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“Everything at Once”:

**The Status of California Low-Income Women
Nearly Four Years Into the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Raúl Chávez, Ph.D.

Four Focus Areas

- **Financial Well-Being**
- **Mental and Emotional Well-Being**
- **Accessing Public Benefits and Support Services**
- **Continuing Needs**



Throughline

- **The pandemic is far from over**
- **Recovery remains far away**



The Pandemic

- **Loss of family members and close friends**
 - “[Losing family] was the worst because that cannot be recovered anymore. I lost my sister, and another sister, and my dad in three days.” (*San Mateo*)
- **Contagion still a real threat**
 - “I have a sister. She barely had her baby girl on April 23. And it’s been a month since the baby was infected. And they took her to the hospital because the baby started crying... So, I’m aware that this is not over.” (*San Fernando Valley*)



Financial Well-Being

- The pandemic destroyed financial security
- The pandemic led to job losses and work hours reductions
- Inflation and high cost of living further challenging recovery



“Macy’s” Story (South Los Angeles)

- “My uncle passed away...And then in February 2021, my cousin passed away... I used my 401(k), my retirement savings, every penny, to bury them.”
- “After I lost [my cousin], I was doing the denial anger thing... I just fell apart. And I was just numb. I had a breakdown shortly after that in March [2020]. And I had another one in August.”
- “On September 30th I’m on the street [if I don’t pay the rent]. And I don't have enough [money]. And not only is it not enough, I would have to work and earn or have some other income of an additional \$700 to even get another place.”



Mental and Emotional Well-Being


- The pandemic raised stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma to unparalleled levels
- Women bore the burden of making hard decisions, from deciding what got paid, to whether a sick loved one should go to a hospital
- Women had to endure this alongside unprecedented social isolation




“Saida’s” Story (*San Fernando Valley*)

- “[The pandemic] affected me psychologically because [my husband was already home sick with cancer]; my job, the children, and him... When the pandemic hit, that is when my brain went, boom! The news. The work. The scandalized people in the streets.”
 - “My [fast food work] hours went down. What am I going to do now? [My husband] is hospitalized for periods of time. The school is very helpful because my children are in school from eight to six in the programs, and that benefits me. The school closed... [My husband] needed to be in a protected area, but the children were at home all day. They didn't pay attention to the class.”
 - “My husband did not survive the four or three times he got COVID... I would never have survived the pandemic if I had not lived [in affordable housing with access to wrap-around services]... I am paying \$920 [per month in rent]. I was working four hours three days a week. I would not have survived.”
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Accessing Public Benefits and Support Services

- **Accessing public benefits and support services has been harder since the pandemic**
 - **CalFresh, CalWORKs**
 - **COVID-19 Stimulus Checks**
 - **Disability Insurance**
 - **Emergency Rental Assistance**
 - **MediCal**
 - **Section 8**
 - **Unemployment Insurance**
 - **Small increases in household income led to the loss of much needed public benefits**
 - **Preference for relying on community-based organizations for assistance**
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“Miriam’s” Story (*San Diego*)

- “I was working for a non-profit for almost two years. I needed to have surgery, so I needed to get unemployment [insurance]. But non-profits do not pay unemployment... that was the big thing for me.”
 - “‘Go here.’ ‘Oh, we can’t help you here.’ ‘Go here.’ ‘Oh, we can’t help you here.’ I don’t have a car. We are in the middle of nowhere [in a tent encampment]. And then you get there and its, ‘Nope. Sorry. Not here. We can’t help you. We don’t have funds.’ I went to five places to get a pair of shoes [for a job interview].”
 - “I just applied for Social Security. I’m going to be 62 in three months. Maybe I’ll finally get a place to live. Senior housing. I don’t know. If not, I’m going back to buying a van. Live back in a van if I have to. I got to do what I got to do.”
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Continuing Needs

1. Services

- Affordable Housing
- Child Care
- Education/Classes
- Health Care
- Higher Wages
- Job Skills and Job Search
- Mental Health
- Nutritious Food
- Rental Assistance
- Transportation


2. Call for government officials to provide services through community-centered approaches

3. Community Centered Approaches

- Churches
- House Visits
- Knocking on doors and leaflets

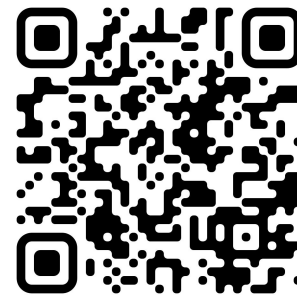


“Elena’s” Story (*San Mateo*)

- “Agencies still have money because they didn't know how to give it to people. And there are still the people who need it who still don't know how to get that money. I know this because the county said they have this amount of money left over from the COVID funds.”
 - “Organizations should have better information on the best methods of distributing information so that opportunities reach everyone... The government needs to prepare us and give us the opportunities and tools we need.”
 - “I hope that all the information you have collected from all the communities where you have gone, from all the people you have met, will be taken and transmitted [to Sacramento] as it really is. And that you tell them that we are a community... Our need is great. But still, we do not break!”
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Q&A



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