



COVID-19 Hauora Wellbeing Survey

of the tangata whenua,
community & voluntary sector

Summary Findings 2021

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Hui E!
Community Aotearoa

Volunteering
NEW ZEALAND

Background

In 2020 Hui E! Community Aotearoa and Volunteering New Zealand partnered with Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy New Zealand to survey the impact of COVID-19 on the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector. Hui E! and Volunteering New Zealand revisited that research this year. We wanted to see how things had or hadn't changed. We wanted to go deeper into organisational hauora, or wellbeing. We commissioned a follow-up survey, supplemented with focus groups. We particularly sought out the voices of organisations caring for Māori, Pasifika, migrant and refugee background, and disabled communities. We know that these voices are often not well heard.

This research summary outlines the key findings of that survey and focus groups, as they relate to wellbeing, funding, service delivery and volunteer support. Note that the surveys and focus groups were completed just before Aotearoa New Zealand went into its second national lockdown in August 2021.

Our thanks to those who generously shared their experiences, insight and wisdom in these busy and pressured times.

As you read this report, we ask that you honour those who shared their experiences by reflecting and taking action to better support the hauora, or wellbeing of the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector and the communities it serves.

Key highlights from this research

- » Demand for services has been rising.
- » Funding in most cases has not kept up with demand. Funding levels have stayed the same and, in some cases, have fallen.
- » Pandemic pressures have created further strain on budgets, staffing, and service delivery.
- » Despite this, members of the sector have shown tenacity and flexibility in continuing to serve the increasing demands of their communities.
- » The disability community is affected by the additional stress lockdowns have placed on clients, for example, additional complications in keeping connected, accessing services etc. High anxiety was reported in this part of the sector over the risks of moving away from the elimination strategy and further opening our borders.
- » Volunteers of migrant and refugee background communities are experiencing particular

stresses and isolation and need priority counselling and support.

- » While volunteer numbers initially fell at the beginning of the pandemic, younger volunteers stepped up to fill the gap. However, pressures on volunteers have increased meaning adequate management support, training and wellbeing support are needed.
- » Staff and volunteer wellbeing is being impacted by increased demand for services, lack of funding, the compounding issues facing communities, and the general impacts of working in a pandemic environment.
- » The natural tensions between community care and self-care have become more apparent in pandemic times.
- » Levels of optimism remain high, though energies are starting to wane.
- » The pandemic has created the conditions for a more collaborative and less competitive approach to funding.
- » Whakawhanaungatanga and local mobilisation have been key to wellbeing and service provision, and will continue to be key. Deeper connections within and across communities are a source of strength, flexibility and tenacity.
- » There is a huge wellspring in our communities of effective leadership, energy, tenacity, skill, knowledge, wisdom, love, respect, kindness, and compassion.

Summary/commentary – how the sector is doing

Our sector has rallied to continue its mahi tahi, labours of love

As with the general population of Aotearoa New Zealand, the wellbeing of paid workers and volunteers in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector has been challenged by the pandemic in multiple ways, and to varying degrees.

Nonetheless, our research has revealed a huge wellspring of effective leadership, energy, tenacity, skills, knowledge, wisdom, love, respect, kindness, and compassion.

Paid workers and volunteers have worked hard to continue their mahi tahi, their labours of love. They have continued to rally. They have continued to innovate. They have remained fiercely committed. They have found energy and enrichment in the new connections and partnerships they have started and sustained across their communities since the pandemic began. They continue to receive greater appreciation for and recognition of their work. And they remain generally optimistic about their futures.

But pandemic pressures are taking their toll

Despite this, the ongoing pressures of a pandemic environment are understandably starting to take their toll on personal and organisational wellbeing. They have never been more wanted, but our sector is continuing to do even more with less. For the vast majority, funding has largely stayed the same or declined, while demand has increased. Staff and volunteers have observed and are being affected by the growing needs, disparities and challenges in the communities they serve. They report that work hours and work pressures are affecting physical and emotional health. The labour of love is starting to feel, for some, like hard toil.

The sector has found a source of wellness in whakawhanaungatanga

In response, people in the sector have sought strength and energy from each other.

Whakawhanaungatanga is cited as a key to keeping well – building close, trusted and supportive relationships with others, closer collaboration and keeping connected are important counters to the pressures people feel they are under.

The sector has found it refreshing and enriching to step away for a moment from competitive models of funding.

Pre-established kinship relationships have expanded to embrace non-kin networks. These networks are playing an increasing role in meeting community need.

Collective visions for shaping the future appear to be centred on the strength of whānau and community grassroots and flax-roots networks.

And our people continue to go the extra mile

The stories we have been told prove that despite increasing pressures on paid workers and volunteers, the people in our sector would do anything for us. They would go more than the extra mile – in fact someone shared they drove 643 kilometres from Wellington to Auckland to advocate for their community!

So how far would we go for them?

Now it's time to consider how far we'd go for them. Our sector needs help and support from the government, philanthropy and their communities.

There are three things that could make the biggest difference for those working in the sector and the people they care for.

1. They see a better future in closer connectedness and collaboration, in harnessing their kin and non-kin based relationships. Incentives for collaboration, and supported places and spaces can support this.
2. They want competitive funding models removed in favour of trust-based models that respond to local need. This means respecting the ability of hapū, iwi and local communities to lead, and supporting locally-led planning and resourcing.
3. They need resourcing for wellbeing and salaries, not only projects.

Why this matters

All things are connected. The hau, or vitality of the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector becomes the hau, or vitality of our communities. When we strengthen the hauora or wellbeing of the sector, we strengthen the hauora of communities. When we compromise the hauora or wellbeing of the sector, we compromise the ability of our communities to survive, flourish and thrive.

Ki te kotahi te kakaho ka whati, ki te kapuia, e kore e whati. When we stand alone we are vulnerable but together we are unbreakable.

Wellbeing

Summary

People working in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector have been known to describe their jobs as a calling rather than a job. Volunteers and paid workers have a fierce loyalty to their communities, and a commitment to continue delivering services, particularly to those they describe as vulnerable.

When funding wasn't available, we heard of natural networks that were ignited, kinship ties that kicked in, and a harnessing of collective effort.

We heard many stories of going above and beyond, of long work hours, of mahi taahi – labours of love – that were not funded but still got done.

This labour of love has surfaced the natural struggles and tensions between self-care and community care. Finding the right balance is not easy when the needs of a community in a pandemic are so great. The labour of love is starting to feel to some like hard toil.

Survey findings

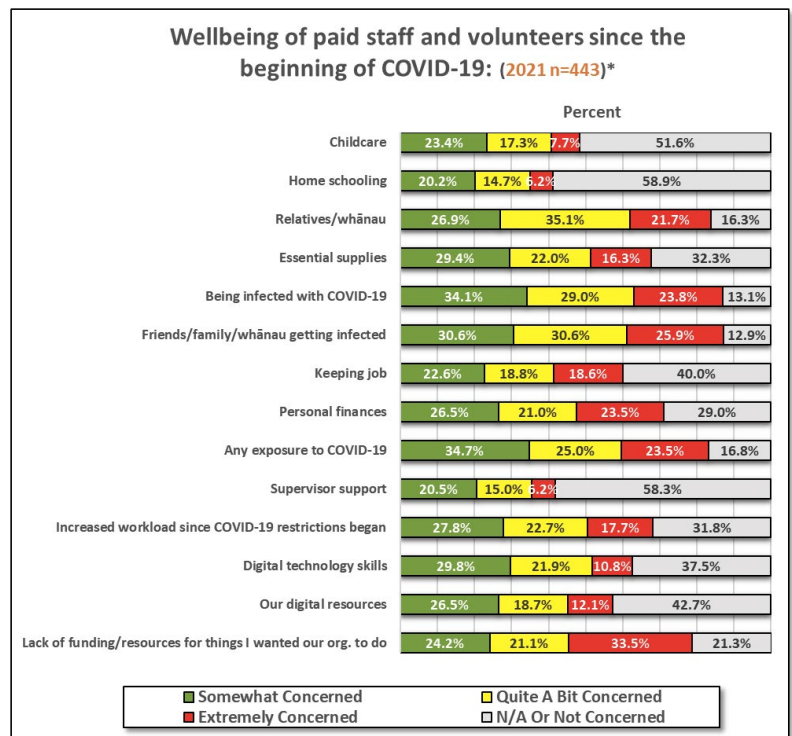
Respondents were asked to rate their level of concern across 14 dimensions of wellbeing.

The responses indicate the wellbeing of staff and volunteers who are members of the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector.

A sizable 83.7% indicated they were either somewhat, quite a bit or extremely concerned about the general wellbeing of their relatives/whānau. Similarly, 87.1% were concerned about the risk/consequences of friends/family/whānau catching COVID-19. Another 86.9% were concerned about being infected by the virus themselves.

More than two thirds (68.2%) of our respondents expressed some level of concern for increased workloads of paid staff and/or volunteers since the COVID 19 restrictions began.

Significant proportions (78.8%) of our respondents were either somewhat concerned, quite a bit or extremely concerned about lack of resources and funding they needed to do their tasks.



Note: Although the responses are likely affected by the size and level of resources of organisations within which people work (among other factors), the collective subjective perceptions of staff and volunteers are important, as they influence organisational wellbeing.

Insights from focus groups

- Respondents talked about enormous pressures on paid staff and volunteers.
- They reported that increasing needs of the communities they care for are not being matched by funding.
- The cumulative effects of not only the pandemic, but natural disasters and already existing disparities and inequities have compounded issues for those they care for, and for the staff who care for them.

“We have never been more busy, more needed. Many rely on our services and we rely on others for kindness. Daily people donate, fabric, food, and encouragement. Actual money—not so much so I am often doing sewing jobs and mending machines for extra koha. I like to do these things but it is on top of 50-hour weeks...and I fear burnout so I try to say ‘no’ more often but then need calls louder. What to do?”

[Survey respondent]

- Whakawhanaungatanga was cited as a key to keeping well – building close, trusted and supportive relationships with others, closer collaboration and keeping connected were important counters to the pressures the sector feels it’s under.
- There was much talk of the value of collaborations and relationships, not only how useful collaboration is but how enriching it has been to step away from competitiveness across the sector.
- Nonetheless, respondents raised questions about how wellbeing can be sustained under the current pressures on the sector.

“And actually, a lot of the things that keep us well, or keep us connected as whānau, as members of a community, don’t require contracts or anything like that...they’re about being kind to each other, they’re about being in each other’s lives...simple things around social connections...”

[Māori focus group participant]

Insights on wellbeing

The wellbeing of communities they serve

The wellbeing of communities also affects the wellbeing of those who care for them. Paid staff and volunteers have observed growing mental health problems and suicidality in the communities of people they assist. There was talk of the worry this places on volunteers and staff. There were some reports of clients becoming more demanding and angry.

The disability community in particular talked of the extra stressors lockdowns have placed on clients. Lockdowns and the particular vulnerabilities of their clients have meant additional complications in keeping connected, accessing services, delivering equipment such as wheelchairs, supporting client self-care, and supporting clients to attend health appointments.

The stress has been horrific these past 10 weeks. I cry often. The people I serve are in crisis. I am struggling not to bring work home. I am worried about suicide and other really serious consequences for the disabled people I serve.
[Survey respondent]

Stress factors

The agencies we work with are stretched and can't get enough volunteers or keep up with demand for their services due to natural disasters like floods, COVID-19 fears and other extreme illnesses over winter, housing and rental increases, high crime rate, unemployment and homelessness.
[Survey respondent]

Stress factors are cumulative. It was noted that there are so many difficulties for so many people – staff, volunteers and service users – that “it is hard to focus on one story...”.

Salaries in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector were noted as being low. Respondents noted that price rises are also impacting their paid workers. However, organisations don't have funding to increase salaries – and often salaries are not funded by philanthropy or government.

As with the general population, staff and volunteers reported detrimental effects from the uncertainty and fear brought about by COVID 19. They felt this was further exacerbated when serving vulnerable community members, e.g. the elderly, disabled, people with health conditions.

Fatigue and workload

Staff and volunteer fatigue was reported as being ever-present. While this is common for the general population, the pressures of increased service delivery while funding and staff numbers remain the same or decline were evident in discussions.

The mental strain is huge and the amount of work just to keep our heads afloat is leading to burnout and depression and a loss of staff.
[Survey respondent]

Particular pressures on chief executives and managers

A combination of staff and volunteers needing more support, and having to do more with less, was mentioned as putting particular pressure on chief executives. It was noted that chief executives in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector do not have the same mentoring and professional development supports as managers in government or business.

Individuals do not have a limitless supply of energy to keep on delivering more with less support.
[Community sector key informant]

***A lot of leaders have probably exhausted themselves through COVID, in our sector. And, yeah, I think we might see some wheels fall off.
[Voluntary sector key informant]***

Funding and service pressures

Funding was cited as one of the biggest pressures on organisations. While funding is always a pressure for the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector, there was a sense from responses that the competitive, complex and inflexible funding models and long-winded forms are adding unnecessary strain in an already pressured environment. As are short-term contracts that don't allow for forward planning or consistent staffing.

How to better support wellbeing

***“[W]e don't see competition as the way forward. The way forward is collectively for us to work together, to have a collaborative voice...to work on...these systemic problems together and start to position ourselves in a different way, and as more of an equal partner to government and business.
[Community sector key informant]***

Support collaborative partnerships

There was an overwhelming consensus that the collaborative partnerships that formed during the first lockdown, and that have been sustained in some but not all cases, must be supported to continue.

There appeared a powerful impetus by both funders and community organisations to work more closely together in the future. There was comment that tangata whenua, community, and voluntary organisations working in a full and equal partnership with central and local government and philanthropic funding bodies will mean less mental strain, better service delivery, and improved hau or vitality of organisations and of the communities they serve.

***How can we be an intentional community not competitive community? So, we're having to teach the community how to communicate and how to stop vetoing and stop bulldozing other groups.
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]***

Remove competitive funding models

Respondents repeatedly called for competitive funding models to be abandoned in favour of collaboration.

Address the inequities

I think there is an absolute disconnect between the conversation around equity and values and what is actually valued. We have had a widening gap in terms of the haves and the have nots...and being Māori, we're at the bottom of the heap in pretty much everything, and that's a known fact. And yet the solutions are not actually going to the heart of addressing those facts. And that comes down to a value decision about what's important in the scheme of things.

[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]

There was some focus group discussion about equity and what is valued in society and by those who fund the sector—who makes the value-based decisions about what's important? It was noted that funding decisions are mostly dominated by Pākehā.

There was a suggestion from representatives of the disabled community that, in times of crisis people who have been ignored and marginalised may be finally listened to—that those “on the fringes” have an opportunity to push for change.

Better support staff and particularly CEs

It is not sustainable to demand ever more of CEs, who are very stretched, and there is a lot of burnout. Some of the training and resources and funding available for governance training needs to be redirected to supporting the CEs.

[Community sector key informant]

The need for increased availability of counselling services was mentioned numerous times. There is now funding for this, but organisations reported there not being enough counsellors available for their staff.

Similarly, there were some reports that organisations are putting money towards staff wellbeing, but that it's difficult to access extra funding for this.

It was commented that people running community organisations are very stretched. It was suggested there needs to be a lot more funded support at the chief executive level.

Whakawhanaungatanga

Pasifika values, culture, and families have helped communities to work together, even though there is not always much money or financial means. [Pasifika key informant]

Collective visions for shaping the future appear to be centred on the strength of whānau and community grassroots and flax-roots networks.

Although funding is important to deal with complex social problems, respondents felt that helping each other as a collective was often more useful than relying on money, contracts, and the social services sector.

A representative of the migrant and refugee background community reported a greater affiliation and support working with Māori organisations who understood kinship, than working with government organisations.

Many Māori organisations highlighted the role of kinship, the vital power of whakawhanaungatanga, and building a relationship through shared experiences as part of their operational success in continuing to deliver care and services to their hapū.

In the future, it appears these pre-established kinship relationships, which now extend into non-kin-defined networks in other rural and urban areas, will play an increasing role in meeting community need.

***And for Chinese groups to feel more connected to local communities, it would be better to reach out to tangata whenua and Pasifika groups, and develop more connections that way, rather than reaching upwards to basically white organisations that don't understand situations [at grassroots level within minority ethnic communities]
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]***

Funding

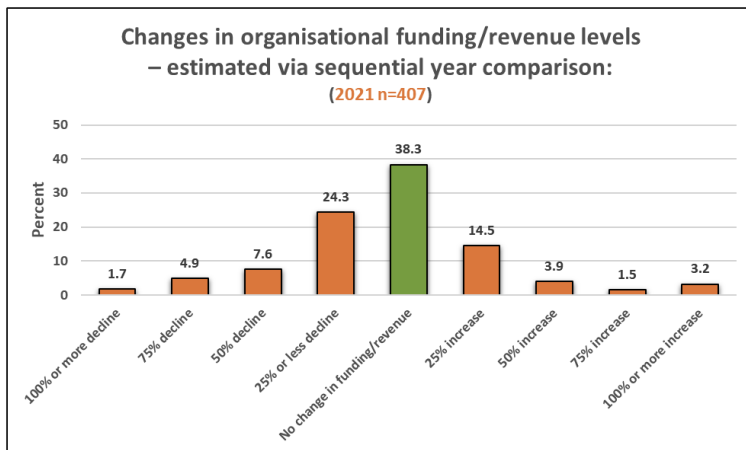
Summary

Funding challenges are endemic in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector. Pandemic pressures have created further strain on budgets, staffing, and service delivery.

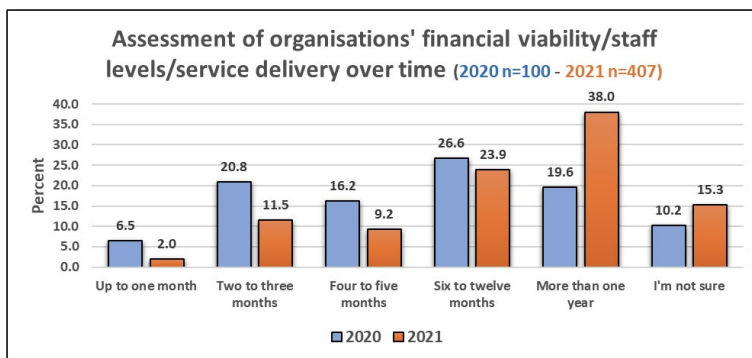
This strain doesn't appear to have been evenly felt. Some organisations report enormous strain on budgets and a struggle to keep their heads above water. Others report receiving funding boosts, being able to vastly expand their reach, and joining with others to seek funds for pandemic support initiatives.

The pandemic has created the conditions for a more collaborative and less competitive approach to funding. Organisations have been trusted to collectively know their own communities and determine where funds are most needed. Criteria have been broadened. Flexibility has meant organisations have been able to adjust their mahi to what's needed at the time. The sector would like to see this less competitive funding model retained.

Survey findings



More than a third of our respondents (38.3%) reported no change in funding/revenue levels in the past 12 months. A further 23.1% reported an increase in levels and a third (36.8%) experienced a serious (25%-75%) decline in funding/revenue. A further 1.7% of respondents experienced 100% or more decline in funding.



Funding for tangata whenua, community and voluntary organisations is often short term. There was much nervousness about funding streams in the first lockdown. This appears to have improved this year with an 18.4% increase in organisations saying they had funds for more than one year. A further 61.9% of organisations have funding for

6-12 months or beyond. However, 22.7% are surviving on very short-term funds of less than five months.

Half of organisations who responded to our survey operate on less than \$125,000 a year. Voluntary organisations surveyed operated on smaller budgets: 50% had operational budgets under 25k, and 70% under 75k.

Insights from focus groups

- Respondent's reported that, when there's no slack in the system, even small changes in funding can leave them in a precarious position.

'Where there's a will, there's a way' used to be my motto, but no longer...After 18 months with no or precarious income from the events sector, not to mention the satisfaction of making a difference in the community, our staff and volunteers and their families and dependents are stressed, ill, worn out. We have all but lost the motivation to carry on.

[Survey respondent]

- One respondent reported delivering more remote online and phone services after the COVID-19 pandemic began, but with less funding. This has had a direct impact on the amount and quality of service delivery that is provided, and their ability to properly support staff and volunteers.
- Meantime, others found themselves tripling their income and therefore their reach. Before the pandemic, a Pasifika organisation was working with around ten Pasifika groups, and now it is working with around thirty, in Auckland and Wellington. They also report receiving food funding from MSD, and working with community networks on put together a secure food plan for their communities.
- Organisations continually advocating for government funding describe the process as a battle. One Pasifika respondent went more than an extra mile to advocate for their community. They drove from Wellington to Auckland to challenge the authority when they refused to pay, and successfully got the resources to the people who needed them.

The key driver for me was, just the injustice in the access to services that we know affects our Pasifika and Māori.

[Pasifika focus group participant]

- Some community organisations reported establishing small but secure funding contracts, but with no fundraising opportunities because of lockdowns, they have lost momentum.
- Some organisations report that the struggles to obtain funding have resulted in more collaboration and partnership with other organisations, which may help to reduce competitiveness over resources in the future.
- Although funding is important to deal with complex social problems, the community quickly realised that helping each other as a collective was often more useful than relying on money, contracts, and the social services sector.

... throughout last year, there were less opportunities to volunteer, potentially because fundraising events were not being run. A lot of volunteering happens in the fundraising space, in events. So, those weren't able to operate.

[Community sector key informant]

What's contributing to funding pressures

Complex and rigid funding processes

Respondents reported that funding and grant opportunities are often hard to find, as well as difficult to apply for, with complex forms to fill in.

“We have the challenge of meeting the monthly requirements of our MBIE contract ... which includes providing at least two face-to-face seminars per month (and we cannot easily replace these with virtual meetings because several of our would-be participants lack the confidence and skills to participate).

[Māori focus group participant]

There were numerous references in the focus groups to forms for funding being too long – some mentioned more than 20 pages long. Pasifika respondents noted these disadvantage those for whom English wasn't their first language. They feel the forms are not designed to complement, let alone fulfil, the diverse needs of Pasifika communities and 'aiga.

Respondents commented on the narrow criteria and concern that the criteria are developed by people who are not close to the community or its issues.

Filling out application forms for funding was described by one respondent as a “game”.

Competitive process

Often the problems talked about were not only about obtaining funding, but also the competitiveness of the process, and the feeling that the community sector has become so bound to a top-down bureaucratic process.

Short term funding

One-year funding is reportedly putting pressure on organisations. It takes up valuable time every year working towards getting funding and proving it was used for a specific objective. It also means staff can only be employed on short fixed-term contracts. This is making it difficult to find staff who want longer-term work. They believe this is also wasteful when staff leave and new people have to be trained. One informant told us this kind of churn is very stressful as well as inefficient.

There is not much time to spend writing lengthy applications for funding, and then waiting three months to hear back if you are getting the funding; and you may have already started the project before that.

[Voluntary sector key informant]

Salaries and other overheads not often funded

Many community organisations applying for funding reported that they are mostly not able to apply for income to cover salaries or wages. They believe there's an expectation that the work is done for free. They report that funders prefer to fund projects with specific outputs. But the success of those projects relies on staff to deliver them. They reported that the limited ability to fund paid positions left those who were waged doing multiple jobs and working long and pressured hours.

It was noted that recruiting and utilising volunteers is not 'free'. There are expenses, and resources are required to create roles, advertise, recruit, onboard, train, and reimburse volunteer expenses.

***You have staff that are doing a lot of the work – community development roles and navigator roles...your admin, and even a GM role. You are all working flat out, but there's actually no funding to support those roles. But if those roles aren't there, then nothing's going to happen.
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]***

Continual changes to criteria

Our respondents emphasised that, when things are changing all the time, it's difficult to keep up with all the alterations in application criteria. They felt that the evidence of need requirements is often hard for applicants to find quickly and easily.

I had to go back like 10 times because we needed some little information that you didn't think of. And then how do you translate [into English] what we know we can do? [Pasifika focus group participant]

How to relieve funding pressures

Thoughts from respondents included:

- providing multi-year funding so that organisations can make plans for the longer term, can commit to staff contracts, and can innovate
- removing competitive funding models
- investing in people and their professional development
- funding infrastructure and staff costs.

***[This is a] really, really important opportunity for us to start reframing our future, and re-evaluating what we do and re-evaluating the values that we operate under and reviewing the paradigm. The paradigm that we exist in has just become so economically driven, especially in the community development sector. We're just constantly put under pressure to deliver KPIs, and we are still in a competitive funding regime.
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]***

Respondents repeatedly called for solidarity in the community and voluntary sector, and for competitive funding models to be abandoned. We heard of examples where removing this barrier to collaboration has built trust, encouraged resource and knowledge sharing, led to more sustainable delivery models, and has significantly increased the number of people who can be helped – both locally and across cities.

There was interest from Pasifika respondents in developing an application process for funding that does not need to be written—those who were not confident in writing in English and/or struggle to provide their ideas on paper could provide video or in-person applications.

COVID contributed towards more collaboration, in the way that the funding was available without people feeling like it was really contestable. So, there was funding where you needed it for the community. That established a lot more trust between a lot of our community organisations ... So, really great things to come from ... not just talking about collaboration, but having a real shared issue where we can play on every organisation's individual strengths to actually work together.

[Voluntary sector focus group participant]

Some respondents expressed the desire to have more power over decisions, especially funding.

There is a strong feeling that the bureaucratic procedures around funding need to change, and that the COVID-19 pandemic has given everyone a chance to “breathe and do something different”.

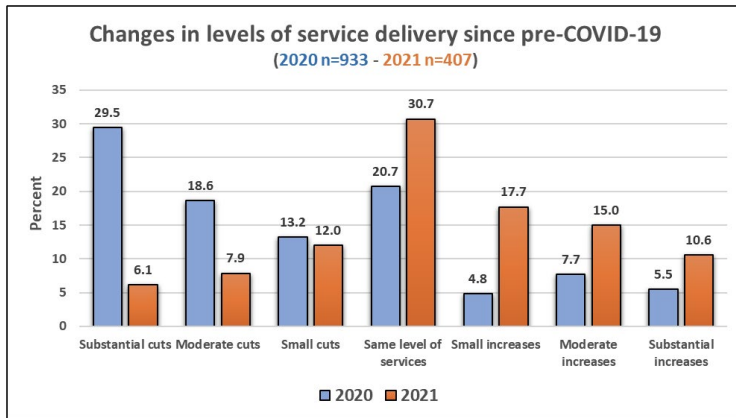
Lockdown sort of re-instituted some of the vision and some of the values that are part of our lives but have been subjected or subsumed under the need for all the fiscal requirements that government has put on us.

[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]

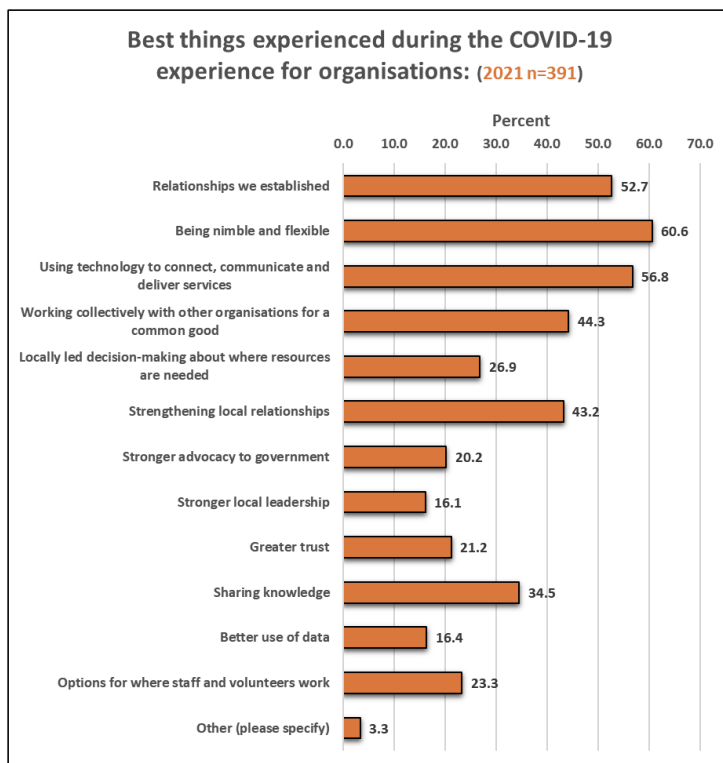
Service delivery

‘We have never been more busy, more needed’, was a common refrain across focus groups. The sector reports that community needs have increased, while funding has largely remained the same or in some cases declined. In response, members of the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector have shown tenacity and flexibility in getting supplies to clients, providing support remotely, finding creative ways to connect and even expand their client base, collaborating to pool resources and expand their reach. Whanaungatanga and deeper connections within and across their communities are once again raised as a source of strength, flexibility and tenacity.

