

Health and wellbeing of Australian retail workers



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FOREWORD

DOMINIQUE LAMB

At the heart of the Australian economy is its retail businesses.

Retail trade accounts for approximately \$329 billion in annual sales, and represents over 1.5 million workers, one of the biggest working population cohorts in Australia.

The retail sector experienced a challenging time in the 2019 calendar year, with annual growth and operating conditions, their weakest since the recession of the early 1990's. Low consumer confidence, sluggish wage growth and underwhelming sales figures throughout the year saw the sector experience one of its more difficult years in recent memory.

In 2020, Australian retail is confronting an unprecedented set of challenges. The full impact from the current Coronavirus pandemic is yet to be fully felt and it follows a summer of devastating drought and bushfires, as well as a flat economy more generally. These difficult times warrant a comprehensive response from governments at all levels to overturn the current tide and get retail back off the canvas.

Simultaneously, Australia is currently facing an increase in preventable chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis and some cancers. The increase in these health conditions is largely due to a range of risk factors, including levels of excess weight and obesity; fruit and vegetable intake; physical activity levels; smoking; and excessive alcohol intake. The health impacts are also mental and emotional, with significant increases in Australians experiencing psychological stress, anxiety and depression.

The current Coronavirus pandemic has brought focus to bear on the health and wellbeing of both the community as a whole, but also those essential workers who are, and will continue to, shoulder a disproportionately large burden of ensuring that society can continue to function with at least a semblance of normality.

Retailers are doing everything within their power to accommodate for the changing demands of the public and the Coronavirus response. Such a response is only contributing to a tense environment where retail workers are subjected to high levels of abuse and violence.

Retail workers are exposed to issues such as retail crime, violence and aggression, domestic abuse, and dealing with societal risks such as drug-affected individuals, all of which are creating serious physical, emotional and mental health issues. Some retail staff are also making some poor lifestyle choices such as smoking, poor nutrition and lack of physical exercise, often compounded by the characteristics of their work.

The National Retail Association is eager to work with government on solutions and strategies to address these serious issues.



Dominique Lamb
Chief Executive
National Retail
Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Never before outside of wartime have so many Australians relied on so few. The roles being played by primary and allied health staff and those supporting them, emergency services personnel, those involved in the management and maintenance of critical infrastructure and services, people involved in manufacturing and food production, and those involved in getting consumer goods to households, be it in key logistics and supply chains, distribution centers, and customer facing essential retail sector staff are central to ensuring society as we know does not break down.

Whilst not diminishing the role of those captured by the above, it is no doubt customer facing retail staff, replenishing shelves and serving customers who, by virtue of their environment, perhaps bear the greatest risk of all as they go about ensuring that Australia's population of 25 million people have access to the goods they need to stay fit and healthy.

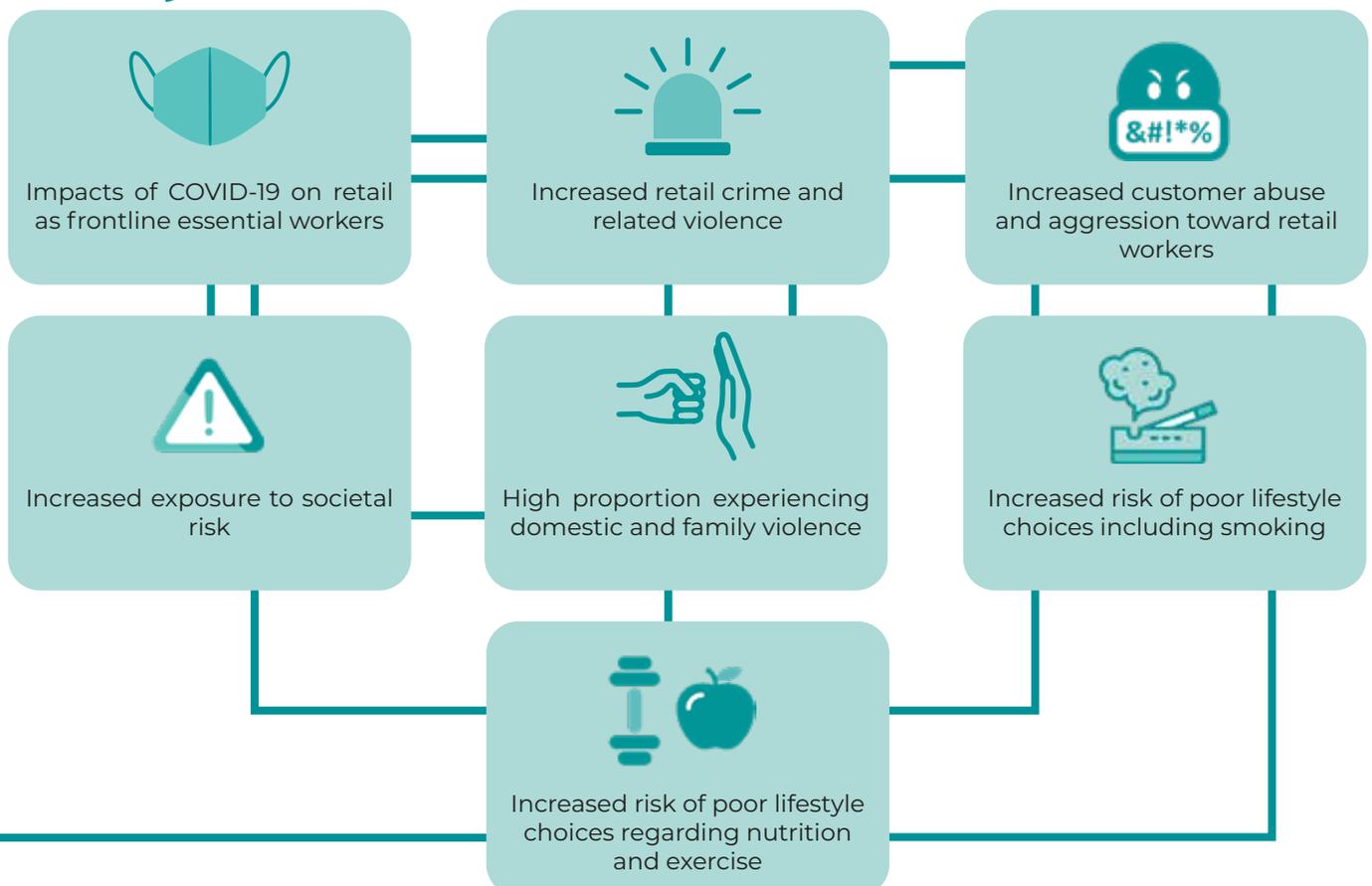
It is in this context that in order to ensure that critical retail operations staff are fit, healthy and

able to effectively deliver their essential service, both now and well into the future, that State and Commonwealth Governments working with industry representatives give consideration to a package practical and easily actionable policy reform initiatives that will go a long way to addressing some of the underlying challenges facing retail sector staff to ensure that they can continue to be the very best version of themselves and in doing so support both the broader community (and economy) in the current environment.

The NRA submits that retail workers represent a significant proportion of Australians impacted by these serious health underlying, by preventable health conditions, however are largely being overlooked in terms of proactive policies and strategies to improve their health and wellbeing. Retail workers represent a large proportion of low to middle income earners aged 14 to 60 years, and include full-time and casual employees, managers, corporate support staff, delivery and back-of-house staff, franchisees and thousands of independent business owners.

This paper provides a brief overview of issues impacting retail worker health and wellbeing, as well as potential solutions and strategies which could make significant differences to the lives of retail workers, and the broader industry and economy as a whole.

The key issues



BACKGROUND

Retail experienced a challenging time in the 2019 calendar year with annual growth and operating conditions at their weakest since the early 1990's recession. Low consumer confidence, sluggish wage growth and underwhelming sales figures throughout the year saw the sector experience one of its more difficult years in recent memory.

In 2020, Australian retail is confronting an unprecedented set of challenges. The full impact from the current Coronavirus pandemic is yet to be fully felt and it follows a summer of devastating drought and bushfires, as well as a flat economy more generally. These difficult times warrant a comprehensive response from governments at all levels to overturn the current tide and get retail back off the canvas.

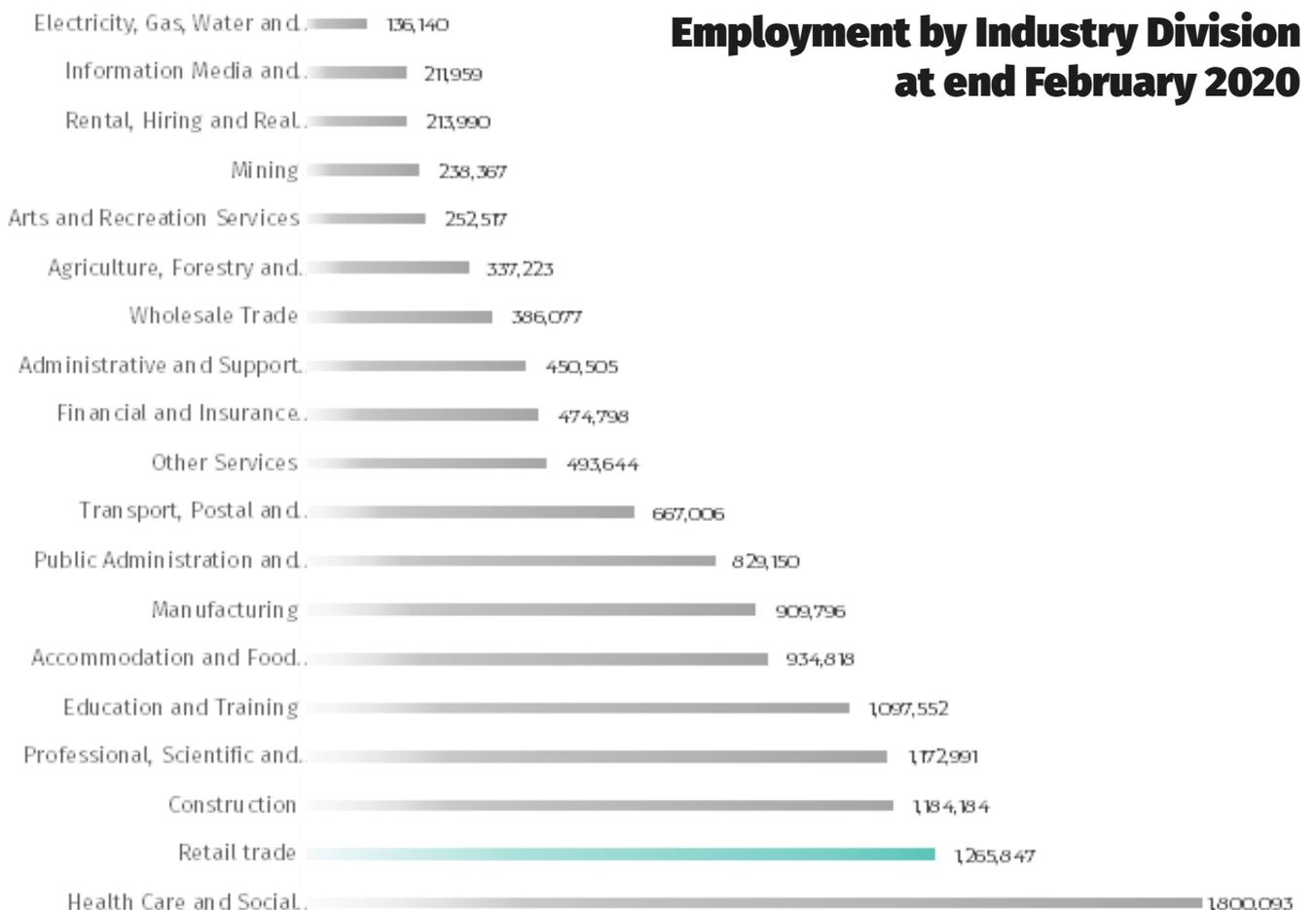
The National Retail Association (NRA) is the modern voice of Australian retail. The association works with all-sized businesses, from the biggest retailers to the smallest, to create better opportunities for all who work in the retail sector. As the most representative organization in the industry, we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of Australian retail, keeping pace with the rapidly changing face of the sector across a wide range of issues. No organisation nationwide is better placed to inform government on the threats, challenges and opportunities facing the retail sector than the NRA.

Australian Retail Industry

At the heart of the Australian economy is its retail businesses. Retail trade accounts for **approximately \$329 billion in annual sales**, not including food retail such as fast food restaurants.

Retail is also the **second largest employer in Australia** (1,256,500 employees) and Accommodation and Food services (including a sizeable number of retail food outlets and cafes) are the sixth largest (934,818 employees) . The importance of retail to the Australian economy cannot be overstated.

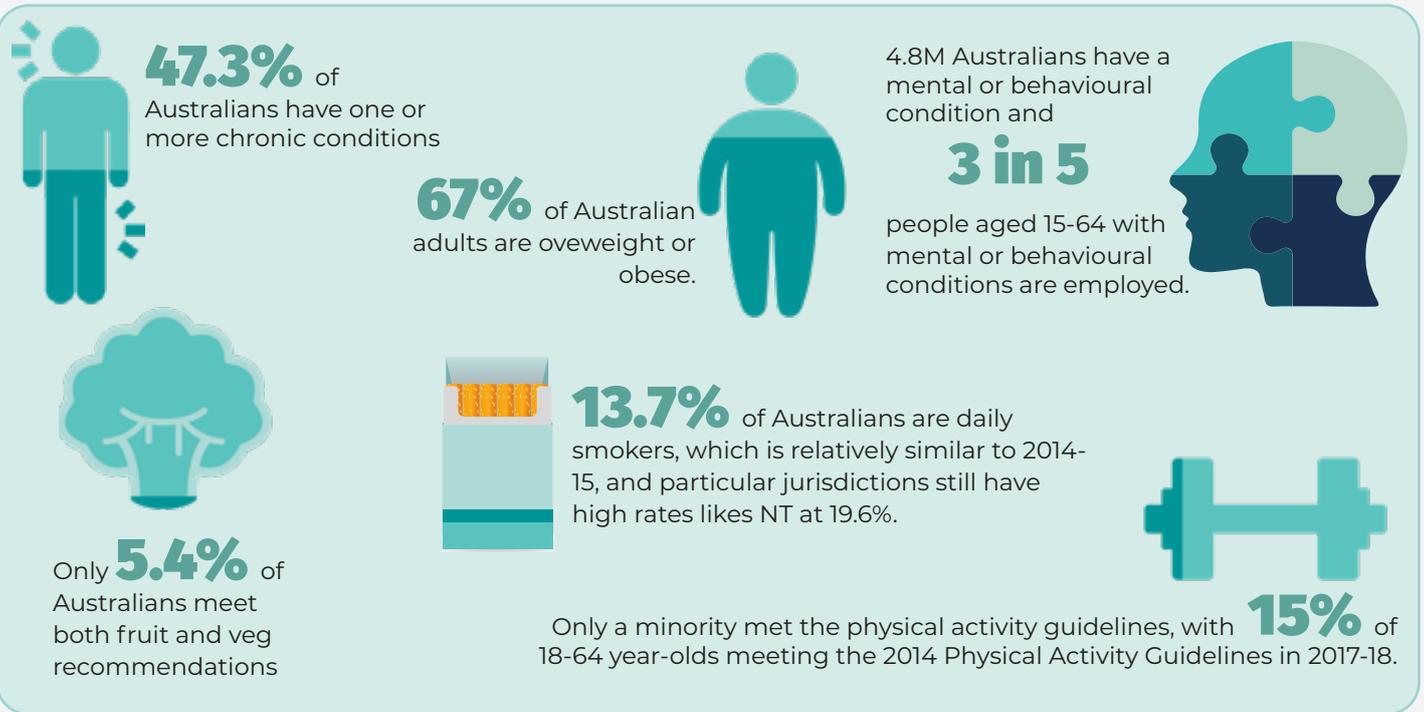
Small to medium independent or franchised retail businesses comprise a large part of the industry. In terms of small business, when all retail and food services data is combined (ANZSIC 40, 41, 42, 43 and 45) there are more than 100,000 small businesses in this sector. Collectively, retailers of all sizes and types can make a very big difference when it comes to implementing government initiatives.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Australia is currently facing an increase in preventable chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis and some cancers. The increase in these health conditions is largely due to a range of risk factors, including levels of excess weight and obesity; fruit and vegetable intake; physical activity levels; smoking; and excessive alcohol intake. The health impacts are also mental and emotional, with significant increases in Australians experiencing psychological stress, anxiety and depression.

The 2017-2018 National Health Survey revealed a range of troubling indicators, such as:



The NRA submits that retail workers represent a **significant proportion of Australians** impacted by these serious health conditions. Retail workers include full-time and casual employees, managers, corporate support staff, delivery and back-of-house staff, franchisees and independent business owners.

Retail, including food retail, represents over 1.5 million workers, one of the biggest working population groups in Australia. Retail is the highest employer of youth, however people from all ages from 16 to 60 years are represented. The retail industry is one of the largest employers of women and also represents a significant proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians.

Retail workers are low to medium income earners with a median of \$500-700 weekly earnings, and many are employed as casual or part-time workers as an entry-level job or as a supplementary role while studying, raising children or helping with the household family income.

However, retail workers are being overlooked by government in terms of their health and wellbeing. Retail workers are exposed to issues such as retail crime, violence and aggression, domestic abuse, and dealing with societal risks such as drug-affected individuals. They are also making some poor lifestyle choices such as smoking, poor nutrition and lack of physical exercise, often compounded by the characteristics of their work.

These issues are impacting the health and wellbeing of millions of Australian retail workers, and also affecting their businesses and the economy as a whole. The retail industry has one of the highest staff turnover rates across the world and is still often perceived as a temporary or entry-level job rather than a career. Small business owners find it hard to retain staff and are constantly faced with high training and recruitment costs, both in time and money.

Taking action to improve the health and wellbeing of retail workers makes good sense, not only in helping retail workers and revitalizing the economy, but also in the critical role retailers play in educating consumers.

IMPACTS OF CORONAVIRUS ON RETAIL AS FRONTLINE ESSENTIAL WORKERS

The Coronavirus pandemic has disrupted our lives and our livelihoods, and its wide-ranging personal, social and economic impacts will continue to be felt for many months and years. The impact on the retail industry has been polarised, with some retail businesses forced to close their stores while others faced accelerated demand to feed and supply the nation.

While retail has often been viewed as a low complexity, low skill sector in the past, the pandemic has exposed the **critical importance of the retail industry** as an essential service, pivotal to Australian livelihoods.

Retail workers have faced **significant new challenges** during the pandemic. While hysteria and health warnings to stay at home were at their peak, retail workers left their homes every day and faced greater personal health risk to themselves and their families in order to ensure the whole community had access to essentials. Many report that this created tension and anxiety in their home, compounded by the fact that many retail workers were now the sole breadwinner. Many retail workers were ineligible for government benefits, such as JobKeeper, as their businesses did not witness immediate losses due to panic-buying.

Retail business owners also faced a whole new set of challenges, feeling increased pressure to provide essential goods to the community while trying to accelerate supply, implementing a raft of new safety measures, hiring extra staff for stock replenishment, protecting their staff, and handling angst and frustration relayed onto workers by the community. Many have increased costs by installing safety measures such as 'sneeze screens', hiring crowd controllers, changing store layouts, pivoting to online and pick-up services, and deploying extensive training programs to improve team and customer safety.

Unfortunately, while many customers were understanding of government restrictions, a significant proportion took their anger out on retail workers, with some retailers reporting **up to 400 per cent increase in aggression and abuse**. Many business owners were forced to employ security guards and crowd controllers to ensure government social distancing measures were followed.

Retail workers have proudly served their community during this crisis but the impacts on their health and wellbeing are serious and expected to be long-lasting. Retailers report that the mental health and wellbeing of their teams has become a more critical issue than ever, with many feeling ill-equipped to handle the stress and challenges presented.



What's needed

We submit that retail workers should be recognised by government as **frontline essential workers** and provided the priority support they deserve.

Retailers need funded assistance to address not only the immediate impacts of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of their workers, but to also train and equip their teams to cope with future disruption.

To commence, we propose a Retail Resilience Program to engage and educate retailers, including those in regional areas where retail is often the economic backbone of the community and health issues can be more pronounced.

INCREASED RETAIL CRIME AND RELATED VIOLENCE

Crime is a serious matter for the retail industry.

It significantly impacts businesses by harming staff, affecting customers, disrupting operations and eroding profitability. Crime statistics show that while major crime categories have been stable over the past few years, retail theft continues to increase.

The industry estimates that retail theft, both external and internal, **costing Australian businesses up to \$9 billion each year**. Of note, during peak coronavirus restrictions where many businesses were closed and retail crime should have declined, the retailers which were open reported significant crime increases.

In addition, over **80%** of retailers under-report crime as they have lost confidence in police response and penal outcomes, meaning actual retail crime rates are much higher. Retail crime is often perceived as petty crime or crime against 'stuff', not people. It is often considered low priority even when violence is involved, with many retailers reporting little to no response from law enforcement.

Retail crime is not victimless crime, and retail workers experience a range of serious impacts including physical assault, verbal abuse, threats, harassment and stalking. In a recent survey, the NRA found that:

- **85% of retail workers experienced verbal abuse** while attempting to prevent theft
- **41% experienced physical abuse** while trying to prevent theft
- **78% feel that verbal and/or physical abuse** targeted at retailers and retail staff is **increasing**
- **85% feel business profitability is affected** by having to implement strategies to counter retail theft

In the home or other workplaces, an act of aggression or violence towards another person is considered assault and in the modern era receives urgent police attention. In many retail workplaces today, staff members face acts of aggression or violence on a daily basis just like hospitals or law enforcement, but either receive a lacklustre police response, or incidents become accepted as an unavoidable "part of the job". This cannot continue to be the norm, especially given retail is the largest employer of young people and one of the largest employers of women.

Retail crime also impacts business viability, eroding profitability and making it harder for business owners to keep their business afloat and staff employed. The majority of retailers have assumed the cost burden of crime and instructed their team to avoid confrontation of criminals for their own safety.

Crime ultimately drives some businesses to close or relocate, increases price pressures on consumers, and increases staff turnover.

What's needed

Crimes against retailers and their teams must be elevated to **serious crime** by government and law enforcement in order to reduce physical and mental harm, encourage workers to stay in the profession, and reduce costs on business.

The retail industry needs to have confidence in law enforcement and the positive outcomes of reporting crime. The NRA recommends that law enforcement should be allocated **dedicated funding and resources** to better address retail crime. This needs to focus on better response, more user-friendly reporting measures for retail, increased prosecution of offenders including juveniles, and increased penalties for recidivist criminals. There should be zero tolerance for criminal behavior.

Retailers also need funded assistance to **improve their ability to prevent crime** and better equip their teams to manage the health and wellbeing impacts such as improving resilience and situation management. Training and resources should be provided to retailers, tailored to their needs and language. In addition, ways to share information and learnings about retail crime trends and prevention should be supported by government. For example, the NRA recently trialed a crime information-sharing network amongst Brisbane retailers, resulting in a 21% increase in retail crimes being reported within a few months.



CUSTOMER ABUSE AND AGGRESSION TOWARD RETAIL WORKERS

Retail workers are facing **increased aggressive and abusive behaviour from customers**, not just criminals. Unlike other situations where this behaviour would be abhorred and prosecuted, Australian society seems to accept abuse of retail workers as the norm, or part of the transaction.

Employee unions and industry associations agree that abuse and aggression from customers has increased. In a 2019 survey by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA), which is the peak union for retail employees, more than **88%** of surveyed members experienced verbal abuse from a customer in the past year, **15%** experienced physical customer violence, and **11%** experienced sexual harassment or abuse³. Another SDA survey found that **39%** had been sexually harassed in the last 5 years and **36%** of harassment was perpetrated by customers.

It is no surprise that customer abuse, aggression and harassment experienced by retail workers impacts their health and wellbeing. A recent report found that “these behaviours are common in the retail sector and exposure to them can have adverse consequences in the short- and long-term for psychological wellbeing, physical health, and work attitudes and performance.”⁴

Serving uncivil, abusive or aggressive customers can cause immediate emotional reaction for employees, negatively altering their mood, and generating feelings of depression, anxiety, or anger that can last well beyond

the work day⁵. In cases where dysfunctional customer behaviour has been extreme or violent, these feelings can manifest into long lasting symptoms of stress disorder (i.e., flashbacks, anxiety or sleeplessness)⁶.

Dysfunctional customer behaviour has also been linked to increased emotional job demands. Employees facing difficult customers must increase their emotional self-regulation efforts to produce appropriate, but feigned, emotional displays. These emotional demands deplete the coping resources available to employees often leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout⁷.

Research into dysfunctional customer behaviour shows that it negatively impacts employees' attitudes towards work. Employees who face dysfunctional customer behaviour experience lower job satisfaction, lower organisational commitment, higher absenteeism, and reduced morale and motivation.

Customers are aware that most retailers have policies reinforcing “the customer is always right” so that customers feel comfortable purchasing products and requesting refunds, however this has also led to abuse of these policies where the new normal is to “make a scene” or abuse the worker to get what you want. Some retailers have taken steps such as displaying signage and even adding phrases like “I’m a sister” or “I’m a volunteer firefighter” to staff badges to humanise interactions.

What's needed

It is difficult for retailers and law enforcement to determine the point at which incivility becomes abuse, and therefore understand what action needs to be taken in each situation. More support is needed to encourage Australians to stay in retail which could not only reduce costs for business but vastly improve the knowledge, experience and service standards offered.

We submit that **legislation could be strengthened** by making trespass laws tougher and providing the ability for law enforcement to issue on-the-spot fines for any action deemed abuse. The NRA has also proposed a “Not Welcome Here” program where abusive customers and criminals can be banned from entire retail precincts, reducing the need for individual stores to enforce trespass notices and risk their safety. Not Welcome Here is a policy position to assist retailers and shopping centres to better manage those people who are no longer considered customers, but rather aggressive individuals, and are not welcome in the store or centre that day, week, month or possibly ever again.

There also needs to be a fundamental shift in **community attitudes** through a large-scale campaign. Abusive behaviour towards retail workers needs to be explained (with everyday real-world examples) so customers understand what behaviour is acceptable

and what is not. For example, Worksafe Victoria launched the “It's never OK” campaign demonising violence and aggression towards healthcare workers and the Queensland Government funded the “Assault isn't part of the job” campaign about paramedics. Part of this campaign should include signage and resources for retailers to display.

Retailers also need **assistance in equipping their teams** with the skills and tools to better identify and manage escalating situations and also better manage the personal health and wellbeing impacts. As raised earlier, the NRA proposes a Retail Resilience Program designed to upskill retailers and their teams to ensure they are equipped to reduce crime, handle disorderly behaviour, protect team and customer safety and wellbeing, and increase employee ability to regulate emotions. A key part of this strategy is encouraging retailers to feel confident in rejecting the “customer is always right” ideology.

Finally, **greater collaboration** between government departments, industry and law enforcement is needed. Retailers have an important role to play in complimenting the work done by Police such as identification of suspicious behaviour and potentially dangerous situations.

INCREASED EXPOSURE TO SOCIETAL RISK

Retail precincts are community hubs where friends and families gather, however they can also attract those in the community suffering from a range of issues. Without a dedicated law enforcement or community support service presence, retailers are forced to manage a range of issues outside their expertise, such as drugs, substance abuse, homelessness, loitering, public nuisance, and crimes such as assault and robbery even outside their stores.

The **influence of drugs and substance abuse** in the community is a serious and increasing issue for retail. Drug-affected individuals are often more violent and brazen offenders. NRA research indicates retailers are experiencing a **200-300% increase** in drug-affected incidents in their stores or precincts.

In some cases, household products are shoplifted and then misused as a drug, often while still in the precinct. For example, there has been a spike in youth chroming where individuals inhale household chemicals and other volatile substances found in products like deodorant, glue, solvents and paint, to get high. For example,

retailers have reported that Rexona deodorant cans continue to be highly targeted for chroming purposes with some outlets having over **30 cans stolen a day**. Target hardening techniques such as caging products or moving them behind counters have had limited effect.

On top of the increased retail crime caused by community drug issues, retail workers are being subjected to increased violent behaviour, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stalking, personal robberies and assault. Retail workers increasingly report that they **feel less safe** entering and leaving work, with some initiating buddy systems and some covering their uniforms to avoid being targeted. The industry relies on a high proportion of young workers and female workers and any increased risk to safety can be the determining factor for leaving or avoiding the profession.

Community issues not only affect retail worker safety and job satisfaction, but also impact the appeal of the precinct, reducing customer traffic and ultimately threatening the viability of the precinct.

What's needed

Retailers need **additional support** to address issues created by community issues such as drug addiction and misuse of substances.

As recommended earlier, **law enforcement needs dedicated funding** to improve their presence and responsiveness in retail precincts. While retail precincts invest heavily in security guards these personnel lack the ability to enforce the law. Retailers, government and police need to work together to identify and safeguard known hotspots.

In addition, greater **community and social intervention** is needed as law enforcement can only go so far. Our communities need greater investment and focus on early-intervention programs, such as youth support programs, to tackle long-standing issues and prevent the need for even greater law enforcement.

It is also well-known that **urban planning decisions** such as the location of health or support services can impact the prevalence of drug-affected incidents in nearby retail precincts. Many precincts that were once vibrant, safe, family places have rapidly declined after poor local planning decisions. We believe all local stakeholders should be consulted in these decisions before they occur, as well as taking immediate steps, such as community programs, to address precincts already impacted.

Retailers should also be provided **assistance to better equip their businesses**, train their teams and share intelligence about repeat offenders or dangerous situations. The Retailer Resilience Program will include a closed information-sharing network to operate like an early identification process, identifying crime trends, insights and prevention measures via regular bulletins.



HIGH PROPORTION EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is a serious issue in Australia. On average, one woman a week in Australia dies at the hand of her current or former partner. One in 6 Australian women and one in 19 men has experienced physical abuse from a current or former partner. Importantly, two-thirds of those experiencing domestic and family violence are employed.

Considering the demographic overlap of retail workers and those most likely to suffer from DFV, we believe approximately **100,000 retail workers are currently experiencing domestic and family violence**, though this may be more still as DFV is under-reported. Up to 50 per cent of women that experienced DFV say they lost a job because of it, for example through absenteeism, lateness, reduced concentration and withdrawn or anxious personality responses.

DFV not only impacts the worker at home, but one in 5 say that the abuse continues at work in various

ways such as stalking, harassing emails or phone calls, and unannounced visits into the store or back dock. This puts the whole workplace and team at risk and employers have legal obligations to provide a safe workplace.

DFV also impacts the whole community with an estimated cost to the Australian economy of **\$22 billion** every year. The NRA estimates that it costs retailers up to **\$100 million every year**.

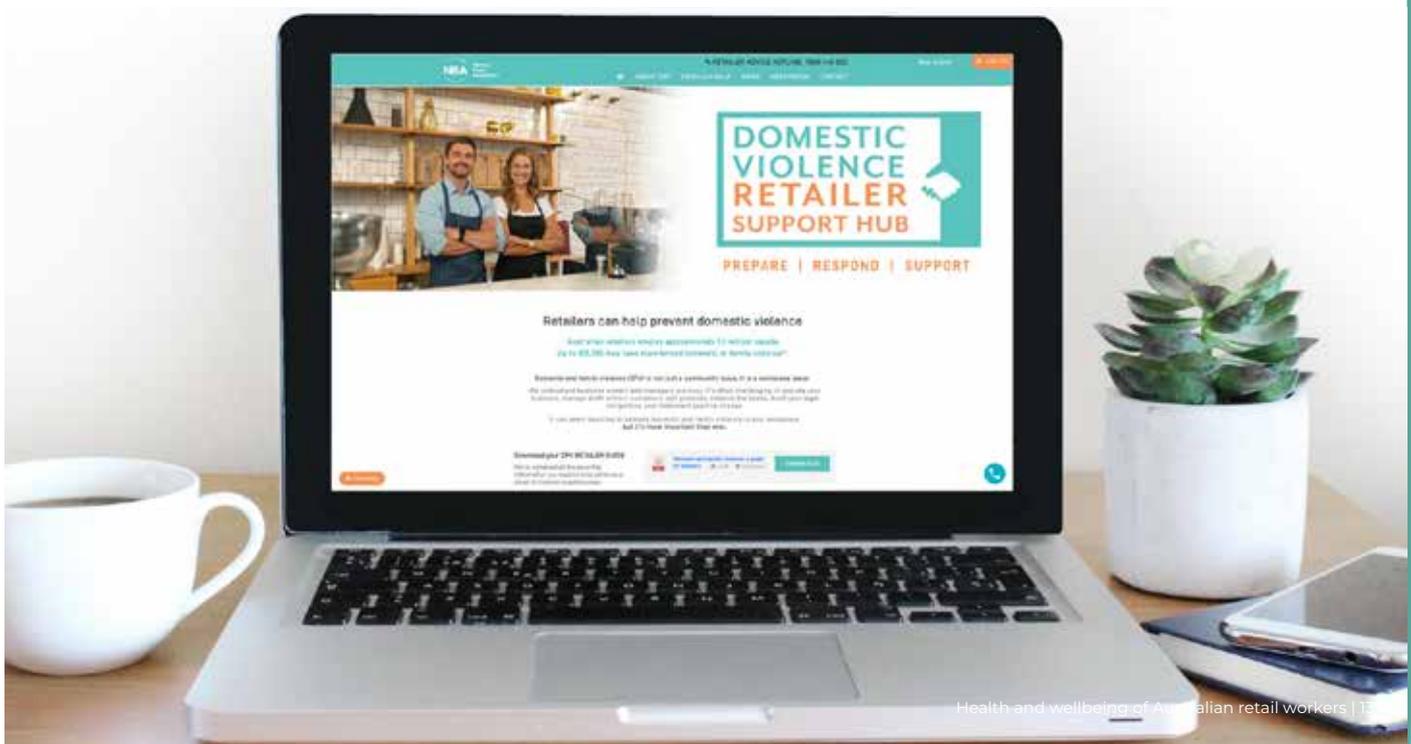
There are employee benefits and support services available to retail workers however the signs of DFV are often overlooked or misunderstood until an incident occurs, resulting in slow or inappropriate action from an employer or mistakenly dismissing the employee over unexplained poor performance.

What's needed

The NRA supports **strengthening government policy** to establish better frameworks and monitoring, as well as harsher penalties for perpetrators and stricter enforcement of domestic violence orders. Victims of DFV need to have confidence that coming forward will be met with support and protection.

Retailers can also play a critical part in **identifying and supporting victims** of DFV. On average it will take a women seven attempts before she leaves an abuser, and employers need to be prepared and equipped for this long-term journey.

The NRA recently partnered with the Queensland Government to develop a DFV Retailer Support Hub (www.dvretail.com.au) which includes a dedicated website of information and a suite of downloadable resources, factsheets and signage. NRA also developed a DFV Retailer Guide which provides 3 steps every retailer can take to prepare their workplace with policies and training, respond quickly and appropriately, and support workers through entitlements and referrals to specialist DFV services. We believe this program should be expanded into other jurisdictions or at a national level.



LIFESTYLE CHOICES - SMOKING

Smoking is the **leading cause of preventable death** and disability, estimated to contribute to 13% of all deaths in Australia each year, or approximately 20,933 deaths.

Limited comparative public data exists in relation to the present smoking rate amongst Australian retail trade sector employees as an individual cohort. However, the most recent analysis of employee cohort smoking rate data from the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention shows that in that country in 2016 approximately **17.8% of retail trade sector employees** regularly smoked cigarettes, versus a national average smoking rate against all employment cohorts of 15.4%. This suggests that retail worker smoking rates are 16% higher than the broader average.

This significant **over-indexation of retail trade sector employees** indicates, amongst other things, that despite significant efforts to reduce smoking rates, including exposure to tobacco warnings on a daily basis, especially for those who work in businesses which sell cigarettes, that more needs to be done to reduce smoking rates of retail workers.

In Australia, smoking as a proportion of the population has **not been declining** in recent years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics: "Since 1995, the proportion of adults who are daily smokers has decreased from 23.8% to 13.8% in 2017-18. Over recent years however, the daily smoking rate remained relatively similar (14.5% in 2014-15)." An earlier survey, conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, also noted that recent changes to the smoking rate have not been 'statistically significant'.

In 2008, Australian state, territory and federal governments committed to achieving a national smoking rate of 10% by 2018. This target was missed, and in 2019 the federal government extended the same target to 2025. Achieving its 10% smoking target by 2025 will require a reduction in total number of people smoking by a further 27.5%, which requires a average reduction of roughly 4% year on year, between 2018 and 2025. We believe that this is simply not possible without the adoption of new approaches and policies.

What's needed

Given Australia's strict tobacco control measures have failed to effectively reduce smoking rates to the level that is necessary to meet defined targets, the NRA suggests that better public health outcomes could be achieved if **new strategies**, draw on more contemporary approaches which effectively address high-risk cohorts and are yielding positive results in other countries. In particular, strategies are needed to encourage people who would otherwise not quit smoking to transition towards less harmful products.

We are concerned that **less harmful alternatives** to traditional cigarettes, including nicotine-based smoke-free products, including smokeless tobacco and nicotine vaping products, are not legal and properly regulated in Australia.

In jurisdictions that have legalised and regulated the smoke-free product category, smoking rates are reducing at faster rates than prior to legalisation and regulation. Presently over 50 countries around the world, including every OECD country with the exception of Australia and Turkey allow the sale of smoke-free consumer products. We are also convinced by current research from numerous health authorities stating that smoke-free products are up to 95 per cent less harmful than smoking cigarettes. Some actively encourage the use of vaping products as a means of helping smokers to quit and reducing the population health impacts of smoking.

An **effective regulatory system** is needed which focuses on strategies to find better alternatives for adult smokers such as retail workers, who may otherwise not quit, so that meaningful reductions in smoking rates can be achieved. We therefore submit that Australian governments should give consideration to the appropriate regulation of smoke-free alternatives based on regulatory models being adopted in the United Kingdom or New Zealand, which seek to strike the balance between protecting young people from the risks associated with vaping and preventing initiation of new users, and supporting adult smokers to switch to a form of nicotine consumption significantly less harmful than smoking.

In addition, retail workers warrant specific attention in **education and support programs** as they are more likely to smoke than many other cohorts in the Australian population.



LIFESTYLE CHOICES - NUTRITION

In 2010, the Department of Health found that retail workers (those in retail and food service) were **over-represented** for inadequate fruit and vegetable intake and inadequate physical activity outside of work.

Unlike office-based workplaces, retail workplaces have limited space for lunchroom facilities and equipment such as microwaves and fridges. Retail workers are less likely to bring their own food and often purchase their lunch and snacks within the retail precinct food court, in which businesses sell convenient food and drink but these are not intended for daily consumption. We have also witnessed significant intake of sugary drinks and foods by retail workers to increase their energy.

Healthy lifestyle choices play an important role in the **prevention of chronic diseases**, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer, as well as maintaining a healthy weight. We are particularly concerned that retail workers in regional and remote communities may be at even greater risk of poor nutritional choices and related health impacts.

Good nutrition is essential for keeping all Australians healthy across the lifespan. A healthy diet helps individuals develop and reduces their risk of chronic diseases, including obesity. Adults who eat a healthy diet live longer and have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

Too often, food at work is seen as an afterthought or a hindrance by employers and is often a “missed opportunity” to increase productivity and morale. Poor diet on the job is costing countries around the world up to 20 per cent in lost productivity, either due to malnutrition that plagues some one billion people in developing countries or the excess weight and obesity afflicting an equal number mostly in industrialized economies.

What's needed

First, we recommend that government invest in undertaking research to provide updated insight similar to that provided in the 2010 Healthy Workplace Study. It is important for industries and sectors to have clear data to identify issues and enact change.

Retail workers need **resources and education** to help improve their choices. We need to identify and address barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption. Research has found that high cost, limited availability and access, and perceived lack of cooking / preparation time can be barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption. For example, resources could be tailored to explain health advice and programs available, such as obesity prevention programs, nutrition standards and tips to help retail workers make more informed choices.

We believe investment is warranted in educating and engaging retailers to shift choices not only of their staff but of all consumers. Retailers play a part in influencing consumer purchasing decisions via communication messages, product placement and promotional strategies. While some retailers express a desire to move away from less healthy products, many retailers currently lack the knowledge and support to take action, with many confounded by issues such as decreasing profit margins, long-term supply contracts, the fear of losing customers by reducing popular products, and being too overwhelmed to know where to start. We therefore propose a comprehensive program that engages, educates and supports retailers to transition to ranges of more healthy options.



CONCLUSION

The health and wellbeing of 1.5 million retail workers deserves attention.

- Retail trade accounts for approximately \$329 billion in annual sales, and represents over 1.5 million workers.
- Australia is currently facing a concerning increase in preventable chronic diseases and mental health issues.
- Retail workers represent a significant proportion of Australians impacted.

Retail workers are experiencing significant impacts and risks to their health and wellbeing.

- Retail workers have been at the **frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic**, weathering increased risk, stress and abuse to keep Australia fed and safe.
- Retail workers are experiencing **increased retail crime and related violence**, with over 85% experiencing verbal or physical abuse while trying to prevent crime. Retail crime costs Australian jobs and up to \$9 billion every year.
- Retail workers are experiencing **increased customer abuse and aggression**, seemingly accepted as normal by society but creating long-lasting wellbeing impacts and increasing exit from the profession.
- Retail workers are on the frontline of **dealing with societal issues** like 'ad-hoc counsellors', such as managing individuals affected by drug or substance abuse.
- Up to 100,000 retail workers are experiencing **domestic and family violence**, with 1 in 6 Australian women experiencing violence, 20% of these women say the violence continues at work, and many lose their jobs.
- Retail workers represent a **high proportion of smokers** given their high-risk demographics and smoking rates are no longer going down.
- Retail workers are more likely to have **poor nutrition and lack of non-work exercise**, creating long-term health impacts.

Urgent change is needed to improve the health and wellbeing of retail workers.

- Retail workers should be recognised and prioritised as frontline essential service workers.
- Retailers need assistance to train and equip their teams to cope with disruption and become more resilient.
- Crimes against retailers and their teams should be treated as, and responded to, as serious crime.
- Law enforcement needs dedicated resources to combat retail crime, increasing retailer confidence that police will respond, offenders will be prosecuted and repeat criminals will be prevented from entry.
- Retailers need assistance to prevent crime, share intelligence and manage the health and wellbeing impacts on their teams.
- We need to change community attitudes that accept customer abuse of retail workers as the norm.
- Retailers and law enforcement need stronger laws and tools to ban abusive individuals from retail precincts, not just stores.
- Retailers need help and support to change abuse-tolerant policies.
- We need to work together to ensure retail precincts are safe for both staff and customers.
- Greater community and social intervention is needed to tackle societal issues rather than expecting retail workers to be ad-hoc counsellors and law enforcement.
- Retailers can play a critical part in identifying and supporting victims of domestic and family violence, and need support programs nationwide to provide tools and resources.
- Given smoking rates reductions have stagnated and retail workers appear to be overindexed when it comes to smoking rates governments must as a matter of urgency consider new ways to reduce smoking rates, including properly regulating nicotine-based smoke-free alternatives (eg. e-cigarettes) which are legal in over 50 countries and supported by many health bodies globally as a less harmful alternative to smoking and an important quitting aid, but which are not yet properly regulated and legally able to be sold in Australia.
- Retail workers need more resources and education to improve their lifestyle choices such as smoking, nutrition and exercise, and also play a critical role in educating customers.

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL RETAIL ASSOCIATION

The National Retail Association (NRA) is Australia's most representative retail industry organisation, servicing more than 28,000 retail and fast food outlets nationwide.

We know all types of retail.

Our members cover all types of retail including fashion, groceries, department stores, household goods, hardware, fast food, cafes and services. The NRA has represented the interests of retailers and the broader service sector for almost 100 years.

We represent all of retail.

The NRA not only leverages off the strength of its existing member network and existing communication channels, but is one of the few industry associations which engages with retailers beyond its membership base. Our inclusive approach allows us to engage across the entire industry, providing unparalleled representation and insight.

We offer an all-in-one solution for retail businesses.

At our core, we help retail and service sector businesses to navigate and comply with an ever-changing and growing business environment. We provide professional services and critical information right across the retail industry, including national retail chains and thousands of small businesses, independent retailers, franchisees and other service sector employers.

We help retailers get on with business.

We understand that as a business operating in a competitive marketplace, it is vital that retailers receive accurate and timely information on issues that impact their business. But no business, whether large or small, can afford to employ in-house experts in every regulatory area in the industry. We provide retailers with easy and affordable access to industry-specific advice and solutions across all jurisdictions.

We know what we're doing.

NRA services are delivered by highly trained and qualified in-house staff with combined decades of experience and industry knowledge. Importantly, because the NRA is a not-for-profit industry association, we can deliver professional services at a much lower cost than other providers.

We work well with others.

The NRA are known and respected for our professional approach to collaboration, influence and negotiation. This mature approach enables us to gain greater access, build stronger relationships, and work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders, including all levels of government, law enforcement, regulatory bodies, shopping centres, community groups, supporting associations and many more.



essential workers
essential support