



MEETING THE MOMENT

MAKE THE ROAD NEW YORK IN THE COVID-19 ERA

CONTEXT

As COVID-19 was taking hold in New York, our staff of over 200 began fielding urgent calls, texts, and emails from community members in desperate need of food, reliable information, and healthcare.

Over the next two months, we witnessed and responded to sickness and loss, the ruthless exploitation of low-wage workers deemed essential, aggressive immigration enforcement, and the immediate crisis of income loss. Not surprisingly, our communities (immigrant, Brown, Black, transgender) were the most ravaged by the virus and the resulting economic fallout, and were mostly left out of humanitarian relief.

The killing of George Floyd further laid bare the extraordinary inequalities that underlie our society. Building on the momentum of this movement, our youth leaders and allies were able to secure a series of police reforms at the state level.

There is so much more to do to realize our vision of justice and freedom. With you by our side, in this extraordinary moment of suffering and transformation, we are providing significant support and winning important reforms. Thank you for making this possible.

“ I haven’t been able to pay my rent since March. It’s very hopeless. We have seen cases of immigrants who have already become homeless. We live here, we pay taxes, we should have the same rights as a citizen. ”



ENRIQUE ROSAS

JUNE 3, 2020: MRNY members and allies marched to our local assembly member’s office in Queens to demand that he repeal 50a in order to increase police accountability across our state.

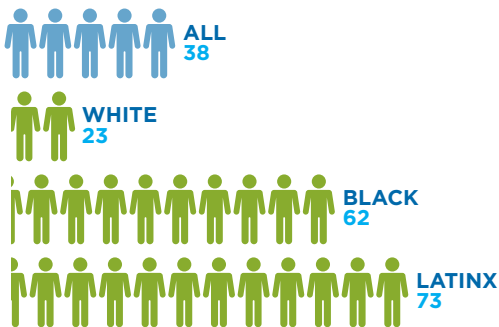
IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITIES

COVID-19 has had a disastrous effect on New York’s low-income communities of color. During the height of the pandemic in New York, Black and Latinx people were dying of COVID-19 related illness at rates 45% to 57% higher than their white and Asian neighbors.¹

Across the country, Black and Latinx people in the US have been three times as likely to become infected as their white neighbors, and nearly twice as likely to die.²

NATIONAL CASES

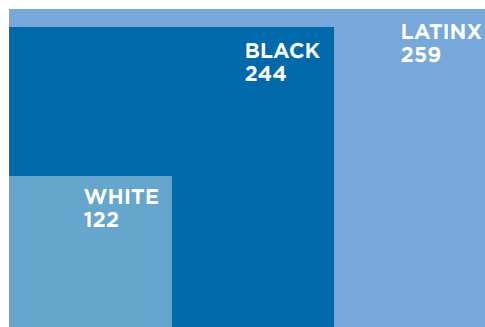
Per 10,000 people (05/28/20)



New York Times

NEW YORK CITY DEATHS

Per 10,000 people (07/24/20)



NYC Department of Health

In NYC, immigrants make up a majority of the essential workforce and one-third of the essential workers statewide.³ The places where they live and Make the Road New York (MRNY) works—Elmhurst, the Bronx, Hempstead, White Plains—have been home to extreme concentrations of COVID-19 cases.

We wanted to know more about the impact of this crisis on the immigrant communities we serve. So, in late April, with our partners at Hester Street, we surveyed nearly 250 working class immigrant, Black, and Brown New Yorkers, one third of whom are undocumented.

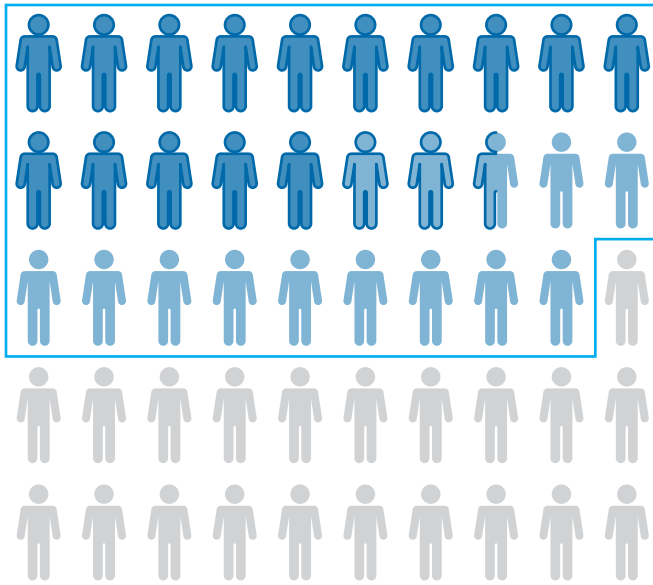
We published the results, “[Excluded in the Epicenter](#).” It is one of the only surveys focused on the experiences of immigrant New Yorkers reported in their own words, and demonstrates the heartbreaking impact of the virus on their health and their lives. We were appalled, though not shocked, to learn that one of every six people surveyed had lost a family member to COVID-19 in the six weeks that had passed; many more had fallen ill and could not access care.

1. NYC DOHMH, “COVID-19 Deaths by Race and Ethnicity,” April 30, 2020.

2. New York Times, “The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequity of Coronavirus,” July 5, 2020.

3. Fiscal Policy Institute, “New York’s Essential Workers Overlooked, Underpaid, and Indispensable.” April 8, 2020.

“ There are many who lost their jobs in factories, warehouses, delis, restaurants, so they got into [food] delivery. We’re scared but we have to work. Rent and food don’t pay themselves. Several of my friends got infected doing delivery and didn’t come back. ”

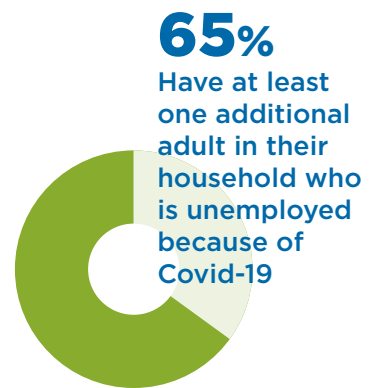
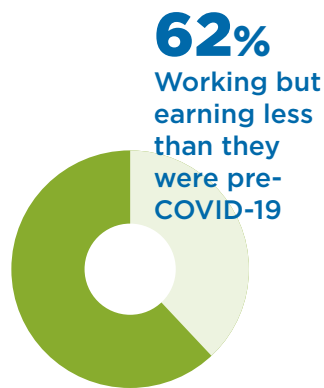
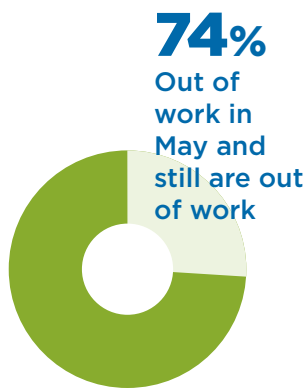
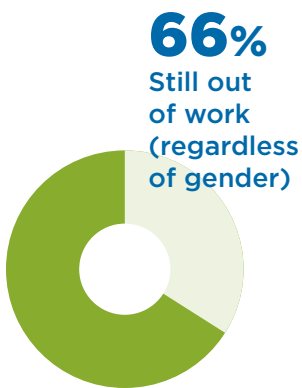


58%
of respondents report that they or a family member have gotten sick since March 1

60%
of those have either confirmed or believe that it was COVID-19

52%
were not confident they had received the medical treatment they needed

In late July, we surveyed respondents again and published the results in [“150 Days Later: Unemployed & Excluded.”](#) The survey results—both the original and the updated results—reveal the scope of the immense economic hardship our communities have faced and continue to face.



of unemployed US Citizen respondents have not received federal or state government economic assistance



of unemployed undocumented respondents have not received federal or state government economic assistance

OUR RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

With your partnership, Make the Road New York has taken unprecedented steps and provided support far beyond anything in our history to help mitigate the devastating impact of COVID-19 on our state's immigrant and working class families.

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND

We are getting money directly to families now while we advocate for long-term government solutions. To date, we have distributed \$3 million to over 4,800 families (nearly 20,000 individuals) spanning the five boroughs, Long Island, and Westchester.

With funding from Open Society Foundations through the City of New York, along with many donations and grants, we will distribute a total of \$4 million to approximately 5,000 families, with each household receiving an average of \$800.



More than 4,800 families have received cash aid through MRNY's COVID-19 Emergency Fund, and many sent photos of themselves posing with the cash card upon arrival.

Before the end of March, as low-income community members lost jobs without notice, the need for emergency food was immediate. Some of our closest funders and donors stepped forward, and we quickly researched the most efficient and reliable way to send cash aid. Many we serve have no bank accounts, so we provided cash cards with fees waived, mailed to their homes.

We launched this cash aid program with a simple application process to assess basic qualifications, primarily loss of income due to the COVID-19 crisis and ineligibility for government support. We screened families for longer term resources like food stamps.

We also created a \$100,000 *In Memoriam* fund to provide financial aid to families who cannot afford burial and cremation costs for loved ones lost to COVID-19—accessed by 50 families to date, with two families receiving additional aid because they lost multiple family members. In addition, we launched a [memorial website](#) and held tributes in all of our offices to honor the 80+ members from our community who we lost.

The need for these two financial relief programs has been overwhelming.

The response from supporters has been remarkable as well: more than 35,000 people have donated from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 19 countries around the world.

Many donors made unprecedented gifts. Prominent allies appealed to their vast networks. Supporters in the US donated their own stimulus checks. Some held fundraisers. We are incredibly grateful for every gift.

“

**Thank God
we've received
support from
Make the Road
New York.**

”



RICARDO ACA

MARCH 2020: Our team rapidly and safely expanded our [Brooklyn food pantry](#), distributing and delivering food to hundreds of families each week.

EMERGENCY FOOD ACCESS PROGRAM

We continue to provide emergency food—produce, nonperishables, and frozen meals—to 1,000 families each week.

After the shutdown, we quickly adapted our Brooklyn and Queens food pantries with stringent new safety protocols, providing food via pick-up by appointment and delivery via a volunteer bike brigade to those unable to leave home. In response to overwhelming need, we started distributing food on Staten Island and Westchester, and are exploring options to distribute food from our Long Island office.

In addition, we established deep regular contact with the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYC’s new Food Czar, NYC Health + Hospitals, and others, to ensure the accessibility of the city’s relief efforts to immigrant populations. We connected members to NYC’s food delivery program, the NYC Department of Education free meals program, and the Pandemic-EBT program.

“
We have children and we need to cover their needs. They cry, yell, because they are hungry. And without a dollar in our pocket, we can’t do anything about it.”

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES INFORMED

We have been sharing critical information on the public health crisis and its impact:

- In March, as soon as the severity of COVID-19 became clear, we sent a bilingual robo call to over 31,000 members, clients, and students with vital information. We continue to send regular robocalls and mass texts to provide accurate, up-to-date information.
- We created two COVID-19 specific hotlines (which have received a total of more than 12,000 calls as of July 1st) and a bilingual website (which has received over 65,000 hits).
- On March 18th, we held our first online bilingual town hall to share resources and mitigate panic. We have held over 50 online events (at times, 2-3 per week, reaching upwards of 40,000 people) on topics including healthcare, mental health, worker safety, federal stimulus relief, tenants' rights, and ICE activity, and to discuss government proposals and actions with elected officials.
- We live streamed powerful vigils on Long Island, Queens, and Westchester to allow our communities to safely participate in honoring those lost to COVID-19.
- Our frontline staff across departments have provided urgent one-on-one support to thousands of families and individuals as described in this report.



ZACHARY SCHULMAN

MAY 21, 2020: *At a vigil in Corona, Queens, we remembered those lost to COVID-19, and committed to continuing our fights for justice in their memory.*

HEALTH ACCESS

MRNY's Health Access Programs have continued online and by phone without interruption, and have expanded to respond to new dire needs:

- We have been helping families access testing and mental health care, intervening with hospitals and the city as necessary to advocate on their behalf, and conducting community health worker "home visits" via video to check on vulnerable individuals at risk for COVID-19.
- We have provided case management to thousands of families and individuals navigating the fear of being sick without health insurance, the worry of putting food on the table, the stress of being unable to self-isolate, and more.
- We helped families who lost loved ones to COVID-19 locate their bodies in hospital morgues or have them removed if they died at home. At the height of the surge in NY, our help was critical in finding funeral homes able to take the bodies.
- We have continued our existing services, including enrolling community members in health insurance and food stamps, negotiating medical debt, and connecting members to providers for other medical issues.

“
It is impacting
us financially,
emotionally—
there is sadness,
worry, fear and
anguish among
my children
because we,
their parents,
could die. We
are concerned
about financial
insecurity and
not knowing
when we will
return to work.
”

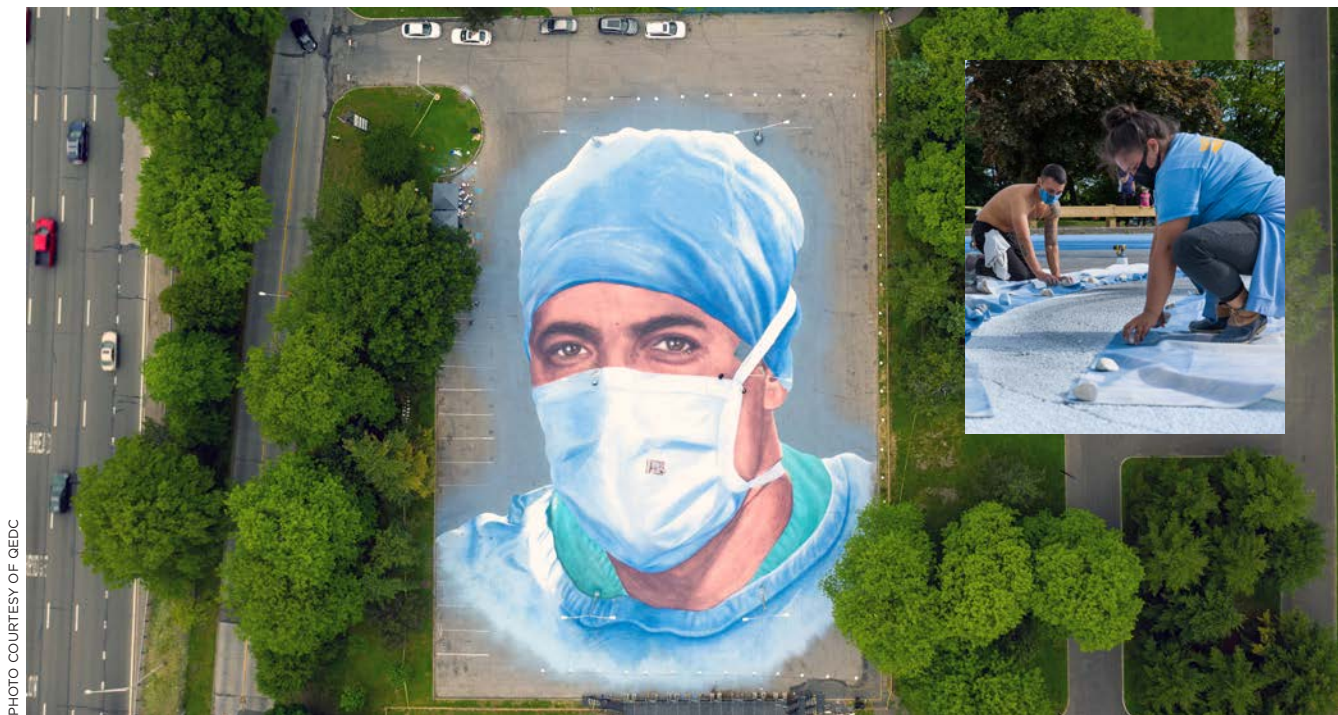


PHOTO COURTESY OF QEDC

May 30, 2020: "Somos la Luz" by renowned artist Jorge Rodríguez-Gerada. Rodríguez-Gerada created a 20,000 square foot mural in Queens, with assistance from three MRNY staff, as a tribute to immigrants who died working on the frontlines of the pandemic. The image depicts Dr. Ydelfonso Decco, an immigrant doctor who died from COVID-19.



DIANA GUERRA

JUNE 16, 2020: Long Island member Silvia (pictured with her daughter) and her family have benefitted from MRNY's legal services, and Silvia has since become a leader in MRNY's organizing campaigns.

LEGAL SERVICES

MRNY's Legal Services continue uninterrupted, and have expanded and taken on increased urgency as referrals and requests for help have doubled:

- We continue to provide full legal representation by helping clients access paid sick time and apply for unemployment insurance, filing urgent immigration applications, and providing rapid response aid for emergency housing cases including tenants facing evictions.
- We have filed over a dozen parole requests, habeas petitions, and motions to the immigration court to get people released from detention centers where the virus is exploding (four released so far), and are advocating with allies to release vulnerable people who are incarcerated.
- We defend the legal rights of essential workers who are demanding workplace safety protections, including representing Amazon workers on Staten Island. By May 31st, at least 51 warehouse workers tested positive for COVID-19 and at least one died. Our lawsuit has garnered the support of members of Congress and international unions. We are also partnering with NY Attorney General Leticia James to hold Amazon accountable for retaliating against the whistleblowing workers we are supporting.

“ I know too well the costs of Amazon's failure to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the facility. We want to protect our own health but also peace of mind for our family members and safety for the many communities in which [Amazon] workers live. ”

EDUCATION AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

We have adapted these programs for social distancing and to provide additional support:

- We moved our Adult ESOL and citizenship preparation classes to Zoom and WhatsApp. Now, more than ever, our classes serve as critical gathering and support spaces for several hundred community members. Students connect to individualized case management and receive critical information about their rights, healthcare, and food and financial relief, while encouraging students' skill building.
- Our Youth Power Project (YPP) has ensured that students have enough to eat, tools for remote learning, social-emotional support, and safe digital spaces. We continue to help students with the college application process, and are providing tuition assistance for 15-20 youth. We moved our summer leadership program online, employing YPP alumni to help lead it.

Our youth leaders, given their lived experience with law enforcement, have led our police reform work for two decades (with some former youth now senior staff). Following George Floyd's death, they organized actions with allies and impacted families that were integral to the passage of the Safer New York Act. This year's summer program cohort is connecting with youth from Minneapolis and Oakland to learn from their successful fights for police-free schools.

“
Thanks to the English classes, I communicate better with my children's teachers. Talking with the teachers and getting information about the virus has helped me a lot right now.”



KIMBERLY LOPEZ

JUNE 25, 2020: Our youth members led a march with partners in the Urban Youth Collaborative to demand that NYC divest from policing and fully remove police from schools. That fight continues.

ORGANIZING AND POLICY CAMPAIGNS

Even as we work double time to provide direct services and emergency aid, Make the Road New York is fighting to win a just recovery for all and policies that transform the structures that made this pandemic such a catastrophe for our communities.

OUR NATIONAL ROLE

In March, we fought to make the federal stimulus package truly inclusive, resisting the foregone conclusion that covering undocumented people with federal-level solutions was impossible. Through a town hall and member meetings with elected officials, rapid response analysis of draft proposals from congressional offices, and a national social media campaign to elevate #AJustStimulus, we helped beat back the worst of the reckless proposals, but the bill failed to include vulnerable populations of all immigration statuses.

We are building on this early work, with our sister organizations in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Nevada and key allies in other states, to advocate for a People's Recovery funding package that includes everyone. We are also helping to animate and lead a multi-state coordinated push calling for Excluded Worker Funds at the federal level, though are ready to pivot to call on state and city leaders to fill gaps where federal relief fails.

POLICY VICTORIES AND DEMANDS

To date, together with allies, we have won free COVID-19 testing and treatment for immigrants on emergency Medicaid, a state-level moratorium on evictions to protect renters (now partially lifted), legalization of e-bikes to protect delivery workers, and introduction of essential worker protections by the New York City Council. The Protect Our Courts Act—a major campaign of ours—was recently passed by the NYS Legislature to keep immigration enforcement out of New York's courts and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

“
As an immigrant, I am paying taxes but there is no aid. It's like the government doesn't take us into account. We are the essential workers. We are battling the disease and we want to be taken into account.
”

On June 12th, after years of organizing by MRNY's youth leaders and allies, and propelled by the current calls for police reform, the Safer New York Act was signed into law. It includes the Special Prosecutor bill to allow the NYS Attorney General to investigate and prosecute police killings, and the Police Statistics and Transparency (STAT) Act and the repeal of 50-A to make police data more publicly available.

On June 18th, we celebrated the Supreme Court's decision to preserve DACA in our landmark case, *Wolf v. Batalla Vidal* (MRNY and several staff and members, including Martin Batalla Vidal, were plaintiffs). With allies, our legal team waged a successful fight. Now, as we go to print, the Trump administration has issued a new attack on DACA, instructing USCIS to reject all initial DACA applications. As we beat back this latest attack, we are processing a wave of DACA renewals.

At the end of July, in response to our two federal lawsuits on Trump's racist public charge rule, which imposes a wealth test on immigrants seeking green cards, a judge issued two nationwide injunctions—one explicitly blocking it for the duration of the pandemic. This means that immigrant families across the country can now access critical services (like food stamps or health insurance) to survive this crisis without fear of adverse immigration consequences.

Now we are working to secure these wins:

- Establish Excluded Worker Funds at the city and state level to provide government-scale emergency income for immigrants left out of federal relief.
- Provide rent relief for New Yorkers to ensure that the most vulnerable tenants, with months of unpaid rent, won't be evicted after the moratorium on evictions expires.
- Release vulnerable populations from jails, prisons, and detention centers including those who are pregnant, immuno-compromised and otherwise at risk for COVID-19.
- Protect transgender women of color by repealing the discriminatory Walking While Trans Ban to end their criminalization and imprisonment.

We have been elevating these demands through car caravan actions, a 24-hour excluded workers' fast and overnight protest, banner drops, virtual town halls, online petitions, weekly phone banks, member testimonies in the media, and a series of videos, including one featuring [Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) which has nearly one million views.

“
For excluded
immigrants,
it's a nightmare
for us.
Nightmare.”

ONGOING PRIORITY WORK

We continue other priority campaigns, including passing rent protections for all New York renters and the Solutions not Suspensions Act to end harsh and ineffective school disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact youth of color and students with disabilities.

We are also ensuring the smooth implementation of the far-reaching state victories we won in 2019, including driver's licenses for all and the New York State Dream Act.

One of our biggest priorities in 2020 was to ensure that our communities are counted in the census. Despite the year's hardships, that work and our broader civic engagement efforts, continue.

- MRNY is a plaintiff in a lawsuit, just filed by the ACLU and other allies, challenging President Trump's new discriminatory order to block undocumented people from being counted in the US census.
- Through our census outreach, we have reached over 60,000 community members through tens of thousands of calls and text messages, and over 100 presentations.
- Our civic engagement outreach continues apace via robocalls, mass texts, social media, and other remote tools. We expect to reach 250,000 New Yorkers.



MAKE THE ROAD NEW YORK

Prior to the shutdown, our census team was hard at work in the streets ensuring a full count in the 2020 census; this has since transitioned to remote outreach.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Our communities continue to face high risk of infection, sustained loss of income, hunger, and homelessness.

The people we serve continue to endure systemic injustices and institutional inequities that cause them—and all communities of color—harm. But your partnership has allowed us to address their needs substantially and effectively over the last several months, and organize for long-term, government-scale solutions that recognize the humanity and contributions of every person.

Your support has been especially critical in light of the government funding cuts we now face. We anticipate deeper cuts in 2021 and have enacted cost cutting measures to ensure that we can see our communities through this crisis.

Together, we have responded with the intensity this moment has required, and provided support far beyond anything in our history. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

“ This crisis has taken away the most precious person in the world to me: my mother. The least that our elected officials can do is respond with a real recovery for all that treats us with the respect and dignity that we deserve. ”



WALTER WLODARCZYK

MAY 1, 2020: During our May Day car caravan, a MRNY member holds a mask to the window with a message about the injustice faced by workers excluded from relief programs that says, I am exploited and then excluded.

Homanaje a Lxs Caminantes
Memorial to Those Who Walked With Us

Rest in Power Caminantes

#Recovery4All
@maketheroadny