Increasing Vaccination Rates among Hispanic Communities:

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant disparities in cases and deaths were observed among Blacks and Hispanic individuals compared to their White counterparts. Similarly, during the initial phases of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, substantial disparities in vaccination rates existed for Hispanic individuals, but these gaps gradually narrowed and eventually reversed. According to the most recent CDC data as of March 2023, 89.1% of Hispanic/Latino individuals have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, slightly higher than the 87% rate among White individuals. Moreover, 84% of Hispanic/Latinos have completed the primary vaccination series, which closely mirrors the 84.3% rate among White individuals.

Over the past three years, various efforts, spanning from federal to local levels, have been undertaken to increase vaccine rates and boost confidence within the Hispanic/Latino communities. Thanks to the dedication and motivation of grassroots organizations involving community health workers, nurses, pharmacists and physicians, the Hispanic community has successfully reversed vaccination rates and is now one of the leading communities in terms of vaccination rates.

Strategies Utilized to Increase Vaccination Rates Among Hispanic Communities:

Numerous factors contribute to vaccine hesitancy among Hispanics, including misinformation and structural barriers within the healthcare system. However, the most effective strategy for increasing vaccination rates is empowering the community through education, providing timely, accurate, and linguistically appropriate health information tailored to their specific needs.

One effective approach involves culturally tailored events aimed at building trust. For example, the NHMA Nebraska Chapter, led by the former immediate co-chair Dr. Armando De Alba, collaborated with local organizations in Omaha, Nebraska, to organization a Vaccinate For All-supported Community Soccer & Vaccine Clinic, a Dias de los Muertos Vaccine Clinic, and a Mariachi Vaccine Clinic to boost vaccination rates among the Hispanic community.

The Community Soccer & Vaccine Clinic featured vaccination services for individuals aged five and up, exhibition soccer matches for both kids and adults, as well as food, drinks, and music. The event was graced by Hall of Fame soccer star Luis Hernandez, known as “El Matador,” who, as a role model within the community celebrity at the vaccine clinic motivated more Hispanic families to receive the vaccine and trust its efficacy.

Notably, at the event, many physicians and families conversed in Spanish, which eliminated language barriers and allowed open dialogue to dispel fears and address concerns related to the vaccine.
Given that soccer is a unifying force within the Latino community, this event provided an ideal platform for bringing together numerous Hispanic families, thereby increasing vaccine uptake and raising awareness about the health issues facing the Hispanic community. The success of this event underscores the importance of community coordination, diversity, and involving entire families in vaccine advocacy.

**Challenges Faced by the Hispanic Community:**

The primary challenge faced by the Hispanic during the COVID-19 pandemic was misinformation, often disseminated through various Spanish-language media and news sources and perpetuated within families.

When hosting the Community Soccer & Vaccine Clinic event, the organization had to be prepared to address misinformation prevalent within the Hispanic community. Many families arrived at the vaccine clinic with doubts about the vaccine. Physicians and volunteers had to address these concerns and doubts in Spanish providing clear explanations of the vaccination process for their families.

**Recommendations:**

The key to success in increasing vaccination rates is collaborative teamwork. Establishing partnerships among different Hispanic organizations to support large-scale events is crucial. With a diverse team, various aspects of a significant project can be effectively accomplished.

Additionally, investing time and efforts to understand the Hispanic community and its unique patterns is essential for building trust. It is important to share results, provide information (through presentations, reports, etc.), and hold community education meetings.

Finally, it is imperative not to shy away from both positive and negative feedback and to be willing to step outside of one’s comfort zone. This willingness to adapt and learn is essential for making progress in increasing vaccination rates within the Hispanic community.

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