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## MEDIA RELEASE

### AUSSIES BRACE FOR A STRESSFUL FESTIVE SEASON: HCF SUMMER HEALTH REPORT

**Tuesday, November 23, 2021: A new consumer insights report on the health of our nation has revealed 71 per cent of Australians are bracing for a stressful Christmas, with 2.6 million anticipating this Christmas will be more stressful than ever, because of pressure to make it perfect to compensate for a 'bad year'.**

The report, titled *Post Pandemic Trends: 2021 Summer Holiday Health Report*, has been released by HCF Australia ahead of the official start of summer to help Australia's largest not-for-profit health insurer guide its members towards the right tools and resources they need to lead healthier lives.

A survey of more than 2,500 Australians was conducted by HCF to understand how people felt the pandemic impacted their mental wellbeing, both during the year and in the lead up to the festive season.

The survey revealed that parents with children at home (80%) were more likely to be expecting to experience stress, pressure and/or loneliness this Christmas/holiday season; and that women were twice as likely as men to say they take the lion's share in their household when it comes to planning gifts and meal preparation for Christmas or summer holiday gatherings (21% vs 10%). Of the 71 per cent anticipating stress, that included social pressures and loneliness.

HCF Chief Officer Member Health, Julie Andrews, said the impact of the pandemic on mental health did not end with the easing of restrictions or lockdowns.

"Our research tells us that even though pandemic-related restrictions are easing, this Christmas won't be without stress for many Australians, in fact it might be even more worrisome for many given the year we've had," Ms Andrews said.

"At HCF we've gone above and beyond to ensure we have a holistic mental health program with quick and easy access to the right tools at the right time, so people know where to go when they need help."

Eligible HCF members have access to a range of exclusive service offers, including PSYCH2U psychiatry and navigation telehealth services.

HCF partner PSYCH2U Psychologist Jeremy Cowden said the most common quote he has heard in the days after Christmas was, "I just thought for one day everyone would be nice to each other."

"Christmas is always a tough time for people and a lot of it is caused by a build-up of expectation, which this year will be greater because we've had a long time to think about it," Mr Cowden said.

Mr Cowden said if somebody's worries were interfering with everyday life, then it might be time to speak to a mental health professional.

"People might be anticipating a stressful situation so much that they're finding it hard to get on with life. That means it's time to learn some strategies and techniques so you know what specifically you can do to manage the way you are feeling."

The survey also found that:

- Most commonly, causes of expected stress include concerns about over-eating and lack of exercise leading to weight gain (23%); feeling pressure to be more social with family and friends than they want to be (22%); feeling worried about travel restrictions and whether they will be able to have the Christmas they want (21%); feeling pressure to spend a lot of money at Christmas on food and gifts that they really can't afford (19%); and that they feel lonelier and sadder at this time of year (19%)
- The younger generations are more likely to expect to experience, stress, pressure and/or loneliness this Christmas/holiday season (Gen Z 75%, Millennials 79%, and Gen X 72% compared to Baby Boomers 63% and Silent Generation 65%)
- In particular, Gen X (20%) are most likely to say Christmas is the most stressful time of year for them while Gen Z are most likely to say they feel pressure to be more social with family and friends this Christmas than they want to be (32%)

For more information about mental health support options for HCF members, visit:

[www.hcf.com.au/members/manage-your-health/mental-health-support](http://www.hcf.com.au/members/manage-your-health/mental-health-support)

To view the *Post Pandemic Trends: 2021 Summer Holiday Health Report*, visit:

[www.hcf.com.au/about-us/media-centre/research-reports](http://www.hcf.com.au/about-us/media-centre/research-reports)

**\*Editor's note: Please attribute all data and statistics to HCF Australia.**

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#### **ABOUT HCF**

HCF, Australia's largest not-for-profit health fund protecting Australians since 1932, covers over 1.75 million members with health and life insurance, and travel and pet insurance. On average over the last five years, HCF has paid out more cents in every dollar in premiums to members as benefits than the industry average. To learn more about HCF go to [hcf.com.au/about-us](http://hcf.com.au/about-us)

#### **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2579 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th October - 3rd November 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Australian adults (aged 18+).