

Health Initiative for Rural Pennsylvania

The ARC of Pennsylvania Presentation March 2022

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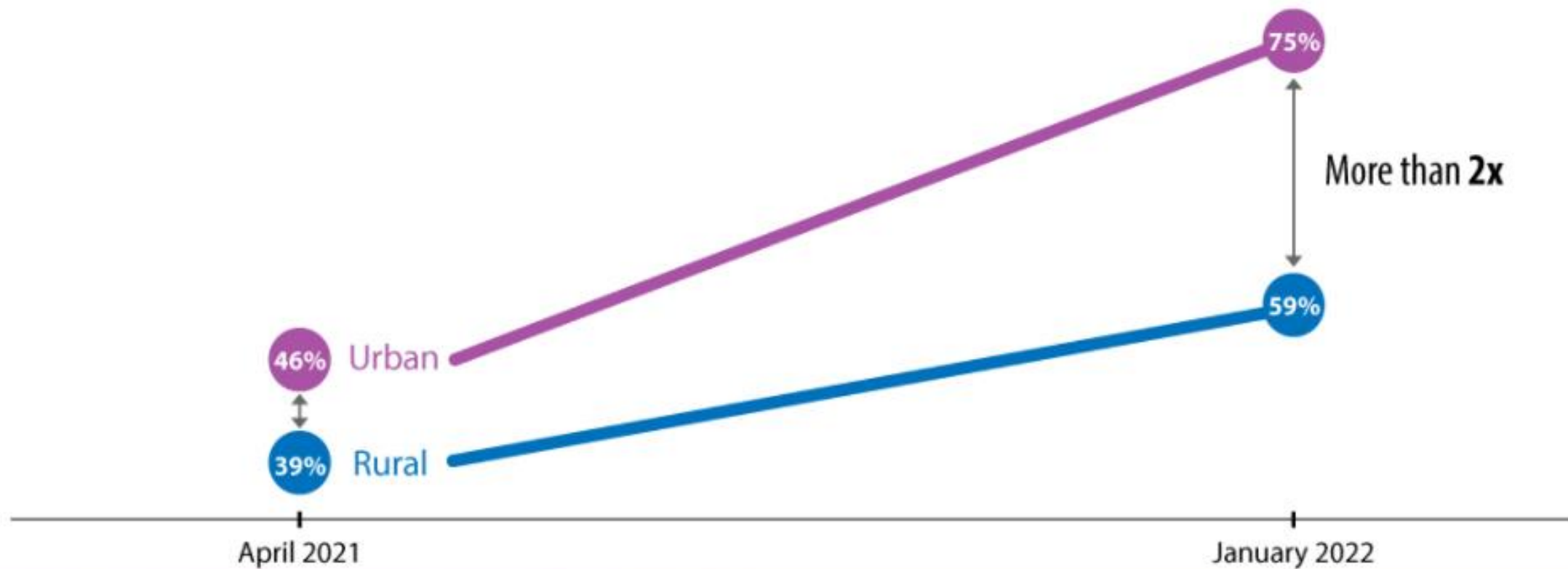
Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health

- One of 50 state offices of rural health
- Situated at Pennsylvania State University in University Park
- Mission is to enhance the health status of rural Pennsylvanians and ensure that rural residents have access to high-quality, affordable health care
- Source of coordination, technical assistance and partnership development

COVID-19 Rural Urban Divide

- COVID-19 death rate in rural counties is 1.3 times higher than urban counties
- 4 out of 5 counties with the highest incidence of COVID-19 are rural
- 9 out of 10 Pennsylvania counties with the lowest vaccination rates are rural (32%-46% fully vaccinated)
- Diminished hospital capacity

The gap in COVID-19 vaccination coverage between urban and rural areas* has **more than doubled** since April 2021



Addressing barriers to vaccination in rural areas can help achieve vaccine equity and decrease COVID-19 illness and death

* Among people aged 5 years and older who received a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine during December 14, 2020–January 31, 2022

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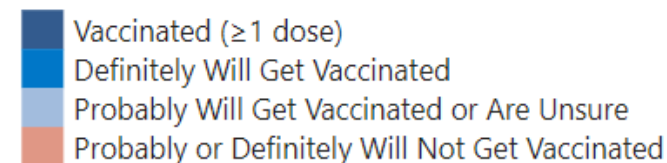


