

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington D.C. 20500

Honorable Norris Cochran
Acting Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington D.C. 20201

February 2, 2021

Dear President Biden and Acting Secretary Cochran,

We write to you deeply concerned about the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to underserved communities and communities of color. While the COVID-19 crisis affects every American, it is the latest disease to infect and kill Black and Latino Americans at higher rates than people in the rest of the population. We have seen firsthand what this crisis is doing to our communities, especially those that are low-income and do not have access to the services they need to stay healthy and pay the bills.

We know that the Trump Administration mishandled the initial rollout of the coronavirus vaccine, and that you were presented with very little data to provide for a seamless transition. For example, it is appalling that you were not informed on how many doses of the vaccine the federal government has in its possession.¹

Unfortunately, time is of the essence, and recent reports regarding the disproportionate access to vaccines by underserved communities demands our immediate attention. Currently, 4 percent of the White population has received a COVID-19 vaccine, as compared to only 1.9 percent of the Black population and 1.8 percent of the Latino population.² As was stated by Former CDC Acting Director Dr. Richard Besser during a recent television interview, our focus needs to be ensuring that the right people are being vaccinated. Considering the fact that communities of color are at the greatest risk of exposure and have hospitalization and death rates that far surpass their proportion of the population, we need to focus on getting the people in these communities vaccinated.³

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/new-cdc-director-said-biden-administration-struggling-lack-vaccine-data-n1255455>

² https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/26/us/vaccination-disparities-rollout/index.html?utm_source=sfmc_100035609&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=38401+The+Latinx+Files&utm_term=https%3a%2f%2fwww.cnn.com%2f2021%2f01%2f26%2fus%2fvaccination-disparities-rollout%2findex.html&utm_id=22551&sfmc_id=2375595

³ At This Hour with Kate Bolduan; CNN January 26, 2021.

Equally concerning is that the rate of vaccinations is disproportionately lower for healthcare workers among communities of color.⁴ This is not only due to an issue with distribution of the vaccine but, also vaccine hesitancy, where only 32 percent of African American adults nationwide say they would definitely or probably take a COVID-19 vaccine.

We believe that the Administration should be looking for creative approaches to solve these problems and get the vaccine to those most in need. For instance, mobile units can be brought to public housing that is home to seniors and other high-risk populations. Also, the federal government can specifically earmark shipments of the vaccine to be delivered specifically to providers in underserved communities with the highest rates of infection and mortalities.

Our hope is that you can outline the Administration's plan to ensure that underserved communities and communities of color are no longer being left behind during the vaccine distribution process. We request that you also provide us with answers to the following questions:

1. What is the Administration's plan to ensure that more providers in underserved communities, such as community health centers and local pharmacies, receive increased doses of the vaccines?
2. What is being done to ensure that these providers have the infrastructure in place, including cold storage machines, to store the vaccines that require such equipment?
3. What is being done to coordinate mobile vaccination units getting sent to these communities?
4. Has the Administration been tracking data on who has received the vaccine, and is this data being disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, and zip code? If so, please provide this data in your response.
5. What is the Administration doing to address vaccine hesitancy in communities of color?

Thank you again for your attention to this pressing issue. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress

⁴ <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-01-27/racial-inequities-la-covid-19-vaccine-rollout-raise-concern>

/s/ Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

/s/ Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

/s/ Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

/s/ Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/ Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/ Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

/s/ Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/ Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

/s/ Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

/s/ Kathy Castor
Member of Congress