

# 2021 Activist Health Census National Report - Summary



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## Introduction

Amnesty International Australia (AIA) proudly leads one of the longest-running studies into organising and action groups through regular activist surveys. Between 8 Oct and 21 Nov 2021, AIA ran an activist survey for the first time since our last [Group Health Check](#) in 2018, prior to a governance change and restructure. Unlike previous surveys, for the first time activist leaders were involved in the design and reporting of this renamed “Activist Census”.

The aim of the Activist Census was to listen to our movement and assess the following:

- Are our action groups/networks/activist structures healthy and sustainable?
- Are AIA’s campaign’s and priorities matching activists interests and what campaigns/projects are they working on?
- Is the movement providing action groups and activists with resources and opportunities for them to skill up to effectively challenge injustice, feel part of a people powered movement and deliver optimal impact?

The critical insights offered by this Activist Census are a key tool in informing how AIA can optimise our efforts to ensure our movement is Activated, Empowered and Impactful going forward.

**Response Rates** - We received 128 responses from 76 groups which represented about 59% of our activist structures. This is consistent with our previous group health checks which had response rates between 55-65%

## Key findings

### Activist Engagement

The organisation is positive and engaged – in spite of the COVID pandemic - 92% of survey participants have engaged in activism over the past 18 months and 88% of respondents said we are moving in the right direction.

Activists choose overwhelmingly positive descriptors to describe AIA - meaningful, empowering, inclusive and safe were the three top choices (others include friendly and fun, connected, community-led and hard work).

Activists report that they are receiving adequate support to perform their roles with 62% agreeing with this question. However, a clear theme that emerged from the comments, and other questions, is the need to address perceived organisational silos and create stronger linkages between national staff, activist leaders and activists.

There are clear areas that need attention, mostly concerned with the after-effects of the transition to a People Powered movement including more clarity and better ways of working between activists, Activism Leadership

Committees and national support (activists and particularly with national staff).

There are core themes raised here that deserve more attention, discussion and proposed solutions which will need to be co-designed by staff, activist leaders and activists.

Confidence scores in staff and activist leadership structures are optimistic - Youth Advisory Group (YAG), Activist Skills Collective and Activist Communications Team are still building recognition and trust.

***“For Amnesty leadership I say to them that I believe strongly in what we are trying to achieve at Amnesty and I believe in the leadership of Amnesty. To my regional ALC I say thank you for your friendships and for having faith in me and my abilities and for accepting me as part of this wonderful and important organisation.”***

Some areas of concern are around how activists reported their experiences in groups. While groups are providing safe spaces and enabling people to feel valued, burnout is a key issue. We have explicitly addressed this in a different chapter of this report because it is so important. Other significant, and potentially related, findings include:

- Clarity of roles and responsibilities in teams/groups
- Integration of new members to teams/groups
- Whether teams/groups have fun and socialise together

## Strategy and Information Flows

***“To be honest I think you are doing a great job Vision 2025 is a good shift around activist participation”***

In comparison to AIA's last Group Health Check in 2018, more activists (12% increase) are familiar with [AIA's Vision and goals](#) whilst a smaller increase was seen (2%) in activists who apply the Vision to their activism. However there are a number of people who are not overly familiar or haven't heard at all about the Vision, Activism Strategy and our priority goals - in fact this is almost 50% of our movement! Therefore there remains a clear gap in all activists driving towards shared purpose and outcomes and delivering strategic human rights impact.

Despite some positive areas of feedback, strategy and information flows is another identified area of improvement. Diversity and Inclusion was a particular area where, while there has been recognised progress, there is still more to do. Our [Diversity Inclusion and Wellbeing \(DIW\) Action Plan](#) provides a starting roadmap. AIA's commitment to DIW is demonstrated in our recruitment of an expert DIW Specialist to lead on this work but we acknowledge that each and everyone one of us has an essential role to play to ensure our movement, events and groups are accessible and inclusive to all.

***“AIA has had challenges with creating a safe and inclusive space for the full and meaningful participation of First Nations and communities of colour in an anti-racist/oppression way. It is trying and on its way but would love to see/hear more work being done on this front”***

Many survey respondents struggle to keep up to date with AIA's changing priorities due to a perceived lack of information and awareness of where or who to go to for support for their queries. Activists indicated they find it difficult to plan their activism due to campaign priority areas changing and short lead in time to prepare for and accommodate these changes. Some of our longer-term activists expressed frustration in regards to finding [Urgent Actions](#) information for them to write letters on Individuals at Risk. Other significant communication

findings were: that the movement needs to get better at communicating campaign wins, impact and successes, celebrating the wins and success of groups and activists, and demonstrating how we are having an impact.

## **AIA Campaigns - Protecting and Defending Lives**

Much of our recent campaigning has been agile and responsive in recognition of significant global changes. However, we are hearing from our movement that 17% of survey participants would like to see AIA focus on certain key issues with strategic plans. The developing Human Rights Act campaign will be an important opportunity to demonstrate that and provide a vital umbrella piece for many other human rights issues that AIA seek to address.

***“Amnesty tries to do everything and is less effective because of it.”***

***“I think AIA is doing many things really well from an activist point of view. There is tension in my opinion between a strong commitment to local autonomy and being effective on priority campaigns. I suggest we lean just a little more to engaging people in priority campaigns.”***

Activists want to see greater opportunities for them to be meaningfully involved in campaign planning, including the design and delivery of AIA's campaigns.

***“Consultation, co-design and co-production need to be embedded in the structure of the organisation, we need to live and breathe this model not just tick a box or delegate it to the DIW staff/committee (who are fabulous by the way)”***

## **Growth, Retention & Sustainable Activism**

Nearly 50% of our movement reported that they or other members of their group had recently shown signs of burnout. This is a significant and concerning finding and one we feel is important to address urgently, in order to better support the wellbeing of our valued activists.

AIA has developed a [self care toolbox](#) which contains a burnout self-assessment and various self care tools people can implement to avoid burnout. There is a professional counselling service which AIA offers our activists free of charge. We would encourage you to access this resource if you feel you need to. Find more details in the self care toolbox or call 1300 361 008.

Recommendations in the report also point to the need to establish a community of care rather than just assume that self care is a personal responsibility.

In order to also ensure sustainability and wellbeing of our movement, activists want to see the organisation grow significantly - especially recruiting and empowering diverse youth voices.

***“Amnesty has also failed to grow the movement, so it relies on the same small pool of volunteers to shoulder the burden and responsibility for human rights change”***

## **Conclusion**

There are extensive recommendations for staff, activist leaders and activists identified in the full report. But they

are not exhaustive - AIA staff and activist leaders will endeavour to further investigate the findings over the course of 2022, prioritising certain aspects for urgent development and application. Some of the most urgent themes are staff / activist relationships and our work on diversity inclusion and wellbeing particularly addressing burnout as well as growth of diverse youth audiences. We will need to work alongside you - our movement - to co-design the right solutions. There will be upcoming opportunities to shape these solutions and we will endeavour to keep you informed of our progress through existing communication channels.

We want to thank all of the stakeholders involved in contributing to this report. In particular to key members of the Activism and Membership Committee - Camille, Katrina and Carol, and Regional Presidents who provided invaluable guidance and feedback along the way. Also a sincere recognition to all the activists who have taken the time to participate in the online survey or phone calls. This report is made more powerful because of all of your contributions.

**Thank you!**

	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b># of groups</b>	119	113	128	130
<b># of Members</b>	5233	4927	5140	5367
<b># of activists</b>	362	1025	1217	1314
- <i>Engaged</i>	0	520	621	646
- <i>Committed</i>	251	329	407	451
- <i>Core</i>	111	176	189	217