Published on *Ciencia Puerto Rico* (https://www.cienciapr.org)

The Scientific Community Demands Resignation of Dr. Carmen Deseda, Puerto Rico's State Epidemiologist [1]

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The Puerto Rico Science Policy Action Network launched a petition on March 19, 2020, to demand the resignation of the state epidemiologist in Puerto Rico, Dr. Carmen Deseda, because we understand that Dr. Deseda does not have the necessary expertise in health public and epidemiology, and has failed to prioritize science and evidence in her decision making. We reproduce the text of the petition below. ***As of today (3/24/20), 185 people have signed the petition, of which 34% identified themselves as graduate students, 34% as professionals with a PhD, Ms, MPH, Ms or DrPH and 32% identified as other (private sector, public sector, contractors, concerned citizens, etc.). See here for a list of signers.*** *[3]*

Dr. Carmen Deseda was appointed as the State Epidemiologist of Puerto Rico by the ex-governor, Ricardo Rossello, in January of 2017. This position comes with the great responsibility of safeguarding the health of the residents of Puerto Rico by monitoring, controlling and preventing diseases across the islands. Furthermore, this position requires prioritizing the systematic recollection, analysis, and interpretation of data that informs the establishment and

dissemination of recommendations for the control and prevention of major health threats.

Unfortunately, Dr. Deseda has repeatedly demonstrated to be unqualified for this position. For example, the mismanagement of leptospirosis cases in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria made landfall. This history of mismanagement in combination with our state of emergency leads to members and friends of the scientific community to demand her resignation.

The Office of Epidemiology and Investigation led by Dr. Deseda did not engage in immediate action when the World Health Organization declared an International Public Health Emergency due to the COVID-19 on January 30, 2020. It was at this time when the office led by Dr. Deseda, along with the Health Department of Puerto Rico, should have been proactive and immediately initiated the necessary actions to have laboratories and hospitals ready to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic in Puerto Rico.

On February 26, when the first suspected cases fell into vigilance for COVID-19 in Puerto Rico, Dr. Deseda stated that these people were not quarantined nor tested for the coronavirus because they “did not comply with the travel and symptomatic criteria”. This happened even when many scientific reports stated that the transmission of the new coronavirus can happen from infected people showing no symptoms.

As recent as of March the 14, Dr. Deseda continued to mislead the community by publicly reassuring that the virus could only be transmitted upon contact with a sick (symptomatic) person. Even with the limited number of COVID-19 tests done in Puerto Rico, and the extensive evidence of asymptomatic transmission, Dr. Deseda holds a strong stance that there are no “autochthonous” cases of community spread in Puerto Rico, and therefore an epidemiologic projection is not necessary.

As of today, the criteria to approve testing for COVID-19 is still very strict, which makes it harder to reliably count how COVID-19 is spreading in Puerto Rico.

After a close evaluation of Dr. Carmen Deseda's decisions and public expressions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that she does not possess the capacity to manage the health of our people. For these reasons, all signatories demand her immediate resignation. We also ask our Hon. Gob. Wanda Vazquez Garced to nominate an epidemiologist with the necessary expertise in epidemiology and public health, but most importantly, someone that prioritizes science and evidence in their decision making.

SIGN THE PETITION BELOW:

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