Survey findings



Service delivery became more stable or increased for a significant proportion of the respondent organisations over the past year. In 2020, 20.7% of respondents reported no change in levels of service delivery; this increased to 30.7% in 2021. This could indicate increased confidence in working through a pandemic since the first lockdown in early 2020.



Importantly, the proportion of organisations who reported increases in service delivery levels more than doubled from 18% in 2020 to 43.3% in 2021.

This is despite only 23.1% of survey respondents reporting an increase in funding. This is in line with reported pressures on staff wellbeing. It indicates a mismatch between funding and increased service delivery, putting pressure on the sector and its volunteers and staff to deliver more with the same, or less, budget.

More than half of our respondent organisations (56.8%) have made more frequent (or first) use of technology to connect and deliver services. In addition, almost two thirds of our respondents (60.6%)

thought that their organisations had developed more nimble and flexible ways of working.

Similarly, 43.2% of respondents stated they had strengthened local relationships, 52% had established (new) relationships and 44.3% had worked collectively with other organisations towards a common good.

Insights from focus groups

Mobilising local resources

Respondents provided multiple examples of mobilising local resources and knowledge, even networks across the motu, to meet community need and change the way things were done.

We may not have money or financial means, but we have our families, we have our culture, our values, and I love that we were able to just mobilise and work together to help each other.

[Pasifika focus group participant]

- The Māori Women's Welfare League helped organise and distribute food using pre-established kinship networks.
- The Sikh community was mentioned for its support, though their food provision service became overwhelmed with requests for help.
- Another community reached out to local market gardeners.
- In another instance there were problems with online order queues with a large supermarket chain, so their community organisation developed a very good relationship with a small food chain.
- Kinship networks were used to establish a new branch of Māori Wardens. With this structure, they were then able to operationalise, restrict outside traffic into their community, and navigate food deliveries to elders more effectively.
- Others worked alongside local emergency management, MSD and local councils on collaborative initiatives.
- One collaborative initiative saw a group of key organisations setting up a website so that people needing accommodation, or food, or clothing or whatever they might need, could go to one portal.

What has changed for us is that the schools are having huge issues with students since COVID. I guess the stress on whānau is coming out at schools. This has increased our workload in the schools. For us to cope we are training up the tutors in the schools to know how to work with angry students. This in the long run will cut back our workload and benefit the school and students
[Survey respondent]

Whanaungatanga

When tangata whenua, community, and voluntary groups have needed to come up with new strategies and tactics, they've reported turning to networks of people they already know rather than to government or philanthropic bodies. Their experience is that the grassroots or flax-roots presence is more effective than the remote response.

The principle that best encapsulates these relational connections is whanaungatanga. Many of our Māori organisations highlighted the role of kinship networks in continuing to deliver care and services to their hapū.

Some Māori organisations alluded to the application of whanaungatanga principles across non-kin-based networks as an operational response to the impacts of the pandemic. Through these networks they created a local infrastructure to better deliver support.

Our Māori and Pasifika respondents repeatedly emphasised the vital role of communal responses, cultural awareness, and the importance of respected and trusted leaders in their communities, such as ‘community champs’ and ‘generators’. These individuals possess their own whanaungatanga networks. They became conduits for outreach. In some cases, these leaders had their own resources or connections, for example with food suppliers. These networks could be leveraged to meet other needs of struggling whānau as well.

And so, we did a lot of work on mobile phones and our social workers were rostered on every second day during the whole lockdown, and their job solely was to ring everybody on our client database just to check in, just to say hello, and maintain that list. We, over the 18 months ... have full technology transferability.

[Disability focus group participant]

Taking advantage of technology

The sector reported becoming more tech savvy and maintaining or growing this since the first lockdown.

Previously, it [our website] was just about using the services we provide. Our website now is more heavily around, this is how you do this, and this is how you do this, so that people can go to the information and then hook into any links that will take them to other places that they can go to.

[Pasifika key informant]

Some community organisations returned to face-to-face contacts once the first lockdowns ended, but some have retained online contact or a mixture of in-person and online contacts. Online training for volunteers has removed the requirements for them to travel. However, keeping some face-to-face events was noted as important for social solidarity.

This digital savviness comes with caveats. The negative impacts on staff and clients of spending a lot of time online were mentioned by some. ‘Zoom fatigue’ and staff being phobic with technology were mentioned. Not all services can be delivered remotely. Face-to-face contact remains important to some, as do in-person fundraising events.

During the shutdowns instead of welcoming people into our creative space we switched over service to delivering materials to people so that they could be creative in their own spaces. There were more people than we regularly saw come in who took advantage of this service and in this way our organisation gained in popularity. For many, even overseas, the posts on our Facebook page became the thing that kept them going.

[Survey respondent]

Some community organisations that provide training or upskilling have reported moving these services online. This is despite their pre-pandemic service delivery being face-to-face. Going online meant they were able to deliver to more people and from a wider geographical area.

Similarly, respondents report that technology has changed the frequency and attendance at hui, workshops, networking. One organisation went from twice-yearly in-person hui with 17 branches across the country to fortnightly online hui which allowed for regular wellbeing checks as well as operational discussions.

The creative arts community, in particular, has benefitted from using technology, the web and social media to keep up and grow membership and interest through lockdowns and levels.

We have been able to rebuild a really significant part of our community...our creative careers programme. We have supported, over 20 years, 3,000 creatives into employment. And a lot of those, we've been able to reconnect with as well, so we've really strengthened the infrastructure, the human and personal and heart infrastructure of the [art-space].
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]

What's contributing to pressures

Increasing demand for services relative to funding and volunteers

Many respondents told us that their organisations have experienced an enormous increased demand for services, and they simply cannot keep up. This issue is compounded for some by the interlinked issues of funding, paying staff and supporting volunteers.

Respondents mentioned the community's demand for food is the most vital need, and is sometimes at crisis point.

We have seen a growth of 73% at our charity for the distribution of food. [Survey respondent]

Inequities and injustices

There was talk in focus groups of a lot of injustice towards Pasifika and Māori in the system. There were experiences of people in the community being unaware that they qualified for the wage subsidy, so there was a lot to do in terms of advising people about their entitlements and helping them get them.

Being distracted from their vision and mission

Pressures from multiple directions - financial, community needs, sustainability are reportedly distracting organisations from honouring their vision and mission. Respondents have commented that these pressures come from people who are disconnected from their local community and don't understand community needs or priorities.

***We're just at the mercy of the dictates of the paradigm that they have sort of supplanted on us. It has very little to do with what the needs we have identified with look like and what we're able to serve.
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]***

How to relieve the pressures

It's clear from listening to our respondents, whether they represent community organisations or funding organisations, that there is a powerful impetus to work closely together in the future.

***It's about networks. It's about in-kind support. It's about opportunities for business, government, the community sector to work together on solutions... money is certainly one part of it, because you need a basic kind of infrastructure for the sector to be able to function and be sustainable... [But this future sustainability] grows out of collaboration and relationship.
[Community sector key informant]***

Whakawhanungatanga has consistently been mentioned as a source of source of community strength, vitality and agility.

A Māori key informant was enthusiastic about the value during the pandemic that came out of the community generators initiative. These are micro-enterprises led by 'community champions' who are kaitiaki within their communities with hubs at marae or libraries. These independent community champions were able to organise and advocate using principles of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga.

It's also clear from respondents that they wish to be mandated as communities to collaboratively decide on local priorities, funding distribution and service delivery rather than relying on government plans and priorities. It's evident that local communities are able, when empowered, to mobilise local networks and resources to meet the needs of their communities.

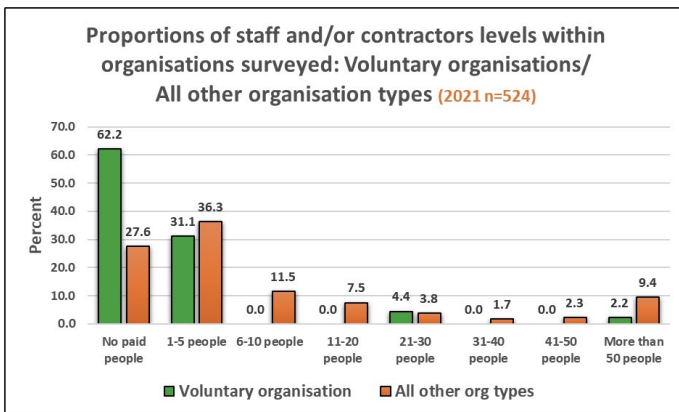
***But through this two, three years, I found so many similar[ities] with Māori and Pasifika because those cultures are more closer than the Western Pākehā culture. So, from my personal experience, I would like to see more integrated organisations in voluntary, ... charitable sectors not separated, using the language.
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]***

Volunteers

Summary

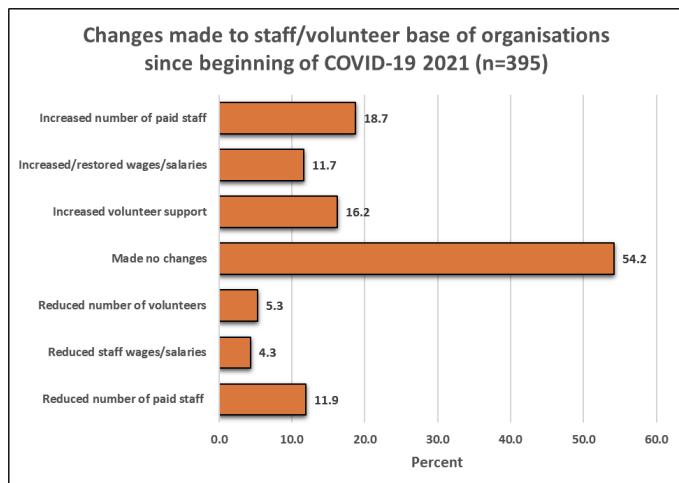
As one of our respondents suggests, “if you are feeling a low level of anxiety and depression...the best thing that you can do is actually give a little of your time to someone else,” which appears to be what some New Zealanders have been doing. While volunteer numbers initially fell at the beginning of the pandemic because volunteers were in an older age bracket, volunteer numbers in most cases have levelled out, and in some cases increased. That said, volunteering should lift your spirits, not bring them down. We’ve heard reports of volunteers having to take on increased responsibility and workload. It’s clear from our respondents that we need to protect our volunteers. We need to ensure that their mahi aroha is met with adequate management support, training and wellbeing support when their organisations are under increased pressure.

Survey findings

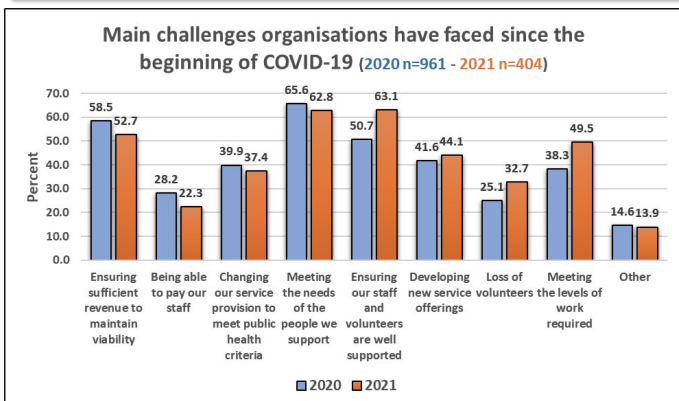


Almost one third (30.5%) of our respondents had no paid staff and operated solely through a voluntary workforce. For voluntary organisations surveyed, this figure goes up to 62.2%. So, almost two thirds of voluntary organisations reported having no paid staff.

More than three quarters (76.9%) of our respondent organisations operated using volunteers and between 0–10 paid staff.



More than half (54.2%) of our respondent organisations made no changes to their staff/volunteer base over the time period. In addition, 16.2% experienced increased volunteer support and 18.7% increased their number of paid staff. In contrast, 11.9% of our respondents reduced their number of paid staff while 5.3% experienced a reduction in their volunteer workforce.



Importantly, levels of voluntary support more than doubled, growing from 10.9% in 2020 to 27% in 2021. Levels of donated goods or services also increased from 15% in 2020 to 23.8% in 2021.

The wellbeing of volunteers is a growing concern for some organisations. The challenge of ensuring staff and volunteers are/were well supported grew from 50.7% in 2020 to 63.1% in 2021.

Insights from focus groups

But we went from quite a lot of retirees looking for volunteer opportunities prior to lockdown, to 71% of the people looking for opportunities at the moment from May [being] under the age of 30. And either in full or part time employment or seeking employment. So, it has been a significant shift, and only about 9% of the people looking for volunteer opportunities are over the age of 60.
[Voluntary sector focus group participant]

It was initially difficult for older people to volunteer when COVID-19 restrictions advised people over 65 to stay at home. Because of this, respondents reported that there was an initial fall in the number of people volunteering when the COVID-19 pandemic began. More recently, by mid-2021, in some places the figures had gone up.

This could be explained by a reported change in the demographics of people who volunteer. They're now younger, rather than retirees.

Some organisations reported that this has provided a challenge for them to engage better with youth and recruit younger volunteers. They report that younger volunteers are looking for different things and need to be managed in very different ways.

Younger volunteers are giving their time and should be rewarded for that and be taught new skills that they want to learn. Organisations should not always merely 'have a fixed role that they want to put someone into,' whereas what we're seeing, through COVID, as new and younger people come into volunteering organisations, if they want to make the most of that, they need to be able to adapt how they engage with those volunteers.
[Voluntary sector key informant]

What's contributing to pressures

Isolation

While we heard that there was a lot of community support and volunteers worked hard, lockdowns and restrictions still increased isolation to levels that had not previously been experienced by everyone, including volunteers.

Stress

Respondents reported many volunteers having to take on more responsibility to support paid workers and to keep regular connections with clients.

Uncertainty about the future, fears about getting COVID-19, and transitioning to remote working were also reported as creating stress for volunteers.

Organisations representing migrant and refugee background volunteers reported the particular isolation, heightened anxiety and high levels of stress their volunteers were experiencing because they had family living overseas in countries with high COVID rates, or in countries that were experiencing political instability, or that their own residency status was uncertain.

The new volunteering environment was reported as another source of stress for some volunteers who had to adapt to new and unfamiliar work arrangements. More specifically, it was reported that increased use of technology was difficult for older people to master, and this was an additional source of stress for them.

Overseas travel limits has increased isolation and anxiety and most of the family is left behind. COVID situation back in their country is a worry too.
[Survey respondent]

Increased demand for services

Service delivery is inextricably tied to funding and to wellbeing issues. Our respondents reported that volunteers worked harder with less. While many worked hard to service an increased demand for services, funding didn't match this. This created stress for staff and volunteers, as well as problems in affording volunteer training. This in turn impacted services which some respondents reported had an impact on energy and morale.

We have never been more busy, more needed. Many rely on our services and we rely on others for kindness.
[Survey respondent]

How to relieve the pressures

We've asked people to cut down and lower their expectations and be much more cognisant of their own needs as a family and family units. And actually putting resources into that.
[Multi-ethnic focus group participant]

Volunteer wellbeing is intricately linked to organisational wellbeing. Many of the elements respondents mentioned elsewhere in this report will undoubtedly relieve pressures on volunteers, including:

- making more counsellors available
- supporting paid staff who are in turn providing management and wellbeing support to volunteers
- relieving funding and administrative pressures on paid staff as these pressures inevitably cross over into the volunteer workforce
- adequately funding the increased needs of the communities they serve
- creating the spaces and places for collaborative partnerships.

It's clear that volunteers of migrant and refugee background communities are experiencing particular stresses and isolation and need priority counselling and support.

As mentioned, younger volunteers are reportedly looking for opportunities to be taught new skills and to learn. If this is to happen, supervision and management of younger volunteers needs to be resourced.

Respondents suggest that community organisation board members need to be freed up to focus on strategic direction. An important strategic issue for most voluntary organisations is the reliance on volunteers. But some respondents report their boards being distracted away from strategic planning to operational issues.

It's clear from respondents that adopting and introducing new technology, and adapting to a new working environment has necessitated support and training. It's not clear how this has been funded but opens up questions about continued funding for training and supporting new technologies.

Ultimately, the hau or vitality of volunteers is intricately connected to that of their organisations and of the communities they serve. When our organisations and our communities are well and flourishing, so are our volunteers. If we're to continue Aotearoa's strong tradition of mahi aroha, and protect and honour those labours of love, we must actively sustain that genuine and enduring whanaungatanga that lifts and nurtures our communities.

I grew up in a whānau that, my grandmother and aunties and extended whānau were all involved in the Māori Women's Welfare League. So the volunteering... was just second nature... So, I wonder if there's something about our town that says being part of [our town] is about helping each other—whatever that looks like. It doesn't have to be hugely transformational, but there's something about giving ... [Māori focus group participant]