

## **A Call for Leadership Solidarity**

As former state and local public health directors we are concerned about the current climate and challenges affecting our public health leaders. Around the country, more than two dozen state and local health officials have recently left their positions after facing personal attacks and threats for their actions to control the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge public and private leaders everywhere to speak out in support of evidence-based approaches to infectious disease control and support the work of public health professionals to control this pandemic.

Public health officials frequently make recommendations and decisions that impact people's lives and livelihoods. Public health officials are also given powers to act, make and enforce regulations in emergency situations. These actions often prompt discussion and controversy that are an important part of our democracy. However, it is important that the words and actions of a vocal minority do not have undue influence on actions that are appropriate, needed and widely-supported.

COVID-19 is the public health emergency of our time. It has caused substantial disruption, suffering, death and inequity across our nation. Restrictive public health interventions have been implemented to avoid rates of severe infection that would overwhelm our health care system, and to avoid widespread illness and fear that could undermine our economy and society to a much greater extent than we have seen so far.

These interventions have been [effective](#). Analyses show they have led to reductions in COVID cases across our communities. These actions are also clearly understood and appreciated by the general public. A recent [survey](#) of public attitudes among adults in New York City and Los Angeles and broadly across the United States found widespread support of stay-at-home orders and nonessential business closures and high degree of adherence to COVID-19 mitigation guidelines. Most respondents reported that they would feel unsafe if restrictions were lifted too soon.

It is time to support public health officials who are facing unprecedented adversity in their efforts to protect our communities, the same way we are supporting medical care workers who are treating those who are ill. Now is the time that we need leadership to help our society through a period of adversity that many of us have never known. Many political leaders have already stepped up to support and protect the professionals they have hired and entrusted to protect the public's health. These actions are the foundation of good and effective government. Leaders across our society, in our professions, businesses, associations, faith communities and philanthropies should find ways to show their solidarity. Our public health leaders need your support as they make some of the most difficult decisions in their careers.

### **Former State/Territorial Health Officials:**

Joel L Nitzkin MD, MPH, MPA, DPA (*Louisiana*)

Howard Rodenberg, MD, MPH (*Kansas*)

Cheryl Bartlett, RN (*Massachusetts*)

Paul K. Halverson, DrPH, MHSA (*Arkansas*)

Leslie M. Beitsch, MD, JD (*Oklahoma*)

Joshua M. Sharfstein, MD (*Maryland*)  
Leah Devlin DDS, MPH (*North Carolina*)  
John Auerbach, MBA (*Massachusetts*)  
Renee D. Coleman-Mitchell, MPH (*Connecticut*)  
Bernard Turnock, MD, MPH (*Illinois*)  
Jeanne Ayers, RN, MPH (*Wisconsin*)  
Lily Lou, MD, FAAP (*Alaska*)  
Nirav R. Shah, MD, MPH (*New York*)  
Shereef M. Elnahal, MD, MBA (*New Jersey*)  
Poonam Alaigh, MD, MSHCPM, FACP (*New Jersey*)  
Kenneth W. Kizer, MD, MPH (*California*)  
Wendy E. Braund, MD, MPH, MEd, FACPM (*Wyoming*)  
Theodore Edward Wymyslo MD, FAAFP (*Ohio*)  
Reed V. Tuckson, MD, FACP (*D.C.*)  
Georges C. Benjamin, MD (*Maryland, D.C.*)  
Christine Grant, JD, MBA (*New Jersey*)  
Karen L Smith, MD, MPH (*California*)  
Len Fishman (*New Jersey*)  
Harry Chen, MD (*Vermont*)  
Mark B Horton, MD, MSPH (*Nebraska, California*)  
Richard J Jackson, MD, MPH (*California*)  
James W. Stratton, MD, MPH (*California*)  
Judy Monroe, MD (*Indiana*)  
Marissa Levine, MD, MPH, FAAFP (*Virginia*)  
Edward P. Ehlinger, MD, MSPH (*Minnesota*)  
Seth Foldy, MD, MPH, FAAFP (*Wisconsin*)  
James W Gillan, MS, HSA (*Guam*)  
John C (Jack) Lewin, MD (*Hawaii*)  
George W. Rutherford, MD, AM (*California*)

Charles Konigsberg, MD, MPH (*Kansas, Delaware*)

Karen MacMaster MPA (*Michigan*)

Anna Whiting Sorrell, MPA (*Montana*)

Terry L Dwelle, MD, MPHTM, CPH (*North Dakota*)

Michelle S. Davis, PhD, MSPH (*U.S. Virgin Islands*)

Thomas M. Vernon, MD (*Colorado*)

Catherine C. Slemp, MD, MPH (*West Virginia*)

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPsych (*D.C.*)

John R. Lumpkin, MD, MPH (*Illinois*)

Sonia Y Angell, MD, MPH (*California*)

Martin P Wasserman, MD, JD (*Maryland, Oregon*)

Hugh H. Tilson, MD, DrPH, FACPM (*North Carolina*)

Janet Olszewski (*Michigan*)

Rahul Gupta, MD, MPH, MBA (*West Virginia*)

Jane S. Smith, RN (*Idaho*)

Robert Harmon, MD, MPH (*Missouri*)

Cathleen Bennett, JD, MPA (*New Jersey*)

Henry Anderson, MD (*Wisconsin*)

Alton Everette James, JD, MBA (*Pennsylvania*)

Robert Moser, MD (*Kansas*)

Richard Raymond (*Nebraska*)

Allan Noonan (*Pennsylvania*)

Karen Murphy, PhD, RN (*Pennsylvania*)

Abinash Achrekar, MD, MPH (*New Mexico*)

William J. Kassler, MD, MPH (*New Hampshire*)

Susan S. Addiss, MPH, MUrS (*Connecticut*)

Lloyd F Novick, MD, MPH (*Vermont, Arizona*)

Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA (*Connecticut*)

Mary Currier, MD, MPH (*Mississippi*)

Japhet C. Rivera (*Puerto Rico*)

Jack Dillenberg, DDS, MPH (*Arizona*)

Heather Howard, JD (*New Jersey*)

Peter A. Sybinsky, PhD (*Hawaii*)

Patti J. Patterson, MD, MPH (*Texas*)

Diana M. Bontá, DrPH, RN (*California*)

James Schamadan, MD (*Arizona*)

Douglas Seward Lloyd, MD, MPH, FACPM (*Connecticut*)

Jeffrey Engel, MD, FIDSA (*North Carolina*)

Stephanie Mayfield Gibson, MD, FCAP (*Kentucky*)

David Lakey, MD (*Texas*)

Marcus Plescia, MD, MPH, ASTHO Chief Medical Officer, former Mecklenburg County Health Director (2011-2014)