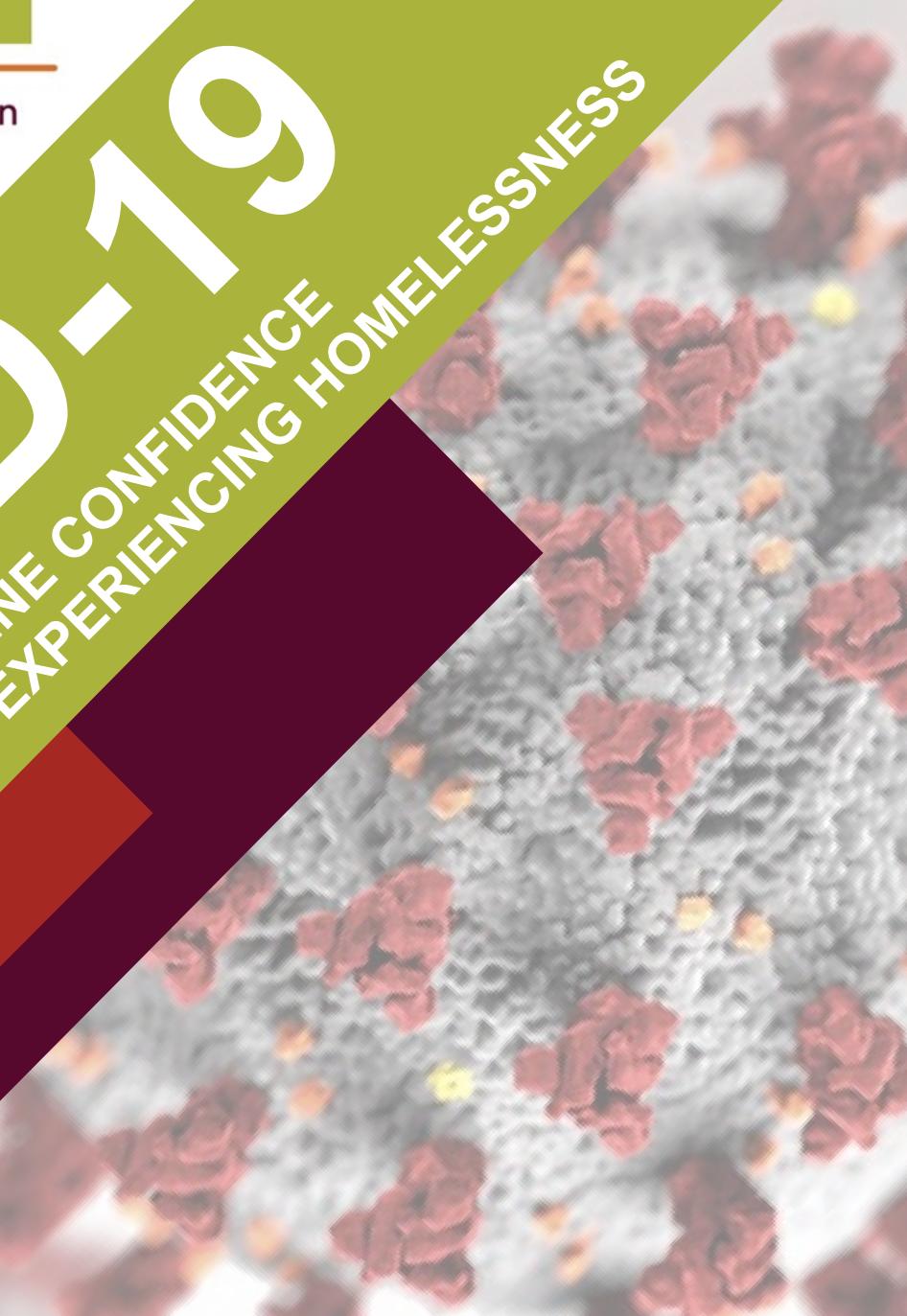




Tucson Pima Collaboration
To End Homelessness

COVID-19

PROMOTING VACCINE CONFIDENCE
AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



This chapter is excerpted from TPCH's Promoting COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Toolkit for Homeless Advocates and Service Providers.

Toolkit Chapters

Download at <https://www.tpch.net/vaccine-toolkit>

Introduction: Overview of the toolkit's purpose, commonly used terms, and updates.

Chapter 1 - Vaccine Ambassadorship: Introduction to vaccine ambassadorship and the important role that homeless advocates can play in building vaccine confidence and uptake among people experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 2 - COVID-19 Basics: Basic information about SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 illness, and risk management.

