

# A blueprint for more equitable care in public health crises

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Mission residents are swabbed for COVID-19 at a pop-up, test site at the 24th St. Mission Bart Station. Unidos en Salud (United in Health), a partnership between the Latino Task Force for COVID-19 and UC San Francisco Medical School, tested close to 6,000 residents over three days across four test sites in the Mission, Tenderloin, Bayview and Excelsior — neighborhoods with high rates of infection. Credit: Mike Kai Chen

A testing lab set up within eight days, teams focused on testing and

treating COVID-19 in the Black and Latinx communities, and the launch of one of the largest testing studies in the nation—these are a few examples of how UC San Francisco partnered with government and community groups to address racial, economic and cultural barriers with the goal of providing equitable care to vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The collaborations are documented in a new UCSF report, "Advancing COVID Health Equity: Strategies for developing an equity-first response."

Starting in March 2020, the report chronicles UCSF's collaboration with the City and County of San Francisco, state and Bay Area health departments, [community groups](#), and other organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report—a blueprint for providing more equitable medical care in future public health crises—describes lessons learned about [public education](#), outreach, data collection and care delivery.

"This report reflects the progress we have made together in addressing the COVID-19 health disparities and inequities vulnerable populations experience," said UCSF Chancellor Sam Hawgood, MBBS. "As we build on this important work, we must bridge the remaining gaps so we can sustain and expand a health-equity approach to improve public health for all."

## **Building connections to reach vulnerable communities**

When the COVID-19 pandemic exploded in 2020, it soon became clear that it was exacerbating long-established health disparities, resulting in Black, Latinx, Asian, Native American and other marginalized communities being disproportionately impacted.

Spurred by the early lack of personal protective equipment and test kits in the pandemic's first months, UCSF faculty, staff and learners rallied with medical partners, [community organizations](#) and government agencies to overcome obstacles to medical care for vulnerable communities. The results were far-reaching and impacted public policy and legislation at local, state and federal levels.

A key takeaway of the report is that building on existing partnerships and establishing new ones with respected local organizations was essential to gaining the trust people needed to follow [public health](#) guidance, such as wearing masks, being tested and getting vaccinated.

Community organizations with deep roots in neighborhoods were able to reach constituents in ways UCSF, as an institution, could not. While UCSF delivered scientific expertise, services and supplies, local organizations played a vital role in directing those resources to have the greatest impact.

"The secret sauce was putting the community-based organizations in charge," said Margot Kushel, M.D., director of the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, who envisioned a program to serve unhoused persons that became a national model.

The UCSF Foundation Board of Directors acted quickly to establish a COVID-19 Response Fund, which greatly enhanced UCSF's ability to launch new initiatives to help those most vulnerable to COVID-19. With the generous support of donors, more than \$23 million was raised for that fund alone, among other COVID-related funds.

The important lessons learned from UCSF's collaboration with partners in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic will inform efforts to address health disparities into the future. UCSF will continue to bring diverse voices to the table as it works to broaden and achieve [health](#)

equity for all.

**More information:** Advancing COVID Health Equity: Strategies for developing an equity-first response:

[ucsf.box.com/s/9zk49a3o7bxlllp5rzd55aw88ce4d6r5](https://ucsf.box.com/s/9zk49a3o7bxlllp5rzd55aw88ce4d6r5)

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