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**Pennsylvania's Top Female Leaders Tackle Challenges
of Public Health and COVID-19 During Virtual Panel
Hosted by The Forum of Executive Women**

Healthcare Equity Remains Critical Challenge

Philadelphia, PA – August 18, 2020 – *Where does public health work for women and where does it fall short? What lessons are we learning during COVID-19 about the effectiveness of our public health infrastructure?* These were among a dozen issues posed to four top female panelists who discussed public health, women and COVID-19 during a virtual event hosted by The Forum of Executive Women on Monday, August 17.

Ali Perelman, Chair of The Forum's Public Sector Leadership Committee and Executive Director of Philadelphia 3.0, moderated the group, which included:

- Dr. Val Arkoosh, Chair of Montgomery County Board of Commissioners
- Dr. Caroline Johnson, Deputy Health Commissioner of Philadelphia
- Dr. Rachel Levine, Pennsylvania Secretary of Health
- Dr. Monica Taylor, Vice Chair of Delaware County Council

"As the scope of the pandemic became clear, especially as it affects women, The Forum's Public Sector leadership convened a panel of public health experts to discuss the myriad challenges and insights of this crisis," said Perelman. "Luckily, in Pennsylvania that meant organizing a group of women who are preeminent figures in the field of public health." Approximately 100 of the region's top female leaders participated in the virtual event.

"Achieving health care equity during the pandemic has been a critical challenge, and it's a priority for us to provide wider access to health care and preventive health care," says **Dr. Rachel Levine**, Pennsylvania Secretary of Health. "The disparity in healthcare equity has been present for a long time and is influenced by a number of social determinants such as the opportunity to make a living wage, environmental issues, and access to housing, transportation, nutrition, and education. All of these factors influence the quality and accessibility of health care that communities receive. That's why we need to prioritize access to health care and preventive care, especially to vulnerable populations including people of color, African American, Hispanic, LGBTQ and rural communities."

"We have to depoliticize public health," says **Dr. Val Arkoosh**, Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. "Investment in public health has been woefully inadequate. Legislators and policy makers must prioritize modernizing old and cumbersome systems and ensure that they are interoperable so we have the data that is required for effective response. We also must create a society wherein when someone is sick, they don't have to choose between paying the rent or keeping their job. It is incumbent upon any employer to provide a

safe and equitable workplace. We lead by example at the county level and hope that other employers follow suit.”

“A vaccine may exacerbate racial disparities as trust in public health has floundered given that some individuals cannot get tested or treated in their own neighborhoods,” says **Dr. Monica Taylor**, Vice Chair of Delaware County Council, which represents the largest county by population in the nation without a health department. “Assuring vaccination for vulnerable populations will be difficult when you consider the testing supply.”

“Discussions around Healthcare equity and access are topics that need to be at the forefront of today’s conversation,” says **Dr. Caroline Johnson**, Deputy Health Commissioner of Philadelphia. “The Forum of Executive Women is making a difference by bringing together women who are thought leaders to discuss and influence critical decisions about public health and COVID-19. This panel event is an example of the kind of thoughtful discussion and active participation that is necessary to make positive change.”

“We appreciate and applaud our panelists for providing insight and perspective around the most challenging issue facing the world today,” says **Lisa Detwiler**, President of the Board of The Forum of Executive Women and Managing Director, General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer, FS Investment Solutions. “Women’s expanded leadership and participation in decision making to improve access to healthcare services are critical factors in achieving equity. The Forum of Executive Women works collaboratively with nearly 500 of the Philadelphia region’s top female leaders to raise awareness, provide resources, spark conversation and take action on this issue and the most relevant issues that face women and communities today.”

About The Forum of Executive Women

Founded in 1977, The Forum of Executive Women is the region's premier women's organization, actively working to increase the number of women in leadership roles, expand their impact and influence, and position them to drive positive change in the Greater Philadelphia region. Visit www.foew.com.

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Available for interview:

- **Ali Perelman**, Chair of The Forum’s Public Sector Leadership Committee, Executive Director of Philadelphia 3.0
- **Lisa Detwiler**, President of the Board of The Forum of Executive Women and Managing Director, General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer, FS Investment Solutions
- **Delphine O’Rourke**, Partner, Goodwin Law, Forum Member
- **Panelists**