



## Media release

# NBN Co and CSIRO research reveals lasting effects of the great work from home experience

**Nearly one in five Australian workers may continue working from home even as COVID restrictions ease - a major increase from one in twenty prior to the pandemic - according to research published this week from Australia's national science agency, CSIRO, and NBN Co.**

The 'Staying connected' report is one of the most detailed data mapping exercises undertaken in Australia to understand the behaviours and habits that have formed during the pandemic.

The research used aggregated **nbn** data and demographic statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to understand how the shift to working from home played out.

It found cities that experienced longer outbreaks during 2020 and early 2021 had a higher proportion of people continuing to work-from-home during COVID-free times compared to other locations\*

Working from home was most persistent in Melbourne (28 per cent) and Sydney (27 per cent), which experienced the most sustained outbreaks over the previous year, compared to, for example, Perth (18 per cent). This suggests that, once established, working-from-home is likely to continue for many people for at least part of the week.

The changes were not even across the board with some occupations seeing a higher persistence of working from home. The insights revealed those most likely to have continued remote working include:

1. Business and systems analysts and programmers
2. Database and system administrators and ICT security specialists
3. Arts professionals
4. Media professionals
5. ICT network and support professionals
6. Financial and insurance clerks
7. Information and organisation professionals
8. Architects, designers, planners and surveyors
9. ICT managers
10. Sales, marketing and PR professionals

In contrast, managerial occupations showed some of the highest working from home levels early in the pandemic, but as restrictions have eased, they have returned to the office to a greater extent than most professional occupations – perhaps reflecting the importance of in-person interactions.

There was also considerable geographic variation in working from home, with areas with the most office professionals recording the greatest proportions of working from home.

Persistent working from home was also highest where more people were previously working from home, suggesting the pandemic has greatly accelerated a pre-existing trend as technology offers opportunities to reduce travel for certain types of work.



The research also found an increase in rates of working from home in regions around the fringes of the biggest cities, suggesting some workers are choosing to relocate further from their offices as they no longer have to commute every day.

**Joanna Gurry, Chief Data Officer nbn, said:**

“This research draws on nbn’s deep knowledge of broadband traffic patterns and CSIRO’s expert data analysis and modelling capability to further understand how households and businesses across Australia have used digital channels during COVID-19.

“The ability to work from home has been of vital to Australian workers, employers and governments through the pandemic. While we hope the peak of the COVID-19 crisis will soon be behind us, many changes will persist, with significant implications for how, and where, we live, work and interact with each other.

“These insights help us to understand long term trends the pandemic is driving so we can continue to evolve and invest in the network.

“The findings related to online social interaction are also important for us as we continue to work toward lifting the digital capability of older Australians.” toward lifting the digital capability of Australians, including older Australians.”

**Dr Andrew Reeson, economist from CSIRO’s Data61, said:**

“The COVID 19 pandemic dramatically accelerated long standing digital transformation trends.

“Through this report we sought to examine how this shift to working and socialising online unfolded.

“In this way, the report provides a snapshot of a unique moment in our history and gives an insight into the some of the changes we may see emerge over the next 12 months.”

In addition to working from home, the analysis found widespread evidence of people increasing their online social activity, such as video calling, as physical distancing restrictions were introduced, with some of this persisting even as restrictions eased.

Online interactions were lowest in areas with a greater proportion of older residents, suggesting there may be an opportunity for digital literacy programs or technology provision to support those who currently miss out, though more fine-grained data would be required to confirm this.

This is the first research project between nbn and CSIRO, with more projects planned to improve understanding of the skills, infrastructure and support needed for Australia’s digital transformation.

**ENDS**

## Notes to editors



- \* In May 2021 - a time of no ongoing community transmission and few restrictions - around 22 per cent of workers worked from home, representing a major increase compared to pre-pandemic levels (around 5 per cent) of nearly one in five workers.
- The research identified an increase in remote working around the fringes of Sydney, particularly in the Southern Highlands and Byron Bay of NSW, and the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast Hinterland in QLD.
- Research analyses data from January 2020 to June 2021.

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## Resources

Interviews available on request

