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New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute Blog

The COVID-19 Crisis Contributes to Increased Need for Mental Health Supports

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary actions to mitigate the health impacts may [increase](#) the need for mental health and substance use disorder support, due to [exacerbated](#) emotional stress. The [uncertainty](#) surrounding the crisis, social isolation, anxiety, and poor economic conditions may negatively impact mental health. Previous research suggests [loss of financial assets](#), [job loss](#), and [the potential for job loss](#) have had negative impacts on mental health. Survey data show the impacts have already had substantial effects on the mental health of many individuals throughout the nation, as nearly half of all adults in the United States reported negative impacts on their mental health due to worry and stress over the 2019 novel coronavirus. In New Hampshire, significant portions of the adult population report experiencing elevated feelings of worry, anxiety, and depression, with disproportionate impacts on the mental health of adults who experienced an income loss within their household.

Social isolation due to social distancing measures has led to elevated levels of feelings of loneliness, anxiety and other emotional distress. Quarantine can have [significant psychological impacts](#), and can lead to post-traumatic stress symptoms, especially among children. National polling conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation for early April found that [45 percent](#) of U.S. adults reported negative mental health effects due to worry or stress related to the crisis. Updated national data from late April showed that [56 percent](#) of adults reported negative effects on their mental health or wellbeing due to the crisis, and by late May that percentage dropped to a still-significant [39 percent](#) indicating negative mental health effects from the crisis. In New Hampshire, [weekly data](#) collected since late April has shown that about half of adults in the state may have experienced frequent feelings of anxiety, nervousness, or uncontrollable worry. During these same periods, about 40 percent of adults in New Hampshire reported feelings of depression, hopelessness, or lack of interest in doing things at least occasionally.

Children and adolescents [may also experience](#) heightened levels of stress due to significant changes in their environment, spurred in part by school closures or quarantine. [Behavioral changes](#) in children and adolescents may be the result of different responses to this stress and may need to be addressed to mitigate long-term mental health effects.

The economic recession caused by the COVID-19 crisis makes uncertainty surrounding job and financial security more likely and challenges the mental wellbeing of individuals. Nationally, [over half](#) of individuals who have lost income or their job due to the COVID-19 crisis have reported additional worry, stress, and overall negative impacts to their mental health. In late March, [40 percent](#) of those who were still employed reported worry or stress related to the 2019 novel coronavirus. By late May, [46 percent](#) of adults in households experiencing an income loss due to the crisis reported negative mental health impacts. In New Hampshire in late May, about [44 percent](#) of households reported experiencing an income loss since March 13; the reported levels of nervousness, anxiety, and worry were higher among these households.

This health crisis and [economic recession](#) has resulted in extensive mental health impacts and heightened emotional distress. These mental health impacts increase the potential for substance use disorders [to become more prevalent](#). Children are susceptible to the [negative mental health impacts](#) of the crisis, and may need additional support along with the increased portion of adults indicating negative mental health impacts. The [current State Budget](#) included appropriations for crisis intervention and other mental health services. Even while [state revenues fall](#), key services providing mental health and substance use disorder support will only become more important to Granite Staters and may need to be expanded. Additional support for mental health services may be necessary to assist those requiring care during and after this crisis.

- *Michael Polizzotti, Policy Analyst*