

Media Release

Social recovery shows positive progress

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Social recovery in Christchurch continues to show positive signs, but there is still much to be done, Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Minister Gerry Brownlee says.

"Encouraging signs are everywhere in greater Christchurch, which helps all of us see the upside," Mr Brownlee says.

"The fourth Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) Wellbeing Survey shows 75 per cent of people rate their quality of life in greater Christchurch as good or extremely good, up from 73 per cent in the last survey period late last year."

The release today of the updated Canterbury Wellbeing Index, and the results of the fourth CERA Wellbeing Survey, identify areas where Cantabrians are doing well in the wake of the earthquakes, and where people are still facing difficulties and various agencies need to focus their attention, Mr Brownlee says.

"It's heartening to see from the latest index that Cantabrians are making good gains in employment, economic wellbeing, physical health, household income, safety and education.

"These encouraging results indicate most people are recovering well from the impacts of the earthquakes.

"In particular, the unemployment rate in greater Christchurch has fallen to 3.3 per cent, well below the national average of 6.2 per cent. As a result of the buoyant labour market, median gross weekly household income – adjusted by age and number of children in the household – increased by 16.6 per cent between 2008 and 2013 in greater Christchurch, compared with 8.1 per cent across New Zealand.

"However both the latest Survey and Index show there are still significant areas of concern for Cantabrians.

"This research shows how important it is to track wellbeing in the recovery so government agencies and community groups know where to focus their efforts.

"For example, we can see from the Index that demand for mental health services increased by 12 per cent in the eight months to August 2013, compared with the same period in 2010.

"And the Wellbeing Survey shows the number of respondents reporting high levels of stress remains around 22 per cent, with living in a damaged environment, transport pressures and dealing with repair and rebuild issues the predominant causes of stress.

"In response, CERA recently released the Community in Mind psychosocial strategy, and the Government announced \$13.5 million in Budget 2014 to continue the Earthquake Support Coordination Service, the 0800 Canterbury Support Line, and free counselling over four years.

"Other areas of concern identified are the affordability and availability of low cost rental housing and stress relating to transport pressures.

"The Government is addressing housing issues with a range of initiatives including a housing accord with the Christchurch City Council, the Awatea Affordable Housing Development, temporary accommodation villages and partnering with the Canterbury Community Trust to provide \$31 million in funding for new social and affordable housing.

"Transport stress rose 8 per cent from the last survey and has become a leading source of stress for Cantabrians.

"The good news is strong progress is being made rebuilding the city's roads and underground infrastructure, with the rebuild programme already half completed.

"Construction of a new \$53 million Bus Interchange has begun and the facility will be open next year, and there are a number of initiatives lined up to improve different modes of transport in the city," Mr Brownlee says.

The Canterbury Wellbeing Index consists of a range of indicators structured around health, knowledge and skills, economic wellbeing, social connectedness, civil participation, housing, safety and people.

The CERA Wellbeing Survey was conducted by Nielsen Research between March and May 2014, with 2,511 residents selected randomly from the electoral roll in Christchurch City, Selwyn and Waimakariri.

The data in the Canterbury Wellbeing Index is updated annually and is available on the CERA website at www.cera.govt.nz/cwi. The CERA Wellbeing Survey is run every six months and the results are available at www.cera.govt.nz/wellbeing-survey.