



Brighton Park Neighborhood Council

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COVID-19 Community Resident Needs Assessment - Initial Findings April 7, 2020

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critically important to assess resource needs within underserved communities. Chicago's communities of color are disproportionately impacted by economic hardship,¹ and anecdotal reports indicate that the current pandemic has accentuated existing inequities. Recognizing the urgency to understand and respond to these resource needs, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC) undertook a systematic community needs assessment of BPNC program participants.

Methods

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the most pressing resource needs in the midst of this escalating public health crisis, Dr. Caitlin O'Grady, Evaluation Manager, and Dr. Arturo Carrillo, Director of Health and Violence Prevention, developed a survey questionnaire in collaboration with staff across all areas of BPNC programming. The aim of the survey was twofold: First, it was intended to serve as a case management tool that allowed BPNC staff members to assess community residents' most urgent needs, connect them with available resources, and coordinate follow-up. BPNC staff have created and disseminated a comprehensive resource guide which was utilized to support families who identified immediate needs. Second, the survey was designed to capture data on prevalent resource needs to inform subsequent advocacy efforts. Survey questions explored resource needs in the areas of finance, housing, and mental and physical health.

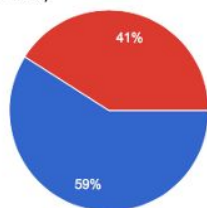
The survey consisted of a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, in order to both quantify existing needs and allow community residents to identify and elaborate on concerns outside of the aforementioned areas of focus. BPNC staff administered surveys via telephone to community residents who were currently enrolled in services at BPNC or who had received services in the past. Community residents' names and contact information were obtained through BPNC program rosters. A total of 814 needs assessment surveys were completed between March 20 and April 7, 2020.

¹ University of Illinois at Chicago Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (2017). A tale of three cities: The state of racial justice in Chicago report. Retrieved from http://stateofracialjusticechicago.com/wp-content/uploads/IRRPP_StateOfRacialJusticeReport.pdf

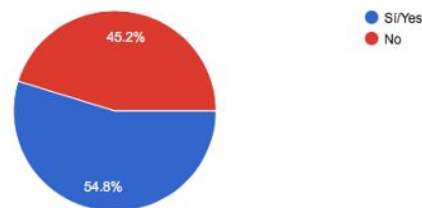
Key Findings

- **The COVID-19 crisis has impacted employment status and subsequently resulted in a loss of income for the majority of survey respondents.** Of the 795 survey respondents who answered the question about their employment status, **58.2%** reported that COVID-19 has affected their employment situation. Of these respondents, **35.9%** are temporarily out of work with no pay, **8.1%** have permanently lost their jobs, and **12.8%** have reduced hours for either themselves or their spouse. It is also noteworthy that half of survey respondents, **50.9%**, report that they are not eligible for unemployment insurance. These findings highlight a substantive loss of income among Brighton Park community residents with limited opportunities to recover lost wages.
- **There is an urgent need for cash assistance for rent and other bills.** In association with loss of income resulting from changing employment situations, assistance paying rent and other bills emerged as a primary resource need among survey respondents. Findings indicate that **59%** of survey respondents are concerned about paying their bills and **54.8%** of survey respondents are concerned about paying their rent or mortgage.

Percentage of Respondents Concerned About Paying Their Bills (n = 792)



Percentage of Respondents Concerned About Paying Their Rent (n = 522)



- **Respondents identify barriers to accessing medical care.** Of the 483 respondents who answered the question about their healthcare needs, **25.7%** reported that they are in need of support accessing healthcare. It is also noteworthy that **over one third of survey respondents, 37.7%**, indicated that they do not have health insurance. Notably many respondents, regardless of insurance status, shared their concerns with the cost associated with treatment if they or their loved ones fall ill to COVID-19. These data highlight another area of concern in the midst of the current pandemic. The challenges in accessing medical care can lead to a heightened health and economic crisis if rapid infection occurs.

Additional Needs Identified

Based on open-ended questions with respondents the following areas of need were identified:

Baby supplies: "I would appreciate support with diapers for my daughter. I have been trying to use less diapers for her because stores are not selling in bulk and I am being forced to occasionally leave her without a diaper in order to conserve the amount being used. I would also appreciate assistance with food as I am working less hours and will soon be laid off."

Childcare: "A single mother of 3 children that have autism. She is unable to work as she has to provide childcare for all 3 of them." "Urgently needs help with child care so she can go back to work since she is the only source of income for the family."

Concerns about the future impact: "So far they are ok financially, but she is worried about the future if the situation does not improve." "The only thing that worries me is if I get laid off because I work in a warehouse and they said they may reduce hours. My husband's work hours were reduced because of the crisis as well. Right now we are ok but I'm worried if this continues for a while with paying bills and rent."

Material needs: "I am also in need of a space heater. I have a basement and the heater is not working appropriately." Access to baby wipes, lysol spray, computers for e-learning, medicine, internet access were among other items identified.

Legal support: "Information about what happens in an event that in case the mother or father dies or both, because of the virus. What can be done in case someone doesn't have a will in place."

Case management support needed: "Would like to know how he can find answers for unemployment, needs help with light, gas and mortgage." Respondents highlighted a great need for assistance applying for unemployment insurance and other emergency relief funds, with specific requests for more information on changing eligibility requirements.

Mental health needs: "Provide emotional support for me as I am currently scared of the virus infecting me or my daughter. I am scared of becoming depressed with the isolation that is being required to obey." "Victim of domestic violence, she is panicking about the crisis, would like help with counseling."

Special needs for the senior citizen population: "Biggest concern is senior health. Her mother cannot go to any appointments." Seniors are also facing food shortages due to finances, limited mobility, and concerns around leaving their home.

Health and wellness for children while at home: "More healthy eating ideas while the kids are at home." "I would like to receive information about ADHD evaluation for my child. Also ideas on sensory stations/ ways my kids can have mini breaks between homework time. Finally, I would like to have information about mental health resources."

Financial anxiety: "If someone got sick at home because of the virus how would they handle it financially? She wants to know how to get insurance or find ways to pay if they can't pay."

Importance of support of BPNC staff: "Please continue to maintain your office open, it helps knowing there's a number I can call if there is a question or necessity." "She appreciates the call to see if she needs any assistance. If she thinks of anything else she will call to leave a message."

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