

Executive Office Leadership

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The White House can play a powerful role in fostering interagency coordination and leadership on global health research and development (R&D). The Biden-Harris administration has been quick to take actions toward several goals supported by the Global Health Technologies Coalition: reinstating the National Security Council Directorate on Global Health Security and Biodefense and elevating the role of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) administrator to the National Security Council; directing the national security advisor to complete a review and recommend actions on global biological risks and national biopreparedness policies, including on the development of medical countermeasures; reaffirming global health as a top national security priority; and directing the secretaries of the Department of State and Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate with the heads of relevant agencies to create a plan for engaging and supporting the development of COVID-19 tools through multilateral institutions.

Policy recommendations

As the administration builds its leadership structure for responding to COVID-19 and evaluates options for improving the whole-of-government response to pandemics, ensure that USAID is at the table.

In 2020, USAID—the only US agency with a mandate to focus on global health and development—was largely excluded from high-level strategic planning for the COVID-19 response. The agency was not included in either the White House Coronavirus Task Force or Operation Warp Speed, creating a disconnect between the tools and efforts needed to confront the pandemic domestically and globally. USAID's deep expertise in global health and development is essential for engineering a US global response to COVID-19. As the Biden-Harris administration looks at the global situation, USAID should be included in high-level planning for the COVID-19 R&D response.



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Hold convenings that elevate global health research and principles of equity; the right to science; and needs-driven, country-led approaches in R&D.

Global health and life sciences research, generally, is at a turning point. COVID-19 has further exposed a deficit of equitable funding for health research that meets the actual needs of affected communities, as they themselves define them, rather than the perceived needs of patients and communities as determined by scientists and policymakers from afar. The United States is recognized for its expertise in R&D and can underscore that expertise by actively demonstrating an ethical and needs-based approach to that work. The Biden-Harris administration should spearhead global convenings that work to decentralize and redistribute power within the global health sector and promote a global health research ecosystem whose agenda and priorities are set by communities that experience a disproportionate burden of disease. These convenings should be established through a health equity lens that critically examines how US scientific resources can equitably and ethically support the most marginalized communities around the world.