



News Release

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CED Report: To Better Prepare for the Next Public Health Crisis, Government and Business Will Need Closer Collaboration

New York, May 24, 2022...As the US emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic's global, transformative disruption, one of the nation's most important missions is to assess the lessons learned to date and identify the solutions. Specifically, we must build on what worked and what didn't to better prepare for the next such emergency, whether it is a virulent new variant form of COVID or a future novel pandemic.

Today, the Committee for Economic Development, the public policy center of The Conference Board (CED), issued a new Solutions Brief, *Preparing for the Next Public Health Crisis: Lessons From the Pandemic*. The report—the latest in a series on Sustaining Capitalism—analyzes the US pandemic response's successes and shortcomings, and includes a set of 15 key recommendations for better preparing to handle the next inevitable situations.

The overriding theme of the study is the importance of close public-private collaboration at all levels for dealing with public health crises. Such partnerships are critical to avoid future severe disruptions to the economy and additional trillions of dollars of spending to avoid even sharper damage. They are necessary not only to minimize economic disruptions but also for making workplaces safe, and, ultimately, responding innovatively and rapidly to mitigate the pandemic's spread, including by developing and distributing vaccines and other therapeutics.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has touched the life of every American, one way or another. We must start working together now to ensure that we are better able to meet the challenges of the next crisis, whether it's a COVID variant or a completely new threat to public health," said Dr. Lori Esposito Murray, President of CED. "Hard experience has taught us how inextricably linked the public and private sectors are during a national health emergency. Critical response areas such as wastewater screening and a global biosurveillance network for tracking future variants and new pathogens require close cooperation."

Key insights from the Solutions Brief include:

Preparedness is the best way to avoid economic shutdowns and costly responses

- Employment fell by 14 percent during the pandemic's early stages.
- Job losses hit workers without a high school education the hardest.
- Counting the six laws Congress enacted specifically as relief and stimulus response, as well as the increase in the public debt from changed Congressional Budget Office projections, the pandemic cost roughly \$6.5 trillion.

The pandemic's impact revealed significant shortfalls in our healthcare system, which needs reform

- Black, Hispanic, and AIAN (American Indian and Alaska Native) people experienced higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death compared to white people.
- The elderly were more than eight times more likely than those aged 55-64 to die from COVID-19.
- Rural residents have had much higher COVID-19 mortality rates than their urban counterparts.
- The pandemic also disproportionately affected those with comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and smoking.
- Moving towards a healthcare system that reimburses providers for maintaining health rather than maneuvering a fee-for-service, administrative price list will help address broader societal determinants of public health. Cost-responsible consumer choice among competing private health care plans will drive the system toward quality, affordable health care for all.

America's response had several bright spots

- The vaccines were developed, tested, authorized, and distributed in record time.
- Federal regulatory relief touching on an exceptionally broad number of areas—from hospitals to the healthcare workforce to telehealth—afforded the flexibility necessary to tackle the crisis.
- Expanded wastewater sampling became a critical, reliable predictor of future COVID cases.
- Genomic sequencing permitted scientists to track the virus's evolution, address emerging variants, and rapidly develop vaccines and therapeutics.

Key recommendations from the Solutions Brief include:

In its Solutions Brief, CED provides 15 recommendations for better preparing for the next public health crisis:

1. **Determine essential businesses** Private sector leaders should coordinate with public sector leaders on the federal, regional, and state levels to use the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic to determine and prioritize essential businesses that would need to operate in a public health emergency and the requirements that the workforce would need to operate in person and remotely.
2. **Determine business plans for future disruptions** Companies should update their business plans/playbooks now with lessons learned for future disruptions. They should also coordinate with state and local officials to ensure that essential business infrastructure that requires public sector support to continue operating in a future public health crisis is addressed.
3. **Expand monitoring for future variants**
 - Continue robust testing and build a structure now for rapid scale-up of testing for a future public health emergency.
 - Expand genomic sequencing of positive tests and build a public-private global biosurveillance network using genomic sequencing to track future variants and new pathogens of concern.
 - Expand wastewater screening as an important early warning signal. To work effectively, the system needs strong commitment from public health agencies and privately run utilities.
4. **Rebuild the Strategic National Stockpile**
 - Organize a national task force with public and private representation to determine essential requirements for the National Stockpile and resilient supply chains: what needs to be physically stockpiled with a planned cycle of disposal and restocking involving FEMA and USAID; and what needs standby surge production capacity.
 - Review and address continually potential disruptions in order to promote resiliency in manufacturing supply chains for vaccines and other public health requirements during the crisis. That includes, most importantly, PPE and IV fluids and medicine delivery equipment, so that they are intact for the next crisis, and where applicable, a digitally-enabled stock rotation system should be created.
5. **Reform CDC** by finding better ways to implement scientific guidance in real-world contexts. Government should consult more closely with business through an advisory committee to minimize disruptions to the economy, using the model of DHS for critical infrastructure, to advise the agency on economic impacts of public health regulations both in planning for and during public health emergencies.
6. **Build a national network of precise, uniform accurate data** Build uniform reporting standards and a new HHS requirement that all states in collaboration with the private sector report certain important data, including hospital data, within a set time to enable the fastest possible analysis. Bringing uniformity to data reporting systems will transform public health.
7. **Expand further the use of private sector distribution and dispensing systems** for vaccines and therapeutics to use their robust existing channels of patient contact to increase accessibility and decrease hesitancy.

8. **R&D investment in life science** Continue private/public support for advanced research on vaccines and therapeutics and their required thermal storage box distribution systems, which successfully and rapidly have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. **Regulatory reform** The Federal government should undertake a review, likely through the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), of the use and effectiveness of regulatory waivers and Emergency Use Authorizations.

Second, states should review their own plans to ensure they wish to incorporate these or similar waivers during the next public health emergency. The reviews should include consultation with private sector leaders. With these tasks done, both HHS and the states will be able to renew a broad package of waivers quickly in the event of a future public health emergency. Looking forward, the FDA should prioritize review of new and upgraded manufacturing facilities being considered for reshoring.

10. **Regional hospital coordination/post-acute care** Hospitals faced exceptional challenges at the start of the pandemic. They were overwhelmed by a surge of patients when infections spread rapidly. The system could have collapsed but did not.

Lessons learned include: 1) Regulatory relief helped, as did coordination among and between hospitals and public health and emergency response agencies, including sharing of critical equipment; and 2) Systems should be in place to rapidly organize and deploy these regional efforts in the early stages of future pandemics.

Regarding the post-acute care sector, which also faced many very serious challenges at the outset of the pandemic: A panel of post-acute care experts should be convened to determine how best to respond to future public health emergencies in this sector.

11. **Rebuild and revitalize the health care workforce** Work closely with the private sector and educational institutions to address the critical shortages in health care providers. Recruit new and retired health care personnel. Ready the National Guard for emergency health care deployment. Implement accelerated graduation tracks and specialized learning in community colleges that offer new pathways to address health care workforce shortages. Regulatory reform, greater use of interdisciplinary teams, and increased use of telehealth will all help address the health care workforce shortage in rural America. Registered apprenticeships offer a chance for participants to embark on a new career while earning funds to pay for learning that career.

12. **Develop a national clinical trial structure** to speed approval of promising therapies and vaccines.

13. **Restore trust in public health** Review and reform public communications procedures for federal government announcements and dissemination of information in a crisis to make sure guidelines are clear when issued, consistent throughout the federal government, and, if they need to be changed, are explained fully as to why.

On a local level, review health education in schools as well as consider expanding the role schools and other trusted institutions can play in disseminating public health information to students and families. Business should embrace its role as a trusted source of information for employees during a public health crisis.

14. **Increase international cooperation on distribution of vaccine and other therapeutics around the world, while protecting intellectual property** Coordinated US leadership from the public and private sector is needed.

15. **Establish an independent commission** including business leaders and public health experts to focus on forward-looking solutions.

The new Solutions Brief, *Preparing for the Next Public Health Crisis: Lessons From the Pandemic*, can be accessed [here](#).

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The Committee for Economic Development (CED) is the public policy center of The Conference Board. The nonprofit, nonpartisan, business-led organization delivers well-researched analysis and reasoned solutions in the nation's interest. CED Trustees are chief executive officers and key executives of leading US companies who bring their unique experience to address today's pressing policy issues. Collectively they represent 30+ industries, over a trillion dollars in revenue, and over 4 million employees. www.ced.org

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