

# **Attorney General Raoul Urges Congress To Ensure Equitable Access To COVID-19 Vaccine**

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**CHICAGO** – Attorney General Kwame Raoul, as part of a coalition of 13 state attorneys general, is urging Congress to take action to ensure all Americans have access to the COVID-19 vaccine at no cost.

Older adults and Black, Latino and Native Americans are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The same populations are also more likely to be uninsured or receive health care coverage through Medicare or Medicaid. [In a letter](#), Raoul and the coalition call on Congress to codify an interim rule providing the vaccine to Medicare recipients at no cost, to properly fund programs that cover administrative fees for people who are uninsured and to increase financial support for Medicaid.

“Once this critical vaccine is available, cost should not be a barrier to access for anyone in Illinois, particularly for our most vulnerable residents,” Raoul said. “As we anticipate the distribution of a vaccine, I encourage everyone to follow guidance from public health officials and take appropriate measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, in 2019, 18.2 percent of Illinois’ residents were covered by Medicaid, 14.1 percent by Medicare and 7.3 percent were uninsured. Among Illinois adults between the ages of 19 and 64, 10.3 percent were uninsured. Additionally, adults who are uninsured or receive coverage through Medicare or Medicaid are more likely to be Americans of color. For example, one-third of Black Americans are insured under Medicaid, and Latino Americans are three times more likely to be uninsured than white Americans.

On top of inequities in health care coverage, Black and Latino communities also have been the hardest hit by the pandemic. Black Americans experience a significantly greater COVID-19 infection rate and a mortality rate that is three times higher than that of white Americans. Latino Americans have had nearly three times as many COVID-19 cases as white Americans and also have a significantly higher hospitalization rate.

In the letter, Raoul and the coalition are urging Congress to take three specific actions in order to ensure equitable access to the vaccines:

- Codify the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services’ recent interim final rule allowing any vaccine authorized by the Food and Drug Administration to be covered at no cost to Medicare beneficiaries.
- Ensure that the CARES Act Provider Relief Fund, which will provide uninsured individuals with access to the vaccine, also covers copays or out-of-pocket fees, as well as costs for outreach to uninsured communities.

- Provide states with additional financial assistance to supplement the Family First Coronavirus Response Act by ensuring that payment rates to providers are sufficient to allow Medicaid recipients to access the vaccine at no cost. Rates should also allow providers to perform outreach to vulnerable communities. While the vaccines' exact costs to patients are unknown, studies have shown that Medicaid recipients have lower vaccination rates than people with private health insurance.

Joining Raoul in submitting the letter are the attorneys general of California, Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia and Washington.