

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

December 9, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
4770 Buford Highway, NE
Atlanta, GA 30341

Dear Secretary Azar and Director Redfield:

We are writing to urge the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine by working closely with states to understand and appropriately implement COVID-19 vaccine distribution recommendations made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). As we approach potential emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration for one or more COVID-19 vaccines, it is essential that we do everything we can to ensure access to the vaccine for communities and populations hit hardest by the pandemic.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on millions of families and claimed the lives of more than 280,000 Americans to date. Older adults, essential workers and communities of color have been particularly hard hit by this virus. Individuals 85 and older are 630 times more likely to die from COVID-19¹, while Black and Latino Americans are more than twice as likely to become infected with COVID-19 and at a significantly higher risk of hospitalization and death compared to white Americans². Essential workers who cannot work from home also face high potential exposure to COVID-19³ - particularly Americans living and working in long-term care facilities, prisons and other congregate care facilities. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are three times as likely to die of COVID-19 compared with others⁴.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6936a3.htm>

⁴ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media2.fairhealth.org/whitepaper/asset/Risk%20Factors%20for%20COVID-19%20Mortality%20among%20Privately%20Insured%20Patients%20-%20A%20Claims%20Data%20Analysis%20-%20A%20FAIR%20Health%20White%20Paper.pdf>

The CDC's ACIP is comprised of leading medical and public health experts. The Advisory Committee is responsible for developing evidence-based public health recommendations for the safe and ethical use of vaccines. Additionally, in the case of COVID-19 – where initial supplies of a vaccine will be limited – ACIP will serve the critical role of making recommendations to ensure the vaccine is equitably distributed. ACIP's recommendations will provide critical guidance to both the federal government and states regarding effectively targeting a COVID-19 vaccine, including to the most at-risk and in need populations.

We ask that you work in coordination with federal, state and local partners to ensure they fully understand and implement ACIP's recommendations in a manner that prioritizes public health, equity, and the most vulnerable communities. Should you have any additional questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator