

# Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report 2022

Shining a light on New Zealand's health and wellbeing



# What New Zealanders' health and wellbeing looks like in 2022

New Zealanders have a unique and enviable lifestyle, where it's possible to enjoy spectacular outdoor scenery, access great education, safely raise a family and easily start a business. It's a country where people can thrive and prosper.

Having optimum health and wellbeing enables people to live this life and, for the most part, New Zealanders are on the same page about what this looks like. However, there is no one version of health and wellbeing and it can manifest differently depending on someone's life stage and outlook.

Southern Cross believes New Zealanders should have ongoing access to health and wellbeing options for themselves and their families. We're proud to give care and attention to over a million New Zealanders and are committed to advancing their health and wellbeing.

We launched the inaugural Southern Cross Healthy Futures Report in 2020, in conjunction with our research partner Kantar (formerly Colmar Brunton), with the intention of exploring New Zealanders' attitudes and behaviours in relation to their health and wellbeing.

The timing of this research enabled us to capture an extraordinary glimpse into New Zealand's psyche before the outbreak of the pandemic and then during the nation's first Covid-19 lockdown.

Two years on, the world is still experiencing ongoing health impacts of the virus, and is facing far-reaching economic uncertainty. New Zealand is not immune to these challenges. This is reflected in three of the five biggest issues concerning New Zealanders; cost of living (1), the economic impact of Covid-19 (2) and affordable housing (5).

Southern Cross, in conjunction with Kantar, has now spoken to more than 5,000 New Zealanders to gain valuable insights to inform the publication of this second biennial report.

Offering a unique opportunity to see the world through the eyes of a diverse New Zealand, we hope it will give people the tools and knowledge to actively support them in their health and wellness journey and empower them to live their lives to the full.



# How New Zealanders think about their health and wellbeing

When Southern Cross set out to uncover perceptions about health and wellbeing, New Zealanders said they see it as being interconnected in three ways – **physical, emotional and social**.

## Health & wellbeing in New Zealand



### Physical health and wellbeing

is about being visibly healthy and what they are doing with their body to achieve this.



### Emotional health and wellbeing

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



### Social health and wellbeing

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

Other aspects 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.



Financial



Spiritual



Environmental



Academic

# 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 health and wellbeing

New Zealanders see emotional 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 (their social status). It's a measure of what they believe has been given back to them based on what they have put out into the world.

# The different 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 influences on New Zealanders' health and wellbeing



## Global events

Global events and issues have become the number one emotional wellbeing issue for New Zealanders, showing a significant increase since the outbreak of Covid-19.

This is unsurprising given how New Zealand is affected by interconnected events around the world. These include ongoing health and economic impacts of the pandemic, the global impact of the Ukraine invasion leading to high oil and energy prices, worldwide delays in shipping goods and raw materials, increasing rates of inflation and the rising cost of living.



## Economic worries

The cost of living and economic impact of Covid-19 are the two biggest concerns overall for New Zealanders. Other economic worries relate to basic needs such as affordable housing and an increase in sentiment that healthy eating is expensive. This has led to a greater move towards planning meals in advance to support tighter budgets.

A third of New Zealanders continue to be unhappy with their financial situation. This is particularly true for people aged between 30 and 49 years of age, those with younger children in the household, Māori and Pacific Islander respondents, those living with an illness or disability and those on low incomes.

# The biggest influences on New Zealanders' health and wellbeing



## Trusted and credible health advice

There has been a significant drop in the number of people seeking general health and wellbeing advice from friends / whānau and the internet including online articles and social media. This is possibly as a result of the anti-science rhetoric which has increased since the outbreak of Covid-19. When people feel physically unwell, they are now more likely to seek information and advice from health professionals such as a GP or pharmacist.

New Zealanders are now more likely to go and see a doctor immediately or within two days of being unwell. This is likely the result of increased attention to health through monitoring of Covid-19 symptoms, as well as lowered immunity amid the resurgence of other infectious diseases. Now that lockdown restrictions have loosened and international borders have opened up, incidence rates of flu, colds, measles and RSV are increasing.

Cost remains the biggest barrier to accessing medical help. Despite more people seeking timely medical treatment when unwell, there has also been an increase in the number of people who say long wait times prevent them from seeing a doctor when unwell.

# The biggest influences on New Zealanders' health and wellbeing



## Food and alcohol consumption

New Zealand is following global trends towards more sustainable methods of food consumption, with people cooking from scratch more, reducing the amount of meat in their diet and an increasing number choosing a vegetarian lifestyle. There has also been an increase in the number of people choosing to abstain from drinking. This is in line with international and local trends towards no-alcohol and low-alcohol beverage options.



## The double-edged sword of technology

The reduction in real life human interaction during periods of lockdown led to people increasingly turning to technology to stay connected and engaged, which has led to perceived advantages and disadvantages.

An increasing number of people are using fitness tracking technology and wellness programmes/apps to monitor their health, giving a more nuanced assessment of activity and health levels. Technology has been highly beneficial in connecting people with distant family and friends and engaging with one's community.

The flipside, however, includes acknowledgment from some people that technology negatively impacts their real-life relationships, likely as a result of spending too much time on technological devices. Use of social media and the internet also adds to daily stresses, which is particularly high amongst women.



# The biggest issues concerning New Zealanders

New Zealanders' health and wellbeing concerns reflect a broad range of physical, emotional and social issues.

As the world grapples with economic uncertainty, it's not surprising that financial worries feature prominently. Cost of living remains the biggest issue, increasing by seven per cent from 2020.

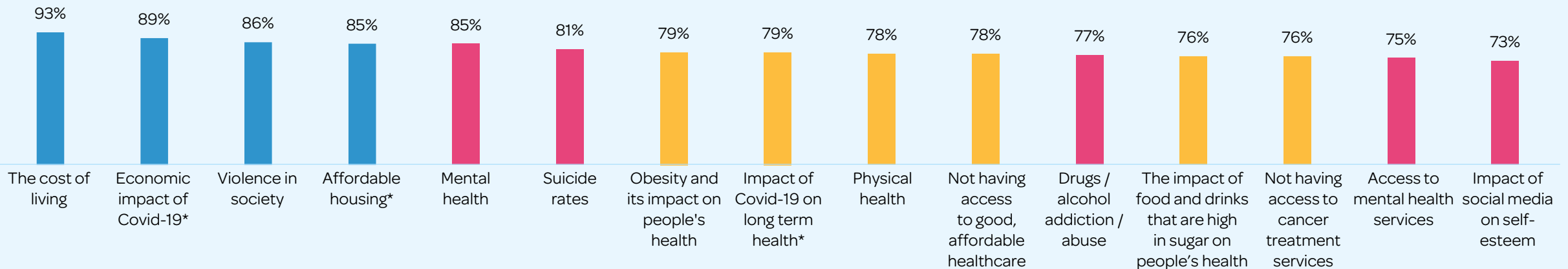
The economic impact of Covid-19 is also a significant concern, as is affordable housing.



- General
- Mental / Emotional
- Physical

HIGHEST CONCERN ←

→ LOWEST CONCERN



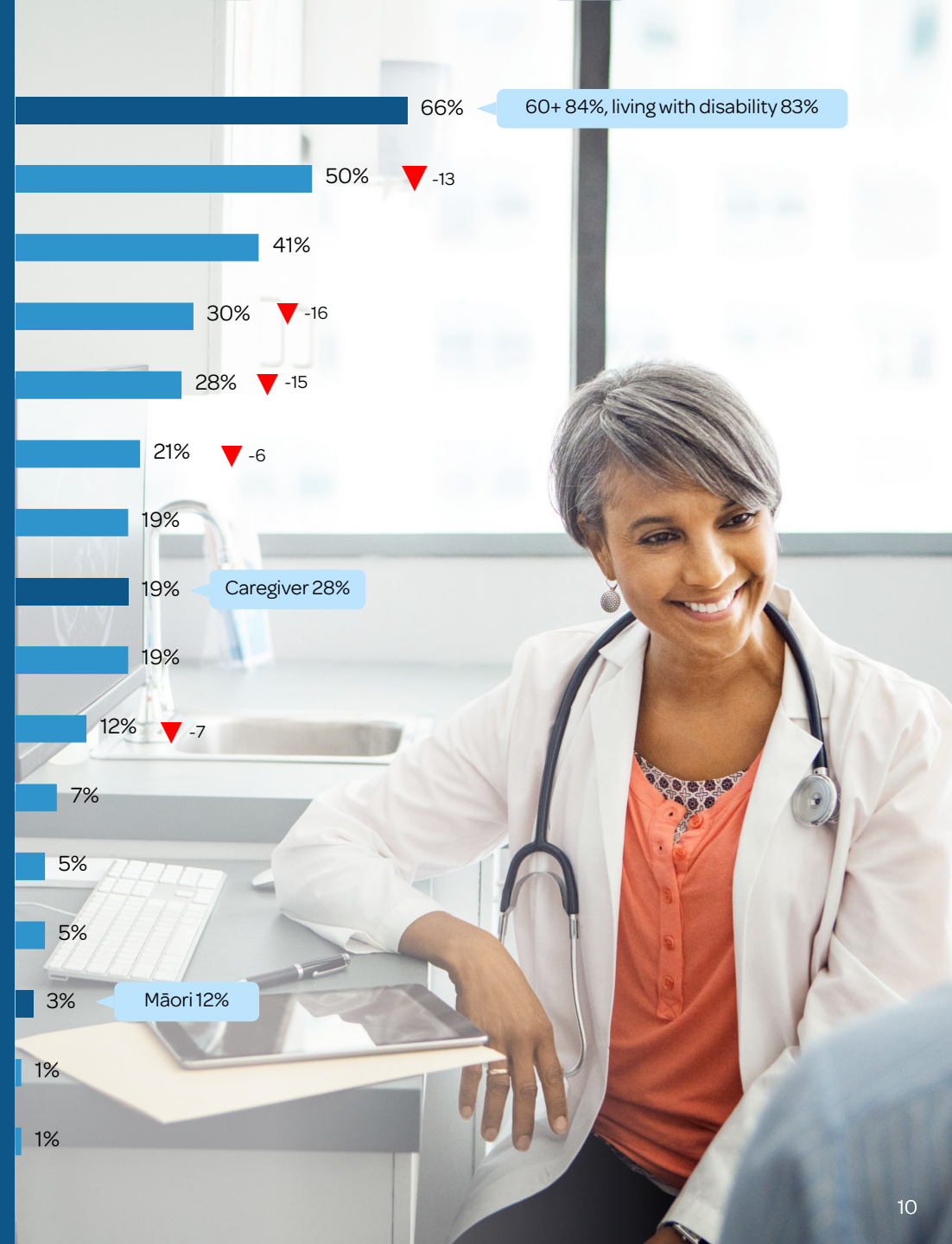
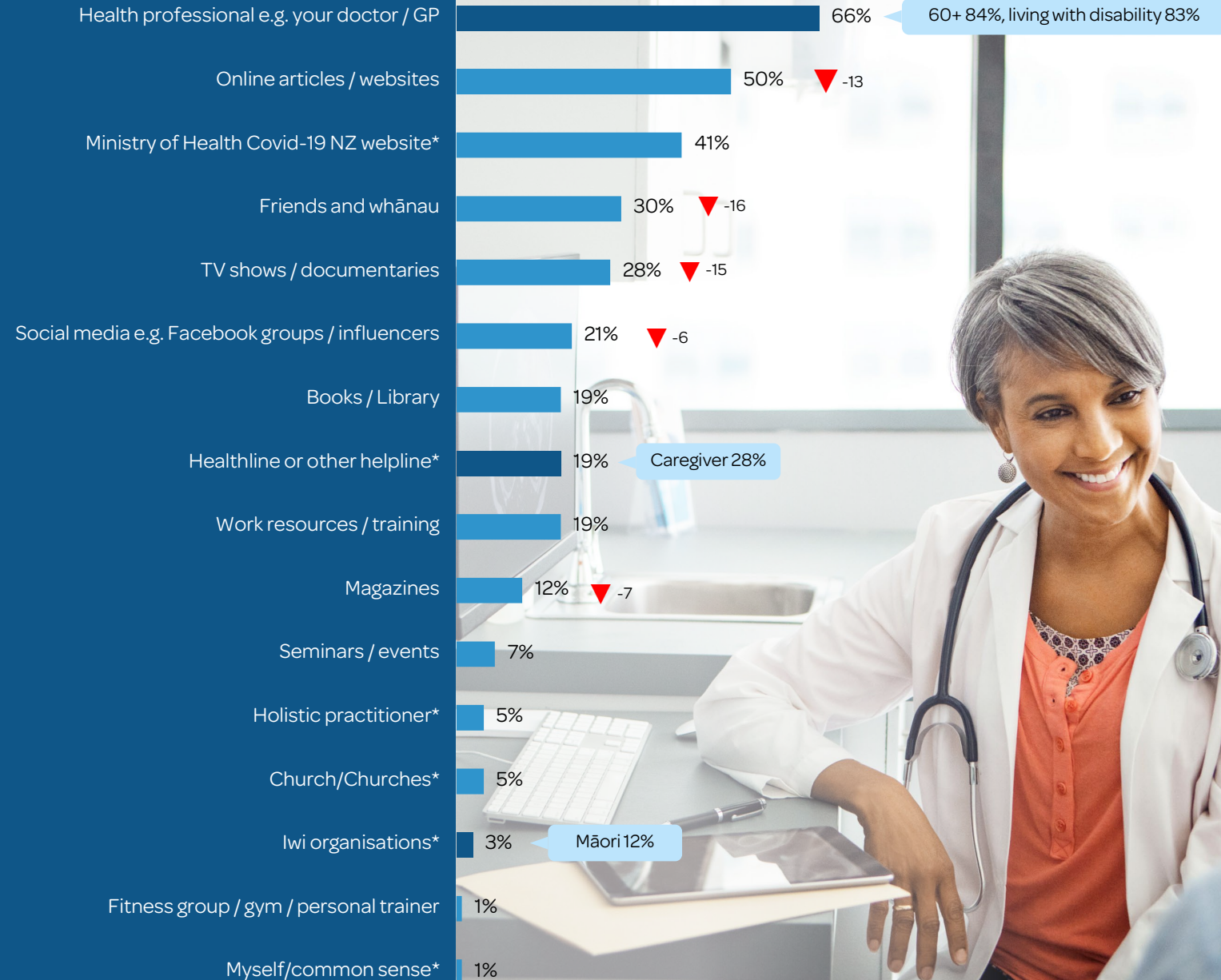
2020 RANKING

1	n/a	2	n/a	3	4	7	n/a	9	6	5	10	8	11	12
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# Sourcing credible health advice in the pandemic era

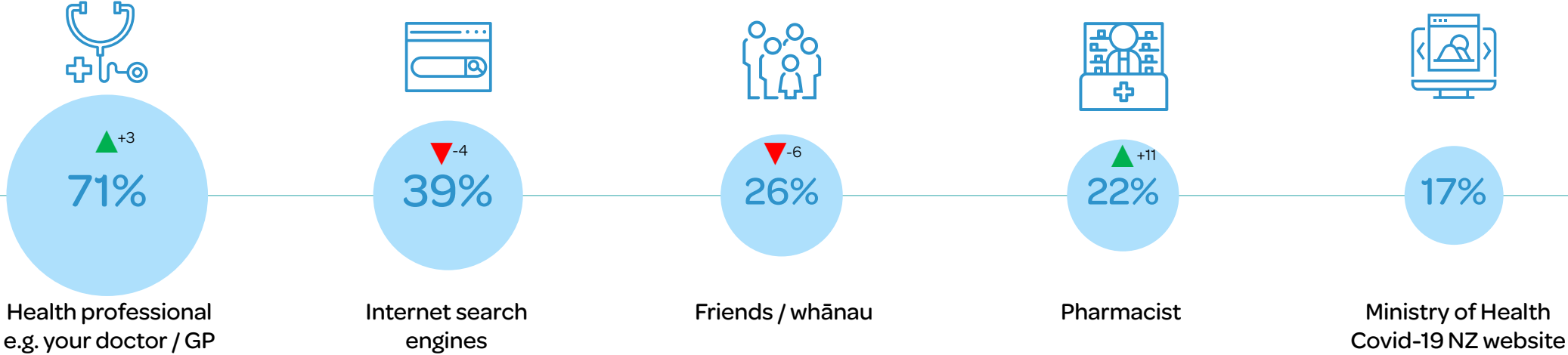
Since the outbreak of Covid-19, there has been a significant decrease in New Zealanders getting general health and wellbeing information from friends / whānau, online articles / websites, social media, TV shows / documentaries and magazines.

▼ significantly lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)  
 Call outs denote results that are significantly higher or lower than total



# Seeking trusted health advice when feeling unwell

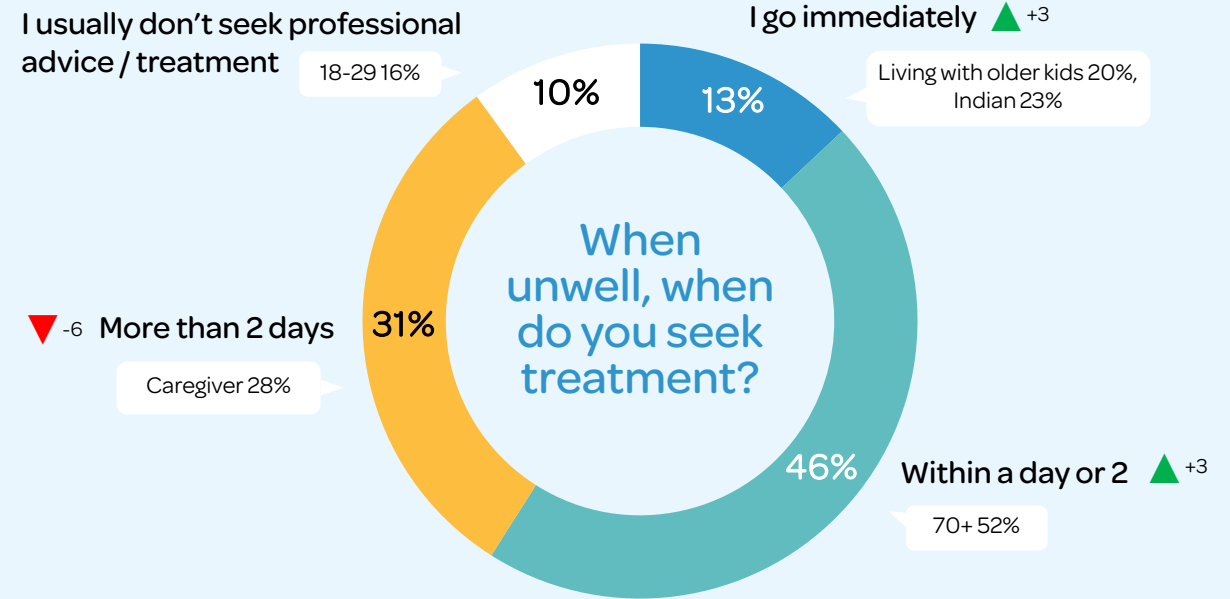
When people are physically unwell, it makes sense they're more likely to seek advice from a medically trained and trusted health professional than when just looking for general health advice (+5%). Interestingly, the number of people seeing pharmacists as a credible source of health information when they're sick has doubled since before the pandemic.



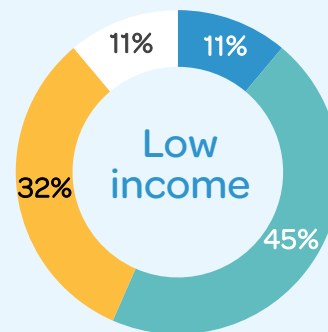
# Accessing timely healthcare

There has been an increase in the number of New Zealanders seeking treatment immediately or within a day or two of feeling physically unwell. This could be a reflection of people wanting to get to the bottom of what could be Covid-19 symptoms.

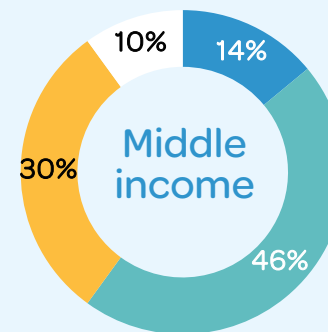
The timeliness of people seeking medical treatment has stayed largely static by income level, apart from a slightly lower number of low-income earners getting immediate treatment. This is the opposite of what was seen in 2020 and makes sense given the increased financial pressures felt by this group.



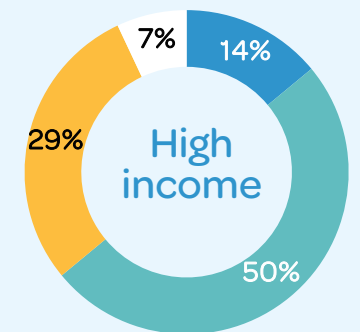
## By income level:



\$50k or under



\$50,001 - \$100k



\$100,001 or above

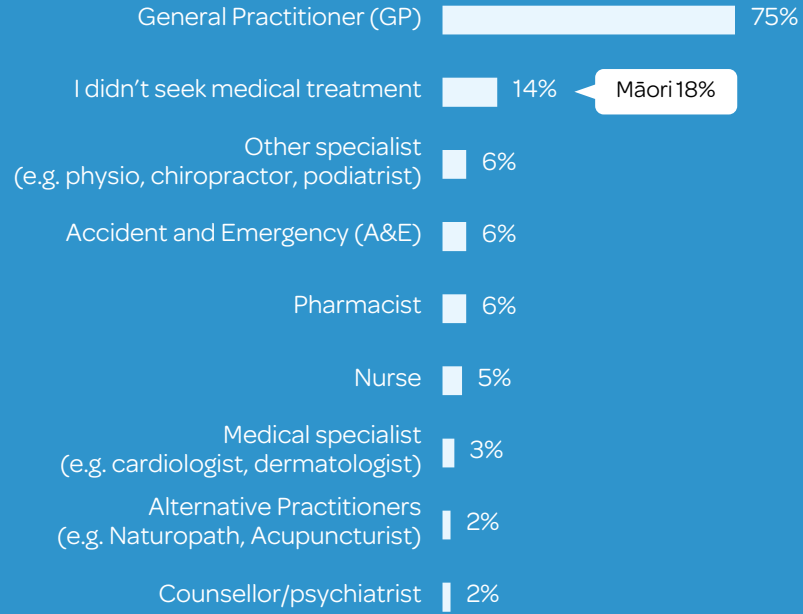
▲ significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)

# Visiting the doctor and dentist

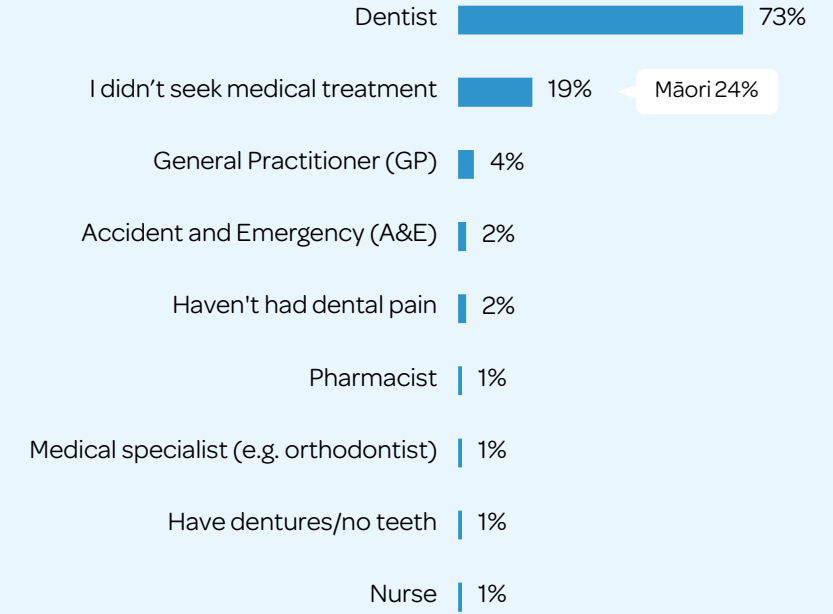
The majority of New Zealanders seek treatment from an appropriate medical professional when feeling unwell or suffering with dental pain.

Māori are more likely to not seek medical treatment when feeling unwell (18%) and when experiencing dental pain (24%).

## When feeling unwell...

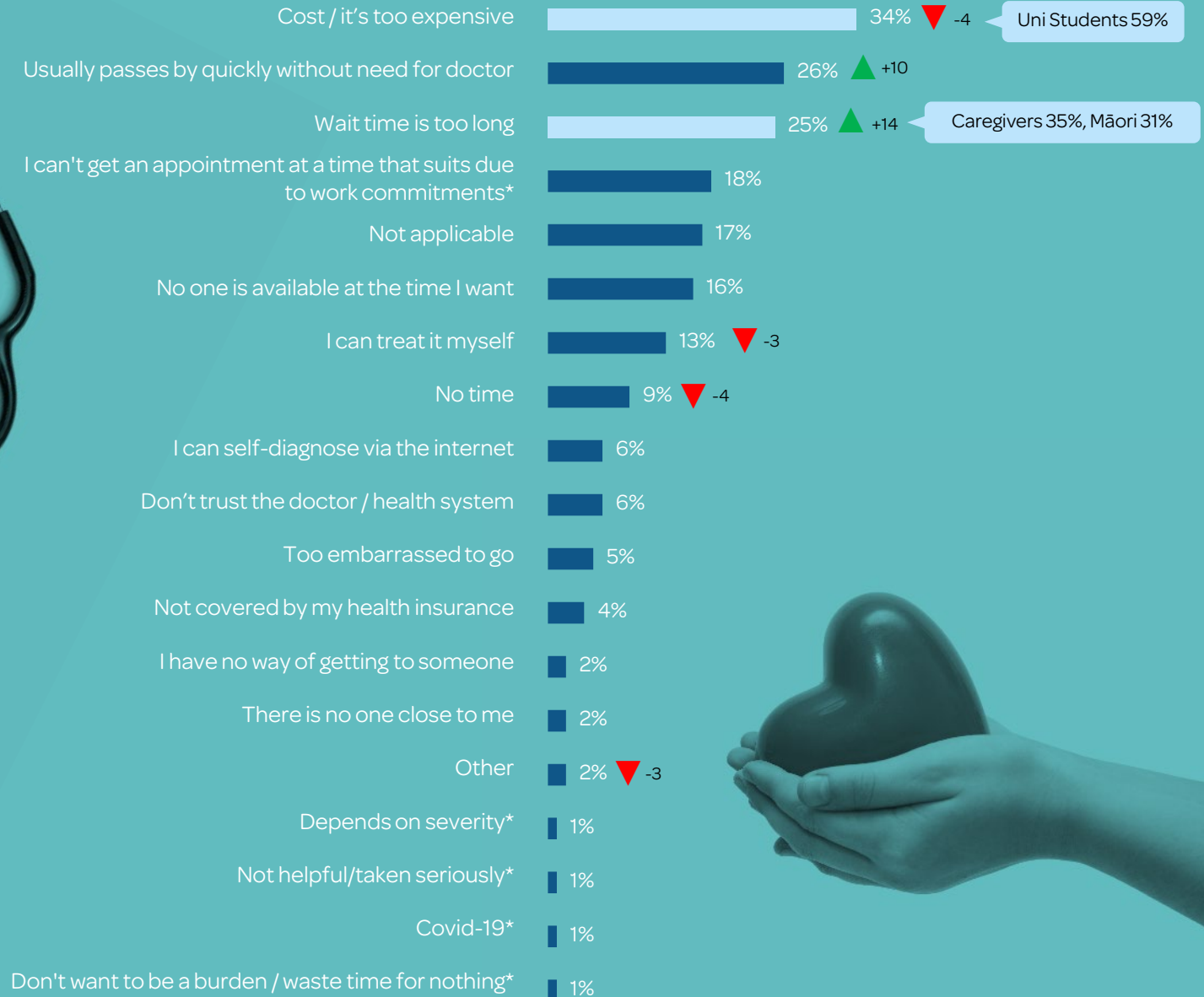
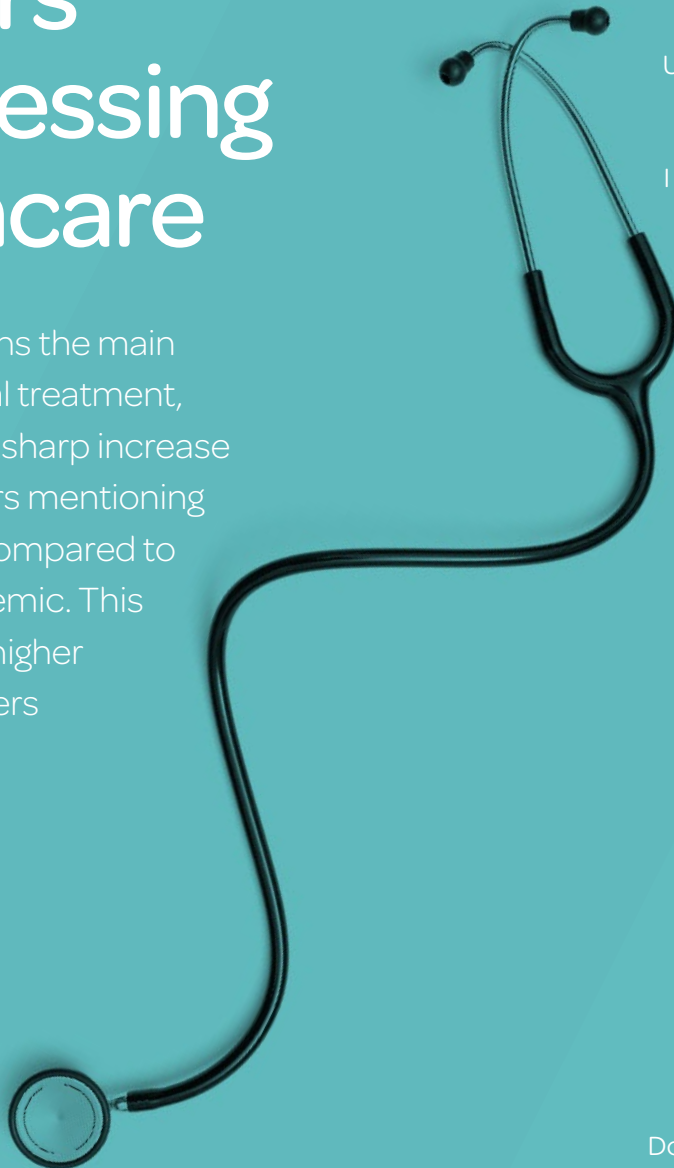


## When experiencing dental pain...



# Barriers to accessing healthcare

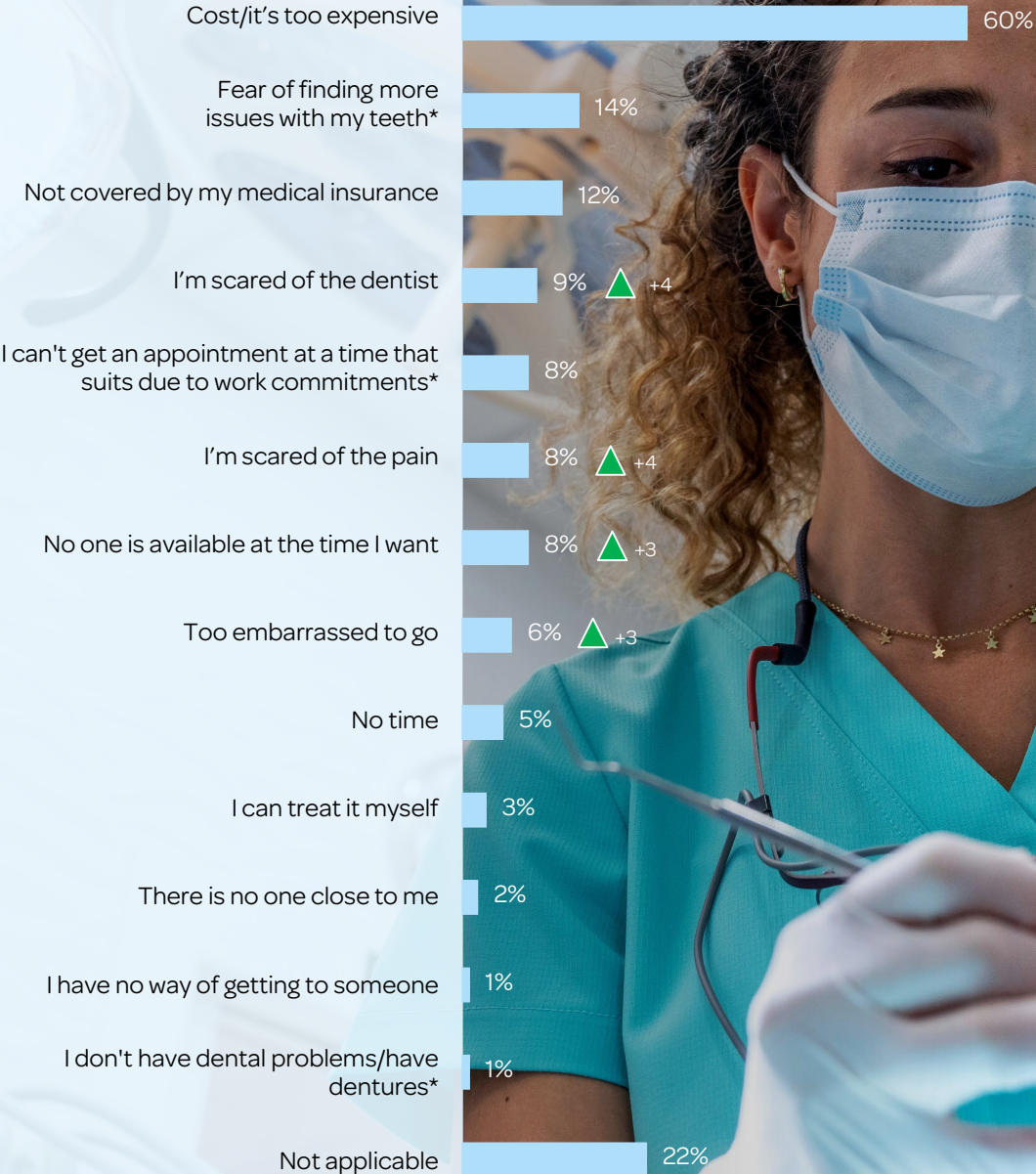
While cost remains the main barrier to medical treatment, there has been a sharp increase in New Zealanders mentioning long wait times compared to before the pandemic. This concern is even higher amongst caregivers and Māori.



# Barriers to accessing dental treatment

Cost is also consistently the main barrier in New Zealanders seeking dental treatment.

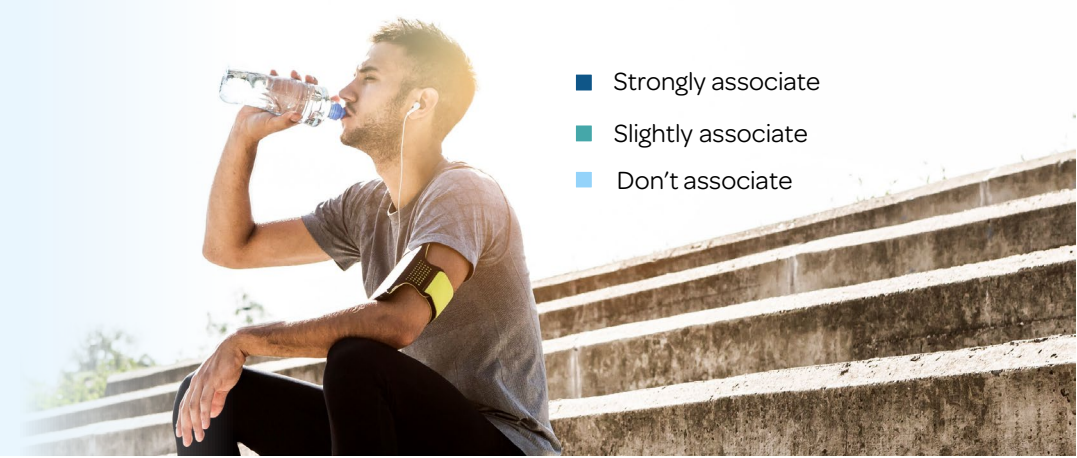
One in 10 are worried about finding more issues with their teeth. There has also been an increase in people's fear of the dentist, or the pain, and these concerns are preventing them from making an appointment.



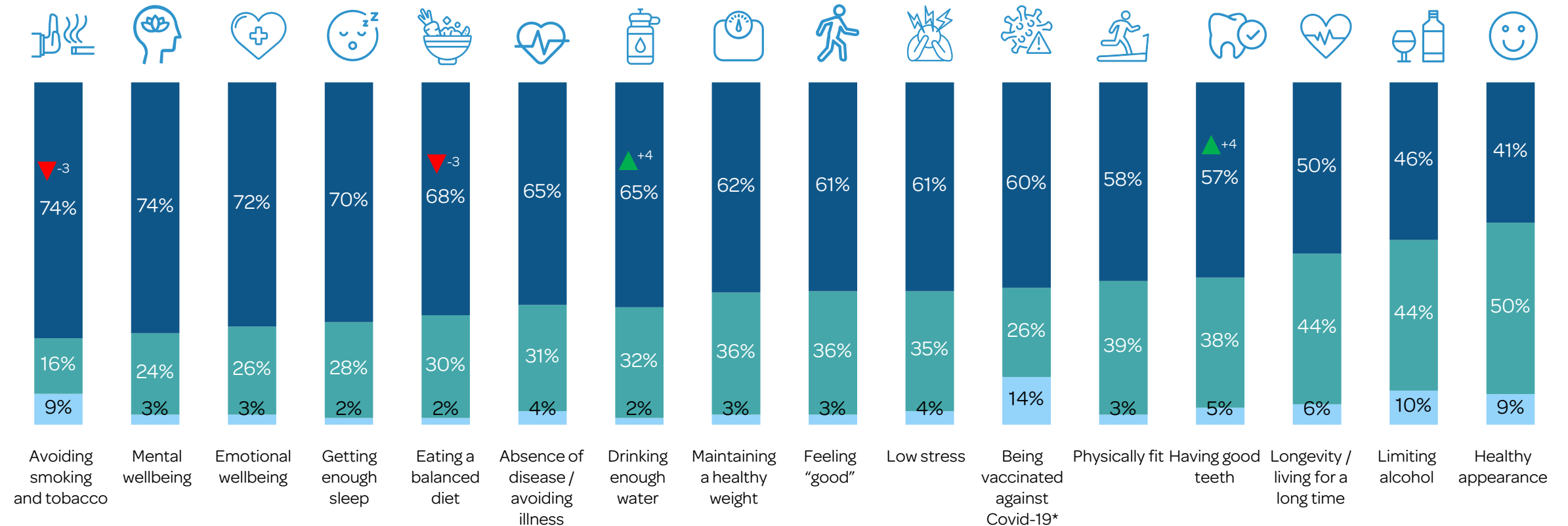
\* new additions to 2022

# What being healthy means

Mental and emotional wellbeing continue to be strongly associated with health. When it comes to the physical attributes of what healthy looks like, more New Zealanders associate being healthy with drinking more water and having good teeth.



- Strongly associate
- Slightly associate
- Don't associate



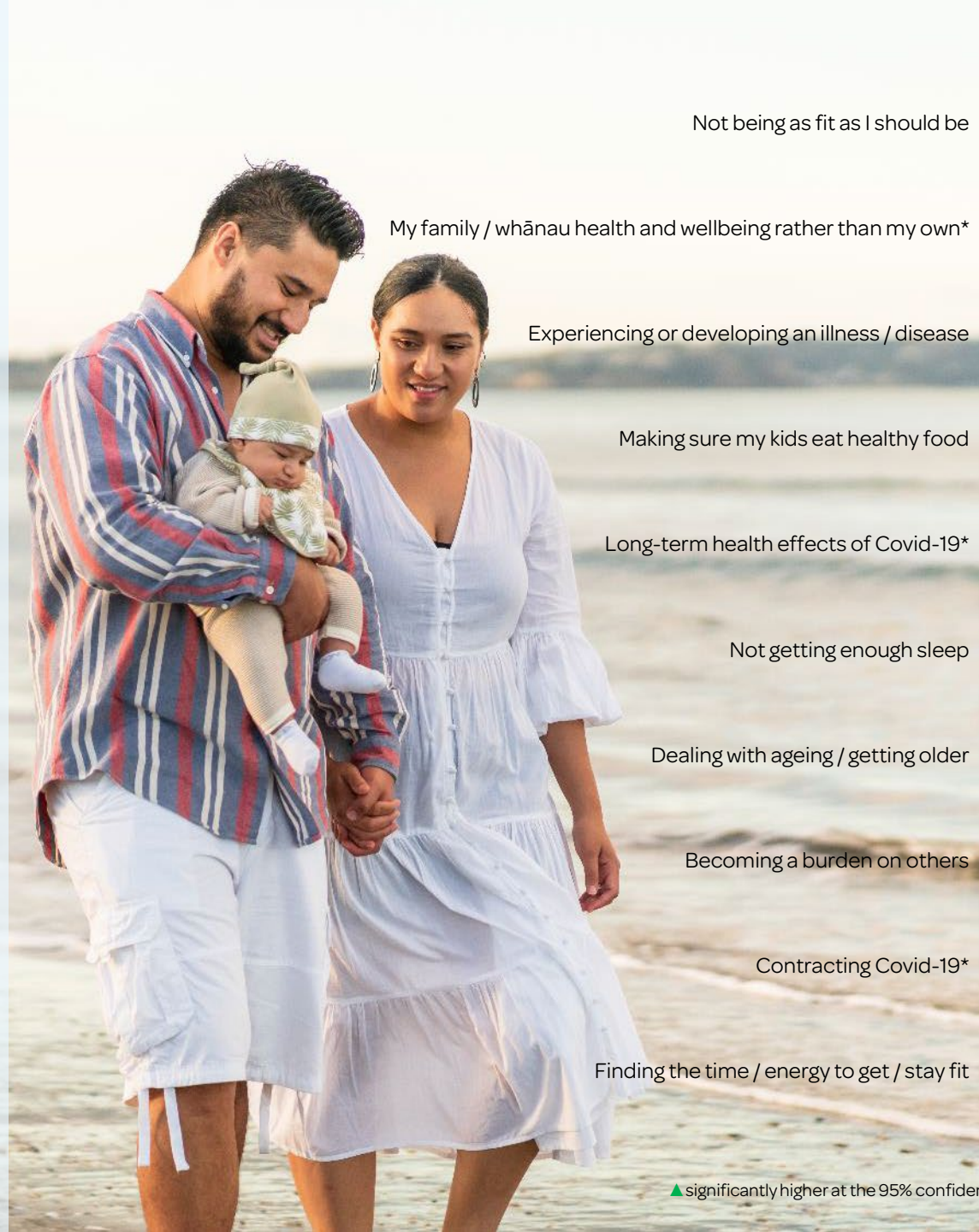


# Physical health concerns

New Zealanders are mostly concerned with their level of fitness and the health and wellbeing of their family/whānau.

Developing or experiencing an illness or disease, dealing with aging and becoming a burden to others, have been growing areas of increased concern over the past two years.

Sixty per cent are concerned about contracting Covid-19.



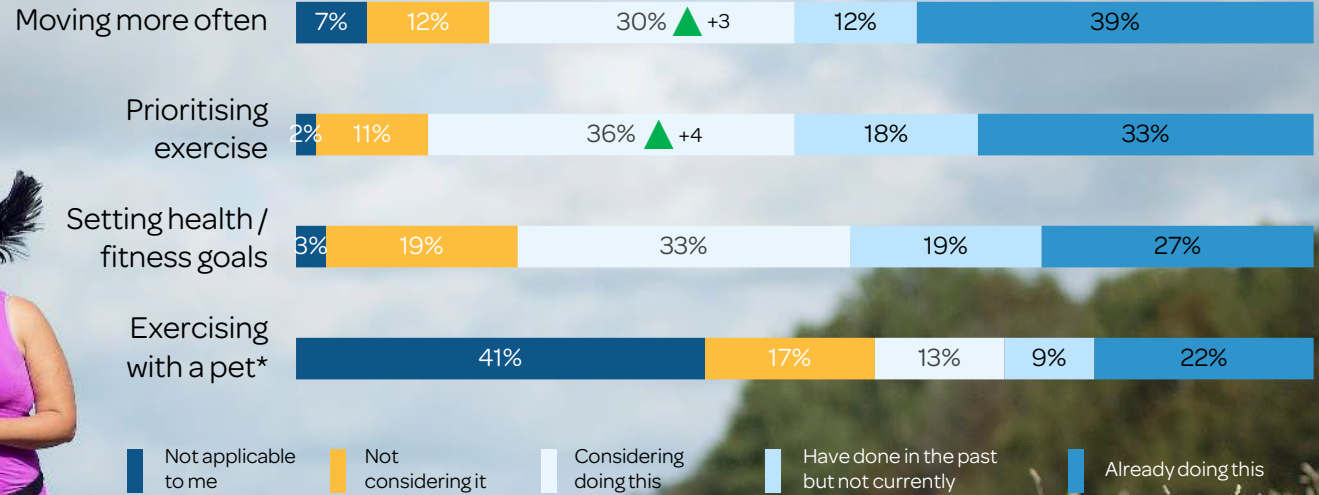
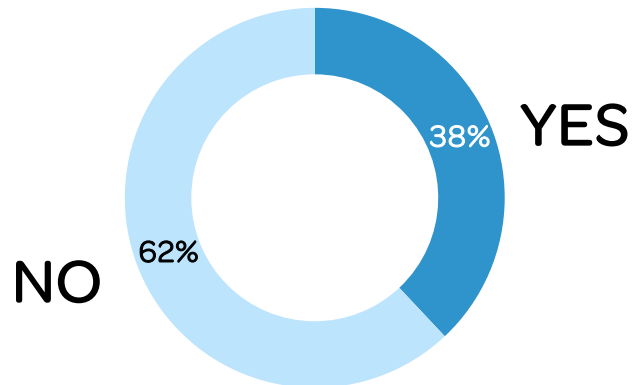
▲ significantly higher at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)

\* new additions to 2022

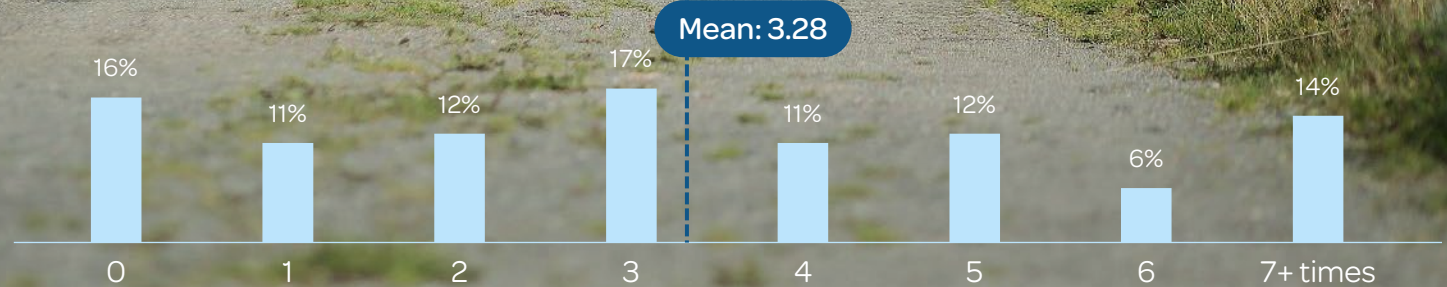
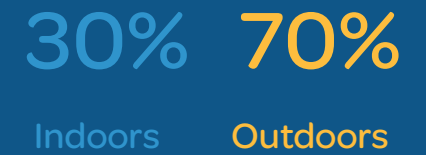
# Focus on fitness

While the proportion of New Zealanders already exercising has remained consistent over the past two years, two thirds of New Zealanders still feel they're not getting enough exercise. The average person exercises for 30 minutes, three times a week – a similar level to that seen in 2020. A more positive sign is the significant increase in the number of people considering moving more often and prioritising exercise.

## Getting enough exercise



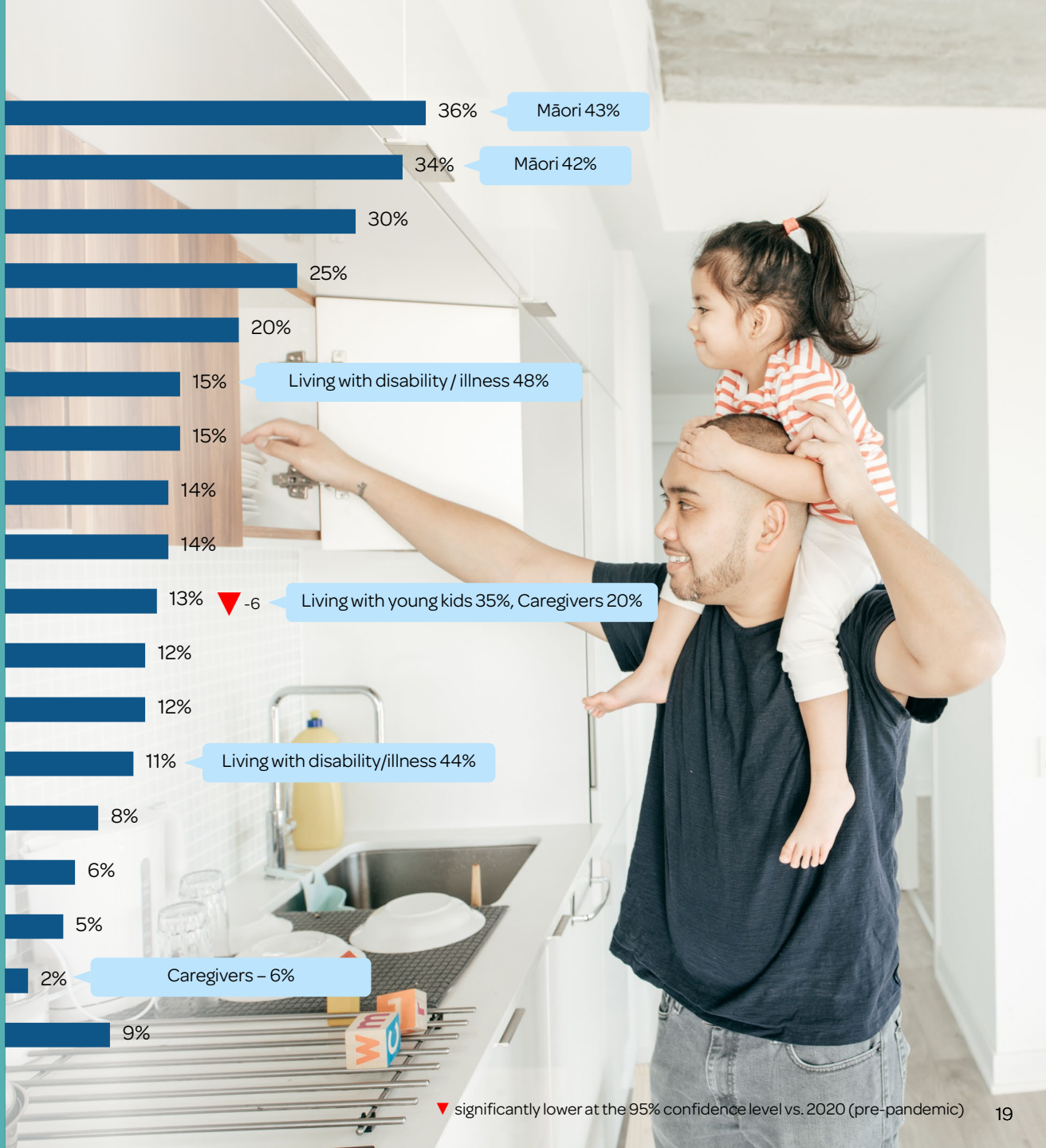
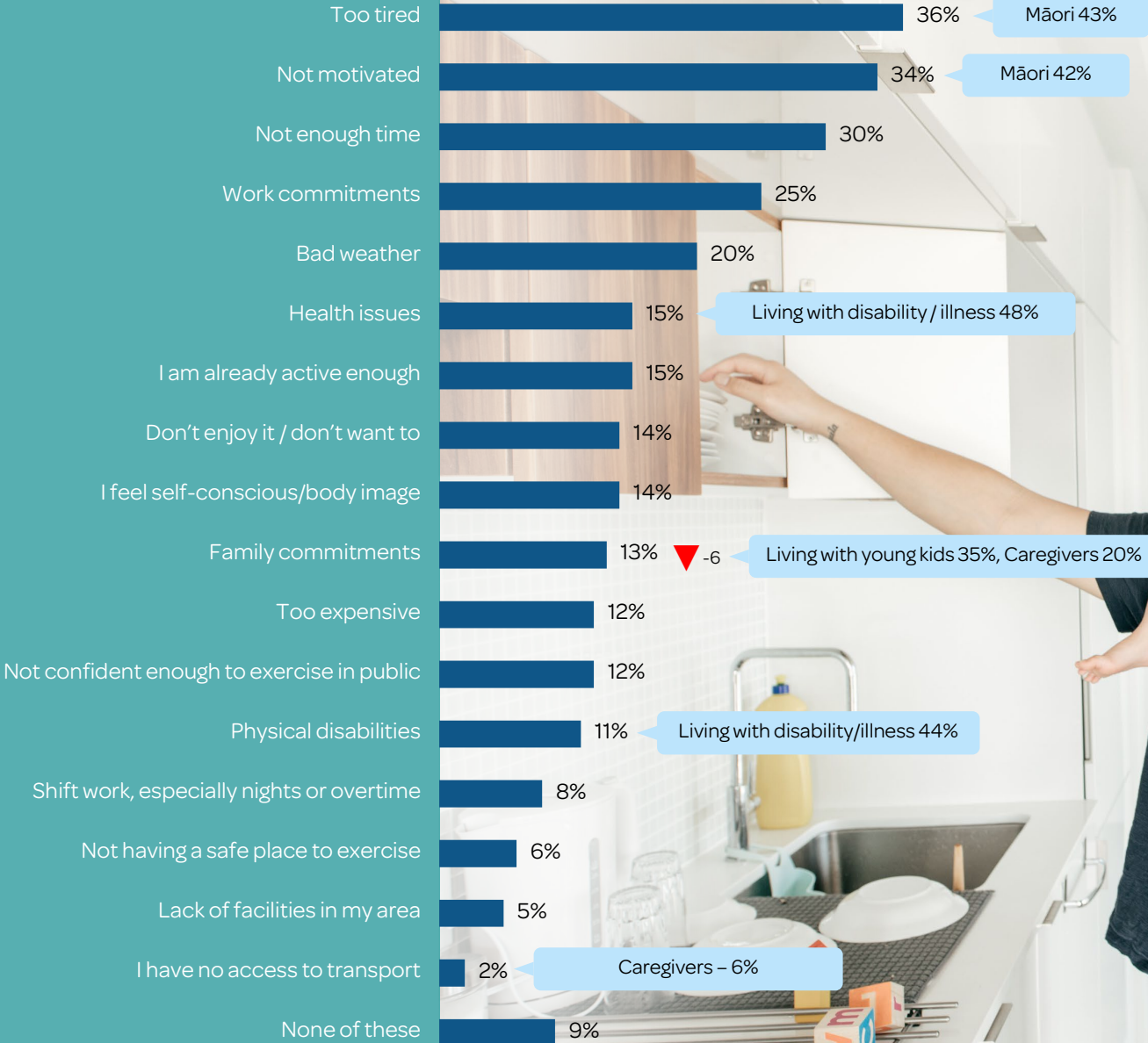
## Performing exercise...



# Hurdles to keeping fit and active

Exhaustion, lack of motivation and time are the main barriers to getting exercise.

Health issues and family commitments are especially big blocks for those living with disabilities.



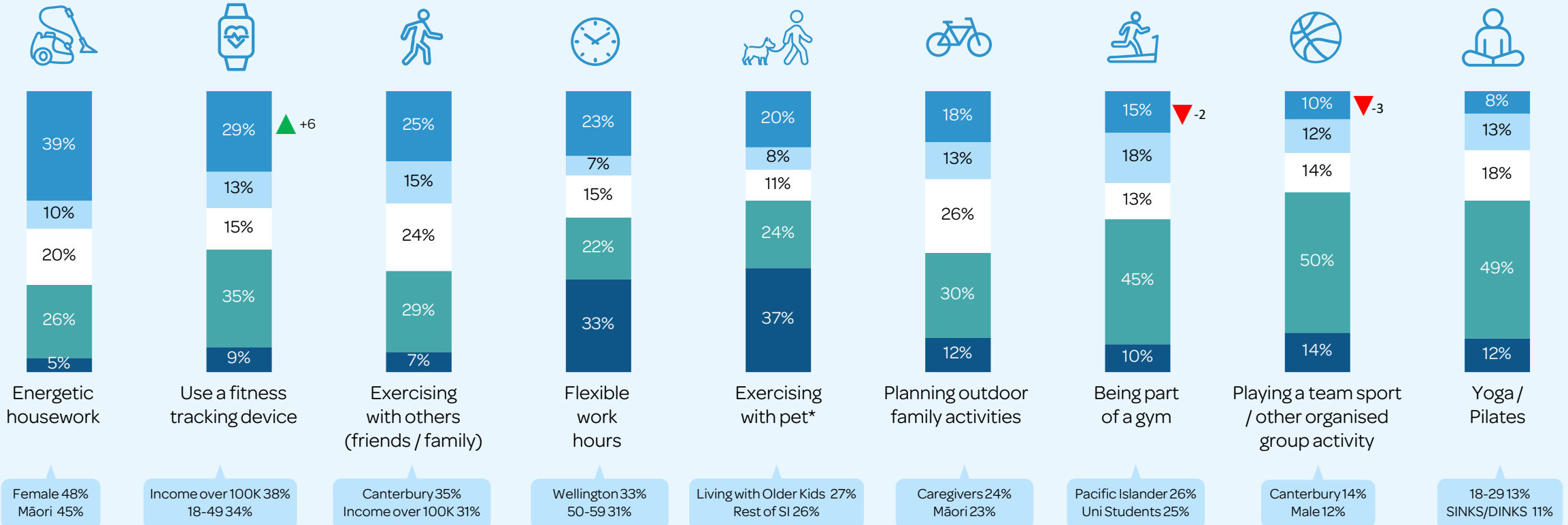
# Clean homes, the key to keeping active

Energetic housework remains the most popular form of exercise and more New Zealanders are using fitness trackers to track their efforts.

Gym memberships and team sports as a form of exercise have seen a decline, likely due to the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions.



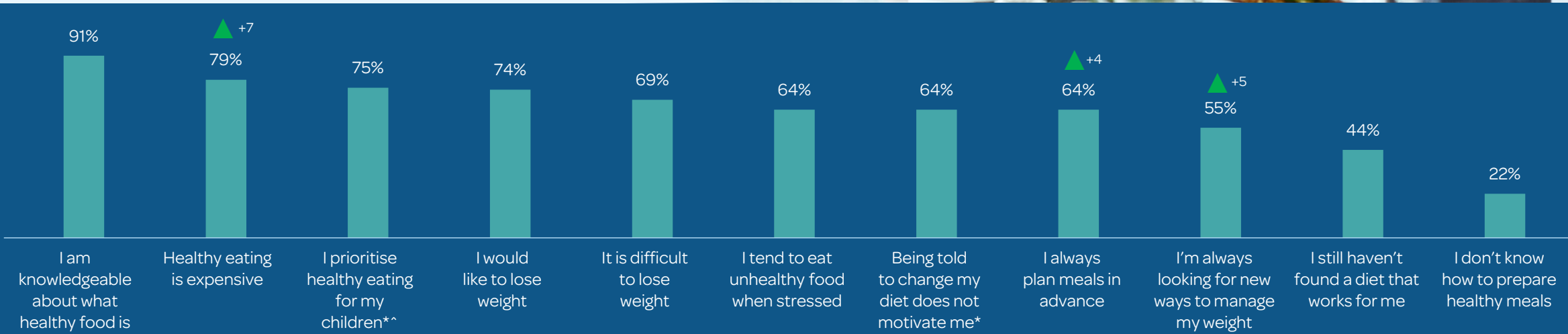
- Already doing this
- Have done in the past but not currently
- Considering doing this
- Not considering it
- Not applicable to me



▲ ▼ significantly higher / lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)

# Our relationships with food

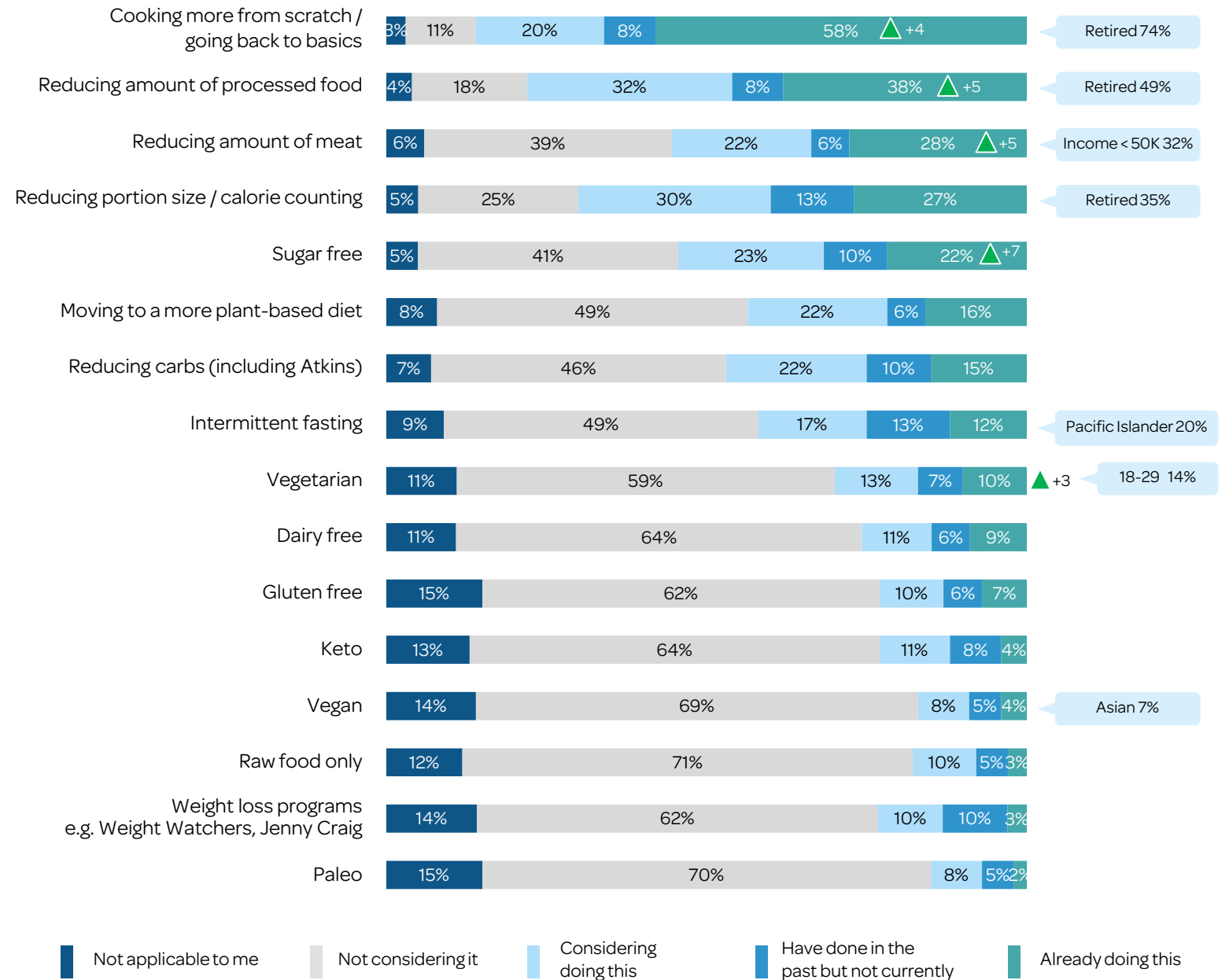
The majority of New Zealanders are knowledgeable about what healthy food is however, there is an increased feeling that healthy food is expensive, and more are planning meals in advance. These attitudes and behaviours reflect inflationary pressures on grocery bills.



# Changes in approaches to nutrition and diet

There has been an increase in people cooking more from scratch, eating less processed food, reducing portions/calories, and reducing the amount of meat and sugar in their diets. This is more common among older adults and retirees who may be feeling the pinch of financial pressures.

Vegetarianism continues to increase in popularity, as does veganism, with younger people more inclined to follow that type of diet.



▲ significantly higher at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)

# Choosing to abstain or drink less

Most New Zealanders feel that their alcohol consumption is on par with what they think is an acceptable amount.

There has been an increase in the number of New Zealanders saying that they do not consume any alcohol, especially amongst those with disabilities.

The average of four standard drinks per week is still well below Ministry of Health guidelines.

## Average drinks per week

4.25

Alcohol units you consume



Caregivers 5.34  
Males 5.14

4.41

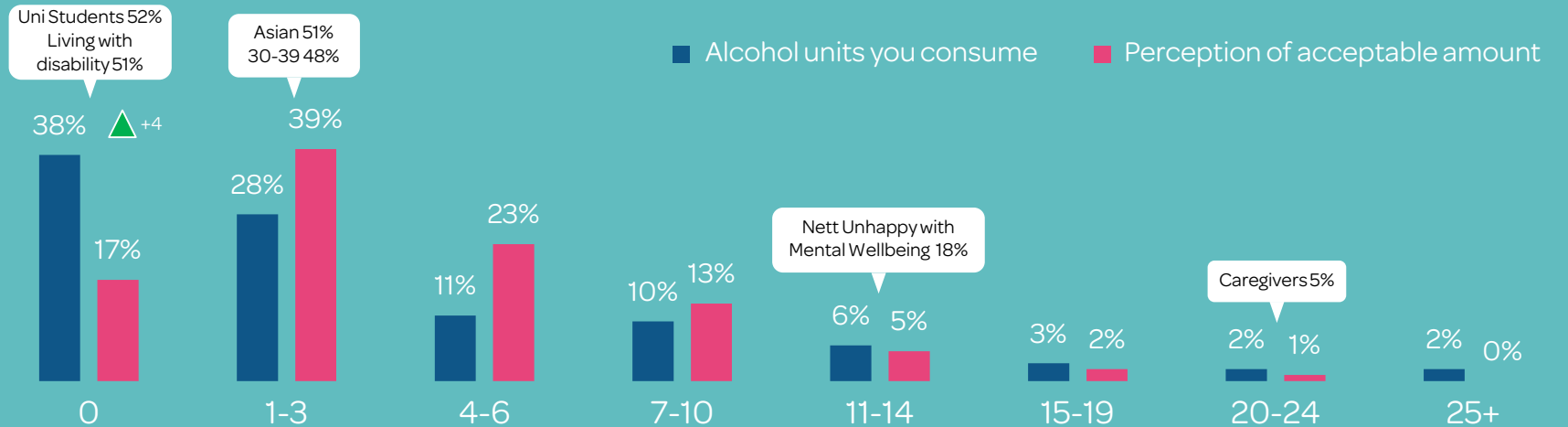
Alcohol units you think you should consume



Caregivers 5.29  
Males 5.25



## Drinks per week



# Impact of drinking on mental health

Compared to those who abstain from alcohol, people who drink more than the MoH guidelines are:



- Indicating they are concerned about not being happy in themselves/ feeling good enough
- More likely to be unhappy with their weight and more likely to consider weight loss programmes
- More likely to consider reducing their alcohol consumption but less likely to currently do so
- More likely to also consider reducing smoking
- More likely to say they regularly exercised in the past but not currently
- More likely to use natural supplements (e.g. magnesium, sleep drops) to aid with sleep
- Concerned about memory issues like dementia



# Those unhappy with health

Compared to those happy with their health, New Zealanders that rate themselves as unhappy are...

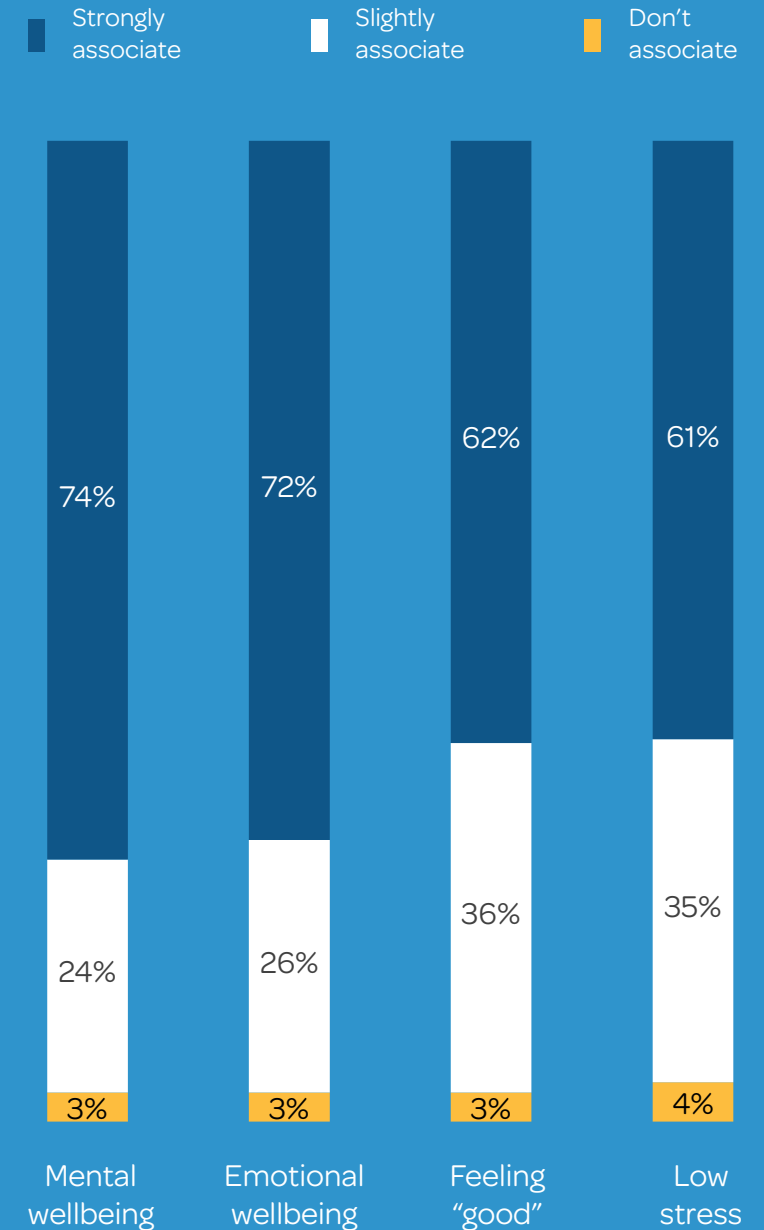
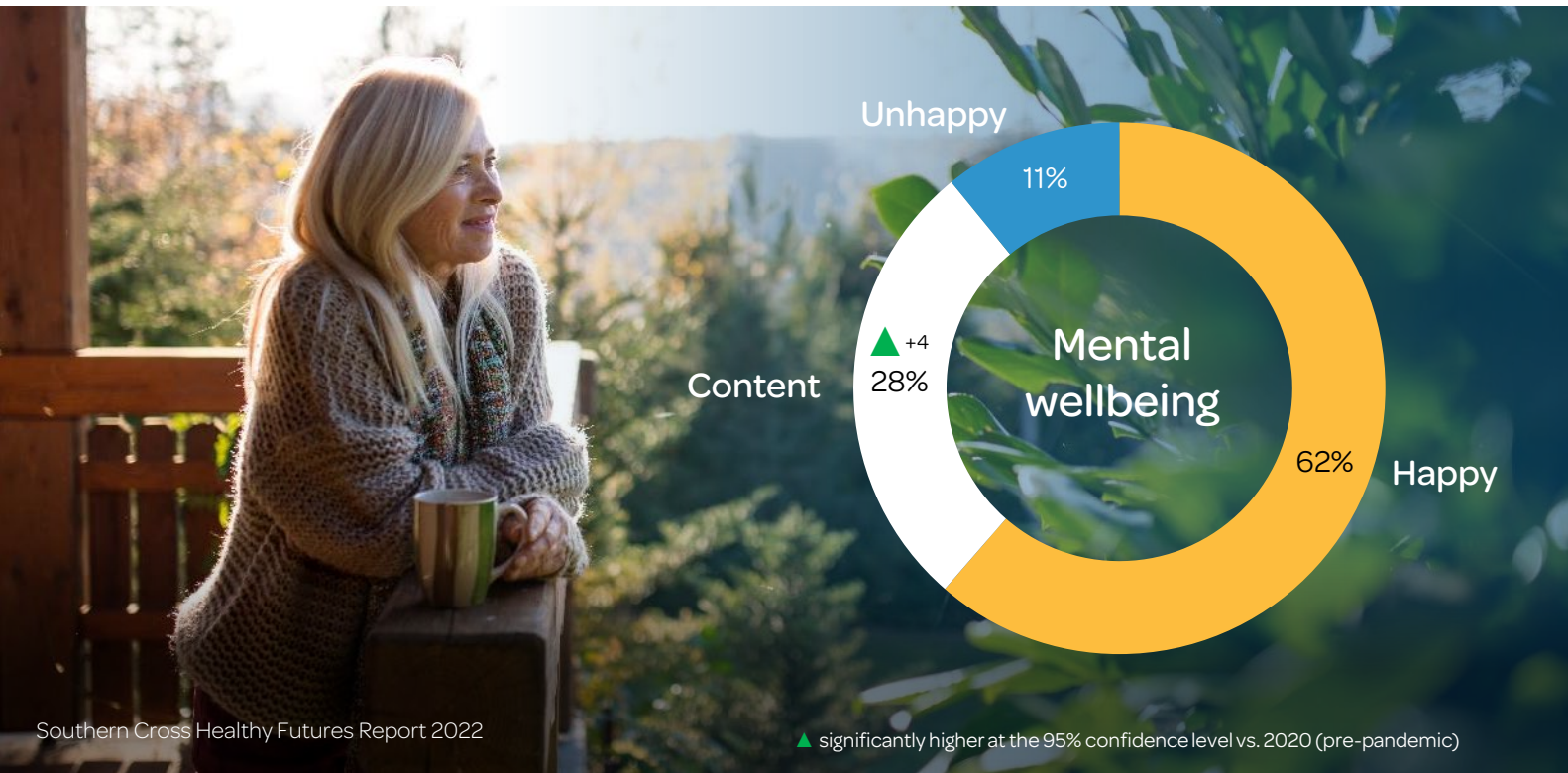


- Not getting enough sleep AND are not prioritising it (even more so than in 2020)
- Not getting enough exercise AND not considering it
- Wait more than two days to seek medical treatment
- Having poor work / life balance and are concerned about overwork / burn-out
- Indicating they have been stressed in the last month
- Would like to practise mindfulness / being in the moment (considering) and more likely to already seek professional support e.g. counselling / therapy / coaching
- More likely to consider nurturing/maintaining relationships and spending time with family but are not doing these already
- Less likely to keep their brain stimulated
- Less likely to spend time outdoors

# Role of mental and emotional wellbeing in overall health

New Zealanders strongly associate good mental and emotional wellbeing with being healthy.

Although the majority of New Zealanders are happy with their mental wellbeing, there has been a slight dip in the past two years. Conversely there has been a slightly bigger increase in those feeling content.



# Emotional wellbeing worries

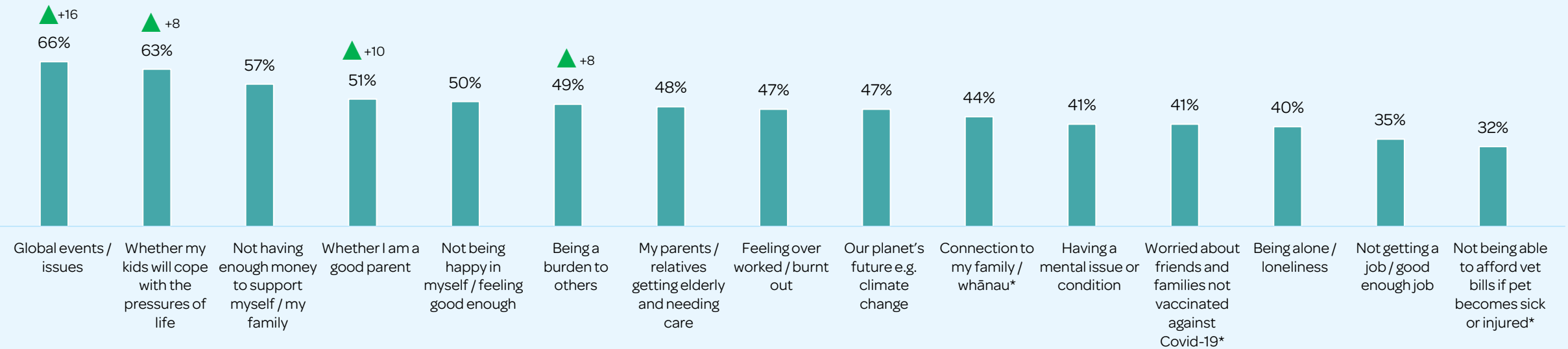
Increasing concerns about global events, how children will cope with the pressures of life and financial worries are personally affecting the emotional health and wellbeing of New Zealanders.



## General concerns of New Zealanders: Emotional wellbeing

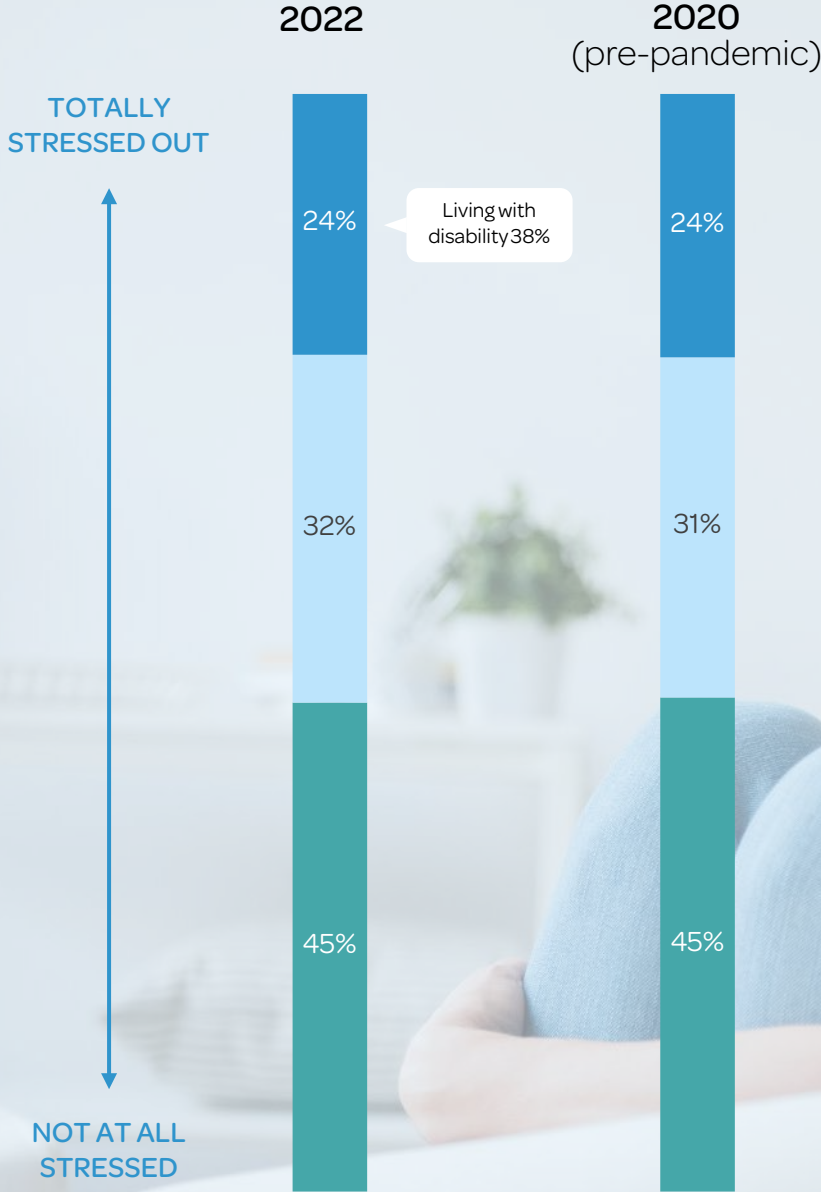
HIGHEST CONCERN ←

→ LOWEST CONCERN



# Maintaining stress levels

The rate at which people have felt stressed in the past month has remained consistent since before the pandemic. People living with disability are experiencing the most pressure on their stress levels.



# New Zealanders feeling stressed in the past month

Compared to those who were not stressed in the past month, people feeling stressed were...

- Less likely to get enough sleep
- Less likely to get enough exercise
- Taking longer to seek medical treatment
- More likely to have poor work / life balance
- Less likely to nurture / maintain relationships
- Less likely to help others or give back to the community
- More likely to seek professional support such as counselling
- Less likely to be happy across all the factors of physical, emotional and social wellbeing as well as their children's health and wellbeing

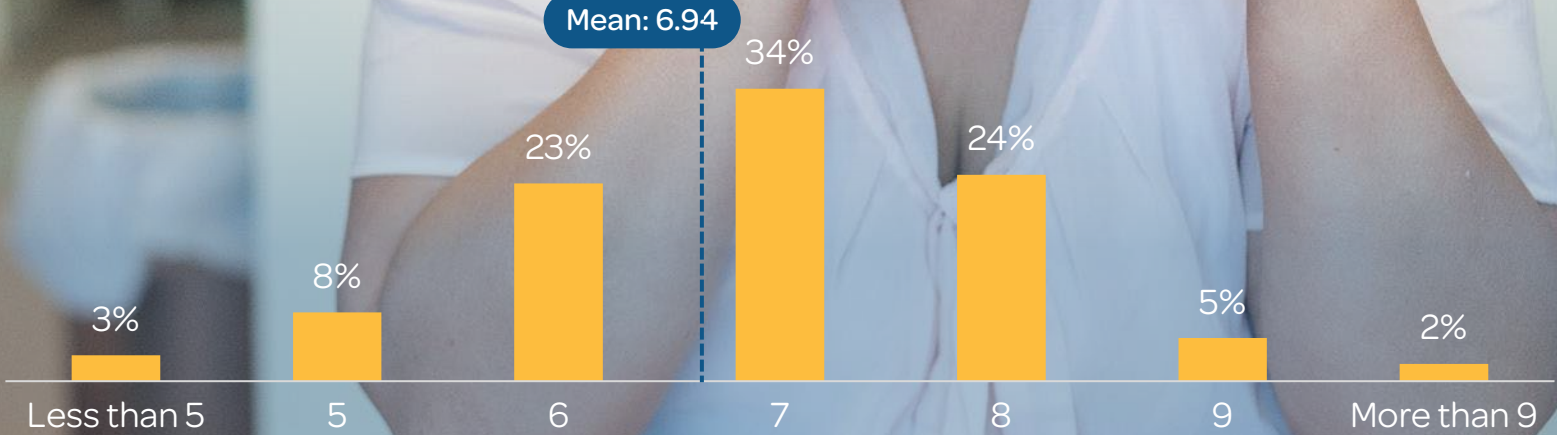
# Chasing enough sleep

More than half of New Zealanders still feel they're not getting enough sleep, at an average of 6.94 hours per night, a slight decrease from 6.97 two years ago. Māori, Pacific people, households with young kids and those living with disabilities, in particular feel more sleep deprived.

A third of people are getting below the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep a night. Pacific people are getting the least amount of sleep, with an average at 6.58 hours per night.

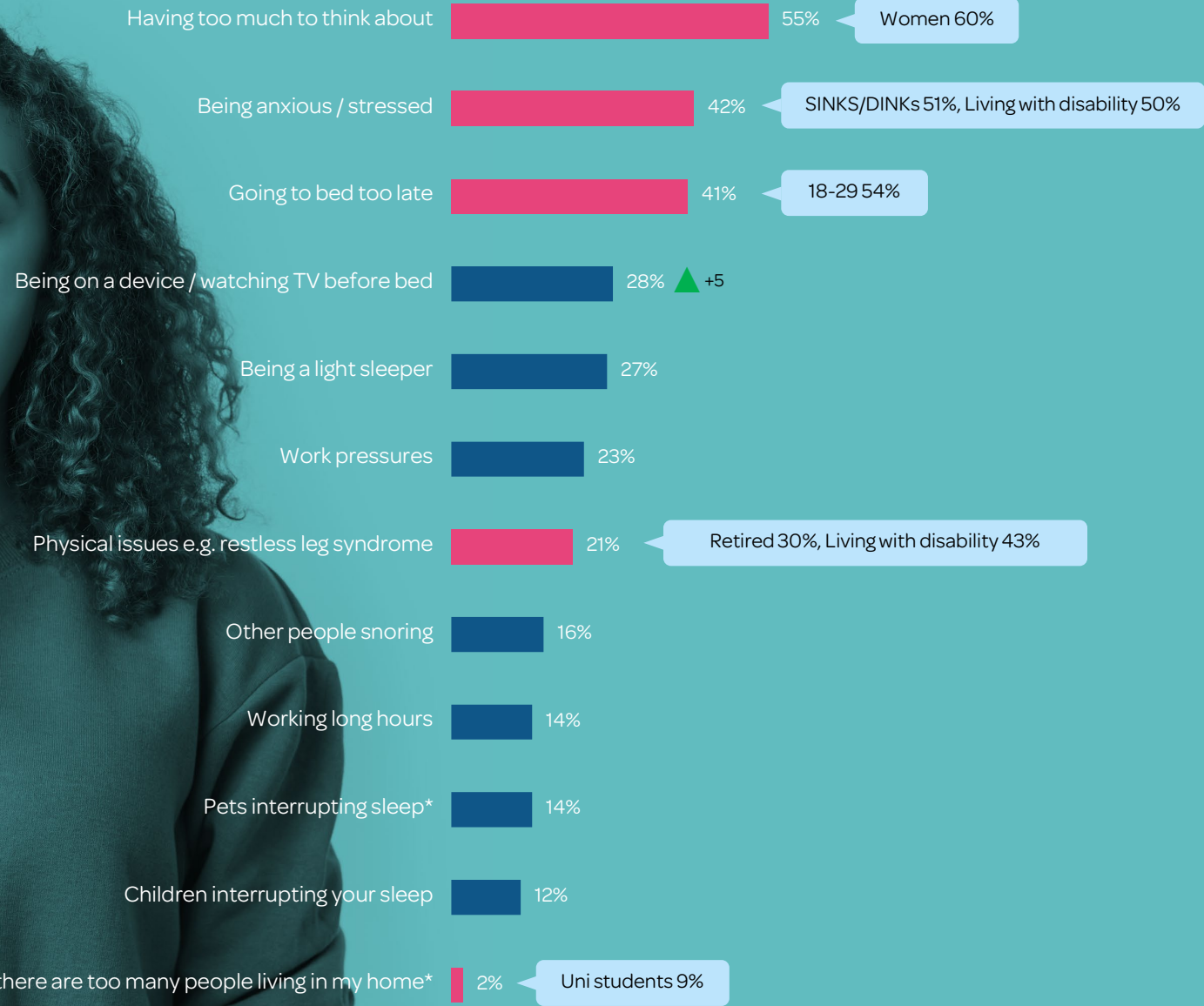


Pacific people 66%  
Māori 65%  
Living with disability 64%  
Households with young kids 64%



# Counting sheep

The main reasons people aren't getting sleep is having a high mental load and feeling anxious or stressed. Being on a device or watching TV before bed has increasingly become a barrier to people getting to bed on time.



# Satisfaction in personal relationships

The majority of New Zealanders remain happy with their personal friends, family and romantic relationships.

People's connectedness with their community increased following the first lockdown in 2020 (49 per cent), but this has now almost settled back to what it was before the pandemic (44 per cent).

People living with disability are the least happy when it comes to personal connection across all social pillars.

■ Happy
 ■ Content
 ■ Unhappy

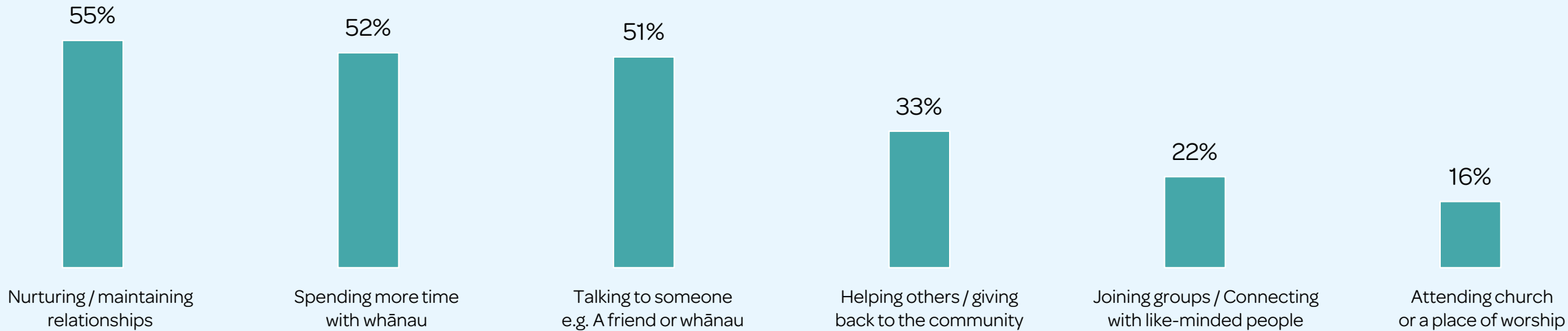




# Relationships and connections are the foundations of happiness

New Zealanders continue to prioritise nurturing and maintaining their relationships, particularly among women and older people. Spending more time with whānau is another important factor in looking after one's emotional health and wellbeing.

While we saw a positive increase in people speaking to someone else during the first 2020 lockdown (64 per cent), this has now decreased, but is still slightly higher than before the pandemic.

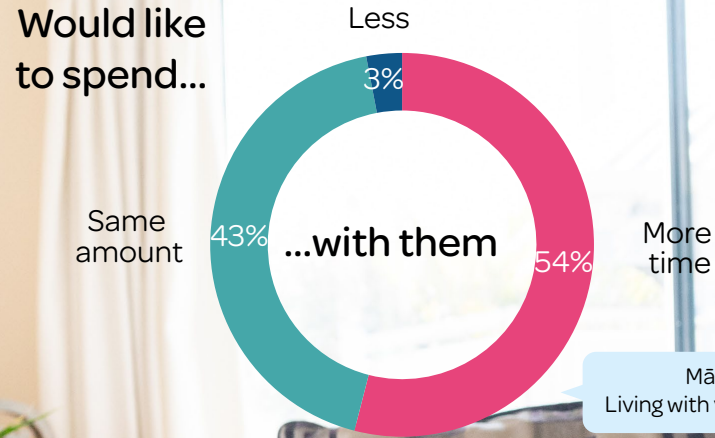
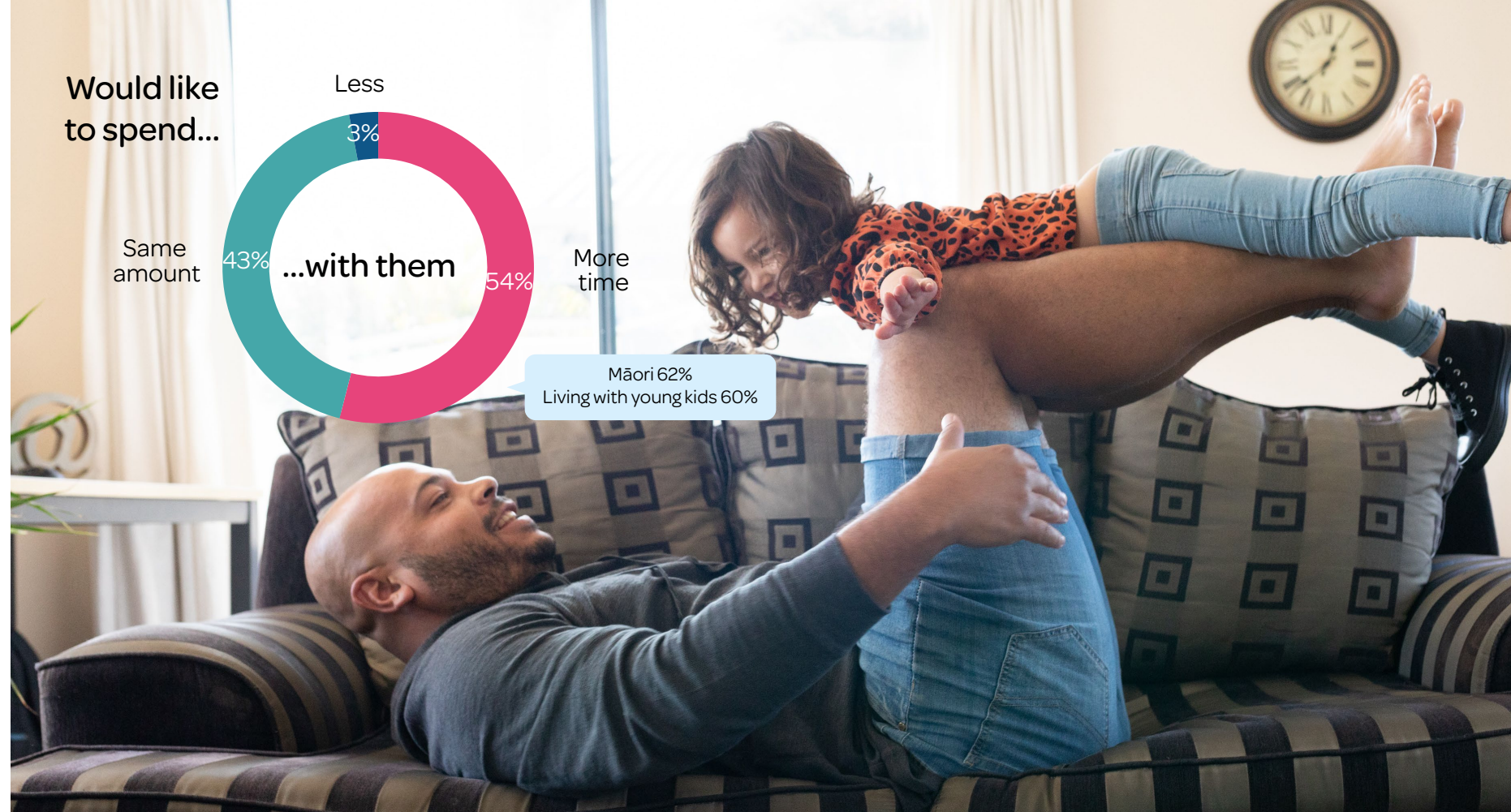


# Quality time spent with whānau

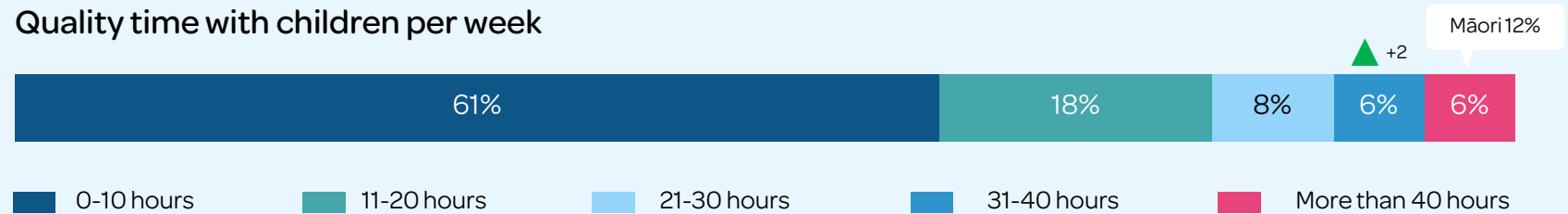
The majority of parents spend fewer than 11 hours of quality time per week with their children. This has not changed significantly since 2020.

More than half of parents want to spend more time with their children, and this figure is even higher for parents with young children.

Māori parents are more likely to spend more than 40 hours per week of quality time with their tamariki, and want to spend even more time with them.



## Quality time with children per week



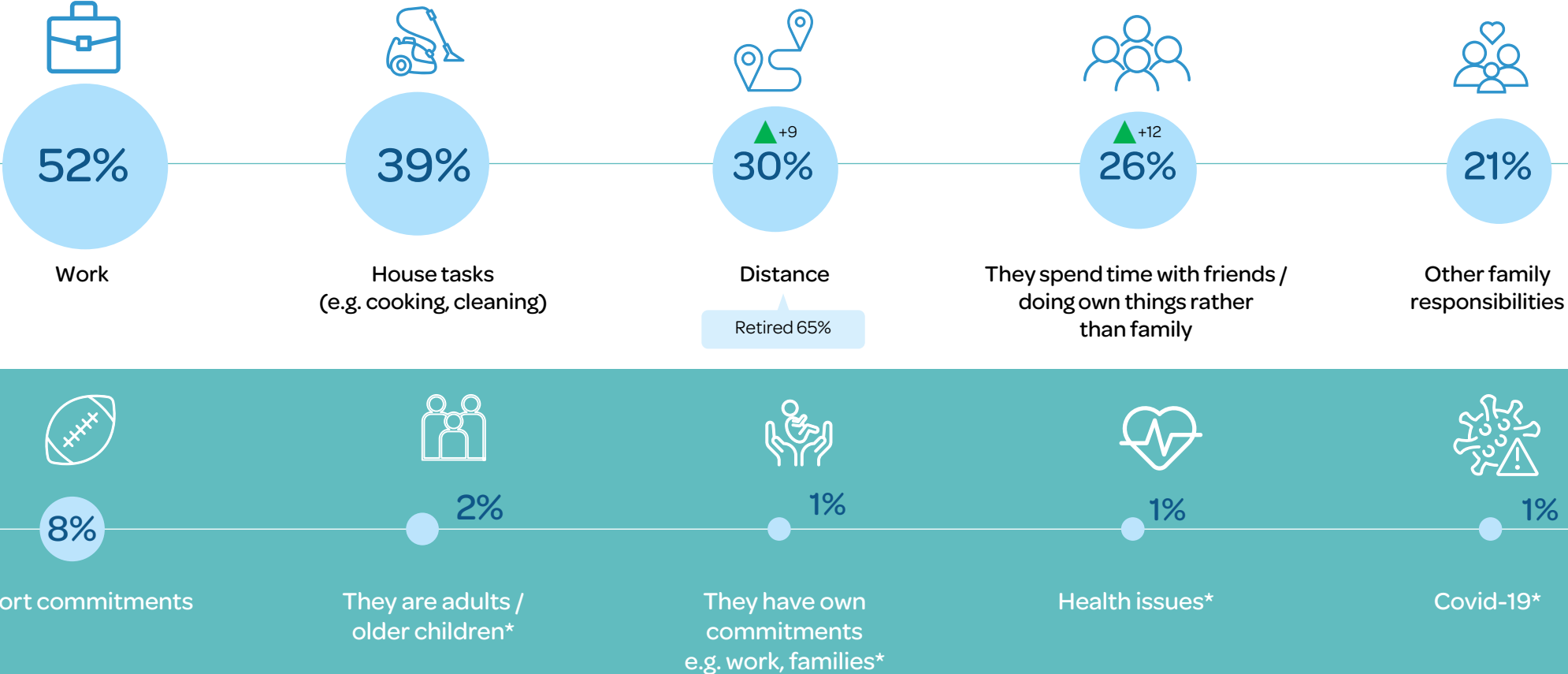
▲ significantly higher at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)

# Barriers to spending more time with whānau

Work and household tasks remain the biggest reasons parents aren't spending as much time with their children as they would like.

'Distance' and children choosing to 'hang out with their friends' as barriers to more family time, have increased significantly over the past two years.

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



# Living with disability or illness

New Zealanders living with disability or illness are more dissatisfied across the three health and wellbeing pillars - physical, emotional and social.

This group's greatest concern is poor mental wellbeing, as this is most associated with good health. They are the unhappiest of all demographics when it comes to their mental health and are the most stressed.

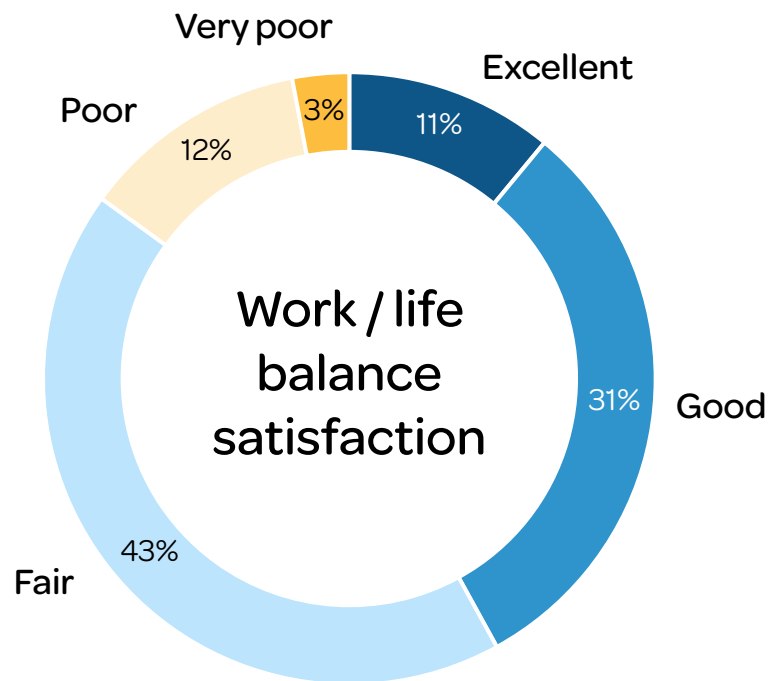


- Sleep is more likely to be disrupted by physical issues and anxiety/stress
- More likely to not drink alcohol
- More likely to be unhappy with their weight, health, fitness levels and appearance
- Are more stressed and concerned with being a burden to others
- Are more likely to improve their emotional health and wellbeing by joining groups or connecting with like-minded people, learning a new skill or seeking professional support e.g. counselling, therapy.



# Balancing work and life

There has been a slight increase in people agreeing that work / life balance is important, but only 42% believe they're currently striking a good or excellent balance between their work and home life.



90% find work / life balance important



88%

2020

90%

2022

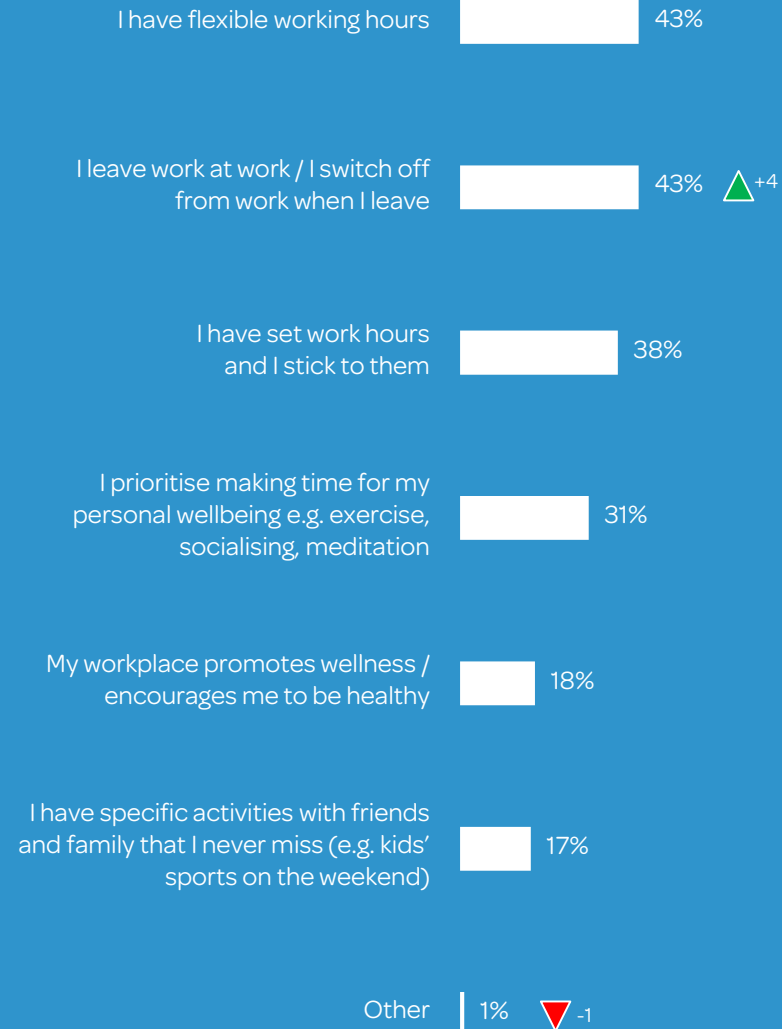
# How to get the balance right

Flexible working hours and switching off from work continue to be the biggest factors in maintaining a positive work / life balance. Conversely, a high workload and financial pressures are the biggest barriers.

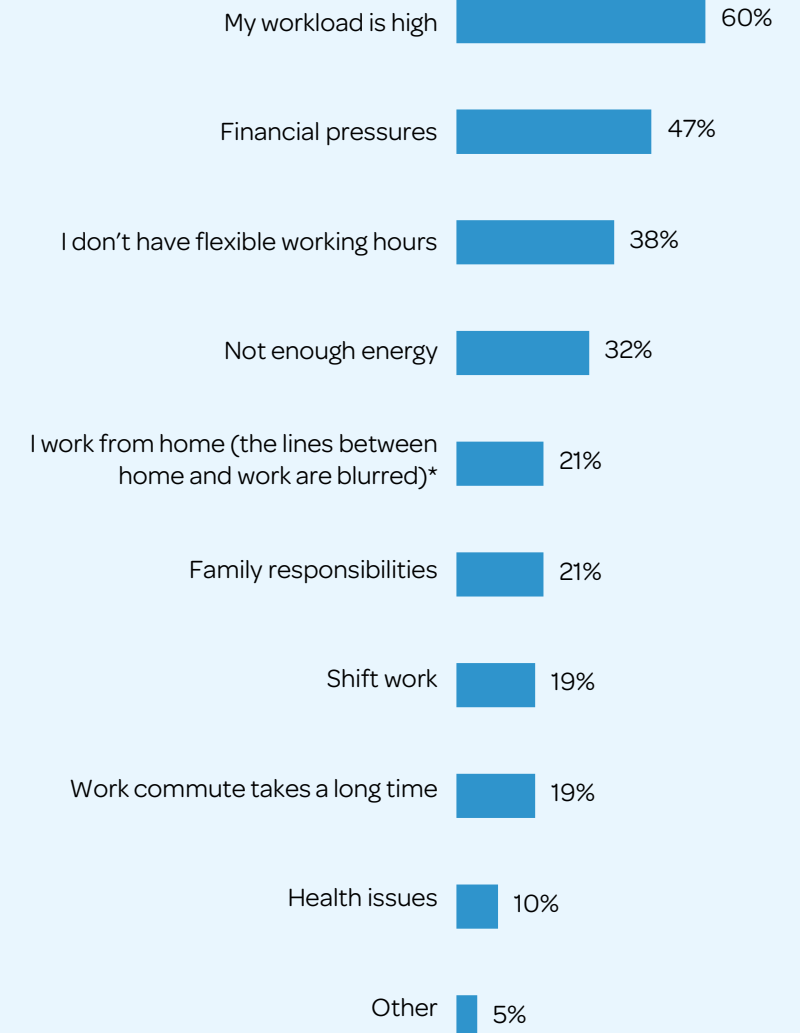
There has been an increase in the number of people who can leave work at work / switch off, which could be the result of an increase in flexible working options offered by many employers.

▲ ▼ significantly higher/lower at the 95% confidence level vs. 2020 (pre-pandemic)

## Good work / life balance...



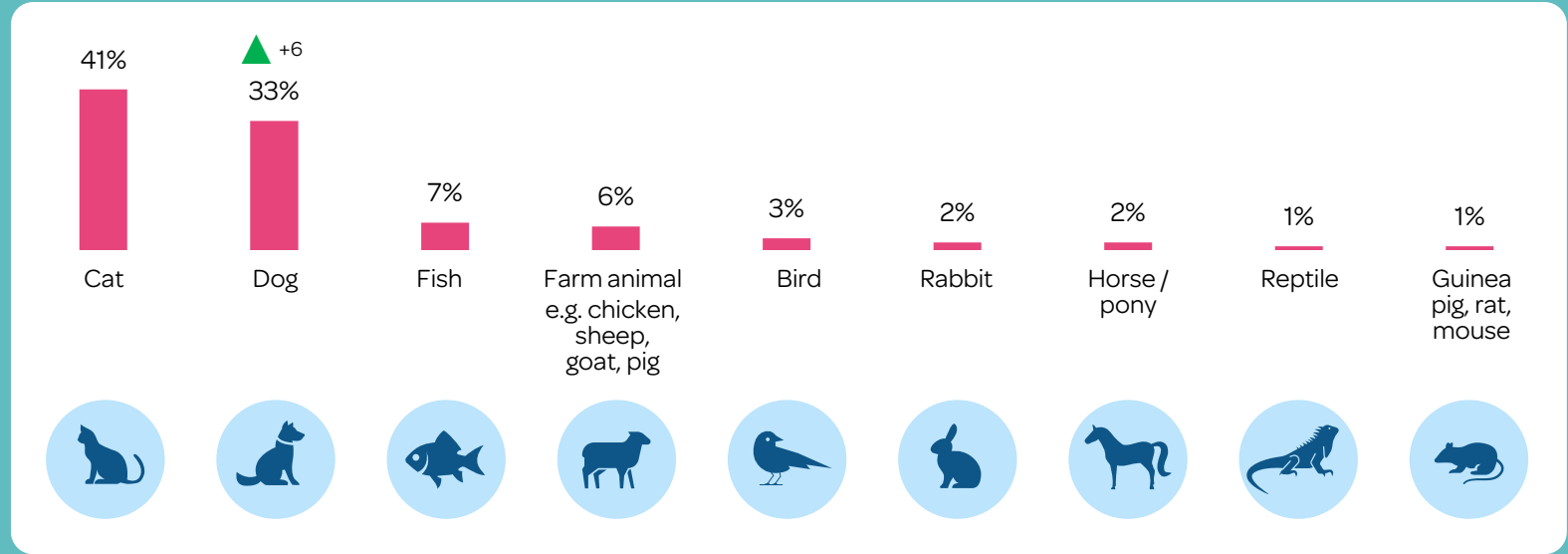
## Bad work / life balance...



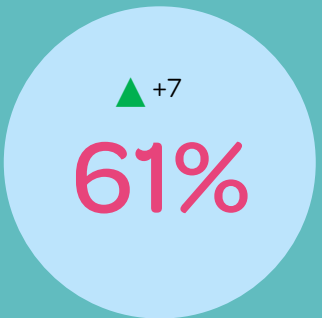
# Pets are part of the family

More New Zealanders than ever now own a pet. While cats are still the pet of choice, dogs have increased in popularity.

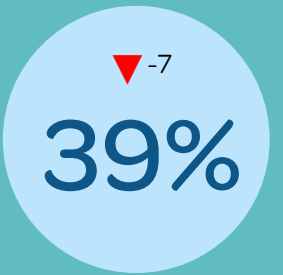
Pets have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of their owners, make great companions and are seen as an integral part of the family unit.



