



# Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report 2024

Shining a light on New Zealanders'  
health and wellbeing

**KANTAR**



# A comprehensive look at New Zealanders' health and wellbeing in 2024

Southern Cross believes all New Zealanders should have ongoing access to health and wellbeing options which work for them. This is why we\* conduct Healthy Futures, a biennial report series looking at our health and wellbeing behaviours.

We have spoken with more than 7,000 New Zealanders over the past five years since our inaugural Healthy Futures report in 2020. During this time, we've been able to track how our health and wellbeing attitudes and behaviours have changed over time and share what's top of mind for New Zealanders today.

New Zealanders have faced some challenging times, including a global pandemic, disruptive world events and extensive economic uncertainty. While concern about the economic and health impacts of Covid-19 have reduced significantly this year, two thirds of New Zealanders believe the pandemic has had a long-term impact

on their physical and mental health. However, the cost of living remains the greatest worry for nine out of 10 New Zealanders, and financial pressures are being felt by all.

Against this backdrop, healthcare is becoming a top priority. We have seen significant increases in the levels of concern relating to access to quality affordable healthcare this year, particularly in relation to cancer treatment services.

By sharing this report, we hope to encourage informed discussion and action so we can embrace opportunities to do things in a better way and address the hurdles facing New Zealanders. We all want to see a healthier future for ourselves and our whānau.

\*Southern Cross Medical Care Society and Southern Cross Healthcare Limited funded the 2024 Healthy Futures survey

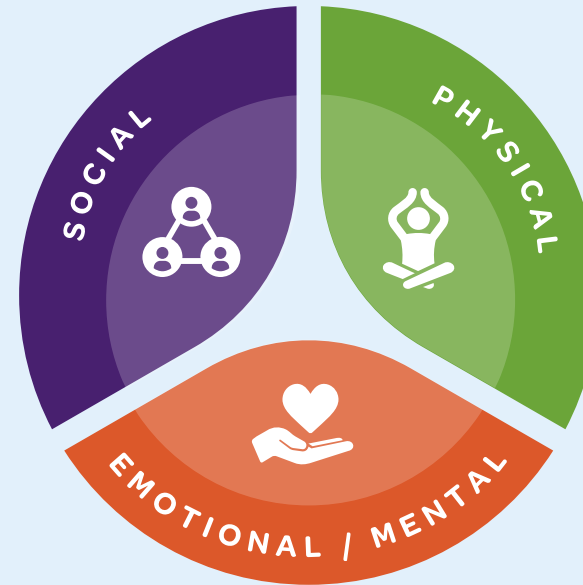


# How New Zealanders think about their health and wellbeing

For people across Aotearoa, there is no one version of health and wellbeing – it varies depending on one’s life stage and outlook.

When New Zealanders talk about their overall health and wellbeing, they typically make sense of it by distilling it to three key dimensions – physical, emotional / mental, and social. The dimensions are not static, they are constantly at play, influencing each another in various ways. A positive or negative sense of health and wellbeing in one dimension can trigger a change in another.

## Health and wellbeing in New Zealand



### Social health and wellbeing

is all about feeling connected and having a relationship with people and the community.



### Physical health and wellbeing

is about being visibly healthy and what people are doing with their bodies to achieve this.



### Emotional / mental health and wellbeing

is about people’s outlook and how they carry themselves through life.

Other dimensions such as financial, spiritual, environmental and academic wellbeing are viewed as influencing factors to people’s overall health and wellbeing rather than standalone categories in their own right.

Environmental



Financial



Academic



Spiritual



# Delving deeper into health and wellbeing



## Physical health and wellbeing

This is the most clear cut of the dimensions - everyone feels like they know what they need to do to be physically healthy and well. However, it also carries the greatest amount of guilt and frustration when people don't live up to these ideals because they feel like they should know better.



## Emotional / mental health and wellbeing

New Zealanders see emotional / mental health and wellbeing as something that needs to be actively pursued and maintained, but there's not a lot of clarity around how best to do this. Mostly people approach this in a reactive way - when something goes wrong.



## Social health and wellbeing

For New Zealanders, their sense of social health and wellbeing acts as a source of feedback and validation for how they are doing in life.

# Health and wellbeing at different places and stages of life

## University students



For students, health and wellbeing at its best is just as much about looking the part as it is about feeling the part.

## SINKS (single income, no kids) DINKS (double income, no kids)



Their approach to health and wellbeing is about living their best life. They measure their health and wellbeing against doing well at an individual level and doing good for the world.

## Parents with young kids (0-9yrs)



Their health and wellbeing is best when achieving balance and simplicity while coping with the demands of a young family. These parents put themselves last with their attitude being “if the kids feel good, then I feel good”.

## Parents with older kids (10-17yrs)



Health and wellbeing is about living a full life, leading by example and providing a good family future.

## Retirees



Their health and wellbeing is best when staying positive, appreciating the good things and staying fully involved in life. They tend to look to their younger, more able and energetic selves as the benchmark for their current health and wellbeing. This can be disheartening – accepting their mortality and living for today is key.

## Living with disability / illness



For people living with a disability or illness, the gold standard in health and wellbeing is about improvement rather than deterioration. Their ability to live their life as successfully and as independently as possible without being a burden on those they love, is the main factor in how they track their health and wellbeing.

# The biggest issues concerning New Zealanders

## Sustained financial hardship

New Zealanders are feeling significantly less secure about their jobs and are less happy with their financial situation this year. Even though concerns about the economic and health impacts of Covid-19 have reduced significantly, the cost of living continues to be the greatest worry for nine out of 10 New Zealanders. Financial pressures are being felt across all demographic groups as we face a recession and rising unemployment.

Accessing basic needs, like affordable housing, is an increasing concern for many this year. There has also been a rise in the number of people who believe eating healthily is expensive, particularly among younger people.

For New Zealand's working population, work life balance is important, but less than half view their situation positively. High workloads and financial pressures are cited as the greatest reason for a poor balance.

The number of people planning holidays increased this year, but so too has the associated stress of arranging a holiday, underscoring the financial pressures impacting all.



# The biggest issues concerning New Zealanders

## Our health

Around two thirds of New Zealanders feel there has been a long-term impact of the pandemic on their physical and mental health. Despite this, we are seeing a potential apathy towards Covid-19 and the cold / flu, as significantly fewer New Zealanders are concerned about contracting Covid-19. There has also been a drop in the number of people interested in workplace flu vaccinations.

Concern around access to affordable healthcare has risen significantly this year – moving up to the third top concern for New Zealanders. This is particularly true for women and older people.

Accessing cancer treatment services was another growing concern for New Zealanders. Concern has dropped around obesity, although concern levels remain very high in the Pasifika community.

Health professionals / GPs continue to be our favoured source of information on health and wellbeing, followed by online articles and websites.

While half of New Zealanders will seek medical attention within a day or two of feeling unwell, there has been an increase among NZ Māori and 18-29 year olds who are choosing not to seek professional advice or treatment.

Cost remains the main barrier for seeking treatment, closely followed by long wait times. There has also been an increase in the number of people who are unable to see a healthcare professional at the time they need, highlighting resourcing challenges in New Zealand's primary healthcare sector.



# The biggest issues concerning New Zealanders

## Shifting health and societal concerns

Many New Zealanders have reverted to pre-Covid-19 concerns about violence in society and climate change issues. Interestingly, concerns around drug and alcohol abuse haven't returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Vaping has overtaken smoking as a major concern, particularly for parents, women, and those serving the community, such as teachers, nurses and the police force.

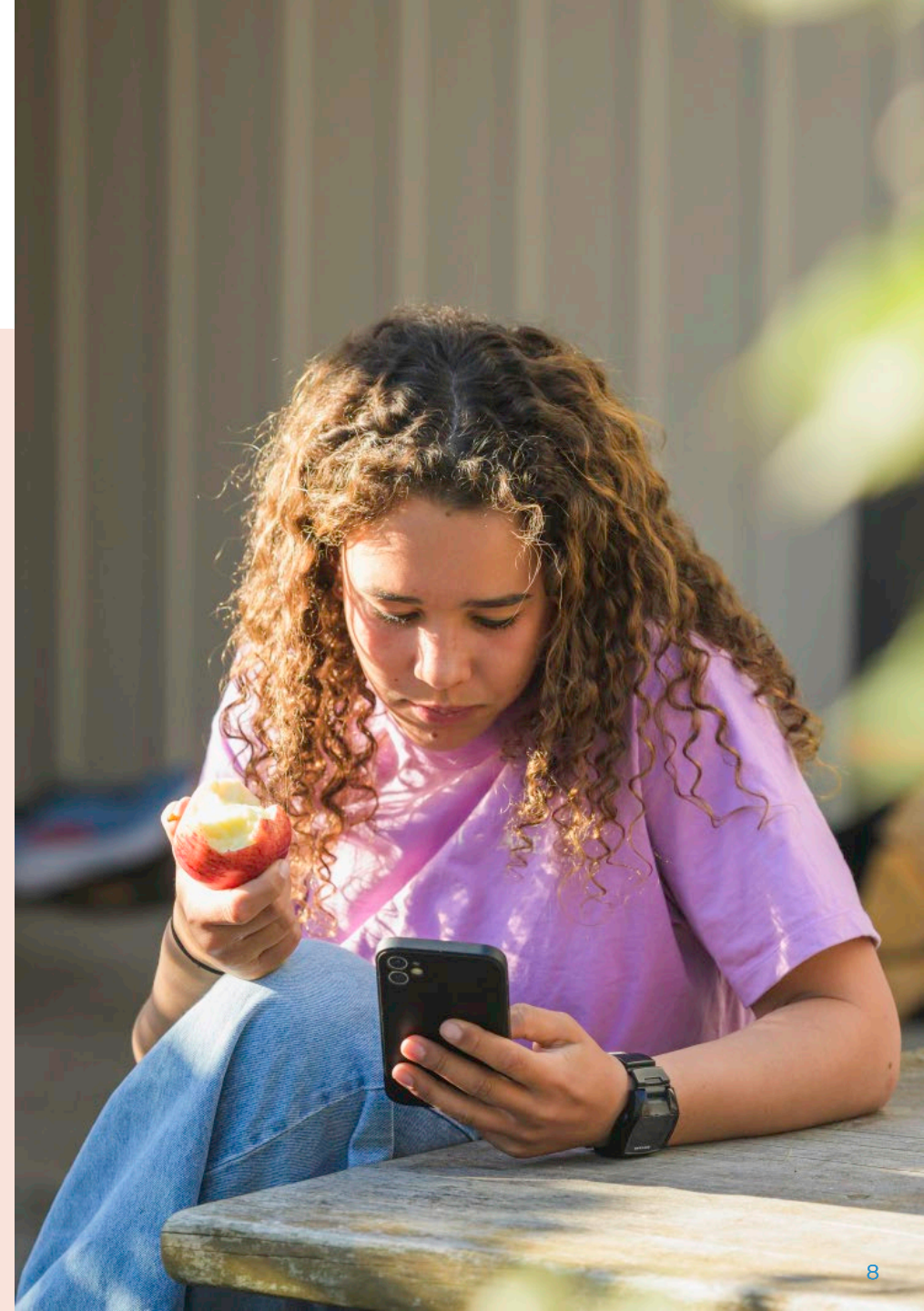
Alcohol consumption patterns continue to shift, with more New Zealanders feeling that low or no alcohol is the way to go. A quarter of New Zealanders reduced their alcohol consumption in the last six months to look after their physical health and wellbeing.

Four in 10 New Zealanders consume no alcohol and the average number of drinks consumed per week is below the Ministry of Health (MoH) recommended guidelines.

## Technology remains a double-edged sword

Concerns about social media increased to the highest level since 2020. Parents are particularly worried about the amount of time their children spend on devices, and there has been an increase in the number of people concerned about the impact of social media on self-esteem.

On the flipside, technology helps New Zealanders to connect with those who live far away. It also helps many of us to monitor our health and wellness through online programmes and apps. Nearly three in 10 New Zealanders use a fitness tracking device.

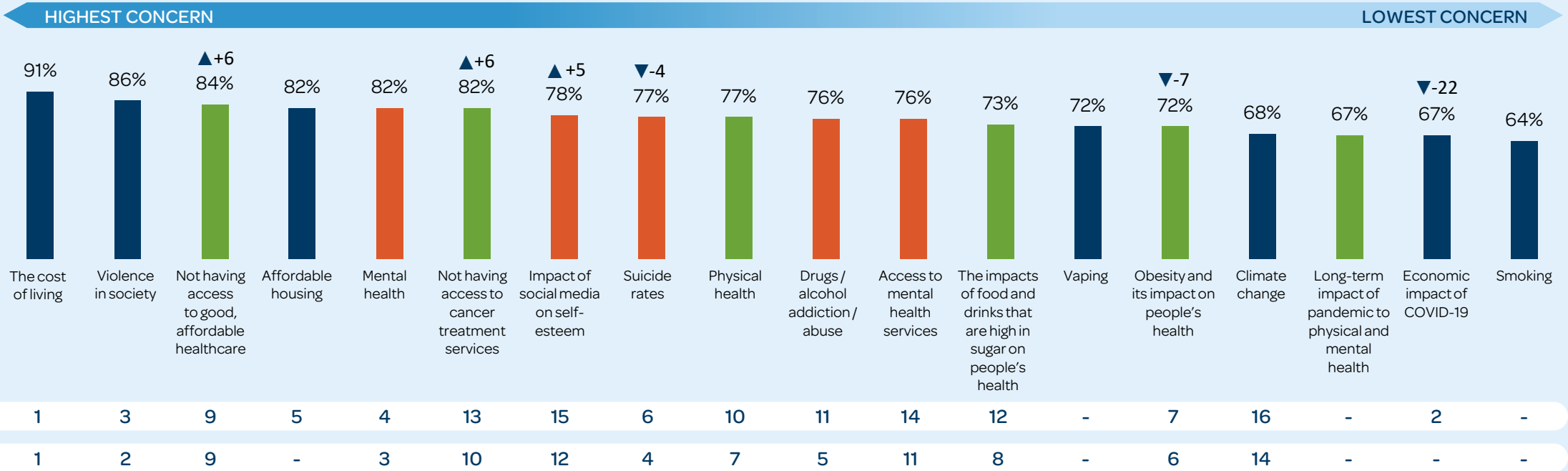




# What New Zealanders are most worried about

New Zealanders' health and wellbeing concerns reflect a range of physical, emotional and social issues which continue to evolve. The cost of living remains our top concern, closely followed by violence in society and not having access to quality affordable healthcare. More people are worried about the impact of social media on self-esteem this year.

