



AFAC is a community-based non-profit that provides supplemental groceries to our Arlington neighbors in need.

AFAC Annual Client Survey, 2021 Report

Introduction & Background

Every year, the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) conducts an in-depth survey to gather client feedback. Responses can help AFAC adapt its services and programs to best meet the needs of the community appropriately and efficiently.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been profound in our community. More and more residents in Arlington have come to AFAC seeking free supplemental groceries to help feed their families. This is in addition to the thousands of families who already rely on AFAC’s services every year.

Questions asked in this survey will help identify areas where AFAC succeeds and where AFAC can improve. Information obtained by the survey can also be shared with community partners to provide external resources that can address issues and problems the survey identified.

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Methods

Food Distribution Sites

Surveys were conducted at all of AFAC’s distribution sites.

| Site | Facility Type | Site Category | Distribution Day |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Nelson | AFAC Headquarters | Open | Monday through Saturday |
| Arlington Mill | Community Center | Community | Monday |
| Assembly of God | Church | Open | Friday |
| Carlin | Senior Apartments | Senior | Thursday |
| Clarendon UMC | Church | Open | Saturday |
| Claridge House | Senior Apartments | Senior | Monday |
| Columbia Hills | Apartment Community | Community | Tuesday |
| Culpepper Gardens | Senior Apartments | Senior | Friday (every other week) |
| Gates of Ballston | Community Center | Community | Friday |
| Green Valley | Apartment Community | Community | Saturday |
| Hunters Park | Senior Apartments | Senior | Tuesday |
| Marbella | Apartment Community | Community | Thursday |
| Whitefield | Apartment Community | Community | Wednesday |
| Woodbury Park | Apartment Community | Community | Thursday |
| Woodland Hill | Senior Apartments | Senior | Tuesday |
| Home Delivery | -- | -- | -- |

All distribution sites are classified as either Open, Community, or Senior sites. Open sites are available to any Arlington resident without additional restrictions. Community sites are only available to clients who reside in that particular community or participate in a program offered by the building’s management. Senior sites are only available to residents who live in their respective properties.

The Nelson distribution center takes place at AFAC’s headquarters at 2708 South Nelson Street in Arlington, VA. Nelson is the only distribution center with six separate food distributions throughout the week. All off-site food distribution centers take place only one time per week. One senior site, Culpepper Gardens, receives food from AFAC every other week.

The pandemic forced changes to some food distribution sites. In March 2020, AFAC stopped distributing food at the Arlington Career Center and Gunston Community Center due to the closure of Arlington County facilities. In September, AFAC stopped distributing food at The Springs, an APAH apartment community due to changes in APAH’s operational capacity. All clients who were served at these distribution sites were reassigned to other Open distribution sites.

A couple of new options emerged. As demand in the Buckingham neighborhood outgrew capacity at Gates of Ballston, a new food distribution was opened at the Assembly of God church in June 2020. Another food distribution was opened at The Apex, a new AHC affordable housing property, in February 2021 (The Apex was not included as a survey site as their distribution just opened as survey dissemination began). Home Deliveries began in March 2020 as an option for any Arlington resident in quarantine for COVID-19 or who is homebound due to a severe medical condition or disability. Home Delivery eligibility is verified by Arlington County’s Department of Human Services.

Clients with an active AFAC referral may receive groceries from their assigned food distribution site no more than once every week. Social workers assign a food distribution site at the time of referral to AFAC. With the approval from their social worker, a client family can switch to any open distribution site, but not to a community or senior site unless they live in those buildings.

Dissemination of Surveys

Due to COVID-19, the surveys were conducted differently at some sites due to health and safety precautions. In prior years, AFAC volunteers and staff would conduct in-person surveys at all sites. This was still done at all Open and Community sites with volunteers wearing face masks and maintaining a safe distance. At Senior sites, visitor access has been restricted since the onset of the pandemic. Instead of conducting the surveys in-person, Resident Services' staff at each senior property distributed the surveys to each senior client as they picked up their food for the week and gave instructions to fill out and return the paper survey the following week. Home Delivery clients received a paper survey with their food delivery and were also given a link to fill out the survey online.

Surveys were conducted in February 2021 over the course of four weeks. The first week (February 1 – 6), surveys were conducted at Nelson every day, with the exception of Monday when AFAC was closed due to inclement weather. The following week (February 8 – 13), surveys were conducted at Arlington Mill Community Center, Assembly of God, Clarendon UMC, Columbia Hills/Grove, Culpepper, Marbella, and Whitefield. Surveys at Green Valley were conducted on February 20 and surveys at Gates of Ballston and Woodbury Park were postponed until February 25 and 26 due to inclement weather. Surveys were distributed at Senior sites and sent to Home Delivery clients during the first week (February 1 – 6). Completed surveys were collected from these groups over the course of the month.

With the help of volunteers and staff, a portion of whom were bilingual, and the written translation services of Alboum Associates, AFAC collected information from clients in Amharic, Arabic, English, Korean, Mongolian, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Survey Questions

To see the 2021 Client Survey, go to the Appendix: [Survey Questions \(English\)](#)

In this year's survey, AFAC clients were asked about their satisfaction of AFAC's services, how often they utilize these services, and how AFAC can improve its services. These questions are asked annually using the same format. An open ended question was added to ask clients how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected them. The last two questions asked if clients were planning on getting the COVID-19 vaccine and what potential barriers or questions they had about the vaccines.

Questions regarding health topics and resources of interest were removed from this year's survey. Each of these questions provided at least 10 multiple-choice answers and clients could select as many as applicable. The goal of this year's survey was to reduce the survey down to one single sided page to reduce interaction time between the client and the volunteer administering the survey.

The section asking for the client's information if they were interested in further interviews with AFAC staff was also removed. In some years, this information was not utilized and alternate methods of direct communication with clients have been identified.

Reporting & Evaluation

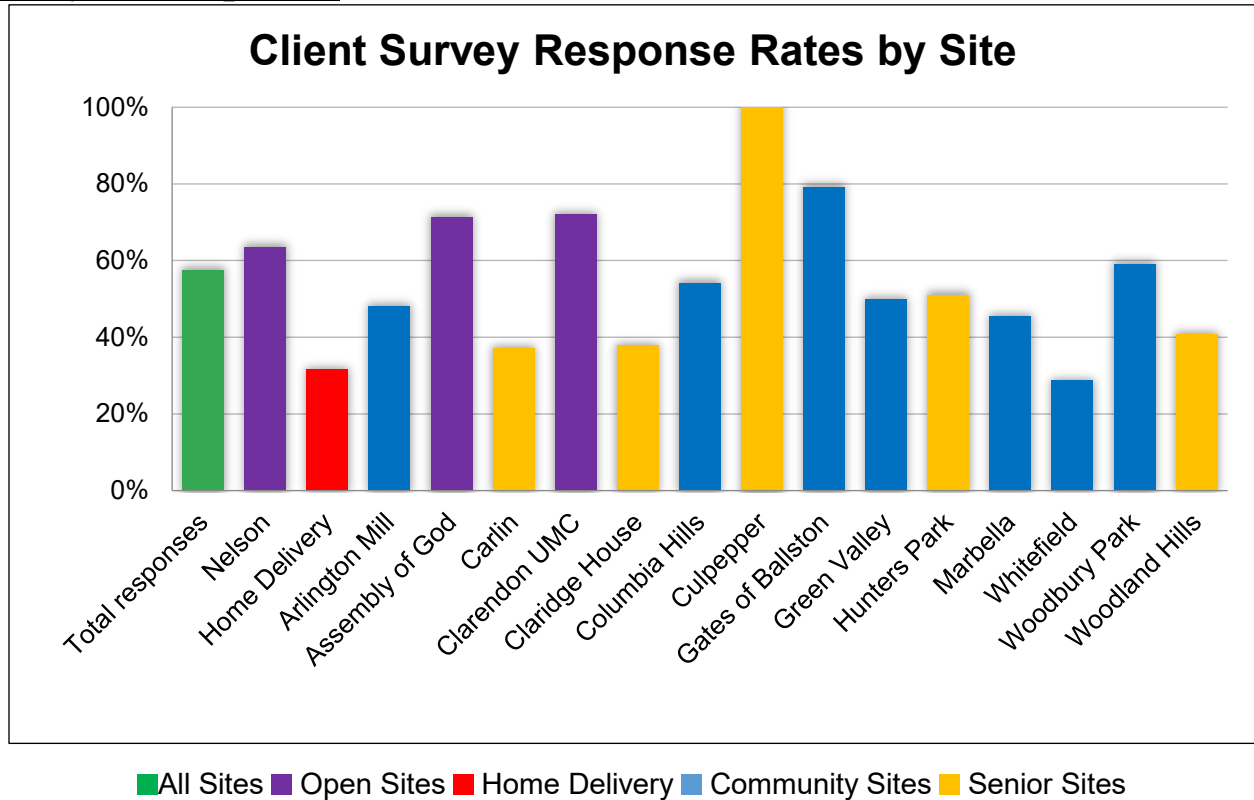
Volunteers entered the responses through an online Google Form version of the survey. For surveys that were completed in other languages, volunteers and staff who were fluent in those languages translated their answers into English so the responses could be entered into the Google Form. Entries were saved on a corresponding Google Sheet.

The answers for questions regarding satisfaction, frequency, and vaccine plans were assigned point values to fit onto a Likert scale for data analysis. Using a Likert scale allows us to view the average response at a particular site, at a particular group of sites, or at all sites combined.

For free response questions, data-entry volunteers tagged categories to go with the responses to help find recurring themes. The categories provided to volunteers were educated guesses as to what likely answers could fall under. Categories with little responses were disregarded in reporting, while uncategorized answers with recurring themes were added as new categories during the analysis of the data.

Results & Conclusions

Survey Participation

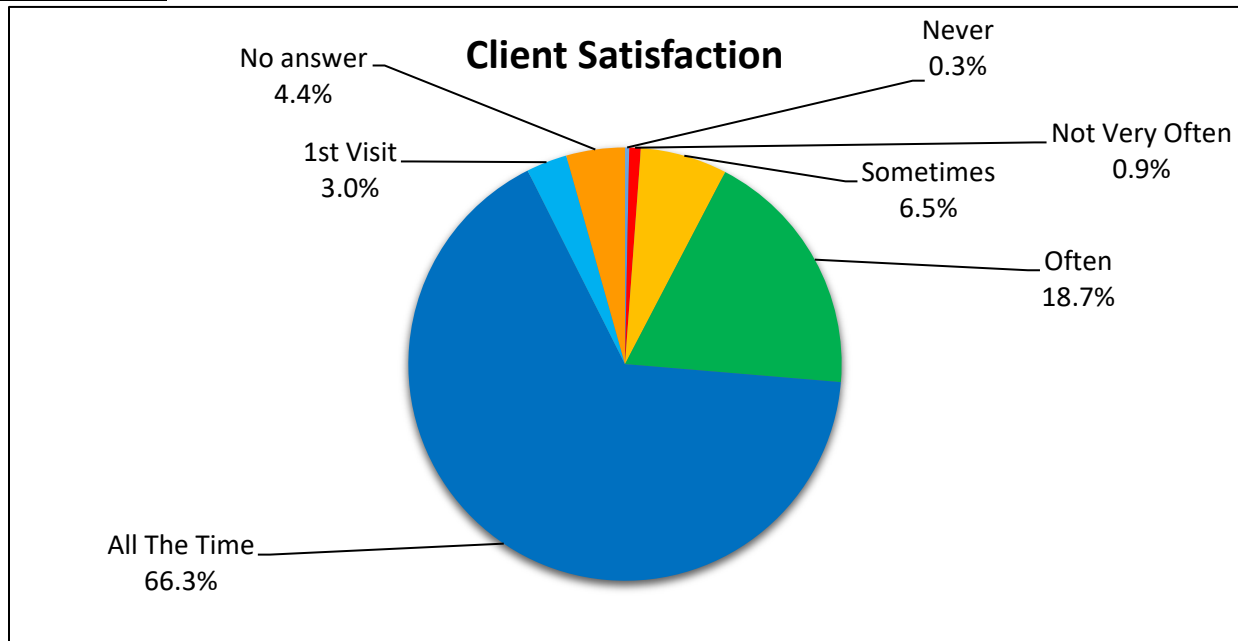


In total, AFAC received 1,241 survey responses, 57.6% of the 2,154 families served with groceries during the period of survey collection. Survey participation increased by 23% from 2020 (34.6% of clients served). This response rate has superseded the recent previous high of 39.2% from 2018. All sites saw an increase in survey participation rate from the previous year, with the exception of Whitefield and Woodland Hills. AFAC is encouraged with the high increase of survey participation, which helps to evaluate its food distribution programs from the perspective of its clients and identify areas of improvement.

At the Nelson distribution center, higher completion success for survey responses (63.6% in 2021, up from 35.1% in 2020) can be attributed to operational changes made due to the pandemic. With the waiting room closed, more people are spaced out standing in line as they wait to be served. This gave volunteers an opportunity to interact with clients as they waited.

At Culpepper Gardens, 100% of the clients served on that day filled out the survey. Instead of having their surveys returned the following week, staff at Culpepper Gardens had their clients fill out the survey as they were picking up their groceries for that week. Overall, Senior sites had a response rate of 50.0%, a 13.4% increase from the previous year. Community sites had a response rate of 53.3%, a 22.6% increase from 2020.

Satisfaction



Clients were asked the question, "Are you satisfied with the services you receive at AFAC?" and could select one of the following choices: "Never," "Not Very Often," "Sometimes," "Often," and "All The Time".

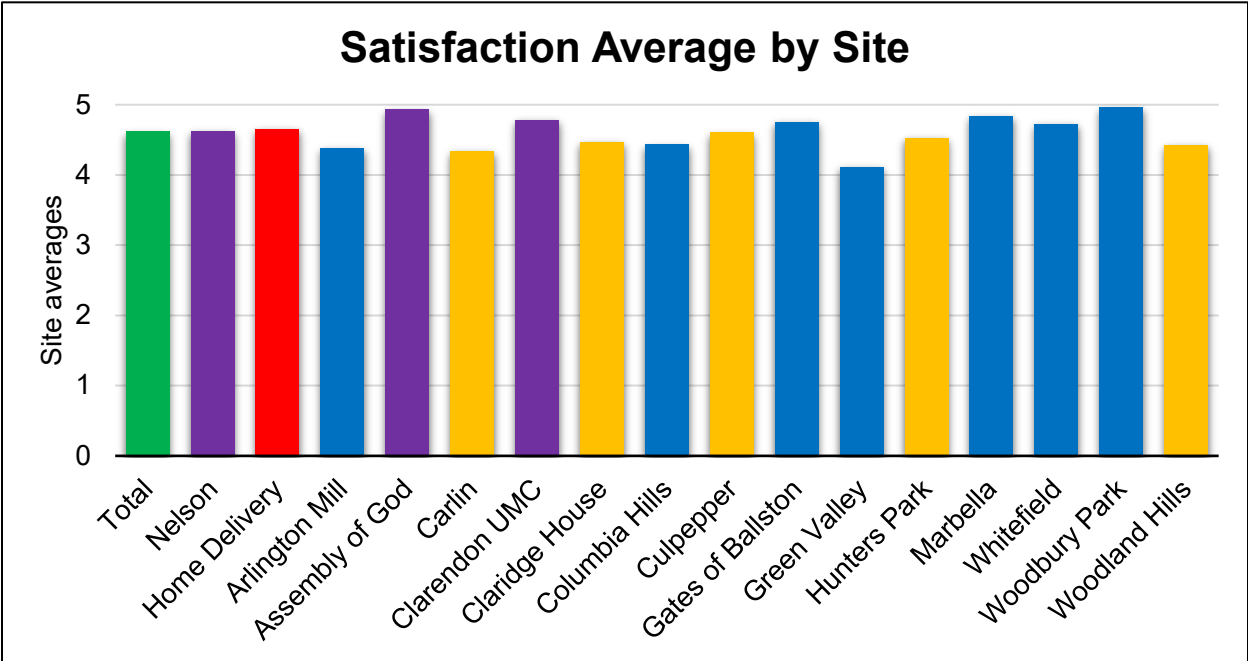
85.0% of clients responded with "Often" or "All The Time," which is down 4.2% from 2020. Meanwhile, only 1.2% of clients responded "Not Very Often" or "Never," which is lower from the previous year by 0.9%. This year, a new category was added to account for clients visiting AFAC for the first time and would not be able to provide a good assessment of AFAC's services.

For the Likert scale, the answers were assigned a value between 1 through 5, with 1 being "Never" and 5 being "All The Time." The number of responses were multiplied by their respective values and an average score was obtained.

The overall Likert scale value is 4.62 out of a possible 5.00. This is 0.01 higher than the overall Likert score in 2020.

The site with the highest average response was Woodbury Park with a Likert scale rating of 4.96 out of a possible total 5.00, meaning all clients surveyed answered that they are satisfied by the services received at AFAC's food distribution "all the time." This is an increase from the previous year's score of 4.65. The site with the highest score in 2020 was Gunston Community Center with a 5.00 score. The highest score among returning 2021 sites was Hunters Park with a 4.82 score.

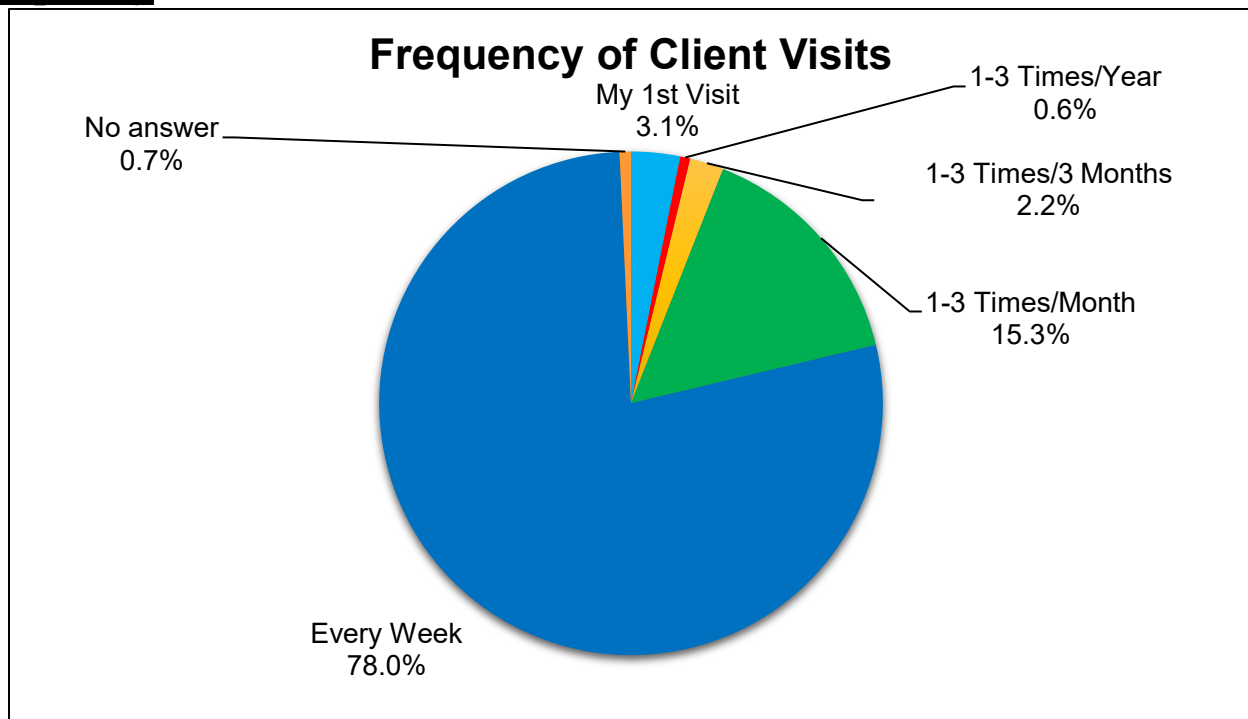
The lowest Likert rating was at Green Valley with a 4.11 score out of 5.00. This was 0.31 lower than in 2020. The site with the lowest score in 2020 was Whitefield (4.21). The score at this center increased to 4.72 in 2021.



■ All Sites
 ■ Open Sites
 ■ Home Delivery
 ■ Community Sites
 ■ Senior Sites

Overall, high satisfaction amongst the clients is an indication of the tremendous quality and care performed by AFAC’s staff and volunteers and also partner agency staff and volunteers to serve families most in need in the Arlington community.

Frequency

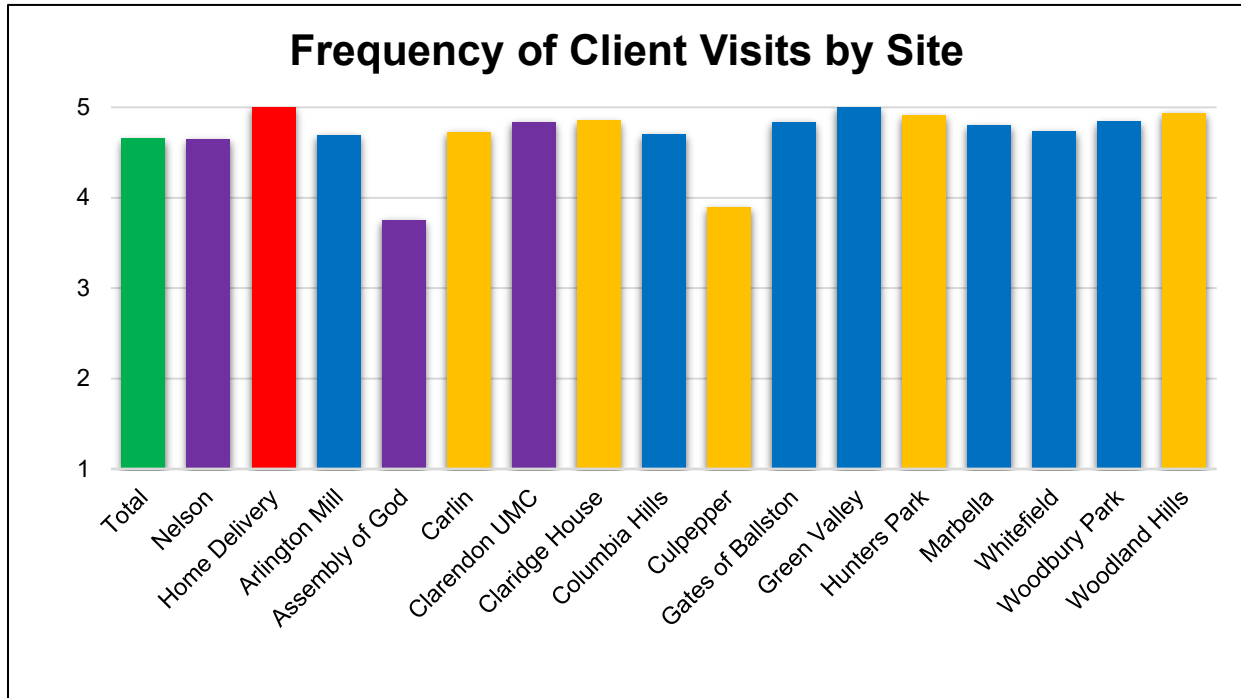


Clients were asked the question, "How often do you get groceries from AFAC?" and could select one of the following choices: "This is my first visit," "1-3 times per year," "1-3 times every 3 months," "1-3 times every month," and "Every Week."

The data collected in the client surveys show us that 78.0% of clients self-reported that they are receiving groceries on a weekly basis, very close to the percentages in 2020 (78.8%) and 2019 (79.0%).

At Culpepper Gardens, food distribution takes place every other Friday. Out of the 66 total surveys returned from this site, 63 indicated they picked up food 1-3 times every month, which is equivalent to saying they pick up food every time it is available. When this is combined with the other clients who said they pick up food every week, 83.6% of the clients surveyed they are receiving groceries as frequently as possible.

To use a Likert scale, these answers were assigned a value between 1 through 5 with 1 being "This is my first visit" and 5 being "Every Week". The number of responses were multiplied by their respective values and an average score was obtained.



■ All Sites ■ Open Sites ■ Home Delivery ■ Community Sites ■ Senior Sites

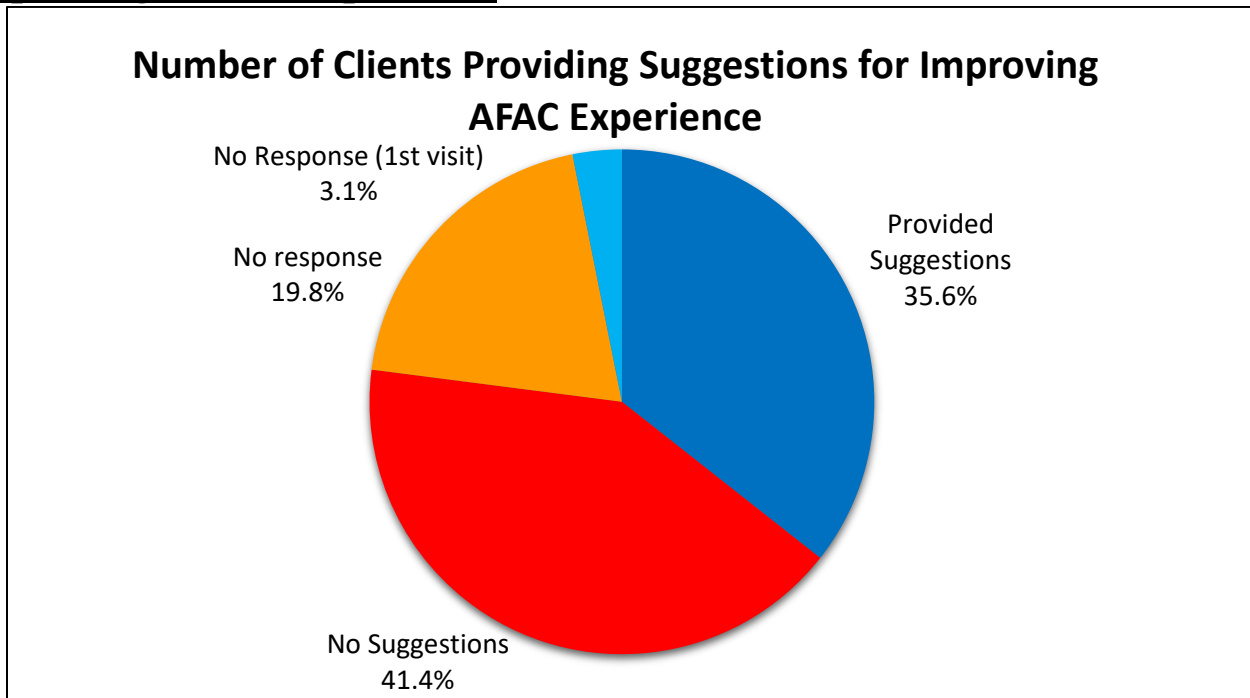
Home Delivery and Green Valley clients indicated they receive their groceries every week, with both receiving a 5.00 out of 5.00 score. By design of the Home Delivery program, in which volunteers are scheduled to pack and deliver grocery packages, each household is served every week.

The second most popular choice across all sites was “1-3 times per month” with 15.3% of responses. Those clients receive groceries almost as frequently, possibly on an alternating weekly basis.

The Assembly of God site had the lowest reported score of 3.75 out of 5.00. This is a new distribution site with low turnout. On the day the survey was administered, 6 out of 20 participating clients indicated this was their first visit.

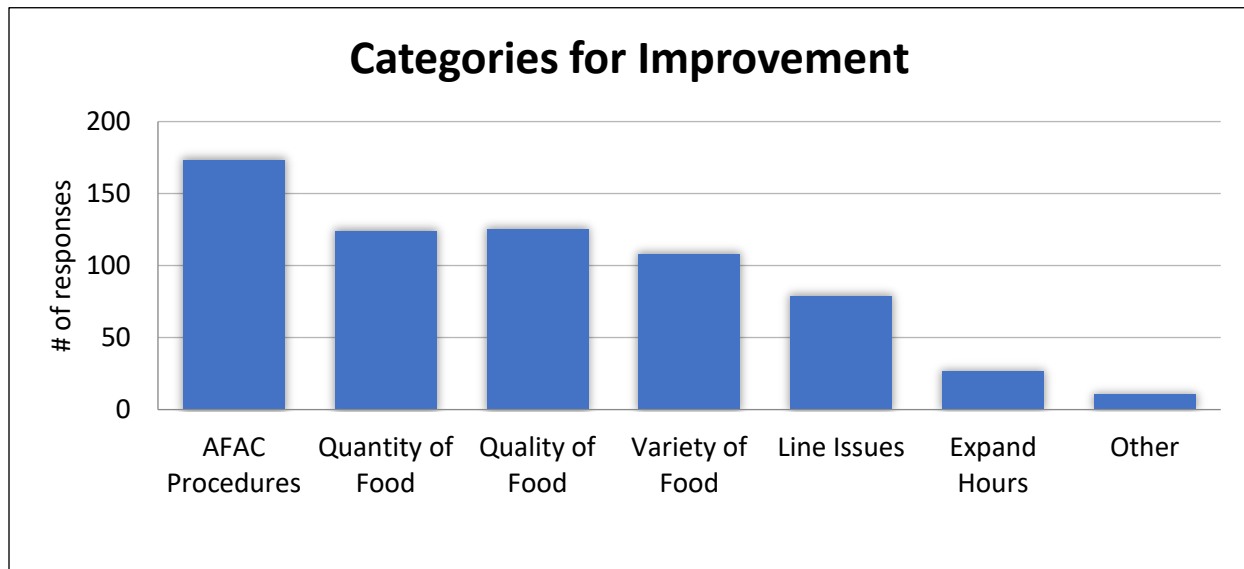
All sites other than Culpepper Gardens and Assembly of God had scores above 4.65. This indicates that across all distribution centers, the majority of AFAC clients receive groceries every week or every other week. This demonstrates that for those clients, AFAC is providing a vital and impactful service.

Improving AFAC Experience



Clients were asked the question, “How can we improve your experience at AFAC?” and were given the chance to provide a free-response answer. AFAC received 442 comments (35.6% of respondents) suggesting various methods for improving food distribution services and experience. The majority of clients (41.4%) left a comment that said they did not have a suggestion or that they were happy with AFAC’s services, but did not offer any suggestions of improvement. Some of the satisfaction comments include, “Staff here are wonderful. Never make us feel ‘less than’ for needing food,” “I am very thankful to all AFAC staff, who help us in such a difficult time like this. I am just very grateful and appreciate it. I can't ask more than what we have,” “Everything is good, I am satisfied,” “all good,” and “very thankful.”

The largest amount of suggestions offered by clients dealt with AFAC’s food distribution procedures (173 comments). The most common suggestion was about the length and the pace of the line (79), mainly mentioned by Nelson clients. A sample of the comments include, “the line needs to move quicker,” “sometimes the line is too long, want quick service,” “move the line faster, ask people to make selections faster,” and “long lines, especially Saturdays.”



The second most common suggestion regarding AFAC procedures was about the food distribution hours of operation (27), all but one of these responses were made by Nelson clients. Comments include, “open for more time – longer hours,” “bring back the early bird hours for disabled,” “expand Saturday hours because we work during the week and it is hard to come during the week,” and “open earlier – like 8 AM.”

In response to the pandemic, AFAC made several modifications to its food distribution at Nelson to prevent the potential spread of the coronavirus. These changes, in addition to an increase in families in need, have caused the lines to be longer than before. The waiting room was closed and clients were required to wait in line outdoors, social distancing markers were placed six feet apart, and fewer clients were allowed inside the building at a time. The layout of the food distribution was reorganized to reduce interaction with and between volunteers. The “early bird” distribution, in which clients with disabilities were served first, was stopped and the schedule was changed to accommodate operational needs extending hours of operations on weekdays and canceling evening distribution hours. A combination of these changes and the higher number of people in need of food because of the pandemic resulted in longer waiting times.

Saturday food distribution times have not changed due to the pandemic and have always been one of the busiest distributions at Nelson. The cancelation of the evening hours may have contributed to making the lines even longer, as clients who cannot come during the daytime hours during the week can only come on Saturday. The possibility of extending the Saturday food distribution hours will be evaluated by AFAC staff.

Outside of comments regarding AFAC’s procedures, the next highest amount of comments were about the quality of the food received by the clients. Out of the 125 comments about food quality, 83 of the responses mentioned food was close to expiring, spoiled, or already expired. Comments include “sometimes food comes damaged and expiration dates are sometimes passed,” “the food expires quickly and sometimes does not last the full week,” “the bread is always expired,” “don’t give expired food,” and “do a better job checking the expiration dates on the items.” Other quality comments call for “fewer canned items and more fresh vegetables and fruits.”

The food that AFAC gives out during food distribution is either purchased or donated. Purchased food comes from AFAC's food budget and is bought through wholesale vendors and is the same quality found in grocery stores. Donated food can come from community food drives and local grocery stores. Even though AFAC is thorough with its inspection of food before it goes in the distribution line, there is room for improvement among staff and volunteers to ensure the food that is given out is still of good quality.

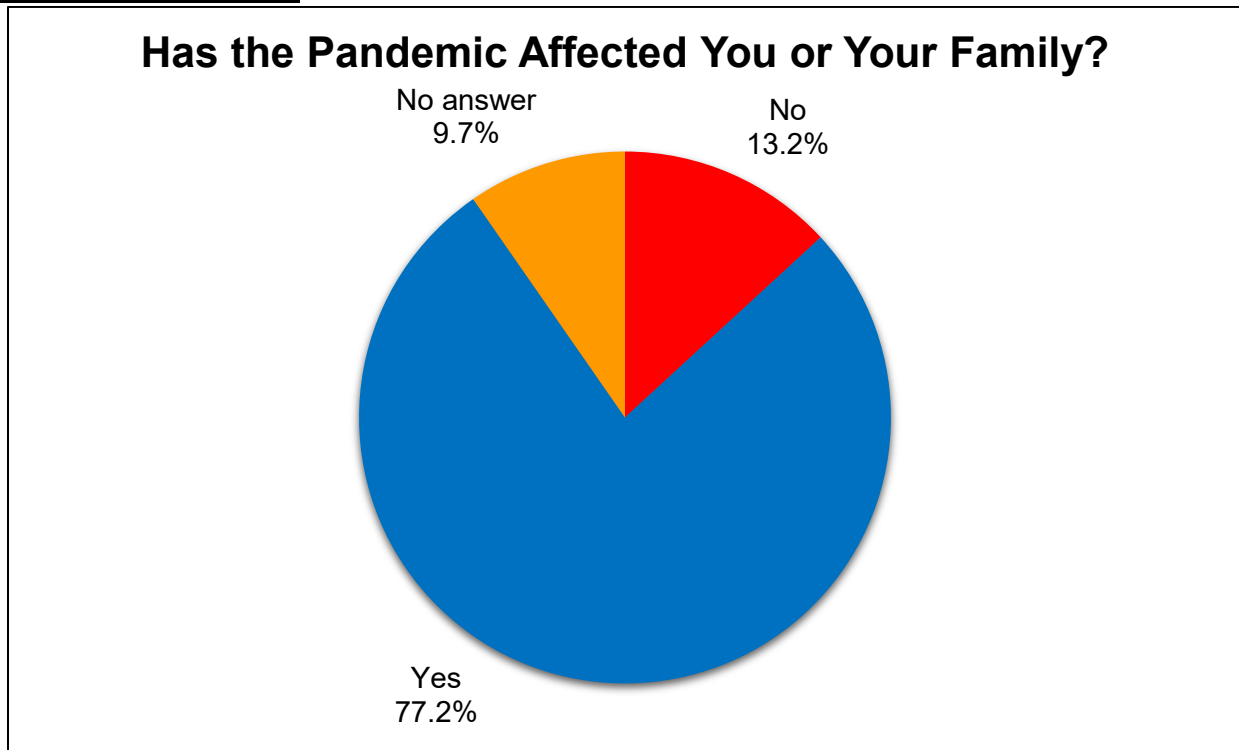
Another 124 comments were concerning the quantity of food given out to clients. Comments include "give us more food," "wish there were more vegetables," "food doesn't last the whole week because we are a family of four," "not enough for a family of six," and "give the same amount to everyone."

AFAC has two family size categories – small and large. A small family consists of families of three individuals or fewer. A large family is considered a family of four individuals or more. The food AFAC gives out is meant to be supplemental and may not satisfy all of the food needs required to feed a family for an entire week. One of AFAC's goals is to explore ways to make food distribution more equitable for all families.

There were 108 comments on food preferences and increasing the variety of food given out at distribution. "More Trader Joe's kale salads & vegan lunchmeat, from MOM's & kale/collard greens in bulk," "always give same food, should change it up," "more bread options, coffee/tea options," "more healthy food," and "people want beef" were some of the comments made about food variety.

For staple items that are purchased, AFAC rotates its food offerings regularly. Knowing the food preferences of its clients allows AFAC to explore purchasing different food items from time to time. Recently, additions have been made to the food ordering rotations, such as masa (corn flour), halal chicken, and ground beef.

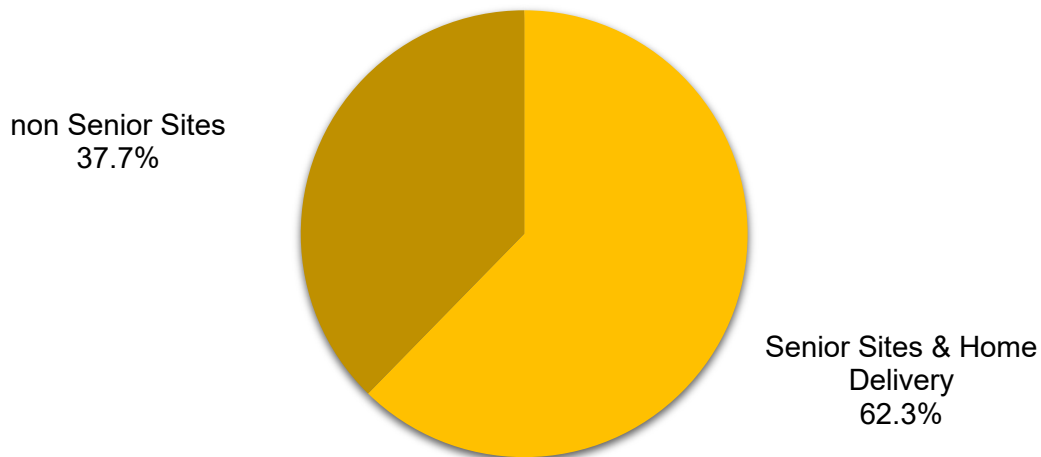
Effect of Pandemic



Clients were asked the question, “How has the COVID-19 Pandemic affected you and your family?” and were given the chance to provide a free-response answer. AFAC received 1,112 total comments with 950 of these responses (77.2% of survey participants) indicating the pandemic has affected their family in some way.

Almost half of all clients (48.5% or 602 clients) mentioned financial and economic hardship due to job loss or reduced hours and other related reasons. Some comments were “I lost my job,” “we lost our money source,” “for 4-5 months we couldn’t work, and now we only work a couple of hours a week,” “can’t find work due to COVID,” and “I have a year without working and AFAC is the only helpful resource I can obtain.” This number increases to 58.7% when clients of senior sites were extrapolated, as many of these residents are retired and were not working before the pandemic. With the exception of Whitefield, all non-Senior distribution sites reported significant levels of financial hardship due to the pandemic. There were 37 responses that their financial situation led to problems paying for rent, housing, or their bills.

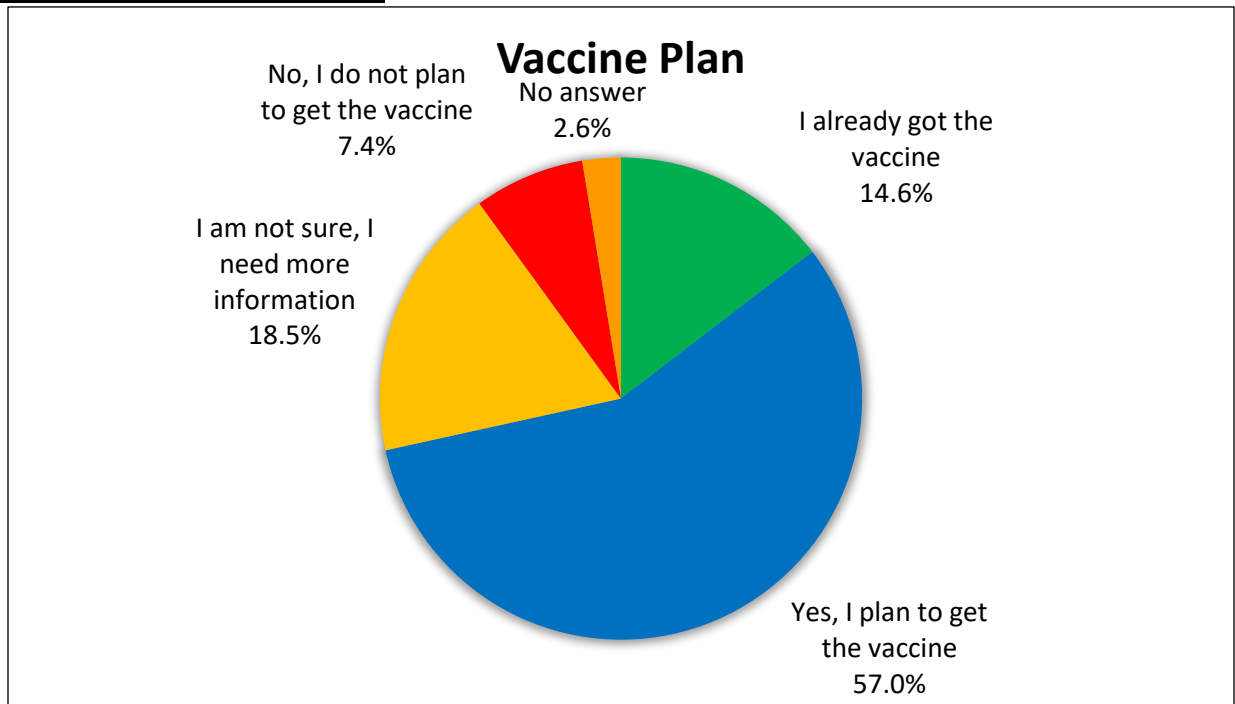
Loneliness and Isolation



The mental health of clients is a concern as the pandemic has left people isolated for more than a year. Feelings of loneliness and isolation were reported by 11.1% of all clients surveyed (138 responses). Some responses include “I’ve been quarantined here in my apartment pretty much since July,” “I stay at home and don’t go out,” “I feel alone and I really feel isolated,” and “sad to not see family and friends for almost a year.” Clients at Senior sites and Home Delivery clients accounted for 62.3% of all loneliness and isolation responses. “I miss going to the senior center,” “lack of communication and depression and loneliness,” and “bad, very bad – no human relations” were some comments made by residents at Senior sites. There were 72 responses (5.8%) from clients that indicated fear, anxiety, or being scared of catching COVID-19. Some clients responded “a lot of worry and constant fear,” “saddened with stress,” and “mental health, problems with depression, loss of appetite.”

There were 56 responses (4.5%) that indicated they were affected by the closure of schools and the move to virtual learning. Some clients expressed concerns about their children’s ability to learn. “The kids are not learning,” “the children spend a lot of time on computers,” and “education not as good for kids - son gets distracted.” Others cite a reduced chance of finding work because they have to take care of their children at home. “I have hard time to find a job. I’m a single mom of twin kids and I have to take care of them at home until they go to school.”

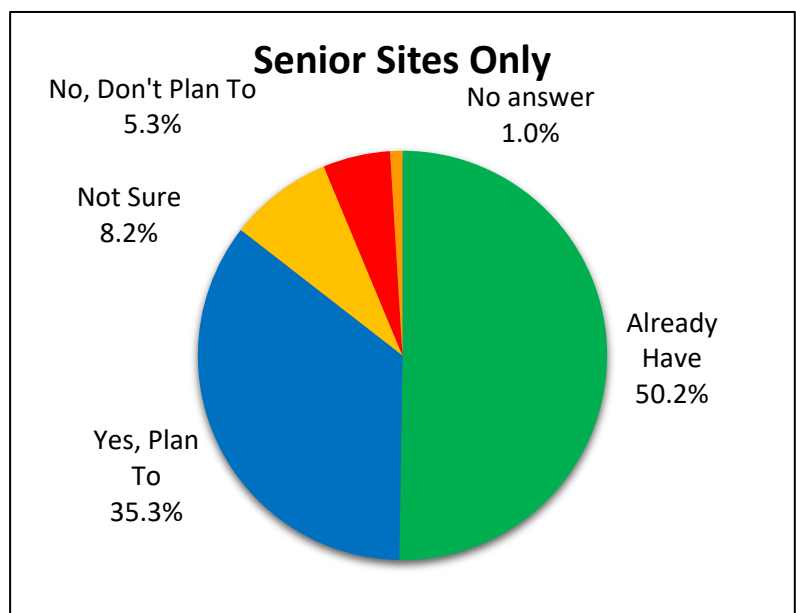
Plan to Receive Vaccine



Clients were asked the question, “Arlington County has already started distributing the COVID-19 vaccine to eligible individuals. Do you plan to get the vaccine when it becomes available to you?” and could select one of the following choices: “Yes, I plan to get the vaccine,” “I already got the vaccine,” “I am not sure, I need more information,” and “No, I do not plan to get the vaccine.”

In total, 71.6% of the clients responded that they either wanted to get the vaccine when available or had already gotten the vaccine; while 18.5% weren’t sure and wanted more information. Only 7.4% of the clients surveyed said they do not plan on getting the vaccine.

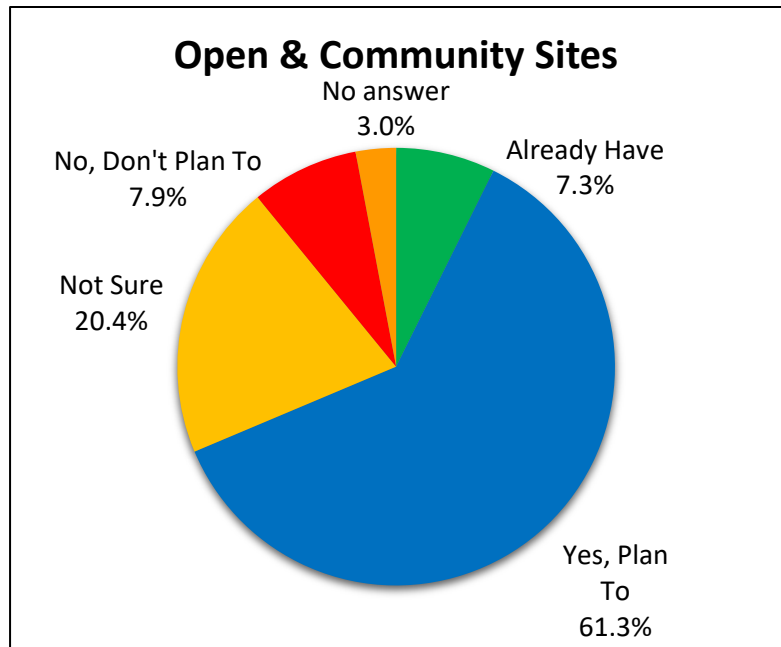
At the time of the survey, Arlington County had already begun to distribute vaccines to eligible individuals, which included health care workers, first responders, and some elderly residents. This is apparent when comparing the responses at Senior and non-Senior sites. More than half of clients surveyed at Senior sites (50.2%) responded they already received the COVID-19 vaccine, whereas only 7.3% of clients at non-Senior sites indicated they already received the vaccine.



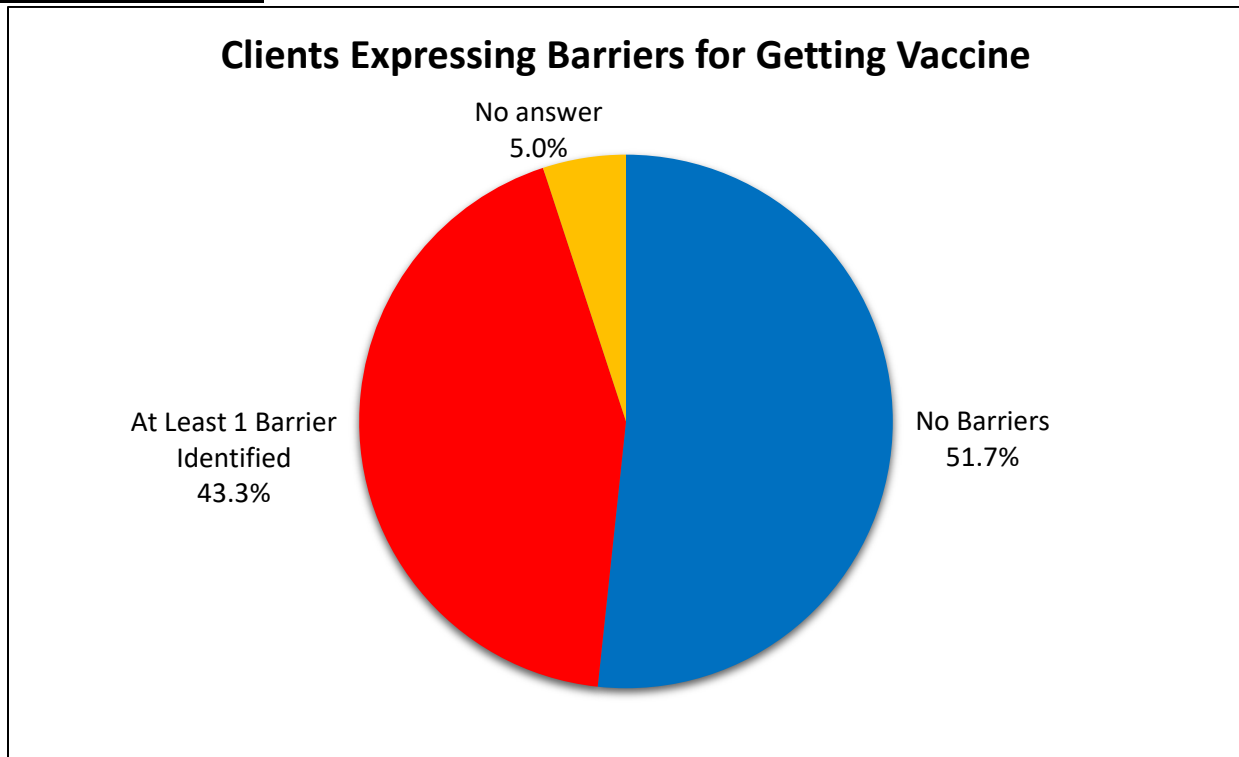
Another big difference between the Senior and non-Senior sites was the uncertainty whether or not the client wanted to receive the vaccine. Most likely because vaccines were already available to seniors over 65 years of age, only 8.2% of clients at Senior sites were not sure about receiving the vaccine, whereas 20.4% of clients at non-Senior sites were unsure.

It is optimistic that the majority of AFAC clients surveyed (71.6%) are interested in receiving a vaccine for COVID-19 or have already received their first or second dose. However, there remains an opportunity to further educate the remaining 18.5% of families who have

indicated that they need more information to make an informed decision. AFAC advises that Arlington's Complete Vaccine Committee and partner agencies provide not only assistance in pre-registration enrollment, but also informational pamphlets or demonstrations about how the vaccine works, why it is safe, and matters of cost and transportation.

