

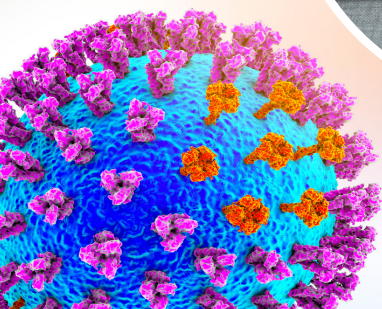
# NOVA SCOTIAN COMMUNITIES & COVID-19

## CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE

---

**Tony Charles, Larissa Sweeney, Libby Dean,  
Rebecca Zimmerman**

Saint Mary's University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia



DECEMBER 2020

# INTRODUCTION

---

The year 2020 was one like no other: COVID-19 has affected communities around the world, in many ways. This report documents some of the impacts in Nova Scotia, through a range of community voices. Despite these impacts, Nova Scotia's communities – whether small villages, rural towns or city neighbourhoods – have strengths that are second to none, and community spirit that helps them meet adversity. This report highlights examples of community resilience through local responses to the pandemic.

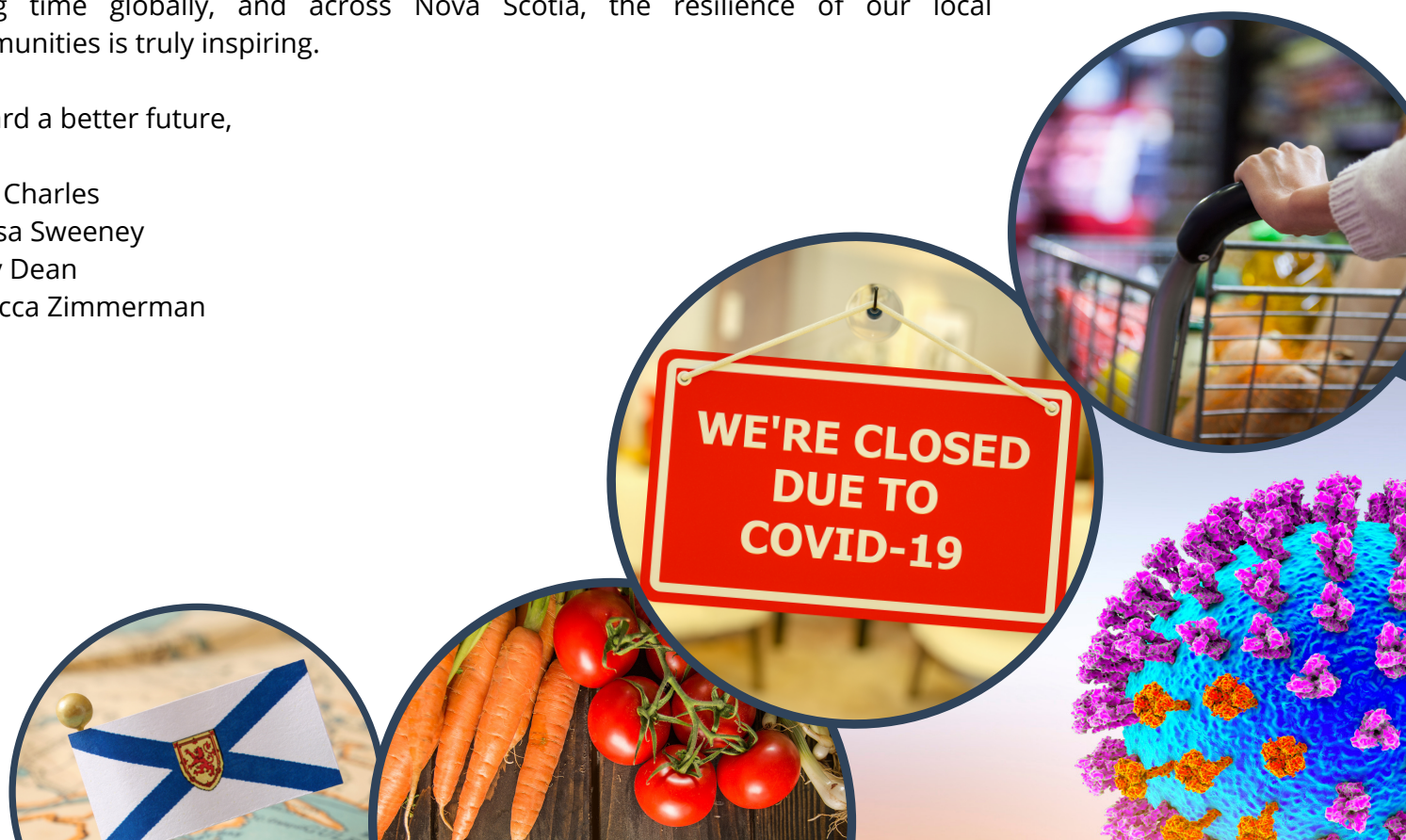
In 2019, we began a study of Nova Scotian coastal communities to look at the issues they are facing, and how they are planning for the future. For each of 50 communities, we spoke to individuals who live in the community as well as elected municipal officials. The study continued into 2020, and when the pandemic became part of everyone's reality, we added a focus on COVID-19 impacts and responses in the communities. This report is the result.

In exploring the effects of COVID-19, we heard most about social and economic impacts, such as employment, schooling, childcare, health and well-being, social activities, access to facilities, and procuring food. We heard equally about community responses to COVID-19: how communities dealt with the impacts of the pandemic in many creative ways... stepping up to make a difference, even while “staying the blazes home.”

We wish to thank the participants in the study for their generosity in taking the time to talk to us about their communities. We were struck by the positive approaches coming from communities across the province. While 2020 has been a trying time globally, and across Nova Scotia, the resilience of our local communities is truly inspiring.

Toward a better future,

Tony Charles  
Larissa Sweeney  
Libby Dean  
Rebecca Zimmerman



"There is no tourism season"

"Most public meetings/gatherings cancelled"

"Too many people not working"

"The mental health cannot be stressed enough, people had a hard time..."

"Difficult to access doctors"

"Seniors felt socially isolated and fearful"

## Nova Scotian communities talk about COVID-19 impacts and responses

"The pandemic has brought out the good in the heart of the community"

"People that were without the ability to look after themselves were helped by family or friends in the area"

"We are very lucky to have so many great businesses in our community who made their services available to ALL"

"Local people took it on to sew masks and scrubs for the hospital"

"A LOT of community champions turned up during this pandemic and definitely helped to transform our town into the new normal of living during a world pandemic"

# COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on Nova Scotian Communities

All communities felt that the pandemic had an impact on their economic activities and social well-being. A large majority of communities faced at least moderate economic (67%) and social (71%) impacts, with 42% of communities feeling extremely affected by social and economic impacts.

About a third (35%) of communities saw little or no impact of the pandemic on the local environment, another third noticed a low/modest impact, and the other roughly one-third (30%) of communities felt environmental impacts were moderate to extreme.

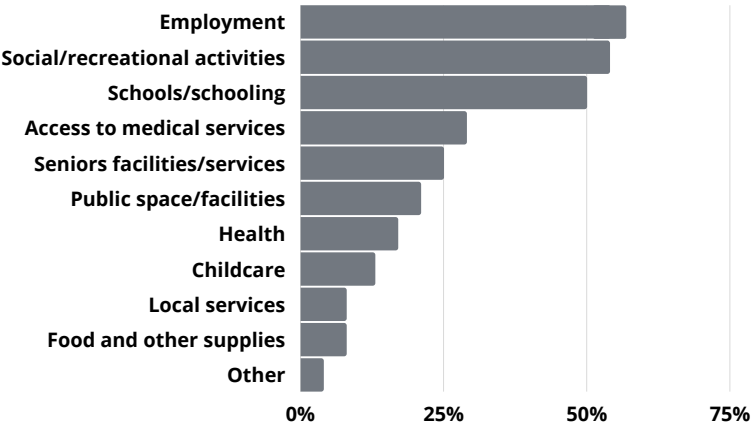
## Social Impacts

The most frequent COVID-19 social impacts in Nova Scotian communities concerned employment (58%) followed by social and recreational activities (54%) and schools/schooling (50%).

Social impacts facing communities included:

- Community events and social gatherings cancelled
- Church services cancelled/places of worship closed
- Gatherings no longer being permitted
- Closure of facilities e.g. schools and town offices
- Limited access to doctors e.g. phone appointments
- A lack of technology, adequate internet services or ability to meet digitally

Social Aspects Most Frequently Affected



"It's a very social community, and people have felt isolated."

"...much of community life centres around the community hall. Community events . . . were all cancelled."

"[Three] of our main summer events . . . were cancelled which affected tourism, fundraising, income for the town."

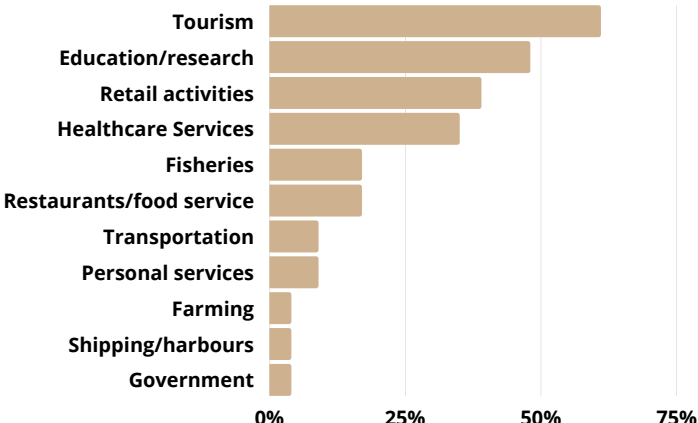
## Economic Impacts

Nova Scotia communities identified the tourism industry (61%), education and educational/research activities (48%) and retail activities (39%) as the top three economic sectors most frequently impacted.

Economic impacts included:

- Local businesses and services closed or operating at reduced hours and capacity
- Farmers suffering heavy losses
- Cancellation of summer events resulting in a loss of revenue for the community
- Permanent closure of small businesses
- Loss of employment


Economic Sectors Most Frequently Affected



# Community Coming Together: Nova Scotian Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many Nova Scotians rallied together to help one another, through initiatives led by community members or community-based groups. Some of the themes noted in responses include access to services, financial aid, social connections, food security and volunteerism.

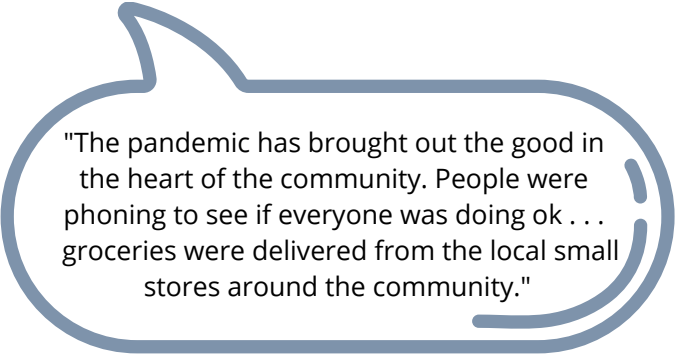
Some noted that responses to the pandemic were nothing out of the ordinary for the community...



"Friends and family members did shopping for others in need of groceries, prescriptions, etc., but this happens all the time anyway."

A large majority of community responses involved providing access to services that are no longer easily obtained for some, notably supporting people in the community to:

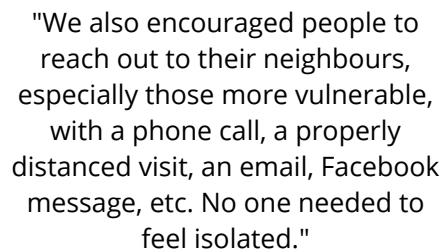
- Obtain necessities such as groceries, prepared meals, water;
- Adapt to changes made in the community in dealing with the pandemic



"The pandemic has brought out the good in the heart of the community. People were phoning to see if everyone was doing ok . . . groceries were delivered from the local small stores around the community."

## Vulnerability

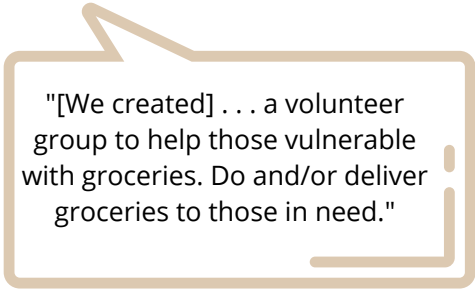
56% of responses focused on seniors, children and those who were at a greater risk from the pandemic.



"We also encouraged people to reach out to their neighbours, especially those more vulnerable, with a phone call, a properly distanced visit, an email, Facebook message, etc. No one needed to feel isolated."

## Food Security

56% of responses were directly related to food security, including meal programs for children and seniors, grocery delivery services provided by volunteers, and a water supply system.

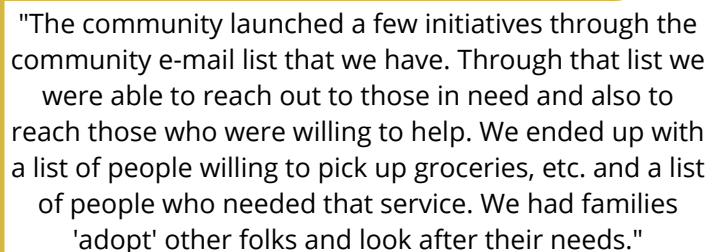


"[We created] . . . a volunteer group to help those vulnerable with groceries. Do and/or deliver groceries to those in need."

## Social Connections

Communities took action to maintain and reinforce connections among people:

- Religious services held virtually on social media
- Take-out community dinners for social connection
- Grants to support regional foodbanks and the local community hall



"The community launched a few initiatives through the community e-mail list that we have. Through that list we were able to reach out to those in need and also to reach those who were willing to help. We ended up with a list of people willing to pick up groceries, etc. and a list of people who needed that service. We had families 'adopt' other folks and look after their needs."

# The Future - Nova Scotian Communities Post-Pandemic

Most of those in Nova Scotian communities who addressed the long-term future, within this study, emphasized the high level of uncertainty.

"... there's been no announcements of planning or strategic planning for the future because of the uncertainty of the future"

Some highlighted particular needs that have become all too apparent within the pandemic, notably improved internet and technology:

"Many do not have the technology to meet electronically . . ."

"So much of what is being done now (recreation, arts, food services) depends on good internet access, and this challenge is not being addressed adequately."

Despite the uncertainty and the challenges, the sense of community is a strength for approaching the future...

"I think that living in a smaller community during something like a world wide pandemic makes you appreciate the slower pace of life, community relationships, neighbours . . ."

And while the future is by no means clear, strong communities clearly make a difference...

"[O]verall thankfulness that we live in such a great community that worked together to keep life as 'normal' as possible during all the changes"

*This study has been made possible through the support of:*



Community Conservation  
Research Network



For citation purposes, please use: Charles, A., L. Sweeney, L. Dean & R. Zimmerman (2020). *Nova Scotian Communities & COVID-19: Challenges and Resilience*. Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Please address inquiries to: [CCRN@smu.ca](mailto:CCRN@smu.ca)

This report is available on the following webpage, where further results will also be shared:

<https://www.communityconservation.net/nova-scotian-communities-and-covid-19/>