

Living well in the ACT region: exploring the wellbeing of ACT residents in 2019-20

Part 2: Bushfire, hailstorm and COVID-19: experiences of ACT residents to May 2020

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Executive Summary

Between late 2019 and May 2020, many ACT residents experienced extended impacts from the 2019-20 summer bushfires and associated smoke pollution, a hailstorm in January 2020 causing extensive damage in parts of the ACT, and the emerging impacts of COVID-19. During April-May 2020, the *Living well in the ACT region* survey asked ACT residents about their experiences of these events. These are examined in this report.

The 2019-20 bushfires were active for an extended period of time in and near the ACT, and in many areas ACT residents regularly travel to for holidays and weekend trips, particularly the NSW South Coast. The most common direct impact of bushfires for ACT residents was poor air quality due to bushfire smoke, experienced by 99% of residents, while 17% had their home at risk from bushfire for a period of time, 7% had to evacuate from the place they were staying, and 6% were advised by local fire brigades that they would not be able to protect their home if fire impacted it. Residents of Tuggeranong South were significantly more likely to report their property/home was at direct risk of fire for a period of time (52%), and that the fire brigade advised that they would not be able to protect their property if the fire came close to it (e.g. because of lack of firefighters or resources, or severity of fire) (18%).

Many people felt unable to protect themselves from the effects of smoke (68%), and many – 67% - were exposed to a lot of smoke in their home, while 36% also experienced exposure to a lot of smoke in their workplace. Despite two-thirds finding it easy to obtain information on air quality, 51% remained uncertain about how to use that information to assess the danger of going outside on high pollution days. Overall, this suggests that a high proportion of ACT residents felt somewhat helpless to reduce the potential impacts of smoke pollution on their own health and that of others in their household, despite being reasonably well able to access information on air quality.

In addition to the direct impacts of smoke and fire, the fires had less direct impacts, through affecting a range of aspects of people's lives such as their ability to travel on specific roads and highways, mobile phone reception, electricity supply, and ability to access goods and services. Forty six per cent of ACT residents experienced difficulty travelling due to road closures, and 23% experienced significant delays when travelling. Fewer experienced loss of mobile reception due to fires (11%, likely while on holidays in bushfire affected areas), difficulty accessing enough food and household supplies at the supermarket (8%), or had to cancel health appointments (7%) due to the fires.

The impacts of bushfires on health and wellbeing are likely to in part depend on the extent to which people experience distress and negative feelings/mood while experiencing the fires. Feeling anxious, worried, helpless, or unable to access support can all contribute to negative impacts on wellbeing and mental health. The majority of ACT residents reporting feeling worried for the safety of people they care about during the fires (74%), but also had access to emotional support (63%), felt confident to make decisions about what to do (62%), felt confident they knew how to keep themselves and their loved ones safe (60%) and felt confident they could cope with the impacts on their work or income (60%). Fewer residents occasionally felt anxious or worried (52%), or sometimes found it hard to concentrate on anything (42%). Despite relatively high levels of access to emotional support, only 40% had access to practical support when they needed it. Around one in three sometimes felt helpless (38%), often felt anxious or worried (36%) and/or were worried about the safety of their pets and/or livestock (31%) during the fires.

The majority of ACT residents reported doing less outdoor exercise due to smoke/fires (91%), and having periods of time where they slept poorly (67%). A total of 47% indicated they did less indoor exercise, 36% indicated the smoke and/or fires worsened existing depression or anxiety, 33% indicated that the smoke and/or bushfires triggered new depression or anxiety, and 31% indicated the smoke and/or fires worsened existing physical health problems. Just over one in four (26%) indicated the smoke/fires triggered traumatic memories or emotions from previous fires, rising to

43% of those living in Tuggeranong South, and 48% of those living in Weston Creek. Twenty one per cent reported eating more unhealthy food than usual, 16% had difficulty managing an existing health condition, 14% reported drinking more alcohol and 11% reported smoking more than usual.

The bushfires affected social connection for many ACT residents, with 48% unable to see friends and family as much as usual during the fires, while 22% found it hard to stay in contact with some family and friends, 11% had extra people staying in their home for a while, 9% volunteered more than usual and 6% had others in their household volunteering more than usual.

As of April-May 2020, few ACT residents felt they were still experiencing mental health challenges triggered by the fires (10%), ongoing physical health problems triggered or worsened by the fires (9%), and only 13% felt they were still experiencing negative impacts from the bushfires. However, many were experiencing concern about the environmental impacts of the bushfires (78%), about the potential for occurrence of future bushfire seasons like the 2019-20 season (71%), and about whether the fires caused long-term damage to places they care about (68%). There was mixed confidence regarding whether nature areas and the community would recover well from bushfires, and 21% reported that they sometimes avoided going to or near places that were burned to avoid seeing the impacts.

Younger people were more likely than older people to report fires triggering psychological distress as well as lower confidence in knowing what to do during fires. Single parents, renters, those living with moderate or severe disability, and in some cases those whose main language was not English were also more likely to report experiencing several types of negative impact from bushfires.

In January 2020, a severe hailstorm occurred that impacted the ACT. Overall, 34% of ACT adults reported experiencing some damage to a car, property or home. Just under a quarter - 23% - of residents lodged an insurance claim associated with hail damage, while unexpected large expenses due to the storm were reported by 16% of residents. The storm impacted transport for 12% of residents who were unable to access their usual forms of transport for a period of time following the storm. Fewer experienced impacts on their work: 5% reported having decreased work hours, and 3% increased work hours, due to the hailstorm. Household income decreased for 3% of households and 1% experienced an increase in household income. Not surprisingly, the most common predictor of experiencing damage to car, property or home, and to the consequent lodging of insurance claims and expenses, was a person's location. The hailstorm impacted Belconnen and the Inner South: 73% of Belconnen residents, 66% of Inner South residents and 64% of Outer Belconnen residents reported experiencing damage from the storm.

Following the bushfires and hailstorm came the impacts of COVID-19. The ACT had relatively few cases of COVID-19, with impacts resulting more from the effects of restrictions put in place to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19. Data for the survey were collected during the period of time when ACT residents were asked to leave home only for essential activities, many retail businesses were closed, many children were home schooled and many adults were working from home.

Almost one in three workers – 31% - had experienced a decrease in paid work hours, while 20% had temporarily lost their job, and 22% had an increase in unpaid work hours. Thirteen per cent were still employed due to their employer using government support to keep them employed. Smaller proportions had experienced an increase in paid work (8%), had to take paid leave due to COVID-19 (8%), lost their job permanently (7%), or had to take unpaid leave from work (5%). One-third of ACT adults reported that they had experienced a decline in household income (34%) due to COVID-19 and 30% reported having decreased personal income. Those most likely to report loss of household income were those whose main language at home was not English (59%), those who had lived in the ACT five years or less (57%), those aged 18-29 (51%), and renters (44%). These groups all overlap: for example, many younger people have lived in the ACT for five years or less and are renters. Those least likely to report a decline in household income were those aged 65 and older (20%).

As of April/May 2020, 49% of ACT residents were shopping for groceries more often than usual due to shortages of stock or limits on how much could be bought at once, while 36% reporting shopping for groceries less frequently than usual. Almost half - 46% - had sought to buy enough supplies to last two weeks in case their household needed to self-isolate, while 33% were keeping bigger stocks than usual due to the difficulties of purchasing some household goods. Just under half of ACT residents – 45% - had at some point run out of one or more types of basic food or goods such as toilet paper and found it difficult to purchase more, while 39% had cancelled some health appointments, and 33% had experienced significant difficulty accessing enough household food and other goods due to shortages on supermarket shelves. Health appointment cancellation was most commonly reported by carers (53%), as well as difficulty filling medical prescriptions (25%).

Overall, 89% of people felt their home was always a safe place to be during COVID-19, and 88% disagreed that they felt unsafe around one or more of the people they live with. However, 6% of people disagreed that their home was always safe and 9% reported they sometimes felt unsafe around someone they currently live with. Those more likely to report sometimes feeling unsafe around one or more people they lived with were younger people (16% of those aged 18 to 29), those whose main language at home was not English (17%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (20%), renters (18%), and those who were unemployed (33%).

Two-thirds of ACT adults (67%) felt they had good access to support from family or friends if they needed it during COVID-19; however, 18% did not. Just over half – 52% - were feeling more isolated or alone than usual, consistent with the increase in loneliness identified in Part 1 of this report. Just over one quarter (28%) were busier than usual, and 23% had a home that was more crowded than usual. More than one in five (22%) reported an increase in disagreements in their household since having to spend more time at home. While most people had access to support, 16% had no-one they could ask for help if they needed it during COVID-19. Those most likely to report having good access to support from family or friends if they needed it during COVID-19 were those aged 65 and older (79%). Those less likely to report having good access to support if needed were single parents (46%), renters (52%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (55%), those with one or more children under 18 living in the home (55%), those living in units/apartments (57%), and those aged 30-49 (59%).

While 57% had more free time than usual due to the impacts of COVID-19, 22% had less free time than usual. This is likely due at least in part to changes in caring and support obligations, with 36% reporting they had increased caring duties for children, 34% were responsible for homeschooling children, and 26% having provided support to people who were self-isolating. Normal volunteering activities were disrupted, with 23% reporting they had to decrease their volunteering hours (for example due to COVID-19 restrictions preventing the volunteering occurring, increased caring obligations, or being at high risk from COVID-19) and only 7% increasing their volunteering hours.

While 83% reported having sufficient internet connection to support both work and social interaction, and 73% that their home had sufficient space, 68% reported they were talking less to people than usual, and only 19% that they were spending more time talking to others than usual. While 68% reported they mostly found it easy to stay in touch with friends and family that didn't live with them, 36% had some difficulty staying in touch with some people outside their household.

There are clear differences in the impacts resulting from COVID-19 for different people in the ACT. Younger adults were much more likely than middle aged and older adults to lose income, experience increased loneliness, and somewhat more likely to report they sometimes felt unsafe in their home, and to have difficulty staying in touch with family and friends. Younger adults were 1.5 times more likely to report reduced household income than those aged 30 and older. Those whose main language was not English were even more likely to report loss of household income. Middle aged adults were more likely to retain their jobs and work hours than those who were younger, but were more likely to be busier than usual, often with increased caring and home-schooling obligations.

Amongst this group, women were more likely than men to report increased caring and homeschooling duties for children. Older adults were less likely to have either reduced income, or increased caring obligations, and were also less likely to report difficulty keeping in touch with friends and family than other age groups, although a significant proportion did report increased loneliness (albeit fewer than for other age groups). Older adults aged 65 and older were also more likely to report having access to support from family and friends if they needed it compared to younger people.

Those with children were more likely to report being busier, having a more crowded household than usual, shopping more frequently from groceries due to difficulty buying goods needed in their household in sufficient quantity, and having more household disagreements than usual. They were also less likely than those without children to have access to support from family and friends. These things were all particularly the case for single parents, who were also more likely than others to report not having anyone they could ask for help if needed.

In addition to being more likely to lose household income than others, those whose main language at home was not English were more likely than others to report sometimes feeling unsafe around one or more people they lived with, not having anyone they could ask for help if needed, and finding it hard to stay in touch with people outside their household.

Carers were impacted by COVID-19 in different ways to others, being more likely to take unpaid leave from work, report increased household disagreements, have difficulty accessing food and other goods due to shortages, have cancelled health appointments, and have difficulty filling medical prescriptions. Those living with moderate or severe disability, were more likely than others to report experiencing difficulty accessing medications and health appointments, increased isolation, increased household disagreements, a lack of access to support, and spending less time talking to other people than usual.

Overall, almost every resident of the ACT was impacted in some way by either bushfires, the hailstorm and COVID-19, and many were affected in multiple ways, often by more than one of these. Younger people were more likely to report negative impacts from both bushfires and COVID-19; to some extent, so were those whose main language at home was not English. Those living in Belconnen and the Inner South are particularly likely to have experienced negative impacts from the hailstorm which may have been compounded by subsequent impacts of COVID-19. Those living in Tuggeranong and Weston Creek were more likely to experience negative impacts from bushfires; similarly, for many this will have been followed by negative impacts from COVID-19, likely leading to higher risk of impacts on wellbeing.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is a need to provide targeted support to specific groups, particularly to younger adults, those who do not speak English as their primary language, carers, single parents, and those living with moderate or severe disability. While financial support is most relevant for younger people, practical and emotional support to reduce isolation and stress is highly important for all groups.

The findings in this report reflect experiences as of May 2020. From mid May through to December 2020 there was gradual lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions in the ACT, with students returning to school, many workplaces gradually reopening to workers, and an increase in the number of businesses able to operate. Shortages of goods also changed, with supermarkets typically returning to high availability of stock, while some other businesses experienced longer-term stock shortages, such as some homewares stores. These changes will have resulted in further change in the impacts experienced by ACT residents. In late 2020, another *Living well* survey will be conducted, examining how the impacts of COVID-19 changed between May and December 2020.

1.0 Introduction

Part 1 of this report examined the wellbeing of adults living in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) using a number of measures that explored differing aspects of wellbeing. Part 1 identified that, for many indicators, the wellbeing of many ACT residents changed between late 2019, when data were first collected as part of the *Living well* survey, and Apr/May 2020, when the survey was conducted a second time. This included many people experiencing decline in personal wellbeing, increase in psychological distress and loneliness, decline in quality of time use, a decline in confidence in business conditions, some increase in use of local green spaces, and increased emergency preparedness.

Many of these changes are likely to be at least in part due to the impacts of the events of late 2019 to early 2020, in which many ACT residents experienced extended impacts from the 2019-20 summer bushfires and associated smoke pollution, a hailstorm in January 2020 causing extensive damage in parts of the ACT, and the emerging impacts of COVID-19. At the time the second set of survey data were collected in April-May 2020, the first wave of COVID-19 was occurring, schoolchildren were studying from home and ACT residents were permitted to leave their home for essential purposes only, to reduce spread of COVID-19.

Given these events, in addition to asking questions intended to measure overall quality of life, the second survey also specifically asked ACT residents about their experiences of bushfire, hailstorm and COVID-19, and whether and how they had been impacted by these events. This report – Part 2 of 3 - presents overall findings from these specific questions. This provides further context to understand the types of impacts of these events, and how they may have contributed to the changes in wellbeing observed in Part 1 of this report.

Part 2 does not measure wellbeing indicators. Instead, it examines the types of ‘exposure’ ACT residents had to differing impacts from bushfire, hailstorm and COVID-19. This includes whether these events directly impacted them in the form of property damage or having to evacuate buildings or homes, the economic impacts in the form of lost employment or, in some cases, increased business activity. It also asks about how these different types of exposure impacted different aspects of people’s lives, including their exercise, diet, sleep, mood and social interaction.

The impacts of bushfires, hailstorm and COVID-19 are examined in this report, after first briefly describing methods, which were described in detail in Part 1 of this report.

2.0 Methods

This report analyses data collected in April-May 2020 in the *Living well in the ACT region* survey. The survey methods are described in detail in Part 1 of this report, and not repeated here. The data presented are for adult residents of the ACT, and all data presented in this report are weighted to be representative of the ACT adult population (see Part 1 for a description of the weighting method).

Throughout this report, different groups are compared. Whereas Part 1 of this report compared a wide range of groups, this report focuses predominantly on a smaller set of groups, namely:

- Gender: men and women
- Age groups: Those aged 18-29, 30-49, 50-64 and 65 and older; in some cases more specific age groups are examined where there was a specific difference in their experiences compared to those of other ages
- Those whose main language at home is not English

- Parents, including cohabiting couples with children and single parents
- Carers, defined as those who care for one or more people who have a disability, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal or serious illness, or who are frail, without this being part of their paid employment (carers payments are not considered paid employment)
- Those with a disability.

Other groups are examined where they have findings different to those for the groups that they are largely composed of. For example, renters are on average younger than those who own their home outright: differences between these groups are not described where they are likely to be associated with this age difference.

Interpreting findings for different groups. This report examines differences in experiences of bushfires, hailstorm and COVID-19 amongst different types of ACT residents. These differences can result from many factors. Care is needed when interpreting the findings: while there is confidence that there is a difference in how common particular experiences are between groups, this does not mean that being a member of that group ‘caused’ the difference. For example, on average renters were more likely to report loss of household income as a result of COVID-19 compared to those with a mortgage or who owned their home outright. Renting is not the cause of this loss of income, but is a common characteristic many of those who have lost income have in common. It is useful to understand these differences, but care is needed not to assume a causal relationship.

A group is only described in this report as being ‘different’ to the average if they met the following criteria:

- 95% confidence intervals indicated there was a significant difference in the proportion of this group experiencing a particular impact or event when compared to all ACT adults, and
- The size of the difference was meaningful, defined as being larger than a 5% difference. Differences of less than 5% are not reported, even if statistically significant based on 95% confidence intervals.

To reduce the size of this report, full data for different groups compared in this report are provided as a separate Appendix, which provides data for every group, and data for confidence intervals.

3.0 Experiences and impacts of bushfire, hailstorm and COVID-19

3.1 Bushfire

The 2019-20 bushfires were active for an extended period of time in and near the ACT, and in many areas ACT residents regularly travel to for holidays and weekend trips, particularly the NSW South Coast. This section examines how many ACT residents experienced different bushfire-related 'exposures', ranging from direct threat of fire or property damage, to smoke pollution, and evacuation. The impacts of smoke pollution, which affected the ACT for an extended period of time, are then examined in more detail. Sense of confidence in being able to make decisions and reduce risk are then examined, followed by impacts of the bushfires on health, social connection, and impacts experienced after the bushfires.

3.1.1 Direct effects of bushfires – fire risk, fire defence and evacuation, property damage, and air quality changes

Bushfires can directly affect a person in many ways. The 2019-20 bushfires affected ACT residents in multiple ways. Many experienced extended periods of reduced air quality due to bushfire smoke, while others lived in areas under direct risk of bushfires for periods of time. With many ACT residents regularly spending time on the NSW coast, where many fires were active, some had to defend or evacuate properties impacted by fire, or evacuate towns as fires threatened the area. These differing experiences can have a range of impacts for those who experience them. To better understand the level of exposure to different bushfire impacts, survey respondents were asked if they experienced any of the following during the bushfires:

- Experienced poor air quality due to smoke from bushfires
- Fire caused damage to or loss of my home, property and/or business
- I was injured while preparing for fire, evacuating or defending my property
- Others in my household were injured while preparing, evacuating or defending from fire
- Close family or friends of mine experienced major injury or died in the fires
- I had to actively defend my home/property from fire
- I helped actively defend a place other than my own home/property from fire
- I volunteered as a firefighter during the bushfires
- The local fire brigade advised that they would not be able to protect my property (e.g. because of lack of firefighters or resources, or severity of fire)
- The property or home I live in was identified as at risk from fire (e.g. in fire maps showing potential fire spread, or by emergency services personnel)
- I evacuated from my home (once or multiple times)
- I had to evacuate from a place I was staying other than home, e.g. holiday rental

As shown in Figure 1, the most common experience was poor air quality due to smoke from bushfires, experienced by 99% of residents. The next most common was a person having their property/home at risk from bushfires for a period of time, with 17% experiencing this, while 7% had to evacuate from the place they were staying, and 6% were advised by local fire brigades that they would not be able to protect their home. Fewer than 5% of residents indicated that they had to evacuate from their home, that they actively helped defend their own home or someone else's home, that close family or friends experienced major injury or died during the fires, that fire caused damage to or loss of their home, property or business, that they volunteered as a firefighter, that themselves or others in their household were injured while preparing, evacuating or defending from fire.

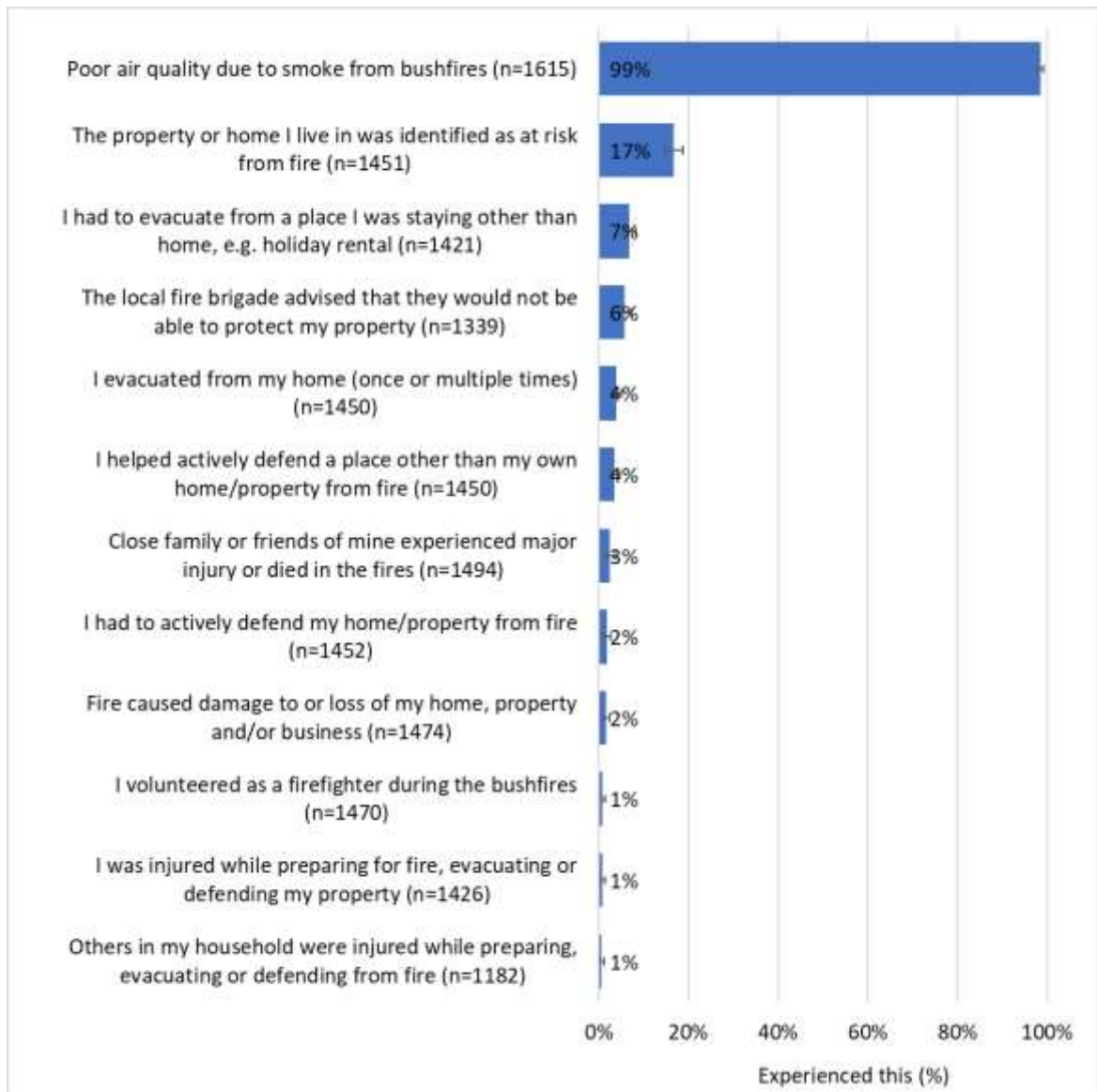


Figure 1 Key impacts and events experienced by ACT residents during the 2019-20 bushfires

Bushfire smoke was experienced by almost all ACT residents, irrespective of age, gender or part of the ACT region, while most other experiences were experienced by few ACT residents, with few significant differences between groups. The exception was residents of Tuggeranong South, who were significantly more likely to report their property/home was at direct risk of fire for a period of time (52%), and that the fire brigade advised that that they would not be able to protect their property if the fire came close to it (e.g. because of lack of firefighters or resources, or severity of fire) (18%).

3.1.2 Ability to manage the impacts of bushfire smoke

Almost all ACT residents reported they experienced poor air quality due to bushfire smoke during the fires. Given the widespread experience of smoke, and its longevity, with several weeks of poor air quality impacting the ACT, survey respondents were asked more detailed questions about whether they felt able to take actions to reduce the potential impacts of the air pollution on themselves and their household. They were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that, during the fires:

- I felt unable to protect myself from the effects of smoke
- I was exposed to a lot of smoke in my workplace
- I was exposed to a lot of smoke at my home
- I was unsure how dangerous going out was on smoky days
- I found it easy to get timely information on air quality
- I found it easy to get local information on air quality
- I found it difficult to know how best to prevent the smoke impacting my health or the health of others in my household

Figure 2 highlights that many people felt unable to protect themselves from the effects of smoke (68%), and many – 67% - were exposed to a lot of smoke in their home, while 36% also experienced exposure to a lot of smoke in their workplace. While most found it easy to get information on air quality (around two-thirds), just over half remained uncertain about how to use that information to assess the danger of going outside on high pollution days (51%), or to better protect their and others’ health (44%). Overall, this suggests that a high proportion of ACT residents felt somewhat helpless to reduce the potential impacts of smoke pollution on their own health and that of others in their household, despite being reasonably well able to access information on air quality.

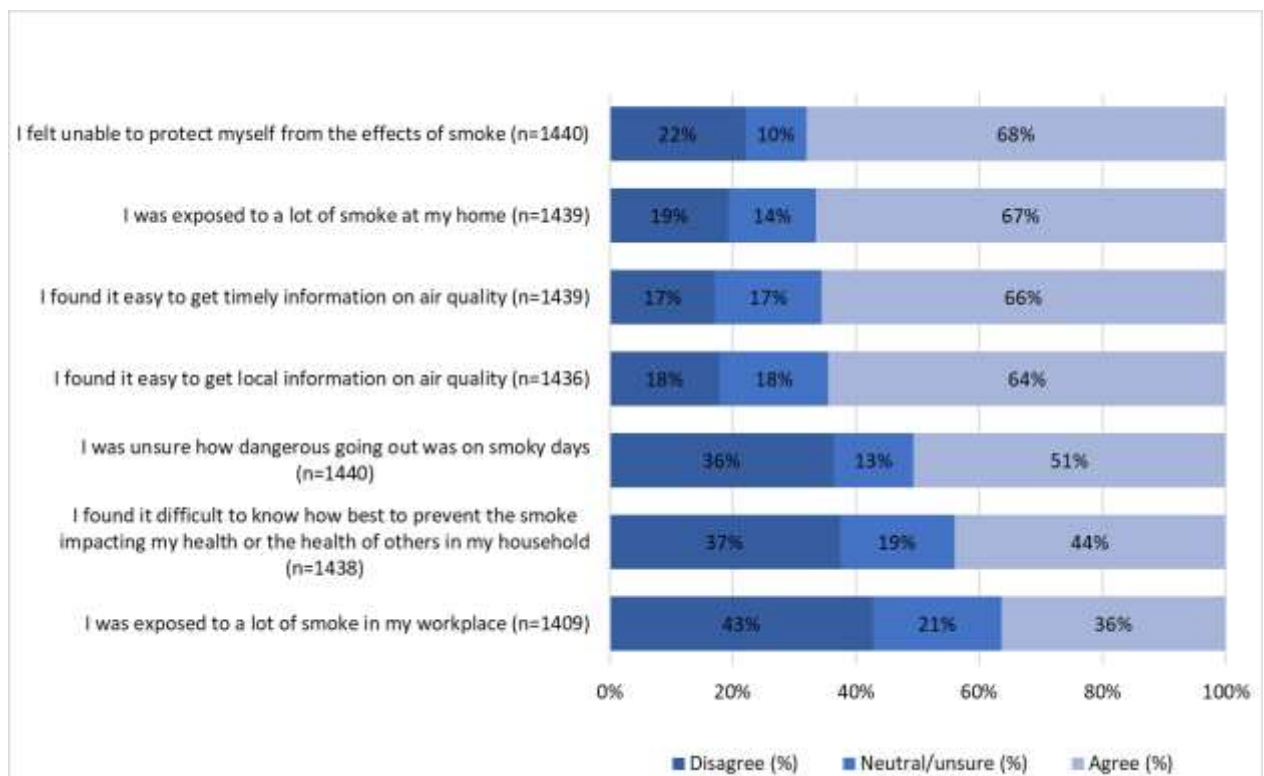


Figure 2 Experience and impacts of bushfire smoke

Some groups experienced more difficulty managing the impacts of smoke, while others were more confident they were able to reduce exposure and protect themselves from the effects of smoke.

- **Ability to reduce impacts of smoke:** 68% of ACT residents felt unable to protect themselves from the impacts of smoke. Those more likely to report being unable to protect themselves were females (74%), those aged 25-34 years (81%), single parents (80%), residents of the Inner North (83%) and residents of Weston Creek (80%). Those who felt more confident were those aged 65 and older (although 59% still reported being unable to protect themselves) and Gungahlin residents (53% felt unable to).

- *Exposure to smoke in the home:* Two-thirds of ACT residents (67%) reported being exposed to a lot of smoke in their home. Those more likely to report this were carers with high caring obligations (79%), those living with moderate or severe disability (76%), Tuggeranong North residents (80%), and Weston Creek residents (79%). Those less likely to report this were those aged 18-24 (54%), those whose main language at home is not English (54%), those living in townhouses (58%), and residents of Gungahlin (58%) and North Canberra (40%).
- *Accessing information:* While 66% of ACT residents found it easy to get timely information about air quality, men were more likely to (72%) and women less likely to (60%), while those aged 35-44 were more likely to than other age groups (77%), and those in Belconnen East (53%) and Tuggeranong South (56%) somewhat less likely to.
- *Assessing danger of going outside:* While 51% of ACT residents were unsure how dangerous it was to go outside on smoky days, this lack of surety was higher amongst those aged 18 to 24 (65%), while those aged 65 and older were more confident, with only 43% saying they were unsure (similar results were found for those with no children in their household, who are often older in age).
- *Reducing impacts of smoke on health:* 44% of ACT residents were unsure how best to reduce impacts of smoke on their health, including 51% of those living in a home with a mortgage, while only 36% of those who owned their home outright (often in older age brackets) reported this.
- *Exposure to smoke in the workplace* was more commonly reported by those aged 18-24 (56% compared to 36% of ACT residents), who had lived in the ACT five years or less (54%) were a single parent (55%) or a couple with children (47%) and those living in the Inner North (49%) and Weston Creek and Molonglo (49%). It was less commonly reported by those in older age brackets, who are more likely to be retired.

3.1.3 Accessing goods and services during the bushfires

In addition to the direct impacts of smoke and fire, the fires had less direct impacts, through affecting a range of aspects of people's lives such as their ability to travel on specific roads and highways, mobile phone reception, electricity supply, and ability to access goods and services. With some transport routes disrupted by the fires, and some goods 'stocked up' on by residents as they prepared for fire, some goods were in lower availability for periods of time in supermarkets. To understand the extent of these types of impacts, survey respondents were asked whether or not they experienced any of the following due to bushfire:

- Road closures stopped me being able to travel (e.g. you were unable to go on a holiday, return from a holiday on time, or travel to work)
- I experienced significant delays when travelling e.g. a trip that normally takes an hour took several hours due to road closures, limits on traffic etc.
- I had no mobile phone reception for a period of time
- My home lost power for a period of time
- A place I was staying other than home lost power for a period of time (e.g. motel)
- Shortages of food on supermarket shelves caused me significant difficulty in accessing enough food and household supplies at some points
- I had to cancel health appointments (e.g. with dentist, specialist, physiotherapist, psychologist, speech pathologist, GP)
- I lacked access to medication I usually take for a period of time

- Bushfires impacted quality of the drinking water I was using (e.g. you may have needed to boil water or buy bottled water instead of drinking from the tap)
- I had difficulty buying fuel for my vehicle

Of these, the most common experienced by ACT residents was road closures and associated travel delays, with 46% experiencing difficulty travelling due to road closures, and 23% experiencing significant delays when travelling. Fewer experienced loss of mobile reception due to fires (11%, likely while on holidays in bushfire affected areas), difficulty accessing enough food and household supplies at the supermarket (8%), had to cancel health appointments (7%), had reduced quality drinking water (7%), lost power at their home (7%), had difficulty buying fuel for their vehicle (5%), or lacked access to medication for a period of time (2%). Many of these may have occurred to those who were travelling to areas such as the NSW South Coast during the summer holiday period when fires impacted the area severely.

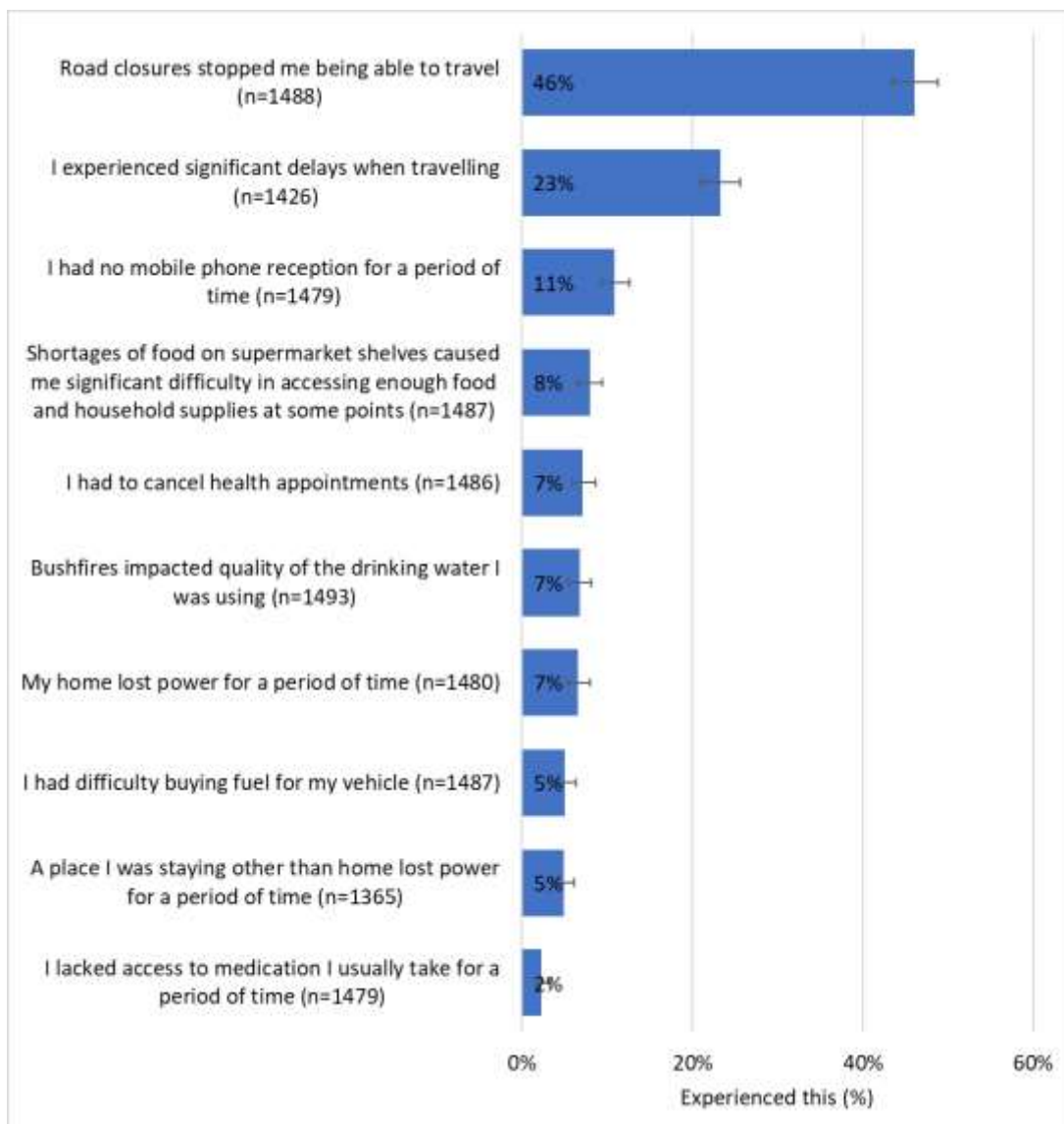


Figure 3 Accessing goods and services during the bushfires

There were some differences in the groups who reported experiencing these different issues:

- Road closures were less often experienced by those aged 65 and older (33%)

- Delays when travelling were more commonly reported by those in younger age groups (38% of those aged 18 to 29) and renters (31%, with this group often also younger in age), and less often by those aged 65 and older (12%)
- Lack of mobile phone reception was more commonly reported by those aged 18 to 29 (17%) and less often by those aged 65 and older (4%), those whose main language at home was not English (6%), and those who had lived in the ACT five years or less (6%)
- Shortages of food causing difficulties was more commonly reported by those living with moderate or severe disability (13%)

3.1.4 Decision making, safety and access to support during the bushfires

The impacts of bushfires on health and wellbeing are likely to in part depend on the extent to which people experience distress and negative feelings/mood while experiencing the fires. Feeling anxious, worried, helpless, or unable to access to support can all contribute to negative impacts on wellbeing and mental health. To better understand this, survey respondents were asked the extent to which the following statements reflected how they felt during the period when the bushfires were active:

- I was worried for the safety of people I care about
- I was worried for the safety of my pets and/or livestock
- I felt confident I knew how to keep myself and my loved ones safe
- I felt confident I could cope with the impacts of bushfires and smoke on my work or income
- I occasionally felt anxious or worried, but not often
- I often felt anxious or worried
- I sometimes found it hard to concentrate on anything
- I sometimes felt helpless
- I had access to practical support when I needed it e.g. help getting my property prepared for fire
- I had access to emotional support if I needed it e.g. people I could talk to
- I always or almost always felt confident to make decisions about what to do

The majority of ACT residents reporting feeling worried for the safety of people they care about (74%, Figure 4), but also had access to emotional support (63%), felt confident to make decisions about what to do (62%), felt confident they knew how to keep themselves and their loved ones safe (60%) and felt confident they could cope with the impacts on their work or income (60%). Fewer residents occasionally felt anxious or worried (52%), or sometimes found it hard to concentrate on anything (42%). Despite relatively high levels of access to emotional support, only 40% had access to practical support when they needed it. Around one in three sometimes felt helpless (38%), often felt anxious or worried (36%) and/or were worried about the safety of their pets and/or livestock (31%) during the fires.

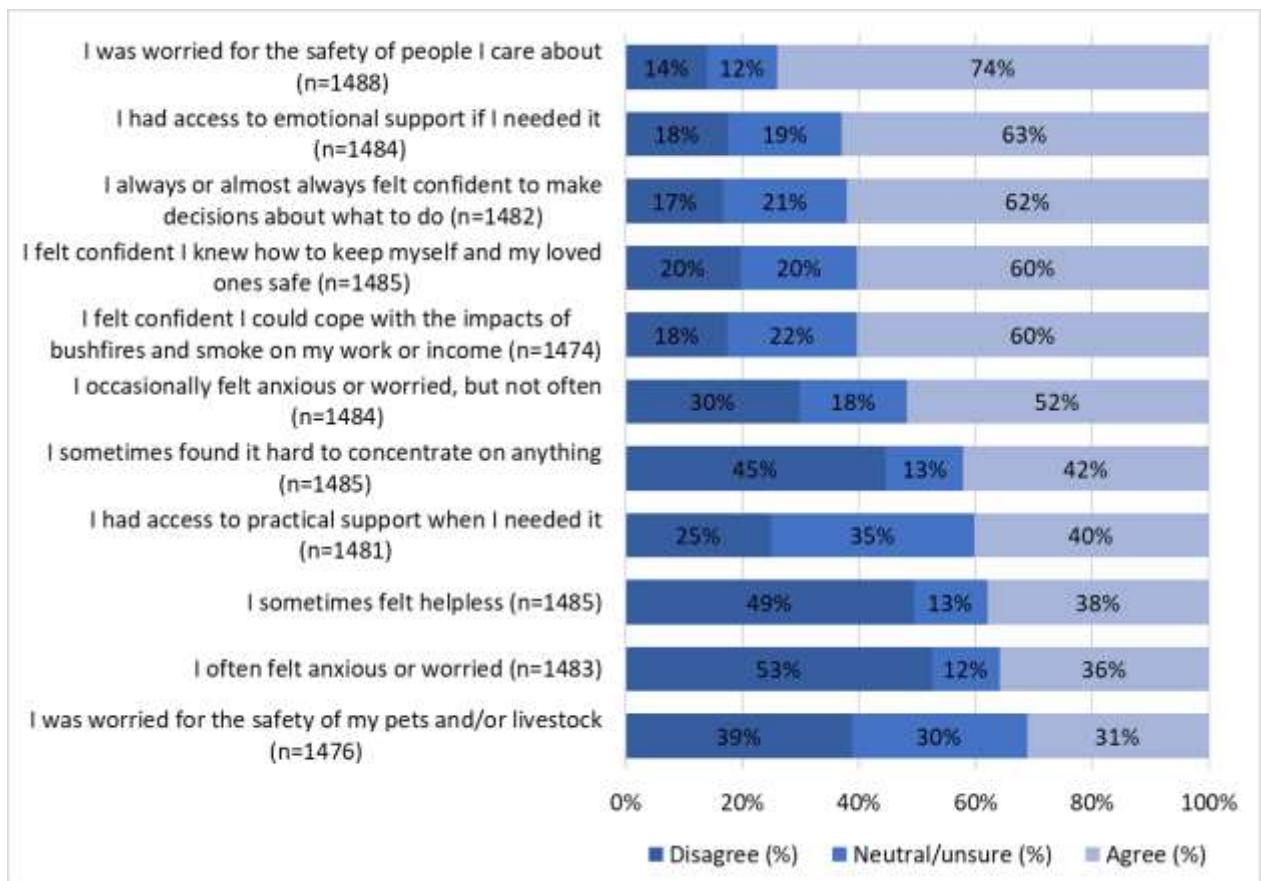


Figure 4 Decision making, safety and support during the bushfires

When different groups were compared:

- Women were more likely than men to report being worried for the safety of people they cared about (74% compared to 66%), to have access to emotional support (69% compared to 56% of men). They were less likely than men to feel confident they knew how to keep themselves and loved ones safe (51% compared to 70%), and more likely to report finding it hard to concentrate (53% compared to 31%) and sometimes feeling helpless (47% compared to 28%), anxious or worried (46% compared to 25%), and feeling worried for pets or livestock (41% compared to 21%).
- Those of different ages often reported different experiences: those who were older generally had high confidence and those who were younger less confidence. For example:
 - 74% of those aged 50-64 and 81% of those aged 65 and older felt confident to make decisions about what to do during the fires, compared to 44% of those aged 18-29
 - 71% of those aged 65 and older and 70% of those aged 50 to 64 felt confident they could keep themselves and their loved ones safe, compared to 40% of those aged 25 to 34
 - 50% of those aged 30-49 reported sometimes finding it hard to concentrate compared to 25% of those aged 65 and older

- 46% of those aged 30-49 reported sometimes feeling helpless, compared to 30% of those aged 55-64 and 20% of those aged 65 and older, with similar findings for feelings of anxiety and worry.
- In addition to the broader gender and age differences:
 - Single parents were less likely than others to have access to emotional support (37% compared to the ACT average of 63%), practical support (16%), to feel confident they could cope with impacts of fires on their work or income (48%), and more likely to sometimes feel helpless (54%), anxious or worried (52%)
 - Renters were less likely to have access to emotional support (54%), to feel confident in making decisions (47%), to feel confident they could cope with impacts of fires on their work or income (49%), and more likely to report feeling helpless sometimes (48%)
 - Those living in units/apartments were less likely than others to have access to emotional support (48%), and practical support (27%), and to be confident in making decisions (45%)
 - Those living in sole person households were less likely than others to have access to emotional support (53%) and practical support (30%)
 - Those living with moderate or severe disability for more likely to report often feeling anxious or worried (48%), finding it hard to concentrate (54%), sometimes feeling helpless (49%), and were less
 - Those whose main language at home was not English felt less confident in making decisions about what to do during the fires (42%)
 - Those with children aged 0-4 in the household felt less confident in making decisions about what to do during the fires (50%) and had lower access to practical support (29%)
 - Those living in Tuggeranong South were less confident they could cope with impacts of bushfires and smoke on their work and income (45%), and more likely to report feeling worried for pets or livestock (53%).

Overall, younger people and women reported more negative impacts and older people and males fewer, while single parents and renters were more likely to experience lack of support and confidence, and those in Tuggeranong South reported concerns more related to the higher direct risk of fire experienced, including impacts on work/income, and on pets.

3.1.5 Impacts on health

The 2019-20 bushfires were unusual in any respects, including their longevity, with the fires threatening areas of the ACT for several weeks, and smoke pollution affecting the ACT for many weeks. Many of the impacts of fires can have flow-on impacts to a person's health, both mental and physical. Survey respondents were asked whether or not they experienced any of the following health related issues due to smoke and/or bushfires:

- Smoke and/or fires triggered traumatic memories or emotions from previous fires I have experienced (e.g. the 2003 Canberra fires, or others)
- Smoke and/or fires worsened my existing depression or anxiety

- Smoke and/or fires triggered new depression or anxiety
- Smoke and/or fires worsened existing physical health problems such as asthma
- I had difficulty managing an existing health condition
- I did less outdoor exercise due to smoke/fires
- I did less indoor exercise due to smoke/fires
- I had periods of time where I slept poorly or had few hours of sleep when affected by bushfire/smoke
- I drank more due to the smoke/fires
- I smoked more due to the smoke/fires
- I ate more unhealthy food than usual while smoke/fires were happening

Figure 5 shows the health impacts of the smoke and/or fires on residents from across the ACT. The majority of residents indicated that they did less outdoor exercise due to smoke/fires (91%), and they had periods of time where they slept poorly (67%).

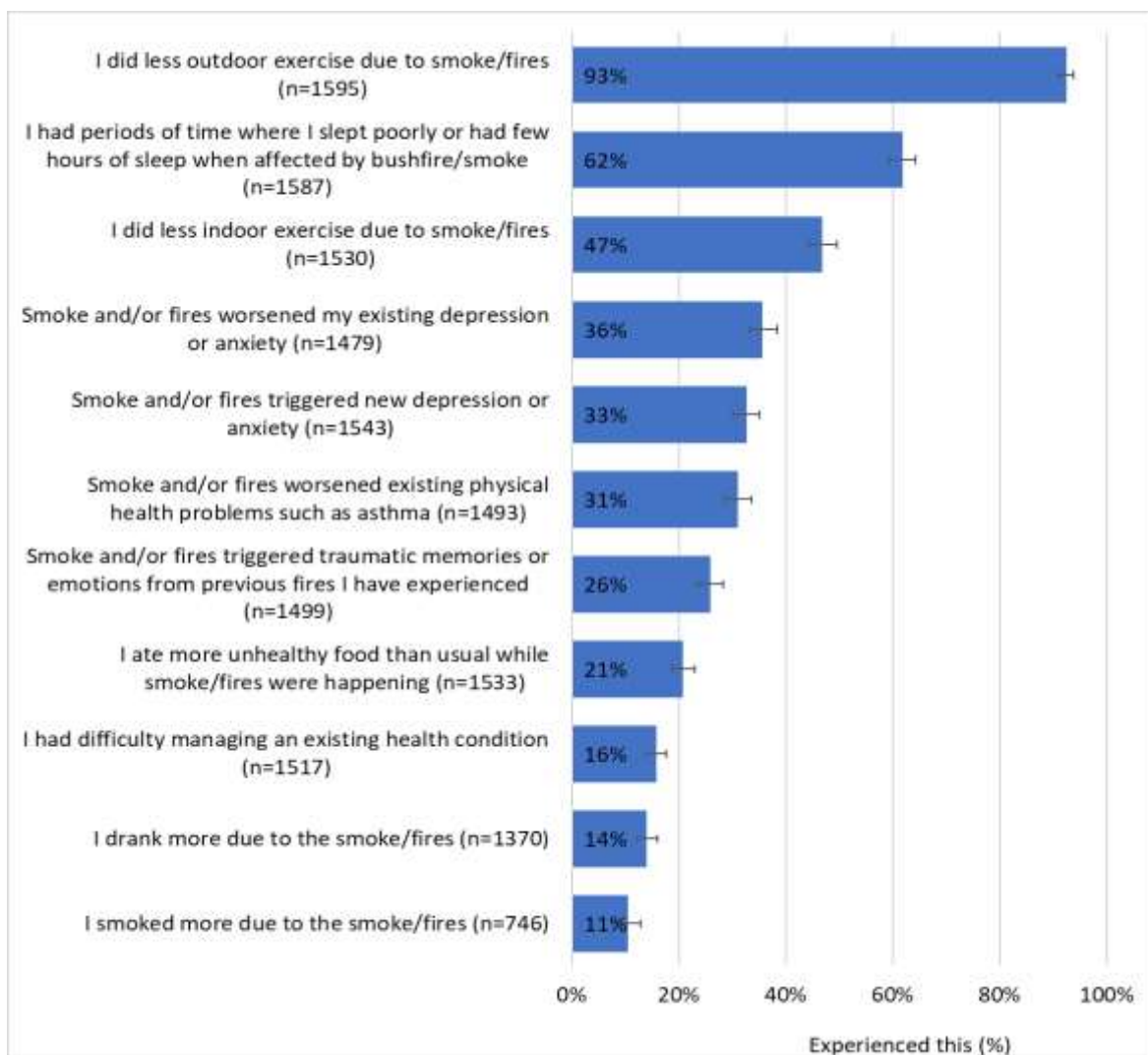


Figure 5 Impacts of bushfires, including bushfire smoke, on health

A total of 47% indicated they did less indoor exercise, 36% indicated the smoke and/or fires worsened existing depression or anxiety, 33% indicated that the smoke and/or bushfires triggered new depression or anxiety, and 31% indicated the smoke and/or fires worsened existing physical

health problems. Just over one in four (26%) indicated the smoke/fires triggered traumatic memories or emotions from previous fires, 21% reported eating more unhealthy food than usual, 16% had difficulty managing an existing health condition, 14% reported drinking more alcohol and 11% reported smoking more than usual.

Impacts reported often differed between groups. In particular, while there were few differences between men and women, there were multiple differences between those of different age groups. In general, younger people were more likely to report negative health impacts and behaviours compared to older people. For example, younger people were more likely to report experiencing poor sleep (74% of those aged 25-34 year old, compared to 36% of those aged 65 and older); experiencing worsening of depression or anxiety (49% of those aged 18-29 and 45% of those aged 30 to 49, compared to 13% of those aged 65 and older); experiencing new depression or anxiety (43% of those aged 18-29 compared to 21% of those aged 65 and older); eating more unhealthy food than usual (30% of those aged 18-29 compared to 7% of those aged 65 and older). However, this was not always consistent, with some impacts more common amongst middle age groups. In particular, triggering of traumatic memories and emotions from previous fires such as the 2003 Canberra fires was more common amongst those aged 50-64 (36%) and less common amongst those aged 18-29 (14%). Higher levels of alcohol consumption and smoking were reported by those aged 45-54 (19%) with fewer people aged 65 and over reporting this.

There were some differences by region. In particular, those living in regions of the ACT impacted by the 2003 bushfires which resulted in significant property loss and damage, as well as injury and loss of life, were more likely to report that the 2019-20 fires triggered traumatic memories or emotions from previous fires. While 26% of ACT residents reported this, it rose to 43% of those in Tuggeranong South, and 48% of those living in Weston Creek.

There were also some differences amongst specific groups of people:

- Those with children in the household and carers were slightly more likely to report reducing their outdoor exercise (97% for both groups, compared to 93% of ACT residents), while those with children aged 0-4 were more likely to report new depression or anxiety being triggered by the fires (48%)
- Single parents were more likely to report experiencing poor sleep (83%), reducing indoor exercise (61%), triggering of traumatic memories or emotions from previous fires they had experienced (40%), eating more unhealthy food (41%) and difficulty managing an existing health conditions (26%)
- Renters were more likely to report experiencing poor sleep (71%), worsening of existing depression/anxiety (51%) or emergence of new depression/anxiety symptoms (45%), worsening of existing physical health problems such as asthma (41%), and eating more unhealthy food (29%) during the fires
- Those whose main language at home was not English were more likely to report experiencing worsened anxiety/depression (48%) or new anxiety/depression (58%), and to report that smoke worsened physical health problems such as asthma (41%)
- Carers were more likely to report worsening of existing depression or anxiety (45%) and of existing physical health problems (41%), and triggering of traumatic memories/emotions from previous fires they had experienced (43%)
- Those living with moderate or severe disability were more likely to report worsening of existing depression or anxiety (52%) and of existing physical health problems (43%), difficulty managing existing health problems (27%), reduced indoor exercise (53%), and triggering of traumatic memories/emotions from previous fires they had experienced

(36%). They were also more likely to report drinking more than usual (21%), smoking more than usual (22%), and eating more unhealthy food than usual (29%).

3.1.6 Social connection, caring and volunteering during the bushfires

Social support and connection are often important aspects of coping in emergency and disaster situations, and there is also often high reliance on volunteers to assist in reducing impacts during these times. Survey respondents were asked whether the bushfires impacted on any of the following to do with volunteering, caring obligations and contact with others:

- I volunteered more than usual
- Others in my household volunteered more than usual
- I couldn't see friends or family as much as usual
- I had extra people staying in my home for a while
- I found it hard to stay in contact with some family or friends

The bushfires did impact on social connection for many ACT residents, with 48% unable to see friends and family as much as usual, while 22% found it hard to stay in contact with some family and friends, 11% had extra people staying in their home for a while, 9% volunteered more than usual and 6% had others in their household volunteering more than usual.

Women were more likely than men to report not being able to see friends or family as much as usual (58% compared to 38%), as were those living with moderate or severe disability (57%), while those who were aged 65 and over were less likely than younger people to report this (39%). Those living in Weston Creek were more likely to report having extra people staying in their home (25%, compared to 11% of ACT residents). Single parents and carers were more likely to report finding it hard to stay in contact with some family or friends (39% and 33% respectively). Those more likely to report increasing their volunteering were people whose main language at home was not English (17%), those who had lived in the ACT five years or less (15%) and renters (14%).

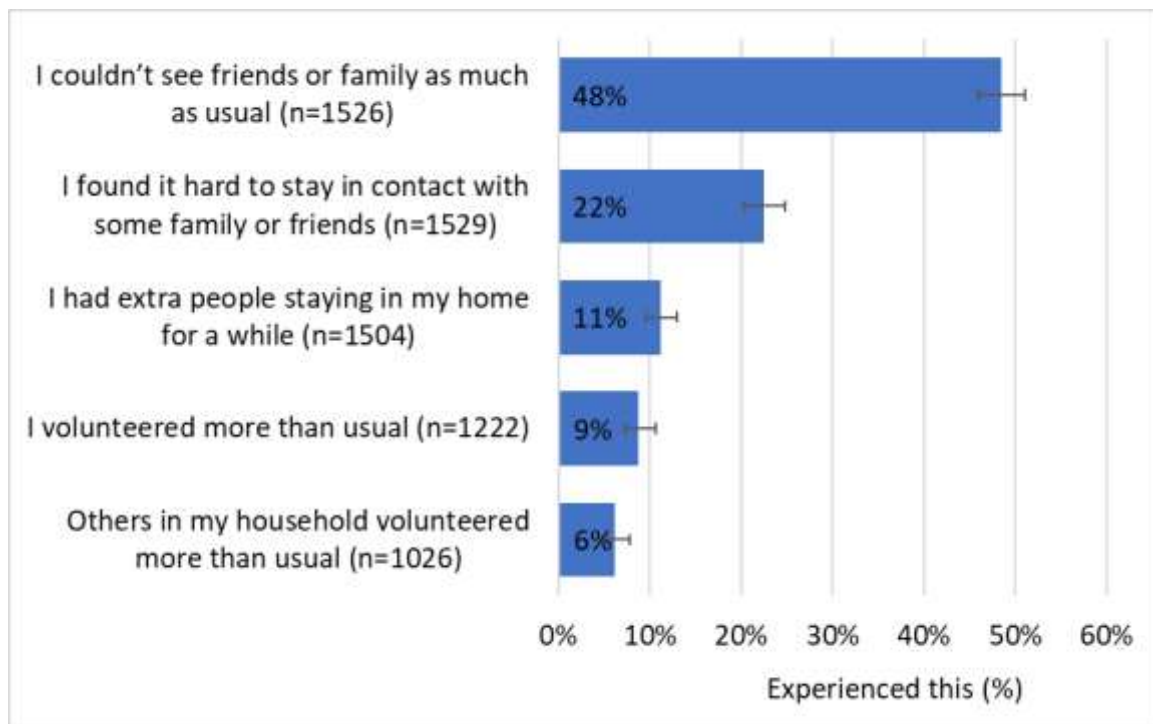


Figure 6 Social connectedness, caring and volunteering during the bushfires

3.1.7 Impacts on work

The bushfires led to closures of some public spaces and workplaces in the ACT on days of high air pollution, as well as reduced business for those relying on good outside air quality. Some involved in bushfire response or related areas experienced an increase in work hours. Survey respondents were asked whether the bushfires affected their work or income in any of the following ways:

- My paid work hours increased
- My paid work hours decreased or I lost my job
- I did more unpaid work than usual (not including volunteering)
- Other member/s of my household lost their job temporarily or permanently
- Other member/s of my household had their work hours reduced
- My household had unexpected household expenses, e.g. had to replace food that spoiled

Relatively few ACT residents reported experiencing any of these (Figure 7), with 12% reporting unexpected household expenses due to the bushfires, 9% reporting reduction in work hours or other household members, 8% reporting losing work hours or their job, and 7% doing more unpaid work than usual. While there were small proportions of any given group reporting these impacts, renters were somewhat more likely to report losing employment hours or their job as a whole (14% compared to 8%).

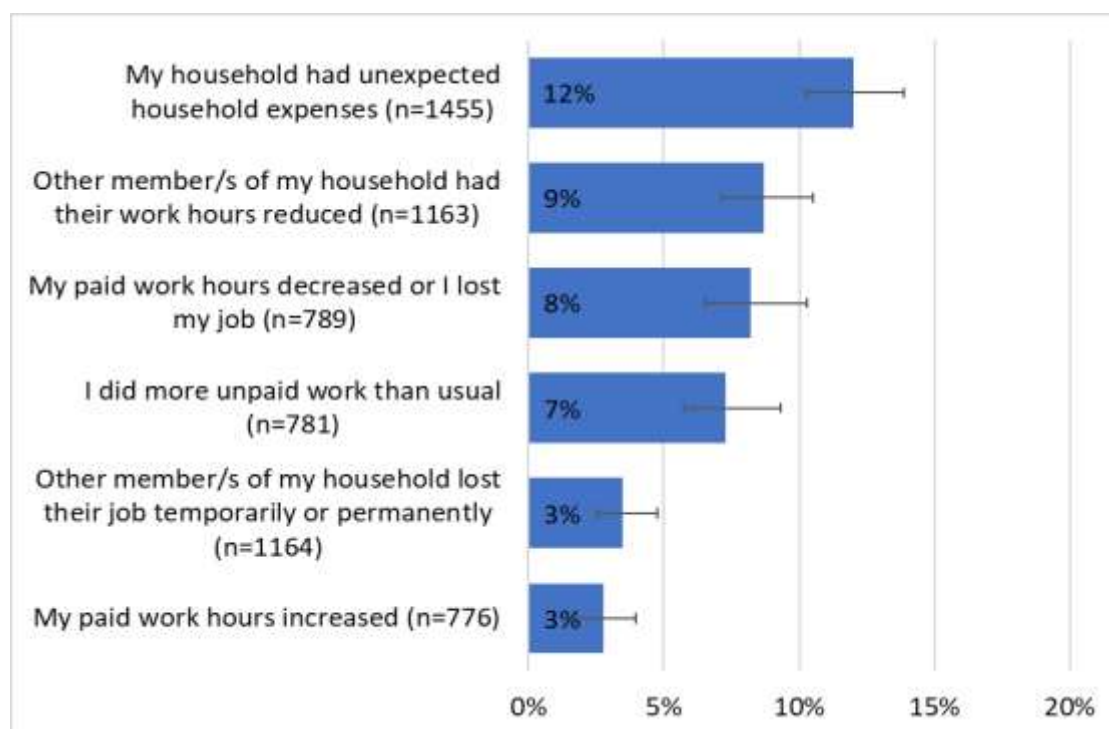


Figure 7 Impacts of bushfires on work

3.1.8 Impacts after the bushfires

The impacts of bushfires do not stop when fires are out, but can be long lasting. Multiple types of impacts can occur post bushfire, ranging from ongoing impacts on health, standard of living and income, to experience of longer-term concern about the likelihood of future similar bushfire seasons occurring. Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about whether they were experiencing different impacts or concerns as of April-May 2020, a period where the fires were out, but had only been so for 2-3 months:

- I am still experiencing negative impacts caused by the bushfires and their effects
- It will take my household a long time to recover from the bushfires
- I am still experiencing mental health challenges that were triggered or worsened by the bushfires
- I am still experiencing physical health problems that were triggered or worsened by the bushfires
- I am worried that we may experience more bushfire seasons like this in coming years
- I am worried about the environmental impacts of the bushfires
- The fires caused long-term damage to places that I care about
- Most nature areas will recover well from the bushfires
- My community is recovering well from the effects of the fires
- I sometimes avoid going to or near places that were burned in the fires, as I don't like seeing the impacts

As shown in Figure 8, few ACT residents felt they were still experiencing mental health challenges triggered by the fires (10%), ongoing physical health problems triggered or worsened by the fires (9%), and only 13% felt they were still experiencing negative impacts from the bushfires. However, many were experiencing concern about the environmental impacts of the bushfires (78%), about the potential for occurrence of future bushfire seasons like the 2019-20 season (71%), and about whether the fires caused long-term damage to places they care about (68%). There was mixed confidence regarding whether nature areas and the community would recover well from bushfires, and 21% reported that they sometimes avoided going to or near places that were burned to avoid seeing the impacts.

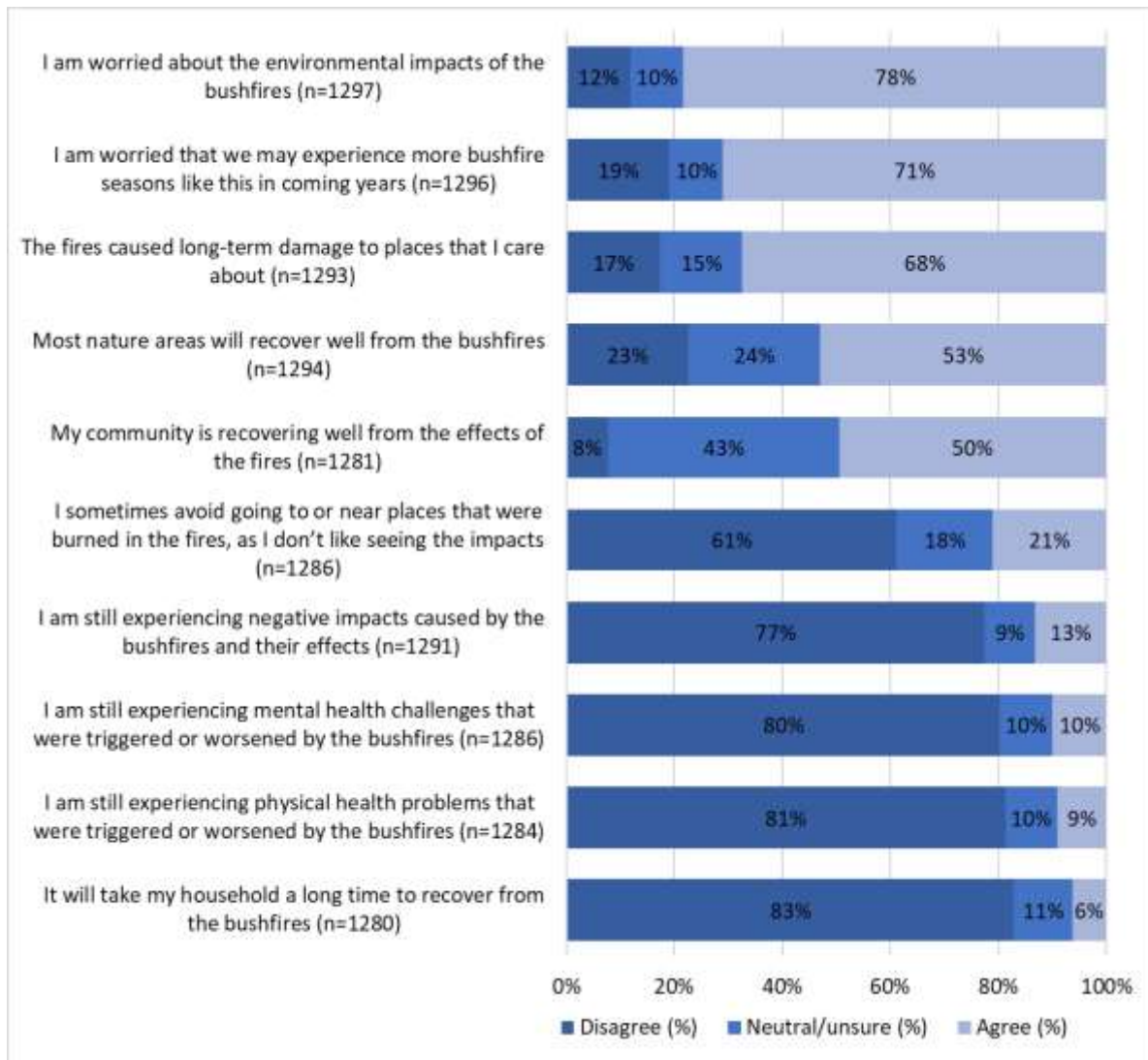


Figure 8 Experiences after the bushfires

While the majority of most groups of ACT residents reported concern about environmental impacts of bushfires and that further similar bushfires may be experienced in coming years, there were more differences for some other post-bushfire impacts and concerns. Younger people were more likely to report sometimes avoiding going to or near places burned in the fires (32% compared to 21% of all ACT residents), and experiencing ongoing mental health challenges triggered or worsened by the bushfires (18% compared to 10% of ACT residents), and to have concern that their household may take a long time to recover from bushfires (13% compared to 6% of ACT residents). Those aged 65 and over were less likely than others to report still experiencing negative impacts from the bushfires (6%, compared to 13% of ACT residents), mental health challenges triggered/worsened by bushfires (2%), or to feel their household would take a long time to recover from the bushfires (3%). Those living with moderate or severe disability were more likely to report ongoing mental health challenges (15%) and physical health problems (16%) that had been exacerbated by the bushfires.

3.1.9 Conclusions

The 2019-20 bushfires had a wide range of impacts on ACT residents, with smoke pollution being the most common, but many living in southern parts of Canberra experiencing risk of direct fire impact for extended periods of time, and many others experiencing disruptions to ability to travel. While few experienced property loss or loss of income, there were impacts on household income for more than

10% of households, through either reduction of work hours or unexpected household expenses. Many found it difficult to protect themselves and others from the effects of smoke, with high levels of uncertainty about how best to do this through the extended period of poor air quality experienced. Many were exposed to smoke in their homes – more than reported exposure as workplaces, suggesting a need to consider whether workplaces should be closed during times of air pollution if workers will then be located in homes that are no better, or more poorly, designed to keep smoke out of the house. Many also experienced ongoing worry for safety of people they cared about, but most had access to emotional support. Practical support was less available for many, a concern when considering how best to ensure practical fire preparation activities are able to be done around homes. Reduced exercise and poor sleep were common, during the fires, and many reported triggering of traumatic memories or of new anxiety and depression. Some groups were particularly likely to experience specific types of impacts: those living in areas impacted by the 2003 Canberra fires were much more likely to report triggering of traumatic memories and emotions, while younger people were more likely to report fires triggering psychological distress as well as lower confidence in knowing what to do during fires. Single parents, renters, and in some cases those whose main language was not English were more likely to report experiencing several types of negative impact.

Many felt these impacts were relatively short-lived, reporting that by the time they completed the survey, they were not experiencing ongoing negative impacts from the bushfires. However, 13% of ACT residents were experiencing ongoing negative impacts. Longer-term follow up should examine whether these residents continue to experience ongoing impact, as well as whether others continue to feel they have not experienced further negative impacts from the bushfires.

3.2 Hailstorm

In January 2020, a severe hailstorm occurred that impacted the ACT. In total, an estimated 44,500 ACT-registered vehicles were damaged, of which around 7,500 were not insured (White, 2020). In addition, many properties experienced some damage requiring repair. In the survey, ACT residents were asked if they or members of their household had experienced impacts from the 20 January 2020 hailstorm across the following nine categories:

- Damage to car, property or home
- Personal injury
- Lodged an insurance claim to cover damage to car or property
- Decrease in household income
- Increase in household income
- Decrease in work hours
- Increase in work hours
- Unexpected large expenses
- Unable to access usual forms of transport following the storm (e.g. car normally used was undrivable and took a long time to get a hire car or repairs done)

Overall, 34% of ACT adults reported experiencing some damage to a car, property or home (Figure 9). Just under a quarter - 23% - of residents lodged an insurance claim associated with hail damage, while unexpected large expenses due to the storm were reported by 16% of residents. The storm impacted transport for 12% of residents who were unable to access their usual forms of transport for a period of time following the storm. Fewer experienced impacts on their work: 5% reported having decreased work hours, and 3% increased work hours, due to the hailstorm. Household income decreased for 3% of households and 1% experienced an increase in household income. A very small percentage (0.5%) of residents experienced personal injury from the hailstorm.

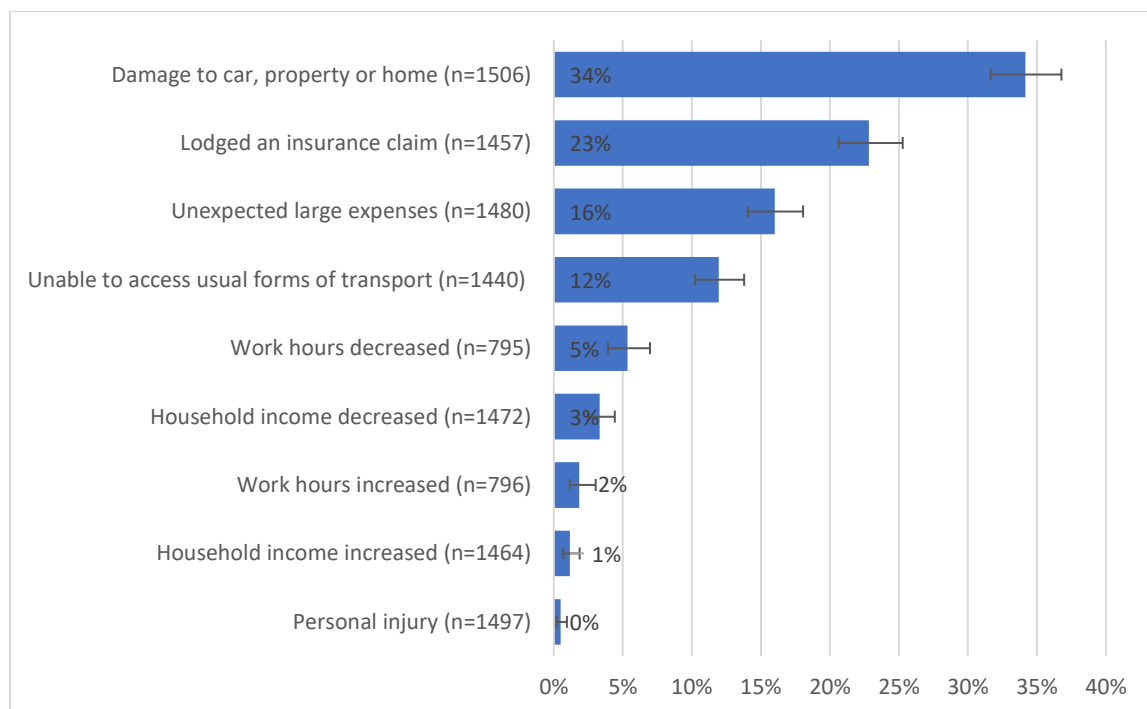


Figure 9 Proportion of ACT residents experiencing different impacts as a result of the January 2020 hailstorm

Not surprisingly, the most common predictor of experiencing damage to car, property or home, and to the consequent lodging of insurance claims and expenses, was a person's location. The hailstorm impacted Belconnen and the Inner South: 73% of Belconnen residents, 66% of Inner South residents and 64% of Outer Belconnen residents reported experiencing damage from the storm. For areas not directly impacted by the storm, damage was largely limited to that experienced by people who had a vehicle in the storm area at the time it occurred. Only 16% of Weston Creek and Molonglo residents, and 13% of those in Tuggeranong South, reported damage, and for most these damage was likely to have occurred to a vehicle that was in the area impacted by the storm at the time it occurred. Lodgement of insurance claims and expenses was also most common in Belconnen and the Inner South. Those in Outer Belconnen were most likely to report experiencing being unable to use usual forms of transport for a period of time, with 20% reporting this compared to the average of 12% across the ACT.

The impacts of the hailstorm were mostly experienced by those who had not been under direct threat of bushfire impacting their properties during bushfires, however some ACT residents will have experienced negative impacts from both bushfires and the hailstorm.

3.3 COVID-19

The survey data examined in this report were collected during April and May 2020. The first Australian COVID-19 case was diagnosed in late January 2020, and the first case recorded in the ACT in March 2020. From late March, ACT schools were ‘pupil-free’, with most students studying from home, and only those with parents who were essential workers or other specific circumstances able to attend school. This continued through to mid May, when there was a phased reopening of public schools between May 18, with the final students returning in early June. From late March, ACT residents were asked to stay at home and only leave for essential purposes, with most working from home, many retail shops closing temporarily, and closures of public institutions and recreation areas.

These COVID-19 restrictions were in place when the second wave of the *Living Well* survey was collected in April-May 2020. Residents were asked a number of questions about how the restrictions put in place to reduce risk of spread of COVID-19 were affecting them and their households. These are reported in this section. The findings reflect how COVID-19 restrictions and impacts were affecting ACT households as of April-May 2020: the third *Living well* survey in late 2020 will further identify which people have experienced ongoing impacts, and which have experienced a return to a ‘new normal’ in which they are able to attend their workplace and earn income, albeit with the ongoing changes to how people interact with each other.

This section examines impacts o:

- Household finances and income
- Employment
- Ability to access goods and services including food, medicine and health
- Household safety
- Social connection, caring roles and support
- Recreation and exercise.

3.3.1 Household finances and income

Survey respondents were asked whether their household and personal income had increased, stayed about the same, or decreased between late 2019 and Apr/May 2020 due to the effects of COVID-19. One-third reported they had experienced a decline in household income (34%), and 30% reported having decreased personal income (Figure 10).

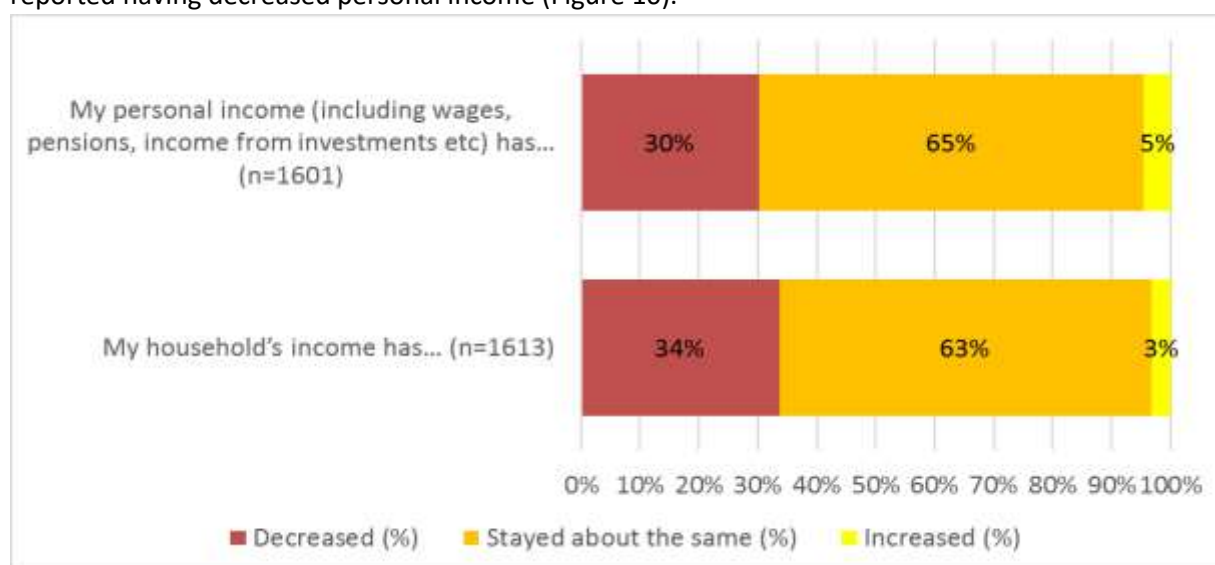


Figure 10 Impacts of COVID-19 on household income up to Apr/May 2020

Very similar findings occurred for household and personal income. Using household income, the groups most likely to report a decrease in income were:

- Those whose main language at home was not English (59%)
- Those who had lived in the ACT five years or less (57%)
- Those aged 18-29 (51%)
- Renters (44%).

Those least likely to report a decline in household income were those aged 65 and older (20%), and other groups that had many people aged 65 and over, including couples with no children at home (23%), those who owned their home outright (19%).

As the impacts of COVID-19 were in early stages at the time data were collected, survey participants were also asked their views about their likely future household financial wellbeing. They were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that”

- I’m worried about having enough money to cover basic household expenses in the next weeks or months due to COVID-19
- COVID-19 is likely to cause me or my household financial problems in the longer term (beyond the next month or two)

At the time of the survey, 25% of respondents were worried about having enough money in the next weeks and month, while 36% felt COVID-19 was likely to cause their household financial problems in the longer term (Figure 11).

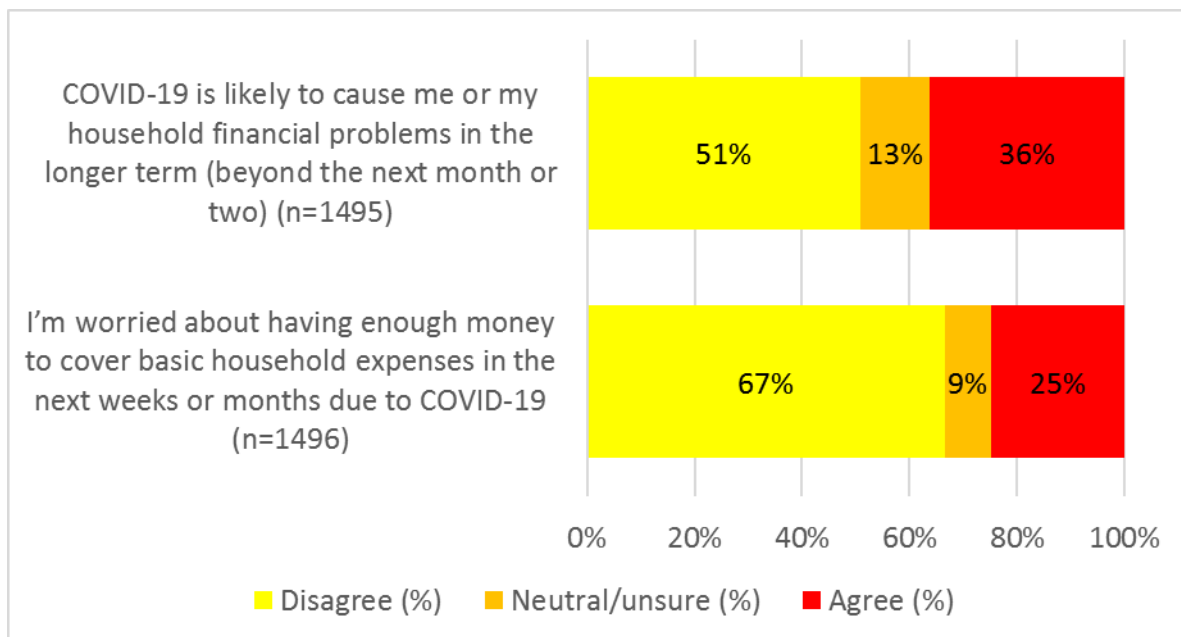


Figure 11 Predicted future impacts of COVID-19 on household finances

Those more likely to report that they were worried about having enough money to cover basic household expenses in the next weeks or months were those aged 18-29 (36%), those whose main language at home was not English (39%), those who had lived in the ACT five years or less (49%), single parents (46%), renters (47%) and those who were unemployed (60%). Those least likely to be worried were those aged 65 and older (11%), and who owned their home outright (9%).

There were similar findings when those worried about COVID-19 causing financial problems for them in the longer term (beyond the next month or two) were examined. Those significantly more likely to report that COVID-19 was likely to cause them or their household financial problems in the longer

term were those aged 18-29 (47%), whose main language at home was not English (51%), who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (63%), renters (57%), and the unemployed (71%). Those aged 65 and older were less likely to be worried, although 23% of this group reported concern, together with 22% of those who owned their home outright.

3.3.2 Impacts on employment

Survey respondents were asked how COVID-19 had impacted their work. They were asked if any of the following had happened to them as of April/May 2020, due to the impacts of COVID-19:

- I lost my job permanently
- I have temporarily lost my job
- My employer is using/plans to use the government wage subsidy to keep me employed
- My paid work hours have decreased
- My paid work hours have increased
- My unpaid work hours have increased
- I shifted to working from home
- I am still working at a location other than home (e.g. you are an essential worker)
- I've had to take unpaid leave from work
- I've had to take paid leave from work due to coronavirus (do not include paid leave you'd already planned to take)

Figure 12 shows the proportion of respondents experiences different work-related issues. Across the ACT, 63% of respondents who were employed reported they had shifted to working from home part or all the time, while 41% still worked at a location other than home some or all of the time. Almost one in three workers – 31% - had experienced a decrease in paid work hours, while 20% had temporarily lost their job, and 22% had an increase in unpaid work hours. Thirteen per cent were still employed due to their employer using government support to keep them employed. Smaller proportions had experienced an increase in paid work (8%), had to take paid leave due to COVID-19 (8%), lost their job permanently (7%), or had to take unpaid leave from work (5%).

Those most likely to report working from home were those aged 30-49 (73%), with children aged 0-4 in the household (77%). Those less likely to have shifted to working from home were those aged 18-29 (46%), who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (45%), and renters (48%).

Those most likely to report having temporarily lost their job (compared to the ACT average of 20%) were those aged 18-29 (34%), who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (34%), and renters (29%). Those least likely to have temporarily lost their job were those aged 30-49 (11%), with children in the home (11%), and those who either owned their home outright (7%) or were paying off a mortgage (11%). Those more likely to have permanently lost their jobs were those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (15%).

A decrease in the number of paid work hours was most commonly reported by those aged 18-29 (43%), whose main language at home was not English (42%), who had lived in the ACT less than five years (47%), and who rented their home (45%). However, those aged 18-29 were also more likely to report their paid work hours increasing than the average (15%, compared to 8% across ACT).

Carers with 15 or more hours per week of caring obligations were significantly more likely to report taking unpaid leave from work (14% compared to 5% of workers more generally).

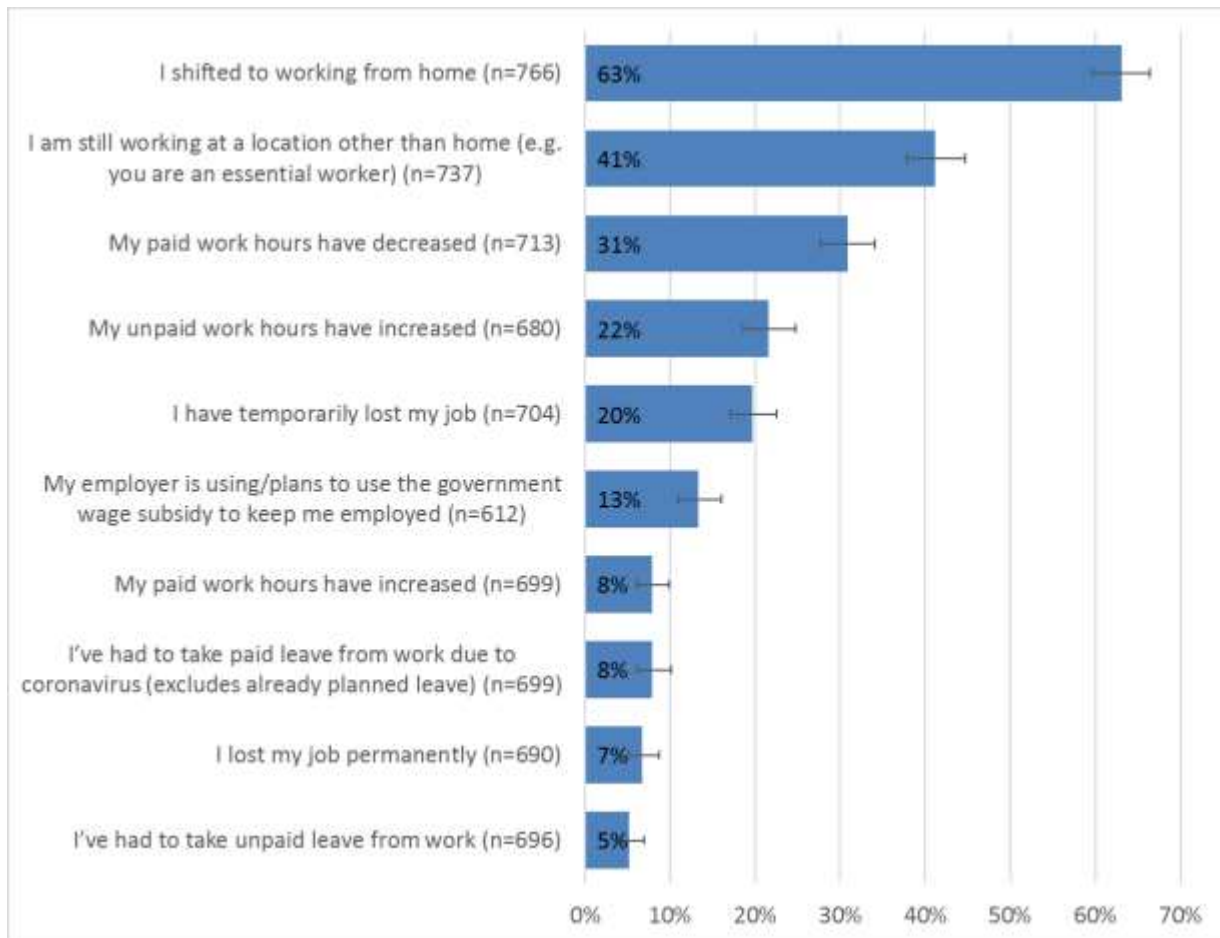


Figure 12 Impacts of COVID-19 on employment, to Apr/May 2020

3.3.3 Accessing goods and services

During the early stages of COVID-19 restrictions, supermarkets introduced purchasing restrictions due to difficulties with lack of stock on shelves, a consequence of both high demand and supply chain challenges. Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that, as of April/May 2020:

- Because some household goods aren't easy to buy, I'm keeping a bigger stock of them at home than usual
- I've tried to buy enough supplies to last the household two weeks in case we have to self-isolate
- I've had to go out to buy groceries more often than usual in recent weeks due to shortages of key items or limits on how much can be bought at once
- I am going out to buy groceries less often than usual at the moment

As of April/May 2020, 49% of ACT residents were shopping for groceries more often than usual due to shortages of stock or limits on how much could be bought at once, while 36% reporting shopping for groceries less frequently than usual. Almost half - 46% - had sought to buy enough supplies to last two weeks in case their household needed to self-isolate, while 33% were keeping bigger stocks than usual due to the difficulties of purchasing some household goods.

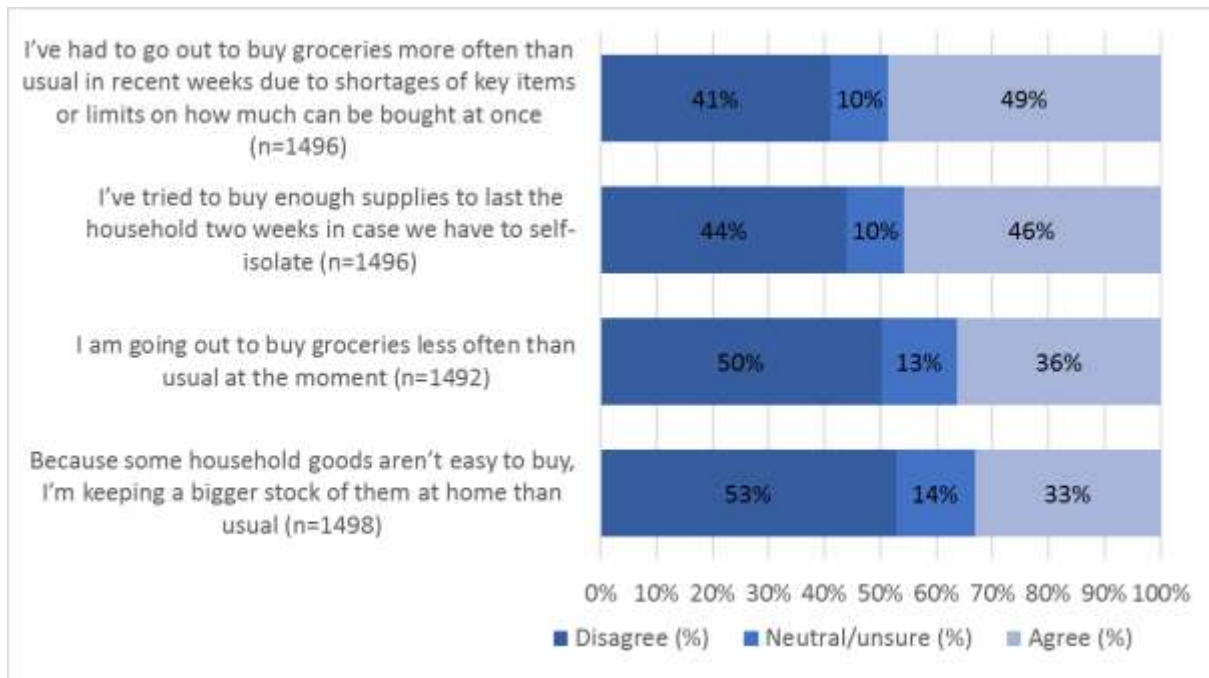


Figure 13 Impacts of COVID-19 on grocery shopping

Some groups were more likely than others to report that they were buying groceries more often than usual, due to shortages or purchasing limits. This included people aged 50-64 (57%), single parents (68%), those with children aged 0-24 in the household (59%), carers (60%), and renters (60%). Those more likely to say they were doing less frequent grocery shopping than usual were those aged 65 and over (44%), and those whose main language at home was not English (49%).

