ChangePlan

AUSTRALIAN CHANGE & TRANSFORMATION

Salary Survey 2026

Know your worth.

Insights from Australian change professionals on salary, contractor rates, and market sentiment in 2026.

Published July 2026 · Survey data collected March–April 2026

changeplan.co

About this report

ChangePlan conducted this salary and market sentiment survey in early 2026 to give Australian change management professionals transparent, data-driven benchmarks. Of 83 total submissions, 62 are from respondents based in Australia. All non-Australian submissions have been excluded from every figure in this report.

Total AU respondents
62
of 83 total submissions

Most common salary band
$170k–$190k
for employees — varies by experience

Most common daily rate
$1,000–$1,250
for contractors (ex-GST)

No pay change in 12 months
58%
stagnation is the norm in 2026

Dominant market outlook
Neutral
47% — the single largest group

Received any pay increase
34%
across all respondents

10+ years experience
58%
a deeply experienced cohort

Work in Govt or Financial Services
50%
two largest employing sectors

A note from ChangePlan

"The market isn't broken, but it isn't moving either. And if you're waiting for it to reward you automatically, you'll be waiting a long time."

That's the honest truth from 62 Australian change professionals who took the time to share what they're earning, what they're billing, and how they're feeling about the market right now. Salary transparency has never been a strength of the change management profession, we've relied on rumour, recruiter conversations, and gut feel for too long. This report exists to change that, with real numbers from real practitioners in the Australian market, right now.

Use this report to benchmark where you stand. Use it to have the salary conversation you've been putting off. Use it to set a rate that reflects your experience, not someone else's budget. And if the data surprises you, good. That's exactly the point.

— The ChangePlan Team

ChangePlan

Why this report exists

"The 2026 market isn't rewarding change managers automatically. This report exists so you don't have to take someone else's word for what you're worth."

The transparency gap

Salary transparency has long been a gap in the change management profession. Unlike more established fields, project management, technology, finance, change practitioners have historically had to rely on informal networks, recruiter conversations, or overseas benchmarks to understand where they stand. That information asymmetry serves nobody well: practitioners negotiate blind, and employers set salary bands without reliable local data to anchor them.

ChangePlan runs this survey to change that. When change managers have access to real, locally grounded data on salaries, rates, and market conditions, they can make better decisions — about negotiating pay, setting contract rates, choosing clients, or deciding when to move on.

What the 2026 data tells us

The honest picture from this year's survey is one of a profession navigating a slow, cautious market. Compensation has largely stalled. Confidence is neutral at best. The practitioner community is deeply experienced but thin on new entrants.

And yet — the data also shows that for those who know where they sit and can articulate their value, the market still rewards expertise. This report does not sugarcoat the numbers. It presents them as they are — and then tells you what to do with them.

Who this report is for

Practitioners	Individual change managers and contractors who want to benchmark their own compensation against peers at the same experience level, and walk into their next salary negotiation with evidence, not instinct.
Leaders & hiring managers	Heads of change, transformation directors, and HR teams who need credible market data to build competitive salary bands, retain talent, and set fair contractor rate expectations.
The profession	By publishing this data openly, ChangePlan contributes to a stronger, more informed community, one that can advocate for itself with evidence, not anecdote.

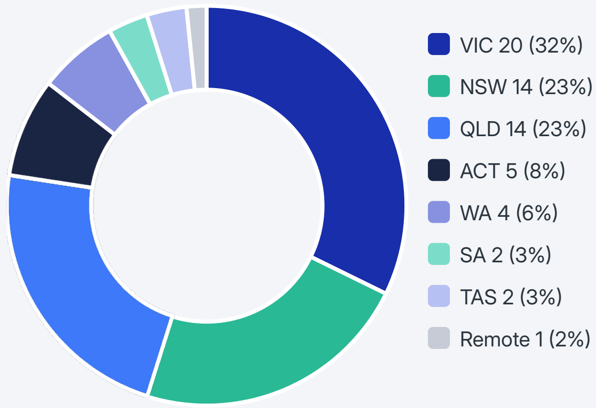
A note on methodology

The survey was distributed through ChangePlan's network, LinkedIn, and the broader Australian change management community during March–April 2026. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Because the survey is self-selecting, results reflect practitioners who chose to respond, they are directionally useful but should not be treated as a statistically representative sample of the entire profession. Where response counts fall below the full 62, this is because some questions were optional (notably salary and daily rate — salary was answered by those in, or most recently in, employed roles; daily rate by contractors).

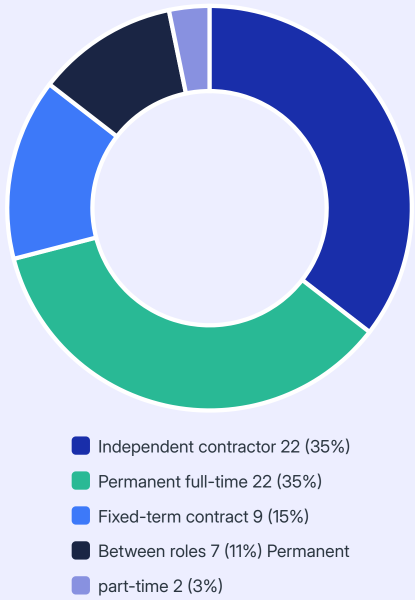
Who responded

Understanding who participated gives important context for all other findings. The respondent base is experienced, concentrated in the eastern states, and almost evenly split between independent contractors and permanently employed practitioners.

Responses by state / territory



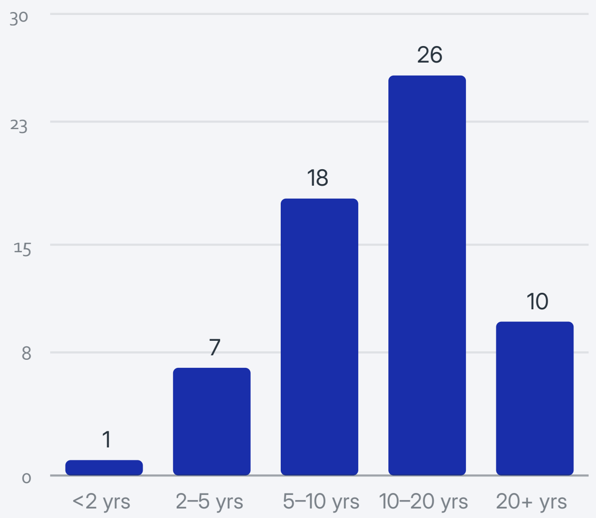
Employment status



READING THE MIX

62 of 83 total respondents are Australia-based. VIC (32%), NSW (23%), and QLD (23%) together account for nearly four in five respondents, consistent with where change management demand is concentrated. Employment is almost evenly split: independent contractors and permanent full-time practitioners each make up 35% of the sample.

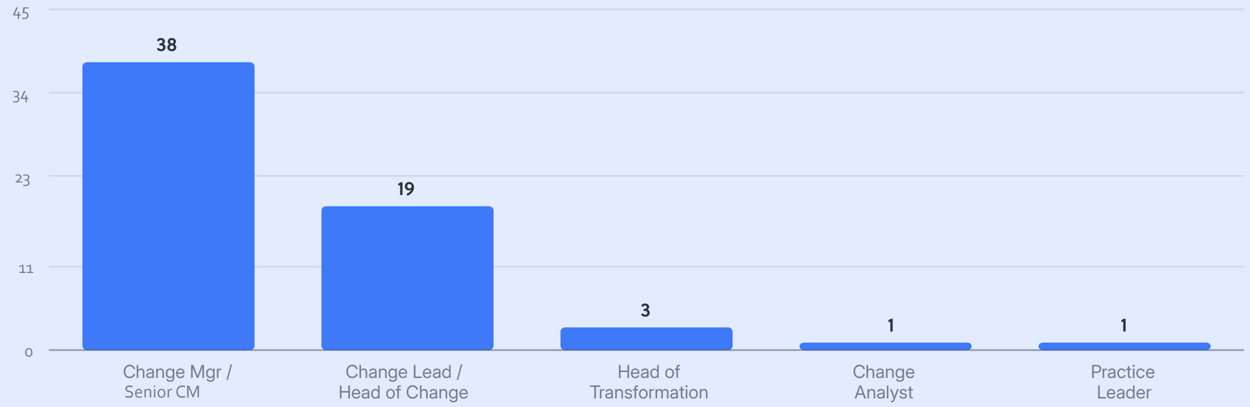
Years of experience



THE EXPERIENCE PICTURE

42% of respondents have 10–20 years of experience, and a further 16% have more than 20 years, meaning 58% of the sample has a decade or more in the profession. A further 29% sit in the 5–10 year band. Only 13% have fewer than 5 years, and just one respondent is under 2 years.

Primary role



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If you are early in your career (under 5 years), the salary and rate figures in this report represent where you are heading, not necessarily where you are now. The experience-segmented benchmarks in Sections 02 and 03 are the most relevant data for you. For the profession more broadly: the thin pipeline of new entrants is a long-term capacity risk. As transformation demand continues to grow across government and enterprise, a profession with no junior talent pipeline faces a structural problem.

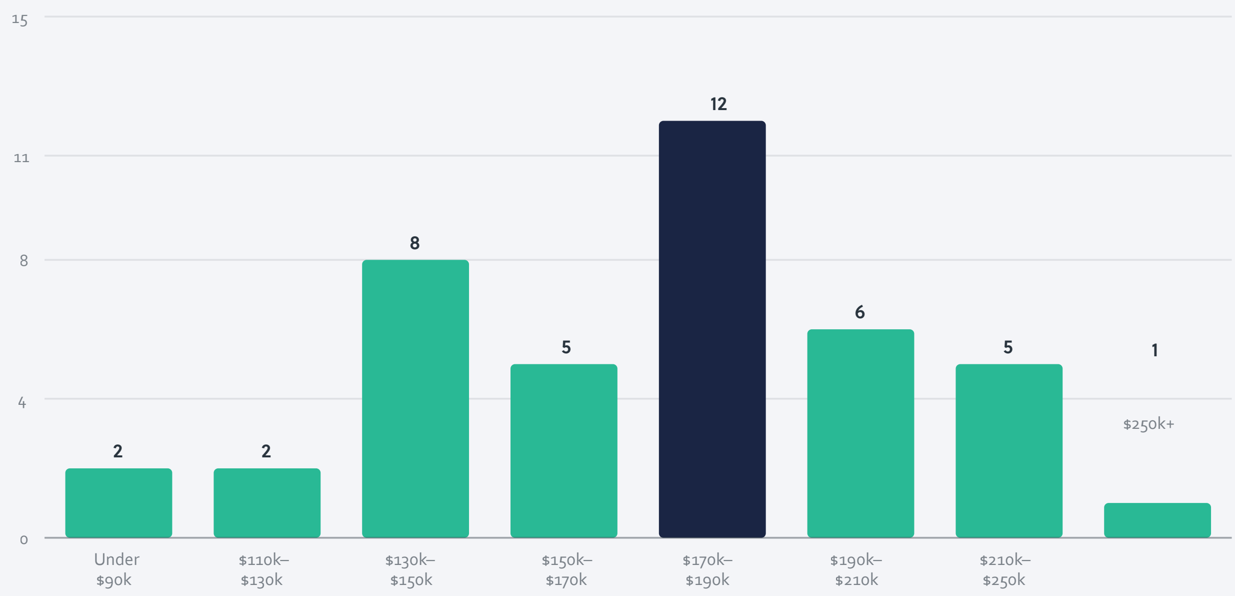
Compensation – employees

02

Salary data reflects the 41 respondents who reported an annual base salary, primarily those in permanent or fixed-term roles (including some respondents currently between roles, reporting their most recent salary). Contractors were directed to the daily rate question in Section 03. All figures are annual base salary in AUD.

Annual base salary — all employees

Highlighted bar = most common response (mode). n=41 employee respondents.

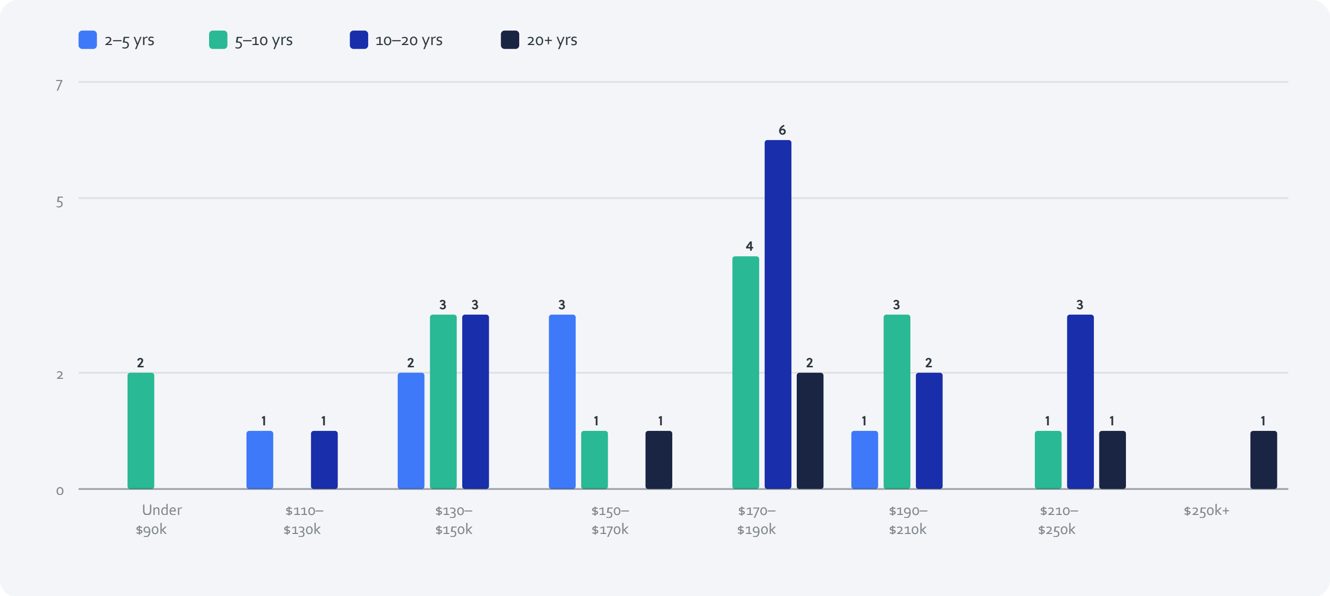


OVERALL SALARY DISTRIBUTION

The single most common salary band is $170k–$190k (29%, n=12), followed by $130k–$150k (20%, n=8), $190k–$210k (15%, n=6), $150k–$170k (12%, n=5), and $210k–$250k (12%, n=5). One respondent earns above $250k. Only 4 respondents (10%) earn under $110k. The $130k–$210k range captures approximately two-thirds of all employee salaries in this cohort.

Salary by years of experience

A flat salary distribution conceals the most important variable: experience. The chart below shows how salary bands differ across each experience group.



A note on sample sizes: the 20+ years group has only 5 salary respondents, directional only. The <2 years group had no salary respondents and is excluded.

Salary benchmark summary by experience

EXPERIENCE	N (SALARY)	MOST COMMON BAND	SALARY RANGE (MAJORITY)	NOTABLE
2–5 years	7	$150k–$170k	$130k–$170k	One outlier at $190k–$210k
5–10 years	14	$170k–$190k	$130k–$210k	Two respondents below $90k
10–20 years	15	$170k–$190k	$130k–$250k	Widest spread — seniority varies
20+ years	5	$170k–$190k	$150k–$250k+	Small sample; treat as directional

What the experience segmentation reveals

2–5 years

The majority cluster between $130k–$170k, with the mode at $150k–$170k. One respondent reaches $190k–$210k, suggesting early acceleration is possible but not typical.

5–10 years

The range widens considerably, from under $90k to $210k+. The mode shifts to $170k– $190k, but the spread is wide, likely reflecting differences in sector, role seniority, and individual contributor vs. lead positions.

10–20 years

The widest spread of any group, from $110k to $250k. The mode remains $170k–$190k, but 5 respondents (33%) earn above $190k. This is the band where the gap between market rate and actual pay is most likely to exist.

20+ years

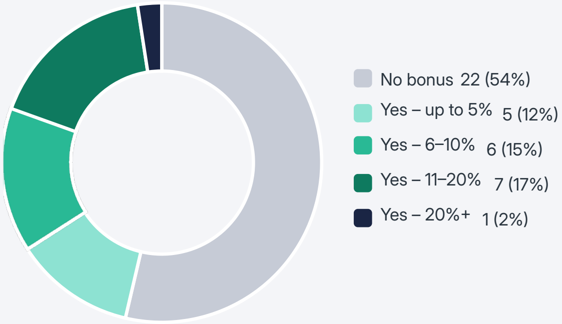
Small sample (n=5), but 4 of 5 respondents earn $150k or above, with one above $250k.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

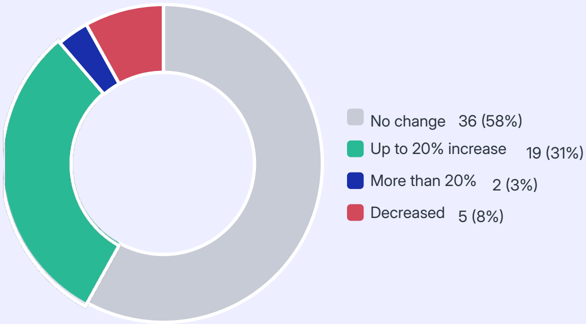
Find your experience band in the table on the previous page. If your current salary sits below the most common band for your cohort, you have a data-backed case for a pay review. If you are in the 10–20 year band and earning below $170k, you are below the most common band reported by your peers in this survey, this is the group most likely to benefit from an active salary conversation backed by this data. Note that sector also plays a role: government and financial services respondents dominate this cohort, so benchmarks reflect those environments most closely. As throughout this report, treat these benchmarks as directional: they reflect 41 self-selected responses, weighted toward government and financial services.

Performance bonuses & pay movement

Performance bonus — employees (n=41)



Salary / rate change in past 12 months (n=62)



BONUSES AND PAY MOVEMENT

Of 41 employee respondents, 22 (54%) receive no performance bonus. Of those who do: 11–20% is the most common range (n=7, 17%), followed by 6–10% (n=6, 15%), up to 5% (n=5, 12%), and 20%+ (n=1, 2%). On pay movement across all 62 respondents: no change is the dominant outcome (58%, n=36). 31% (n=19) saw an increase of up to 20%. Just 3% (n=2) saw growth above 20%. 8% (n=5) experienced a decrease, notable in a profession that has historically been insulated from backward movement.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If your organisation does not offer a performance bonus, this data shows you are not alone, but 46% of employee respondents do receive one. If bonus structure is not part of your current package, it is a legitimate ask in your next negotiation, particularly in financial services and consulting. The 58% who saw no pay movement in the past 12 months should not interpret stagnation as a market signal that their value has not grown. It is more often a reflection of organisational inertia, and data like this exists precisely to overcome it.

Spotlight finding

The repositioning gap: why some contractors earn $500 more per day than their peers

One of the most intriguing patterns in the contractor data is not the most common rate, it's the shape of the distribution. The $1,750–$2,000/day band drew more respondents than the $1,500–$1,750 band (3 vs 2). With numbers this small, that could be chance. But it runs against the shape you'd normally expect, each higher band thinner than the last, and it matches what we hear from the senior end of the market. The curve dips, then rises again.

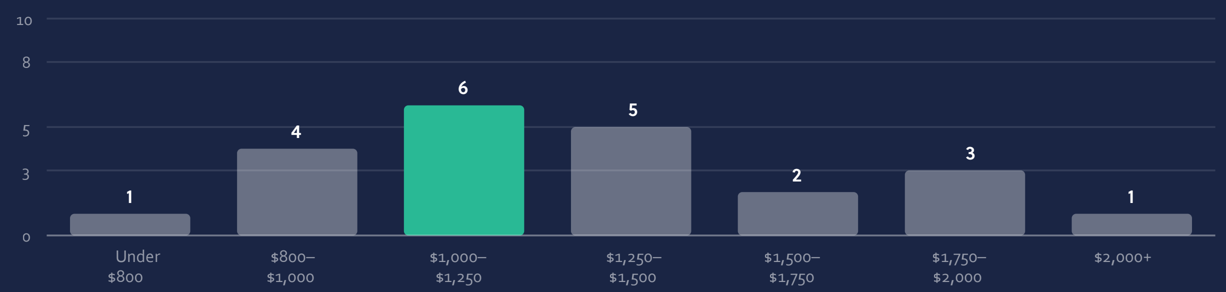
If it holds, this pattern points to a split in how the market values change expertise. There's a mid-market of practitioners billing at $1,000–$1,500/day, solid, experienced, and in demand. And then there's a premium tier billing at $1,750+ who have repositioned themselves not as change managers, but as transformation leads, strategic advisors, or programme-level change architects.

The gap between those two groups isn't just about years of experience. It's about how they describe their value, which conversations they're in, and whether they're being hired to execute a plan or help define one.

> THE QUESTION EVERY CONTRACTOR SHOULD SIT WITH
>
> **"Am I being hired to run a plan, or to shape one?"**

If the answer is always the former, that's worth examining. The sample is too small to call this proven, but the pattern is worth sitting with: the practitioners who have moved into the latter, even partially, appear to be commanding rates that reflect it.

CONTRACTOR DAILY RATE DISTRIBUTION — THE DIP-THEN-RISE PATTERN



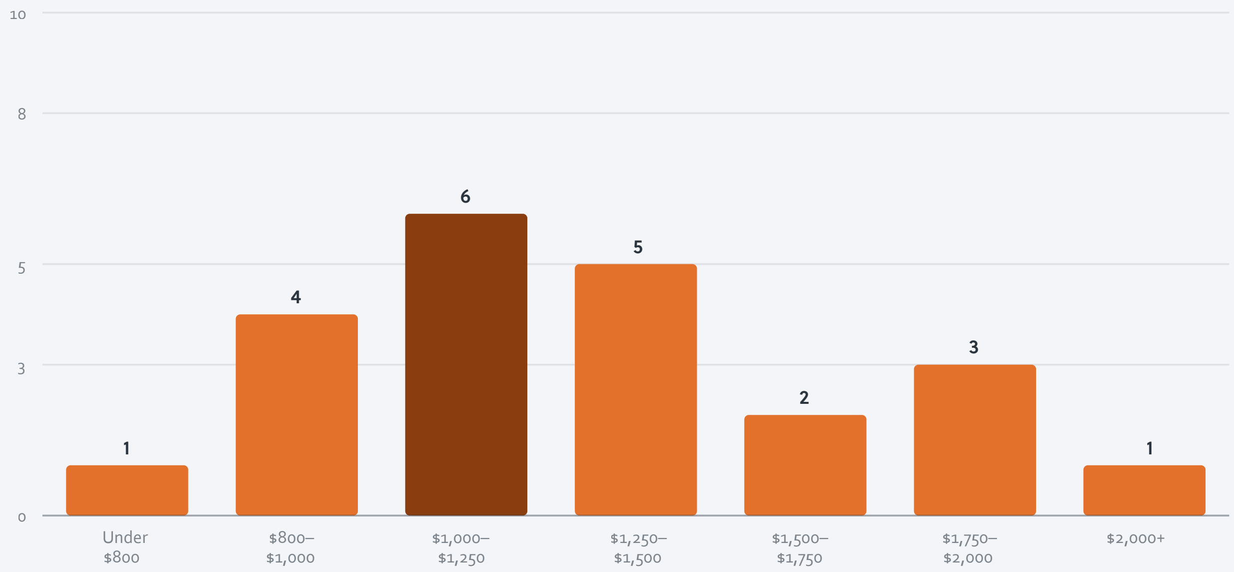
Compensation – contractors

22 of the 62 Australian respondents provided daily rate information. All rates are in AUD, exclusive of GST.

03

Daily rate (AUD ex-GST) — contractors

Highlighted bar = most common response (mode). n=22 contractor respondents.

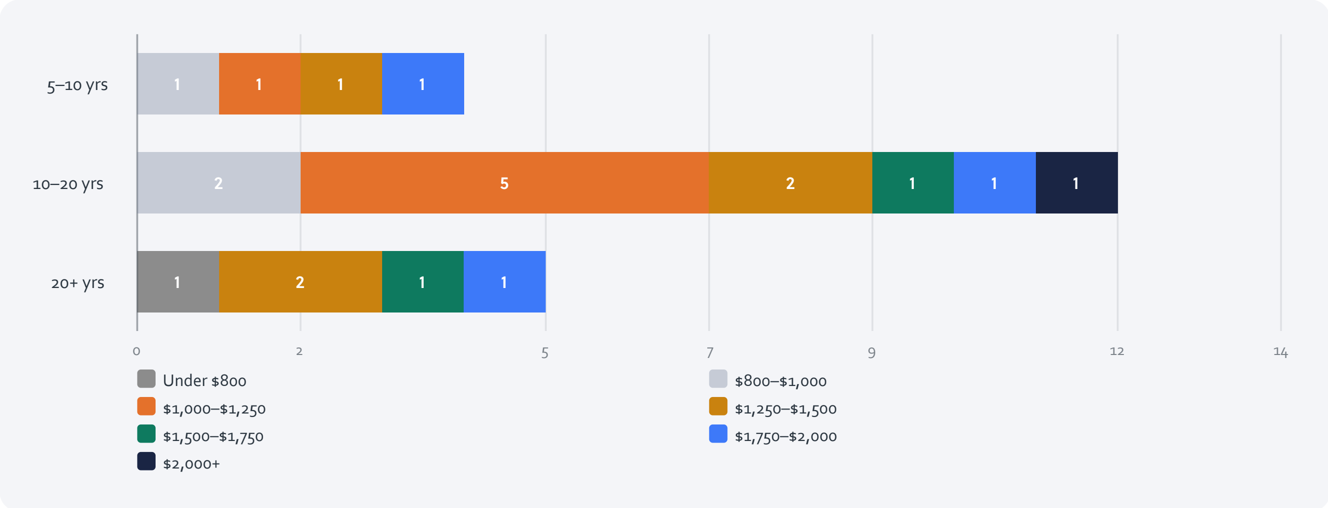


OVERALL RATE DISTRIBUTION

$1,000–$1,250/day is the most common band (27%, n=6), followed by $1,250–$1,500 (23%, n=5), $800– $1,000 (18%, n=4), and $1,750–$2,000 (14%, n=3). $1,500–$1,750 accounts for 9% (n=2). One respondent bills below $800/day and one above $2,000/day. Notably, $1,750–$2,000 (n=3) edges out $1,500–$1,750 (n=2) — a small difference, but one that may hint at a premium tier of senior specialists who have repositioned beyond the mid-market (see the spotlight on page 11).

Daily rate by years of experience

As with salaries, rates vary significantly by experience. The stacked chart below shows how rate bands distribute within each experience group.



Contractor sample sizes are small across all experience bands. <2 years (n=1) is excluded. Directional benchmarks, not statistically robust estimates.

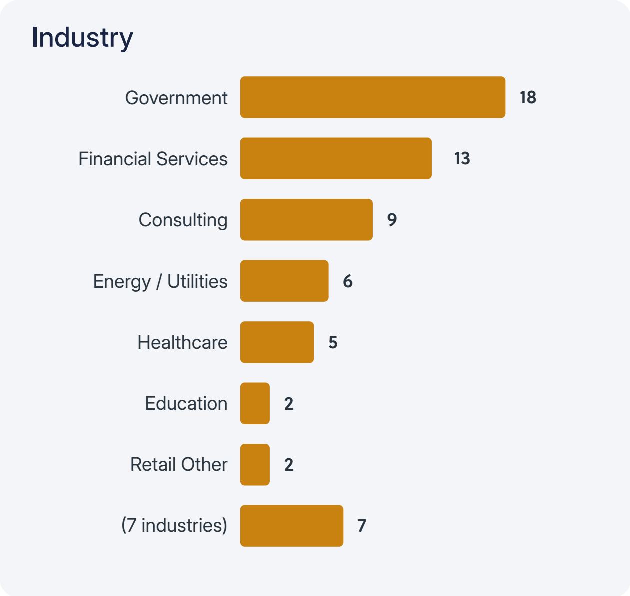
Daily rate benchmark summary by experience

EXPERIENCE	N (RATE)	MOST COMMON BAND	OBSERVED RANGE	NOTE
5–10 years	4	Even spread across bands	$800–$2,000	Small sample; wide spread
10–20 years	12	$1,000–$1,250	$800–$2,000+	Most robust group; full range observed
20+ years	5	$1,250–$1,500	Under $800–$1,750	One low outlier; majority $1,250+

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

For contractors: locate your experience band and compare your current rate. If you are in the 10–20 year group billing below $1,000/day, the data suggests you are below where most of your peers sit. If you are at $1,000–$1,250 and have been there for more than 12 months without a review, this report gives you a solid starting point for a rate conversation. The $1,750–$2,000 cluster in the 10–20 year band suggests that senior practitioners who position themselves as transformation leads, not just change managers, are able to command materially higher rates. These are directional benchmarks from 22 contractor responses — weigh them alongside your own market signals before setting a rate.

Industry & organisation size



WHERE CHANGE MANAGERS WORK IN 2026

Government is the single largest employer (29%, n=18), followed by Financial Services (21%, n=13) and Consulting (15%, n=9). Together these three sectors account for nearly two-thirds of all respondents. Energy/Utilities (10%), Healthcare (8%), Education (3%), and Retail (3%) round out the named industries. On organisation size: 1,000–5,000 employees is the most common (37%, n=23), followed by 5,000–10,000 (19%, n=12). Only 10% work in organisations above 10,000 people.

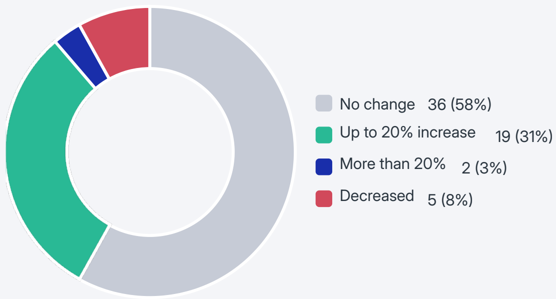
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The concentration in Government and Financial Services reflects where change management has the most structural investment. For practitioners considering a sector move: Consulting offers broader industry exposure and typically higher contractor rates, while Healthcare and Energy/Utilities are growing but still under-resourced markets. The near-absence of Technology sector respondents is striking, it may represent a genuine gap in change management maturity there, or simply a gap in survey reach that future editions should address.

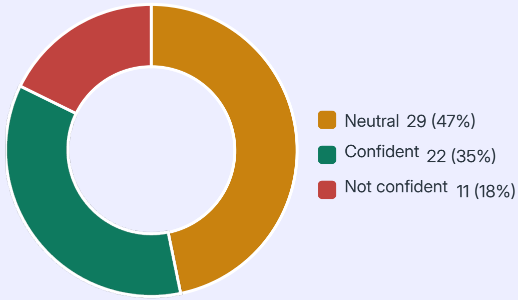
Market sentiment

Two questions reveal how practitioners are experiencing the current market. Read together, they describe a profession that is not in crisis, but is not thriving either. The dominant mood is caution.

Pay movement in past 12 months (n=62)



Confidence finding a suitable new role (n=62)



STAGNATION IS THE MAJORITY EXPERIENCE

"No change" is the dominant outcome: 58% (n=36) of all respondents saw their salary or rate stay flat over the past 12 months. 31% (n=19) saw an increase of up to 20%. 8% (n=5) experienced a decrease, significant, since the change profession has historically been insulated from downward movement.

NEUTRAL DOMINATES, AND THAT TELLS ITS OWN STORY

"Neutral" is the single largest response at 47% (n=29), not optimistic, not pessimistic, but genuinely uncertain. "Confident" comes second at 35% (n=22), and "Not confident" accounts for 18% (n=11). A 47% neutral reading suggests the market is generating real uncertainty about hiring timelines, budgets, and whether organisations will invest in change capability or look to technology and AI tooling as a cheaper alternative.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The 2026 market is not rewarding change managers automatically. Stagnation at 58% is not a sign that the profession is devalued, it is a sign that most organisations will not move salaries or rates unless asked. The practitioners most likely to sit in the confident 35% are those who have maintained visibility: active on LinkedIn, connected to communities like ChangePlan and Change Superheroes, and clear on the commercial value they deliver. The data in this report, particularly the experience-segmented benchmarks in Sections 02 and 03, is designed to support exactly that kind of conversation.

Full data summary

06

The table below summarises the distribution of responses across all survey questions for the 62 Australian-based respondents included in this report.

QUESTION	RESPONSE	N	%
State / territory	VIC	20	32%
	NSW	14	23%
	QLD	14	23%
	ACT	5	8%
	WA	4	6%
	SA	2	3%
	TAS	2	3%
	Remote (Australia-wide)	1	2%
Employment status	Independent contractor	22	35%
	Permanent full-time	22	35%
	Fixed-term contract	9	15%
	Currently between roles	7	11%
	Permanent part-time	2	3%
Primary role	Change Manager / Senior Change Manager	38	61%
	Change Lead / Head of Change	19	31%
	Head of Transformation / Transformation Director	3	5%
	Change Analyst	1	2%
	Change Practice Leader	1	2%
Years of experience	10–20 years	26	42%
	5–10 years	18	29%
	20+ years	10	16%
	2–5 years	7	11%
	Less than 2 years	1	2%

QUESTION	RESPONSE	N	%
Annual salary (employees)	$170k–$190k	12	29%
	$130k–$150k	8	20%
	$190k–$210k	6	15%
	$150k–$170k	5	12%
	$210k–$250k	5	12%
	Under $90k	2	5%
	$110k–$130k	2	5%
	$250k+	1	2%
Performance bonus	No bonus	22	54%
	Yes – 11–20%	7	17%
	Yes – 6–10%	6	15%
	Yes – up to 5%	5	12%
	Yes – 20%+	1	2%
Daily rate (contractors)	$1,000–$1,250	6	27%
	$1,250–$1,500	5	23%
	$800–$1,000	4	18%
	$1,750–$2,000	3	14%
	$1,500–$1,750	2	9%
	Under $800	1	5%
	$2,000+	1	5%

QUESTION	RESPONSE	N	%
Industry	Government	18	29%
	Financial Services	13	21%
	Consulting	9	15%
	Energy / Utilities	6	10%
	Healthcare	5	8%
	Education	2	3%
	Retail	2	3%
	Other (7 industries, 1 each)	7	11%
Organisation size	1,000–5,000 employees	23	37%
	5,000–10,000 employees	12	19%
	Fewer than 500 employees	10	16%
	500–1,000 employees	9	15%
	10,000–20,000 employees	2	3%
	20,000–50,000 employees	2	3%
	50,000–100,000 employees	2	3%
	100,000+ employees	2	3%
Salary change (12 mths)	No change	36	58%
	Yes – up to 20%	19	31%
	Decreased	5	8%
	Yes – more than 20%	2	3%
Job search confidence	Neutral	29	47%
	Confident	22	35%
	Not confident	11	18%

Run by ChangePlan, for the change profession.

We plan to run this survey again for 2027. If you have feedback on the questions, the methodology, or how to make this more useful, we want to hear it. Visit changeplan.co to connect with the team and access further resources for change management professionals.

What to do with this report

Data is only useful if it changes something. Here's how to put this report to work, depending on who you are.

If you're a change practitioner

Start with your experience band in the salary or rate tables in Sections 02 and 03. Find the most common band for your cohort. If you're below it, you now have evidence, not just a feeling, that you may be under market. The next step is not to wait for your next review cycle. It's to have the conversation now, with this data in hand. And if the 58% stagnation figure resonates with you personally, know that the data suggests this is a market pattern, not a reflection of your individual value.

If you're a contractor

Review your current rate against the experience-segmented table in Section 03. If you haven't had a rate conversation with your client or agency in more than 12 months, this report is your prompt. You don't need to make an aggressive ask — you need to make an informed one. If you're billing in the $1,000– $1,500 range and want to understand what it would take to reach the $1,750+ bracket, the spotlight finding on page 11 is worth sitting with.

If you're a leader or hiring manager

This data is your benchmark too. If your salary bands haven't been reviewed in the past 12–18 months, there's a reasonable chance they're already behind. The practitioners who are not confident about finding a new role right now (18%) won't stay that way. The more immediate risk is in recruitment: if you're trying to hire into a role that pays below the benchmark for its experience band, the data in this report is exactly what candidates are looking at.

For everyone

Share this report. The more practitioners who have access to this data, the more the whole profession benefits. Salary transparency is not a zero-sum game — when change managers can benchmark accurately, employers have to compete on value, not information gaps. And come back next year: the 2027 data will tell us whether the market started moving again — and whether practitioners moved with it.

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