



COVID-19

From Response to Recovery – the next normal.

Analysis of 372 individual surveys, 87 organisation surveys and feedback from the Whanganui River Traders Market to the COVID-19 response and understanding the 'next normal'.





Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Aotearoa New Zealand, Whanganui District Health Board and Whanganui District Civil Defence Emergency Management combined its emergency responses into one team to support our whole rohe (region). This brought the health, social and economic aspects into pandemic response.

The kaupapa behind this helped form the Integrated Recovery Team (IRT), which also includes Ruapehu District Council and Rangitikei District Council, alongside iwi, government organisations and others.

As the IRT moved from crisis response to recovery mode, it canvassed the community, both individuals and organisations, about what their experience of lockdown was like, what could be done better throughout our region to support people in future, how organisations can best work together to achieve the best outcomes for the community and more.

The next step in this process is to use this feedback, as well as ongoing feedback with community groups, to develop a more cohesive structure where health, community, social and economic organisations work together on achieving some of the things people told us through this survey.



Executive Summary

COVID-19 provided an opportunity for our communities to converge around a common threat and to share a purpose. It enabled us to bring the community into a conversation so that needs and issues could be identified. These needs and issues are not necessarily a direct result of COVID-19 but the pandemic has provided a vehicle for people to voice concerns around community well-being.

Surveys carried out from end of May to 12 June 2020 resulted in 372 individual and 87 organisational responses and a number of others engaged with the IRT at the River Traders Market on 20 June.

What people enjoyed about lockdown was an appreciation and enjoyment of having more time, a slower pace of life, family time, less traffic on the roads, the ability to walk around and enjoy the community, the friendliness of people and living more sustainably.

The positives people took from the experience were a sense of greater connection to the community, stronger partnerships, improved technology knowledge and online service delivery.

People want to hold onto using online services and the connections that were formed. They also want to have a better work-life balance through flexible working arrangements. People also want there to be continued hygiene practices and a greater focus on well-being. The quality of the natural and physical environment is important to people including sustainability, self-reliance and safety.



“On the whole I felt there was a great ‘we are all in this together’ attitude and people reconnected with each other in old fashioned ways. Kiwis came up with great and inventive ways to keep positive and support each other, and I think we discovered new and better ways of connecting.”



Individual Survey Analysis

A total of 372 individuals completed the survey. Of those 249 were from Whanganui, 31 Whanganui rural (incl. Whanganui River Road), 66 from Rangitikei and 26 from Ruapehu. 15% of respondents were Māori, 79% NZ European/Pakeha and 6% other.

How did people get information over Alert Level 4 lockdown?

The majority of people surveyed (81%) felt that they received enough information about what was happening. The main sources of information were TV and social media. Other sources included email, government, employer/work, radio, internet, family and friends.

How many people requested support over lockdown?

11% of people surveyed required assistance over lockdown.

"I went to Work and Income for financial support. It was amazing, so easy, fast and stress free which was great."

"We requested business support from our accountants and Whanganui and Partners. They were helpful and we got a voucher to go towards some accounting help too."

"I was approached by The Hub and it was a great help. They delivered kai packs to me every three weeks, they advocated for me and kept in contact about job opportunities and my family well-being."

"Professional supervision from the well-being team at the WDHB was very helpful and valuable during a stressful time."

"MSD wage subsidy was a great reassurance."

"District Council, Police, Medical Centre, Local Iwi, combined churches – small towns provide great support. It's about knowing who is in the community and how to access help as required."

Was stress and anxiety an issue for people over lockdown?

40% of people surveyed responded that they suffered from stress during Alert Level 4 lockdown.

What were the main concerns for people during Alert Level 4 lockdown?

1. Keeping me and family safe
2. Grocery shopping/availability of food and essentials
3. Contracting the virus
4. Other people's safety especially the elderly
5. Mental and general health
6. Isolation
7. People not following the rules
8. Distancing from other family
9. Financial
10. Uncertainty
11. Children's education and well-being
12. Ability to work from home

What did people think worked well over the lockdown period?

