



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Surgo Ventures Contact: Bethany Hardy,  
[bethanyhardy@surgoventures.org](mailto:bethanyhardy@surgoventures.org),  
202-277-3848**

**Black Equity Coalition Contact: Ayanna A. King,  
[ayanna@blackequitypgh.org](mailto:ayanna@blackequitypgh.org), (412) 609-4481**

## **New Data Tool Will Help Track Inequities in COVID-19 Testing, Hospitalizations, and Deaths in Allegheny County**

*Surgo Ventures, RAND Corporation, and Black Equity Coalition launch online data tool to help policymakers address future inequities in the county's COVID-19 response*

**PITTSBURGH, May 26, 2021** — Unlike at the national level, more COVID-19 tests per capita have been conducted for Black residents since the start of the pandemic than white residents in Allegheny County— possibly a reflection of local stakeholders' extensive efforts to track and expand equitable access to testing. Similar efforts surrounding vaccine distribution could help expand vaccine access in communities experiencing vulnerability throughout the county.

This is one of the key findings from [the Allegheny County COVID-19 Vulnerability + Inequity Tracker \(ACCVIT\)](#), a new tool launched today by Surgo Ventures, the RAND Corporation, and the Black Equity Coalition (BEC). This interactive tool assesses the state of COVID-19 testing, cases, and deaths in Allegheny County, and allows users to visualize disparities and opportunities to address inequities in Allegheny County's COVID-19 response.

The tool was developed in order to help policymakers, advocacy groups, concerned citizens and others address the pandemic's disproportionate impact on the health and well-being of people of color. The tool will be updated with new data weekly. Among its findings:

- **Black residents in Allegheny County test positive and are hospitalized from COVID-19 at higher rates** than white residents
- **COVID-19 positivity rates in Allegheny County as a whole have exceeded WHO thresholds for infection control**, with an average test positivity rate of 13%—much higher than the 5% benchmark rate
- **Testing sites generally are more available near communities experiencing the highest vulnerability to COVID-19**, a goal of the community's advocacy to provide access in these areas
- **Physical distancing initiatives are associated with lower death rates, especially among the communities most vulnerable to COVID-19.** But residents in these communities are also less likely to be able to spend more time at home.

The tool incorporates Surgo Ventures' [COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index](#), which was created in March 2020 to help federal, state and local leaders target vulnerable communities with more informed and effective interventions. The index—which was inspired by the [CDC's Social Vulnerability Index](#) and is [featured as a CDC resource](#)—ranks U.S. communities in terms of their vulnerability to COVID-19 based on seven key factors, including socioeconomic status; housing and transportation-related challenges; minority status and languages spoken; epidemiological factors; and more.

The BEC developed a [data dashboard](#) and identified racial disparities in COVID-19 outcomes in early May 2020, originally scraping data from state and local data systems, and later advocating for the public availability of the Allegheny County Health Department dataset used for this tool. The availability of county-level data disaggregated by race and geographic area, and the initial advocacy work to encourage the county to publicly publish this data was a critical factor in our ability to draw granular, interactive insights and recommendations on vulnerability and equity in Allegheny County.

The tool is intended to help serve a variety of users:

- **Pennsylvania-, Allegheny County-, and Pittsburgh-level policymakers:** For example, a state policy maker who is drafting a bill that would expand free COVID-19 testing locations could use the tool to identify municipalities with the greatest need.
- **Decisionmakers from Allegheny County community-based organizations:** For example, an executive at UPMC who is planning mobile vaccination clinics and wants to schedule visits specifically in communities experiencing vulnerability could identify those neighborhoods from the tool.
- **County- and city-level policymakers nationwide:** For example, a mid-size city Department of Health and Human Services that has made a commitment to advance an equitable COVID-19 response can use the tool as a model for collecting and analyzing relevant data.
- **Allegheny County residents:** For example, a resident who is active in her local neighborhood association can use the tool to stay informed on the state of COVID-19 response in her community.

“COVID-19 is an exceptional disease, not just because of the speed and extent of its spread, but because of the way it has highlighted and heightened the inequities that exist across the United States, including in Allegheny County. That’s why we developed the COVID Community Vulnerability Index (CCVI) — to identify the communities impacted most negatively by the virus, so we can better serve those communities who are disproportionately impacted due to their race and ethnicity,” said **Dr. Sema K. Sgaier, CEO of Surgo Ventures and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.**

“This tool provides a portrait of the communities in Allegheny County that are most vulnerable to COVID-19 and the racial inequities experienced thus far during the pandemic,” said **Evan Peet, a RAND economist** who helped create the tool. “We hope the new

presentation of this information helps policymakers and community members as they continue to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

This collaboration included researchers, data scientists, funders, community stakeholders, and content experts working together to disseminate accurate and timely data on COVID-19 inequities associated with resilient populations in Allegheny County. The Black Equity Coalition was able to bring a cross-contextual lens to the approach of developing the tool, which incorporates health equity principles into the content of the tool, and also contributed to a more equitable development and dissemination process. This tool will allow for key stakeholders to act swiftly in creating culturally and programmatically relevant interventions and policies to eliminate COVID-19 inequities,” said **Dr. Tiffany Gary-Webb, Black Equity Coalition and Associate Professor of Epidemiology University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.**

**Access the Allegheny County COVID-19 Vulnerability + Inequity Tracker (ACCVIT) [here](#).**

###

### **About Surgo Ventures**

[Surgo Ventures](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving health and social problems with precision. We do this by bringing together all the tools available from behavioral science, data science, and artificial intelligence to unlock solutions that will improve and save lives. We work globally; in the United States, the United Kingdom, and in low- and middle-income countries on issues including COVID-19, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, housing, and more.

### **About RAND Corporation**

[RAND Corporation](#) is a nonprofit research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous.

### **About the Black Equity Coalition**

The [Black Equity Coalition](#) is a network of predominantly Black professionals, executive leaders, medical doctors, researchers, and community stakeholders in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania who are intentional about ensuring that Black and brown communities receive accurate and reliable information about COVID-19.