



Vaccinating People Affected by Homelessness

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Vaccinating the homeless is an essential step in battling the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, it has proven to be a challenge for municipal governments. Cities have to solve issues regarding distribution, planning second doses, and general distrust among the homeless towards the very governments tasked with keeping them safe. Despite these many barriers, some cities have kept the homeless population a top priority. By executing creative solutions to problems that arise from homeless vaccination, cities like Denver and Washington give hope to the large homeless population otherwise left vulnerable to COVID-19.

Governments have to ensure that people affected by homelessness have access to the vaccines. Unfortunately, people affected by homelessness lack the technology that affords others the ability to plan their own vaccination. Lindsey Van Ness from the Pew Charitable Trusts argues that, although twenty states do not include people living in homeless shelters in their vaccination plan, prioritizing these shelters may be the most efficient way to vaccinate the homeless population. Shelters could provide people affected by homelessness with direct access to the vaccine, as well as a way to schedule their second dose and a means of making that appointment. Van Ness also identifies some conflicts with states' vaccination plans: "Denver officials are sending teams to shelters to vaccinate homeless people age 65 and older." Although the state of Colorado prioritized seniors over the homeless, Denver still sent vaccination teams to shelters. If the state and city had agreed on vaccination priorities, Denver could have gotten an even bigger head start on vaccinating the shelter. Thankfully, Denver kept it mind those affected by homelessness and did what they could to help them.

Cities face a new set of problems when attempting to vaccinate people experiencing homelessness that do not live in shelters. Olivia Pham from the Kaiser Family Foundation reports cities using mobile teams to vaccinate those that live on the street. However, since most vaccines require a second dose, mobile teams have to deal with scheduling, inventory, vaccine expiration, and finding people with homelessness who might suffer a physical or mental disability or a substance addiction that could prevent them from making the appointment themselves. Stefan Sykes from NBC claims that the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine helped alleviate a lot of the problems that arose from mobile vaccination. However, recent information on this vaccine, including issues with blood clots, might make this vaccine a less

viable option. The recent negative attention to the vaccine will not help with the current distrust among people experiencing homelessness.

People affected by homelessness do not generally trust the vaccine. This is the most difficult problem states and cities have had to struggle against. Though exact statistics are not yet available, Lindsey Van Ness provided some information from their own investigation that suggested about half of the people in a homeless shelter eligible for a vaccine actually take it during any one visit. Stefan Sykes attributes this vaccine hesitancy to misinformation regarding the vaccine in addition to a pre-existing mistrust towards the government. Sykes also reported that Washington, D.C. attempted a peer education program that allowed homeless people to encourage their community to get vaccinated. Ironically, some of the peer mentors have not accepted the vaccination themselves. Olivia Pham claims that “gift cards, socks, and other basics” are great incentives for people experiencing homeless to vaccinate.

Works Cited

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