

September 2020

The Road to Recovery Coalition (RRC)<sup>1</sup> was formed out of concern for the impact COVID-19 was having on the communities each agency serves. To better understand, advocate, and ultimately address the needs of these communities, RRC partners created and distributed a survey to the people they serve across the San Diego region. South Bay Community Services (SBCS) leveraged its resources to coordinate the data collection and distribution. The survey was disseminated by 23 community-based organizations (CBOs)<sup>2</sup>, resulting in more than 3,500 survey respondents who represent each of the seven Major Statistical Areas (MSAs) in San Diego County, including some from communities that have been historically underinvested in and hardest hit by the pandemic. This InfoBits report shares highlights from the survey regarding how these households have been affected.

### Did you Know?



Around **seven in ten (71%)** respondents reported having **immediate unmet needs**, with the most common related to **food, housing, utilities, and employment**.



**Two-thirds (66%)** of those surveyed reported their **employment was negatively affected** by COVID-19 and **more than half (52%)** reported some type of **housing instability** due to the pandemic.



**Three in five parents** with school-aged children (**61% of preschool/elementary** and **59% of middle/junior/high school**) reported **challenges with distance learning** in the 2019/2020 school year.

### COVID-19 Economic Impact on Residents Hardest Hit

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large impact on the San Diego region's economy, with estimated unemployment rates as high as 25% at its peak and 18 weeks of unemployment rates spiking higher than the most recent great recession<sup>3</sup>.

Two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents said that at least one person in their household had experienced negative impacts to their employment due to the pandemic. The most common outcomes include reduced hours (58%), losing their job (27%), being at-risk of losing their job (22%), or having to stop working or reduce hours because of childcare issues (14%).

In addition, 17% of all respondents said they or a household member reduced hours or stopped working entirely because of a COVID-19 illness, with the most frequent explanation being they did not feel safe returning to work and were fearful of being exposed to COVID-19.

<sup>1</sup> RRC partners include Casa Familiar, Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Local Initiatives Support Corp San Diego, MAAC, Parent Institute for Quality Education, San Diego for Every Child, San Ysidro Health, South Bay Community Services, and Urban League of San Diego.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the RRC partners, surveys were distributed by Barrio Logan College Institute, Barrio Station, Episcopal Community Services, Family Health Centers San Diego, Home Start, Jacobs Center, Manpower, North County Lifeline, Paving Great Futures, San Diego Youth Development Foundation, San Diego Youth Services, and YMCA Youth and Family Services.

<sup>3</sup> The 13 hardest hit ZIP codes (as measured by highest number of COVID-19 cases and highest estimated unemployment rates) in the San Diego region represented 59% of the survey sample reported here. This report can be found at: [https://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid\\_4699\\_27884.pdf](https://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_4699_27884.pdf)

Half (50%) of those who reported that they or a household member was unemployed or had reduced hours due to COVID-19 had received pay for the time they did not work, in most cases (58%) through unemployment benefits.

More than half (52%) of those surveyed also reported some type of housing instability as a result of the pandemic. Among these households, 45% said they were unable to pay rent or mortgage<sup>4</sup> and 66% reported the need for assistance to pay next month's rent or mortgage.

One in four (25%) households that reported housing instability had already received mortgage or rent assistance and 9% reported a loss of housing, resulting in homelessness, or now living with a friend or family member.

**Households with children, who identified as Latino and had a household income of less than \$25,000 were more likely to report housing and employment instability than households without children, who did not identify as Latino, and those with higher incomes.**

## Other COVID-19 Effects

Seven percent (226 of 3,266) respondents said they or someone in their household had a reason to be tested for COVID-19 and were not. When these individuals were asked why they did not get tested, a variety of reasons were shared:

- **Did not feel sick or have any symptoms (38%)**
- **A fear of income loss (28%)**
- **Nowhere to self-isolate (23%)**
- **Fear of the nasal swab test (23%)**
- **Thought they would have to pay for a test (22%)**
- **Unsure where to get tested (21%)**
- **Not part of the high-risk population (14%)**
- **Tried to get tested but couldn't (4%)**



## Effects on Households with Children

Seven in every ten respondents (70%) reported school-aged children in their households. Of these households, 74% reported having preschool or elementary aged children, and 63% reported having middle/junior high or high school-aged children. While the majority of parents/caregivers reported that preschool/elementary (86%) and middle school/junior/high school teachers (83%) were in communication with them, 61% and 59%, respectively, reported challenges with distance learning during the 2019/2020 school year. It should be noted that school districts are aware of these challenges and are working on addressing them in the 2020/2021 school year.

### Positives Noted by Parents/Caregivers:

- **95%** of households have at least one parent/caregiver with an email address.
- **93%** of preschool/elementary and **88%** of middle/junior/high school parents/caregivers had received information about free meals for their children.

<sup>4</sup> Eighty percent (80%) of respondents reported they rented, 15% owned, and 5% said they were homeless or had no fixed address.

**Challenges Noted by Parents/Caregivers:**

- **Four in five** reported a computer or other digital device is always **(58%)** or usually available **(23%)** to their children for educational purposes.
- **30% to 45%** of preschool/elementary and **37% to 45%** of middle/junior/high school parents/caregivers reported being **unclear** about teacher expectations, due dates for assignments, if their child was turning in work, and when their child was expected to meet with their teacher.
- **19%** of preschool/elementary and **15%** of middle/junior/high school parents/caregivers said they **did not have electronic equipment** for the children, and the school did not provide one.
- **25%** of preschool/elementary and **35%** of middle/junior/high school parents/caregivers with an ESL (English as a Second Language) student said they **did not receive the support they needed** from the school.
- **21%** of preschool/elementary and **24%** of middle/junior/high school parents/caregivers said they **did not understand the information teachers shared with them regarding online classes or distance learning.**
- **88%** of preschool/elementary and **83%** of middle/junior/high school parents/caregivers who did not have access to the internet said the **school did not assist them in accessing services.**

**Household income was a predictor for computer availability for school-aged children. Just over half (54%) of household with incomes under \$25,000 reported computer availability for students, compared to 73% of those with incomes over \$50,000.**

In addition, **29%** of parent/caregivers respondents noted that they could use additional support with distance learning.

When asked what was needed for their children to return to school on campus, the top four answers included safety measures **(79%)**, a consistent schedule **(38%)**, a full-time schedule **(29%)**, and before and after school care **(20%)**.

**Existing Resources and Investments Needed**

Around 1 in 3 (35%) said they lived in a household with a high-risk COVID-19 individual. While around three-quarters (76%) reported that everyone in the household had insurance, 16% said that only children were covered, 6% said that no one in the household had medical insurance, and 2% said at least one family member did not have it.

Respondents were asked about what their households needed. Overall, around 7 in 10 (71%) reported having at least one immediate need (with a median of 3 needs and a range of 1 to 14, the maximum number possible). Of those who reported having a need, the top ones included food (57%), rent or mortgage assistance (46%), utility assistance (30%), and employment assistance (27%)<sup>5</sup>.

Of the 2,833 respondents who answered a question about household access to high speed WiFi, 86% responded affirmatively<sup>6</sup>.

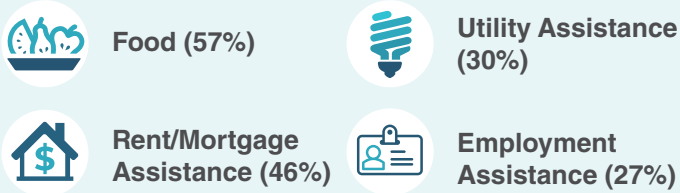
**Household income was also a predictor of WiFi access. 79% under \$25,000 reported having WiFi access, compared to 93% of those with incomes of \$50,000 or more.**

<sup>5</sup> Survey respondents were also asked to describe their needs in the future, but the pattern of responses was very similar to the immediate needs identified now.

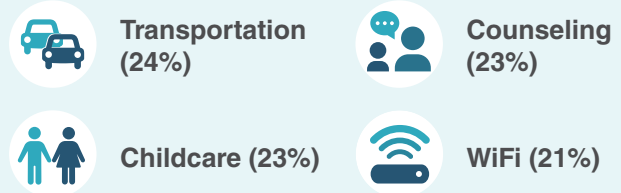
<sup>6</sup> This question was directed at respondents with school-aged children, but some individuals who reported not having children also answered it.

## Top Four Needs of Households

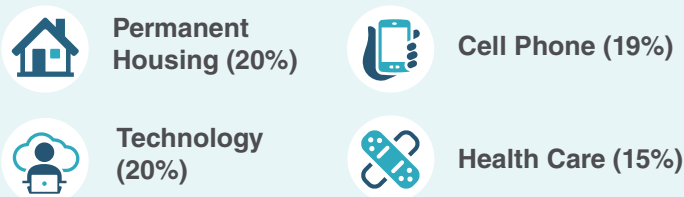
### Top 4 Needs



### Next 4 Needs



### Last 4 Needs



The top 4 needs of households with incomes less than \$25,000 included food (61%), rent/mortgage assistance (49%), employment assistance (33%), and transportation (33%).

The top 4 needs of households with incomes more than \$50,000 included counseling (35%), food (33%), rent/mortgage assistance (31%), and utility assistance (25%).

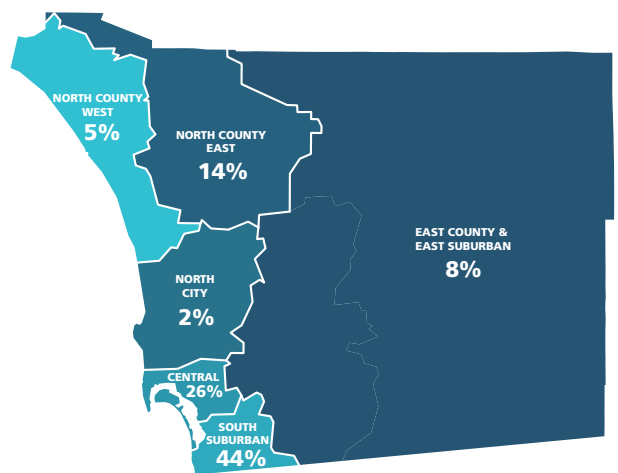
## Survey Respondent Characteristics

A total of 3,527 surveys were completed from residents around the region who had contact with one of the participating CBOs. The greatest percentage of respondents were from South Suburban (44%), the hardest hit by the current pandemic. Other respondents reported residing in the Central MSA (26%), North County East (14%), East County and East Suburban (8%), North County West (5%), or North City (2%) (Map 1).

More than 4 in 5 respondents (82%) reported that at least one member of the household identified as Latino, and 52% reported the primary language spoken in the household was Spanish. When examining race, at least one member identified as White Hispanic in 53% of the 1,946 households that provided this information and 11% identified as White non-Hispanic. Other races represented included multi-racial (19%), Black (11%), Asian/Pacific Islander (4%), and Native American (2%)<sup>7</sup>. The mean household size was 4.3 (range 1 to 9).

Just over two-thirds (71%) reported the highest level of adult education in the household was a high school diploma, GED, or less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade. None of the respondents reported any adult in the household had a college degree. Sixty-eight percent (68%) reported receiving some type of public benefit and 42% reported a household income of less than \$25,000 (44% reported between \$25,000 and \$49,999 and 14% reported \$50,000 and higher). Forty-nine percent (49%) of the households described themselves as married, 33% as single, and 18% as separated, divorced, or widowed.

Map 1: Percent of Surveys Returned in Each MSA



<sup>7</sup> Individuals were asked two separate questions regarding whether anyone in the household identified as Latino, and then were asked to identify all races in the household. It is possible that due to how these questions were phrased the race percentages represented in this report could vary slightly because it could reflect one individual or multiple in a household.

## Summary and Conclusions:

These survey results clearly articulate the disparate effects COVID-19 have on individuals and families who were economically disenfranchised prior to the pandemic. The following suggestions are made based on these data for further discussion.

- Seven in every ten households surveyed had immediate unmet needs. While basic needs, including food, shelter, and utilities topped the list, there was not one universal need expressed by all. **Entities including government and philanthropic partners providing assistance to families in need are encouraged to explore ways to provide direct monetary assistance to families to allow them to obtain those things that will best meet their immediate basic needs.** Another benefit of this strategy is the likely investment in local businesses that have also been hardest hit.
- The families who shared their experiences since the pandemic began were already struggling in many ways, with the majority living in communities hardest hit by the pandemic, both financially and with high rates of COVID-19. The ability of the CBOs to connect with their clients to get their input reflects the trust the community has in them. **To ensure an equitable recovery that will positively impact this and future generations who have roots in these same communities government entities are urged to explore new and innovative ways to partner with CBOs who are viewed as trusted messengers.**
- During this pandemic, San Diego County's reliance on essential workers who continue to keep our economy running has been demonstrated. While the services these individuals provide are essential, it is important that long-term investments be made in the communities hardest hit due to structural inequality resulting in economic exclusion. **Public-private partnerships that include government, philanthropy, and businesses supporting training and internship opportunities to areas that have not**

**historically been focused on could have the dual benefit of expanding job opportunities for capable individuals who are striving to expand their employment opportunities, as well as create more economically diverse and strong communities that would contribute in the short- and long-term to the resiliency of their neighborhoods.**

- With the 2020/2021 school year already starting for most districts at the time of this report, the greater challenge remote learning may place on families who are struggling financially is clear, especially as it relates to the digital divide and families having equitable access to technology and internet broadband access. **The community as a whole, including government, businesses, CBOs, and philanthropy, is encouraged to look at innovative ways to address these disparities so that youth from communities most affected are able to thrive.**

## Survey Methodology and Limitations

When interpreting these survey results, it is important to note that this was a sample of convenience and not a random sample of San Diego County residents. The intention of the RRC was to gather information quickly, with the least amount of burden on families to ensure clear understanding of the most pressing needs. In addition, because of how it was distributed through CBOs, it reflects feedback from those residents who have sought support from these organizations, assuming those with a higher level of need in the community reached out to CBOs for assistance.

## About infobits

SANDAG serves as the region's clearinghouse for information and data. InfoBits publish timely, relevant information informing the public while providing context on complex issues facing the region.

[sandag.org](http://sandag.org)