

# Emerging from lockdown: Covid 19 and your community

*July 2020*

**The world as we emerge from lockdown and beyond will be very different. We have all been impacted by the pandemic, but for some the situation has been devastating. What will this mean for local churches as we work out what mission within local communities looks like?**

This paper draws on emerging data, as well as research conducted by the Joint Public Issues Team and Church Action on Poverty. It outlines some of the ways in which Covid 19 may be impacting on your community, and suggests five things which might be true for your community.

## **1. Uncertainty means that communities will be more in need than ever of reassurance, security and love**

The pandemic has caused a great deal of loss and grief, across every community. Many have lost loved ones, or have given up significant aspects of their life.

The UK population is uncertain and [anxious](#) about the future. People's expectations for the [economy](#) and their own financial future are at a record low. Levels of anxiety jumped at the beginning of lockdown, and remain at historic highs. These figures appear to be linked to an increase in people reporting difficulties with their mental health.

Young people are particularly at risk. A large survey in May found that approximately a third of 16 to 34 year-olds reported a mental health problem – more than double the rate of a year previously. Young adults are often less established within communities, living in insecure rented accommodation and doing low-paid insecure work. Lacking or losing security is strongly associated with a deterioration in mental health.

The central mission of the churches is to offer people and communities the reassurance of God's steadfast love. It is clear that that love and reassurance is needed by many people.

## **2. Lockdown and Covid 19 magnified the inequalities of our society**

If you were disadvantaged before Covid 19, you are more likely to have experienced the impact of pandemic and the lockdown severely. People living in more [deprived areas](#) have experienced Covid 19 mortality rates more than double the rates of those living in less deprived areas. People from [Black and Minority Ethnic](#) communities have higher mortality rates than the UK average – even when accounting for factors such as age and deprivation. The huge existing health inequalities within the UK have been magnified by Covid 19.

The lockdown has also been likely to [amplify existing economic inequalities](#). Those with higher wages have tended to be able to work from home and keep their incomes, while those with low paid or insecure work are more likely to have lost their jobs or been [furloughed](#) on reduced pay.

Whilst we may all have faced the same storm, we haven't all been in the same boat. These inequalities were not caused by the nature of the virus but by the unequal nature of the society we have built.

As we seek to recover, we must ensure that everyone is offered the resources they need. Churches have a role to play in raising up the voices of those who have experienced amplified economic inequalities during the pandemic.

### **3. Richer families' debts down, but poorer families' debts up**

Churches that are associated with debt advice centres or foodbanks are keenly aware of the huge increases in demand. [The Trussell Trust](#) has seen a doubling of demand at foodbanks since lockdown, with the increased need focused on young families. There is [no indication](#) that this level of need will decrease in the foreseeable future.

During the lockdown, [poorer families' debts](#) have increased while richer families' debts have decreased. Higher income families have had less opportunity to spend and so saved money. Poorer families however were more likely to see a fall in income. This has often been compounded by a significant increase in outgoings, as cheaper shops closed and families were unable to shop around. They have faced the increased costs of having children at home and needing technology and data for schooling. The result for many has been increased debt often at a high interest rate.

Perhaps even more worryingly we are seeing an increase in the number of families falling into council tax and [rent arrears](#). There are temporary suspensions of evictions and bailiff proceedings but these only delay rather than solve the problem of unsustainable debts accrued by families left with no other option. Once the moratorium on evictions is ended, [we will see an increase in homelessness](#).

Debts will follow poorer families around for many years after the pandemic. Maybe the biblical example of a Jubilee – freedom from the slavery of debt – is a just way out of this situation.

### **4. A third of jobs are supported by the Furlough Scheme which ends in October**

Unemployment has risen rapidly. The number of people claiming Universal Credit has increased by [more than 2 million](#) and an additional [9.1 million jobs](#) are currently supported by the Furlough Scheme.

The Furlough Scheme is due to end in October. It is certain that unemployment will be at a level greater than we have seen this century, but the scale of the problem is still to be seen. The level of unemployment that persists into next year and beyond will depend greatly on what support for employment has been put in place when the Furlough Scheme ends.

The social consequences of mass of unemployment are enormous and will have an impact on every community.

### **5. Huge change is inevitable, but we have the chance to prioritise the right things**

Government, national and local, as well as businesses and community groups, just like our churches, are working out how to operate in the post lockdown world. Huge changes are now inevitable. We all play a huge part in shaping that change.

Churches can do this in a number of ways. They can use their convening power, drawing together different groups and ensuring that those who are easily ignored have the opportunity to be heard. They can influence decision makers – both nationally and locally. Crucially, churches can share their vision inspired by God’s kingdom, where all creation flourishes.

*Do you think this reflects your community’s experiences of the pandemic and the lockdown?  
If you’d like to talk further about this issue please contact [enquiries@jointpublicissues.org](mailto:enquiries@jointpublicissues.org).*  
**Find out more at:** [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/corona-virus](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/corona-virus)