A Message from the Program Manager

I want to start by saying this has been an amazing first year. The adult ambassador program was intended as a 6-month concept that would focus on engaging historically marginalized communities and provide them with accessible COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, and treatment. In March of 2021, we launched the program with a team of 17 ambassadors and three program coordinators. Our team successfully managed over 27,000 vaccinations and 6,800 home and business visits.

Everything we have done over the last year has been in partnership with our community. In order to build trust, we developed strong relationships with over 70 community and faith-based organizations. In partnerships with community leaders and others, our ambassadors spent thousands of hours speaking directly with community members to clarify misinformation, address historical mistrust, ease fears and answer questions.

The ambassador program has also been successful in workforce development, allowing the ambassadors to enhance their existing skills and develop new skills that have advanced them into professional careers. 75 percent of the ambassadors have moved out of the program into public health-related positions.

At our first meeting I asked them to join me on a journey; one where we would all need to embody the idea of agility. The ambassadors have become an agile team, able to pivot direction and work in challenging situations. They ask questions and redefine plans as needed to meet our goals. We are excited to utilize best practices to expand community engagement to other opportunities. As we look forward to the changing landscape of the COVID-19 response, we will continue to work towards eliminating equity gaps in accessing health resources for historically marginalized and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) members of our community. We believe this Ambassador program is a premier model to enhance workforce development and partnerships with the communities that we serve.

In Community,

signature

Program Manager, Ernesto De La Torre briefing two COVID-19 Adult Ambassadors during a mobile vaccine clinic at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Pittsburg.
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to share with program stakeholders and the community the work achieved by the Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) COVID-19 Adult Ambassador Program. This report highlights lessons learned, accomplishments, and best practices acquired during the first year which can inform the evolution of the program. This report also addresses structural, operational, and general programmatic challenges faced by the team and methods used to overcome those challenges.
The COVID-19 Adult Ambassador program launched in March 2021 through a partnership between Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS), Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services (EHSD) and the Workforce Development Board Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Career Services provider, Rubicon Programs, Inc. The effort was in response to an urgent call-to-action from CCHS community partners urging the importance of a “boots-on-the-ground” approach to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections and misinformation.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, CCHS was required to respond more rapidly to community needs. In addition to establishing testing, medical treatment protocols and surveillance, CCHS established a COVID-19 Community Engagement and Outreach (CEO) team whose primary role was building partnerships to create urgent and relevant communication strategies, while centering empathy, cultural humility and trust. The ability to communicate clear and accurate information to the public, especially to the Black and Brown communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, became the highest priority of the CEO team and its’ community-facing arm now known as the COVID-19 Historically Marginalized Communities Engagement Unit (HMCE).

The community-centered conversations and relationships within the five HMCE workgroups (ie. African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino/x, Aging and Older Adult, and Youth and Young Adult) fostered a proven community model of activating and training teams of community members with shared cultural backgrounds, neighborhoods and lived experience to become trusted messengers for the hardest-hit populations. Messengers that could deliver critical information into everyday community spaces, outside the walls and business hours of our health centers, and also relay the experiences and perspectives of the community back to our health department. While CCHS already had a well-established team of Promotoras and African American Health Conductors serving in this type of role, they were strongly tied to the healthcare access and delivery functions. This “boots-on-the-ground” plan to leverage community expertise, for messaging and prevention by embedding a new career pathway within pandemic response led to the inception of the COVID-19 Adult Ambassador Program.
Held 48 clinics at religious institutions (churches, temples, mosques) throughout Contra Costa County resulting in 4,596 vaccinations.

The vaccine equity mobile team visited over 15 farms and agriculture businesses in West County and Far East Contra Costa County and vaccinated 1,324 Campesinos and their family members and agricultural workers. Many of whom faced several barriers that prevented them from accessing the vaccines at traditional clinics sites.

Administered vaccinations for 1,144 community members at 33 mobile clinics held in partnership with small family-owned supermarkets during weekday, late afternoon, and evening hours.

The ambassadors visited over 2,000 businesses to provide guidance, education, and address concerns about the pandemic. Over 800 of those businesses being visited during the various Health Order Mandates.

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The vaccine equity mobile team provided mobile vaccination services that were often delivered from a mobile health van at temporary sites, such as community centers, parks, auditoriums, or business parking lots. During the first year, the program conducted 172 mobile vaccination clinics and delivered over 11,400 vaccinations at these mobile clinics.

The adult ambassador program supported the State Office of Emergency Services (OES) in 50 vaccination clinics and helped deliver over 10,000 vaccinations to community members in targeted areas - Census tracts in the lowest quartile of the Healthy Places Index (HPI).
Our vision is radical accessibility.

Our ambassadors meet the community where they are.
The Adult Ambassador Program worked with a host of organizations to address disparities and increase vaccination rates, within historically marginalized communities of color, underserved communities, and others most at risk for negative health impacts due to the pandemic.

The motto that guided the ambassadors is radical accessibility, intentionally meeting the community where they are.
Adult Ambassador Program Goals

1. Decrease the equity gap in COVID-19 vaccination rates and access to health resources in communities of color, underserved communities, and those disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Provide workforce development opportunities to underemployed members of the community interested in public health careers.
3. Develop strong partnerships with the community by building trusting relationships with community leaders from faith-based organizations, CBOs, and civic organizations.

In line with the stated goals, this report provides an overview of our impact and commitment to increasing vaccination rates among the communities hardest hit by the pandemic. The program addressed systemic barriers that prevent access to vaccination and supported the community by providing other COVID-19 related resources.
As an ambassador, we are doing our best to promote health equity in our most disadvantaged communities by providing specific needs catered to that community. For example, having evening/late hours for our mobile vaccination clinic or ensuring that we have enough Spanish-speakers for a community whose demographic is majority Hispanic. We really wanted to be sure health information about COVID-19 was accessible to everyone in the community.

- Sabrina Villaro
  Adult Health Ambassador, Alumna
The ambassador program worked with the underserved population and communities of color, to make sure that we broke the barriers of any registration difficulties that they may have in order to be able to get their vaccine for COVID-19.

- Veronica Santana
  Adult Health Ambassador, Alumna

The program focused on empowering Contra Costa County community members to play a central role in community outreach and education about COVID-19 testing and vaccination. Ambassadors were recruited and hired to represent the diversity of Contra Costa County. Ambassadors were trusted community connectors who were empowered to use their lived experiences to build trust to address misinformation, myths, and fears about COVID-19.
Expanding Outreach into Marginalized Communities

To expand outreach and connections to marginalized communities, the Ambassador program ventured away from providing health education within conventional fixed clinic locations. Their outreach efforts encompassed places where people work, study, and worship. Some of their nontraditional outreach locations included visiting small neighborhoods with high foot traffic. Visiting places like small grocery stores and family-owned restaurants outside of normal business hours, were also successful strategies to meet the needs of marginalized communities. The ambassadors’ outreach strategy also included attending community events, hosting informational tables at locations across the county, facilitating community listening sessions, and engaging community members through residential and business canvassing.
The ambassador team worked on expanding healthcare access through radical accessibility, which also included providing vaccinations at nail salons, supermarkets, liquor stores, gas stations, hardware stores, apartment complexes, local flea markets and schools. When a county-wide vaccination mandate required vaccinations for employees in certain industries the team visited 831 businesses to assist backend employees (i.e. bussers, dishwashers) in getting vaccinated. In partnership with the county’s Environmental Health Department the ambassador team engaged businesses across the county to provide information and explain the county's vaccination and masking mandates. This engagement allowed us to build trusting relationships with business owners and managers. Some even allowed us to come in and vaccinate their staff on-site.
The infographic below shows strategies employed by the COVID-19 Adult Ambassadors during outreach to help increase vaccinations and overcome hesitancy due to misinformation, distrust of institutions. These efforts have helped to close the vaccination equity gap for the LatinX/Hispanic population in Contra Costa County*. No single strategy will persuade everyone. The team found that a combination of strategies are effective in reaching vaccine-hesitant people. These strategies are needed to address populations that differ by age, gender, education level, immigration status, health behaviors/norms, culture, and race and ethnicity, as well as the historically marginalized.

