

**The Only Way Out: Transform our Conditions to Halt the Virus**  
*Health Workers Call for Stronger Federal Protections Amidst Devastating COVID-19 Surge*

To the Biden Administration and Congress:

On September 9, President Biden announced a new prong in the federal government's strategy to combat COVID-19 — establishing vaccine mandates for almost 2/3rds of workers in the US, including health care workers, federal contractors, large businesses, and the vast majority of federal workers. While this push *may* stem the tide of the current surge, vaccinations alone will not address the ongoing harms experienced by the communities most impacted by the pandemic.

**As public health workers, many of whom have been on the frontlines of our nation's healthcare and health department responses to the pandemic, we say: *enough is enough.*** As we face the ever-growing COVID-19 surge, we need additional, immediate actions to protect our communities' health and prevent further avoidable suffering.

**The stakes are far too high for half measures. We need our leaders to continue to be bold and courageous, and to use public health expertise to save lives. We must address the structural conditions that increase risk of exposure and the worst impacts of the virus.**

**This means immediately acting on what communities most harmed by injustice have called for since the start of the pandemic:** stronger workplace protections; access to safe, affordable housing; decarceration of jails, prisons, and detention centers; and expanded vaccine access. We commend the state, tribal, territorial, local, and private sector leaders who are already implementing some of the necessary measures to keep our communities safe. ***This bold leadership must now be matched at the federal level.***

Because of systemic racism and structural oppression, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, working class people, and people in rural areas are at greater risk of exposure to the virus, and its worst health outcomes. And decades of disinvestment from critical public health and health care infrastructure have especially devastated these communities. Intervening to disrupt these injustices is the only way to stem the continued spread of the virus.

***We call for the following measures to be taken immediately by Congress and the Biden Administration. The demands in this letter echo those of impacted communities and leaders in the housing justice, community safety, and economic justice movements.***

### **Housing & Utility Protections**

Renters, people who are unhoused, and working class homeowners face multiple negative health outcomes due to housing instability amidst the resurging pandemic. Now, the absence of federal eviction protections, major delays in dispersal of federal Emergency Rental Relief, and climate crisis-fueled extreme weather events like hurricanes and wildfires have further

compounded health risks. We need long-term housing protections that extend beyond current baseline needs to affirm a basic right to shelter.

**To support housing and utility protections, we call on:**

- **Congress** to swiftly legislate a full eviction moratorium to:
  - Ban all eviction filings, hearings, judgments, and writs of execution;
  - Cover all eviction types, including those related to rent and otherwise; and,
  - Apply automatically and universally, without the need for a tenant to file declaration, and not limited to areas where cases are spiking – protections are needed everywhere to prevent virus spikes and allow people to stay safe
- **Congress and the Biden Administration** to support utility debt cancellation (including Rep. Tlaib’s Maintaining Access to Essential Services Act of 2021) and its inclusion in ongoing infrastructure funding packages
- **Congress and the Biden Administration** to support ongoing direct cash assistance as the solution to the slow rate of Emergency Rent Relief distribution
- **Congress and the Biden Administration** to create incentives and guidance for local extension and enactment of hotel programs to prevent heightened exposure risks associated with being unhoused
- **Congress and the Biden Administration** to raise awareness of and include in other relevant federal guidance CDC’s existing guidance to halt encampment “sweeps”

**Community Safety**

The pandemic continues to magnify the horrific health consequences of the criminal legal system, with outbreaks continuing in overcrowded jails, prisons, and detention centers while federal relief funds are funneled into policing and incarceration. Policing and incarceration were public health crises long before the COVID-19 pandemic, and lives continue to be at stake.

**To support community safety, we call on:**

- **Congress** to co-sponsor and pass the People’s Response Act, which redefines public safety as a public health issue and funds community-based, community-centered approaches to safety
- **Congress** to cut funding to ICE and CBP and invest in our communities, including education, healthcare, and housing
- **President Biden** to use his power to grant clemency to incarcerated women and girls, following the leadership of the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
- **President Biden and CDC** to rescind the Title 42-based Trump-era border closure order which misuses public health powers to detain and expel people seeking asylum, and instead implement existing public health measures to welcome refugees and immigrants into the US
- **The US Attorney General** to not re-incarcerate people who were formerly incarcerated in federal prisons and released due to the COVID-19 pandemic

- **The Department of Treasury** to issue a final rule to ensure implementation of the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund established under the American Rescue Plan Act is an investment in community recovery not a boon to banks, cops, and more corporate tax cuts

### **Workplace Protections**

Workers in public-facing and other high-exposure jobs – positions that are disproportionately held by Black, Indigenous, and people of color – continue to be at high risk of contracting COVID-19 due to inadequate protections to safeguard the health of working class people. Workers need access to liveable wages, paid sick leave, strengthened workplace health and safety standards, and other health-sustaining programs and policies to thrive during the pandemic and beyond.

