

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COVID-19 AND RACIAL EQUITY

HOW IS THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IMPACTING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR?

[Emerging data](#) indicate that the coronavirus is infecting and killing people of color at a disproportionately high rate. While COVID-19 can infect anyone, historically marginalized populations are more likely to experience acute and structural risk factors that increase the likelihood of contracting and experiencing severe cases of the disease.

Due to structural racism and discrimination, people of color are more likely to experience adverse social determinants of health, at-risk comorbidities, and the inability to social distance. Specifically, [Black Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans](#) are more likely to suffer from long-term health conditions and have limited access to health care. [Tribal governments](#) face significant barriers to protecting their citizens, including inadequate federal funding and resources. Moreover, people of color experience higher rates of poverty and are more likely to work in service industries, making it more difficult to practice social distancing and abide by stay-at-home ordinances. People of color are overrepresented in [jails and prisons](#), which have been identified as potential hotspots for the rapid spread of COVID-19 due to overcrowding, lack of sanitation products, and limited testing and quality health care.

This dangerous combination of risk factors is contributing to higher rates of infection and death in Black, Native, and Latino communities. Moreover, the rise in discrimination, racist rhetoric, and hate crimes against the [Asian American community](#) in response to the coronavirus is deeply troubling. Acts of discrimination, fueled by misinformation and xenophobia, are impacting Asian Americans' economic stability and access to social services.

People of color will also experience greater burdens and social upheaval in the aftermath of the acute crisis. In addition to facing higher mortality rates in their communities, the economic impact of COVID-19 will likely increase rates of job insecurity, food insecurity, and housing instability and homelessness.

THE HOUSING CRISIS DISPROPORTIONATELY HARMS PEOPLE OF COLOR, AND THERE IS GROWING EVIDENCE THAT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IS BEING FELT MOST SEVERELY BY PEOPLE OF COLOR. WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HOUSING AND HEALTH?

Systemic racial inequities in housing contribute to an uneven impact of coronavirus on people of color. People of color are significantly more likely than white people to experience evictions and homelessness, the result of centuries of institutional racism and economic inequity. People experiencing homelessness are at much higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and experiencing severe complications. Housing instability and homelessness are two of the most significant barriers to flattening the curve and ending the COVID-19 pandemic. It has never been more clear that housing is healthcare.

Historic and ongoing government-sponsored residential segregation contributes to racial disparities in health, education, employment, and socioeconomic status. [Racial residential](#) segregation continues to be a primary contributor to racial health disparities. [Black Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans](#) face significant inequities in health care access, largely due to structural racism and chronic underfunding of services for these communities. These racist policies lead to differences in neighborhood quality, with Black Americans and Latinos more likely to live in "[food deserts](#)" - areas with limited access to affordable, healthy food. [Native Americans](#) in tribal areas and rural communities also face high levels of food insecurity and limited access to healthy food options.

People of color are also more likely to live in areas characterized by poor housing quality, high housing density, and elevated exposure to harmful pollutants and allergens. American Indian and Alaska Native households face some of the worst [housing conditions](#) in the United States. Overcrowding, structural deficiencies, and plumbing, electrical, and heating problems place Native communities at extreme risk during the pandemic.

HOW IS CONGRESS' CURRENT COVID-19 RESPONSE ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES?

COVID-19 is [exacerbating preexisting racial inequities](#) entrenched in our country's healthcare, housing, and economic systems. The impact of the coronavirus will not be shared equally across the country; rather, communities of color are experiencing the burden and impact of the coronavirus disproportionately.

The "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act" (CARES Act) provided flexible funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to address housing instability and homelessness through existing and new programs. Historically marginalized groups, however, may be unable to access many of the federal resources provided under the CARES Act. For example, [Economic Impact Payments](#) and [unemployment insurance](#) are unavailable to undocumented immigrants, and people experiencing homelessness - who are disproportionately people of color - will likely encounter enormous challenges in accessing Economic Impact Payments. Additionally, programs set up to help small businesses stay afloat during the coronavirus outbreak, like the Paycheck Protection Program, have effectively [locked out](#) as many as 95% of Black-owned businesses, 91% of Latino-owned businesses, 91% of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander-owned businesses, and 75% of Asian-owned businesses. Moreover, many people exiting the criminal justice system may be unable to access regular HUD assistance and face significant barriers to obtaining affordable, accessible housing.

NLIHC, the National League of Cities, National Alliance to End Homelessness, and Mayors & CEOs for U.S. Housing Investments [issued guidance](#) to elected officials on how they can use these federal funds to address racial inequity. The flexibility of Emergency Solution Grants (ESG), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and Coronavirus Relief Fund resources can be used to address the urgent housing needs of marginalized communities, including people experiencing homelessness, people with criminal records, undocumented immigrants, and other individuals.

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT OUR COUNTRY'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS ADDRESSES RACIAL EQUITY IN BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG-TERM?

Congress must take every step to prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and should center racial equity when making the investments and systemic reforms needed to address the short- and long-term impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 will have devastating impacts on communities of color. To address urgent and immediate needs, NLIHC urges Congress to include at least \$11.5 billion in ESG funds to respond to coronavirus among people experiencing homelessness. Congress should enact a national, uniform moratorium on evictions and foreclosures to ensure that low-income renters will not lose their homes during the coronavirus. While a national moratorium would be a vital step, a moratorium, on its own, is not enough. Congress must also provide [\\$100 billion](#) in emergency rental assistance to help renters avoid eviction after the moratoria are lifted and back-rent is owed. These measures will help state and local governments meet the urgent housing needs of lowest-income renters, who are more likely to be people of color. For more information, read [NLIHC's COVID-19 policy recommendations](#).

In addition to addressing immediate housing needs caused by the pandemic, Congress should address our nation's pervasive structural and racial inequities and reform [federal disaster planning and response efforts](#) to center on those individuals and communities with the greatest needs, including people of color, immigrants, people with limited English proficiency, and other individuals. By increasing investments in

proven solutions like the national Housing Trust Fund, housing vouchers, public housing repair funds, and other resources, Congress can address the underlying causes of homelessness: the severe shortage of affordable, accessible, and available rental homes for the lowest-income households, who, as noted above, are more likely to be people of color. We must also reform existing programs by applying a racial equity lens to ensure that affordable housing investments and the federal disaster recovery framework are equitable and meet the needs of marginalized populations. Access to federal housing, healthcare, food assistance, and other benefits should be provided to everyone in need, regardless of immigration status, disability, or involvement with the criminal justice system.

