Local community strength and spirit

- On average, 80% of respondents across all cities said that they belonged to some social group or network.
- Over three quarters felt that a sense of community was important and that they had positive interactions with their neighbours.
- Ethnicity and age are key variables in terms of the location of social groups and networks.

WHAT THIS IS ABOUT
Being part of a social group or network has positive outcomes for the individual and society. The presence of formal and informal relationships between people facilitates participation in society, encourages a sense of belonging, and enables stable communities.

This indicator explores the nature and extent of social groups and networks in the eight cities. Data is derived from the Eight Cities Quality of Life Survey 2002. Four measures are included:
- Group or network that matters most to residents
- Community support
- Sense of community
- Social isolation.

WHAT DID WE FIND?
Group or network that matters most to residents

Survey respondents were asked which of the options best describes the group or social network that matters to them most: people who live in the same area; people who have the same interests, culture or beliefs; or no groups or networks.

On average, 80% of respondents in all cities said that they belonged to some social group or network. The majority stated that their network is made up of people who have the same interests but who do not necessarily live in the local neighbourhood.

RESIDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF GROUP OR NETWORK THAT MATTERS MOST TO THEM (2002)

Data source: Eight Cities Quality of Life Survey 2002. ‘Don’t know’ responses are not shown in graph therefore figures might not add to 100 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENT</th>
<th>North Shore</th>
<th>Waitakere</th>
<th>Auckland</th>
<th>Manukau</th>
<th>Hamilton</th>
<th>Wellington</th>
<th>Christchurch</th>
<th>Dunedin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly people living in my neighbourhood</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly people with same interests but not necessarily living in my neighbourhood</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular groups or networks that I feel part of</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Waitakere, at 18%, contained the highest proportion of residents with networks of people who do live in the same area whereas Christchurch had 8%. The highest proportion of people who felt they did not belong to any group or network was Manukau (22%).

Respondents over 55 years (18%), and particularly those over 75 years of age (21%), placed greater importance on their local neighbourhood, as did Pacific Islands people (22%). Two thirds of Europeans stated that the groups and social networks that mattered most to them were those whose members contained similar beliefs and ideas, and that these do not necessarily have to be within a local neighbourhood.

Differences in terms of the location of social groups are partly influenced by mobility and technology. Vehicle ownership rates and email use mean that social networks can stretch across space. However some key local social institutions, such as churches and day centres, draw upon local population catchments.

Community support

This measure looks at perceptions of the level of support that people provide to one another in a neighbourhood. Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the community works together and people and support each other, on a five point scale of ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

In the eight cities combined, over half the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that people in their local neighbourhood supported one another. Residents in Manukau and Dunedin (both 58%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree with this than respondents in other cities.

Maori and European respondents were less likely to feel that the community works together in their local neighbourhood compared to other ethnic groups. This links with previous findings in which Europeans stated that the groups and social networks that mattered most to them do not necessarily have to be within a local neighbourhood.

Sense of community

This measure looks at the perceived sense of community in local neighbourhoods amongst city residents. Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that a sense of community exists in their neighbourhood and whether they thought this was important, on a five point scale of ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Over three quarters of respondents across all cities agreed or strongly agreed that feeling a sense of community was important (75%) and that they had positive interactions with their neighbours (86%). There was little variation between the individual cities.
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Continued...

Social isolation

Survey respondents were asked how often they had felt lonely or isolated over the last 12 months on a six point scale of ‘never’ to ‘all of the time’.

On average, 80% of survey respondents stated that they ‘hardly ever’ or ‘never’ felt lonely or isolated in the last 12 months. Dunedin respondents were more likely than others to state this (85%) whereas Auckland respondents were more likely than others to say that they felt lonely only some (or more) of the time (22%).

There was a correlation between income levels and feelings of isolation. People in households earning less than $20,000 a year were more likely to feel lonely and isolated, compared with those earning $40,000 or more per annum. Asian and Indian peoples were more likely than others to feel lonely and isolated. This may be linked to high levels of Asian immigration and a lack of established social networks, and language difficulties.

Belonging to a social network is important to a person’s wellbeing. People who feel that they do not belong to a social network can experience isolation. This is particularly relevant in the larger cities as they become home to an increasing number of migrants from foreign countries.