## Concerns of New Zealanders



■ General
 ■ Physical
 ■ Emotional / mental

# Where New Zealanders go for health advice

While healthcare professionals remain the main source for New Zealanders seeking health information, social media is increasing in popularity among younger people and Pasifika. Friends / whānau are particularly important for NZ Māori and females when seeking health advice.

## Swing to social

Significantly more younger New Zealanders (18-49 year-olds) and Pasifika people are favouring social media and influencers for information on health and wellbeing. This highlights the opportunity for healthcare professionals to communicate through a mix of channels to reach more New Zealanders.



Health professional  
e.g. your doctor / GP **64%**



Online articles / websites **52%**



NZ Māori – 43%  
Female – 40%

Friends and whānau networks **32%**



TV shows / documentaries **30%**



Ministry of Health website \* **28%** ▽ -13



Pasifika – 40%  
18-29 year olds – 37%

Social media e.g. Facebook  
groups / influencers **27%** △ +6



Healthline or other helpline \* **18%**



Books / library **17%**



Work resources / training **15%**



Magazines **10%**



Online seminars / events **8%**

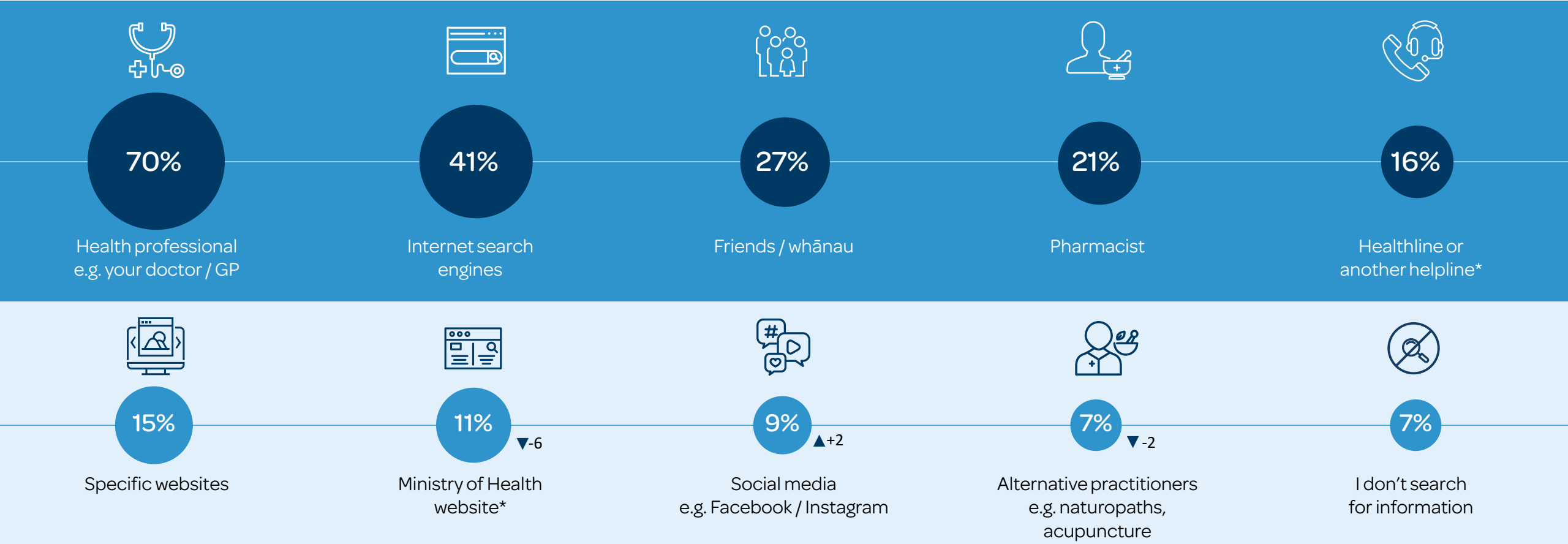
\*Wording updates in 2024

△ ▽ Significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level v. 2022

Holistic practitioner, Iwi organisations and churches not selected as sources to get information on health / wellbeing in 2024

# Seeking trusted health advice when feeling unwell

Primary care health professionals (GPs) remain the most trusted source for people seeking help when they are physically unwell - particularly for people with a long-term health condition. When younger New Zealanders feel physically unwell, they are more likely to ask friends and family / whānau than go to a healthcare professional.

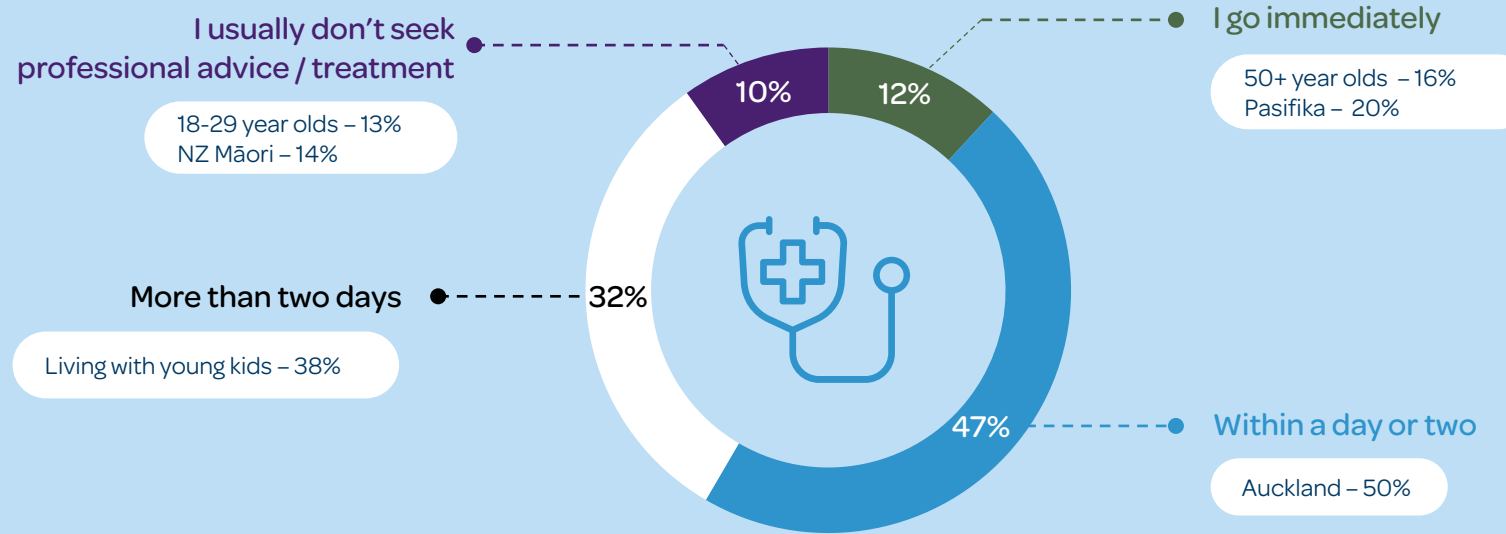


# Accessing timely healthcare

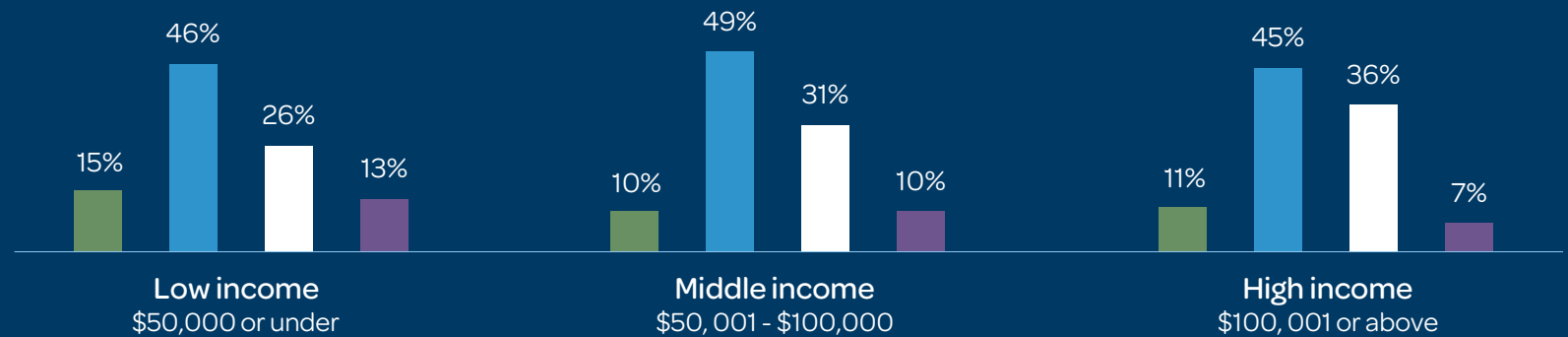
Most New Zealanders will seek treatment immediately or within a day or two of feeling physically unwell.

When looking at the timeliness of people seeking treatment by income level, more high-income earners are waiting more than two days to be seen by a health professional and more people in the lower income group are choosing not to seek treatment at all.

## When unwell, when do you seek treatment?



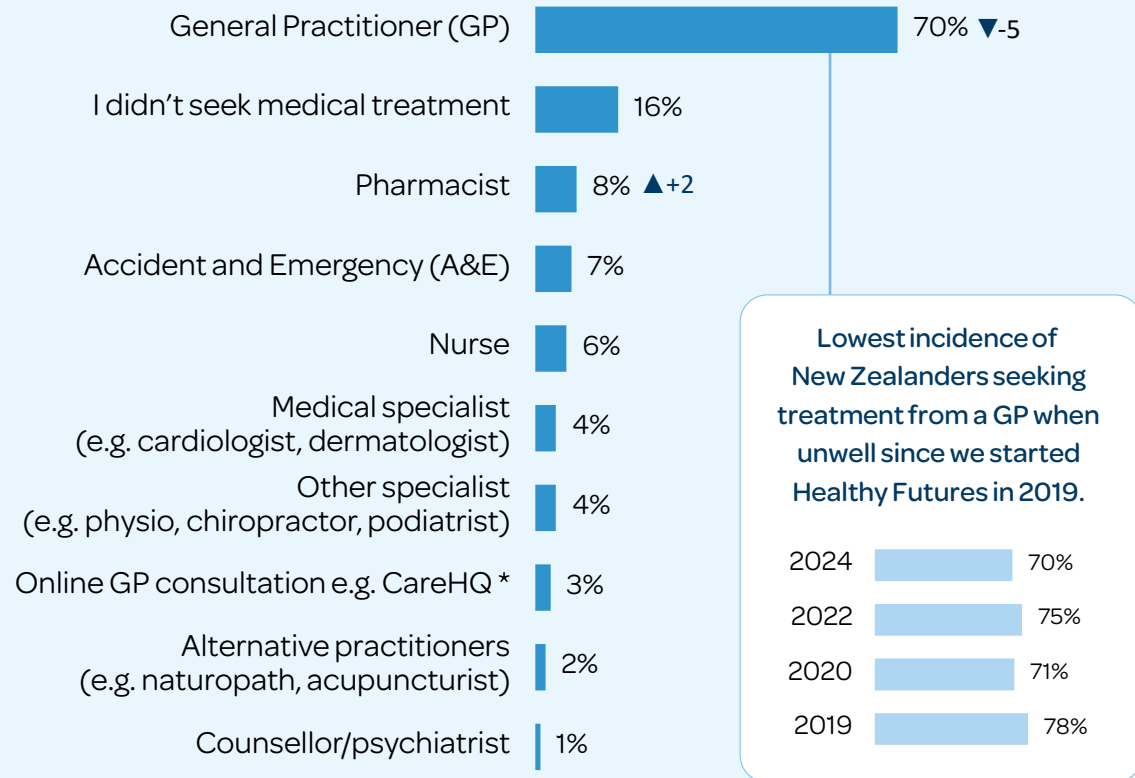
## By income level:



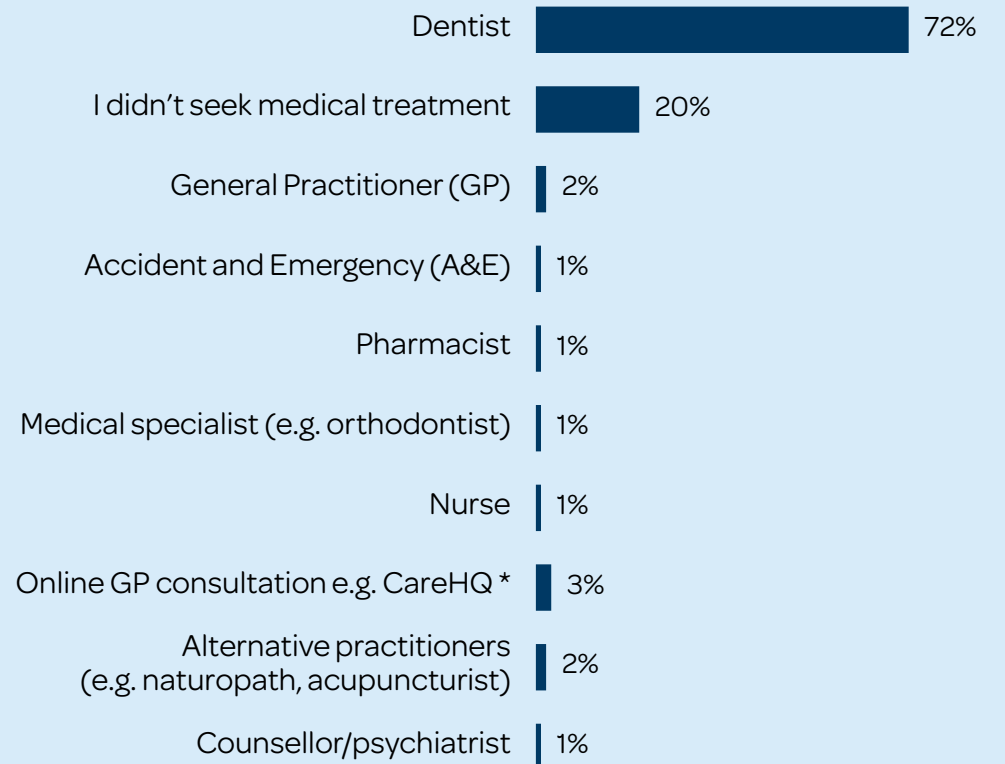
# Visiting the doctor and dentist

Most New Zealanders will seek timely treatment when feeling unwell or suffering from dental pain, although two in 10 of us are choosing not to seek treatment. There has also been a decline in the number of people seeking treatment from a GP from previous years.

## When feeling unwell I will see a...

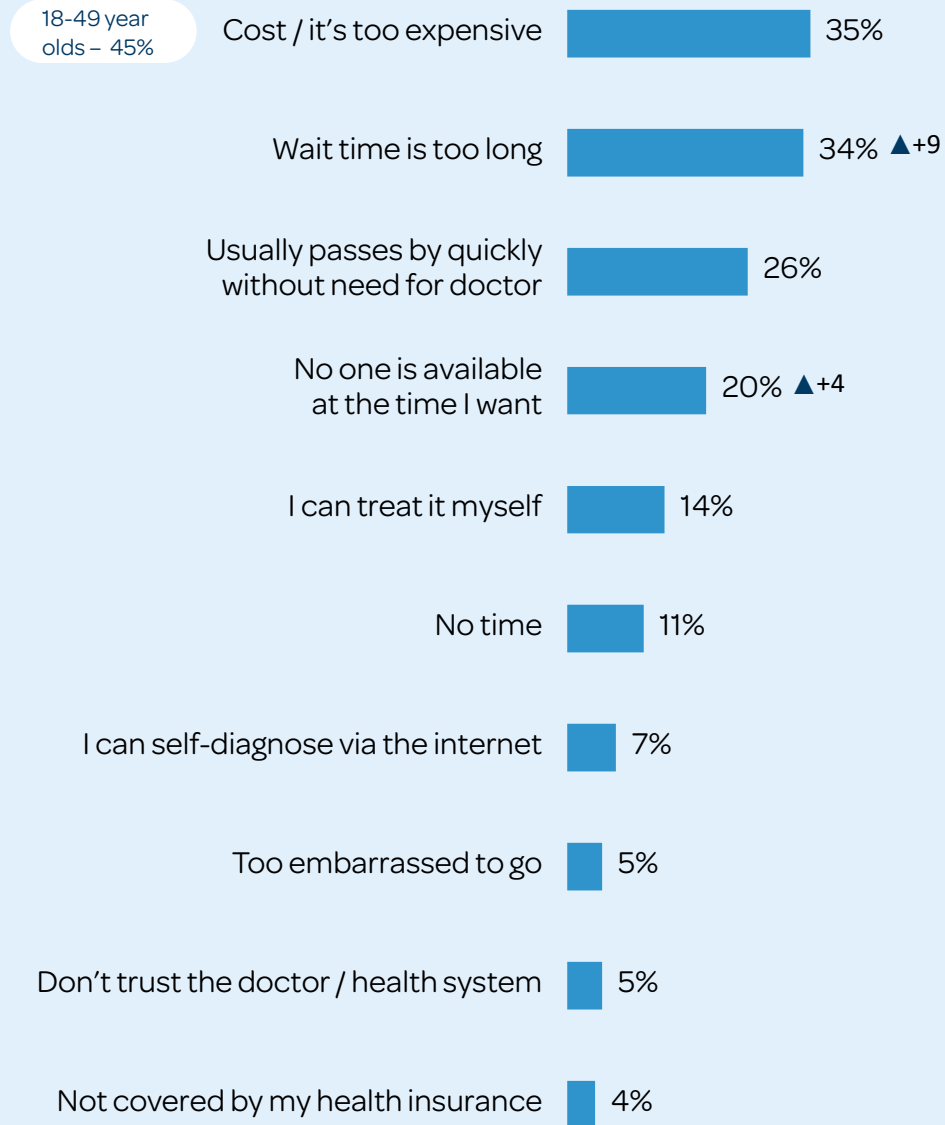


## When experiencing dental pain I will see a...



# Barriers to accessing healthcare

Cost remains the main barrier to seeking treatment, particularly for 18-49 year olds. Wait times and the unavailability of healthcare professionals are increasingly the reasons why people delay or don't seek treatment.

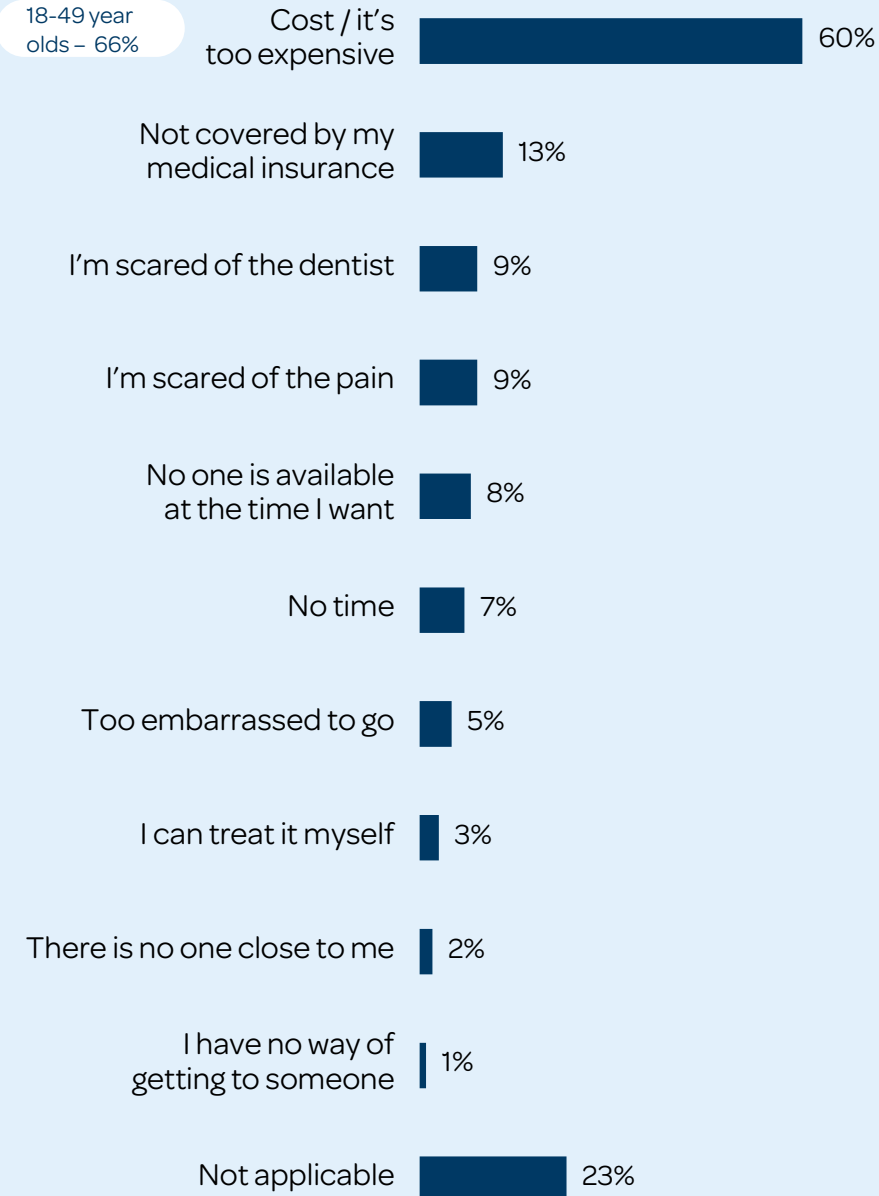


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# Barriers to accessing dental treatment

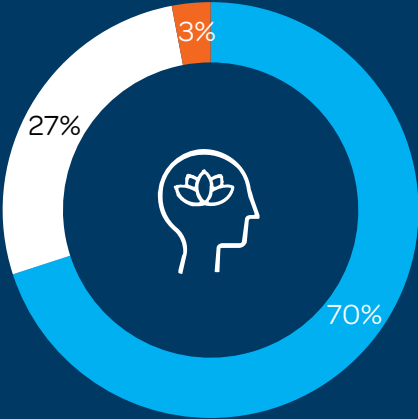
Cost remains the as main barrier for New Zealanders seeking dental treatment, particularly for those under the age of 50. Not being covered by medical insurance is the second most common barrier, closely followed by a fear of the dentist.



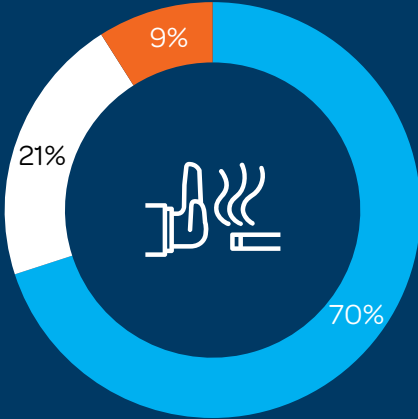
# What 'healthy' means to New Zealanders

Mental wellbeing, getting enough sleep and eating a balanced diet are all strongly associated with being healthy. While emotional wellbeing is still important for older people, this has dropped in prominence from 2022.

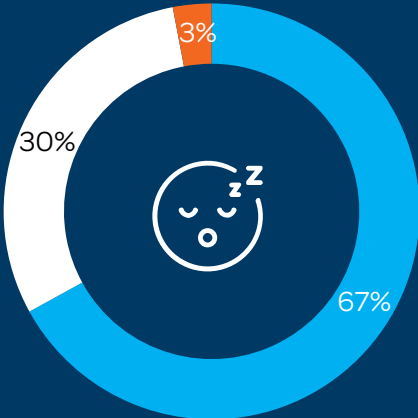
Strongly associate   Slightly associate   Don't associate



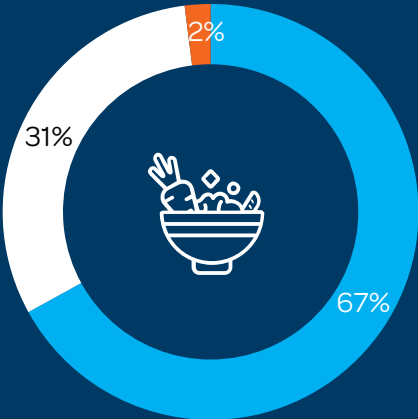
Mental wellbeing



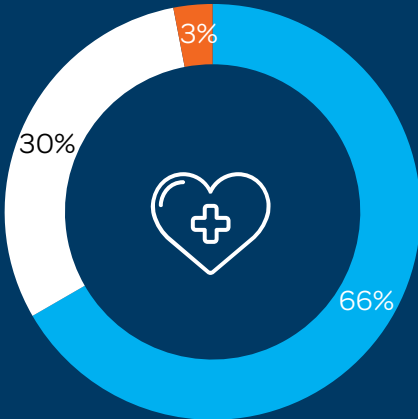
Avoiding smoking and tobacco



Getting enough sleep



Eating a balanced diet



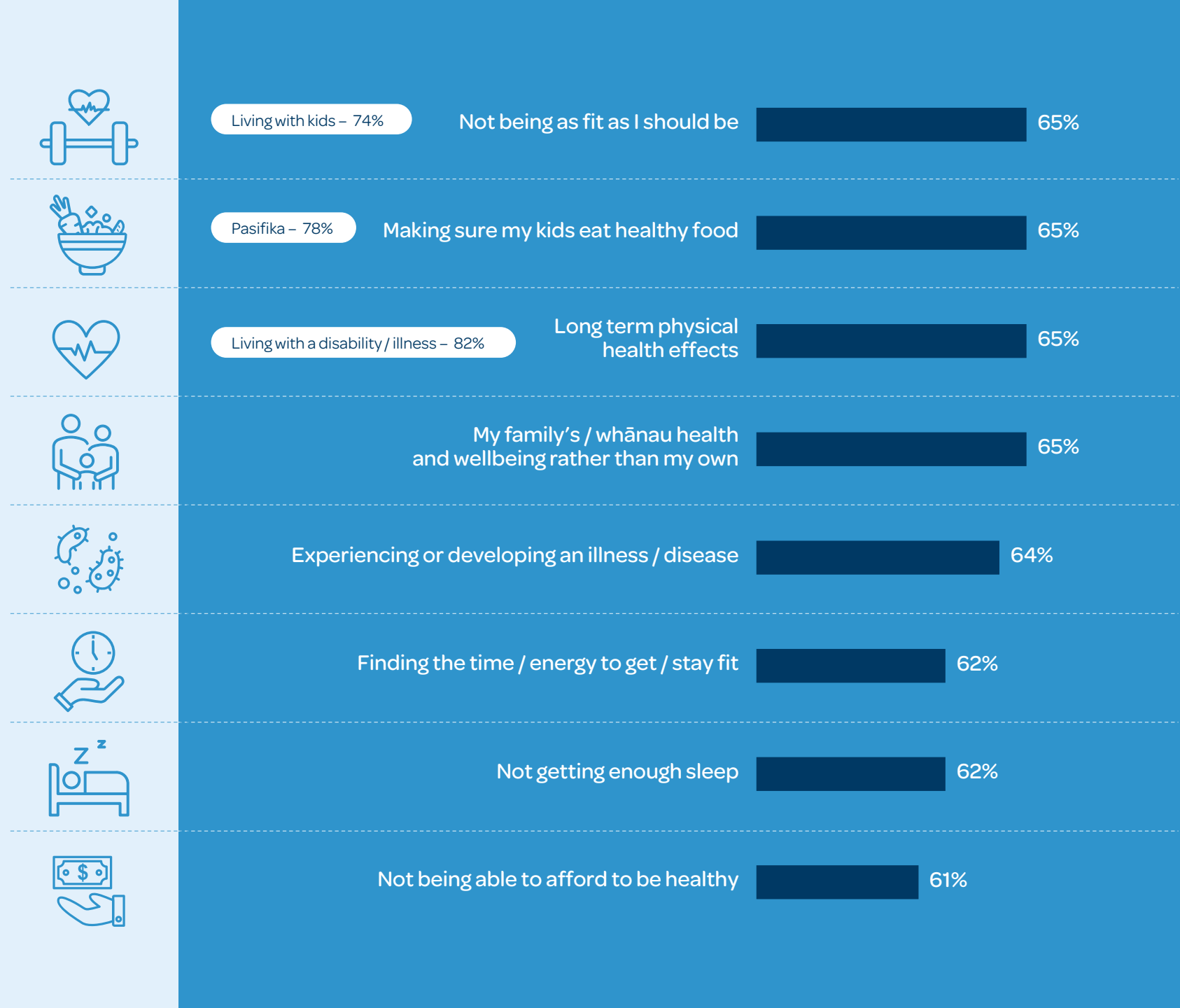
Emotional wellbeing



# Physical health concerns

The main concerns New Zealanders have about their physical health continue to be their level of fitness, particularly among parents with young kids, and the health and wellbeing of family / whānau.

Managing long-term physical health effects of Covid-19 is a concern for the majority of New Zealanders, and especially for people living with a disability / illness.

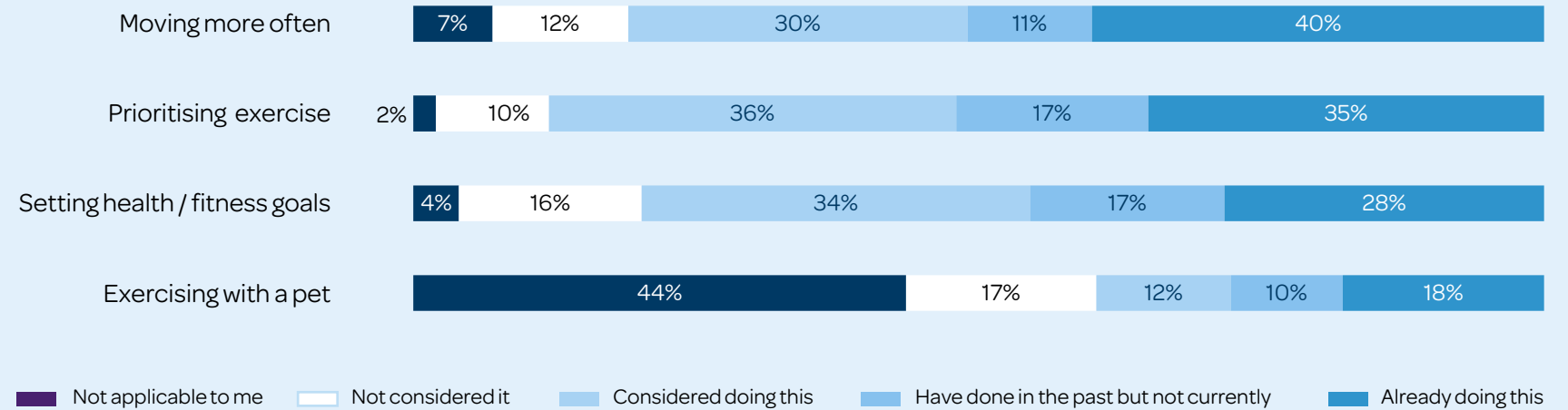


# Focus on fitness

The majority of New Zealanders feel they are not getting enough exercise, with the average person exercising for 30 minutes, three times a week. This is an ongoing trend from previous years.

New Zealanders prioritised exercise in the past six months and a third considered setting health / fitness goals. The number of people exercising with a pet has decreased, perhaps reflecting a drop in pet ownership since 2022.

## Considered doing in the last six months

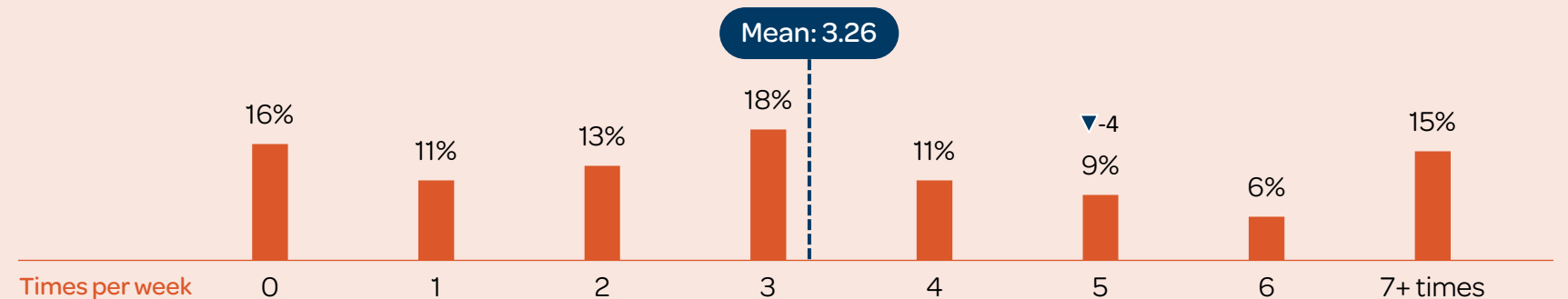


Getting enough exercise...

61% NO

39% YES

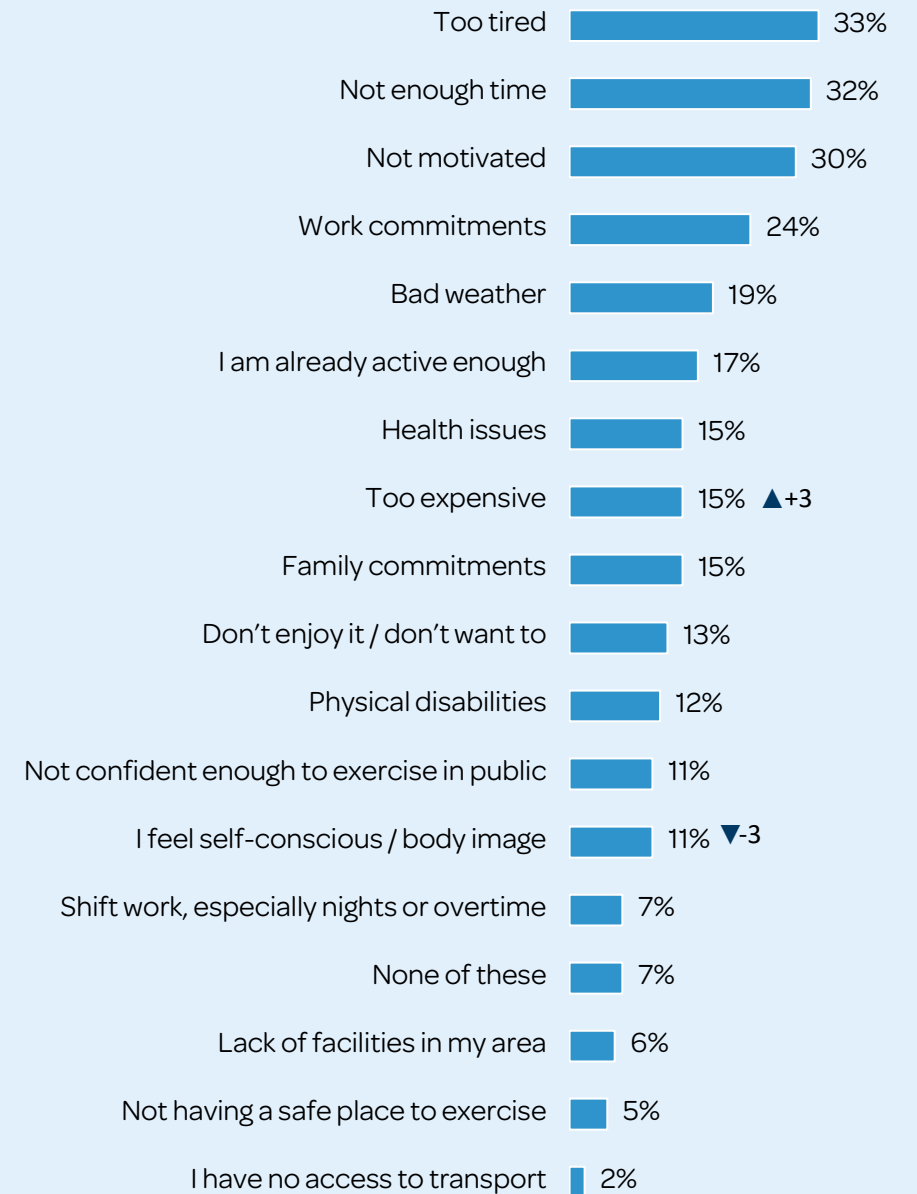
## Moderate-intensity exercise per week



▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2022

# Hurdles to keeping active

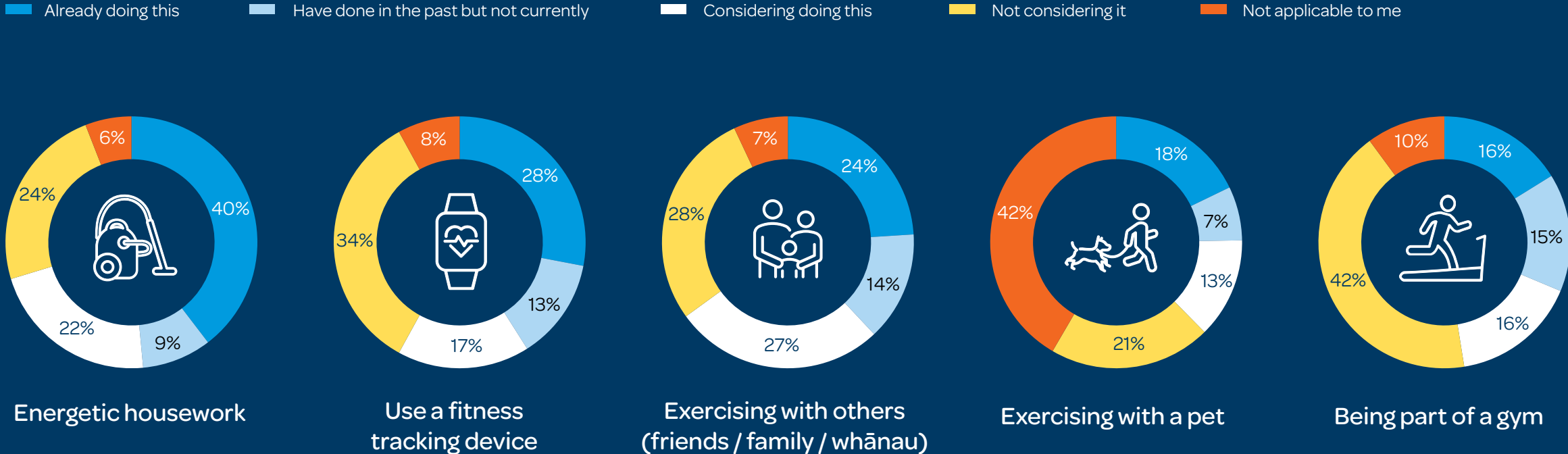
Tiredness and a lack of time and motivation continue to be the main barriers to exercising - particularly for those living with young children. Cost is increasingly a reason why people aren't exercising.



▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2022

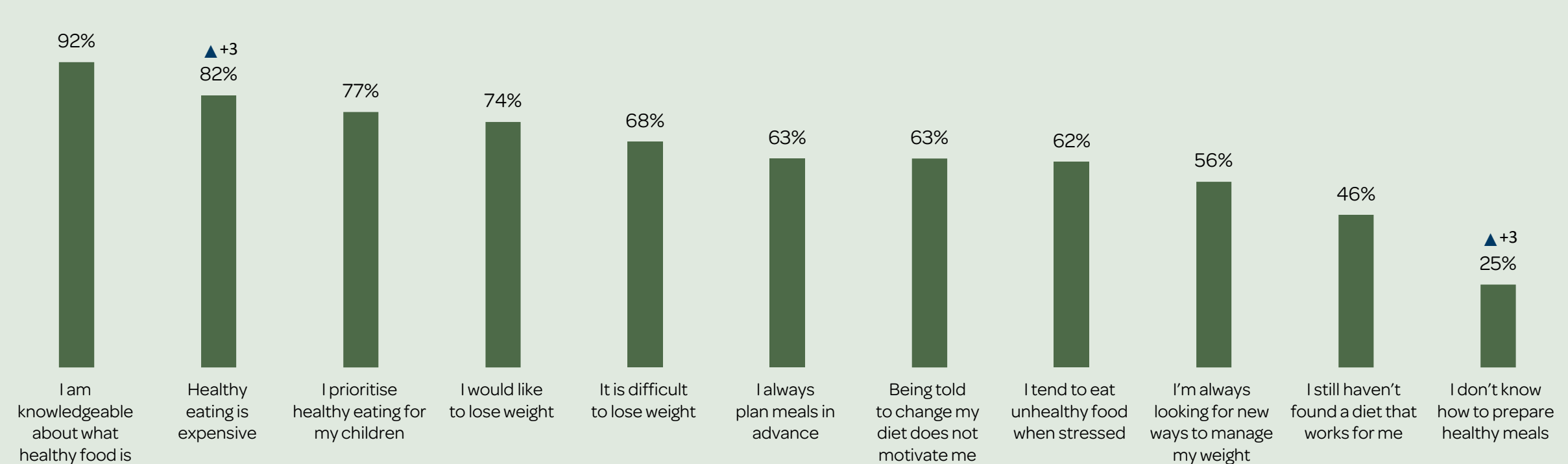
# Clean homes, the key to keeping active

While energetic housework is considered to be the most popular type of exercise, more New Zealanders are looking to join a gym this year, and nearly three in 10 are using a fitness tracker to monitor exercise.



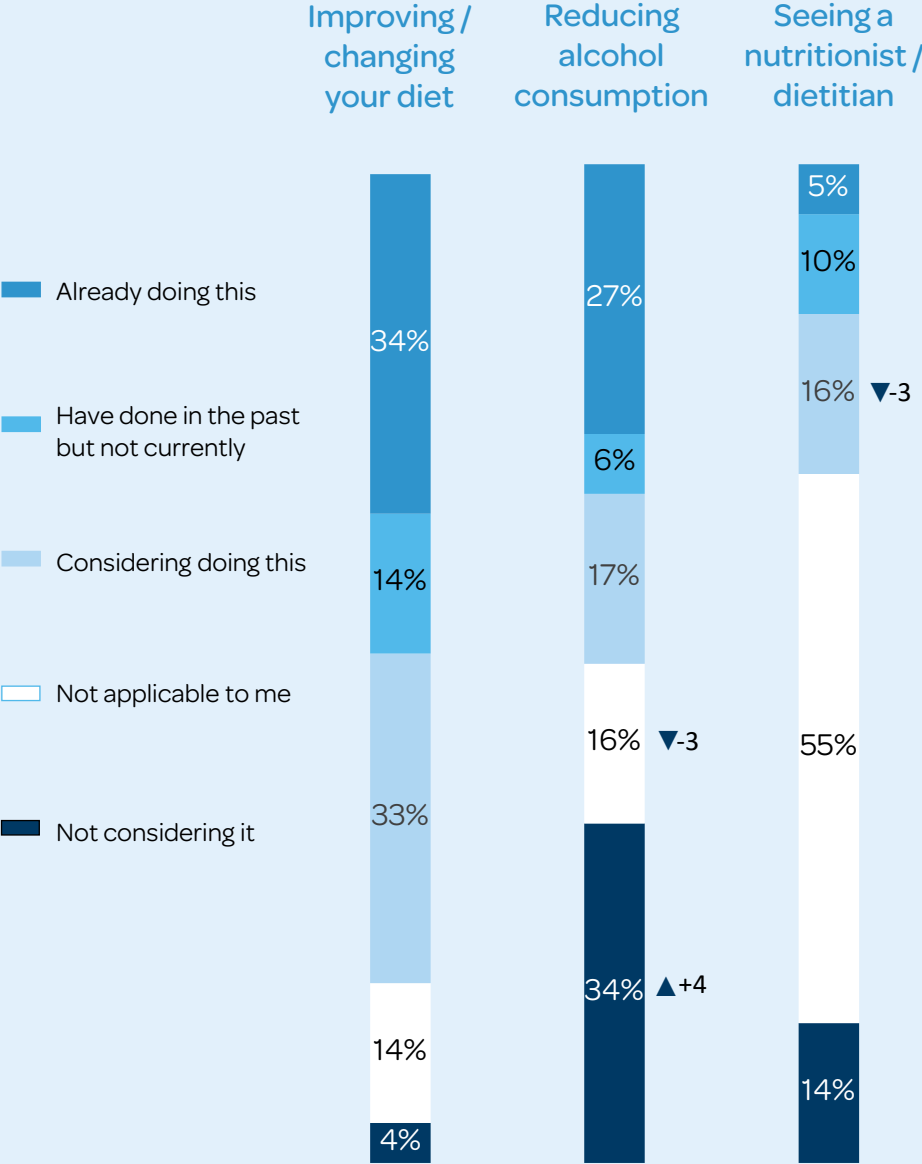
# How we view food

New Zealanders believe they are knowledgeable when it comes to healthy food but consider healthy eating to be expensive. A growing number of younger people don't know how to prepare healthy meals. These attitudes reflect the high cost of groceries and point to a need for more education on healthy food preparation.



