

THE STATE OF OUR COMMUNITIES



Queenstown 2020

The development of this report on the state of Queenstown has highlighted major concerns in regard to the impact of Covid-19, from both the community perspective and key informants. As a tourist mecca it is widely acknowledged that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted Queenstown economically, compared with other communities in New Zealand. The report highlights the domino effects of employment and income on the social wellbeing of the community. Whilst some concerns, such as housing and living costs, precede Covid-19, the pandemic has exacerbated these issues and compounded other issues, such as migrant workers, mental health and the strain on health and social services.

What do you like about your community?

The **people and the local community** were identified as the strongest assets Queenstown has, with almost 62 percent of survey participants describing their community as resilient, caring, friendly, diverse, supportive, generous, kind and welcoming. Locals associated community cohesiveness with the **size** of Queenstown and also attributed the community cohesiveness to Queenstown being a safe place to live. Locals talked about the landscape, scenery and outdoor activities available as a key feature of Queenstown. Locals also identified that enjoying the outdoors is synonymous in their community and as a result creates a closer community. Other features that locals enjoyed about their community were utilities (bars, restaurants and shops), accessibility, quietness and the lifestyle.

What are some of your concerns or fears about your community?

The lack of **tourism** as a result of Covid-19 and the flow-on effects to **employment and income** were the greatest concerns for locals. The loss of employment and income raised many concerns for locals, including the mass exodus of migrants and kiwis leaving Queenstown. The loss and uncertainty of employment and income coupled with high living costs, also has impacted the **mental wellbeing** of many locals. Locals also raised issues in regard to the availability of support for the growing issues in the community, such as **housing**. One of the key concerns is for the large **migrant** population in the area. Locals talk about the disproportionate effects Covid-19 has had on the migrant population: unable to receive government assistance, compounded by convoluted **immigration** process, inability to return home and isolated from their support networks. Other concerns locals identified were the rapid **growth** in the region pre-Covid-19, the impact this has on **infrastructure** and the local community.

How has Covid-19 impacted you?

The greatest impacts of Covid-19 were the loss and uncertainty around **employment and income**; over half of the participants, or their partners, have either lost employment or income. Many of the locals talked about **financial hardship** and not being able to pay rent or their mortgage; the stress this caused and the impact on their **mental health**. Locals also talked about the uncertainty around employment and the instability that this creates for them and their families. Other locals talked about the sense of **isolation** and not being able to see their family and friends. Despite these hardships caused by lockdown and employment



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loss, many of the locals identified impacts of Covid-19 that were **positive**, such as **family time** and the ability to work from home.

What are Queenstown's key social issues for Election 2020?

The key social issues for the people of Queenstown are **Employment and Income**. Many of the locals talked about diversifying the local economy and creating employment opportunities. Some locals talked about getting people reemployed to prevent financial and mental hardships. One of the key issues important to locals was the need to increase healthcare services, particularly mental health services. The recovery from Covid-19 is an important issue for locals, particularly regarding the reopening of the borders. Many of the locals also talked about the importance of equitable support for migrants, simplified visa processes and sustainable immigration policies. Housing plays a pivotal role in the demanding living costs of Queenstown and is a primary issue for locals; locals want available, affordable and quality homes.

What changes would you like to see in Queenstown in 5 years' time?

The seven key aspirations for the Queenstown in 2025 are:

- 1 stronger and more resilient community
- 2 reshape the way tourism looks in Queenstown
- 3 availability of quality and affordable housing
- 4 improved infrastructure to meet the population needs
- 5 a diversified economy with employment opportunities
- 6 more healthcare services and more mental health services
- 7 better immigration processes and treatment of migrants.

Moving Forward

Covid-19 is having a major impact socially, mentally and economically in the region. In review of the community and key informant's insights, these are a few of the questions we have identified moving forward.

- **How does Queenstown redevelop and diversify an economy that is not dependent on tourism?** What are the other options for a sustainable economy in Queenstown? Whilst many are holding out for the reopening of borders and return of tourism, the hope is that lessons will be learnt, and changes need to be made to ensure the resilience of the Queenstown economy.

The mass exodus of migrants from Queenstown has posed many challenges, as Queenstown has been dependent on migrant workers. What happens if the number of migrant workers drops for the region? How will Queenstown cope and what impact will this have on the community? The plight of the migrant population echoed throughout the surveys. The migrant population is an integral part of the diversity and vibrance of Queenstown but, moving towards recovery, we must consider what will happen if this source of cheaper labour runs out.

- **Mental health** The *Queenstown Lakes District Council Quality of Life Report 2019* showed that there was a strong correlation between low income and the likelihood of accessing mental health services. The 2018 Quality of Life report showed that the highest demand for services required in the region was mental health, at 62 percent. Again, locals were very clear about the need for more access to and availability of mental health services. This gap must be addressed as the region moves forward in recovering from this pandemic.



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