

15 imperatives to effectively address the COVID-19 emergency

Actions to enable response, recovery, and preparation for future public health crises

COVID-19 has caused widespread loss and devastation in communities across the United States. Despite incredible advances in therapeutics, testing, and vaccines, COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to soar across the country. Public health departments, health care workers, and leaders across the public and private sector have worked tirelessly to respond to the virus; however, at the beginning of 2021 the pandemic has entered an increasingly deadly phase. The extent of infection both in the US and around the globe brings with it a new threat—that of escape variants that are creating additional urgency to suppress the COVID-19 outbreak as they increase transmissibility and further strain health care resources and may disrupt the efficacy of the critical therapeutics, tests, and vaccines that have been developed.

While these variants have led to additional urgency to quickly suppress COVID-19, the solutions continue to be rooted in traditional

public health principles. The fight against COVID-19 must be waged locally with strong national infrastructure and guidance supporting health leaders in our communities. Across the US, we must empower health systems to offer critical pharmacological interventions while also enabling localities to implement non-pharmacological interventions that meet the unique contours of the crisis in their community.

While the national figures are staggering, the impacts are felt at an individual and local level. The Biden administration inherits the daunting task of stemming the toll of the pandemic within individual communities to meaningfully address this national public health crisis. We applaud the efforts to date to accelerate vaccine development, the recent Congressional stimulus package, and the plans and executive orders released by the Biden administration to address immediate and long-term challenges exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19. Recent executive orders to require masks on federal properties and 



public transportation, establish a testing board, evaluate critical supply shortages, and provide guidance to local officials are a much needed first step. Our experience in working with clients across the public and private sector throughout the pandemic suggests that to make progress on immediate and future needs to strengthen our ability to end the pandemic and prevent future crises, the Biden administration's response can build on these efforts and should consider three distinct needs:

Respond to the immediate crisis: Accelerate strategies to increase vaccinations, testing, and genetic sequencing, while reducing the pressure on health systems experiencing outbreaks through shifting resources, leveraging technology, and adjusting communication strategies to limit misinformation and build trust.

Enable recovery in our communities: Implement strategies that will allow local communities to not only suppress the virus but begin to return to pre-COVID-19 operations.

Strengthen public health resilience: Integrate lessons learned from the pandemic to address identified gaps in our public health infrastructure and build more resilient communities and systems of health.

Respond to the immediate crisis

With COVID-19 spreading as quickly as it is in communities across the country, rapid vaccination and widespread testing is critical to suppress the virus. In addition, with hospitals at capacity, innovative solutions to surge capacity, leveraging virtual solutions are critical to enable effective care of those infected.¹ Finally, in addition to addressing viral spread, leaders must address the spread of misinformation in order to encourage adoption of public health guidance and build trust. Together, these actions can greatly reduce the spread of COVID-19 and enable a shift from crisis response to recovery. Specific recommendations include:



1. **Empower effective local distribution, administration, and promotion of vaccines:**
 - a. **Challenge:** While the COVID-19 vaccines available to date were developed in record time, their distribution has proven challenging. Not only are the vaccines complicated to transport, store, and prepare for injection, but some states have struggled with tracking and reporting, while individuals are navigating shifting eligibility guidelines and misinformation about vaccine safety.² As the scale of vaccine administration expands beyond hospital networks to retail clinics and beyond, state and local governments need continued support, including process definition and off-the-shelf technology solutions, to successfully manage distribution and administration complexities and mitigate the risks of temperature deviations, counterfeit/theft, and loss. Similarly, as vaccination efforts shift from easily identified and accessed individuals, such as health care workers and long-term care facility residents, public health officials will likely face additional hurdles reaching key demographics, which may be further complicated by vaccine hesitancy. National guidance, infrastructure, and digital communication campaigns are needed to accelerate vaccine distribution and empower local officials to quickly scale vaccination efforts.
 - b. **Opportunity:** The Biden administration's proposed national vaccination campaign can accelerate vaccinations by deploying clear guidance for local public health officials to support their expanded distribution efforts, in addition to the funding requested. Providing clear, simple guidance and training for multiple models of distribution sites regarding workflow, vaccine administration, reporting, emergency response, and resourcing recommendations will accelerate the opening of new avenues to provide vaccinations. In addition, engaging the private sector and trusted community organizations to enable innovative distribution and administration models, from targeted pop up sites to mass vaccination programs, can increase vaccination accessibility. These connections can also support a much-needed communications campaign to reduce vaccine hesitancy and highlight the importance of vaccinations to diverse demographic groups leveraging influencers and trusted messengers. Finally, analytics support to help local officials conduct community segmentation and identify those who are likely to seek the vaccine in local pharmacies versus those who are unlikely to proactively access the vaccine when eligible will enable local officials to design programming and partnerships to effectively target key demographics. For example, local officials could partner with Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to leverage existing infrastructure and relationships to reach individuals in rural and inner-city communities.
 - c. **Example actions:** Support enhanced tracking and reporting systems; Develop guidance for vaccine distribution that can be leveraged by local public health officials to launch new distribution efforts; Provide support for analytics to inform outreach campaigns. ➔

2. **Expand symptomatic and screening testing nationwide:**

- a. **Challenge:** Testing, while slow to ramp across the US initially, has expanded significantly since the outbreak began. Our research suggests that testing and contact tracing together not only reduce spread but when conducted effectively by an organization can be extremely efficient. However, as testing capacity has increased around the country, organizations and employers have not implemented screening protocols at scale—more than 80% of employers report not testing workers for COVID-19, largely citing costs.³ The recent Congressional package and the Biden plans have recognized this need to expand testing, and our experience suggests that using multiple avenues to increase demand and supply for testing is critical.
- b. **Opportunity:** Research has shown that frequent, fast screening tests can reduce and even eliminate an outbreak within six weeks.⁴ In order for testing to meaningfully reduce spread however, it must be widely accessible to a large portion of the public. This will require additional scaling of fast, low-cost, reliable tests that are easily accessible. Many of these tests exist today but are not approved for asymptomatic testing. The Executive Order establishing a Pandemic Testing Board could be a great first step to evaluating opportunities to quickly address shortages in testing. For example, the FDA could potentially review tests with Emergency Use Authorizations to see if they are fit for additional purposes that could enable employers and public health officials to deploy new testing programs that can reach more individuals more frequently.⁵ In addition, some of the funding that the Biden administration has proposed for testing could be used for national incentives and support for employers and organizations, such as schools, to design and implement testing programs and enable more frequent screening. Simply reducing the barriers for organizations who have brought employees back to in-person work to confidently provide testing will enable precision engagement of key populations who may otherwise not seek out government or health care provided COVID-19 testing.
- c. **Example actions:** Increase supply of fast, affordable tests; Create regional markets for key COVID-19 supplies, such as tests, PPE, and technology to take action based on results; Provide incentives for employers to introduce testing protocols or for individuals to get tested frequently.

3. **Dramatically increase genetic sequencing of positive test results:**

- a. **Challenge:** As COVID-19 continues to spread, escape variants are highly likely. Recent variants such as B.117 have shown that the virus can mutate to become more transmissible, while future escape variants may render much of our progress developing antigen testing, therapeutics, and vaccines far less effective. To date, the US has not developed



a consistent, widespread sequencing effort in order to identify and track the spread of new variants, limiting our ability to warn the public and implement initiatives to reduce spread of particularly harmful strains of the virus.

