

Opportunities & Barriers to Improve Immunization Rates Among Medicaid-Covered Children & Pregnant People: Targeting Medicaid Partnerships Community of Practice (CoP)

Project Overview

Partnerships between Medicaid and immunization programs are critical to improving immunization rates for children and pregnant people with Medicaid coverage. AcademyHealth, the National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) and Immunize Colorado coordinated efforts for a three-year CDC funded cooperative agreement to implement new state-based strategies and policies to address immunization gaps among low-income pregnant people and children. The project's objectives were to make changes to state Medicaid policies or outreach procedures to facilitate vaccination of children living in poverty, implement policies that include providers caring for pregnant people and/or adults as covered vaccinators, and improve MMIS and Immunization Information System (IIS) information exchange to support outreach and targeted interventions. Embarking on this project at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CoP state teams faced common challenges including but not limited to staff bandwidth due to COVID-19 response efforts, workforce challenges, vaccine misinformation, and capacity of external partners. Despite these challenges, states were able to demonstrate significant accomplishments in expanding vaccination infrastructure and partnerships to improve vaccination rates among individuals covered by Medicaid. Washington state's CoP team was comprised of Health Care Authority (HCA) Medicaid agency and Department of Health (DOH) Office of Immunization staff.

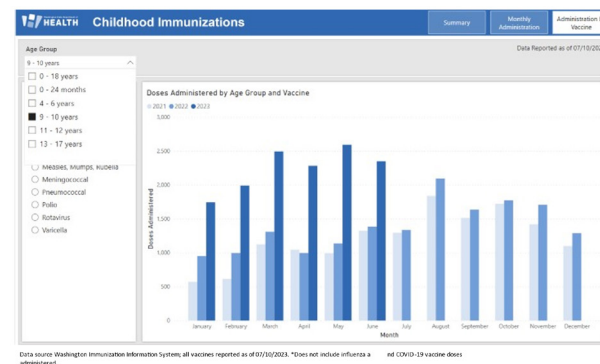
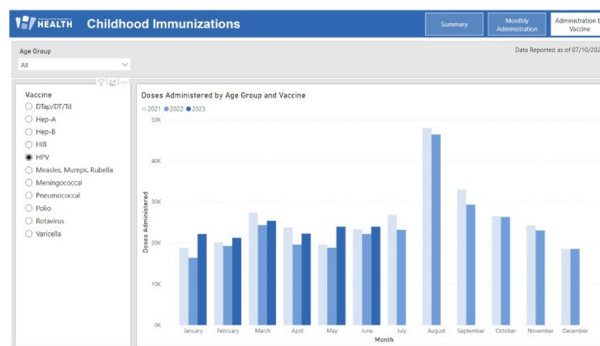
Washington's individual goals for this project were:

1. Identify gaps in data system exchange and update data reporting and analysis
 - a. Upgrade managed care organization (MCO) and Immunization Information System (IIS) exchange to more standard interface and exchange
 - b. Take an equity lens to data
 - c. Identify and leverage funding to support the IIS data infrastructure
 - d. Create a dashboard (DOH data combined with ProviderOne data) for routine immunizations to allow for more accurate reporting
2. Promote healthy families and increase use of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) exams for children and adolescents to increase vaccinations
3. Reduce barriers to accessing primary care services for Medicaid clients
4. Understand implications of providing pediatric vaccines in pharmacies and impact on well-child visits

Project Successes

Improved Provider Engagement & Education

- DOH launched the [Power of Providers](#) (POP) initiative to capitalize on the impact of provider recommendations on COVID-19 vaccinations. The POP initiative establishes partnerships with providers to identify and address barriers to vaccination by giving providers the training and materials they need to effectively communicate with patients.
- DOH supports the [Immunization Quality Improvement for Providers](#) (IQIP) initiative to advance provider-level quality improvement strategies designed to increase vaccine uptake among children. A recent project that came out of this initiative was a collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to promote providing HPV vaccines beginning at age nine. DOH identified messaging strategies to recommend that providers begin providing HPV vaccines to children starting at age nine. DOH added a prompt in the IIS system to encourage providers to have these conversations with parents when children turn nine years old.



- To prepare for commercialization of COVID-19 vaccines, DOH surveyed providers participating in the COVID-19, Vaccines for Children (VFC), or adult vaccine programs to get an understanding of their future plans to continue to provide these vaccines. The majority of providers (78%) indicated plans to continue offering COVID-19 vaccine after the commercialization of vaccine. The providers who indicated no plans to offer COVID-19 vaccine after commercialization (22%) were large mass vaccination sites or vaccine depot centers established to redistribute vaccine. Several COVID program only providers expressed intent in enrolling in one of the other publicly supplied vaccine programs:
 - Interested in enrolling in Adult Vaccine Program (49.0%)
 - Interested in enrolling in both programs (47.0%)
 - Interested in enrolling in the Childhood Vaccine Program (4%)
- DOH initiated collaboration with HCA in September 2022 to increase vaccination rates in Medicaid children under age 3. These children have experienced decreased vaccination coverage during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on interviews and surveys of healthcare providers, there are capacity concerns in catching up children who are behind in their vaccinations. The identified strategies are focused in three counties in Washington state, and include:
 - Conducting reminder/recall
 - Organizing large routine childhood vaccination clinics
 - Sharing resources with healthcare providers and families
- DOH assessed if there are other reasons for gaps and barriers related to vaccination through provider interviews and direct feedback. With the goal to provide all VFC providers an opportunity to give feedback on the program, barriers, and opportunities for improvement, DOH identified several key opportunities:
 - Adding new parent education tools including for exam room in process;
 - Using Care-a-Van to support childhood vaccinations;
 - Creating provider tools for use on reminder/recall efforts (recording, etc.);
 - Streamlining medical assistant training a sharing a competency toolkit; and
 - Creating tools and communication resources is needed to ensure appropriate community supports (translated materials, in-office language support, etc.).

Expanded Stakeholder Collaboration

- Washington established regular collaboration between the DOH Office of Immunization (DOH) and the Health Care Authority (HCA), the state Medicaid agency. For instance, DOH and HCA collaborated to:
 - Convene focus groups for 3000 Medicaid beneficiaries to gain better understanding of vaccination uptake and target messaging on where individuals can receive vaccines.
 - Launch a quality improvement initiative with MCOs to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates.
 - Issue joint guidance encouraging pharmacy partners to vaccinate down to age 6 months.
 - Partner with Washington State Pharmacy Association to gather information and address billing and other barriers pharmacies face in providing vaccine services to Medicaid clients and participation in the VFC program.
- DOH created a 2023 [Immunization Strategic Map](#) to outline strategic goals

related to vaccination in alignment with the Department's [Transformational Plan](#). This roadmap set the direction of the Department in addressing vaccination challenges, prioritizing populations, and partnering across organizations and with communities.

- Through the Rate Improvement Projects with local health jurisdictions (LHJs), DOH annually provides opportunities to all LHJs to identify a quality improvement project that they would like to work on with their communities. Available funding is split based on county residency rates and can be used for these funds based on federally approved expenditures identified including, for example, education and training materials, personnel costs, etc.

Leveraged Data to Address Disparities

- DOH updates a public [COVID-19 data dashboard](#) and regularly publishes reports focusing on COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage by Race and Ethnicity in Washington State Counties.
- DOH and HCA began developing reports on COVID-19 vaccination rates for Medicaid clients on a monthly basis. The reports highlight vaccination rates by age group, race/ethnicity, and county.
- DOH and HCA are working to update an immunization data exchange between managed care organizations (MCOs) and DOH to be more standard across all MCOs. Data sharing will occur on a monthly basis.
- DOH and HCA are partnering with MCOs, providers, and communities on an ongoing basis to remove barriers and increase access and vaccination rates for children.

Incentivized Providers to Reach Vaccination Goals

- The HCA provides financial rewards to Medicaid MCOs when they meet the Combination 10 immunization measure.
- The HCA added the 99401 billing code to reimburse providers for COVID-19 vaccine counseling.
- The HCA matched Medicare rates for vaccine administration, including pharmacies and home-based vaccination.

Expanded Access to Immunizations and Health Care

- The HCA updated the EPSDT billing guide to a calendar year policy for well-child visits, giving families more timing flexibility in scheduling well-child appointments.
- DOH increased access to vaccinations through [Care-A-Van](#) mobile health clinic, which prioritizes communities most impacted by COVID-19 and other vaccine inequities. Care-A-Van provides COVID-19, influenza, mpox and routine child vaccines, as well as blood pressure and blood sugar checks.
 - This initiative provided a total of 55,489 COVID-19 vaccine doses (as of July 12, 2023).
 - There are 1,990 clinics in 36 counties in Washington state.
 - More than 50% of the clinics served BIPOC communities.
 - Approximately 77% of the clinics were held in areas with a social vulnerability index (SVI) of 7 or higher.

- DOH and HCA are collaborating to amplify messaging for providers who provide perinatal/obstetrical care to increase vaccination rates for recommended vaccines during pregnancy.
- DOH is collaborating with education partners to improve access to vaccines at schools. For instance, in partnership with DOH, Washington's Seattle Public School district implemented school-based clinics, strategic messaging, and community engagement efforts to improve immunization rates, particularly among Black and multilingual students. A recent [study](#) showed that vaccination rates for students in this district ages 5-18 increased from 56.5 percent to 80.3 percent between December 2021 and June 2022. Ongoing support for schools/school districts across the state as well as childcare centers through the Immunization Module (also known as the School Module) helps support identification of children who are under-vaccinated or out of compliance with immunization requirements defined in RCW. More information is available: [IIS School Module Fact Sheet \(wa.gov\)](#).

COVID: By the Numbers*

In Washington, 5,930,701 people or 75.4% of the state has received at least one dose.

Overall, 5,443,653 people or 69.2% of Washington's population are considered fully vaccinated.

As of August 21, 2023, 16,898,516 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Washington

(*All data as of August 21, 2023)

Source: [COVID-19 Vaccination Data | Washington State Department of Health](#)

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