



January 29, 2021

The Honorable Diana DeGette
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations,
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Health,
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Morgan Griffith
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations,
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health,
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairwomen DeGette and Eshoo and Ranking Members Griffith and Guthrie:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the 136,700 family physicians and medical students we represent, I write in response to the two hearings: “No Time to Lose: Solutions to Increase COVID-19 Vaccinations in the States” and “Road to Recovery: Ramping Up COVID-19 Vaccines, Testing, and Medical Supply Chain.” We thank you for your attention to these timely and important issues and would like to offer our recommendations for combating COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and ensuring efficient, equitable vaccine administration.

As vaccine distribution is accelerated, the AAFP strongly urges improved 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.

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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.

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 the committee's attention to ensure equity in the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. 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. We look forward to engaging with you further as you examine the COVID-19 response and develop legislative solutions. Should you have any questions, please contact John Aguilar, Legislative Affairs Manager at jaguilar@aafp.org.

Sincerely,



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

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/>