

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: White House announces \$1.7 billion investment to fight COVID-19 variants

Posted on Friday, Apr 16, 2021

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin worked to include a \$1.7 billion investment in the American Rescue Plan to more effectively fight COVID-19 variants and today the Biden Administration announced that they are rapidly investing the federal funding to help states and other jurisdictions improve the detection, monitoring, and mitigation of these variants.

The first allocation of funding, including over \$4 million for Wisconsin, will be distributed in early May.

“We haven’t beaten COVID-19 and variants are a real threat to the progress we have made in this fight. I worked to include this investment in the American Rescue Plan because I understand it’s an essential component in our effort to beat COVID-19 and get past this pandemic,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Our state has been a national leader on tracking the spread of COVID-19 and variants for over a year, and the federal investment we are receiving is going to be put to good use on our Made in Wisconsin science, research and innovation that is working to protect public health.”

[Last week, Senator Baldwin visited the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) to meet with university faculty and staff working on genomic surveillance sequencing to identify and track coronavirus variants.

With the original strain of COVID-19 comprising only about half of all cases in America today, today's funding, allocated through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), will help the CDC, states, and other jurisdictions more effectively detect and track variants by scaling genomic sequencing efforts. With the information from sequencing, the CDC and state and local public health leaders can implement known prevention measures to stop the spread.

[Today's announcement](#) includes:

- \$1 billion to expand genomic sequencing: This funding will help CDC, states, and other jurisdictions improve their capacity to identify COVID mutations and monitor circulation of variants. Specifically, it will allow CDC and jurisdictional health departments to conduct, expand, and improve activities to sequence genomes and identify mutations in SARS-CoV-2. Much of this work is done through CDC partnerships with the laboratory community and through state laboratories, and the funding will support the collection of COVID specimens, the sequencing of COVID viruses, and the sharing of the resultant data. An initial \$240 million in jurisdictional funding, including over \$4 million for Wisconsin, will be distributed in May.
- \$400 million to support innovation initiatives including the launch of new innovative Centers of Excellence in Genomic Epidemiology: The funding will establish six Centers of Excellence in Genomic Epidemiology. These centers of excellence will operate as partnerships between state health departments and academic institutions, and today's funding will fuel cutting-edge research into genomic epidemiology. For example, the partnerships could focus on developing new genomic surveillance tools to better track pathogens of public health interest with the objective of developing surveillance methods to be used more widely in the public health system. Areas of focus will likely include bioinformatic workflows and the critical integration of genomic and epidemiologic data.
- \$300 million to build and support a National Bioinformatics Infrastructure: One of the challenges of building out the nation's sequencing capacity is having the data system necessary to quickly and effectively access information and turn it

into concrete actions to prevent the spread of viruses. Experts use bioinformatics and complex computing to connect the dots between how pathogens spread and mutate to help solve outbreaks. This investment will support bioinformatics throughout the U.S. public health system, creating a unified system for sharing and analyzing sequence data in a way that protects privacy but allows more informed decision making. This funding also will support training to increase sequencing in clinical settings and expand CDC's Bioinformatics Fellowship program.