

Reimagining How to Meet the Needs of New York State's Families in Times of Crisis

Findings from CCC-COFCCA's survey of Child Welfare Prevention Service Providers

Project Overview

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) and Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) are partners in policy and budget advocacy. From 2020 into 2021, COFCCA and CCC developed a questionnaire in collaboration with child welfare prevention service providers in New York City to gather insights on first-hand experience carrying out programs under existing contracts and responding to emerging needs of families during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 350 staff from provider agencies serving New York City participated in the survey.

To gather insights from providers in counties outside of New York City, the questionnaire was adapted for the statewide context in collaboration with providers in each region of New York State. More than 120 staff from provider agencies working in all 57 counties outside of New York City participated in the survey.

Key findings on the survey of counties outside of New York City are presented below as are comparative data from the New York City survey where appropriate.

Key Findings

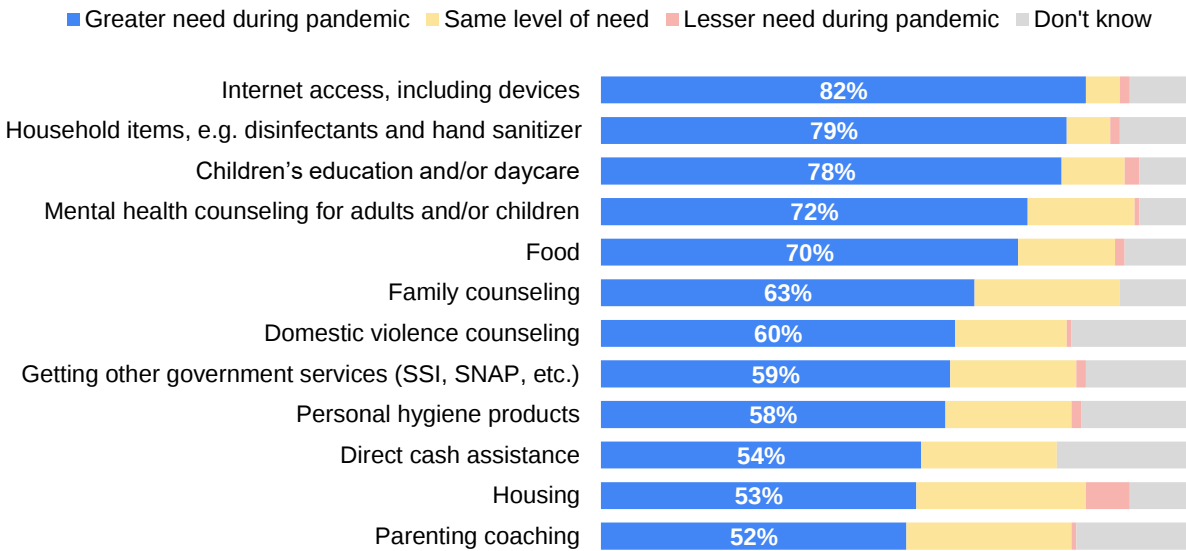
Results from both the New York City and State surveys shed light on the experiences of families and prevention service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic and point to both long-standing and emerging challenges that demand policy action. Namely, the survey reveals a wide range of needs that have increased because of the pandemic. Providers have pivoted to meet families where they are by increasing cash and non-cash supports and offering alternative to in-person visits, such as video conferencing, to ensure consistent communication and social distancing. However, prevention service provider agencies report crucial challenges with funding and staffing that limit their capacity to meet families' needs.

Families' basic needs have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented various challenges to families with children across New York State. CCC-COFCCA's survey of prevention service providers sought to illuminate how specific needs have changed over the course of the pandemic, and the results point to a range of heightened needs. In New York State, providers report that the pandemic has increased families' need for internet access, child care, mental health care, food, and many other supports.

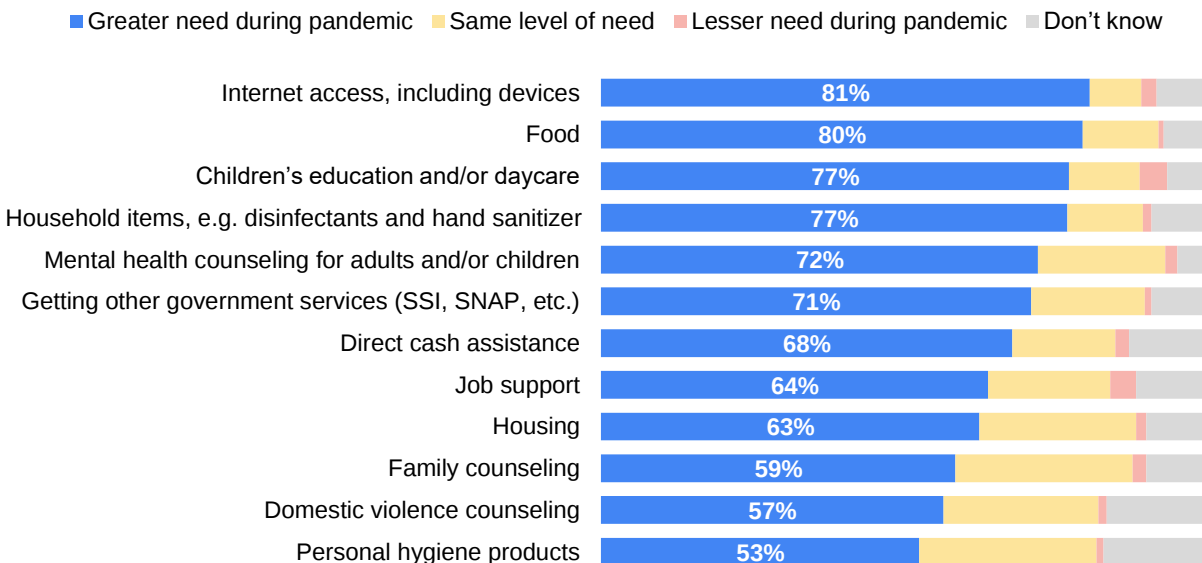


Figure 1. NYS Provider Survey: How have families' need for the following services changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?



Many of the needs reported by providers statewide reflect the same trend in increased needs that providers reported in New York City. **In both the City and State surveys, the issues of internet access, food, child care, mental health, and household items compose the five areas where providers report the greatest increases in needs over the pandemic.**

Figure 2. NYC Provider Survey: How have families' need for the following services changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?



Providers work creatively to meet families where they are

The COVID-19 pandemic also presented obstacles to communication and contact between service providers and families due to public health-induced lockdowns and safety measures. In this transition, prevention service agencies and staff responded by meeting families where they are through a combination of in-person visits, phone calls, and virtual conferencing.

Figure 3. NYS Provider Survey: Clients' communication preferences during the pandemic based on prevention service providers' reporting

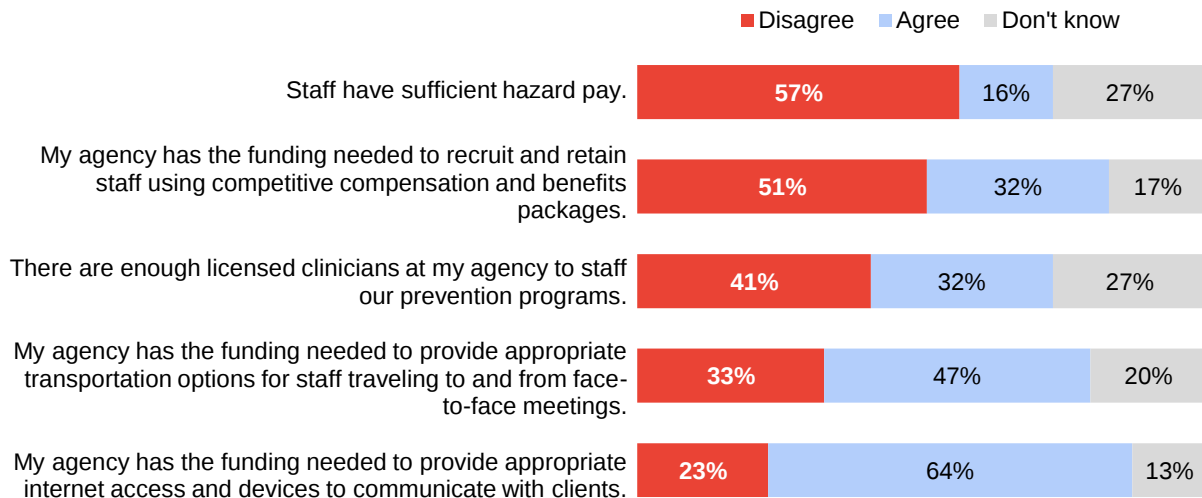
■ In-person visit ■ Phone call ■ Virtual conference ■ Combination of all three ■ No preference / Don't know



Providers face challenges, especially related to workforce and funding needs

The statewide survey reveals that **prevention staff feel a need for more support and funding to meet families' increased needs**. A significant share of respondents report that their agency does not have the funding to provide appropriate internet and transportation options to enable communication and contact with clients. Further, close to half of providers report challenges with retaining and recruiting the personnel, such as licensed clinicians, to staff prevention programs.

Figure 4. NYS Provider Survey: Providers' views on workforce and funding needs



Recommendations

The findings of these surveys make clear the need to elevate policy solutions that can lift household income, stabilize housing for children and family and expand access to primary prevention supports before the need for child welfare involvement, and support recruitment and retention of the prevention services workforce. These survey findings are particularly timely to support ongoing efforts to transform the NYS child welfare system and continue the trend of reducing foster care placements and relying

more heavily on supports that can strengthen families and communities to ensure child safety and family stability.

Moreover, the findings support related advocacy calling attention to the need for reauthorization of the state statute that allows for critical investments in child welfare prevention services, which is up for renewal in 2022. CCC and COFCCA, along with child welfare direct service and advocacy partners, urge policy makers to ensure reauthorization of the child welfare statute in ways that strengthen child welfare financing and in doing so produce better outcomes for children and their families:

- Supporting full funding and restoration of the state and local (65/35) match for protective and preventive and independent living services;
- Pulling the statutory parameters and funding for the Kinship Guardian Assistance Program out of the Foster Care Block Grant to mirror the adoption subsidy;
- Raising the value of the child welfare housing subsidy to ensure successful reunification and independent living;
- Investing in a stable, well-trained workforce by increasing base salaries for staff and providing regular cost of living adjustments.

As demonstrated in the survey data, prevention services play a vital role in meeting the needs of children and families and are even more critical today as we re-imagine ways to support families and communities in New York.