

April 21, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Becerra:

On behalf of the Association for Psychological Science (APS), a 25,000-member scientific organization dedicated to the advancement of research psychology, thank you for your continued leadership of the U.S. pandemic response and your work to prepare the country to respond to future health emergencies.

Human behavior is central to most public health problems, including the pressing ones now facing our country. Individuals' decisions to accept safe vaccines, follow and share accurate health information, and act in ways that promote individual and collective health can be anticipated, understood, and influenced by behavioral science. Research by APS members shows that the field of psychological science can help individuals and communities navigate the current pandemic and defend against future ones.

We appreciate that you are working to ensure that all scientific, technical, engineering, mathematical, and medical fields capable of contributing to the COVID-19 response are appropriately integrated. As you continue in this work, we would like to draw your attention to a recent statement from Congress encouraging the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to include psychological science in its planning. In report language accompanying fiscal year 2022 appropriations, Congress set forth the following:

Behavioral Science and the COVID-19 National Strategy.—The Committee applauds the Administration's robust National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness and appreciates that the strategy reflects the best advice of scientists and public health experts. As our success in these areas depends on our scientific understanding of human behavior, the Committee urges the Department to include psychological scientists at every level of the Department's response to COVID-19 and future public health emergencies to most effectively meet these common goals (H. Rept. 117-96, p. 233).

APS has reviewed HHS and other government pandemic committees and panels, and we agree with Congress that these groups need psychological scientists and research psychology expertise. Indeed, all units of HHS can benefit from the knowledge and technical skills that psychological scientists possess. All HHS programs can deploy findings from research psychology to improve the effectiveness of pandemic programs and interventions.

The [APS Global Collaboration on COVID-19](#) illustrates some of the many ways that psychological science can improve pandemic preparedness and response. This initiative is identifying and recommending steps to improve our capacity to respond to future emergencies. Working groups associated with the Global Collaboration are studying [mental health](#), the [psychology and biology of infections](#), how COVID-19 has [affected work and the workforce](#), and how technology has helped and hindered the pandemic response.

As COVID-19 is an endemic problem facing the world, there is still an opportunity to benefit from behavioral science. Please contact me or Andy DeSoto, PhD, Director of Government Relations, at adesoto@psychologicalscience.org, to share what additional information we can provide to assist you in drawing on psychological science for the good of HHS and the country.

Thank you for your continued efforts and for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Gropp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert Gropp, PhD
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director