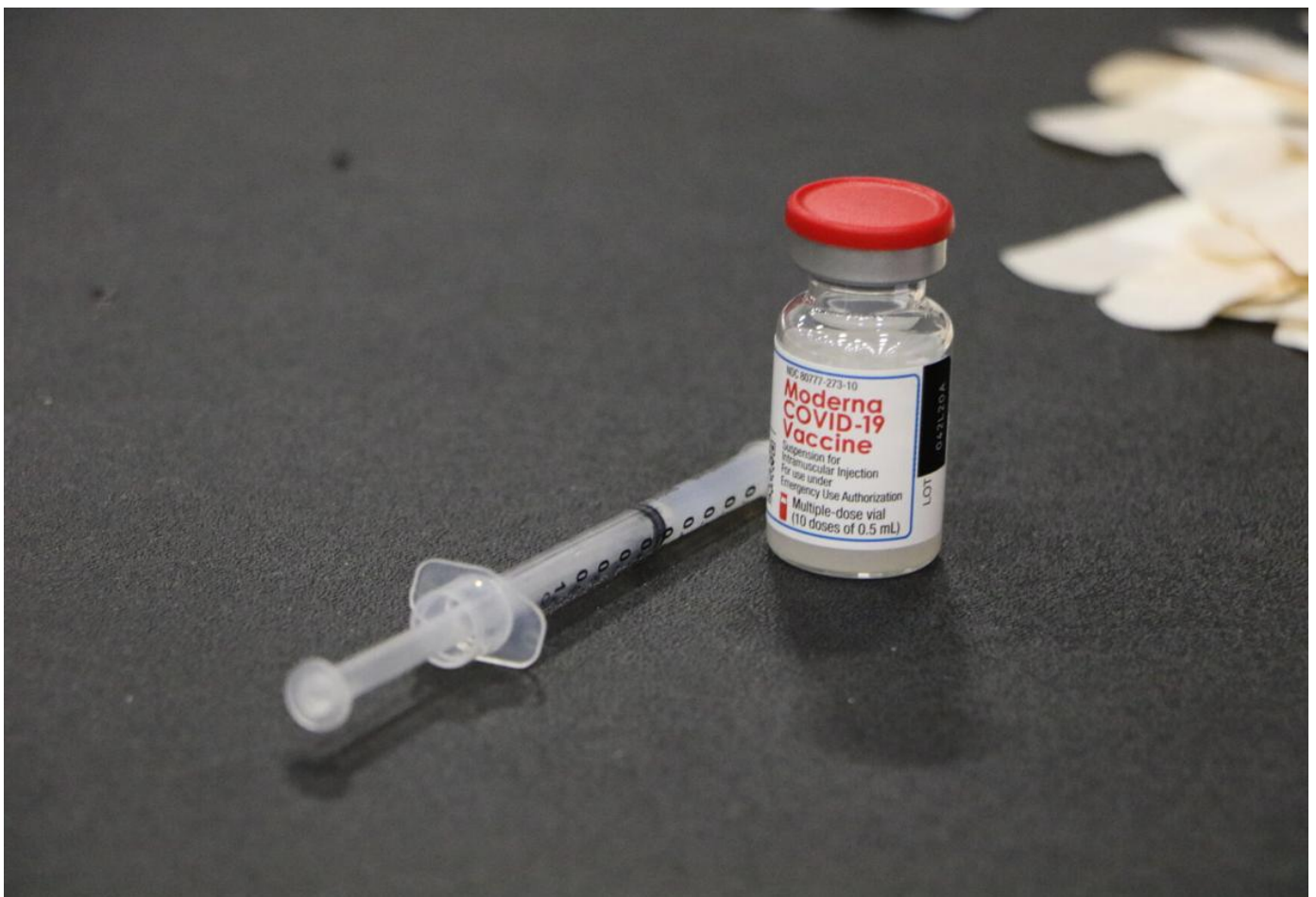

https://tulsaworld.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-state-must-coordinate-covid-relief-funding/article_9fc5d0fa-0059-11ec-af5e-33fb69ac7967.html

Opinion: State must coordinate COVID relief funding

Craig Knutson and Teresa Meinders Burkett

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By braiding American Rescue Plan Act funds with existing resources, and building on proven approaches and practices in the state, Oklahoma can ensure that families with young children and their communities emerge from the pandemic safe, secure, healthy and well.

World File

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After a tornado rips through an Oklahoma community, the recovery requires the coordination of construction crews, financing, immediate relief paired with long-term recovery supports to get residents back into the safety and security of their homes and communities.

The same is true for the COVID-19 pandemic, a traumatic public health event and life storm that has swept the foundation out from under many families and communities.

Just like rebuilding after a tornado, pandemic recovery requires crews of professionals from mental health, behavioral health, education, early education, housing, workforce development and philanthropy to rebuild together.

Through coordination of financial resources and common goals, Oklahoma can construct the pathways and opportunities that will restore strong foundations.

By braiding American Rescue Plan Act funds with existing resources, and building on proven approaches and practices in the state, Oklahoma can ensure that families with young children and their communities emerge from the pandemic safe, secure, healthy and well.

The Potts Family Foundation, working in concert with other foundations, nonprofits and researchers, is supporting the development of such a framework of goals and objectives, focused on families with young children hit the hardest by this pandemic.

What's needed is for the Legislature, the governor, county and local leaders and other decision makers over rescue fund act money to support this strategic framework.

While it's true the we have all been impacted, some more than others, ongoing research from Johns Hopkins, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to name a few, indicates the pandemic has taken its greatest toll on families already experiencing adversity.

If infants, toddlers and preschoolers are left out of Oklahoma's pandemic recovery plan, it will be certain that the state will be left with the high cost of repairing the damage year after year into the foreseeable future.

We know that this age group, because of the sensitive period of human development that occurs in early childhood, is particularly vulnerable to elevated levels of anxiety, depression, income loss, housing instability, and substance use that are evident in current data.

Intentionally designing and funding a set of strategies to construct protective factors into the lives of families with young children and their communities will build the foundation on which the state's current and future economy and workforce rests.

Our collective goal is to repair immediate problems and set a new foundation: As part of the state's economic recovery, all Oklahoma young children and their families who live with adversities become safe, secure, healthy, thriving and contributing to strong local and state economies now and in the future.

There is a saying, "When is the best time to plant a tree? Twenty years ago. The second best time to plant a tree is today." Oklahoma and its communities will pay a high cost for years to come and suffer an intense drain of workforce capacity today and in the future if rescue fund act money and other funds are not collected together in a coordinated plan designed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on young children and their families.

Craig Knutson is president and CEO of the Potts Family Foundation. Teresa Meinders Burkett is a Tulsa attorney, former member of the Tulsa World Community Advisory Board and a board member of the foundation.

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