



In 2020, most individuals and communities have been impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic in some way. In addition to daily updates and tolls, there has been an abundance of information, advice and recommendations on how to reduce viral transmission and exposure. Although variable control and support measures have been developed, communities have been largely expected to self-adapt and cope in an environment of risk, uncertainty, and rapidly changing circumstances. There have been a number of surveys and research projects designed to determine medical, physical and mental health implications of this crisis, however, there has been limited understanding of impacted

communities in terms of awareness, preparedness, response and resilience. From a disaster management/risk reduction perspective there are a number of potential lessons that can be learnt from this event regarding effective communication, disaster preparedness and pandemic management.

To address this apparent knowledge gap, an online survey was developed by the Centre for Disaster Studies at James Cook University to investigate Australian community awareness, understanding, preparedness and response to COVID-19 and pandemics. Distributed primarily via electronic and social media, the survey directly targeted any public Australian based corona virus/covid-19 group visible on Facebook (over 50 groups). Within the first month of the survey (9 April – 9 May 2020) over 1000 survey responses had been received, with participants from all States and Territories. Key preliminary results were collated and publically disseminated to the community/associated groups with a basic infographic (refer Figure provided).

While the survey data cannot be considered representative of the entire Australian population, it did highlight a high degree of confusion and uncertainty regarding response, behavior and pandemic management strategies. Although most believed it was primarily an individual or household responsibility, 9% of respondents indicated they were taking no form of voluntary, recommended or mandated control measures (ie social, individual and/or environmental control). The degree of confidence in official information and government imposed strategies also remained highly variable. In the broader disaster management context, despite the duration and ongoing nature of the crisis, almost all respondents indicated they still did not have the knowledge, resources and/or capacity to adequately prepare for a recommended 14 day pandemic/isolation lock down. This limitation has significant implications if an additional hazard/disaster were to occur during a pandemic.

The survey will remain open until 9 June 2020 with further insight expected. The collated data and responses will be analysed to provide feedback and recommendations to all relevant stakeholder. As public good research the survey was not commissioned or sponsored by any agency.