

Recruitment for a mobile phone delivered intervention to improve COVID-19 vaccine behaviours among Latino families in Los Angeles demonstrates a high demand for reliable vaccine information.

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BACKGROUND – Increasing vaccine rates in America’s hardest-hit cities is critical to mitigating the health inequities faced by vulnerable communities. In Los Angeles County, COVID-19 was the leading cause of death for Latinos throughout the 2020 pandemic and continues to be compared to all other racial and ethnic groups who reside in Los Angeles County. As of September 2021, Latinos reported the highest death rates, with over 12,000 deaths. Barriers, including the need for linguistically accessible and reliable information, continue to present challenges toward getting both adults and Latino children vaccinated. Studies have shown that some of the most prominent barriers to vaccine acceptance in the Latino community are the dissemination of misinformation and myths about COVID-19 vaccines, lack of linguistically and culturally-tailored information, and the lack of reliable and trusted sources of information.

“Personally, I liked receiving accurate information from doctors. I liked the updates providing additional information. This was important and accessible that I was able to share with a other parents in my network”

An educational program for the Latino Community

– To promote COVID-19 vaccine confidence and address COVID-19 pandemic disparities, Dr. Yelba Castellon-Lopez a medical doctor and researcher from the UCLA Department of Family Medicine who focuses on improving health outcomes in the Latino community and Dr. Luisa Blanco Reynal an economist with expertise in mobile phone interventions from the Pepperdine School of Public Policy University, came together as two Latina investigators to design a culturally and linguistically tailored mobile intervention. Their goal was to combat dis- and misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine and empower vulnerable Latino communities to make an informed decision about COVID-19 vaccination for themselves and their school-aged children. The study will look at measuring vaccine behaviors of unvaccinated Latino families in LA County. Outreach for the study was conducted in partnerships between two academic institutions and several Los Angeles-based community organizations, who played an essential role in informing the study implementation and recruitment. Eligible participants were recruited based on the following criteria: 1) Adults 18 years and older, 2) Identify as Latino, 3) At least one family member who is unvaccinated, 4) Have a mobile device to receive texts.

Participants received educational information twice a week for four weeks. Each week, participants were sent text messages containing links to short web-based videos from Latino medical professionals and a community health worker that addressed concerns and misinformation

about the COVID-19 vaccine. Participants also reviewed online relevant information tailored to parents of children 2-17 years old, in addition to easy-to-use instruction on how to access the COVID-19 vaccine. All material was created in English and Spanish and was easily accessible to participants via the program’s platform via the internet.

Community Organizations as trusted partners:

From July 1 to August 29, 2021, a total of 470 families expressed interest and were invited to participate in the study. Participants were asked to complete a baseline demographics survey. A total of 366 families completed the initial survey. A central goal was to provide reliable and easily accessible information about the COVID-19 vaccine to Latino families in East and South Los Angeles. These two regions have experienced a disproportionate number of COVID-19 cases and also lag in vaccination rates. Seventy-nine percent (n=292) of study participants requested to receive study information in Spanish. Sixty-nine percent of participants were first-generation immigrants (n=254). Among all participants, seventy-three percent (n=267) had a high school education or less, and seventy-two percent (n=262) of participants reported an income of <25,000. Seventy-one percent (n=261) of participant families reported at least one minor in the household ages 2-11, and fifty-one percent (n=185) had at least one child aged 12-17 years. Among adult participants, 21.9% were not vaccinated.

-Rocio Elorza, an L.A. Unified parent and member of the parent-led group, Our Voice: Communities or Quality Education

"I participated as a parent and volunteer in mivacunaLA. As a volunteer recruiter, I told parents that they would be receiving information from a doctor at UCLA as well as the County of Los Angeles. This helped parents trust the program"

-Rocio Elorza

Mobile phone program successfully engages some of the most vulnerable communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic: The mivacunaLA showed the need to develop and disseminate language and culturally tailored messages about COVID-19 vaccines and children. MivacunaLA represents an effective and low-cost program that can be quickly disseminated, addressing gaps in knowledge and misinformation in the Latino community via mobile phone. The program successfully reached socioeconomically vulnerable "hard to reach" populations, especially immigrant underserved Latino families. Families in the study expressed their interest in learning more about COVID-19 vaccines with the mivacunaLA program via mobile phone.

Policy Implications:

Our successful outreach and recruitment efforts demonstrate that there is a high demand for COVID-19 vaccine-related information among Spanish-speaking Latinos. Collaborating with community organizations to inform community members of the study was an important strategy that led to successful recruitment efforts. Based on feedback from community partners, there was a great demand for reliable information that is linguistically and culturally tailored to address the needs of vulnerable Latino communities. Our approach demonstrated that it is imperative to take a community-partnered approach to improve vaccination outreach and education. Education programs should accompany vaccine dissemination efforts for Latino families and children in LA County. Especially in areas in the county where the pandemic has hit the hardest, like East Los Angeles and South Los Angeles. Access to reliable and trusted information to counter myths and disinformation around the COVID-19 vaccine will be essential to help Latino parents make informed decisions about getting themselves and their children vaccinated. The results from the miVacunaLA study are forthcoming. Government efforts should ensure that families are informed of the safety measures to combat COVID-19, including getting vaccinated. To promote vaccine awareness, policies should aim to address cultural and language barriers particular to the Latino community



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