

A Deeper Look at Community Needs According to 211OC Data

6 Months of 211OC's
COVID-19 Pandemic Response –
March through August 2020





211OC began circulating weekly Community Needs Briefs in May 2020 to capture the fluctuating community needs in Orange County. This report provides a more comprehensive look at 6 months of community needs data from March through August 2020 compared to March through August 2019. The main sources of data analyzed are calls and web searches from this time-period. The top need in terms of absolute number of inquiries during this period was housing (34,435 needs), a change from 2019 to 2020, in which the top need was food (29,848).

Community Need – March through August 2020

From March through August 2020, 211OC received 51,349 calls and 112,720 needs from the community compared to 27,345 calls and 70,789 needs in the same period in 2019. This is an 88% overall increase in calls. From 2019 to 2020, web searches for resources at www.211oc.org grew from 135,128 in 2019 to 406,932 in 2020 – a 201% increase! As can be observed in Appendix I, Latino/a and Asian populations saw spikes in need in 2020. This is in alignment with consistent findings that COVID-19 has hit communities of color hardest.

Top 10 Needs – March through August 2020

Analysis of 211OC call data from 2020 shows that the most prevalent needs from March through August 2020 period. Table 1 below shows the top ten needs.

Table 1: Top 10 Community Needs, March through August 2020

Need	Number Calls 2020	Percent
Housing	34,435	31%
Food/Meals	29,848	26%
Health Care	9,465	8%
Utility Assistance	7,447	7%
Mental Health/Addictions	5,561	5%
Information Services	5,002	4%
Income Support/Assistance	4,806	4%
Legal, Consumer and Public Safety Services	4,401	4%
Individual, Family and Community Support	3,439	3%
Clothing/Personal/Household Needs	3,355	3%

Top 10 Needs in Terms of Growth – March through August 2020

Analysis of call data from March through August in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 highlights the impact of COVID-19 on community need. The ten needs in Table 2 below are the top-ten in terms of growth from 2019 to 2020. In other words, these are the needs became more prominent in the community due to COVID-19.

Housing has consistently been a top community need in Orange County from 2019 through 2020, and is explored in detail later in this report. COVID-19 has created an immense economic burden on OC residents, pushing them to food insecurity and concerns with other basic needs. For example, the pandemic exacerbated the following needs: food/meals, information services, income support/assistance, health care, disaster services, utility assistance, and more. Our community, including nonprofits, the public sector, and philanthropy, has largely responded to these needs, but these needs continue and when they will wane is uncertain.

Table 2: Top 10 Needs in Terms of Growth from 2019 to 2020 (March through August)

Need	Percent Growth
Food/Meals	239%
Information Services	208%
Income Support/Assistance	181%
Health Care	165%
Disaster Services	105%
Utility Assistance	101%
Other Government/Economic Services	45%
Employment	30%
Volunteers/Donations	27%
Clothing/Personal/Household Needs	26%

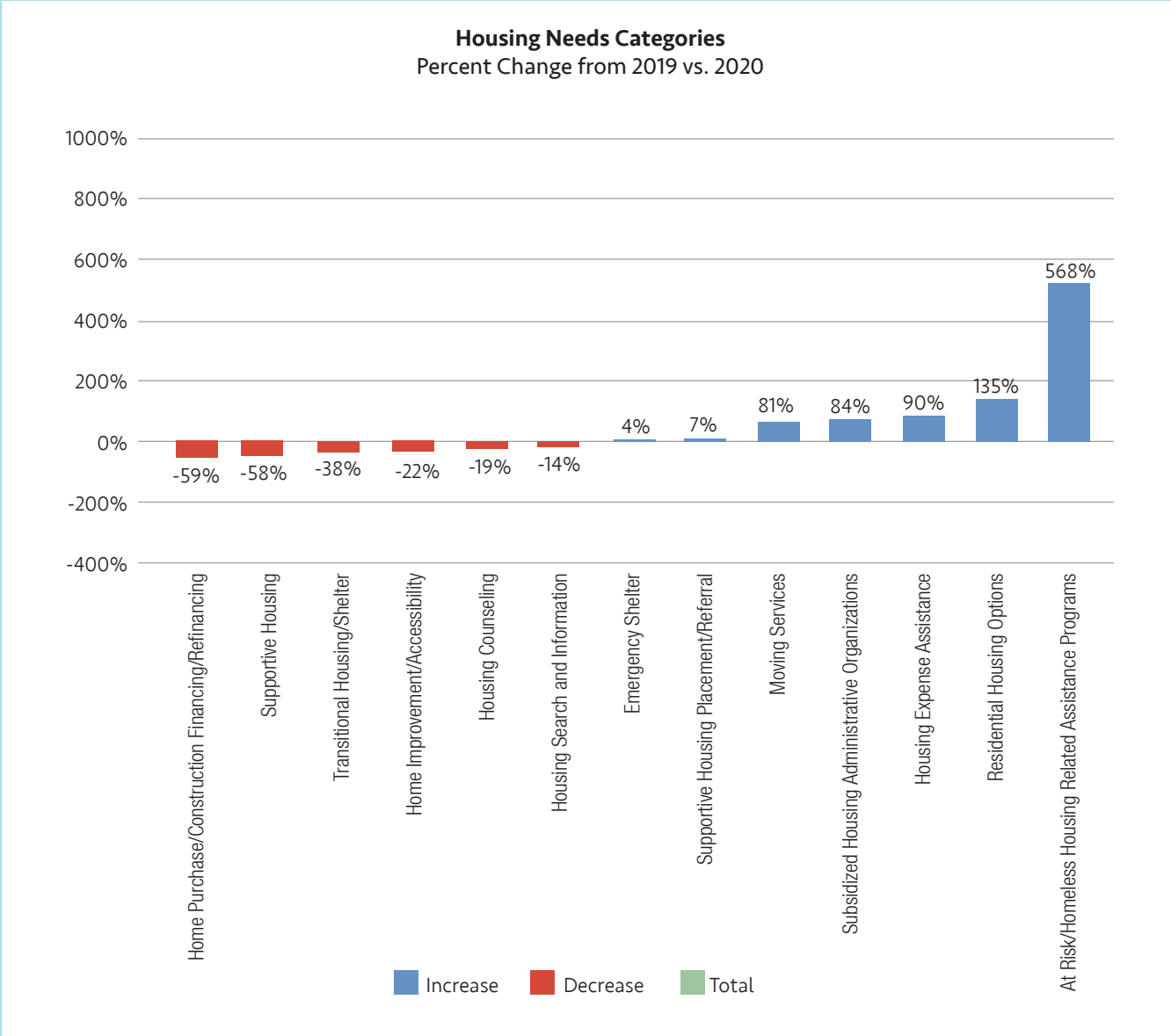
This deeper look into some of the top growth categories teaches us more about the impact of COVID-19 on the community. The following sections go into even more detail and analysis on some of the top needs.

Housing – Homeless Prevention: A Need on the Rise

Housing is consistently a community need in Orange County. However, in 2020, in addition to inquiries regarding emergency shelter to cover immediate needs, inquiries regarding “housing expense” grew by 90%. Inquiries regarding “At Risk/Homeless Housing Related Assistance Programs” grew by 568% and “Residential Housing Options” grew by 135%. Many more individuals are facing the potential of losing their homes and we are therefore focusing more attention on prevention activities. For instance, 211OC partnered with United Way Orange County’s Assist OC program to pre-screen and schedule 1:1 virtual appointments to qualify for a \$500 Visa card. The 211OC Contact Center helped identify 1,044 client households to enroll into the Assist OC program, driving \$522,000 into the community for prevention support. A great collaborative effort to assist in preventing homelessness during this time of great need.



Chart 1: Housing Needs Categories (2019 vs. 2020)

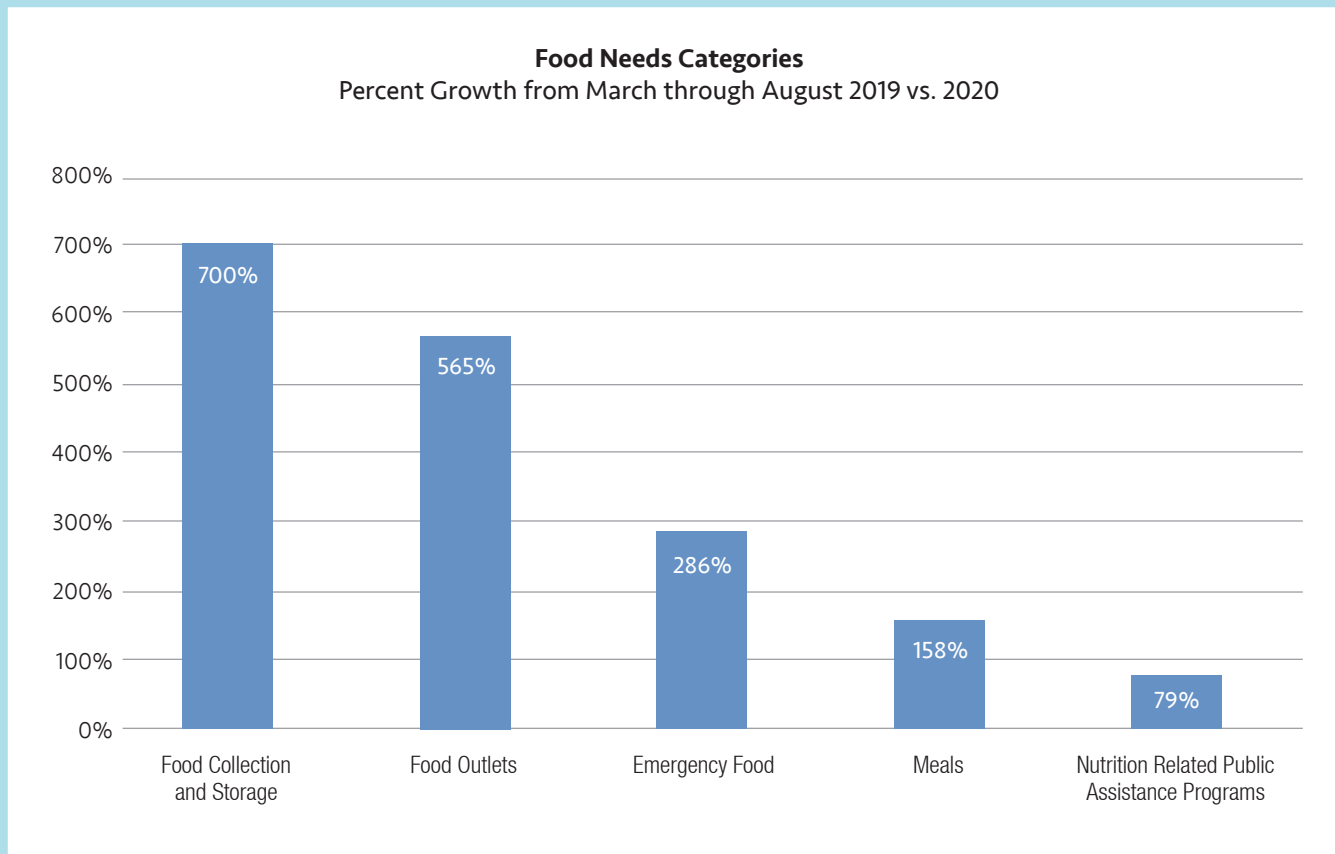


Food Insecurity Continues as a Top Need

With 8,816 total food/meals calls in 2019 and 29,848 in 2020, there is a clear and dramatic increase in need. Looking a little deeper, the table below shows the growth in specific food/meals categories.



Chart 2: Food Need Categories March through August 2019 vs. 2020



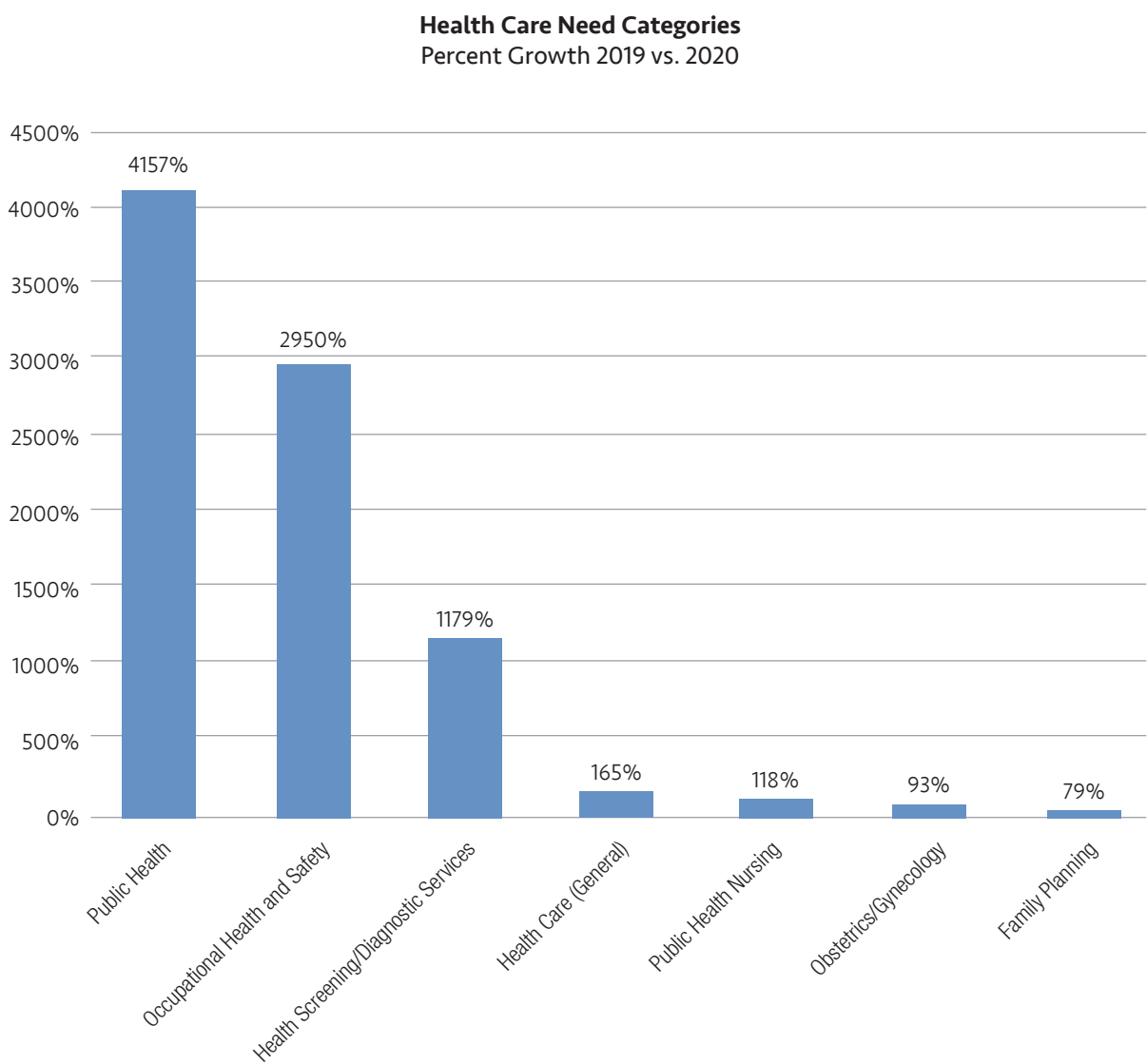
The County responded well to the heightened need for food, with initiatives including, but not limited to publicly funded programs such as District 5 Supervisor Lisa Bartlett's Nutrition Gap Program and CalFresh, as well as privately funded programs such as the Delivering with Dignity program. **Food Collection and Storage** increased the most as Second Harvest and OC Food Bank (who package and redistribute food), partnered with 211OC. **Food Outlets** consist of markets that accept online orders and deliver food to the household. This category increased significantly with Amazon Marketplace and Walmart accepting CalFresh or CalWORKS electronic benefit transfer (EBT) as payment for online grocery purchases and deliveries in May 2020. **Emergency Food** increased in tandem with Second Harvest Food Bank and OC Food Bank's mass drive-through food distribution events and other local pantries. **Meals** include prepared meal programs such as Meals on Wheels and the Great Plates programs, many of which transitioned to prepared frozen meal distribution. Lastly, **Nutrition Related Public Assistance Programs** grew with increased enrollments into the CalFresh program (nationally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). 211OC's CalFresh Enrollment grew by over 300% compared to the same time last year – assisting households enroll into the program completely over the phone using a telephonic signature.

Health Care Needs in a Public Health Crisis

While general health care needs increased 165% percent from 2019, there was even more growth in specific sub-categories of health care. Searches for “public health”, “occupational health and safety,” and “health screening and diagnostic services” grew by 1000’s of percent. Communicable disease- control calls not surprisingly skyrocketed by 32,455%! (This category has been omitted from the chart below to retain readability).



Chart 3: Health Care Need Categories March through August 2019 vs. 2020



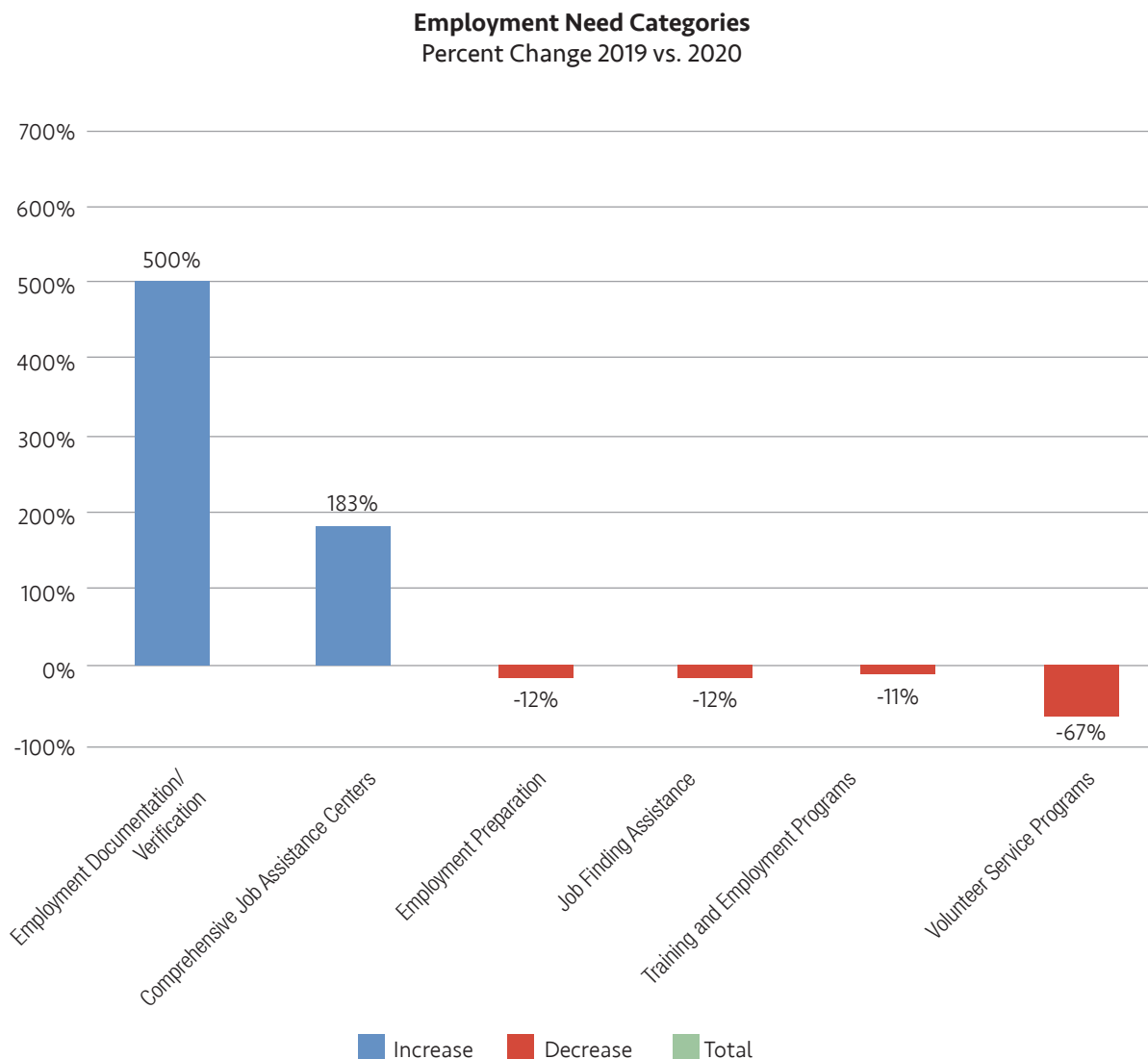
Employment is a Multi-Faceted Picture

There is no doubt that COVID-19 created months of increased unemployment. The average unemployment rate from March through August 2020 in Orange County was 13%, ranging from 15% in May to 10% in August.

While 211OC employment calls grew dramatically in some areas such as Job Assistance and Employment Documentation/Verification (500%), other areas shrank and stagnated. Comprehensive job assistance centers, such as the Orange County One-Stop Center services category increased by 183%. A plausible hypothesis for why 211OC did not see growth in employment related calls in every category is that people are aware that the most direct route is to contact the EDD for their unemployment benefits. Moreover, the picture of soaring unemployment in Orange County from March through August is evident in other needs such as food/meals, housing, income and utility assistance.



Chart 4: Employment Needs Categories March through August 2019 vs. 2020



Growth in Basic Needs Support – Income Support and Utility Assistance

Inquiries regarding Income Support need grew 181% comparing March through August 2019 to 2020. Inquiries regarding Utility Assistance need grew 101% in the same time-period.

211OC has responded with multiple programs, including the Access and Functional Needs (AFN)¹ San Diego Gas & Electric pilot in South Orange County, which assists in coordinating emergency care for those individuals who need that assistance when utilities are required to do emergency shutoffs. 211OC also has a relationship with Southern California Edison, which for now aims at reducing utility need emergencies through education and information campaigns.

Mental Health – A Paradox worth Deeper Analysis

At 211OC, mental health needs calls declined by 8% during this period. However, upon a closer look, several categories grew from 2019 to 2020. One to highlight is Talk lines/Warm lines, which grew by 26%. Talk lines/Warm Lines consist of Programs that enables people who are troubled to talk confidentially about their personal problems. One plausible hypothesis for this growth during COVID is that individuals deferred regular therapy or pursuit of therapeutic services.

Other categories, including substance use disorder treatment programs, crisis intervention, therapy referrals, counseling decreased by up to 88%. These numbers might be a reflection of people practicing physical distancing, and prioritizing the fulfillment of basic needs over mental health and well-being.

Additionally, in the last 2 weeks of Oct we are seeing mental health needs rise. This may be a “second wave” need.

Closing

These findings show a community with sustained heightened needs in the areas of basic needs such as housing, food, informational services, income and utility assistance, and health care. Our community residents economically strapped and seeking assistance. With a second round of layoffs and uncertain end to COVID-19, we need to sustain care for our most vulnerable populations in the mid and longer term.

Given this, we offer the following recommendations to our community:

1. **For Individual Donors and Grant makers:** Stay invested in disaster recovery and resilience work for the long haul. The 211OC Needs Data shows that needs remain heightened and more have emerged. The most vulnerable are being hit especially hard in the areas of basic needs, and other groups are becoming vulnerable and living through food, income, and health insecurity. We know that these needs have grown dramatically and they are here to stay for some time. Our recommendation is to stay committed to the most pressing needs created by and exacerbated by disaster.
2. **For Our Nonprofits:** Continue your hard work for the community, and consider our data a resource for you to adjust and make cases to improve and hone your services for those most in need. 211OC can provide you with data necessary to tell your story.
3. **For the Community:** Continue to use 211OC as a resource and referral clearinghouse for all of your needs. Share the number 211OC with those who are newly vulnerable, and let them know that we are here to help. For those wishing to volunteer your time, we always have opportunities to serve, and even more so in this time of heightened need. Please reach out! Contact: Danielle van der Reest, Community Engagement Manager volunteer@211oc.org or 714-589-2367.
4. **For all of the above:** As a referral clearinghouse, 211OC maintains useful community needs data. We have been gratified to share weekly Community Needs Briefs with you over the past six months. If you are interested in partnering with us to create empowering data reports, reach out and we will be happy to discuss and collaborate. Contact: Amy Arambulo, Director of Community Programs aarambulo@211oc.org 714-589-2350.

¹ AFN refers to individuals who are or have: Physical, developmental or intellectual disabilities. Chronic conditions or injuries. Also, refers to those with Limited English proficiency.

Appendix I: Need Demographics 2019 vs. 2020

	2019	2020
Race		
Asian	4%	9%
Black/African American	10%	6%
Declined to Answer	1%	0%
Latino/Hispanic	41%	56%
Middle Eastern	1%	1%
Multiple Races/Ethnicities	6%	3%
Native American/Alaskan Native	1%	.
None	0%	.
Not Asked	0%	0%
Other/Unknown	2%	2%
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	1%	1%
White/Caucasian	31%	22%
Gender		
Man	33%	31%
Woman	67%	69%
Veterans		
No	95%	97%
Yes	4%	3%
Unknown	1%	1%
Age		
12-17	2%	0%
18-24	10%	4%
25-54	59%	68%
55-64	16%	17%
6-11	1%	0%
65-74	7%	7%
75-84	3%	2%
85 and older	1%	1%
Birth-5	2%	0%
Unknown	0%	1%
Household Size		
1	41%	29%
2	20%	20%
3	15%	13%
4	11%	16%
5	7%	12%
6	4%	6%
7	1%	2%
8	0%	1%
9 or more	1%	1%