*Increasing vaccination rates by 11% for Black/African Americans and 12% for Hispanic Latinos between May and August 2021. Increasing vaccination rates by 17% in the lowest quartile of the Healthy Places Index (HPI) between May and August 2021 and reducing the equity gap between highest and lowest quartile by 6% in that time frame.
TARGETED OUTREACH

The ambassadors’ outreach efforts were informed by data. The most disproportionately impacted cities and communities were prioritized based on COVID-19 case rates, social determinants of health, and the vaccination rates of BIPOC individuals. The program utilized data from the Center for Disease Control’s Social Vulnerability Index, California Healthy Places Index Map and county-specific data provided by CCHS on local case rates and vaccination rates. This data was overlaid onto polling precinct maps that are more detailed than ZIP codes to illuminate the needs of highly-impacted precincts.

Antioch, CA has several census tracts with the lowest vaccination rates in the Bay Area and state overall. Providing evening vaccine access directly in the community and close to neighborhoods with low vaccination rates helped to close the vaccination gap in communities of color and historically marginalized communities. For example, Antioch A street clinic operates in the late afternoon and evening when there is high traffic and offers extended clinic hours (3:30 - 7:00 pm). Increasing clinic access to residents reduced barriers for those who worked late or were unable to make it to clinics Monday–Friday. These adjustments ultimately led to more community members getting vaccinated.

*Clinics were paused in January due to staffing adjustments.
The ambassadors were able to share their community insights to reduce barriers and improve COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts. For instance, ambassadors were able to advocate to extend vaccine clinic hours beyond traditional clinic hours (7:30am-3:00pm) to help improve accessibility for many people. The ambassadors listened to low-wage workers and learned that lengthy commutes and work commitments across other parts of the Bay Area were a barrier to obtaining a vaccine appointment. The county was able to address this by extending hours and offering weekend clinics.

Another example of COVID-19 Adult Ambassadors taking the vaccines to Campesinos in their workplace. Engagement was important to reduce the fear and hesitancy in the campesino population. Alongside partners from Hijas del Campo, bilingual ambassadors spent time walking with farm workers as they pick lettuce to answer questions and explain the importance of getting vaccinated.
Ultimately, being an ambassador allowed me to work toward reducing health disparities related to COVID-19 and being able to do that for my own community made it more worthwhile.

Another goal of the COVID-19 Adult Ambassador program is to provide workforce development opportunities to members of the community interested in public health careers. The program employed 17 ambassadors and three coordinators. To date, 12 employees exited the program, and of the 12, nine have pursued careers in public health-related fields. The program included regular training on community outreach and public health education. Ambassador training also included instruction on the following core competencies:

- Facilitating Focus Group Research (presenter Dr. David Fraser, California State University, East Bay)
- Interview Skills Training (presenter Michelle Wade; Lead Program Manager, Opportunity Junction)
- Grant Writing Workshop: How to write a winning grant proposal (presenter Dr. David Fraser, California State University; East Bay)
- Resume writing (presenter Tina Pruett, Human Resources Manager, Contra Costa County)
- Database Management
  - MyTurn
  - MyCalVax
  - Epic
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
Being an Ambassador was a deeply rewarding opportunity both on a personal and professional level. The program provided me with the opportunity to get involved with the community at different levels and provided me the opportunity to develop skills I already possessed as well as gain new ones. Approximately 7 months into the program, a position for program coordinator became available. The position represented professional advancement and the opportunity to move into an entry-level supervisory role. I was able to harness the skills I learned as an ambassador to advance into the new program coordinator position.

- Diana Aleman
  Program Coordinator
  Adult Health Ambassador Alumna
The Community Health Ambassador Program has provided an amazing opportunity to acquire the skills and insights that have served as a bridge in obtaining the knowledge that is essential in equipping me with the ability to merge my passion to serve my community and facilitate my lifelong dream of starting my own business. The remarkable work environment that this program fostered while I was employed, inspired me to achieve the completion of my higher education at UC Berkeley and has allowed me to give my all to helping others, as well as encouraging others to do the same.

- Leticia Carrera
Adult Health Ambassador Alumna

Being a COVID-19 Community Health Ambassador was one of the best experiences of my life. I learned to do things I had never considered, like outreach and engagement. I always felt too shy to talk to people but working with the ambassador team challenged me to step outside of my comfort zone. Now I can talk to any and everyone. And everything that I learned while engaging the community inspired me to get my associates degree in addiction counseling, which I'm currently pursuing. Now I am a Behavioral Health Ambassador.

- Ruby Tobor-Vasquez
Adult Health Ambassador Alumna
The ambassador program at CCHS really gave me a deeper understanding of what community health means. For example, how the environment, your socioeconomic status, and the zip code you live in can all ultimately affect your health. I was able to develop my professionalism by working with other public health professionals and expand my network by collaborating with CBOs. I was able to see the health disparities that were present in my own community. The role gave me the opportunity to work towards addressing these issues. I learned how to adapt to community needs and was able to promote cultural humility through my work. The ambassador position provided me invaluable experience that you can’t get by simply working in office or looking at a computer, and for that, I am always thankful for the time and experiences I had there. It was a great steppingstone that led me into my role at SFDPH, and I’m carrying those same values of promoting healthy equity and cultural humility into my new role.

- Sabrina Villaro
Adult Health Ambassador Alumna

In March of 2021, I joined Contra Costa Health Services with the desire to make a profound impact in the community affected by COVID-19. Being a COVID-19 Community Health Ambassador allowed me to join a cause that has positively impacted the lives of many underrepresented people. My work as a COVID-19 Ambassador has transcended into the work that I began in November of 2021 when I moved to Chicago, IL. As a Family Support Specialist working for the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, I continue to advocate for the well-being of the underserved population. In Chicago I work with Unaccompanied Minors crossing the perilous borders to find a better life in the U.S. My role is to support families by connecting them with services in their community. Among those services, my goal is to ensure that I continue to advocate for the health and safety of these individuals, making it a priority in educating them on the benefits of becoming vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus. I am grateful for the experience and knowledge I obtained during my time as an ambassador and I know I will continue to use my voice to advocate for those that feel they cannot advocate for themselves. Thank you, Contra Costa Health Services!

- Veronica Santana
Adult Health Ambassador Alumna
We found that when engaging with our target populations, spending the time to build that trust would help move them towards positive action.

The third goal of the COVID-19 Ambassador program was to develop strong partnerships with the community by building trusting relationships with community leaders from faith-based, community based and civic organizations across the county. Partnering organizations were identified due to their cultural and linguistic expertise, reputation and experience working with historically under resourced and hard to reach communities.

Faith-based organizations were highly trusted resources and served as central gathering places for community members. Ambassadors partnered with faith-based organizations to provide outreach and learn how to address hesitancy and increase COVID-19 prevention. Faith-based institutions also played an integral part in intervention, by hosting mobile clinics.

The ambassadors were able to build trust in the community by being a consistent presence in the neighborhoods through various partnerships. Their efforts to provide education on testing, vaccine development, vaccine types and vaccine effectiveness helped increase COVID-19 testing and vaccination rates in Black and Latinx communities.

Exploring people’s beliefs and feelings through respectful, trust building interactions over time, led to candid conversations that addressed myths and misinformation. A primary part of engagement was to take the time to answer their concerns in a no pressure style to build rapport. One essential element of trust-building is multiple interactions with the same person. Each encounter was another opportunity to answer questions for an individual and address any uncertainties they may have.
Promoted vaccine education and outreach through cultural and linguistically appropriate messaging, built bridges between communities, and brought vaccines directly to community members, and mitigated vaccine misinformation.

Participated in various outreach activities which included hosting events, mobile vaccination clinics, community fairs; canvassing at shopping centers, restaurants, nail salons, barbershops, supermarkets, and other essential businesses; and appearances on local media outlets.

Provided safety-net resources beyond vaccines such as assisting with access to food, rent and mortgage relief, temporary shelter, 211 and behavioral-health services.

**TOGETHER WITH OUR PARTNERS**

The Adult Ambassador Program:

- Promoted vaccine education and outreach through cultural and linguistically appropriate messaging, built bridges between communities, and brought vaccines directly to community members, and mitigated vaccine misinformation.

- Participated in various outreach activities which included hosting events, mobile vaccination clinics, community fairs; canvassing at shopping centers, restaurants, nail salons, barbershops, supermarkets, and other essential businesses; and appearances on local media outlets.

- Provided safety-net resources beyond vaccines such as assisting with access to food, rent and mortgage relief, temporary shelter, 211 and behavioral-health services.
"BOOTS-ON-THE-GROUND" EXPERTISE

Ambassadors exchanged neighborhood expertise, learned alongside and co-led outreach strategies with resident leaders and community health advocates representing United Latino Voices, Monument Impact, Healthy Contra Costa, and Brighter Beginnings.

46
# of clinics w/ partners

5,601
# of vaccinations achieved w/ partners

15,000
# of bilingual flyers created w/ partners

A COVID-19 Adult Ambassador shares and learns best practices on engagement with staff from Brighter Beginnings Family Health Clinic.

Total Clinics & Vaccinations

Equity Mobile Vaccine Clinics:
- 172 Clinics
- 11,495 vaccines administered

OES Clinics:
- 50 Clinics
- 10,000+ vaccines administered

Other Partnership Clinics:
- 46 Clinics
- 5,601 vaccines administered

GRAND TOTAL:
- 268 Clinics
- 27,096 vaccines administered
ACHIEVEMENTS

Through the 172 equity mobile and 50 OES clinics, the 46 partnership events, and 6,177 hours of canvassing across the county, the program assisted over 27,000 people receive their COVID-19 vaccine.

Throughout the year, the Adult Ambassadors provided quality engagement* with:

- **25,000** individuals
- **2,000** businesses
- **51,600** bilingual flyers
- **800+** health order mandates

The Ambassadors have a 85% positive interaction percentage when engaging with businesses.

* "Quality Engagement" is defined as interactions that lasted two minutes or more
My experience within the program has taught me that kindness and non-judgmentalism will get you far when talking to vaccine hesitant community members. We gain more success when we consider the person’s specific barriers and try to address them in a way that will feel relevant.

- Nicola Ifill-Fraser
  Program Coordinator
This includes connecting with leaders at partnering organizations to promote engagement, continuously building new partner relationships, and strengthening long-standing ones. An effort this size required leveraging existing community relationships. Our success was dependent on building partnerships with organizations and individuals across the county and working together. In addition to existing relationships our partners had on the ground experience that was vital to rapidly training our ambassadors. Likewise, the ambassador team was able to easily share lessons learned.

Trust-building was a key component in our strategy to address barriers and fear of getting the vaccine. Exploring people’s beliefs and feelings through respectful, trust-building interactions over time gave us the opportunity to generate positive emotions that set the stage for trust and increased the uptake of vaccinations. Trust-building is an ongoing process comprising of consistency and a series of conversations; it is not a one-time event. Understanding why a person may be unsure about getting the vaccine is essential for a successful conversation.

In the past accessibility has meant ensuring services are accessible when people come to you. For the ambassador team the idea of radical accessibility takes that one step further by providing accessibility in new and different ways. This includes going to the places that the community love, trust, and frequent, rather than expecting them to come to a brick-and-mortar clinic that is inaccessible or inconvenient to that population (meeting the community where they are). We have been in the fields, in nail salons, supermarkets, hardware stores, and outside family owned supermarkets in underserved communities in the county.

Ambassadors are committed to becoming compassionate messengers to people of all backgrounds. The rich cultural diversity of Contra Costa could have posed challenges for ambassadors. We worked to identify and overcome these potential challenges with active cultural humility. With this approach, we provided services to clients and communities that emphasized an awareness of the limitations of our cultural perspectives, and an acknowledgment of the risks of imposing our own beliefs on those we work with.
THE ROAD AHEAD

The COVID-19 Adult Ambassador program serves as a bridge to reaching individuals and communities that have been historically marginalized and disproportionately impacted by health inequities. The ambassadors’ impact expands beyond hard benchmarks and quotas. It can also be measured through the quality of the conversations that happen during a mobile vaccine clinic at a farm as campesinos tend to crops, in a local supermarket as parents shop for dinner, and by becoming regular symbols of care in the places where individuals live, work and play. The notion of radical accessibility is the motto that guides the COVID-19 Adult Ambassador program’s grassroots efforts to eliminate disparities in vaccination rates in Contra Costa County. The work will continue, and their efforts will be rooted in expansive data, culturally relevant information and education, and by health interventions that continue to meet and serve people where they are.
PARTNERS

- Ambrose Recreation Center
- A More Excellent Way Health Improvement Organization
- Antioch Community Center
- Bethel Church
- Bethel Island Scout Hall
- Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church
- Brentwood Community Center
- Brentwood Senior Center
- Brighter Beginnings
- Celebrate Antioch Foundation
- Cielo Supermarket
- Contra Costa Medical Reserve Group
- District 3, Supervisor Diane Burgis
- District 5, Supervisor Federal D. Glover
- Delta Veteran’s Group
- Easter Hill United Methodist Church
- First Baptist Church
- G&S Farms
- Grace Bible Fellowship of Antioch
- Grace Temple Church
- Greater El Bethel Baptist Church
- Hello Fresh
- Hijas del Campo
- Iglesia Fuente de Salvacion
- Islamic Society of West Contra Costa County
- Knightsen Food Pantry
- Kaiser Permanente
- La Clinica de la Raza, Mobile Team
- Las Montañas Supermaket Monument - Concord
- Las Montañas Supermaket Willow Pass - Concord
- Las Montañas Supermarket - San Pablo
- Macedonia Baptist Church
- Meadow Homes Elementary School
- Miracle Temple Apostolic Pentecostal Church of Richmond
- Monument Impact
- Mt. Zion Baptist Church
- NAACP El Cerrito Branch
- NAACP East County
- National Alliance on Mental Illness, Contra Costa (NAMI)
- North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church
- Oakley Recreation Center
- One Accord
- Parchester First Baptist Church
- Pittsburg Youth Development Center
- Richmond Multicultural Institute
- Riverview Middle School
- San Pablo Senior Center
- Southside Economic Empowerment Development
- Shore Acres Elementary School
- Small World Park
- Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church
- Solomon Temple Ministries International
- Sri Guru Ravidass Temple
- St. Cornelius Catholic Church
- St. John Missionary Baptist Church
- St. Mark’s Catholic Church
- St. Vincent de Paul
- The Church 4 Me
- The Church at Antioch
- The Outsiders Car Club
- Tibetan Association of Northern California
- 4ever Me Foundation
- The City of Pittsburg
- United Latino Voices