WASHINGTON, September 22, 2020—The Alliance for Aging Research (Alliance) and 79 other national organizations representing patients, healthcare providers, and multi-stakeholder coalitions signed a letter directed to the leaders of federal health care agencies urging them to rise above the political considerations and focus on providing the American public with information about the well-established guidelines in place to ensure safe and effective COVID-19 prevention, detection, and treatment. Information and decisions that are perceived as anything less than science-based weaken the public’s confidence in research and innovation, and hinder adherence to mitigation efforts. In fact, a recent STAT/Harris poll found 78 percent of Americans worry the COVID-19 vaccine approval process is being driven by politics rather than science. It is this sentiment that federal government health officials must work with trusted partners to change if they intend to curb the deadly spread of COVID-19 and encourage widespread acceptance of an effective vaccine.

“Public perception of political influence in scientific decision-making is causing widespread confusion and distrust. We call on our federal health agency leaders to be straight with policymakers and the public about what lies ahead in the fight against COVID-19, without sugarcoating or political spin,” said Susan Peschin, MHS, President and CEO of the Alliance for Aging Research, which spearheaded the effort. “As our letter states, ‘stand strong, and we will join with you to communicate that scientists are leading the way to ensure treatments and vaccines are safe and effective—and in turn—lead the nation to full recovery.’ The stakes couldn’t be higher.”


- To promote public health and economic recovery, government decisions must be based on evidence – not politics or individual interests.
- By clearly explaining the processes in place to ensure scientific rigor, federal agencies and government leaders will build the confidence and public trust necessary for America to meet this challenge.
- Evidence derived from clinical trials that meet FDA standards should drive assessment of which COVID-19 therapeutics are safe and effective.
- Routine, rapid, accurate, and easy-to-access COVID-19 testing—followed by timely and efficient contact tracing—is needed to help prevent community spread.

The 80 organizations listed below signed the letter:

AcademyHealth
Aging Life Care Association
AliveAndKickn
Alliance for Aging Research

Alpha-1 Foundation
Alström Syndrome International
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Neurology
About the Alliance for Aging Research
The Alliance for Aging Research is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to accelerating the pace of scientific discoveries and their application to vastly improve the universal human experience of aging and health. The Alliance believes advances in research help people live longer, happier, more productive lives and reduce healthcare costs over the long term. For more than 30 years, the Alliance has guided efforts to substantially increase funding and focus for aging at the National Institutes of Health and Food and Drug Administration; built influential coalitions to guide groundbreaking regulatory improvements for age-related diseases; and created award-winning, high-impact educational materials to improve the health and well-being of older adults and their family caregivers. For more information, visit www.agingresearch.org.
Science
— Not Politics —
Will Lead Us Out of COVID-19

The deadly COVID-19 pandemic has caused national economic disruption and generated significant anxiety to protect the public’s health and restore the nation’s economy.

As we persevere and eagerly anticipate the end of the pandemic, we need trusted guidance from our nation’s leaders.

To promote public health and economic recovery, government decisions must be based on evidence—not politics or individual interests. Decisions perceived as influenced by political priorities lower the public’s confidence in science, research, innovation, and public health efforts. Amenity, 78 percent of Americans worry the COVID-19 vaccine approval process is being driven by politics rather than science. The leaders of our federal agencies—even if they serve as political appointees—must be independent voices that are guided by evidence and the integrity of their agencies’ employees.

By clearly explaining the processes in place to ensure scientific rigor, federal agencies and government leaders will build the confidence and public trust necessary for America to meet this challenge. Leaders should directly address public concern and skepticism about the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines, including expressed worries that “steps are being skipped” or questions about safety. Focusing on the well-established guidelines for federal approval, rather than factors impacting the timing of an authorization, will foster trust and bolster the public’s willingness to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Federal agencies and government leaders can also partner with trusted clinicians, patient, and minority community organizations to build confidence through transparent communications. We will not be able to fully “return to normal” until an effective vaccine is widely available and accepted as safe.

Evidence derived from clinical trials that meet FDA standards should drive assessment of which COVID-19 therapeutics are safe and effective. In times of crisis, it is natural to want to offer hope to those facing hardship. However, federal agencies need to continue to support the existing, formal scientific efforts that allow for the study of the safety and efficacy of experimental therapeutics. Authorizing widespread use prematurely may impede participation in the types of comparative studies needed to illustrate the safety and effectiveness of a treatment.

Routine, rapid, accurate, and easy-to-access COVID-19 testing—followed by timely and efficient contact tracing—is needed to help prevent community spread. Individuals exposed to a person with COVID-19 should be tested, even if they are not yet exhibiting symptoms. Known asymptomatic carriers must be directed to isolate to reduce community spread. The ability to rapidly test, contact trace, and quarantine individuals with a confirmed COVID-19 infection will empower America to restore a robust national economy and safely allow in-person school attendance.

The nation looks to the leaders of our health care agencies to establish and maintain confidence in public health guidance, vaccines, and therapeutics. By sticking to science, you build public faith in the process. Stand strong and we will join you in communicating that scientists are leading the way to ensure treatments and vaccines are safe and effective—and in turn—lead the nation to full recovery.