

A Decade of HSE history

Ten years of the HSE Opportunity Index:

Australia's only longitudinal measure of Health, Safety & Environment job market conditions, tracking every shift, shock and surge since October 2015.

236K+

JOB LISTINGS
TRACKED SINCE
INCEPTION

125

CONSECUTIVE
MONTHS OF
UNBROKEN DATA

-10%

COVID IMPACT -
COMPARED TO
52% ACROSS THE
BROADER MARKET

8

STATES AND
TERRITORIES
TRACKED



The Resilient Profession

When The Safe Step launched the HSE Opportunity Index in October 2015, the purpose was simple: give HSE professionals and the organisations that employ them an authoritative, data-driven view of their own job market – something Australia had never had before. A decade on, that dataset tells a unique story of remarkable resilience, rising strategic importance, and a market shaped not by economic cycles, but by regulation, risk and the irreducible value of keeping people safe.

"When we started tracking this data in 2015, there was no authoritative benchmark for the HSE job market in Australia. Ten years and 236,000 job listings later, we've built something genuinely unique – a continuous record of how this profession has grown, been tested and ultimately emerged stronger than ever."

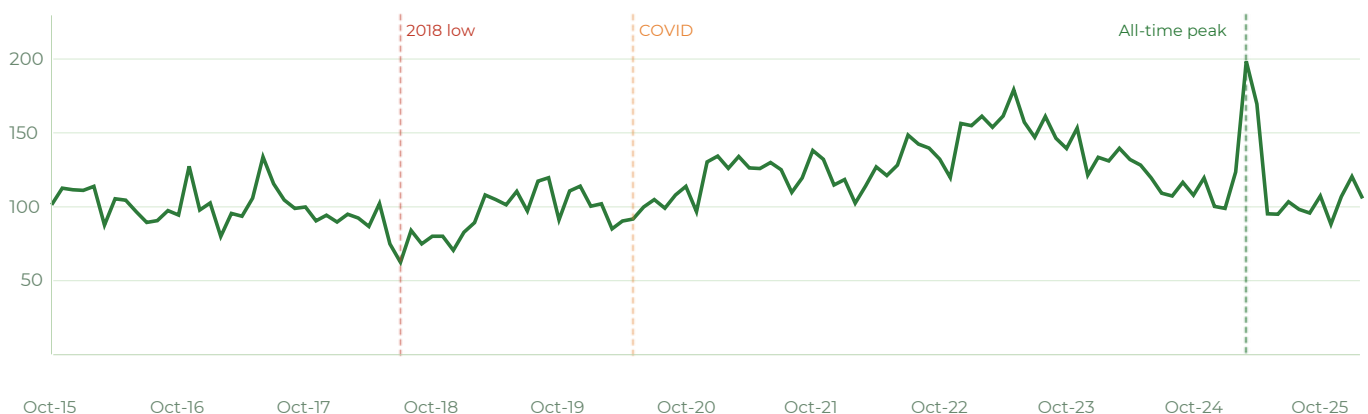
– Aaron Neilson, CEO, The Next Step & The Safe Step

Over 125 consecutive months, The Safe Step has tracked more than 236,000 individual HSE job listings across every state and territory, four HSE disciplines and all major industry sectors. The picture that emerges is of a profession that runs confidently ahead of the economic cycle.

THE FULL PICTURE

National HSE Opportunity Index, 2015–2026

Seasonally adjusted. Base = 100 (October 2015). Unlike most job markets, the HSE index has never fallen below 63.



■ National Index (Seas. Adj.) Note the shallow COVID dip (orange) vs. the deep 2018 trough driven by mining sector contraction




The Decade in Data

198.6 

ALL-TIME INDEX PEAK
March 2025

 **63**

LOWEST POINT
July 2018 – mining
sector contraction

-10% 

COVID IMPACT
May 2020, vs -52%
for HR market

+311% 

UTILITIES SECTOR GROWTH
Standout industry
performer

236K+

TOTAL ADS TRACKED
75% of all
listings over
decade 

30,744

ADS IN 2023
Psychosocial
safety surge 

 **3,513**

PEAK MONTHLY LISTINGS
- March 2025

1,746 

ADS in October
2015 – same as 2026



"When COVID-19 struck in 2020, the national HR market fell 52% in 90 days. The HSE index fell just 10% and recovered within months. Safety professionals were, by definition, essential."

– Katie Johnson,
Director, The Safe Step



The Defining Moments

2015

LAUNCH

Australia's First HSE Job Market Index Goes Live

The Safe Step publishes the inaugural HSE Opportunity Index in October 2015 – the first proprietary, longitudinal measure of HSE employment conditions in Australia. Tracking 1,746 listings in its first month, the index establishes a new standard for market intelligence in the safety profession.

Index at launch: 101.7

2017

HISTORIC LOW

Mining Sector Contraction Drives the Index to All-Time Low

The index hits its lowest point of the decade at 63.0 in July 2018, driven by lessened resources sector hiring – the single largest employer of HSE professionals in Australia. It marks the profession's only significant structural downturn of the decade, entirely unrelated to the broader economy.

All-time low: 63.0 (Jul-2018) · Year-end: 71.1

2019

RECOVERY

A Robust Return – Market Surpasses Pre-Dip Levels

The index stages a full recovery through 2019, closing the year at 114.3 – its strongest December reading since inception. The rebound is driven by construction, infrastructure, and a broader corporate awakening to psychosocial risk as a regulatory obligation.

Year-end 2019: 114.3

2020

RESILIENCE

COVID-19: HSE Proves its Essential Status

While Australia's broader job market collapsed in early 2020, the HSE index merely dipped, falling just 10% to 92.2 in May, before recovering within months. Safety professionals were at the frontline of the pandemic workplace response. The index ends 2020 at 130.7, its highest year-end reading to that point.

COVID dip: -10% to 92.2 (May-2020) · Year-end: 130.7

2021

RECOVERY

The Great HR Talent War Begins

As lockdowns lift and labour markets tighten, the HR Opportunity Index embarks on a sustained rise. By October, the index is up 48% year-on-year. TA roles peak at 138.2 in November as organisations scramble to staff up. HR generalist roles surge over 50%. Vic posts the biggest state turnaround in index history.

Year-end: 160.6 · TA peak: 138.2 (Nov-2021)

2021-
2022

BOOM

Psychosocial Safety Drives Sustained Demand

New legislative obligations around psychosocial hazards, combined with post-pandemic workforce complexity, drive sustained HSE hiring through 2021 and 2022. The index reaches 156.6 by December 2022 and annual listings hit 25,810 in 2022, up 62% on the pre-COVID 2019 base.

Year-end 2022: 156.6 · Annual listings: 25,810



2023

RECORD YEAR

The Busiest Year in HSE Job Market History

2023 becomes the most active year ever recorded in the Index, with 30,744 HSE job listings nationally. The index peaks at 179.3 in May 2023, driven by the Utilities and Public Sector experiencing a surge in safety compliance requirements.

Annual record: 30,744 listings · Index peak: 179.3 (May-2023)

2025

ALL-TIME PEAK

The Index Sets Its All-Time High – A Decade After Launch

March 2025 sees the HSE index reach its all-time peak of 198.6 – the highest reading in the Index's history, representing 3,513 individual monthly listings. Uniquely, the HSE market peaked nearly two years later than the broader HR market, reflecting the sustained, non-cyclical nature of safety compliance demand.

All-time peak: 198.6 (Mar-2025) · Monthly listings: 3,513

2026

TODAY

Ten Years On: Safety is Non-negotiable

The February 2026 index stands at 106.1 – modestly above where the decade began, having been on a far more dramatic journey in between. Monthly listings of 1,757 are consistent with inception, but the profession itself is unrecognisable: more strategic, more regulated, and more indispensable than ever.

Current index: 106.1 · Monthly listings: 1,757

STRUCTURAL SHIFTS

How HSE Work has Changed

Permanent Roles Dominate

Permanent HSE roles have grown 7% over the decade while contract roles have declined 8%. Permanent now represents 84% of all listings – up from 82% at inception – as organisations increasingly embed safety leadership as a permanent, strategic function rather than a project-based resource.

The Slow Climb

The HSE market peaked in March 2025 – nearly two years after the broader market peaked in 2023.

This lag is structurally significant: safety demand is driven by legislation, incident risk, and regulatory obligation, not by business confidence cycles. When the economy slows, safety spending is the last to follow.



BY DISCIPLINE

How HSE Roles Have Shifted

Within the HSE profession, demand has shifted meaningfully toward senior leadership and advisory roles, while the overall market has remained remarkably stable in composition.

DISCIPLINE	START (OCT-15)	CURRENT	10-YEAR CHANGE	PEAK
HSE Executives	86.2	127.2	+48%	268.3
HSE Advisors	110.8	125.4	+13%	212.3
HSE Managers	115.7	108.1	-7%	183.7
Environmental Health Advisor	71.8	80.9	+13%	155.3

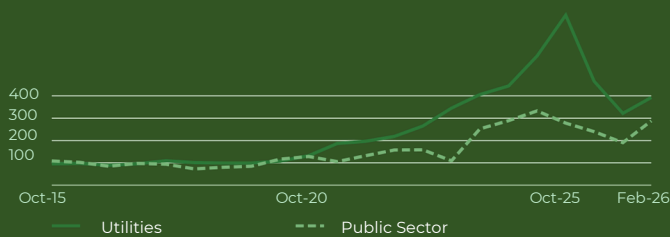
The growth of HSE Executive roles (+48%) reflects the profession's elevation to strategic leadership – a trend consistent with the decade's regulatory intensification.

BY INDUSTRY

The Sectors Driving HSE Demand

Industry tells the most dramatic story in the HSE data. Two sectors have transformed the market – Utilities and the Public Sector – while others reflect the volatility of their underlying business cycles.

UTILITIES VS PUBLIC SECTOR – A DECADE OF REGULATORY GROWTH



WA GROWTH VS NSW/ACT DECLINE – STATE DIVERGENCE



The Standout Sectors

Utilities (+311%) and the Public Sector (+165%) are the decade's transformational stories, both driven by escalating regulatory obligations, infrastructure investment and the expanding scope of workplace safety obligations into psychosocial and environmental domains.

Manufacturing & Supply Chain has remained consistently the largest employer of HSE professionals, growing 26% over the decade and holding steady as the backbone of the HSE market.

The Caution Signs

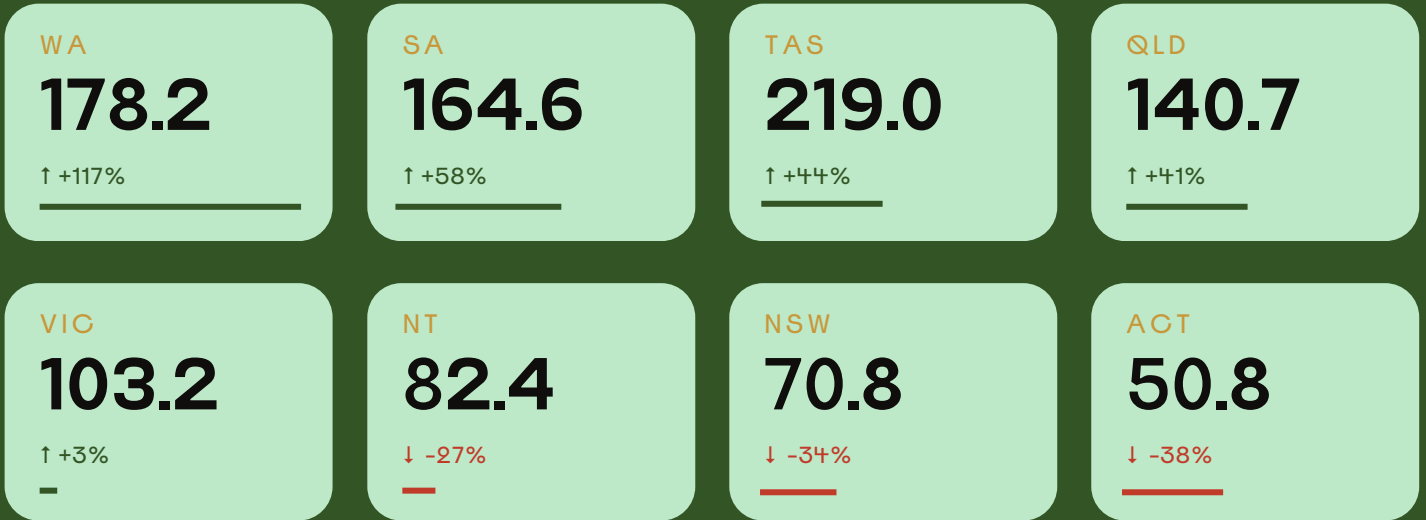
Healthcare & Medical (-81%) and Mining (-40%) highlight sector-specific risk. Mining's decline reflects the end of the resources boom; Healthcare's sharp fall in recent periods reflects resourcing pressures and public sector constraints rather than a reduction in safety need.

Construction (+32%) remains a strong and consistent performer, underpinned by Australia's sustained infrastructure pipeline and rigorous WHS obligations on major projects.



The Geographic Story

The HSE market has diverged sharply by geography over the decade – with WA emerging as the standout growth market and the eastern seaboard capitals showing concerning declines.



The Western Shift

Western Australia's 117% growth over the decade is the most significant geographic story in the HSE index – driven by LNG and critical minerals investment, major infrastructure projects and the scale of industrial operations that require embedded safety capability. WA is now one of Australia's most active HSE job markets by relative demand.

The Eastern Decline

Home to Australia's largest corporate and government populations, NSW and ACT have both declined significantly over the decade, down 34% and 38% respectively. This reflects the concentration of outsourced safety functions, public sector hiring constraints, and a shift toward non-advertised consulting and contracting arrangements over permanent HSE headcount in major organisations.

FUTURE FOCUS

Looking Forward

"A market that barely moved during COVID, that peaked most recently of any profession, and that is driven by obligation rather than optimism. That's what makes HSE professionals genuinely indispensable."

– Aaron Neilson, The Next Step