

Focus on a COVID-19 Vaccination: The Role of Medicaid Managed Care Organizations

The NORC Medicaid Managed Care Organization (MCO) Learning Hub shares timely and relevant resources to support Medicaid MCOs and other stakeholders in improving the health of their members and increasing advancements in health equity and health care transformation. We encourage you to share your experiences and feedback on future Medicaid MCO Learning Hub work so we can better serve your needs. To start the conversation or join our distribution list, please email us at MCOLearningHub@norc.org.

In November 2020, the NORC team convened four discussion groups, one with each of its Medicaid MCO Learning Hub partners – Community Catalyst, the Association for Community Affiliated Plans (ACAP), America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), and Families USA – and their affiliated Medicaid MCOs and advocacy experts to discuss member engagement efforts. During these discussions and a subsequent Roundtable with representatives from all four partners, we asked MCO and advocacy representatives about the role of MCOs in COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts as well as in building public trust for vaccination. This brief seeks to provide the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), its grantees, MCOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs), among other stakeholders, MCO and advocacy representative perspectives on a COVID-19 vaccination.

As COVID-19 vaccinations have recently been approved, states have developed preliminary vaccine distribution [plans which are quickly being updated and refined](#). Even while vaccinations are being approved, [a Pew Research Center November 2020 survey](#) showed that nearly two-fifths (39%) of U.S. adults would definitely or probably not obtain a COVID-19 vaccine. Black Americans are particularly skeptical of receiving a vaccine, with only 42% reporting they would definitely or probably accept a vaccine for COVID-19 if one were available today, even while Black Americans are [facing disproportionately higher rates of hospitalization and death](#) from COVID than other groups.

The NORC Medicaid MCO Learning Hub held a series of discussions with each Medicaid MCO Learning Hub partner – Community Catalyst, the Association for Community Affiliated Plans (ACAP), America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), and Families USA – and a subsequent Roundtable on member engagement. During these discussions, we asked MCO and consumer

advocacy representatives to discuss the role of MCOs in COVID-19 vaccination distribution and in pushing out trusted information and communication on the vaccines to Medicaid members.

I. GARNERING PUBLIC TRUST FOR A COVID-19 VACCINATION

Consistent and credible messaging from federal and state governments, MCOs, and providers is critical for increasing public trust for a COVID-19 vaccine

Both MCO and advocacy representatives emphasized the importance of ensuring information about COVID-19 vaccine(s) is consistent and fact-based and comes from trusted messengers including the federal government, state and local governments, MCOs, CBOs, and providers. With that said, discussion group participants noted that public trust in COVID-19 vaccines is low due to conflicting information, changing recommendations and historic distrust among communities of color in the health care system.

II. ENSURING EQUITY IN VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

Ensuring equity in vaccine distribution will be important for reducing the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on Black and Latinx populations

The disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on communities of color have been stark. Trusted messengers are needed to build confidence in these and other underserved communities to promote COVID testing, treatments and vaccines, as well as how to access these medical services.

Advocacy representatives encouraged the use of equity-focused principles for distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine. They noted that states and MCOs should **leverage culturally appropriate messaging** to provide credible information to providers and consumers on the safety and effectiveness of vaccines when they become available using multiple communication channels.

Discussion group participants encouraged communication to happen at multiple consumer touch points and for states and MCOs to work with councils like the Latino Task Force and Latino Health Equity coalitions. This work needs to be collaborative and start early in the process, so that all parties have equal footing and input in defining priorities, shaping research, developing distribution plans, and conducting outreach.

III. THE ROLE OF STATES AND MCOS IN COVID-19 DISTRIBUTION

States and MCOs should continue to partner with CBOs and trusted community entities for more effective dissemination of COVID-19 vaccines information

Advocacy representatives noted that it will be important for states and MCOs to work with and provide resources to community leaders and trusted entities to promote COVID-19 vaccinations.

“The state by itself is not enough of a trusted voice to get people to want to participate. The closer you can get to the community and tie [vaccination and messaging] to trusted entities, the higher the likelihood of success.” – Advocacy Representative

Advocacy representatives noted that underrepresented populations, including Latinx, Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Native American populations, **may see federally qualified health centers, their providers, faith-based institutions, and CBOs as trusted entities.** Participants noted that successful COVID-19 testing and contact tracing efforts to date have

leveraged partnerships between local health departments, states, Medicaid agencies, and health centers with community organizations and trusted voices like churches and FQHCs. They also described working with local news and radio stations to disseminate accurate information about COVID-19 vaccinations.

Lessons learned from other vaccine programs can inform COVID-19 vaccination campaigns

Discussion group participants encouraged states and MCOs to look at lessons learned from programs that encouraged individuals to receive other vaccinations such as the flu, infant, and child immunizations, and HPV vaccinations and apply available best practices to COVID-19 vaccination messaging campaigns. An advocacy representative noted that offering a small financial payment to Medicaid members in order to receive the vaccine could be a very effective strategy to increase uptake of the vaccine.

Other strategies noted by discussion group participants included launching eye-catching campaigns and infographics, working with partner organizations to conduct home visits during the pandemic to catch children up on their immunizations, and making vaccines available in accessible and convenient locations.

MCOs should ensure reduction of administrative barriers for providers conducting vaccinations

Discussion group participants noted that many stakeholders have an important role to play in making it easy for people who want the COVID-19 vaccine to receive it when vaccinations are available for the general public. MCOs can be a credible source of COVID-19 vaccine information for both providers and consumers.

ABOUT NORC MEDICAID MCO LEARNING HUB

The key goal of the NORC Medicaid MCO Learning Hub is to serve as a source of information, expertise, and best practices to support managed care organizations in moving forward with system reform. NORC and its partner organizations identify, develop, and disseminate promising approaches and emerging opportunities for MCOs to improve the physical health, behavioral health, and social needs of their members.

Your ideas and opinions are important to us. We welcome your feedback on future Medicaid MCO Learning Hub work or programs you are working on to better serve your needs.

We want to hear from you. Please contact us at MCOLearningHub@norc.org to start the conversation or join our distribution list.

www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/medicaid-managed-care-organization-learning-hub.aspx

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