







### **Transforming Our Lives Through Covid-19's Lessons**

Insights from 2021 CIHF Keynote



### **Healthy Futures**

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# Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures

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### Insights from the 2021 CIHF Keynote June 24, 2021, 2:00PM-3:00PM (EDT)

Reported by CIHF

Webinar chaired by: **Brooke Hollis**Co-Founder and Executive Director Emeritus
of the Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted every aspect of our lives: how we work, socialize, provide healthcare, take care of society's most vulnerable and disenfranchised — even our rituals of death and mourning. But do we really want to "go back to normal?" Or is it time to create a healthier, more equitable future?

In this webinar, thought leaders from the Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures (CIHF) explored how life might change in response to the pandemic; they provided suggestions for transforming the challenging experiences of the past year into positive lessons. This session highlighted key takeaways from a new collaborative CIHF white paper focusing on COVID-19's lasting impacts on: healthy work, healthcare and hospitality environments, food access, and the senior living experience.

#### Main Points:

- Trends in telework and legislation that impact healthy employee outcomes
- How specific changes in the built environments of healthcare and hospitality facilities can improve social and community activities
- Innovations in food systems to address food insecurity and social justice issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic
- Ways providers can enhance socialization and other important aspects of the senior living experience
- Why social equity is a necessary guiding principle for healthy futures



### **CIHF Participants**

#### **Moderator**



Brooke Hollis

CIHF Co-Founder &

Executive Director Emeritus,

Executive in Residence, SLOAN

Program in Health Administration,

School of Public Policy



#### **Panelists**



Mardelle Shepley
CIHF Executive Director,
Professor, Design+
Environmental Analysis,
College of Human Ecology



Heather Kolakowski
CIHF Associate Director,
Lecturer, School of Hotel
Administration, Cornell SC
Johnson College of Business



Nicolas Ziebarth
CIHF Associate Director,
Associate Professor of Policy
Analysis and Management,
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Administration, School of
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# Work Life: Cultural Shifts for a World in Flux

"To avert the future pandemics we know are coming, we must grapple with all the ways 'normal' failed us. We must build something better." - Science Journalist, Ed Yong

Many aspects of our lives have changed as a result of the pandemic. However, the most immediate impact has been on work life. As Professor Nicolas Ziebarth explains, there are lasting changes when it comes to employee health and sick time. Pro-COVID, going in to work sick was a sign of a superior work ethic, but that has changed. The culture is changing. Employers are no longer encouraging employees to come in to work sick, and possibly spread illness throughout the office.

Paid sick leave is good for the health of the individual, the family, and the community.

However, the research shows that being able to earn sick leave results in less turnover and a more productive workforce. The health of the individual is truly connected to the health of the economy.

"Pre-COVID, going to the office while sick was a sign of a superior work ethic, but that has changed. The culture is changing."

The evolving cultural shift is that employers will be more supportive of employees staying home when sick, and will not enact judgements or penalties. In fact, employers will encourage their people to stay home if they are not feeling well, thus protecting the rest of their employees.

The changing priorities of the work force are having an impact on jobs that do not typically



provide paid sick leave. Some states have mandated sick leave and there is discussion at the Federal level. Ziebarth believes there are reasons to be optimistic that both policy makers and employers will provide paid sick leave across the board, regardless of profession.

Workforce dissatisfaction with conditions and lack of benefits has negatively impacted worker availability in some industries. As a result, resignations and reluctance to return to the workplace has meant a contraction of the workforce in these industries.

What we are witnessing could be the beginning of new bargaining power for workers in the food and hospitality industries, among others. The question centers on how to best retain workers and diminish turnover. The current debates

imply that the way forward must include increasing workers satisfaction by providing healthy working conditions and better benefits. Essentially, the pandemic has highlighted disparities in work experiences, and provides an opportunity to reassess and make positive changes.

In other industries, that have pivoted to primarily virtual work, we continue to witness ingenuity around previously ubiquitous meetings, conferences, and team-based work. Specifically, we are going to continue to see less business travel. Not only will this shift be more convenient and cost-effective, but also environmentally friendly.





# Food Insecurity: The Epidemic Within the Pandemic

The pandemic exacerbated existing inequities
This is particularly true for families struggling
to put food on the table. Heather Kolakowski,
a faculty member in the School of Hotel
Administration, explained that during the
pandemic more families became food insecure
due to job loss or diminished work hours.
Many were forced to choose between paying
for their housing (rent or mortgage), and
buying groceries. Further, during the
pandemic 42 million Americans have accessed
SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutrition
Assistance Program). This points to roughly 5
million more people becoming food insecure
over the course of 2020 and into 2021.

As a response, the federal government has increased aid for food insecure households. In the past, food aid was thought of solely in terms of emergency aid, and, therefore, considered temporary. Increasingly food aid is recognized as necessary for day-to-day survival.

The pandemic highlighted the need for expanded child nutrition programs. When school instruction became virtual, families relying on school lunches were suddenly without a much-needed food source. This





is a similar situation to the summer months when there is no school to assist food insecure families.

Increasing SNAP benefits and expanding EBT (electronic benefits transfer) programs has been critical to helping families. There has also been a significant rise in mutual aid societies - grassroots organizations,

"During the pandemic, we've witnessed a rise in food insecurity. The result is more government support and communities organizing on behalf of food insecure families."

community food cabinets, and monetary donations through which neighbors directly help neighbors during this difficult time. Food banks, a community staple, remain in high demand.

Both government and community support have increased during the pandemic to meet the needs of increasingly food insecure American families. Among working families, food insecurity is expected to continue in the foreseeable future. Offering living wages and better benefits for working families are expected to be part of the solution.





# Hospitality: Changing Needs & Creative Solutions

The pandemic forced many organizations to quickly pivot in order to remain in business. Part of this turn necessitated investing in technology. In fact, new technology uptake in restaurants has been explosive. While contactless ordering and payment predate the pandemic, they have not been widely adopted. Since COVID, we are seeing these options normalized.

Similarly in the hotel industry the ability to virtually check into a hotel without waiting in line in a potentially crowded lobby will increasingly become the norm.

These technologies can enhance service without replacing the person-to-person connection so vital to successful hospitality experiences. The challenge going forward will be striking a balance between using technology to keep people safe and safeguarding the humanistic foundation to the hospitality industry as a whole.

In addition to increased technological

innovation and uptake, we have seen shifts in managing physical environments. For those who have the space, outdoor dining has been a game-changer. Some restaurants have been creative, transforming sidewalks and parking lots into outdoor dining spaces for patrons. As seasons change in certain parts of the country, outdoor seating was no longer an option; more air circulation, air flow, and social distancing between diners provided adequate solutions. In these

### "These technologies can enhance service without replacing the person-to-person connection..."

scenarios, masks were worn by staff, and patrons were asked to "mask up" when not eating. These measures helped the dining industry to adhere to national and international safety measures, and, in the process, created anxiety-free dining.

COVID has drawn critical attention to updating and maintaining HVAC systems for improved air circulation. Look for new buildings to be designed with stronger air flow in place, and with the ability to section off spaces within the building during a crisis. These are lasting lessons that will change hospitality ventures at every level.



# The Guest Experience: Transparency and Balance are Key

Prior to the pandemic, there was an emphasis on cleaning surfaces, vacuuming, beyond the view of the guests in order to minimize disruptions and maintain the ambiance of the hotel or restaurant. COVID drove a shift in guest expectations as patrons demanded transparency in sanitation practices.

This change has guided creativity on messaging around cleaning protocols. One manifestation of this was that in the early days of the pandemic, poster boards were often displayed in hotel lobbies listing the protocols enacted to protect guests and staff from infection. This is largely seen as a short-term solution and an immediate reaction to the crisis. Longer term, what signaling is appropriate to cleanliness measures to the guests?

### "This comes down to a philosophy that centers on the guest perspective."

Some organizations have embraced creative ways to demonstrate their sanitation protocols. For example, marketing the fact



that staff are required to complete a cleanliness certificate program demonstrates consideration for the health of their guests and staff. Another approach comes with hospitality pedagogy. Heather Kolakowski trains her students to be mindful of all details when running a dining room, highlighting close attention to the cleanliness of cutlery, surfaces, and floors. According to Kolakowski, "this comes down to a philosophy that centers on the guest perspective."

However, there must be a balance to cleanliness practices and the dining experience. No one wants to dine with the scent of antiseptic or bleach permeating the air. Therefore, the challenge will be taking an open and clear approach without undermining guest comfort.



### Senior Living: Necessary Pivots in Technology & Design

A sense of community is critical when it comes to the human experience, and this is especially true for senior living. Senior living communities are the ultimate platform for uniting hospitality and healthcare design. Existing design practices already have proven their efficacy in addressing pandemic-living.

Mardelle Shepley and Brooke Hollis shared that the lessons learned during 2020 will have lasting impacts on senior living facility design. Going forward, one of the questions that will be central to design will be: how to protect the mental and physical health of seniors, expressly, during a health crisis?

and providing spaces that allow for distancing between visitors and staff, are two examples of how design theory for senior living will change.

Additionally, technology that supports social interaction and access to the outdoors are important design elements. The ability to eat dinner with someone virtually, and possibly watch a film "together," will help alleviate the social isolation that can be demoralizing to seniors. The ability to speak to loved ones through voice commands - as opposed to computers that could be intimidating - would also be beneficial. Integrating this technology into spaces in a way that still speaks of comfort will continue to be central to design practice.

Access to outdoor space and décor elements that invoke nature, is also critical for health, as they are known to reduce stress. When done thoughtfully, a useful balance can be struck between high tech and natural solutions for the health and longevity of seniors.







# COVID Aftershocks: The Changing Landscape of the Healthcare Industry

It is well documented that 2020 was an incredibly difficult year for healthcare workers as well as the industry as a whole. Elective services plummeted, dramatically reducing a vital revenue stream many hospitals relied on for operating budgets. The past 15 to 16 months have seen hospitals in financial crisis and, increasingly, with weary healthcare workers on the front lines of caring for COVID patients.

The CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act, has provided some much-needed financial support and liquidity to healthcare providers. However, because most of this support came in the form of loans they will need to be repaid. While

operating costs continue to weigh heavily on many providers, the possibility that the Biden administration will defer loan payments would be beneficial.

This is especially true for financially precarious medical facilities, particularly rural hospitals. Over the next year and a half we are likely to witness many hospital closures, leaving some communities without healthcare facilities, even as new COVID variants spread throughout the nation. COVID is likely to have a lasting impact on the availability of medical facilities. Institutions with the resources are likely to continue to adjust quickly, remain productive, and survive the crisis.

Beyond survival, however, the quality of care will depend on addressing the needs of an increasingly burnt out healthcare labor force.

Images courtesy of canva.com



# Transforming Our Lives Through Covid-19's Lessons

With the resolution of the pandemic still uncertain, the ultimate transformation of our institutions, likewise, remains uncertain. It is clear, however, that workplaces, nutrition programs, hospitality settings and facilities for seniors will continue to evolve to best serve the long-term goals of health and wellbeing.



### Innovating across health, hospitality, and design in support of...



