



**SUBJECT: A United States-Led Plan to Prevent Future Pandemics at the Source**

**DATE:** April 2021

**TO:** Biden-Harris Administration Officials

**FROM:** Coalition to Prevent Pandemics at the Source (in alphabetical order: Conservation International; Dalberg Catalyst; EcoHealth Alliance; Health In Harmony; Rainforest Alliance; Right to Health (R2H) Action; The Nature Conservancy; Wildlife Conservation Society; World Resources Institute; World Wildlife Fund)

With the rate of zoonotic disease outbreaks rapidly increasing, it is clear that the next million-death pandemic is more likely to happen in the next decade than in the next century. Investing in early detection and containment is critical, but it is not enough. Our organizations are deeply concerned that there is far too little action and investment to prevent the spillover of pathogens from animals to humans - leaving us vulnerable to further devastating pandemics.

The Biden Administration is already taking important steps to ramp up pre-spillover surveillance and pathogen monitoring pursuant to National Security Directive 1 (NSD-1) on strengthening international COVID-19 response, global health security and biological preparedness. We welcome in particular the support in NSD-1 for new multilateral and bilateral efforts on pandemic preparedness and response, including prevention, as well as the strengthening of existing programs such as USAID's pathogen-tracking PREDICT and [STOP Spillover](#) programs, in addition to the planned [DEEP VZN](#) program focused on discovering and stopping emerging pathogens. We also applaud the Administration's commitment to provide assistance in implementing the Priority Action recommendations of WHO-led [Joint External Evaluations](#), which helps countries identify the most critical gaps within their human and animal health systems in order to prioritize opportunities for enhanced preparedness and response; this will be hugely helpful to containment efforts.

**Despite these measures, we must do much more to forestall the next COVID-19 at the source.** Taking a [One Health](#) approach – which works to achieve optimal health outcomes by recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment – greatly reduces spillover risk. This approach, already recognized by the Biden Administration, is the basis for all of the recommendations highlighted below. Our coalition recommends that the United States act in four key areas where we believe needed solutions are clear, proven, and cost-effective:

- 1. Incorporate prevention at the source as a major component of the U.S. government's COVID-19 'build back better' efforts.** Right now, efforts to prevent pandemics at the source are [largely missing](#) from our plan of action.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we are focusing nearly all of our efforts on health systems preparedness and containment - both of which come into play only *after* an outbreak has occurred. This is an imprudent approach. We must supplement these efforts with significantly increased investments in preventing spillover in the first place to lessen the chance of another global pandemic. Particularly as we witness how quickly viruses like COVID-19 can mutate, potentially making vaccines less effective, stopping spillover should become a top priority. The United States should:
  - a) **Make prevention at the source a key part of the Global Health Security agenda.** We can show leadership by ensuring the global response to COVID-19 goes far beyond efforts to improve containment.
  - b) **Support high-risk partner countries to develop One Health systems with financial and technical assistance.** As we make prevention at the source an integral part of our own agenda, we should work

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<sup>1</sup> Carlin, Ellen et al. Building Resilience to Biothreats. EcoHealth Alliance & World Bank, 2019. Link: <https://www.ecohealthalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Building-Resilience-to-Biothreats.pdf>

with other countries, particularly those where spillover is most likely to occur, to enhance existing One Health programs in wildlife, deforestation, and agricultural practices. This will help to elevate the importance of prevention at the source worldwide.

2. **Shut down commercial wildlife trade that risks contributing to zoonotic spillover events**, depending on the local context, geography, and nature of wildlife markets. This will require taking action at every stage, from production to consumption. The United States should:
  - a) Work to **end or stringently regulate commercial wildlife farming**, particularly mammals and birds, to reduce the risk of spillover.
  - b) Promote measures to **prevent commercial trade in live wildlife and raw or unprocessed wildlife parts and derivatives** that risk contributing to zoonotic spillover events. Introduce effective monitoring mechanisms for supply chains, markets, and restaurants to ensure wildlife that risks contributing to zoonotic spillover events are not transported and sold.
  - c) Assist and incentivize countries in adopting, implementing, and enforcing legislation and/or regulations to **close commercial markets for live and freshly butchered wild birds or mammals for human consumption**, that risk contributing to zoonotic spillover.
  - d) Expand efforts to **change consumer behavior to reduce demand for wildlife and wildlife products** that risk contributing to zoonotic spillover events, including in the United States.
3. **Engage with key tropical forest nations to reduce the drivers of deforestation, forest degradation, and forest fragmentation through diplomacy, aid, and trade as a crucial public health priority.** The fate of tropical forests is linked to human health for many reasons, not least of which is that many of their diverse wildlife species act as reservoirs for hundreds of thousands of zoonotic viruses. Deforestation and other degradation of remaining tropical forests increases human-wildlife contact, creating significant spillover risk. Efforts to end deforestation also serve Administration priorities for combating climate change and conserving nature, as articulated in the President's January 27<sup>th</sup> Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. To serve the linked goals of reducing pandemic risk and tackling the climate crisis, the United States should:
  - a) **Fund improved community health, forest management and safety of livestock production, in tropical landscapes at high risk of zoonotic disease spillover (emerging infectious disease [EID] hotspots).** This means implementing integrated health, forest, and farm landscape management efforts in the 10% of tropical areas that houses 60% of the spillover risk and lies within about 30 tropical countries. It involves establishing community health clinics and alternative livelihood training programs for rainforest communities, improving forest management, and sharing best practices on biosecurity for improved veterinary and sanitary practices in livestock production.<sup>2</sup>
  - b) **Develop and enforce demand-side policies and regulations to prevent import of commodities that drive deforestation and forest degradation.** The U.S. can send a powerful signal to its trading partners by taking action to restrict the import of agricultural commodities produced on deforested land, often in violation of the law, that are key drivers of tropical deforestation and degradation. The U.S. has already done this with respect to illegally harvested timber through the Lacey Act amendments of 2008 (and

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<sup>2</sup> Our Coalition would be glad to provide examples of NGOs that have used an integrated One Health model to improve health through forest conservation in specific geographies, which could be used as examples for further education and capacity-building. [One such model](#), guided by community-led design, invested \$5.2 million over 10 years in a medical center and job training program; the results were numerous health benefits to the community (67% reduction in infant mortality and significant declines over time in diagnosed cases of malaria, TB, neglected tropical diseases, and diabetes), a 90.6% reduction in the number of logging families and an effective halt to logging in primary forest, and the averted loss of \$65.3 million in above-ground carbon. There are many other examples of One Health models with proven results that can be scaled and replicated.

should build on this effort by prioritizing full implementation and increased enforcement) and a variety of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic, aid and trade initiatives. The European Union and the United Kingdom are already putting demand-side “imported deforestation” measures in place for “forest risk” commodities like palm oil, soy, beef, rubber, and cocoa. If the U.S. were to follow suit, it would be a major step in creating a “new normal” for international trade in which the production of commodities in ways that both contribute to climate change and increase pandemic risk would no longer be acceptable.

- c) **Support key tropical forest countries to establish and effectively manage protected and conserved areas** in tropical forest hotspots for emerging diseases, including indigenous and community-conserved areas, and ensure that U.S. investments that support infrastructure development and economic recovery in these countries do not contribute to the destruction, fragmentation or degradation of forests or loss of biodiversity.

**4. Support Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as front-line tropical forest defenders.** IPLCs play a critical role in protecting and sustainably managing the lands they hold and use. They are, in many cases, our first line of defense against spillover. At the same time, these groups often rely on wildlife for essential nutrients, and pastoral communities in particular rely on livestock production. To continue supporting the vital role that IPLCs play in preserving the environment, while also supporting their livelihoods and nutritional needs, the United States should:

- a) Secure **legal recognition and effective protection of the land tenure, access and use rights of IPLCs**, including by expanding USAID-led land titling programs and supporting local advocacy efforts for policy change to ensure women’s inheritance and property rights.
- b) Fund **alternative livelihoods and healthcare programs** that are complementary to forest conservation and wildlife conservation, as well as safe agricultural and livestock practices.
- c) Provide IPLCs with **culturally-sensitive education on animal handling, sanitation, and disease transmission** (particularly important for pastoral communities and livestock enterprises near natural ecosystem frontiers).
- d) Regulate legal hunting and marketing of wildlife for household use in a way that **meets basic nutritional requirements sustainably**.
- e) Support the development of **village-level high nutritional value food alternatives** to wild meat, when appropriate.

‘Building back better’ also means enhancing global health security, which must include U.S. leadership and investments to prevent pandemics at the source. With new pandemics looming, trillions in economic damage accruing, and economic, social, and security environments continuing to deteriorate, one thing is certain: the cost of even the boldest initiative to stop future pandemics is miniscule in comparison to the cost of insufficient action. It is for this reason that we are pushing for \$2.5 billion to be included in the President’s budget in support of prevention. Such funds would provide the Administration with the leverage and seed funding needed to recruit other major donors to this effort, which could be announced as part of the action agenda at the G7 hosted this year by the UK government.

Our Coalition stands ready to assist agencies across the Biden Administration in taking all of the actions described above, and advise on the integration of pandemic prevention investments and policies into COVID-19 recovery efforts. We are convening a high-profile Taskforce, hosted by Harvard, to define specific policies within each of these topic areas and working to design a Global Fund for Pandemic Prevention that would finance related investments. We would be delighted to help drive these efforts in partnership with the Administration.