

COVID-19 indicators for older people – February 2021 update

- 1 This document updates the key indicators being used to track the impact of COVID-19 on older people. It uses data available up to the December 2020 quarter.

Highlights

- This report uses data up to the December 2020 quarter (three months to December 2020).
- In the December 2020 quarter, 6.6% of people aged 65-74 said they did not have enough money to meet everyday needs, similar to the overall average of 7.6%.
- Over the same period, 3.3% of those aged 65-74 and 1.0% of those aged 75+ said they had received help from an organisation or foodbank in the last 12 months.
- The unemployment and underutilisation rates for older workers aged 50+ in the December quarter saw decreases from the September 2020 quarter. The underutilisation rate remains slightly elevated at 7.8% (compared to 7.2% in the March 2020 quarter) but has decreased since the September quarter. Substantial differences in underutilisation of women aged 50+ (9.5%) as compared to men (6.3%) remain.
- The total number aged 50+ on Jobseeker Support Work Ready (JSWR) increased to 27,663 in December 2020. This remains substantially higher than the 18,177 JSWR recipients in February 2020 (prior to lockdown). The number receiving the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment fell to 894 in December 2020.
- Loneliness and discrimination levels have not changed significantly since the last report. The proportion of people aged 75+ who feel lonely at least some of the time was 16.3% in the December 2020 quarter (compared to 12.3% in 2018, but this difference is not statistically significant). The proportion of people aged 65-74 who have experienced discrimination in the last 12 months was 12.5% in the December 2020 quarter (still significantly higher than the 7.7% recorded in 2018). Differences between older men and older women are no longer statistically significant.
- Many stakeholders report that they and their clients have “recovered” from the impacts of COVID-19, although those operating in Auckland report still being in “recovery mode”. Stakeholders report that a minority of older people continue to struggle.

Introduction

- 2 In July 2020 we outlined a small set of key short-term indicators to track the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on older people aged 65 years and over (65+) and older workers aged 50 years and over (50+). Following the initial report, we published updated reports in August and November 2020.¹
- 3 This report incorporates published and customised data available up to the December 2020 quarter:
 - December 2020 quarter financial wellbeing, loneliness and discrimination data from Stats NZ’s Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) wellbeing supplement²

¹ Previous reports can be found at: <http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/about-superseniors/ageing-population/covid-19.html>.

² The December 2020 release can be found at <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/wellbeing-statistics-december-2020-quarter>

- December 2020 quarter unemployment, employment and underutilisation data for older workers (aged 50+) from Stats NZ's Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS)³
- MSD income support data up to December 2020
- numbers of calls to the Elder Abuse helpline up to December 2020
- feedback from key stakeholders who work with older people
- housing register data up to the December 2020 quarter.⁴

Material hardship

Rationale for the indicator: Material hardship may increase due to reduced employment earnings, reduced income from investments (including interest) and impacts on investment balances (including KiwiSaver).

Baseline data for older people showed that the younger cohorts were a little more likely to be in material hardship (4% for those aged 65-74 and 2% for those aged 75+ in 2018/19)⁵ and European ethnicities⁶ are less likely to be in material hardship than other ethnic groups.⁷

- 4 Stats NZ has not yet released data for the proposed COVID-19 material hardship indicator collected in the HLFS COVID-19 supplement. Their initial exploration of the data has identified concerns about the quality of the data, especially its comparability with the 2018/19 Household Economic Survey (HES) used for published poverty measures. This data may be published later. They have, however, published some other financial wellbeing data, which we have used.
- 5 In the December 2020 quarter:
 - 6.6% of people aged 65-74 (not significantly different to the 6.3% in the September 2020 quarter) said they did not have enough money to meet their everyday needs, similar to the average for all age groups of 7.6%.
 - 4.8% of people aged 75+ (not significantly different to the 3.8% in the September 2020 quarter) said they did not have enough money.
 - Māori and Pacific people aged 65+ continue to be more likely to say they did not have enough money (13.6% and 20.8% respectively in the December 2020 quarter).
- 6 Over the same period:
 - 3.3% of people aged 65-74 (not significantly different to 3.6% in the September 2020 quarter) said they had received help from an organisation or foodbank at least once in the last 12 months
 - 1.0% of people aged 75+ (not significantly different to 3.3% in the September 2020 quarter) said they had received help from an organisation or foodbank at least once in the last 12 months.

³ The December 2020 quarter release can be found at <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-december-2020-quarter>

⁴ The latest housing register statistics can be found at <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/index.html>

⁵ MSD unpublished analysis of Stats NZ's 2018/19 HES, percentage in a household that is missing out on six or more of 17 basic items (the same DEP-17 measure used in Stats NZ's child poverty statistics).

⁶ The European ethnic group includes New Zealand Europeans and a wide grouping of other European communities. Ethnicity data used in Stats NZ surveys is self-identified and people can choose to be included in more than one ethnic group.

⁷ MSD unpublished analysis of Stats NZ's General Social Survey, combining data for 2014, 2016 and 2018, using an alternative measure: percentage of people with Material Wellbeing Index (MWI-9) score from 0-7.

- Māori and Pacific people aged 65+ continue to be more likely to say they had received help from an organisation or foodbank at least once in the last 12 months (9.3% and 19.7% respectively in the December 2020 quarter).
- 7 The Commission for Financial Capability (CFFC) released the results of a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on New Zealanders' financial wellbeing on 8 December 2020.⁸
 - 8 The survey of 4,009 New Zealanders was conducted between 30 September and 22 October 2020 and follows a similar survey conducted in the second half of April (during Alert Level 4). There were 486 people aged 65+ in the sample. Both surveys utilised online panels, so exclude those without internet access.
 - 9 Key findings include:
 - Households where the main respondent was aged 55 to 64 were the most likely age bracket to report lower incomes than in February 2020 (37%). Individuals in this age group were less likely to have lost their job than younger respondents, but those that did were less likely to have found a new job
 - Households where the main respondent was aged 65 or over were less likely to report lower incomes (22%)
 - Older households are more likely to be financially secure than younger ones, but nonetheless 20% of households where the main respondent was aged 65 or over were experiencing financial difficulties in October 2020 (compared to 18% in April 2020).

Official statistics show little change in the unemployment rate and underutilisation

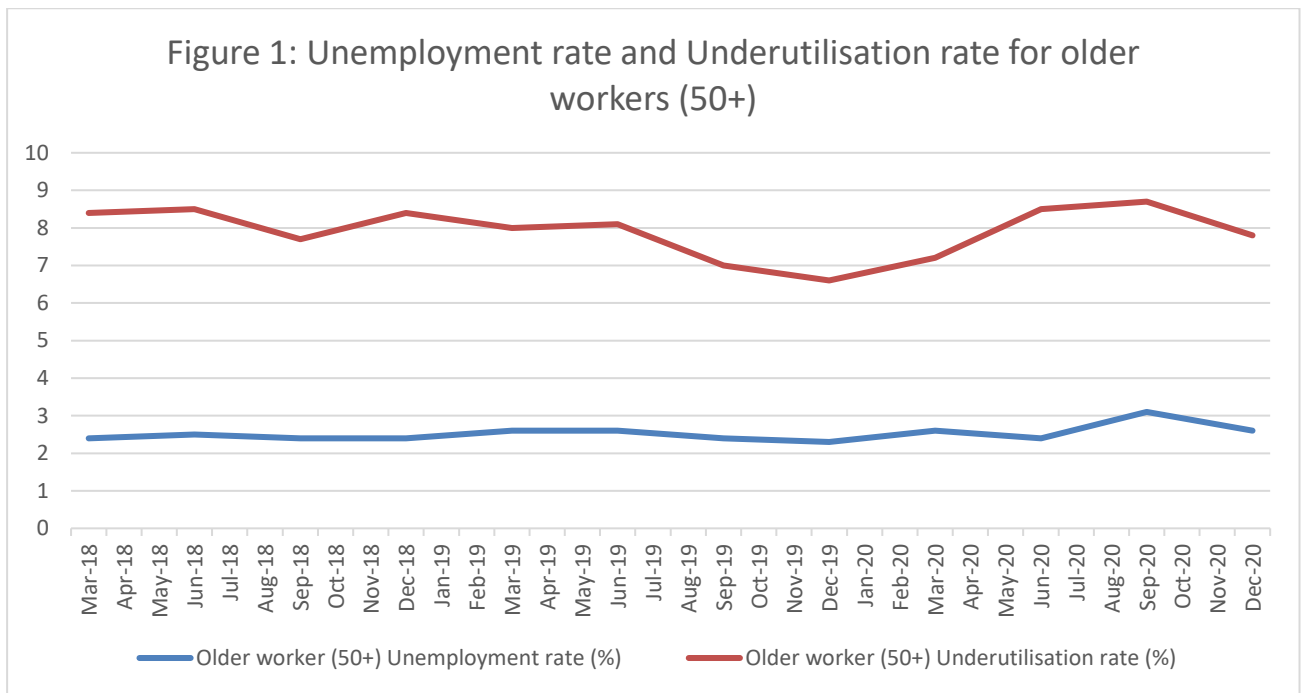
Rationale for the unemployment indicator: While older workers are less likely to become unemployed, they are more likely to become long-term unemployed than younger workers.⁹ The long-term impacts of job displacement are greater for older workers than younger workers - on average displaced workers over 50 have 11-12 percent lower employment (and 25-30% lower earnings if employed) after 4-5 years¹⁰

- 10 An estimated 77,400 older workers aged 50+ were underutilised in the December 2020 quarter - 25,500 unemployed, 28,100 underemployed and the remainder in the potential labour force.
- 11 Changes in unemployment and underutilisation rates for older workers in the December 2020 quarter were not statistically significant.
- 12 The unemployment rate for older workers aged 50+ decreased from 3.1% in the September 2020 quarter to 2.6% in the December 2020 quarter, which is the same unemployment rate as the March 2020 quarter (see figure 1).
- 13 The unemployment rate for older female workers (50+) decreased from 3.2% to 2.9%, and older male workers (50+) decreased from 3.0% to 2.4% (see figure 2).
- 14 The underutilisation rate for older workers aged 50+ decreased from 8.7% in the September 2020 quarter to 7.8% in the December 2020 quarter (see figure 1).
- 15 The underutilisation rate for older female workers (50+) decreased from 11.1% to 9.5%, and older male workers decreased from 6.7% to 6.3% (see figure 3).

⁸ <https://cffc.govt.nz/news-and-media/news/pink-and-blue-collar-households-hit-hardest-by-covid-19-survey/>

⁹ For more information see <http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/documents/better-later-life/financial-security-and-economic-participation-indicator.docx>.

