

The Impact of COVID-19 on North Carolina Executive Summary

The state of North Carolina has experienced a major exogenous shock as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. After analyzing state and federal data, recently graduated researchers from UNC Public Policy have found that the pandemic has deepened health and economic disparities in N.C. along the lines of race and geography, and that the state's public schools are not well-prepared for the coming school year.

I. HEALTH

- i. Probability of death once infected with COVID-19 is higher in counties with greater concentrations of animal farms or meat-processing plants (*Figure 1; Table 1*).
- ii. Counties with a greater probability of death once infected with COVID-19 tend to have higher poverty rates. In general, counties in the Eastern part of the state—Duplin, Sampson, and Wayne—have a higher concentration of poverty and a higher number of cases (*Figure 2*).
- iii. Urban areas followed stay-at-home orders more closely than rural areas (*Figure 3*).

II. ECONOMY

- i. By May 2020, unemployment in N.C. was higher than at the height of the Great Recession. Unemployment claims nearly tripled from March to April 2020 (*Figure 4*).
- ii. The Western half of the state saw disproportionately high increases in unemployment rates from February to April, with some recovery in May (*Figure 5; Tables 1-2*).
- iii. North Carolina companies have reported nearly 22,000 long-term layoffs since January 2020. The full structural impact of the economic crisis will develop more slowly than the immediate spike in unemployment (*Figure 6*).

III. THE PANDEMIC AND GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

- i. More Black than White households used the “stimulus checks” for expenses. Over a third of Hispanic or Latino households never received a payment at all (*Figure 7*).
- ii. Black North Carolinians disproportionately filed initial unemployment claims in April (*Figure 8*).
- iii. Medicaid enrollment increased by 4.77% from March to June 2020 (*Figure 9*).
- iv. Compared to 2019, SNAP enrollment from January to June 2020 soared (*Figure 10*).

IV. UNEQUAL IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

- i. In general, a higher percentage of the Hispanic or Latino population has experienced a loss of employment income than any other racial or ethnic group in N.C. (*Figure 13*).
- ii. More low-income households have lost employment income than wealthier households since April 2020 (*Figure 14*).
- iii. On average, Black and Hispanic or Latino North Carolinians are more likely than white North Carolinians to experience housing insecurity (*Figure 15*).
- iv. While 7.70% to 12.1% of overall households in N.C. are food insufficient, Black residents and Hispanic or Latino residents consistently report above the weekly average (*Figure 16*).
- v. A higher percentage Black and Hispanic or Latino households reported feelings of anxiety, nervousness, or stress throughout the pandemic (*Figures 17-18*).

V. THE K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION CHALLENGE

- i. Regardless of in-person or remote instruction in the coming school year, students will need unique support for their academic, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing—support that was lacking even before the pandemic (*Figure 19; Tables 3-4*).
- ii. The local education agencies (LEAs) that are experiencing the highest concentration (per 100,000) of COVID-19 cases are the least prepared to meet student needs (*Table 3*).
- iii. Of North Carolina's 100 county-wide LEAs, 54 fail to meet the nationally recommended ratio for students to school nurses, 91 fail to meet the ratio for students to guidance counselors, and 98 fail to meet the ratio for students to psychologists (*Figure 19*).

More detailed findings are available at <https://publicpolicy.unc.edu/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-north-carolina/>.