



Annual Consumer Survey 2020:

**Consumer experiences of the
COVID-19 pandemic and the
homelessness service system
responses**

in Melbourne's north and west

May 2021

Acknowledgement

This Report has been compiled by the Consumer Participation Working Group of the Northern and Western Homelessness Local Area Service Networks in Melbourne.

The Networks would like to thank all those people, with a lived experience of homelessness, for so generously sharing their thoughts and experiences with us.

The Working Group would also like to acknowledge all the homelessness workers, who are so committed to learning from those people who have sought our assistance.



The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks also acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

Use of the Report

The Working Group asks that, anyone who uses all or parts of this Report acknowledges the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks and references the source of any components of the Report that they use.

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Background

Every year the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks survey people who have accessed homelessness assistance through the 180 homelessness programs operating in Melbourne's north and west.

This is the ninth year that the North and West Homelessness Local Area Service Networks (LASNs) have run this survey. For the first four years the consumer survey focussed on consumer experiences of the newly coordinated homelessness service system.

In the fifth year the survey was more qualitative, exploring the responses received in the previous four years.

In the sixth year the survey focussed specifically on consumers' experiences of emergency accommodation, in response to feedback received in the previous survey. In the seventh year the survey was also primarily a qualitative survey – focussing on consumers' experiences of homelessness and a lack of housing.

In 2019 the survey focussed on four key areas: consumer experiences of the homelessness service system, suggested improvements, whether consumers had to re-tell their stories, whether they felt respected and how they would like to be contacted. Survey responses from young people and adults were reported separately.

In 2020 the survey focussed on the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of consumers and on their experience of the changed homelessness service system arrangements during the pandemic. During the pandemic homelessness services were required to move away from face to face contact with most clients. This created additional challenges for completion of the survey, resulting in a smaller participation rate than usual.

Victoria is experiencing a housing crisis - there is not enough affordable housing for everyone who needs it. The Networks use the consumer feedback to improve the quality of our service system responses and to advocate for changes in the broader environment.

Over 1,700 people have taken part in the eight consumer surveys and many changes have been made as a result.

The most significant actions arising from consumer feedback have been:

- The release of the "Crisis in Crisis: the appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west" report: <http://nwhn.net.au/Crisis-in-Crisis.aspx>
- The 'More Houses for People' and 'Every Victorian Should Have a Home' advocacy campaigns, which has seen hundreds of signed postcards from people with lived experience of homelessness, and other members of the community, sent to the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premier of Victoria.



Summary of results

Demographics and participation:

- Participation was lower than usual (just over half) as a result of the COVID restrictions on face to face contact. This suggests that lack of face to face contact does place limitations on provision of support for some consumers.
- The highest number of First Nations people participated than in past surveys. People from a significantly diverse range of ages and cultural backgrounds participated.
- There were fewer respondents to the 2020 survey, but there was a greater diversity amongst respondents than in other surveys.
- Three quarters of respondents (75) reported experiencing a mental health or physical disability.

Impact of COVID:

- Participants reported 104 negative impacts of COVID vs 11 positive impacts. The negative impacts most commonly reported were in the following areas: isolation (17), wellbeing (17), income (15) and housing situation (11).
- The majority of participants identified a deterioration in mental health through this period. 72% of participants reported experiencing a mental health issue, which was more difficult for them to manage during the pandemic, particularly during lockdowns.
- Most respondents talk about stress and distress with a portion reporting that their mental health became worse through the pandemic. 14 respondents either lost their jobs or were unable to get employment. Respondents report the impact of isolation and the negative impact of the pandemic on their relationships.
- 15% of respondents identified that they had become homeless as a result of the pandemic.
- 31 respondents reported that their income had gone down during the pandemic, while 36 respondents reported that their income had increase during the pandemic.
- Nearly two thirds of those people who reported that their income had gone down during the pandemic reported that housing was more difficult to access, whereas 29% of those whose income went up reported that their housing situation was easier. This suggests that the impact of the pandemic was not sufficient to cancel out the impact of the housing crisis.
- 70% of those whose income went down reported that this caused a decline in their mental health, nearly half reported an impact on their health and one third reported that it impacted on their capacity to care for their children. Conversely, nearly two thirds of those whose income went up reported that this made caring for their children easier.
- More men reported difficulties in finding housing, accessing food, health and mental health.
- Men born outside Australia experienced a greater decline in health and mental health issues.
- All respondents who reported experiencing a disability identified that capacity to care for children became more difficult.

Support

- Participants are largely happy with the support they are provided.

Accommodation

- 43 respondents (43%) identified that they had been accommodated in emergency accommodation by the homelessness sector during COVID. 75% of these respondents were accommodated in hotels and motels and only 11% in serviced apartments.
- There was a clear message from a number of participants that, even if the hotel accommodation was not great, it is better than rooming house accommodation.
- Just under half the respondents reported a good or OK experience in the hotels. Just over a third of those who stayed in hotels reported negative impacts including feeling unsafe, poor facilities and difficulty in the noisy/chaotic environment. Three respondents said that the support was good – the descriptions suggest that this was in hotels with the Hotel Emergency Response.

Income

- Almost as many respondents said that their income had gone down (37%) during COVID as said their income had gone up (40%). Almost one quarter of respondents said that their income had remained the same.

Contact with the homelessness system

- 43% of participants contacted homelessness services for the first time. This is interesting as only 15% of participants reported becoming homeless as a result of the pandemic.
- Just over half of the participants identified that they would like services to continue to text as a preference (55%) and just under half would like to see the first appointment continue over the phone (45%). Participants have identified that they would like to see a variety of forms of communication continue as an option, particularly phone calls (53%) and texting, followed by holding the first appointment over the phone, rather than presenting to the service.
- A portion of participants would not like to see any alternative forms of communication to continue. This suggests that the homelessness sector should continue all forms of communication adopted during the pandemic but that we should ask consumers to choose their preferred mode of communication.
- Most respondents identified that they were satisfied with the support they received. Six participants responded that more housing is needed and four responded that they would like faster responses and more support.
- Other respondents identified that more vouchers, a wider variety of food options and more face to face contact would ease their situation.

Results: Participation

100 people participated the survey (74 fewer than in 2019).

Results: Demographics:

- 56% of respondents were women.
- 7% of respondents identified as Aboriginal.
- 69% of respondents identified as having a disability and, of those, 72% reported experiencing a mental health issue.
- 21% of respondents were single people with children and 47% reported being single/living alone.
- 29% of those who identified their country of birth, were born overseas.

Results: Summary statistics

In 2020, the numbers of responses from women and from people of Aboriginal descent are the same as their proportions amongst those who present to homelessness services generally.

The range of participants is more diverse than in other years, with 27% of participants born outside Australia, 10% of respondents being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and 7% identifying as GLTBTI+.

Table 1: Gender

	#	% of those answering
Female	49	56%
Male	37	42%
Prefer not to specify	0	0
Trans	1	1%
Non binary/gender neutral	0	0
Intersex	0	0
Total	88	
Did not answer	12	

Table 2: Age Distribution of Participants

Participant ages ranged from 17 to 84 years old. There were two participants over 80 years old.

	#	% of those answering
<18	1	1%
18-24	22	26%
25-34	25	29%
35-44	13	15%
45-54	15	17%
55+	12	14%
Total	86	
Did not answer	14	

Table 3: Use of interpreters

	#	% of those answering
Yes	6	6%
No	92	92%
Total	98	

Table 4: Disability

NB In some cases there was a technical glitch and respondents could only select one option.

	#	% with disability
Intellectual	4	8%
Physical	8	12%
Mental Health	49	72%
Vision	4	8%
Hearing	3	4%
Total	68	68% of all participants
Did not answer/No disabilities	32	

Table 5: Living arrangement

	#	% of those answering
Lone person	41	48%
Lone person with children under 18	18	21%
Couple	10	12%
Couple with children	6	7%
Other	11	13%
Total	86	

Table 6: ATSI status

	#	% of those answering
No, Neither	79	90%
Yes, Aboriginal descent	6	7%
Yes, Torres Strait Islander descent	3	3%
Yes, both	0	0
Total	88	
Did not answer	12	

Table 7: Sexual orientation

LBGQTI+	#	% of those answering
Yes	6	7%
No	74	86%
Prefer not to say	5	6%
Other	1	1%
Total	86	
Did not answer	14	

Table 8: Country of Birth

Country	#	
Australia	60	71%
Somalia	5	6%
India	5	6%
Lebanon	2	2%
Philippines	2	2%
South Sudan	1	1%
Chile	1	1%
Vietnam	1	1%
Sri Lanka	1	1%
Syria	1	1%
Ethiopia	1	1%
Iraq	1	1%
Pakistan	1	1%
Thailand	1	1%
Nepal	1	1%
Sudan	1	1%
Didn't answer	15	

Table 9: Main language spoken at home

	#	% of those answering
English	70	79%
Arabic	2	2%
Somali	2	2%
Oromo	2	2%
Tagalog/Filipino	2	2%
English/Macedonian	1	1%
English/Vietnamese	1	1%
English/Spanish	1	1%
English/Somali	1	1%
Telagu	1	1%
English/Pinjarra	1	1%
Sinhala	1	1%
English/Arabic	1	1%
Urdu	1	1%
Thai	1	1%
Nepali	1	1%
Didn't answer	11	

Results: Qualitative questions

Question 6: What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on your life?

Themes

Theme	Positive impact	Negative impact
Isolation		17
Impact on relationships	1	10
Housing situation	3	11
Wellbeing	2	17
Employment		14
Mental health		9
Access to services	2	7
Income	1	15
Substance use	1	2
Health	1	3
Displaced		7
Total	11	104

Summary:

Most respondents talk about stress and distress with a portion reporting that their mental health became worse through the pandemic. 14 respondents either lost their jobs or were unable to get employment. Respondents report the impact of isolation and the negative impact of the pandemic on their relationships. A number of respondents report being stranded outside their area – generally interstate and away from family and supports. Numbers of respondents identified that it was harder to access services – particularly health services.

Participants reported 104 negative impacts of COVID vs 11 positive impacts. The negative impacts most commonly reported were in the following areas: isolation (17), wellbeing (17), income (15) and housing situation (11).

Responses:

- Covid 19 ruined my life! It meant that my industry was not allowed to work so I lost ALL income. It meant I couldn't pay my rent. I ended up squatting in the house, not paying rent. My mental health deteriorated to a point where I became reliant on drugs to get me through the day. I ended up in hospital for damage to my nerves on my spine from the drugs. While in hospital, the house was robbed, I lost everything of value as well as everything that meant something to me like photos and wedding stuff for example. Once I got home and realised I lost everything, my mental health took another hit. While in hospital I begged and begged to go into rehab but because of Covid it wasn't available. So it meant I went home and got back on drugs, ruining my life further. Because I couldn't pay, I became homeless. I am still homeless, in crisis accommodation with the likelihood of being out on the streets come January. My mental health is just destroyed, while in crisis accommodation I have been taken to hospital multiple times for suicide tendencies, because I don't want to live any more. It's not a nice lie at all. I have been a complete waste of a life. Each time in hospital I was told that there was nothing they could do and sent me home, spent 4 hrs on hold to mental health nurse who said I need to see other people. But I am so overwhelmed, so exhausted, so over everything, I have no energy to seek help, hence being taken to hospital. While I fill this out, I am currently figuring out where I can run away to, tried to message Lifeline online but nothing I was too late. My bags are packed. I am ready to go!!! But where? I just need to disappear. So that is what covid 19 did to me. Completely ruined me, broke me. It had a lot of impact on my life. Especially with my mental illness. Feeling isolated. It was hard to talk to my psychologist.*
- Covid has in a way made my life better as I have been sleeping off the streets and have had more financial support from the Government*
- It really completely changed my life. I am totally on the other side of Australia now. I am not sure for the*

better or for worse.

- *lost my job in the beginning of covid*
- *Isolation, couldn't see family members. - Cannot go to work, decreased income - Living cost went up - Hard to find PRs (private rental) Mentally challenged - Lost freedom*
- *Being homeless in Covid is really hard and difficult. Easier to catch virus sleeping on the street and you can find easier, and more difficult to get into refuge and housing. My experience is getting \$1000 and spending on motels/hotels, couldn't live on the street. Couldn't couch surf because friends worried about Covid-19. Access to health appointments was bad. Couldn't get my medication early and health suffered. Prior existing medical condition.*
- *Initially was staying with a friend and her Mum. Then Covid hit and was told better off to stay with Aunty. Then fighting happened with Aunty. Aunty very worried about Covid and didn't let me go back to school. Teachers and principal told Aunty to let me go back. Schooling was impacted, had to do it online. Felt like it was harder to access mental services and everyone needed it. Pandemic made more people need services. Felt like a burden because had to rely on social worker and they had other people to look after. Had to wait a long time for appointments with mental health services. Better for me to communicate face to face than on the phone, better for my mental health.*
- *Hard being homeless and trying to have shelter to be safe from Covid-19. Being in different areas and having fines and social distancing.*
- *Disruptive: caused tension in my family and it has been hard to find work. Not seeing people in person, unable to have person to person interaction.*
- *Really stressful. It was difficult with kids at home having to home school, care for all of them, make sure they were doing homework and attending class. I had to move house during the pandemic which was really difficult. It was difficult accessing services as they were so overwhelmed and busy and difficult connecting as it wasn't in person.*
- *"Oh wow a lot, in positive ways, yeah, I don't know how to answer it shortly, pretty much just changed my life for the better. Finally off the drugs, got a support network like people such as yourself, a bit of communication with, I actually see the difference in my life and why I should of done this a while ago., although they say everything happens for a reason, so I'm not resentful about the past or anything, I'm actually grateful to be where I am not to have the support around me that I do have"*
- *Allocated a case worker*
- *The laws Created more fear People are changing around me*
- *created homelessness lack of medical of attention Doctors would send me home were unable to attend to me doctors were not present or available*
- *Big impact; not knowing what is going to happen; a lot of uncertainty*
- *Anxiety Stress Standdown from employment*
- *Lost employment and income*
- *feeling isolation as no family at home now. Harder to find work as I don't have a computer or internet at all*
- *due to an occupant at the residence suffering from immune diseases and asthma we had to self isolate for 8 months this was extremely stressful costly and has caused mental issues yet to be explored*
- *Huge impact - differently to most, I was able to achieve lot of goals and finalize a lot of 'to-do's' that i'd be putting off over the years. It also meant spending quality time with my loved ones*
- *It didn't affect me that much. I keep to myself normally - and being homeless was very hard, so compared to being homeless and being in jail, being at home was a breeze. Even the curfew wasn't hard - having a home & can have freedom to do you what you want /have choices (completely free/not like jail)*
- *I was stuck inside a toxic household more. Being in the high risk category I was stuck inside a lot more than other*
- *seeing people face to face. i have anxiety and it helps if i can see people face to face. it relaxes me.*
- *I cant find work so I am homeless*
- *I lost my casual job as a cleaner*

- *Was already homeless before COVID19, though became displaced way out of area from Wyndham due to a lack of crisis options. COVID19 made things even more stressful sometimes on top of the stress caused by homelessness.*
- *It had caused me to become stranded and homeless in the state of Victoria, as I needed to return to South Australia and couldn't due to border closures. It has made the last 3-4 months very difficult and stressful for me.*
- *It has affected my mental health, living conditions and working conditions.*
- *Money shortage Higher bills More mental health stress Less social interaction with anyone*
- *Devastating impact, whereby I lost my housing where I was staying in Victoria, became stranded with few options as I could not go back to my family in South Australia due to border restrictions.*
- *Nothing really changed*
- *Being cooped up (not wanting to go out Prahran) led to a lot of skulling alcohol.*
- *Stressful. Daughter's wedding postponed. Home schooling in a very small space.*
- *made family life hard, because current house is too small. And all members of family stuck in doors- shopping very happy especially with young children*
- *Elevated stress Not seeing family or services face to face*
- *Lock down, when we aren't allowed to go anywhere for a couple of weeks. This was very difficult . No social supports face to face.*
- *Online study was difficult*
- *more money harder to get accommodation*
- *loss of income*
- *loss of job*
- *Its been very difficult without family and friends support in Melbourne. Its been a really traumatic time for me, the pandemic just made it worse.*
- *It made it hard but got used to the new normal. At first there was so much to worry about but eventually became used to it. Just hoping things will get back to normal*
- *Staying at Home Loosing Income Stress and Anxiety*
- *income loss, mental health issues, relationship tensity*
- *Nothing really changed*
- *Socially, no contact with friends or family*
- *Financial impact, emotional and physical impact*
- *Loss of income*
- *loneliness stress lost income*
- *Due to this pandemic I've lost my job and this bought me financial hardship. I appreciate the way this helped me to overcome this situation thank you so much*
- *Relationship breakdown*
- *Minimal impact. Very inconvenienced but no impact.*
- *I couldn't put the kids in day care and kinder. I do not drive and therefore it was challenging to catch PT and do my shopping and tings with the children. I didn't get to see any workers for a while and now they all want to see me all the time. Certain groceries were hard to get which was also a struggle*
- *Totally isolated me from family and work.*
- *its very difficult having to wear the mask all the time. its hard when you can't get in the car with your worker, like at the beginning. Now it's easier as my case worker can take me in her work car. I had three tests since i came back to victoria in June. I hated it, my tests came back clear, but each time I couldn't have my home care workers support me until the tests came back. that really upset me.*
- *Not being able to see family and get things done*

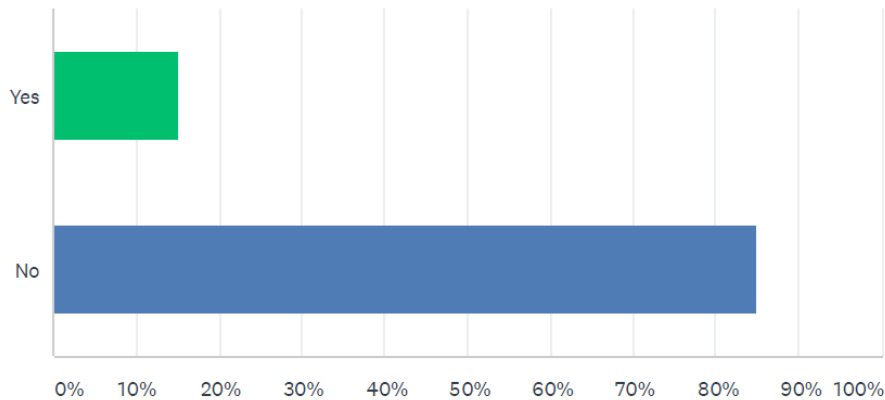
- *Been stuck in a toxic house for longer*
- *Restricted access to seeing you daughter*
- *Living in an Aged Care Facility, I have been unable to move into other housing because of COVID 19. The 2 government grants via Centrelink were very helpful. My mother contracted COVID 19 and that has effected her badly mentally and physically. Being her Power of Attorney has been difficult emotionally and practically too. Being unable to leave the ACF to do the practical things for mum like banking and shopping.*
- *Not much different than what i have experienced recently.*
- *Its been hard as I can't see my family and get support with my baby*
- *Due to the Covid-19 I didn't get some of the applied jobs. Employers were cancelling and put on hold some new positions. Some liked to recruit the employees who had the jobs earlier due to the job keeper allowance. Due to the Covid-19 Government payment rules were waved -off and I got some payments earlier without waiting for 2 years period. Also due to the covid-19 people cannot travel, ticket prices have gone up, hotel quarantine cost a lot. Due to that my parents or I couldn't travel to see them and get their help to look after kids. Single parents without a job with kids has to manage all expenses with Centrelink income has become a challenging tasks when Covid supplement ended. Due to Covid-19 most of kids outdoor activities (dancing, singing) were closed and kids at home bored and addicted to internet and lost the interest of doing other activities and facing some mental issues. However, compared to the most of other countries, Australian Government has done a great job by controlling the spread of Covid-19 and provided more supports to individuals. I believe that has helped to reduced financial stress and other stresses due to this pandemic.*
- *Not much impact as I have been incarcerated.*
- *Made it hard for day to day and person to person chores .*
- *none*
- *- its made me more closed off and isolated - stressed to go out - wasn't able to begin employment after year 12*
- *COVID AFFECTED CLIENTS FIRST JOB HOEVER RECENTLY SECURED ANEW JOB IN THE SECTOR OF HER EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCE THE LOCKDOWN DID NOT AFFECT CLIENT AND HER DAUGHTER*
- *COVID 19 has had an impact on all people's lives. For me, COVID 19 meant my children had to do remote schooling. We are newly arrived in Australia so I would have preferred my children to learn face to face.*
- *Lost work because of COVID So much stress for my family Stressful not knowing where to go for help Everybody is scared Families and friends around the world not as lucky as us Helping them if I can Want to be able to do more*
- *- stress - so depressed - alone - services closed - less help*
- *the client and in her words said " i felt that i am like a prisoner in the house-unable to go out for shopping -and see friend joy*
- *The increase of daily living has increased*
- *I lost my job.*
- *I have felt more depressed and stressed as I haven't been able to see family or friends*
- *It hasn't effected financially, however feeling lonelier*
- *a lot going on, more isolated, more stressed without support*
- *Lost of income, mental stress and future insecurity*
- *Since being in lockdown, I have felt socially isolated and more anxious especially with my little one*
- *stressful, more depression, no motivation staying in a motel*
- *Stayed in a motel couldn't see friends or couch surf.*
- *Not much has changed for me as i live in residential care and have still been able to attend school.*
- *Nothing*
- *It has affected my mental health and it has affected my financial and living conditions as well.*

- *JUST THE PRICE OF BUYING MASK AND GLOVES AND NOT BRING ABLE TO VISIT MY PARENTS GRAVE BECAUSE OF THE MILEAGE RESTRICTIONS*
- *Not been able to go out - having issues at home with parents and brother. Very stressful*
- *COVID-19 has had a big impact on my mental health, my career and my family's income*
- *Covid hasn't had much impact on my life but the unreasonable restrictions placed by the government have greatly impacted my relationship and my mental health in a big way.*
- *Studies*

Question 7: Did you become homeless as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Response	#	
Yes	14	15%
No	79	85%

Answered: 93 Skipped: 7



Would you like to say more about that?

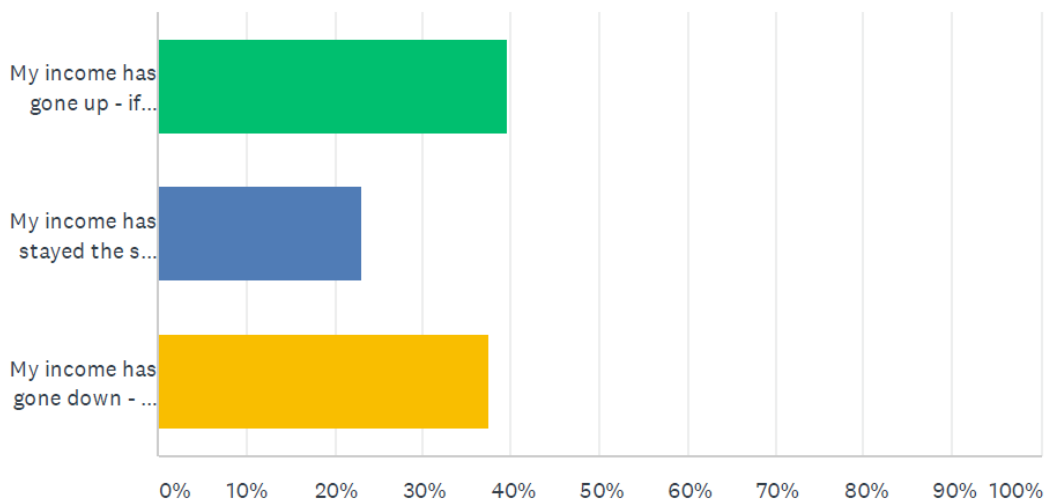
- *[Agency] supported me to maintain my tenancy*
- *No but it made my housing uncertain.*
- *I became homeless as a result*
- *was evicted during this period*
- *The cost of paying rent as a primary concern sent us into debt to tune of \$5000 and affected everything else to do with the cost of living*
- *I have had to stay in unsatisfactory accommodation for another 12 months because of COVID 19*
- *Since due to the government supports, I was able to pay rent for the house. However, appreciated if the government provided Covid-19 supplement or other kind of additional support for single parents without jobs.*
- *But close to becoming homelessness. The restriction of lockdown was a big challenge.*
- *Still don't know how I became homeless.*
- *Family issues and having no relationship with family. The minute my worker tried to get me a house Covid happened and we were locked down.*
- *Too many people living together with family. The restrictions made it hard.*
- *Was a contributing factor. Restrictions impacted relationship with family.*
- *Almost made me homeless*
- *No. did not become homeless but I was worried and stressed because I was told to look for another property 2 years ago, it was worrying for me because it is not a good time to move out during COVID*
- *I contacted [agency] and helped me with rent arrears*
- *covid kept me in my accommodation for now but I have to seek new home in future*
- *I was already homeless in QLD and came back to Victoria because of family violence. in QLD, I was sleeping in the park in the Terrace, we didn't care if the coppers came, we didn't really notice the covid, there was a detox place we could stay in sometimes, we didn't need a test, [xxx] came in a bus, picked us up and then gave us a bed, feed and shower and then I'd go back to the park. My home care package provider arranged a motel, but i got evicted from it because i had mates from the park over. They organised for me to come to Victoria, I stayed with my daughter but it was too tough so I went to [agency] and then they put me in a hotel and that's when I met my worker from [support agency].*

- *I became homeless because of family violence. And some government agency's made it worse by not helping.*
- *nearly was homeless before connected to [homelessness program]. was looking for someone to move in with me. as centrelink gave me more money now i can afford to live on my own but i need a job*
- *Housing is too expensive*
- *I WITH MY DAUGHTER-WE WERE SHARING ACCOM WITH MY MOTHER AT MOTHERS OWNED PROPERTY*
- *Was already living in homelessness before the pandemic, and was living almost rough for approx 12 months - ie: inadequate dwelling and conditions.*
- *Almost because I couldn't pay my rent and I was scared*
- *i am staying with my niece at the present time-will relocate to my new rental property on 15/12/20*

Question 8: Has your income gone up or down during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Homelessness services	#	% of those who responded
Income has gone up	36	40%
Income has stayed the same	21	23%
Income has gone down	34	37%
Didn't answer	9	

Answered: 91 Skipped: 9



Summary:

Almost as many respondents said that their income had gone down (37%) during COVID as said their income had gone up (40%). Almost one quarter of respondents said that their income had remained the same.

Question 9: If your income has gone up during the pandemic, can you tick on the boxes to show the impact this had on various parts of your life?

47 participants identified that their income had gone up during the pandemic.

	MORE DIFFICULT	STAYED THE SAME	BETTER/EASIER	N/A
Housing	22.22% 10	33.33% 15	28.89% 13	15.56% 7
Access to food	13.04% 6	28.26% 13	47.83% 22	10.87% 5
Health	12.20% 5	53.66% 22	24.39% 10	9.76% 4
Mental health/wellbeing	26.67% 12	35.56% 16	20.00% 9	17.78% 8
Capacity to care for children (if you have them)	18.18% 8	11.36% 5	13.64% 6	56.82% 25

Question 10: If your income has gone down during the pandemic, can you tick on the boxes to show the impact this had on various parts of your life?

43 participants identified that their income had gone down during the pandemic.

	MORE DIFFICULT	STAYED THE SAME	BETTER/EASIER	N/A
Housing	62.79% 27	18.60% 8	0.00% 0	18.60% 8
Access to food	57.14% 24	23.81% 10	0.00% 0	19.05% 8
Health	42.86% 18	30.95% 13	4.76% 2	21.43% 9
Mental health/wellbeing	69.77% 30	11.63% 5	0.00% 0	18.60% 8
Capacity to care for children (if you have them)	27.03% 10	13.51% 5	0.00% 0	59.46% 22

Themes

- Decrease in income:** people who were on Centrelink benefits such as Jobseeker and Jobkeeper would have had an increase in income, so these respondents would have had a different income source to these. The disability and aged care pensions were increased for 2 payments, then returned to the standard rate, so these respondents were unlikely to have been on those payments either. It is likely these respondents were receiving a wage and lost employment, resulting in lower income.
- Housing:** a number of respondents commented that they had lost employment or found it difficult to find employment. This may be the reason that their housing situation became more difficult. The decrease in income in itself would have made this more difficult. In responses to other questions in the survey, people

talked about the strain on households and relationships due to everyone in the family being locked down together. This could also be the reason for difficulty with housing. It would be unlikely that these respondents are people who had been rough sleeping and were accommodated in hotels and provided support workers during the pandemic.

63% of those whose income went down during COVID found it harder to access housing, whereas 29% of those whose income went up during COVID found it easier to access housing.

- **Access to food:** For those who found this more difficult, this could have been an affordability issue, panic buying at supermarkets making it difficult to access what is needed or the temporary closure of services that provide food, such as food vans.
- **Housing and mental health:** 72% of participants reported experiencing a mental health issue, which was more difficult for them to manage during the pandemic, particularly during lockdowns. If this impacted on their behaviour, perhaps leading to neighbourhood disputes and complaints, their tenancy could have been at risk, making their housing situation more difficult.

70% of those whose income went down during COVID said that this negatively impacted their mental health.

- **Capacity to care for children:** In other survey questions, respondents discussed the difficulty of having to home school their children and the pressure of having the whole household home together every day. This may be why they are expressing some difficulty in their capacity to care for children, however it seems a lower number of people said this was more difficult than would be expected. It is possible that parents are concerned about saying their capacity to care for children is more difficult, in fear of judgement or reprisals from services or government agencies.

57% of those whose income went up said it was easier to care for their children.

Comparison of the impact of income changes during COVID:

	More difficult		Stayed the same		Better/easier	
	Income up	Income down	Income up	Income down	Income up	Income down
Housing	22%	63%	33%	19%	29%	0
Access to food	13%	57%	28%	24%	11%	0
Health	12%	43%	54%	31%	10%	5%
Mental health/wellbeing	27%	70%	36%	12%	18%	0
Capacity to care for children	18%	27%	11%	14%	57%	0

Nearly two thirds of those people who reported that their income had gone down during the pandemic reported that housing was more difficult to access, whereas 29% of those whose income went up reported that their housing situation was easier. This suggests that the impact of the pandemic was not sufficient to cancel out the impact of the housing crisis.

70% of those whose income went down reported that this caused a decline in their mental health, nearly half reported an impact on their health and one third reported that it impacted on their capacity to care for their children. Conversely, nearly two thirds of those whose income went up reported that this made caring for their children easier.

Question 11: Did you contact the homelessness services for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic?

	#	% of those who responded
Yes	38	43%
No	51	57%

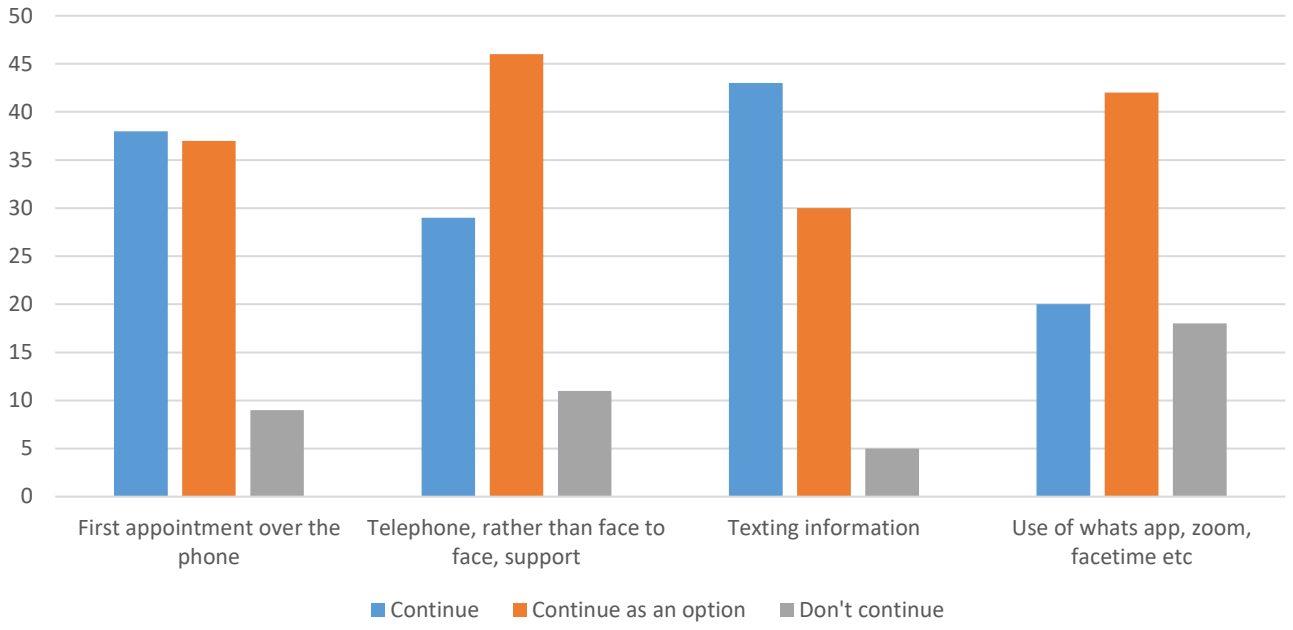
Question 12: During the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness services had to change the way they work. Services have had to provide most their assistance over the phone. People can now ring services, rather than having to present for an appointment. Some services are providing support through text, Whats app, zoom, messenger. Tick which of these you would like to see homelessness services continue with when they can re-open.

Just over half of the participants identified that they would like services to continue to text as a preference (55%) and just under half would like to see the first appointment continue over the phone (45%). Participants have identified that they would like to see a variety of forms of communication continue as an option, particularly phone calls (53%) and texting, followed by holding the first appointment over the phone, rather than presenting to the service.

A portion of participants would not like to see any alternative forms of communication to continue. This suggests that the homelessness sector should continue all forms of communication adopted during the pandemic, but should ask consumers to choose their preferred mode of communication.

	CONTINUE	CONTINUE AS AN OPTION	DON'T CONTINUE
First appointment over the phone, rather than presenting to the service	45.24% 38	44.05% 37	10.71% 9
Telephone, rather than face to face support	33.72% 29	53.49% 46	12.79% 11
Texting information	55.13% 43	38.46% 30	6.41% 5
Use of whats app, zoom, facetime or other online technology for appointments	25.00% 20	52.50% 42	22.50% 18

Recommended responses to continue post pandemic



Question 13: Are there other things that homelessness services could have done differently to help you through the COVID-19 pandemic?

Themes:

Nothing else	29 respondents identified that there is nothing that homelessness services could have done differently
More housing	6
Respond faster/more time	4

Most respondents identified that they were satisfied with the support they received. Six participants responded that more housing is needed and four responded that they would like faster responses and more support.

Other respondents identified that more vouchers, a wider variety of food options and more face to face contact would ease their situation.

- 29 respondents identified that there is nothing that homelessness services could have done differently.
- *I was satisfied with the service provided.*
- *I don't think so. I can't believe how much they have done. Almost feels they have done too much.*
- *I am happy with the support I got from my case manager but I like some face to face contacts. I do not like filling up the forms or text messages. Phone is fine.*
- *I think you've done the best you can. Happy and feel lucky to got help*
- *Educate new Australians how to understand english more. Clean Carnegie Motor Inn properly - it stinks!!*
- *Plenty of things were left to the last minute at [access point]. Waiting outside in the cold the whole day. No-where to go and also signing out of motel. Services should plan everything earlier and not leave until the last minute.*
- *No. Stay extended during pandemic.*
- *No was thoroughly impressed by the service*
- *Nope [agency] has been fantastic help. Also amazing support*
- *face to face and outreach*
- *more diet options*
- *more knowledge communicated*
- *more funding for older people*
- *This is first experience in homelessness service so what I have experienced is good for now. Because I know its hard for everyone to manage but things are so good so far*
- *they are doing a fine job it seems with the resources available*
- *I was fine, I understood what was happening. I think it was handled well/people did their best, and would have done what they could to help.*
- *Nah my worker was available on the phone a lot.*
- *I need to see workers face-face - its hard on the phone. I like to know who I am working with so I can see if I can trust them. Sometimes telephone can affect my health - it can make me turn and get paranoid and angry. Face-face is much easier.*
- *I think they did the best they could*
- *Nothing, I had a great experience*
- *Unsure, new to service*
- *There is a lot they could do to improve because i believe the system is failing some*
- *Yes, they are helping me to find a job and helping me for my child's school items and assisting me to find a suitable house to move.*

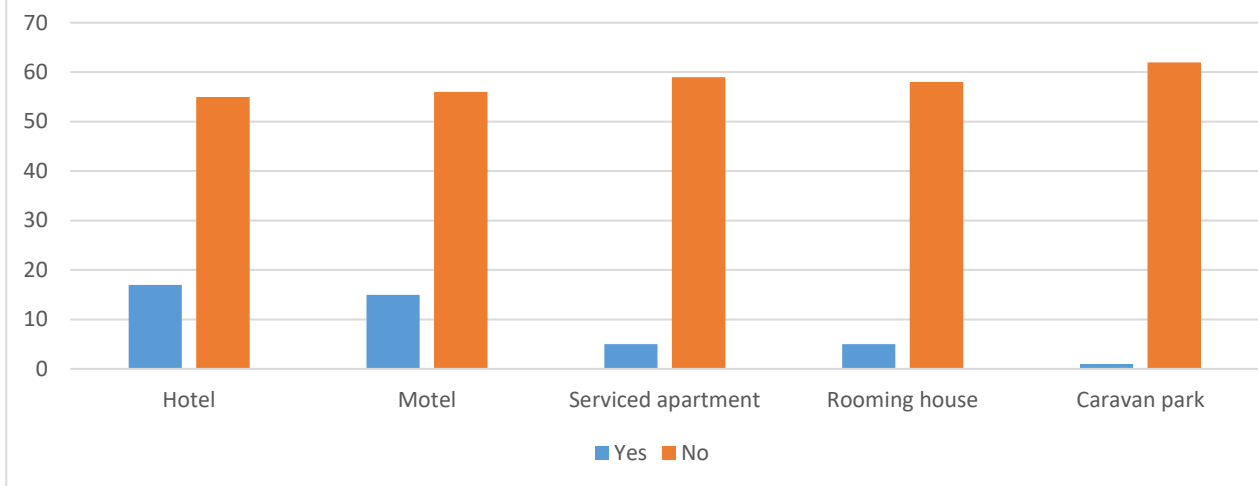
- *They have helped me a lot. Maybe more housing.*
- *not really maybe more food vouchers would be good*
- *Everything Digitally filed to access the paperwork*
- *- I don't think so - more access to things like vouchers and actual housing*
- *We were hoping to get out of motel accommodation quicker and into transitional housing. The motel accommodation was reasonable, though was difficult such a small space with 4 children, as well as being so far out of area.*
- *Provided more information on COVID restrictions Called more*
- *An exit plan!!! Which I understand is difficult especially when most places where closed or full. The amount of rough sleepers currently now that everyone got kicked out is so high and it's only going to increase and get worse.*
- *more housing not hotels real houses so we can settle i could bring my family and friends to visit me*
- *Provide food vouchers*
- *perhaps more options of crisis accommodation*
- *more time spent with access points/communication*
- *no, the help has been amazing*
- *I was lucky to be in transitional housing before the pandemic, I have felt very supported*
- *Respond to people quicker*
- *Respond quicker*
- *House me in a property as soon as I attended.*

Question 14: During the COVID-19 pandemic, has a homelessness service provided you with accommodation in one of the following?

