

COVID-19 indicators for older people – as at 14 July 2020

This document outlines the proposed key indicators to track the impact of COVID-19 on older people. It includes baseline data where available.

Background

- 1 In February 2020, we released initial indicators to track the outcomes of *Better Later Life – He Oranga Kaumātua 2019 to 2034* (Better Later Life indicators) on the Super Seniors website¹. This list of indicators uses mainly annual or two-yearly data sources to track the outcomes in the medium to long-term.
- 2 Since then, New Zealanders of all ages were affected by increasing border restrictions and self-isolation requirements to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- 3 These restrictions have had both social and economic consequences.
- 4 We plan to monitor a small set of key short-term indicators to track the impacts of COVID-19 on older people aged 65 years and over (65+) and older workers aged 50 years and over (50+).

The proposed indicators will monitor the areas where we expect older people and older workers to be most affected

- 5 The proposed indicators are:
 - **Material hardship** – percentage of older people with low material wellbeing, from Stats NZ’s Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) COVID-19 supplement.
 - **Unemployment rate of older workers (aged 50+)** - percentage of people in the labour force who are not working, are available for work and actively seeking work, from the quarterly HLFS. We will also monitor employment and underutilisation² rates.
 - **Jobseeker Support take up (for those aged 50+)** - from MSD administrative data. We will also look at numbers of people aged 50-64 and 65+ receiving other main benefits, supplementary assistance (for example Accommodation Supplement and Disability Allowance), hardship assistance and COVID-19 Income Relief Payments.
 - **Loneliness** – percentage of older people feeling lonely at least some of the time. The primary data source for this is likely to be the HLFS COVID-19 supplement. We will also look at loneliness data collected weekly in the Ministry of Justice’s COVID-19 Justice Sector Survey and the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Survey.
 - **Elder abuse** – numbers of calls to the Elder Abuse hotline and numbers of approaches or cases received by Elder Abuse Response Services. We will also ask services to describe how demand for their services changed during the different alert levels.
 - **Discrimination** – percentage of seniors experiencing discrimination, including but not limited to ageism, from Stats NZ’s HLFS COVID-19 supplement.
 - **Housing** – number/percentage of older people on the Public Housing Register. We will also look at data from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development on older people in motels due to COVID-19 and data from their rental survey.

¹ <http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/about-superseniors/ageing-population/indicators/better-later-life-indicators.html>

² Underutilisation includes people who would like a job but are not actively looking and those who would like to work more hours, as well as those who fit the official statistical definition of unemployment.

- 6 Where possible, we will look at the data for older people by demographics such as gender, ethnicity and disability. However, this will be limited by the sample size for the surveys.

Highlights

- 7 It is still early days in the COVID-19 recovery, and June 2020 quarter data will give a better indication of how older people and older workers have been affected. However, initial data shows:
- 18% of older people surveyed in the second half of April (mostly under 80) said they were experiencing financial difficulties
 - those in the 51-64 age group (especially renters) were more likely to be struggling financially than older people
 - increased numbers of older workers 50 and over are receiving Jobseeker Support and other income support
 - more older people were lonely during Levels 3 and 4, but loneliness was reduced in Level 2
 - numbers of older people on the public housing register continued to increase at a similar rate to people under 65.

Seniors are less likely to be in material hardship than younger people, but some are experiencing financial difficulties

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

- 8 Data is not yet available for the proposed COVID-19 material hardship indicator (from Stats NZ's Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) COVID-19 supplement).
- 9 Baseline data for the 2018/19 year shows that younger seniors were a little more likely to be in material hardship than older seniors (4% for those aged 65-74 and 2% for those aged 75+), but both are lower than for younger age groups.³ European older people are less likely to be in material hardship than other ethnic groups.⁴
- 10 A Commission for Financial Capability online survey⁵ conducted during the last two weeks of April 2020 found that:
- 18% of seniors surveyed (mostly under 80) were experiencing financial difficulties and 31% were at risk of financial difficulty if they experienced a drop or further drop in income. Those aged 65-74 were more likely to be experiencing financial difficulties than those aged 75+
 - people aged 51-64 were doing worse: 35% were experiencing financial difficulties and a further 35% were at risk of financial difficulty. In this age group, 63% of renters were in financial difficulties, compared with 37% of home owners with a mortgage and 13% of mortgage-free home owners.

³ MSD unpublished analysis of Stats NZ's 2018/19 Household Economic Survey, 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).

⁴ 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

⁵ CFFC, 2020. *Impact of Covid-19 on Financial Wellbeing*. <https://cffc.govt.nz/news-and-media/news/covid-19-exposing-new-zealanders-financial-vulnerability/>.

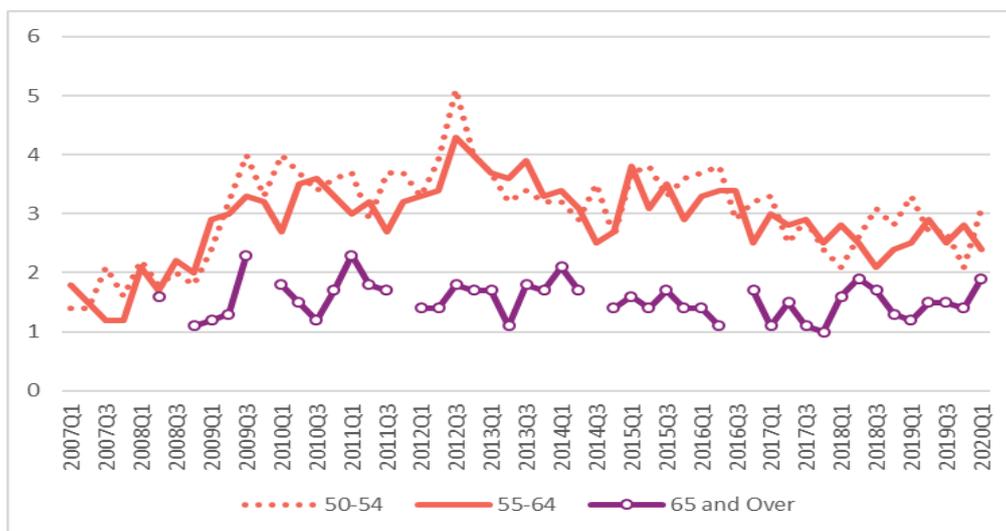
- 11 The Ministry of Justice’s COVID-19 Justice Sector Survey⁶ found that:
- during Levels 3 and 4, overall 9% of seniors and 16% of people aged 50-64 years could not afford an unexpected expense. Those aged 15-29 were least likely to be able to afford an unexpected expense (27% could not)
 - during Level 2, overall 8% of seniors and 15% of people aged 50-64 years could not afford an unexpected expense. This is significantly lower than those aged 15-29, where 30% of this group could not afford an unexpected expense, but not much different to Level 3 and 4.

March quarter unemployment statistics largely reflect the strong labour market before lockdown

Rationale: Job displacement has much larger and longer impacts on displaced workers aged 50 and over than younger age groups.⁷

- 12 The March quarter HLFS was collected over the first 13 weeks of 2020, so does not show much effect from Covid-19 – the June quarter data is expected to show more.
- 13 Changes between the March 2019 and March 2020 quarters were not statistically significant. Based on published age group data:
- the unemployment rate for those aged 50-64 years fell slightly between March 2019 quarter and March 2020 quarter (from 3.3% to 3.1% for those aged 50-54 and from 2.6% to 2.2% for those aged 55-64)
 - the unemployment rate for those aged 65+ increased from 1.2% to 1.9% (from 1.7% to 1.9% for those aged 70+). The 65+ employment rate increased from 23.4% to 23.7% over this period. Note: data is suppressed for some periods.

Figure 1 Unemployment rates for older age groups, percent



Source: Stats NZ, Household Labour Force Survey

Increasing numbers are receiving income support

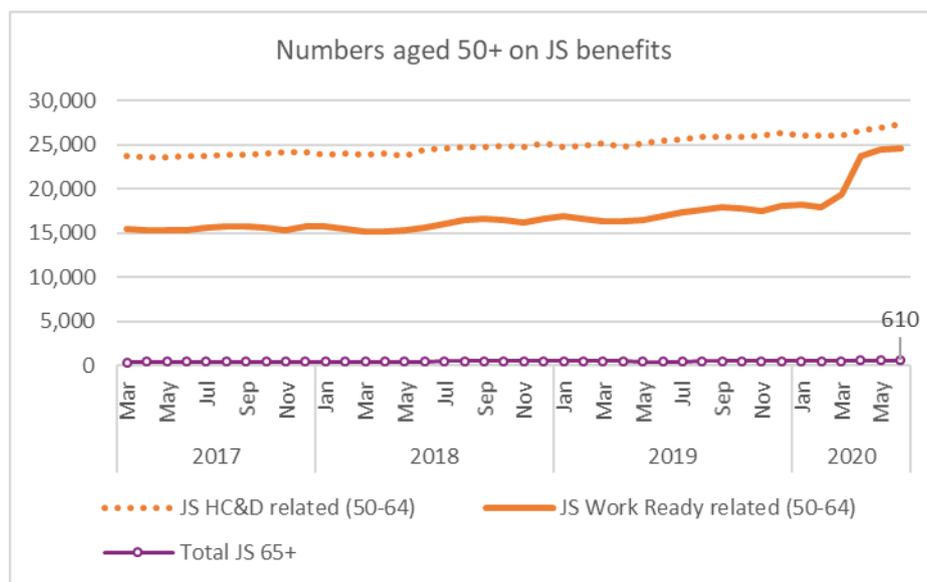
Rationale: The number of people receiving Jobseeker Support and other income support is expected to increase as people lose their jobs and earn less from investments, and investment balances reduce.

⁶ <https://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/research-data/covid-19-justice-sector-survey/>

⁷ Motu, 2017. *The Longer Term Impacts of Job Displacement on Labour Market Outcomes* <https://motu.nz/our-work/population-and-labour/individual-and-group-outcomes/the-longer-term-impacts-of-job-displacement-on-labour-market-outcomes/>

- 14 In June 2020, 51,936 people aged 50-64 were receiving Jobseeker Support (JS), 7,854 (18%) more than in February 2020 (before lockdown). The number on JS who are available for full-time work (Work Ready) was 37% higher than in February 2020 and 45% higher than in June 2019.
- 15 The number of people aged 65+ receiving Jobseeker Support and other income and asset-tested income support is much smaller because most seniors receive NZ Super. In June 2020, there were 610 seniors on Jobseeker Support, 13% higher than in February 2020 and 29% higher than in June 2019.

Figure 2 Numbers of older workers receiving Jobseeker Support



Source: MSD, administrative data

- 16 More people are also receiving other benefits, supplementary assistance (especially Accommodation Supplement) and hardship assistance.
- 17 Benefit data is timelier than the official unemployment data, but only includes those who qualify for assistance, and may exclude many older workers who receive NZ Super, have partners working or significant investment income. The COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP), on the other hand, is available to people who have lost their job due to the impact of COVID-19 since 1 March 2020, some of whom may not qualify for a benefit.
- 18 CIRP commenced on 8 June 2020 and is payable for up to 12 weeks. People with partners who are still working may be eligible for this payment if their partner is earning under \$2000 per week. People who qualify for NZ Super may be eligible and people on other benefits may choose to switch from a benefit to the Income Relief Payment.
- 19 In June 2020, 2,144 COVID-19 income relief payment recipients were aged 50-64 and 604 were aged 65+, out of a total of 10,579 recipients.

Older people may have been more likely to be lonely during lockdown

Rationale: 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.

- 20 Data is not yet available from Stats NZ's HLFS COVID-19 supplement.
- 21 The 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) provides baseline data indicating that older people in private dwellings were less likely than younger people to feel lonely at least some of the time (11.2% of those aged 65+ compared to 19.4% of those aged 15-49).

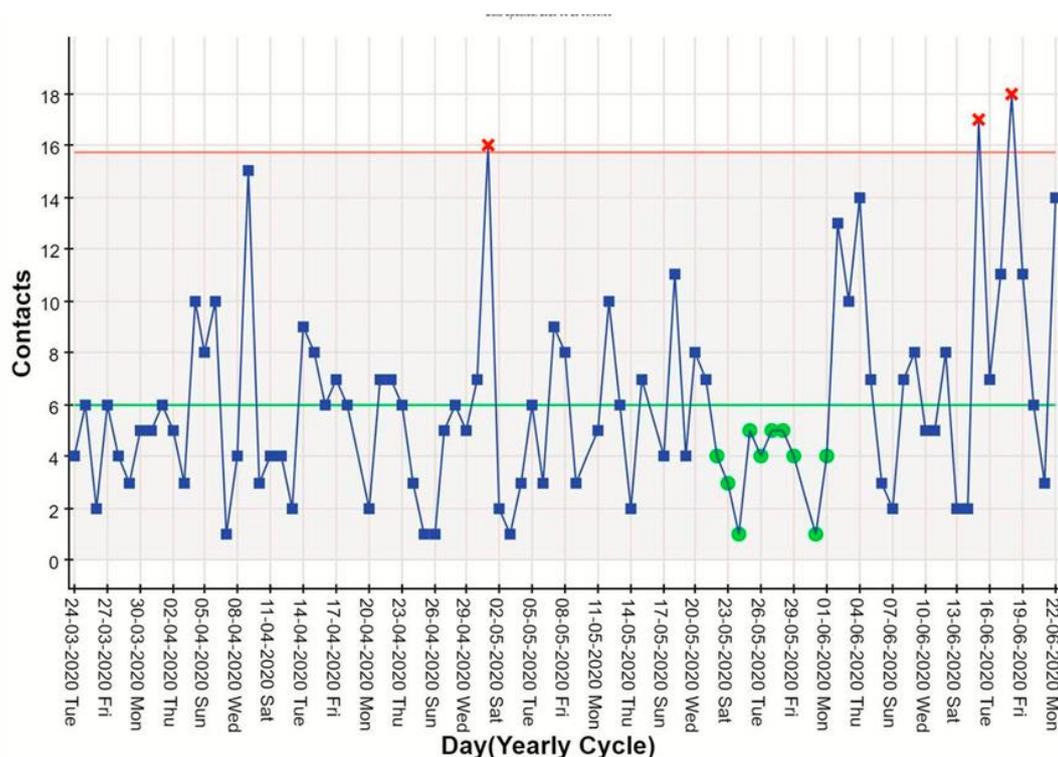
- 22 The Ministry of Justice’s COVID-19 Justice and Wellbeing Survey found that:
- during Levels 3 and 4, overall 15% of seniors surveyed said they felt lonely at least some of the time in the last week - a little higher than for those aged 30-64, but the differences were not statistically significant
 - loneliness amongst seniors appeared to spike in the week of 28 April–4 May, when 24% said they felt lonely at least some of time over the last 7 days
 - during Level 2, only about 8% felt lonely at least some of the time.
- 23 This survey has high sample errors due to small sample sizes. The Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Survey has a considerably larger sample size, but data is not yet available by age group.

Elder abuse

Rationale: 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.

- 24 The prevalence of elder abuse was identified as a key data gap in the Better Later Life indicators.
- 25 Figure 3 shows daily numbers of calls to the Elder Abuse helpline, from 24 March to 22 June 2020. The green line is the median and the red line is the upper quartile. The red x’s show where volumes are above predicted levels, including peaks on and after World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. We are working to get more data and understanding of what the data is showing.

Figure 3 Numbers of inbound calls to the EARS helpline



Source: HCM, numbers of inbound calls to elder abuse helpline

Discrimination

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

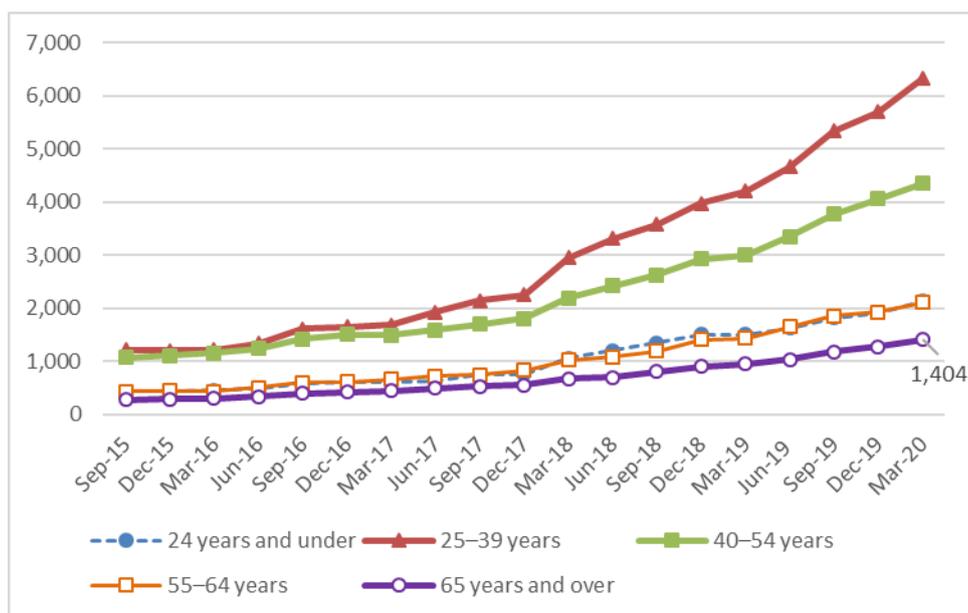
- 26 Baseline data from the 2018 General Social Survey indicated that older people are less likely to say they experienced discrimination than younger people. We do not yet have any data on discrimination experienced during or after Covid-19 restrictions.

Numbers on the housing register have continued to increase

Rationale: Reduced incomes may affect some older people's ability to fund rents and mortgages.

- 27 Baseline data used in the initial Better Later Life indicators show that older people were least likely to be in severe housing deprivation and least likely to be on the public housing register.
- 28 There were 1,404 seniors on the public housing register in March 2020. This was 47.4% higher than in March 2019 (similar to the overall increase) and nearly five times higher than in March 2016.
- 29 MSD paused all new Public housing assessments under COVID alert level four, and since April 28 (alert level three) has limited assessments to those most in need, including clients living in emergency housing. Public housing assessments will be available to all cohorts from 1 July.

Figure 4 Numbers on the housing register by age of main applicant



Source: MSD, Housing register⁸

Next steps

- 30 We will continue to work with other agencies to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on older people and older workers, and on government and community responses to mitigate these impacts.
- 31 We will provide the first quarterly update on these indicators in August 2020, after the results of the June 2020 HLFS and HLFS COVID-19 supplement are released.

⁸ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/index.html>