A scenic landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a river flows through a valley floor, surrounded by hills with distinct horizontal layers of reddish-brown and tan soil. The middle ground shows more rolling hills with similar geological features. In the background, a range of dark, forested mountains rises against a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

# **Wheeler County Public Health Vaccine Equity Plan 2021**



# WHEELER COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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July 28, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

We have each reviewed the attached responses to all questions and affirm that the LPHA jurisdiction will continue to make meaningful efforts to offer culturally-responsive, low-barrier vaccination opportunities, especially for populations in our jurisdiction 5 experiencing racial or ethnic vaccine inequities. We commit to implementing this plan to close the racial and ethnic vaccine inequities in our jurisdiction.

The LPHA and its partners will continue to ensure that vaccine sites are culturally-responsive, linguistically appropriate and accessible to people with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities and other unique vaccine access needs.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
James Edwards, MD  
Wheeler County Local Public Health Officer

7/28/2021  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Shelby Hahn, BSN, RN  
Wheeler County Local Public Health Administrator

7/28/2021  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Judge N. Lynn Morley  
Wheeler County Board of County Commissioners Chair

7/28/2021  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**1. Please review race/ethnicity data for the LPHA jurisdiction on the OHA website ([click on statewide tab](#)) and the race/ethnicity vaccination rate data shared weekly with the LPHA. Based on the experience of the LPHA and its partners, including community-based organizations, what are the operational, policy, and systemic barriers or strengths demonstrated in these data?**

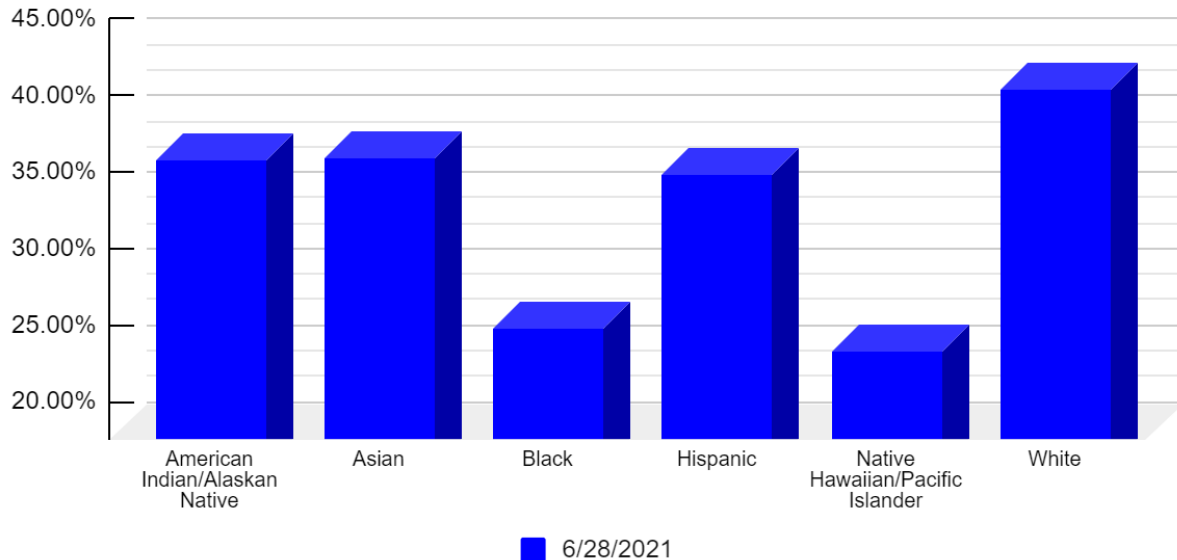
To begin, it should be noted that the demographic makeup of Wheeler County is not accurately reflected in the regional groupings OHA presented on the statewide data tab. Both the demographic and statistical data collected regarding race and ethnicity and their respective vaccination trends for Wheeler County was done in combination with Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Hood River, Jefferson, Morrow, Sherman and Wasco Counties.

In addition, the statistical data evidenced throughout this plan was gathered on June 28, 2021 and therefore will not illustrate the most current information. As Wheeler County continues its efforts towards eliminating racial and ethnic vaccine inequities, the vaccination rates amongst minority groups will continue to improve.

Nationwide, COVID-19 has disproportionately affected specific communities, including Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Black, American Indian, Alaskan Native, those with disabilities and more. The pandemic has highlighted the inequities and inequalities these communities have experienced in their ability to access vaccines.

Data configured from OHA confirms that specific minority groups have not received COVID-19 vaccines at the same rates as their White counterparts. Regionally, White people make up just over 72% of the population and have the highest vaccination rates with 42.1% currently vaccinated. Hispanics represent the second largest racial/ethnic group of the regional population at nearly 19%. However, only 36.6% of the Hispanic population has been vaccinated. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders combined make up the smallest percentage of the regional population at less than 1% and similarly exhibit the lowest vaccination rates with only 25.1% currently vaccinated. Other vaccination rates specific to minority racial and ethnic groups include Black at 26.5%, American Indian and Alaskan Native at 37.5% and Asian at 37.6%, respectively.

Percent of the Population Vaccinated by Race/Ethnicity in Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Hood River, Jefferson, Morrow, Sherman, Wasco & Wheeler Counties



Vaccine inequity and inequality our BIPOC communities experience is commonly defined as the disproportionate allocation, access and administration of vaccines within specific racial/ethnic groups. Vaccine inequity and inequality occur not only in Wheeler County, but throughout the State as well. Achieving vaccine equity in which everyone is given equal opportunities and access to vaccines is of highest importance. Wheeler County Public Health is committed to prioritizing vaccine equity and addressing racial disparities to bring our County closer to a full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to attain this goal, we must first understand what barriers exist within the County and their root causes. Wheeler County has encountered various barriers in providing minority populations equitable vaccine access. Some of these barriers include vaccination phases, limited staffing, transportation and vaccine hesitancy.

On December 1, 2020 the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended to Federal, State and Local jurisdictions that both essential healthcare personnel and residents of long-term care facilities should be the first groups to receive a COVID-19 vaccine (2020). ACIP believed that early protection of health care workers was critical to preserve our capability of caring for patients



with COVID-19. ACIP also reasoned that it was important to have long-term care residents vaccinated due to the high mortality rates among residents in these settings. Under Oregon Health Authority (OHA), Wheeler County was directed to use ACIPs recommendations to guide the administration of COVID-19 vaccines within the County.

By limiting vaccine availability to these two groups, inequities were immediately exposed among BIPOC and senior community members in Wheeler County. Compared to the population as a whole, individuals working in the healthcare field are primarily white ethnicity leaving people of color at a great disadvantage in receiving access to COVID-19 vaccines.

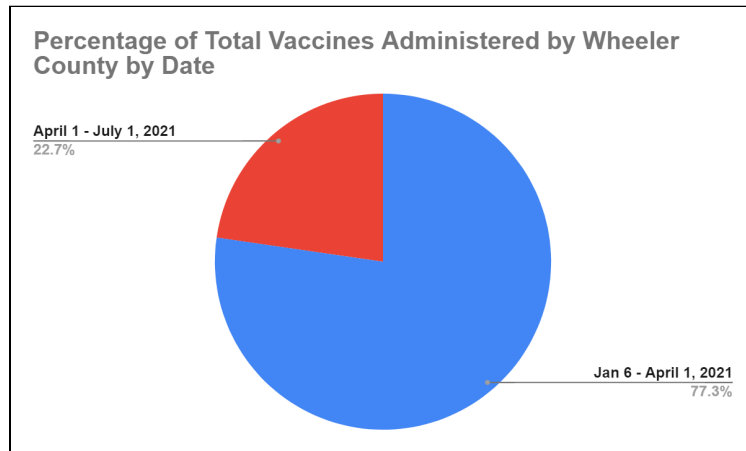
Limited staffing was another barrier we faced in vaccinating racial and ethnic minority groups in Wheeler County. Currently, Wheeler County Public Health is composed of one Local Public Health Officer, one Public Health Administrator and one Registered Nurse. With limited staffing comes limited patient capacity, limited appointment hours and limited outreach capabilities. Due to limited staffing and goals to minimize vaccine waste, Wheeler County Public Health chose to host scheduled vaccine clinics. The vaccine clinic was centrally located in Fossil, Oregon. Appointments were made through individual phone calls to patients who were eligible to be vaccinated by the COVID-19 RN and Public Health Administrator.

Generally, these clinics were very successful in vaccinating large groups of people while also keeping vaccine waste to a minimum. However, the mass vaccine clinics created a burden for individuals who were unable to take time off work and travel to the main vaccination site in Fossil.

The pre-scheduled appointment process worked well for residents receiving their first vaccine doses but were not quite as favorable to those receiving their second doses. Unfortunately, many patients experienced conflicting schedules with the limited dates and times we offered for our vaccine clinics. Oftentimes, patients never returned voicemails to reschedule, or didn't provide an updated phone number for us to reach them at. These barriers resulted in numerous patients falling overdue for their second vaccine doses or never receiving them at all.

Recently, the interest in vaccines has shifted and there has been a significant decline in the rates of COVID-19 vaccination throughout the State. Data compiled from ALERT IIS revealed that 394 COVID-19 vaccine doses were given from April 1

- July 1, 2021, a significant decline from the previous three months (January 6 - April 1, 2021) in which 1,341 COVID-19 doses were given. This indicates a 77% decrease in vaccines administered.

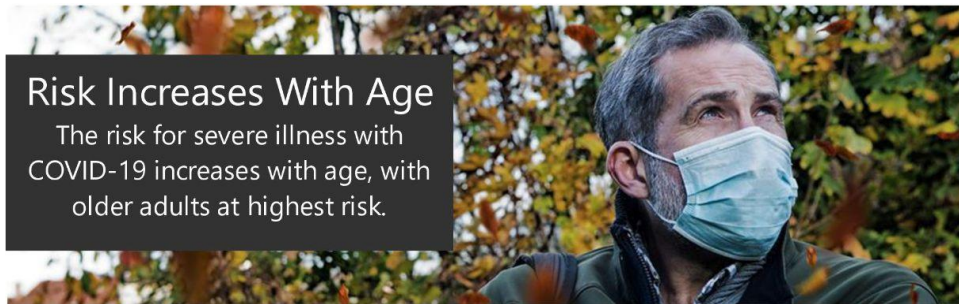


To some degree, this decrease is directly related to fewer people needing to be vaccinated. However, other contributing factors driving the decline include vaccine inequalities and vaccine hesitancy. As more people become vaccinated, more flaws in our system become apparent. It is of highest priority to understand the

inequalities our population faces and why members of the community are hesitant to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Wheeler County is committed to conducting continued research through a Rapid Community Assessment to determine the cause of decreasing vaccination rates.

Although Wheeler County has experienced various barriers in providing equitable vaccine access, our County has also exhibited many strengths throughout the pandemic, some of which include; early access to vaccines in vulnerable populations, strong community partner relationships and recent increases in regional vaccination rates among BIPOC communities.

Compared to the national average, Wheeler County has a higher population percentage of adults 50 years-of-age and older. In fact, more than 63% of the County population is 50 years-of-age and older with more than 47% of the population being 60 years-of-age and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). This indicates that demographically, over half of our County population is highly vulnerable to complications from COVID-19.



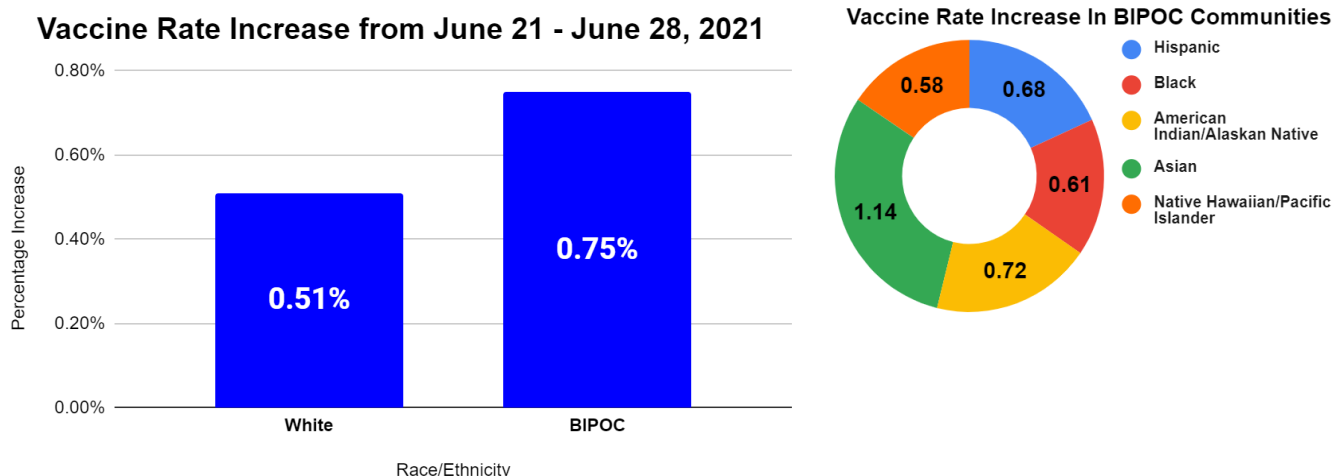
According to the CDC (2021), “Older adults are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19. More than 80% of COVID-19 deaths occur in people over age 65, and more than 95% of COVID-19 deaths occur in people older than 45.”

Because of the disproportionate risk that COVID-19 presents to these individuals, many residents were eager for the opportunity to get vaccinated. In fact, 1,341 COVID-19 vaccines were administered by Wheeler County Public Health in the first three months it was available.

To that end, Wheeler County Public Health’s strong community relationships were instrumental in gaining trust and providing our community with access to COVID-19 vaccines, tests and prophylactic PPE. These community relationships are in conjunction with Spray, Mitchell and Wheeler High School, Haven House assisted living facility, and local businesses including Dig-In Diner, Sally’s Foods, Tiger Town Brewery, Fossil Mercantile, Times Journal, KSNZ radio station, and Asher Community Health Center, to name a few.

Many of these partners are valued and trusted members of the community. Strengthening the relationship between these partners and Public Health allowed us the opportunity to also strengthen the communities trust in our efforts to provide free COVID-19 vaccines, testing, PPE, and educational pamphlets to our community members. These community partners acted as the liaison between the community and public health, which in turn, directly increased vaccine administration rates within the County.

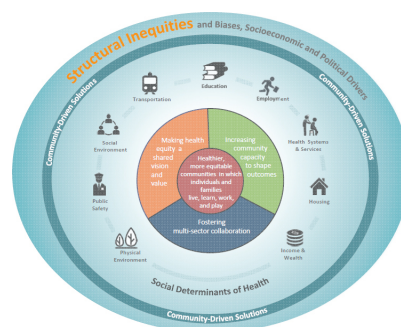
Although there has been a recent decrease in vaccine rates, the vaccine rates within the BIPOC communities have seen the greatest percentage increase. While the white population had an increase in vaccines by 0.51% the greatest increase in vaccine rates was seen in Asian (1.14%) and American Indian/Alaska Native (0.72%) populations.



## 2. What steps have the LPHA and its partners already taken to address specific racial and ethnic vaccination inequities in the community?

Data compiled from OHA confirms that people of color are at a disproportionately higher risk for morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 than those of white ethnicity (2021). Unfortunately, these groups also face more barriers in getting vaccinated as evidenced by the significantly lower percentage of vaccines administered throughout these communities. The combination of inequitable vaccine access and higher risk for complications these communities face is known as health inequity.

Health inequities are systematic differences in the opportunities groups have to achieve optimal health, leading to unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes (Braveman, 2006; WHO, 2011). The disproportional accessibility to vaccines is directly correlated with the lower vaccination rates in BIPOC communities. However, other factors play a role in decreasing vaccine rates. Historical racism and biases have led to distrust in government and healthcare systems and have greatly affected BIPOC communities' personal decisions to get vaccinated.



To eliminate health inequities, it's important we provide BIPOC communities with more power and resources to healthcare. Wheeler County Public Health is committed to providing all community members with health equity. Some of the

steps we have taken to address specific racial and ethnic vaccination inequities include prioritizing minority groups by providing flexible appointment times, mobile clinics, free transportation and collaboration with trusted community partners.

As vaccines became more widely available throughout the state, appointment capabilities have become more flexible as well. We have shifted our focus away from mass vaccine clinics to walk-in appointments. We also created a website with COVID-19 vaccine and testing appointment capabilities. After an appointment is made, the patient is sent a confirmation text or email as well as a reminder one day prior to their appointment. This feature reduces miscommunication between the patient and Public Health and increases the likelihood of patients' receiving their second doses on time.



By partnering with our Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), Asher Community Health Center, we have also been able to provide further community outreach. Asher Community Health Center Providers have administered vaccines, provided education and performed COVID-19 testing at both outlying clinics in Mitchell and Spray.

Although more coordination between the patient and Public Health is needed for these sites, the change in requirements surrounding vaccine waste has substantially increased the access patients have to receive COVID-19 vaccines. Partnership with ACHC also provided us the opportunity to send Home Health Nurses to patients' homes, safely administering COVID-19 vaccinations.

Many community members who chose not to get vaccinated had received very little information surrounding COVID-19 vaccines or had been misinformed about them. To better educate our community and equip our minority racial and ethnic groups with the ability to make informed decisions, Wheeler County Public Health partnered with Wheeler, Mitchell and Spray High Schools, Times Journal newspaper editors and KSNZ radio station to disseminate educational material throughout the County.

Creating partnerships with local businesses such as Tiger Town Brewing Co. and Fossil Mercantile was also beneficial in reducing vaccine barriers among racial and ethnic minority community members. We found we were able to reach more

people of color by offering COVID-19 vaccines at their workplaces in which we partnered with. We were also able to gain more outreach in our BIPOC population and youth populations by coordinating with local schools and vaccinating students and community members in Mitchell and Spray High School. Our community partners were monumental in promoting our vaccine events, connecting us with minority populations and acting as vaccine ambassadors in their communities.



Partnering with Asher Community Health Center, Fossil Mercantile, Dig-In Diner, and Spray, Mitchell and Wheeler High Schools not only increased vaccination rates but greatly reduced the risk of morbidity and mortality within our rural community. Through these partnerships, we were able to prevent and manage COVID-19 outbreaks by providing the community with culturally responsive COVID-19 testing and prophylactic PPE.

Throughout the pandemic, Wheeler County has been fortunate to offer free transportation services to all community members. For those who are unable to leave their homes, we have been able to send our Home-Health Nurses to safely administer COVID-19 vaccines in the patients homes.

### **3. What steps do the LPHA and its partners plan to take to continue to address these inequities in the jurisdiction?**

COVID-19 has clearly exposed the disproportionate access to vaccines among different racial groups. Our current systems have proven to provide advantages to those with English skills, education, reliable transportation, stable housing and digital skills and access. Wheeler County Public Health continues to address these inequities in a number of ways, including; vaccine promotion events and outreach, flexible appointments, continued relationship improvement and ongoing education.

Vaccine promotion events may aid in reducing vaccine inequities by giving those who are unable to make appointments during business hours, a chance to receive one at a Friday or Saturday night event after work. One major event that



Wheeler County Public Health is hosting is a “Movie Night” in which community members can enjoy free food and beverages along with easy access to receive a COVID-19 vaccine on site. This event not only promotes COVID-19 vaccines but community participation as well. Wheeler County collaborated with Wheeler County Trading Company, Lone Elk Market, Fossil General Mercantile, Fossil Post Office, Dig-In Diner, KC’s Country Value, and Sally’s Food Co. to promote the event and spread the word throughout the County. The event is posted on social media and on flyers throughout Fossil, Mitchell and Spray.



Another event that Wheeler County plans on hosting is an educational seminar at the local High Schools. This education was planned during the 2020-2021 school year but had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. However, we do plan to conduct this during the 2021-2022 school year. Educating children 12 years of age and older may reduce hesitancy and promote increased trust among BIPOC communities enabling them to make an informed decision regarding receiving a vaccine.

Another way Wheeler County Public Health continues to address the inequities is through flexible appointments and continued outreach. Walk-in COVID-19 vaccine appointments and flexible testing throughout Fossil, Mitchell and Spray greatly increases equitable access to our minority populations and BIPOC communities.

Continuous relationship building with local partners and Community Based Organizations (CBO) is essential in reducing health inequities. It's important to recognize the benefits that CBO's bring to the community, especially when a community member must quarantine. Being under quarantine is especially hard for our BIPOC communities who need to work to support their families, our local CBO's can aid in reducing the financial burden on these families. Wheeler County Public Health's goal is to have consistent meetings with local CBO's, including them in local events we host, to promote a better relationship within the community. Oftentimes, their services aren't used due to the lack of knowledge surrounding the resources they provide. By partnering with them, we can help more of our minority families financially while also reducing the risk of community members spreading COVID-19 due to fear of not working.

Finally, Wheeler County Public Health plans to address vaccine and health inequities in BIPOC communities by using updated data that OHA reports weekly. The data regarding increasing or decreasing vaccine rates among our BIPOC communities is necessary to reflect upon to ensure we are providing equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

#### **4. What plan does the LPHA and its partners have to close the specific vaccine equity gaps among specific racial and ethnic populations?**

Wheeler County will continue to gather data and use community feedback from the Rapid Community Assessment to close the vaccine equity gaps among specific racial and ethnic populations. It will be of highest importance to prioritize highly vulnerable racial and ethnic groups and actively monitor and address any barriers to vaccines they may encounter. Given the knowledge we have now, Wheeler County anticipates the need for continued clinical outreach, creative education techniques, and the implementation of innovative strategies to remove vaccine inequities in the community.

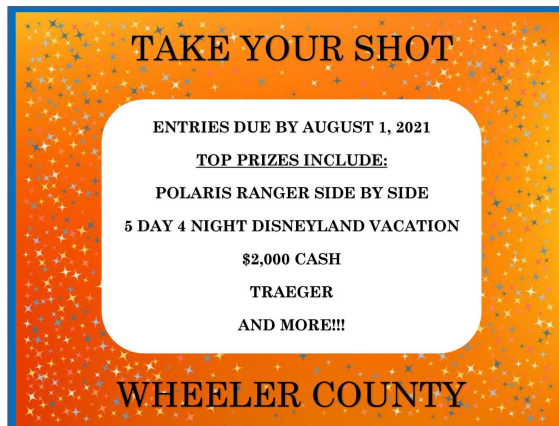
Wheeler County Public Health will continue to provide clinical outreach. We will provide ACHC with vaccines for outlying clinics, promote vaccine events such as our upcoming “Movie Night” and continue to provide walk-in appointments during clinic hours.

Wheeler County Public Health will also implement creative education techniques. Although many people may appear to be well educated about COVID-19 vaccines, many of our minority groups and youth are not as well educated. Creative education techniques, including interactive presentations in middle school and high school classes and the use of vaccine ambassadors may be beneficial in providing these groups with the confidence to choose whether or not they would like to be vaccinated. It is equally important to offer COVID-19 vaccines in the most convenient place such as their school or workplace, to close vaccine inequity gaps.

Equipping trusted community partners with the information they need to help people make a decision around vaccination is a great way to help close vaccine inequity gaps. Many trusted partners include, but are not limited to, local business owners, community health workers, BIPOC leaders, Schools, and faith leaders. Many of these organizations that serve racial and ethnic minority populations will be able to provide us with feedback regarding how to best serve their members.



Innovative strategies such as vaccine events may be used as a creative way to conveniently vaccinate those who wish to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Events Wheeler County Public Health have promoted include a “Movie Night”, Wheeler County Fair and Rodeo prize giveaway, and a mobile vaccine clinic to name a few.



Wheeler County prize giveaway is an event in which those who receive at least one COVID-19 vaccine by August 1, will have a chance to win a prize. Feedback from community partners shows that many residents are looking forward to putting in for prizes and in fact has incentivized many more to get their vaccine for a chance to win.

According to KFF (2021), Black and Hispanic adults suggested mobile vaccine clinics could help further reduce racial and ethnic disparities in vaccination rates, and that one in six overall would be motivated by this intervention to get their vaccine. With this in mind, Wheeler County Public Health has chosen to partner with OHA to provide a mobile vaccine clinic throughout the community. OHA will host the very first mobile vaccine clinic within Wheeler County August 16-18, 2021. This mobile van will target our minority groups in Spray, Mitchell and Fossil and provide them convenient accessibility to vaccines and testing for three full days.

**5. OHA has provided LPHAs county level survey data from OHA funded CBOs indicating their preferred involvement in vaccination efforts. In reviewing the CBO survey results that outline the interest of CBOs in your community to host, support, and/or promote vaccine events in your jurisdiction:**

**a. What steps are the LPHA and its partners taking to engage and actively partner with these and other organizations to increase meaningful, culturally responsive, low-barrier access to vaccines?**

Wheeler County's relationship with local CBO's during the COVID-19 pandemic has been subpar due to the lack of perceived necessity and refusal of services by patients.

Fortunately, Wheeler County has experienced the lowest rate of positive COVID-19 cases in Oregon. Consequently, this also led to the lack of collaboration between Wheeler County and local CBO's. While the local CBO's assigned to us have been responsive and willing to take upon any patient we have referred to them, the few patients who have been referred have refused their services or not answered their outreach phone calls. Further research is needed to determine if the root cause is related to lack of knowledge surrounding the CBO services, lack of trust, or if it is a result of poor telephone service in our communities remote locations.

Wheeler County Public Health is committed to providing our community with every available resource and will do this by improving the relationship between CBO's and the community. We are actively engaged in educating patients about who the CBO's are and what resources they offer. Allowing CBO members to appear at local events may also be a great way to integrate them into the community so they become a trusted partner.

Wheeler County Public Health has also partnered with Wheeler High School and Fossil Fair and Rodeo Board to host events that aim to decrease the barriers of vaccine accessibility. July 16, 2021 Wheeler County will host a community "Movie Night" where free food and games will be served and all three COVID-19 vaccines will be available the duration of the event to anyone who would like to be vaccinated. Hosting this event on a Friday evening is more convenient for BIPOC communities to attend. Wheeler County also plans to attend the Wheeler County Fair and Rodeo and give away incentive prizes to residents who get vaccinated by August 1, 2021. By offering free vaccines at established events, community members won't have to choose between getting vaccinated or the event itself making vaccination more accessible.



**b. How will the LPHA and its partners ensure that CBOs and navigators are aware of vaccine events so they can assist with registration and outreach as able?**

Unfortunately, Wheeler County has experienced a lack of CBO services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Wheeler County is committed to partner with

and build a strong relationship with our CBOs to provide the best outreach within the community as possible. We plan to schedule and attend regular meetings with our local CBO to learn more about the services they offer and collaborate about local vaccine events that they could attend and use their services as able. By having CBO's at our local events, it allows our community the opportunity to build a trusting relationship as well as learn about and utilize the services they offer.

**6. The agricultural employer survey results were shared with the LPHA and the LPHA has provided information to its Regional Emergency Coordinator (REC) about how the LPHA and its partners plan to use the survey results. OHA will be reviewing the information provided by the LPHA to the REC. Does the LPHA have any additional updates regarding work to serve 4 agricultural workers in its jurisdiction since the LPHA last provided information to the REC?**

There are many workers in the agricultural field in Wheeler County such as farm, ranch and forestry workers, many of whom are business operators. Unfortunately, no agricultural employers responded to the survey that OHA sent out and therefore no updates are able to be provided.



Despite the lack of feedback, Wheeler County Public Health understands that this group is at a disadvantage in receiving COVID-19 vaccines and is committed to providing outreach capabilities to decrease the barriers to vaccine access they face.

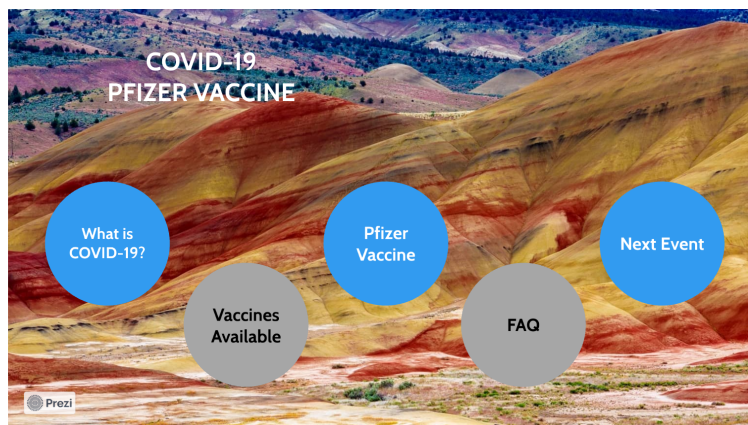
Long and inconsistent work hours and mistrust in the government may be the largest barriers these community members face in receiving COVID-19 vaccines. Education surrounding the efficacy of the vaccine and helping them to weigh the pros and cons in the same way they would do for their livestock may be a better approach at connecting with these community members on a deeper level. The mobile vaccine clinic OHA is hosting may be another opportunity to offer vaccines where our agriculture workers live, reducing the transportation barriers they may face.

## 7. What steps have the LPHA and its partners taken to actively address vaccine confidence in the community?

We recognize that for many community members, vaccine information is most influential when delivered by a trusted source. We've worked closely with local Providers, Nurses, High Schools, radio stations, newspaper editors, and other trusted community partners to increase the confidence in the community and their choice to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Many of our partners have also become vaccine ambassadors. For example: ACHC Providers educated unvaccinated patients about the pros and cons of COVID-19 vaccines and the risks of contracting COVID-19 without vaccination. The Wheeler County Public Health Coordinator and COVID-19 RN made individual phone calls to community members to educate them about COVID-19 vaccines and offer them an appointment to get vaccinated if they were interested. Wheeler County Public Health has also aired on the local radio station to discuss the most up to date information surrounding COVID-19 as well as promoting upcoming vaccine events. Wheeler County Public Health also partnered with the Times Journal newspaper editors to write multiple articles about COVID-19 and how to get vaccinated.

Wheeler County Public Health has continuously partnered with Wheeler, Spray, and Mitchell High School to send students home with vaccine information packets to initiate discussions about getting vaccinated with their families. Our schools are a highly trusted group of individuals within the County. Utilizing them to deliver information has been a great opportunity to build trust between the community and Public Health.



Lastly, we have been cognizant to always be available to speak on the phone or in person during working hours to answer any questions our community members may have. Our efforts and approachability have helped to build trust within the community.



## 8. What plans do the LPHA and its partners have to continue addressing vaccine confidence?

Despite our efforts, we recognize that vaccine hesitancy continues to be a barrier in increasing COVID-19 vaccination rates especially among our BIPOC community. Many people have expressed concern regarding the speed of vaccine development and whether manufacturers cut corners, prioritizing profit over safety. This fear paired with historical racism and health inequities only further promotes our BIPOC communities' lack of trust within health care services, research and government-funded initiatives.

A study performed by KFF indicates that “One in ten adults say they want to “wait and see” before getting vaccinated.” Four in ten adults in the “wait and see” group say they are likely to wait more than a year before getting vaccinated, while half state that they would receive the vaccine when it becomes FDA approved. KFF’s study (2021) also determined that Black and Hispanic adults remain more likely than their counterparts to say they will “wait and see.”

Promoting confidence and building trust within our BIPOC communities is a key component in eliminating health inequities. Oftentimes without realizing it, health care providers feel obligated to resolve problems “right now” based on



supporting evidence or personal beliefs rather than focusing on building long-term trust-based relationships. Building trust takes time through a series of conversations. Exploring one’s thoughts and feelings and understanding why an individual may be unsure about getting vaccinated is essential for a successful conversation and a trusting relationship.

Studies have shown that vaccination rates increase with their confidence in the provider they receive it from. As trust between BIPOC Communities and Public Health increases, so should the vaccination rates. It’s important to understand that building trust between these groups is a long-term process. We as healthcare providers must be cognizant of our actions and recognize that what we say and do directly affects our patients long-term decisions.

Wheeler County Public Health strives to build trusting relationships among our BIPOC community to increase confidence and better understand the barriers our community experiences. We plan to implement a Rapid Community Assessment to develop a better understanding of vaccine hesitancy within Wheeler County. Despite the in depth information this assessment can provide, the Rapid Community Assessment may take multiple weeks to complete due to limited staffing. It is evident that another approach will be necessary to improve the confidence within our community.

