

# Attitudes towards Ageing 2021

Research commissioned by the Office for Seniors



**Te Tari Kaumātua**  
Office for Seniors

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

Te Tari Kaumātua – Office for Seniors works to improve the lives of older people across New Zealand by providing information, promoting the wellbeing and concerns of older people and increasing awareness of the issues facing our ageing population.

Attitudes towards older people and ageing can have an influence on how well we enjoy our later years and our efforts to plan for the challenges and opportunities that come with an ageing population. The Office for Seniors commissioned research to better understand individual views on how we value age, our outlook as we age, age-related discrimination and our preparedness for an older population.

The first *Attitudes towards Ageing* report was published in 2016, with data collected in 2015. Its findings helped to inform the development of the Government's strategy for our ageing population, Better Later Life – He Oranga Kaumātua 2019 to 2034 (Better Later Life).

This is the second *Attitudes towards Ageing* report. Using the same research methodology, many of the same important questions were asked. This has enabled us to compare the findings with the 2016 report. The *Attitudes towards Ageing 2021* report also considers the COVID-19 pandemic and questions specifically relating to Better Later Life. More analysis on these topics will be added as supplementary resources to this report, which will be published on the Office for Seniors [website](#).

Understanding New Zealanders' attitudes to ageing and older people will help central and local government, policymakers, businesses and communities plan for a society where, in 15 years' time, more than one in five of us will be aged 65. The findings of this report will be used to support work to improve outcomes for older people and ensure older people in New Zealand lead valued, connected and fulfilling lives.

# Executive summary

## How we value age

We have found that most respondents (81%) have great respect for older people. This level of respect in 2021 hasn't changed when compared to the 2016 report (83%).

Many recognised the contributions older people make to society. Of those who responded to the survey, 50% consider older people to be an asset to society, and only 10% see older people more as a burden.

## Our outlook as we age

The analysis of the data showed that concerns about ageing decrease as we age. Those in younger age groups (18 to 49) worry more about what life will be like when they reach later life than people in older age groups. The main concerns about ageing are (a) becoming physically ill or disabled, and (b) becoming mentally ill or getting dementia. These were consistent across all the age groups.

Overall, respondents are mostly optimistic about the future. When asked, 4 in 10 said their life in 5 years will be better than it is now. Those aged 18 to 34 were more likely to think this way. Only 1 in 10 thought their life in 5 years would be worse than it is now.

## Age-related discrimination

Over a third of respondents (35%) believe that age discrimination is a serious issue. Different age groups rated the seriousness of age discrimination differently, with those aged 35 to 64 being more likely than other age groups to say it is serious.

## New Zealand's preparedness for an ageing population

Almost half (49%) of the respondents are confident that New Zealand will be well prepared for an ageing population. This is an increase when compared to the 2016 report (38%). Those aged 18 to 34 are more likely to feel confident about our preparedness for an ageing population than those aged 35+.

## Suggested changes to ensure older New Zealanders lead valued, connected and fulfilling lives

We asked respondents to suggest one change that would make the most progress towards achieving the Better Later Life vision for older New Zealanders to lead valued, connected and fulfilling lives. The most common responses focused on financial and funding issues, including adequacy of NZ Superannuation, retirement planning and savings.

## **Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on respondents' attitudes towards older people and getting older**

For about 70% of respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic has not changed their attitude towards older people, nor has it changed their attitude towards getting older.

It is noteworthy that 23% of respondents said the pandemic had a positive impact on their attitude towards older people, and 16% said the pandemic had a positive impact on their attitude towards getting older.

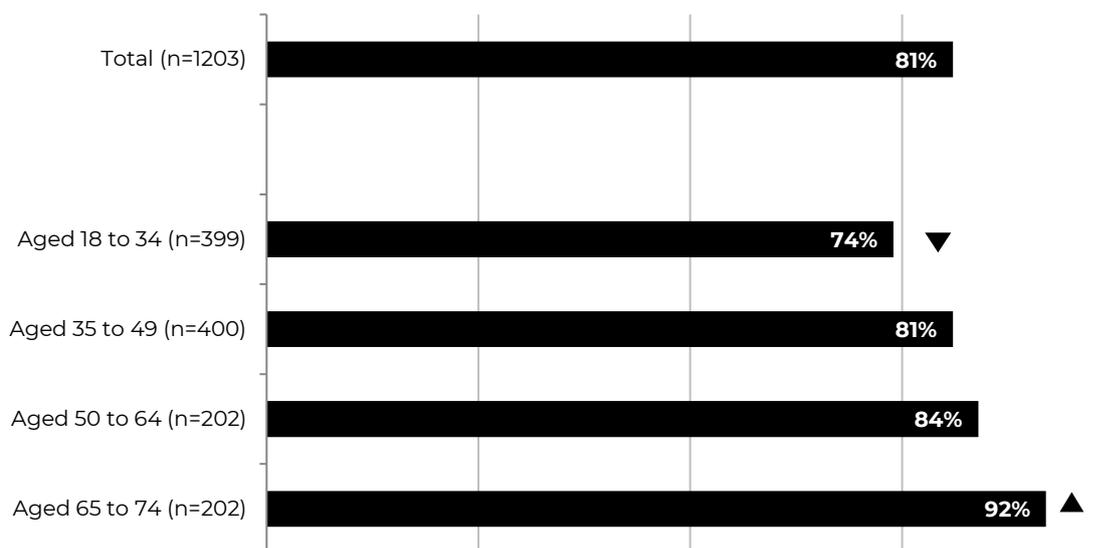
# Findings

## How we value age

### There are high levels of respect for older people

Most respondents under 75 (81%) have great respect for older people. Those aged 65 to 74 have the highest levels of respect, with nearly all (92%) stating they have great respect for older people. Figure 1 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents' level of respect for older people.

**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who have great respect for older people, by age group**

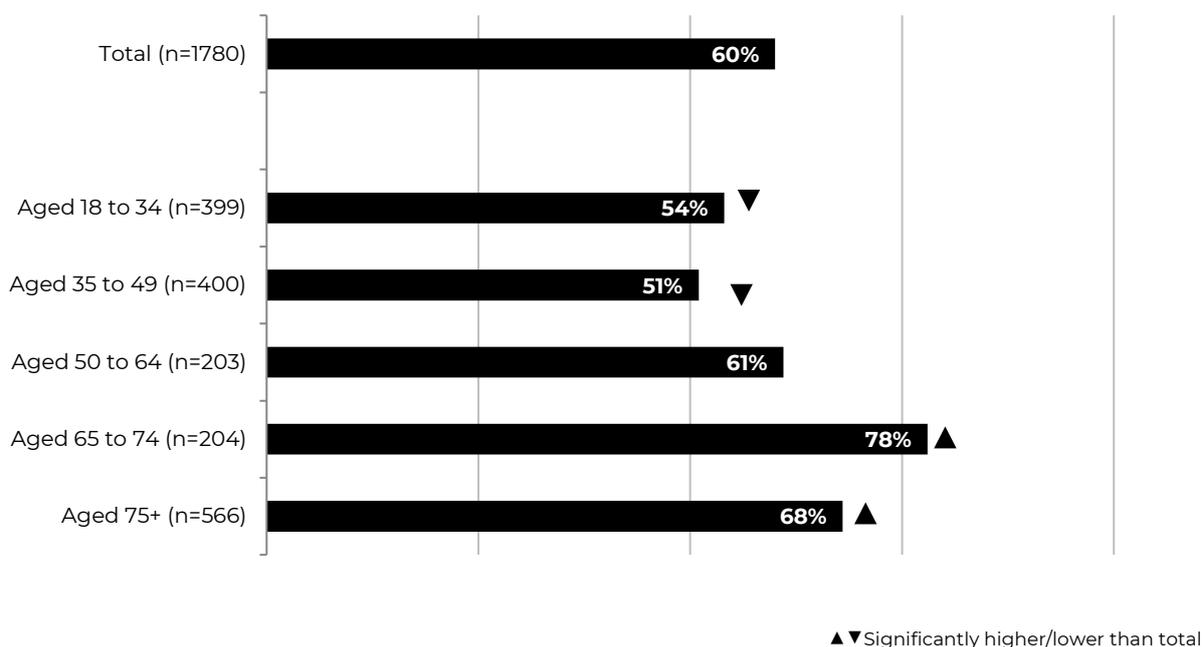


▲ ▼ Significantly higher/lower than total

## Attitudes towards age, by age group

Respondents aged 65+ are more likely to be proud to tell people their age than those who are younger than 65. For those aged 65 to 74, there has been a positive increase since the data was collected for the 2016 *Attitudes towards Ageing* report (2021 = 78%; 2016 = 67%). Figure 2 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents who are proud to tell people their age.

**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who are proud to tell people their age, by age group**

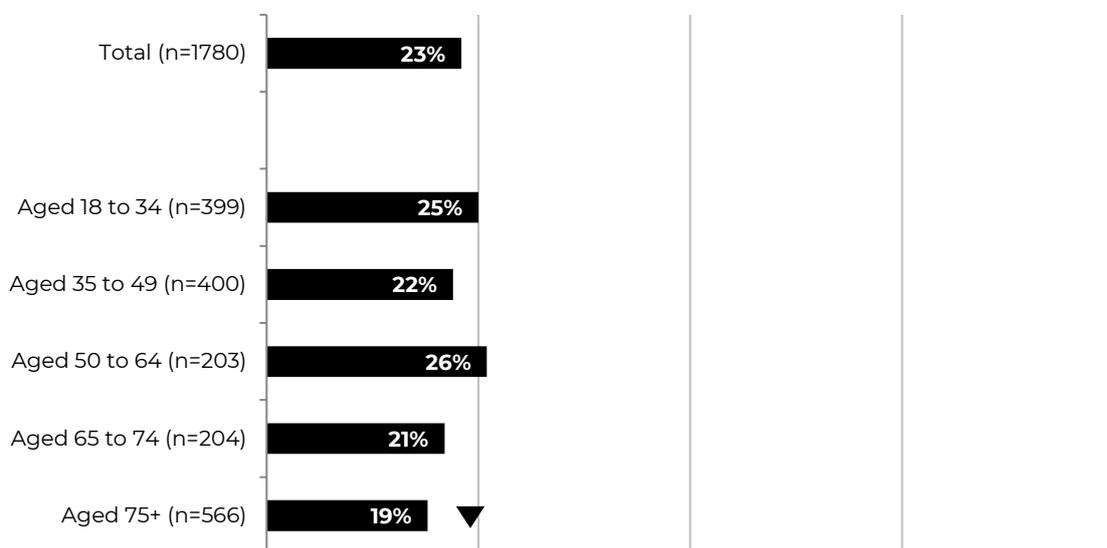


## Some feel invisible because of their age

Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) sometimes feel invisible because of their age. Those aged 50 to 64 are the most likely to sometimes feel invisible (26%).

For those under 49 this feeling of invisibility has increased since 2016 (aged 18 to 34: 2021 = 25%, 2016 = 19%; aged 35 to 49: 2021 = 22%, 2016 = 15%). Figure 3 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents who sometimes feel invisible because of their age.

**Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who sometimes feel invisible because of their age, by age group**



▲ ▼ Significantly higher/lower than total

## Most respondents consider older people an asset to society

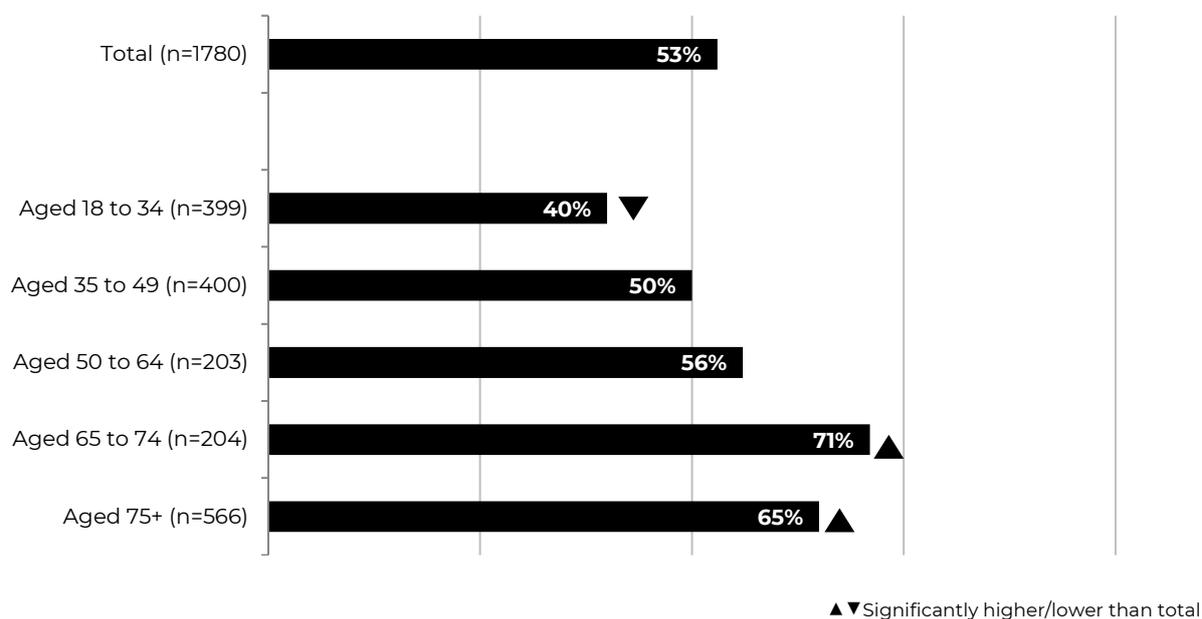
More than half of respondents (53%, compared to 54% in the 2016 report) feel that older people are an asset to society and bring benefits and value to society. A small proportion (9%) see older people more as a burden, and 38% see them as neither an asset nor a burden.

Those in the older age groups (aged 65+) are more likely to regard older people as an asset to society (aged 65 to 74: 71%; aged 75+: 65%).

Only 40% of those aged 18 to 34 consider older people an asset to society.

Figure 4 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents who view older people as an asset to society.

**Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who consider older people an asset to society, by age group**



## Negative stereotypes outstrip positive

Respondents were asked to write down three words to describe a typical older person in New Zealand. Many of the words they chose are descriptive of situations (e.g. retired grandparent) or appearance (grey-haired, wrinkled).

Negative stereotypes were mentioned more commonly than positive. This is a change from the 2016 *Attitudes towards Ageing* report, where positive stereotypes were more common than negative ones.

Examples of negative stereotypes are that older people are slowing down, wrinkled, have health issues and are frail. The most widely mentioned positive words respondents used in relation to older people were: wise, happy, sprightly, life experienced, kind and knowledgeable. Many of these words were also used by respondents in the 2016 report.

## **Our outlook as we age**

### **Respondents were mostly optimistic about their future**

When asked if they thought their life in 5 years' time will be better, worse or about the same as it is now:

- 4 in 10 thought it would be better
- 4 in 10 thought it would be the same
- 1 in 10 thought it would be worse
- 1 in 10 didn't know.

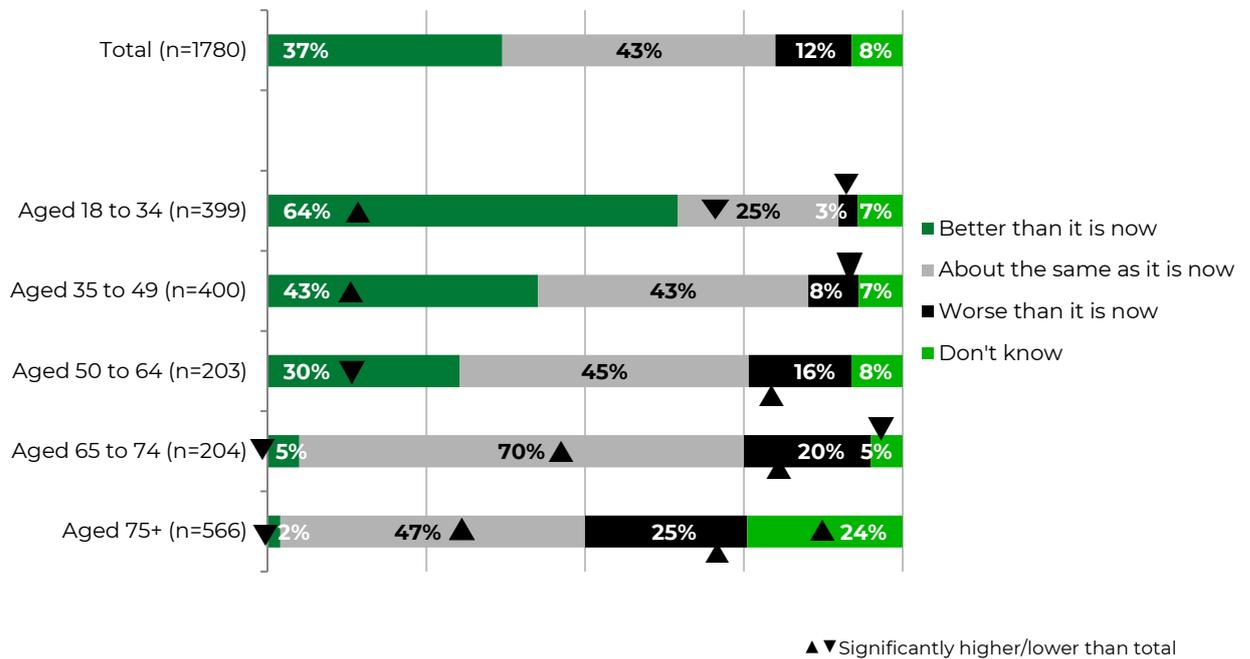
Those aged 18 to 34 were more likely to think that their life in 5 years will be better than it is now. This is an increase from 2016 (2021 = 64%; 2016 = 55%).

There has been no significant change in the views of the other age groups.

The majority of those aged 35 to 49 and 50 to 64 think their life will be better or about the same. The majority of those aged 65 to 74 think it will be about the same as it is now – this is the same proportion as in 2016.

Figure 5 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents' rating on how life will be in 5 years' time.

**Figure 5: Rating how life will be in 5 years' time, by age group**



The two aspects that respondents are most looking forward to as they get older are:

- having more time to spend on the things they want to do
- having freedom to do as much or as little as they want when they want.

### Concerns about ageing decrease with age

The level of worry about what later life will be like has increased since the 2016 *Attitudes towards Ageing* report (2021 = 54%; 2016 = 49%).

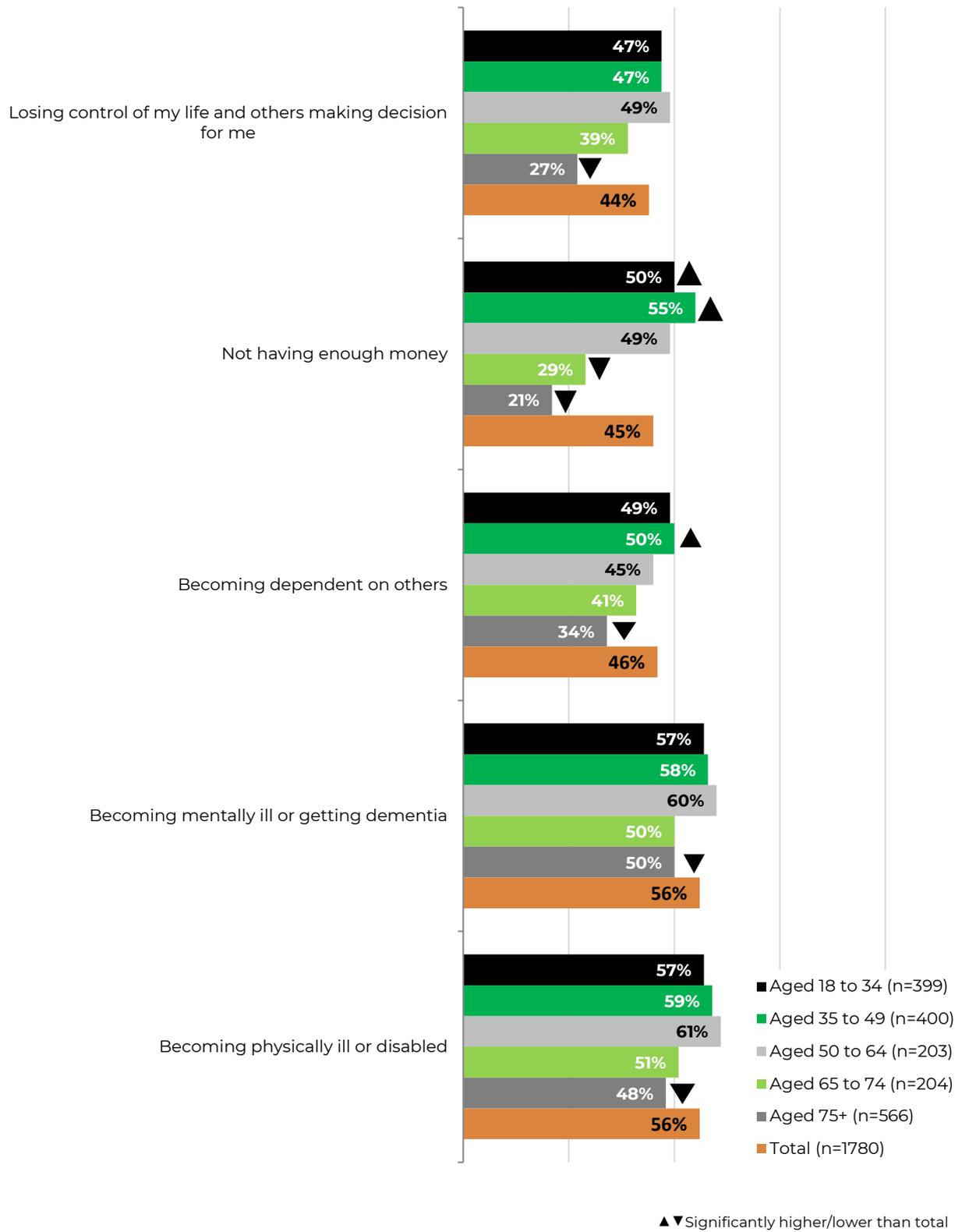
Of those in the younger age groups (18 to 34 and 35 to 49), 6 in 10 worry about what life will be like when they reach later life. This level of worry decreases as age increases, with 5 in 10 worrying in the 50 to 64 age group, and 4 in 10 worrying in the 65 to 74 age group.

For all age groups, the main concerns about getting older are (a) becoming physically ill or disabled, and (b) becoming mentally ill or getting dementia.

The aspects of ageing that respondents are worried about are consistent with the findings from the 2016 report. Not having enough money is more likely to be a concern for younger age groups (18 to 34, 35 to 49). For those aged 35 to 49 this concern about money has increased since 2016 (2021 = 55%, 2016 = 47%).

People aged 75+ are less concerned about aspects of ageing. Figure 6 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents' top 5 concerns about getting older.

**Figure 6: Top 5 concerns about getting older, by age group**



## **Age-related discrimination**

Thirty-five percent of respondents rated age discrimination as serious. Different age groups rated the seriousness of age discrimination differently, with those in the middle age years (35 to 64) more likely to rate it as serious.

Only 12% of those aged 75+ rated age discrimination as serious.

Broken down by age group, age discrimination was rated as serious by:

- 33% of those aged 18 to 34
- 41% of those aged 35 to 49
- 41% of those aged 50 to 64
- 36% of those aged 65 to 74
- 12% of those aged 75+.

Age discrimination is not considered by respondents to be as serious as other forms of discrimination. Ethnicity-based discrimination is considered to be the most serious form of discrimination against people in New Zealand, with 56% rating it serious. This is followed by sexual orientation discrimination (39%) and gender discrimination (36%).

## **New Zealand's preparedness for an ageing population**

### **Awareness of the size of the New Zealand population aged 65+**

When respondents under 75 years of age were asked if they knew the number of people in New Zealand who are aged 65+, awareness was low – only 1 in 5 answered within the correct range (currently, there are more than 800,000 people aged 65+ in New Zealand).

A third did not feel able to choose an answer.

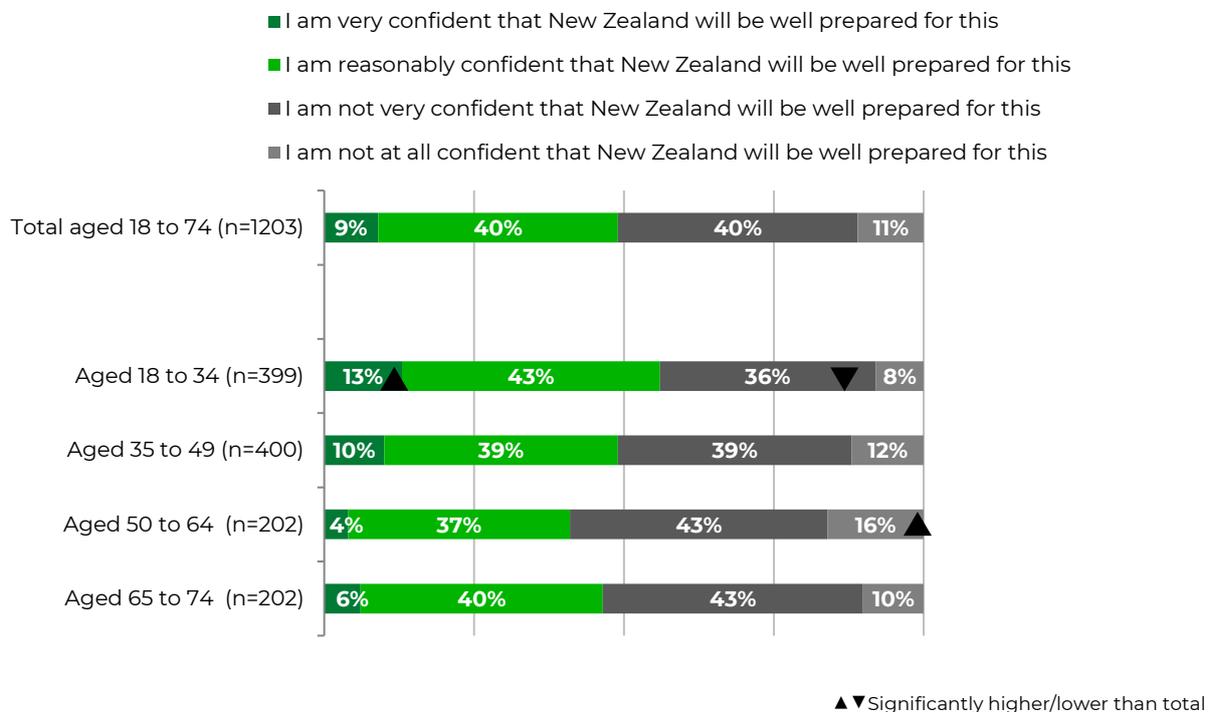
## Confidence of New Zealand’s ability to prepare for an ageing population

Almost half (49%) of respondents feel reasonably or very confident that New Zealand will be prepared to cater for the size of the older population in 15 years’ time.

This is an increase in confidence from 2016, when 38% were reasonably or very confident.

Figure 7 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents’ confidence level in New Zealand’s preparedness for an ageing population.

**Figure 7: Confidence in New Zealand’s preparedness for an ageing population, by age group**



Respondents aged 18 to 34 are the most likely to feel confident in New Zealand’s preparedness for its ageing population (56%) and are feeling more confident than in 2016 (44%).

Older respondents (aged 35+) are less confident than those under 35, but all are more confident than in 2016.

Figure 8 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents who feel reasonably/very confident of New Zealand’s preparedness for an older population between 2021 and 2016.

**Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who feel reasonably/very confident in New Zealand’s preparedness for an older population, by age group, 2021 and 2016**

	Reasonably/very confident	
	2021	2016
Total	49%▲	38%
Aged 18 to 34	56%▲	44%
Aged 35 to 49	48%▲	34%
Aged 50 to 64	42%	36%
Aged 65 to 74	47%▲	35%

▲ Significantly higher than the 2016 report result

## **Suggested changes to ensure older New Zealanders lead valued, connected and fulfilling lives**

Better Later Life, the Government’s strategy for our ageing population, has a vision for older New Zealanders to lead valued, connected and fulfilling lives.

When asked to suggest one change that would make the most progress towards achieving this vision, the most common responses centred on financial support. The second most common theme was around respect, communication and interactions.

Ten percent of respondents said that no change was needed.

Table 1 provides details of respondents’ suggestions (grouped by theme) to help achieve the Better Later Life strategy’s vision

**Table 1: Changes suggested by respondents to help achieve Better Later Life strategy's vision, by category**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Coded categories</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased superannuation/pensions; better financial support</li> <li>• Free/better/affordable health care</li> <li>• More age-related benefits, cost savings, and use of Super Gold Card</li> <li>• Encourage retirement planning and saving; make KiwiSaver compulsory</li> <li>• Control the cost of living/inflation</li> </ul>	24
Communication/ respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More respect; teach young people to respect older people</li> <li>• More support, care and awareness of older people</li> <li>• Encourage more intergenerational communication/interaction</li> <li>• Better communication; listen to the people; keep them informed</li> <li>• Focus on loneliness/isolation</li> </ul>	18
Value/work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More activities, socialising and community involvement for older people</li> <li>• Recognise, value and use the knowledge and experience older people have</li> <li>• More employment and part-time opportunities; no age discrimination by employers</li> </ul>	13
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better housing; more housing; affordable housing</li> <li>• More/better rest/retirement homes; more affordable with quality services</li> <li>• Better aged care workers; better pay and conditions for aged care workers</li> <li>• More communities housing mixed age groups (including families and older people)</li> <li>• Build villages, communities and centres specifically for older people</li> <li>• Provide support to help older people to continue living independently and stay in their own homes</li> <li>• More regulation around retirement/lifestyle villages; better affordability</li> </ul>	10

Theme	Coded categories	% of responses
Safety/ discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat all New Zealanders equally; less racism/ageism</li> <li>• A safer society for all (lower crime rate; safe from home invasion and harassment)</li> <li>• Deal with elder abuse (including being safe in their homes and safe from bullying and scammers)</li> <li>• Promote older people more positively</li> </ul>	7
Support/ services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier access to services and facilities</li> <li>• Better public transport; free transport</li> <li>• Training and support with new/modern technology</li> <li>• Encourage/support families to care for their parents</li> </ul>	5
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other</li> <li>• Change the Government; too much focus on beneficiaries</li> <li>• Address/make changes to the retirement policy</li> </ul>	11

## Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes towards ageing

### Age groups and changes in respondents' attitudes towards older people

For most respondents (70%), particularly those aged 65 to 74 (83%) the COVID-19 pandemic has not changed their attitude towards older people:

