COVID-19 health equity initiatives: The Public Health Alliance of Southern California

In this installment of "COVID-19 health equity initiatives," learn how the Public Health Alliance of Southern California works to support its members in improving population health and advancing equity for disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color.

Overview of initiative

Public Health Alliance of Southern California Vaccine Equity Video Series

The Public Health Alliance of Southern California’s Vaccine Equity Video Series aims to elevate promising and replicable practices for equitable vaccine distribution. The series showcases community-informed and equity-centered practices that specifically aim to reach disproportionately impacted low-income Californians and Californians of color. The Public Health Alliance is fiscally administered by The Public Health Institute.

The series also emphasizes vaccine distribution efforts working to reach disproportionately impacted communities both here in California and across the country. The efforts highlighted to date include:

- **Reaching older Black adults through faith-based mobile clinic partnerships**
  The City of Long Beach and the health department are working with community-based partners to advance vaccine equity through community-based, mobile clinic events focused on disproportionately impacted Long Beach residents, specifically Black, Latinx and Cambodian community members. On Feb. 10, the city launched a mobile clinic for Black adults in partnership with community-based partners Elite Skills Development and the Long Beach Minister’s Alliance. The clinic event, “Black and Well in the LBC,” successfully vaccinated over 200 older adults, 95% of whom identified as Black or African American.

- **Multi-sector, community-based partnerships to reach farmworkers**
  Riverside County Public Health Department, in partnership with the Coachella Valley Equity Collaborative (spearheaded by the Desert Healthcare District & Foundation (DHCD) and community-based partners, like TODEC), launched mobile vaccination clinics that brought COVID-19 vaccines directly to farmworkers in the fields with critical funding support from the Public Health Institute’s "Together Towards Health" initiative. Community-based partners helped register farmworkers, who have been some of the most impacted community members due to COVID-19.

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, in person during registration events at their worksites. They also answered questions in preferred languages, including indigenous languages such as Purépecha. Partners in these efforts addressed a broad range of concerns during vaccine registration and administration, including concerns related to vaccine side effects, immigration status and public charge. To date, the mobile vaccination clinics have successfully vaccinated well over 5,000 farmworkers throughout the Eastern Coachella Valley.

**Data-driven, neighborhood-based strategies to reach Black and Latinx Chicagoans**

In January of this past year, in response to data on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Chicago’s communities of color, especially Black and Latinx Chicagoans, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced the launch of the city-wide vaccine equity plan, Protect Chicago Plus. The plan is a targeted COVID-19 vaccine distribution effort designed with equity as the central strategy. The plan responds to the uneven distribution of COVID-19 burden on Black and Latinx Chicagoans by focusing vaccine supply and resources on the 15 most disproportionately-impacted neighborhoods throughout Chicago, co-developing vaccine distribution strategies with neighborhood-based community stakeholders, including tailored, on the ground, outreach and engagement strategies. Protect Chicago Plus is a unified effort between the City of Chicago, the Chicago Department of Public Health and local community partners with the goal of changing the map of disease burden and ending the pandemic. The city’s efforts have successfully increased the percent of first dose vaccines going to Black and Latinx Chicagoans from 18% in the first week of distribution to close to 59% in the most recent week of distribution; a percent equal to the city’s total Black and Latinx population.

**Intra-governmental partnerships to reach city of St. Louis Housing Authority residents**

In St. Louis, like in many places across the U.S., low-income communities and communities of color have disproportionately shouldered the burden of COVID-19 sickness and death and now face inequities in COVID-19 vaccination efforts. Fredrick Echols, MD, with the city of St. Louis Department of Health was determined to proactively engage and outreach to communities most disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through strategic community-based and intra-governmental partnerships. With the strategic engagement of the Alana Green, executive director of the St. Louis Housing Authority and staff from the housing authority’s resident initiatives team, the departments outreached to housing authority residents directly. Engaging the housing authority as a trusted partner and messenger for this vaccine effort resulted in the ability to vaccinate over 300 senior residents of the housing authority in just one clinic effort, roughly 98% of whom identified as Black/African American. The partnership between the health department and housing authority serves as a promising model for intra-governmental partnerships to reach disproportionately impacted community members in vaccine distribution and administration.

**Improving vaccination accessibility for individuals living with disabilities**

Health leaders from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health’s (LADPH) Center for Health Equity, in partnership with key community stakeholders with lived experience and
organizations that serve communities with disabilities, have developed and are working to implement a set of core recommendations to improve access to COVID-19 vaccinations for individuals living with disabilities. The recommendations developed are a recognition of the urgent need to develop processes and systems to improve accessibility for communities with disabilities throughout Los Angeles County. While the recommendations address current COVID-19 vaccination efforts, these recommendations may be applied to COVID-19 testing and broader emergency response activities.

**Partnership efforts to reach transgender and gender nonconforming community members**

The Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA) has focused their mobile COVID-19 vaccination clinic efforts on communities most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. In response to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on transgender and gender nonconforming (GNC) residents, specifically residents of color, OCHCA co-led a mobile vaccination clinic event with their community partner, Alianza Translatinx. The event was designed to foster an inclusive space, free of discrimination or judgment, to ensure transgender and GNC residents felt safe and comfortable receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. From registration, to vaccination, to observation, the partners took intentional steps to create an affirming and welcoming space. Thanks to in-person and online outreach efforts from partners like Alianza Translatinx, they were able to administer over 250 vaccines to community residents, the majority of whom were members of the Orange County transgender and GNC community. OCHCA and their partners plan to build on the success of this event in order to reach more disproportionately impacted transgender residents throughout Orange County.

"While the media narrative has often focused on vaccine hesitancy in communities of color, many community-based partners are focused instead on ensuring adequate supply and access for Black, Indigenous and other communities of color."

—Marley Williams, health equity & justice manager, Public Health Alliance

**What was the impetus for the racial equity work?**

The “Public Health Alliance Vaccine Equity Video Series” focuses on elevating promising and replicable practices for advancing equity in vaccine distribution, and supports members and other local health departments throughout the country in ensuring those community members most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be prioritized in vaccine distribution efforts.
When did the work begin? When is it expected to end?

The alliance launched the vaccine equity video series in March 2021, by highlighting the first “promising practice,” focused on a faith-based, mobile clinic partnership to reach older Black adults in Long Beach, California. The alliance will continue to work to identify and produce videos highlighting equity-informed, community-based strategies for reaching disproportionately impacted residents of color in vaccine distribution efforts throughout the response.

What are the expected results or outcomes?

- Increased focus on community-based strategies for reaching disproportionately impacted individuals and communities of color in vaccine distribution and administration
- Implementation of community-based, equity-centered strategies in vaccine distribution

Who are the key partners for this work?

- Local health departments and other governmental partners
- Community-based partners who represent and/or serve disproportionately impacted individuals and communities
- Philanthropy that aims to support equitable, community-informed distribution strategies
- Faith-based partners working to support local vaccination distribution efforts

What are your future steps for this initiative?

The Public Health Alliance of Southern California will be updating the series with new promising, equitable practices approximately every few weeks. Check the website for more videos in the future.

What advice & recommendations do you have?

The need to partner with trusted, community-based partners to reach the individuals and communities most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 cannot be overstated. Community-based and equity-informed efforts are critical to reaching communities of color in vaccine distribution. It is also critical to work with public and private funders to support both local health department and community partners who are doing the time consuming and labor intensive work to reach all eligible members of their
communities.

Contact information

For more information about the Public Health Alliance of Southern California initiative, please contact: Marley Williams, health equity and justice manager at mwilliams@phi.org.

Additional resources

- The Public Health Alliance Vaccine Equity Video Series: Promising & actionable practices for local health departments

Find out about other initiatives

- Black Arizona COVID-19 Task Force
- Cambridge Health Alliance (Massachusetts)
- Chicago Racial Equity Rapid Response Team
- Meharry Medical College
- Michigan Public Health Institute
- Milwaukee Health Department
- New York City Department of Health
- Spectrum Health Lakeland
- UC San Diego Refugee Health Unit

Visit the COVID-19 health equity initiatives main page for additional information.