

YMCA of the USA President and CEO Joins Black CEOs in Effort to Champion Equity for the Black Community in Accessing COVID-19 Vaccines

Black executives of YMCA of the USA, AARP, ADA, APA, ICMA, and NLC join forces to equip Black Americans with accurate information about COVID-19 vaccination efforts

WASHINGTON, D.C. – YMCA of the USA joined five of the nation’s largest non-governmental, non-profit membership organizations today to announce the launch of a vaccine equity and education effort. The work aims to help Black Americans make informed decisions about vaccination by providing them with accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccines from medical professionals and health officials and combating misinformation about the vaccines. All six organizations are also committed to raising awareness and the importance of equitable access to the vaccine for Black communities.

Led by a diverse group of Black CEOs, this effort gathers resources from respected and trusted community and business leaders, health professionals and public officials to ensure that accurate and transparent information about the COVID-19 vaccine is available to Black Americans. Our country’s long history of unethical medical practices in the Black community has increased distrust around medical science and may contribute to hesitancy among Black Americans to take the vaccine. This initiative seeks to ensure Black Americans can get answers to their questions so they can make informed decisions about protecting themselves, their families and their communities.

“Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the Y has worked tirelessly to meet the most pressing needs of the 10,000 communities we serve across the country,” YMCA of the USA President and CEO Kevin Washington said. “Now that the COVID-19 vaccines are beginning to reach the broader population, the Y is committed to doing our part to ensure equitable access to accurate information about the vaccines and to the vaccines themselves, especially in Black and Brown communities, which have been disproportionately affected by the health and economic impacts of the virus. I am excited to partner with these esteemed colleagues and their organizations to increase awareness about the critical importance of equity in vaccine education and distribution.”

COVID-19 has revealed and exacerbated long-standing racial disparities in the nation’s health system. The initial vaccine outreach and distribution has not reflected equity as a priority, the CEOs said. Available data from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Opens a new window**, shows that only 5 percent of the limited supplies of vaccines so far have gone to Black Americans. And nearly half of vaccination records are missing race and ethnicity data, according to the CDC, which further hampers abilities to address disparities that may widen as demand grows. Additionally, a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that approximately one-third of Black Americans are reluctant to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

AARP, the American Diabetes Association (ADA), the American Psychological Association (APA), the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the National League of Cities (NLC), and YMCA of the USA are joining forces on this effort. Together, the six organizations have a combined reach of more than 60 million Americans. The effort will:

- Marshal the resources of all participating organizations to equip Black Americans with accurate information from medical professionals, health officials and other trusted sources and to combat misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines;

- Engage community leaders and organizations of all backgrounds at the local, state and national levels to amplify the importance of reaching Black Americans about COVID-19 vaccines and providing equitable access; and
- Provide resources to reach and engage the Black community about the COVID-19 vaccine more effectively.

*“The pandemic’s toll on older Black, Indigenous, and people of color is staggering and must be addressed urgently to avoid even greater loss of life. Americans age 50 and older represent nearly 95% of COVID-19 deaths, and Black and Hispanic nursing home residents have died at three times the rate of other residents, making up a substantial number of these deaths,” said **AARP CEO Jo Ann Jenkins Opens a new window**. “It’s a national disgrace, but through information, advocacy, and outreach, our nation can and must do better. That’s why AARP is committed to providing trusted information about vaccines, and advocating nationwide for officials to improve information and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines now.”*

*“This country’s health inequities have been heightened by this pandemic for millions of Black and underserved communities, especially those Americans living with diabetes, and once again we see more alarming numbers coming out of the vaccine distribution where only 5% of the limited supply of vaccine has gone to Black Americans,” said **Tracey D. Brown, CEO of the American Diabetes Association Opens a new window**. “If we don’t make these communities a priority now then we will continue to see mounting devastation with severe complications and deaths from this virus. The ADA has made it a goal to address health inequities like these through our Health Equity Now platform and we will continue to advocate and drive change. Inaction is no longer an option; we must do better for all citizens.”*

*“Once COVID-19 vaccines were developed, the country’s attention turned immediately to the logistics of dissemination. These plans, however, have not reflected enough of what we know about human behavior to encourage consistently strong vaccine uptake, particularly for communities that have historically been wary of our health care system,” said **Arthur C. Evans, PhD, APA chief executive officer Opens a new window**. “We know from research that populations differ in their understanding of what vaccines do and their effectiveness. Additionally, for Black Americans, there is research documenting the widespread discrimination they face in interactions with our health care system, which further influences this population’s beliefs about vaccines. As a result, people are likely to form biased perceptions and beliefs about negative outcomes – like the severity of the vaccine’s side-effects – affecting them at higher rates relative to other populations. We must better understand people’s perceptions of the vaccine and then deliver evidence-based information through trusted community sources in order to enable people to make informed decisions about the vaccine.”*

*“All of us, especially our local leaders, have the power to stop the spread of disinformation and misinformation and educate our communities about the COVID-19 vaccine. ICMA will continue to support our members and all local leaders by providing the resources to combat this virus and support equitable distribution of the vaccine,” **ICMA Executive Director Marc Ott Opens a new window said**. “Vaccination is an opportunity for us to prevent further health and financial hardship in communities of color. We encourage Black Americans and people of color to utilize these resources to learn more about the safety of the vaccine.”*

*“The COVID-19 pandemic is once again exposing the long-standing health and economic disparities that have existed since the founding of our country. Black Americans are dying at nearly three times the rate of White Americans, and Black-owned businesses have closed at more than twice the rate of non-minority firms since the start of the pandemic,” **NLC CEO and Executive Director Clarence E. Anthony Opens a new window said**. “As leaders of some of the largest member organizations in the United States, and also as Black Americans, we understand the critical importance of providing Black communities with the facts*

and data to help build confidence in the science behind COVID-19 vaccines. I am proud to work alongside my outstanding colleagues to help uplift the Black community during this critical time for the future of our nation.”

For additional information and resources on COVID-19 response and vaccination facts from each organization, visit [YMCA of the USA](#) and the following web pages:

- **AARP: [Coronavirus Latest News and Guidance](#) Opens a new window**
- **ADA: [Diabetes and Coronavirus](#) Opens a new window**
- **APA: [COVID-19 Bias, Discrimination, and Equity Resources](#) Opens a new window**
- **ICMA: [Coronavirus Crisis Response: Resources for Your Community](#) Opens a new window**
- **NLC: [COVID-19 Pandemic Response](#) Opens a new window**

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