



Statement for the Record: Dr. Robert Gabbay, Chief Scientific & Medical Officer,
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House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis Hearing:
"Building Trust and Battling Barriers: The Urgent Need to Overcome Vaccine Hesitancy"
Thursday, July 1st, 2021

Thank you Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and distinguished members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, for providing the American Diabetes Association (ADA) the opportunity to submit comments regarding the importance of combatting vaccine hesitancy and promoting greater vaccine uptake. We appreciate your consideration of this urgent topic at this critical time.

The ADA is the nation's leading voluntary health organization fighting to bend the curve on the diabetes epidemic and help people living with diabetes thrive. For 80 years the ADA has been driving discovery and research to treat, manage, and prevent diabetes, while working relentlessly for a cure. We help individuals with diabetes thrive by fighting for their rights to health care equity and access and advocating for research, education, and management tools designed to improve their quality of life.

As you are no doubt aware, Americans with prediabetes, diabetes, and their loved ones have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While just over 10% of the U.S. population has diabetes overall, [40% of Americans who have died from COVID-19](#) had the condition, according to a CDC study released in July of last year. Americans with diabetes and other underlying conditions are also hospitalized [6 times more often](#), and their likelihood of readmission is [20% greater](#) than the general population. In the most serious cases, people with diabetes and other related conditions are [12 times more likely](#) to die of COVID-19 than those without, and [just about half](#) of COVID-19 decedents under the age of 65 had diabetes. While these figures are startling, the disparity is even greater among underserved communities and communities of color.

While these statistics convey the dangers that people with diabetes face in contracting COVID-19, we are also aware of alarming data on the impairments to *diabetes management* in the midst of the pandemic. Forty-three percent of Americans with diabetes say they have [delayed seeking routine medical care](#) during the public health emergency. Additionally, one in five Americans with diabetes say they have [foregone or put off getting the technology they need](#) to manage their diabetes, like an insulin pump or CGM, during the pandemic. Because the diabetes community is already experiencing outsized vulnerability to COVID-19, these barriers to managing diabetes care become a compounding factor, perpetuating a cycle of poor outcomes.

Given the disparate impact of the pandemic on those with diabetes, vaccine uptake is critically important. The COVID-19 vaccine – which is proven to be remarkably effective and safe – is our single greatest defense against the virus to date, especially as more deadly and contagious variants predominate. Not only will vaccination prevent the likelihood of illness, hospitalization, and death in the individuals who get the shot, but it will also reduce the likelihood of spreading the virus to others who may be more vulnerable. The vaccine is key to curbing rates of transmission and ensuring that individuals with diabetes can safely manage their condition to the best of their abilities.

Because the vaccines provide a clear path to ending this crisis, the degree of hesitancy that we see across the country is distressing. More must be done to highlight the merits of immunization and refute misinformation that stokes skepticism. Just as importantly, though, more must be done to make sure vulnerable populations, like the diabetes community, have access to health care providers and vaccine sites. We are grateful to lawmakers for supporting additional resources to expand access to vaccination, especially via creative delivery mechanisms such as mobile vaccine units and free transportation to sites in underserved communities. Now it is crucial to ensure those resources are fully realized. This is a public health necessity that will not only protect each vaccinated individual from the virus, but also the community as a whole. As such, we urge Members of Congress to continue to explore ways in which the federal government can educate and engage their constituencies around the importance of being vaccinated and help their constituents locate and access travel to vaccine sites. We must reach the communities that have statistically proven less likely to get vaccinated, especially people with conditions like diabetes that make them far more likely to experience a serious or deadly COVID-19 outcome.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. The American Diabetes Association looks forward to continuing to work with Congress to identify ways to promote vaccine uptake. We'll work together to promote a safer, healthier, more protected population. The ADA stands ready to be a resource to this Subcommittee in supporting your work to reach these urgent objectives.