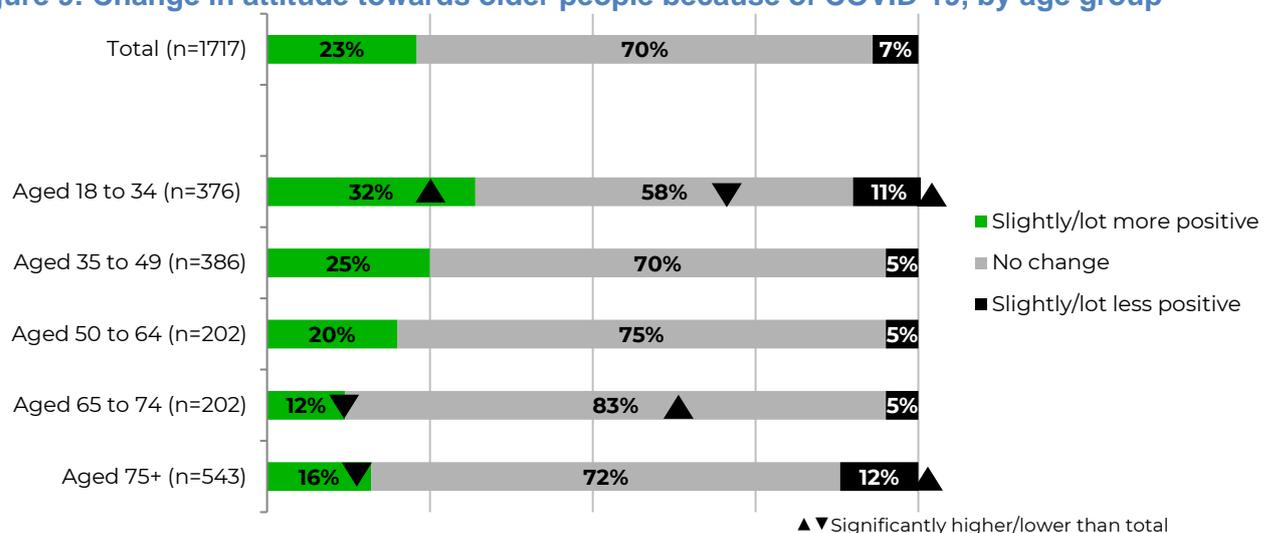
- 23% of respondents said the pandemic had a positive impact on their attitude towards older people.
- 7% of respondents said the pandemic had a negative impact on their attitude towards older people.

Respondents aged 18 to 34 (32%) and 35 to 49 (25%) are more likely to have had a positive change in attitude towards older people than people aged 65 to 74 (12%) and 75+ (16%).

Respondents aged 18 to 34 (11%) and 75+ (12%) are more likely to have had a negative change in attitude towards older people than other age groups and the total surveyed population.

Figure 9 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents' whose attitude towards older people changed because of COVID-19.

**Figure 9: Change in attitude towards older people because of COVID-19, by age group**



## Age groups and changes in attitudes towards getting older

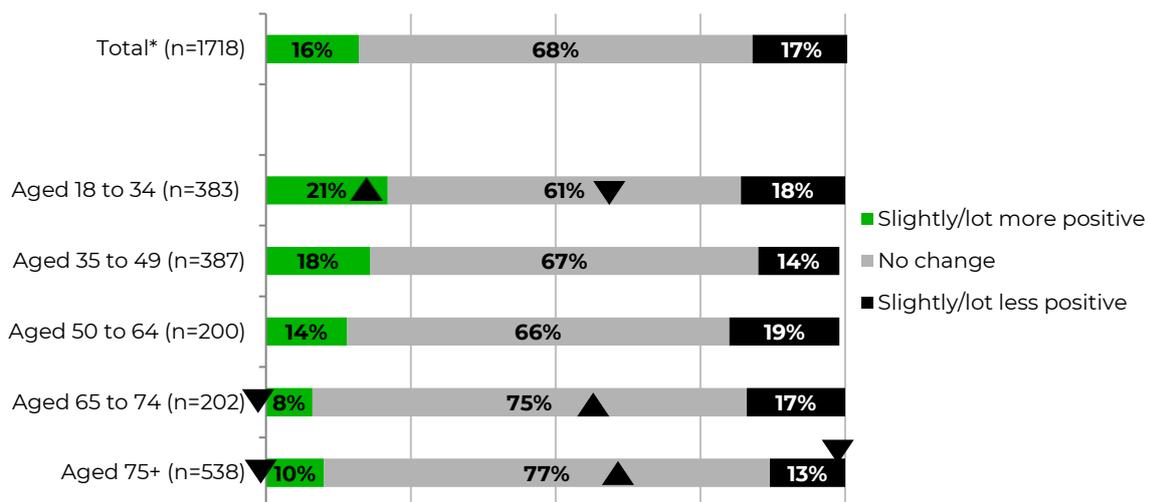
For most respondents (68%), particularly those aged 65 to 74 (75%) and 75+ (77%), the COVID-19 pandemic has not changed their attitude towards getting older:

- 16% of respondents said the pandemic had a positive impact on their attitude towards getting older.
- 17% of respondents said the pandemic had a negative impact on their attitude towards getting older.

Respondents aged 18 to 34 (21%) and 35 to 49 (18%) are more likely to have had a positive change in attitude towards getting older than respondents aged 65 to 74 (8%) and 75+ (10%).

Figure 10 shows for each age group the percentage of respondents' who changed their attitude towards getting older because of COVID-19.

**Figure 10: Change in attitude towards getting older because of COVID-19, by age group**



▲ ▼ Significantly higher/lower than total

\*Please note that, due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100%.

## How has the COVID-19 pandemic caused attitudes to change?

When asked about how the COVID-19 pandemic caused their attitude to change, 21% of respondents (1 in 5), said their attitude had not changed. For those who did describe a change in attitude, the most common responses centred on awareness or worries. The second most common theme was around appreciation.

Table 2 provides details of the percentage of respondents in relation to different categories of attitude change.

**Table 2: Changes in respondents' attitudes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, by category**

Themes	Coded categories	% of responses
Awareness/worries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be more health conscious; fear of COVID-19 infection</li> <li>Feel worried/scared/stressed; fear of the unknown</li> <li>To be cleaner/more hygienic</li> <li>To be more careful/cautious</li> <li>To be more aware of people, surroundings and different age groups</li> <li>Money/financial stress; loss of income</li> <li>Lost my job; redundancy; fear of job loss</li> </ul>	24
No change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change to my attitude/not applicable/none</li> </ul>	21
Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To appreciate/value life more; live life to the fullest</li> <li>More appreciation/awareness of older people/my older family members</li> <li>To reset/simplify my life; be more adaptable; be open to change</li> <li>Grateful to live in New Zealand; grateful for government's swift response to pandemic; grateful for team of 5 million</li> </ul>	20
Older people and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feel vulnerable/older people are more vulnerable/at risk</li> <li>Older people are more susceptible to illness/COVID-19</li> </ul>	19

Themes	Coded categories	% of responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of dying; people dying; dying before my time</li> <li>• Tolerance/patience/empathy</li> <li>• Resilience; how resilient people can be</li> </ul>	
Social connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family; family time; valuing time spent with family and friends</li> <li>• Isolation/loneliness; older people are isolated</li> <li>• Socialisation; became less social; staying at home more</li> <li>• Travel restrictions; less likely to travel; unable to visit family overseas</li> </ul>	10
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others/don't know</li> <li>• Everything; COVID-19 has changed the world</li> <li>• Vaccine – positive/negative mentions</li> </ul>	26

## Quotes from respondents about COVID-19

*"I notice older people a lot more now, and I check consciously that they are okay, or if they need help. They are on my radar a lot more than before because I feel that their age has made them more vulnerable than most to COVID."*

Female, Canterbury, 35–49, Asian and others

*"Have become more focused on what is most important in life e.g. family and friends and mental and physical health."*

Male, 50–64, Auckland, New Zealand European

*"By reassessing my own mortality with respect to the pandemic I am generally more appreciative of normal interaction with people and more so with older people due to their life experiences."*

Male, 65–74, Waikato, New Zealand European

*"Older people are being affected and are dying so have to be more careful where I go as my mum and dad are of age."*

Female, 18–34, Christchurch, Pacific Peoples

*"It's made me think more empathetically about other peoples' needs and well being whereas I may have been more self concerned beforehand. To be a contributing part of the team of 5 million united in the fight against the pandemic has been significantly life changing."*

Male, 65–74, Wellington, Māori

*"I think I took everything for granted, and when the virus hit one tends to reflect and change attitudes."*

Male, 65–74, Auckland, Asian and others

*“If you’re older you’re more susceptible to disease and illness, which is just scary. So you want to avoid older people in case they have it, and you don’t want to get older because it attaches to you easier.”*

Male, 18–34, Manawatū-Whanganui, New Zealand European

*“More careful about where I go especially in crowds. Apart from that stay in my own back yard and carry on with life.”*

Female, 65–74, Canterbury, Asian and others

## Methodology

- The survey sample was structured to ensure sufficient numbers of respondents were achieved in each age group so the results could be reliably analysed within each generation.
- Fieldwork took place between 13 May 2021 and 9 June 2021. New Zealand was at COVID-19 Alert Level 1 during this time.
- In total, 1,780 respondents completed the survey. The sample broke down as follows across age groups:
  - 18–34 years: 399
  - 35–49 years: 400
  - 50–64 years: 203
  - 65–74 years: 204
  - 75+ years: 566
- Within this sample, quotas were set by generation, gender and geographical region. Additionally, minimums for specific ethnicities were set to ensure their views were represented within this study. In total, interviews were achieved amongst each ethnicity demographic:<sup>1</sup>
  - Māori: 282
  - Pacific peoples: 102
  - New Zealand European: 1,161
  - Asian and others: 381
- For respondents under the age of 75, the survey was completed online and the sample was provided by global online market research firm Dynata.
- For respondents over the age of 75, a hard copy survey was provided and respondents were asked to fill it out and return it in a prepaid envelope. Within this age bracket (75 to 90), the sample was randomly selected from the Electoral Roll in equal proportion to the gender and regional breakdowns within the New Zealand population.

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<sup>1</sup> More than one ethnicity could be selected. Respondents are counted in all the groups they identify with.

- Of the 1,780 responses, 1,255 were completed online and 525 were completed on hard copy.
- To account for variations within the sample, the data was weighted by age, gender and geographical region in proportion to the New Zealand population. As equal quotas had been set for each generation to ensure meaningful comparisons could be made within generations, this meant certain generations had lower/higher weight factors applied. For example, as the 75+ generation makes up only about 8% of the New Zealand population but accounted for one third of our sample, these results were weighted down at this stage.
- The margin of error on the sample of 1,780 is +/- 2.3%. For each of the different age groups, the margin of error is:
  - +/- 4.9% for the age groups 18 to 34 and 35 to 49
  - +/- 6.9% for the age groups 50 to 64 and 65 to 74
  - +/- 4.1% for the age group 75+.