



# COVID-19 Vaccine Qualitative Research Report Executive Summary

Prepared for the Washington State Department of Health

C+C | December 2020

# Executive Summary

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) contracted C+C to develop a social marketing initiative designed to vaccinate most adults in Washington.

To do this effectively, the campaign needed to build receptivity, intention and action among people in Washington to get a COVID-19 vaccine. DOH is particularly interested in ensuring that the typically under-served populations are proactively considered part of the priority audience. Understanding the attitudes, beliefs, barriers and motivators regarding the COVID-19 vaccine is fundamental in creating an effective and equitable social marketing initiative and communications campaign.

This report summarizes the findings of a qualitative research project with 120 research participants. Participants spent 30–45 minutes per day for four days completing research activities designed to uncover attitudes, beliefs, barriers and potential motivators to getting the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available.

## **The research included ten audience segments:**

1. African American/Black Adults
2. Adults 30-49
3. Rural Adults
4. College Students
5. LGBTQ+ Adults
6. Hispanic/Latinx English Preferred Adults
7. Hispanic/Latinx Spanish Preferred Adults
8. Asian American Adults
9. Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian Adults
10. Pro-vaccine Adults

The research first talked to participants about their overall attitudes and beliefs about vaccines in general and then moved to talking specifically about COVID-19 vaccines.



## Key Themes about Vaccines in General

Overall, all of the audiences think that vaccines are generally safe, reliable and helpful, even though they aren't perfect.

1. **People understand the benefits of vaccines for society:** People feel that vaccines are good for their communities because they prevent people from getting sick and control serious diseases.
2. **Concerns about vaccines are more individual:** While people understand the societal benefits of vaccines, their concerns were more centered around individual impacts such as side-effects, allergies to ingredients, possible long-term health impacts and worry that the vaccine might not be effective.
3. **Systemic racism and discrimination has caused mistrust for some audience segments:** Throughout the study, the following audience segments made reference to mistrust in the medical community and the government as it relates to the development and distribution of vaccines:
  - > African American/Black Adults
  - > Hispanic/Latinx – English Preferred Adults
  - > Hispanic/Latinx – Spanish Preferred Adults
  - > Asian American Adults
  - > Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian Adults
  - > LGBTQ+ Adults

Within these audiences, there is a dichotomy among those who expressed a desire for, and those that were not comfortable with, members of their community being represented in early testing and distribution of vaccines.

4. **Misconception that vaccines can give you the disease:** There is a false belief that a vaccine can give you the disease it is trying to protect against.
5. **Not all vaccines should be treated equal:** Some participants perceive some vaccines are more important than others related to how deadly the disease is.



## Key Themes about the Covid-19 Vaccine

The research uncovered a dozen key themes that will be helpful in planning for communications and outreach regarding COVID-19 vaccines.

1. **Mixed emotions driving a “wait and see” mentality:** People have very mixed feelings about the COVID-19 vaccine, and they are dominated by anxiety, worry and nervousness. They are hopeful that a safe, effective vaccine will be produced. However, they think the vaccine has been rushed and that has eroded their confidence. Most people plan to wait and see how it goes with others before they decide whether to get the vaccine.
2. **Safety is key:** The biggest barrier is concern over the safety of the vaccine. Warp Speed, comparisons to the flu vaccine, political involvement and mistrust of “big pharma” are contributing factors to this concern. Safety was much more of a concern to people than efficacy of the vaccine.
3. **Historical trauma:** There is an added level of mistrust around vaccines for typically under-served populations due to systemic racism.
4. **Difficult decision:** The decision on whether or not to get the COVID-19 vaccine is going to be difficult to make. People will be discussing whether or not to get the vaccine with their family, close friends and their doctor. A number of people have said they will discuss with their family members and make a family decision about what to do.
5. **Doctors are most trusted:** Doctors and other healthcare providers are the most trusted source for information and recommendations about COVID-19 vaccines.
6. **Unsure who else to trust:** There is concern that politics is driving the process making it harder and harder to know who to trust for reliable scientific information about the vaccine. Beyond doctors, independent, scientific reviews of results are preferred by most audience segments over the FDA and pharmaceutical manufacturers.



7. **People need proof:** At this point in time, most people are not willing to get the COVID-19 vaccine until it has been out and proven safe in their community. They want to see that people have received the vaccine and have not had adverse effects. Several audience segments are concerned there will not be adequate testing among their demographic group (African American/Black Adults, Hispanic/Latinx – Spanish Preferred Adults, Hispanic/Latinx – English Preferred Adults, LGBTQ+ Adults, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian Adults).
8. **Eager to end the pandemic:** People are interested in doing what they can to end the pandemic, and the sense of urgency of the situation may motivate some people to take a “calculated risk” for the greater good.
9. **Protect those we love:** The desire to help protect loved ones, community members, and the vulnerable is also a strong motivator for getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Many people would protect others over protecting themselves. No one wants to be the reason someone else got COVID-19.
10. **Idea of “WARP Speed” increases concern:** Parallel production and testing is not intuitive and is seen concerning rather than a good thing. The primary concern stems from the belief that speed does not give enough time to see full results.
11. **Urgency and moral obligation are motivators:** The urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic makes some people more willing to get vaccinated. They are conducting a “risk/benefit analysis” to drive their decision-making process. Some people are also motivated by a sense of moral obligation – it is the “right thing to do” or a “duty as a citizen.”
12. **Straightforward messaging is well received:** People value accessible, straightforward vaccine messaging. This approach is believable and evokes positive, hopeful emotions and an interest in learning more.

