

# Australia's labor laws need updating now that remote work is here to stay, says professor

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Australia's employment laws and regulations must be updated to reflect the changing nature of work, with many people continuing to work from

home long after the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's according to University of South Australia Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior Dr. Ruchi Sinha who says labor laws and protections should be updated to clarify issues related to [work hours](#), overtime, and breaks in a remote work context, now that almost half of all employees are working from home at least once a week.

[The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(AIHW\) report](#) on the welfare and well-being of Australians launched yesterday found that prior to the pandemic, 13% of people aged 18 and over with a job reported working from home most days, according to the ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey.

By April 2022, 46% of people had worked from home at least once per week in the previous four weeks.

Dr. Sinha says the changing nature of work has brought about a need to ensure remote workers have access to the same employment protections as in-office workers and are provided the same training and development and health and well-being opportunities.

"We need to ensure that remote work policies are inclusive and provide reasonable accommodations for employees, including employees with disabilities," she says.

"Employers should be promoting the adoption of technologies that enable people to work from home, this includes essential equipment like laptops, webcams and audio tools. Such investment in digital infrastructure and resources for remote workers should be encouraged in [rural areas](#) too, to reduce digital poverty."

Other findings in the two-yearly AIHW [report](#) included life satisfaction,

[psychological distress](#), and loneliness among Australians.

The report found that although people's satisfaction with life in general has shown recovery since the pandemic, it has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, with the average [life satisfaction](#) in August 2023 recorded at a 6.6 out of 10, compared to 7.5 in 2019.

The proportion of adults experiencing psychological distress has also failed to return to pre-pandemic levels, with 12.9% of adults reporting severe psychological distress in August 2023 compared to 8.4% in 2017.

Almost 40% of Australians also report having experienced loneliness recently.

Dr. Sinha says employers can play an important role in helping to promote health and well-being in peoples' lives, particularly if employees are working from home.

"Employers can recognize the potential challenges of remote work on [mental health](#) and establish policies that promote well-being including encouraging regular check-ins between managers and remote workers, and providing access to mental health resources and support," she says.

"It's important too to balance remote and in-office work by considering hybrid work models that meet the needs of both employees and employers. Things like face-to-face events and meetings arranged at cafes and restaurants can help with loneliness as well as culture building."

Provided by University of South Australia

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