

COVID-19 and older Australians

The 45 and Up COVID Insights surveys provided valuable, real-time information about the health and wellbeing of older Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Challenge

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe in 2020, there was an urgent need to gather real-time data on its impact on people's health and wellbeing. Traditional research methodologies often lacked the agility required to capture rapidly evolving trends and sentiments among vulnerable populations.

Our Role

Supported by a grant from the **NSW Ministry of Health**, the Sax Institute developed **45 and Up COVID Insights**, a series of rapid online surveys harnessing the power of the 45 and Up Study. The Institute has managed the 45 and Up Study – which tracks the health of 250,000 Australians – since it began in 2005. We recruited 32,000 people from the 45 and Up Study to take part in five online surveys conducted between 2020 and 2022.

The surveys were co-produced by the Institute and NSW Health and involved input from research, clinical and policy groups. Survey questions covered a wide range of themes, including the pandemic's impact on health, loneliness, physical activity, diet, mental health, access to healthcare services, and experiences with telehealth and vaccination.

Policy Impact

We collected and analysed data from the 45 and Up COVID Insights surveys, delivering real-time insights to policymakers and clinicians. Survey data shed light on the pandemic's effects on different population groups and stages of its progression. Key findings were:

- Lower rates of physical activity in 2020
- Fluctuations in missed healthcare appointments over two years
- Worsening mental health outcomes as the pandemic progressed
- High COVID-19 vaccination uptake.

These findings played a crucial role in informing policy and planning initiatives at both state and national levels, including:

- Targeted messaging to encourage physical activity during lockdowns
- Future planning for cancer screening services
- Enhanced mental health service provision to address increased prevalence of mental health concerns.

Date: 2020-2022

Partner organisation: NSW Ministry of Health