

Barbershops to Cut Through Vaccine Hesitancy



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Biden Announces Partnership With UMD Center, Black Coalition Against COVID and SheaMoisture to Encourage Vaccinations in Communities of Color

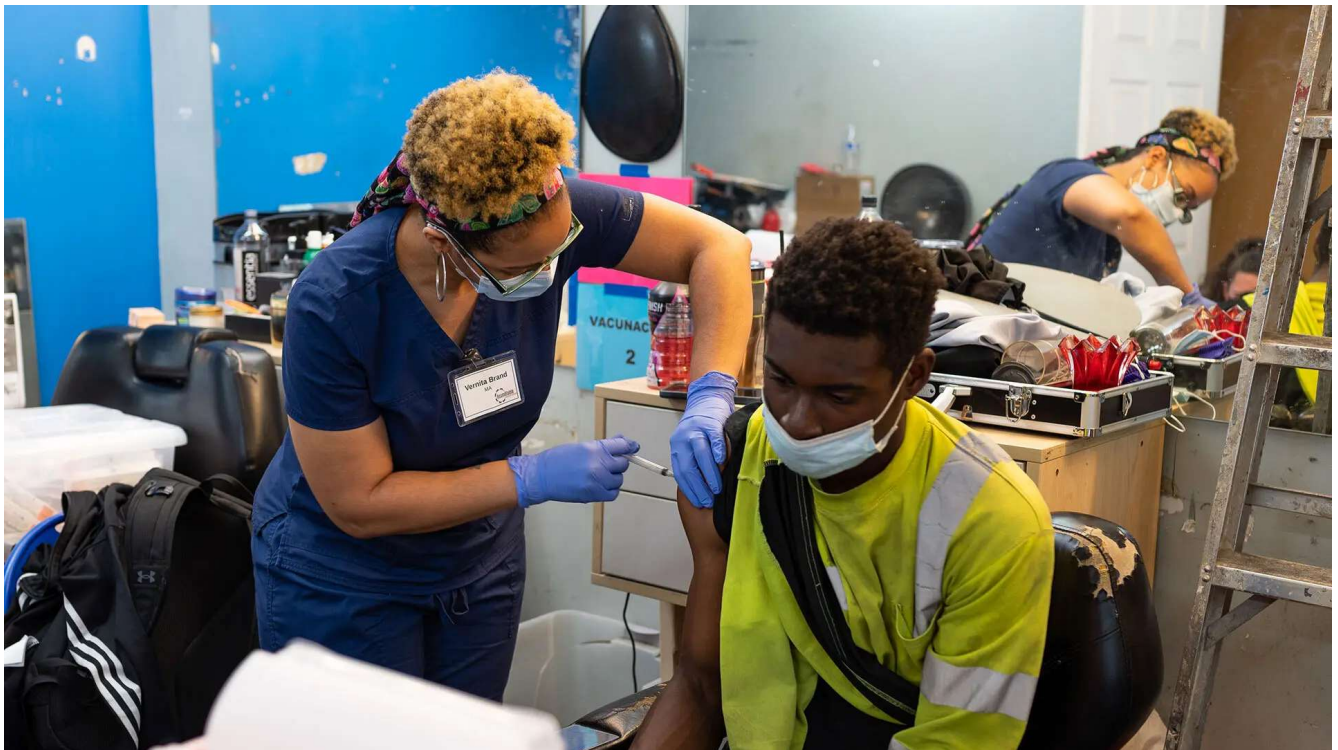


Photo by Aaron Kassman

Medical Assistant Vernita Brand gives a COVID-19 vaccine shot to a patron at a clinic held in May at the Shop Spa in Hyattsville. It was the first barbershop-based COVID-19 clinic held in Maryland, organized by the HAIR campaign at the UMD School of Public Health.

President Biden today announced the formation of a White House-backed partnership between the University of Maryland's [Maryland Center for Health Equity](#), the [Black Coalition Against COVID](#) and the personal-care company [SheaMoisture](#) to recruit 1,000 Black-owned barbershops and hair salons nationwide to encourage people of color to get COVID-19 vaccinations—even on site.

“Shots at the Shop,” part of a broader Biden effort to quickly increase lagging COVID-19 vaccination rates in Black, Latino and other communities of color through community-based programs, will also train Black hairstylists and barbers to dispel myths and disinformation about COVID-19.

The initiative builds upon the Health Advocates In-Reach and Research (HAIR) campaign, a culturally tailored, community-based intervention developed at the UMD School of Public Health by Stephen B. Thomas, director of the Maryland Center for Health Equity.

“For the last 15 years, we have done the research on Black barbers and stylists as an important asset in the community. It took a pandemic for people to recognize how important it is to be in communities and build trust,” said Thomas, a professor of health policy and management. “It is my hope that Shots at the Shop is the beginning of truly recognizing the role that barbers and stylists can play in promoting health and preventing disease. We need to stay there to address the underlying health conditions, like hypertension, cancer and diabetes, that have made people of color vulnerable to this pandemic.”

Participating barbershops and salons will take a four-hour training course to become volunteer community health workers. It will be delivered online through the University of Maryland, using national public health and medical experts along with barbers and stylists who have already achieved Certified Community Health Worker status. Once trained, some salons and barbershops will also become COVID vaccination sites. SheaMoisture, a Liberian-founded company that supports Black entrepreneurship, is providing a \$1,000 stipend to each participating shop through a [\\$1 million fund](#).

“Hair salons and barbershops are important micro community centers,” said Dr. Reed Tuckson, founding member of the Black Coalition Against COVID, a Washington, D.C.-based community initiative. “Shots in the Shop will help address lingering questions about COVID-19 by providing science-based information as well as access to vaccines in this trusted environment.”

Since 2010, Thomas and his Center for Health Equity team have been training barbers and stylists to help educate clients about prevention of colon cancer, diabetes and other preventable chronic diseases. Barbers and stylists have “street credibility,” according to Thomas, whose HAIR network now includes 10 barbershops and salons.

One of them is the Shop Spa in Hyattsville, which hosted Maryland’s first barbershop-based COVID vaccine clinic last month. The event co-hosted by the center and Luminis Health welcomed about 100 interested individuals, but fewer agreed to a shot—evidence of the challenges in boosting trust in the vaccines across communities of color.

While more than 62% of Americans have reported receiving at least one dose of a COVID vaccine, that number is lower for all non-white demographic groups. In Maryland, 70.3% of adults are at least partially vaccinated, but the rate is only 46% in majority-Black Prince George’s County.

Outlining a five-part plan including expanding pharmacy hours for vaccination appointments, providing free child care for people getting vaccinated, and encouraging businesses to offer incentives to vaccinated employees, Biden today reiterated his goal of having 70% of Americans vaccinated by July 4, Independence Day.

"A summer of freedom. A summer of joy. A summer of get-togethers and celebrations. An all-American summer that this country deserves after a long, long, dark winter that we've all endured," he said.