

April 7, 2021

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
Governor  
State of Florida  
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The Honorable Jeanette Nuñez  
Lieutenant Governor  
State of Florida  
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The Honorable Wilton Simpson  
President  
Florida Senate  
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The Honorable Gary Farmer  
Minority Leader  
Florida Senate  
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The Honorable Chris Sprowls  
Speaker  
Florida House of Representatives  
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The Honorable Bobby DuBose  
Minority Leader  
Florida House of Representatives  
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Mr. John Bussey  
Chief of Staff  
Florida Division of Emergency Management  
[Jon.Bussey@em.myflorida.com](mailto:Jon.Bussey@em.myflorida.com)

**RE: Comprehensive Vaccination Plan Needed for Florida's Communities of Color**

Dear Governor DeSantis, Lt. Governor Nuñez, President Simpson, Speaker Sprowls, Leader Farmer, Leader DuBose, and Mr. Bussey:

The undersigned write to urge you to take immediate action to provide equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for Florida's Hispanic, Black, Asian, and other marginalized communities of racial, national origin, and religious diversity. A comprehensive plan is needed that will build trust within our communities and provide clear information about vaccine distribution to all vulnerable and hard-to-reach Floridians. As hurricane season approaches, Floridians are reminded of the importance of effective planning and preparation: Making a plan for vaccine distribution should be no different. The state of Florida needs to prepare people for vaccines with the same intensity as it does for natural disasters, and that starts with a comprehensive plan centered on input and expertise from local community organizations.

Based on the latest [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) COVID per capita data](#), Florida's case and death rates are higher than California's and trending in the wrong direction. Furthermore, based on the state's most recent [COVID-19: Vaccine Summary report](#), the vaccination rates of Florida's Hispanic, Black, and Asian communities are half that of non-Hispanic White Floridians (e.g., Hispanic 15.6% and Black 11.8%, compared to non-Hispanic White 30.5%). Given COVID-19's disproportionate impact on Latino, Black, Asian, and other marginalized communities, more work is needed on your part to ensure that all families can get fully vaccinated quickly and equitably.

As you know, there is great concern in our communities over the effectiveness of vaccines, and there is a distrust of the government based on a history of racialized exploitation due to the lack of community engagement and education. This sentiment will only further delay the vaccination rollout, effectively

slowing the entire state's health and economic recovery from COVID-19. In our meetings with your constituents and the community-based organizations that serve them, the common theme that dominates conversations is confusion. Inconsistent messaging, vaccine distribution plans without details, and lack of community engagement are preventing more people in our communities from getting vaccinated. Based on feedback from your constituents, federal guidance, promising approaches in communities and states, and our expertise, we believe the core elements of a comprehensive plan would do the following:

**Ensure equitable access.**

- Distribute vaccines based on COVID-19 “hot spot” ZIP Codes to curb the spread of COVID-19.
- Increase fixed vaccination sites in communities of color and high-poverty neighborhoods, especially along public transportation routes and where trusted community partners operate.
- Keep all vaccination sites open daily until at least sunset to allow third-shift workers easier access to vaccines.
- Partner with community-based organizations, that locals have confidence in, to host pop-up COVID-19 vaccination sites in underserved Hispanic, Black, and Asian communities.
- Use only trusted law enforcement with community ties to provide security, when needed, at vaccination sites.
- Do not require identification or proof of residency for vaccination.

**Build community trust through local partnerships to maximize vaccination rates and increase vaccine efficacy.**

- Include leaders of trusted community organizations and networks within communities of color in vaccination planning, education, delivery, and administration.
- Invite local community leaders and doctors to co-host and participate in vaccination publicity events and press conferences to foster community trust.
- Partner with community leaders to produce culturally competent education materials, including one-page guides and social media collaterals, on the vaccine in languages spoken locally.
- Invest in ethnic media to educate community members on the benefits of the vaccine and how to access them.
- Provide funding to community-based organizations to support their capacity to assist in the vaccine rollout promotion and foster the building of rapport.

**Provide transparent, consistent, and clear information to track vaccination progress and educate all on how to make a vaccine plan.**

- Develop and widely release a comprehensive vaccination distribution plan including best- and worst-case timelines for when the entire population—regardless of immigration status or incarceration (current or previous status)—will have easy access to vaccines and not require an appointment. The plan should include vaccination benchmarks related to racial/ethnic equity, a blueprint for local community engagement, and how trusted local organizations can partner with the state on vaccine distribution.
- Use the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) definition of essential workers at all vaccination sites, regardless of operator, to avoid eligibility confusion and to prioritize Florida's critical workforce such as farmworkers, truck drivers, meatpackers, and childcare workers, to name a few.
- Expand daily vaccination reporting to include an online dashboard with ZIP Code and race information to better identify and serve under-vaccinated communities.
- On the Florida Health Department's COVID-19 Determination of Extreme Vulnerability form, define what “extreme vulnerability” means and include eligible conditions for a physician's authorization to prevent fraud or remove the requirement completely.

- Assure community members that no Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or other immigration officials will be present at or near vaccination sites.
- Communicate that vaccinations are free to everyone regardless of immigration status and that receiving a free vaccination will not impact current or future status.
- Ensure that comprehensive data are collected and shared among relevant stakeholders to assess disparities in vaccine distribution, and specific demographic categories should be disaggregated, including separating “Asian” from “Other,” from race reporting categories in the COVID-19 vaccine summary reports.

The undersigned urge you to create a detailed comprehensive plan no later than the end of the 2021 legislative session to address the issues that prevent all Floridians from getting vaccinated and being able to recover from the pandemic. Also, we urge you to acknowledge the sacrifice and suffering happening throughout Florida, especially in the “hot spot” ZIP Codes, and take the necessary action to remove barriers plaguing Florida’s hard-to-reach, vulnerable, and underserved communities and to provide equitable support to all families and businesses as we recover.

Florida’s Hispanic, Black, Asian and other marginalized communities of racial, national origin, and religious diversity have carried our economy on their backs throughout this crisis, and now it is time for state leaders to have their backs. For further information about our efforts in the state or to communicate with our community-based practitioners, please contact UnidosUS’s Florida State Advocacy Director Jared Nordlund at [jnordlund@unidosus.org](mailto:jnordlund@unidosus.org).

Sincerely,

Africans In Action, Inc.  
 Asian American Federation of Florida  
 Asian Caribbean Exchange  
 Caridad Center, Inc  
 Catalyst Miami  
 Central Florida Commission on Homelessness  
 Central Florida Jobs with Justice  
 Centro Campesino  
 Centro de Ayuda para los Hispanos  
 Council on American-Islamic Relations, Florida  
 Enterprising Latinas, Inc.  
 Faith in Florida  
 Florida Asian Services  
 Florida Asian Women Alliance  
 Florida For All Education Fund  
 Florida Immigrant Coalition  
 Florida Policy Institute  
 Hispanic Family Counseling  
 Hispanic Services Council  
 Hispanic Unity of Florida, Inc.  
 Hope Partnership Inc.  
 Housing and Education Alliance (HEA)  
 Latino Leadership, Inc.  
 LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Meals on Wheels South Florida  
Mexican American Council  
Miami Workers Center  
Miami-Dade County Commission for Women  
Miami-Dade League of Women Voters  
National Haitian American Elected Officials Network (NHAEON)  
OCA South Florida Chapter  
Pan American Behavioral Health Services of Florida  
Poder Latinx  
Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA)  
Rural Women's Health Project  
Sant La, Haitian Neighborhood Center  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida  
SOS by Urbander  
Spread The Vote  
UnidosUS  
WeCount!