Those more likely to report having tried to purchase sufficient supplies to last two weeks in case of needing to self-isolate were those whose main language at home was not English (59%), while those less likely to have done this were single parents (32%) and younger people (32% of those aged 25-34, for example).

Respondents were also asked if they had experienced any of the following due to COVID-19, and could select which they had experienced:

- I had to fully self-isolate for a period of time (meaning you couldn't leave your home at all, even to get essential supplies)
- At some points I have run out of some basic food or goods in my home and been unable to easily buy more e.g. toilet paper, pasta
- Shortages of food on supermarket shelves has caused me significant difficulty in accessing enough food and household supplies
- I've had some health appointments cancelled (e.g. with dentist, specialist, physiotherapist, psychologist, speech pathologist, GP)
- I've had difficulty filling medical prescriptions needed by others in my household e.g. Ventolin

Just under half of ACT residents – 45% - had at some point run out of one or more types of basic food or goods such as toilet paper and found it difficult to purchase more (Figure 14), while 39% had cancelled some health appointments, and 33% had experienced significant difficulty accessing enough household food and other goods due to shortages on supermarket shelves. Fewer had experienced difficulty filling medical prescriptions (14%) or had to self-isolate for a period of time, such as while waiting for a COVID-19 test result (9%).

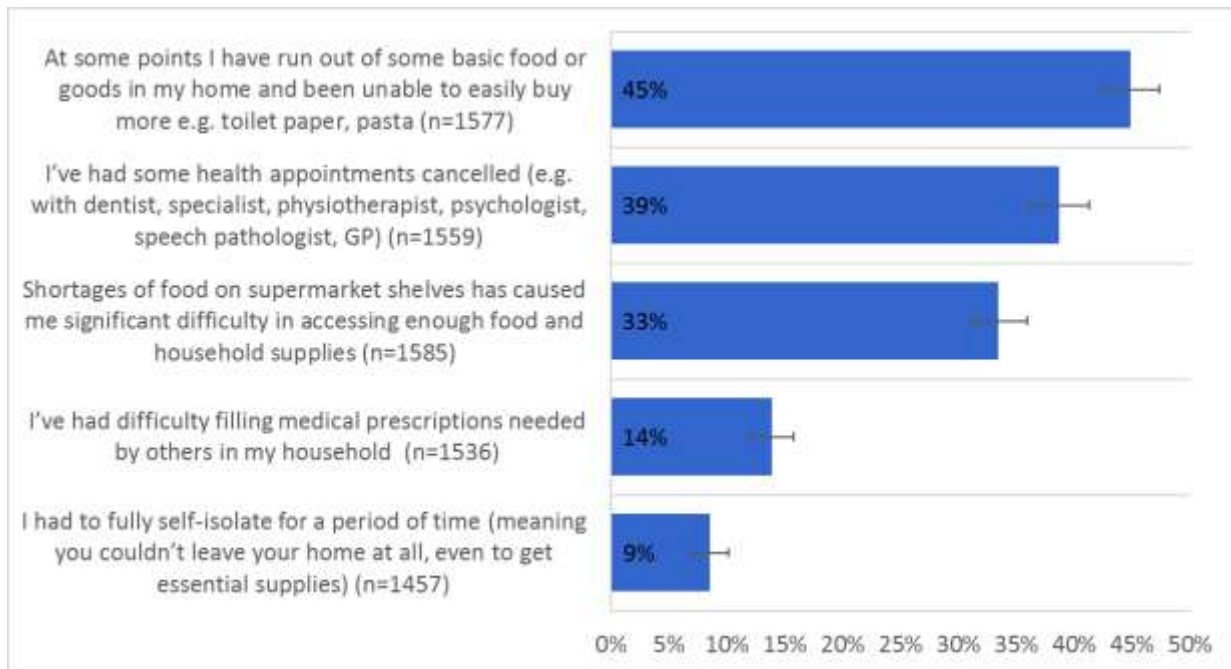


Figure 14 Availability of food, medicine and health appointments during COVID-19

Those more likely to report having run out of some basic food or goods in their home at some point were younger people (56% of those aged 18-29), women (52%), those whose main language at home was not English (53%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (57%), renters (56%), and those living with moderate or severe disability (51%). Those least likely to report this were men (38%), and those aged 65 or older (31%). The same groups were more likely than average to report shortages of food causing them significant difficulty, with the addition of carers – 54% of carers with 15 or more hours of caring obligations reported this, the highest of any group examined and much higher than the 33% of ACT adults reporting difficulty.

Health appointment cancellation was most commonly reported by carers (53%), particularly those with 15 or more hours a week of caring obligations (55%), those in Tuggeranong South (51%), those living with moderate or severe disability (50%), women (46%) and those with children living in their household (47%). Carers were also more likely to report difficulty filling medical prescriptions (25%) than other groups, as were those living with moderate or severe disability (24%).

3.3.4 Household safety

COVID-19 restrictions required many people to spend more time in their homes than usual. While most people feel safe in their homes, not all do. Survey participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that:

- My home is always a safe place to be
- I sometimes feel unsafe around one or more of the people I currently live with

Overall, 89% of people agreed that their home was always a safe place to be, and 88% disagreed that they felt unsafe around one or more of the people they live with. However, 6% of people disagreed that their home was always safe and 9% reported they sometimes felt unsafe around someone they currently live with (Figure 15).

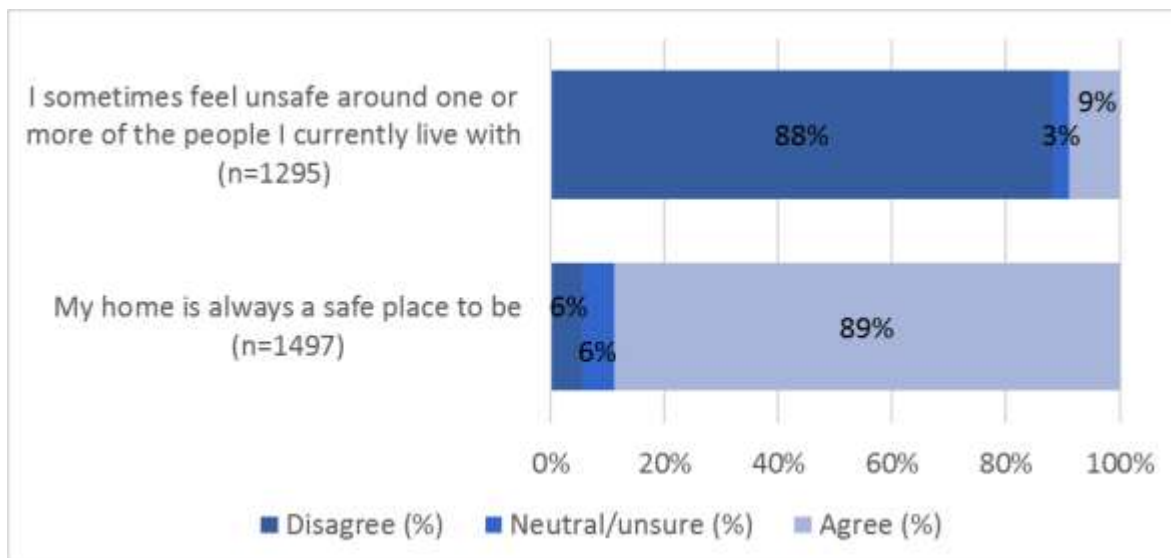


Figure 15 Safety in the home during COVID-19

Lower levels of safety were reported by some groups than others. Those more likely to report sometimes feeling unsafe around one or more people they lived with were younger people (16% of those aged 18 to 29), those whose main language at home was not English (17%), those living with moderate or severe disability (15%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (20%), renters (18%), and those who were unemployed (33%).

3.3.5 Social connection, loneliness, caring and volunteering

Many of the restrictions put in place to reduce spread of COVID-19 can create challenges for maintaining common forms of social connection, and can affect ability to access support, as well as the quality of social interaction between those living in a household. To better understand this, survey respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that:

- I have good access to support from family or friends if I need it during COVID-19
- I'm feeling more isolated or alone than usual due to COVID-19
- My home is more crowded than usual due to COVID-19
- I'm busier than usual due to COVID-19
- I don't have anyone I can ask for help if I need it during COVID-19
- There's been more disagreements in my household since we had to stay home more

Overall, 67% of ACT adults felt they had good access to support from family or friends if they needed it during COVID-19; however, 18% did not (Figure 16). Just over half – 52% - were feeling more isolated or alone than usual, consistent with the increase in loneliness identified in Part 1 of this report. Just over one quarter (28%) were busier than usual, and 23% had a home that was more crowded than usual. More than one in five (22%) reported an increase in disagreements in their household since having to spend more time at home. While most people had access to support, 16% had no-one they could ask for help if they needed it during COVID-19.

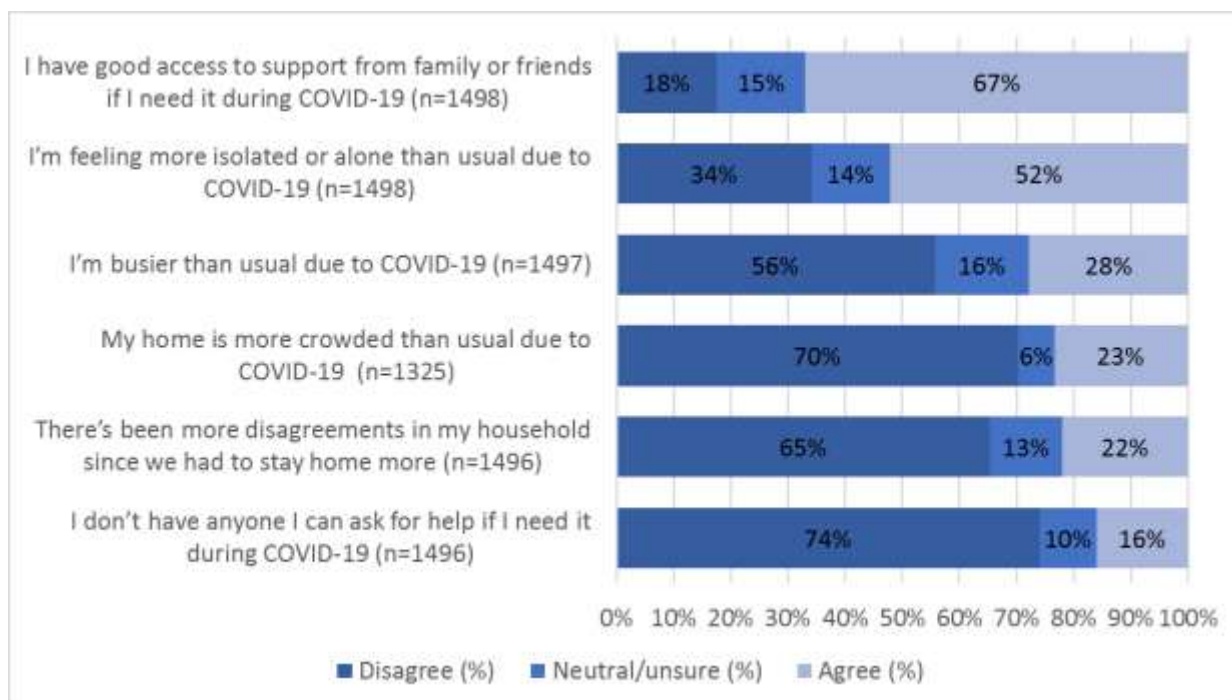


Figure 16 Social connection, being busy, and access to support during COVID-19

Those most likely to report having good access to support from family or friends if they needed it during COVID-19 were those aged 65 and older (79%), and those groups with a high proportion of people aged 65 and older including couples with no children at home (75%), and those who owned their home outright (76%). Those less likely to report having good access to support if needed were single parents (46%), renters (52%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (55%), those with one or more children under 18 living in the home (55%), those living in units/apartments (57%), and those aged 30-49 (59%).

Similar groups were likely to report feeling more isolated or alone, with this more commonly reported by those aged 18-29 (68%), renters (63%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (63%), those living with moderate or severe disability (61%), and those who were unemployed (79%). Those less likely to report feeling more isolated or alone than usual were those aged 50-64 (45%) and 65 and older (39%), although these figures still suggest a significant proportion of these groups were experiencing more isolation than usual.

Those reporting their home was more crowded than usual due to COVID-19 were predominantly those with children: 40% of those with any children agreed between 0 and 24 living in their home reported their home being more crowded than usual, compared to 23% of all ACT adults. This was higher amongst those with children aged 5 to 14 (45%) and 15-17 (54%) in the home. The age group most likely to have children at home was also more likely to report increased crowding (31% of 30-49 year olds), as were single parents (39%). Those less likely to report their home was more crowded than usual were those aged 65 and older (3%), and those with no children aged 0-24 in their home (6%).

Those who were more likely to report an increase in crowding were also more likely to report being busier than usual. While 28% of ACT adults reported being busier than usual, this rose to 39% amongst those aged 30 to 49, 44% amongst single parents, 52% amongst those with a child aged 0-4 in the home, and 44% amongst those with one or more children aged 5-14 living in the home. Again, those aged 65 and older were less likely to report an increase in how busy they were (9%).

An increase in household disagreements was most commonly reported by those carers (29%), particularly those with high caring obligations each week (38%), those living with moderate or severe

disability (31%), by those aged 18-29 (34%), renters (34%), and by couples with children living at home (29%), particularly those with children aged 0-4 in the household (34%). Those who were unemployed were particularly likely to report an increase in disagreements (46%). Those with no children aged 0-24 in the household were less likely to report an increase in disagreements (9%), as were those aged 65 and older (8%).

The groups most likely to state that they did not have anyone they could ask for help if they needed it during COVID-19 were those who were unemployed (42%), single parents (28%), those living with moderate or severe disability (27%), renters (26%) and those whose main language at home was not English (23%).

Survey respondents were also asked if their caring and support provision obligations, as well as the amount of free time they had more generally, had changed due to COVID-19. They were asked to identify whether any of the following had happened to them as a result of COVID-19:

- I've had increased caring duties for children
- I've been responsible for homeschooling children
- I've supported some people who are self-isolating e.g. delivering food to them
- I've had increased caring duties for other adults living in my home (e.g. had to care for someone who lives with you)
- I've received support from family/ friends who have delivered food or goods to me
- I've received support from community groups who have delivered food/goods to me
- I've increased my volunteering hours
- Others in my household volunteered more than usual
- I've had to decrease my volunteering hours (e.g. because you've been told you can't volunteer any more, or because of needing to care for people at home)
- I've had more free time than usual
- I've had less free time than usual

Responses varied: for example, while 57% had more free time than usual due to the impacts of COVID-19, 22% had less free time than usual. This is likely due at least in part to changes in caring and support obligations, with 36% reporting they had increased caring duties for children, 34% were responsible for homeschooling children, and 26% having provided support to people who were self-isolating. Normal volunteering activities were disrupted, with 23% reporting they had to decrease their volunteering hours (for example due to COVID-19 restrictions preventing the volunteering occurring, increased caring obligations, or being at high risk from COVID-19) and only 7% increasing their volunteering hours.

Those more likely to report having an increase in free time were those aged 18-29 (68%) and 65 and older (67%), with no children living in their household (64%), those who were unemployed (68%), and those living in units/apartments (74%). Those more likely to report having *less* free time than usual were those aged 30-49 (34% had less free time), single parents (45%), those with children aged 5-14 in the household (51%) and more generally those with any children living in the household (43%).

An increase in caring duties for children was most commonly reported amongst those aged 30 to 49 (62%), those with children aged 5-14 in the home (89%) or 0-4 in the home (75%), single parents (60%) and women (44%). Those less likely to report having increased caring duties for children were men (29%), those aged 18-29 (17%), and those aged 65 and older (8%). Very similar findings were identified for homeschooling of children, which was more commonly done by women (42%), and those aged 30-49 (56%), and less commonly by men (26%) and those aged 18-29 (18%) or 65 and older (5%).

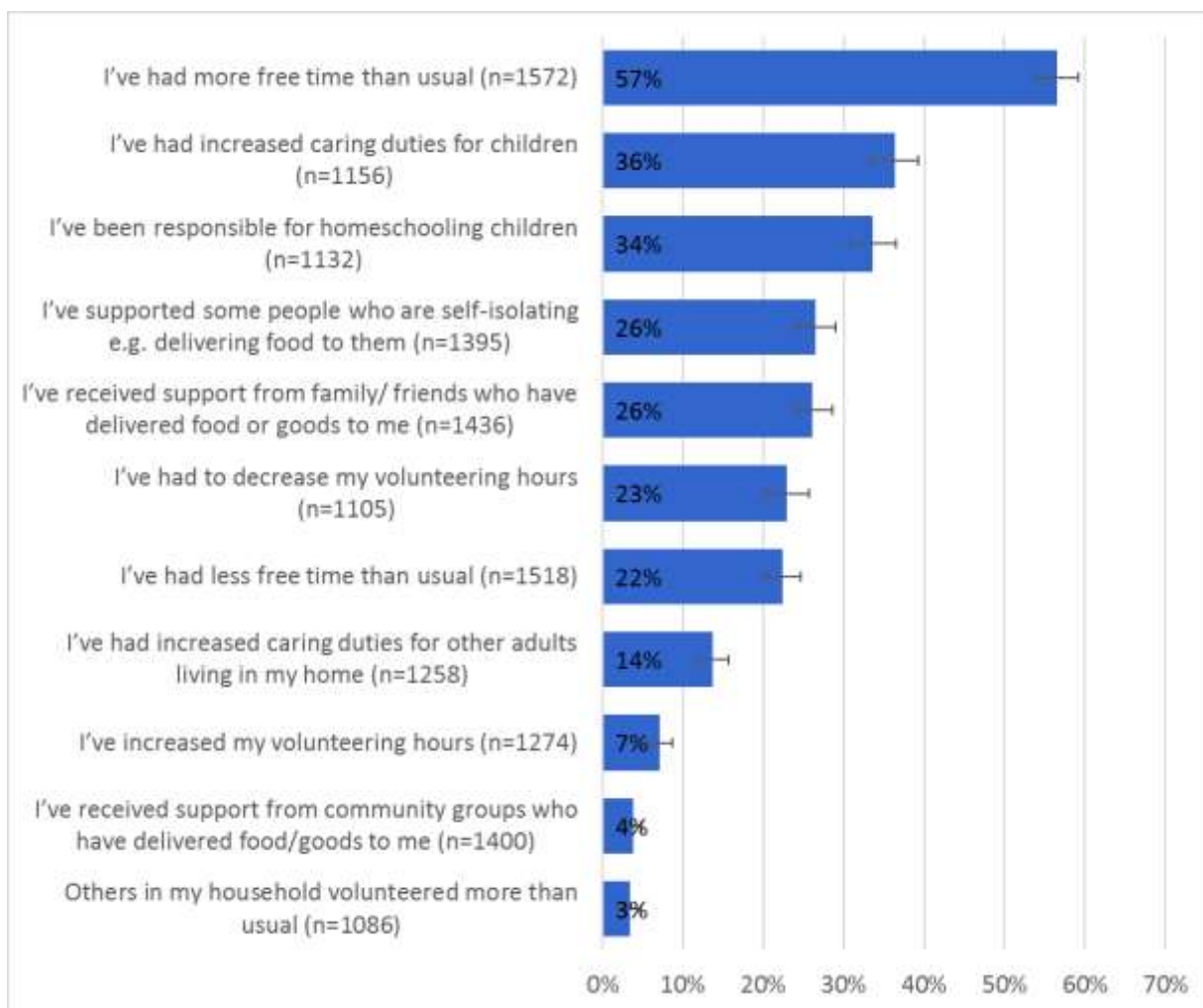


Figure 17 Caring, volunteering and giving support during COVID-19

Those aged 18-29 and 50-64 were most likely to report having supported some people who were self-isolating (35% for both groups, compared to 26% of ACT adults), while those aged 65 and older were more likely than other age groups to have received support from family or friends who delivered food or goods to them (38%), particularly those aged 75 and older (58%).

Increased caring duties for other adults living in the home were more commonly reported by carers with 15 or more hours a week of caring obligations (40%), carers more generally (33%), those who were unemployed (25%) and those whose main language at home was not English (21%).

Having to decrease volunteering hours was most commonly reported by those aged 65 and older, with 32% reporting this compared to 23% of ACT adults. Those aged 18-29 were more likely than most to have received support from community groups who had delivered food or goods to them (10%), as were those whose main language at home was not English (8%) and had lived in the ACT five years or less (9%), renters (10%), and the unemployed (17%). Many of these groups have in common that they include a large proportion of young people.

Finally, survey participants were asked if COVID-19 had changed how easy it was to stay connected, and to live comfortably in their home. They were asked whether any of the following applied to them since COVID-19:

- I've found it easy to keep in touch with friends and family who don't live with me

- I've found it hard to stay in touch with people outside my household
- I'm spending less time talking to people than usual
- I'm spending more time talking to people than usual
- My home has plenty of space for the people now working/studying/living in it
- My home has good enough internet connection for the residents to easily work/study/ stay in touch with friends and family

As shown in Figure 18, while 83% reported having sufficient internet connection to support both work and social interaction, and 73% that their home had sufficient space, 68% reported they were talking less to people than usual, and only 19% that they were spending more time talking to others than usual. While 68% reported they mostly found it easy to stay in touch with friends and family that didn't live with them, 36% had some difficulty staying in touch with some people outside their household.

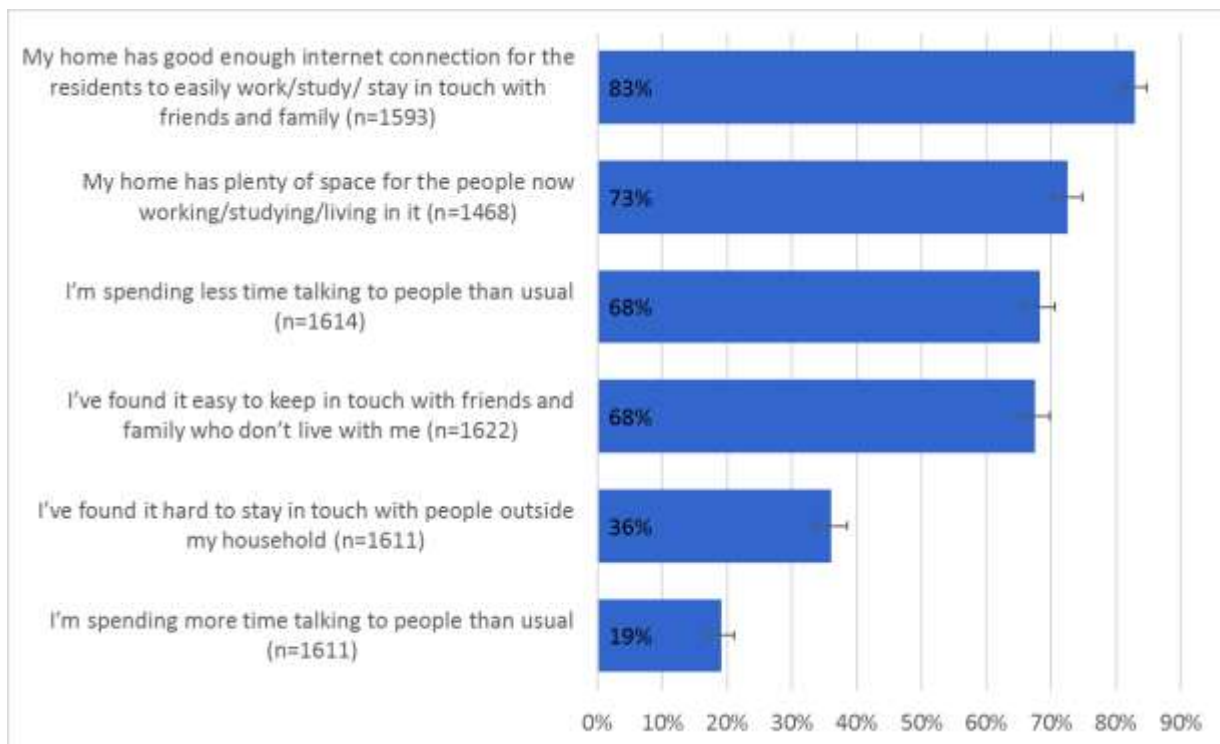


Figure 18 Social connection during COVID-19

Those less likely to report having a good enough internet connection to easily work, study and stay in touch with friends and family were those aged 18-29 (68%), those whose main language at home was not English (74%), renters (69%) and those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (67%). Those less likely to say their home had plenty of space for the people now working/studying/living in it were renters (59%), those living in units/apartments (57%), those with one or more children aged 0-4 in the household (62%), single parents (56%), those aged 18-29 (60%) and those whose main language at home was not English (63%).

While large proportions of all groups reported they were spending less time talking to other people than usual, one group was particularly likely to report this: those living with moderate or severe disability (78%). Those more likely to have increased the time they spent talking to people were those whose main language at home was not English (30%), and those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (31%).

Those aged 65 and older were more likely than others to say they found it easy to keep in touch with friends and family who didn't live with them (87% reported this, compared to the ACT average of 68%). In contrast, those aged 18-29 were more likely to report finding it hard to stay in touch with people outside their household (45%, compared to only 19% of those aged 65 and over), as were those whose main language at home was not English (47%), those who had lived in the ACT for five years or less (45%), single parents (48%), those living with moderate or severe disability (43%), renters (47%), and those with one or more children living in their home (46%).

3.3.6 Conclusions

There are clear differences in the impacts resulting from COVID-19 for different people in the ACT. Younger adults were much more likely than middle aged and older adults to lose income, experience increased loneliness, and somewhat more likely to report they sometimes felt unsafe in their home, and to have difficulty staying in touch with family and friends.

The impacts of financial loss resulting from reduced job hours and job loss were disproportionately experienced by younger people, who were 1.5 times more likely to report reduced household income than those aged 30 and older. Those whose main language was not English were even more likely to report loss of household income. Renters were also more likely to experience loss of household income compared to those who were paying off a mortgage or owned their home outright.

Middle aged adults were more likely to retain their jobs and work hours than those who were younger, but were more likely to be busier than usual, often with increased caring and home-schooling obligations. Amongst this group, women were more likely than men to report increased caring and homeschooling duties for children.

Older adults were less likely to have either reduced income, or increased caring obligations, and were also less likely to report difficulty keeping in touch with friends and family than other age groups, although a significant proportion did report increased loneliness (albeit fewer than for other age groups). Older adults aged 65 and older were also more likely to report having access to support from family and friends if they needed it compared to younger people.

Those with children were more likely to report being busier, having a more crowded household than usual, shopping more frequently from groceries due to difficulty buying goods needed in their household in sufficient quantity, and having more household disagreements than usual. They were also less likely than those without children to have access to support from family and friends. These things were all particularly the case for single parents, who were also more likely than others to report not having anyone they could ask for help if needed.

In addition to being more likely to lose household income than others, those whose main language at home was not English were more likely than others to report sometimes feeling unsafe around one or more people they lived with, not having anyone they could ask for help if needed, and finding it hard to stay in touch with people outside their household.

Carers were impacted by COVID-19 in different ways to others, being more likely to take unpaid leave from work, to be shopping more frequently than usual for household food and goods and have difficulty purchasing sufficient food due to shortage, have cancelled health appointments, and have difficulty filling medical prescriptions. Carers were more likely to report an increase in household disagreements than most others.

Conclusions

Almost every resident of the ACT was impacted in some way by either bushfires, the hailstorm and COVID-19, and many were affected in multiple ways, often by more than one of these. While smoke pollution was experienced by almost all, other impacts varied substantially between groups. Young people aged under 30 were more likely than others to report that the bushfires triggered psychological distress, as well as to have lower confidence in knowing what to do during the fires to protect their household. While not disproportionately impacted by the hailstorm, young people were then more likely to experience financial loss, social isolation, and poor access to support due to the impacts of COVID-19. This group is the most likely to have experienced negative impacts due to COVID-19, particularly those who have lived in the ACT for less than five years, and those whose main language at home is not English.

Those whose main language at home is not English were more likely to report finding it difficult to know how to protect themselves during the bushfires, and subsequently more likely to lose household income due to COVID-19, as well as to feel unsafe in their home and have difficulty staying in touch with family and friends. Many of this group were also younger in age.

Middle aged adults – particularly women - were more likely to report that COVID-19 had increased how busy they were with increased caring commitments, often for school aged children, and often limited access to support. Disagreements also increased more in households with children than in households with no children. Single parents were much more likely to report experiencing negative impacts from both bushfire and COVID-19 than most groups, particularly in relation to lacking access to emotional and practical support, and increased time commitments.

While carers were not more likely to report experiencing financial impacts due to COVID-19, they were more likely to have increased caring obligations and experience an increase in household disagreements, as well as difficulty with accessing health appointments and prescriptions. Those with moderate and severe disability also experienced difficulty with increased household disagreements, accessing health appointments and medication, and also increased isolation and lack of access to support.

Those living in Belconnen and the Inner South are particularly likely to have experienced negative impacts from the hailstorm which for some will have then been followed by negative impacts from COVID-19. Those living in Tuggeranong and Weston Creek were more likely to experience negative impacts from bushfires such as spending an extended period in which their property was at risk from bushfires, or having traumatic memories/emotions from previous bushfires triggered by the 2019-20 bushfires. Again, for some this will have been followed by negative impacts from COVID-19, likely leading to higher risk of impacts on wellbeing.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is a need to provide targeted support to specific groups. In particular, younger adults and those who do not speak English as their primary language have experienced multiple impacts: they are more likely to have lost household income during COVID-19, to have increased isolation and loneliness, and to have experience increased psychological distress during the bushfires. Carers and single parents, while not as likely to have experienced financial impact, are likely to have limited access to support and increase in caring and support obligations, which can increase stress. Those with children often have increased time commitments, with high levels of time-related stress, while not being as likely as younger adults to have lost income. Those with moderate and severe disability were particularly vulnerable to isolation and lack of support during COVID-19.

The findings in this report reflect experiences as of May 2020. From mid May through to December 2020 there was gradual lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions in the ACT, with students returning to school, many workplaces gradually reopening to workers, and an increase in the number of businesses able to operate. Shortages of goods also changed, with supermarkets typically returning

to high availability of stock, while some other businesses experienced longer-term stock shortages, such as some homewares stores. These changes will have resulted in further change in the impacts experienced by ACT residents. In late 2020, another *Living well* survey will be conducted, examining how the impacts of COVID-19 changed between May and December 2020.

References

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