

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.

Teenagers and Young Adults

A common area of concern raised by participants was the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic response, and the economy in general, on younger generations, and what that might mean for their future prospects:

Long-term I do worry about how [the money pumped into the economy is] going to be paid back. My kids are teenagers and what that means for the workforce in the future I think is a concern (MWB4).

I'm still quite worried about where we're heading with our economy and that's mainly around the cost of housing, it's really driving a division. It's creating classes of the landers and the landless, and that's only going to get worse, and every-day house prices are going up and rents are going up. It's not a sustainable system that we've built, and it's really going to start biting pretty hard. As my kids move into their adulthood, I think there's going to be some really tough issues that we're going to be facing as a society as a result, and I'm really frustrated that the government's refusing to deal with that. It seems like it's just chucking petrol on the fire really and it's not really going to be great, and I'm worried about the sorts of social issues as a result of those economic issues (MWB89).

I think probably the only thing I really worry about is the future for our children....we've got two at university and everybody's managed to stay pretty stable, but I do worry there's not going to be the same opportunities for them as far as buying houses and stuff like that and jobs, just the economic impact it's going to have on them and their future (MWB53).

The environmental legacy being left behind for younger generations to deal with was raised by participants; however, it was noted that there was a high awareness of the issue among young people:

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

...my great nieces are teenagers, or one's just turned 20, and I'm worried about them. Because we've made a mess of this planet and we're just going to walk away and leave them to pay it off...I'm worried about what kind of future they're going to have...[But young people's] awareness of climate change and the loss of native species and things like that, really impresses me. Because people in my own age group or even 20 years younger don't know or care. But the under 25s do, and I find that positive (MWB35).

A big issue identified by participants was that the pandemic has meant young people have had to put dreams and plans on hold, or worse, give them up. Examples included teenagers having to leave school to find work to support families, students unable to study abroad, job losses, and those unable to go on their Big OE (overseas experience). Of main concern were the mental health impacts resulting from this:

It'll be interesting to see the impact on young people, I guess even just looking at friends and family it's the people that are just starting – I've got friends planning to go studying abroad that are not able to, they're having to change university. So yeah, I can imagine that's a big impact at the start of your life (MWB9).

...it's a loss to our students not being able to go – essentially not being able to go overseas to do their tertiary education or go on an OE, because these experiences are so valuable (MWB2).

A lot of the younger people that I talk to and deal with and some of those who perhaps don't have the benefit of some savings I think a lot of those have – some of those have struggled. Some of the younger people have suffered from depression. And so, I think it's possibly hit the younger people harder...I think it's...[not] having the resources to cope with the uncertainty but it's also for a lot of them it's their dreams have been bashed. And I think when that happens, whether it's your school year or your gap year or whatever, you can feel a little bit frustrated, hard done by, ...disappointed, frustrated, ...depressed, whatever (MWB10).

For some young people and teenagers, the lockdown meant they could not see their partners due to bubble restrictions. If they were living in flats/shared accommodation it also had impacts on space, particularly for those that had to work from home:

...a lot of my flatmates have partners who don't live at the flat, so they couldn't see their partner for the first 3 months, basically, which...was pretty tough for them. [Also]...I really love my flat, but the reality of having...a separate place to your bedroom to setup a workstation, it's just not the reality for most people, not in my age group...I felt really lucky that I've got a desk in my bedroom, a lot of people I know don't have desks, and they weren't able to get one, so they were working on their bed (MWB79).

The freedom of movement and the ability to socialise in person and attend events with others, due to the Government's response, is appreciated and has contributed to the well-being of young people:

...the things I missed are very precious, like being able to go to the ocean or go to the pool, or going to work, or seeing people I care about in person, and going to a gig. All those things I did before, but they feel really precious. I just feel a lot more grateful for routine things that we're able to do now (MWB79).