



**Health
Consumers
Tasmania**

Building a Consumers Health Voice in Tasmania

Concerns and queries regarding COVID-19

Survey 4

conducted 16 – 19 July 2020

Executive Summary

28 July 2020

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Executive Summary

From 15-19 July 2020 Health Consumers Tasmania conducted a survey into Tasmanians concerns and queries about COVID-19.

A total of 294 people responded to the on-line survey. This is the fourth survey of its type; the most recent survey was run 28 to 29 April 2020 with 435 responses and the second survey just prior to Easter (6-9 April) with 323 participating.

The survey was distributed through Health Consumers Tasmania stakeholders and networks, comprising patients, carers, health consumer representatives, community volunteers and health service employees. The survey sample was a self-selecting group and it strongly represents those who are involved with the Tasmanian health system in some form and thereby their collective views are critical as they are the most likely group within the community to be impacted by any changes to health system.

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.

Key conclusions are tabled below:

- On the whole, we can conclude that Tasmanians are learning to live with the coronavirus and are feeling safer now compared to the height of the lockdown (during Easter).
 - When asked, the majority felt safe or very safe (83%) now compared to 79% in April and 63% during Easter.
 - For those who were not feeling safe, the two main reasons provided included a concern the virus would return to Tasmania and that other people were not doing the right thing in relation to social distancing and self-quarantining.
 - Most people said they would get a test for coronavirus if they felt unwell (84%). Despite only 4% indicating outright that they would not get a test, there is still a further 12% who were unsure.

- Of concern to Health Consumers Tasmania is that people's overall health and well-being has deteriorated since February (before coronavirus) with indicators including anxiety, feelings of isolation, physical health and safety all showing disturbing signs of decline.

More people worried

- The level of anxiety within the community is significantly higher with nearly half those surveyed (46%) are now more worried when compared to February (45% indicated no change).
- The proportion of the community being more worried increased with age.

More people feeling isolated

- Over half of those surveyed (55%) now felt more isolated when compared to February (39% indicated no change).
- Increased isolation is more likely to be reported by older people (aged over 65).

Physical health deteriorating

- Physical health is getting worse for 25% of those surveyed (1 in 4 respondents) while 62% indicated no change to their physical health.
- Anecdotally,
 - those who reported a health condition were more likely to report their physical health had deteriorated compared to those with no underlying health conditions.
 - a higher proportion of those aged between 35-44 and over 75 indicated their physical health has deteriorated.

Feeling less safe

- Nearly half (43%) indicated that they are now feeling less safe compared to February while 40% indicated no change.

Accommodation security

- One positive is that around 8% of those surveyed indicated that they felt that their home/accommodation was more secure
- 3% indicated less secure – the majority (89%) indicated no change with their accommodation security.
- Of concern is that those who indicated less secure in their accommodation are predominately aged 45 – 64 or to a lesser extent aged 18 – 24.

- Health Consumers Tasmania asked what restrictions should be lifted and those that should remain in their region. Overall, feedback is strongly in favour for the Government to not alter or change the restrictions in force at the time of the survey.

- Between two thirds and three quarters of those surveyed wanted no change to most restrictions in place.
- Interstate travel was the only exception to this finding with 41% of those surveyed wanting the restrictions on interstate travel tightened for interstate travellers, with a further 40% want these restrictions staying the same.
- There is no public appetite for any easing of the States borders at present.
- The only other areas where there was some demand for a change in the current restrictions was with 33% wanting greater access to elective surgery.

What this is telling us is that the community believe the current policy settings around the restrictions is about right with most requesting a cautious approach to the easing of restrictions. People are clearly quite nervous about the virus returning to Tasmania through transmission from another State.

The community's views on the current lockdown is important as they will bear the social cost to any easing of restrictions, both with their mental health but also if these changes results in people contracting the virus down the track (a second wave). They have a view on what level of risk they are prepared to tolerate as the community emerges from the coronavirus.

- Most Tasmanians have heard of telehealth (90%), yet only 68% of those surveyed knew how to use telehealth which is considered low given that nearly 25% indicated they didn't know how to use telehealth.
 - Reasons given for not knowing about telehealth was that they were unsure whether they could "easily use the internet to find information and services you might need to help with your health".
 - People who did not know or were not sure about telehealth were more likely to be older (over 75) or were twice as likely to have finished schooling at year 11 or below.
 - The usage of telehealth has peaked in Tasmania with less people now (43%) indicating they would use telehealth compared to 55% in April. This is because a higher proportion of people now (52%) would visit their GP in person compared to 34% in April – people are now feeling safe to visit their GP in person.
 - Anecdotally, people who identified that their physical health had deteriorated since February were more likely to use telehealth to see a GP and were less likely to visit their GP in person compared to the broader sample of those surveyed.
 - Those using telehealth were either very satisfied (40%) or satisfied (46%) which is consistent with the findings in April
 - It is worth noting that those not satisfied (14.0%) was higher than April (8%).

- Most people (91%) reported being easily able to use the internet to find health related information and services. Although this figure is high, when services are increasingly delivered on-line, that leaves nearly 1 in 10 people missing out.

- A high number of responses (87%) of those surveyed indicated that they understood everything they needed regarding the current restrictions in place. That 8% stated they didn't understand and still had questions and a further 5% didn't know is considered quite high.
 - A lack of clarity about the rules were the main area of questioning. This applied especially to the fact people were continuing to arrive into Tasmania despite the borders being closed and that people were not physically distancing in public places.
 - There were some responses around clearer information on the nature of the virus (how it spreads) and what plans the government has in place for the future and whether the restrictions would be enacted fast enough if required to restrict future outbreaks in Tasmania.

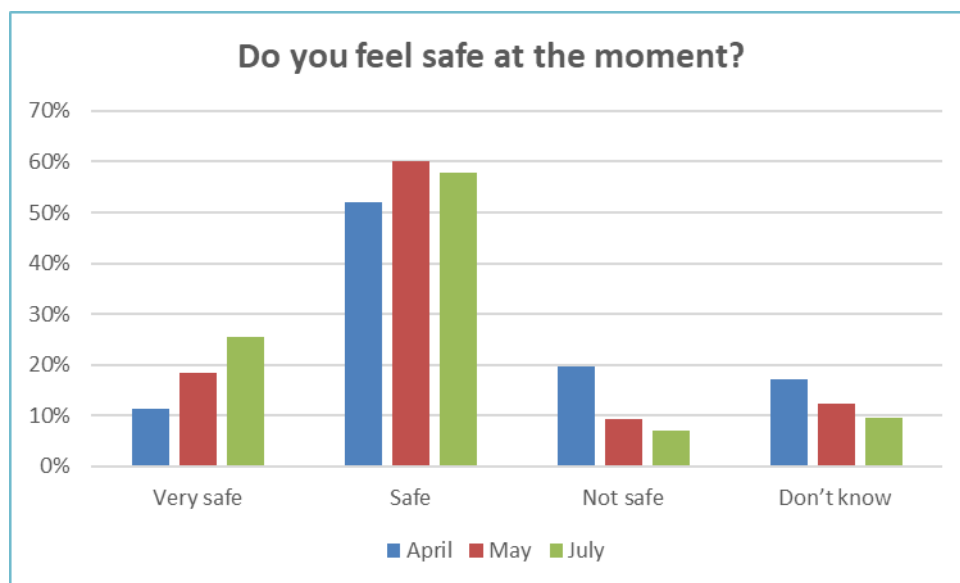
- The number of Tasmanians who cannot access medications, doctors and carers is around 7%. Those missing out reported poor access to medical support, medications or carers.

- A total of 13.6% of those surveyed have been tested for coronavirus (all negative) compared to 6.8% in April.

Finding 1 – Tasmanians are starting to feel safer since the peak of the outbreak

Tasmanians feelings of safety have improved over each month since April. There is a feeling of confidence that the virus has been successfully negotiated given the State did not record any new cases over a 66 day period (till 20 July).

People who felt safe or very safe has increased from 63% in April, to 79% in May and is now at 83% for July. Those who felt unsafe or didn't know has halved over this period (from 37% in April to 17% in July) but which is still considered unacceptably high.



For those not feeling safe, their main reasons for not feeling safe were that they were worried about coronavirus returning to Tasmania and people not doing the right thing.

This suggests that since the coronavirus outbreak commenced in March, people are learning to, or are more becoming more comfortable living with coronavirus in some capacity.

Finding 2 – Tasmanians health and well-being is suffering because of Coronavirus

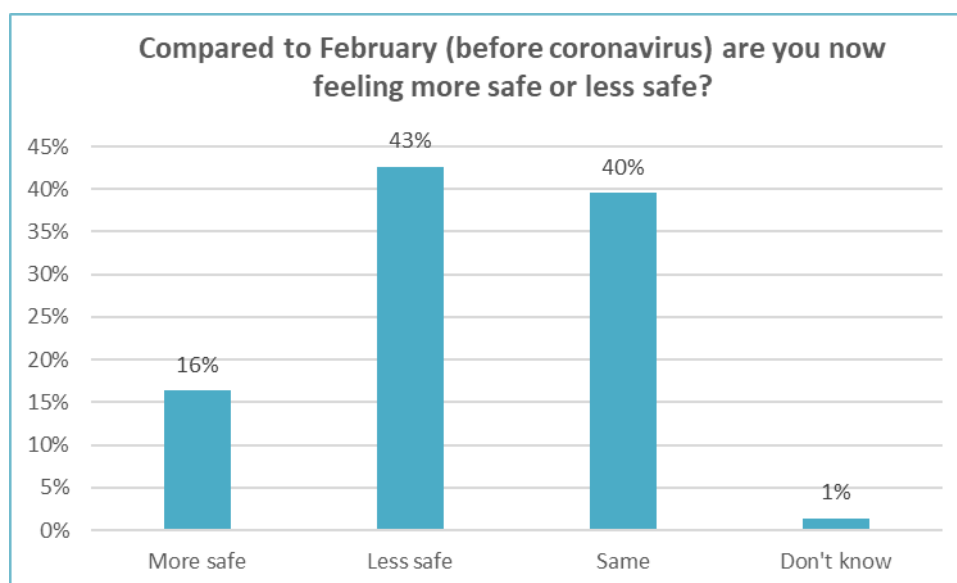
Tasmanians general health and well-being is suffering, with evidence suggesting that anxiety levels are now higher, people are feeling more isolated and the general feeling of peoples own physical health has declined since February.

Feelings of safety

People are feeling much less safe now compared to prior to the outbreak (February) (*see graph below*).

Respondents were asked to identify whether they were feeling more or less safe compared to February 2020 (before the coronavirus began in Tasmania). Approximately 40% indicated they were feeling less safe now than prior to the coronavirus and a similar proportion indicated that they were feeling the same level of safety compared to February.

Of concern, is that approximately 4 in 10 are feeling less safe than when the virus commenced.

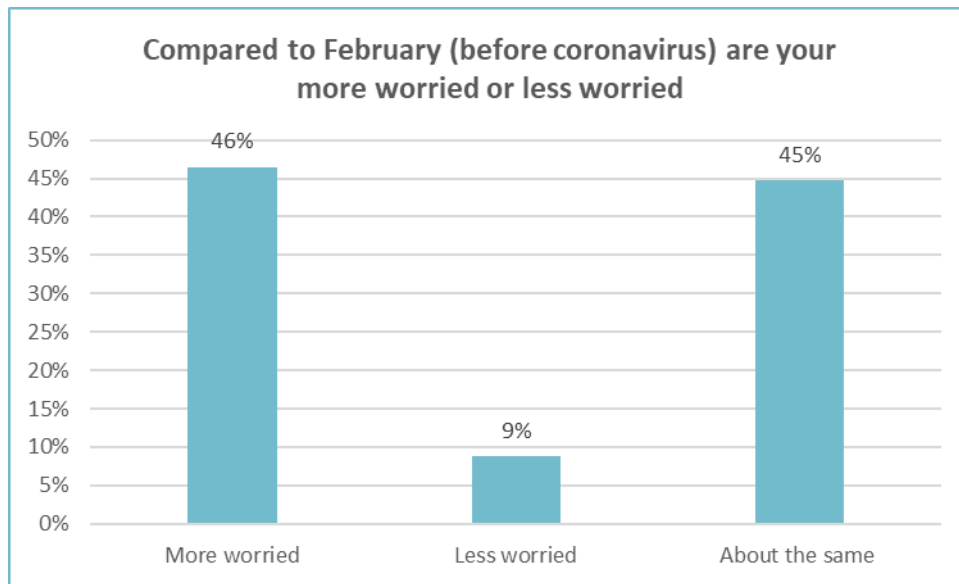


Feeling worried

The level of anxiety within the community is significantly higher now than February 2020 (before the coronavirus began in Tasmania) (*see graph below*).

46% of those surveyed are more worried now compared to February and this figure is higher (50%) for those with health conditions compared to 41% of those without health conditions.

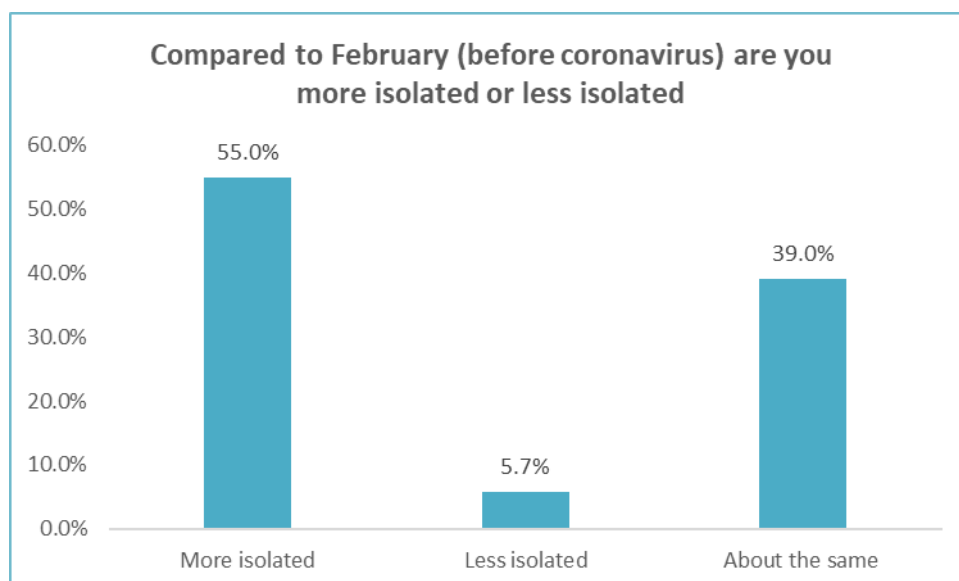
Just over half of those surveyed were either less worried (9%) or felt about the same (45%).



Feeling isolated

A high proportion of those surveyed 55% felt more isolated now compared to February with 39% felt no change (*see graph below*).

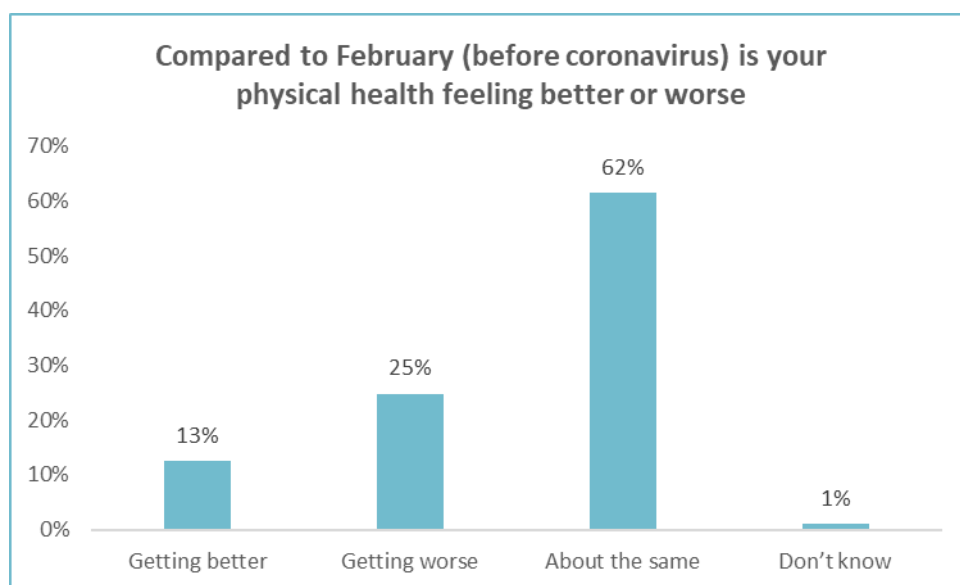
Again, the feeling of isolation was significantly higher for those with health conditions at 63% compared to those without health conditions (45%).



Feelings about physical health

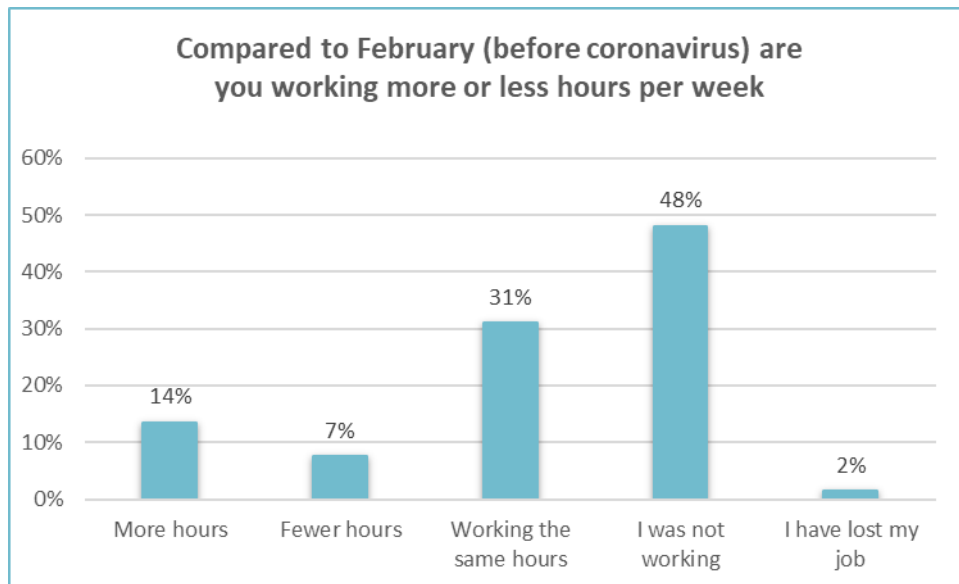
Peoples feelings of their physical health has deteriorated for 25% of those surveyed which represents 1 in 4 respondents (*see graph below*).

Again, the divide between the healthy and those with health conditions is apparent with nearly a third (32%) of those with health conditions identified that their physical health has deteriorated compared to 14% for those without any adverse health conditions. It appears that this later group (no health conditions) have been able to maintain their physical health levels to that of pre coronavirus.



