

March 22, 2023

U.S Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions:

The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact low-income and minority communities and people with disabilities across America the hardest. While our nation recovers from the crisis, it is important to recognize that public-private partnerships helped generate innovative solutions to the pandemic that benefited all populations.

INNOVATION TO IMMUNITY: LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

As we know, the private sector has long been at the forefront of medical innovation, developing life-saving drugs and treatments that have transformed healthcare for millions of people around the world. During the pandemic, companies that normally compete for new innovative therapies pursued a collaborative response effort that brought vaccines and other lifesaving therapies to market. Coordination between the public and private sector not only accelerated the pace of vaccine development but ensured the nation had the resources and infrastructure in place to manufacture and distribute the vaccine quickly and efficiently.

The government should continue to support such private sector innovation and investment. To properly address future health crises, we need policies that encourage investment in research and development and prioritize public health and safety while also allowing innovation to thrive. This approach will help ensure that we are prepared to support and protect our nation's most vulnerable communities.

INNOVATION CAN ADDRESS DISPARITIES AND BUILD TRUST AMONG COMMUNITIES

According to a study from the Morehouse School of Medicine, the death rate among Black children was 2.7 times higher than among White children during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Black and Hispanic children also required hospitalization at greater rates than White children. Approximately 23% of children hospitalized with severe Covid cases were Black, and 51% were Hispanic. This research demonstrates what many of us already know too well, minority populations are more likely to face ongoing economic and health struggles. In addition, adults with disabilities from marginalized communities were overrepresented among U.S. COVID-19 patients requiring hospitalization.² In the face of health crises, vulnerable populations need access to innovative cures.

¹ https://www.msm.edu/RSSFeedArticles/2023/March/2022BCAC_Report.php

² https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/COVID19/ACL_Research_ImpactC19-PWD.pdf

A recent Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) poll, “The COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights from Three Years of KFF Polling,” highlights another alarming healthcare trend. Over the course of the pandemic, KFF polling found a decline in the trust of public health officials.³ To address health disparities, communities of color must know and trust that health professionals understand their needs and are working to deliver high-quality care. Once again, innovation can help break down barriers and ensure at-risk and underrepresented populations receive the care they deserve. Public and private sectors collaborations during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a successful approach to addressing existing disparities. The KFF data showed, that early gaps in vaccination rates between Black, Hispanic, and White adults were largely eliminated by the end of 2021.

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION TO DRIVE FUTURE CURES

Innovation is fueled by intellectual property (IP) and IP rights are the foundation on which the development of new cures and treatments are produced by medical research and development (R&D) innovators. America’s IP system allows innovation to flourish and is critical to improving medical treatments, and patient care and spurring economic growth. Without adequate IP protection, innovators are unable to secure the needed resources to fund the researchers and develop the cure for the next COVID variant or next pandemic virus.

To address the COVID-19 virus, we witnessed a rapid mobilization of life science companies working around the clock to develop diagnostics, medical devices, and therapeutics. This unprecedented commitment and pooling of resources by the life sciences industry to develop, manufacture, and distribute billions of vaccine doses globally was only possible because of our nation’s innovation ecosystem. This robust ecosystem is built upon strong IP protections.

In closing, we encourage you to recognize the value of public and private sector collaborations played in the fight against COVID-19. By working together to promote innovation and investment, together we can support and develop healthcare solutions that protect our diverse communities and help us overcome existing disparities. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to protecting the health and well-being of populations who need it most.

Sincerely,

ALLvanza
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Black, Gifted, & Whole Inc.
Caregiver’s Helping Hand Inc.
Center for Black Equity
HEAL Collaborative
National Association of Councils on Development Disabilities
National Consumers League
National Disability Rights Network

³ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/the-covid-19-pandemic-insights-from-three-years-of-kff-polling/>

National Hispanic Medical Association
Partnership for Innovation and Empowerment
The National Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce



CENTER FOR BLACK EQUITY



NACDD

National Association of Councils
on Developmental Disabilities



Caregiver's
Helping Hand, Inc.



National Hispanic Medical Association

NATIONAL
DISABILITY RIGHTS
NETWORK



The National Puerto Rican™
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE