

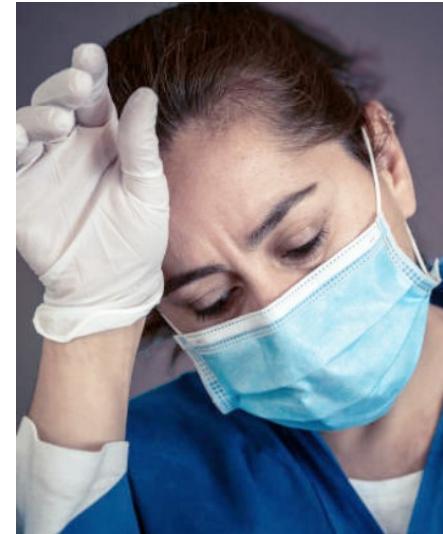


# COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Vaccination Readiness

Americans will only be able to return to our way of life when a COVID-19 vaccine is created and administered to the entire population. Political division and government distrust threaten the volunteer reception of the vaccine that is currently under development.

COVID-19 has disproportionately endangered Hispanic communities across the United States. A lack of tailored awareness communications creates a continuing environment of increased risk. HCN understands how to effectively communicate and reach these specific, yet very diverse audiences and, along with our partners, has the capability to create a multi-cultural communications campaign to generate COVID-19 vaccine awareness.



The COVID-19 pandemic is the largest health crisis to threaten the United States in over a century. COVID-19 has been destructive to this nation on a cataclysmic scale—medical care facilities are overwhelmed and medical professionals have been forced to make difficult prioritization decisions, consumer spending has collapsed and resulted in unprecedented unemployment, and average Americans are struggling to financially support themselves. Meanwhile, the virus infections continue to increase, and the death toll rises.

Knowledge, developed from *accurate*, *accessible*, and *timely* information, is the most important resource that will enable the public to defeat the virus. In order to control the spread of the virus, the eventual COVID-19 vaccine will need to be widely accepted and vaccinations voluntarily received. In the current environment of disinformation and suspicion, communicating the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine should not be taken for granted.

## **A successful vaccine rollout will require an awareness campaign that addresses the public's doubts and counters misinformation. Every segment of America must be reached.**

No individual, family, or community should be left behind. Different communities require specific messaging at appropriate health literacy levels in order to achieve a mature understanding of misinformation trends, for which specific issue history expertise is required to meet the needs of each demographic. Communicating accurate and helpful information about the vaccine, its development, production, and distribution, along with creating awareness of existing resources is vital to effectively controlling the spread of COVID-19.

Vaccine development is currently underway and significant progress is being made. Researchers around the world are developing more than 160 vaccines against the coronavirus, and 26 vaccines are in human trials. The United States has so far invested nearly \$2.3 billion in the effort to find a vaccine to counter SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. At least two COVID-19 vaccine companies receiving millions of dollars from the U.S. government plan to eschew profits or set a single global price if their vaccines prove successful. To accelerate the process, the federal government is signing billion-dollar contracts with a handful of companies to design and manufacture candidate vaccines, agreeing to pay even if their product fails along the way.

But the investments made into research, design, and production will all be for naught if the public questions the safety or effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations and decides not to accept the vaccine.

Vaccinating the entire nation's population is the most effective method of controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate further havoc caused by this rampant disease, vaccine distribution will need to reach nearly everyone. People will need to accept and take vaccinations, and communication will play a primary role in increasing vaccine acceptance among the American public, which is increasingly skeptical due to lack of accurate and timely information to counter online rumors and inaccuracies.



Vaccine acceptance is a nuanced and difficult to define concept, especially since it is often influenced by implicit factors. According to a systematic review in the *Human Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics* Journal, “Vaccine acceptance depends on **public trust** and confidence in the **safety and efficacy** of vaccines and immunization, the health system, healthcare professionals and the wider vaccine research community.”

## Common Misconceptions/Miscommunication in Mass Media

When executed correctly, awareness campaigns reach the intended audience and leave a positive, lasting impression. However, COVID-19 vaccine awareness does not just happen. The risk of a failed campaign is successive waves of COVID-19 case increases, increasing distrust of authorities in the federal government and the medical community, and ultimately continued economic stagnation as the country struggles to reopen. The public becomes inundated with fear and suspicion when miscommunication and misinformation is rampant. If the public questions the safety of the vaccine or feels that the process was too rushed, there will be little volunteered reception of the vaccine, following all the costly efforts to develop and produce it.

The recent miscommunication on masks should serve as a warning of the messaging difficulties ahead. Initially, the American public was told explicitly NOT to wear masks and to reserve masks for only healthcare workers. As time went on, public messaging changed, and the public was encouraged TO WEAR masks. However, these contradictory public announcements eroded public confidence in the expertise of authorities and directly affected the spread of the virus, as the public questioned the reliability and accuracy of COVID-19 public messages. The mixed message on mask-wearing and lack of unity among different branches of government created an environment of confusion and a resistance to mask-wearing pervades even in states where elected leaders have publicly embraced masks. States continue to have varying stances and laws on mask-wearing and communicate different, often contradicting messages about COVID-19.

This kind of communications mismanagement cannot be repeated when it comes to vaccine distribution—it will only lead to extreme vaccine hesitation. As we draw closer toward a successful vaccine, low public trust will be direct impediment to voluntary administration of the vaccine and our best chance to regain control of the pandemic.

**Communications is the key to correcting this tremendous public trust obstacle. In fact, successful cultural communications strategies are the only method to increase trust in the vaccine.**

## Vaccine Trust and Distrust

To increase the speed and efficacy of vaccine distribution, public trust in vaccines must increase. Trust in vaccines is multi-faceted; people will need to believe that the research, development, and testing of the vaccine have been responsibly conducted with no room for error.

The American public is apprehensive of the quicker-than-usual vaccine development and testing process. To trust the vaccine means to believe that there were no short-cuts in any phase of vaccine development. Medical evidence must demonstrate the COVID-19 vaccine has gone through extensive research and testing. Consumer audiences must also believe the sources of information are above reproach. A campaign that relies only on presenting traditionally recognized facts through traditionally recognized channels will fail. Only an extremely thorough and benchmarked campaign that targets focused demographics and confronts and disproves misinformation will succeed.

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## The HCN Solution

HCN is a Washington DC based full-service social impact agency. All work is designed to improve quality of life for US Hispanic / Latinx consumers. HCN delivers culturally driven – not translations driven – multimedia strategies that create positive behavior. We use discovery research to identify the right mix of creative, messaging and communications platforms that engage priority Hispanic audiences with measurable results. With extensive experience conducting nationwide public awareness campaigns, HCN has the capabilities and robust expertise to administer far-reaching and impactful marketing campaigns to build a climate of trust for the eventual COVID-19 vaccine.

Hispanic communities are experiencing disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths in America. According to the CDC, Latinos represent more than 27% of COVID-19 related deaths in areas considered virus hotspots, despite accounting for 18% of the US population. For a population of 60 million Hispanics in the US, of which 75% mainly speak Spanish at home, there is an existing lack of Spanish-language resources on important health and safety precautions to address COVID-19.

With key insights on how to foster vaccine trust in the Hispanic community, HCN serves as the largest producer and syndicator of Spanish-language educational and informational media content in the US through its *La Red Hispana* multimedia networks. We work through trusted influencers and Latinx Celebrities to build a comprehensive communications strategy to combat misinformation. Micro-targeting audience subgroups will deliver targeted, factual information to the groups that will have the greatest impact. Our communications solutions currently reach 8+ million individuals weekly in top urban, medium, rural and emerging Hispanic markets nationwide.

HCN offers significant experience in communications, a unique and exclusive distribution network and a deep understanding of media as a whole—including, but not limited to: radio, TV, digital and social media, print, public relations, influencers, and podcasts—HCN is equipped to design, produce, and execute communications strategies that will greatly aid vaccination dissemination in the United States.

## Cultural Solutions. Meaningful Results.

### Let's Connect

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