Chapter 3 - COVID-19 Vaccines: General information about currently available COVID-19 vaccines.

Chapter 4 - Vaccine Hesitancy: An introduction to vaccine hesitancy, common concerns expressed by people experiencing homelessness, and the relationship between racial trauma and vaccine hesitancy.

Chapter 5 - Promoting Vaccine Confidence: Tailored strategies to address common vaccine concerns among people experiencing homelessness, and sample responses to those concerns using messages that are proven to work.

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Chapter 1: Vaccine Ambassadorship

Vaccine ambassadors are everyday people who provide accurate information about COVID-19 vaccine options and safety to PEH. They provide education about COVID-19 vaccine options and efficacy by sharing their personal reasons for confidence in available vaccines based on real-world experience. Vaccine ambassadorship requires homeless advocates to listen to and honor the concerns and fears that PEH may have about the COVID-19 vaccines, dispel myths when possible, and help PEH who choose to be vaccinated prepare for and obtain the vaccine when they are eligible.

Our homeless vaccine ambassadorship approach is rooted in principles and best practices of successful peer outreach models, community health worker/promotores programs, and other effective health promotion strategies being used to address COVID-19 and other health crises among PEH and other populations.

Homeless advocates including homeless services staff, volunteers, and people with lived experience of homelessness are uniquely positioned to facilitate vaccine ambassadorship and promote vaccine confidence among PEH, especially those with whom they share racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, faith, sexual orientation, and/or gender identities.

Who Can Help PEH Build Vaccine Confidence?

Our vaccine ambassadorship strategy centers known homeless advocates, those with trusted and established relationships with PEH in the local community, as key messengers to promote vaccine confidence and uptake among sheltered and unsheltered people. Experience has proven that vaccine ambassador efforts are most successful when ambassadors share directly from their own experience – particularly experiences of COVID-19 illness, of taking the COVID-19 vaccine, of homelessness, as part of a racial or ethnic minority group, or as a staff person or volunteer working in settings that serve PEH.

With the right information and preparation, any homeless services staff member, volunteer, person with lived experience, or other trusted community member can be an effective vaccine ambassador. To answer the question of who can help PEH build vaccine confidence, you need only look in the mirror. With the right information, we can all play a part in promoting vaccine confidence.

- Individuals with lived experience of homelessness and homeless services staff/volunteers, especially those who have been vaccinated or plan to be, can share their reasons for vaccine confidence.
- People who have had COVID-19 and recovered and/or who have family members that have had COVID-19 and recovered can share their personal experience with the illness and the vaccine's value in protecting the health of PEH and the community.
- People who have lost a loved one or friend due to COVID-19 illness can share their personal experience of loss and the vaccine's value in protecting PEH from illness and death.
- People who work in outreach, shelter, housing, and other programs for PEH can remind participants that they care about them and their health, and share their reasons for vaccine confidence.



- Faith leaders, mentors, peer support specialists and other people who provide support for people experiencing homelessness such as librarians and meal program volunteers can share information about vaccine safety and effectiveness and their personal reasons for vaccine confidence.

Instead of asking who can help PEH build vaccine confidence, ask yourself how you will help your neighbors experiencing homelessness protect themselves and each other from COVID-19?

Homeless Services Staff and Volunteers: A Front Line in Health Promotion Among PEH

Homeless services staff and volunteers have been on the front lines helping PEH navigate the COVID-19 pandemic since its onset. Outreach, shelter, housing, and supportive service programs have provided basic information about prevention and testing, offered education to help PEH understand and mitigate their risk of exposure and transmission, acted as liaisons between PEH and public health professionals, and adapted service models and approaches to keep themselves and PEH safe while maintaining critical outreach, shelter, supportive housing, and other services open and accessible.

As communities move into the next phase of the pandemic, begin vaccination efforts, and sustain strategies to increase vaccine uptake, targeted approaches are needed to promote vaccine confidence among sheltered and unsheltered PEH. It is only logical that homeless services staff and volunteers – people who have already established trusting relationships with PEH and been their primary source of information and education throughout the pandemic - continue to deliver health promotion messages to reduce vaccine hesitancy.

The table below indicates some of the ways that homeless advocates are already supporting PEH navigate health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and is adapted from [Community Health Workers and COVID-19](#), by [MHP Salud](#).