# Changes in approaches to diet

Diet is top of mind for many. One third of New Zealanders are already taking steps to improve or change their diet. Behaviours around seeing a nutritionist remain largely unchanged over the past two years, but more people in the Pasifika community are likely to consider seeing a nutritionist.



▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2022



# Choosing to abstain from alcohol

More New Zealanders feel that no alcohol is the way to go with four in 10 choosing not to consume any alcohol.

The average of four standard drinks per week is similar to 2022 and is still below MoH guidelines (up to 10 standard drinks for women and 15 for men).

## Average drinks per week



4.12

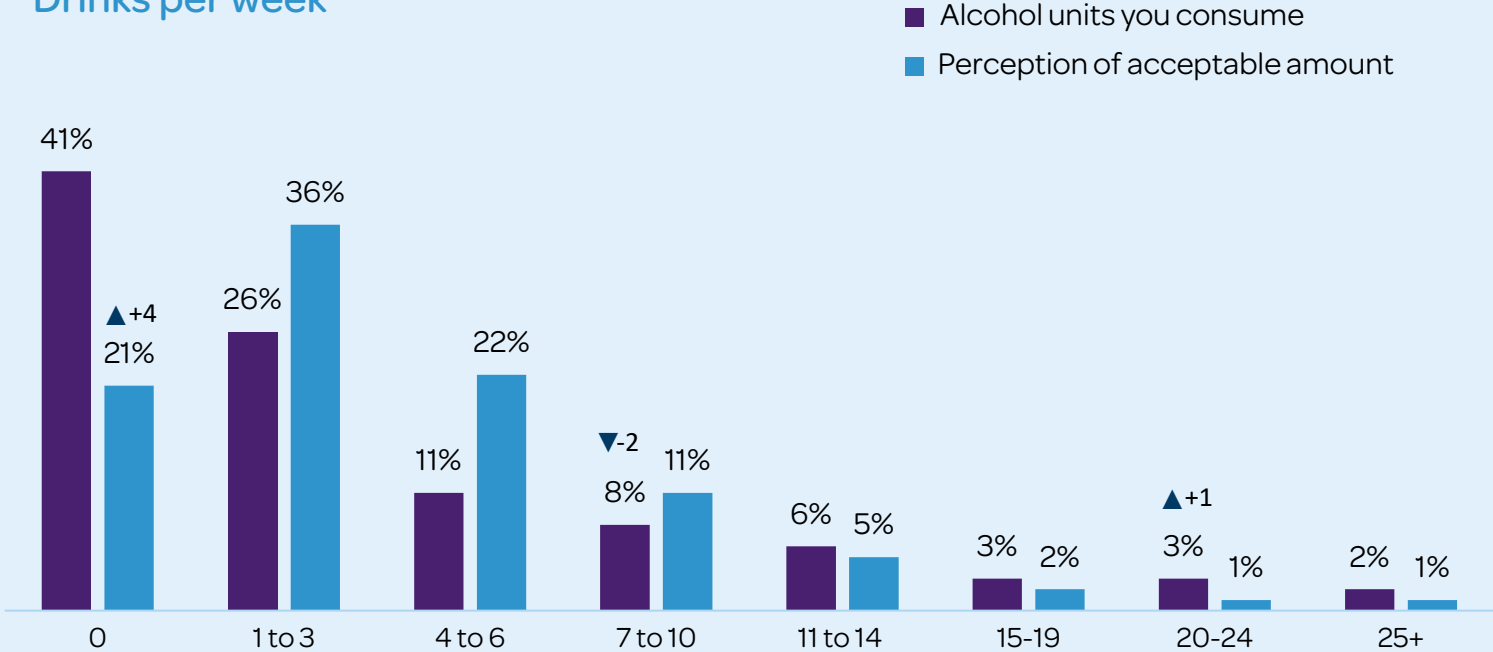
Alcohol units you consume

4.23

Alcohol units you think is acceptable to consume



## Drinks per week



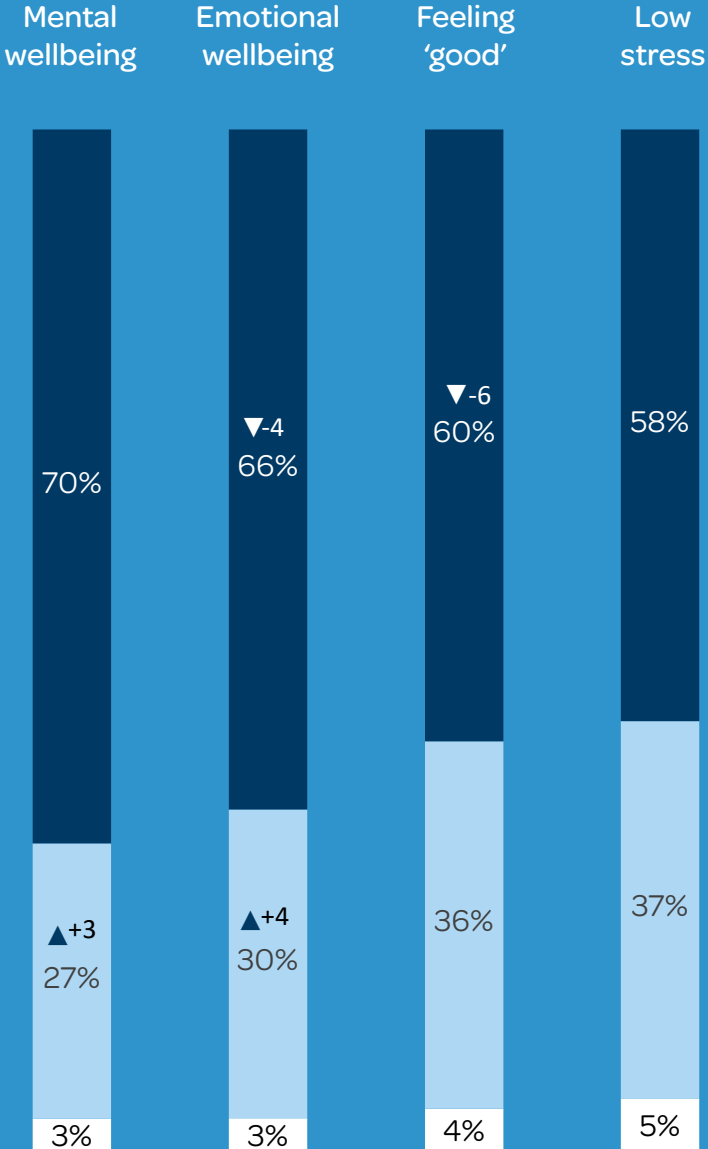
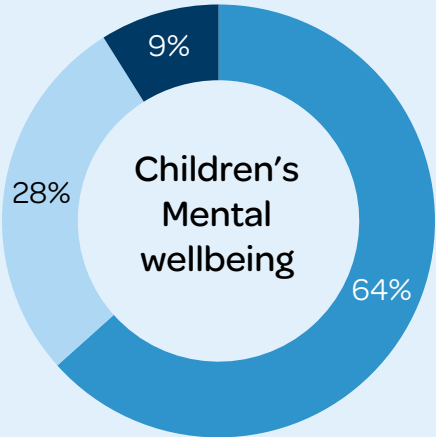
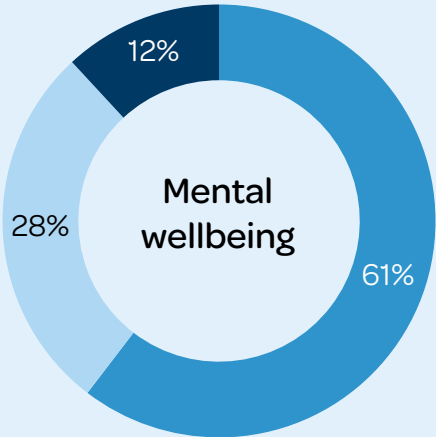
▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2022

# How mental and emotional wellbeing links to overall health

Although most New Zealanders strongly associate good mental and emotional wellbeing with being healthy, this sentiment has decreased over the past two years. Males, SINKS / DINKS and those living in Auckland are all less likely to strongly associate mental health with being healthy.

The vast majority of New Zealanders are happy or content with their children’s mental wellbeing.

Happy    Content    Unhappy

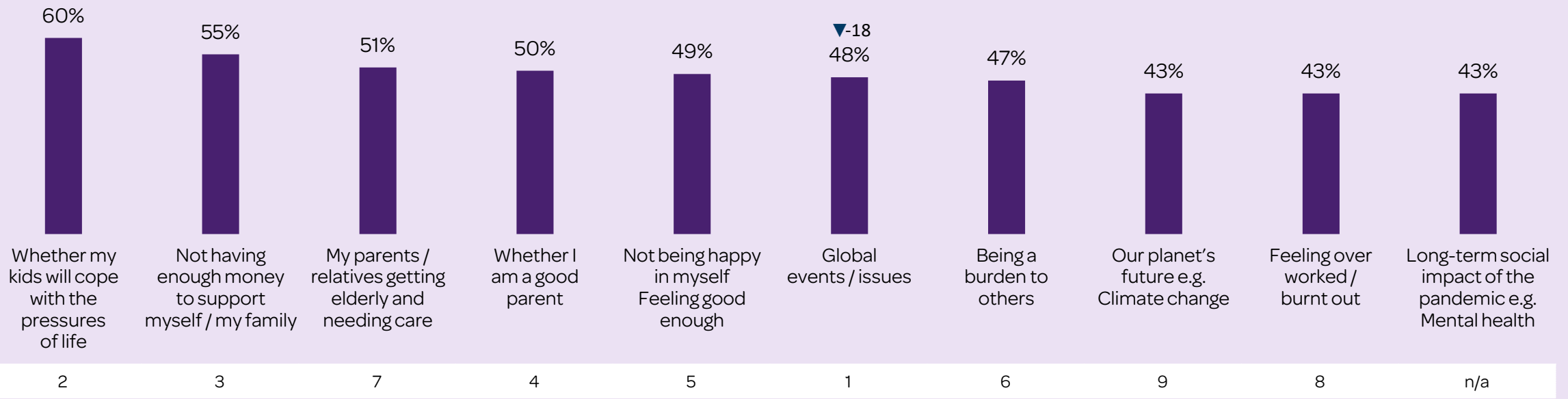




# Emotional wellbeing concerns

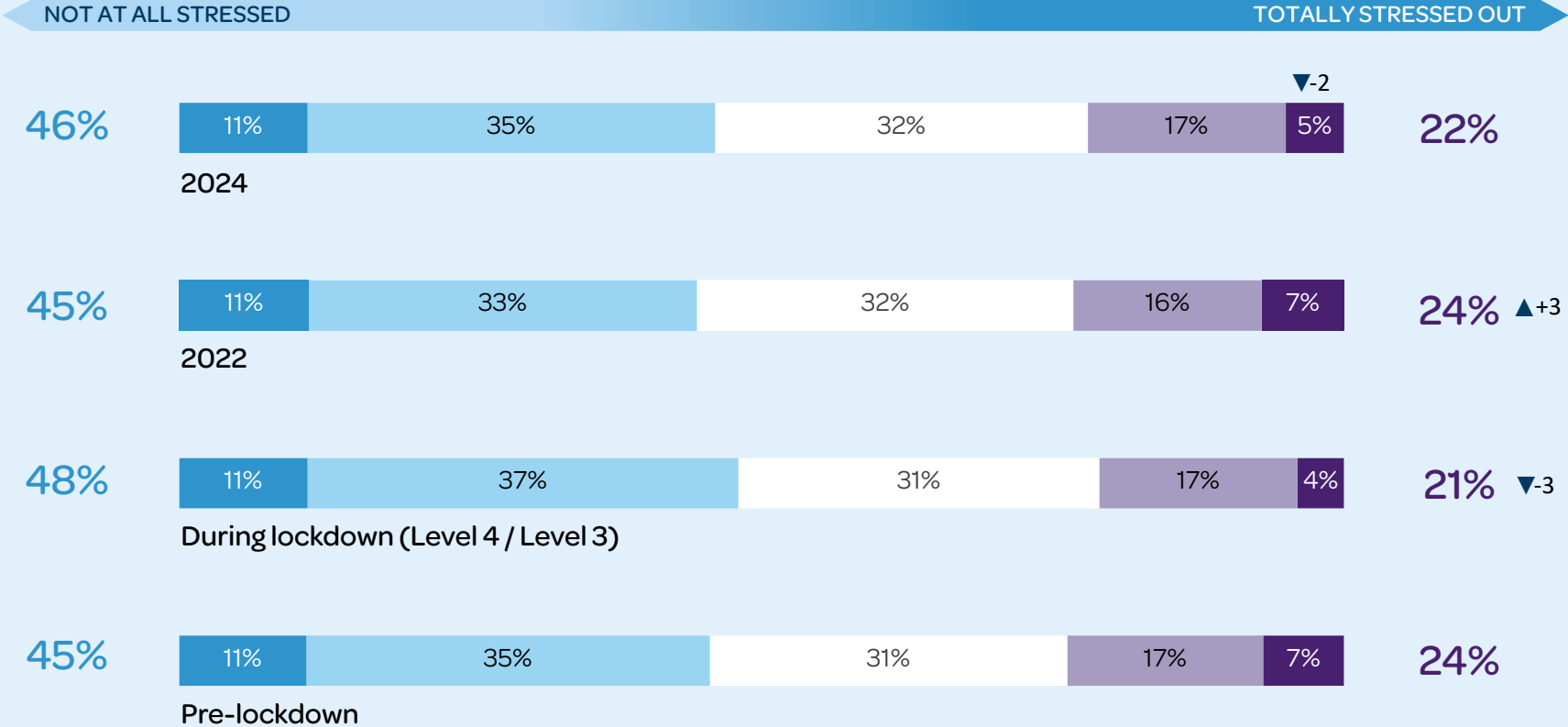
The most prevalent emotional wellbeing concerns for New Zealanders are whether their children will cope with the pressures of life, followed by not having enough money and parents / relatives needing care (moving from seventh to third place).

