



Recruiting and Training Trusted Messengers

A guide prepared by the National Alliance for Hispanic Health
for the CDC *Vacunas* Network Partners

Background

The Partnering for Vaccine Equity (P4VE) is a CDC program that was launched in 2020 with the goal of increasing equity in adult vaccination. The National Alliance for Hispanic Health is one of the grantees and is focused on increasing vaccine equity particularly in the Hispanic Community. The program uses methods that include developing local partnerships, organizing vaccine events, and using a variety of communication strategies including social media.

An integral part of effective messaging around COVID-19 outreach involves the use of trusted messengers and spokespersons who can communicate effectively to their communities and increase COVID-19 and influenza vaccination rates. This brief guide is designed to be an overview to help Alliance CDC *Vacunas* partners recruit and train trusted messengers.

Historically, Hispanic adult flu vaccination rates lag behind all other racial and ethnic groups' vaccination rates. This disparity has been consistent over time, as noted [in this chart](#) from the CDC. For example, in 2010-2011, only 32.3% of Hispanic adults were vaccinated against the flu compared to 43.2% of non-Hispanic White adults, and in 2020-2021 the disparity continued with 38.6% of Hispanic adults obtaining flu vaccinations compared to 55.5% of non-Hispanic White adults.

During much of the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 vaccinations for Hispanics have lagged behind vaccination rates for non-Hispanic White adults, though in recent months the disparity for initial COVID-19 shots has closed, with 65% of Hispanics receiving at least one dose compared to 63% of non-Hispanic White persons, as seen in [this chart](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

While the percentage of Hispanic persons obtaining an initial COVID-19 shot has improved, booster shots tell a different story. According to data on the [KFF website](#), for 24 states and DC that are reporting booster shot rates by race and ethnicity, Hispanic persons are receiving booster shots at a rate that varies from eight percentage points lower than non-Hispanic White persons (in Virginia) to 39 percentage points lower (in Tennessee). As the data is continually changing, the latest rates can be found [here](#).

While the data discussed here is based on national and state data, it is important to know that vaccination rates may vary within local geographic areas, so even if rates are high in a county or zip code, vaccination rates in a particular neighborhood may vary due to socioeconomic factors that affect vaccine equity.

Some Key Points

- Over time there has remained a consistent disparity in **flu vaccination** with 38.6% of Hispanic adults getting vaccinated compared to 55.5% of non-Hispanic White adults.
- While community based efforts effectively reduced disparities in **COVID-19 vaccination** for Hispanics, State data show that disparities continued in getting booster shots.
- Experience with both flu and COVID-19 vaccination has shown the importance of reaching pockets of **underserved communities** even in geographic areas with high vaccination rates.

Why Spokespersons/Trusted Messengers?

When contemplating whether to get vaccinated, people are exposed to an abundance of misinformation from friends and family who are unsure or against vaccination, via social media, and conflicting stories in the media. Due to this misinformation, people may believe that vaccines cause more harm than good. While misinformation is an issue with vaccine uptake, some people in the community may not get vaccinated due to being unaware of their eligibility for a vaccine primary dose or booster shot. Others may not get vaccinated due to logistics issues, such as lack of transportation or time off from work.

Trusted messengers can encourage vaccination by providing accurate information or even practical assistance to promote vaccination in their communities. People are more likely to trust someone they know or who is a respected member of the community than strangers. When communicating, trusted messengers can share their own personal positive experience with vaccines, empathize, address questions, listen to concerns, and provide accurate information to counter misinformation. While some trusted messengers are medical experts or healthcare providers, others may be lay health workers or community members who have been trained on the value of vaccines and are able to communicate effectively with members of their communities.

Trusted messengers can also reach people in community settings who otherwise would not be reached with positive vaccine messaging and contribute to vaccine equity. These include community campaigns such as one-on-one interactions, door to door visits, and at community sites. Trusted messengers can also work at health fairs or vaccination events in the community, create online video testimonials and share their own social media accounts. At work, trusted messengers can incorporate vaccine messaging into regular clinical or other workflows to make vaccine conversations part of the services that an agency provides the community. See the section below called "[Strategies for Healthcare Providers](#)" for more suggestions on incorporating vaccine messaging into clinical workflows.



Recruiting Trusted Messengers

Where can you find local trusted messengers?

- **Community health workers:** Do you have community health workers at your agency who promote health in your community and could be trained in vaccine messaging? These could be staff who promote health on other topics such as diabetes, healthy eating and active living, cancer prevention, or health care access.
- **Leaders from within your agency:** Key staff in leadership roles at your agency can be trained in vaccine messaging and could speak at community events or staff meetings about the importance of COVID-19 and flu vaccinations.
- **Clients of your agency:** Your patients (if you provide healthcare) or clients (if you provide social or community services) who receive vaccines through your efforts may be willing to speak to others about the benefits of vaccination. These messengers directly from the community could be influential with their friends, families, and neighbors.
- **Healthcare providers:** Clinicians and other healthcare providers can become vaccine champions, ensuring that every patient they interact with is offered appropriate vaccines during regular healthcare visits.
- **Community leaders:** These could include elected officials or faith-based leaders who could speak to their constituents or faith groups about the importance of vaccines. Many people will trust these community leaders by virtue of their office.
- **Community members:** These could include staff at nonprofits, wellness professionals, or other community members who are interested in improving the health of their community.



While many of these trusted messengers may volunteer their time or include vaccination messaging as part of their job duties, some agencies may wish to compensate trusted messengers who are recruited from the community. This can be in the form of nominal gift cards or could be certain amounts of money that are offered when trusted messenger tasks are completed. If you would like to explore this in your grant budget, please check with the Alliance.

Training Trusted Messengers/Spokespersons

Trusted messengers should first be trained on fundamental information about COVID-19 and influenza vaccines. As these topics are regularly changing and guidance is being constantly updated, the CDC is the best source for up-to-date information regarding vaccination. The goal for trusted messengers is to increase both vaccine confidence (the concept that vaccines are safe and beneficial to individuals and society) and vaccine uptake.

The current [messaging from the CDC](#) regarding COVID-19 vaccination states that:

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.
- COVID-19 vaccination helps protect adults and children ages 6 months of age and older from getting sick or severely ill with COVID-19 and helps protect those around them.
- Some people who are vaccinated against COVID-19 will still get sick and have a vaccine breakthrough infection because no vaccine is 100% effective.

Further messaging from the CDC regarding COVID-19 vaccination can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/work.html>

Similarly for the flu, the [CDC states](#) that:

- Everyone 6 months of age and older should receive a yearly flu shot.
- Flu vaccination is recommended as long as flu viruses are circulating.
- Certain groups, such as older adults, children under 2, persons with certain health conditions, pregnant women, and certain racial and ethnic groups, are at higher risk of flu complications. (For example, according to [CDC data](#) from 2009 to 2019, Hispanic or Latino persons had a rate of flu hospitalization of 45 per 100,000 compared to 38 per 100,000 for Non-Hispanic whites).

Further messaging from the CDC regarding flu vaccination can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/resource-center/index.htm>

Once they are grounded in the basics of flu and COVID-19 vaccination, trusted messengers need to adapt their messaging based on their audience and consider how their audience responds. For example, your messaging and communication styles will vary depending on whether you are speaking to family, friends, community members, parents of children, patients of your health center, or clients of your nonprofit agency.



Community Strategies

The CDC has a guide that includes information on twelve different [Community Vaccine strategies](#) to increase vaccinations in communities. Several of these are strategies that community-level trusted messengers can adopt to increase vaccination in their communities include:

Vaccine Ambassadors: People who have been vaccinated can share their positive stories about vaccination with family, friends, and other community members. This sharing can happen informally or as part of campaigns at health centers, faith-based locations, social media, or other venues. The interaction illustrated in the University of Southern California produced video [Of Reasons and Rumors](#) demonstrates how Vaccine Ambassadors can have a positive influence about vaccination on those around them, and this [video by America Ferrara](#) shows an example of sharing personal positive stories about vaccination.



Messaging by Trusted

Messengers: In this strategy, Trusted Messengers are “seen as credible sources of information”, especially persons those that are viewed as experts, such as scientists and physicians. For example, this [video by Dr. Edith Bracho-Sanchez](#) discusses her personal experience regarding COVID-19 vaccines and the fact that they do not hurt fertility. Some groups of people may not trust scientists and doctors, so trusted messengers can also be trained as Vaccine Ambassadors who can positively influence their community.

Combatting Misinformation: Debunking misinformation and disinformation is challenging. Trusted messengers need to use empathy and provide facts and be aware of the latest trends in vaccine misinformation and find messages that may help their audiences. [Project VCTR](#) is a useful platform that monitors social media and reports on trending posts that promote both positive and negative messages around vaccines on both English and Spanish social media and can be a tool to find what misinformation is currently spreading. Another helpful tool regarding misinformation is the US Surgeon General’s [Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation](#).

Strategies for Healthcare Providers

Many of our partner agencies in the *Vacunas para todos* network are either healthcare providers or partner closely with healthcare providers to provide COVID-19 vaccinations. The CDC suggests the following three methods that healthcare providers can use to promote vaccinations in their [Community Vaccination](#) guide:

- **Medical Reminders Strategies:** Messages can be sent to patients by text message, automated phone calls, or phone calls from outreach staff to promote vaccinations and booster shots. Since healthcare providers have access to patients' medical records, this strategy can be targeted toward those who are unvaccinated, are eligible for booster shots, or to encourage take-up of seasonal flu shots.
- **Provider Recommendation:** This strategy involves healthcare providers recommending vaccinations and including these recommendations as part of the delivery of health care, such as during regular office visits.
- **Medical provider vaccine standardization:** This involves healthcare providers standardizing how vaccines are presented in the practice, basically making the default option that patients will get vaccinated during visits.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has prepared a [20-minute video](#) on how to promote COVID-19 vaccination at healthcare practices that demonstrates how to incorporate these concepts.



Having Vaccine Conversations

Several resources offer suggestions on how to talk to family and friends such as this [guide by the US Department of Health and Human Services](#), as well as this [guide to Motivational Interviewing](#). An example on how to have these difficult conversations with friends and family is the USC Film School produced video [Team Player](#).

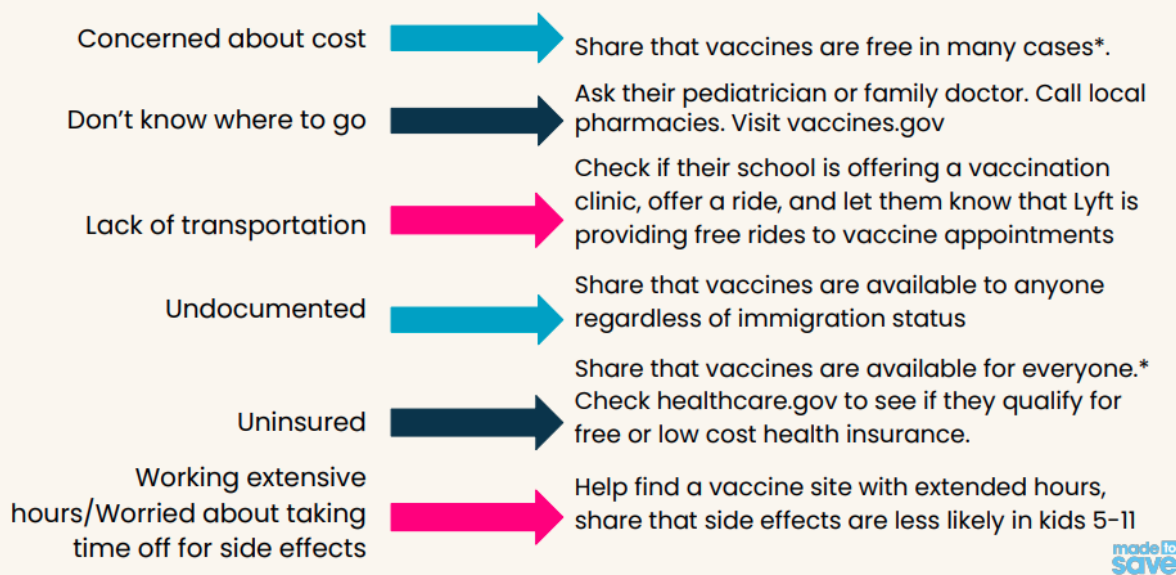
Made to Save, a CDC P4VE grantee, promotes the [TEO method](#) to facilitate vaccine conversations. This involves:

- **T – Building Trust.** This involves listening to understand, finding shared values, and sharing your own vaccine story.
- **E – Expressing Empathy.** Messengers can acknowledge concerns and ask empathetic questions, while avoiding making assumptions.
- **O – Help them find their OWN reason for getting vaccinated.** It is important that the person finds what could motivate them to get vaccinated.

Click for more details about [using the TEO method when talking to friends and family](#). For many families, access barriers are a greater obstacle to vaccination than vaccine hesitancy. Rather than vaccine hesitancy, issues cited by Hispanics center around a cluster of logistics issues including 64% of unvaccinated Hispanic adults reporting they are very or somewhat concerned that side effects will make them miss work; 52% citing concern about an out-of-pocket cost; and, 39% citing concern about having to provide a social security number or government issued identification.

This graphic, from Made to Save, suggests ways that trusted messengers could address some of these common barriers.

Common access barriers and potential solutions



(From Talking to Parents: <https://madetosave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Talking-to-Parents-and-Guardians-about-the-COVID-19-Vaccines-for-Kids.pdf>)

The Road Ahead

We do not know what the coming days, months, and years will bring with regard to flu and COVID-19, but what we documented is that timely and accurate information provided by trusted community messengers will be key to facing future challenges. The efforts of the *Vacunas* network and the extraordinary work of trusted messengers made the difference in access for Hispanic communities and as a result the 2021-2022 vaccination campaigns delivered close to a million vaccinations and provided information to tens of millions. Thank you for being an essential part of *Vacunas* and helping to create a healthier future for all.

Resources for Trusted Messengers

CDC

- P4VE specific resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/health-equity/resources.html>
- COVID-19 main page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- Flu main page: <https://www.cdc.gov/Flu/>

HRSA

- COVID-19 Resource Guide: <https://www.hrsa.gov/coronavirus/community-based-workforce-resources>

Made to Save talking guides:

- Talking to Adults: <https://madetosave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FINAL-Talking-to-Your-Friends-and-Family-about-the-COVID-19-Vaccines-Slide-Deck.pdf>
- Talking to youth: https://madetosave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/3KjbSolurQpZlgWhAzCuekSRIn5PJ_jE6Kx96EB5QpU.pdf

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Vaccine Confidence Conversations: <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/covid-19-vaccine-for-children/covid-19-vaccine-confidence-mini-series/>

Vacunas and Sesame Street in Communities

- COVID-19 *Promotores* Guide: You can find resources we've collaborated on to support families in asking questions and getting the answers they need to keep themselves and their communities safe from COVID-19. This suite of downloadable Spanish and English resources are located conveniently on a [Google drive](#), including a guide for *Promotores* (Community Health Workers), Posters, Videos featuring Muppets, Elmo and Rosita and their friend Sophia talking about COVID-19 and answering questions; and a Social Media Guide.
- Healthy Families / Familias Saludables: Available at <https://bit.ly/3lyoL1e>, this special video loop of Sesame Street themed healthy stories, messages, and games is intended for use in waiting rooms and other locations where families with young children may be in order to provide information in Spanish and English in a fun and engaging way.

For More Information

Lance Goller, *Vacunas* Project Director • lgoller@healthyamericas.org • 202-797-4346