- b. **Opportunity:** The Biden administration has acknowledged the need for sequencing in its most recent proposal. Genetic sequencing of COVID-19 strains is not particularly challenging, and many labs and academic medical centers (AMCs) are well suited to conduct these analyses. The Biden administration should activate these assets to expand sequencing nationwide by providing funding and incentives to organizations that commit to sequencing positive test results and quickly reporting findings. By establishing a national sequencing program, the administration will create visibility into where escape variants are spreading and gain a deeper understanding of the implications these variants will have on the overall COVID-19 response, enabling more informed, proactive decision-making and investments in alternative therapeutics, tests, and vaccines if needed.
 - c. **Example actions:** Create national reporting system for genetic sequencing of positive COVID-19 test results; Distribute funding for sequencing programs to AMCs and private labs.
4. **Surge capacity in targeted geographies:**
- a. **Challenge:** Hospitals have begun to experience staffing and bed shortages as the need for COVID-19 treatment grows across the country. While additional space can be provided through field hospitals, clinical staff cannot be easily scaled to flex capacity to meet the need, especially in rural areas.
 - b. **Opportunity:** Federal resources can be mobilized and directed to support in the most critically impacted areas. Multiple federal entities can support overwhelmed providers, including the US Public Health Corps, National Guard, National Disaster Medical System, and the Veteran's Health Administration ➔



can all contribute emergency support to meet the needs of individuals in need of care who cannot be treated in a hospital due to capacity constraints.^{6,7,8} In addition to leveraging these resources and scaling critical supplies as the Biden administration's proposal has suggested, the administration can leverage predictive analytics to identify potential hotspots early and quickly mobilize and shift as needs change across the country. This will enable the most critical patients to receive appropriate care and could offset crisis situations and care rationing. Furthermore, developing supply chain control tower capabilities to limit runs on supplies and instead divert critical supplies to highest need areas can improve care and reduce shortages.

- c. **Example actions:** Deploy federal entities (e.g., US Public Health Corps, National Guard, and VHA resources) to staff field hospitals and fully utilize brick and mortar assets to triage COVID-19 cases in hot spots where traditional provider capacity has become limited; Leverage predictive analytics to identify hot spots early and surge resources and supplies in advance.

5. Scale virtual health solutions:

- a. **Challenge:** Many existing health care facilities are reaching capacity as the second surge hits regions across the US. Coupled with this, many clinical staff are tired and burning out, which is exacerbating capacity challenges.⁹ In addition, many hospitalized COVID-19 patients could stay at home for longer with appropriate observation and support.¹⁰ However, without adequate tools and training for their family and in-home support systems, many of these patients check in to local hospitals for care before their status may warrant it.¹¹ This exacerbates the capacity crisis and places further strain on our front-line health care professionals.
- b. **Opportunity:** Virtual health solutions can reduce pressure on hospital capacity while providing care to the sick. Virtual enabled field hospitals expand existing bed capacity by creating new locations to care for patients, but they also reduce the burden on staff by creating high acuity virtual critical care wards, which care for high acuity patients using telecare networks.¹² Organizations such as National Emergency Tele-Critical Care Network should be expanded

to provide more flexible, higher acuity care for COVID-19 patients.¹³ Additionally, Hospital in Home solutions can be deployed by providers to support COVID-19 patients. Upon receiving a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, patients could be provided with a digital care kit which includes a pulse oximeter, blood pressure monitor, high resolution camera, and other devices. These connected devices can be centrally monitored by a command center, which connects to patients virtually if they have a concern or mobilizes a care team should their condition worsen.¹⁴ This would allow some patients to safely stay at home while also alleviating health care facility capacity concerns.

- c. **Example actions:** Staff central contact centers with clinicians who can support treatment; Expand NETCCN, especially within areas with low hospital capacity; Establish contracts with major virtual health providers; Provide information to integrate into test results for patients to access supplies.

6. Launch targeted communications campaign:

- a. **Challenge:** The cost-effectiveness of mask wearing is well proven; however, due to misinformation up to 50% of Americans report believing disproven myths about masks causing a buildup of CO2 and almost 30% of Americans report that they do not wear a mask every time they leave the house.¹⁵ In addition, more than 70% of people do not trust the Executive Branch's COVID-19 communications.¹⁶ The Biden administration's commitment to and emphasis on restoring trust in public health guidance is critical, and a thoughtful approach to public health communications is needed to build widespread trust and reduce transmission.
- b. **Opportunity:** To achieve widespread behavior change, consistent messaging at all levels and precision communication strategies are needed to help deliver nudges through trusted sources for key population segments. The Biden administration's proposal of "100 Days of Masking" and the associated Executive Orders requiring masks in federal spaces and public transit are good examples of this and a great start to driving a consistent message about a key public health guideline.¹⁷ Making additional progress within communities around the country, however, will likely 

require an understanding of the “contagion model” for communications, specifically within population groups that have not been persuaded by communications to date or have been influenced by misinformation. Analyzing data to understand what influences these key demographics across the country can enable precision communication strategies to be implemented leveraging the trusted sources that can reach the people that traditional media cannot. Engaging diverse communicators trusted within local communities can enable non-traditional and influencer-led communication strategies to help improve compliance and limit viral spread among populations that have not been reached effectively to date.

- c. **Example actions:** Engage communications experts to understand barriers to widespread adoption of public health guidance across multiple demographics and geographies; Design influencer-based social media campaign.

Enable recovery in our communities

As response tactics begin to reduce cases, communities will turn to the challenging work of further suppressing the virus while supporting economic and social recovery. Since March 2020, Deloitte has worked with public, private, and nonprofit clients to conduct operations while working to continue to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We have learned critical lessons about the task ahead and have come to understand that, while national strategies are essential, combating COVID-19 also requires precise, targeted interventions to see an end to COVID-19 in the US. Our experience to date suggests that national or state policies alone are unlikely to achieve these outcomes without tailored local implementation. Instead, leaders at all levels of government must be empowered with data and strategies that enable precision interventions to reach the vast majority of the population. To respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe the Biden administration should address four key challenges and can pursue the following strategies:

7. Sustained funding for local response efforts:

- a. **Challenge:** We applaud the recent passage of a stimulus bill providing support for critical pandemic response efforts, the Biden administration’s support for ongoing local funding, and recent statements from philanthropic and private sector groups to engage in COVID-19 recovery efforts.



Efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19—from widespread testing to reducing close contacts through pharmacological interventions (NPIs)—will require ongoing funding to be effectively implemented. Without economic resources, we have seen states and localities struggle or fail to implement effective programming to enable public health agencies to effectively respond.¹⁸ Similarly, governments, businesses, and individuals have struggled to make the choice between following public health guidance and continuing operations due to economic pressures.

- b. **Opportunity:** In addition to the Biden administration’s support for funding for state and local public health efforts, the administration can engage the private sector and philanthropic community to help.
- c. **Example actions:** Assess funding needs to estimate fundraising required; Publicize business case for funding and engage private sector and philanthropy to support specific needs; Evaluate executive actions that can relieve financial pressures on state and local governments, businesses, and individuals.

8. Implement locally tailored COVID-19 guidelines:

- a. **Challenge:** Fatigue with virus prevention measures has grown as the pandemic continues to rage, limiting the effectiveness of long-term, large-scale restrictions.¹⁹ In addition, patchwork restrictions that have been implemented in lieu of a cohesive national strategy increase confusion and misinformation.²⁰ Targeted restrictions derived from global lessons learned and local data can simplify logic, increase adoption, and limit spread but require stronger data analytics capabilities that enable precise modeling and action.
- b. **Opportunity:** While large-scale lockdowns proved effective in some regions early in the pandemic, we have seen fatigue with these restrictions over time. Today, global, national and local data is available to enable a deeper understanding of when and under what conditions restrictions are most effective. To limit confusion, leaders could develop an overarching risk assessment framework to help guide local health departments in implementing restrictions based on key data points, such as R_t or positivity rates. With this framework in hand, leaders can begin to proactively implement locally tailored restrictions. For example, leveraging local data at the census tract level has enabled Deloitte’s D.SMaRT tool to predict up to three weeks in advance where cases are likely to spike, enabling clients to shift their operations. Similarly, databases of global actions taken throughout the pandemic can yield critical insights that can enable more informed actions by local leaders, such as whether closing schools or closing restaurants are more likely to limit spread given specific conditions. Centralizing this data and developing an overarching logic framework for risk assessments can enable local leaders to implement clear, actionable ways to enable leaders at all levels to implement data-driven, precise strategies to limit spread. ➔

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- c. **Example actions:** Develop overarching risk analytics framework and suggested actions; Centralize key data into one location and promote usage by state and local officials.

9. Scale digital contact tracing tools:

- a. **Challenge:** Given COVID-19's disproportionate impact on low-income and vulnerable populations, contact tracers have struggled to reach or effectively quarantine individuals who have been exposed due to economic and social obstacles.²¹ Without digital tools to better access individuals who may have been exposed and local partners to enable compliance with guidelines, even the best trained and staffed force of contact tracers will struggle to make an impact.
- b. **Opportunity:** Contact tracers can present opportunities for support to individuals, thereby improving success in outreach and compliance. Integrating resource referral programs into contact tracing tools can link exposed individuals to the social support they need to effectively comply with guidance. These digital tools require integration with local partner organizations that are trusted within disadvantaged communities and can mobilize resources quickly to meet needs during an outbreak. By integrating digital solutions with local resources, contact tracing programs bolster their reputations within at-risk communities and reduce the stigma and fear associated with outreach, leading to increased compliance and reduced transmission. Similarly, reaching out to unemployed individuals from disproportionately impacted industries could expand the reach of contact tracing forces while providing economic support.
- c. **Example actions:** Develop centralized contact tracing solution that can be tailored by states and counties, including option to transition cases to local partners; Publicize opportunities to be connected to support services via contact tracing; Engage unemployed individuals to support expanded contact tracing efforts.

10. Make COVID-19 data more timely, accessible, and actionable:

- a. **Challenge:** From tracking community spread to managing vaccine distribution, COVID-19 strategies can be made more effective by increasing data transparency and interoperability across organizations and governments. Many of the current social, legal, and technical networks to detect threats and support outbreak management and intervention are disjointed and have resulted in siloed data systems that hinder any response strategy and limit the ability to deliver interventions. The Biden administration has recognized this challenge and its Executive Order to evaluate data collection systems that are critical to COVID-19 response efforts is welcome.²² Moving forward, a network of technology, policy and stakeholder relationships built on trust and high quality, reliable data, will be essential for reporting the virus and must be enhanced to accelerate action and limit spread.



- b. **Opportunity:** All of the above strategies require the ability to exchange, access, and analyze timely, reliable, and trustworthy data and at levels that enable precise interventions. The Biden administration can engage public and private partners who have shown unique capabilities to collect, exchange, analyze, and present data to accelerate this effort. These data networks need to be based on trust, with an emphasis on open data, interoperability architectures, and the ability to implement innovative solutions that can co-exist with existing data systems. Improved data access at all levels can empower officials to make data-driven decisions while creating opportunities for individuals to more effectively manage their own risk. Creating an interoperable system for COVID-19 data can enable improved decision-making, enhance outreach capabilities, and accelerate innovation at all levels of government.
- c. **Example actions:** Continue and expand investments into public health data modernization, with a focus on public-private partnerships that enable the use and application of data within state and community intervention. This will require human center design and user- interfaces for organizations and individuals to access and provide relevant data; Manage, coordinate, improve, existing and new data networks, including health care delivery systems and health information exchanges; Prioritize individual-focused applications for widespread use.

Recover to thrive

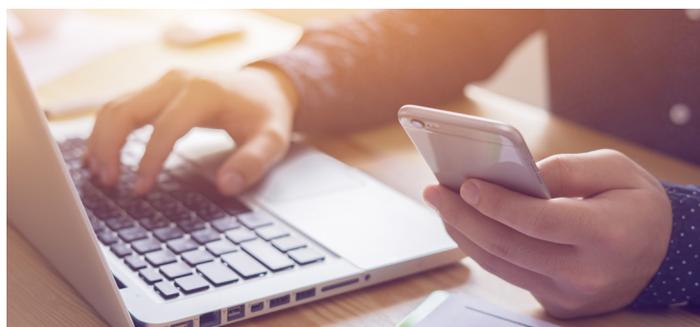
As the immediate COVID-19 crisis ebbs and we begin to return to more normal operations, the plans released by the Biden team to date recognize that there is an opportunity to take the lessons learned from this crisis to strengthen our public health infrastructure to prevent or limit the impact of future crises. By beginning to take action now, we can emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic better prepared to support communities and individuals with preventative care, tools, and systems to improve overall health and wellness and effectively respond to health hazards. ➔

11. **Strengthen public health surveillance systems:**

- a. **Challenge:** COVID-19 spread rampantly without detection in the Pacific-Northwest and Northeast, leading to the initial surge of cases in the Spring of 2020.²³ As cases were seeded in other areas of the country, late detection led to widespread exposure and limited the ability of public health systems and officials to suppress the virus.²⁴ In addition, our health care providers did not have visibility into how inventory of key supplies was likely to be impacted as cases surged, leading to shortages of PPE and standard equipment. Moving forward, our tools for detecting, reporting, and preparing to treat outbreaks must be enhanced to accelerate action and limit spread.
- b. **Opportunity:** Many innovative techniques have been developed to enable early detection of the virus, including wastewater testing, in addition to traditional syndromic surveillance systems.²⁵ These techniques, as well as new electronic reporting capabilities, can be strengthened and expanded in order to monitor potential community spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses. In addition, virtual monitoring of critical care supplies within provider networks can generate alerts when supplies are becoming depleted and could jeopardize care. Most importantly, existing alert systems such as the Health Alert Network can be integrated with surveillance and detection tools so that when COVID-19 or other health hazards are detected anywhere, every state and local official can be alerted that the risk is present and take action. While integrating surveillance and alert systems, protocols can be established to enable consistent guidance for public health officials to build confidence and trust in these systems and the entities acting on their information.
- c. **Example actions:** Design national effluent testing system, expand existing surveillance tools and integrate findings into national alert systems; Develop protocols to distribute consistent guidance to public officials as alerts are triggered to build trust.

12. **Expand sustainable work and school models prepared for future crises:**

- a. **Challenge:** The pandemic has exposed gaps within more than just our health care system. Our schools and workplaces were not well equipped to safely adjust operations to mitigate



the impact of the virus, yet these organizations are essential for our communities and provide critical services.^{26,27} Our critical community infrastructure should be redesigned to integrate the technology that enables effective remote work, while also preparing for ongoing in-person operations during a public health crisis to ensure that children, families and communities can receive the support they need even during a national or global health crisis.

- b. **Opportunity:** We should take the time to evaluate what we have learned from this crisis, and the Biden administration's Executive Orders directing federal agencies to provide guidance on safe reopening of schools and employee protections in workplaces are a welcome start.²⁸ Some immediate lessons learned are readily apparent and can begin to be addressed in the near term. Air filtration in many workplaces and schools should be upgraded to limit the spread of an airborne pathogen not just to limit COVID-19 spread but other health concerns like the flu.²⁹ Additionally, investments are needed to strengthen broadband across the country to enable virtual work and learning, especially in rural and disadvantaged communities. Finally, essential workplaces should be evaluated and provided guidance to improve operations to limit the potential for spreading health hazards like COVID-19. A widespread evaluation of how we learn, work, and socialize and the potential opportunities to strengthen these ways of living can improve not only our preparedness for future health crises, but also our ability to support critical workers and infrastructure within our community.
- c. **Example actions:** Upgrade air filtration systems; Accelerate delivery of broadband solutions nationwide; Conduct evaluation of essential industries to develop guidance to enable safer environments.

13. **Launch digital health credentials solutions:**

- a. **Challenge:** The global passport system has been largely unchanged even as technology has improved. Vaccination records in particular are often required at points of entry; however, these checks are often conducted separately from passport screening and may not have the validity needed to truly stop the spread of health hazards from country to country. COVID-19 has demonstrated that health care is a matter of national security, and our entry and exit systems must reflect this to prevent epidemics from becoming global pandemics.
- b. **Opportunity:** Innovators have developed applications where patients can store vaccination and other health records for easy access and validation.³⁰ These records will need to be accessible and verifiable as travel begins again as the pandemic ebbs, creating an opportunity to digitize health credentials around the world. Building this system will require convening large travel partners to develop a framework for what digital health credentials can and cannot include in order to deliver on their goal of integrating key 

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information without providing sensitive personal information. By beginning this conversation now, we can ensure that progress continues to provide critical health information at the border and limit the future spread of diseases.

- c. **Example actions:** Propose framework for digital health credentials systems; Engage key travel partners in dialog to align on framework and test solutions.

14. Strengthen vaccine development infrastructure:

- a. **Challenge:** Operation Warp Speed and ACTIV PPP have been success stories demonstrating that collaboration and incentives between government and pharmaceutical companies can accelerate clinical breakthroughs.^{31,32} This can be a model for a future system for clinical research and development, especially for threats to public health. In addition, we will learn a significant amount about the strength and limitations of our distribution networks as we deploy the vaccine across communities, and these learnings can be integrated into designs to improve the access to care and critical therapeutics to communities across the country.
- b. **Opportunity:** One of the bright spots during this pandemic has been the collaboration across research institutions, pharmaceutical companies, and governments. The openness to data sharing and supportive investment applied to COVID-19 vaccine research can be replicated with proper incentives. This could accelerate scientific and clinical breakthroughs in a wide range of fields. The federal government, academia and pharmaceuticals should evaluate opportunities to continue to enable data sharing and collaboration, especially on public health topics, and design appropriate incentives and regulatory frameworks needed to advance these ways of working. In addition, investments can be made to improve the readiness of all communities to quickly mobilize resources to reach citizens with preventative care, like vaccines and other therapeutics as needed.
- c. **Example actions:** Design centralized data sharing system for early research data funded with public support to expand access for research purposes; Refresh incentives for researchers and pharmaceuticals to encourage collaboration; Evaluate local distribution networks and invest in infrastructure to improve outreach and distribution of critical public health services.



15. Target preventative care programming to high-risk communities:

- a. **Challenge:** One of the most devastating findings from the COVID-19 pandemic has been its disproportionate impact on low income, vulnerable communities, as well as underrepresented minority groups. These communities do not only see disparate outcomes in COVID-19 but have seen lower levels of preventative care for decades, leading to higher rates of preventable disease and lower life expectancy.³³ The Biden administration's Executive Order establishing a COVID-19 Health Equity Taskforce recognizes the need to proactively address these gaps in care and outcomes seen during COVID-19.³⁴ While COVID-19 exposed health inequities in our communities, it did not create them, and it is imperative that the lack of access to quality preventative care is addressed if we are to limit the risk for these communities moving forward.
- b. **Opportunity:** COVID-19 has brought outreach to high-risk communities in a way that we have not seen at scale in the past. This creates an opportunity to formalize this outreach and build a system of community health hubs that can build trust in communities, provide access to preventative care, and address underlying gaps in the drivers of health. In addition, targeted public health campaigns can support increased awareness of the value of preventative care and continue to repair trust in the health care system across communities. As the country addresses both the pandemic and systemic racism as a public health crisis that has made COVID-19 worse in communities of color, developing strategies to target underrepresented minority communities with accessible, preventative care can begin to address long-standing inequalities on our systems.
- c. **Example actions:** Supply incentives for health care systems to invest in disadvantaged communities; Design community hub system and engage partners to deliver against goals; Create incentives for large institutions to make anchor investments in underserved communities that enhance economic opportunity for residents; Implement strategic communications campaign to provide public health education.

The COVID-19 pandemic will likely not be solved by a single national strategy. It will take ongoing collaboration to bring national and global insights, tools, and best practices to hyper-local levels. COVID-19 spreads due to individual choices and combatting it will require tailored actions to reach individuals from all backgrounds. The Biden administration will be positioned to not only combat this crisis but to lay the foundation to build a better public health system by creating tools for partners across the country to implement strategies with precision, leveraging the power of a cohesive, centralized response and deploying it through innovative methods to support individuals, businesses, and communities across the country and around the world. ➤

Endnotes

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