

COVID-19 Health Disparities Action Act of 2020

U.S. Senators Menendez and Cardin

As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread across the nation, it has revealed and exacerbated longstanding health disparities. Initial data from CDC shows that America's racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of COVID-19,¹ worse health outcomes from the disease, and barriers to accessing and affording treatment.²

While efforts are underway to develop a vaccine, testing and contact tracing are among the most important tools for combatting COVID-19. When a vaccine is approved, it is important that its safety and efficacy are communicated effectively to all communities. These public health responses must be tailored to further prevent the spread of COVID-19. Senators Menendez and Cardin are introducing the COVID-19 Health Disparities Action Act of 2020 to address some of these health disparities. This legislation would require the following:

Health Disparity-Informed Contract Tracing Grants- Contact tracers are more likely to be effective if they “live in and share culture, language, and life experiences with the members of the communities they serve.”³ To build trust and achieve the goal of reducing community transmission of COVID-19, contact tracers must be culturally competent and in some cases multilingual. This legislation would ensure that contact-tracing efforts are tailored to the racial and ethnic diversity of local communities.

Create and Implement a Federal Health Disparities Action Plan- The legislation would require the administration to develop an action plan to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 among racial and ethnic minority, rural, and other vulnerable populations. HHS would develop the plan in coordination with other Offices of Minority Health, the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, and community-based organizations. States would also be required to revise testing and contact tracing plans to address racial and ethnic minority, rural, and other vulnerable populations experiencing health disparities related to COVID-19.

Develop a Public Awareness Campaigns to Address Health Disparities- This legislation would authorize the development of targeted public awareness campaigns directed at racial and ethnic minority, rural, and other socially vulnerable populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Endorsements: The legislation is endorsed by the National Hispanic Medical Association, Families USA, the National Alliance against Disparities in Patient Health (NADPH), the Friends of National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), the National Council of Urban Indian Health, and UnidosUS.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#Race_Hispanic

² <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/communities-of-color-at-higher-risk-for-health-and-economic-challenges-due-to-covid-19/>

³ <https://www.naccho.org/uploads/blog/nacchoessentials/A-Guide-to-Community-Based-Workforce-Principles-for-Contact-Tracing-HealthBegins-5-19-20.pdf>