



United States House of Representatives
Ways and Means Committee

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Statement from Nicholas R. Hart, Ph.D., Data Foundation President

Subject: Findings from the COVID Impact Survey Relevant to Understand the Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color

Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement in response to the hearing on “The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color.”

The Data Foundation is a non-partisan Washington, DC-based non-profit that develops and encourages strategies for data to be useful in decision-making and for society writ large. We support efforts that promote open data, evidence-based policymaking, and the accessibility of information. This brief statement offers insights from a project we launched in April called the COVID Impact Survey, which specifically fills information voids for decision-makers to understand how the American people are experiencing the pandemic and the behaviors being taken across the country.

About the COVID Impact Survey

Decision-makers and researchers alike need clear information and trusted data sources about the prevalence of coronavirus, as well as its potential impacts on the American people. With the high levels of COVID-19 incidence reported across the country, a nationally- and regionally-representative survey that encapsulates markers of incidence as well as other key physical health, mental health, and economic information can help decision-makers and researchers understand impacts caused by the pandemic.

With funding provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, the Data Foundation launched the COVID Impact Survey in April 2020. The COVID Impact Survey fills identified gaps for researchers and decision-makers that can benefit key public health and economic policy decisions in coming weeks and months, while also providing a valuable resource for the research community in the years ahead. This survey asks health and economic questions in the same instrument with a random sample, providing national results as well as results for 18 states and cities (California, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New York, Oregon, Texas, Atlanta, Baltimore, Birmingham, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Phoenix, and Pittsburgh). Initial summary statistics and data are now publicly available at the national level and for selected geographies for two waves of survey data collection.

Relevant Findings Related to Disproportionate Impacts

The second wave of data collected for the Data Foundation’s COVID Impact Survey in early May highlights considerable disparities between non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and Hispanics. These disparities are evident in how non-white Hispanics and blacks experience stay-at-home orders,

education disruptions, employment changes, and food security. Below are key statistically significant differences between these communities identified in the survey:

Knowledge of COVID-19 Mortality

Non-Hispanic blacks were much more likely to report knowledge of mortality associated with COVID-19. 14 percent of blacks reported having a family member or close friend die since March from COVID-19 or respiratory illness, 11 percentage points more than the 3 percent for whites.

Differences in the Experience with COVID-19

While blacks and Hispanics are taking measures like avoiding crowded places and practicing social distancing at the same general rate as whites, considerable variation exists for other behavioral responses to the pandemic with statistically significant differences from whites:

- 54 percent of Blacks (+16 p.p.) wiped packages entering their homes, compared to 38 percent for whites;
- 68 percent of blacks (+9 p.p.) avoided contact with high-risk people, compared to 59 percent for whites;
- 89 percent of blacks (+8 p.p.) and 87 percent of Hispanics (+6 p.p.) wore facemasks, compared with just 81 percent for whites;
- 46 percent of blacks (+18 p.p.) and 37 percent of Hispanics (9 p.p.) reported stockpiling food or water, compared to 28 percent of whites; and
- 19 percent of blacks (+11 p.p.) reported staying home because they felt unwell, compared to 8 percent of whites.

Government restrictions and stay-at-home orders have also disproportionately affected blacks and Hispanics according to the COVID Impact Survey's May results. Respondents indicated the following statistically significant differences in plans that were changed by the following restrictions:

- Stay at home orders and quarantines changed plans for 41 percent of blacks (+12 p.p.) and 37 percent of Hispanics (+8 p.p.), compared to 29 percent of whites;
- Bans on gatherings of 10 or more people affected plans for 48 percent of blacks (+18 p.p.) and 44 percent of Hispanics (+14 p.p.), compared to 30 percent of whites;
- Workplace closures affected plans for 45 percent of blacks (+14 p.p.) and 43 percent of Hispanics (+12 p.p.), compared to 31 percent of whites;
- Reduced public transportation affected plans for 45 percent of blacks (+13 p.p.) and 40 percent of Hispanics (+8 p.p.), compared to 32 percent of whites; and
- Closing of places of worship changed plans for 41 percent of blacks (+8 p.p.) and 42 percent of Hispanics (+9 p.p.), compared to 33 percent of whites.

Education and training closures also disproportionately affect blacks and Hispanics, according to responses with the following statistically significant differences:

- K-12 school closures changed plans for 38 percent of blacks (+9 p.p.) and 39 percent of Hispanics (+10 p.p.), compared to 29 percent of whites;
- Pre-K and child care closures changed plans for 40 percent of blacks (+9 p.p.) and 41 percent of Hispanics (+10 p.p.), compared to 31 percent of whites; and

- College or training closures changed plans for 43 percent of blacks (+12 p.p.) and 40 percent of Hispanics (+9 p.p.), compared to 31 percent of whites.

Economic Security

In addition to documented changes in behaviors and the impacts of restrictions imposed across the country, the COVID Impact Survey collects data to measure and monitor the effects of the recession and economic changes on household security. The following are statistically significant differences for key economic metrics:

- 34 percent of blacks (+21 p.p.) indicated they would not be able to pay for an unexpected expense of \$400, compared to 13 percent of whites; and
- 58 percent of blacks (+7 p.p.) indicated they did not work for pay over the prior week in May, compared to 51 percent of whites.

Food Insecurity

Nationally, while much attention has been offered to consider the strategies for addressing food insecurity, the COVID Impact Survey documents high levels of insecurity across the country. The following are statistically significant differences for the survey's food security measures:

- 41 percent of blacks (+22 p.p.) and 43 percent of Hispanics (+24 p.p.) worried often or sometimes that food would run out before they got more money to buy food over the prior 30 days, compared to 19 percent for whites;
- 37 percent of blacks (+23 p.p.) and 34 percent of Hispanics (+20 p.p.) indicated that often or sometimes food bought for the household didn't last and they didn't have money to purchase more over the prior 30 days, compared to 14 percent for whites; and
- 16 percent of blacks (+11 p.p.) received assistance from food pantries, compared to 5 percent for whites.

Conclusion

The Data Foundation is actively working to produce and disseminate analysis from the COVID Impact Survey to support decision-making. We are also deliberately producing a de-identified microdata file for researchers to quickly use as an input for ongoing projects to meet the needs of decision-makers across the country in determining reasoned, appropriate responses to the pandemic. For the first two waves of the COVID Impact Survey, results are now available as open data; a third wave will be published in mid-June.

The disparities in how persons of color are experiencing and responding to the pandemic and the economic recession are evident based on data collected from the COVID Impact Survey. Armed with this information, decision-makers have an opportunity to design national, state, and local policies that can address the disproportionate impacts on these communities in the American public. Regardless of how policymakers and Congress choose to proceed in considering policy options, one thing is clear: the disparities related to the pandemic are both real and significant. These disparities cannot be ignored and meaningful policy solutions are needed.