

# #STOPTHESPREAD

A survey of crisis assistance service providers and people on the frontlines working to stop cycles of crime



ALLIANCE FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE



# INTRODUCTION

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**Long before COVID-19, state and local government's public safety systems have been failing to adequately support communities struggling with cycles of crime and trauma, and high incarceration rates. Too often, public safety systems have prioritized arrest and incarceration instead of crime prevention and treatment, leaving too many communities without access to safety.**

The deadly new coronavirus disease and its economic fallout are making matters worse — with crowded incarceration facilities becoming hot spots for the spread of the disease, and communities faced with doing more to both stop crime cycles and the spread of the virus.

In neighborhoods across the country, trusted service providers and frontline organizations have the solutions we need for improving safety — and public health. Investing in these solutions can help us stop the spread now and build safety for all for generations to come.

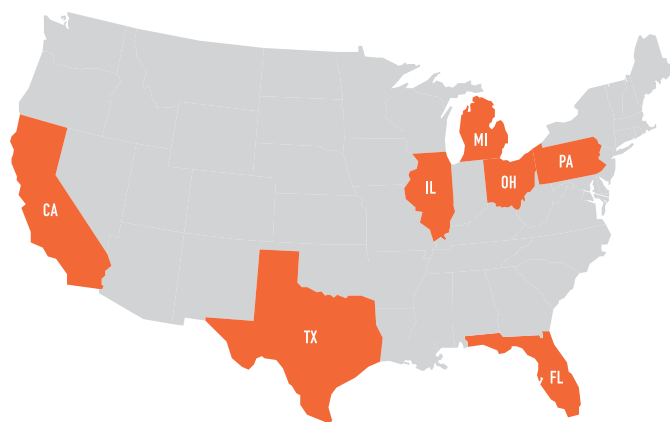
This survey aims to provide a snapshot of what leaders working to stop cycles of crime are experiencing and what they need to scale to meet the challenges of today. These are the solutions every state needs for both safety and health, from trauma recovery centers to reentry services to violence interventionists and more. We hope this inspires a rebalancing of our public safety investment priorities and more support for needed safety services.



# THE SURVEY

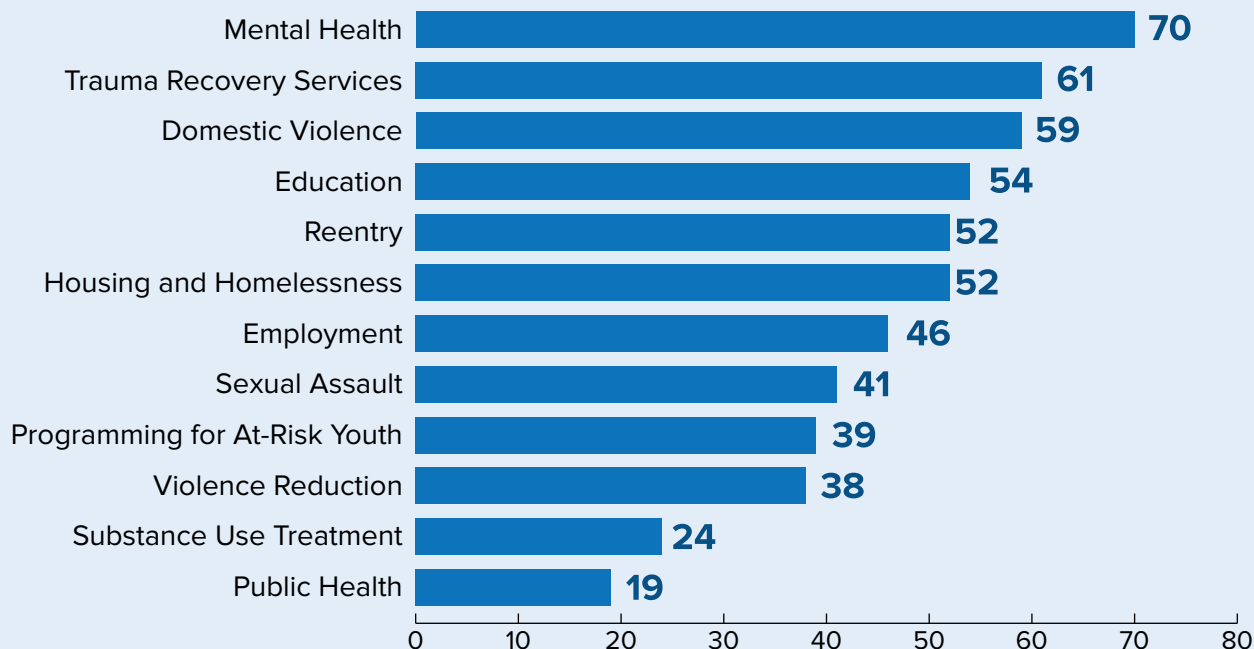
Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) recently surveyed organizations across the nation that provide crisis support in vulnerable communities. The surveys were disseminated to service provider organizations affiliated with our [TimeDone](#) program (an initiative that works to eliminate the legal barriers that people living with old convictions) and [Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice](#) (a national network of crime survivors working together to create healing communities and shape public policy) to learn more about their recent experience of helping people respond to COVID. This summary of the survey's results is offered to help us better understand what people on the frontlines are experiencing and needing in these early days of America's COVID-19 epidemic.

Alliance for Safety and Justice conducted a survey of service providers in the seven of the states with the largest annual expenditures on corrections, reaching out to contacts with



organizations that were known to ASJ through past outreach, events, and organizing. Two surveys were sent out—one that was California-specific and one national—with nearly identical questions. The surveys have drawn more than 150 responses to date from California, Illinois, Michigan, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas. While not a representative sample, these organizations represent a wide range of service provision, organizational structure, and experience.

## TYPES OF SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED PROVIDE



# BACKGROUND

Even before the epidemic, America had an uneven track record of helping crime survivors and of people needing rehabilitative or reentry services. Much of the help that is available, especially for those living in the country's most vulnerable communities, is provided by local and community-based crisis assistance services — from domestic violence shelters, trauma recovery centers and reentry organizations to a network of nonprofit community and faith-based services that offer support on issues ranging from housing and employment to mental health and substance use.

These organizations were overburdened even before the coronavirus outbreak. *Today, we are learning, things are far, far worse.*

A preliminary review of the responses to our national survey reveals three significant themes:

## INCREASING NEED FOR SERVICES AND DIMINISHED ABILITY TO PROVIDE THEM.

Key issues include growing demand for reentry services, for necessities for families in distress, and for services to address

family violence. Four in five organizations report a change in service requests, resulting from both increased needs and from an inability to reach or provide services to clients directly.

## GROWING NEEDS IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES AND AMONG CRISIS SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDERS.

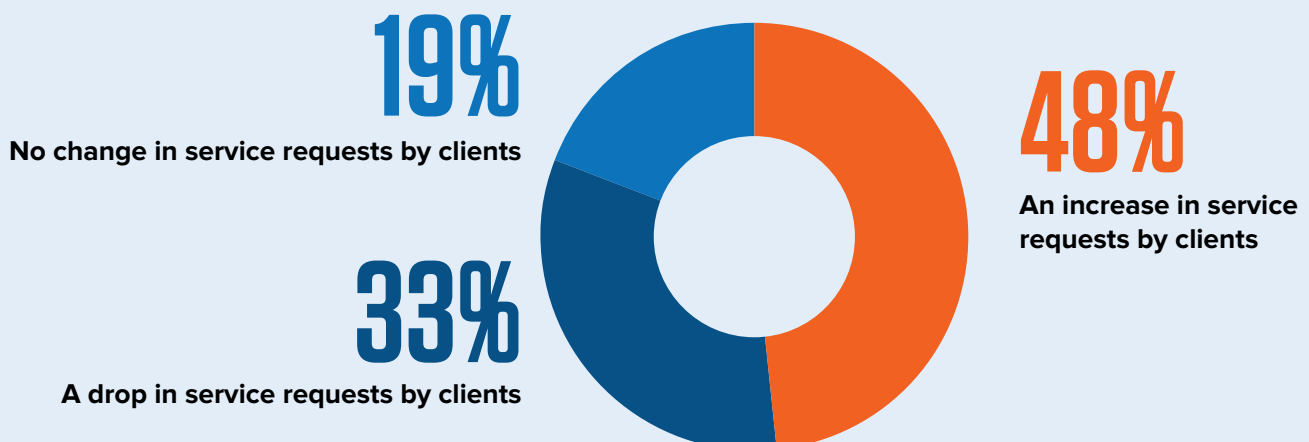
Key needs include technical support to provide services virtually, support for staff, and better, more accessible information.

## MORE FUNDING IS NEEDED.

Respondents reported a severe drop in funding, including corporate and foundation giving, and across the board called for more flexible funding from the government.

Let's look at each of these themes in more detail.

## SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK, MY ORGANIZATION HAS SEEN:



# CHALLENGES COMMUNITY-SERVING PROGRAMS FACE OPERATING IN THE COVID-19 CLIMATE.

Organizations that serve crime survivors and people returning to the community have different missions, but sometimes can face similar challenges. In the wake of COVID-19, both are reporting an increase in demand for services, and fewer resources to be able to deliver them.

Community-serving programs providing services to clients also share structural challenges that make it much, much harder to navigate in the COVID-19 climate, including:



**Navigating the fee-for-service business model.** Many, if not most service providers operate on a fee-for-service model.

This means the organization provides services and then bills the government, receiving reimbursement long after the fact. If demand increases suddenly—as it has during the pandemic—the organization may not have dollars to meet the new demand. Providers could have difficulty managing cash flow under a fee-for-service or cost reimbursement system that requires them to provide the up-front services without the resources to pay for them.



**Restricted, categorical funding instead of flexible funding.** Some organizations receive funding from state or local government

that is restricted (e.g., it can be used only for case management to broker services from pre-existing sources, or to purchase a certain type of treatment or service). If a domestic violence shelter or a reentry housing provider is only funded through categorical, restricted sources, it may mean they cannot purchase personal protective equipment (like masks, or sanitizers), or cannot purchase smartphones, tablets, and computers so that a service can be delivered virtually. Clients of either system may not own phones, let alone computers or internet service plans, and because of funding restrictions, service providers may not be legally able to purchase these necessities with the funding they receive.



**Lack of coordination with the criminal justice system.** Ideally, state and local governments coordinate with service

providers to better track capacity and match the number of clients they have to existing capacity or contracts for housing, counseling, and mental health services. Because information is not flowing in the way that it once did, a crisis like COVID-19 can result in inefficient and disjointed case management.



**Looming fiscal restraints facing the public sector.**

Some state governments are already reporting and warning of dire cuts coming as their tax bases evaporate, putting pressure on their ability to fund essential programs for those dependent upon social services, such as those with mental illness, substance abuse addiction, people experiencing housing challenges, and the reentry population.

# INCREASING NEED

for services and diminished ability to provide them.

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By almost all accounts, COVID-19 and the social distancing required by many states and jurisdictions to stop its spread are powerful fertilizer for stress and turmoil in vulnerable communities. Inconveniently, they also are barriers to kind of direct contact with people in need that is historically fundamental to how many of these organizations operate.

## INCREASED DEMAND FOR REENTRY SERVICES.

In some places, government officials have taken action to prevent the spread of the coronavirus by safely releasing some incarcerated people—the elderly, for example, and those who are likely to be held only a short time or who present minimal risk of recidivism. To ensure these people return to the community safely—that they find housing, secure necessary documents and gain access to health care, employment and other needs—reentry services are essential. Yet many reentry organizations told us it is difficult under current circumstances to provide this support. *“The virus does not affect the need for reentry services,”* a California provider wrote, *“only our ability to deliver the services.”*

## INCREASED DEMAND FOR FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES.

That sheltering in place and limits on mobility will inflame family violence is another common theme from the survey. *“There is no quarantine on violence,”* a representative of a California shelter wrote. *“Although the closures make securing support a lot more challenging, these are the times when organizations like ours are needed the most.”*

## INCREASED DEMAND FOR NECESSITIES.

Many respondents also highlighted declining food security as access to employment recedes in the wake of COVID-19. These include low income families that may suddenly have no work and are serving an additional meal to homebound children, people who are homeless, and people who are ineligible for, or reluctant to request, government support due to their own, or another’s, immigration status. A representative of a Midwest group focused on reducing gun violence told us, *“my families are low income. A lot of them are off work with limited finances. [There] has been an increase in food and snack requests...”* *“People are worried about where their next meal may come from,”* a representative of a Pennsylvania reentry services provider wrote.



# ILLINOIS: GROWING DEMANDS AND NEW CHALLENGES FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROVIDERS.

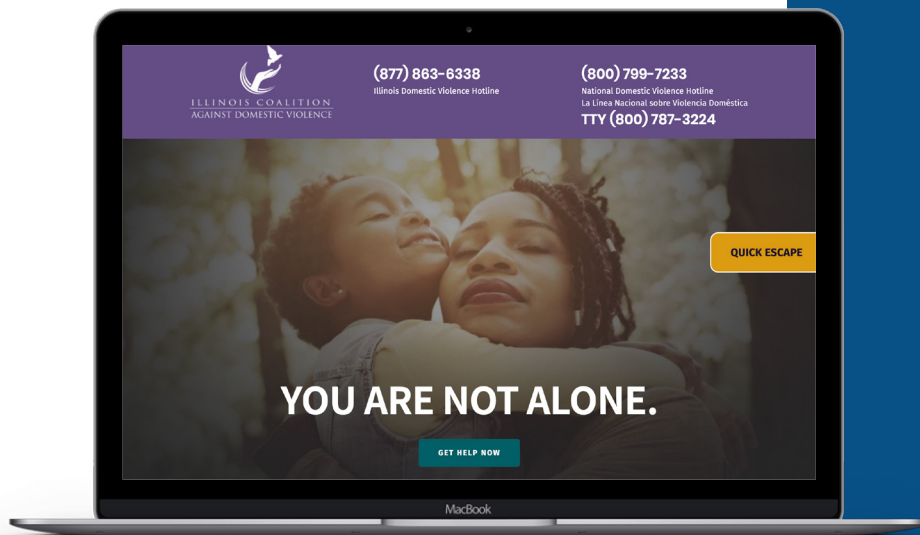
Shelter-in-place orders help reduce the spread of COVID-19, but experts expect the lockdown to exacerbate risks for populations at risk for domestic violence by increasing isolation of survivors, eliminating prior escapes such as going to work or seeing friends, and increasing dependency on potential abusers. [Research](#) based on the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis showed a 50 percent increase in unemployment correlated with a 10-12 percent increase in domestic violence. Media accounts report an international surge in domestic violence cases coinciding with COVID-19, and that shelters are lacking in proper personal protective equipment, leaving staff unprotected and afraid. Even prior to COVID 19, the justice system faced challenges meeting victims' needs, with only about [one in nine survivors of a violent crime](#) reporting receiving any services from a victim-services agency, and [two out of three victims reporting they received no help](#) following the incident.

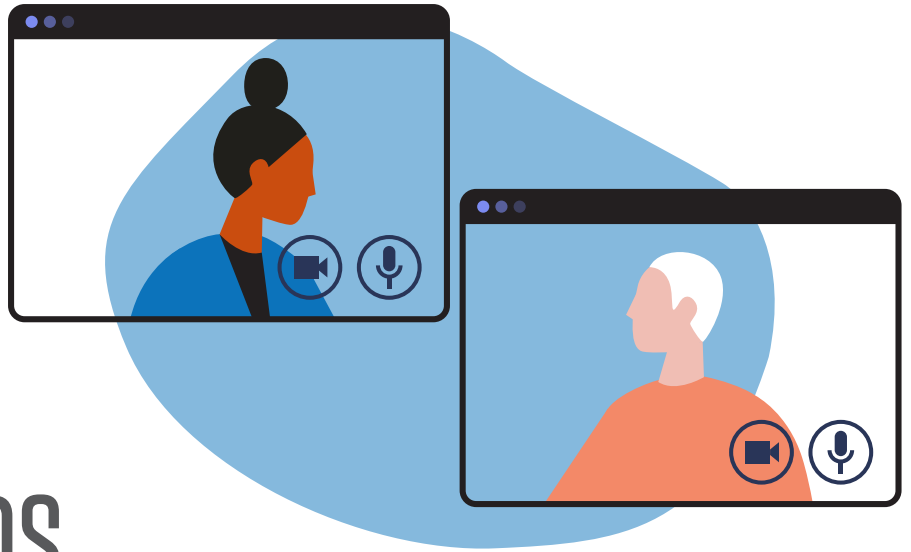
People who request shelter from domestic violence are especially vulnerable: They sometimes have no other safe resources, and their needs can go beyond short-term shelter and include protections from civil and criminal courts, physical and mental health care for themselves and their children. Some domestic violence victims require ongoing counseling to address the trauma that they have experienced as well as access to job training services to support themselves and their children.

The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) is a statewide membership organization made up of about 50 local nonprofit domestic violence agencies that respond directly to survivors and their dependents, as well as other organizations with an interest in services and advocacy. These agencies typically provide intervention and prevention services as well as shelter or group home housing.

ICADV member organizations are seeing that providing ongoing safety to survivors has become more difficult with fewer solutions. There is a major concern that because survivors are isolated at home with their abusers, they are not able to safely call and ask for help. As a result of the need for social distancing, domestic violence service providers can no longer house families in shared rooms and have moved toward housing survivors in hotels and motels, especially extended-stay lodges so that families still have access to kitchens. This has brought new financial burdens on service providers, who either have to shift funds around in an attempt to meet these new needs, find new resources, or not pay for certain kinds of help. ICADV member organizations report providing counseling and advocacy via phone due to limited services in places like courthouses, Department of Human Services offices and housing agencies.

ICADV member groups are trying to navigate this new context, while also meeting the diverse needs of survivors: the Illinois community of providers had already been evolving to better serve the needs of communities of color, immigrants, and LGBT victims of domestic violence. Service providers are adjusting to meet this diversity of needs while simultaneously having conversations about adapting programs, services, and technology to meet those needs in the context of COVID-19-driven social distancing.





# GROWING NEEDS

in particularly vulnerable communities and among crisis-support services providers.

Respondents pointed to a varied array of growing needs—both for their clients and for themselves.

## BETTER INFORMATION THAT COMMUNITIES FIND ACCESSIBLE.

*“We need more awareness, services, information and systems advocacy,”* wrote a representative of a California anti-poverty group. *“Our Youth need promotional campaigns to help educate on Stop The Spread, Social Distancing and Adhere to issued Shelter in Place orders NOW!”* wrote a respondent from a California group which works with kids. A response from an Ohio organization serving the Latinx community called for more *“trustworthy and up-to-date information in Spanish.”*

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT.

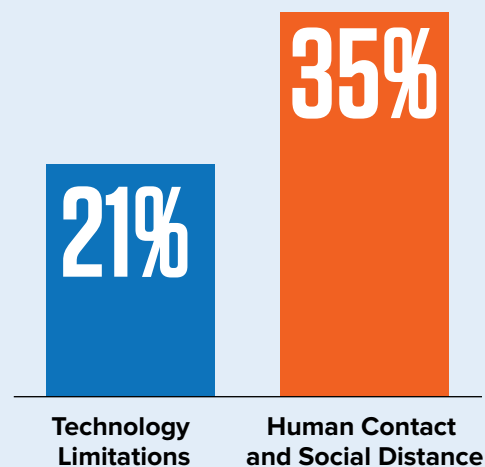
Many service providers said they lacked the equipment necessary to provide services remotely during this time of government-mandated shutdowns and heightened fear of communicable disease. Others indicated this deficit may be even more widespread among their clients. *Topping the wish list: computers, cell phones and free Wi-fi.*

## MORE SUPPORT FOR STAFF.

Many crisis support personnel are struggling with childcare needs due to closed schools, or prevented from working if their positions have not been deemed “essential.” Others are simply

afraid—particularly if they are at higher risk for the disease. *“We just had a staff member resign her post today as a case manager and we cannot function without such an important role fulfilled,”* wrote a respondent from a West Coast group.

## COVID-19 SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FACING ORGANIZATIONS



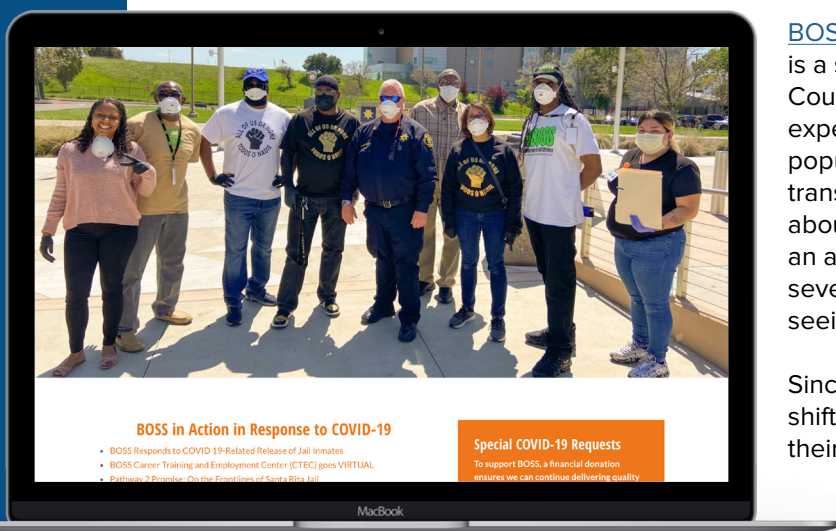
As a result of Covid-19, organizations face new barriers in reaching clients and being effective in the services they deliver, and the limits of and access to technology exacerbate these challenges.



## CALIFORNIA: SURGING DEMAND FOR REENTRY SERVICES IN BUT REDUCED RESOURCES TO PROVIDE THEM.

On any given day, some 20,000 people sentenced to prison and arrested and jailed for crimes are released from custody. As state and local governments take emergency actions to stop the spread of COVID-19, many have moved towards rapidly depopulating their jails and prison, increasing the number of people released to the community.

Community-based reentry providers serve a crucial case-management role in ensuring that people who are arrested, convicted and incarcerated for crimes are connected to jobs, housing and treatment. [Prior to COVID-19, these community-service programs and corrections agencies were not keeping up with the needs of the reentry population](#), and those crucial reentry services have been placed under great stress by the consequences of COVID-19.



[BOSS](#) (Building Opportunities for Self Sufficiency) is a social services provider based in Alameda County, California, that works with people experiencing homelessness and reentry populations providing case management, transitional housing, and job training services to about 4,000 people annually. With the release of an additional 400 people from the county jail and several thousand people from state prison, BOSS is seeing increased demand for its reentry services.

Since the pandemic began, some staff have shifted to working remotely and have modified their housing and public benefits workshops to a virtual model (e.g., phone and internet based). BOSS has been working since the shelter-in-place order to build a new virtual intake and management system that is now

coming online. BOSS's job-training program has been suspended.

Some services, such as shelter and transitional housing, cannot be provided from a distance. To mitigate the spread of the virus and get people housed, BOSS has adopted [Seattle's King County standard](#) for sanitation and disinfecting their impact centers, shelters, and housing program, and for staff wearing personal protective equipment.

To respond to the increased demand for housing, those who can are staying with friends and family, but this is typically a short-term solution at best. Those who cannot stay with friends and family are finding housing to be a major challenge. BOSS has identified potential temporary emergency beds for about 350 people, but it has been a struggle thus far to secure the additional funding necessary for those additional beds.

BOSS continues to operate and receive financial support from the county, though the financial support structure has been a continuing challenge. As a result of COVID-19, BOSS has adjusted from a fee-for-service model to a temporary agreement with the Board of Supervisors for a cost reimbursement billing model. The reimbursement agreement has covered BOSS's operating expenses during this initial response phase while they worked to make necessary adaptations to their services model. Beyond these short term changes, the financial outlook is unclear and not promising, which may result in BOSS closing down facilities and services for the community's most vulnerable populations.

# MORE FUNDING IS NEEDED.



Community-service programs that provide crisis-support services in vulnerable communities almost universally operate on tight budgets, even in the best of times. It is no surprise, then, that with demand and costs rising together—and in many cases, income falling—funding is a major concern.

## SEVERE DROP IN FUNDING REPORTED, INCLUDING DONATIONS.

A respondent from a large multi-service organization in Texas explained that state-mandated closures and a prohibition of gatherings of 10 people or more had led to a severe drop in the income that usually sustains its housing services, and concluded, *“In order to best be able to serve our community, we need flexible funding.”* Another respondent, from California, lamented, *“I had to close my thrift stores, so my employees are not being paid.”* Some organizations have already reported a drop in private and corporate donations.

## ACROSS-THE-BOARD NEEDS FOR MORE FUNDING.

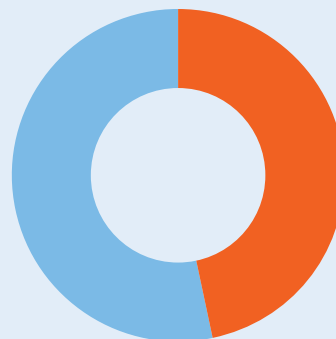
Respondents to the survey said they need more funding to serve more clients, to support clients in immediate and dire need, and more funding to pay staff, including hazard pay. They also now need funding for new pandemic-related expenses, such as the obligation to socially distance people who previously might have been sheltered together.

## A NEED FOR GOVERNMENT TO FILL GAPS AND PROVIDE MORE FLEXIBLE FUNDING.

While some expressed a desire for philanthropic organizations to provide more funding, most respondents looked to state and local government (the survey began circulating before the federal CARES Act was passed). And not just for more money, but also more flexibility. Many hoped that billing requirements and other bureaucratic features could be at least temporarily relaxed.

## WHAT DO YOU NEED MOST RIGHT NOW?

Forty-two percent of responses to this question included some mention of funding, including loans, grants, flexibility, emergency assistance, and operating expenses.



**42%**  
Funding

# CONCLUSION

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The COVID-19 pandemic is placing an enormous strain on community-service programs that provide the backbone of support for vulnerable communities in the United States. As a result, millions of people and thousands of communities face a heightened risk of contracting—and spreading—this disease, or suffering greatly from its economic consequences. To avoid wider spread of the disease, more social instability and unnecessary suffering, it is imperative that this network of support be sustained and empowered at this critically important moment. To help address the challenges documented in this survey, four dozen organizations have joined ASJ in a nationwide campaign to [#StopTheSpread](#). These organizations are calling upon government to protect all communities from the impact of COVID-19 by immediately:

## SAFELY REDUCING INCARCERATION.

- Accelerate testing and release of people in prison especially elderly, sick, people who pose little risk and people that will be released soon anyway.
- Authorize and expand non-incarceration options for people entering jail.
- Prevent people on probation or parole from unnecessary incarceration and exposure by terminating probation or parole supervision for people that are low risk and stopping returning people on probation or parole to incarceration for technical violations.

## EXPANDING CRISIS ASSISTANCE.

- Deeming critical assistance services to be “essential” services.
- Immediately expanding emergency shelter options.
- Establishing a \$1 billion Crisis Assistance Emergency Response Fund.
- Accelerating application reviews and reducing bureaucratic barriers to emergency aid.
- Helping critical community services move online.
- Establishing or expanding crisis-assistance navigator hotlines, and
- Eliminating rules that make people with past convictions ineligible for housing, employment and other essential assistance.

# ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION.

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Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a national organization that aims to win new safety priorities in states across the country, and brings together diverse crime survivors to advance policies that help communities most harmed by crime and violence. For more information, visit [allianceforsafetyandjustice.org](https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org).