

SEPTEMBER 2021

EXCLUDED IN THE HEARTLAND

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON WORKING-CLASS IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN IOWA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigrant communities in Iowa are reeling from COVID-19 and the public health and economic crises it has unleashed. We hear daily from workers who have lost their jobs and were excluded from stimulus checks, unemployment insurance, and childcare credits, and do not know how they will be able to buy groceries or pay the rent. We hear, too, from front-line workers who still face the risk of contracting the deadly coronavirus at their work sites, where they labor without unions or adequate protections.

This report is based on a survey of 289 undocumented immigrant workers in Iowa conducted from June 26 to August 31. The highest response rates came from workers living in and around Iowa City, Coralville, Columbus Junction, Muscatine, Washington, West Liberty, Postville, Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, and Des Moines.

As workers in the heartland grapple with the grave risk of infection and the dramatic loss of income, they need urgent action from governments, businesses, churches, and communities at every level.

#FUNDEXCLUDEDWORKERS 
Iowa

THE CONTEXT

DISPARATE IMPACT

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Iowa's low-income communities of color.

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES ARE AT THE EPICENTER OF THE CRISIS

Immigrants make up a large percentage of Iowa's essential workforce in sectors such as farming and agriculture, construction, hospitality, and food service. The places where they live have had extreme concentrations of COVID cases.

ECONOMIC EMERGENCY

In addition to being more likely to perform essential work, immigrants are more likely to have lost work from this crisis.

NO GOVERNMENT RELIEF

50,000 undocumented immigrants in Iowa were excluded from all forms of federal pandemic relief, undermining the economic recovery.

COVID POURED GASOLINE ON THE FIRE OF INEQUITY

Immigrant communities in Iowa were marked by inequity well before the pandemic, with limited access to health insurance, healthcare and healthy food, and suffering from low incomes, high unemployment rates, outsized rent burdens, less healthy and more overcrowded living conditions and, as a result, more chronic health problems.

STORIES FROM THE PANDEMIC

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Iowa

I am from Honduras and I'm a single mother of four children who were all born here. So my question is, **why haven't we also received a stimulus check?** Just because we're immigrants doesn't mean we should be treated any differently than other people here.

We've all suffered the same under the same pandemic. We have to leave our houses and take the risk to go work and we should all be treated the same.



Ingrid D.
Excluded Worker

80% of 289 survey respondents defined themselves as essential workers. **17%** report they are still unemployed.

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Iowa

I'm a single mother of two children and since the pandemic started they let me go. **To this day I'm still not working.** I was infected by COVID.

For two weeks I was at home with my children and I wasn't able to access health-care this whole time. We believe we should be given the **same rights as other people**, even though we're undocumented, and receive the same support.



Jacqueline
Excluded Worker

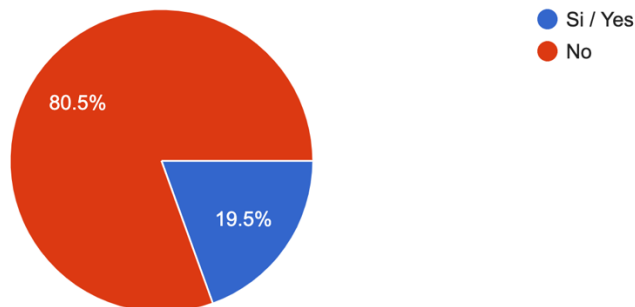
#FUNDEXCLUDEDWORKERS 
Iowa

FINDINGS

HEALTH SYSTEM FAILURE

¿Actualmente tiene seguro de salud, no incluyendo el Medicaid de emergencia? Do you currently have health insurance, not including Emergency Medicaid?

277 responses

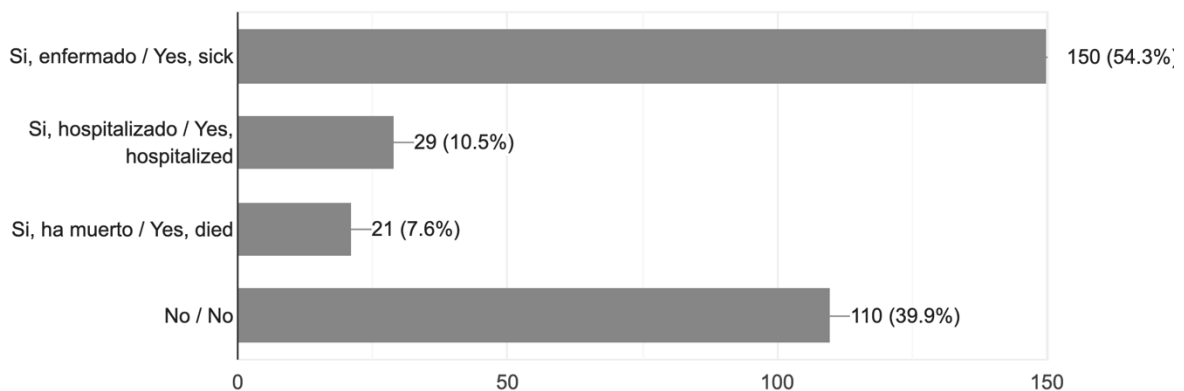


While **3 out of 5** of respondents report someone in their family has been sick with COVID-19 since March 1, 2020, **less than half** received the medical treatment they needed. Nearly **10%** of respondents reported losing family to the coronavirus. Many reported increased anxiety or depression and did not know where to go for help.

60% of respondents reported at least one person in their family has gotten sick with Covid, been hospitalized, or died. “*Si, 12 enfermos (12 family members got sick with COVID-19)*”.

¿Usted o alguno de sus familiares se ha enfermado con Covid, ha sido hospitalizado o ha muerto? Have you or anyone in your family gotten sick with Covid, been hospitalized, or died?

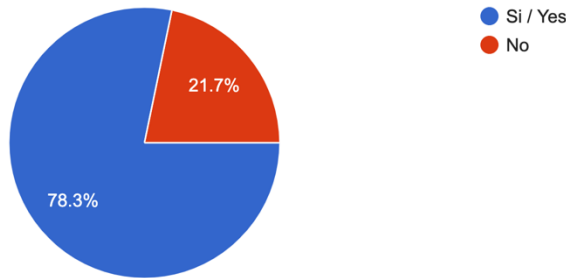
276 responses



OVERWHELMING JOB LOSS & NO SAFETY NET

¿Usted o alguien en su hogar a perdido su trabajo o ingresos desde el 1 de marzo de 2020? Have you or anyone in your household lost a job or income since March 1, 2020?

276 responses



Nearly **80%** of respondents reported that they or another earner in their household had lost their job or income as a result of the pandemic.

**Federal law excludes workers without authorization from receiving unemployment, regardless of how much they have paid into the system.*

¿Recibió seguro de desempleo ("la colecta") del gobierno desde el 1 de marzo de 2020? Have you received unemployment insurance from the government since March 1, 2020?

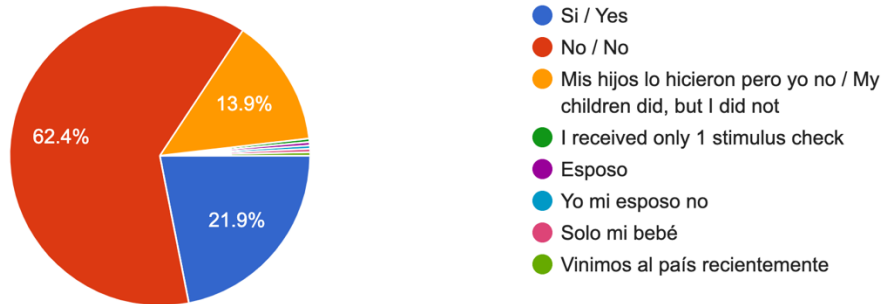
278 responses



94% of respondents did not receive unemployment insurance from the government since March 2020. **76%** of respondents reported not everyone in their household received a stimulus check. *"En la comunidad inmigrante hay mucha necesidad económica. In the immigrant community there is a lot of financial need."*

El gobierno federal brindó asistencia monetaria (“el estímulo”) en efectivo a las personas en respuesta al Coronavirus. ¿Calificó y recibió asis... you receive cash assistance from the government?

274 responses

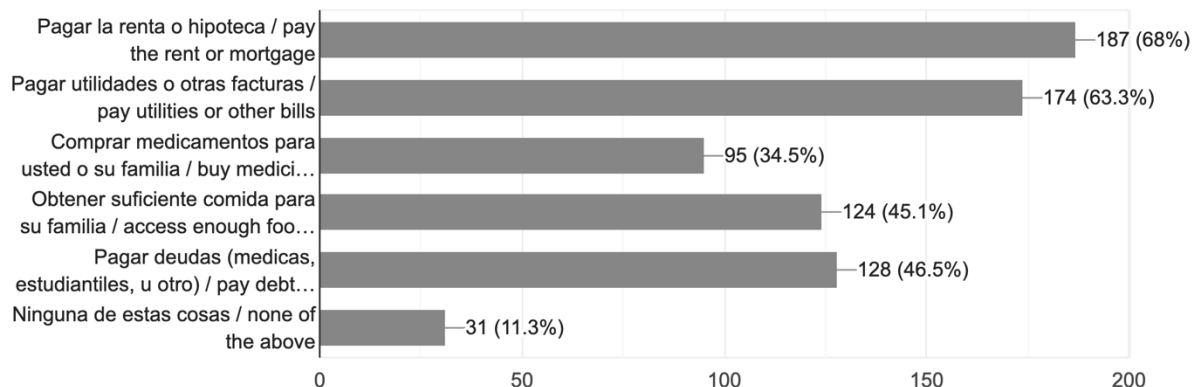


NOWHERE TO TURN

89% of respondents reported they are worried about how they are going to be able to pay rent, utilities, food, and medicine next month. *“The pandemic affected much in my family because I was left without work. Even now I only have a few hours and it’s not enough to pay the bills. We live in constant fear that our young ones might catch the virus, but our faith that God will watch over us has always made us feel better.”*

Pensando en el próximo mes, ¿le preocupa poder: (Marque todo lo que corresponda) / When you think about the next month, are you worried about being able to (Mark all that apply):

275 responses



“Many people around my community have trouble paying their bills because they've been laid off. My close friend had to leave town with his family because he couldn't afford the long drive to work every morning after starting his new job.”

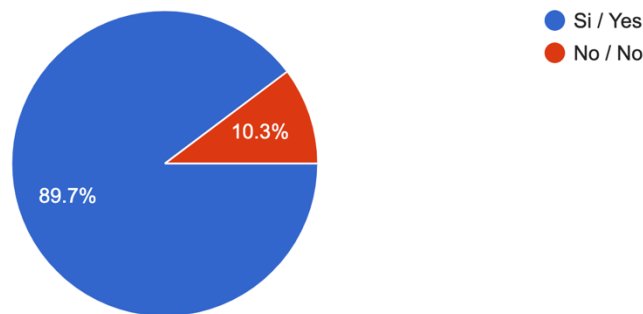
CONCLUSION

This report shows the overwhelming damage that the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought on immigrant, Black, and Brown communities. Survey data and the lived experience of community members reveal extraordinarily high rates of illness, death, and economic devastation. Undocumented immigrant workers are not only worried about protecting themselves and their loved ones from the virus, they are also worried about being able to pay for food, rent, and other essential utilities. Meanwhile, most of these Iowans have been largely excluded from the government's recovery funding.

Community members are hungry because they have no money to buy food. They are worried about being displaced because they cannot pay their rent. **90%** of respondents support American Rescue Plan investments in workers who were excluded from federal stimulus and unemployment benefits. **96%** support hazard pay for essential workers.

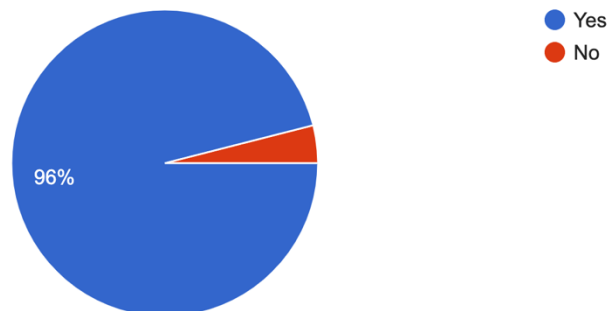
¿Apoya el alivio de la pandemia que va a los trabajadores esenciales que fueron excluidos o dejados fuera de los programas de asistencia anter...uded or left out of previous assistance programs?

273 responses



¿Apoya el alivio de la pandemia que se destina al "pago por alto riesgo" para los trabajadores esenciales que arriesgaron su salud y seguridad pa...their health and safety to keep our society going?

277 responses



SOLUTION # 1 – PROVIDE DIRECT CASH ASSISTANCE TO IMMIGRANT WORKERS EXCLUDED FROM PANDEMIC RELIEF

County / city / local:

- Create emergency Excluded Workers Funds to give \$3,200 direct cash assistance to local immigrant workers excluded from previous economic stimulus checks.

State:

- Create an emergency Excluded Workers Fund to give 50,000 undocumented lowans up to \$15,000 in unemployment insurance compensation.

SOLUTION # 2 –HAZARD PAY RAISES FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS MAKING LESS THAN \$15/HOUR

Local / City / County / State:

- Invest American Rescue Plan dollars in hazard pay bonuses for low-wage essential workers making less than \$15/hour.

Businesses:

- Raise wages to at least \$15/hour, plus 10% hazard pay.

SOLUTION #3 – CANCEL RENT AND SUSPEND MORTGAGE PAYMENTS

State:

- Extend new eviction moratorium.

SOLUTION # 4 – HEALTH CARE

State:

- Create a state-funded Essential Plan for Iowa expanding Medicaid for All lowans up to 200% of the federal poverty level, regardless of immigration status.

City / County:

- Pass Paid Sick Leave guaranteeing workers 14-days paid sick leave each year.

Businesses:

- Voluntarily recognize unions, commit to neutrality, and invite workers to collectively bargain wages, benefits, and conditions.

SOLUTION # 5 – AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Local / City / County / State:

- Scale up affordable and cooperative housing initiatives to meet the need.
- Expand public transportation for 2nd and 3rd shift workers, including weekends and Sundays.

SOLUTION # 6 – BUILD STATEWIDE IMMIGRANT WORKER POWER

Civil society, community organizations, and churches:

- Stand with immigrant workers to build more statewide community power.

METHODOLOGY

The pandemic impact survey was circulated in the Hispanic immigrant community by the Iowa City Catholic Worker between June 26 and August 31, through word of mouth, in-person, and online. Special thanks to Hispanic Catholic parishes St. Patrick in Iowa City, St. James in Washington, St. Josephs in Columbus Junction and West Liberty, St. Mary Matias in Muscatine, and St. Anthony's in Davenport.

Additional technical assistance and support was provided by Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, Quad Cities Interfaith, El Trueque Iowa News, Latinos for Washington, and the Diversity Service Center of Iowa in Muscatine.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT & MOVEMENT-BUILDING

According to data provided by Common Good Iowa, previously known as the Iowa Policy Project, every dollar of direct cash assistance to low-wage workers generates at least \$1.38 in local spending and economic activity.

Beyond highlighting the urgent need for pandemic relief, livable wages, universal health-care, affordable housing, and public transportation, the survey results also demonstrate the need for immigrant workers and their allies to rebuild a mass base of power in Iowa. There is currently no organization in the state with a real base of thousands of trained, active, and dues-paying immigrant workers, a prerequisite to scalable social change.

The time to act is now. **90%** of the 289 respondents reported they want to be updated on the survey results and have a voice in public discussions about ongoing relief efforts. A follow-up door canvass program across Eastern Iowa is already generating hundreds of petition signatures from immigrant workers on the same issues.

¿Quiere que le informemos sobre los resultados de la encuesta y cómo se gastarán los millones de fondos ARP? Do you want us to update you on the r...o please indicate your contact information below.

271 responses

