

## *Rural Matters May 2021*

### **Rural Health Network's Covid Vaccination Response**

From Executive Director, Jack Salo



In this special issue of Rural Matters, you will read about the ways that Rural Health Network is supporting the vaccination effort. As a community organization working in partnership with the **Southern Tier COVID-19 Vaccination Hub**, we are contributing important information on rural vaccination needs, transportation services and the opportunities available through our AmeriCorps Program to provide additional human resources to work on vaccine support. Our programs and staff have been hard at work assisting community members with registering for vaccine appointments (Northern Broome CARES and Community Health Services), arranging free transportation to vaccine appointments (Getthere), and sharing useful information and updates, including testimonial videos on the importance of being vaccinated.

In late April, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that eight percent of those who received their first Pfizer or Moderna shot had not returned for the second dose. For those with transportation barriers, it is likely that the percentage is higher. One of the vaccine assistance strategies I became most excited about was a suggestion by Bill Wagner, the Director of our Getthere Program. The Mobility & Transportation Advocate team would initiate follow-up calls to those for whom we arranged transportation to their first vaccination appointment, to inquire on their need for a ride to their second appointment. This action has been initiated, and through active outreach by the Mobility and Transportation Advocates, rides are being scheduled to second vaccination appointments. This intersection of mobility management and public health is a small crossroad, but one that will result in more people becoming fully vaccinated.

The Covid-19 vaccination effort is about mobilizing teams and systems to provide vaccines as well as providing skillful assistance to vulnerable populations who may be confused by the vaccination information and/or the registration process. There are people who may need transportation to a vaccination site, or who are frightened by what they are reading and hearing about vaccines. Rural Health Network remains committed to working with our partners to ensure access to vaccines across the region, and will continue to provide support directly to those individuals who need help addressing barriers and challenges to being fully vaccinated.

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**Vaccine Assistance Positions  
Available at Rural Health Network  
and other Community Partners**

Rural Health Service Corps is recruiting members to serve from May to November 2021 on COVID vaccination efforts. This will involve non-clinical direct support at 12-40 hours/week. Potential activities of these members include: educating people on vaccine preparation, managing waiting lists and sign ups, making transportation referrals to Getthere staff at Rural Health Network, assisting at point-of-distribution (POD) sites, conducting post-vaccine follow up, tracking and documenting the number of people served, assisting with messages to address vaccine hesitancy, and assisting with additional vaccine/COVID-related public health initiatives. We have numerous positions available of various term lengths, so please visit [our website](#) for more information and to apply, and stay tuned for updates! For specific inquiries, please email [hdesilet@rhnsncy.org](mailto:hdesilet@rhnsncy.org).



**AmeriCorps**

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## Ongoing Efforts to Encourage Vaccination

As mentioned in Jack's opening message, several RHN Leadership Team members have been active participants in the UHS-led Southern Tier Regional Covid-19 Vaccine Hub. They are committed to working collaboratively with clinical and community partners across an eight county region (Broome, Tioga, Chenango, Delaware, Tompkins, Chemung, Steuben and Schuyler), to reach rural populations and to provide credible sources of information addressing vaccine hesitancy factors.

As the structure of the HUB task force and subcommittees have changed, RHN has stayed in close contact with the group and has focused its efforts on gathering the most current community information to ensure that RHN personnel are up to date with the constantly changing COVID and vaccine-related environment, and that public-facing messaging reflects the most beneficial community information.

While our original goal was to share information about vaccine opportunities, the purpose has shifted to address factors which may contribute to hesitancy, as **demand for vaccines has fallen**. The Centers for Disease Control measures levels of hesitancy using data from the US Census Bureau's **Household Pulse Survey**, along with other sources.

Responses to the survey question: *"Once a vaccine to prevent COVID-19 is available to you, would you get a vaccine?"*, which provides the following options: 1) *definitely will*; 2) *probably* 3) *unsure*; 4) *probably not*; and 5) *definitely not*, contributes to three categories used to capture the strength of hesitancy to receive a vaccine.

- 1) Strongly hesitant
- 2) Hesitant
- 3) Hesitant or unsure

The first map on [this page](#) shows projected hesitancy rates in each county. Using the filters feature on the right-hand side, you can choose NY State and the county of interest. We know that there are specific strategies which work well with building trust in hesitant populations, and we strive to engage community members in ways that are proven effective.

This report from the National Academies of Sciences, ***Strategies for Building Confidence in Covid-19 Vaccines***, outlines strategies for engaging communities to combat mistrust and build public confidence.

- 1) Form partnerships with community organizations;
- 2) Engage with and center the voices and perspectives of trusted messengers who have roots in the community;
- 3) Engage across multiple, accessible channels;
- 4) Begin or continue working toward racial equity;
- 5) Allow and encourage public ownership of Covid-19 vaccination; and
- 6) Measure and communicate inequities in vaccine distribution.

RHN will continue to focus its vaccine advocacy, outreach, engagement, and public health education efforts on identified highest need rural communities within our service area. Simultaneously we will look inward to offer vaccine support to our current and expanding client base across our direct service programs via Community Health Workers, Getthere Mobility Transportation Advocates, and Public Health Service Corps members.

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## Ask a Black Doctor



We encourage our community partners to watch this informative video and consider the information an opportunity to share information with their staff and service populations. YouTuber and actor, KevOnStage uses humor to engage with a Black doctor about the COVID-19 vaccine as it relates to the Black community. The content in the video is useful and entertaining for all audiences, including non-Black populations.

Some of the topics discussed are:

- How the vaccine works
- How the vaccine was able to be developed in a year and why it needed to be developed quickly
- Medical distrust in the black community in relation to the vaccine and that black doctors have been involved in the whole process of the vaccine
- The vaccine will continue to be studied
- Symptoms of COVID-19 are likely to be worse than any possible side effects of the vaccine
- Vaccine protection against mutations of the original COVID-19
- You may still get the virus after getting the vaccine, but you are much less likely to die from it if you are vaccinated

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Getthere has been transformed from a person-centered mobility management program helping the most vulnerable in our community to a vital contributor of public health by meeting the transportation needs of our community made vulnerable by the global pandemic.

COVID-19 has shuttered neighborhood businesses, taken the lives of friends and family members, and changed life as we knew it. When vaccine sites began springing up, Getthere utilized its experience and expertise to quickly provide



## The Fight Against COVID-19

Getthere took over  
1,400 calls in March  
& April 2021



Getthere has  
arranged over 700  
vaccination trips

70% of COVID related  
calls received  
assistance getting to  
a COVID-19  
vaccination site



30% of COVID  
related calls  
received assistance  
accessing food &  
prescriptions

Getthere is a program of the  
Rural Health Network of  
South Central New York

RURAL HEALTH  
NETWORK  
Serving South Central New York

transportation assistance to those in need.

In order to understand how Getthere was able to field over 1,400 calls this past March and April and arrange an impressive 700 vaccine trips, we must take a brief look into the past. Getthere's Connection to Care (CTC) program, which was established in late 2013 to help rural residents gain access to health care, laid the groundwork for the today's robust transportation offerings.

Taking a person-centered approach, staff identified and resolved transportation needs through a cost-effective, personalized strategy to get people to their non-emergency health care appointments. In its first year alone, CTC provided 506 people with transportation.

Getthere has grown in size and scope since 2013 to meet the transportation needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals living in poverty. The need swelled in 2020 as the COVID pandemic hit our community. Getthere expanded services to encompass transportation to COVID-19 testing, accessing food and prescriptions for those in quarantine, and pandemic-related job loss.

Getthere joined a team at the Rural Health Network actively involved in the strategic planning process for the rollout and subsequent distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine on the Regional COVID Vaccination Taskforce. In meeting after meeting transportation was cited as a barrier to get people vaccinated and threaten efforts to return the community to good health.

Getthere was confidently able to stand up and declare that transportation would not stand in the way of people reaching a vaccination site. Getthere's "we got this" attitude, along with funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), allowed us to embark on new collaborations and implement innovative strategies. For example, our partnership with Tompkins County allowed us to connect their residents with vaccine sites in other counties before local pop-up sites emerged.

Getthere will continue to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals in our community while offering programming that bolsters the health and well-being of the community as a whole.

## News of Interest

- **The Southern Tier Vaccine Hub's PSA, featuring Mobility & Transportation Advocate Julie Fehely** (Additional PSAs can be found at [this link](#), under the heading: *UHS Covid-19 Vaccination PSA Videos*)
  - **Governor Cuomo Announces New York State to Adopt New CDC Guidance on Mask Use and Social Distancing for Fully Vaccinated Individuals**
  - **Building Connections for Mental and Physical Health, from The Administration for Community Living**
  - **Register for our upcoming webinar: A Fresh Outlook for Rural Food Retail: Business Transitions and Cooperative Ownership**
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