

ALSWH COVID-19 Survey

Report 12: Survey 12, 30 September 2020

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Background

The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) has been collecting comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data from over 57,000 Australian women for 25 years (alswh.org.au). As with the rest of the population, the women in the study have never lived through anything like the current pandemic. To capture this moment in time, a series of fortnightly short online surveys was deployed via email to women in the three ALSWH cohorts born 1989-95, 1973-78, and 1946-51, commencing in late April 2020. The purpose of these surveys was to ascertain women's experiences with COVID-19 testing, their overall wellbeing, and the changes occurring for them during the pandemic.

Method

COVID-19 Survey 12 was deployed on Wednesday 30 September 2020. Email invitations were sent to 27,987 women: 13,666 from the 1989-95 cohort, 8,336 from the 1973-78 cohort, and 5,985 from the 1946-51 cohort. In total, 7,049 (25%) women completed Survey 12: 1,911 (27%) from the 1989-95 cohort, 2,383 (34%) from the 1973-78 cohort, and 2,755 (39%) from the 1946-51 cohort.

This report presents data from the 6,756 women who completed the COVID-19 Survey 12 within the first seven days of survey deployment (30 September to 6 October 2020, inclusive).

Findings

COVID-19 symptoms and testing

Overall, 11% (n=732) of women reported experiencing flu-like symptoms in the previous 14 days, 2% (n=120) reported that they thought they might have COVID-19, and 5% (n=350) reported having been tested for COVID-19 within the previous 14 days (see Table 1).

Table 1. Recent flu-like symptoms (within last 14 days) among 6,756 ALSWH women

	1989-95 cohort N=1,843		1973-78 cohort N=2,267		1946-51 cohort N=2,646	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Flu-like symptoms	354	19.2	246	10.9	132	5.0
Thought they might have COVID-19	62	3.4	39	1.7	19	0.7
Tested for COVID-19	145	7.9	128	5.6	77	2.9

Missing observations were included in the denominators.

Missing data for Flu-like symptoms: 1989-95 cohort n=1; 1973-78 cohort n=7; 1946-51 cohort n=17.

Missing data for Thought they might have COVID-19: 1989-95 cohort n=8; 1973-78 cohort n=11; 1946-51 cohort n=19.

Missing data for Tested for COVID-19: 1989-95 cohort n=7; 1973-78 cohort n=18; 1946-51 cohort n=27.

Of the 759 women who reported that they had flu-like symptoms or thought they might have COVID-19 within the past 14 days, 23% of women reported that they had been tested for COVID-19.

At Survey 12, 30% of women reported having ever been tested for COVID-19 (n=2,021). Among these women, 65% (n=1,319) of women reported one COVID-19 test, and 34% (n=683) of women reported more than one COVID-19 test (19 women did not report number of tests).

Delays to screening services due to the COVID-19 crisis

Overall, 8% of women reported that they had to delay a skin check, 5% reported having to delay cervical cancer screening and 3% reported having to delay a mammogram due to the COVID-19 crisis. Women aged 25-31 were the most likely to report that they had to delay cervical cancer screening or skin checks due to the COVID-19 crisis, whereas women aged 69-74 were the most likely to report having to delay a mammogram due to the COVID-19 crisis (see Figure 1).

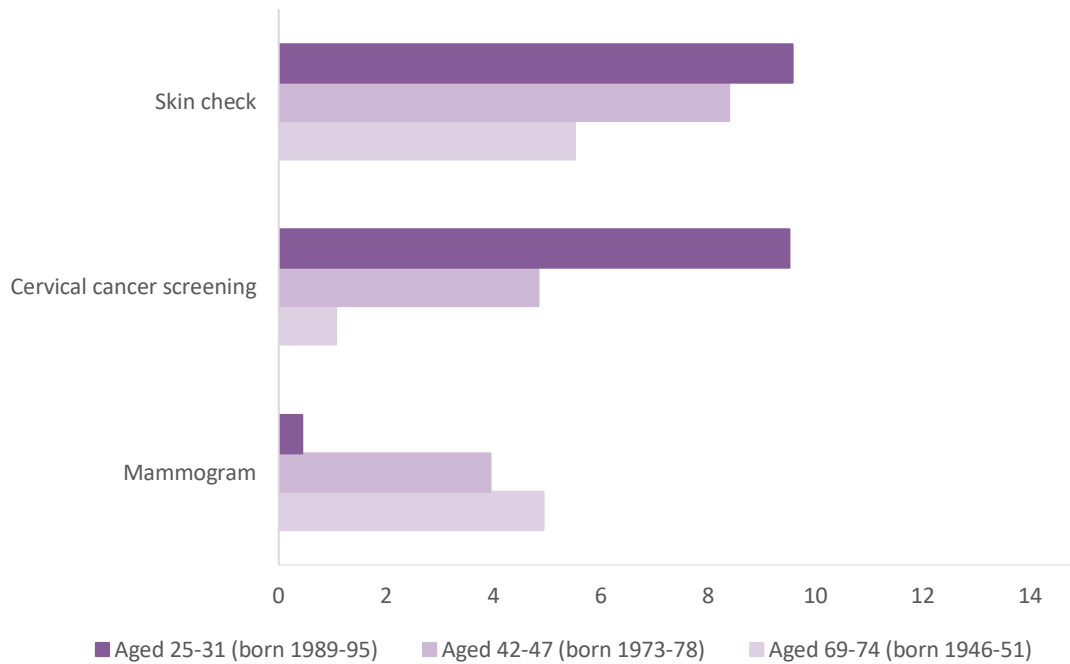


Figure 1. Proportion (%) of women aged 25-31 (n=1,838), 42-47 (n=2,253) and 69-74 (n=2,610) reporting delays in screening services due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Telehealth use during the COVID-19 crisis

A total of 57% of women reported that they had at least one Telehealth consultation since the COVID-19 crisis began. Nearly half of women (48%) reported that they had a Telehealth consult with a general practitioner (GP) or doctor, and 14% reported they had a Telehealth consult with a specialist doctor during the COVID-19 crisis. One in ten women reported having a Telehealth consult with a psychologist or counsellor during the COVID-19 crisis. Telehealth consults with allied health practitioners were also reported by women (6%) during the COVID-19 crisis.

Women aged 25-31 were the most likely to report having had a Telehealth consultation during the COVID-19 crisis (65%), compared to women aged 42-47 (52%) and those aged 69-74 (55%; see Table 2). Women aged 25-31 were more likely than older women to report having had a Telehealth consultation with a GP or doctor (55%), or a psychologist or counsellor (21%) during the COVID-19 crisis. Women aged 69-74 were more likely than younger women to report consulting with a specialist doctor via Telehealth during the COVID-19 crisis (18%).

Table 2. Telehealth consultations during the COVID-19 crisis among 6,756 ALSWH women

	1989-95 cohort N=1,843		1973-78 cohort N=2,267		1946-51 cohort N=2,646	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
General practitioner or doctor	1,004	54.5	963	42.5	1,280	48.4
Psychologist or counsellor	393	21.3	246	10.9	46	1.7
Specialist doctor	221	12.0	292	12.9	463	17.5
Allied health practitioner	117	6.4	119	5.3	168	6.4
At least one Telehealth consultation	1,196	64.9	1,176	51.9	1,458	55.1

Missing observations were included in the denominators.

Missing data for Telehealth consultations: 1989-95 cohort n=27; 1973-78 cohort n=27; 1946-51 cohort n=32.

The majority of women (at least 80%) reported positive Telehealth consultation experiences with their health practitioners.

Mental health service use during the COVID-19 crisis

Information seeking for mental health resources

Overall, 18% of women reported that they looked for information about mental health resources and/or services during the COVID-19 crisis. Younger women were more likely than older women to seek information on mental health resources and/or services (see Figure 2).

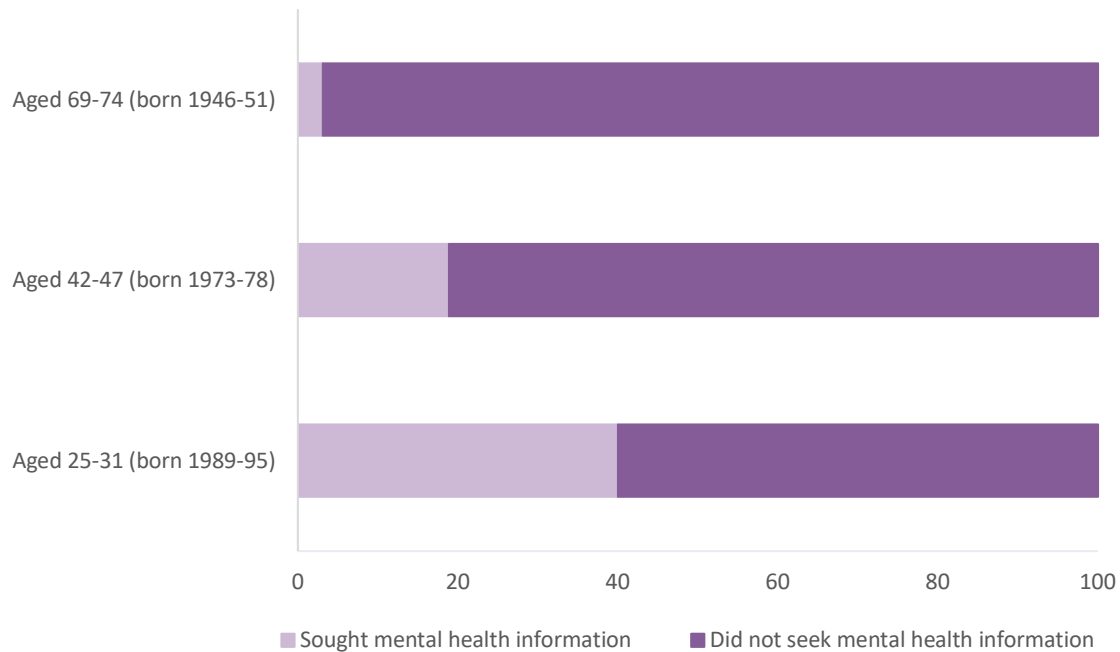


Figure 2. Information seeking for mental health resources and/or services during the COVID-19 crisis among women aged 25-31 (n=1,836), 42-47 (n=2,255) and 69-74 (n=2,634).

Mental health service use during the COVID-19 crisis

About 17% of women (n=1,119) reported that they accessed a mental health service during the COVID-19 crisis. Seeing a psychologist during the COVID-19 crisis was reported by 11% of women. Counsellors were reported to be seen by 3% of women during the COVID-19 crisis, with 2% of women reporting that they accessed mental health helplines or online chat services (e.g. Lifeline). Nearly 4% of women reported accessing other mental health professionals or services.

Women aged 25-31 were the most likely to report using mental health services during the COVID-19 crisis (34%), compared to women aged 42-47 (18%) and those aged 69-74 (3%; see Figure 3).

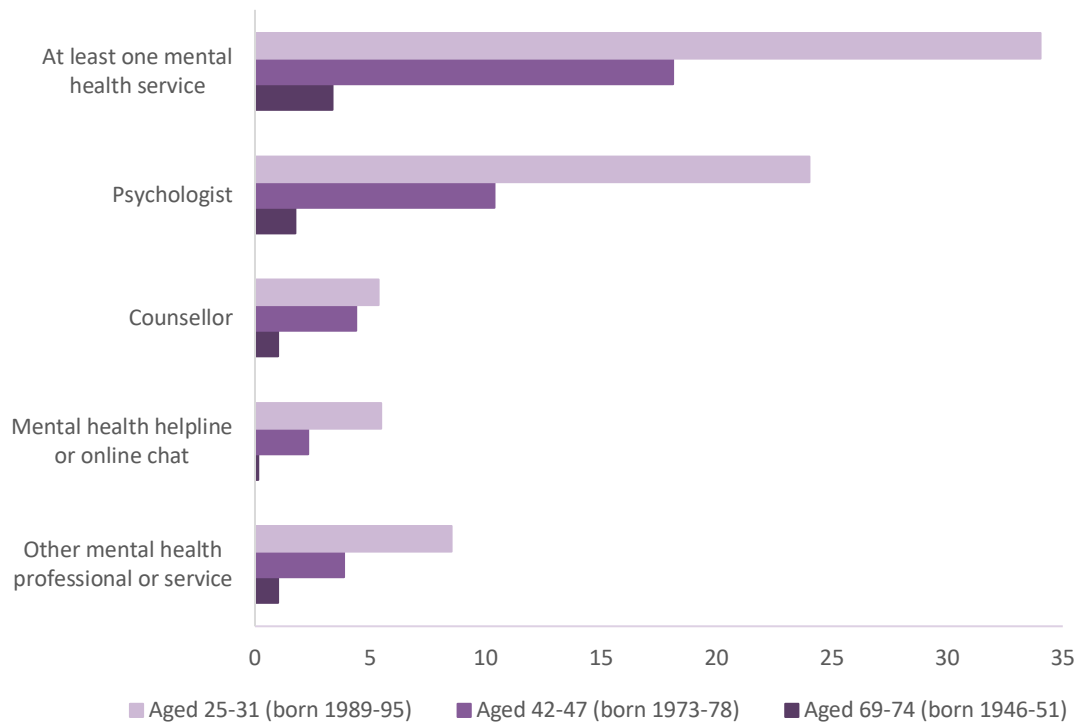


Figure 3. Mental health service use during the COVID-19 crisis among women aged 25-31 (n=1,831), 42-47 (n=2,253) and 69-74 (n=2,629).

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to mental health services

In total, 13% (n=851) of women reported having a mental health appointment changed to a Telehealth consultation as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Appointment delays for mental health services due to the COVID-19 crisis were reported by 6% of women, with 2% of women reporting appointment cancellations for mental health services. Less than 2% of women reported that they were unable to access a mental health service because of the COVID-19 crisis. Inability to access medication for mental health due to the COVID-19 crisis was reported by nearly 1% of women. Almost one in ten women (9%) reported that there was no impact of COVID-19 on their usual access to mental health services.

Acknowledgements

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