

December 7, 2020

Dr. David Kessler, Co-Chair
Dr. Vivek Murthy, Co-Chair
Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, Co-Chair
Biden-Harris COVID-19 Advisory Board

Dear Drs. Kessler, Murthy, and Nunez-Smith:

On behalf of the Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM), the nation's leading group of multi-specialty professionals dedicated to improving health and quality of life through proven behavioral science, thank you for accepting the challenge of leading our nation in the development and implementation of a scientifically-based approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic under the Biden-Harris Administration. Your selection as co-chairs of the COVID-19 Advisory Board suggests a strong focus on public health and scientific expertise to help manage the current national surge in cases and the equitable distribution of safe and effective vaccines.

We are encouraged by the Advisory Board's inclusion of experts in public health, global health, epidemiology, infectious disease, immunology, and emergency medicine. These specialties have been critical to the initial response of the pandemic and remain a vital force to our ongoing management of the virus. However, a glaring omission from the current list of advisors is expertise from behavioral medicine.

Behavioral medicine is the interdisciplinary field concerned with the development and integration of behavioral, psychosocial, and biomedical science knowledge and techniques relevant to the understanding of health and illness, and the application of this knowledge and these techniques to prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation. Behavior is central to the prevention, treatment, and management of numerous disease and health conditions, including COVID-19. Our work draws on decades of evidence on increasing health promoting behaviors (see [Fisher et al. 2011](#)) that can be applied to mask-wearing, hand-washing, and physical distancing that are essential to slowing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Behavioral scientists have also provided extensive evidence on what it takes to encourage uptake of "controversial" vaccines such as the HPV vaccine (see [Cochrane review](#)). Behavioral science has contributed substantially to the evidence base for addressing vaccine hesitancy and can thus inform multi-level efforts to increase adoption of the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccines (see [Jacobson et al. 2015](#), [Jacobson et al. 2016](#), [Jacobson et al. 2020](#)).

In addition, our research has identified key strategies to engaging patients and families in the delivery of health interventions (see [Kwon et al. 2017](#)) as well as specific strategies toward health behavior change in populations experiencing a greater health burden such as Black, Indigenous, people of color, and rural residents (see [Spina et al 2018](#), [Bogart et al. 2017](#), [Vadheim et al 2017](#)). Finally, SBM has published several policy position statements relevant to the work of the COVID-19 Advisory Board including on such topics as [rural health](#), [food assistance](#), [vaccination](#)

[adherence](#), and [equitable healthcare](#). Additional statements are in development related to intimate partner violence and mental health services during the pandemic.

In closing, we are very pleased by the formation of this Advisory Board and the potential it has to shape a successful national response to the ongoing pandemic. We know that the inclusion of behavioral scientists to this group will greatly enhance the effectiveness of the recommended strategies for prevention and treatment of COVID-19. On behalf of SBM and its membership, we strongly urge you to add this expertise to your group. Our membership includes numerous individuals with extensive experience in behavior change who recognize the critical role of diversity, equity, and inclusion when setting national policy. We are happy to connect you with these individuals for your consideration. Thank you for your commitment to the health of our country.

Respectfully,

Monica L. Baskin, PhD
President, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Professor of Preventive Medicine, University of Alabama at Birmingham

David E. Conroy, PhD
President Elect, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Professor, The Pennsylvania State University

Michael A. Diefenbach, PhD
Immediate Past President, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Professor, Northwell Health

Stephanie L. Fitzpatrick, PhD
Member Delegate, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Senior Investigator, Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research

Lila J. Rutten, PhD, MPH
Member Delegate, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Director of Population Science, CSHCD, Mayo Clinic

Rachel C. Shelton, ScD, MPH
Member Delegate, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Associate Professor, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health

Sandra J. Winter, PhD, MHA
Secretary/Treasurer, Society of Behavioral Medicine
Executive Director, Senior Coastsiders