LONDON COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE SURVEY: WEEK TWENTY/TWENTY ONE

FIELDWORK 21st – 2nd September 2020

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Community Response Survey

The COVID-19 Community Response Survey asks civil society organisations who work in London a small number of questions to understand the impact of COVID-19 and associated policy measures, such as social distancing, on vulnerable populations in the capital.

The first week of the survey focused on asking baseline questions to capture organisational profiles, and included a small number of questions relating to the immediate impact post-lockdown of COVID-19.

Surveys from week two onwards are shorter, and ask organisations a number of questions about changes they have seen in the last week.

This week's survey collected data over two weeks.

Results from the survey are shared with responding organisations and with decision-makers supporting the pan-London response to COVID-19.

Cohort details

The questions were sent to more than 360 Civil Society organisations who have agreed to take part. The organisations were recruited through existing contacts and mailing lists held by the GLA Community Engagement and Equality & Fairness teams.

In addition, larger organisations and infrastructure providers were asked to cascade the invitation down to their networks.

A total of 103 organisations responded in full or in part to the week seven questions, which were live between Monday 21st and Wednesday 2nd September 2020.

Note: due to the relatively small sample size and the targeted way in which recruitment was conducted, it is important not to extrapolate from any findings in the weekly survey to all civil society organisations in London or any particular population of Londoners. Results from the weekly survey should be used alongside other sources of intelligence to understand the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities.

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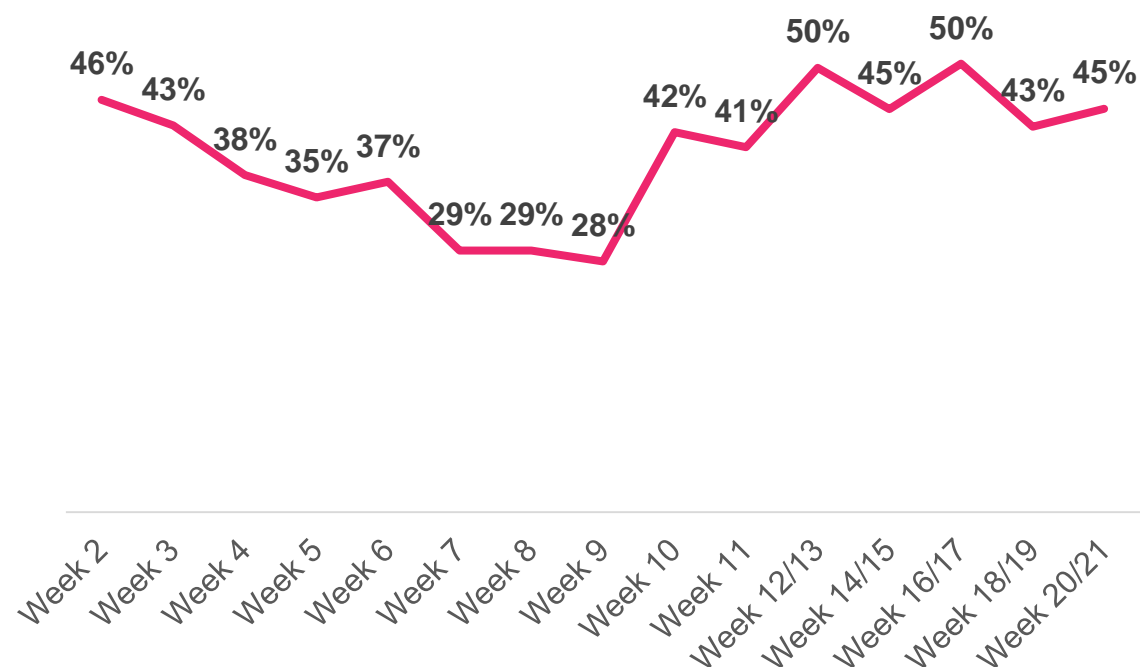
CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE SEEKING SUPPORT

This week 45 per cent of responding organisations (45) saw an increase in the number of people seeking support in the last two weeks.

41 reported little change in numbers and 15 reported a decrease

Organisations working with BAME Londoners were particularly likely to report an increase in demand (65%). This is consistent with a pattern we have seen across surveys.

Fewer organisations that work with disabled people (31%) reported an increase in demand.

Change in numbers seeking support (number of organisations)

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CHANGE IN NUMBERS SEEKING SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC ISSUES

We asked responding organisations to tell us whether the number of people seeking support for a range of specific issues was higher, the same or lower compared to last week. We asked them to only answer if they deal with and have seen each of the issues. This week we have seen a noticeable increase in the proportion of organisations experiencing an increase in demand around mental health, access to benefits, digital connectivity and access to care.

Issue	Proportion reporting higher demand	No. of responses	Issue	Proportion reporting higher demand	No. of responses
Employment	65%	52	Childcare or Parenting	35%	34
Mental health	**59%**	**64**	Access to health	33%	51
Housing	57%	44	Domestic violence	33%	40
Poverty	54%	56	Immigration issues	31%	39
Access to benefits	**50%**	**54**	Hate crime	30%	33
Digital connectivity	**48%**	**54**	Discrimination	28%	36
Homelessness	47%	38	Grief bereavement	28%	29
Education	46%	41	Access to food	27%	67
Debt issues	45%	49	Substance misuse	27%	30
Capacity Building/organisations or volunteers	43%	42	**Access to care**	**22%**	**41**
Isolation and loneliness	40%	63	Victim support	20%	25
Physical health	39%	51			

Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey

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WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOUR ORGANISATION IS FACING THIS WEEK?

We asked responding organisations to tell us the three biggest challenges they were facing last week. The most common challenges are still longer-term funding and recovery planning, however we have seen an increase in groups citing capacity due to staff working from home and working with local authorities.

Challenge	Number of organisations
Funding sustainability beyond the crisis	44
Planning for recovery/easing of lockdown	21
Capacity - due to increased demand	20
Delivering services whilst following social distancing guidelines	17
Funding general	17
Funding access to urgent funding for new needs	16
Reaching vulnerable groups	15
Staff wellbeing and mental health	11
Capacity - due to staff working from home	**10**
Working with local authorities	**10**

Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey

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WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOUR BENEFICIARIES ARE FACING THIS WEEK?

We asked responding organisations to tell us the three biggest challenges their beneficiaries were facing in the last week. This week the top issues identified remain consistent with W18/19, loss of employment, low income, mental health & social isolation are the top four issues.

Challenge	Number of organisations
Loss of jobs or lack of employment opportunities	42
Mental health	38
Low income	33
Social Isolation	25
Digital exclusion	24
Access to food and essentials	16
Social distancing rules	13
Inadequate accommodation	12
No recourse to public funds	9

Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey

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BENEFICIARY CHALLENGES BY BENEFICIARY GROUP

Do biggest beneficiary challenges vary by the main groups of beneficiaries organisations work with? Percentages shown are of responding organisations, and are relative to the cohort overall.

Organisations working with disabled Londoners were particularly likely to mention mental health (58%) and loss of jobs (50%).

Organisations working with young people were much more likely to mention multi-lingual support (58%) and home schooling (13%).

Organisations working with BAME Londoners were much more likely than other organisations to mention loss of jobs (60%) and more likely to mention low income (55%) digital exclusion (45%).

Organisations working with low income Londoners were more likely to mention loss of jobs (52%) access to food (30%) and No Recourse to Public Funds (22%).

What are your and your beneficiaries' biggest concerns relating to Covid and transition?

The most commonly occurring theme related to employment and the labour market (18)

This was followed by fear of a second wave (15), which was linked to wider concerns about the repercussions of another lockdown.

"We are hoping to reinstate activities at the community centre in September and are working on strategies to incorporate current Covid 19 government guidelines. We are hoping to continue with our food distribution service as many people are losing their jobs after being furloughed so the already very high debt poverty is increasing in White City."

"A lack of employment prospects is the major concern expressed by low income communities and young people we have interviewed as part of our Pandemic Stories participatory action research project."

"Our 'visitors' (beneficiaries) are very concerned about a second wave occurring, and the prospect of further isolation (and the effects on their emotional health and well being), and the continued loss of work and the inability to find new work."

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What are your and your beneficiaries' biggest concerns relating to Covid and transition?

Uncertainty about the future and poor guidance was a reoccurring theme (12)

As was mental health and levels of anxiety within communities (12)

"Confusion about how to stay safe. Difficulty abiding by rules if this impacts income."

"Struggling with changes in rules and knowing what is allowed."

"Lack of clarity about the rules and lots of conflicting information being given."

"Challenge of mixed messages re guidance. anxiety for vulnerable adults re recovery plans and services reopening."

"Some *(in the Traveller community)* were afraid to go out to the shops. This anxiety continues and they are not reassured by current guidance. Many have several long-term health conditions and there is particular anxiety within and about this group."

"Some of our beneficiaries are anxious about resuming their everyday life. One of our main concerns is about disadvantaged BAME women falling in the gaps and not being supported by mainstream services."

"Mental health - we are struggling with people having break downs, violence towards us and verbal abuse where people are struggling."

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What are your and your beneficiaries' biggest concerns relating to Covid and transition?

A number of groups raised concern about limited provision for rough sleepers or those needing accommodation, and concern about rent arrears and evictions (10)

Concerns about funding were also raised by respondents (9), particularly in relation to increased costs relating to Covid and the need for sustainable funding.

"lack of shelters/hostels for rough sleepers. once a referral made to Streetlink it'll take long time before the rough sleeper is offered accommodation."

"Young people's homelessness and accommodation need are mostly being ignored - despite the other attention to rough sleeping and the lifting of the eviction ban."

"Many of our clients have expressed anxiety about the lack of attention they have received from the authorities with regard to their wider issues such as housing. They feel as though these services have been put back."

"Funding to deliver new activities on line , promoting our services . Following government guide lines , for the safety of re opening our centre and the carers and resuming activities that cannot be delivered on line ."

"Meeting the costs of being Covid-secure (returning to in person support, PPE for staff etc). Sustainable multi year funding."

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Organisations that deliver food aid were asked what key challenges in providing food do they anticipate in the next 6-12 months

The most common responses related to worry about access to food (10)

And concern about increased need due to loss of jobs (10)

"Getting access to food for us to distribute. We have had grants over the crisis and huge donations of food from local people from March - late July . But now they are slowing down markedly."

There won't be adequate distribution of food parcels.

Sustainability of surplus food sources

"With the possibility of a second wave and / or the threat of an economic downturn, the food project anticipates that within the next 6 months we will still need to be providing an emergency food support to those most in need in our community, including those that will be further affected by unemployment, poverty and a decline in their emotional wellbeing."

"We are struggling with the amount of people the challenge will be to sustain it whilst also offering help"

CITY INTELLIGENCE

Organisations that deliver food aid were asked what key challenges in providing food do they anticipate in the next 6-12 months

Within the context, groups raised concern about funding sources (9)

"Money! We expect due to the COVID crisis their will be loss of jobs/homes and subsequently more people on the streets. To help feed these vulnerable people and provide essentials we have to rely on donations from the public and it is just not enough."

"Transitioning to a sustainable service as funding for emergency relief ends. Engaging clients as we move over to low-cost instead of free service."

And the loss of volunteers (8)

"Delivery services, as we are already struggling already with many of our volunteers heading back to work. We are also concerned about our capacity, we are currently giving food to around 500 people a month and this prevents us from giving specialized advice and help to those most in need."

"We are delivering food through bicycle deliveries by volunteers. Volunteer numbers are dropping fast as people are un-furloughed and as the weather gets colder and more windy. We don't have the funds to by vans/hire drivers."

ANY OTHER ISSUES

The most common issue raised related to housing and homelessness (8).

"The number of rough sleepers has gone up after the end to Everybody in' project on 4th July. Due to adhering to physical distancing hostels which used to offer shelter to the rough sleeper can't operate with full capacity hence rough sleepers stay on the street for a long time."

"We are still concerned about what happens next, with regard to the ending of the covid hotels, the lifting of the eviction ban and the lack of winter night shelter accommodation that will be available because of covid restrictions"

Impending homelessness for those who have Leave To Remain and a right to work but no recourse to public funds is the biggest emerging issue.

"We are aware of vulnerable people who chose not to engage or found it difficult to engage over the past 5 months and remained street homeless and not cared for. This includes people who felt safer socially distancing on the street.   We are thinking about ways to engage those people again with any service we can provide although due to safety precautions we are unable to provide drop in facilities which hard to reach homeless people attract."

ANY OTHER ISSUES

A number of concerns relating to the impact of transition on civil society were also raised. This includes rising costs, staff redeployments having to return to 'normal' services whilst need for food aid remains high, and the difficulty in reaching vulnerable groups who are unlikely to use pre-booking systems, and a reduction in collaboration.

"We are seeing growing costs in being able to deliver services: we are maintaining a strong online offer in order to safely reach as many people as possible, while starting to bring back small face to face groups for those most in need. This takes more resource than ever!"

"Many organisations have been able to utilise their staff during lockdown to run food banks and do deliveries. Now that organisations are running 'normal' services the demand on staff is higher and this is impacting on them and organisations."

"We normally engage large groups in boxing fitness and fit and fed. However, the size we can work with had reduced and we can't book people in to attend, as we want to engage the most disadvantaged and they are the least likely to book."

"The momentum and joined-up working that we saw in the response to the crisis is starting to slow down and it feels as though people are reverting to their old disconnected ways, especially local authorities. Some recent decisions is setting up parallel structures between statutory and voluntary sector, or between health and social care seem to be getting set up along old fault-lines."

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NEXT STEPS

The next survey will cover two weeks, being in the field between 7th September – 16th September

Results available on Monday 21st September.

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