

SOZOSEI FOUNDATION  
Response to COVID-19  
Spring 2020 - Present

**Phase One:**  
**Immediate Need When COVID-19 Hit**

When COVID-19 swept across the United States in the Spring of 2020, Sozosei had just formalized its governance structure and was in the midst of a national search for its inaugural Executive Director. Simultaneously, Sozosei – with leadership from its Board of Directors – moved swiftly to address the immediate needs of patients, healthcare workers, and families impacted by COVID-19.

As a first step, Sozosei deployed \$500,000 to nonprofits located near OAPI's offices in Princeton, New Jersey and Rockville, Maryland that focus on an array of critical services, such as providing meals and housing services to at-risk community members including children and the elderly.

The local charities were:

- Meals on Wheels – Mercer County, NJ
- Food Bank of South Jersey – Trenton, NJ
- Community Food Bank of New Jersey – Newark, NJ
- Martha's Table – Washington, DC
- Manna Food Center – Montgomery County, MD

A press release issued at the time reported a few reflections on these donations: “Unfortunately, the COVID-19 virus has already taken an enormous toll on too many families and our hearts go out to those who have been affected by this global pandemic,” said Kabir Nath, board member, Sozosei Foundation and President & CEO, Otsuka North America Pharmaceutical Business. He added, “We are seeing communities around the world come together to protect the most vulnerable and lessen the hardships on the millions of people worldwide who have been impacted the most. We feel privileged to contribute to each of these charitable organizations to help ensure people have access to basic necessities such as food and shelter during this time.”

Martha's Table President & CEO, Kim Ford, noted, "We are truly honored to be among the first grantees of the Sozosei Foundation. This transformative gift will help us to double-down on our mission to support strong children, strong families, and strong communities amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Together, we will ensure Washingtonians have access to the healthy food and essential resources they need during this difficult time."<sup>1</sup>

Soon thereafter, Sozosei became aware that many national organizations serving those in need with mental health and kidney disease were struggling to offer core services and support in a new virtual world. In response, the Foundation deployed \$439,000 in donations to four national, non-profit organizations prioritizing access to mental health care, online support groups, mental health support services for healthcare professionals, and financial support to kidney patients for transportation to dialysis, medicines, and food.

The following organizations were recipients of this support:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness ([www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org))
- American Kidney Fund ([www.kidneyfund.org](http://www.kidneyfund.org))
- Mental Health America ([www.mhanational.org](http://www.mhanational.org))
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance ([www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org))

A press release at the time quoted William H. Carson, MD, chairman, Board of Directors, Sozosei Foundation, as saying: "With the current COVID-19 health crisis, we are privileged to support these organizations in their efforts to pioneer creative initiatives that will help those most impacted by this pandemic." Likewise, Paul Gionfriddo, president and CEO, of Mental Health America said, "There is absolutely no question that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the nation's mental health, and for those health care workers on the frontlines, it is all too real. It is because of the Sozosei Foundation's generous contribution that Mental Health America will be able to respond to the needs of health care workers, their families, and Americans around the country to provide critical mental health-related resources to those that need it."

"We are so grateful to the Sozosei Foundation for this profoundly generous gift that will put food on the table, provide safe transportation to dialysis and other medical appointments, and pay for medical essentials for hundreds of low-income dialysis and post-transplant patients during this crisis," said LaVarne A. Burton, president and CEO of the American Kidney Fund. "The AKF Coronavirus Emergency Fund is a lifeline for patients who are vulnerable and highly susceptible to serious illness if they come in contact with the coronavirus. 100% of this gift will go directly to patients in need."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.otsuka-us.com/discover/sozosei-foundation-donations-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biospace.com/article/releases/correcting-and-replacing-sozosei-foundation-donates-439-000-to-support-those-with-mental-health-and-kidney-diseases/>

## Phase Two: A Local and Global Approach in Communities Where Otsuka has a Presence

As Summer 2020 began, data on the impact of COVID-19 in the United States crystalized the fact that the communities hardest hit by the virus were those with the largest number of Black and Hispanic/Latino people. According to the US Centers for Disease Control, “race and ethnicity are risk markers for other underlying conditions that affect health including socioeconomic status, access to health care, and exposure to the virus related to occupation, e.g., front-line, essential, and critical infrastructure workers.”<sup>3</sup> Against this landscape, and in light of the fact that the Foundation had decided to prioritize grantmaking through a racial equity lens, Sozosei deployed another round of funding to drive support into the communities with the greatest rate of COVID cases. We selected communities that were also closest to the offices in Princeton, New Jersey and Rockville, Maryland, namely: Northern New Jersey and communities around Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland.

As such, the Foundation made two grants of \$100,000 each to two separate community foundations - one serving Northern New Jersey and one serving counties around Rockville with the highest COVID rates. In turn those foundations, through their dedicated COVID funds, have made grants to the nonprofits working to meet the needs of those hardest hit. For example, across Northern New Jersey, Sozosei funds supported 25 organizations providing mental health services, and connected mental health providers to food pantries and other food distribution centers to support clients in need.

To learn more about these efforts in both locations, please visit:

<https://www.thecommunityfoundation.org/covid-19>

<https://www.nnjcf.org/covid-19-rapid-response-fund/>

In addition to supporting US based communities where OAPI has a presence, the Sozosei Foundation recognized the need to support relief efforts in India where COVID was ravaging people and communities. To support communities in and around Otsuka’s India presence, Sozosei awarded a \$100,000 grant to the American India Foundation. This grant supported rescue efforts as India witnesses the world’s highest daily tallies of COVID-19 infections. The second wave of the pandemic sent an alarming number of people into a fragile health care system, critically short of hospital beds and oxygen.

To learn more about the work of the American India Foundation, go to: <https://aif.org/>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

### Phase Three:

## A Lasting Mental Health Crisis and COVID-19 and the Rise of Anti-Asian American/Pacific Islander Racism

Sozosei is well aware that COVID-19 catalyzed a significant mental health crisis that will last well beyond the pandemic. We recognize that many healthcare providers face significant mental health challenges having worked on the frontline of the virus for over a year. To support access to mental health care for these frontline healthcare workers, Sozosei has funded Heroes Health. Heroes Health is an app-based initiative designed by Google and launched by the University of North Carolina Medical School that provides healthcare workers and first responders with an easy way to track their mental health and access crisis support and resources.

To learn more about Heroes Health, visit:

[Welcome to the Heroes Health Initiative, a support tool for health workers \(unc.edu\)](https://www.unc.edu/heroesh/)

Meanwhile, across the United States, acts of violence and racism toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders has increased at an alarming rate as blame for the Coronavirus is inappropriately placed on their communities. To counter the distressing trend in violent acts and build public support for AAPI communities, the Foundation awarded grants to three national organizations with extensive networks and a strong voice in the growing public dialogue.

Grants of \$25,000 were awarded to:

- [Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#)
- [Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund](#)
- [Stop AAPI Hate](#)

### Phase Four:

## Vaccine Roll Out

As the COVID vaccine roll out continues in the United States, Sozosei is supporting the needs of communities facing the greatest vaccine access challenges and the acceleration of the vaccine rate. A recent grant of \$25,000 will help seed the newly-established Mental Justice Alliance and support their work to ensure compliance with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) regulations in correctional settings and increase vaccine access for incarcerated people.

### Conclusion:

It has been an honor to serve our local communities through the philanthropic efforts outlined here. We are also humbled by the extraordinary efforts of frontline workers, share in the collective grief that so many are suffering around the globe due to COVID, and extend sympathy to those who are grieving.