

Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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KEY INSIGHTS

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. Research³ 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.

COVID-19 Communications

A common theme from our interviews was appreciation for Government communications about the COVID-19 pandemic response. People usually noted that it contributed to their sense of well-being and wanted to see that communication style continue:

I thought [the communication] was really good to be honest, I thought, I don't think anybody could have done better, to be honest. I think it was calm, it was factual, it was honest, empathetic, as clear as can be, given what we were dealing with. So, I think that was, I think it was good (MWB43).

I felt like the government handled everything very clearly and we watched our one o'clock updates, and we felt like we knew what the plan was and that the plan was working and that we would eventually come out of it. You could tell reasonably quickly that we weren't going to end up in a prolonged lockdown. A lot of our friends talked on social media and what do we think about this? Everyone seems to be reasonably positive, so I think just feeling like we knew what the plan was made a big difference to that, and so we felt confident that we would be back to some sense of normality quite quickly (MWB64).

I thought they responded well, and I liked the way they fronted it and stood up every day and said what was going on. And trying to tell people what they knew and what was the truth rather than hiding things or anything like that, which some other countries have attempted to do (MWB90).

...I think New Zealand will be looked upon as a case study in terms of response and communication... (MWB9).

³ A background and methodology report is available from StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz

I think we've had that very clear messaging around COVID and I hope that that will continue (MWB54).

While people generally praised the Government's style of communication, they were more critical of other information sources:

They [the mainstream media] use that term [breaking news] all the time when in fact I think it needs to be used a bit more selectively. It just doesn't help with anxiety levels if you've got breaking news coming up on your phone. ...So that alarmist kind of thing, that would be nice to leave that behind, ...but I guess that's always the case isn't it, the media likes bad stories, negative stories (MWB4).

Well, I did appreciate the Director of Public Health, I appreciated both his and Jacinda Arden's their unemotive factual responses to everything. I really appreciated knowing – I didn't want to be persuaded and I'm incredibly intolerant of politicians bad-mouthing each other, and newspapers looking for dramatic stories as well. So, I found their approach and their reporting to be refreshing and believable and a nice, calm steady way of dealing with things. So, I felt empowered because of it (MWB63).

I didn't take much notice of social media because generally I find that's a really unreliable source of information (MWB67).

...it kind of annoyed me, all of the media emphasis on how dreadful the test was (MWB56).

Another common response from participants was an appreciation of the science-based approach the Government has taken in their response thinking, planning, and communication. Furthermore, people liked hearing directly from the scientists:

...the communication's been so good, – it's been very clear, very compassionate. I've really enjoyed all the scientists (MWB9).

[They were] communicating to [the] general public some quite heavy-going science stuff. So Siouxsie [Wiles] was amazing there, I think. It really has opened up science, I think, to people more. And I thought the communication of that was really awesome (MWB101).

...the advice that the government got from those key people who are indeed scientists, who are indeed virologists, who are indeed bacteriologists, I don't think you could get a better line-up of advisers that a government could use. It's not your blooming auntie around the corner that's giving the opinion, these are opinions of professional people (MWB72).

Participants wanted to see this science-based approach adopted and expanded into other spheres beyond the COVID-19 response:

Science has been communicated really well, is my first thought....and I wish other science was taken as seriously (MWB71).

That collaboration between government and science, it'd be nice to think it's established a working pattern. Again, probably wishful thinking on my part but that that then is applied to other issues and spheres of life. Hopefully, it can be seen that that's worked really well, so maybe people can see that relying on science is a good thing and it works, and it helps (MWB4).