



December 2023

Partner Spotlight: El Centro Hispano

*How a Community-First Public Health Approach Increased
COVID-19 Vaccinations for Immigrant Communities in Rural
Arkansas*

BACKGROUND

Through support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Partnering for Vaccine Equity (P4VE) program, Community Catalyst's Vaccine Equity and Access Program (VEAP) partners with over 90 community-based organizations (CBOs) across the United States. To increase COVID-19 and influenza equity, these community health partners build vaccine confidence and promote vaccine uptake in communities of color.



Photo Credit: El Centro Hispano

One such example is El Centro Hispano, a partner that serves Hispanic and immigrant populations in Northeast, Central, and Northwest Arkansas with its main facility located in Jonesboro. For over 25 years, El Centro Hispano has been addressing community-level quality of life needs by offering programs and services focused on six key areas: health, education, social, cultural, legal, and civic engagement. Each of these are considered a social determinant of health, meaning they have a significant impact on people's health, well-being, and quality of life.

Language accessibility is fundamental to El Centro Hispano's work, as evidenced by the implementation of daily activities in a bilingual format for English and Spanish-speaking populations. As part of their commitment to making a positive impact for community members at higher risk for negative health outcomes due to racism, classism, and other forms of oppression, El Centro Hispano provides free and low-cost services to individuals with low-incomes.

THE CHALLENGE

El Centro Hispano's target population face several hurdles to accessing COVID-19 vaccinations. Due to language and literacy barriers, lack of access to health insurance, an increasing rise in health care costs, and unpredictable challenges to the immigration statuses of individuals and their family members, access to equitable and affordable vaccines remain challenging.

At the local level, the delayed release of vaccines – available in limited quantities in rural areas – also contribute to the difficulty in accessing COVID-19 vaccines.

Bridges to Vaccine Access are Built with Collaborative Partnerships

Through partnerships with the Mexican and Salvadoran Consulates, El Centro Hispano was able to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake through their accessible and innovative "mobile consulate" activations.

In addition to COVID-19 vaccination and other health services, the mobile consulate events provided opportunities for individuals to renew, update, and receive important legal documents for their future in the United States. According to reports from partner consulate employees, El Centro Hispano's mobile consulate events had higher participation rates on average than similar events in larger cities.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- » El Centro Hispano completed bilingual outreach and education to **9,501 individuals** in different cities across Arkansas and the Southern bootheel of Missouri.
- » In their Mobile Consulate events they reached **242 people (Salvadoran)** through outreach and event activities, and **631 people (Mexican)**.
- » El Centro Hispano identified **13 different communities** (cities with concentrated Hispanic/immigrant populations) that were reached and received services through these events.

“

Our team incorporated COVID and flu education and vaccinations in mobile Mexican and Salvadoran Consulates held at our facility. We carefully and strategically prepared for these events including bilingual COVID and flu education for all attendees. We also set up opportunities for clients to schedule their vaccines by promoting incentives and having a robust team on each day of the mobile consulates.

El Centro Hispano Staff

In addition to innovative approaches, like the mobile consulates, El Centro Hispano's team has invested in building powerful partnerships with key stakeholders in local businesses, health care agencies, and local leadership. A significant benefit to their partnership development and sustainability efforts is their ability to facilitate access to local leaders for communities who might not otherwise have a voice or direct connection to the vital information and systems that impact their lives.

“

Our immigrant leadership also uniquely understands the plight of our target demographic and advocates for health equity for minorities and people of color. El Centro Hispano has invited community members to roundtable discussions and Q&A sessions with local leaders. Efforts like this promote inclusion and put us at eye level with our low-income communities. When Hispanic people and immigrants are included in this way, it often touches them, makes them feel important, and gains their trust.

El Centro Hispano Staff

The Work Continues: Team Training and Integrated Efforts with Health Care Providers

Reflecting on their commitment to staff development and strategic partnerships with vaccine providers, El Centro Hispano affirmed a commitment to sharing culturally relevant vaccine information within the communities they serve.



Photo Credit: El Centro Hispano

“

We attended multiple training sessions to learn more about vaccine schedules, new variants, and future possibilities to provide vaccines. Our team developed an exhaustive list of all pharmacies and potential vaccine providers in the area. We contacted all vaccine providers and scheduled COVID-19 and flu vaccine appointments for community members where they were available.

El Centro Hispano Staff

As a result, El Centro Hispano's team improved their ability to provide culturally tailored, accurate information to their clients on changes in vaccine schedules, variants, and the cost of vaccines in a way that was easy to understand. They also provided follow-up communications with updated, evidence-based information that supports community health needs regarding COVID-19 and the flu.

El Centro Hispano has its sights set on developing community leadership that support youth enrichment and focuses on improving overall quality of life. Their vision of this work includes programs and services that address mental well-being.

AUTHORS

Thank you to contributing authors Dia S. Hodnett, MPH and El Centro Hispano Staff for reflecting on the impacts of leadership and partnership on community-first public health work.

We acknowledge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for its support of the Vaccine Equity and Access Program under cooperative agreement CDC-RFA-IP21-2108 awarded to Community Catalyst.

“

We envision one community and one family that operates together to open equitable access to high-quality services and programs for all minorities including Hispanic and immigrant populations.

El Centro Hispano Staff

REFERENCES

Buro AW, Roman Candelaria K, Bailey R, Luna F, Albizu-Jacob A, Stern M, Redwine L. Exploration of Multilevel Barriers and Strategies That Affected Early COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing in Rural Latino Communities in Southwest Florida. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2022 Sep 18;19(18):11785. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191811785. PMID: 36142059; PMCID: PMC9517188.

Moore, R., Rojo, M.O., Purvis, R.S. et al. Overcoming barriers and enhancing facilitators to COVID-19 vaccination in the Hispanic community. *BMC Public Health* 22, 2393 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14825-y>

Kerrigan, D., Mantsios, A., Karver, T.S. et al. Context and Considerations for the Development of Community-Informed Health Communication Messaging to Support Equitable Uptake of COVID-19 Vaccines Among Communities of Color in Washington, DC. *J. Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 10, 395–409 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-022-01231-8>

ABOUT COMMUNITY CATALYST'S VACCINE EQUITY ACCESS PROGRAM

Community Catalyst is working to build the power of people to create a health system rooted in race equity and health justice, and a society where health is a right for all. Since 2021, Community Catalyst's Vaccine Equity and Access Program (VEAP) has partnered with 90+ community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop and implement effective health communications and community engagement strategies. to address COVID-19 and influenza vaccination hesitancy in racially and ethnically diverse communities.

Learn more about Community Catalyst and our community-first public health initiative at communitycatalyst.org.

Learn more about El Centro Hispano and their work in Arkansas at centrohispanoarkansas.com.