



HEALTHIER, LONGER,  
BETTER LIVES

# INSIGHTS FROM THE NEW ZEALAND ADVISER WELLBEING RESEARCH 2023

Supporting financial advisers to thrive



December 2023  
[aia.co.nz](https://aia.co.nz)



# FOREWORD

At AIA NZ, our Purpose is to help people live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives – and that includes New Zealand’s financial advisers. We know advisers help many New Zealanders access financial advice and insurance solutions – so ensuring a healthy, robust, and professional financial adviser industry is of critical importance to our industry and to the financial wellbeing of New Zealanders.

We have a goal to support advisers to thrive, and to encourage them to focus on their own health and wellbeing, so they can continue to be there for their clients, their businesses, and their whānau.

In 2021 we sponsored an independent adviser wellbeing research project to better understand the current health and wellbeing of the adviser market in New Zealand.

The results from this first of its kind research provided valuable insights into the key challenges experienced by financial advisers and subsequently informed our approach to engage with the market.

In 2023, we commissioned a second independent study following a similar approach to 2021. We know the context for advisers has changed since the first research project and there were specific concerns about adviser wellbeing with the implementation of legislative changes to the Financial Advice industry. Since then, New Zealand has also experienced a financial downturn and extreme weather events that have impacted society.

Our decision to sponsor the NZ Adviser Wellbeing Research again is an acknowledgement of how committed we are to our Purpose, and a recognition of how challenging market conditions have been for financial advisers.

The aim of the second study was to determine whether or not these factors had contributed to a worsening of adviser wellbeing, and whether the legislative changes were still impacting adviser wellbeing in 2023.

Reviewing the 2023 research findings, it is pleasing to see improvements in some areas. However, it’s clear that we still have work to do collectively as an industry to ensure our advisers have the tools and support to be mentally healthy, to focus on their wellbeing, and have the opportunity to thrive and do what they do best every day.

Even though the 2023 results were more positive than the results from 2021, we strongly believe that prioritising the mental health and wellbeing of financial advisers is not only important for their personal and professional development, but also for the overall financial wellbeing of the clients they serve.

Our goal as an industry needs to remain on supporting advisers, improving their overall wellbeing, and creating a safe and supportive industry now – and for generations to come.

We invite you to join the discussion.

To download the full research report, please visit [here](#)



A stylized white signature of Sharron Botica on a dark background.

**Sharron Botica**  
AIA NZ Chief Partnership  
Distribution Officer &  
Research Sponsor



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The project was undertaken by independent researchers led by Dr Adam Fraser, founder of The e-lab, and Dr John Molineux from Deakin University in Australia.

The research project seeks to:

- Better understand the current state of mental health for New Zealand financial advisers.
- Explore the habits and attitudes of those advisers who are currently experiencing positive mental wellbeing.
- Understand the mindset and behaviours needed to evolve and manage significant market disruptions.

Participants included life and health insurance advisers, business owners, home loan advisers, investment advisers, risk advisers, sole trader advisers, and general advisers, aged 18 to over 60, who were either qualified, partly-qualified, or unqualified.

The process for the 2023 project consisted of one study with two components. The first component was a survey of financial advisers – this was quantitative in its approach and involved a broad group of 336 advisers (214 male and 121 female) completing an online survey. The second component involved 21 financial advisers (15 male and six female) who volunteered to be contacted for an interview.

Data from this research was compared with a similar study of New Zealand financial advisers in 2021.



**Dr Adam Fraser**

Human Performance Researcher, consultant and speaker who studies how people and organisations adopt a high-performance culture and the importance of wellbeing to thrive in this challenging and evolving world. He holds a PhD in Biomedical Science.



**Dr John Molineux**

Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management at Deakin Business School and Course Director of the Master of Human Resource Management programme.

# KEY INSIGHTS

The 2023 data shows that overall, advisers in New Zealand are in a better state than they were in 2021 in terms of mental health risk, stress levels, and desire to stay in the industry.










Even though the results are more positive than they were back in 2021, it remains important to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of financial advisers, not only for their personal and professional development, but also for the overall financial wellbeing of the clients they serve.

## IDENTIFIED KEY SOURCES OF STRESS

Although the overall wellbeing of financial advisers showed signs of improvement since 2021, stress remains a concerning factor.

In 2021, **government regulation** was the highest stressor at 61%. Looking at the 2023 results, while advisers have adjusted to the new regulatory requirements, the greatest source of stress they face is **compliance**, with 50% of advisers rating it as 'highly' or 'very highly' stressful.

### Comparison of 'highly' or very 'highly stressful' issues between 2021 and 2023

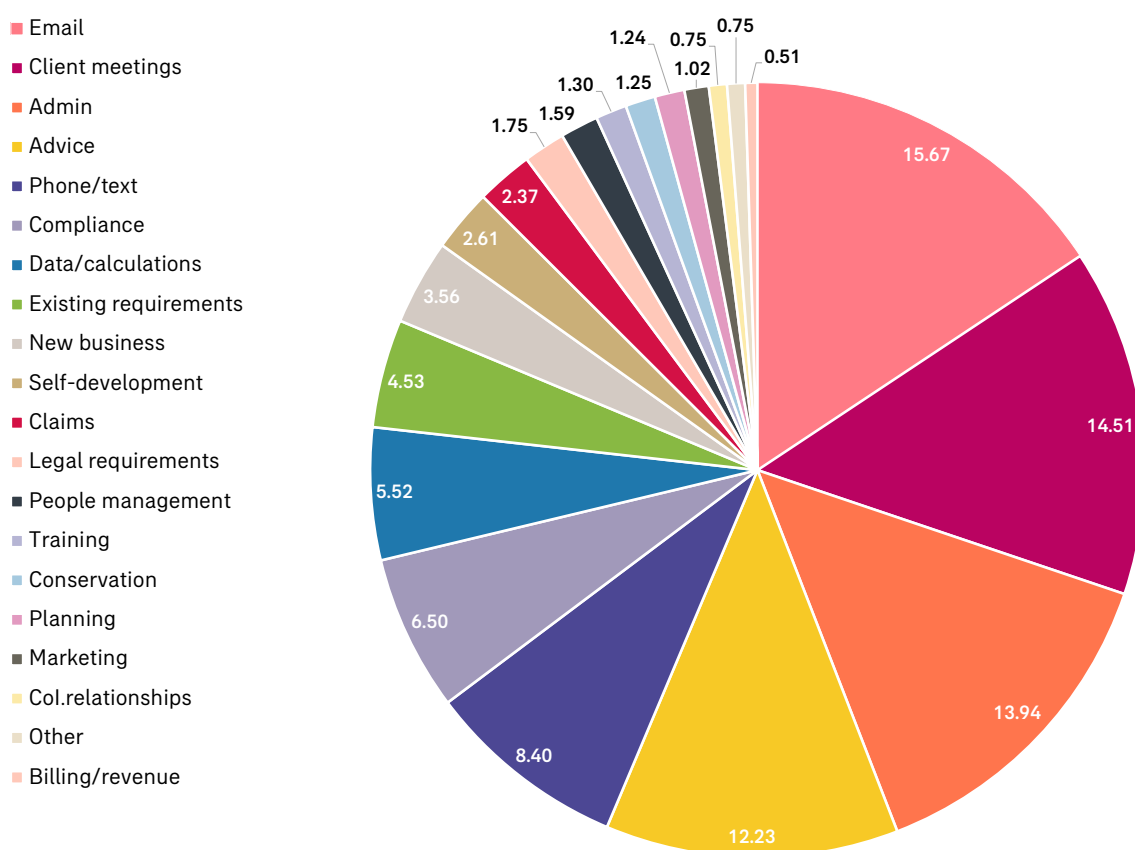
STRESSFUL ISSUES (STRESSOR)	2021	2023	% DIFFERENCE
 COMPLIANCE DEMANDS	61.4%	50.9%	-10.5%
 WORK OVERLOAD	42.2%	36.7%	-5.5%
 EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS	37.4%	22.2%	-15.2%
 WORK CRISES	32.1%	28.3%	-3.8%
 BALANCE WORK & HOME	28.8%	27.1%	-1.7%
 REVENUE & EXPENSES	27.5%	28%	+0.5%
 DEVELOP NEW BUSINESS	28.7%	29.9%	+1.2%
 CONFLICT	27.2%	26.6%	-0.6%
 MANAGING PEOPLE	9.0%	7.0%	-2%

# BREAKDOWN OF WORK TASKS REPORTED BY ADVISERS IN 2023

This graphic highlights the complex demands on financial advisers, who are often small business owners, and the things that take them away from their core business – which can ultimately have a significant impact on their overall wellbeing.

**Administration** (+11.6%) and **Claims** (+76.1%) had a higher ratio in 2023 than in 2021, but this was offset by **Compliance** (-17.6%) and **Marketing** (-42.4%), which was lower in 2023 than 2021.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Work tasks reported by advisers in 2023.



# KEY INSIGHTS

## IMPACT OF WORK STRESS

The impact of work stress on advisers' health and wellbeing remains a concern however, overall there has been improvement since 2021.



Risk of stress leave

20% → 19%



Seeking medical support for stress

20% → 17%



Use of alcohol to manage stress

19% → 15%

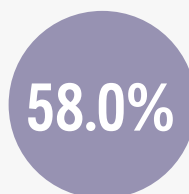


Advisers experiencing sleep issues

45% → 41%

## IMPROVING WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

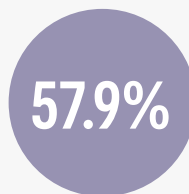
Those doing well are tackling the sources of stress through support from others and practicing good wellbeing habits



Support from product manufacturers



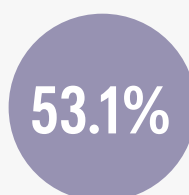
Improved boundary strength, which is the ability to separate work and home.



Industry peers



Self-development



Groups and FAPs



-4%

Decreased work overload

# KEY INSIGHTS

More encouraging is that the researchers found a large group of advisers (37.2%) surveyed in 2023 are working 35 to 40 hours per week, with the percentage of people working over 50 hours per week decreasing by 8% compared to 2021.

This year also saw an increase in people saying they were doing a good job at balancing the expectations of both their work and family life (+3%), with 46.4% of advisers recording they felt like their 'personal time is my own'.

The number of advisers surveyed which said they will continue in the industry has increased significantly since 2021 (93% compared to 84%). In terms of how the demographics affected the results, there were some interesting variables:

- Advisers aged 60 and above scored better in terms of work-family balance, boundary strength, work overload, stress, stressful issues, alcohol use, wellbeing, impact, psychological capital and mental health risk. Whereas the younger advisers, aged 29 and under, scored better for industry support, recovery at home and innovation at work.
- That said, advisers in the 29 and under age group score higher than the remaining age groups in respect of mental health risk. Of concern is the high percentage of advisers in the 29 and under age group in the the high to very high mental health risk category at 23.1%.
- Female advisers scored lower in work-family balance, wellbeing, psychological capital, innovation at work and adaptive performance than male advisers, but had higher scores for self-development, recovery at work, recovery at home, and industry support.
- Location had a significant effect on the results, with Marlborough scoring better than other regions in the constructs of work overload, stressful issues, alcohol use, work-family balance, boundary strength and industry support. Whereas Auckland had the lowest scores for wellbeing and adaptive performance. Taranaki had the highest levels of mental health risk but scored the highest for adaptive performance. Despite having the best scores in flow, recovery at work, recovery at home and self-development, Southland had the worse scores in work overload, stress, stressful issues and impact of work stress.
- Home loan advisers were worse off for work-family balance, wellbeing, stress, stressful issues, impact of stress, alcohol use, mental health risk, psychological capital, self-development and adaptive performance. Sole trader advisers were a small sample, but had the best results across most constructs, with the next best positive score group being investment advisers.



**71.7%** believe they are doing a good job of balancing the expectations of both their work and personal life.

**46.4%**

feel their 'personal time is their own'.



**93%** will continue in the industry.



# VERBATIM INSIGHTS

Here is a selection of comments from the interviews in the 2023 research. Comments show that although many advisers are adapting well in the business context, others have been struggling with their mental health, compliance and the perceived threat of compliance audits and other issues.

## BUSINESS

*"I've been in the industry for six years and it was steady, steady, steady, and then crazy off the back of Covid, and this is the first sort of dip that I've experienced in the industry. It has been challenging."*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL, RESILIENCE AND OPTIMISM

*"I'm an optimist, I believe in positivity, but the unknown at the moment creates that uncertainty, I think. And the more we work towards clarifying that unknown, rather than putting your head in the sand, is going to actually help get rid of that."*





### **FLOW AND ENJOYMENT AT WORK**

*"The people, the clients. Every day is different. And actually finding solutions for people as well. One big rewarding thing, although I don't like it happening, is when claims happen, you can actually give someone a lump sum of money or pay the hospital bills and things like that. Yeah, that's probably the most rewarding thing of the whole job, is when the rubber hits the road, they find out why they've taken the thing out in the first place."*

### **REGULATORY CHANGE AND COMPLIANCE**

*"I think one of the challenges with our regulator is you just don't know what you're being tested up against. So well, how do we know if we've got good enough evidence base and you can go to every compliance team as possible, but ultimately the big stick's going to come in one day and they're going to find things because their job is to find things wrong with you. How do you manage that expectation, that concern, and still operate with confidence? I think it's a really tough balance to not be fearful of what you're doing every day."*

### **STRESS AND STRESSFUL ISSUES**

*"I just remove myself from the situation. I've started to work a lot more from home. We converted a spare bedroom because sometimes it just gets too much and I don't like the heaviness in the atmosphere, so I just removed myself from a negative situation, turn it into a positive."*

### **INDUSTRY SUPPORT**

*"I think one thing is that everyone is very cooperative and sometimes when you need something, they'll be there. Then automatically the work is done without any help. So that moral support is very important, which we get from the companies, from the colleagues and people whom you interact with who have been older within the industry. They're very welcoming and very warm with the suggestions and the ideas. I think that is what we need."*

### **WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH**

*"I'm becoming better at recognising when I need to step out and just do some soul. And I think if we could allow our industry to do that a lot more, that would actually help a lot with our burnout. It's okay to have a day off. It's okay to get that exercise into the diary. It's okay to not be full to the brim with appointments"*

Based on the findings of the research, the team suggested recommendations for improving the wellbeing and mental health of advisers.

Based on the findings of the research, the team suggested recommendations for improving the wellbeing and mental health of advisers.



Industry support is one of the factors that helps advisers cope with the strains of work. However, many advisers are not accessing the support that is available. It is recommended that advisers seek help from the various industry support services such as Financial Advice Providers, FANZ, Financial Service Council and product providers.

Advisers interviewed discussed the value and importance of networks and peer support. Advisers that get the most out of these networks are those that are active within them. Find out about conferences and events and attend them.

There has not been sufficient change in recovery activity since the previous research in 2021. Advisers are urged to engage in regular recovery including physical exercise, mindfulness or meditation, hobbies, debriefing with others and social activities. As in 2021, interviewees who were doing regular exercise and other forms of recovery found that they had more energy for work and their health and wellbeing improved overall.

Interviewees who indicated that they had employed administrative support or had a shared admin support arrangement with another adviser business appreciated the release of their time to focus on client work. This is also where networks can help by finding other advisers who may be able to share administrative support. There are some companies that provide this support, and systems that can automate processes. A number of advisers interviewed indicated they have significantly automated their processes to save time.

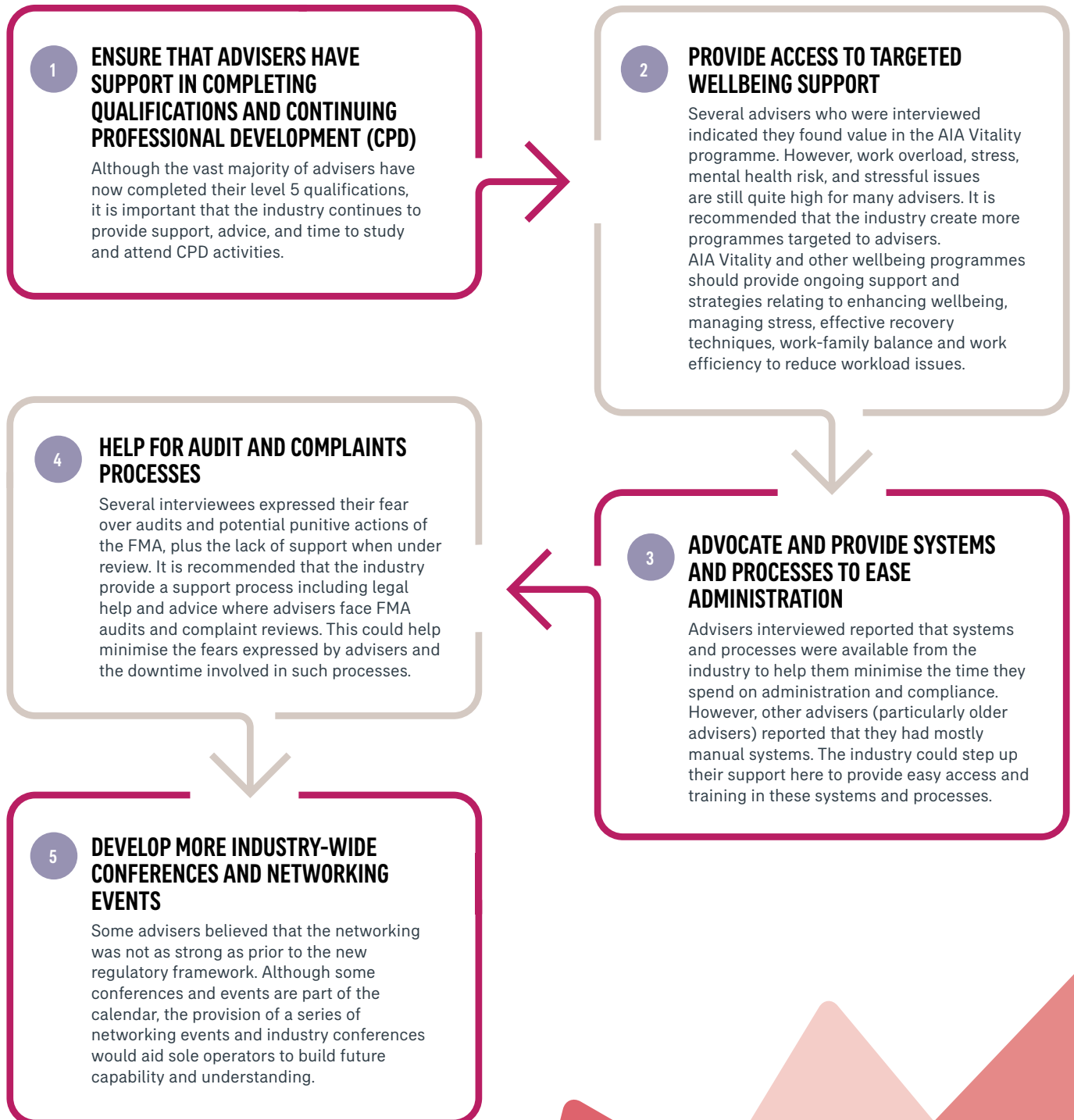
Advisers have expressed the mental strain of their work and business operations, plus the perceived threats related to FMA actions and audits. It is important for mental health that advisers seek help including the support of counsellors and / or psychologists when experiencing mental stress.

Many advisers reported integrating work and home, blurring the relationship between work responsibilities and home life. Other advisers reported clear boundaries between work and home and it also showed in higher wellbeing and worklife balance scores and lower mental health risk. It is recommended that advisers carefully consider what is work and what is home and minimise the crossover between them to ensure focus both at work and at home, especially when working from a home office.

The most successful advisers had plans to build their businesses and change their approaches according to opportunities or threats. It is recommended that advisers who run their own business consider the long-term, look for future opportunities and threats, and work on a future strategy for long-term success.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FINANCIAL ADVICE INDUSTRY

Five recommendations for the financial advice industry





# AIA'S COMMITMENT

## What's next?

We understand the industry needs to do more to support the mental health and wellbeing of financial advisers. That's why we're committed to provoking change, and will look to action the following initiatives over the coming months:

- Share our 2023 Adviser Wellbeing Research report and findings across the market to increase awareness and understanding.
- Continue to start conversations with industry bodies and key decision-makers, challenging them to consider how we can collectively make improvements moving forward.
- Talk to key government stakeholders and regulators about findings from the report and discuss how to support change in the industry.
- Review our own practices for ways to improve and uncover new opportunities for adviser support.
- Plans include:
  - Continuing AIA NZ's AIA MyCare offer, supporting our advisers to live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives. This includes the option of securing a second medical opinion on any medical diagnosis and provides access to a range of medical experts including those specialised in mental health.
  - Hosting a variety of AIA NZ wellness-focused sessions for advisers throughout the year.
  - Continue enhancements to our current AIA Vitality programme offering on mental wellbeing for advisers.
- Explore further opportunities to support advisers with our AIA Vitality partner The Mental Health Foundation.
- Challenge other insurers in New Zealand to prioritise adviser wellbeing and consider ways to better support our adviser market to thrive.

## LET'S START THE CONVERSATION!

If you have any questions on this document, please contact: [NZ.COMMS@AIA.COM](mailto:NZ.COMMS@AIA.COM)

To read the final research report visit [here](#).

### AIA New Zealand

74 Taharoto Road  
Takapuna, Auckland 0622  
[aia.co.nz](http://aia.co.nz)