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Thank You to all those who shared their
COVID - 19 Stories



Disclaimer...

"After Effects" was made possible from grant funds awarded by the Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Health Department. The opinions of presenters are their own and do not necessarily represent those of the Alaska Black Caucus or the Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Health Department.

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RECOVERY

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving advice,
you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me that I
shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you have to do some-
thing to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as
that may seem.

So, please listen and just hear me.

And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn;

And I'll listen to you."

-Author Unknown

When most people think of "RECOVERY," they tend to think of medical care. The common thread in this book's recovery stories highlights that interpersonal relationships with family and friends are key factors in recovery and outlook for the future. Dr. Bernie Siegel, Yale physician and author of the best-selling book, *Love, Medicine and Miracles*, affirms the power of love: "*Unconditional love is the most powerful stimulant of the immune system. The truth is love heals.*"

Siegel B. *Love, Medicine and Miracles: Lessons Learned About Self-Healing from a Surgeon's Experience and Exceptional Patients*. New York: Harper Perennial 1986, 181.

We Salute All Frontliners



**Thank you for your dedication and sacrifice
during this difficult time.**

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FOREWORD

As President and CEO of the Alaska Black Caucus (ABC), I extend our sincere appreciation to those who created positive outcomes for our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ABC received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the Anchorage Health Department to address disparities in access to COVID testing and vaccinations and to engage the whole community to build health equity. I'm so thankful to the ABC COVID-19 Grant team: Program Manager Deanne Woodard, Reverend Edwenia Brown, Lynette McNair, Jacketta Oliver, Cyrese Gorrin, and Jessica Brown for their hard work and dedication and the Alaska Black Caucus Health Committee (under the direction of co-chairs Allison Hourigan and Thea Agnew Bembien), which became active in the summer of 2020 with the aim to promote, protect and maintain the health of Black Alaskans through advocacy, education, and research. Since that time the Health Committee, working under the leadership of the ABC, created a resolution, *Racism is a Public Health Crisis in Alaska*, which was approved by the Alaska Public Health Association in 2021; successfully advocated for improvements to data collection and reporting for race in COVID-19 cases and vaccination rates, and; helped secure COVID-19 grant funding and assisted with implementation of the projects detailed in this book. Lastly, I want to recognize and thank ABC's board members: Chair Yolandous (Doyle) Williams, Leroy Williams, Brenda Tyler, and Nasya Williams for their encouragement, support, and guidance.

Thank you to the Anchorage Assembly for authorizing federal grant

funds for this work. Thank you to the Municipality of Anchorage COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee that the Anchorage Health Department formed in February 2020 to ensure that vaccines and testing were distributed equitably and efficiently to everyone in our community. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have served on the committee. Through the committee, we helped develop vaccination sites to serve Black and BIPOC communities, monitored data to track our efforts, shared information and hosted events to encourage vaccinations, and engaged with other community and healthcare leaders to guide the Anchorage Health Department's pandemic response. I'm also grateful to our project staff, allies, volunteers, and everyone in the community who came to events, participated in conversations, and engaged with the ABC over the last year.

It was our feeling from the outset that our outreach would produce positive results and we were right! This is the model we must follow in other critical areas of our community, like forming active partnerships between police forces and the communities they serve.

The contents of this book share the results from the three main areas of our work over the past year. This work was intended to:

- Improve efforts and increase access to COVID-19 testing in the community.
- Build capacity to increase access to COVID-19 vaccines in the community.
- Implement strategies that decrease health inequities as well as other COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts, prevention, and individual recovery.

As 2020 began we, like the rest of the nation and countries around the world, were faced with the worst public health crisis in 100 years. At that time, little was known about COVID-19: how it spread, its potential variants, and the tremendous number of deaths it would produce, which recently crossed the unfathomable threshold of 1 million in the U.S. alone.

Communities of color already experience disproportionate rates of chronic disease and other health issues, which placed us at higher risk for hospitalization and death from COVID-19. Federal, state, and local leaders recognized the need to fund community-led efforts to engage our communities to reduce disparate outcomes among different racial groups in Anchorage, which would protect the health of all Anchorage citizens and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

To do this, we needed extensive and intensive involvement with citizens in underserved communities. The ABC hosted nine community conversations on topics specific to COVID-19 and its impacts and shared information about testing, vaccination, recovery, and important preventative measures. We worked with the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) to host a Grand Rounds series to educate healthcare providers about the impact of systemic racism in medicine and ways to build health equity. With the help of UAA, we also completed the Black Alaskans Health Status Report and Assessment, the first of its kind, to gather primary data and analyze secondary data; this allowed us to compile a comprehensive look at the health and well-being of Black Alaskans. We hosted a BIPOC Health Fair that brought the former US Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams to Alaska to engage with local public health leaders about pandemic recovery and how to build health equity. We served formerly incarcerated persons returning to the community and helped them access vaccinations, testing, and other resources. We helped establish a vaccination and testing site at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Anchorage, already a center for the Black community, that the CDC recognized as one of the country's leading vaccination sites.

We are proud we met and exceeded expectations with the results from this funding by implementing a clear plan supported by a strong marketing campaign led by local community members and businesses.

This book shares the story of our efforts to protect the health of Black Alaskans during the COVID-19 pandemic and to form strong alliances with citizens, other BIPOC-led organizations, health care providers and leaders, elected officials, funders, and all Alaskans who believe we all should enjoy full opportunities for health and well-being. We hope this book will serve as the basis for future policy initiatives. We believe our results demonstrate the transformative power of citizens and grassroots organizing to save lives and bring about what U.S. Representative John Lewis urged us to build: the Beloved Community.



ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS BOARD of DIRECTORS

<http://www.thealaskablackcaucus.com>



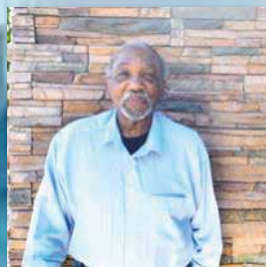
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The Equity Center



Photo by TeamJones Photography

The Alaska Black Caucus purchased a building intended as a service hub for the Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) community. Based in downtown Anchorage, the Equity Center

will provide office space for BIPOC-led organizations and businesses, a commercial kitchen, and meeting space to address equity concerns in education, economics, justice, health and more. During summer 2021, ABC was evaluating an existing building built in 1974 – previously a print shop and dental office – for its suitability for renovation and repurposing as an Equity Center. ABC and lead volunteers like Marc Johnson from Alyeska Pipeline Services and George Harrison of Harrison Quality Homes helped develop construction cost estimates for building repair and renovation to assist ABC in its decision to purchase the building or not. Upon estimate reviews, ABC procured the building in October 2021. These two volunteers and others then assisted ABC with planning renovation work, including developing design services and construction services scopes of work. The building is now in the early design phase with renovation completion expected in late 2022 or early 2023. The Equity Center will be a positive addition to Alaska, to the community of Anchorage, and to downtown Anchorage.

Alyse Galvin
M Diane Johnson
Donna Hourigan
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Andy Holleman
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Julia Metzger
Lisa Jamieson
Hugh Brown III

Kristen Fowler
Linda Soriano
Kristen Gee Oip
Linda Soriano

Penelope Cordes
Anna Brawley
Dr. Jocasta Gee Oip
Tara Wheatland

Thank You!

TO THOSE THAT HAVE DONATED THUS FAR TO THE ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS EQUITY CENTER! EQUITY ISN'T AN OPTION, ITS AN OBLIGATION! BELOVED COMMUNITY, HERE WE COME!!!!

Anchorage Assembly

Meghan Holtan
Brenda Tyler

\$437,500

Rasmuson Foundation

\$400,000



KeyBank \$50,000

Michael Burke
Kirsten A Moore
Clare Ross
Doyle Williams
Ginny Grabowski
Sam Volk

Alyssa Hartman
Greg Razo
Richard Watts
Erin Bendle
Patricia Dooley

Joshua Albee's Branstetter
Karen Turner
Veronica Slajer
Julie and Brenden Raymond-Yakoubian

Jacque Evans
Mychal Bond
Trevor Storrs
Ginger Blackmon
Celeste Hodge Growden
Susan Wingrove-Reed

Barbara Bankston
Carey Carpenter
Christy Sturgis Lawton
Pamela Gilden
The Drip

Providence Hospital \$50,000 First National Bank Alaska

\$25,000

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Erin Bendle
Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson
Jay King
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Tasha Pineda
Claire Lubke

Sidney McCausland
Meghan Holtan
Margo Belamy
George Walling & Scott Bell
Carl Jacobs
Mini Myers Card

U.S. COVID-19 Vaccine Product Information

Primary series

COVID-19 vaccines are available for everyone six months and older. For more information, visit covidvax.alaska.gov.

For most children 5 years through 17 years of age, a primary series consists of 2 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

For most people 18 and older, a primary series consists of a 2-dose series of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Pfizer or Moderna (mRNA vaccines) are preferred. You may get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in some situations.

Booster doses

Everyone 5 or older should get a COVID-19 vaccine booster if it's been five months since receiving the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or two months since receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

People over the age of 50 and some immunocompromised individuals should receive a second mRNA booster (Pfizer or Moderna) four months after their first booster dose. Additionally, people who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine for both their primary dose and booster dose may receive a second booster dose using an mRNA vaccine.

Pfizer or Moderna vaccine boosters are preferred. Individuals age 5-17 can receive a Pfizer booster only.

Additional doses for immunocompromised people Individuals ages 5 and older who are moderately or severely immunocompromised should get an extra shot in their primary series, then get a booster shot if they are 12 and old-

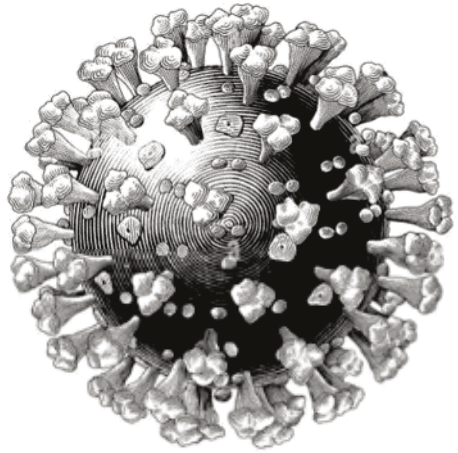
er. For those who initially received an mRNA vaccine (Moderna or Pfizer), they should get a third shot at least 28 days after their second shot, followed by a booster shot at least 3 months later. For those who initially received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, they should get an mRNA shot at least 28 days after their first shot, followed by a booster shot at least 2 months later. A second mRNA booster dose is available four months after the first booster dose.

In addition to vaccinations, immunocompromised individuals may also consider EVUSHELD. EVUSHELD is an FDA-authorized monoclonal antibody used to prevent COVID-19 infection for moderately to severely immunocompromised people who may not mount an adequate immune response to vaccination. EVUSHELD is not a substitute for COVID-19 vaccination in individuals for whom vaccination is recommended. Your health care provider can help you determine if this treatment is right for you.

Find a COVID-19 Vaccine Provider

COVID-19 vaccines are available at most pharmacies and provider offices in Alaska. Visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find convenient appointments or walk-in vaccine clinics near you, or browse our events calendar for special vaccine events.





EMPOWERED DECISIONS

VACCINATE
IT'S NOT TOO LATE

We know there are concerns in the Black community surrounding COVID-19 and vaccinations.

The Alaska Black Caucus wants you to feel **empowered** and **informed** to make this important decision. We are here to help.

To beat COVID-19, we must seek resources that are rooted in science, not fear.

COVID - 19 DECLARATION

The participants at the Bettye Davis African American Summit (both in-person and virtually) deeply appreciate the President/CEO of the Alaska Black Caucus (ABC) for graciously hosting the Bettye Davis African American COVID19 Summit on Oct. 23, 2022 at the Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School.

Because we know the COVID - 19 pandemic has caused unprecedented public health, social, economic, and security challenges and threatened the lives and livelihood of millions of people, and it has intensified inequalities worldwide, particularly regarding vaccine production and distribution. COVID -19 threatens the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of many health programs worldwide.

Reiterating the vaccine injustice is an existential challenge for health today: It divides between those who have access to vaccines and those who do not.

Recognizing that the ABC convened leading health experts nationally, statewide and locally to help educate, enlighten, fight for vaccine equality and ultimately, save lives. The participants urged political leaders, agencies and organizations, society and industry to strive for more equality in education, vaccination, testing and other measures to help save lives.

Emphasizing that despite efforts to increase delivery and access to COVID -19 vaccines through various mechanisms, now focused particularly on Black and other BIPOC are still left behind, which is particularly problematic for those groups who have especially high risk.

Stressing that there is no time to lose: vaccines are public good. Living without vaccinations put the lives of many people, as well as the economy and the security of the world, at stake. It also increases the risk for the development of more aggressive virus mutations and yet another pandemic wave. Fast and effective measures are needed to tackle the present situation and to increase preparedness for the future.

Underlining the importance for fair and equitable access to vaccines as the key to ending the pandemic, restoring normal life and economy, preventing the unacceptable health gap to widen further.

Recognizing that at the Bettye Davis African American COVID-19 Summit, the signatories of the Declaration on COVID - 19 Vaccine Equality strongly advocate strategic partnership and effective cooperation for distribution, production and access to vaccines according to scientific and medical need, with a focus on BIPOC communities.

Affirming that this crisis reminds us to foster the spirit of collaboration, solidarity, and cooperation instead of practicing vaccine egoism and nationalism. We need to transform Universal Health Coverage to include universal health preparedness, and universal health solidarity.

We are all in this together!

I GOT MY SHOT



Hennies McConnell

I spend a lot of time working with the public, which puts me at risk of either being diagnosed with COVID-19 or bringing it home. My wife's immune system was compromised, so I decided to get vaccinated and boosted for her protection and mine.

Vonnie Gaither, an Alaskan Artist, says, "the reason I wanted to get vaccinated and boosted is that I have heart disease, and I want to be here to enjoy my eight and five-year-old grandchildren."



Ruth McConnell says, "I have sarcoidosis of the lungs; I needed to make sure I was vaccinated and boosted; I did not want them pounding on my chest, which people have told me they experienced. I was told it was important to get my vaccinations and boosters."

Michelle Williams says, "I have an autoimmune disease diagnosis of multiple sclerosis."



Reverend Edwenia Collins

Brown says, "Our Christian beliefs must provide a critical moral framework and practical blueprint that guide our continued response to COVID-19. It's not all about me; we must resist the temptation of selfish individualism and prioritize the common good by showing special attention and care to those most vulnerable. However, my decision to get vaccinated and boosted was due to historical evidence that vaccinations and booster shots work."



PERSONAL STORIES

Delores Waldron: Hospitalized for two weeks, sent home positive for Covid-19 on an oxygen tank.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I viewed all the COVID-19 hype as a virus that I knew had to be airborne. As a retired nurse, it did have my attention. I did whatever they said to do. I already knew how to wash my hands. I sheltered in place unless I had to go out. I made sure I wore a mask and did the six feet of separation. We were careful, but my life shifted...my husband died on February 12, 2021.

A year after the pandemic began, a year of being in the house, and now the grief. After a while, my kids felt we all needed a change of scenery. We left the state and stopped in Las Vegas to visit one of my granddaughters on our way to North Carolina.

My journey with COVID-19 started [on that trip] with a horrible cough, which I had attributed to my chronic bronchitis, something I usually knew how to get over. However, one of my daughters became worried as the cough worsened, and she took me to a Vegas hospital emergency room. I tested negative for the virus, however, they kept me in the hospital to perform surgery on my aorta. The operation caused an unexpected extended stay in Vegas; although the doctors and nurses were good, I wanted to come back home to recuperate fully.

Once released to travel, we came back to Alaska. I was feeling better, ready to begin my cardiac rehabilitation. After being home for approximately a month, I started coughing again. I never felt sick, but my immune system had become compromised. Then about 2 a.m. one morning, my granddaughter found me washing down the bathroom walls. I was confused, so confused, and experiencing hallucinations. She was afraid and quickly took me to the hospital. Once there, I received a diagnosis of viral pneumonia due to COVID-19. My oxygen level was 60%, so I was placed on oxygen and admitted to the hospital. My oxygen level slowly increased, and I thank God I did not have to be intubated. During my hospital stay, I was not on many medications; I stayed in bed and prayed.

My hospital room felt different to me. It was a two-bedroom but only had one bed. Everything was different; I felt different, and my state of mind differed. I could not understand why I could not have visitors, especially

my kids. I felt alone, a little fearful; I was used to seeing my children every day. That was the most challenging thing for me to accept, not being able to see my kids or grandkids. Even though it was hard, I eventually accepted that for now, I could not see them. I spoke with them every day, and they called the nurse's station and the doctor to check on my progress daily.

My children wanted to care for me. They didn't know what was happening to me. They didn't see the quality of care, and they were fearful also. My daughter Sherise would leave food at the nurse's station and the nurse would bring it to me. Some days I could eat a little. On other days, I could only eat some. I had no sense of taste or smell. During my stay, I was not on many medications; I stayed in bed and prayed.

My mind was blank. I imagined things. I just wanted to be around my kids. There was nothing else on my mind. The fear I felt without my kids around was hard on me. That is hard when you are used to interacting



Photo by TeamJones Photography

with people every day and then nothing but strangers. During my first few days, I had out-of-body experiences where I would look down at myself, crying and screaming. I knew it wasn't real, but that knowledge did not make me feel any better. I now know that delusions are another symptom of COVID's effect on the brain.

After my first week, a nurse came to see me. She had been gone for a few days, and she told me how she was happy that I was still here. Others my age (octogenarian) had not made it. Other nurses and so many doctors came by to check on me. Alaska Regional nurses were so lovely. The hospital in Vegas was good, but not as good as ours here. I felt the doctors here had a more understanding bedside manner.

When I came home, my kids worked shifts to care for me, two at a time. I was released on an oxygen tank, still testing positive for COVID-19. My doctor said I was a fighter, that there had been a younger woman on his caseload who was not as medically compromised as me who did not make it. I give all credit to God. He kept me!

I am still experiencing some aftereffects, such as brain fog. I must use eye drops for my eyes, and my skin itches as if I have a rash. I sometimes don't remember things. But before COVID, I didn't remember some things anyway. COVID-19 has also caused damage to my lungs, which were not too great anyway. Although I stopped smoking over 40 years ago, a doctor told me I still had scar tissue from the cigarettes. That is why I would cough up mucus and have problems with the lower part of my lungs, which is COVID-19 residue. I believe if you don't do follow-up, you are in trouble. It helps with the aftereffects to know what is happening and how my body heals.

As I look back at life before the pandemic, I would walk every day. One of my daughters and I used to run in marathons. I ran a basketball camp for 20 years. I led a very physically active life. I also live a vibrant spiritual life of worship and fellowship. I usher and participate in many events at the church.

As I get well, I will be with my family, go to church, and continue to help people wherever I can. I completed my three-month, three times per week cardiac rehab at Alaska Regional, a good program. After the bout with COVID-19, I missed going to church. I would watch what I could on social media, but I really missed the in-person services. I am amazed that I stayed away from church for a year. Losing my husband after 40 years – we did everything together – it's been a journey, a struggle. But God has been faithful and blessed me with a good life, a good husband,

and the world's best mom before him.

I don't know how I got COVID-19. I did not leave the house to visit other people. My family and I followed strict protocols. I had begun to participate in water aerobics again; someone there may have had it and not told anyone. I don't understand why [someone] would not tell anyone they had COVID. I can and will tell anyone that I had it. I would not go out and be around other people until I was sure I was free of the virus. I feel it is so shameful to infect other people. I don't know why people don't do the right thing; it's like being in a crowd and having a killer among you. COVID-19 is no joke. Please don't be ashamed; let people know you have COVID!

People need to know that anyone can get COVID-19 because it is airborne. Make sure your family is protected. Eat right, stay away from crowds, partying, and all that stuff. Wear a mask. It is a deterrent – you may still get it – but it may not be as bad as it could be. Also, make sure you get all your shots – many people who don't get vaccinated end up on respirators or worse! I questioned the vaccine, but I got it anyway. COVID attacks the lungs, brain, and heart. It is only because of the grace of God that I sit in my house today, slowly getting better. I made it through because of God's grace, mercy, and blessings he has bestowed upon me.



Paula Allen - Wait and see until COVID touched her personally.

Before our diagnosis, my thoughts about COVID were that I wanted to wait and see. What was COVID-19, and how long was it going to be around?

However, I had a sister-in-law who lived in Alaska who had become ill. We had faith that God would heal her, so she never tested. Her employer had contacted us and asked us to contact her, informing us that it was not like her to take leave without letting them know. We contacted her, and three days later, she died. She did not have a Will, and she left two adult special needs children. I was angry about that, but I have forgiven her now.

My husband filed for guardianship and a good friend stepped in and was willing to take the children; we were happy about that. Her [Paula's sister-in-law] children are 21 and 23 years old who she mainly kept by herself; I don't know how she did it for so long, but she did. I saw them this past December when they came into town from the Valley. They are working at Carrs and are happy to be contributing to society. They both tested positive for COVID-19 but have recovered. Our friend caring for them has indeed been a blessing to them and us. They get to learn how to live and be responsible adults.

On January 12, 2021, my husband and I both began to experience a cough; his was a wet cough, and mine was dry. He contacted one of his coworkers, telling him about our symptoms, which we believed were due to COVID-19. My husband's coworker asked if we had tested; we had not, so he came by our home and gave us the home test kit. We had not heard about a home test; I think they were just starting home testing. He provided us with the tests, and we found we were positive that same night. I wasn't worried; my husband thought it was fatal for him, but I had confidence that it would not be fatal for me! I have known the Lord too long!

The next day we went to the Dimond COVID Center and received a rapid test which confirmed our home test. They also tested us to see if we were able to receive the monoclonal antibody, which they gave us the next day. I believe this treatment was only available for those who were 64 years old or older. It was also the same treatment that President Trump received.

I believe we did not experience any added COVID symptoms due to the monoclonal antibody infusion. I may have taken cough drops, and we kept essential oils in our air purifier, which we had on all the time. It was about a week when we returned to the Center and received a negative test.



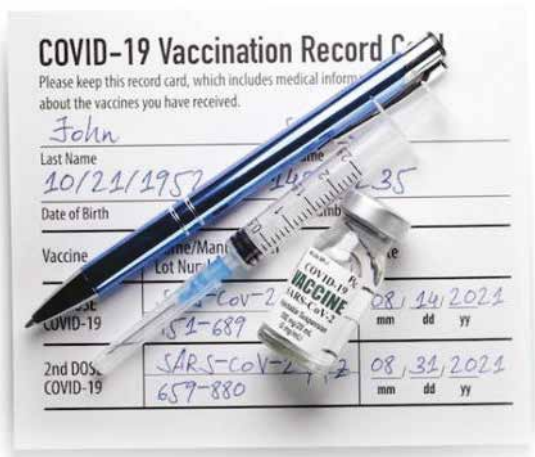
Photo by TeamJones Photography

We have always lived a quiet life. There was really no change during the hunker down in our personal lives. I have an interdenominational Christian prayer ministry we have been doing for over 20 years, Healing Rooms of Alaska, and I had to stop holding prayer on Thursday nights.

While sheltering in, we connected more with our families. We text and call family more often than we did before COVID. We set up a family ZOOM with our families in California. During this time, I completed my Reiki class. I am pursuing my goals.

This COVID experience fortified my faith because my hope lies in God. It stretched me. I saw it as a SELAH. It was as if God had suspended everything. He slowed us down, and the earth was able to regenerate, giving us a chance to breathe. The skyline you could not see before in some cities, but after He slowed us down, you could see it. It was clear.

We are double vaccinated. We put on masks, got on a plane, and went to Hawaii in March; we are getting back to living. I believe it's essential for people to keep moving forward, trusting science, and trusting God. I am ready for the next, whatever God has for me, WHATEVER! HE HAS FOR ME! This experience fortified my faith because my hope lies in Him. I will not stop until the Lord takes me home.



Get vaccinated!

Margo Bellamy – Trust the Science get vaccinated and both boosters.



Photo by TeamJones Photography

I have always taken COVID seriously in my personal and professional life. When the Anchorage School District started offering vaccines, I was one of the first in line. My family and I have been real COVID-conscious. We sanitized at home more, stayed home more, and wore a mask whenever I was out.

In my household, we received double shots and double booster shots too. However, I had only gotten my first booster when I tested positive. I believe if I had gotten that second one, I would not have gotten COVID. I stayed out of the hospital. I went to the hospital only because I had a headache; I had never had a headache like that before. I had no fever. If my campaign manager [during Margo's run for school board] had not been exposed and had not come down with COVID, I would not have noticed. I would not have given it a second thought if he and I had not had a meeting two or three days before.

I remember that I became aware that I was exhausted, had no energy, and was fatigued, but had no fever. In our house, we tested every week, and if something happened during that week, we tested again, so I am thankful for that home test. It was one of the things I did on Wednesdays; I took the test, and it had two lines. I took a picture and sent it to my daughter; she said to get another test. I masked up and went and took the test. It came back positive too.

I still wasn't feeling anything besides the fatigue, but by that Friday, I had this headache that went from temple to temple, which I thought was high blood pressure. So, I did go to the hospital emergency room and told them I had tested positive. She said, "Yeah, you do have COVID." I told her, "I am 72 years old – do I need to go into the hospital now? I have had both vaccinations and one booster. The attendant replied, "no, we will just keep an eye on you, if you have been vaccinated and boosted there's no need for you to go into the hospital." She told me that a headache was a symptom, though it was one I had not heard about. I heard about the fatigue. I had no fever but chills, which was unusual for me. If I had chills, I usually had a fever. Once I knew it was not my blood pressure, I just had to hang in there with this headache.

At some point, I noticed it was getting more difficult for me to hold on to thoughts. My brain was foggy, and it took me longer to do things where I would usually be able to do something just like that. Reading my emails took longer, and sending a text took longer. Brain fog was the scariest part; the fatigue was the most aggravating. After a week, my head began to clear up. I got a tickle in my throat; I still must sometimes clear my throat. It's a COVID after-effect. I started to lose my hair, which has been challenging to come to terms with, but I have a close friend who lost hers, and it has come back. So, I thank God for losing hair and a tickle in my throat; they're minimal compared to what others are experiencing as their COVID residual struggles.

Those were my significant challenges, slowing down my cognitive faculties, which lasted about two weeks. Brain fog came in stages – I had to write things down more, and I have a memory like an elephant. I could remember things that happened 50 years ago, but I was struggling to remember things that happened right now. That was the scariest part, and I am thankful that is no longer the case.

I am pretty much back to normal, no brain fog, fatigue, or fever. I know because I had that one vaccination and booster, I had no coughing, temperature, or sore throat, and I never lost taste or smell. I love my coffee. When it comes to coffee, I love to smell and taste my coffee.

Pre-COVID, we were a very active family, and I was very active in the community. I spent a lot of time in face-to-face church and school meet-

ings. When the hunker-down orders occurred, I followed directions as much as possible and attended church virtually. There was no in-person social life; we limited who came into our house and who we visited. We did not socialize with anyone else but family. I was blessed to have my daughter and her son live with us. We had that; it was not just us in the home alone. It was a time for family. We did more cookouts in the yard, my grandson attended virtual school, and we had the opportunity to help with his education. From March 2020 through January 2021, I don't think we saw anyone face to face besides family.

My husband and I had medical appointments, and I am thankful that the doctors did not shut down. They had protocols in place – you pulled up for your appointment, let them know you were there, and waited in your car. Once inside, you followed whatever protocols they had in place: mask, sanitize, go into the room, see the doctor, and follow the same protocols on your way out.

COVID caused everyone to rethink everything, and technology helped ensure you were engaging. We were able to hold birthday parties and paint parties, and if we could fit on a ZOOM, we did it. I focused more on my learning, which I access virtually. I taught my students at UAA virtually.

In my sorority we held our meetings virtually, held special events online, and used technology to check in on each other, ensuring people had what they needed. Even with my neighbors, we left notes more often than we would have; usually, we would be at each other's doors, in each other's homes, checking on each other's needs.

My in-laws and my family are scattered coast to coast in the lower 48 and we would meet on ZOOM, my family at one time and my in-laws at another. We kept in touch much better with ZOOM and through text than before the pandemic. My husband had to learn the skill of texting. He could not text pre-COVID; he now sees the value of texting. Not only is he sending texts, but he answers them now too!

I ran for office during this time of no in-person contact. The first time I ran, there was more personal contact. I called and talked to people, met them, and went where they were. I knew this time would be pretty different, so I hired a campaign manager who knew all the ins and outs of technology. He knew how to reach people and maximize my time. I would call someone if they did not pick up. I could leave a message but did not have to record it personally. The system would determine a time for me to call back. I ran the last campaign without a single in-person event.

I attended community council meetings and fundraisers via ZOOM. I

have never seen as many people in the community council meetings as I have over the last two years. Although some have excellent attendance, you are lucky to have ten people in the room. Well, we had 100 people in the room and another fifty trying to get on ZOOM. ZOOM allowed the council to increase its capacity. I have seen younger people attend these meetings. People can tune in to a meeting while getting themselves and their families together. Those who had young children could get them settled and still attend. Community council meetings are at five or six o'clock in the evening, which does not work for a young family. However, because of the technology, their attendance has been excellent. I have not been in a council meeting with less than 30 people.

I found virtual church interesting, but I look forward to getting back into the entire flow of church. I am more worried about my husband than myself. I don't want to bring anything home because he is immunocompromised, and we must ensure he is not unnecessarily exposed. Figuring out school for my grandson was scary, but you got to do it. How were we to mitigate his attending in-person school because he needed to be in school? The school had protocols, and we set up our protocol between home and school. We no longer make him take his clothes off in the garage before he enters the house. He remembers that routine very well. He said to me the other day, "Nanna have the germs gone away yet? I don't want to wear my mask." I told him they were almost gone, but there would always be germs. He didn't have to wear his mask during the last two days of school, which made him very happy!!

Through it all, we managed to have fun. The organizations I support with my service made the loop, switched to ZOOM, and I could track those. I missed the physical touch; I like to see your eyes engage as much as your words, but your body language lets me know how you feel. But I thank God for the technology.

It allowed me to meet with people, was a way for me to connect to people, and I met a lot of new people. Some of these people, I knew their eyes, and just recently have met them face to face; I feel like I have known them forever. That was a different way of thinking and living, and I thrive on the energy of others. It doesn't come the same way through ZOOM as in the moment and the present!

It was a struggle for me personally as a member of the School Board, the decisions you make are not necessarily the ones you want, and they are the ones that are best for everyone. And in the age of COVID, as a woman, it was not lost on me that the people impacted the most were poor people. Part of that is the systemic inequities in healthcare, and the other part is historical. I had to convince my husband to take the shot. He remembered what he read about the Tuskegee incident – "It's a manmade virus." It may be, but right now it is all we got. I am not a sci-

entist. Not being a scientist, I trust science.

COVID impacted my entire life, but despite it being a challenge, we had great opportunities. I connected more with my own family. I participated in professional development. I joined conversations I probably never would have joined if I had to get up and go to them.

It helped to have friends and family that would look out for you and you for them. Even the phone calls were good and welcomed. I remember telling my husband, daughter, and the school board I had COVID. I chaired the board meeting via ZOOM. I had not been around the board members. It was my responsibility to let them know.

I had gotten my hair and nails done and told them it was necessary to inform them; it was my responsibility to let people know. That was a busy week, too, it was the end of the campaign, and we had planned to have a thank you event for the staff and volunteers at Gallo's Mexican Restaurant. So, I had to cancel a lot of stuff that week. And people were so gracious. I did not take anything for COVID and let it run its course. I took medication for the headache; besides that, I took my usual supplements.

I have always pictured my family and others nestled in the hands of God, where I feel the most secure and will stay. I didn't have to question my faith; I just nestled in more. During COVID, my church family at New Hope reached out weekly once people knew. I had told my Pastor and a good friend because I was worried about her. I thank God for the technology. They were not okay until they could see my face. It was a nice touch and very reassuring to have people care. There was nothing they could do for me except help the boys. My faith has not changed. It was as strong as ever, no questions, there was no doubt! It was here I am, I am in your Hands, and I know it's going to be the way it will be.

I have friends now who will not take the vaccine for religious reasons. I don't challenge that. They are in the hands of their God, just like I am in the hands of my God. The problem is that they could infect those around them, who also may not be vaccinated or vaccinated and have a breakthrough case.

In the future, I can only answer by what I say to my family and those close to me, trust the science. No one is perfect, and science is not perfect; it is ever-evolving. Follow the science and do what you can to be a responsible person. Take the vaccine and take both boosters. It will keep you alive. At 72 years old, I did not have to go to the hospital. It is a blessing.

So, take the vaccine, and encourage those around you to be vaccinated. This pandemic had to start with one person and one host, and it infected the whole world. We knew nothing then; we know now that we cannot mitigate what happened. But when you know better, you do better. We know the vaccines work; the boosters keep you out of the hospital and help keep those vaccines viable.

My advice is to do the best, follow and trust the science, and get vaccinated and boosted. Encourage those around you to do the same. We owe each other that at a minimum. I still wear a mask today and don't gather in large groups. Please don't be ashamed to wear your mask; you are a strong person. I will get to the point where I will be at a comfort level where I will not wear it as much. However, I am still cautious.



"Please don't be ashamed to wear your mask; you are a strong person."



Photo by TeamJones Photography

Edwin Brown: Fully vaccinated, Edwin tested positive for COVID twice.

I've had COVID twice, that I know of. The first time, I was coming back from the movies and thought I just had a nasty headache. I had an energy drink and was drinking too fast, and then my head started hurting. Every time I looked around my head hurt *really* bad. This was last year or might have been two years ago [summer of 2020]. I wasn't mad that I got it; I thought someone just touched the drink I'd bought.

It took like five days to a week for me to get over it. My head hurt and I was tired. To me, COVID felt like a big headache. The second time was basically the same thing, so I wasn't really worried about it.

I was vaccinated when I got it the first time. I got the Moderna shot; my arm was sore, not super sore. The second time I got COVID I thought,

“It’s trash.” [slang to describe an activity that is less than desirable]. I got it more than once, you know? I don’t want to get a booster or a third shot.

Bridgette [Edwin’s longtime girlfriend] got it, and she was vaccinated. She had it for like a week, and she had it like way worse than me. Her lower back was hurting. My friend Nate got it; well, his brother had it on a trip to Seattle where we all were together with other friends in a group. We don’t think he got it [COVID] before. He got it after, but it was okay.

I was scared when COVID first came out, when everyone else started getting it, but I didn’t really care for a while. I don’t think COVID is as serious as people said it was. I’m 21, maybe if I was a little older, it would suck more?

I’m actually scared about monkeypox, about the same level of fear as when COVID first came out. I would stay home for monkeypox or mumps or something. Definitely was more worried about how it looked on me. I would *actually* stay home! I wouldn’t go anywhere at all. I’d definitely react more to monkeypox. I mean, have you seen it!?

In the end, getting vaccinated is your choice. I got vaccinated more for convenience, like you wouldn’t be able to go out of state and stuff if you didn’t get your vaccination. As far as comparing COVID and monkeypox vaccinations, I’d take the first [monkeypox vaccine], maybe the second one. monkeypox is scary. I don’t know if it’s terrible, like how contagious it is, or how it spreads.* I’d have to see how it goes.

**The monkeypox virus can spread when a person comes into contact with the virus from an infected animal, infected person, or materials contaminated with the virus. To learn more visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/transmission.html>*

Roscoe Wyche: For restaurant owner Roscoe Wyche, COVID was a blessing and a curse.

Of course, like everyone COVID was something that took us all by surprise; it was a scary situation. It was like watching a science fiction episode become a reality and eventually coming to light. As COVID rolled across the country, people were dying, and the number of cases was growing; it affected and changed my family's lives daily.

Especially in the restaurant business, we were dealing with so many people. As restaurateurs, we have a more outstanding obligation to protect ourselves and keep the public safe from any disease or illness. Before all this, it was, "I am calling in sick." You would say, "Okay," or you might not believe them so you may ask for a doctor's note. Now it's, "Please stay home! Do not come in!" COVID has brought a heightened sense of awareness to all aspects of life. People were afraid to come out of their homes and dine out-- that was a whole 'nother story! Being a social butterfly who likes to see people, communicate with people, and just be with people, COVID impacted me in my interactions with customers, friends, and strangers.

As hard as it may be to believe, the hunker down time was an enjoyable time and a lousy time. We utilized Door Dash and Grub Hub, which helped us out a lot. Working with these businesses picked up our business. Although using them increased expenses, we acquired new customers through those relationships. The business was so good that it kept us from receiving government funds that were made available to help with small businesses and/or restaurant revitalization. According to our taxes, we made more in 2020 than in 2019. We fell into a category that disqualified us from receiving the assistance that others were able to get. It was a catch-22; it helped, but it hurt also.

During this period, there was a burglary at the restaurant, and the guy set fire to the stove to cover it up. Fortunately, the fire department was around the corner and saw the flames. We had just finished remodeling the floors and countertops; there is a lot of water damage throughout the restaurant, and the costs for the damage have exceeded the insurance.

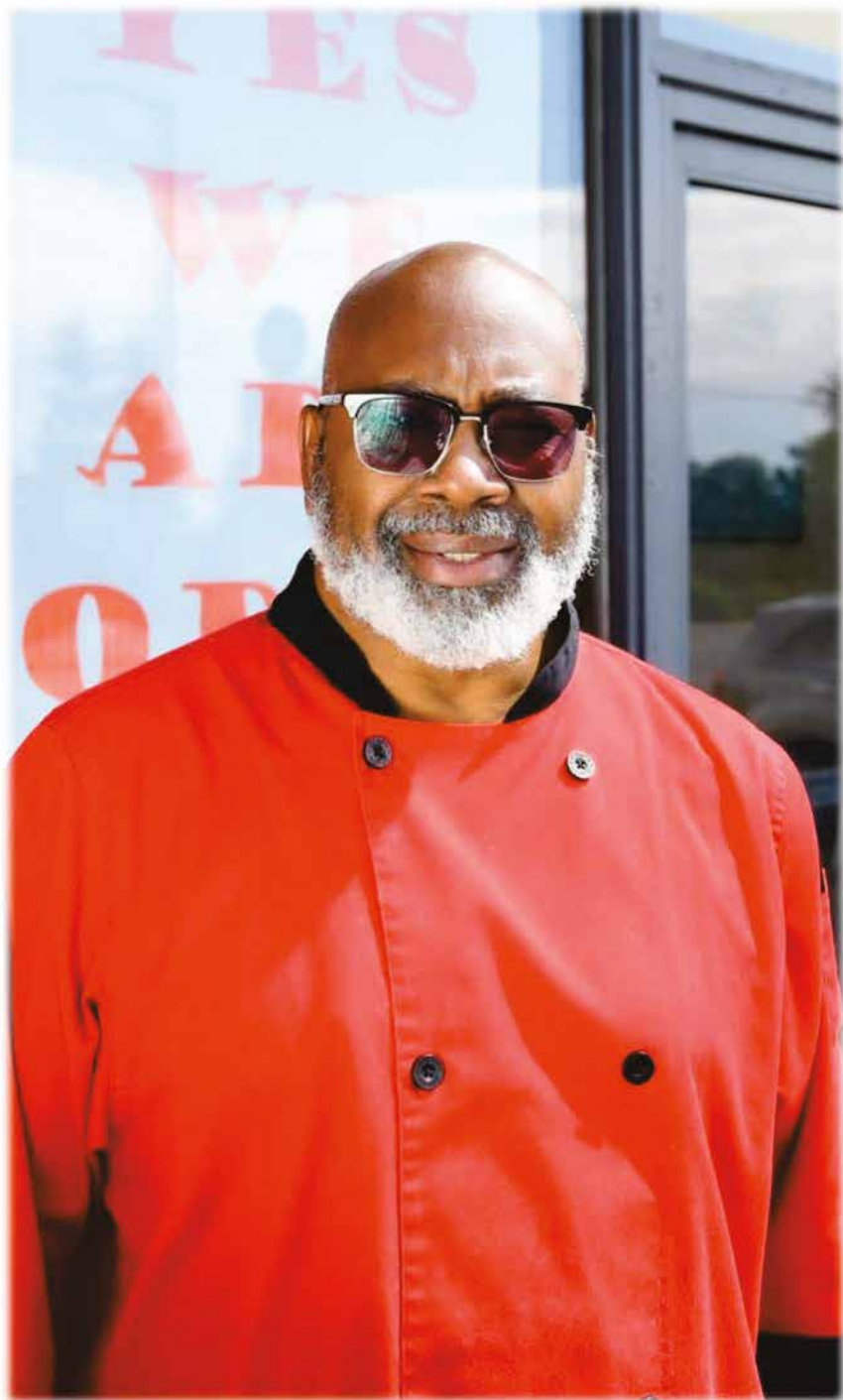


Photo by TeamJones Photography

A program sponsored by the Alaska Restaurant Association had a lottery that allowed you to cater to needy people. We were a part of that program, which we enjoyed, although we did not have any income and had to purchase the food. We had to feed 50 people. I always try to bring a smile to people's faces. The Lord has blessed me to cook food that reminds people of their food from back home. It's hard to see the smiles through the masks, but you can tell! I am trying to make life a better place. I walk with God every day. That's where I am at.

During the pandemic, we made a lot of phone calls and checked in on family members, making sure everyone was okay, seeing if they needed anything, and things of that nature. A nice friendly hello and finding out if anything is needed goes a long way with family and friend bonds. We did celebrations differently; birthdays and graduations were drive-by situations, more so than family gatherings. Whoever was having the birthday or graduation appreciated the drive-by.

I did not contract COVID, but my sister, niece, and her family did. My grandfather contracted it while in an assisted living home in Georgia. Ultimately, he succumbed, and an uncle in Florida died from it. It definitely affected our family directly.

My grandmother lived to be 101. We had a caregiver who looked after her. The caregiver contracted COVID and died. She was in her late 20s or early 30s. To see such a bright woman, full of energy, succumb was hard. She called my sister to let her know that she had gone to the hospital and that they wanted to put her on a ventilator. She did not want to because they never come off once people are on the ventilator. She called my sister to come and get her, but the hospital would not let her leave. Her vital organs were already shutting down. Her husband was stuck out of the country because of COVID. And she was alone. You see your loved ones go to the hospital and die alone. It's just another dire situation COVID brought into our lives. This disease touched all of us.

We have had vaccinations and boosters for smallpox, polio, and chicken pox. All the kids had to get vaccinated for school. And now people want to relate the reason they don't get the vaccine to their religion, afraid because it is the mark of the beast. Getting vaccinated was something I wanted to protect my family, myself, and others. I encourage everyone to get vaccinated and boosted; had my grandmother's caregiver gotten vaccinated, maybe she would be alive. People are dying because they didn't have the vaccination, and they could have gotten it. Yes, some

people still get COVID after being vaccinated. People are quick to say, "He was vaccinated, and he got it." They don't understand that the vaccination doesn't stop COVID from happening, but it keeps you out of the hospital in most cases.

My first hope is that we continue to pray for one another and put God first. That is what I have done, put God first. And I treat people with respect, stay focused on being a better person, and try to lead by example. I am not a politician, and one of my fears is that we do not have good leadership. When the pandemic first started, there was a lot of inaction. When we were first notified, knowing what we know now, many illnesses and deaths could have been prevented. We must fight for good leadership!

My personal relationship with God before COVID has helped me so much during the pandemic. I am a member of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. I have always enjoyed the teachings and leadership of Pastor Alonzo Patterson; he is a great leader, a good teacher, and most of all, a trusted voice in our family and community. At times like this, it helps your inner spirit to know that you are walking with someone with a true heart and faith. I pray every day; I have faith in God. God has blessed me and my family. Going forward, people need to vaccinate and boost, if not for themselves, then for me, my family, and our community.





Photo by TeamJones Photography

Walsh Brown: Vaccinated, boosted, and a COVID survivor.

When we went on lockdown back in 2020, I was worried because I didn't know what it would do to me. I was not concerned to the point where I could not function. In the back of my mind, it was like, "If I get this thing will it knock me out? Would it put me in the hospital?" I did what I needed to, got the vaccinations, stayed away from people, and washed my hands.

By 2022, when I got the virus, I had become a little lax. I was not doing the strict handwashing and mask-wearing like I was supposed to. I wore my mask for a little while until I got to the point where I did not see the need to wear it. There was no longer a mask mandate. I had stopped wearing them if I were in a place where there was open space. But

when I was around people I didn't know, I would wear one.

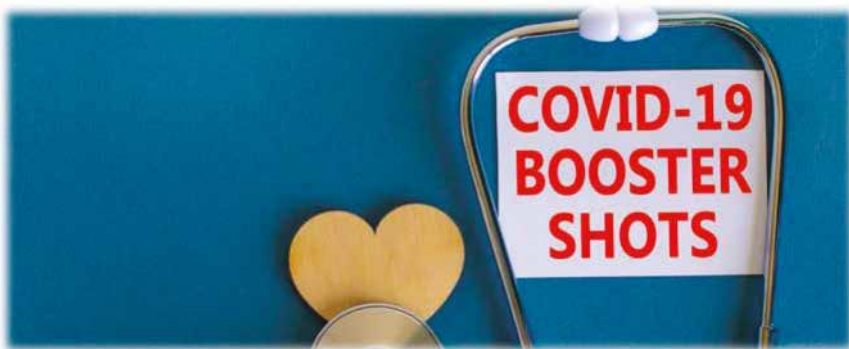
Early in the year, there was a gathering where everyone was masked, but I had to speak and took my mask off. After my presentation, we had a luncheon where we were appropriately spaced but had to take our masks off to eat. I must have encountered somebody who had COVID, and that is where I got it.

I got COVID in January of 2022. I had gotten both my vaccines and a booster. I ended up getting it ironically right after getting my first booster shot. I had a terrible headache and then I got sick. I was congested, but I thought I had allergies. We had a warm spell during the winter, some warm winds came in, and I thought maybe the temperature change – when it's a dramatic temperature change, I'll get congested and sick – was what was going on.

Then I got tested because of how people reacted to the virus. I just wanted to be sure. I did not want to accidentally pass it to my mom, who is in her 70s, or anybody else. I work at a church, and I did not want to affect anyone there. So, I got the test thinking it was going to be negative, and it turned out to be positive.

I was in denial. I didn't think it was COVID. I had just had my booster shot two and a half weeks beforehand; I got the booster the first week of January, and then in the third week, I had gotten COVID. I thought that they were detecting the effects of the booster shot, so I asked them if this was a possibility. When I took my second test, it took four days to get my positive results by e-mail. I was very concerned because I was at risk. I am diabetic and overweight, so I was worried about the severity of the illness. I was afraid of hospitalization and did not want any lasting effects.

Anyway, I got it and was sick for about three days. On the first day, I



had chills, a bad headache, and congestion. By the third day, I felt almost normal. So about five days after my initial sickness, two days after my positive test results, I went to Starbucks and got a coffee. At the time, the quarantine was five days, and then you would have to wear a mask for another five days. I had gone to a Starbucks after five days of quarantine. I got a coffee and a slice of lemon loaf. When I got home, I ate the slice of the lemon loaf and was like, "Man, they didn't put any sugar in this lemon loaf, this tastes like a piece of bread." Then it dawned on me that I had partially lost my sense of taste. I could not taste anything sweet. I could not taste anything sour. I could taste salt, like in meats.

Once I recovered from COVID, the fear and concern about COVID subsided because I knew I could survive it. It was only three days of severe discomfort. I didn't need oxygen or go into intensive care or anything like that. That doesn't mean I don't have to get another shot. I will take my second booster and continue to follow the CDC's advice.

After my experience with COVID, I was relieved – I knew it wouldn't batter me. There is no telling about a new strain. I did get the Omicron strain, there's no telling what the new strain will do, but there's a sense of relief to know that I can survive COVID even with my pre-existing conditions. I don't fear it. When I got it and got through it, I thanked God; that is all it was for me. I know that is not always the same for everybody. I try to think of others, so I will continue to be vaccinated, and if I must wear the mask again, I will. It looks like there is an end to the tunnel, at least for me. I feel confident that I will probably not have anything more severe than before.

COVID has not impacted my professional and personal life significantly. I work every day. I'm an IT manager, so it is easy to work from home, and often my work requires other employees to be out of the workplace before I can complete my tasks. I started a business last year, a production company, that is doing well. My family in Alaska is small. We gather constantly and were only separated when a member had to quarantine. I live a quiet life. My social circle includes a few close friends; we were able to gather, and I am glad I can go golfing again! These interpersonal relationships are VALUABLE now; they were even more so during the last three years of COVID. I am thankful!

I believe my experience with COVID was a severe threat. I'm not saying it was overhyped. I believe if I hadn't had my vaccinations and my booster, I probably would have been sicker than I was. I don't think the

vaccination was a waste of time. I believe it was beneficial – possibly a lifesaver! Let's face it, some people will get COVID, even when vaccinated and boosted. Some people will not get COVID, whether vaccinated or not. I believe it is a virus, like the flu or a cold you get, and it can wreak havoc on your body. Every time, I will go with the vaccinations and boosters. At some point, I am hoping here in the next two to three years, just like with the flu, there will be a vaccination you can take to prevent infection.

That is my experience with COVID. I think it has been positive in that there are no lingering illnesses or lasting effects. I'm thankful for making it through. As far as I know, I have only had it once. I do not want it again, as I'm not too fond of feeling sick, but I do not fear it. If I get it again, I will rest and do what I must. If a new variant comes out, I believe I will survive it.

I am Walsh Brown, and I have had COVID!

*The best way to protect yourself
from COVID-19, including Omicron
is to get vaccinated and boosted.*



Lynette McNair – I was asymptomatic.

February of 2020, I was home recovering from a surgical procedure. I watched a lot of television, and during this time, I began hearing about the Coronavirus or COVID-19. At the beginning of COVID-19, the President made COVID sound like it was simply a form of the flu, and no one had to worry about it. This information shaped my view of COVID-19 during the early days. It was a viral disease similar to the flu virus. Some people died from the flu virus, and COVID-19 was another flu strain. I wasn't too concerned.

However, COVID-19 quickly became an epidemic and then a pandemic. Everyone was sheltering in place. It seemed like we were living out a scene in a Zombie Apocalypse movie. People were buying all the disinfectants, toilet paper, water, and food, storing up for the unknown circumstances of the growing pandemic and isolation. This panic buying helped me realize that COVID-19 was much more than the average flu virus. I began to do my research.

I was working and had a vibrant and active social life. I participated in several organizations. I was an event planner for one organization; I planned fundraisers, meetings, and travel. When the shelter-in-place orders took effect, I had to learn how to interact with people in a new way. And I, the social butterfly, was now in the house, working from home, texting, calling, face-timing, zooming--using whatever vehicle was available to stay active and involved.

I love to travel and was happy when the airlines were flying again. Once travel opened, a friend and I took a trip to Disney World. To stay safe, we followed all airline and Disney World COVID protocols. When we returned, we knew we had just left crowded conditions in Florida, and even though Anchorage residents were not required to test, I tested anyway. I tested positive for COVID. However, I did not believe my test results were accurate. I felt fine and had no symptoms; I learned some people are asymptomatic. I decided to retest three days later, and the effects were negative. While I was not considered a risk, after receiving my negative COVID test results, I decided to get vaccinated to reduce the chance of getting COVID and putting others at risk.



Photo by Tara Jones Photography

I am pregnant now and have other medical complications and conditions putting me at high risk. I have taken precautions, such as working from home, wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, and shopping online. I carefully plan my interactions and movements so that COVID does not hinder my quality of life.

I am grateful that my faith has not been affected by my experience. My faith and belief in God helped me know I was making the right decision to receive the vaccination. There was so little research on the effects of the vaccine on women who would later get pregnant, pregnant women, and the babies born to women who received the vaccination and booster shots. Many protestors loudly proclaimed the vaccine was unsuitable for expectant mothers and their unborn children. The medical community was not saying much to refute these claims. So again, I did my research and trusted God.

People need to know that we will face many medical, emotional, spiritual, and physical challenges in life. Regardless of our challenges, we must have faith and trust that God will see us through each challenge. But we must also be prepared and stay informed to ensure our families, and we are safe. The BIPOC community faced many disparities in receiving adequate medical care during COVID-19. I am Black, so it was vital for me to understand the dynamics of the virus. It was essential to know how to keep me safe, which vaccine was best for me and where to seek medical attention if I wanted to receive the best care.

As we move forward, I hope more people will receive the vaccine, and as research progresses, the COVID-19 virus will soon fade so life can return to normal.



Photo by TeamJones Photography

Penyon & Arnold Dade

HAVE YOU HAD COVID, BEEN EXPOSED TO COVID, OR LOST A LOVED ONE TO COVID?

Penyon was the first to answer, "No, I have not had COVID."

Arnold answers quickly, "I have had COVID... caught it off a family member."

HOW HAS COVID IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

For Penyon, "Scary" was the word she used to describe the beginning of the pandemic. "'Shutting the house' and 'quarantined' are words we all know all too well on a global scale, which was a completely new way to conduct life." Penyon conveyed an overarching aura of nurturing and caregiving to ensure her and her family's safety. Her goal was to bring about "as much normalcy as possible." As such, COVID has impacted her significantly and allowed for new online businesses and new positive beginnings.

Arnold had a different perspective. "It [COVID] got real for me when my brother passed away." Arnold knew it was severe quickly. "Two calls... two days." It only took two days from the time he discovered his brother had gotten COVID from another relative to the last time Arnold's broth-

er would draw breath. "He was gone that fast. That is when it was real to me." He turned his whole life around about it.

A

STEP UP & A HAND UP

COVID shut the whole world down and impacted everyone's life in some shape or form. Now, each person must choose how to move forward. And that's an interconnectedness I see between Penyon and Arnold.

They both decided to move forward in positivity, bridging the gaps in the lives of people they can touch, be it family, friends, or others, and within themselves, fostering improvements both big and small. The pair took a four-month trip with the vision and purpose to visit family that had fallen out of contact.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW TO COPE WITH COVID?

Arnold said, "Safety. Pick your surroundings well, prepare your surroundings well, make sure your hands are clean. There's a lot of safety to the point of even leaving out of your door. COVID is very serious."



Penyon chimed in, "I wash my hands constantly. I wear my mask all the time. We don't eat out as much as we used to. Even buying groceries, I'm constantly buying and using hand sanitizers and hand wipes." The overarching theme between the two is, "Be cautious and take that extra time for safety, not only for your protection but for others."

IS THERE ANY FURTHER ADVICE YOU WISH TO SHARE?

Penyon's advice – "With me thinking about this pandemic, this isn't the first pandemic we've had. I think people tend to forget possibly. I mean, you know when I was young, we had polio and had to take vaccines for polio. HIV, influenza, the 'Asian Flu' (H2N2), cholera, we've had smallpox... we've had all types of pandemics over the years and so we will continue to have pandemics. It's just the way we handle them, and if they say to get a vaccine, we need to get a vaccine. We need to get vaccinated. We need boosters. I mean, that's the only way they knocked these other ones out. With vaccines and with boosters,

we no longer have polio and smallpox and the other pandemics and epidemics that we used to have. So, we need to do that with COVID. We need to fight COVID as hard as COVID is fighting us”.

Arnold's advice – “We definitely have to protect our families. Why give something to another family member if you love them? Do you call that love? That is not love. If they have something to prevent having a vaccine, you know? To prevent this disease, why not protect your family, you know? If you say your vows to be married for better or worse –this is worse. If you're married, it shouldn't be a question. When you lose somebody that you really love, and you didn't take that shot, the world will come to your reality and kick in real quick, real quick. But protect your family, especially the men, you know what your job is, do your job. Protect your family. If you don't want to take your shot, that's fine but protect me from you! I don't want to catch something from you.”

Penyon adds – “We're not saying that the vaccine and the booster will prevent COVID, but it slows down the symptoms because even though Arnold was vaccinated and boosted, he still caught COVID, but it just wasn't tremendous. The severe symptoms were not to where he had to go to the hospital, and he was able to fight it himself. I believe those that didn't get vaccinated or boosted, I think they really suffer the consequences. It's all about understanding what we are dealing with. Really try your best to take care of yourself and your family.”

Arnold – “It took me 10 days to get over COVID; for some people, it takes 30 days, but you can get over it if you have your shots.”

Penyon – “But it took him two months to test negative.”

It took that time to get back to normalcy, Arnold admitted. However, Penyon said the two still get tested twice a month.

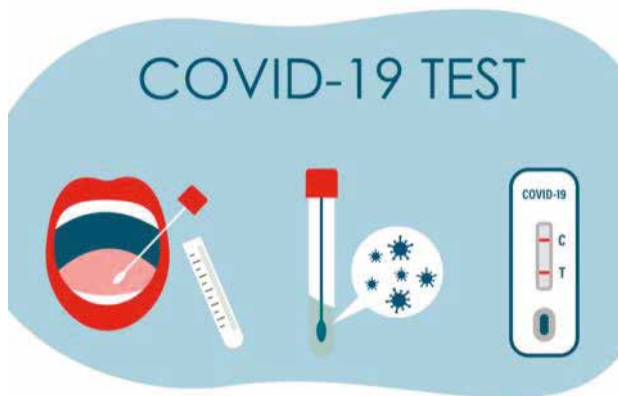




Photo by TeamJones Photography

The Sisters - Matilda Yeager & Esteria McGrew.

Matilda Yeager-

In the very beginning, although I was hesitant about hunkering down and wearing a mask, I did. It was not until I saw the actual numbers and my sister got sick did I recognize the seriousness of COVID-19. My daughter caught Covid from my grandsons; everyone in her household had it. Covid is still out there, housed in places I don't go. If I hear people coughing and blowing their noses, I stay away or leave.

I wear a mask, sanitize, and do the six am store runs.

They gave us the option to work from home or the office at work. Because we worked with many files, it was easier to go to the building

where office equipment was available; however -- 90 percent of us worked from home. Those who worked at the office could maintain social distancing in their own offices.

I was diagnosed with Covid on October 21, 2021, and it frightened me. Covid was brought home from school through one of my grandsons. I remember it was on Tuesday of that week that I did not feel good. I did not get the Covid test until Friday and received confirmation that Sunday of a positive test.

Although I had received both vaccine shots, the unknown was the frightening part. Each day, I would thank God for another day. I was scared.



I started feeling a little worse on Sunday night, and I had a fever. When I called my boss, he recommended that I have the monoclonal drip. I tried working from home, but I couldn't do much. I could only work a couple of hours per day. My oxygen level was down, but I was not gasping for breath. When I was tired, I would go lay down. My daughter told me, "Mom, you cannot be working because you have COVID."

My boss called me every four hours and put me off work for ten days. Once I felt better, I was ready to go back to work. And still, even now, I have no smell or taste every so often. When I get a scent, some foods smell so bad. Like ground beef, it smells the bloodiest, so no more ground beef. Because I had the vaccines, I believe my condition is not as bad as it could have been. Although I lost hair, I told myself there is a lot of fake hair available. When it was awful for me, I would lose my train of thought, totally forget or have a foggy mush brain; it was an experience.

Before the pandemic, we would go out, and I would stay in the mall, not necessarily spending money but walking. We had large family gatherings and church and spent time with friends. During the hunker down, we would call each other all the time. My sister Mary made food and dropped it off at our homes. If one couldn't go out for food, we would drop off what was necessary. Covid brought us closer together. We just saw it as showing more love, talking more.

My sister Esteria's Covid symptoms were worse than mine; however, she had gotten Covid at the very beginning of the pandemic. My sister Mary did not get Covid, and she was an essential worker at the hospital. My brother, who lives in Mississippi, got it. I had one brother who passed during this time but not from Covid; that was hard not being with family. We had to express our love with phone calls; we helped each other.

My two grandsons, ages 8 and 9, were diagnosed with Covid; one tested positive one day and the other the next day. Zoom was the way for school, and I helped them with their school work. I had been doing it when they first were home from school, and it felt wonderful to do so again. They are brilliant boys, and while on Zoom, they were able to be in the same classes, which also helped.

Before COVID, I had experienced other trials in my life, and I thought my most challenging trial was a divorce after 30 years of marriage. My faith was not as strong at that time, and it was hard to bounce back. However, I found a church and began attending, and I have started to grow. This church has taught me how to search the scripture. Before going here, I attended another church for approximately five years. In those five years of consistently going to church, I didn't learn half of what I have learned about faith, the Word, and a relationship with God through Christ Jesus. One of the biggest lessons I learned is that God is not about fear and emotions. This knowledge helped me turn my initial fear about Covid around. So when my brother died, which was hard, I had faith and understanding that God is the one in control.

I want to leave people with this Covid is real, relevant, and still out there. Continue to comply with the protocols that are in place. Although some people are just rebellious, we still need to be very cautious. Those with underlying conditions continue to follow protocols to stay safe and healthy. Those who pray, pray even more for your family, friends, this country, and the world.

Esteria McGrew: COVID does have some positive outcomes – you just have to look for them.

At the beginning of COVID-19, I was conscientious – washing my hands and staying in, hoping not to be exposed. My husband brought COVID into the house. He had all the symptoms, but he never got tested. I had been exposed, and he told me I probably got it at church, although he brought it home. My cousin had died from COVID. I was scared. I thought COVID was a death sentence for people. I have never seen

anything like it or experienced anything like it in my entire life. I thought it was a biblical plague, which is what it seemed like to me. I thought, what in the world?!

COVID was pretty new when I got it in early 2020. I didn't know much about it, and I was frightened. It started as a cold, and then I lost my taste and smell. When I tested positive, I broke down. MY FEAR TOOK OVER when I got my test results back, and I then called my brother. I was so upset and afraid. He told me to calm down, that this is not a death sentence. He prayed with me, and I needed those words. They helped me calm down, although I was still somewhat afraid.

At first, I was terrified. I just assumed I was going to die like my cousin. However, something positive happened. COVID made me focus more on my health. And it did a number on my health. I took my taste and smell away for almost a year. Then, my hair started falling out. Approximately two or three months after getting COVID, my hair came out in globs. I received a prediabetic diagnosis right after COVID, which I believe is another side effect for me.

I lost my appetite and didn't want to eat; I couldn't get myself to eat. But when I called a friend of mine who is a nurse, she said I needed to get some nutrients into my body. I had to force myself to drink some broth. She then bought me the zinc, vitamin C – you know, all the vitamins they told us to get. I started that regimen. Thank God I had no respiratory issues at all. It [COVID] was something. It's still something. My taste and smell have returned, but now they come and go.

I found it pretty interesting that the people from the health department called me every day to check on me, to see how my symptoms were. I guess they had to document everything. They called every day until they told me I was no longer contagious and was good to go.

When my daughter came up to visit, she got it; she had to quarantine until it was safe for her to fly back home. She experienced the same symptoms as I did – a cold, loss of taste, smell, and appetite. Her loss of taste and smell lasted for about a year also.

My son was living in Italy, and I was afraid for him too. COVID was rampant there; people died in their homes and were left there for a few days. They had stringent protocols. To travel anywhere, you had to have a piece of paper to show where you were going. Praise be to God, he did not get it.



I was also concerned because I babysit a two-year-old, and she would always be in my face,

and you know they say you are contagious before you know you have it. With her all up in my face, eating after me, kissing me, it was nothing but the Grace of God she didn't get from me. Praise be to God; she didn't have it.

I had retired after 32 years in the school district, and I thank God I was already a retired teacher when COVID hit. I did not have to deal with that stress and my initial fear. God was looking out for me on that one.

Now, I am an event planner, and pre-COVID I would do a lot of parties. Well, when the hunker down happened, it cut all that out. No one had a social life anymore. It put a damper on the parties, but safety first. COVID caused me to cut out many things, like my weekly outings with a friend for lunch, and church went from in-person to online. It was different but still enjoyable. I was thankful because COVID made families sit down and talk. It brought families together. We were all stuck in the house and had to talk to each other.

Today, I'm living life and using wisdom in all I do. I am back to planning parties and using sanitizer. Sanitizer and masks are a must. I've traveled. I have even gotten on a plane. I am trying to do some of what I was doing before the pandemic. Our church has opened back up for in-person services, and we still wear our masks and social distance. When I first got back, I just wanted to fall on the floor and say thank you, God, you pulled me through this, and I am back. I just felt good to be back. I missed the in-person face-to-face eye contact. Even with our masks, it feels good because you can still see people smiling through their masks. I am back, with hands lifted to you. You pulled me through this, Lord. I am back.

COVID deepened my faith walk with Christ. If you fear that you will die and die right now, certain situations will bring you closer to God. I'm in my Word, praying more, on the phone with my friends more, praying over the phone with my friends more, and Bible study changed a lot. That was another positive thing. Don't get me wrong, before I got sick, I read my Word, but when I got sick, I read and researched my Word. I had to call on it moment by moment, day by day!

My hope for the future is for my grandchildren who will live in this country. I grew up during the 1960s, so I have experienced and seen a lot of things, and I am concerned. As an African American, I do not want them to experience racism. The climate we have right now is very toxic. I am still very concerned about COVID, but I am becoming more worried about how racism is rearing its ugly head. If we cannot get this thing together, I don't know what the future will hold for my grandchildren. I don't know what will happen to them.

I hope my children give my grandchildren an excellent Christian foundation and a good upbringing to know who God is because they need

to know who God is to survive. Listen, if you don't know God, you better get a relationship with Him. That is the truth right there. Get a relationship with Him because man does not know everything, but God does. If I had not known God, I could have never made it.

I just want people to abide by the rules, regulations, and guidelines. Have an open mind and follow them. So, whatever protocols are put into place to keep us safe, just follow them. Whenever it comes, whatever God is going to do or allow to happen, just follow the protocols. Washing our hands, what harm did it cause? What injury was caused by wearing a mask, and what damage did social distancing cause? NONE. Sometimes we get so caught up in the wrong things and become rebellious, going our own way. Then you die, or someone in your family dies. It just keeps right on going. It's just dumb. Even those who said it was just a cold caught it and realized it was not just a cold.

COVID is still with us, it's not gone. People say that COVID has passed. I don't know about that; I have my doubts. I say use wisdom and live life as much as you can. We will never go back to the way things were before COVID. This is the new normal, and I'm okay with that.



Need assistance making your
COVID-19 vaccine appointment?

Call the COVID Vaccine Helpline:
 **907-646-3322**
Hours: 9am - 6:30pm (Mon-Fri),
9am - 4:30 pm (Sat-Sun)



Photo by TeamJones Photography

Clarice & Richard Murray

Clarice Murray - COVID isn't a hoax – it's real

When COVID first happened – I know it sounds terrible – my husband and I thought it was a myth. Maybe it isn't real. It took nine months for it to finally hit our household, but it didn't even come from us, and we were not the only family members that were affected.

My husband and I are essential workers. I work in finance, and he works in the oil industry. When COVID first hit in March we still had to work; there was no working from home for us. The world continued to run normally for us; we just had to wear masks everywhere we went. The fact that we did not get COVID made us feel like it really was a hoax, maybe it was not real.

However, we really didn't have a social life where we would have had the opportunity to be exposed to COVID. Pre-COVID we spent a lot of time at church. My husband and I both work in the media ministry, which required us to spend a lot of time at the church, along with making sure our kids were able to participate in extracurricular activities. Our social life consisted of church, work, and our kids. When our church went virtual, we were even more isolated from people, which made the myth more real.

We spent a lot of time with my husband's family, who were social distancing. My in-laws were the first ones to get it. They are both retired and have just themselves. Eventually, being just the two of them started to take a toll, so one day they decided to invite their friends over to play cards. This was probably sometime just before Thanksgiving. They all started the game wearing masks and social distancing, but about halfway through the hangout, they all were like, "We are okay," and they removed their masks. They were able to trace getting COVID back to their hangout.

I had been sending my kids over there to hang out during the school break, so we were already in close contact. It was Thanksgiving Day as we were hugging them and were about to have dinner when one of their friends called and said, "We are just calling to let you know we have tested positive for COVID." We all looked at each other and said, "Guess we are quarantining together. Our kids have been with you all week and we have been close contacts." We called my sister-in-law, who was heading over and told her not to come.

For about a week I was fine. It was right before my birthday on December 8th when I realized that I had lost my sense of taste. I never got a fever or any of the other symptoms, thankfully, but I did lose my sense of smell and taste. My first thought was that I must have COVID. We tested and everyone in the house tested positive, and if they all have it, I knew I must have it as well, even though I have never had a positive test. Everyone else's symptoms followed shortly after mine.

My children basically had the same symptoms as I did. My husband had a slight fever for a day. He also had chills and loss of taste and smell. My mother-in-law, Nana, had bad flu symptoms for two weeks – hot sweats, fevers, and chills. She was also fatigued, couldn't eat, and had no energy. But my father-in-law, Pop-Pop, had it the worst, and it took a hard toll on our family. Pop-Pop had to be hospitalized on Elmendorf in the ICU, where he was isolated and medically monitored. I think he was in there for about four to five days.

With what happened to Nana and Pop-Pop we knew we had to social distance from my parents because they too have underlying health conditions. We concluded that okay, maybe this is a thing and maybe it does affect everyone differently. It was then that we began to be vigilant about wearing our masks and social distancing.

Since my sister-in-law did not come to my in-laws' house the day we all found out, she was the only one who could shop for my mother-in-law. We could not go into the stores to get food or other necessities, so we posted online asking if anyone could help us. I even offered to Cash-App the person money. However, our parish leader stepped in to help and asked why we didn't reach out to him. I told him I didn't want to be an inconvenience, especially since we live on different sides of

town. I mean, I know that the church helps people, but I didn't think people like us. When I think about the church helping, I think about the homeless. There were so many people displaced and so many programs that our church had stopped doing. So, I didn't even think of my household as being one of those that needed help. But my parish leader saw my post online and immediately helped us.

While we were getting better, we got everything that had to do with boosting energy and immunity. If it was on a shelf, we got it. I even still use the hydrating stuff because I am bad at drinking water and taking multivitamins.

When the schools closed, we did not have the childcare issues that some others may have had because we had Nana and Pop-Pop. But that didn't stop the educational hurdles. We set up the extra room in our house with two computers and decided to do the complete homeschool thing since Anchorage School District kept changing the dates that the kids were to go back to school.

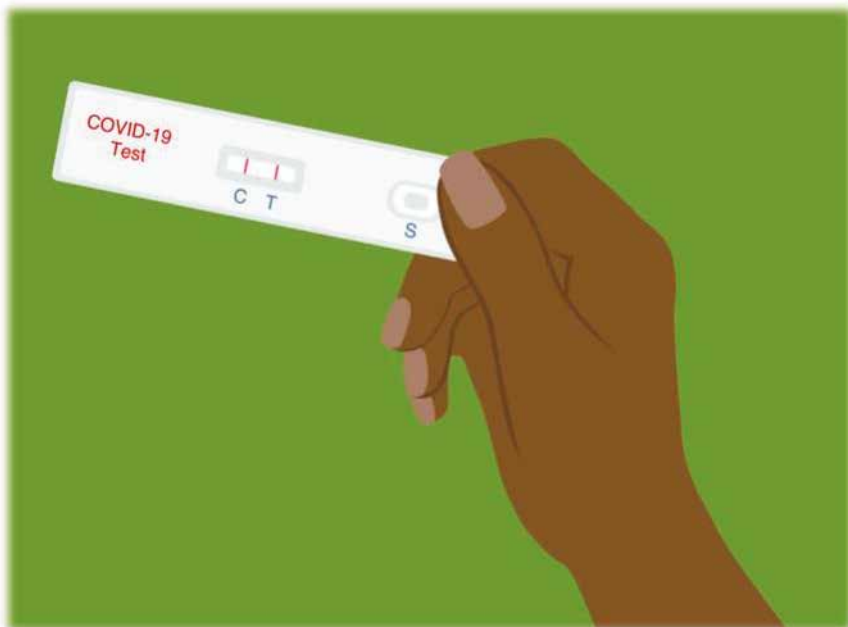
I would learn the lessons at night and then teach Nana and Pop-Pop and they would teach the kids all week. Three weeks in, we decided that the kids would return to school when ASD was ready. Nana and Pop-Pop said they retired for a reason, not to be teachers. On the days I would teach the kids, I would need to have my grace cup full. Kids behave differently for their teachers than they do their parents. And when you're both, it's hard to transition from being the teacher to telling them to clean their rooms. Kids need to be at school with actual teachers. What is that saying? Distance makes the heart grow fonder.

While I was working from home is when we decided COVID is just a thing, and it just doesn't affect everyone the same. We were social distancing; we are wearing our masks. We got vaccinated. We were like, "Well, we don't really know if the flu vaccine works but we get that every year. So, if this is like the flu then we should get the vaccine."

There are still many things that I cannot taste or smell. I'm a Pepsi girl – I grew up on cherry Pepsi – and if you're Coke, we're not friends. Now, I can't drink dark sodas. Garlic too, I know what it tastes like, it's very pungent, but I can't taste it either. I can't complain because I believe that God doesn't give you any more than what you can bear.

Richard Murray: Live each day as if it's your last

I have been a member of Shiloh [Missionary Baptist Church] for 10-plus years. I am here to make sure you understand what COVID is and how to stay safe. I received a positive test for COVID in November 2020, around Thanksgiving. My two kids also tested positive. My wife had symptoms, but she tested negative. My parents had it too, we were more worried about them and what they were going through than ourselves.



COVID took us out of human civilization. We were stuck in the house and couldn't do anything as far as go out and live a normal life. We couldn't visit our loved family members. It affected us a lot, but we did grow closer, as far as being with each other and as a family.

God revealed Himself to me during that time and continues to do so. He made us aware that we need to be together and as a family how we need each other. We learned that we need to live each day as if it would be our last day and spend as much time with each other as possible. We are to be there for one another as family and friends.

Coping with COVID now, my advice is that you stay safe wherever you go and listen to the CDC guidelines. It's here and we all must make sure we do precautionary things. We know it's here. If it goes away, then it goes away, but you got to prepare, you got to do what it takes to stay safe. If you choose to get the COVID shot, nice, it's a personal decision. Just always stay safe, that is what we want to do regardless; keep your family safe, make sure they understand. If you have little kids, make sure they know what the deal is, so they can be prepared when it comes to the future.

Shirley Midgett: Diagnosed with COVID-19 twice, even when fully vaccinated.

It was in January and February 2020 that I remember hearing the news about COVID-19. I remember the outbreaks, in the beginning, hitting New York and other places on the East Coast, then California. I asked my boyfriend if this was something we should be worried about and his reply was he didn't think so, with Alaska being so isolated. With that said, we watched the numbers rise and kept on with our lives as usual until the shelter-in-place orders.

Before those orders, our social life consisted of a couples' group that met weekly on Fridays. We played games and cards, watch movies, and broke bread together. We also attended trivia nights around town, sometimes meeting up with couples from our group of friends. Other times, it was just the two of us. Sometimes we would have friends and family over for dinner, watch movies and sports, and play games.

My mom and my siblings were all sheltering in place. I was working from home, and my boyfriend works as a bank manager, so he went in sporadically. His employer had protocols in place to protect him and his employees.

After the orders, we heard that you could spend time in social bubbles while sheltering in place. So, on Fridays, we would spend time with the same couples, playing cards and eating dinner with the agreement that we only socialized with each other. Gathering again was great! One of my adult children was in the home at that time. She followed all the protocols and had no one outside of the family in her social bubble.

On October 30, 2020, one of our friends, a radio DJ, developed a cough he couldn't shake and was going to get tested. He called each of us to let us know he was going in for a test, and on November 2, 2020, he let us know his test was positive. On hearing his results, my household went to get a rapid test; our results were negative. We heard from others in our bubble that they had tested positive on that same date. We went the next day and received another test, this time testing positive.

It was the following Wednesday my symptoms began to kick in. Although I had what is called a mild case, my thought was it would progress and that I was going to die. I already had a 35-year-old friend die

of COVID-related acute respiratory distress. That, coupled with the news media only reporting deaths, I just knew I would die in a couple of weeks. It wasn't until I realized that I wasn't declining that I became angry about having no taste and smell. I only lost it for a few days, probably five. It was the worst. You didn't eat, you had to remind yourself to eat, even to drink water. I felt miserable with no taste or smell.

My boyfriend had a cough with no fever, and my son had the same symptoms as me. We were quarantined in the house for two weeks, each in various parts of the house, making contact by text. So, when we received the negative test, it was a relief. In our social bubble, we had three other friends test positive. We learned about the unpredictability of the virus when a couple in our bubble got tested – the wife was positive, but the husband was negative.

It wasn't until the following January, after we resumed really living our lives, that I began coughing up bloody phlegm – some during the day, and sometimes at night I would wake coughing up this phlegm. It happened so often that I made an appointment with my doctor. I had taken pictures of the phlegm and informed her that I had been plagued with this cough and phlegm since January. I believe COVID damaged my lungs, and she believes it was drainage from my nasal passage.

What did she do? She prescribed me a nasal spray of steroids and hormones that I would use twice daily. Well...it did not work, so I stopped using it, telling her it did not work and that it was still happening. I sought a referral to a specialist, and she offered to refill my prescription. I fear that COVID has damaged my lungs and am worried that I may eventually have scar tissue. My doctor told me that I only needed to stick with the plan and did not need an ENT or lung specialist.

On November 14, 2021, I received my first dose of the vaccine; my side effect was a stiff arm. I had my second dose approximately 15 days later with the same side effects. I had begun going back to work at the office. On January 4, 2022, my coworker, who had been out since the week before, announced in a matter-of-fact way she had COVID over the weekend. It was like, "By the way, I went dancing over the weekend." This was my prompt to get tested.

After experiencing COVID, I had both the vaccine and booster and I believed I was well covered. Boy, was I wrong! This was unbelievable. On January 6, 2022, I had to quarantine again; my employer had me out for 14 days. My coworker told no one that she brought her weekend to work. I was angry, and to top it off, I was asymptomatic and sitting at

home with a positive test.

The second time, I thought I was vaccinated and assumed that the vaccine meant I would not get it again. I followed the protocols except for my coworker, who was training me. My actual reason for getting the vaccine in the first place was so I could visit the places I wanted to go in the Lower 48. Some of these places required that you had proof of having been vaccinated to get in. I am deathly afraid of needles. The vaccines were necessary to meet my objective. And now I was angry. I had succumbed again and was misled by what the vaccine hype represented.

I believe that it is a shame that COVID had to happen for people to be more sanitary and more considerate of others' space. We need to keep doing that. It took COVID to give people their space in grocery lines. Why were people not washing their hands? Why were businesses so lax in not sanitizing when dealing with the public day in and day out? Why did COVID have to happen for people to be told if they are sick, do not leave the house? You had to be told not to stand close to people. I thought this was insane.

At the time, I felt that God did not care whether you followed all the protocols or not. You still get it, it's a plague. I thought God was thinning us out. Then I thought the pandemic was His way of cleaning the earth, getting our attention, and making us value family – which is all of us.



Photo by TeamJones Photography



Photo by TeamJones Photography

Cyrese Gorrin: An entire family getting through COVID together.

I love birthdays! I have six kids, and they know if mom is going to do anything, she will celebrate their day! My son's golden birthday was coming up, and we were going to make the party to end all parties! The venue had been booked, presents purchased, and the vibe was set. This was going to be the best golden birthday yet!

On the morning of January 11th, my birthday boy's day, everything started as fun as most birthdays do. There was tons of laughter, gifts, cake, and plans to gather with friends that evening. But we all felt a little off. My head was aching in a way it hadn't before, and the Excedrin that usually stops my headaches in their tracks wasn't cutting it. I got the kids off to school and figured I needed to drink more water. Since I work from home it takes a lot for me to call in, so I pushed through and finished my work, and in the afternoon, I laid down for a quick nap. My alarm woke me up three hours later, and I was still drained. I knew I

was very sick. I can always pull it together for a birthday, but I was exhausted. I called my husband, and he wasn't feeling well either. He was on his way home. My daughter texted me that her body hurt but didn't want to miss her next class. I told her she needed to go to the nurse and get a COVID test. Within two hours my husband, our kids, and I were tested and heading home. We canceled our party and crawled into bed. We stayed in and ordered delivery.

My son opened his presents while blowing his nose and coughing. We hoped it wasn't COVID, but knew it probably was. My son and I had a temperature of 101° F. I fell asleep around 5 p.m. and woke up the following day at 8 a.m. My head was throbbing, but now I also had this horrible dry cough, and my ribs hurt as if someone had kicked me. My kids and I stayed in bed the rest of the day. This was my husband's second bout with COVID, and he seemed to be handling it better than any of us, so he took care of us well. I'm so thankful to friends for dropping off groceries and dinner; there was no way we could do much in those first few days.

By the following evening, I felt a little better. My fever had dropped, and I was able to make breakfast for the family. Our results came in that evening. It was confirmed – we all had gotten COVID. I reached out to my doctor, who encouraged us to stay home, drink lots of fluids, and take our vitamins. Eight kids inside for a week is a struggle, but we made it!!

By day six, I felt 70% better. I began riding my Peloton, and we took family walks outside just to get some fresh air. By the end of the 14 days, I was back at 100%.

My headaches have continued to come and go, but they don't take me like they used to. I'm thankful that my family was fully vaccinated. It could have been a lot worse!

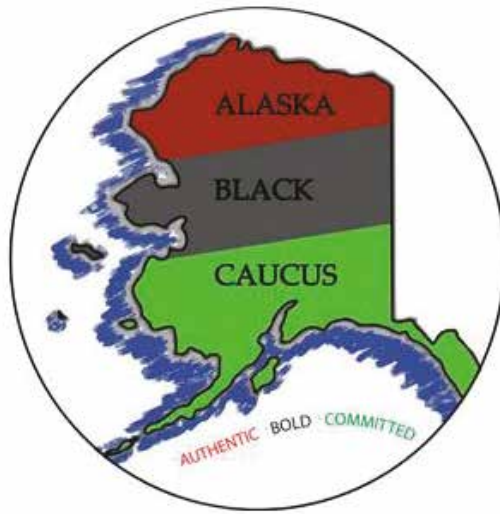
COVID has been something I took very seriously from the start. In January 2020, I took my kids in for a physical and our pediatrician told us about COVID and how concerned she was with what it could become. We decided to hunker down before the mayor requested it. Truthfully, I was considered a weirdo in my family. I was terrified and seeing the ticking death toll on the news terrified me. We all were vaccinated as soon as our age group came up. I understand why others, especially Black people, could be hesitant, but the risk of waiting outweighed the fear for us.

My kids missed their final school trips, volleyball championships, and graduations; they missed their friends. We tried to use the time together to play games, make TikTok videos, and watch old movies. I tried crazy recipes no one would eat, and we built a garden that grew nothing. We went on long walks and had beautiful talks. As hard as it was not to see my mom or our other family, it was a time we bonded and grew closer than ever. In May 2020, we began fostering my niece and nephews, so

our family of six grew to a family of 10! My kids were thrilled to have their cousins around to play with, and although the noise level only seemed to stay at level 10, the kids all felt safe, which was wonderful.

As we move into a more COVID norm time, I feel optimistic. I hope Anchorage stays calm and supportive. Some will be ready to rip off their mask and live life to the fullest before others. If we remember to treat others with respect and kindness, we will get through this and whatever else COVID brings our way.





OUR POSITION

The Alaska Black Caucus strongly recommends COVID-19 vaccinations, as people in our community have been **disproportionately affected by COVID-19.**

We see vaccinations as the best way to protect our people, our businesses, and our legacy.

VACCINATE
IT'S NOT TOO LATE



Dr. Amana Mbise, Ph.D, MSW, Postdoctoral Fellow preparing to present the Black Alaskans Health Needs Assessment at the Accelerating Health Equity Conference in Cleveland, Ohio.



President and CEO, Celeste Hodge Growden at the Accelerating Health Equity Conference in Cleveland, Ohio.

A BOOST OF PROTECTION

Even if you are fully vaccinated, booster shots greatly increase your protection against COVID-19.

Everyone age 12 and up is eligible to receive a booster shot at least 5 months after completing the primary COVID-19 vaccination series.



FACTS

FACT #1 Federal data shows that African Americans and Latinx in the U.S. have been three times more likely to contract COVID-19 than white residents

Source: NAACP COVID KNOW MORE, 1.3.21

FACT #2 In Anchorage between March 2020 to November 2021, Black people testing positive for COVID-19 were hospitalized 73% more than the general population

Source: State of Alaska COVID-19 Dashboard, 12.6.21

FACT #3 As of December 6, 2021, 47.9% of Black people age 5 and older in Anchorage have received at least one COVID-19 vaccination, compare to 67% of the general population.

Source: State of Alaska COVID-19 Dashboard, 12.6.21

FACT #4 According to federal data, Black Americans are nearly twice as likely to die from COVID-19 compared to white residents.

Source: CDC Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity, 12.7.21

FACT #5

COVID-19 vaccines are free for everyone.

Source: State of Alaska COVID-19 Dashboard, 12.6.21

FIGHTING TOGETHER WITH FACTS

African Americans have been
disproportionately impacted
by COVID-19.

71%

Of Black Americans know
someone who was hospitalized
or died from COVID-19.

TRUSTED FAITH-BASED VACCINE SITE

Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church Anchorage, Alaska

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Reverend Undra Parker, Pastor of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, knew the faith community had a tremendous responsibility to become a trusted and sacred location for keeping the Black community informed up-to-date about the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic disrupted one of the foundations of Black American culture—coming together to worship.

With the advent of the COVID-19 vaccine, we began seeing the possibility of coming back together. Pastor Parker immediately began encouraging the Black community to take advantage of the life-saving vaccine. He knew this would be a hard sell because distrust and lack of access to the COVID-19 vaccine run high among Black Americans. Pastor Parker believes, "The faith community has a role to help Black people understand. Yes, there has been a history of abuse around medicine. However, if we are going to survive as a Black community, we must get the vaccine as soon as possible to protect our families and community." He led in taking the vaccine. He offered the church as a trusted vaccine access site. And he consistently and relentlessly challenges the Black community: **GET VACCINATED!**

Shiloh established partnerships with the municipal health department and the Alaska Black Caucus to provide access to the vaccine. In 2020, the first vaccine clinic operated six days a week, 8 hours a day; the health department closed that clinic when usage declined. In 2021 the municipality began "pop-up" clinics in targeted neighborhoods-- Shiloh signed up to be a "pop-up" clinic for the area. The third clinic opened in 2022 with the support of the Alaska Black Caucus and a private health provider; it operates three days a week, 9 hours a day. Creating this trusted space with the support of the partners helped reduce vaccine hesitancy in the Black community. In 2022 the site became the most active vaccination site in Anchorage.

Shiloh is in an under-resourced, culturally diverse area of the city. Pastor Parker and the church are committed to providing COVID-19 education and vaccine access to the community for as long as it takes to nurture and protect Black lives.






Photo by TeamJones Photography


ANCHORAGE **COVID-19** **VACCINE** **INFORMATION**

Anchorage COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments

Everyone age 6 months and older is now eligible for a free vaccine in Anchorage!

Many sites no longer require an appointment - you can simply show up and get your free vaccine.

 **How to sign up?** Find a date and location to schedule your free vaccine appointment. [Find more COVID-19 vaccine providers.](#) Need help? 📞 Call [1-907-646-3322](tel:1-907-646-3322) & someone can help you sign up or answer questions.

 **COVID-19 vaccines are now authorized for children age 6 months and older: Pfizer (6 months to 4 years) and Moderna (6 months to 5 years.)** Many pharmacies will only administer the vaccine to children age three and older. Check with the provider or your pediatrician if you have questions.

Need help? Call [1-907-646-3322](tel:1-907-646-3322) and someone can help you sign up or answer any questions. Ask for an interpreter right away if you need help in another language.

If you're 60 or older and need help getting to your appointment in Anchorage, call AnchorRIDES at [1-907-343-6543](tel:1-907-343-6543) after you have scheduled your vaccine appointment to arrange a ride.



Appointment information updates every minute and the exact number of appointments may be different depending on how quickly people sign up for the appointments. You will need to refresh the page to get the latest information.

This page is a collaboration between the [Municipality of Anchorage's Innovation Team](#), the [Alaska Department of Health and Social Services](#), and the [Office of Information Technology](#).

Sleeves up. Alaska

Reasons to Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe; millions of people have been safely vaccinated after extensive safety testing and monitoring
- COVID-19 vaccines are effective at providing protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death
- Vaccination is the best defense against new variants
- COVID-19 vaccines are free
 - The cost of COVID-19 disease can be very high, including missed work, ER visits, or hospitalization
- Vaccination is a safer way to build protection than natural infection
- It's safer for vaccinated people to travel and spend time together
- Vaccination provides a strong, robust immune response that's much safer and more protective than acquiring immunity through natural infection
- 1/3 of people who tested positive for COVID-19 are affected for weeks, months or longer
- Vaccines prevent long-term COVID-19 symptoms like fatigue, cough, headaches, loss of taste and smell, dizziness and more
- Vaccination protects your children and other loved ones by reducing your chances of getting infected and transmitting COVID-19 to vulnerable people who are too young to get the vaccine or have compromised immune systems

Visit covidvax.alaska.gov for more information,
Call the Vaccine Helpline at 1-833-482-9546 for help, or
Text your zip code to 438829 to find vaccine sites near you.

RESOURCES

MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

www.covid-response-moa-muniorg.hub.arcgis.com

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

www.dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19

CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov

VETERANS AFFAIRS: COVID-19 Vaccines At VA

www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine

ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS

www.thealaskablackcaucus.com/covid19-dash

RECOVER

Researching COVID to Enhance **Recovery**

National Institute of Health (NIH)

created the RECOVER Initiative to learn
about the long - term effect of COVID

www.recovercovid.org

This page is a collaboration between the Municipality of Anchorage's Innovation Team, the Department of Health and Social Services, and the Office of Information Technology.



THE ALASKA
BLACK CAUCUS
PRESENTS

WENDY
WILLIAMSON
AUDITORIUM

THURSDAY
JUNE 30,
2022

6:00PM-
8:00PM

COVID & BEYOND: BLACK HEALTH
AND WELLNESS TOWN HALL



Topic of
Discussion



*Review of the 2022 Black
Health Assessment, Open
discussion and the screening
of the short film; Toxic: A
Black Women's Story.*



SPEAKERS:

Dr. Amana Mbise

Assistant Professor of Social Work in the
School of Social Work



Monique Andrews LPC, CDCII

Licensed professional counselor and
brings a holistic approach to therapy



LaShanda McGowan MED, MSW

Mental health counselor who
practices community health.

An Evaluation of Black Alaskan's Health Status...

SURVEY RESULTS



EVALUATION BLACK ALASKAN'S HEALTH STATUS AND NEEDS TO INFORM COMMUNITY EDUCATION STRATEGIES BY THE ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS

SURVEY
RESULTS

2022

Amana Mbise, Ph.D., MSW ¹; Gabriel Garcia, Ph.D., MA, MPH ¹; Cary Brown, MPA¹; Celeste Hodge Growden ²; Allison Hourigan ²; Thea Agnew Bemben ³; Rei Shimizu, Ph.D., LMSW ¹, Jennifer Leigh ¹



PROJECT

An Evaluation of Black Alaskan's Health Status and Needs to inform Community Education Strategies by the Alaska Black Caucus.

INSTITUTION

University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), School of Social Work

FUNDING AGENCY

Alaska Black Caucus & Anchorage Health Department

The Alaska Black Caucus (ABC) is a non-profit organization working to advance the quality of education, economic, and political status of Black people in Alaska. ABC has partnered with a team from UAA to conduct a community health assessment among Black-identifying/African Americans in Alaska. This project is delivered from a joint partnership with the UAA School of Social Work and the Alaska Black Caucus (ABC) through a grant (G14536) awarded by the Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Health Department. For questions about this report, please contact Amana Mbise, ambise@alaska.edu



School of Social Work
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE



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FOCUS GROUP
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Analysis of these Survey Results serves to establish the health needs of Alaska's Black-Identifying / African American population to assess the community's health status.

This is the first known assessment of the community's health needs and status using participatory and collaborative information gathering, interpretation, and dissemination methods. The project was initiated during a time when COVID-19 was exposing deep-seated health disparities through the world amid a national reckoning with racism as a public health issue. The assessment team applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze information obtained.

This report summarizes key findings from the survey, focus groups, and key informant interviews. In addition, it offers recommendations for areas that may help improve the health and wellbeing of Black-Identifying / African Americans living in Alaska.

PREFACE

For over 150 years, Black people have traveled to Alaska, calling it their home¹. They have actively participated in state politics, economics, and culture, strengthening community connections over the decades.

Today, Alaska's Black-Identifying and African American communities constitute a considerable size of the population. According to the 2020 US Census Bureau data, the share of **Alaska's population identifying as Black grew from 2.8% to 3.4% in the last ten years.**

Yet despite recent growth in both size and influential status, Black people encounter hostile environments more often, experience racism and marginalization, have high health disparities, and are excluded from public health data reporting.

For instance, when looking at Alaska's health data for the state and Municipality of Anchorage, **it is apparent that significant gaps exist in health-related data reported by race.**

To highlight as of July 18, 2021, approximately 34% of all state reported COVID-19 cases labeled persons **"unknown race," "under investigation," "multiple races," or "other race"** (ABC, 2021).



The currently available reporting makes it difficult to accurately identify and successfully address racism-based health disparities.

While recently focus has spotlighted on the disparities faced from COVID-19, **Black people remain disadvantaged across the entire healthcare system** and carry a disproportionate share of the burden of the disease.

Endnotes

1

https://www.nps.gov/articles/upload/Black-History-in-the-Last-Frontier_Reader_Compressed.pdf



PREFACE



**SIGNIFICANT GAPS
EXIST IN HEALTH
RELATED DATA
REPORTED BY RACE**

The death rates for Blacks/ African Americans average higher than white people for heart diseases, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza/ pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and homicide¹. Additionally, they are more likely to have worse health outcomes, unmet health needs, and a lack of health insurance coverage².

Overall, Blk people suffer at a disproportionately higher rate from kidney failure (up to three times higher) and are more likely to die younger.

In terms of mental health, Black people are 20 times more likely to report experiencing psychological distress, yet are over 50% less likely to receive counseling or mental health treatment. Within the current context of COVID-19, we have seen that Blacks/ African Americans experience greater and more severe illnesses and death than their white counterparts³.

Endnotes

1 <http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=61>

2 <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-271.pdf>

3 <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid19-radical-disparities>



APPROACH

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, & METHODS

OBJECTIVES

The health status assessment aimed to address the following key objectives:

OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE
Understand the health status of Black Alaskans using secondary and Primary data sources.	Document the perspectives of Black Alaskans about their health and well-being.	Produce a high quality report that enlightens the leadership of the Alaska Black Caucus about health factors and issues within Black Alaska.	Appreciate how Black Alaskans view their health and the issues they face in protecting and advancing their health.	Set the stage for subsequent action by the Alaska Caucus to advance advocacy for health promotion within Black Alaska.

These objectives were operationalized through the collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data utilizing qualitative approaches. Secondary data collection involved the collection and analysis of existing public health data and summarized the first Black Alaskan's Health Status Report 2022. The report profiles the Black community in Alaska through household statistics, education and economic measures, morbidity and mortality rates, incidence rates and other health and wellbeing indicators. It also

compares the Black/African Americans to White, Alaskan Native/American Indian, and general US population on key health indicators and outcomes. The scope of the analysis included all existing data from 1995-2020.

Primary data collection involved an online survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The survey was developed using existing health assessment surveys with some modifications specific to the Black Community of Alaska and

input from Key Informants. The survey was distributed online through Qualtrics, a research survey tool. The initial goal was to sample a total of 300 participants from the Black Alaskan community. However, we were able to receive an impressive 674 responses.

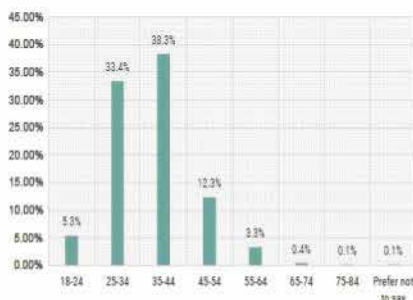
The survey was then followed by focus groups with select cohorts of the Alaska Black Community (Youth, Elders, and Black Healthcare Workers) and Key Informant interviews.

ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT

Who participated in the survey?

SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 674 participants responded to the survey.



MARITAL STATUS

In terms of their marital status, most participants indicated that they were married.

70%

MARRIED

19%

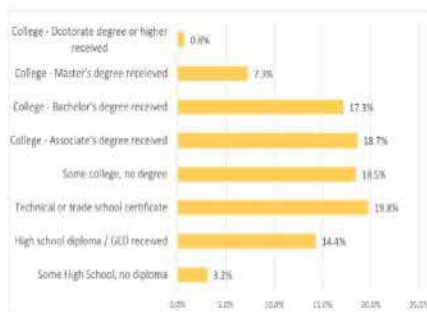
SINGLE

2%

WIDOWED/
OTHER

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

An average participant in this sample has some college education without an earned degree. N=626



MAIN ACTIVITY TYPE WITHIN 3 MONTHS

A majority are working at a job or business.

89%

WORKING
AT A JOB

6%

LOOKING
FOR WORK

3%

COLLEGE
STUDENT

2%

RETIRED

KEY POINTS

HEALTH STATUS

Overall, the black community perceives its own health as ranging between being good and moderately healthy and individual health as being. This is also true for individual assessment of health and wellbeing.

MORBIDITY

Far too many Black Alaskans are unable to work because of **untreated physical or mental health challenges**. Nearly **33%** lose a day or two of work every month due to poor physical and mental health.

HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

83%, A majority of participants have health insurance coverage. This is mostly through,

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| → Work / Private Provider (57%) | → Tribal Health Services (3%) |
| → Medicare / Medicaid (36%) | → Military / Veteran Affairs (3%) |

HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Yet despite high rates of coverage, many couldn't get the care they needed due to,

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| → Cost / Financial Factors (61%) | → Provider Not Available (42%) |
| → Provider Doesn't Accept Insurance (38%) | → No Available Appointments (56%) |

HEALTH CARE UTILIZATION

46%, Nearly half of our participants reported **not having a mental health provider**. For those who did, the services that were most recently sought after were for,

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| → Counseling / Therapy (40%) | → Crisis Care Assistance (21%) |
| → Hospitalization (24%) | → Other Mental Health Service (33%) |

KEY POINTS

HEALTH STATUS



HEALTH CONDITIONS

The following health problems are among the leading diagnosis by health care providers affecting participants overall health.

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| → HYPERTENSION (24%) | → HIGH CHOLESTEROL (19%) |
| → OVERWEIGHT (23%) | → MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES (24%) |
| → ALCOHOL ABUSE (24%) | → SUBSTANCE ABUSE (19%) |
| → DEPRESSION (23%) | → ARTHRITIS/RHEUMATISM (20%) |

HEALTH BEHAVIORS

The majority of participants engage in weekly activity and exercise with intensity levels in the following categories.

