



A Letter to the Biden-Harris Administration

March 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris,

The Beyond Flexner Alliance (BFA) is a national movement, focused on health equity and training health professionals as agents of more equitable health care. In 2020, a team of BFA interns launched the Beyond Flexner Alliance Student Assembly (BFASA) - a student centered arm of BFA, focused on bringing together interdisciplinary health professions students passionate about social mission. Social mission of a health professions school is broadly defined as the contribution of the school in its mission, programs, and the performance of its graduates, faculty, and leadership to enhancing health equity and addressing the health disparities of the society in which it exists.

In January 2021, the BFASA, along with the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), co-hosted the *Health Professions Students' Voices on Voting and the Election* webinar. The webinar featured current Physician Assistant, Medical, Public Health, and Physical Therapy student panelists, moderators who are actively engaged in advocacy efforts, and a total of 40 attendees from a variety of health professions. The webinar sought to provide insight into various voting initiatives, create a safe environment for students by students to discuss their responses and viewpoints regarding the 2020 election results, and establish a space for students to process current events and share actionable steps. Through discussion and a survey disseminated during and after the webinar, the panelists and attendees were able to share top issues for the Biden-Harris Administration to address from the health professions students' perspective. The results of the survey and themes of discussion drive the following recommendations:

COVID-19 Response

One of the top issues health professions students believe need to be addressed within the first 100 days is an appropriate response to COVID-19. The highest office has a great responsibility in not only making sure that this country is equipped to combat the coronavirus but that the gravity of the COVID-19 outbreak is well known. The U.S is in dire need of a federal government that is dedicated to controlling the virus, regaining trust from the public and administering an

accessible and effective vaccine. The thousands of lives lost during this pandemic could have been prevented if proper measures were taken from the very beginning. It is now time to look ahead and plan for the future of our country and the people who heavily depend on our government and health officials for guidance. Health professions students believe that the next steps in tackling COVID-19 must include an equitable vaccine rollout and expansion of the public health emergency which expires in April 2021. This expansion would increase resources for patients, including accessibility to health providers.

Increased Healthcare Access

Health professions students advocate for greater funding for innovative care models such as building out telehealth or supporting innovations to render care to the community at large. The shift from reactive medicine to preventive medicine allows for better transitions of care, improved clinician/patient communication, and increased access to health professionals. Health professions students also push for Medicaid expansion in all 50 states or a public option that makes sure healthcare is no longer tied to employment. Additionally, removing burdensome copays will help improve access to a variety of health professionals, such as physical therapists. Increasing access to health care will improve overall health in the U.S.

Dismantle Racism

Finally, health professions students call on the new administration to adequately address racism and actively work towards dismantling it. Specifically, through naming the structures that demonize and exploit marginalized communities, promoting legislation that protects and supports Black communities, and having no tolerance for white supremacist ideology. The only way to rebuild community trust in the government is to bridge the gap in communication and understanding, but also through making sure words are coupled with intentional actions that bring about change. Towards these ends, we recommend the following.

Accessible Health Professions Education

As future providers will be charged with delivering equitable, high quality care to our nation, it is imperative that we invest in healthcare students today. The expense of healthcare professional programs is a barrier to all students, but in particular for students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who are more likely to practice in underserved areas and improve the diversity within our fields. We implore the new administration to improve access to federal loans, particularly Stafford Loans with lower interest rates, for all healthcare students. Additionally, we hope to see scholarship and loan forgiveness for healthcare professionals which will facilitate equal opportunity and access to education and ultimately fortify the future supply of providers.

Increase Diversity of the Healthcare Workforce

As healthcare students witnessing the injustices and inequalities facing patients every day, we call on the Administration to increase the diversity within each of our professions. We believe that the Biden-Harris Administration should act to provide incentives for healthcare program enhancement and development at institutions with student populations from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, increased funding

pipeline and pathway programs should be made to encourage and support students from marginalized backgrounds to pursue careers in healthcare. Incentives for programs should be made available to promote recruitment of diverse students and faculty, and to have mandatory anti-racist curriculums. Healthcare programs are also often limited by the lack of clinical rotation and residency locations. We hope to see the Biden-Harris Administration address this issue by providing incentives to healthcare sites around the nation, particularly the ones serving disadvantaged patient populations, to welcome students and train them for the future of healthcare.

Through these investments, the Biden-Harris Administration will demonstrate their commitment to a just, equitable, and multiculturally competent healthcare workforce for generations to come. COVID-19 has emphasized the importance of a strong, interdisciplinary, health workforce that is able to successfully collaborate with the ultimate goal of improving patient outcomes and eliminating health disparities. Health professionals must understand the professional perspective of their colleagues and implement a team based approach to provide holistic, high quality care. COVID-19 has shed light on the stark disparities that exist in our society. Health professionals must be equity trained and practice with an anti-racist lens in order to address disparities and make long lasting structural change. Health professions education is a training ground for social justice. By investing in the future health workforce and forming social mission practitioners, the health care system can move towards equity and justice for all. We call on the Biden-Harris Administration to consider our recommendations and improve the health of the nation.

Sincerely,

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