

# ISR INSIGHTS SPEAKER SERIES

Social Science in the Public Interest

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Older Adults During the Pandemic: The COVID-19 Coping Study

Prepared and Presented by:

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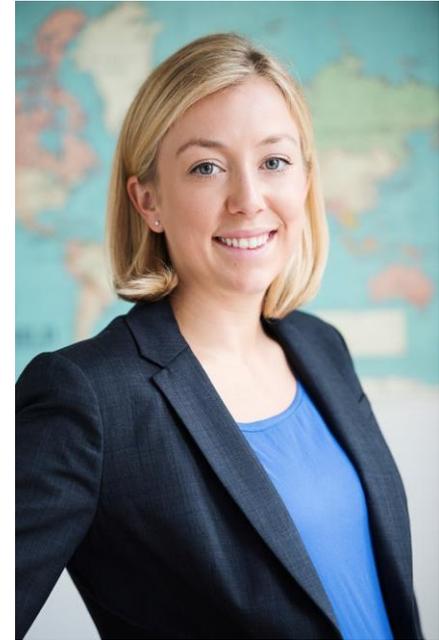
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# COVID-19 Coping Study Co-Investigators

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# Background

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a public health crisis that extends beyond direct illness and mortality due to the virus.

What are the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health and well-being of older adults?

Older adults may be particularly vulnerable to short- and long-term harms associated with the pandemic.



# Study goals

1. Investigate dynamic changes in older adults' experiences, perspectives, daily activities, coping strategies, mental health, and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Identify risk and resilience factors that influence mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Longitudinal mixed-methods study



At least 55 years old



Currently living in the US



English or Spanish

# Recruitment: April-May 2020



Social media ads



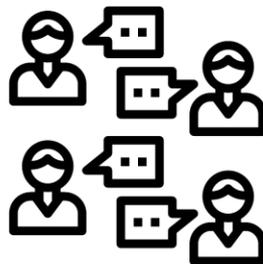
Email mailing lists



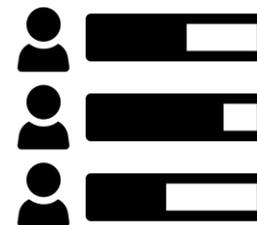
News outlets



NIH ResearchMatch  
U-M Health Research



Word-of-mouth



Professional survey  
company

# 20-minute online baseline questionnaire

Demographics

Job and income  
loss

COVID-19  
symptoms and  
testing (self +  
family/friends)

Physical and  
mental health

Physical distancing  
practices

Changes to daily  
life

Worries and  
stressors

Ways of coping

# Study design



The diagram illustrates the study design through three sequential steps, each represented by a chevron-shaped arrow pointing to the right. The first arrow is dark teal and contains the text 'Baseline questionnaire'. The second arrow is a lighter teal and contains 'Monthly follow-up questionnaires'. The third arrow is a light blue-grey and contains 'Telephone interviews'. Below each arrow is a corresponding time period: 'April-May 2020', 'May 2020 – May 2021', and 'Fall 2020 – Winter 2021'.

Baseline  
questionnaire

April-May 2020

Monthly  
follow-up  
questionnaires

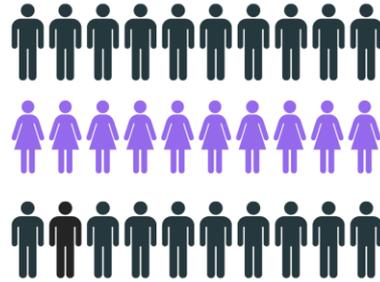
May 2020 – May 2021

Telephone  
interviews

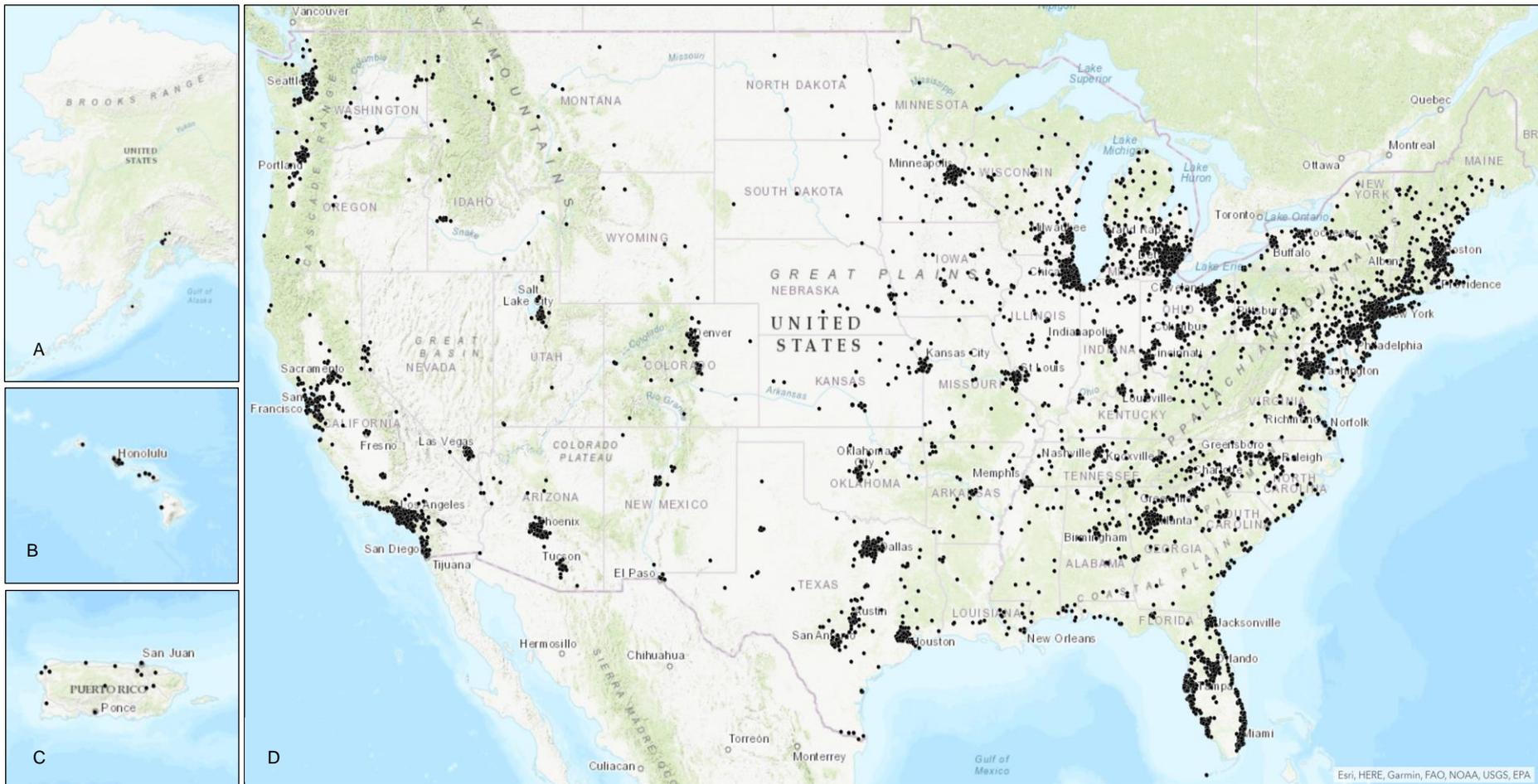
Fall 2020 – Winter 2021

# COVID-19 COPING STUDY

6886

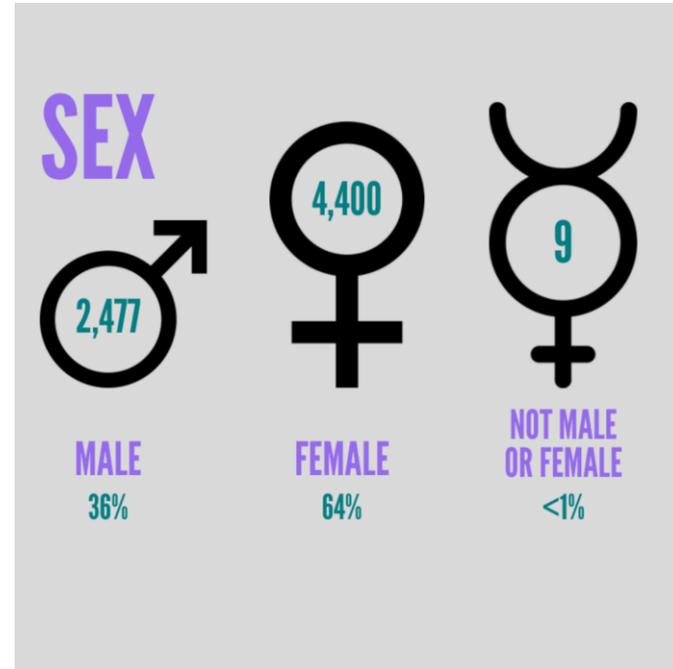
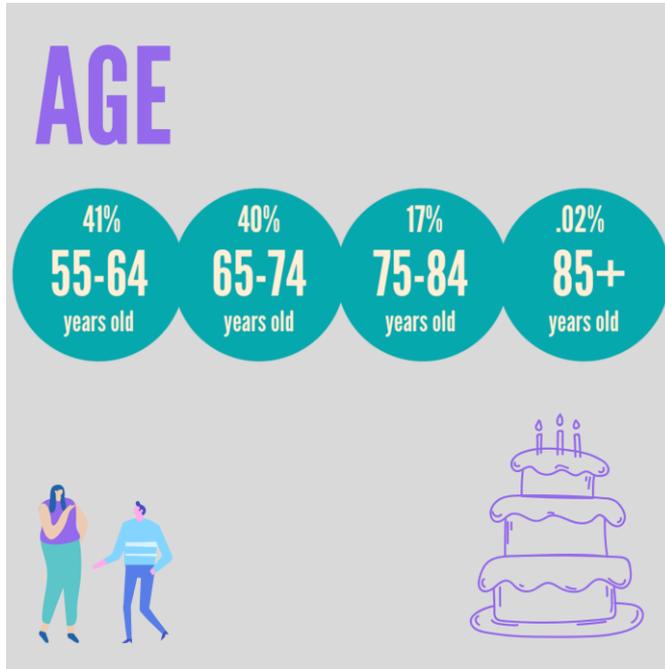


PARTICIPANTS

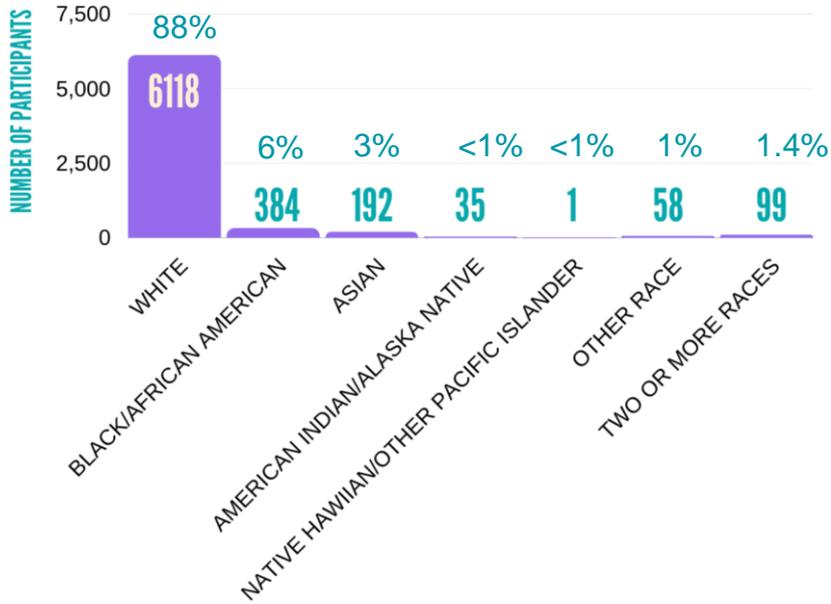


Participants across Alaska (A), Hawaii (B), Puerto Rico (C), and continental United States (D)

# Participants

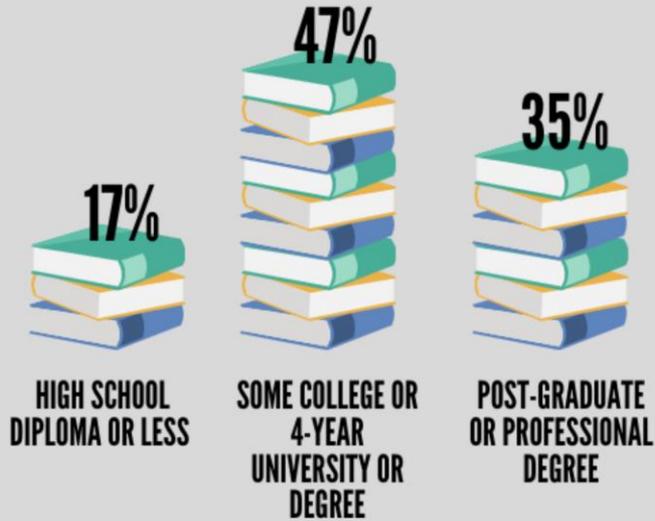


# RACE



# EDUCATION

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS



EDUCATION LEVEL



# LIVING SITUATION



# EMPLOYMENT

3,572

RETIRED

52%



3,315

NOT RETIRED

48%



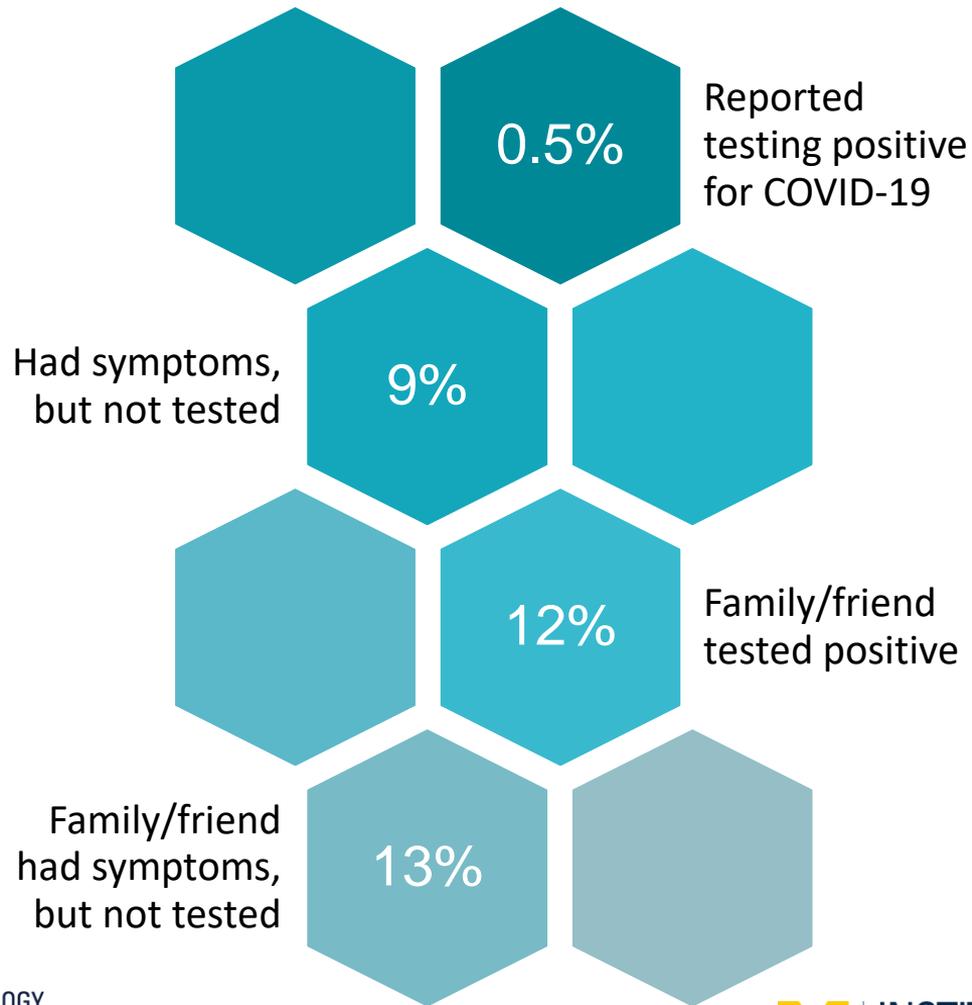
## Of those not retired:

- 5% lost their job
- 15% furloughed
- 22% lost work hours or income
- 43% now working from home
- 20% work not affected by COVID-19

## HOW WORRIED ABOUT COVID-19 ARE YOU?



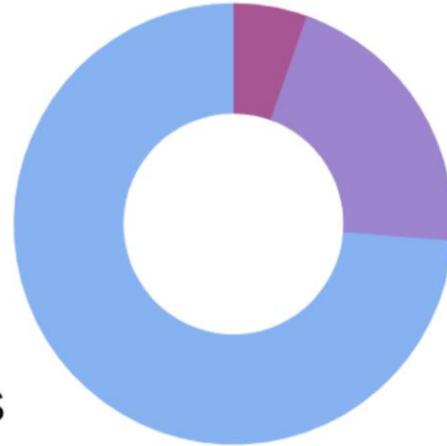
# COVID-19 symptom and testing history



# NUMBER OF DAYS (IN THE PAST WEEK) PARTICIPANTS SPENT SELF ISOLATING



7 DAYS  
73.8%



0 DAYS  
5.4%

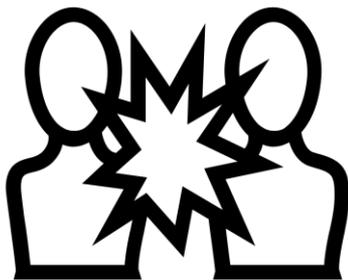
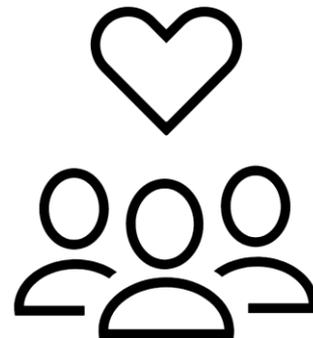


1-6 DAYS  
20.8%



# At-home family dynamics

*"I have secretly loved having my two adult children staying with me during this time. We have really bonded again."*



*"Living with adult children during covid 19 is very stressful. Battle over control within the household."*

# Mental health

**32%**

Depression (8-item CES-D)

**11%**

Anxiety (5-item Beck Anxiety Inventory)

**28%**

Loneliness (3-item UCLA Loneliness Scale)

# Mental health

*“Even though my life is stable and I’m staying at home with a spouse I get along well with, I’m surprised at how the situation has amplified anxiety and depression that I thought I had under control.”*



*“I’ve discovered my inner hermit; fear I may have trouble relating when back in the real world.”*

# 5 TOP CAUSES OF WORRY

1

FRIENDS/FAMILY BECOMING SICK FROM COVID-19



2

CATCHING THE COVID-19 VIRUS



3

BECOMING SERIOUSLY ILL FROM COVID-19



4

RETIREMENT SAVINGS



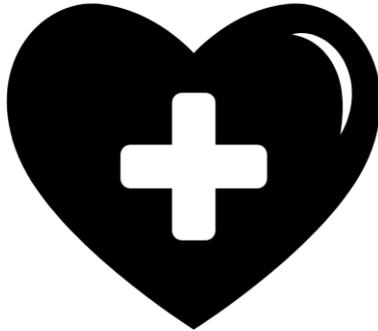
5

FUTURE PLANS



# Worries and stressors

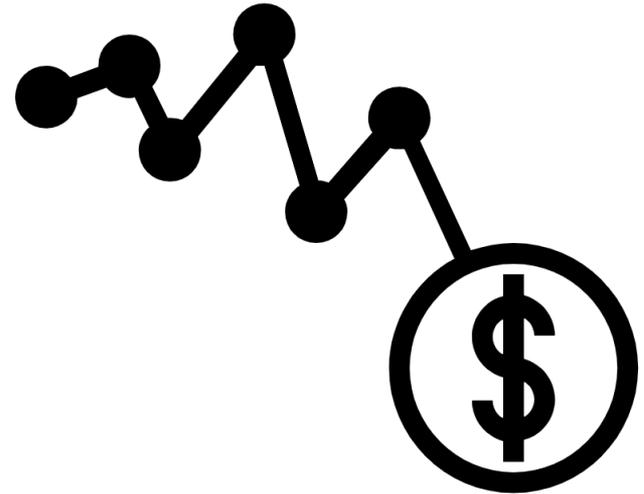
*“Recently diagnosed with cancer has made this much more difficult. Testing was delayed by 8 weeks due to C[ovid]-19, which added stress.”*



*“Caregiving for my 96 year old father is much more challenging as he does not understand current public health restrictions.”*

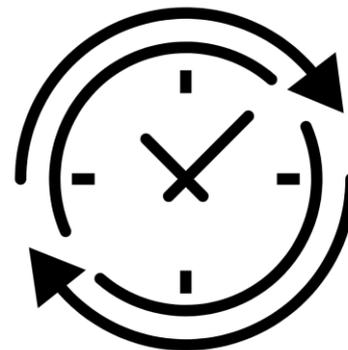
# Worries and stressors

*"My economic life was evaporating before my eyes and I could do nothing....my most infirm years ahead were looking bleaker with each financial shock. I can only hope my children love me enough.... "*



# Ways of coping

**At-home projects:** spring cleaning, cooking and baking, writing, arts and music, woodworking, puzzles, knitting



**Daily routine:** keeping busy, staying informed, reading, watching TV, listening, eating better, prioritizing sleep

# Ways of coping



**Exercise:** walking, yoga, biking, jogging, enjoying the outdoors

**Faith:** praying, reading scripture, watching or participating in faith services



# Ways of coping



**Physical safety:** Wearing a mask and gloves, staying home, maintaining distance, grocery shopping via family-members or online

**Mental health:** engaging with mental health professionals and support groups, anti-anxiety or depression medication

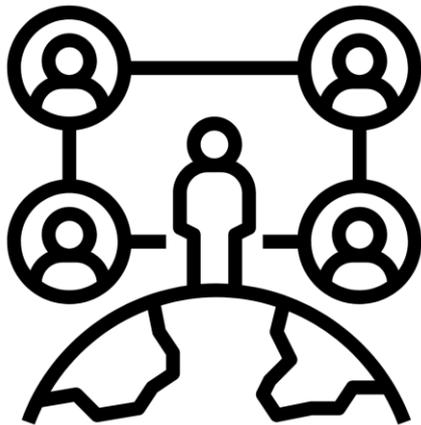
# Ways of coping

**Attitude and outlook:** Meditation, mindfulness, breathing exercises, staying positive, seeking out laughter and humor



**Civic engagement:** making masks for others, donating, volunteering

# Ways of coping



**Social connections:** reaching out to and communicating with family, friends, neighbors, and community members; quality time with loved ones

*“I have made over 400 face masks/coverings for health care professionals/front line responders, friends and neighbors. This has given me a purpose during this pandemic (and something to do instead of clean my garage!).”*



## Coping



*“Along the lines of mindfulness, I remind myself how lucky I am to have shelter, food and friends; I remind myself to concentrate on only that which is in front of me, and which I can control; I remind myself often that this won’t last forever..”*

# Next steps



Monthly  
follow-ups

Telephone  
interviews

Make data  
publicly  
available

# Mental health and well-being

## Social

- Isolation, physical distancing, living alone
- Support networks, family dynamics, online connections

## Geography

- Local COVID-19 burden
- Neighborhood infrastructure, level of reopening

## Behavior

- Exercise, alcohol
- Coping and resilience

## Longitudinal

- Changes in physical and mental health
- Experiences over time

# Public engagement

Public talks  
and media

Newsletter  
and website

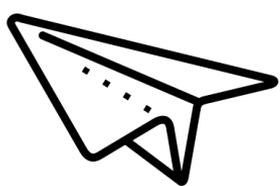
Inform  
policymaking



# Thank you!

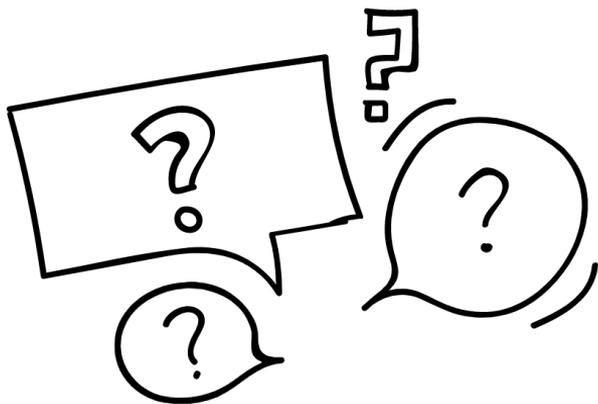
- Marisa Eastman
- Jasdeep Kler
- Brendan O'Shea
- Yamani Vinson
  
- Raphael Nishimura
- Caroline Palavicino-Maggio
  
- Most importantly, the study participants!





## More information

- <https://www.covid19copingstudy.com/>
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