

COVIDSafe: Why the government should share what it knows

May 13 2020, by Robert Slonim



Credit: Endorse COVIDSafe

It's 18 days since the government launched its digital contact-tracing app COVIDSafe. The latest figure we have for downloads is [5.4 million](#), on May 8, about 29% of smartphone users aged 14 and over.

My own mini-survey suggests that in Sydney and Melbourne the takeup could already be 40% – a figure the government has mentioned as a target—while in other places it is much lower.

Oddly, it's information the government isn't sharing with us.

Total number of COVIDSafe app users (millions)

The importance of downloading and using the app is growing day by day as we relax restrictions. We are able to see what has happened in countries such as [South Korea](#) that have relaxed restrictions and then experienced a second wave.

5.4 million Australians after 13 days is a promising start.

As can be seen in the above graph produced by my colleague Demetris Christodoulou and me, 5.4 million downloads represents about 28.7% of Australians with smartphones.

It compares favorably to the 22.4% of [Singaporeans](#) with smartphones who downloaded their app within 13 days of its launch.

But the government is only making public a single figure indicating "total" downloads. It would be far more useful if it provided disaggregated community, city and state level data, and below, I attempt to fill the breach.

Letting us know more about which communities are downloading the app would help with health, motivation and transparency.

Health

Knowledge about potentially-dramatic variations in where the app was being downloaded could help guide policy.

Hypothetically speaking, if 70% of Melbourne's [smartphone users](#) had downloaded the app but only 20% of Adelaide's users, this could have distinct implications for the ability to successfully trace COVID-19 outbreaks in the respective cities and for the right amount of easing of restrictions in each city.

It could also help residents of those cities make more informed decisions about their own safety, such as whether and how to shop and whether to wear a mask.

Motivation

While COVIDSafe originally generated more than 500,000 daily downloads, the number has fallen to less than 100,000, suggesting that new efforts to motivate more downloads is urgently needed.

Providing geographical details could energise downloads in three ways.

First, people often feel enormous pride when their community steps up to help others. Knowing how well the community is doing is likely to motivate more people to help.

Second, knowing how well other communities are doing can be a powerful incentive to catch up; few people want to be in the community that isn't doing its part.

Third, if state leaders make decisions about relaxing restrictions partly on the basis of local downloads, [community members](#) will see a direct connection between downloading the app and the freedoms that will be available to them.

Transparency

The government's appeal to download the app is built around trust.

It has asked us to trust it by downloading the app. In return it should trust us with better information.

People in Adelaide, Alice Springs, Brisbane, Cairns, Canberra, Darwin, Geelong, the Gold Coast, Hobart, Launceston, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth, Sydney, Townsville, Wollongong, rural communities and other places deserve access to information the government already has that could help them make better choices.

The sort of data authorities are keeping to themselves

Given the lack of transparency to date, I conducted my own [online survey](#) among 876 residents of Sydney, Melbourne and regional communities with less than 50,000 people.

My survey results, run with a sample of people using the online survey platform [PureProfile](#), indicate the proportion of people who had downloaded the app by May 11 was 50.5% in Sydney, 44.0% in Melbourne and 36.1% in less populated communities.

Controlling for age and gender, there was no significant difference between downloads in Sydney and Melbourne. Both were significantly higher than rural communities.

Restricting the responses to people who have a mobile phone that is capable of downloading the app, the proportion of downloads increases to 53.8% in Sydney, 47.8% in Melbourne and 41.2% in less populated communities. An extra 7.2%, 6.9% and 5.7% of respondents said they would either definitely or probably download the app in the next week.

This survey evidence indicates that there are stark regional differences in the downloads, and that although the national level of downloads is about 29%, some locations such as Sydney and Melbourne may have already surpassed (or will soon surpass) the 40% government stated target.

Of course the government shouldn't rely these [survey results](#), because it's

got the actual information. It is time it shared the detailed [download](#) information it has with us, both to reciprocate our trust and let us make more informed decisions.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#). This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: COVIDSafe: Why the government should share what it knows (2020, May 13) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-covidsafe.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.