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Health Literacy and New Mexico's COVID-19 Initiatives

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HEALTH LITERACY AND NEW MEXICO'S COVID-19 INITIATIVES

HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARY
& INFORMATICS CENTER

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OBJECTIVE

Overcoming obstacles to health literacy is difficult—particularly, during a pandemic when misinformation abounds in social media, Internet sites, and news outlets. Public health has become political, and it is imperative that reliable health information gets to individuals who need it, particularly to communities that COVID-19 disproportionately affects. Many of New Mexico's residents are members of rural and medically underserved communities who experience health literacy challenges. To provide information and services about COVID-19 for the underserved populations of New Mexico, the city of Albuquerque's Office of Equity and Inclusion received federal funding for the "City of Albuquerque Health Literacy (HL) Project to Enhance Equitable Community Response to COVID-19." The grant's partners include community health centers, community-based organizations, New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH), University of New Mexico (UNMCHWI) who oversees Community Health Workers (CHWs), and the Health Literacy Office (HLO) at the University of New Mexico Hospital (UNMH). The objective of this study is to describe the services provided by the UNM, NMDOH and HLO grant partners as they work to disseminate COVID-19 information to underserved populations in New Mexico during the first year of a two-year grant funded project.

METHODS

The Clinical Services Librarian at the Health Sciences Library and Informatics Center (HSLIC) at the University of New Mexico serves on a Health Literacy Task Force at the University of New Mexico Hospital and participates in meetings with the HLO and NMDOH's CHWs.

RESULTS

The main goals of community health worker programs are to:

- Provide cultural and linguistic-friendly education which meets the health information needs of minority and underserved populations
- Take active steps towards bridging socio-economic inequalities
- Enhance trust towards healthcare providers (Valeriani et al)
- Report community health needs to healthcare facilities, providers and policy makers (Olaniran et al)

New Mexico's community health workers are hired and trained under the auspices of the "City of Albuquerque Health Literacy (HL) Project to Enhance Equitable Community Response to COVID-19" federal grant. CHWs represent New Mexico's Hispanic, African American, Native American, Asian American and migrant communities.

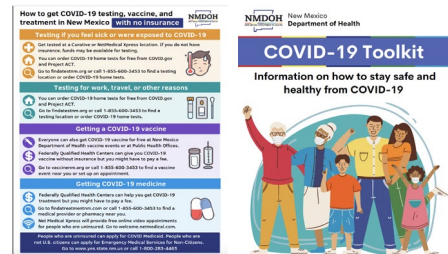
As part of their service, CHWs from around New Mexico meet via Zoom in joint bi-monthly meetings with the NMDOH and UNMCHWI teams. In each of these meetings, CHW participants:

- Get the latest information about COVID-19 variants and vaccinations from the NMDOH
- Get tools for community outreach developed by the NMDOH and UNMCHWI and vetted by the UNMH Health Literacy Office for appropriate literacy levels. Tools are available in Spanish, English, Dine and Vietnamese.
- Share community issues with NMDOH
- Get tips on effective community messaging
- Share anxieties and stress with other members of the CHW community and work on ways to cope collectively and receive support
- Learn the latest information on additional emerging community health issues such as monkey pox, polio and West Nile Virus from the NMDOH.

RESULTS CONTINUED...

New Mexico's CHWs have access to informational websites developed by the NMDOH and have received health literacy training through the NMH Health Literacy Office.

Examples of NMDOH's CHW outreach tools:



CONCLUSION

The Federal Government recognizes the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on rural and underserved populations and provides funding to support local and state initiatives through Community Health Worker programs.

REFERENCES

Valeriani, G., Sarajilic Vukovic, II, Bersani, F.S., Sadeghzadeh Diman, A., Ghocbani, A., & Mollica, R. (2022). Tackling Ethnic Health Disparities Through Community Health Worker Programs: A Scoping Review on Their Utilization During the COVID-19 Outbreak. *Population Health Management*, 25(4), 517-526.

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