HPV VACCINATION IS CANCER PREVENTION

Identifying and addressing health disparities in Hispanic communities
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE HPV AND CANCER CONNECTION

According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 45,000 cases of human papillomavirus- (HPV-) related cancers are diagnosed each year. HPV is linked to at least six types of cancer, with cervical cancer being the most well-known. Other cancers linked to HPV include vulvar, vaginal, penile, anal and oropharyngeal (back of throat) cancers. Additionally, the CDC reports Hispanic women have the highest rates of cervical cancer of any racial or ethnic group. More than 90% of cervical cancer cases are caused by HPV.

Since 2006, there has been an HPV vaccine available in the U.S. to protect against the virus and prevent cancer. The HPV vaccine series is recommended for both boys and girls as a routine vaccination at age 11 or 12, but vaccination for HPV can start as early as age 9. The CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) also recommends the vaccine for everyone up to age 26 if not previously vaccinated. Research shows the Hispanic population has a significantly lower rate of HPV vaccination than the general population, leaving Hispanic individuals at increased risk for HPV and unprotected against the cancers it can cause.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Prevent Cancer Foundation® is seeking to improve access and education within the Hispanic community for HPV-related cancer prevention. The Foundation contracted with NP Strategy, a strategic communications firm, to research and execute an environmental scan to identify states with low uptake rates of the HPV vaccine within Hispanic communities, specifically among adolescents and young adults. As part of this analysis, NP Strategy performed a 10-year legislative review on vaccine and related policies in three states. The Prevent Cancer Foundation aims to engage with public health officials in cancer prevention and control programs in those states.

THE STATES

The study team examined legislative and policy activities in California, New Mexico and North Carolina. The analysis focused on potential opportunities for the Prevent Cancer Foundation to further its reach and advance its goal of increasing HPV vaccination rates through educational messaging and policy actions. Opportunities include legislative engagement and identifying local/national partners with either a connection to the target population or an existing interest in cancer prevention and/or health awareness in medically underserved or minority communities.

California

As the most populous state in the United States, California presents numerous opportunities for an increase in the HPV vaccine uptake rate. While more than half of Californians and the majority of Hispanic citizens of California have received at least one dose of the HPV vaccine, rates are still below the Healthy People 2020 goal of 80% of adolescents receiving two or three doses of the HPV vaccine by age 13–15 years. The percentage of male Hispanic individuals vaccinated against HPV lags behind females. Over the 10-year study period, just two bills have addressed HPV vaccination specifically. Therefore, opportunities for community interventions, public policy and advocacy efforts are needed.
New Mexico

According to the Commonwealth Fund, New Mexico is ranked in the lower half of states related to affordable and accessible health care. The Hispanic population has outpaced the general public on receiving the first dose of the HPV vaccine. However, completing the two- or three-dose vaccine series remains a challenge in all states and populations. Over the past decade, the New Mexico General Assembly has considered fewer than three pieces of legislation pertaining to HPV vaccination. No bill has successfully become law, leaving room for advocacy groups to educate lawmakers and lay the foundation for an increased interest in the HPV vaccine and cancer prevention legislation and education.

North Carolina

Home to the “City of Medicine,” North Carolina has consistently been a leader in multiple areas of medical treatment and technology. Unfortunately, that has not translated to the HPV vaccination rate amongst the entire population. The single-dose HPV vaccination rate for persons of Hispanic origin or descent outpaces that of the general population. Again, completing the two- or three-dose vaccine series remains a challenge in all states and populations. Over the past decade, the North Carolina General Assembly has considered multiple pieces of legislation pertaining to HPV vaccination and education. Though only one bill has been successful, it did not lead to a meaningful impact on the rate of HPV vaccination. Multiple opportunities for future legislation and education awareness exist.

FEDERAL ACTIVITY

The aim of the Promoting Resources to Expand Vaccination, Education and New Treatments for HPV Cancers Act of 2021, or the (PREVENT) HPV Cancers Act of 2021, H.R. 1550, is to increase resources to expand vaccination, education and new treatments for HPV-related cancers. The bill was introduced in March 2021 by Representative Kathy Castor (D-Fla.) and passed the House on November 30, 2021. If signed into law, the bill would require the CDC to educate the public about HPV vaccination in consultation with federal and state health officials. It would also allow existing funding programs to be used to support state vaccination information systems and would direct the National Cancer Institute to expand research activities focused on HPV-associated cancers and reauthorize the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, which provides access to screening and diagnostic services to uninsured and underserved individuals.1

IMPACT OF VACCINE HESITANCY

Research is underway to examine whether the ongoing COVID-19 vaccine program will present a challenge for future HPV vaccine mandates or policy initiatives. Federally-authorized programs, by their nature, limit the ability of states to enact legislation or policy which exceeds the federal authority in an allowable manner granted under the state powers doctrine of the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Federal programs to increase access to HPV vaccination could be beneficial, especially since data indicate many vaccinations have been missed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations outline general strategies that can be utilized across multiple states by the Prevent Cancer Foundation and partner organizations to improve the rate of HPV vaccination amongst adolescents of Hispanic origin and descent.

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Data show that multiple demographic groups are disproportionately impacted by HPV-related cancers, most notably persons of Hispanic origin or descent. Though some states have attempted to take proactive steps forward, states with high populations of persons of Hispanic origin or descent have yet to implement meaningful policy actions to make improvements. While state action is important, the pending federal legislation H.R. 1550, the PREVENT HPV Cancers Act of 2021, could pave the way for more resources to states.

Advocates must support state and federal action, working in partnership with stakeholders and advocacy organizations to ensure an increase of HPV vaccination rates, especially amongst persons of Hispanic origin or descent.