

Snapshot

# Checking in with children and young people

## Lockdown 4

June 2021

The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent body that advocates for the rights, safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in Victoria.

This snapshot summarises what 312 children and young people told us between 1 June to 18 June about their experiences of Victoria's fourth lockdown. This includes their reflections on mental health and wellbeing, education, safety and security at home and the future.

### About our snapshots

Since early 2020, we have been asking children and young people about the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives. This includes their education, mental health and feelings of safety. We publish what we hear in a series of snapshots and use the feedback to tell government and the broader community about what children and young people need to feel supported during this time. We have an online survey that children and young people can complete during different periods, recognising that things will continue to change.

Our last snapshot reported on responses we received from children and young people between November 2020 and February 2021. This snapshot reports on responses during lockdown 4 in June 2021 and includes some comparisons with results from our previous snapshot.

Our survey and snapshots are a general 'temperature check', rather than a conclusive view. This is because the survey sample is not always representative of the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of children and young people and some questions are optional (which can lead to some questions having a lower response rate). It also relies on those surveyed feeling comfortable to answer honestly. It is important to remember every young person's experiences and circumstances are different.

# Our consultations

## Who we heard from

**312** children and young people

### Age

**252**  
aged  
under 18

**60**  
aged between  
18 and 25

### Gender\*

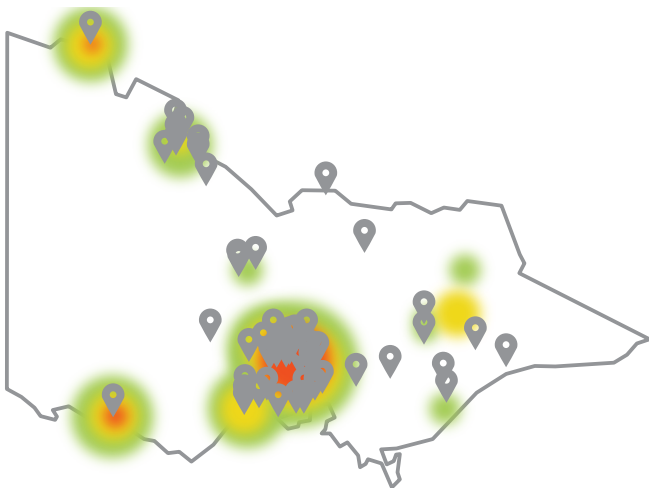
**197**  
female

**91**  
male

**18**  
described their gender as  
**non-binary** or in  
another way

*\*6 responses not provided*

**Located**  
across **Victoria** as shown in the heat map:



Almost  
**15%**  
lived in **rural** or  
**regional areas**

**Housing situation**  
Most respondents told us they live in the family home. About 10% of respondents said they lived:

- with kinship carers
- in residential/ supported accommodation
- with friends or a partner or
- on their own

**126** told us they have a **disability** or **long-term health condition**

**8** identified as **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

**75** identified as being from a **culturally diverse background**

## When we heard from them

This snapshot covers responses between 1 and 18 June 2021, covering the fourth lockdown in Victoria and other heightened restrictions.

# Summary

## Key themes

In this Lockdown 4 snapshot, we heard some similar themes to our previous snapshots. This included that:

- a high proportion of children and young people continue to struggle with poor mental health, feel isolated and disconnected, and find it hard to get the help they need due to long wait times or because it is too expensive.
- some children and young people are feeling the impacts of the pandemic on their parents or carers, who are struggling with poor mental health or due to lost jobs or income, and talked about increasing tensions at home.
- many young people felt worried about their future including their job prospects and the impact of disruptions on their schooling.

We also identified much stronger comments about mental health and educational effects of lockdown and remote learning compared to our last snapshot. We heard that:

- going to school is very important to most children and young people, for social connection, wellbeing and to achieve the best learning outcomes. For this reason, many urged for in-person learning to continue, even under lockdowns.
- there are some built-up negative impacts being felt from successive lockdowns and ongoing feelings of uncertainty making it difficult to feel optimistic about the future.

Children and young people clearly want governments to understand their experience of the pandemic and factor their views and ideas into their decisions, recognising their stake in the future.

## How are children and young people feeling overall?

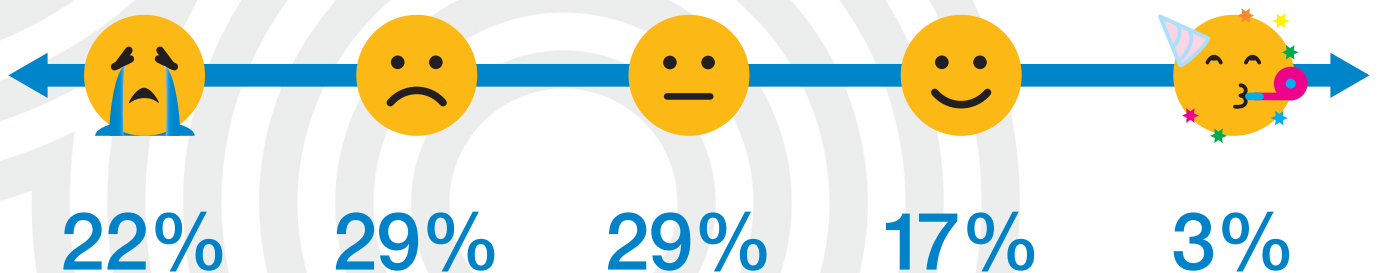
Most children and young people are not feeling good, with around half (50 per cent) feeling bad or terrible. This is a shift from the previous snapshot where 38 per cent of children and young people reported feeling bad or terrible. About a third of people (29 per cent) reported feeling average, with only 20 percent reporting feeling good or great.

We found children and young people were more likely to report feeling bad or terrible if they were aged between 10 and 12 years, or around the age of 17 (noting their final years of school may have been disrupted). They were also more likely to report feeling bad or terrible if they lived in metropolitan

areas, possibly due to stricter and longer lockdown restrictions in these areas. Children and young people with a long-term health problem or disability or who identify as gender diverse were also more likely to report feeling bad or terrible.

Children and young people who describe their gender as non-binary or in another way, who are culturally diverse or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to report feeling unsafe or unsupported (online, at school or in the community) compared to other children and young people.

### Responses to 'how are you feeling overall?'



# Mental health and wellbeing

It is becoming clearer through our survey that the pandemic is having major and cumulative effects on children and young people's mental health. While some children and young people were feeling positive, a significant proportion talked about how challenging the lockdown has been and the impacts on their mental health. Some children and young people talked about the impact of multiple lockdowns on their wellbeing.

Seventeen per cent of children and young people told us they are experiencing mental ill health and 23 per cent reported having mental illness. Many told us they experience both.

Connecting with friends and relationships, and mental health were most frequently ranked as highest importance to children and young people. These overtook education, which was ranked as highest priority in our last snapshot.

## Positives

A small number of young people surveyed provided neutral or positive effects on their mental health and wellbeing. Several felt lockdown provided an opportunity to rest and re-charge at home, or reported that it didn't have a very bad impact on them.

***I feel positive because I have become stronger and more resilient.***

*Young person, 16 years old, female*

***I have been feeling okay, everything is mostly fine.***

*Young person, 14 years old, male, culturally diverse background*

## Challenges

Consistent with our earlier snapshots, a significant number of children and young people reported struggling to cope during lockdown. Some of the words they commonly used to describe how they are feeling included: overwhelmed, isolated, lost, disconnected, lonely, bored, trapped, annoyed, angry, frustrated, flat, drained, confused, upset, and burnt out.

Some talked about how 'up and down' they felt.

***Half the time I feel great to have a little break from society as sometimes I can get emotionally drained. The other part I feel horrible and stressed as I don't talk to anyone except my household and one friend.***

*Young person, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***My feelings and emotions have been all over the place, since the first lockdown to be exact.***

*Young person, 22 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

Others reported that they were really struggling.

***I feel like I'm on fire while people with hoses are standing and just watching. That's the best way to describe how I feel since COVID started.***

*Young person with mental illness, 19 years old, male*

***My mental health has been pretty bad and my stress and sadness has been very high as well which makes school hard.***

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

***Honestly its very depressing it's a lot of work to keep up a healthy mental state during COVID.***

*Young person, 17 years old, male, culturally diverse background*

In the context of Victoria's fourth lockdown, many felt a sense of hopelessness and were worried that the cycle of lockdowns will continue.

***The possibility of another lockdown is always in the back of my mind. I'm glad the last two have been relatively short, but I'm afraid Victoria will end up in another lengthy lockdown like we experienced last year.***

*Young person with disability, chronic health condition and mental illness, 24 years old, female*

***I feel like someone can lock me down from my school and friends in a second.***

*Child, 12 years old, non-binary*

***I hate existing in this liminal space, in this in between, waiting and not knowing... Burn out, depression, family violence, self-harm, merely survival, and everything feeling like its falling apart. Really I feel like I am a character in an apocalyptic story.***

*Young person with mental illness, 18 years old, non-binary, culturally diverse background*

***I have been feeling really flat lately. I do not enjoy online school a lot. As I am an introvert I naturally isolate myself, but when we go into lockdown I isolate even further, not talking to my friends at all. I have also missed out on a lot of opportunities because of lockdown, which makes me feel sad. I often feel stressed when announcements come out as I am anxious to hear what will happen.***

*Young person with mental illness, 15 years old, female*

Some reported that the pandemic and restrictions had made pre-existing mental health conditions worse.

***I was struggling with mental health issues; anxiety, depression, OCD prior to COVID and COVID made them all 10 times worse, it has changed me for the worse.***

*Young person, 18 years old, female*

***Constantly stressed and anxious. I hate being stuck at home and my depression sky rockets... idk I just feel alone and numb.***

*Aboriginal young person, 18 years old, female*

***COVID-19 and the lockdowns have caused my stress and anxiety to escalate extremely.***

*Young person, 16 years old, female*

***It's put me back into a depressive place I thought I was free from.***

*Young person, 21 years old, non-binary, culturally diverse background*

Some young people talked about the impact of multiple lockdowns.

***Going in and out of lockdown has had a big impact on my mental health especially my social anxiety and I have started having panic attacks again.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition and mental illness, 22 years old, female*

***COVID has impacted my family and me a lot to the point where just the latest lockdown has given me no motivation at all... I have gone through so many mental health issues and how old am I?? 15. It's so bad so many people have just fallen apart.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition and mental illness, 15 years old, female*

A small number talked about their peers using drugs, self-harming or talking about suicide.

***A lot of kids my age are vaping, using drugs, have nothing to do, nowhere to hang out... No one bothers accessing mental health services. A lot of kids self harm and post it on apps like Snap Chat. Parents and schools don't know what kids do.***

*Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***Our generation is depressed, I have friends who are self harming and are suicidal.***

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

## What children and young people said they need

We continue to hear about the need for better access to mental health supports both delivered by mental health services as well as from within educational settings. Children and young people struggling with mental health issues told us they need both face-to-face counselling and good online support services, together with stronger mental health programs in schools. Young people told us about frustration with how inaccessible mental health services have been to them. Problems included long wait times and some services being expensive to access.

**More direct access to mental health places that can be gone to in the flesh. Talking to a random person face to face without technology is very comforting in a time where technology is used every day.**

*Young person, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

**We also need mental health support. ACTUAL mental health support. I know more people that are mentally ill than mentally healthy.**

*Young person with mental illness, 19 years old, male*

**More Aboriginal Support workers and counselling for indigenous kids that feel more comfortable and welcomed by someone within their culture.**

*Aboriginal young person with a chronic health condition, 18 years old, female*

**Mental health services need way more funding than what they get. If I need a service I'm on a waiting list for at least 6 weeks and in that time I'm left with nothing.**

*Young person with a chronic health condition and mental illness, 18 years old, female*

**There needs to be more mental health services available to people in Victoria. Currently, to speak to a psychologist or psychiatrist, the wait time can be up to 10 weeks, which is not a realistic time frame period for someone who is in a crisis.**

*Young person with mental illness, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

**Need more mental health support in schools, a lot more**

*Young person with mental illness, 17 years old, female*

**The government should really consider supporting schools more, whether it's in terms of reducing assessment or providing proper mental health programs. The aftereffects of the long lockdown last year have not been taken into consideration...**

*Young person, 16 years old, culturally diverse background*

# Education

Victorian students have experienced intense and frequent disruption to their education during the pandemic, and the impacts of this are starkly highlighted in survey responses.

Just over half of those studying at school and over 60 per cent of those studying at TAFE, university or somewhere else told us they were feeling bad or terrible, which has increased since our last snapshot.

## Positives

Some children and young people preferred online learning. This was because they felt the tasks were easier, the workload more manageable and flexible or because they felt well-supported by their teachers. Others recognised online learning wasn't ideal, but understood it was the best option during times of increased risk of community transmission.

***I prefer school in lockdown to some degree, as I can complete the work in my own time without being in the classroom for the whole while.***

*Young person, 15 years old, female*

***Didn't mind lockdown to be honest. I already had all my schoolwork on the cloud so the only thing that changed was using video conferences instead of being in school.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition, 17 years old, male, culturally diverse background*

## Challenges

Many others struggled with home learning, preferring to study alongside others in person. Some young people didn't have a good setup at home or felt disconnected from peers or teachers, making it hard to learn.

***Missing the environment of a school has been really hard, as going onto zoom doesn't make me feel connected to peers and teachers.***

*Young person, 18 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***It is really bad cause I am very good at working around people than working at home.***

*Young person, 19 years old, male*

***The continuous cycle of waking up, attending class for 6 hours, completing homework and doing further study for exams while staying at home was physically and mentally draining.***

*Young person, 18 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***I felt less support from people that I deserved most support from such as my teachers as they wanted me to focus more on school rather than myself***

*Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***The internet is sometimes slow and that makes learning at home hard.***

*Child, 12 years old, male*

We heard that children and young people were struggling with the transitions between remote and in-person learning, and some told us they have not felt supported by their teachers or school.

***Working from home at first was stressful, but I got used to it and now, because I got used to working at home how I liked, I can't work at school properly. Now heading back to COVID and back to school it's overwhelming and stressful.***

*Young person, 17 years old*

***...feeling pressured during the changes of routine when going to school then suddenly changing to online learning.***

*Young person, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

Several talked about how the pandemic had negatively impacted their focus and motivation, making some of them worry about the impact on their grades.

***I have lost the motivation to go to school or study online, my education is suffering.***

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

*I was in year 11 in 2020 when COVID began and it had a tremendous impact on me and my school year. I was naturally a dedicated student and strived to do well but I no longer have the capacity to work as hard as I used to. I have tried to get back to the way I used to be, but I can't. I was taking a year 12 subject last year and COVID completely ruined my result and I thought that this year would be different, and even thought it hasn't been as bad, I have not healed from all the trauma that was experienced last year and I don't know when I will.*

*Young person, 18 years old, female*

## What children and young people said they need

Many children and young people told us they want in-person learning to continue, even during lockdowns. Many encouraged other health measures, such as vaccination and mask-wearing, to manage risks instead of closing schools.

*Let us go to school face-to-face. Having online schooling badly impacts our mental health and motivation to cope with things.*

*Young person with mental illness, 16 years old, female*

*Keep schools open, better online learning, vaccinate teachers.*

*Child, 10 years old, female*

*I wish school stayed even when there is a lockdown. I can wear a mask.*

*Child, 12 years old, male*

*Let us stay at school. Stop locking us down.*

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

Children and young people also wanted greater acknowledgement of the impact of lockdown and disruption on their studies. This included teachers being more understanding and adapting their teaching style to suit the changing circumstances.

*Being more understanding that people can change over online school, and so much happens and teachers don't care sometimes and aren't accommodating so it sucks.*

*Young person, 13 years old, female*

*I think helping teachers make work more engaging? I know some primary school classes get to have a theme for a Webex or something and I thought even though high-schoolers are older just to maybe encourage stuff like that as well? Just to get the kids a bit more engaged. Possibly lightening the work load a bit for high-schoolers as well because it's easy to do in class but online a lot of your motivation to get things done goes out the window because you have no classmates to compete against or just to encourage you.*

*Young person, 14 years old, female*



# Safety and security at home

The Commission is particularly interested in the impact of the pandemic on different factors that can increase risk to children and young people's safety at home. This can include difficulties that arise when families facing adversity are not well supported during periods of heightened challenges.

Most children and young people told us they felt safe at home with some reflecting that lockdown has provided the opportunity to connect more with their family. A small proportion of children and young people talked to us about restrictions leading to increased pressures at home and tensions that have built up over a number of lockdowns.

## Positives

Some children and young people emphasised the importance of the support they received from family and friends in getting through this difficult time.

**My family give me comfort and belonging.**

*Young person, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

**I think COVID-19 has helped my family feel more connected because we have had time to do more things together. We've been very lucky.**

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

## Challenges

Some young people reported not feeling safe or supported at home. Stress associated with the pandemic sometimes led to conflict and tension within the family, and in some cases relationship breakdowns.

