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Community Action Study Examines Impact of COVID-19 on Low-Income Families and Communities in North Carolina

RALEIGH, NC (September 14, 2021)— Financial hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are hitting low-income families in North Carolina especially hard, according to a new report released today by the North Carolina Community Action Association (NCCAA).

The study, which explored the impact of COVID-19 on low-income families and communities in North Carolina, was commissioned by NCCAA to gauge how the pandemic was affecting its efforts to combat poverty and facilitate self-sufficiency in low-income communities. The full report is presented in two parts. Part I, *"Lived Experiences of the COVID-19 Pandemic,"* presents the findings from focus groups with low-income families throughout the state. Part II, *"Ruminations from the Frontlines of the COVID-19 Pandemic,"* presents the findings from key informant interviews with local leaders in low-income communities served by Community Action Agencies throughout the state.

"The voices of the people behind the numbers are equally important but heard less often, especially the voices of low-income people who have had their trials multiplied by the pandemic," said lead researcher Dr. James Johnson, Jr., director, Urban Investment Strategies. Dr. Johnson conducted the study in conjunction with researchers from the Kenan Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Cedar Grove Institute for Sustainable Communities.

The study concluded that COVID-19 exacted a disproportionately heavy toll on low-income families, especially in terms of both exposure to and deaths from the coronavirus. "This finding was not surprising, particularly as we know that low-wealth individuals who hurt the most are hardest hit by any catastrophe," said Sharon C. Goodson, executive director, NCCAA. The study also found vaccine hesitancy to be widespread among North Carolina's low-income families and households.

In addition to disparate exposures and deaths among the state's low-income population, the study found that the COVID-19 pandemic created major employment challenges and forced

low-income households to make difficult decisions and choices regarding work versus personal safety and the health and wellbeing of their families. The shift to remote learning during the pandemic shed new light on deficiencies in the availability, access, quality, and cost of internet services for low-income families.

Focus group participants noted heightened personal and familial stress and anxiety posing, in the process, major socioemotional and mental health challenges for low-income individuals and families throughout the state.

Government safety-net programs were an important lifeline for these families but fell short of addressing the actual range of assistance low-income households needed. However, nonprofit organizations increased their efforts to provide additional financial and socio-emotional support, and basic-necessities such as food and personal protective equipment. Conversely, local governments and nonprofits have been forced to better collaborate to provide support, goods, and services to the needy in their communities.

The full report can be found [HERE](#).

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About the North Carolina Community Action Association

The North Carolina Community Action Association is a member organization providing North Carolina's community action agencies with the resources to help improve living conditions and deliver opportunities to the state's most vulnerable families. Founded in 1967, we offer technical assistance, training, and other resources to aid our members in fighting poverty in their local communities. Our goal is to help stabilize and help provide self-sufficiency to families in crisis. For more information about the North Carolina Community Action Association, please visit our website at www.nccaa.net.