

COVID-19 health equity initiatives: Black Arizona COVID-19 Task Force

In this installment of "COVID-19 health equity initiatives," we look at the lack of outreach, policy or coordinated efforts in Arizona's Black community to address COVID-19 or the economic stabilization and recovery of Black, Brown and marginalized communities.

Overview of initiative

Black Arizona COVID-19 Task Force

The Black Arizona COVID-19 Task Force found that there is no strategy in place for food security, residential resources, job security, small business stabilization or voter retention in the aftermath of COVID-19 in Arizona.

The task force is an initiative of the Women's Economic Institute, Inc. It was created to ensure Black Arizonan's have accurate, readily available and transparent information on the coronavirus; equitable access to testing, training, resources and services; and that Black youth, families and small businesses remain aware, engaged and eligible for any and all administrative and economic relief provided through state and federal stimulus dollars during and post-recovery.

It also serves as an advocacy and policy initiative, engaging government and fostering community education and outreach through media, virtual channels, community organizing, and technical assistance.

Over the next 11 months, the task force will roll out various measures to address the inequities. These include:

- Drive data collection as it relates to inequities facing African Americans in receiving economic relief services/testing/treatment/tracing due to COVID-19
- Build a statewide communication and education network and resources
- Maintain social and other media platforms
- Provide technical resources and assistance for small businesses
- Drive cash and rental assistance, resources and workforce stabilization services for community individuals

- Identify and coordinate food distribution sites
- Advocate for inclusive economic policies
- Develop a 1-800 line to report violations
- Build out a voter engagement strategy

"As states reopen their economies African Americans are still challenged by preexisting inequality and racial discrimination."

—Charlene Tarver, JD (Black Arizona COVID-19 Task Force chair)

What was the impetus for the racial equity work?

As of May 7, 2020, Arizona had 9,945 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 450 deaths. Of those cases, 5,138 were in Maricopa County (Phoenix), 1,425 in Pima County (Tucson) and 892 in Navajo County. These numbers are increasing daily, and Arizona is doing minimal to no testing therefore we are uncertain of the accuracy of our numbers. We also lack race/ethnic data although we are seeing geographic data.

Based upon the national data, we've seen glaring disparities in terms of the health and economic status of Black America. COVID-19's disproportionate impact on African American families and communities is grossly apparent. We've noted the disparities nationwide, both in terms of contraction, rate of infection and fatalities.

A collective of African American parents, business, faith leaders, educators, physicians, public officials and public health administrators have galvanized under the banner the Black AZ COVID-19 Task Force to ensure Black Arizonan's receive statewide health and economic equity during COVID-19 as well as economic recovery and voter retention post-COVID-19.

The task force convened stakeholders from across the state to ensure there is equity in testing, access to state resources, and information and technical assistance for federal and local stimulus dollars. The task force also maintained consistent communication with health care providers, the Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS), local mayors and governmental entities impacting unemployment (i.e., DES), and the governor's office. One of the primary goals for this was to collect adequate data and provide protections to minimize the health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the Black community.

When did the work begin? When is it expected to end?

Work began in March 2020 and will be further developed in three phases.

Phase 1

March 2020—May 2020: The task force provides: Bi-weekly electronic communications, a weekly community resource call with COVID-19 front line decision makers, social media and virtual outreach, community education through PSAs and virtual sessions in partnership with Equality Health and other community based health care and economic providers serving the Black community statewide.

Phase 2

May 2020-April 2021: Community survey, campaign and ongoing engagement around COVID-19 and public health COVID-19 antibody mobile and walk up testing; mental health and wellness counseling and services; technical assistance for women, minority, and small Black owned businesses (300 or less employees); food security (coordinating food distribution around marginalized communities including those who are unemployed and/or immobile).

Phase 3

The work is ongoing throughout the pandemic, but may modify based upon allocation of funding.

What are the expected results or outcomes?

Our programmatic objectives are to:

- | Provide targeted outreach and marketing to Black and Brown communities
- | Educate African Americans and the general population on COVID-19 and the underlying and pre-existing health conditions which make African Americans more susceptible to death from COVID-19
- | Create targeted messaging (age and socially appropriate) that helps vulnerable populations realize and minimize their potential risk/liability through wellness visits, insurance, violence screenings
- | Ensure messaging is reaching the right demographic through appropriately identified social media and other platforms
- | Provide technical resources and assistance for small business, families and individuals.

Who are the key partners for this work?

Our collaborative partners include the African American Christian Clergy Coalition, NAACP (WIN), and Equality Health. We're also in discussions with our local universities around a registry, modeling, and contact tracing.

Other collaborators/agencies include:

- African American Christian Clergy Coalition
- Arizona Community Foundation
- Arizona Informant Black Newspaper
- Arizona State University, Biodesign Institute
- Black Child and Family Services
- Central Arizona Shelter System
- Community Legal Services
- Governor's Commission on African American Affairs
- Maricopa County Recorder's Office
- Maricopa County Sheriff's Office
- National Alliance of Black School Educators
- Phoenix College
- Phoenixsoul.com
- Real Women Revealed
- Somalian Association of Arizona
- West Valley NAACP
- WUBAZ
- 2020 Census African American Outreach
- 10,000 Fearless

What are your future steps for this initiative?

The task force is currently working with the city of Phoenix, the state of Arizona, and the Arizona Department of Health Services to coordinate a community campaign on the value of masking and consistent testing for families and youth as our students return to school and prepare for flu season.

What advice & recommendations do you have?

In order to promote full transparency and ensure equitable distribution of resources for the Black and

brown communities in Arizona, it is important that groups:

- | Utilize the task force to actively engage community-based groups that specifically serve Black and Brown communities.
- | Work with community-based foundations to secure funding, resources and services.
- | Identify transparent partners who have a demonstrated commitment and history in serving marginalized, low income and minority communities.
- | Identify and engage agencies that provide direct resources/services in eviction prevention, food distribution, education, health care, technology, policy, workforce training/readiness.
- | Think strategically about how best to engage community leaders, elected officials, and decision makers, i.e., you might want to take steps to lobby, testify before the state legislature and/or city council, lead a letter writing campaign, and/or propose policy and legislation.
- | Make sure to poll the community and conduct surveys that outline “our experiences” during COVI-19, i.e., services denied, availability and access to testing, experiences in requesting and receiving state and federal resources/services (i.e., CARES ACT, unemployment claims, eviction moratoriums), understanding of COVID-19 mandates and executive orders, and access to PPE.

What other guidance do you have?

Achieving health equity is challenging given the lack of economic equity and limited access to data, resources, information and services. As states reopen their economies African Americans are still challenged by preexisting inequality, racial discrimination and bias which fosters high unemployment, over incarceration, disproportionate homelessness, and high preexisting chronic stress and medical conditions.

Contact information

For more information about the Black Arizona Task Force initiative, please contact: Charlene Tarver, chair of the Black AZ COVID-19 Task Force at ctarver@womenseconomicinstitute.com.

Find out about other initiatives

- | Cambridge Health Alliance (Massachusetts)
- | Chicago Racial Equity Rapid Response Team
- | Meharry Medical College



- | Michigan Public Health Institute
- | Milwaukee Health Department
- | New York Department of Health
- | Spectrum Health Lakeland
- | UC San Diego Refugee Health Unit

Visit the COVID-19 health equity initiatives main page for additional information.