



January 12, 2022

Dear EXCITE partners,

Happy New Year!

As the Acting Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD) and the Center's Deputy Director for Science, I wanted to express my gratitude for our partnership with all of you at the U.S. Cooperative Extension System (CES) on the EXCITE project – which CDC is proud to feature as a spotlight on its [Health Equity in Action](#) page.

The CDC awarded funds to USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture to partner with CES, because Extension field agents are known trusted messengers working in every county across the nation, both big and small. Extension field agents are uniquely situated at local levels to engage with their communities and build partnerships to improve community health. As my team listens to our partners in the field, we hear story upon story of the need for one-on-one, honest discussions with trusted messengers to address concerns about COVID-19 vaccines.

Tailored messaging in rural areas works. As of today, over 76% of people in the United States have received their first COVID-19 vaccine dose. In rural areas, 71.4% of people ages 18 and older have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine – with the percentage of those reporting that they definitely will get vaccinated [on the incline](#). Thank you to those who helped realize these achievements by getting vaccinated and helping others do the same.

In order to reach the remaining individuals who are hesitant about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, we are relying on trusted messengers to provide education about the vaccines, share information on how they were developed, and address myths about what's in the vaccines. There's an enormous need to cut through the confusion that exists about why everyone should receive a vaccination, how to get a vaccine, where to get vaccinated, and what services are available to get them to the point of vaccination (if needed).

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, messages will need to adapt, and conversations will need to continue. Understanding the needs of the community is invaluable in framing these conversations. To help in this effort, CDC recently published a [COVID-19 Vaccination Field Guide Addendum: Rural Considerations for Vaccine Confidence and Uptake Strategies](#). This resource complements CDC's [12 COVID-19 Vaccination Strategies for Your Community](#) and content on [How to Conduct a Rapid Community Assessment](#), both designed to support the work of communities across the U.S. to increase vaccine confidence and vaccine uptake.

At CDC, we know one size does not fit all and that context is important, which is why we're looking forward to learning from CES and understanding community concerns to develop and deliver effective tailored messaging to increase vaccination in hard-to-reach communities, in both rural

and urban settings. I know how hard field agents work, the long hours and distances traveled especially in rural and frontier areas, and how much you all care about the community members you serve.

Thank you for all that you do!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samuel F. Posner".

Samuel F. Posner, PhD  
Director (Acting)  
National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention