

# North Carolina's Excluded Communities

## COVID-19 Community Impact Survey Findings



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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey data featured in this report was coordinated and collected by Reyna Gonzalez (Action NC). Maggie Corser (Center for Popular Democracy) analyzed the survey data and wrote the report. The report was edited by Héctor Vaca and Pat McCoy (Action NC); and Natalia Renta and Emily Gordon (CPD).

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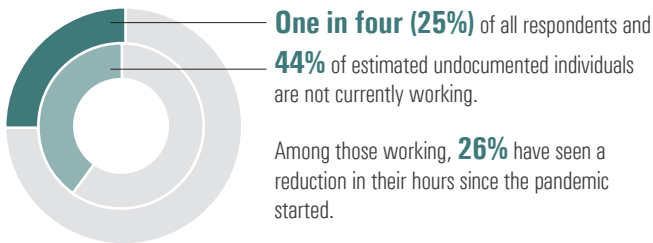
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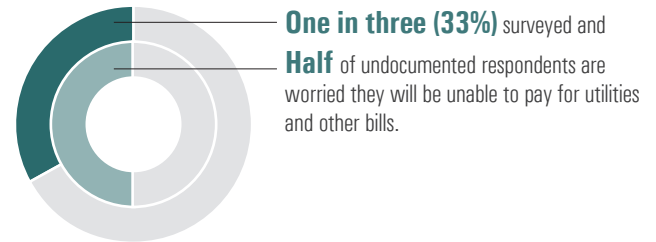
# Executive Summary

North Carolina's Latinx, Black, and immigrant communities are being hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. This echoes the experiences of communities of color around the country who have been disproportionately impacted by the virus and resulting economic catastrophe. Against the backdrop of North Carolina's rising COVID-19 cases, Action NC conducted in-depth surveys with over 100 primarily Latinx and Black community members to more fully understand the public health and economic crises facing people of color and immigrants across the state.

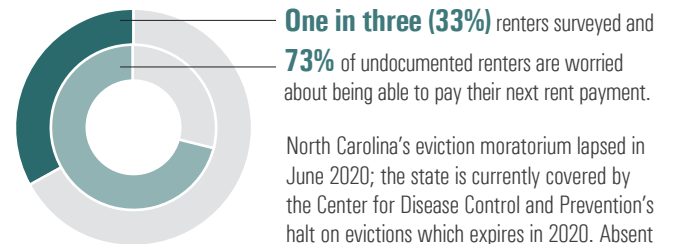
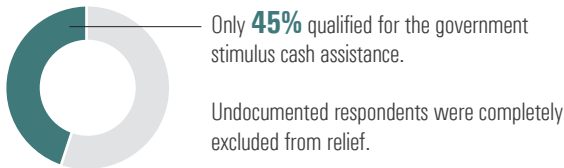
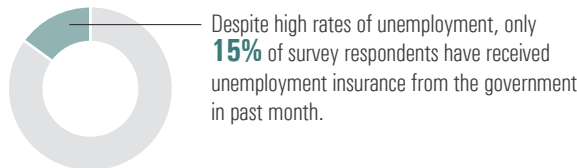
The survey results reveal widespread financial instability and hardship among North Carolina's most vulnerable residents, and underscore the need for policy solutions that are both responsive to this urgent moment and center those most impacted. Findings include:



**Widespread financial hardship is severely impacting community members' ability to secure basic necessities like food, medicine, and utilities.**

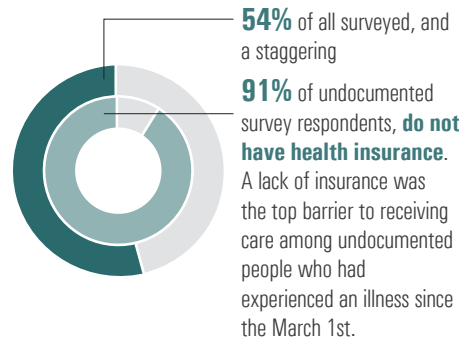
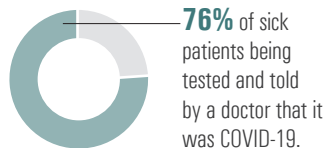
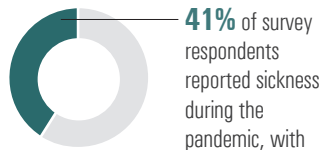


**Government support is not reaching those who need it most.**



North Carolina's eviction moratorium lapsed in June 2020; the state is currently covered by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's halt on evictions which expires in 2020. Absent policy interventions, these already precarious renters are likely to face high rates of eviction in early 2021.

The pandemic has been disproportionately impacting North Carolina's Black and Latinx communities who were more likely to contract and lose loved ones to COVID-19 and less likely to have health insurance and access to care.



Sadly, **17%** of survey respondents lost a family member or loved one from a COVID-related illness in 2020.

A small number of survey respondents currently have family members or loved ones in immigration detention or criminal custody. These survey respondents were worried for their health and safety and reported challenges contacting their family members on the inside.

# Policy Recommendations

In light of the trends surfaced in Action NC's community impact survey, policymakers must take immediate steps to:



## Provide economic relief and protections for workers

### Federal:

- Include immigrant families in all COVID-19 relief measures, including in both cash payments that currently exclude many mixed-status families and those who file their taxes with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), and in expanded unemployment insurance.
- Extend the availability of Pandemic Unemployment Insurance (PUA) and the additional \$600 in weekly unemployment benefits for the duration of the crisis. Invest in states' infrastructure to ensure their ability to process and disburse unemployment benefits quickly and efficiently.
- Provide a pathway to citizenship for essential workers, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and Temporary Protective Status (TPS) holders.
- Leverage the Employee Retention Tax Credit (ERTC) to secure paychecks and benefits of workers and provide small businesses with the financial assistance they need to keep their businesses from shuttering.
- Do not provide corporations with immunity from liability, which would serve as a disincentive for employers to provide necessary protections to their workers.

### State and local:

- Eliminate any citizenship, residency, and documentation requirements from all state and local COVID-19 relief programs.
- Enforce existing workplace protections, and strengthen them in higher-risk industries prevalent in the state, like poultry and pork processing.
- Enact mandated paid sick days for all workers.
- Invest in the state's unemployment insurance infrastructure to ensure applications are processed quickly.
- Raise the amount of unemployment insurance payments, and increase the time limit on receiving benefits.
- Make grants for small businesses widely available and invest in outreach and technical assistance for immigrant-owned businesses.
- Create a state fund to provide economic support to those excluded from federal economic relief programs



## Keep community members in their homes

### Federal:

- Institute a nationwide eviction and foreclosure moratorium.
- Provide at least \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance to help keep the lowest-income renters in their homes.

### State and local:

- Enact a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.
- Enact a moratorium on utility shut-offs and make funding available to pay utility bills.
- Institute a statewide right of first refusal, which would give renters the opportunity to purchase their homes before owners sell them in the open market.
- Overturn statutory prohibition on rent control.
- Institute strong anti-discrimination housing provisions, and provide for robust enforcement against landlords who violate them.
- Publicly fund legal representation for low-income tenants facing eviction or mistreatment.

**Our communities need resources now more than ever. By adopting key fiscal policies, North Carolina can fill budget shortfalls, generate new revenues, and provide vital community support.**

The state of North Carolina and its local governments are facing unprecedented budget shortfalls. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has estimated that North Carolina could see a \$1.6 billion budget shortfall in 2020 and a \$2.6 billion shortfall in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Mass layoffs and cuts to vital public programs can be prevented but only with decisive action.

There are a range of important fiscal policy reforms that will generate billions in new revenues in the coming years. This includes tax reform legislation that would 1) reverse big cuts for the wealthy and corporations, 2) create a more progressive tax structure to fund public needs that have been inadequately funded during the pandemic, and will continue to be, until tax revenues are increased.



## Ensure access to healthcare regardless of legal status

### Federal:

- Cover COVID-19 testing and treatment for everyone, regardless of immigration status, through Emergency Medicaid.
- Ensure everyone can access healthcare by passing the Health Care Emergency Guarantee Act.
- Suspend the public charge immigration rule, a regulation that has deterred immigrant communities from seeking healthcare, nutrition assistance, and other essential services.
- Suspend Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement activities, as they have a chilling effect on immigrant communities' access to government services in this critical time.

### State and local:

- Ensure free COVID-19 testing and treatment is available to all, regardless of immigration status.
- Extend state-funded Medicaid to all North Carolina residents, regardless of immigration status.
- Distribute personal protective equipment and testing equipment to community-based health providers.
- Increase language access for healthcare services and at testing sites.
- Increase funding for community-based organizations with connections to immigrant communities to connect immigrants to health care service providers.
- Improve community education around the public charge immigration rule to counter the chilling effects the rule has had on immigrant access to healthcare.



## Depopulate jails and prisons

### Federal:

- Suspend Immigration and Customs Enforcement enforcement activities and release detained individuals.
- Reduce funding for ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and institute restrictions on the transfer of funds to those agencies.
- Provide for the decarceration of federal prisons and incentives to states and localities to reduce jail and prison populations and admissions.
- End all federal funding for police in schools.
- End the Department of Defense's 1033 Program and associated transfers of all military equipment and vehicles to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

### State and local:

- Provide state funding for municipalities to start non-police crisis response teams.
- Reintroduce and pass the Citizens Review Board Establishment Bill, which would authorize the use of citizen review boards to investigate allegations of police misconduct and require training of neighborhood crime watch programs.
- Legalize marijuana.
- Build local non-police crisis response and violence interruption pilots.
- Address racial disparities in traffic stops and marijuana arrests.
- Declare homelessness a public health crisis to be addressed through services, not the criminal legal system.
- Immediately halt all ICE detention in any North Carolina county jail or state prison, and halt all transfers from criminal custody to immigration custody.
- Publicly fund legal representation for immigrant community members at risk of detention and deportation who cannot afford legal counsel.
- Substantially reduce the population in North Carolina's jails and prisons.

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# Introduction

As of mid-December, 2020 North Carolina had over 415,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and over 5,700 deaths.<sup>2</sup> North Carolina is ranked 12th in the nation based on total cases per state.<sup>3</sup> As the state enters the current phase of the pandemic, several key trends have emerged that highlight the urgent need for federal, state, and local action.

## North Carolina’s communities of color have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to systemic and historical racism in our economy, healthcare system, and society generally, Latinx and Black communities are bearing the brunt of this crisis, contracting and dying from COVID-19 at alarming numbers.<sup>4</sup> Nationally, the COVID-19 mortality rate for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities is nearly triple the white mortality rate.<sup>5</sup>

Trends in North Carolina echo this national data. North Carolina’s COVID-19 deaths are largely concentrated in places with higher numbers of Latinx and Black community members. For example, North Carolina’s hardest hit county, Mecklenburg, has seen over 49,000 COVID-19 cases and over 470 deaths. The county is 33% Black while the state is 22% Black overall.<sup>6</sup> According to North Carolina’s health officials, the Latinx community makes up 26% of the state’s COVID-19 cases, despite making up only 9.8% of the North Carolina population.<sup>7</sup> Given the lack of comprehensive demographic data—the state is missing race data on 18% of its COVID-19 cases and missing ethnicity data for 34% of its COVID-19 cases—these racial and ethnic disparities could be even higher than official tallies.<sup>8</sup>

Communities of color have less access to health insurance and have long experienced racism when accessing healthcare.<sup>9</sup> These factors contribute to higher rates of chronic illness and make communities of color especially vulnerable to COVID-19.<sup>10</sup> Latinx and Black people also fill a high number of essential jobs on the frontlines and are more likely to be employed in industries that lack adequate paid sick days. Undocumented communities have an added layer of discrimination and vulnerability during the pandemic, facing enormous economic and public health crises while being excluded from necessary government social and economic supports.

## North Carolina’s immigrant communities and communities of color are experiencing enormous economic suffering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the survey results highlight, these communities have seen significant job loss and reduction in income, a lack of insurance and access to care, financial precarity for renters and homeowners who are poised to fall short on rent and mortgage payments, and a limited ability to secure vital government support, like unemployment insurance or the stimulus payments.

The survey findings underscore the urgency of this situation. State and local policymakers must immediately adopt policy solutions to address these pressing needs by investing in the state’s unemployment insurance program, eliminating citizenship or documentation requirements for all state and local COVID-19 relief programs, enacting a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures in 2021, and extending state-funded Medicaid to all North Carolina residents, among many other policies. These policy solutions will provide North Carolina’s residents the vital economic support, stable housing, and health coverage they urgently need to get through this pandemic.

*“[I have] less work and have accumulated debts. I worry about my grandmother.”*

—Survey respondent

*“[I’m] afraid to run out of resources during the pandemic.”*

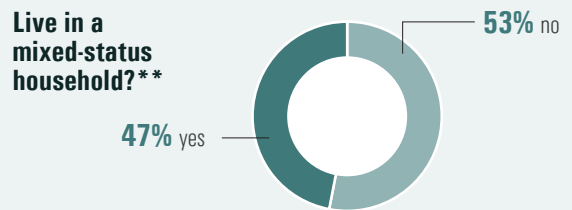
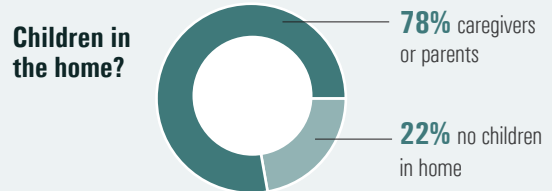
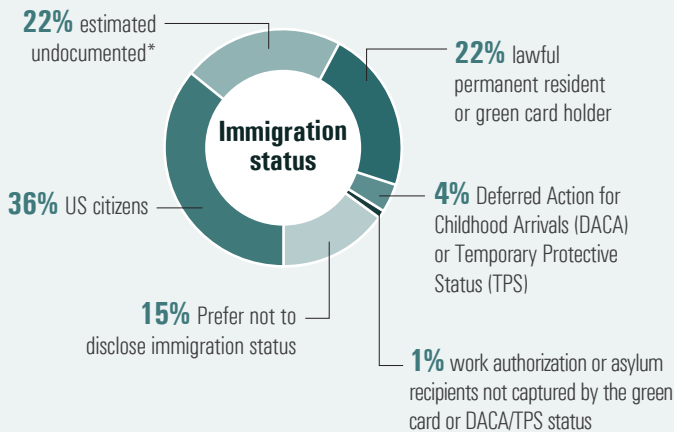
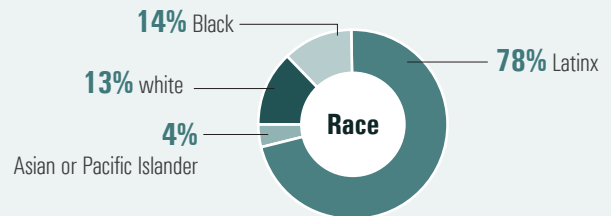
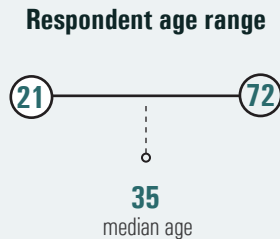
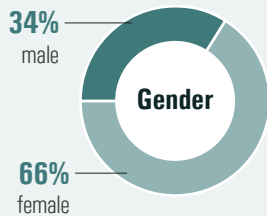
—Survey respondent

# Survey Findings

Action NC fielded in-depth community impact surveys with 100 primarily Latinx and Black community members in fall 2020. The survey was designed to surface key issues facing North Carolina residents related to employment, housing, health, and economic security during the pandemic. These findings reveal enormous precarity and suffering in local communities, as significant economic and health disparities take their toll.

