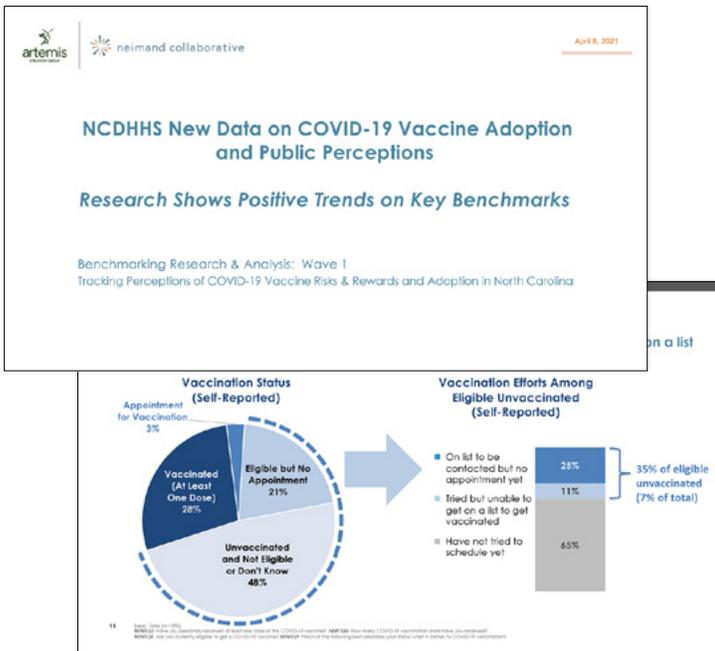


# CASE STUDY: Spanish Language Support

AUGUST 2023

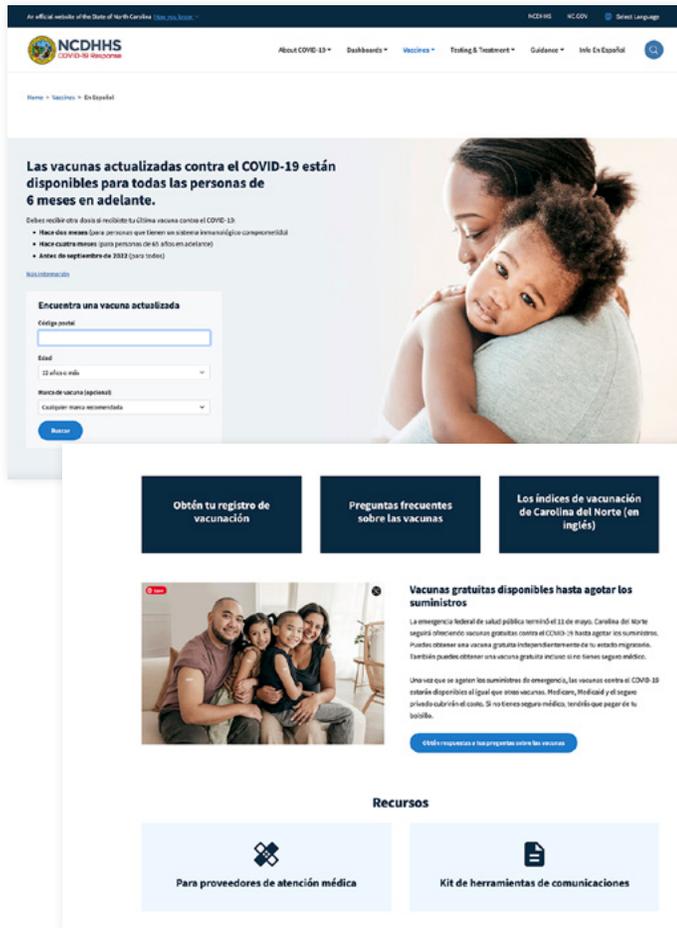
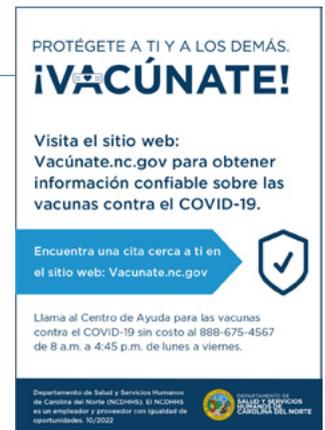
**Historically Marginalized Populations (HMPs), including the Hispanic/Latino community, were hardest hit during the pandemic.** According to the most recent census, almost eleven percent of North Carolina’s population is Hispanic/Latino, and more than three out of four speak a language other than English at home. Yet until the pandemic, many informational materials created and shared by NCDHHS were not available in Spanish. Early on, we engaged stakeholders to better understand this need and quickly realized that Spanish translation was a foundational part of our communication strategy. **Through research our team conducted**, we learned trust (or the lack thereof) impacted whether people would get their COVID-19 vaccine, particularly within historically marginalized populations. Our team wanted North Carolinians to trust the information they received from NCDHHS about COVID-19 vaccinations, and for the information to be provided in a culturally appropriate and linguistically competent manner.



