

June 22, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

Thank you for your diligent commitment to combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend you and the Biden administration for your goal of ensuring that our response to this crisis is fully informed by scientific research.

Developing an effective and safe vaccine is only part of a successful campaign to mitigate the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Vaccines and other medical interventions are likewise only part of the solution for combating other threats to public health and safety, whether those are the spread of the flu or the next zoonotic disease or the negative effects of inequity and bias on access to high-quality health care services. A truly successful effort to combat these and other problems that negatively impact the lives and livelihoods of people in the United States and around the world requires insights from the behavioral sciences. Although many people assume psychology is solely a mental health field providing services to patients, psychological science is actually a broad field. Many psychologists indeed integrate science and practice to understand and treat mental illness, but other psychologists conduct experiments that elucidate other dimensions of human behavior—how we perceive the world around us, learn, and make decisions or judge risks; how our behavior and brains change with age, how we interact with others in social or employment settings, the interplay with artificial intelligence and robots, and how our biology and behavior intersect to shape our responses to environmental factors, as just a few examples. Psychological science thus has much to contribute to the work of all programs within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

As you continue to work to incentivize COVID-19 vaccination and responsible behaviors, we encourage you to ensure that behavioral scientists are centrally involved in all aspects of this work. Moreover, we ask that you direct all units of DHHS to review whether they are appropriately working with psychological scientists and deploying the insights gained from the empirical research conducted by psychological scientists to improve the effectiveness of their programs and interventions.

Thank you for your continued efforts to improve public health and safety. We are happy to share additional information about the important roles that psychological science and scientists can play in supporting DHHS. We look forward to an opportunity to talk further with you or your

*Association for Psychological Science*  
*Letter to Sec. Becerra re: psychological science*  
*June 22, 2021*  
*Page 2*

staff on this or any other matter where APS and our members may be of assistance. Please feel free to contact Dr. Andy DeSoto, Director of Government Relations, at [adesoto@psychologicalscience.org](mailto:adesoto@psychologicalscience.org) to coordinate a meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Gropp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Robert Gropp, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

CC: Rachel L. Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health