Financial Strain Mounts for Kiwis Over 50 as Cost of Living Bites, New Survey Reveals

New Zealand Seniors' Silver Dollar Survey highlights widespread concern, with nearly half finding it harder to cover essential expenses and over seven in 10 worried about their financial security.

The cost of living crisis is hitting older Kiwis hard according to new research, which reveals nearly half (49%) of over 50s are finding it harder to cover essential expenses now, than compared to a year ago, while over seven in 10 (71%) are moderately to extremely concerned that rising costs are affecting their financial security.

The Silver Dollar Report 2026 commissioned by New Zealand Seniors in partnership with consumer research group, MYMAVINS, surveyed more than 500 New Zealanders over 50 about how they are spending their "silver dollar" amid a cost of living crisis, juggling essentials while still making space for life's little luxuries.

How Kiwis are spending their "Silver Dollar" as the cost-of-living climbs

The financial pressures are forcing difficult decisions, with two in five (41%) older New Zealanders having to choose between paying for one essential or another in the past year, leading many to cut back on necessities like clothing (59%), food and groceries (57%), and personal care items (54%).

The survey paints a clear picture of the everyday impact of inflation. Rising grocery/food costs are by far the biggest pain point for the majority of Kiwis over 50 (80%) in the past year, causing nearly three in five (57%) to seek out cheaper grocery brands. Meanwhile, rising utility and power bills are the second biggest financial worry for two in three (66%), leading to almost half (46%) reducing their heating and power use at home.

Comfortable retirement is out of reach for most Kiwis

These pressures are also reflected in retirement planning. The report found that three in five (60%) feel their total retirement savings are inadequate, including around a third (33%) who feel their savings are very inadequate. This concern is highlighted by recent figures from the Retirement Commission, showing the average KiwiSaver balance at the end of 2024 was approximately $37,000. This has led to a notable shift in confidence, with nearly half (46%) of those not yet fully retired feeling unconfident they will be able to retire comfortably.

For those still working, nearly three in five (58%) expect they may need to work longer than planned, despite the ideal retirement age for just over two in five (42%) being between 65 and 69. The fear of outliving savings is a significant issue, as close to two in five (39%) are very or extremely concerned about running out of money in retirement, with the majority (84%) defining retiring comfortably as not being able to cover essentials without financial stress.

The Bank of Mum and Dad

The findings also highlight the immense financial support older New Zealanders provide, with the report revealing that nearly half (49%) of Kiwis over 50 are financially supporting family or friends, the majority being their children or grandchildren.

This support is substantial, with two in five (40%) of those providing help giving at least $5,000 over the past year, while nearly one in fourteen (7%) gave $20,000 or more. The financial aid is most often used to cover everyday essentials like groceries (49%), one-off payments (31%), or household bills (29%).

While driven by a desire to help and a deep concern for the financial future of younger generations (50%), it presents a significant balancing act. Among those who have provided support in the past 12 months, just over two in five (42%) have dipped into their own savings, while 40% have cut back on their own spending. For some, it has directly reduced their ability to save (34%) or contribute to KiwiSaver (13%). Overall, more than a quarter (27%) of older New Zealanders are feeling concerned that supporting their family could reduce their own financial security later in life.

Navigating Future Decisions Around Housing and Care

Many are also actively considering their future housing and care needs. While just over one in four (26%) are considering a major housing decision like downsizing in the next decade, affordability is a key factor. Over half (55%) cite the ability to afford aged care as a barrier to planning, which is understandable given residential care can cost up to $80,000 annually.

Wellbeing and Enjoyment Remain Priorities Amid Shifting Lifestyles

Finally, lifestyle and travel aspirations are being re-evaluated. While just over two in five (41%) say their finances limit what they can do socially and nearly two in three (63%) have travelled less or stopped altogether in the past year due to rising living costs. Over two in five (44%) have cut back on "life's little luxuries," but many are still making room for small indulgences like takeaway meals (39%), streaming services (33%), and dining out (32%). Despite these shifts, over three in four (77%) agree that it is important to still spend on things they enjoy even when money is tight.

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