Hi everyone. This is Mandy Cohen, Director of the CDC. And I wish I could be in person with you today and be part of that conversation about how to advance cardiovascular health and strengthen support for health equity. Now, much of the public’s recent attention and knowledge about the CDC’s work has been about disease control. Our work on the COVID-19 pandemic, and responding to infectious health threats. But as you and I know, people with chronic health conditions, and from certain racial and ethnic groups, are impacted by infectious diseases even more.

And that’s why our ability to respond to threats starts with a healthy nation. Preventing and treating chronic disease is critical. In our work to be the healthiest country in the world, ready to respond to any health threats, we, at CDC, are fully committed to equitable prevention and control of heart disease and stroke. We are bringing to bear our data and detection capability, our skills in translating science into practice, our investments in health departments and tribal nations, and our partnerships with the Health Delivery System, and others, to accelerate the implementation of what works, to build a heart healthy and stroke-free nation for all.

For example, CDC funds all 50 states and the District of Columbia to prevent and manage cardiovascular diseases. Grantees are implementing community health workers, referrals to lifestyle change programs, and behavioral health supports, so that people are more successful in managing their chronic disease. We’ve also long worked to help people monitor and control their blood pressure at home by supporting clinical best practices, like self-measuring blood pressure programs. And we also have programs that serve specific populations with higher rates of cardiovascular disease.

I’m grateful for the leadership of Dr. Darwin Lebarthe, the founding director of the Division of Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. Darwin, you set a strong foundation that CDC values to this day. But building a heart healthy nation is a team sport. And I’m so grateful for the longstanding partnerships and deep commitment of the National Forum members, and your leadership. All of the areas where we’re focused on protecting health intersect with cardiovascular health, and the work of the National Forum.

Our alignment with the National Forum has been and continues to be strong. First, we are both working hard to protect people this fall and winter from respiratory infections and related hospitalizations and death. CDC was honored to support the Forum’s flu vaccination efforts in collaboration with Million Hearts. We’re excited to hear that you have brought in this foundational work to include COVID-19 and other important adult vaccinations, and that you linked the vaccination campaign to your accessible and growing Move the Mayor Initiative. Mayors, equipped with evidence on how to keep their people safe, are powerful change agents. So thank you.

Second, our shared commitment to protect our nation’s mental health. We have so much alignment. We know that those with cardiovascular disease are at higher risk of mental health issues, and vice-versa. Behavioral health problems like depression, anxiety, and substance use can affect our ability to be physically-active, to take our prescribed medicines, to follow up with our clinical teams, and to stay connected to our friends and
family. Mental health is heart health. And I appreciate the opportunity to work with all of you on these challenging and complex issues.

Lastly, we, at the CDC, are also focused on supporting young families. We want children to get the best start in life, no matter where they live, and to stay on that healthy trajectory. Prevention starts with protecting the health of mothers during pregnancy. Hypertension during pregnancy, whether it’s chronic gestational, preeclampsia, or eclampsia raises the likelihood of a bad outcome for Mom or her baby. Having a hypertensive pregnancy not only raises a woman’s lifetime risk of heart disease and stroke, it accelerates how soon it develops. I hope that the Forum members, longtime experts in, and advocates for equal detection and control of hypertension, will join us in this mission for healthy pregnancies and brighter futures for all.

Now, as I close I have an important ask for the National Forum members. I know you’re a diverse group, representing public health and healthcare experts, payers and employers, industry and community organizations. And so my ask of all of you is to help get more people protected with vaccines this fall and winter respiratory season, we have more tools than ever, including for the first time, immunizations for all three major respiratory viruses: flu, COVID, and RSV. With heart disease being among the most common and high-risk conditions for severe illness for these respiratory viruses, we value your help in getting the word out to your communities and your patients.

Healthcare providers are people’s most trusted source of information on vaccine. So thank you for your collaboration. And thank you for your ongoing work you are doing to protect the health of all Americans. I look forward to working together to support healthy people, healthy families, and a healthy nation through equitable prevention of heart disease and stroke. Thank you.

[End of audio]