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Greater Focus on Equity Needed for State to Contain Virus

Outreach efforts must ramp up to overcome vaccine hesitancy due to racism

Boston, MA – Today, the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) issued a statement calling on the Baker Administration to take the necessary steps to assure equity in the rollout of its vaccination plan. MPHA expressed disappointment regarding the Baker Administration’s lack of engagement with communities hardest hit by the pandemic – especially low-income communities of color.

“Like so many others, we are excited and hopeful to have safe and effective vaccines against the coronavirus,” said MPHA Executive Director Carlene Pavlos. “Our challenge now is to make them widely available, as quickly as possible, and to prioritize those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, especially residents in low-income communities of color.”

“We will not be successful in containing this virus without supporting the communities with the highest rates of infection and death,” continued Pavlos. “When we focus on equity and bring resources to those who are most impacted, everyone benefits.”

Currently Black residents represent less than 3% of those who have received a first vaccination and Hispanic/Latinx residents represent 3.5%. These numbers are far less than their percentage in the population (7% and 12%, respectively) and far less than their representation in the rates of COVID+ tests, hospitalizations or deaths.

MPHA is calling for a more concrete state plan to engage trusted community leaders in hard-hit communities.

“The Baker Administration must take action now to build trust,” continued Pavlos. “Historical and ongoing systemic racism is at the heart of many of the barriers to equitable vaccination. These issues are plaguing phase 1 of the roll out – including the low percentage long-term care workers and people who are incarcerated who are choosing to be vaccinated. We cannot wait until further stages of phase two to address these urgent issues of communication and engagement. Action must be taken now.”

The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit www.mapublichealth.org. ###