



MEDIA RELEASE

Families stepping up to help us cope with COVID-19, new survey finds

Families and friends are playing a critical role helping their loved ones cope with the financial and emotional fallout from COVID-19, with new research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) revealing younger people and those in regional and remote communities, in particular, were struggling to access the professional support services they needed.

Help and Support – the latest research paper drawing on AIFS’ *Families in Australia: Life during COVID-19* survey of more than 7,000 Australians in May 2020 – looks at how Australians sought and provided financial, emotional and physical assistance during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

AIFS Director, Anne Hollonds, said lockdowns and tough new social distancing measures had impacted people’s ability to help, and caused many people who needed help to struggle to get it.

“When the pandemic struck, nearly one in five people who regularly provided help to others outside of their household said they had to stop giving help, and half had to change the way they provided help.

“Restrictions during COVID-19 also made access to professional services like GPs, counsellors, or psychologists more challenging, at a time when people were likely to be needing them most,” Hollonds said.

One in five AIFS survey respondents said they needed to access mental health services, but more than half of those who needed them had not accessed them.

Across a range of professional services, limited access was more pronounced in regional and remote areas. Ten per cent of people in cities who needed to access GP and primary healthcare services did not access them; compared to 14% of those living in regional, and 17% in remote or very remote areas, for example.

The need for services also varied across age groups, with younger people more likely than older people to say they needed mental health services and counselling, and people under 50 more likely to have needed but not to have accessed family relationship services.

The Families In Australia Survey lead investigator and AIFS Deputy Director (Research), Kelly Hand, said that many professional providers adapted to the challenges and demands of an unprecedented crisis, for example, through telehealth. However, families as well as friends and neighbours – had continued to play a critical role in supporting Australians through the pandemic.

“Relatives were the most common source of help, with more than one in four people saying their household got help from a relative living elsewhere.

“The most common type of support received was emotional support – with friends and colleagues often stepping in to take on that role.

“There was also a large number of people – around six in ten – who said they had given some type of physical help to someone outside their household, things like shopping, dropping of food, domestic work, or help with transport or personal care,” Ms Hand said.

Like with professional services, age was a key factor in predicting how support was received or given.

“People aged under 50 were more likely to receive emotional and financial support than older people. People aged 70 and over were more likely than others to receive physical help. People aged 50–69 years were the least likely to receive help, but the most likely to give it – especially when it came to financial assistance.”

Ms Hand said the data showed Australians of all ages were pitching in to help their loved ones in the best ways they could, during unprecedented circumstances.



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“Families are the backbone of communities, and at times of crisis families are doing the heavy lifting. The work they do to support each might be invisible, but it is pivotal in keeping communities functioning.”

Help and Support is part of AIFS' Life during COVID-19 research series, aimed at understanding how Australia is adjusting to unprecedented lockdown restrictions and social distancing measures. Read the full paper at: [Families in Australia Survey: Life during COVID-19 Report no. 3: Help and Support](#)

Other key research findings

- The most-needed service during the first wave of the pandemic was GP and primary health care, with just over half (53%) of people saying they needed to access a GP or health care professional. Fewer respondents reported needing mental health services (21%), counselling (21%) or family relationship services (8%).
- People living in major cities were more likely (30%) than those in regional (26%) or remote areas (22%) to receive emotional support; people in remote (29%) and regional areas (28%) were more likely to receive physical support than those in major cities (22%).
- Younger people were more likely than other people to help friends outside their household.
- Women were more likely than men to help someone outside their household (76% vs 67%), commonly with food or supplies (39% vs 28%) and providing emotional support (59% vs 42%). While women were more likely than men to provide some form of physical help (45% vs 39%), men were slightly more likely to help specifically with jobs around the home (14% vs 10%). Men were also more likely to provide financial support (19% vs 15%).
- People aged under 30 and over 70 were less likely than other people to be regularly helping someone outside their household, while four in five people aged between 50–69 reported providing physical, emotional or financial support to someone outside their household.
- Twelve per cent of respondents reported that they, or someone they lived with, regularly required help with daily tasks due to disability or chronic illness. Among this group, 43% reported receiving physical help and 17% receiving either financial or emotional support from someone outside their household in the past month. While relatives and friends were their primary sources of help, they were more likely than other people to also be receiving help from community or local organisations (14% vs 2% of households without a disability or chronic illness).

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AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them. See aifs.gov.au for more.