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Provider Perceptions of COVID-19

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Introduction

In February of 2020, a team of interdisciplinary researchers and community partners came together to improve the way housing and services are allocated to homeless individuals and families, particularly those who are Black, Latinx, LGBTQ, aging, women and survivors of interpersonal violence. This work is a collaboration between the University of Southern California, University of California, Los Angeles, California Policy Lab, UCLA's Semel Institute, the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, the Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, Lens Co, University of Missouri, Los Angeles Housing Authority (LAHSA), United Way of Greater Los Angeles Home for Good Program and the USC Homelessness Policy Research Institute.

With the onset of COVID-19, the homeless service system became a rapidly changing and environment and providers of homeless services were inundated with triaging persons experiencing homeless into housing as quickly as possible. To understand the extent to which COVID was impacting the use of the triage tools and housing allocation, the Coordinated Entry System Triage Tool Research & Refinement Project (CESTTRR) team created an online survey that enabled service providers to share their perspectives on assessment tools—in particular, the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)—used to assess people experiencing homelessness for potential housing placement. Findings from this effort were used to inform the larger study which aims to better understand how the tools are used and how they assist in allocating housing resources. The survey included closed and open-ended questions that ascertained perceptions of the goals (i.e., purpose) and application of the tools. The survey was administered in collaboration with the policy partner, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), to optimize reach and response rates.

Methodology

The CESTTRR team sent the "Provider Survey" via email to every non-LAHSA employee listed on the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's CES leadership list. The provider survey was 78 questions in length and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Beginning, July 6th, 2020, the survey was distributed to 105 unique individuals who comprised 27 unique agencies and programs. 11 emails bounced back as undeliverable (10%). Qualtrics was the platform used for data collection. The initial request provided a deadline of August 14th, 2020 for survey completion. The CESTTRR project team sent reminder emails twice a week (Monday and Friday) for a period of six weeks. Collectively, the CESTTRR team sent 1,050 email requests for survey completion. Service providers who completed the survey received a $10 cash gift of their choice via Cash App, Venmo, PayPal or e-gift card for their time. Surveys were submitted by 45 providers, across 18 agencies, with a completion rate of 43%.
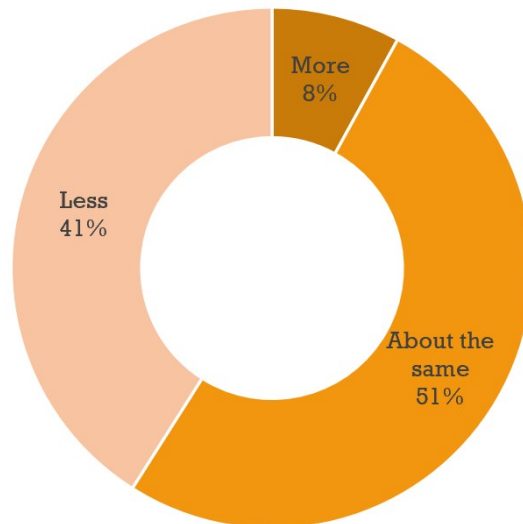
Of the providers who completed the survey, 44% were Latinx, 35% were White, 6% were Black, 6% were Asian, 4% identified as Mixed race/ethnicity, 2% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 2% identified as Other. Most providers identified as female (77%). Almost two-thirds of providers had been with their agency for 1-3 years, and 35% of providers had been working in the homelessness field for 10 years or more.
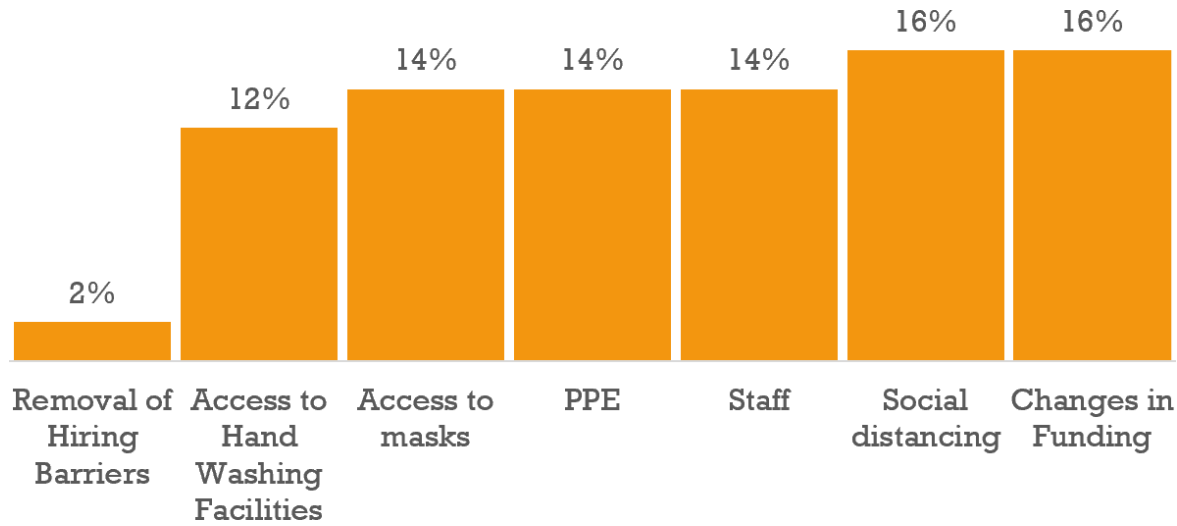
Findings

Providers of homeless services were asked if their organizations used the assessment tools to prioritize placement into housing during COVID-19. Almost 75% of providers said yes.

■ Yes ■ No

74%

26%
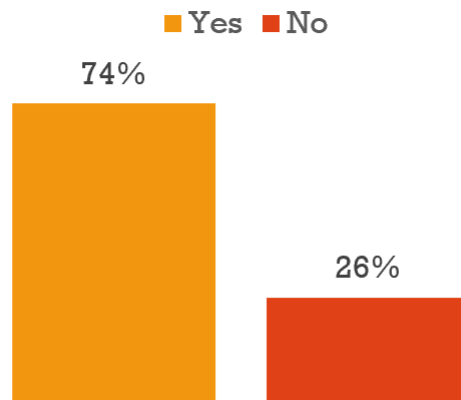
Providers were also asked how frequently their agencies administer assessments during COVID-19. The results suggest that frequency of assessment administration varies by agency. Specifically, 51% of providers indicated that assessments are administered at the same rate as before COVID while 41% of providers said assessments are administered less frequently, and 8% indicated more frequently.

More
8%

Less
41%

About the
same
51%

14% 14% 14%
12% 16% 16%

2%

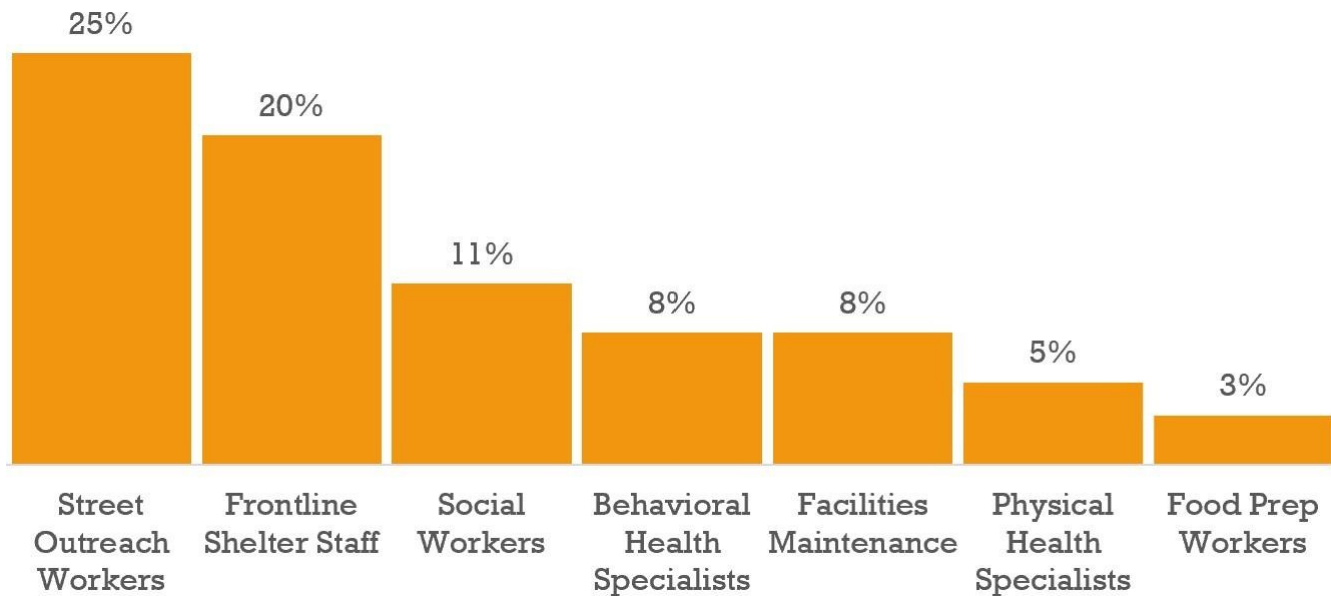| Removal of Hiring Barriers | Access to Hand Washing Facilities | Access to masks | PPE | Staff | Social distancing | Changes in Funding |

Providers were asked to identify what is needed *most* to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Among providers, needs appear to vary by agency. As displayed above, 16% of providers noted that social distancing and changes were needed most while 14% providers selected additional staff, personal protection equipment, and access to masks as priorities. Other providers highlighted access to hand washing facilities (12%) and the removal of hiring barriers (2%).

■ Yes ■ No

53%

47%
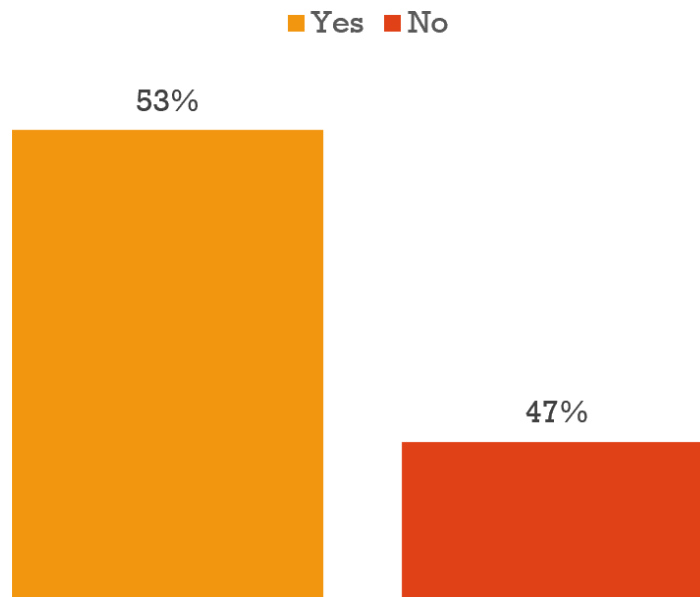
Providers were asked if they were experiencing COVID-19 related staff shortages. Over 50% of respondents said yes.

Street Outreach Workers: 25%
Frontline Shelter Staff: 20%
Social Workers: 11%
Behavioral Health Specialists: 8%
Facilities Maintenance: 8%
Physical Health Specialists: 5%
Food Prep Workers: 3%

When asked to indicate what areas staff shortages are occurring, street outreach workers (25%) frontline shelter staff (20%), social workers (11%), behavioral health specialists (8%), facilities maintenance (8%), physical health specialists (5%), and food prep workers (3%).

Providers were asked to share organizational challenges to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Providers highlighted:

- Lack of Personal Protection Equipment
- Staff Shortages
- Client Education
- Availability of COVID Testing
- Social Distancing
- Resources (Beds, funding, & food).

We also asked providers what has continued to function within their agencies as it did before COVID-19. These themes emerged:

- Everything
- Nothing
- Phone Screens
- Services
- Outreach Efforts
- Initial Screenings
- Agency support
- Client Communication

In the provider survey, we asked respondents to share what has changed drastically due to COVID-19. The following things arose:
- Staff Outreach
- COVID Protocols
- Phone/Virtual Business
- Case Management
- Ability to obtain documents
- Housing
- Appointments
- Intake Processes
- Office Culture
- Volunteer Base

In terms of what providers are worried about after COVID-19, providers highlighted:
- Housing
- Evictions
- Illness
- Employment
- Funding
- High rights on convictions
- Lack of Permanent Supportive Housing
- Ongoing pandemic
- People needing more assistance

Lastly, we asked providers if there were any other challenges/concerns that they'd like to share (related to COVID-19 or the CES triage tools)? Providers shared:

- Miscommunication
- Inaccurate assessment of vulnerabilities
- Missing vulnerability indexes
- Lack of progress in locating housing
- Difficult to know if client is alone
- Tool doesn't account for severity
- Triage tool shouldn't be shared publicly
- More permanent resources
- Accessible training for CES tools
- CES has proved to be a useful standardized assessment.

Limitations

COVID-19 created challenges in conducting community-engaged research with service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness. Previously planned qualitative fieldwork via face-to-face interviews and focus groups could no longer be implemented. As a result of pivoting to online surveys as well as limited access to diverse sampling pools and the inability to physically enter marginalized communities, we were unable to reach a more representative sample. This includes males as well as BIPOC. Furthermore, as the distribution of the survey occurred at the height of Los Angeles' first COVID surge, providers of homeless services were inundated with a rising homeless population and expedited housing requests.

Acknowledgements

Provider Perceptions: Online Survey Questions

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in USC's Provider Survey. The purpose of this survey is to explore your perception of CES Triage tools. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses are confidential. If you agree to participate, you will receive $10. The provider survey should take about 20 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please contact Chyna Hill at Chynahil@usc.edu.

Q2 Which CES Triage Tool does your agency use? (Check all that apply.)

- ○ VI-SPDAT for single adults
- ○ CES or Next Step Tool for youth (TAY-VI-SPDAT)
- ○ Family VI-FSPDAT for families

Q3 Do you administer any of the CES triage tools currently?

- o Yes
- o No

Q4 Which CES triage tools do you personally administer?

- ○ VI-SPDAT for single adults
- ○ Next Step Tool for youth (TAY-VI-SPDAT)
- ○ VI-FSPDAT

Q5 How many CES assessments do you, personally, administer on a monthly basis on average?

_____

Q6 Have you administered any of the CES triage tools in the past?

- o Yes
- o No

Q7 Other than yourself, how many people administer CES triage tools in your organization? (If you don't know the exact number, an estimate is fine.)

_____

Q8 When a client is assessed at one agency; are providers at other agencies able to see the assessment information (For example, can a provider at another agency access a client's responses)?

o Yes
o No
o Unsure

Q9 When a client is assessed in one service planning area; are providers in other service planning areas able to see the assessment information(For example, can a provider in another SPA access a client's responses)?

o Yes
o No
o Unsure

 Q10 Are you willing to share this survey with people who administer CES triage tools in your agency?

o Yes
o No

Q11 In your own words, what do you believe the CES triage tool is assessing?

_____

Q12 The next set of questions will ask you how well the CES triage tool is assessing or predicting various components.

Q13 How well is the tool assessing or predicting: **Vulnerability to victimization?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o   Unsure

Q14 How well is the tool assessing or predicting: **Vulnerability to death?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o Unsure

Q15 How well is the tool assessing or predicting: **Successful PLACEMENTS in housing interventions such as PSH or RRH?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o Unsure

Q16 How well is the tool assessing or predicting: **Successful RETENTION in housing interventions such as PSH or RRH?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o   Unsure

Q17 How well is the tool assessing or predicting: Appropriateness for specific types of services (For example, connecting to emergency shelter, enrolling in MediCal, enrolling in CalFresh,etc)?

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure

Q18 How well is the tool assessing or predicting: **Appropriateness for specific types of housing (PSH orRRH)?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure

Q19 There are some people who believe that the CES Triage Tools are not working well for specific populations of persons who experience homelessness. The next set of questions will ask you how well you believe the current CES Triage Tool works for specific populations.

Q20 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **African American or Black persons?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q21 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Latino**, **Latina, Latinx**, **or Hispanic persons?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o   Unsure
o   I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q22 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **White persons?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o   Unsure
o   I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q23 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Asian/Asian Americans?**

o   Very well
o   Somewhat well
o   Not well at all
o   Unsure
o   I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q24 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Native Americans/American Indian/Indigenous persons?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q25 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q26 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic persons?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q27 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **LGBQ persons?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q28 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Transgender persons?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q29 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Older persons (over 50 years)?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q30 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Women?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q31 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **persons who have experienced domestic violence or intimate partner violence?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q32 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **persons who have experienced human trafficking?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q33 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Veterans?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q34 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Transition Age Youth (18-24 years)?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q35 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Youth (17 years or younger)?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q36 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Families?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q37 How well does the current CES Triage Tool work for: **Families with young children?**

o Very well
o Somewhat well
o Not well at all
o Unsure
o I don't know because I don't work with this population

Q38 What would be the **most** valuable purpose of an assessment tool for you in the work that you do?

o Assessing vulnerability to victimization
o Assessing vulnerability to death
o Assessing success in housing
o Assessing likelihood of successful exit from homelessness
o Assessing appropriateness for specific types of housing
o Something else (please specify):

_____

Q39 In your opinion, what are the **most** important risk factors currently captured by the CES Triage Tool? (Please select your top 3).

○ Length of time homeless
○ Exposure to violence on the streets
○ Exposure to violence prior to life on the streets
○ Substance abuse and use issues
○ Mental health issues
○ Physical disabilities
○ Conflict with family
○ Other (please specify):

_____

Q40 Are there any risk factors that should be in the current CES Triage Tool but are not currently captured?

o Yes
o No

Q41 What risk factor(s) should be in the current CES Triage Tool and are not currently captured?

_____

Q42 The next set of questions will ask you about administrative challenges.

_____

Q43 When people who work at your organization administer the CES triage tools, where are the assessments done? (select all that apply)

- ○ In a private office
- ○ In a quiet part of a public space at the agency
- ○ In a public space at the agency (space that is not quiet)
- ○ On the street
- ○ Other: _____

Q44 When people who work at your organization administer the CES Triage Tool, when are the tools administered (a majority of the time or most often)?

o At the first meeting with a new client o After at least 2 meetings with a new client

o After at least 1 month of service with a new client

o When a client is about to move into a unit

o When a client has recently moved into a housing unit ?

o When you are aware that new housing units or resources are becoming available

Q45 What kind of training are people in your organization given with respect to administering the CES triage tools?

_____

Q46 What challenges, if any, does your organization have in capturing or entering the CES Triage Tool information you collect? (For example where/when/how it is being administered, barriers to data capturing and entering, etc.)

_____

Q47 Organizations sometimes re-administer the assessment tool for a particular person. What are the scenarios in which your organization re-administers the tool with the same person?

_____

Q48 The next set of questions will ask you about the extent to which you believe the following issues create challenges in administering the CES Triage Tool.

Q49 How much of a challenge is: **the length of the tool?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q50 How much of a challenge is: **the extent to which the tool seems to be trauma informed?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q51 How much of a challenge is: **client's understanding of the purpose of the tool?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q52 How much of a challenge is: **agency staff's understanding of the purpose of the tool?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q53 How much of a challenge is: **client trust in how the information collected from the tool will be used?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q54 How much of a challenge is: **staff trust in how the tool will impact the housing options of clients they are working with?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q55 How much of a challenge is: **language barriers?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q56 How much of a challenge is: **cultural barriers?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q57 How much of a challenge is: **racial/ethnic discordance (i.e., client & provider do not share the same racial or ethnic background)?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q58 How much of a challenge is: **question sensitivity (i.e., questions that may cause a client to feel uneasy about answering truthfully or at all)?**

o Serious challenge
o Minor challenge
o Not a problem at all
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q59 The next set of questions will ask you about COVID-19 experiences.

Q60 What is needed **most**, **besides housing**, to prevent COVID-19 infection and spread amongst people experiencing homelessness?

o Implementing social distancing
o Access to masks or materials for masks
o Access to hand washing facilities
o Access to hand sanitizer
o PPE (e.g., masks, gloves) for staff
o Having enough staff
o Hiring barriers
o Changes in funding
o Other please specify:

_____

Q61 What is your organization's greatest challenge, **besides housing**, to preventing COVID-19 infection and spread among people experiencing homelessness?

_____

Q62 What has continued to function as it did before COVID-19 within your agency?

_____

Q63 What has changed drastically due to COVID-19?

_____

Q64 What are you worried about happening after COVID-19?

_____

Q65 During COVID-19, how frequently has your agency administered assessments?

o More
o About the same
o Less
o Other (please specify):

_____

Q66 During COVID-19, how frequently have you, personally, administered assessments?

_____

Q67 Has your organization used the assessment tools as a way of prioritizing housing placements

o Yes
o No

Q68 Are you experiencing COVID-19-related staffing shortages?

o Yes
o No

Q69 **If** you are experiencing COVID-19-related staffing shortages, in what areas are they occurring? (Check all that apply.)

- ○ Frontline Shelter Staff
- ○ Social Workers
- ○ Physical Health Specialists
- ○ Street Outreach Workers
- ○ Behavioral Health Specialists
- ○ Food prep workers
- ○ Facilities Maintenance
- ○ Volunteers
- ○ Other (please specify):

  _____

- ○ None

Q70 Are there any other challenges/concerns that you would like to share (related to COVID-19 or the CES triage tools)?

_____

Q71 In the final set of questions, we will ask you about demographic characteristics.

_____

Q72 What agency do you work for?

o Ascencia
o Bridge to Home
o Center for Pacific Asian Family
o Coalition for Responsible Community
o Exodus Recovery
o Harbor Interfaith Services
o Hathaway-Sycamores Child & Family Services
o Homeless Health Care - Los Angeles o Jovenes Inc
o LA Family Housing
o LGBT Center
o Mental Health America - Los Angeles o PATH
o Rainbow Services
o Safe Place for Youth o Salvation Army
o SCHARP
o Special Services for Groups
o St. Joseph Center
o The Center at Blessed Sacrament
o The People Concern
o The Village Family Services
o The Whole Child
o Union Station Homeless Services
o Valley Oasis
o Volunteers of America - Los Angeles
o Watts Labor Community Action Committee
o Other: Please specify

_____

Q73 What is your role?

o Adult Co-Matcher
o Adults Matcher
o Assistant Adult Coordinator
o CES Director
o Coordinator o Data Coordinator
o DV Coordinator
o Family Coordinator
o Family Matcher
o Family Regional Coordinator
o Interim Adult Matcher
o Interim Family Matcher
o Lead Coordinator
o Outreach Coordinator
o Partnership Coordinator
o Regional Coordinator for Adults & Families
o Regional Data Coordinator
o Regional Performance Coordinator
o Regional Program Director
o Regional Systems Director
o SPA Lead Coordinator
o Veteran Lead Coordinator
o Youth Matcher
o Youth Coordinator
o Other: Please Specify

Q74 How long have you worked at your agency?

o Less than one year
o 1-3 years
o 4-6 years
o 7-9 years
o 10 or more years

Q75 How long have you worked in the homelessness field?

o Less than one year
o 1-3 years
o 4-6 years
o 7-9 years
o 10 years or more

Q76 How old are you?

o 18-24
o 25-29
o 30-34
o 35-39
o 40-44
o 45-49
o 50-54
o 55-59
o 60-64
o 65-69
o 70-74
o75+

Q77 What is your race/ethnicity?

o American Indian or Alaskan Native
o Asian o Black or African American
o Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
o White o Mixed Race
o Latino, Latina, Latinx, or Hispanic
o Other (Please specify)

_____

Q78 What is your gender?

o Male
o Female
o Transgender - Male to Female
o Transgender - Female to Male
o Non-Conforming
o Other