

Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health & Human
Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

March 24, 2021

Dear Secretary Becerra and Director Walensky:

On behalf of the undersigned groups, we write to urge you to ensure funding for COVID-19 public health response activities provided through the American Rescue Plan Act (P.L.117-2) prioritizes the communities of color and tribal communities that are disproportionately affected and underserved.

The disparities in burden of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death are troubling, and insufficient demographic data masks the full extent of these disparities.ⁱ Compounding these inequities is the historical and current lack of resources directed to the communities and neighborhoods that have been hardest hit. For example, in the demographic data available on COVID-19 vaccination thus far, we have seen lower rates of vaccination for Black and Latino populations than for white populations,^{ii,iii} despite similar levels of interest in seeking the vaccine across demographics.^{iv} These troubling data indicate barriers to services that must be addressed through dedicated funding for communities that lack the infrastructure and resources to achieve an equitable response to the pandemic.

We urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to ensure a significant portion of funding through the following sections of the American Rescue Plan Act is directed to specialized efforts by local, state, tribal and territorial public health agencies encouraged to work in partnership with and provide resources to community-based organizations that build trust, ensure access, and provide culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services. Such targeted funding is necessary to promote equity among population groups that are bearing such a heavy burden of COVID-19 illness and death:

- **Sec. 2301: Funding for COVID-19 Vaccine Activities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**
- **Sec. 2401: Funding for COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Mitigation Activities.**

We applaud the recent funding opportunity announcements that allocate targeted funding for these purposes, including the Office of Minority Health's *Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Equitable Community Responses to COVID-19*, the allocation of vaccination funding from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and the CDC National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved Communities,^v including racial and ethnic minority populations, immigrants, and rural communities. We encourage HHS to build upon these investments with continued focus on the people hardest hit by the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Alliance Medical Center

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine

American Association on Health and Disability

American College of Clinical Pharmacy

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees

American Federation of Teachers

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

American Medical Student Association

American Muslim Health Professionals

American Physical Therapy Association

American Public Health Association

American Society for Microbiology

American Thoracic Society

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Association for Prevention Teaching and Research

Association of American Medical Colleges

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Public Health Laboratories

Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Big Cities Health Coalition

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research
Children's HealthWatch
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)
Community Catalyst
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Endocrine Society
Epilepsy Foundation
Families USA
Healthcare Ready
HIV Medicine Association
Human Rights Watch
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Justice in Aging
Lakeshore Foundation
NASTAD
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials
National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID)
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigration Law Center
National League for Nursing
National Network for Arab American Communities
National Network of Public Health Institutes

National Partnership for Women & Families

National Urban League

National Working Positive Coalition

Peggy Lillis Foundation

People For the American Way

Physicians for Reproductive Health

Prevent Blindness

Prevention Institute

Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)

Public Health Accreditation Board

Public Health Institute

Research!America

RESULTS

Safe States Alliance

Share Our Strength

Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

Southern Poverty Law Center

The AIDS Institute

The Praxis Project

The Workers Circle

Trust for America's Health

Truth Initiative

UnidosUS

Vaccinate Your Family

ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html> (accessed March 12, 2021)

ⁱⁱ Latest Data on COVID-19 Vaccinations Race/Ethnicity. Kaiser Family Foundation, March 3, 2021.

<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/latest-data-on-covid-19-vaccinations-race-ethnicity/> (accessed March 12, 2021)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Pandemic's Racial Disparities Persist in Vaccine Rollout - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#) March 5, 2021. (accessed March 12, 2021).

^{iv} [KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor Dashboard | KFF](#) Kaiser Family Foundation, (accessed March 12, 2021)

^v [CDC Announces \\$2.25 Billion to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities in Communities that are at High-Risk and Underserved | CDC Online Newsroom | CDC](#) March 18, 2021. (accessed March 18, 2021).