

FDA's Dr. Marks among 7 honored by AMA for work amid pandemic

MAR 22, 2022

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The AMA has bestowed its Awards for Outstanding Government Service on seven elected officials and government employees—in the executive branch, in the senate, at the regional level and at the local level—for their leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of these awardees, Peter Marks, MD, PhD, director of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, has been at the forefront of the country's COVID-19 vaccination campaign.



Peter Marks MD, PhD, was honored as a member of the executive branch in career public service. Since 2016, Dr. Marks has led the FDA's efforts to regulate and assure the safety and effectiveness of the country's biological products, including vaccines, allergenic products, blood and blood products and cellular, tissue and gene therapies. During the pandemic, Dr. Marks and his team have played an instrumental role in ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.

Dr. Marks has worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure the COVID-19 vaccine development process was transparent, based on rigorous review of scientific data and free from political interference," said AMA Board Chair Bobby Mukkamala, MD. "Despite this enormous responsibility, Dr. Marks took the time to regularly speak with and present data to physicians and the medical community to ensure we had the information and data we needed to feel confident in recommending the COVID-19 vaccines to our patients."

Watch Dr. Marks' acceptance speech.

U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt

The Republican from Missouri's unwavering commitment to improving rural health care has long benefited groups that have been economically or socially marginalized across the Show Me State.

For example, Blunt championed the opening of a rural medical school campus in St. Joseph and helped secure the funding to make it happen. This allowed the University of Missouri–Kansas City School of Medicine to double its class size and attract students with an interest in a career in rural primary care.

Blunt's support for higher education has benefited students across the country. He authored legislation to increase maximum Pell Grant awards in four consecutive years, and in 2017 he reinstated Year-Round-Pell, which allows students to receive additional Pell Grants during the school year to help them graduate on time and with less debt.

"A former history teacher and college president, Sen. Blunt has never forgotten his roots in areas where health care access is challenging," Dr. Mukkamala said. "He has leveraged his position on the Appropriations Committee to strengthen medical education and college grants. Although he is retiring, his contributions to rural health will long benefit the citizens of Missouri."

Watch Sen. Blunt's acceptance speech.

Mandy Cohen, MD

As secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Cohen and her team lead the COVID-19 response for the North Carolina, making major strides in hospital surge capacity, testing capacity, tracing capacity and availability of personal protective equipment (PPE). They also constructed the advance data infrastructure used to collect and analyze key data points that have driven the state's decision-making on pandemic issues.

Additionally, Dr. Cohen's "buying health" agenda has focused on social determinants of health. Under her leadership, North Carolina implemented a first-in-the-nation statewide coordinated care network, NCCARE360, which electronically connects people with identified needs to community resources.

"A credible and innovative leader, Dr. Cohen has earned high marks during an incredibly trying time for her clear communication and collaborative style," Dr. Mukkamala said. "When physicians and front-line health care workers needed help with PPE, Dr. Cohen was there. And when they needed straightforward guidance and information about public health, Dr. Cohen was there."

Watch Dr. Cohen's acceptance speech.

Travis Gayles, MD

The top public health official in Montgomery County, Maryland, Dr. Gayles was asked to lead some of the most challenging on-the-ground efforts in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Gayles, who is also a lecturer in health administration at New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, previously led the HIV Treatment and Prevention Program at Northwestern University.

"With information and data scant and with a clear need for leadership and consistent messaging, local officials like Dr. Gayles were absolutely critical during the earliest days of the pandemic," Dr. Mukkamala said. "Dr. Gayles is a steadfast advocate for science- and data-driven solutions, and officials at the Maryland State Medical Society and the Montgomery County Medical Society credit him and his leadership with saving lives and lessening the local impact of the virus."

Watch Dr. Gayles' acceptance speech.

These additional three officials have been honored by the AMA and will receive their awards in person from the respective state medical association:



- Cindy F. Friedman, Massachusetts state legislator.
- Sam L. Page, MD, St. Louis County, Missouri, county executive.
- Nirav Shah, MD, director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Check out a list of previous past winners of the AMA Awards for Outstanding Government Service (PDF).