

Partnering with Black faith leaders and pharmacists increases COVID-19 vaccine uptake among Black communities: study

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New research being presented at the European Congress of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases (ECCMID) held online this year,

suggests that partnering with Black churches and medical professionals in delivering COVID-19 education and vaccination could be an effective way of increasing vaccine uptake in Black communities.

The researchers hope this more proactive, community-based approach can help others implement effective COVID-19 initiatives and other pressing health concerns among vulnerable populations.

"Black churches have long been more than places of worship to their communities," says Dr. Jacinda Abdul-Mutakabbir from Loma Linda University School of Pharmacy, California, USA, who led the research. "They serve as strongholds for disseminating trusted information and have been integral in our initiative to help achieve racial equity in the COVID-19 [vaccine rollout](#)."

Black communities have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with Black Americans dying of COVID-19 at a rate three times than White Americans.

While it was hoped that the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines could help reduce existing disparities, various barriers to vaccination that disproportionately affect Black communities, such as limited access to computers and the internet, and a lack of transportation, have left them at a disadvantage. Consequently, less than 15% of Black Americans have received the first dose of a COVID-19 [vaccine](#).

To address this, Loma Linda University (LLU) School of Pharmacy researchers began collaborating with Black churches and health agencies to promote vaccination and improve access to the Black community of San Bernardino County in California. In 2020, the University was the county's largest vaccination centre, and like other vaccination sites across the country, is located in the suburbs, with an online appointment system, and vaccines available free of charge.

Although almost 8% of San Bernardino County residents are Black, vaccination rates were especially low among Black individuals at the start of 2020. Between January 5 and February 5, 2020, LLU clinics vaccinated 14,157 residents with their first COVID-19 vaccine dose—of whom just 451 (3.2%) were Black.

In the study, researchers developed a three-tier approach to set up mobile vaccination clinics. First they engaged with a group of 20 churches, sharing COVID-19 information and building Black Faith leaders support for the vaccine. Then, they involved a Black pharmacist to deliver COVID-19 education webinars that were advertised and coordinated by pastors, who also managed appointment lists for vaccination clinics to ensure internet access was not a barrier. Finally, they used a place of worship as a vaccination site to bring the vaccine closer to the people.

The mobile vaccination clinic, held on church grounds in February 6, 2021, vaccinated 420 individuals, 351 (84%) of whom were Black. Importantly, the study also found an increase in Black attendance at LLU mass vaccinations sites in the week following the mobile clinic initiative—of 9,373 first-dose vaccines delivered to residents, 399 (4.3%) were received by Black individuals. The authors say that this might be potentially attributed to the information provided about the mass clinics, during the mobile vaccination effort.

"In religious communities of colour, where access to vaccination centres is limited and vaccine hesitancy is often rooted in mistrust of health care systems, seeing faith leaders put their trust in COVID-19 vaccines is a key motivator for them to do the same", says Abdul-Mutakabbir. "We have vaccinated 1,542 Black individuals in San Bernardino County to date and have expanded our efforts to provide comprehensive information to Latino/LatinX communities, who have also been underrepresented in traditional vaccination efforts. We hope to have our

results available within the coming months."

Provided by European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases

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