



Covid-19 Vaccines and African Communities

Community African Network

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Facilitation team

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Introduction

Community African Network (CAN) over the last few years has built the capacity and experience in service design, delivery and working with Black and minority community groups within London especially in Hackney. CAN has a track record of working with African communities to deliver health messages and help change behaviour. Through a network of trained community champions and volunteers CAN engage with the African community in places where people congregate, enabling sympathetic, culturally relevant dialogue and discussion about knowledge, barriers, and support. As an umbrella organisation for 11 African-led local charities, the member organisations represent service users from "hard to reach" communities like Somali, Francophone speaking Africans, Portuguese speaking Guinea Bissau people, Tigranya, Swahili and other ethnic minority communities

CAN have worked on multiple projects like this one such as breast cancer awareness, safe sex awareness through promotion and distribution of condoms, TB awareness, information and signposting and Bowel Cancer uptake within the ACH communities.

Workshop background

On the 13 March 2020, CAN brought together a diverse group of people with representation from the different African communities and different community-based organizations. The organizations representatives and the community members present expressed their interest to hear more about Covid-19 disease, vaccine safety and progress. Community champions were also present to obtain more information that would be useful to encourage the members of their communities to take the Covid-19 vaccine. The event was aimed at promoting community dialogue to address the issues around COVID-19 vaccine uptake hesitancy within the African Community. Speakers from the Congolese, Somali, Guinea Bissau, Tigray and East African communities were present. The mayor of Hackney, Public Health Hackney directors, Clinical lead for Covid-19, Medical doctors, C.E.O of Hackney CVS and members of CAN were also present. A key component of the workshop was to highlight some of the barriers towards covid-19 vaccine uptake, possible suggestions and solutions to these barriers and available grants for covid-19 vaccination campaigns.

Objectives of the event

- Connect communities with other community members, council and the health care system
- Support community organizations on getting access to the right information, training and grants for Covid-19 and other community issues
- Understand the communities' point of view in regard to the Covid-19 vaccines
- Discuss the facts and myths around the covid-19 vaccines
- Discuss challenges that communities face and suggestions to these challenges
- Share more information on the overview of the span of the Covid-19 pandemic, levels of infections, level of vaccine uptakes and the current impact of vaccination.
- Discuss the safety and effectiveness of the Covid-19 and other vaccines and how they work
- Answer questions about Covid-19 from concerned members of the community
- Trusted leaders within the community to share their experiences of taking the vaccine and provide culturally appropriate information.

Several speakers from Public health sector and clinical settings made presentation that provided more information on Covid-19 disease and vaccination. This gave the participants an opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns.

The issues discussed by various speakers were as follows:

The clinical lead for Covid-19 addressed:

- Key message on how the vaccine works.
- Questions on why the vaccine was developed in such a short time.
- The effectiveness of the vaccine and the safety in healthy individuals and individuals with underlying health conditions.
- The side effects of the vaccines and guidelines in the event of allergic reaction
- talked about how vaccines work, local vaccination provision across Hackney and encouraged participants to register with their local GP. The speaker also emphasized on the safety and effectiveness of all the Covid-19 vaccines available.

The Mayor of Hackney addressed:

- The available funding for grassroot organizations
- Listened to challenges and concerns of the community members

- Acknowledged that more needed to be done regarding challenges faced by community organizations.
- Encouraged participants to take the vaccination.

The CEO of Hackney CVS addressed:

- Ways to connect communities with the council and health system.
- Funds available for Covid-19 community information and education purposes and ways to access these funds.
- Community challenges caused by Covid-19 pandemic i.e., mental health challenges, lack of basic needs and possible reasons for Covid-19 vaccine hesitance.
- Encouraged the participants to take the vaccine when offered.

Community champions shared their Covid-19 vaccination experience and their reasons to take the vaccination. Some of the information shared were as follows:

- Some champions experienced side effects from the Covid-19 vaccination ranging from mild to moderate.
- Some champions had concerns and worries about the vaccines, but they still decided to take it.
- Some champions had prior Covid-19 infection and still took the vaccine.
- Most of the champions decided to take the vaccines to protect their family and community members.

Key things to take home:

- All the Covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective.
- The Covid-19 vaccine was not developed from the placenta, It cannot integrate into a person's DNA, and it does not make a person get covid or cause infertility
- Anyone can get access to the vaccine and health care regardless of their immigration status, race or economic status.

In different language groups i.e., French, Somali, Swahili, Portuguese, Luganda and English; participants discussed the barriers to the covid-19 vaccine uptake among their communities and the possible solutions to address these barriers. They then presented information gathered from their respective communities.

Feedback from the community discussions

Barriers

- Lack of information on the type of vaccine to take.
- Misinformation and myths about the safety and effectiveness of the covid-19 vaccine
- Negative attitude towards the vaccine due to negative information from social media
- Illiteracy therefore challenges in understanding information in written form
- Lack of information on how to access the vaccine.
- Lack of technology skills prevents some community members from online GP registration and booking for vaccination.
- Lack of trust in the system

Suggestions to possible solutions

- Request for information about what vaccine to take and the vaccination provision – This would be followed up by the community champions who obtained more information regarding this during this forum.
- Reach out to the local community and organize community-based conversation like the current forum – This would be possible through providing access to funds to enable community champions to reach out to the community members through community forums and campaigns.
- Community champions to come together and work with the local council to support each other in listening to the concerns of the community members and addressing the issues raised.
- Information about Covid-19 should be videotaped in oral form and sent to the community members in their native language so that all members of the community can understand the message conveyed.
- Enable frequent open and honest discussions with community members.

Key points

Key points from the presentation and discussion that followed:

- Covid -19 has negatively impacted on the health and wellbeing of the African community.
- There is still high hesitancy among the black community to take the Covid-19 vaccine, but a lot of concerns were addressed during this forum
- There is low uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine by the ACH community due to issues around misinformation, cultural and religious issues, health inequalities, institutional racism and lack of trust in the system.

- Some organization representatives were not aware of the available funds for community outreach programs.
- Illiteracy, lack of access to technology and lack of proper information are the main barriers to Covid-19 vaccine uptake.
- Most community representatives needed financial and moral support to conduct community awareness, vaccination campaigns and other community work.
- Awareness and community vaccination campaigns is key to increase the Covid-19 uptake among the African communities.

Reflections and way forward

- As the event was being concluded, the participants concluded that it would be useful to consider the following actions following everything that was discussed in the forum:
- Participants to sign up to be community champions in their various community to enable them to get continuous access to new information on Covid-19 and access to help in other community issues.
- More translated information in simple diagrams and videos will be passed to the communities.
- Community members who do not have basic computer skills will be assisted by their community champions in GP and vaccination registration.
- Community conversation forums will be held in different communities to address the concerns of the community members and to encourage them to take the Covid-19 vaccine.
- The mayor committed to take back what was discussed in the forum to the decision makers.
- Community African Network will engage more with the mayor to address community issues.
- Participants to continue to share their vaccination experience with community members.
- CAN together with other stake holders will share links and support local community organizations to establish a better way to promote Covid-19 vaccine uptake.

Conclusion

The event will help identify the barriers to the low uptake of the vaccine and provide a platform for members of the African community to ask informed questions.

Community Questions

Myths

1. Vaccine was made using baby placenta.
2. Vaccine is a mark of the beast as it allows Govt to track you as referenced in book of revelations.
3. Vaccine is a ploy to eliminate Black African people.
4. Vaccine can cause infertility for men and women.
5. Vaccine was done to quickly so side effects not known.
6. Pfizer vaccine more effective than Astra Zeneca.
7. Historical issues with vaccine trials in Africa (Pitzer).

Guinea Bissau Portuguese speaking community.

What can I do if I get some sort of reaction to hand sanitizer?

How can I make sure which website is providing me the correct information on Covid-19?

What conversations can I have with family members who don't believe in the virus and how can protect myself when I am with them?

What reactions has Covid-19 had on people who have received the vaccine?

What is in the Covid-19 vaccines? Ingredients?

I will take the vaccine but wanted more information about the vaccine.

Where is the best place to get information?

Do I need to be vaccinated every year or in a longer period?

What are the long-term effects of the vaccine?

Some African countries have been taking excellent measures to tackle the spread of the virus and even some have been creating excellent resources to prevent their communities from the virus. Why do you think the self-proclaimed developed countries and the media in general don't inform the general public about that?

What do you think African countries could learn in terms of prevention and creating strong health bodies from this pandemic?

Apart from institutional racism why do you think Black and Brown communities are the most endangered communities when we talked about access to healthcare.

West Africa

What are the side effects especially in the future? Who will I hold responsible?

If you are undocumented and you have side effect after taking Covid-19 vaccine, will you be supported?

Can a pregnant woman take vaccine inoculation or under fertility treatments?

Some react to this inoculation in different ways , how can we manage this?

Swahili Community

Can one be vaccinated after recovering from Severe Covid19 ?

Why NHS calls inviting the Victim of Covid19 to test for Antibodies. How is it beneficial?

Why do they encourage me who suffered Covid19 to donate blood? What is it for and how does it benefit my health? How will I know I have enough blood to donate?

Tell me more about anti bodies after Covid19.

Why do I feel a bit confused and no concentration after covid19?

Will I heal of anxiety and get normal?

What is the best vaccine here in UK?

Somali Community

Couple Qs to all but particularly Dr. Husbands and Dr Couchlin

1. How can you take further steps to ensure minority communities access vaccination
2. There's is a huge barrier on test centres on particularly languages
3. In Hackney how we can launch more pop-up centres and deploy community volunteers (Language)