New York Community Health Advocates Form the COVID-19 Working Group (CWG-NY) to Address Disparities and Protect Vulnerable Communities

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Several prominent organizations with decades of experience in HIV/AIDS and infectious disease advocacy have pooled their resources to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable and marginalized communities in New York. The Covid-19 Working Group – New York (CWG-NY) is a coalition of doctors, healthcare professionals, scientists, community workers, activists, and epidemiologists committed to a rapid and community-oriented response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Since March 4th of this year, Treatment Action Group, PrEP4All, Housing Works, the National Black Leadership Commission on Health, Callen Lorde, and the Latino Commission on AIDS—along with several other community organizations and health advocates—have worked diligently and around the clock to identify key policy concerns for populations that are particularly vulnerable to complications from COVID-19 and the socioeconomic impact of physical distancing and other containment and mitigation strategies.

The CWG-NY will continue to work closely to advocate for policies and protocols that address unique barriers to health care services, safe isolation spaces, and important income and safety net services for marginalized New Yorkers including homeless individuals, incarcerated populations, and those living with chronic health conditions. The group is also focused on diagnostics, treatment, prevention and vaccine pipelines for COVID-19, with members bringing their unique expertise on community-led research advocacy for other infectious diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis C, and tuberculosis.

“It is time to put the public back in public health. We demand that vulnerable populations and experienced community health advocates have a seat at the table to bring our expertise on infectious disease epidemiology and research and to make critical decisions about equitable access to testing, safe isolation spaces, and medical care.” James Krellenstein, Co-Founder of the PrEP4All Collaboration
“Many of the challenges we are seeing with conducting rigorous, ethical research and appropriately communicating study findings to vulnerable communities and the broader public are the same that we saw in the early years of HIV/AIDS research. As we race toward the development of essential new tools to address COVID-19, we must be committed to high quality science, peer reviewed literature, and evidence-based communications.” Mark Harrington, Executive Director, Treatment Action Group

“It is not surprising that African Americans are placed at greater risks for contracting and dying from the coronavirus given the health disparities that have existed for years. While mitigation efforts including testing, supplies, equipment and resources must be prioritized in these hardest hit communities, this crisis reaffirms the urgent need to create a more equitable health care system for eliminating disparities and achieving health equity.” C. Virginia Fields, President and CEO, National Black Leadership Commission on Health, Inc.

“Community leadership is essential in order to successfully address any public health threat and threat to our healthcare infrastructure. Many of us have decades of experience in working on infectious diseases like HIV, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis. We know too well that diseases like these tend to expose our greatest weaknesses as a society and do the greatest harm to those who have slipped through the cracks.” Kimberleigh J. Smith, Senior Director for Community Health Planning and Policy at Callen-Lorde Community Health Center

“The disjointed, uncoordinated, and lethargic response to the needs of homeless and incarcerated populations during the COVID-19 outbreak has been absolutely unacceptable. Representatives from the most disenfranchised New York populations must be at the table as critical decisions on next steps to address the pandemic among communities that do not have the ability to physically distance and are particularly impacted by closures of public facilities and services.” Charles King, CEO of Housing Works

“Marginalized communities—including immigrants, migrant and undocumented individuals—face unique challenges to accessing care, engaging in physical distancing, accessing COVID-19 testing, contact tracing and protection for those in the service industries to mitigate exposure to COVID-19. Community based providers are essential in our response to this current public health crisis. We need to ensure that we address any type of stigma and discrimination in our communities.” Guillermo Chacon, President of the Latino Commission on AIDS and Founder of Hispanic Health Network

For more information on the CWG-NY, contact the group at CWGNYCommunications@googlegroups.org or visit https://www.covid-19workinggroupnyc.org/.