



SHIFT PULSE REPORT 2026

Shift Pulse Report

Insights from the global people platform for hourly work.

REPORT · AUSTRALIA

MAY 2025 – APRIL 2026



Introduction

The 2026 Shift Pulse Report utilises feedback from hundreds of thousands of Australian shift workers to provide a contemporary analysis of workplace sentiment across diverse industries, regions, and generations. Current findings indicate that while the workforce maintains a predominantly positive disposition, there is a transition toward a more moderated and sustainable perspective relative to the unprecedented levels of optimism observed in the preceding year.

The identified trends align with historical data. Specifically, engagement diminishes and the risk of burnout intensifies when employees encounter insufficient flexibility, inadequate staffing levels, or perceived inequities in scheduling and professional opportunities. In contrast, organisations that prioritise stability, ensure equitable and predictable work arrangements, and invest in the frontline employee experience are better positioned to cultivate resilient and high-performing teams.

Workplace sentiment serves as more than a current emotional metric; it is a leading indicator of future retention rates, productivity, customer satisfaction, and overall institutional performance. Successful organisations will be characterised by their ability to remain attuned to the fundamental realities of frontline operations and their commitment to implementing data-driven insights.

It is intended that this report will assist employers, policymakers, and human resources leaders in developing a sophisticated understanding of the evolving Australian shift workforce. Furthermore, it aims to highlight actionable opportunities for the development of professional environments where both individuals and enterprises can achieve mutual success.



Ciaran Hale

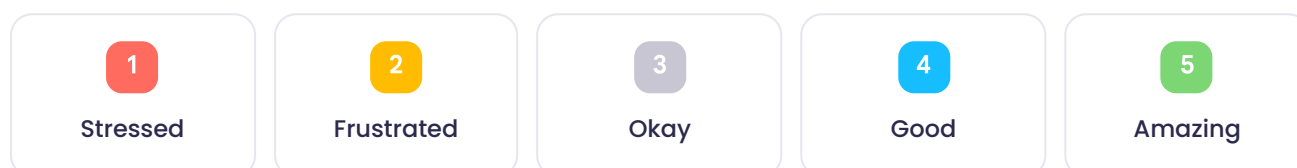
CTO, Deputy

How we measured the mood

The 2026 Shift Pulse Report is based on an analysis of 1,062,159 Shift Pulse survey responses submitted by shift workers across Australia between May 1, 2025 and April 30, 2026.

What is Shift Pulse?

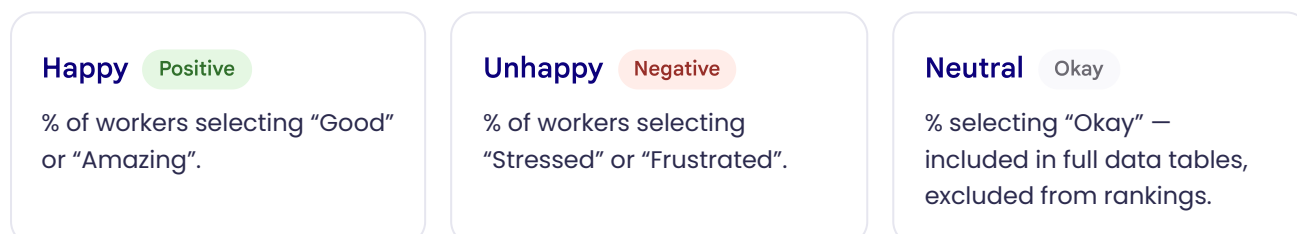
Shift Pulse is Deputy's one-tap in-app feedback tool that allows shift workers to anonymously record how they feel at the end of every shift. Workers choose from five response options:



These daily micro-interactions offer real-time visibility into worker sentiment across thousands of workplaces, enabling powerful data-led insights at scale.

Sentiment Analysis Approach

All analysis in this report categorises shift worker sentiment into three groups:



Each sentiment value is calculated as a proportion of total Shift Pulse responses within a defined cohort, such as an industry sector, parent industry, state, generation, or national group, and expressed as a percentage. Throughout this report, every dimension is presented as two separate rankings: a Happy (Positive) list and an Unhappy (Negative) list, each ordered strictly by its underlying percentage and accompanied by its own commentary, so the happiest and most pressured groups can be read clearly on their own terms.

NEW THIS YEAR

The generational lens. For the first time, the 2026 edition segments sentiment by generation, offering a clearer view of how age and life stage shape the way Australians experience shift work.

NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Aussie shift workers remain mostly happy, with sentiment holding steady

In 2026, 81.14% of Australian shift workers reported feeling happy at the end of their shifts, a modest dip from 82.16% a year earlier. At the same time, unhappy sentiment actually eased slightly, from 5.90% to 5.73%. The result is a workforce that is still overwhelmingly positive, with unhappiness contained below 6% nationally, even as the very top end of enthusiasm has come off its peak.

81.14%

reported feeling happy at the end of their shifts

▼ from 82.16% a year earlier

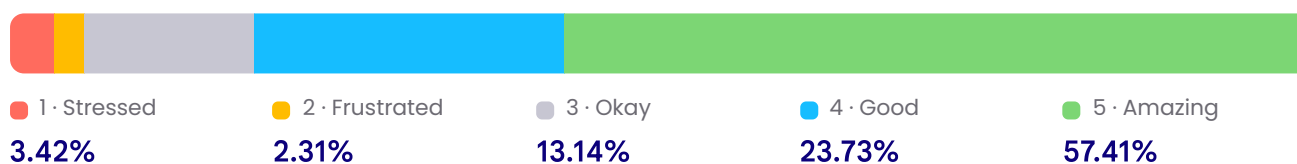
5.73%

reported feeling unhappy at the end of their shifts

▼ eased from 5.90%

2026 National sentiment

Share of all responses

**81.14%**

Happy (Good + Amazing)

13.14%

Okay (Neutral)

5.73%

Unhappy (Stressed + Frustrated)

The real story lies within the response distribution. Although “Amazing” continues to be the most prevalent choice, selected by more than half of the shift workforce, a notable shift is occurring. There is a growing trend of workers occupying the stable middle ground, concluding their shifts feeling “Good” or “Okay”.

What's behind the shift?

The minor decrease in overall happiness does not signal worker disengagement; instead, it indicates a shift in emotional intensity as more employees are completing shifts feeling “Okay” or “Good” rather than “Amazing.” While the general sentiment remains positive, the collective mood has become more tempered over the past twelve months.

This trend reflects current economic conditions in Australia. Despite their resilience, shift workers face challenges to their daily satisfaction from stagnant wages relative to rising living costs and inconsistent scheduling. Sentiment is currently being defined by three core structural factors:



Financial strain

The need to stretch stagnant pay to cover rising expenses diminishes the positive emotional impact of a productive shift.



Poly-employment

To secure enough hours, many in the Services and Retail sectors continue to manage multiple positions, often across various organisations.



Unpredictable schedules

Flexibility remains unevenly distributed; while some workers enjoy autonomy, others face rigid rostering and unpredictable changes.

On a positive note, the slight reduction in negative sentiment suggests that major stress points may be reaching a point of stability. For employers, the primary objective is to leverage this stability to recreate the “Amazing” shift experience that fosters long-term loyalty.

Parent industry sentiment

Across the four parent industries, Hospitality remains the happiest place to work in shift-based Australia, while Retail carries the most strain. Reading the positive and negative rankings separately shows that the two don't simply mirror each other — Hospitality, for instance, ranks highly on happiness yet also carries elevated unhappiness, a sign of how intense the work can be.

Happy industry rankings

1	Hospitality	82.91%
2	Healthcare	80.42%
3	Services	79.25%
4	Retail	78.69%

Hospitality (82.91%) leads on positive sentiment, with workers in cafés, fast food, and bars reporting strong team connection, social energy, and a clear rhythm to their working hours. Despite the high-pressure nature of the work, the emotional reward of direct customer service and tight team dynamics continues to buffer against stress.

Healthcare (80.42%) and Services (79.25%) are anchored by purpose-driven, relationship-based roles such as in-home care, medical clinics, gyms, and personal services, where autonomy and continuity of care correlate strongly with steady sentiment.

Retail (78.69%) ranks lowest on happiness but still posts a strong figure — nearly four in five workers finish their shifts feeling positive, even as poly-employment and shift unpredictability weigh on engagement.

Unhappy industry rankings

1	Retail	6.83%
2	Hospitality	6.44%
3	Healthcare	4.84%
4	Services	4.33%

Retail (6.83%) represents the highest level of negative sentiment across the primary industries analysed. The sector is characterised by structural challenges, including poly-employment and insufficient working hours. A lack of scheduling consistency often hinders employee engagement, as workers find it difficult to establish a routine or identify clear avenues for career progression.

Within Hospitality (6.44%), the drivers of dissatisfaction differ. While the industry is often perceived as engaging, the operational demands, particularly late night and weekend shifts, remain intense. Labour shortages contribute to elevated stress levels among staff.

Healthcare (4.84%) and Services (4.33%) maintain lower levels of workplace unhappiness relative to other industries. This is largely attributed to clinical and personal care positions, which frequently offer greater professional autonomy and more stable rostering albeit a large portion of the workforce in these industries being poly-employed.

Industry sub-sector sentiment

Jobs focused on personal interaction and autonomy tend to be the most rewarding, whereas those characterised by predictable rosters, and significant emotional demands report higher levels of strain. Comparing the two distinct rankings highlights a sharp divide in worker experience; notably, certain areas like adult services and tobacco or vape retail feature in both categories, indicating they offer highly positive experiences for most while causing considerable dissatisfaction for a specific subset.

Top 10 happiest sub-sectors

1	Adult Services	88.63%
2	In-Home Care	88.56%
3	Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores	88.05%
4	Gyms	87.81%
5	Doctors' Office / Medical Clinic	86.55%
6	Cafés / Coffee Shops	85.77%
7	Accommodation	84.20%
8	Bars	83.11%
9	Fast Food / Cashier Restaurants	82.40%
10	Sit Down Restaurants	80.60%

Adult Services (88.63%) tops the list, with nearly two-thirds of workers selecting "Amazing." These roles tend to be independent and high in autonomy, with workers exercising significant control over their own hours and environment.

In-Home Care (88.56%) sits a fraction behind and tells one of the clearest stories in the data: it pairs very high happiness with the second-lowest unhappiness of any sector. Purpose-driven work and long-term client relationships create deep emotional connection and remarkably little stress.

Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores (88.05%) complete the top three, and stand out for the single highest "Amazing" share of any sub-sector, 78.44% of workers chose the top response, far above any other sector. This marks a striking reversal: a year ago these solitary, low-autonomy roles ranked among the most pressured in shift-based work. The turnaround likely reflects more settled trading conditions and clearer regulation across the category, allowing typically small, single-operator stores to deliver a calmer, more predictable day. It is worth noting, however, that the sector is not uniformly positive, it also carries a meaningful negative share of 5.73% and appears on the unhappiest list as well, pointing to a small but real cohort of workers who still find these roles isolating.

Gyms (87.81%), Medical Clinics (86.55%), and Cafés (85.77%) round out the strongest performers. They are community-based, high-trust environments where small teams and steady client relationships keep workers feeling supported and seen. Other hospitality staples like bars, fast food, and accommodation also feature prominently, reaffirming why Hospitality leads at the parent-industry level.

Top 10 unhappiest sub-sectors

1	Call Centres	14.59%
2	Home, Hardware & Garden Stores	10.47%
3	Security Services	10.02%
4	Services (Other)	8.09%
5	Catering	7.63%
6	Retail (Other)	7.13%
7	Food & Beverage Stores	7.00%
8	Adult Services	6.82%
9	NDIS Provider	6.22%
10	Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores	5.73%

With an unhappy sentiment of 14.59%, Call Centres are the clear outlier for workplace pressure, exceeding the next closest sector by over four percentage points. This strain is fuelled by frustration (10.42%) rather than stress, contributing to the lowest happiness rating of any sub-sector. Persistent emotional fatigue in this environment is driven by rigid schedules, mundane workflows, and intense KPI monitoring.

