

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 14, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

We write regarding data showing minority communities are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and to ask what steps the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is taking to monitor health inequities and to curb the current outcomes, including in Oregon.

On April 8, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention took a first step in releasing initial data on the hospitalization rates and characteristics of patients hospitalized with COVID-19. The data underscores the need for additional data collection, including public daily reporting of disaggregated COVID-19 cases and deaths. In addition to the location, age, gender, race and underlying health conditions, we ask that you include to the extent it is possible, economic (e.g. income and occupation) and social (e.g. education, housing status, and language) factors in the data collection to assist public health researchers better understand the disparities.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on racial minorities. We know that communities of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and other currently and historically marginalized communities face inequitable access to health and worse health outcomes, in addition to differences in the quality of care and the collection of health data. These health disparities are only further amplified during a health crisis. We are seeing this in Oregon, where data released by the state on April 8 shows Latino/as are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. We are seeing this nationally among many minority communities with higher rates of chronic disease or underlying health conditions who have disproportionate rates of infection and mortality.

We urge you to work with states and localities to collect comprehensive data that is disaggregated and publicly reported daily. We also ask that you take immediate action to respond to the current outcomes, including by targeting resources and taking proactive action to communities based on need and disproportionate share of COVID-19 cases and fatalities.

Thank you for your continued work during this pandemic. We look forward to your response and thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress