

Pandemic Recovery Project Community Impacts Survey Summary of Results

June 10, 2022





Summary and Key Findings

As a part of the Pandemic Recovery Project between The City of Williams Lake and the Social Planning Council, community members within the region were invited to participate in a survey to help understand the impact the pandemic had on the community. The survey was available online for six weeks starting November 10, 2021 and was promoted through social media and other regional marketing and communications channels. In total, 393 responses were received.

This survey aimed to understand unmet community health and well-being needs, with particular attention to the social determinants of health, and to the social, economic, and physical environments that support health and well-being and their evolution throughout the pandemic.

The following table highlights the key findings from the survey:

Mental Health and Well-being	Economic Impact
 <p>Social connection, loss of connection with family/friends, and mental health were the top challenges that respondents experienced during the pandemic.</p> <p>Overall community wellness (including overall, individual, interpersonal, and social wellness) and mental health levels have declined since the pandemic began. Many respondents chose the words frustrated, anxious, worried, overwhelmed, and isolated to describe themselves in the current day.</p> <p>Other key mental health and well-being impacts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Alcohol and marijuana consumption increased across young to middle aged respondents.» Younger populations experienced worse effects on their wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic relative to older respondents.» Youth experienced disproportionate increases in alcohol use and violence in their relationships/households during the pandemic. <p>Respondents commented that they were unsure where to find Mental Health (MH) services, there was a lack of MH services in community, and that MH services are too expensive during the pandemic.</p>	 <p>Financial security was the 3rd largest challenge during the pandemic. Overall survey results indicated that although some of the respondent's household's incomes were impacted during the pandemic, most respondents' incomes have recovered.</p> <p>Other key economic impacts and challenges that the community faces are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» More than half of all respondents reduced their personal spending and nearly half of all respondents reduced their household spending since the pandemic began.» There has been a decline in housing and food affordability since the pandemic began.

Physical Health



Despite physical health being identified as the 4th largest challenge during the pandemic, survey results highlight that there are few respondents in community that have lasting physical symptoms from COVID-19.

Indirect challenges that can affect survey respondents' physical health include:

- » Many respondents could not access health care or have delayed routine health care appointments due to the pandemic.

Respondents reported a shortage of doctors as a key challenge to accessing services within the community.

Community Supports and Resources



Approximately, one fifth of community members did not know where to access services. When respondents were asked where they would go to find or access services if they needed, respondents said online (36%), through their doctors or medical institutions (12%), directly to local service agencies (12%), and rely on word of mouth (5%).

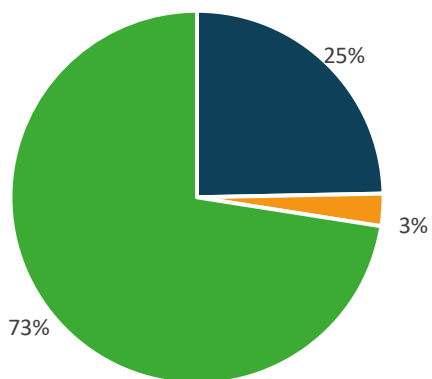
Other key challenges respondents faced when trying to access services during the pandemic include:

- » A considerable number of respondents were not comfortable accessing services online, particularly youth.
- » Respondents from outlying community areas (i.e., 150 Mile, Horsefly, Likely, Wildwood, McLeese Lake, Springhouse) struggled to access services due to internet challenges.
- » Service closures and reduced service hours impacted respondents' ability to access services.

Demographics

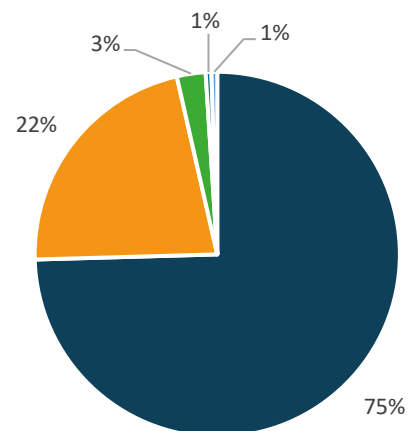
Respondents were asked the following demographic questions to capture who participated in the survey. Based on the survey results, the majority of the respondents (73%) live in Williams Lake City or immediately surrounding neighborhoods (Figure 1). Most respondents (75%) were predominantly female (Figure 2) and Caucasian (85%) (Figure 3). Respondents' ages are somewhat equally distributed between the ages of 25-74. It should be noted that there were fewer respondents between the ages 15-24, 75-84 and there were no respondents under the age of 14 or 85+ (Figure 4). The largest proportion of respondents' household incomes were over \$100,000 (Figure 5). Lastly, many respondents were living with partners with children (36%) or living with partners without children (32%) and some participants (14%) were single people living on their own (Figure 6).

Figure 1: what community do you live in? (N=393)



- Outlying community/area - including 150 Mile, Horsefly, Likely, Wildwood, McLeese Lake, Springhouse
- Rural area - Chilcotin, Esket-Alkali, Canoe/Dog Creek, or other area
- Williams Lake - in the city or immediately surrounding neighbourhoods

Figure 2: My gender is: (n=393)



- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe
- Transgender or Non-binary

Figure 3: What is your racial or ethnic identity? (N=390)

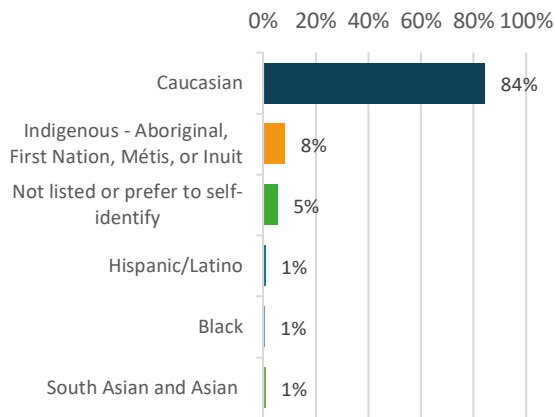


Figure 4: My age is: (n=393)

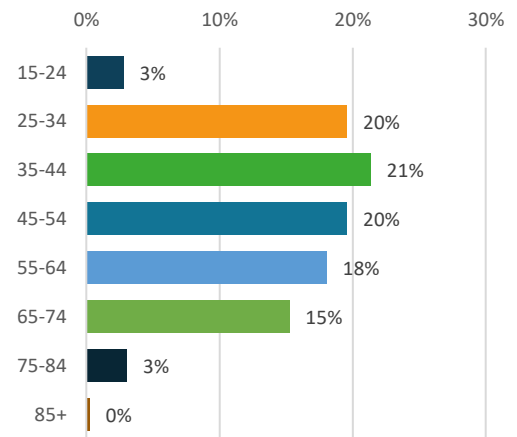


Figure 5: What was your yearly household income level before the pandemic (March 1, 2020)? (n=338)

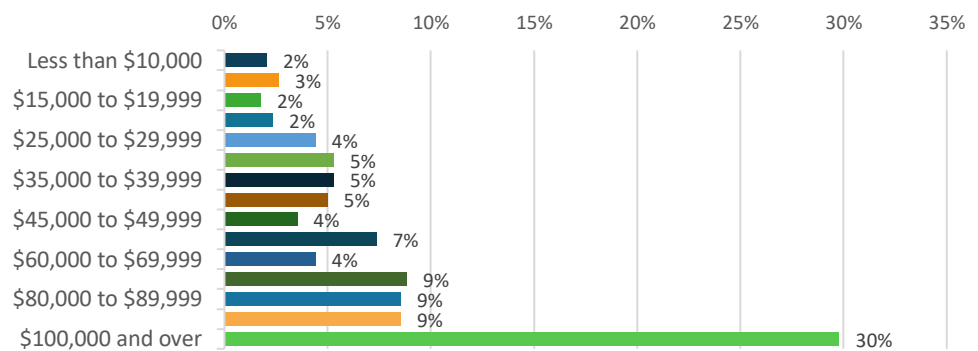
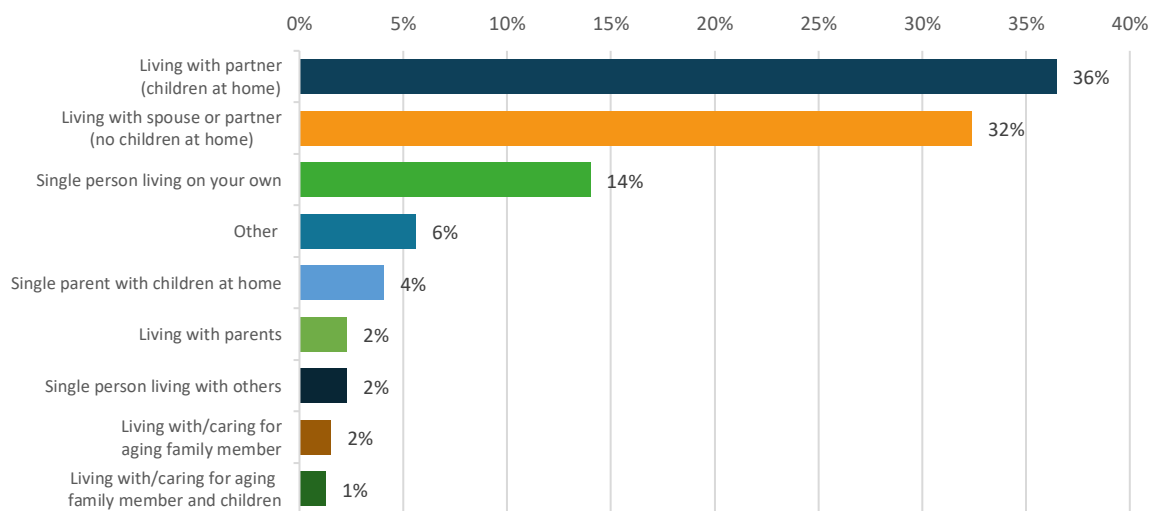


