

# Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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## KEY INSIGHTS

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Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research<sup>3</sup> undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

### Building a Better Society

A key theme raised by participants was that New Zealand's post-COVID-19 response was seen as an opportunity to initiate significant societal change. They saw it as an opportunity, not to just build back or return to normal, but to build a better society:

*I think it's a great opportunity for New Zealand to lead in the way that it resets (MWB2).*

*Well, I think the thing is we've got – we're having such massive change now, that we've got the chance to change it in a way that's good (MWB81).*

Participants regarded the response process as a real opportunity to address issues affecting New Zealand's societal well-being (i.e. our ability to live well together):

*I think a lot more people are...aware of how interdependent we are, which gives the lie to...individual success being the pinnacle...of what we should strive for.... I think people have recognised that. Far more people have recognised that... (MWB7).*

*I'd love a strong national team ethos based on looking after each other to continue (MWB79).*

*I think I would like to see us as a nation being more supportive of those who are significantly impacted by a wellbeing deficit, whether that's financial or social or cultural (MWB91).*

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<sup>3</sup> A background and methodology report is available from [StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz](mailto:StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz)

While many hoped the Government would be bold, there was a tinge of pessimism from some participants that nothing would change and that we would just return to our old ways of doing things once the pandemic was over:

*So, all governments around the world have the opportunity to really do better at a systemic level, which will take some thinking and some insights and some courage, and I hope the New Zealand government takes the bull by the horns and acts on that and actually makes systemic change as opposed to squandering the opportunity (MWB30).*

*I was really disappointed in that national messaging, that we all want to get back to normal as quickly as possible, and I just felt like I didn't want to get back to normal at all. I had thought it was a real opportunity for significant change (MWB76).*

*...if I was feeling very optimistic, we would extend this, ...to things like housing and increasing benefits to a liveable level, and caring about the environment, and caring about everyone having access to food and healthcare in ways that is not equal in New Zealand. I think that we will not see that radical change in those things, unfortunately (MWB79).*

Others were more optimistic, noting that New Zealand's COVID-19 response showed that we could come together and address significant issues facing New Zealand. If we could do it for COVID-19, then,

*... what kind of response could we make to poverty in New Zealand? What kind of response could we make towards sustainable living and climate change? What kind of response could we make towards housing people in a more equitable society? In a way that would really improve people's quality of life and relationships (MWB40).*

As indicated by the above quotes, there was a strong desire for societal change from participants. Participants spoke to a wide range of topics that they deemed important contributors to improving societal well-being in New Zealand (i.e. inequality, tourism, economic paradigms, climate change, health, etc.). While not all these concerns were the direct result of COVID-19, the pandemic has brought these underlying issues to the fore – leading many to reflect on 'what kind of society do we want in New Zealand?'

*So yeah, maybe there's some collective thought around the kind of society that we want to create moving forward and how we can do that together (MWB41).*

*I think we can have social, economic, and sustainable outcomes flow out of this crisis that are more positive than what we've had before. ... So, I think that there are real opportunities in rethinking a little bit on what makes a good life in New Zealand and what makes a good life in general, and that we can push towards that and do lots of good things on the way (MWB2).*