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# BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS ON MPOX MESSAGING AND VACCINATION EFFORTS

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**This toolkit provides best practices** for collaborating with local health departments to develop effective health messaging and vaccination efforts.

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Historically, there has been distrust of vaccines in the Black/African American community, which may result in vaccine hesitancy. Other factors, such as access to healthcare, affordability, and trust in healthcare providers, also play a role.

Data on MPOX vaccination is still growing. A recent survey (2022) investigated factors associated with COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and relate them to MPOX vaccine hesitancy. The study found 25% of Black Americans surveyed reported vaccine hesitancy. This hesitancy was associated with concerns about vaccine safety, mistrust of the medical system, and perceived lack of vaccine efficacy.

Another recent article (2022) discussed the lessons learned from HIV, COVID-19, and monkeypox (MPOX) stigma to guide stigma-informed preparedness and responses. They argue that stigma and discrimination related to HIV and COVID-19 may also occur with MPOX, particularly within the Black community.

These studies highlight the need for collaboration between community members and their local health departments to address the MPOX epidemic from a stigma-informed approach. These collaborations are essential to promoting health messaging and vaccination efforts, address vaccine hesitancy, increase vaccine trust, and reduce stigma.

Local health departments may not have all the surveillance data needed to effectively address a community's needs and can benefit from the insights of community member advocacy and collaboration. This toolkit provides best practices for collaborating with local health departments to develop effective health messaging and vaccination efforts.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

- + **Build relationships:** Develop a relationship with local health department staff members to establish trust and open communication. It is essential to establish person-to-person relationships. These allow you to work collaboratively to identify and address community needs. **Advocate your own value and insight as a community member and stakeholder, and how your contribution will inform the existing health department.**
- + **Communicate regularly:** Stay in touch and send follow up emails after 3-5 business days to ensure that efforts continue to address your community's needs. **Remain professional, but persistent as you are representing your community.**
- + **Identify who is underserved:** Identify which groups are not currently being addressed in your community and offer guidance to your health department on how to effectively reach them. This can accelerate response time. **Marginalized communities are often placed at greatest risk for infection transmission and stigma. Your advocacy reminds the health departments to target key demographics with community guidance.**
- + **Use evidence-based information:** Evidence-based information can establish trust and credibility with the community. Research studies are a strong source of evidence, but locally collected data (e.g., informal surveys, community pledges, meeting headcounts) still offer valuable information that can help your health department make decisions. **Data-driven advocacy adds credibility and urgency to your message.**
- + **Participate in community events:** Choosing to participate, individually or as a collaborating organization, in community events hosted by the local health department helps to establish a presence and show your support. **Demonstrate that you are in this fight with your health department.**

- + **Collaborate on public messaging:** Work with your local health department to develop messaging that is culturally sensitive and accessible to all populations. Your advocacy in this area ensures the messages are appropriate for your community. **Request, or volunteer, to be part of a community advisory or reviewing committee before they are finalized.**
- + **Highlight stigma:** Stigma and disease fatigue have been shown to reduce community response to public health messages and prevention efforts. Consider the discussions you hear from your community and how members tend to respond to health information. **Advocate to your health department to use language, messages, and information that de-stigmatizes personal health.**
- + **Track and report data in a timely manner:** Offer to support your local health department by assisting in data tracking, and reporting on the community response to their messages. Provide this information accurately and in a timely manner can expedite the health department understanding of, and response to, community needs. **As a community member, you can offer uniquely valuable insight about how health messages are received.**
- + **Provide accurate and timely information to your community:** When collaborating with your health department, advocate for the most up to date information. Find out if the materials provided have been updated in the last 3 - 6 months to ensure your community has access to the latest and most accurate information. **Asking for updated information and materials tells your health department where they can improve to serve the community.**
- + **Be patient and committed:** Advocacy is tiring work. Your local health department may not respond as quickly as you would. If your community's needs are not being addressed, remain patient and committed to seeing your community receive what it needs. This may mean continuing to advocate through collaboration with other organizations in your area. **Do not give up. A "no" is an opportunity for a "what can we do instead?"**





## References

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