

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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MEMORANDUM

June 28, 2021

To: Members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis

Fr: Committee Staff

Re: Hybrid Hearing on “Building Trust and Battling Barriers: The Urgent Need to Overcome Vaccine Hesitancy”

On **July 1, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. E.T.**, the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis will hold a hybrid in-person/remote hearing on ways to increase coronavirus vaccine confidence and uptake. Chairman Clyburn and Ranking Member Scalise jointly invited the below witnesses to participate in the hearing.

This hearing will convene in person in 2154 Rayburn House Office Building and remotely using Zoom, which has been approved by the House, at the discretion of the Chairman, the witness, and other Members.

Members attending remotely are asked to connect by 8:30 a.m. to ensure their participation and troubleshoot any connectivity issues. The hearing will be recorded and livestreamed for the public.

I. CURRENT STATUS OF THE PANDEMIC AND VACCINATIONS

The United States has made significant progress in containing the coronavirus. Since peaking in December and January, the seven-day average of new cases and deaths has fallen by more than 90 percent.¹ Multiple states have recently reported the lowest levels of coronavirus

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker: Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in the US Reported to CDC, by State/Territory* (online at https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases) (last accessed June 28, 2021); *see also U.S. Nears 600,000 Virus Deaths Despite Progress From Vaccines*, New York Times (June 22, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/06/15/us/virus-deaths.html).

hospitalizations since the start of the pandemic.² As new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths hit record lows, nearly every state has reopened safely while lifting mitigation restrictions.³

As of June 28, 2021, more than 63 percent of Americans ages 12 and older—the current age range eligible to be vaccinated—have received at least one dose, including more than 66 percent of adults and more than 87 percent of seniors.⁴

The pace of vaccine administration has slowed in recent months, as most Americans wishing to get their shots were able to do so in the weeks after they became eligible. Vaccination rates are uneven across the country. As of June 28, 2021, 14 states have fully or partially vaccinated less than 57 percent of adults, while 12 states report rates above 73 percent.⁵ In recent weeks, some states with large unvaccinated populations have seen new cases and hospitalizations increase, particularly with the emergence of the “Delta” variant which experts caution poses significant risk to unvaccinated and partially vaccinated populations.⁶

II. HIGH RATES OF VACCINE HESITANCY AND BARRIERS TO VACCINATIONS PUT AMERICAN PROGRESS AT RISK

A. Trends in Vaccine Hesitancy and Uptake

Although recent surveys show a steady increase in public confidence in coronavirus vaccines since the beginning of the year, a significant share of U.S. adults remains reluctant to get vaccinated. According to the most recent Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) vaccine monitor:

- 66 percent of adults report they have received at least one vaccine dose or intend to get vaccinated as soon as possible, up from 47 percent in January;

² See, e.g., *Massachusetts Again Reports a Record Low for Coronavirus Hospitalizations*, Boston Herald (June 16, 2021) (online at www.bostonherald.com/2021/06/16/massachusetts-again-reports-a-record-low-for-coronavirus-hospitalizations/); *N.J. Reports 5 COVID Deaths, 138 cases. Hospitalizations Hit New Low Since Early Days of Pandemic*, NJ.com (June 15, 2021) (online at www.nj.com/coronavirus/2021/06/nj-reports-5-covid-deaths-138-cases-hospitalizations-hit-new-low-since-early-days-of-pandemic.html); *Conn. COVID-19 Hospitalizations Reach Lowest Levels Since Start of First Wave of Pandemic*, NBC Connecticut (June 17, 2021) (online at www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/coronavirus/conn-covid-19-hospitalizations-reach-lowest-levels-since-start-of-first-wave-of-pandemic/2510545/).

³ See *Reopening Plans and Mask Mandates for All 50 States*, New York Times (online at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/states-reopen-map-coronavirus.html) (last accessed June 28, 2021).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker: COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States* (online at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>) (last accessed June 28, 2021).

⁵ See *How Vaccinations Are Going in Your County and State*, New York Times (online at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/covid-19-vaccine-doses.html) (last accessed June 28, 2021).

⁶ *Coronavirus Infections Dropping Where People Are Vaccinated, Rising Where They Are Not, Post Analysis Finds*, Washington Post (June 14, 2021) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/06/14/covid-cases-vaccination-rates/); *Vaccine Effort Turns into Slog as Infectious Variant Spreads*, Associated Press (June 16, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-nyc-state-wire-mo-state-wire-ca-state-wire-michael-brown-55f60540f171cba3c7a8571ac9f2d5de>).

- 20 percent of adults report they will “definitely not” get vaccinated or will get vaccinated “only if required,” which has remained largely fixed throughout the year; and
- 12 percent of adults report they want to “wait and see” before getting vaccinated, down from 31 percent in January.⁷

A Gallup poll conducted in May found that of the U.S. adults who do not plan to get vaccinated (24 percent), 78 percent say they are unlikely to change their minds, while 21 percent are very or somewhat likely to change their minds.⁸

KFF found that certain demographic groups report varying degrees of hesitancy towards getting vaccinated:

- 38 percent of rural residents are not vaccinated or eager to get vaccinated, compared to 35 percent of suburban residents and 27 percent of urban residents;
- 41 percent of white Evangelical Christians, 38 percent of Black adults, 34 percent of Hispanic adults, and 31 percent of all non-Hispanic white adults are not vaccinated or eager to get vaccinated; and
- Younger Americans are less likely to be vaccinated or seeking to get vaccinated immediately (approximately 43 percent of those ages 18 to 49) than older Americans (approximately 26 percent of those ages 50 to 64, and 15 percent of those ages 65 and older).⁹

Despite reporting levels of vaccine hesitancy similar to white adults, Black and Hispanic communities are receiving smaller shares of vaccines as compared to their shares of the total population, coronavirus cases, and deaths.¹⁰ Among the 40 states that report race/ethnicity data, the percentage of white people who have received at least one dose is approximately 1.4 times higher than the rate of Black people and 1.2 times higher than the rate of Hispanic people.¹¹ The

⁷ *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: May 2021*, Kaiser Family Foundation (May 28, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-may-2021/).

⁸ *COVID-19 Vaccine-Reluctant in U.S. Likely to Stay that Way*, Gallup (June 7, 2021) (online at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/350720/covid-vaccine-reluctant-likely-stay.aspx>).

⁹ Kaiser Family Foundation, *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: May 2021*, Kaiser Family Foundation (May 28, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-may-2021/).

¹⁰ Tufts University Research Group on Equity in Health, Wealth and Civic Engagement, *Survey: Despite Similar Levels of Vaccine Hesitancy, White People More Likely to Be Vaccinated Than Black People* (May 18, 2021) (online at <https://now.tufts.edu/news-releases/survey-despite-similar-levels-vaccine-hesitancy-white-people-more-likely-be-vaccinated>); *Vaccination Rates Lag in Communities of Color, But It’s Not Only Due to Hesitancy, Experts Say*, ABC News (May 8, 2021) (online at <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/vaccination-rates-lag-communities-color-due-hesitancy-experts/story?id=77272753>).

¹¹ *Latest Data on COVID-19 Vaccinations by Race/Ethnicity*, Kaiser Family Foundation (June 23, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/latest-data-on-covid-19-vaccinations-race-ethnicity/).

most socially vulnerable counties also have lower vaccination rates than less vulnerable areas, with suburban and rural counties most affected.¹²

B. Reasons Americans Remain Unvaccinated

Many unvaccinated Americans have raised concerns about the speed of development and approval of the coronavirus vaccines and possible safety issues and side effects. Financial considerations also appear to play a role, including concerns about having to miss work due to side effects, take time off work to get vaccinated, or pay an out-of-pocket cost to get vaccinated, even though coronavirus vaccines are free. Other common reasons that Americans cite for remaining unvaccinated include a perception that vaccination is unnecessary or unsafe following recovery from natural infection, and that the likelihood of serious illness from the virus is low or non-existent.¹³

Some of the skepticism around coronavirus vaccines is driven by misinformation, including false rumors that vaccines may cause coronavirus infections or infertility, alter DNA, or be used to implant tracking devices.¹⁴ Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s database for detecting possible vaccine side effects—known as the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS)—have been misrepresented by anti-vaccine groups to spread unfounded theories about the dangers of the vaccines, including distorting VAERS data on the number of deaths reported after a vaccination to imply causality when there is none.¹⁵

Many Americans also remain unvaccinated due access barriers and unmet informational needs, particularly in communities of color.¹⁶ Experts warn that lack of access to or familiarity with technology (including smartphones, computers, and broadband internet), lack of access to private transportation, inability to travel (including due to disability or an inability to take time

¹² Vaughn Barry et al., *Patterns in COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage, by Social Vulnerability and Urbanicity – United States, December 14, 2020 – May 1, 2021, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (June 4, 2021) (online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7022e1.htm).

¹³ See, e.g., Gallup, *COVID-19 Vaccine-Reluctant in U.S. Likely to Stay That Way* (June 7, 2021) (online at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/350720/covid-vaccine-reluctant-likely-stay.aspx>); *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: April 2021*, Kaiser Family Foundation (May 6, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-april-2021/).

¹⁴ *Lowest Rates, Highest Hurdles: Southern States Tackle Vaccine Gap*, The Pew Charitable Trusts (June 17, 2021) (online at www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/06/17/lowest-rates-highest-hurdles-southern-states-tackle-vaccine-gap); *Microchips, Magnets and Shedding: Here Are 5 (Debunked) Covid Vaccine Conspiracy Theories Spreading Online*, Forbes (June 3, 2021) (online at www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2021/06/03/microchips-and-shedding-here-are-5-debunked-covid-vaccine-conspiracy-theories-spreading-online).

¹⁵ *Anti-Vaccine Activists Use a Federal Database to Spread Fear About COVID Vaccines*, National Public Radio (June 14, 2021) (online at www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/06/14/1004757554/anti-vaccine-activists-use-a-federal-database-to-spread-fear-about-covid-vaccine).

¹⁶ *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor - April 2021*, Kaiser Family Foundation (May 6, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-april-2021/); see also Jacinda C Abdul-Mutakabbir et al., *A Three-tiered Approach to Address Barriers to COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery in the Black Community*, *The Lancet* (Mar. 10, 2021) (online at [www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(21\)00099-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(21)00099-1/fulltext)).

off from work), vision and hearing impairments, and language issues may cause difficulties in getting vaccinated.¹⁷

III. INCREASING VACCINE CONFIDENCE AND UPTAKE IS CRITICAL TO OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC

The more that the virus continues to circulate—both in the United States and globally—the greater the risk that deadlier, more contagious, and vaccine-resistant variants will emerge.¹⁸ Several variants are already spreading in the United States, including the “Delta” variant which experts warn is likely to become the dominant strain in the United States in the coming weeks.¹⁹ To slow the emergence of variants, it is important to get as many people vaccinated as quickly as possible. Experts estimate that at least 80 percent of the population must be vaccinated to provide sufficient population immunity to stop viral transmission. The United States is unlikely to reach this threshold without addressing vaccine hesitancy.²⁰

To successfully reach those who remain unvaccinated, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine advises that individuals who are “hesitant, reluctant, distrusting, or otherwise unmotivated with respect to the COVID-19 vaccines” must be provided the “resources, information, and support” they need to inform their vaccination decision.²¹ Studies suggest that partnerships with community organizations and dialogue-based interventions from trusted community messengers, such as advertising campaigns in which community members share why they chose to get vaccinated, are effective methods to counter vaccine hesitancy and promote vaccinations.²² Polling shows that local health care providers are one of the most trusted sources for unvaccinated Americans and that a majority of those who remain unvaccinated would prefer to get their shots from their local doctor’s office as opposed to a pharmacy or large vaccination site.²³

¹⁷ See, e.g., *Older Adults Without Family or Friends Lag in Race to Get Vaccines*, Kaiser Health News (Feb. 1, 2021) (online at <https://khn.org/news/article/older-adults-without-family-or-friends-lag-in-race-to-get-vaccines>); *Covid-19 Vaccines Are Slow to Reach Rural America*, Wall Street Journal (Dec. 19, 2020) (online at www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-vaccines-are-slow-to-reach-rural-america-11608390001).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Elisabeth Mahase, *Delta Variant: What is Happening with Transmission, Hospital Admissions, and Restrictions?*, The BMJ (June 15, 2021) (online at www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1513).

¹⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *SARS-CoV-2 Variant Classifications and Definitions* (online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variant-info.html) (last accessed June 28, 2021); *Vaccine Effort Turns into Slog as Infectious Variant Spreads*, Associated Press (June 16, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-nyc-state-wire-mo-state-wire-ca-state-wire-michael-brown-55f60540f171cba3c7a8571ac9f2d5de>); *Fauci Warns Dangerous Delta Variant Is the Greatest Threat to U.S. COVID Efforts*, National Public Radio (June 22, 2021) (online at www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/06/22/1008859705/delta-variant-coronavirus-unvaccinated-u-s-covid-surge).

²⁰ *Reaching ‘Herd Immunity’ Is Unlikely in the U.S., Experts Now Believe*, New York Times (May 3, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/05/03/health/covid-herd-immunity-vaccine.html).

²¹ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Strategies for Building Confidence in the COVID-19 Vaccines* (Feb. 2021) (online at www.nap.edu/read/26068/chapter/1#3).

²² *Id.*

²³ *Half of Unvaccinated People Would Get the Jab from Their Doctor*, Bloomberg Law (June 16, 2021) (online at <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/health-law-and-business/half-of-unvaccinated-people-would-get-the-jab>).

State and local governments, in partnership with business and community leaders, have rolled out a range of programs designed to incentivize vaccine uptake. For example, the state of Ohio announced in May the “Vax-a-Million” program, under which all vaccinated adult Ohioans are entered in weekly lottery drawings for \$1 million and vaccinated teenagers are entered in weekly drawings for full scholarships at Ohio public universities.²⁴ In the first week following the announcement of this program, state officials reported a 46 percent increase in vaccinations among young adults ages 18 to 19, and a 55 percent increase among adults ages 20 to 40, although the program recently concluded with less than half of the state’s population having received at least one dose.²⁵ Multiple states have since implemented similar vaccine lottery programs.²⁶

Other programs provide smaller financial or experiential incentives to everyone who has been vaccinated, such as gift cards and savings bonds, free food and drink at participating establishments, free tickets to amusement parks, and better seats at concerts and sporting events.²⁷ Although polling suggests that these incentives help motivate only small shares (between 10 to 15 percent) of unvaccinated individuals to get a vaccine, larger shares of Black and Hispanic adults and those with lower incomes report that such incentives make them more likely to get vaccinated, suggesting that financial incentives and travel assistance can help reduce racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in vaccination rates.²⁸ State and local governments have also taken steps to facilitate access to vaccinations, including by sending text messages containing information about nearby appointments to those living in areas with low vaccination rates, providing free transportation to vaccination sites, and partnering with employers to provide vaccination clinics at worksites.²⁹

from-their-doctor); Kaiser Family Foundation, *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: January 2021* (Jan. 27, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/report-section/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-january-2021-vaccine-hesitancy/).

²⁴ Ohio Department of Health, *Press Release: Governor DeWine Announces Vaccine Incentives, End Date for Health Orders* (May 12, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/resources/news-releases-news-you-can-use/covid-19-update-05-12-21>); *Recent College Grad Wins a Million Dollars for Getting Vaccinated in Ohio*, Washington Post (May 26, 2021) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/05/26/ohio-vax-a-million-winner/).

²⁵ *The Psychology Behind COVID-19 Vaccine Lotteries*, Axios (June 21, 2021) (online at www.axios.com/covid-lotteries-states-work-success-psychology-1a775d44-32ec-4e9f-8e57-5ae21e520d45.html); *Ohio Ends Vaccine Lottery with State Still Below 50 Percent Threshold*, NBC News (June 24, 2021) (online at www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ohio-ends-vaccine-lottery-state-still-below-50-percent-threshold-n1272228).

²⁶ *COVID-19 Vaccine Incentives*, National Governors Association (June 23, 2021) (online at www.nga.org/center/publications/covid-19-vaccine-incentives/).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: May 2021*, Kaiser Family Foundation (May 28, 2021) (online at www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-may-2021/).

²⁹ See, e.g., *OSDH Starts Statewide Text Message Campaign for COVID Vaccines*, Fox 25 (June 2, 2021) (online at <https://okcfox.com/news/local/osdh-to-begin-statewide-text-message-campaign-for-covid-19-vaccine>); *Need a COVID-19 Vaccine? Visit Your Local Transit Center*, The Pew Charitable Trusts (Apr. 12, 2021) (online at www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/04/12/need-a-covid-19-vaccine-visit-your-local-transit-center); *To Get the COVID Vaccine to More Hispanic Coloradans, the New Goal is Meeting the Unvaccinated Where They Are*, 9News (June 16, 2021) (online at

Experts have recommended additional strategies for increasing vaccine uptake. For example, studies suggest that sending text messages to remind individuals that a vaccine is “reserved” or “waiting” for them can boost vaccination rates. The rationale for this approach is that most people intend to support their health interests but need additional motivation to act.³⁰ Some experts have advised structuring vaccine lotteries to include smaller prizes, which offer a greater probability of winning, or to select winners under a so-called “regret” lottery system, where all adults are automatically entered in the lottery but the winners must show proof of vaccination to claim their prize.³¹ Public health experts have also called on states to supply more vaccines to primary care physicians’ offices, where many unvaccinated Americans would prefer to receive their shots.³² Ultimately, research suggests that multiple strategies for incentivizing vaccinations and facilitating vaccine access will be needed to increase population immunity meaningfully.³³

IV. WITNESSES

Georges Benjamin, M.D.

Executive Director
American Public Health Association

Joshua Garza

Coronavirus Survivor

Katy Milkman, Ph.D.

Professor of Operations, Information, and Decisions at the Wharton School
Professor, Division of Health Policy at the Perelman School of Medicine
University of Pennsylvania

Jerome Adams, M.D., M.P.H.

Former Surgeon General of the United States (2017 – 2021)

Additional witnesses to be determined

www.9news.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/vaccine/covid-vaccine-hispanic-latino-coloradans/73-c5846ba0-c405-4d81-a767-e01ddcb07625).

³⁰ *Behavior Change for Good Unveils Effective Strategies to Boost Vaccination Rates*, Penn Today (Feb. 8, 2021) (online at <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/Penn-Behavior-Change-for-Good-strategies-boost-vaccination-rates>).

³¹ *The Science Behind Vaccine Incentives*, National Public Radio (May 26, 2021) (online at www.npr.org/2021/05/26/1000616898/the-science-behind-vaccine-incentives).

³² *CDC Urges States to Get More COVID-19 Vaccine in Doctors’ Offices*, American Medical Association (May 7, 2021) (online at www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/cdc-urges-states-get-more-covid-19-vaccine-doctors-offices); *Half of Unvaccinated People Would Get the Jab from Their Doctor*, Bloomberg Law (June 16, 2021) (online at <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/health-law-and-business/half-of-unvaccinated-people-would-get-the-jab-from-their-doctor>).

³³ Kevin G. Volpp, M.D., Ph.D. and Carolyn C. Cannuscio, Sc.D., *Incentives for Immunity — Strategies for Increasing Covid-19 Vaccine Uptake*, *The New England Journal of Medicine* (May 26, 2021) (online at <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2107719>).