## Survey Sample at a Glance

**103** Survey respondents residing in 14 cities across North Carolina but primarily living in Charlotte

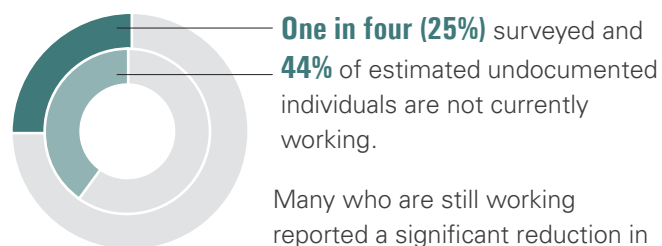


\*\* With at least one member with a different citizenship or immigration status

\*See methodology appendix for more details.

## North Carolina's communities are facing significant job loss and reduction of income.

Across the state, North Carolina's workers have been hard hit by the pandemic. **During some months of the pandemic, the state saw historic unemployment with over 600,000 people out of work.**<sup>11</sup> Over 1.3 million people in the state have filed unemployment insurance claims since the start of the pandemic.<sup>12</sup> The survey shows the lasting and particular impact of unemployment and reduced hours on many Latinx and undocumented families:



Many who are still working reported a significant reduction in income, with **26%** of community members surveyed reporting their employers had asked them to work fewer hours since the start of the pandemic.

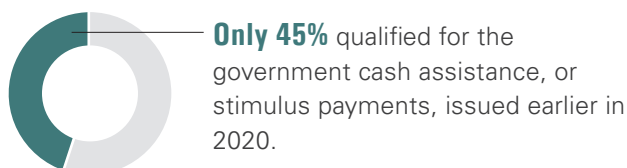
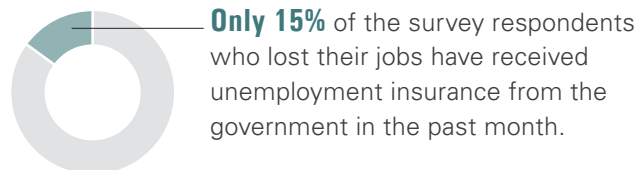
Half of those surveyed said someone in their household had lost their job and/or had hours reduced by employers since the start of the pandemic. Undocumented respondents were most likely to report someone in their household had lost a job or seen their hours cut.

**Among the respondents who had lost their job, nearly 40% (and half of all undocumented respondents) indicated this was as a direct result of the pandemic.**

These job losses spanned many sectors including domestic work, warehouse/factory, and retail. Among the undocumented respondents currently out of work, the vast majority previously worked in restaurant and domestic work roles. Several of these sectors represent a significant percentage of North Carolina's overall economy and were heavily hit by the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

## Communities of color have not received adequate government support and undocumented individuals are completely excluded from relief.

Unemployment insurance and stimulus checks are not reaching North Carolina's families in need.



*Because of COVID, I was 6 weeks in the hospital and I could not work*

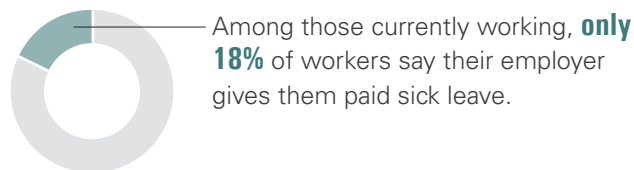
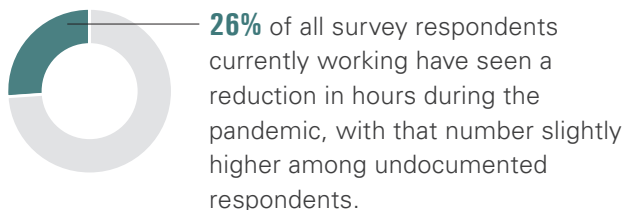
**Undocumented families in desperate need for federal and state aid are excluded from receiving any support.**

Undocumented survey respondents have been left out of state and federal cash aid. Among undocumented respondents who lost their jobs, zero undocumented survey respondents have received unemployment insurance.

70% of undocumented respondents live in mixed-status households, with at least one member with a different citizenship or immigration status than them. Despite living with family members who are not undocumented, 100% of undocumented respondents still report they will not qualify to receive any federal stimulus assistance.



**Among the people currently working, many have seen their hours cut and report a lack of paid sick days. This not only leaves working people financially precarious, but means they are unable to take time off if they are sick.**

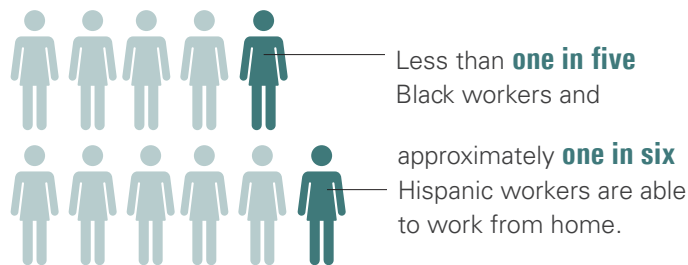


These reductions in hours (and income) are leaving many families in financially precarious situations with paychecks that vary from week to week and an overall reduction in income.

**No undocumented workers surveyed receive paid sick days.** This not only poses serious concerns over the limits and lack of enforcement of existing protections under the federal paid sick provisions, it also means many workers are unable to take paid time off if they become ill.

**Nationally, Latinx and Black workers are much more likely to work essential front-line roles.** According to the Economic Policy Institute,<sup>15</sup>

As many as three million North Carolinians have no guaranteed access to paid sick days. While Congress created an emergency paid sick leave program in response to the pandemic, it leaves out many millions of North Carolina workers.<sup>14</sup>



This is reflected in the North Carolina survey findings: survey respondents, who are 78% Latinx and 14% Black, are currently concentrated in industries like retail, restaurant, healthcare, domestic work, and construction where remote work is not possible and where the risk of COVID-19 exposure is significant.

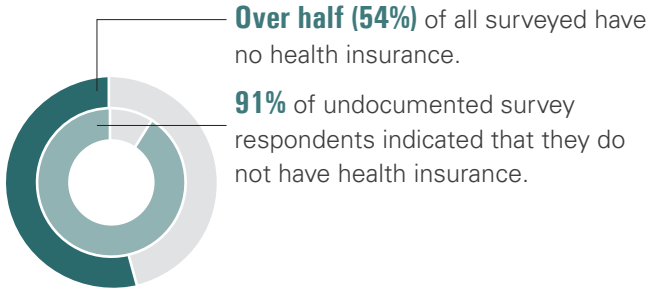
While some workers reported their employer seemed to be doing what they could to protect workers—including providing face masks, ensuring social distancing, and providing trainings—one in ten workers report they are not benefiting from adequate protections, personal protective equipment, or requirements for customers to change behavior to keep workers safe.

*“I worry about the family. My mom is sick [with] no insurance.”*

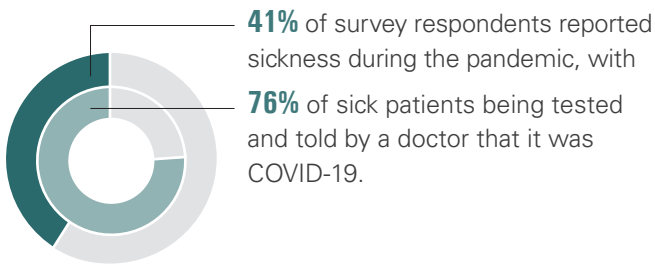
*“[The pandemic] has affected me mentally due to medical reasons. A family member was kept indoors due to a previous medical emergency and then COVID struck the same family member with multiple health issues.”*

*“I am stressed. Everyone in my family caught Covid-19. We’re all fine, thank God.”*

## A lack of health insurance during the COVID-19 pandemic has been disproportionately impacting North Carolina’s undocumented communities and communities of color.



**North Carolina has long had high rates of uninsured residents.** In 2019 it had the 9th highest rate of uninsured people nationally.<sup>16</sup> The survey underscores how the pandemic has exacerbated existing issues.



**Overall, only 57% of survey respondents—and only 17% of undocumented respondents—said they received the care they needed**

People cited a lack of insurance (55%) as the top barrier to care, although overcrowded hospitals and language access were cited by some. A lack of insurance was also the top barrier of care among undocumented people who had experienced an illness since March 1st.

Sadly, **17%** of survey respondents had lost a family member or loved one from a COVID-related illness in 2020.

Among undocumented immigrants, who are largely excluded from any health insurance coverage, the chilling effects of immigration enforcement are clear.



**Two out of three** people reported not having gone to a doctor, or abstaining from using local services in the past, as a result of fear of immigration enforcement or the impact on their status.



## In the midst of widespread financial hardship and uncertainty, many survey respondents reported mental health challenges.

40% of respondents reported feeling anxious most of the time. An additional 40% indicated they were anxious some of the time. Similarly, one in three survey respondents reported feeling depressed most of the time while an additional 41% of respondents felt depressed some of the time.

Many peoples' mental health was negatively impacted by the stress of losing jobs and income, the fear of becoming infected with COVID-19, worries for loved ones who have gotten sick, and the sadness of losing loved ones. People described the tension of being afraid to go out while feeling stressed by being at home all the time. In the words of survey respondents:

*I'm scared for me and my family.*

*Me and my family [are] scared to go out all the time.*

*[The pandemic] has caused a lot of stress and a lot of anxiety.*

*Definitely stressful, there was a period that my mother and I were not able to see each other, the normal family rituals of being together were not possible.*

*I'm stressed, hoping that everything returns to normal.*

*With much anxiety and stress, hoping the pandemic ends quickly*



## North Carolina's renters are already struggling to make rent. Many will face even greater housing precarity in the coming months.



**56%** of those surveyed currently rent the place where they live.



**One out of three** renters surveyed are worried about being able to pay their next month's rent payment.



**73%** of undocumented respondents said they are worried about being able to pay their next rent payment.

Among homeowners, **20%** are worried about being able to pay their next mortgage payment.

These survey findings echo government data revealing high rates of housing insecurity in North Carolina. According to US Census data as of December 11th, over 477,000 households in North Carolina are either not current on rent or mortgage payments or are confident they will be unable to pay next month's payment on time.<sup>21</sup>

### **North Carolina's eviction moratorium expired in June, which left 700,000 North Carolinians at risk of eviction.**

In an unprecedented move, in September the CDC ordered a halt on evictions until the end of 2020.<sup>17</sup> In the time between the lapsed NC eviction moratorium and the CDC halt on evictions, landlords in the state filed for eviction against 18,000 NC families.<sup>18</sup> It remains to be seen whether the state's landlords will comply with the CDC rule and how already precarious renters will be impacted now and in the future.

### **Long before the pandemic, North Carolina had an eviction crisis.**

It was home to five of the 25 US cities with eviction filings higher than the national average.<sup>19</sup> In fact, North Carolina had eight of the country's top 100 evicting large cities (including Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Fayetteville, Charlotte, High Point, Durham, Wilmington, and Raleigh) and 14 of the top 100 evicting mid-size cities.<sup>20</sup>

Based on the survey findings, it is clear that failing to provide protections for renters would be disastrous for many North Carolina's residents.



### **Survey respondents listed many reasons for why they are worried about being able to pay rent.**

These included a lack of work, a reduction in hours by employers, and less customers during the pandemic.

*"My husband is the only one working"*

*"Sometimes there are less hours."*

*"Customers dropped a lot with the pandemic"*

*"[My] hours were cut and I was not notified."*

*"I lost my job and only my husband works."*

## Financial hardship is severely impacting North Carolina families' ability to secure basic necessities like food, medicine, and utilities.



**One in four** surveyed are worried they will be unable to pay for utilities and other bills in the coming month, and concerned about being able to pay debts like medical and student loan debt.

*“Because of the pandemic, I have received fewer children to care for, so I do not have enough paycheck to paycheck.”*

—Survey respondent

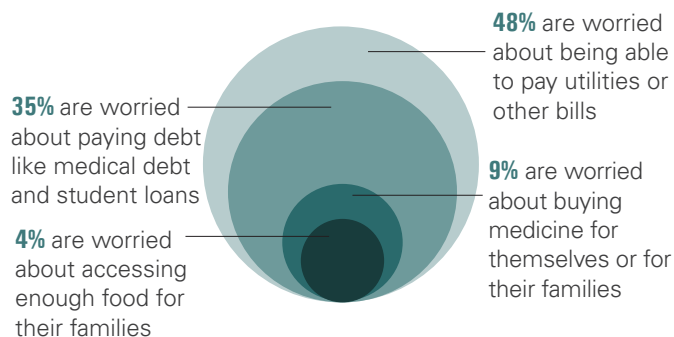
*“[I have] money problems and little work”*

—Survey respondent

### Caregivers report challenges with remote learning related to the digital divide.

Among those surveyed, 78% have children in their home. While the majority of survey respondents indicated their experiences with remote learning had been positive, the top challenge cited was no or limited internet access in the home (among 38% of caregivers). A smaller subset of survey respondents said language access, adults in the house working and unable to support children in remote learning, and a lack of communication from schools were additional challenges.

### Undocumented respondents had especially high levels of worry about basic necessities:



### A small number of survey respondents currently have family members or loved ones in immigration detention or criminal custody.

These survey respondents were worried for the health and safety of their loved ones and reported challenges contacting their family members on the inside. As of September, over 120 COVID-19 cases have been documented at the state's only immigration detention facility, Alamance County Detention Center. Detention facilities are facing growing public scrutiny for the lack of safety precautions to protect the people being held at these facilities.<sup>22</sup> North Carolina has seen enormous spikes and hotspots in its correctional facilities—**over 6,300 people being held in state prisons have tested positive for COVID-19 as of mid-December 2020.**<sup>23</sup>

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# Conclusion

Action NC's community impact survey highlights the enormous toll the pandemic is having on the state's communities of color, including immigrant communities. The experiences and voices featured in this report have painted a picture of widespread precarity and suffering across the state of North Carolina. To chart a path forward, North Carolina's policymakers must immediately adopt a set of policy recommendations that are responsive to and center those most impacted by this unfolding crisis: Latinx, Black, and undocumented communities. This must include investing in the state's unemployment insurance program, eliminating citizenship or documentation requirements for all state and local COVID-19 relief programs, enacting a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures in 2021, and extending state-funded Medicaid to all North Carolina residents, along with other vital reforms outlined in this report. By taking swift action, North Carolina can ensure all communities around the state have the support they so urgently need.

## Methodology and Survey Sample

The survey findings featured in this document were the result of a 50 question survey conducted over the phone by Action NC in October and November 2020. The survey sample included 103 respondents residing in North Carolina. Survey respondents spanned 14 cities across the state, including Belmont, Canton, Charlotte, Concord, Gastonia, Goldsboro, Indian Trail, Kannapolis, Matthews, Mint Hill, Monroe, Mount Holly, Pineville, and Salisbury. The bulk of respondents lived in Charlotte.

The survey respondents were 66% female and 34% male and ranged in ages from 21 to 72 (the median age was 35). Respondent race and ethnicity totals were: 78% Latinx, 14% Black, 13% White, and 4% Asian or Pacific Islander (Note: respondents were able to "check all that apply" so race and ethnicity figures do not total 100%).

Reported immigration status among survey respondents were 36% US citizens; 22% estimated undocumented\*\*; 22% lawful permanent residents or green card holders; 4% Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients or Temporary Protective Status (TPS) holders; 1% work authorization or asylum recipients not captured by the green card or DACA/TPS status. 15% of survey respondents preferred not to disclose immigration status.

\*\*The estimated undocumented data highlighted throughout this report, refers to survey respondents who indicated they were immigrants to the United States but not US citizens, lawful permanent residents, DACA or TPS recipients, or individuals with any other work authorization or asylum status. Survey respondents who declined to answer any of the survey questions on immigration status were not counted in the estimated undocumented total (n= 23), but are instead reflected in the overall survey response total (n = 103).

## Endnotes

- 1 “States Grappling With Hit to Tax Collections,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, November 6, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/states-grappling-with-hit-to-tax-collectionsstate-budget-and-tax/states-grappling-with-hit-to-tax-collections>.
- 2 North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, “COVID-19 North Carolina Dashboard,” Accessed December 11, 2020, <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/>.
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