1. Good communication
2. Collaboration between agencies
3. Mobile testing stations
4. Telehealth
5. Working from home/flexibility
6. Encouraging kindness/community spirit
7. Less traffic/felt safer
8. Encouraging exercise
9. Encouraging hygiene
10. Zoom meetings

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"Juggling working from home with looking after 6 and 9 year olds and their learning, and looking after elderly relatives that we had to physically distance ourselves from but who needed groceries and medical supplies"

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"I actually think that everyone stepped up to the mark and performed to their best ability"

What services that were stopped did people want restarted?

1.	Health services
2.	Recycling
3.	Reopening of community
4.	Accepting cash
5.	Hospital visiting



“Resetting our future – supporting local economy; need to reorganise health to be community focused; set up hubs in communities”



Organisation survey

A total of 87 organisations responded to the survey. 41 worked across the whole Whanganui DHB region, 14 in Rangitikei District, three in Ruapehu District and 29 in the Whanganui District.

Did organisations require support?

20% of organisations indicated that they thought they would need support in the short term and 23% indicated that they would need support in the longer term (6-12 months) to continue to deliver their services.

The areas of support most needed:

1.	Developing organisational capacity and adapting
2.	Financial support/funding flexibility
3.	Building strategic partnerships
4.	Exploring social innovation and enterprise
5.	Recovery planning and business continuity

The majority of organisations (55%) delivered the same services in a different way, 5% shifted focus to different services. The service changes were:

1. Supply of food and household goods
2. Support for other vulnerable populations
3. Supply of hygiene materials
4. Support for older people and those living alone
5. Encouraging neighbourhood connectivity
6. Forming new relationships and partnerships with other groups

Nine organisations indicated that they or their employees required support around mental health and well-being. The needs arose from being a frontline worker, lack of health care, concerns about returning to work, financial concerns and isolation.

What were the immediate challenges or concerns for organisations in the short term?

1. Ensuring vulnerable populations could access services
2. How to innovate and adapt
3. Increased needs in the community
4. Health and safety issues
5. How to keep operating
6. Recovery planning and business continuity
7. Digital/online capability
8. Leadership/volunteer burnout
9. Cashflow
10. Increases/decreases in staffing
11. Changes to funding streams
12. Financial constraints to meet demand for services



“Having an iwi hub enabled connection and engagement with all of our Whanganui whānau”

What were the positive outcomes as a result of COVID-19?

1. Increased connection to our community
2. Increased digital knowledge
3. Increased connection/partnerships with other organisations
4. Expanded reach through online delivery



“Now that community links have been established maintain strong community engagement and communication”

What things should we keep doing post COVID-19 lockdown?

1. Increase use of online services
2. Community engagement/communication
3. Working from home
4. Hygiene education
5. Work/life balance/flexible hours



“A big problem was the lack of good internet in the rural areas”

The biggest thing people wanted to reinstate was face to face interactions.

If the health services were to be redesigned what would people like to see change?

1. Smaller health centres/community agencies
2. Better assessment of community needs
3. More funding
4. Better partnerships/collaboration (incl Māori)
5. Better access

River Traders Market feedback

What worked well over lockdown?

- More time, slowing down, had a rest, slower pace, family time, time to play together, calmer, people out walking and biking
- Neighbourliness, checking on others
- Sustainability, living off own fruit and vegetables

What was stopped that was missed?

- Human touch, seeing people
- Use of cash, how to get money
- Social and community activities
- Education

"This was a different way of life with a lot of uncertainty. I missed my family and not being able to hug my grandparents"

What were the main concerns?

- Couldn't see family, no socialising
- Support for older people, disabled
- Decline in business, job uncertainty
- Overwhelming and conflicting messaging
- No school and childcare
- Health – not being able to see loved ones in hospital, missed doctor's appointments

What things would people like to see continue?

- Focus on wellness and better health and hygiene
- Safe biking
- More sustainability, recycling, education in home gardening, self-reliance, looking after the environment
- People connecting, strong neighbourhood support, community events