



Age Concern Nelson Tasman

LIVING WITH COVID IN THE COMMUNITY

2022 SURVEY OF SENIORS

INTRODUCTION

Covid 19 has had huge impacts on the way New Zealanders work, socialise and stay connected. The global pandemic has forced us to change the way we live, and for many of our seniors that has been exhausting and stressful.

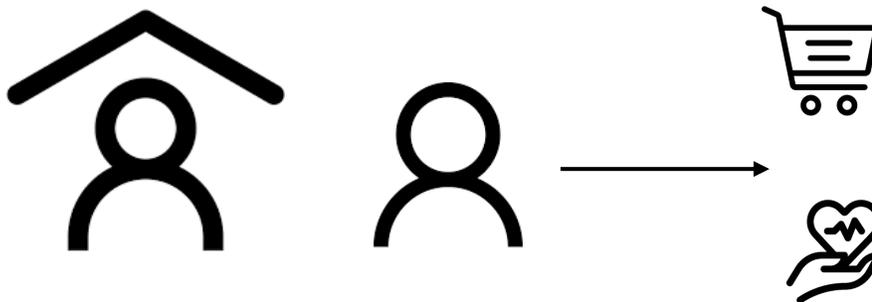
Back in 2020, during New Zealand's first lockdown, the 70+ age group was told to stay home due to the evidence from other parts of the world where Covid had run rampant.

Two years on, the landscape is very different – Omicron has hit our shores; we've had very high levels of vaccination, and mandates have been introduced.

Since 2020 here at Age Concern Nelson Tasman we've heard anecdotal evidence that many older people have found living in the pandemic very hard, while others have coped really well. We wanted to find out more, and so this survey is a snapshot of the wellbeing of seniors in a six-week period between April and May 2022.

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, our findings showed that just over half (52%) of respondents are trying to stay home as much as possible.
- When they do leave home it's mostly for health appointments or shopping.



- There is a real concern among seniors about catching Covid. Asked to give their concern a rating between 0 (not at all concerned) and 10 (very), the **average response was 6.2**. Interestingly, it was the oldest responders – those aged between 90 and 94 – who were the least concerned, giving a rating of 4.3 on average.

- A pleasing result was that only a quarter of respondents said they felt more anxious or worried now than they had at previous times during the Covid pandemic.
- A high percentage of people – 4 out of 5 – are keeping socially connected with family and friends. Almost half are doing it with phone and video calls, almost a third are seeing people in person, and just under a quarter via social media and texting.



- Asked what they found the most difficult about living with Covid, the most common response was how long it was going to last. A close second was 'being in a crowd of people'.
- We received 100 comments from respondents, some of which we've included in this report. One of the most common issues raised was the frustration and anxiety that older people felt with people being unmasked in social settings. Others spoke to their choice of limiting social contact because of other health conditions.

"So many people are acting as though Covid does not exist any more. Mask wearing is going by the wayside."

"I am seeing a lot less people wearing masks than are supposed to. In the supermarket today, could be as many as 25% unmasked. Why have a mandate and not enforce it?"

“The uncertainty of how many years Covid will affect social connectivity, job security, effects on those who catch Covid long-term, the fact that you’re always wary of visiting friends and family, relationships are no longer natural and spontaneous, and you tend to always be balancing the risks against having fun or activities. It does narrow your world and your life compared with pre-Covid . . .”

Overall, we were heartened by how many people spoke to their resilience and ability to cope with the massive differences to their everyday lives that Covid has created. This survey backed up our conversations with many of our older clients and members, who have been quietly getting on with things, showing support and kindness to others, volunteering to help those less fortunate, and supporting the government mandates of wearing masks and getting vaccinated. We particularly enjoyed this comment:

“Hopefully, we will be able to normalise this virus. As we get older that means our time to enjoy things is reducing – so it is important to do as much as we can with whatever time we have left. Make every day count.”

Kia ora to you all

The Age Concern Nelson Tasman team

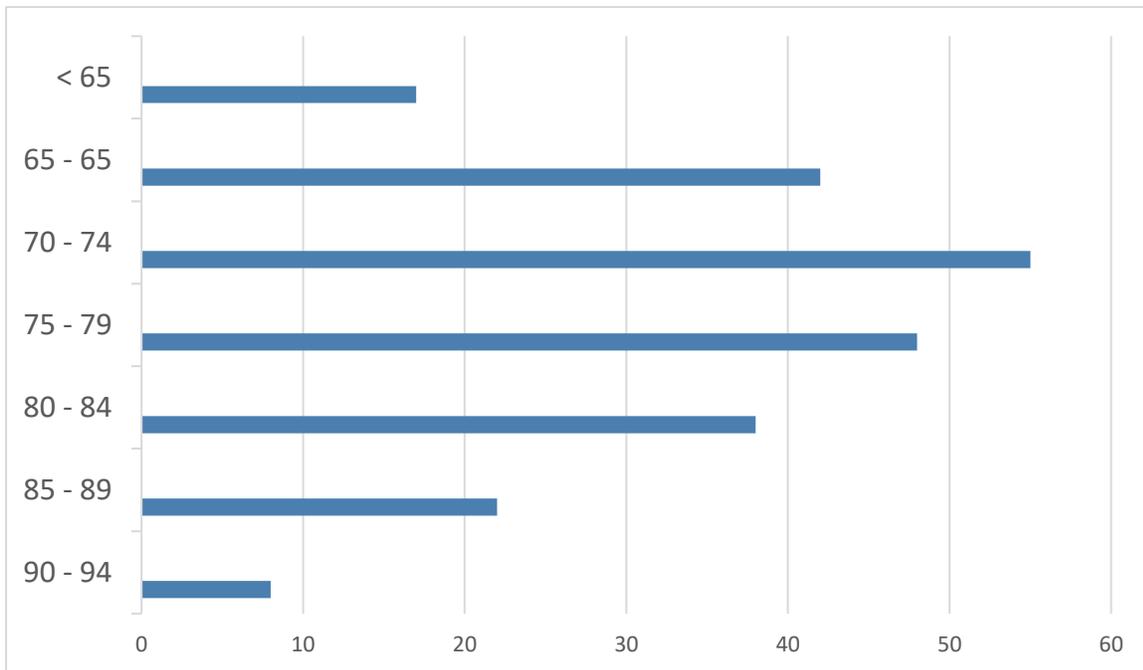
METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted between 8th April and 25th May 2022. In total, 233 people responded, with 216 of them over 65. This represents approximately 1.2 % of the senior population of the Nelson Tasman region. It is important to note the small size of the under-65s when considering comparisons in this report. However, we considered it still useful to draw conclusions about any differences between seniors and the wider population.

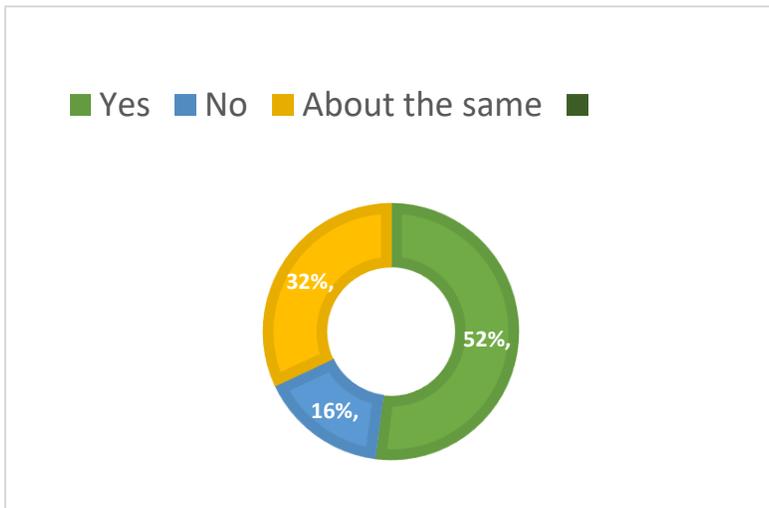
The survey was online and sent out to Age Concern Nelson Tasman's database, volunteers and other senior groups, as well as being shared on social media. We acknowledge that it does mean only those with email and internet access could respond.

No location data was collected.

AGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



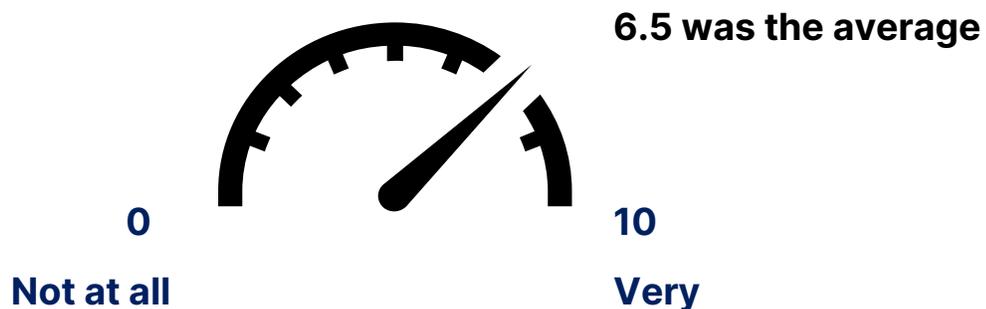
ARE YOU TRYING TO STAY HOME AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE?



“My husband is 90 and has health issues. While we are both fully vaccinated, we are actively trying to avoid crowds. We haven’t been to the movies or eaten out in over two years.”

There were few differences between age groups for this question. Less than 1 in 5 had not changed their behaviour because of Covid.

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT CATCHING COVID?



The under-65s and over 90s were the two age groups who showed the least concern. The highest rating was given by those aged 85 to 89, with the others all around the same.

“I am more worried about getting this virus than I would normally be because I have had pneumonia twice in the last three years.”

WHAT ACTIVITIES TO DO YOU LEAVE THE HOUSE FOR?

SHOPPING



87%

MEDICAL



87%

FRIENDS & FAMILY



65.5%

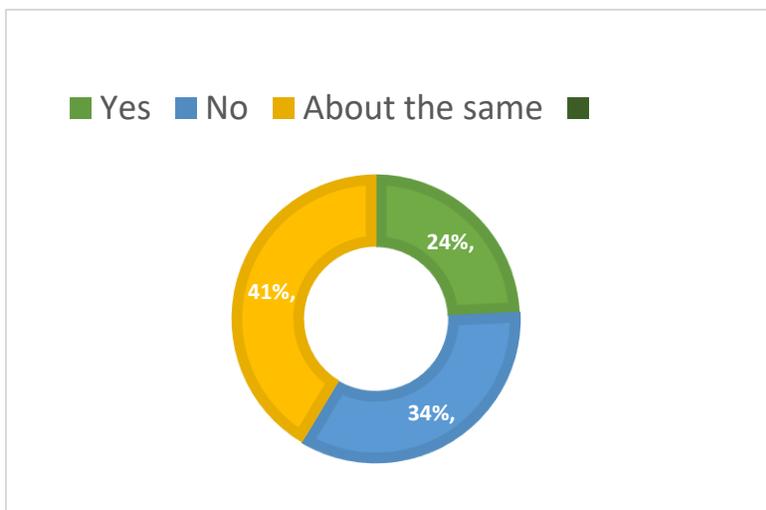
RECREATION



63.3%

People were allowed to select as many of these as they wanted. 2 out of 5 are going to the library and continuing to eat out. Half of seniors are attending social gatherings, and 17% are attending church/worship.

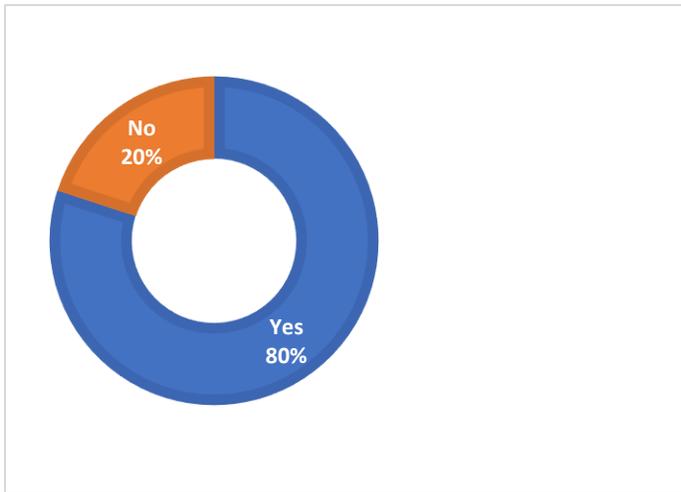
DO YOU FEEL MORE ANXIOUS/WORRIED NOW THAN YOU DID AT PREVIOUS TIMES DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC?



It was interestingly the younger seniors – those up to 74 – who gave No as their top answer. But no group reported that they did feel more anxious or worried, which is a good result to see.

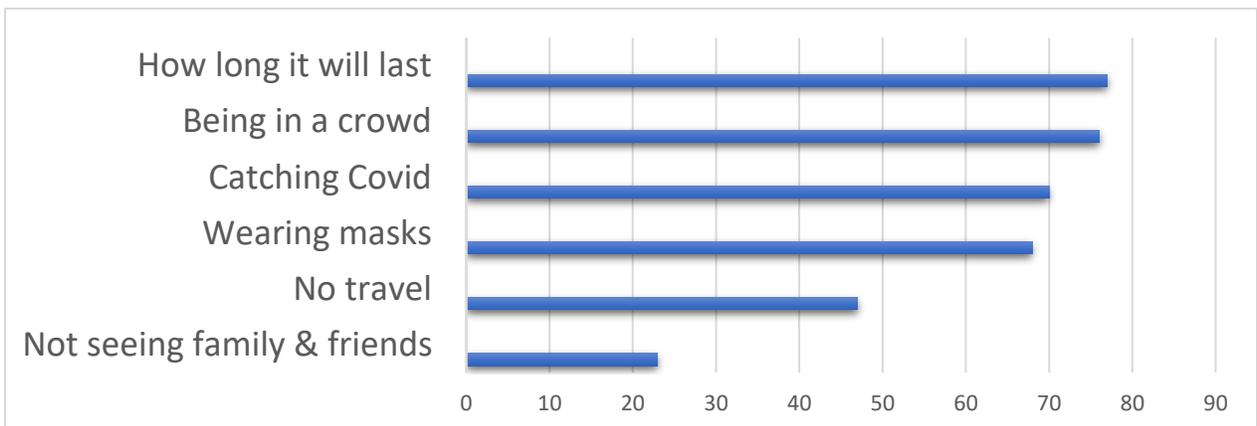
“Just trying not to be too consumed by all the negative info but also avoiding situations that could be a threat.”

ARE YOU MANAGING TO KEEP SOCIALLY CONNECTED WITH FRIENDS/FAMILY?



We were really pleased to see that 4 out of 5 seniors are keeping in touch with friends and family, and there was little difference in the results broken down into age groups.

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST DIFFICULT ABOUT THE PANDEMIC AT THE MOMENT? (Asked to select just one)



When we analysed the responses by different age groups, there were slight differences. Those aged up to 75 were less worried about how long it might last, while the 75+ were much more worried about being in a crowd than the younger respondents.

OTHER COMMENTS PROVIDED BY RESPONDENTS

“Wearing hearing aids and talking to mask wearers is very difficult as I lipread a lot.”

“I have noticed people are more willing to help with lifts to supermarket and bringing me things.”

Recently retired, this is the time when I should be making new friends as working full time did not allow for that. We should also be getting out and travelling NZ but as my other half is immune compromised he is too scared to go far . . . We don't even see the grandchildren because Covid has been spreading through their schools. I haven't been able to see my Mum as she has been in lockdown at her special care area of the resthome since January.

“I personally feel we have to learn to live with it like we do with other ailments, especially the regular flu. We also need to be sensible and take reasonable care.”

“I feel we are lacking consistency in the government's response to Covid. We have drifted from eradication to total acceptance, and this does not fill me with confidence.”

ABOUT AGE CONCERN NELSON TASMAN

Age Concern Nelson Tasman is a registered charity providing services and support for people 65+ in the Nelson Tasman region.

Our vision is for older people to live a meaningful life in an inclusive society.

Our services help older people live their best lives. This means:

- Connecting people with each other and their communities
- Protecting people from harm
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Enabling people to maintain independence

As a member of Age Concern New Zealand, we work closely with a network of local Age Concerns providing similar services to older people through the country.



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