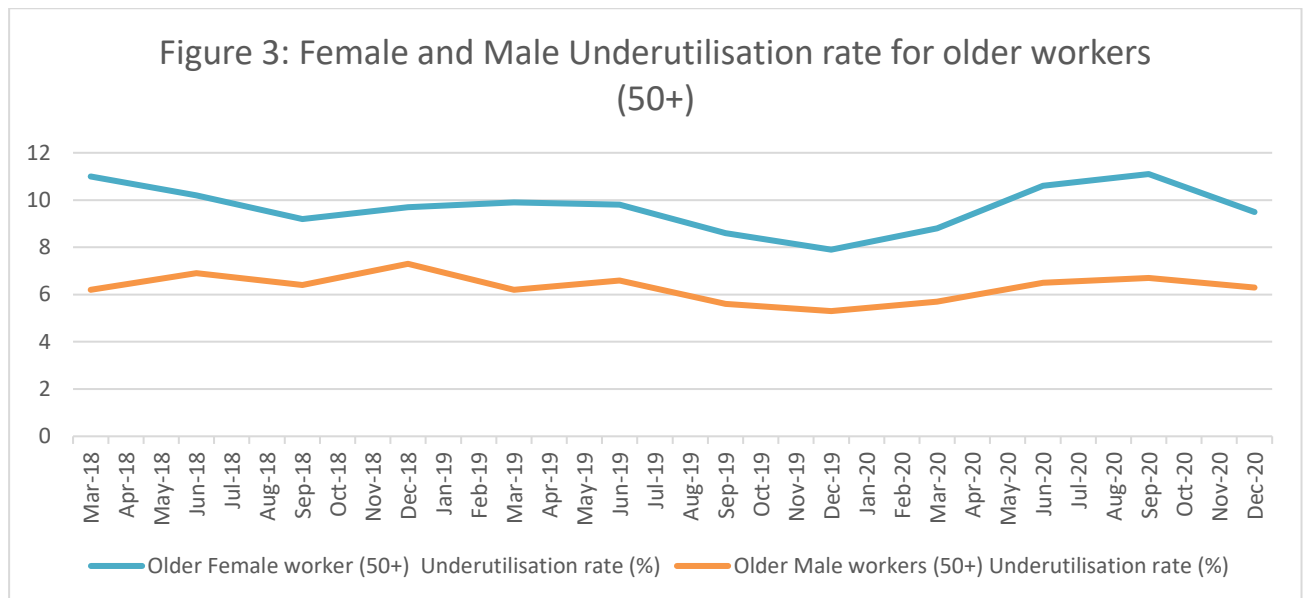
¹⁰ <https://motu.nz/about-us/news/workers-who-lose-their-jobs-are-disadvantaged-for-years/>



Source: Stats NZ, Household Labour Force Survey, customised data



Source: Stats NZ, Household Labour Force Survey, customised data



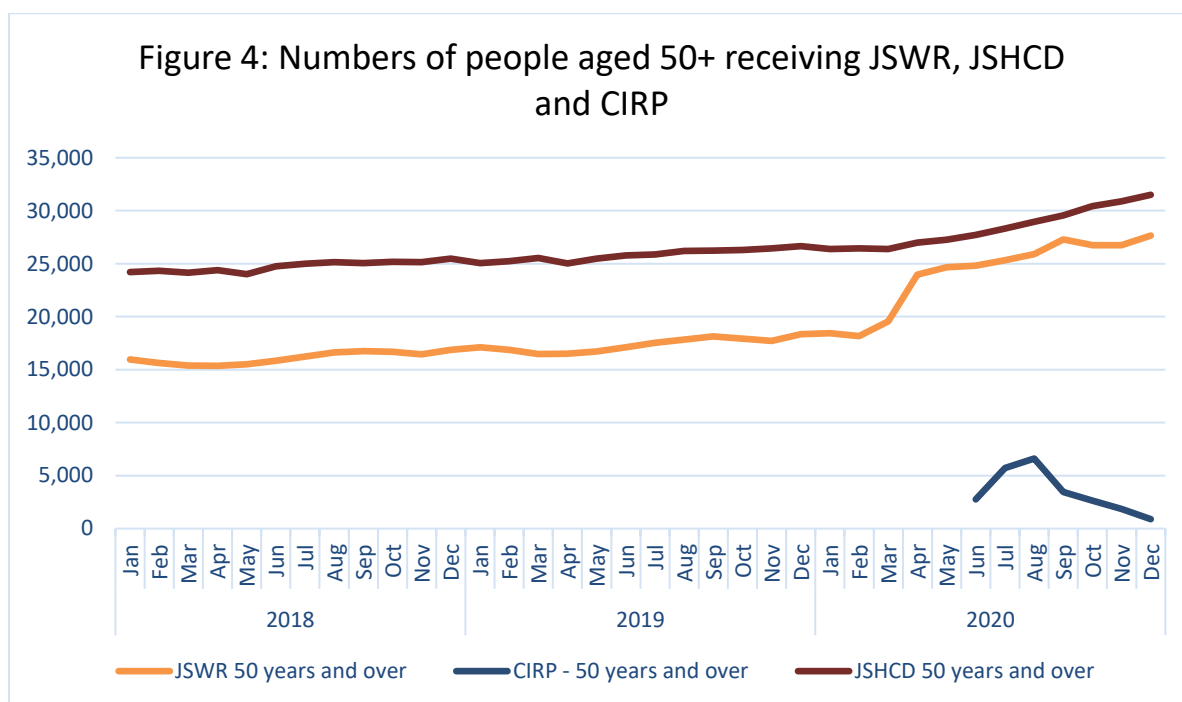
Source: Stats NZ, Household Labour Force Survey, customised data

Increasing numbers are receiving income support

Rationale for the indicator: The number of people receiving Jobseeker Support (JS) and other income support is expected to increase as people lose their jobs and earn less from investments, and investment balances reduce. Some people who lost their job from 1 March 2020 to 30 October 2020 due to COVID-19 were eligible for the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP) for up to three months, including some people not eligible for main benefits¹¹. Others were in jobs supported by wage subsidies.

- 16 At the end of December 2020 quarter, 59,169 people aged 50 years and over (50+) were receiving Jobseeker Support (JS). This was made up of 27,663 receiving Jobseeker Support Work Ready (JSWR) and 31,506 receiving Jobseeker Support Health Condition or Disability (JSHCD).
- 17 The number of people aged 50+ receiving JSWR increased from 18,177 in February 2020 (before lockdown) to 27,663 in December 2020. This is an increase of 9,496. (See figure 4)
- 18 The number of people aged 50+ receiving JSHCD increased from 26,442 in February 2020 (before lockdown) to 31,506 in December 2020. This is an increase of 5,064.
- 19 The number of people aged 50+ receiving the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP) peaked at 6,615 in August 2020 and has fallen to 894 in December 2020. Research undertaken using Stats NZ's IDI database suggested that about one third of people (of all ages) who reached the end of their CIRP entitlement gained some form of employment.
- 20 Other benefits, supplementary support and hardship assistance appear to be relatively similar to the September 2020 month. (For more information, please see appendix A.)

¹¹ For more information refer <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/income-relief-payment/index.html>.



Source: MSD, administrative data

COVID-19 wage subsidies

Rationale for the COVID-19 wage subsidies indicator: to understand the number or percentage of employees aged 50+ were supported by a wage subsidy.

21 COVID-19 Wage Subsidy applications closed on 1 September 2020. The September update reported on wage subsidy data for those aged 50+ based on an MSD analysis of data to 11 September 2020.¹² By this time all wage subsidies were closed to new applications and most subsidies had been completed. This analysis has not been updated.

Loneliness

Rationale for the loneliness indicator: Loneliness and social isolation may be a particular risk for those aged 70+ or with compromised immune systems who were asked to stay home for longer, and for those who are unable to connect with family and friends digitally.

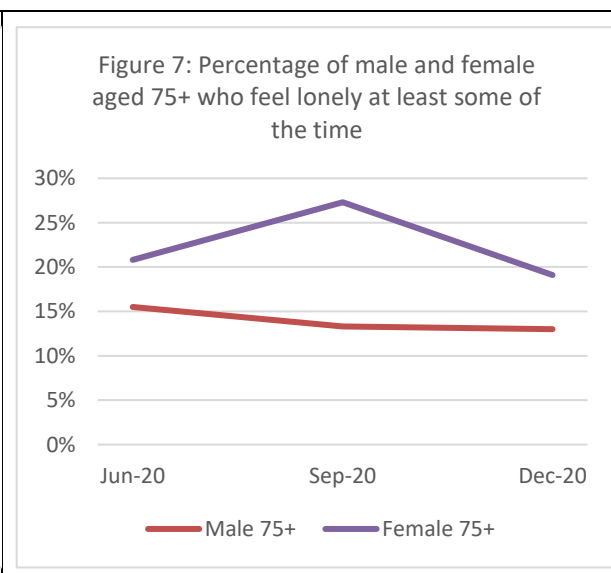
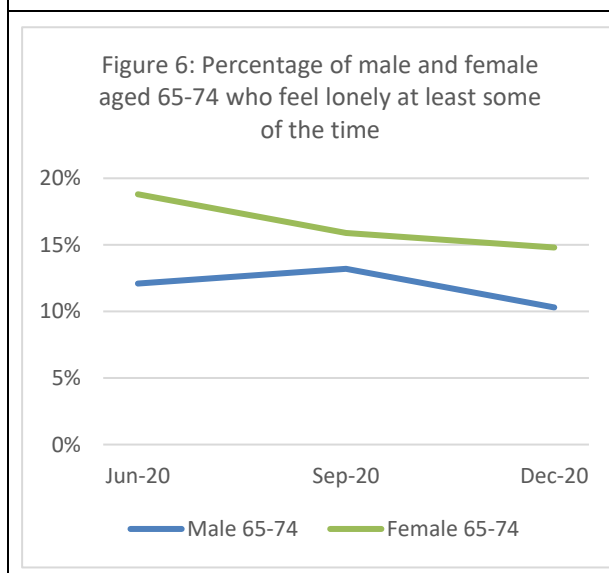
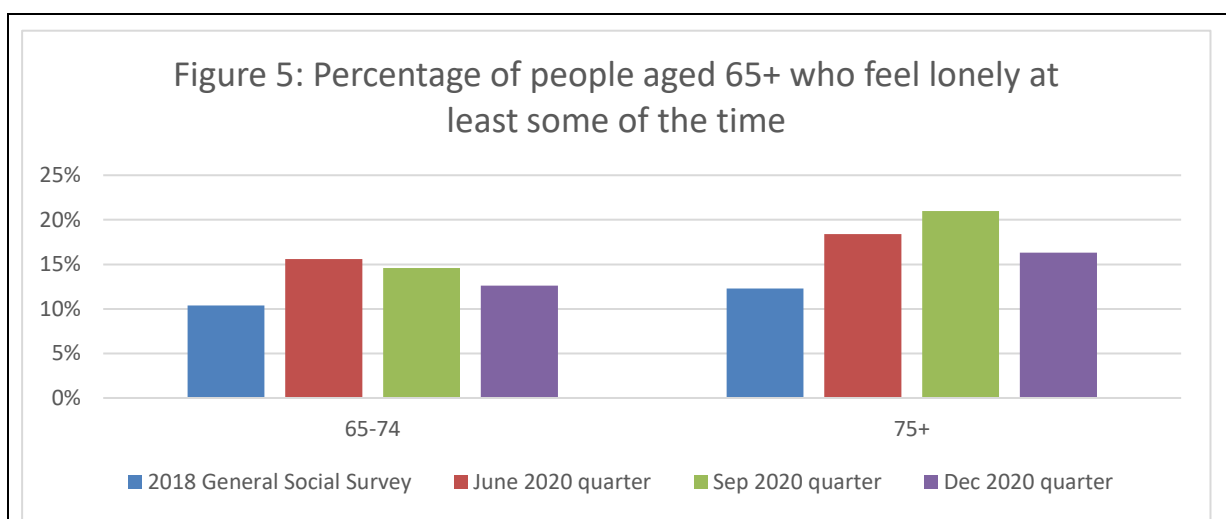
22 The percentage of people aged 65-74 who felt lonely at least some of the time (some of, most of, or all the time) reduced from 14.6% in September 2020 quarter to 12.6% in December 2020 quarter:

- males reduced from 13.2% in September 2020 quarter to 10.4% in December 2020 quarter
- females reduced from 15.9% in September 2020 quarter to 14.8% in December 2020 quarter.

23 The percentage of people aged 75+ who felt lonely at least some of the time (some of, most of, or all the time) reduced from 21.0% in September 2020 quarter to 16.3% in December 2020 quarter:

¹² This report is available at <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/who-received-the-covid-19-wage-subsidies-september-2020.html>
The results in this report are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), managed by Statistics New Zealand. Refer the full disclaimer in the report.

- male reduced from 13.3% in September 2020 quarter to 13.0% in December 2020 quarter
 - female reduced from 27.4% in September 2020 quarter to 19.1% in December 2020 quarter.
- 24 These differences between September 2020 and December 2020 quarter are not statistically significant. The December 2020 quarter results are not significantly higher than the equivalent measure collected in the 2018 General Social Survey (GSS). (See Figure 5)
- 25 Women are more likely to say they felt lonely at least some of the time than men across all age groups.
- 26 Some caution is needed in comparing these survey results. In particular the GSS collects data across a full year via face-to-face interviews from people aged 15 and over, while the HLFS supplement collects data for the quarter, primarily via phone interviews, from people aged 18 and over.

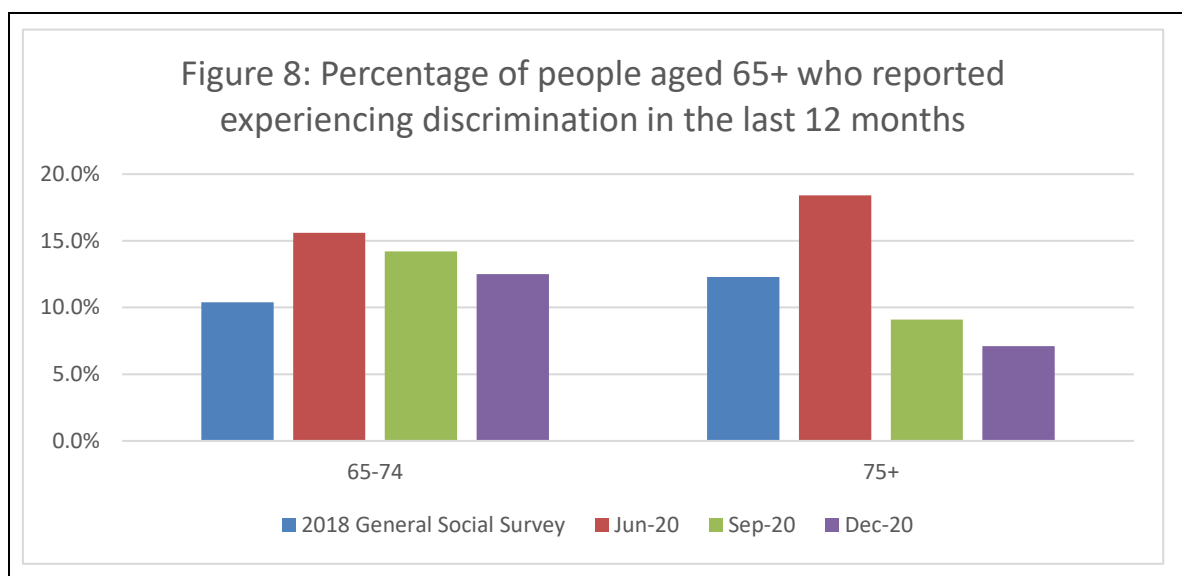


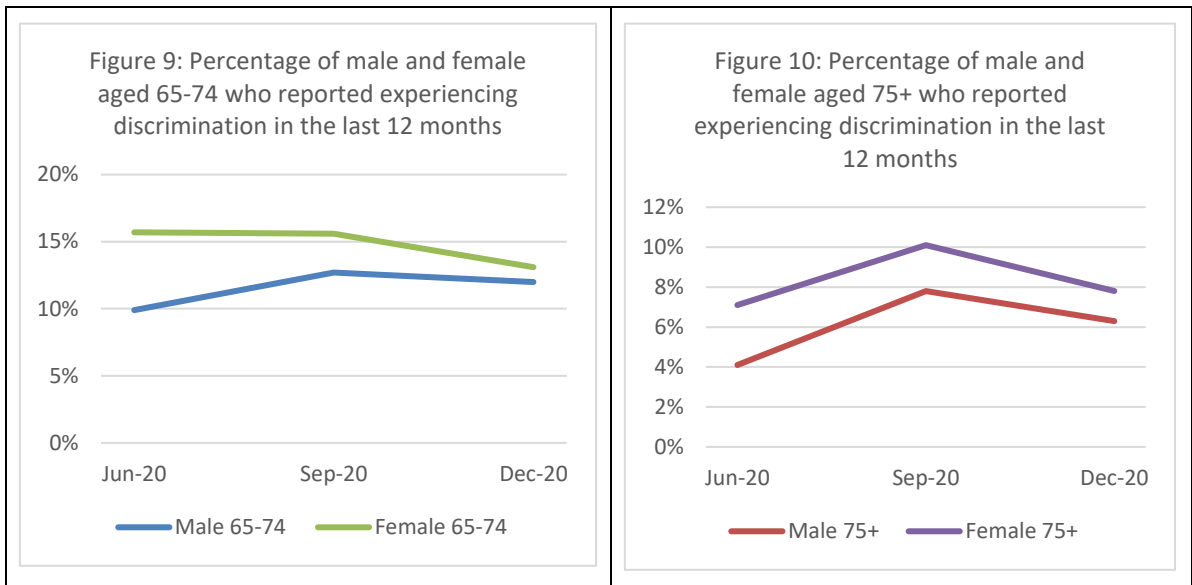
Source: Statistics NZ, Wellbeing Statistics

Discrimination

Rationale for the discrimination indicator: Perceptions that lockdown and the associated economic impacts were only to protect older people and that older people are vulnerable may increase ageism.

- 27 The percentage of people aged 65-74 who reported experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months reduced from 14.2% in September 2020 quarter to 12.5% in December 2020 quarter:
