

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2021**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 19

SUBJECT: FRAMEWORK FOR OUR FUTURE: DECLARING HEALTH MISINFORMATION A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The resurging pandemic has led to more infections and hospitalizations than the region has seen since the beginning of the year and ICU capacity is once again being tested. The U.S. Surgeon General has recently warned that health misinformation presents an urgent threat to public health. Therefore, urgent action is needed to curb the spread of the Delta variant by combatting misinformation, thereby supporting our health care system and, in turn, saving lives. There would be a substantial detrimental effect on the County and public if not acted upon immediately. For these reasons, this Board Letter requires immediate action at the next Board meeting.

This Board Letter declares health misinformation to be a public health crisis. At a pivotal time in our history, with an FDA-approved vaccine available to all San Diegans free of charge and booster shots recommended later this year, health misinformation now presents a greater threat to public health than a variant of COVID-19. In response, the Board of Supervisors of the County of San Diego recognizes the vaccine hesitancy, that stands in the way of the County moving beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, is being fueled by the spread of health misinformation, and commits to developing strategies to actively combat health misinformation.

Following the recommendations of the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy in his advisory entitled “Confronting Health Misinformation,” this board letter acknowledges the role misinformation has had in the resurgence of COVID-19 infections, once again filling hospital capacity, and driving the deaths and hospitalizations of thousands, including San Diegans and committing County resources to work with trusted stakeholders to aggressively counter misinformation in our community and engage in outreach based on best practices.

We strongly urge your support for the recommendations in this letter to recognize health misinformation as the threat to public health that it is, and take the necessary steps towards a stronger, healthier future.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER

1. Approve resolution titled “Resolution of the Board of Supervisors of the County of San Diego Declaring Health Misinformation a Public Health Crisis.”
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to implement the following strategies cited by the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy in his advisory entitled “Confronting Health Misinformation,” and report back within 90 days on the status of implementation and within 180 days upon completion:
 - a. Devote resources to identify and label health misinformation and disseminate timely health information to counter misinformation that is impeding our ability to keep our community safe,

- b. Modernize public health communications with investments to better understand gaps in health information, and questions and concerns of the community, especially in hard-to-reach communities. Develop targeted community engagement strategies, including partnerships with trusted messengers,
- c. Expand our research efforts to better define and understand the sources of health misinformation, document and trace its costs and negative impacts, and develop strategies to address and counter it across mediums and diverse communities,
- d. Invest in resilience against health misinformation including digital resources and training for health practitioners and health workers. Explore educational programs to help our communities distinguish evidence-based information from opinion and personal stories.
- e. Partner with federal, state, territorial, tribal, private, nonprofit, research, and other local entities to identify best practices to stop the spread of health misinformation and develop and implement coordinated recommendations.
- f. Identify resource gaps to combating health misinformation and working with state and federal partners to meet ongoing needs.
- g. Work with the medical community and local partners to develop a website that will serve as a central resource for combating health misinformation in our community.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of individuals, businesses, and communities across San Diego County. Recent studies have found that online misinformation campaigns are associated with a decrease in vaccinations over time, which impacts all communities' ability to reach herd immunity. But, the impacts are greater in ethnic minority communities as a majority of non-white adults were found to be hesitant to receive the Covid-19 vaccine. Studies have found vaccine and healthcare distrust continue to serve as major barriers to addressing racial equity in Covid-19 vaccine efforts. It is believed that developing sustainable and sound strategies to mitigate and combat misinformation, such through the actions proposed in this Board action, is crucial to closing health outcomes gaps within Black and Hispanic communities and achieving overall public health goals.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action. There may be future fiscal impacts associated with final recommendations which would need to be approved by the Board.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ACTION:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Fletcher, seconded by Supervisor Vargas, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended, adopting Resolution No. 21-142, entitled: A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO DECLARING HEALTH MISINFORMATION A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS.

AYES: Vargas, Lawson-Remer, Fletcher

NOES: Anderson, Desmond

State of California)
County of San Diego)

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter

