



Colchester Long-Term Recovery Committee Resident Survey Results

Reported October 2020

COVID-19 needs no introduction. In fact, it is a name we would all like to forget. The pandemic will result in impacts anticipated to be felt for many years. Many aspects of our everyday lives have indeed been changed forever, and many ramifications are yet unrealized. Lives have been lost, families have struggled, school-aged children have suffered setbacks and our economy, particularly small businesses, have been forced to make sacrifices that may, or already have, resulted in substantial losses, many permanent.

What makes this disaster particularly impactful is that existing emergency or incident response protocols designed to respond to natural disasters are substantially inapplicable. For the most part, we were caught off guard. Short-term response came in the form of an effort to reduce the spread, educate the populous, and scramble to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE). Good, useful information was countered with bad, harmful information, conspiracy theories abound and many worried, and still do, that their freedom was being tampered with.

In response to a directive from State of Connecticut Governor Lamont, municipalities were asked to create a committee to evaluate and respond to the long-term impacts of the pandemic, albeit remotely. In Colchester, the Planning Director was tasked with assembling a group of individuals representing a range of interests, and thus, a 10-member Long-Term Recovery Committee convened, meeting regularly via ZOOM.

Unfortunately, direction from State or regional emergency response teams was, and has been, limited as the more immediate, short-term response remains the priority. The Committee decided to move forward with the understanding that the goals and objectives of this group were likely to evolve as more information about the pandemic and its impacts is gathered. In order to accommodate this uncertainty, the Committee recommended the following statement as the charge as they understood it:

The Colchester Long-Term Recovery Committee was established to identify the short and long-term needs of the Colchester community as residents and businesses recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee's findings and recommendations, based on feedback from community members, will be presented to the Board of Selectmen and communicated with local groups and organizations.

The following is a report on the results of a survey drafted by the Committee to gather input from Colchester residents on the varying impacts of COVID-19 on their lives. The Committee emphasized the use of a digital survey by sharing a brief introduction and link to the survey with as many public interest groups as possible. A QR-Code was produced, and flyers were distributed by Committee members to residents who may not have received the link to the survey.

This report includes several recommendations that should be considered examples of the many ways the municipality and residents of Colchester might respond to the needs of the public. These recommendations are intended to help the Board of Selectmen, appropriate town departments, and key local community service organizations, prioritize and organize action. The Long-Term Recovery Committee intends to contribute however appropriate.

Long-Term Recovery Committee Members

Matthew Bordeaux, Town of Colchester Planning Director, Chair

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Jack Faski

Alex Levere

Chuck Maynard

Marge Mlodzinski

Michelle Noehren

Rosemary Coyle, Board of Selectmen Liaison

A special thanks is required for Michelle Noehren, a Colchester resident and founder of 'Colchester is Kind', for the work she put into the generation of the survey and preparation of this report.

Additionally, the Committee extends its appreciation to the CT Data Collaborative for its helpful review of the survey data and assistance in report preparation.



Survey Respondents

There were 1,009 responses to the COVID-19 survey. Of those 1,009 responses, 99% are from Colchester residents. 79.8% of respondents identify as female, 20% as male, and .2% selected the “other” category.

From youngest to oldest, .2% of respondents are under the age of 18, .8% are between ages 18-24, 30.8% between the ages of 25 and 44, 42.2% between the ages of 45 and 64, and 26% are over the age of 65. The majority of respondents (73.8%) are of working age (18-65).

Consistent with Town of Colchester demographics overall, the majority of survey respondents identified as White (91.1%), followed by Asian (1.1%), Black or African American (0.9%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.2%), and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (0.2%). Approximately 4.7% chose not to disclose their race.

The majority of respondents (8 out of 14) who selected “Other” for race wrote in an identity that is consistent with Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. The committee did not ask respondents about their ethnicity, which likely would have provided additional helpful information. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

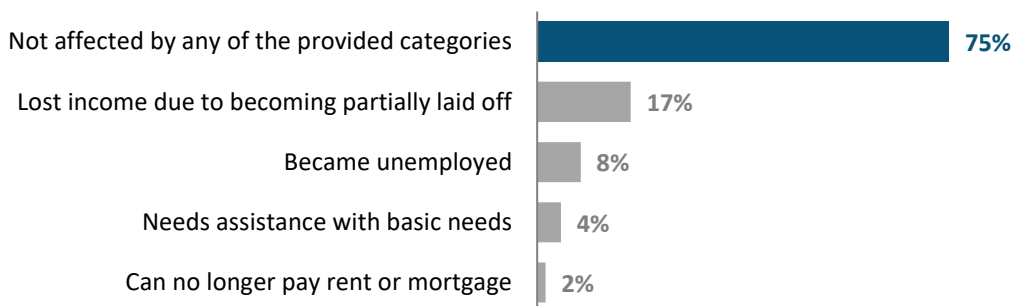
Effects of COVID-19

This survey asked Colchester residents to share how COVID-19 has impacted their lives across a variety of factors, including income and financial stability, child care and education, and mental health and relationships. The survey also asked about any positive effects of COVID-19 on Colchester residents. See Appendix B for a summary of the themes from open-ended responses for additional impacts of COVID-19.

Income & Financial Stability

When asked how the pandemic has challenged respondents economically, 17% said they lost income due to becoming partially laid off, 8% said they became unemployed, 4% said they need assistance with basic needs, and 2% said they can no longer pay their rent or mortgage. 75% of respondents said they were not affected by any of the provided categories.

The majority of respondents shared that they have not been affected economically by Covid-19.



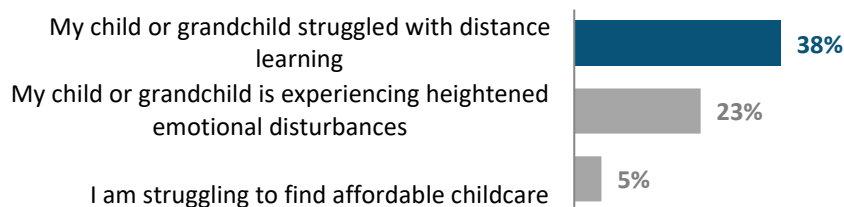
Approximately 15% of open-ended responses were about changes in employment, while another 4% were about the economy, and 3% about financial struggles.

Recommendation: Develop separate communications for each social program offered through Colchester Social Services including energy/heating assistance, school lunches, and the Food Bank. Communications should educate residents about the purpose of each program and how to access it. The committee will utilize email, social media, and shareable graphics to reach the populations most economically effected by COVID-19.

Child Care & Education

For respondents with children or grandchildren, 38% said they have at least one child in the Colchester school system and struggled with distance learning, 23% said their child is experiencing heightened emotional disturbances, and 5% said they are struggling to find affordable childcare.

More than 1 in 3 (38%) respondents said that their child or grandchild struggled with distance learning.



Of the open-ended responses, 12% were about child care and education with approximately two-thirds focused on shifting to distance learning and another third about struggling with the loss of child care.



I am an elementary school teacher so I was very stressed trying to implement distance learning with 5-10 year olds and I have lots of anxiety about the safety of myself and students going back to school.”

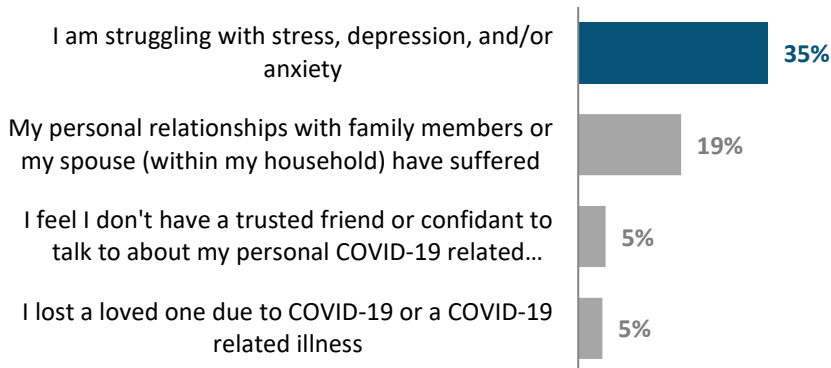
Recommendation: Work with the school district to identify strategies to help students maintain focus during distance learning such as setting up a classroom environment at home and sticking to a schedule. Additionally, identify experts in child psychology to develop a communication for parents about how they can best support their child’s mental health. Work with the school district and PTO’s to determine the best way to distribute this information for parents and caregivers.

Mental Health & Relationships

When asked how their mental health and/or personal relationships have been impacted by COVID-19, over one-third of respondents (35%, 357) said they are struggling with stress, depression, and/or anxiety. One in five respondents (19%) said their personal relationships with family members or their

spouse have suffered, 5% said they don't have a trusted friend to talk to about their personal COVID-19 related feelings, and 5% said they lost a loved one to COVID-19.

More than 1 in 3 (35%) respondents said that they are struggling with stress, depression, and/or anxiety.



Over half (55%) of the open-ended responses about the impacts of COVID-19 were about people struggling with mental health, isolation, and relationships.



I have not been able to visit my adult children and grandchildren who live in New York and Virginia since the beginning of the pandemic. I really miss my visits with them.



I work from home and love my solitude. The isolation is a whole other animal that I struggle to keep from consuming me.

Recommendation: The Committee should develop a communication that would go out either as a town-wide mailing or an insert in the Rivereast News Bulletin that would provide a link to a database of therapists, as well as a link to information about programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), support groups, and local places of worship. Due to the high number of respondents struggling with anxiety and depression, this initiative is extremely pertinent and warrants the allocation of resources (funding, etc) to support an action of this kind.

Older Adults

For those age 60 and over, 24% said they have experienced social isolation, 5% said they have had trouble getting groceries, 7% have struggled with technology, 1% had trouble getting their medications, 0.8% were not able to find a mask, and 0.5% had difficulty getting transportation.



1 in 4 older adults experienced social isolation



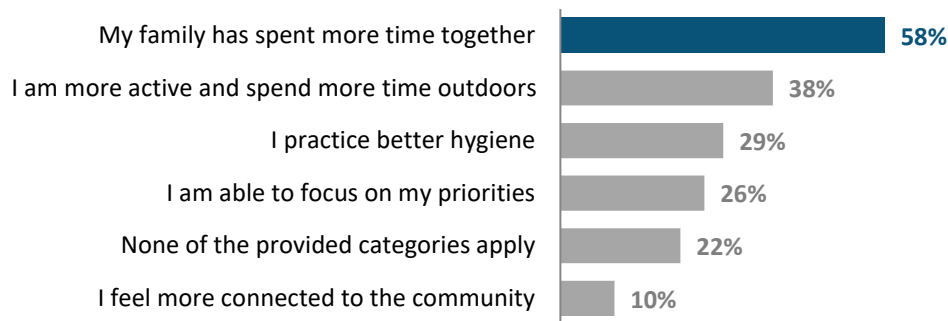
I'm isolated. I've gained weight because I can only exercise in a therapy pool. I miss being able to hug my grandkids. I worry constantly about our country, the world and the way people are suffering. At times, I can't get supplies or food I need.

Recommendation: The Town should identify who is most affected and where they are located and develop a plan to address the issues. Suggestions of outreach include local churches and synagogue, Senior Center, community and housing groups, social service agencies, youth groups, etc. In addition, we need to identify opportunities for education and outreach with regards to technology, e.g., identifying available hardware/software options, on-line instruction, programs at the Senior Center, the Connecticut Tech Act Project through the Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability, partnering with students at Bacon Academy and one-on-one instruction with residents.

Positive Changes

When asked if respondents experienced any positive outcomes as a result of the pandemic, 58% said their family has spent more time together, 38% said they are more active and spend more time outdoors, 26% said they are able to focus on their priorities, 10% said they feel more connected to the community, 29% said they practice better hygiene, and 22% said none of the provided categories applied to their situation.

Over half (58%) of respondents said that their family has spent more time together as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Opened-ended responses about the positive impacts included improved relationships, time to try new activities, time for home projects, slower pace, learning new information about where they live, less traffic, saving money, improved spiritual practice, distance learning, cleaner oceans, and getting a pet.



Became more knowledgeable about community by listening to Mary on facebook live videos daily.



Gained greater appreciation for the rural character of the town and all its open space.

Community Resources

Respondents were asked what community resources they have found most helpful. The most popular responses were:

Communications

- First Selectman’s Facebook updates
- Governor Lamont’s updates
- Emails from the school district

Programs/Organizations

- Curb-side library pick up
- Kids crafts provided by the library
- Colchester Senior Center
- Colchester is Kind
- Colchester Food Bank
- Free school lunches
- Colchester Land Trust

Businesses

- Businesses who offered curbside pick up (including grocery stores)
- FUD delivery

Other

- Local hiking trails
- Individuals who made and donated masks

The vast majority of respondents (81.2%) indicated they have enough information about COVID-19 to keep them and their families safe. 4.8% said they do not have enough information and 14% were unsure.

Consumer Behavior

The Committee was interested in learning how the pandemic has affected consumer behavior. Despite public health concerns related to the pandemic, the majority of respondents continue to shop in store: 88% of respondents said in-store, 25% said pick-up, and 32% said delivery.



88%

shopped in store



25%

picked up shopping



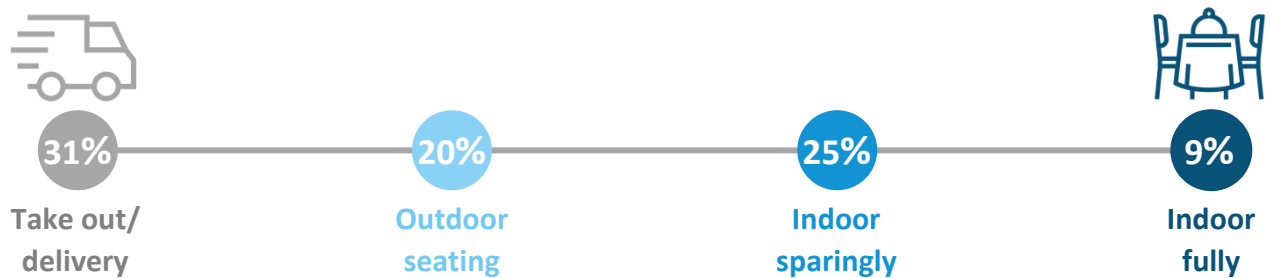
32%

used delivery services

Recommendation: Build a stronger relationship with organizations like the Colchester Business Association (CBA) to improve the marketing of and support services for local businesses. In the absence of a chamber of commerce, the CBA, perhaps in partnership with the Town of Colchester Economic

Development Commission, should also grow its presence as a source of information and opportunity. The Town and the CBA should monitor trends in the various industries affecting Colchester businesses and work to respond to the needs identified.

When asked what they are most likely to do when the State removes all restrictions to dine-in at restaurants, 31% said they will continue ordering take-out/delivery, 25% said they will start dining-in at restaurants, but sparingly, 20% said they will only dine-in at a restaurant with outdoor seating, 16% said they don't frequent restaurants often enough to make a decision, and 8.6% said they will start dining-in at restaurants, as they would normally have done prior to COVID-19.



Recommendation: Hold a local forum to discuss ideas for restaurant owners and operators to consider as the cold-weather approaches and with it the limitations of the outdoor-dining option. Invite local code officials, as well as marketing and internet commerce specialists, to share information and encourage innovation.

Lastly, when asked if they are shopping more locally than before the pandemic, 43% said no, 14% said maybe, and 42% said yes.



Recommendation: Again, improving the marketing of local businesses is a role for many community stakeholders. The pandemic unquestionably impacted the way consumers acquire goods and services. Looking at these figures with a glass half-full, a 42% increase in local shopping is something to celebrate. Building off that response is critical. This Committee should continue to explore ways to spread the message and educate the public about the role of the local economy in the quality of life for residents.

Community Needs

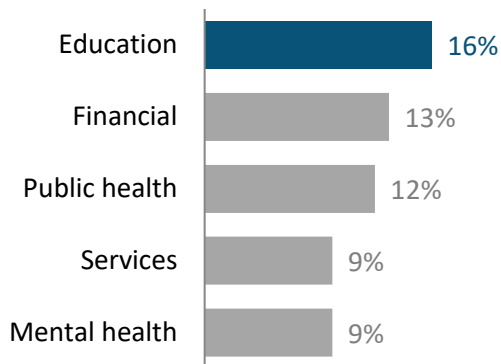
The survey asked the Colchester community what help they need right now and what help they will need in the future. A full list of themes with counts can be found in Appendix C for help needed now and Appendix D for help needed later.

The top three themes for **help needed now** were help with education (plan for reopening schools, actually reopening schools, childcare, and assistance with distance learning), financial assistance, and public health (increased awareness, clear guidelines, adherence to guidelines, information dissemination, and access to supplies, testing, and a vaccine). Respondents also expressed a need for expanded services, which included help with errands, internet, expanded hours for the food bank, transportation to appointments, more delivery options, and close-captioned videos. Nine percent of respondents reported needing help with mental health to manage their stress and other social-emotional challenges due to COVID-19. Note that some responses had more than one theme (119 responses with 129 themes coded).

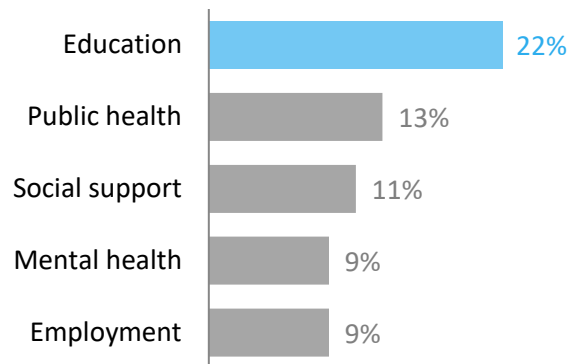
The top three themes for **help needed long-term**, excluding those who responded none or not sure, were help with education (plan for reopening schools, actually reopening schools, child care, options for school format, and receiving a quality education), public health (adherence to guidelines, information dissemination, access to a vaccine and supplies), and social support. Respondents also expressed a need for mental health services (9%), employment (9%), other services such as help with errands and transportation (6%), and food assistance (6%). Note again that some responses had more than one theme (112 responses with 128 themes coded).

Three themes emerged as cross-cutting between help needed now and help needed long-term. Those were: education, public health, and mental health.

Top 5 themes for help needed now



Top 5 themes for help needed long-term



Appendix A: Colchester COVID-19 Survey

Measuring the Impact of COVID-19 on Colchester Residents

The newly established COVID-19 Long-Term Recovery Committee is conducting a survey of Colchester residents to gather information about how individuals and families have been affected by the current pandemic.

Your response to this survey is completely anonymous.

The information received will be used to help the committee develop suggestions for the Town moving forward.

This survey will close at 5 PM on July 20, 2020. Completed surveys will be accepted by mail or drop off. You can mail this survey to: Town of Colchester, ATTN: Matthew Bordeaux, 127 Norwich Ave, Colchester, CT 06415 or you can drop it off through the drop box at Town Hall.

Demographics

First, tell us about yourself. Your information is anonymous.

1. Are you a resident of Colchester?

- Yes
- No

2. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65 and over

3. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other: _____

4. What is your race?
- White
 - Black or African American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
 - I do not want to disclose this information
 - Other: _____

5. How many people live in your home?

6. How many people under the age of 18 live in your home?

Effects of COVID-19 on the Community

Please note that this information is being collected for informational purposes only.

1. We care about how the pandemic has affected our community. Please select the ways you have been challenged economically due to COVID-19.
- I became unemployed due to COVID-19.
 - I lost income due to being partially laid off/reduction in hours.
 - I can no longer pay my rent or mortgage.
 - I need assistance with basic needs such as food.
 - None of the above.
2. If you have children or grandchildren, please let us know if you have been affected in any of the following ways:
- I am struggling to find affordable childcare options.
 - My child is experiencing heightened emotional distress.
 - I have at least one child in the Colchester school system and found digital learning difficult.
 - I do not have children or grandchildren in Colchester.

3. How has your mental health and/or personal relationships been impacted by COVID-19?
- I am struggling with stress, depression, and/or anxiety due to COVID-19.
 - My personal relationships with family members or my spouse (within my household) have suffered.
 - I feel I don't have a trusted friend or confidant to talk to about my personal COVID-19 related feelings.
 - I lost a loved one due to COVID-19 or a COVID-19 related illness.
 - None of the above.
4. Do you feel that you have adequate information about COVID-19 to keep you and your family safe?
- Yes
 - No
5. We are interested in knowing if you have experienced any positive outcomes related to the pandemic. Please select all that apply.
- My family has spent more time together.
 - I am more active and spend more time outside.
 - I have been able to focus on my priorities.
 - I feel more connected to my community.
 - I practice better hygiene.
 - None of the above.
 - Other: _____
6. If there are other ways that COVID-19 has impacted your life that were not described above, please use this space to tell us about your experience.
7. If you are age 60 and over, please select all that apply to your COVID-19 experience.
- I am not over the age of 60.
 - I have experienced social isolation.
 - I have had a hard time getting my medications.
 - I have had trouble getting groceries.
 - I have not been able to find a mask.
 - I have struggled with technology.
 - I have had difficulty getting transportation to medical and other appointments.

Colchester Senior Center

If you are age 55 or over and need immediate help, please contact the Colchester Senior Center at (860) 537-3911.

8. What community resources, if any, have you found most helpful during this time?

9. What help, if any, do you need right now?

10. What help, if any, do you need long-term?

Immediate Assistance

If you need immediate assistance, please contact Colchester Youth & Social Services by calling (860) 537-7255.

Consumer Behavior

Lastly, please let us know how your behavior as a consumer has changed due to COVID-19.

1. How are you doing your shopping?
 - In store
 - Pick up
 - Delivery

2. When the State removes all restrictions to dine-in at restaurants, what are you most likely to do?
 - Continue to order take-out/delivery.
 - Start dining-in at restaurants, but sparingly.
 - Start dining-in at restaurants, as I normally would have prior to COVID-19.
 - I will only dine-in at a restaurant with outdoor seating.
 - I don't frequent restaurants often enough to make a decision.

3. Have you found that you are shopping more locally than you were before the pandemic began?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback will be used to provide recommendations to the Town about how to best help Colchester residents and the community-at-large.

Appendix B: Additional Effects of COVID-19

Summary of themes from respondent comments about additional effects of COVID-19.

Theme	Count
Cancelled - activities	28
Cancelled - services	7
Cancelled - travel	6
Economy – cost of living	6
Economy – small business	6
Education - general	1
Education - childcare	10
Education – distance learning	21
Education – schools reopen	2
Employment - general	3
Employment - changed	2
Employment – hours cut	2
Employment – job loss	10
Employment – pay cut	2
Employment – work from home	14
Employment - work more	9
Financial - challenges	6
Financial - investments	2
Isolation	75
Mental health	67
None or not sure	2
Other	1
Other - access to care	1
Other - change in charitable giving	1
Other - lack of food options	1
Other – weight gain	3
Other - wedding change	1
Other - changed behavior	1
Positive - activities	7
Positive - distance learning	1
Positive - environment	1
Positive - got a pet	1
Positive - home	7
Positive - information	4
Positive - less traffic	3
Positive - nature	1
Positive - new activities	1

Theme	Count
Positive - other	1
Positive - relationships	14
Positive - saving money	3
Positive - services	1
Positive - slower pace	7
Positive - spirituality	2
Public health - adherence	10
Public health - distrust	12
Public health - got COVID	1
Public health - information	1
Public policy - change	1
Relationships - family moved in	6
Relationships - family moved out	2
Relationships - became caregiver	2
Relationships – depend on others	1
Relationships – safety concerns	1
Relationships - loss of a loved one	4

Appendix C: Help Needed Right Now

Summary of themes from respondent comments about help needed right now.

Theme	Count
Assistance – financial	15
Assistance – food	3
Assistance - housing	2
Economy – financial (support for local arts)	1
Economy - information	2
Economy - reopen	3
Education - childcare	2
Education – distance learning	3
Education – reopen plan	9
Education – reopen plan	1
Education - school	1
Education – schools reopen	3
Employment - essential	1
Employment – flexible work	1
Employment - job	5
Mental health	11
None or not sure	5
Other	5
Policy change - general	5
Policy change - taxes	4
Public health - adherence	3
Public health - awareness	1
Public health - guidelines	5
Public health - information	1
Public health - supplies	2
Public health - vaccine	1
Public health - testing	1
Services - accessibility (closed-captions)	1
Services - accommodations (more delivery options)	1
Services - errands	5
Services - expand hours	1
Services - internet	2
Services - transportation	1
Social support	9
Volunteer opportunities	4
Youth activities	9

Appendix D: Help Needed Long Term

Summary of themes from respondent comments about help needed right now.

Theme	Count
Assistance - financial	5
Assistance - food	7
Assistance - housing	2
Economy - reopen	3
Economy - small business	1
Education	2
Education - childcare	5
Education - options	4
Education - quality	1
Education - reopen plan	7
Education - schools reopen	6
Employment	1
Employment - increase hours	2
Employment - job	7
Mental health	10
None or not sure	17
Other	6
Policy change	5
Policy change - taxes	1
Public health - adherence	4
Public health - information	4
Public health - supplies	2
Public health - vaccine	4
Services	4
Services - errands	1
Services - internet	1
Services - transportation	1
Social support	12
Youth activities	3

