



COVID-19 Surveys for Community Organizations Report

WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY
HEALTH UNIT

July 2020



Executive Summary

Two surveys were sent out to community partners that primarily support newcomers and immigrants, to gain an understanding of client needs during the COVID-10 pandemic, what was being done to support these needs, and what additional could be done.

Some organizations reported that they found various ways to meet their clients' needs. There were some suggestions for future steps that could lead to additional actions. This survey was directed towards those individuals that support organizations, not necessarily answered by caseworkers or clients directly. As one respondent stated in the additional comments "we often don't have the 'full picture' of the many barriers the clients may have or experienced in the past". COVID-19 has reduced the number of face-to-face interactions; the ability to engage directly with clients has been reduced to enhance safety and reduce the spread of the virus. Many of the responses suggest that agencies are working in new ways with concern to best support their clients.

Some general conclusions can be drawn from the two surveys. The food and mental health supports that have come from a community collaboration have provided support to clients. The concern about safe access to food is still present and slightly increased, while the concern for counselling support has decreased by 14%. Access to the internet/access to online information was, and still is, a concern; there has been a slight decline in the concern for access to safe transportation.

Accessing more funds, appropriate services, and volunteers (or staffing), seem to be common ways to address many of the identified issues. Lacking important information and personal protective equipment (PPE) makes it difficult to safely get food; though with more (or free PPE) and successful communication, safety could be increased. Addressing inequities is a way to provide support to this vulnerable population, and would support making the healthier way an easier action.

Locally agencies did follow through on a number of the recommendations, as stated by the Government of Canada in their [Vulnerable Populations and COVID-19](#) summary document. Initially, the community did start by sharing simple things that could be done to keep everyone healthy, agencies needed time to learn the facts, get prepared, and provide education to prevent the spread of the virus.

In the future, it could be valuable to directly engage with clients and their service providers (i.e., settlement workers, educational supports, peer counsellors) to identify solutions that have are being implemented, and to find ways to improve supports for the community.

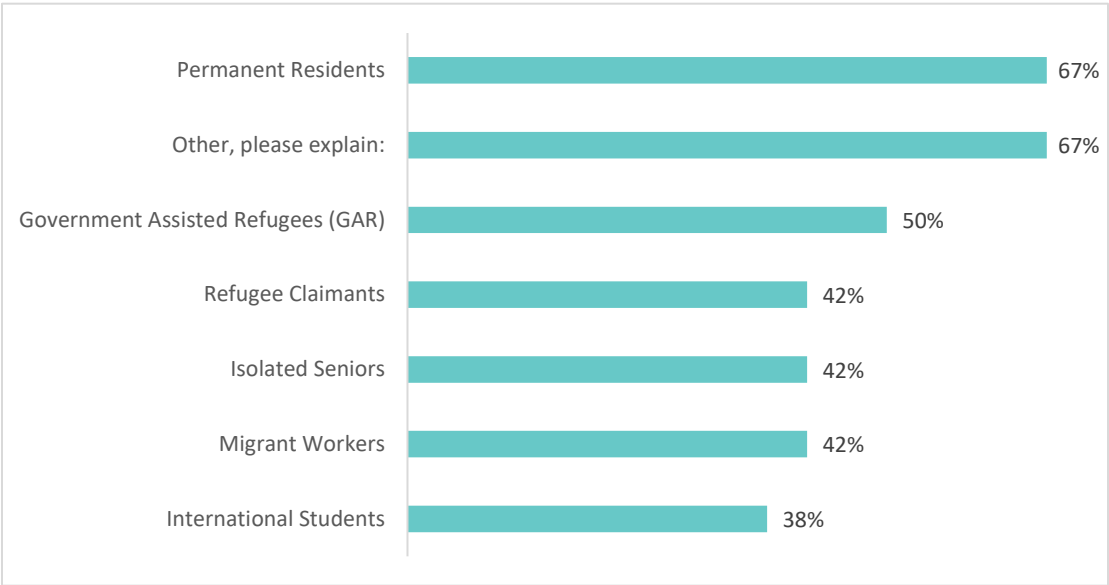
Introduction

In April 2020, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) in partnership with the Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP) sent a survey to local organizations to gain a better understanding of each organization’s needs and concerns related to their services and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. To enhance that understanding of the needs and concerns a second survey was sent in May to WE LIP council members after their Spring Council Meeting. At this meeting, the results of the first survey were presented, as well an opportunity to suggest questions for the second survey was provided. The draft report of the findings from the first survey, and the recording of the presentation, was sent to council members along with the second survey. The surveys were offered both in English and French.

Results Survey 1

The first survey was sent to 36 individuals from 31 organizations across Windsor-Essex. Responses were received from 27 individuals from 24 different organizations. Respondents were first asked what populations they served and how their programs and services had changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses to these questions are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Population Served

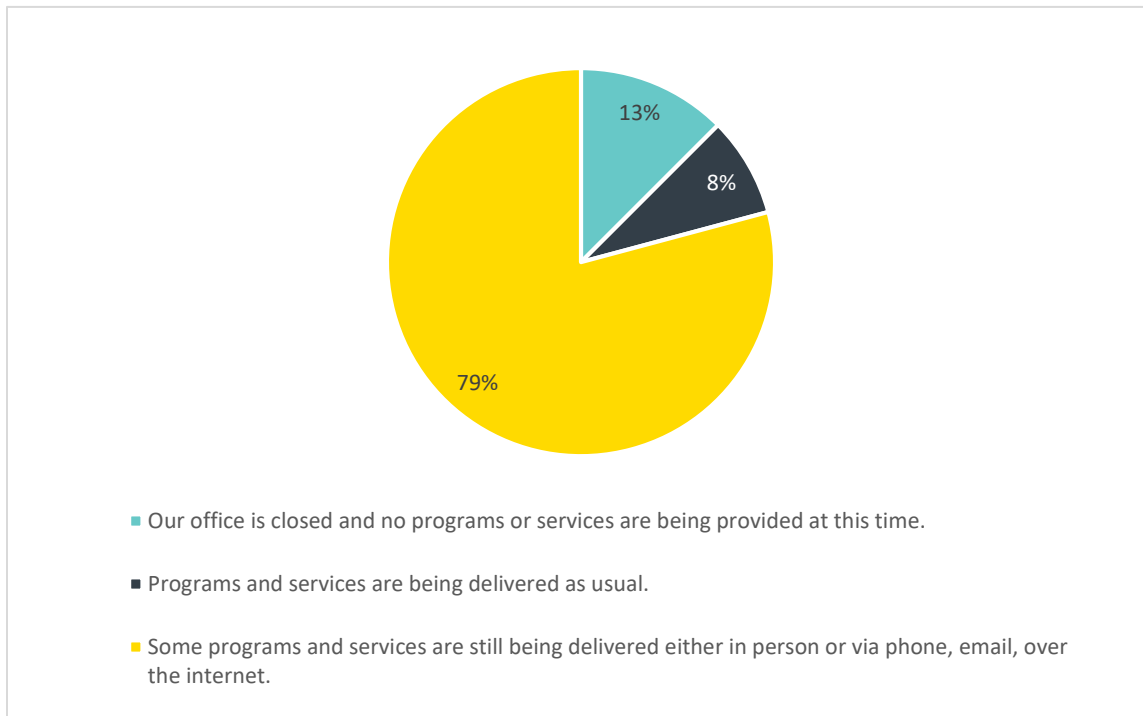


‘Other’ populations selected by 67% of respondents included:

- Children, youth and families who have had a referral to the child welfare system (i.e. someone has called)
- Francophone women

- Children, youth & adults with an intellectual disability and their families in Essex County
- Convention Refugees
- Non-Status Individuals
- Trafficked people
- Undocumented people
- Youth and adolescents,
- School children and their families

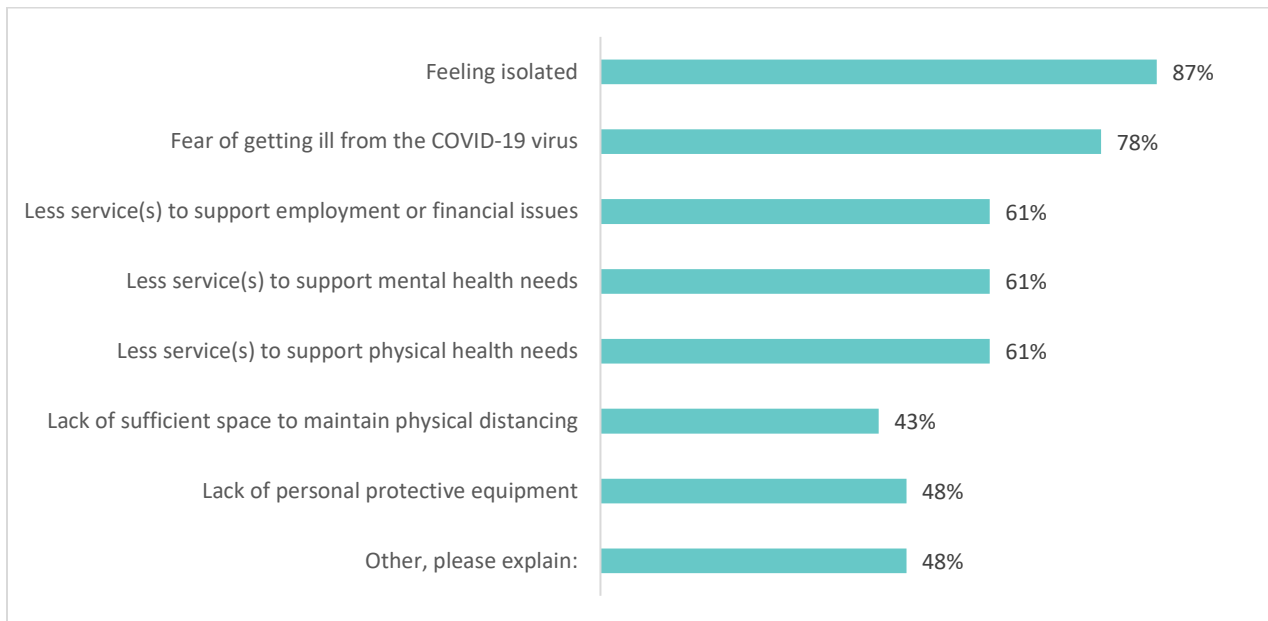
Figure 2: How have your services/programming changed since COVID-19 has affected our community?



Those who responded that “some programs and services are still being delivered either in person or via phone, email, over the internet,” were then asked which programs and services they continued to offer, and how the delivery had changed in light of the need for social distancing. Based on the responses, all services that could continue to be provided via phone or other virtual platforms were still being provided.

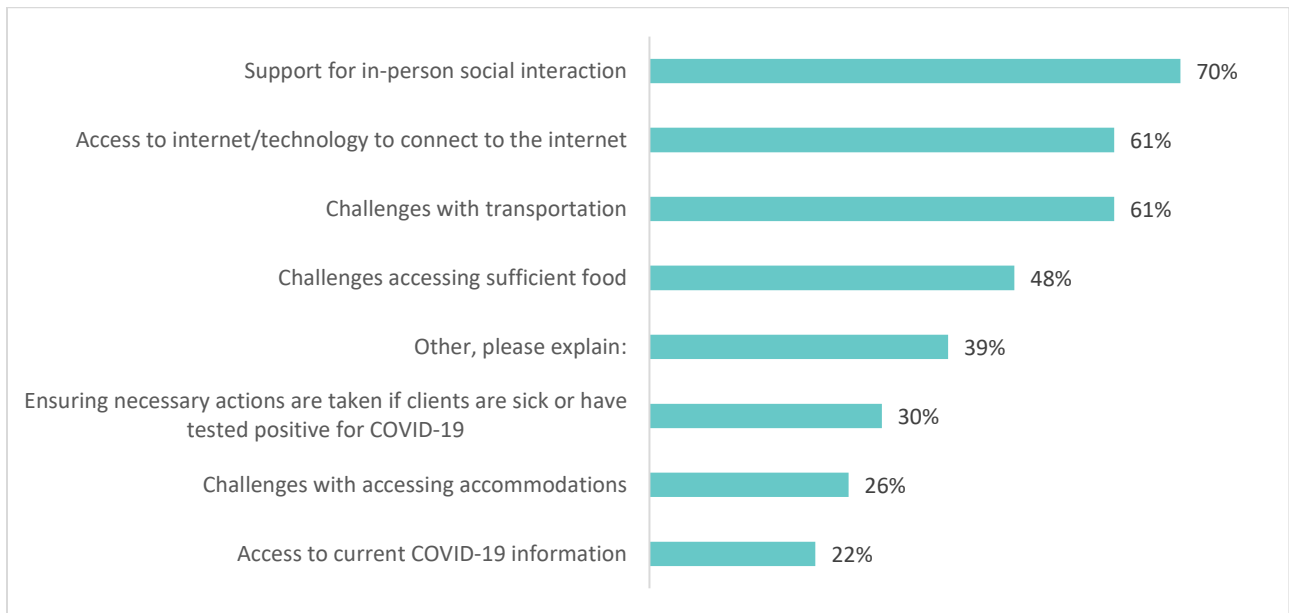
Respondents were then asked to identify issues that their clients are facing at this time. The most common response was ‘feeling isolated’ (88%), followed by ‘fear of getting ill from the COVID-19 virus’ (81%). All of the responses to this question can be found in Figure 3. ‘Other’ responses provided by respondents included challenges for clients with distance work, financial strain, increased stress on families – particularly with children not in school or other programs – and the potential for an increase in domestic violence, and issues with balancing the needs to homeschool children with working from home.

Figure 3: Please identify the challenges or main issues that your clients are facing at this time.



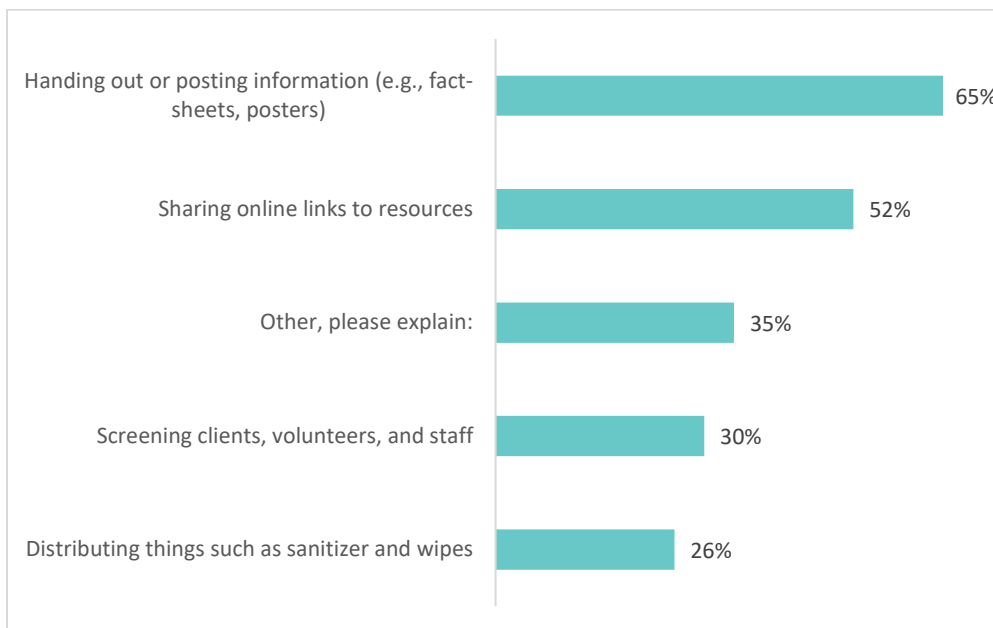
Respondents were also asked to identify the most challenging or difficult issues to address at this time. The most common response was ‘support for in-person social interaction’ (70%), followed by ‘access to internet/technology to connect to the internet’ (61%). All of these responses are represented in Figure 4. ‘Other’ responses provided by respondents included difficulty accessing emergency care (dental), a need for childcare and lack of access to traditional support systems, and challenges with self-isolation (when required).

Figure 4: What are the key issues facing your clients at this time that are difficult to address?



Respondents were asked whether they were referring clients to the WECHU.org website for information on COVID-19. 96% said that they were doing this. Respondents were also asked whether they were providing their clients with any supports or information specific to COVID-19. 100% said that they were. The types of information or supports being provided are listed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: What type of information and/or supports are you providing to your clients specific to COVID-19?



'Other' supports listed included:

- Sanitizer, gloves, etc., being shared with staff
- Frequently updated FAQ's, protocols, screening tools, etc...
- Telephone check-in calls
- Information presented in plain language
- Infographics and videos
- Grocery gift cards
- Personal cards

When asked what additional resources or linkages their organization would find helpful to support your clients during this challenging time, the most commonly selected response was 'supports to help clients access food safely' (65%), followed by, "on-line access to information' (57%), and 'personal protective equipment' (48%).

Figure 6: Are there any additional resources or linkages that your organization would find helpful to support your clients during this challenging time?

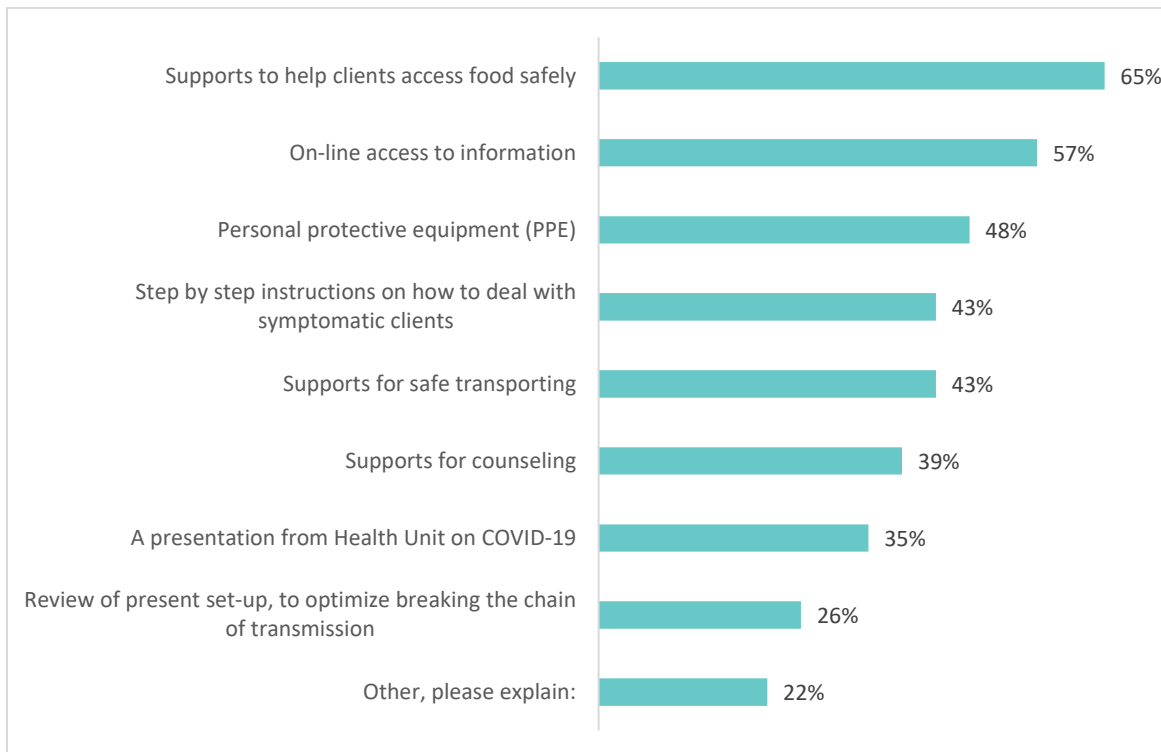


Figure 6 contains a complete collection of the responses. 'Other' responses provided by 20% of respondents included a centralized database with all local COVID related resources, virtual access to a psychiatrist for people supported who also have mental health challenges, and

access to a safe means of transportation for clients who must come into contact with our employees (for example, to commission documents).

Five respondents provided open text comments; specifically, these included questions about accessing emergency dental care, a request for multilingual COVID-19 information, a note that not all the answers provided apply to all situations and all clients, and two notes of thanks.

Results Survey 2 Added

Based on the results of the first survey, WE LIP and WECHU identified the top five needs/concerns related to COVID-19; specifically: safe access to food, internet access/access to online information, mental health supports, access to safe transportation, and personal protective equipment (PPE) for clients and staff. Many community groups and organizations did come together to help address some of these needs. The second survey gathered more information through open-ended responses from community partners and stakeholders, to better understand any continued concerns and ways to address these concerns.

The second survey was sent in both official languages to all voting members of the WE LIP council, of which 74 work directly with clients. Full responses received from 18 different organizations, from 20 individuals, and one partially completed survey were included in this report. This second survey was identified as a way to understand current efforts and possible solutions related to supporting their clients' needs during the pandemic. All members, regardless if they responded to the first survey, were asked to respond.

Access to food

The first survey revealed that access to food was a key issue facing clients by 48% of respondents to the survey, and 65% said that supports to help clients access food safely would be helpful at this time.

Earlier to address this issue, the *Windsor-Essex Food Helpline* launched. The helpline provides emergency food support for low-income families and seniors who are self-isolating or require access to prepared meals. The helpline is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 8:30 pm at (888) 488-1578 or online at www.weareunited.com/GetHelp. Translation services were available for those with language barriers.

In the second survey, 66% of individuals identified accessing food safely to be an issue. The majority of the responses in the second survey indicated that some clients have used various services like delivery services, a community service for food support, and received gift cards/donations which have been used to support local food banks or clients. The hotline or 211 was identified as being supportive for clients to know how to use the service. In particular, one respondent indicated that they are ordering food online and using curbside or delivery; if this option is not available, managers are supporting the shopping and delivery of food for clients. The responses indicate that various community partners have collaborated to increase access to food.

There were many examples given of barriers and challenges that clients face when it comes to accessing food safely during the pandemic. Common themes among respondents related to safe transportation for their clients, not having PPE, and concerns about grocery shopping safely. Additional issues were related to appropriate food for their ethnic preferences and specific dietary needs, child care, limited income, and language barriers.

Various measures have been taken by organizations to mitigate the difficulties to secure and safe access to food. The main efforts seem to include getting transportation support for clients to get to a store or by supporting others to get food to clients. For example, some organizations have used volunteers to deliver the food. Some have distributed resources in various languages about community agency contact details, as well as instructions on how to shop safely to reduce the risk of contracting COVID.

Identified were several common themes around additional measures that could be taken to access food safely, that build off of a lot of what is already being done. These are ways to get more volunteers into the system to keep this vulnerable population supported, increased funding, and providing free PPE. One agency suggested linking clients to ethno-cultural groups/churches and social media groups where they trust to get supports in their language. One respondent suggested potentially providing food kits that have enough food for 10-12 days.

Internet access/Access to online information

During the first survey, it was identified that access to the internet and access to technology to connect to the internet were key issues faced by clients (61%), and 57% of respondents said that support with online access to information would be helpful for them and their clients at this time.

Early on in order to address access to online information, the translation feature of *BrowseAloud* on WECHU's website was made more user-friendly so that the ear symbol is now labelled as providing a translation in a highlighted bar, with type scrolling in many languages. In addition, the WECHU.org website now contains multilingual resources provided from the local, provincial, and federal levels.

During the second survey, 67% of the respondents said that their clients continue to face challenges when it comes to accessing the internet and accessing online information during the pandemic. The second survey explored in more detail issues around these barriers and challenges. Common themes related to internet access included not having a device or enough devices for their household members, stable internet, and enough computer/internet literacy. A few respondents stated that some of their clients have difficulty accessing online information because of their age, sight, and/or hearing difficulties.

Respondents discussed steps taken to address the challenges of their clients when it comes to accessing the internet and accessing online information. Many of the organizations have provided devices to their clients as a temporary measure and provided technical support, while some are seeking additional funding to get devices to their clients. Some agencies are filtering new information and passing it along in the appropriate language for their clients, by whatever means seems most appropriate (e.g., phone calls, WhatsApp, Zoom, or mailed packages). Common responses regarding future considerations were about getting additional access to technology (devices and internet access) and providing training on how to put it to use. Other unique responses were around updating agency websites more often and getting information out in the language spoken by their clients.

Mental health supports

Feeling isolated and fear of getting ill from the COVID-19 virus were the top two concerns facing clients, identified as a challenge by 87% and 78% of respondents respectively. In addition, 61% of respondents also identified fewer services to support mental health needs as a main issue being faced by clients, and 39% said that supports for counselling would be helpful for clients at this time.

In order to address some of these issues, the *Windsor-Essex Counselling Support* line opened for those experiencing mild to moderate distress. The line is available 24/7 by calling (519) 946-3277 and offers timely, safe, and responsive professional service. English and French translation

are available through this service. Counselling appointments are also available from Family Services Windsor Essex over the phone by calling 1-888-933-1831 or 519-966-5010. They use *Language Line* as a service to provide the translation and have counsellors available that speak Arabic, French, and English.

On April 15, the Federal Government launched *the Wellness Together Canada: Mental Health and Substance Use Support*, which provides no-cost tools and resources to deal with challenges related to COVID like isolation, financial and employment uncertainty, and changes to daily life. Ensuring that settlement agencies are relaying these supports to their clients is important.

In the second survey, 47% of the respondents noted that clients are continuing to face challenges when it comes to accessing mental health support. These access issues related to getting a referral from a doctor, finding services in their preferred language, and the stigma related to seeking support. Organizations are taking a number of approaches to address their client's mental health needs; these include linking clients to services that are appropriate for them, addressing the stigma about seeking support, and giving supports to help parents caring for children. Common themes related to potential strategies focused on continuing or expanding access to mental health by providing concurrent childcare, providing service via a trusted group or club, and expanding hours of service.

Access to safe transportation

A majority of respondents (61%) noted challenges with transportation was an issue for their clients, with 43% of respondents noting a need for supports for safe transporting would assist their clients at this time.

At the time the first survey was distributed, Transit Windsor was not operating. However, the services resumed on May 4th as a free service with a modified schedule and enhanced safety measures. In addition, the WECHU has addressed concerns related to taxi and rideshare services on the WECHU.org website. The website information has general information, frequently asked questions, and other resources including a public health memo for passengers and drivers using the service during COVID-19.

In total, 57% of respondents in the second survey indicated that transportation remains an issue for clients. Respondents provided examples of barriers and challenges faced by their clients. Bus routes were noted as being too limited, capacity limitations made it challenging to access the bus, and alternative transportation (e.g., taxis) was too costly.

Respondents noted that they were working to reduce the barriers to safe transportation by trying to deliver to clients so they do not need to go out, covering the costs of transportation, and providing information about transportation services. Other suggestions included reducing fees (either by having a fund or another agency covering the costs) and increasing safety in a taxi by ensuring cleaning and masking. One unique response was to schedule times for travel for vulnerable populations like the elderly or children.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) for clients and staff

In the first survey, 48 % of respondents noted that a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) was a challenge for their clients, and 48% identified PPE as something that would help them support their clients. The second survey asked ‘Do you feel that your clients and staff will face challenges accessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when services re-open?’ In total, 71% of the respondents felt this would be an issue. Respondents explained and gave examples of PPE needs, mainly related to masks and sanitizer for clients and staff. The main barriers identified were sourcing, affordability, length of time to receive, and the language barrier when explaining requirements and usage.

Many organizations mentioned taking these common steps to address the need to access PPE, difficulties distributing PPE, difficulties conveying instructions to staff and clients, and the need to develop policies about PPE use. Additional measures that could be taken to reduce the identified barriers included: collective bulk purchasing, working from home (where possible), giving out free PPE, forming a stockpile to draw from, and investigating further PPE specific needs by role.

Additional Comments

There was an array of responses to the last open-ended question: ‘What would the respondents like to add that was not already covered in earlier questions?’ One respondent stated that a more system-wide approach of dealing with income inequities/poverty/disparities would be beneficial. Others mentioned that without a vaccine, systemic issues, such as housing, access to health care, and access to health information would continue worsen. One organization suggested that all newcomers receive training on virtual connection options. One respondent mentioned additional challenges, including housing, job searching, safe moving of clients, and accessing live interpretation for medical consultations. Two respondents thanked the health unit for guidance and inspection support.



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