



## Priorities for the Biden-Harris Administration

December 2020

On behalf of Prevention Institute, a national nonprofit dedicated to promoting health, safety, and wellbeing through thriving, equitable communities, we applaud the core priorities detailed in the Biden-Harris Build Back Better platform.

2020 has highlighted the fact that building back in and of itself is not sufficient to achieve a healthy and just society. Despite the often-expressed desire for a “return to normal” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the communities Prevention Institute works with would say that the “normal” systems and structures our society relies on were never designed to be inclusive and have to be completely reimagined and redesigned to achieve racial justice and health equity. Accordingly, Prevention Institute strongly urges comprehensive actions across the four priorities in the Build Back Better platform designed to:

- ❖ Pursue policies, practices, and investments that end racialized segregation from opportunity, advance racial justice and health equity, and allow Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and people of color communities to reliably access resources and opportunities to thrive and achieve optimal health, safety, and wellbeing; and
- ❖ Significantly strengthen the country’s public health and prevention infrastructure through sustainable policies, programs, and investments that bolster community protective factors and emphasize community-driven solutions and leadership.

Specifically, we recommend that the Biden-Harris administration prioritizes the following:

- **Advance a portfolio of policies and actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that prioritize public health and address the underlying factors and systems that have placed communities of color and others at disproportionate harm.** Controlling the pandemic through effective and equitable testing, contact tracing, science-based mitigation strategies, and vaccinations is only one step in an overall response that must also strengthen community protective factors that benefit public health. Community protective factors include: a living wage, safe and affordable housing, fully resourced schools and access to higher education, quality public transportation, healthy food systems, accessibility of parks and open space, clean air and water, and labor protections, among others. An equitable COVID-19 recovery process should maintain the effective policy responses already put in place during the pandemic as the foundation for ongoing policy solutions that will advance long-term health and wellbeing, including:
  - **Providing direct relief to individuals, workers, and families to support resilience, recovery, and rebuilding.** Direct relief should be provided regardless of immigration or incarceration status.
  - **Providing direct funding to states, territories, tribes, and locales** to allow full and equitable access to programs and services that are essential to ensuring equitable community-wide recoveries.
- **Strengthen and expand the public health and prevention workforce to reflect the priorities and leadership of communities that have been most harmed by structural racism and violence.** In addition to fully resourcing governmental public health agencies, investments must be made to grow a diverse, community-rooted public health workforce that is reflective of, and trusted by, the communities that public health serves. These public health and prevention workers—including community health workers, promotoras, community violence interrupters, peer support workers, and young leaders and organizers working across different community priorities—should be paid a living wage and receive ongoing training to build and further their skills. Increased and sustained funding to the community-based organizations that hire and train these

workers; accessible training, certification and fellowship programs; and loan forgiveness are all among the incentives needed to recruit and retain a skilled community-based public health and prevention workforce.

- **Adopt a comprehensive approach to preventing trauma at the individual and community levels** (i.e., adverse childhood experiences *and* adverse community experiences) by addressing the inequitable community conditions that increase the risk of trauma for children, families, and across entire communities, including structural racism, systemic violence against the LGBTQ+ community, a hostile climate for immigrants, mass incarceration, displacement, economic inequity, and unequal access to health-promoting resources and opportunities.
- **Champion policies and actions that promote healing and address the harms that results from structural racism and systemic violence** based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, immigration status, or country of origin; including:
  - **Establish a White House Office focused on achieving racial justice and health equity that works directly with, and is guided by, community stakeholders** to set clear goals and targets for improvement, and is responsible for coordinating core public health, environmental, and economic justice issues across federal agencies.
  - **Expand programs that are focused on the intersection of community health and racial equity**, such as the CDC’s Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program.
  - **Fund and build on the provisions in the Health Equity and Accountability Act (HEAA)** as a strategic legislative and administrative roadmap to eliminate racial and ethnic health inequities.
  - **Restore and strengthen the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule** at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.
  - **Restore and expand access and eligibility to safety net programs that address health, safety, and wellbeing**, including WIC, SNAP, school meals, early education, housing and utility assistance, transportation access, comprehensive reproductive and gender affirming health services, and healthcare access.
  - **Rescind the regulatory revisions to section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act** that institute an ideologically based re-definition of sex discrimination that excludes discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation and rolls back access to interpretation and translation services.
  - **Rescind Executive Order 13950, “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping,”** and reaffirm a federal commitment to addressing racism and implicit bias across all federal departments and agencies.
- **Reimagine community safety using safety in Black communities as the barometer for change.** Hold current systems accountable for producing racist, violent, and oppressive outcomes and invest in policies and practices—including culturally rooted mental health supports, community-based crisis supports, and restorative justice practices—that truly ensure community safety and wellbeing for those who have suffered.
- **Increase resources and capacity building for public health departments and communities to implement and participate in comprehensive community efforts to address and prevent multiple forms of violence** (e.g., school, community, intimate partner, sexual assault, and child abuse and exploitation).
- **Advance a [comprehensive public health platform](#) to prevent all forms of gun violence**—including mass shootings, intimate partner violence, suicide, community violence, and violence involving law enforcement. A public health approach to gun violence includes:
  - Preventing the imminent risk of lethality through sensible gun laws and a culture of gun safety.
  - Expanding solutions beyond gun access to reduce additional risk factors associated with gun violence and bolster resilience in individuals, families, and communities.

- Building a prevention infrastructure with mechanisms for scale, sustainability, and effectiveness—including increasing funding for the CDC to research factors that contribute to gun violence and ways to predict and intervene to prevent violence.
- Investing in continuous learning and innovation in emerging areas—including preventing community trauma, promoting community healing, and supporting healthy norms about masculinity—to increase impact through research and practice.
- **Reform the criminal justice system away from racialized punishment and disproportionate rates of incarceration** towards an emphasis on public health approaches that address the underlying contributors to violence.
- **Protect the health, safety, wellbeing and dignity of immigrant families** through humane immigration policies, by restoring access to essential public health programs and social supports including COVID-19 relief, undoing the current public charge regulation, and funding community-led outreach and education on access to public benefits.
- **Emphasize community-level primary prevention strategies as part of the national response to diseases of despair**—including opioids and other substance misuse, and suicide—to complement an ongoing focus on treatment. This includes addressing the growing epidemic of social isolation with strategies that build connection, safety, and trust.
- **Recommit to preventing and addressing the impacts of climate change and other environmental threats, especially on communities of color**, by increasing resources and passing policies that contribute to community resilience, support healing from climate-related trauma, and strengthen the infrastructure needed to prevent the severity of impact of future climate-related events. We also support the creation of a new White House office of climate mobilization to coordinate and lead these efforts across agencies and with states and local jurisdictions.

All of our priorities center prevention, racial justice, and health equity and must therefore be guided by the vision and leadership of communities that have most greatly been impacted by structural racism and inequity, and who know best what strategies will be most effective in their communities. We welcome the opportunity to speak further and stand ready to support the administration's implementation of these priorities. Please reach out to Sana Chehimi, Director of Policy and Advocacy at [sana@preventioninstitute.org](mailto:sana@preventioninstitute.org) or Ruben Cantu, Program Manager at [ruben@preventioninstitute.org](mailto:ruben@preventioninstitute.org) at your convenience.

In unity,

Prevention Institute