

United States Senate

February 25, 2021

Mr. Jeffery Zients
White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Zients,

For over a year, COVID-19 has wreaked havoc both domestically and internationally. However, the approval of vaccines provides an opportunity for our nation to get one step closer to defeating this devastating disease. Through a robust vaccine initiative, our schools, economy and lives can return to some semblance of normal. While a lack of planning and leadership by the previous Administration resulted in a slow and chaotic vaccine rollout, we are encouraged by this Administration's efforts to scale up vaccinations across the country. President Joe Biden's initial actions of expanding vaccine availability, assisting states in vaccination efforts, and committing to ensuring all Americans who want a vaccine can have one by the summer, are mitigating further COVID-19 devastation. Additionally, the Administration must build on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) vaccine data dashboard, as it has done for other COVID-19 metrics. In particular, it is critical that our federal database tracks nationwide distributions of vaccines to states, territories, and tribes, and collects robust demographic information to ensure at-risk communities are being vaccinated appropriately.

While almost all states are reporting vaccination data to the CDC, only 32 states include demographic data specifying race and ethnicity.¹ However, there are still gaps in reported data because race and ethnicity data was missing for nearly half of vaccine recipients in the early days of vaccine distribution.² Black, Hispanic, and Native American communities have been disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet, they are being vaccinated at significantly lower rates.³ There have also been reports of inaccurate and inconsistent data collection by states, leading to logistical lapses that highlight the need for increasing data entry staff.⁴

According to the GAO report on *Critical Vaccine Distribution, Supply Chain, Program Integrity, and Other Challenges Require Focused Federal Attention*, there is currently no federal process or system to ensure the collection of standardized COVID-19 data,⁵ resulting in reporting of data that is often incomplete and unreliable. The lack of a uniform system across the country makes it difficult to provide a clear picture of vaccine distribution and administration. Comprehensive

¹ <https://www.nashp.org/how-states-report-covid-19-data-by-race-and-ethnicity/>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/02/01/covid-vaccine-race-ethnicity-data/>

³ <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/01/cdc-coronavirus-vaccine-disparities-464452>

⁴ <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/states/new-jersey/story/2021/02/02/states-complain-feds-data-system-is-holding-up-vaccination-effort-1361609>

⁵ <https://www.gao.gov/reports/GAO-21-265/>

vaccine data is crucial for helping public health officials evaluate how to efficiently and equitably distribute COVID-19 vaccines across the United States. It is also a crucial tool to aid public health officials in identifying the barriers minority communities face in receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and determine where vaccine hesitancy may persist.

We request that the national COVID-19 vaccine dashboard be updated in order to improve transparency and communication in vaccine distribution and administration across the country. It is essential to our public health response efforts that the CDC COVID-19 vaccination dashboard display the most up-to-date information regarding the number of individuals that have received the COVID-19 vaccination by various demographics and by state of residence.

At a minimum, we believe the dashboard should include:

- Federal distributions of vaccines to states, territories, and tribes;
- information on the number of vaccine doses distributed and administered;
- new data points for novel vaccine administration, such as a single-shot dose;
- demographic information such as race/ethnicity and age/sex; and
- where states are sending and dispersing vaccines.

By updating our national dashboard to include more demographic data, we can better target and invest federal funding in those communities where vaccination rates lag, and ensure vaccines are equitably distributed and administered across the country. We urge you to take the steps necessary to develop and implement this valuable tool. We look forward to your response and thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert Menendez
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Ben Ray Luján
Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

/s/ Raphael Warnock
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

/s/ Alex Padilla
Alex Padilla
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

CC: Norris Cochran
Acting Secretary
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Rochelle Walensky
Director
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention