

Research Insights

Taking the Pulse of the Nation

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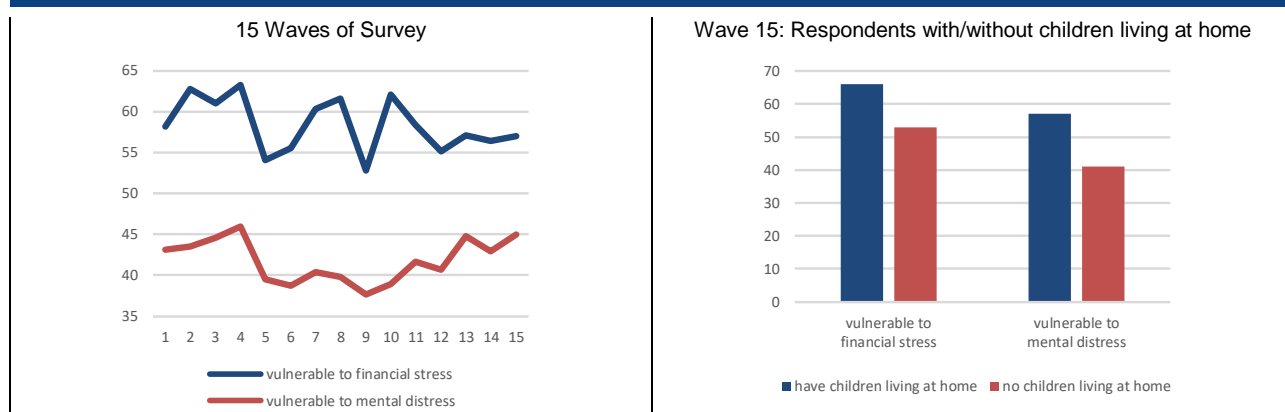
Melbourne Institute's Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia

Survey Results*: Wave 15 (20–24 July 2020)

A majority of Australians would choose to stay at home as much as possible to minimise the risk of infection, but Australians with children living at home are more vulnerable to financial stress and mental distress.

- Australia is getting to the point when many people are faced with the choice between staying at home to minimise the risk of infection or continuing normal daily activities and accepting an increased risk of infection. When respondents were asked to nominate their preference, an overwhelming majority of people (77%) chose to stay at home compared to 20% who chose to undertake normal activities. Across the States, 86% of Victorians opted to stay at home and 13% opted to accept the risk of getting infected; for Queensland, the corresponding percentages were 66% (stay at home) and 31% (undertake normal activities). These revealed preferences understandably reflect the current situation where Victoria is experiencing a second wave of coronavirus infections while the pandemic in Queensland appears to be contained.
- In this survey we also asked respondents to assume that they are able to leave home to undertake usual activities and to nominate the number of new cases per day (in their local community) that would make them think about staying at home as much as possible. The five top responses for cases per day were: 1 (17%), 10 (14%), 5 (11%), 2 and 100 (both at 7%). About 10% of respondents did not volunteer a number, for cases per day. A closer look at the data also showed that, regardless of demographic characteristics and preferences to continue with normal activities, a single-digit number of new cases is enough to make Australians consider staying at home as much as possible.
- Respondents are also expressing concerns that the effect of the coronavirus will not be over soon. In mid-May (wave 7), when respondents were asked how long they expected to be impacted by the coronavirus, 41% said it would be under six months while 56% expected it to be longer. Eight weeks later in wave 15, only 25% of Australians expect the duration to be under six months compared to 67% who expect it to be longer.
- Meanwhile, the proportion vulnerable to financial stress (i.e. those having difficulties paying for essential goods and services and just making ends meet) and those vulnerable to mental distress (i.e. experiencing depression and anxiety some, most, and all of the time) have edged up. (See Figure 1). And while staying at home might be a preferred choice for many, respondents with children (under 18 years) living at home are more vulnerable to financial stress and mental distress, than respondents without children living at home.**
- Satisfaction with government policies to support jobs and keep people at work improved from 58% in wave 14 to 62% in wave 15, following the announcement on 21 July that the JobKeeper and JobSeeker support schemes will be extended, albeit with reduced payments. Satisfaction with policy is still below the 66% recorded in wave 11.

Figure 1: Vulnerability to financial stress and mental distress: proportions (%)

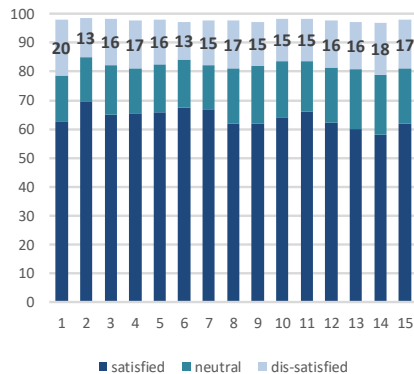


* The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

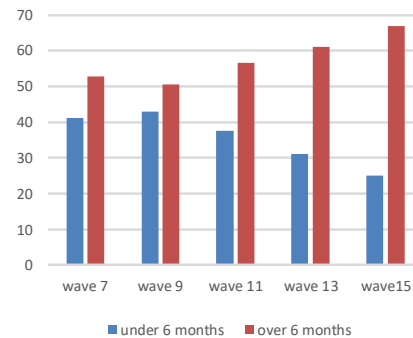
** see Research Insight "Behind closed doors: the surge in mental distress of parents" by B. Broadway, J. Moschion and S. Mendez

Figure 2: How are Australians coping with COVID-19?
15 waves of surveys from April 6 to July 24

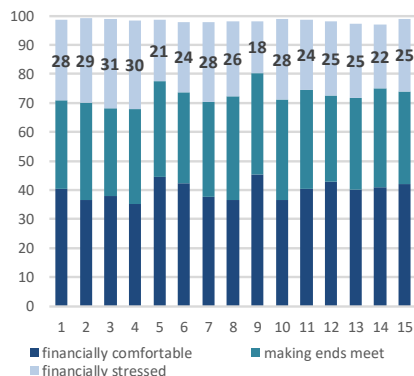
How satisfied are you with government economic policies to support jobs and keep people at work?



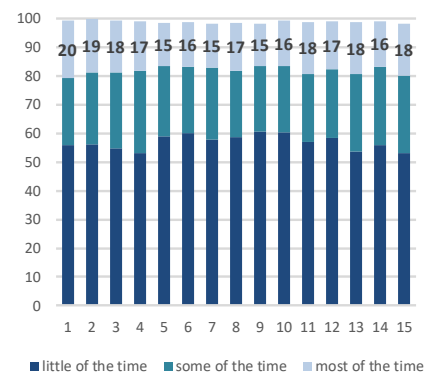
How much longer do you think you personally will be affected by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic (e.g. as it relates to your home activities, employment situation, and social interactions)?



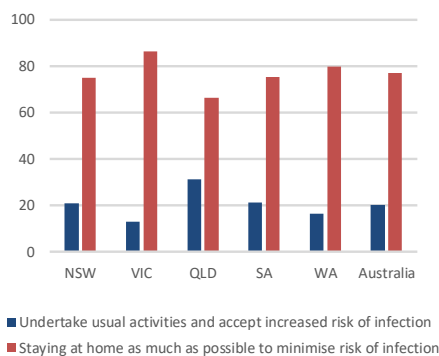
How would you describe your financial conditions, in terms of paying for essential goods and services?++



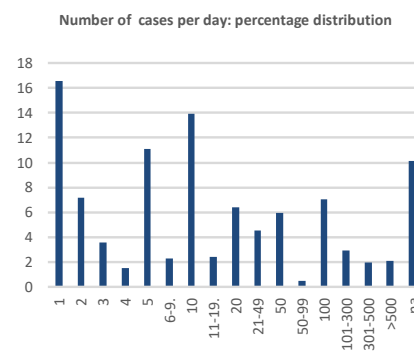
How often did you feel depressed or anxious during the past week?+



Which of the following two choices would you personally prefer?



How many new cases per day (in your local community) would there need to be, for you to choose to stay at home as much as possible?



+ 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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