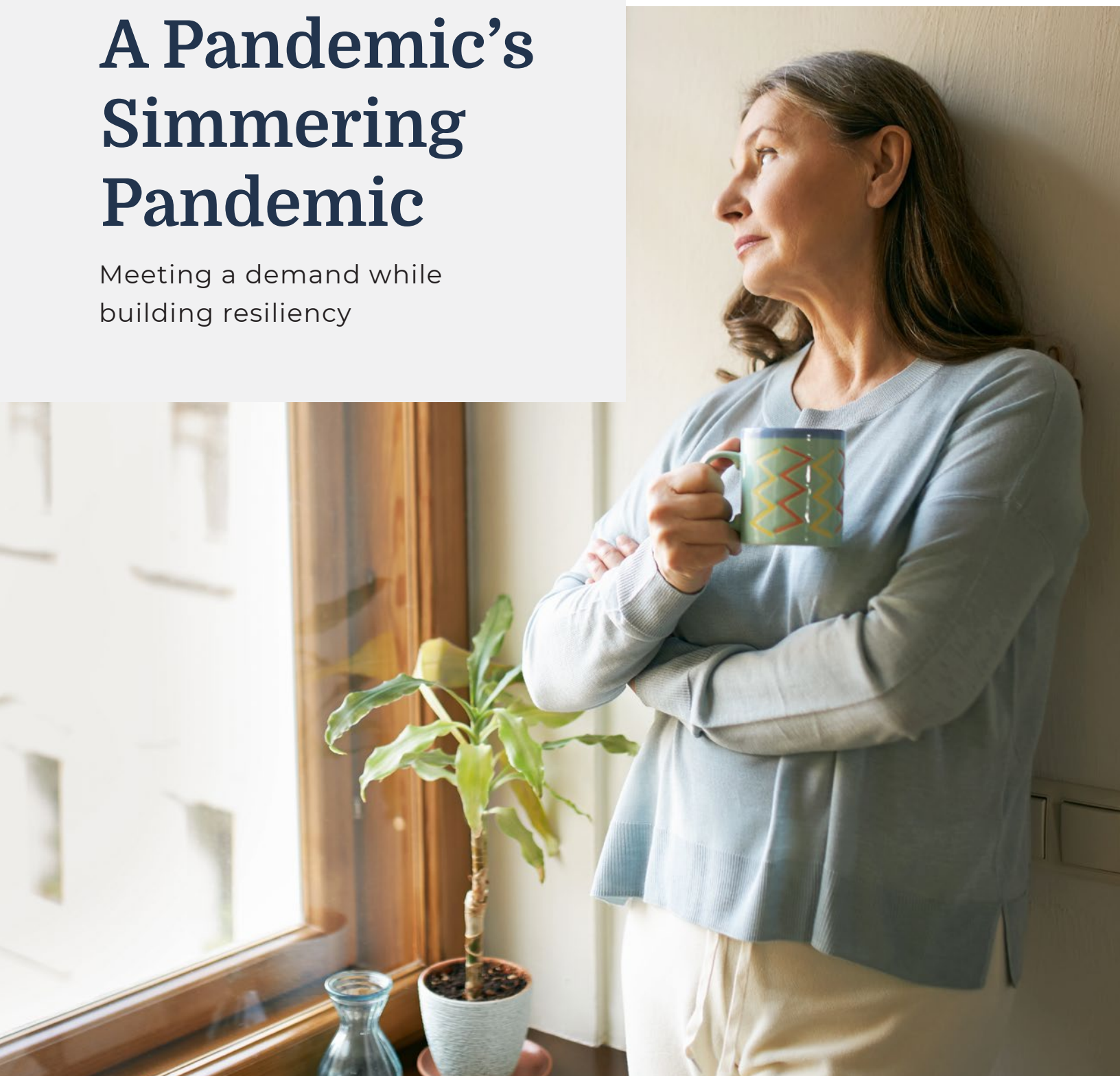


A Pandemic's Simmering Pandemic

Meeting a demand while
building resiliency



A Toll No One Knows

At the moment, it's not possible to accurately measure the all-encompassing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From finance and housing to education and mental health, It has seemingly touched every aspect of life in ways that can only be understood through personal experience.

