

Issue Brief

COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution and Implementation in States and Territories

February 2021

Background

The COVID-19 national vaccination campaign is a historic undertaking aimed at providing safe and effective vaccines to prevent COVID-19 infections in all residents of the United States. Every jurisdiction submitted a comprehensive plan for a phased rollout of the vaccine. Tens of thousands of private providers were enrolled and trained on vaccine administration and storage. A national tracking system was built to connect state immunization information systems. More than 30 million doses have been administered in the first seven weeks of the vaccine campaign. States and jurisdictions continue to improve vaccine distribution efficiency, standing up large-scale vaccination clinics while distributing to private providers and pharmacies. Furthermore, they are engaging with communities to build trust and confidence in vaccines as they look to improve equity in vaccine distribution. We remain encouraged by announcements of increased vaccine allocations and look forward to expanding vaccine availability to additional priority populations in more community-based settings.

ASTHO is grateful for the emergency supplemental appropriations passed in December 2020 to support state and territorial implementation of jurisdictional plans to allocate, distribute, and administer unprecedented amounts of vaccine. Funds have been used to update existing data systems and implement new ones, enroll providers to administer vaccines, develop public information and education campaigns, and coordinate vaccine distribution with partners across the public health and healthcare sectors (e.g., pharmacies, hospitals, physician offices, local health departments) – all while continuing to manage the daily impact of COVID-19. Previously approved appropriations are a critical down payment to support the initial stages of distribution. On Jan. 27, 2021, ASTHO and the Association of Immunization Managers (AIM) communicated to Congress support for President Biden’s proposal for an additional \$20 billion for vaccine distribution activities, with at least \$6 billion specifically allocated to state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments in the next COVID-19 supplemental funding package. Funds are needed to continue essential work supporting additional vaccine administration sites, improve communication, support outreach and education, upgrade existing data reporting systems, and hire additional staff. Because there are many uncertainties about the future course of the pandemic, including potential virus variations and the possible need for booster shots, we advocate that ongoing, predictable, and sustained funding for public health vaccine distribution infrastructure is equally imperative as the current urgent need.

Issues and Considerations

- Congress approved \$4.5 billion in federal funding to state and local agencies for COVID-19 vaccine distribution and administration. [Three billion](#) of this funding was allocated to states in January of 2021, a month into the vaccine distribution effort.
- Coordination and communication between federal, state, and local health agencies have been challenging. Lack of transparency and a national vision impeded the collaborative development and execution of consistent vaccine implementation plans across states, territories, and large

cities. Questions remain concerning sustained funding, IT system implementation, interoperability of interstate data exchange, and predictability of vaccine supply and distribution.

- The federal government has engaged private sector pharmacy providers, including chain pharmacies, to administer vaccines with minimal state or local governmental public health pre-decisional involvement. There has been limited coordinated effort to harmonize plans between public and private sectors, and a clear understanding of the role of the private sector in the vaccine effort is still lacking.
- There is a lack of coordinated communication to promote confidence in the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccine refusal and hesitancy and public mistrust of vaccines are compounded by a climate that is critical of state efforts to prevent and control COVID-19.

Solutions and Ideas for Improvement

- Form a governmental public health advisory group including members of ASTHO, AIM, and other state and local officials to inform federal leadership on issues from the state or local perspective and to ensure coordinated implementation of a national vaccination program.
- Support \$20 billion in additional emergency supplemental funding dedicated to a national vaccination program, with **at least \$6 billion specifically allocated to state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments.**
- Develop a federally coordinated, locally customizable communications strategy following CDC's Vaccinate with Confidence framework. Utilize a robust scientific evidence base and communications strategies devoid of political interference to promote confidence in vaccination among the American people. Highlight increasing data on vaccine safety and extraordinarily low incidence of serious adverse events.
- Develop a communications and community partnership strategy to address vaccine hesitancy among communities of color and to assure equitable administration and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine across the United States, including rural, frontier, and highly urbanized areas.
- Explore incentives for timely compliance with required reporting on race and ethnicity.
- Identify options to increase vaccine production to improve the predictability of vaccine supply.

Further Resources

- [What You Need to Know About the COVID-19 Vaccine](#)
- [Leading Health Organizations Unite to Implement National COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#)
- [Nation's Health Officials Call for Greater Collaboration and Communication with Federal Government](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccination Program Planning: A Checklist for State and Territorial Health Officials](#)
- [Summary and Analysis: ASTHO Survey of State Health Agency Staff on H1N1 Response Policy and Legal Issues](#)
- [ASTHO and the Association of Immunization Managers Immunization Campaign Policy Principles](#)
- [ASTHO Commentary on Equitable Vaccine Allocation](#)

Contact

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