



**Catalyzing Innovation for Healthy Aging**

Contact: Lauren Smith  
[lsmith@agingresearch.org](mailto:lsmith@agingresearch.org)  
Direct: (202) 688-1229  
Cell: (240) 498-8123

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**National Groups Call on U.S. Federal Health Agency Leaders to  
Stand Strong for Science Over Politics in the Fight Against COVID-19**

*Faith in Public Health Guidance and Vaccine and Treatment Approval Processes  
Must be Restored to Overcome the Pandemic*

**WASHINGTON, September 22, 2020**—The [Alliance for Aging Research](https://www.agingresearch.org/) (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."

The letter, published today in the Washington, DC, edition of the *Wall Street Journal* to reach a wide swath of federal decisionmakers ahead of tomorrow's Senate HELP hearing, [COVID-19: An Update on the Federal Response](#), emphasizes the vital role American public health officials play in the prevention, detection, and treatment of the coronavirus. The letter outlines:

- 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  
Alstrom Syndrome International  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Neurology

American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Anthropological Association  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American College of Physicians  
American Geriatrics Society  
American Medical Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Pharmacists Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Society for Cell Biology  
American Society of Consultant Pharmacists  
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of Black Cardiologists  
Association of Jewish Aging Services  
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
Big Cities Health Coalition  
Biophysical Society  
CancerCare  
Caregiver Action Network  
Coalition for the Life Sciences  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
COPD Foundation  
Entomological Society of America  
Epilepsy Foundation  
Everylife Foundation for Rare Diseases  
Families USA  
Federation of American Scientists  
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered  
Friends of Cancer Research  
Global Healthy Living Foundation  
Global Liver Institute

GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer  
HealthyWomen  
Hermansky-Pudlak Syndrome Network  
Infectious Diseases Society of America  
Lakeshore Foundation  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
Lupus Foundation of America  
Men's Health Network  
Mended Hearts  
MLD Foundation  
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)  
National Breast Cancer Coalition  
National Communication Association  
National Consumers League  
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases  
National Health Council  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Medical Association  
National Minority Quality Forum  
National Organization for Rare Disorders  
National Psoriasis Foundation  
National Treasury Employees Union (representing the employees of FDA)  
NBIA Disorders Association  
Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation  
Prevent Blindness  
Prostate Cancer International  
Public Affairs Council  
Spina Bifida Association  
StopAfib.org  
The Arc of the United States  
The Gerontological Society of America  
The Mended Hearts, Inc  
Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy, University of the Pacific  
Tribal Ground LLC  
USP

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### **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](http://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 uncertainty for many Americans. The development of safe, effective vaccines and treatments are essential 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. Already, 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 vaccinations, 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 clinician, 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 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.**

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Families USA  
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**AgingResearch.org**