

October 26, 2021



PTO Pick Kathi Vidal Must Incorporate an Equity Agenda

Washington, D.C. – With [today's announcement](#) that Kathi Vidal is President Joe Biden's pick to lead the U.S. Patent Trademark Office (USPTO), it is critical that the new director, if confirmed, takes up the [challenge issued by the administration](#) for all federal agencies to identify and fix systemic inequities in their operations.

As an office that is directly linked to the issues of pandemic recovery, [racial equity](#), and rising prescription drug costs, few federal agencies are as primed to enact an equity agenda as the USPTO. I-MAK has developed a [10-point equity agenda](#) for the USPTO and this administration, with recommendations ranging from redefining the agency's mission to prioritize equity, to reversing policies that curb public participation in the agency's process.

President Biden's [recent executive order](#) on competition also includes promises to take action on drug pricing and health equity and their connection to patent misuse. These latest pledges, along with the stalled progress since announcing the administration's support of the WTO TRIPS waiver to ramp up vaccine production globally, will require the strength of a public-oriented USPTO director to be successful.

"For most of the globe, the pandemic is not over. The Biden administration has taken a symbolic step to changing that, but much more is needed," said I-MAK Co-founder Tahir Amin. "We need a patent office director who will work with the administration to help swiftly advance and implement the agenda that temporarily waives intellectual property and ensures vaccines and medical products reach every corner of the world."

The USPTO plays an integral role in the documented link between patent monopolies and America's exorbitant prescription drug prices. The proliferation of patents in the last 40 years has resulted in longer monopolies and weakened the original social contract of the patent system. Longer monopolies in the pharmaceuticals sector has impacted competition and is a key factor in the current drug pricing crisis facing America: research shows that 13% of Americans have lost a loved one in the past five years due to unaffordable medication. That figure is twice as high for people of color.

"The patent office plays a critical role in determining who can afford their prescriptions – which in many cases amounts to who lives or dies," said I-MAK Co-founder Priti Krishtel. "We need a leader who recognizes the link between patents and drug prices, and will work to change that. We are prepared to carefully listen to what the new Director's plans will be, but it can't be business as usual."

In assuming this role and if confirmed by the Senate, Kathi Vidal will have unprecedented challenges to resolve. For too long the patent system has escaped scrutiny for the monopoly problems we face today. Given the agency's crucial role in setting the economic landscape for corporations and consumers, it is crucial that the administration require Kathi Vidal prioritize equity as part of the USPTO's formal mission. Doing so will begin the process of building an inclusive patent system, addressing our national drug pricing crisis, and demonstrating global leadership in utilizing a common sense pandemic response.

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