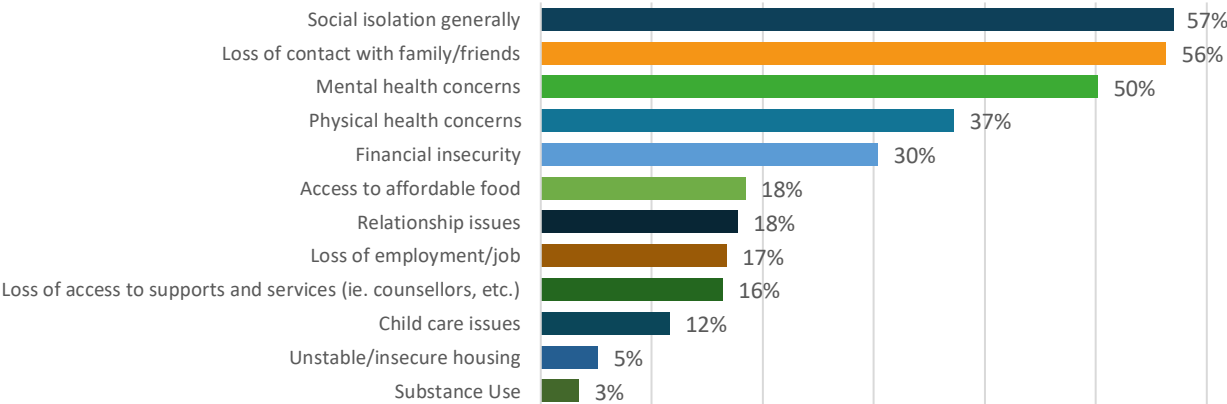
Figure 6: Please select the one response that best describes your household currently (n=392)



Key Challenges: Social Connection, Mental and Physical Well-Being, and Financial Insecurity

Many community members struggled with a sense of connectivity, mental and physical wellbeing, and financial security during the pandemic. Social isolation, loss of contact with family/friends and mental and physical health concerns were the top challenges across respondents of all ages during the pandemic (Figure 7). Alternatively, financial security appeared to be a key challenge for respondents between the ages of 25-64. It can be assumed that respondents aged 65+ were not as impacted by financial security as they are often no longer in the job market. Furthermore, survey results indicate that although some respondent's household incomes were impacted during the pandemic, most respondents' household incomes have recovered but nearly half of all respondents have reduced their households spending.

Figure 7: Looking back over the time since the beginning of the pandemic, what have been the most challenging things for you to deal with? choose as many as apply. (n=293)

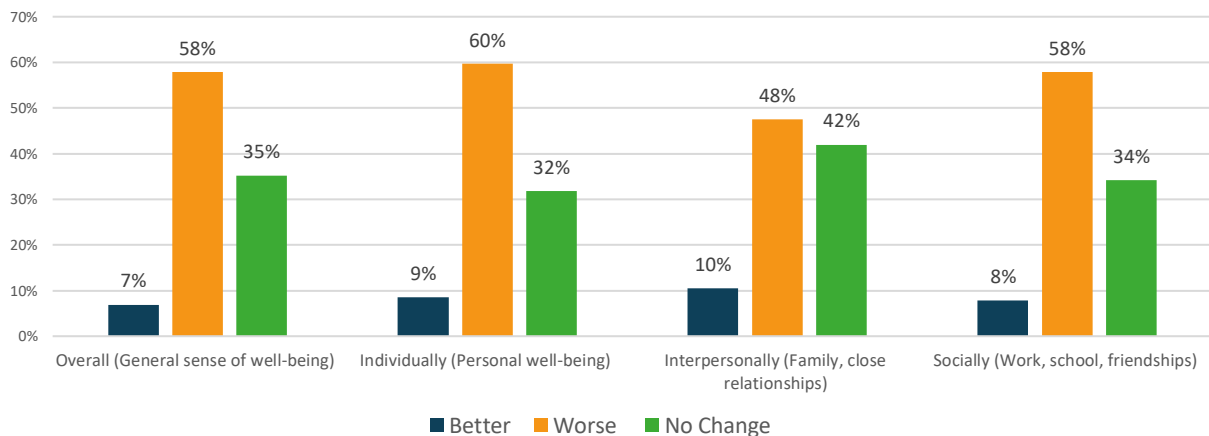


Well-Being

Declines across participant wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic

Survey responses highlight that during the pandemic there was a large decline in well-being and mental health wellness within the community. Fifty-eight percent (58%), sixty percent (60%), forty-eight percent (48%), and fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents reported that they feel that their overall, individual, interpersonal, and social wellbeing's declined, respectively (Figure 8). Similarly, sixty-seven percent (67%) of respondents reported that their mental health is worse now than before the pandemic (Figure 9). Furthermore, survey responses showed a correlation between the lower the age of respondent and the lower their ranking of their wellbeing (excluding social wellbeing) and mental health. Therefore, it appears that younger populations experienced worse effects on their wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic relative to older respondents.

Figure 8: Looking back over the past 6 months how would you say that your well-being has changed since before the pandemic? (N=305)

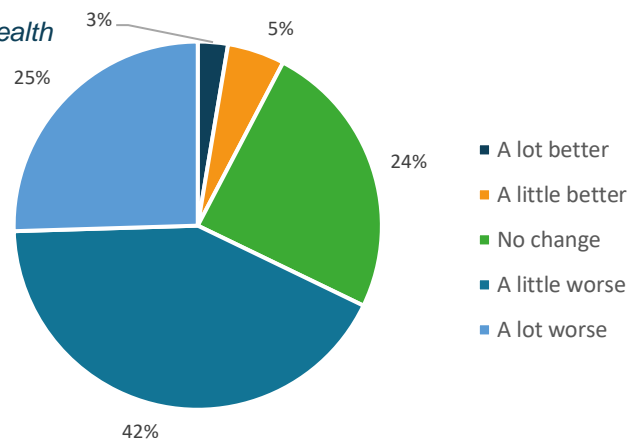


Respondents were asked to choose from the list of words, to describe how they were feeling in the present moment.

The top selection of words respondents used to describe their feelings were:

- » Frustrated
- » Anxious
- » Worried
- » Hopeful
- » Overwhelmed
- » Grateful
- » Isolated

Figure 9: How would you rate your mental health now compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic? (n=305)



Increases in alcohol and marijuana use and disproportionate relationship/household violence amongst youth during the pandemic

Respondents were asked to describe changes to their various behaviors (i.e., gambling, the use of alcohol, the use of marijuana, the use of other substances and violence in their households) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following two key findings emerged:

1. Alcohol and marijuana consumption have increased across young to middle aged respondents. Approximately 20% of respondents increased their alcohol consumption and 13% increased their consumption of marijuana during the pandemic. Both increases were somewhat equally driven by respondents below the age of 64.
2. Youth are experiencing disproportionate rises in alcohol consumption and violence in their relationships/households. Survey responses indicated that more than half of youth respondents (ages 15-24) have experienced increases in alcohol consumption and violence in their relationships/ households.

Community Supports and Resources

Community supports and resources are necessary to empower people who are experiencing hardships so that they can have opportunities to improve their standard of living and break free from challenging cycles. When assessing community supports and resources, it is important to consider the quality, availability, breadth and awareness of local supports and resources.

Strong social support networks but lower awareness of local resources and help especially amongst younger populations

The survey responses indicate that respondents have strong social support networks as ninety percent (90%) of respondents feel that they can reach out to a friend, family member or someone they trust if they need help (Figure 10). Comparatively, awareness of local help and resources within community is lower, especially amongst younger populations. The survey responses indicate that approximately nineteen percent (19%) of respondents do not know where to access local help and resources if they need them and that younger populations are less aware of local help and resources within community (Figure 11). As seen in Figure 11, younger respondents are disproportionately unaware of local help and resources; forty-three percent (43%) and twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents between the ages of 15-24 and 25-34 do not know where to access to local help and resources which are significantly higher than the average respondents' level (19%).

Figure 10: Do you have a personal friend, family member or someone you trust who you can reach out to for help? (n=299)

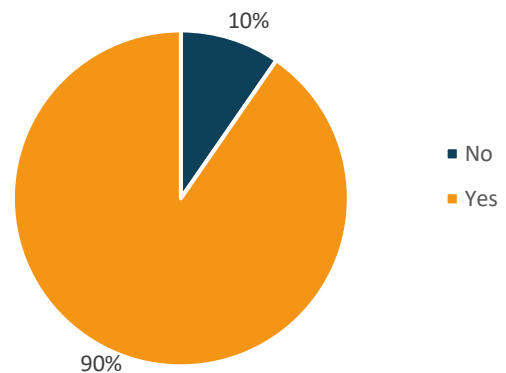
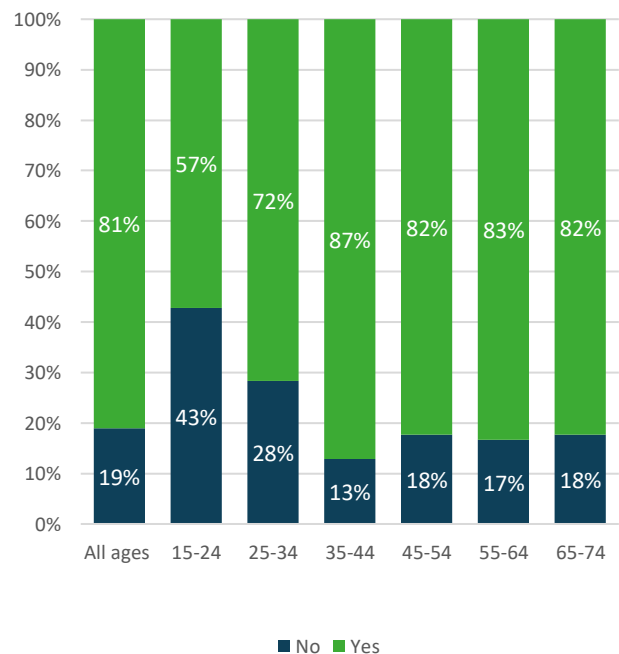


Figure 11: Do you know where to access local help and resources if you need them? (n=299)



Where Community Members Look For Resources

Survey respondents were asked where they would go to find/access services if they needed them. The following responses emerged.

1. Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents would search online for resources.
2. Twelve percent (12%) of respondents would go to their local doctor or a relevant medical institution.
3. Twelve percent (12%) of respondents would go directly to local service agencies (i.e., women's centers, senior's centers, foodbanks, Cariboo Friendship Society, Denisiqi Service Society, The Salvation Army, etc.) or to government buildings including government service centers, recreation centers, and libraries.
4. Five percent (5%) of respondents would rely on word of mouth by asking friends, family or contact through their social circles such as religious networks.

Key Challenges Accessing Services During the Pandemic

Respondents were asked what challenges they had when accessing services during the pandemic. The following key insights emerged:

1. Four percent (4%) of respondents commented that services closures and reduced hours impacted their ability to access services.
2. A significant number of respondents, thirty-one percent (31%), did not feel comfortable accessing services online. More specifically, youth between ages 15-24 were significantly less comfortable with accessing services online than other age groups.
3. Eight percent (8%) of respondents commented that a shortage of doctors is a key challenge to accessing medical supports.
4. Seventy-two percent (72%) of all survey respondents living in outlying community areas (i.e., 150 Mile, Horsefly, Likely, Wildwood, McLeese Lake, Springhouse) struggled to access services due to internet challenges.
5. Four percent (4%) of respondents commented on challenges accessing Mental Health (MH) services. Challenges included that they were unsure where to find MH services, there was a lack of MH services in community, and that MH services are too expensive.

