Executive Summary

Vote & Vax: A Community-Based Strategy to Promote Adult Immunization

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported *Vote & Vax* (officially called *Vote and Vaccinate: A Community-Based Strategy to Promote Adult Immunization)* to increase the number of adults aged 50 and over in low-income, underserved communities who receive an annual influenza vaccination (flu shot). Following a pilot test on Election Day 2004, the program continued as a larger demonstration during the midterm and presidential elections through November 2010. More than 460 Vote & Vax clinics conducted during four elections accounted for the administration of nearly 40,000 flu shots.

RWJF provided four grants totaling $1.13 million for *Vote & Vax.* The program was developed and managed by SPARC (Sickness Prevention Achieved through Regional Collaboration), a nonprofit health organization based in Lakeville, Conn. SPARC's president, Douglas Shenson, MD, MPH, MS, served as national program director.[1]

Read the full report.
Learn more about the program here.

CONTEXT

Every year, as many as 49,000 influenza-associated deaths occur in the United States, and approximately 200,000 people are hospitalized with the flu. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines recommend that every person 50 and older receive an annual influenza vaccination, but the likelihood of receiving that flu shot

[1] Vote & Vax was a countywide initiative originally, and expanded to be nationwide with RWJF's support.

varies greatly, depending on an individual's ethnicity, race, education, and whether he/she has a regular source of health care.

Early November, when U.S. elections are held, is an optimal time to receive a flu shot. Since 1997, SPARC has offered immunization for influenza at a variety of community locations, including polling places.

THE PROGRAM

RWJF funded public health departments and other pubic health organizations such as visiting nurse agencies to organize, promote, and implement influenza vaccination clinics within easy reach of polling places during presidential and midterm election days in 2004 and 2006. In 2008 and 2010, the Foundation supported the deployment of *Vote & Vax* as a national strategy that would establish it as a standard public health practice.

KEY RESULTS

Vote & Vax staff reported the following overall results to RWJF, based on its experience in multiple Election Day projects:

- **Nearly 40,000 flu shots have been administered through more than 460 *Vote & Vax* clinics, beginning with the 2004 presidential election and continuing through Election Day 2010.** Most states and the District of Columbia have held clinics.
- **The program reached many people in priority population groups who were otherwise not likely to receive immunization.** Of those receiving vaccines, 62 percent of Blacks, 65 percent of Hispanics, and 71 percent of people without health insurance had either not received flu shots at all in the past, or not regularly.
- **Vote & Vax has been a well-established resource (through its website and the technical assistance it offers) for mass immunizers seeking new avenues through which to provide flu shots.**
- **Vote & Vax has extended its reach through connections with local pharmacies, retail pharmacies, and pharmacies that are part of larger retail chains (e.g., CVS, Walgreen's, Kmart, Rite Aid).**
- **Vote & Vax has had an impact on public health practices beyond seasonal influenza protection, as evidenced by:**
  - Acceptance of *Vote & Vax* by many local public health departments and the national Medical Reserve Corps as a prototype for a disaster preparedness strategy. For example, program staff suggested polling places could be used to provide widespread immunization against the H1N1 influenza virus when the pandemic emerged in 2009.

— New attention to the polling place as a platform for other public health interventions, such as delivering other immunizations (pneumococcal, tetanus, hepatitis A and B, etc.), cancer and cardiology screenings, and other preventive health services.

AFTERWARD

Although RWJF funding ended in 2010, *Vote & Vax* continues throughout the country. *Vote & Vax* offered clinics in more than 1,200 sites in 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam on Election Day 2012.

The CDC's Healthy Aging program is providing support for *Vote & Vax* national activities and programs in North Carolina and Virginia. Promoting partnerships between pharmacies and local health departments is a continuing program priority.

Program Management: Sickness Prevention Achieved Through Regional Collaboration (SPARC)
Program Director: Douglas Shenson, MD, MPH, MS