

# How is life going for the disability community? (First Survey)

**1 May 2020**

*How life is going for the disability community?* is a weekly survey. The purpose of the survey is to understand the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic being experienced by disabled people and their whānau/families. The survey also collects information from service providers and others in the disability sector.

Questions in the survey cover a wide range of topics. The topics covered in the analysis of the findings from the first survey (17 April to 24 April 2020) are:

* information
* access to personal protective equipment
* access to food and other essentials
* wellbeing: safety and loneliness.

These topics were selected based on their importance for the wellbeing of disabled people and their whānau/families in the COVID-19 environment.

1,564 responses were received, with 767 completed surveys (655 disabled people and 112 service providers). However, there was significant variation in the number of survey questions answered by each respondent.

It is important to bear in mind the probable bias inherent in the online survey, given that there are disabled people who do not have access to digital technology.

The survey was presented in a standard version (SV), Easy Read (EV) and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). Respondents identified whether they were a disabled person or a service provider supporting a disabled person(s).

## Information

### Access to information about COVID-19

Effective access to information is critical for disabled people in the COVID-19 environment. Of the 655 disabled respondents who completed the access to information question in the SV version of the survey, over half stated that it was “very easy” to find information about COVID-19 (see Graph 1). Close to 33% of the 153 respondents who completed the EV version of this question expressed a similar view. And just over 14% of the 112 service providers who responded, “strongly agreed” that, on average, the people they support can access reliable information about COVID-19, whereas 48% said “agree”.

The number of respondents indicating that it was “hard” to find information about COVID-19 was low for all survey respondents: SV – 2.14%, EV – almost 8%, service providers - 12.5%.

Bar graph showing survey results on ease of access to information about COVID-19

Graph : SV survey results on ease of access to information about COVID-19

### Understanding information about COVID-19

Almost 52% of the 654 SV respondents completing the understanding information question said they “very well” understood the Government’s information about COVID-19, compared with almost 20% of the 152 EV respondents (see Graph 2). Only 14% of the 112 service providers surveyed for this question “strongly agreed” that the people they support understand the Government’s information, whereas 48% said “agree”.

As in the case of the question about access to COVID-19 information, the number of respondents indicating that it was “hard” to understand relevant information was low: SV – 2.60%, EV – 15%, service providers - 12.5%.

The overall theme of the comments from the EV survey respondents was that they accessed information primarily online and by watching television.

Bar graph showing Easy Read survey respondents' ability to understand government information on COVID-19

Graph : EV survey on ability to understand government information on COVID-19

## Access to personal protection equipment

The survey asked service providers and disabled people whether they were able to access the equipment they need to keep themselves safe. This was one of the most answered questions in the survey. 44% of the 650 disabled respondents who completed the SV survey, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to the equipment they needed to keep themselves safe (see Graph 3). Similarly, of those who completed the EV survey, 55 respondents out of 150 (37%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to personal protection equipment (PPE). 34 respondents (23%) from the EV survey said they had some access to PPE and 114 respondents (17.5%) from the SV survey shared this view.

The response from service providers reflected similar views, with 36% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they had access to the equipment they needed to keep themselves and others safe.

Various reasons for the lack of confidence in obtaining PPE were provided through EV survey comments; a common reason was “out of stock in stores” and several respondents mentioned correct sizes not being available.

Bar graph showing respondents' access to Personal Protection Equipment

Graph – SV survey on access to Personal Protection Equipment

## Access to food and other essentials

We asked about the ability of disabled people to access food and other essentials they need. 68% of both the EV survey and the SV survey respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that they could safely get food and other things they needed. In the EV survey, 4% said they could not get what they needed and 10% found it hard to get what they needed, a total of 14%. 119 of the 637 SV survey respondents (19%) disagreed, or strongly disagreed that they were able to safely get food and other essential items. Comparatively, 65% of service providers agreed, or strongly agreed, that disabled people were able to safely access food and other essential items (see Graph 4).

The overall theme of the comments from EV survey respondents was that family or support staff were able to get food and essential items for them. Several respondents favourably noted priority supermarket delivery and, in some cases, they had received a food parcel.

Bar graph showing service providers' views on whether food and other essential items are accessible to disabled people

Graph – Service providers view on whether food and other essential items are accessible to disabled people

## Wellbeing: Safety and loneliness

Of the 671 SV disabled respondents who completed the home safety question, over one-third felt “mostly safe”. Around 27% of the 156 EV respondents provided the same answer. Similarly, around 35% of the 112 service providers responding stated that the disabled people for whom they provide services were “mostly safe”.

When respondents were asked how well they are “doing right now”, almost 34% of the 95 SV disabled respondents stated that they were “mostly doing well” (see Graph 5). The equivalent figure was almost 50% for the 139 EV respondents. Similarly, 37% of the 95 service providers responding believed that their clients were “ mostly doing well”.

Regarding the question of how “your family/whānau are doing at the moment”, over 30% of the 577 SV disabled respondents indicated that their family/whānau were “okay”, compared to 30% of the 130 EV respondents (see Graph 6).

As to the question of whether “you felt lonely during Alert Level 4”, almost 30% of the 609 SV disabled respondents (see Graph 7) and almost 27% of the 142 EV respondents felt “lonely some of the time”.

There is a similar question in the Stats NZ General Social Survey (2018/2019). The sampling process for the General Social Survey is different to the on-line voluntary method used in the current survey and, hence, comparisons between the two surveys must be made cautiously. However, it is interesting to note that 17% of the disabled people completing the General Social Survey reported feeling lonely some of the time.

The comments on wellbeing made by the EV respondents are quite similar to views expressed by non-disabled people in the wider society throughout the lockdown at Level 4. Many of the comments refer to a supportive environment during the enforced seclusion. However, respondents also state that they missed not being able to see extended family and friends. The overall impression conveyed by the EV respondents was that they were doing their best coping with a challenging situation.

Bar graph showing how survey respondents are doing at the moment

Graph – SV respondents on how they are doing at the moment

Bar graph showing how Easy Read survey respondents feel their family is doing at the moment 

Graph – EV respondents on how their family/whānau is doing at the moment

Bar graph showing survey respondents on loneliness during lockdown

Graph – SV respondents on loneliness during lockdown

## Summary

The findings from this first weekly ODI online survey suggest that, overall, the surveyed disabled people have not experienced inordinate risk during lockdown at Level 4.