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UTILIZING COMMUNITY NETWORKS IN BARBERSHOPS AND SALONS TO ADDRESS COVID-19 VACCINE HESITANCY IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Background:
COVID-19 has disproportionately affected communities of color with Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans four times more likely to be hospitalized and three times more likely to die from COVID-19 (1). Nevertheless, vaccination rates are still three times higher in white people compared to Black Americans (2). In Maryland, Black Americans make up 15.5% of currently vaccinated individuals (3) despite making up 31.1% of Maryland’s population (4). Further, according to a Kaiser Family poll, 35% of Black Americans say they do not plan on getting the vaccine citing mistrust in the safety of the vaccine development process (5).

Methods/Approach:
We reached out to an existing community network of barbershops and salons. After receiving input from employees and customers, we mutually developed a COVID-19 vaccine education plan. In this plan, QR codes are to be distributed to barbershops and salons in Baltimore, directing community members to COVID-19 vaccine outreach material from social media platforms, expert panels and written information on websites. The plan additionally provides community members an opportunity for continued engagement in COVID-19 vaccine education via email.

Lessons Learned:
Leveraging previously existing community health networks can be critical in addressing vaccine hesitancy that is rooted in decades of medical distrust. Community-based participatory research provides a framework for sustainably engaging in this work and measuring the impact.

Implications:
To reach vulnerable populations and promote the spread of accurate information, clinicians and public health professionals must engage their local communities via culturally sensitive approaches.

References: