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COVID – 19: NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AMONG AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANTS

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The coronavirus pandemic has presented at least three realities. It has impacted minority and Black immigrant communities harder. It has exacerbated inequities. It has underscored that community and faith-based organizations are essential to the lives of low to moderate-income and immigrant families.

The above observations validate the calls to philanthropic foundations and government agencies to empower immigrant-led agencies.

When the coronavirus pandemic started, Black immigrant-led organizations used multi-pronged and collaborative strategies to help hundreds of families alleviate the social, educational, health, political, and economic impacts of the disease.

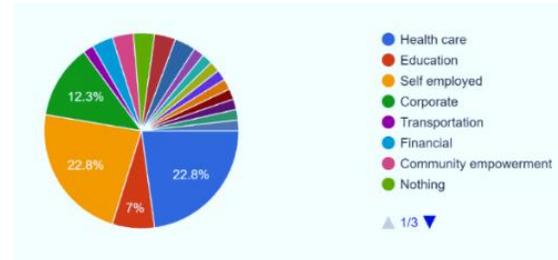
At the start of 2021, a community needs assessment seemed essential to achieve more¹.

We asked 58 African and Caribbean immigrants to answer two questions (1) How the coronavirus pandemic impacted them, their families, and communities² and (2) what assistance would benefit them the most.

91% of the respondents were Africans and 9% from the Caribbean islands. They spoke English, French, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Bambara, Wolof, Mandingo, Arabic, and Krio.

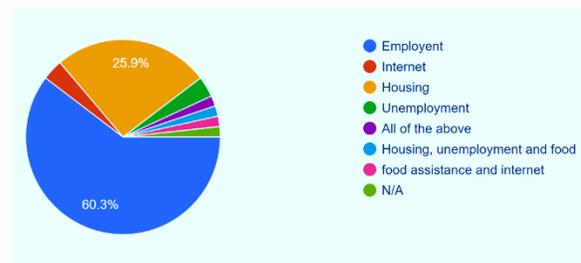
58% of the of the respondents identified as community members and 42% identified as leaders of communities.

They work in diverse sectors of employment with healthcare, education and self-employment topping the list.



Needs

By order of importance, finding employment, housing, food, and access to the Internet topped the needs among African and Caribbean immigrant families and communities as a result of the pandemic.



Recommendations for policy

The question “Do you have any suggestions about how we can better assist immigrants and refugee families in 2021?” yielded answers that agencies and policymakers must consider holistically in future interventions to address the disparities the pandemic created.

Cash Assistance

¹ As the pandemic lingers, we anticipated that in 2021, immigrant-led agencies would see another surge in demands for assistance. They will also have to do more to reach the traditionally hard-to-reach populations.

² Communities here means any group like ethnic associations, church, mosques, social clubs, national organizations.

Providing direct cash assistance via checks, gift cards, and debit cards is indispensable. It is not a panacea³. However, it empowers the recipients financially and mentally. In 2021, community-based organizations and agencies must raise more money to support their cash assistance programs. Donors must trust the processes, invest more in these programs, and reduce grant application requirements to accommodate grassroots organizations. Policymakers must support policies that eliminate administrative burdens to allow many people access to Covid-19 relief benefits.

Employment Assistance

“Access to jobs,” “Provision of jobs,” “Employment.” These statements reflect the need to invest in workforce development strategies during and after the pandemic. Because of the pandemic, thousands of immigrants stopped working or worked reduced hours. The self-employed (natural hair braiders, Uber, and Taxi drivers, restaurant owners) have lost revenues because of the pandemic.

Community resources

“Educating immigrants on how to access resources in their communities” is essential. The recommendation implies that immigrant-led organizations must improve their outreach and marketing strategies to allow many immigrants to know their services and access them. It means these organizations must network a lot more and strengthen their collaborations. Likewise, lawmakers must outreach to immigrant communities. Immigrants often do not know these services exist and are available to them. Access to community resources must include the

³ Heath Henderson published an article in [Generosity](#) (March 18, 2021) “Why cash payments aren’t always

translations and interpretations of program announcements in multiple languages.

Social and Emotional support

Immigrant communities are less likely to access social and emotional support services during the pandemic. Whereas immigrants rely on their community networks and families for emotional support, they must also access more specialized mental health and behavioral services. This recommendation implies: “making more social benefits and support accessible,” “helping immigrants understand the seriousness of Covid-19 and how devastating it is,” and “be in permanent contact with immigrants and refugees.”

Kids’ Learning Center

The recommendation to “create a center for the kids to study” reflects immigrant parents’ worries about remote learning and digital literacy. The idea of operating a physical center amid the pandemic reflects how many immigrant parents are skeptical about online schooling, adequate access to online classrooms, childcare and supervision, and English Language Learning (ELL) programs from non-native English-speaking students. School officials shall give attention to ELL parents and students to mitigate learning disparities. The Philadelphia School District’s plan to return to limited in-person learning must prioritize ELL students.

Immigration and Legal Assistance

While the pandemic has wreaked havoc among minority groups and Black and Brown immigrant communities, it has impacted the undocumented twice as much. Many have not

the best tool to help poor people.” The article has some value, we argue that the temporary cash assistance is indispensable.

benefited directly or indirectly from federal and state Covid-9 relief assistance packages. The pandemic has also caused delays in the USCIS' adjudication and approval of immigration benefits applications. The following recommendations, "Give them papers," "Help them with proper documentation," "I want the community help to be regular immigrants," clearly means that advocating and organizing for fair immigration policies is a dimension of the COVID19 Relief strategy.

Housing and Utility needs

There is a positive correlation between requests for cash assistance and rental, housing, and utility bills payment assistance. It has been one or the other or all of the above at the same time. This correlation implies that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) must maximize immigrants' access to city or state resources by hiring new staff to help immigrants apply for rental or utility assistance programs. The end of the moratoria on evictions and shutoffs will create unique needs. CBOs must advocate and petition lawmakers to make rental and utility assistance program applications less cumbersome.

Healthcare and Insurance

The pandemic added to prevailing policies like the Public Charge Rule to increase health disparities and create new forms of insecurities among immigrant communities. Service providers and lawmakers must pay attention to the decrease in health insurance applications

for eligible but underserved communities. Reports⁴ have estimated a significant fall of insured immigrant families as many feared receiving these benefits would bar them from legal permanent residency or naturalization. Likewise, the cost associated with funeral expenses also warrants a careful study to determine the affordability of life insurance policies for low-income families.

Food and clothing

Access to food which aligns with the cultural cuisine and diet of immigrant families is essential to a robust culture of health during the pandemic. The delivery of food boxes and other items is salutary. But, immigrants often refrain from attending food pantries. To satisfy immigrants' nutritional needs, agencies must invest in direct cash assistance, food vouchers, and collaborations with immigrant-owned food services (restaurants, grocery stores). These food services must also be empowered to accept EBT cards whenever possible and provide affordable fresh food.

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⁴ Susan H. Babey & al., from UCLA found in a [study](#) published on March 28, 2021 that "one out of 4 (25%)

low-income immigrant adults reported avoiding public programs out of fear that participating would negatively impact immigration status.