Create culturally and linguistically appropriate materials.

We were intentional and proactive in how we incorporated Spanish translation into content development timelines, and we noted early on that we wanted all of our materials to be available in Spanish concurrently (not to provide Spanish after English was already available). Translated materials were reviewed to ensure readability, accuracy, consistency in terminology and cultural appropriateness for Hispanic/Latino readers and audiences.

We also embedded communication partners with expertise in culturally and linguistically appropriate messaging and strategy. This engagement led to the creation of our first Spanish-language COVID-19 vaccine campaign, “¡Vacúnate!”. The campaign served as a companion to the English language “You have a spot, take your shot” campaign and it included a variety of collateral materials and website content.



**More than 1.7 million Spanish-language users came from outside North Carolina, visiting the site from Mexico, California, Texas, Florida and all over the world.**

Using our experience with the ¡Vacúnate! campaign, we were able to replicate this transcreation process with the rest of our campaigns, ensuring that Spanish language content was created and available at the same time as our English content. This process was not easy, but it was important because it increased our credibility with Spanish speakers across the state.

**In doing this work, we learned helpful lessons:**

- Translation won't always suffice, transcreation is needed so meaning isn't lost or warped in a way that dilutes your message;
- Work with native Spanish speakers to ensure content created delivers messages that keep the original tone and meaning in a way that resonates with the community;
- Be thoughtful and particular about the terminology you use, maintain a list of commonly used Spanish terms so everyone in your division uses the same words and rely on your partners to help you understand how real people are speaking about the topic at hand;
- Given the reading level of many North Carolinians (54% need an 8th grade reading level or lower and 20% need a 6th grade reading level), develop Spanish-language materials at a 6th grade reading level, use informal Spanish on general public outreach materials to help increase readability and understanding and to use a tone that is approachable while still being authoritative.

The **Vacunate.nc.gov** website was translated by native Spanish speakers instead of using machine translation and it became a global source of information. The website served an estimated 720,000 Spanish-speaking North Carolinians 3 to 7 times more effectively than other state websites—many of which use machine translation. Because of its effectiveness, Google designated that the site was an authority on a variety of Spanish-language topics and directed people to the website no matter where they lived.

## Build and maintain trust and partnerships with the community.

**We prioritized partnering with community organizations and trusted messengers to get reliable information to community members fast.** We were very intentional in working

*with and for* the Spanish-speaking community, and this involved engaging our partners often and consistently. We were transparent in what we knew and didn't know, shared updates, asked for feedback and encouraged participation in our events. We also worked closely with NCDHHS's Director of Hispanic/Latino Policy and Strategy and the Healthier Together initiative. These collaborations helped us get feedback on our materials, partner with Hispanic/Latino community organizations around the state and ultimately better understand the needs of the Hispanic/Latino community.

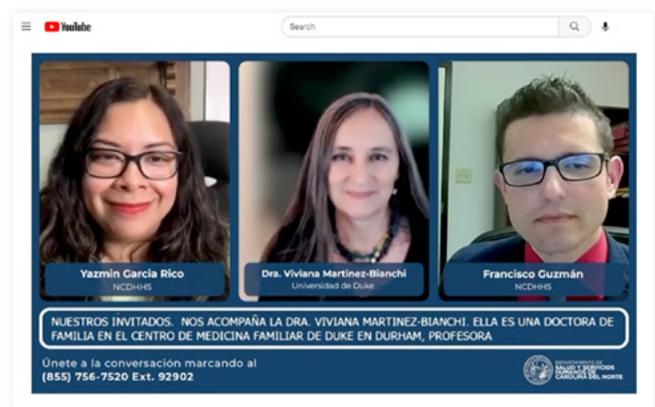


## Reach people where they are.

**Part of building trust within the Hispanic/Latino community also meant showing up — literally.**

Our team regularly coordinated with operations to ensure that vaccines were meeting people where they were. This included bringing mobile vaccine units to events like a highly attended international soccer match and having a presence at community events around the state. The goal was to remove barriers to access COVID-19 vaccines that we learned the community was facing, like lack of transportation, child care and time off of work.

**Working closely with trusted messengers and organizations was a valuable piece of the team's strategy in engaging HMPs.** The team relied on community stakeholders with existing relationships and trusted them to share our messages. For instance, we trained native Spanish speakers to present 'Vaccine 101' presentations to their communities when vaccines were authorized. These presentations engaged hundreds of education, faith and community groups across the state. We also made it easy for people to get answers to their questions. We hosted 15 virtual and tele-town halls in Spanish (which we named "Cafecitos") and had more than 75,075 tele-town hall participants and 71,725 social media viewers for a total reach of 146,800 people. These townhalls covered different topics and featured North Carolina medical experts, community leaders and people who were impacted by COVID themselves. People could ask questions in Spanish by phone or by typing them into the comments section on various social media channels.



