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February 26, 2021

Doug McMillon  
President & CEO  
Walmart, Inc.  
702 S.W. 8th St.  
Bentonville, AR 72716

Dear Mr. McMillon:

As a physician and public health expert, I have been aggressively advocating for more vaccines in my district. Specifically, I have been working to ensure that the underserved areas of my district do not get left behind as retail pharmacies expand the number of locations offering vaccines. I was pleased to learn that Walmart has partnered with the federal government to provide COVID-19 vaccinations but was disappointed that you are not operating in California.

In the coming weeks, I urge you to expand number of states in which you that you will offer the vaccines and to prioritize locations in the hardest hit, highest risk underserved communities in California's 36<sup>th</sup> district in eastern Riverside County.

Twelve communities in Riverside County are defined by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as Medically Underserved Areas, including Blythe, Hemet, San Jacinto, Coachella, Indio, Idyllwild/Pine Cove, Banning, Beaumont, Chiriaco Summit/ Desert Center, which are all in my district.<sup>1</sup>

Many of those same communities have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, compounding the problem, including Hemet, Indio, and Coachella which have all had approximately 10-15% of their populations test positive for COVID-19, compared to 8.4% in California.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>

Despite these significant areas of infections and the lack of medical access in those communities, Walmart has not included my district in Riverside County in their vaccination location plan. This

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/mua-find>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/WEEKLY\\_BOS\\_REPORT\\_DISTRICT%203\\_1.25-1.31.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101228-620&timestamp=1612289577656](https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/WEEKLY_BOS_REPORT_DISTRICT%203_1.25-1.31.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101228-620&timestamp=1612289577656)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/WEEKLY\\_BOS\\_REPORT\\_DISTRICT%204\\_1.25-1.31.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101228-633&timestamp=1612289574457](https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/WEEKLY_BOS_REPORT_DISTRICT%204_1.25-1.31.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101228-633&timestamp=1612289574457)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/COVID-19%20Tests%20Jan18-Jan%2024%20byCDP\\_RiversideCounty%20Feb12021\\_Merged.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101227-807&timestamp=1612289694248](https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/1/COVID-19%20Tests%20Jan18-Jan%2024%20byCDP_RiversideCounty%20Feb12021_Merged.pdf?ver=2021-02-02-101227-807&timestamp=1612289694248)

<sup>5</sup> <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/>

pandemic has highlighted the acuteness of health disparities in our system. We are seeing disparities in rates of infection, hospitalizations, and deaths, as well as who has access to care. We certainly saw it play out in access to testing, when nurses treating COVID-19 positive patients struggled to access testing, but professional baseball players were able to get tested multiple times a week. I sounded the alarm that vaccine access would head down that same path if there weren't a coordinated, strategic plan that prioritizes groups according to risk and then ensures those high-risk groups actually received the vaccines expeditiously. Prioritizing based on risk isn't enough if people who qualify for a vaccine can't actually access them.

As you are aware, this pandemic has highlighted the acuteness of health disparities in our system, and we are experiencing those disparities in vaccination rates. Underserved communities with higher rates of infections have disproportionately low inoculation rates, as do individuals of color, despite the fact that they are more likely to contract COVID-19 and die from the disease. This is true in Riverside County, where data shows that Hispanic individuals make up 47% of the population and 63.3% of the COVID cases, but the vaccination rate in that population is under 18%.<sup>6,7</sup>

Fortunately, retail pharmacies have an opportunity to address this troublesome trend. Because retail pharmacies are located in every community, they can play a pivotal role in getting the vaccine into the arms of the individuals in communities that have been disproportionately overburdened with infections and death by COVID-19. They can also help disseminate important vaccine information and help patients overcome vaccine hesitancy – in doing so they can significantly contribute to saving lives and ending the pandemic.

We have a moral responsibility to make sure that we do not leave people behind simply because they lack resources or live in certain zip codes. I urge you to expand the number of Walmart vaccination sites and prioritize high-risk, underserved communities like those in California's 36<sup>th</sup> district. Not doing so will lead to further disparities and prolong the pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that these communities are prioritized as you develop your plans for future vaccination sites.

Sincerely,



Raul Ruiz, M.D.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2021/02/12/riverside-county-reports-big-discrepancy-vaccination-rates-race/6727260002/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/5/COVID\\_19\\_Race\\_Ethnicity\\_Data\\_02.18.21\\_for\\_website.pdf?ver=2021-02-22-122524-747&timestamp=1614025613851](https://www.rivcoph.org/Portals/0/Documents/CoronaVirus/Feb2021/Dashboard/5/COVID_19_Race_Ethnicity_Data_02.18.21_for_website.pdf?ver=2021-02-22-122524-747&timestamp=1614025613851)