



COALICIÓN FORTALEZA + CASA OF OREGON PRESENT:

SOUTHERN OREGON HOUSING STUDY

THE ALMEDA FIRE IMPACT ON OUR LATINX COMMUNITY



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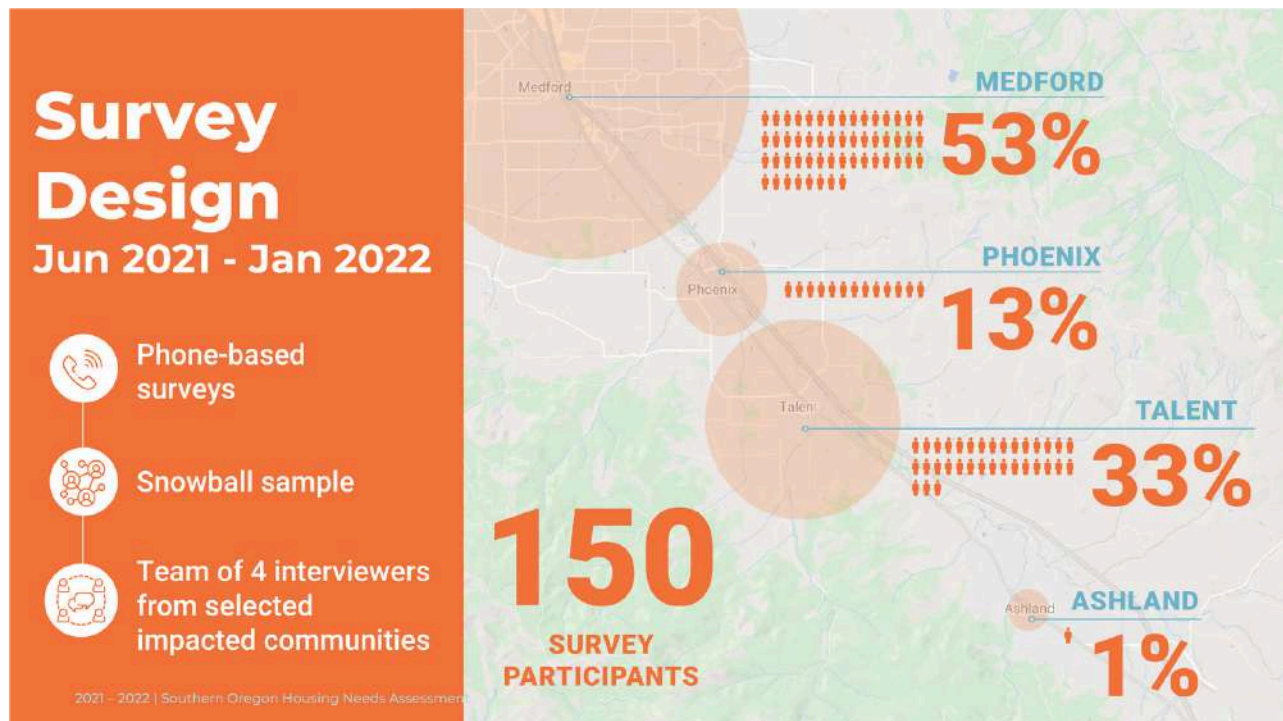


Figure 1. Survey Design

DEMOGRAPHICS AND REPRESENTATION

Survey targets were established based on Latinx- and farmworker-identified households. Many households were multilingual and multi-ethnic. The Latinx and Indigenous immigrant population in Oregon is young, growing, and diverse. There are various ethnic cultures and languages actively in practice that contributed to the creation of various linguistic and cultural barriers when navigating the aftermath of the wildfires.

GENDER

Seventy-three percent (110/150) of survey community members identified as women and 27% (40/150) as men. Many matriarchs identified as heads of households and single mothers (discussed later). There are many reasons why this apparent overrepresentation of women might occur. One explanation is traditional gender roles within the Latinx and Indigenous community tend to charge women with the care and emotional work of the household, such as interfacing with educational systems, accessing child care support, and safety support to alleviate COVID-19 and wildfires impacts. This could have led to more women being willing to answer the phone and share their experiences coping with the wildfires. Moreover, the feminization of labor has also given women the dual role of wage earners and domestic providers. The visible gender disparities are discussed in the Impact of Wildfires on Women section.

²³ Akerkar, S., & Fordham, M. (2017). Gender, place and mental health recovery in disasters: Addressing issues of equality and difference. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 23, 218-230. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.03.014>

The Household Profile Before Wildfires

Reported Housing Type



Figure 5. Household Profile before Wildfires

Preceding the wildfires, community members had higher rates of homeownership. In the total survey sample, 65% of people reported they owned their homes, 32% rented, and 3% were in another housing arrangement type. Among those who owned their homes, 61% of those homes were mobile homes, 3% owned a single-family home, and 1% owned an alternative housing type. Ninety percent of people who lived in manufactured housing owned their homes. This is a favorable mobile and pre-manufactured homeownership rate which compares to the national average of 80%. Among the renters, only 13% of people rented a manufactured home. In other words, in the sample, manufactured housing is directly linked to high rates of homeownership.

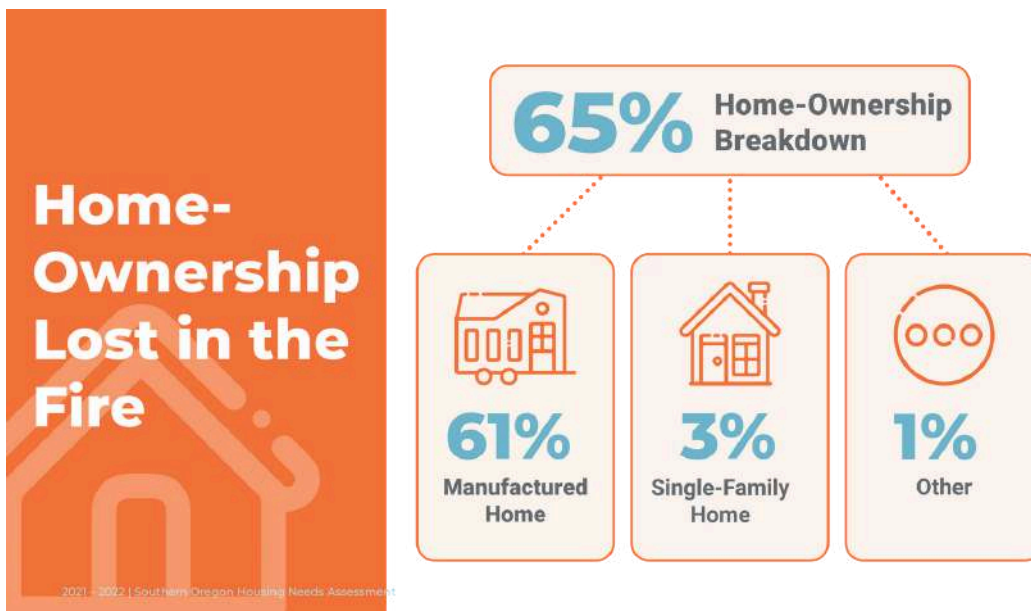


Figure 6. Homeownership Breakdown

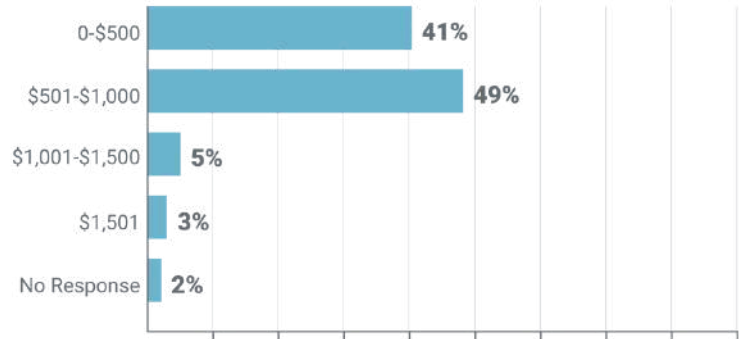
³⁵ Housing Assistance Council. (2011). Rural Housing Research Note Preserving Affordable Manufactured Home Communities in Rural America: A Case Study. <https://ruralhome.org/report-categories/manufactured-housing/>



Photo by RODNAE Productions

Housing Costs

Monthly Mortgage/Rent Costs Prior to Wildfires



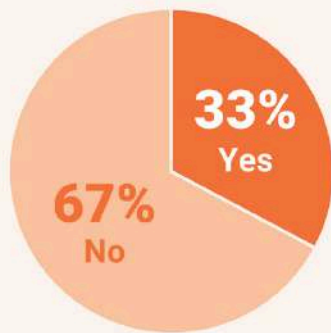
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Figure 15. Housing Costs

Community members in our survey provided monthly estimates about housing-related expenses across six categories: electricity, water, gas/propane, trash, internet, and housing insurance. Typically electricity and internet were the highest household expenses. Residents paid these costs in addition to their monthly mortgage/rent and land fees. Residents paid various rates for electricity. Most commonly (37%) people paid between \$76-125, followed by 28% who paid \$126-200; 14% paid \$25-75; payments ranged between \$201-300 for 13% of residents; 3% paid \$325 or above; only 5% said electricity was included, and 1% did not provide a response.

With the onset of COVID-19, internet connection became an essential utility as children went to virtual school from home. Internet service became an additional cost to most families' monthly household costs. Only 12% of families said their internet was included or the costs were not applicable. Most commonly, 47% of people paid between \$25-75; 33% paid \$76-125; 7% paid \$126-200, and 1% paid between \$201-300 (Figure 16). Trash (87%), water (79%), and gas/propane (51%) costs were included in monthly housing costs.

Have you ever Used Rental Assistance?



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She applied for rental assistance when the pandemic started because her hours were cut. They never replied to her after the fires, she says she still has debt from the home that burned.

Interviewer Field Note

Figure 18. Rental Assistance Use

As residents searched for housing and rental prices rose as a result of the wildfires, the need for rental assistance sharply increased. Many fire survivors looked to local organizations, friends, family, and federal relief for support to pay for housing costs after the wildfires as they resettled. As revealed below, many community members underscored they did not typically seek rental support until it was necessary after the wildfires. The field notes document the solidarity economies that emerged and were enacted in recovery efforts.

Local organizations have helped them pay rent; since moving into an apartment rent has become very expensive. Says that after the fires she was forced to ask for shelter cost assistance. FEMA only paid her \$3,000 for what was lost in the home and she said she lost a lot more.

—Lola,
Stay-at-homecaretaker,
Medford, OR

Says that he has never asked people to borrow money, but that he did apply for help from different organizations when he needed it.

—Joel,
Nursery, Farm, Hemp,
Packing, and Hotel and Food
Service worker, Medford, OR

Everything was burned in fire. Had to ask my family for help and stayed with other family members for some time.

—Soledad,
Hotel and Food Service
worker, Medford, OR

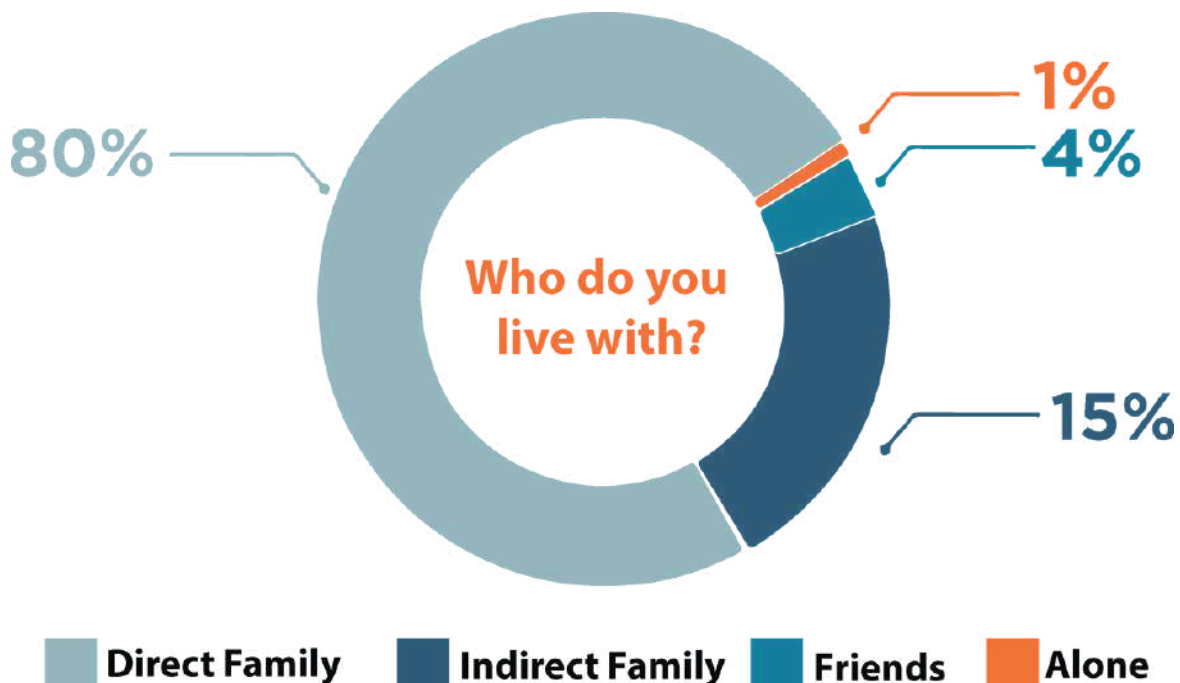


Figure 19. Who do you live with?

In some cases families were temporarily separated as they dealt with damages to their households. These difficulties were exaggerated for families with children. Many families reported moving out of their home school districts and commuting an hour each way often by bus or private transportation. The separation of families, communities, and neighborhoods added major layers to the anxiety experiences by fire survivors.

Their home did not get burnt, but got damaged. Everything inside the home is ruined. They have not been able to find financial help. They still had to pay rent monthly at their toxic home. He is the only one living in the home trying to get it fixed up again. His family needs to live somewhere else. He only got \$6,000 from insurance.

—Alberto, Hotel and Food Service worker, Talent, OR

IMPACT ON HOMEOWNERSHIP

Overnight, homeowners in our sample (mobile home and single-family homeowners) lost their homes in the wildfires drying up any trace of equity gathered over the years of their laborious work. After the wildfires, only 27% of residents owned the homes they were living in, representing a striking 39% loss in homeownership rates. Figure 20 visually describes the changes in homeownership prior to and following the aftermath of the wildfires. Renting or subleasing increased amongst community members to 53%. Nine percent of respondents said they lived in “other” housing, and 11% preferred not to respond (not pictured in Figure).

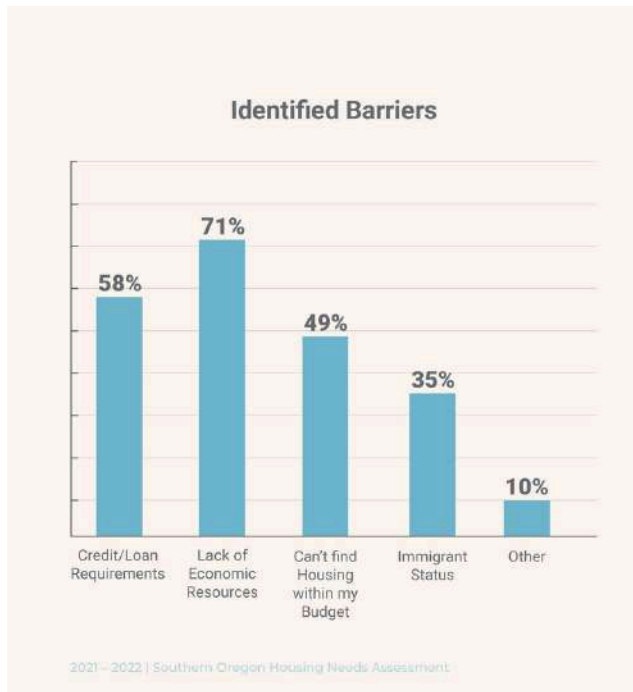


Figure 31. Barriers to Homeownership

Barriers to Home-Ownership

Interviewer Field Notes:

- » Banks are charging undocumented folks 3x of interest (Phoenix, OR)
- » Age and lack of access of information through networks (Medford, OR)

The layers of stress these processes add to already traumatic and exacting events, such as with unforgiving real estate, loans, and banking system transactions, are expressed in the following field notes.

Knowing English is a huge obstacle. She had to pay an interpreter to be able to do her real estate transactions. Bank loan interest rate was quoted at 8.9%, last minute the bank denied them their payment because he didn't have a copy of his SS card because it burnt in the fires. They ended up having to pay for two home inspections.
—Eva, Hotel and Food Service worker, Medford, OR

Three siblings lost their home. It was difficult for her to get a loan on her own as a single mother. She took out a loan with her sister so that her sister could at least buy a home.
—Rosa, Hotel and Food Service worker, Talent, OR

Banks don't easily loan for mobile homes and lenders ask for social security.
—Juanita, Farm, Nursery, and Marijuana and Hemp worker, Talent, OR

This report includes ten policy recommendations adopted through the collaborative work amongst the organizations and researchers involved in the survey. We believe the policy recommendations uplift and support diverse Latinx and Indigenous immigrant community members impacted by the disaster in order to recover and rebuild in an equitable manner that considers their unique needs. The Alameda Fire is unlikely to be the last devastating extreme weather event for the communities cited in our study. Rather, it is an episode in what is likely to be a long cascade of destruction induced by the changing climate. For policy makers, this should be on the forefront of subsequent interventions.