



February 2, 2021

Tami Perriello
Acting Administrator
US Small Business Administration
409 3rd St, SW
Washington DC 20416

Inspector General
Hannibal "Mike" Ware
US Small Business Administration
409 3rd St, SW
Washington DC 20416

RE: Consumer Health Advocates Oppose PPP Loans Given to Anti-Vaccine Groups

Dear Acting Administrator Perriello and Inspector General Ware:

We write to express our grave concerns about the fact that, according to the [Washington Post](#), five of the most virulent anti-vaccine organizations—each of which has spread misleading information about the coronavirus—were granted more than \$850,000 in loans from the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

PPP loans were awarded to more than five million small organizations at the outset of the pandemic to help struggling entities navigate a volatile economic landscape.¹ Unfortunately, due to a woefully inadequate vetting process, recipients of PPP loans include organizations that engage in conspiracy theories and lies about the safety and efficacy of vaccines generally and in this current environment, have spread misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine. These groups include the National Vaccine Information Center, Mercola.Com Health Resources, Informed Consent Action Network, Children's Health Defense, and Tenpenny Integrative Medical Center.

Operation Warp Speed—the federal government's program to develop, produce, and distribute enough COVID-19 vaccine doses to inoculate 300 million Americans in record time—has cost the American taxpayer roughly \$12 billion so far, a number expected to grow to as much as \$26 billion.²

It is unfathomable and utterly counterproductive that taxpayer money was awarded to anti-vaccine groups during this national public health crisis. These entities have sowed chaos as our public health community has tried to inform the American people regarding the clinically established safety and efficacy of the two COVID-19 vaccines now available. Never has vaccine confidence been more important than during this pandemic.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2021/01/18/report-anti-vaccine-groups-collected-federal-covid-relief-funds/?sh=438a29c014a9>

² <https://khn.org/morning-breakout/warp-speed-race-for-vaccine-starts-to-look-much-slower/>

World Health Organization (WHO) Director General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has called vaccine misinformation “a major threat to global health that could reverse decades of progress made in tackling preventable diseases.”³ Thus, it is deeply concerning that the US government has awarded money to groups actively opposing its agenda and seeking to undermine public health.

Our groups call upon the Small Business Administration and the Biden Administration to investigate and rescind the loans made to the following anti-vaccination groups.

Mercola.Com Health Resources (\$335,000)

Of the five groups, Mercola.Com Health Resources received an astonishing \$335,000 to maintain its operations during the pandemic. In December 2019, Mercola’s founder, Joseph Mercola, authored an article⁴ falsely stating that COVID-19 vaccines released via emergency authorization may cause massive side effects. In 2019, Mr. Mercola funded pervasive anti-vaccine efforts while the nation was grappling with widespread spikes of measles cases.⁵

Informed Consent Action Network (\$166,000)

The Informed Consent Action Network (ICAN), founded by anti-vaccine activist, Del Bigtree, received approximately \$166,000 in PPP funding.⁶ Mr. Bigtree has attracted over 43,000 followers via ICAN, and regularly posts about his skepticism regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, actively downplaying the severity of the pandemic. In a December 2020 interview, Mr. Bigtree falsely stated that the COVID-19 vaccines would lead to “vaccine-enhanced diseases” and could cause infertility in women, arguing that the antibodies could potentially attack a woman’s placenta, rather than the spike protein as intended. “If it starts attacking placentas, no one will be able to get pregnant. These are legitimate theoretical issues.”⁷

National Vaccine Information Center (Less than \$150,000)

Robert F Kennedy, Jr., head of the National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC), took to social media in December of 2020 to call into question the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines, “We clearly have a systematic problem when government health regulators have utterly abdicated their responsibility to safeguard public health and refer safety concerns about shoddily tested, zero-liability vaccines to pharmaceutical companies.”⁸ Mr. Kennedy’s claims regarding the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines have not been validated and are irresponsible.

Children’s Health Defense (Less than \$150,000)

Mr. Kennedy also founded Children’s Health Defense. His group’s misinformation campaign has contributed to widespread vaccine hesitancy around the country, primarily executed via social media, stirring up unfounded concerns among the population.

³ <https://www.who.int/news/item/04-09-2019-vaccine-misinformation-statement-by-who-director-general-on-facebook-and-instagram>

⁴ <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2020/12/joseph-mercola/emergency-covid-19-vaccines-may-cause-massive-side-effects/>

⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2019/10/15/fdc01078-c29c-11e9-b5e4-54aa56d5b7ce_story.html

⁶ <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/01/18/texas-coronavirus-vaccines-ppp/>

⁷ <https://www.infowars.com/posts/bombshell-interview-with-del-bigtree-covid-vaccine-could-make-the-virus-far-more-deadly/>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/30/opinion/covid-vaccine-bobby-kennedy.html>

Tenpenny Integrative Medical Center (\$72,000)

Tenpenny Integrative Medical Center, spearheaded by physician, Sherri Tenpenny, was awarded \$72,000 in PPP loans. Ms. Tenpenny, has authored the book "Saying No to Vaccines: A Resource Guide for All Ages."⁹ Additionally, Ms. Tenpenny's online forums promote alternative health in lieu of immunization and argue against vaccinations across an individual's lifespan. One of Ms. Tenpenny's pages was banned from Facebook in December for spreading misinformation.

The disbursement of taxpayer money to these anti-vaccine organizations is unconscionable as we as a nation come together to fight COVID-19 through a massive vaccination campaign.

And while states and the federal government seek to iron out problems with vaccine distribution, vaccine hesitancy—exacerbated by these anti-vaccine groups—further complicates efforts by government officials and public health leaders to coordinate the distribution and administration these vaccines.

We insist that our taxpayer dollars be well spent on efforts to vaccinate 60-70% of Americans. Operation Warp Speed and other related efforts are the right investment. Funding groups with a long history of using junk science to question the safety and efficacy of vaccines is a colossal waste of taxpayer money. Any funds provided to groups that oppose the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines must be returned to the Treasury. PPP funding should *not* contribute to efforts aimed at undermining our national efforts to fight the SARS CoV 2 virus.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Aging Research
American Immunization Registry Association
American Medical Student Association
American Muslim Health Professionals
Families Fighting Flu
Idaho Immunization Coalition
Kimberly Coffey Foundation
Meningitis B Action Project
National Consumers League
Vaccinate Your Family

Copy: Major L. Clark III,
Acting Chief Officer
Office of Advocacy
Small Business Administration

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/18/business/anti-vaccine-ppp-loans.html>