

# **HHS National COVID-19 Testing Implementation Forum (NTIF)**

## **Meeting #3**

### **Topic: Engaging Minority and Underserved Communities**

**Thursday, September 3, 2020, 2-3:30 p.m. EDT**

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health hosted the third meeting of the National COVID-19 Testing Implementation Forum (NTIF). These meetings are being held to gather individual input from a wide range of stakeholders. This meeting focused on how to engage minority and underserved communities.

#### **Action Items**

- The Assistant Secretary for Health welcomed input on what HHS can do better to encourage testing in more vulnerable communities.
- Further discussion among forum participants is encouraged. Participants are encouraged to join the National COVID-19 Resiliency Network (NCRN).
- The Rockefeller Foundation will share a handbook it has prepared on best practices in public health communication with OMH and OASH.
- Additional information and comments may be sent to [ntif@hhs.gov](mailto:ntif@hhs.gov).

#### **PRESENTATIONS FROM FEDERAL PARTICIPANTS**

A representative of the HHS Office of Minority Health (OMH) presented on COVID-19 and minority populations, showing that rates of COVID-19 illness, and especially severe illness, are disproportionately high among Blacks and Hispanics and among American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN). It was noted that demographic data is limited, and others agreed that such data collection is an area that needs improvement. OMH also presented on their efforts to address barriers to testing among vulnerable minority groups, including a national network of trusted community organizations to connect at-risk individuals to testing and other services, and private-public testing partnerships.

An administrator from the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC) described community health center programs that provide a wide array of services to underserved communities. These centers provide both primary care services and COVID-19 testing.

The Assistant Secretary for Health noted that the federal government has supported retail test sites, and two-thirds of these retail sites are in what are considered vulnerable communities.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The discussion addressed the changing demographics of testing, the importance of trust when it comes to advocating for tests and vaccines, and offers for enhanced community testing services.

#### **THE NATIONAL COVID-19 RESILIENCY NETWORK**

Morehouse College presented on its NCRN, stating that the network was enacted with the goal of mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable minority populations. NCRN is developing a technology platform that will engage directly with patients, collect data, and serve as a resource hub for community partners. NCRN is being built on partnerships with community members. NCRN will focus on research, community engagement, communication and dissemination.

## DISCUSSION

Morehouse encouraged the organizations represented on this call to join NCRN by contacting Morehouse or the leadership of OMH, and the Rockefeller Foundation recommended a handbook of best practices for public health communication as a resource.

## REACHING MINORITY COMMUNITIES

A representative from the National Medical Association (NMA), the organization of African American physicians, described the NMA's strong advocacy efforts and the growing network it has engaged to improve COVID-19 equity. The organization shared its outreach actions including webinars, biweekly calls with pastors, and public appearances, for example on the radio.

A representative of the National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) described the organization's efforts to improve testing access and COVID-19 preparedness in Hispanic communities including a congressional briefing on COVID-19 with the Surgeon General and monthly virtual summits and frequent policy forums.

## DISCUSSION

Discussion included the importance of targeted media campaigns and social media outreach, and the institution of a program of surge testing in places where there have been significant outbreaks.