- | |
|---|
| → VIGOROUS ACTIVITIES, Exercise at least 3-4 times weekly (60%) |
| → MODERATE ACTIVITIES, Exercise at least 3-4 times weekly (80%) |

LIFESTYLE CHOICES

ALCOHOL, Most participants consume alcoholic drinks, on a weekly basis, between,

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| → 2 to 3 drinks per week (40%) | → 6 or more drinks per week (10%) |
| → 4 to 5 drinks per week (24%) | → No alcoholic drinks (20%) |

TOBACCO, Participants use and consumption of tobacco products are noted as,

- | |
|---|
| → Tobacco Cigarettes, Pipes, and Cigars Used to Consume Tobacco (56%) |
| → No Plans Made to Quit Smoking Within the Next 6 Months (43%) |

KEY POINTS

HEALTH STATUS

LIFESTYLE CHOICES

FOODS, On average, **95% of participants eat one or more fruits servings each day** (excluding juices), and consume slightly less in vegetables with,

- **3 to 4 vegetable servings daily (50%)**
- **1 to 2 vegetable servings daily (38%)**

Roughly, 3% of participants do not eat any servings of vegetables daily. While this is a relatively small percentage, encouraging others to increase the amount of vegetables they incorporate into their diet, is important for a maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

NEIGHBORHOOD FACTORS

Participants reside primarily in **apartment-type housing (50%)**, followed by **Single-Family homes (24%)**, and **Condo/Townhouses (23%)**. Over half of participants, **58%, are homeowners** and own their current residence. Of all participants, close to half, view their community avorably and agree that their neighborhood,

- **Offers easy, walkable access to public outdoor spaces (24%)**
- **Has easy access to healthy food stores/restaurants (23%)**
- **Is environmentally safe, providing clean air and water (24%)**
- **Feels safe, with little/low crime occurrences (23%)**
- **Location provides access to good-quality schools (19%)**

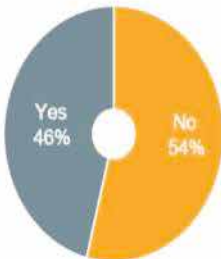


MENTAL HEALTH

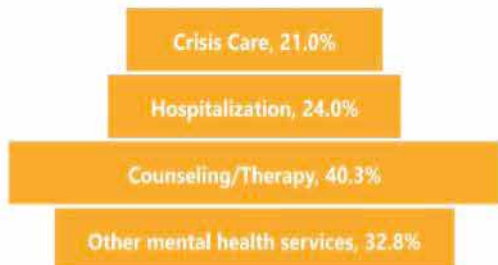


Far too many Black-Identifying/African Americans are unable to work because of untreated physical or mental health challenges. 33% of the people lose a day or two of work every month due to poor physical or mental health.

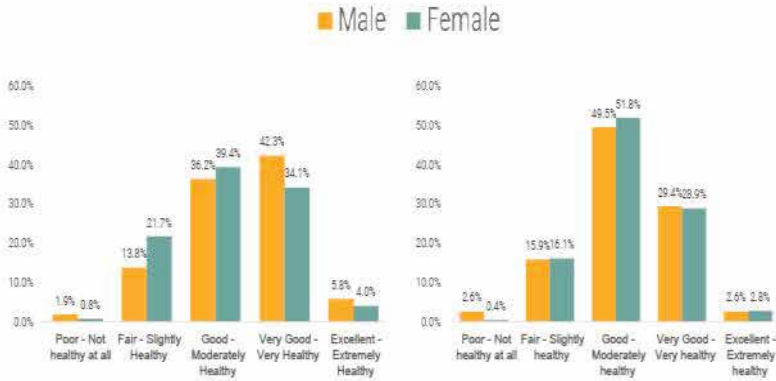
Do you have a mental health provider that you currently see? N=641



Which mental health services did you use?
N=638

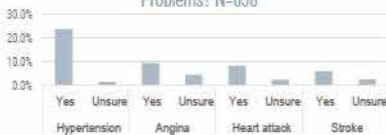


HEALTH PERCEPTION

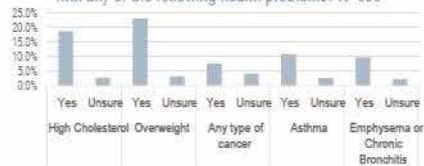


HEALTH ISSUES

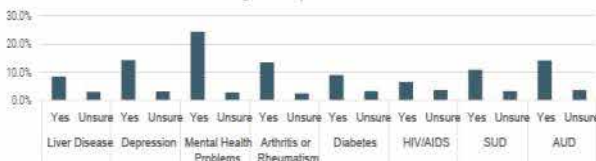
Has your Health Care Provider Ever Diagnosed You With Any of the Following Health Problems? N=638



Has your health care provider ever diagnosed you with any of the following health problems? N=638



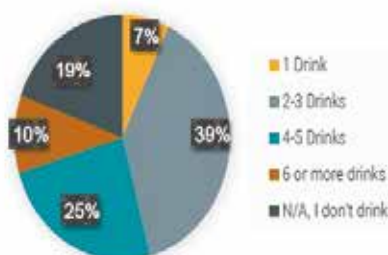
Has your health care provider ever diagnosed you with any of the following health problems? N=638



HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOR

Do You Use Pipes, Cigars or Other Tobacco Products?

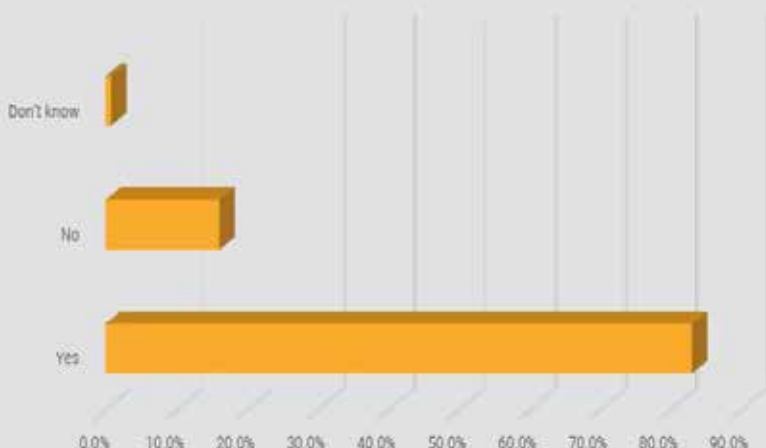
N=326



Average Number of Drinks Per Week
N=634

Did You Participate in Moderate* Activities in the Past 30 Days?

N=639



*Moderate activities are exercises lasting 30 minutes or longer, such as brisk walking, swimming, or anything where you sustained an increase in your heart rate and breathing.

COVID-19 Vaccines Are Free to Anyone in the United States

COVID-19 vaccines are available for everyone ages 6 months and older at no cost. Vaccines were paid for with taxpayer dollars and will be given free of charge to all people living in the United States, regardless of health insurance or immigration status.

- CDC does not require U.S. citizenship for individuals to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Jurisdictions (state, tribal, local, and territorial) cannot add U.S. citizenship requirements or require U.S. citizenship verification as a requirement for vaccination.

Be aware of scams

If anyone asks you to pay for access to a COVID-19 vaccine, you can bet it's a scam. Don't share your personal or financial information if someone calls, texts, or emails you promising access to a vaccine for an extra fee.

COVID-19 vaccination providers cannot:

- Charge you for a vaccine
- Charge you directly for any administration fees, copays, or coinsurance
- Deny vaccination to anyone who does not have health insurance coverage, is underinsured, or is out of network
- Charge an office visit or other fee to the recipient if the only service provided is a COVID-19 vaccination
- Require additional services in order for a person to receive a COVID-19 vaccine; however, additional healthcare services can be provided at the same time and billed as appropriate

Safe, Easy, Free, and Nearby COVID-19 Vaccination

The federal government is providing the vaccine **free of charge** to all people living in the U.S., regardless of their immigration or health insurance status.

COVID-19 Grant Summaries

Community Conversations

The purpose of the COVID-19 Community Conversations series with a focus on infectious diseases was to provide education and open discourse about COVID-19 and its impact in the BIPOC community, as well as broader topics of critical importance to the health of the BIPOC community. Each COVID-19 Community Conversation highlighted either a featured speaker, a panel of subject matter experts, community members and/or a combination of each of these. The following topics were discussed throughout the Community Conversation series:

September 19, 2021	COVID-19: Fighting COVID-19 Together, Fighting with Facts
October 10, 2021	COVID-19: Trauma and Mental Health
November 21, 2021	COVID-19: Vaccinations 2.0 - Focus on Kids and Young Adults
December 12, 2021	COVID-19: End of Life Care
January 30, 2022	COVID-19: Racism is a Public Health Crisis
February 27, 2022	COVID-19: A community dialogue with the healthcare system
March 27, 2022	COVID-19: Essential workers, how are you recovering from Covid?
April 24, 2022	COVID-19: Community Recovery: Personal Stories of Recovery and Loss
May 29, 2022	COVID-19: What is the new normal? How do we move forward in health and safety?
June 11, 2022	COVID-10: United We Stand Pre-Juneteenth BIPOC Health Fair in the Park

ECHO Health Equity Grand Rounds

The health equity ECHOs were intended for clinical care providers, including medical doctors, physician assistants, advance nurse practitioners, nurses, members of the allied health team, and clinical care provider trainees. The ECHO series ran for six (6) 1.5-hour sessions, covering the topics of: the history of racism in medicine and implications for COVID-19 outcomes, race-based medicine, visions for health equity in Anchorage, trauma-informed care, conversations between healthcare providers and BIPOC individuals, and system changes to increase health equity. The Grand Rounds featured guest presenters from around the United States who are recognized experts in their fields. The

in-depth and candid discussions that stemmed from the presentations and case studies allowed for open dialogue, truth-seeking and discovery, and a renewed commitment to health equity amongst health care providers in Alaska.

Black Alaskans Health Status Report and Health Needs Assessment

The Black Alaskans Health Status Report and Health Needs Assessment project sought to assess the health status and needs of Black Alaskans through quantitative and qualitative approaches. This was the first known evaluation of the health needs and status of Black Alaskans utilizing participatory and collaborative methods of data collection, interpretation, and dissemination. The project came at a time when COVID-19 had exposed deep-seated health disparities and brought a reckoning with the impact of racism on the health and well-being of Black people in America. This project was, therefore, set within this context and sought to utilize public health methods to elevate the voice of Black people, assess their perceptions of health and well-being, and provide evidence-informed recommendations for strategies to advocate for the health and well-being of Black people in Alaska. The findings of this evaluation will feed into the larger community education work of the Alaska Black Caucus.



Findings from this project include: *Pages 78 - 91*

The findings have informed a Recommendation and Implementation Plan of community developed strategies for improvements that have been shared with local healthcare and public health systems. All of the data and findings have been compiled, shared, and published in a comprehensive white paper to provide a framework for improved health equity within the African American community.

Additionally, a COVID-19 Town Hall was held on the campus of the University of Alaska Anchorage to publicly share the findings from the assessment and the Recommendation and Implementation plan with the community which allowed for community members to get more information and to ask questions of the researchers and the community leaders.

Comprehensive Messaging Campaign

A concentrated and intentional messaging campaign was conducted within the BIPOC community to increase awareness around COVID-19, vaccinations and boosters, and health equity. Printed materials, digital

ads, TV and radio commercials, bus ads, and tabling at events were all forms of a deliberate messaging campaign. From local doctors, community members, and businesses, the Alaska Black Caucus was able to reach thousands of people in the BIPOC community here in Alaska with messages of encouragement, hope, reassurance, education, and support.

DOC Project

The Department of Corrections (DOC) project provided a targeted messaging campaign to support and encourage disproportionately represented women and men of color being released from prison with education about COVID-19 vaccines and provide them with a COVID-19 Tool Kit which included PPE items, brochures and information on where to get vaccinated and tested, and hand sanitizer wipes. In partnership with the DOC, the Alaska Black Caucus delivered over 500 Tool Kits to be given to newly released men and women of color.



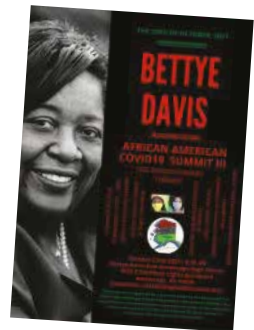
Shiloh COVID-19 Vaccination Site

Shiloh Baptist Church in Anchorage, Alaska served as the premier vaccination site for the BIPOC community maintaining the highest numbers of vaccinations and boosters provided in the state at a time when other sites saw a sharp decrease in the number of vaccinations given daily and weekly. As a hub in the African American community, Shiloh's commitment to health equity and serving its community remained constant. This vaccination site served a large number of people throughout the time the site was open. The CDC recognized the Shiloh site as a leading vaccination site in the country.



Bettye Davis African American Summit on COVID-19

In 2021, the annual Bettye Davis African American Summit focused on COVID-19 and its effects in the BIPOC community. The event featured COVID-19 education, vaccinations, and sessions and speakers that related the ABC core areas of education, justice, health, and economics to COVID-19 recovery efforts. The event provided an opportunity for the community to come together at a time when the overwhelming effects of the pandemic threatened to overtake the BIPOC. The sense of community and a common fight renewed



hope and empowered leaders and community members alike.

United We Stand Pre-Juneteenth BIPOC Health Fair in the Park

The United We Stand Pre-Juneteenth BIPOC Health Fair in the Park was a celebration that took place at the Delaney Park Strip on Saturday, June 11, 2022, as a kick-off for a week-long schedule of Juneteenth events throughout the community. Juneteenth is a federal and state holiday commemorating the emancipation of African-American slaves. It is also often observed for celebrating African American culture. Originating in Galveston, Texas, it has been celebrated annually on June 19 in various parts of the United States since 1865. Hosting this event as a precursor to the Juneteenth celebration provided opportunities to tap into a large segment of the Black and BIPOC community as we worked to address health inequity, disparities in healthcare and vaccine access, and outcomes related to the COVID-19 infection.



The Health Fair served as one of the major pieces to the grant work engaged by the Alaska Black Caucus during the entirety of the grant period. While it has been the primary goal to continue to address the inequities COVID-19 has placed on BIPOC communities, we looked to the Health Fair to also be a time of celebration for the victories experienced over the last year of meaningful work.

Access to clear, accurate, and trustworthy health information is crucial to manage and respond to this unprecedented health crisis. The Health Fair offered real-time health solutions for attendees, including COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters with the opportunity to ask questions from experts, as well as opportunities for routine blood work, blood pressure checks, screening tests, blood donation, and insurance enrollment. There were also educational/resource booths pertaining to health topics, entertainment, food, drinks, and physical activities to fully engage the spectrum of those in attendance.

Additionally, our keynote speaker was Dr. Jerome Adams, a former U.S. Surgeon General, who shared his views around COVID-19 and the effects on mental health in the BIPOC community. He was joined by several other key officials from state and federal Health & Human Services divisions, local dignitaries, and community leaders who worked to inform, enlighten, and uplift the BIPOC community.



Bettye Davis African American Covid19 Summit & School Renaming



Alaska Native Heritage Center and ABC United We Stand Health Equity Fair

