

# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT UPDATE - COVID 19



## INTRODUCTION

This update to the 2020 Chautauqua County Community Needs Assessment has been developed by Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) in response to the global health pandemic that has affected every community in the United States. In December 2019, the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) was discovered to be the causative agent for acute respiratory and flu-like symptoms that began infecting increasing numbers of people in China. The first case in the United States was confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on January 22, 2020. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. By March 17, 2020, all 50 U.S. states had confirmed cases of the virus.

Symptoms of Covid-19, also known as Coronavirus, may appear from 2 to 14 days after exposure, and may include (but are not limited to) fever, cough, shortness of breath, headache, muscle ache, fatigue, or loss of taste or smell. Persons having trouble breathing or a persistent pain or pressure in the chest are advised to seek medical treatment immediately. Covid-19 spreads mainly through close contact from person to person via respiratory droplets. The risk of infection decreases greatly when people are six feet apart or more. People carrying the virus can spread it to others whether or not they are having symptoms themselves.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions such as heart or lung disease or diabetes are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from Covid-19.

Because of the highly contagious nature of Covid-19, the alarmingly high rate of fatalities associated with it and the lack of a vaccine or treatment in the beginning stages, the only effective way to prevent mass illness was through restricted travel, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, and wearing masks. By mid-March 2020, local, state and federal public health officials recommended additional measures to minimize a public health catastrophe: mass quarantine, physical distancing, and a virtual lockdown of all public gatherings and

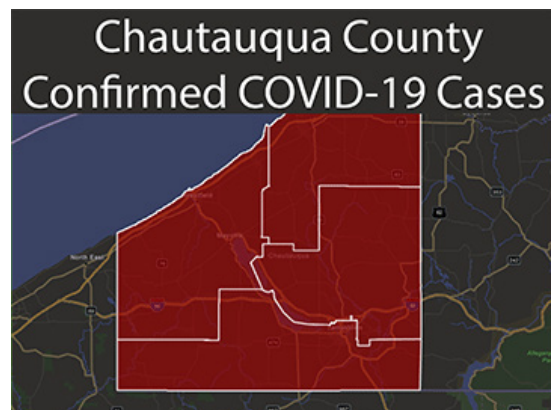
economic activity. The rollout of safe and effective vaccines in early 2021 began to provide hope that an end to the pandemic and the resulting restrictions was on the horizon. However, a number of factors contributed to a resurgence of the virus later in the year.

In addition to the detrimental health impacts of the pandemic, the resulting conditions have had major impacts on businesses, employment, education, and childcare. Food insecurity, housing instability, and access to basic supplies are all factors that increased as the crisis unfolded. This Community Needs Assessment update is intended to describe the scope of this crisis on our community and to inform the delivery of services to those affected.

## DATA

According to the CDC, as of January 3, 2022 there have been 53,795,407 Covid-19 cases nationwide and 820,355 deaths attributed to the virus. The NYS Department of health reports 3,617,566 cases statewide since the pandemic began, and 61,242 deaths in the state.

Since the onset of Covid-19 cases in Chautauqua County, comprehensive data has been compiled by the Chautauqua County Department of Public Health and made publicly available, which is the source of all local data in the narrative, charts and tables this section:



<https://chqgov.com/public-health/covid-19-dashboard>

As of January 1, 2022 in Chautauqua County there have been:

- 19,280 total confirmed cases
- 18,110 recovered cases
- 283 deaths

Monthly totals of Covid-19 cases and deaths attributed to the virus are illustrated below.

Similar to trends for the nation and the state, numbers of new cases spiked in January 2021, but fell to much lower levels by June and July of 2021 as growing numbers of people became vaccinated. However, by August new cases were again on the rise due to a number of factors that include highly contagious variants of the virus and hesitancy of a large percentage of the population to get the vaccine.

