

Thought Leaders' Corner

Each month, *Population Health News* asks a panel of industry experts to discuss a topic suggested by a subscriber. Here is this month's question:

Q. How can COVID-19 vaccine reticence among BIPOC communities be overcome?

Historical factors play a key role in today's vaccine hesitancy - here are steps to help shore up trust.

As the COVID-19 vaccine gets rolled out to the U.S. population, nearly a quarter of all unvaccinated adults have indicated reluctance to take the vaccine once one is available to them. Additionally, over 1/3 of Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) have indicated they probably, or definitely, will not get the vaccine, according to a U.S. Census Bureau [Survey](#). And yet another [survey](#) by Langer Research Associates reveals that safety and trust concerns, criticisms of the process, politics, the previous administration and institutional racism also contribute to vaccine hesitancy. Enduring injustices, including the history of mistreatment of Black patients, contribute to this reticence. The survey further revealed that 2/3 of Black adults believe the government can be rarely or never trusted to look out for the interests of the Black community, with just four in 10 Black adults stating they would get the vaccine. Among the Latinx community, 43% believe the government can be rarely or never trusted to look out for the best interests of Latinx people, with six in 10 Latinx community members saying they would get the vaccine.

Given the medical community's challenges in fostering trust in the COVID-19 vaccine, what can be done to help shore up trust among the BIPOC community?

- **Understand your community's fears.** For communities where there is a lack of trust in the science and/or the vaccination development process, there may be little you can do to overcome hesitancy in the short term. However, for communities that fear side effects or efficacy, address those concerns by setting clear expectations and providing easy access to reliable and well-known contacts for support.
- **Connect with trusted community advisers.** Partner with religious leaders, community activists, cultural leaders and influencers, and other trusted community advisers. Equip them with the information they need in a culturally relevant context to help you gain traction in communities of color.
- **Remove barriers to vaccine access.** The greatest barrier in some communities is access to a vaccine site. Long drive-thru lines and few "walk-up" options inherently limit access for individuals and communities with fewer resources. Eliminate these barriers with targeted mobile efforts or partnerships with community providers. Flexible hours that accommodate schedules for working parents, single parents, and shift workers will help to address timing barriers.
- **Engage workplaces in the process.** BIPOC individuals are disproportionately placed at-risk due to their jobs as essential workers. Partner with employers to provide information about the vaccinations and identify vaccination sites that are convenient for their employees to assist in removing barriers to access and driving greater uptake of the vaccination.

Right now is a critical time to fight this global pandemic and build trust in our healthcare system with communities that have been most harmed by an inequitable system. Any hesitance will be detrimental to not only the health of individuals and communities, but also to healing the deep wounds of healthcare disparities that have haunted BIPOC communities for centuries. We need to put all resources into this effort, for the sake of our communities' health and for future generations' trust in the healthcare ecosystem.

Min Matson is a healthcare consultant with [Point B](#), a management consulting company. He has spent his career dedicated to improving healthcare quality, enhancing access to underserved communities, and connecting quality care to patient outcomes, for providers, payers, and pharma clients.



Min Matson
Senior Director, Point B
San Francisco, CA