

# Citizen perspectives on public services during life events

Citizen-centric approaches to public services, while not new, have accelerated in popularity in the last two decades. There has been an increasing emphasis on **the need for services that revolve around 'life events'**, such as changing employment status, transitioning to university, becoming a parent or carer, exiting the workforce, or suffering serious illness or injury. Life event approaches highlight how public service needs span across various agencies and levels of government. However, optimising service provisions to the needs of Australian citizens relies on robust data, and a consideration of long-term trends.

## The Citizen Experience Survey

This report details our analysis of the **Citizen Experience Survey (CES)**: a regular, national survey measuring public satisfaction, trust, and experiences with Australian public services. The Survey offers a whole-of-Australian Public Service (APS) and cross-sectional view of service experience, complementing existing work undertaken by APS agencies. (Further information can be found at: <https://pmc.gov.au/public-data/citizen-experience-survey>). In the CES survey, life event questions are positioned between demographic questions, and service outcomes measures. **Life events therefore give essential context to citizens' perceptions of their public service interactions.**

The CES only addresses public services at the federal government level, accessed by respondents in the preceding 12 months. However, the survey complements the approach to life events seen in many state-level services, and in academic life-course research conducted in Australia. More broadly, the **CES' approach to life events and citizen satisfaction is also similar to many OECD nations.** However, we note that the list of events in the CES excludes some significant 'negative' or 'adverse' life events.

The life events data captured in the CES (collected between March 2019 to February 2021) is the core of our in-depth analysis. We **use life events as a lens through which to explore measures of service satisfaction and note important demographic characteristics.** While we eliminated responses that did not identify any life event experiences or did not report accessing services, our analysis is comprehensive: it captures the **life event experiences and service outcomes of 18,234 service users.**

## Key findings

Using this data, **we have created a five-part life event typology.** Each 'cluster' group represents several 'core' life events that, statistically, often occur together. These clusters are **1) family formation, 2) family dissolution, 3) travel & migration, 4) employment, and 5) health.** The clusters in turn, have 'subclusters', featuring additional life events that occur alongside one or more of the core events. Rather than viewing a life event as an isolated experience, **our typology shows how multiple life events and public service interactions overlap.** In doing so, **it highlights the value of '1 APS' approaches to service delivery.**

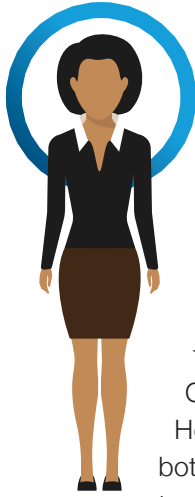
Table 1: Service users across the typology clusters and subclusters

Life Events Typology	% of all service users*
<b>1. FAMILY FORMATION</b>	12.2
1A. Care & schooling during family formation	4.8
1B. Partnering & work during family formation	5.7
<b>2. FAMILY DISSOLUTION</b>	8.1
2A. Care & schooling during family dissolution	2.8
2B. Financial hardship during family dissolution	3.2
<b>3. TRAVEL &amp; MIGRATION</b>	34.8
3A. Care arrangements accompanied by travel/migration	4.8
3B. Partnering & work accompanied by travel/migration	13.3
<b>4. EMPLOYMENT</b>	49.9
4A. Study transitions & work eligibility	23.1
4B. Financial hardship during employment transitions	13.6
4C. Early school leaving	3.3
<b>5. HEALTH</b>	38.7
5A. Care arrangements amid health issues	4
5B. Financial hardship amid health issues	11
5C. Retirement & death	12.4

\*Note: service users can appear in multiple clusters. Percentages are not intended to total to 100.

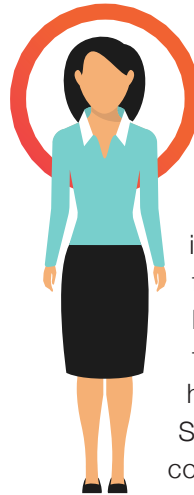
Some life events – such as ‘experienced financial hardship’ – appear multiple times in the typology: as both a foundational life event, and as a ripple effect of other life event experiences. This hardship may be seen as an ultimate driver of service access, or, as something for services to consider as part of a holistic approach to service delivery. This may sound intuitive, but **the value of our typology is that it begins to map and visualise complex connections between life events in a data-driven way.**

Figure 1: Abridged personas for the life event typology



## FAMILY FORMATION

**Pavi** is a first-time parent. She has recently returned to university part-time. She and her partner found that it took a lot of effort to register their family's details with Centrelink and Medicare. However, she is satisfied with both services and trusts them to provide reliable support.



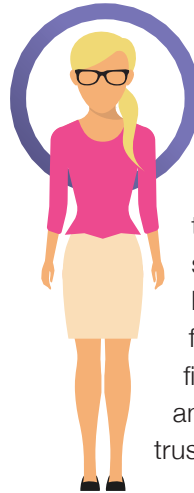
## FAMILY DISSOLUTION

**Nina** is a single mother with two children. She is currently experiencing financial hardship and is looking for a new job at the same time as juggling her care responsibilities. Seeking support, she has contacted 7 different services, and generally finds these to be negative experiences.



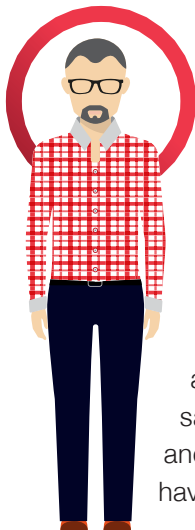
## TRAVEL & MIGRATION

**Yusef** is a young man who moved to Australia to study. He is now a citizen and is looking for full-time work. He has applied for visas for both himself and his brother, and while these were lengthy processes, he was highly satisfied with his service experience.



## EMPLOYMENT

**Tamara** combines university study and part-time work. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she was stood-down from her job, and experienced financial hardship. Despite finding services frustrating and stressful to navigate, she trusts public services overall.



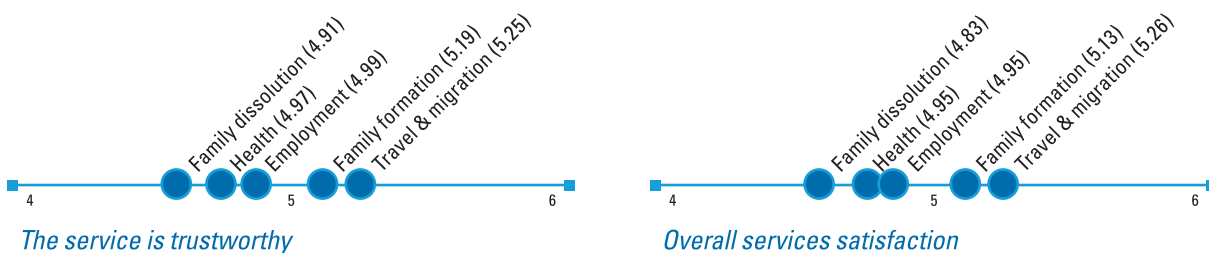
## HEALTH

**Nicholas** has multiple caring responsibilities in his extended family. He has sought support from multiple services, and while these interactions have been demanding and lengthy, he was highly satisfied with the information and support he and his family have received.

## Service outcomes

Here we highlight the mean (average) service outcomes for **trust** in the services used, and over **satisfaction with public services** for each of our typology groups. Survey responses are on seven-point scales (i.e., from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’). The dataset contains more extreme responses, but the **mean response score is largely positive: falling between 4 and 6 across all typology groups.**

Figure 2: Selected service outcome measures



Responses to measures like **reliability, responsiveness, fairness, openness and honesty, and integrity** showed more varied between clusters. Speaking broadly, **family formation** and **travel and migration** are areas where positive relationships with public services are found. **Family dissolution, employment** and **health** had more negative responses, relatively speaking. The lowest mean satisfaction score is in the **family dissolution** cluster (4.83), but there is interesting variation in outcomes in subclusters. For example, subcluster **3A) Care arrangements accompanied by travel/migration** is the highest mean satisfaction score (5.55).

Despite citizens’ personal experience of stressful life events, such as those associated with family dissolution, they do not appear to be prejudiced against services overall: **measures of trust and overall satisfaction are consistently positive** (higher scores), and the **general perception of all-of-APS is more positive than the perception of individual services**. Even if citizens struggle with service interactions or do not agree with the decisions made by services (i.e., measures like **fairness**), service users still trust the public services and are satisfied with services overall.

We also accounted for the number of services accessed by survey respondents. However, there were no strong relationships. **This means that ultimately, the number of services a user accessed did not greatly impact on whether they perceived services positively or negatively.**

This suggests that **the quality of each service interaction is paramount in maintaining good relationships**, regardless of whether service access is perceived as seamless by users.

Our typology is designed to supplement existing analyses of the CES available within the APS. This includes the Citizen Engagement team’s existing work with the CES, the life event approaches of the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA), and the citizen satisfaction markers reported at the Australian Government’s *Performance Dashboard*. Specific services, agencies, and departments are not the focus of this report, although the life event approach of this work may inform future investigations with more specific service orientations.