**Being in lockdown with family has made things insanely tense and really hard to cope.**

*Young person with a chronic health condition and mental illness, 23 years old, female*

**There seems to always be a level of tension in my family. Everyone has different coping mechanisms but some of them are more harmful to others which I have experienced from other family members.**

*Young person, 18 years old, male*

**I have divorced parents which makes things a bit tricky... family issues are the main reason I don't entirely feel safe.**

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

**A lot of arguments in my home as everyone is frustrated and angry after 4 lock downs.**

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

Children and young people talked about the impact of the pandemic on their parents and family members. Some witnessed their parents or carers struggling with their mental health and reported financial pressures or instability in their housing.

**We don't have much money because of COVID-19... We are getting kicked out of our house so the owner can bring her family from Melbourne to live in the house it's not fair we will be homeless as auntie can't find a house for us.**

*Aboriginal child, 10 years old, female*

**COVID has been a major concern and a serious problem for housing in [my area] for my family as of recent!**

*Aboriginal young person with a chronic health condition, 18 years old, female*

## What children and young people said they need

Some children and young people told us about the importance of government support for families who are struggling financially.

**There is not enough support for some jobs and if my parents couldn't work at home we would be in poverty and wouldn't be able to pay for the house.**

*Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

**For families whose parents can't work in lockdown, make sure they have help so that people don't go without food and things they need.**

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

# The future and having a say

Children and young people had mixed responses about the future. Some talked about feelings of optimism while others talked about strong feelings of uncertainty and concern about future prospects. As noted in other snapshots, children and young people talked about the importance of having a say in decisions about their future.

## Positives

Some children and young people reported feeling more optimistic about the future, feeling that we can turn the corner on the pandemic through health measures.

***I'm used to COVID now and I understand what we have to do to keep our city safe even if you can't see your family and friends.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition and mental illness, 18 years old, female*

***I feel like it is a big change, but I believe that if we all work together it can stop. I wear my mask and social distance all of the time to try stop the spread.***

*Child, 12 years old, female*

## Challenges

We continued to hear about children and young people feeling uncertain about the future and a sense that things will never return to 'normal', with lockdowns and restrictions becoming part of life.

***I feel quite uncertain about the future. Even when COVID-19 eventually subsides, it will not likely be the last global pandemic.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition, mental illness and disability, 24 years old, female*

***Ever since COVID I've just been living in my thoughts more than I've ever had to and I constantly question if everything will become normal again.***

*Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***Like when an upcoming music exam, special event, swimming meets and other events come up it is so exciting but you are filled with worry that a sudden lockdown will occur and it will be cancelled. That has happened a lot already especially lockdown 4.***

*Young person, 14 years old, female*

Young people also expressed worry about the practical impacts on their life goals, particularly their ability to get a job.

***COVID has placed my career goals on hold for example I'm unable to find work placement.***

*Young person, 22 years old, female, culturally diverse background*

***I am struggling with my business and I wanted to build it up well so it was stable income so I could buy a house but that can't happen now because I don't get paid when I'm shut down and I lose clients and have no work when I can reopen.***

*Young person, 20 years old, female*

***How hard it's been being on youth allowance even with a disability supplement as well. I am about to start a new job next week that pays enough to get by, in the meantime, I can't afford food for the week and I'm over a month late in rent.***

*Young person with mental illness, 20 years old, male*

## What children and young people said they need

A strong theme from children and young people was their desire to be listened to, have their ideas heard and be taken seriously. Many want to contribute to decisions and policies that impact their lives.

***The Government could start believing us, when we say something important. We are children but we are not stupid.***

*Young person, 13 years old, female*

***I do not think the government really sees young people with a disability - we are seen as our parents' concern - we could add to our world if they helped us.***

*Young person, 17 years old, non-binary*

***Consider the perspectives of young voices; we are not naive, we think, we care and we want a better future. We wish to help, but we cannot if this is not allowed.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition and mental illness, 14 years old, culturally diverse background*

Some respondents talked about financial support for young people.

***Having access to government financial support when lockdowns occur would assist me greatly to weather the current situation... provide additional financial support during lockdowns. I understand that these are federal rather than state government issues, but young people have been left out in the cold despite disproportionately working in retail and hospitality. These industries have suffered more than most during the pandemic.***

*Young person with a chronic health condition, mental illness and disability, 24 years old, female*

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