



Australian Government  
Australian Public Service Commission

# First Nations employees in the Australian Public Service

## Understanding our workforce

People Insights Branch  
Research Note 12-23



# Key findings

- 3.5% of APS employees identify as First Nations in their agency's HR system.
- First Nations employees are generally female, younger, and work in lower classifications than non-First Nations employees.
- First Nations employees work across Australia in varied roles.
- A range of employee perceptions differed for First Nations employees. These included:
  - Satisfaction with health and wellbeing supports
  - Perceived workplace respect and inclusion
- Perceptions of discrimination, harassment and bullying are higher for First Nations employees than non-First Nations employees.

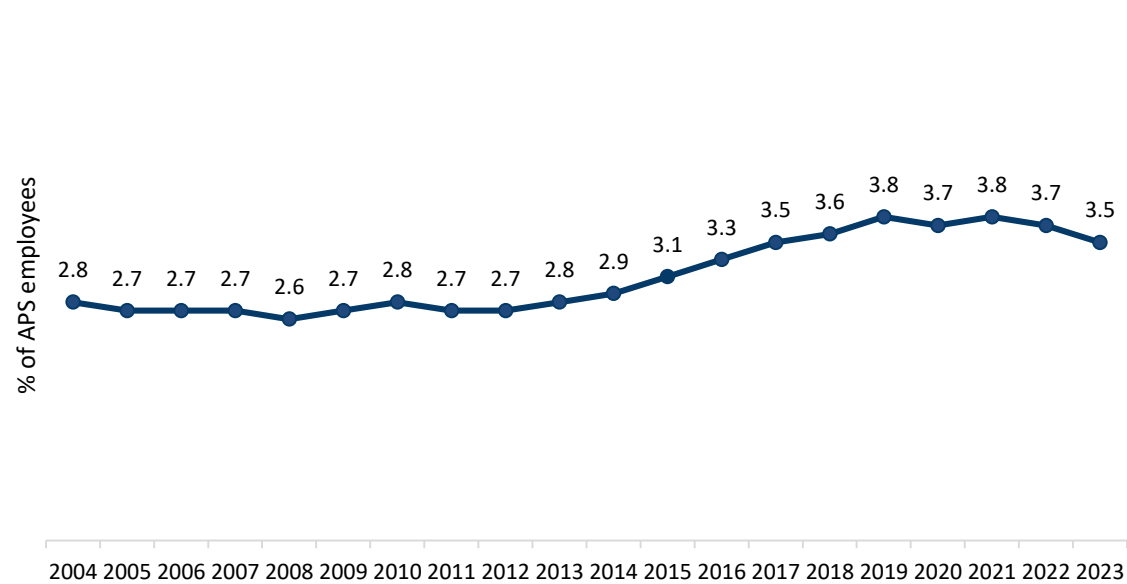
# Most First Nations employees share their First Nations identity with their agencies

3.5% of APS employees identify as First Nations in their agency's HR system.

Similarly, 3.6% of respondents to the 2023 APS Employee Census identified as First Nations. Of these, a small proportion (9.2%) indicated their First Nations status was not recorded in their agency's HR system, for reasons that included:

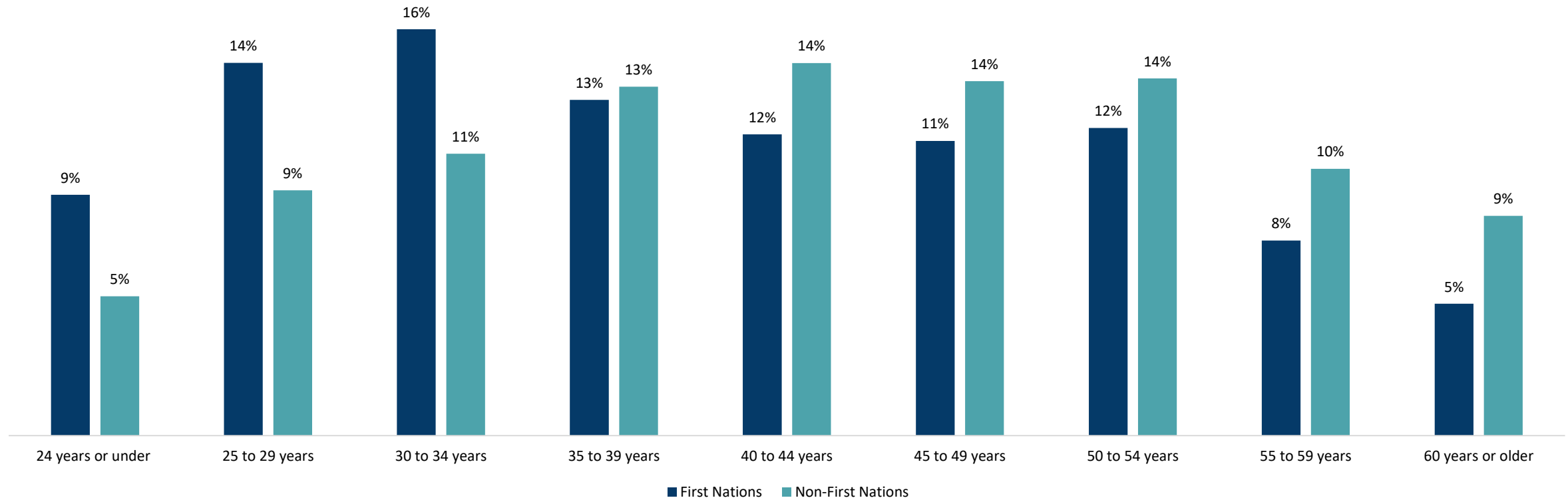
- They did not see the identification as relevant to their employment
- They did not see any reason or benefit in sharing this information
- They did not wish to share their private information
- They were concerned about being discriminated against

Proportion of First Nations employees



Source: APS Employment Database 30 June 2023, 2023 APS Employee Census

# Higher proportions of First Nations employees are in younger age groups



First Nations employees are more commonly in younger cohorts, with 39% under 35 years as compared to 26% for non-First Nations employees.

# Some First Nations employees also identify with other diversity cohorts



Female

68% of First Nations employees are female



Disability

9% of First Nations employees have an ongoing disability



LGBTIQA+

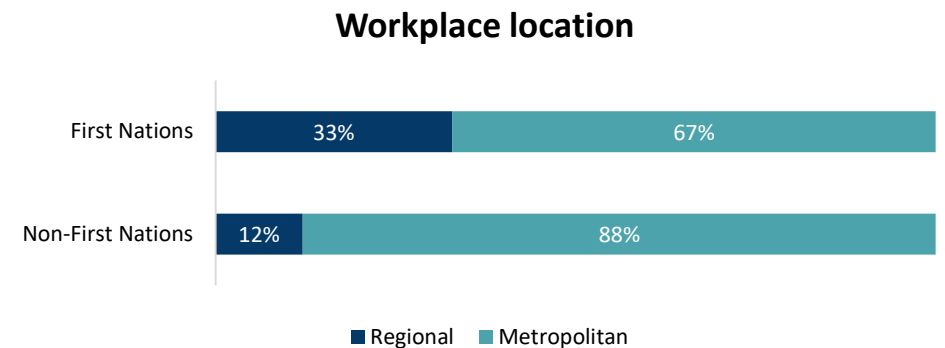
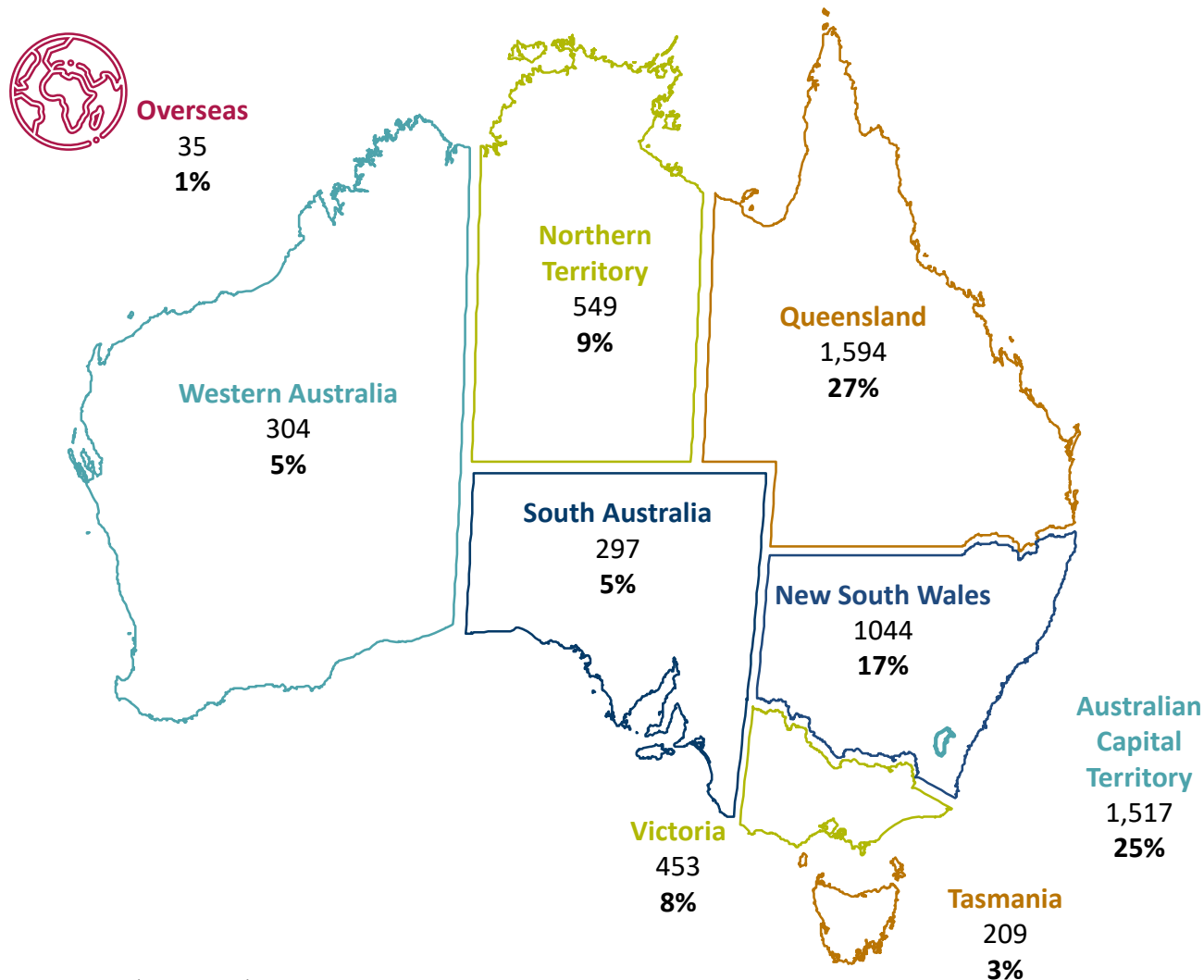
13% of First Nations employees indicated they identified as LGBTIQA+



Neurodivergent

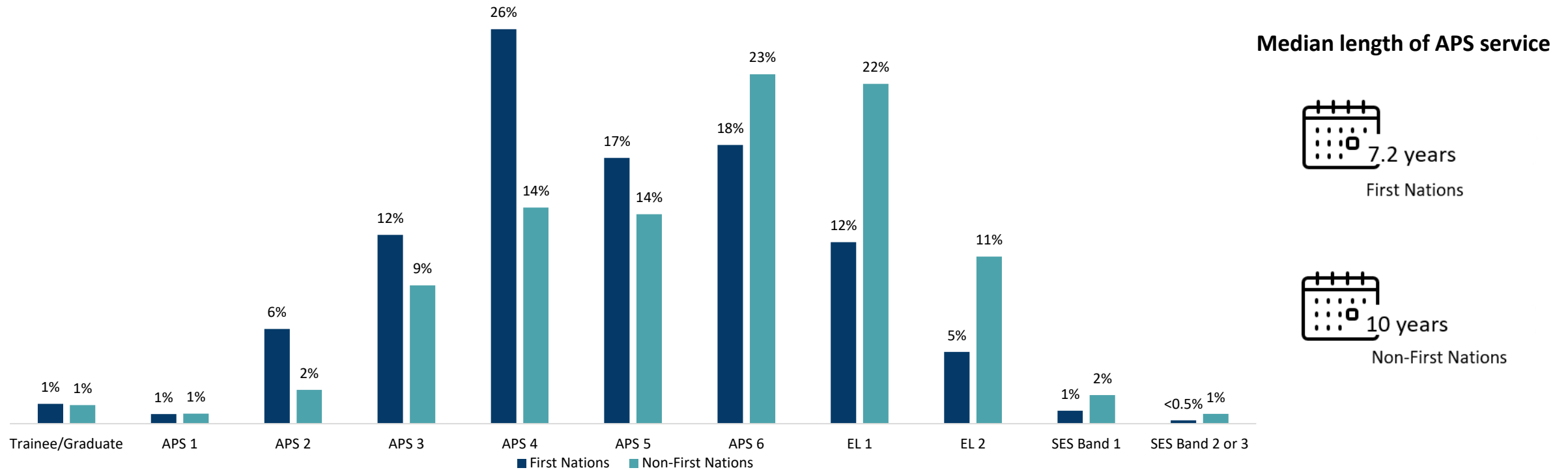
12% of First Nations employees considered themselves to be neurodivergent

# First Nations employees work for agencies with footprints across Australia



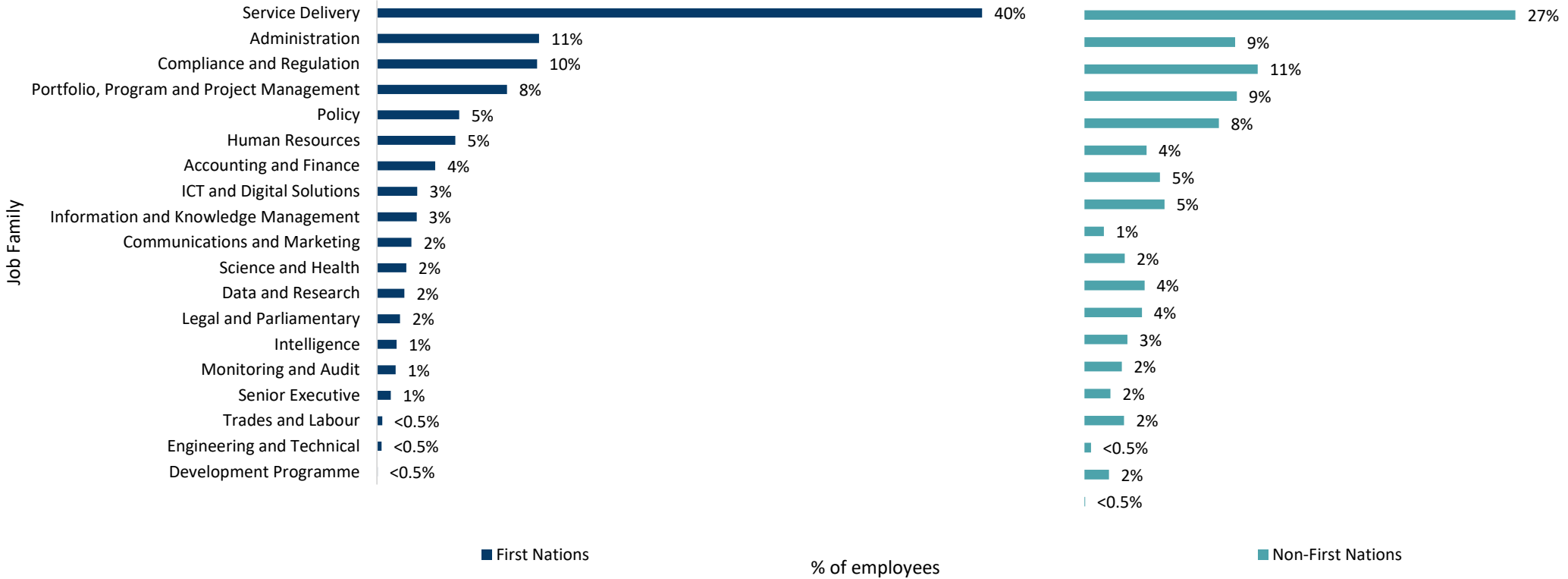
A greater proportion of First Nations employees work for agencies in regional areas (33%), than non-First Nations employees (12%).

# The majority of First Nations employees work in APS-level classifications and have shorter careers



First Nations employees work in roles across all classification levels of the APS. However, most work in APS 2 - APS 5 (62%) classifications. First Nations employees generally have shorter APS careers than non-First Nations employees.

# First Nations employees work across all job types in the APS



Overall, similar proportions of First Nations and non-First Nations employees work in roles in each broad type of work. However, there is a higher proportion of First Nations employees within the Service Delivery job family (40%).

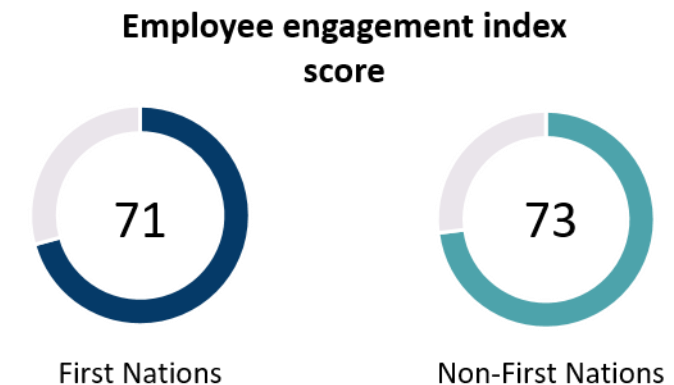
Source: APS Employment Database 30 June 2023



# First Nations employees report slightly lower employee engagement scores

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.

In the 2023 APS Employee Census, First Nations respondents reported slightly lower employee engagement index scores than non-First Nations respondents.

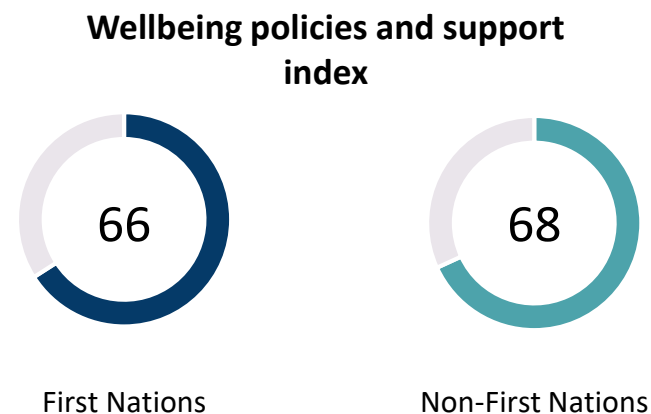


# Smaller proportions of First Nations employees felt that their health and being was supported

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.

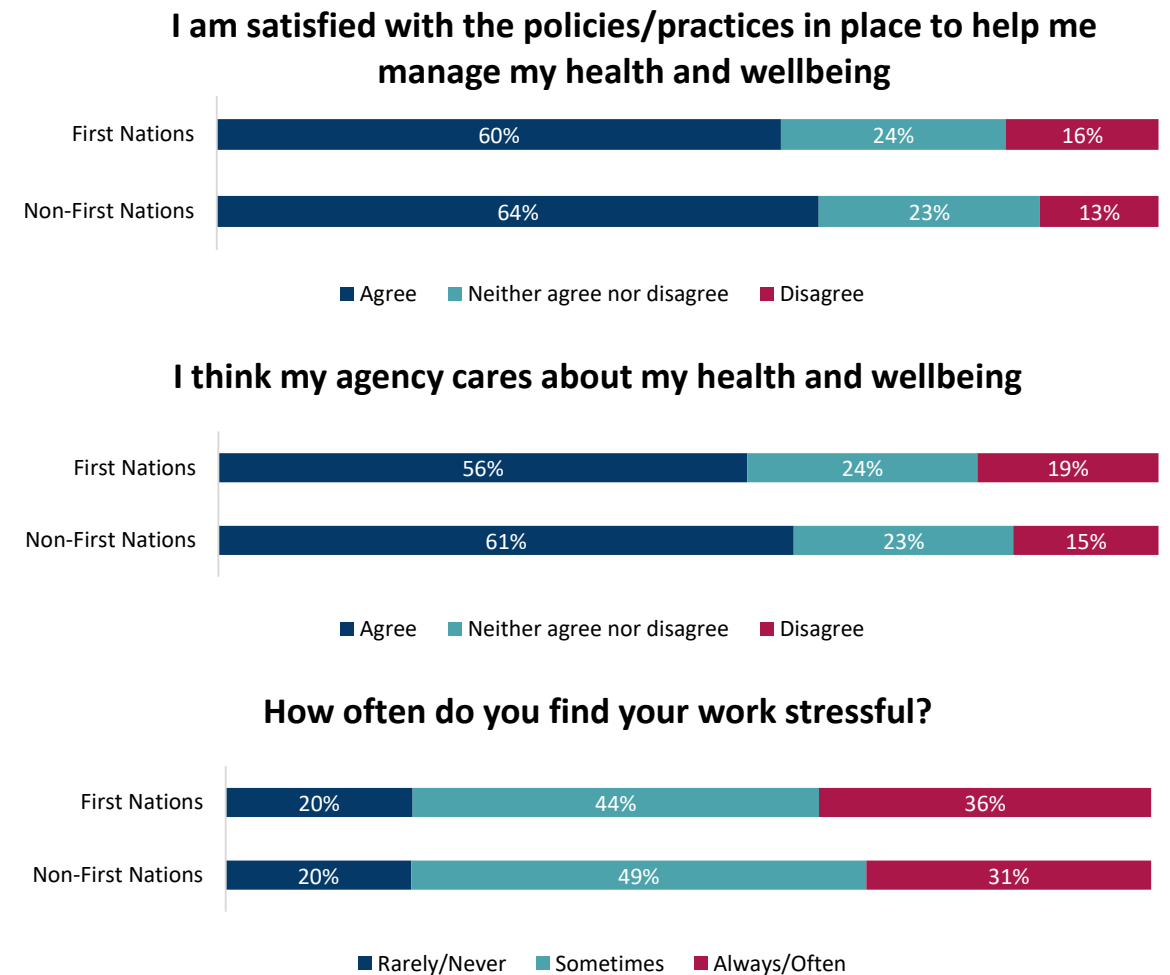
In 2023, First Nations respondents reported slightly lower wellbeing policies and support index scores than non-First Nations respondents.



# First Nations employees were less satisfied with health and wellbeing supports and had higher rates of stress

First Nations respondents reported lower satisfaction with the policies/practices in place to help them manage their wellbeing (60%) than non-First Nations respondents (64%).

First Nations respondents also had lower perceptions of their agency's care for their health and wellbeing (56%) and more often found work stressful (36%).

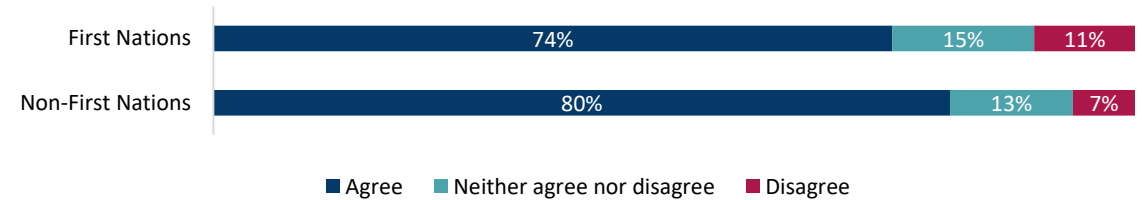


# First Nations employees reported lower levels of perceived respect and inclusion at work

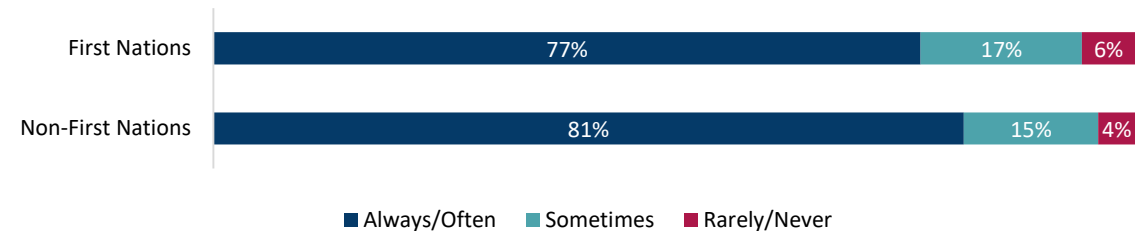
First Nations respondents reported lower agreement that their agency promotes an inclusive workplace (74%), 6 percentage points less than non-First Nations respondents (80%).

A smaller proportion of First Nations respondents also reported that they always or often received the respect they deserved from colleagues at work (77%) when compared with non-First Nations respondents (81%).

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

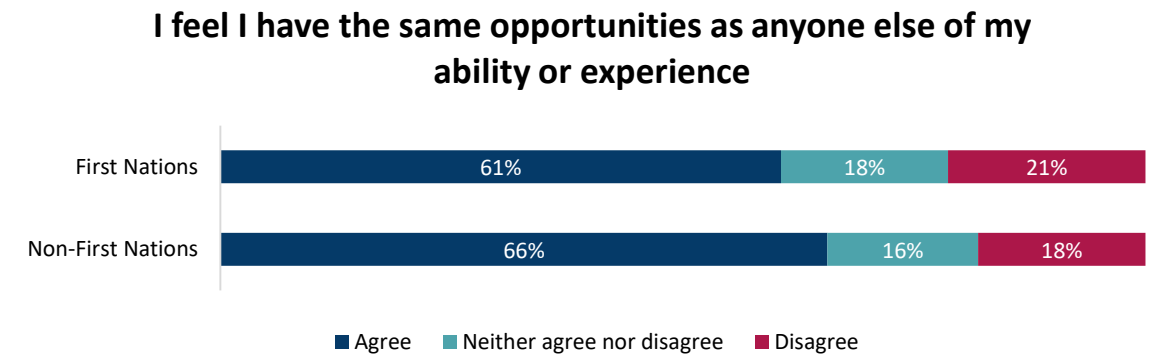


**I receive the respect I deserve from my colleagues at work**



# First Nations employees have lower perceptions of workplace opportunities

First Nations respondents show lower agreement that they receive the same workplace opportunities than other employees of similar ability or experience (61%).

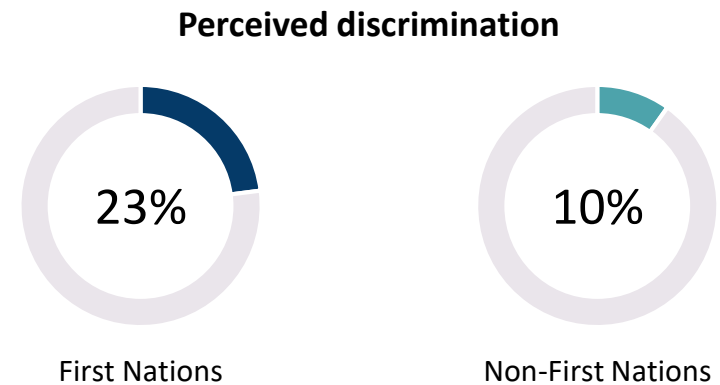


# A larger proportion of First Nation employees perceived discrimination

Nearly one in four First Nations respondents (23%) perceived discrimination on the basis of their background or a personal characteristic during the previous 12 months.

This was more than double the proportion of non-First Nations respondents who perceived discrimination.

The most common bases of perceived discrimination for First Nations respondents were due to identification as an Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person (45%), race (34%) and gender (19%).

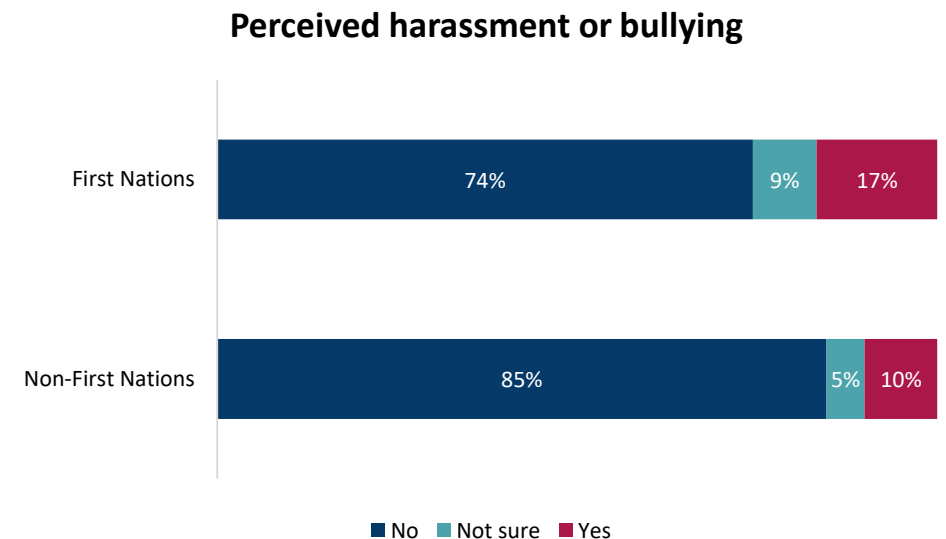


# A larger proportion of First Nations employees perceived harassment or bullying

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 7 percentage points higher for First Nations respondents (17%) than non-First Nations respondents (10%).

The most common types of harassment or bullying for First Nations respondents were interference with work tasks (41%), verbal abuse (41%) and inappropriate and unfair application of work policies or rules (34%).



# First Nations employees have different work experiences to non-First Nations employees

First Nations employees in the APS are generally younger and work in lower classifications than non-First Nations employees. They also more commonly work in regional locations and experience shorter APS careers. These results highlight the importance of ongoing career initiatives and pathways for First Nations employees to increase representation across middle management, executive level and senior executive leadership roles in the APS.

First Nations employees reported more negative experiences across numerous APS Employee Census measures and higher perceptions of unacceptable behaviours. Ongoing efforts are vital to improve and embed the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the workplace and support the development of culturally-safe APS workspaces and services.



# The Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy aims to create an APS culture that benefits and supports First Nations peoples

The [Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-2024](#) provides a foundation for building an inclusive and diverse APS:

- **Cultural Integrity** – improving and embedding the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the workplace to support the development of culturally-safe work spaces and services, and creating a more inclusive Commonwealth Public Sector.
- **Career Pathways** – diversify and strengthen the pathways into and across the Commonwealth Public Sector.
- **Career Development and Advancement** – individual career development and advancement plans supported by targeted development initiatives and advancement opportunities.

# The APS uses several different terms to record and report our First Nations employees

The APS Employee Census and APS Employment Database use different terms to record and report First Nations status.

In line with the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-2024, the APS Employee Census asked respondents if they identified as an “Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person”.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status is reported within the APS Employment Database as “Indigenous”.

For the purposes of this report the term “First Nations” has been used to represent all cohorts across all APS collection methods.

For further information please contact:

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