# Survey finds NEDs coping with lockdown

# … but cracks appearing

MEDIA RELEASE
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Non-Executive Directors are professionally lonely, just coping with extended COVID lockdowns and impacts on boardroom decision making and relationships are starting to appear, a recent Women on Boards survey has found.

Executive Director, Claire Braund, said Women on Boards undertook a two-day snap survey of its members and wider network to better understand the impact that lockdown is having on how they are coping with their boardroom and leadership responsibilities.

“Of the 342 respondents, 99% were female and 72% serving on a board or committee. At least one-quarter felt that remote board meetings were having a somewhat negative impact decision making and relationships,” Ms Braund said.

“As Chair, I have found it more challenging to plan and run meetings remotely and recruiting/on boarding two new Directors during this period has also been more challenging. Whilst we have made it work, it is not my preferred approach to engage and maintain professional relationships.” Respondent

“With an overall coping rating of 6.5/10 across the survey, we can see that female leaders and directors are coping (just), but the question has to be asked how much longer their leadership and governance roles can be sustained if the current lockdowns continue for many more months?” Ms Braund said.

“Zoom fatigue, professional loneliness and lack of connection are all starting to take their toll.”

The survey also revealed that lockdowns are impacting leadership capability, productivity, morale, staff management, health and wellbeing.

* 36% reported a drop in productivity
* 59% said that they feel staff morale is lower
* 47% find staff management more difficult.

“The leadership role is very hard to enact without presence in a zoom meeting where you are just one tile. There is no easy way to bring empathy and cohesion without the breaks and informal part of the working relationships.”

Ms Braund said there was also a strong correlation between respondents’ capacity to cope and their exercise and eating habits.

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| **Coping Rating** | **Looking After Health** | **Exercising Most Days** | **Eating Healthily** |
| **0 - 4** | 2.4 | 2.5 | 2.4 |
| **5 – 6** | 3.0 | 3.2 | 3.1 |
| **6 – 7** | 3.5 | 3.4 | 3.3 |
| **8 – 10** | 3.7 | 3.7 | 3.9 |

“Those coping best (scoring above eight out of 10) were at least 50% more likely to be eating well, exercising most days, and looking after their health,” Ms Braund said.

“This shows how critical it is for leaders and board members to maintain activities that boost mental health and provide a supportive environment for staff to do the same.”

Ms Braund said there were some positives from the survey, with respondents reporting shorter meetings, deepening of relationships between executives and board members and hybrid working potentially enabling better diversity on boards.

“Respondents are also enjoying more time with immediate family, increased flexibility, ability to focus away from busy workspaces and not commuting.”

Of the 14% not in lockdown, the majority said they are impacted by lockdown, including an inability to visit family and friends or travel, business downturns and poorer mental health.

**For Interviews contact**

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To read the full survey please click [here](https://www.womenonboards.net/womenonboards-AU/media/AU-Reports/REP_Lockdown-Impact-Survey_210817.pdf).

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**About the Survey**

* The survey was sent on Friday 6 August 2021 and closed midnight Sunday 8 August 2021.
* 342 respondents completed the survey
* 86% were in lockdown at the time of the survey.
* 97% of respondents were based in Australia and 3% overseas.
* The majority in Australia were from NSW, Victoria and Queensland.
* Women comprised 99.3% of the sample, with the majority aged 45-65 years.



