

2021 Update- Racial and Gender Inequity Continue to Make COVID-19 More Dangerous for Women, Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Immigrant People

February 2021

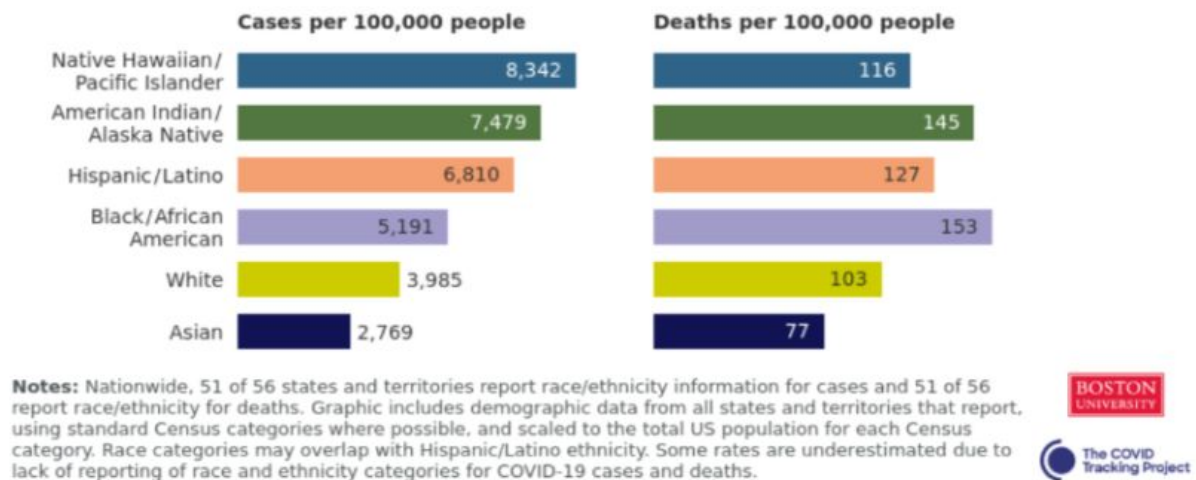
Black, Latinx, immigrant, and Indigenous communities are disproportionately dying from the COVID-19 pandemic and suffering its economic consequences. This is a direct result of disinvestment in communities of color, the continued devaluation of caregiving work and inadequate workplace standards and protections. Policymakers have failed to treat healthcare, housing, and livable wages as basic human needs. As a result, families across the country, particularly families of color, and immigrant families, are less able to safely go to work, shelter in place, and care for their families.

This brief highlights some of these racial and gender disparities and offers a framework for policy change to address the root causes of this crisis.

People of color are disproportionately contracting and dying from COVID-19, exposing how systemic racism impacts people's lives

COVID-19 is affecting Black, Indigenous, Latinx and people of color the most. Black people have been most likely to die from the virus and Native Hawaiians/ Pacific Islanders have been most likely to get the virus.

Figure 1.



As illustrated in Figure 1, Black people have died at a rate of 153 for every 100,000 people, higher than any other racial group. Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders have contracted COVID-19 at a rate of 8,342 per 100,000 people, followed by American Indian/Alaska Native (7,479 per 100,000), and Latinx people (7,479 per 100,000).

Racialized economic inequality and decades of exclusionary policy contribute to these disproportionate effects. A recent [study](#) finds that COVID-19 cases and deaths are greater in counties located in areas where Black and Latinx people are residentially segregated from white residents, with income inequality making each of these measures worse.

The number of people of color who have gotten sick and or have died from COVID-19 is gravely underestimated due to the lack of available race and ethnicity data. The federal government must require, collect, and share more complete data of COVID-19 infections, deaths, and vaccinations in order for our response to adequately meet the demand. Currently, only a third of states and territories share [information](#) on the race and ethnicity of vaccine recipients. Limited data indicates over 60% of vaccine recipients are white, 11.5% are Latinx, and 5.4% are Black ([CDC](#) 2021, Feb).

Black, Latinx, immigrant workers, and women are more likely to be essential workers

Black, Latinx, immigrant workers, and women are over-represented in occupations that put them at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure. Black workers are overrepresented in many [essential positions](#), including but not limited to: grocery and drug stores, public transit, trucking, warehouses, postal services, health care, child care, and social services. [Latinx workers](#) comprise more than 40% of employees in building cleaning services, 40% in bakeries, and 30% in crop production. Undocumented workers similarly labor in [front line](#) occupations, where nearly 3 in 4 working undocumented immigrants are employed in childcare, food, construction, and other essential industries.

As of February 2021, at least 3,373 U.S. healthcare workers have [died](#) because of COVID-19 and the majority of these fallen workers have been people of color: 27% have been Black, 23% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 15% Latinx. Women make up three quarters of the full-time healthcare workforce; They hold [84 %](#) of nursing positions and [88%](#) of home healthcare services positions.

Within frontline occupations, many workers, especially women, make poverty level [wages](#) and have inadequate or no health benefits for themselves and their families. In the U.S., around 129 million jobs are classified as service sector jobs, where nearly [70 %](#) of workers make less than \$15 an hour with no paid sick leave (58%) and inadequate health insurance (61%). Pay inequities among these high-risk workers disproportionately affect women of color. Overall, 49% of Black women and 57% of Latinx women are [low wage earners](#), compared to less than 30 % of white men and 38 % of white women.

Unemployment and lack of worker protections during COVID-19 is disproportionately harming Black and Latinx workers and women

Since the start of the pandemic, over [26.8 million](#) workers have been affected economically. Over 19.3 million workers are unemployed or out of the labor force and 7.5 million are experiencing a drop in hours. At the end of 2020, the [unemployment rate](#) for Latinx workers was more than double what it was at the end of 2019, and nearly double for Black workers. Latinx and Black workers are less likely to be able to [work remotely](#) either because this is not an option or because of lack of internet access, increasing their chances of losing work and employer-sponsored healthcare options.

The participation of women in the labor force is now the [lowest it has been since 1988](#) as a result of the pandemic. Many of the lost jobs have been in retail, hospitality, and childcare, with Black and Latinx women bearing the largest share of the losses. Of the women who have been able to continue to work, many report a substantial loss in hours, rendering them ineligible for most paid sick options. The burden of at-home child care and learning has largely fallen on the shoulders of mothers-- especially single mothers -- many of whom have been forced out of the workforce to care for their children.

Furthermore, nearly [60 million workers](#) were left out of COVID-19 related paid sick days and paid family leave protections. The Families First Coronavirus Relief Act, which granted workers these protections, excluded companies with 500 or more employees. Thus, companies that have the highest levels of revenues and federal tax breaks have been excused from providing the humane worker protections that are most needed during this crisis.

Housing insecurities disproportionately fall on families of color

Black, Latinx, and immigrant households are much less likely to weather the economic shut-down that the pandemic requires, due in large part to disparities in economic security and racial [wealth gaps](#) that make Black and Latinx communities less likely to own assets and more likely to live in debt. Most Black and Latinx households would not be able to afford a \$400 emergency expense. As a result, families of color face greater risks of housing insecurity, eviction, and foreclosure.

Families of color are among the most [housing insecure](#) and these realities are only exacerbated during the pandemic. Black households are more likely to be behind on rent and mortgage payments, followed by Asian and multi-racial households. Recent data indicate an average renting family owes nearly \$6,000 in [back rent](#) and anywhere from [10.5 million](#) to [40 million](#) renters are behind on rent payments. Simultaneously, [8.7 million](#) homeowners occupying their homes are behind on their mortgage. Although these numbers are staggering, available information likely underestimates the housing insecurity of families of color due to missing data.

As a result of the pandemic, tens of millions of families are at risk of an eviction. The current federal eviction moratorium is in effect until March 31, 2021 and is likely to be extended a few more months with pending legislation. But eviction moratoriums do not prevent evictions, they merely postpone them. Once in [eviction](#) court, 90 % of tenants do not have a lawyer, while 90 % of landlords do. Black and Latinx families make up approximately [80%](#) of people facing eviction.

Mass incarceration puts a disproportionate number of Black, Latinx, and immigrant people at risk

COVID-19 continues to spread through prisons and jails across the country, which cage Black and Latinx people at a much higher rate than white people. Black Americans make up 13% of the U.S. population, but comprise [40%](#) of the incarcerated population. Among incarcerated women, nearly 30% are Black women. Beyond having the highest incarceration rate in the world, the U.S. also has the largest immigration detention center system in the world, holding over [52,000](#) people on any given day in more than 200 prison-like facilities across the country.

U.S. correctional facilities are overcrowded and ill-equipped to face the current COVID-19 pandemic. Cleaning products, soap, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers, which are recommended by the CDC to fight the coronavirus, are often viewed as contraband and confiscated if found. As of February 2021, the [Federal Bureau of Prisons](#) reports 1,867 federal inmates and 1,737 BOP staff have tested positive for COVID-19. Nationwide, 217 federal inmates and 4 staff members have died. As of February 2021, the [Marshall Project](#) reports at least 372,500 people in prisons across the country have tested positive for COVID-19, with at least 2,350 deaths of incarcerated people. Standalone jails with people awaiting trial are not included in these estimates.

Immigrants, including children, are increasingly experiencing criminalization, detention, separation from their families, and deportation. Yet, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has refused to [release detainees](#), and has failed to safeguard detainees from COVID-19 with adequate testing and social distancing. As of February 2021, there have been over [9,300 detainees](#) who have tested positive for COVID-19, a number that is only expected to grow.

Undocumented workers have been blocked from accessing basic relief

Survival resources like access to health care, food stamps, federal cash relief, income-based rental assistance programs, and unemployment insurance are inaccessible to most undocumented immigrants. Although there is a method to get cash in the hands of these families through their Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), over [four million](#) people have been excluded from receiving federal cash income during the global crisis.

Along with the long list of [assistance programs](#) undocumented immigrants are barred from, they are ineligible for Medicaid and health coverage through the Affordable Care Act, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to COVID-19. Although recent legislation provides free COVID-19 testing to uninsured people, the combination of language barriers and fear of deportation leaves undocumented families with limited options and higher risks of getting sick.

Shelter-in-place policies increase risk of domestic violence and disadvantage women and gender nonbinary people

The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified domestic violence. Approximately [1 in 4](#) women and nearly 1 in 10 men have experienced partner violence during their lifetime. [Over half](#) of transgender and nonbinary people have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes. These experiences are only expected to rise as stay at home orders have trapped millions of people in homes with their abusers. Safely getting help is already difficult for people in abusive relationships, and now nearly impossible for many who must stay home to avoid possible viral infection. The National Domestic Violence Hotline reports that a growing number of callers say that their abusers are using COVID-19 as a means of further isolating them from their friends and family.

Addressing systemic inequality with immediate COVID-19 relief and a bold and inclusive solution to direct relief to most impacted families

We need to address the systemic inequities that marginalize women, Black, Latinx, immigrant, and Indigenous communities and leave them more susceptible to financial hardship and even death, as we have seen during the COVID-19 crisis. Every family, regardless of where they live or their immigration status, needs and deserves housing, living wages, and access to healthcare without fear of being detained or incarcerated. Our communities need an economic foundation including direct cash payments for necessities and access to affordable housing, health care, child care, and other services to safely weather the long lasting impacts of this pandemic.

We are calling for policies that protect all people living in America, including mixed-status and undocumented families. President Biden's American Rescue Plan is a good starting point for negotiations. Community Change Action recommends the following plan:

- **Immigrant rights:** Fully include all immigrants in cash relief, the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, childcare subsidies, and pandemic unemployment insurance programs. Provide a path to citizenship for all undocumented essential workers, immigrant youth and TPS holders.
- **Child care:** Make a \$100 billion investment in child care to ensure survival of providers that must keep their doors closed to protect the safety of kids and families, to support providers who need to stay open to serve children of

essential workers and to expand access for families that need affordable quality care.

- **Workers' rights:** Raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour for all workers without exceptions for tipped workers or workers with disabilities. Include premium pay for all frontline workers. Provide family care, including childcare for essential workers. Support all workers with unrestricted paid leave and sick time. Extend the weekly increase of \$600 in pandemic unemployment insurance benefits along with pandemic unemployment benefits for workers who do not qualify for regular benefits (e.g. gig workers).
- **Guaranteed income:** Authorize more substantial, inclusive and recurring cash payments of at least \$2,000 a month for all and for the duration of the crisis. Boost and expand access to the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit (CTC) and make the CTC fully refundable.
- **Housing protections:** Include \$100 billion to provide emergency assistance so everyone has an affordable and safe place to call home, including renters at risk of homelessness. Add an additional \$75 billion to help homeowners struggling to pay their mortgages, property taxes and utilities, and protect renters and homeowners from evictions for the duration of the crisis. Fully fund the Housing Choice Voucher program to meet demand.
- **Public Health:** Immediately address the racially inequitable impact of the pandemic by investing in robust public health infrastructure, including funding for community-based health centers in low income and minority communities and making equitable vaccine access a top priority.
- **Rising hunger:** Address by boosting maximum SNAP benefit by 15% and increasing the minimum benefit, alongside additional funding for nutrition programs that help families put food on the table.
- **State and local aid:** Deliver \$1 trillion in state and local government aid to help offset lost tax revenue, which would save hundreds of thousands of jobs and protect the delivery of vital human services.
- **Dismantle the police state:** Governments at the local, state and federal levels must divest from policing, mass incarceration and end the militarization of state and local police departments. We must implement reimagined systems of justice that invest in people and communities so they can thrive and live without fear.

These policy responses must become part of our vision and path to a more just world where everyone can thrive.

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