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How to get the BEST out of OUR COUNCILS

# COVID – 19 Community Perceptions and the Role of Local Government

## NSW Community Pulse March 2020

I have frequently mentioned community satisfaction surveys in these columns. It is important for policy makers and service providers to know how community perceptions have been affected by the current COVID - 19 environment we are all living in. Orange City Council should be congratulated for responding to community concerns about touching the parking ticket machines at the Ophir Car Park and have made parking free.

Micromex Research is a community engagement business that regularly takes the temperature of the NSW community through research using an online panel and publishes the findings regularly as a Community Pulse, as well as undertaking community and customer satisfaction surveys for clients.

The February 2020 Community Pulse can now be used to measure the impact that COVID - 19 is having on NSW communities. The Micromex Quality of Life benchmark is based on 11,700 responses for multiple Councils since 2016. The online panel consists of 1,728 participants who are demographically and geographically representative of the adult population of NSW with 53% of them being from Metropolitan Sydney and 47% from Regional NSW.

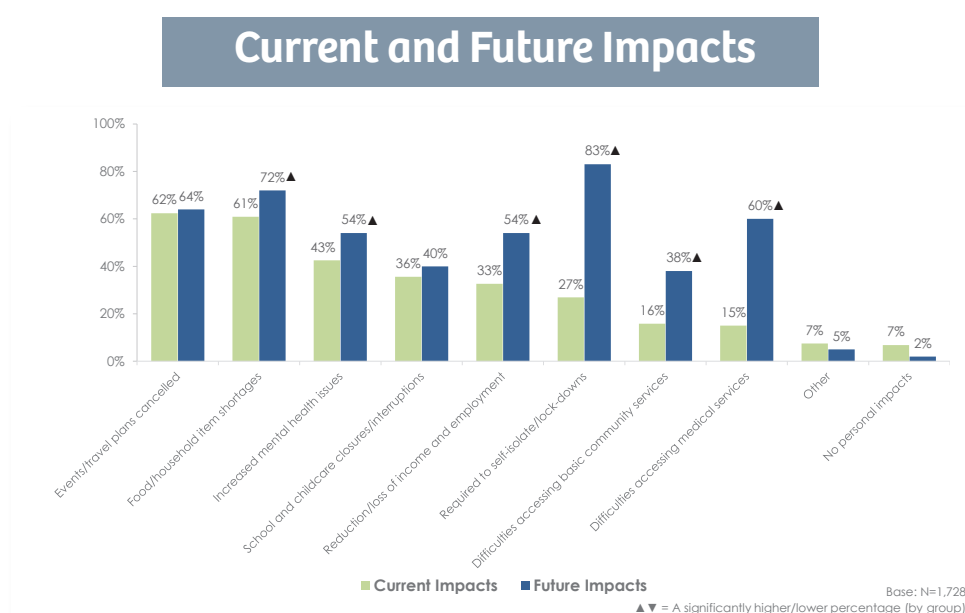
It has been a rocky six months for NSW residents. Community perceptions of quality of life have fallen since before bushfires, floods and the virus.

In March, 85% of residents were concerned or very concerned about COVID-19 and 81% concerned or very concerned about Australia's economy. Whilst level of concern for some areas has diminished, residents are still able to consider categories beyond COVID-19, with concern for cost of living and climate change remaining consistent with February data. Access to medical services has also remained consistent while concerns about the accessibility of public transport is significantly down, unsurprisingly.

Women and residents aged under 50 have higher levels of concern around the health and economic aspects.

### The following questions were asked:

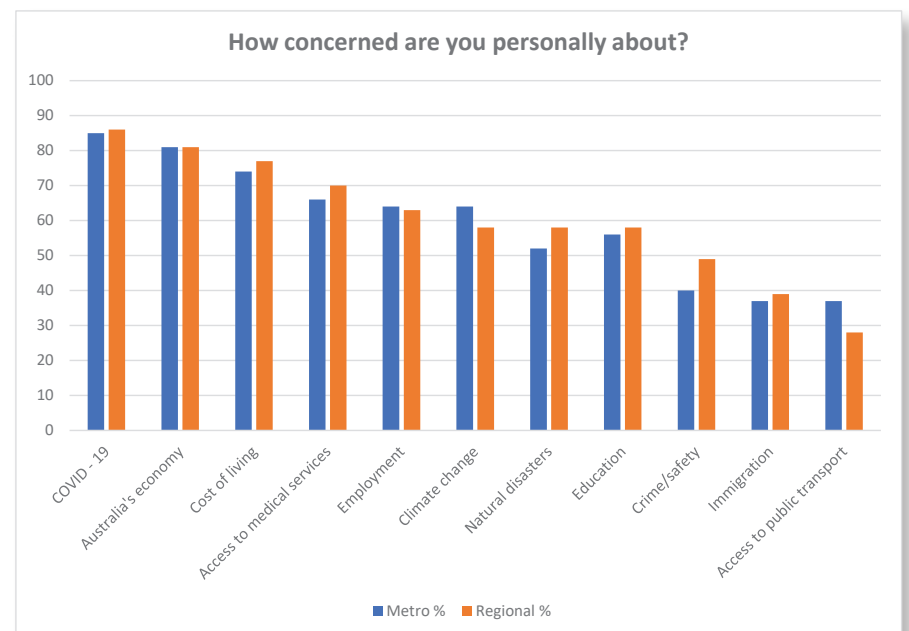
- At the moment we understand that our community is facing significant uncertainty –please indicate which of the following things, if any, are currently negatively impacting on your quality of life?
- How, if at all, do you think you personally may be impacted by COVID-19 in the future?



All have been impacted or expect to be in some way, shape or form. 43% of NSW residents already have experienced increased mental health issues. This incidence is expected to increase. As we know the Federal Government has responded to these concerns by increasing funding to mental health organisations.

76% of employed residents have had their work impacted in some way by COVID-19. Television and online are the most common ways that residents are getting information about COVID-19.

There are differences between perceptions of Metro Sydney residents and residents of regional NSW.



### Role of Local Government

NSW residents believe that the primary responsibilities of local governments are to support local businesses and community members during this period, particularly the elderly and vulnerable - whilst ensuring that the LGA contains to be maintained and cleaned with the continuation of essential services.

### Comments received about the role of local government included:

- Practical support and communication
- Working to check that local people and businesses are abiding by the regulations
- Ensure that the elderly and those in isolation get the support they need
- Community services like meals on wheels and mobile libraries
- Support local health services and continue council services like garbage collection
- Continue to provide the services they can without violating social distancing rules
- Reducing stress by removing parking fees and having flexible payment options for rates
- Maintain the cleanliness and functionality of our LGA.

88% of NSW residents agree/strongly agree that it is important for local governments to plan and engage with the community regarding future needs. One arguably universal observation is that community well-being and quality of life has been under strain for a significant period, and that people want to be talking and planning around a Post CV-19 future. Agreement is relatively consistent across all demographics.

To see the full Micromex survey presentation, go to - <https://www.amandaspaldingconsulting.com/articles/c/micromex-community-pulse-march-2020-1>

I have received feedback that many people find these columns informative and I am happy to receive comments from readers about this column and other issues you would like me to cover so please either contact me at Orange City Life or [aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com](mailto:aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com)