

Highlights from NIHCM Webinar: The Future of the COVID-19 Response: The New Administration, Vaccines, and the Health Care System

Overview

On November 18, 2020, the National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation held a panel discussion about the ongoing healthcare response to COVID-19, discussing possible upcoming federal and state government action, plans for vaccine approval and distribution, and how health plans are preparing to handle COVID-19-related challenges in the coming year. Panelists included Dr. Michael Osterholm, member of President-Elect Biden's COVID-19 Advisory Board and professor at the University of Minnesota, Hemi Tewarson, visiting senior policy fellow at the Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy, and Dr. Katherine Dallow, vice president of clinical programs and strategy at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Click this [link](#) for more information about this event, including NIHCM's recording of the full panel discussion.

Highlights

Dr. Michael Osterholm said news about the effectiveness of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is promising, but noted that most Americans are still months away from receiving a vaccine. He argued that Americans must be ready to self-isolate as vaccine distribution occurs to prevent a larger spike in cases, especially since COVID-19 cases and COVID-related deaths are currently at an all-time high. He explained that on their current trajectory, cases could potentially overwhelm hospital capacity and result in shortages of crucial supplies like personal protective equipment and drugs, and also make vaccine distribution more difficult.

Dr. Osterholm's key priorities for the COVID-19 response in the coming months included comprehensive national response planning, supporting state and local partnerships to build capacity for rapid vaccine distribution, good communication with the public, and de-politicizing the COVID-19 vaccine.

Ms. Hemi Tewarson argued that lack of cohesive federal leadership has required states take the lead in the COVID-19 response. She explained that state leaders are now focused on how to prepare for authorization and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, which is a challenge since states do not know exactly how many vaccine doses they will receive initially. Currently, states are planning for multiple scenarios and a phased rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine that prioritizes high-risk groups and essential workers. States' [Vaccination Plans](#) explain their distribution strategies in greater depth. Ms. Tewarson also highlighted vaccine challenges faced by states, including communication with citizens on when vaccines will be available, identifying key populations and allocating early vaccine doses, and building a robust data sharing infrastructure.

Ms. Tewarson said the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIP) recommendation on who should receive the COVID-19 vaccine first will probably have an impact on how states prioritize vaccine distribution, but that first vaccines will still likely go to healthcare workers, first responders, and nursing home residents first. She also argued that more widespread testing and contact tracing will be useful for keeping case numbers down as the vaccines are distributed.

Dr. Katherine Dallow discussed Blue Cross Blue Shield Massachusetts' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including premium relief, communications campaigns to inform the public, and supporting state efforts to prepare for distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. She argued that disseminating accurate information to the public will be crucial for the next few months of the COVID-19 response so that high-risk people are able to get the vaccine more quickly and be aware of when and where they will receive their vaccines. Dr. Dallow also argued that communication will be crucial for building public trust to ensure good uptake of the vaccine as soon as it is available, and for cutting down on misinformation, fraud, waste, and abuse.