effie Awards Australia

2026
Case Study



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Agencies
Colenso BBDO

Client
Medibank

Title
Medibank Family Roast

Category
B11c. Insight & Strategic Thinking - campaigns $5-20 million

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Q1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & WHY DOES THIS CASE DESERVE AN AWARD?

In October 2022, Medibank suffered the largest cyberattack in Australian corporate history. Trust collapsed overnight. Advertising stopped. The brand became the sixth most distrusted in the country.

This Effie is about demonstrating what exceptional strategic thinking looks like when the conventional marketing won't do the job.
When you can't just advertise your way back.
When discounting won't work
And when you can't distract people with a new product.

The insight that unlocked everything came from a single, deceptively simple question: how could Medibank take genuine action to earn back the trust of Australians and make a meaningful, differentiated impact on one of the biggest health challenges we face – mental health.

The answer arrived at through deep research with counsellors, psychologists, academics and people with lived experience, was this: the first line of defence in mental health is family.
Not GPs.
Not helplines.
Not apps.
Family. And yet Australian families lack the practical tools to have the conversations that protect each other.

That insight generated a strategy that was unexpected, ownable and genuinely useful. Position Medibank not as a brand talking about mental health, but as the brand that activates the support system behind the support system.

The result was Family Roast: a mental health tool hidden inside a card game.

This was not a big-budget solution. The creative idea emerged entirely from strategic rigour.

The phased campaign (Announce, Prime, Ignite, Fuel) was built to create cultural permission before the product launched. The distribution model (HelloFresh, Parkrun, retail) was designed around a behavioural insight: access matters as much as awareness.

Over 800,000 Australians played the game. 97% had more meaningful conversations with family as a direct result.
Brand reputation reached its highest level in five years.
Contestable preference rose from 16% to 18%.
Consideration increased +7.8%.
Earned media reached $8.6 million. ROI: 2:1.

Every result in this entry flows from a single, sharp, well-executed strategic insight. That is what this category exists to celebrate.

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Q2. WHAT WAS THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE?

Category Context
Private health insurance in Australia is a highly regulated, price-sensitive, low-involvement category. Consumers rarely engage with their insurer until they need to claim.

Brand differentiation is structurally difficult. Products are broadly comparable, pricing is heavily regulated, and switching behaviour is driven primarily by premium increases rather than brand preference.

The dominant competitive dynamic is retention rather than acquisition. This makes brand health metrics, things like trust, affinity and consideration, critical drivers of commercial growth.

Medibank competes against Bupa, HCF, NIB, and a range of smaller funds. Before the cyberattack, Medibank held a position of relative brand strength.

Then the worst cyber-attack in Australian history destroyed that overnight

The Cyberattack and Its Aftermath
In October 2022, Medibank experienced the largest cyberattack in Australian corporate history. The personal health data of 9.7 million current and former customers was stolen and published online.

The reputational damage was immediate and severe.

Medibank became the sixth most distrusted brand in the country. Advertising stopped overnight. The brand entered a prolonged period of silence followed by crisis communications.

The challenge was not merely reputational repair. It was demonstrating credibly that Medibank deserved to exist as more than an insurance transaction. In a category where trust is vital, the brand needed to earn back the right to be in Australians' lives. Trying to do this through advertising alone wouldn't be enough.

Mental Health as the Strategic Battleground
Australia's mental health landscape was identified as the topic through which Medibank would try to rebuild trust, consideration and most importantly, its reputation.

22% of Australians experience a mental health disorder each year.

40% of young Australians aged 18–34 are affected.

75% of all mental health conditions onset before the age of 25.

Demand for care outstrips capacity, with long wait times, workforce shortages, and funding gaps across the system.

Despite this, the mental health communications space is crowded. The plethora of major brands, government bodies and NGOs urging Australians to 'talk for their mental health' is overwhelming.

Awareness is not the problem. Knowing 'how to start' is. Making a tangible, differentiated difference in this space meant enabling Australians to talk, not just telling them they should.

For Medibank, mental health represented a genuine chance for demonstrative (and differentiated) action. A space where action, not advertising, could rebuild trust.

But it wouldn't be easy
The degree of difficulty was significant. The category is scrutinised for exploitation of sensitive health topics, the brand's credibility had been damaged, and the marketing team operated without a permanent CMO for an extended period following the death of CMO Lisa Ronson just four months into her tenure.

1. ^Brand Reputation: RepTrak
2. ^https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/prevalence-and-impact-of-mental-illness
3. ^ABC News (5/10/2023): "Mental health disorders in young Australians surge by 47 per cent over 15 years"
4. ^BlackDog Youth mental health report 2012 -2020
5. ^https://www.ranzcp.org/news-analysis/world-mental-health-day-new-aihw-data-shows-demand-for-mental-health-care-is-increasing

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Q3. WHAT WERE YOUR OBJECTIVES? State specific goals.

The overarching objective was to return Medibank's brand health to pre-cyberattack levels and demonstrate meaningful progress on mental health differentiation.

Our specific objectives were:

Business Objectives
Reverse the post-cyberattack decline in commercial brand metrics and demonstrate that investment in purpose-led marketing delivers measurable return on brand and business value.

Objective 1:Increase contestable preference (a direct commercial indicator) from 16%

Objective 2: Improve net trust from 22%, with a target direction of return to 2019 norms

Objective 3: Most importantly, begin to rebuild trust.

Marketing Objectives

Objective 1:
Increase awareness of Medibank.
This sounds simple, but when you're one of the biggest players in the category, and your name has been mentioned every time any company suffered a cyber attack over the last two years, increasing awareness (for the right reasons) isn't straightforward.

Objective 2:
Increase consideration by 5%
Overcoming our narrative from the previous few years would be tough. Doing it without discount or giveaway incentives (a category favourite) would be even tougher.

Objective 3:
Brand champions better health and wellbeing for all Australians: +8pts
Brand committed to delivering wellbeing programs: +8pts

Campaign Objectives
Create a health intervention that drives measurable engagement and differentiation for Medibank (as measured in ongoing brand tracking, specifically against the questions:

- Brand that helps members manage their mental health
- Mental Health differentiation

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Q4. WHAT WAS YOUR STRATEGY AND HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

Target Audience
Often, when you're a mass market brand, the primary audience is 'all Australians'. However, in the case of this work, this mass reach was intentional because Mental health does not self-select. The commercial opportunity for Medibank lay in broad relevance rather than narrow targeting.

However, within that, particular emphasis was placed on households with young adults aged 18-34, where mental health prevalence is highest and protective habits are most formative. They also represent the largest cohort coming into the private health insurance category in the coming years. As well as being those with the highest propensity to switch.

Secondary audiences included:

- Existing Medibank members (retention),
- Lapsed or consideration-stage consumers (acquisition)
- The broader health and media ecosystem (credibility and authority).

Making the biggest difference
The mental health system is overloaded. We couldn't train more mental health professionals. Reaching the most people meant we needed to take action upstream, where we could reach people before mental health challenges became full-blown mental health issues. The focus on prevention rather than treatment was a deliberate strategic choice. It allowed Medibank to act in a space of genuine need, without overreaching its authority as an insurer, and positioned the brand as proactive rather than reactive.

Key Insight
Research conducted with counsellors, psychologists, academics and people with lived experience consistently surfaced the same finding: **the first line of defence in mental health is often the people closest to you.**

Family knows us best. They love us. They want us to succeed. Yet despite this, the formal support system - GPs, counsellors, helplines - is the default framing for mental health support and intervention, meaning the informal support system sitting behind it, family, are underused. Not because people don't value it, but because they don't know how to activate it. For many Australians, talking to someone they didn't know often felt easy that reaching out to those who know us best.

The opportunity
The barrier was not willingness. It was a practical one. People don't know how to start the conversation.

Strategic reframe:
Instead of telling Australians to have the conversation with family, we needed to enable it.

The strategy was to position Medibank as the brand that activated the support system behind the support system, unlocking family as a preventative mental health resource, rather than simply pointing people toward the formal system.

This reframing served two purposes: it was genuinely useful to Australians, and it was credibly ownable for a health insurer rather than being a direct mental health service claim.

1. ^Quantitative interviews

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Q5. HOW WAS YOUR STRATEGY BROUGHT TO LIFE?

The Creative Idea
Family Roast was a card game featuring 40 carefully designed questions, developed with leading mental health experts. The questions began playfully. Using humour and banter as disarming mechanisms before progressively guiding families into deeper, more reflective conversations.

The game was a mental health tool hidden inside something Australians actually wanted to play.

Launching a cause, not a campaign
We knew we couldn't just put the game out there and hope people embraced it. We needed to create the conditions for success. Ensuring Australians welcomed Family Roast into their lives meant priming them to accept it.

In light of everything Medibank had been through, the phasing of its entry into the mental health space was considered and deliberate.

The strategy was executed across four active phases:

- **Announce:**
  Establish Medibank's POV and intent about family as the first line of defence.
  Here, Medibank's CEO announced a $50 million commitment to Australia's mental health. This signalled business-wide intent, not a campaign budget.

- **Prime:**
  Permeate culture with the insight.
  In partnership with The Growth Distillery, a clinically-backed national study on family disconnection and generational attitudes to mental health was published and distributed to major media, as well as through Medibank's own channels. This built authority before the product launched.

- **Ignite:**
  Launch Family Roast and build toward Family Roast Day (20 July).
  Mass media, distribution partnerships, influencer activation and owned channels worked in concert to drive awareness of, and participation with, Family Roast.

- **Fuel:**
  Relive the game to give the investment a tail
  Content from families across Australia, extended the campaign's cultural reach and reinforced authentic participation.

The ignite and Fuel phases also included additional firepower. Fronted by Sharon Strzelecki (played by Magda Szubanski) and alongside her never-before-seen children Tim and Pam, the campaign used culturally resonant humour to lower psychological defences. Strzelecki was the perfect vehicle: instantly recognisable, warmly irreverent, and capable of making an emotionally serious topic feel approachable.

Media and Channel Strategy

The channel strategy was built around a single insight: participation requires both awareness and access. Knowing the game exists is not enough. The game needs to be in front of people at a moment when playing it feels natural.

This shaped a dual ecosystem approach:

- Mass media (TV, cinema, out-of-home, print, social) built national fame and drove awareness of Family Roast Day.
- Distribution partnerships embedded the physical game directly into Australian homes and community rituals: HelloFresh meal kits (delivered into family kitchens), Parkrun events (community health participation occasions), Medibank retail stores and direct member channels.

A digital version of the game was available via the Medibank Live Better app and online, extending reach to families separated by geography and enabling multilingual participation.

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Content and Partnership Ecosystem

Two major media partners were brought in not as publishers but as creative collaborators. These two played an important role across all phases, but particularly during the 'Prime' and 'Fuel' phases.

- News Corp built editorial authority through the 'Can We Talk?' platform. A multi-phase series across news.com.au, metro mastheads and Body+Soul, grounding the campaign in journalistic credibility.
- Mamamia created 'I Never Told You This', an original content series in which young adults used the Family Roast cards to have intimate, unscripted conversations with a parent on camera. This was a partner-originated creative that extended the campaign in directions no brief had specified.

Influencer activity across Instagram and TikTok generated voluntary social amplification. Social engagement on Family Roast content reached between 41% uplift on Instagram and more than five times the internal benchmark on TikTok.

This wasn't just about media alignment. It is behavioural orchestration. Each phase moved Australians along a defined journey: from passive awareness of the importance of family connection, to awareness of Family Roast, to active participation on Family Roast Day on 20 June.

Q6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR CAMPAIGN WAS SUCCESSFUL?

14.8 million physical cards were distributed nationally (370,000 packs). Over 800,000 Australians played Family Roast, representing close to 10% of the entire private health insurance market(1). This was active, chosen participation, not passive reach.

The digital version extended participation across geographies and languages.

Post-participation research demonstrated direct behavioural outcomes:

- 97% of players reported having more meaningful conversations with family members as a direct result of playing the game(2).
- Families reported increased confidence in initiating mental health discussions(3).
- Participants associated open conversation more strongly with protecting their own mental well-being(4).

Business Objectives

Reverse the post-cyberattack decline in commercial brand metrics and demonstrate that investment in purpose-led marketing delivers measurable return on brand and business value.

Objective 1:
Increase contestable preference (a direct commercial indicator) from 16%
Result: Exceeded.
Contestable preference increased from 16% to 18%(5)

Objective 2:
Improve net trust from 22%, with a target direction of return to 2019 norms
Result: Exceeded.
Net trust: 22% rose from 24% (only 1pp off pre cyber levels)(6)

Objective 3:
Improve reputation. Move Medibank outside the 'Top 20 most distrusted brands.
Result: exceeded
Medibank's RepTrak brand reputation score rose from 65.6 to 70.3 - the highest sustained level since 2019(7). This directly reversed the post-cyberattack decline and exceeded the directional recovery target.

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Marketing Objectives

Objective 1:
Increase awareness of Medibank.

Result: achieved

Unaided awareness increased: +1.9%.(8)

Comms awareness increased: +14.7%.(9)

Objective 2:
Increase consideration by 5%
Result: Exceeded

Consideration rose +7.8% as a result of Family Roast.(10)

Affinity also increased: +5.5%.(11)

Objective 3:
Medibank has the ambition to be seen as a health company. Not just a private health insurer. As such, being recognised for non-PHI initiatives is important.

1. Increase 'Brand champions better health and wellbeing for all Australians' by +5pp.

   Result: Exceeded. Family Roast delivered a +8pts increase. (12)

2. Increase 'Brand committed to delivering wellbeing programs' by +5pp.

Result: Exceeded. Family Roast delivered a +8pts increase.(13)

Campaign Objectives

Create a health intervention that drives measurable engagement and differentiation for Medibank (as measured in ongoing brand tracking, specifically against the questions:

1. Increase 'Brand that helps members manage their mental health' by +5pp
   Result: Exceeded. 'Brand that helps members manage their mental health' increased +9pts(14)

2. Drive any increase in perceived 'Mental Health differentiation'
   Result: Achieved. 'Mental health differentiation' score rose from 35% - 36%.(15)

Category Fame
Family Roast became the #1 most recognised ad in the health insurance category during the campaign period. It generated extensive national coverage across earned media.(16)

- Earned media value for mental health initiatives, March–December 2025: $8.5–8.6 million.(17)
- ROI: 2:1 return versus paid media investment.(18)
- Social engagement: highest ever recorded across Medibank-owned channels, 2–8x internal benchmarks; TikTok results exceeded Healthcare and Financial Services industry benchmarks. (19)

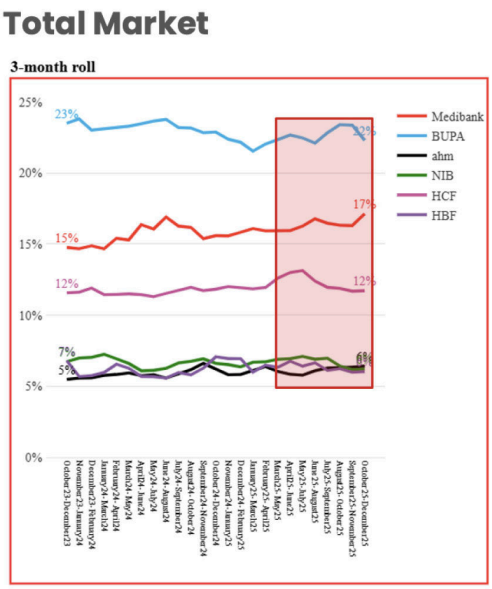
A final result doesn't appear in any metric, but is arguably the most valuable. It is the internal cultural change within Medibank. Family Roast galvanised the business unlike any project (marketing or otherwise) that had come before. It gave renewed direction, confidence and belief back to an organisation unsure of its role.

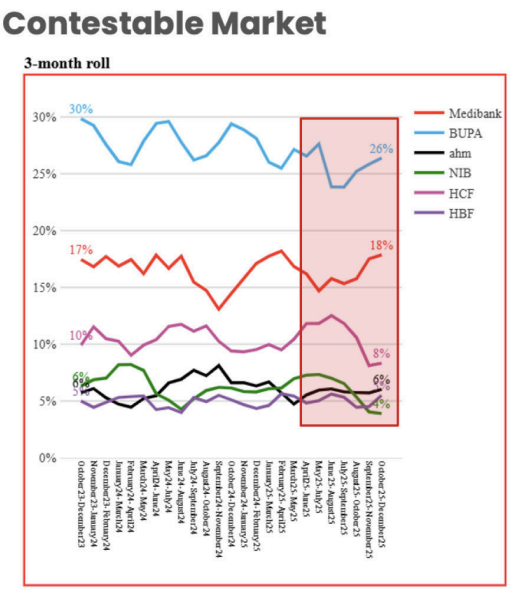
It also fundamentally changed the way the business collaborates and implements ideas of this scale and impact. The importance of this, after everything the organisation has been through, cannot be overstated.

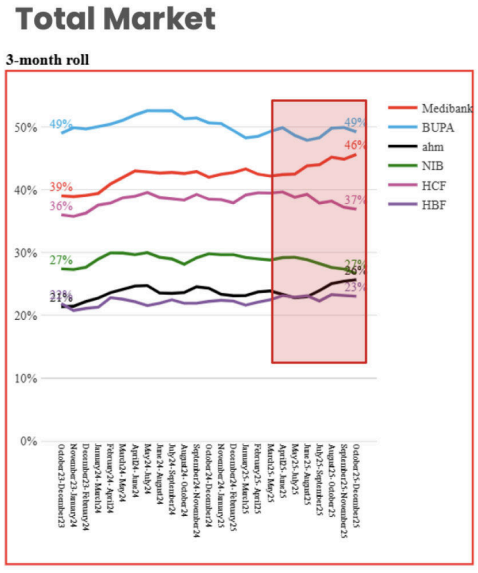
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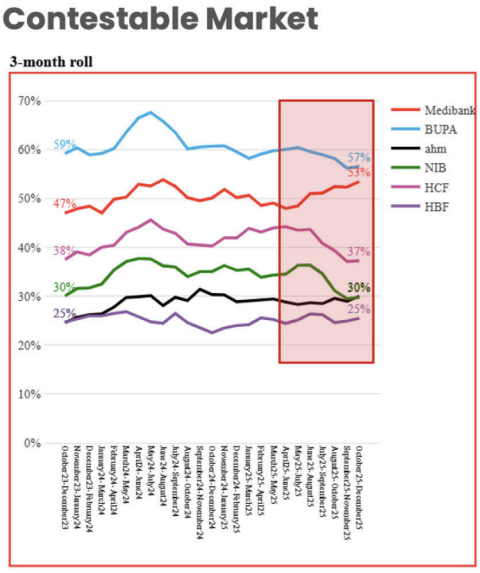
1. ^ Internal and distribution data (including digital plays)
2. ^ https://www.apra.gov.au/quarterly-private-health-insurance-membership-and-benefits-summary-march-2025
3. ^ Follow up interviews with players
4. ^ Follow up interviews with players
5. ^ Follow up interviews with players
6. ^ Brand Metric Results (Dec 2025),
7. ^ Brand Metric Results (Dec 2025),
8. ^ Brand Reputation Source: Reptrak: Dec 2025
9. ^ Brand Perception and Affinity metrics: Source: Kantar, Oct 2025
10. ^ Brand Perception and Affinity metrics: Source: Kantar, Oct 2025
11. ^ Brand Perception and Affinity metrics: Source: Kantar, Oct 2025
12. ^ Brand Perception and Affinity metrics: Source: Kantar, Oct 2025
13. ^ Brand Metric Results (Dec 2025),
14. ^ Brand Metric Results (Dec 2025),
15. ^ Brand Metric Results (Dec 2025),
16. ^ Brand Metric Results (Dec 2025),
17. ^ Streem Advertising Value Equivalency, March–December 2025
18. ^ Streem Advertising Value Equivalency, March–December 2025
19. ^ Hootsuite

CHARTS/IMAGES SUPPORTING CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

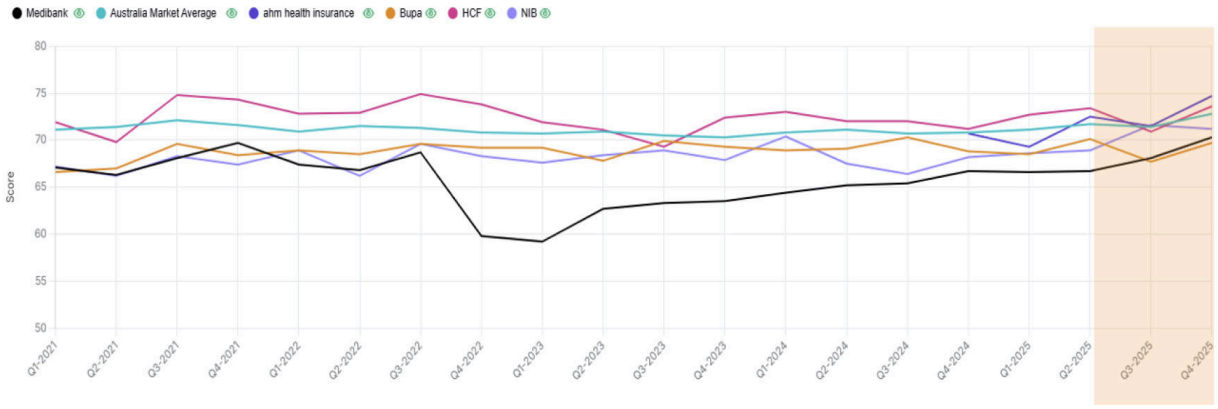


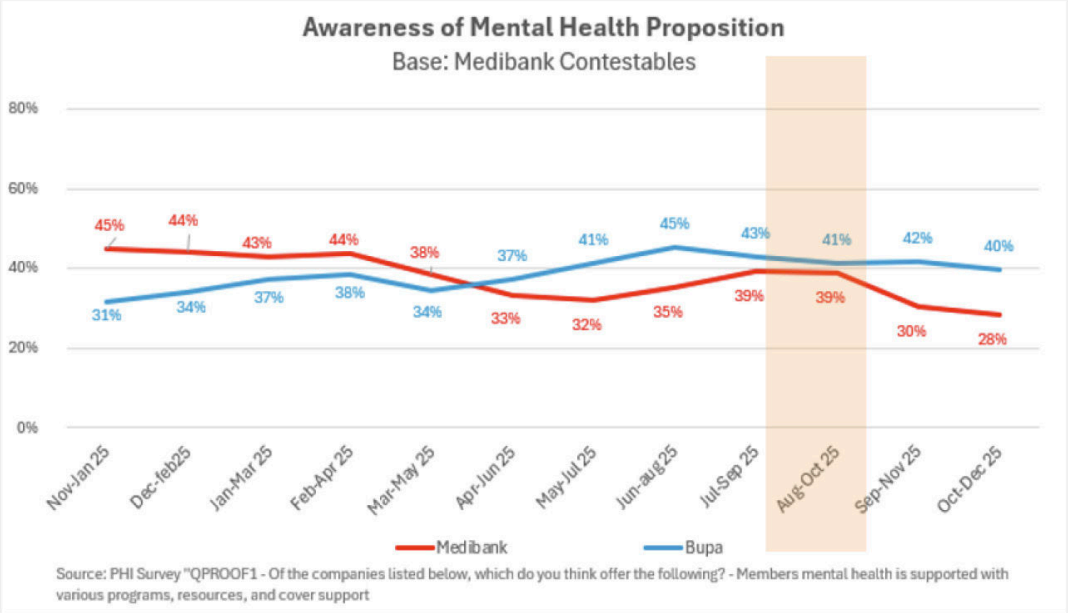






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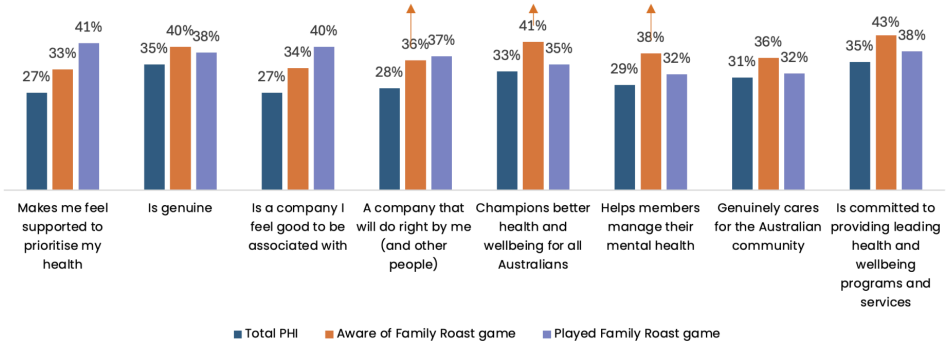
Source: PHI Survey "QPROOF1 - Of the companies listed below, which do you think offer the following? - Members mental health is supported with various programs, resources, and cover support

Emotionally driven drivers & genuineness strengthen with deeper engagement with Family Roast game (from awareness to gameplay)

Medibank Drivers Endorsements
(July-Dec25)

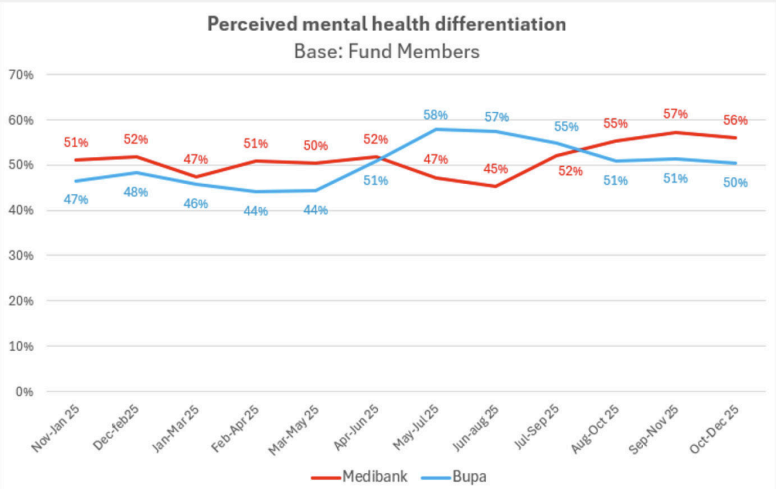
Non-Medibank members who are aware of the game show significantly stronger endorsement of Medibank on these drivers than non-members who are unaware.

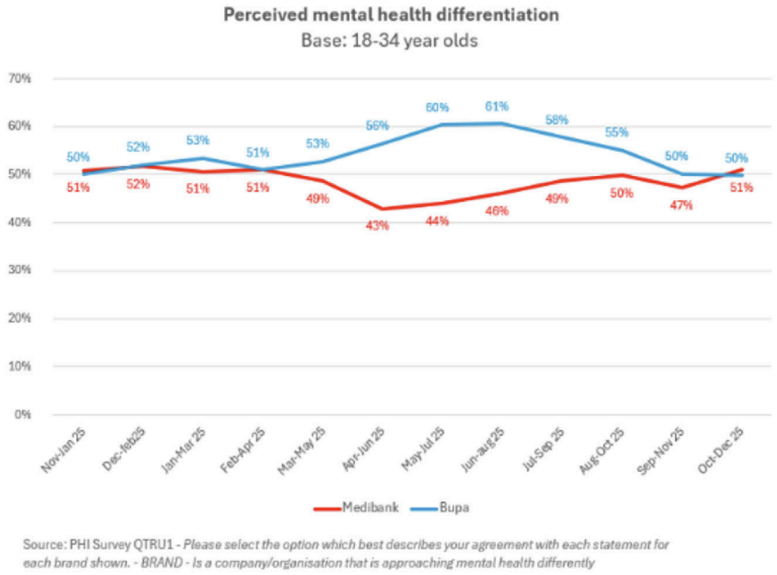
Note:
Of those aware of the Family Roast game, only 22% are Medibank members and 78% are non-members, indicating the uplift is not driven solely by our member base.

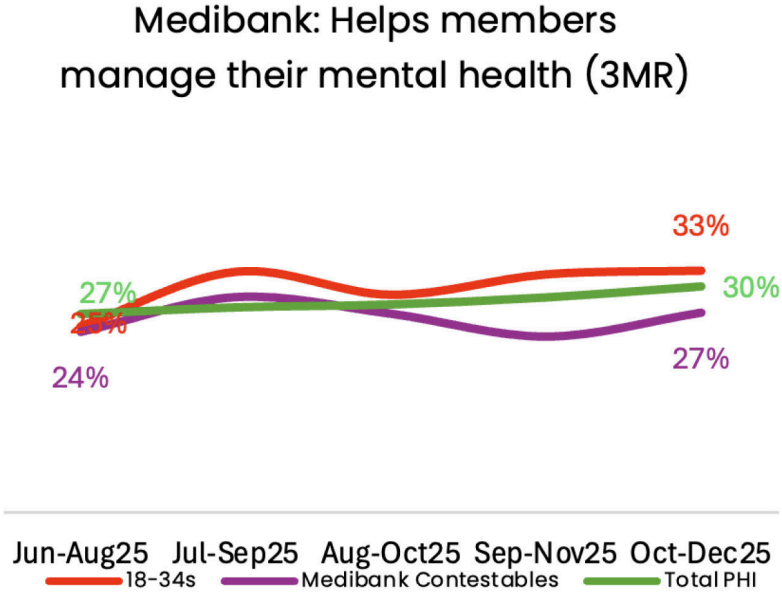


11 **QPHI_CUSTPROM1.** Considering the list of customer service goals below, please tick the company that you think are meeting their goals... You can pick as many or as few companies as you want to for each statement. I think this company... **Source:** Medibank PHI Tracker, July25 – Dec25

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Q7. WAS THE CAMPAIGN A GOOD INVESTMENT?

Family Roast delivered a demonstrably strong return across multiple measures of value.

Reputation recovery to its highest level in five years, reversing a cyberattack-induced decline that advertising alone could not have addressed and representing a restoration of brand equity that would otherwise have required years of incremental spend to rebuild.

Direct Media ROI
The campaign delivered a 2:1 return on paid media investment, measured against earned media value generated (Source: Streem Advertising Value Equivalency, March–December 2025). This means every dollar of paid media investment generated two dollars of earned media value.

Brand and Commercial Value
The movement in contestable preference from 16% to 18% is the most commercially significant metric. In a category of Medibank's scale, a 2-point shift in contestable preference represents a material change in the pool of consumers willing to consider switching to or staying with Medibank. This has direct revenue implications.

Efficiency of Distribution
The physical distribution model through HelloFresh and Parkrun was structurally efficient: it placed the product in contextually relevant moments (family meal times; community health participation) without requiring incremental media spend per impression. 14.8 million cards reached Australian households through channels that were paid partnership investments, not media costs.

Longevity Beyond Paid Media
A critical measure of investment quality is what happens after the media runs out. Mamamia and News Corp continued to promote Family Roast and family connection as an ongoing editorial commitment. Parkrun incorporated the cards into their community culture. The digital game remained available and in active use. An investment that continues to generate return beyond its campaign window is, by definition, exceptional value.

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Q8. DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RESULT WAS NOT DUE TO OTHER FACTORS

Other Marketing Activity
During the same period, Medibank ran a separate campaign supporting its 24/7 Mental Health Support Line. This campaign was distinct in its objective, audience behaviour and channel approach. Firstly, it was designed at the more acute end of the model of care for mental health. Where Family Roast was designed for the 'well' population, 24/7 was designed for those with more acute mental health needs.

It was a direct response activation designed to drive calls to a specific service, rather than a brand-building or participation program.

There was no creative overlap or shared messaging between the two campaigns.

The Family Roast results can be attributed with confidence because:

- Participation metrics (physical card distribution, digital game plays, post-play survey responses) are uniquely associated with Family Roast activity and have no plausible alternative attribution.
- The post-play survey results (97% more meaningful conversations) were measured specifically among Family Roast participants, isolating the behaviour to the campaign.
- Brand tracking uplift in mental health-specific perception metrics (+8 and +9 point shifts) directly tracks the campaign's core message and timing window, with no comparable competitor activity in the same space during the period.

Category and Competitive Context
No major competitor launched a comparable health intervention or purpose-led campaign of similar scale during the campaign period. The absence of significant competitive creative activity during the period strengthens the attribution case for Medibank's brand metric improvements.

External Factors
Australia's mental health crisis did not improve materially during the campaign period. If anything, public awareness of the issue increased, which could be expected to benefit any brand operating credibly in the space. However, the specificity of Medibank's metric improvements (mental health differentiation, help managing mental health) rather than generic health metrics indicates the campaign drove the shift rather than a broader category tailwind.

The cyberattacks' reputational damage was a continuing ambient factor. As was the death of well-known CMO, Lisa Ronson. That Medibank achieved its highest reputation score in five years despite this demonstrates the positive contribution of the campaign beyond simply 'the crisis fading'.

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Q9. GIVE CONTEXT TO BUDGET IN COMPARISON TO COMPETITORS.

> Budget is about the same

Q10. GIVE CONTEXT TO THE BRAND'S OVERALL BUDGET.

> Brand budget is more

Q11. MEDIA BUDGET ELABORATION

> The budget predominantly went towards paid media - both in traditional buys, but also through collaborative media partnerships with News and Mamamia.
>
> Split:
> Paid: 65%
> Owned: 10%
> Earned <5%
> Shared: 20%

Q12. DESCRIBE OWNED MEDIA ACTIVITY

> Signage for Family Roast in Medibank in-store display, and member comms

Q13. OUTLINE ANY SPONSORSHIPS

> Medibank was in year 2 of a 3-year sponsorship with AFLW. The investment was the same as in year one. Players were used to promote the game through social, but all other ALFW comms were independent of the family Roast.

Q14. OUTLINE COMMUNICATION TOUCHPOINTS

> TV
> OOH
> INSTORE
> SOCIAL
> PRINT
> DISPLAY
> EDITORIAL
> INFLUENCER
> OLV
> ACTIVATION
> PR
> PARTNERSHIP (HelloFresh & Parkrun)

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