Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report 2020

A comprehensive look at New Zealand’s health and wellbeing
Shining a light on New Zealand’s health and wellbeing

Southern Cross gives care and attention to over a million New Zealanders and is committed to inspiring Kiwis to advance their health and wellbeing.

The Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report has been designed to explore what’s on the minds of New Zealanders at a time when understanding health and wellbeing has never been more important.

Together with research partner Colmar Brunton, Southern Cross spoke to more than 3,000 Kiwis to get insights into how they see and value different aspects of their lives when it comes to health and wellbeing.

When the outbreak of COVID-19 sent New Zealand into lockdown, it impacted the way Kiwis perceive the world and their outlook on life at home in a way never seen before in their lifetimes.

The Southern Cross Healthy Futures study was able to capture a glimpse of New Zealand’s psyche before the outbreak of the coronavirus and then tracked the attitude and behaviour shifts that took place during Alert Level 4 and 3.

These insights offer a unique opportunity to see the world through the eyes of a diverse New Zealand.
How New Zealanders think about their health and wellbeing

When Southern Cross set out to uncover perceptions about health and wellbeing, Kiwis said they see it as being interconnected in three ways – physical, emotional and social.

Other aspects such as financial, spiritual, environmental and academic wellbeing are viewed as influencing factors to people’s overall health and wellbeing rather than standalone categories in their own right.
Delving deeper into health and wellbeing

This is the most clear cut of the dimensions - everyone feels like they know what they need to do to be physically healthy and well. However it also carries the greatest amount of guilt and frustration when people don’t live up to these ideals because they feel like they should know better.

New Zealanders see emotional health and wellbeing as something that needs to be actively pursued and maintained, but there’s not a lot of clarity around how best to do this. Mostly people approach this in a reactive way - when something goes wrong.

For New Zealanders, their sense of social health and wellbeing acts as a source of feedback and validation for how they are doing in life (their social status). It’s a measure of what they believe has been given back to them based on what they have put out into the world.
Getting personal

For the most part, Kiwis are on the same page about what good health and wellbeing looks like.

However there is no one version of health and wellbeing in New Zealand as it manifests differently depending on...

- life stage
- outlook
- how people prioritise it
The many faces of New Zealand

University students
For students, health and wellbeing at its best is just as much about looking the part as it is about feeling the part.

SINKS (single income, no kids) / DINKS (double income, no kids)
Their approach to health and wellbeing is about living their best life. They measure their health and wellbeing against doing well at an individual level and doing good for the world.

Parents with young kids (0-9yrs)
Their health and wellbeing is best when achieving balance and simplicity while coping with the demands of a young family. These parents put themselves last with their attitude being “if the kids feel good, then I feel good”.

Parents with older kids (10-17yrs)
Health and wellbeing is about living a full life, leading by example and providing a good family future.

Retirees
Their health and wellbeing is best when staying positive, appreciating the good things and staying fully involved in life. They tend to look to their younger, more able and energetic selves as the benchmark for their current health and wellbeing. This can be disheartening – accepting their mortality and living for today is key.

Living with disability / illness
For people living with a disability or illness, the gold standard in health and wellbeing is about improvement rather than deterioration. Their ability to live their life as successfully and as independently as possible without being a burden on those they love is the main factor in how they track their health and wellbeing.
Issues concerning Kiwis most

The top health and wellbeing concerns reflect a broad range of physical, emotional and social issues.

- The cost of living: 86%
- Violence in society: 85%
- Mental health: 84%
- Suicide rates: 83%
- Drugs / alcohol addiction / abuse: 80%
- Not having access to good, affordable healthcare: 79%
- Obesity and its impact on people’s health: 79%
- Not having access to cancer treatment services: 79%
- Physical health: 79%
- The impact of food and drinks that are high in sugar on people’s health: 77%
Looking at where Kiwis get their health advice, there is some interesting demographic differences. Retirees rely heavily on health professionals while more university students consult social media. The majority of Kiwis look to digital channels for information.
Almost half of Kiwis will seek treatment within a day or two after starting to feel unwell. One in 10 take steps as soon as they feel sick, but the same amount don’t seek any treatment at all. This figure is even higher for university students. The timeliness of people seeking medical treatment stays fairly static by income level, apart from a slightly higher number of low-income earners looking for immediate treatment.
Visiting the doctor and dentist

While almost three quarters of Kiwis see an appropriate medical specialist when feeling unwell (74 per cent) or experiencing dental pain (73 per cent), nearly one in five do not seek any medical treatment, especially among those with dental pain.

When unwell...

- General Practitioner (GP): 74%
- I didn’t seek medical treatment: 13%
- Pharmacist: 6%
- Nurse: 5%
- Accident and Emergency (A&E): 5%
- Other specialist (e.g. physio, chiropractor, podiatrist): 5%
- Medical specialist (e.g. cardiologist, dermatologist): 3%
- Alternative Practitioners (e.g. naturopath, acupuncturist): 3%

With dental pain...

- Dentist: 73%
- I didn’t seek medical treatment: 19%
- General Practitioner (GP): 4%
- Accident and Emergency (A&E): 2%
- Nurse: 1%
- Pharmacist: 1%
- Medical specialist (e.g. orthodontist): 1%
Barriers to healthcare

Cost is by far the main barrier to Kiwis seeking medical treatment when feeling unwell, followed by a lack of convenience and choosing to self-treat.

A high number of people indicate they would wait it out rather than seeing a health professional.

- Cost, it’s too expensive: 38%
- No one is available at the time I want: 18%
- I can treat it myself: 16%
- Usually passes quickly without need for the doctor: 16%
- No time: 13%
- Wait time is too long: 11%
- I can self-diagnose via the internet: 6%
- Too embarrassed to go: 5%
- Not covered by my health insurance: 4%
- Don’t trust the doctor / health system: 4%
- I don’t know who to go to: 3%
- I have no way of getting to someone: 2%
- There is no one close to me: 2%
What physical health means to Kiwis

There is an overall pattern to what New Zealanders strongly associate with physical wellbeing. A number of these factors are emphasised especially strongly amongst older retirees.

**Avoiding smoking and tobacco**
- Strongly associate: 77%
- Slightly associate: 16%
- Don't associate: 7%

**Eating a balanced diet**
- Strongly associate: 71%
- Slightly associate: 27%
- Don't associate: 2%

**Getting enough sleep**
- Strongly associate: 70%
- Slightly associate: 28%
- Don't associate: 2%

**Absence of disease / avoiding illness**
- Strongly associate: 65%
- Slightly associate: 31%
- Don't associate: 4%

**Maintaining a healthy weight**
- Strongly associate: 63%
- Slightly associate: 35%
- Don't associate: 2%

**Drinking enough water**
- Strongly associate: 61%
- Slightly associate: 35%
- Don't associate: 4%

**Physically fit**
- Strongly associate: 57%
- Slightly associate: 40%
- Don't associate: 3%

**Having good teeth**
- Strongly associate: 53%
- Slightly associate: 42%
- Don't associate: 5%

**Longevity / living for a long time**
- Strongly associate: 47%
- Slightly associate: 46%
- Don't associate: 7%

**Limiting alcohol**
- Strongly associate: 44%
- Slightly associate: 48%
- Don't associate: 8%

**Healthy appearance**
- Strongly associate: 39%
- Slightly associate: 51%
- Don't associate: 9%

**Physical strength**
- Strongly associate: 34%
- Slightly associate: 56%
- Don't associate: 10%
**Physical health concerns**

Kiwis are most concerned about not being as fit as they should be and whether they are doing right by their children when it comes to diet and exercise – particularly those with young children at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not being as fit as I should be</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure my kids eat healthy food</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the time / energy to get / stay fit</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing or developing an illness / disease</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not getting enough sleep</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being able to afford to be healthy</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with ageing / getting older</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting physical injuries / conditions</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure my kids get enough exercise</td>
<td>53%</td>
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</table>

Families with young kids:
- 81% concerned about being as fit as they should be
- 70% concerned about ensuring their kids eat healthy food
Focus on fitness

Only a third of Kiwis feel they are getting enough exercise. On average Kiwis are putting in three sessions of 30 minutes of exercise a week. During lockdown, both of these measures improved.

Getting enough exercise

- Pre-lockdown: 37% YES
- During lockdown (L4/L3): 41% YES

Average times per week – minimum of 30 minutes (mean)

- Pre-lockdown: 3.22
- During lockdown (L4/L3): 3.52
Hurdles to staying active

Being time-poor, feeling unmotivated and lack of energy are the biggest barriers to people being more active.

Family commitments and time constraints pose more of a challenge to families with young children.

- Not enough time: 34%
- Not motivated: 34%
- Too tired: 33%
- Work commitments: 25%
- Bad weather: 23%
- Family commitments: 19%
- Health issues: 17%
- Too expensive: 14%
- I am already active enough: 14%
- Not confident enough to exercise in public: 11%
- Don’t enjoy it / don’t want to: 11%
- Physical disabilities: 10%
- Shift work, especially nights or overtime: 7%
- Not encouraged to: 7%
- Lack of facilities in my area: 5%
- Study commitments: 4%
- Not having a safe place to exercise: 4%
- None of these: 8%

Source: Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report 2020
Despite these challenges, many Kiwis are displaying positive attitudes and behaviours towards their physical health. Looking at their behaviour regarding exercise in the past six months, more than 40 per cent of Kiwis are moving more often and a third are prioritising exercise and setting health and fitness goals.
Kiwis are using a number of ways to get their exercise in. The most popular method is through 'energetic exercise', but there is a distinct difference between genders.

A quarter of Kiwis are considering exercising with friends and family.
A weighty issue

Kiwis are generally happy with the weight of their children and partner but are more critical about their own.

- Child’s weight: 69%
- Partner’s weight: 62%
- Own weight: 44%

Happy - Unhappy
The majority of Kiwis say they are knowledgeable when it comes to understanding what is or isn’t healthy food. Three quarters would like to lose weight, however they find this difficult and eating healthy food expensive. Stress also contributes to less healthy eating for two thirds of New Zealanders.
New Zealanders are using their knowledge about healthy food to make better nutrition choices. Over half are cooking more from scratch and going back to basics, and a third are already reducing the amount of processed food they are consuming.

The global trends to reduce meat intake and move to more plant-based diets is also apparent in New Zealand. University students and younger singles / couples are significantly more likely to endorse plant-based diets.
Those unhappy with their health

Compared to those happy with their health, Kiwis who rate themselves as unhappy are...

- Less likely to spend time outdoors
- Waiting more than two days to seek medical treatment
- Experiencing poor work-life balance
- More likely to consider nurturing/maintaining relationships and spending time with family, but are not doing these already
- Not getting enough sleep AND are not prioritising it
- Indicating they have been stressed in the last month
- Not getting enough exercise AND not considering it
- Less likely to keep their brain stimulated
- Less likely to consider nurturing/maintaining relationships and spending time with family, but are not doing these already
Role of mental and emotional wellbeing in overall health

Kiwis strongly associate mental and emotional wellbeing with being healthy.
One in 10 New Zealanders is unhappy with their current mental state.
Emotional wellbeing worries

Concerns about money, children’s resilience and global issues are personally affecting the emotional health and wellbeing of Kiwis.

- Not having enough money to support myself / my family: 57%
- Whether my kids will cope with the pressures of life: 55%
- Our planet’s future e.g. climate change: 50%
- Global events / issues: 50%
- Not being happy in myself / feeling good enough: 49%
- My parents / relatives getting elderly and needing care: 49%
- Missing out on the fun side of life: 47%

- Not having a plan for the future: 46%
- Feeling over worked / burnt out: 45%
- Whether I am a good parent: 41%
- Being a burden to others: 41%
- Having a mental health issue or condition: 40%
- Being alone / loneliness: 38%
- Not getting a job / good enough job: 36%
- How I compare to other people: 29%
Looking at stress levels

A high proportion of people associate low stress with being healthy.

Before COVID-19 a quarter of Kiwis had felt stressed in the past month. During the lockdown New Zealanders reported feeling less stressed overall despite uncertainty about the potential impact of the pandemic with regard to health, job security, family pressures and the economy.
Kiwis feeling stressed in the past month

Compared to those who were not feeling stressed in the past month before the outbreak of COVID-19, people feeling stressed were...

- Less likely to get enough sleep
- Less likely to get enough exercise
- Taking longer to seek medical treatment
- More likely to have poor work-life balance
- Less likely to nurture / maintain relationships
- More likely to seek professional support such as counselling
- Less likely to help others or give back to the community
Sleep deprived Kiwis

Over half of Kiwis feel that they are not getting enough sleep. This is even higher among those with young kids.

A third of Kiwis are getting below the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep a night.
Keeping Kiwis up at night

The main reasons people aren’t getting sleep are having too much to think about, being anxious or stressed and going to bed too late.
Worries about keeping socially connected

There are many factors affecting people’s emotional wellbeing with regards to being socially connected.

As COVID-19 started impacting New Zealanders personally, global events and issues became the biggest concern.

At the same time, despite people being isolated physically from friends and family, feelings of loneliness and being a burden on others decreased.

General concerns of Kiwis: social health and wellbeing

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- University students (52% vs 41%) and people living with an illness / disability (56% vs 67%) were the most concerned about being a burden on others before and during lockdown.
- Men and women reported similar concerns about being alone / loneliness before lockdown (38%) but men had a bigger decrease during lockdown (down to 28% vs. 32% for women).
- Retirees concerned about being lonely decreased (27% to 24%).
Value of personal relationships

Most Kiwis are happy in their personal relationships with family, friends and romantic partners.
Connecting with communities

Fewer than half of Kiwis feel happy about the connection they have to their community although this improved during lockdown.

Many people got behind widely reported initiatives such as putting teddy bears in windows for children to spot on neighbourhood walks, donating much-needed funds to food banks and the launch of the support local / shop local campaign.

Felt happier with connectedness in the community

- Pre-lockdown: 14% Happy, 44% Content, 42% Unhappy
- During lockdown (L4/L3): 12% Happy, 39% Content, 49% Unhappy

SINKS/DINKS felt the least connected (41%)
Retirees felt the most connected during the lockdown (69%)
Lack of quality family time

Two thirds of Kiwi parents spend less than 11 quality hours with their children each week.

More than half want to spend more time with their kids. This figure is even higher for parents aged 30-39 and 40-49.
Getting in the way of family time

Work, household tasks and other family responsibilities are the main reasons parents don’t spend as much more time with their children as they would like.

What gets in the way of spending more time with them?

- **Work**: 60%
- **Household tasks**: 49%
- **Sport commitments**: 35%
- **Distance**: 13%
- **Other family responsibilities**: 10%
- **They spend time with friends / doing own things other than with family**: 3%
Getting the balance right

Most Kiwis agree that finding a good work/life balance is important, but over half feel that their current balance is only fair (42 per cent), poor (12 per cent) or very poor (3 per cent).
Flexible working hours and switching off from work help with maintaining a good work/life balance.

Conversely high workload, financial pressures and a lack of flexible working hours tend to add pressure on achieving a healthy work/life balance.
Pets are part of the family

Kiwis have high rates of pet ownership (especially cats) and the majority agree that pets make great companions and offer health benefits.

- 46% Own a pet (NO)
- 54% Own a pet (YES)

- 89% A pet is great companionship
- 87% Pets are good for the health and wellbeing of their owners
- 87% Pets are members of the family
- 86% Pets help you remain / be active
- 85% Pets help relieve stress

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Digital and device behaviour

Most Kiwis recognise the benefits of technology, but there are concerns about time spent on devices.

- 72% Technology has brought me closer to distant family/friends
- 65% Computer games and devices can help children learn problem-solving and connect to others
- 62% Devices help me connect with others through social media and give me a sense of community
- 61% I worry about the impact time on devices is having on my children’s health
- 57% I spend too much time on my devices in my free time
- 51% Technology helps me look after my health and wellness through online programmes and apps (e.g. fitness/diet tracking/meditation/brain exercises)
- 43% I worry about the impact time on devices is having on my health
- 36% The time I spend online negatively impacts my real-life relationships
- 34% Social media has a negative effect on how I feel about myself
- 33% The internet and apps add to my daily stress level
- 29% I compare myself to others based on social media
Holidays are important to health

Holidays are viewed as expensive but worthwhile to save for, because most Kiwis feel less stressed after a trip.

- 82%: Holidays require a significant financial sacrifice
- 78%: I feel less stressed after a holiday
- 77%: Holidays are a way to connect to other cultures
- 71%: I’m not familiar with
- 67%: Holidays are about getting away from the noise of the city and getting back to nature
- 67%: I prefer to save money for holidays and experiences rather than objects/items
- 53%: Having a pre-existing illness/condition excludes people from travel insurance
- 50%: Planning a holiday is stressful
- 49%: Having a pre-existing illness/condition excludes people from travelling overseas
- 38%: I would enjoy a wellness retreat (e.g., yoga, meditation)

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Investing in future health

Kiwis have a variety of ways to look after their emotional health and wellbeing, which include both physical and social activities.

Many are keeping their brain stimulated, spending time outdoors, nurturing relationships and making time for themselves a priority.

During lockdown, people found more time to focus on more positive changes. These included minimising things and decluttering, practicing positive thinking, gardening, practicing mindfulness and being in the moment.
Methodology

Desktop and qualitative research gave us an in-depth understanding of the current situation in New Zealand regarding health, lifestyle, activity levels and wellbeing.

A total of 3068 people from across New Zealand

54 life-streaming discussions:
four-day online forum with n=54 people from across New Zealand all logging in for 30 minutes daily to join discussion and complete tasks.

Online survey of New Zealanders from across the country who completed a 25 minute survey about their attitudes and behaviours.

• Wave 1 – fieldwork:
  4 – 30 October 2019 (Spring)
  n=1000

• Wave 2 – fieldwork:
  2 – 15 March 2020 (Autumn)
  n = 1007

Seven in-home immersions: 2.5 hour immersive / empathy discussion with New Zealanders at different life stages to understand their world.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, a separate online survey was undertaken to measure the impact on behaviour and attitudes of the lockdown in New Zealand. Fieldwork was completed during Alert Level 4 and the first few days of Alert Level 3.

• Wave 3 – fieldwork:
  22 – 28 April 2020
  (COVID-19 lockdown dip) n = 1000
For more information about the Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report visit:

www.southerncrosss.co.nz/healthy-futures
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