

Bernie Sanders and the Vaccines

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The Bernie Sanders platform needs to expand its foreign policy and health care plans to include continued investment in the development of new vaccines, as one way to advance the principles of democratic socialism at home and internationally. In the 1940s and 1950s, the United States government and military rapidly developed a multitude of vaccines, from polio to smallpox to the annual flu vaccine. They also partnered with the international community to eliminate smallpox, which was achieved by 1979, marking the end of a disease that in that century killed over 300 million people ([Hoyt](#)). With the ongoing effort to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we have shown that with investment and cooperation, we still have the capability to quickly develop and administer vaccines around the world to protect and safeguard the lives of people. Current efforts mask the fact that rates of vaccine development had been slowing over the past 25 years around the world, hitting its lowest levels in 2017, as demonstrated by the slower responses to SARS, bird flu, swine flu, and Ebola ([Azimi](#)). With the newly-ramped-up vaccine industry, the United States now has the capacity to move forward with an H.I.V. vaccine, a universal flu vaccine, or a norovirus vaccine. We need to reinvigorate old attitudes to vaccines which saw creation as a duty, not a choice to increase profits; as one virologist who worked in the 1960s described it, "pharmaceutical companies looked at vaccine divisions as a public service, not as huge revenue generators" ([Hoyt](#)). Vaccines are a social service that promote more equitable access to healthcare, and their manufacturing supports the ideals of democratic socialism and Bernie Sanders.

The development of vaccines will disproportionately benefit working people around the world because while many wealthy people around the globe can by their lifestyles insulate themselves from the perils of H.I.V., the yearly flu, or norovirus, poor people are forced to struggle to access the critical medications which dramatically improve the quality of life. For example, in the United States, yearly treatment for H.I.V., which makes the virus undetectable and untransmittable, can cost upwards of \$39,000. In many sub-Saharan African nations, where the virus is more prevalent than in the United States, treatment is around \$75 a year, significantly lower than the United States but still a financial burden to many individuals and families ([Rosenberg](#)). Furthermore, in the United States, H.I.V. disproportionately affects low-income people and racial and sexual minorities ([American Psychological Association](#)).

The case of the seasonal flu is also instructive; in the 2019-2020 season, 400,000 people went to the hospital, and 22,000 died in the United States ([Centers for Disease Control](#)). When people have proper access to healthcare, they are able to focus on other issues in their lives, such as civic participation and fighting to expand their rights. By continuing investment in vaccine development, the Bernie Sanders campaign can empower people both at home and abroad to have the opportunity to mobilize and fight for their democratic rights.

Bernie Sander's platform, as well as his past actions, support this viewpoint of vaccine development to advance human development. For the 2020 presidential election, he described his campaign as supporting "democracy, human rights, environmental justice, and economic fairness" in the foreign policy arena. By advocating for vaccinating people abroad and at home, he supports the advancement of democracy, access to health care, advances the cause of human rights, and improves economic fairness around the world. Domestically, Bernie Sanders supports the idea of deco-modifying the American healthcare system, which is the concept of changing the current system from a profit-based system where access to healthcare is a commodity and a privilege to one where healthcare is a right of all people ([Sanders](#)). By creating and distributing vaccines for

these diseases, he protects Americans from having to shell out large portions of their income or take unpaid time off work due to illness. While this issue is less critical than it was during the first push for vaccination in the 1950s, it aligns with the principles of Bernie's platform.

The development of vaccines to improve the lives of working people supports the core principles of democratic socialism championed by activists such as Eugene V. Debs and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as the socialist organization International Workers of the World. In his trial in 1917 in court, Debs declared, "where liberty is not, ... socialism has a mission, and, therefore, the mission of socialism is as wide as the world" ([Debs & Davenport](#)). The teachings of Eugene V. Debs have influenced both the political theory and actions of Bernie Sanders. His statement on how socialism has an international component directly supports the idea of vaccine development and distribution as protecting people's health empowers them to fight injustice and advocate for more equitable systems of government.

Rosa Luxemburg, a year before Debs' speech, also advocated for an international socialist approach and declared, "The immediate task of socialism shall be the intellectual liberation of the proletariat from the domination of the bourgeoisie as manifest in the influence of nationalistic ideology" ([Luxemburg](#)). Vaccine development and distribution should be a part of Sanders' platform because by covering people's basic needs, it supports "intellectual liberation" and allows people to fight back against dangerous "nationalistic ideology." Lastly, the framework which defines the International Workers of the World party supports the idea of the development and distribution of vaccines around the world as it would support the plight of working people across the globe regardless of citizenship in their continued struggle against the capitalist class. Bernie Sanders has drawn many of his principles and approaches to policy from socialist philosophers and organizations, and this issue should be adopted as it is supported by historical thought.

The United States has shown in the 20th century and now today the incredible capability to create and distribute vaccines and how vaccination can improve the lives of people around the world, specifically working-class people. Bernie Sanders should adopt this idea of utilizing the currently expanded vaccine creation and production processes to support the development of vaccines for H.I.V., universal flu, and norovirus to improve the lives of working-class people at home and abroad and aid the group in the fight for democratic socialism.