

CITIES AND HEALTH DEPARTMENTS:

# Partnership on COVID-19 Vaccinations

The triumph of science has led to several approved safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccines for the United States, but the rollout has been slow across the country. Most states lack the capacity to meet the demand for vaccines and have decentralized patchworks of providers and sites, with criteria and sign-up systems that are difficult to navigate. Vaccine distribution has fallen short of equitably reaching communities of color and residents that are the most at-risk.

In a confusing landscape, partnership between cities and health departments are vital to provide accurate information, to expand access points for vaccine administration, and to build public confidence.

## Coordinate with Health Department

Since most local health departments are managed through counties, it's vital to designate a point person to work with the city, county, tribal and/or state health department to get the most up-to-date guidance and information on vaccine supply and distribution, as well as to influence vaccine plans for local communities.

- ◆ Mayor Roy Buol of **Dubuque, Iowa** designated the city's Public Health Specialist to liaise with the county health department since the beginning of the pandemic. She speaks with the health department virtually daily, to make them aware of local needs and concerns in vaccine planning, and reports regularly to the mayor and city council.
- ◆ In many rural towns of Alaska the tribal health organization is in charge of vaccine distribution. Many of these communities have been underserved for so long that they've developed their own strategies to reach diverse and geographically scattered populations. Given vaccine eligibility and often single source of healthcare providers, everyone knows who and where to get vaccinated. As of March 2021 [Alaska leads 50 states](#) in the proportion of its population who are fully vaccinated.

## Align Communications with Health Department Leaders

The public needs consistent information on vaccine distribution and availability. Local elected officials can coordinate and disseminate the best current guidance with health department officials. This can be information on the city's website as well as joint press conferences or other public events.

- ◆ The **City of Gulfport, Florida** works closely with the Pinellas County Health Department on well-integrated [web resources](#), including a PSA by Mayor Sam Henderson on vaccine scams.
- ◆ Mayor Muriel Bowser of **Washington, DC** and health department director Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt hold joint public events on the status of COVID-19 vaccine distribution, reach and equity in their city. Tracking and data review led to changes in prioritization of Wards and zip codes with residents who are disproportionately affected by COVID yet have low rates of vaccinations.

## Establish and Maintain Integrated Partnerships: State and Federal, Organizational and Corporate

- ◆ The **City of Kansas City, Missouri** with its Health Department launched [a six-week partnership with Walmart and the local YMCA](#) to vaccinate more than 3,500 eligible Kansas Citizens in zip codes with the lowest life expectancy. Walmart will host these vaccination clinics at a YMCA in the city, utilizing a vaccine allotment provided directly to them by the federal government.
- ◆ The City Managers of **ten local municipalities in Adams County, Colorado** came together with the County Manager to coordinate communications about accessing vaccines, the importance of wearing masks and other safe practices, sensitivity to cultural issues and the status of COVID spread in an area where 60% of the employed are essential workers.
- ◆ **Mayor Linda Gorton of Lexington** worked alongside the Governor and the Mayor of Louisville to ensure that the state's vaccination efforts are successful. Two mega-vaccination sites are being opened within Fayette County, to be managed by the state health department. The city is working with its COVID task forces and the local senior centers to ensure priority populations without computers can sign up and obtain transportation.
- ◆ The **City of Philadelphia** established three mass vaccination sites to reach the most underserved communities. These are located at a senior adult center, charter school and a health science university. A fourth site opened at the Pennsylvania Convention Center with [FEMA's expedited financial assistance](#) to local and state governments, and is run in partnership with FEMA and staffed by members of the U.S. military.

## Build Trust and Develop Messages for Hard-To-Reach and Vaccine-Hesitant Groups

Local officials have credibility and relationships at the local level to reach out to trusted intermediaries, community and faith leaders and public health officials to provide information and support to the community.

- ◆ Recognizing vaccine hesitancy most heavily impacts minority communities, Mayor Jorge Elorza of **Providence** brought together leaders of the Black community and the Department of Health to get to know each other and to answer questions. Local neighborhood and faith leaders are best positioned to share accurate information on vaccine benefits/risks with their respective communities.
- ◆ In addition to many internet-based resources, the **City of Houston** recognized they also need to “go old school public health” to reach many African American communities with evidence-based information on the vaccine in the places residents trust. This includes distributing flyers, going to barbershops, partnering with faith-based organizations, outreach to sororities and fraternities.

- ◆ The **City of Baltimore** wanted to mitigate the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Latino community. They partnered with CASA, an advocacy and assistance organization trusted by the community. CASA hired community promoters to do canvassing and door knocking, and spoke to people in high traffic places like bus stops and grocery stores. City health officials have also sent a sound truck onto the streets of Latino neighborhoods to blast vaccine messages and dispel myths about the vaccine.

## Role Model Vaccine Confidence

Local elected leaders can work with public health officials to get vaccinated on camera or volunteer at a vaccination site to show support for COVID vaccinations to local residents.

- ◆ As the **City of Long Beach, California** kicked off the essential workers phase for vaccinations. Mayor Robert Garcia, City Manager Tom Modica and Health & Human Services Director Kelly Colopy received the COVID-19 vaccine together, along with other City employees who are critical to COVID-19 emergency response.
- ◆ In December when the first vaccines rolled out, the [City of Hampton Virginia Mayor Donnie Tuck](#) and Hampton University President Dr. William Harvey rolled up their sleeves and got vaccinated together to show their confidence in the vaccine. Dr. Harvey also addressed the historical racism and lack of trust in vaccines among the Black community.

## Promote Safe Practices to Prevent Spread and Foster Mutual Accountability

As vaccines roll out across the country and COVID transmission falls, the country will be better able to control any hot spots that may flare up using testing, contact tracing, quarantine, and targeted vaccination campaigns. Daily average cases in the U.S. are still at a dangerously high level, and new variants of the coronavirus may cause a “fourth spike” in the country. Furthermore, people who are vaccinated may continue to spread COVID-19 even if they are protected from severe illness and death.

Local leaders can convey messages of hope and a sense of collective responsibility to their residents to follow safe practices – until people can confidently get back to do the things they love with friends and family members.