



Global Parliament of Mayors Summit Position Paper

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Urban Pandemic Response - Global Vaccination
22 October 2021

On October 21-23, mayors from around the world, convened by the Global Parliament of Mayors, will gather virtually in Palermo to chart a path forward for leadership in the post-COVID era. They will be joined by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities, think tanks, industry, and other stakeholders. Participating mayors will debate critical policy points, share experiences and lessons, and identify key policy actions around five themes: Culture; Urban Pandemic Response; Global Governance; Cities, Urban Areas, and Climate Migration; and Rethinking Urban Economies after COVID-19. This paper provides a policy brief and possible policy actions for the Urban Pandemic Response theme.¹

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role that cities play in protecting public health, not just of their citizens, but of national and global populations. Every city is unique, but their resilience to pandemics and other health threats depends on a well-prepared healthcare system. In this age of pandemics, public health institutions must be designed, managed, and equipped to address urbanization in the twenty-first century.

Cities are on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic, and mayors are working tirelessly to protect their populations. Urban residents are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 due to a number of factors including crowded living conditions, reliance upon public transport, economic participation, types of employment, and exposure to national and international travel. In cities, there are significant disparities in access to health services, risk communication, and community engagement that result in unequal health and economic outcomes

To best protect their populations, city leaders must promote equitable access to vaccines once available. While vaccination is important, the efficacy of other proactive measures should not be discounted, and those must also be driven by an equitable approach. The virus and lockdown measures have disproportionately affected those who were already vulnerable, particularly people with existing health conditions, poorer communities, and those with precarious employment or living conditions. These risks

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and vulnerabilities should be reflected in local policies for health protection and promotion. Vulnerable groups should be placed at the heart of plans for pandemic response and recovery, and mayors are uniquely positioned to lead these efforts.

The Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM) believes that cities have a vital role in making vaccines and other public health interventions inclusive, equitable, and rooted in the needs of their communities.

Policy Brief

While cities often cannot negotiate their own vaccine access agreements, they can support national efforts with efficient and equitable vaccine delivery. Cities must ensure that vaccine distribution prioritizes the most vulnerable, including health workers and sociodemographic groups at higher risk of disease or death. Their voices and platforms are crucial for advocating at national and international levels to ensure the equitable vaccine distribution in countries that are under-resourced. Moreover, city networks play an important role in sharing experiences, providing technical support, and communicating local needs to the global community, through vaccine equity statements, grants and technical assistance, and network commitments.

Public health measures—such as wearing masks, practicing physical distancing, and adequate indoor ventilation—are extremely effective at protecting people in the absence of or in conjunction with vaccines. Some local authorities may use their legislative powers to introduce and enforce such public health measures. Cities can also support one another by sharing success stories and lessons learned to encourage the adoption of good practices between peers.

Local government officials are often trusted more than officials at higher levels of government. Mayors are thus well-positioned to address misinformation, as well as the global ‘infodemic’ of damaging vaccine myths. In a pandemic, accurate information saves lives. It is especially important to understand if there are specific population groups that are negatively affected by COVID-19 myths and are discouraged from receiving their vaccine. Community engagement should also be a priority in the pandemic response. City leaders and health officials must listen to their communities to understand and address fears around vaccination and other concerns about following COVID-19 advice.

Finally, city leaders must ensure that the influence of social determinants on health is reflected in pandemic response strategies. Inadequate housing, lack of water and sanitation, food insecurity, economic instability, and the inability to produce medical records all undermine people’s opportunities for better health. Poorer communities have already been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, from both health and



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socioeconomic perspectives. The impact of entrenched social inequalities undermines the success of public health programs.

In the absence of a vaccine, recognizing and addressing some of these social determinants of health will strengthen citizens' protection against COVID-19. It will also contribute to a stronger recovery from the environmental, economic and social consequences of the pandemic, and foster resilience against future threats. The pandemic has underscored the importance of cities in responding to national and global public health challenges. At the same time, it has also highlighted opportunities to build back better at the local level, ensuring that citizens remain at the heart of urban design and decision-making. The GPM will continue to prioritize equitable urban health planning for pandemic preparedness and response.

Recommended Local, National and International Policy Actions

The GPM is well equipped to advance, coordinate, organize and scale up the collective action of mayors and local leaders. Recommended policy actions, which target the international community, national governments, local leaders and communities, include:

- **Prioritizing the most vulnerable residents**, for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and improving their access to other health-related services.
- **Tackling the spread of misinformation on COVID-19 and vaccination**, especially through community engagement to understand and address the fears and concerns of residents.
- **Strengthening mechanisms for knowledge-sharing between cities**, including experiences, lessons learned, and successful strategies for COVID-19 prevention, management, and vaccination.
- **Calling on national governments** to enhance vaccine access and provide subnational funding for urban health initiatives focusing on urban health preparedness, response, and resilience.
- **Calling on international organizations** to provide financial and technical assistance for urban pandemic preparedness and response, and to address other social determinants that affect public health and wellbeing.