

# BIDEN'S PLAN TO ENSURE HEALTH EQUITY, EXPLAINED



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Figure 1: Present-elect Joe Biden signing executive Orders Source: Politico

Over the past year, COVID-19 has shaken the world, and has taken the lives of over 420,000 Americans. As a nation, we are all facing the pandemic; however, communities of color are facing social challenges that place them in more vulnerable positions.

The deadly virus has disproportionately hit vulnerable communities of color the hardest. According to the [APM Research Lab](#), underserved communities of color, such as Black, Latinx, and Native American people, are **four times more** likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 complications than non-Hispanic white people. This is the direct consequence of social, economic, environmental, and structural disparities that prevent minority populations from having the necessary resources to place protective barriers against diseases and pandemics.

## What are structural inequities?

To put this into perspective, imagine a single mother whose service job places her at higher risk for contracting COVID-19. If she contracts the virus, her high blood pressure could lead to complications. Since she is an essential worker, working from home is not an option, and she is the only income in the household that supports her two children. Health inequity is not just a singular issue; on the contrary, it is the intersection of discrepancies faced on a daily basis due to race, type of employment, crowded living conditions, whether or not they are immunocompromised, whether or not they have healthcare.

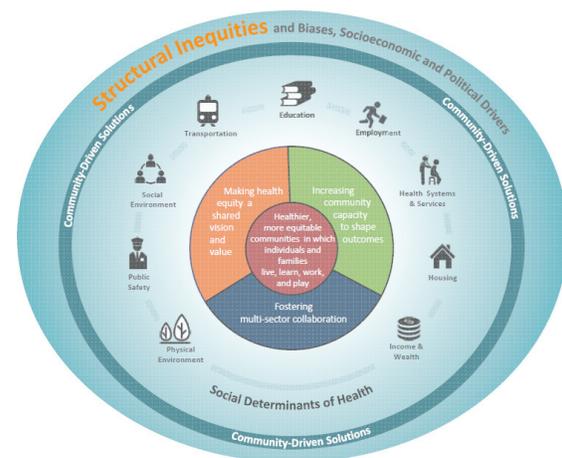


Figure 2: A display showing the forms of structural inequities and community-level solutions Source:

## Why is health equity important?

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), health equity is “when everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.” Imagine the goal is to pick an apple from an apple tree. The tall person can easily pick the apple, but a shorter person might need a boost. Equity is aiding the shorter person with a boost in order to pick their own apple. In this case, the apple symbolizes health.

**There are two different kinds of inequities... One is inequities in health status. The other's an inequity in health care.” - Dr. Nancy**

*Krieger*

How can the single mother, that is an essential worker and immunocompromised, be equitably supported to be healthy? It is important to not only shed light on the social discrepancies that manifest vulnerabilities, but also, take action to stimulate health equity amongst minority populations in order to give them the opportunity to stay safe and healthy.

On January 21, President-elect Joe Biden signed an executive order to Ensure an Equitable Pandemic Response and Recovery. The [sixth goal](#) states to, “protect those most at risk and advance equity, including across racial, ethnic and rural/urban lines.”

In order to uplift the underserved communities of color during this merciless pandemic, the Biden-Harris administration has prescribed five main objectives: (1) Establish the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force (2) Ensure equitable access to critical COVID-19 PPE, tests, therapies and vaccines (3) Expand access to high quality healthcare (4) Expand the clinical and public health workforce, including community-based workers. (5) Strengthen the social services safety net to address unmet basic needs.

## Biden’s Equitable Pandemic Response: 5 Key Takeaways

### **1. Establish the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force**

The COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force, led by [Dr. Nunez-Smith](#), was created to address the urgent disproportionate impact within underserved and minority communities. The Health Equity Task Force is imperative during the pandemic because they work to better understand the intersecting social determinants that contribute to the disproportionate cases of COVID-19 amongst communities of color.

It is important to note that, over the past year, as the coronavirus spread from 1 case to over 27,000,000 cases, a Health Equity Task Force did not exist.

Under the Trump Administration’s [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#), it was advised that “people who feel sick should stay home.” By recommending people to stay home from work and/or school, it is insinuating that people can afford to do this. Under the failed guidelines, It was also advised to “contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.” Again, this is insinuating that all people have medical providers. Trump’s pandemic strategy was flawed in a manner that it did not account for the inequities low-income Americans face on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, the Health Equity Task Force, under Biden's administration, will ensure to take into account the social challenges of the most at risk for coronavirus. They will provide specific recommendations in terms of allocating COVID-19 resources and relief funds equitably, collecting demographic-specific data, and ensuring the overall support of communities most at-risk.

## **2. Ensure equitable access to critical COVID-19 PPE, tests, therapies and vaccines**

In terms of allocating resources equitably, Biden's pandemic response will focus attention to communities that are not getting enough resources. The plan aims to make personal protective equipment (PPE), tests, therapies, and vaccines more accessible to disadvantaged communities of color. The wide distribution of resources will be done by specifically targeting federal qualified health centers in low-income minority populations. [The Federally Qualified Health Centers](#) serve over 30 million low-income patients every year, and as Dr. Nancy Krieger professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health explains, these centers are "a trusted provider and they reach key populations."

## **3. Expand the clinical and public health workforce, including community-based workers**

In order to be able to allocate resources fairly, there needs to be a bigger workforce. Therefore, the Biden-Harris administration plans to increase the amount of clinical and community based workers. [The United States Public Workforce Program](#) will fund 100,000 public health workers to triple the nation's community health roles. These roles will include: testing, tracing, vaccination, along with, the redistribution of workers in under-resourced communities.

## **4. Expand access to high quality healthcare**

One of the main social determinants that has caused the dense disparity within communities of color is the differential resource allocation. Unequal access or no access to healthcare services is a central point of departure. Minority populations often have lower quality healthcare because of either their inability to pay for expensive treatments/co-pays, or do not receive healthcare at all because of their lack of insurance. As a result, there are higher death rates and more disease.

For this reason, the Health Equity Task Force will work to address healthcare inequities by expanding affordable health coverage in order to increase access to healthcare. As stated on page 20 of the National Strategy, "specific actions include efforts to increase funding for community health centers, provide greater assistance to safety net institutions, strengthen home- and community-based services, expand mental health care, and support care and research on the effects of long COVID."

## **5. Strengthen the social services safety net to address unmet basic needs**

The pandemic has exacerbated inequities amongst minority populations, that includes food, housing, and transportation. Over [10 million Americans](#) remain unemployed and struggle to make ends meet. Therefore, the Biden-Harris plan will equitably address these needs by providing rental assistance, child care support, and paid sick leave.

# Los Angeles: The Disproportionate Impact in Low-Income Minority Communities



Figure 3.1: Displays the correlation between high poverty levels and high amount COVID-19 cases

Figure 3.2: Displays the correlation between high percentage of White residents and low amount of COVID-19 cases

With over [1,000,000 confirmed cases](#), Los Angeles, California has been one of the hardest hit cities in the country. The Los Angeles County is densely populated with minority races that live under the line of poverty. A study conducted by [Race Counts](#), a California-based organization dedicated to increasing transparency amongst the disproportionate cases within minority populations, has shown the intersectional effects between poverty, communities of color, and high rates of COVID-19 cases.

Figure 3.1, displays the spike in coronavirus cases in relation to poverty. As the weeks progress, it becomes evident that the communities that experience high levels of poverty did not have the necessary access to resources, such as testing, treatment, and personal protective equipment. Therefore, the residents under the federal poverty level, experienced nearly three times more COVID-19 cases than communities with lower percentages of poverty.

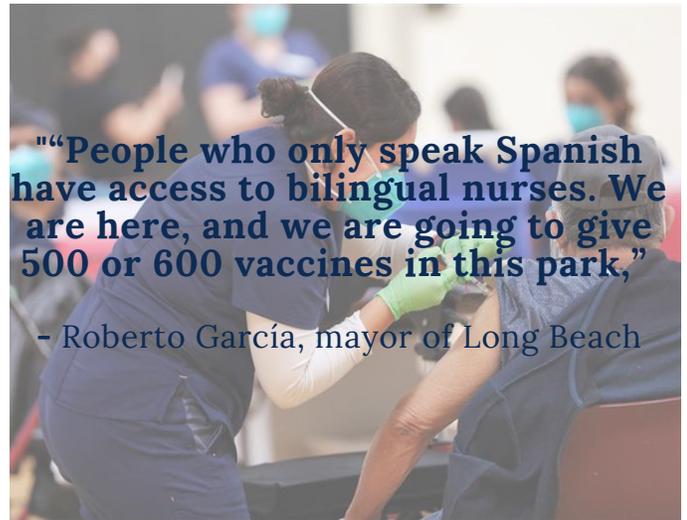
Figure 3.2, brings to light the racial disparities within active coronavirus cases. Majority white populations were able to slow down the spike in COVID-19 cases, as compared to, populations with lower percentages of white people. Communities with a higher percentage of White residents have 0.49 times as many cases than communities with lower percentage of White residents. On January 20, the areas with less White residents had over 675,000 cases, whereas, areas with more White residents had 330,000 coronavirus cases.

# Long Beach: How Biden's Equitable Pandemic Response is Helping

In a [press brief](#), President-elect Joe Biden declared that within the first month of his administration, mobile clinics will be deployed in order to aid communities hit hardest by the pandemic.

As of February 6th, under Biden's equitable and aggressive pandemic strategy, over [1 million vaccines](#) have been administered in Los Angeles County-- 4 million total in California.

In Long Beach, CA a vaccine clinic, that was launched as role of an outreach program to vaccinate people in "high-risk" neighborhoods, will serve Latino adults sixty-five and older. Through Biden's strategy to expand the clinical and public health workforce, including community-based workers, the mobile clinics are able to reach the most vulnerable communities.



**"People who only speak Spanish have access to bilingual nurses. We are here, and we are going to give 500 or 600 vaccines in this park,"**

- Roberto García, mayor of Long Beach

Figure 4: Displays vaccine clinic serving primarily Latino adults 65 years and older [Source](#): Twitter @LongBeachCity

According to a [press release](#) by the City of Long Beach, there have been over 49,000 coronavirus cases in the area, and more than 52,000 vaccines have been distributed.

## Final Note

The pandemic has revealed the health inequities that lay within disadvantaged communities of color as statistics show that they are 4x more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 complications.

It is important to note that poverty within communities of color is not a natural phenomenon. It is a deliberate policy choice. The rising inequalities in the wealth gap only seems to get larger. The government cuts back on public provisions that are in place to uplift disadvantaged communities, in order to accumulate wealth to a small margin. This is a result of structural inequities in all of its various levels. Therefore, the issue that results in health inequity requires structural change by facing the raw nature of the problems, and not just by helping people for the sake of democracy. Equity and redistributive justice is not just about basic needs, but about creating conditions in which democracy can be achieved.

**"The COVID-19 pandemic will come to an end eventually, but what is needed afterward is a renewed focus to ensure health is not a byproduct of privilege."**

- Oxiris Barbot commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

President-elect Joe Biden's administration aimed to create a pandemic strategy that addresses these structural inequities by creating a Health Equity Task Force. By recognizing that these issues are deeply engrained into our society is the first step in having a more equitable life for everyone during the coronavirus pandemic.



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