

BioCommunications Association
Executive Board Statement in response to Covid-19 global pandemic



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Executive Board Statement
March 11, 2020**

In response to the current worldwide health crisis represented by the Covid-19 global pandemic, the BCA Executive Committee has made the unprecedented decision to postpone [BIOCOMM 2020](#), the annual meeting of the BCA, which was to have taken place in Santa Fe, New Mexico on May 19-23, 2020. We offer the following points of discussion in support of this action.

First and foremost, the health and safety of our membership must be considered. Gatherings of multiple people from many different areas are being banned or highly discouraged by our member's institutions, as such gatherings can inadvertently become a nucleus for spreading the disease. Many of our attending members also fall into the higher, at-risk age groups for severity of the disease. Published mortality rates for Covid-19 are high overall and highest in people above 50 and/or those with compromised health conditions. Transmission appears to be mostly from surfaces but may also be airborne. The disease is highly contagious and people moving through centers for travel, like airports, will be more susceptible to exposure in these locations.

As of March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization has indicated that Covid-19 has been characterized as a pandemic. Certain countries are under various levels of official quarantine, including China, Italy, South Korea, Iran and Hong Kong. Over 100 countries have now reported cases in the 3 months since this disease was first recognized. As an international organization, we are aware of people from at least 4 countries, including the U.S., who were planning on attending BIOCOMM. Covid-19 has been reported in each of these member countries. We must recognize that international travel has been highly discouraged or even banned by our member institutions and that travel restrictions are extremely fluid and changing daily. Travel to and from the meeting can and will impact meeting attendees in unknown ways. As of today, there have been no reports of the disease in New Mexico, and we certainly do not want to be responsible for bringing it there.

Although we recognize that the public reaction to this crisis has been somewhat distorted, the fallout of that reaction affects our members who were planning on attending the meeting. Many institutions, including Wistar (where Jamie Hayden works), have banned all official travel, meaning there will be no reimbursement for tickets already purchased and time away for a conference can only be on personal time. Other locations, including Australia, will require people attending the conference to self-quarantine for 2 weeks on returning to their country. These are just 2 examples of the many reports we have been hearing about travel restrictions and required actions for our members. As the situation escalates, these responses may change and become even more restrictive.

As we are only about 60 days out from the scheduled meeting date, time has become a limiting factor in making plans to attend. Decisions need to be made now. Waiting for a month to see if the situation gets better is wishful thinking. If we wait to decide, and then are compelled to cancel at that point, we feel that it would not be giving fair consideration to those who need to finalize travel plans now. If we force them to decide now, it will probably have to be for pulling out. We believe it is better to decide now which will be best for our members and to the financial responsibilities we have for the BCA.

We have been able to negotiate a fair adjustment to our contract with the hotel. They will not charge us any penalties if we simply change our dates to next year, May 2021. The exact date of the meeting will be publicized once it is all set. We were at risk of being charged $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of our contract for cancelling. There have been some limited financial outlays for plane tickets for officers, directors, and speakers, but these may hopefully be changed due to airline accommodations. Even if we lose those monies, it represents a much smaller loss than if we decided to move ahead now, and then were forced to change later, or put on a meeting that no one was able to attend.

This situation is unprecedented. As there are too many unknowns at this time and decisions must be made in relatively short order, the prudent thing to do is to postpone the meeting to 2021. Certain activities, such as the official business meeting can be handled asynchronously through remote means,

so we can still take care of the Association's business and use the ensuing year to work on other projects for the organization. Meanwhile, we can spend the time to further enhance the experience for BIOCOMM 2021, which will now be the 90th official gathering. This is a difficult decision, but we believe it to be the right one.

Thank you to Jamie for putting this notice together for the Executive Board.

Again, your leadership is available to you by phone or e-mail: <http://bca.org/about/leadership.html>.

Thank You,

***Adam Cooper, RBP, FBCA
President***

***James Hayden, RBP, FBCA
Vice President***

***James Koepfler, FBCA
Secretary/Treasurer***