Health Equity Now
A Federal Policy Platform to Advance Public Health
Introduction

The early days of the Biden-Harris administration hold tremendous power to turn the tide towards justice and health. We need bold, immediate, and systems-focused action to address the acute and long-standing health crises impacting our communities, including severe economic inequality, housing insecurity, systems of state violence, and the gutting of public health infrastructure. To move towards collective health, this administration must swiftly and directly heed the demands of communities and organizers most directly impacted by systemic racism and inequity.

Because of systemic racism, it is people of color — especially Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities — who are disproportionately harmed by these intersecting crises, all of which have been further exacerbated by COVID-19 and the global climate crisis. These same communities are also leading the work of naming and building transformative solutions.

Public health officials, institutions, and practitioners can hold the Biden-Harris administration accountable to its commitments to center racial justice and health equity, and push further for visionary solutions to support collective health.

We need to end public health’s collaboration with, complicity in, and silence on systems of harm in both the private and public sectors. When we build public health power, it must be in partnership with organizers and movements — not with carceral, polluting, profit-driven, or other systems of harm.

Building on our Health Equity Policy Platform for COVID-19 Response and Recovery, we’ve compiled this cross-sector policy platform because cultivating health, well-being, and liberation requires immediate upstream action to redress past and ongoing harms. It requires following the leadership—and centering the demands of—those who have been most impacted by systemic violence and injustice. And we know that public health has a critical role to play. From writing OpEds in local and national publications, to leveraging our positional power to create policy change in support of peoples’ demands, we can build with communities and movements across the country to move towards collective health.

This policy platform consists of demands gathered from community groups, movements, organizers, and public health organizations across the country, that support health equity and justice.
Where did these demands come from?

This policy platform was created by consulting with and tracking the demands of the following grassroots and public health organizations and coalitions, their members, and allied groups working closely with impacted communities, including:

- Detention Watch Network
- Dignity Not Detention Coalition
- Family Values @ Work
- HealthBegins
- Jobs with Justice
- Movement 4 Black Lives
- National Association of County & City Health Officials
- National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
- National Domestic Workers Alliance
- National Lawyers Guild (SF Bay Area Chapter)
- Paid Leave for All campaign
- People’s Coalition for Safety and Freedom
- Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival
- Public Health Alliance of Southern California
- Right to the City Alliance
- Trust for America’s Health
- United for Respect
- United We Dream
Economic Security

Economic security is critical for the health of families and communities. All people need access to a stable income and robust social support programs to thrive. For collective health, we need economic policies that center equity and people over profits, and include all workers and families. In this moment, we can enact policies that address historical inequities, the current pandemic and economic crisis, and create permanent solutions that support working people, families, and our communities. Livable wages and other health-promoting economic policies create stable, equitable, and healthy communities.

A. Guarantee liveable wages for all people
   - Immediately increase the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour, and eliminate the subminimum wage for tipped workers, workers with disabilities, incarcerated workers, and youth workers. Enact legislation that guarantees a living wage for all in the next four years.
   - Expand and extend recurring direct cash stimulus payments and direct income support programs for all people and families for the duration of the pandemic and ongoing economic crisis.
   - Provide states with sufficient funding to bolster and reform unemployment insurance systems to respond to increased demand, and to protect those who lose their jobs or whose hours are reduced.
   - Ensure independent contractors, gig workers, formerly incarcerated people, and undocumented people are included in all federal legislation and economic recovery funding.

B. Provide paid leave for all workers
   - Enact legislation to guarantee all workers permanent, job-protected paid sick leave and 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave to attend to health and caregiving needs for themselves and their family members.
   - Expand and extend COVID-19 emergency paid leave so that all workers can take time off when they are sick, to care for family members, and during school closures.
   - Expand and extend hazard pay for all essential workers.

C. Invest in critical health-promoting economic policies
   - Guarantee collective bargaining rights — the right to form and join unions — for all workers.
   - Cancel all student debt.
   - Invest in federally-funded child care infrastructure to support children, families, and child care providers.
● Invest in long-term and home care infrastructure that supports workers and families, and that creates a path to citizenship for undocumented care workers.

● Expand and extend workplace health and safety standards during COVID-19 and beyond.

Ways to take action on economic security

✓ Ask your members of Congress to support the Raise the Wage Act to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour and eliminate the sub-minimum wage.

✓ Ask your members of Congress to support the FAMILY Act to guarantee workers up to 12 weeks of paid family leave to care for loved ones, themselves, or to welcome a new child into their families. Ask your organization to support the FAMILY Act by signing on to this letter to Congress.

Housing Justice

All people need access to stable, safe, dignified, and affordable housing for health and well-being. During the pandemic and beyond, housing must be protected and promoted as a human right, not a commodity. People must be able to shelter in place, and have protection from displacement to support health and well-being. Equitable housing policies need to acknowledge and address historic inequities and past harms, and housing and land must be controlled by local communities via democratic structures and processes. Through these short- and long-term solutions, just housing can support healthy, thriving, sustainable, and interconnected communities.

A. Cancel payments and suspend rate increases and shut-offs

- Cancel accumulated rent, mortgage, utility payments, late fees, and other resulting debt through the duration of the COVID-19 and economic crisis for all renters, homeowners, and small businesses, and ensure a 3+ month recovery period.

- Ensure that utilities — including water, gas, electric, phone, and internet — are provided as a public good, especially during a public health crisis.

- Indefinitely suspend any proposed utility rate increases and service shut-offs for all households, regardless of ability to pay.

B. Enact strong moratoria on evictions, foreclosures, and encampment sweeps, and support safe sheltering-in-place

- Enact, extend, and strengthen moratoria on evictions and foreclosures at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure all people are able to stay in their homes, including universal and automatic protections for renters and homeowners, prohibiting accrual of debt and fees, and more as outlined here.

- Prevent sweeps of encampments and provide comprehensive support to those sheltering-in-place outside.

- Turn vacant units (in hotels, dorms, offices, etc.) into safe homes for those who need them, including people experiencing houselessness, intimate partner violence, and those released from incarceration and detention.

- Ensure all people have access to safe and dignified housing and are able to maintain their belongings to ensure personal and public health and safety.

C. Invest in quality, stable, and affordable housing for all

- Support Indigenous-led “landback” campaigns to facilitate the rightful return of Indigenous land to Indigenous people.

- Establish and enforce policies for rent control, tenant protections, proactive rental-
inspections, tenant opportunity to purchase, and the prevention of displacement during development.

- Convert publicly owned vacant land into community land trusts (CLTs), and invest federal, state and local resources into programs for CLTs and other collective/cooperative housing models.

- Remove housing from speculative markets and convert into permanently affordable, community-controlled housing.

- Invest in expanding public housing units and improving existing public housing.

- Build homes and develop land in environmentally sustainable ways.

Ways to take action on housing justice

✓ [Sign onto this petition to Biden and Congressional leadership](#) anchored by a coalition of national grassroots housing organizations, calling for COVID-19 housing relief via moratoria and rent/mortgage/debt cancellation, economic recovery, and a Homes Guarantee.

✓ [Sign this petition to tell Biden and the CDC](#) to end evictions, stop utility shut offs, and cancel rent, mortgages, and debt.

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Photo by Brooke Anderson Photography, @movementphotographer. Community members in Oakland, CA rally alongside Moms 4 Housing to keep families housed and healthy amidst the ongoing evictions and COVID-19 crisis, September 2020.

HumanImpact.org/HealthEquityNow
February 2021
Community Safety

To build a society where all people are healthy and free, we must wield our collective resources to help, rather than to punish or hurt. Throughout a year characterized by both a deadly global pandemic and uprisings to defend Black Lives, there is a groundswell of support to defund the police and invest instead in resources and infrastructure that keep us healthy. We must enact policies that move us towards dismantling systems of policing, incarceration, and immigration enforcement. These systems all uphold anti-Blackness and hinder our collective ability to advance health equity. Together, we can and must create conditions that promote health and freedom for all.

A. Free people from jails, prisons, and immigrant detention centers
   - Release everyone currently detained in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody to the community with notice to family and appropriate service providers.
   - Prohibit local, state, tribal, territorial, and federal officials from transferring people to ICE upon their release from jails or prisons.
   - Grant clemency to incarcerated women and girls.

B. Defund the police
   - Divest from policing and invest in a new vision of public safety.
   - Defund Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and police.
   - Repeal the 1994 Crime Bill, which built the architecture for mass incarceration.

C. Invest in community-based safety
   - End money bail in favor of presumption of release and provide the pretrial support people need to live healthy lives.

Ways to take action on community safety

✓ Call your members of Congress and post on social media to support the BREATHE Act, which will divest from policing and invest in a new vision of public safety.

✓ Demand that the Biden-Harris administration take action in its first 100 days on immigrant rights including reinstating and expanding Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (ACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), including all immigrants in COVID-19 response and recovery, releasing all people from ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CPB) detention camps, and defunding ICE, CBP, and police.
Public Health Infrastructure

Public health infrastructure must have the capacity, funding, mandates, and power to analyze and address the root causes of health and respond to the most pressing issues of our time, including racial justice, health equity, climate change, and government transformation. Because of historic disinvestments in the public health sector, this requires a massive infusion of funding and capacity at all levels of local and state governmental public health. Rebuilding our public health infrastructure will support a diverse and culturally competent public health workforce capable of enacting transformative systems change.

We must build a robust and resilient public health system that is capable of dismantling systems of oppression and advantage, and that uplifts the power of communities most directly impacted by health inequities to lead decision-making, via analyzing root causes of health issues, responding to current challenges, facilitating relationships across government sectors, and building community power through meaningful collaboration between government and community organizers.

A. Significantly invest in transformative public health infrastructure

- Create a mandatory multi-billion dollar per year "Public Health Infrastructure Fund" to support foundational public health capabilities at the state, local, territorial, and tribal levels. Funding should allow health departments flexible use of their federal funds so they can direct time and resources where they are needed most — particularly during public health emergencies.

- Develop a Federal Public Health Improvement Plan that provides a comprehensive national roadmap for rebuilding our public health infrastructure, identifies funding and workforce needs, and provides recommendations for action through deep engagement with communities most impacted by inequities.

- Fund establishment of Offices of Health Equity at each state health department, with robust staffing, training, tools, and enabling legislation.

- Provide capacity building and technical assistance to all state and local health departments in 21st century public health competencies, practices, and tools needed to eliminate health inequities through policy and systems change, including Health in All Policies, climate change, racial equity, and partnerships with community organizations.

- Mandate that all state and local health agencies assess and eliminate institutional racism in their policies, programs, and operations, and create funding to strengthen the capacity of anti-racist public health practice.
B. Leverage funding to conduct comprehensive and meaningful community engagement, organizing, and planning

- Create dedicated funding to resource community-based health coalitions and community organizer partnerships with health departments.

- Expand and facilitate the development of innovative community investment models, such as accountable communities for health, wellness funds, anchor institutions, and Medicaid demonstration waivers that incentivize and encourage partnerships between public health, health care, and community partners to address health equity together.

C. Expand and strengthen the public health workforce

- Create a comprehensive public health workforce development plan that engages high schools, community colleges, schools of public health, prison reentry programs, social services, and labor and workforce development organizations in the recruitment, training, and maintenance of the public health workforce.

- Enact and fund a public health loan repayment program to aid in recruitment and retention for local and state health departments; for example, following the outline of the Strengthening the Public Health Workforce Act.

- Fund community health workers and promotoras to support COVID-19 contact tracing, testing, and vaccination, in alignment with the Community-Based Workforce Principles. Ensure training and promotion pathways to careers in public health, including health prevention and promotion, and community engagement and organizing. Hire from communities most impacted by inequities.

D. Integrate health equity, racial justice, and climate justice in decision-making processes

- Utilize public health expertise to ensure strong implementation of executive orders that all Federal regulations assess and mitigate health, racial and social justice, and climate change impacts.

- Encourage adoption of a Health and Equity in All Policies approach across federal agencies to ensure that health, climate, and racial justice considerations are central in policy and program development, and in budget allocation decisions outside of the traditional health sector, and to foster more effective cross-sectoral collaborations to improve population health.

- Use health equity metrics, such as the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index, the Opportunity Index, and the California Healthy Places Index to ensure equity in COVID-19 response, resource allocation, program planning, service delivery, and to guide and incentivize COVID-19 testing and re-opening, and prioritize vaccination.
Ways to take action on public health infrastructure

✓ Call your members of Congress and ask them to include $4.5 billion in long-term, additional annual funding for CDC, state, local, tribal and territorial core public health infrastructure to modernize the nation's public health system, rebuild the workforce, and promote healthier communities in the current stimulus bill.

✓ Call your members of Congress and ask them to support the Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2021 which will create a social determinants of health program at the CDC. Ask your organization to support by signing on to endorse the bill.

✓ Demand Congress pass the Anti-Racism in Public Health Act to create a "National Center for Anti-Racism" at the CDC that enables our public health system to fight racism as a public health crisis, develop the research base and knowledge in the science and practice of anti-racism, and create a Law Enforcement Violence Prevention Program.

Photo by Ryan Sin, @ryansincamera. Health workers in Oakland, CA demanding divestments from policing and systems of violence, investment in public health and health care services, 2020.
Ways for Public Health to Take Action

Below are some of the ways that individual public health practitioners and public health institutions and organizations can take short- and long-term action on these demands at local, state, and federal levels.

Take action using Public Health Awakened's Action Database

- [Check out, share, and act on Public Health Awakened's list of urgent and up-to-date actions](#) to advance bold and systems-focused policies for collective health.

Use your public health expertise to speak out

- [Write an op-ed](#), letter to the editor, or blog post using your public health expertise and making the connections between these critical issues and health.

- [Call or email](#) your members of Congress or local elected officials to express your support for proposed policies that advance social and racial justice and health equity.

Educate your public health community

- Share this platform and others with your public health colleagues.

- Find opportunities in your public health communities (your workplace, listservs, social media, etc.) to share health equity policy demands, resources, and actions.

Take action locally

- Advocate to pass strong local and state policies on these issues while also pushing for them at a federal level.

- [Ensure that local policies](#) both address short-term needs during the pandemic, and create long-term, sustainable, and equitable solutions.

- Understand how governmental public health can [leverage its legal authority](#) to make demands regarding COVID-19 response and recovery.

- [Support budget campaigns](#) to invest in community health and divest from systems of harm.

Find your people and get involved

- [Join Public Health Awakened](#), our national network of public health professionals organizing for health, equity, and justice.

- [Connect with local organizations](#) working on the issues you care most about — go to a meeting, get on the email list, connect with a member, or show up at an action.
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: sari@humanimpact.org

Need support?
The Human Impact Partners team is available to support your organization in centering health equity.
Email us to set up a time to talk: info@humanimpact.org.

Ready to act?
Take action using Public Health Awakened’s Action Database to put pressure on this administration to advance health equity, and join Public Health Awakened to build public health power for social justice.
Photo by Ryan Sin, @ryansincamera. Families and communities in Oakland, CA gather to call for racial justice and health equity, June 2020.