

FACT SHEET: PRIORITIZING AN EQUITABLE COVID-19 RECOVERY IN ORANGE COUNTY

The COVID-19 pandemic vividly reveals how systemic racism devastates low-income communities of color and the urgent need to equitably distribute resources to Highest Need communities.

In Orange County, COVID-19's racially inequitable impact is stark:

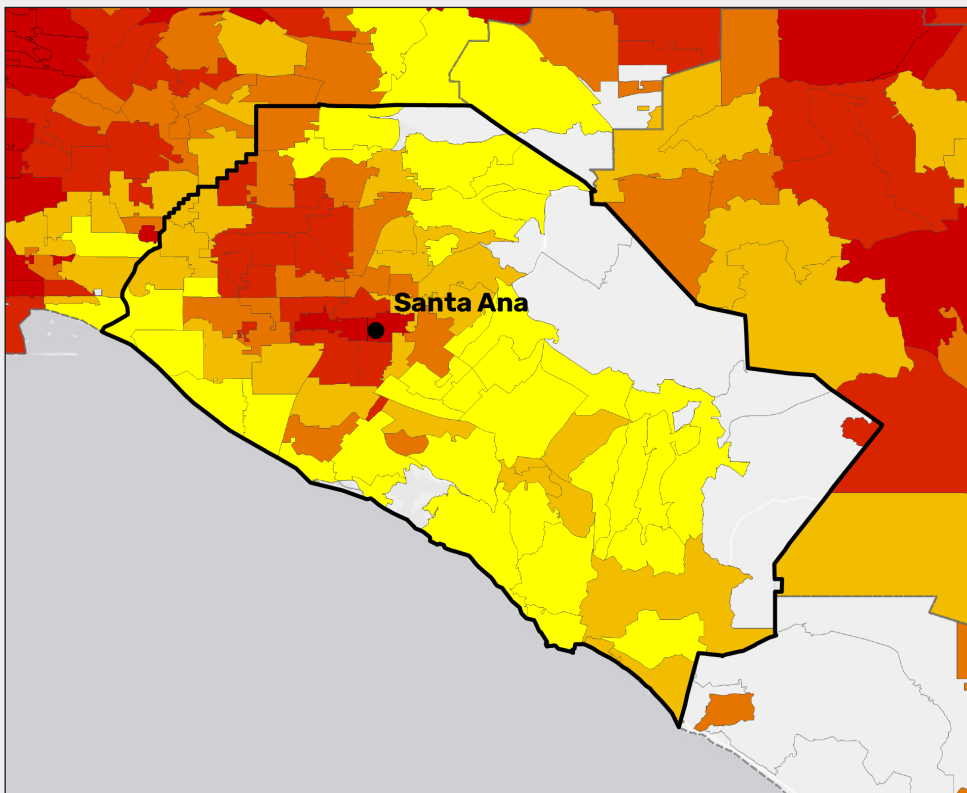
- Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are nearly four times more likely to contract COVID-19 than the groups with the lowest rates.
- Latinx and American Indians and Alaska Natives are about twice as likely to contract COVID-19 than the groups with the lowest rates.¹

- All Highest Need communities in Orange County are located in Santa Ana.

The estimated \$615 million in federal funds that Orange County will receive under the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act² should be equitably distributed to improve the short- and long-term health, safety, and welfare of Highest Need communities.

RACE COUNTS' COVID-19: Statewide Vulnerability & Recovery Index provides a useful guide:

Communities in Orange County by Need Level



The Index uses ZIP Code-level data to identify California communities most in need of immediate and long-term pandemic and economic relief. It is comprised of three components—Risk of Infection, Severity of Illness, and Recovery Need—with the last scoring a community's ability to recover from the pandemic's health and socioeconomic costs.

VULNERABILITY & RECOVERY INDEX CATEGORY

- LOWEST (0-19th Percentile)
- LOW (20-39th Percentile)
- MODERATE (40-59th Percentile)
- HIGH (60-79th Percentile)
- HIGHEST (80-100th Percentile)

¹ Case rates retrieved from <https://covid19.ca.gov/equity/> on 2/26/21.

² National Association of Counties, "State and Local Coronavirus Fiscal Relief Funds," <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/state-and-local-coronavirus-fiscal-recovery-funds#table>.

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Recommendations

1. County Government Should Use RACE COUNTS' COVID-19: Statewide Vulnerability & Recovery Index to Equitably Allocate Funds:

The Index provides ZIP Code-level data highlighting communities where people face the highest risks of infection, severe illness or death, and vulnerability to the pandemic's long-term economic and social costs. The Index should be leveraged to target and equitably allocate federal relief to Highest Need communities.

2. Using the RACE COUNTS Index for Equitable Allocation, 2021 American Rescue Plan Act Funds Should be Used for the Following Purposes:

- **Equitable Vaccine Distribution:** Because of structural racism—such as barriers in access to health care, jobs and living wages, housing, and education—people of color are being vaccinated at rates far lower than Whites, despite being more at risk of COVID-19 infection, serious illness, or death. To offset this, government officials and staff should prioritize vaccinating individuals who are more at risk and create systems (such as mobile vaccination clinics) that remove vaccination time, location, and appointment scheduling barriers that disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. The supply of vaccines allocated to community health centers in Highest Need communities should continue to be increased.

- **Community-Based COVID-19 Response Teams:** Distribute funds to community-based organizations that serve Highest Need communities to provide outreach and education on public health guidance and vaccine access, case investigation and contact tracing, and connect residents to COVID-related resources, such as rent assistance for housing stability, food access, and internet service.

- **Safety for Essential Workers:** Our front-line services workforce is disproportionately comprised of low-income people of color who keep our society running. They deliver our mail, groceries, and online purchases, provide care for the elderly, and offer a whole host of other services and supports. Funds should be directed to ensure essential workers—including farm and food workers and warehouse employees—are safe. This includes providing medical-grade masks, monetary stipends and “hero” pay, and financial support for jobs lost due to businesses that close.

- **Support for Youth Mental Health:** The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the mental health of youth of color, especially those in Highest Need communities. Children of color have been removed from ordinary social interactions key to their development and are experiencing significant anxiety because of extreme isolation. Many Latinx

and Black youth cannot participate in online distance learning because of structural barriers, such as computers and internet access. Some students must take care of younger siblings because their parents are essential workers who cannot afford to stay home. Youth of color are simultaneously living with the trauma of loved ones dying as people of color continue to have exceptionally high COVID-19 death rates. To address these issues, pandemic relief funds should be used to provide trauma-informed care and education—with an emphasis on restorative practices—to protect the long-term mental health of children from Highest Need communities.

- **Provide Housing Assistance and Security:** People in Highest Need communities experience higher levels of poverty, homelessness, and housing insecurity. Many also live in overcrowded spaces with multiple families under one roof, which makes them more at-risk of COVID-19 infection. In addition to canceling rental and mortgage obligations, funding should be used to provide housing assistance and preclude evictions for families in Highest Need communities.

- **Build the Future Resilience of Highest Need Communities:** Direct public investments to improve the long-term overall socioeconomic well-being of communities in ZIP Codes with a Recovery Need score in the top 20th percentile.