

# The broader impacts of COVID-19: Societal perspective in health economic evaluations

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A colored scanning electron micrograph of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Credit: NIAID

The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) has not only left societies with a high number of excess deaths and a wide range of health consequences, but also taken a heavy toll on wider global

economies—impacting other sectors outside health.

Future analysis must take into account societal impacts of a wide range of responses to COVID-19, if policymakers are to take better decisions about resource allocation, [intervention](#) implementation and boosting economic and social recovery.

In practice, many health economic evaluations tend to adopt a narrow study perspective predominantly estimating the [economic impact](#) around healthcare costs. They fail to consider how dealing with public health problems and interventions affects other sectors of society such as education, [criminal justice](#), housing, consumption and the environment.

Publishing their Editorial today in *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Healthcare*, researchers from the Universities of Birmingham and Maastricht University call for a more [holistic approach](#), meaning for economic evaluations of public health interventions to adopt a societal perspective for analysis, where truly appropriate.

The current pandemic highlights the importance of adopting a societal [perspective](#) to consider these broader impacts of public health issues and interventions.

The researchers noted the existing evidence that reveals the risks of a pandemic and related interventions on a range of sectors including the labour market and productivity, as well as other areas such as education, criminal justice, housing and the environment.

Co-author Lena Schnitzler, a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham's Institute of Applied Health Research, commented: "We all have seen that responding to this pandemic has not only involved the health sector, but required a whole society approach and impacted many other sectors—and bringing into sharp focus the broader impacts that a

public health threat has on society.

"Capturing and quantifying these wider societal impacts is complex, but we must press for adoption of societal perspectives in economic analyses—this will help our [policy makers](#) to take better decisions in dealing with the pandemic's aftermath."

Existing evidence reveals that people living under poorer socio-economic circumstances and those with underlying [health](#) conditions are at a higher risk of contracting the virus and developing complications compared to others. The pandemic also exacerbates domestic burdens mostly borne by women.

"Everyone can see the impacts of the pandemic which range from the impact on education with school closures causing inequity in access to online education to the impact on the environment with falls in air pollution—and all the impacts in between including those on aspects of society spanning Criminal Justice, housing and consumption.

"We desperately need wider perspectives to understand these effects and take action to reduce their impact on [society](#)," added Irina Pokhilenko, Researcher at Maastricht University.

Provided by University of Birmingham

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