



January 29, 2021

Jeffrey Zients
Coordinator of the COVID-19 Response and Counselor to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Leveraging Primary Care Physicians to Accelerate COVID-19 Vaccination

Dear Mr. Zients:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), representing more than 136,700 family physicians serving on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, thank you for your efforts to date to improve access to COVID-19 vaccines across the nation. Family physicians are uniquely positioned to combat vaccine hesitancy and ensure efficient, equitable vaccine administration. **As vaccine distribution is accelerated, the AAFP strongly urges you to improve collaboration with primary care physicians and practices, including by explicitly incorporating them in distribution plans and empowering them to administer vaccines across the country.**

Family physicians provide preventive services and comprehensive primary care to patients across the lifespan. Family physicians are also integral members of their communities and see firsthand how pervasive health inequities contribute to poor health outcomes, with COVID-19 being just the latest example. As such, they play a critical role in the fight against COVID-19 by diagnosing and treating their patients, as well as counseling patients and administering vaccines.

According to data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, primary care physicians provided 54 percent of all clinical visits for vaccinations, which made them more likely to administer vaccines than other stakeholders, such as pharmacies or grocery stores.ⁱ In other words, patients already rely on their primary care physicians to educate them about vaccines and administer vaccines. Evidence confirms that health care professionals are the most trusted advisor for vaccination decisions.ⁱⁱ Indeed, family physicians report that their patients are contacting them for information on the COVID-19 vaccines and, in many cases, asking when they can receive the vaccine from their current primary care physician.

Unfortunately, 85 percent of independent practices are unable to obtain COVID-19 vaccines for their patients.ⁱⁱⁱ Most practices are also not receiving information from their state or local governments about where their patients can access the vaccine. Many small and independent physician practices are in rural and other under resourced areas that lack large retail pharmacies or other mass immunizers. Primary care physicians are well-equipped to administer the vaccine and are eager to help improve access to COVID-19 vaccines in their communities.

STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

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We call on the federal, state, and local governments to take immediate steps to supply community-based primary care physicians with COVID-19 vaccines. Leveraging health care distributors who already supply physicians with flu and other vaccines could help more health care providers access vaccines and ultimately accelerate the pace of immunizations.

COVID-19 vaccination strategies should leverage trusted primary care physicians to combat vaccine hesitancy. Early data suggests that Black and Hispanic populations are being vaccinated at a slower rate than White populations, despite being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 cases and deaths.^{iv} Further, a significant proportion of rural residents report vaccine hesitancy and rural residents remain much more likely than those in urban areas to indicate that they will not get the vaccine.^v As trusted members of their communities, and the primary source of comprehensive health services in rural and under resourced areas, community primary care physicians play an integral role to ensuring equitable vaccination rates across the nation.

The AAFP commends your recent efforts to accelerate and broaden vaccination access, as well as your ongoing commitment to combating inequities. We appreciate the inclusion of physician practices and the emphasis on increasing the workforce of vaccine administrators in the President's *National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness*. We strongly believe that incorporating primary care physicians and practices into vaccination plans, as well as enhancing coordination and communication with physicians, will advance our shared goal of ensuring equitable access to vaccines for all.

Should you have any questions or wish to set up a meeting, please contact Stephanie Quinn, Senior Vice President for Advocacy, Practice Advancement and Policy. We stand ready to partner with you.

Sincerely,



Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair
American Academy of Family Physicians

Cc: Norris Cochran, Acting Secretary of Health and Human Services
Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense

ⁱ Analysis conducted by the Robert Graham Center. Publication forthcoming.

ⁱⁱ Paterson P, Meurice F, Stanberry LR, Glismann S, Rosenthal SL, Larson HJ. Vaccine hesitancy and healthcare providers. *Vaccine*. 2016 Dec 20;34(52):6700-6706. doi: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2016.10.042. Epub 2016 Oct 31. PMID: 27810314.

ⁱⁱⁱ Medical Group Management Association. https://www.mgma.com/news-insights/press/nation%E2%80%99s-physician-practices-left-out-of-covid-19?utm_source=ga-organic-st-01.26.21&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=ga-vaccine-press-release

^{iv} Ndugga N, Pham O, Hill L, Artiga S, Mengistu S. Early State Vaccination Data Raise Warning Flags for Racial Equity. Kaiser Family Foundation. January 21, 2021. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/early-state-vaccination-data-raise-warning-flags-racial-equity/>

^v Hamel L, et al. KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: January 2021. Kaiser Family Foundation. January 22, 2021. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-january-2021-vaccine-hesitancy/>