Research Insights

Taking the Pulse of the Nation

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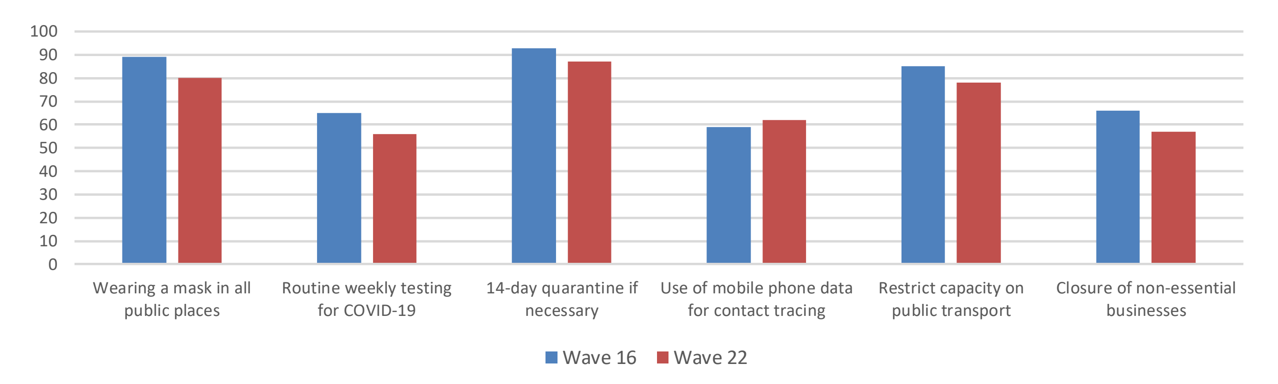
Melbourne Institute's Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia

Survey Results*: Wave 22 (2-8 November 2020)

About 1 in 3 Australians are still limiting activities outside their homes and while support is up (slightly) for contact tracing, support is down for wearing masks, routine weekly testing, closure of non-essential businesses, 14-day quarantine period and restricting capacity on public transport.

- Australia appears to be on the road to economic recovery as all States ease restrictions and allow more social and economic interactions, including greater mobility of people within and between the states. In wave 22, the proportion of people limiting activities outside their homes because of concerns about contracting Covid19 was 35% (down from 46% in wave 16 in early August). However, the proportion for Australia is heavily influenced by the high proportion for Victoria (45%). For completeness, the proportions for the other states were: NSW (35%), QLD (32%), SA (33%) and WA (23%).
- Importantly, survey results for the question about whether spending is more, the same or less than at January 2020, showed that the proportion "spending more" has increased compared to corresponding proportions in the previous two waves when this question was asked (namely wave 18, in early September and wave 14, in early July). Alternatively, the proportion spending less has decreased over 3 survey waves. This holds for both actual spending and expected spending (6 months from time of survey). This result reflects the rebound in consumption expenditure and importantly signals an expected growth in consumption (albeit still low, for now).
- Satisfaction with government policies to support jobs has been trending down. Conversely, dissatisfaction has been creeping up and the proportion dissatisfied is now at a high of 23% (and now also greater than the proportion who are neither satisfied or dissatisfied, at 19%). In wave 22, the proportions dissatisfied across the states were: NSW (25%), VIC (25%), QLD (19%), SA(30%) and WA (17%).
- In wave 22, the proportion of Australians reporting that they had experienced anxiety and felt depressed most to all of the time was 23%, exceeding the proportion experiencing mental distress some of the time (19%). There seems to be an age effect, with the proportions for the age groups under 44 years exceeding the national average; specifically, the latest proportions were: 18-24 years (29%), 25-34 years (36%) and 35-44 (38%).
- The proportion of Australians making ends meet has fallen from 35% in wave 16 to 29% in wave 22, increasing the pool of people susceptible to adverse income shocks. This is particularly acute for the youngest age-group – 18-24 – where the proportion financially stressed exceeded the proportion financially comfortable by 15 ppts.
- The special question in this survey wave assessed people's willingness to accept various preventive measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. The survey identified an increase in support for use of mobile phone data for contact tracing (up from 59% in wave 16 to 62%), but support is down by 9 ppts for wearing masks, for routine weekly testing and for the closure of non-essential businesses. There was a 6 ppts decrease in support for a 14-day quarantine period and a 7 ppts decrease in support for restricting capacity on public transport. Overall support for preventive measures remains high, but fatigue may be creeping in.

Figure 1: Proportions (%) supporting preventive measures (comparing responses in Waves 16 and 22)

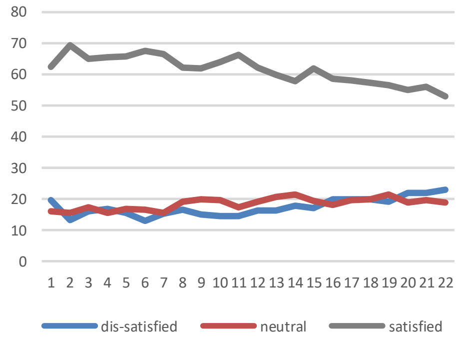


* The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

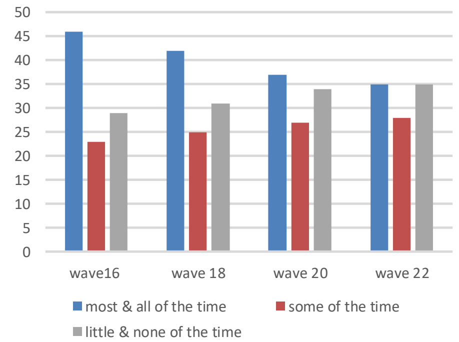
Figure 2: How are Australians coping with COVID-19?

22 waves of surveys from April 6 to November 8 (Proportions, %)+

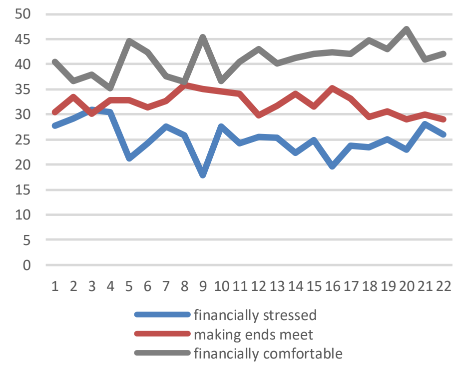
How satisfied are you with government economic policies to support jobs and keep people at work?



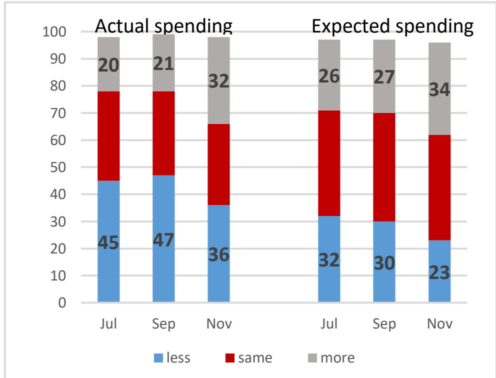
How often do you limit activities outside of your house because of concerns about contracting covid-19?



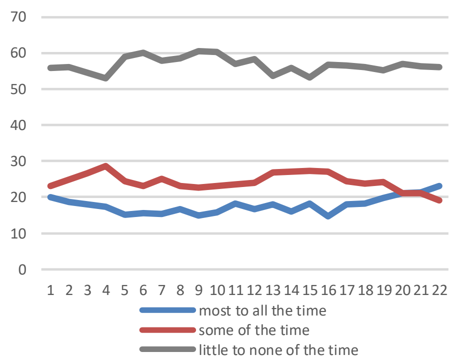
How would you describe your financial conditions, in terms of paying for essential goods and services?++



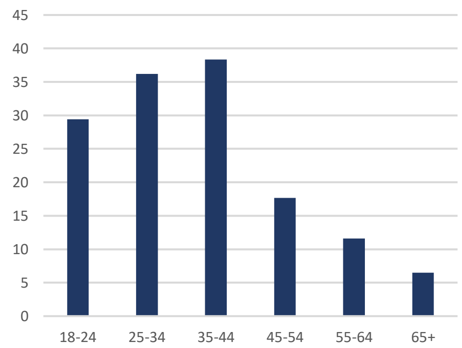
Is your spending more, the same or less than that in January 2020? Actual as at time of survey; Expected is for 6 months from now



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



Proportion (%) who feel depressed or anxious most to all the time (Age-groups)



+ 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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