



Media release

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nbn Covid-19 Behavioural Change Survey: Lockdown brings increased digitisation to the health and lifestyle habits of regional Australians

- **Almost half (46%) of regional Australians who needed a health consultation in the past two months did so virtually via telehealth services**
- **More than half (56%) of regional Australians working from home are beating social isolation by connecting with family through video calls and 27% are now making social video calls with colleagues.**
- **A quarter (24%) of regional Australians are now keeping fit with the support of online exercise classes.**

Lifestyle habits of regional Australians have undergone a major shift since the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, with record numbers of people exploring online substitutes for everything from access to health support services to exercise, skills training and entertainment.

When compared to their metro counterparts, however, regional Australians still seem to prefer in-person interactions.

The *nbn Behavioural Change Survey* investigated internet usage habits before and during social distancing, to understand how data consumption needs have changed during the COVID-19 crisis. The survey, conducted by Venture Insights and commissioned by NBN Co, found increased demand for key online activities that could help predict permanent behaviour changes that endure once social distancing restrictions are eased.

Adoption of telehealth services

46% of regional Australians who have needed to access a health service during the crisis did so using a telehealth service. This take-up mirrors changing behaviour across the country, where as a whole, 48% of respondents who needed a health consultation did so via telehealth.

Nationally, two-thirds (64%) of people who have accessed health services during COVID-19 are open to considering using telehealth in the future.

Beating social isolation

Access to online services has played a significant role in keeping us connected, with the research showing 56% of regional Australians working from home have beaten social isolation by connecting with family through video calls.

More than a quarter of regional Australians are also missing workplace social connections, with 27% of regionally-based respondents making social video calls with their colleagues.

Keeping active and entertained

Exercise has also moved online since COVID-19, with 24% of regional respondents working from home indicating they are also working on their fitness with the assistance of online classes.

In addition, the research revealed an increase in spending on entertainment equipment, with 1 in 6 respondents nationally (15%) purchasing items such as smart TVs, media devices or digital assistants to keep them entertained during downtime.

Gavin Williams, Chief Development Officer, Regional and Remote, NBN Co, commented:

“We’ve seen online activity significantly increase during COVID-19 as Australians rely on broadband to work from home, access telehealth services, learn new skills, connect with friends and family and enjoy entertainment. Our research shows that people have significantly increased their use of online services and that many expect new online habits to stick as life returns to normal.

“One of the activities that is being heavily supported by access to fast and reliable broadband is telehealth. The waiting room is no longer an essential stop on the path to see a GP and now more than ever Australians of all ages are accessing telehealth services - a trend that is likely to continue once restrictions have lifted.

“Accessing telehealth services saves both money and time as patients no longer need to jump in the car and drive to a consultation. This is particularly important for many regional and rural Australians who may need to travel long distances to see a specialist,” he added.

Simone Dudley, Co-Founder of leading allied health telepractice Therapy Connect, commented:

“Telehealth has been a vital element of healthcare for rural and regional Australians for many years. I’ve run a telehealth practice for six years, providing thousands of hours of speech and occupational therapy, psychology and physiotherapy support to children and families living all over Australia via the nbn. The reality is, many of our clients wouldn’t have access to various forms of therapy and other healthcare practices without telehealth services.

“Over recent months I have noticed the confidence in telehealth services from clients growing, as they realise they can still receive the highest quality treatment. I anticipate people will continue to use telehealth services, particularly as more practitioners begin to offer the service,” Ms Dudley said.

To assist the health sector and support these lifestyle changes, **nbn** recently announced a COVID-19 connectivity relief package, including offers of higher speeds for telehealth providers to help ensure they have the capability to manage anticipated increase in telehealth activity during this period. As an essential service, they are also eligible to receive, via their internet provider, enhanced service levels, prioritised connections and fault resolution and business-grade services at no additional charge.

For more information on the *NBN Behavioural Change Survey* and to learn more on what NBN Co is doing to support Australia through COVID-19, please visit: www.nbnco.com.au/campaigns/covid-19

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Notes to editor:

This research was undertaken by Venture Insights on behalf of NBN Co. The research took place in April 2020, and was completed on 28 April. 1,006 respondents aged 18+ completed the survey and they were proportionally spread across ACT (2%), NSW (31%), NT (0.5%), QLD (20%), SA (8%), TAS (2%), VIC (26%) and WA (10%). 77% of the respondents belonged to a metro area, and 23% to a regional area.