

# 2022 Jean Hailes National Women's Health Survey

Media kit



# Acknowledgements

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health would like to thank the following researchers:

**Professor Jane Fisher AO**, Finkel Professor of Global Health and Director of Global and Women's Health, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University

**Dr Karin Hammarberg**, Senior Research Fellow, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University

**Ms Hau Nguyen**, Global and Women's Health, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government. Jean Hailes acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout

Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.



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# We didn't bounce back

Many Australian women say their physical and mental health has deteriorated since the pandemic began, regardless of whether they have had COVID-19 or not, the 2022 Jean Hailes' National Women's Health Survey has found.

The survey was conducted in March-May 2022, attracting over 14,000 respondents, and for the first time was translated into simplified Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese. This year's survey focused on the pandemic, providing the most up-to-date snapshot of how Australian women are faring in a 'COVID-19 normal' environment.

*"The results show how hard it has been for women, financially, physically and mentally over the past two years. It also reminds us that our experiences varied, with concerning findings for women with disabilities, who represented over 10% of respondents."*

**Janet Michelmore AO**  
CEO of Jean Hailes for  
Women's Health



**4 in 10 women say their health has deteriorated during the pandemic**



# Women's physical and mental health declined whether they had COVID-19 or not

The survey reveals an alarming drop in the number of women rating their health as 'very good' or 'excellent' compared to five years ago, and a trend towards more women experiencing health problems, particularly younger women.

Professor Jane Fisher AO, Director of Global and Women's Health at Monash University, said the results suggested the negative impacts of the pandemic were persisting for women even though many restrictions, such as lockdowns, have eased.

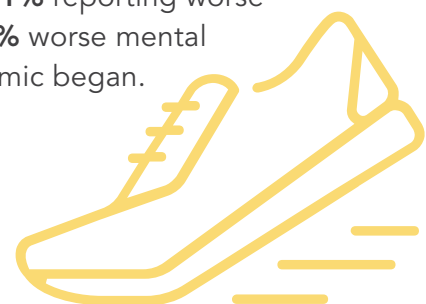
*"I and many other researchers thought there would be a significant recovery by now, but we can't see that in this data because the pandemic continues to disrupt many aspects of our lives. We haven't seen the bounce back in physical or mental health we were expecting to see by now."*

**Professor Jane Fisher AO**  
Director of Global and Women's Health at Monash University

Despite the availability of vaccines, more treatments for COVID-19, and fewer restrictions to control the virus, **43%** of women said their physical health had declined since the pandemic began. This was despite only **22%** of women – around one in five – reporting a previous COVID-19 infection. The most common problems cited were weight gain, loss of fitness and muscle and joint pain.

Nearly half of all women (**46%**) said their mental health had deteriorated during the past two years. Sadly, one in five said their mental health had stopped them engaging in everyday activities and **17%** reported a pre-existing mental health condition had worsened. Around one in ten (**11%**) said they needed medication to help manage their mental health.

Younger women aged 18–25 were much more likely than older women to report a deterioration in their physical and mental health, along with people in LGBTIQ communities and women with a disability. Women who had had a COVID-19 infection were also more likely to report a decline in their physical and mental health compared to other groups, with **51%** reporting worse physical health and **54%** worse mental health since the pandemic began.



## Disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable

The survey highlighted major health equity problems, particularly for women with a disability, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, and those in LGBTIQ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

While **44%** of all women said they could not afford to see a doctor or health professional, the same problem was reported by **70%** of women from non-English speaking backgrounds, **62%** of those with a disability, and nearly half of those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and LGBTIQ communities.

Fifty-five per cent of women from non-English speaking backgrounds said they could not find health information in their own language.

Overall, **44%** of women said they could not easily get an appointment with a doctor or health professional when they needed one. This was despite a shift towards more use of the internet and telehealth for information and healthcare.

## Health checks went to the bottom of our to-do list

The survey also revealed many women had missed health appointments due to the pandemic. One third said they had missed a dental visit and one in five said they had missed a GP health check. Eight per cent said they had missed either a mammogram to check for breast cancer or a cervical cancer screening.

Caring responsibilities may have been a barrier for some. Thirteen per cent of women said they cared for someone with a disability or additional needs and **22%** had dependent children. Not surprisingly, nearly 40% of women said access to free or more affordable childcare, or respite care, would help them stay healthy.

*"It's more important than ever to get women's screening rates back on track. This survey and many others have shown a decline in women's health checks during the pandemic, which is very concerning because we know it leads to delayed diagnosis which in turn can lead to worse health outcomes."*

**Adj. Professor Karen Price**  
RACGP President

# What is next

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CEO of Jean Hailes for Women's Health Janet Michelmore AO thanked women for sharing their views.

*"What's important now, is what happens next. We know there has been a serious decline in women's health. Women have withdrawn from their health care, everyday activities, and continue to shoulder the role as carers. It is up to all of us, to provide the support women need to recover and thrive."*

**Janet Michelmore AO**  
CEO of Jean Hailes for Women's Health

## Media

For more information visit [jeanhailes.org.au](https://jeanhailes.org.au)

For all media enquiries please contact [caroline.cottrill@jeanhailes.org.au](mailto:caroline.cottrill@jeanhailes.org.au)

## About Jean Hailes

Jean Hailes for Women's Health is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the health of all women, girls and gender diverse people. The organisation was founded 30 years ago in honour of pioneering medical practitioner, Dr Jean Hailes, who established the nation's first women's health clinic dedicated to menopause. In 2022, Jean Hailes now operates two clinics in Victoria, servicing all women's health needs. Jean Hailes for Women's Health provides free, evidence-based health information for all women. Consumers can access fact sheets, booklets, health tips, videos, animations, articles and podcasts. Resources and educational kits are available in easy-to-understand English and languages other than English. Jean Hailes also offers accredited e-learning courses, webinars, and plain English and in-language resources for health professionals to support their clinical practice.

Jean Hailes takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. The terms 'women' and 'all women' are used throughout this resource to refer to all women and gender-diverse people.



# Overall results

14,407

respondents

11,006

sample size for analysis

40% 

live outside a major city

20% 

are born outside Australia

5%

spoke a language other than English at home



5%

identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent



10% identified as having a disability

15% care for someone with a disability or additional needs with special needs

65% have children

## Decline in physical health



43%

of women said their physical health had declined since the pandemic began



59% of 18-25 year-olds



51% LGBTI

## Decline in mental health



46%

of women said their mental health had declined since the pandemic began



59% of 18-25 year-olds



56% women with a disability



55% women from non-English speaking backgrounds



## Missed appointments due to the pandemic

32%

of women missed a dental appointment



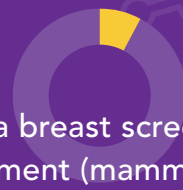
18%

missed a health check with a GP



8%

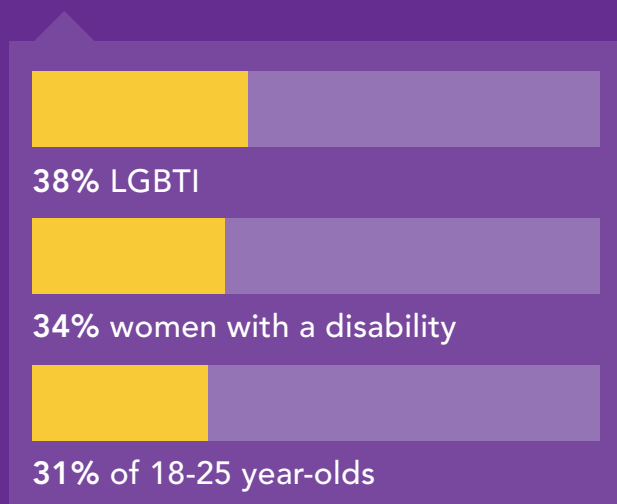
missed a breast screening appointment (mammogram)



## Withdrawal from everyday activities

21%

said their mental health stopped them from taking part in everyday activities



## Doctor Google or Doctor

79%

of women said they go to Google, and 78% said they see a doctor, if they have a question about their health



## Health equity

44%

cannot afford to see a doctor or other health professional when they need it



70% women from non-English speaking backgrounds



62% women with a disability



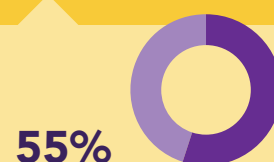
53% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



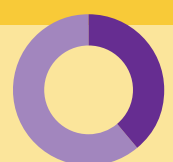
57% LGBTI

29%

could not access health information in their own language



55% women from non-English speaking backgrounds



39% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

# Summary results

The full report can be found at:  
[jeanhailes.org.au/research/womens-health-survey/survey2022](https://jeanhailes.org.au/research/womens-health-survey/survey2022)

## Overall results:

### Physical health

- **43%** of women said their physical health had gotten worse since the pandemic began
- **9%** said their physical health was better since the pandemic began
- **30%** said they were less fit
- **28%** said they had gained weight
- **20%** said they had muscle and joint pain
- **35%** of women rated their health as 'very good' or 'excellent' – down from **56%** in the 2017 ABS Health Survey.

### Mental health

- **46%** of women said their mental health had gotten worse since the pandemic began
- **21%** said their mental health stopped them from taking part in everyday activities
- **17%** said a mental health condition they had before the pandemic had worsened
- **11%** said they needed medicine to manage their mental health.

### Missed appointments due to the pandemic

- **32%** of women missed a dental appointment
- **18%** missed a health check with a GP
- **14%** missed an appointment with a specialist doctor
- **8%** missed a breast screening appointment (mammogram)
- **8%** missed a cervical cancer screening appointment (pap smear).

### Access to health information and healthcare

- **44%** of women could not easily get an appointment with a doctor or health professional
- **32%** said their financial situation had worsened since the start of 2020
- **35%** said they had attended four or more telehealth appointments
- **79%** of women said they go to Google, and **78%** said they see a doctor, if they have a question about their health
- **44%** could not afford to see a doctor or other health professional when they needed it, compared to **24%** in the 2018 Jean Hailes National Women's Health Survey.

## Women with a disability

- **57%** said their physical health had declined since the pandemic began compared to **42%** of all women
- **56%** said their mental health had declined since the pandemic began compared to **46%** of all women
- **34%** said their mental health stopped them doing everyday activities compared to **21%** of all women
- **34%** said a pre-existing mental health condition had gotten worse since the pandemic began compared to **17%** of all women
- **55%** said they could not easily get an appointment with a health professional compared to **44%** of all women
- **62%** said they could not afford to see a doctor compared to **44%** of all women.

*“Women with disability reported that they could not access information regarding COVID-19 or other health services due to a wide range of reasons....[Women with disabilities] need to be included in the conversation and codesign health information so that it is accessible to all people with a diverse range of disabilities. We have not and will not “bounce back” until we have an adequately funded and resourced health system to make sure we can “bounce forward” equitably as a society.”*

**Saphia Grant**

WWDA LEAD Project Manager,  
Women With Disabilities Australia  
(WWDA)

Available for interview. Please contact [caroline.cottrill@jeanhailes.org.au](mailto:caroline.cottrill@jeanhailes.org.au)

# Women from non-English speaking backgrounds

- **55%** said their mental health had declined since the pandemic compared to **46%** of all women
- **48%** said their financial situation had declined since the pandemic began compared to **32%** of all women
- **50%** said they know how to access health services compared to **72%** of all women
- **55%** said they could not access health information in their own language compared to **29%** of all women
- **70%** said they could not afford to see a doctor compared to **44%** of all women.

*We know moving to Australia can impact heavily on migrant women's resilience as they are confronted by isolation and unfamiliar systemic barriers that result in poorer health outcomes. We need to ensure that this group is not disadvantaged, and we need to aim for better health equity."*

**Mary Ann Geronimo**

Director of Policy – Health & Ageing,  
FECCA

*"The results from the National Women's Health Survey show that there is much more work to be done when it comes to improving outcomes for women from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia.*

*With a staggering **55%** of women from non-English speaking backgrounds indicating that they could not access health information in their preferred language, a clear opportunity has been identified for government agencies and community organisations to continue to invest in communicating important health information in languages that all women can understand."*

**Costa Vasili**

Founder & CEO,  
Ethnolink

**Both experts available for interview.**

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# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

- **41%** reported they were in excellent or very good health, higher than **35%** of all women
- **39%** said they could not find health information in their own language compared to **29%** of all women
- **53%** said they could not afford to see a doctor compared to **44%** of all women
- **49%** said their financial situation had declined since the pandemic began compared to **33%** of all women.

*“High quality evidence based research is essential to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait women’s health sector workforce in their everyday practice. I am very pleased to partner with Jean Hailes for Women’s Health to share these important finding as widely as we can. The findings of this large scale study clearly demonstrate that the pandemic has had a profound impact the physical and mental health of many groups in our society including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Practitioners throughout Australia will benefit from these insights into the lived experience of respondents during the pandemic to enable them to better understand and respond to the needs of their patients and those they work with.”*

**Professor Neil Drew**  
**AM FAPS FCCOM**

Director,  
Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet  
Honoured to be living and working  
on Whadjuk Noongar Country

# LGBTIQ

- **51%** said their physical health was worse than before the pandemic began compared to **43%** of all women
- **64%** said their mental health had declined since the pandemic began compared to **46%** of all women
- **38%** said their mental health had stopped them taking part in everyday activities compared to **21%** of all women
- **36%** said a pre-existing mental health condition had gotten worse since the pandemic began compared to **17%** of all women
- **26%** said they needed medicine to manage their mental health compared to **11%** of all women
- **64%** said they know how to access health services compared to **72%** of all women
- **57%** said they could not afford to see a doctor compared to **44%** of all women
- **51%** said their financial situation had declined since the pandemic began compared to **32%** of all women.

*“We have known for some time that LGBTIQ people across Australia carry a disproportionate burden of mental ill-health and suicidality. That means that many in the LGBTIQ community went into the pandemic in an already challenging situation, which was only made worse by the impacts of COVID-19. We also know that many LGBTIQ people, particularly those who are trans or gender diverse, can struggle to access mental health services that are understanding and attentive to their needs.”*

**Associate Professor Adam Bourne**  
Acting Director,  
Australian Research Centre in Sex,  
Health and Society

Available for interview. Please contact [caroline.cottrill@jeanhailes.org.au](mailto:caroline.cottrill@jeanhailes.org.au)

# Younger women

Younger women aged 18–25 were more likely to report a deterioration in their physical and mental health.

- **59%** of women aged 18–25 said their mental health had declined since the pandemic compared to 45% of all women
- **31%** of women aged 18–25 said their mental health had stopped them from taking part in everyday activities compared to **21%** of all women
- Young women were more likely to have had COVID-19 than women overall, with **39%** of 18–24 year-olds reporting a previous infection.

*“There is no denying young people have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic. Over the past two years young people have experienced major changes to the way they study, work and connect with friends and family. These are all important protective factors for young people and when they are removed, it can have a detrimental impact on mental health.”*

**Vikki Ryall**

Executive Director Clinical Practice,  
Headspace

*“The findings from Jean Hailes survey show that younger women continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic as we try to embrace a ‘COVID normal.’ Our research at the start of the pandemic revealed that mental health was significantly worse in younger people. With Jean Hailes’ survey, we can see how the pandemic has disrupted their lives, altering lifestyles, changing opportunities, and increasing isolation in younger women.”*

**Dr Prerna Varma**

Turner Institute for Brain and  
Mental Health, Monash University

**Both experts available for interview.**

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