The Colorado Health Foundation™



Heartwired: COVID-19 Vaccine Messaging Guide

A Heartwired messaging guide for people working to advance equitable COVID-19 vaccine uptake.

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Build trust. Answer questions. Inspire hope.

Even as vaccines become more widely available, restrictions lift and policymakers declare independence from COVID-19, the virus remains a significant public health risk for communities in the United States and beyond. A large proportion of people living in the U.S. have hesitancy about the vaccine. This is particularly true in communities of color, where both historic and contemporary experiences of discrimination and experimentation by the government and medical community spark distrust of vaccines today. Widespread and equitable uptake of the vaccine by both adults and children is important to ensure that lives are saved and the pandemic ends.

The Colorado Health Foundation engaged Wonder: Strategies for Good and Goodwin Simon Strategic Research to conduct public opinion research and develop messaging strategies for the vaccine-hesitant in Colorado, focusing on people of color. This messaging guide summarizes the recommendations.

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The Guide At a Glance

Mindset Overview

- **There is a spectrum of vaccine mindsets.**
  For many, the decision to get vaccinated is not a simple yes or no, instead it encompasses multiple emotionally-complex factors.

  Advocates can focus on moving people along the spectrum: from a state of refusal and even sabotage; to resistance, skepticism and hesitance; to acceptance and even ambassadorship.

  Our research suggests that the best focus of energy may be on those who are hesitant and skeptical rather than engaging with those who are refusers.

- **Most people have plenty of information, and yet they still have questions.**
  People are coming into their conversations about COVID-19 vaccines with a high level of information. Many people have done their own research and drawn conclusions from this research.

  Yet, they still have many questions. Frequently, these questions emerge from their own unique circumstances.

- **People mix information, personal experiences and emotion to weigh risks and benefits.**
  People are coming to conclusions about whether or not to get vaccinated in personal ways. They frequently talk through risk/benefit calculations for vaccine decisions, weighing concerns they have about the vaccines against the risk of getting seriously sick from COVID-19.

  Information and misinformation about vaccines plays a role in these decisions, as do personal experiences and emotions, with vaccines frequently triggering anxiety.

- **People are drained, distrustful and “over” COVID-19.**

People are emotionally drained by COVID-19. People across the hesitancy spectrum say they are “over it,” and these audiences are tired of feeling perpetually anxious and afraid.

Across race, gender, age and ideology, there is a deep fear of being tricked, manipulated or having information hidden.

Messaging Recommendations

Our recommended approach is to first **build trust**, then **answer questions** and **inspire hope**. While each conversation, like each individual, will be slightly different, in our research, we found that a three-step approach to conversations with vaccine-hesitant individuals can help move people along their journeys.

- **Build trust:** Familiarity and relatability helps to calm fear and anxiety experienced by vaccine-hesitant individuals.
- **Answer questions:** Vaccine-hesitant people respond positively to people who are able to answer their questions – and who do so with transparency, integrity and honesty.
- **Inspire hope:** Messages that help people draw the connection between getting vaccinated and being able to experience the things in life that we love have been well received.

Resources

- **Full Guide:** Effectively Engaging People Who Are Hesitant About the COVID-19 Vaccine Messaging Guide (PDF)
  - *En español*
- **Overall Messaging Guide:** Effectively Engaging People Who Are Hesitant About the COVID-19 Vaccine Messaging Guide (Google Doc)
  - *En español*

- **WATCH:** Demand is Down: Building Trust and Effective COVID-19 Vaccine Messaging Webinar
- **MORE:** Click here to view additional technical assistance resources for organizations and individuals that are engaging people who are hesitant about the COVID-19 vaccines.