

Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition

Community COVID-19 Research Workshop



OAC RESEARCH PROJECT

Ottawa Indigenous Community
Members' Experiences in the First
Year of COVID-19



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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the land that Creator has provided to all forms of life so that we may be present and together on this territory.

We acknowledge the gift of being on unceded Algonquin Anishnabek territory and want to recognize the two closest Algonquin First Nation communities: Kitigan Zibi and the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan.

We also recognize that today – Ottawa/Gatineau is a gathering place for First Nations, Inuit and Métis from across Canada.

This land acknowledgement commits us to the original relationship we are building together – based on friendship and peace and mutual respect.



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The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition



- 10 Indigenous run service organizations
- Annually serving 20,000 Indigenous community members
- Employ over 500 staff in Ottawa



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Research Process

- Decision on July 2020 to tell our collective COVID story
- OAC Research Question:
 - What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the Ottawa urban Indigenous community members?
- Three streams:
 - **Stream 1: What happened to Indigenous community members during COVID?**
 - Stream 2: What happened to Indigenous service organizations?
 - Stream 3: How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact Indigenous community members across Canada



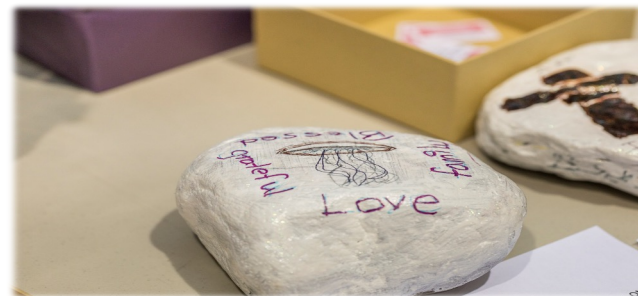
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The Research Process



- Community Driven Research Process
- Established a committee of community and partners
- Secured funding and hired staff
- Work was built on the Ownership, Control, Access, and Participation principles (OCAP) and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles
- Ethics Review
- Launched the survey with ceremony and through song



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Respectful Observations about Ethics from an Indigenous World-View



- The research world is not well placed to support Indigenous community-based research coming out of community.
- To do our research, we had to either create our own processes or experience a colonial process. (Ethics Review Process) That process became a barrier to facilitating the process
- Our new partners were with people and not institutions.
- The outcomes for our research are not the same as academic outcomes. Our outcomes are from community and for community. We wanted to improve services and processes to Indigenous community members.

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Respectful Observations about Ethics from an Indigenous World-View



What we have Done

- Presented to CIHR
- Presented to Royal Hospital Ethics Committee

Moving Forward

- Meeting with Secretariat of SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR to discuss policies on research with Indigenous communities, including chapter 9 of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
- Contacting York University regarding their first autonomous Indigenous Research Ethics Board (IREB)

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How we did our Research

Community Based Analysis

- Research Community (OAC staff, Partners, Community Members)
- Intentionally finding community members that match our demographics
- Analysing data together as a research committee using the Indigenous Gender Based Analysis
- Indigenous Researchers
- Community Research Workshop



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How we did our research



Indigenous Gender Based Analysis (IGBA)

- It requires that we do not assume all Indigenous people are the same, we are each uniquely different
- We use an intersectional approach that lets us see our uniqueness
- We are always moving in a direction
- We have four roles we balance: self, family, community, and nation
- IGBA is a tool to analyse the colonial systems that Indigenous people navigate every day and highlight the unique experiences



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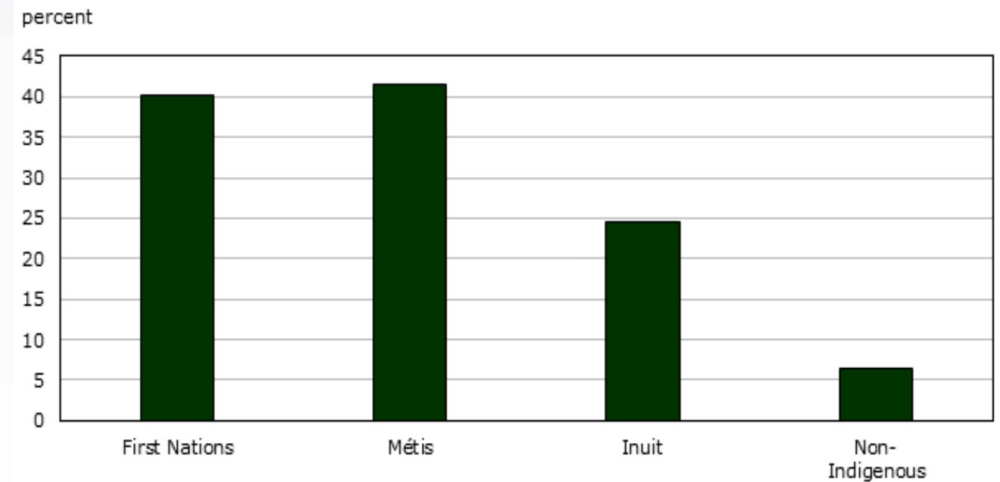
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The Ottawa Urban Indigenous Community



- 40,000 people - 4% of the Ottawa community
- Estimates (at any given time) in Ottawa
 - 2,000 to 5,000 Inuit
 - 10,000-15,000 Métis
 - 25,000 First Nation
- We are a Young Community

Chart 2
Percent increase in number of youth, aged 15 to 34, by
Indigenous identity, 2006 to 2016



Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 to 2016.

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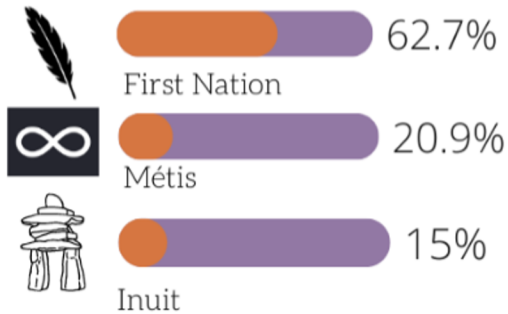
Our Community Members: Who Answered the Survey?



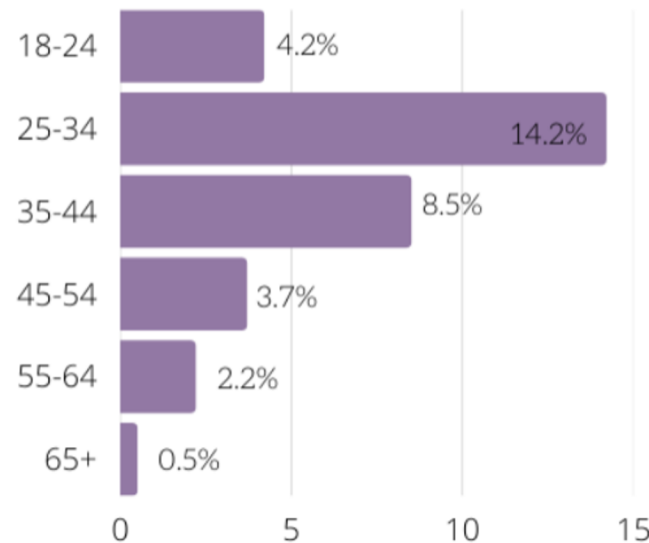
1077 Community Members

Indigenous Identity

***Indigenous identity was self identified*

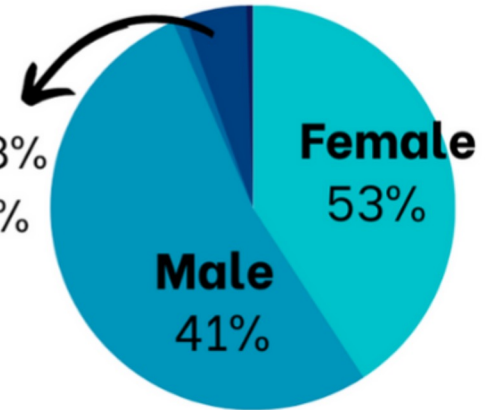


AGE



Gender

Non-binary - 0.8%
Gender Fluid - 5%
Other - 0.5%



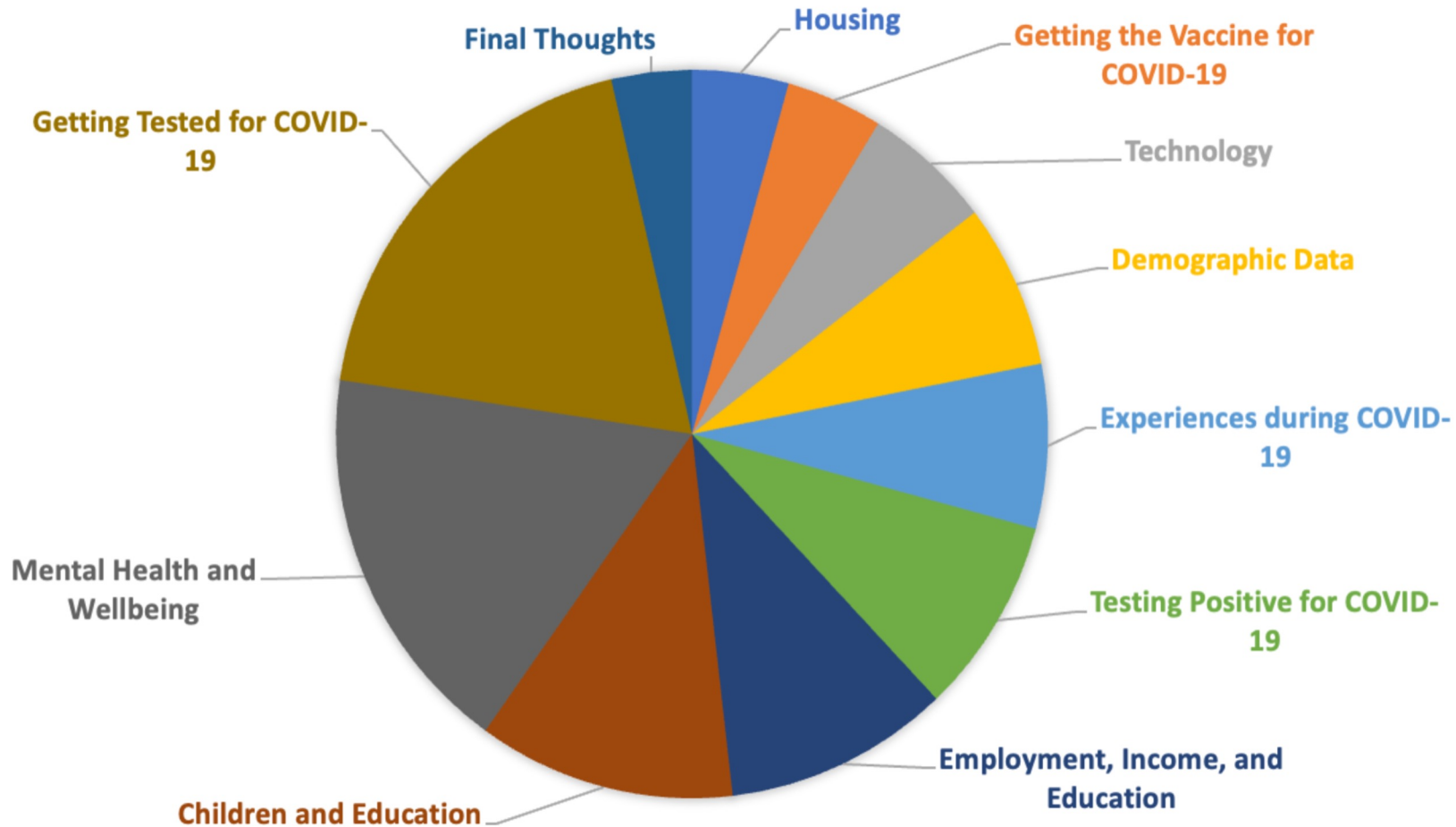
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Survey Overview: 12 Sections



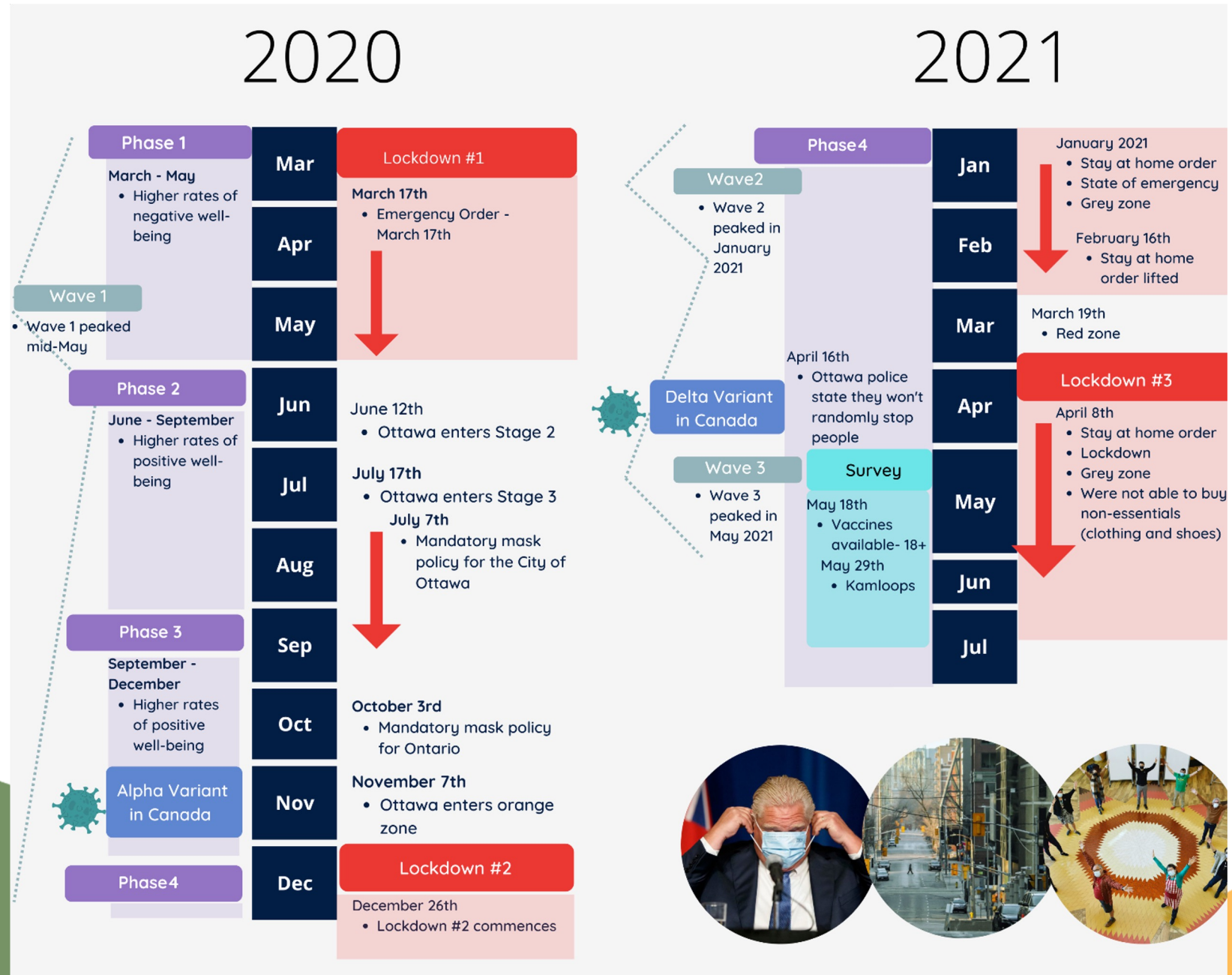
Total #
of Survey
Questions: 68



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Remembering the First Year of COVID-19

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The Themes

1. Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone
 2. Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others
 3. As a Community in Ottawa we Responded to the Crisis
 4. We kept Ourselves and Others Safe from COVID-19
 5. "It's for and about the Kids"
 6. We Experienced Grief and Loss
- Next Steps- Priorities Moving Forward



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Theme 1: Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone



“It has been a very difficult year and some months - first losing my job to COVID was very hard and not seeing my family especially during the Christmas holidays was even harder. I also found it hard not to be able to spend quality time with my friends but at least we connected via text or phone.”

“Being apart from my family and not being able to travel to my community to see my family has been so difficult. My children have really struggled with the lockdown and not being able to go to school and be with their friends. Emotionally was very challenging as I was pregnant most of 2020 and then having a newborn during the pandemic was very hard.”



Concerns

People were the most concerned about:

People aged **18-44** were **more concerned about job security** compared to individuals aged 45 and over.

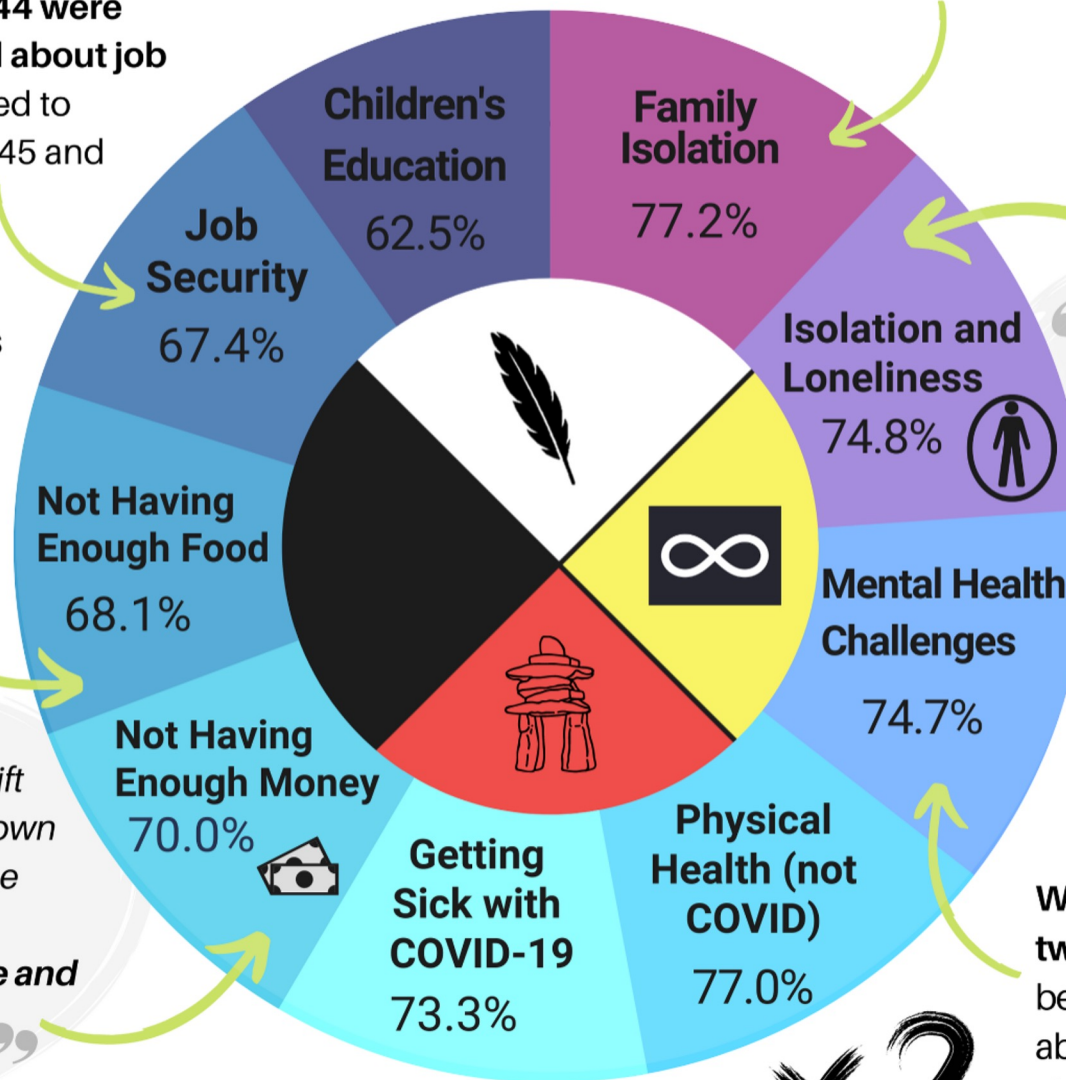
72% of individuals **with children** were concerned about having enough food.



“The constant shift between lock-down and zones left me **very uncertain** about my future and financial state.”



25-35 year olds were the most concerned group about not seeing their families.



“I know one to two people who have died a month due to depression, losing their business, isolation and loneliness.”

Women were **twice as likely** to be concerned about mental health challenges.

x2

Community members described feeling disconnected from friends, family, and community. 56% of community members felt an increase in isolation. Community members talked about what they were missing during periods of isolation.

Theme 1: Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone

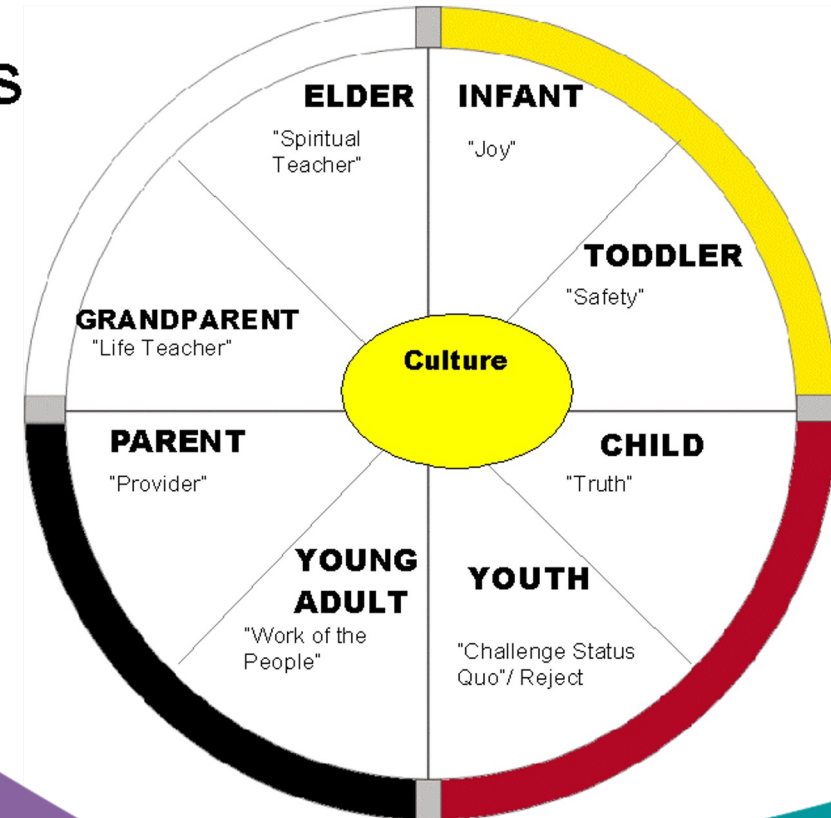


There were Disruptions at Significant Times in our Lives



Lifecycle Wheel Teaching

8 Stages of Life



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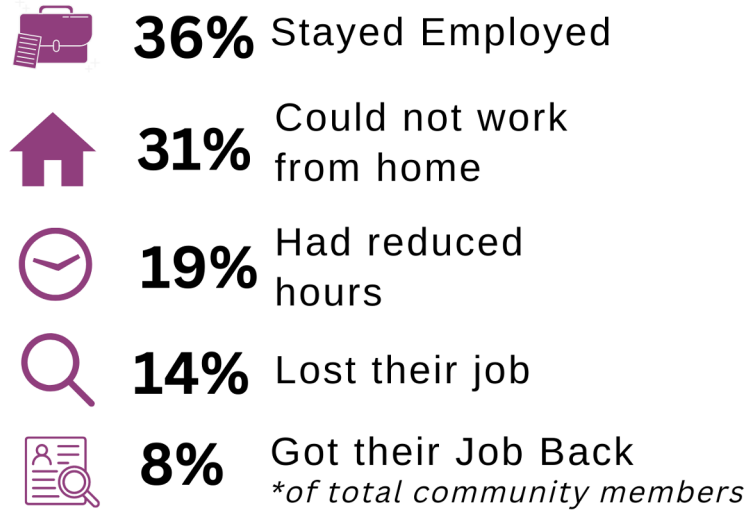
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Theme 1: Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone

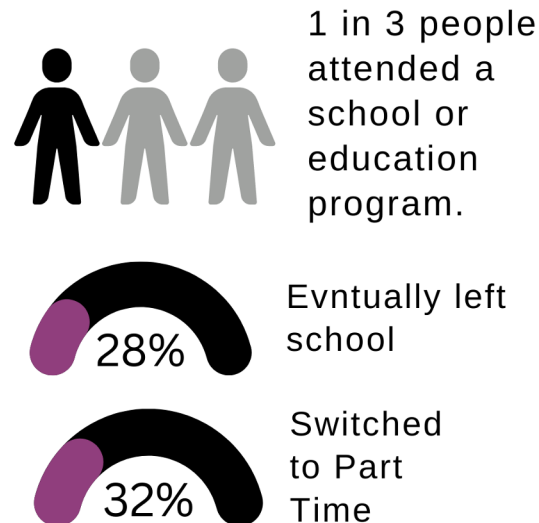


There were Disruptions in our Education and Work Journeys

Employment



Education



Theme 1: Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone

Community Members experienced Cycles of Crisis



People who Lost Housing

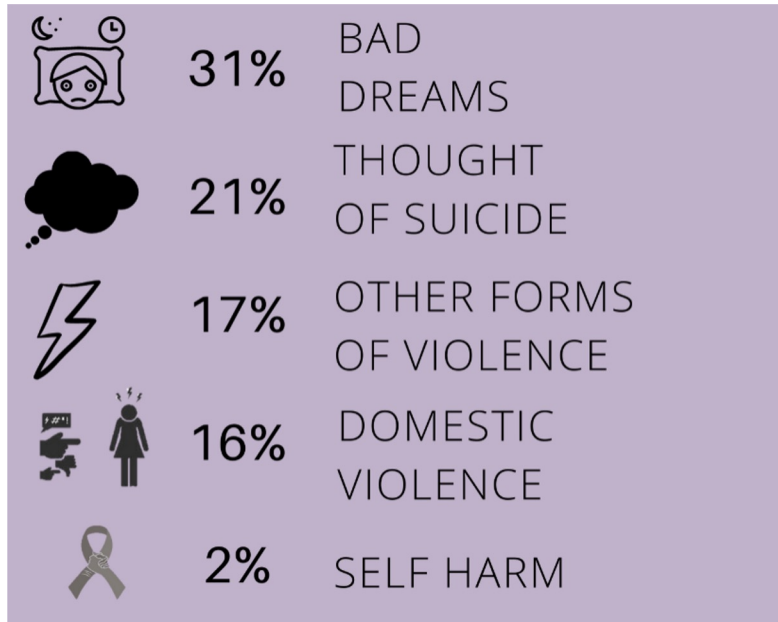
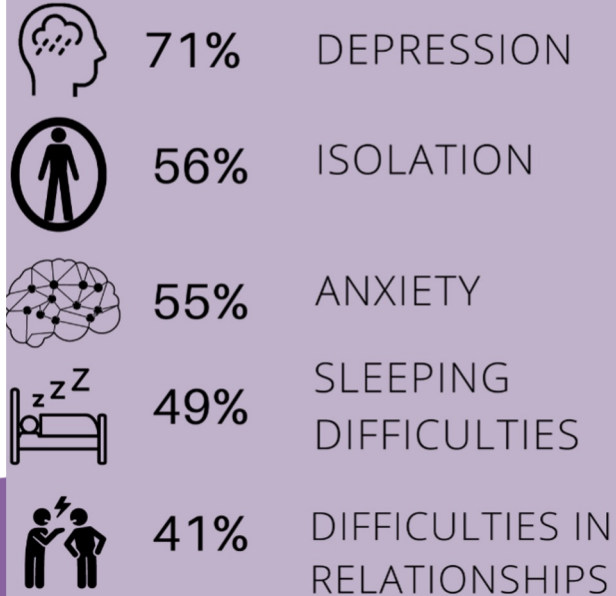


Theme 1: Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone



Disruptions in Mental Well Being, Community and Cultural Connection

INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH STRESSORS

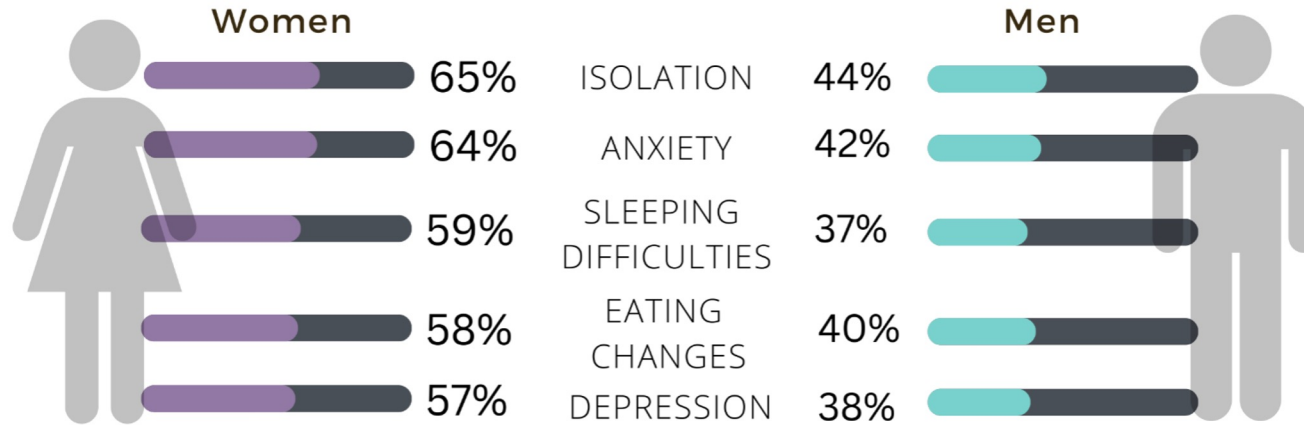


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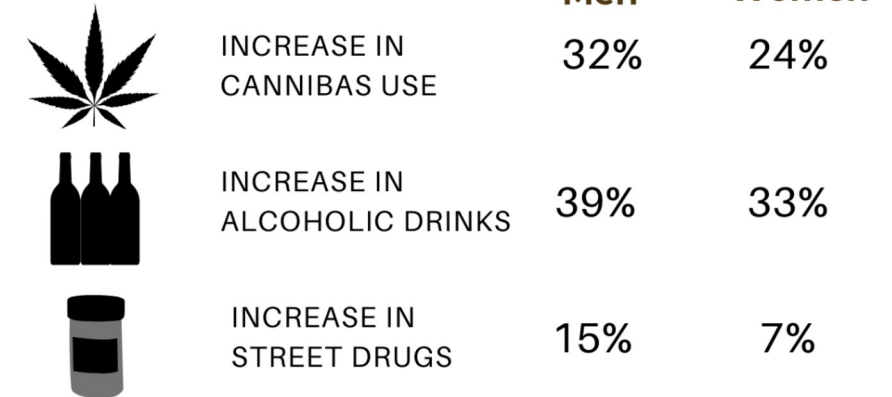
Theme 1: Life was Profoundly Disrupted for Everyone



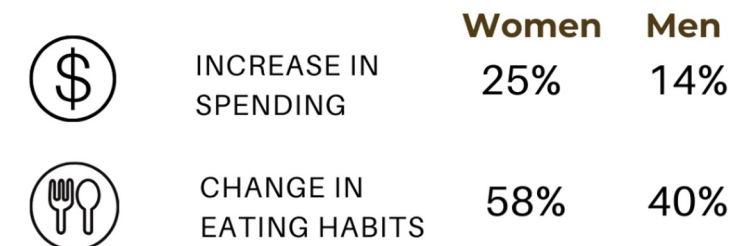
Disruptions in Mental Well Being, Community and Cultural Connection



Men coped more with mental health stressors with the following:



Women used the following to cope more:



Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others



"With the help of family and friends, I collected masks for my band - George Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan and shipped hundreds of masks to them."



"I have become stronger physically and mentally. I had to. I left an unhealthy marriage after 20 years together. I do this for the children. They are our future."

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Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others



CONNECTING TO CULTURE: BETTER MENTAL HEALTH

"I lost 40lbs as a result of being active outside- just like our ancestors did!"

- Community Member

Smudging, prayer, sacred medicines, knowledge, ways of healing, nature, and the outdoors were a source of pride and influenced better health.

Community members who were connected to their spirituality used prayer and smudging as well as connecting with others, and nature to maintain their spirituality and be well. It was important to be able to connect to land.

Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others



"We're able to work together when the time comes. Everyone did their part to keep their families safe which kept the community safe. Even faced with COVID cases, the supports were there and the families survived. And we adapted as the rules changed. "



"My family and friends became closer - even though it was online, to support each other through this pandemic. I supported my community by making sure that those around me had what they needed since I was in a place to help them buy food and necessities because I never lost my job."

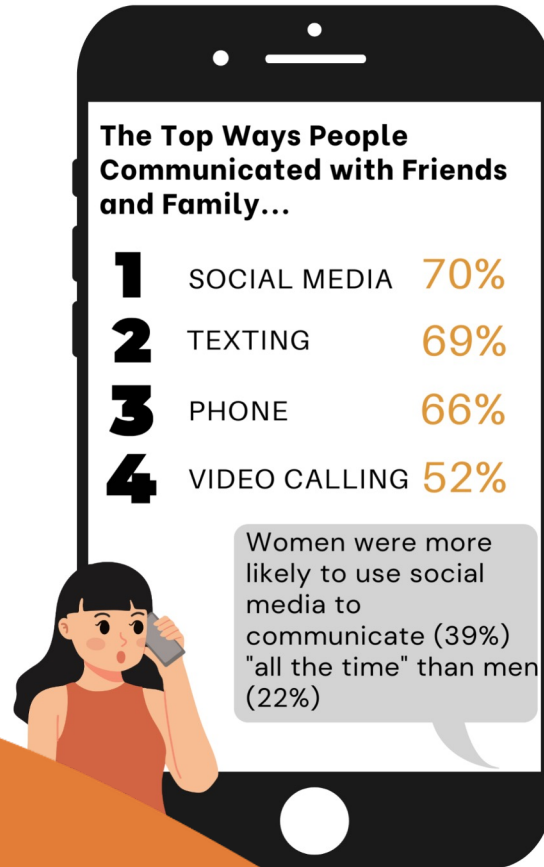
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Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others



Community members changed the ways they communicated with others.



People found these activities were helpful when trying to stay connected:

- Video Chatting
- Walking/Exercising
- Sending Gifts
- Video Chat Parties
- Giving to Community
- Participating in Cultural Traditions

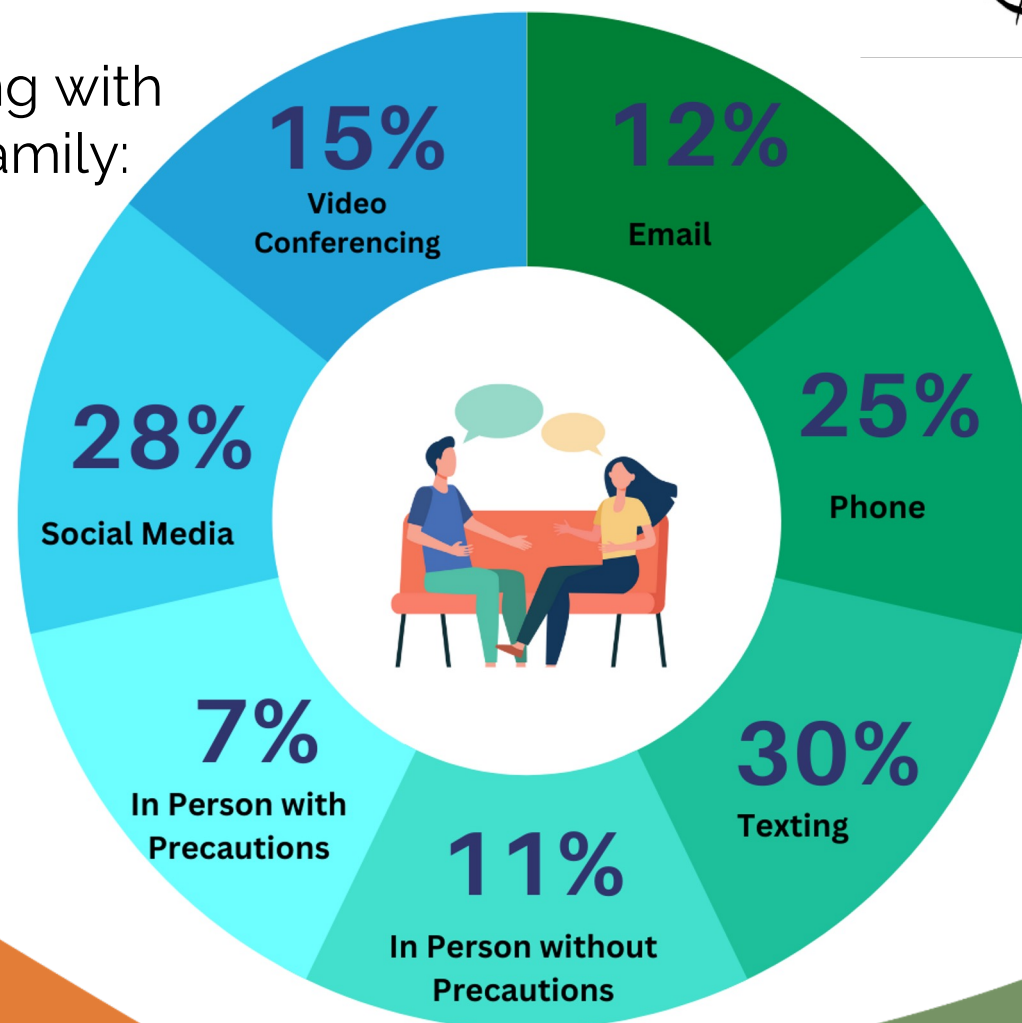
Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others



Communicating with Friends and Family:



"Host zoom parties where we could come together and try and support one another"



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Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others



Increased Resiliency Based Activities



ARTISTIC
ACTIVITIES

34%



READING

34%



PROFESSIONAL
SUPPORT

30%



SPIRITUAL
PRACTICES

29%



GOING
OUTDOORS

26%



PHYSICAL
ACTIVITIES

24%

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Theme 2: Indigenous Community Members Pivoted to Meet Responsibilities and Found New ways to Care for Self and Others • • • • •



A research committee member in a media quote reflected the strength that was in community members.



"The main thing I told her from a cultural perspective is that an elder told me that we need to think of COVID as a ceremony. It's making us go into a fast, not from food but from all the things that we just took for granted, and in doing so we're going to find out what's really important to us that we want to bring back into our life, and what we can let go. So there are blessings and gifts in all of this."

(Natalie Lloyd, OAC Research Committee member, Wabano Manager – excerpt from a Citizen article in September, 2020)

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Theme 3: As a Community in Ottawa we Responded to the Crisis



- Organizations collaborated with each other which benefited the community
- Wabano, VAW shelter at Minwaashin Lodge, and Indigenous housing providers did not close and responded to community needs
- OAC staff worked with multiple partnerships at the City level to meet needs of our homeless community



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Theme 3: As a Community in Ottawa we Responded to the Crisis



"We are fighters.
When we stand together
We can persevere.
Our organizations care
about us."



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Theme 3: As a Community in Ottawa we Responded to the Crisis



OAC organizations were tight and connected which positively impacted community members



Theme 3: As a Community in Ottawa we Responded to the Crisis



- There were gaps in care; culturally appropriate therapy, grief and loss counselling, addictions/detox, programs for children, housing, food, and financial supports



“More adequate mental health [care]. The talk therapy is very limited, and fairly triggering. It would be great if there was an Indigenous psychiatrist that I could connect with. Especially in terms of understanding Intergenerational trauma from a lived experience. Often times when I am talking to counsellors, they are not even aware of some of the issues I speak to as they weren't taught it.”

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Theme 3: As a Community in Ottawa we Responded to the Crisis



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"Indigenous organizations stepped up to support community members however they could. This speaks to the strength of our community"



Theme 4: We Kept ourselves and Others Safe from COVID-19



The Ottawa Indigenous Community had one of the highest rates of vaccination in Ontario

By **June 2021**, the following number of community members received Covid vaccines and/or tests...



Were tested at least once for COVID-19



Of those who did not receive a vaccine, 75% planned to get it



Theme 4: We Kept ourselves and Others Safe from COVID-19



"I'm very proud of Wabano for organizing the vaccine clinic. I'm proud of the Indigenous workers who were there to help - staff who came around to check on you and give you snacks, staff who offered to sign you up for services through Wabano, etc. Being surrounded by artwork and traditional music was a really great experience."



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Theme 4: We Kept ourselves and Others Safe from COVID-19



Indigenous community revealed that they were proud of the community coming together and being united in the face of COVID-19.

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Theme 4: We Kept Ourselves and Others Safe from COVID-19



"Putting together care packages, checking in with youth, Elders, new parents. Desire to keep community safe."



"Staying vigilant and seeing the bigger picture in this pandemic for everyone's safety."



"The community uplifts each other - even something as simple as vaccine appointments, everyone is willing to help you find one, support you on your way, and ask the hard questions."



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Theme 4: We Kept ourselves and Others Safe from COVID-19



"Annoyed at people who disrespect guidelines"



"Nervous about getting sick due to actions....of the community are not obeying the cautions and safety of their and other peoples health."



"It was a rollercoaster of emotions. Frustration about those not respecting rules and prolonging the life of the disease and the measures to control it. Elated that a vaccine was found so quickly. sad at the job loss and the loneliness of the elderly. "

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Theme 5: “It’s for and about the Kids”



Parents had the following concerns about their children (ranging from sometimes to always concerned):

- Overall Wellness (91.8%)
- Social Interaction (90.5)
- Learning Development (88%)
- Language Skills (86%)
- Child Development (85.2%)



CHILDREN'S STAGE OF LIFE

Day Care/
Preschool
52%



School-Aged
48%



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Theme 5: “It’s for and about the Kids”



Parents were thrown into juggling multiple responsibilities in roles they were unfamiliar with, across all areas of life

Parents during COVID-19 Experienced;



Able to Stay Home in March 2020



Had Resources for School at Home



Had Access for Funding/Resources

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Theme 5: “It’s for and about the Kids”

- Parents worked to gain information about the changing state of COVID-19, guidelines, and shutdowns in order to make informed decisions about what would be best for their children.



“I feel proud that we kept our kids safe and in good spirits. Our family connections grew stronger and my relationship with my husband was better. I was also proud that we did well homeschooling, having never done it before.”

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Theme 5: “It’s for and about the Kids”



- Schools played a vital role in providing the necessary technology to its students so that they could participate in online learning the COVID-19 pandemic brought to society.
- Schools and school boards were the most accessed resource for technology for their children. Parents were grateful.

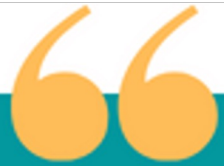
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Theme 5: “It’s for and about the Kids”



- Parents wanted more support for their kids to better care for them



“Managing the emotional well-being of my children as there were no other supports. Trying to role model resilience.”



Theme 5: “It’s for and about the Kids”



- What we learned:
 - It was important for parents to have the option for children to return to in person or online school
 - Up to date and accessible information about changing information and guidelines regarding COVID-19 was important for parents to make informed decisions
 - Children with independent learning plans and/or disabilities were not given adequate access to learning help or resources online.

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Theme 6: We Experienced Grief and Loss



- Compounding and Cascading
- Loss was a core theme for almost all people- loss of routines, connections, help, support, services, etc.
- Some community members experienced the loss of loved ones



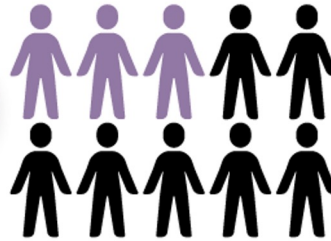
Theme 6: We Experienced Grief and Loss



Loss of:

- Daily routines
- Connection to family and community
- Loss of access to services and supports
- Employment
- Education
- Medical services
- Childcare

GRIEF AND LOSS



Lost Someone to Overdose

31%

of community members lost someone due to overdose in the first year of COVID-19.



Lost Someone to COVID-19

27%

of community members lost someone due to COVID-19 in the first year.

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Theme 6: We Experienced Grief and Loss



"My mother was sent home from the hospital during COVID-19 to keep her safe but she was sent home with pneumonia and passed away. My uncle's wife - her father - he was like my grandfather, passed away during COVID-19. My godmother's mother passed away during COVID-19 due to COVID while receiving cancer treatment."



"My husband's father and his whole family had covid at the same time, his father ended up passing quite quickly. We were not able to be there. A zoom makeshift covid funeral was beyond traumatic."

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Theme 6: We Experienced Grief and Loss



Positive Coping in relation to Nature and Outdoors

For people who were able to access the outdoors, it was linked to their positive mental health and wellbeing



I OBSERVE AND ABSORB THE BEAUTY OF THIS WORLD WITH AS MANY SENSES AS POSSIBLE.



"When my husband passed away people in the community brought over food for my family. Community would text or phone to make sure I was ok. People were praying and smudging for me. I would get phantom smells of medicines that would tell me my husband or my ancestors were smudging me."



"With having contact with close group of people that I could have ceremony remain during this time."

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Next Steps - Community Priorities



Navigating COVID helped us understand that while the majority of Indigenous people live in cities and outside their First Nation, Inuit and Métis home communities, the experiences of urban Indigenous people is not always considered by government decision-makers.



Community Priorities

- Access to Land for Ceremony and Wellbeing
- Strengthening Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Strengthen our Response to Mental Health and Addictions Crisis
- Building new ways of doing our Work with our Partners
- Finding better ways to Respond to the Needs of our Children and Families



Community Priorities

- Access to our own Information (Data Sovereignty)
- Respecting our own Processes for Telling our Stories
- Strengthening Indigenous Housing and Homelessness Strategy
- Improving Services to Indigenous Community Members

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Where to Access the Research

We will be releasing more in depth sections of this research over the upcoming months. You can access these reports and the booklet on the OAC website:

<https://www.ottawaaboriginalcoalition.ca/covid-19-research-project>

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Questions?

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Meegwetch
Merci

Thank You

Niá:wen

Nakurmiik

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