

## Research Insights

# Taking the Pulse of the Nation

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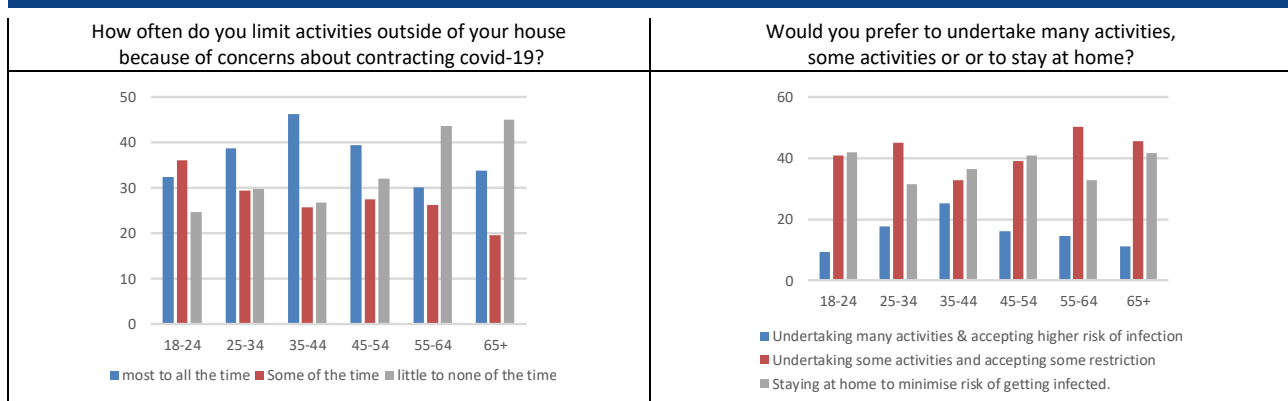
# Melbourne Institute’s Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia

## Survey Results\*: Wave 20 (5-10 October 2020)

*Proportion of Australians satisfied with government policies is the lowest on record for this survey and increasing social and economic activities may be challenging as only 3 in 4 are willing to be vaccinated and 1 in 3 still prefer to stay at home as much as possible to minimise the risk of contracting COVID-19.*

- On Tuesday October 6, the Federal Budget was handed down revealing a commitment to a fiscal stimulus package that will result in an underlying cash deficit in 2020-21 of \$213.7 billion (11.0 per cent of GDP). Despite the fiscal boost, satisfaction with government policies to support jobs is trending down. Satisfaction was highest in Wave 2 of the survey in early April (69%) but is now standing at 55%, the lowest on record for this survey. There are differences across the States, with satisfaction lowest in NSW (52%) and highest in WA (62%).
- Meanwhile, some improvements in the state of the economy appear to have had some mitigating effects on financial stress and mental distress. The proportion having difficulties paying for essential goods and services fell while the proportion being financially comfortable rose from 43% to 47%. Likewise, the proportion experiencing depression and anxiety some to most of the time fell (from 44% to 42%) while the proportion experiencing mental distress a little of the time (i.e. occasionally) rose from 55% to 57% (albeit these changes are within the statistical margin of error).
- The Federal Budget also assumed that the economy will recover on the back of a vaccine being developed and adopted widely. In this survey, we also asked: “If a vaccine for COVID-19 is developed and approved for use by the Australian Government, would you be willing to be vaccinated?”. Around 75% said “yes” (and this proportion is the majority across gender, age and location).\*\*
- The other interesting result in this survey is the revealed attitude of people in terms of whether they would prefer to engage more socially and economically (and risk getting infected) or to stay at home as much as possible (and minimise the risk of getting infected).
- The proportion limiting activities outside of their house (such as shopping, going to a restaurant or taking public transport, because of concerns about contracting Covid-19) most of the time, has fallen while the proportion limiting activities a little of the time has risen. However the behavioural pendulum has not swung to the point where more people limit activities only occasionally. This is particularly so for those aged between 25-54 years (see Figure 1, lhs) and this is of some concern as recovery requires more engagement with economic and social activities.
- In this survey, respondents were also asked to indicate their preference between 3 options: (a) continuing many normal daily activities (and hence accepting a higher risk of getting infected with COVID-19), (b) undertaking some activities and accepting some restrictions (such as wearing masks in public places), (c) staying at home as much as possible to minimise the risk of getting infected. A minority, 16% picked (a) while 2 in 5 picked (b) or (c) (i.e., 42% and 37% respectively). There are differences across the States (with more people in Victoria preferring to stay at home). However this cautious attitude, evident across the ages (Figure 1, rhs), is not encouraging for promoting

**Figure 1: Limiting or Undertaking more Activities: Proportions (%)**



\* 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.

\*\* See Research Insight 29/20, How does your view of government affect your willingness to be vaccinated against COVID-19? By Marco Castillo & Ragan Petrie

**Figure 2: How are Australians coping with COVID-19?**  
20 waves of surveys from April 6 to October 10 (Proportions, %)<sup>+</sup>



+ 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.

+++ The question about feeling depressed is about assessing symptoms/experiences and not about assessing the presence of a clinical diagnosis or disorder.

# Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research

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## About the survey

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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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