

**UHI/RWJF Powering Healthy Lives Final Report for
Live Longer: Empowering and Engaging Pittsburgh Communities**

Recap: Within the *Live Longer: Empowering and Engaging Pittsburgh Communities* project, Community Empowerment Association's goal was to heighten the community's understanding of health equity and its importance for achieving a dignified life. It utilized USALEEP data to provide initial evidence of disparities in life expectancy (LE) within its community (Homewood, PA), linking health inequities to social and environmental determinants.

Using LE and mortality data, the project included a series of neighborhood roundtable conversations to encourage the community to think broadly about various factors influencing health (e.g., air quality, food/nutrition, safety, housing, violence, racism, sexism).

Community Empowerment Association's community working group also attempted to identify and fill "risk" gaps. With assistance from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, the team developed projects that involved gathering and analyzing data and with a goal of ultimately presenting findings to decision makers (such as government officials) and the community at large. Attention was given to "upstream" issues, focusing on prevention and differences in the social determinants of health.

The Project was a community based participatory problem solving initiative that and community led by the Community Empowerment Association (CEA). Our grass-roots approach was in collaboration with a Pitt Public Health (PPH) team that was chosen not for their focused expertise, but rather their broad-based conceptual knowledge in public health and long-standing interactions with the school and its faculty. This approach was fundamental to the Project's implementation, employing the knowledge and experience of the grassroots community. As noted in the Project Narrative, the effort conjoined a culture of health awareness and empowerment activism thereby altering the health and social equity landscape. An extensive report was submitted in December 2019 documenting our progress up to that date.

When we launched our project Live Longer: Empowering and Engaging Pittsburgh Communities our overarching goal was to use USALEEP data, community-based participatory research and problem solving to demonstrate the relationship between life expectancy (LE)-related disparities and various social and environmental determinants of health. Utilizing USALEEP data the Pitt Public Health life expectancy computation of 63 Pittsburgh area neighborhoods, determined longevity (life expectancy differentials) ranged from 62-84 years – a 22 year differential.

We were on track to do that, however, the COVID-19 pandemic put those plans to an immediate pause. The pause became a health department mandated lockdown permanently suspending our planned Project, Neighborhood Roundtable Conversations, employing Citizen

Scientists to verify community perceptions about premature death and development of a Social Area Score. Those three (3) deliverables were no longer viable.

After our meeting on May 5th with USALEEEP, we adjusted our Live Longer: Empowering and Engaging Pittsburgh Communities Project to include COVID-19 impact on communities' perceptions about the affect food insecurity has on premature death – life expectancy. We proposed to expand our Live Longer Project to community member's perception about the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on premature death in three areas: Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity and School Closure (remote education).

As described in our August 2020 report, Community Empowerment Association's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was to address the food insecurity issues that was prevalent in their targeted communities so a food distribution project was initiated which not only included food products, but also other basic needs items, including coats, bookbags, hygiene products, etc. In addition, a Covid-19 impact survey was created to discern what additional issues were impacting residents in CEA's targeted neighborhoods. Questions asked were:

1. Has the pandemic affected any of the following for you or your family: a. Buying your family's medication b. Having enough food for your family to eat c. Paying your rent or mortgage d. Your employment e. Transportation
2. During the pandemic and ACHD/Government's stay at home restrictions, have you been able to: (This question required a yes or no answer) a. Access the internet b. Have a laptop or computer in your home for usage by your school age children c. Help your children in your home with their homework.
3. Have you been tested for COVID-19? (Also a yes or no question)

The results of the survey were documented in the August 2020 report from those residents that responded. Community Empowerment Association, Inc. was interested in continuing to collect survey information at our sponsored events, and also reconnecting with the 327 responses (those of whom left contact information) that we received from residents in the 32 neighborhoods during the initial phase (pre-covid) of our project, report our findings and include an analysis. The results are reported below.

Activities from August 2020 – December 2020: Community Empowerment Association's COVID-19 survey backs up these claims made by Allegheny County Health Department as well as Dr. Jerome Gloster, CEO of Primary Health Care Services who oversees federally funded clinics in many communities with majority black population here Allegheny County, including McKeesport, Braddock and Homewood Community Empowerment Association attempted to reach out the 327 participants of the Live Longer Project who completed a Perception of Your Neighborhood tool during many of the town hall meetings during the Live Longer Project. Because of anonymity and privacy of our participants, many of them did not leave contact information; therefore, we were only able to reach out to a small fraction of those participants

for the COVID-19 survey. However, during the 13 distribution events held by Community Empowerment Association, we were able to collect an additional 60 completed COVID-19 surveys for a total of 91. The outcomes of the COVID-19 survey are as follows:

- 54.55% of the people who completed the survey lives in Homewood, PA
- 18.18% of the people who completed the survey lives in East Liberty, PA
- 11% of the people who completed the survey lives in McKeesport, PA
- 60.9% have not been tested for COVID-19
- 29.2 % say they have more than one family group living in the home
- 45.3% say that the pandemic as adversely impacted their ability to feed their families
- 43.4% do not know the warning signs of heart disease
- 30% say that the pandemic has adversely impacted their transportation and the ability to travel
- 32% say that the pandemic has adversely affected their employment status
- 35.5% report increased levels of anxiety, isolation and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic

These results are attached in graph form to this report. Adding the additional residents surveyed did not alter the percentages significantly.

Conclusion: From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and as the virus continued to spread, there is a consensus from citizens of Pittsburgh’s marginalized communities that there are inequities in access to healthcare. This inequity to quality healthcare for black and brown people is nothing new. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19”. Furthermore, according to the CDC “Racial and ethnic minority groups are experiencing higher rates of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death. Inequities in the social determinants of health have historically prevented these groups from having the same opportunities for economic, physical, and emotional health.”

African Americans make of 13% of Allegheny County’s population, according to 2019 Census estimates. According to Allegheny County Health Department:

- 20% of test of COVID-19 are among black people
- 27% of cases of COVID-19 are among black people
- 31% of hospitalizations for COVID-19 are among black people

- 20% of deaths due to COVID-19 are among black people

Dr. Debra Bogen, Director of Allegheny County Health Department, Public Information Office states, "The causes of this significant health disparity are likely many, including higher rates of underlying health conditions linked to poverty, physical environment, and limited access to medical care. Higher exposure rates to the virus due to not being able to work from home or from working in close contact with others; a greater likelihood of living in crowded homes, and other factors."

In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to COVID-19 testing was not readily available in minority communities. According to Dr. Gloster, "One of the most prominent oversights in the pandemic is access to testing. There are limited resources flowing into many of these practices, and ours is one of them, meaning it is hard to get personal protective equipment, it is hard to get the testing kits." Until recently says Dr. Gloster, the region's major hospitals chains had no testing sites in any of these communities. Many of the citizens in these communities rely on public transportation and travel to testing sites if they are exhibiting symptoms, not ideal for someone who has a communicable disease such as COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly a once in a lifetime epidemic. Many of us were not prepared for what was to come. As we watched one by one, as our neighbors, family and friends contracted this deadly disease, we were powerless to stop the viral spread. The country as a whole has been ravaged and devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, however the minorities including black and brown people throughout the country have fared much worse. According to Boston University's The COVID Tracking Project, as of December 30, 2020, minorities in Pennsylvania make up 19.7% per 100,000 cases of COVID-19, whereas white people make up only 2.8% per 100,000 of COVID-19 cases. To put that into deeper context, white people make up 80.85% of Pennsylvania's population whereas black and Latino combined, only make up 11.20% of Pennsylvania's population. Inequities in healthcare for minorities as always existed in this country, but the COVID-19 pandemic ripped the scar of inequity right off.

Community Empowerment Association is committed to finding real solutions for the people it serves. The Live Longer Project was a critical start. Our people did voice their opinion during the voting process in record numbers – which is one thing that we felt was necessary and mentioned it in our August 2020 report. That being the case, we have much work to do. Our populous must be encouraged to become aware of and continue to fight for their rights. We must understand that it will be up to us to do the necessary work to insure our positive healthy outcomes. The Live Longer Project was a step in the right direction. One of our next hurdles will be to insure that residents be accepting of the vaccine and not hesitate to get vaccinated, in the hope that further stimulation and motivation will occur to pursue a more healthy lifestyle. Community Empowerment Association, Inc. will continue to be in the forefront to educate, motivate and activate – in service to the African American Community.

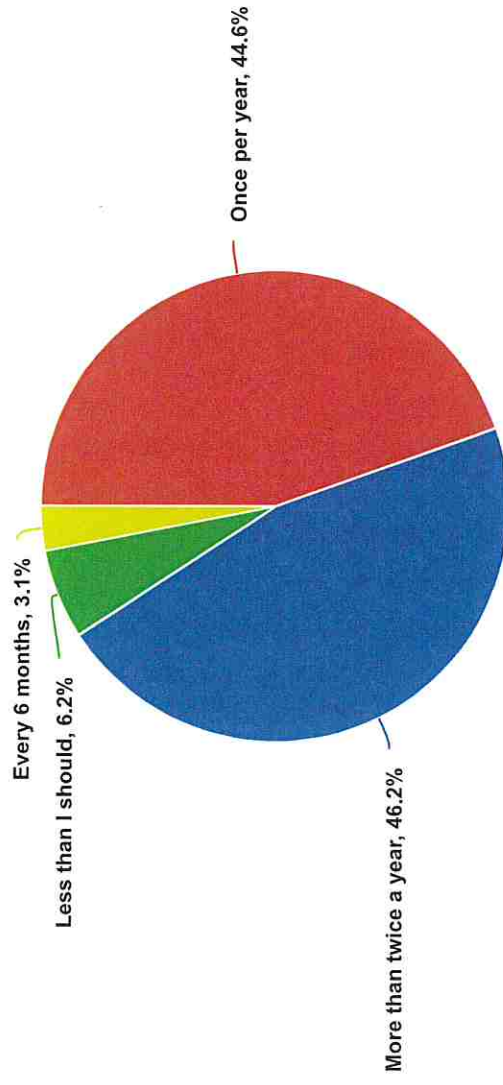
Community Empowerment Association: COVID-19 Live Longer Survey Results

COVID-19- Regular Check Ups

Forms

COVID-19 Community Survey

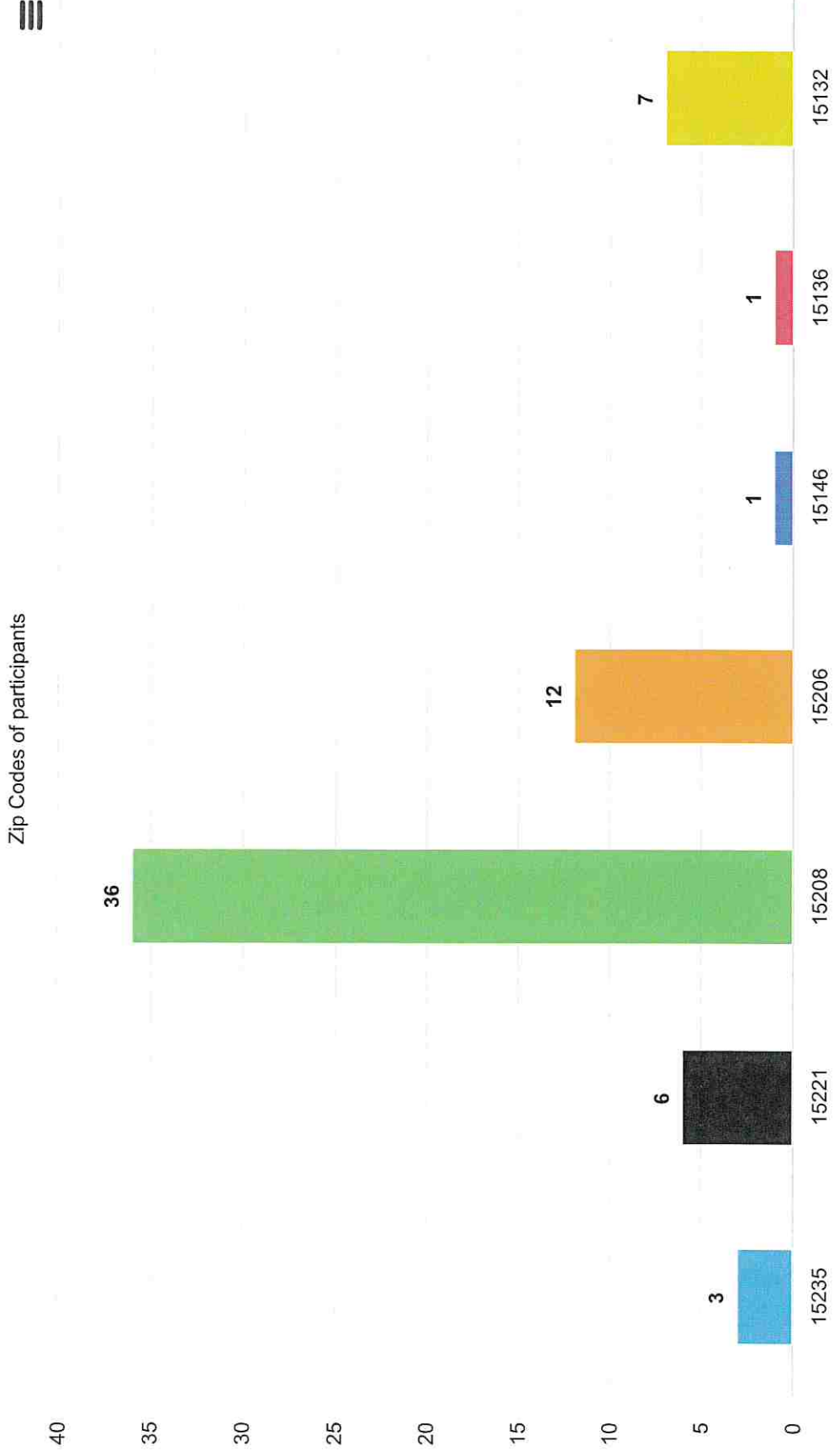
How Often Do You Get Regular Medical Check Ups



Zip Codes of Participants

Forms

COVID-19 Community Survey

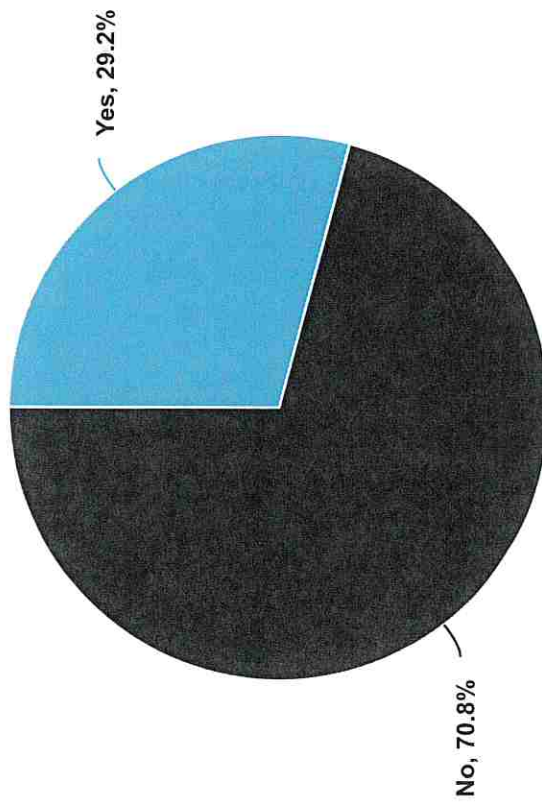


Do you have more than one family living in your home?

Forms

COVID-19 Community Survey

Do you have more than one family living in your home?

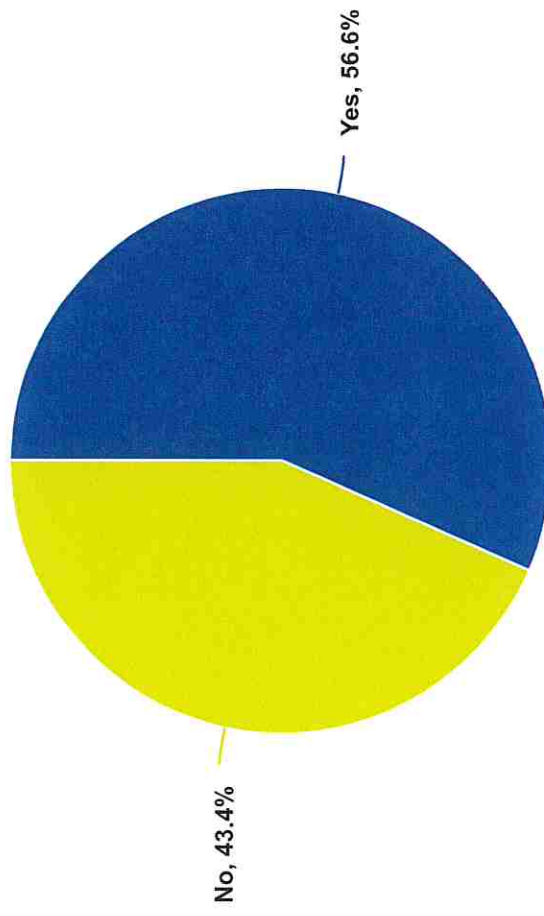


Do you know the warning signs of heart disease?

Forms

COVID-19 Community Survey

Do you know the warning signs of heart disease?

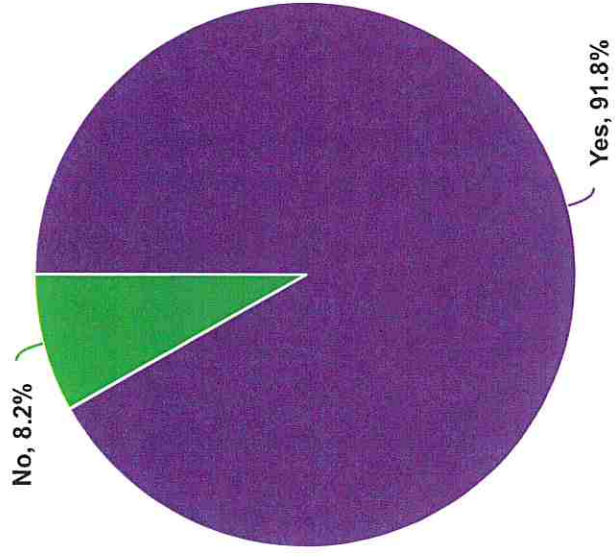


Does everyone in your family have medical insurance?

Forms

COVID-19 Community Survey

Does everyone in your house have medical insurance?

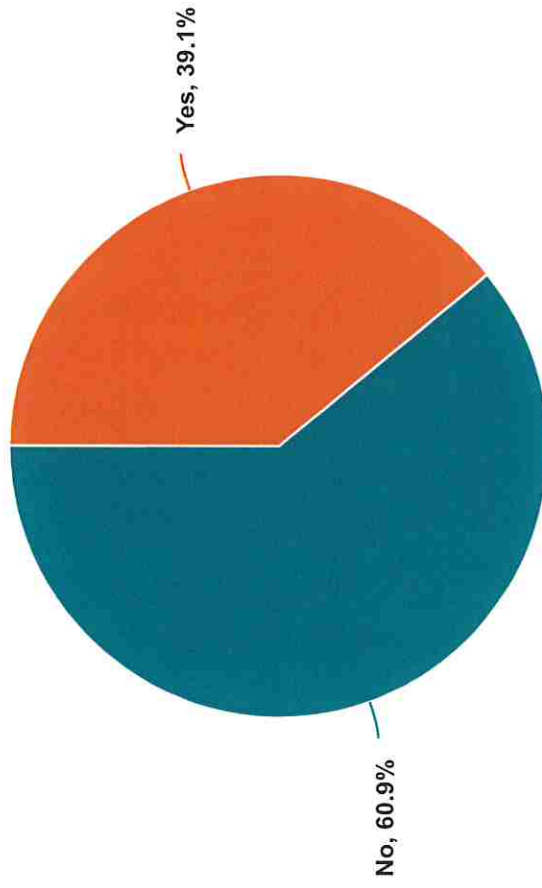


Have you been tested for COVID-19?

Forms

COVID-19 Community Survey

Have you been tested for COVID-19?

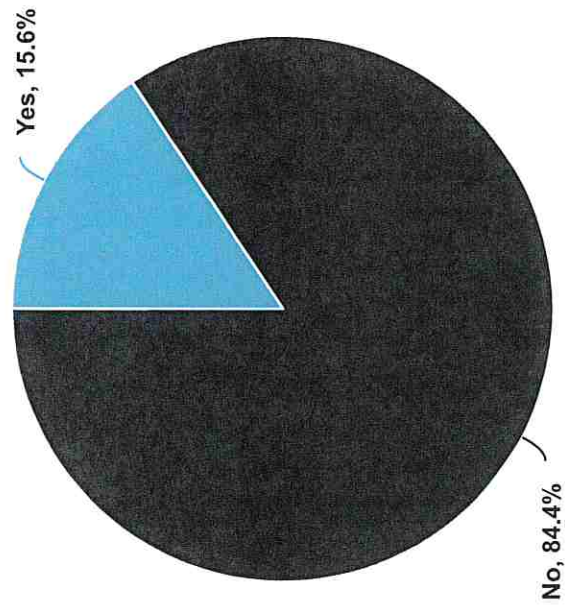


Has the pandemic affected buying family's medication?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Has the pandemic affected buying your family's medication

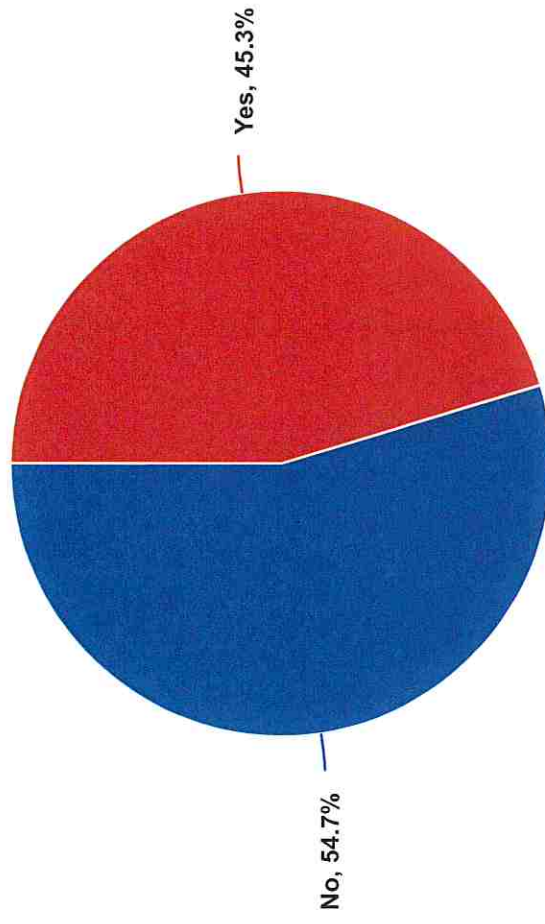


Has the pandemic affected having enough food for your family?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Has the pandemic affected having enough food for your family?

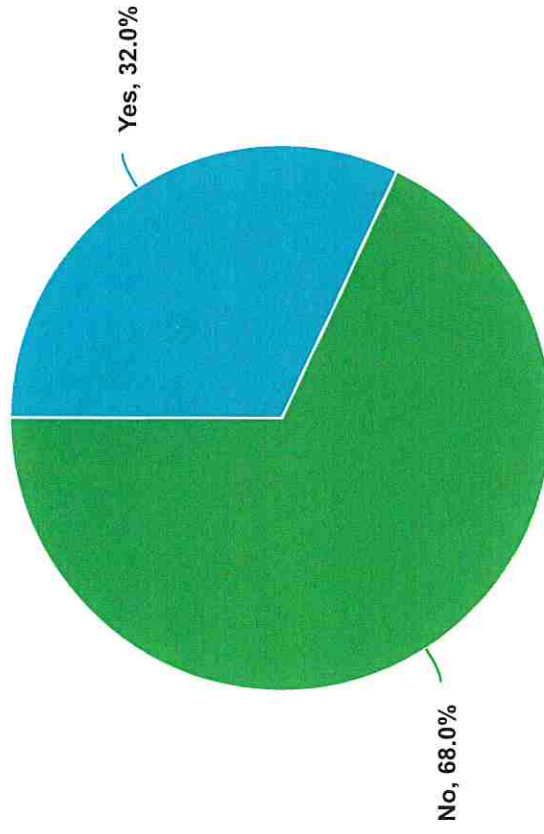


Has the pandemic affected your employment status?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Has the pandemic affected your employment status?

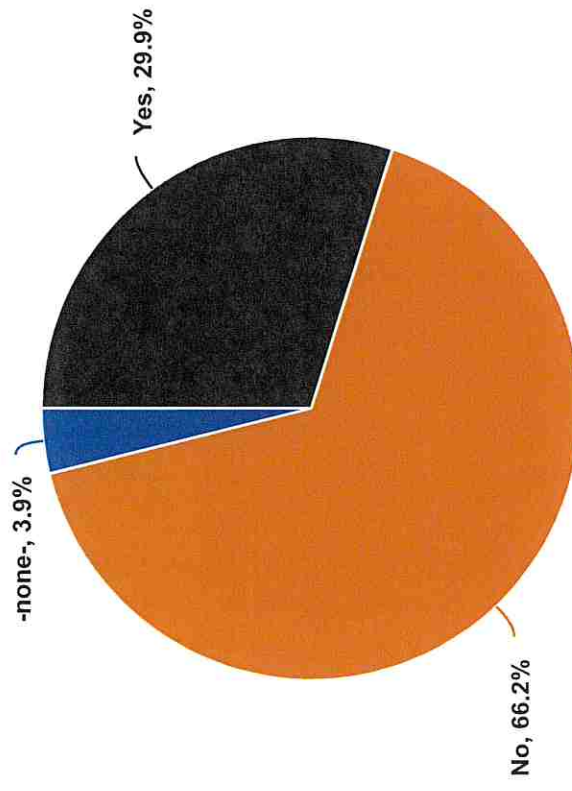


Has the pandemic affected your transportation?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Has the pandemic affected your transportation?

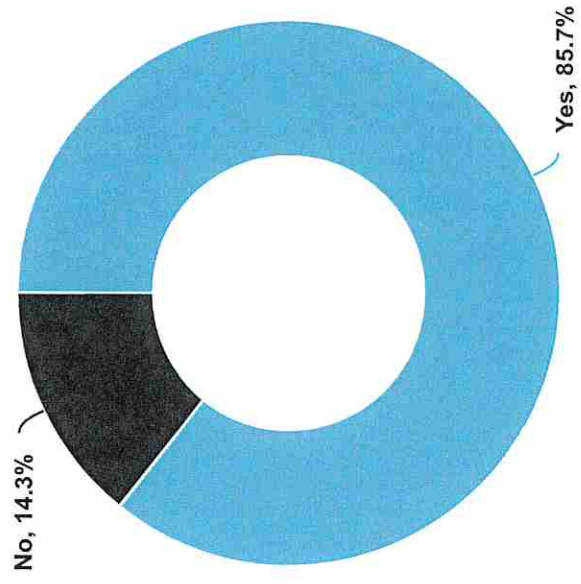


Do you access to the internet?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Do you have access to the internet?

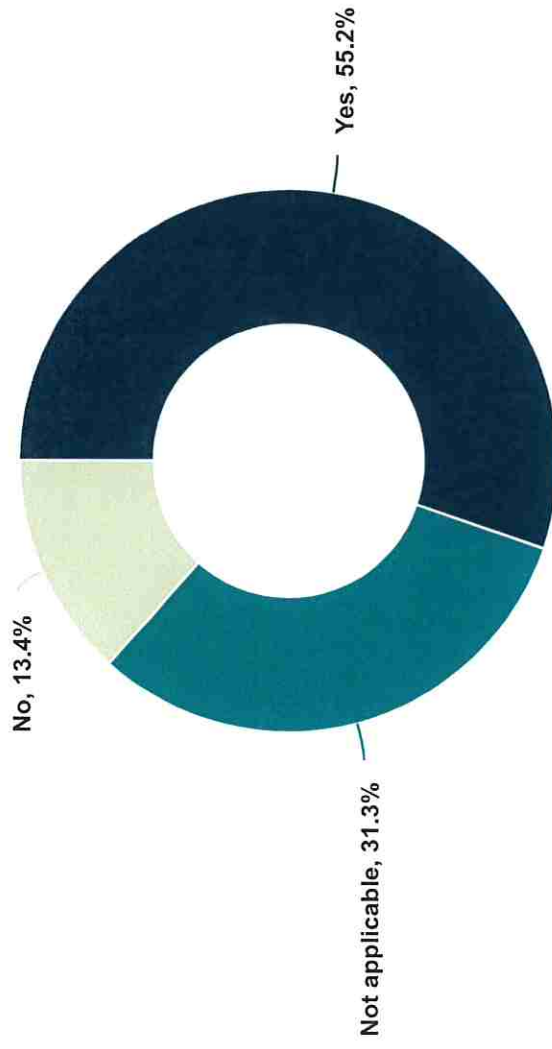


Do you have laptops or computers for your school age children?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Do you have laptops or computers for your school age children?

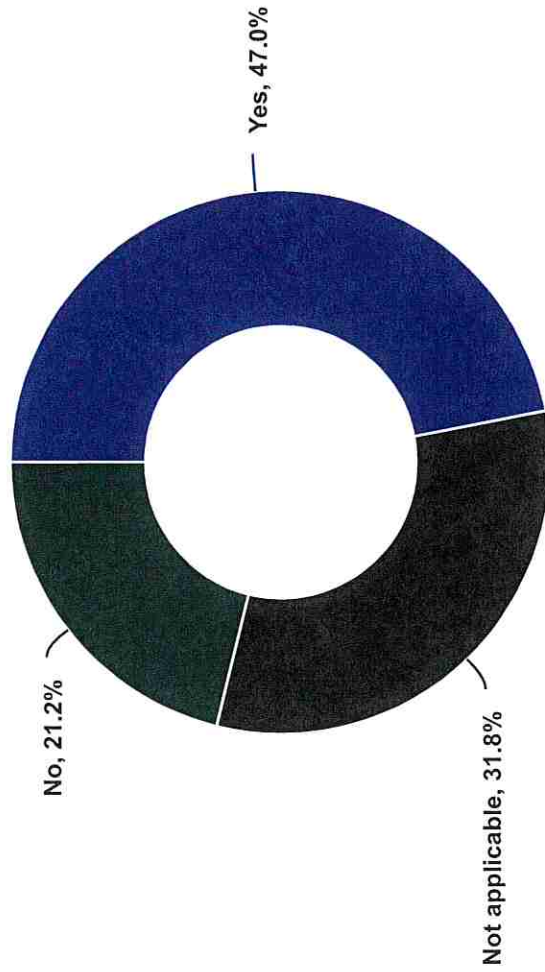


Are you able to help school age children in your home with their homework?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Are you able to help school age children in your home with homework?

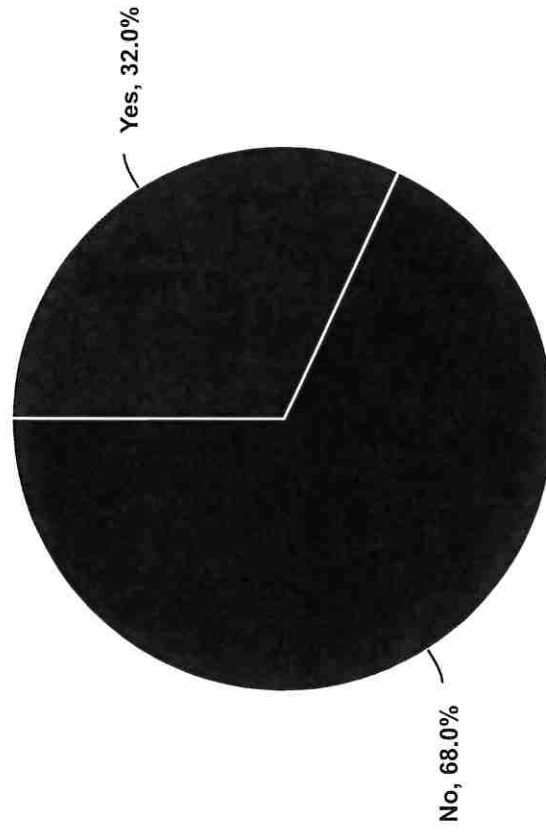


Has the pandemic affected your ability to pay rent, mortgage or utilities?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

Has the pandemic affected your ability to pay rent, mortgage or utilities?



How else has the pandemic adversely affected you and your family?

Forms

Questions 9 and 10

What other ways has the pandemic affected you and your family?

