

Jan. 22, 2021: Biden's first moves will aid pandemic fight, boost global health

The AMA is hailing President Joe Biden's first flurry of executive orders to address the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, immigration and LGBTQ issues.

On COVID-19, the administration launched a 100-days masking challenge, asking Americans to #MaskUp for 100 days and requiring masks and physical distancing in all federal buildings, lands and by federal employees and contractors. The Department of Health and Human Services will work with state and local officials to implement masking and other public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, which has killed 400,000 Americans since the first case was identified in the U.S. 12 months ago.

President Biden also rescinded former President Trump's withdrawal from the World Health Organization, a move that the AMA and many other health care stakeholders opposed as detrimental to harmonizing global efforts to combat the deadly spread of COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the new president also created the position of COVID-19 response coordinator to make sure all elements of the government's response—including production, supply and distribution of personal protective equipment, vaccines and tests—are working swiftly. That coordinator person will be Jeff Zients, who helped revive HealthCare.gov after its rocky rollout in 2013.

"Defeating COVID-19 requires bold, coordinated federal leadership and strong adherence to the public health steps we know stop the spread of this virus—wearing masks, practicing physical distancing, and washing hands," said AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD.

"The Biden Administration also activated the Defense Production Act (DPA) to ramp up the production of personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as testing and vaccine supplies desperately needed to stem the spread of illness and deaths.

"We are pleased by the Biden administration's steps today, including universal mask-wearing within federal jurisdictions, providing federal leadership for COVID-19 response, and reengaging with the World Health Organization. Taking these actions on day one of the Administration sends the right message—that our nation is laser focused on stopping the ravages of COVID-19."

The AMA's president, an allergist and immunologist from Fort Worth, Texas, also applauded these other Biden administration first-day moves.

Rejoining the Paris Agreement on climate change. “A critical step to demonstrate American leadership in the prevention of the devastating health harms of climate change.”

Preserving and fortifying the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

“Thousands of Dreamers are working in, or training to join, health care professions and our country is in need of their services in the fight against COVID-19. Giving Dreamers certainty about their legal status is a critical step in the right direction by the Biden Administration. People with DACA status contribute to a diverse and culturally responsive physician workforce, which benefits all patients.”

Prohibiting workplace discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. “We were proud to join 15 other leading health organizations in an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in the recent Title VII case, and we are encouraged by today's action by the Biden administration to ensure equality.

“The AMA supports access to quality, evidence-based health care for all people, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, and we will continue to work diligently at all levels to expand access to health care, reduce stigma in treating patients with unique needs, and break down discriminatory barriers to care.”

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