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## Health system overload tops list of Tasmanians' COVID concerns

Tasmanians intend to increase their vigilance in COVID-safe practices once the State borders open amid the common concern that the health system will be overloaded if an outbreak occurs.

These are two of the findings of the most recent completed survey from [The Tasmania Project](#), a program of research being conducted by the [Institute for Social Change at the University of Tasmania](#). The Tasmania Project was set up to give Tasmanians a voice and to gather important information during and beyond the pandemic.

More than 1300 people responded to the latest survey, which asked a series of questions about border restrictions. Most respondents (86%) agreed that when borders open, they will be more vigilant with COVID-safe practices.

Thinking about the most concerning scenarios when the borders opened, 66% were extremely or moderately concerned about the healthcare system overloading and 62% were extremely or moderately concerned about family and/or friends being infected with COVID-19.

The Tasmania Project found that support for keeping the Tasmanian borders closed until COVID-19 is eradicated in Australia has declined over the duration of the pandemic.

The Leader of The Tasmania Project and Director of the Institute for Social Change, Professor Libby Lester, said this was possibly due to COVID-19 fears decreasing within the community and an increased understanding that management of the virus, rather than eradication, is a more plausible future.

Over the duration of the pandemic respondents have been asked whether they always followed social/physical distancing rules. In the first general survey, 81% agreed, however this proportion decreased substantially in two subsequent surveys to 64% and 47%.

A majority of respondents (84%) indicated they would wear a mask in public to limit the spread of COVID-19. Seventy-six per cent said they would be vaccinated if a vaccine became available, but 18% said they did not know whether they would be vaccinated.

Professor Lester said the [Third General Survey](#) also asked respondents about broader levels of safety in Tasmania. It found that 45% of Tasmanians surveyed felt "very safe" in Tasmania when thinking about world events. "This compares with a recent Lowy Institute finding from an Australia-wide survey that found only 4% nationally said they felt very safe," she said.

The biggest threats to Tasmania's future, according to respondents, are pandemics, environmental disasters and degradation, global economic downturns and Tasmania's lower levels of education. The threats considered least critical are international protest movements, slow population growth, and terrorism, both domestic and international.

*The Tasmania Project's current survey invites Tasmanian residents aged 18 years and over to have a say in Tasmania's recovery from COVID-19 by sharing their ideas and priorities with the Premier's Economic and Social Advisory Council (PESRAC). [www.utas.edu.au/tasmania-project](http://www.utas.edu.au/tasmania-project)*

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