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"Community members have more impact on their neighbors than celebrities": Leveraging community partnerships to build COVID-19 vaccine confidence

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Vaccines are a strong public health tool to protect against severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. Still, inequities in COVID-19 vaccination rates and health outcomes continue to exist among Black and Latino populations. Boston Medical Center (BMC) has played a significant role in vaccinating medically underserved populations, and organized a series of community-engaged conversations to better understand community concerns regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. We accessed and analyzed nine publicly available recordings of the community-engaged conversations which were held between Mar 2021-Sep 2021 (n=8-122 attendees). We employed a Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research-driven codebook to code our data and utilized a modified version of qualitative rapid analysis methods. Five main themes emerged: (1) Structural factors are important barriers to COVID-19 vaccination; (2) Mistrust exists due to the negative impact of systemic oppression and perceived motivation of the government; (3) There is a desire to learn more about biological and clinical characteristics of the COVID-19 vaccine as well as the practical implications of being vaccinated; (4) Community engagement is important for delivering COVID-19 information and education and; (5) Community leaders believe that the COVID-19 vaccine is a solution to address the pandemic. In highlighting the themes which resulted from these community-engaged conversations, this study illustrates a need for community-engaged COVID-19 vaccine messaging which reflects the nuances of the COVID-19 vaccine and pandemic without oversimplifying information and underscores important considerations for public health and healthcare leadership in the development of initiatives which work to advance health equity.