MMWR

Vaccination status and intent among all adults ages 18+, by demographics

United States

Data Collection Period: March 13 – March 19, 2022 (N= 16,157)



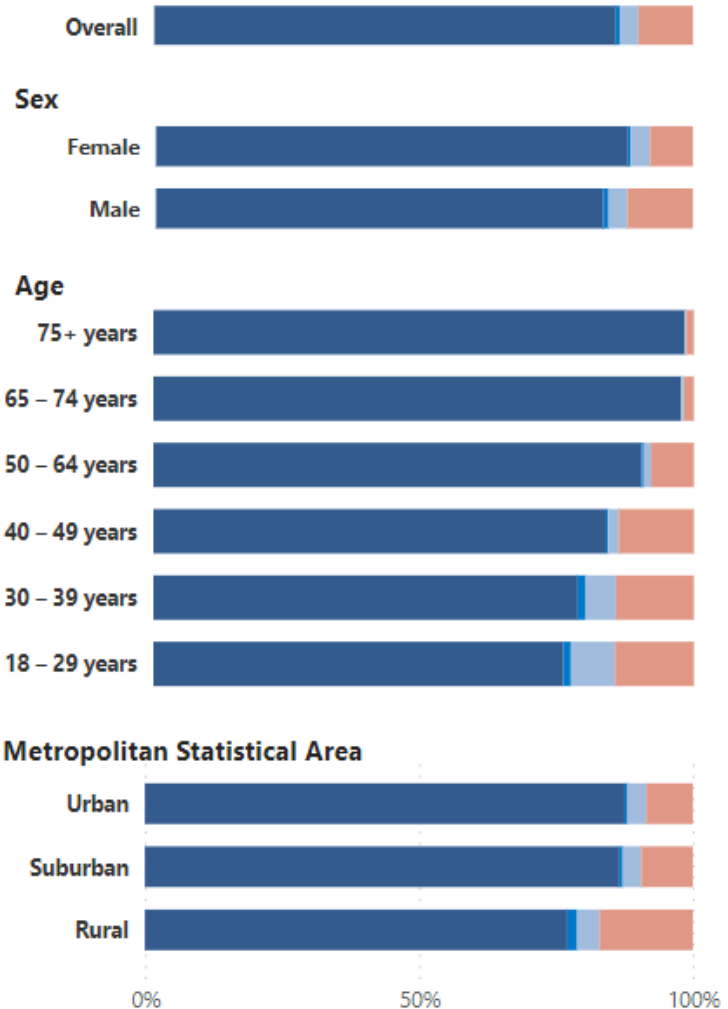
Overall

86.3% are **Vaccinated (85.6%)**
or **Definitely Will Get Vaccinated (0.7%)**

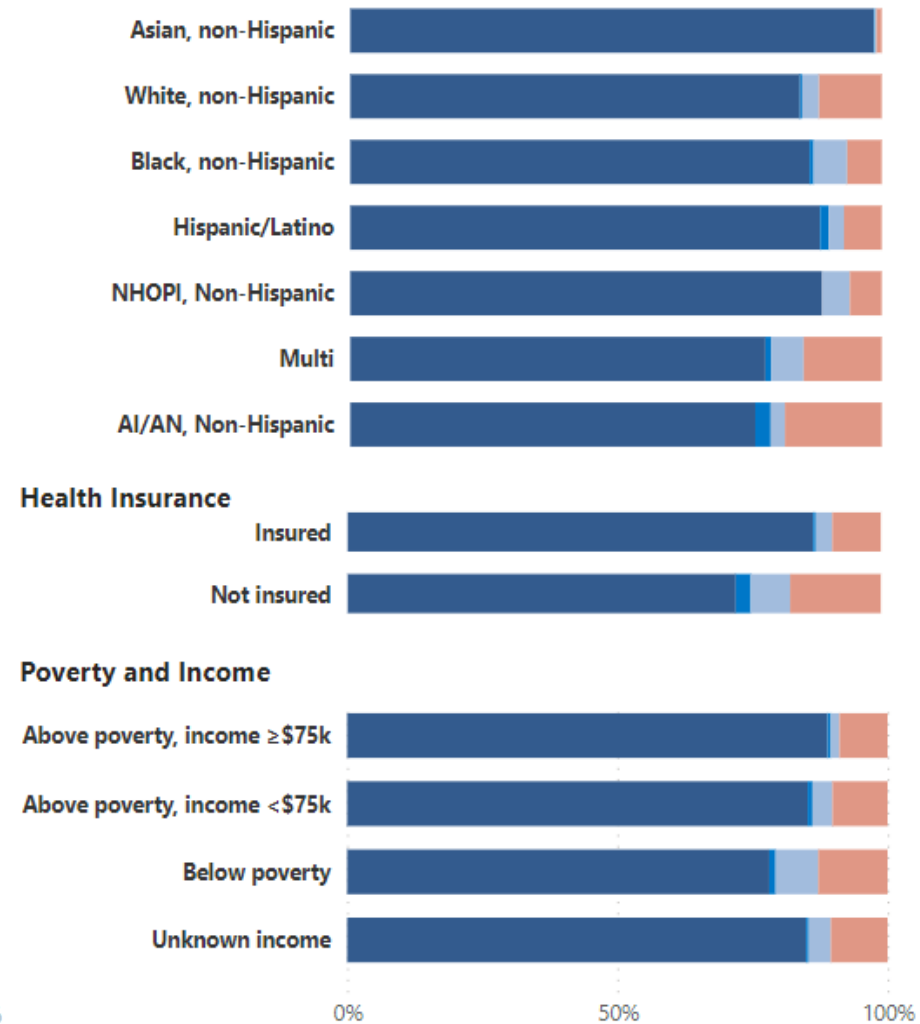
3.5% **Probably Will Get Vaccinated**
or Are Unsure

10.1% **Probably or Definitely**
Will Not Get Vaccinated

All Adults Age 18+



Race/Ethnicity



Health Insurance



Poverty and Income



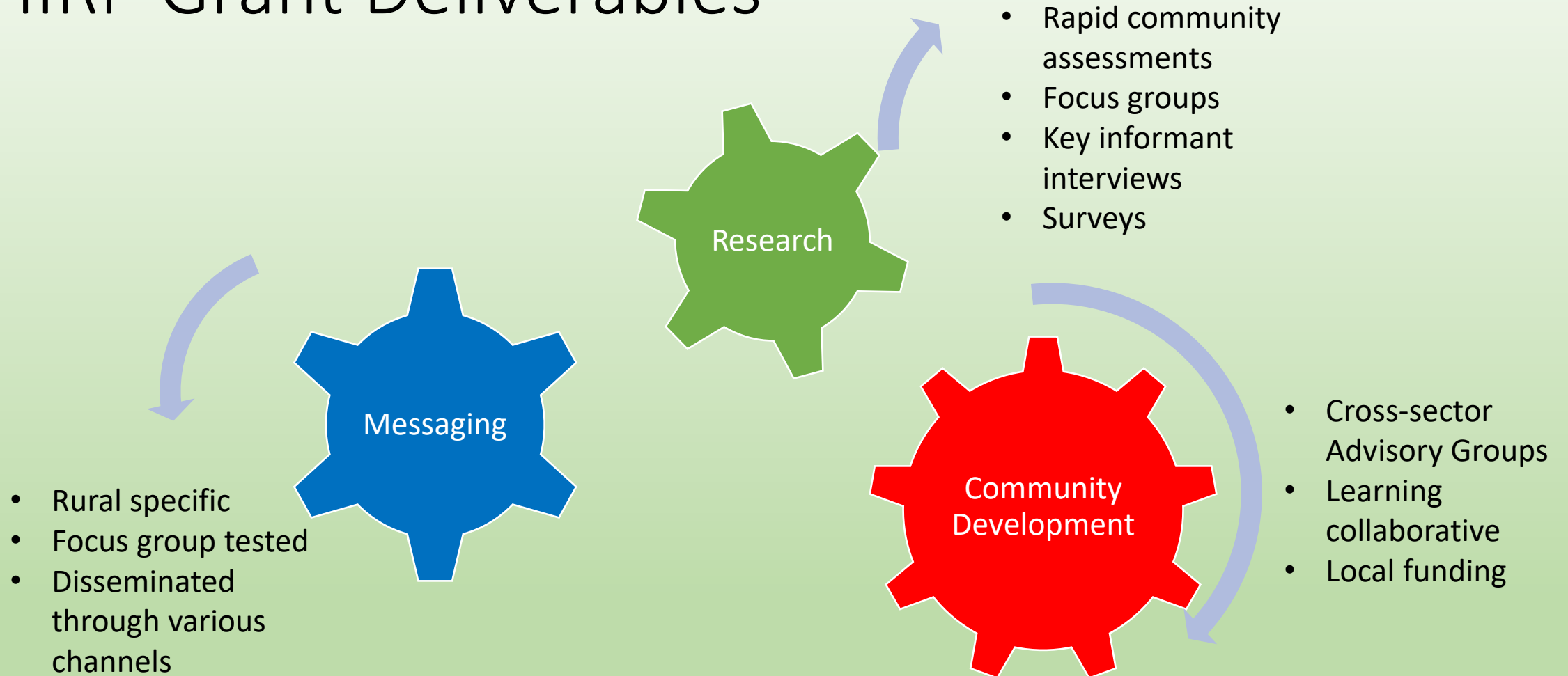
Percent (%)

Health Initiative for Rural Pennsylvania (HIRP)

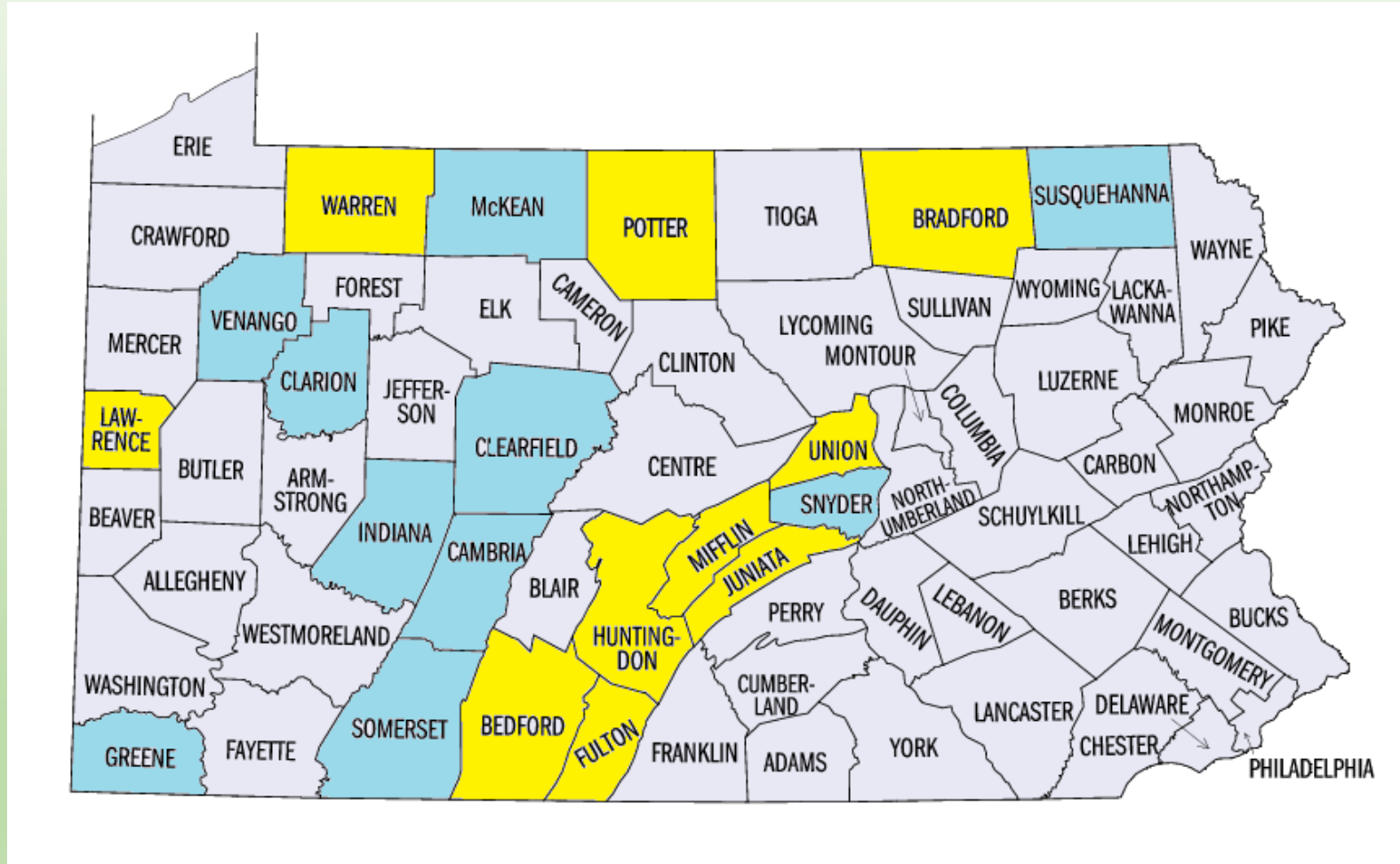
- Department of Health grant – CDC COVID-19 Health Disparities
- June 2021-May 2023
- Short-term objectives:
 - Reduce the incidence of COVID-19
 - Increase COVID-19 vaccinations
 - Promote pandemic preparedness and pandemic recovery
- Long-term objective:
 - Build lasting infrastructure in rural communities



HIRP Grant Deliverables



Rural Counties at Highest Risk for COVID-19

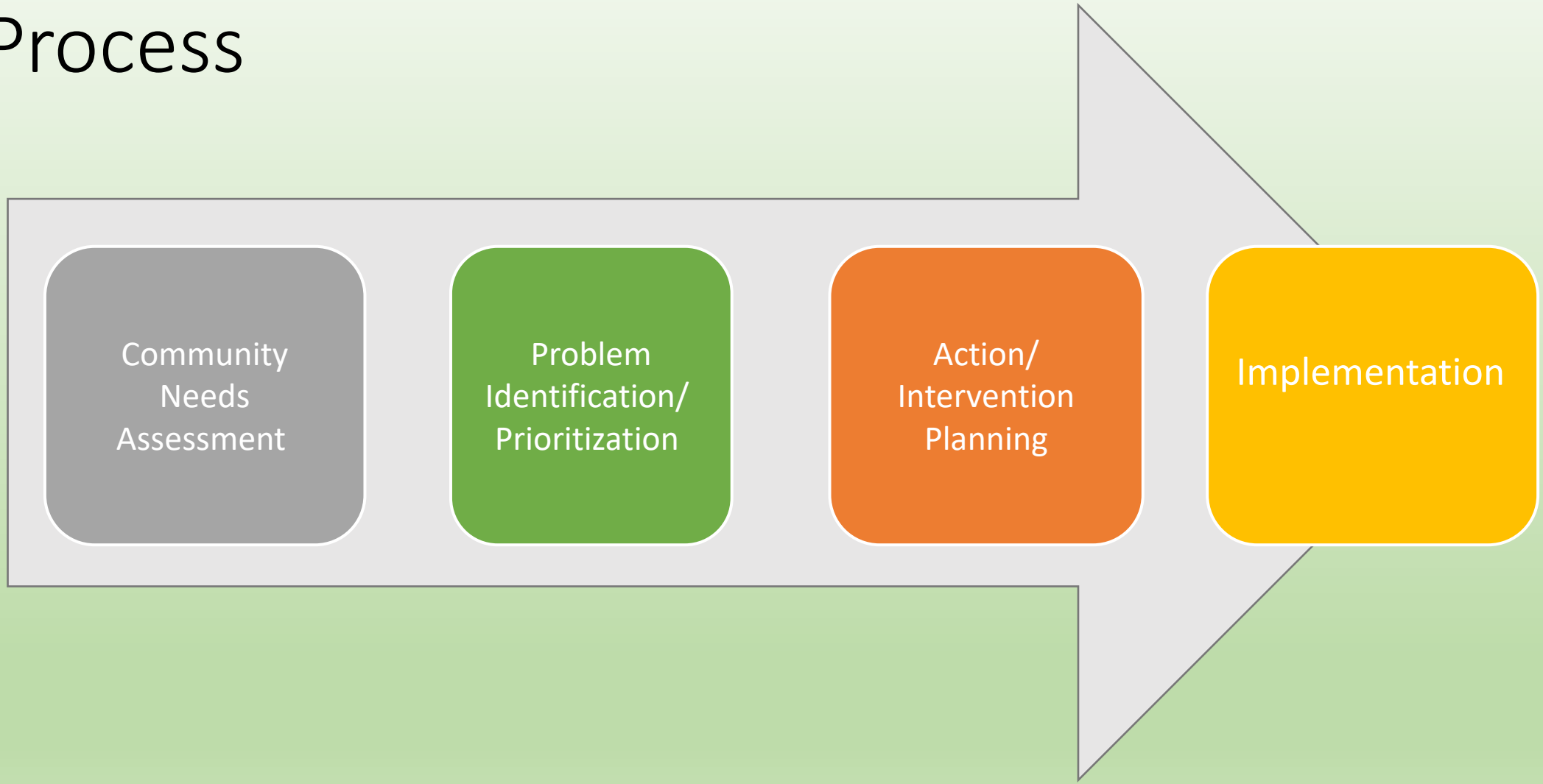


Advisory Group Membership

- Hospitals
- Primary care clinics
- Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Rural Health Clinics
- Pharmacies
- County Commissioners or other elected officials
- School Superintendents
- Colleges or Universities
- Chambers of Commerce
- Business and Industry
- Local ARCs
- Emergency Management Offices
- Regional EMS Councils
- DOH COVID-19 Nurses, Staff and Community Health Organizers
- Penn State Extension
- Farm Bureaus
- United Ways
- Community Action Agencies
- Human Services
- Patient Safety Authority
- Faith-based leadership



Community Development Process



Progress to Date

- Developed/convened Advisory Groups in 16 counties
- Merged with or restarted existing COVID-19 Taskforces in 4 counties
- Finalized 10 community action/implementation plans
- Implementing action through community charters
- Identified ten county organizations to serve as subcontractors
- Developed the Rural Pennsylvania COVID-19 Learning Collaborative (211 members)
- Compiled and shared local best practices/lessons learned
- Developed Rural COVID-19 Promising Practice Awards Program

Progress to Date Continued

- Completed 12 key informant interviews
- Contracted with a vendor to test, develop and disseminate rural specific marketing campaign

Early increases in vaccinations rates:

- Mifflin: 50% to 51.1%
- Union: 49% to 50.9%
- Venango: 46% to 47.8%
- Warren County: 40% to 48%



RCA Results

n=69, 13 Rural PA Counties

Vaccine hesitancy reasons:

- Myths and mis/dis-information
- Perceived immunity from prior COVID-19 infection
- Politically charged/motivated
- Wait and see approach
- Expressions of freedom and personal choice
- Distrust of government
- Urban only issue
- Lack of reliable, consistent information
- Ingredients in the vaccines



Source: Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health

Common Problems Across Counties

- Mis/dis-information
- Lack of local endorsement, local infrastructure and local storytelling
