

Summary of Survey Results on Agency Response to COVID-19

In March 2020, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) conducted a survey to assess system-level responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by justice and child welfare agencies. The survey, open for eight weeks, was answered by 185 respondents from 20 states and Australia. Responses represented the views of staff from juvenile and adult probation and parole departments, juvenile and adult residential

detention facilities (including jails and prisons at the adult level), and child welfare agencies.

Respondents were asked about their agencies' responses to the pandemic, including safety measures taken to protect staff and clients, problems encountered and remedies employed, and needed resources.

Key Findings



Limited or inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) was the most significant challenge across all groups.



One third of respondents reported using additional safety measures (beyond state-imposed physical distancing requirements and enhanced cleaning measures), with 38% reporting limits on in-person meetings and use of other physical distancing techniques.



Just over one in 10 (14%) of respondents from residential facilities reported using isolation as a physical distancing strategy (contrary to recommendations).



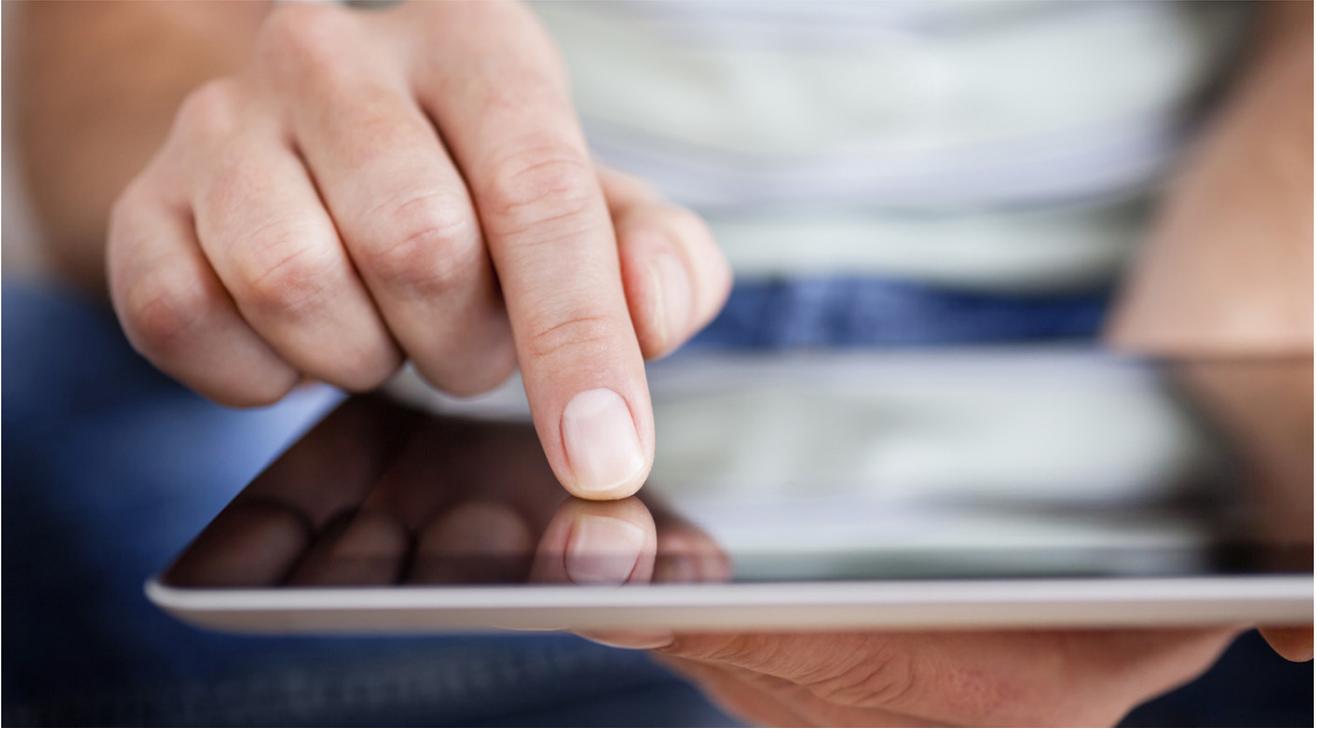
The same proportion (14%) of residential staff respondents also reported releasing some residents to address physical distancing concerns.



The highest reported need among justice agencies was information from other agencies on how they are responding to the pandemic and the associated challenges. Other needs included more and better technology and more training and webinars.



Clients with substance abuse needs represented the highest category of affected clients as reported by community supervision and child welfare staff. All categories of respondents cited increased mental health complaints by clients as the most prevalent trend.



Recommendations

NCCD previously published a [list of recommendations](#) for probation and parole departments to deal with increasing caseloads as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are some more general recommendations for justice and child welfare agencies based on survey findings.

For staff:

- **Increase access to PPE.** Staff should have access to masks, gloves, and other PPE when they are required to interact with clients, especially if those interactions take place in the community as opposed to office visits.
- **Address technology limitations.** Many staff cited a lack of computers and personal electronic devices (e.g., tablets, smartphones) that were adequate to support remote work. Agencies should update both hardware and software to support staff.
- **Maintain flexibility in working conditions.** Teleworking and other physical distancing–

compliant accommodations can increase staff's comfort level to complete their work and thus result in better service for their clients.

- **Increase support (personal and professional) for line staff.** Many staff reported a need for increased support from management, including more support for self-care (e.g., time off, resources).
- **Transparent and up-to-date communication.** Knowledge and circumstances around the pandemic continue to evolve. Agencies need to maintain clear and thorough communication with staff and clients about changes that will affect them.
- **Information sharing across agencies.** Respondents, particularly among justice agency staff, want to know more about how other agencies are responding to the pandemic. NCCD has a number of [COVID-19 resources](#) for both justice and child welfare agencies. Local cross-agency collaboration could be another easy way for agencies to share information.

For clients:

- **Recognize challenges for different clients and populations.** Certain populations (e.g., older people or clients with medical, mental health, or substance abuse issues) may be more prone to physical and mental health complications associated with the pandemic. Staff should be vigilant about checking in with these clients and helping them to find the necessary supports.
- **Increase support/access to community supports and resources.** Many clients served by justice and/or child welfare agencies need additional support for financial, medical, employment, food, or other social service needs. Staff are well suited to operate as brokers for and referrals to agencies that can help clients address these needs.
- **Support frequent, meaningful access to friends and families outside (for residential facility clients).** Particularly for clients who are

residing away from their families during the pandemic, communication and connection are paramount to ease the anxiety and stress that many feel.

- **Be ready to respond to domestic violence and other household/family issues.** Anecdotally, incidents of domestic violence, calls for service, and suicide hotline calls have increased. Given the connections and access that justice and child welfare staff have with individuals and families, they may be the first line of defense and response for issues of domestic violence, child abuse and maltreatment, suicidal ideation, and other issues.

The full report includes recommendations for justice and child welfare agencies to improve their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic based on the survey results.

Additional survey results can be found [here](#).

