



**COVID Vaccine Equity and Access to Life-saving Vaccines
for Florida's Most Vulnerable
March 16, 2021**

As vaccine availability increases, Florida's vaccination strategy should prioritize the dual goals of equitable distribution and ensuring that no vaccine or vaccination slots go to waste. For starters, the state must immediately reverse course on the recent requirement that those under 65 with underlying conditions present a Department of Health form signed by a doctor in order to receive their vaccine. The new requirement has already shown it disadvantages low-income residents and residents of color, who are more likely to serve as essential workers, less likely to have a regular source of care, less likely to be insured, and who have experienced disproportionate economic harm as a result of the pandemic.

The situation is made worse by Florida's failure to expand Medicaid, leaving roughly a million Floridians uninsured and without access to their own doctor. In the face of these constraints, we cannot expect, and we certainly should not require, that low-income residents, and those marginalized from the health care system will be able to allocate the time and the resources required to obtain the required form. As is being done elsewhere, including at Miami Dade County's Jackson Health System, Florida residents should be allowed to "self-attest" to an underlying condition.

Jackson Health has already adopted self-attestation as a way to facilitate vaccinations for vulnerable Floridians with underlying conditions such as diabetes and asthma, which puts them at higher risks of complications and death if they contract Covid. That's how it should be. As Maura Healey, the Attorney General of Massachusetts, which allows for self-attestation, so aptly stated: "The most effective way to save lives is to make sure that our most vulnerable residents have access to the vaccine."

While policies like that requiring proof of state residency, and the DOH form, are intended to keep out those who might take advantage of the system, these barriers end up blocking access not just to potentially bad actors, but also to our most marginalized residents. This is too high a price to pay. Until all vaccination sites are fully open and the life-saving vaccine is widely accessible, every effort should be made to eliminate barriers for those at greatest risk. Lives and health justice are at stake.