

Economic Challenges for Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence During Covid-19

In their own words...

Providers Working in Culturally-Specific Organizations

In a national survey on the economic challenges facing survivors due to Covid-19, LGBTQ+, Immigrant, and Survivors of Color were among some of the hardest hit during the onset and shut-down period (March-May 2020). The survey was completed by 608 domestic and sexual violence service providers and advocates, 278 of whom worked in culturally-specific organizations. **Here are the challenges these respondents said survivors faced:**

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Health and Safety



“Survivors calling the hotline was actually low because people are housed with their abusive partner and cannot use their safe space to do so, such as at work or school. Many calls have been made late at night whispering or stepping outside to the backyard.”

“My undocumented clients who are working for cash pay and are not able to receive benefits or continue working have become even more impoverished or dependent on abusive partners. Their limited English makes it difficult for them to communicate with schools/teachers and help their children with schoolwork. It is even challenging for them to understand how to utilize Zoom for their kids or the other technology required.”



Child-Related Challenges

“Usually when a client doesn't have access to a computer or WiFi and needs assistance, they come to my office in person and get assistance and guidance from me. With COVID-19 it's not safe for the client or myself to be close to each other; and even if I assisted them, some of the cases are not a priority at the moment. Clients are just as afraid and at risk as us at the agency. Everyone could benefit from getting financial help, people that normally wouldn't need financial assistance now need it.”

Money and Resources



“Most of the survivors I serve have become unemployed and face hurdles paying rent. They express shame when asking for financial assistance, and our organization has limited funds for victim services. Some survivors are still waiting for stimulus checks and many had difficulties getting unemployment benefits either because employers were telling them that they were not eligible or because they did not know how to file for unemployment.”



Financial Relief

“Many of our clients have pending documentation status and mixed documentation status/citizenship households. ICE activity has not decreased, and the fear has increased. Many are concerned that if they access any benefits/assistance that their pending residency or citizenship applications will be hit with a “public charge.” This includes those who are fearful to get the COVID-19 test or go to the hospital for treatment.”

Legal and Systems





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Recommendations for Policy & Practice

Supporting LGBTQ+, Immigrant, & Survivors and Communities of Color During Covid-19

Programs, advocates, and survivors, alike, are doing more with less and filling the gaps created by systems' failures.

In our [survey on the economic impact of Covid-19](#), advocates who work with programs or organizations that serve specific populations (i.e. immigrant, LGBTQ+ and/or communities of color) reported that two-thirds of the survivors they worked with mentioned **lost income/job and trouble paying bills**, half or nearly half mentioned **trouble getting food, concern about the stimulus check, and trouble accessing public benefits**, and one-third mentioned a **myriad of legal, child, and other health-related challenges**.

Advocates and programs are struggling to meet the increasing demands and multiple needs. Among the same advocates, two-thirds reported their own challenges with **shifting to remote/virtual advocacy** or programming, one-third reported having to **turn away survivors**, and one-fifth are worried about **reduced funding for programs and services**.





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Supporting LGBTQ+, Immigrant, & Survivors and Communities of Color During Covid-19

For Donors, Funders & Policy Makers

1 Prioritize Flexible Funding To Programs

- **Maintain, increase, or expand funding** to DV/SA programs serving immigrant, LGBTQ+ and communities of color. (See more funding recommendations [here](#).)
- Enhance **highly flexible funding** in grant-making and **minimize reporting requirements** and other administrative burdens.
- **Talk openly with the organizations you fund** about their changing needs and their capacity to provide funds directly to survivors.
- Provide resources, funding, and training to serve survivors with **mental health challenges**, especially to programs working with survivors who are multiply marginalized (i.e. Asian immigrant survivors experience safety, legal, as well as anti-Asian harassment/discrimination due to Covid-19).

2 Target State/Federal Economic Relief Directly Toward Survivors

- Our data showed that survivors' economic needs are multiple and varied. **Get creative about getting money directly into survivors' hands.** Whether you're a funder, policy-maker, or program, there are [local](#) and [national](#) and [culturally specific](#) models of what this can look like.
- **Rethink what it means to respond to survivors in the context of an economic downturn.** Challenge assumptions about money, survivorship, and be willing to start fresh with programming, funding, policies.
- Reduce barriers to **public benefits, housing assistance & unemployment.**
- Pass **additional Covid-19 relief** targeted towards survivors, including immigrant survivors.
- Strategize with advocates to **stop stimulus checks from going to abusive partners or legal guardians/caretakers** (i.e. for survivors with disabilities and/or older adults).



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3 Ensure Housing Protections & Broaden Access to Rental Assistance

- Extend the **moratorium on evictions, foreclosures, & provide rent relief** to prevent homelessness.
- **Stop the spread of misinformation** about immigrant survivors' eligibility for shelter/housing and **enforce immigrant housing rights and protections**. In many cases there are no immigration requirements for emergency shelter, transitional housing, affordable housing, or emergency rental assistance made available directly to states through the CARES Act. See more [here](#).
- Federal regulating agencies, servicers, and Congress can **prevent a “flood” of foreclosures**, and the disparate impact on Black and Latino homeowners, through data collection and policy analysis, targeting interventions (including direct resources) to communities and families facing barriers to access current mortgage assistance and foreclosure prevention, and can even create automatic forbearances and payment plans for those struggling with mortgages due to Covid-19. See more [here](#).
- Shelter and transitional housing programs should **review eligibility policies** (and programming), reducing eligibility barriers based on immigration status, race, religion, sexuality/gender identity and income/employment.
- **Use the moment to build and expand partnerships** with tenant rights, housing/homeless services and advocates, mutual aid, and beyond, to invest in safe, fair, and affordable community housing. See more [here](#).

4 Use the Drive to Digital Services to Ensure Tech & Language Access for Survivors

- Provide funds and support to help **programs provide and survivors access digital services**, including cell and internet service, computers, and tablets.
- Courts should provide **virtual hearings, language access, allow for virtual advocate accompaniment, and prioritize cases** that most impact survivor safety and economic security.
- Make sure you **communicate the economic and other resources you can provide** on websites, in outreach, and other channels so survivors know they can come to you. Programs in multilingual communities should **prioritize translating outreach materials**.





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For Programs & Advocates

1 Get Creative & Offer Flexibility With Your Program Funds

- Dedicate emergency funds from unrestricted funding streams to support **immigrant survivors' legal fees.**
- **Prioritize emergency & unrestricted funds and supplies** to survivors and families experiencing multiple barriers to economic relief or assistance.
- **Review intake, selection & eligibility guidelines** from a perspective of equity and access for survivors who experience multiple barriers to traditional services.
- **Use existing resources in flexible ways.** Flexible funding is key to supporting survivors' realities.

2 Familiarize Yourself With Your State's Policies & Guidance Around Covid-19 -- and use what you know!

- **Remedies and processes are continuously evolving** (e.g. immigration, schooling, food distribution, legal, health). Stay informed with updates from TA providers, culturally-specific organizations and other social justice resources. (See list of partners in the footer.)
- Use [this data](#) and your own insights to **educate and advocate for the economic and safety needs** of survivors due to Covid-19 with donors and local/state policy makers. (See [here](#) for other helpful data sources.)
- Develop relationships with **non-profit law firms, pro-bono legal services and reputable attorneys** who use sliding fee scales.
- **Regularly review "Know Your Rights" information** with survivors living at home and in shelter. Build skills to talk regularly with immigrant survivors about immigration safety planning for themselves, family members, and their children.





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For Programs & Advocates

3 Build & Use Partnerships to Identify & Expand Access to Essential Resources

- Identify resources and partners in your community who can help with **meal provision, food pantry, rental subsidies, providing computers/internet service**. Ensure advocates are talking with survivors about these needs.
- Use creativity in making safety & support plans with survivors. **Consider informal networks of support**, skills & talents that can be used to generate income, and strategies for staying safer at home with their partner.
- **Use this moment to start economic conversations**, understand survivor values, prioritize goals based on their self-defined needs. See more [here](#).
- Identify partners and resources who can help **address the language barriers in access to** stimulus funding, social services, courts, public health information/guidance, etc.

4 Institutionalize & Normalize Advocate Self Care

- Challenge organizational and **leadership expectations about workloads and output**, especially when fewer or the same staff are doing more.
- **Address staff stress, overwhelm, and isolation in intentional and meaningful ways:** Create flexible schedules, change number/type of meetings, increase pay/benefits, offer paid time-off, and revisit org policies and practices to ensure they allow staff to show up and take care.
- Be intentional and tailored with each staff about **appreciating and recognizing their work and contributions** - individual and as teams. We need to make sure this movement takes care of its people!
- Work with survivors and advocates to identify new ways to **create community and share culture virtually**, while in-person gathering is restricted. Reimagine things like: prepping traditional meals, playing traditional music during support group, doing cultural crafts, etc.

See websites of partners in the footer of this document for more information and resources to guide your advocacy -- with survivors and in funding/policy. Select resources are re-posted [here](#).
More data briefs and recommendations to come!

