

1.2: CRRF SURVEY: HOW IS COVID-19 AFFECTING RURAL CANADIANS?

PREPARED FOR THE
CANADIAN
RURAL
REVITALIZATION
FOUNDATION

RURAL INSIGHTS SERIES: COVID-19

THE INFORMATION INCLUDED HERE IS A SUMMARY OF CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN RURAL CONTEXTS. THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE WILL EVOLVE AS ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH IS CONDUCTED, SO CONTINUOUS REVIEW OF REPUTABLE SOURCES AND WEBSITES IS ADVISED.

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DISCLAIMER:

The information included here is a summary of current knowledge about the COVID-19 Virus and its implications in rural contexts. The state of knowledge will evolve as additional investigation and research is conducted, so continuous review of reputable sources and websites is advised.

This primer presents a high-level overview of areas of interest to key stakeholders and members of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation and should be read as an exploration of challenges and opportunities that communities might consider as they consider their own unique circumstances.

Given the broad nature of the issues considered for this paper, individual communities and/or economic development professionals should take this paper as a preliminary starting point for their own investigations and planning processes. As such, this paper does not constitute specific recommendations for individual communities, and neither the authors nor the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation may not be held liable for any actions taken in response to this paper.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN RURAL REVITALIZATION FOUNDATION

The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (www.crrf.ca) is a national charity that contributes to the revitalization and sustainability of rural Canada through collaborative research for rural leaders in the community, private sector, and in all levels of government. CRRF works to create credible insights and to improve our understanding of issues and opportunities that are of common interest to rural residents across Canada. Knowledge and better understanding are the fundamental pillars for the welfare of rural communities and environments.

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KEY MESSAGES

Survey respondents are concerned that their unique experiences will not be seen, heard, or represented in pandemic relief and recovery initiatives.

1. Respondents expressed significant concerns about ensuring rural people and communities have access to appropriate healthcare services. Ensuring rural healthcare systems can cope through coordinated response measures as well as protecting communities by limiting travel to rural and remote areas are critical throughout the height of the pandemic.
2. Respondents are concerned about the loss of small businesses and local economies and expressed the need for expanded relief packages that ensured rural businesses and employers would be adequately supported.
3. Respondents emphasized the importance of all aspects of rural life. Recovery initiatives should go beyond economic supports to consider social dynamics, cultural activities, and the non-profit/charitable sector.
4. Respondents want to see stronger coordination among key social and economic sectors. 'Information overload' and confusion over which order of government is responsible for different interventions figured prominently in suggestions about supporting rural recovery.
5. Respondents emphasized the importance of supporting local capacity development and ensuring communities have a say in decisions that impact their futures. As relief and recovery initiatives are developed, it is important that they are co-developed with key stakeholders in rural and remote communities so that they are responsive to local needs and goals.

SURVEY 1: APRIL 2020

The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) issued a survey to its membership and the wider public to gauge the early impacts of COVID-19 on rural Canada. The survey included six open-ended questions:

1. How would you describe yourself and your role in rural? For example, are you a rural resident, rural researcher, local government official, provincial government official, federal government official, rural business owner, and/or some other role?
2. What is the rural community and/or organization you represent?
3. What is your biggest concern(s) related to COVID-19?
4. Have you implemented or seen any innovative responses to address these concerns related to COVID-19?
5. What resources do you need to adapt and recover from COVID-19? And who should provide these resources?
6. How can CRRF help rural Canada during this time?

RESPONSES BY THE NUMBERS

The survey ran from April 3-30, 2020 and gathered 128 completed responses. While not all respondents indicated their location, responses that did indicate a location represented 113 different communities/regions from 8 of Canada's provinces ([Map View](#)).

Province	Number of Respondents
British Columbia	21
Alberta	8
Saskatchewan	1
Manitoba	8
Ontario	63
Quebec	5
New Brunswick	3
Nova Scotia	2
PEI	0
Newfoundland & Labrador	2
Yukon	0
Northwest Territories	0
Nunavut	0

Respondents identified themselves as representing different roles in their community and shared their experiences based on a variety of perspectives associated with those roles:

Self-Identified 'Role in Rural'	Number of Respondents (*respondents may have multiple roles)
Rural Resident	77
Rural Researcher	11
Retired	14
Student	3
Business/ Consulting/ Self-Employed	36
Government (Any Capacity/ Order, including both elected officials and staff, incl. EcDev)	25
Agriculture	14
Civil Society/ Non Profit/ Volunteer	25
Health	3
Education	5
First Nation	2
Caregiver	1

Perspective	Organization/Sector Represented (*Respondents May Represent Multiple Perspectives)
University/College	4
Research (Unspecified)	3
Agriculture, Fisheries, Natural Resources	8
Business Owner (non-ag)	9
Local Government	5
Provincial Government	2
Economic Development Organization	4
NGO/Philanthropic	17
Retired	3
First Nation	2
Healthcare	4
Education	1

KEY CONCERNS, CHALLENGES, INNOVATIONS, AND NEEDS

1. Top of Mind Concerns

- Concerns about how rural communities and residents would manage post-pandemic recovery were frequently noted.
 - These concerns were not just about economic recovery, but about maintaining social connections, the loss and recovery of cultural assets in the community, and the continued survival of vital community/civil society organizations
- Many respondents were concerned about ensuring access to adequate health care and the ability of rural health care facilities to handle a surge in critical cases.
 - These concerns were often noted in relation to worries about seasonal residents visiting rural areas and increasing the risk of exposure as well as increased total burden on local healthcare resources.
- Risks of virus transmission ensuring the care and safety of everyone in the community, particularly vulnerable people, was a significant concern.
 - Respondents were worried about the risks associated with visitors, seasonal residents, individuals not following physical distancing, and restrictions being lifted too soon.
- Concerns about local/small businesses not surviving figured prominently – both for respondents who indicated they were business owners and for those who indicated they were more generally rural residents.
- The challenges posed by a lack of broadband were noted by many, including concerns about how the digital divide affects access to information, limits the ability to work or learn remotely, and deepens inequality.
- Caring for vulnerable people (including gender-based violence, populations at high risk to the virus, and long-term care) and the need for mental health supports were noted by many respondents.
- For agricultural producers as well as businesses and consumers, restrictions in market access were noted as concerns about vulnerabilities in supply chains exposed by COVID-19
- Respondents consistently noted that they were concerned about their eligibility for funding support to reduce financial strain.
 - There were also several concerns about which individuals and/or businesses were falling through the cracks of recently announced relief efforts.

2. Interesting Innovations

- Unfortunately, many respondents were concerned about a perceived lack of innovation in response to COVID-19.
- While some respondents indicated that some level of innovation was happening, they couldn't specify examples.
- Where respondents indicated observing innovations in response to COVID-19, they were noted as:
 - Changes in operating/business model, such as moving to online retail, curb-side or direct delivery, contactless purchasing.
- While perhaps not innovative, many respondents pointed to changes in consumption habits, specifically consuming more local goods and services and an emphasis on hyper-local economies.
- Respondents consistently highlighted the coordination of effort between different orders of government, local organizations, and the private sector.
- Many respondents noted that they were working hard to maintain community connection through virtual platforms (like Zoom) and that these connections were leading to deeper conversations about the future.

3. Resources for Recovery

- Respondents expressed a need for immediate relief for their local healthcare services, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), increasing the capacity of care centres, expanding testing, and ensuring rural hospitals can care for everyone who needs their support.
- Many people expressed that they didn't have any specific need for resources or were unsure what they would need, as they feel it is too soon in the process to know exactly what the impact of COVID-19 will be for their community.
- Many respondents emphasized the need for expected funding to continue and the need for greater financial relief for individuals, businesses, social services agencies, and all sectors - ranging from wage subsidies to rent relief, bankruptcy protection to ensuring seniors and students get extra support.
- The need for investing in local capacity was consistently noted by respondents and respondents expressed a desire for funds to be downloaded, and for decisions regarding funding to be made locally. Suggested ways senior governments could invest in local capacity included:
 - Supporting greater localization of agri-food supply chains;
 - Buy-local economic stimulus packages;
 - Broadband infrastructure investment;
 - Retraining/reskilling individuals and businesses.
- The most requested resource was for better coordination of information. Furthermore, the coordination of key players in each sector and organizations and

institutions throughout different chains of service or markets was noted as an important part developing long-term plans that will incorporate all of the lessons learned.

- Respondents noted that they would like more support in local enforcement of quarantine act to protect rural areas, such as more restrictions on travel to seasonal properties.

4. Asks of CRRF

Respondents are looking for CRRF to:

- Serve as an advocate on behalf of rural issues.
- Develop an information hub - what's working, stories, and updates.
- Research and provide lessons learned/evaluation of what's happening and how rural areas can move forward through exercising their resiliency.
- Connect experts and communities for knowledge mobilization.

RURAL INSIGHTS SERIES: COVID-19

The information included above represents a summary of current knowledge about COVID-19 and its implications for economic resilience and recovery in rural contexts. The state of knowledge will evolve as additional investigation and research is conducted. Continuous review of reputable sources and websites is advised.

CRRF is producing a series of insight reports on key issues impacting rural communities as they face the challenges of managing the pandemic and look to future recovery. CRRF will be publishing reports through the *Rural Insights Series: COVID-19* on a rolling basis throughout 2020. Topics to be covered by these reports include (but are not limited to):

- Agriculture
- Rural Health
- Well-Being & Mental Health
- Employment & the Labour Force
- Local Economic Development
- Immigration
- Digital Divide
- Gender-Based Implications
- Localism & Supply Chains
- Islands
- Tourism
- Fisheries
- Mining
- Manufacturing
- Drinking Water
- Infrastructure Investment

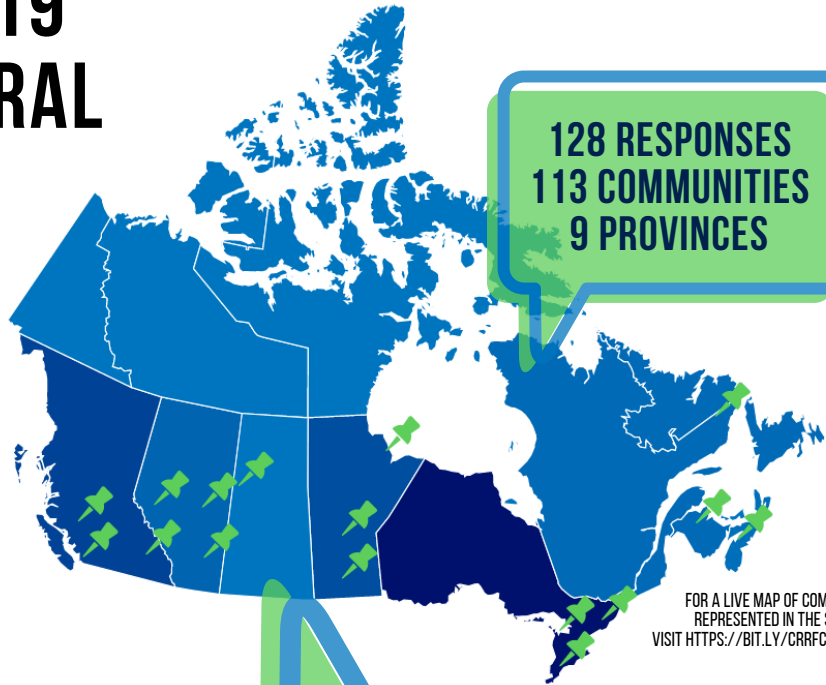
Please visit www.crrf.ca regularly to access the *Rural Insights Series: COVID-19* as well as updates to emerging research and additional resources on the implications of COVID-19 for rural Canada.

THE CANADIAN RURAL REVITALIZATION FOUNDATION ASKED...

HOW IS COVID-19 AFFECTING RURAL CANADIANS?



"I WORRY THAT WE'RE JUST WALLPAPER."



TOP RURAL CONCERNS

- ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES + CRITICAL CARE CAPACITY
- BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE + ACCESS TO INFORMATION
- RELIEF FOR SMALL + LOCAL BUSINESSES + EMPLOYERS
- SUPPORT FOR NON-PROFIT AND SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR
- MARKET ACCESS FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, & NATURAL RESOURCES
- LOCAL CAPACITY BUILDING + LONG TERM STRATEGIES FOR RURAL RESILIENCE

RESPONDENTS INCLUDED RURAL RESIDENTS, BUSINESS OWNERS, RESEARCHERS, FARMERS, STUDENTS, FIRST NATIONS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS & STAFF, EDUCATORS, FRONT-LINE WORKERS, RETIREES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS...

RURAL CANADIANS ARE CONCERNED THAT THEIR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES WILL NOT BE SEEN, HEARD, AND REPRESENTED IN RELIEF AND RECOVERY INITIATIVES.

DISCLAIMER: THE INFORMATION INCLUDED HERE IS THE RESULT OF WEB-BASED SURVEY ISSUED BY CRRF ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) FOR RURAL PEOPLE AND PLACES. THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE WILL EVOLVE AS ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH IS CONDUCTED, SO CONTINUOUS REVIEW OF REPUTABLE SOURCES AND WEBSITES IS ADVISED. PUBLISHED MAY 12, 2020. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE CANADIAN RURAL REVITALIZATION FOUNDATION AT WWW.CRRF.CA

