

BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Promoting stronger collaborations between academic medicine, public health departments, social services agencies, and community-based organizations



MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE

Meharry Medical College (Meharry) was selected by The American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) to promote confidence in COVID-19 vaccines for adults and children in 2022 and 2023. Located in Nashville, Tennessee, Meharry is one of the nation's oldest historically black academic health science centers dedicated to the education of health care providers, public health practitioners, and policy experts. Meharry's research and programmatic initiatives help improve the lives and health of disadvantaged populations. The contents of this brief focus on the second year of grant activities (October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023).

WHAT STRATEGIES HAS MEHARRY IMPLEMENTED?

Initial efforts were focused on creating a website to inform parents about the facts surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine before their child's clinic visit. Many pediatric health care providers across the state attempted to promote COVID-19 vaccination but were met with significant parental hesitancy resulting from politicization and increased misinformation. The clinics indicated the parental hesitancy was so great that it was risking other vaccines and creating potentially volatile situations if they used the website. The lifting of the COVID-19 emergency declarations and subsequent state legislation on vaccine consent caused Meharry and partners to shift program activities towards creating a COVID-19 and flu vaccine informational toolkit. This toolkit is equipped with posters, images and content for social media, text messages, one-pagers, and a talking point card to be used by health care providers in their clinics. Cumberland Pediatric Foundation (CPF) assisted Meharry in the distribution of the toolkit.

WHO DID MEHARRY SERVE OR ENGAGE?

Meharry has maintained long-standing and trusted relationships with several groups within their local communities and throughout the state. Many of these groups asked for education on COVID-19 vaccine facts at local events. CPF, a long-standing community partner, worked with Meharry to distribute the informational toolkit to health care providers and collect evaluation data on the toolkit's reach and effectiveness. St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a pediatric treatment and research facility located in Memphis, was also a partner on the project.

WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES?

- Presented at 40+ community events
- Created informational COVID-19 [website](#)
- Developed comprehensive toolkit for health care providers
- Disseminated 42 toolkits and over 6,000 related postcards at local back to school and vaccination events



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WHO DID MEHARRY PARTNER WITH IN THE COMMUNITY?



Considering the objective of the initiative was to increase confidence and uptake of the COVID-19 and flu vaccines in pediatric populations, a partnership with CPF was perfectly aligned. CPF is a charitable non-profit organization in Tennessee that focuses on improving health care services for children through scientific and educational outreach by addressing the quality, efficiency, and cost of pediatric health care services. The network of pediatric clinics that CPF serves opened up avenues for Meharry to provide access to the informational materials on the pediatric COVID-19 and flu vaccines. While CPF helped to distribute materials, they are also providing access to integral evaluation metrics to measure the program's impact.



PARTNER PERCEPTIONS

Meharry's initial strategy was to partner directly with local pediatric clinics to distribute educational materials to parents and measure if exposure to these materials impacts child vaccine rates. With Tennessee's removal of the emergency preparedness plan, many clinics within the state had to shift priorities to managing existing required vaccines and ongoing general vaccine hesitancy. This misunderstanding, plus lack of guidance on the state's new vaccine informed consent policy, prompted many clinics to step back from much of their COVID-19 and other vaccine activities resulting in lost momentum to push back against vaccine hesitancy. This unexpected development inspired additional efforts for Meharry, St. Jude, and CPF to inform clinics that they still can administer the COVID-19 vaccine and what steps they must complete to continue to provide their communities with this critical preventive measure.



PARTNER BENEFITS

The partnership between Meharry, St. Jude, and CPF is built on mutual respect and trust. This marriage between community, clinical, and academic settings has amplified the two partners' similar missions and allows the other to bring their strengths to the partnership.



PARTNER CHALLENGES

Parents' limited scientific knowledge of vaccines and their safety have hampered COVID-19 vaccination uptake among adolescents.

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