

# Looking at the Impacts of COVID-19

*on housing insecure and homeless individuals in the CBRM area*

On March 20th, 2020, reps from local non-profits, shelters, justice, and health came together to find solutions to the closures and reduced services for the people they serve. This group known as the **COVID-19 Working Group** has since expanded membership and continues to meet regularly.

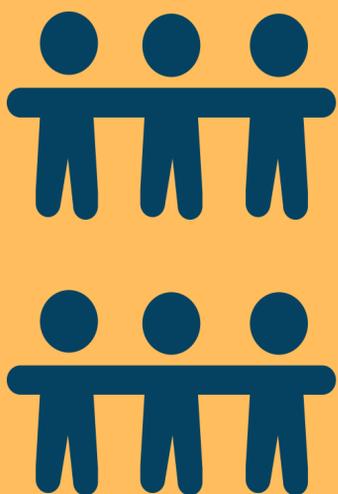


Through the working group partners, administered by the Ally Centre, some important actions were put in place: portable toilets throughout CBRM, comfort centres for hot beverages, snacks, clean clothes, showers and information, and onsite COVID testing and transportation was organized.

The Working Group wanted to know more about how COVID-19 is affecting the populations they serve, and whether they have access to resources that will help in preventing the spread the COVID-19 virus. The **Ally Centre-Coordinated Access Program, Community Cares Youth Outreach, Loaves and Fishes, Community Homeless Shelter, Community Corrections, Elizabeth Fry Society, CB Transition House, Every Woman's Centre, CaperBase@Access808, and Glace Bay Food Bank** handed the survey to their clients to complete between September 14 and 21st, 2020. The survey included questions on housing, income, food, health & well-being, COVID-19 resources and a Speaker's Corner.

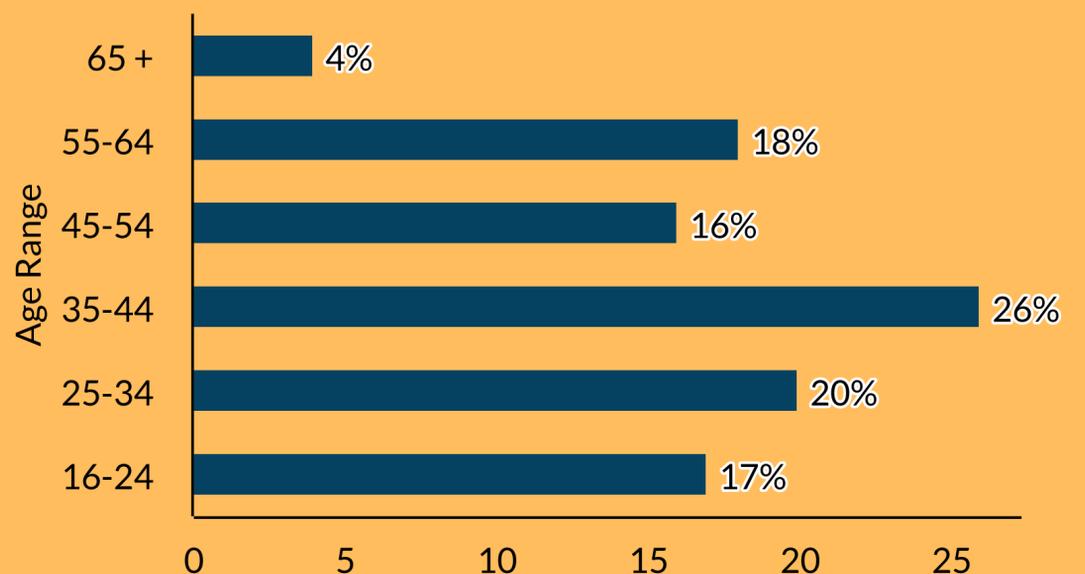
## Who We Heard From

115 individuals responded



48% women  
49% men  
2% trans  
1% other

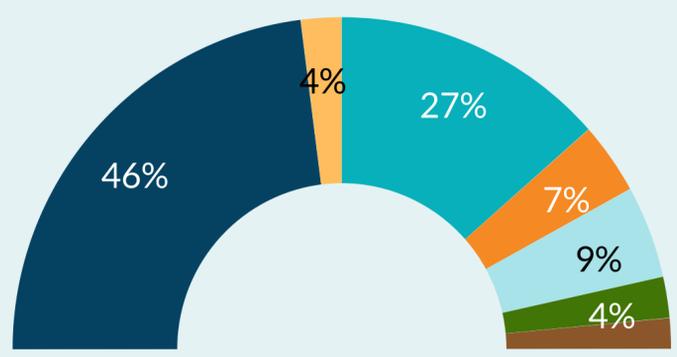
Age Range of Respondent





# Housing

## Current Housing Situation



- Rent apartment/house (46%)
- Staying mostly outdoors (4%)
- Staying at a shelter (27%)
- Renting room (rooming house/hotel) (7%)
- Couch surfing/staying with others (9%)
- Transitional Housing (4%)
- Other (3%)

**43% said housing situation changed since March 2020.**

### How it changed:

- Evicted
- Moved into Shelter or reached maximum stay at Shelter
- Incarceration (entered or released)
- Became homeless
- Increased rent or costs too high

**44% said their housing was unstable or worry they could lose their housing easily.**

### Why they feel this way:

- Unable to find affordable housing/ low income
- Currently experiencing homelessness
- Poor living conditions (infestation, bad repair)
- Substance use/mental health issues
- Discrimination by landlords

**One third of respondents who said they rented an apartment or room were living in a place in bad repair.**

*"I was in jail had place to stay before going in. Came out homeless."*

*"I used to sell artwork and crafts at art fairs, because of COVID 19 fairs and markets are not held so that hurt me a lot, as that's usually my money used for school supplies, clothing, extras, birthdays and Christmas for my children as well as outings for my children."*

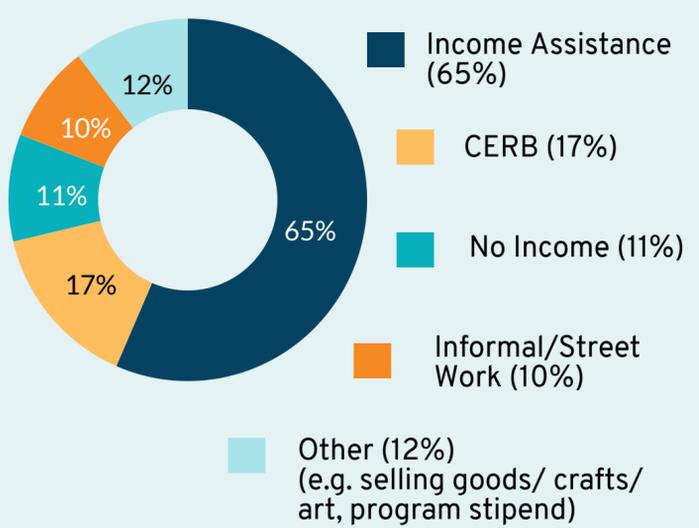
*"Holes in walls, leak in roof and mold"*

*"Rats are eating my food. There are holes in my walls. I fear that my toilet will fall through the hole in my ceiling into my kitchen."*



# Income

## Current Sources of Income



*"\$508 monthly - not enough to live on."*

*"The casual work I did to get by was hard to come by."*

**Most respondents reported their current sources of income was from government assistance programs.**

**Nearly one third of respondents who are on income assistance indicated they also receive CERB.**

## Reported changes related to employment since March 2020

- 27% - Loss of a job or casual employment
- 13% - Reduced hours of work
- 6% - New work opportunities/More hours of work

## Impact of changes to Income

- 40% - my income has not changed
- 25% - my income decreased enough to negatively change how I live month to month
- 15% - my income changed a little, but not enough to change how I live month to month
- 13% - my income has increased enough to positively change how I live month to month



## Health & Well-being

### Able to access Support for Mental Health?

- **35%** - Yes, I was using mental health support services before COVID and continued to do so.
- **6%** - Yes, I started needing mental health support and was able to access it.
- **14%** - No, since COVID I became unable to use the mental health services I was using.
- **13%** - No, I think I need mental health support but have not been able to access it.
- **23%** - No, I don't think I need mental health support.

"...we are home more so need more healthy food to eat..."

"Can't get through to supports - have no phone."

"I missed my weekly home visits/drives with housing support worker."

"Food Bank too far away to walk, can't afford taxi and no emergency access food bank only open 1 day a month."



## Food

**51%** had an increased need for food supports

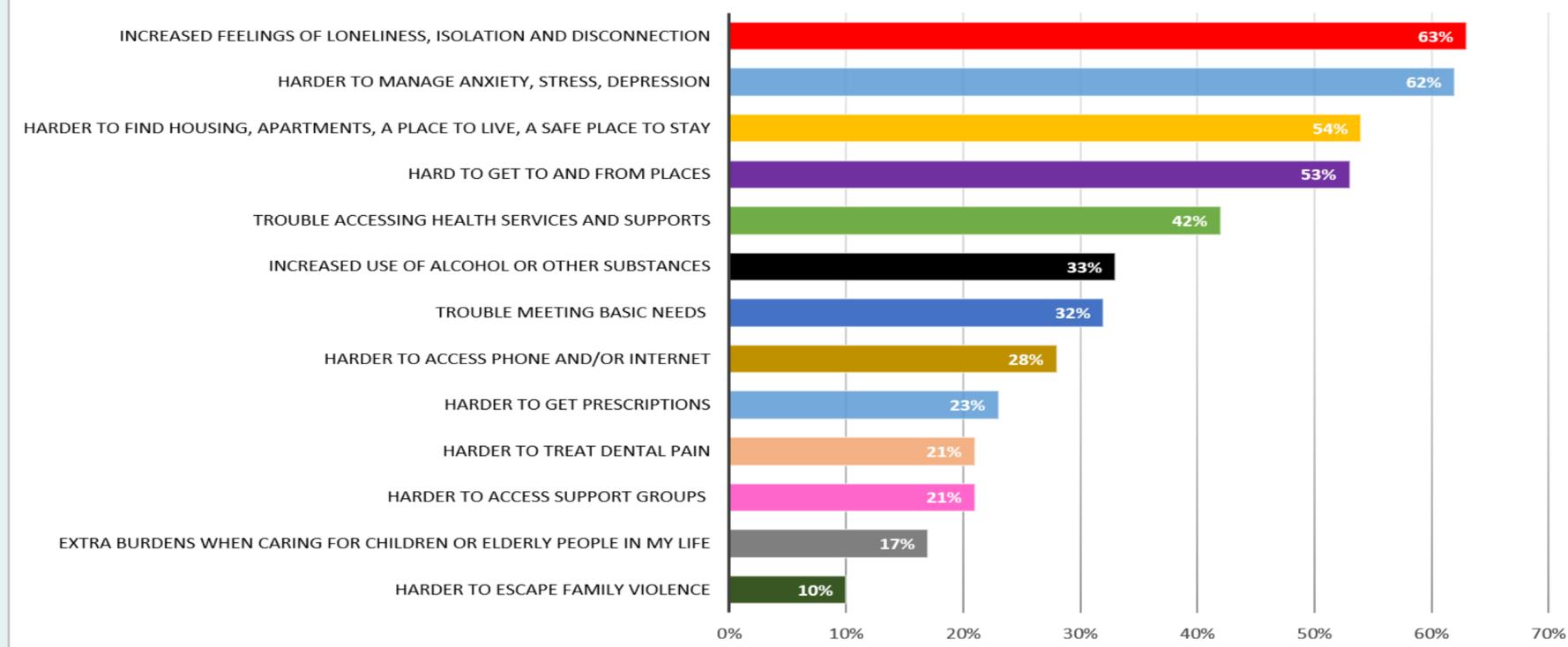
### Food programs accessed:

- **55%** food banks
- **44%** daily meal program
- **27%** food assistance from family and friends
- **17%** food support program (hampers & baskets)
- **21%** other  
*(e.g. Ally Centre, food at shelter, community cupboards)*

### What made it hard to get food?

- transportation
- no supports in their community
- health and mobility issues
- substance use issues
- being denied support

### Situations that became harder since Covid-19



### Top Sources for COVID Information

- **54%** news (radio/TV/newspaper)
- **37%** word of mouth
- **31%** social media
- **17%** community org

*(e.g. Ally Centre, library, police)*



### COVID Resources

- People overall currently have access to most COVID resources/safety measures (*masks, info, etc*).
- The area requiring the most improvement is access to washrooms with **16%** not being able to access when needed.



### Speaker's Corner

What would you tell government/leaders if you had a chance?

**53%** completed this section

Themes included:

- Need for more income
- Washroom access
- Laundry access
- Wifi/internet access
- More affordable housing

# COVID-19 Working Group Recommendations

During this pandemic, poverty reduction, harm reduction and overdose prevention, affordable and safe housing, food security, and wrap around supports must remain at the forefront. Through discussions and information shared during the Working Group meetings and results of this survey, here are recommendations to help ensure fundamental basic services are available for community members, during the pandemic and beyond:



## Housing

- More collaboration, flexibility and **partnership between non-profits and three levels of government to provide housing solutions** such as transitional housing, overflow shelter beds, and rent subsidies.
- Focus should be on **mobilizing housing with supports** such as safe drug supply programs, managed alcohol programs, mental health and addiction services, and more outreach services.



## Income

- Some individuals that were in receipt of income assistance also reported receiving CERB. People who are not eligible to receive CERB may be faced with devastating clawbacks. The Nova Scotia Department of Community Services should look at the implications of clawbacks during these extraordinary times. **CERB needs to be considered exempt** in the same way as other benefits such as the Canada Child Benefit to ensure people living in poverty do not fall behind.
- Long term income supports are required so that no one will fall behind. **Create a Basic Income** to ensure fundamental needs are met.



## Health & Well-being

- Vital medical and mental health services moved to phone or internet/online platforms. Nearly one third of respondents indicated it was harder to access phone or internet. Provincial government health services may need to look at **expanding and supporting programs that provide phone and internet coverage** to members of the population so they can remain engaged and connected with services. Services must plan ways to provide **alternative means of human connection** with those without phones/internet so they are not missed.



## Food

- Community based organizations experienced increased costs related to take out containers and food packaging as well relied on volunteers to make food deliveries. **Funding should be made available for additional staffing and food costs** for organizations that provide food supports. Locally the need was great – in just a few months: “Undercurrent was serving 1,000 per week; New Dawn distributed 6,100 hampers; and Community Cares Youth Outreach regularly served 80 families in Sydney Mines and area.”



## COVID Resources

- We heard clearly that the biggest gap in COVID resources was having a place to use the washroom. This is a matter of dignity. Although the Ally Centre, and partner organizations, were successful in securing funding for portable toilets this was only enough for three months. Something more humane must be obtained especially in colder months when portables are not a comfortable solution. **Comfort/access buildings should be a regular part of a community's municipal service structure.**



## COVID Information

- The top source of info, after news, was ‘word of mouth’ at 37%. This shows a great need to ensure peer support networks have accurate info to share. From service providers, we heard there was a **need for relevant, realistic, first voice based messages.** Some felt that clients had difficulty understanding social distancing terminology. Plus, many simply couldn't follow the expected ‘rules’ due to shared living spaces, crowded apartments, etc. We cannot forget housing insecure populations in the way messaging is designed.