

Research Insights

Taking the Pulse of the Nation

Australians paying increased attention to health care, but 4 in 5 Australians expect the impact of the pandemic to be around for longer than the next 3 months. Net satisfaction with government policies is trending down.

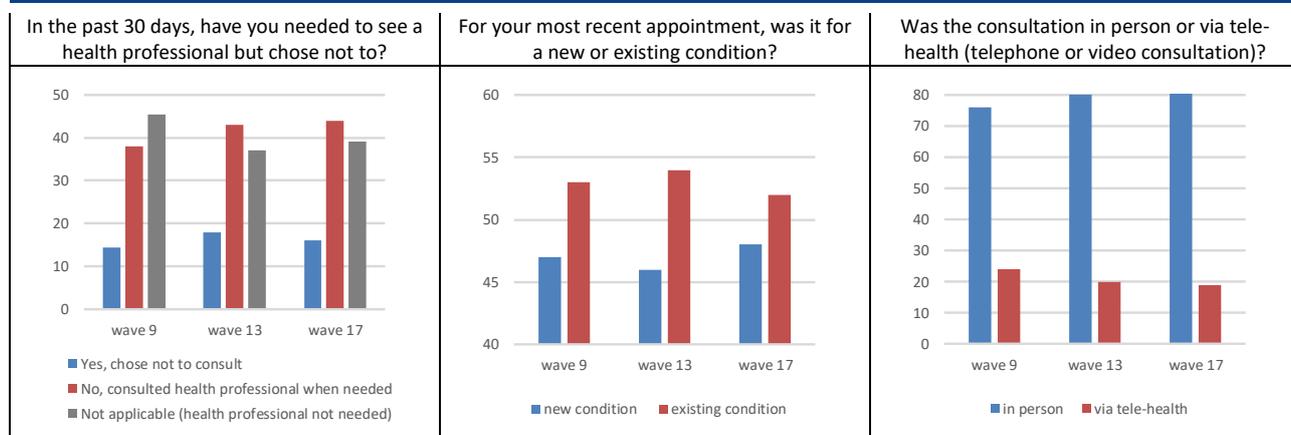
Melbourne Institute's Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia

Survey Results*: Wave 17 (17-21 August 2020)

Australians paying increased attention to health care, but 4 in 5 Australians expect the impact of the pandemic to be around for longer than the next 3 months. Net satisfaction with government policies is trending down.

- Satisfaction with government policies to support jobs and keep people at work appears to be trending down, from a high proportion of respondents, 69% in wave 2 (April 13-17) to 58% in waves 16 and 17. Over the same time frame, dis-satisfaction increased from a low of 13% (in wave 2) to 20% in the last 2 survey waves. Net satisfaction (proportion satisfied less proportion dis-satisfied) fell from 56% in wave 2 to 38% in wave 17. This pattern – a fall in net approval between waves 2 and 17 - was across all the States. SA had the smallest drop in approval (fall of 2 percentage points) while the largest change was recorded in Victoria (fall of 23 percentage points), possibly reflecting concerns about the handling of quarantines and cases in aged care facilities.
- Looking at financial stress (i.e. having difficulties paying for essential goods and services) throughout the 20 weeks of the survey, the proportion of Australians who are financially comfortable outweighed the proportion who are financially stressed. However, the group vulnerable to financial difficulties in the event of unexpected negative income and/or spending shocks also includes those just making ends meet. In other words, the majority of Australians are vulnerable to financial difficulties (the proportion has been above 50% throughout the 20 weeks) and there are still no clear signs of economic recovery.
- Looking at mental distress (i.e. feeling anxious or depressed most to all the time) the survey showed that the majority of Australians experience anxiety a little to none of the time (average of 57%). A closer look at the proportion experiencing mental distress most to all of the time shows that it fell a little around when restrictions were eased, but it is creeping up along with the realisation that the pandemic may not be over anytime soon.
- When survey respondents were asked to suggest how much longer they expect to be affected by the coronavirus pandemic (e.g. as it relates to their home activities, employment situation, and social interactions), the proportion of Australians expecting it to be under 3 months was less than 10% in waves 15 and 17 (with about another 10% expressing uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic). This suggests that about 4 in 5 Australians expect the pandemic to be around for longer than the next 3 months and this attitude is similar across the mainland States.
- The special question in this survey is about health and the responses show that Australians are paying more attention to health care. The proportion who have consulted a health professional when needed, have increased from 38% in wave 9 (1-5 June) to 44% in wave 17 with in-person consultations increasing from 76% to 81% (corresponding fall in use of telehealth from 24% to 19%).**

Figure 1: Are Australians looking after their health?



* The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population

** For more analysis, see Research Insight 23/20: Using health care during the pandemic: should I stay or should I go? By Professor Yuting Zhang, Dr. Judith Liu, and Professor Anthony Scott

Figure 2: How are Australians coping with COVID-19?
17 waves of surveys from April 6 to Aug 21



+ The question about feeling depressed is about assessing symptoms/experiences and not about assessing the presence of a clinical diagnosis or disorder. The proportion in the "don't know/refused" category, is very small and has been excluded from the figures.

++ Financial stress refers to the situation of having difficulties paying for essential goods and services while financial vulnerability refers to being in financial stress or making ends meet.

Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research

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About the survey

These results have been drawn from *Taking the Pulse of the Nation* - Melbourne Institute's survey of the impact of COVID-19. The aim of the weekly survey is to track changes in the economic and social wellbeing of Australians living through the effects of the coronavirus pandemic whilst adapting to various changes in Federal and State government policies.

The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over each week. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

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