

TALKING POINTS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

April 22, 2020

Note: These talking points are designed to be used in whole or in part. Feel free to adapt them to fit your audience.

BACKGROUND

- **The Louisiana Department of Health is reporting that a majority of all the deaths of COVID-19, 56 percent as of Wednesday, April 21, were African-American.**
- We know from data released in other cities around the country that African-Americans are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Hypertension, diabetes and other chronic conditions are contributing factors in COVID-19 deaths.
- Governor John Bel Edwards and Louisiana Department of Health leaders have made a long-term commitment to addressing health disparities.
- The governor and health leaders need the community's help. They need our help in the short-term to stop the spread of the new coronavirus. And they will rely on us to unify around a message of health equity that can create long-term change.

What can be done?

- As a community, we must display wisdom to help stop the spread.
- Displaying wisdom means we will rely on facts, not fiction or myths or unfounded rumors.
- It is wise to listen to the governor and our public health professionals' advice.
- Those professionals tell us:
- We are in this together. This means you are taking the following measures in the knowledge that doing so helps your neighbor, your brothers and sisters, your elders and your community to stay healthy.
 - The primary way to stop the spread is to frequently wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, especially after you come in contact with a frequently-touched surface in public.
 - Social distancing is a must, especially when going out in public. This means keeping a distance of 6 feet from other people, even those you know well.

- Our leaders have asked us to wear face masks or other cloth coverings, even if others may think coverings are silly or over-the-top. Think of it as a social courtesy; like holding open a door for someone.
- A face mask protects your neighbors and community because you may not have symptoms and could more easily spread the virus without your mask.
- If you are an essential worker, protect yourself and others by washing your hands and using hand sanitizer when soap and water isn't available after touching frequently-touched surfaces, which may include cash registers, credit cards or key pads when processing orders, etc.

What leaders are doing

- In the short-term, our leaders are using science to guide when things can reopen.
- Our leaders do not like keeping things shut down, and recognize people are anxious to get back to work.
- Our leaders are also conscious of fear, the loss and the tragedy the pandemic has caused. But we believe we can get through this.
- Getting through this means shining a light in a time of darkness.
- During a health crisis, that light is often brightest in areas of weakness and among vulnerable communities.
- A health crisis tends to expose gaps in services and bad health outcomes, especially those created by chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes.
- A health crisis also helps highlight the need for compassion and creating unity around concepts like health equity.
- Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

What does health equity mean, and why hasn't more been done?

- Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.
- Health professionals have long been concerned about vulnerable communities experiencing chronic conditions at much higher rates.
- Those disparities have caused tragedy for far too long, just as poverty and injustice have made communities vulnerable for too long.
- One thing has not changed: This has always been a problem for our entire society. It is not a problem that is limited to or caused by the communities that are vulnerable.
- Health leaders in Louisiana recognize that the health care system is not built for everyone, and that change is needed.

- Our system has shown major areas of improvement: Medicaid expansion, permanent supportive housing and services for the elderly and the disabled.
- But we need to refocus all areas of health back on health equity as a top priority.
- Health leaders have a plan to address health equity in Louisiana, and recognize that the COVID-19 crisis is a new call to action.

It is important to recognize that “social determinants of health” are key factors that lead to disproportionate health outcomes.

- Social determinants of health simply means that there are certain challenges that people deal with: How they will put food on the table, how they will get transportation to their next doctor’s appointment, living in unsafe or unstable housing, unemployment or underemployment.
- COVID-19 can help us demonstrate the importance of our leaders prioritizing improving social determinants of health.
- The underlying conditions causing deaths from COVID-19 may be a major weakness during this pandemic, but we can address this weakness in the future.
- Our health leaders have committed to doing more to address social determinants of health through community health workers, expanding Medicaid and making our health care system work for everyone.
- But there is more work to be done.

We have the research. Now is a time for action.

- Political and health leaders and communities across Louisiana must unify around a commitment to health equity. The bad health outcomes in vulnerable communities affect every person, no matter their background.
- We can address this because Louisianans are a resilient people.
- Even so, African-Americans and other people of color have suffered, and have experienced loss, separation and division in ways that other communities have not.
- Despite our resiliency, African-Americans and other people of color have encountered roadblocks. Many roadblocks were created with the intent of making our lives and our livelihoods more difficult.
- Roadblocks are not new.
- Our response to roadblocks always needs to be refreshed.
- The alarming statistics associated with COVID-19’s toll on the African-American community is the public health wake-up call we’ve been waiting for.
- It is a clarion call.

- We have made important inroads around criminal justice reform, civil rights and social justice.
- Now is our time to extend this to public health and health equity.
- Achieving health equity is crucial to our community. It is key to strengthening our society.
- Achieving health equity requires vision paired with action.
- If you are fortunate enough to teach, to lead or to act, this message must be clear:
- Reject fear.
- Embrace hope.
- Display wisdom.
- Act to create better days ahead.
- It is not too late to create a world where the young, the old, the rich and the poor can live in a healthier future enjoyed by everyone.

Where you can get help:

- If you have questions about the coronavirus or COVID-19, you can dial 211 to get additional information about the state's response and what you can do to protect yourself.
- If you are experiencing anxiety, depression or mental health issues, you can call the Keep Calm Through COVID crisis phone line, where counselors can assist you with information and service coordination 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are confidential. Call 1-866-310-7977.
- If you have recently lost a job and were not eligible for Medicaid before, your job loss probably qualifies you. You can apply for benefits on the Louisiana Department of Health's website, ldh.la.gov.