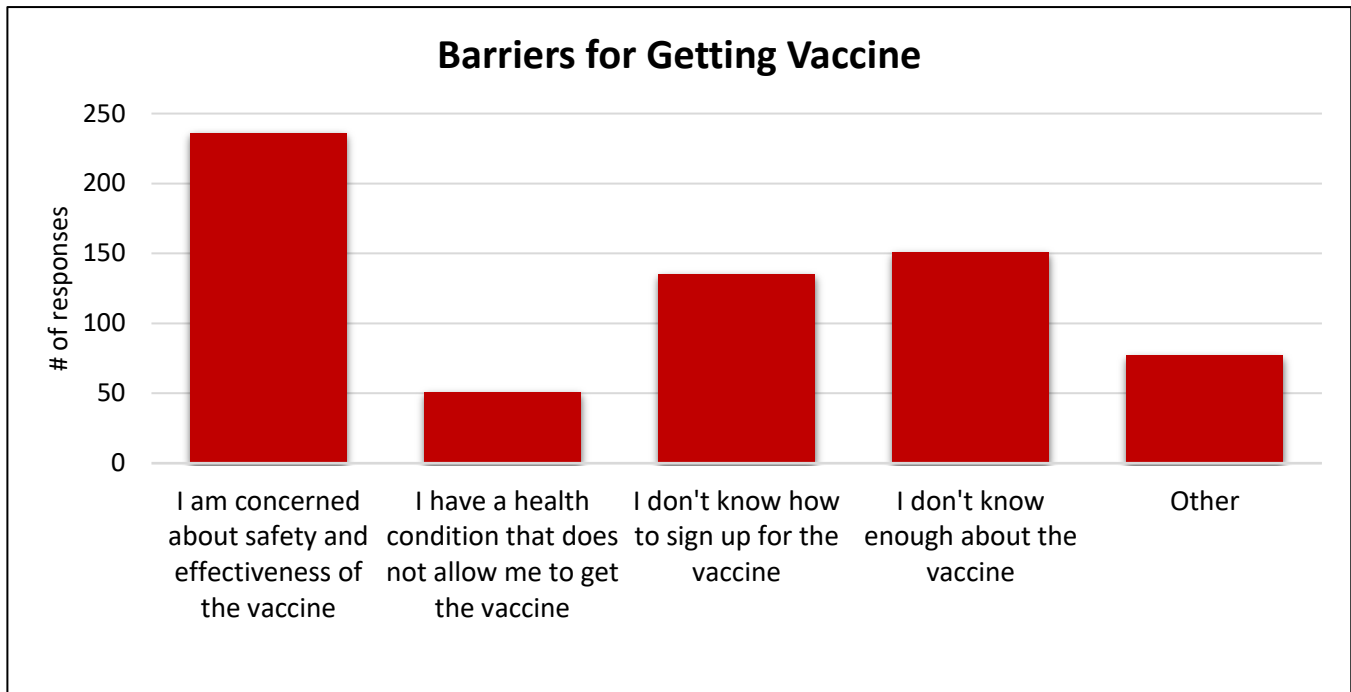


Vaccine Barriers



Clients were asked the question “What barriers might stop you from getting the COVID-19 vaccine?” and could select as many answers that applied between “none, I plan to get the COVID-19 vaccine,” “none, I have already gotten the COVID-19 vaccine,” “I am concerned about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine,” “I have a health condition that does not allow me to get the vaccine,” “I don’t know how to sign up for the vaccine,” “I don’t know enough about the vaccine,” and “Other” with space to write in a response.

Out of all the clients surveyed, 43.3% identified at least 1 barrier that would prevent them from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. The most common concern was about the vaccine’s safety and effectiveness (236 responses). The next highest response was not knowing enough about the vaccine (151 responses), followed by the uncertainty of how to sign up for the vaccine (135 responses). Sites with clients that reported the most barriers included Nelson, Columbia Hills, Marbella, and Woodbury Park. Each of these sites have large populations that are younger, have families with kids, and speak Spanish as their primary language.



Seventy-seven clients selected “Other” and provided their own responses ([a sample of "other" responses for vaccine barriers can be found in the Appendix](#)). A recurring theme among some answers was to reaffirm their position of not wanting to get the vaccine. Answers include “don’t believe in vaccines,” “not trusting the vaccine,” “there is no pandemic,” “it is a biological agent that destroys human DNA,” “God’s plan,” and “doesn’t trust the government.” A few clients say they don’t need the vaccine because they “have antibodies,” “had COVID,” or are “not sick.” Health concerns, such as pregnancy, diabetes, and allergies are potential barriers.

Several clients indicated their willingness to be vaccinated, but issues such as transportation, cost, and questions about insurance give them some concern. Others have stated they want to “wait for availability,” “don’t want to be the first,” and “want to wait until the more vulnerable get vaccinated.”

Appendix

2021 Client Survey Questions (English)

Are you satisfied with the grocery services you receive at AFAC? *[Choose one]*

- No, never
- No, not very often
- Sometimes
- Yes, often
- Yes, all the time

How often do you get groceries from AFAC? *[Choose one]*

- This is my first visit
- 1 time every week
- 1 – 3 times every month
- 1 – 3 times every 3 months
- 1 – 3 times every year

How can we improve your experience at AFAC? *[free response]*

How has the COVID-19 Pandemic affected you and your family? *[free response]*

Arlington County has already started distributing the COVID-19 vaccine to eligible individuals. Do you plan to get the vaccine when it becomes available to you? *[Choose one]*

- I already got the vaccine
- Yes, I plan to get the vaccine
- I am not sure, I need more information
- No, I do not plan to get the vaccine

What barriers might stop you from getting the COVID-19 vaccine? *[Select all that apply]*

- None, I plan to get the COVID-19 vaccine
- None, I already got the vaccine
- I am concerned about safety and effectiveness of the vaccine
- I have a health condition that does not allow me to get the vaccine
- I don't know how to sign up for the vaccine
- I don't know enough about the vaccine
- Other _____

Sample of Other Responses for Vaccine Barriers

| | |
|---|--|
| I was ill | Not accessible/too expensive |
| Wants to see about what the process is, there are others who need it more | But want to wait until the more vulnerable get vaccinated |
| She never vaccinated here before | Won't fix/heal everything and everyone |
| Bad effect on lots of people | social media negative look on vaccine and we listen |
| He doesn't have a lot of confidence in it | can't pay |
| I don't have insurance | Waiting for doctor to call w/ appointment |
| Maybe because has allergy to penicillin | I don't know if my insurance will pay for it |
| afraid of being with so many people getting their vaccine in one place | if taking it I would only one time not twice |
| worried that me getting the vaccine won't help my kid | Knows she should get it but doesn't want to be the first |
| Does not believe in vaccines | need more info due to underlying conditions |
| Want more info | had COVID already |
| Don't get vaccines | I only trust God and I feel good. Maybe sometime in the future. |
| need vaccine distribution to be bus accessible | having trouble signing up since all is online |
| has antibodies | I need help with transportation |
| don't believe in vaccine | I did not discuss it with my doctor yet. |
| He is not sure it will prevent him from getting COVID | There is no pandemic, it is a fraud a lie. It (the covid vaccine) is not a vaccine. It is a biological agent that destroys human DNA. |
| The more they give out, the more they know about it | God's plan |
| insurance | I have tried to register with Kaiser and couldn't get through |
| eligibility for non-residents, there is no such information provided anywhere | I am pregnant |
| not trusting the vaccine | never gets vaccinated |
| doesn't know how to get it bc of travel resources | doesn't trust the government |
| doesn't know what may happen/doesn't trust vaccine | His mom is nervous about getting it. Thinks it will be good to put info for others. |
| when will I be eligible? | Kids - worried for them |
| transportation - no car | It is necessary that the vaccines be available at pharmacies like CVS, etc. |
| Pregnant & not sure if you can get vaccinated | There should be more information. Experts who can explain because there are many sources of information. Doubt can be a big barrier. Make space for more information, Q&A for the community. |
| The cost of the vaccine | Is the vaccine free? |
| no, i don't plan to get the vaccine | Plans to get it, but wants more information anyway |
| afraid | already had COVID |
| accessibility, now, unsure if future will fix enough | No plans to have vaccine - is not sick |