

# Living with COVID-19

## Community Response Now Report 15

December 2021

LEWERS 



It has been just over a year since Lewers published our last Community Response Now Report. I don't think any of us were expecting that there would still be a need. But to celebrate the country coming out of lockdown, we thought what a great way to end the series and the year we didn't want to live through again. We had already started the research when news of the Omicron variant hit. We knew then that this report was going to be another timely look at the sentiments of Australians as they deal with opening up, the prospect of travel, the new normal and a new COVID variant.

As always, we have used the power and resources of our own online community, PurplePatch to tap into the shifts in attitude, sentiment, behaviour and mood using a variety of both qual and quant methodologies and techniques.

The Community Response Now reports are provided free of charge, and we hope that the information we provide is both interesting and valuable.

Stay safe and we hope you can welcome 2022 with friends and family.

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# Contents and Highlights



## Introducing Omicron

News of the Omicron dividing opinion and stoked anxieties about a return to rolling lockdowns. Inevitably worse fears in the most locked down states, weary of restrictions.

Australians beginning to rethink their social interactions and remain inside as cases gradually climb.



## Sentiment and Change

COVID concern re-sparked particularly among younger males and older females as Omicron reaches our shores.

Australians divided on COVID in Australia with fear, trust and anger coming through alongside vaccination sentiment.

Lifted restrictions allowing Australians to return to normal, but many are nervous with COVID-19 making some lasting changes.



## Travel and Border Reopening

The future of travel remains uncertain. Burgeoning domestic travel plans were quickly dashed as anxieties around Omicron emerged.

Strong differences of opinions over state and international border closures highlight divisions between lockdown and non-lockdown states.

# Introducing Omicron

# News of the Omicron has divided opinion and stoked anxieties about a return to rolling lockdowns. Inevitably fears are greater in the most locked down states already weary of restrictions.

Fears that a pattern of restrictions will exacerbate divisions between states and different social groups

## Weariness and worry abound

*Here we go again. // Male, 67, NSW*

*It will mean lockdowns, infections and deaths. // Male, 74, QLD*

*More lockdowns and restrictions, panic buying starts again, closed country and state borders. // Male, 69 SA*

*I think it means that we will be inundated with Omicron positive people within the next few months. We will have some lockdowns reinstated, continued mask wearing and not being able to visit friends/family again. // Female, 52, NSW*

## Fears about lockdowns, health, and social divisions

*More unnecessary lockdowns, further dividing of the country, more controversy and hate. // Female, 24, VIC*

*Lockdowns and more hermit kingdom rules. // Male, 47, VIC*

*It means that this Pandemic is far from over and people who don't want to get vaccinated should take a good look at their motives. // Female, 78, SA*

*I worry that there might be some return to snap lockdowns, which is bad for communal mental health. // Female, 68, VIC*

*I believe another lockdown is looming. // Female, 53, VIC*

## With less affected states calling for a return to sealed borders

*I am hoping to heaven that it will mean the WA hard border will remain in place and keep all COVID out for longer. I was dreading having to return to isolation in February when it is due to be dismantled. I also hope that the hard international border will go back up to keep more omicron out. // Female, 51, WA*

*I think that it is now time to close our borders to international travel. // Female, 52, VIC*

*This may mean further lockdowns if they open international borders. We need to stay closed to outside countries. // Female, 43, NT*

## Others advocate 'wait and see' - a measured, scientific approach

*People will want to go about things like normal but...let's listen to the people that actually know what they are talking about...the medical and scientific community. // Female, 25, SA*

*It's definitely of concern and something Australia needs to take seriously but have all the facts before making rash decisions. // Female, 40, VIC*

*Don't panic wait until we know more. // Female, 65, NT*

**Question:** Please tell us what you think 'COVID Omicron as a variant of concern' might mean for Australia?

**Base:** Australians aged 18-89 n=632



# Omicron causing Australians to rethink their social interactions and remain inside as cases slowly rise.

## Omicron Impact

*The news of Omicron has led...*



**48%**

of Australians to avoid crowds



**33%**

to limit their social activities



**27%**

to be less likely to visit shopping centres



**38%**

to be more comfortable working from home



**34%**

unmoved and making no changes as a result of Omicron

**Question:** Thinking about the news of Omicron, please tell us how much you agree with the following...  
**Base:** Australians aged 18-89 n=632

# Not surprisingly, news of the Omicron variant stirs feelings of anxiety and exhaustion.

## How Australians feel about Omicron



It's like we thought we were though the worst and now something else and its shocking. // Female, 50, QLD



Total knockout. Just when you think it's going to be okay you get knocked down again. // Female, 43, NT

Just knocked for a six emotionally - here we go again. // Female, 52, VIC

A real knock and hit to the positivity we were experiencing with the state opening up again and coming out of lockdown. // Male, 44, VIC



Just when you thought you were finally out, you're deep in again and drowning. // Male, 29, NSW

Feels like we keep sinking with this virus and not getting ahead // Female, 48, QLD

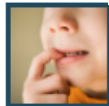


We need Australia's international borders closed again to keep Omicron out. // Male, 59, NSW

This image will hang in a lot of shop windows if lockdown happens again. // Male, 52, NSW



This news is just another option to threaten people and spread fear to help the people in power to limit our freedom and demolish democracy // Female, 59, TAS



The youth of our country will be anxiously biting our nails waiting to see what the elders of our country try to do this time round // Female, 20, SA

I'm more concerned about the way people and the media seem to be blowing it out of proportion somewhat, and also concerned about how long this will keep happening. // Female, 38, VIC

Question: Choose the image that best represents how Omicron makes you feel. How does this image capture how you feel?

Base: Australians aged 18-89 n=632

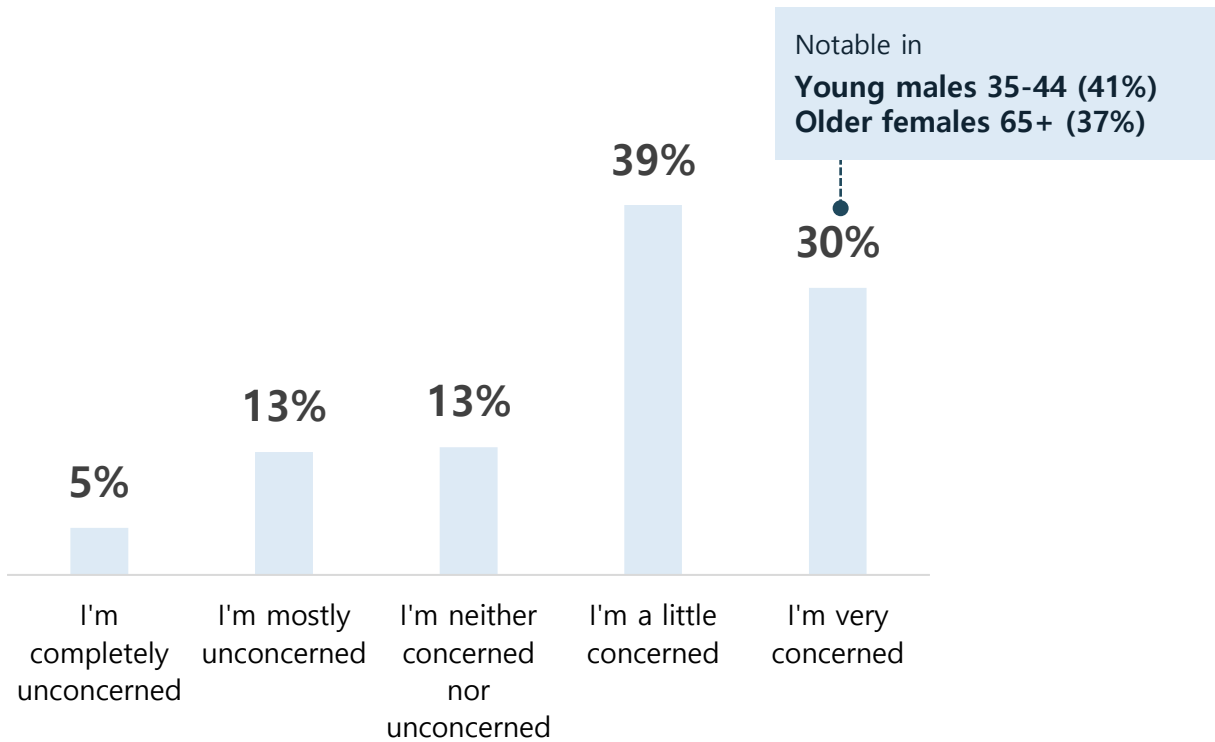
# COVID-19 Sentiment and Change



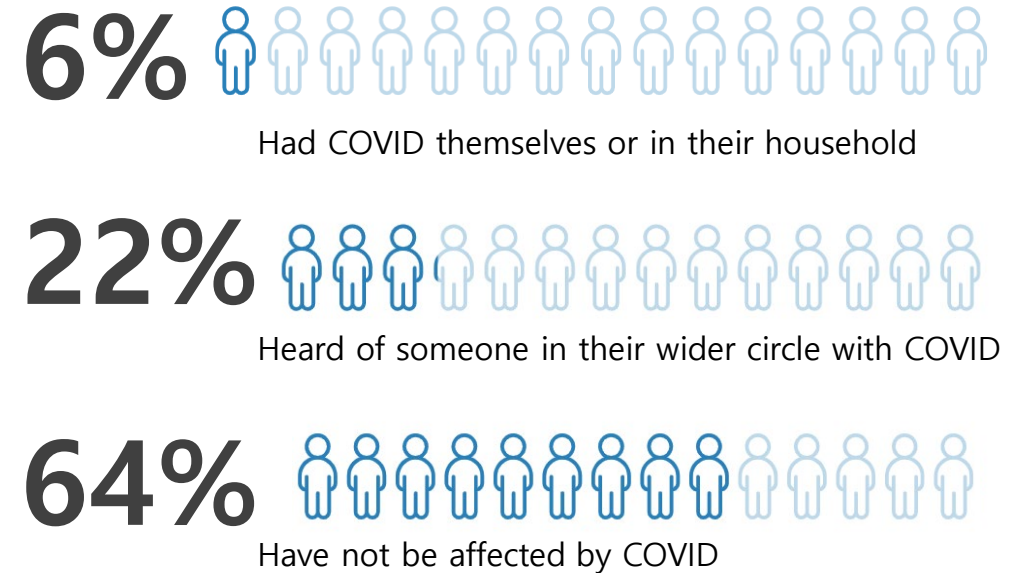
# Omicron's arrival re-sparking COVID concern particularly among younger males and older females. 6% of Australians have reported having COVID themselves or in their household.

## Concern with COVID-19

How you are currently feeling about the COVID-19 outbreak?



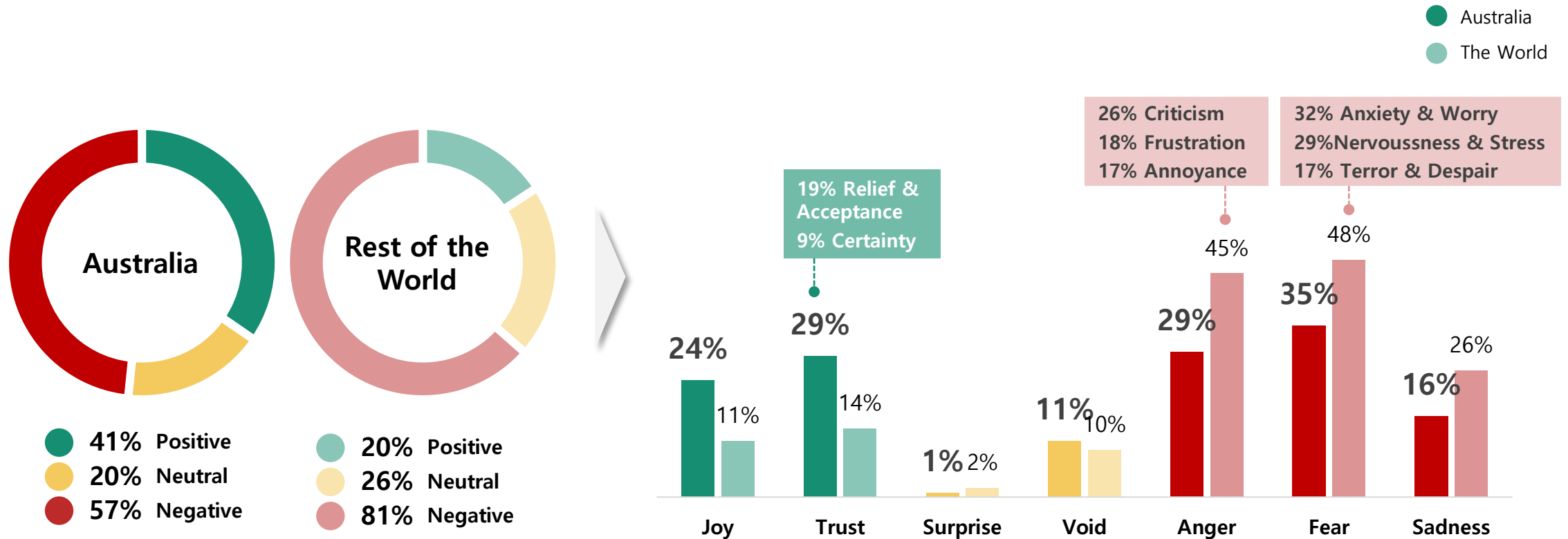
How have you been affected by COVID-19?



Base: Australians aged 18-89 n=726

# Despite persistent concerns, Australians feel more positive about how COVID is being handled in Australia than the rest of the world.

## What Australians think about the COVID situation in Australia and the Rest of the World




Note: People can be coded into multiple emotions

Question: Please tell us in 2-3 words how you feel about the COVID-19 situation in Australia/the rest of the world.

Base: Australians aged 18-89 n=726

# Extremes of divisiveness evident in anti-vaxxers feeling vilified and isolated. Those 'anti the anti-vaxxers' have equally strongly held views. Vaccine mandates are both applauded and reviled.

Emotive and often violent language used by both sides, amidst a sense that leadership has failed to control the hatred.



## Fervent views amongst those anti the vaccine, who feel freedoms have been restricted

*I do not support the mandates and feel it should be individuals who make their own choices not being forced to inject their bodies with an injection that has little to NO trial. So how has my life changed? Well I don't go out at all (only to food shop if not home delivered- which I am not a fan of online grocery shopping). I don't visit friends, don't travel via plane, won't be going out in the near future either, I am planning to now work via online... So, basically we are a prisoner in our own homes. // Female, 52, QLD*

## Heartfelt pleas for greater focus on the science, and accountability

*Trust our medical experts in situations like this and don't listen to ratbag and anti-vaxxing extremists. // Female, 31, NSW*



## Equal fervency, from the opposite side

*I'm sick of idiot anti-vaxxers who demonstrate stating that we are taking their freedom away whilst they don't look at what they are doing to the freedom of others. // Male, 76, QLD*

*I think it is still a problem if you study the numbers. The vaccination rate is good so we are approaching an immunity of sorts. The anti-vaxxers (QAnon devotees) should all be summarily exterminated. // Male, 52, VIC*

## Dividing families and life-long friends

*Very different views and opinions on the whole situation has divided our family and distanced me from close friends. // Female, 64, NSW*

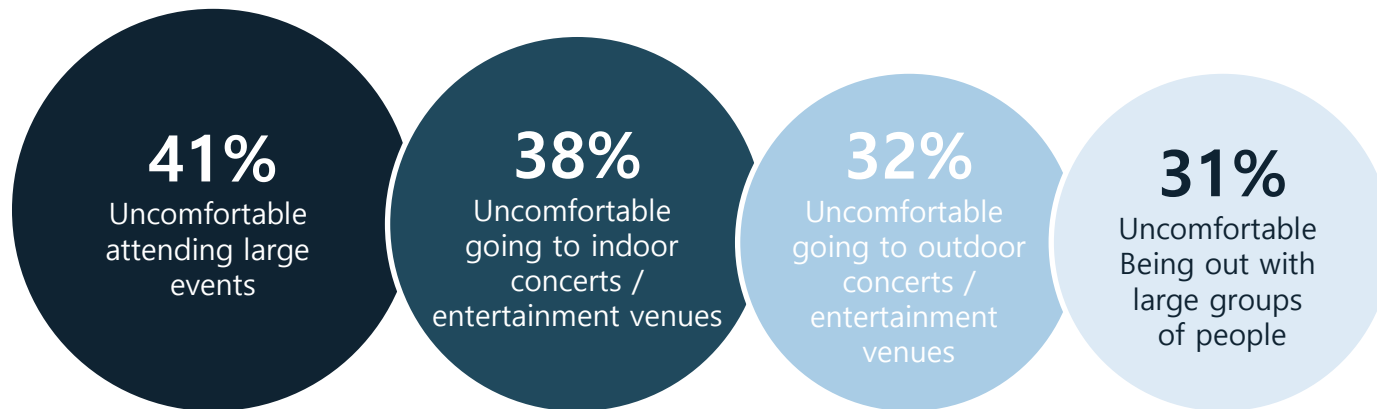
Base: Australians aged 18-89 n=726

# Lifting of restrictions means Australians can return to some sort of normal but many remain nervous, with fear of crowds particularly driving discomfort.

## Comfort Level

Australian states and cities have reopened – but how comfortable are we with returning to normal?

Crowds making people most nervous



*Having to wear a mask on public transport and being suspicious of someone who coughs and sneezes. // Female, 52, TAS*

*Learning to live with COVID-19, Australia will not have lockdowns unless another variant of the virus happens. Life will go on much as now, keeping away from crowds, no hugs no kisses. // Female, 71, ACT*

*I will now watch how I integrate with large crowds of people, for the foreseeable future. // Male, 77, NSW*

*I will never feel safe in crowds again. // Male, 59, NSW*

**Question:** Please tell us how comfortable or uncomfortable you are with the following activities...(0-4 not at all comfortable)

**Base:** Australians aged 18-89 n=726



# Unprecedented COVID times have led to both major and minor life changes, personal and professional. For those worst affected, isolation and uncertainty are of most concern.

Bad changes due to social isolation, lack of purpose or events beyond their control. Good changes including life refocus, refresh, revive

## Job losses and uncertainty felt to be causing greatest damage

*Occasional mental health challenges relating to news segments, social media and fear mongering. Family members and friends lost their employment. Unable to see family members due to border restrictions. Strict mask wearing rules. // Female, 35, SA*

*I guess the biggest change for my family has been loss of income and loss of freedom. We were also unable to attend three funerals which was very debilitating, as who wants to say goodbye to their parents on a screen? That was probably the hardest thing. Financially, we've been unable to catch up due to my husband's loss of work, we've had to keep postponing bills, and we've been unable to catch up. // Female, 53, VIC*

**Question:** Please tell us in your own words what the biggest changes to your life have been since COVID-19 began?

**Base:** Australians aged 18-89 n=726

## Less interaction with others at the heart of unwelcome changes

*I feel less healthy due to less interaction with general public. We need that to boost our immune system. Mentally, I feel ok. // Male, 43, NSW*

*Feel much, more lonely than before. // Female, 46, NSW*

*Not having any physical contact with people outside my home, greeting people now feels so awkward when it used to be one of the easiest things in the world. // Male, 49, NSW*

## Yet positive new patterns and perspectives counteract the gloom

*We have spent a lot more time at home and have limited our travels. We have been cooking at home more and trying many new recipes which we have quite enjoyed. // Male, 70, NSW*

*I am not travelling as much and I miss seeing family. I am cooking and baking more, from scratch. Learned to make sourdough bread and also fermenting vegetables and fruits. // Female, 69, NSW*

## For some, the change in perspective due to COVID can feel life-changing and positive.

*How I see life in general, how I value people around me that values me, my point of view from afar has changed so much. My spending attitude even change. I saved now more than ever and try to help more people in need. // Female, 43, SA*



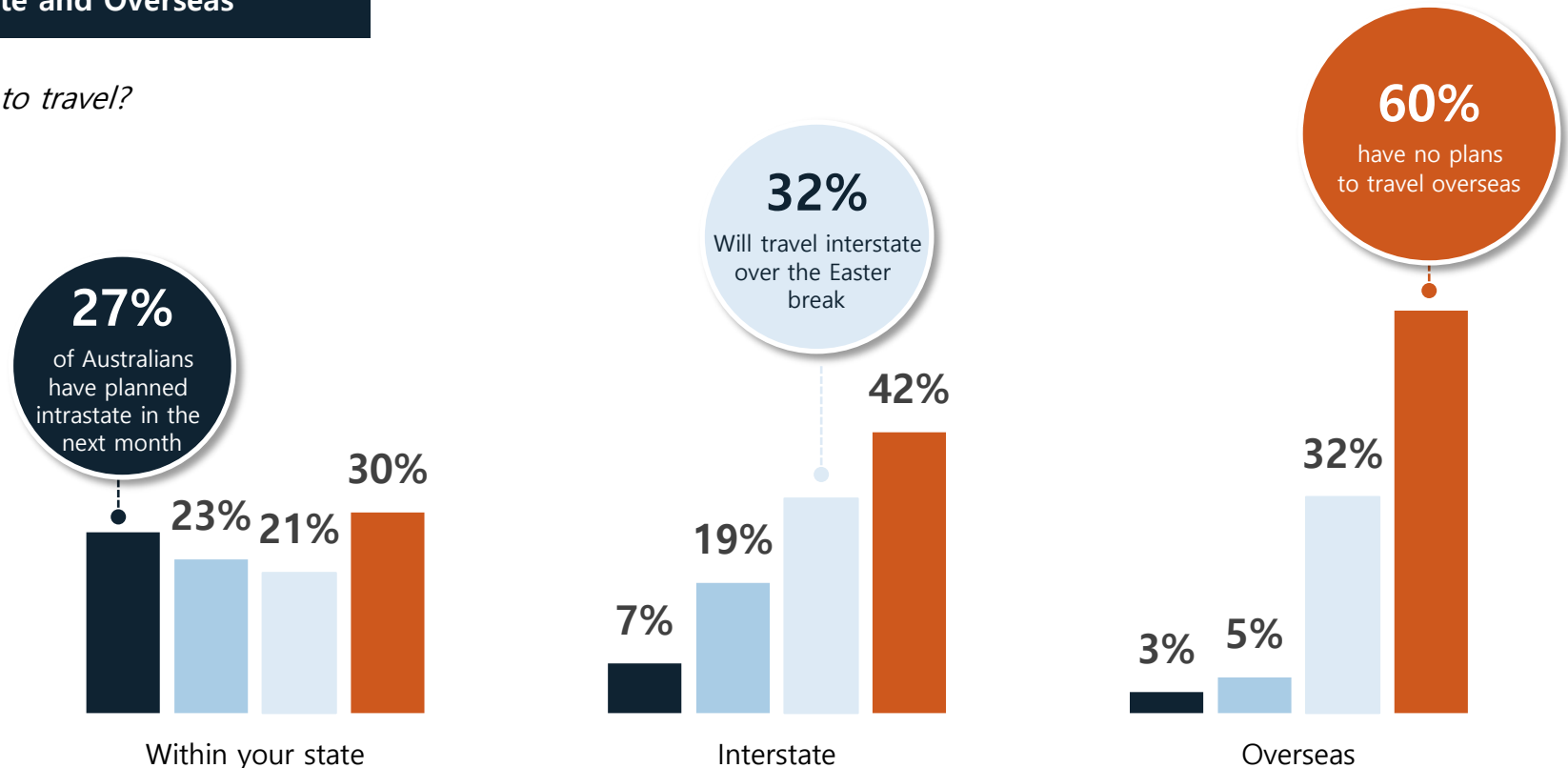
# Travel and Re-opening the Borders

# Travel plans rekindling intra and interstate pre-Omicron announcement, with a third planning travel within the next six months. Post-Omicron, 34% reconsidering travel plans.

## Travel: Intrastate, Interstate and Overseas

Pre-Omicron: *When do you intend to travel?*

- Within the next month
- Dec - Jan period
- Around Easter 2022
- No plans to travel



Base: Australians aged 18-89 n=726

Q: *Has the Omicron COVID variant forced you to rethink interstate Christmas travel plans?*

34%

Now reconsidering interstate travel after Omicron's arrival in Australia



# Constantly changing rules and restrictions for all travel causing confusion and frustration. Over half only likely to travel within their own state. Just over a third are too scared to make any bookings.

## How people feel about travel right now



**54%**

find all the different state travel rules confusing

“

*Being restricted on travel, has been the hardest here. The only place we can safely travel seems to be within our own state. // Male, 70, QLD*



**53%**

more likely to travel only within my state

“



**27%**

will only book holidays that they can cancel even if it costs more, in case there's another lockdown



**38%**

will get top travel insurance to make sure they're covered

“

*I plan to resume annual travel again, but only if I feel safe and providing insurance companies are willing to cover COVID. // Female, 68, VIC*



**34%**

Are too scared to book anything in case there is another outbreak

“

*We generally only travel to visit family and close friends. This, obviously, has been curtailed recently but we are hoping to have our children and their respective partners home for Christmas. We have not made any plans beyond that. // Male, 77, NSW*

**Question:** Please tell us about how COVID-19 has impacted the way you and your family are planning on travelling now and in the future.

**Base:** Australians aged 18-89 n=726



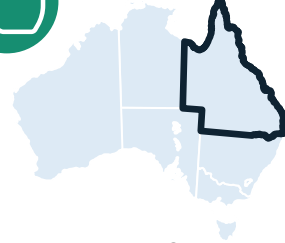
# Western Australia and Queensland led the way with majority of Australians believing these states handled COVID-19 the best. Victorians least happy overall with how their state handled the crisis.

## State Debate: Who handled it best?



54%

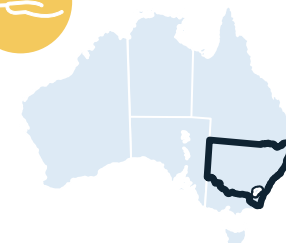
Believe **Western Australia** handled situation well



45%

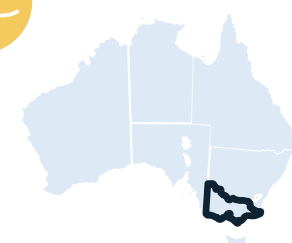
Believe **Queensland** handled the situation well

Compared to



31%

Believe **New South Wales** handled the situation well



28%

Believe **Victoria** handled the situation well

“ I am hoping to heaven that the WA hard border will remain in place and keep all Covid out for longer. I was dreading February when it is due to be dismantled. I also hope that the hard international border will go back up to keep more Omicron out. // Female, 64, WA

“ They have done a reasonable job, but they have stuffed it up somewhat due to the isolation of people away from their families. // Male, 56, QLD SW

“ The state government holding their people hostage and keeping them oppressed, they are attempting to dictate every facet of their lives. They are all under lock and key. // Male 29, NSW

“ It was a struggle because of the restrictions are like putting a veil over you even though you may not need to do the restricted activities. Felt like the VIC Government was not listening. // Female, 43, VIC

## There is also strong criticism of the Federal Government's handling of the crisis.

The Federal Government has stuffed up the COVID response. Sometimes it feels like it's making rules on the run and just crashes through. Always tried to blame someone else for the problems other than themselves. // Male, 35, NSW

**Question:** How has each state handled the entire COVID-19 situation, including the transition to living with COVID?  
**Base:** Australians aged 18-89 n=726



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