

Mental health, alcohol, and other drug use – COVID-19 Omicron Wave

May 2022 Report

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

In association with:
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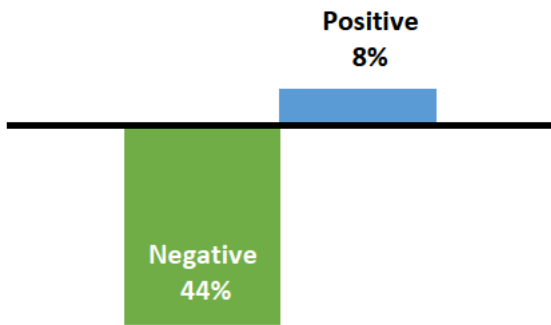
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KEY FINDINGS

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON PEOPLES' WELLBEING



Base: n=1,175

1.76 million adults (44% of the population) say the pandemic has had a negative impact on their wellbeing

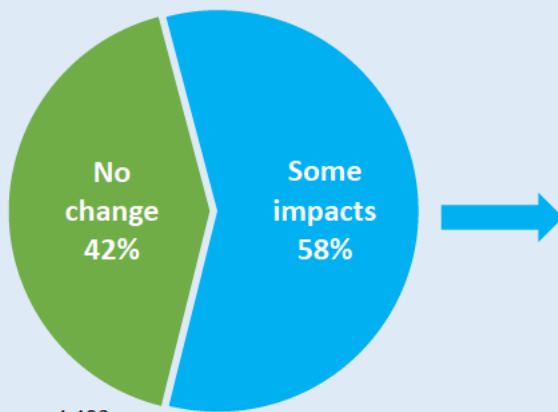


By contrast, 8% say the impact was positive, 46% say it was neutral and 2% are unsure

More likely to mention a negative impact ▲	
Aged 18-24	59%
Have a serious health impairment	59%

HOUSEHOLD IMPACTS

Impact of the Omicron wave on households (since February 2022)

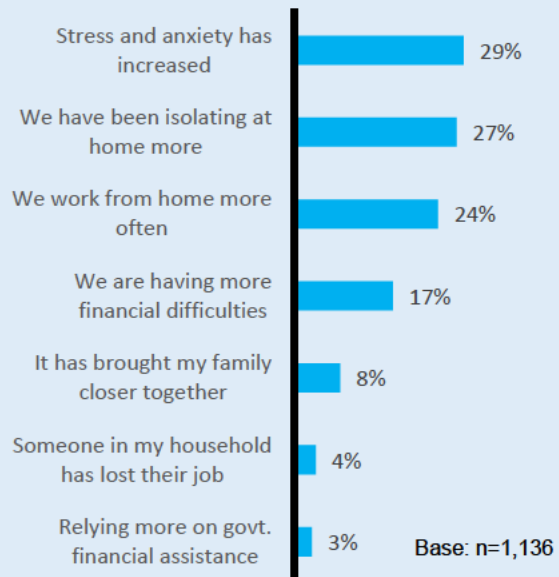


Base: n=1,136



58% (2.3 million people) say their household has been impacted by the Omicron wave.

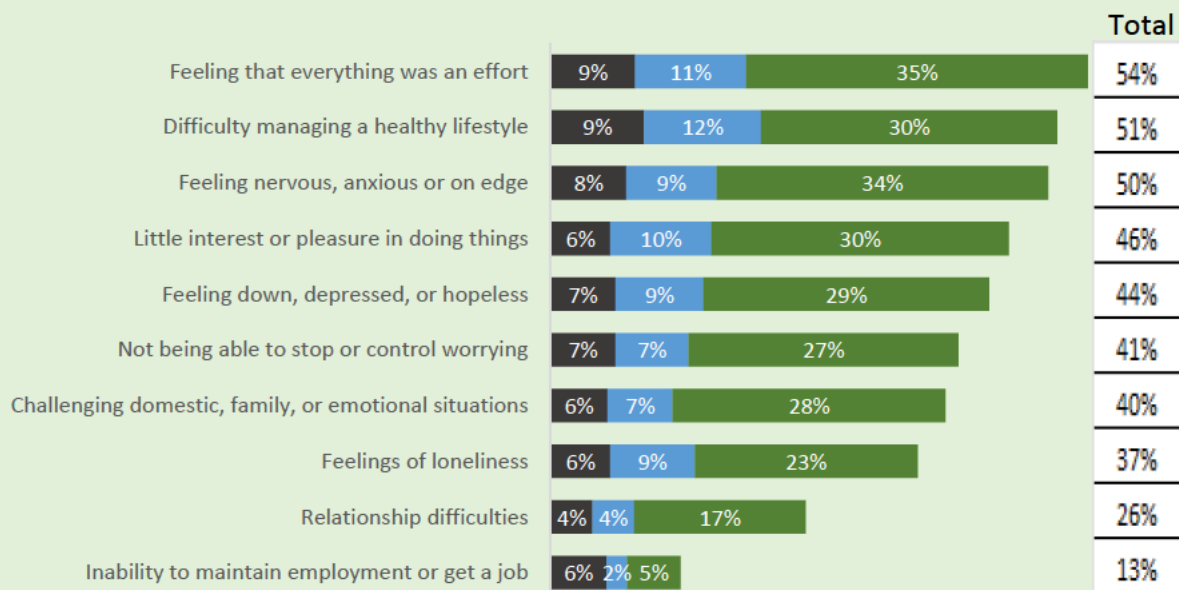
Main impacts are increased stress and anxiety (29%), isolating at home more (27%) and working from home more (24%)



Base: n=1,136

KEY FINDINGS

HEALTH ISSUES EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS



Base: n=1,153

■ Nearly every day ■ More than half the days ■ Several days

54% (2.2 million adults) experienced ‘everything was an effort’ to some extent in the past fortnight, and 9% (359,000) experienced this every day. Similarly, 51% had ‘difficult days managing a healthy lifestyle’, with 9% experiencing this every day.



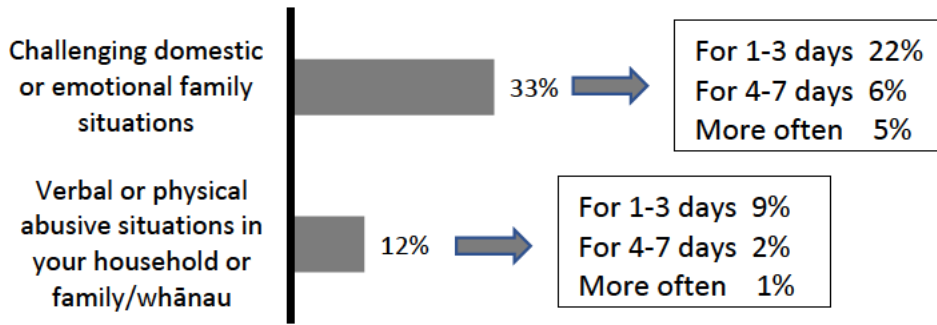
Those who had ever tested positive for COVID-19 reported slightly more issues than the total, but this was not statistically significant. See the example below for ‘feeling down, depressed or hopeless’:

Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	ALL	Have you ever tested positive for COVID-19?		
		Yes, confirmed PCR Test	Yes, confirmed RAT Test	No
Not at all	56%	42%	53%	57%
Several days	29%	30%	28%	29%
More than half the days	9%	17%	11%	8%
Nearly every day	7%	11%	8%	6%
N (unweighted)	1153	49	202	920

KEY FINDINGS

EXPERIENCED CHALLENGING SITUATIONS IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS

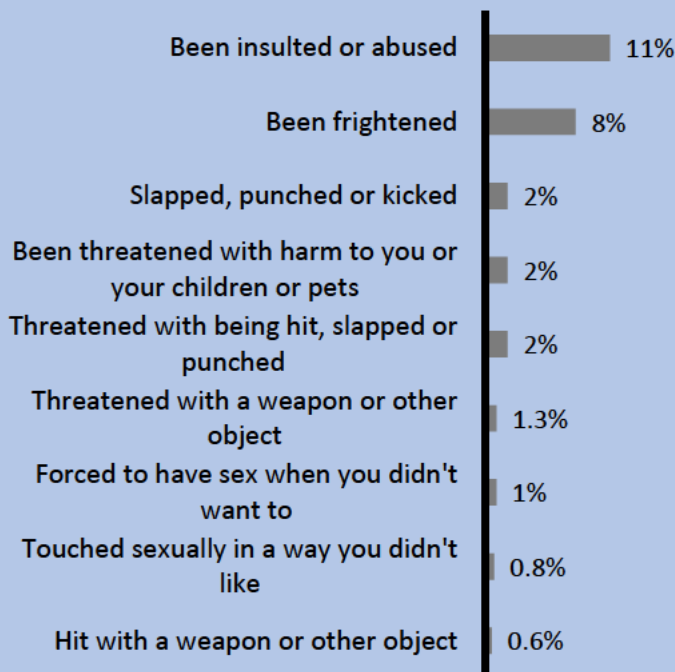
A third of households had experienced challenging domestic or emotional situations in the past fortnight



Base: n=875

EXPERIENCES OF NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR BY A FAMILY/WHĀNAU MEMBER SINCE THE OMICRON WAVE

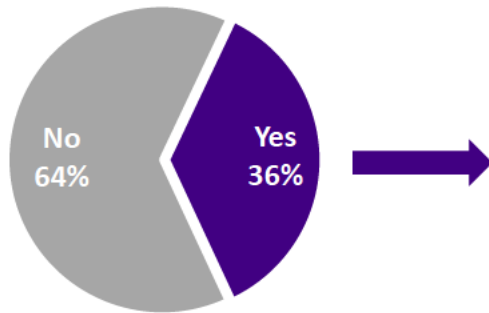
The most common experiences of negative behaviour by a family/whānau member were being insulted or abused (11%) or being frightened (8%)



Base: n=877

KEY FINDINGS

ASKED FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS



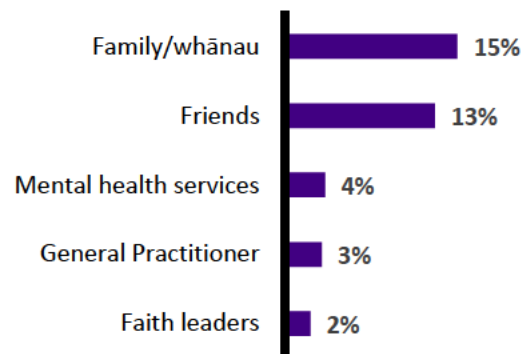
Base n=1,104

10% (399,000 adults) said they hadn't asked for help but wanted to

1.43 million adults (36% of the population) asked for emotional support in the past fortnight



Main sources of support:



Base n=1,104

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

In the past two weeks, have you been drinking more or less alcohol than before the Omicron wave? (February 2022)



Base n=894



On balance, over the last fortnight people said they had been drinking less than before the Omicron wave

Main reasons for drinking less are:

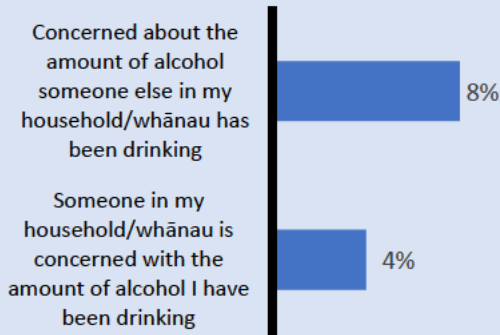
- Physical health reasons (38%)
- I haven't been able to socialise as much or go out (29%)
- Money/ cost reasons (27%).

From a small base (n=58), main reasons for drinking more are:

- It helps me relax/ switch off (65%)
- Feeling stressed out/ anxious (53%)
- Spending more time drinking socially (27%).

KEY FINDINGS

CONCERN ABOUT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION SINCE THE OMICRON WAVE (FEBRUARY 2022)



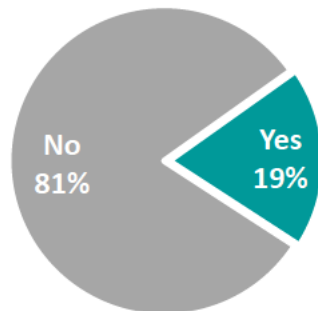
Base n=890

8% are concerned by how much someone else in their household/whānau is drinking, while 4% say that someone in their household/whānau is concerned about their drinking (the respondent)



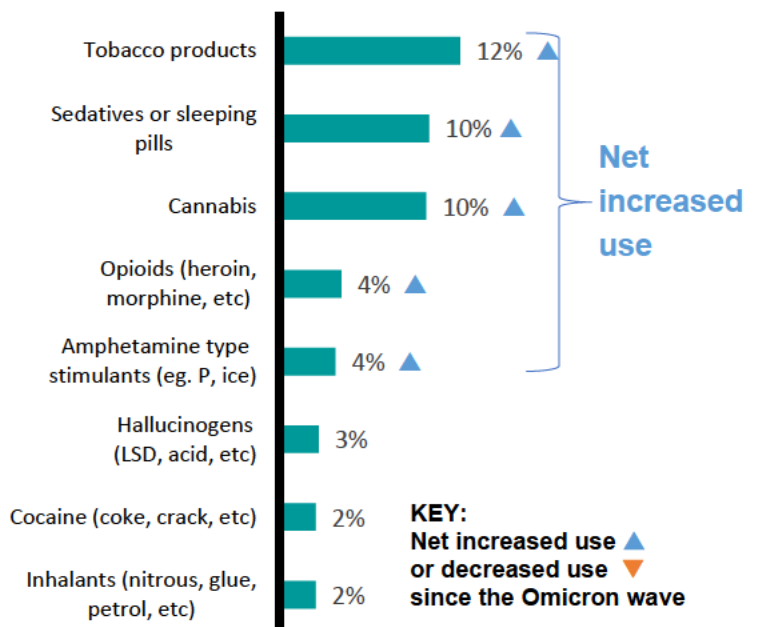
OTHER DRUGS

Used other drugs such as tobacco, sleeping pills or recreational drugs since the Omicron wave (February 2022)



19% of the adult population, or 759,000 people nationally, have used drugs other than alcohol since the Omicron wave

Drugs used other than alcohol

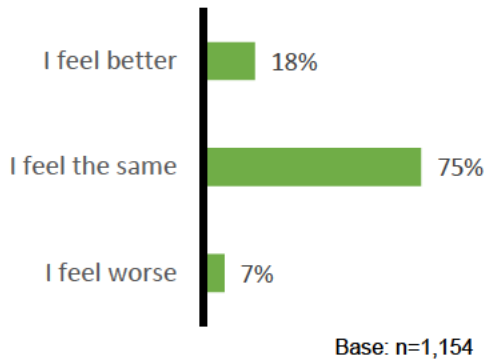


Base n=889 – multiple answers allowed

More likely to have used these drugs ▲	
Have serious mobility issues	54%
Have a serious health impairment	30%
Less likely to have used these drugs ▼	
Age 75 plus	6%

KEY FINDINGS

REACTION TO THE SELF-ISOLATION PERIOD REDUCING FROM 10 TO 7 DAYS



Adults are 2.5 times more likely to feel better than worse about the reduction in the self-isolation period from ten to seven days (18% cf. 7%)

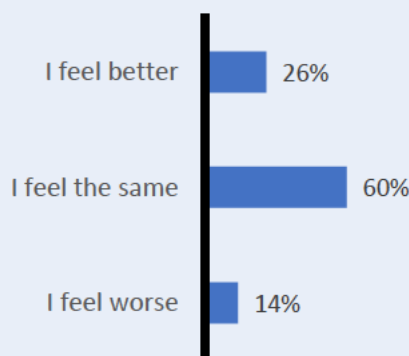
Main reasons for feeling better include:

- Feeling like I have more freedom (62%)
- Concern about needing to ask for support from others while in self-isolation (42%)
- Concern about my mental health (36%).

