



Protect Our Care's Priorities for Addressing Racial Disparities in Health Care



PROTECT
OUR CARE

December 2020

Protect Our Care's Priorities for Addressing Racial Disparities in Health Care

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the deep fault lines within our health care system. Structural racism has left people of color with higher rates of chronic illnesses and steep barriers to accessing health care, a grim reality exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic. Protect Our Care has released a [series of reports](#) on this issue over the last year.

President Trump's complete failure to respond to the pandemic and his four year [war on American health care](#) dramatically worsened these unacceptable inequalities. This will change on January 20th. President-elect Biden has made it clear that expanding coverage, lowering costs, and taking on health inequities will be priorities of his administration. Protect Our Care urges the Biden administration to take the following steps to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and meaningfully address deeper racial disparities in health care.

Coverage

- **Incentivize Medicaid Expansion In Holdout States.** Research confirms that Medicaid expansion has played a vital role in improving health outcomes and reducing racial disparities in coverage. However, Black residents disproportionately [reside](#) in the [12 states](#) that continue to reject expansion. The Biden administration can incentivize holdout states to expand Medicaid, either by pushing [legislation](#) to increase federal matching funds or through [executive action](#) to make expansion even more appealing to states.
- **Restore Marketplace Outreach & Advertising.** President Trump cut the outreach advertising budget for Open Enrollment by [90 percent](#), from \$100 million to just \$10 million—a move that resulted in as many as [1.1 million](#) fewer people getting covered. The Trump administration also [slashed](#) funding for non-profit health Navigator groups that help people shop for coverage, from \$36 million to \$10 million. The Biden administration can restore outreach and enrollment funding, extend the Open Enrollment period back to 90 days, and [re-engage with partner organizations](#)—like the Latino Affordable Care Act Coalition—to boost enrollment.
- **Reverse Trump's Medicaid Sabotage.** The Trump administration championed harmful Medicaid policies, including work reporting requirements and block grants, designed to cut funding and curb enrollment. The Biden administration can immediately rescind the block grant guidance and reject any future state proposals to impose work reporting requirements.
- **Increase Premium Tax Credits.** Biden's health care plan expands access to and increases the size of tax credits for millions of families, ensuring people pay no more than 8.5 percent of their income on coverage. Per [Families USA](#): "Increased assistance targeting low- and moderate-income people would address serious affordability challenges that disproportionately affect people of color."

- **Halt Trump's Public Charge Rule.** [Experts point to](#) Trump's immigration policies, such as the [public charge rule](#), for having deterred many Latino families from obtaining insurance, resulting in steep coverage losses, especially for children. Biden can reverse these harmful actions, ensuring that equality is at the center of his health care agenda.
- **Increase Immigrant Children's Access Health Care.** The Biden administration can work to increase immigrant children's access to Medicaid and CHIP by lifting the [five-year waiting period](#) for eligibility.

COVID-19

- **Open A Special Enrollment Period (SEP).** The Biden administration can immediately open a SEP to ensure that everyone—including those who lost employer coverage and those who were uninsured before the crisis—can get covered for the duration of this national emergency. Several states that operate their own marketplaces [created](#) a SEP in the spring and saw thousands gain coverage as a result. Notably, about a third of people who [enrolled](#) in coverage through Maryland's COVID-19 SEP were Black.
- **Increase The FMAP.** The Families First Coronavirus Response Act [included](#) a 6.2 percentage point increase in the Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP), but experts have warned that without increasing the FMAP further, states could be forced to limit enrollment or cut benefits as the nation is still reeling from the pandemic. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state budget shortfalls will total about [\\$615 billion](#) over the next three years. The Biden administration can work to pass legislation that would automatically increase federal matching rates for Medicaid based on state economic conditions.
- **Provide Robust Funding For Testing & Contact Tracing.** The Trump administration completely failed to develop a national testing strategy, delegating the responsibility for testing downward to state and local governments, rather than centralizing the supply chain and coordinating efforts. As it stands, testing facilities are often concentrated in wealthy areas but scarce in poor neighborhoods and areas with significant minority populations. The Biden administration can establish a national testing strategy, ensuring patients everywhere have access to testing with no out-of-pocket costs. Additionally, Biden can support states to implement coordinated contact tracing efforts and public health surveillance.
- **Increase State Funding In Response To Coronavirus Crisis.** The Biden administration can [prioritize](#) providing flexible funding to states to help offset looming budget revenue shortfalls. The Biden administration can also work with states to put forth streamlined messaging to promote health and safety goals while ensuring messaging is culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of different populations.
- **Support Vaccine Distribution.** From day one, the Biden administration can strengthen public outreach and develop broad education campaigns on getting vaccinated, with an

emphasis on transparency and accountability. Additionally, the Biden administration can support congressional efforts to increase state and local funding for vaccine distribution, guaranteeing that vaccines are widely available in underserved communities and that every American can access the vaccine at no cost. For future vaccine research, the Biden administration should advocate that clinical trials include a higher proportion of racial and ethnic minorities.

- **Require Better Data Collection.** The Biden administration can work to standardize data collection to track outcome measures nationwide, with a particular emphasis on collecting information on race and ethnicity. The Biden administration can also align provider incentives to reporting dating and improving patient outcomes to show they are making progress on addressing racial disparities in care.
- **Support Essential Workers.** People of color are heavily represented on the [frontlines](#) of the battle against the virus, serving as health care workers, farm workers, and in other essential roles — putting them at high risk of exposure. Instead of protecting workers, Senate Republicans are [advocating](#) for liability protections that would only exacerbate the risk for people of color. In May, the House passed the Heroes Act, which established a \$200 billion “Heroes Fund” for essential workers. The Biden administration can advocate for robust funding to ensure these workers receive hazard pay and that workplace safety protections are consistent with CDC guidelines.

Better Care

- **Increase Funding To Community Health Care Centers.** Community Health Centers are essential sources of care for low-income Americans and communities of color in particular. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Congressional Black Caucus [called](#) for \$60.1 billion in funding for Community Health Centers, the National Health Service Corps, and the Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education program. The Biden administration can work to support Community Health Centers for the duration of the coronavirus crisis and beyond.
- **Expand Medicaid Coverage To Pregnant People One-Year Postpartum.** In order to address the maternal and infant mortality crisis, the Biden administration can work to provide funding for states to [expand](#) comprehensive Medicaid coverage to all pregnant individuals for one-year postpartum.
- **Support Expanded Access To Telehealth Services.** The Biden administration can continue to support expanded access to telehealth by empowering Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance to continue to cover these services for the duration of the crisis and beyond. Biden can support efforts to further invest in broadband, ensuring patients in low-income and rural communities have access to telehealth services.
- **Address Root Causes Of Health Disparities.** The Biden administration can support health care policies that address the social determinants of health, for example by preserving and

strengthening access to critical programs such as SNAP and Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation. Biden's CMS can also expand Medicare and Medicaid payment models that work to address the social determinants of health and improve health outcomes.

Conclusion

These policies seeking to lower costs, expand coverage, improve care, and respond to the pandemic will undoubtedly benefit communities of color. Of course, these policies must rest in a broader set of work to improve the health and livelihoods of these communities that have been left behind for far too long. Addressing underlying issues such housing affordability, racial disparities in the environment, food security, and other social determinants of health will be key to managing the long-term effects of the pandemic and working toward a more healthy, equitable society.