

Ad campaign launches to build public trust in COVID-19 shots

February 25 2021, by Mike Stobbe

A public service ad campaign unveiled Thursday aims to convince Americans to get vaccinated against COVID-19, telling them "It's Up to You."

The campaign by the Ad Council and its partners is focused on those who may be hesitant to get the shots. One print ad reads: "Getting back to hugs starts with getting informed," and directs readers to a website with information about vaccines in seven languages.

"Our goal is to move them from being hesitant to being confident" in vaccines, said Lisa Sherman, the Ad Council's president.

As many as 1 in 3 Americans say they definitely or probably won't get the COVID-19 vaccine, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Some scientists estimate that more than 2 in 3 Americans will need to get vaccinated to stop the epidemic that has killed more than 500,000 people in the U.S.

The large, national campaign is producing an array of English and Spanish ads for TV, billboards, bus shelters, social media and publications that will be rolled out over the next few months. A few of the ads are expected to feature celebrities like the actors Angela Bassett and John Leguizamo, CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta, and the government's top infectious disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci.

The spots are expected to run throughout the year.

The effort includes materials specifically for church leaders, doctors, pharmacists and others in Black and Hispanic communities

The new campaign was funded by \$52 million in donations—supplemented with donated labor and resources, said Sherman. The advertising industry-backed group calls it one of the largest public education efforts in U.S. history. It's famous for many iconic public service campaigns that include "The Toughest Job You'll Ever Love" campaign for the Peace Corps.

Print versions show an adhesive bandage framing the words "It's Up to You." One video spot shows a series of illustrated arms of different colors and one robotic, all with a bandage on the upper arm, blending in to a mosaic of the U.S. map. "You've got questions. And that's normal" reads another ad. It invites viewers to go to a website, GetVaccineAnswers.org, to get more information.

Although vaccines have been available—in limited supplies—in the U.S. since mid-December, the timing of the ad campaign is actually good, said Jay Winsten, a Harvard University public health communications expert.

It takes a while for people who question the effectiveness or safety of vaccines to gain faith in shots, said Winsten, who is known as the architect of a national designated driver campaign that aimed to reduce drunk driving injuries and deaths.

But it also helps that millions of Americans have already gotten shots, and they did not suffer serious side effects, he added.

"People will be more open to the messaging now" because of that, he said.

The [federal government](#) is involved in the Ad Council's campaign, but also has its own in the works. A \$300 million U.S. Department of Health and Human Services campaign was put on pause late in the Trump administration. Biden administration officials have picked it up but have not said when it will launch.

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