



# COVID-19 PATIENT PRIMARY CARE SURVEY

SERIES 6 FIELDED MARCH 19-31, 2021



In a March 2021 survey fielded during the pandemic, over half of patients report increased anxiety or depression and most report a decrease in their mental health status. Further, low income and rural communities reported poor access to critical services, e.g., low-income respondents had over 50% greater difficulty putting food on the table as compared to the general population. Yet at a time of increased isolation and adversity, two-thirds of those surveyed felt strongly connected to their primary care doctor. Most (78%) have been in contact with their doctor during the pandemic, with over half identifying primary care as the place they called when they needed someone to trust.

## The pandemic has placed greater stress on individuals and families, and has worsened mental health

- 55% struggle more with loneliness and isolation, 26% respondents struggle more with addiction
- 43% struggle more to manage childcare, 54% have difficulty adjusting to school-aged kids home during the day
- 19% report they are generally in poorer physical health than before the pandemic

## People from low-income and rural communities disproportionately struggled to access critical services

- Rural and low-income respondents have struggled to varying degrees with social needs since the start of the pandemic

|                              | Overall | Rural | Low income |
|------------------------------|---------|-------|------------|
| Putting food on the table    | 32%     | 39%   | 48%        |
| Finding a safe place to live | 22%     | 23%   | 28%        |
| Maintaining employment       | 38%     | 40%   | 51%        |
| Paying your bills            | 39%     | 47%   | 57%        |

## Primary care has stepped up, providing critical support and access to healthcare for people across all communities

- 53% report their doctor knows them as a person, 69% can ask their doctor about anything, medical or not
- 74% feel their doctor helps make sense of what is going on, 63% say seeing their doctor makes them feel better
- 73% prefer a usual doctor's office for primary care, compared with 14% using a doctor's office at their job, 10% urgent care, 4% retail clinic, 11% online only doctor's office, and 4% concierge practice
- 55% report they are more likely to use video or phone with a doctor that knows them

**Methods** – Fielded by the Larry A. Green Center, in partnership with the Primary Care Collaborative and 3rd Conversation, this survey was offered through public posting on a survey website and open to people 18 years or older. This is a convenience sample, voluntary and anonymous, with enrollment becoming limited as it filled to ensure diversity in respondent demographics. Fielded March 19-31, 2021.

**Sample** – 1507 respondents. General population trends based on 1007 respondents sharing population diversity consistent with US census report. Rural and low-income trends include an additional 500 respondents, over-sampled among low income (defined as household income < \$50K; n=682) and rural (rural status was self-reported; n=405) populations. Demographics of general population sample: 24% high school degree, 65% college or higher; 12% household income (HHI) < \$25k, 31% with HHI > \$100k. 29% urban, 20% rural. 31% 18-35 years old, 33% over 55. 44% male, 54% female. 21% were unemployed.

*"I feel that the pandemic advanced how we see our PCP. Video appointments are far more efficient and convenient for routine needs but will not replace the importance of in person visits for acute/physical concerns." – Washington*

*"I'm very thankful for my primary doctor and using telehealth. He's a great physician and I love that he made it easier to meet with him." – Connecticut*

## ***Open text comments from patients regarding...***

### ***Mental health and social stressors***

- My landlord was forced to sell the house. Five seniors became homeless and had difficulties finding places to live. Nevada
- My entire family have all struggled with a much higher amount of depression. Massachusetts
- I can't sleep at night anymore. Louisiana
- I am depressed and mentally exhausted. The news is becoming overly scary which is unhealthy for the fragile brains of the planet. New York
- I am doing pretty okay now but still worried about my child and COVID. Iowa
- I lost my first job and after 6 months I found a new job. Colorado

### ***Additional challenges during COVID-19***

- I got COVID-19 and was hospitalized for almost a week in October. It is now March and I still need supplemental oxygen at times. Utah
- There is a real problem with people of color not being able to get the vaccine as readily as white people in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania
- Appointments where another person can't join was very stressful. Vermont
- I am hoping to return to my specialist for treatment of my brain tumor. I have a low quality of life and am anxious for that to improve. It is not life threatening, so I am waiting until the worst of the pandemic is over. Colorado
- The only doctor I have had trouble with actually seeing is my therapist. We meet through video, but I don't really like it. I think those are the doctors that are the most important to be able to meet face to face with now during the pandemic because of all the extra stress. Indiana
- My area in general suffers from having enough primary care providers. Washington
- It was hard to get an in-person appointment but had telephone appointments with my doctor. Rhode Island
- It was hard to see the doctor without having to wait. When you did, you would be afraid, because you don't know who has the virus, especially when you have health issues. South Carolina
- In recent weeks, many countries have been reporting an increase in "pandemic fatigue" – people are feeling demotivated about following recommended behaviors to protect themselves and others from the virus. Wisconsin

### ***Relationship with primary care clinician***

- I fully trust my doctor. She knew early, in Jan. 2020, that COVID-19 was going to be a serious problem. New Jersey
- My doctor was very careful about social distancing and cleanliness, I felt comfortable during my visits. New York
- My doctors were always there for me. Texas
- My PCP is always there when needed. He shows overall concern for my wellbeing! Texas
- It takes a good amount of trust with your doctor to get through COVID-19. Texas
- My primary care physician saved our lives when we were sick with COVID-19. Idaho
- I have been able to see my doctor whenever I wanted to. Florida
- I miss seeing my doctor in person. California

### ***Other experiences with primary care during the pandemic***

- They were excellent in developing a separate area near the clinic for COVID-19 testing and intake. California
- Very thankful for those in the health profession taking extra care to ensure patients visiting the doctor do not have COVID symptoms. Thanks to all those in the health profession that work tirelessly during the pandemic. Nevada
- I have had excellent care and my clinics are very careful with sanitation and social distancing. North Carolina
- I love telehealth. It's a great tool and should have been used before the pandemic. Florida
- I love video appointments and hope they stay post-pandemic. New York
- I was initially too worried to go to any of my doctors, but with time I have felt better about it. Colorado
- Our local hospitals and health departments have been terrific in keeping us safe. Minnesota
- I miss how primary care was before the pandemic. Texas