



COVID-19 and the Economy: U.S. Resident Experiences in the Late Stage of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

As we near the third anniversary of its start, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a global health challenge with far-reaching political, economic, and sociological implications. The loss of life and health has been immense. The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 exceeded one million in May 2022, and research indicates that roughly 20% of adults have at least one health condition related to a previous COVID-19 infection.¹

Even as we move into the later stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and a return to public life enabled by mass vaccinations, communities are still working toward a full recovery from the necessary disruptions of the past few years. The information contained in this report is intended to aid recovery efforts by helping decisionmakers understand the experiences of individuals and households in the late stages of the pandemic.

The survey from which this report draws was fielded in August 2022 during the late stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and represents public opinion as the last widespread mitigation measures were ending and public life was fully resuming. By March 2022 remaining mask mandates had largely ended. In June 2022 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines for children aged 6 months to 5 years, removing one of the last significant barriers to a safer reopening of public life. By August 2022 K-12 schools across the country were returning to more-or-less normal operations with guidance to enact layered protection if local infection rates began climbing. While this survey was in the field, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued streamlined nationwide guidance for COVID-19 that largely eliminated isolation in the event of exposure and reduced the time in isolation for those who have tested positive.

Using data from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adult residents, we report on disease burden related to COVID-19, relative access to healthcare, financial hardships, economic outlooks, and support for both previous and future policies related to minimizing the spread of COVID-19. We find that, regardless of income level, individuals in households where at least one member has worked two jobs at once in order to make ends meet at some point in the past five years often report confirmed cases of COVID-19 and financial hardships at higher rates than other groups. We also find that, in retrospect, a majority of respondents support early measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, and many would support such measures if necessary in the future.

¹ Centers for Disease Control (22 September 2022). CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline. Via <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html#Early-2022>

Report Highlights

- Households at all income levels experienced a degree of financial hardship during the pandemic.
- Households in which someone worked two or more jobs at once in order to make ends meet at some point in the past five years reported financial hardships more frequently than households at or below the national median income, even if their household income is relatively high.
- When asked to consider policies that shut down public life in the first months of the pandemic, the majority of respondents across incomes agreed that such policies protected the health of the public, slowed the spread of COVID-19, and were necessary at the start of the pandemic.
- Although such policies seem unlikely to return, 54.8% of respondents in households earning less than median income agreed that policies to shut down may be necessary in the future, should a dangerous new variant emerge.

Methods

Survey Distribution

From August 2 through August 16, 2022, the survey for this study was distributed by YouGov on behalf of the EDA University Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to a nationally representative sample of 2,000 United States residents drawn from the YouGov United States research panel. Survey questions focused on respondent experiences during the late stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the impact of the pandemic on individual and household finances, support for past and future policies related to the pandemic, perceptions of COVID-19 vaccinations, and individual behavior related to minimizing the risk of contracting COVID-19, among other issues.

YouGov interviewed 2207 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

Respondent Characteristics

In the final sample, respondents averaged 47.8 years old (SD=17.8) and 48.7% reported female as their gender. Race and ethnicity were reported using existing YouGov categories, with 62.9% reporting White as their race, 12.0% Black, 16.3% Hispanic/Latinx, 2.4% Asian, 1.4% Native American, 0.3% Middle Eastern, 1.7% two or more races, and 3.0% other. Education was measured using the highest level completed, with 6.8% reporting some high school, 32.3% high school graduate or GED, 20.2% some college, 10.2% 2-year degree, 19.2% 4-year degree, and 11.2% post-graduate education.

About 40.1% of respondents reported full-time employment, 12.5% part-time employment, 0.4% temporarily laid off, 8.5% unemployed, 18.8% retired, 6.1% permanently disabled, 6.9% homemaker, 4.8% student, and 1.9% other. Income was measured categorically, with the first quartile falling at \$19,999 or less, median falling between \$60,000 and \$69,999, and the upper limit of the third quartile falling between \$80,000 and \$99,999, which is slightly lower than the 2021 estimated U.S. median household income of \$70,784 and 2020 median of \$71,186.² For this sample, 60.5% of respondents reported household incomes less than U.S. median income, 7.8% of respondents reported households at median income when measured categorically as \$70,000 to \$79,999, and 31.7% reported greater than median household incomes.

² United States Census Bureau. (2022). Income in the United States: 2021. Via <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-276.html>

Income & Employment Burden

Differences in the impact of COVID-19 on individuals of varying incomes have been relatively widely covered in news reports. However, income alone doesn't provide a complete picture of who is struggling. Job loss, unexpected emergencies, downturns in the economy, poor decision making, or changes in household circumstances occur at all income levels and relatively high household incomes can mask financial struggles.

Respondents were asked, "At any point in the last five years, have you or someone in your household had to work two jobs at once in order to make ends meet?" Although holding multiple jobs is not solely related to the pandemic, nor is it unique to this era, we consider these households as having high employment burdens.³ This population reports levels of financial stress and COVID-related illness at different rates than other groups. As a result, this group is a population of special interest in this report. While, at 32.5%, respondents in households earning less than the U.S. median household income were more likely to report a multiple jobholder in their household, a strategy of working two or more jobs was common across income groups.

Table 1. At any point in the last five years, have you or someone in your household had to work two jobs at once in order to make ends meet?

	All	Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median
	%	%	%	%
Yes	29.0	32.2	27.7	23.3
No	71.0	67.8	72.3	76.7

All n=1,816 Chi p<0.001



³ From January 2017 to August 2022, between 4.0% and 5.3% of respondents to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey were multiple jobholders on the day they completed the survey. By asking respondents to report multiple job holders in the household for a time period of five years, our question captured a significantly larger portion of households.

COVID-19 Health Burden & Household Income

The number of people who have contracted and recovered from a COVID-19 infection is considerably higher than the number of people who have had a confirmed case of the illness. One of the challenges in survey-based data collection on the impact of COVID cases is ensuring that respondents do not mistakenly attribute the effects of other viruses, such as influenza, to COVID-19. To account for this, respondents were asked “Have you ever tested positive for COVID-19 or been told by a doctor or other health care provider that you have had COVID-19?” In total, 35.6% had a confirmed case. Among those with confirmed cases, 11.6% experienced severe symptoms, 8.9% were hospitalized, and 32.7% had symptoms lasting more than three months.

Confirmed Cases & Income

The rate of confirmed cases varied by income level. Respondents in households with lower incomes were less likely to report a confirmed case, with 33.5% of respondents in households earning less than the U.S. household median income (\$69,999 or less) reporting a confirmed COVID case, as compared to 42.6% of respondents in households earning median incomes (\$70,000 to \$79,999), and 40.1% of respondents in households earning greater than median incomes (\$80,000 or more). Despite lower overall rates of confirmed cases, respondents in households earning less than median income reported severe symptoms more often (15.5%) than those in median income households (8.3%) or greater than median income households (7.4%).

Confirmed Cases & Multiple Jobholder Households

Respondents in households with a multiple jobholder had higher rates of confirmed COVID-19 cases, severe symptoms, long COVID, and hospitalization. Slightly more than two in five (41.7%) respondents in these households reported a confirmed case as compared to roughly one in three (33.2%) of those in households without multiple jobholders. Those living in households with multiple jobholders reported experiencing severe symptoms (16.8% vs. 8.8%), symptoms lasting longer than three months (42.2% vs. 28.0%), and hospitalization (17.7% vs. 4.4%) at much higher rates than respondents in households without multiple jobholders.

Table 2. Severity of COVID-19 among respondents with confirmed cases

	All	Income Level			Multiple Jobholders	
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Confirmed Case	35.6	33.5	42.6	40.1	41.7	33.2
Severe Symptoms	11.6	15.5	8.3	7.4	16.8	8.8
Symptoms 3+ Months	32.7	37.1	31.5	30.9	42.2	28.0
Hospitalization	8.9	8.1	11.1	8.4	17.7	4.6

Note: No statistical difference for among less than median, median, and greater than median incomes for symptoms lasting longer than 3 months or hospitalizations; All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001; Multiple jobholder n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

Access to Healthcare, Income & Employment Burden

Since answering “yes” to the initial question about COVID-19 requires a respondent to have access to testing or medical professionals, it is likely that access to healthcare affected the response rate to this item. This seems especially plausible among those in lower income households, given the lower rate of confirmed cases but higher rates of severe illness, long COVID, and hospitalization in this group. The decision to delay testing, or not test at all, could be a reasonable choice if one’s symptoms are mild, and free tests or low-cost medical care are neither readily available nor affordable.

The U.S. Census Bureau tracked reduced access to healthcare through the first 15 months of the pandemic through its Household Pulse Survey. During the first round of the survey in June and July 2020, 38.7% of respondents reported having reduced access to one or more types of care due to the pandemic in the two months leading up to their participation in the survey. By August 2020, that number had decreased to 28.2% of respondents, and by the third round in May and June 2021 the number of Household Pulse Survey respondents reporting reduced access had lowered to 12.7%.⁴



34.3% of all respondents reported that accessing healthcare has been harder since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changes in Access to Healthcare

Respondents were asked, “Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, has it been harder or easier to do the following, or have there been no changes at all ... Access health care?” Respondents in households earning less

⁴ Centers for Disease Control. (6 August 2021). Reduced Access to Care. Via <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/rands/reduced-access-to-care.htm>
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than median income reported changes in access to healthcare at higher rates than other groups, with 50.4% in this group reporting that access has been harder, 3.3% reporting access has been easier, and 46.3% reporting no change. In comparison, 56.7% of respondents in households with median incomes reported no change in access to healthcare, 36.9% reported that access was harder and 6.4% reported that access was easier. Respondents in households with greater than median incomes were the least likely among this comparison group to report changes, as 63.0% reported no change, 29.0% reported access has been harder and 8.0% reported that access has been easier.

Respondents in households with multiple jobholders were also more likely to report a change in access to healthcare during the pandemic, with 43.1% reporting that access has been harder. More respondents in this group, 12.1%, reported that access has been easier than in any other grouping, and 44.8% reported no change at all. In comparison, 29.9% of respondents in households without multiple jobholders reported that it has been harder to access healthcare, 6.2% reported that access has been easier, and 64.0% reported no change at all.

Table 3. *Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, has it been harder or easier to do the following, or have there been no changes at all ... Access health care*

	All	Income Level		Multiple Jobholders		
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
No Change	58.5	46.3	56.7	63.0	44.8	64.0
Harder to Access	34.3	50.4	36.9	29.0	43.1	29.9
Easier to Access	7.3	3.3	6.4	8.0	12.1	6.2

All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001; Multiple jobholder n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

Economic Recovery & Financial Hardships

Economic recovery from the pandemic has been steady but slow. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. economy cycled quickly from high to low, with the peak of an historically long 128-month expansion occurring in February 2020 and the trough of a short but severe contraction occurring in April 2020 after businesses, schools, and public life were paused to curb soaring infection rates.⁵ The rapid development of vaccines made it possible to fully reopen the economy sooner than expected, but unforeseen problems with supply chains in the immediate aftermath of reopening, and the more recent rapid increase in commodity prices as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have complicated the economic recovery.⁶

Consumer spending recovered to pre-pandemic levels by January 2021⁷ and small business revenue recovered by mid-October 2021,⁸ but employment levels have continued to lag. At the time this study's survey was fielded, employment levels were still below those in January 2020. Although the August and September 2022 job reports both noted gains, these were not sufficient to bring employment back to pre-pandemic levels. Despite overall lower employment levels, the unemployment rate dipped to 3.7% in August, just shy of a 50-year low.⁹ There has been speculation that workers have dropped out of the workforce by choice as part of the "Great Resignation" as quit rates reached a record 3.0% in November and December 2021¹⁰, and the "Great Retirement" as Baby Boomers retired, reversing a trend of working past age 65.



Although consumer spending recovered and reached pre-pandemic levels by January 2021, small business revenue didn't recover to those same levels until mid-October 2021.

⁵ National Bureau of Economic Research. (2022). US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions. Via <https://www.nber.org/research/data/us-business-cycle-expansions-and-contractions>

⁶ Kashkari, Neel. (12 October 2021). Remarks at the 2022 Northwoods Economic Development Summit. Via <https://youtu.be/jN7qTU0n8w?t=541>

⁷ Opportunity Insights. (6 October 2022). Percent Change in All Consumer Spending. Via [Tracktherecovery.org](https://tracktherecovery.org)

⁸ Opportunity Insights. (6 October 2022). Percent Change in Small Business Revenue. Via [Tracktherecovery.org](https://tracktherecovery.org)

