

Medical Students Demand COVID Response Puts Patients First

The Coronavirus Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis represents an unprecedented challenge facing our nation. From overburdened emergency rooms to a sharp spike in COVID as a leading cause of death, the coronavirus has wreaked havoc on our health system and society in general.^{1,2} While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act provided critical aid to families facing unparalleled uncertainty, subsequent legislation must go further to provide for the health and financial security of our nation's most vulnerable. As a community of over 30,000 physicians-in-training who will soon be on the frontlines of the coronavirus response, the American Medical Student Association calls for strong protections and health safeguards in any future COVID relief legislation.

"Shining a Bright Light" on Health Disparities

Our nation's most vulnerable are being disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Patients with health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and lung disease are at higher risk of contracting the virus and of facing complications and potentially death from the disease.³ Since it is well-documented that racial and ethnic minorities face significant health disparities related to these conditions, it is tragic but unsurprising that these communities are bearing a disproportionate burden of COVID-related deaths.⁴ Dr. Anthony Fauci, our nation's top infectious disease expert, explained that coronavirus is shining a light on the "unacceptable" level of health disparities for the African American populations.⁵ Other already disadvantaged populations, such as the incarcerated and those experiencing homelessness may also face significant challenges from the spread of the pandemic.

Future Physicians Call for Expanded Access to Health Care and Treatment

The causes of health disparities are myriad and complex. The pandemic has merely exacerbated existing health injustices. However, as future physicians we know that access to care unfettered by financial barriers is a critical piece of health equity.

As such, the American Medical Student Association calls on any future Congressional coronavirus recovery bill to provide relief for patients and communities by:

- **Ensuring access to any COVID-19 vaccine developed or treatment identified for all, regardless of insurance or documentation status, with no out-of-pocket costs**
- **Requiring fair and reasonable pricing on all COVID-19 vaccines and treatments to prevent "pandemic profiteering"**
- **Requiring non-exclusive licensing for any contracts, licenses, or arrangements related to coronavirus research and development to ensure there are enough doses to meet the global need**
- **Expanding health care access by extending enrollment in Affordable Care Act marketplaces and significantly increasing the Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) with the same strong maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements included in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act**

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/05/health/inside-new-york-coronavirus-hospital/index.html>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-deaths-how-many-2nd-leading-cause-of-death-in-the-us-on-march-31-peak-cases-april/>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/07/coronavirus-is-infecting-killing-black-americans-an-alarmpingly-high-rate-post-analysis-shows/?arc404=true>

⁵ <https://www.businessinsider.com/fauci-covid-19-shows-unacceptable-disparities-for-african-americans-2020-4>