

COVID-19 indicators for older people – November 2020 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 30 November 2020.

Highlights

- This report uses data available up to 30 November 2020. Most of the data relates to the September 2020 quarter (three months to September 2020).
- In the September 2020 quarter, 6.3% of people aged 65-74 said they did not have enough money to meet everyday needs, similar to the overall average of 7.2%.
- Over the same period, 3.6% of those aged 65-74 and 3.3% 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 September quarter were not significantly different to the June 2020 quarter. The underutilisation rate remains high at 8.7% (compared to 7.2% in the March 2020 quarter). Substantial differences in underutilisation of women aged 50+ (11.1%) as compared to men (6.7%) remain.
- Numbers on Jobseeker Support (JS) and other main benefits have increased. At the end of October, 26,771 people aged 50+ were receiving JS Work Ready and 2,625 were receiving the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment.
- Loneliness and discrimination levels have not changed significantly since the last report but remain elevated. The proportion of people aged 75+ who feel lonely at least some of the time was 21.0% in the September 2020 quarter (compared to 12.3% in 2018). As in previous reports, these indicators are substantially higher for older women than older men.
- In general, European* ethnicities appear to be faring better than other ethnicities, experiencing lower unemployment and underutilisation rates and less likely to report that they do not have enough money.
- The consensus among stakeholders was that older people doing well before the pandemic generally continued to do well, while anyone struggling or close to struggling before the pandemic continued to struggle.

* See Footnote 1¹

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+). The first quarterly update report incorporated data available up to August 2020.²
- 3 This report incorporates published and customised data available up to 30 November 2020:

¹ 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.

² Both reports can be found at <http://www.superseniors.ms.govt.nz/about-superseniors/ageing-population/covid-19.html>.

- September 2020 quarter financial wellbeing, loneliness and discrimination data from Stats NZ's Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) wellbeing supplement³
- September 2020 quarter unemployment, employment and underutilisation data for older workers (aged 50+) from Stats NZ's Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS)⁴
- MSD income support data up to October 2020
- wage subsidy data up to 11 September 2020
- numbers of calls to the Elder Abuse helpline up to September 2020
- feedback from key stakeholders who work with older people.

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 ethnicities are less likely to be in material hardship than other ethnic groups.⁶

- 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 September 2020 quarter, 6.3% of people aged 65-74 said they did not have enough money to meet their everyday needs, similar to the average for all age groups of 7.2%. Those aged 75+ are less likely to say they do not have enough money (3.8% in September 2020 quarter).
- 6 Over the same period, 3.6% of those aged 65-74 and 3.3% of those aged 75+ said they had received help from an organisation or foodbank in the last 12 months, compared to 5.2% of those aged 18 and over.
- 7 Māori, Pacific and Asian older people were significantly more likely than European ethnicities to say they did not have enough money. Māori older people were also most likely to have received help from an organisation or foodbank in the last 12 months.

Official statistics show increases 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.⁷ The long-term impacts of job displacement are greater for older workers than younger

³ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/wellbeing-statistics-june-2020-quarter>

⁴ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-september-2020-quarter>

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).

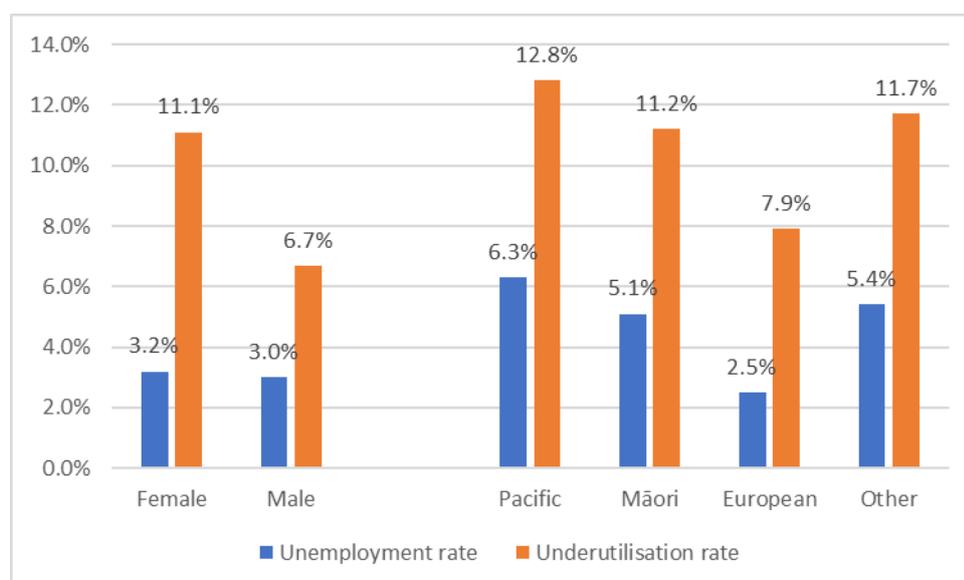
⁶ MSD unpublished analysis of Stats NZ's General Social Survey, combining data for 2014, 2016 and 2018, using an alternative measure: percentage of people with Material Wellbeing Index (MWI-9) score from 0-7.

⁷ For more information see <http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/documents/better-later-life/financial-security-and-economic-participation-indicator.docx>.

workers - on average displaced workers over 50 have 11-12 percent lower employment (and 25-30% lower earnings if employed) after 4-5 years⁸

- 8 The unemployment rate for older workers aged 50+ increased from 2.4% in the June 2020 quarter to 3.1% (29,800 people) in the September 2020 quarter. The unemployment rate for those aged 50-64 increased from 2.6% to 3.4%, while the rate for those aged 65+ increased from 1.6% to 1.8%. None of these increases were statistically significant.
- 9 The underutilisation rate for older workers aged 50+ was 8.7% in the September 2020 quarter. This is not significantly different to the June quarter rate of 8.5% but is significantly higher than the March 2020 quarter underutilisation rate of 7.2%.
- 10 Similarly, the underutilisation rate for females aged 50+ increased significantly between March 2020 and September 2020 quarters, from 8.8% to 11.1% (mainly driven by increased underemployment). The underutilisation rate for males aged 50+ remains lower at 6.7% and has not increased significantly since March 2020 quarter. (Refer Figure 2).
- 11 The unemployment rate and underutilisation rate for Europeans aged 50+ is significantly lower than the other ethnic groups. The data for other ethnicities have relatively high sample errors and none have changed significantly since the March 2020 quarter.

Figure 1: Unemployment and underutilisation rates for older workers 50+, September 2020 quarter



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

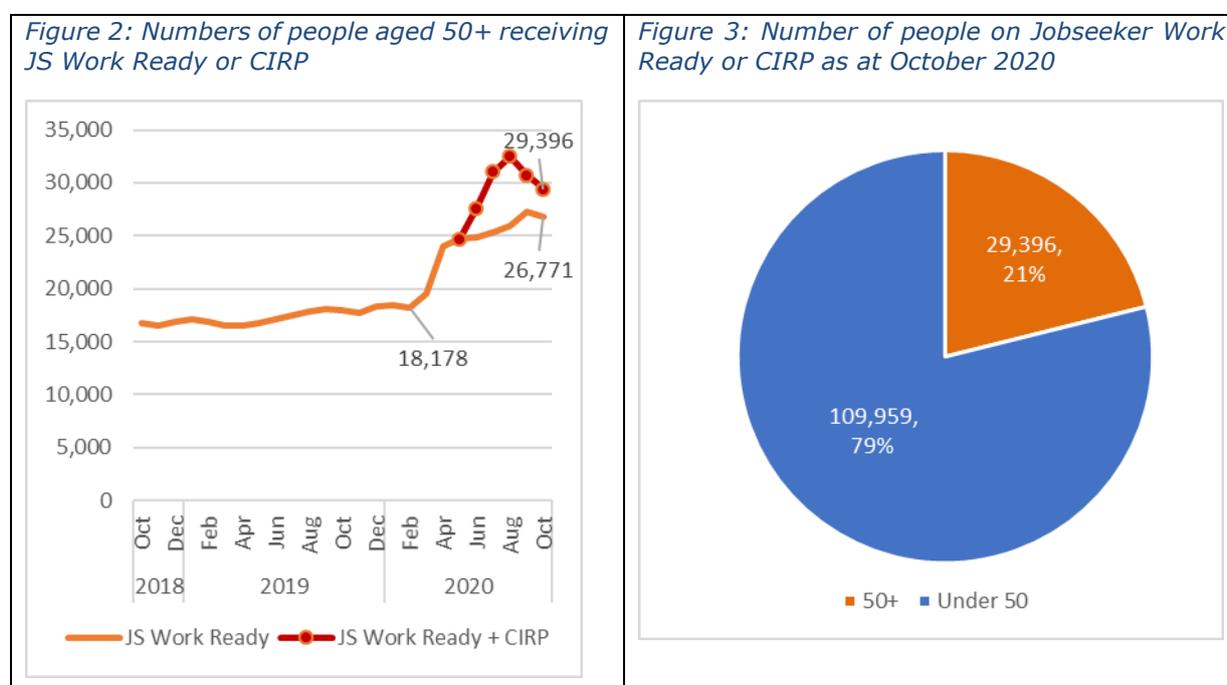
Increasing numbers are receiving income support

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), including some people not eligible for main benefits⁹. Others were in jobs supported by wage subsidies.

⁸ <https://motu.nz/about-us/news/workers-who-lose-their-jobs-are-disadvantaged-for-years/>

⁹ For more information refer <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/income-relief-payment/index.html>.

- 12 In October 2020, 26,771 people aged 50+ were receiving Jobseeker Support (JS) and available for full-time work (JS Work Ready). This is 47.3% (8,593 people) higher than in February 2020 (before lockdown). Numbers dipped by 2.0% between September and October, after increasing every month between February and September 2020.
- 13 The number of people aged 50+ receiving the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP) increased from 2,748 in June 2020 to 6,613 in August 2020, before falling to 2,625 in October 2020. Around 90 percent of people of all ages who stopped receiving CIRP did so because they had reached the end of their 12-week entitlement, rather than obtaining work. Around 1,200 people who have received CIRP were also receiving New Zealand Superannuation.
- 14 In total, in October 2020 29,396 older workers (aged 50+) were on Jobseeker Support (JS) – work ready or the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (refer Figure 2).
- 15 More people aged 50+ are also receiving JS Health Condition and Disability (HCD), other main benefits, supplementary assistance and special needs grants. A similar number of advances of benefit were made to people aged 50+ as in February 2020, once school-related advances are excluded (refer Table 1).



Source: MSD, administrative data

Table 1 Supplementary benefits and hardship assistance

| | Numbers as at October 2020 | | Percentage change from Feb 2020 (before lockdown) | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-----|---|-------|-------|-------|
| | 50-64 | 65+ | 50+ | 50-64 | 65+ | 50+ |
| Main Benefits (excluding NZ Superannuation) | | | | | | |
| Jobseeker Health Condition related | 30,050 | 400 | 30,450 | 15.1% | 22.3% | 15.1% |
| Jobseeker Work ready | 26,478 | 293 | 26,771 | 47.4% | 37.6% | 47.3% |
| Total JS related | 56,528 | 693 | 57,221 | 28.2% | 28.3% | 28.2% |

| | Numbers as at October 2020 | | Percentage change from Feb 2020 (before lockdown) | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---------|--|-------|--------|--------|
| | 50-64 | 65+ | 50+ | 50-64 | 65+ | 50+ |
| Other main benefits¹⁰ | 54,036 | 5,387 | 59,423 | 1.7% | 5.5% | 2.0% |
| Supplementary benefits | | | | | | |
| Accommodation Supplement | 77,348 | 49,070 | 126,418 | 14.3% | 5.1 % | 10.6 % |
| Disability Allowance | 54,213 | 130,021 | 184,683 | 2.8% | 0.8% | 1.6 % |
| Temporary Additional Support/Special Benefit | 28,070 | 9,720 | 38,085 | 21.2% | 18.3 % | 21.4 % |
| Hardship assistance | | | | | | |
| Benefit Advances | 10,964 | 3,690 | 14,654 | -7.1% | -1.5% | -5.7% |
| Special Needs Grants | 20,340 | 5,082 | 24,376 | 8.2% | 23.3% | 6.3% |

Source: MSD administrative data

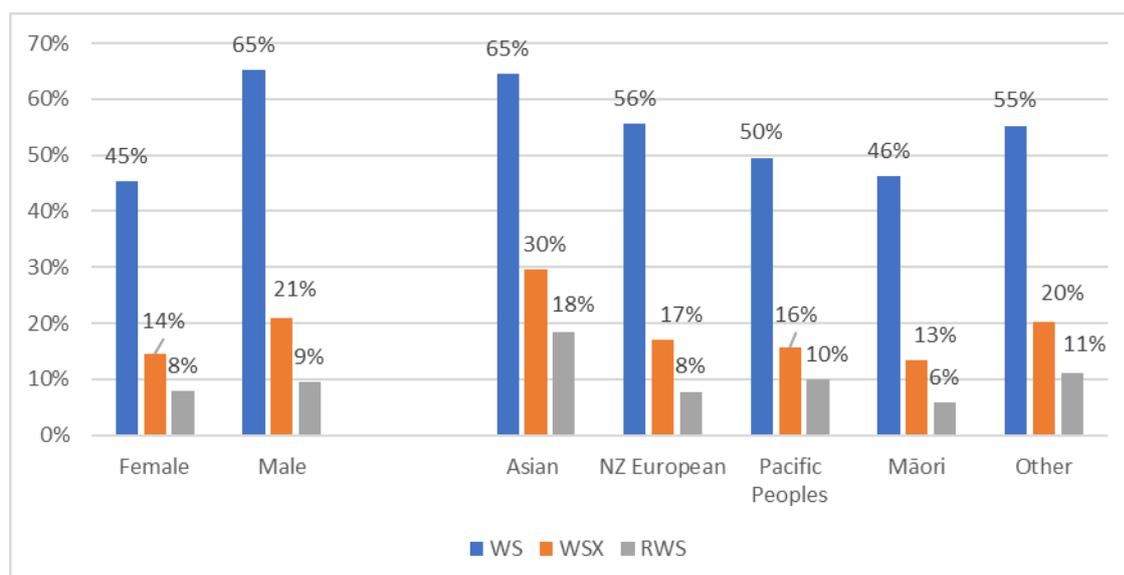
Significant numbers of jobs were supported by COVID-19 wage subsidies

- 16 MSD has produced an updated report on how wage subsidies were distributed across the population and the kinds of jobs that were supported. It incorporates data to 11 September 2020. By this time all wage subsidies were closed to new applications and most subsidies had been completed¹¹. The data excludes sole traders.
- 17 In total, 425,500 jobs (57%) held by employees aged 50+ were supported by at least one wage subsidy, compared to 64% of jobs held by employees under 50. Jobs held by employees aged 50-64 were more likely to be supported (58%) than those aged 65+ (53%).
- 18 Looking across the different wage subsidies, 55% of jobs held by employees aged 50+ were supported by the original Wage Subsidy (WS), 18% were supported by the Wage Subsidy Extension (WSX) and 9% were supported by the Resurgence Wage Subsidy (RWS).
- 19 Male job holders are more likely than women to be in jobs supported by the WS (65% for men aged 50+ and 45% for women aged 50+), the WSX (21% of men aged 50+ versus 14% of women aged 50+). The differences were smaller for the RWS (9% of men and 8% of women aged 50+). (Refer Figure 4.)
- 20 Asian people are more likely to be in jobs supported by the WS (65% for Asian employees aged 50+), the WSX (30% of jobs held by Asian employees aged 50+) and the RWS (18% of jobs held by Asian employees aged 50+).

¹⁰ Main benefits include JS related, Sole Parent Support, Supported Living Payment, Youth Payment/Young Parent Payment, Emergency Benefit, and Jobseeker Support Student Hardship Maintenance Allowance. NZ Super and Veteran's Pension are not main benefits.

¹¹ This report will be available at <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/covid-19-evidence.html> in early December 2020. 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.

Figure 4: Proportion of unique jobs supported by the Wage Subsidy and Wage Subsidy Extension – 50+ by sex and ethnicity



Source: MSD, 2020. *Who received the COVID-19 wage subsidies?*

Older people's loneliness is still higher than 2018

Rationale for the 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.

- 21 September 2020 quarter wellbeing statistics from Stats NZ's COVID-19 supplement¹² showed that 14.6% of people aged 65-74 and 21.0% of people aged 75+ felt lonely at least some of the time (some of, most of, or all the time). These results are not significantly different to the June 2020 quarter, but remain significantly higher than the equivalent measure collected in the 2018 General Social Survey (GSS). (Refer Figure 5.)
- 22 Those aged 18-24 are still most likely to feel lonely at least some of the time, but the difference between them and those aged 75+ is not statistically significant. Women are more likely to say they felt lonely at least some of the time than men across all age groups. (Refer Figure 6.)
- 23 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.

¹² <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/wellbeing-statistics-september-2020-quarter>.

Figure 5: Percentage of people who felt lonely at least some of the time in the last four weeks- by age group

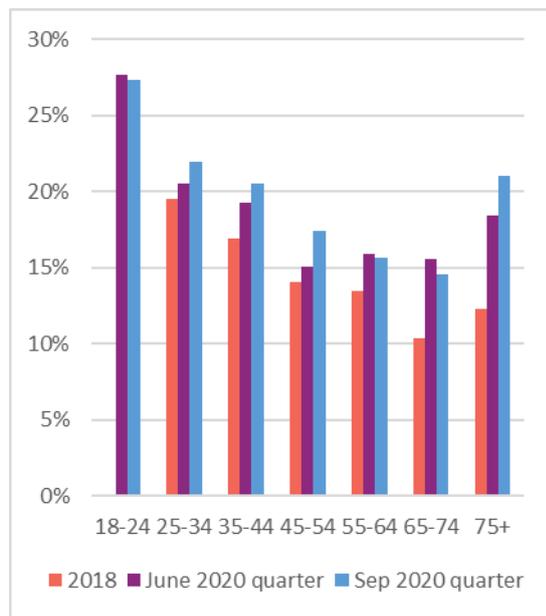
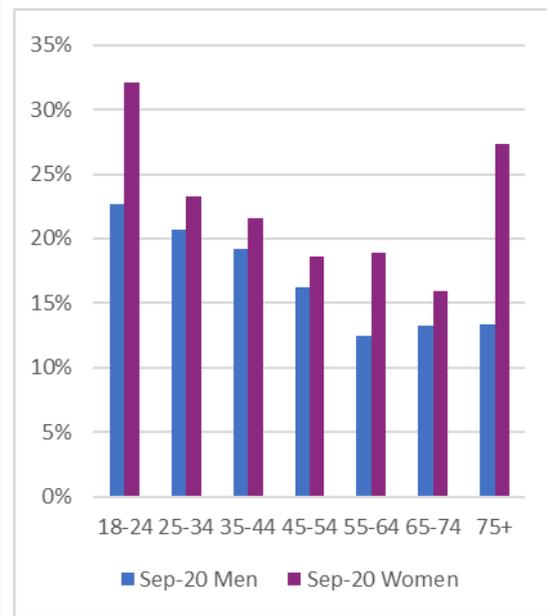


Figure 6: Percentage of people who felt lonely at least some of the time in the last four weeks - by age group and sex



Source: Statistics NZ, Wellbeing Statistics

Discrimination reported by people aged 65-74 is still significantly higher than in previous years

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

- 24 September 2020 quarter data from Stats NZ’s COVID-19 supplement showed that 14.2% of people aged 65-74 and 9.1% of people aged 75+ reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination in the last 12 months. These proportions are not significantly higher than those reported in the June 2020 quarter, and remain significantly higher than the 7.7% reported in the 2018 GSS. Older people are still less likely than average to say they experienced some form of discrimination. (Refer Figure 7.)
- 25 Women are more likely to say they had experienced some form of discrimination than their male counterparts (for example, 15.6% of women and 12.7% of men aged 65-74). (Refer Figure 8.)

Figure 7: Percentage of people who have been subject to some form of discrimination in the previous 12 months, by age group

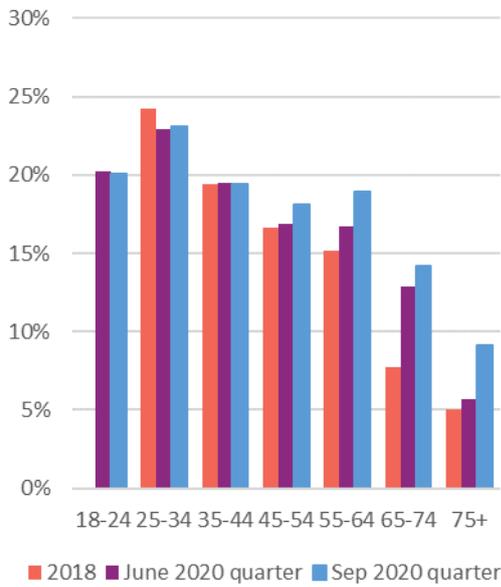
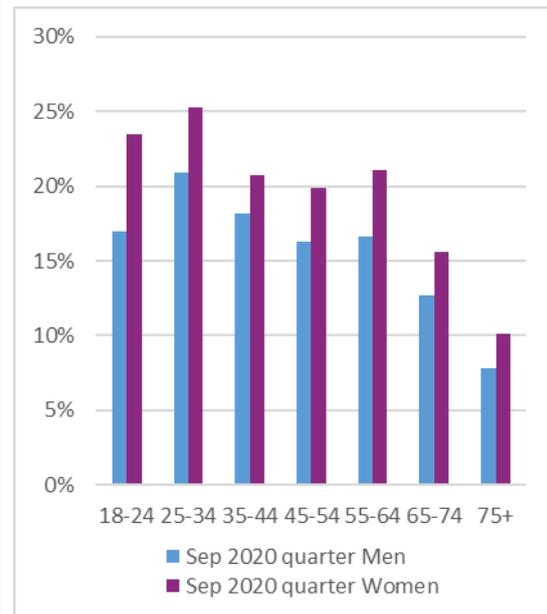


Figure 7: Percentage of people who have been subject to some form of discrimination in the previous 12 months, by age group and sex



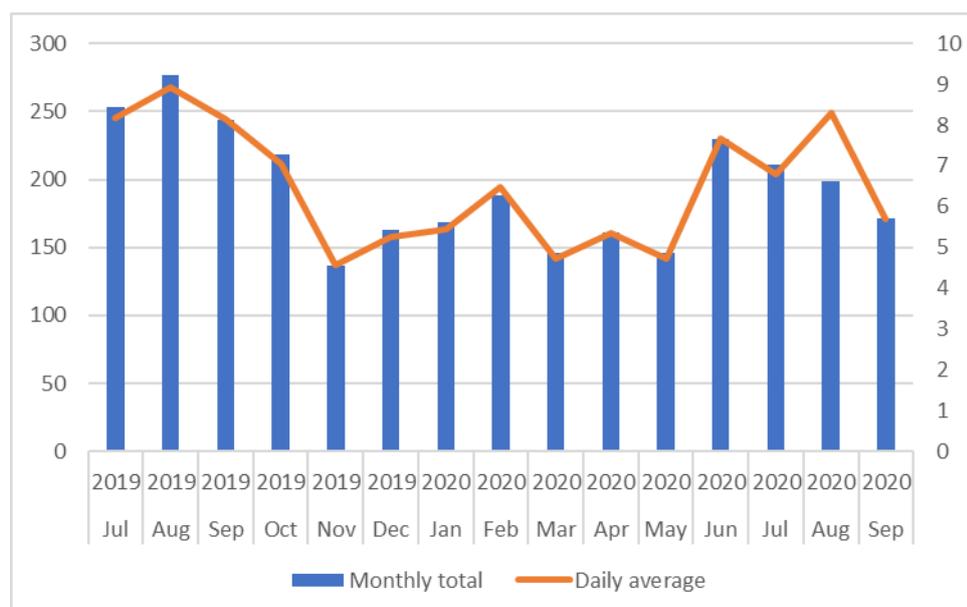
Source: Statistics NZ, Wellbeing Statistics

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.

- 26 There were 581 calls to the Elder Abuse Response Service (EARS) phone line in the September 2020 quarter. This was higher than the 537 calls in the June 2020 quarter. The June 2020 quarter was influenced by the campaign led by the Office for Seniors to raise awareness of elder abuse). The number of calls in each of July, August and September 2020 were all lower than the same month the previous year. (Refer Figure 9).
- 27 There were also 71 emails in the September 2020 quarter - contacts to the EARS der Abuse Response Service email is often from concerned others such as family members seeking information regarding locally available services. There were just four SMS' (texts).
- 28 This data does not include direct approaches or referrals to local EARS providers that do not go through the national call centre. Some stakeholders have said there has been an increase in elder abuse over lockdown periods.

Figure 8: Numbers of inbound calls to the Elder Abuse Response Service helpline



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 five years to March 2020.

- 29 September 2020 quarter public housing register data has not yet been published.
- 30 MSD paused all new Public housing assessments under COVID alert level four, and between 28 April and 30 June limited assessments to those most in need, including clients living in emergency housing. Public housing assessments became available to all cohorts from 1 July 2020.
- 31 The number of emergency housing grants paid to older people (65+) by MSD increased from 209 in February 2020 to 411 in October 2020.

Key stakeholders

- 32 The Office for Seniors contacted a cross-section of stakeholders across New Zealand in the week ending 20 November 2020 to ask them about the experiences of older people and their organisations during the pandemic.

Most organisations said the pandemic had presented them with both opportunities and challenges

- 33 Some mentioned improvements to systems and digital communications, an increase in the visibility of issues affecting older people, more people wanting to join or connect to their organisations, and getting a clearer understanding of their organisation's purpose, values and role.
- 34 Others reported fewer members renewing their subscriptions, possibly due to reduced face-to-face services being offered, some older people being fearful of resuming face-to-face activities, and the removal of cheques by many banks. Organisations that are less digital and/or whose members are not digitally literate struggled to adapt. Some experienced an increased demand for some services and struggled to respond.
- 35 A few organisations said the pandemic had caused them financial stress as their workload had increased, but they did not have enough resources to fund overtime. Some are concerned about an increase in their staff's stress levels.

Most older people are doing well, but some continue to struggle

- 36 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. There were several other factors that influenced this including whether they were already connected with support services, what type of support services they were using, where they lived and who they lived with, their age group and health.
- 37 Themes included:
- the resilience of people and communities, including enablers and barriers to resilience
 - fear of resuming activities and reengaging in public life. Stakeholders are concerned about the risk of “social atrophy” among a reportedly significant minority of older people who are apprehensive or fearful of resuming activities
 - delay in resumption of services or services being cut entirely (raised by many stakeholders). Stakeholders are particularly worried about how this will affect social isolation and physical health, particularly in relation to fitness
 - the digital divide – while for some the pandemic has been a push to get digitally connected, for many others who are not digitally connected this increasingly impacted on their ability to meaningfully participate in society. The impact of banks reducing the use of cheques is also a common concern
 - a perception that some of the public health response rules were discriminatory. Examples given included higher alert level restrictions being imposed on those living in rest homes, including independent villas, than on the rest of the population
 - an increase in elder abuse over lockdown periods reported by some stakeholders.
- 38 Stakeholders representing migrant communities raised a number of issues specific to their communities. This included the social and cultural impact of borders being closed and being unable to visit or be visited by family, financial stresses due to younger family members’ job losses and business closures, language barriers impacting communications about the public health response, family members advising older people not to resume activities because of health concerns.
- 39 Stakeholders also commented on the possible impact on vulnerable older people of further moves to alert levels 3 and 4. They were especially concerned about the effect on older people’s mental health, which was more of an issue during the August COVID-19 resurgence than in March and April.