



**MEMORANDUM**

**May 21, 2021**

**To: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Members and Staff**

**Fr: Committee on Energy and Commerce Staff**

**Re: Hearing on “A Shot at Normalcy: Building COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence”**

On Wednesday, May 26, 2021, at 11:00 a.m. (EDT) via Cisco WebEx online video conferencing, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hearing entitled, “A Shot at Normalcy: Building COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence.” The hearing will explore strategies for increasing confidence in and uptake of vaccines for the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19).

**I. BACKGROUND**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced the first reported case of COVID-19 in the United States on January 21, 2020.<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 can be asymptomatic or cause a range of symptoms, typically more severe among older adults and people with underlying medical conditions, and has disproportionately affected people of color.<sup>2</sup> Multiple COVID-19 virus variants are circulating globally and at least five variants of concern, which appear to spread more quickly and easily than others, are in the United States.<sup>3</sup> More than 32 million people in the United States have contracted COVID-19, leading to more than 584,000

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *First Travel-related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected in United States* (Jan. 21, 2020) (press release).

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19: Things You Need to Know ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/need-to-know.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/need-to-know.html)) (accessed May 18, 2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html)) (updated Apr. 23, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19: About the Variants ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html)) (accessed May 18, 2021).

deaths.<sup>4</sup> Since January 1, 2021, the seven-day moving averages of daily new cases and deaths have fallen by approximately 80 percent.<sup>5</sup>

On December 11, 2020, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the first COVID-19 vaccine, a two-dose regimen developed by Pfizer, for adults ages 16 and older.<sup>6</sup> Since then, FDA has issued EUAs for a two-dose vaccine regimen developed by Moderna and a one-shot regimen developed by Johnson & Johnson, both of which are authorized for adults ages 18 and older.<sup>7</sup> On May 10, 2021, FDA issued an EUA expanding Pfizer's vaccine authorization for use among adolescents ages 12 years and older.<sup>8</sup> All authorized vaccines have been demonstrated to be safe and effective at preventing COVID-19.<sup>9</sup> As of May 21, 2021, more than 279 million vaccine doses have been administered in the United States, and more than 126 million Americans are fully vaccinated.<sup>10</sup>

## II. INCREASING COVID-19 VACCINE CONFIDENCE AND UPTAKE

Widespread administration of COVID-19 vaccines is critical to containing the pandemic, protecting vulnerable populations, and safely reopening social and economic life.<sup>11</sup> The daily average vaccine administration in the United States reached a peak of 3.4 million doses in April

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<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID Data Tracker: United States COVID-19 Cases, Deaths, and Laboratory Testing (RT-PCR) by State, Territory, and Jurisdiction ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html)) (accessed May 21, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in the U.S. Reported to CDC, by State/Territory ([covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends\\_dailytrendscases](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases)) (accessed May 21, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Takes Key Action in Fight Against COVID-19 By Issuing Emergency Use Authorization for First COVID-19 Vaccine* (Dec. 11, 2020) (press release).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Takes Additional Action in Fight Against COVID-19 By Issuing Emergency Use Authorization for Second COVID-19 Vaccine* (Dec. 18, 2020) (press release); Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Issues Emergency Use Authorization for Third COVID-19 Vaccine* (Feb. 27, 2021) (press release).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: FDA Authorizes Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for Emergency Use in Adolescents in Another Important Action in Fight Against Pandemic* (May 10, 2021) (press release).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Learn More About COVID-19 Vaccines From the FDA* ([www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/learn-more-about-covid-19-vaccines-fda](http://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/learn-more-about-covid-19-vaccines-fda)) (accessed May 18, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID Data Tracker: COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States ([covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations)) (accessed May 21, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Strategies for Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines* (Feb. 3, 2021).

2021; however, that average has declined to approximately 1.8 million daily doses in recent weeks.<sup>12</sup> Experts caution that the slowing vaccination rate may hinder efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 and prolong the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

Public opinion of COVID-19 vaccines generally falls along a spectrum, ranging from demand, to passive acceptance, to refusal.<sup>14</sup> According to CDC, the information, experiences, barriers, and influencers people encounter can shape and shift their attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccines along this demand spectrum.<sup>15</sup> The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has emphasized that people who are “hesitant, reluctant, distrusting, or otherwise unmotivated” toward COVID-19 vaccines must be provided the “resources, information, and support they need” to inform their vaccination decision.<sup>16</sup>

Concerns among American adults who are less eager to get vaccinated vary, although they tend to cluster geographically or culturally.<sup>17</sup> Studies show that dialogue-based interventions, such as engaging with trusted medical providers and community leaders, can effectively counter mistrust, overcome concerns, and promote confidence in vaccines.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, communication strategies focused on unvaccinated individuals in the so-called “movable middle”—people who want to protect their health but have questions about vaccines—have been shown to be most effective at increasing vaccine uptake, rather than targeting people who are strongly opposed to vaccination.<sup>19</sup> In addition to promoting confidence in COVID-19 vaccines, public health experts have underscored the importance of motivating individuals to get vaccinated and reducing barriers to accessing COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *U.S. vaccination pace slides further from peak levels as Covid case counts decline in most states*, CNBC (Apr. 29, 2021); Bloomberg, COVID-19 Tracker ([www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-vaccine-tracker-global-distribution/#us](http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-vaccine-tracker-global-distribution/#us)) (accessed May 21, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> *‘Doomsday scenario’: Lagging vaccine rates stir fears of dangerous variants*, Politico (May 6, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Rapid Community Assessment Guide* (February 2021) ([www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccinate-with-confidence/rca-guide/downloads/CDC-RCA-Guide-2021-508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccinate-with-confidence/rca-guide/downloads/CDC-RCA-Guide-2021-508.pdf)).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *See* note 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *We Can Do This: Campaign Background* (Apr. 6, 2021) ([wecandothishhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/WCDT%20Public%20Education%20Campaign%20Backgrounder.pdf](http://wecandothishhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/WCDT%20Public%20Education%20Campaign%20Backgrounder.pdf)).

<sup>20</sup> *From incentives to easy access, experts discuss defeating vaccine hesitancy*, ABC News (May 9, 2021); *Vaccination rates lag in communities of color, but it's not only due to hesitancy, experts say*, ABC News (May 8, 2021).

### III. COVID-19 VACCINE CONFIDENCE TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES

Public confidence in COVID-19 vaccines has steadily increased since the first vaccine was authorized, though this trend appears to have plateaued.<sup>21</sup> According to the most recent Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) monthly survey of U.S. adults:

- 64 percent of adults report they have either received at least one dose of a vaccine or intend to do so as soon as possible, up from 47 percent in January 2021;
- 13 percent report they would “definitely not” get vaccinated and another six percent report they would get vaccinated only if required to do so, which is largely unchanged since January; and
- 15 percent report wanting to “wait and see” before getting vaccinated, similar to the share reported in the prior month’s survey. Adults who are open to getting vaccinated but have not yet done so expressed perceived concerns about safety, logistical barriers, or lack of information among the reasons for delaying their vaccination.<sup>22</sup>

The majority of every key demographic group in America reports being open to getting a COVID-19 vaccine, although some groups indicate more resistance to vaccination than the general population.<sup>23</sup> For example, more than 25 percent of rural residents and white Evangelical Christians, respectively, report that they either definitely will not get vaccinated or will do so only if required.<sup>24</sup> Almost the same share of young adults, ages 18 to 29, indicate similar attitudes toward vaccination.<sup>25</sup>

Despite structural public health inequities and a history of health care discrimination and exploitation of people of color, polling indicates that Black adults are no more likely to be hesitant toward COVID-19 vaccines than white adults.<sup>26</sup> Further, among those not yet vaccinated, Hispanic adults are twice as likely as white adults to report wanting to get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.<sup>27</sup> Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than white adults to cite logistical barriers to

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<sup>21</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor - April 2021* (May 6, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> See note 11; *More Black Americans open to COVID-19 vaccines after outreach efforts, poll says*, ABC News (Apr. 10, 2021).

<sup>27</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: COVID-19 Vaccine Access, Information, and Experiences Among Hispanic Adults in the U.S.* (May 13, 2021).

vaccination, such as concerns about missing work or inability to obtain a vaccine from a trusted location.<sup>28</sup>

Recent survey results also reflect the need to build vaccine confidence in parents of children under 18 years old. Among these parents surveyed, less than 30 percent report they would get their child vaccinated “right away” once a vaccine is authorized and available for their child’s age group.<sup>29</sup> Experts note that efforts to persuade parents to have their children vaccinated will be critical to containing the pandemic.<sup>30</sup>

#### **IV. EFFORTS TO INCREASE COVID-19 VACCINE CONFIDENCE AND ACCESS IN THE UNITED STATES**

##### **A. Federal Action**

Congress and the Biden Administration have taken steps to promote COVID-19 vaccine confidence and uptake across the country. The American Rescue Plan (ARP), signed into law by President Biden on March 11, 2021, contains \$160 billion in support of COVID-19 response efforts, including efforts to promote vaccine confidence and administration.<sup>31</sup> This legislation followed enactment of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, which authorized additional activities to improve vaccination rates, including a national vaccination awareness campaign and improved data surveillance activities.<sup>32</sup>

On March 25, the Biden Administration announced a \$10 billion investment from the ARP to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines and build vaccine confidence in the hardest-hit and most vulnerable communities, including \$3 billion to help increase vaccine access, acceptance, and uptake.<sup>33</sup> Further, nearly \$1 billion of ARP funding has been committed to increasing COVID-19 vaccinations in rural communities and \$7 billion has been dedicated to hire and train public health workers, including school nurses, to provide information about COVID-19 vaccinations among adolescents and to support local public health efforts related to the pandemic

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<sup>28</sup> *Id.*; see note 21.

<sup>29</sup> See note 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Convincing skittish parents to vaccinate their children will be key to curbing Covid, says Dr. Hotez*, CNBC (Mar. 31, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. 117-2.

<sup>32</sup> Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. 116-260.

<sup>33</sup> White House, *Fact Sheet: Biden Administration Announces Historic \$10 Billion Investment to Expand Access to COVID-19 Vaccines and Build Vaccine Confidence in Hardest-Hit and Highest-Risk Communities* (Mar. 25, 2021) (press release).

response.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, the Biden Administration launched a nationwide COVID-19 public education campaign to increase vaccine confidence and uptake.<sup>35</sup> As part of its campaign, the Administration formed the COVID-19 Community Corps—a nationwide, grassroots network of trusted local voices, such as local medical professionals, faith leaders, rural stakeholders, and civil rights organizations.<sup>36</sup> The Administration is providing members of the Community Corps with resources and science-driven information on COVID-19 vaccines to empower thousands of trusted messengers to increase vaccine confidence and uptake in their communities.<sup>37</sup>

As more Americans become fully vaccinated, CDC has updated its COVID-19 public health guidance and recommendations. On May 13, CDC announced changes to its prior public health recommendations, indicating that fully vaccinated Americans can resume pre-pandemic activities without masks or physical distancing, except where required by governments, businesses, or workplaces.<sup>38</sup>

## **B. State and Local Action**

State and local governments, public health officials, and industry and community leaders have deployed a variety of strategies to build vaccine confidence and increase uptake in their communities. For instance, in New Jersey, state leaders partnered with local breweries on a “shot and a beer” program, while sports franchises, such as the Atlanta Braves, are offering free tickets to those receiving a vaccine at the stadium.<sup>39</sup> Ohio recently announced a “vaccine lottery,” offering a prize of \$1 million or free tuition to vaccinated Ohioans.<sup>40</sup> Some nonprofit

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<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *HHS Announces Nearly \$1 Billion from American Rescue Plan for Rural COVID-19 Response* (May 4, 2021) (press release); White House, *Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration to Invest \$7 Billion from American Rescue Plan to Hire and Train Public Health Workers in Response to COVID-19* (May 13, 2021) (press release).

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *COVID-19 Public Education Campaign: About the Campaign* ([wecandothis.hhs.gov/about](https://www.hhs.gov/about)) (accessed May 18, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19: When You’ve Been Fully Vaccinated* ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html)) (accessed May 13, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> *New Jersey breweries will give anyone who gets their first shot in May a free beer*, Politico Pro (May 3, 2021); *Braves will offer COVID-19 vaccine shots at games Friday and Saturday*, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (May 5, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> *Ohio Lottery to Give 5 People \$1 Million Each to Encourage Vaccination*, New York Times (May 12, 2021).

organizations are also working with local officials to find new ways to reach their unvaccinated neighbors. In Colorado, for example, advocates are deploying a “get-out-the-vote” operation to encourage appointment sign-ups and facilitate transportation to vaccination sites.<sup>41</sup>

## V. WITNESSES

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

**Nick Offerman**

Actor and Woodworker

**Saad Omer, M.B.B.S., Ph.D., M.P.H., F.I.D.S.A.**

Director

Yale Institute for Global Health, Yale University

**J. Nadine Gracia, M.D., M.S.C.E**

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

Trust for America’s Health

**Amy Pisani, M.S.**

Executive Director

Vaccinate Your Family

**Karen Shelton, M.D.**

Director

Mount Rogers Health District, Virginia Department of Health

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<sup>41</sup> *Colorado battles COVID vaccine hesitancy with get-out-the-vote tactics*, Axios (May 3, 2021).