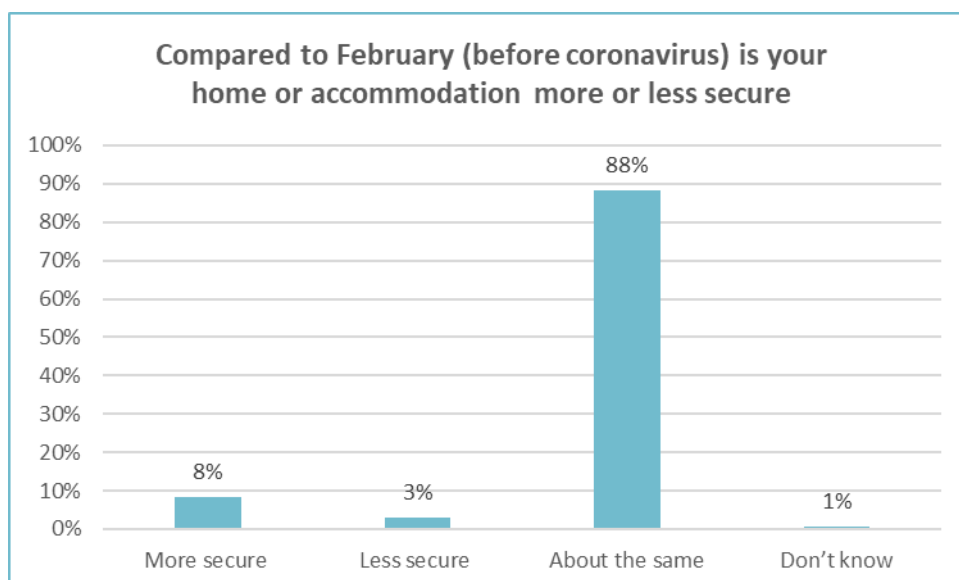
Working hours

Approximately half of those surveyed currently do not work, but for those working, it appears that a greater proportion have actually increased their hours of work compared to those who are working less hours, with the majority surveyed working the same hours (*see graph below*).



Security of accommodation

One positive arising from the coronavirus is that 8% of those surveyed indicated that their accommodation was more secure, with 3% indicating it was less secure compared to February. The majority of this cohort indicated no change to their accommodation security (*see graph below*).



Finding 3 – Tasmanians want status quo with current restrictions

Health Consumers Tasmania asked whether the current restrictions that the Government has in place should be changed in your region, either to be increased, decreased or remain the same.

The following list provides the State Government with a clear direction on where the community suggests changes would be supported.

Any easing of restrictions requires strong community support, and the feedback from the survey indicates that respondents are in favour of restrictions staying as they are at the time of the survey being conducted. Very few people advocated for any easing of restriction across most areas (graph on the following page).

The table 1 on page 13 breaks the type of restrictions into three groups, namely, where:

- There is strong community support to either maintain or increase the current level of restrictions, being interstate travel;
- there is some (limited) community support to relax existing restrictions, for example elective surgeries; and
- there is strong community support to keep the current level of restrictions in place.

The one area that received the strongest level of support to increase restrictions (41%) was for non-essential travel around Australia.

The only area where there is some community support for further easing of restrictions was in elective surgery and being able to be outside for travel or exercise (which is now permissible).

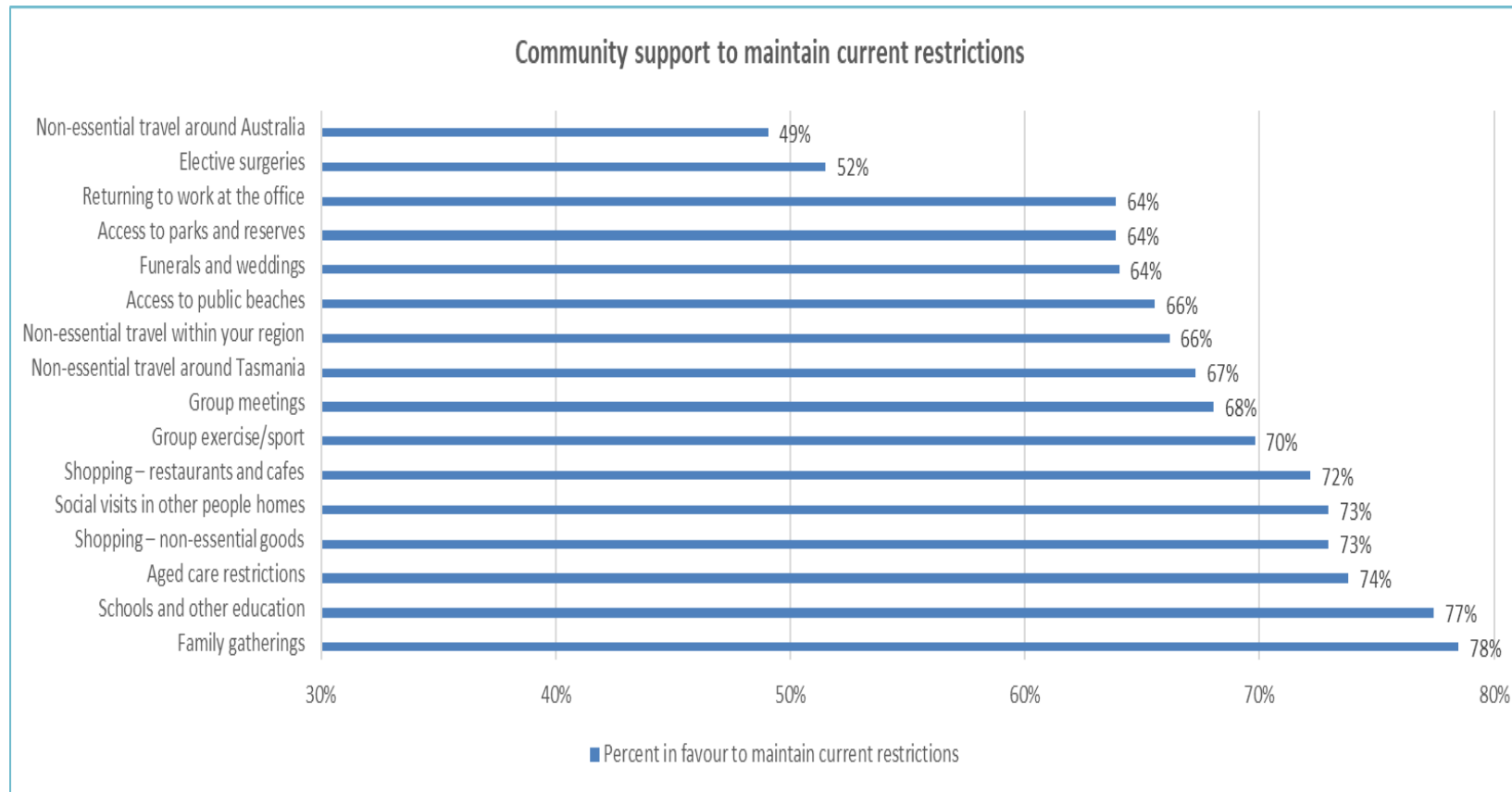


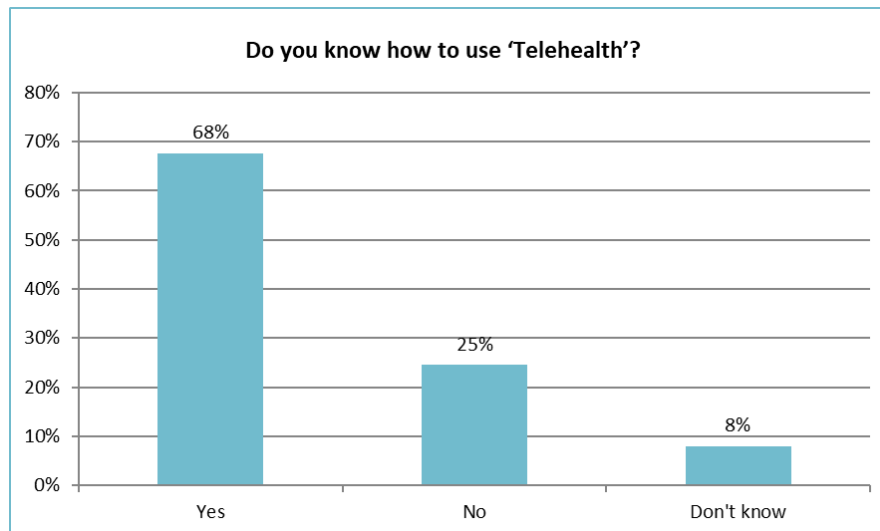
Table 1

Area of restriction	Increase restrictions	Maintain current restrictions	Decrease restrictions	
Non-essential travel around Australia	41%	49%	7%	Some support to Increase restrictions
Elective surgeries	3%	52%	33%	Some support for further easing of restrictions
Access to parks and reserves	5%	64%	27%	
Funerals and weddings	6%	64%	24%	
Non-essential travel around Tasmania	7%	67%	23%	
Non-essential travel within your region	9%	66%	21%	
Access to public beaches	6%	66%	21%	
Family gatherings	8%	78%	10%	Endorse the current status
Schools and other education	6%	77%	6%	
Aged care restrictions	9%	74%	7%	
Shopping – non-essential goods	10%	73%	13%	
Social visits in other people homes	11%	73%	12%	
Shopping – restaurants and cafes	12%	72%	12%	
Group exercise/sport	9%	70%	13%	
Group meetings	18%	68%	9%	
Returning to work at the office	9%	64%	14%	

Finding 4 – Telehealth use declines in Tasmania

Most Tasmanians have heard of telehealth with only 10% indicating they were either unsure or had not heard of telehealth.

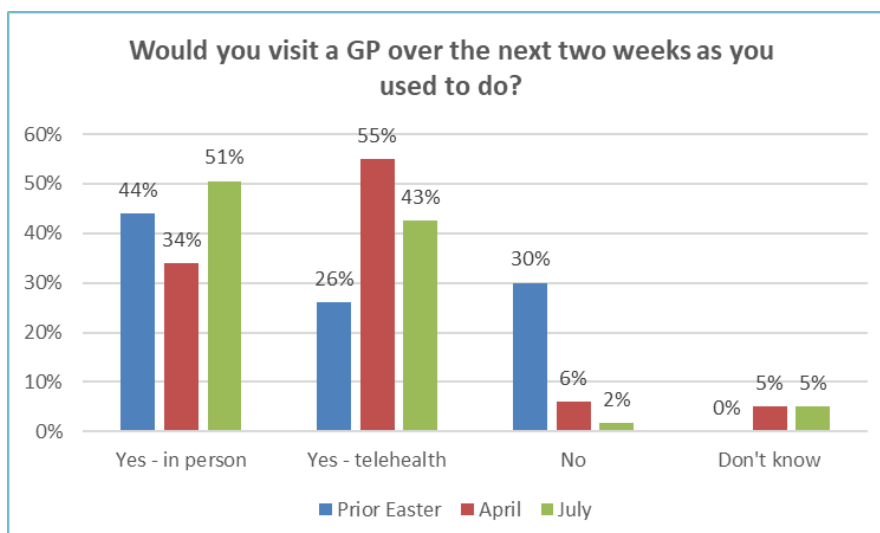
Despite this, a third (33%) of respondents indicated they didn't know how to use telehealth.



Tasmanians intention to use of telehealth has declined since April with less than half of those surveyed (43%) indicating they would use telehealth compared to 54.8% during April. This compares with 26% prior to the Easter period.

The community has re-engaged with their GP and they are now returning to seek care from the GP with 94% indicating they would contact their doctor in person or via phone, which is a positive result compared to around 70% prior to Easter.

There is still a group (7%) who indicated they would not visit a GP if they needed to.



Those with existing health conditions would be more likely to use telehealth compared to those without an existing health condition.

Those using telehealth are satisfied or very satisfied with the service with a small increase in the number who were not satisfied.

Level of satisfaction with telehealth	July	May
Very satisfied	40%	50%
Satisfied	46%	39%
Not satisfied	14%	8%
Don't know	0%	3%
Total	100%	100%

The majority of those surveyed indicated they would seek a coronavirus test if they felt unwell.

Despite this, there was still a relatively high proportion (16%) who indicated they would not seek a test or were unsure.