- Reduced demand for vaccination
- Lack of resilience, COVID-19 fatigue and preparedness for future waves
- High levels of vaccine hesitancy and “dug in” thinking
- Sense of rugged individualism
- Overriding negativity and lack of compliance with mitigation
- Altered perceptions of risk
- Differing political and faith-based influences
- Overwhelmed health care systems and unrealistic expectations for health care access
- Mixed perceptions and implementation in schools, businesses and faith-based organizations
- Inconsistent/hard to use data sources
- Equity and access issues for testing and vaccination
- Inability to isolate/quarantine
- Local mandates may not be enforceable

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

- Education and outreach
 - Local storytelling
 - Local endorsement
 - Address mis/disinformation
 - Develop/enhance local information hubs
 - Counter negative discourse through staged debates, townhall meetings, listening tours, educational workshops etc.
 - Local information hubs: <https://warrenvax.com/>
 - Employ trusted messengers/programs in schools, churches, businesses or other local venues
 - ✓ Schools ([Philly Teen Vax Ambassadors](#))
 - ✓ Churches ([St. Paul's United Church of Christ](#), 90% vaccination rate)
 - ✓ Local businesses ([Proctor and Gamble](#))



Best Practices and Lessons Learned continued

- Accessibility of vaccines, testing and other mitigation strategies
 - Reinvent and incentivize vaccination opportunities, focus on pediatrics
 - Home test kits
 - Mitigation stations
 - Less intrusive mitigation (air filtration)
- Tailored programing and toolkits
- Equity issues – transportation assistance, cost assistance, mental health services, wrap around services for isolation or quarantine





Local Feedback

- Reduced vaccine demand
- Case counts are down
- COVID-19 fatigue
- Local politics

Potential pivots

- Pandemic recovery
- Pandemic preparedness



Audience Feedback

How can we better incorporate the needs of people with disabilities into our process?

Contact Information

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