#### **To support workplace protections, we call on:**

- **Congress** to increase funding for inspection and enforcement of COVID-19 safety regulations at workplaces by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), including to state and regional offices
- **Congress** to expand Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA tax credits), currently set to expire on September 30th, to allow employers with under 500 employees to claim a tax credit when employees use emergency paid sick leave
- **Congress** to pass permanent, job-protected paid sick leave and at least twelve weeks of paid family and medical leave to ensure workers can take time off when they are sick, to care for family members, and to care for children during school closures throughout the pandemic and in the recovery
- **Congress** to enact hazard pay and priority vaccine distribution for all essential and frontline workers, and provide Workers' Compensation and job protection for workers who contract COVID-19 (with the presumption that exposure was at work)
- **Congress** to increase funding for states to bolster and reform unemployment insurance systems in response to increased demand, and to protect those who lose their jobs or whose hours are reduced with "right of return" policies
- **Congress** to include independent contractors, gig workers, formerly incarcerated people, and undocumented people in all federal legislation and economic recovery funding
- **The National Labor Relations Board and Congress** to protect workers against retaliation when they speak out against unsafe conditions at work
- **The Department of Labor** to require Strict enforcement of the OSHA's COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard, which covers healthcare workers, and prompt issuance by OSHA of enforceable emergency COVID-19 protections for all workers

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to illuminate and amplify the existing inequities in the social and economic systems that shape our health. The impacts of this virus are experienced unequally, with communities most harmed by centuries of injustice disproportionately experiencing the worst health impacts of the pandemic and economic fallout. Endless health

inequity is not inevitable: existing tools and policies can stem the ever-growing COVID-19 surge. As public health professionals, it is our charge to disrupt these injustices. We call on Congress and the Biden Administration to take bold action with leadership based in a commitment to the well-being of *all*.

Sincerely,  
*The undersigned health workers and organizations*

**Health organizations**

Human Impact Partners  
 The Praxis Project  
 New York Doctors Coalition  
 HPEACE: Health Professionals for Equality and Community Empowerment  
 Physicians for a National Health Program - NY Metro  
 Institute for Healing Justice and Equity  
 Covid Courage  
 American Muslim Health Professionals  
 #Docs4POC (Doctors for People of Color)

**Health workers**

Jenny	Ajl	FNP, MPH	Tucson	AZ
Anika	Akhter	MPH	Los Angeles	CA
Jesenia	Angeles	MPH	New Orleans	GA
Elizabeth	Aulner		Orlando	FL
Susan	Avila	IL	Chicago	IL
Omid	Bagheri Garakani	MPH	Seattle	WA
Keith	Baker		Rolling Hills Estates	CA
Eva	Batalla-Mann	MPH, MSW	Los Angeles	CA
Latifa	Bazzi	MPH	Troy	MI
Zackary	Berger	MD, PhD	Baltimore	MD
Ellie	Bergren	MPH	Boulder Creek	CA
Sari	Bilick		Berkeley	CA
Eryn	Block	PhD, MPP	Eugene	OR
Matthew	Bosley	MD, MPH	Omaha	NE
Stephanie	Caldwell	CA	Los Angeles	CA

Alice	Cartwright	MPH	Durham	NC
Mary ann	Castle	Phd	New York	NY
Sruthi	Chekur	MPH	New York	IL
Xi	Chu	NY	Brooklyn	NY
Kayla	Clark	RN	Boise	WA
Elizabeth	Corcoran	MPH, CPH	D.C.	DC
Toni	Dang	Pennsylvania	Philadelphia	PA
Lori	Dorfman	DrPH, MPH	Berkeley	CA
Lili	Farhang	MPH	Oakland	CA
Andrea	Ferguson	COVID-19 Resource Navigator	Brooklyn	NY
Alyssa	Figueroa	RN, MPH	Akron	OH
Robin	Fink	MPH	Oakland	CA
Stephanie	Flash	RN	Portland	ME
Mary Grace	Fries	MPH Candidate	Ann Arbor	MI
Jenna	Gaarde		Oakland	CA
Emily	Galpern	MPH	Berkeley	CA
Megan	Gaydos	MPH	Denver	CO
Norbert	Goldfield	MA	Northampton	MA
Andrew	Goldstein	NY	NYC	NY
Cynthia	Golembeski	MPH	Newark	NJ
Eda	Gordon		Santa Fe	NM
Solange	Gould	DrPH, MPH	Berkeley	CA
Linda	Green	MD	Mount Rainier	MD
priscilla	grim		Brooklyn	NY
Max	Hadler	MPH, MA	Brooklyn	NY
Ann	Harper		Phoenix	AZ
Robert	Heimer	PhD	New Haven	CT

Emily	Heinlein	MPH	Baltimore	MD
Jonathan	Heller	PhD	Berkeley	CA
Deborah	Herdan	RN	Brooklyn	NY
Jacqueline	Hernandez	MPH	Los Angeles	CA
Lauren	Hill	MPH	Los Angeles	CA
Jessica	Ho	MPH	New York	NY
Emily	Hops	MPH	Seattle	GA
Monique	Hosein	MPH	Albany	CA
Emalie	Huriaux	MPH	Olympia	WA
Ellen	Isaacs	MD	New York	NY
Praise	Iyiewuare		Burlington	VT
William	Jordan	MD, MPH	Queens, NY	NY
Annie	Kane		Alameda	CA
Anna	Kaplan	MPH	Medford	MA
Ariana	Katz	California	Los Angeles	CA
Ghada	Khan	DrPH	Santa Barbara	CA
Betty	Kolod	MD	Bronx	NY
Peggy	Korpela	MPH	Plymouth, MI	MI
Liz	Kroboth	MPH	Oakland	CA
Cady	Landa	OH	Dayton	OH
Regina	LaRocque	MD, MPH	Wellesley Hills	MA
Alex	Lem		Nashville	TN
Renee	Levant		Amherst Town of	MA
Clara	Liang		San Francisco	CA
Danielle	Lucero	MSW,MPH	Albuquerque	NM
Andrea	Lyman	MD, MSc, MS	New York	NY
Tessa	M Cushman	CO	Denver	CO

Daniel	Madrigal	MPH	Oakland	CA
Melissa	Makled	MPH	Dearborn	MI
Deepa	Manjanatha	MPH	Little Rock	AR
Shelley	Mann-Lev	Mph	Santa Fe	NM
Ocotlan	Martinez Libreros	RN	Santa Rosa	CA
Jaime	Metzger	BA	Upper Providence Twp	PA
Juliana	Morris	MD	Oakland	MA
Juliana	Morris	MD	Oakland	MA
Jen	Murray	MPH	Milwaukee	WI
Dilhara	Muthukuda	MPH	Lansing	MI
Nancy	Neudorf	RN, FNP	Irvine	CA
Becca	Neuwirth	NP	San Francisco	CA
Max Jordan	Nguemeni Tiako	MD, MS	West Roxbury	MA
Liesl	Nydegger	PhD, MPH, CHES	Milwaukee	TX
Martha	Ockenfels-Martinez	MPH	Oakland	CA
Ngozi	Oleru	PhD	Seattle	WA
Nate	Olsen		Atlanta	GA
carolyn	park		Los Angeles	CA
Deepa	Patel	MPH	Elkton	MD
Robin	Pearce	MPH	Oakland	CA
Aswini	Periyasamy	MPH	New York	NY
Amber	Piatt	MPH	Oakland	CA
Karyn	Pomerantz	MPH, MLS	College Park	MD
Sukhdip	Purewal Boparai	MPH	Fairfield	CA
Barrie	Raik	MD,	New York	NY
Riley	Reyes	MPH, MSW	Madison	WI
Maddie	Ribble	MPH	Dorchester Center	MA

Dana	Rosenberg	MPH, RN	Brookline	DC
Danielle	Rossoni	MSPH	Baltimore	MD
Rachel	Rubin	MD, MPH	Chicago	IL
Taylor	Sabol	PA	Philadelphia	PA
Jamie	Sarfeh		Oakland	CA
Katherine	Schaff	DrPH, MPH	Berkeley	CA
Terry	Schleder	MPH	Albuquerque	NM
Marc	Shi	MD	Bronx	NY
Sophia	Simon-Ortiz	MPH	Berkeley	CA
Heidi Lee	Sinclair	MD, MPH	Baton Rouge	LA
Sofia	Singer		Seattle	WA
Rael	Slavensky	RN, MSN, MPH	Geneseo	IL
Emerald	Snow	MSPH, MA	Sherman Oaks	CA
Deborah	Socular	MPH	New York	NY
Mark	Spencer	MD	Atlanta	GA
Gloria	Sun	BA	Frisco	TX
Emy	Takinami	EdM, MSW	Brookline	MA
Ana	Tellez	MA	Berkeley	CA
Zoey	Thill	MD, MPH, MPP	Brooklyn	NY
Ariana	Thompson-Lastad	PhD	Berkeley	CA
Shannon	Tracey	MS	Oakland	CA
Emilia	Vignola	MSPH	New York	NY
Louis	Weissert	MPH	Milwaukee	WI
Danielle	Zemmel	MPH	Ypsilanti	MI
Michael	Zingman	MD, MPH	Brooklyn	NY



