

Initiative Leverages Barbershops to Increase Vaccination Among Black Americans



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Key Takeaways

- Barbershops and beauty salons will help address vaccine hesitancy in Black communities where vaccination rates are disproportionately low.
- A White House-backed program offers community health training for barbers and stylists, and encourages health providers to set up COVID-19 vaccine clinics at the shops.
- President Biden announced the “Shots at the Shop” partnership as part of his plan to get 70% of Americans vaccinated by July 4.

In a push to increase confidence in the COVID-19 vaccine in minority communities, public health advocates are taking to barbershops and hair salons.

The “Shots at the Shop” initiative is a partnership between the White House, Black Coalition Against COVID, SheaMoisture and the University of Maryland Center for Health Equity. Barbers and stylists are trained to address vaccine hesitancy among their customers and can invite health providers to offer vaccine clinics at their shops.

President Biden [announced](#) the partnership last week as part of his “month of action” campaign to get 70% of the American population at least partially vaccinated before Independence Day. As of June 14, more than 64% of U.S. adults have received at least one dose of the vaccine.¹

Of people who have received at least one shot, only 9% are non-Hispanic Black Americans, even though they make up 12.4% of the U.S. population. By comparison, non-Hispanic White Americans comprise 61.2% of the population and account for 60.6% of the vaccinations.²
[Half of U.S. Adults Are Fully Vaccinated. How Do We Reach the Other Half?](#)

Shots at the Shop

The [Health Advocates In-Reach and Research](#) (HAIR) initiative began as a way to provide preventative treatments and share accurate medical information. The group, which is now part of the Maryland Center for Health Equity (M-CHE) at UMD, pivoted to tackle vaccine hesitancy in the Black community during the pandemic.

“In the black community barbershops and beauty salons are sacred spaces,” [Stephen Thomas, PhD](#), director of M-CHE, tells Verywell. “You're going to be there all day catching up on the news, talking about what's going on in the neighborhood. It's a community affair, it's a family affair. It's where trust and social norms are solidified.”

Mike Brown is a barber from Maryland who works with HAIR to encourage vaccination among his clients.

“I understand your distrust with the government or what have you,” Brown said in a [town hall](#) hosted by BlackDoctor.org. “The solution is to get vaccinated so we can get back to normalcy, so that when I see you, if I haven't seen you in a while, I can dab you up and...[give you] a hug, not just a fist bump.”

The group first tried its model in mid-May at a Maryland barbershop. The White House soon reached out to M-CHE to seek a collaboration. The team planned to upscale the program, inviting business owners from across the country to participate. Their goal is to include 1,000 barbershops and salons.
[Black Doctors and Nurses Are Urging Black Americans to Get COVID Vaccine](#)

SheaMoisture, a Black-founded personal care company, pledged \$1 million to be distributed to salons and barbershops in \$1,000 mini-grants. These funds are meant to support business owners through the program.

“SheaMoisture is a brand that stands ready to support the Black community,” Cara Sabin, CEO of SheaMoisture said in a [statement](#). “We hope this will bring the necessary educational and material resources to Black communities across the U.S. in a safe, efficient, and convenient manner.”

Barbers and hairstylists will go through a four-hour virtual training course through the University of Maryland. They'll be trained as volunteer community health workers, learning from public health and medical experts as well as those who have already become certified.

On Monday, HAIR held its latest clinic, offering COVID-19 education and vaccines for people 12 to 18 years old. The event featured music, food and entertainment, as well as medical staff to answer questions about COVID-19 and offer vaccinations.

“Nobody wants to go to the doctor, but everybody wants to go to a barbecue, everybody wants to go to a festival. So how might we make getting your vaccine at the beauty salon or barbershop feel more like you're going to a festival or barbecue,” Thomas says.

Dispelling Vaccine Myths

In the training, public health experts will address vaccine hesitancy among the business owners themselves, and provide tools for dispelling misinformation within their communities. Thomas says that just as these spaces can be helpful for sharing positive health messages, it's also easy to pass misinformation through word-of-mouth.

“Barbershops and beauty salons can also be spawning grounds for conspiracy theories,” Thomas says. “Many of our minority communities have been marinating in disinformation misinformation for a very, very long time.”

In addition to sharing educational materials with information from the CDC and other health groups, participating barbershops are encouraged to stream COVID-19 information on one or more of their TV screens.

[Vaccinating BIPOC Communities Depends on Access, Not Hesitancy](#)

Building Networks for Public Health

The HAIR program first began in 2001 as an effort to increase screening for colon cancer among Black communities. [Colorectal cancer](#), which is the third most common cancer in the U.S. and [disproportionately affects African Americans](#), can be more easily prevented or treated with screening tests. Since its inception, the program has expanded to address other high-morbidity diseases like HIV and AIDS, diabetes and prostate cancer.

Leveraging the networks of trust and community support found in barbershops and hair salons can make accessing health care feel more comfortable. Thomas says he hopes the HAIR network continues to grow and serve communities across the U.S. after the threat of the pandemic is gone.

“If we can do a medical care of delivering a lifesaving vaccine in a barber shop or a beauty salon, then why can't we be there to do the blood pressure screenings, the hypertension control, and all the other things that can be done outside of the hospital that could save lives and keep people out of the emergency room,” Thomas says.

Rather than simply giving the COVID-19 shot and leaving, he hopes that relationships forged with health clinics will stay strong after the pandemic.

“If we are building this bridge to communities that had been neglected, then why would we dismantle the bridge when the community spread of COVID has passed,” Thomas says. “The infrastructure we're creating is one that needed to be there anyway and we should nurture it and sustain it.”

Other White House Vaccination Initiatives

Shots at the Shop is part of the White House's full-court press effort to increase vaccination rates. The administration is teaming up with various private companies and public health groups to encourage vaccinations.

The nation will experience “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,” Biden said in his announcement.

[White House Announces New Perks and Programs to Encourage COVID Vaccination](#)

Some private companies are incentivizing vaccinations with sweepstakes and giveaways. Anheuser-Busch, the company that produces Budweiser, announced it will give away free beverages if the

country reaches Biden's Independence Day goal.

Biden also announced that [four of the nation's largest childcare providers](#), including KinderCare, Learning Care Group and more than 500 YMCAs across the country will offer free, drop-in appointments. Bright Horizons will provide free childcare to employees of participating organizations. Plus, states can create their own initiatives to support parents in getting vaccinated by using child care funding allocated in the most recent COVID-19 relief bill.

What This Means For You

Shots at the Shop is trying to reach at least 1,000 barbershops and salons across the country. If you're interested in becoming involved with the program, you can sign up [here](#).

The information in this article is current as of the date listed, which means newer information may be available when you read this. For the most recent updates on COVID-19, visit our [coronavirus news page](#).