

# Our Community & COVID-19



## Exploring early impacts of COVID-19 for LGBTQ+ Coloradans

Research indicates that LGBTQ+ individuals are disproportionately impacted by mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.<sup>1</sup> The increased challenges and risks generated by COVID-19 are likely to exacerbate already perilous conditions for many in our community, particularly for young people and older adults.

Envision:You, with support from OMNI Institute, reached out to LGBTQ+ Coloradans across the state to understand their emerging concerns and needs in the face of COVID-19.

**277** individuals across the state completed a brief online survey, and representatives from several LGBTQ+-serving organizations shared their insights. We asked them to weigh in on early impacts of the pandemic, along with needs and potential resources that Envision:You might consider to better support our community through this time. **Here's what we learned:**

### Significant impacts to social supports, employment and housing are already being experienced.



44% reported a loss of support systems



Over half of those do not feel they have the supports they need to manage their mental health right now



30% reported a loss of job or income



6 out of 10 of those are worried about making ends meet



20% reported a change in their living situation

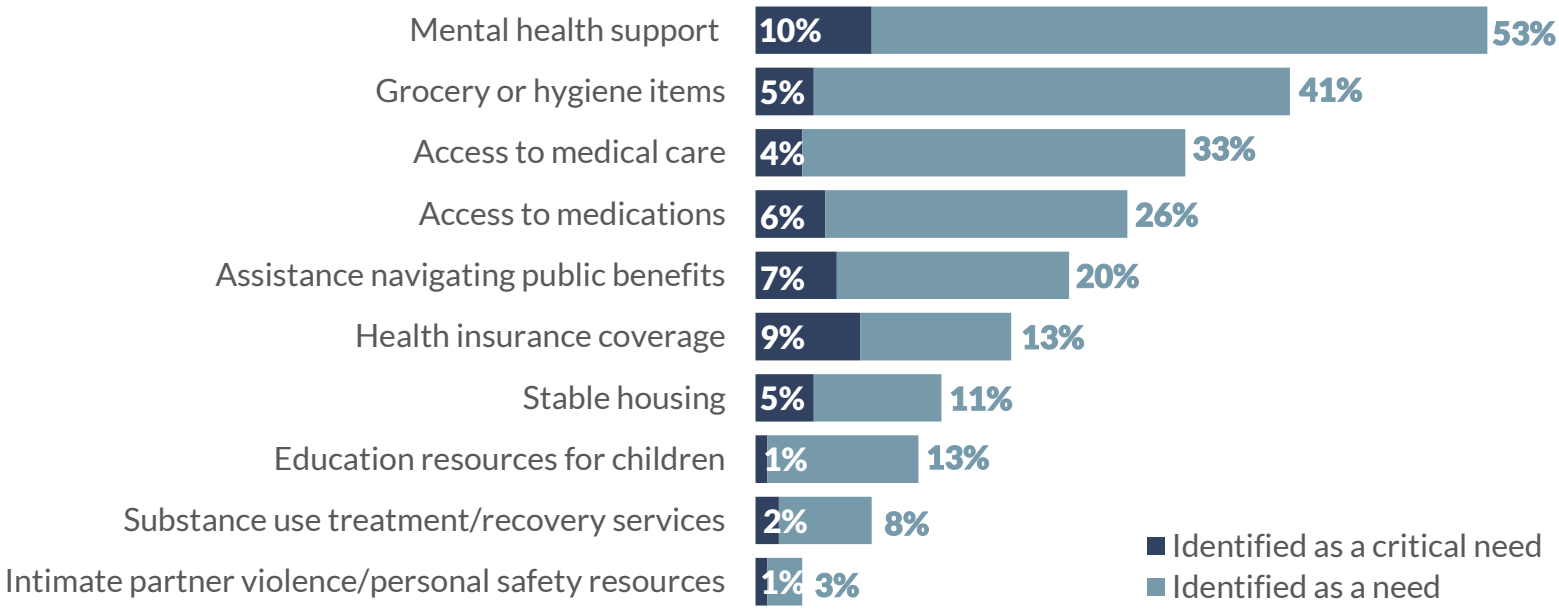


4 out of 10 of those are worried about their safety in their current living condition

1. One Colorado. *Closing the Gap: The Turning Point for LGBTQ Health*, 2019 <https://one-colorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Closing-the-Gap.pdf>, Accessed 20 May 2020.

# What we heard about community needs:

Mental health support was identified as a **need** by over half of respondents, with 10% of those identifying it as a critical need.



**“ Social distancing...has severely negatively impacted my mental health. Substance abuse has increased and motivation has plummeted. My relationships are suffering and I fear that this will have a lasting impact beyond the quarantine. ”**

## Loss of Social Support

Respondents described a variety of social impacts as a result of COVID-19:

- ▶ **Loss of support systems and social networks**, both in general and specific to LGBTQ+ community support and connections.
- ▶ Living alone in **isolation**, without a partner, family members or roommates.
- ▶ Living in **unsupportive, non-affirming home environments**: several respondents shared the struggle of being forced to live in home environments that don't support their gender identify and/or sexual orientation or having to live in isolation with an ex-partner or in an unhealthy relationship.
- ▶ Additional risks faced by people who are most disconnected or living with **unrecognized/"invisible" illnesses** and may not know how to access support until they are in acute crisis.

**“ I’m alone and that scares me more than the virus. ”**

# Immediate Critical Needs

Respondents also shared many concerns about being able to meet basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- ▶ **Unemployment** from job loss, a reduction in hours by employers, or a reduced demand for services by gig workers or self-employed.
- ▶ Difficulty meeting **physical health care** needs due to finances and/or access to remote care. Impacts ranged from postponement of routine health care visits such as physical therapy or disease management, as well as delays in transition-related health care (e.g., hormone therapy or surgery).
- ▶ Impact on **mental health** including difficulty managing existing symptoms or substance use concerns/diagnoses, as well as new or increased symptoms such as anxiety and depression.
- ▶ Fear of **housing loss** due to an inability to meet rent or mortgage costs by individuals, their partners, or roommates who have co-responsibility for housing costs.
- ▶ Difficulties navigating the processes and paperwork to access needed **services or supports** such as health insurance, financial assistance or loans, etc.
- ▶ Concerns about being able to access necessary **childcare** or care for family members or pets.



***I have some chronic health conditions... If I don't return to work though, I will be disqualified for receiving unemployment... I will essentially need to choose between risking my health and the lives of others or having income to support myself and live.***

## Other Mental Health Impacts

Respondents also reported several additional impacts on mental health, such as:

**Anxiety about longer-term financial stability** (e.g., credit issues, savings, etc.), even if immediate needs are currently being met.

**Fear of exposure** to COVID-19, particularly for those...

- ...living in shared housing or apartment buildings.
- ...returning to work where social distancing is not possible/practiced.
- ...at high risk (e.g., older or with compromised immune systems).
- ...in contact with others who are not following precautions.

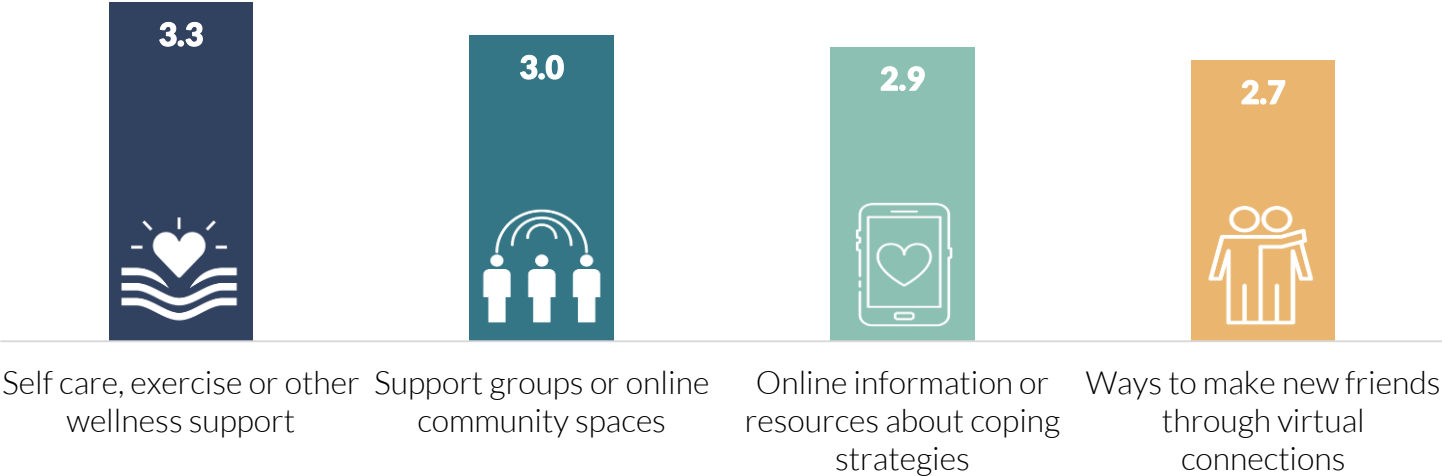
**PTSD symptoms** for those who have experienced prior isolation, abuse, or the stigma and fear of HIV/AIDS during the 1980s and 90s.



# What we heard about resources needed:

Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of various resources and to share what else would be helpful during COVID-19.

Self-care, exercise, or other wellness supports were identified as the most useful type of resource\*



\*Mean scores were calculated on a scale of 1-5 with 1 (“resources that would not be helpful/useful at all right now”) to 5 (“resources that would be extremely helpful/useful right now”)

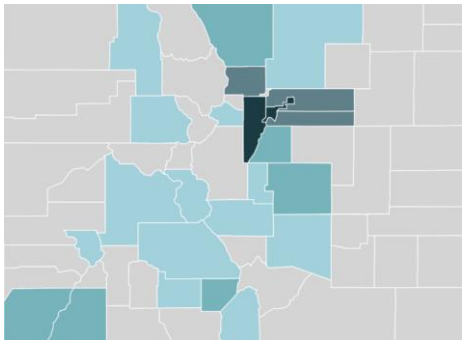
## Other resources of interest to respondents included:

- ▶ Access to technology to utilize virtual support (e.g., internet access; iPhones or other devices, etc.)
- ▶ Virtual safe spaces, support groups, social networking opportunities and/or informational resources, focused on the following groups or topics:

- Youth and young adults who are in isolated home environments and lack safe supportive spaces to express their gender identity and sexual orientation
- People experiencing delays in transition-related healthcare
- Transgender health information/guidance
- LGBTQ+ parents
- People experiencing divorce or difficult relationships during isolation
- Seniors
- Wellness resources (e.g, online yoga)
- Social workers, therapists and other direct service providers who work with individuals facing increased challenges and hardships related to COVID-19



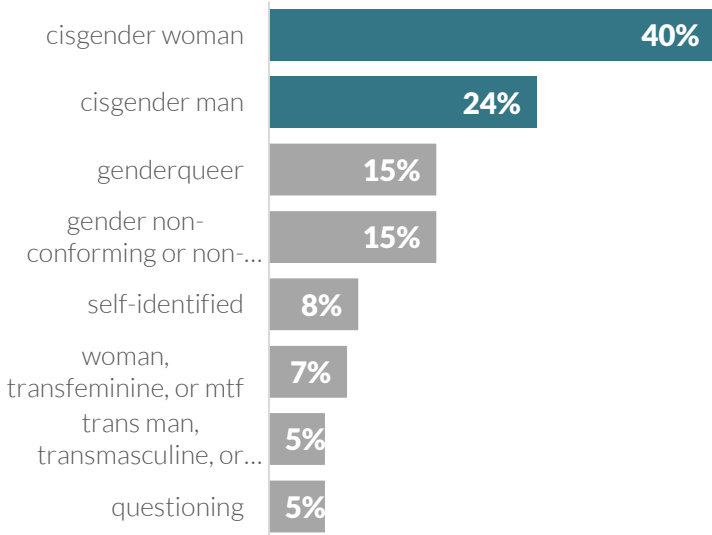
# Who we heard from:



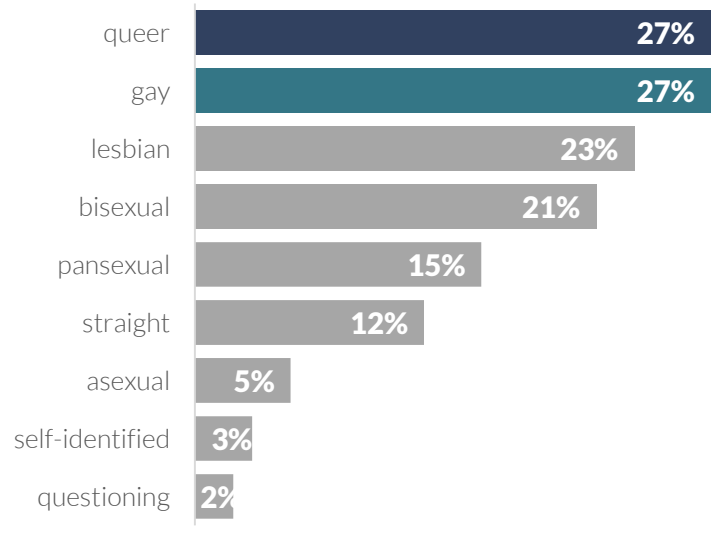
Respondents represented **25 counties** across Colorado.

- 31.8%** from large cities/urban areas
- 21.2%** from suburban areas
- 19.7%** from medium-sized cities
- 16.7%** from small towns
- 10.6%** from rural areas

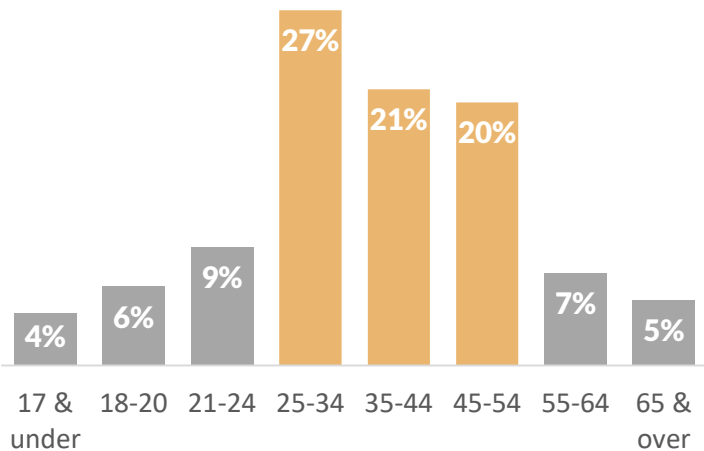
The majority of respondents identified as **cisgender**.



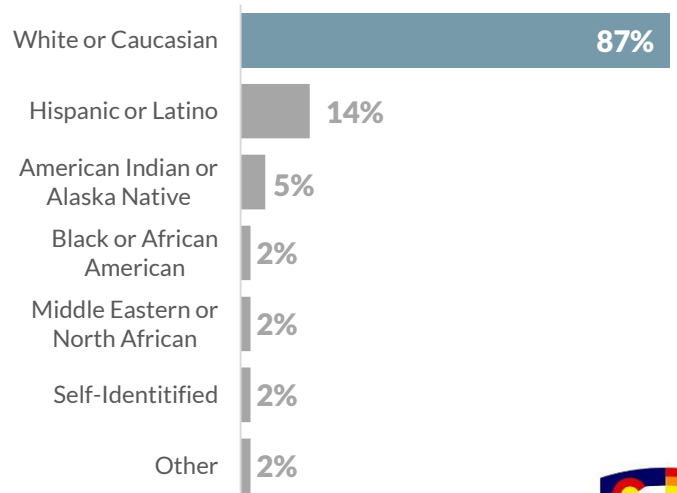
Approximately one in four respondents identified as **queer** and/or **gay**.



The majority of respondents were within the **age range of 25-54**.



The majority of respondents were **white or Caucasian**.



# Our response and next steps:

This brief assessment was an initial step in our work to explore the swiftly evolving impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBTQ+ Coloradans. We know that our survey respondents are not fully representative of our larger community and we will continue to seek input from the voices not yet captured here.

We are currently working on a larger **statewide community needs assessment** that captures a diverse and representative subset of the LGBTQ+ population with behavioral health concerns.

In response to what we're learning about the behavioral health needs of our community, Envision:You has recently launched several initiatives, including:



**The Envision:You COVID-19 Behavioral Health Support Program.** This program, in partnership with Caring for Denver Foundation, will provide no-cost virtual telehealth services to support LGBTQ+ individuals with mental health, emotional and substance use issues, and interpersonal relationship concerns that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



**'How to have the Talk.'** We know that one of the most difficult challenges any of us face is confronting a person we care about who is suffering from an untreated behavioral health concern. Thanks to a grant from the Colorado COVID-19 Relief Fund, Envision:You will be launching a campaign this summer encouraging members of the community to have the 'talk' with friends and loved ones around mental health.



**The Envision:You LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Provider Training Program.** Envision:You is developing a training program to confront implicit and explicit biases that exist among behavioral health practitioners when working with LGBTQ+ individuals. The Envision:You program will be designed to help registered and licensed mental health clinicians, addiction counselors, and certified peer specialists to develop new skills and gain critical knowledge to enhance the delivery of quality, culturally relevant and affirming behavioral health interventions for members of the LGBTQ+ community.



To ensure our community has access to relevant and affirming resources, Envision:You has **compiled a list of resources and information** that can be found at [www.envision-you.org](http://www.envision-you.org)

## About us:

The mission of Envision:You is to support, educate, and empower members of the Colorado LGBTQ+ community living with mental health and substance use disorders. To advance our mission, Envision:You supports a range of efforts including public education and awareness building; provider education, training, and resources to support culturally competent treatment services; and higher-level policy and advocacy efforts to advance equity for LGBTQ+ individuals living with mental health and substance use disorders.

OMNI Institute is a nonprofit social science consultancy that provides integrated research and evaluation, capacity building, and data utilization services to accelerate positive social change.

For more information about our work or questions about this report, please contact T Schweimler: [LSchweimler@omni.org](mailto:LSchweimler@omni.org) or 303-303-839-9422 or 800-279-2070 ext. 177