

LESSONS ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINE MESSAGING AND DELIVERY FOR MARGINALISED POPULATIONS/COMMUNITIES

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Background:

Achieving high COVID-19 vaccination rates can reduce severe outcomes including hospitalisations and deaths. However, some in the Australian community remain un- or under-vaccinated for COVID-19. We investigated perspectives of COVID-19 vaccination among Australian populations/communities with histories of social marginalisation.

Methods:

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews before and throughout Australia's vaccination program (November 2020-October 2021) from three studies: people who inject drugs (PWID) in New South Wales, people living with HIV (PLHIV) and gay and bisexual men (GBM) around Australia. Data for PWID were collected before vaccines were widely available (November 2020-February 2021). Analyses were informed by the WHO's 'Behavioural and Social Determinants of COVID-19' model.

Results:

62 participants aged 23-78 years were interviewed. Vaccine context at interview reflected vaccination uptake (no PWID participants, minority of PLHIV, majority of GBM). Similarities were evident among perspectives and knowledge of vaccines, the social processes that inform them, risk of COVID-19, and practical issues of access. However, attitudes to vaccines were influenced by unique histories of social marginalisation. All populations/communities viewed vaccination as important, safety concerns were expressed, although PLHIV were more trusting of new biomedical technologies. Distrust was evident among PWID and GBM, however, expressions of this differed (general suspicion versus distrust of pharmaceutical companies, including influenced by cultural background). Practical issues (e.g., booking, travel) were more common among PLHIV and GBM, possibly influenced by interview timing.

Conclusion:

Marginalised populations/communities acknowledged the benefits of vaccination. Reaching them with appropriate messaging and access to vaccination is key. Histories of distrust among two groups highlighted the importance of collaborating with trusted local networks for high vaccine uptake. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented

learning opportunities about designing systems that maximise vaccine messaging and delivery and reducing marginalisation of key populations/communities.

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