Home, Hardware & Garden Stores (10.47%) and Security Services (10.02%) are the only other sectors in double digits, and here the strain skews toward stress rather than frustration. Both involve high physical or mental demands, solo or low-interaction work, and limited recognition, a combination that erodes morale even in roles that offer routine and structure.

Catering (7.63%) is a real cautionary tale. Last year it was one of the happiest sectors (90.80%), but now it's one of the most frustrated. It's a good reminder of how quickly things can change when staffing gets tight and schedules get messy.

NDIS Providers (6.22%) also have it tough: the work is emotionally and physically draining, and it often feels like their efforts are invisible. Tobacco and vape stores (5.73%) are interesting because they show up on both lists. Most workers are happy, but a small group feels really isolated. Just missing the top ten unhappiest list is cleaning services (5.64%), where repetitive shifts and a lack of thanks continue to bring down morale.

Happy vs unhappy industry traits

Across every cut of the data, the same drivers separate the happiest sectors from the most pressured ones. They have less to do with the type of work and more to do with how that work is structured, supported, and scheduled.

Happy industry traits POSITIVE

Schedule predictability

Controlled environments with consistent hours and minimal last-minute rostering.

Autonomy and task clarity

Workers know what's expected and have clear role boundaries (e.g. medical clinics, in-home care, personal services).

Purpose-driven work

Health-adjacent and care roles such as in-home care and allied health are emotionally rewarding.

Community-based team structures

Cafés, gyms, and beauty services foster high-trust, small-team cultures where workers feel supported and seen.

Unhappy industry traits NEGATIVE

High emotional labour

Call centres and care roles demand constant emotional effort with little recovery, raising the risk of burnout.

Solo or isolated work environments

Security, cleaning, and hardware roles often involve low peer interaction and a high self-management burden.

Schedule volatility and limited control

These workers are more likely to receive last-minute roster changes or juggle multiple jobs to make up hours.

Understaffing and rising expectations

Especially in cleaning, catering, and retail, shift workers are being asked to do more with less.

State & territory sentiment

The 2026 state picture marks a striking reversal: the Australian Capital Territory, bottom of the rankings a year ago, has climbed to become the happiest jurisdiction in the country. Read separately, the happiness and unhappiness rankings reveal that the calmest workforces aren't always the happiest, the Northern Territory, mid-pack on happiness, is by a wide margin the least stressed place to work in Australia.

Happiest states & territories

1	ACT	85.28%
2	QLD	82.49%
3	SA	82.07%
4	VIC	80.80%
5	NSW	80.78%
6	NT	79.30%
7	WA	79.01%
8	TAS	78.74%

With a positive sentiment rate of 85.28%, the Australian Capital Territory now ranks as the nation's leader, a significant recovery of approximately seven percentage points from the previous year (78.23%). This improvement appears driven by better conditions in care-based and government-adjacent shift positions, which has revitalised what was the country's most pressured workforce.

Queensland (82.49%) and South Australia (82.07%) continue to benefit from large, well-functioning hospitality and healthcare sectors, supported by reliable rostering, strong team culture, and comparatively stable employment.

At the lower end, Western Australia (79.01%) and Tasmania (78.74%) sit just below the pack, reflecting resilient but increasingly stretched workforces where rising pressure in customer-facing roles is beginning to weigh on morale.

Most unhappy states & territories

1	TAS	6.29%
2	VIC	6.28%
3	NSW	5.99%
4	WA	5.78%
5	SA	5.41%
6	QLD	5.36%
7	ACT	4.34%
8	NT	2.64%

Tasmania (6.29%), Victoria (6.28%), and New South Wales (5.99%) carry the highest stress and frustration of any state. In each, rising pressure in customer-facing roles, particularly retail, cleaning, and services, is the main drag on morale, even where headline happiness remains reasonably strong.

Western Australia (5.78%) and South Australia (5.41%) sit in the middle of the pack, while Queensland (5.36%) pairs comparatively contained stress with one of the strongest happiness scores in the country.

The ACT (4.34%) stands out for the right reasons: it pairs the nation's top happiness ranking with the second-lowest unhappiness, confirming a broad-based improvement rather than a one-dimensional spike. And at the very bottom of the table, the Northern Territory records Australia's lowest negative sentiment by far, at just 2.64%. Though its happiness sits mid-pack, this points to a genuinely low-burnout environment, likely supported by smaller team sizes, less congestion, and tight-knit communities where shift workers feel more connected and less isolated. Encouragingly, unhappiness eased across most states year-on-year, suggesting the sharpest stress points are stabilising even as the top end of enthusiasm cools.

Generation sentiment

For the first time, this year's report segments sentiment by generation. Reading the two rankings separately reveals a pattern that a single score would hide: happiness declines steadily with age, yet the calmest generation is the oldest, and the most frustrated is one of the youngest. Age shapes not just how happy workers are, but how intensely they feel on both ends of the scale.

Happiest generations

1	Generation Alpha	87.23%
2	Generation Z	83.95%
3	Millennials	82.04%
4	Generation X	80.15%
5	Baby Boomers	79.40%

Generation Alpha (87.23%), the youngest workers entering the shift economy, report the highest positivity of any group. For many, shift work represents a first job and a source of independence and social connection, and that novelty and energy shows up clearly in the data.

Generation Z (83.95%) follow close behind, while Millennials (82.04%) and Generation X (80.15%) sit in the middle as the experienced core of the workforce, often balancing work with family and financial commitments, with steady rather than spiked sentiment.

Baby Boomers (79.40%) report the lowest happiness. Rather than signalling dissatisfaction, this likely reflects a more measured relationship with work, fewer peak "Amazing" shifts, as the unhappiness ranking below makes clear.

Unhappiest generations

Ranked by unhappiness %

1	Generation Z	6.32%
2	Millennials	4.85%
3	Generation X	4.71%
4	Generation Alpha	4.47%
5	Baby Boomers	3.95%

Generation Z (6.32%) carries the highest negative sentiment of any generation, a striking contrast with their near-top happiness ranking. This combination of high highs and high lows points to a cohort that is emotionally invested in their work but also more exposed to its frustrations, whether through frontline customer roles, poly-employment, or pressure around hours and pay.

Millennials (4.85%), Generation X (4.71%), and Generation Alpha (4.47%) cluster in a moderate, stable band, meaningful frustration, but well short of Gen Z's level.

Baby Boomers (3.95%) record the lowest unhappiness of any generation. Read alongside their lowest happiness score, this paints a clear portrait: an even-keeled cohort with fewer emotional peaks but far less stress and frustration. Experience appears to bring equanimity.

FOR EMPLOYERS

Here's what employers should remember: the same shift schedule hits different generations in completely different ways. Your younger staff are high-energy and enthusiastic, but they need help handling the day-to-day frustrations of frontline work. Your older staff, though, bring a solid, stable presence that can really hold a team together. If you want to get ahead, you need to design your recognition, rostering, and training to match those differences.

CONCLUSION

The frontline, bottom line

Australian shift workers remain remarkably resilient and positive. With 81.14% of responses recorded as positive (Good or Amazing) over the past year, the national sentiment is overwhelmingly favourable. However, the past twelve months have seen a transition toward a more temperate mood, with some of the previous year's peak enthusiasm levelling off into a steadier emotional state.

Worker morale is strengthened by meaningful tasks, independence, and reliable rosters, yet it is weakened by solo work, insufficient staffing, and scheduling instability. This year's findings further underscore the distinct impact of these factors across age groups, where the vibrant enthusiasm of Generation Alpha embarking on their initial careers stands in relief against the balanced composure of Baby Boomers.

For business leaders and policymakers, the path forward involves stabilising these stress points and fostering the conditions that drive peak engagement.

Prioritising the stability and recognition of shift workers is essential, as their well-being is directly linked to customer satisfaction and overall business success.

Deputy's Shift Pulse tool provides organisations with a streamlined method to capture real-time, anonymous feedback. By leveraging these insights, managers can implement meaningful changes to enhance team effectiveness and workplace culture.

1,062,159

This report is based on the analysis of 1,062,159 Shift Pulse survey responses.



**Improving the world of
work, one shift at a time.**

deputy 