

Strategies for Prioritizing Farmworkers in Vaccine Distribution

Cross-Jurisdictional Learning Session Summary
MARCH 1, 2021



Farmworkers in California are the backbone of our food system. They sow the seeds and harvest the food that feeds families all across the nation. When the pandemic fully gripped the nation, they were deemed essential and continued to work. As a result, **they have been some of the hardest impacted communities due to COVID-19.** Our member local health departments (LHDs) recognized the challenges associated with providing adequate health education, linguistically and culturally appropriate information, COVID-19 testing, medical care, and now distribution of lifesaving COVID-19 vaccinations.

On March 1, 2021, the Public Health Alliance of Southern California (Alliance) convened an informal, cross-jurisdictional learning session that brought together equity staff and some key community partners from six member health departments. The goal of the session was to share multi-sector and community-based strategies that have enabled successful distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine in farmworker communities throughout Southern California. This summary of emerging “promising practices and approaches” is one component of our broader **Alliance work to elevate promising and replicable practices for advancing equity in vaccine distribution and allocation.**

Key Cross-Jurisdictional Takeaways

It is clear that no one strategy will be enough to reach all farmworkers who need the COVID-19 vaccine. All jurisdictions who participated in the learning session acknowledged it will take a concerted, ongoing commitment to partner with and support on the ground community partners and other multi-sector partners in vaccine distribution and administration efforts. The following are a few of the key takeaways that emerged from the cross-jurisdictional learning session:

Partner with Trusted Messengers and Community-Based Partners to Assist in Outreach, Registration & Education

The importance of trusted, community-based partners in the success of the current farmworker-focused vaccination efforts cannot be overstated. In a sea of misinformation and disinformation around COVID-19 and the vaccine, engaging with trusted community members to provide direct, high-touch outreach, registration support, and education is critical. This includes utilizing different forms of media (e.g. social media, local radio, etc.), providing in-language support (especially in preferred indigenous languages), training Community Health Workers (CHWs) and promotoras on outreach and education, and other creative, on the ground approaches for how to best reach farmworkers when resources and time are limited. In addition, multiple jurisdictions elevated the critical need to provide ongoing funding support to sustain high-touch, on the ground, community partnership efforts.

Communicate Utilizing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Outreach and Engagement Materials

Indigenous communities from Southern Mexico make up approximately one third of farmworkers in California. Languages spoken among these communities include Mixtec, Zapotec languages, and Purépecha (to name a few). Preferred language outreach, translation and interpretation services are often provided by local community partners, which is critical for reaching a large group of farmworkers. Examples of translated materials are included below:

- The **Santa Barbara** LHD hosts a **series of short videos** in Mixteco covering the basics of COVID-19 (Mixteco **Alto** and **Bajo**) including **proper handwashing, social distancing,** and explaining the **stay at home orders.**

- Staff from the **Farmworker Resource Center** in **Ventura County** attended all of the mobile clinics in order to provide language translation for Indigenous communities. **The Farmworker Resource Program** has also developed videos in multiple indigenous languages.
- In **Riverside County**, the partnership provided all educational and informational materials in **English, Spanish, and Purépecha**. Their local community partner, **TODEC**, provided in-person outreach and translation in multiple languages, including in Purépecha.

Adopt Low or No Barrier Identification Requirements

The current state of California's farmworker labor force presents unique challenges and barriers with utilizing traditional forms of eligibility verification. **Across California approximately 75% of farmworkers are undocumented.** The seasonal nature of the work means many farmworkers move around the state to continue work during local off seasons. Additionally, border communities integrate workers from MexiCali, and vice versa. Many member LHDs are creating low to no barrier identification requirements to address some of these issues:

- **LA County** has provided **expanded guidance on eligible forms of identification for food/agricultural workers**, including badges, pay stubs, and letters from employers.
- **Santa Barbara County** is taking a similar approach and **expanding what can be used for identification**, including many non-governmental issued IDs, such as business cards, work identification, library cards, a letter from your employer or school, bank/ATM cards, Costco card, electrical bill, matricula consular, paystub, money transfer receipt, a **letter from a trusted community partner**, etc.
- **Riverside County** is taking a two-pronged approach, which includes expanding acceptable forms of identification, including letters from growers on letterhead, badges, pay stubs, or vouching from the grower. They are also relying on the screenings being done by community partners during registration efforts to confirm eligibility.

Work to Address Concerns Related to Immigration Status and Public Charge

In addition to adopting low barrier identification requirements, multiple jurisdictions elevated the need

to proactively address fears and concerns related to immigration status, and public charge more specifically. **CA Protecting Immigrant Families** has produced multilingual materials that can support jurisdictions and their partners in addressing these concerns.

Develop Strong Relationships with and Outline the Role of Growers

Many LHDs expressed how important it is to partner with growers, and how strong grower partnerships can play an important role in successful vaccination efforts. Some LHDs elevated the need to provide growers with protocols to outline the roles and responsibilities for those growers wishing to partner in a vaccination clinic event. Protocols for growers can include: LHD expectations around supporting employees with registration, providing paid time off to receive the vaccine, providing sick time for unexpected side effects, and providing critical supplies (e.g. canopies, tables, chairs, electricity and trash).

Choose Sites that Increase Geographic Reach

In addition to partnering with growers to host mobile vaccination clinics on site, LHDs are also engaging other trusted community partners, such as faith-based organizations (e.g. the Catholic Diocese in Riverside), to host vaccine clinics. Multiple jurisdictions also elevated the need to rotate sites every few days to ensure broad reach and to intentionally include both large and small growers in vaccination efforts.

Aim to Provide Low Barrier Registration Opportunities

Many LHDs worked with trusted community partners to conduct both in person and over the phone registration. In addition, LHDs should be prepared to register people on the spot. Unforeseen challenges may be on the horizon with the move to a new online vaccine registration portal. LHDs are anticipating those challenges and are thinking of ways to register people on site.

Include Wraparound Services and Resources (When Possible)

Some jurisdictions identified vaccination clinics as an opportunity to also provide additional resources to farmworkers directly (e.g. mask, sanitizer and glove distribution in Santa Barbara) or provide additional support related to basic needs or workplace rights (e.g. partnering with the Farmworker Resource Program to

provide resource information in Ventura). When possible, LHDs can think about additional applicable resource distribution and partnership opportunities that can be aligned with vaccine clinic events.

Alliance Member Vaccine Distribution Spotlights: Learning Session Summaries

IMPERIAL COUNTY

On February 26, 2021 the Imperial County LHD hosted their first farmworker vaccine clinic where they were able to vaccinate close to 1,000 individuals in one day. Imperial County faces unique challenges with a large binational population. Many people live in Imperial County and work in Mexico or live in Mexicali and work in Imperial County. Imperial County also has workers that cross over into Arizona and vice versa. In addition, many seasonal workers move with the harvest, so the County's focus is to vaccinate as many people as possible before the season ends in April/May. To reach their goals, the health department is partnering with the farm bureau, the worker's association, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to assist with registration, education, outreach, and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE). The health department relied heavily on their experience administering the flu vaccine and built on the success of the mobile vaccination efforts they conducted for the H1N1 vaccine. The clinic received very few walk-ins and created low barriers to identification (identification could include a letter from the employer

certifying the individual as an employee or a pay stub). The half day effort took place at the end of the day to ensure that if there were any immediate side effects, farmworkers could safely rest at home.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LADPH) is currently partnering with **Comunidades Indigenas En Liderazgo (CIELO)**, an Indigenous, woman-led non-profit that works to support Indigenous communities throughout Los Angeles. Through this partnership, CIELO and other aligned partners have been working to conduct multilingual outreach and register eligible residents through their networks, starting with residents age 65 and older. The department responded to concerns around vaccine chasers deterring intentional vaccine equity efforts in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, by creating exclusive codes that agencies could use to register community members. In order to expand the County's capacity to reach their most disproportionately impacted community members, LADPH is providing funding support to CIELO and other community-based partners working on vaccine outreach and education. In anticipation of vaccine expansion to agricultural workers, CIELO will soon be working on multilingual visual presentations, video clips and show and tell strategies in a variety of indigenous languages spoken throughout Los Angeles County.



RIVERSIDE COUNTY

As of March 1, 2021 mobile vaccination clinic partnerships in Riverside County's Eastern Coachella Valley have vaccinated well over 4,100 farmworkers and have recently caught the interest of Governor Gavin Newsom as an emerging best practice to elevate and replicate across the state. Early on, the Riverside County Health Department formed a vaccine equity task force and invited community and faith-based organizations (FBOs) to the table. In partnership with the Coachella Valley Equity Collaborative (spearheaded by the Desert Healthcare District & Foundation, and community-based partners, like community organizing group TODEC), the County was able to launch mobile vaccination clinics that brought the vaccines directly to farmworkers in the fields. Community-based partners helped register farmworkers in their preferred languages, answered questions and addressed concerns. Youth volunteers from TODEC were on site, in the fields, supporting registration and answering questions. Partnerships with the local Catholic diocese also helped create trusted avenues and messengers to help disseminate information, educate, and to debunk myths. Close partnerships with local CBOs and faith-based organizations ensured that special vaccination links for farmworkers were closely monitored. The County has also focused on providing vaccines during work hours, which has been facilitated by the growers, who have also provided transportation support when needed (including bus transportation for farmworkers at neighboring sites). The community groups vital to the success of this effort have received funding support through Public Health Institute's Together Towards Health Initiative.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

The FarmWorker CARE Coalition partnered with Champions for Health to establish a strong educational foundation through their "platicas" with farmworkers. This education strategy, which started well before vaccines were available, helped build trust and gave them time and space to answer questions around the coronavirus and vaccines, and address issues such as fear associated with public charge. Through these efforts, they've seen vaccination acceptance rates up to 95%. Vista Community Clinic (VCC) is a key partner in providing vaccines to farmworkers through this collaborative, however, as a federally qualified health center (FQHC), VCC is only allowed to administer vaccines to their current patient population. The coalition is currently looking at hybrid vaccine models where they can partner with another approved vaccination partner to serve those that are not their patients at their events. Education remains a strong

strategy as they are providing ongoing training to CHWs and promotoras to continue serving as trusted messengers in outreach and engagement. They are getting ready to launch Universidad Popular, a community education campaign which is funded through the labor and workforce development agency. To date partners in San Diego County have relied heavily on in-kind labor and resources and recognize that parts of the county that do not have strong on the ground presence from CBOs may be left behind in equity-focused COVID-19 vaccine efforts. They hope to secure funding in the future to address geographic resource gaps in the county.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

On Sunday, February 28th, Santa Barbara County launched their first farmworker focused mobile vaccination clinic in partnership with their power building partners, Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) and Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP). Together, the effort led to the successful vaccination of 540 disproportionately impacted farmworkers, with a special focus on reaching farmworkers with specific linguistic and cultural access barriers to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. CAUSE & MICOP were crucial partners in the success of this effort, not only providing direct registration support, but also supporting farmworkers in overcoming any hesitancy around getting vaccinated. In addition, community partners provided in-language support the day of the event, including the ability to answer questions in 9 different languages (with a focus on the indigenous languages spoken by farmworkers in their County). The County also partnered with their local agricultural commissioners and growers; each farmworker who attended the clinic left with a bag that included hand sanitizer, gloves, and masks from the county Agriculture Commission's Office. Santa Barbara also invited the Mexican consulate on-site as an additional resource for attendees. All resources and services, including translation and interpretation services, were provided in-kind by the community partners. The County hopes to replicate the success of this event for other disproportionately impacted farmworkers throughout the County.

VENTURA COUNTY

Partners in Ventura County launched a pilot mobile vaccine clinic in mid-February, which initially served just a few dozen farmworkers at a time. Their efforts gained traction very quickly and by the end of February they were serving close to 500 farmworkers. The success of these efforts depended on the coordination with public health staff, nursing staff from different health sectors, the

County's multilingual Farmworker Resource Program (including multilingual staff), and local growers. The local growers were responsible for registering employees and helping them fill out the forms and risk assessments. Employers also vetted all registrants to ensure they were employees. Growing pains from expanding so quickly meant that dedicated education efforts had to be adapted to fit the larger scale events. The department recruited additional health educators to help manage logistics of the event, like assisting with traffic control, so that farmworkers could ask questions and get answers at almost any point of contact. The **County Farmworker Resource Program** staff attended all of the mobile clinic events and provided language translation for indigenous language speaking community members.

Additional Considerations for Future Efforts

- Community partners are vital to ensuring equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to our farmworker communities. More funding is needed to support the effective strategies necessary to reach farmworkers and ensure high vaccine uptake. In some jurisdictions, community partner staff and volunteers have been working long hours and providing mostly in-kind services to do this work. It will be important to identify sustainable, ongoing sources of funding to continue to support the high-touch CBO work vital to ensuring that these efforts remain a success.
- Throughout the year, farmworkers shift between being classified as agriculture workers or food workers. This is largely due to the seasonal nature of their work, and the roles that they take on when the harvesting season is over. Not recognizing these distinctions may mean that some farmworkers may not qualify depending on the time of year that vaccine distribution efforts are being conducted. Jurisdictions should acknowledge and plan for these shifts.
- Farmworkers often move across jurisdictions based on the seasonal harvests; it can become a challenge to reach individuals for second doses if timing is not considered.
- When creating specialized registration links, it's important to keep the number of people that distribute that link small and controlled. In one case, a registration link was shared so widely that the department had to go back and cancel some appointments.
- Growers in several of our member jurisdictions have been acknowledged for their important role and partnership in the success of COVID-19 vaccination efforts. However, many community partners have also elevated ongoing challenges that farmworkers continue to face in their day-to-day work when it comes to workplace health and safety standards. It is our hope that jurisdictions can continue to build on the success of the COVID-19 vaccination partnerships with growers in order to continue to improve workplace conditions and standards for farmworkers throughout California.
- One-dose vaccines that provide strong protection against COVID-19 are particularly exciting because of the ease of logistics compared to vaccines that require two doses. Many jurisdictions are considering targeting one-dose vaccines for seasonal, migrant, and hard-to-reach populations such as farmworkers, people experiencing homelessness, and individuals who are incarcerated. However, cultural and **religious beliefs may turn people away from receiving vaccines that utilize specific techniques that go against their moral beliefs**. It will be important for jurisdictions to work with community-based partners and farmworkers themselves to address barriers that may arise as the one-dose vaccines become more readily available. When possible, jurisdictions can also consider incorporating more than one vaccine option into distribution planning.

For More Information

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