

“Make unemployment last longer
and be greater in value.”

Heather —

Do Better.

“A little more ease to get some
unemployment help for self-employed
people would be a great help.”

George —

Hungry.

“Do BETTER for your people.”

— Sam

COVID-19
Pandemic

HELP.

“Still in a
crisis.”

— Shakia

“We can’t wait on you to make
up your mind to do the right
thing. We are losing our
homes and jobs right now.

Kaycee —

Jobless.

Please help...

“I would ask them why
unemployment is still
at \$225 a week when
clearly nobody can
survive on that!? It’s
a spit in the face...”

— Ashleigh

Listen.

“Help with keeping lights
on and running water and
keeping car insurance so
I can look for work.

Torie —

Pandemic.

“Try to see
people’s
problems.”

— Kelly

**FLORIDIANS
STRUGGLING
TO SURVIVE**

basics of food, rent, and utilities needed most

Overview

From August 28 to September 7, 2020, the SouthStrong campaign surveyed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants in 12 Southern states. The surveys used to collect the data shared in this report were written and analyzed by the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP), and the conclusions and calls to action belong to Florida Policy Institute.

The data analyzed here rely on self-reported information from 361 anonymized surveys in Florida. Respondents were invited to answer a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions about challenges and changes in the wake of the pandemic, experiences using and applying for government benefits, and recommendations and requests for policy-makers. Respondents were invited, but not required, to share their first names to be attached to quotes you see here.

The surveys were administered by Propel (www.joinpropel.com), the operators of a financial services app, Fresh EBT (www.freshebt.com). Fresh EBT, used by over 4 million households, is a smartphone app available at no cost to SNAP participants to track and manage SNAP and TANF benefits. The survey, designed by SEAP, was made available through Fresh EBT to randomly selected individuals who opened the app between August 28 - September 7, 2020.

Summary of Findings

Finding #1: Food insecurity and job loss have been the top challenges in the pandemic.

Finding #2: Government aid made a real difference for many families... but much of it has expired.

Finding #3: Help with food, housing, and utilities are needed now.

Finding #1:

Food insecurity and job loss have been the top challenges in the pandemic

56% of these struggling Floridians have had trouble buying enough food at some point during the pandemic. Job loss was the second most frequently mentioned challenge, followed closely by health and housing issues housing issues. Respondents talked about the burden of higher food prices, hours being cut from their jobs, depression, and stress.

Top 4 Challenges Since the Pandemic Began



*trouble buying
enough food*



housing issues



loss of job

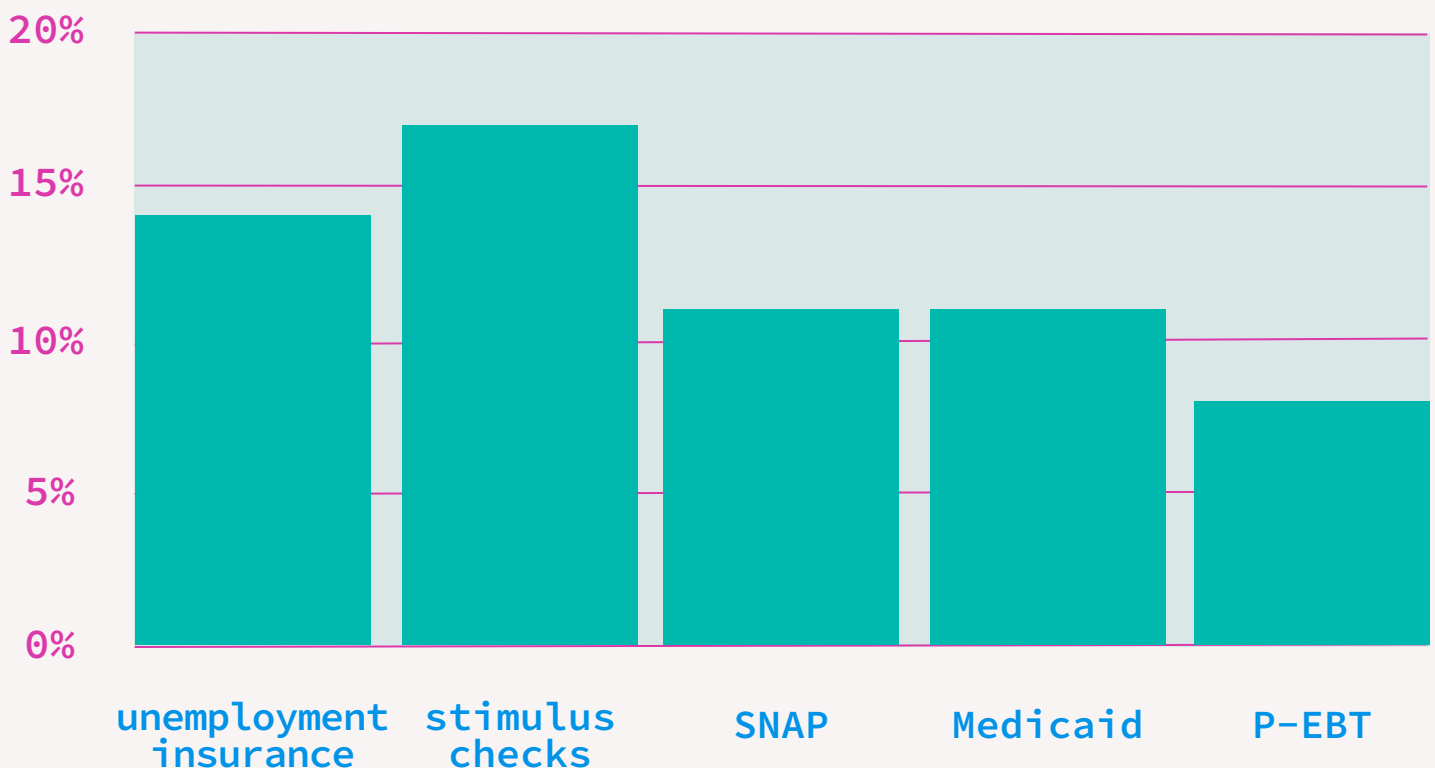


health issues

Finding #1: Continued

Almost half of respondents (45%) have had problems applying for or receiving at least one type of assistance (UI, stimulus check, SNAP, P- EBT, Medicaid). Stimulus checks and unemployment insurance were the most challenging to receive. Challenges included busy phone lines, no responses from agencies, difficult websites, long wait times (weeks and months), and one benefit causing ineligibility in another benefit.

45% had problems applying to or receiving at least one type of aid had a problem with:



THE VOICES OF THE IMPACTED

“Grocery prices increased.
Seniors can't afford groceries.”

— *Shirley*

“It took months to get unemployment
payments. Wasn't able to receive food
assistance until after I'd become
homeless.”

— *Jared*

“Not able to pay light bill and
water bill, car insurance.”

— *Torie*

Finding #2:

Government aid made a real difference for many families... but much of it has expired

In spite of challenges applying for or receiving certain aid, 61% of respondents said programs or assistance made a real difference for them and their family in managing the pandemic. Food assistance programs were the most frequently mentioned programs, with 45% of respondents saying food programs made a real difference in the pandemic. Stimulus checks and unemployment insurance were the two other most frequently mentioned programs. While helpful, much of the aid has expired or will expire soon.



***FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE A SOURCE
OF SUPPORT FOR MORE THAN HALF
OF THESE STRUGGLING FLORIDIANS.***

55%

THE VOICES OF THE IMPACTED

What has made a real difference?

“SNAP extension has given me a realistic food budget that I did not have before.”

— *Nicole*

“Stimulus check was very helpful. I have been getting extra food stamps too, which has been great.”

— *Sandi*

“Definitely the EBT, stimulus and the \$116 weekly unemployment. Those have helped the most, but also food drives and food pantries have helped.”

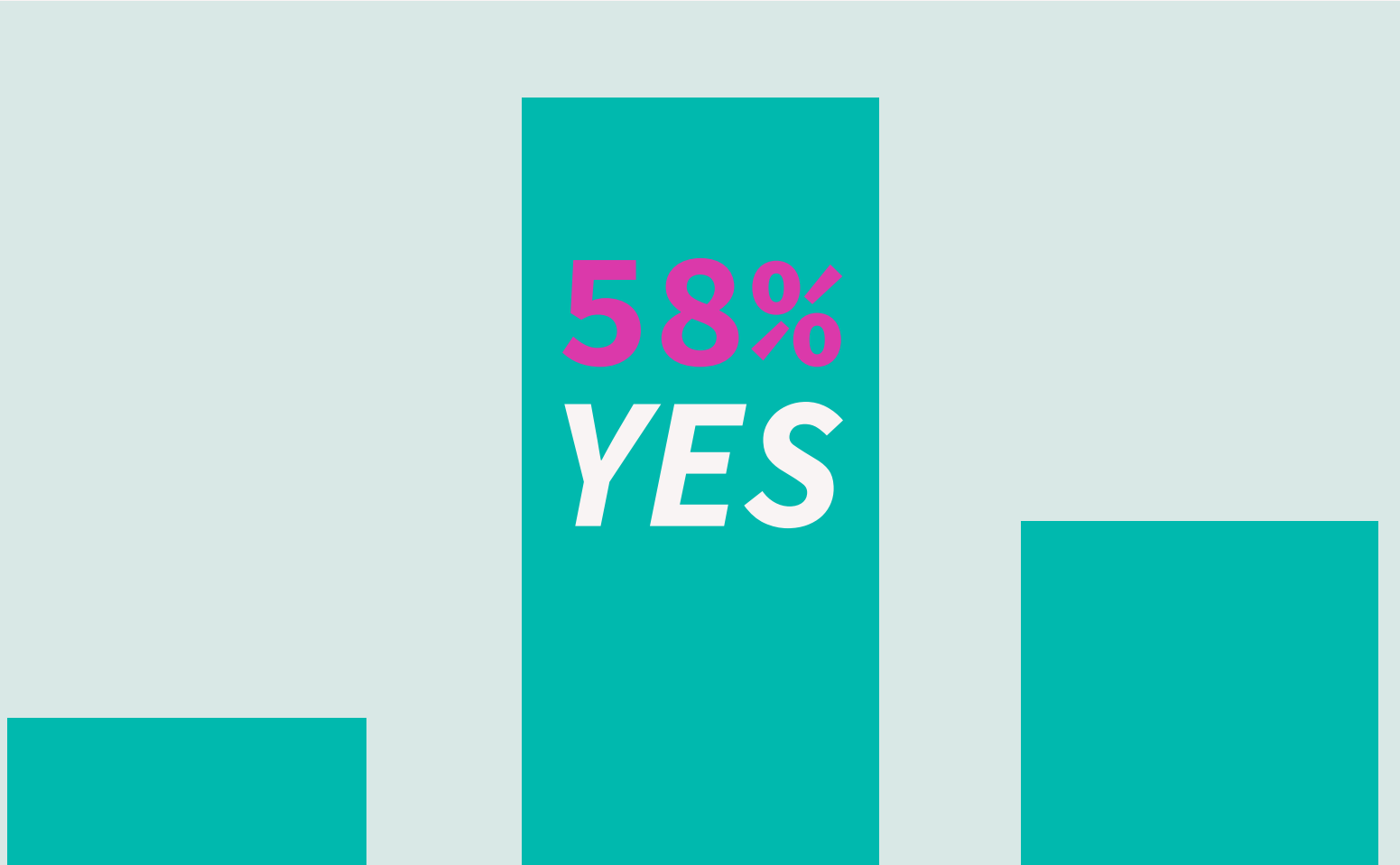
— *Jared*

Finding #3:

Help with the basics of food, housing, and utilities are needed now

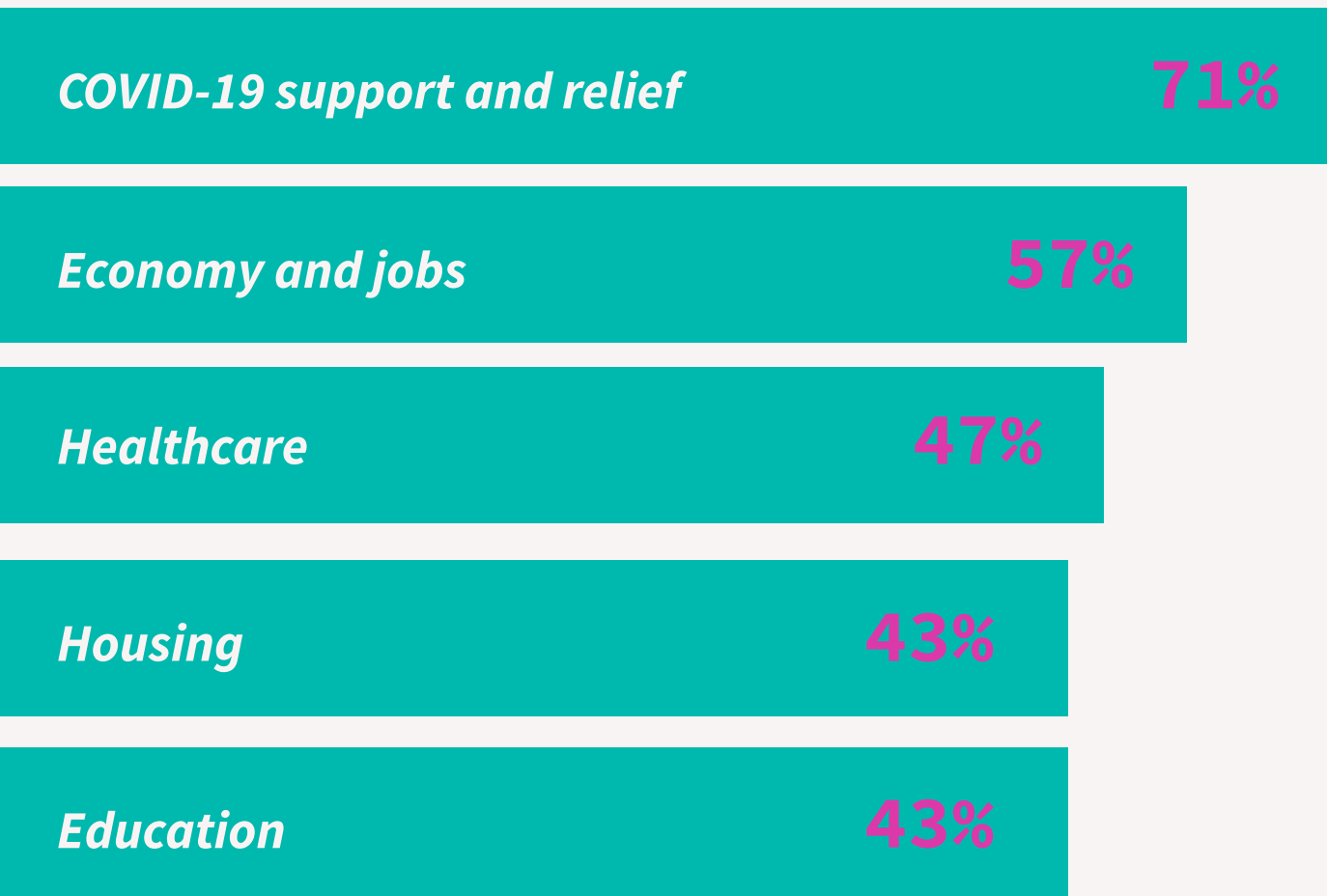
Overwhelmingly, these struggling Floridians said they cannot pay for housing, electricity, water, and food due to job loss, wage cuts, and loss of work hours. At the same time, they spoke again and again about food price increases, rent increases, and higher utilities due to being at home more. Covid-19 support and relief was the top concern.

Worried that you may not have stable housing in the next 2 months?



58%
YES

What issues are you most concerned about?



Your state has money to spend to help people in the pandemic. Which would be the most useful?

Top three responses:

**FOOD
ASSISTANCE**



**HELP PAYING
UTILITIES**



**HELP PAYING
RENT**



“Just put yourself in our shoes. Being a parent trying to make ends meet during a deadly pandemic. I’ve lost 3 family members since the pandemic and now I’m currently in self- isolation.”

— *Berlyne*

“Need another stimulus payment desperately.”

— *Amber*

“Please help us. We’re struggling to pay rent and bills so the 2nd stimulus check will be a great help.”

— *Amy*

“I would ask them why unemployment is still at \$225 a week when clearly nobody can survive on that?! It's a spit in the face...”

— *Ashleigh*

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

“Help homeless families in hotels.”

— *Crystal*

We can't wait on you to make up your mind to do the right thing. We are losing our homes and jobs now.

— *Kaycee*

“Please don't take Medicaid away from the working poor, like single mothers who financially can't afford a plan with her job. Just help the people (all the people). We are all one at the end of the day.”

— *Angela*

“Please extend the prohibition of eviction because I am behind on my mortgage and afraid of losing my home.”

— *Janet*

“Provide free childcare during pandemic and a monthly payment for families that are truly struggling to pay rent and other obligations like a car note.”

— *Kasey*

“Be there for the aged and elderly.”

— *Joseph*

“A little more ease to get some unemployment help for self-employed people would be a great help.”

George —

“Please continue to extend the maximum allotment for EBT and bring back the pandemic EBT for students.”

Jamie —

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

“Do BETTER for your people.”

Sam —

“Please cut the pay of utility/rent until December. Us lower class or self-employed, even small business owners, are all still having a lot of trouble getting on our feet.”

— *Amanda*

“Make unemployment last longer and be greater in value.”

— *Heather*

“Please if we can stay with the maximum amount of food stamps each month until the coronavirus is over, that will be helpful. Not everyone is working their full-time hours.”

Clarissa —