Covering vaccines in religious and cultural communities

Takeaways from Pulling back the curtain on religious and cultural resistance to vaccines

Reporting on vaccines within religious and cultural communities requires moving beyond assumptions and taking the time to understand the nuances that shape people's concerns. As misinformation, shifting policies, past experiences, and unique belief systems intersect differently in each community, effective coverage depends on listening closely and grounding stories in accurate cultural context.

To get vaccine coverage in these communities right:

- **Become familiar with the specific community you are reporting on and listen closely to their concerns.** Be cautious not to inadvertently make assumptions about how many in the community are hesitant toward vaccines, why they are hesitant, which vaccines they may have concerns about, and what interventions would be effective.
- **Identify key, trusted community leaders and influencers who can share representative views of the community**, including opposing or varying perspectives within the community. Ask questions to learn about the range of beliefs, attitudes, fears, concerns, and effective strategies in this particular community.
- Ask questions that **uncover the root concerns of vaccine hesitancy** so that you can include key cultural context in your story, ensuring that audiences recognize the underlying contributors to the community's concerns.
- When identifying expert sources, **invest time in finding providers and public health officials who are from the community you are covering** and/or who work closely with members of that community and understand what messaging is most effective.
- **Seek out a trusted person who can provide a sensitivity read of your story**, whether that person is in your newsroom or your wider network. Someone who is a member of or is familiar with the community you're covering can look for inadvertently culturally insensitive phrasing and help you avoid missteps.
- When possible, **use a solutions-based framing** that includes discussion of what strategies are effective and evidence-based in this community, buttressed by research and by experts with education-based knowledge and lived experience.

And avoid the following pitfalls:

- **Avoid framing in stories that implies shame or blame** toward communities with hesitancy. Pay close attention to language that may carry patronizing or condescending connotations, and avoid fear-based messaging, including in anecdotes.
- **Avoid ascribing beliefs or attitudes to the group you're covering that exist in other communities**, including ones with similar demographics. The large Somali community of Minnesota, for example, may substantially differ from Somalis in Columbus, Ohio, or Seattle.

➤ Further reading: The range of vaccination perspectives held by members of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam