

Research Insights

Taking the Pulse of the Nation

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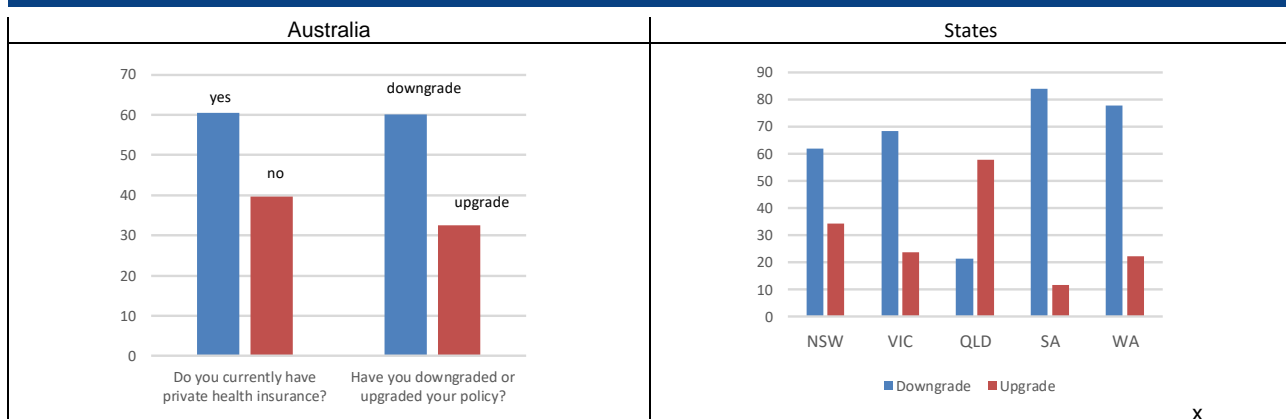
Melbourne Institute's Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia

Survey Results*: Wave 21 (19-23 October 2020)

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- All States in Australia, except Victoria, appear to be on the road to economic recovery. In this Report, attention is paid to how Victorians coped with the pandemic compared to the rest of Australia. The survey was conducted in the week when Victoria was still in a lockdown.
- About 1 in 5 Australians were dis-satisfied with government policies to support jobs in October and this proportion is the same as that in early April (the period immediately following the announcement of the imposition of lockdowns and the closure of borders in Australia). Dis-satisfaction was lower around May when JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments began to flow, but the proportion dis-satisfied crept up when people realised that restrictions were likely to be around for a prolonged period. Australians have lived through seven months in a COVID-19 pandemic environment, and the proportion dissatisfied has ranged from a low of 13% to a current high of 22%. In wave 21, dissatisfaction was highest in Victoria (28%) compared to NSW (20%), QLD (22%), SA(16%) and WA (18%).
- On average, over 21 waves (7 months), about 1 in 4 Australians have reported difficulties paying for essential goods and services. This proportion has varied between waves, varying in the range 20% to 31% throughout the weeks of lockdowns and easing of restrictions. Despite Victorians living through a second wave of coronavirus infections and a second period of lockdown, in wave 21, the proportion of people in Victoria under financial stress was 31%, which is not significantly different from the proportions in QLD (29%) and WA (29%). It appears that 1 in 3 people in the two states dependent on trade in resources and in tourism remain financially vulnerable. For completeness, the corresponding proportions for the other 2 States were: NSW (25%) and SA (26%).
- On average, about 1 in 5 Australians have experienced anxiety and felt depressed most of the time during the past 7 months. This proportion has varied between 15% to 21% throughout 21 waves and 7 months of coping with the pandemic. In wave 21, the proportion in Victoria was 27%, compared to the proportions in NSW (19%), QLD (20%) SA (26%) and WA (20%). In all States, the majority have reported experiencing mental distress a little of the time.
- Despite easing of restrictions, 59% of Australians still expect the pandemic to affect their normal activities for longer than 6 months. The proportions across the States are: VIC (58%), NSW (61%), QLD (61%) SA (56%) and WA (55%).
- The special question in this wave is about private health insurance (PHI). About 60% have and 40% don't have PHI. Moreover, since March 2020, 20% have changed the coverage of their PHI, and within this group, 60% have downgraded while 32% have upgraded their private health insurance policies (with changes more likely to occur amongst those who are financially stressed and those who are mentally distressed) ** Queensland is the only State where there were more upgrades than downgrades of PHI policies.

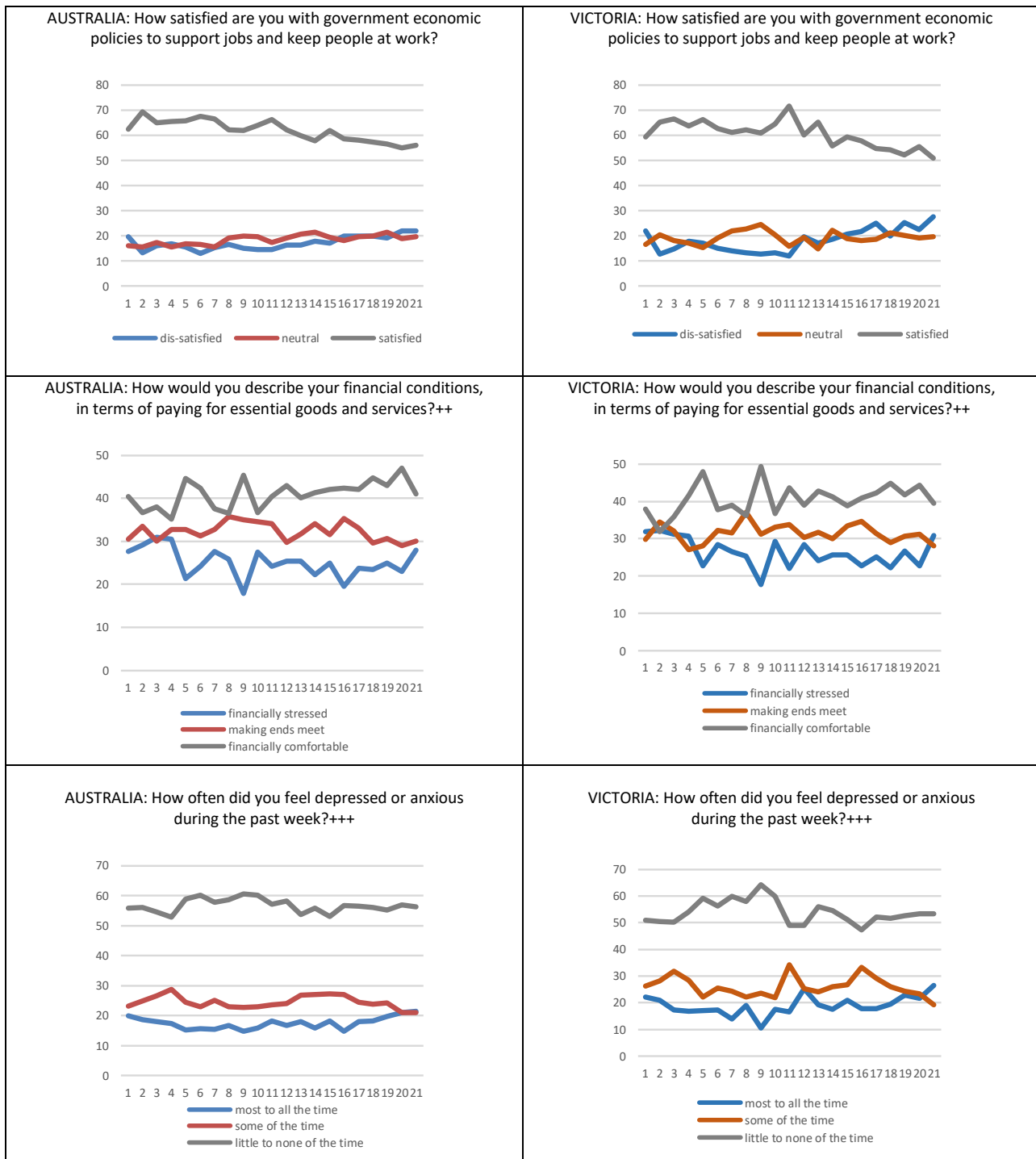
Figure 1: Private Health Insurance (Proportions, %)



* 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 30/20, Who is ditching private health insurance during the pandemic? by Yuting Zhang.

Figure 2: How are Australians coping with COVID-19?
21 waves of surveys from April 6 to October 23 (Proportions, %)+



+ 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

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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