



Students Assist America

"It's great to have a vaccine, but vaccines don't save lives: vaccinations save lives. And that means you've got to get that vaccine into people's arms all over this country.

It's a giant logistical project."

- Ron Klain, Chief of Staff to President-elect Joe Biden

November 15, 2020

November 19, 2020

(by email)

To the Members of the Biden-Harris COVID-19 Task Force,

Congratulations on your recent appointment, and thank you for the important work you are doing for the health and welfare of our country. On behalf of [Students Assist America](#) (SAA), we write to offer access to a significant and largely untapped resource to add to the fight against COVID – students in the health professions who are prepared to lend their skills and time.

In an analysis to date, students who can vaccinate are not mentioned in the federal plan, and appear in only eight of the state plans, and even then, in a limited way. We want to work with you to change that and mobilize the workforce needed to meet the demand for COVID vaccination and related services in all 50 states.

Background

SAA is spearheaded by the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine and is an interprofessional collaborative of 11 associations representing academic health institutions across the country. Collectively, SAA has access to nearly 1 million students in the United States, from medicine (DO and MD), nursing, public health, pharmacy, PA, social work, optometry, dentistry/dental hygiene, veterinary medicine and psychology. SAA has been engaging with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, national and state Medical Reserve Corps leaders, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and with Governors' offices to get students in the vaccination workforce.

Now that potential Pfizer and Moderna vaccines exist, interest in this approach is rising, but we need your help to make the promise of SAA a reality.

Our Request

We respectfully ask for a 15-minute audience with you to discuss in more detail the following requests and for your help to engage this army of students who can vaccinate, contact trace, test, staff mental health hotlines, and more - at essentially no cost to states or the federal government.

1. **Clarify the language in the CDC guidance and questionnaires for state plans to explicitly include trained, supervised students as part of the vaccination workforce** and make an associated public announcement to Governors and state health departments. *(Request made to Nathaniel H. Smith, MD, MPH, CDC, Deputy Director for Public Health Service and Implementation Science, on November 5)*
2. **Encourage Governors to expand scope of practice, waive state-level academic institutional liability, and establish agreements with schools and programs in their states** to permit and encourage eligible, supervised students to supplement the COVID vaccination workforce. Models exist from H1N1 plans, but the COVID response will require additional practitioners and types of students due to the unprecedented volume of need. *(Requests ongoing)*
3. **Engage SAA directly in the Biden-Harris Plan to Beat COVID-19 so we can more effectively rally the hundreds of thousands of skilled students in the United States** who are looking to help their country. This is the most cost-effective way to expand our workforce, and we stand ready to do our part.

We see clear roles for students in your 7-point plan:

- Point 1: access to testing
 - Point 2: PPE access and distribution
 - Point 3: communicating evidence-based information
 - Point 4: effective vaccine distribution
 - Point 5: protecting high-risk populations
 - Point 7: implementing mask mandates and modeling desired behavior
4. **Give consideration for prioritized access to the COVID vaccine for students in the health professions** who are now and will be working in high-risk clinical settings.

We would also encourage the Task Force to add a mental health services component to your plan, as the immense burden shouldered by patients, families and health care providers alike continues.

Thank you for your time, congratulations again on your important leadership role in the Task Force, and please let us know how we can work together to ensure we beat COVID-19. Our contact person is Virginia Bader, Director of Students Assist America, who can be reached at vbader@aacom.org or 703-963-9906.

Sincerely,

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