

# Leave

## Chapter 10

### On this page

[Special leave](#)

[Paid unscheduled absence - sick and carer's leave](#)

[Age](#)

[Notes](#)



**56.3 hours**

per FTE in 2020 (-1.4 vs 2019)

**Sick leave (paid)**



**7.1 hours**

per FTE in 2020 (+0.7 vs 2019)

**Carer's leave**



**3.7 hours**

per FTE in 2020 (+2.7 vs 2019)

**Special leave**



**149.3 hours**

per FTE in 2020 (-10.7 vs 2019)

**Recreation leave**

Severe bushfires in NSW and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis of the main categories of leave can help identify the impact of the workforce availability.

**Table 10.1: Average hours of leave taken per FTE in the total public sector, 2017–2020**

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sick leave (paid)	59.0	59.7	57.7	56.3
Carer's leave	5.1	5.5	6.4	7.1
Special leave	0.9	0.8	1.0	3.7
Recreation leave <sup>1</sup>	163.2	162.7	159.9	149.3

Recreation leave decreased by 10.7 hours per FTE compared to 2019. This is a notable decrease given the relative consistency of the level of leave in the previous three years. This is likely to reflect the need to cancel overseas travel due to COVID-19, and the level of resources required to respond to both the severe bushfires and the pandemic.

Special leave increased by 2.7 hours per FTE, more than triple the level of the previous three years. This increase reflects the impact of the severe bushfires and the pandemic on NSW public sector workforce availability because there were provisions to use special leave in certain circumstances in both events.

Sick leave decreased 1.4 hours per FTE compared to 2019. While the level of sick leave can vary, this figure could partly reflect the increase in work-from-home arrangements, and decreased travel and social interaction in response to the pandemic.

Carer's leave increased 0.7 hours per FTE compared to 2019. This follows a longer-term trend of increases in this category of leave and may not specifically relate to these events.

## Special leave

All services saw a substantial increase in average special leave hours per FTE in 2020. The Public Service and other Crown services had the highest level of special leave per FTE in the government sector (4.9 hours), with other Crown services reporting the largest increase (4.2 hours) compared to 2019.

**Table 10.2: Average special leave hours by service, 2019–2020**

Service	2019 hours per FTE	2020 hours per FTE	Change (hours)
Public Service	1.7	4.9	3.2
NSW Health Service	0.5	3.5	3.0

Service	2019 hours per FTE	2020 hours per FTE	Change (hours)
NSW Police Force	1.8	3.8	2.0
Teaching Service	0.5	2.3	1.8
Transport Service	0.9	3.3	2.4
Other Crown services	0.7	4.9	4.2
<b>Total government sector</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Total public sector</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>

The increase in special leave was driven by increases in the agencies most affected by COVID-19 and the bushfires, such as frontline health and emergency service agencies. Within the Public Service, the Office of the NSW Rural Fire Service reported special leave hours per FTE of 46.9 (up 36.7 hours) while the Sydney Opera House Trust reported an increase of 27.5 hours. Within other Crown services, NSW Trains and Sydney Trains also reported large increases in special leave of 7 hours and 6.3 hours respectively. There was also a large increase from 0.4 hours to 4.7 hours per FTE for School Administrative and Support Workers within other Crown services. Almost all NSW Health Service agencies and all Local Health Districts reported substantial increases in special leave hours per FTE.

## Paid unscheduled absence - sick and carer's leave



**63.5 hours**

per FTE in 2020

### By age

**Aged 50 or under**

55.7 hours per FTE of PUA in 2020

**Aged 50+**

76.7 hours per FTE of PUA in 2020

**By salary**

**Salary under \$100k**

66.1 hours per FTE of PUA in 2020

**Salary \$100k+**

59.4 hours per FTE of PUA in 2020

Paid unscheduled absence (PUA) is a combination of paid sick leave and carer’s leave that is generally used as an indicator of the productivity and health of a workforce, to assist workforce planning.

In the NSW public sector in 2020, the number of hours of PUA per FTE decreased to 63.5, a reduction of 0.6 hours compared to 2019. While the total number of hours of PUA increased by 1.5% from 2019 to 20,478, this was due to the increase in the size of the public sector.

**Table 10.3: Paid unscheduled absence (total hours and hours per FTE), total public sector, 2015–2020**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Hours per FTE (non-casual)	65.1	67.1	64.1	65.2	64.1	63.5
Change from previous year (hours)	1.3	2.0	-3.0	1.0	-1.1	-0.6
PUA (,000 hours)	19,878	20,512	19,548	19,881	20,183	20,478
Percentage change in total hours from previous year	2.0	3.2	-4.7	1.7	1.5	1.5

In 2020, most services experienced a decrease in hours of PUA per FTE compared to 2019 (see Table 10.4). The largest reduction occurred in the Transport Service (-5.6 hours), the Public Service (-2.2 hours) and the NSW Police Force (-1.9 hours). Decreases were spread across the sector, with 63.3% of agencies<sup>2</sup> having a decrease in average PUA per FTE; however, these agencies represented only 46.8% of the sector’s FTE. Rates of PUA increased in only two services: the Teaching Service (1.5 hours) and the NSW Health Service (0.2 hours).

**Table 10.4: Paid unscheduled absence by service, 2019–2020**

Service	2019 hours per FTE	2020 hours per FTE	Change (hours)
Public Service	65.5	63.3	-2.2
NSW Health Service	61.8	62.0	0.2
NSW Police Force	64.7	62.8	-1.9
Teaching Service	63.7	65.2	1.5
Transport Service	61.6	56.0	-5.6
Other Crown services	71.2	69.6	-1.7
<b>Total government sector</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>-0.6</b>
State owned corporations	57.8	56.3	-1.5
External to government sector	52.0	50.6	-1.5
<b>Total public sector</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>-0.6</b>

The direction of change in PUA per FTE from 2019 to 2020 varied across major occupation groups (see Table 10.5). Five out of seven occupation groups recorded reductions, which accounts for around half (45.8%) of the sector FTE. The three occupation groups with the highest decreases were Machinery Operators and Drivers (-4.4 hours), Managers (-2.1 hours), and Clerical and Administrative Workers (-1.8 hours). Despite the decrease for Machinery Operators and Drivers, they had the highest average PUA of all occupation groups (from 80.9 hours down to 76.5 hours in 2020).

The rate of PUA in the other half of the sector, which comprised mostly Professionals, remained relatively flat (+0.1 hours). At 60.1 hours per FTE, this group is below the sector average and did not materially influence the decrease in PUA in the sector in 2020.

**Table 10.5: Paid unscheduled absence by occupation groups, 2019–2020<sup>3</sup>**

ANZSCO major group	2019 hours per FTE	2020 hours per FTE	Change (hours)
Machinery Operators and Drivers	80.9	76.5	-4.4
Managers	51.9	49.8	-2.1
Clerical and Administrative Workers	67.1	65.3	-1.8
Community and Personal Service Workers	71.9	71.3	-0.6
Labourers	73.1	72.9	-0.2
Professionals	60.1	60.1	0.1
Technicians and Trades Workers	71.0	71.2	0.2
<b>Total public sector</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>-0.6</b>

In 2020, Managers had the lowest overall rate of PUA, with 49.8 hours per FTE. This is a significant decrease from 2019 and is the lowest level for this group since 2013. In 2020, those with a salary of \$100,000 or more took 6.7 hours less leave per FTE than those on lower salaries (59.4 hours per FTE versus 66.1 hours, respectively). This gap has grown since 2019.

## Age

There is a well-established link between the age of employees and the rate of PUA. In 2020, the gap in average hours per FTE for those aged 50 or over, compared to those under 50, widened slightly to 21.0 hours (76.7 hours and 55.7 hours, respectively). This is a continuation of a trend that has seen this gap widening over the past 10 years, from 11.8 hours in 2010. This occurred even though the biggest reduction in PUA by age group between 2019 and 2020 was in the 55–59 age band (-2.2 hours per FTE). This decrease in the 55–59 age band was offset by increases in average PUA for people aged 60 or over, and there were broad decreases in all age bands below 59, contributing to the widened gap in 2020.

In 2020, similar to 2019, PUA hours per FTE increased incrementally with each successive five-year age band, except for people aged 40–49, where the figure remained stable before increasing again for older cohorts (see Figure 10.1).

The rate of PUA decreased across all the younger age groups between 2019 and 2020 but increased for all people aged over 60.

**Table 10.6: Paid unscheduled absence by age, 2019–2020<sup>4</sup>**

Age	2019 hours per FTE	2020 hours per FTE	Change (hours)
15-19	40.5	38.5	-2.0
20-24	44.5	43.5	-1.0
25-29	49.8	48.5	-1.3
30-34	56.6	55.7	-0.9
35-39	60.1	59.3	-0.8
40-44	59.6	58.4	-1.3
45-49	60.6	59.0	-1.6
50-54	63.8	62.8	-1.0
55-59	74.2	72.0	-2.2
60-64	84.7	88.3	3.6
65+	103.6	107.9	4.3
<b>Total public sector</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>-0.6</b>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Note that due to the unique leave arrangements for schools, the Teaching Service and School Administrative and Support Workers are excluded from all recreation leave figures.

<sup>2</sup> Some entities that did not exist in 2019 or had fewer than five FTE have been excluded from this calculation.

<sup>3</sup> The Sales Worker category has been excluded due to its small size, so totals do not match total sector figures.

<sup>4</sup> Records where employee age is unknown are included in total sector figures. These accounted for 0.01% of total FTE in 2019 and 0.02% in 2020.

---

**Next chapter**

Regional profile of the public sector