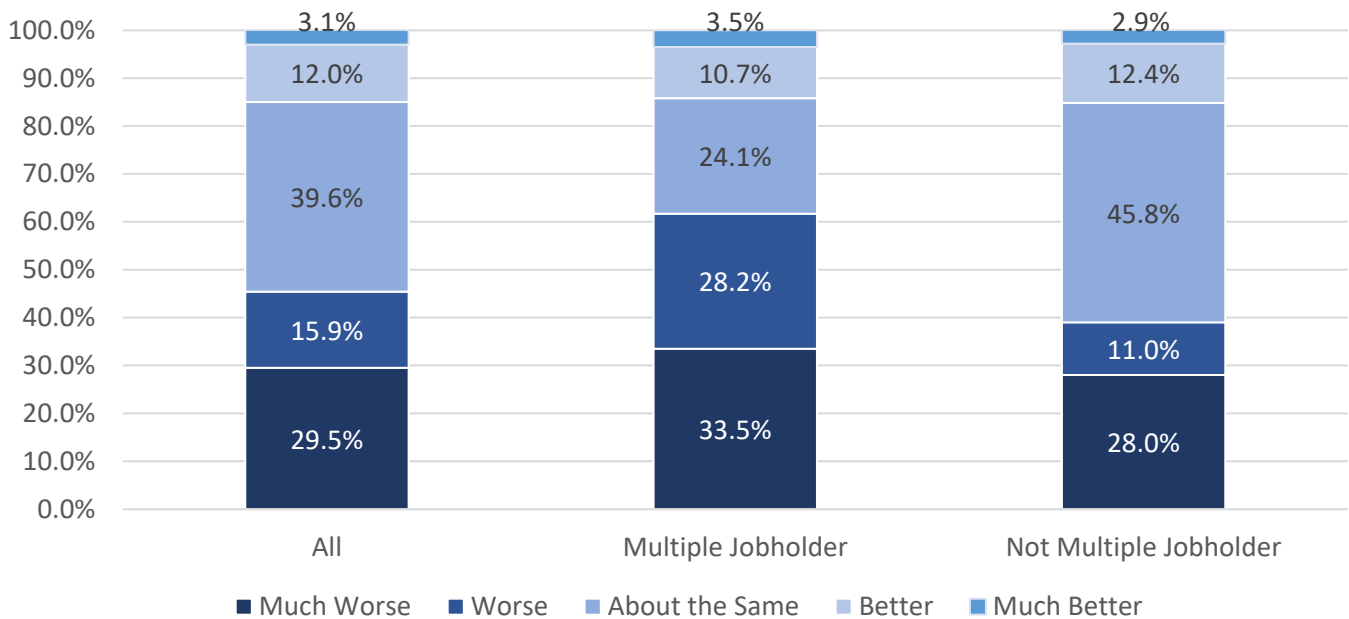
⁹ Rubin, G.T. (7 October 2022). September Jobs Report Shows Payrolls Grew by 263,000, Labor Market Cooled Some. Wall Street Journal. Via <https://www.wsj.com/articles/september-jobs-report-unemployment-rate-economy-growth-2022-11665091101>

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (July 2022). The "Great Resignation" in Perspective. *Monthly Labor Review*. Via <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2022/article/the-great-resignation-in-perspective.htm>

Financial Hardships Persist Among Respondents

The effects of a slow economic recovery at the household level were evident in survey responses. Financial hardships related to the pandemic were widespread among respondents as we moved into the Autumn of 2022. Relatively high proportions of respondents in all groups reported some level of financial distress and 45.4% of all respondents reported that their financial situation was worse in August 2022 than it was in January 2020. Although there were no statistically significant differences in the responses among those in less than median income, median income, and greater than median income households for this item, 61.7% of respondents in multiple jobholder households reported that their situation was worse in August 2022 than in January 2020, as compared to 39.0% of those in households without multiple jobholders.

Figure 1. Comparing your overall financial situation right now to your financial situation around January or February 2020, right before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic ... is your financial situation worse, better, or about the same as it was before the pandemic began?



All n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001; Multiple jobholder n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

Job Loss and Job Leaving

Between January 2020 and April 2020, non-farm payrolls shed 22.1 million jobs,¹¹ with unemployment peaking at 14.8% in April 2020 as employers sent workers home to isolate and slow the spread of COVID-19. Unlike previous downturns, a mass return to work depended on more than the availability of jobs. Employees with children who suddenly lacked daycare or in-person schooling, those living with a health condition that increased their own risk of serious illness from COVID-19, or those living or caring for others with such health conditions were less able to return to work once businesses and employers re-opened. In order to account for this, we expanded the definition of job loss to include leaving a job because of the pandemic. We asked, “Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, have you lost a job, been laid off, or quit a job because of the pandemic?”

At 23.9%, nearly one in four respondents reported losing or leaving a job. Individuals in households with multiple jobholders reported losing a job or leaving a job because of the pandemic more often than the general survey sample. Roughly two in five respondents in multiple jobholders households reported losing or leaving a job, as compared to one in four respondents in households earning less than median income, and one in five respondents in households earning median income or greater than median income.

Table 4. *Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, have you lost a job, been laid off, or quit a job because of the pandemic?*

	All	Income Level		Multiple Jobholders		
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Job loss or leave	23.9	26.4	18.3	21.0	43.8	14.6
No change	76.1	73.6	81.7	79.0	56.3	85.4

Asked of a subset of respondents who were employed during the pandemic. All n=1,622; A portion of respondents declined to provide household income, thus income level n=1,490 Chi p≤0.001; Multiple jobholder n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

¹¹Falk, G., Romero, P.D., Nicchitta, I.A. & Nyhof, E.C. (20 August 2021). Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Congressional Research Service*. Via <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R46554.pdf>

Income Reduction Related to the Pandemic

The labor market had been tight prior to March 2020. The swift action to shut down businesses, schools, and public places in March 2020 resulted in a dramatic shock to employment levels, with consequences for individual and household incomes. Unemployment claims peaked in the week of April 4, 2020 with 6.13 million total claims filed, the equivalent of 3.76 claims for every 100 people in the workforce. At the lowest point, on April 17, 2020 employment rates decreased by 23.9% as compared to January 2020.¹² Employment began to recover in late summer 2020, and by June 2022 unemployment claims were recorded at 0.9 per 100, roughly what they had been in February 2020.⁴ By August 2022 non-farm employment had largely recovered to February 2020 levels.¹³ Despite high employment levels, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a decrease of 3.4% in real average weekly earnings from August 2021 to August 2022, while this survey was in the field.¹⁴

Job loss and a reduction in income were reported across groups among this survey's participants. Roughly one-third of all respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic reduced their incomes. Those in households earning less than median incomes (40.1%) and those in households with multiple jobholders (56.8%) were more likely to report that the pandemic "reduced" or "greatly reduced" their incomes. More than half of respondents in households without multiple jobholders, and households earning median income or greater than median income reported no change or an increase in income.

Table 5. *How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your income?*

	All	Income Level		Multiple Jobholders		
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Greatly Reduced (1)	12.7	17.5	9.3	5.4	25.5	7.6
Reduced	22.0	23.6	17.9	21.2	31.3	18.3
Stayed the Same	46.2	42.1	53.6	53.5	27.8	53.6
Increased	7.8	6.6	10.0	10.2	7.4	8.0
Greatly Increased (5)	1.5	1.1	1.4	2.4	1.9	1.3
Does Not Apply*	9.7	9.2	7.9	7.3	6.2	11.1
Mean (SD)	2.88(1.28)	2.45(0.92)	2.75(0.86)	2.82(0.80)	2.24(1.00)	2.74(0.80)

*Excluded from mean. All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001 ANOVA p≤0.001; Multiple jobholders n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001 ANOVA p≤0.001

¹² Opportunity Insights. (6 October 2022). Current Unemployment Claims per 100 People. Via [Tracktherecovery.org](https://tracktherecovery.org)

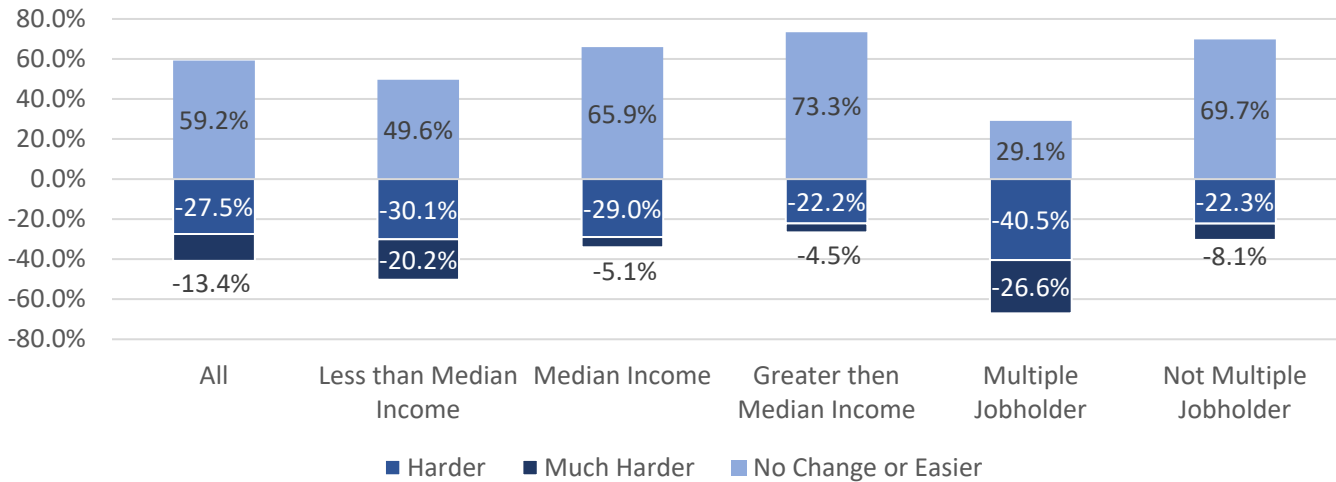
¹³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2 September 2022). The Employment Situation – August 2022. Via <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

¹⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (13 September 2022). Real Earnings Summary – August 2022. Via <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/realer.nr0.htm>

Widespread Difficulty Paying Bills

About 41% of all respondents reported that it has been more difficult to pay bills since the start of the pandemic. Difficulties varied by income and presence of multiple jobholders. Roughly half of respondents in households earning less than median incomes, 1 in 3 at median household income, and 2 in 5 at greater than median incomes reported difficulties paying bills. Individuals in households with multiple jobholders reported difficulties at the highest rates, with nearly 7 in 10, or 68%, reporting difficulty paying bills.

Figure 2. *Since the pandemic, has it been easier or harder ... to pay your bills?*

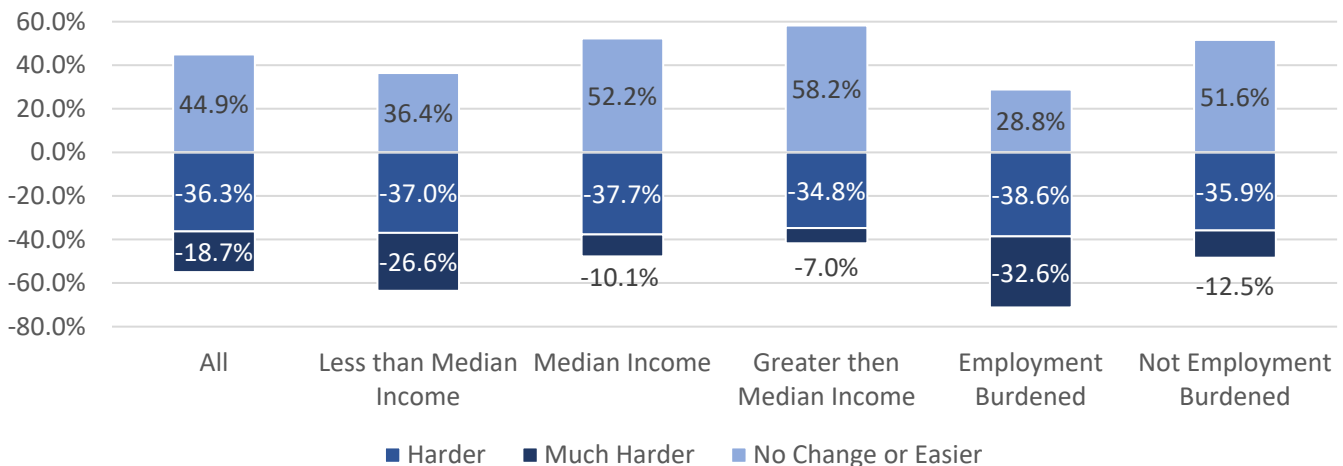


All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001 ANOVA; Multiple jobholders n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

Difficulty Affording Groceries or Food

More than half of all respondents, 55%, reported that it has been harder to pay for food or groceries since the start of the pandemic. Challenges were reported at higher rates among respondents in less than median income households (63.6%) and those in households with multiple jobholders (71.2%).

Figure 3. *Since the pandemic, has it been easier or harder ... to afford groceries or food*



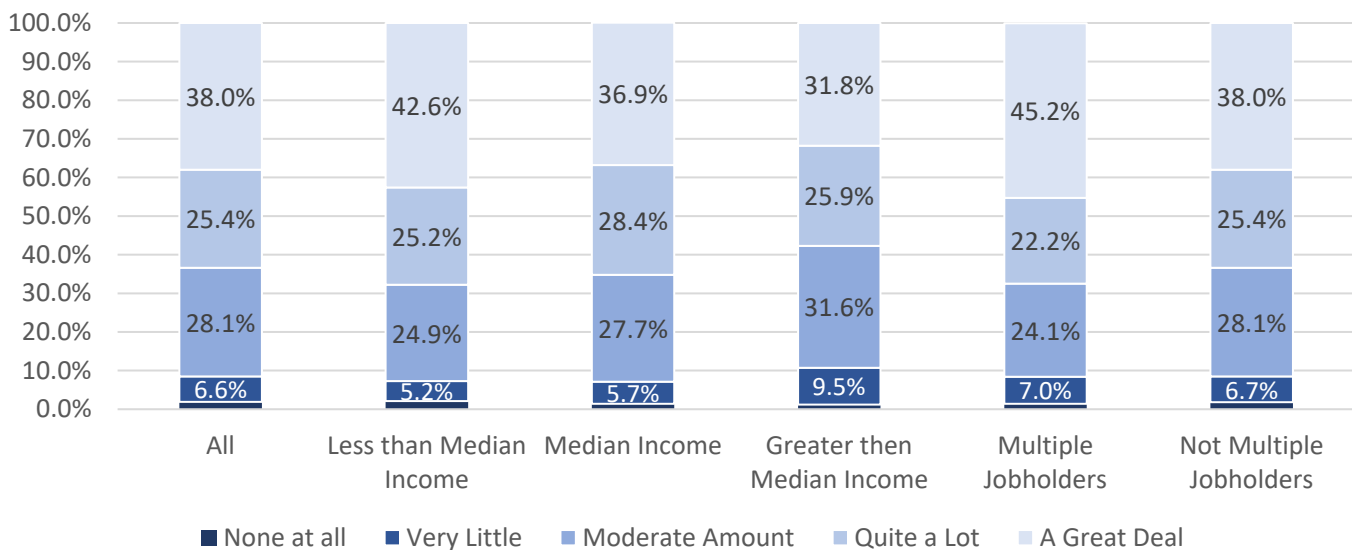
All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001; Multiple jobholders n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

Worries About Inflation

The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers reached 8.3% in the 12-months ending August 2022, as this survey was in the field.¹⁵ We asked respondents how worried they were about inflation. About 8.5% of respondents reported that they had “very little” or “[no worry] at all,” 28.1% reported “a moderate amount” of worry, 25.4% “quite a lot” of worry,” and 38.0% reported “a great deal of worry.”

Although statistically significant differences existed between groups in both categories, clear majorities in each group expressed strong concerns about inflation with slightly higher proportions in lower income groups and among individuals in households with multiple jobholders.

Figure 4. How much concern or worry do you have about inflation?



All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001; Multiple jobholders n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001

¹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (13 September 2022). Consumer Price Index-August 2022. Via <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cpi.pdf>

Personal Economic Outlook

Individual and household level economic decisions are affected by our beliefs about future events and outcomes as well as our current situation. Respondents were more optimistic about their financial situation five years into the future than one year into the future. In total, 31% of respondents believed their financial situation would be worse off within one year out and 21.8% believed they would be worse off within five-years mark. In comparison, 27.5% believed they would be better off within one year and 51.3% believed they would be better off within five years.

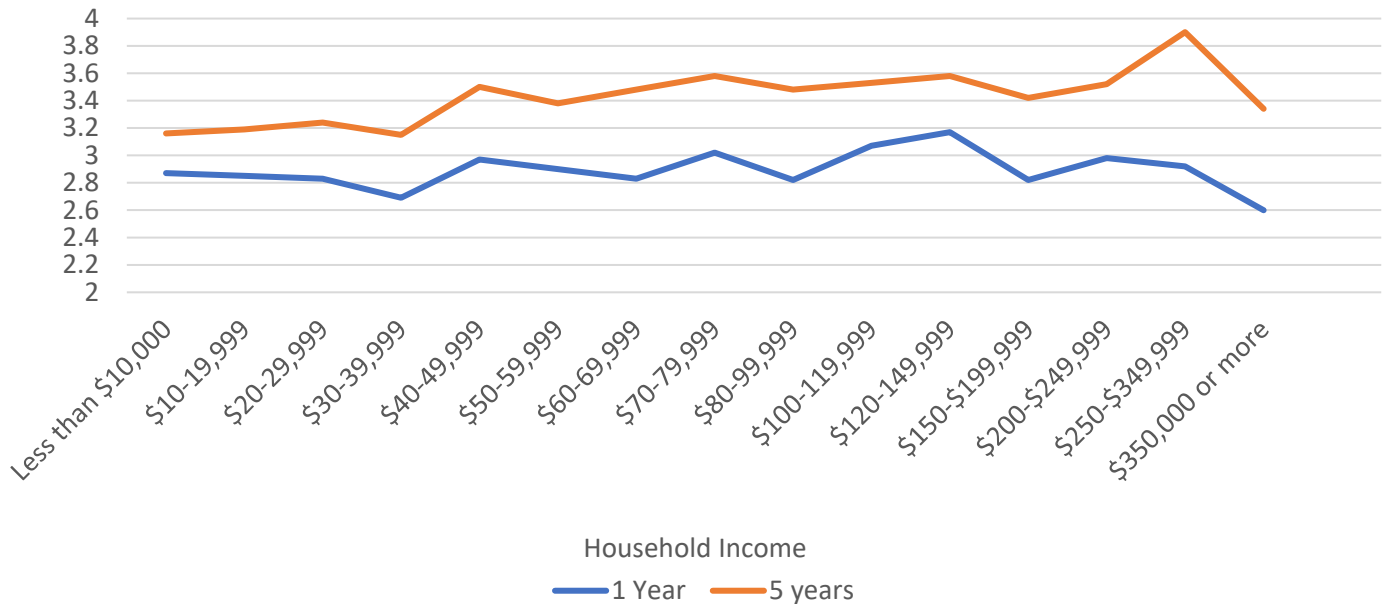
While there were no statistically significant differences when comparing respondents on a scale according to median income or presence of multiple jobholders, there was a small, statistically significant effect based on income.

Table 6. Looking ahead, do you think you will be better off, worse off, or about the same ... one year from now? Five years from now?

	One Year	Five Years
	%	%
Much Worse (1)	9.7	9.2
Worse	22.3	12.6
About the Same	40.4	26.9
Better	23.2	32.1
Much Better (5)	4.3	19.2
Mean (SD)	2.90(1.00)	3.39(1.20)

All n=2,000

Figure 5. Looking ahead, do you think you will be better off, worse off, or about the same ... one year from now? Five years from now?



n=1,815; 1=Much worse, 2=Worse, 3=About the same, 4=Better, 5=Much better; ANOVA p≤0.001

Attitudes Related to COVID-19 Era Policy

Support for Early Shutdown Policies to Minimize the Spread of COVID-19

Policy has been an important tool in minimizing the effect of the COVID-19 and widespread mandates to close businesses, schools, and public spaces were one of the early and unique features of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were interested in respondent opinions when they considered such measures in retrospect. We were also interested in future support for shutdown policies if a new, more infectious, or more deadly variant emerges at some point.

More than half of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that policies to shut down businesses, schools, and public places protected the health of the public, slowed the spread of COVID-19, and were both necessary and the right thing to do at the start of the pandemic. Slightly less than half, 46.3%, felt the policies were fair. Almost exactly half of respondents, 50.5%, agreed that these policies might be necessary in the future if a dangerous new variant emerges, and 30.9% felt that those policies are the right thing to do now.

Table 7. *At various points during the pandemic, many individual states and local communities required businesses, schools, and public places to shut down in order to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these measures ... Protected the health of the public? Slowed the spread of COVID-19? Were necessary? Were fair? Were the right thing to do at the start of the pandemic? Are the right thing to do right now? Might be the right thing to do in the future if a dangerous new variant emerges?*

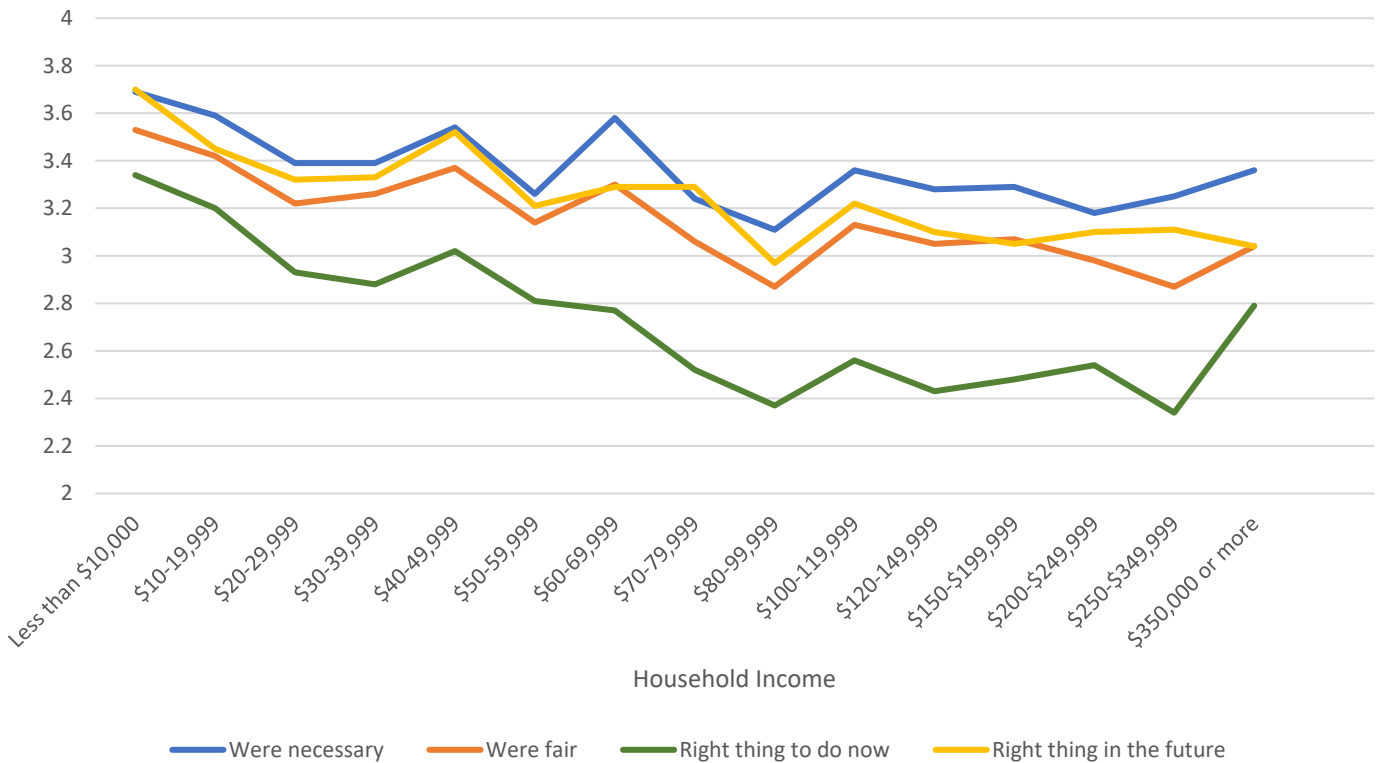
	Protected health of public	Slowed spread of COVID-19	Were necessary	Were fair	Right thing to do at start	Right thing to do now	May be right in future
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Disagree strongly (1)	13.1	12.8	17.3	19.2	12.1	24.9	19.9
Disagree	12.3	11.6	9.1	11.8	7.4	18.8	9.3
Not sure	17.5	16.8	19.2	21.8	18.3	25.4	20.3
Agree	31.0	32.8	28.5	26.4	30.8	17.4	25.2
Agree strongly (5)	26.2	26.1	25.9	20.9	31.4	13.5	25.3
Mean	3.45	3.48	3.37	3.18	3.62	2.76	3.27
(SD)	(1.34)	(1.33)	(1.41)	(1.40)	(1.32)	(1.36)	(1.44)

n=2,000

Support for Early Shutdown Related Policies Decline as Household Income Increases

Although there were no statistically significant differences when comparing respondents by presence of multiple jobholders in the household, there was a small but clear trend for declining support for shutdown policies as income rises. This is consistent with a 2020 survey of Wisconsin resident reactions to state level Safer at Home policies by the Division of Extension in which residents with lower incomes were more supportive of shutdown and quarantine policies. One possible explanation is that those at lower income levels are more likely to work public-facing jobs and, as a result, are at greater risk for exposure to COVID-19. Federal financial aid, including extended employment insurance and other supplemental payments, provided those at lower income levels with a measure of financial security that allowed them to act in the best interest of their health.

Figure 6. At various points during the pandemic, many individual states and local communities required businesses, schools, and public places to shut down in order to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these measures ... Were necessary? Were fair? Are the right thing to do right now? Might be the right thing to do in the future if a dangerous new variant emerges?

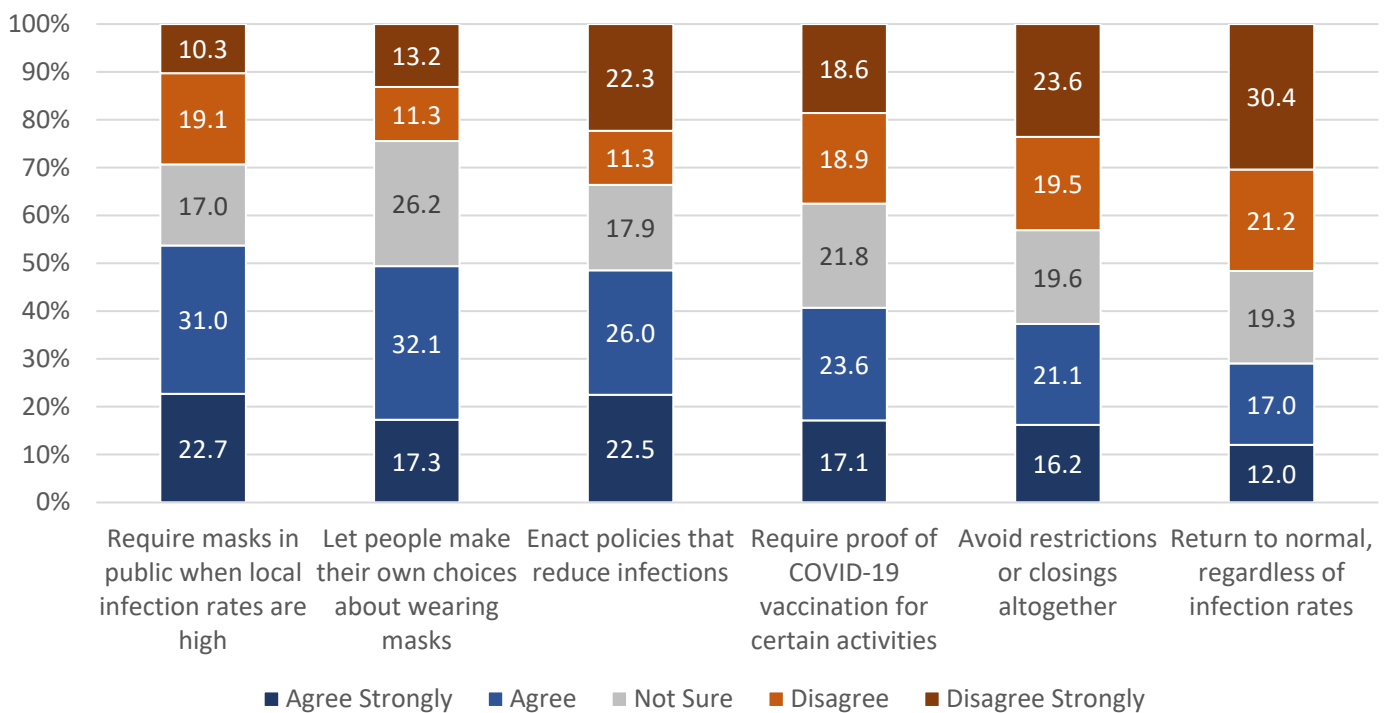


n=1,815; 1=Disagree strongly, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure, 4=Agree, 5=Agree strongly; ANOVA p<0.001

Support for Current Mitigation Measures

There has been some acknowledgement that health officials and local elected leaders have faced difficult decisions when balancing public health concerns against public wishes to return to normal, especially as the pandemic wore on. A degree of support remains for restrictions that minimize the spread of COVID-19. Among all respondents, 53.7% agreed or agreed strongly to requiring masks in public when local infection rates are high, and 48.5% agreed with enacting policies that would reduce infections to a level where people feel comfortable. While 37.3% of respondent agreed that the best way forward is to avoid restrictions altogether and 29.0% agreed to returning to normal regardless of infection rates, a larger proportion, 43.1% and 51.6% of respondents, respectively, disagreed with those statements.

Figure 7. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The best way forward for our country related to the pandemic is to ...

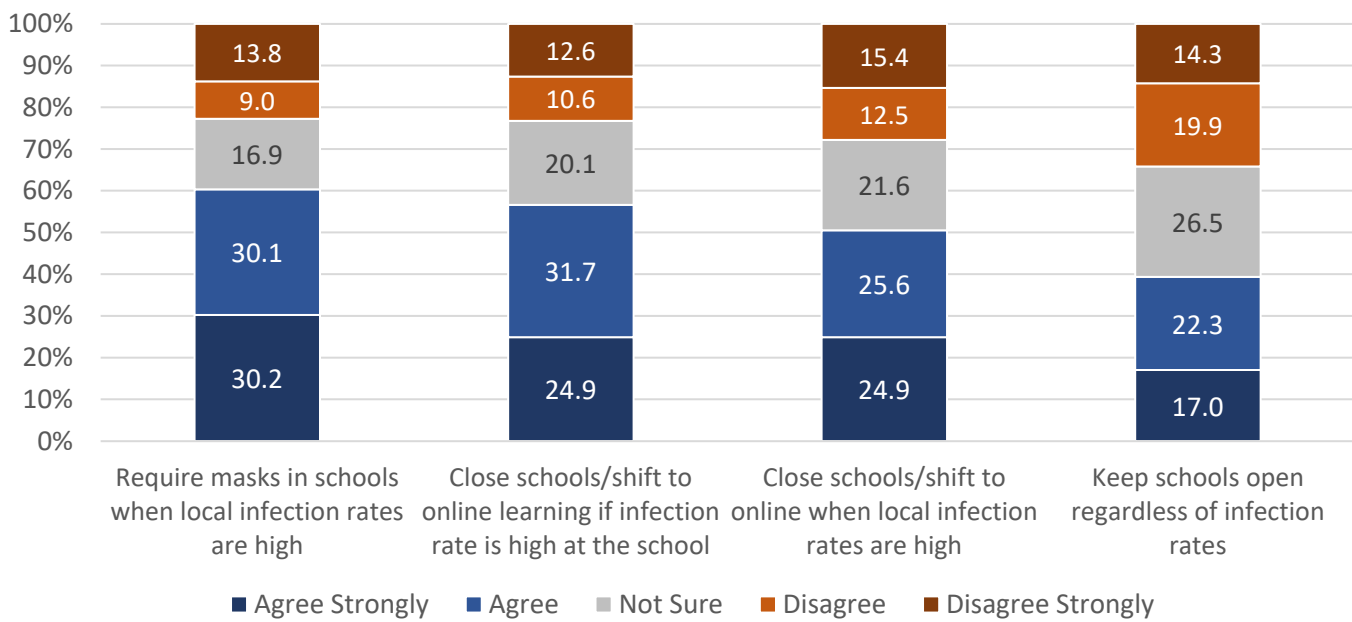


n=2,000; 1=Disagree strongly, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure, 4=Agree, 5=Agree strongly

Support for Mitigation Measures at Schools

Schools have occasionally been a flashpoint for restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with a number of policies that have been common across the nation. In total, 60.3% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly with requiring masks in schools when local infection rates are high. School closures were supported by a segment of respondents, with 56.6% agreeing to closing schools or shifting to online learning if infection rates at that school are high, and 50.5% agreeing to the same if local infection rates are high. In comparison, only 29.3% of respondents agreed with keeping schools open regardless of infection rates. There were no statistical differences between parents and non-parents for these items.

Figure 8. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The best way forward for our country related to the pandemic is to ...



1=Disagree strongly, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure, 4=Agree, 5=Agree strongly

Summary

There is still a great deal of work to be done as communities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We chose to focus on the economic effects for this report as our individual experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic are amplified or buffered by household income and employment burden. Throughout this report, the data consistently reveals that respondents in households with lower than median incomes and those in households with at least one multiple jobholder have experienced higher rates of adversity across most health and economic measures.

Before treatment protocols and vaccines were developed, widely enacted policies to shut down public life were the only tools available to reduce the rate at which COVID-19 was transmitted. The data in this report finds a degree of agreement in retrospect with these measures. The proportion of respondents who agreed that these policies slowed the spread of the virus, protected the health of the public, and were necessary when they were enacted outnumber those that disagree by 2 to 1. We may not have liked those policies at the time, and we may not look back fondly on our days of isolation, but data indicates that significantly more people agree with the necessity of those measures than disagree at this point in time.

This report also finds that pandemic-related financial hardships are widespread and ongoing as we approach the third anniversary of the declaration of a public health emergency. One in four respondents to the survey in this study reported losing or leaving a job because of the pandemic. Nearly 1 in 2 rated their financial situation at the time of the survey in August 2022 as worse than it was in January 2020, and 1 in 3 respondents report that the pandemic has reduced their income. Two in five respondents report difficulty paying bills, and 1 in 2 report that it has been harder to afford food or groceries since the start of the pandemic. Although there is some optimism among respondents that their financial situation will improve over the next five years, short term outlooks are anemic or pessimistic. Two in five believe their situation will remain the same over the next year, and 1 in 3 believe their situation will be worse.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the first global pandemic in an era of highly advanced biotechnology and technologically enabled communication that allows us to exchange information across time zones and continents in real time. Compared to previous pandemics, we are recovering with relative swiftness thanks to the rapid development of protocols to treat those who've contracted the illness and vaccines to reduce the likelihood of severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Still, the loss of fellow community members, the damage to individual health, and the sustained economic difficulties have been difficult to endure. Data collected through this report, and others like it, can be useful in helping us achieve a full recovery.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Respondent Household Income Distribution

	Income Level				Multiple Jobholders	
	All	Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Less than \$10,000	7.8%	12.9%	---	---	8.7	7.4
\$10-19,999	7.8%	12.9%	---	---	8.4	7.5
\$20-29,999	11.1%	18.3%	---	---	12.9	10.3
\$30-39,999	8.9%	14.7%	---	---	8.7	9.0
\$40-49,999	8.8%	14.5%	---	---	8.4	8.8
\$50-59,999	8.8%	14.5%	---	---	12.4	7.3
\$60-69,999	7.4%	12.3%	---	---	7.6	7.3
\$70-79,999	7.8%	---	100%	---	7.4	7.9
\$80-99,999	8.9%	---	---	28.0%	6.5	9.9
\$100-119,999	7.3%	---	---	23.0%	5.9	7.8
\$120-149,999	6.2%	---	---	19.7%	5.1	6.7
\$150-\$199,999	4.6%	---	---	14.6%	4.0	5.0
\$200-\$249,999	2.4%	---	---	7.5%	2.1	2.5
\$250-\$349,999	1.7%	---	---	4.2%	0.8	1.6
\$350,000 or more	0.4%	---	---	3.1%	1.2	0.9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
n	1,816	1,100	141	575	526	1289

Note: 184 respondents declined to provide income data.

Appendix 2. Respondent Education

	All	Income Level		Multiple Jobholders		
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Some High School	6.8	9.6	2.9	2.4	8.8	6.0
High School	32.3	41.1	30.0	16.3	30.5	33.0
Some College	20.3	21.3	17.9	16.7	21.8	19.6
2 Year Degree	10.2	10.2	16.4	9.4	11.6	9.6
4 Year Degree	19.2	13.5	20.7	30.4	18.0	19.7
Post-Graduate	11.3	4.4	12.1	24.8	9.3	2.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
n	1,999	1,100	141	575	568	1,431

Note: 184 respondents declined to provide income data and were excluded from median income analyses as a result.

Appendix 3. Respondent Race & Ethnicity

	All	Income Level		Multiple Jobholders		
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
White	63.0	57.4	66.2	71.4	56.2	65.6
Black	12.0	14.7	15.0	6.3	13.2	11.6
Hispanic/Latinx	16.3	19.5	16.9	10.9	19.9	14.9
Asian	2.4	2.1	1.4	3.6	2.3	2.4
American Indian	1.3	1.4	0.0	1.6	1.9	1.0
Two or More	1.8	1.8	1.4	2.1	2.5	1.5
Other	2.9	2.9	2.1	3.6	3.3	2.8
Middle Eastern	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.7	0.1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
n	1,816	1,099	142	576	568	1,432

*Excluded from mean. All n=2,000 Chi p≤0.001; Income level n=1,815 Chi p≤0.001 ANOVA p≤0.001; Multiple jobholders n=1,998 Chi p≤0.001 ANOVA p≤0.001

Appendix 4. Respondent Gender and Age Distribution

	All	Income Level		Multiple Jobholders		
		Less than Median	Median	Greater than Median	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Female	50.7	55.4	49.6	43.6	50.7	51.6
Male	49.3	44.6	50.4	56.4	49.3	48.4
Age Mean	47.81	48.16	48.61	46.77	41.47	50.32
Age SD	(17.76)	(17.59)	(19.45)	(16.34)	(16.05)	(17.79)
n	1,999	1,100	141	575	526	1289

Note: 184 respondents declined to provide income data.



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