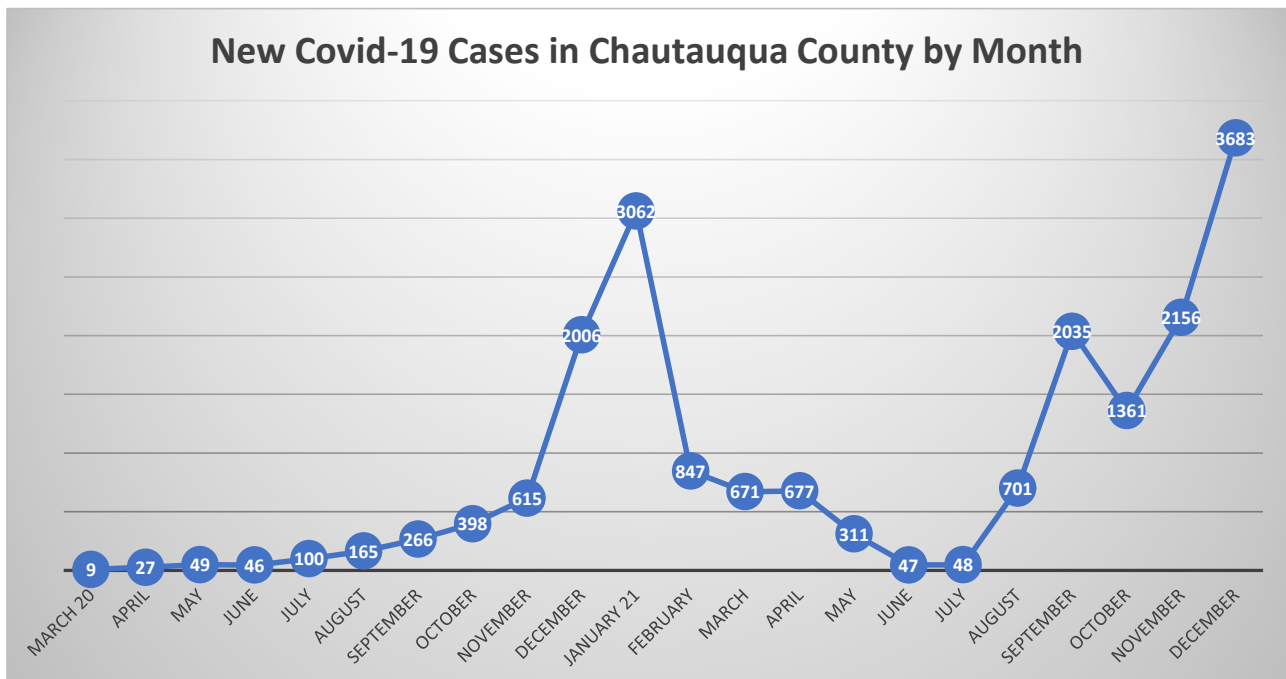
All ages are susceptible to contracting the virus, although individuals over the age of 60, especially those with underlying health conditions, are known to be at particularly high risk for hospitalization and death. The following table displays the age range for all confirmed cases of Covid-19 through January 1, 2022 as a percentage of the total cases.

While Figure 1 illustrates higher percentages of cases for the young adult populations, the data in Figure 2 concerning those who have died in the county as a result of the virus illustrates the increased fatality rates for the older population.

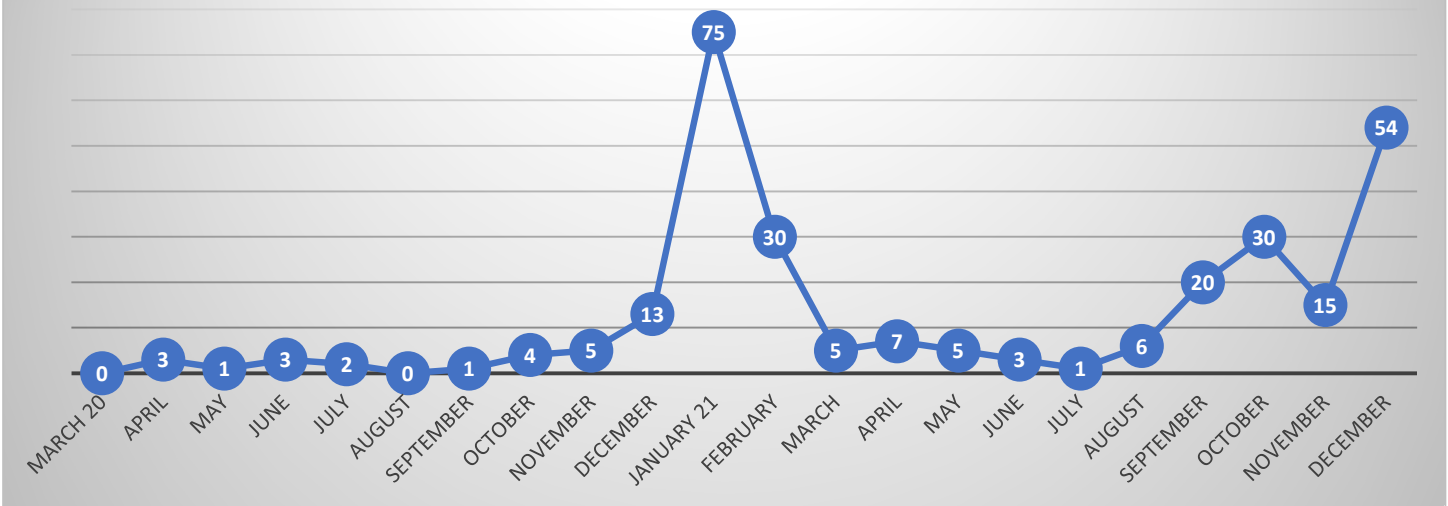
FIGURE 1

Age Group	Chautauqua County COVID-19 Cases by Age Group as a Percentage of Total Cases
0-4	3.2%
5-9	4.6%
10-14	5.8%
15-19	7.7%
20-29	17.0%
30-39	15.0%
40-49	13.0%
50-59	13.1%
60-69	10.7%
70-79	5.6%
80-89	3.0%
90+	1.3%

Distribution of the vaccines was initially limited to older adults and those with underlying health conditions, in addition to frontline health care workers and essential workers such as firefighters and police. As more vaccines became available, it was recommended that everyone age 12 and older be vaccinated. By the Fall of 2021, the CDC began recommending vaccinations for children ages five and older.



## Deaths Due to Covid-19 in Chautauqua County by Month



Booster shots were recommended by the CDC as the data began to show vaccine protection decreasing over time. While breakthrough infections occur among vaccinated individuals, the rates of hospitalization and death among the vaccinated are greatly diminished.

As of January 1, 2022, a total of 56.3% of Chautauqua County's population age 5 and over is fully vaccinated.

**FIGURE 2**

Age Group	Number of Deaths	Fatality Rate
0-19	0	0 %
20-29	2	.06 %
30-39	3	.11%
40-49	6	.24 %
50-59	32	1.28 %
60-69	46	2.26 %
70-79	61	5.75 %
80-89	83	14.64 %
90+	50	20.16 %
<b>ALL AGES</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>1.47%</b>

### LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE

As the pandemic spread, service providers looked to government agencies for guidance on protecting their clients and staff. All non-essential businesses were closed to the public to help prevent the spread of the virus. Employees not considered essential to work onsite were allowed to work from home. Essential businesses include health care facilities, nursing homes, child care facilities, utilities, airports, food processing facilities, pharmaceutical manufacturers, pharmacies, drug stores, trash collectors, law enforcement, banks, gas stations, funeral homes, and other establishments.

The public was instructed to wear face masks in public and practice social distancing of at least six feet from one another. Increased cleaning and disinfecting of all surfaces and frequent hand washing quickly became the norm. Public places and work environments, when allowed to open, offered hand sanitizer and disposable face masks to enforce compliance with mandates and guidelines that were frequently updated. Visitors to county offices and to many other service provider agencies were asked not to enter if they have any of the symptoms of Covid-19. Health care facilities, child care centers, and other essential service providers used touchless thermometers to prevent individuals with a fever from having contact with others.

Most businesses were allowed to open by the summer of 2021, but with precautionary measures in place and in some cases with a reduced workforce and capacity. As cases again began to rise in the fall, restrictions were again put in place.

## HEALTH CARE

The high number of Covid-19 cases in the county has put a tremendous strain on local health resources. Many health care providers have turned to telehealth options to continue to provide care during the pandemic. The volume of patients needing inpatient or emergency care for Covid-19 has caused the state to limit or ban non-essential and non-urgent procedures at various times throughout the pandemic.

UPMC-WCA Hospital in Jamestown has an adult inpatient capacity of 111 beds. Between December 2020 and November 2021, they reported a weekly average bed occupancy rate of over 95% for 32 of the 52 weeks; for 18 of those weeks, the occupancy rate was over 100%.

Brooks Memorial Hospital in Dunkirk reported a 142.2% weekly average occupancy rate for their 35 adult inpatient beds for the week of December 25, 2020. Rates fluctuated between 45% and 75% thereafter, until the last week of September, 2021 when cases began to spike again and weekly inpatient occupancy averages increased to between 81.1% and 93.6%. [U.S Department of Health and Human Services data, as reported by StatesmanJournal.com.]

Like other occupations, staffing shortages in the health care field have become a major issue during the pandemic. Health care workers are at high-risk of exposure to Covid-19 and are under immense stress due to additional work hours and challenging work conditions. In addition to caring for the heightened volume of patients, staffing is needed to handle additional work associated with the pandemic such as testing, contact tracing, immunizations, and public awareness. Staff are unable to report to work if they are in quarantine due to a positive Covid-19 test or if they have been in close contact with someone else who has tested positive. They may also need to stay home to care for a child who has tested positive. Health care workers statewide have been mandated to get the Covid-19 vaccine or terminate employment.

Mental and behavioral health resources will need to be

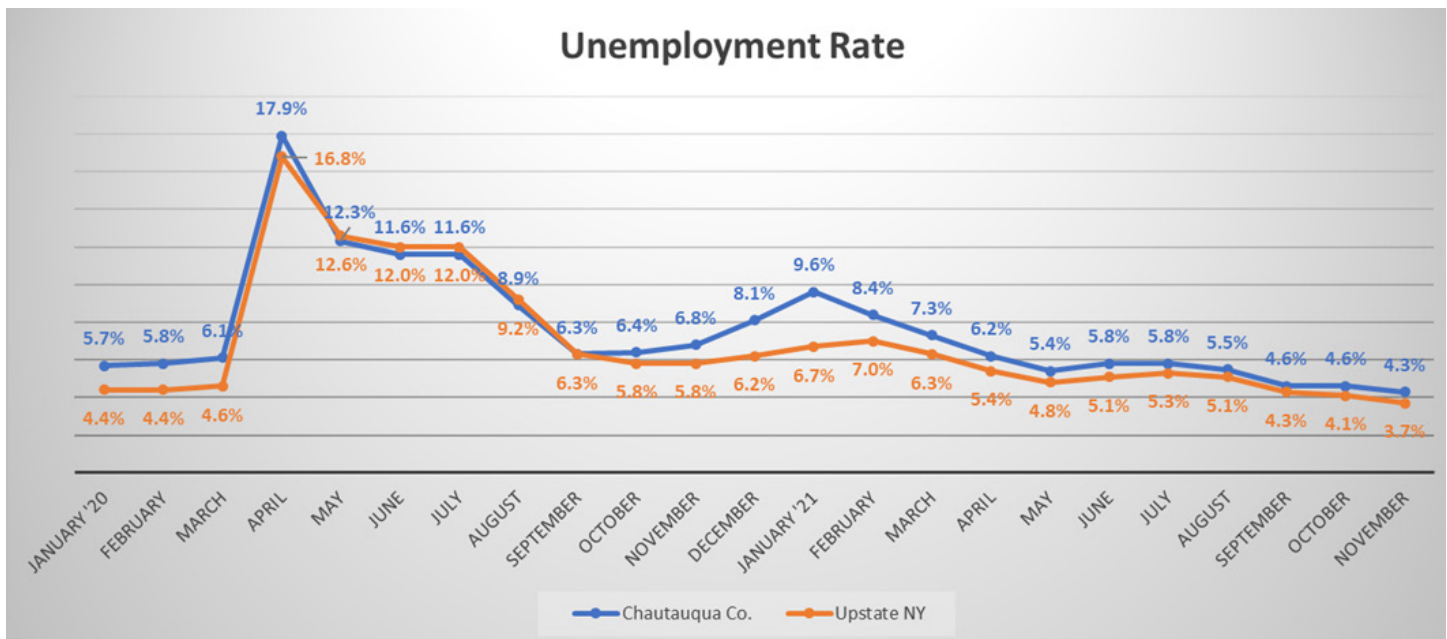
available in new and increased ways to deal with the many different stressors/traumas caused by the pandemic, especially its impact over an extended time period. Issues such as domestic violence, elder abuse, child abuse, drug abuse, suicide and other indicators of behavioral health issues are a particular concern.

COI conducted a survey in the Fall of 2021 to collect information about how members of the community have been affected by the pandemic. A summary of responses collected from 276 community members appears on page 7. Notable health indicators revealed by the survey include:

- Over 73% of respondents reported experiencing fear of getting sick during the pandemic that was either newly developed or made worse.
- 67.0% reported new or worsened general anxiety.
- 61.9% reported experiencing a new or increased sense of isolation.
- 53.4% have had difficulty maintaining a healthy weight during the pandemic; 30.5% said this was a new problem for them.
- 30.2% of those surveyed reported problems with accessing health care.
- 22.6% reported new or existing problems with accessing mental health care.

## EMPLOYMENT AND THE ECONOMY

Individuals in many sectors of the economy have experienced sudden and unexpected unemployment. In particular, the service and retail sectors, as well as 'gig' workers and others that tend to be lower-wage workers have been greatly affected because they are more vulnerable to layoffs and may not be able to work from home due to the nature of the job. Many businesses were closed completely and may not have been able to reopen. Some workers may lack the technology resources in their home to work remotely. Forty-three percent of those responding to COI's Covid-19 survey said that at least one person in their household lost income because their place of employment or their own business was closed due to the pandemic.



NYS Department of Labor Data

In March of 2020, Congress passed a \$2.2 trillion stimulus package known as the CARES Act that included supplemental benefits to people collecting unemployment. Americans also received a one-time stimulus payment of \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child in the household. An advance on the Child Tax Credit became available in monthly installments to families with children to help ease the financial crisis caused by the pandemic. Various grants and loan programs were included in the CARES Act to help businesses respond to or recover from the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Unemployment rates for Chautauqua County are illustrated in the following chart in comparison to rates for upstate New York (excludes NY City). The unemployment rates for the county and upstate NY both increased dramatically in April 2020, with the county rate continuing the trend above the upstate NY level.

County and state unemployment rates closely mirrored each other, through September 2021 when both fell to 6.3%. By January 2021, the county's unemployment rate had risen to 9.6%, compared to the upstate NY rate of 6.7%. Both rates trended mostly downward throughout the rest of 2021, with the county rate exceeding the rate for upstate NY throughout the year.

## HOUSING AND BASIC NEEDS

Because the pandemic caused income losses for large numbers of households, NYS placed a moratorium on

evictions in order to keep people in their homes. While the moratorium has prevented a surge in homelessness, it has also made vacant affordable housing scarce and placed a burden on the landlords of those who can't pay their rent. As the eviction moratorium has continued to be extended, homeless households are staying in shelter longer and are finding it more difficult to locate permanent housing. This has put a strain on local shelters and other resources that were already stretched thin.

COI conducted a survey in the Fall of 2021 to collect information about how members of the community have been affected by the pandemic. A total of 276 responses were collected. Of these, 126 households (45.7%) include at least one person with a disability. Minority households (non-White and/or Hispanic) made up 22.1% of those responding (61 households).

Respondents were asked to indicate which statement best describes how their household was affected by the pandemic for a number of topic areas. Their responses are summarized in Figure 3 on the following page.

Additionally, disparities in the needs of disabled and minority populations were revealed by the data. The chart on page 6 illustrates the heightened challenges the pandemic has caused for the general population and in particular, these vulnerable populations.

## EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

Caregivers of school-age children who must quarantine

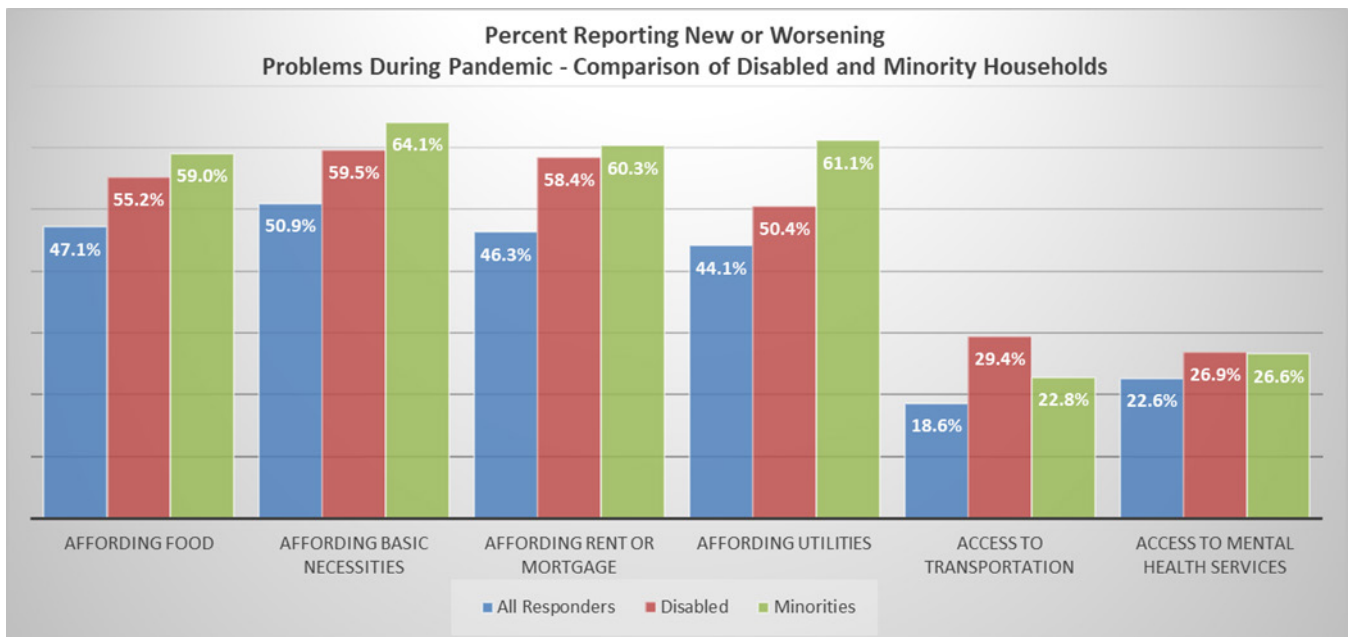


FIGURE 3

	Became a problem during the pandemic	An existing problem – got worse	An existing problem - no change	An existing problem - improved	Not a problem before/no change
Affording food	30.2%	16.9%	6.6%	5.5%	40.8%
Affording basic necessities (soap, diapers, toilet paper, etc...)	37.0%	13.9%	7.3%	1.1%	40.7%
Finding or accessing food and other necessities	49.8%	9.8%	6.2%	1.1%	33.1%
Affording rent or mortgage	31.0%	15.3%	6.6%	1.1%	46.0%
Affording utilities	29.4%	14.7%	7.7%	2.6%	45.6%
Access to transportation	9.9%	8.7%	4.7%	1.1%	75.6%
Access to health care	26.2%	4.0%	5.1%	1.4%	63.3%
Access to mental health services	17.5%	5.1%	4.0%	0.3%	73.1%
Fear of getting sick	57.8%	15.6%	1.5%	1.8%	23.3%
General anxiety	37.3%	29.7%	7.3%	0.0%	25.7%
Feeling of isolation	44.4%	17.5%	4.0%	1.8%	32.3%
Maintaining a healthy weight	30.5%	22.9%	11.3%	4.0%	31.3%

or learn remotely must secure day care arrangements for their children or sacrifice employment to care for their children. Of those who responded to COI’s 2021 survey who indicated they needed child care to be able to work, 58.9% said it was “extremely difficult” to find child care during the pandemic; 26.0% said it was “somewhat difficult”, and 15.1% said finding childcare was “easy”. A total of 76.7% of those needing child care said that someone in their household had missed work due to the inability to find child care (including if a child or caregiver had to quarantine). According to the Chautauqua Child Care Council, six child care providers closed in 2021 as a result of the pandemic.

Public schools in the county closed immediately in March 2020. This had an immediate impact on children’s education. Children with less access to resources (broadband internet, computers/tablets, technology expertise, language barriers, etc.) are most at-risk for suffering learning loss. Many schools developed their Fall 2020 reopening plans to include remote or hybrid learning models rather than in person instruction. Remote instruction brought on additional problems, as parents of young children were expected to be primary teachers for their children during the period of remote learning. Parents with limited resources face numerous challenges as a result.



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Among families with children responding to COI's survey, 8.6% said that remote access to school was not possible because they either had no internet access or no computer in the household. Other family households (25.7%) said the children in their household were able to access school remotely only with assistance provided by the school or another organization. When asked if they believe the children in their household are able to learn effectively using remote learning, the majority of responders said "no" (42.8%) and 32.1% said that some children in their household are able to learn remotely but it is difficult for others.

Children (15 weeks to 5 years of age) who had reduced attendance (even with remote services) in COI's child care programming demonstrated developmental skill levels lower than those of peers who maintained regular attendance. The percentage of children meeting or exceeding developmental outcomes was significantly below the percentage of children who met these measures during the previous two years (5-15% fewer children depending on outcome).

Additionally, COI's Child Care Council reports that 13 programs closed during the pandemic, further compounding the need for child care in Chautauqua County.

## **SURVEY TO BOARDS OF DIRECTORS**

The Boards of Directors of COI and its economic development affiliate, Chautauqua Opportunities for Development, Inc., were surveyed in September 2021 to solicit their opinions regarding local needs in relation to the pandemic. The Boards are made up of elected officials, representatives of organizations that serve vulnerable populations, and private sector representatives with expertise in areas such as education and financial management. Their responses have been summarized below.

1. What are the most important issues impacting businesses in Chautauqua County as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Shortage of employees
- Economic stability (escalating costs, fear of having to close)
- Risks associated with unvaccinated employees
- Reluctance of the population to venture out to patronize small businesses

2. What are the most important issues impacting families with children in Chautauqua County as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Loss of children's education
- Parents inability to work due to lack of child care or remote schooling
- Inconsistent standards in schools regarding masks and social distancing
- Rising cost of living

3. Do you believe that there are subpopulations of people in Chautauqua County (low-income, minorities, disabled, elderly) who have been more severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic than the population in general? In what ways?

- Low-income families with children need online access for school; most lower paying jobs require close interaction and cannot be done remotely
- Elderly and disabled are on fixed incomes and cannot afford rising costs
- Elderly people may not have the technical expertise to stay socially connected with loved ones.
- Because Chautauqua County is rural people may be misinformed about Covid or discouraged from being vaccinated.
- Without a doubt, disadvantaged are impacted by job loss, childcare shortage, ability to pay for child care, and education impacts. Students who need the most assistance are the hardest hit by hybrid or remote schooling, especially in the area of reading and literacy.

4. What do you think is the best way we can get to the point where we no longer have to worry about spreading the Covid-19 virus?

- Vaccinations
- Mask wearing and good hygiene
- Time

5. What are the impacts of the pandemic that you think will take the longest time to overcome?

- Economy and inflation; loss of small business and tourism
- Children's loss of learning
- Impact of social isolation on children, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations
- Distrust of the government, each other, and health officials