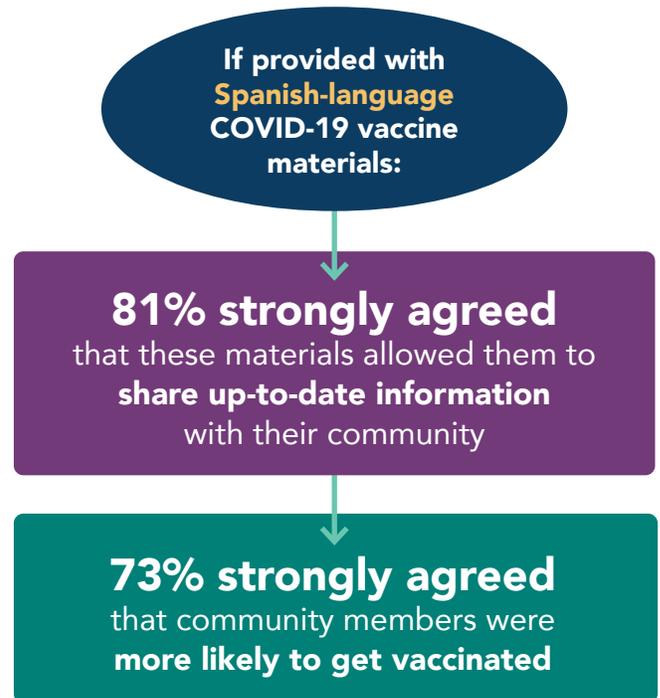
## Lessons learned

**The Department should work to elevate the voices of trusted messengers from the community and continuously engage community members to seek feedback that informs strategies, content and operations.** This includes collaborating with the Director of Hispanic/Latino Policy and Strategy to better understand community needs and to get connected to groups like LATIN-19, El Centro Hispano and Iglesia La Semilla. Involving stakeholders in communication efforts builds trust and their feedback helps improve materials so that what is created resonates with how the community is speaking about the issue. Additionally, understanding the barriers communities are facing and then developing resources and strategies to respond to these barriers, is essential to increasing access to care and to maintaining trust in the communities you are working to serve.

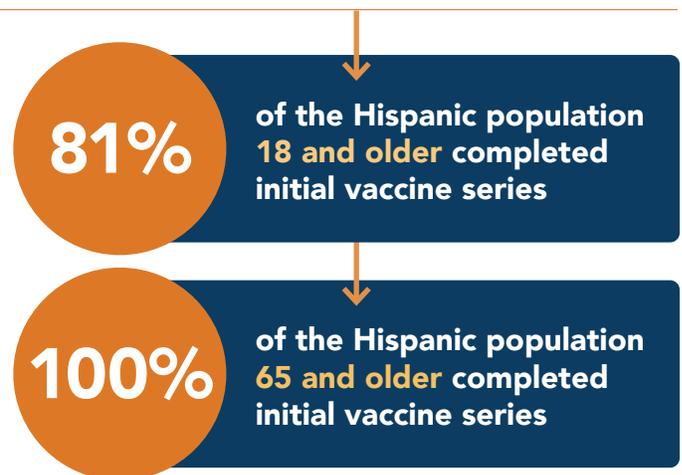
**In a March 2023 survey sent out to community leaders and organizations asking about their usage of Spanish-language COVID-19 vaccine materials,** 81% of survey respondents strongly agreed that having these materials allowed them to share up-to-date information with the Spanish-speaking community they served.

Additionally, 73% of survey respondents strongly agreed that community members they served were more likely to get vaccinated if provided with COVID-19 vaccine resources in Spanish. The biggest takeaway from our Spanish-language work is that strategies for successful communications are supported by trusted community messengers, created with input and revised when necessary and done with collaboration that is culturally appropriate and linguistically competent. Our approach and intentional focus on Spanish communications that reached the communities they were designed for contributed to

the ultimate shared goal—there was no COVID-19 vaccination gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic North Carolinians getting their first two life-saving vaccines. In fact, more people who identified as Hispanic were vaccinated than who identified as non-Hispanic.



As of late 2022:



The Neimand Collaborative produced a series of case studies capturing best practices and lessons learned in outreach efforts to support COVID-19 vaccination. Case studies address telephone outreach, lessons learned during COVID-19 vaccine communications, data-focused decisions, Spanish-language outreach and community partnerships. All of the case studies can be found at [www.neimandcollaborative.com](http://www.neimandcollaborative.com).