Concerns about world events and vaccination status dramatically decreased from 2022, potentially pointing to a normalised view of Covid-19 amongst New Zealanders.



# Stress levels

The rate at which people have felt stressed this year is slightly lower than in previous years, including the pre-lockdown period. This has been influenced by a reduction in the number of people who feel 'totally stressed', however certain groups are more stressed, including people living with disabilities and 18-49 year olds.



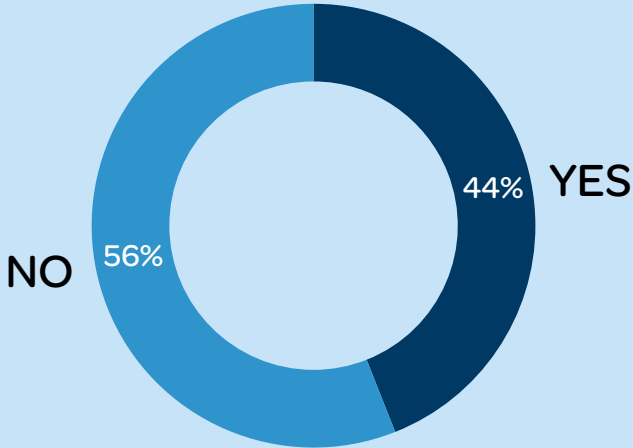
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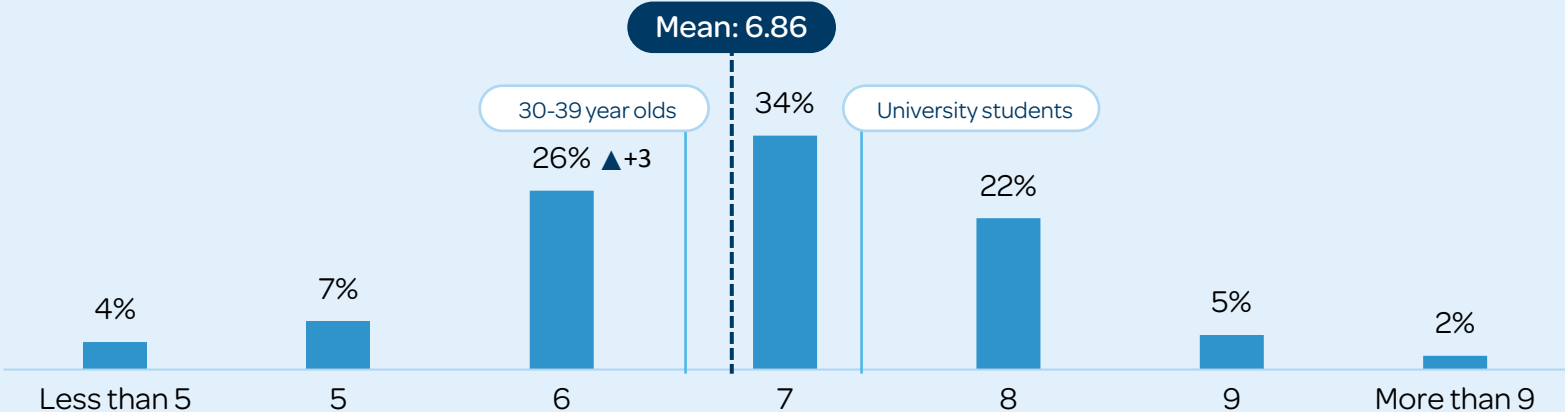
# Precious sleep

More than half of New Zealanders still feel they're not getting enough sleep, at an average of 6.86 hours per night, a slight decrease from 6.94 hours two years ago. People living with kids, and those living with a disability are more sleep deprived than others.

## Get enough sleep

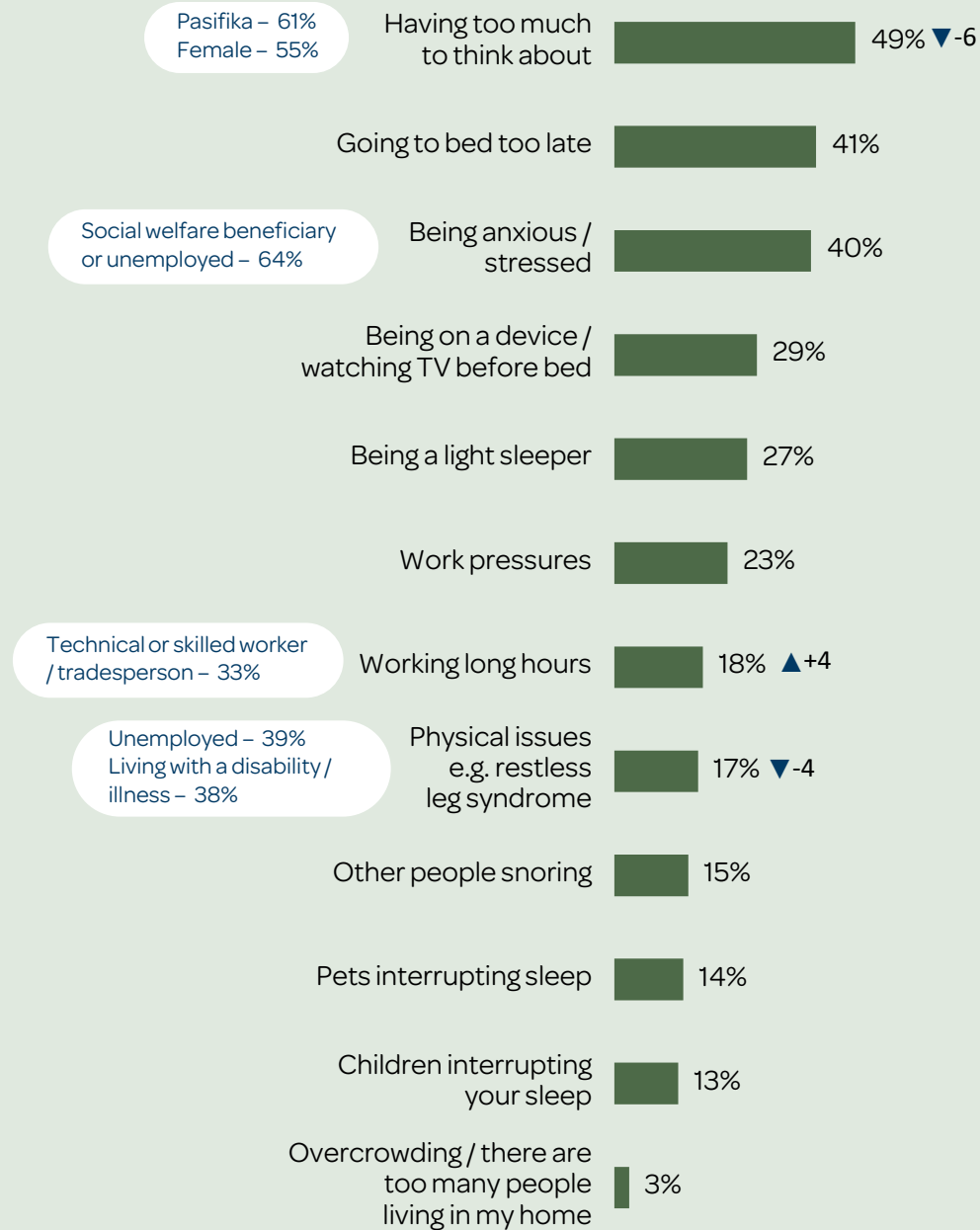


## Number of hours of sleep per night



# Chasing sleep

A high mental load, going to bed late and feeling anxious or stressed are among the main reasons New Zealanders are not getting enough sleep. More people are losing sleep from working longer hours than two years ago, particularly for technical or skilled workers / tradespeople.

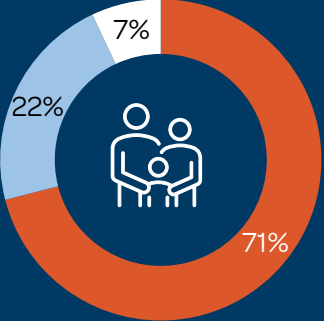


# Connecting with others

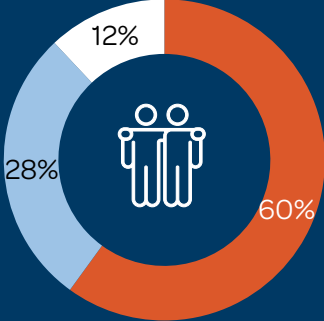
The majority of New Zealanders continue to be happy with their family life, social life / friendships and romantic relationships.

## Satisfaction and personal relationships

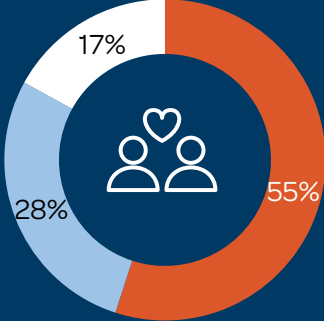
Happy Content Unhappy



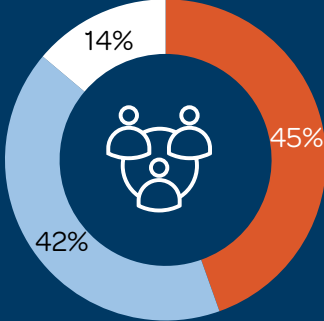
Family life



Social life / friendships



Romantic relationships



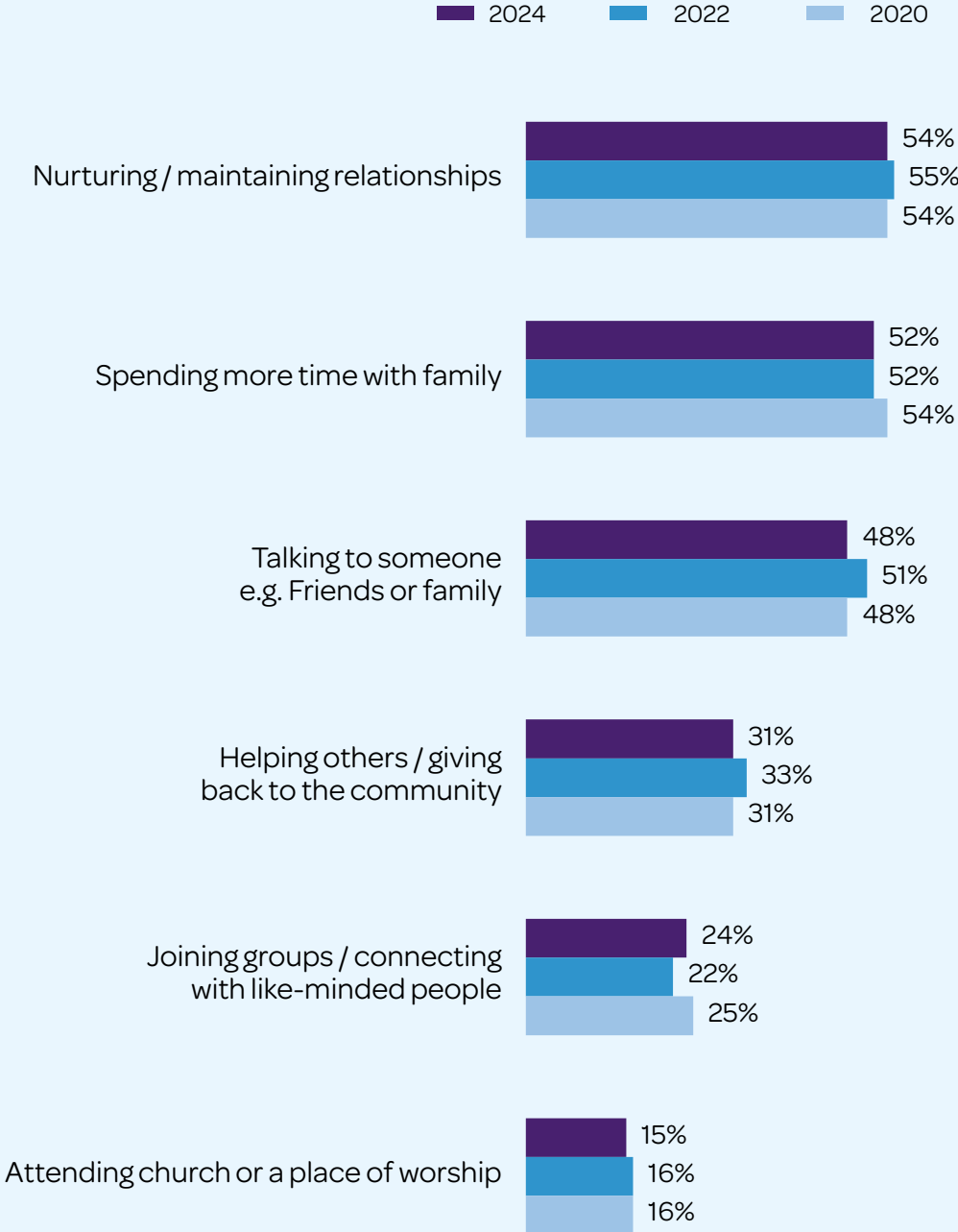
Connectedness in your community



# Connectedness is the key to happiness

As in previous years, New Zealanders are prioritising nurturing and maintaining their relationships to look after their emotional wellbeing – this is particularly true for women and older people. Spending more time with family / whānau continues to be another important factor for maintaining emotional wellbeing for many.

New Zealanders are slightly less likely to attend a church or place of worship than in previous years.

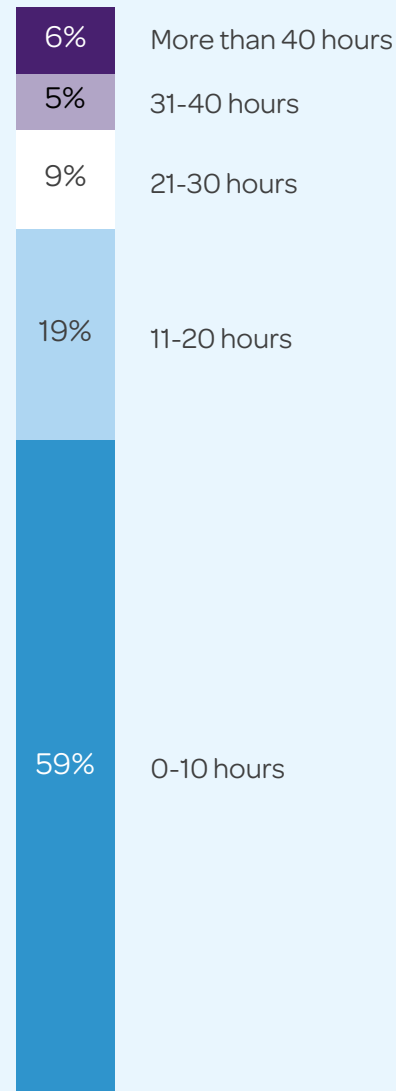


# Quality time with whānau

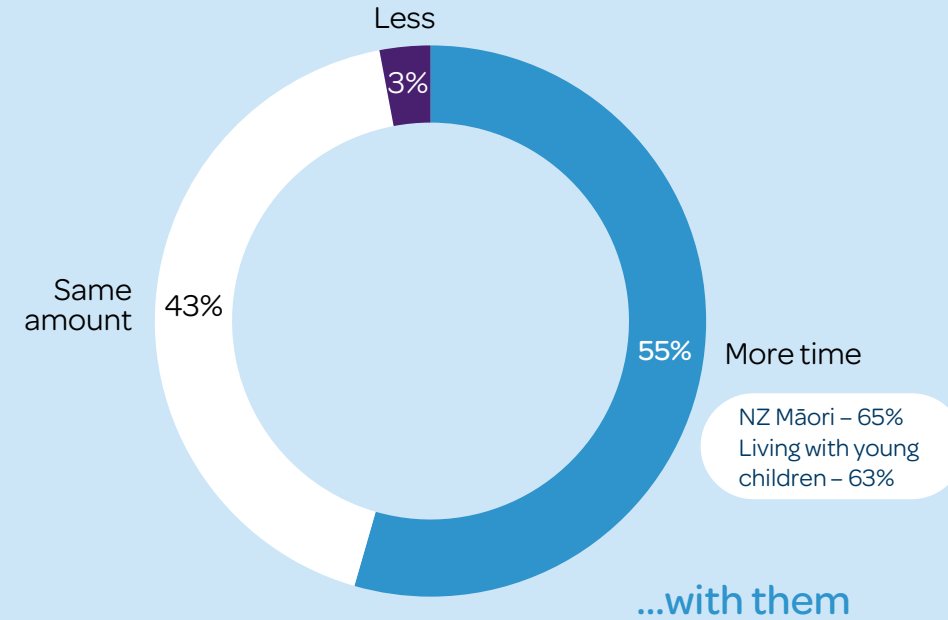
The majority of parents spend fewer than 11 hours of quality time per week with their children. This has not changed significantly since 2020.

Half of parents want to spend more time with their children, and this figure is even higher for Māori parents and those living with young children.

## Quality time with children per week



## Would like to spend...



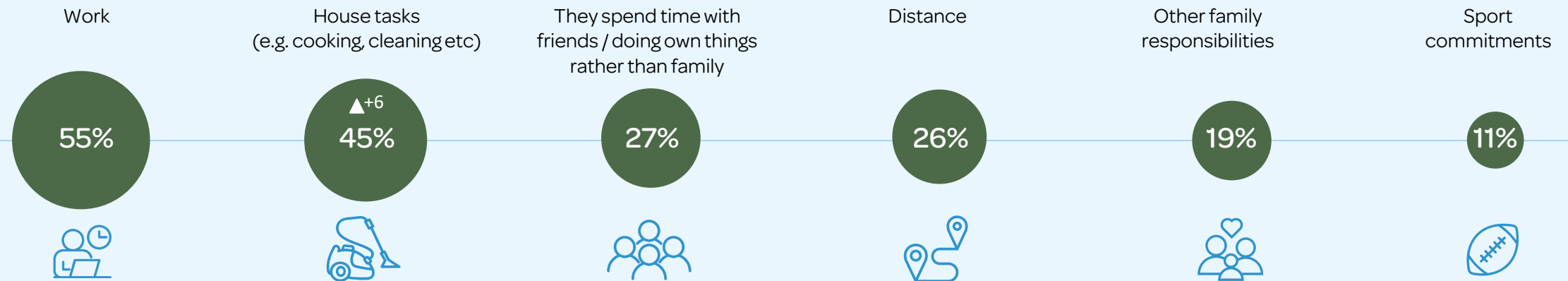
# Barriers to spending more time with whānau

Work continues to be the number one barrier, especially for those living with young children and 18-49 year olds. There has been an increase in the number of parents who believe household tasks are getting in the way of spending quality time with their children.

It is more likely for 50+ year olds to spend time with friends or doing things on their own rather than with family.



## What gets in the way of you spending more time with them?





# Living with a long-term condition

New Zealanders living with a long-term condition are more likely to be unhappy across the three health and wellbeing pillars - physical, emotional and social.

This group believes their health challenges hinder them from improving their wellbeing.



More likely to seek preventative treatment



More unhappy with their weight, appearance and health



Prioritising sleep is more of a priority but anxiety and stress hinder this



Feel more stressed than the general population



Less likely to take holidays every year



Unhappy with mental wellbeing and especially concerned about becoming a burden on others



# Work life balance

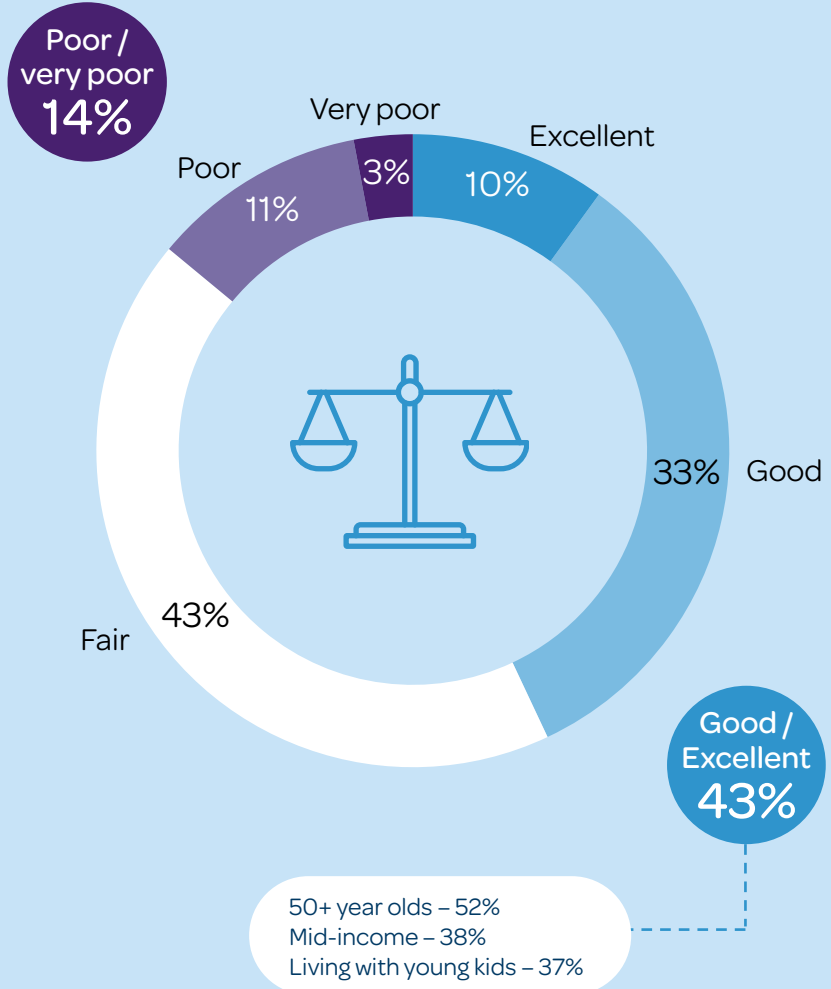
Work life balance is a challenge for many employed New Zealanders. Less than half describe their current work life balance positively - especially so for mid-income earners and people with young children.

Unsurprisingly, 88% of New Zealanders believe finding the right balance is important, although this has slightly decreased from 2022.



**88%**  
say work life balance is important

## Work life balance satisfaction



# Achieving the right balance

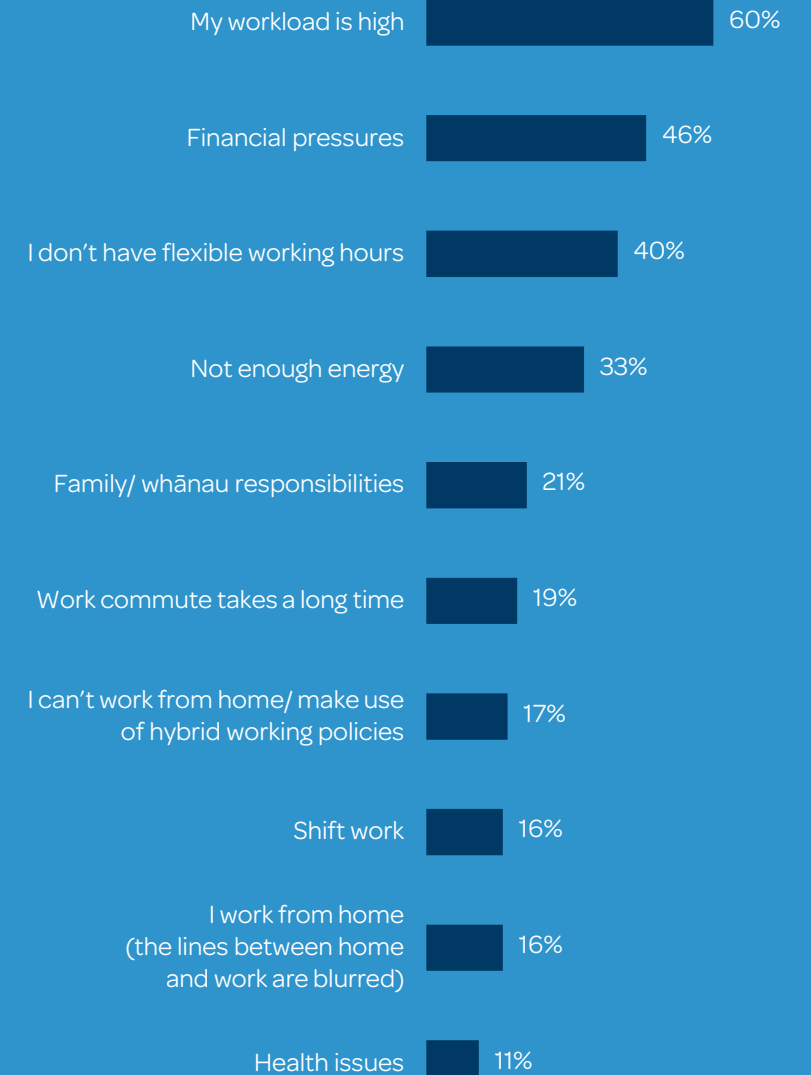
Flexible working hours and switching off from work are important to maintaining a positive work life balance, however high workloads and financial pressures impact this.

Fewer people are sticking to their agreed work hours than two years ago, potentially reflecting increasing work pressures for many employed New Zealanders.

## Good work / life balance...



## Bad work / life balance...



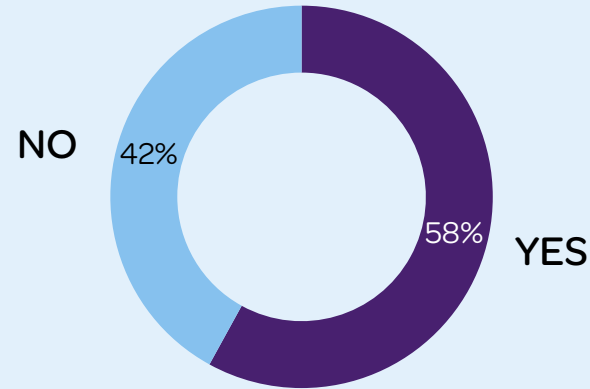
▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2022

# Pets are part of the family

The majority of New Zealanders continue to own a pet, however, there has been a slight decline in pet ownership since 2022 when Covid-19 restrictions were in place. Cats and dogs continue to be the most popular pet. NZ Māori and 18-29 year olds are the groups most likely to have a pet.

Pets are seen as family members and great companions, while helping their owners to be more active and relieve stress levels.

