

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer
Governor
PO Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909



Dear Governor Whitmer,

As representatives of Michigan's leading physician, pharmacist, nursing, public health, pediatric health and hospital organizations, we are writing to urge you to increase funding for the state's *I Vaccinate* public education campaign in the FY 2021 state budget.

I Vaccinate is needed now more than ever to protect Michigan's public health and economy. As a public-private partnership between the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the nonprofit Franny Strong Foundation, this public health education initiative is vital to the protection and support of Michigan residents' health going forward.

Before COVID-19 forever changed our state, our communities and our lives, *I Vaccinate* was succeeding in helping to increase Michigan's childhood immunization rates after more than two decades of decline. In 2017, when the campaign launched, Michigan ranked 44th in childhood vaccination coverage. As of 2019, Michigan has jumped to 29th, with the amount of fully immunized children climbing each year.

COVID-19's massive community spread in early March required you to take necessary, prudent, and strict life-saving actions to protect the people of Michigan. For those actions, we applaud you and will be forever grateful. Your decisions saved thousands of lives and helped to protect our frontline health care workers when we were most at risk and in need. Like Michigan, many states also put restrictions on travel, gatherings, and visits to many of the places we typically frequent in normal times. As a result, many states – including Michigan – experienced steep declines in the number of people traveling to the doctor or local health public facilities to be vaccinated, and to have their children vaccinated. Now, states across the nation – including Michigan – have seen immunization rates plummet alarmingly. According to recent data issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccination rates overall for children 18 and younger dropped by more than 20%, going from about two-thirds of children to less than half, leaving communities vulnerable to other outbreaks of preventable illness.

I Vaccinate will drive Michigan's vaccination rates back up again, just as it was doing before COVID-19. In fact, it is the perfect public education vehicle to educate Michigan residents about the safety and efficacy of vaccines that prevent many diseases that can sicken and kill thousands of people and crush the economies of entire states and nations.

I Vaccinate is, by any measure, a modest state appropriation. Launched in Michigan in 2017, the campaign is funded by a \$740,000 line item in the state Medicaid budget, which then qualifies for federal matching funds. *I Vaccinate* has been strongly supported by legislative Republicans and Democrats. The campaign is also supported by nearly every physician and nursing organization in Michigan, all local and state public health agencies, the CDC, the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, and all Michigan hospitals.

For many reasons, *I Vaccinate* is the perfect tool to educate Michigan residents about the safety and efficacy of vaccines that prevent diseases that sicken and kill thousands of people:

- ***I Vaccinate* helps protect Michigan's health care system from multiple outbreaks of serious diseases.** Across Michigan, hospitals, doctors and public health experts are warning that like our economy, our health care system is not prepared to handle two major disease outbreaks at once. From health experts at the state, national and global levels, including the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC, and the World Health Organization, to our elected officials including state governors and our president, all support a catch-up immunization campaign to protect residents of all ages.
- ***I Vaccinate* can help protect Michigan's economy – this state can't afford another economic shutdown that could be complicated by an outbreak of a second communicable disease.** The COVID-19 pandemic has caused undeniable economic suffering for millions of Michiganders. Scientists across the world, nation and Michigan are deeply concerned about a second wave of COVID-19 this winter and additional economic fallout. A second wave accompanied by a concurrent outbreak of another vaccine-preventable disease would result in economic catastrophe. A review of the costs of measles outbreaks in the United States between 2004-2017 found a median cost per single case of \$32,805 (range of \$9,862 to \$76,154). The measles outbreak in New York City that began in October of 2018 cost the city \$6 million. Most measles cases were among unvaccinated (73%), incompletely vaccinated (7%) or individuals who did not know their vaccination status (15%). *I Vaccinate* can educate people on vaccines that will stop the spread of additional communicable diseases that could strike at the same time as a second wave of COVID-19.
- ***I Vaccinate* has established, active and frequently visited public communication channels, including a robust website (IVaccinate.org) and social media channels.** Content is based 100% on medical science and facts and is vetted by state and local public health and immunization experts, physicians, and nurses.
- ***I Vaccinate* was successfully driving Michigan's vaccination rates higher.** Since the start of the campaign, the percentage of Michigan toddlers aged 19 to 35 months that were up to date on all recommended vaccinations increased nearly 6 percentage points, from 54% to 59.7%, according to state data from September 2019. The percentage of Michigan teens ages 13 to 17 years that were up to date on all recommended vaccinations increased 12 percentage points, from 29% to 41.4%.
- ***I Vaccinate* messaging is empowering and non-judgmental.** The campaign has created safe spaces for parents to ask their vaccine questions and get answers based in medical science, to help them make decisions to protect their families.
- **Vaccines save millions of dollars in health care costs.** Every dollar invested in vaccination yields \$3 in direct benefits and \$10 in benefits when societal costs are included, according to the CDC.
- ***I Vaccinate* is the perfect public health platform to educate Michigan residents about vaccines, including the highly anticipated COVID-19 vaccine.** If and when a COVID-19 vaccine is approved, the *I Vaccinate* website, traditional and social media channels, and the many public health agencies across Michigan that support the campaign's messages are perfect vehicles and advocates for the vaccine.

Because I Vaccinate helps protect Michigan’s economy and health care system from disease outbreaks and pandemics, the education campaign must be protected in the new state budget. In fact, because the state’s immunization rates have fallen following the COVID-19 pandemic and because a COVID-19 vaccine is likely coming in the next year or so, we are respectfully calling on you to support the campaign with an increase from \$740,000 to \$1 million. We fully recognize the fiscal challenges facing the state budget in the coming year however, we also know that a \$1 million appropriation is minuscule compared to the financial implications of either another wave of COVID-19, a second vaccine-preventable disease outbreak facing our health care system, or when available, a lack of uptake in the new COVID-19 vaccine.

Now more than ever, I Vaccinate is needed to protect Michigan’s public health and economy and is perfectly positioned to do so. All of us would welcome the opportunity to discuss I Vaccinate with you and your team.

Sincerely,



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 CEO, Michigan Health and Hospital Association



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