

# People's Panel Long COVID Survey



**Staffordshire and  
Stoke-on-Trent**  
Integrated Care System

## Research Report

5 April 2023



# Long COVID Survey



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## Research Method

Fieldwork dates: 20<sup>th</sup> February – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Online survey emailed to all 1,108 current members of the Staffordshire People's Panel

Emailed out invite:	1,237
Bounced back:	13
Unsubscribed:	25
Opened the survey but did not complete:	18
<b>Completes:</b>	<b>139 (11% response rate)</b>

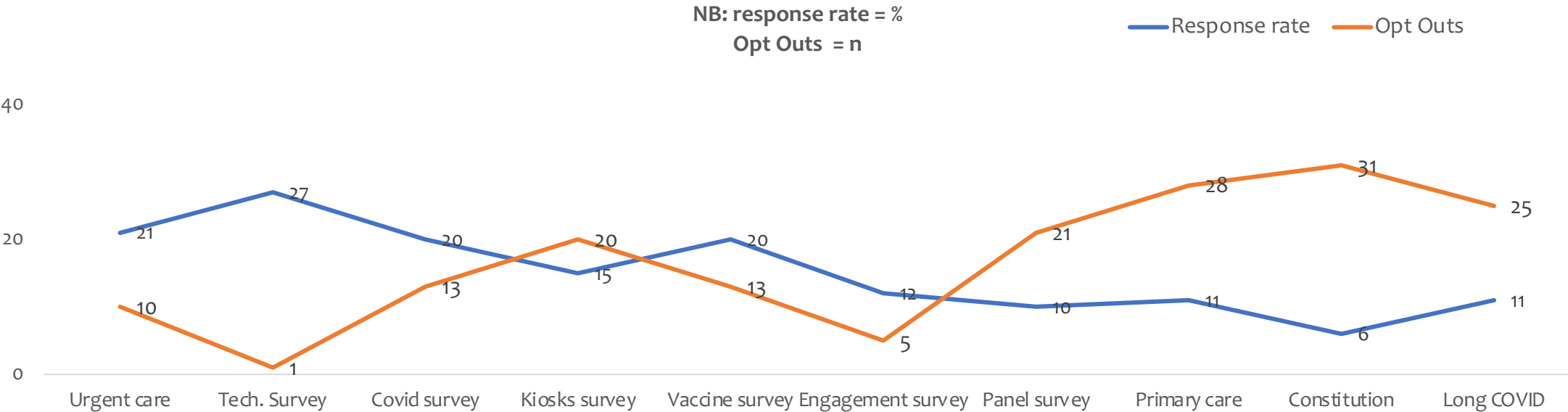
Responses:

Initial Mail Out:	84
1 <sup>st</sup> Reminder:	37
Final call:	18

# Response Rates

The response rate of 11% was higher than for the Constitution survey and similar to last year's surveys, whilst the number of opt-outs fell slightly to 25.

## Response Rates vs Opt Outs



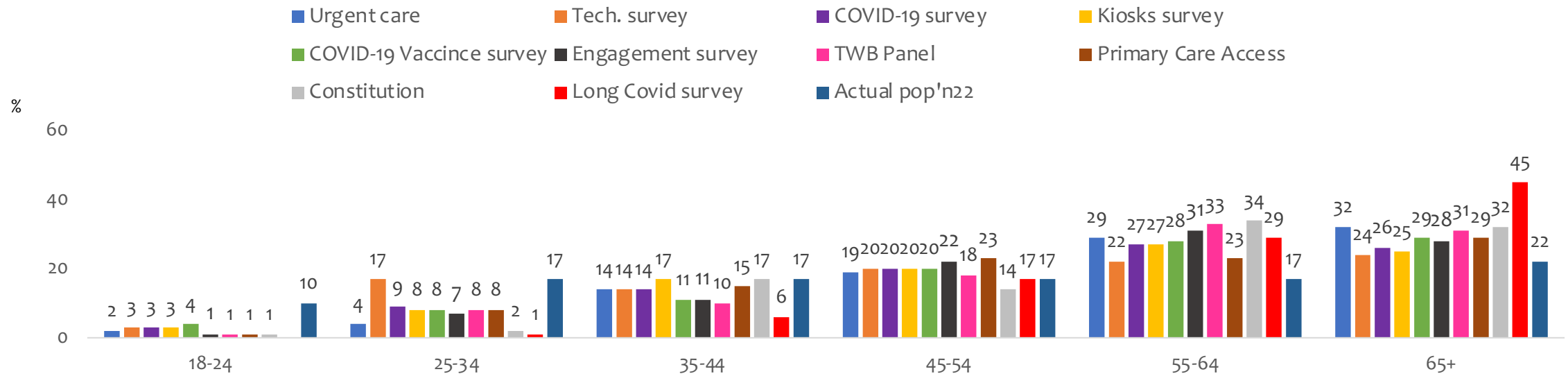
# Sample Profile



## Age group

- Notably, the sample for this Long COVID survey was significantly older than in previous People's Panel surveys: nearly one-in-two people were aged 65+, which is double the percentage found within the overall Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent population.
- Only 7% of survey participants were aged under 45, compared with 44% of the actual Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent population.

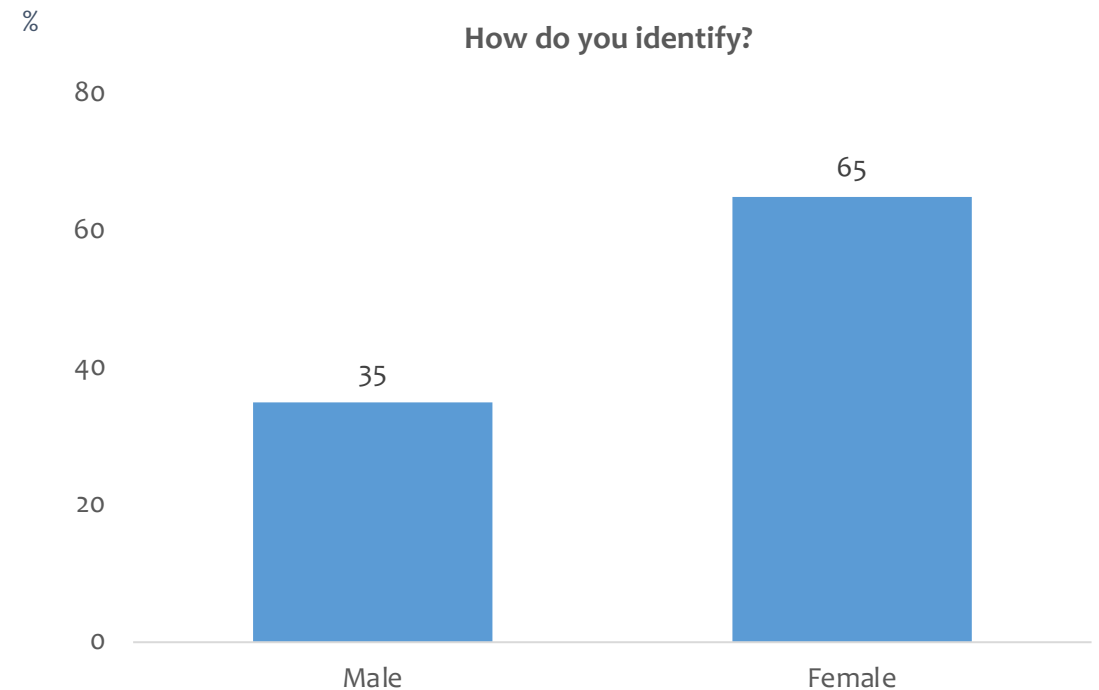
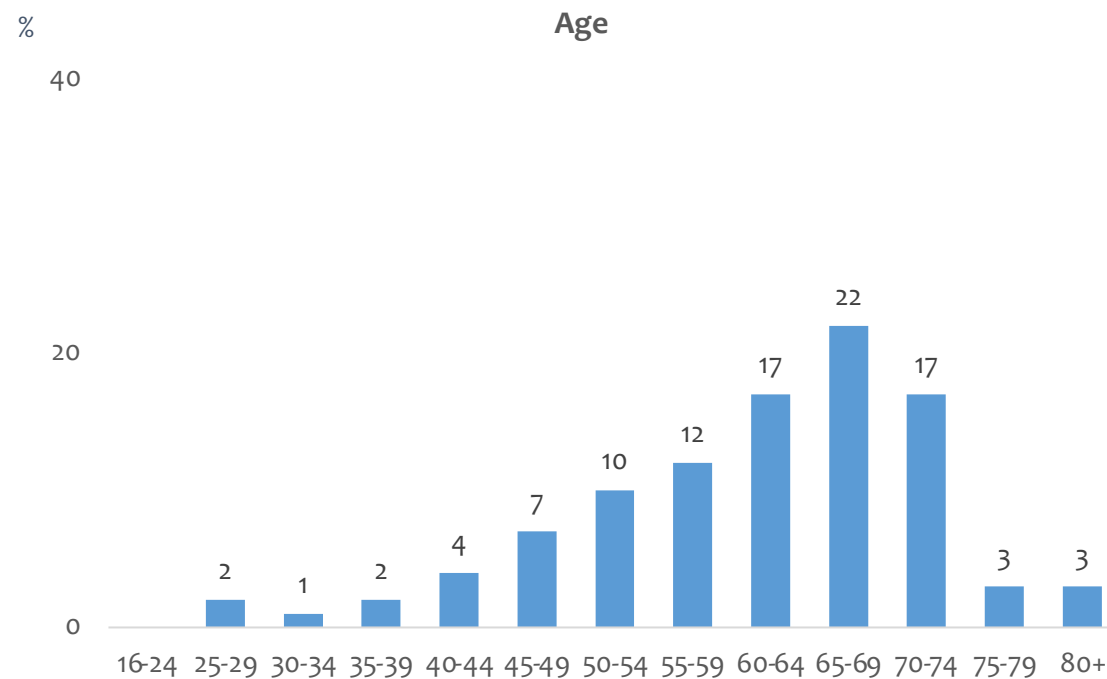
Age group: comparison of unweighted samples



## Age and Gender

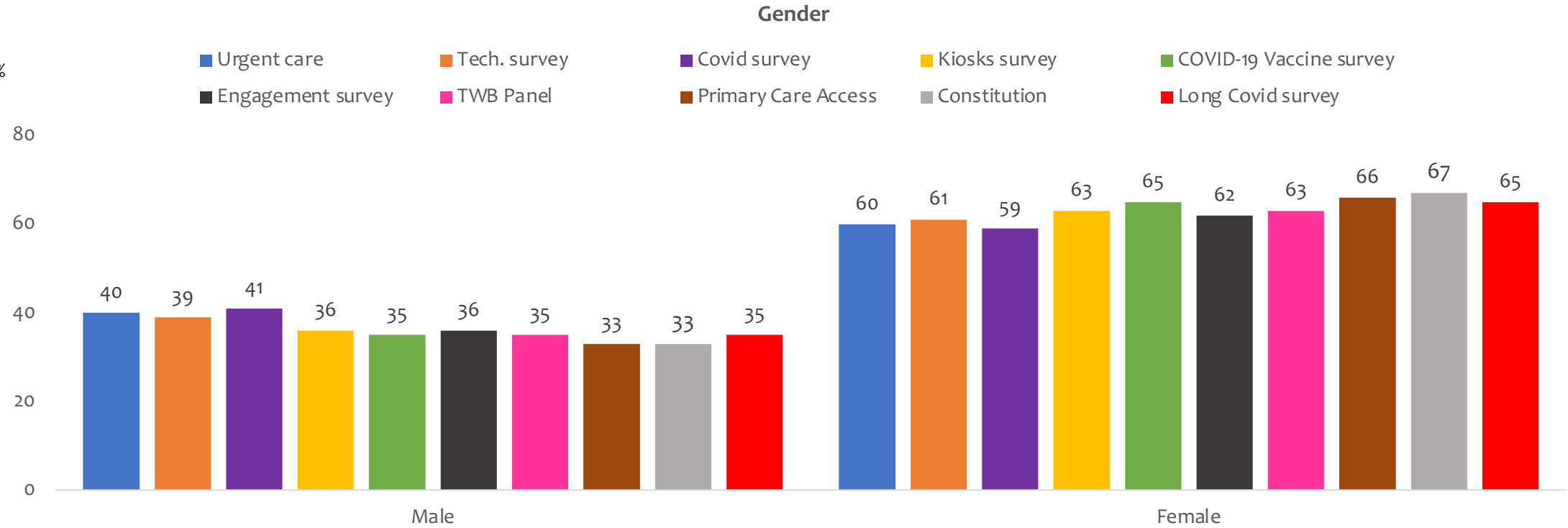
The detailed age breakdown shows that 22% of the People's Panel sample were aged 65-69 years, which represents a strong skew to this age group.

The split by gender was more representative, although the majority of survey participants were female.



# Gender

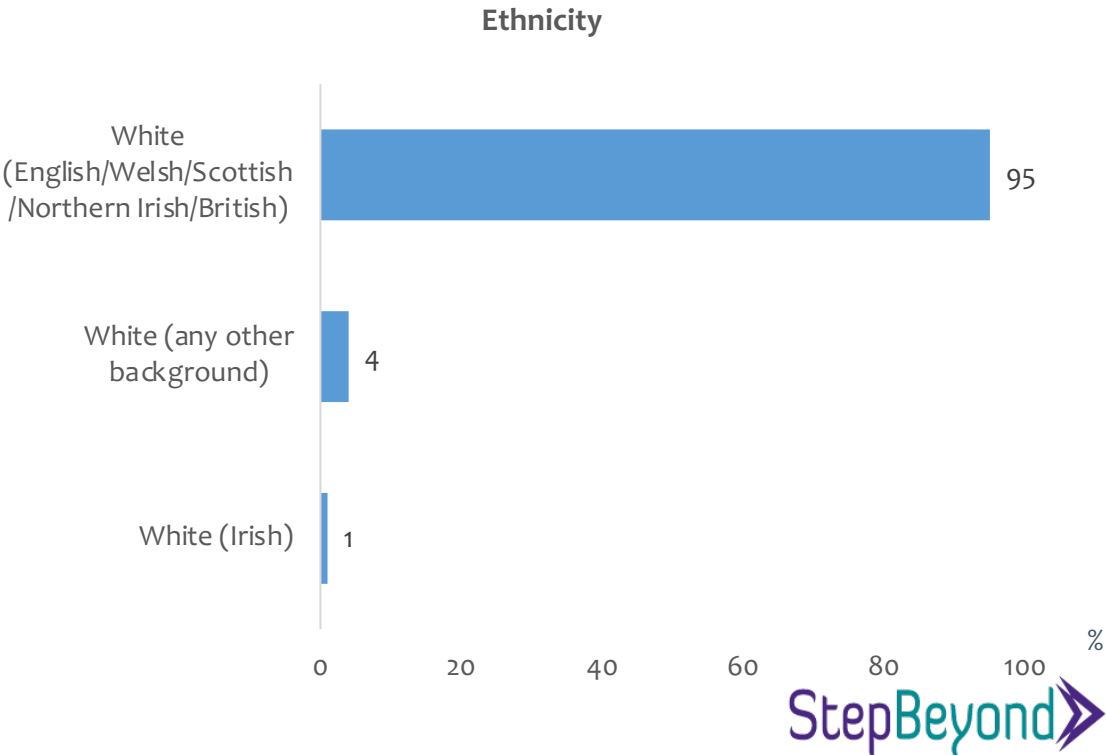
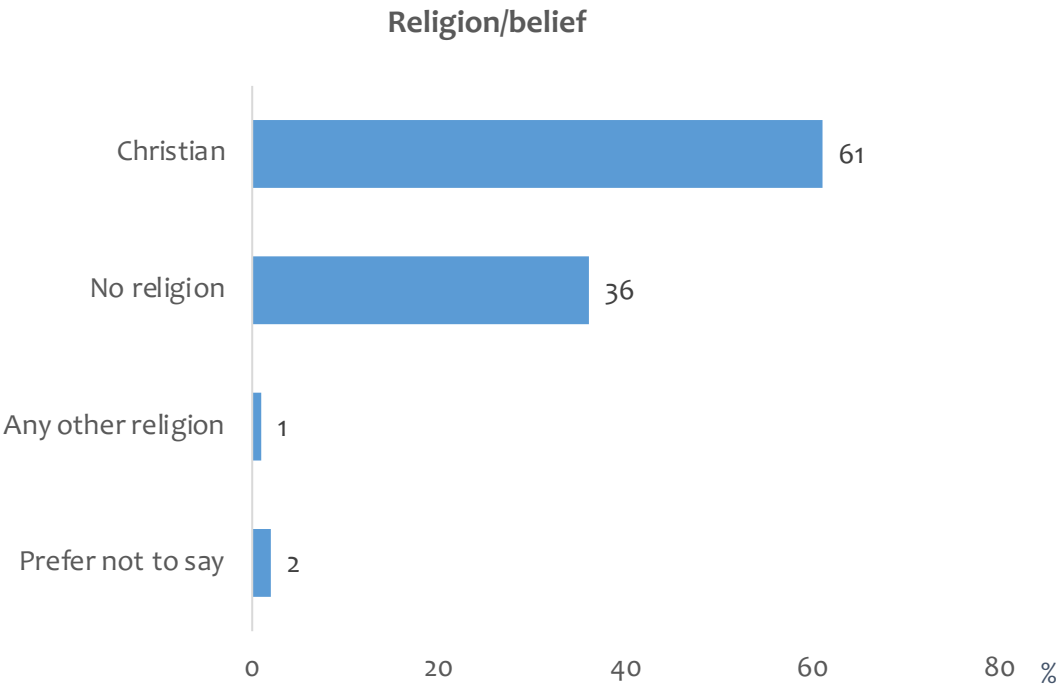
This higher response rate from females has however been seen in all previous People’s Panel surveys: and so the sample is very comparable with past surveys in this respect





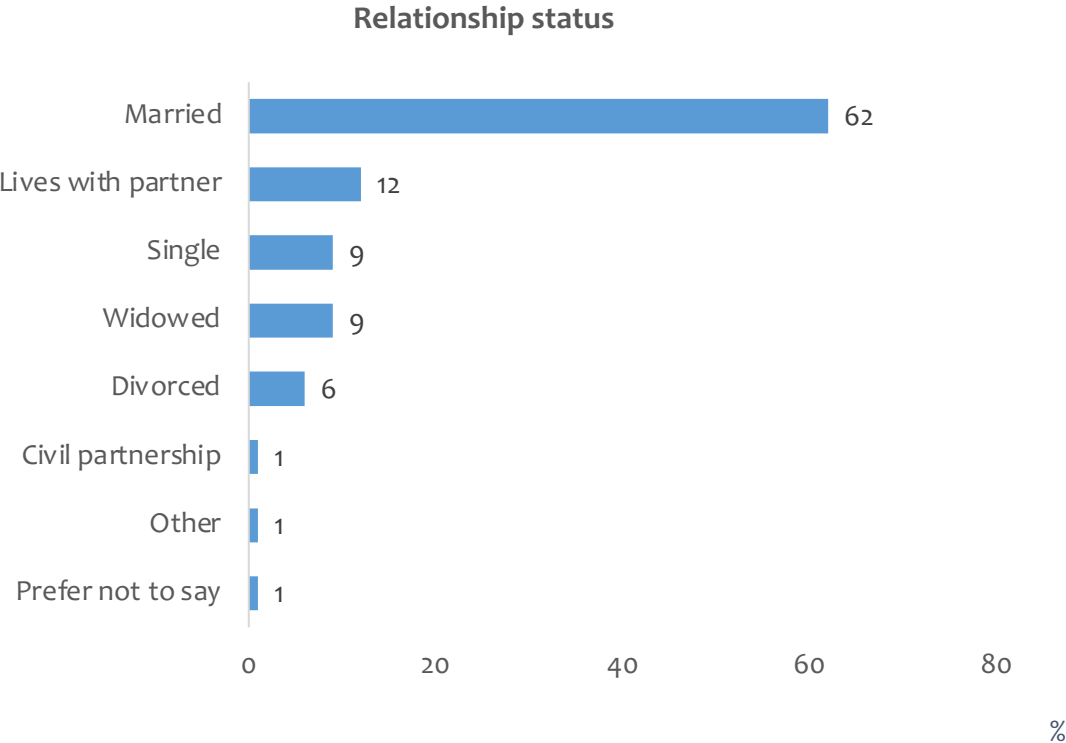
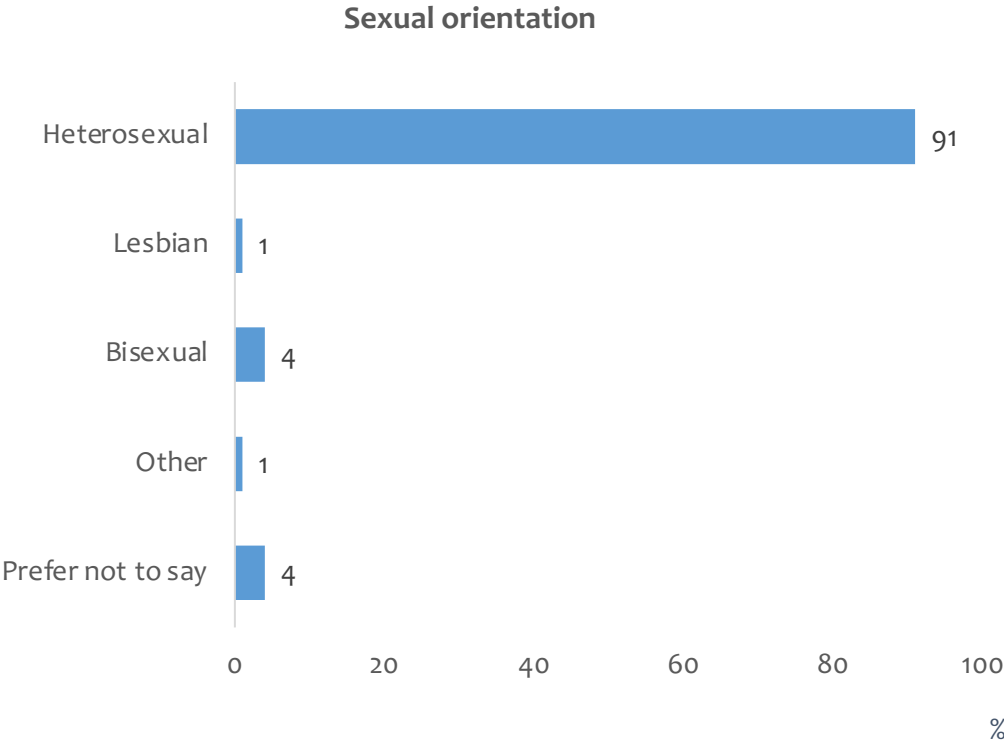
# Religion and Ethnic Background

- Over a third of the sample said they had no religion, while almost all the remainder were Christian.
- The entire sample for this survey was White, and almost exclusively White British.



# Relationships and Sexual Orientation

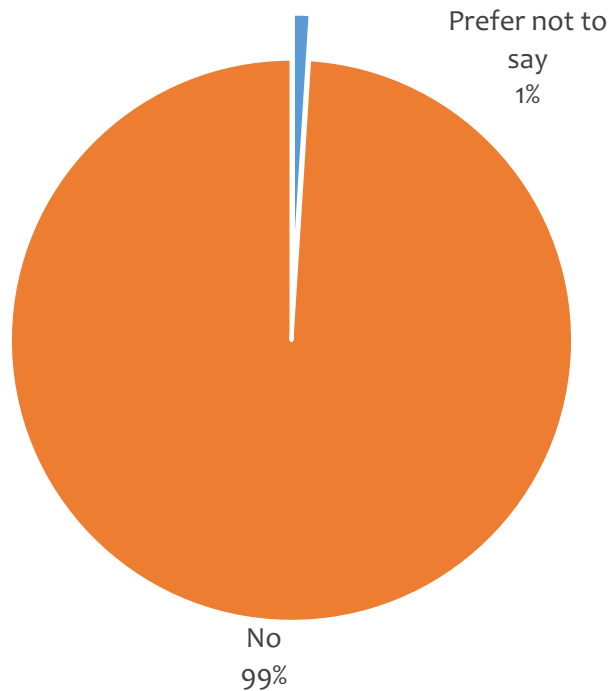
- Nine-in-ten People’s Panel members who took part on this survey said they were heterosexual
- And nearly two-thirds were married; an additional 12% living with a partner



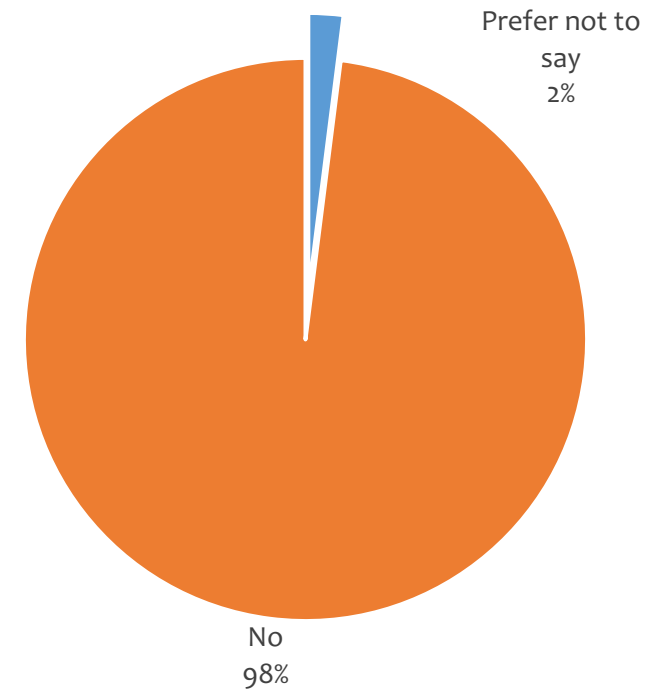
## Pregnancy

- No one said they were either pregnant, or had given birth in the past six months

Are you pregnant at this time?



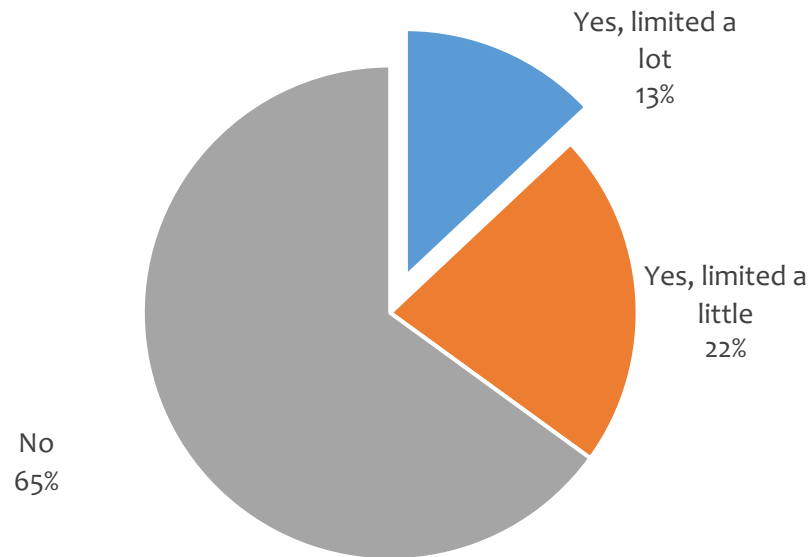
Have you recently given birth?



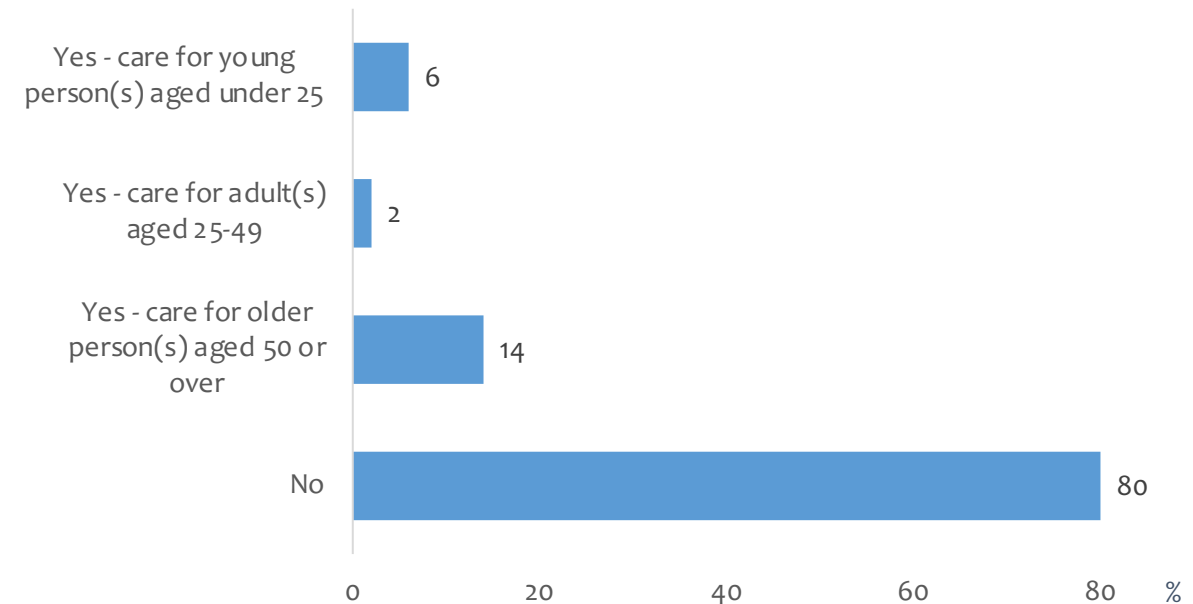
## Disabilities and Care

- One-in-three survey participants have some form of limiting long-term health problem or disability
- And two-in-ten said they provide care for someone – most often for older people, but sometimes for younger people

**Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?**

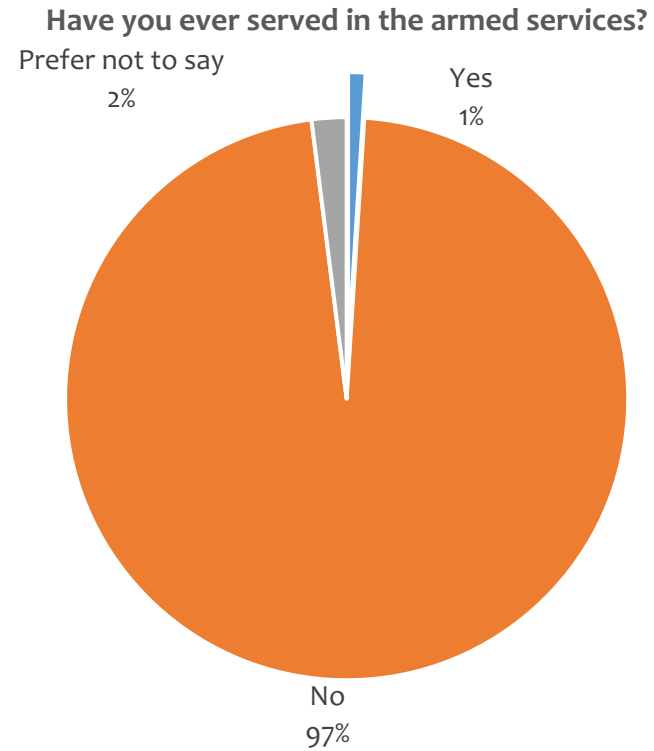


**Do you provide care for someone?**



## Armed Forces

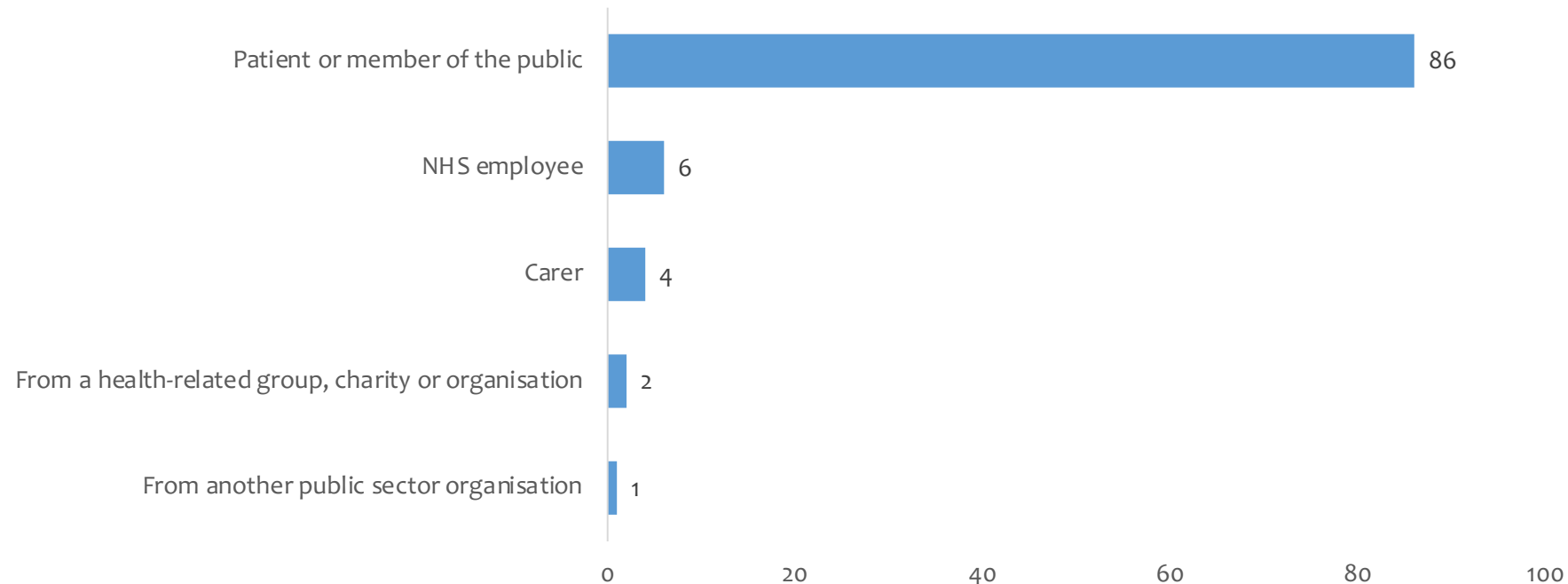
Only one person had served in the armed forces.



# Respondent Status

- The great majority of People’s Panel members who took part in the survey said they were responding as a patient or member of the public.
- 6% were however responding as an NHS employee and 4% as a carer.

As an individual responding to this questionnaire, which of these best applies to you?



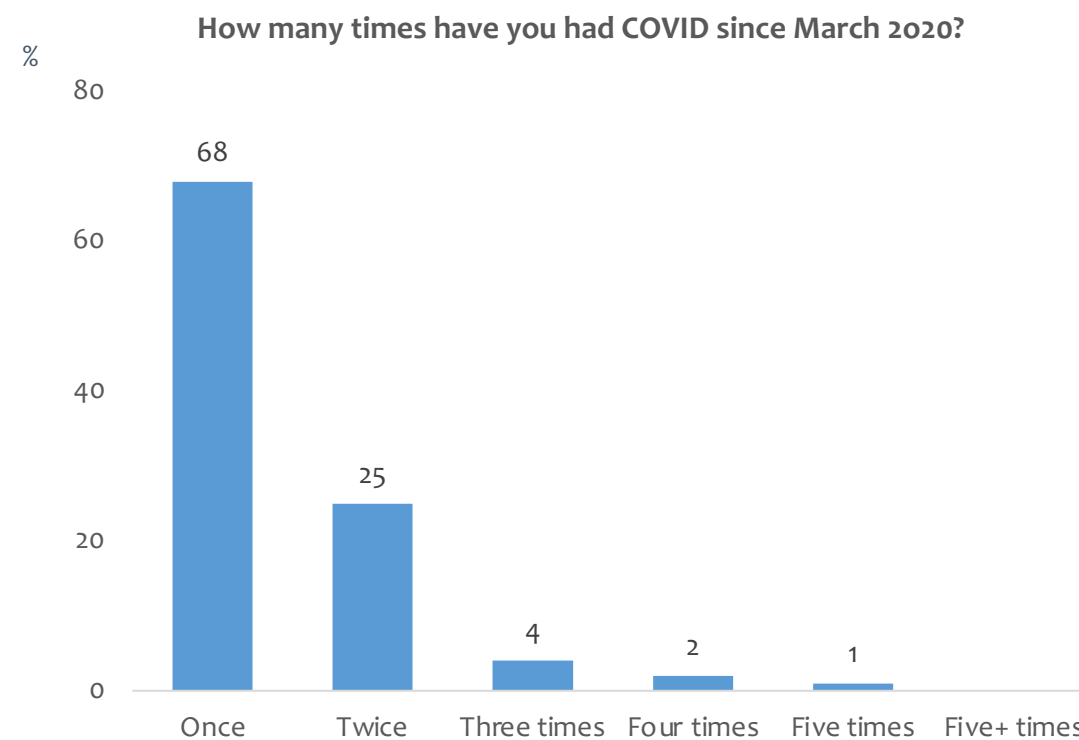
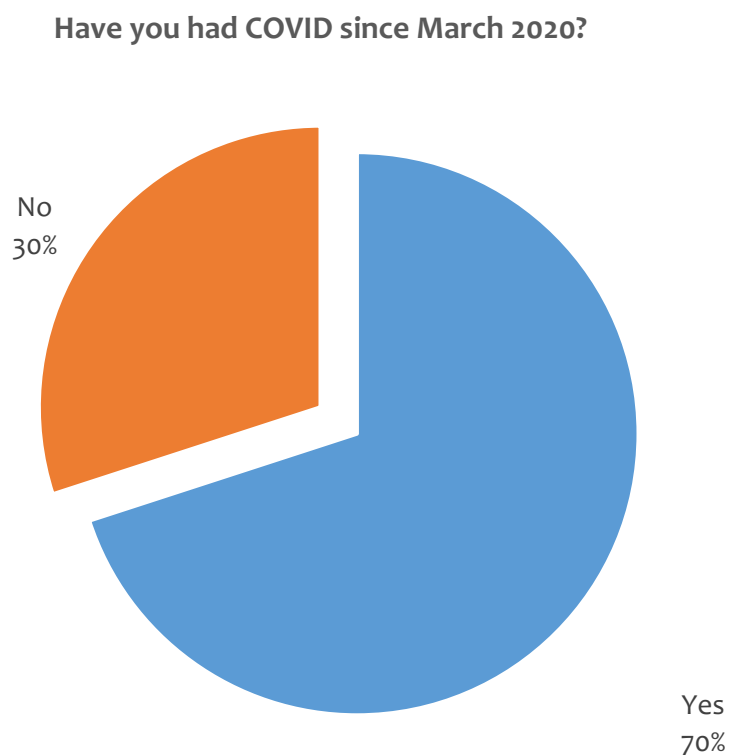
# Experience of COVID-19



# COVID-19

- In total, 70% of People's Panel members who took part in the survey have had COVID since March 2020.

- Most have only had COVID once, but one-in-three have had it at least twice.

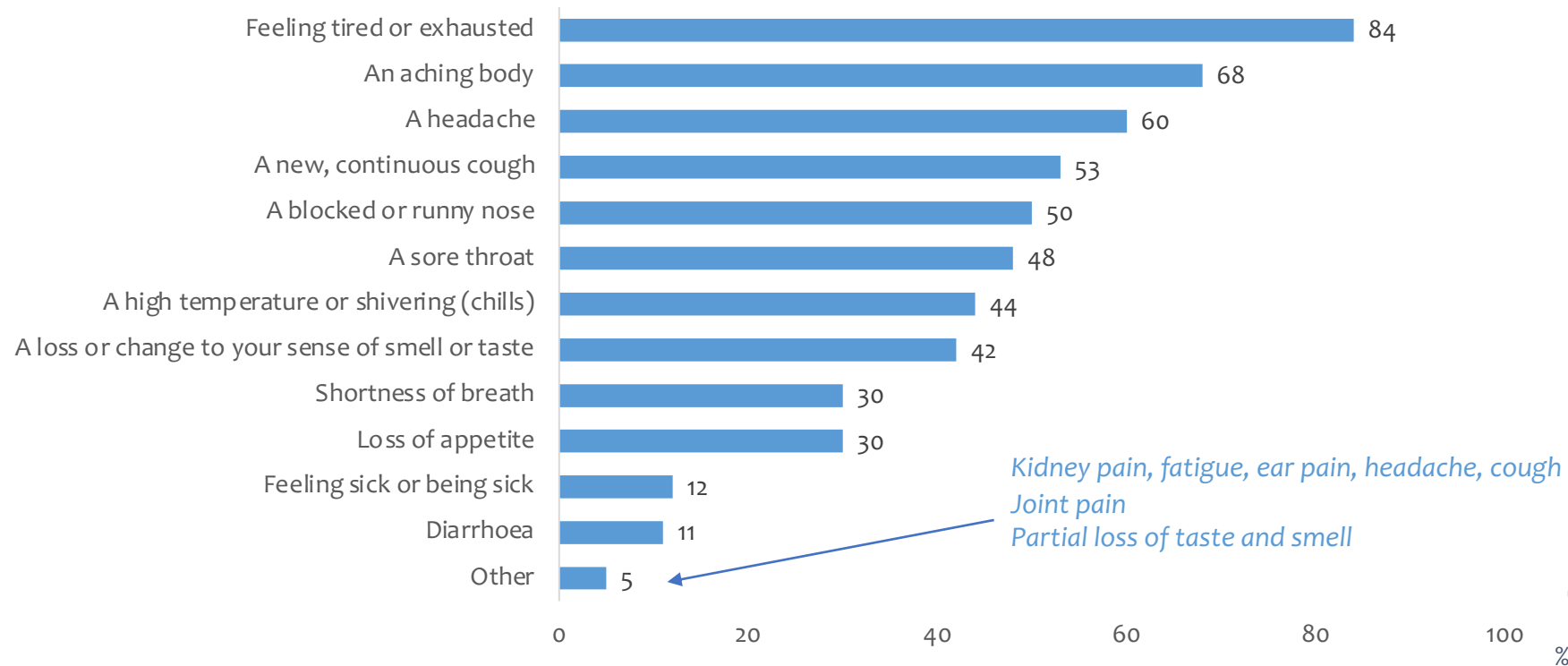




# COVID symptoms

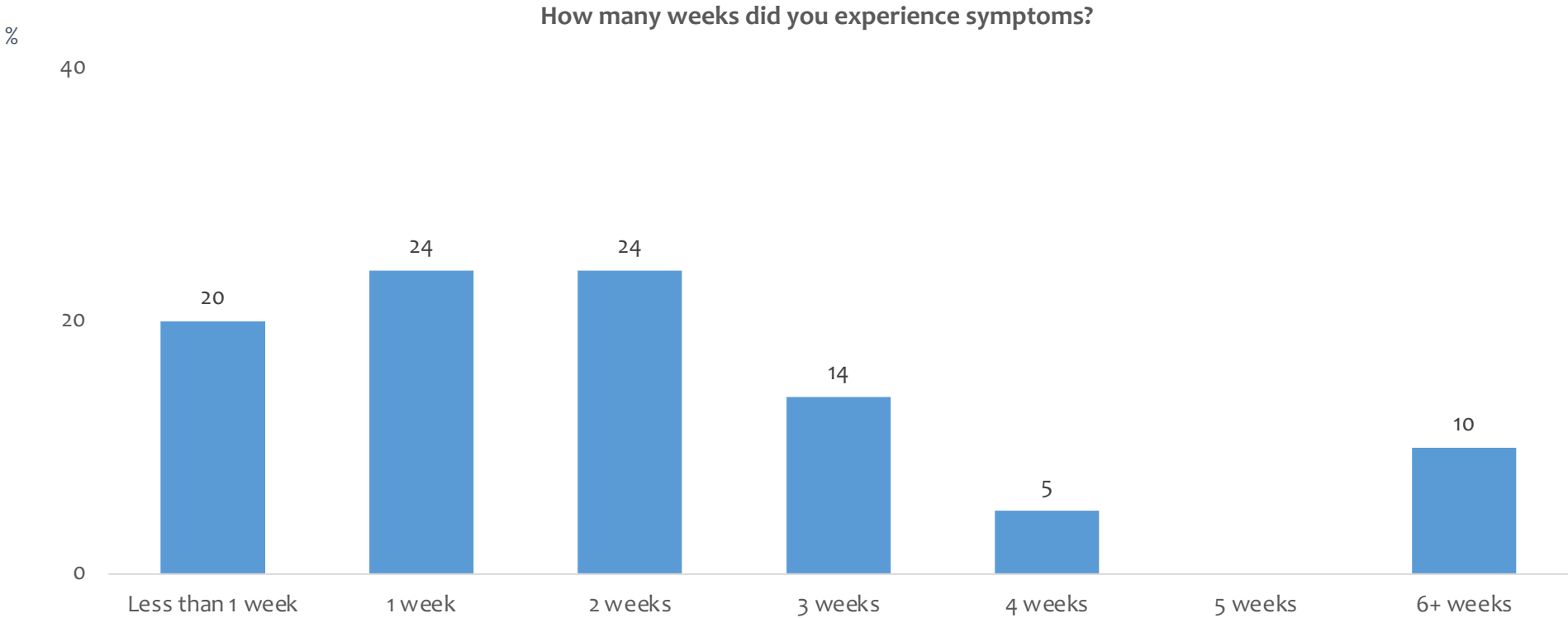
- Those who've had COVID had suffered a wide range of symptoms: the most common being feeling tired or exhausted, and having an aching head or body.
- One-in-two had experienced a continuous cough, a blocked or runny nose and/or a sore throat.

What symptoms did you experience when you had COVID?



# COVID Duration

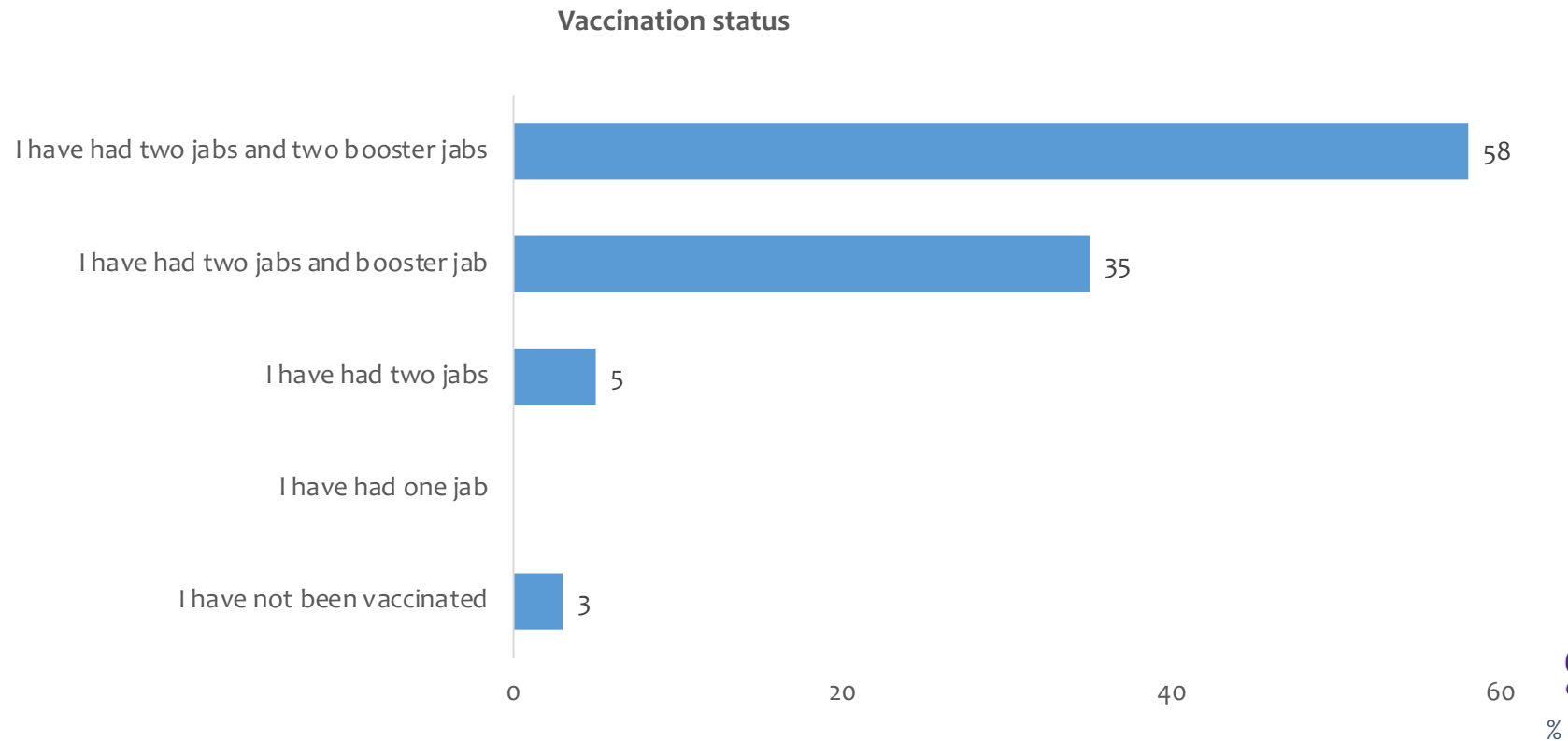
- Just under half had experienced COVID symptoms for one week or less, leaving 53% who'd experienced symptoms for at least two weeks
- One-in-ten said they'd had symptoms for six weeks or longer.



Base: Total sample (139)

# Vaccination Status

- The majority of People’s Panel members who replied to the survey have had two vaccines and two booster jabs
- Most of the remainder have had both vaccines, but only one booster
- Just four people said they hadn’t been vaccinated at all.



# Experience of Long COVID

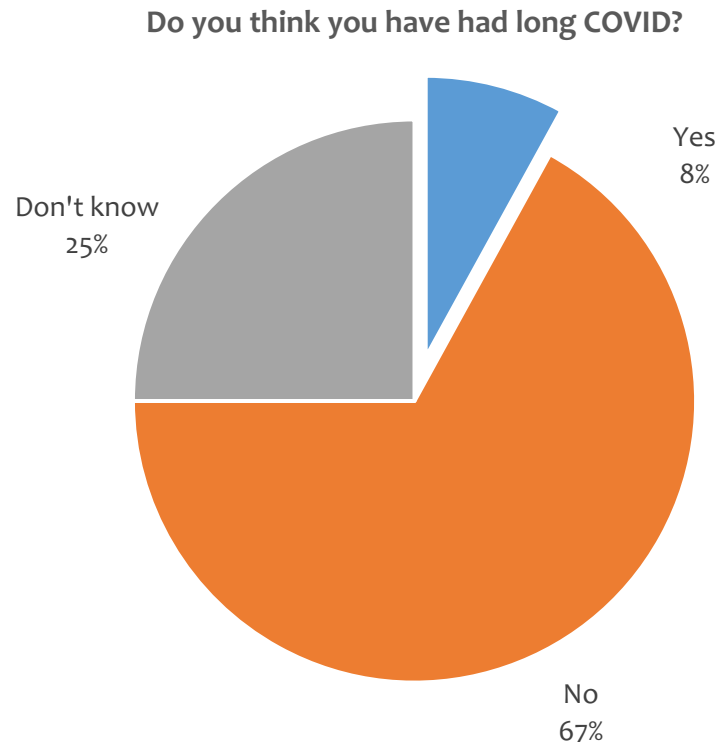


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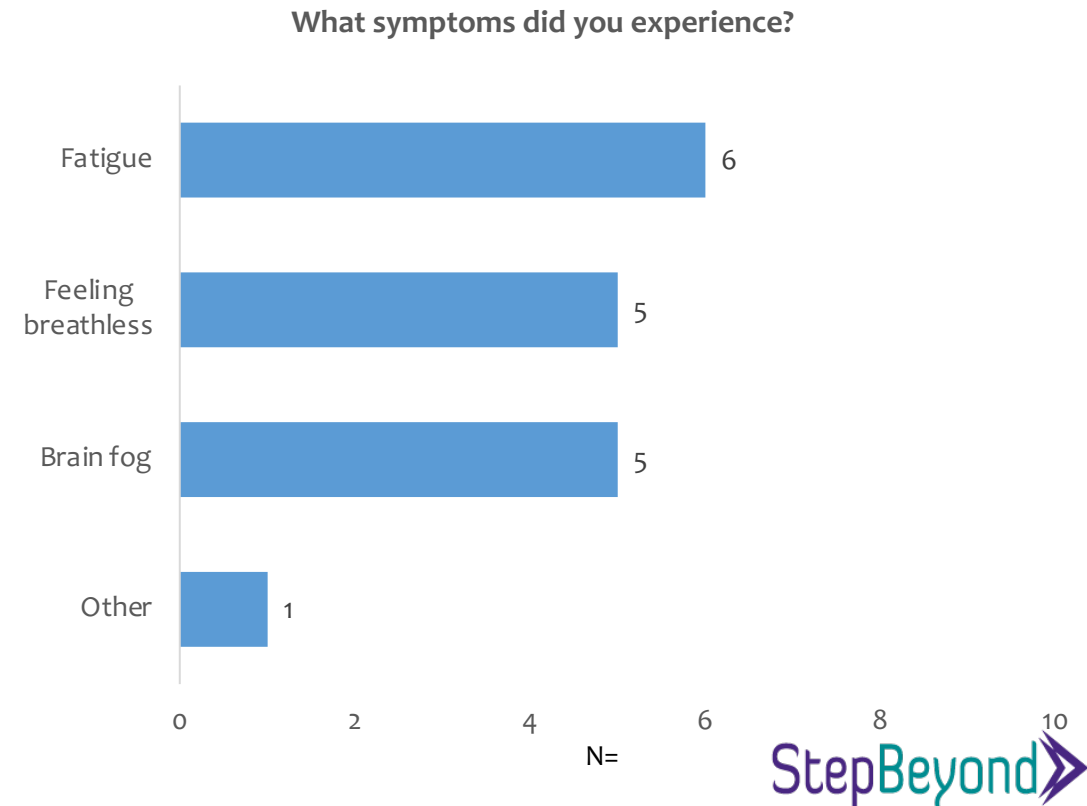


## Long COVID

- 8% of survey participants thought they'd had long COVID at some point, while another 25% weren't sure whether they have or not.

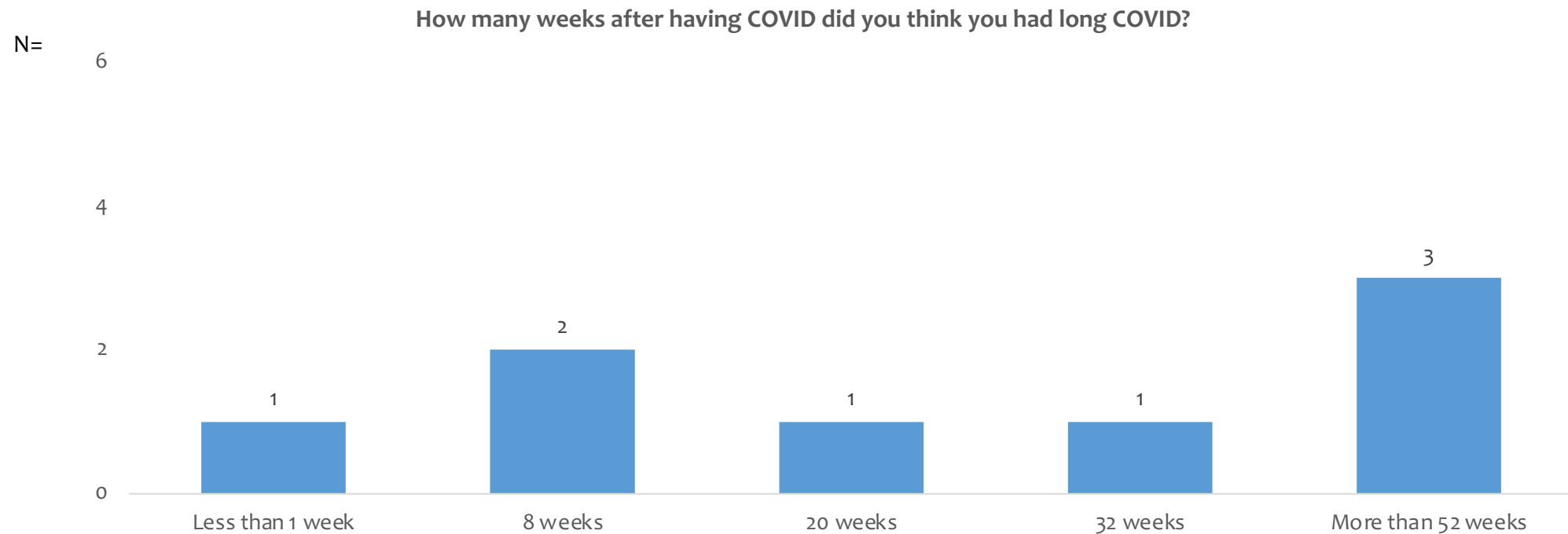


- Their symptoms consisted of fatigue, breathlessness and/or brain fog
- NB data is represented as numbers rather than percentage,s due to the small base size



## Long COVID Duration

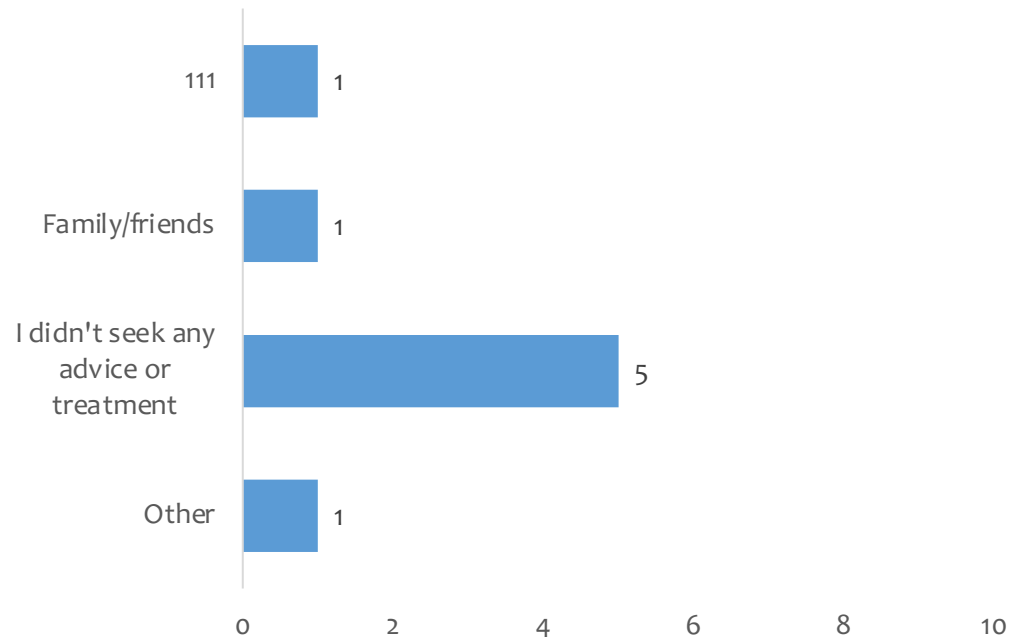
- Again, these are raw numbers rather than percentages, but those people who thought they'd had long COVID, had generally experienced symptoms for at least eight weeks.
- And three people said they'd had symptoms for more than a year.



# Long COVID Treatment and Advice

- Five of the eight Panel members who thought they'd had long COVID hadn't sought any advice or treatment for it.
- No one said they had been to their GP, but their subsequent responses suggest that at least two people had a telephone consultation.

Where did you go for advice and treatment?



N=

## Who encouraged you to get help?

*I couldn't breathe 1st time & working in care, I knew had to get advice*

*GP*

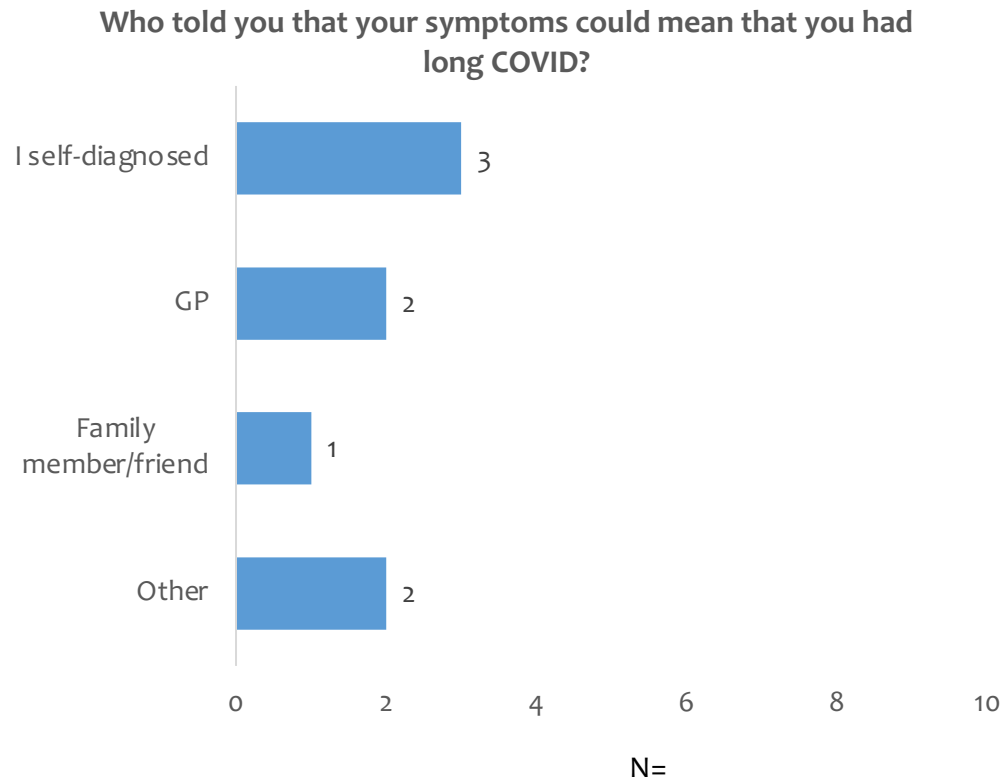
## Experience of help

*111 were brilliant, they referred me to my GP, booked appt, then got drugs to help quickly, antibiotics & steroids*

*Very fragmented service but both courses did help. Learning to pace and gentle exercise helped. Group conversations reassuring that others were having similar experiences.*

# Long COVID Diagnosis

- Two people said their GP had diagnosed long COVID (hence they had probably had a telephone consultation)
- Three had self-diagnosed.



## Reasons for not getting help from a healthcare professional

*Because the symptoms were just continuous from when I had covid. I didn't think there was anything they could do with my fatigue ( which was by far the worst symptom) and my cough was very gradually getting better. Didn't want to take up an appointment when they couldn't help anyway.*

*I understand the changes in my body since contracting covid so therefore did not need any medical diagnosis. Patient appointments are at a premium and so therefore I have purposely stayed away from the surgery and I certainly wouldn't expect any treatment for such a condition.*

*Difficult to get appointments. Talk to friends and family. Lots of people worse than me. Tend to get on with it.*

*I did but it wasn't noted as long covid*

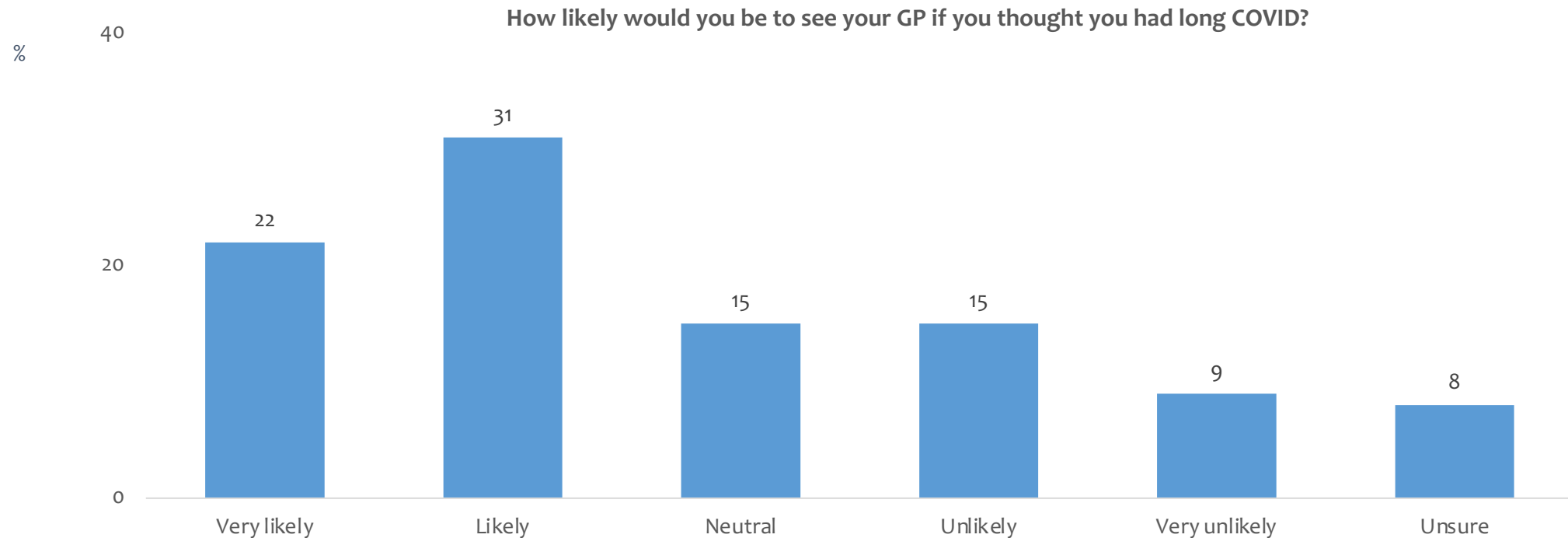


# GPs and Long COVID



## GPs and Long COVID

- One-in-four Panel members who replied to the survey said they'd be 'very likely' to see their GP if they thought they had long COVID, and another 31% would be 'likely' to do so.
- This leaves 47% who have some form and extent of reservation over doing so



# Long COVID: Motivations to contact GP



- Those who **would** see their GP seemed to be receiving a good service from them, and also believed that something could be done to help them

*For help. If it lingers it can impact your life*

*To see about the symptoms and how they could be treated*

*Would like to know how to deal with it*

*She is very well informed and supportive*

*My surgery is usually pretty good for getting appointments*

*My GP practice is easy to access and professional*

*My GP has always been excellent for 32 years, totally trust the practice*

- Others would often be motivated by wanting to rule out 'a more serious' condition through diagnosis, and also to get advice on treatment and likely symptoms/duration

*Not sure what they could do but they could rule out other potential issues*

*It scares me so much I'd need to know if it was covid or something else*

*The symptoms could be other medical conditions*

*To ensure diagnosis and for any solution to illness*

*To gain a better understanding of Long Covid and what to expect*

*To seek advice on possible treatment, interventions and lifestyle.*

# Long COVID: Motivations to contact GP

- A few people with direct experience or knowledge of long COVID felt they should see a GP because it's a serious condition

*My brother had it at the same time and he has been really debilitated with long Covid.*

*It's a very serious complaint and I would want to make sure I had the best level of care and treatment for it.*

*Some uncertainty about long term effects which need to be addressed through professional help*

- Others said their likelihood to contact their GP would depend on the severity of their symptoms

*Likely to see GP if symptoms continued to affect everyday living for advice*

*I would probably see the GP but would have been showing symptoms for a good three or four months before thinking of going.*

*If I was feeling unfit and thought I had long covid, would like to understand how best to deal with it.*

*If the symptoms of long covid were no worse than when I had covid I would carry on and presume they would eventually go.*

*It would depend upon my symptoms and if I needed assistance with them.*

## Long COVID: Barriers to contacting GP

- Difficulties in access definitely seem to be creating a barrier to seeking advice from GPs

*Cant get in to see a doctor*

*Getting an appointment at the moment seems impossible, and I really think CBT is probably all that can be done. I am losing faith with GPs*

*Hard to get appointments and unsure what they can actually do apart from painkillers*

*I asked my GP if he thought I may have long covid in November 22 but he dismissed me*

*Not sure my doctor would see me. Do not have confidence to contact*

- Along with significant doubt as to whether anything can be done, other than self-care and OTC medication

*There's no cure for Long COVID, so no point of seeing the GP.*

*Wouldn't think there was any treatment available*

*Because there's nothing anyone can do*

*I think it is something to just follow along with normal things like paracetamol and just work through it . After all you have been fully jabbed , what more can they give you*

*I would try to manage the symptoms myself*

*I don't know if any thing could be done, its similar to a common cold.*

# Long COVID: Barriers to contacting GP

- Reluctance to contact a GP is sometimes due to existing medical issues – making people think it would be difficult to isolate the symptoms of long COVID and also meaning that they are focused on ‘more important’ problems.

*Got cancer so don't know what are symptoms of treatment/illness and what will be long covid*

*Already have ME and get no help with that*

*I'm immunosuppressed and have psoriatic arthritis and other lifelong illnesses*

*I suffer from Allergic Rhinitis & an under active Thyroid so symptoms could just be those.*

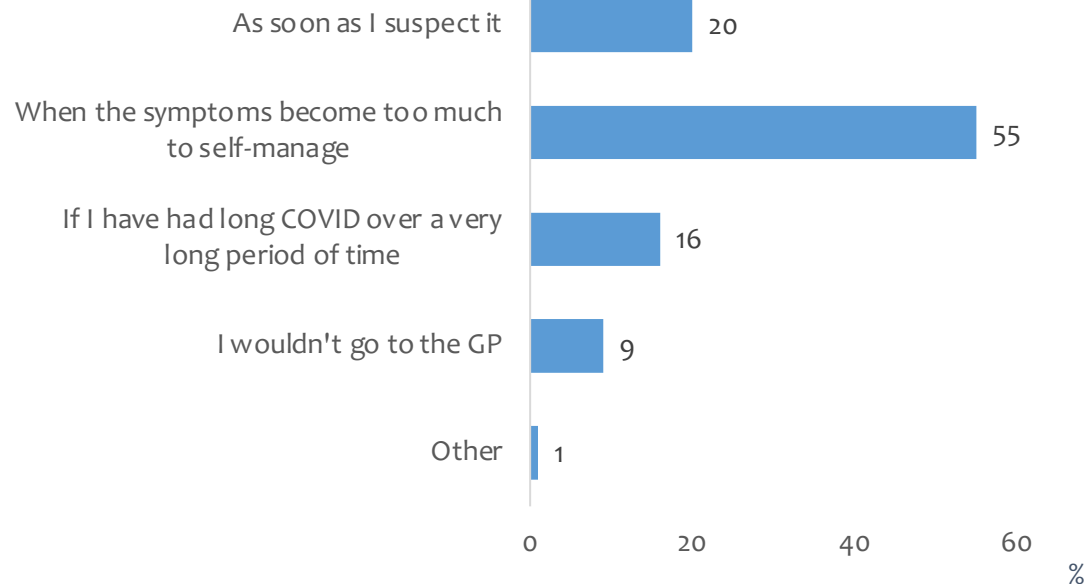
*I have enough other medical bits I am working through. I haven't the energy to start dealing with any other symptoms*

*I am disabled and struggle daily with fatigue so not sure I would recognise that I have had it.*

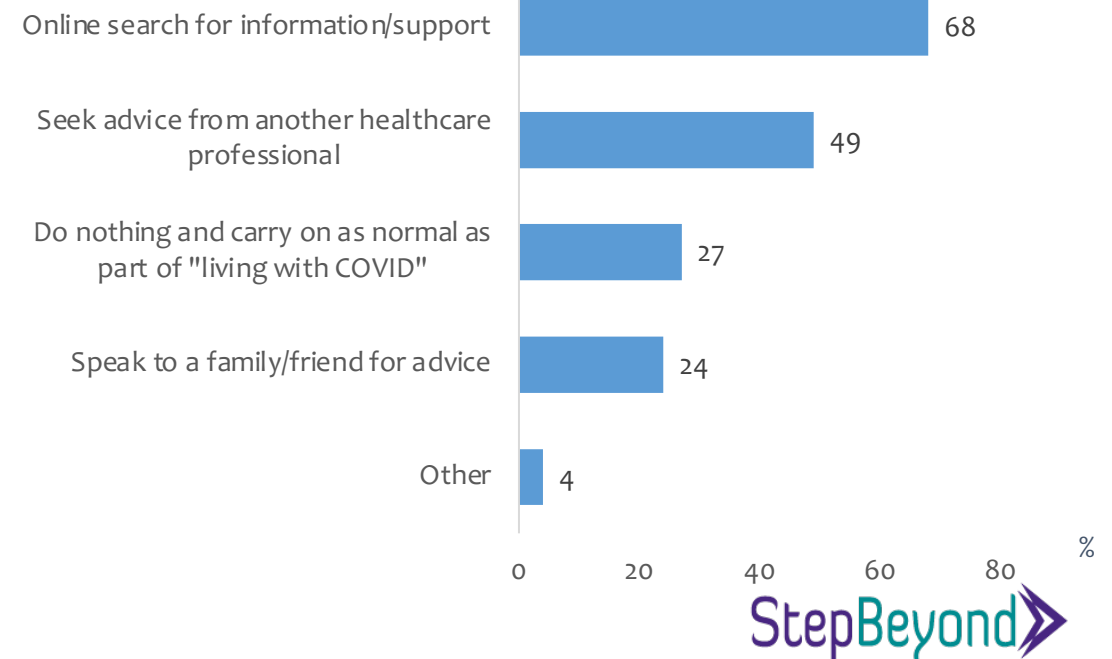
## GPs and Long COVID

- Most People's Panel members say they would contact their GP when their long COVID symptoms become too much to self-manage
- Although 20% would go to their GP immediately and 9% wouldn't go at all
- Two-thirds would search online for information/support and one-in-two would seek advice from another healthcare professional.
- One-in-four would do nothing and just follow the government advice to 'live with COVID'

**When would you see your GP if you thought you had long COVID?**



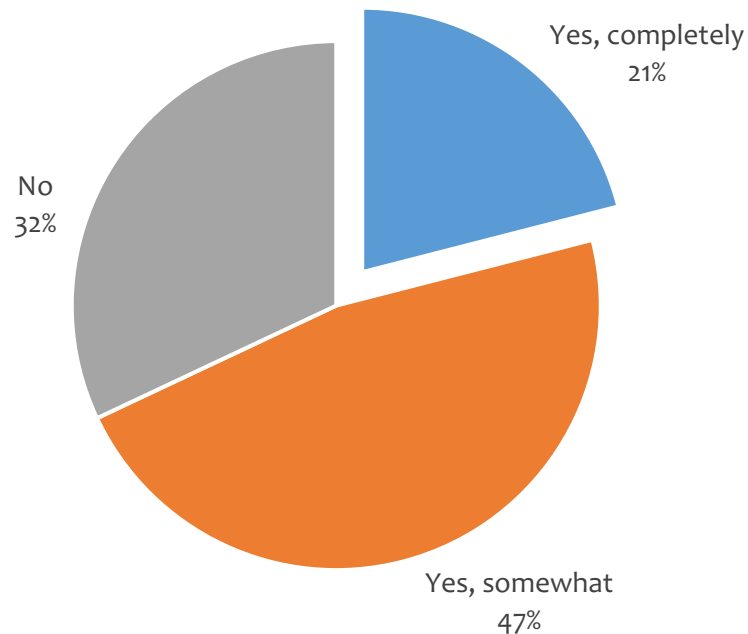
**Any other actions you might take if you were suffering from long COVID?**



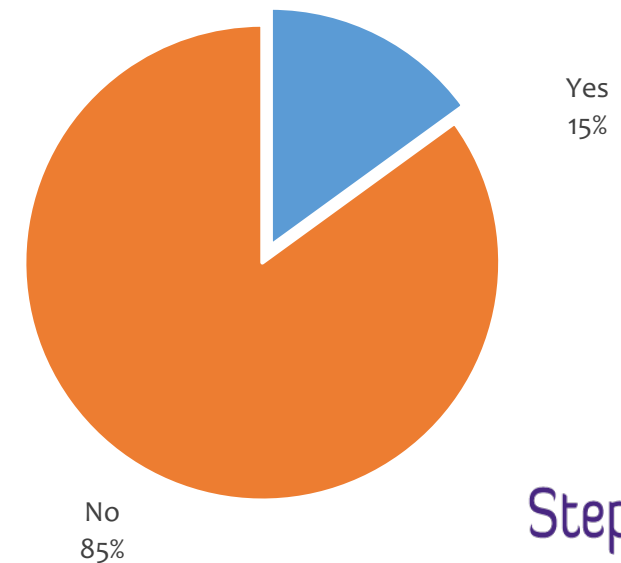
# Long COVID: Awareness of Support Services

- Just 21% of survey participants said they are ‘completely aware’ that GPs can support people with long COVID.
- One-in-three people are not aware of this at all
- And only 15% are aware of long COVID clinics

Were you aware that GP’s can support people with long COVID?



Did you know that long COVID clinics are available in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and that you can be referred by your GP?





# Executive Summary



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## Executive Summary

- Firstly, the People's Panel sample for this survey was strongly skewed towards the older age groups and especially to those people in their mid-late 60s. However, given that older age groups tend to be more susceptible to COVID this may not be a problem (and indeed may have **resulted** in the skew, as mid-older Panel members may have seen the survey as more relevant and important to them). The sample wasn't large enough to weight and thereby achieve a more representative sample.
- The great majority of the sample (70%) have had COVID at some time since March 2020 – generally just once but one-in-three have had it two or more times. The most common symptoms among these people were feeling tired/exhausted and aches and pains. Over half had these symptoms for at least two weeks (and 10% for 6+ weeks)
- Most survey participants have had both COVID vaccines and two boosters – almost all the remainder have had one booster.

## Executive Summary

- 8% of survey participants think they have had long COVID and 25% aren't sure whether they have or not. They generally said they'd experienced fatigue, breathlessness and brain fog, and had suffered these symptoms for more than 8 weeks after having COVID (three people for more than a year).
- However, the survey has found considerable reluctance among People's Panel members to seek medical help if they think they may have long COVID – mainly due to difficulties getting GP appointments and also to a perception that there's nothing that can be done anyway. Most would only contact their GP if they reach a point where they feel they can't manage the symptoms on their own.
- One-in-three people aren't aware that their GP can support people with long COVID, and another 47% are only 'somewhat' aware of this. Only 15% are aware of long COVID clinics.
- However, most people **would** search online for help and guidance around long COVID, and would also contact other healthcare professionals (such as pharmacists)
- There therefore seems to be great potential for an effective communications campaign to help address these issues.

# Thank You!



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