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A Demand for Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines

COVID-19 continues to disproportionately affect racially and ethnically minoritized groups; with higher cases, hospitalizations, and death rates being reported in non-Hispanic Black, American Indian, and Hispanic Americans when compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts. To put this into perspective, American Indians are hospitalized nearly 4 times more, and die 2.4 times more than non-Hispanic Whites from COVID-19. Furthermore, non-Hispanic Blacks are hospitalized almost 3 times more and die nearly 2 times more from COVID-19, and Hispanics are hospitalized 3.2 times more and die 2.3 times more from COVID-19 in comparison to non-Hispanic Whites. Disparate outcomes such as these are heavily attributed to structural racism, which has resulted in blatant health inequities amongst these minoritized groups. The available COVID-19 vaccines are well-positioned to alter these statistics; however, decades of distrust of the healthcare system, a lack of healthcare access, and quality healthcare threaten to limit vaccine uptake. Black and other minoritized pharmacists have taken a unique role in educating their respective communities on the importance of being vaccinated against COVID-19 but inequitable access to these vaccines remains. This is apparent in the disproportionate number of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans who have been vaccinated in comparison to non-Hispanic White Americans. To date, 63.1 million doses have been provided to vaccinate against COVID-19 in the United States; however, less than 15% of those vaccines were received by racially and ethnically minoritized individuals.

While individuals ages 65 years and older have been placed as a priority for receiving the available COVID-19 vaccines, this, in itself, is a disadvantage to racial and ethnic minority groups. In the United States, the average Black American has a shorter life expectancy than their White counterparts. Thus, despite being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 these racially and ethnically minoritized groups continue to fall outside of the reach of survival. In addition, the state distribution procedures are inconsistent, difficult to navigate, and ultimately

do not provide an equitable process to all Americans, alike.

As pharmacists, we are uniquely positioned to address the systemic challenges that limit the access of the COVID-19 vaccines in racially and ethnically minoritized communities. This is an urgent priority. As one of the most trusted healthcare professionals, it is our utmost duty to advocate for equitable access and to demand transparency for vaccine allocation and distribution, primarily to those in racially and ethnically minoritized communities that bear a disproportionate amount of the negative outcomes of COVID-19.

- We, as a profession, advocate for the continued education of racially and ethnically minoritized communities on the implications of not being vaccinated against COVID-19. We acknowledge that education provided by pharmacists of racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds is imperative to promoting vaccine trust amongst these communities.
- We also understand the importance of engaging pillars within these communities, such as faith leaders. Pillars within the community are crucial to disseminating key information and creating access within their communities, as they are on the frontline confronting this crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We stand for swift actionable measures to address issues of inaccessibility to the COVID-19 vaccines in racially minoritized communities. Pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians are adequately trained in proper vaccination administration practices. Additionally, we are experts in disseminating vaccinations to the masses. The most notable example of this is the yearly influenza vaccine. All 50 states allow pharmacists to safely administer the influenza vaccine in an efficient manner. Pharmacist-led and/or supported vaccination efforts, in predominantly racial and ethnic minority communities, are of paramount importance in effectively addressing accessibility-related inequities. Furthermore, with the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to community pharmacies, the need for transparency in the specific allocation of these vaccines to racially and ethnically minoritized groups escalates from urgent to emergent.
- We recognize the utility that Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as well as minority owned pharmacies have in assisting in the delivery of COVID-19 vaccinations to minoritized communities
- We advocate for measures to limit the use of a solely digitized process for vaccine dissemination, especially in majority racially minoritized areas; thus perpetuating inequitable practices.

It is imperative that we engage in dialogue on methods to increase the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to these heavily affected racially and ethnically minoritized groups. We must all dedicate ourselves to ending the COVID-19 pandemic and eliminating health disparities amongst the aforementioned groups. The profession of pharmacy, represented by the National Pharmaceutical Association and the Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists, should engage in actions to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates among racially and ethnically minoritized groups. These actions include but are not limited to:

1. Working together to deliver timely COVID-19 vaccine educational materials to racially and ethnically minoritized groups in an effort to assuage vaccine hesitancy and distrust within these communities.
2. Engaging pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians in vaccination efforts that can increase vaccine accessibility for racially and ethnically minoritized groups.
3. Gaining the support and endorsement of faith leaders within racially and ethnically minoritized groups regarding vaccination efforts, since their impact is those

communities is significant.

4. Delivering strategies on how to synergize digital and paper-based COVID-19 vaccine delivery methods and appointments in an effort to increase accessibility and lessen the “digital divide” between minoritized groups and their non-Hispanic White counterparts.

We understand that the COVID-19 vaccinations are essential to ending the current pandemic. It is our hope to ensure equitable and transparent processes for the distribution of these life-saving COVID-19 vaccines. If there is any additional information needed, please contact our groups and we are more than ready and willing to assist.

Respectfully,

National Pharmaceutical Association

Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists

