

NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID
February 10, 2021
via Zoom
Notes

Kelly Calabria, President & CEO of the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation, stressed the importance of making connections and facilitating collaboration to elevate all voices across the state, with a focus on raising awareness of COVID-19 prevention and vaccine deployment across NC. She shared two objectives of the coalition: 1) to bring information, tools and resources to help those on the ground, and (2) to create a feedback loop for information exchange to understand what methods in fighting COVID are working and what are not.

Kelly introduced the speakers on the agenda: Jeff Howell, Emergency Services Director, Yancey County; Schell McCall, Executive Director of Partners Aligned Toward Health , serving Yancey and Mitchell counties, and Alejandro Peña, Latinx Advocacy Team and Interdisciplinary Network for COVID-19.

Jeff Howell emphasized the importance of sharing information, whether in a small town where people all know each other, like his, or especially in communities where people are new. He gave a shout out to Schell McCall, who is a huge support and partner to Yancey County. He receives daily updates from NC Emergency Management, and extracts salient information and forwards it to community members. Until the pandemic, he had never worked with the health department, and has learned a lot about rural health care. <https://yanceycountync.gov>. <mailto:Jeff.Howell@yanceycountync.gov>

Schell McCall stated that her organization's 20 year career has included meeting the health needs of communities, which they have identified through community health assessments, community partners and by working as a bridge for information. They work closely with health departments, with Jeff Howell, parks and recreation, the Economic Development Commission, community and county governments. <mailto:schell@pathwnc.org> website: pathwnc.org

She gave kudos to Jeff Howell, as the pandemic has caused a struggle dealing with the unknown, he has been the hub for collecting information from the health center, FQHCs, childcare centers, and school systems, then compiles it in a digest and disperses it. He has also assisted in distributing masks, and partnered with Schell's group and others to start a COVID relief grant fund for the community.

They also developed a lay community ambassador program, working with bilingual and bicultural community members and providing them with information to present to their networks as trusted community spokespersons, regarding COVID prevention, vaccine distribution, and best practices. Only information that can be verified by the CDC, NC DHHS or FQHCs is distributed, and recipients are asked to share it within their networks. The ambassadors are asked to create messaging that will reach their communities and there is a constant exchange of information regarding needs of the communities and what information should be relayed to them.

Alejandro Peña introduced himself and described the Latin 19 initiative, which started as a group of 12 people, and grew into 560 participants, from 80 organizations, including, academia, public sector, and grass roots organizations, who meet weekly to focus on COVID-19. At the peak of the pandemic, they were representing 75% of people infected They have joined forces and created a synergy. Last night, Duke provided 150 vaccines and the organization ran a vaccination event. In NC, 18% of the population

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is Latinx and in Durham, 14% of the population is Latinx. The inequity in the system regarding vaccine distribution is evident. Only 2% of vaccines distributed went to the Latina community.

Sue Collier added it's important to recognize that information exchange has to occur at all levels. This accelerates getting people involved in equitable vaccine distribution. She cited an example of a woman who came to her event against the advice of her peers, and Sue asked her what information she could take back to her community to reinforce the safety of the vaccine.

Alejandro shared several links from the Latinx COVID-19 vaccination event, which was a pilot program and will be scheduled again. The events need to occur where individuals live. Most events are scheduled far from Latin communities. The other was their website, <http://latin19.org/> which links to Twitter and Facebook live events. The third was a link to the weekly meetings https://duke.zoom.us/meeting/register/vJEqd-Ghpzop7-YCAYR5IDxoDL2f_o84Rg to which he invited everyone. A cross section of teams has been created to raise concerns and bring solutions, not just share information. He is thankful to be part of RAC and be part of a network within a network to expand the reach of resources available.

Kelly added that the Resilient American Communities has been created to address the long term solutions to issues that have become evident due to the pandemic. The link to the landing page was posted to the chat, where tools can be accessed and resources from other sources are frequently updated.

Kelly reiterated that Schell McCall stated that solutions to community health must be based on needs identified by the community. Kelly asked how she lives into that mindset. Schell makes it a priority to show up where conversations are happening and create bridges. She also reaches out to others who have access to community networks and compares information.

Danielle Brown of Black Voters Matter in NC stated that they have partners across the state, mostly in rural areas and hears frequently that educational resources and vaccines are not getting to the Black communities and people aren't aware of what resources are available. Her organization and a partnership organization are petitioning Dr. Mandy Cohen via emails, to make sure resources are reaching these rural communities, which comprise 80% of the state. She provided a link to the letter and asked everyone to sign on. #HealthOverProfit Campaign <http://bit.ly/mandycohen> Danielle added that there will be a 21 county listening session on April 21 to hear the needs of the communities to help support them.

Jeff Howell reiterated the importance of disseminating information to those who can use it. However, he noted that electronic means can't be the only method of distribution, since much of the older population doesn't use email or social media. He encouraged using the fire department and church communities to help distribute information. The faith communities have offered their full cooperation.

Alejandro added that his organization includes faith community members in their meetings and they are terrific communicators and trusted voices in the community.

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A question was posted to the chat, what is the most effective way to dispel myths in communities? Schell responded that public relations campaigns via newspapers and social media are effective. By using a trusted local community speaker in those messages, they discussed reasons for wearing a mask, reasons for getting a vaccine, and inviting people to ask questions. The Community Ambassadors are doing a community fact or fiction social media spots, engaging the community.

Kelly summarized the meeting, thanking all for participating. The links will be shared from the chat and the FHLI website will have a link to the NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID landing page.

<https://bit.ly/ruralfightscovid> She asked everyone to complete the participant survey and to reach out to Carla Obiol <mailto:Carla.Obiol@foundationhli.org> if you'd like to speak at a future meeting.