



Doctors on call for the Biden campaign

Health-care workers are urging Americans to support the Democratic candidates for president and vice president, emphasising the health issues at stake. Susan Jaffe reports.

As the race for the White House approaches the November finish line, Democrat President Joe Biden and the Republican former President Donald Trump are competing for the votes of Black and Latino individuals, women, union members, young adults, and other groups. But the latest outreach effort by the Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris campaign cuts across the usual demographics and special interests by enlisting doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals to help build support for the Democratic candidates for president and vice president.

Health Care Providers for Biden-Harris, a group the campaign formed in May, 2024, includes doctors like Sharee Livingston, an obstetrician-gynaecologist and Black maternal health advocate in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The state is one of the seven battleground states where the outcome of the election is expected to be decided. As *The Lancet* went to press, Trump was leading in all but two of them. When the Biden campaign called on her, Livingston didn't hesitate.

"I responded wholeheartedly because, as an ob-gyn physician, I understand the dangerous nature of *Roe* falling and what impact that will have on many people of reproductive age but specifically Black people", she said.

While former President Trump is proud of the three Supreme Court justices he appointed who voted to overturn the nationwide right to abortion established under *Roe v Wade*, President Biden has promised to restore abortion access. Trump also opposes several Biden legislative and policy health achievements, including allowing Medicare to negotiate prices directly with pharmaceutical makers; expanding Medicaid coverage for hundreds of thousands more people

with low incomes; and maintaining generous subsidies for people with Obamacare marketplace insurance. To help seniors with Medicare coverage afford insulin, Biden's administration mandated that patients cannot be charged more than US\$35 a month.

"Doctors and other medical professionals are among the most trusted voices in the United States and will be critical to highlighting the stakes for every American's health care this November", said a Biden campaign statement.

The Trump campaign did not respond to requests about the role of health-care providers in appealing to voters. Groups like the GOP Doctors Caucus, which include members of Congress, and other Republican organisations most likely favour Trump but they are not part of his campaign.

In addition to speaking at a May press conference with other Pennsylvania medical professionals in support of Biden, Livingston appeared alongside Biden's wife, Jill Biden, during a campaign stop in Pennsylvania last month. She was also one of 80 Pennsylvania health-care providers who signed a public letter backing Biden's re-election bid that was circulated across the state. "I enjoyed speaking from both my heart and my clinical perspective on the benefits of having full unwavering access to reproductive health care", she said. "I believe that abortion is health care and that the decisions pre, during, and post care should fit squarely between the person and their health-care provider." Livingston spoke as an individual and not on behalf of the hospital where she chairs the obstetrics and gynaecology department.

The percentage of Americans without health insurance is at an all-time low, said John Purakal, an emergency

medicine physician in Durham, North Carolina, another battleground state. He spoke at a local Biden campaign event last month. In North Carolina alone, about 480 000 people gained coverage by enrolling in the state's expanded Medicaid programme, he said. Doctors have a unique perspective on the impact of government health-care policies, said Purakal. "I think physicians can say, 'here's what I've seen in my practice, here's how it's going to change if Trump wins'", he said.

The Biden campaign's focus on health-care issues was boosted by Supreme Court wins in June, with the Court deciding that abortion pills can be mailed to patients, and requiring that hospitals provide emergency abortion care; however, health care doesn't appear to be a top concern for some voters, opinion polls show. "Inflation and immigration are, by and large, the most important issue for Republicans, and abortion ranks much lower on the list", said Ashley Kirzinger, Associate Director of Public Opinion and Survey Research at KFF, a health policy research and news organisation. KFF polls show Democrats are more likely than Republicans to vote in November because of concerns about abortion access, she said.

In the battleground state of Wisconsin, obstetrician-gynaecologist Kristen Sharp is a member of Health Care Providers for Biden-Harris who specialises in pregnancy loss. She said several of her patients who had a diagnosis of "pretty devastating fetal anomalies" had to travel out of state in order to get an abortion. "From everything that I have seen in the lives of my patients, I just can't sit back and see how this election plays out."

Susan Jaffe