



**Health  
Consumers  
Tasmania**

Building a Consumers Health Voice in Tasmania

## **Concerns and queries regarding COVID-19**

**Survey conducted 6-9 April 2020**

### **Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

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From 6 to 9 April 2020 Health Consumers Tasmania conducted a survey into Tasmanians concerns and queries about COVID-19.

The survey was distributed through Health Consumers Tasmania stakeholders and networks, comprising patients, carers, health consumer representatives, community volunteers and workers, and health service employees.

A total of 323 people responded to an on-line survey.

We thank members of our Consumer Reference Group for assisting in survey design and advertising.

The attached report, prepared by Dr Susan Banks (UTAS), Dr Brendan Churchill (UMelb) and Dr Jack Leggett (UQ) provides important insights into the attitudes and concerns of Tasmanians as they experienced the first 100 reported infections from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key conclusions are tabled below:

- On the whole, Tasmanians feel safe.
  - Nearly two thirds (63%) felt safe or very safe
    - Reflecting this was a general theme supporting our State leaders in making quick and difficult decisions
  - Of concern
    - 1 in 5 (19.6%) indicated that they did not feel safe
    - and a similar number (17.0%) didn't know
    - younger people (aged 18-34) felt the least safe of the age groups
    - those people with a pre-existing health condition or a disability also felt much less safe.
  
- The matter of how treatment would be prioritised was also raised in the survey across several questions – although the numbers were low. This concern or “sense of safety” is an ethical issue that was raised mostly by those with a disability, chronic illness or who are older. They have raised concerns that access to health support may be denied if the number of those who are infected exceeds the number of emergency beds / ventilators.
  
- Nearly one third of Tasmanians indicated they would not go to see their GP or a doctor if they became sick or needed ongoing treatment as they normally would over the next two weeks. A significant proportion of those surveyed did not appear to be aware of the new steps GP's and pharmacists were taking through telehealth initiatives.
  - 43.8% indicated they would go to see their GP or doctor as per normal
  - 26.3% indicated they would phone and use telehealth if that option was available, but not visit a doctor in person
  - 30% indicated they would no longer seek medical treatment as they were concerned with contagion risk, were purposely delaying all non-emergency treatment or

thought they were doing the right thing by not overburdening the health system during the pandemic.

- There appears to be a high number of Tasmania's (17%) who are now being left behind without access to medications, doctors and carers. The reasons given relate mostly to elective surgery cancellations or now not being able to access specialists.

People with a disability and those with a chronic condition were more worried about access to health care services than were non-disabled people.

- The primary concerns or worries of Tasmanians during this period related to the impact of the virus on their own health "Is this how I'm going to die", the health of others "the NW health outbreak", "community transmission" or on the health system itself "capacity and availability of medicines and health services".
  - Half of those surveyed (50%) indicated their primary concern was that they would catch the virus, someone they loved would catch the virus or were worried that the health system would not cope – considered the *direct health impact* of the coronavirus on Tasmania.
    - Peoples concern about catching the virus themselves (15.4%) was less than their concern that someone else may catch it
    - 27% indicated they were concerned for others ie someone they knew, elderly parents, children etc (14.1%) would catch the virus, or their fellow Tasmanians (12.9%)
  - Other concerns related to the pending Easter lockdown (13.3%), other people breaking the isolation rules (9.8%), the economy or their own finances (8%) and the ability for their existing day to day health concerns being met during the coronavirus (7.9%).
- People with a disability and those with one or more health conditions wanted more information about how Covid-19 can be caught, spread and test procedures which includes how to stay safe. This finding would also relate to carers of patients also.

There were also significant information requests through this survey around

- the Government's current testing regime, the availability of testing and what does this mean for potential community transmission rates
- the number of people who have been tested and the number of positive cases within localised areas
- having a deeper understanding about what the future might hold, having access to information about possible scenario options that may emerge and the different responses that could be adopted.

## Finding 1 - Communities feeling of Safety

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Despite most people indicating they feel safe or very safe, there is still a high number of those in our community who don't feel safe - one in five – and a similar number are not sure.

Reasons given for not feeling safe range from:

- ***Every-one is at risk of infection***

“I don't want to leave my house but I have to get groceries. I am terrified I will get sick, shops are crowded”

“very contagious virus and not enough testing”

“Only feel safe at home” or “no one is safe or immune”

- ***Concerned about other people behaviour***

“people breaking rule”

“with contact with 20 plus adults at work every day. I am not content that many of my colleagues are taking isolation orders seriously. One attends church, one has play dates with friends and their kids”

- ***Personal risk of infection***

“I am 36 weeks pregnant and my pregnancy is high risk, the added worry of becoming infected with coronavirus coupled with an upcoming necessary caesarean is creating a lot of anxiety”

“catching it I have asthma”,

“compromised immune system but still need to go to appointments/chemist etc”

- ***Other comments***

“because I live in an area where there are a large number of virus cases where the source is not able to be tracked”

“waiting for more information to come in on community transmission rates”

“I don't feel like I have all the information”

## Finding 2 - Visiting a GP or Doctor over the next two weeks

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Over half those surveyed (56.2%) would change their behaviour regarding seeking medical treatments as they would normally do. A quarter would phone first and utilise telehealth services whilst just under a third would delay or not visit their GP or doctor.

Reasons given for not seeing a GP or doctor ranged from:

- ***Concerned about the risk of infection***

“I don’t want to take any chances”

“It’s too risky and my doctor didn’t really listen to my concerns about my mental health”

“because I don’t want to get sick”

“too high a risk” and “is it safe”

“no, I support social distancing and avoiding public places”

“I am currently avoiding making doctors appointments for unrelated matters as I am concerned about being infected in the waiting room”

- ***Putting off minor / less serious matters***

“not unless absolutely almost life threatening”

“I am over-due for non-urgent treatment of an ongoing condition – but prefer to avoid the LGH at the moment”

- ***Not wanting to over burden the health system***

“worried about taking a spot of someone who is ill, worried about being in an area with unwell people”

“trying to keep away to free them up and stay safe”, “wouldn’t want to take time away from people who might need it”

### **Finding 3 - Access to medications, doctors or carers.**

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Approximately one in six people (17.0%) cannot access medications, doctors or carers at the moment.

Reasons given relate to:

- ***Services full, closed or cancelled***

“elective surgery cancelled, I was being checked for cancer regularly”

“My son has had surgery cancelled. My son is not able to see his Paediatrician in person”

“Doctor not available for anything other than emergency”

“my mum’s doctor is only doing on-line consults. She is 86 and needs both flu and pneumonia vacs”, “knee replacements cancelled”

#### **Finding 4 - major concerns the community have regarding coronavirus**

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Half of those surveyed (50%) indicated their primary concern was that they would catch the virus, someone they loved would catch the virus or were worried that the health system would not cope as a result of the virus.

Reasons given relate to:

- ***Catching the virus***

keeping my family safe”

“catching the virus” and “that people I love will die”

“my elderly mothers health”

“vulnerable parents and how we interact with them”

“poor availability of PPE’s for medical staff”

“concerns our hospitals won’t cope”

“I don’t want the virus to spread to my home or community”

“what do I do if something happens to my elderly people in Victoria”

“the fact that it is in our hospitals”

“catching it and dying”

“will I be judged as not a worthy life to save in a pandemic because I live with a disability”

“what do we do if one of us gets it but not the other”

“being exposed as an essential worker”,

- ***Lockdown / isolation***

“everyone’s mental health”

“mixed messages”

“that I can’t meet friends”,

“the lack of support for our most vulnerable (carers, disabled, aged)”

“keeping the elderly home”

“that I cannot get to the state where my family lives”

“lack of healthy distractions”

- ***Behaviour of others***

“people with symptoms not adhering to self-isolation”

“too much people movement”

“apathy of some people”

“unnecessary stores still being open so people are still basically ignoring the essential outings only advice”

"I am anxious that my elderly mother won't stay in the house. She continues to go and buy paper and won't accept help"

- ***Finance and economy***

"income and supporting my family"

"job security"

"the short and long-term impacts of this on Tasmania and the world", "having been shut down....no income don't qualify"

- ***Access to health services for non-Covid-19 causes***

"continuing access to food and medications over coming months"

"the hospitals will become infected"

"withdrawal of health services from people with chronic health conditions"

- ***The future***

"life post lockdown"

"the lasting effect on people's mental health and wellbeing"

"how long will this last"

"the length of time to eradicate the virus"

"lack of a cure/immunisation"

"can the testing regime be expanded",

## Finding 5 Questions people want answered

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There doesn't appear to be one primary source of information "where can I find up to date information"?

People have requested more information around the following areas

- ***Nature of the disease, its spread, testing regimes and response***

"current risk of community transmission"

"Is this illness able to be caught more than once"

"Is there a full recovery after you have had the virus?"

"Clearer answers to confirmed cases and where there have been exposed"

"Daily updates of the amount of people that have recovered"

"Open information to main whereabouts of virus. Districts areas"

- ***Rules around lockdown and isolation***

"Why there is no essential services list"

"More clarification of what is an acceptable reason to leave home (eg can I travel from Hobart to Devonport with my partner to check on his parents?)"

"Why can we just be able to surf? I don't think it's fair we can't swim in the ocean"

- ***Access to health and other services***

"Where would I go if I needed to be diagnosed?"

"when to see the GP with flu like symptoms. Concerned we might have mild symptoms and be spreading the virus."

- ***Modelling and strategies***

"reasoning behind govt response"

"How long should we be preparing for these measures to stay in place for"

"What are the plans going forward regarding lifting of social distancing"

"How do authorities intend to control exposure"

"The modelling the Tasmanian Govt is using to base it's decisions on and how long they predict the precautions will be in place based on that modelling"