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## Report: People living in America’s most vulnerable counties are 32% more likely to have died from COVID-19 than those in the least vulnerable counties

*Surgo Ventures releases analysis and new dashboard showing how our handling of the pandemic has failed to protect the most vulnerable*

**WASHINGTON, January 28, 2021** — Closely monitoring and targeting resources to America’s most vulnerable communities—those most at risk of the negative financial and health impacts of the pandemic—can help save lives. **Since the start of the pandemic, people living in America’s most vulnerable counties are 32% more likely to have died from COVID-19 than those in the least vulnerable counties.**

This is one of the key takeaways from [“Vulnerable Communities and COVID-19: The Damage Done, and the Way Forward.”](#) a report Surgo Ventures released today, using its [COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index](#) and its new [Precision for COVID Data Explorer](#), a tool made possible by support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“President Biden’s [pandemic response plan](#), released last week, includes a recommendation to ‘provide clear, consistent, and evidence-based guidance’ to help U.S. communities navigate the pandemic, and we have the data to help them do that,” said **Dr. Sema Sgaier**, co-founder and CEO of Surgo Ventures. “By using Surgo’s COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index, federal, state, and local policymakers can plan for, prepare, and respond to COVID-19 with precision, targeting the right resources to the right communities at the right time.”

“Navigating the pandemic successfully relies on decision makers having access to good data,” said **Dr. Atul Gawande**, Founder and Chair of Ariadne Labs and former member of the Biden/Harris Transition COVID-19 Advisory Board. “I’ve learned from partnering with Surgo Ventures that they have the ability to build public data tools that ensure decision-makers have the information they need.”

“*Vulnerable communities and COVID-19*” report ([link](#)) examines the one-third of all U.S. counties that score highest on Surgo’s COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index. **(See a full list of the U.S. counties included in the report [here](#).)** It shows how communities across America are not all equally vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic, and sends an important message: The virus has not discriminated—but America’s response has. As COVID-19 has spread over the last 12 months, certain factors—such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, work environments, and



healthcare systems—make some communities more vulnerable to its impact, and in differing ways. The report’s key findings are:

1. Vulnerable populations have been **23% more likely to be diagnosed** with and **32% more likely to have died** from COVID-19 since the pandemic began.
2. Different types of vulnerable communities took turns in getting hardest hit, with **communities with high rates of comorbidities** being hit especially hard at the moment.
3. The health systems in vulnerable communities have been under stress since tracking started in August; **stress has reached “extreme” levels in vulnerable communities** in January 2021.
4. The **unemployment gap between low and high vulnerable counties quadrupled** as the pandemic hit and that gap has persisted to this day, especially hitting urban areas and those with pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerability.
5. Rent payments are increasingly falling behind for everyone, but especially so in vulnerable states, where **delinquency is 36% higher than in other states**.
6. Early disparities in COVID-19 test site access have improved with targeted resource allocation, though as of January 2021, **15 million people still have to travel 10 or more miles to get tested**.
7. Vaccine rollout is off to a slower start in vulnerable states, where rates of administered shots are as much as **20% lower** than non-vulnerable states.
8. Implementing national guidance on vaccine redistribution to vulnerable communities **would only require diverting 6% of doses** from low vulnerability areas, but would **accelerate vaccination by 14%** where it is needed most.

Access the full report and detailed findings [here](#).

### About the COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index

Surgo Ventures launched the [COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index](#) 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: socioeconomic status; household and transportation; minority status and languages spoken; epidemiological factors; healthcare system factors; high-risk environments; and population density.

### About the Precision for COVID Data Explorer

Surgo Ventures launched the [Precision for COVID Data Explorer](#) in January 2021. Made possible by support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Data Explorer helps policymakers and others examine how vulnerable communities across the U.S. have been impacted by COVID-19 to date—and how equitable our response has been—by integrating dozens of datasets available at a local level.