Health Equity Policy Platform for COVID-19 Response and Recovery

HiP
HUMAN IMPACT PARTNERS

Introduction

Decades of underinvestment in our public infrastructure and neoliberal policies that gutted protections for working people, our healthcare, and our wider safety net are vividly exposing their consequences. People of color — most harshly Black, Latinx, and Native people — are disproportionately experiencing the consequences of these conditions.

In this context, directly impacted communities are naming and working towards transformative solutions around areas including the criminal legal system, housing security, economic security, and healthcare access.

Public health needs to act on solutions led by directly impacted communities

Below is a cross-sector policy platform, that if implemented, would challenge the conditions that create inequities in health outcomes. HIP did not generate these ideas — they come directly from grassroots organizations, and their members, who are leading the work. As public health, we need to do everything possible to aid in putting these policies in place to support people during this pandemic and beyond.

Now — as ever — is the time to set aside concerns of objectivity and politics, and use our power to change the unjust systems that have perpetually harmed the health of communities across the US.

> ## *Where did these demands come from?*
>
> This list of demands was collated by consulting with and tracking the demands of the following grassroots and powerbuilding organizations and coalitions, their members, and allied organizations working closely with impacted communities including:
>
> - Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (UCSF)
> - Center for Law and Social Policy
> - Critical Resistance
> - Detention Watch Network
> - Movement for Black Lives
> - National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
> - National Lawyers Guild
> - National Low-Income Housing Coalition
> - National Nurses United
> - Paid Leave for All campaign
> - Poor People's Campaign COVID-19 Health Justice Advisory Committee
> - Right to the City Alliance / Homes for All Campaign
> - SisterSong

Economic Security

Policies to center health equity and people over profits in economic response and recovery plans.

A. Expand unemployment, income support, paid leave, and childcare programs

- Expand and extend recurring, direct cash stimulus payments until the economy recovers. Develop a payment infrastructure to quickly disburse aid and refer to the universal basic income as a model to learn from.

- Enact job-protected paid sick leave and paid family leave to cover all workers in businesses of all sizes in those states where such systems do not already exist (e.g., through the federal PAID Leave Act).

- Bolster and reform state unemployment insurance (UI) systems to respond to increased demand and to protect workers who lose their jobs and those whose hours are reduced. Extend timeline for expanded unemployment benefits program. Waive job-seeking requirements and eliminate all waiting periods for delivery of benefits.

- Expand employee retention tax credit to businesses who keep employees on the payroll, to help subsidize wages.

- Expand direct income support programs for people and families, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) while also relaxing eligibility requirements.

- Invest in childcare including relief to providers, classification of childcare providers as essential workers, and access to no-cost childcare for essential workers.

B. Ensure access for independent contractors and gig workers

- Extend the availability of economic support programs to correctly classified independent contractors and gig workers.

- Communicate clearly to workers who may have been misclassified as independent contractors (e.g., gig workers) that they may apply for UI and that the state—not their employer—will make the ultimate decision regarding eligibility.

C. Ensure access for formerly incarcerated and undocumented people

Allow formerly incarcerated people, undocumented people, and people living in mixed immigration status families access to:
- Paid leave and UI programs
- Direct income supports
- Stimulus payments
- Nutrition assistance

Ways for public health to take action on economic security

✓ Demand that local governments enact strong and permanent paid sick days legislation, that includes expanded leave for public health emergencies. Check out this sample policy language from A Better Balance. Governmental public health: make sure you understand how you can leverage your legal authority to make these demands.

✓ Demand that the Senate take up the HEROES Act by asking your Members of Congress to support this legislative package which would address gaps in the current federal bills by expanding access to emergency paid sick days and paid leave, among other important provisions to support workers

✓ Advocate for local and state emergency paid sick leave legislation that expands on federal bills so that it covers businesses with over 500 employees, employers with less than 50 employees, and misclassified gig workers. Check out this policy tracker from CLASP that compiles amended, expanded or newly passed paid sick laws in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, outlining the eligibility and details of each leave policy.

✓ Advocate to create a fund to support undocumented people who are not included in federal bills and to expand support for workers to access available state benefits. Check out these examples from California and from New York City.

✓ Advocate to create local, state, and federal green economic recovery plans and stimulus legislation based on the Green Stimulus policy proposals.

