

The End of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency: Lessons Learned from the Pandemic and Implications for People

Playbook for Federal and State Policymakers

The pandemic highlighted America's rigid, inequitable health care system and forced us to look at how our health care system was not working for so many people. Through this time, the health care system adapted with increased flexibility and a renewed focus on people. We now have an opportunity to create a system that prioritizes people's needs and advances health equity through carefully-crafted policies.

WHO CREATED THIS PLAYBOOK

United States of Care is a nonpartisan advocacy organization **committed to ensuring that everyone has access to quality, affordable health care.** The organization drives a unique cross-sector, people-centered approach to creating and advancing state and federal policies that meet the needs of people and result in a more equitable health care system.

United States of Care created this playbook through extensive research, interviews with members of its [Founders Council](#), [Leadership Council](#), and [Voices of Real Life Council](#), as well as feedback from external partners, to get a comprehensive perspective of the COVID-19 policy flexibilities and its impact on people.

UNITED SOLUTIONS FOR CARE

Through listening work, USofCare created [United Solutions for Care](#), a roadmap of 4 goals and 12 solutions to build a better health care system. Achieving these shared goals will move us to a system where every person can access health care, regardless of who they are, how much money they make, or where they live.

- 1 People have the **certainty** that they can **afford** their health care.
- 2 People have the **security and freedom** that **dependable** health care coverage provides **as life changes**.
- 3 People can get the **personalized** care they need, **when and how** they need it.
- 4 People experience a health care system that is **understandable and easy to navigate**.

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I want everyone to just have standard basic care that is affordable, so people can just go get primary care at the doctor or at the hospital or whatever...I think just setting standards for health insurance plans to make sure everyone can have access to those plans.”

- Focus group participant, New York

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the world and our entire U.S. health care system — killing and sickening millions, and forcing us to focus on the cracks in our health care system and how it does not work for so many people. The pandemic highlighted and exacerbated long-standing inequities in our health care system for [people of color](#), [low-income people](#), [people with a disability](#), [people who are uninsured](#), and many others.

The pandemic, and resulting policy responses, also unleashed an unprecedented level of flexibility and innovation across our entire system. This versatility enhanced people's ability to obtain and keep health care coverage, while simultaneously allowing for increased flexibility in how and when they access health care services.

Many policy flexibilities created during the pandemic and public health emergency (PHE) helped people access health care services that became more affordable, dependable, personalized, and easy to understand. Unfortunately, many of these policy flexibilities were temporary and are set to end when the PHE ends. Many policymakers have recognized the progress that has been made and created permanent policies that meet people's needs, improves access to care, and advances health equity. These proposed policies can serve as a replicable model and guide for other policymakers across the country. As a result, the end of the COVID-19 PHE provides federal and state policymakers an opportunity to enact long-term solutions that will ensure equitable access to health care for all.

To help federal and state policymakers continue and build upon the progress made during the pandemic and PHE, United States of Care created this playbook with a people- and equity-centered lens to identify:

- ★ Pandemic-era policy flexibilities, their impact on people's health care, and implications for people if the policy flexibilities are discontinued;
- ★ Federal and state initiatives that help fill in the gaps; and
- ★ Federal and state opportunities to advance a health care system that is affordable, dependable, personalized, and easy to navigate.

UNITED STATES OF CARE

United States of Care (USofCare) is a non-partisan non-profit working to ensure everyone has access to quality, affordable health care regardless of health status, social need, or income. By putting the needs of people at the forefront of our research and policy solutions, we can create a health care system that works for people.