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A Survey of Nail Salon Workers and Owners in California During Covid-19

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A SURVEY OF NAIL SALON WORKERS AND OWNERS IN CALIFORNIA DURING COVID-19



CALIFORNIA
HEALTHY NAIL SALON
COLLABORATIVE

Liên Hiệp Ngành Móng Tay Lành Mạnh

UCLA Labor Center

June 2020



About the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative

The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative's mission is to improve the health, safety and rights of the nail and beauty care workforce to achieve a healthier, more sustainable, and just industry. Through outreach and education, nail salon workers and owners build their knowledge and skills on health, safety, and workplace rights. We also provide leadership development and believe in organizing to transform communities, organizations and individuals to create healthy and just communities and social justice movements.

For more information, go to www.cahealthynailsalons.org

About the UCLA Labor Center

The UCLA Labor Center believes that a public university belongs to the people and should advance quality education and employment for all. Every day we bring together workers, students, faculty, and policymakers to address the most critical issues facing working people today. Our research, education, and policy work lifts industry standards, creates jobs that are good for communities, and strengthens immigrant rights, especially for students and youth.

For more information, visit labor.ucla.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a leading hub for the nail salon industry, California comprises more than 100,000 licensed manicurists who work in mom-and-pop salons throughout the state. With the sudden rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, nail salons were upended as they were forced to shut down to comply with shelter-in-place orders. A Survey of Nail Salon Workers and Owners in California During COVID-19 analyzes and summarizes the socio-economic impacts that COVID-19 had on the nail salon industry through both owner and worker perspectives. Based on 636 worker and 90 owner online surveys, this report provides a brief snapshot of the experiences, needs, and challenges facing workers and owners during the COVID-19 shutdown and as they anticipate reopening.

1. Workers face significant economic hardship and difficulty obtaining basic necessities

- Before COVID-19, workers earned low wages. Since the closures, three quarters of workers expressed doubt that they will be able to afford food and other necessities in the next month.
- Over 90% of workers applied for unemployment benefits, while almost half need support in applying for and obtaining such aid.
- Workers lack broader financial support from family members and/or other employment. Only 8% of workers have other jobs, while most do not have financial support from family, community, or other members of their household.

2. Owners are struggling to sustain business demands and salon expenses

- Only 6% of owners were able to keep their workers on payroll.
- Over a third of owners were unable to pay rent at the time of the survey, and half could not pay rent beyond one or two more months.
- Two-thirds of owners reported were unable to or unsure if they would have the funds for food and other necessities.
- Three-quarters of owners applied for business loans, yet some did not qualify, and others still needed support navigating the loans and grants programs.
- Reasons for not applying for business loans or grants included forms were complicated, not knowing where to get information, and concerns about interest rates.

3. Workers and owners alike are anxious about challenges in reopening

- Nearly 75% of workers felt that it was somewhat or very likely that their salons would hire them back.
- Most owners did not want to reduce staffing, though 14% were unsure they would be able to reopen once restrictions are lifted.
- 70% of owners want clear guidelines on health and safety and 69% need additional funds to modify their salons
- Both workers (61%) and owners (43%) are most worried about health and safety upon reopening.
- Both workers (43%) and owners (63%) note finances as their primary stressor overall.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the nail salon industry and impacted employers and workers alike. As the industry moves toward reopening, it will need not only new practices to ensure the health and safety of employees and consumers but also sufficient economic support to restart and be sustainable. This moment also presents an opportunity to reshape the industry as one that provides safe and quality jobs for workers. As such, the following are recommendations to ensure that nail salons can be effectively supported to safely reopen without posing health risks to workers and the wider public:

- 1. Provide translated comprehensive health and safety guidelines and small business support for reopening.**
- 2. Coordinate an issue campaign to counter xenophobia, stereotyping, discrimination, and violence in nail salons.**
- 3. Ensure that strong workers protections are in place in the context of reopening.**

INTRODUCTION

California has the largest number of nail salon workers and businesses in the country. There are more than 100,000 licensed manicurists who work in mom-and-pop salons throughout the state, and more than 90% have fewer than 10 employees. The nail salon industry is primarily owned and staffed by Vietnamese immigrants and refugees, who have created ethnic entrepreneurship and economic niches that are unique to the industry.*

The industry faces complex challenges for workers, who earn low wages and encounter a variety of labor issues, and for employers, most of whom run small salons and are expected to provide services at low costs. Nail salons were upended by COVID-19 and the resulting shelter-in-place order in March 2020 that forced them all to shut down. The effects on an already vulnerable workforce and sector have been devastating. This brief provides a snapshot of the challenges experienced by nail salon workers and owners in California.

On April 14, 2020, the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative launched an online survey in Vietnamese and English as part of their emergency assistance aid application process. The Collaborative used existing contact lists as well as salons listed with the Healthy Nail Salon Recognition Program in five cities and counties to reach workers and owners. Survey participants have also been recruited through word of mouth. As of May 27, 2020, the Collaborative had collected 636 worker and 90 owner surveys. The UCLA Labor Center analyzed the responses and summarized the findings here.

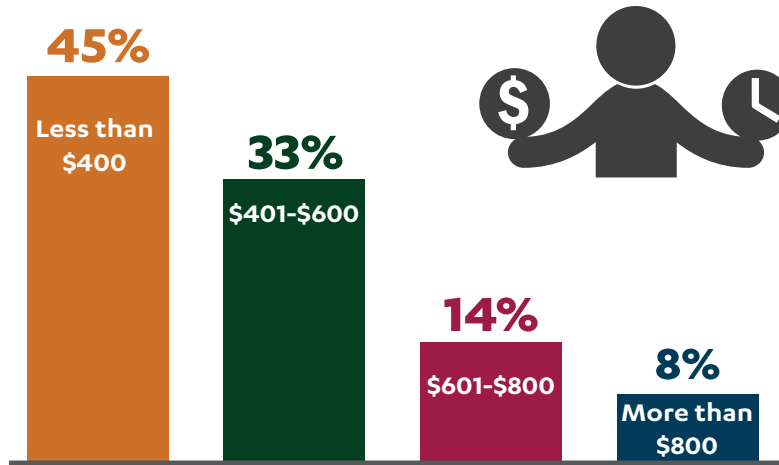
WORKER EXPERIENCE OF THE SHUTDOWN

Pay and Wages

Workers face difficult financial realities during the COVID-19 shutdown. Before the nail salon closures, workers were already earning low wages, with 45% earning less than \$400 per week and more than 3 in 4 reporting earning less than \$600 a week.

* Preeti Sharma et al., *Nail Files: A Study of Nail Salon Workers and Industry in the United States*, UCLA Labor Center and the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, 2018, www.labor.ucla.edu/publication/nail-files/.

Figure 1: Workers' Weekly Earnings Including Tips, Before COVID-19



Only 1% of surveyed workers continued to get paid after salons shut down; only 6% of owners were able to continue paying employees.

The closing of nail salons and the sudden lack of income has left workers struggling, particularly those in single-income households or those with family members' whose jobs have also been impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown.

"Me and my parents lost all our jobs now. Both my mother and I work in the nail salon industry."
—Worker in San Francisco, 6–10 years in the industry

"Due to the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order, I am not able to work and earn an income. Only one person in my household is allowed to work and earn an income."
—Worker in Santa Clara, 1–5 years in the industry

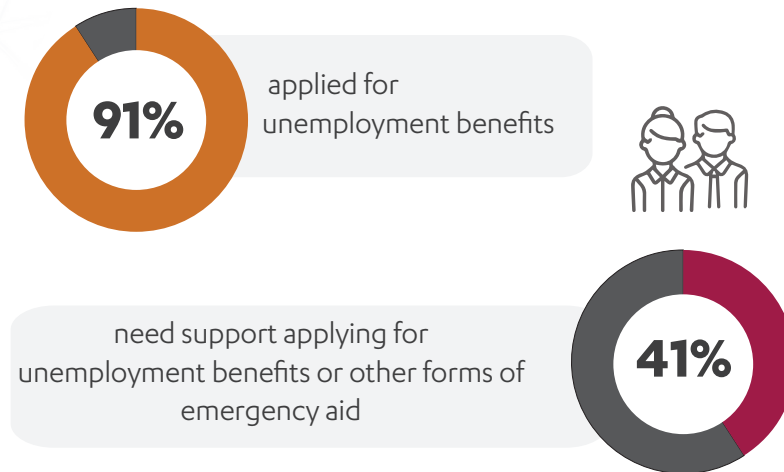
"I am currently struggling to look after my mother with diabetes and high blood pressure. Now my mother needs to go to the doctor for medicine."
—Worker in Santa Clara, 6–10 years in the industry

"I am worried about my financial situation. I am afraid I will be homeless if I am unable to pay my rent in the next few months."
—Worker in Santa Clara, 6–10 years in the industry

Worker Benefits and Economic Hardships

The majority of workers applied for unemployment benefits, though they need support navigating the benefits systems and accessing other forms of aid, including ongoing follow-up with the California Employment Development Department (EDD).

Figure 2: Access to Benefits and Other Forms of Aid



Of those who did not apply, some felt that the form was too complicated or not available in their language, others didn't know where to access information, and about half did not apply because didn't think they qualified. Overall, workers need language support and tools to navigate these government systems.

Many workers were still waiting for a response about their unemployment while others were not able to apply at all. The employment classification of some manicurists as independent contractors (many whom may be misclassified) instead of employees added to the difficulty of applying and qualifying for unemployment insurance and resulted in a potential loss of benefits.

"I was laid off more than a month ago, and it has been very difficult. I have applied to EDD but I still have not heard from them."
—Worker in Mountain View

"I don't know when I'll be able to return to work, I applied for unemployment benefits but don't know why they responded that I will be receiving no money."
—Worker in Mountain View

“I’m the head of household and a single mom, so not working has been really hard on us. I’ve used up all my savings just to pay for rent and bills. I’ve applied for unemployment, but no answer.”
—Worker in Santa Monica, 6–10 years in the industry

“I was only able to file as 1099 [independent contractor]. The owner only allowed me to file as 1099, difficulty in applying for EDD. I’m feeling pressure from multiple fronts. I’m hoping I’ll be able to receive some portion of this support fund/EDD benefits so I can cover my living costs at the moment.”
—Worker in Mountain View

Surveyed workers experienced high levels of economic insecurity, with more than half (54%) noting that they were unsure if they would be able to pay for food and other necessities over the next month.

Figure 3: Workers’ Ability to Buy Food and Other Necessities in the Next Month



Most alarming are worker concerns over food and housing insecurity:

“I do not have enough money to buy food. I have been getting my food from food banks.”
—Worker in Compton, 21–25 years in the industry

“My financial situation is not great. I have had to budget and ration my food.”
—Worker in Santa Monica, 6–10 years in the industry

“It was stressful that the beauty salon is not allowed to be open during this pandemic time—stressful because I still need to pay rent and food, even though I’ve been eating instant noodles everyday with tears. Hope to get better, and everyone can be strong and stay together.”
—Worker in Mountain View, 6–10 years in the industry

“This time is so hard with my family. We do not have enough money to pay the rent and buy food. I’m working as a manicurist but due to the COVID virus, I do not know when I can come back to my work. My husband cannot go to work too because of the Coronavirus, but since the day my daughter applied EDD for him, we hear nothing back from EDD. And until now we have no EDD too.”

—Worker in Los Gatos, 11–15 years in the industry

Only 8% of workers have other jobs, some of which have also been impacted by the shutdown, like those in hair salons and restaurants. A few of the workers reported working as caregivers through In-Home Supportive Services. Most do not have additional resources from family or community members, and only a quarter have another household member who is working.

Figure 4: Sources of Broader Financial Support



OWNER EXPERIENCE OF THE SHUTDOWN

Salon Expenses and Economic Hardships

The nail salon sector is mostly comprised of small businesses run by immigrants and refugees. Almost all of the owners surveyed had only one salon, and the majority employed fewer than 10 workers.

Figure 5: Number of Salons Owned



Figure 6: Number of Employees

0 (owner only)	2%
1-3	47%
4-5	26%
6-9	15%
10 or more	9%

Most salon owners faced immediate economic hardships as a result of their salons closing, with only 6% able to keep their workers on payroll.

“I am worried about my employees because they don’t have money, and I don’t have money to pay them.”

—Salon owner in San Jose, 16–20 years in industry

Owners were also concerned about being able to continue paying commercial rent. The median salon rent is \$3,000 a month. Over a third of owners were unable to pay rent at the time of the survey, and half could pay for only one or two months more.

Figure 7: Monthly Salon Rent

Under \$2,000	21%
\$2,000-2,999	26%
\$3,000-4,000	22%
More than \$4,000	31%



Figure 8: Number of Months Owners Could Continue to Pay Salon Rent

0	40%
1	29%
2	21%
3 or more	10%

“I’m worried because I don’t know whether I’ll be able to pay rent, because my rent is too high.”
—Salon owner in Santa Clara, 6–10 years in the industry

Concerns about food insecurity are also widespread among owners. Close to half (48%) were unsure about their ability to pay for food and other basic needs in the next month.

Figure 9: Owners’ Ability to Buy Food and Other Necessities in the Next Month



“I had to close my store due to Covid-19 since March. Since the closure, I have no income, but there are plenty of bills, rent, and food to pay for five people in a family. In addition, my husband also lost his job due to Covid19. We’re trying to get through one day at a time.”

—Owners in Redwood City, 11–15 years in the industry

Accessing Business Loans and Grants

Our survey found that three in four owners had applied for financial assistance through programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Emergency Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), and other Small Business Association (SBA) grants and loans. In addition, owners who had misclassified workers as independent contractors instead of employees did not qualify for most small business loans.

Figure 10: Owners’ Ability to Apply for Business Loans and Grants



Even if they had applied, most owners still needed support navigating the loans and grants programs.

“I applied for PPP from the bank but it only helps to cover two months’ rent. The other loans were not accepted.”

—Salon owner in Santa Clara, 1–5 years in the industry

“Unable to obtain a loan because I did not have all the paperwork for submission, because the accountant did not provide a 2020 quarterly report.”

—Salon owner in Alameda, 21–25 years in industry

“The funding ran out of money.”

—Salon owner in Los Gatos, 11–15 years in the industry

“I applied for an SBA loan since 03/19/2020 but I haven’t got approved and haven’t received loan assistance at all. I’ve been paying my rent from my business savings, but I’ll be out of money soon.”

—Salon owner in San Francisco, 21–25 years in industry

Among those owners who did not apply for business loans or grants, 41% noted they did not do so because the forms were complicated. One third expressed not knowing where to get information, and another third of the owners expressed concerns about interest rates.

Figure 11: Reasons for Not applying for Business Loans or Grants

Forms were complicated	41%
Not sure where to access information	32%
Concerned about interest rates	32%

“I was unable to access the app online. They said they are no longer accepting applications.”

—Salon owner in Santa Monica, more than 25 years in the industry

“I don’t know where to start. The bank is not helping. They only say to apply online.”

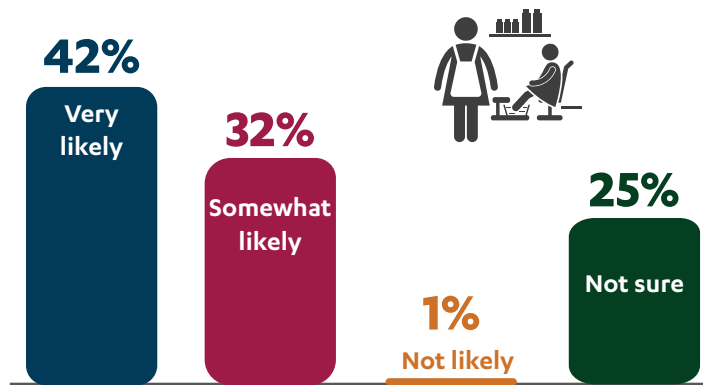
—Salon owner in Santa Clara, 11–15 years in the industry

REOPENING: CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Returning to Work

Salon closures have hit both workers and owners hard, and many are anxious to open up the sector and get back to work. In fact, 99% of workers hope to continue working in the industry when salons reopen. Nearly three quarters of workers felt that it was somewhat or very likely that their salons would hire them back.

Figure 11: Workers' Perception: Likelihood Their Salons Will Hire Them Back

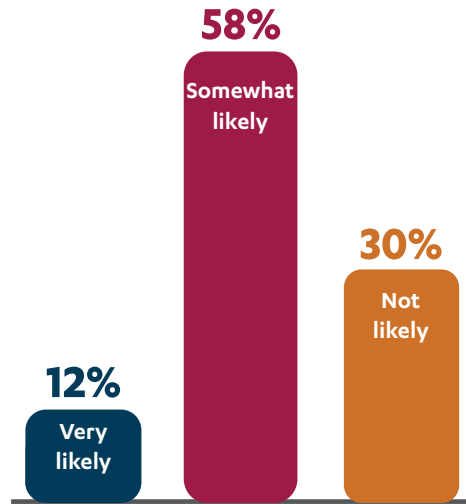


Most owners thought it was likely they will hire workers back when salons reopen, though there was some concern about whether their staff would come back. Most owners did not want to reduce staffing, though 14% were unsure they would be able to reopen once restrictions are lifted.

Figure 12: Owners' Perception: Likelihood of Rehiring Staff if Salons Open in Two Months

	All staff	Fewer staff
Very likely	69%	20%
Somewhat likely	25%	37%
Not likely	6%	43%

Figure 13: Owners' Perception: Likelihood of Staff Not Returning When Salons Reopen in Two Months






Owner Concerns About Reopening

While owners are anxious to reopen their salons, in a dangerous public health crisis that puts workers, owners, and consumers at risk, there need to be clear guidelines and financial support.

Close to half (45%) of owners were concerned about the health and safety of both customers and workers. More than one third were concerned about losing customers because of fear of infection.

Figure 14: Owner's Main Concerns About Reopening

	Health and safety	43%
	Decreased customer base	41%
	Decreased income	14%

"Some clients may be scared to come back since the governor's comment that we are a source of COVID. It makes me wonder the type of impact it will have on my business."

—Salon owner in San Francisco, 11–15 years in the industry

"Health and safety, especially transmission of COVID19, since we are in close proximity to customers' faces."

—Salon owner in Oakland, 16–20 years in the industry

When it came to staffing considerations, owners had concerns that anti-Asian racism might reduce business and that employees may be afraid to come back due to concerns about their safety and health.

“I’m afraid there won’t be enough income for manicurists because of the social distances rule.”
—Salon owner in Santa Clara, 6–10 years in the industry

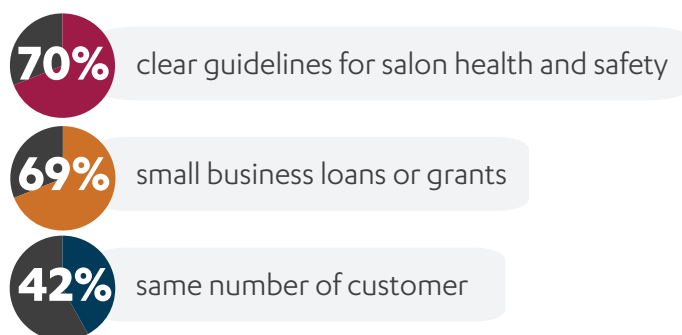
“I am worried that business will be slow due to fears of infection as well as racism.”
—Salon owner in Santa Monica, 16–20 years in the industry

“I am worried I will not get as many customers. The majority of my customers are tourists, and people will not be traveling. I will have to rebuild my clientele.”
—Salon owner in Santa Monica, more than 25 years in the industry

“I’m worried about how much I will have to increase the cost of my services. Because if I reopen my salon, I will have to create a sanitary facility, and to protect my customers’ and workers’ safety, I will have to buy many solutions and masks.”
—Salon owner in Santa Clara, 6–10 years in the industry

Owners also responded that they needed clear guidelines and additional financial support to be able to safely reopen and prevent the spread of COVID-19. In order to meet health and safety guidelines, salons will need additional funds to upgrade their salons.

Figure 15: Owners’ Needs for Reopening



When asked about their sources of stress, owners primarily noted financial constraints and health and safety concerns.

Figure 16: Owners' Overall Concerns

Finances	63%
Rent	32%
Uncertainty about reopening/need to reopen	32%
Health and safety	17%

"I am worried about my health when I go back to work. I need to work to support my family but am very scared to do so as of right now."
—Salon owner in San Ramon





"I hope the Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative will have specific instructions and disseminate information on how to protect the health of nail salons' staff and patrons when returning to work. Information and advertising on social networks or newspapers to customers about healthy nail salons so they can return to doing nails safely."
—Worker in Alameda, 6–10 years in the industry

"I am prepared and ready to reopen my salon. We have to apply new rules and protocols, train and update on new sanitized equipment to protect everyone who works here and public health."
—Salon owner in Santa Clara, 11–15 years in the industry

Worker Concerns About Reopening

Many workers are worried about getting infected because they work in such close proximity to customers and each other. Others noted that salons will have to adjust to social distancing guidelines, likely resulting in fewer customers and fewer manicurists.

Figure 17: Workers' Main Concerns About Reopening

 Health and safety	61%
 Decreased customer base	14%
 Job security	11%
 Decreased income	4%

“The hours are going to be cut short to absorb the social distances law. Will earn less money.”
—Worker in Gilroy, 6–10 years in industry

“I am concerned my employer will not rehire me because they are not rehiring everyone because they are worried business will be slow.”
—Worker in Santa Monica, 6–10 years in the industry

“I am unsure if my employer will rehire me when the salon reopens because I am the oldest nail technician. I think my employer might rehire the younger nail technicians first.”
—Worker in San Clemente, more than 25 years in the industry

“I am afraid I will get sick. I hope my employer will do what is necessary to protect my health.”
—Worker in San Jose, 11–15 years in the industry

“I’m scared and nervous because I have little one at home and older people in my house. I don’t want to get them sick.”
—Worker in San Jose, 16–20 years in industry

“I’m afraid there won’t be a vaccine. If I go back to work, I’m afraid I’ll get sick and die. There won’t be anyone to take care of my kids.”
—Worker in Campbell, 11–15 years in industry

Workers expressed similar concerns about financial hardships and health and safety. For them, financial strain outweighs the health and safety risks; work is an imperative rather than a choice.

Figure 18: Workers’ Overall Concerns

Finances	43%
Job security/need to return to work	21%
Caring for family/basic needs	21%
Health and safety	21%

“The COVID-19 epidemic will last, and I am worried that there will be no money to cover my daily expenses, such as electricity, water, rent, and food for my children.”

—Worker in Santa Clara, 1–5 year in the industry

“I’m concerned we have no vaccine. It’s hard to treat it especially because salon workers are in close contact with customers.”

—Worker in San Francisco, 11–15 years in the industry

“Fear of becoming infected if returning to work (infecting small children).”

—Worker in Los Gatos, 1–5 years in industry

“Not enough money to pay the rent... What if this lockdown is going for a long term? My family does not have enough money because the owner of the house does not decrease the rent. It’s my family’s difficulties.”

—Worker in San Mateo, 1–5 years in industry

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nail salons represented a thriving industry primarily composed of mom-and-pop businesses run by an entrepreneurial, innovative immigrant and refugee workforce. COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the nail salon industry and impacted employers and workers alike. As the industry moves toward reopening, it will need not only new practices to ensure the health and safety of employees and consumers but also sufficient economic support to restart and be sustainable. This moment also presents an opportunity to reshape the industry as one that provides safe and quality jobs for workers. Reopening and recovery will take time, resources, and restructuring to build a better and more equitable industry. As such, the following are recommendations to ensure that nail salons can be effectively supported to safely reopen without posing health risks to workers and the wider public:

1. Provide translated comprehensive health and safety guidelines and small business support for reopening

- Create a community dissemination plan to educate and inform the nail salon workforce of the state's reopening guidelines in partnership with community groups on the ground.
- Include key information that reinforces workplace labor laws to remind employers of their responsibilities and to remind workers of their rights
- Require that the BBC and CDPH provide ongoing in-language technical assistance and support to salons to understand and implement re-opening guidelines.
- Create a statewide inventory of products recommended for business modifications and make it available for all small business owners to access at wholesale prices to prevent price gouging.
- Have the Governor to issue a statewide executive order that businesses can deny anyone not wearing a mask. This adds an additional measure of protection for all, especially for immigrant owned forward-facing small businesses who may have language barriers.

2. Coordinate an issue campaign to counter xenophobia, stereotyping, discrimination, and violence in nail salons

- Involve the Labor and Workforce Development Department to issue and publicize a statewide messaging and publicity campaign that supports small businesses and counters stereotyping, anti-Asian violence and workplace discrimination in Asian owned

small businesses, including nail salons.

3. Ensure that strong workers protections are in place in the context of reopening

- Require that the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement establish a statewide nail salon technical assistance program to educate, train and support nail salon owners and workers on workplace labor standards.
- Establish a partnership, in cooperation with DLSE and CalOSHA, that allows organizations such as the CA Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative to conduct outreach, education, and training on safety standards.
- Remind all employers that they are required to revise their Illness and Injury Prevention Plan (IIPP) to include a COVID-19 prevention program that allows workers to report COVID-19 related health and safety concerns without fear of retaliation.

APPENDIX

Workers' and Owners' Select Characteristics

Characteristic	Percentage of Workers	Percentage of Owners
Years in the Nail Salon Industry		
5 years or less	37	12
6–10 years	27	18
11 or more years	36	70
Age		
18-34	23	13
35-44	24	27
45-54	33	44
55 and older	20	16
Top Three Places of Residence		
San Jose	57	38
San Francisco	23	28
Oakland	4	4
Household Size		
1	7	9
2–3	46	42
4–5	38	35
More than 5	9	14

Nail Salon Locations

Top 5 Cities	Percentage of Worker Survey Participants	Percentage of Owner Survey Participants
San Francisco	23	28
San Jose	25	19
Santa Clara	5	8
San Mateo	5	8
Alameda	3	4

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