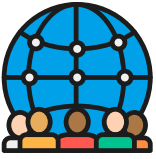# Stopping COVID-19 in the United States

KEEPING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES SAFE AND ACCELERATING SOLUTIONS FOR PANDEMIC CONTROL

As economies reopen, local governments need more resources and assistance to minimize transmission and protect their communities. Despite its vast clinical infrastructure, **the United States' struggle to respond to the pandemic has exposed weaknesses in a fragmented and under-resourced public health system**, which is proving to be particularly devastating for vulnerable populations. Black Americans, for example, are more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as white Americans.

Drawing on evidence-based best practices in public health, and 35 years of experience containing disease outbreaks around the world, **Partners In Health (PIH) is partnering with state and local governments to implement contact tracing, facilitate social support, and disseminate best public health practices across the country**. PIH seeks to provide rapid solutions for filling key gaps in the U.S. response to COVID-19 and strengthen public health systems for the long term, enabling a more effective response to future outbreaks.

In early April, Gov Charlie Baker (center) announces a collaboration with Partners In Health to improve and expand contact tracing for COVID-19 across Massachusetts.

Photo courtesy of Massachusetts' Governor's Office

EVOLUTION OF THE U.S. RESPONSE

When the novel coronavirus pandemic swept the globe in early 2020, **PIH mobilized comprehensive, preventive responses in some of the most resource-poor settings around the world**. Based on PIH's expertise in epidemic control, **the Commonwealth of Massachusetts asked PIH leaders in April to spearhead a significant expansion of its plan to prevent COVID-19** transmission. The partnership, known as the Community Tracing Collaborative (CTC), seeks to reduce new cases through contact tracing and was the first large-scale program of its kind for COVID-19 in the U.S. As of June 1, the program, which operates in service to 351 local boards of health throughout the state, has hired and trained more than 1,900 staff to reach individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their contacts.

PIH recognized the opportunity to share its public health expertise with other local governments and organizations seeking to implement contact tracing programs and other public health measures. With mounting public pressure to let Americans return to daily routines, PIH has received many requests from under-resourced public health departments and partners across the U.S.

Thanks to transformational support from the Audacious Project, PIH established the U.S. Public Health Accompaniment Unit, extending its COVID-19 technical advisory services to state and local governments across the country. The unit seeks to build resilience into public health efforts for long-term impact, prioritizing protections for the most vulnerable.
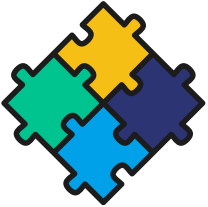

Health professionals administer a COVID-19 test for a man living in Navajo Nation.
Photo by Ronald Alsburg / COPE

PRIORITIES OF THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH ACCOMPANIMENT UNIT

1 **Extend support to U.S. government agencies, local jurisdictions, and their partners in the rapid mobilization of expert technical assistance and support**. The initial cohort of partners includes Departments of Health in New Jersey (Newark), Ohio, Illinois, and North Carolina. As this work expands, PIH seeks to support the most under-resourced, hardest hit communities in the U.S. Recognizing that safe isolation and quarantine are not financially feasible for many, PIH is also facilitating social support to vulnerable groups, based on urgent needs identified by government and community partners. PIH's advisers will work with frontline practitioners in existing health units to build out their teams, processes, and implementation capacity, to enable strengthened surveillance and response systems and build resilience for future outbreaks, well beyond PIH's direct engagement.

2 **Lead the Learning Collaborative, an open-source, online platform designed by PIH to support the exchange of best practices and improved public health responses across the country for partners fighting the COVID-19 pandemic**. This virtual platform makes key information and best practices in contact tracing and other measures widely available and accessible to partners seeking resources in program design. It will unite a broad ecosystem of partners and stakeholders, providing trainings, webinars, discussion forums, and peer-to-peer learning to accelerate effective COVID-19 responses. Over the next year, PIH aspires to expand this initial U.S.-based learning community to include partners globally, forming a cadre of health leaders from around the world with deep experience in pandemic control and emergency preparedness.

3 **Educate, influence, and advocate**. PIH will leverage learnings and the collective expertise of our partners to amplify advocacy efforts in the U.S. Focus areas will include targeted advocacy to inform state and local legislation related to the COVID-19 response, and broader public health financing and systems reform for longer- term efforts to strengthen public health units and advance the right to health for all. PIH will collaborate with local community organizing groups to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are central to all response and recovery efforts, with a lens to health equity and racial justice. PIH will also increase public awareness and education through targeted social media campaigns and other education platforms and create an online landing page with information and answers to frequently asked questions about containing COVID-19.

PROJECTED IMPACT

Reduced transmission of COVID-19 across the U.S., reduced mortality, and a pathway to pandemic control. A recent study published in the Lancet Global Health found that rapid case detection and contact tracing, combined with other basic public health measures, has over 90 percent efficacy against COVID-19, making it as effective as many vaccines.

Positive economic impact. The former CDC director estimates contact tracing has the potential to create up to 300,000 jobs. Contact tracing jobs and other public health positions can be filled by individuals across a wide spectrum of experience and education, creating an antidote to high unemployment levels.

Increased social solidarity and cohesion. Engaging communities in the solution and properly positioning local governments to effectively respond to COVID-19 can minimize confusion and fear, deepen awareness, and create solidarity among communities.

Strengthened public health capacity. PIH is committed to building these programs within states' existing public systems, which will enable more cohesive statewide responses in the short-term, while also building long-term capabilities and resilience for future management of infectious disease.

PIH's strategy is centered on the recognition that supporting, accompanying, and resourcing local public health systems is the solution for pandemic control.

ABOUT PARTNERS IN HEALTH

Partners In Health (PIH) works to advance equity in health care globally. We aspire to redefine what is possible in delivering innovative, scalable, and sustainable solutions to the world's most intractable health problems. By partnering with Ministries of Health all over the world, PIH is successfully transforming health outcomes, while creating an evidence-base and a roadmap for scaling solutions that advance the right to health for all. For over 30 years, PIH has honed its expert epidemic control experience and compassionate caregiving model to successfully fight infectious diseases all over the world, including Ebola in West Africa; cholera in Haiti; and multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in Peru, Kazakhstan, Russia, and beyond.