



TENNESSEE HEALTH
CARE CAMPAIGN

COVID-19 Vaccine Listening Sessions

Part 2:

The Voices of People of Color in Rural Tennessee

The Tennessee Health Care Campaign (THCC) is a non-profit, non-partisan health advocacy organization dedicated to equitable, affordable, quality health care for all Tennesseans.

Table of Contents

Page	
2	Introduction
3	Report of the Listening Session at Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee
11	Report of the Listening Session at House of Faith Ministries, Alamo, Tennessee
18	Lessons Learned

Introduction

Tennessee Health Care Campaign has been working since Spring, 2021 to improve COVID vaccination in 5 of the most at-risk counties in West Tennessee: Hardeman, Haywood, Lauderdale, Crockett, and Madison. In August 2021 THHC held to two listening sessions with unvaccinated participants. The results of those listening sessions are included in our 2021 report: **COVID-19 Listening Sessions: The Voice of People of Color in Rural Tennessee.**

A year and a half later, THHC wanted to talk with those who made the decision to get vaccinated. We hoped to learn what motivated community members to get the vaccine, what information informed their decision and who encouraged them.

The listening sessions were intended to be completely conversational, with the participants taking the lead. There was a facilitator to keep the conversation moving and guided. The voices and perspectives of the participants were the center and purpose of the sessions. One listening session was held at Lane College, a historically black college in Jackson, Tennessee. The session consisted of 16 people. A second session was held at House of Faith Ministry in Alamo Tennessee with 8 attendees. Alamo is the county seat of Crockett County, population 13,911 in rural West Tennessee. All the participants were African American. Both sessions took place in January 2023. The listening sessions were facilitated by Robin Gadsden-Dupree, a community resident and trained facilitator.

Collectively, both of these listening sessions provided key insights as to how to better reach unvaccinated individuals. THHC used the feedback that these listening sessions illuminated to develop more effective Public Service Announcements and educational materials for frontline clinic staff.

This report is made possible through a grant from the Tennessee Department of Health.

COVID19 Vaccine Listening Session

Tennessee Health Care Campaign

Summary

The Tennessee Health Care Campaign in partnership with various community groups organized a focus group about the COVID19 vaccine. The purpose of the focus group was to listen to people who have been vaccinated for COVID19 and to learn the reasons why they chose to do so. Some of the participants were vaccinated and boosted, others just vaccinated.

Introduction

The focus group consisted of 16 African-American people (9 women and 7 men) who have been vaccinated for COVID19 and who attended the discussion session at Lane College, Kirkendoll Student Center at 816 N. Hays Avenue, Jackson, TN 38301 on Tuesday, January 24th 2023 at 4:00p.m. The focus group session was designed to gather information from the attendees regarding the following:

- To find out why people made the decision to get vaccinated.
- To understand concerns and opinions attendees hear from unvaccinated people in the circle of influence.
- To learn more about attendee perceptions of doctor, clinic, and vaccine providers.

Attendees' Perspectives Listening Session

- **Outcome 1:** To know if they regularly get the flu vaccine.
- **Question asked during focus group:** Many of us have decided on the flu vaccine. Do you regularly get a flu vaccine? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- **Findings from the focus group:** The majority of the group does not get the flu vaccine for various reasons.

Attendee: [I have underlying conditions, I have diabetes so I take the flu shot]

Attendee: [I long time ago I got the flu, and I don't ever want to feel what I felt then, so I got it]

Attendee: [I have a chronic illness so I have to make sure I take all vaccines, little things that don't affect some can trigger me to go to the hospital]

Attendee: [I got it because I play sports and I want to keep my body healthy]

Attendee: [I got the flu shot years ago and I was sick, I hope the antibodies are enough, so I don't get the vaccine]

Attendee: [I almost died when I got the flu shot so I'll never do it again]

Attendee: [I don't have a reason for not getting the shot, if it ain't broke don't fix it]

- **Outcome 2:** To know the reasons why other people are unsure about the COVID19 vaccine.
- **Questions asked during focus group:** With the COVID19 vaccine, many people are still undecided, especially about vaccinating their children. If you know anyone who is unsure about the COVID19 vaccine or booster, why are they unsure? What questions do they have?
- **Findings from the focus group:** Misinformation and confusing information contributed to many not being vaccinated especially during the beginning stage.

Attendee: [Lack of education and miseducation, we've seen so much about vaccinations. The first thing black people will say is look at the Tuskegee experiment, but we have to follow the science. We are not properly educated on this]

Attendee: [Some will say how do you know what's in it, they don't know? How did they get it so fast?]

Attendee: [Why are you getting COVID after you got the shot? It's back to misinformation. Information is not transparent, if people would understand that you can still get COVID but you're not going to die. We need more information concerning how people feel after vaccination, hear testimony from those after the fact]

Attendee: [You're gonna get COVID, we're saying you're not gonna die]

Attendee: [We have historical trauma, then think about who the President was during all this, everyday you kept hearing things, it was twitter and COVID 19, people said you can't trust politicians]

Attendee: [People who got earlier vaccines had a problem deciding which one to take cause they rolled all three out and talked about the percentage of effectiveness. When they recalled the Johnson & Johnson one, I wasn't trying to get that one, I wanted Pfizer. Then it was what do you do next? We had a number of deaths in the city and state. They took church and school away from us, people were stuck in the house. Many have said "I don't trust any of this"]

Attendee: [Some people believe the safest course is to do nothing]

Attendee: [I lost up to 10 people to COVID]

Attendee: [You hear all these stories about communities who lost lives. When COVID was on the rise it seemed like a lot of Americans didn't have the capacity to be empathetic – do I fight for black lives or health or both. When the riots were going on, people thought about black lives but what about the life of your grandmother at home? If you don't feel for someone you'll never get it, we have become so desensitized]

- **Outcome 3:** To learn some of the things people think about the COVID19 vaccine.
- **Questions asked during focus group:** In thinking about people you know who have clear opinions on COVID19 and the vaccine, what are some of the things you've heard from them about the COVID19 vaccine, pro or con? And what about children taking it?
- **Findings from the focus group:** Because COVID19 is a novel strain many were and are still unsure of the long term effects and there is no longitudinal data at this time.

Attendee: [One of the problems, even now are the long term side effects, I was afraid of that. A couple of weeks ago there was a lawsuit against Pfizer. The CDC has a number of people 65 and older who were vaccinated and are now having heart attacks and strokes. As far as children go, I was vaccinated but if he (pointing to her grandson with her) was my child he would be vaccinated too, it's her personal view. We all had to get vaccinations before we went to school.

Attendee: [My first and second shot and my booster were all fine. Like someone mentioned there's lots of misinformation, early on the updates were constant. There's so much going on like Black Lives Matter, seems like we are in survival mode and the people that are supposed to lead should give us some reassurance.

- **Outcome 4: To find out if social media provided information on COVID19.**
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** Have you seen or heard any information about COVID19 vaccines (e.g., on the news, on social media) that you could not determine were true or false?
- **Findings from the focus group:** The group felt that social media had a mixture of ideas and thoughts with no singular consistent message.

Attendee: [I heard something about the affects it would have on pregnant women]

Attendee: [My mom got a kidney, and the doctor was saying while she is alive she should get the vaccination but they did not want her to get it in the first round]

Attendee: [I heard a lot of things on social media about the vaccine being a good thing]

Attendee: [I heard the vaccine will make you feel some kind of way and make you sick. They just want to take your data and put it in the system]

- **Outcome 5: To find out who people trust to get information on the vaccine.**
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** Who do you trust when it comes to information on the vaccine?
- **Findings from the focus group:** To group all agreed that the religious community needs to be more involved in telling people facts about the vaccine. Most people were hesitant at initially getting the vaccine but after talking to trusting people they got it.

Attendee: [I trust myself; I always want to read and decipher what the sources are saying. I would go to various websites for information. Let's say I have a distrust for the government and the healthcare system, I would take my time and read then proceed. During the summer Miss F and a lot of other gurus on campus did a lot of research and gave us the opportunity to study and read what they had. A lot of positive information came from that, whether you believe it or not. We got this information almost weekly, they kept us informed since our department was one of the only ones where people could work from home, but we actually came into the office to work.

Attendee: [We are expected to trust the people who are in the field doing research, I'm and educator and people trust their kids with me. People trust me because I am teaching and doing the job. One thing bothered me was that we had a President of the United States who was not qualified]

Attendee: [I was told by my coach and mentor you better get the vaccine if you're going to play and be around everyone, so I did]

Attendee: [I played sports and trusted the people around me every day, and seeing how it affected those that took the vaccine. If it was negative, I wouldn't take it, but I chose to take it because I've seen the positive affect on the community and the people I trust.

Attendee: [When it first came out I was told not to take it. I was getting by and like he said earlier if it ain't broke don't fix it. I was working at a bakery and a nursing home at the same time, and I was still good. I have to make money; I have a daughter. I really didn't think about this until I got here (Lane College) and my coach and mentor was like, I'm sorry you'll have to go if you don't get the vaccine. He was basically opening up my eyes, he said social media is not going to give you all the information you need to know, do your own research. So, I did a little bit of research and I asked around right before I got it. I asked, "how did it make you feel" and

people said you'll be a little tired. I took it and it was okay, then I had the second shot and it wasn't as bad as the first shot.

Attendee: [In the denomination I'm in, really good people got vaccinated, our presiding Bishop got some of the best scientists to collaborate with all of us. They started having meetings with everyone, showing videos, and telling the pros and the cons. They explained things and said: sit down, this is like that, etc. A whole bunch of people started to open up about the vaccine. Pastors should get more involved and start promoting the vaccine and take the time like they do with offerings. Get Christian scientists that have the information to refute misinformation and tell the facts, then let people make their own decisions]

- **Outcome 6:** To find out when attendees made the decision to vaccinate.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** What is the precise moment when you decided you'd get vaccinated?
- **Findings from the focus group:** Several had sick loved ones that prompted them to get vaccinated, or they would not be allowed to do something they wanted until they were vaccinated. Getting money to vaccinate was also an important incentive for many.

Attendee: [I was real sick and I went to the doctor, he came into my room and said I had COVID19. He said with what we are seeing you're not gonna live. He told me I could get a shot in my stomach they called it an infusion; with that I could get well. He said if I get COVID again the infusions may not help. He said when you get well get vaccinated. I got well and I said okay I'm too young to die so I got the Johnson and Johnson vaccine (lot's of laughter from the group]

Attendee: [I was forced to take the vaccine because I changed jobs, and it was required]

Attendee: [Back in 2020 my stepfather had a massive heart attack he died but came back. He was weak but he's feeling better now. He's still prone to things for sure. So being fully vaccinated helps me go back home and be around my parents and siblings, and everyone is safe]

Attendee: [I was told if I didn't get vaccinated, I wouldn't be able to play basketball. When I came back to campus, they were giving money out to get vaccinated so I did and it worked out]

Attendee: [I was in ICU with my 6-week-old daughter in my arms, they didn't know how much longer she would have so my husband and I and her siblings got vaccinated. She's fine but it was heartbreaking]

Attendee: [My moment was when I got a phone call that my mentor had died, and a lot of people really close to us knew him. The vaccine hadn't been created yet but when it was available, I was going to get it and I did]

Attendee: [I'm big on making money and I have a family so I would not like to get it but vaccinating gets me money. I'm glad I took it though because it definitely opened up more opportunities for me to grow]

Attendee: [During the pandemic when everything was shut down, my cousin's mom would have zoom parties where we could all hang out. It seemed like every month someone we knew had it. Luckily, I live by myself, so I was good. I watched my cousin get it, everybody was recovering but she got so sick she couldn't walk. I started wondering if this thing was gonna get me, it seemed like it could really take you out. She went to rehab and was doing better. It kept me on my toes, so I got it and got the booster on campus. The thing that really shook me was after all she went through, she still said she didn't know if she would get the vaccine]

Attendee: [I was a junior in high school when COVID started running rampant and it was the end of our basketball season. We were getting ready for the championship game, and they had to cancel it because of COVID. One of my teammates got COVID and exposed everybody and I brought it back home. My dad got sick and was hospitalized, he died twice but was brought back, after that I got the vaccine]

Attendee: [I was home over break when COVID first came out. I was outside with my little brothers playing football. During the night I got really really sick, and I was saying "what is this" my mom who is a nurse and works at a hospital figured that it was COVID. My temperature was high, I couldn't keep any food down, my body was weak. I didn't want to feel like that, I felt like I was on the verge of death. When it was time for me to come back to school, I got the vaccine. First because of school, and then secondly, I wanted to play football. I wanted to be around the environment and community again and the money was a reason too]

Attendee: [My mom was a stroke patient, she had a stroke when she was 24 years old so she gets everything, the flu shot and anything else. She was adamant that she would get the COVID vaccine, she had tears in her eyes, so I had to take her. She kept asking me to get it with her and you want to make your parent happy. I said I would leave it in the hands of God, and I got it too]

Attendee: [My dad is 80 something and went and got his vaccination rather than being questioned or persuaded. I was asking him if he felt sick and he said no. I told him that people were getting sick all around and he said they were probably sick before that anyway.

Someone's mother died in the office from COVID, so we all went together and got vaccinated. My dad helped me make the decision by seeing how it handled it]

- **Outcome 7:** To determine why attendees did or didn't vaccinate their children.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** If you are a parent, what influenced your decision to vaccinate or not vaccinate your child.
- **Findings from the focus group:** It was a mixture of some children being vaccinated and some not.

Attendee: [I really prayed about it but I feel they are not old enough. They have been vaccinated for other things and there's history with those vaccinations, I can go back years and look at research. There's not enough history with the COVID vaccine. I was nervous for myself, but I am vaccinated. I'm still thinking about whether I should get them vaccinated but right now I haven't]

Attendee: [My daughter is in kindergarten and she's around other kids, so she has been vaccinated we both got vaccinated]

- **Outcome 8:** To find out what makes attendees feel good about getting the vaccine.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** For you what is the best thing about being vaccinated?
- **Findings from the focus group:** Everyone agreed that being vaccinated gave them a sense of freedom and the ability to get back to some normalcy.

Attendee: [You can move around, play sports, get back into the community and interact with people, you can get on a plane and go somewhere]

Attendee: [The reassurance that I'm covered, not saying I won't get COVID but if I do, I won't be real sick, my dad that I mentioned earlier just got COVID but because he's been vaccinated he wasn't really sick. He said no need on coming over to check on me, I'm fine]

- **Outcome 9:** To learn if attendees experience discourtesy when they go to medical professionals.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** When you go to the doctor or clinic, is there anything that makes you feel disrespected? Are there things that you wish vaccine providers and other medical staff knew about your community?
- **Findings from the focus group:**

Attendee: [Some preconceived notions that medical professionals have about black people. When I'm explaining my pain and asking can they do something, because I'm a black woman they say stop doing that, even when I know something isn't right]

Attendee: [The quality of care is different when you have insurance from work or insurance like Medicare. They don't talk to my mother like my primary care physician]

Attendee: [I think everyone is saying the same thing, with this new online insurance lot's of doctors of the last generation are retiring. It used to be that the doctor knew you and your family, but now it's your chart number and name and they don't engage with you]

Attendee: [Schools had closed, and I think Lane was closed because we had large COVID numbers. That was kind of in the news a little when I went to the doctor. They know I work at Lane with the team. The asked if I was working from home or the office. At that time, I worked in housing and in the office. I felt a little uncomfortable with the questions]

Attendee: [We have to go across town sometimes to get available health care]

Attendee: [I purposely went to a clinic in my hometown on the white side so I could get better health care. When I thought I had COVID, I had a chill and I wanted to get it checked out, I wanted to make sure nothing was attacking my body. They were very nice, welcoming, very warm. I was in the room for 30 minutes waiting for lab results. I could hear their conversation outside the door, they didn't want to come in and tell me. I wish they would have been a little more like the image they gave off when I first came in]

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the attendees were happy and glad to be vaccinated, there was some laughter with talk of the problems with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The mixed messages and the concerns about the recalls was mentioned. All attendees showed a great amount of compassion for family, friends and acquaintances who had COVID 19. Many of the attendees got vaccinated because they didn't want anyone else to get sick like they did.

Getting money to get vaccinated definitely worked for many especially the younger population, this clearly was an important incentive for them. Similarly, a trusted friend, teacher or mentor telling them about the vaccine made all the difference as well. In addition, the religious community played a significant role in influencing some, this is an area that needs to be addressed further.

We hope that this report can inform approaches and strategies to get more people in West Tennessee vaccinated.

COVID19 Vaccine Listening Session

Tennessee Health Care Campaign

Summary

The Tennessee Health Care Campaign in partnership with various community groups organized a focus group about the COVID19 vaccine. The purpose of the focus group was to listen to people who have been vaccinated for COVID19 (some were vaccinated and boosted, others just vaccinated) and to learn the reasons why they chose to do so. It is the hope that this can inform approaches and strategies to get more people in Crockett County vaccinated.

Introduction

The focus group consisted of 8 African-American people (5 women and 3 men) who have been vaccinated for COVID19 and who attended the discussion session at House of Faith Church at 411 W. Church Street, Alamo, TN 38001 on Thursday, January 26th 2023 – 6:00p.m. The focus group session was designed to gather information from the attendees in regard to the following

- To find out why people made the decision to get vaccinated.
- To understand concerns and opinions attendees' hear from unvaccinated people in the circle of influence.
- To learn more about attendee perceptions of doctor, clinic and vaccine providers.

Attendees' Perspectives Listening Session

- **Outcome 1:** To know if they regularly get the flu vaccine.
- **Question asked during focus group:** Many of us have made a decision on the flu vaccine. Do you regularly get a flu vaccine? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- **Findings from the focus group:** The majority of the group gets the flu vaccine, a few were emphatic about not taking it at all with no explanation or reason. The pneumonia vaccine was mentioned by one person, then the others mentioned it, but it was not in the question.

Attendee: [I don't get it, I never get sick, I don't get the flu or colds]

Attendee: [I had the flu once so bad, since then I take the pneumonia and flu shot]

Attendee: [I don't take it because I don't need it]

Attendee: [I got the flu 3 times in one year, after that I take it]

Attendee: [I take the flu shot every year and I've gotten the pneumonia once]

Attendee: [I got sick after I took the flu shot, I take the pneumonia shot because it helps your respiratory system, but I don't take the flu shot anymore]

Attendee: [I took the flu and pneumonia shot at the same time, I got a reaction with a sore arm, so I just take the flu every year now]

Attendee: [I don't take the flu shot, if I did I know if would catch it]

- **Outcome 2:** To know the reasons why other people are unsure about the COVID19 vaccine.
- **Questions asked during focus group:** With the COVID19 vaccine, many people are still undecided, especially about vaccinating their children. If you know anyone who is unsure about the COVID19 vaccine or booster, why are they unsure? What questions do they have?
- **Findings from the focus group:** The majority of the group felt that misinformation and conflicting information contributed to people not taking the vaccine. All felt that getting it was a good thing to do.

Attendee: [They don't trust the system but they need to really take it, especially when it first came out]

Attendee: [Yeah Dr. Fauci said wear a mask, don't wear a mask, wear three masks. It's all for your own good. You should take it to protect you, it protects you from getting it when you are in the public, it helps]

Attendee: [I think out of ignorance, some say if I'm going to die from something and it's up to GOD. But GOD gives you sense to do what's right. Some have other reasons but mainly it's out of ignorance]

Attendee: [Some feel if they get the shot it will make them sick since the flu shot made them sick. I saw how many local people died from it, they would be in town eating breakfast at a local spot then some died from it. It made me afraid not to take the vaccine]

Attendee: [I knew someone that took the 1st shot and they were fine, they took the 2nd one and got sick then they said the COVID shot makes you sick]

Attendee: [I had the 1st shot then had no appetite for awhile, I lost 25 pounds, I took the 2nd shot then it made me eat]

Attendee: [Ignorance and not paying attention to the information they were given is part of it. I got COVID during revival last year, it made me tired and sleepy, but that was it, I took precautions and I was fine]

- **Outcome 3:** To learn some of the things people think about the COVID19 vaccine.
- **Questions asked during focus group:** In thinking about people you know who have clear opinions on COVID19 and the vaccine, what are some of the things you've heard from them about the COVID19 vaccine, pro or con? And what about children taking it?
- **Findings from the focus group:** There is a lot of misinformation that people hear about the vaccine, plus it has been politicized so much. The group heard lot's of reasons not to get to shot from people in the community but they all opted to get it anyway.

Attendee: [My brother had COVID and the doctor told him if he hadn't gotten the vaccine he would have died. His wife was taking care of him, he got pneumonia she ultimately died from COVID. It made me think well I better get this, it's better to be safe than sorry]

Attendee: [Some people think since they are already sick with other things that taking it would make them sicker]

Attendee: [Yeah and I took it because I have diabetes and other things]

Attendee: [My friend got COVID, he said his kids got it too but they were still riding their bikes and not acting sick because he said they have a different metabolism. He said it felt like he had glass in his lungs, he couldn't breathe, he said it was horrible. If I hadn't taken it after hearing his situation I would have run to get the shot. His kids never got the shot but he did]

Attendee: [I sometimes work in the schools and there were lots of mixed feeling from parents. Some didn't want that poison in their children, others did get it for their children. The children wore masks because they had a pregnant teacher, I told them they had to do the same thing for me. One child said his parents opted out of mask wearing, I told him I might have to opt him out of the class]

- **Outcome 4:** To find out if social media provided information on COVID19.

- **Questions asked during the focus group:** Have you seen or heard any information about COVID19 vaccines (e.g., on the news, on social media) that you could not determine were true or false?
- **Findings from the focus group:** No one in the group used social media outlets in any substantive way.

No social media usage in the group

- **Outcome 5: To find out who people trust to get information on the vaccine.**
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** Who do you trust when it comes to information on the vaccine?
- **Findings from the focus group:** Most attendees trusted the medical profession for information on the vaccine. Faith, prayer and trusting that God will help them make a good decision was also evident in the group.

Attendee: [I trust the doctors]

Attendee: [I trust the doctors and GOD, he told me to get the vaccine]

Attendee: [Research and scientist and Dr. Fauci. There have been a lot of vaccines that we got and we didn't know much about it but science did]

Attendee: [I go to the Mayo Clinic website for my information]

Attendee: [The good Lord]

Attendee: [Health professionals, early on in COVID, I would see information on TV almost every day of pictures of people in hospitals with tubes, I didn't want any part of that, plus someone in my house kept bugging me so I got the vaccine.

Attendee: [The doctors and other professional people, especially when they said people with underlying conditions needed it. I'm not diabetic but I am borderline, so the shot helped. I also have fluid because I'm not active, so I needed the shot.

- **Outcome 6:** To find out when attendees made the decision to vaccinate.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** What is the precise moment when you decided you'd get vaccinated?
- **Findings from the focus group:** The majority of attendees were ready to get the vaccine as soon as they could and felt positive about getting it.

Attendee: [Before it came out I wanted to get it, so as soon as it was out I got it]

Attendee: [When they said we have it and it's for your age group I went and got it]

Attendee: [I heard about Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, but I knew I wanted Moderna based on what I was hearing it was the mildest. I heard of some guys dying in Texas so as soon as I could I got it]

Attendee: [It was on TV and I said get up and get moving, then I prayed]

Attendee: [I kept hearing my brother say he was sick a week after that I got vaccinated]

- **Outcome 7:** To determine why attendees did or didn't vaccinate their children.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** If you are a parent, what influenced your decision to vaccinate or not vaccinate your child.
- **Findings from the focus group:** This was briefly discussed earlier, participants mentioned children in a cursory way, most of the attendees have none or older children.

There was little to no responses regarding children other than some mention in other questions.

- **Outcome 8:** To find out what makes attendees feel good about getting the vaccine.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** For you what is the best thing about being vaccinated?
- **Findings from the focus group:** Overall everyone felt that vaccinating was positive for them personally and professionally. All felt that it was the healthy thing to do in a community and society.

Attendee: [I feel safe and comfortable about my health]

Attendee: [I feel free]

Attendee: [I feel good that If I get it I won't have to go to the hospital, your loved ones can't visit you in the room. I remember kids used to take measles and polio shots but nowadays they won't get the vaccine. It is protection.

Attendee: [I feel good knowing I have it because I work with the elderly it's good for me and them]

Attendee: [I feel safe, if I'm around others I put my mask on for me and them. My 18 year old son did not want to get it so I was always spraying the house, eventually he got the vaccine]

Attendee: [I feel free to go – I hate wearing the mask]

Attendee: [I feel safe, I got COVID after getting the vaccine and it wasn't bad at all]

- **Outcome 9:** To learn if attendees experience discourtesy when they go to medical professionals.
- **Questions asked during the focus group:** When you go to the doctor or clinic, is there anything that makes you feel disrespected? Are there things that you wish vaccine providers and other medical staff knew about your community?
- **Findings from the focus group:**

Attendee: [When I go to the doctor and other people are coughing with no mask on and they start talking about how dumb people are for wearing masks, it makes you want to leave. If I didn't believe in I would still wear a mask to protect myself and others.

Attendee: [Some people just be doing it to do it when they see you with a mask on. I hate to get racial but it's white folks being right up on you coughing, it's so disrespectful]

Attendee: [It's disrespectful when their kids are sick and they push them off on other people at school, like head lice. Then they won't take them to the doctor]

Attendee: [I went to the doctor about 15 times about my hip, he kept saying you should stop complaining. Someone said I should go to the bone and joint center, when I went they said my hip bone was displaced.

Attendee: [I feel disrespected when I have an 8:00 appointment and I don't get seen to 9:30. I know sometimes there are circumstances that happen but when it happens almost every time it's not good. If I'm late okay, but If I'm on time I want to be seen on time]

Attendee: [The doctors sometime won't even look at you to see what's happening, they say we'll give you this or that but won't give you enough time for their patients]

Attendee: [When you go somewhere or talk to your landlord you should wear a mask, or they should put a sign on the door. Some people won't do it.

Attendee: [My community has caring people in it, we are black but it doesn't mean we don't care. We are concerned about our neighbors.

Attendee: [How is it that everyone you talk to is on the same medicine for high blood pressure or whatever. Everyone's body is different, when you ask them what they are taking for high

blood pressure they will say Losartan or something else. They just give all blacks the same medicine]

Attendee: [I read the prescription information and it said not good for African- Americans, I took it back to the pharmacy and he said surely they knew your were black. I didn't take it. They think because you are black you are ignorant so they just take your money]

Attendee: [First they ask for your family history assuming you have what other family members have, my uncle ate everything he wanted, he was 90 and had a 34 waist, everybody is not the same]

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, the attendees appeared to be pleased with the vaccine and some said they would get one or another booster. Some attendees had 2 shots and 3 boosters, 2 shots and no boosters and other combinations. All attendees wished everyone would get the vaccine, caring for the community was an important reason to all. Many expressed concerns about mask wearing and the desire to see it more in public places.

Because many of the attendees said that they prayed and asked God for answers, it is highly recommended that community leaders especially pastors and deacons encourage their congregations to get the vaccine. Providing testimonials from pastors and deacons in the larger community could be effective, holding a focus group with them could be useful.

Focus Group Facilitator Dr. Robin Gadsden-Dupree, Crockett County Vaccine Ambassador

Lessons Learned

THCC conducted 2 listening sessions in January, 2023 with a total of 24 participants. The sessions were located at a historically Black college and church. In the two sessions, 24 adults shared their feelings about the COVID Vaccine and their motivations for getting vaccinated.

The participants were all glad that they were vaccinated. They wished everyone would take the vaccine. Many had friends or family members who had suffered or died from COVID 19. Caring for the community was an important motivation in their decision to vaccinate. They hoped to prevent others from getting sick.

Participants heard conflicting messages about vaccination. Some pointed out that the recommendations changed as the pandemic wore on. They cited changing messages about masking and updated information about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine. Some heard complaints from friends who felt the vaccine made them sick. Participants also expressed concern about the legacy of racism and in some cases the current disrespect of black patients.

Nevertheless, the participants turned to medicine for answers about the COVID vaccine. They mentioned Dr. Fauci and the Mayo clinic, as well as local doctors.

Amidst all the rumors and misinformation, many in the group turned to trusted leaders for advice about getting vaccinated. The college students turned to coaches and faculty mentors. Incentives also helped motivate the college students. Family members played a role in encouraging vaccination. Participants of all ages mentioned the importance prayer and advice from clergy.

These listening sessions point to the importance of trusted local messengers, such as medical and faith leaders, in overcoming vaccine hesitancy. Future programs in Culturally Competent COVID Vaccination for frontline medical staff, and in Faith-Based health initiatives are recommended. Qualitative research with faith leaders would help us better understand how to overcome barriers and support clergy in this role.

Both of the listening session groups only account for a small sample of the communities that they represent. Our findings cannot be considered exhaustive, but do provide some key insights and guidance as we work to develop messaging and programs to encourage COVID-19 vaccinations.