



# National COVID-19 Traveller Service User Experience Survey

The National Social Inclusion office  
Report of Findings

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Building a  
Better Health  
Service

# Foreword

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021 recognises that the Traveller communities are among the most marginalised in Ireland. The All Ireland Traveller Health Study published in 2010 provides comprehensive evidence on the range and depth of health inequalities experienced by Travellers in Ireland. Similarly, subsequent Census reports 2011 and 2016; two major reports undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and a Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition (2020) highlight that Travellers are more likely to experience poor health than non-Travellers.

The Department of Health (DoH) and the HSE have endorsed and proposed the use of Service User feedback in reviewing and planning service delivery. ‘The Your Service Your Say’ campaign has been the leading vehicle for Service User feedback in the HSE (HSE, 2017). Within the National Social Inclusion Office (NSIO) we acknowledge that there is space for services themselves to be innovative in engaging Service Users and understanding Service Users perception of their care.

The challenge for us is to devise the best process on how to gather the experiences of the people who use our services, introduce a standard tool applicable to all HSE Services and devise a project plan for implementation. Given rapid changes to service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSIO coordinated a National COVID-19 Traveller Service User Experience survey in September 2020.

Travellers have a right to be heard and listened to and it is especially important that they are consulted and involved in matters and decisions that may affect their lives. We were pleased to get a positive response with over 400 Travellers completing the survey. These responses provide the HSE with valuable information about Traveller health and well-being and their experience using healthcare services during the outbreak.

Findings will not only help to inform service planning throughout the ongoing pandemic but will also provide guidance in relation to ongoing HSE service planning and quality service improvement.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to and supported this project including staff of the Traveller Health Units (THUs) and the Traveller projects that helped promote participation in the survey. I’d also like to thank Michelle Hayes in the NSIO for leading out on the project. Most importantly, we would like to sincerely thank each and every individual member of the Traveller Community who took the time to respond to the survey and share their health experiences with us.

**Joe Doyle**  
**National Lead, Social Inclusion**

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# Introduction

Travellers in Ireland are particularly disadvantaged in terms of health status and access to health services. The total number of Travellers in Ireland is estimated at over 30,000 (<1% population). However, Travellers health inequalities are greater than almost any other group. Their poor health status is highlighted in the findings of the [All Ireland Traveller Health Study \(2010\)](#). These include overall mortality e.g. life expectancy among Traveller women is 11.5 years less than in the general population and among Traveller men it is 15 years less than general population. Infant mortality is 14.1/ 1,000 live births vs 3.9 among the general population. The study also showed that deaths from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and suicides were higher in Travellers than in the general population.

## HSE Structures to support Traveller Health

HSE Social Inclusion and Primary Care provide support to a range of primary care projects and other initiatives for Travellers e.g. Traveller Health Units (THU) and Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects (PHCTPs). In PHCTPs Travellers work as community health workers, and this allows primary health care to be developed based on the Traveller community's own values and perceptions.

## COVID-19 Preparation

All HSE Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) areas with the National Social Inclusion Office (NSIO) prepared Traveller Support plans which include in particular: risk assessment, identification of the medically vulnerable for support if infected and those extremely medically vulnerable for cocooning.

HSE Social inclusion convened early and regular teleconferences with THUs and Social inclusion / Public Health to develop guidance for Travellers.

Some issues which were highlighted in the preparatory phase:

- Stigma likely to feature as barrier to early test and diagnosis
- Challenges in hygiene, sanitation, accommodation in official and unofficial sites
- Lack of access to GPs (due to mobility /missed GMS cards etc.)
- Difficulties expected for self isolation in sites

## Traveller COVID-19 Measures to date

### The HSE's priorities include:

- Infection prevention and control (IPC) measures through education awareness and information
- Working with THUs and NGO partners to enhance information and awareness about hygiene, Government measures on social distancing, restricted movements etc.
- Advocacy in reduction of overcrowding where possible
- Cocooning for extreme medically at risk
- Triage and Testing (Case finding) with priority agreed for testing
- Monitoring of patients with COVID-19.

## Support measures in place

There are a range of support measures put in place for the Traveller community to combat COVID-19 including:

- regular meetings
- a national helpline
- website resource page: [Traveller COVID 19 sharing resources](#) which features posters, videos and other communication materials
- Traveller community added as priority group for COVID-19 testing criteria
- Traveller specific webinar held on infection control
- Specific Traveller HPSC vulnerable group guidance (the guidance document gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 and dealing with cases of COVID-19) [www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/vulnerablegroupsguidance/](http://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/vulnerablegroupsguidance/)
- Various other guidance documentation including Public Health approach to Outbreak control for Travellers
- Series of communication information [videos](#)
- Specific local supports have been put in place in various Community Health Organisations to support Travellers, for example, the [Community Assessment Hub in the Mater Hospital](#) is accessible to Travellers.
- For more information on Traveller Covid-19 Resources visit: [www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/traveller-covid-19-resources.html](http://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/traveller-covid-19-resources.html).

## Data analysis

414 responses were submitted to and stored on Smart Survey, an online survey tool from 2<sup>nd</sup> of September to 30<sup>th</sup> of September. All survey data and raw response data is password protected and only accessible by the HSE NSIO. All participant data will remain anonymous and be shared by the NSIO in national and/or local report/s for HSE service providers and planners.

Data was also broken down by region and by services specifically set up for COVID-19 shielding/cocooning and self-isolation.

A thematic analysis was undertaken to systematically analyse qualitative responses provided in the questionnaire. Comments are visually presented in word clouds. Quantitative survey data is visually presented in charts and tables.

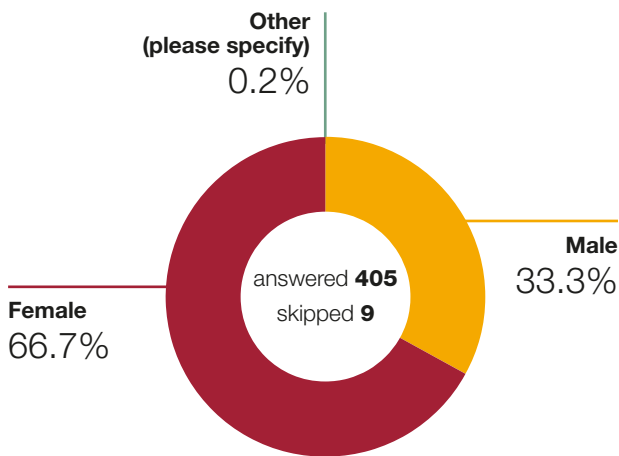
This report summarises results from the total number of responses (N=414).

# Results

## 1. Gender and age (demographics)

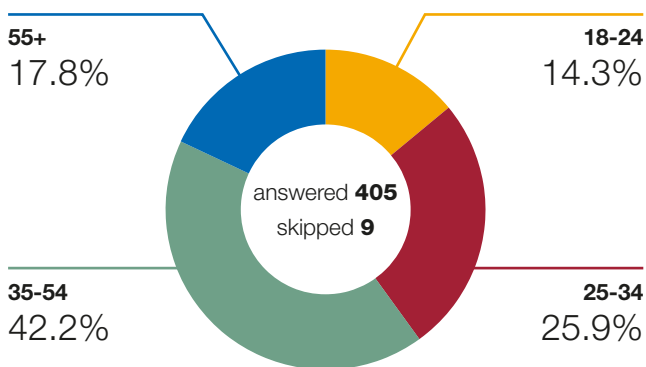
The majority of survey respondents were female (67%) (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Gender of respondent



The majority of respondents were between the ages of 35-54 years (42%) 25-34 years of age (26%) (see Figure 1.2 below).

Figure 1.2: Age of the respondent



## 2. Place of residence

The majority of respondents (42%) lived in Dublin and the surrounding counties of Kildare and Wicklow (CHO Area 6: Community Healthcare East, Area 7: Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow and Area 9: Dublin North City and County Healthcare) with the second highest response from the Midlands region (CHO Area 8: Midlands, Louth, Meath Healthcare) (32%). (see figure 2.1 below).

Figure 2.1: Response rate from the county where the respondent currently resides (n=414).

Which county do you live in		
Answer Choice	Response %	Response Total
<b>CHO Area 1</b> Donegal, Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan, Cavan/Monaghan LHOs		
Donegal	11.2%	46
Sligo	0.0%	0
Leitrim	0.7%	3
Cavan	0.2%	1
Monaghan	0.0%	0
<b>CHO Area 2</b> Community Healthcare West		
Galway	4.9%	20
Roscommon	0.2%	1
Mayo	1.5%	6
<b>CHO Area 3</b> Mid West Community Healthcare		
Clare	0.2%	1
Limerick	1.2%	5
North Tipperary*		
Tipperary*	2.2%	9
<b>CHO Area 4</b> Cork Kerry Community Healthcare		
Cork	1.7%	7
Kerry	0.0%	0
<b>CHO Area 5</b> South East Community Healthcare		
Carlow	0.2%	1
Kilkenny	0.0%	0
Wexford	1.0%	4
Waterford	0.2%	1
South Tipperary*		
<b>CHO Area 6</b> Community Healthcare East, CHO Area 7 Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow, CHO Area 9 Dublin North City and County Healthcare		
Dublin**	28.1%	115
Kildare**	11.2%	46
Wicklow**	2.4%	10
<b>CHO Area 8</b> Midlands Louth Meath Healthcare		
Laois	7.8%	32
Offaly	0.2%	1
Longford	5.1%	21
Westmeath	17.4%	71
Louth	1.0%	4
Meath	1.0%	4
		answered 409 skipped 5

\* North Tipperary forms part of the geographical boundary for **CHO Area 3** Mid West Community Healthcare and South Tipperary forms part of the geographical boundary of **CHO Area 5** South East Community Healthcare, for the purposes of reporting, responses for Tipperary are reported under **CHO Area 3** Mid West Community Healthcare.

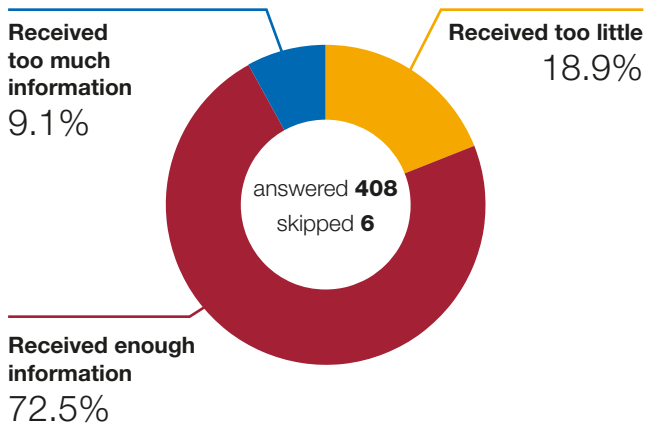
\*\*Responses for **CHO Area 6** Community Healthcare East, **CHO Area 7** Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow, **CHO Area 9** Dublin North City and County Healthcare are reported as counties not by CHO area.

## 3. Information provision

### 3.1 How would you rate the level of information you received from the HSE about COVID-19?

The majority of survey respondents 'received enough information' on COVID-19 (73%); whereas 19% of respondents felt that they had 'Received too little' information in relation to COVID-19 (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Level of information respondents received from the HSE about COVID-19



### 3.2 From what sources do you most frequently access information on COVID-19?

Respondent's most frequent access to information on COVID-19 was via a local Traveller project (73%). While 56% of respondents obtained their information from the 'News', that is, through television and radio. While the third most popular way for respondents to access

information about COVID-19 was through 'Social media' (33%). Respondents chose more than one source in reply to this question.

The NSIO's Travellers' Resource Page - NSIO resource page - was the least used source of obtaining information in relation to COVID-19 (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Type of sources used to obtain information about COVID-19

Answer Choice	Response %
HSE.ie	22.4%
NSIO resource page	6.6%
Local Traveller project	72.7%
THU	12.9%
News	56.8%
Social media	33.2%
Face to face (includes via video link)	11.0%
Other	2.4%

answered 410 skipped 4

## 4. HSE's response and opinion

### 4.1 Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the below statements about the HSE's response to Travellers during the ongoing pandemic?

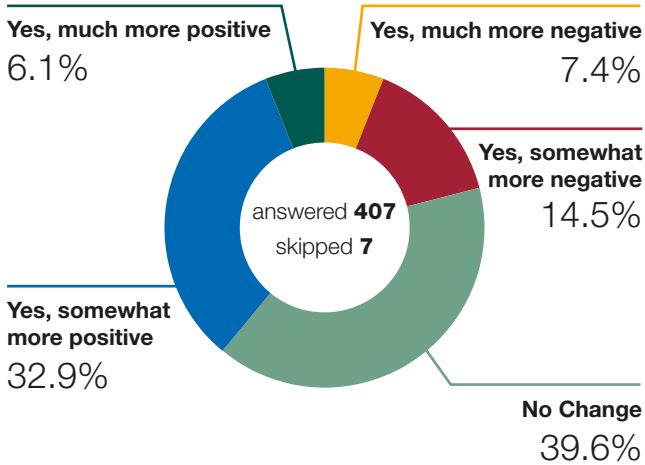
Over half of respondents were satisfied with the response of the HSE (57%) and had confidence in the ability of the HSE to manage the pandemic into the future (54%). Whilst 22% of respondents were not satisfied with the response of the HSE and 18% did not have confidence in the HSE's ability to manage the pandemic into the future.

Answer Choice	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
1 I am satisfied with the response of the HSE to Travellers during COVID-19?	27 (7%)	63 (15%)	84 (21%)	198 (49%)	34 (8%)	406
2 I have confidence in the HSE's ability to manage the COVID-19 pandemic into the future?	20 (5%)	51 (13%)	108 (28%)	186 (48%)	24 (6%)	389

### 4.2 Has your opinion of the HSE changed since the beginning of COVID-19?

The majority of respondents said there was no change or that their opinion was more positive (79%). Only 22% of respondents stated that their opinion of the HSE was more negative since the beginning of COVID-19 (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Respondents opinion of HSE since the beginning of COVID-19

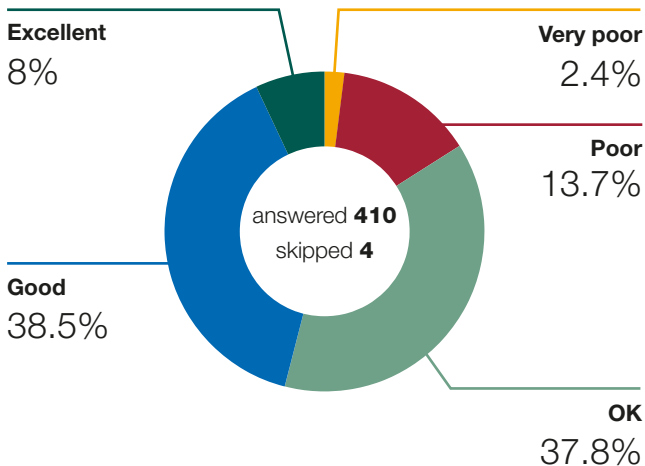


## 5. Physical Health

### 5.1 In general, would you say your physical health is?

Over 76% of respondents reported that their general health was 'Ok' or 'Good' at the time of completing the questionnaire. While 16% of respondents felt that their general health was 'Poor' or 'Very poor' during the same period (see Figure 5.1).

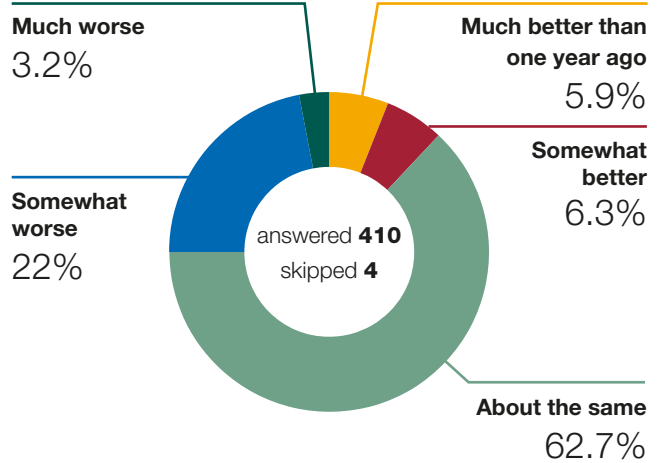
Figure 5.1: Self-reported status of respondents physical health



### 5.2 Compared to one year ago, how would you rate your physical health now?

Over 63% of respondents felt that their physical health was 'About the same' as it was compared to one year ago. While 12% stated that their health was 'Somewhat better than one year ago' or 'Much better than one year ago'. However, a quarter of respondents (25%) reported that their physical health was 'Somewhat worse' or 'Much worse' compared to 12 months ago (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Self-reported view of respondents' physical health compared to a year ago

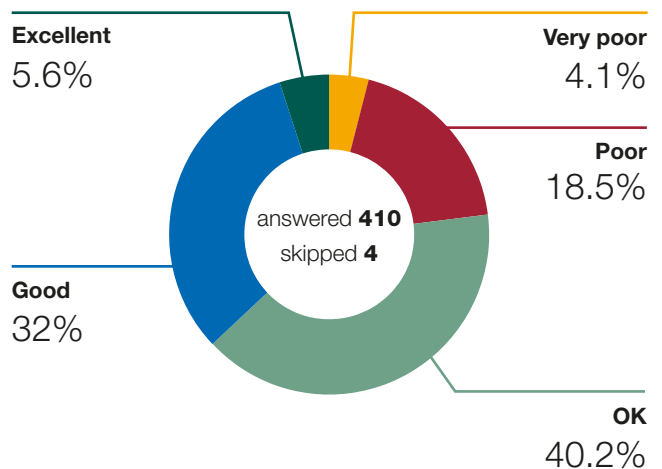


## 6. Mental Health

### 6.1 Currently, would you say your mental health is?

Over 78% of respondents reported that their mental health was 'Ok' or 'Good' at the time of completing the questionnaire. While 23% of respondents reported that their mental health was 'Poor' or 'Very poor' at the time of completing the questionnaire (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Self-reported current mental health status

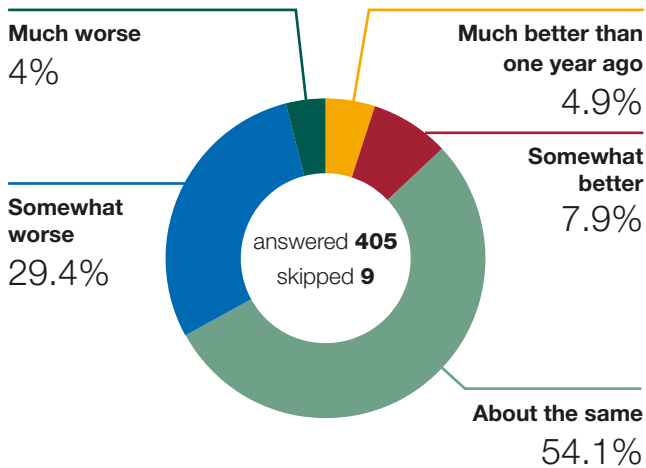




## 6.2 Compared to one year ago, how would you rate your mental health now?

Over 4% of respondents reported that their mental health was 'Much better than one year ago', while 8% of respondents felt that their mental health was 'Somewhat better than one year ago'. In contrast, 34% of respondents reported that their mental health was either 'Somewhat worse' or 'Much worse' than it was one year ago. Still 54% of respondents reported that their mental health was 'About the same' compared to one year ago (see Figure 6.2).

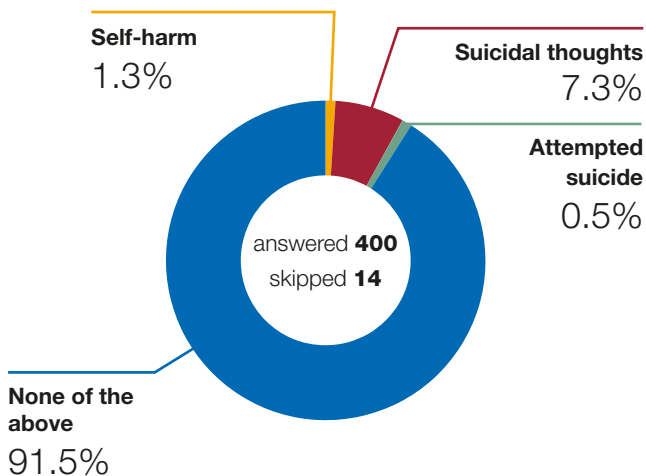
Figure 6.2: Self-reported status of current mental health status compared to one year ago



## 6.3 In the last month have you experienced any of the following?

Over 91% stated that they had not experienced any of the following in the last month, that is: self-harm, suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide. However, 9% of respondents reported that they had experienced 'Self-harm', 'Suicidal thoughts' or 'Attempted suicide' in the last month (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Self-reported status of mental health in the last month

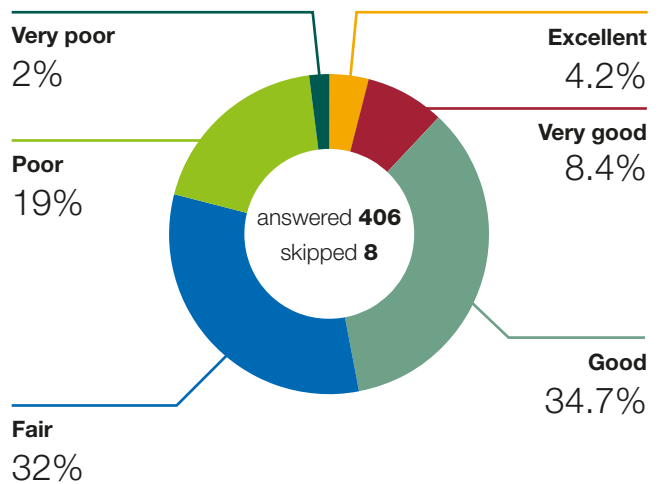


## 7. Quality of Life

### 7.1 Would you say your current Quality of Life\* is? (\*Quality of life refers to your ability to enjoy normal activities and your general life satisfaction, including everything from physical health, family, education, employment, wealth, safety, security to freedom, religious beliefs, and the environment).

47% of respondents reported that their quality of life was 'Excellent', 'Very good', or 'Good' at the time of completing the questionnaire. While 32% of respondents reported that their quality of life was 'Fair' during the same period. However, 21% of respondents reported that they had a negative view about the quality of their life, that is to say, 19% reported that they had a 'Poor' quality of life, while 2% of respondents reported that they had a 'Very poor' quality of life (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Self-reported Quality of Life



## 8. Health care provision

### 8.1 Which of the following health professionals did you see in person between September 2019 and the end February 2020? (You may select more than one option)

86% of respondents reported that they had seen a general practitioner in person between September 2019 and the end of February 2020. While 29% of respondents reported that they had been seen by a nurse during the same period. A further 20% of respondents reported seeing a medical doctor or nurse in hospital during the same time period. However, only a minority of respondents reported visiting an occupational therapist or physiotherapist; key worker/case manager; psychiatrist; other mental health professional or counsellor. But 18% of respondents categorised seeing a health care professional under the heading 'Other'. Examples given of 'Other' health professionals were; Traveller Primary Health Care staff, community healthcare workers and local projects. (see Figure 8.1). Respondents chose more than one source in reply to this question.

Figure 8.1: Health professional seen by respondents during September 2019 and end February 2020

GP	86.5%	
Nurse	29.6%	
Social Worker	3.8%	
Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist	3.3%	
Key worker/case manager	6.3%	
Medical doctor or nurse in hospital	19.5%	
Psychiatrist	3.8%	
Other mental health professional	2.8%	
Counsellor	5.8%	
Other (please specify):	18.3%	
answered <b>399</b> skipped <b>15</b>		

### 8.2 Which of the following health professionals did you see in person from March to August 2020? (You may select more than one option)

79% of respondents reported said that they had seen a general practitioner in person between March and August 2020, followed by 24% of respondents reporting to have been to see a nurse during the same period. While 2% of respondents had been seen by a social worker and 2% had been seen by an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. 6% of respondents had been seen by a key work/case manager. While 13% of respondents had been seen by a medical doctor or nurse in hospital. 3.4% of respondents had seen a psychiatrist, 2% saw another mental health professional, 4% saw a counsellor and 20% stated that they had been seen by some 'Other' health professional apart from the aforementioned health professionals. Examples given of 'Other' health professionals were; Traveller Primary Health Care staff, community healthcare workers and local projects. (see Figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2: Health Professionals seen by respondents from March to August 2020

GP	78.6%	
Nurse	24.1%	
Social Worker	1.9%	
Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist	1.6%	
Key worker/case manager	6.1%	
Medical doctor or nurse in hospital	13.2%	
Psychiatrist	3.4%	
Other mental health professional	1.9%	
Counsellor	3.7%	
Other (please specify):	19.6%	
answered <b>378</b> skipped <b>36</b>		

### 8.3 Which of the following professionals did you speak to on the telephone or through video call\* from March to August 2020?\*e.g. zoom, skype

The vast majority of respondents spoke with a general practitioner (76%), nurse (21%) or medical doctor or nurse in a hospital (10%) through a video call between March and August 2020. A minority of respondents consulted with other health professionals via a video call during the same period. However, what is more notable is the fact that 25% of respondents reported that they had consulted an 'Other' health professional during the same period (see Figure 8.3). Examples given of 'Other' health professionals were; Traveller Primary Health Care staff, community healthcare workers and local projects.

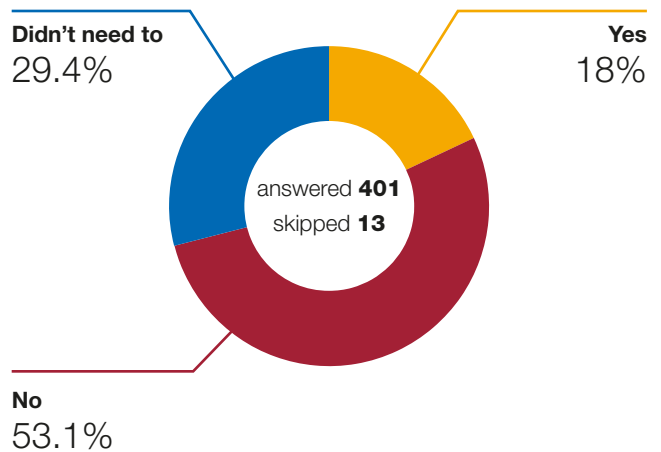
Figure 8.3: Health professionals contacted through video call

GP	76.5%	<div style="width: 76.5%;"></div>
Nurse	20.7%	<div style="width: 20.7%;"></div>
Social Worker	3.1%	<div style="width: 3.1%;"></div>
Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist	2.5%	<div style="width: 2.5%;"></div>
Key worker/case manager	5.3%	<div style="width: 5.3%;"></div>
Medical doctor or nurse in hospital	9.5%	<div style="width: 9.5%;"></div>
Psychiatrist	1.1%	<div style="width: 1.1%;"></div>
Other mental health professional	2.0%	<div style="width: 2.0%;"></div>
Counsellor	4.5%	<div style="width: 4.5%;"></div>
Other (please specify):	24.6%	<div style="width: 24.6%;"></div>
		answered <b>357</b> skipped <b>57</b>

### 8.4 Have you accessed any new health supports since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak?

18% of respondents reported accessing new health supports since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, while 53% stated that they had not and 29% of respondents reported that they 'Didn't need to' (see Figure 8.4). Examples of new health supports accessed were; COVID-19 Tests, treatment for COVID-19, support from local Traveller projects, support ringing the GP and prescriptions and Traveller Primary Healthcare projects.

Figure 8.4: New health supports accessed since the start of COVID-19



### 8.5 How many times between March and the end of August 2020 and between September 2019 and the end of February 2020 did you access the following services?

Respondents reported using health services more often during the latter end of the year (September '19 – February '20) over the former end of the year (March – August '20) (see Figure 8.5).

- Access to a general hospital clinic as an outpatient increased by 16%
- Access to a hospital as an inpatient increased by 12%
- Access to Accident & Emergency increased by 21%
- Access to a local health centre increased by 26%
- Access to a psychiatric hospital as an inpatient increased by 2%
- Access to a psychiatric hospital as an outpatient increased by 2%

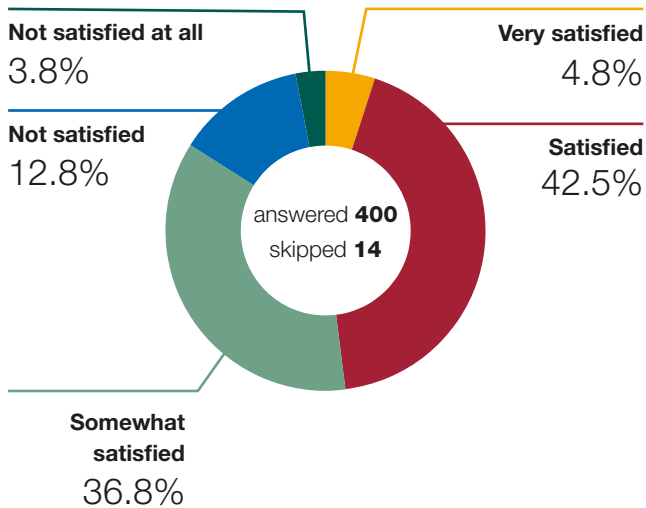
Figure 8.5: self-reported access to health services

Answer Choice		Number of times March-August 2020	Number of times September 2019-End February 2020
1	General hospital clinic as outpatient	214	184
2	Hospital as an inpatient	163	146
3	Accident & Emergency	180	149
4	Local health centre	200	158
5	Psychiatric hospital as inpatient	143	140
6	Psychiatric hospital as outpatient	143	140

### 8.6 How satisfied are you with the current health services you are receiving?

The majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the services provided by the HSE. For instance, 5% were 'Very satisfied', 43% were 'Satisfied', while 37% were 'Somewhat satisfied' with the services. Only, 13% of respondents were 'Not satisfied', while 4% of respondents were 'Not satisfied at all' with the quality of services being provided by the HSE (see Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6: Service satisfaction



# Suggestions for service improvement

Suggestions from respondents on how health services and supports can be improved are listed below, from most commonly suggested to least commonly suggested:

1. Additional mental health supports (most commonly suggested).
2. Reduce waiting lists.
3. Greater cultural awareness of Travellers' identity.
4. HSE should recruit additional staff from the Travelling Community.
5. Phone services of GPs need to be improved.
6. Additional help needed around issues related to poverty.
7. Additional accommodation supports required.
8. Literacy skills remain problematic.
9. Travel and transport to appointments can be problematic.
10. Free mask and sanitizer kits (least commonly suggested).

From what support I have received trough my local traveller primary health care project i believe there should be more Travellers employed in frontline services by HSE and givin the opportunity to make huge positive changes within our community towards better health.

The phone systems need to be address as were waiting to long on the phone when ringing your GP, hospital

HSE information is difficult to understand as there was too much information and this is difficult when there is reading difficulties. Info was provided easily and in a user friendly approach from health care workers in LCRL PHCP. Increased access to them during the weeks and upcoming weeks would be very helpful.

...travellers health is a problem when I must die twenty years before the general population for no other reason than I am a traveller....

How people can get to there appointment on time because of transport, poverty, and Transport is a big factor when you live in a isolated area

I feel we have been bombarded with leaflets on covid 19

more help for mental health

Just people mental health is not good though this covid 19 and there should be more help and support if needed

Could help being more informed on travellers cultural needs.

Videos made by LCRL traveller project were very good and got messages across to Travellers on Facebook.

More supports for travellers gtm is doing good but travellers are getting more depressed

More focus on medical services and other health related services designed to meet the needs of Travellers on their sites/places of residences. I believe more Travellers would access health related services when in attendance with peers or group rather than attending alone

...the HSE need to strengthen public information and think of people who cant read and write

Would love to see more support around the virus and more on TV to let young people to be more understanding

Not at this time with everything that's going on, its an awkward situation. Health professionals are doing there best

keep up the good work

My local traveller primary healthcare staff went above and beyond their roll during the pandemic and should be working frontline within HSE if these women/men were givin the correct training and opportunity imagine what an asset they could be!

# Summary of findings

Below is a summary of key findings to inform both national and local service planning and development:

1. The vast majority of survey respondents felt that they had received enough information about COVID-19.
2. The vast majority of respondents obtained information about COVID-19 through their local Traveller project, yet a significant majority (33%) obtained information regarding COVID-19 via social media.
3. Over half of respondents were satisfied with the HSE's response to COVID-19 (57%), therefore 54% of respondents had confidence in the ability of the HSE to manage the pandemic into the future.
4. The vast majority of respondents maintained a positive opinion of the HSE since the beginning of the pandemic.
5. More than 75% of respondents reported that their physical health was about the same or better compared to one year ago. However 9% reported that their physical health had decreased in the last 12 months.
6. 66% of respondents felt that their mental health was about the same or better than it was 12 months ago, however 33% of the respondents reported that their mental health had become worse over the same period.
7. 32% of respondents said their quality of life was fair, whilst 21% were not satisfied with the quality of their lives.
8. 82% of respondents reported that they did not access nor need to access any new services since the start of the pandemic.
9. Increased access to all health services listed in the survey has been recorded since the start of the pandemic, for example, access to local health centres has increased by 26%.
10. Access to mental health services and supports increased by 2%. However, 34% of respondents reported that their mental health has declined in the past year.



## Contact Us

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á Forbairt

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