

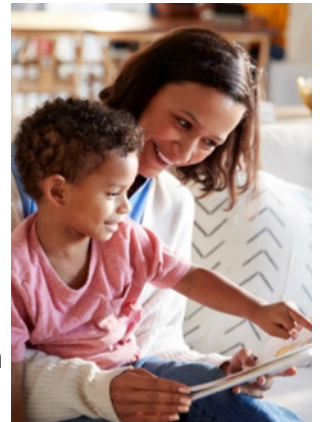
Mobilizing Community and Family Resilience Across Illinois Community and Family Resilience Impact Group

April 16, 2020

At the request of President Tim Killeen, IGPA has assembled more than four dozen interdisciplinary faculty experts from all three System universities to assess COVID-19's effects on the state. Assessments focus on three impact groups: Economic and Fiscal Impact, Community and Family Resilience, and the Healthcare Workforce. Each group is collaborating on a series of economic modeling activities, data analyses, and syntheses of impact.

This report from the Community and Family Resilience Impact Group draws on the strength of 26 scholar-signatories.

As of this writing, the total confirmed cases of COVID-19 and deaths continues to grow daily, though at slower rates than in March and early April. Physical distancing efforts instituted by the governor of Illinois in March may extend into May, at least.



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Executive Summary

Findings: To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and alleviate the pressure on medical resources, state and local governments in Illinois have [mandated](#) measures of social distancing, including sheltering at home. While necessary during a pandemic, these measures have the potential to undermine essential social and family ties that individuals depend upon on top of the present-day illness and death from COVID-19, and fears thereof, as well as the associated economic crisis. All Illinoisans are impacted by the strains COVID-19 places upon communities and families, but some persons are more vulnerable than others, including the elderly, and those with disabilities, prior mental illness, financial disparities, and fragile social and family ties.

Prior disasters have taught that mobilizing community and family resilience can help promote positive coping for all, and prevent adverse health and mental health outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable.

Key Recommendation: To mitigate against potential negative outcomes during the response and recovery phases over the next nine months, we recommend that Illinois rapidly launch a new Resilient Illinois Initiative that provides targeted training and support to communities and families. This initiative will build and strengthen their resilience for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Next Steps: This can be achieved through a public-private collaborative effort funded by the state, led by a community-based organization with support from university researchers, which will engage a network of community-based organizations so as to reach communities and families throughout Illinois.

Physical Distancing and Solidarity in Illinois

On March 20, 2020, Governor Pritzker issued a "[stay at home](#)" order prohibiting gatherings of more than 10 people and barring residents from socializing in-person with people outside their household. The order has been extended until at least April 30. Social distancing is deliberately increasing the physical space between people, to lessen the chances of spreading COVID-19.

Our leaders and public health authorities have asked for more, as infectious diseases expert Dr. Emily Landon [explained](#): "Now it's your turn to do your part." Some have called for actions based upon social solidarity (that is, the interdependence among individuals and across groups). These calls urge not just staying home, but also safely reaching out to those in need. Senior residents across the state would be one population where deliberate outreach is important since many are retired and live alone.

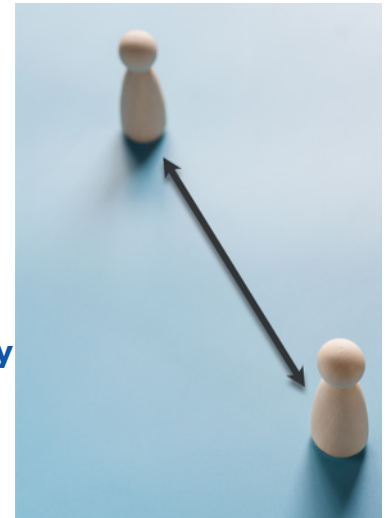
Key challenges are how to make social distancing sustainable for months and how to promote and build on the social solidarity that sustains our society.

How the Pandemic Challenges Community Life in Illinois

Communities of all sizes function best with public infrastructure systems that are developed to support basic human needs. It is the social and cultural fabric, however, that give rise to the vibrancy of communities and feed systems of social cohesion and resilience. As epicenters of activity, urban areas, with increasing concentrations of populations, present both unique challenges and opportunities during disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. States and cities of all sizes with well-functioning infrastructure are better equipped to handle a crisis, particularly if they have invested thought and resources into highly developed emergency management systems.

On top of these systems, are mechanisms and networks of interpersonal and social support. In this disaster, the extended periods of social distancing, the economic crisis, and exposure to illness and death, undermine the social and cultural relations that are critical in times of disaster or crisis—precisely at a time when they are most crucial and could be of most value.

In other words, the COVID-19 health and economic impacts, and the social distancing that is necessary to impede its accelerated spread, simultaneously create an array of stressors on all persons, and especially vulnerable populations. It also impedes the social and cultural systems within communities and families that normally provide social cohesion, belonging, and safety. Among these are schools, [religious organizations](#), sports teams, civic organizations, and family, workplace, and friendship networks.



How the Pandemic Impacts Communities and Families

Prior experiences with disasters teach us that the distress people experience will be due both to the pandemic itself and to the losses of communality and support that result from these disruptions.¹

For example, in the 1995 Chicago heatwave, social isolation among the elderly in poor, segregated, and abandoned neighborhoods was linked with otherwise preventable deaths. The risks associated with the losses of communality and support can occur across the entire state, or can be localized to particular communities and particular vulnerable groups.

Because of persistent and widespread racial inequity and residential segregation,² the pandemic will likely impact communities unevenly, resulting in families and communities of color, including undocumented persons, being among the hardest hit.

Prior work in disasters has identified how multiple stressors can negatively impact families. Research shows that during times of stress, rates of intimate partner violence, child abuse, and family conflict increase.

Family instability, including mental health concerns, substance abuse, prior trauma exposure, and the loss of work that creates economic hardships, magnify these concerns.

For the most vulnerable children, even if the risk for infection is very low, the risk for heightened anxiety, fear, and depression can increase.³

As challenging as these community and family disruptions can be, prior experiences with disasters also teach that “the prevalent human nature in disaster is resilient, resourceful, generous, empathic, and brave.”⁴

Disasters, including COVID-19, can actually open up individuals, families, and communities to positive changes, if activated by prudent public-private actions to strengthen communities’ and families’ abilities to weather the expected destructive and disruptive consequences.

Community Resilience: Community resilience is the sustained ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations.⁵

Researchers have identified four primary sets of resources that underlie community resilience: Economic development (the level of resources, their diversity, and equity); Social capital (social support, participation, bonds, roots, and commitment); Information and communication (trusted information sources and positive narratives); and Community competence (collective action and decision-making skills, collective efficacy, and empowerment).⁶ Access to some versions of these resources are critical during a disaster.

The [Los Angeles County Disaster Resilience](#) (LACCDR) project identified four especially critical areas of emphasis:

1. **Education** ensures ongoing information about preparedness, risks, and resources before, during, and after a disaster.



2. *Engagement* includes community members and promotes participatory decision-making in planning, response, and recovery activities.
3. *Self-sufficiency* enables and supports individuals and communities to assume responsibility for their preparedness.
4. *Partnership* increases and enhances the linkages and collaborations between government and community-based organizations (CBOs).

Targeted actions on these four levers are needed to enhance community resilience, as described in our recommendations below.

Family Resilience: Family resilience is “A product of family relationships where hardships and challenges are opportunities for healing and growth.”⁷ Family resilience can be manifest in the family’s belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes.

Broadly speaking, family resilience is the capacity of the family to adapt to challenging situations in the face of adversity.⁸ It is not a trait of any individual in the family, as is being optimistic under stressful circumstances. Instead, family resilience arises from coordinated efforts of family members to draw upon resources (both material and psychological) and strengths under times of stress. Higher levels of family resilience are associated with greater flourishing among children experiencing adversity.⁹



Specific coping mechanisms for families span four themes:

1. Flexible and reciprocal family organization;
2. Hopeful family beliefs and communication;
3. Staying connected with family; and
4. Making the best of living in a new context.¹⁰

Supporting and enhancing these family coping mechanisms is key for family and individual well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several family processes have been identified as potentially protective of child and family health during stressful times to aid in building capacity for resilience. Specifically, these are family routines and rituals, supporting emotional security and regulating arousal, and maintaining family and cultural traditions.¹¹

In terms of family routines and rituals, it is important to maintain regular bedtime routines such as book reading, prayers, and reducing distractions such as watching TV before bedtime. Parents may be called upon to respond to more negative emotions in a way that generates calm rather than panic. Cultural and family traditions also promote resilience such as maintaining weekly, annual, and special celebrations, even through virtual contacts.

What is Needed to Support Community and Family Resilience

To help Illinoisans during the response and recovery phases expected to last for at least the next nine months, we recommend that the state of Illinois rapidly launch a new Resilient Illinois Initiative. The Initiative will provide targeted training and support to help communities and families through building and strengthening their resilience for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.



While social distancing policies are still in effect, the Initiative's activities will have to be convened virtually, but as the risk of infection spread diminishes and the recovery phase progresses, activities can also be convened in person.

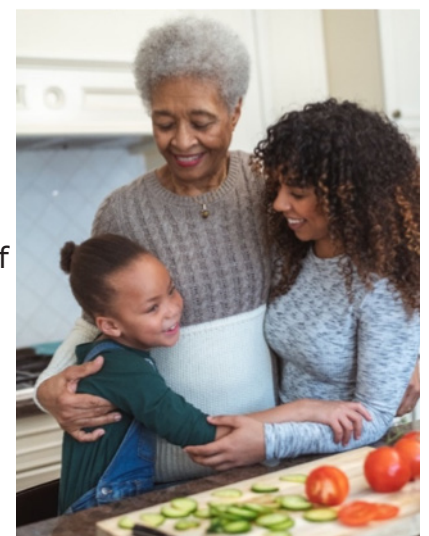
Specific Recommendations:

For State and Local Governments: State government can select and fund a community-based organization to lead, and a university research team to support, a new Resilient Illinois Initiative. Rapid start-up is critical to address the needs during the current response phase and the subsequent recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to conducting targeted resilience building programming (described below), the Initiative should also seek to conduct other community resilience-building activities with community-based organizations and other key state and local partners, including: strengthen partnerships; strengthen information sharing, communication, and coordination; identify and address problems; build capacity for community response; and offer technical assistance. Funds would be used to develop programming, provide necessary infrastructure, and incentivize community participation.

For Community-Based Organizations and Community Leaders: Conducting resilience-building webinars and community workshops which can build capacity in community advocates and organizations to strengthen community and family resilience specific to the COVID-19 pandemic's local impacts. This work can be shared statewide through a digital platform and related network. Local schools and libraries have been distributing tablets and laptop computers to students, so they can participate in distance learning. To ensure that all community members and families can be a part of this proposed network, the Resilient Illinois Initiative should partner with schools, libraries and other organizations, such as businesses, that might have surplus hardware to help close any gaps in access to technology. This collaboration will take advantage of partners across all of Illinois and benefit every part of the state.

For Academics and Researchers: A university research team is needed to support the Resilient Illinois Initiative in multiple ways by developing and disseminating guides in several languages on resilience building for families and communities; documenting new community efforts to build resilience to the pandemic; providing brief measures of family and community resilience and evaluating program effects, including a racial equity impact analysis.

For Communities: Through the Resilient Illinois Initiative, community-based organizations will convene workshops that identify available resources, prior examples of resilient coping, community needs and problems, and help vulnerable community members. Additional workshops might prioritize effective community actions in the face of COVID-19. From this, communities can form coalitions, devise action plans, and begin implementation, learning from, and sharing with other communities through participation in the emerging network.



For Families: Families will learn from Resilient Illinois Initiative materials and webinars about how they can strengthen their family and help vulnerable family members. Key strategies to be emphasized include: maintaining emotional regulation; listening and providing support; encouraging positive family rituals; and practicing family problem solving. Families can also learn and share strategies with others through the Resilient Illinois Initiative.

We are honored to have the opportunity to harness our collective research and experience to serve our neighbors and the residents of Illinois during a time of great need.

Respectfully submitted,

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Audience: *IGPA Impact Reports are intended to be useful to policymakers and stakeholders, including but not limited to University of Illinois System leaders, state legislators, Governor J.B. Pritzker's office, state agencies, news media, nonprofits, educators, volunteer organizations, and faith leaders.*

Endnotes

- 1** Erikson, K. T. (1976). *Everything in its path: Destruction of community in the Buffalo Creek flood*. New York: Simon and Schuster
- 2** Henricks, Kasey, Amanda E. Lewis, Ivan Arenas, and Deana Lewis. 2017. *A Tale of Three Cities: State of Racial Justice in Chicago Report*, Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy, UIC, Chicago, IL. See also Matthew D. Wilson and Teresa L. Córdova. *Industrial Restructuring and the Continuing Impact on Youth Employment in Illinois*. Great Cities Institute, May 2018, available at <https://perma.cc/XEF8-26XQ>.
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- 6** Norris, Fran & Stevens, Susan & Pfefferbaum, Betty & Wyche, Karen & Pfefferbaum, Rose. (2008). *Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness*. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 41. 127-50. 10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6.
- 7** McCubbin HI, Thompson AI, McCubbin MA. *Resiliency in families: A conceptual model of family adjustment and adaptation in response to stress and crises*. In: McCubbin HI, Thompson AI, Mccubbin MA, editors. *Family assessment: Resiliency, coping and adaptation - Inventories for research and practice*. Madison: University of Wisconsin System; 1996. pp. 1-64.
- 8** Masten & Monn, 2015. *Child and family resilience: A call for integrated science, practice, and professional training*. <https://perma.cc/T25N-TX39>
- 9** Walsh, F. (2006). *Strengthening family resilience*. NY: Guilford.
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IGPA TASK FORCE ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
(AS OF APRIL 13, 2020)

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