

# Health seeking behaviours

March 2022 Report

**Prepared for:**

Evaluation and Behavioural Science  
Science, Surveillance & Insights  
COVID-19 Health System Response Directorate  
Ministry of Health

**In association with:**

the School of Population Health,  
University of Auckland.

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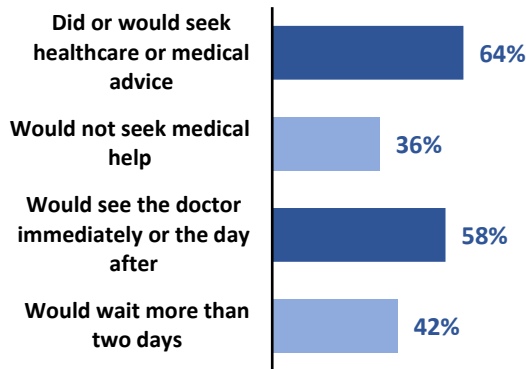
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## KEY FINDINGS

### Response to having COVID symptoms



Base: n=1,235

By far the most common health care providers adults would go to **first** are their GP (69%) and Healthline/ Whakarongorau (20%)

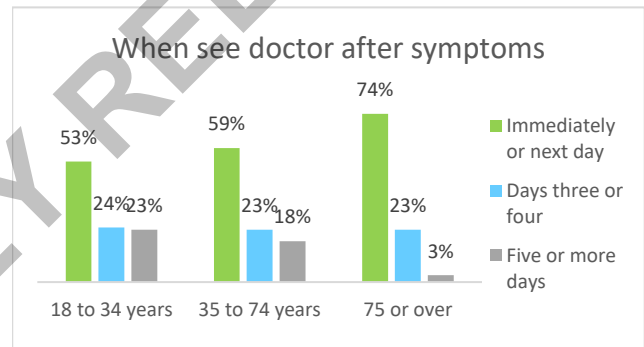
74% would wait until the symptoms were at least moderate, and 26% would wait until they were severe. Three per cent say they **never** want to see a doctor.

**1.4 million adults say they won't seek medical help if they develop COVID-19 symptoms**

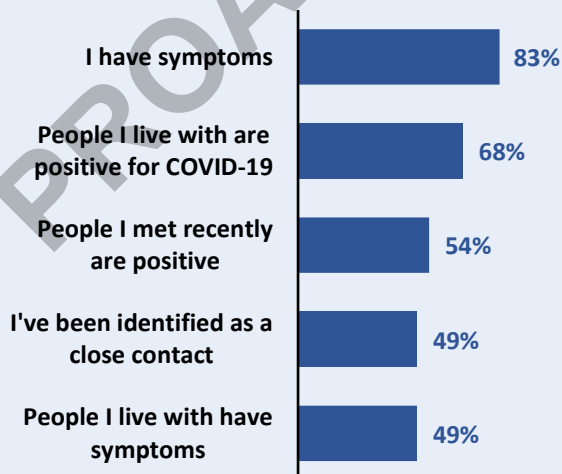


Almost two-thirds (64%) say they will seek medical advice if they have symptoms. However, 36% say they won't seek medical help.

58% would see the doctor immediately or the day after if they develop symptoms, but 42% would wait longer than this. 18% would wait to day 5 or after.



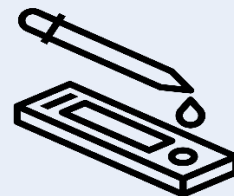
### Main reasons for self-administering a Rapid Antigen Test



Base: n=1,234

**83% or an estimated 3.3 million adults aged 18 or over would want to get a RAT test to test themselves if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.**

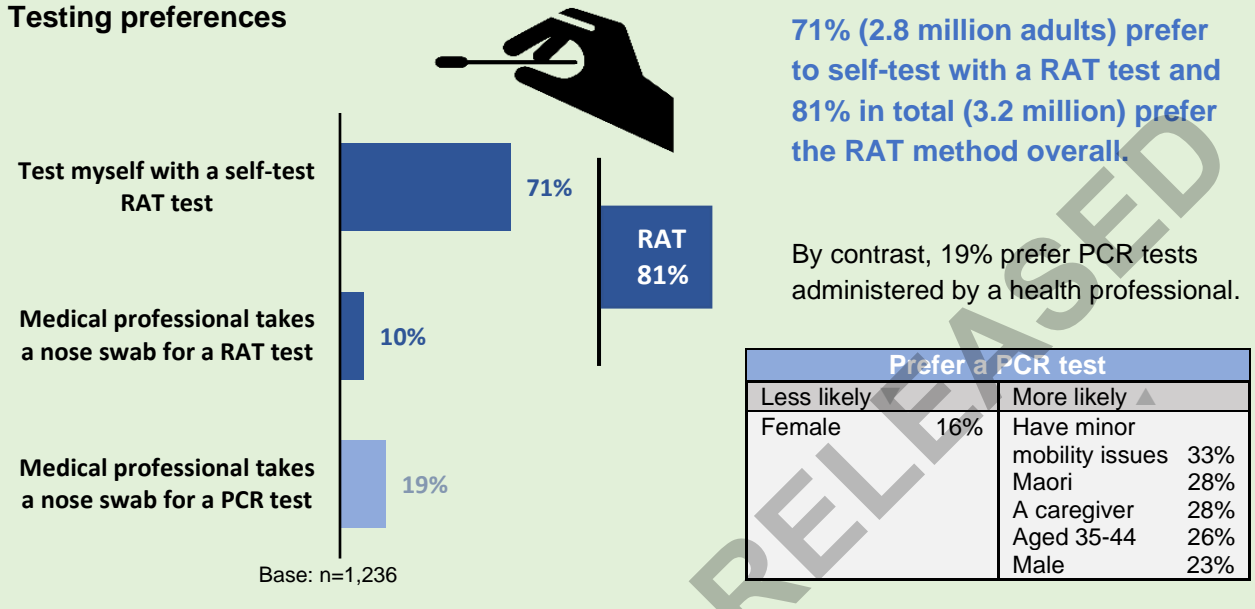
7% never want to be tested.



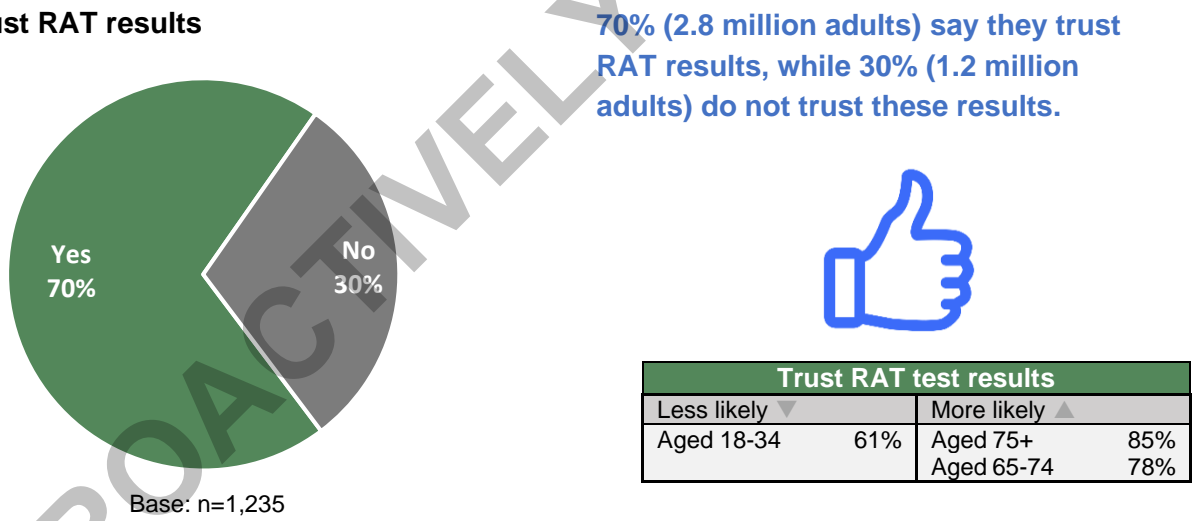
*"I have got some RATs to check if I feel sick, whether it is COVID or just a cold. We hardly go out or see anyone as we are old and want to avoid catching it"*

**KEY FINDINGS**

**Testing preferences**



**Trust RAT results**



*“I just went and got RAT tests for the household and we tested to ensure we knew whether it was COVID or flu”*

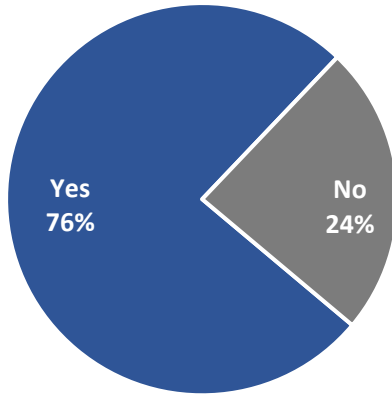
*“It is a shambles. Rules change daily. I am a teacher and we are not RAT tested on site”*

*“RAT test question was tricky. Mostly trust the result but not 100%”*

*“I would prefer the accuracy of a PCR test, but it isn’t possible to support disability needs and wait two hours for a test”*

## KEY FINDINGS

### Are COVID-19 tests still necessary?

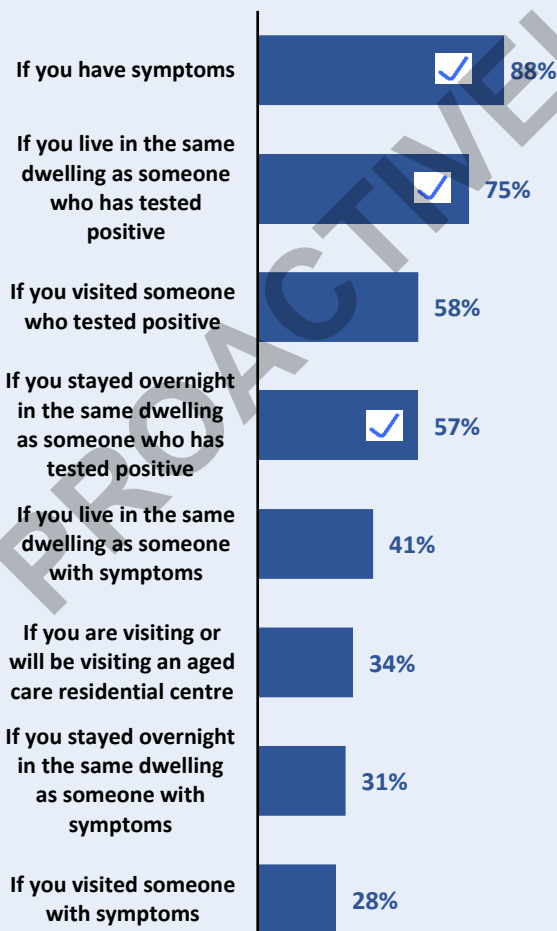


Base: n=1,230

Three-quarters of the adult population (76%) believe COVID-19 tests are still necessary. This equates to 3.0 million adults.

| COVID-19 tests are still necessary |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Less likely                        | More likely                        |
|                                    | Aged 75+ 90%                       |
|                                    | Have mobility issues 87%           |
|                                    | Have serious health impairment 87% |
|                                    | Have a degree 81%                  |

### When should you get a COVID-19 test? (top 8 reasons)



Base: n=1,226

88% or an estimated 3.5 million adults say they should get tested if they have symptoms

Other common reasons include:

- Living in the same house as someone who has tested positive (75%)
- Having visited someone who has tested positive (58%)
- Staying overnight in the same dwelling as someone with a positive test (also 57%)

Ticks indicate the situations where the Ministry recommends people get tested.

***“As soon as I get symptoms, I will get tested and isolate”***

***“I don’t think there is any need to test anymore, we just need to let it run its course and take the fear factor out of it, so people can get on with their lives”***

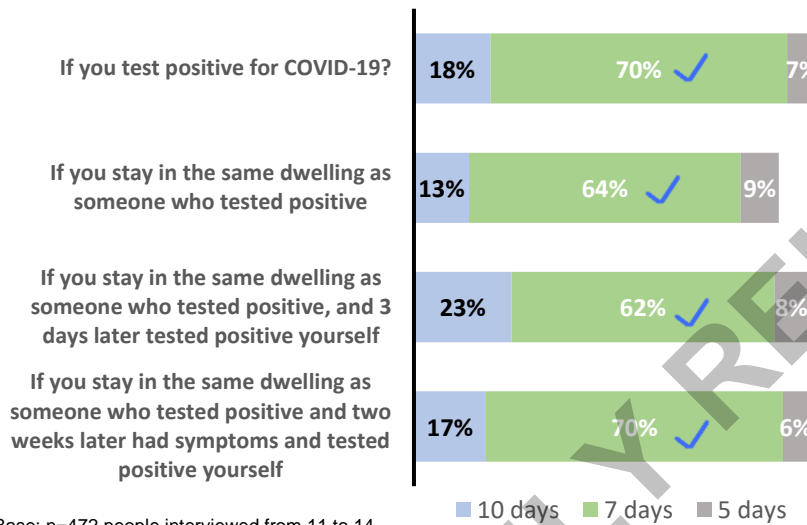
***“If I didn’t have any symptoms or was not sick, I wouldn’t waste resources”***

## KEY FINDINGS

### Knowledge of isolation rules

#### How long do you need to isolate?

Top three responses for a range of scenarios

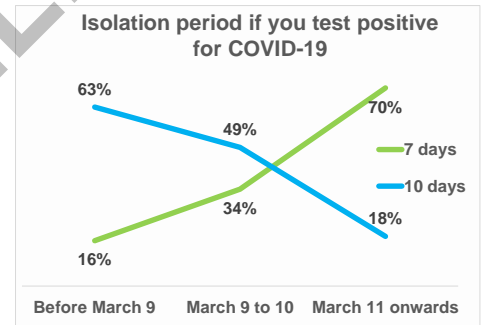


Base: n=472 people interviewed from 11 to 14 March out of 1,226 who answered these questions

The required period of isolation changed from 10 days to 7 days on 11 March, and announced on 9 March in the middle of fieldwork. Therefore, results are only shown for interviews conducted from 11 March onward.

For all four scenarios tested from 11 March, over sixty percent correctly say the isolation period is seven days. Before March 9 it was ten days.

The effectiveness of communicating this change is illustrated in the following chart:



#### When should you start isolating?

Less than half of adults correctly identify when they should start isolating in a range of scenarios

| Scenario   | Correct response                                  | % who selected the correct response |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| If you were symptomatic and tested positive for COVID-19?  | When you first had symptoms                       | 43%                                 |
| If you stay in the same dwelling as a person who had symptoms and tested positive  | When the other person first had symptoms          | 33%                                 |
| If you stay in the same dwelling as someone who tested positive, and 3 days later tested positive yourself but had no symptoms | When you got your test that had a positive result | 33%                                 |
| If you stay in the same dwelling as someone who tested positive and two weeks later had symptoms and tested positive yourself  | When you first had symptoms                       | 25%                                 |

**“I guess if I have symptoms, get tested and it's positive, I'll be told what to do or I could look it up. I've seen it on the website but just can't be bothered trying to remember it all as it changes so often”**

## APPENDIX 1 – SOCIAL EQUITY ISSUES



**The following analysis focuses on vulnerable groups in the community.**

In this section we examine whether the following vulnerable groups exhibit significant differences compared with the total regarding their attitudes to COVID-19 symptoms and testing:

- Māori and Pasifika
- Elderly people and young adults
- Disabled people and those living with impairments or long-term health conditions.

Questions analysed include the following:

- Did they or would they seek medical help in response to having COVID-19 symptoms?
- How long would they wait to see a doctor if they have symptoms?
- How severe would their symptoms be before they would see a healthcare provide?
- Do they trust the results of RAT tests?
- Do they think COVID-19 testing is still necessary?

**Relatively few instances were observed where vulnerable groups have lower levels of health-seeking responses to COVID-19 compared with the total.**

**These differences are all age-related:**

- Those aged 55 to 74 are less likely than the total to say they did seek or would seek medical help in response to having COVID-19 symptoms (59% cf. 64% overall)
- Younger adults aged 18 to 24 are more likely to say that COVID-19 would need to be of high severity before seeing a healthcare provider (36% cf. 26% overall). This age group is also less likely to trust the results of RAT tests (42% cf. 70%).

**By contrast, there are more examples where vulnerable groups have a higher level of health-seeking responses than the overall population**

**Age-related differences:**

- Older people aged 75 or over are more likely than the total to say they did seek or would seek medical help in response to having COVID-19 symptoms (83% cf. 64% overall).
- This age group is also more likely to trust the results of RATs (85% cf. 70% overall) as is the 65 to 74 year age group (78% cf. 70% overall).

- The 75 plus age group is also more likely to say they will see a doctor immediately or the day after if they observe symptoms (74% cf. 58% overall); to say they will seek medical help for symptoms of moderate severity (62% cf. 48% overall); and to agree that COVID-19 tests are still necessary (90% vs. 76% overall).

### Ethnicity differences:

- Māori are more likely to say they will see a doctor immediately or the day after if they observe symptoms (66% cf. 58% overall).

### Disability and impairment-related differences:

- Those who are disabled with mobility issues (both moderate and severe) are more likely to say they did or will get medical help if they notice COVID-19 symptoms (74% cf. 64% overall).
- They are also more likely to say they will see a doctor immediately or the day after if they observe symptoms (71% cf. 58% overall); and to say they will seek medical help for symptoms of mild severity (40% cf. 23% overall).
- This group is more likely to say COVID-19 tests are still necessary (87% cf. 76% overall).
- People with serious medical impairments are also more likely to say COVID-19 tests are still necessary (87% cf. 76% overall).



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## APPENDIX 2 – METHOD



### Research approach

An online survey of people aged 18 or older.

### Sample sources

Members of the nationwide HorizonPoll and Horizon Research Māori panels as well as two third-party respondent panels: s 9(2)(ba)(i)

### Fieldwork dates

8 to 15 March 2022

### Sample size

n=1,236

### Survey reliability

For the total sample the maximum margin of error is  $\pm 2.8\%$  at the 95% confidence level.

### Quotas

Demographic quotas were used to ensure a representative sample. In addition, quotas for Māori and Pasifika respondents were boosted to achieve sufficient interviews to ensure reliable results for these ethnic groups.

### Weighting

The total sample is weighted on age, gender, ethnicity, region and highest education to match the adult population at the most recent census.

### Questionnaire design

The survey includes 28 questions (27 pre-coded questions as well as 1 open-ended question). The majority of questions were compulsory to answer. To ensure good quality data, only those people who answered 26 or more questions were included in the survey sample.

### Interview duration

The median time to complete the survey was 6.5 minutes.

### Sample profile

See Appendix Three.

### National population size for estimates

All estimates are based on Statistics NZ's Q3 2021 population projection of 3,956,300 New Zealanders aged 18 or more.

### Guide to interpretation

Cross analysis of the results only features statistically significant differences from the total at the 95% confidence level. These results are indicated by the following symbols:

- ▼ significantly **less** than the total    ▲ significantly **more** than the total.

## APPENDIX 3 – SAMPLE PROFILE



### A) By Personal Demographics all percentages to 1 decimal point

| Gender         | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Male           | 600             | 48.5%          | 49%          |
| Female         | 624             | 50.5%          | 50.1%        |
| Another gender | 12              | 1.0%           | 0.9%         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1236</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

| Age          | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 18-24        | 75              | 6.1%           | 8%           |
| 25-34        | 211             | 17.1%          | 22%          |
| 35-44        | 219             | 17.7%          | 17.1%        |
| 45-54        | 214             | 17.3%          | 16.9%        |
| 55-64        | 205             | 16.6%          | 13.9%        |
| 65-74        | 208             | 16.8%          | 14.3%        |
| 75 or more   | 104             | 8.4%           | 7.7%         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1236</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

| Priority Ethnicity | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Māori              | 285             | 24.1%          | 20.1%        |
| Pasifika           | 51              | 4.3%           | 3.8%         |
| Asian              | 97              | 8.2%           | 7.5%         |
| European           | 728             | 61.5%          | 67.3%        |
| Other              | 23              | 1.9%           | 1.4%         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>1184</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

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| Highest education level  | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|--|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Postgraduate degree (Masters degree or PhD)                          | 156             | 12.6%          | 12.5%        |
| Undergraduate (Bachelor) degree                                      | 305             | 24.7%          | 22.0%        |
| Vocational qualification (includes trade certificates, diplomas etc) | 310             | 25.1%          | 26.4%        |
| University Bursary or 7th form                                       | 88              | 7.1%           | 10.0%        |
| Sixth form/UE/NCEA Level 2   | 133             | 10.8%          | 11.7%        |
| NCEA Level 1 or School Certificate                                   | 123             | 10.0%          | 8.3%         |
| No formal school qualification                                       | 93              | 7.5%           | 7.5%         |
| Prefer not to say  | 28              | 2.3%           | 1.6%         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1236</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

| Essential worker  | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Yes               | 325             | 26.3%          | 27%          |
| No                | 894             | 72.3%          | 71.3%        |
| Prefer not to say | 17              | 1.4%           | 1.7%         |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>1236</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

| Look after or help others because of their long-term health issues | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|--|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Yes  | 277             | 18.4%          | 17.9%        |
| No   | 999             | 80.8%          | 81.2%        |
| Prefer not to say  | 10              | 0.8%           | 0.9%         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1236</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

| Number in Household | n=<br>(unweighted) | %<br>(unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| One                 | 192                | 15.5%             | 14.6%        |
| Two                 | 423                | 34.2%             | 33.1%        |
| Three               | 253                | 20.5%             | 21.4%        |
| Four                | 210                | 17.0%             | 17.8%        |
| Five or more        | 158                | 12.8%             | 13.1%        |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>1236</b>        | <b>100%</b>       | <b>100%</b>  |

