COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on the Black/African-American Community in King County

A community assessment project by Seeds of Success (SOS)

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Welcome!

Name, Pronouns, What brings you joy?

About Seeds of Success: African-American, women-led collective focused on advocacy and programming by and for African-American communities in King County.

Mission: To empower individuals and families to be successful.

What We Do: 1:1 coaching/systems navigation, resource connection-building, education, and outreach to African-American communities in King County.

Our CHE Grant Work

Wellness Clinics

4 free community workshops and gatherings focused on self-care, holistic well-being, and connection.

Engaged over 40 youth, adults, and elders from the Black/African-American community.

Surveys/Interviews

Surveys and interviews were administered to learn about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and livelihoods of Black/African-Americans from King County.

We learned from 144 survey respondents and 8 interviewees.

Trainings

3 free trainings hosted for individuals working in direct services to explore racism as a public health crisis, recognizing and addressing bias, and strategies for enacting change.

Engaged approx. 35 individuals from diverse sectors and backgrounds.

Survey Report

Survey - Demographics

144 survey respondents

Race

-80% identified as Black American descendants of enslaved Africans

-6% identified as African immigrant/refugees

-10% identified as non-Black/African people of color

-4% identified as white

Gender (multiple selections were available to respondents)

-75% identified as "woman"

-0.5% identified as non-binary

-0.5% identified as non-binary woman

-0.6% identified as genderqueer or genderfluid

-25% identified as men

-0.6% identified as transgender man

Age

-6% identified as youth (18 years old or under)

-12% identified as young adults (19-24 years old)

-40% identified as adults (25-40 years old)

-22% identified as middle-aged adults (41-54 years old)

-19% identified as elders (55 years old and up)

Onset of COVID-19 Pandemic and Shelter-In-Place Phase (2020): Survey Themes

Loss

From loss of lives to loss of jobs to loss of connections, community members consistently remarked about devastating impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on their lives and the challenges that continue as dynamics at home, work, and public spaces have changed.

Basic Needs Resources

Access to basic needs resources were most frequently reported as a hardship. Business, childcare, and school closures made notable impacts on individuals and families who experienced extensive delays for medical care, hardships with children transitioning to virtual school, and lack of childcare resources - to name a few.

Information Access

Personal sources (social media, family/friends), followed by news stations, were most relied upon for finding information on COVID-19 –as opposed to healthcare professionals, social or case workers, and self-directed research.

Onset of COVID-19 Pandemic and Shelter-In-Place Phase (2020): Survey Deep Dive

- The most frequently reported impact of the onset of COVID-19 pandemic was the loss in community connections in gathering.

- Community members frequently reported **interruptions with school and work** as primary impacts experienced at the onset of COVID-19 pandemic.

- Approximately ⅓ reported loss of their job as a result of shelter-in-place order and business closures. Job loss includes: reduction in hours, layoffs, and termination.

- Just under a ⅓ reported that they continued working or school, but with personal protective equipment (PPE).

Progression of COVID-19 Pandemic (2021-22): Survey Themes

Strained Connections

As the pandemic progressed, community members remarked about the **strain on community connections and gatherings** as the public grappled with public health guidelines and **lack of adequate equipment for accommodating safe participation** in community activities.

Basic Needs Resources

Long waits and delays were most frequently reported by community members, exacerbated by many service organizations maintaining virtual systems and **high competition for resources.**

Direct experience of racial discrimination in access to services and resources, with anecdotal observations of bias towards non-Black communities were also noted.

Information Access

Personal sources (social media, family/friends), followed by news stations, were most relied upon for finding information on COVID-19 –as opposed to healthcare professionals, social or case workers, and self-directed research.

Progression of COVID-19 Pandemic (2021-22): Survey Deep Dive

- As the pandemic progressed, more community members were seeking source of information beyond their personal network (social media, friends/family) to learn about the COVID-19 virus.
  - However, a majority report low-to-medium confidence in the accuracy of information given by these sources - suggesting:
    - Culturally-responsive, accessible public health messaging and information is needed.
    - Greater transparency and consistency across health departments and organizations may increase the public's confidence in advisories and guidelines around COVID-19, vaccinations, and safety precautions.
- 70% of respondents report a need for basic needs resources, followed by:
  - Housing/rental assistance
  - Mental health services
  - Job assistance
  - Educational resources
  - Childcare resources
- Delayed/long wait times were most frequently reported challenges for accessing needed resources, followed by inaccessibility of location and resource delivery methods.
  - The transition to virtual for many service organizations created challenges for many who lack the tech to access them.
- About ⅓ reported experiences of economic discrimination in trying to access basic needs resources (e.g. discrimination based on income status), with about 27% reporting racial discrimination.
- Increasing housing and living expenses were also reported by many respondents.

Continuance of Pandemic (2022-Onward) : Survey Themes

Mental Health

From being directly affected by the COVID-19 virus to navigating difficult systems to losing access to community gatherings, community members consistently reported the pandemic's **negative effect on their mental health.**

Adjusting to life or the new "normal" despite COVID-19 still existing is a highlighted challenge.

Basic Needs Resources

Access to basic needs resources remains an unmet need, as service systems are overwhelmed and unable to meet demand.

Community members also report the increase in food and day-to-day expenses as well as debt due to job loss during 2020.

Information Access

As the pandemic progresses, more information sources are being sought out, with more community members relying on **healthcare professionals and self-directed research**, but report a **low-to-medium level of confidence in these information sources.**

Continuance of Pandemic (2022-Onward) : Survey Deep Dive

Basic Needs Resources
Community members report a persisting need for better access to basic needs resources
- ○ Not only is there high competition for resources, but Black/African-American community members report experiences of economic and racial discrimination in navigating service and resource systems.

Mental Health & Community Connections
- Respondents continue to identify decreased/strained community connections and gatherings as the pandemic evolves. Understanding the cultural importance of community and relationship-building for Black/African-American communities, this suggests:
  - ○ Tools and spaces that support safety, access, and health precautions for gatherings are highly demanded.
  - ○ Public events should consider cultural values of connection and belonging, particularly if leaning on virtual or hybrid settings.
  - ○ Culturally-responsive support around adjusting to the "new normal" of connecting and gathering is needed across all social venues - in addition to maintaining COVID-19 safety precautions.

Financial Impacts
- Financial strains and challenges are another frequently reported challenge as the pandemic continues.
  - ○ Community members report a marked increase in housing and living expenses which are not adequately addressed or supported by service systems and gov't/federal resources

End of Federal Health Emergency Status of COVID-19 - Impacts (Survey)

With the end to the declaration of COVID-19 pandemic as a federal health emergency, the following impacts were identified:

1. **Continued spread of COVID-19 across communities is a top concern** for community members, followed by:
2. Increase in COVID-19 infection, spread, and long-term complications
3. Increased risks to health and safety at work, school, and public spaces
4. Increased costs in PPE
5. Lack of up-to-date information and reporting on the evolving pandemic
6. Losing access to free COVID-19 testing
7. Losing financial assistance or benefits offered during 2020 era of pandemic
8. Lack of COVID-19 mitigation measures in public spaces and events
9. Losing work, including losing telework options
10. Losing telehealth services

End of Federal Health Emergency Status of COVID-19: Survey Testimonials on Impact

Community members testified to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- "COVID is still here." ← *this was the most repeated sentiment amongst respondents.*
- I do not care what other people I cannot speak for other people, but I will continue to wear my mask to protect myself I have never caught Covid, but from what I hear it's not a very pleasant thing to have so with that being said, I will continue to wear my mask regardless I asked her what other people may do if people continue to wear their mask and take extra precautions … some people just think they can do what they wanna do… because they don't care about others…"
- "My concern is the long-term effect as far as the body goes healthwise. If you come in contact with Covid, what are the long-term [effects] of the impact?"
- "I want to be safe and have all the things I need to protect myself from all viruses."
- "Services ended and Covid continued and still here without services."
- "Covid is still here without precautions being used to protect health and prices are still rising."
- "I think overall we learned a lot during the pandemic but keeping information and services available as the pandemic isn't gone the services are the more people are taught the better off we'll be."
- "I feel somewhat secure because we have been through COVID once the medical providers have a road map of how to approach treatment but I'm totally unsure of our government."
- "Covid isn't gone but services are."

We asked "What are your recommendations to public policymakers and funders on how to better serve the needs and well-being of Black/African-American communities? "

Survey respondents answered:

- 70% said "Apply a racial equity lens across all policy design and funding strategies."
- 69% said "Prioritize and center on Black/African-American communities for resource creation and allocation."
- 66% said "Make public health decisions based on how most-impacted communities are affected by the pandemic."
- 56% said "Invest in and take direction from service providers and organizations that are led by and for Black/African-Americans."
- 45% said "Advocate for and equip communities with COVID-19 tracking tools and mitigation within public spaces to curb community levels of risk and infection."

Additionally, respondents proposed:
- "Increase first aid efforts to First Nation communities."
- "Make more educational things accessible because all kids are behind in school."

Community Recommendations - Survey Responses

- **It cannot be denied that pandemic issues are racial justice issues**. Community members desire a racial equity lens and a centering of Black/African-American experiences and needs in the development of public health policies and practices.
  - This includes targeted universalism approaches in resource distribution to ensure those positioned furthest from opportunity are placed front and center for access to needed resources.
- **Communities desire tools and resources for tracking and responding to the pandemic in culturally-rooted and community-based ways**. This requires transparency and consistency in public health information-sharing as well as relationship-building across government and community levels to ensure community-led messaging and strategies are developed to support Black/African-American and most-impacted communities.
- **A continual investment of funding and public health safety measures is needed** to ensure Black/African-American communities, and those disproportionately affected by COVID-19, **can lead safe, healthy lives and can belong and thrive in community.**
  - **We must not leave communities behind!** Black/African-American and other marginalized folks (unhoused, disabled, etc.) continue to bear the burdens of illness, health complications, and other pandemic impacts in this current reality that largely ignores the continued existence and risks of COVID-19 to public health.

Interviews - Demographics

<u>8 interviewees</u>
Race
100% identified as Black-American descendants of enslaved Africans, with 11% identifying as mixed Black-American and Hispanic.

Gender (multiple selections were available to respondents)
-13% identified as "man"
-87% identified as "woman"

Age
-12% identified as youth (18 years old or under)
-0% identified as young adults (19-24 years old)
-38% identified as adults (25-40 years old)
-12% identified as middle-aged adults (41-54 years old)
-38% identified as elders (55 years old and up)

Pandemic Impacts - Themes From Community Interviews

Mental Health

Most interviewees highlighted a negative impact of the pandemic on their mental health, including: **anxiety, isolation, and tension** exacerbated by shelter-in-place orders.

Virtual school and gatherings **disrupted a sense of connection and community.**

Fear around the unknown has persisted as the virus evolves.

Basic Needs Resources

Access to basic needs resources were most frequently reported as a challenge, as service systems are overwhelmed and unable to meet demand.

Benefits and assistance offered during the 2020 era have ended, although t**here remains a huge need for continued support.**

Loss

From loss of lives to loss of jobs to loss of connections, community members consistently remarked about devastating impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on their lives and the challenges that continue as dynamics at home, work, and public spaces have changed.

Community Interviews - Deep Dive

Mental Health

- A majority of interviewees described dealing with anxiety, stress, depression, and isolation at the onset of the pandemic. Mental health remain an under-addressed topic and an area of needed support.
  - Parents observed socioemotional impacts of virtual learning on their children's social and academic skills.

Home Life

- Parents and teens repeatedly reported strain on family dynamics, especially with shelter-in-place orders affecting personal space and work-life or school-life balance.
  - Parents of young children remarked difficulty with juggling work and childcare and supporting their children in virtual learning.

Basic Needs

- Basic needs services were the #1 resource sought out by interviewees, but delays and long waiting times were consistent challenges experienced in trying to access services.
  - Many experienced income loss and incurred debt still impacting them today.

Employment

- With the exception of those working in healthcare, 100% of those who were employed before 2020 experienced job loss (e.g. termination, layoff, or reduction in hours) as a result of the pandemic.
- For those who worked in healthcare, work became more difficult as healthcare workers witnessed high rates of COVID-related death and illness, PPE shortage, and compromised safety measures due to supply shortages.

Community Connection

- Nearly all interviewees discussed strains/loss in community connections due to the shift to virtual engagement, and the difficulties of safely gathering due to lack of COVID-safe infrastructure and equipment for community.

End of Federal Health Emergency Status of COVID-19: Impact (Interview Responses)

COVID is still here - How do we stay safe?

- "My concerns are that it would still affect today, like if we stopped all the resources, there wouldn't be nothing to help nobody that actually is in need of it and can actually can't really just go out and go to the doctor and ask for it and pay for the shots or whatever it makes."
- "The resources definitely are needed, especially for people that are still trying to get back up…"
- "Everybody's been like, it's been so long, we don't have to wear masks, but I've been wearing masks most definitely because it's still going around. Sickness is still going around. So regardless of it not being COVID, it's still like precautions that I feel like we should still take."
- "No more mandating of masks in healthcare facilities."
- "People are having long-term effects from people that did get it."
- Because I didn't realize that [COVID is] affecting our community and the, you know, people of color communities [are] more…And that was really alarming and pretty disappointing."
- "To be honest, I think we still need that declaration to come back. I would hate for it to be a massive outbreak."
- "Yeah, I'm just concerned that the virus is still around and that everybody's gonna let their guard down. And it's gonna come back and and possibly shut us down again."

Limited/Competitive Resource Access
- "Doctor's appointments are being scheduled further out now because I guess more people are trying to get in."
- "No more free COVID-19 testing."
- "Not having [PPE] available or on hand."

We asked "What are your recommendations to public policymakers and funders on how to better serve the needs and well-being of Black/African-American communities? "

Interviewees responded:
- "[State] should really help the Black community and poor community… The Black community has no resources. Implement care for Black people."
- "More resources, like counseling… rent services and assistance."
- "Continuing groups like [SOS] to keep us informed, keep us on our toes."
- "More information and centers put in our communities and ways to communicate to our communities [on] what the updates on COVID [are] and being able to assist them with doing either the testing or getting the PPE… Making making resources more easily accessible."
- "Probably putting more resources in the communities because I know it was hard… just being more communicative as to how to reach out and what to do."
- "Just making all the resources that you give everybody [be] the same for everybody. The same stuff you offer people in Bellevue, you know, offer to the people in Seattle, the Black community."
- "Just keep improving the policy and listening to the people, the leaders and making sure the policies get in place so we won't have this again."
- "Let's just listen more and have more programs available."
- "I would just really try to advocate like the need for the resources that were given…it was a state thing that ended them, but I would just try to push for the continuance of it because…those things and those resources at that time [are] still in high demand."

"Nothing about us without us!"

Black/African-Americans continue to be disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 virus and the social, economic, and cultural impacts of the **ongoing pandemic.**

Contrary to the sentiments of *"back to normal"* from mainstream health institutions and society today, Black/African-American communities are still deeply impacted by and critically aware of the persisting existence and effects of COVID-19.

Racism is indeed a public health crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. On a policy level, health and government institutions must implement a racial equity lens in their messaging and services.

Pandemic response strategies should prioritize equipping communities with tools and resources to direct what collective care, connection, and well-being looks like within their own communities.

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