

Date: February 19, 2021

To: Dr. Eric France, CDPHE Chief Medical Officer

From: Vaccine Provider Agencies in Larimer and Weld Counties

Re: Northern Colorado Regional Vaccine Equity Plan

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this plan is to build a foundation for vaccine providers in Larimer and Weld counties to address and ensure vaccine equity across the region and among communities disproportionately affected by COVID-19. First, it is important to emphasize that in order to significantly reduce inequities in vaccine uptake, local jurisdictions need to have meaningful input into where vaccines are allocated. We will work hard to address vaccine equity in our Counties and meaningful impact will only come from having influence into how/where vaccines are being distributed within each of our respective counties. Our equity plan is premised on being able to first create a more local-driven process regarding where vaccines are distributed in our region.

Vaccine Providers and Equity Partners in Larimer and Weld Counties

Northern Colorado public health agencies and health care partners have been working diligently to ensure that vaccine distribution is fast, equitable, and transparent. This collaborative, consisting of public health, clinical health care systems, and other organizations will work together to expand vaccination opportunities to areas and populations in both counties that have been more negatively affected by COVID-19. Partners are already implementing strategies to address potential barriers to vaccination, such as transportation, language accessibility, disinformation about vaccines, and mistrust of government and health systems. This work will be prioritized throughout the immunization response.

Vaccine Providers and Equity Partners include: Banner Health, North Colorado Health Alliance, Sunrise Community Health Centers, Salud Community Health, Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment, Larimer County Department of Public Health and Environment (LCDHE), UCHealth, NoCo Healthcare Coalition, Larimer Recovery Collaborative, Larimer and Weld County Emergency Management, Larimer and Weld County Human Services, City of Greeley, City of Fort Collins, Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado, Regional Accountable Entities (RAEs), Health District of Northern Larimer County, the United Ways of Larimer and Weld Counties, and other municipalities in Larimer and Weld Counties.

Vaccine Providers and Equity Partners are committed to:

- Building a community of public health and health professionals, working through a lens of social justice, to ensure that achieving health equity is central to the work we do together.

- Working to effectively reach and vaccinate under-represented, overburdened persons in our communities, and we understand that they may face unique barriers to receiving vaccines.
- Acknowledging that vaccine hesitancy among these communities stems from a long history of systemic racism and structural inequities in health care.
- Reducing vaccine hesitancy through a combination of interventions, including the engagement of community members, community leaders, social media, and health care professional training.
- Continuing to collaborate with and recognize the significant work has been done by community organizations and advocates, municipalities, vaccine providers, and coalitions to address inequities in access to testing and language accessibility.

Defining the Priority Population

Current evidence (local, state, and national) shows that COVID-19 disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minority groups including Black, Hispanic or Latinx communities. For example, Hispanics/Latinos make up 12% (Larimer) and 30% (Weld) of the population, however, Hispanics and Latinos are disproportionately represented among COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. For example, in Larimer County Latinx residents have an 89% increased risk of being diagnosed with COVID19 compared to White residents.

In Northern Colorado, getting the vaccine not only depends on who you are but also where you live. Preliminary analysis examines where low income and minority populations reside along with initial vaccination rates in those areas and how they are related to where current vaccine providers are located. However, we recognize that geographic and physical access might be more of a challenge in Weld County relative to Larimer County given the population distribution in both counties. Providers in each county are ready to respond to the particular needs and barriers to vaccination their communities are experiencing with support and guidance from local public health officials.

Much of the increased risk of COVID-19 in these communities is tied to social risk and structural inequality, e.g., disproportionate representation in high-risk jobs in essential industries, larger household size, and living in areas with higher levels of concentrated disadvantage such as poverty and unemployment.

In terms of vaccine, local data shows that among the 97,000-vaccine eligible Hispanic/Latinx residents across both counties, only about 2,500 (2.6%) Hispanic/Latinx residents have received their initial dose of vaccine to date. The countywide (all groups) initial vaccination rates for both counties is currently about 14%.

Census data estimates that are available indicate that about 5,500 Hispanic/Latinx individuals who are age 70 or older live in Larimer and Weld County. About 1,000 of this group (nearly 2 in 10) has had at least one dose of vaccine. However, nearly 3 times that many white non-Hispanic/Latinx age 70 or older residents have had their initial vaccine dose. We

anticipated this challenge because Latinx adults are among the least vaccinated for flu shots compared to other groups and many older Latinx adults show a preference for natural immunity instead of vaccination. We're focused on closing this disparity.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Currently we have limited supply of vaccine doses, and we do not anticipate having an adequate supply to meet demand in the near future. With these constraints in mind, we are committed to closing the disparity in vaccination experienced by some of our racial and ethnic minority communities. We will continue to monitor and evaluate vaccination rates by race and ethnicity and assess areas that are undervaccinated. We will use geographic vaccination data to inform our vaccination equity strategies, detailed below. Finally, we'll continue to evaluate race and ethnicity data in order to gauge our steps toward our goals of increased vaccine equity.

Goal: Reduce the current gaps in vaccination rates between racial and ethnic groups by 50% or more in the next 6 months.

Strategies for Increasing Vaccine Uptake

Vaccine equity ensures that every person is considered and treated as having equal dignity, worth, and value. Mitigation of health inequities includes the obligation to explicitly address the higher burden of COVID-19 experienced by the populations affected most heavily, given their exposure and compounding health inequities. This plan summarizes three (3) strategies to address and ensure vaccine equity in Larimer and Weld counties:

Strategy 1: Engaging Communities

Northern Colorado vaccine providers and equity advocates are working to build effective, authentic, and meaningful engagement with community-based organizations and ensure effective vaccine delivery for priority populations. Building upon previous community outreach successes, new opportunities for collaboration are now evolving. Community engagement and trusted messengers have proven to be an effective way for public health messages to be shared and helps to encourage the uptake of health services, including vaccination, in communities of color.

1. Partner with Community Organizations
 - Community leaders and trusted messengers can amplify and spread key messages to the communities that are undervaccinated or disproportionately impacted by COVID19, such as the Latinx community, refugees communities, and BIPOC communities. Agencies currently working with public health or local advocacy groups to meet the health, educational, employment, housing, and social needs of individuals and families have been essential partners to public health and healthcare agencies throughout the pandemic. Several community organizations and advocacy groups have expressed that they have built trust and already serve as trusted messengers in mobile home communities, religious

organizations, schools and childcare facilities, and nonprofits that serve the marginalized groups.

The Colorado Vaccine Equity Team's key messages that we will partner with trusted messengers to share include:

- COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective
 - No corners have been cut
 - Vaccines have been tested with tens of thousands of participants, including volunteers who are Black, Latinx, and Native American.
 - Scientists from communities of color have been instrumental in developing, testing, and distributing the vaccine.
 - Vaccines are more effective at protecting individuals from hospitalization and death from COVID than anything else including having previously had COVID19.
 - Vaccines appear to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus.
- The vaccine is free of cost to everyone
 - No insurance is needed
 - Undocumented residents will be informed that no data of any kind will be shared with immigration officials

Strategy 2: Addressing Access Barriers

Multi-agency partnerships are coordinating to develop small- and large-scale PODS across the region. We will utilize targeted clinics and multiple community-based partnerships, including pharmacies, hospitals, and healthcare provider offices. Lastly, part of our overall strategy will be to continue to sign up providers in those identified communities who can receive and administer vaccine per state guidelines in an effort to have vaccination distribution points located throughout both counties. Weld and Larimer counties recognize that while they share some regional challenges, they also serve unique constituencies and will need to tailor their approaches to meet particular community needs.

The following will be addressed in an effort to diminish or eliminate access barriers for target populations:

- Physical accessibility and transportation
 - Indirect and opportunity cost
 - Date, time, and location of available vaccine
 - Appointment scheduling mechanisms
 - Appropriate staff and providers to administer vaccines
1. Prioritize easy access to the vaccine for frontline essential workers using targeted PODs, and partnering with community agencies and businesses to provide vaccinations at or near worksites
 - Equip business owners with information on how to talk to staff about vaccination and create employee-facing materials that are at appropriate literacy levels.

- Consider how employers can appropriately discuss vaccination decisions with staff and implement policies that are non-discriminatory.
- Considers different needs for small and large business
- 2. Continue addressing barriers for older adults hardest to reach by coordinating with service providers to eliminate technology, transportation and language barriers.
 - Include partners that have resources for in-home services
 - Expand services for appointment follow up
 - Deliver services in primary language of older adults including spanish, east african languages and asian languages.
- 3. Assess and address access barriers for rural and mountain communities leveraging established connections to towns and individuals.
 - Identify providers that can provide services including police, fire or EMS.

Strategy 3: Communications

Successful implementation of PODs and addressing barriers relies on effective communication. Vaccine providers in Weld and Larimer County will address mistrust and disinformation about vaccines through both traditional and digital media and ensure up-to-date information about how to access the vaccine is communicated clearly. Vaccine providers and equity partners will improve access to information that is accurate, culturally relevant, and at least in English and Spanish. In partnership with interested communities and stakeholders, Northern Colorado vaccine providers and equity partners will:

- Develop a joint comprehensive COVID-19 vaccine promotion campaign (using print, radio, social media, and TV) in English and Spanish and other languages where feasible, to tailor communications and provide accurate information to reach our priority populations. This effort will include engaging key influencers to engage their communities as trusted messengers to amplify and spread key messages.
- Continue to improve information access by expanding COVID-19 call center hours and adding additional bilingual staff to answer phones, emails, and text messages.
- Build, and/or improve the language accessibility of vaccine provider websites.
- Provide opportunities to address common misconceptions and disinformation about the vaccine through virtual community conversations, Q&A, and forums hosted and coordinated by vaccine providers and/or community partners. Spanish-speaking trusted messengers and local community members will be invited to speak on the call about vaccination.

Northern Colorado vaccine providers in Weld and Larimer County have a history of successful collaborations to address the public health needs of those living in this region. Coordination is ongoing as agencies take on specific tasks and activities related to the strategies outlined in this plan. Vaccine providers and equity partners in Northern Colorado are committed to the shared goal and the hard work of ensuring the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines