



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY

**TO** Sarah Reyes and Jonathan Tran  
The California Endowment

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**RE:** Survey of Vulnerable California Populations on the Impact of Coronavirus

**DATE** May 20, 2020

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a survey of 813 Californians in communities particularly likely to be vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>1</sup> In order to qualify for the survey, respondents had to either have a household income below \$50,000, be a person of color, or a Spanish-speaker. The results show widespread concern about the coronavirus among vulnerable communities, with most respondents indicating they believe the worst is yet to come. Though concern about economic impacts is widespread -- and many have lost jobs, had their hours cut back or their wages reduced -- the dominant worry remains fear of infection. They are acutely aware of the inequities inherent the virus's impact, with solid majorities saying communities of color and low-income Californians are bearing disproportionate health and economic impacts. Respondents indicate that they are already taking advantage of a wide range of public benefits designed to offer support during the pandemic; and yet, about half lack confidence that they would know where to turn if they found themselves in need of further help.

Key specific findings of the survey include:

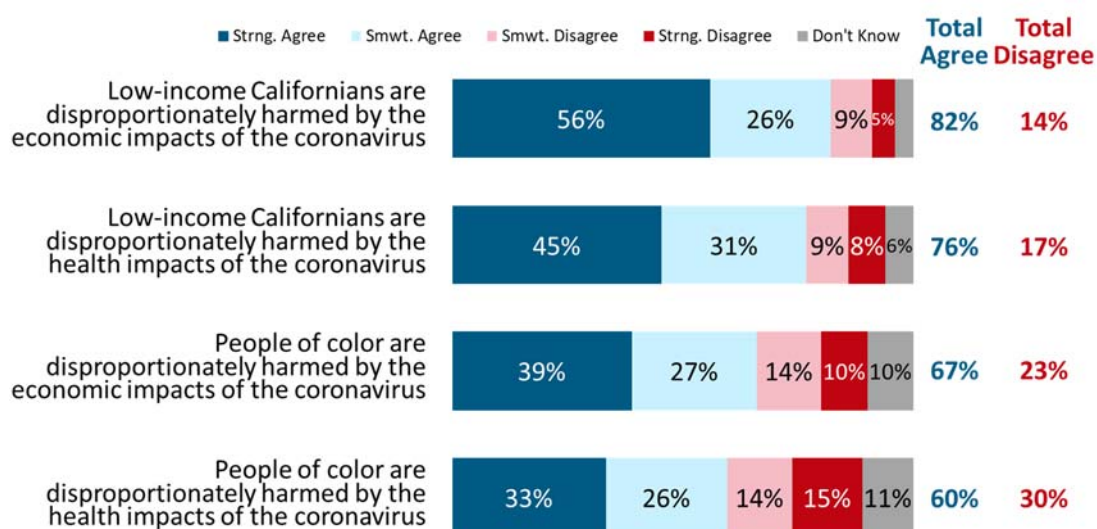
- **Coronavirus is among respondents' top concerns; however, strong concerns about homelessness, the cost of living, and cost of housing persist.** Seventy-three percent say coronavirus is an “extremely” or “very serious” problem. However, 75% say the same about homelessness, 71% say the same about the cost of housing and 70% about the cost of living. Residents of rural northern California tend to express less concern about coronavirus (with 53% rating it a “very serious” problem), than are residents in other areas of the state, with those in LA County expressing the greatest degree of concern (83%). Additionally, respondents of color are more likely to be concerned than are white respondents (77% as compared to 62%).
- **There is a broad sentiment that the worst of the crisis is yet to come, and that it is impacting the health and finances of lower-income Californians and people of color more harshly than others.** A majority says the

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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From April 25-30, 2020, FM3 completed 813 online and telephone (landline and wireless) interviews with Californians who either have household incomes of \$50,000 or less, are Californians of color, or are Spanish-speakers. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.

worst of the crisis is yet to come (55%) while only 30% think the worst is over. Additionally, there is broad agreement that the impacts have been greater on low-income Californians and on people of color (Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: Perceived Impact of the Coronavirus on Low-Income Californians and People of Color**  
 Here are some statements about the coronavirus pandemic. Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

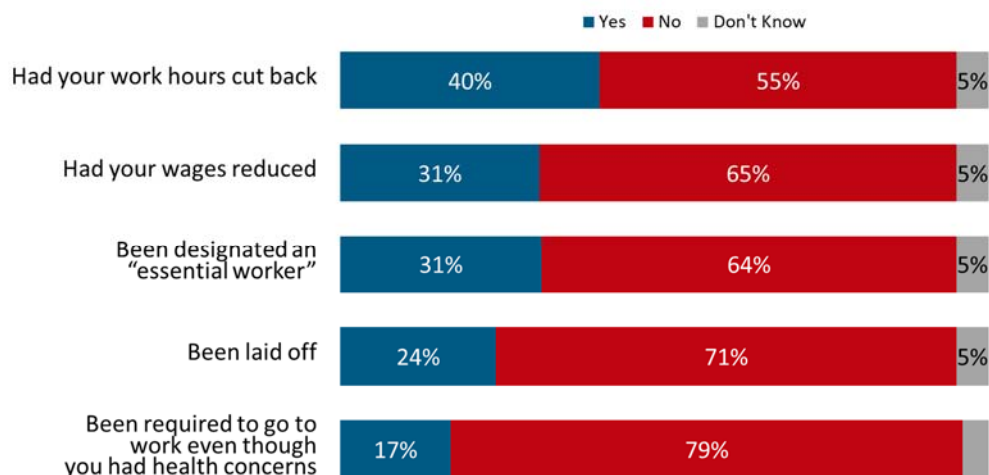


A few demographic distinctions were evident in responses to these questions:

- ✓ Asian/Pacific Islander respondents are much more likely than others to think people of color were being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic’s *health* impacts.
  - ✓ The lowest-income respondents are least likely to say that people of color are being disproportionately impacted by the *economic* impacts of the crisis.
- **A majority expresses greater fear of infection than of loss of income.** Fifty-seven percent say they are more likely to fear getting infected than a loss of income, while 32% are more afraid of losing income. Fear of the economic impacts is (not surprisingly) correlated with household income, with the least-affluent respondents most worried about a loss of income. However, majorities across lines of age, gender, ethnicity, and income fear infection more.
  - **At the same time, sizable subgroups have already suffered negative economic impacts.** Two in five have had their hours cut back in the wake of the pandemic and nearly one-third have had their wages reduced. Additionally, nearly one-third have been designated an essential worker (Figure 2 on the next page). Latino respondents were more likely than other groups to have had their hours cut, had wages reduced, been laid off or to have had to go to work despite health concerns.

**Figure 2: Economic Impacts of the Pandemic**

*In response to the coronavirus crisis, have you experienced any of the following?*



- While seven in ten say they would apply for public benefits if needed, only half are confident that they would know where to turn to obtain them.** Respondents offer broad support for the public benefits that have been introduced in response to the pandemic, and 71% say they would be likely to apply for benefits like Medi-Cal or unemployment if they lost their main source of income. The relatively small share (22%) who are unlikely to apply think they either do not need them or that they are unlikely to qualify. At the same time, despite expressing a high level of likelihood to apply for benefits only 50% say they are “confident” that they would know where to turn for help.
- Half of parents say it has been difficult to address childcare needs; and while many say they have received academic support from their school, support in accessing public benefits and mental health resources has been more limited.** A sizable majority of the lowest-income parents say they are having difficulty addressing childcare needs. Majorities of parents say that schools have provided them with distance learning opportunities (78%), technology such as computers and tablets (78%), information on accessing meals (71%), materials to support homeschooling (70%) and information on free or discounted Internet (57%). However, less than half say they have been given information on mental health resources for their children (45%), information on accessing public benefits (44%), and mental health resources for patients (37%).

The survey findings confirm there have been income, ethnic and gender disparities in how the crisis has impacted California’s most vulnerable residents, and that there is a clear need to better connect this segment of the population with available benefits and supports. The next phase of our research, a statewide survey of likely voters, will assess public support for action to address some of these inequities.