| Date Survey Completed | n=<br>(unweighted) | %<br>(unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Before March 9        | 291                | 23.5%             | 25.9%        |
| March 9 to 10         | 473                | 38.3%             | 39.7%        |
| March 11 onwards      | 472                | 38.2%             | 34.4%        |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>1236</b>        | <b>100%</b>       | <b>100%</b>  |

| DHBs                | n=<br>(unweighted) | %<br>(unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Northland           | 37                 | 3.0%              | 3.0%         |
| Waitemata           | 145                | 11.7%             | 14.3%        |
| Auckland            | 108                | 8.7%              | 9.4%         |
| Counties Manukau    | 109                | 8.8%              | 10.3%        |
| Waikato             | 103                | 8.3%              | 8.8%         |
| Lakes               | 28                 | 2.3%              | 2.4%         |
| Bay of Plenty       | 62                 | 5.0%              | 5.5%         |
| Tairāwhiti          | 18                 | 1.5%              | 1.4%         |
| Taranaki            | 30                 | 2.4%              | 2.1%         |
| Hawke's Bay         | 41                 | 3.3%              | 2.8%         |
| Whanganui           | 17                 | 1.4%              | 1.1%         |
| MidCentral          | 56                 | 4.5%              | 4.2%         |
| Hutt                | 46                 | 3.7%              | 2.7%         |
| Capital and Coast   | 120                | 9.7%              | 7.4%         |
| Wairarapa           | 13                 | 1.1%              | 0.9%         |
| Nelson/ Marlborough | 32                 | 2.6%              | 2.4%         |
| West Coast          | 10                 | 0.8%              | 0.8%         |
| Canterbury          | 167                | 13.5%             | 13.0%        |
| South Canterbury    | 16                 | 1.3%              | 1.2%         |
| Southern            | 78                 | 6.3%              | 6.5%         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>1236</b>        | <b>100%</b>       | <b>91.4%</b> |

| Region                                   | n=<br>(unweighted) | %<br>(unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Northland                                | 37                 | 3.0%              | 3.0%         |
| Auckland                                 | 362                | 29.4%             | 33.9%        |
| Waikato                                  | 98                 | 8.0%              | 8.5%         |
| Bay of Plenty                            | 92                 | 7.5%              | 8.0%         |
| Taranaki                                 | 30                 | 2.4%              | 2.1%         |
| Gisborne/Hawkes' Bay                     | 62                 | 5.0%              | 4.5%         |
| Wairarapa                                | 9                  | 0.7%              | 0.6%         |
| Whanganui/ Manawatu/<br>Palmerston North | 73                 | 5.9%              | 5.2%         |
| Wellington                               | 166                | 13.5%             | 10.0%        |
| Nelson/ Tasman/ Marl-<br>borough         | 32                 | 2.6%              | 2.4%         |
| Canterbury                               | 183                | 14.9%             | 14.2%        |
| West Coast                               | 10                 | 0.8%              | 0.8%         |
| Otago                                    | 53                 | 4.3%              | 4.5%         |
| Southland                                | 25                 | 2.0%              | 2.0%         |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>1232</b>        | <b>100%</b>       | <b>99.7%</b> |

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## B) By Health & Disability Status

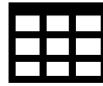
| Identify as disabled              | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted)  |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| No                                | 1,055           | 85.4%          | 86.2%         |
| Yes, minor mobility issues        | 129             | 10.4%          | 9.7%          |
| Yes, more serious mobility issues | 26              | 2.1%           | 2%            |
| Yes, a vision impairment          | 22              | 1.8%           | 1.7%          |
| Yes, a hearing impairment         | 36              | 2.9%           | 2.8%          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>1268</b>     | <b>102.6%</b>  | <b>102.6%</b> |

*Multiple responses were allowed; hence the totals add to more than 100%*

| Live with impairments or long-term health conditions | n= (unweighted) | % (unweighted) | % (weighted) |
|--|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| No   | 720             | 58.3%          | 59.7%        |
| Yes, a minor one that doesn't affect me too much     | 385             | 31.1%          | 30.2%        |
| Yes, one that is more serious                        | 131             | 10.6%          | 10.1%        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1236</b>     | <b>100%</b>    | <b>100%</b>  |

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## APPENDIX 4 – TECHNICAL REPORTS



Excel tables (cross-tabs) and the raw survey data including verbatim comments and the questionnaire are provided separately from this report.

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