- male reduced from 12.7% in September 2020 quarter to 12.0% in December 2020 quarter
 - female reduced from 15.6% in September 2020 quarter to 13.1% in December 2020 quarter.
- 28 The percentage of people aged 75+ who reported experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months reduced from 9.1% in September 2020 quarter to 7.1% in December 2020 quarter:
- male reduced from 7.8% in September 2020 quarter to 6.3% in December 2020 quarter
 - female reduced from 10.1% in September 2020 quarter to 7.8% in December 2020 quarter.
- 29 The proportion of those aged 65-74 who reported experiencing discrimination remains significantly higher than the equivalent measure collected in the 2018 GSS. The other results are not significantly different to the September 2020 quarter, and the 2018 GSS.



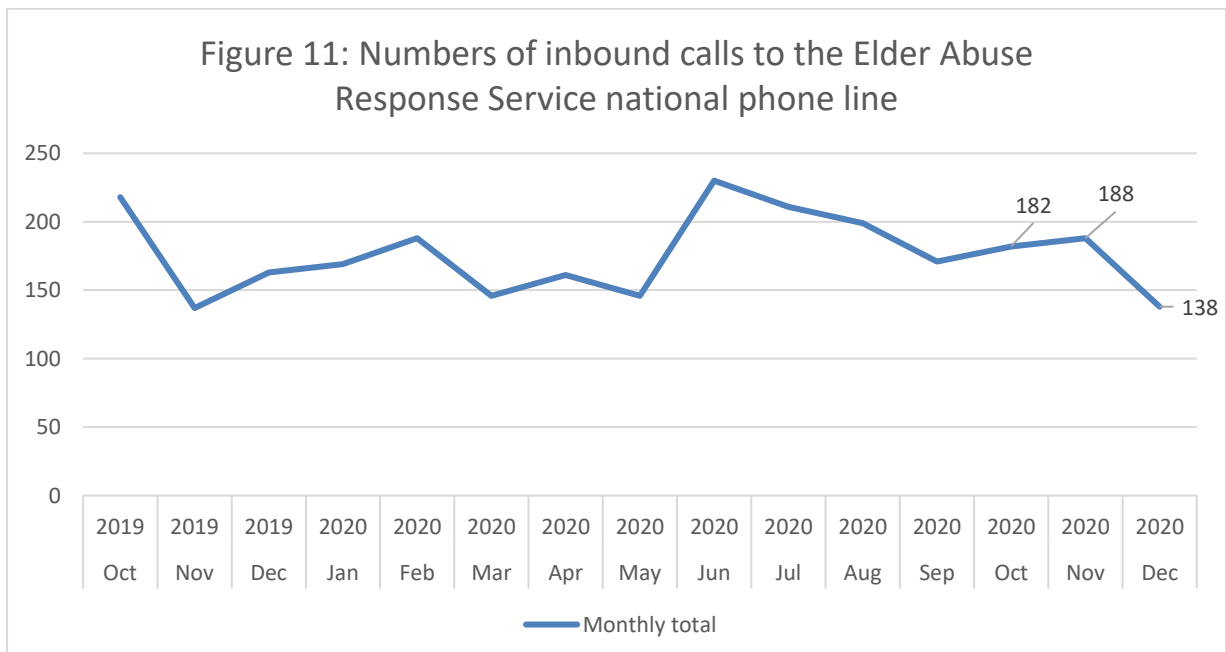


Source: Statistics NZ, Wellbeing Statistics

Elder abuse

Rationale for elder abuse indicator: Some older people may have become more vulnerable to elder abuse due to increased family stress (including financial stress) and being unable to leave their home environment.

- 30 There were 508 calls to the Elder Abuse Response Service (EARS) national phone line in the December 2020 quarter. This was lower than 581 calls in the September 2020 quarter. It was also slightly lower than the December 2019 quarter (518). The number of calls in October and December 2020 months were lower than the previous year, while the number of calls in November 2020 was higher than the previous year. (see Figure 11).
- 31 There were also 80 emails in the December 2020 quarter - contacts to the Elder Abuse Response Service email address are often from “concerned others”, such as family members seeking information regarding locally available services. There were just two SMS (texts).
- 32 Note this data does not include direct approaches or referrals to local EARS providers that do not go through the national phone line.

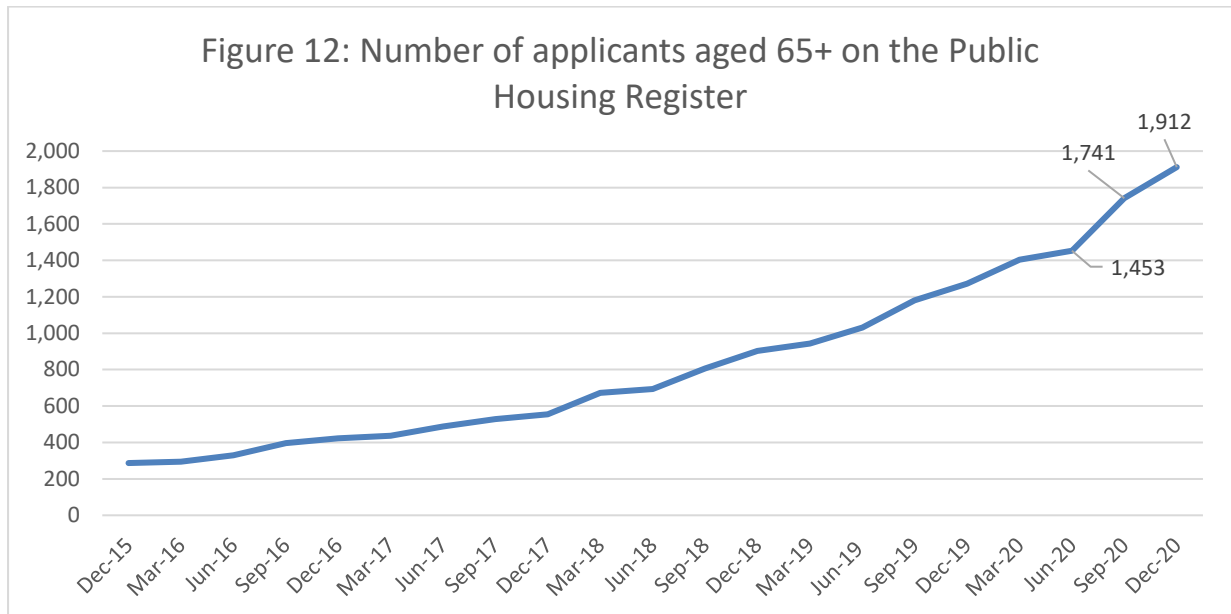


Source: Homecare Medical

Housing

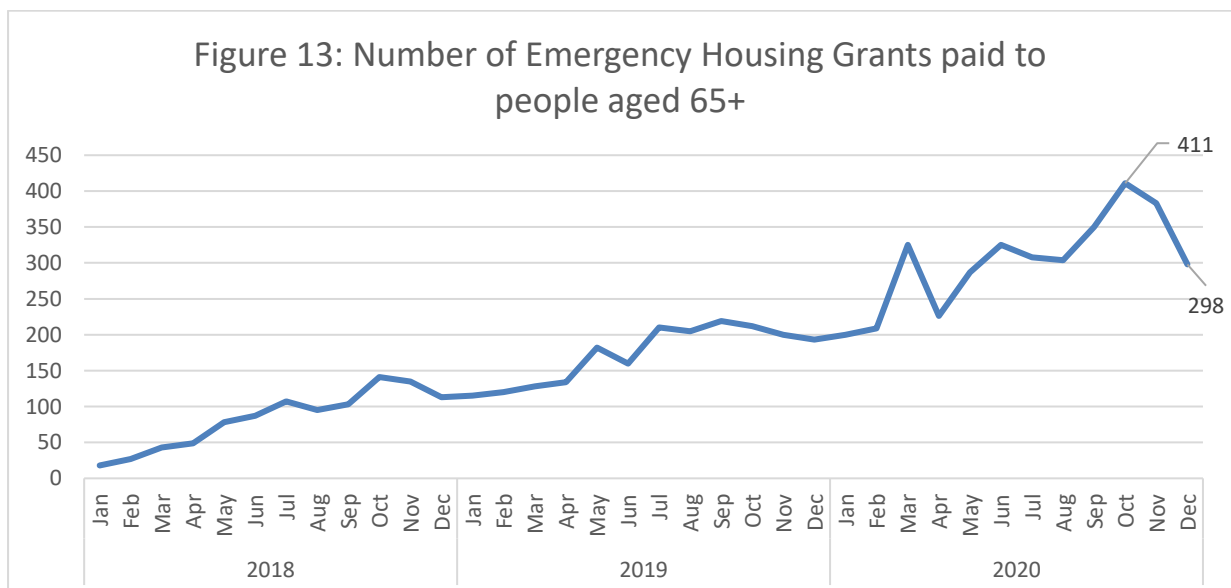
Rationale for the housing indicator: Reduced incomes may affect some older people's ability to fund rents and mortgages. While older people are least likely to be in severe housing deprivation and least likely to be on the public housing register, the increase in the number of older people on the housing register is similar to the overall increase in the past five years.

- 33 December 2020 data shows that the number of applicants aged 65 and over on the Public Housing Register has increased by 171 from September to December 2020 (see figure 12).



Source: MSD, Housing Register

- 34 MSD paid 298 Emergency Housing Grants to older people (65+) in the December 2020 month, down from a peak of 411 in October 2020 but still higher than before lockdown. (See figure 13).



Source: MSD, administrative data

Key stakeholders

- 35 Following its initial stakeholder contact in the week ending 20 November 2020, the Office for Seniors conducted further outreach to a cross-section of stakeholders in the week ending 19 February 2020 to ask them about the experiences of older people and their organisations during the pandemic.
- 36 Some of the organisations contacted were also contacted in November and were able to give an update on the past three months. Other organisations contacted were being asked about this for the first time and reflected on the entirety of the pandemic as well as the past three months.

Most organisations said they have now successfully adapted, however Auckland based organisations are still in "recovery mode"

- 37 Stakeholders from most parts of the country reported their organisations and the older people they work with have recovered from the initial effects of the pandemic and now feel they are prepared for any future changes to alert levels. However, Auckland based stakeholders and the older people they work with are still in recovery mode.
- 38 Stakeholders still reported some concerns relating to COVID-19, repeated observations included:
- Some were worried about where they would get funding once COVID-19 specific funds ended
 - Some peer-to-peer group activities are being impacted by group leaders being reluctant to resume their roles
 - Stakeholders reported finding it difficult having to cancel, postpone and avoiding starting/scheduling events and activities which target older people, especially when alert levels change
- 39 Other stakeholders reported positive outcomes as a result of COVID-19 including:
- An increased visibility on issues affecting older people
 - Stakeholders who are membership organisations rather than providing services to seniors feel their organisations are flourishing with an increase in members and for some an increase in funding
 - Some volunteer organisations said they have experienced an increase in people wanting to volunteer.

For most older people life is getting back to normal, but some are still struggling due to the pandemic

- 40 The consensus among stakeholders was that older people who were doing well before the pandemic generally continued to do well, and those struggling or close to struggling before the pandemic continued to struggle. The majority also felt that for many older people life has been getting back to normal over the past three months, however there are still some who continue to feel the impact of the pandemic.
- 41 Many of the observations made by stakeholders in November were repeated by the stakeholders contacted in February. Key similarities included:
- Enquiries to support services increase during raised alert level periods, especially those relating to loneliness, isolation, banking, accessing food and medication
 - Older people in migrant communities are continuing to find language barriers are impacting their ability to access services such as Healthline
 - Some older people are still reluctant to return to activities and to access services. This has been observed less in younger older people
 - Feelings of fear, anxiety and loneliness continue to have a negative impact on some older people

- Some older people continue to struggle financially especially those who have to support younger family members
 - The digital divide continues to be one of the biggest issues for older people. As the pandemic has continued so too has a move to digitising activities and services. This continues to isolate those who are not digitally connected and even for some who are digitally comfortable it has led to a decrease in the number of face-to-face social interactions they have, exacerbating feelings of loneliness
 - Stakeholders working in the carer or Alzheimer's and dementia space expressed concern about the differentiated treatment of older people in rest homes compared to the rest of the population during alert level changes. As this is reportedly have negative health consequences for those affected.
- 42 New comments that have arisen since the last survey included the following key themes:
- Some older people have expressed concern about being classified as vulnerable
 - Some older people are reportedly struggling, feeling that they have had to give up volunteer roles
- 43 Stakeholders also commented that the pandemic response can be confusing for some older people as alert level changes happen very quickly and they aren't necessarily connected to the same digital services as other age groups. Some rely on newspapers as their main source of information and do not receive digital updates.
- 44 A couple of organisations that interact with older people in a frontline capacity have observed they seem to be less likely to sign in using the COVID-19 tracer app and some that make the attempt struggle to do so. They are worried that older people either aren't getting the information they need about COVID-19 or don't understand it properly. Several noted that a lot of older people do not know how to use the tracing app and do not like being asked for their details for contact tracing purposes.

Appendix A – MSD selected main benefit, supplementary support, hardship assistance and CIRP time series for people aged 50+

Main Benefits													
Benefit	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20
Jobseeker Support Work Ready (JSWR)	18,354	18,438	18,177	19,557	23,967	24,678	24,825	25,329	25,905	27,306	26,772	26,769	27,663
Jobseeker Support Health Condition or Disability (JSHCD)	26,652	26,388	26,442	26,379	26,994	27,261	27,723	28,332	28,944	29,577	30,450	30,885	31,506
Sole Parent Support (SPS)	3,069	3,066	3,057	3,108	3,213	3,237	3,261	3,285	3,315	3,378	3,426	3,438	3,507
Supported Living Payment (SLP)	51,549	51,411	51,465	51,786	51,942	51,930	51,933	51,918	51,864	51,912	51,930	51,990	52,071

Supplementary support and hardship assistance													
Supplementary support and hardship assistance	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20
Accommodation Supplement	114,654	114,372	114,312	115,860	119,070	120,021	121,275	123,222	124,662	126,060	126,417	126,801	127,845
Disability Allowance	182,997	181,920	181,947	182,868	183,375	183,276	183,117	183,342	183,690	184,185	184,452	184,902	185,601
Temporary Additional Support and Special Benefit	31,737	31,257	31,386	32,172	33,969	34,536	35,079	35,952	36,774	37,917	38,085	37,245	37,188
Benefit Advances*	13,206	16,446	15,546	13,023	4,581	12,615	16,995	17,247	13,818	14,640	14,655	16,254	15,198
Special Needs Grants	29,091	25,974	22,932	28,113	51,552	31,734	26,715	28,530	24,009	20,100	24,375	26,256	34,062

* Number of grants granted, not number of people receiving grants. An individual could receive multiple grants during the month.

COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP)													
	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20
COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP)							2,748	5,733	6,615	3,465	2,625	1,854	894

Source: MSD administrative data