



RAUL RUIZ, M.D.
Member of Congress
36th District of California

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3605

Washington, D.C. Office:
2342 Rayburn House
Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: [202-225-5330](tel:202-225-5330)

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President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden:

I applaud your Administration's efforts to address the racial health disparities that have always plagued our health care system and have been exacerbated during this pandemic. Ensuring equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine for the very populations who have been hardest hit by the pandemic is critical in this effort. I am encouraged by the steps the administration has already taken to tackle this issue.

I strongly support the Administration's efforts to vaccinate high-risk and underserved populations across the country in Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), where one out of six Californians seek their health care. The launch of the Federally Qualified Health Center program, which will provide direct distribution of vaccines to our Community Health Centers (CHCs), will help reach the communities that have largely been left behind in the inoculation process.

I was pleased to learn that four CHCs in California were selected in the first cohort of twenty-five CHCs to receive the vaccines, beginning next week. However, I am disappointed Riverside County was not represented in this selection. I am respectfully requesting that Riverside County CHCs receive vaccines in the next cohort of 250 health centers.

The ten FQHCs located in my district, California's 36th Congressional district, fit squarely into the criteria you outlined for this program. They serve more than 191,000 patients each year for a total of 905,000 patient visits at 41 service sites. They provide comprehensive quality health care to a diverse population of patients who have been disproportionately affected by the COVID pandemic. Of the patients served, 97% are considered low income; 72% identify as an ethnic or racial minority; 3% are agricultural workers; 3% are unhoused; 64% are Hispanic; and 37% report English as their second language.

This program is designed to increase vaccine access for patient populations who have been hit hardest by COVID-19. Riverside County has the 7th highest percentage of new cases in the entire

state of California, and its ICU capacity is at 94%.¹ Moreover, twelve communities in Riverside County are defined by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as Medically Underserved Areas, nine of which are concentrated in my district including Blythe, Hemet, San Jacinto, Coachella, Indio, Idyllwild/Pine Cove, Banning, Beaumont, Chiriaco Summit/ Desert Center.²

Many of those same communities have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, compounding the problem, including Hemet, Indio, and Coachella which have all had approximately 10-15% of their populations test positive for COVID-19, compared to 8.4% statewide in California.^{3,4,5,6}

I have been assured the CHCs in my district, located in Eastern Riverside County, are ready, equipped, and able to accept vaccines and inoculate their communities. Thank you again for prioritizing this issue and for your consideration of this request.

I look forward to working with you to ensure that these communities are prioritized as you develop your plans for future vaccination sites.

Sincerely,



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

Cc: Dr. Marcella Nunes-Smith, Chair of the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force

¹ <https://covidactnow.org/us/california-ca/?s=1580520>

² <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/mua-find>

³ https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/WEEKLY_BOS_REPORT_DISTRICT%203_1.25-1.31.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101228-620×tamp=1612289577656

⁴ https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/WEEKLY_BOS_REPORT_DISTRICT%204_1.25-1.31.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101228-633×tamp=1612289574457

⁵ https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/COVID-19%20Tests%20Jan18-Jan%2024%20byCDP_RiversideCounty%20Feb12021_Merged.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101227-807×tamp=1612289694248

⁶ <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/>