



September 16, 2020

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Amanda Cohn:

As leaders from some of the country's largest organizations serving the needs of older Americans, we want to commend your Committee and its leadership on the rigorous work you are doing to help America grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and get much needed vaccines to the public. We were particularly impressed by the thoughtful discussion at the most recent ACIP meeting in late August, where it was abundantly clear that focus continues to be on the ongoing and serious threat that COVID-19 poses to the population our organizations represent—adults over the age of 65.

We share in those concerns.

As your Committee discussed, adults aged 65 and over represent roughly 16 percent of the COVID-19 cases in the United States, but nearly 80 percent of the deaths. Risk factors for contracting COVID-19 rise with an individual's age and other factors like pre-existing conditions that occur frequently with advancing age, only heighten the risk for hospitalization and severe outcomes.

Therefore, our grave concern for our organizations' members brings us to this point: While we navigate this pandemic AND try to keep older adults compliant with existing vaccines for preventable diseases, we feel there is still a lack of adequate representation of older adult advocates and experts on ACIP and its advisory components. We would like to see that changed so that the voice of older Americans and medical experts who understand their health challenges can be heard in discussions and decisions around all adult vaccines.

Over the years, many of us have shared this concern with members of your Committee and ACIP staff. But now, while older Americans are being so devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we feel it is urgent to address this matter with you again and encourage you to consider ways to rectify the situation as soon as possible.

Vaccines are critical to the health and well-being of all Americans, but particularly for those over the age of 65. As the number of vaccines targeting this older age group grows,

we believe it is even more important that ACIP actions reflect the input of experts who can share their knowledge of gerontology, geriatrics and other sciences that address adults of advanced age.

In addition to adding aging specialists to your membership, we also suggest that you consider establishing a working group focused upon this critically vulnerable age group. Such an action would make certain there is continued examination of the unique characteristics and challenges that come with aging and provide information and counsel to your Committee. Representation on this committee from a variety of gender, racial and ethnic perspectives of older Americans would be vitally important as well.

For example, such a group would be better able to advise ACIP on best practices not only for all older adults but also those with additional age-related risk factors and those who live or spend significant time in congregate settings. This expertise is so important in assessing potential COVID-19 vaccines now and in the evaluation of promising adult vaccines that the Committee will consider in the coming years.

With more than 40 million Americans over the age of 65 and an expectation that this number will grow to reach 20 percent of the U.S. population in the next decade, we need to be prepared and armed with experts who have broad knowledge in this area.

There is one more aspect of this issue to which we draw your attention—health disparities and aging. For those of us who represent minority elder populations, and those who work with older adults battling rare and/or difficult to treat underlying conditions, the threat of this pandemic is even more harsh. We must ensure representation that can speak especially for them during this pandemic and into the future.

Therefore, we respectfully request a virtual meeting with members of the ACIP leadership at your earliest convenience to discuss a path moving forward that includes more specialized focus on the elderly. Please provide Christine Perez @ c.perez@nhcoa.org with possible date/time for virtual meeting and she will coordinate with letter signatories.

Respectfully submitted,

National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCOA)
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
National Caucus and Center on Black Aging (NCBA)
National Council on Aging (NCOA)
Caregiver Action Network (CAN)
Alliance for Aging Research
N4A
RetireSafe
Gerontology Society of America (GSA)

National Consumer League
National Alliance for Caregiving
Aging Life Care Association
Generations United
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
SAGE

c.c. ACIP Committee Members and Liaison Groups