

CHR CONDEMNS ATTACKS AGAINST SCIENTISTS AND PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS BATTLING COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES

The Committee on Human Rights (CHR) of the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has, for nearly half a century, advocated for colleagues targeted for abuse as a result of their professional activities and their exercise of internationally recognized rights and freedoms. Many of these colleagues have come under threat for their efforts to provide evidence-based advice during periods of widespread societal mistrust and uncertainty.

As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the United States, we are alarmed by reports of widespread intimidation of scientists and public health experts working to combat the pandemic. Numerous experts have been disparaged, harassed, and threatened with physical violence for doing their jobs: gathering and interpreting data on COVID-19 and providing science-based guidance to promote health and safety.

The growing climate of intimidation surrounding the response to the pandemic poses a serious threat to scientists and health officials. Many of these individuals have expressed fear of retaliation as a consequence of their work. Attacks on experts battling the pandemic also pose a wider, grave danger to life and health, as they impede efforts to address a disease that has already infected more than four million people, and caused more than 140,000 deaths, in the United States.

To overcome the crisis we are facing, which is most severely impacting vulnerable populations in our country, we must marshal the expertise of the scientific and medical communities and ensure that they are able to carry out their work without intimidation or reprisal. The CHR stands in support of our colleagues working to confront COVID-19 and strongly condemns all acts of retaliation against them.