

Truman Medical Centers/University Health Conducts Vaccine Outreach in Underserved Communities



A patient receives the COVID-19 vaccine at the Tony Aguirre Community Center. (Photo: Truman Medical Centers)

On an unusually warm day in March, handfuls of Kansas Citians come in and out of the Tony Aguirre Community Center. The Community Health Strategies and Innovations team at Truman Medical Centers/University Health (TMC/UH) turned the Westside community center into a COVID-19 vaccination site.

It is one of the many sites throughout Kansas City where TMC/UH has brought the vaccine to people who may have faced barriers navigating the medical center's on-campus vaccination process. Since December, TMC/UH has administered more than 100,000 doses of the vaccine at its two hospital locations, local schools and businesses, as well as this community outreach.

At Tony Aguirre, grateful recipients filled out paperwork in the sun, lingering for just a moment before heading inside to get a second dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccination event was a reunion of sorts, for mostly Hispanic

vaccine recipients, from a traditionally close knit west side community. Friends, separated by social distancing, were able to chat. Recipients once again met with the trusted, and bilingual, TMC/UH team that for over a year has been offering COVID-19 education and testing in pockets of Kansas City, Mo., that have been hit hardest by the pandemic. And now, thankfully, the team is able to offer vaccines.

"If the team says it's going to be there, it's going to be there with a level of expertise and high standards, because the community deserves it," said Niki Lee Donawa, Community Relations Director at TMC/UH. Donawa has overseen the community-based team for nearly a decade. She says the relationships the team cultivated with community partners through programs like the Healthy Harvest Mobile Market—which brings fresh produce to sell in food deserts—has allowed for a seamless vaccine rollout.

"It becomes very personal with the

individuals," she said. "People like it when you meet them in their own backyard and treat them with dignity and respect."

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

That trust and partnership means the vaccine is getting to the people who need it most. The Community Health Strategies and Innovations team relies on its community partners to identify recipients. So, for example, when a month earlier, it was icy and bitterly cold on the day the team was scheduled to administer the first dose of vaccine, partners were able to check in with recipients and ensure they arrived safely.

Other sites where the Community Health Strategies and Innovations team has vaccinated eligible Missourians include St. James United Methodist Church, Friendship Baptist Church, Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, the Linwood YMCA (where TMC/UH has a clinic), Della Lamb Community Services, the Mexican Consulate and the Delta Sigma Theta Athenaeum.

In addition, Donawa has worked with the Ride KC and the KC Housing Authority to create the Care Connect program, which will ensure transportation isn't a barrier to vaccination.

Ultimately, removing barriers to health and wellness is the Community Health Strategies and Innovations team's goal.

Donawa is hopeful that the connections made during the pandemic encourage Kansas Citians who are often left behind to take control of their health, and create a legacy of wellness for the next generation.

The above article was prepared by Truman Medical Centers/University Health. 🌐