USC Dornsife

LABarometer

Top 5 Takeaways
from
The Affordability & Prosperity Report

WAVE 2

Release Date: May 9, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our second wave of the USC Dornsife LABarometer Affordability & Prosperity survey brings new data to an old but pressing social problem in Los Angeles County: the problem of affordability. The survey's general aim is to evaluate the accessibility, affordability, and quality of four key resources in L.A. County: housing, healthcare, food, and education. Survey topics range from the cost and quality of housing, to healthcare experiences and challenges, food security, and school quality. The survey also examines residents' financial health and spending habits, their barriers and pathways to social and economic mobility, and the real and perceived impact of growth and change in their neighborhoods.

Wave 1 of the survey was fielded from September 30, 2020, to November 1, 2020 – six months after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were coping with massive disruptions to their local economy, schools, and healthcare systems, and our data reflected this – a population burdened by the high cost of housing and healthcare; racially and economically stratified in its access to quality education; and recovering from a food crisis that had left a third of the region food insecure.

A little over a year later, the results of Wave 2 (fielded to a sample of 1,250 residents from October 14, 2021, to January 9, 2022) suggest that although social and economic conditions have improved significantly in L.A. County, disparities persist and new challenges loom.

After the pandemic forced 12% of parents of school-age children into homeschooling arrangements in 2020, Wave 2 reveals that rates of homeschooling have decreased to 2%, as more parents now feel satisfied with the schooling options available in their neighborhoods.

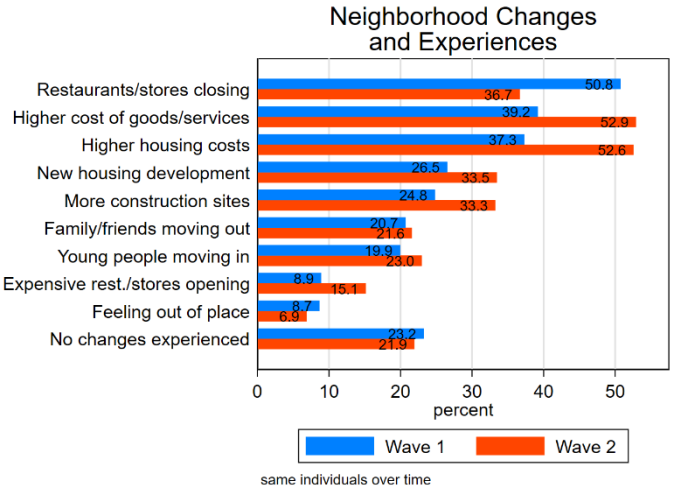
Neighborhood stressors have also evolved since the pandemic arrived, for better and worse. In both survey waves, we asked respondents about changes occurring in their neighborhood, including changes, like upscaling or turnover, that might increase risk of displacement for poor or long-term residents. In Wave 1, the most commonly reported indicator of neighborhood change was store closures (51% of respondents). By Wave 2, reports of store closures had decreased in frequency to 38% while reports of new housing developments and construction sites had increased – all signs of economic growth. On the other hand, reports of higher living costs increased in frequency as well – signs of a population increasingly burdened by the pressures of upscaling and inflation.

We see similar tensions in our results for food and healthcare. While food insecurity decreased in prevalence in 2021, rates remain heavily stratified by race, with non-white residents experiencing food insecurity at a rate 2.5 higher than that of white residents. Likewise, rates of forgone COVID testing due to cost concerns almost doubled in 2021, despite increased rates of preventive, primary care-seeking.

On the following pages, you will find the top five takeaways from Wave 2 of the LABarometer Affordability & Prosperity survey. To learn more about this survey and other LABarometer surveys, please visit https://cesr.usc.edu/labarometer/overview.

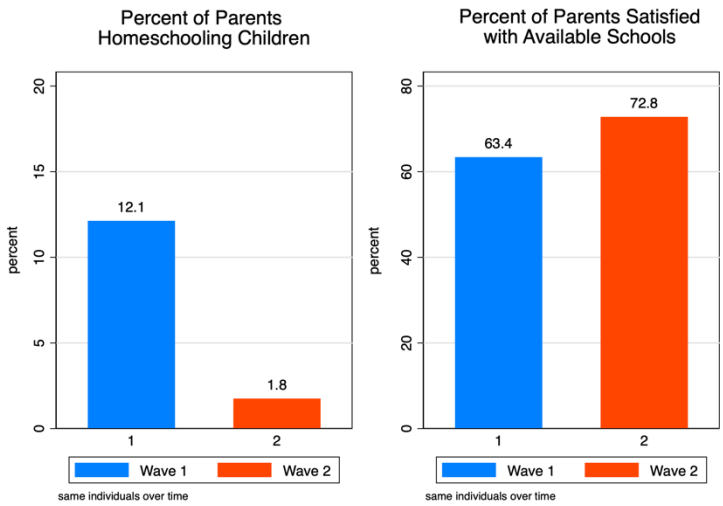
TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS

1. Over half of L.A. County residents saw living expenses in their neighborhood increase in 2021, up from 37% in 2020.



Approximately 78% of residents experienced some major form of change in their neighborhood in 2021, from the arrival of new housing and more expensive restaurants or stores, to the departure of friends and family and increased costs for goods and services. While the overall fraction of people reporting neighborhood change is similar to what we observed in Wave 1, the most frequently cited indicators of change in neighborhoods are different. In Wave 1 – fielded in the midst of the pandemic-induced recession – the most commonly reported indicator of neighborhood change was store closures. Approximately 51% of respondents had witnessed restaurant or store closures in their neighborhood in the prior 12 months. By Wave 2, that percentage had dropped to 37%, and reports of new housing developments and construction sites increased in frequency. Meanwhile, reports of higher living costs—that is, higher costs for housing, goods, and services – increased in frequency between survey waves, from 38% in Wave 1 to 53% in Wave 2. Altogether, these results signal economic growth but also warn of a population increasingly burdened by the forces of upscaling and inflation.

2. Rates of homeschooling decreased in 2021, as more parents report satisfaction local schooling options.

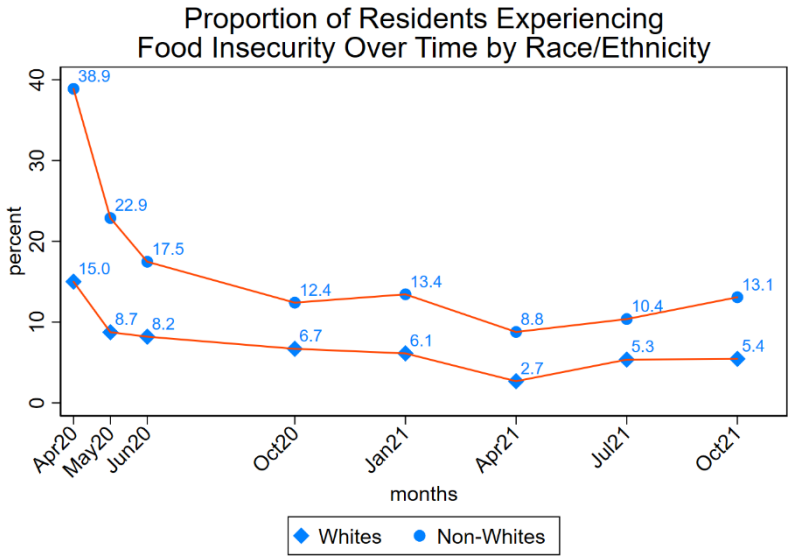


According to our survey, rates of homeschooling decreased by 85% in 2021, after pandemic-related school closures forced many parents into homeschooling arrangements in 2020. Likewise, our results suggest that attitudes towards neighborhood schooling options have improved significantly since 2020. In Wave 1, 63% of participating parents of school-age children reported that the availability of schooling options in their neighborhood that met their

needs was good or very good. By Wave 2 of our survey, that percentage had increased to 73%. These results indicate that after a number of setbacks in 2020, more schools are finding ways to balance the tradeoff between children's educational needs and public health concerns.

3. In 2021, non-White residents experienced food insecurity at a rate comparable to what White residents experienced at the height of the 2020 recession.

Our survey team has been tracking the prevalence of food insecurity in L.A. County since the early days of the pandemic, when rates were overwhelmingly high and racially stratified. In April 2020, respondents were asked to report on their food habits and experiences over a two-week period. Within our sample, 39% of non-White residents reported some level of food insecurity – 2.5 times the rate observed among White residents.

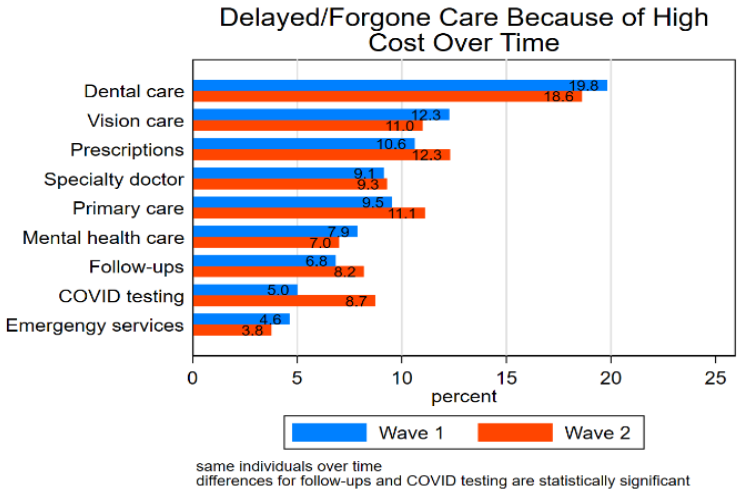


Rates of food insecurity declined sharply thereafter – by almost 300% — as governments mobilized to strengthen the social safety net for residents suffering from pandemic-related hardships. However, the racial divide in food insecurity persisted. By the end of 2021, our data show that non-White residents were still 2.5 times more likely than White residents to experience food insecurity, at a rate of 13% compared to 5%. Moreover, our data reveal that, as of October 2021, non-White residents experience food insecurity at a rate (13%) comparable to the rate (15%) observed among White residents in April 2020, at the peak of the pandemic recession.

4. Angelenos are 1.75 times more likely to opt out of COVID-19 testing due to concerns about cost than they were in 2020.

As the pandemic wears on, our data reveal that Angelenos are increasingly likely to delay or forgo necessary COVID-19 testing due to cost concerns. In both waves of our survey, we asked respondents if they had delayed or gone without the health care they needed in the last 12 months because the cost of care was too high. Among those who participated in both survey waves, 5% of respondents reported delaying or forgoing testing for COVID-19 in Wave 1. By Wave 2, that percentage had increased to 9%.

It is unclear why Wave 2 respondents are more likely to forgo COVID-19 testing due to concerns about cost. This increase in prevalence may reflect a real or perceived increase in the cost burden of testing, as demand for at-home rapid tests has increased but private insurers only recently began covering the cost of such tests.



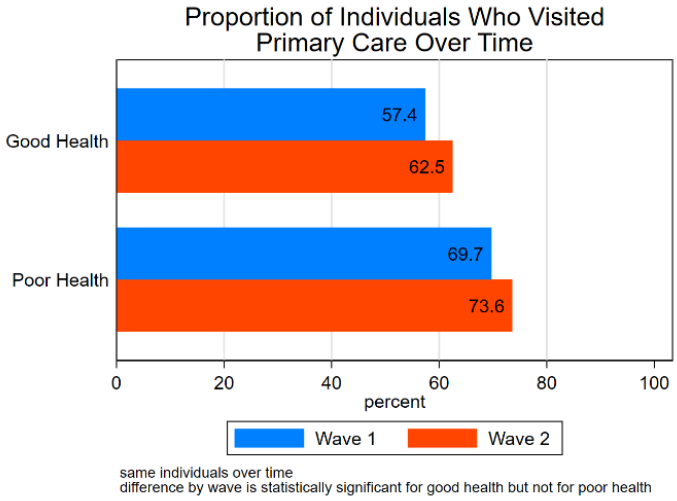
It is also plausible that "pandemic fatigue" or a general perception of recent COVID strains as less severe than prior strains has led residents to weigh their concerns about healthcare costs more heavily than they did in the early days of the pandemic.

In Wave 2, we also observe a statistically significant increase in the percentage of respondents who are delaying or forgoing follow-up care. All other changes reported across survey waves are not statistically significant.

5. 63% of healthy Angelenos sought primary care in 2021, up from 57% in 2020.

Forgone medical care has been a major public health concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, as disruptions to the U.S. health care system and economy have resulted in increased psychological, financial, and logistical barriers to care. The health consequences of forgone medical care are significant and range from increased complications and costs to delayed medical diagnoses and heightened mortality risk. While the results above suggest that financial considerations dissuaded some residents from getting the COVID testing they needed in 2021, we also find that more residents sought in 2021 primary care than in 2020.

In both waves of our survey, we asked residents about the medical care they had received during the prior 12 months. We then calculated rates of care-seeking for respondents in two categories of self-reported health—those who indicated that their overall health at the time was "good" (excellent, very good, or good) and those who reported that their overall health was "poor" (fair or poor).



In Wave 1, we found that 70% of residents in poor health and only 57% of residents in good health had visited a primary care doctor in the past year. By Wave 2, the rate of primary-care-seeking among residents in poor health had not changed significantly. However, the rate of primary-care-seeking among residents in good health saw a statistically significant increase, to 63%. Despite the increased rate of opting out of testing noted before, a growing share of healthy Angelenos are receiving primary, preventative care.

ABOUT US

USC Dornsife LABarometer

LABarometer is a quarterly, internet-based survey of approximately 1,800 randomly selected Los Angeles County residents, designed and administered by the *Center for Economic and Social Research* at the University of Southern California. The survey monitors social conditions in Los Angeles, with a focus on four key issues: livability, mobility, sustainability & resiliency, and affordability & prosperity. By following the same residents over time, LABarometer aims to capture trends and shifts in residents' attitudes and circumstances, allowing decisionmakers in the public and private sectors to better understand the evolving lives and needs of L.A. residents.

About the Affordability & Prosperity Survey

The LABarometer Affordability & Prosperity survey assesses the accessibility and affordability of four key resources in L.A. County: housing, healthcare, food, and education. It will also assess residents' financial health and spending habits, their barriers and pathways to social and economic mobility, and the real and perceived impact of growth and change in their neighborhoods.

Data and Methods

A total of 1,250 Los Angeles County residents participated in wave 2 of the Affordability & Prosperity survey, from October 14, 2021 through January 9, 2022. Participants were recruited from LABarometer's survey panel of 1,662 adults living in randomly selected households throughout Los Angeles County. The participation rate for the survey was 75%. The margin of sampling error[†] is 2.8 percentage points.

The survey was conducted in respondents' choice of English or Spanish. To participate in a survey, respondents could use any computer, cell phone, or tablet with Internet access. Internet-connected tablets were provided to respondents without internet access.

[†]Sampling error is calculated at the 95% confidence level, using a sample proportion of 0.5 to generate an upper bound of uncertainty. Please note that factors other than sampling error, including question wording, question order, sample type, survey method, and population coverage, may affect the results of any survey.

For More Information

For a complete description of our data, methods, and findings, please find our full Affordability & Prosperity Report on online at https://cesr.usc.edu/labarometer/reports_releases. For more information, contact us at labarometer-l@usc.edu.