

AHISA MEDIA RELEASE

15 March 2022

COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on the health and wellbeing of school leaders

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) says the report of the [2021 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey](#), released today, reveals that the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on schools has worsened the risks of long-term damage to principals' health and wellbeing.

AHISA's CEO, Ms Beth Blackwood, noted that 11 years of annual survey data have now been gathered by the Survey.

'Each year the Survey confirms that principals work longer hours, suffer far higher levels of work-related stress and are at greater risk of physical violence and threats of violence than the general population,' said Ms Blackwood. 'The 2020 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey revealed that the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic put principals at greater risk of burnout after managing lockdowns and remote learning. A further year of COVID-19-related challenges, uncertainty and distress saw one in three principals receive a 'red flag' warning after completing the 2021 Survey.'

A 'red flag' alert is triggered when principals' responses to the Survey show them to be at 'high' or 'very high' risk in three or more Survey categories.

'It is particularly concerning that younger school leaders, between 30 and 40 years, were more likely to trigger a red flag alert,' said Ms Blackwood. 'Employers must be vigilant in ensuring that system demands are not unreasonable and that workplace practices support school leaders' health and wellbeing.'

Ms Blackwood said principals' professional associations also have an important contribution to make to support principals' health and wellbeing.

'In 2020 the Coalition of Australian Principals (CAP) worked with Pivot Professional Learning to survey principals on the impact of COVID-19 on schooling in Australia,' said Ms Blackwood. 'The [2020 CAP project with Pivot](#) revealed the importance of collegial support for school leaders to address the challenges of remote learning. Over 90 per cent of principals (91.3%) reported relying on colleagues for professional support.'

Ms Blackwood said the CAP-Pivot survey showed that over half of principals of independent schools reported they relied on their professional association for support.

'AHISA Branches adopted a number of strategies to support our members during 2020 and 2021 which we have maintained,' said Ms Blackwood. 'In addition to our email networks, which proved vital for sharing in-time information, and holding our state and territory Branch meetings online, we localised

support even further by creating small groups or hubs of members within the larger Branches. Members had ready access to each other to share management approaches and our Branch Chairs kept in touch with members to ensure everyone was aware of how important it was to safeguard their own wellbeing and to offer additional support if required.'

Ms Blackwood said AHISA's National Office also promoted principals' wellbeing during 2020 and 2021.

'An important COVID-19 addition to our collection of videos and written briefings on wellbeing issues for Heads covered the topic of decision fatigue,' said Ms Blackwood. 'We also encouraged members to access a personalised wellbeing tracking function on our EAP service provider's app.'

Ms Blackwood said AHISA saw its sponsorship of the annual Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey as another wellbeing service for members.

'The Survey is an important way school leaders can keep tabs on their wellbeing and benchmark it against the sector and the general population,' said Ms Blackwood. 'The Survey's red flag alert can help avoid long-term damage to health and wellbeing and we highly recommend participation in the Survey to our members.'

ENDS

Contact: Ms Beth Blackwood, AHISA CEO, mobile 0417 180 842.

AHISA is a professional association of 450 Heads of independent schools. Its members lead schools that collectively account for over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments and 70 per cent of independent sector enrolments.