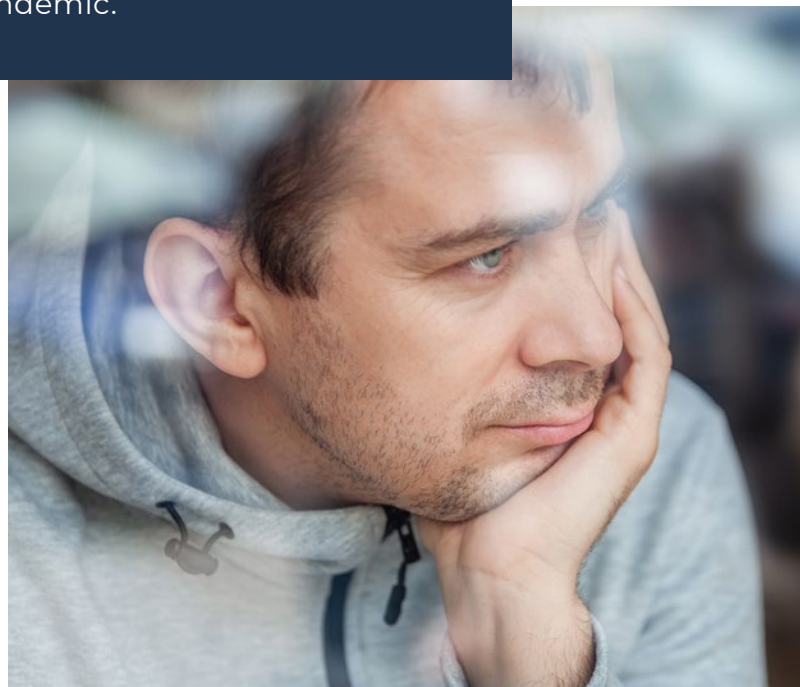
Going forward, once the pandemic is behind us, we'll be able to see a detailed picture of the overarching toll. For now, **we're starting to get a glimpse of what that picture will look like.**

It will include a generation of **children** who grew up in a formative period where they could not play with friends or hug their grandparents, could not attend school and could not explore museums and playgrounds like they used to. It will include a startling percentage of **women** who left the workforce to care for and teach those children at home.

It will also include a nationwide group of **frontline healthcare workers** who put their lives on the line to try and save others, many times without success. As **minority populations** experienced a higher rate of infection from the virus, the aftermath of the pandemic will also have a disparate impact on **communities of color** with many empty chairs left at the dinner table.

And overall, it will include **a nation** that has been deeply impacted, one that needs to heal in a number of ways and will very likely need help doing it.

This scratches the surface and begins to describe the genesis of what experts have described as a “pandemic within a pandemic,” a simmering behavioral healthcare crisis that could create a “tsunami” (as several providers have labeled it) of need in the months and years ahead.



75,000 projected additional deaths of despair related to COVID-19.

Source: [Wellbeing Trust](#)

An expanded behavioral healthcare regulatory landscape has allowed for an evolution of care that could assist with capacity challenges; however, the waning stigma over mental health conditions and treatment is prompting more people to seek help — which could fuel additional capacity challenges.

None of the needs ahead are insurmountable, and — if anything — humanity has shown itself to be a resilient force. Preparing for the unknown based on what is known could shape the trajectory of future outcomes.

A Measurable Impact

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is illustrated by the statistically supported themes it is shaping across different populations. Accordingly, each of those themes may benefit from behavioral health intervention, which most experts agree, is most beneficial when delivered in a timely manner — meaning a balanced capacity is crucial for achieving the best possible outcomes.

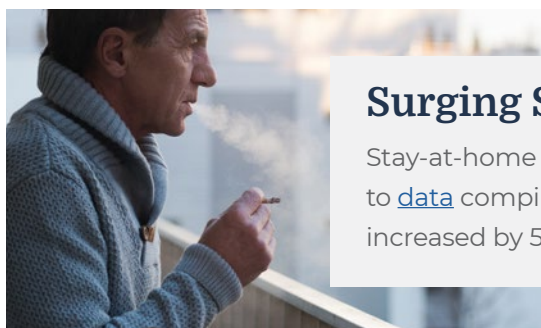


Generation C

A generation of **children** growing up with, being born into and feeling the after-effects of a world shaped by COVID-19. [Experts](#) debate the span of time but agree the most vulnerable are the 7-9 age group.

(Un)Working Women

American Progress [reports](#) **women** lost at least 1 million more jobs than men during the pandemic, and in December of 2020, women accounted for 100% of the 140,000 job losses that month.

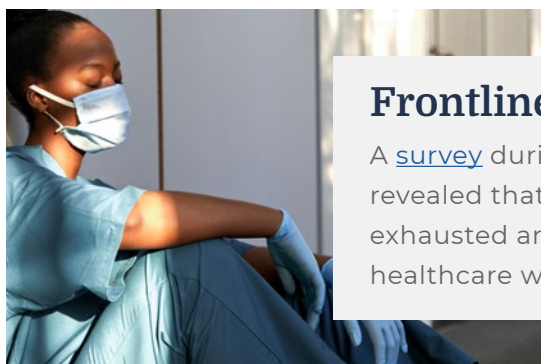


Surging Substance Abuse

Stay-at-home orders correlated with a surge in **drug overdoses**, according to [data](#) compiled by Forbes. In one month alone, May of 2020, overdoses increased by 50% compared to baseline averages the two previous years.

Disease Disparity

CDC [figures](#) reveal that **minority populations**, such as Black American, Hispanic American and Native American populations, experienced increased rates of infection, hospitalization and death than white Americans.



Frontline Fatigue

A [survey](#) during the summer of 2020 by Mental Health America revealed that 82% of **frontline healthcare workers** were emotionally exhausted and 68% were physically exhausted. About 10% of healthcare workers have [resigned](#) since the pandemic began.

The Rippling Mental Health Effect

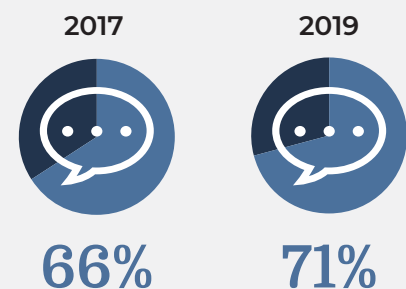
When it comes to the stresses and viability of behavioral healthcare clinics and organizations, an analysis of pandemic-related cause and effect, seems to resemble an entangled, blurred loop.

Just as a number of community organizations are facing an increased demand for care, so too are a number facing the crippling reality of lost revenue and potential closure.

A [survey](#) conducted by The National Council for Behavioral Health in September of 2020 indicated 52% of behavioral health organizations were seeing an increase in demand for services. At the same time, 54% of organizations had to close programs and 65% had to cancel, reschedule or turn away patients.

As an added variable, people have become [more comfortable](#) seeking treatment for mental illness in recent years which represents progress but increases demand.

Percentage of people who feel comfortable talking with someone about their mental illness.



In the wake of the pandemic, clinics and organizations that remain open will be seeing patients with a wide range of mental health challenges, either directly or as a consequence of physical conditions introduced by the illness.

For example, the CDC reports [long-term](#) symptoms of a COVID-19 infection could include joint and muscle pain, depression, heart palpitations and other cardiovascular complications, a “brain fog” characterized by an inability to concentrate, anxiety and mood changes, and neurological complications linked to sleep issues and memory problems.

In addition, Harvard Health Publishing [reports](#) a notable percentage of COVID-19 survivors who had received ICU care had a profound degree of cognitive impairment, comparable to a traumatic brain injury.

And even for those who have avoided a COVID-19 infection, or who have recovered without complication, they still had to [survive](#) the anxiety that comes with a pandemic, the isolation it required and the financial and lifestyle burdens it created. To cope, according to the CDC, about 13% of Americans started or increased [substance use](#). A survey by the Addiction Policy Forum indicates [measurable increases](#) in cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and non-prescribed fentanyl following nationwide quarantine orders

Across the board, the fallout from the pandemic has created a recipe for a perfect storm of needs, and it's waiting on the doorstep of the behavioral healthcare and addiction treatment communities.



People have become more comfortable seeking treatment for mental illness in recent years which represents progress but increases demand.

Source: [Health Partners](#)



“

And so our job now is to make sure that what happened to COVID-19, where we knew it was coming, but we didn't really quite do what we needed to do to prepare for it, that that doesn't happen again with respect to the coming epidemic and tsunami of overdose and suicide.”

— Patrick Kennedy, on PBS Newshour

Mitigating A Crisis.

Resiliency through flexibility.

The delivery of behavioral healthcare and addiction treatment has evolved, drastically and quickly, as a result of the pandemic. Where telepsychiatry became a necessity during periods of quarantine, it is increasingly becoming a sustainable choice for an industry facing a number of challenges related to capacity, staffing, demand and complex patient populations such as those living with SMI and co-occurring conditions.

Clinics and organizations that found flexibility throughout the pandemic by integrating remote providers into their in-person clinical teams improved their capacity and decreased no-shows while improving access to care for the patients who needed it most.

And by adding a diversity of provider types beyond psychiatrists, including psychiatric nurse practitioners and licensed clinical social workers, clinics and organizations realized the benefits of expanded provider teams that were able to see and offer treatment to children and adults.

The Upside to Adding Remote Team Members

- ✓ Alleviate **capacity issues**
- ✓ Prevent **provider burnout**
- ✓ **Flexibility** in scheduling
- ✓ Introduce **new specialties**
- ✓ Improve **access to care**

In the end, the flexibility of remote care allows providers to break through physical barriers and **meet their patients exactly where they are.**

The quality of outcomes directly correlates to an ability to access care. Improved access improves outcomes. And improved outcomes define resiliency, which is the ultimate goal.



innovaTel is a national telepsychiatry provider that partners directly with community-based organizations to improve access to behavioral health services. For the past seven years, innovaTel has been providing telebehavioral health services with a remote clinical team made up of psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners and licensed clinical social workers with a fundamental mission of increasing access to care.

For more information, visit www.innovatel.com.