

# Characteristics of the Queensland public sector workforce

Findings from the  
adult preventive health survey 2018



### About this report

This report describes the Queensland public service (QPS) workforce by profiling demographic and behavioural risk characteristics.

Data are from an annual survey from a wider preventive health surveillance system. The adult preventive health survey series monitors the health and lifestyle of adult Queenslanders. Each year, about 12,500 randomly selected households participate with an adult aged 18 years or older randomly selected to complete a computer assisted telephone survey on either their landline or mobile phone. The survey includes topics such as physical activity, nutrition, height and weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. Additional information about the survey is available from [www.health.qld.gov.au/phsurvey](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phsurvey).

To understand more about employed adults, the 2018 survey included additional questions about employment at the Commonwealth, State or local area government level.

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## Summary

**The issue:** The health, safety and wellbeing of the Queensland workforce is a key factor in the future prosperity of Queensland. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises the workplace as a key health promotion opportunity to integrate wellbeing, health and safety into core organisational values.

Lifestyle related chronic disease reduces workplace productivity. A recent multicohort study looked at multiple lifestyle risks and sickness-related absence from work in over 70,000 European employees and estimated the decrease in absences if a risk factor was eliminated.<sup>1</sup> For example, if smoking was eliminated, it was estimated that absences due to musculoskeletal disorders would decrease by 6%, depressive disorders by 12%, circulatory diseases by 10% and respiratory diseases by 5%.

The benefits of supporting healthy workplaces extend beyond the individual and include numerous benefits to the business, employees' family members, and the broader community. As workplaces continue to evolve, supporting healthy workplaces should be viewed as an investment rather than a cost.<sup>2</sup>

**The findings:** This report profiles the sociodemographic characteristics and behavioural risk factors of the Queensland public sector (QPS) workforce. Queensland preventive health survey data provides a unique opportunity to compare the QPS to adults employed in other settings and the Queensland population overall. Characteristics of QPS employees were:

- 8% smoked daily while 62% had never smoked (similar to other employed Queenslanders)
- 36% were a healthy weight (similar to other employed Queenslanders)
- 63% were overweight or obese (similar to other employed Queenslanders)
- 69% consumed alcohol at lifetime low risk levels (more than other employed Queenslanders)
- 20% consumed alcohol at lifetime risky levels (less than other employed Queenslanders)
- 65% met the guidelines for sufficient physical activity (similar to other employed Queenslanders)
- 51% met daily fruit consumption guidelines (similar to other employed Queenslanders)
- 13% met daily vegetable consumption guidelines (more than other employed Queenslanders)
- 65% reported being sunburnt in the past 12 months (similar to other employed Queenslanders)
- 8% reported their health was poor or very poor (similar to other employed Queenslanders).

**The opportunity:** As the state's largest and most diverse employer, the QPS plays a leadership role in creating healthy and safe workplaces. The burden of chronic conditions and comorbidities increases in people aged 45 to 64 years<sup>3</sup> and with a significant proportion of this age group in the workforce, many workplaces acknowledge the benefit of providing supportive environments where healthy choices are the easy choices.

The Queensland Government's commitment to workplace health, safety and wellbeing is being driven through a longstanding partnership between the Queensland Public Service Commission, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, WorkCover and the Department of Health. The collective aim extends beyond the QPS to support all workplaces, associated peak industry bodies, other member organisations and business and community leaders to integrate employee health, safety and wellbeing into organisational culture. This can be achieved by building system capacity, raising broader awareness and recognising good practice in all workplaces.

## Aim of this report

This report describes the Queensland public service (QPS) workforce by profiling sociodemographic characteristics and behavioural risk factors. By using the Queensland preventive health survey,<sup>4</sup> the QPS can be compared to other employed Queenslanders and the Queensland population overall. Information for individuals not in the workforce and those who are unemployed is included in tables, however, results are not discussed in text.

## Characteristics of the Queensland public service workforce

Of the 12,386 participants in the 2018 adult preventive health survey, 10% worked in the QPS, 4% worked in other government settings (Commonwealth or local government area), 49% were employed in the non-government sector, 3% were unemployed, and 33% were not in the labour force. A description of the survey and analytical methods is found in Appendix 1.

Some of the findings below will be explained by differing age structure between the QPS and the total adult population as results were not adjusted for differences in age structure. Mean age by employment status was 47 years (Queensland overall), 44 years (QPS), 41 years (employed in other settings), 38 years (unemployed), and 58 years (not in the workforce).

### Demographic characteristics

In 2018, of QPS employees (Table 1, page 6):

- 58% were women
- the majority (86%) were aged between 30 and 64 years
- more than half (60%) had a bachelor degree or higher
- 76% were married or in a de facto relationship
- 26% lived in a socioeconomically advantaged area
- most (81%) lived in major cities or inner regional areas.

### Risk factors

In 2018, of QPS employees (Table 2, page 7):

- 8% smoked daily and two-thirds (62%) had never smoked
- 20% consumed alcohol at risky levels
- 36% were a healthy weight
- 63% were overweight or obese
- 65% met the guidelines for sufficient physical activity
- 51% met the guidelines for daily fruit consumption whereas 13% did so for vegetable consumption
- 65% reported being sunburnt in the past 12 months
- an average of 3.7 mentally unhealthy days and 3.0 physically unhealthy days were reported in the past month.

## QPS workforce compared to other employed Queenslanders

### Demographic characteristics

Compared to employees from other sectors QPS employees were:

- more likely to be female (58% compared with 44%)
- more likely to be aged between 30–64 years (86% compared with 72%)
- less likely to be aged between 18–29 years (11% compared with 23%), particularly for women (9% compared with 25%)
- twice as likely to have a Bachelor's degree or higher (60% compared to 30%)
- more likely to be married or in a de facto relationship (76% compared with 67%) and less likely to have never married (12% compared with 23%).

### Risk factors

QPS employed adults differed from those employed in other sectors in only two characteristics. They were:

- more likely to drink alcohol at low risk levels (69% compared with 60%) and less likely to drink at risky levels (20% compared with 27%)
- more likely to meet the recommended consumption of vegetables (13% compared with 7%).

## QPS workforce compared to adult Queenslanders

### Demographic characteristics

Compared to the adult Queensland population, adults employed in the QPS were:

- more likely to be female (58% compared with 51%)
- more likely to be between 30–64 years of age (86% compared with 60%)
- less likely to be between 18–29 years of age (11% compared with 20%)
- twice as likely to have a Bachelor's degree or higher (60% compared with 29%)
- more likely to be married or in a de facto relationship (76% compared with 64%) and less likely to have never married (12% compared with 22%).

### Risk factors

Compared to the adult Queensland population, adults employed in the QPS were:

- more likely to report excellent, very good or good health (92% compared with 85%)
- more likely to have never smoked (62% compared with 56%)
- more likely to have been sunburnt in the past 12 months (65% compared to 54%)
- less likely to be physically unhealthy—3 physically unhealthy days in the past month on average compared with 4 days. Unhealthy days due to mental health were similar.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics by employment status of Queensland adults 18 years and older, 2018

	Persons 18+ years % (95% CI)	Employed: State Government % (95% CI)	Employed: Other % (95% CI)	Unemployed % (95% CI)	Not in the work force % (95% CI)
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	49.1 (47.5-50.6)	41.9 (37.4-46.7)	56.0 (53.8-58.1)	56.8 (47.0-66.0)	39.3 (36.9-41.8)
Female	50.9 (49.4-52.5)	58.1 (53.3-62.6)	44.0 (41.9-46.2)	43.2 (33.9-53.0)	60.7 (58.2-63.1)
<b>Persons</b>					
18–29 years	20.4 (18.7-22.2)	10.5 (7.5-14.4)	23.4 (21.1-26.0)	45.3 (34.9-56.0)	16.1 (13.3-19.4)
30–44 years	28.1 (26.8-29.5)	43.4 (38.8-48.2)	36.4 (34.4-38.6)	17.0 (11.5-24.3)	11.1 (9.6-12.8)
45–64 years	32.2 (31.0-33.6)	42.9 (38.5-47.4)	36.0 (34.1-38.0)	35.1 (27.2-43.8)	22.7 (21.0-24.6)
65 or more years	19.2 (18.4-20.1)	3.3 (2.3-4.7)	4.1 (3.6-4.6)	*2.7 (1.4-5.1)	50.0 (47.5-52.5)
<b>Males</b>					
18–29 years	20.4 (17.8-23.2)	13.0 (8.0-20.6)	22.2 (18.9-25.8)	51.7 (37.0-66.2)	14.3 (9.9-20.2)
30–44 years	28.8 (26.8-31.0)	40.7 (33.4-48.5)	37.8 (34.9-40.8)	*20.5 (12.2-32.3)	5.5 (3.9-7.5)
45–64 years	32.2 (30.3-34.2)	41.9 (34.9-49.2)	35.1 (32.5-37.8)	25.6 (16.9-36.8)	23.3 (20.4-26.4)
65 or more years	18.6 (17.4-19.9)	*4.4 (2.5-7.6)	4.9 (4.2-5.7)	*2.2 (1.0-5.1)	56.9 (52.6-61.2)
<b>Females</b>					
18–29 years	20.4 (18.2-22.8)	8.6 (5.6-13.2)	25.1 (21.8-28.7)	36.8 (24.9-50.6)	17.3 (13.8-21.4)
30–44 years	27.5 (25.7-29.3)	45.3 (39.5-51.3)	34.7 (31.9-37.6)	*12.4 (7.1-20.9)	14.8 (12.6-17.3)
45–64 years	32.3 (30.6-34.0)	43.5 (38.0-49.2)	37.1 (34.4-40.0)	47.5 (35.7-59.5)	22.4 (20.3-24.6)
65 or more years	19.8 (18.7-21.1)	2.5 (1.6-3.7)	3.1 (2.5-3.8)	**	45.5 (42.6-48.5)
<b>Education level</b>					
Still studying or no post-school	27.8 (26.3-29.2)	7.7 (5.9-10.0)	21.8 (19.9-23.9)	28.7 (21.3-37.4)	43.2 (40.8-45.7)
Bachelor degree or higher	28.6 (27.2-30.0)	59.7 (55.1-64.1)	30.3 (28.2-32.4)	*15.3 (9.1-24.6)	17.7 (15.9-19.7)
Trade certificate	11.3 (10.5-12.2)	5.3 (3.3-8.5)	13.0 (11.8-14.4)	12.1 (7.5-18.8)	10.3 (9.2-11.5)
Diploma or cert (non-trade)	32.4 (30.9-33.8)	27.2 (23.4-31.4)	34.9 (32.8-37.0)	43.9 (33.9-54.5)	28.7 (26.6-30.9)
<b>Marital status</b>					
Married/de facto	63.9 (62.3-65.5)	75.9 (72.0-79.5)	67.2 (64.9-69.5)	29.7 (22.3-38.3)	58.1 (55.5-60.7)
Separated/divorced/widowed	14.6 (13.8-15.4)	12.1 (9.9-14.7)	10.0 (9.1-11.1)	16.3 (11.9-22.0)	22.5 (21.0-24.1)
Never married	21.5 (19.8-23.2)	12.0 (9.1-15.5)	22.7 (20.4-25.2)	54.0 (44.2-63.6)	19.3 (16.5-22.4)
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>					
Disadvantaged	18.5 (17.5-19.5)	16.4 (13.5-19.9)	15.5 (14.2-16.9)	31.9 (23.7-41.4)	22.7 (21.1-24.4)
Quintile 2	19.7 (18.7-20.8)	18.4 (15.7-21.5)	18.9 (17.5-20.4)	21.0 (15.3-28.1)	21.2 (19.6-22.9)
Quintile 3	19.9 (18.7-21.2)	16.5 (13.6-19.8)	21.1 (19.3-22.9)	*19.9 (11.4-32.5)	19.1 (17.3-21.0)
Quintile 4	20.5 (19.2-21.9)	23.2 (19.3-27.6)	22.0 (20.1-24.0)	*13.8 (8.2-22.3)	18.0 (15.9-20.4)
Advantaged	21.3 (19.8-22.9)	25.5 (21.2-30.3)	22.5 (20.3-24.8)	*13.4 (7.5-22.6)	18.9 (16.6-21.4)
<b>Remoteness</b>					
Major cities	61.5 (60.1-62.8)	63.1 (59.1-67.0)	62.9 (61.0-64.8)	49.2 (39.2-59.4)	59.8 (57.6-61.9)
Inner regional	21.0 (20.0-22.0)	17.9 (15.3-20.8)	19.1 (17.8-20.4)	32.7 (24.5-42.2)	23.9 (22.3-25.6)
Outer regional	13.8 (13.0-14.6)	14.1 (11.9-16.6)	13.9 (12.7-15.1)	15.5 (10.5-22.2)	13.3 (12.2-14.5)
Remote/very remote	3.8 (3.5-4.1)	4.9 (3.6-6.5)	4.1 (3.7-4.6)	2.5 (1.6-3.9)	3.0 (2.6-3.5)

\*Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

\*\* Not available for publication; relative standard error greater than 50% or sample size criteria not met

Table 2: Health risk factors by employment status for Queensland adults 18 years and older, 2018

	Persons 18+ years	Employed: State government	Employed: Other	Unemployed	Not in the work force
	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)
<b>Smoking Status</b>					
Current daily	11.1 (10.2-12.1)	8.4 (6.3-11.2)	11.7 (10.3-13.3)	25.3 (18.4-33.7)	9.6 (8.4-10.9)
Current – not daily	4.7 (3.9-5.6)	*3.1 (1.8-5.2)	5.5 (4.3-6.9)	*5.6 (2.7-11.2)	3.8 (2.6-5.5)
Ex-smoker	28.4 (27.1-29.6)	26.5 (22.8-30.6)	26.0 (24.3-27.7)	19.0 (13.5-26.1)	33.6 (31.6-35.7)
Never smoked	55.9 (54.3-57.4)	62.0 (57.5-66.3)	56.8 (54.6-59.0)	50.1 (40.0-60.1)	53.1 (50.6-55.5)
<b>Alcohol Consumption</b>					
Abstainers	17.1 (16.0-18.1)	11.0 (8.6-13.9)	12.5 (11.1-14.0)	15.0 (10.5-20.9)	26.4 (24.5-28.4)
Lifetime low risk	60.6 (59.1-62.1)	68.6 (64.1-72.7)	60.4 (58.2-62.5)	66.0 (57.3-73.7)	58.2 (55.8-60.5)
Lifetime risky	22.3 (21.1-23.7)	20.4 (16.9-24.5)	27.2 (25.2-29.2)	19.0 (13.6-26.0)	15.4 (13.6-17.4)
<b>Body mass index</b>					
Underweight	2.4 (1.9-3.1)	*1.5 (0.7-3.2)	2.1 (1.5-3.0)	*4.6 (2.0-10.1)	3.1 (2.1-4.3)
Healthy weight	37.1 (35.6-38.7)	35.7 (31.2-40.3)	38.2 (36.0-40.5)	43.4 (33.0-54.5)	35.3 (32.9-37.8)
Overweight	36.3 (34.8-37.8)	36.5 (32.1-41.1)	37.1 (35.0-39.3)	24.1 (17.2-32.7)	35.9 (33.5-38.4)
Obese	24.2 (23.0-25.4)	26.4 (22.5-30.6)	22.6 (20.9-24.3)	27.9 (20.1-37.3)	25.7 (23.9-27.6)
Under/healthy weight	39.6 (38.0-41.2)	37.2 (32.7-41.9)	40.3 (38.1-42.6)	48.0 (37.7-58.6)	38.3 (35.9-40.9)
Overweight/obese	60.4 (58.8-62.0)	62.8 (58.1-67.3)	59.7 (57.4-61.9)	52.0 (41.4-62.3)	61.7 (59.1-64.1)
<b>Sufficient fruit and vegetable consumption</b>					
Fruit	52.1 (50.6-53.7)	51.3 (46.6-55.9)	50.9 (48.7-53.1)	33.3 (25.1-42.7)	56.2 (53.7-58.6)
Vegetables	8.6 (7.8-9.6)	12.5 (9.7-16.1)	7.3 (6.3-8.4)	*3.0 (1.2-7.4)	10.1 (8.5-12.0)
<b>Physical activity</b>					
Inactive	9.5 (8.7-10.4)	7.5 (5.0-11.1)	8.0 (6.9-9.2)	11.3 (7.1-17.5)	13.2 (11.7-14.9)
Insufficient	30.7 (29.2-32.2)	27.9 (23.8-32.3)	28.4 (26.4-30.5)	38.3 (29.0-48.6)	35.5 (32.9-38.2)
Sufficient	59.7 (58.1-61.3)	64.7 (59.9-69.1)	63.6 (61.4-65.7)	50.3 (39.9-60.7)	51.2 (48.3-54.2)
<b>Sunburn</b>					
Sunburnt past 12 months	54.3 (52.8-55.8)	65.1 (60.5-69.3)	63.0 (60.9-65.0)	52.0 (41.8-62.0)	37.3 (34.6-40.0)
Not sunburnt past 12 months	45.7 (44.2-47.2)	34.9 (30.7-39.5)	37.0 (35.0-39.1)	48.0 (38.0-58.2)	62.7 (60.0-65.4)
<b>Self-rated health</b>					
Excellent/very good/good	85.2 (84.3-86.1)	91.6 (88.9-93.8)	90.5 (89.4-91.6)	80.1 (73.0-85.7)	75.1 (73.3-76.8)
Poor/very poor	14.8 (13.9-15.7)	8.4 (6.2-11.1)	9.5 (8.4-10.6)	19.9 (14.3-27.0)	24.9 (23.2-26.7)
<b>Total unhealthy days, past 30 days</b>					
0-4 days	60.1 (58.6-61.7)	64.0 (59.4-68.4)	64.3 (62.1-66.5)	51.5 (41.5-61.5)	53.1 (50.6-55.5)
5 or more days	39.9 (38.3-41.4)	36.0 (31.6-40.6)	35.7 (33.5-37.9)	48.5 (38.5-58.5)	46.9 (44.5-49.4)
<b>Mean unhealthy days, past 30 days</b>					
Mental	4.5 (4.2-4.7)	3.7 (3.0-4.4)	4.0 (3.7-4.4)	7.8 (6.0-9.7)	5.2 (4.7-5.6)
Physical	4.2 (4.0-4.4)	3.0 (2.4-3.6)	2.8 (2.5-3.1)	5.0 (3.4-6.5)	6.6 (6.2-7.1)
Total	7.6 (7.3-7.9)	6.2 (5.3-7.0)	6.3 (5.9-6.7)	10.7 (8.5-13.0)	9.9 (9.3-10.4)

\*Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

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## Appendix 1

The Queensland preventive health survey is an annual general population survey with data collected by computer assisted telephone interview (CATI). The survey has been conducted regularly since 2004 and as of 2015 approximately 12,500 adults participate each year. Data were collected by the Queensland Government Statisticians Office using a sampling frame of mobile and landline numbers that is maintained under the *Statistical Returns Act 1896* for official government statistical purposes.

The preventive health surveys use an area-based measure of socioeconomic status. The Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)<sup>5</sup>, developed by the Australia Bureau of Statistics, ranks areas according to measures of relative social advantage and disadvantage.

The preventive health surveys use the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+)<sup>6</sup> to categorise areas by remoteness. ARIA+ classifies areas into five types (major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote) based on population size and distance to the nearest service centre.

In 2018, employed participants were asked if they were employed as a government employee or contractor. If so, participants specified whether their employer was the Commonwealth government, Queensland government, or a local government area. Information about preventive health risk and protective factors was collected using standardised methodology and is similar to that used to monitor risk factor trends by the Commonwealth or other jurisdictions.

Participants' health in the past month was measured using a four-item health related quality of life instrument developed by the Centers for Disease Control in the United States.<sup>7</sup> The instrument has been used in population surveys in the US since the mid-1990s and is a reliable and practical method to monitor trends, identify health disparities among demographic subgroups and communities, and assess change based on broad population-level interventions.

Additional information about the preventive health surveys is available from [www.health.qld.gov.au/phsurvey](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phsurvey)