

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO**



**SUE FROST
SUPERVISOR
FOURTH DISTRICT**

February 22, 2021

Dear Sacramento County's African American Leaders and Members:

This is in response to the Open Letter dated February 17, 2021, pertaining to COVID vaccinations in Sacramento County's African American Community. The letter pointed out that in a recently released report of vaccinations administered by race/ethnicity in California, African Americans constituted 4% of those vaccinated, even though they make up 10% of the population in the State. This disparity is a reflection of the underrepresentation of African Americans and other communities of color in the occupations that were initially prioritized for vaccination, rather than a reflection of outreach efforts. When the vaccination was rolled out in December, California released a prioritization by phases which included healthcare workers in phase 1A and first responders, teachers and agricultural workers in phase 1B. Later on in January, the State added people over the age of 65 years in Phase 1B. Most counties started vaccinating people in Phase 1B in February.

Sacramento County has made concerted efforts throughout the pandemic response to pay attention to underserved communities, knowing that there would be a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 in these communities. With the allocation of additional CARES funds in August, Public Health established community testing sites to increase access, and dedicated a portion of the budget to community based agencies that then established the SacCollab coordinated by Sierra Health Foundation, to support and provide wrap around services to individuals impacted by COVID. As Public Health planned for the vaccine roll out to the general public, the plan included community outreach, collaboration with community based agencies, and coordination with healthcare partners to increase access to the vaccine in

disadvantaged communities. The roll out has been slow due to limitations in doses, nevertheless, staff have been working diligently on executing that plan. Below is a response summary to the issues raised in your letter, including some of the activities staff are engaged in:

1) Convene an African American COVID-19 Vaccine Committee to help inform steps the county and health systems will be taking to address the health crisis as it is related to the African American community.

Sacramento County Public Health (SCPH) is working with Sierra Health Foundation to convene a Health Equity Task Force (HETF) that will support and provide input to ensure our public health response is equitable and inclusive for African Americans, Indigenous, people of color, and other community members with intersecting identities (i.e., disabilities, documentation status, sexuality, and more). This task force will include a diverse representation of Sacramento County's community members, organizations, and leaders. Within the HETF, there will be various sub-committees, including one specifically including Black/African American members and leaders. We recognize that there is no one size fits all approach to health and/or one solution to address the COVID-19 disproportionate impacts on communities of color. Thus, with the HETF, we hope to leverage the wisdom, experiences, and capacity of community members and leaders from the diverse communities to better inform SCPH's COVID-19 response. The goal is to have this taskforce start meeting at the end of this month.

In the meantime, we have been collaborating with Community Based Organizations (CBOs), members, and leaders, including regular calls with African American community leaders led by Deputy County Executive, Bruce Wagstaff. These calls were held on a weekly basis throughout the first several months of the pandemic, and continue to be held bi-weekly. The County has included department directors and key staff on these calls, including Public Health, our Homeless team, and the Sheriff's office. Some of the African American community organizations that Public Health has been working with, but not limited to, are: Neighborhood Wellness, Rose Family Center, South Sacramento Christian Center, Africa House, Sierra Health Foundation, and others. Also, SCPH has been working on community vaccine

pop-up sites in Del Paso Heights and South Sacramento, specifically outreaching to our African American community members, while leveraging trusted messengers within the community to address vaccine hesitancy.

We have also led and facilitated over 10 COVID-19 community story sessions to help us better inform our COVID-19 public health response. These sessions are focus groups, where individuals of color are compensated for their time to provide insights on how SCPH can be more equitable and inclusive with the COVID-19 response. Questions asked during these sessions include: "1) How can Sacramento County Public Health support the community or better support you and your loved ones during times of public health emergencies, like this current COVID-19 pandemic? 2) Thoughts on COVID-19 vaccine and likelihood of getting vaccinated, once available."... and others.

These are some of the examples where we have been listening to the voices and wisdom of our diverse constituents to include a more equitable COVID-19 response.

2) Establish regular and transparent dialogue with the African American community about the availability of state and federal resources that will be received by distributors to address the vaccine rollout;

As mentioned above, we are working to establish an HETF with our partners, community members, and leaders. Within the HETF, there will be sub-groups for specific communities. We plan to meet on a regular basis, where there will be transparent dialogue and updates on SCPH's COVID-19 response. Staff from the County will be present to work with the communities in continuing to build trust between our communities and the local government. This will be a collaborative effort, where we hope to bring the diverse experiences of each sub-group to build capacity, disseminate information, address vaccine hesitancy, advise on vaccine allocation, and others.

3) Open multiple vaccination clinic sites in areas where the target population can access them – with particular attention given to our homeless population;

There will be multiple vaccination distribution sites in areas where individuals that face access and other barriers could go to get vaccinated. Currently, we are limited with vaccine supplies. However, once the supplies become more readily available, we aim to have other large vaccine Medical Points of Dispensing (MPOD) in areas such as South Sacramento. Currently, we are working on the North Highland location MPOD site, where older adults 65+ may come to get their vaccines. To mitigate transportation barriers, we are working with our partners at Sacramento Regional Transit to get community members to and from these sites for free. In addition to these larger MPOD sites, we are also hosting community vaccine pop-up sites - these are small scale events that community members may come to get vaccinated. These pop-up events are intended to help vaccinate community members in underserved communities, especially those that are facing digital, language, access, and/or other barriers. There are other alternatives that SCPH is working on too, such as vaccine trailers and strike teams. We will also be working with providers of homeless services to ensure proper vaccination efforts take place in the unhoused communities. We look forward to your input on these and others initiatives.

4) **A review and oversight of the distribution plans and ongoing performance of health care providers and big-box pharmacy companies such as CVS and Walgreens related to the outreach and inclusion of African Americans;**

Pharmacy companies get their allocation from the federal government. Healthcare systems such as Kaiser, UC Davis, Dignity Health and Sutter Health get their allocation from the State. Local governments are not part of the process and do not provide oversight; however, we expect there will be an opportunity through the HETF discussion to review the experience with these systems.

5) **Publish and maintain a comprehensive, up-to-date listing of ALL vaccination sites with dates, times and tiers**

Vaccinations are by appointment only and limited to specific tiers. Currently Sacramento is making appointments available to those in phase 1a and phase 1b Tier 1. We get allocations on a weekly basis and appointments and clinic sites are determined once we know the next week's allocation.

Because of the limited doses, and weekly changes in sites, we do not make the links for appointments public. We send out links to those that are eligible to try and ensure that they get an opportunity to sign up. The plan is that once we have more vaccine supply and can cover more of the general public, we will have the information on our website so people can sign up. For our most current information on vaccine tiers, please check

<https://www.saccounty.net/COVID-19/Pages/CoronavirusVaccine.aspx>

6) Launch a targeted community outreach and education campaign to motivate and inform the African American community to participate in the vaccination effort.

SCPH has been working closely with our community partners to target and outreach to the African American community. For example, we are working on an ethnic media campaign with Sierra Health Foundation and partners to address vaccine misinformation and hesitancy among African American community members. In addition, we are working with other CBOs that serve/work with the African American community on targeted community outreach and education campaign to better inform community members from the African American community. Lastly, we are working closely with healthcare providers and other agencies such as Sacramento Republic FC and UC Davis, to capture media and photos of older adults of color getting vaccinated to combat some of the vaccine hesitancy.

Our goal is to do everything we can to eliminate the disparities and inequities in vaccination administration. We welcome participation from members of the impacted communities to continue to look for solutions to address vaccination hesitancy and remove barriers for access.

Sincerely,



Supervisor Sue Frost, Chair
District 4