

UNIONS TASMANIA 2020

# COVID-19 RECOVERY

# SURVEY RESULTS

WORKER CENTRED  
RECOVERY

UNIONS  
tasmania

## FROM THE SECRETARY

Between June and August 2020, Unions Tasmania surveyed workers about priorities for Tasmania's social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We asked them what their experiences were in the workplace and in the community, before and during the pandemic. We asked what changes they needed to see most in terms of their own work. And we asked for their views on Tasmania's priorities when it comes to government investment, industry development and job creation.

Almost two thousand (1,923) workers responded to the survey from across Tasmania.

Throughout the pandemic, it is Tasmanian workers who have kept supplies moving, kept our communities safe, kept businesses running, carried out vital public services and saved lives. Tasmanian workers are experiencing deep impacts from the pandemic across industry.

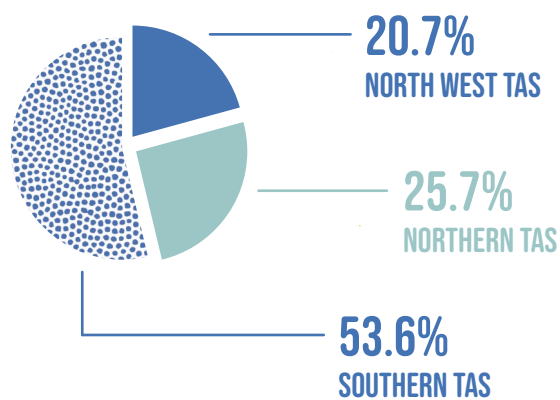
A number of respondents noted their support for the Tasmanian Government's handling of COVID-19 to date and commented positively on the Government's decision to close borders early and to prioritise community health and safety, however; Tasmanian workers overwhelmingly told us they didn't want to return to the old 'normal'.

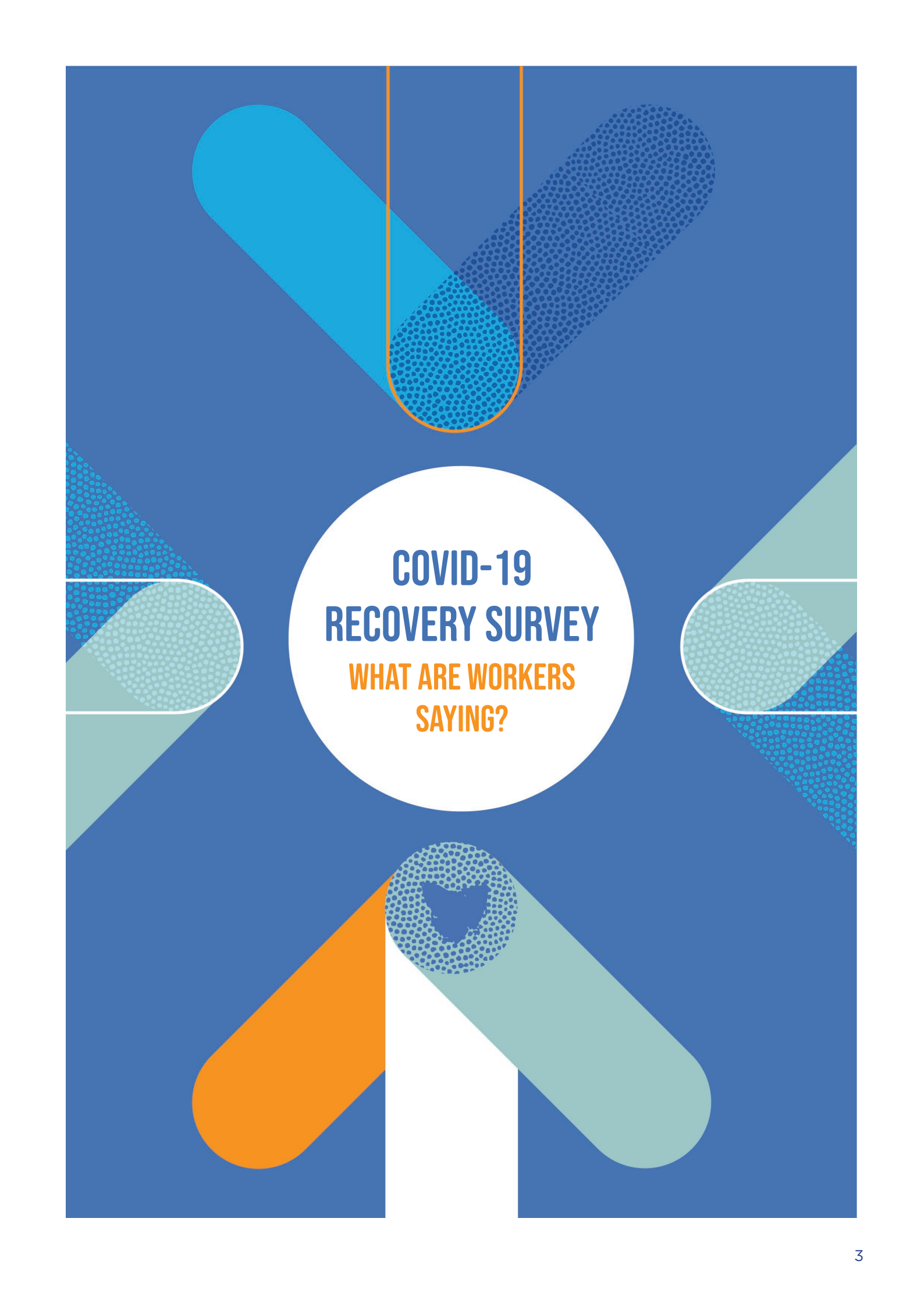
To recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and come out stronger, Tasmanian workers need a bold, coordinated plan with secure, well-paid jobs at its centre. Tasmanian workers want to see:

- ✓ **More public services**
- ✓ **A multi-faceted plan to support all workers**
- ✓ **An inclusive recovery**

### JESSICA MUNDAY

Secretary  
Unions Tasmania





**COVID-19  
RECOVERY SURVEY**  
**WHAT ARE WORKERS  
SAYING?**

## 1. MORE PUBLIC SERVICES

The public service supports Tasmanian workers, families, and businesses daily, whether at the most highly cited areas of frontline health, aged care, housing, education and training; or in delivering projects to keep Tasmanians connected, safe and strong, managing resources and infrastructure, supporting economic growth, or the many other roles that keep our state moving.

When asked what a better Tasmania looks like, a bigger public sector was a clear priority identified by Tasmanian workers, with 39% of those surveyed calling for increased services to build a resilient community and economy.

Public services were a recurring theme throughout the survey, and expressly identified by one in three workers as a priority area for government investment. Respondents also highlighted the opportunity to drive economic growth with direct public sector employment.



**OVERALL, CLOSE TO 60% OF RESPONDENTS WANTED MORE PUBLIC SERVICES.**



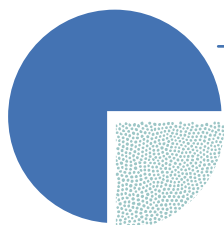
**Basic, fundamental government services are underfunded and understaffed. Put the money into [these], create jobs, improve the future of the next generation of Tasmanians.”**

Now is the time to purposefully expand the size and capacity of Tasmania’s public service, to fill gaps in essential service delivery, to implement the government’s recovery plans, to return failed privatisation experiments to public hands and as a direct employment measure.

## 2. A MULTI-FACETED PLAN TO SUPPORT ALL WORKERS

The pandemic continues to have uneven impacts on Tasmanian workers, depending not only on their industry sector, but also on their age, gender, location, and their pre-existing job and income security.

A very clear outcome from the survey is that Tasmanian workers want to see an economic recovery plan that supports industries and demographics where there is demonstrated need. While workers understand the importance of the construction industry to Tasmania’s economy, they want to see more than construction stimulus as a recovery plan.



**74%**

**OF RESPONDENTS WANT MORE THAN A CONSTRUCTION BLITZ TO GET TASMANIA'S ECONOMY MOVING**

Three-quarters of respondents identified alternative sectors where they would prefer to see government recovery policy and investment targeted. Respondents wanted to see long term, ambitious planning to build sustainable new industries, particularly in manufacturing and renewable energy. Key reasons cited by respondents for prioritising these areas were to create secure, well-paid jobs, to develop environmentally sustainable new economic activity, and to build our self-reliance.

Local food production and food security was another priority identified by respondents, as was support for retail, tourism and hospitality with an emphasis on local spending.

Another consistent theme in the survey responses was the need to tie investment and support to clear job outcomes. Workers need long term returns to the community, as well as immediate impact from government spending.

Reliance on interstate workers has masked the extent of our skills shortages, left young workers out of the loop and now in the pandemic, put Tasmanian health and jobs at risk. Vocational skills are vital to the creation of a well-educated, socially capable and resilient population with the skills to face the future. Respondents wanted to see an expansion in TAFE and apprenticeships, starting with the workforces in projects that have government investment.

“  
They should be visionary enough to engage the entire community within a development plan for Tasmania that takes time...  
Be bold, be imaginative, creative and democratic.”

### 3. INCLUSIVE RECOVERY – ADDRESSING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

**83% OF RESPONDENTS WANT AN INCLUSIVE RECOVERY PLAN FOR TASMANIA.**

Tasmanian workers were emphatic about this. Addressing social and economic inequality must be the guiding objective in pandemic recovery planning.

**Before the COVID-19 pandemic, how was Tasmanian Government going in terms of supporting the community?**



Workers responded consistently to survey questions about a better Tasmania, and priorities for economic investment, with our need as a community to ensure that everybody has access to the basics for a safe and healthy life.

Homelessness was the most raised social issue, with respondents indicating that community assets such as housing should be prioritised in all construction spending, along with health care facilities and emergency service stations in high growth and regional areas. Transport infrastructure, and public transport were also priorities for workers.

A range of other priorities were raised, including support for young people, inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse Tasmanians and addressing the impacts of the pandemic on women. Another common response was that people want greater trust in politicians, specifically noting the concern that government was beholden to monied interests.

**Before the COVID-19 pandemic, how was Tasmanian Government going in terms of supporting working people?**



Respondents strongly identified the focus of government policy at both the federal and state levels on supporting businesses without giving direct consideration to the outcomes for the people who work in them, as a vehicle for economic inequality in our state.

For an extended period prior to the pandemic, too many workers did not see the benefit of headline economic growth. As a result many Tasmanian workers were already economically vulnerable coming into the pandemic.

A wide range of examples were cited by respondents. Insecure work flourished while wages stagnated or even went backwards for many of the lowest paid workers in Tasmania, and the development of Tasmania's workforce stalled with cuts to TAFE and apprenticeships. Discrimination and exploitative work practices such as wage theft went largely unchecked.

Some respondents blamed the Tasmanian Government's protracted bargaining process and steady cuts to its own workforce, even as their workload climbed, for poor outcomes for workers as well as the communities they serve.

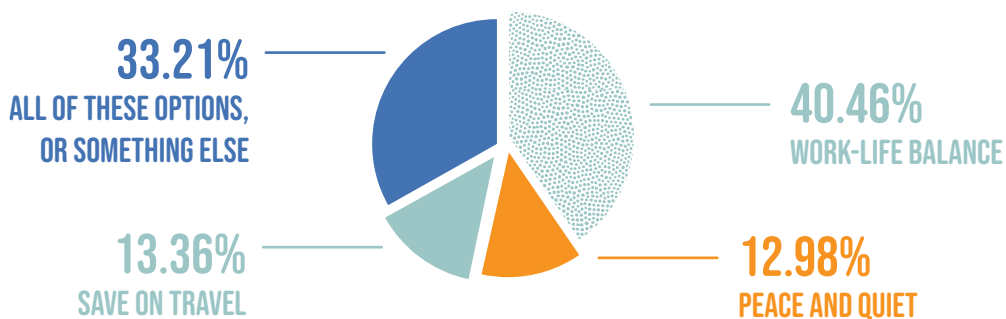
The two most common work impacts of the pandemic for respondents who had not lost work, were increased workload and work stress impacting their personal life.

### Top 5 impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on your work



For those workers who had been able to work from home (15% of respondents), it was mostly a positive experience, with 78% reporting that their employer had been supportive in terms of equipment and workload expectation. For those juggling caring responsibilities with working from home, two-thirds responded that they spent more time caring than before. Nearly 90% of those who worked from home wanted to keep this option into the future.

### What's the main reason you'd like the option to keep working from home?





Respondents also noted the heightened vulnerability of several groups of workers, including casuals, women, and young people. This has compounded the economic effects of the pandemic for many, particularly those in hard hit industries.

A result of the existing inequality for workers is broader economic fragility for Tasmania coming into the pandemic. Shopfront closures, and the flow on effect to local businesses of low wages before the pandemic were also noted by respondents.

Stronger outcomes for workers will be critical to the recovery of our local economy, and respondents highlighted several priorities.

### Top 6 priorities for Tasmanian workers in their own workplace

- 1 PAY RISE
- 2 MORE RESPECT
- 3 ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS
- 4 JOB SECURITY
- 5 FOUR-DAY WEEK
- 6 GET PAID FOR ALL THE HOURS I WORK

“

A society where homelessness and poverty are relatively rare and where the discrepancy between the wealthy members and the least wealthy is much less. Where few jobs are casualised and most are permanent.”

## CONCLUSION

Tasmanian workers have told us clearly that to recover socially and economically from the COVID-19 pandemic, they need an inclusive plan that targets better outcomes for workers, supports development of sustainable local industries and jobs, and invests in more public services. Unions Tasmania will advocate for a worker centred recovery that builds a more resilient community and economy.

## Free Worker Helpline

If your job has been impacted by COVID-19 and you need advice now on your workplace conditions, rights, wages or health and safety, please contact the **Free Worker Helpline**, a confidential service supported by the Tasmanian Government.

ph: (03) 6216 7616  
covidhelp@unionstas.com.au  
Facebook DM @unionstasmania



The COVID-19 Recovery Survey is an initiative of Unions Tasmania to ask workers about priorities coming out of the pandemic.

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