

Quarterly Economy Tracker

The Institute

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The Institute is a partnership among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, and Wilkes University

Impact of COVID-19 on Workforce Demographics

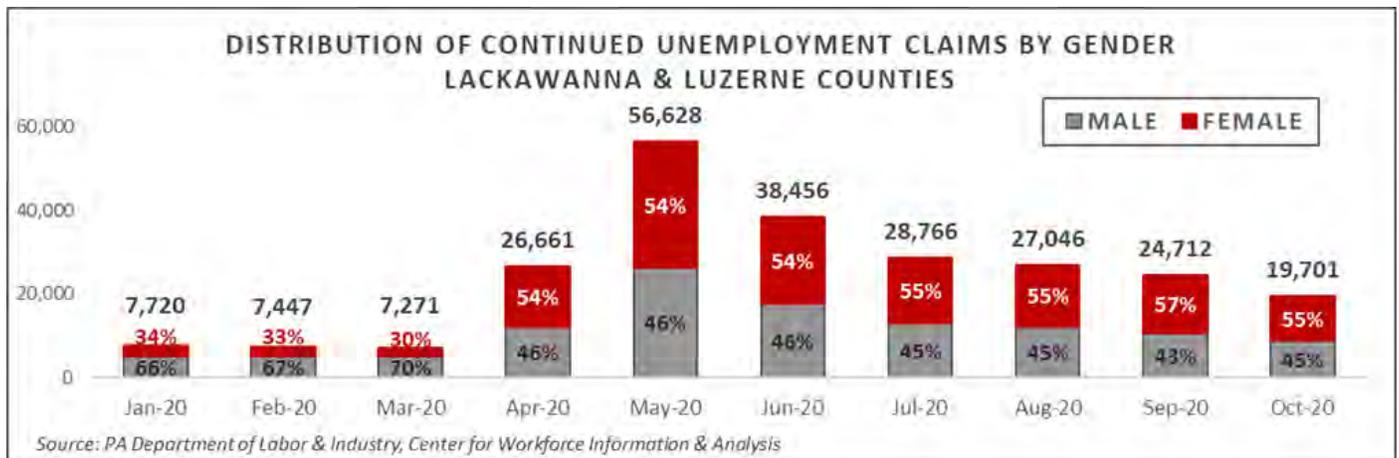
By Megan Stachowiak, Research Analyst and Kara McGrane, Research Assistant

While the nation seeks to recover from the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, an analysis of unemployment claims data indicates certain segments, including women, younger workers, and some minority groups have been disproportionately

impacted by job losses. Women have been leaving the labor force in much higher numbers than men since the pandemic began. Nationally, there are more than 2.5 million fewer women in the labor force than before the pandemic began, and the labor force participation

rate for women, or the share of women working or looking for a job, fell from 57.9 percent in January 2020 to 55.6 percent in September.

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For more research and analysis on COVID-19's impact please visit us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and our website!

COVID-19 Labor Market Update

COVID-19 and associated mitigation actions have forced businesses to close, reduce their services, or alter their operations to continue providing services deemed essential. Though most businesses have reopened since the region entered the green phase of reopening early in the summer, employment impacts remain. Since then, some employment and hiring recovery has been evident. However, significant challenges remain for the labor market and broader economy.

The unemployment rate in Lackawanna Count spiked from 5.6 percent in February to a higher of 17.2 percent in April, and saw significant improvement to 8.2 percent in September. In Luzerne County, the unemployment rate grew from 6.6 percent in February to 18.5 percent in April, and has similarly seen significant decline in the following months. Both counties saw unemployment drops of five percentage points from July to September alone, indicating a rapid pace of economic recovery on the whole.

Unemployment Rate (Not Seasonally Adjusted)				
	Lackawanna	Luzerne	Pennsylvania	United States
2015	5.8	6.4	5.3	5.3
2016	5.6	6.3	5.4	4.9
2017	5.1	5.8	4.9	4.4
2018	4.5	5.4	4.2	3.9
2019	4.9	5.7	4.4	3.7
Jan 2020	5.7	6.7	5.1	4.0
Feb 2020	5.6	6.6	5.1	3.8
Mar 2020	6.5	7.7	5.9	4.5
Apr 2020	17.2	18.5	15.6	14.4
May 2020	14.7	16.2	13.2	13.0
Jun 2020	14.5	16.1	13.3	11.2
Jul 2020	13.5	14.8	12.8	10.5
Aug 2020	11.2	12.6	10.6	8.5
Sep 2020	8.2	9.5	7.7	7.7

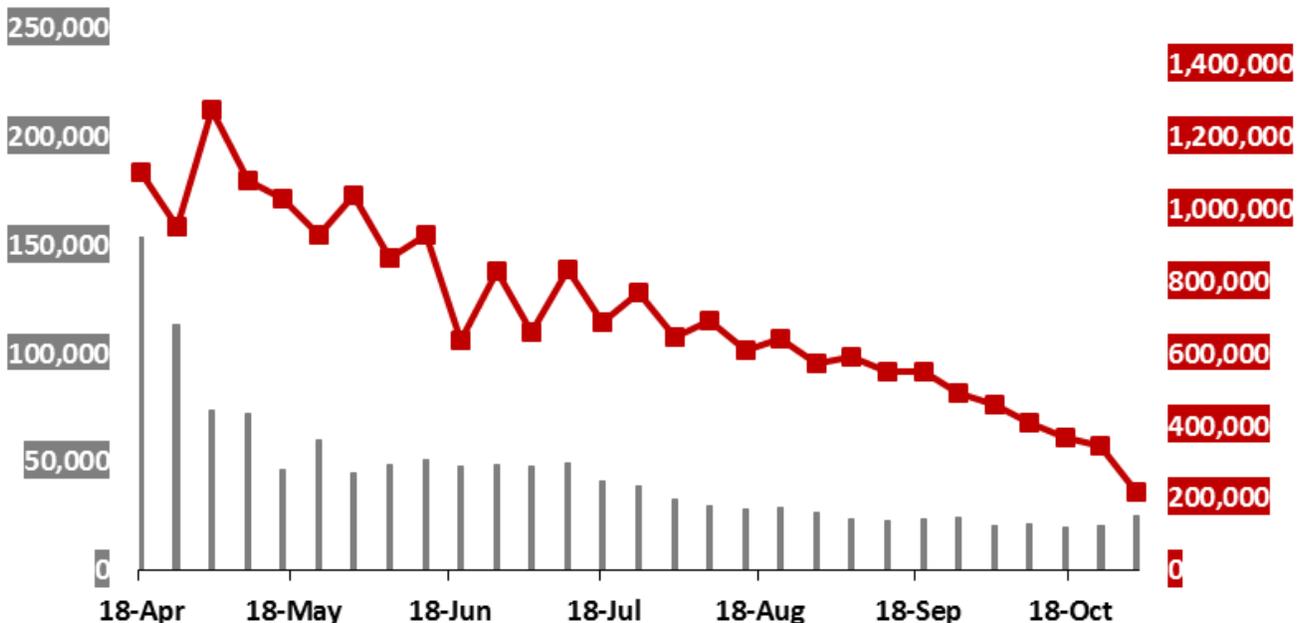
September 2020 data is preliminary except for US unemployment rate.

Statewide, initial and continued unemployment insurance claims have trended down also. Continued claims (indicating long-term unemployment) have fallen from over 1 million per week statewide in May to about 219,000 in the week ending October 31.

Initial unemployment claims have also trended noticeably downward, though over the most recent several week, the rate of decrease has slowed, with an average of 20,000 to 25,000 statewide new claims per week. This is still well above the pre-pandemic average of about 16,000 initial claims per week, indicating that significant economic

Data Sources: US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics and Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry

Initial & Continued Unemployment Claims - Statewide



Workforce Demographics — *continued from page 1*

Some industries with higher concentrations of female employees, such as Retail Trade, Leisure and Hospitality, Government, and Education Services, were hard hit with job losses, and a higher percentage of women have dropped out of the labor force, or are no longer looking for work. According to an analysis by the National Women's Law Center, of the nearly 1.1 million workers ages 20 and up who dropped out of the labor force between August and September, 80 percent were women.

Part of the reason for this is the pandemic has created even greater challenges for working parents, with some struggling to find child care and support their children's education as schools have increasingly moved to virtual learning environments. Due to the pay gap between men and women, in households where both parents work, it often made more sense for women to stay home if someone needed to care for children or assist with homeschooling. And for single mothers, these challenges have been even greater. In addition to taking on increased childcare responsibilities, women have also been assuming the role of caregivers for elderly parents and family members affected by the pandemic. This has contributed, in part, to the high number of women scaling back their workloads or leaving the workforce.

An analysis of regional unemployment claims illustrates how women in the workforce have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. In Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, women accounted for more than half (51 percent) of the nearly 90,000 initial unemployment claims filed since March, compared to 49 percent for men. This represents a dramatic shift from 2019, when women accounted for only 37 percent of initial claims filed, while men represented 63 percent of initial claims.

Since April, women have continued to represent the majority of the continued unemployment claims filed in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties. In early 2019 prior to the pandemic, women represented around one-third or less of continued unemployment claims filed in the region, while men accounted for the remaining two-thirds or more of continued claims. This shifted in April, when women accounted for the majority (54 percent) of continued

"Women accounted for more than half of the nearly 90,000 initial unemployment claims filed since March, compared to 49 percent for men. This represents a dramatic shift from 2019"

unemployment claims. As the volume of continued unemployment claims in the region peaked in May at more than 56,000 claims, and then began tapering off to around 20,000 continued claims in October, women have continued to represent the majority of continued unemployment claim filers in the region. This sharp reversal from the pre-pandemic employment landscape illustrates the impact COVID-19 has had on working women.

Pandemic-related job losses have also disproportionately impacted younger workers. Statewide and in Lackawanna & Luzerne, the proportion of initial unemployment claims filed since March for workers ages 16-34 have exceeded their share of claims filed in 2019. The largest shift has been in claims filed by workers ages 20-24. In 2019, this age group accounted for seven percent of initial unemployment claims filed statewide and in the two counties. Between March and October of 2020, this increased to 12 percent of claims filed statewide, and 10 percent of claims filed in Lackawanna and Luzerne. While workers under age 35 accounted for a larger share of initial unemployment claims, older workers, particularly those ages 45-64, represent a smaller share of initial claims filed since March.

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Institute Insights on COVID-19

By Teri Ooms, Executive Director

The Institute realizes regional leaders will need reliable information, unbiased fact-based analysis, and real-time data to make the tough decisions necessary for a successful economic recovery. These decisions will need to be data-driven - and The Institute is answering the call. Our region needs a well-defined path forward and we strongly believe that a comprehensive COVID-19 data and research initiative will be critical in this process.

To support these goals, The Institute has embarked on Institute Insights on COVID-19, a multi-faceted research effort.

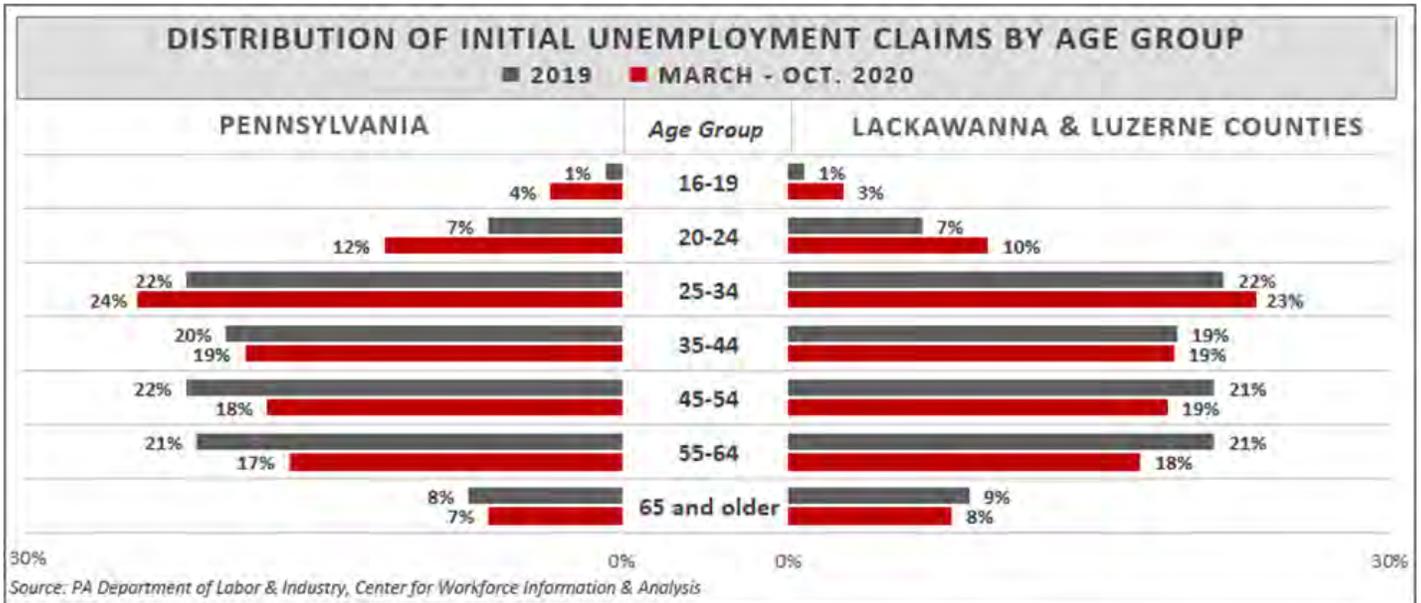
This critical work is supported by funding from The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce, Sordoni Family Foundation, and UGI Utilities along with the Luzerne County COVID_19 Emergency Response Fund of The Luzerne Foundation, Scranton Area Foundation's NEPA COVID-19 Fund and Wells Fargo Foundation. ♦

Full Studies Online Now:

- ***Workforce Development in the Face of COVID-19***
- ***Regional Telehealth Services***
- ***Impact of COVID-19 on K-12 Education***
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Read the full reports from The Institute on [our website](#) and follow our [YouTube Channel](#) for the most current data updates!

Workforce Demographics — continued from page 3

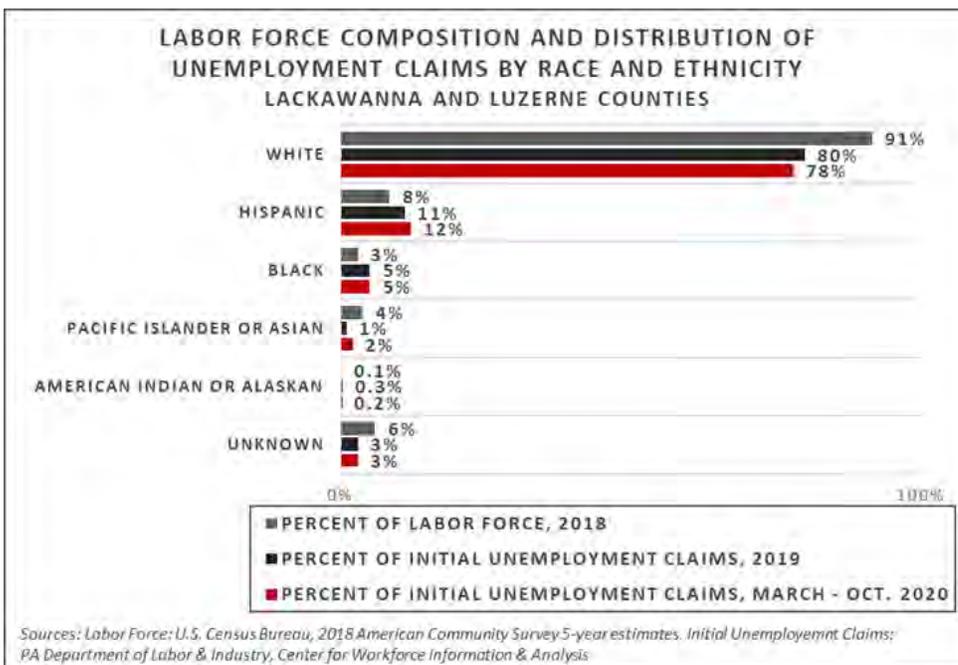


The latest available regional data from the U.S. Census Bureau on employment status by race and ethnicity indicates that in 2018, more than 9 in 10 workers age 16 or older in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties were White/Caucasian. However, White workers represent a smaller share of initial unemployment claims filed both in 2019 and since the pandemic began in March 2020 relative to their share of the total workforce in the region, accounting for around 8 in 10 claims filed. While the Hispanic/Latino

population represented eight percent of the region’s workforce in 2018, they accounted for a larger share of initial unemployment claims filed in 2019 (11 percent). This has increased slightly since the pandemic began, with Hispanic/Latino workers accounting for 12 percent of initial unemployment claims filed. Similarly, while Black/African American workers comprised three percent of the region’s workforce in 2018, they accounted for a slightly larger share (5 percent) of the initial unemployment

claims filed in both 2019, and since March 2020.

Non-white workers also represent an increasing share of continued unemployment claims in the region. In the two counties, non-white workers accounted for 21 percent of continued employment claims in January 2020 prior to the pandemic. As of October 17, this share has increased 32 percent of continued unemployment claims in the two counties combined. The largest shares of continued claims from non-white workers in both counties comes from Hispanic workers, who account for 19 percent of filers, and Black workers, who account for eight percent of filers. Among males, Hispanic workers’ share of continued claims increased from 9 percent in January to 18 percent in October, while among females, Hispanic workers share of continued claims increase from 17 percent to 20 percent. Male black workers share of continued claims doubled from four to eight percent during this time period, while female black workers share remained stable at seven percent. This illustrates that Hispanic and Black workers are more susceptible to job losses in the region, and this has intensified during the pandemic. ♦



Job Posting Trends Shed Light on Economic Recovery

By Andrew Chew, Senior Research & Policy Analyst and Tommy Marmolejo, Research Intern

COVID-19 has changed staffing need and priorities for businesses in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties. In the 2nd quarter of 2020, coinciding the some of the most significant impacts of business closures on businesses, there were 21,426 job postings. This has increased to 24,642 in the most recent 90 day period, a growth of over 15 percent.

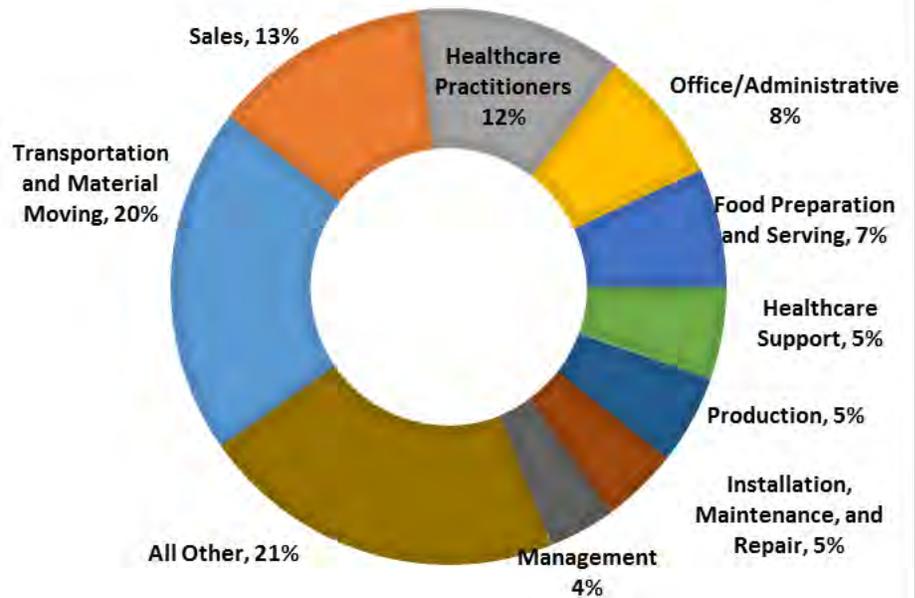
In the most recent data, the largest share of job ads were in transportation and material moving occupations (20 percent) followed by sales (13 percent) and healthcare practitioners (12 percent).

The greatest needs are for stockers and order fillers, retail salespeople, registered nurses, and heavy truck drivers, each with over 1,000 postings in the two county region. The table at right shows the top 15 occupations with the largest number of postings in the last 90 days with a comparison to the 2nd quarter of this year.

Occupations that have seen the largest growth in postings compared with early in the pandemic include several associated with transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing. Postings for heavy truck drivers are up 109 compared with the 2nd quarter, while light truck driver postings have grown 78 percent, hand laborers and material mover postings grew by 58 percent, and stockers and order fillers and production workers both saw increases of over 40 percent. This indicates that these industries appear to be experiencing a strong recovery in the region. ♦

"Occupations that have seen the largest growth in postings compared with early in the pandemic include several associated with transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing."

90 DAY JOB POSTINGS FOR MAJOR CATEGORIES



Job Posting Trends for Top 15 Occupations			
Occupation	Most Recent 90 Days	Q2 2020	% Change
Stockers and Order Fillers	1,809	1,246	45%
Retail Salespersons	1,356	1,038	31%
Registered Nurses	1,288	1,265	2%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	1,206	578	109%
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	803	507	58%
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	700	611	15%
Customer Service Representatives	577	485	19%
Social and Human Service Assistants	512	540	-5%
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping	495	466	6%
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	481	391	23%
Fast Food and Counter Workers	416	366	14%
Production Workers, All Other	410	293	40%
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	399	435	-8%
Nursing Assistants	356	321	11%
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving	347	345	1%
Personal Care Aides	317	245	29%
Light Truck Drivers	314	176	78%
Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising,	295	289	2%
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating	288	262	10%
Cooks, Restaurant	266	233	14%

Data Source: Chmura Economics via JobsEQ

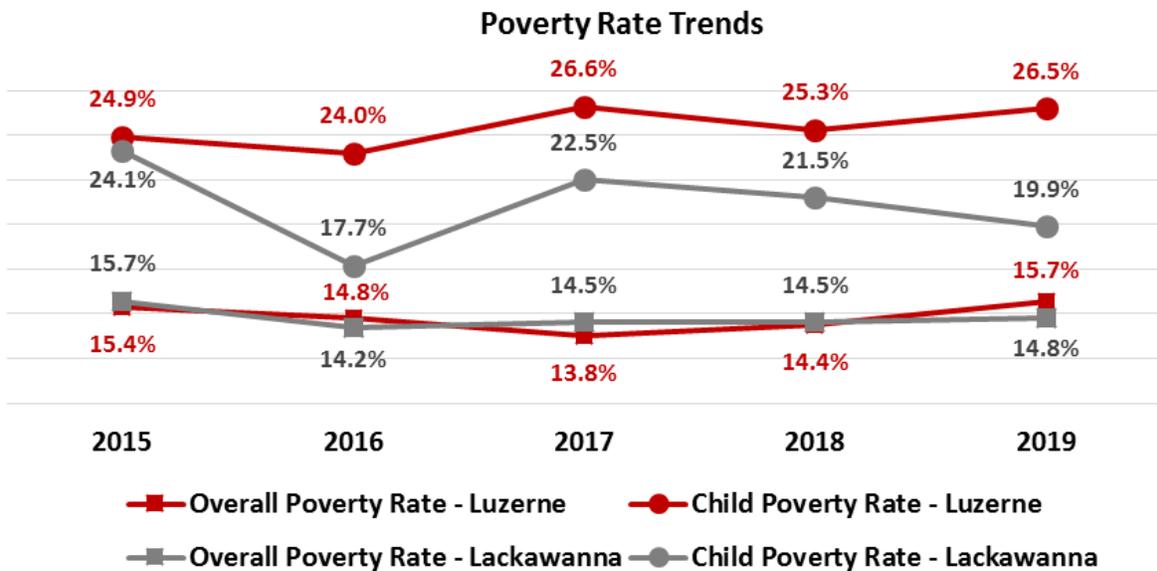
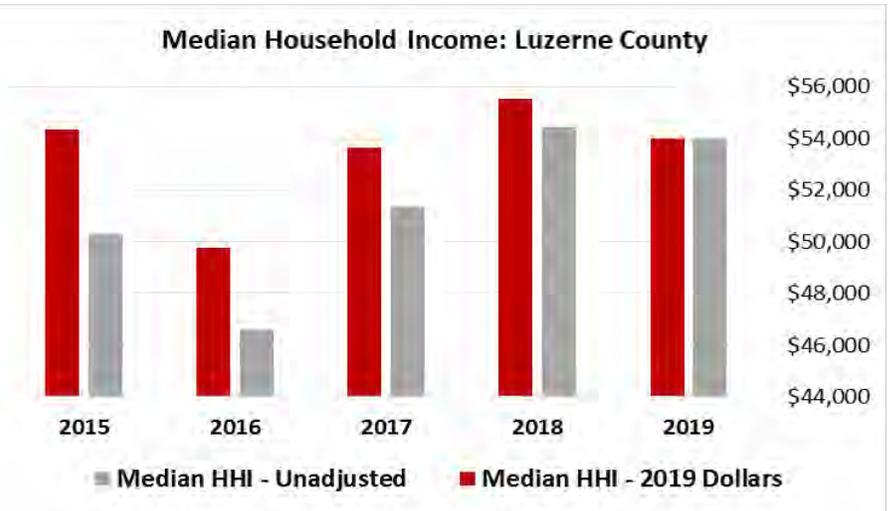
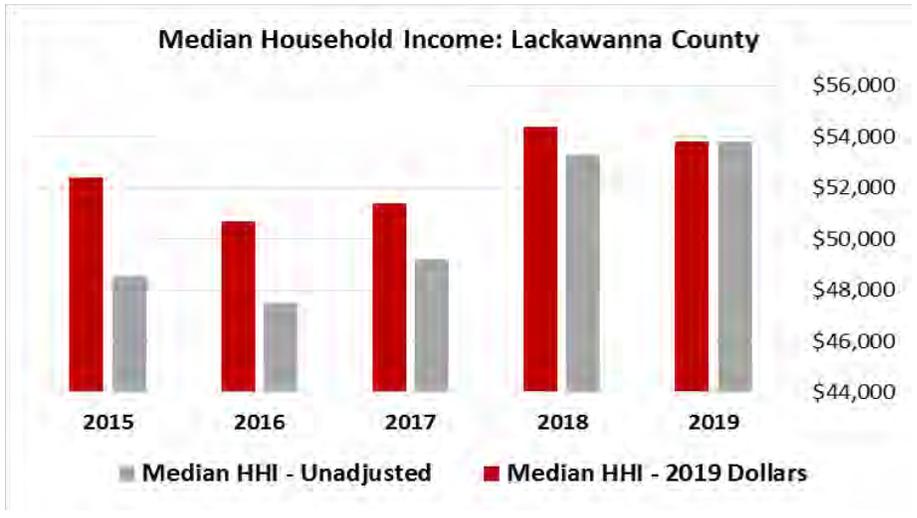
New Data Show Income & Poverty Trends

By Andrew Chew, Senior Research & Policy Analyst

Annual estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey provide county level data on key socioeconomic indicators including median household income and poverty rates. The latest data released this fall are estimates for 2019 - this data will be a useful pre-COVID baseline, as the 2020 data, to be released in fall 2021, will begin to show any shifts that occur due to the pandemic’s impacts on the economy.

Median household income has generally trended up in both counties, particularly when analyzing data that does not control for inflation, shown in gray on the charts at right. The growth from 2015 to 2019 is less pronounced when comparing real household income, in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars, in red on the charts. Both counties saw their median household income dip from 2015 to 2016 before seeing more significant growth from 2016 to 2018.

During that same time, poverty rates fluctuated in both counties. As of 2019, About 15 percent of all residents in both counties had incomes below the federal poverty level. Among children, this rate was nearly 20 percent in Lackawanna County and 26.5 percent in Luzerne. Lackawanna County has shown some modest improvement from 2015 to 2019, while both rates in Luzerne County are higher in 2019 than in 2015. ♦



COVID-19 has Impacted Public Education in Our Region

By Megan Stachowiak, Research & Policy Analyst

As students returned to school for the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, school administrators faced a myriad of considerations in determining the best approaches to safely and equitably provide instruction during the pandemic.

Many school districts in Lackawanna and Luzerne have tried to provide parents with options for virtual, in-person or hybrid learning. Half of school districts in the counties initially reopened following a total remote approach; 36 percent opted for a blended, or hybrid, reopening, with a mix of in-person and remote learning; and 14 percent followed a total in-person reopening. Since reopening, outbreaks of COVID-19 have caused many schools in the region to pivot to remote learning.

Area school districts have expanded access to electronic devices for remote instruction compared to the spring, although many districts faced challenges obtaining devices prior to the start of the school year due to high demand and a shortage of supplies. There has also been an increase in the number of districts providing synchronous, or live-streamed, instruction to remote learners. Across both counties, 68 percent of districts planned to offer synchronous instruction compared to 41 percent in the spring.

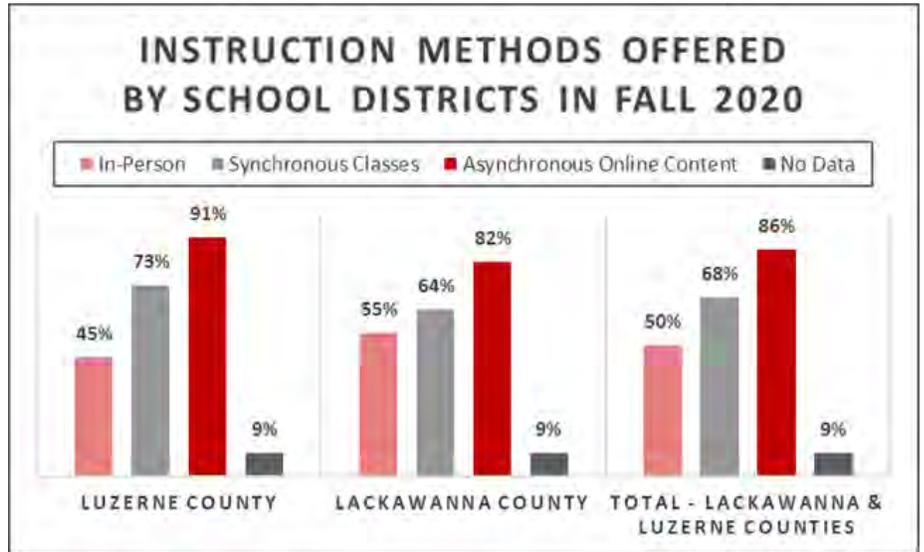
There have been numerous challenges in transitioning to remote learning. Educators, students and parents have faced difficulty acquiring the necessary electronic resources and becoming

acclimated with the technology and platforms in use, leading to an increased need for support from district staff. Districts have also struggled with monitoring student attendance and participation. In addition, schools are trying to ensure students and staff have the resources needed to deliver special education services virtually, and to provide for students to receive in-person assistance when feasible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the education

system, and fundamentally altered the way education is delivered. It has also placed additional responsibilities on school administrators to monitor and protect the health and safety of students and staff. Although initial federal and state funding has been allocated to assist districts in covering the financial costs they are incurring to address these challenges, additional funding and support will be needed to provide the necessary resources to ensure meaningful and equitable education for students in a safe environment. ♦

Read the full reports from *The Institute on the Impact of COVID-19 on K-12 Education in our region* on [The Institute Insights on COVID-19 page](#).



Uptick in Share Without Health Coverage in 2019

By Andrew Chew, Senior Research & Policy Analyst

New data for 2019 from the American Community Survey shows that in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area, the share of the population with no health insurance coverage grew to 5.7 percent, continuing the trend over the past several years. The share with public coverage has grown, however, while the percent of the population with private health insurance has fallen from 72 percent in 2016 to 67 percent in 2019. ♦

Health Insurance Coverage Trends				
Scranton/Wilkes-Barre MSA	2016	2017	2018	2019
Percent with health insurance	95.8	95.5	95.5	94.3
With private health insurance	72.3	71.3	69.6	67.1
With public coverage	39.9	41	43.1	43.7
Percent with no health insurance	4.2	4.5	4.5	5.7

Data Spotlight

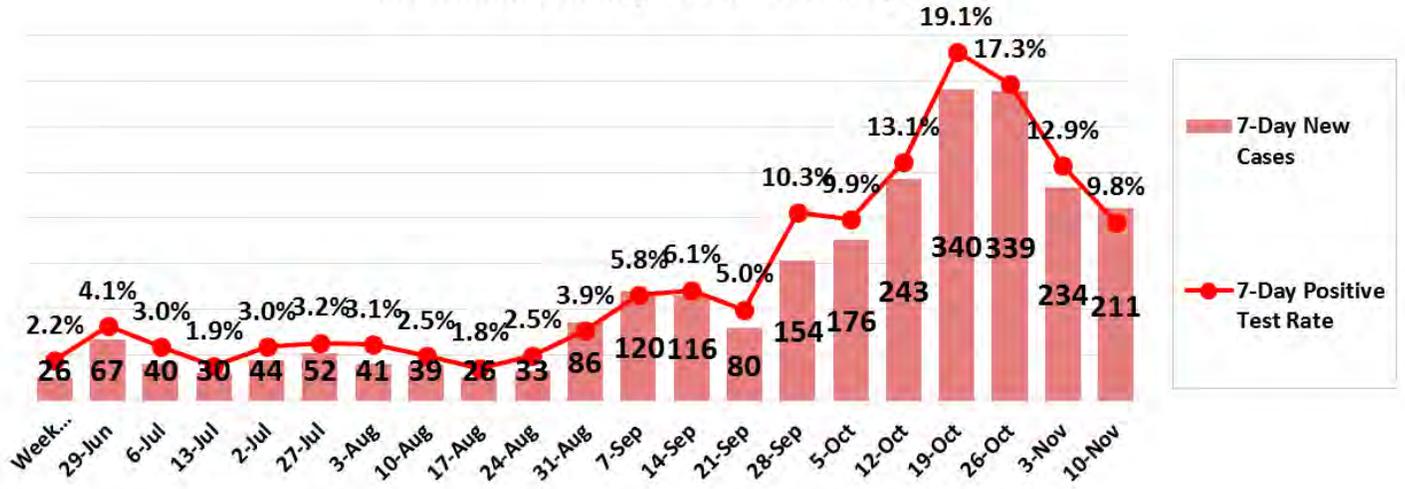
Slowing the Spread of COVID-19 in Northeast PA

COVID-19 cases have surged throughout the region this fall. The charts below show the total number of new cases and percentage of tests that were positive for 7-day periods since July. In Luzerne County, the seven day period ending November 10th had 612 new cases and a positive test rate of over 18 percent, the highest of the time period analyzed. Both of these statistics indicate that the virus is rapidly spreading in the community. A positive test rate higher than five percent is considered an indicator of growing viral activity.

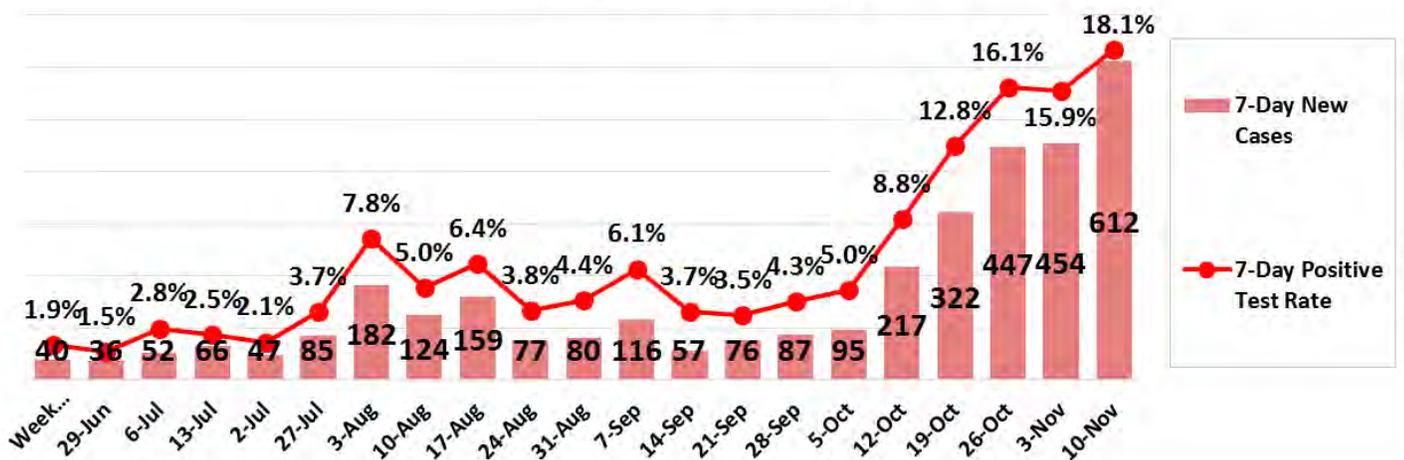
In Lackawanna County, the number of new cases and the positive test rate has fallen since mid-October; however, the number of new cases remains far above levels seen over the summer, and the positive test rate has been above five percent since late September.

Additionally, several surrounding counties, including Carbon, Schuylkill, and Wyoming, have also reported much higher rates of COVID-19 cases and higher positive test rates in the last several weeks. The region's ability to slow the spread of COVID-19 will be one of the most significant factors affecting the regional economy going forward. ♦

Lackawanna County COVID-19 Weekly Trends



Luzerne County COVID-19 Weekly Trends



Data Source: Institute analysis of data from Pennsylvania Department of Health
Beginning on 3 November, 7-day periods analyzed end on Tuesdays. Previously, 7-day periods ended on Mondays.

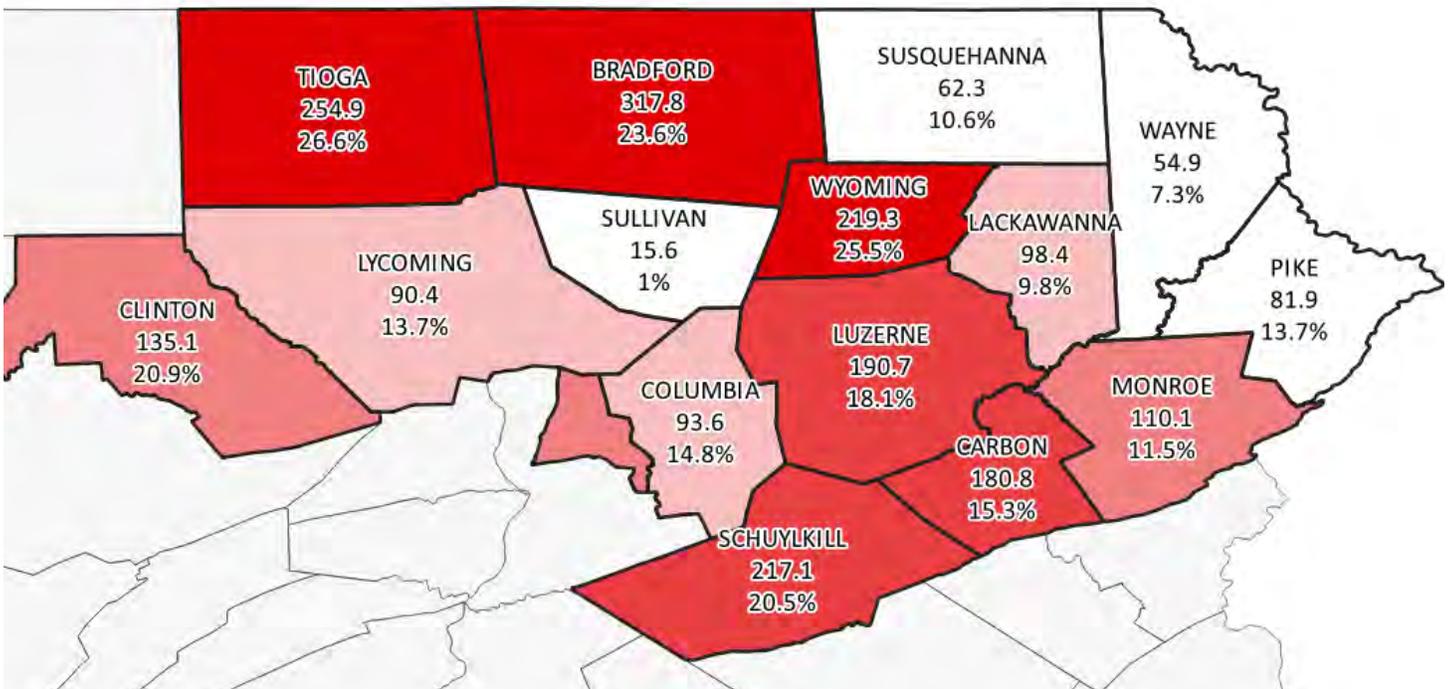
Cartography Corner

Slowing the Spread of COVID-19 in Northeast PA

Recent data shows that COVID-19 is resurgent in Northeastern Pennsylvania this fall. Most counties have seen growth in the rate of new cases. The map below shows the number of new cases in the most recently available 7-day period per 100,000 population. The highest rates per populations are seen in several Northern Tier counties: Bradford, Tioga, and Wyoming. Carbon, Luzerne, and Schuylkill Counties also have relatively high rates of new cases.

The positive test rates have also been elevated in the region. A positive test rate above five percent is one indicator of community spread of the virus, and suggests that increasing caseloads are not just the result of increased testing being conducted. In the greater Northeastern Pennsylvania region, all counties except for Sullivan have positive test rates in excess of five percent for the seven days endings November 10, 2020. ♦

COVID-19 Cases per 100,000 in 7 Days Ending November 10, 2020 and Positive Test Rate for 7 Days Ending November 10, 2020



"In the greater Northeastern Pennsylvania region, all counties except for Sullivan have positive test rates in excess of five percent for the seven days endings November 10, 2020."

"The region's ability to slow the spread of COVID-19 will be one of the most significant factors affecting the regional economy going forward."

COVID-19 Drives Increase in Telehealth Services

By Megan Stachowiak, Research Analyst and Alexandra Cuddy, Research Intern

The COVID-19 pandemic drove a surge in telehealth visits, as health providers modified their operations to offer patients a safe alternative to accessing medical care while remaining socially distant. Local health systems including Geisinger, Commonwealth Health and Lehigh Valley Health Network, all offered expanded availability of telehealth services from primary care doctors and specialists. Community-based health care providers in the region also expanded their use of telehealth services, including the Wright Center for Community Health, Volunteers in Medicine, and Scranton Primary Health Care Center.

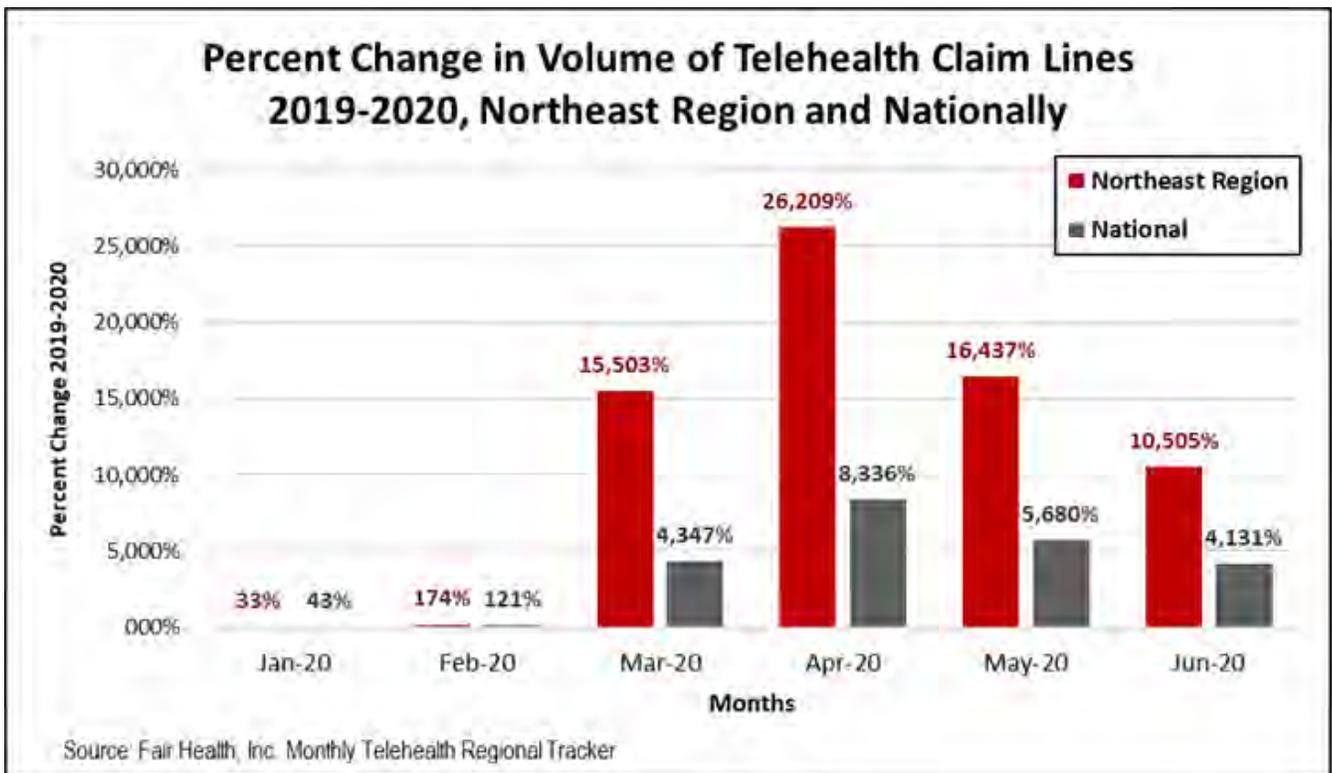
According to Fair Health’s Monthly Telehealth Regional tracker, telehealth visits skyrocketed as COVID-19 cases started to grow in the United States in March 2020. The percent increase in the volume of telehealth claims in the Northeast region of the United States compared to the prior year is significantly higher than the national

increase. Both the Northeast region and the nation as a whole experienced a sharp increase in telehealth claims in March and April, with activity peaking in April before tapering off in the following months. Although the volume has decreased from the April peak, it still continues to far surpass telehealth activity from the prior year.

Regulatory waivers issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) broadened access to telehealth services during this public health emergency, allowing patients to receive a wider range of services and relaxing restrictions on where and how these services could be provided and paid for. Many private health insurers also adjusted their reimbursement policies to provide coverage for telehealth visits. The temporary regulatory changes will remain in effect for the duration of the public health emergency, although there has been growing support to make the changes more permanent.

While telehealth services provide many benefits for both healthcare providers and patients, there are some challenges to making it an accessible option to all patients for the long-term. Technological challenges including lack of broadband access, and regulations regarding cross-state licensing of physicians that have been temporarily lifted during the public health emergency are barriers that need to be addressed, in addition to continuing coverage for telehealth visits by insurers. Long-term policy changes to address these challenges and advancement in internet capabilities across rural areas will be important to the longevity of telehealth services, and offer the potential to increase access to healthcare services in rural areas and medically underserved regions. ♦

The Institute’s full report on the Impact of COVID-19 on Telehealth Services can be found on [The Institute Insights on COVID-19 page](#).



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The Institute Research Team:

Teri Ooms, Executive Director

Andrew Chew, Senior Research & Policy Analyst

Megan Stachowiak, Research Analyst

Joseph Gallo, Research Assistant

Kara McGrane, Research Assistant

Jill Avery-Stoss, Research, Data & Intern Coordinator

Alexandra Cuddy, Research Intern

Tommy Marmolejo, Research Intern

Offices in Wilkes-Barre and Scranton

Phone: 570.408.9850

Email: info@institutepea.org

www.institutepea.org

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