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## Hopkins alumni and faculty appointed to Biden's COVID-19 task force

By [ELLIE ROSE MATTOON](#) | November 23, 2020  



COURTESY OF LUCIANA BORIO AND CELINE GOUNDER

Borio (left) and Gounder (right) are two of the Hopkins affiliates who have joined the transition team.

Several Hopkins professors and alumni have been invited to serve on the Biden-Harris COVID-19 task force.

One appointee is Dr. [Luciana Borio](#), an infectious disease physician at Hopkins Hospital. Borio worked with the Barack Obama and Donald Trump administrations in biodefense and counterterrorism, eventually leaving the National Security Council global health security team when it was disbanded under Trump.

In addition to Borio, Dr. [Céline Gounder](#) is a Bloomberg School of Public Health graduate and former faculty at the Hopkins School of Medicine working with HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis. She is currently a professor at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine.

Both Borio and Gounder had been fighting the COVID-19 pandemic on the front lines as medical professionals and scholars when they received a pivotal call in early November inviting them to join Biden's team.

They learned about their invitation just a few days before the rest of the world did. In a matter of days, their world started filling with Zoom calls and press interviews.

"Pretty much, from 7 a.m. until 11 p.m., literally my calendar is a back-to-back-to-back schedule," Gounder said in a phone interview with *The News-Letter*.

With only about 10 weeks until Biden's scheduled inauguration day, the team is working long hours, often with all the challenges of virtual collaboration, to ensure the administration is ready to tackle the nation's issues beginning on Jan. 20.

In terms of COVID-19 relief, the team faces a laundry list of tasks. According to Gounder, the team's first priority will be invoking the Defense Production Act. This will activate manufacturers to produce personal protective equipment, which — eight months into the pandemic — is still of insufficient quantity for the current demand.

Two vaccines are set for receiving emergency approval by the end of the year, meaning that the task force will also attempt to realize the monumental feat of making sure every American can receive a vaccine and a booster shot.

Gounder mentioned that multiple different vaccines will likely be administered depending on their characteristics: More sensitive vaccines with stricter storage instructions will likely be administered in urban centers, while vaccines with fewer storage restrictions will go to rural areas.

Even with these measures, Gounder acknowledges that the general public will probably not receive a vaccine until April or May at the earliest. In the meantime, the team will have to work to make monoclonal antibodies, an IV therapy most effective in the early days of illness, a more accessible and convenient treatment option.

Both Borio and Gounder agreed that their clinical experiences have shaped their perspective.

As an attending physician at Bellevue Hospital during the initial surge of cases in New York City this spring, Gounder witnessed first-hand the detrimental effects of a spike in COVID-19, not only on patients and their families, but the entire health-care system.

Gounder expressed her worries that the mortality rate not seen since the beginning of the pandemic in New York could return if hospitals get overwhelmed in the current surge of cases.

Borio described a bittersweet situation of spending less time in the clinic to work with the Biden administration, but still cherishes the time she gets to spend with her patients.

"Something I always carry with me is how would everything I do impact the people I interact with in clinic," Borio said.

Borio and Gounder addressed the fact that due to the General Services Administration's (GSA's) [refusal to acknowledge](#) Biden's presidential victory, the transition team has faced some unusual challenges.

"Given the fact that GSA has not yet ascertained the elections, the team is not allowed to interact with the employees of the federal government," Borio said.

This means that it is more difficult for transition team members to learn about important pending actions and vacancies for a given federal agency in advance. On a larger scale, Biden is unable to receive [national security briefings](#) and the team is currently limited to using public information for their research.

"It would be like saying, 'Okay, you're gonna have to take over fighting an armed conflict with a foreign power, but we're not gonna share any classified information with you. You're just gonna have to read the *New York Times*,'" Gounder said.

"I hope that this is the government that will restore the image of how [this work] is important," Borio said. bjectives, including consulting with former federal employees and drawing on the extensive experience of the P resident-elect and his team members.

In addition, many of the team members have worked with each other before in previous projects or administrations, creating a sense of solidarity.

These factors make Borio optimistic about the Biden administration's potential legacy. She expressed her hope of getting more young people into public service in the face of an [aging federal workforce](#) and declining government trust.

"I hope that this is the government that will restore the image of how [this work] is important," Borio said.

In addition to Borio and Gounder, several other individuals with ties to Hopkins have been invited to Biden's task force. [Vivek Murthy](#) is a former distinguished policy scholar at Bloomberg who served as surgeon-general under the Obama administration.

Additionally, [Tom Inglesby](#), director of the Center for Health Security at Bloomberg, is serving on Biden's Agency Review Team for the Department of Health and Human Services.

Inglesby and Murthy both declined to speak about their role in the administration until a later date.

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This article gives no credit to the Trump Administration and its Operation Warp Speed success. Very slanted. Remember, VP Biden was in charge of the H1N1 effort during the Obama Administration and he did absolutely nothing. Lucky for him, the H1N1 was not very fatal but more than 60 million cases affected Americans. Today, the media would report those "cases" as a true disaster and a failed administration.

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