COVID-19 Challenges	Role of Homeless Advocates
Self-medication and self-diagnosis due to lack of health insurance.	Homeless services staff/volunteers assist PEH to apply for health insurance (<u>AHCCCS</u> /Medicaid, <u>Medicare</u> , <u>VA</u> , etc.) and connect PEH to indigent and community-based medical services.
Lack of health information available in their language.	Homeless services staff/volunteers assist with the translation of documents and information if multi-lingual, connect PEH to community translation options, and advocate for development and distribution of documents and information in languages in which PEH are fluent.
Lack of health information available in their literacy level.	Homeless services staff/volunteers explain documents and information in ways that are easily understood by PEH and advocate for the development and distribution of accessible, simple language documents and materials.
Fear of accessing services due to immigration status	Homeless services staff/volunteers assist with clarifying immigration myths and make referrals to community agencies that could offer assistance.



Misinformation due to word of mouth and false news.	Homeless services staff/volunteers direct PEH to credible and reliable sources of information about COVID-19 and vaccines, and can use the messages described in our "Homeless Advocates' Guide to Discussing Vaccine Hesitancy with People Experiencing Homelessness."
Lack of effective communication with health providers (due to language barriers, mental illness, or other issues).	Homeless services staff/volunteers provide patient advocacy and assist with patient/provider communication with the consent of PEH.
Lack of transportation to medical appointments and services including COVID-19 vaccine appointments.	Homeless services staff/volunteers direct PEH to available transportation services including public transit, arrange transportation using ride share services, or provide transportation to appointments directly. Homeless services staff/volunteers help PEH access transportation options through AHCCCS /Medicaid or other health insurance if eligible.

How Can I Help PEH Build Vaccine Confidence?

Homeless advocates can provide accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccine and help build vaccine confidence among PEH in many ways. This list has been adapted from the [Vaccine Ambassador Job Description](#) developed by the [UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative](#).

- Learn as much as you can about COVID-19 vaccine safety and efficacy (participate in training, review this guide, and stay up to date on vaccine information released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, your local health department, and other reliable sources).
- Learn about histories of medical abuse and mistreatment experienced by people experiencing homelessness and communities of color, and how these histories influence mistrust and vaccine hesitancy.
- Learn about local requirements for receiving the vaccine and help PEH navigate these requirements to improve access (i.e. arranging transportation to/from appointments and for drive-thru events, ID requirements, etc.)
- Provide accurate information about COVID-19 vaccine safety and efficacy through ongoing outreach to PEH through personal interactions, social media, resident newsletters, and other strategies.
- Display vaccine-reinforcing materials in homeless services settings and use visual cues to encourage vaccine discussions with PEH accessing services.
- Listen to and honor concerns expressed by PEH and share your personal reasons for vaccine confidence.
- Engage in supportive conversations that help PEH explore and interrogate their underlying beliefs about COVID-19 and the vaccine.
- Help PEH understand vaccine options and provide assistance with vaccine scheduling.



- Provide honest information about what to expect at a vaccine appointment and potential side effects.
- Help PEH receiving a two-dose vaccine schedule their second dose appointment, provide appointment reminders, and arrange transportation or accompany PEH to receive their second dose.
- Provide linkages to services and care for PEH who experience expected symptoms from the vaccine or have an adverse reaction.
- Honor the autonomy and self-direction of PEH and provide harm reduction education to PEH who decline vaccination.
- Educate PEH, regardless of vaccination status, about the continued need to practice risk reduction strategies such as social distancing and mask-wearing.

Rely on Health Professionals for Medical Advice

Homeless advocates can play an important role in helping people experiencing homelessness build confidence in the COVID-19 vaccine by sharing honest, accurate information about vaccine options and our personal experiences with COVID-19 and vaccination. While we can help build vaccine confidence, we need to know our own limitations. Speak from personal experience and be honest if you do not know how to answer a question or address a specific concern.

Never give medical advice unless you are a medical professional. Your local Health Department, [Healthcare for the Homeless](#) program, and federally qualified health centers (FQHC) are great resources for people experiencing homelessness in need of medical advice or services.

Conclusion

Homeless advocates have been on the front lines of the community response to the COVID-19 pandemic all along. They have collaborated with health professionals, government agencies, and PEH to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the pandemic as it is experienced by people in sheltered and unsheltered settings. They have served as the primary messengers to PEH about health risks, safety, testing, and vaccination since the onset of the pandemic and are uniquely positioned to promote vaccine confidence among this population.

By learning about COVID-19 and available vaccines, exploring their own personal experience, sharing accurate information, and engaging in trauma-informed, strengths-based conversations with PEH, homeless advocates can help prevent needless illness and death.