



CIGNA COVID-19 GLOBAL IMPACT STUDY

UAE Residents Remained Resilient, Ending the Year with an Improved Performance on the Health and Well-being Index

February 2021



INTRODUCTION TO THE FIFTH EDITION BY JEROME DROESCH, CEO, CIGNA MEA AND SEA

2020 was a year when we were confronted with stressors that most of us have never experienced before. Stepping into the new year, there is a renewed sense of hope with the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination program in the UAE, providing protection for every single member of society, expatriates and citizens alike.

Looking at the results of our latest edition of the COVID-19 impact study from late November / early December 2020, we see the initial impact of the vaccine roll-out in line with the sustained efforts of the UAE government. The results showed how the government has played a vital role in preserving the good health, positivity and well-being of its population, giving people reason for hope. We saw an emerging resilience in the UAE population after months of adapting, pivoting and coping.



The world is a very different place since we began this research back in early 2020, and some of the changes are here to stay, such as the use of virtual health which continues to be a feature of the care continuum. The pandemic forced providers to accelerate their adoption and caused a mindset shift for many patients, resulting in radical changes in the way medical care is provided to patients and allowing people to continue to access the care they need even during the pandemic. And our report suggests this will not just be a short-term change.

But if this study has shown us anything, it is how important it is to consider an individual's health in a holistic way, understanding that wellness is not just about physical well-being but also their mental health. There are many factors, both within the workplace and at home, that can impact whole health and during this study, we have tracked five themes that we think are critical: physical, family, social, financial and work. By understanding more about people's sentiments towards these themes, we have been able to provide specific support, such as the stress tools and content, to our customers that we know they need to support their teams. We will continue to use the data to make informed decisions to help our customers where they need it most.

Predicting how the pandemic will continue to unfold in our everyday lives is difficult, but there are reasons for hope. We have seen the scientific community unite and work at pace to develop not just one, but multiple vaccines to address the COVID-19 threat. We also have a greater appreciation for the small things in life such as spending time with loved ones, going out for a meal or having a chat with a colleague in the office. While the fight against COVID-19 is far from over, I believe that when we come out the other side of this pandemic, we will find that this transformative period has changed the way we think about health and the importance of taking care of our whole health.

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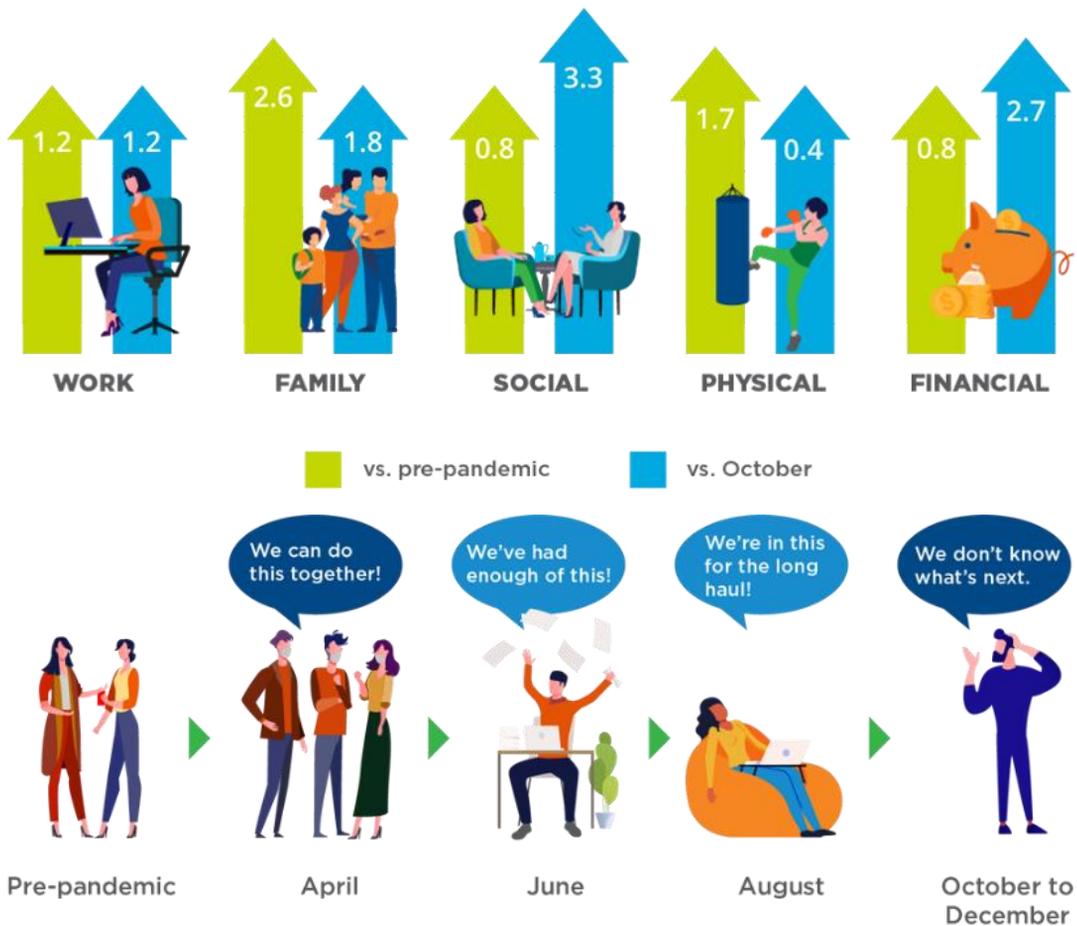
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1. UAE ENDS THE YEAR STRONG

As we continue to live through the ups-and-downs of lockdowns and restrictions in response to the pandemic, people are craving normalcy. Building on the previous wave of results from October, several markets saw continued record lows as pandemic-associated lockdowns continued.

However, a different picture emerged in the UAE where the vaccine deployment has commenced. The UAE saw increases of 1.8 points, wrapping up 2020 with a strong performance on the overall Wellbeing index with a score of 67.4 points in December. The global average, on the other hand, was 60.9 points in December.

WELL-BEING INDEX: PRE-PANDEMIC COMPARED TO YEAR-END



2. STRESS AND ALWAYS-ON CULTURE TRIGGERED BY COVID-19 REMAINS THE BIGGEST THREAT

While the UAE has seen an improvement in overall well-being and managing stress levels, employees indicate that they continue to stress primarily over finances, uncertainty over the future and lack of job security. With longer working hours, the always-on culture continued to prevail during the work from home period, leading to an increase employees feeling stressed about work. The change in stress levels in this latest study can be attributed to:

- A startling 68% have reported work-related stress, registering the highest stress levels since the pandemic.
- The prevailing always-on culture, which consistently recorded high levels of around 93% through 2020
- Struggling to switch off work, 53% of employees admitted to working on weekends and a majority (71%) reporting working after-hours in December as they did in April during the lockdown phase.

Unsurprisingly, the always-on culture has had an impact on the productivity of employees. The study reveals that more than half (54%) of employees' productivity levels have been negatively impacted. This finding reaffirms that overwork has an adverse impact on mental health and directly results in reduced productivity and absenteeism at work.

However, despite the increased stress levels, 75% reported a reasonable workload in December. Among those under stress, it was promising to see that 79% found their stress to be manageable.

We observed many highs and lows during the year as people navigated the challenges, which shaped consumer behaviour and outlook. The conversation around mental health and stress is critical and the UAE has continued to facilitate this dialogue in the country.



3. EVOLVED EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

As a global community, we are collectively sharing the experience of the pandemic and its highs and lows. With the situation enduring for close to a year and the resulting new habits and expectations of employees at the workplace, there is a continued gap in what is offered to them.

A majority of the participants (69%) expect more mental health support from their employers and 64% seek flexibility in work location and hours – however, only 37% are receiving it. Unsurprisingly, health and well-being remain a continued priority for employees, with 74% seeking enhanced health cover in December. However, only 28% of employees admitted to receiving it.

Mental health support from employers showed a continued decline throughout the phases of the study. Only 29% of respondents claimed to receive support in December, a decline from 34% recorded in June and 32% between July and August.



4. FAMILIES REMAIN CLOSE-KNIT

Despite the continued stress and always-on culture, overall family well-being scores have remained robust in most markets.

The results in this area have improved since the last study in October. In the UAE, 57% of people said they had high-quality family time in December compared to only 53% in October.

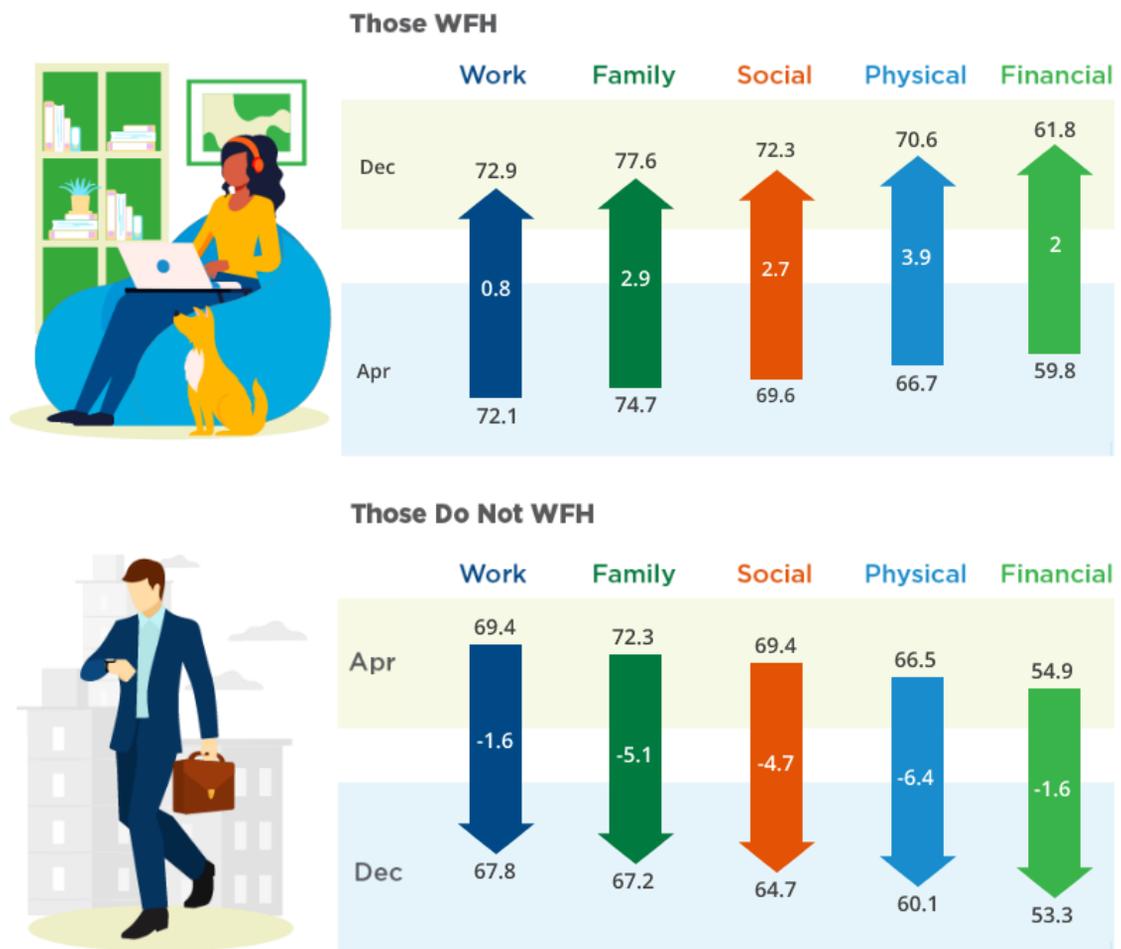
When asked about having a close-knit family and getting the emotional support they need from each other, scores remained consistent with 58% in April and 59% in December.



5. SHIFT IN PREFERENCE FROM WORK FROM HOME TO WORKING IN AN OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

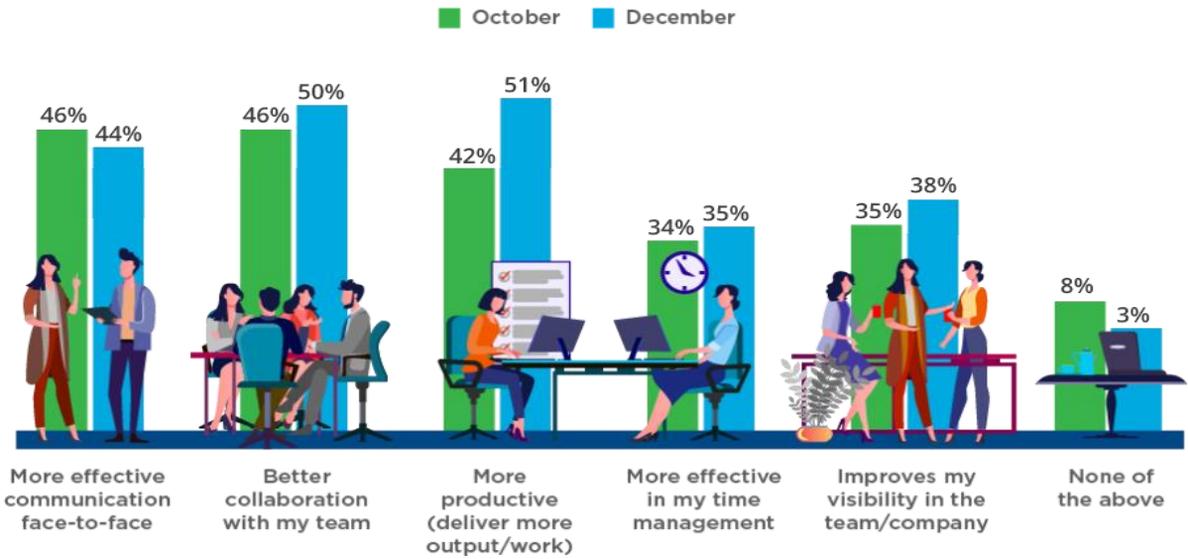
In previous reports, we have seen that remote work in response to the pandemic has been largely successful for employers and employees alike. Looking at well-being indices since the beginning of the pandemic, people who worked from home reported higher scores across different aspects than people who had to work in an office environment, with the exception of financial well-being scores which remained consistently low throughout the crisis.

COMPARISON OF OVERALL WELL-BEING INDEX THROUGHOUT PANDEMIC



More than half (67%) of UAE respondents prefer to work either entirely from the office or spend at least 80% of their time in the office. This reflects the sentiment to return to the office in the UAE, where continued efforts are being made to contain COVID-19.

RETURN TO WORKPLACE SEEN MORE BENEFICIAL



When asked about the perceived advantages of working in an office environment, 44% of UAE respondents in December said better communication is achieved during face-to-face interactions, 50% said they experience better collaboration and 51% believe they are more productive compared to when they are working from home.



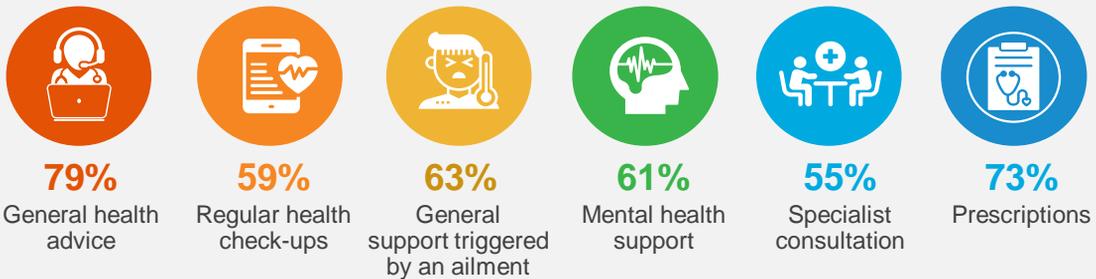
6. CHANGING MODELS OF HEALTH

Since the beginning of 2020, different models of care have become embedded in our new normal. Notably, virtual health is now a widely accepted part of mainstream healthcare in the UAE.

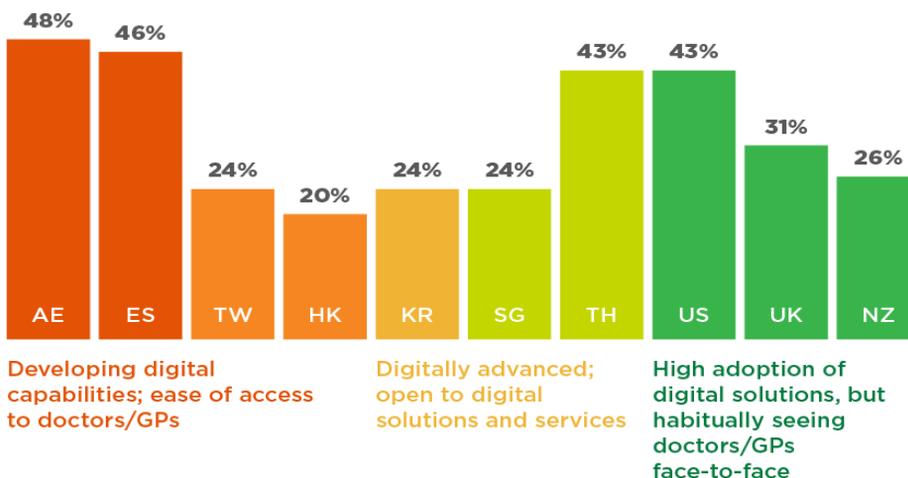
77% of people say they would choose to have a diagnosis virtually. However, when asked how likely they would be to use virtual care if they could connect with their regular doctor, it increased to a remarkable 88%.

The trend towards increased usage of health and well-being apps seems set to continue with 79% of people in the UAE now reporting that they would consider or prefer virtual rather than face-to-face engagement when it comes to general health advice, such as nutrition and lifestyle tips. We also see strong interest in virtual health for mental health support, such as therapy and counseling, with 61% of people saying they would consider or prefer virtual consultations, opening up the potential to rapidly expand mental health provision across the UAE.

PREFERENCE FOR VIRTUAL USAGE



SUMMARY OF MARKET PERCEPTION AND USAGE



When looking at people's usage and perceptions of virtual health across the various markets, we have identified a spectrum of views where digital capabilities and infrastructure vary greatly. In the UAE, figures showed that people have used virtual services in the past, but their preference for access to healthcare is via traditional in-person visits to clinics and hospitals. This is due in part to the perception that this route is a more affordable, convenient, and timely way to access the care they need.

7. HELPING PEOPLE AND BUSINESS GET THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

As the fifth study findings have shown, the ongoing pandemic continues to change people's outlook on key areas of their life - family, finance, physical, social and work - and this all adds up to an impact on their whole health. In 2021, governments around the world are faced with the greatest global vaccination roll-out challenge ever, and this next chapter in the pandemic's history will undoubtedly have an impact on people's daily lives.

The sustained nature of the pandemic, and the shift it has caused in the fundamentals of how we live and work, presents a major challenge to employers in terms of how they can continue supporting their employees' health and well-being.

To help employers and individuals with their stress care, Cigna has created a range of tools and advice, including health and well-being resources to help Check-In and support each other in an effective way.

Our stress care digital hub offers expert advice on financial, workplace, and family stress; interactive webinars with exclusive global partners; and educational visualization technology on the effects of prolonged stress. This hub is constantly growing and as this research evolves, we will continue to incorporate these insights into our stress assessment tools.

We also have a strong network of mental wellness and specialist experts who are well-positioned to help people create their own stress care plans.

All content is free of charge and available [here](#).

8. ABOUT THIS REPORT

At Cigna, we have been closely observing how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted people's well-being, as well as their changing attitudes towards health and work. In partnership with Kantar, a leading data, insights and consulting company, we established the Cigna COVID-19 Global Impact Study, ongoing research that tracks perceptions of well-being over time and geographies.



The study is an extension of our annual 360 Well-Being Survey and Index, which has reported on individual health and well-being since 2014. The Cigna COVID-19 Global Impact Study focuses on four key areas: the Cigna Well-Being Index; the health and wellness scorecard; the virtual health assessment tracker; and opinions on what the new normal will look like.

The survey examines five themes that influence well-being: physical, family, social, financial and work, and so far has engaged more than 25,000 people across China, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Korea, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States through the course of 2020.

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How to find out more?
meacommunications@cigna.com