✓ Work with local officials to enact universal basic income programs for residents, to ensure they can stay housed, fed, and healthy even if they lose their jobs or get sick. Check out the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration.

AP/Seth Weinig photo. Attendees are seen at a rally for paid family leave in New York, March 2016.

Housing Security

Policies to ensure housing for all, protect renters and homeowners, and prevent debt accumulation during COVID.

A. Cancel payment requirements and suspend rate increases

- Cancel rent, mortgage, and utility payments for all through the duration of the public health and economic crisis for all renters, homeowners, and small businesses, and ensure a 3+ month recovery period.

- Ensure that utilities like water, gas, electric, phone, and internet are provided as a public good, especially during a public health crisis. Indefinitely suspend any proposed rate increases and utility service shut-offs or all households, regardless of ability to pay.

B. Enact a moratorium on evictions, foreclosures, and encampment sweeps

Ensure permanent refuge and enact moratoriums on evictions, foreclosures, and sweeps of encampments. All people must:

- Be able to stay in their homes
- Be provided adequate housing
- Be allowed to safely shelter-in-place whether they are housed or unhoused. Provide [comprehensive support](#) to those "sheltering-in-place" outside.
- Be able to maintain all of their belongings to ensure personal and public health and safety.

C. Turn vacant units into safe homes for those who need them

Turn vacant units (in hotels, dorms, offices, unoccupied homes, etc) into safe homes for people experiencing:
- Homelessness
- Intimate partner violence
- Being released from incarceration and detention
- Others needing healthy housing now

D. Invest in quality, stable, affordable housing for all

Invest in homes for all to protect and promote the public's health by:

- Converting publicly owned vacant land into community land trusts
- Removing housing from speculative markets and converting into permanently affordable, community-controlled housing
- Preventing displacement during development
- Establishing enforceable rent control, tenant protections, and proactive rental inspections

Ways for public health to take action on housing security

✓ [Sign onto the Public Health Awakened letter to Governors](#) calling for housing protections

✓ [Sign onto the Right to the City Alliance's Beyond Recovery Demands](#)

✓ [Sign onto COVID-19 National Housing Platform](#)

✓ Demand that local governments [leverage their legal authority](#) to enact strong anti-displacement measures and prevent utility shut-offs for public health protection. [See this example linking housing instability to health impacts during the coronavirus](#) or these [model ordinances](#) for rent control and eviction moratoriums at local and state levels.

✓ Advocate for protections for renters, rent control, and eviction moratorium ordinances. [Start by checking this state housing policy scorecard](#). You can also [check out this eviction moratorium ordinance template.](#)

✓ Coordinate with local organizers in your city, county, or state to add your public health voice and see if adapting the above demands into a letter to decision-makers would support their existing work. [Check out an example of demands from the CA National Lawyers Guild](#), and letters from health workers in [New York](#) and [San Francisco](#).

✓ Help people facing housing instability [connect with local organizations](#) and work with your local health officer to expand access to shelter by issuing hotel vouchers and make use of vacant property to protect public health and ensure homes for all.

Photo by Brooke Anderson Photography of a car rally in April 2020 in San Francisco, CA.

Criminal Legal System

Policies to release people, protect those incarcerated, and limit new incarcerations.

A. Stop incarcerating people

Stop incarcerating people, including by ending:

- The application of money bail
- Revocations of parole or probation
- ICE enforcement actions and detention
- Sweeps of unhoused people
- Criminalization of sex work

B. Decarcerate jails, prisons, and detention centers

Decarcerate our jails, prisons, and detention centers, starting with those who are most directly vulnerable to health harms, including:

- Older adults
- Pregnant people
- People with disabilities and chronic illness
- Those who are primary caregivers for loved ones

C. Protect incarcerated people

Meet the immediate needs of people who are still incarcerated by:

- Ensuring proper access to hygiene materials and masks in jails, prisons, and detention centers
- Offering universal testing to those incarcerated in jails, prisons, and detention centers
- Ensuring that those who are incarcerated and their loved ones no longer have to pay fees for phone calls
- Ensuring that those who are incarcerated no longer have to pay copays for medical visits

D. Divest from policing and punishment and invest in health-affirming supports

As we divest from jails, prisons, detention centers, and policing, ensure those resources are reinvested in health-affirming supports, such as:

- Robust health care
- Affordable housing
- Living wages
- Quality public education
- Public transportation

Ways for public health to take action on criminal legal system policies

✓ Coordinate with local organizers in your city, county, or state and see if adapting the above demands into a letter would support their existing work. Check out these examples from Alameda County, CA and from Washington State.

✓ Governmental public health agencies: get clear on your statutory authority to support decarceration and act on it. Check out this example from San Francisco Jail Health Services.

✓ Adapt the recommendations in this letter from faculty at the University of Washington to support and demand the safety of those protesting against police violence, including opposing the use of tear gas and respiratory irritants, advocating against the arrest and confinement of protesters, and distributing masks and hand sanitizer at protests.

✓ Support campaigns for immigrant liberation. Check out this toolkit for taking action.

✓ Encourage decarceration and reject the use of policing via checkpoints, fines, or jail time for violating shelter-in-place or stay-at-home orders in your local contexts. Check out these toolkits from our Health Instead of Punishment team, in collaboration with Community Justice Exchange and the End Police Violence Collective, to learn more about why policing and punishment will not protect public health.

✓ Ensure that COVID-19 cases and deaths inside carceral facilities are counted, and not excluded, in all public health data collection and reporting within the jurisdiction where the people were held.

✓ Read our blog post with links to public health research and more details about these actions.

Public health practitioners rally at the American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting in 2019.

Healthcare Access

Policies to ensure everyone has access to testing, treatment, a place for care, and protective equipment.

A. Expand testing and treatment and eliminate disparities in access

- Expand health care coverage through Medicaid and the exchanges and protect coverage for those with employer-based plans. Eliminate barriers to health screenings and treatment in Medicaid for undocumented people.

- Significantly expand testing and treatment to be accessible to all, including the uninsured and underinsured, poor communities and communities of color with limited healthcare access, and all immigrants.

- Ensure that any rationing of care decisions do not deny equal access to care for poor people, people of color, and people with disabilities and chronic conditions, and ensure that any criteria do not replicate past and ongoing discrimination.

- Ensure abortion care is protected in every state as essential healthcare, and oppose any new restrictions being placed on abortions.

- Ensure access to interpretation services, so that limited English proficiency speakers and people with disabilities are able to understand what is happening and communicate with loved ones.

B. Protect essential workers

- Purchase and disburse personal protective equipment to all those who contribute to patient care and who provide other essential services (i.e., front-line workers), including by using the Defense Production Act.

- Provide those working in essential services with hazard pay.

C. Track COVID-19 data by race/ethnicity, income, and other demographics currently not collected

Require hospital and health department reporting of COVID-19 cases and deaths by:
- Race/ethnicity
- Income
- Geography
- Occupation
- Other relevant demographics that are currently not reported

Ways for public health to take action on healthcare access

✓ Amplify demands of frontline healthcare and other essential workers for provision of PPE. See the National Nurses United updates as an example.

✓ Sign on to these Community-Based Workforce Principles and help agencies adopt the principles as they expand their contact tracing workforce to ensure that response efforts are appropriately embedded in disproportionately impacted and vulnerable communities.

✓ Advocate to state authorities to expand coverage and eliminate barriers to care. Start by checking this healthcare policy expansion tracker for your state to assess gaps.

✓ Pursue the release of race/ethnicity and demographic data. See examples from New York City, Santa Clara, CA, and Cook County, IL health departments.

✓ Actively counter racism and stereotyping through public health messaging, see examples from Colorado and the Berkeley Media Studies Group.

✓ Exercise health department authority by issuing statements to hospitals outlining abortion care as an essential service. See this Massachusetts Department of Public Health memo as an example. Learn more about local and state health department abortion-related work.

✓ Learn more about the COVID-19 Health Justice Advisory Committee Statement from the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

Know of examples?

Send us concrete examples of organizations, public agencies, and/or elected officials moving these policies forward at the local, state, or federal level.

Email us examples: covid19@humanimpact.org

Need support?

The Human Impact Partners team is available to support your organization in centering health equity as part of the coronavirus response and recovery work that lies ahead.

Email us to set up a time to talk: info@humanimpact.org.

Ready to act?

Join Public Health Awakened, our national network of public health workers organizing and taking action around these policy demands and others during this pandemic and beyond.