



Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2020-2021

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Leanne Castley MLA: To ask the Minister for Mental Health

Mental Health, ACT Health Annual Report 2020-21, Performance analysis

Improving the Mental Wellbeing of Canberrans, Table 4 (p69)

Table 4 refers to the percentage of ACT adults who self-report their mental health status as very good or excellent (according to the 2020 General Health Survey). The government's target for 2020-21 was >60 per cent but the actual figure was just 52 per cent. This figure has remained steady since the question was introduced into the ACT General Health Survey in 2018 however other surveys have reported a decline in self-rated mental health.

Questions:

1. Minister, how do you respond to the actual figure?
2. Why is the target set at ">60 per cent" which seems quite low?
3. Why do you think only half of adult Canberrans report their mental health as very good or excellent?
4. Are you concerned that the figure is so low?
5. Other studies have reported a decline in self-rated mental health – why does the situation seem so bad?
6. Do you have any figures about what the levels are in other places, such as Sydney and Melbourne?
7. Will the government be revising its target?

[Minister Davidson]: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

1. The survey was undertaken in late 2020 and asked Canberrans to assess their mental health on a five-point scale ranging from excellent to poor. Excellent and very good are the points on high end of the scale, the rating of good is the middle point. In this survey 52 per cent rated their mental health as very good or excellent and 28.4 per cent rated their mental health as good. This means that 80.4 per cent of Canberrans rate their mental health as good or better.
2. This is a new measure, and is not set low by national standards, in fact the target is an aspirational target which seeks to see an improvement over time. 60 per cent is a relatively high target for this measure but speaks to our intent to seek to improve the lives of Canberrans.
3. At the time of the survey, we were experiencing the impacts of the pandemic and had within the last year experienced bushfires in areas surrounding Canberra and a severe hailstorm. Despite these challenges just over half the ACT people self-reported their mental health was very high or excellent and over 80 per cent rated their mental health as good or better.
4. Overall it is very pleasing that good mental health is enjoyed by the vast majority of Canberrans. The ACT Government is aware of the need to support people who experience mental ill health and the Annual Report reflects the wide range of new and ongoing responses in place.
5. People's mental health is affected by many complex issues both personal and from the environment and community in which they live and work. Fear, worry, and stress are normal responses to threats, and at times when we are faced with uncertainty or change. Understandably, people are experiencing increased concerns about their mental health during the pandemic. These results mean that despite the pandemic, more than 80 per cent of Canberrans consider their mental health as good or better. This is a good result during the challenging circumstances of a pandemic.
6. It is important to note that different surveys have different methodologies and are undertaken at different times, so making comparisons between results needs to be done with extreme caution. The City of Sydney Community Wellbeing Indicators 2019¹ identified that in 2015 58 per cent of people had rated their mental health as very good or excellent and this reduced to 49 per cent in 2018.

The 2020 Victorian Population Health Survey² found 40.5 per cent of people rated their mental health as very high or excellent. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)³ has undertaken regular consistent surveys over 2020 and 2021 and the rate of people across Australia who rated their mental health as very high or excellent has varied over the last two years and includes 42 per cent in May 2021 and 47 per cent in December 2020.

¹ <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/surveys-case-studies-reports/community-indicators-report>

² <https://vahi.vic.gov.au/report/population-health/victorian-population-health-survey-2020-dashboards>

³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/household-impacts-covid-19-survey>

However, this used a different collection methodology to the ACT General Health Survey and was undertaken at a different time.

7. All targets are routinely reviewed for relevancy and context and adjusted if required.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Signature: *Emma Davidson*

Date: 8 March 2022

By the [Minister for], [name of Minister]