Community health workers and community educators are frontline workers who need vaccine access

FAQs

**What do community ambassadors do?**
At Black Health, community ambassadors engage directly with members of the community. They approach residents who are not wearing masks or who may not understand the importance of social distancing. They also work with communities who face multiple disparities such as homelessness, overcrowded housing, and people with health comorbidities. They are in close proximity to people at high risk of COVID-19 and distribute literature and masks. Ambassadors at other community health organizations take on similar roles.

**What is their current priority access to vaccines?**
Community ambassadors at any community health organization are not currently recognized as essential workers or healthcare staff and do not have priority access to vaccines.

**Do support staff have access to vaccines?**
Each event is usually hosted with the support of 3 additional volunteers on average who are also in close proximity to people at high risk of COVID-19 over several hours and in enclosed spaces.

**What essential services do ambassadors refer people to?**
Community ambassadors are a key connection to housing supports, testing sites and vaccine registration sources.

How to use this data

- All community ambassadors employed by all community health organizations throughout the T2 Test and Trace program should be granted priority access to vaccines as they are essential, frontline healthcare workers.
- Priority access to vaccination should also be recognized for volunteers working more than one event per week under T2 funded activities.
- Community ambassadors can be encouraged to share their experiences with getting the vaccine when speaking with groups at increased risk of COVI-19 during outreach activities.

Methodology: This data was collected from activity event summaries completed by Black Health’s community ambassadors between January 1, 2021 and February 28, 2021 and summarizes 271 events held across New York City’s highest COVID-19 rate zip codes. COVID-19 rates were taken from data published by the NYC Department of Health on January 29 and February 27, 2021 and are the average COVID-19 rates for the 31 zip codes where community ambassadors are working. Estimates were calculated based on an average event length of 3.5 hours, with 2 community ambassadors on average at each event. Published by Black Health, visit us at: nbtech.org
Poor access to testing and vaccine serve as barriers to care, not skepticism

Black Health’s community ambassadors distribute masks, food and COVID-19 literature and share information around vaccines and testing. In January and February, our events included mobile testing and vaccine access outreach. Here are the challenges community members faced when attempting to access services. This data shows that access to services is a more significant barrier to vaccines or testing than skepticism and hesitancy.

**Events in January and February 2021**

- **89 events had physical challenges**
  - 81 events occurred during severe weather conditions or snowstorms. Community ambassadors continued to work through them.
  - 7 events had safety concerns (threatening behavior or concentrated garbage).

- **84 mobile van events struggled with poor coordination**
  - 11 did not have Spanish speakers when in Latino/a neighborhoods.
  - 17 turned away elderly for not having an email or mobile phone.
  - 5 reported rude staff.
  - 46 were in low foot traffic areas or miscommunicated their location.
  - 5 vans had faulty equipment.

Only 16 events (0.3%) reported mask, testing or vaccine aversion as a key challenge.

**About our study**

A summary of key challenges in January and February 2021

Black Health conducts outreach activities in local neighborhoods with high COVID-19 rates.

In January and February, our activities included:
- COVID-19 education and mask distribution
- Referrals and support to mobile testing sites
- Referrals and registration to vaccine sites

**Our recommendations**

Involve the community in planning outreach. In several cases, our staff and our President were able to intervene and ensure elderly citizens could access testing and vaccine registration without a mobile phone or email.

Locate vaccine and testing in areas of high disadvantage. Work with community leaders to identify appropriate sites and to help identify what services (such as language translation needs) will be needed.

Train mobile testing and vaccine staff in diversity and compassion training. Remove workers who do not treat community members with respect and dignity.

**Methodology:** Community ambassadors working with Black Health and funded under the T2 Grant program complete surveys after each organized event. This includes questions on number of items distributed and tallies of community discussions, as well as highlights challenges experienced during their work. Events were categorized based on challenges community ambassadors identified, and these were organized based on emerging themes.