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February 14, 2022

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RE: COVID 19 Transition

Dear Dr. Aragon:

On behalf of the California Conference of Local Health Departments (CCLHO), we wish to express our gratitude to all public health partners in California for their tireless commitment to the health and well-being of all Californians. Public health has demonstrated their tremendous dedication to combating COVID-19. After two plus years of response efforts, it is time to transition into living with the virus, as the landscape has shifted. Public health should continue to emphasize the mitigation strategies that have been proven to be effective and focus on education and community collaboration. It is time to renew and refresh the overall roles and responsibilities of public health personnel in California. To build upon and strengthen the ongoing relationship between state, regional, and local partners, it is critical to meet all partners where they are.

Utilizing strategies that recognize the exhausted operational capacity of public health that will help facilitate the vital work necessary should include: 1) moving away from individual case reporting and shifting to a surveillance system like what is done for influenza; 2) prioritizing case and outbreak investigation for high-risk congregate settings such as healthcare and schools, 3) discontinuing contact tracing; 3) transitioning out of the requirement for employers to report outbreaks to local public health; 4) emphasizing strong, effective mitigation measures such as vaccines, self-isolation and quarantine, masking, therapeutics, and testing; 5) returning the responsibility of medical diagnosis and treatment back to the healthcare system; and 6) amplifying health education and risk communication efforts to build trust and rapport with the public to empower them to make their own decisions.

CCLHO asks that CDPH take the lead and issue guidance that will not only empower public health but all residents within California. As you know, regions and jurisdictions in California are extremely diverse and have varying priorities. Recently, the Greater Sacramento Region developed a transition plan that lays out a pathway forward to live with the virus while acknowledging that we are not done with our response efforts. The Greater Sacramento Region has met and presented their plan with the other four regions identified in California's response to solicit input and feedback accordingly. CCLHO supports the transition plan laid out by the Greater Sacramento Region and would like to express our appreciation for the willingness to think ahead and plan appropriately in a shifting environment. Continued leadership and direction from CDPH will ensure a statewide consistent approach and will promote the health and safety of all Californians.

As each region considers transition approaches, the common understanding from all regions and jurisdictions is that timing, messaging, and communication will be extremely important to establish ongoing trust with all our communities. In addition, strategic alignment between the state, regions, and jurisdictions will be essential for a successful long-term response.

CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now California Department of Public Health), other departments, boards, commissions, and officials of federal, state, and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions.

Sincerely,

Julie Vaishampayan, MD, MPH
President, California Conference of Local Health Officer