One way we plan to improve confidence and vaccination rates in our community is by enlisting well-liked community members such as business owners, school superintendents, teachers, faith leaders, to be vaccine ambassadors, who can share their personal stories around why they chose to get vaccinated.

**9. What is the communications plan to dispel misinformation through a comprehensive, multi-modal communications strategy for communities experiencing racial and ethnic vaccine inequities in your jurisdiction? Examples could include: Spanish language radio spots, physically distanced outdoor information fair, training local faith leaders and equipping them with vaccine facts and information to refer a community member to a health care professional for follow up, etc.**

Wheeler County plans to dispel misinformation among communities experiencing racial and ethnic vaccine inequities by committing to build trusting relationships and providing our community with the most current information surrounding COVID-19. We will partner with local businesses such as Dig-In Diner, Fossil General Mercantile, Tiger Town Brewing Co, Spray, Mitchell and Wheeler High Schools, local faith leaders in Fossil, Mitchell and Spray, and local radio and newspaper editors. Many of these community partners have great outreach among our BIPOC communities and have already built trusting relationships with them.

We plan to partner with Oregon Health Authority (OHA) as well as our local businesses in order to develop a comprehensive communication plan for the community. The ability to collaborate with trusted community partners and identify a common goal is a very effective way to deliver consistent, effective messaging to the right people at the right time. This strategy will be implemented to promote confidence and dispel any misinformation that exists surrounding COVID-19 vaccines.

**10. How has and how will the LPHA and its partners ensure language accessibility at vaccine events?**

Wheeler County has offered all vaccine fact sheets in both English and Spanish at every vaccine event to ensure language accessibility. We plan to continue to provide this service as well as to work towards making the Public Health website fully translatable in Spanish. Wheeler County understands the limitations not having a translator brings, and is currently working with OHA to obtain the proper technology.

**11. What plans do the LPHA and its partners have to decrease transportation barriers to accessing vaccine?**

Given the geographical population spread of Wheeler County, it's understandable that even centrally located vaccine events may not be convenient or accessible for all. We will continue to decrease the transportation barriers by offering vaccines in our rural locations weekly, vaccinating



community members at our rural clinics, individual workplaces, local schools and homes as needed. We will continue to assess our vaccine rates and ensure that we are offering our services close to those who may be experiencing inequitable access to the vaccine. One way we plan to do this is through OHA's mobile vaccine van August 16-18, 2021. This mobile unit will spend one full day in each town and will be able to go to individual homes or workplaces upon a patient's request.

**12. What plans do the LPHA and its partners have to ensure meaningful, low-barrier vaccine access for youth, especially those from Black, Indigenous, Tribal and other communities experiencing inequities in COVID-19 disease, death and vaccination?**

Many youth in Wheeler County are at risk for contracting COVID-19, including those of color as well as those who are under the age of 12 and ineligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. As a whole, this group of individuals are actively engaged in close contact with their peers in both sports and other extracurricular

activities. Although complications from COVID-19 are not as prevalent among our younger population, as it is in our older populations, this age group is still highly likely to contract and spread COVID-19 due to their close contact and inability to get vaccinated.

Wheeler County is committed to ensuring equitable access and care to all of our youth, including those of color, and will continue to organize and offer school-based vaccination opportunities at middle school and high schools in Spray, Mitchell and Fossil. By offering vaccine administration at local schools, our BIPOC youth gain convenient vaccine access in an environment that is entrusted by both students and parents.



Another way we plan to reach these youth groups is to offer vaccines and other preventative health care services at school based clubs or sporting events. This will aid in reducing transportation barriers these children face.

Another effective method we plan to use to increase vaccine confidence among our BIPOC youth is through social media platforms. Many youth who choose not to get vaccinated have either not received information surrounding COVID-19 vaccines or may have been misinformed. We plan to combat this by working closely with OHA and Wheeler, Mitchell and Spray schools to share the vaccination stories of local youth members on social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Facebook and the Public Health website.

**13. How will the LPHA and its partners regularly report on progress to and engage with community leaders from the Black, Indigenous, Tribal, other communities of color to regularly review progress on its vaccine equity plans and reassess strategies as needed?**

Overall, we have seen that our local BIPOC communities are experiencing vaccine inequalities and access to care. Wheeler County Public Health is committed to prioritizing vaccine equity and addressing racial disparities in all regards to advance us toward the recovery from COVID-19.



Wheeler County Public Health will use collected data from the Rapid Community Assessment along with the weekly data from OHA's zip code data sheet about vaccine rates in BIPOC communities. This database updates weekly with vaccine trends by zip code and is helpful to see where our underserved populations are located. We also plan to meet regularly with trusted community partners and vaccine ambassadors to report and discuss any concerns or barriers they see within the BIPOC community in vaccine accessibility or confidence. Based on this data, we will reassess our current strategies and discuss alternative techniques to provide our minority communities equitable access to vaccines.

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