



**DIVERSE
ELDERS
COALITION**

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MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

National Asian Pacific Center on
Aging

National Caucus and Center on
Black Aging

National Hispanic
Council on Aging

National Indian
Council on Aging

SAGE

Southeast Asia Resource Action
Center

March 9, 2020

Dear Representatives and Senators,

As a leading organization working to improve aging in communities of color, American Indian and Alaska Native communities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities, the Diverse Elders Coalition is deeply concerned about the slow response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. We implore you to address this growing epidemic and provide additional resources to ensure the safety of older Americans, as this disease is proving to adversely affect Americans ages 60 and older and people with underlying health issues.

People 60 years of age and older and those with underlying health conditions (e.g., diabetes, HIV, heart disease, and lung disease), are most vulnerable to getting sick or even dying from COVID-19. Many of the communities we represent already face pronounced health disparities. In fact, on March 9, 2020, the Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, said that older adults should take extra precautions to protect themselves.

While it is expected that many people in the United States will be exposed to COVID-19 given the current trajectory of the outbreak, it is important to focus on those most at risk and vulnerable. Dr. Messonnier issued a call to action, asking older adults, their families and caregivers to stock up on their medications, medical supplies, household goods and food to stay out of the public for an indefinite period of time. However, to achieve this call to action, older Americans need your help!

Many older adults live on limited incomes and do not have the means to stock up on necessities for indefinite periods of time. Additionally, given no national policy on paid leave exists, when an older adult does get sick, additional hardships are placed on their loved ones and caretakers. As Dr. Messonnier said, "Everyone has a role to play in helping to protect our family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors who are at most risk," including government officials who can allocate additional funds and resources to ensure the safety of American older adults, their families and caretakers.

The Diverse Elders Coalition urges Congress to take action to ensure that:

- Older Americans, particularly those who are most vulnerable and suffer from chronic diseases, have access to the necessary medications and medical supplies. In an effort to keep older adults safe from COVID-19, we need to ensure their other health needs are met.
- Older Americans, particularly those who are most vulnerable, have access to healthy and affordable food. Approximately one in every six American older adults faces the threat of hunger and not being properly nourished.
- Caregivers have the support necessary to care for their loved ones. Now is the time to pass Paid Leave legislation to ensure caregivers are able to provide the necessary support for their loved ones during this current epidemic.



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We need you to take action in the face of this epidemic and to keep our older adults healthy so they can continue to age with dignity. The Diverse Elders Coalition looks forward to working with you to enact these common-sense measures to protect American older adults. Our support is behind you.

Founded in 2010, the Diverse Elders Coalition (DEC) advocates for policies and programs that improve aging in our communities as racially and ethnically diverse people; American Indians and Alaska Natives; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT) people. Our six member organizations have a rich history of advocating for and improving the health and wellbeing of the communities they serve.

If you have any questions or need any further clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your ongoing leadership.

Sincerely,

Dr. Yanira Cruz, President and CEO, National Hispanic Council on Aging
Joon Bang, Chief Executive Officer, National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
Karyne Jones, President and CEO, National Caucus and Center on Black Aging
Larry Curley, Executive Director, National Indian Council on Aging
Michael Adams, Chief Executive Officer, SAGE
Quyen Dinh, Executive Director, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Jenna McDavid, National Director, Diverse Elders Coalition