EQUITY AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS COMMITTEE

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the Mayor’s ReOpen DC survey, the Committee received input through engagement with nine focus groups and interviews with more than 10 stakeholder groups. This engagement involved representatives from the African-American community, Asian and Pacific Islander community, Latinx community, African community, LGBTQ community, senior citizen community, blind and low vision community, mobility-impaired community, hearing impaired community, intellectual and developmental disabilities community, people experiencing homelessness and advocates, and nonprofit organizations that provide services to vulnerable populations.

SAFEGUARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the report’s primary guidance and universal safeguards (e.g., physical distancing of at least six feet, use of masks in public spaces, stringent sanitation and hygiene practices), the Committee proposes the following guidance listed below.

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<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>ADDITIONAL SAFEGUARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Employment and income</td>
<td>Increase SNAP benefit eligibility to vulnerable populations not currently covered</td>
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<td>Increase investments and partnerships for connecting vulnerable populations to in-demand careers</td>
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<td>Increase small business support to assist vulnerable businesses to access COVID-19 assistance</td>
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<td>Provide unemployment insurance for job sharing workers with lost wages</td>
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<td>Incentivize employer accommodation of extended work-from-home and employee requests of delay returning to work due to COVID-19 related considerations</td>
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<td>Invest in legal aid and resources for the public in advance of increased requests for legal assistance regarding lost benefits</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>Provide school supplies as well as food and clothing services for children in need</td>
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<td>Provide mobile Wi-Fi or floating locations in vulnerable communities, adjacent to open spaces, and outside public facilities such as libraries and community centers</td>
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<td>Develop an Extended Academic Program available and offered through schools and/or neighborhood community centers, integrating school supports such as learning opportunities and community partnerships to eliminate learning loss</td>
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<td>Work in tandem with DC Public Schools and area charter schools to address the digital divide, providing Wi-Fi, equipment, and tech literacy education for caregivers</td>
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<td>Stage distance learning in ways that minimize internet bandwidth challenges and facilitate device sharing in households</td>
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<td>Expand childcare opportunities and access for families of workers who must return to work</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendations to the Mayor</strong></td>
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| **Food environment** | Provide free tuition and stipends to residents without a college degree for non-profit state colleges and community colleges  
Enforce signage, sanitation, cleaning, testing, and distancing standards equitably in retail |
| **Health and medical Care** | Continue to facilitate the expansion and reach of fresh food retailers and nonprofit food pantry, preparation, and delivery programs, especially ‘East of the River’  
Expand delivery of farmer’s market produce and urban garden capacity  
Support equitable payment options both in brick-and-mortar markets and online by adapting for unbanked populations and public benefit recipients and expanding the number of establishments that can accept WIC and SNAP payments  
Ensure that families that rely on free and reduced lunches and summer meal sites have safe access with proper physical distancing |
| **Housing** | Expand programming for medical literacy to help the public better navigate the medical system and access preventative medical care, including behavioral health care  
Target medical care and testing availability (including mobile testing), as well as tracing capabilities in underserved communities  
Implement and enforce equity practices in treatment and clinical trials through increased oversight and the development of a patient reporting system  
Work with pharmacies and other medical corporations to prevent treatment shortages in underserved areas  
Increase access to physical, mental, and psychological health resources for front-line workers and other individuals experiencing significant increases in stress and trauma. Resources should be made available 24/7, as typical 9am-5pm operating hours pose barriers to access for these services  
Regulate the price of essential items like sanitization supplies  
Make telehealth/telemedicine services accessible to all and ensure it is covered by insurance |
| **Transportation** | Prevent displacement of vulnerable residents that are impacted by illness, economic turmoil, and job loss  
Sustain investments in the expansion of supportive housing and affordable housing for domestic violence victims, returning citizens, and homeless individuals (not shelter housing)  
Expand services to populations who are housing insecure due to poverty and histories of incarceration, especially rental assistance programs to pay down rent arrears and financial support to prevent more people from experiencing homelessness  
Protect tenants’ rights, health and safety by prohibiting evictions and unsafe management by landlords  
Expand the use of hotel rooms for residents experiencing homelessness who have become infected or have been exposed to COVID-19 or have the highest prevalence of COVID-19 risk factors  
Provide a systemic evaluation of congregate living settings with regular testing  
Ensure that all residents have access to affordable heating and cooling options during the stay-at-home order by preventing utility shutoffs |
| **Reinstall free Circulator access and expand free bike share access** |
| **Outdoor Environment and Recreation** | Increase resources for expanded and safe transit operations, including hazard pay for vulnerable transit employees  
Improve safe access to DMV services and improve the ease of online and mail-in DMV services  
Encourage the use of PPE by riders on public and micro transit |
| **Community Safety** | Implement reopening protocols with a focus on accommodating people of all abilities  
Increase investments in ‘East of the River’ recreation amenities including fitness gyms, outdoor parks, and trails, etc., and implement physical distancing guides for safe use  
Ensure that people of all abilities and those with underlying conditions, or vulnerability due to age, are able to participate fully in recreational activities, and train recreational opportunity providers about barriers that exist with current programming so that they can be made more accessible  
Implement reopening protocols with a focus on accommodating people with disabilities  
Consider innovative ways to fight disparate environmental impacts on low income communities |
| **Other Recommendations and ‘Big Ideas’** | Expand domestic violence prevention and services to respond to an anticipated surge in requests for service once the stay-at-home order is lifted  
Downgrade sentencing for lesser offenses to work release programs that require enrollment in workforce development initiatives and are attached to independent living and housing opportunities  
Eliminate long lines in public buildings and other facilities to reduce the chances of transmission and infection |

**OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS AND ‘BIG IDEAS’**

The committee and its members have identified several additional initiatives and ideas for consideration, which include:

- **Invest in accelerated closure of the digital divide through initiatives including:**
  - Providing free public Wi-Fi, devices and training for technical literacy  
  - Increasing mobile availability of information, with an emphasis on accessible technologies  
  - Incorporating universal accessibility in communications and devices, including instant translation, voice-activated communication, etc.  
  - Expand the use of mobile messaging and development of mobile applications to deliver government services

- **Restructure outreach strategy to vulnerable communities that do not traditionally engage with government through initiatives including:**
  - Incentivizing individuals to opt-in to ongoing communications regarding COVID-19 (e.g., Metro Pass lottery)  
  - Expanding 211 to include a hotline and call center to field requests for real time updates  
  - Creating a universal application and outreach program for services and data sharing between agencies  
  - Engaging workers who must return to work through unions and employers
- Launching a “know your rights” campaign that includes distinct branding and a website for vulnerable populations during COVID-19
- Leveraging trusted government programs (such as MORCA and Project Empowerment) to inform justice-involved individuals and their families about health updates and rights

- **Ensure recovery efforts are grounded in data, particularly in identifying existing inequities and disparate outcomes, to providing a roadmap of understanding who the recovery is serving and how programs are developed and implemented equitably by:**
  - Ensuring all data related to the Disease and resources is stored and made accessible
  - Securing private sector participation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of economic equity data