



# 2020 State of the Commonwealth Report



December 2020

Dear Reader:

**T**his is Old Dominion University's sixth annual State of the Commonwealth Report. While it represents the work of many people connected in various ways to the university, the report does not constitute an official viewpoint of Old Dominion, its president, John R. Broderick, the Board of Visitors, the Strome College of Business or the generous donors who support the activities of the Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy.

Although our devotion to this work remains steadfast, our enthusiasm, admittedly, has been dampened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the toll it has taken on the Commonwealth and nation. Our work seeks to inform about the road ahead and the nature of recovery over the coming years.

To adapt, improve and overcome, we must understand where we are and where we want to go. Our goal is to contribute to this conversation without glossing over the challenges we face. We want to encourage the difficult conversations to help Virginia improve outcomes for all its residents in the coming years.

The 2020 State of the Commonwealth Report is divided into five parts:

### **COVID-19 and the Commonwealth**

In January 2020, Virginia was focused on the continuing economic expansion and shortages of skilled labor in many areas of the Commonwealth. Now, as 2020 draws to a close, we face the prospects of a hard winter and a slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We examine the impact of COVID-19 on Virginia and discuss how the pandemic has disproportionately impacted our Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino residents.

### **The Way We Were: 2010-2019**

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated social distancing measures, the challenges of the last decade seem almost trivial in comparison. Yet, these challenges hold valuable lessons for our current economic

environment and how to build a better economy in this decade. We take a fresh look at the previous decennial – our economic successes and areas where we could improve – and provide insight into how these experiences can help us recover in the coming years.

### **Feeding Virginia**

In 2018, 1 in 10 adult Virginians did not know with certainty how they would obtain their next meal. This food insecurity affects an even greater proportion of children in the Commonwealth. It not only lowers learning outcomes, but also reduces workplace productivity. Now, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity in Virginia has increased. We explore how public programs and regional food banks are working to address this problem.

### **Youth Mental Health in Virginia**

Over the last decade, an increasing number of young people reported being anxious or depressed. And now, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated closing schools, curtailing extracurricular activities and limiting social contacts for many of Virginia's youth. In this chapter, we explore the state of youth mental health in the Commonwealth and gauge how our younger residents are faring during the pandemic. We find that there is an increasing need for youth mental health services and discuss what can be done to help those who could benefit the most.

### **Virginia's Opioid Epidemic Continues and COVID-19 May Be Making It Worse**

In 2017, we explored the rising toll of the opioid epidemic in Virginia and the United States. While COVID-19 has garnered much of the attention in 2020, the opioid epidemic continues in the Commonwealth. We revisit the evidence and consider whether the pandemic and social distancing measures have affected opioid overdoses in Virginia.



The Strome College of Business and Old Dominion University continue to provide support for the State of the Commonwealth Report. However, it would not appear without the vital backing of the private donors whose names appear below. They believe in Virginia and the power of rational discussion to improve our circumstances but are not responsible for the views expressed in the report.

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All six State of the Commonwealth Reports are available at [www.ceapodu.com](http://www.ceapodu.com).

If you have comments or suggestions, please email us at [rmcnab@odu.edu](mailto:rmcnab@odu.edu).

Sincerely,



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