

Trust and Creativity: Increasing COVID-19 Vaccination Rates in Orange County, California

Community-Based Promising Practice

This profile highlights the creative outreach and educational strategies implemented by Latino Health Access which helped increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake in farmworker and Latinx communities of Orange County, California.

Organization

Latino Health Access (LHA) is a non-profit that has been serving communities in Orange County, California, for nearly 30 years through a vast array of services ranging from diabetes self-management classes, emotional wellness assistance, and advocating for policy change to improve people's lives. LHA was founded by Dr. America Bracho, who approached community health through the Promotor de Salud Model to address the social inequities that impact the communities where Promotores de Salud live.



Description of the Practice:

At the onset of the pandemic, Latinx communities were disproportionately affected by COVID-19. LHA's Community Health Workers, also known as Promotores de Salud, demonstrated the importance of meeting community members where they are at and approaching complex topics creatively through a popular education approach. While the strategy highlighted here is only one method of many strategic actions implemented by LHA, other wrap-around concepts contributed to the overall success of the organization in reaching the community. See Figure 1 for LHA's holistic COVID-19 response.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Phase 1



Figure 1: This profile focuses on Education and Outreach and the way Promotores de Salud engage Latinx individuals and farmworkers in transforming their environments.

Key Challenges

Infodemic & COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy

Up against an excessive and oftentimes unreliable amount of information about the virus, questions, myths, and fear surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine have been rampant in many communities, including Orange County. New vaccine technology was difficult to understand and it was crucial to acknowledge and address these concerns. LHA was presented with the challenge of breaking down complex information into content that was relatable and easily understood by farmworkers and other members of their community.

Key Strategies:

Outreach Partnerships at Cultural Community Events

Hosting events around cultural holidays as opportunities to educate and shed light on pressing issues is part of LHA's strategy. During Dia De Los Muertos, the community created an altar adorned with typical ofrenda (offering) items, honoring a Mexican tradition that pays respect to loved ones who have passed away. During this event, Promotores de Salud had the opportunity to educate community members about alarming and recent deaths due to COVID-19 in the Orange County community, the importance of taking action, and offering viable solutions.

During the event's planning stages, LHA collaborated with a Commercial District to close important roads in populated areas of the community. They successfully hosted vendors, food, music, and, most importantly, a theatrical play. The play helped create a dialogue highlighting the importance of getting the vaccine. With the help of volunteer actors and Promotores de Salud who created costumes and artwork, the group created a carro alegorico also known as a float in English. The inspirational and dynamic message elaborated by the carro alegorico was filled with a sense of hope that the pandemic will pass and our communities would be able to flourish again as we work together to combat COVID-19. The carro alegorico drew favorable attention from the crowd and caught the eye of many news outlets that covered the parade.



Pictured:

Cultural events promoting the social obligation of friends, family, and community members to combat COVID-19



Pictured:

Promotores de Salud created costumes out of material typically used to make a piñata.



Pictured:

Float with words that read “La Vacuna Es Nuestra Esperanza” which means “The Vaccine Is Our Hope” in English.

Harnessing Creativity through Popular Education and Outreach

LHA has developed a high level of expertise in targeting and designing educational material and informational campaigns that integrate art, music, and theater. LHA has a long tradition of using the arts to highlight important issues affecting the community for any emerging topic. Plays and skits dramatized the way the vaccine will defeat the virus and other COVID-19 variants. The content was highly interactive and engaging for audience members, which made this information easier for them to understand.

Health Literacy and Unpacking Vaccine Hesitancy at Farms

LHA Promotores negotiated with employers to allow them to speak with farmworkers during their lunch breaks or at the end of the workday. While delivering information about COVID-19 vaccine efficiency and availability on the farm, they customize these informal meetings to be culturally appropriate and facilitated by Promotores de Salud who teach and engage participants on a peer level. Promotores de Salud explains complex concepts such as the mRNA technology behind the new vaccines to people unfamiliar with the science involved. They utilize a popular education approach while doing these on-farm education sessions, which enables workers to feel confident, respected, and safe enough to openly ask questions or express doubts about vaccines.

Some key elements to LHA approach included:

- **Questioning** - This helps to identify the starting point of where Promotores de Salud needs to meet workers. Asking questions is important for the learning experience of the worker.
- **Analysis** - Understanding a worker's perspective and recognizing that misinformation about the vaccine comes from a place of concern and caring for the livelihood of their families.
- **Analogies** - People learn from stories and can grasp complex information using metaphors or analogies. For example, to facilitate conversations, Promotores de Salud may ask workers to think back to what types of phones they used when they were younger compared to the types of phones they use now. This allows Promotores de Salud to discuss how technology changes over time, similarly to vaccines and the brand-new COVID-19 vaccines in question.
- **Active Learning** - Promotores de Salud creates an environment that supports learning from each other. Workers have different experiences and stances on the vaccine. All ideas are welcome.
- **Collective Experience** - On a peer-level, promotores create an atmosphere of respect and confianza (trust). Workers are encouraged to openly ask all sorts of questions about their fears and hesitations about the COVID-19 vaccine without being judged by the Promotores de Salud and other workers who are listening and sharing.
- **Critical Thinking** - Promotores de Salud incorporates different points of views which allows participants to listen to different ideas, and encourages workers to make their own decisions.
- **Reflection** - Every meeting ends with reflection and evaluation which leads to actions of change and empowerment to apply the change.

Regardless of the participants' perspectives after the day of the meeting, Promotores de Salud always remain a reliable part of the social fabric of participants' personal networks. In LHA's experience, it takes an average of 1 hour and 2-3 contacts with one person to get them vaccinated.



Pictured:
LHA Promotora de Salud
facilitates a vaccine discussion
during workers' lunch break.

On occasion, LHA set up special clinics just for farmworkers to get their vaccine immediately after the workday with the help of the farm owners. They also collaborated with a school site to provide transportation to the workers to a nearby vaccine distribution site. When necessary, Promotores de Salud also offered to drive workers to vaccination sites.

Partners

[Orange County Healthcare Agency \(OCHCA\)](#) is a regional provider in Orange County, charged with protecting and promoting individual, family and community health through the coordination of public and private sector resources. OCHCA works closely with Latino Health Access in providing funds for the work of the COVID-19 Education Response Team.

[RISE- Communities Rise Together](#) supports on-the-ground vaccination efforts in Black, Asian-American/Pacific-Islander, Latinx, Native-American, rural, immigrant/migrant and low-income older adult populations. Latino Health Access provides training and technical assistance to smaller community-based organizations as part of their support for rapid COVID-19 response.

Evaluation: Data Collected and Results

Vaccine Outreach and Education

- Through LHA's overall efforts as COVID-19 vaccine rolled out, they vaccinated a total of 51,399 community members.
- Promotores de Salud provided information and resources to community members with varying needs related to COVID-19 such as testing and treatment, and other needs ranging from unemployment to food insecurity, eviction and housing issues, and healthcare access issues. A total of 66,447 community members received education through LHA Call Center alone and countless more through in-person efforts.



Tools and Resources:

- Learn more about Latino Health Access' [The Promotora Model](#)
- [RISE- Communities Rise Together Resources](#)
- [Recruiting the Heart, Training the Brain: The Work of Latino Health Access](#)

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Pro Tip:

Having a constant presence in the community and trust-based relationships has been the secret successful component of LHAs' efforts throughout the pandemic.

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