Main reasons for feeling worse include:

- Concern about others being infectious in the community (72%)
- Concern that I could be infectious in the community (44%).

REACTION TO RELAXED BORDER RESTRICTIONS



Respondents were told: "Since April 12 travellers from Australia have been able to enter New Zealand without isolating. From May 1 travellers from visa-waiver countries (like the large tourist markets of the UK, US, Japan, Germany, Korea, and Singapore) will also be able to arrive and not have to isolate".

Almost twice as many people feel better about the relaxed border restrictions than feel worse (26% cf. 14%)

Main reasons for feeling better include:

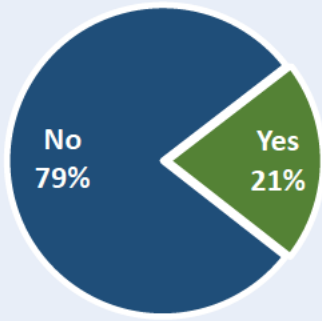
- Good for the economy (69%)
- I feel I can travel now (66%)
- Able to reconnect with family/whānau overseas (62%).

Main reasons for feeling worse include:

- Risk of new variants arriving (88%)
- Risk of increased case numbers (85%)
- Risk that newcomers won't follow the traffic light system rules (77%).

KEY FINDINGS

EVER TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19



Base: n=1,175

839,000 adults (21% of the population) say they have tested positive for COVID-19

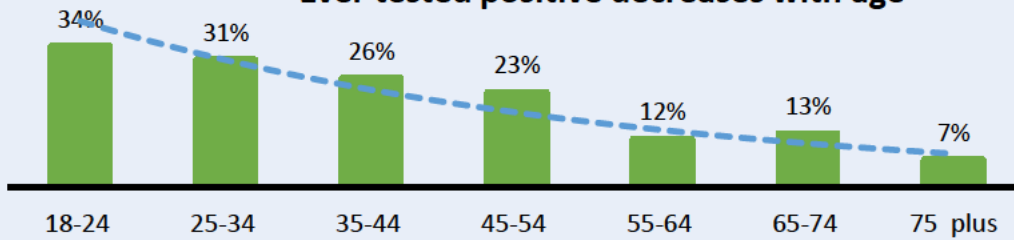
How confirmed:

18% via RAT test
5% via PCR test

Total adds to more than 21% as some people reported using both testing methods



Ever tested positive decreases with age



Incidence of testing positive by other variables			
	Lower ▼		Higher ▲
Have a serious health impairment	8%	Ethnic priority Pasifika	38%
Ethnic priority European	17%	A caregiver	36%
		Ethnic priority Māori	27%
		Have a university degree	25%

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 at the 95% confidence level compared with the total adult population regarding their health and wellbeing:

- Ethnic priority Māori and Pasifika
- Elderly people and young adults
- Disabled people and those living with serious medical impairments. *NB. Sample sizes were too small to analyse results for those who have vision or hearing impairments*

Responses analysed include the following:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on my wellbeing
- Ever tested positive for COVID-19
- Experienced the following in the last two weeks:
 - Feeling that everything was an effort
 - Difficulty managing a healthy lifestyle
 - Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
 - Little interest or pleasure in doing things
 - Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless
 - Not being able to stop or control worrying
 - Challenging domestic, family, or emotional situations
 - Feelings of loneliness
 - Relationship difficulties
 - Inability to maintain employment or get a job
- Feel worse with changes to the rules (the reduced self-isolation period and/or relaxed border restrictions)
- Asked for emotional support in the last two weeks
- Consumed more alcohol than before the Omicron wave
- Concerned with the amount of alcohol someone else in your household and/or whānau has been drinking
- Someone else in your household is concerned about the amount of alcohol you are drinking
- Consumed other drugs in this period, such as tobacco, sleeping pills or recreational drugs
- Increased use of these drugs since before the Omicron wave
- Experienced challenging domestic or emotional family situations and/or verbal or physical abusive situations in the last two weeks

- Experienced negative behaviour by a family or whānau member in the last two weeks, specifically if they had been:
 - Insulted or abused
 - Frightened

NB. Other negative experiences relating to this behaviour are not analysed due to their very low incidence

Age-related findings:

Young adults (age 18 to 24)

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on my wellbeing (59% vs. 44% overall).
- Ever tested positive for COVID-19 (34% cf. 21% overall)
- Experienced health or personal issues in the last two weeks:
 - Felt nervous, anxious or on edge (72% cf. 50% overall)
 - Little interest or pleasure in doing things (59% cf. 46% overall)
 - Felt down, depressed, or hopeless (64% cf. 44% overall)
 - Not being able to stop or control worrying (61% cf. 41% overall)
 - Feelings of loneliness (63% cf. 37% overall)
 - Inability to maintain employment or get a job (25% cf. 13% overall)
- Asked for emotional support in the last two weeks (53% cf. 36% overall)

Older people (age 65 plus)

- *No areas were recorded where negative experiences are significantly higher than the total.*

Ethnicity-related findings using the priority ethnic classifications requested

Māori

- Ever tested positive for COVID-19 (27% cf. 21% overall)
- Experienced health or personal issues in the last two weeks:
 - Difficulty managing a healthy lifestyle (63% cf. 51% overall)
- Feel worse about the reduction from 10 to 7 days self-isolation (12% cf. 7% overall)
- Asked for emotional support in the last two weeks (48% cf. 36% overall).

Pasifika – note a relatively small sample size (n=56) means that results must have a fairly large difference from the total to be statistically significant

- Ever tested positive for COVID-19 (38% cf. 21% overall).

Disability and impairment-related findings:

Disabled with mobility conditions

- Experienced health or personal issues in the last two weeks:
 - Feeling that everything was an effort (68% cf. 54% overall)
 - Difficulty managing a healthy lifestyle (74% cf. 51% overall)
 - Felt down, depressed, or hopeless (54% cf. 44% overall)
 - Not being able to stop or control worrying (52% cf. 41% overall)
 - Feelings of loneliness (50% cf. 37% overall)
 - Inability to maintain employment or get a job (26% cf. 13% overall)
- Feel worse about the changes to border restrictions (22% cf. 14% overall)
- Asked for emotional support in the last two weeks (47% cf. 36% overall)
- Consumed drugs such as tobacco, sleeping pills or recreational drugs in the last two weeks (54% cf. 19% overall). *NB. This result applies to those with serious mobility issues*

Have serious medical impairments

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on my wellbeing (59% vs. 44% overall)
- Experienced health or personal issues in the last two weeks:
 - Feeling that everything was an effort (78% cf. 54% overall)
 - Difficulty managing a healthy lifestyle (76% cf. 51% overall)
 - Felt nervous, anxious or on edge (70% cf. 50% overall)
 - Little interest or pleasure in doing things (60% cf. 46% overall)
 - Felt down, depressed, or hopeless (62% cf. 44% overall)
 - Not being able to stop or control worrying (61% cf. 41% overall)
 - Challenging domestic, family, or emotional situations (51% cf. 40% overall)
 - Feelings of loneliness (57% cf. 37% overall)
 - Inability to maintain employment or get a job (23% cf. 13% overall)
- Feel worse about the changes to border restrictions (29% cf. 14% overall)
- Asked for emotional support in the last two weeks (53% cf. 36% overall)
- Consumed drugs such as tobacco, sleeping pills or recreational drugs in the past two weeks (30% cf. 19% overall).

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: [REDACTED]

Due to the sensitive nature of questions relating to abuse and experiences within households, the third-party panels would not ask those questions, but a sample size of almost 900 was achieved for them.

Fieldwork dates

26 April to 4 May 2022

Sample size

n=1,197

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.

Priority ethnic groups

Horizon used priority ethnic groups to determine ethnicity.¹

Weighting

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

Interview duration

The median time to complete the survey was just over 5 minutes.

Sample profile

See Appendix Four.

National population size for estimates

All estimates are based on Statistics NZ's Q1 2022 population projection of 3,993,540 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.

¹ If someone identifies as Māori, they are Māori. If someone does not, but identifies as Pasifika, they are Pasifika. If someone identifies as neither, but Asian (including Indian), they are Asian. If someone does not identify as any of these groups but instead European (either of New Zealand descent or not) they are European. Otherwise, they are Other.



Appendix 3 – sample profile

A) Demographics

Gender	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Male	585	49%	49%
Female	603	50%	50%
Another gender	9	1%	1%
Total	1197	100%	100%

Age	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
18-24	86	7%	9%
25-34	217	18%	21%
35-44	160	13%	13%
45-54	266	22%	21%
55-64	100	8%	8%
65-74	171	14%	13%
75 or more	197	16%	15%
Total	1197	100%	100%

Priority Ethnicity	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Māori	191	16%	19%
Pasifika	60	5%	6%
Asian	63	5%	6%
European	763	64%	66%
Other	30	3%	3%
Total	1193	100%	100%

Highest education level	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Postgraduate degree (Masters or PhD)	180	15%	13%
Undergraduate (Bachelor) degree	298	25%	23%
Vocational qualification (includes trade certificates, diplomas etc)	327	27%	27%
University Bursary or 7th form	82	7%	8%
Sixth form/UE/NCEA Level 2	115	10%	12%
NCEA Level 1 or School Certificate	96	8%	10%
No formal school qualification	70	6%	7%
Prefer not to say	25	2%	3%
Total	1193	100%	100%

Healthcare worker	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Yes	89	7%	7%
No	1104	93%	93%
Total	1193	100%	100%

Look after or help others because of their long-term health issues	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Yes	191	16%	17%
No	1002	84%	83%
Total	1193	100%	100%

DHBs	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Northland	41	3%	4%
Waitemata	166	14%	15%
Auckland	131	11%	11%
Counties Manukau	79	7%	8%
Waikato	100	8%	9%
Lakes	22	2%	2%
Bay of Plenty	54	5%	5%
Tairāwhiti	6	1%	1%
Taranaki	16	1%	1%
Hawke's Bay	38	3%	3%
Whanganui	26	2%	2%
MidCentral	52	4%	4%
Hutt	47	4%	3%
Capital and Coast	99	8%	7%
Wairarapa	16	1%	1%
Nelson/ Marlborough	38	3%	3%
West Coast	14	1%	1%
Canterbury	147	12%	12%
South Canterbury	17	1%	2%
Southern	83	7%	7%
Total	1192	100%	100%

Region	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
Northland	41	3%	4%
Auckland	376	32%	34%
Waikato	100	8%	9%
Bay of Plenty	76	6%	7%
Taranaki	16	1%	1%
Gisborne/Hawkes' Bay	47	4%	3%
Wairarapa	16	1%	1%
Whanganui/ Manawatu/ Palmerston North	75	6%	6%
Wellington	146	12%	11%
Nelson/ Tasman/ Marlborough	38	3%	3%
Canterbury	164	14%	14%
West Coast	14	1%	1%
Otago	59	5%	5%
Southland	24	2%	2%
Total	1192	100%	100%

B) By health and disability status

Identify as disabled	n= (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	% (weighted)
No	997	84%	84%
Yes, minor mobility issues	130	11%	11%
Yes, more serious mobility issues	29	2%	2%
Yes, a vision impairment	35	3%	3%
Yes, a hearing impairment	47	4%	4%
Total	1191	104%	104%

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	633	53%	54%
Yes, a minor one that doesn't affect me too much	424	36%	35%
Yes, one that is more serious	134	11%	11%
Total	1191	100%	100%

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.