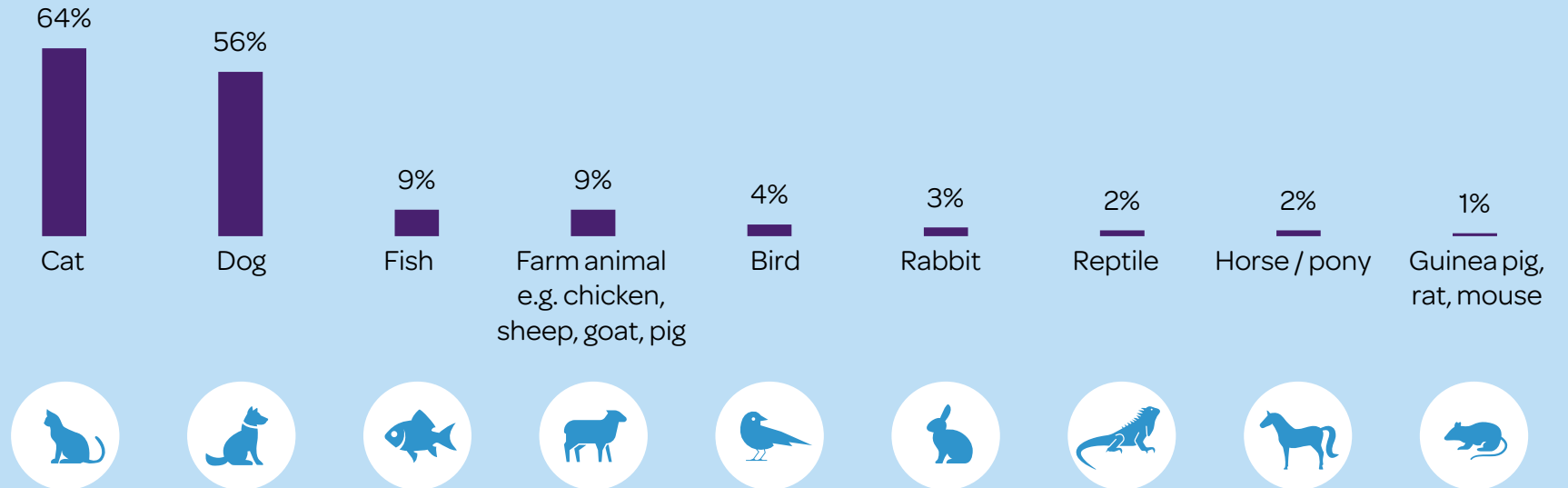
## Own a pet



## Agree with the following statements...



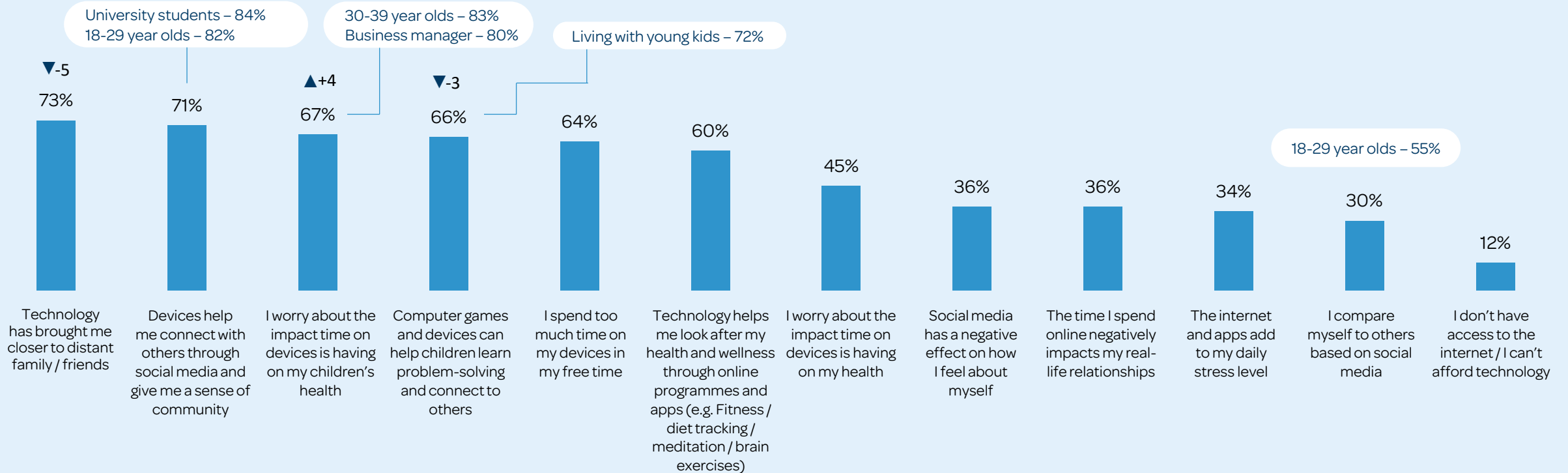
## Type of pet



# Impact of technology on health and wellbeing

There is growing concern among New Zealanders about the impact time on devices has on their children’s health, particularly for those aged 30-39. Fewer people believe computer games and devices can help children to learn problem-solving and to build connections with others.

Technology can also have a positive impact. It helps us to connect with others through social media and provides a sense of community, particularly for university students and 18-29 year olds.



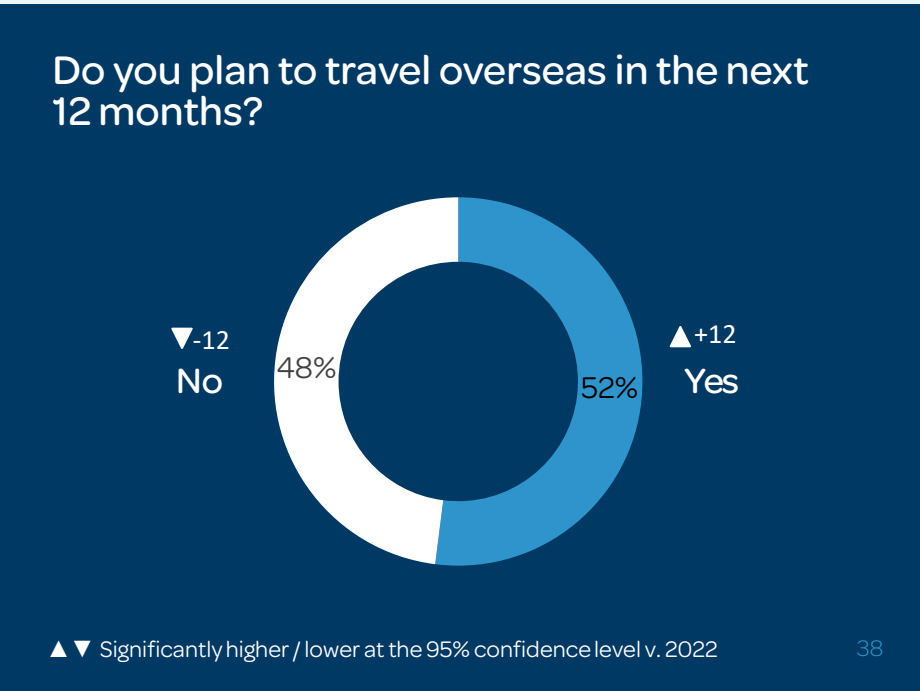
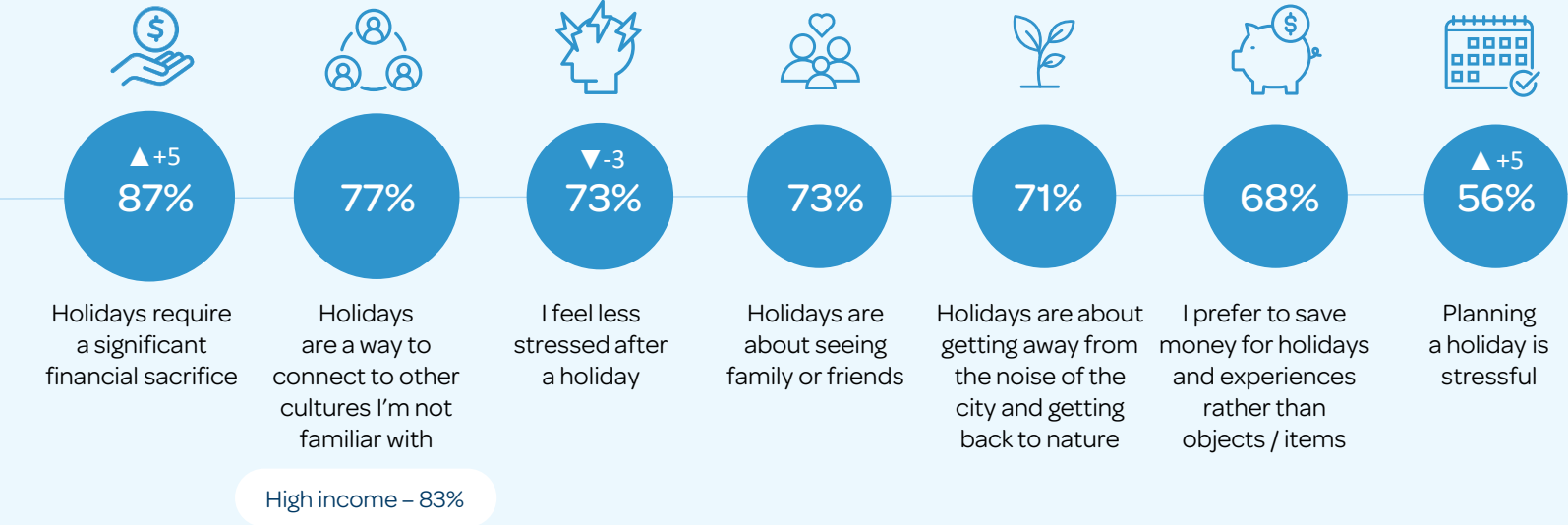
# Going on holiday

Although holidays require a significant financial sacrifice for more New Zealanders, the majority of us are planning to travel overseas in the next year. Holidays are widely seen as a way to connect to other cultures and provide an opportunity to see friends and family.

Holidays can also be stressful. There has been an increase in the number of people who feel less stressed after a holiday and more people find planning a holiday stressful. This could be linked to the financial pressures facing New Zealanders today.

Covid-19 is no longer a worry for most New Zealanders when travelling overseas, mirroring the removal of international travel requirements and restrictions.

## Agreement with the following statements



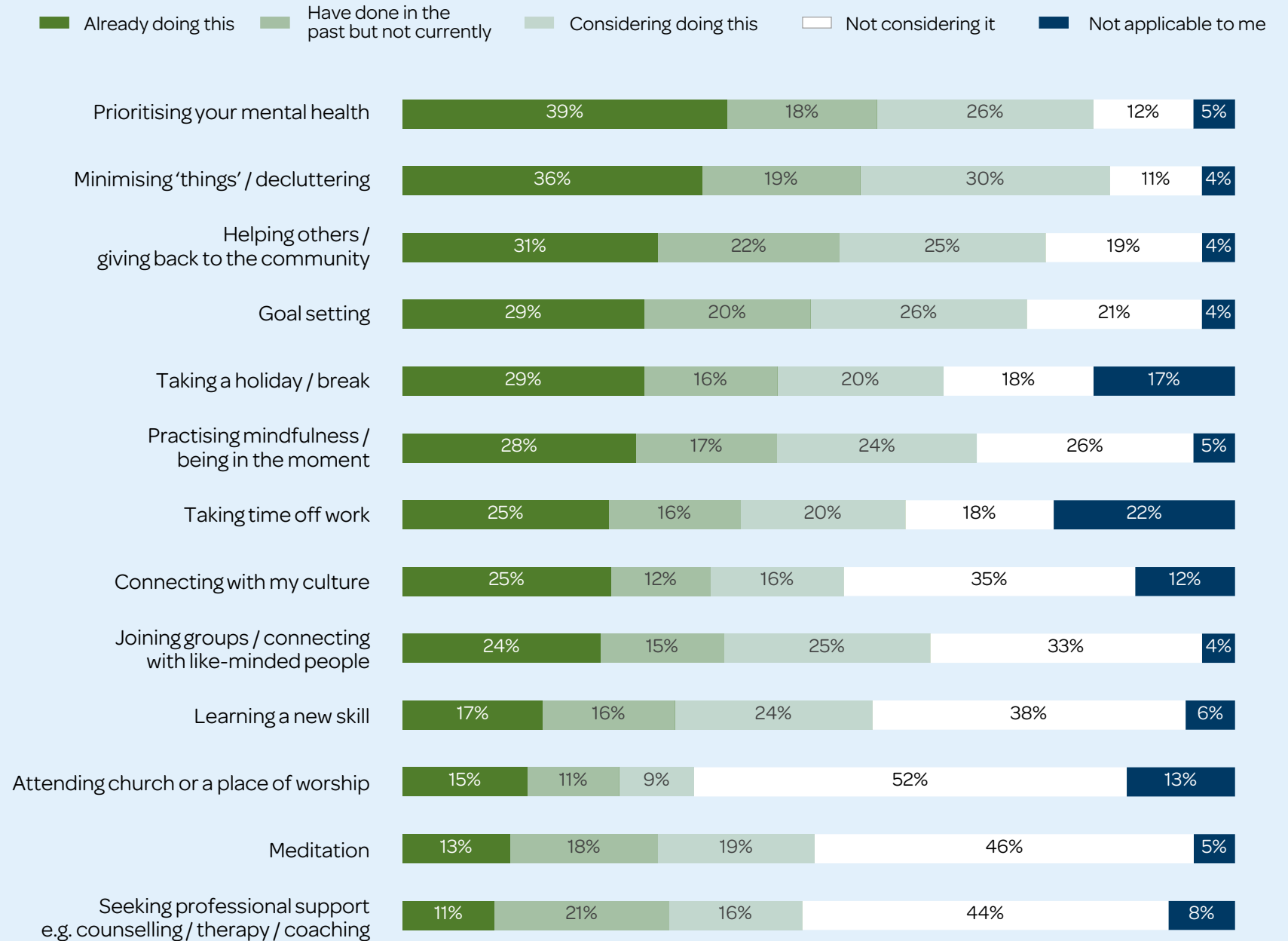
# Building a healthy future

New Zealanders look after their emotional health and wellbeing by using a mix of physical and social activities. In the past six months, New Zealanders have been keeping their brain stimulated, spending time outdoors (with a growing number considering this), nurturing relationships and spending time with family.



# Building a healthy future (continued)

Prioritising mental health, decluttering and helping others / giving back to the community are popular ways New Zealanders look after their emotional health and wellbeing in an effort to build a healthier future.





# Methodology

Quantitative research has given us an in-depth view of New Zealanders' health, lifestyle, activity levels and wellbeing, since 2019. This is the fifth wave of our Healthy Futures survey. Fieldwork was conducted in March 2024.

**Wave 1 – fieldwork:**  
4 October to 30 October 2019 (Spring) n=1,000

**Wave 2 – fieldwork:**  
2 March to 15 March 2020 (Autumn) n=1,007

**Wave 3 – fieldwork:**  
22 to 28 April 2020  
(Covid-19 lockdown 15 min dip) n=1,000

**Wave 4 – fieldwork:**  
4 to 26 March 2022 n=2,000

**Wave 5 – fieldwork:**  
5 to 26 March 2024 n=2,000

**Pre-lockdown**  
Combined together  
to compare against  
lockdown period

**During lockdown**  
Level 4 and Level 3

**During traffic light system**

**No lockdown / restrictions**



...a total of **7,007** people from across New Zealand have taken part in the Healthy Futures study since 2019



For more information about the  
Southern Cross Healthy Futures  
Report 2024 visit:

[Healthyfutures.co.nz](https://Healthyfutures.co.nz)

