NATIONAL PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS STRATEGY
Statement of Principles

To anticipate and prepare for future pandemics, the United States needs to develop an effective National Pandemic Preparedness Strategy (NPPS) focused not only on the infectious pathogen, but also resulting, collateral health care challenges we can anticipate. National health emergencies threaten everyone, but pose a particularly acute danger to those with chronic and underlying conditions and those facing barriers to accessing care and other health disparities.

To preserve life and health for all during a pandemic, an effective National Pandemic Preparedness Strategy must:

Preserve & Enhance Access to Care	Enhance Infrastructure & Capacity	Innovate on Emerging Threats & Disparate Impact
Address the needs of front-line health care workers, including addressing workforce shortages in public health, primary care, infectious disease, and eldercare.	Invest in public health infrastructure at national, state, and local levels to enhance and sustain timely monitoring, reporting, and knowledge sharing on existing and emerging infectious disease threats.	Address the current and growing crisis of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), the need for innovation in the development of new antimicrobial treatments and rapid diagnostics, the sustained commitments required to make an impact, and the threats posed by the erosion of vaccine confidence in America.
Support a health care infrastructure that ensures continuity of access to high-quality preventive, primary, and secondary medical care for all.	Encourage public and private collaboration in creating monitoring and early warning systems, sharing key learnings and best practices, and developing solutions to prevent and manage infectious disease threats.	Anticipate and address the disproportionate impact of infectious disease outbreaks associated with health disparities and related social determinants of health.
Anticipate and address ongoing and increased demand for behavioral health care and access challenges associated with infectious disease outbreaks.	Anticipate and address communications messaging, vehicles, and audiences to empower stakeholders in planning and execution, including limiting misinformation.	Close the digital divide by supporting and enabling broadband access to telehealth services, remote learning, telework, and social connectivity.

BACKGROUND

An effective National Pandemic Preparedness Strategy (NPPS) must deal not only with the direct response to a novel pathogen, but also with collateral health care issues a pandemic can produce. It necessitates planning and implementation with a long-term focus on sustainability with success potentially defined by identifying, controlling, and addressing emerging threats to limit the human and economic toll of infectious disease outbreaks in the future.

The new NPPS must facilitate safe, ongoing, and uninterrupted access to health care for America's most vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how woefully unprepared we have been in this regard.

Consider that as of June 2020, 41 percent[1] of adults had avoided medical care due to COVID-19. For Black and Hispanic Americans, as well as those with underlying conditions, the prevalence of health care avoidance during the pandemic has been even greater. A successful national strategy should include provisions for ensuring vulnerable populations are successfully supported in the event of a pandemic, including access to insurance coverage, closing gaps in benefit designs, and assuring adequate provider access and reimbursement. Clear, consistent communications and information resources to this end are critical. We also must address growing health care workforce shortages, particularly in areas of public health, primary care, infectious disease, and eldercare.

We need to invest in broadband access to close the digital divide that limited access to telehealth services, remote learning, telework, and social connectivity during the pandemic. Other socioeconomic factors resulting in health inequities in health care coverage and access and a higher prevalence of chronic conditions have contributed to disproportionately higher number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths associated with COVID-19. The NPPS must anticipate and address these disparities to reduce the toll on vulnerable populations.

An effective NPPS must also address the behavioral health impacts associated with infectious disease outbreaks. COVID-19 has had tragic mental and behavioral health effects resulting from social isolation, anxiety and depression related to the health threat and economic fallout, and increased challenges in access to behavioral health care services. Overdose deaths exceeded 80,000[2] in 2020, reversing recent trends. Plans must factor in the social and emotional needs of the population, especially older adults and others living alone with chronic conditions and provide training and support for those caring for them, during and after recovery from the pandemic.

The NPPS must strengthen our public health infrastructure by reinforcing the public health workforce. We must invest in innovative data collection, monitoring, and tracking technology — like the CDC's National Healthcare Safety Network[3]. Doing so will help prevent the spread of future outbreaks and facilitate the equitable procurement and distribution of scarce resources to the hardest-hit communities. Importantly, though, tracking systems must avoid placing an additional administrative burden on hospitals and health care facilities. Such systems should work cohesively to facilitate health care providers and systems sharing real-time learnings to improve outcomes.

A national communications plan to disseminate credible information about ongoing and emerging public health threats is essential to an effective NPPS. According to a study published in the journal Progress in Disaster Science[4], COVID-19 misinformation on social media had a deleterious impact on how individuals personally responded to pandemic conditions. A national communications strategy to disseminate credible, consistent, and actionable information and to counter misinformation efforts would facilitate an effective U.S. response, decrease risks of morbidity and mortality, and empower the public to take steps needed to protect themselves, their families, and their communities.

The development and implementation of a National Pandemic Preparedness Strategy is a policy imperative. We stand ready to support and encourage the development of an NPPS embracing the principles described above to help us better prepare with an effective NPPS.

1. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6936a4.htm
2. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm
3. https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/index.html
4. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590061720300569