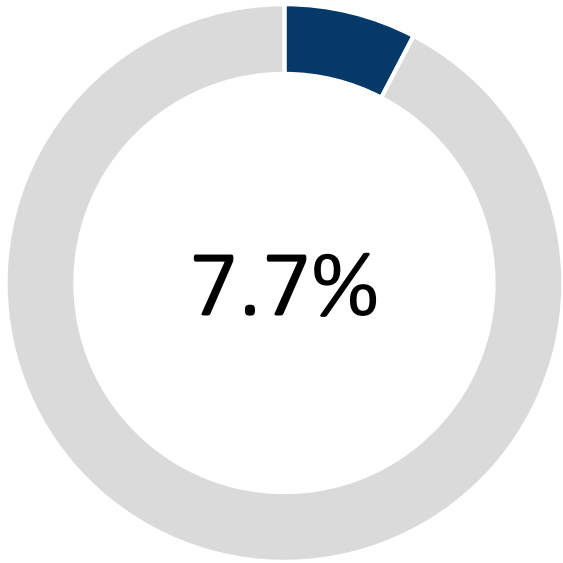
- 7.7% of APS employees considered themselves to be neurodivergent.
- Neurodivergent employees were typically younger and worked in lower classification levels.
- Larger proportions of neurodivergent employees worked in policy, data and research, ICT, and communications and marketing job types.
- Neurodivergent employees reported lower rates of:
  - Satisfaction with health and wellbeing supports
  - Perceived workplace respect, inclusion, and equal opportunity
- Perceptions of discrimination, harassment and bullying were higher for neurodivergent employees than those who do not consider themselves to be neurodivergent.

# The 2023 APS Employee Census captured data on neurodivergence

For the first time in an APS Employee Census, APS employees were asked

*“Do you consider yourself to be neurodivergent?”*

Results showed 7.7% of respondents considered themselves to be neurodivergent. A further 11.5% indicated they were not sure.



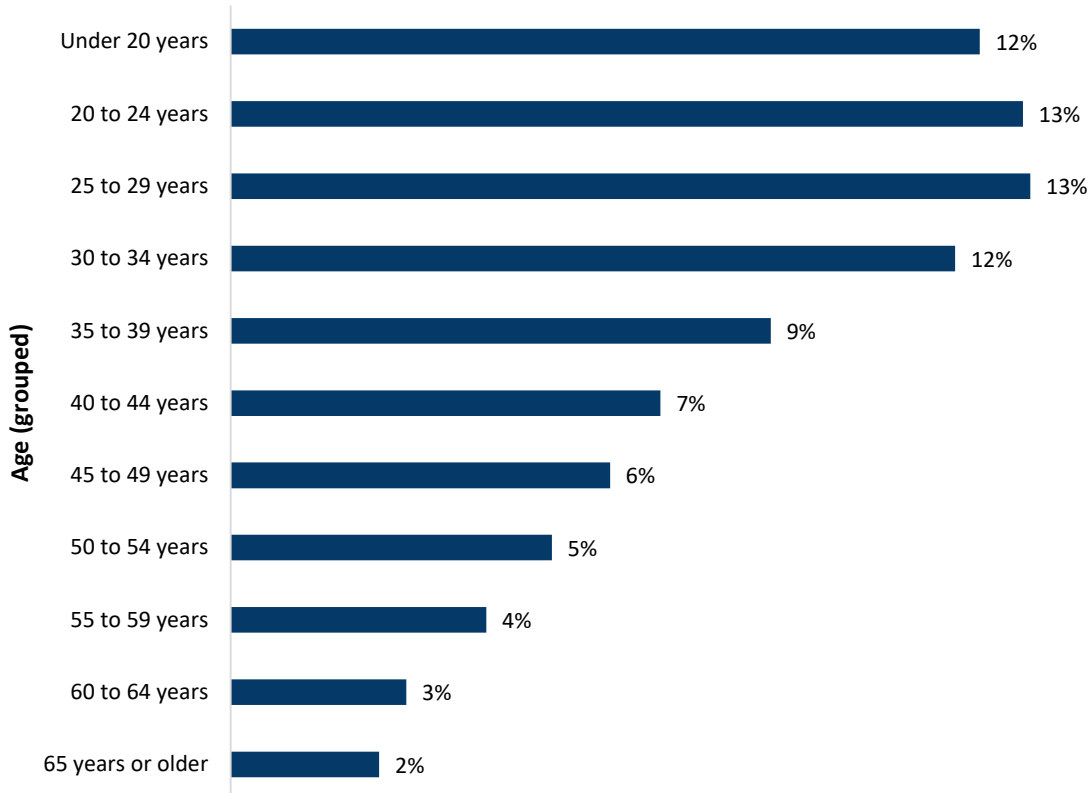
Note. This report presents findings of respondents who answered “yes” to the above question. It does not present findings for respondents who answered “not sure” due to methodological limitations within the neurodivergence measure. Further details are contained at the end of this report.

# Respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent were typically younger

Higher proportions of respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent were in seen younger age groups. Thirteen percent of those aged 25 to 29 years considered themselves to be neurodivergent.

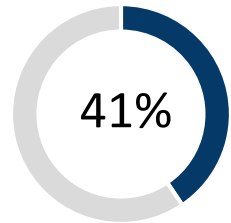
The proportion who considered themselves to be neurodivergent steadily decreased in older age groups.

Proportion of respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent within each age group



# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent also commonly identified with other diversity groups

Respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent



**Disability**

Indicated they had an ongoing disability



**First Nations**

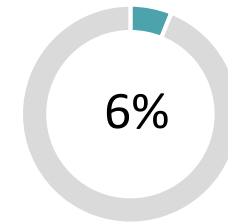
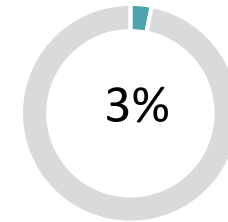
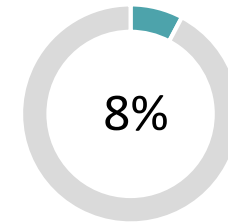
Indicated they identified as an Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person



**LGBTIQ+**

Indicated they identified as LGBTIQ+

Respondents who did not consider themselves to be neurodivergent

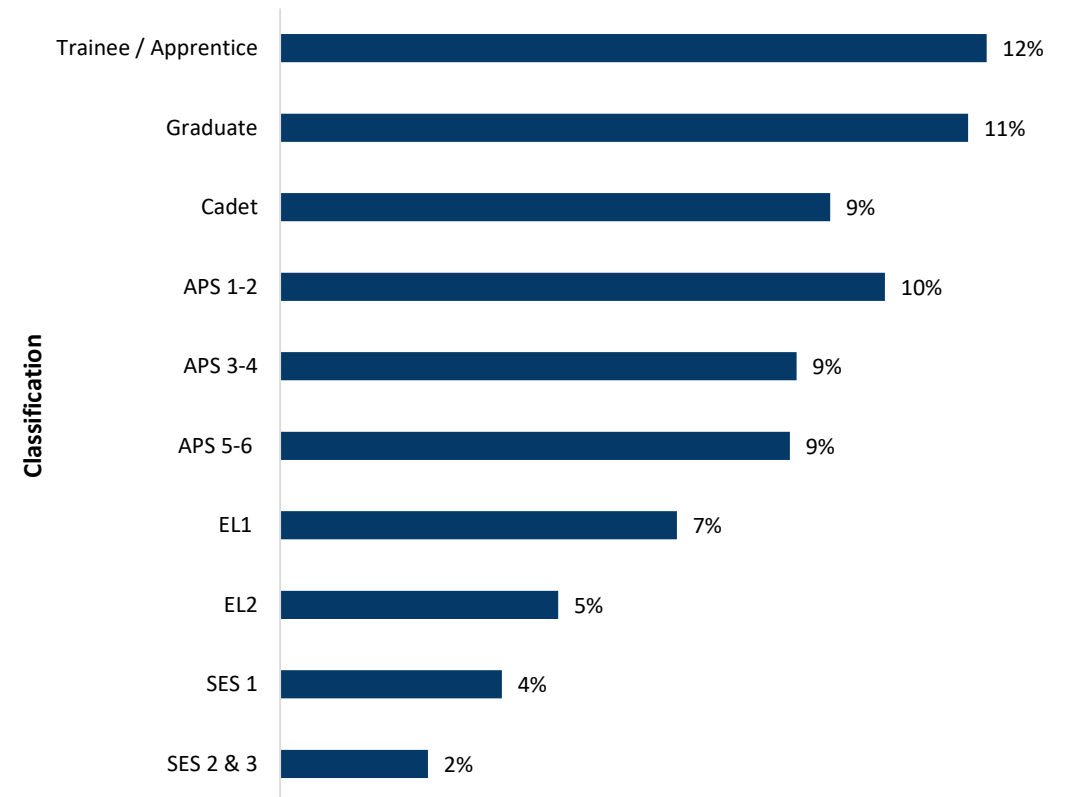


# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent more commonly worked in roles at entry level and APS 1-6 classifications

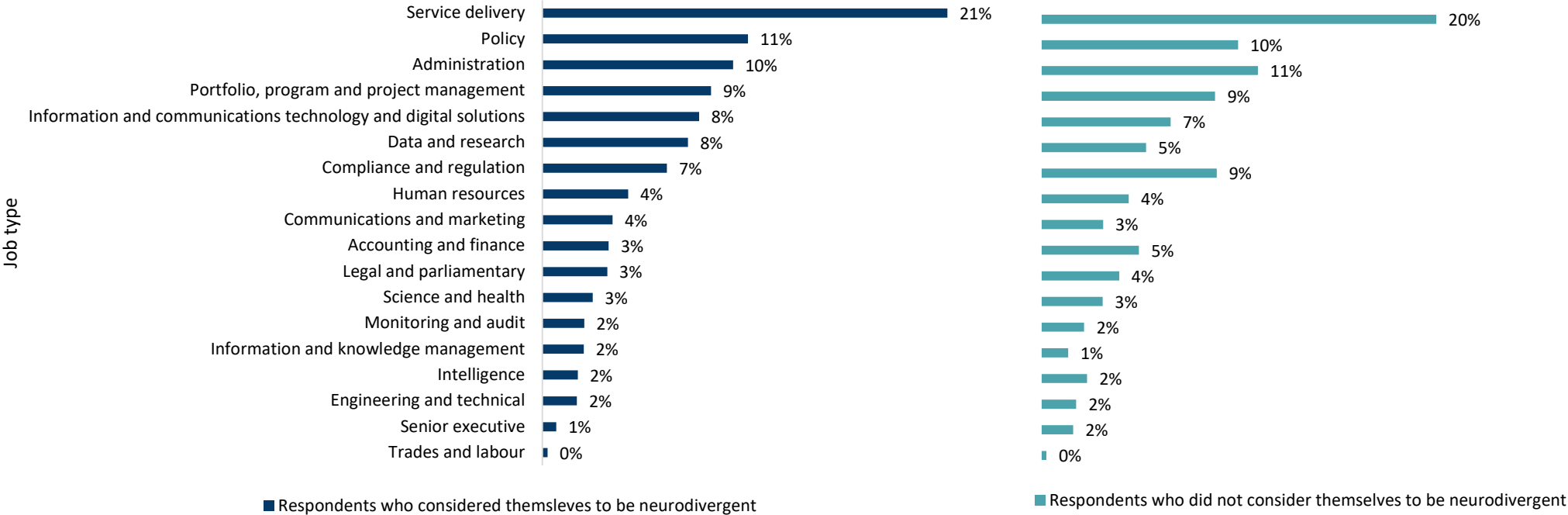
Around one in every ten employees who work in roles at entry level and APS 1-6 classifications considered themselves to be neurodivergent.

