December 2020

Communications & Community Engagement:
Lessons Learned

Partners In Health

Context for these materials

The ideas presented in this deck reflect the latest public health thinking and scientific evidence as of December 2020. However, the COVID-19 landscape is changing dramatically daily, and so must our recommendations over time.

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Overview

1   **Context and key considerations:** why and how this component is critical to the success of effective and equitable public health responses to COVID and critical decisions that organizations must make

2   **Lessons learned**: emerging learnings from implementation across the US

3   **Communications case study:** Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative
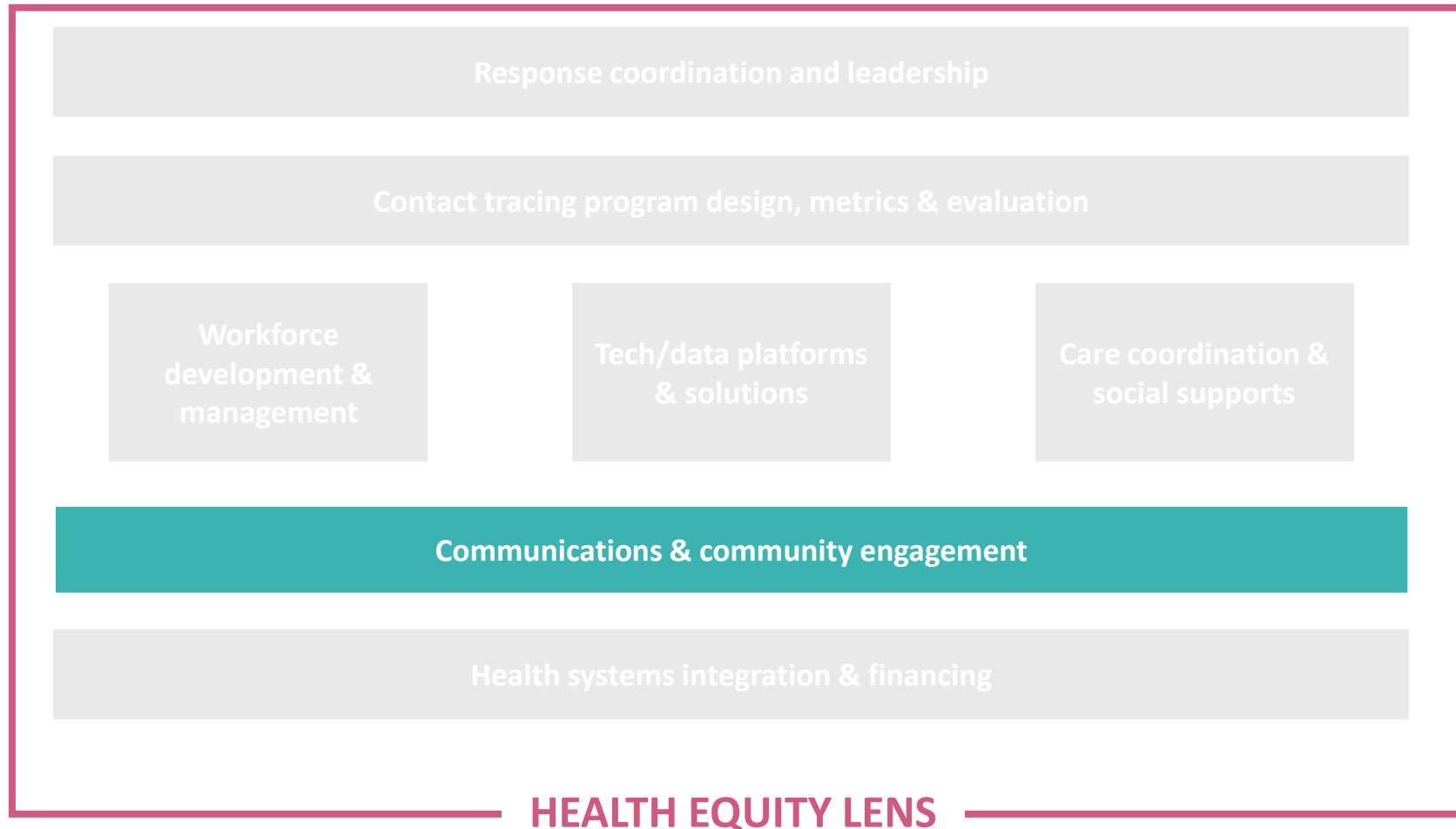
4   **Open questions, learning agenda:** key questions we seek to work on in the coming months

Core elements of an effective and equitable COVID contact tracing program

Response coordination and leadership

Contact tracing program design, metrics & evaluation

Workforce development & management

Tech/data platforms & solutions

Care coordination & social supports

Communications & community engagement

Health systems integration & financing

HEALTH EQUITY LENS

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Communications is an essential pillar of any effective contact tracing program

Response coordination and leadership

Contact tracing program design, metrics & evaluation

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Communications & community engagement

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HEALTH EQUITY LENS

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Context and key considerations

Background

- Successful contact tracing requires the **voluntary and broad participation of the public**

- While contact tracing has been around for decades and it is routinely performed by most local public health departments, **the public is not widely familiar with the process and benefits**

- Contact tracing requires the disclosure of some personal information, such as close contacts; **privacy concerns are top of mind and can become barriers** to participation by the public

- An effective communication plan uses available intelligence to tailor messages around the target audience's needs and should be complemented with grassroots community engagement

Key considerations

Top-down vs. Bottom-up

- Depending on the awareness of contact tracing locally, comms teams should decide how much emphasis to put on the top-down approach (e.g. major earned placements and multi-channel advertising) compared with a local grassroots approach (e.g. local community engagements, events, local media, targeted social media, etc.)

Campaign Plan: Phasing and Objectives

- Based on the specific needs of the local audience, the comms team should map out a phased approach at the beginning of the campaign and assign clear objectives (e.g. awareness, engagement, adoption), milestones, and measurements indicators for each phase

- Depending on local conditions, different campaign phases might be concurrent or sequential to allow for engagement of a well-informed audience that therefore increases adoption outcomes

Lessons learned on communications and community engagement

Early Audience Intelligence

- **Size up the target universe** (i.e. how many people need to be reached) and identify audience parameters (e.g. barriers to adoption, pre-existing misinformation, etc.) *before* defining a campaign strategy

- **Audience intelligence is critical** to develop the right messaging segmentation and determining appropriate budgets that meet both reach and frequency requirements

- Early local **intelligence will also help reveal local vulnerabilities** and inform necessary social support such as food, safe housing, and job protection

Recruitment of Local Partners

- **Identify and recruit local partners** such as local boards of health, community health centers, and local community groups and they will be more likely to help with local community engagement

- Because local partners work within the communities, they are best positioned to **engage diverse audiences with cultural sensitivity**

- Work with local partners to **identify existing "owned" channels of message dissemination** (newsletters, websites, email lists, etc.) as well as trustworthy local influencers

Lessons learned on communications and community engagement

Professional support

- **Seek additional professional support and hire agencies** as a dedicated resource for all aspects of the campaign including strategy, public relations, messaging, media placement, creative development, influencers outreach and analytics
- **Assign an internal lead** to interface with agency partners and report back to local administrators about progress, challenges, and necessary pivoting

KPIs and analytics

- **Set measurable KPIs for each phase of the campaign** (i.e. awareness, engagement, adoption) and **develop a robust analytics framework** that consolidates all data in real-time (or close to it) through shareable dashboards
- **Link communication and engagement metrics with operational metrics** (e.g. new cases by geography, contact rates, etc.) then **assess landscape changes weekly** by looking at the desired outcomes and consider pivots in both messaging, channel mix and media buys

Lessons learned on communications and community engagement

Looking Beyond Paid Media

- **Actively pursue pro-bono media opportunities** such as remnant ad space, gift-in-kind inventory, PSA allocation of network airtime, etc.

- **Use local clout to recruit high-level influencers** with local ties (e.g. athletes, celebrities, businesspeople, politicians, etc.)

- **Work with local implementing partners to recruit local trustworthy voices** such as faith leaders, community activists, councilmembers, etc.

Case Study: Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative

Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative: what we learned

- Communications strategies must go deep with audience-listening to inform a culturally relevant message

- Find the trusted voices within the community

- A two-pronged strategy reaches the more vulnerable

- We go farther and faster when we partner with existing local organizations from the get-go

- These are not "set-it-and-forget-it" campaigns, they are constantly evolving and need active participation and leadership

- Action builds trust – communications is part of a public health response that helps mitigate spread and provides real supports to people affected by COVID-19

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PIH's Chief Medical Officer, Joia Mukherjee, addresses the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during a state press conference to announce PIH's involvement in the Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative alongside Governor Charlie Baker.

Lessons learned: top-down media

Main goal:
Create basic information to educate and spread trusted information

- Creative must keep up with the ever-changing nature of the virus

- Video ads, Radio ads, social

- Infographics

- All ads adapted to a community must be based on community languages

Lessons learned: utilize trusted voices from the bottom

Main goal: restore community trust

- Frequent virtual town-halls

- Pair influential community leaders with experts

- Boost social media word-of-mouth

- Identify "one-to-many" opportunities to spread the message

Lessons learned: not everyone has cable

Main goal: reach everyone

Different populations utilize different types of media. Therefore, communications campaigns must utilize varied approaches to reach the greatest amount of people, including:

- Unified COVID-19 web portal

- 211 hotline

- SMS emergency notification system

- Local FM Radios, free community newspapers

- Flyers (public transit, testing sites, point of care, places of employment)
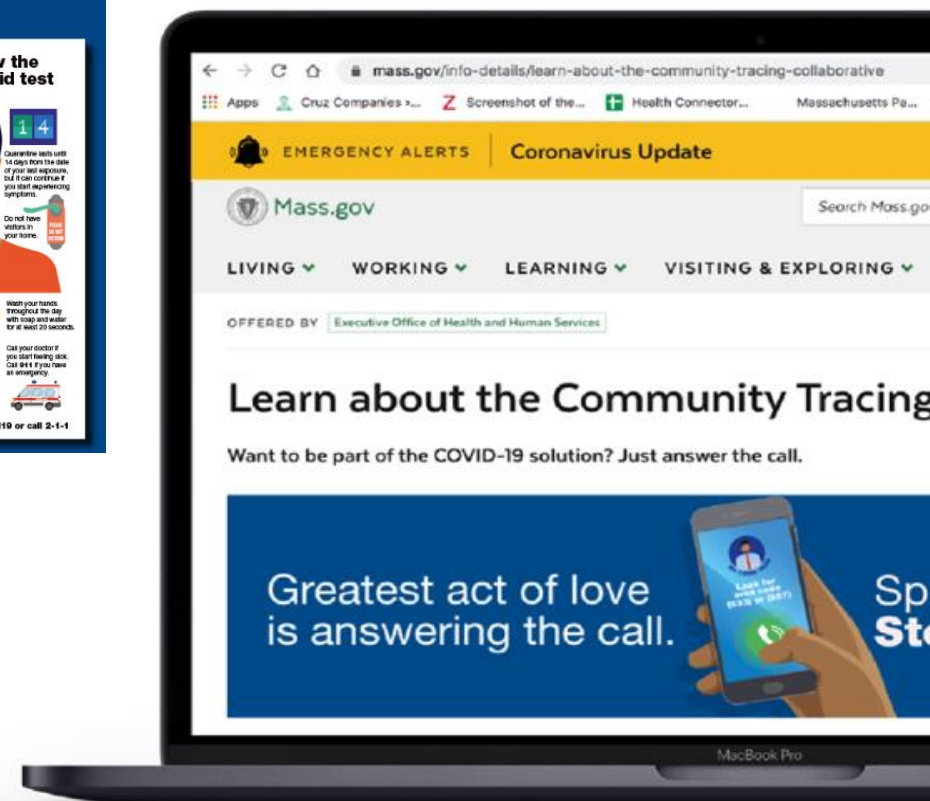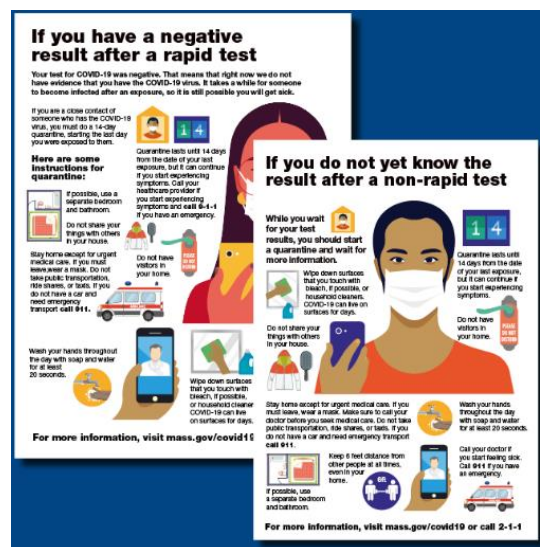
Lessons learned: getting personal

Main goal: connect with the public in a meaningful way

- Responding to this virus is about love, not politics

- Understand the "What's in it for me?" of the public in any messaging: stay safe, protect your loved ones, keep working

- Communicate that they are not alone: we have resources to help families get through this

Open questions, learning agenda for the coming months

- **New emerging barriers to adoption:** now that states and municipalities have begun the reopening process, how will "re-entry plans" affect contact tracing messaging?

- **Boots on the ground?** As restrictions are lifted, should we consider deploying door- to-door contact tracing? How do we do this safely?

- **Can this pandemic inform communication and engagement response systems for the next one?** Many experts predict a second, and possibly deadlier wave of COVID- 19 in the upcoming Fall and Winter. How do we anticipate comms needs? How do we prepare now?

- **How do we influence a shared approach among states** to increase efficiency and response time?

US Public Health Accompaniment Unit

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