



LONDON COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE SURVEY: WEEK TWENTY SIX/TWENTY SEVEN

FIELDWORK 5th – 14th October 2020

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Community Response Survey

The COVID-19 Community Response Survey asks civil society organisations who work in London a small number of questions to understand the impact of COVID-19 and associated policy measures, such as social distancing, on vulnerable populations in the capital.

The first week of the survey focused on asking baseline questions to capture organisational profiles, and included a small number of questions relating to the immediate impact post-lockdown of COVID-19.

Surveys from week two onwards are shorter, and ask organisations a number of questions about changes they have seen in the last week.

This week's survey collected data over two weeks.

Results from the survey are shared with responding organisations and with decision-makers supporting the pan-London response to COVID-19.

Cohort details

The questions were sent to more than 360 Civil Society organisations who have agreed to take part. The organisations were recruited through existing contacts and mailing lists held by the GLA Community Engagement and Equality & Fairness teams.

In addition, larger organisations and infrastructure providers were asked to cascade the invitation down to their networks.

A total of 100 organisations responded in full or in part to the week seven questions, which were live between Monday 5th and Wednesday 14th October 2020.

Note: due to the relatively small sample size and the targeted way in which recruitment was conducted, it is important not to extrapolate from any findings in the weekly survey to all civil society organisations in London or any particular population of Londoners. Results from the weekly survey should be used alongside other sources of intelligence to understand the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities.

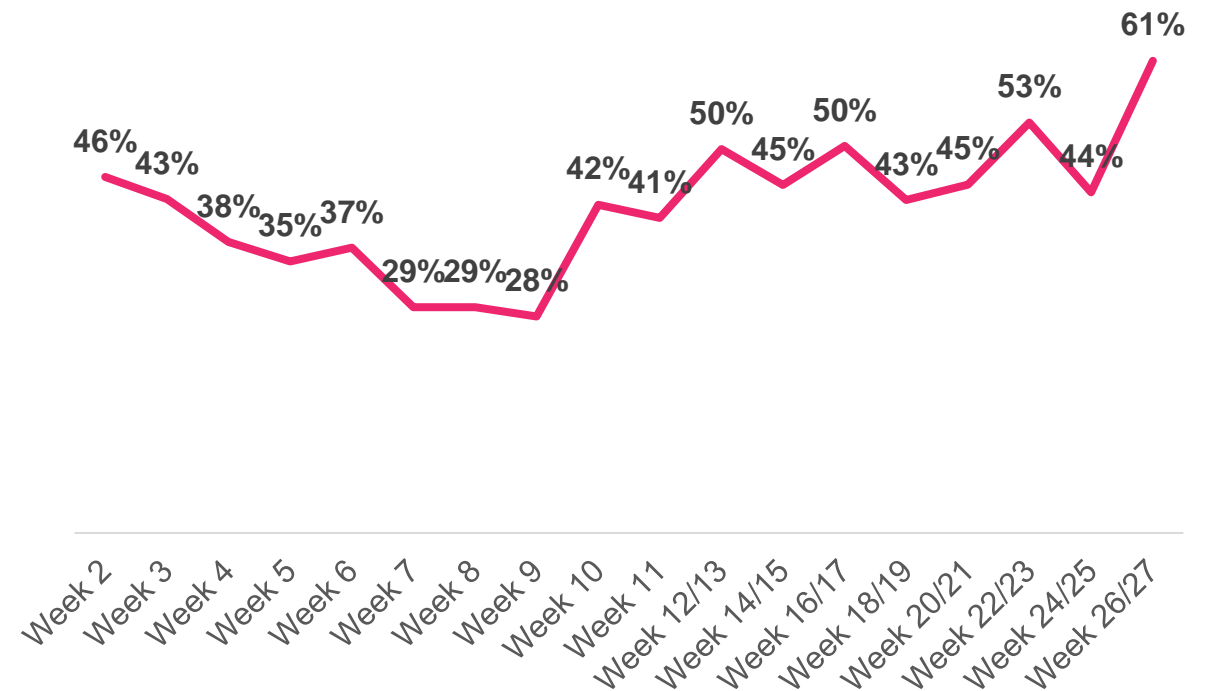
CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE SEEKING SUPPORT

This week 61 per cent of responding organisations (61) saw an increase in the number of people seeking support in the last two weeks.

35 reported little change in numbers and 4 reported a decrease.

Organisations working with BAME Londoners and socially excluded people reported increases in demand in line with the cohort overall at 61%. Organisation working with older people and young people were slightly less likely to report higher demand at 42% and 52% respectively.

Increase in numbers seeking support



CHANGE IN NUMBERS SEEKING SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC ISSUES

We asked responding organisations to tell us whether the number of people seeking support for a range of specific issues was higher, the same or lower compared to last week. We asked them to only answer if they deal with and have seen each of the issues. The issues with the highest proportion reporting higher demand are employment, mental health, poverty and housing. This week we have seen a noticeable (>10pp) increase in the proportion of organisations experiencing an increase in demand around employment, immigration issues, access to health and access to benefits.

Issue	Proportion reporting higher demand	No. of responses	Issue	Proportion reporting higher demand	No. of responses
Employment	70%	50	Isolation and loneliness	47%	58
Mental health	62%	58	Access to benefits	44%	48
Poverty	62%	42	Childcare or Parenting	43%	23
Housing	61%	41	Access to food	43%	56
Immigration issues	59%	32	Physical health	42%	43
Education	58%	36	Domestic violence	36%	36
Homelessness	53%	30	Hate crime	33%	27
Substance misuse	50%	18	Grief bereavement	31%	32
Access to health	49%	43	Discrimination	31%	36
Capacity Building/organisations or volunteers	49%	39	Access to care	30%	30
Digital connectivity	48%	54	Victim support	29%	17
Debt issues	48%	42			

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOUR ORGANISATION IS FACING THIS WEEK?

We asked responding organisations to tell us the three biggest challenges they were facing last week. The top three issues identified were funding sustainability, capacity due to increased demand and staff wellbeing and mental health. We saw a higher number of organisations reporting challenges with providing new or changed services and maintaining engagement with beneficiary groups compared to Week 25.

Challenge	Number of organisations
Funding sustainability beyond the crisis	34
Capacity - due to increased demand	27
Staff wellbeing and mental health	19
Funding general	15
Need to provide new or changed services	13
Capacity - general	12
Delivering services whilst following social distancing guidelines	12
Maintaining engagement and contact with beneficiary groups	12
Digital or tech equipment (laptops, mobile phones or other devices)	11
Funding access to urgent funding for new needs	11
Planning for recovery/easing of lockdown	11
Reaching vulnerable groups	11

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOUR BENEFICIARIES ARE FACING THIS WEEK?

We asked responding organisations to tell us the three biggest challenges their beneficiaries were facing in the last week. This week the top issues remain loss of employment, mental health and low income.

Challenge	Number of organisations
Loss of jobs or lack of employment opportunities	39
Mental health	33
Low income	30
Digital exclusion	26
Social Isolation	23
Access to food and essentials	19
Social distancing rules	14
Inadequate accommodation	12
Family tension	8

BENEFICIARY CHALLENGES BY BENEFICIARY GROUP

Do biggest beneficiary challenges vary by the main groups of beneficiaries organisations work with? Percentages shown are of responding organisations, and are relative to the cohort overall.

Organisations working with young people were twice as likely to identify mental health (67%) as a main challenge, compared with the cohort overall. They were also more likely to select loss of jobs (57%).

Organisations working with BAME Londoners were more likely than other organisations to mention loss of jobs (57%), digital exclusion (43%) and multi-lingual support (17%).

Organisations working with older people were more likely than the cohort average to select low income (47%) and social isolation (32%) as main challenges.

CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACT OF SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19 (n=80)

Two of the most prominent concerns raised were the impact of a second wave on mental health (23) and social isolation (18), this included reference to beneficiaries and employees.

“In addition to the considerable medical impact of Covid on both our team & our beneficiaries, their families and the wider community, the prolonged high levels of uncertainty, fear, mistrust, isolation etc and the associated physiological impact of such are causing many to become unwell. So, although only a few of them have contracted Covid, many others are suffering a loss of drive / low energy / depression / manic thinking, paranoia etc. This causes a lack of sleep and all that this brings as well as plenty of digestive issues too as our fight / flight responses kick in & are active for prolonged periods ... Many of our YP's attendance at our sessions has become more sporadic over the past few weeks - since schools / colleges & universities reopened. No-one seems to know what is the best way to behave - the level of confusion and uncertainty are having a toll on our communities. This is leading to some changes in behaviour as people are figuratively being pushed to the edge.”

“We were on the cusp of starting work to reopen our building. We plan to continue to do this to make it Covid secure but no longer anticipate working there for the coming months. Heading into winter with rising cases is causing more anxiety, including among staff and volunteers.”

“Social isolation as LGBTQ+ venues and services are shut down again.”

“Direct impact on older people who are at risk of severe health implications and the 'side effects' of self-isolation and shielding. Our lived experience research indications a significant deterioration in mental and physical wellbeing in older adults as a result of the indirect impact from Covid-19. Further decline of physical poor health (ie lack of mobility / falls & non treatment of pre- existing conditions / non diagnosis of new health issues. Decline of mental health particularly with the prospect of facing further confinement and lack of "hope" about when the restrictions will end / improve. Christmas could heighten these feelings even further. Digital exclusion is, and will continue to be, an issue.”

CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACT OF SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19 (n=80)

This was in line with groups raising concern about the impact of a second wave on service delivery (23), with digital provision not being suitable for individual with complex needs or those who are digitally excluded. The importance of face to face contact for sustaining relationships was also raised.

“Impact on our organisation is not able to provide our services in person to our vulnerable members. Our information & advice for benefit application is almost impossible to deliver remotely.”

“Not able to deliver on contracts which will lead to loss of income Unprecedented demand on services- staff burn out and exhaustion Difficulty to plan activities in an environment of constant change.”

“Working on line is not as effective for some survivors as face to face working.”

“Many beneficiaries have little or no access to the internet and so it is difficult to deliver services such as ESOL or social engagement online. Also, beneficiaries usually prefer to visit the office to talk to us in person about their issues, as they have communication barriers over the phone or online. With a lockdown , less beneficiaries will seek our help.”

“Increased period of isolation for vulnerable residents. Many we know were not accessing mainstream advice services by phone/email and were waiting for face to face to re-open. This will increase depth and complexity of their issues by the time they seek help.”

“We're also concerned about the impact on our relationships as an organisation with the community, as we've now had a long period of no face to face contact with community members, which affects some of our services such as youth development, community organising, supporting victims of domestic abuse etc In the long term we are worried about the impacts of digital exclusion that many Gypsies and Travellers face and how this will further marginalise many people in the community, from accessing health, education, work.”

CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACT OF SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19 (n=80)

The economic impact of a second wave and rising levels of poverty (18)

“Financial - second wave of COVID coincides with end of furlough scheme, and we anticipate many more families experiencing reduced income and poverty”

“the potential increase in poverty and destitution due to NRPF”

“Fuel Poverty - they are already starting to choose between putting on the heating and food. We have found many behind on utility bills as we start to refer them to the Green Doctors for support. Potential job opportunities are already scarce. WHO say a second lock down will cause an increase in poverty and we couldn't agree more. Our beneficiaries are just about hanging on. With a potential local lockdown this will increase debt. We have referred many for care navigation to access their GPs. We are told the NHS is open for business but our beneficiaries are not finding this!”

The need for long term funding (15) and worry about organisations not being able to sustain themselves through further uncertainty.

“Forward thinking funders - i.e. not immediate response but longterm consequences, including job market, core costs and recession.”

“Too much recovery funding is short term only, no vision or funding for the long term recovery”

“A second wave will put further financial strain on the organisation, and without a suitable level of job retention support there will be a need for more cuts and potential redundancies. Any future recovery of the live programme will take much longer if further staff cuts are made in the short - medium term. Current restrictions already make it impractical to start to recover lost income and the confidence of beneficiaries continues to be lost when guidance is unclear. There is concern that if lockdown restrictions intensify we may be better placed to mothball the organisation than to try and stay open running at a potential loss. This means we will not be able to provide the support for our beneficiaries until we have secured the long term sustainability of the business.”

CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACT OF SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19 (n=80)

Respondents also raised concern about digital exclusion (9), an increase in demand (8) that they will not be able to meet and fears about access to food (8).

“That we haven't learnt the lessons of the first wave and/or have not had the time or space to act on the lessons. EG: we know digital exclusion/poverty is an issue but have not secured funding to address this as yet.”

“Tighter restrictions / even another lockdown will mean more organisations having no alternative than to offer remote and mainly online services & activities. But still many beneficiaries may not be able to access online offers and many smaller orgs lack confidence and skills to do this.”

“A second wave and lockdown will put additional pressure on already oversubscribed service provision by our members. They are already seeing an increase in people accessing their support services and they are concerned that they won't be able to meet the need and reach out to the most vulnerable groups during a second lockdown. Many of the groups are also worried of the financial implications and potential permanent closure of their community group or organisation.”

“We are already exhausted and depleted. Other 'front doors' are closed so we are seeing so many more walk in emergencies”

“General concern about access to Food by people who might start self-isolating. Impact on unemployment, and mental health.”

“We are concerned about the possibility of increased need for food - supplies of surplus food seem to be going down in both quality and quantity. Also: continued loss of income from our premises, continued staff anxiety and mental health issues.”

ANY OTHER ISSUES

Mental health (8) is the most common risk raised by respondent for a second week. Organisations referenced feelings of helplessness and lack of hope amongst their communities.

“The impact of the high levels of fear and anger is a major concern. As the economic impact of unemployment begin to really kick in, we fear that life for the groups we work for & with will become even more challenging. We collectively need to ensure that there is major piece of work developed & delivered to enable people to 'see a light at the end of this tunnel'. Otherwise, feelings of exclusion, despondency and despair will be added to the fear and anger - producing a lethal cocktail! We seem to have lost the feeling of 'community', 'togetherness' & 'good will' that was so overt in the early stages of lockdown...if we cannot resurrect the 'together we are stronger' approach, we fear that we may be approaching a breakdown of the core holding society together.”

“Although things may be getting back to some sort of normal for most, with those visiting the food project little has changed for them. Our 'visitors' display a range of needs, including little to no promise of work, physical and mental health disabilities, lack of opportunity, involvement and sometimes hope itself.”

This was followed by respondents raising concern about the needs of and support for older people (7).

“Elderly, especially from BEMER Community need help to understand all the policies and structures from government. Many of them have no clue what's going to happen in the second wave. They are unsure and scared, and they feel vulnerable.”

“Older people, especially those with dementia have nowhere to go and often cannot access online support.”

“Older people are increasingly feeling isolated and desperate for social connectedness. Youth and young people are experiencing depression and feelings of helplessness and having no future. We have a massive increase in people needing support with mental health issues which is also impacting on our staff and resources.”

ANY OTHER ISSUES

This week a number of responses flagged particular needs of community and voluntary sector organisations, as well as the critical role they are playing in supporting Londoners. Including translating advice in to different languages, increasing capacity through remote training of volunteers and supporting Londoners to access services.

“We are translating all advise from the government to Somali and are sharing it on our social media so that everyone understands the guidance regardless of their language barriers.”

“We have been hugely successful in delivering fully remote volunteer recruitment and training with 16 new volunteers on our phones helping us to meet higher numbers than ever before. Some of our former volunteers are not delivering due to lack of IT equipment. If we had access to funding for laptops / headphones we could bring more volunteers back to front line delivery.”

“We are helping an elderly lady with serious health conditions, CPOD, mental health issues, who has the means to pay for support but is unable to access it. She was previously supported by a mutual aid which is no longer viable and she has been waiting for over six weeks for some form of support, referrals have not been made and when they are they are not followed through, there has been a long delay with information being shared which has impacted on her both physically and mentally. We are concerned there are many more elders who are facing similar challenges.”



NEXT STEPS

The next survey will cover two weeks, being in the field between 19th – 28th October. It will include an additional three questions focussed on the impact of COVID on civil society, these questions will be asked every two months.

Results available on Monday 2nd November.