The proportion of respondents working at different classifications decreased from entry level classifications (Trainee/Apprentice 12%, Graduate 11%) to SES Band 2 and 3 roles (2%).

Proportion of respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent within each classification



# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent were present in all job types across the APS

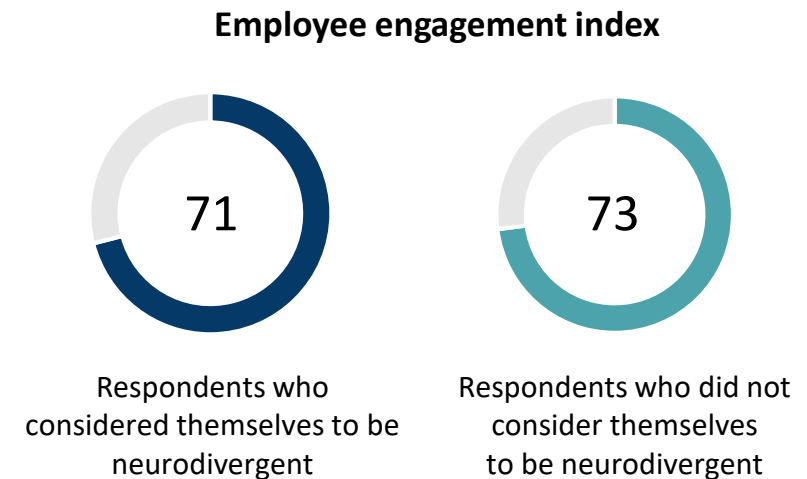


Overall, similar proportions of respondents who did or did not consider themselves to be neurodivergent performed each broad type of work. Slightly larger proportions of neurodivergent respondents worked in policy, data and research, ICT, and communications and marketing job types.

# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent reported slightly lower levels of employee engagement

Employee engagement is more than simply job satisfaction or commitment to an organisation. It is the extent to which employees are motivated, inspired and enabled to improve an organisation's outcomes. Employee engagement is a two-way relationship that exists between an employee and their organisation.

Respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent had a slightly lower employee engagement index score than those who did not.



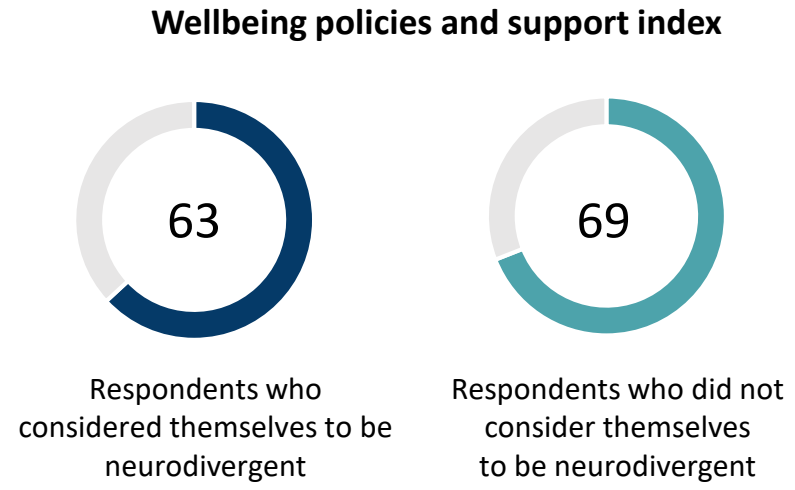


# A smaller proportion of employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent felt their health and wellbeing was supported

The APS Employee Census wellbeing policies and support index measures employees' awareness of the support offered by their agency in areas known to assist a healthy and sustainable working environment.

Higher scores indicate that respondents feel their health and wellbeing is supported.

Respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent had a considerably lower wellbeing policies and support index score than those who did not.

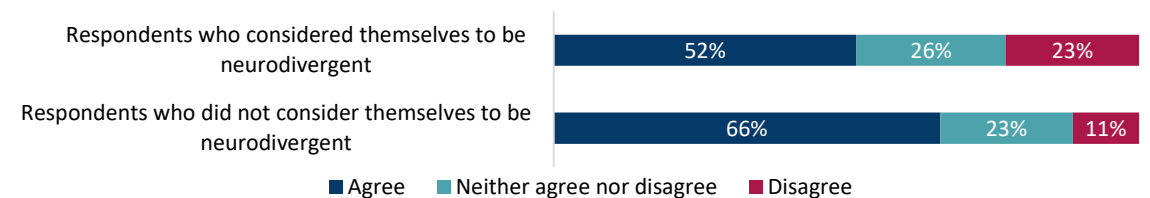


# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent were less satisfied with wellbeing support and experienced greater stress

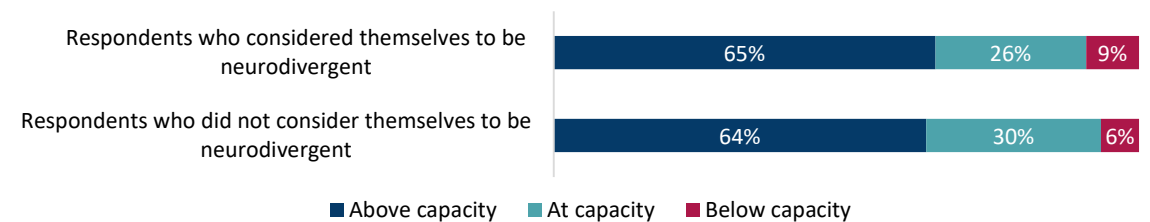
Only around half of those who considered themselves to be neurodivergent (52%) were satisfied with policies/practices in place to help them manage their wellbeing.

While those who considered and did not consider themselves to be neurodivergent tended to view their workloads similarly, a larger proportion of neurodivergent respondents (41%) found their work always or often stressful.

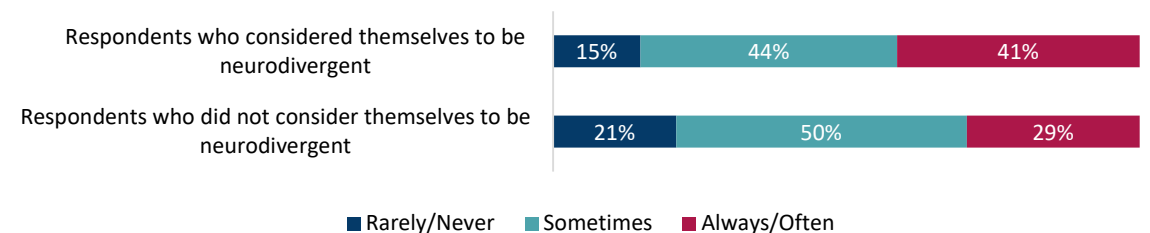
## I am satisfied with the policies/practices in place to help me manage my health and wellbeing



## What best describes your current workload?



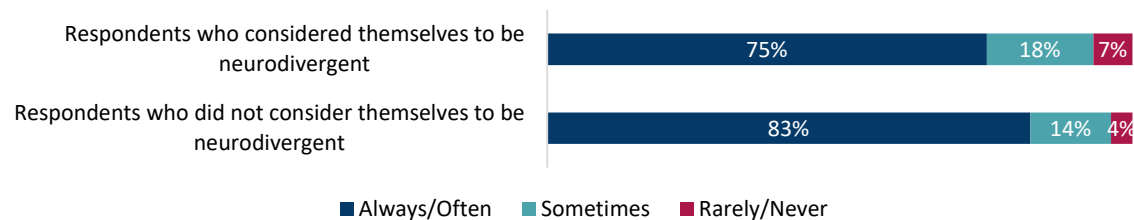
## How often do you find your work stressful?



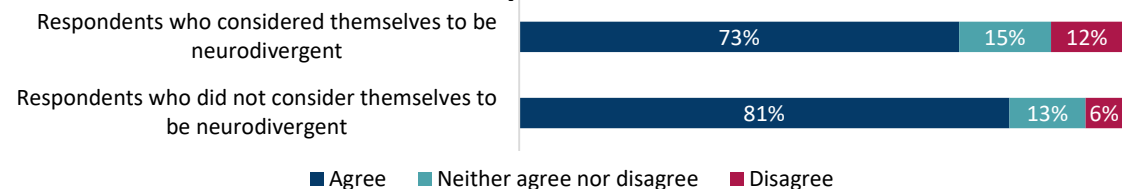
# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent reported lower levels of respect and inclusion at work

When compared to those who did not, smaller proportions of those who considered themselves to be neurodivergent felt they received the respect they deserved from colleagues (75%), that their agency supported and promoted an inclusive workplace culture (73%) and that they had the same opportunities as anyone else of their ability or experience (58%).

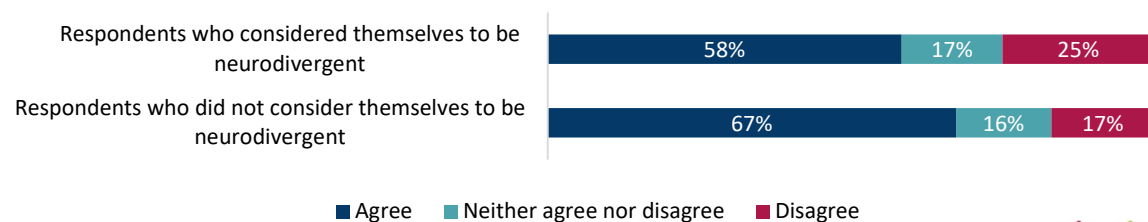
## I receive the respect I deserve from my colleagues at work



## My agency supports and actively promotes an inclusive workplace culture



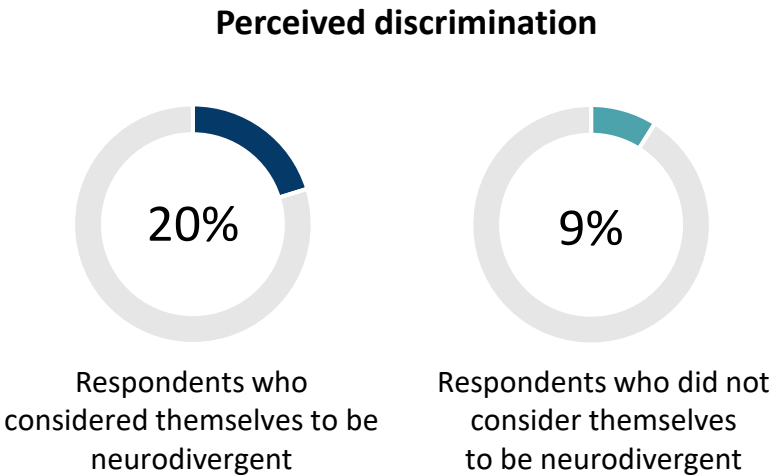
## I feel I have the same opportunities as anyone else of my ability or experience



# Employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent more commonly perceived discrimination

Twenty per cent of respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent perceived discrimination on the basis of their background or a personal characteristic in the course of their employment over the previous 12 months.

The most common form of discrimination was on the basis of disability (41%).

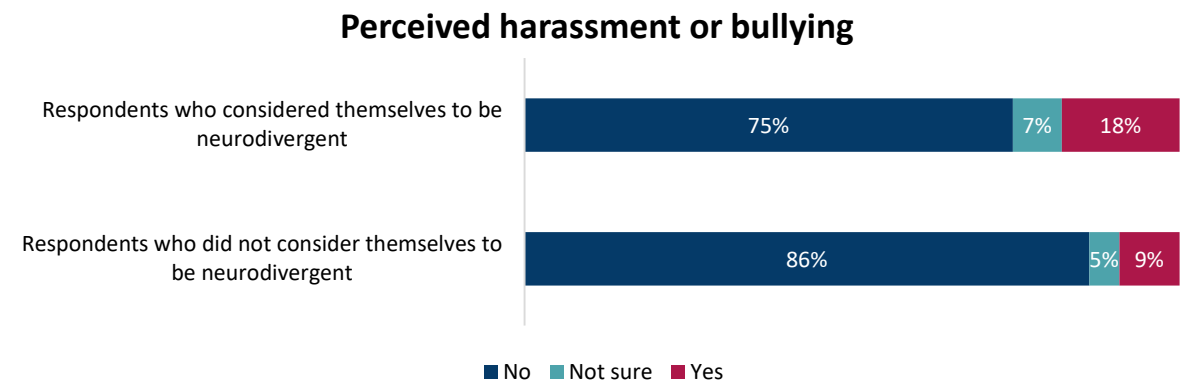


# A larger proportion of employees who considered themselves to be neurodivergent perceived harassment or bullying in the workplace

The APS Employee Census asked respondents if they had been subjected to harassment or bullying in their current workplace during the previous 12 months.

Perceptions of harassment and bullying were 9 percentage points higher for respondents who considered themselves to be neurodivergent (18%) than those who did not (9%).

The most common types of harassment or bullying perceived by respondents who consider themselves to be neurodivergent were interference with work tasks (47%), and verbal abuse (41%).



# The APS is working to improve awareness of neurodiversity and unlock the benefits of these diverse skills and capabilities

APS agencies are implementing programs to attract and support employees who consider themselves neurodivergent.

The Aurora Neurodiversity program at Services Australia and the Neurodiverse Apollo program at the Department of Home Affairs provide career pathways for neurodivergent people.

In late 2022, the APS-wide Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice was established by neurodivergent employees from employee-led diversity networks. Their goal was to spark an ongoing conversation between agencies on the work being done to support and include neurodiversity in the APS.

# Research limitations

The 2023 APS Employee Census' neurodiversity measure was constrained by the lack of a universally agreed academic, medical and/or social definition of neurodivergence.

Hence, participants may have provided a “not sure” response to the survey for differing reasons.

For many, this likely reflects that they are aware of, but yet to confirm that they consider themselves to be neurodivergent.

However, for some respondents, it is also possible that a “not sure” response has been used to indicate their lack of knowledge, uncertainty, or overall understanding of what neurodiversity and neurodivergence is.

Given this group may not be a unified cohort and may display distinct differences in their opinions, attitudes, and motivations, the APS Employee Census recognises any analysis that involves this group are at risk of producing unreliable results and insights.

The APS Employee Census continues to work with the Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice and key stakeholders to improve the validity of the neurodiversity measure for future data collections.

## See also

Appendix 2 – State of the service additional data, State of the Service Report 2022–23, page 169.

Australian Government Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice, APSC website, <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/public-sector-neurodiversity-community-practice>, accessed 5 October 2023.

Australian Government (n.d.) Aurora Neurodiversity program, Services Australia website, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/aurora-neurodiversity-program?context=1>, accessed 5 October 2023.

Australian Government Neurodiverse Apollo program, Department of Home Affairs website, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/careers/neurodiverse-apollo-program/overview>, accessed 5 October 2023.



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