43 respondents (43%) identified that they had been accommodated in emergency accommodation by the homelessness sector during COVID. 75% of these respondents were accommodated in hotels and motels and only 11% in serviced apartments.

Type of accom	#
Hotel	17
Motel	15
Serviced apartment	5
Rooming house	5
Caravan park	1
Total	43

Type of accommodation provided during the pandemic



Question 15: What was your experience of that accommodation?

Themes:

Good	14
OK	6
Negatively impacted health	5
Unsafe	4
Good support	3
Poor facilities	2
Too loud/chaotic	3
Expensive	2

Just under half the respondents reported a good or OK experience in the hotels. Just over a third of those who stayed in hotels reported negative impacts including feeling unsafe, poor facilities and difficulty in the noisy/chaotic environment. Three respondents said that the support was good – the descriptions suggest that this was in hotels with the Hotel Emergency Response.

- *It was alright at the time, i was full on drinking everyday, there were people who came into my room and became friends and drank with me, i had my ups and downs, they had to bar my daughters and family to visit but i found it really hard not seeing family. my worker couldn't come to my room, we had to sit downstairs, it wasn't very private for meetings. I found it really hard not going to regional victoria for funerals - my worker helped me view the funeral by video and i really liked that i could do that, but i'm used to moving around freely so Covid has been really hard - i can't get to country and reconnect easily. the hotel workers were understanding - sometimes they would use big words - but they were good at keeping me calm when i was upset, the nurse and hotel manager were really helpful, the room was lovely, i loved having access to a bath, other people would knock on my room all the time for smokes, drinks and i did find it hard - i kept getting angry.*
- *Some of the accommodation is good but some is very bad. If someone is homeless because of family violence and they get placed in rooming houses or motels for protection is ridiculous specially when the motel they get placed in has drug dealers, prostitutes, and people who have just been released from jail how's the person being protected? They are just being placed in more danger. And as for rooming houses they are just as bad. Someone suffering from mental Health issues does not need to be placed into a rooming house it just makes their mental health issues worse.*
- *Good, very good.*
- *Crest on Barkly/good*
- *Usually was ok. Usually make you pay for yourself. I paid 5 days for myself once and spent all my savings. Was unsafe motel, there was a man trying to put us in a gang, people were trying to sell me drugs and there was sex work at the motel. The cheaper motels are always the crazy ones.*
- *Motel - struggle. Didn't have a microwave for daughter's bottle of meals. Had to go to friends to make food for my child. Next door neighbour fighting with partner a lot. Fly screen wasn't secure. Easier at refuge.*
- *For what it was it wasn't terrible. They didn't seem to veto the people very well. There were some not so savoury characters. eg Residents were substance affected, residents appeared disturbed around mental health at the time.*
- *Staff are pretty awesome, good support, as long as you work in with hotel management, its been amazing, i've got a whole new life. No issues with staff just been there and supporting even if i wanted to try I couldn't think of anything to complain about*
- *Okay*
- *Prefer [crisis supported accommodation]*
- *satisfactory*

- *room and TV liked it*
- *I relapsed I ended up back at the psych ward*
- *Good*
- *I enjoyed being in a motel but not in a rooming house.*
- *Chaotic and stressful. Also scary, felt under constant threats of violence - and motels more hotel staff were rude.*
- *The motel was good better than sleeping in a shed on old mattress*
- *It was OK, though the room was very small, as there was 5 of us altogether which includes the kids. A lack of adequate cooking facilities to prepare food. It was more costly to eat, as we had takeaway and preprepared food more regularly.*
- *It was fairly decent. Was very happy with the motel accommodation. It was fairly safe. Much better the going into a dangerous, filthy rooming house which are usually full of drugs and violent behaviour.*
- *Excellent. I was super lucky and put at a beautiful hotel with incredible staff! Their kindness and understanding toward our situation has been incredible and should be noted. There were a lot of different people from different backgrounds and walks of life, so there has been crazy times, drug deals, arrests, fights, etc. The staff handled this fantastically. As someone who has never been homeless it was an eye opener to be put with criminals, drug dealers etc whose life has spent a lot of time being homeless, It's their norm and its not mine, however it is now because I cant get out if of it. So that's been interesting. I was just lucky I wasn't put at the [hotel] I would not have survived in that environment. So I am sooooo grateful that I was placed where I am.*
- *the hotels were alright they were too loud too many people up at night people using drugs and not well i feel sorry for them but i just wanted a house i'm too old to be around other people*
- *It was very clean and the workers were great*
- *It wasn't the greatest, I was heavily pregnant, added to my anxiety*
- *It has been amazing, I don't want to leave, I feel that my life has been better especially with my Mental Health . I have felt a lot safer*
- *clean, very good, safe workers were no issues*
- *loud but good*
- *Great*
- *It was great, as it relieved a lot of stress for me. Prevented me from living rough in my car. It was a roof over my head. It was greatly better than going into a rooming house.*
- *The accommodation was amazing! However a small hotel room is not for me haha.*
- *It was hard being locked up in a hotel room in the sky with mental health problems it is always preferable to not have a balcony overlooking a fatal drop*