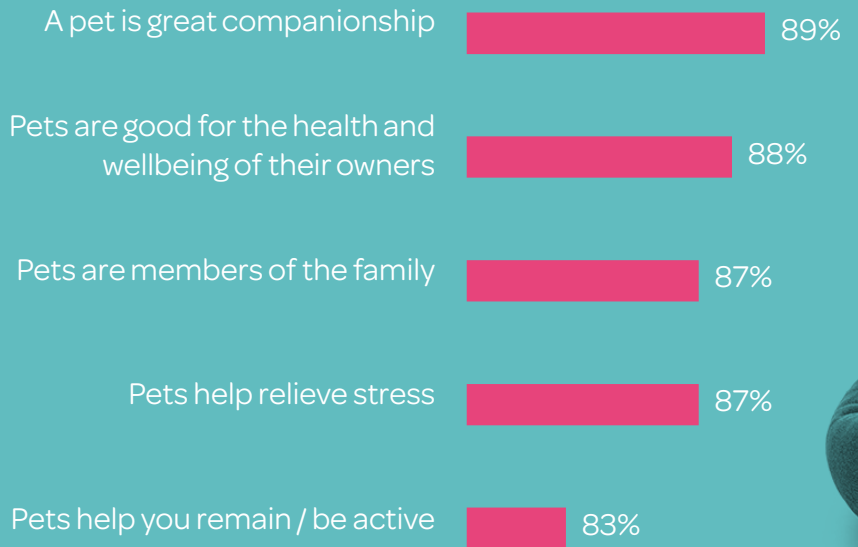
## Own a pet



YES



NO

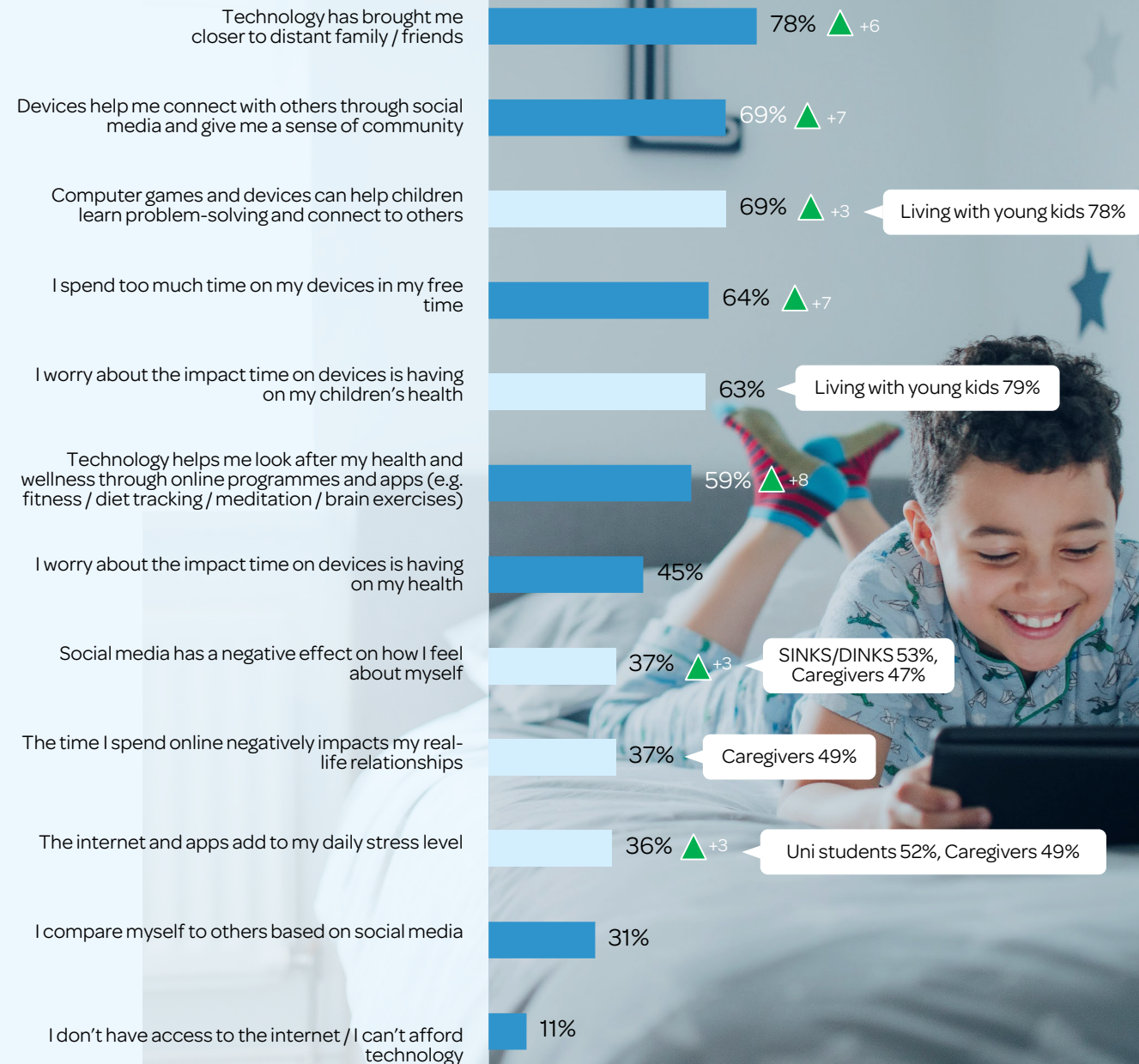


# Impact of technology on health and wellbeing

The majority of New Zealanders recognise the benefit of technology but there is a growing concern about the amount of time spent on devices. Conversely, technology has also brought people closer to distant family and friends – which is unsurprising given the number of lockdowns and continued border closures over the past two years.

Devices are a doubled-edged sword for parents with young children, who say they are helpful for educational purposes, but worry about the time spent on them.

Caregivers experience the most negative impacts from technology, with a higher number indicating social media impacts their self-esteem and time spent online adds to their stress levels.





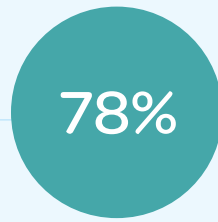
# Back to booking holidays

While most agree taking a holiday requires financial sacrifice, New Zealanders take away many positive benefits from travel; feeling less stressed afterwards, valuing being able to see friends and family and experiencing other cultures.

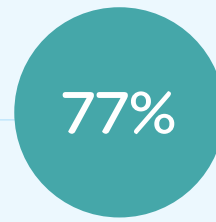
There has been a significant increase in people changing their travel plans due to the effect travel has on climate change, and 73 per cent are now worried about travelling overseas due to the pandemic.



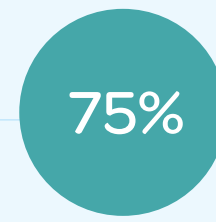
Holidays require a significant financial sacrifice



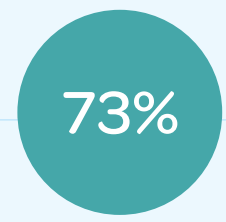
I feel less stressed after a holiday



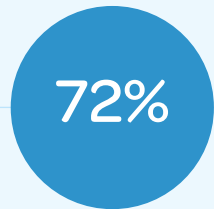
Holidays are a way to connect to other cultures I'm not familiar with



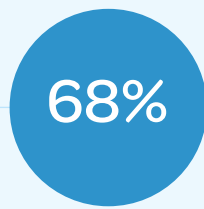
Holidays are about seeing family or friends



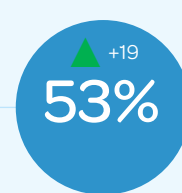
I am worried to travel overseas due to the Covid-19 pandemic\*



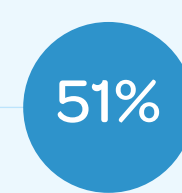
Holidays are about getting away from the noise of the city and getting back to nature



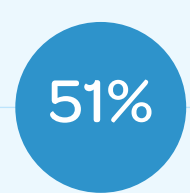
I prefer to save money for holidays and experiences rather than objects / items



My travel priorities / habits have changed in light of the effect of travel on the climate



Having a pre-existing illness / condition excludes people from travel insurance



Planning a holiday is stressful

# Building a positive healthy future

New Zealanders include both physical and social activities in their lives in an effort to look after their emotional health and wellbeing.

In the past six months, New Zealanders have been spending time outdoors, keeping their brain stimulated and nurturing relationships.



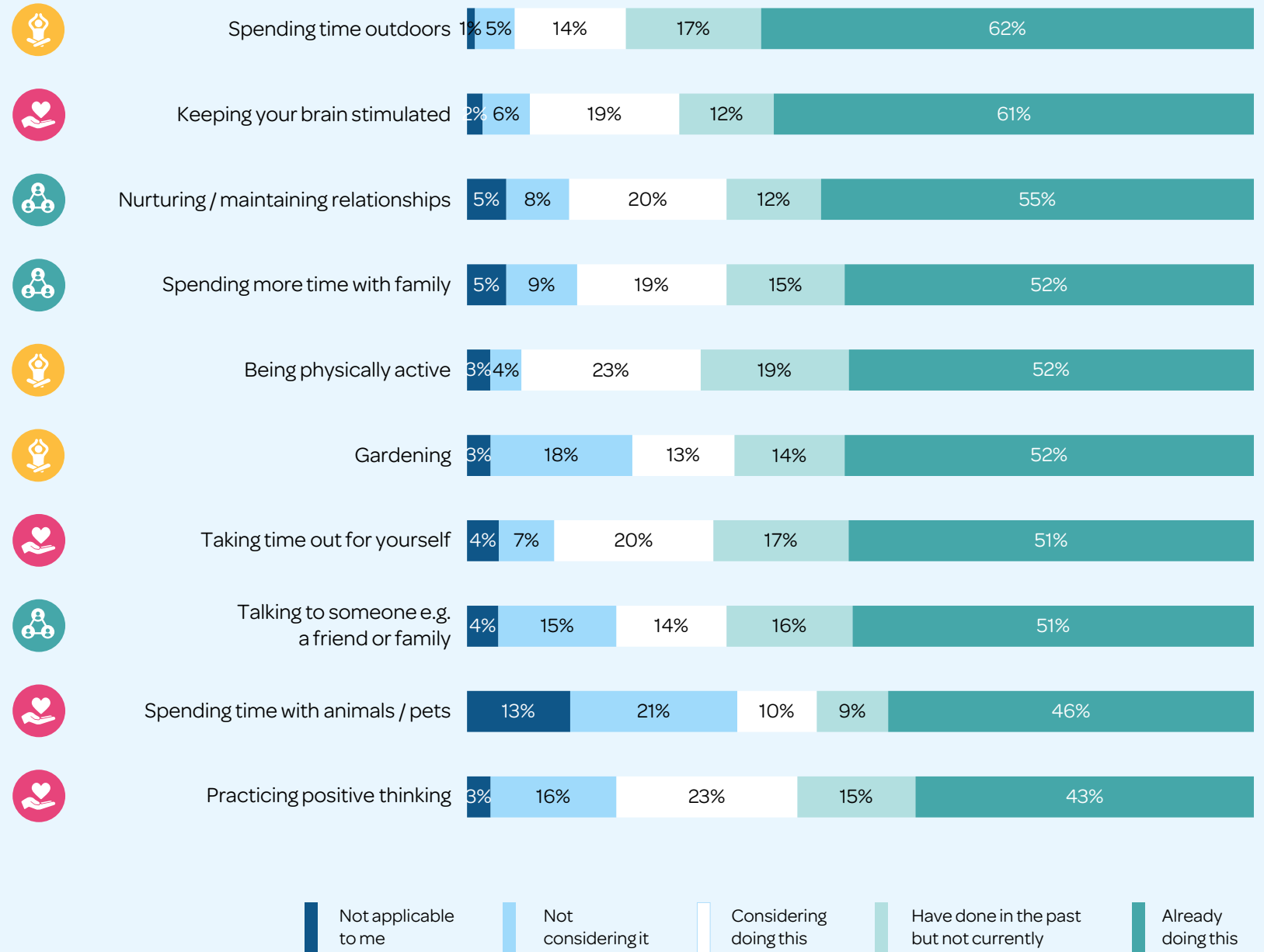
Physical



Emotional





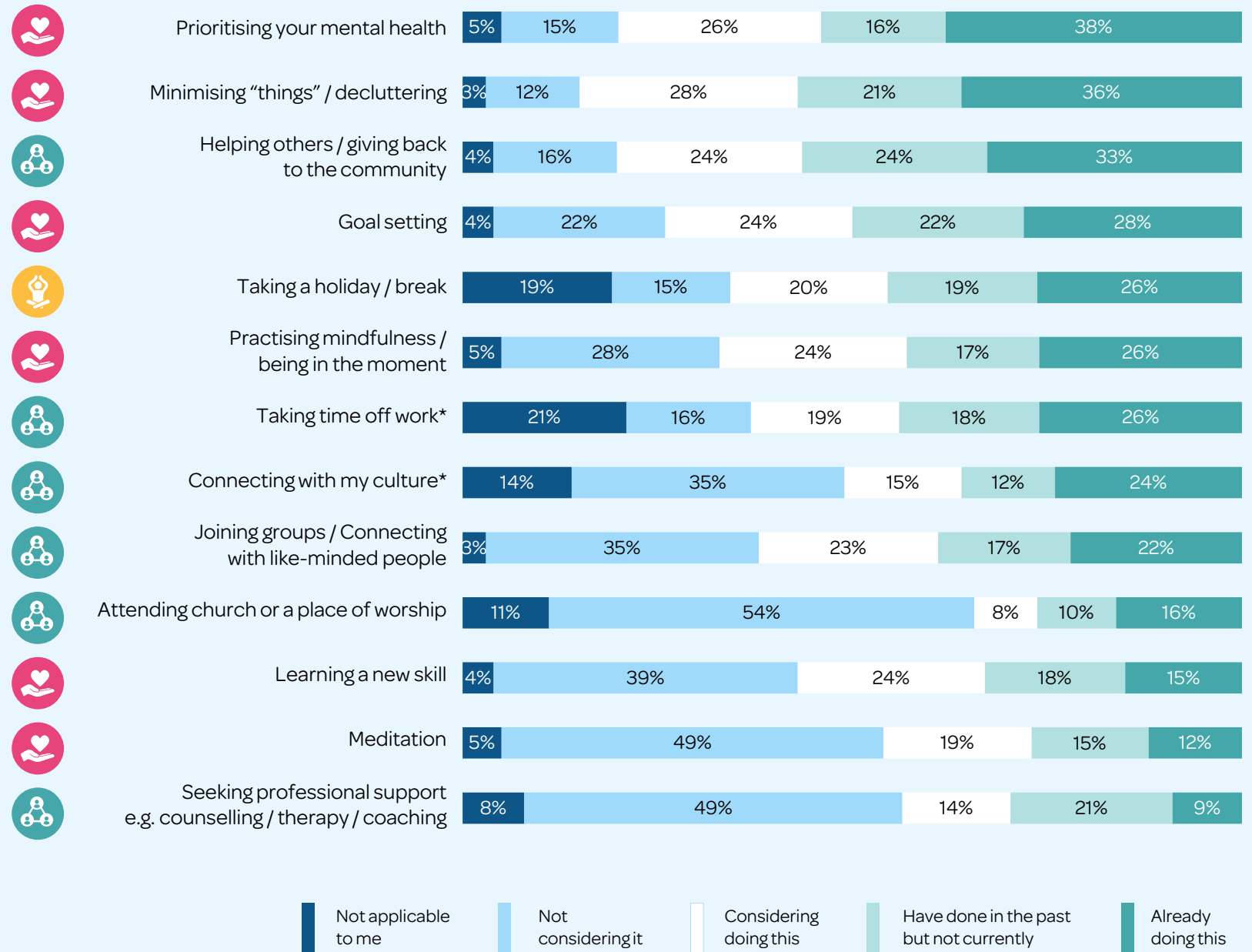
Social / Community



# Building a positive healthy future

New Zealanders are using a mix of mental and social activities to look after their emotional health and wellbeing. Some other popular methods are people prioritising their mental health, decluttering, giving back to the community and taking a holiday.

-  Physical
-  Emotional
-  Social / Community



# Methodology

Desktop and qualitative research gave us an in-depth understanding of the current situation in New Zealand regarding health, lifestyle, activity levels and wellbeing.

This is the fourth wave of Healthy Futures. Fieldwork was conducted during the Omicron outbreak and implementation of the traffic-light system across New Zealand.

## Wave 1 – fieldwork:

4 October to 30 October 2019 (Spring) n=1000

## Wave 2 – fieldwork:

2 March to 15 March 2020 (Autumn) n=1007

## Wave 3 – fieldwork:

22 to 28 April 2020  
(Covid-19 lockdown 15 min dip) n=1000

## Wave 4 – fieldwork:

4 to 26 March 2022 n=2000

### Pre-lockdown:

Combined together to compare against lockdown period

During lockdown Level 4 and Level 3

During traffic light system

A total of **5,007** 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  
2022 visit:

[www.southerncross.co.nz/healthy-futures](http://www.southerncross.co.nz/healthy-futures)