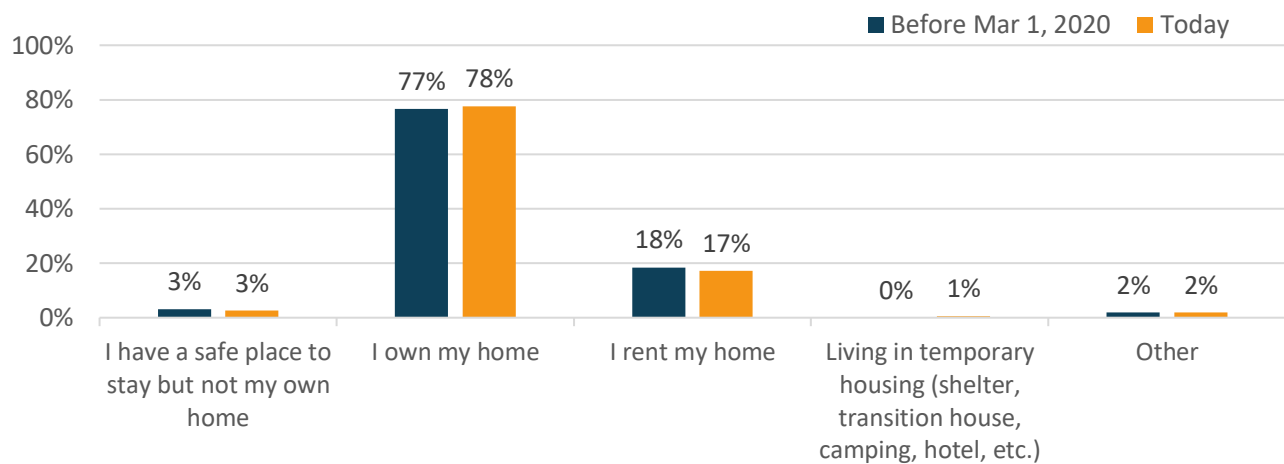
Housing

Access to housing is a basic human right and is a key determinant of health and wellbeing. Having secure access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing is necessary to support individuals to have a healthy standard of living.

Housing Status Remains Stable

The survey results indicated that seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents own their home, while seventeen (17%) indicated that they were renters (Figure 12). Overall, housing status amongst respondents appears to have remained stable when comparing pre-pandemic to present day.

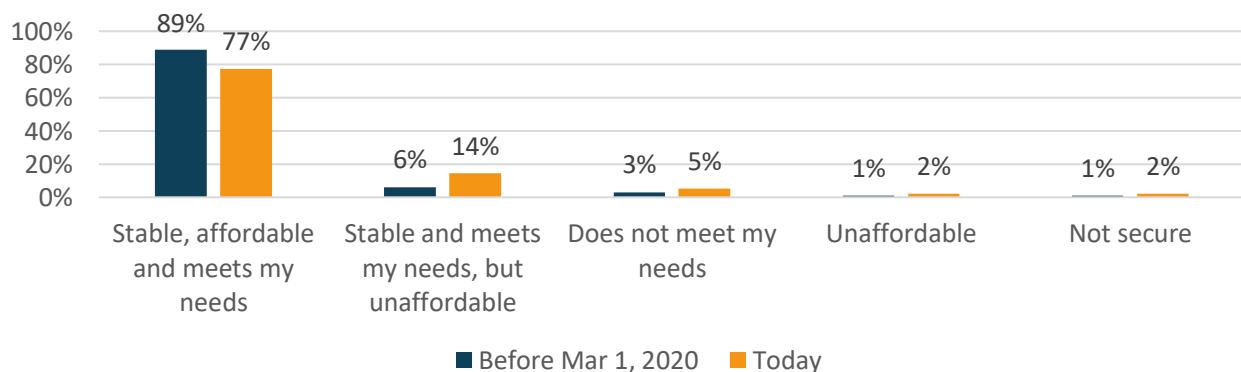
Figure 12: What best described your housing situation? (n=383)



High But Declining Levels of Housing Affordability During Pandemic

Overall, housing affordability appears to have declined within the region during the pandemic. Figure 13 highlights that the majority of respondents (77%) feel that their housing is stable, affordable and meets their current needs, but this has declined by approximately 12 points when compared to the pre-pandemic levels. Alternatively, there has been a 7-point rise in respondents that feel that their housing is stable and meets their needs but is unaffordable.

Figure 13: Does your housing meet your needs? (n=384)



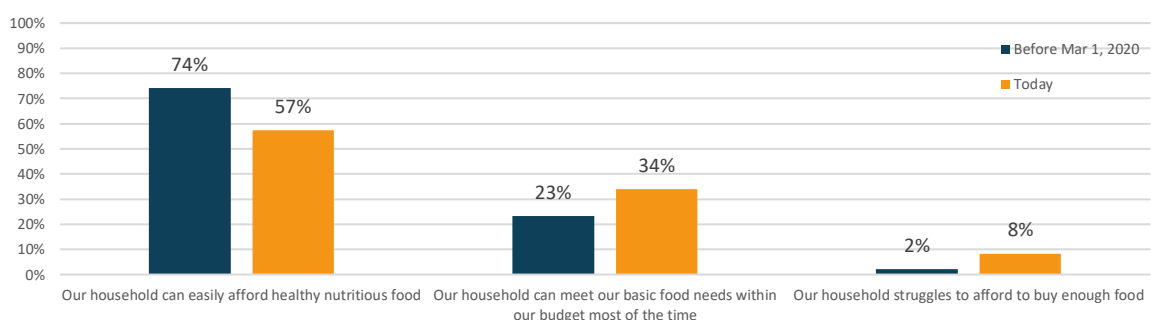
Food

The ability to access a quality diet and meet one's nutritional needs is essential to a person's growth and development. People who are struggling financially can face food insecurity; a lack of resources may limit secure access to an adequate quality diet to meet their nutritional needs.

Decline in food affordability during the pandemic

Based on survey responses, affordability of food has become a growing challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thirty-one percent (31%) of respondents indicated that food affordability has declined since the beginning of the pandemic. Additionally, Figure 13 highlights that currently only fifty-seven (57%) of respondents feel that they can easily afford healthy, nutritious food representing a significant 17-point decline compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 13: What best describes your ability to meet your food and nutrition needs? (n=311)



Rise in community members pursuing self-sufficient food strategies

Survey responses indicate that many community members have increased their self-sufficient strategies to managing their food supply for both themselves and other community members. Respondents were asked to indicate changes on how their household accesses food between Phase 1 of the COVID-19 pandemic to where they are today. Results showed that respondents have increased their behaviors across the following categories:

1. Produced our own food (gardening, raising animals for food (102 responses)
2. Canned/preserved food (81 responses)
3. Made our own bread, cheese, beer, wine, etc. (77 responses)
4. Wild/traditional food harvesting (hunting/fishing, nettles, mushrooms, etc.) (46 responses)
5. Produced food to help feed others in our community (31 responses)
6. Used a school food program (5 responses)
7. Used a free/low-cost meal program (5 responses)
8. Received food from a food bank or community service (4 responses)

Conclusion

The results from the community survey highlight many challenges and unmet community health and well-being needs within the community. The results have been summarized into four categories:

- 1. Mental Health and Well-Being:** Social connectivity and mental health are top concerns amongst respondents. The declining levels in respondents' mental health and well-being since the beginning of the pandemic are significant and cannot be ignored, especially amongst youth. The community survey has highlighted increased levels in alcohol and marijuana use, violence in youth households/relationships and a need for more affordable, accessible mental health resources within the community.
- 2. Economic Impacts:** Financial security was identified as a top challenge for respondents throughout the pandemic. Although survey results indicate that most household incomes have recovered to pre-pandemic levels, nearly half of respondents reported that they have reduced their household spending. Additionally, survey results have indicated that the community is seeing declines in housing and food affordability since the pandemic began.
- 3. Physical Health:** Despite physical health being identified as a large challenge during the pandemic, survey results highlight that there are few respondents in the community that have experienced lasting physical symptoms/conditions from COVID-19. Moving forward, it is critical to consider the impact of indirect challenges and adjusted behaviors that stem from the pandemic (i.e., delaying health care procedures, inability to access health care or doctor shortages in community) on community members physical health.
- 4. Community Supports and Resources:** Survey results highlight many opportunities to enhance community supports and resources by addressing key challenges respondents faced during the pandemic and particularly by improving community members' awareness of local services. Key challenges accessing support throughout the pandemic include discomfort accessing services through the phone, outlying community areas (i.e., 150 Mile, Horsefly, Likely, Wildwood, McLeese Lake, Springhouse) struggling to access services due to internet connectivity, service closures, and reduced service hours.