



# Partnering with Communities to Address COVID-19

## The NIH Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities

In the United States, COVID-19 has taken its toll on almost every community. But some groups—especially African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Native Americans—have suffered more than others. Addressing such health disparities has long been a priority for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the pandemic shows us just how critical to public health this focus is. As we work to respond to COVID-19, one of our goals is reducing the burden of the disease on those who are hardest hit by it.

Through our COVID-19 Community Engagement Alliance, the NIH aims to:

- Make available the best, most accurate information about the spread of COVID-19, about recruitment and participation in clinical studies, about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines and treatments, and about any concerns that may come from false rumors.
- Increase the use of preventive practices that can reduce the spread of COVID-19, especially in underserved communities, while offering timely access to proven new treatments.
- Increase the public's understanding of how science works—specifically, the medical research process and how treatments and vaccines are developed.

Meeting these goals will mean building strong partnerships in communities where rates of COVID-19 are highest. We will work hard to make sure that clinical trials to test new treatments, vaccines, and other virus prevention practices include members of communities hardest hit by COVID-19. It is critical that proven public health practices, as well as new ways to diagnose, treat, and prevent this virus, benefit everyone, especially people who are affected the most.

### What is NIH doing?

The leadership and expertise of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) will drive this NIH-wide community engagement effort focused on addressing the major impacts of COVID-19 on specific communities.

The initiative's activities have two primary components:

- **Support and expand existing community outreach efforts** by NIH COVID-19 trial networks,<sup>1</sup> such as [ACTIV \(treatments\)](#), [RADx](#) and CoVPN ([vaccines](#)), by taking advantage of the ongoing relationships between NIH-funded researchers and the communities they serve. These efforts will help NIH identify and engage hard-hit communities who might otherwise not be reached through COVID-19 clinical research recruitment sites. These connections are made through the Alliance's **Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities research teams**.
- **Establish communication networks across available channels and through engagement with trusted organizations and people.**

1. NIH research investments include but are not limited to; the [COVID-19 Prevention Trials Network \(CoVPN\)](#), the [Accelerated COVID-19 Therapeutic Interventions and Vaccines \(ACTIV\)](#) public-private partnership, the [Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics \(RADx\)](#), and sites where there are contract research organizations (CROs).



This will make it easier to share accurate and trustworthy information about the virus, how to reduce its spread, and how to protect people, families and their communities. It is also important to encourage people to join testing, treatment, vaccine, and other COVID-19 research studies, using messages and channels that reach people who live where COVID-19 has caused higher rates of sickness and death.

### How will NIH support community organizations?

The CEAL research teams and community-based communication networks led by local leaders (Community Champions) are the first steps toward helping community organizations address inaccurate information, build trust, and reduce the impact of COVID-19. The Alliance is also:

- Bringing together national organizations to identify more local “champions” in these communities to create and test information and messages for media, social media, and outreach to the public.
- Creating one, easy-to-access location for resources tailored to community outreach. This will allow Community Champions to draw from a pool of news and feature stories, fact

sheets, public service announcements, and other trustworthy content that’s relevant to their local community.

- Quickly connecting NIH researchers with people in other federally funded programs. These include clinical practice-based research and community health worker networks, participating research centers, and federally qualified health centers. Together, their primary goal will be to help people find and learn about COVID-19 treatment, vaccine, and other prevention studies near where they live.

### Building trust, increasing awareness and education, and promoting inclusion

This Alliance quickly brings together teams including people from federally supported programs, the community networks they work with, and other community champions. The goal is to help the people hardest hit by COVID-19 by giving them accurate health and clinical research study information while also testing education, outreach, communication, and engagement materials and activities to reach people in sustainable ways. Ultimately, this work and what we learn from it will enhance the health of all Americans.

## CEAL Research Teams

*The **Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities** research teams work with research groups and centers funded by NIH that are also located in communities of African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Native Americans who are hardest-hit by COVID-19. Community leaders and NIH-funded programs have existing, often long-lasting relationships with the people in these communities. **CEAL** programs will work with these groups to quickly launch outreach that hopes to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on these groups. Through open conversations and regular contact, **CEAL** research teams will develop and test information that accomplishes this goal and speaks to the lived experiences of the people in the community.*