

Steps can be taken to ease financial hardships

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As the coronavirus pandemic rages on, some local families are falling further and further behind.

A Bankrate.com survey conducted in January found 71% of respondents considered the impending \$600 stimulus payment very or somewhat important to navigating their near-term financial well-being.

More than half of survey participants didn't believe the income would be enough to get them through the next month.

Many Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, an earlier Bankrate.com survey showed.

Keeping up – or catching up – with the bills was the top financial priority for 46% the participants. It was the highest percentage dating back to 2012, when the personal finance website started conducting the polls.

Covering monthly living expenses was the No. 1 goal across all demographic groups, including those based on age, race, gender, income level and geographic location, Bankrate.com said. The survey included responses from 1,007 adults. Results were released in September.

Take Charge America, a nonprofit credit counseling agency based in Phoenix, suggested steps consumers can take to meet “realistic, actionable financial goals” in 2021:

- Reassess your budget by reevaluating your income, expenses and spending habits. Consider whether some monthly subscriptions can be canceled and some debt can be renegotiated.

- Increase your income by taking on part-time or gig work, which can include driving for a meal delivery service. Before pursuing any new job, evaluate the pan-

demic-related risks.

- Pay down credit card debt by reviewing your budget and income opportunities to free up more money to put toward balances. Contact creditors for information about programs that can reduce fees or interest rates. Consider consulting a nonprofit credit counseling agency for help creating a plan.

- Rebuild your emergency fund by making small cuts in monthly spending and funneling that money into savings. Throughout the year, set aside extra cash you receive, including birthday gifts and tax refunds. Set up any gig work or part-time job earnings to be automatically deposited into your emergency fund. Your emergency fund should be enough to cover three to six months' worth of expenses.

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