

Highlights from the Alliance for Health Policy's Webinar – Why Our Vaccine Deployment is Shy of Target: State Responses to Vaccine Supply

Overview

On February 4, 2021, the Alliance for Health Policy held a webinar to discuss the lessons learned from the slower-than-expected COVID-19 vaccine deployment. Speakers discussed their perspectives and reasons why the United States fell short of its target to vaccinate 20 million essential workers and seniors in December 2020, and strategies to reach future targets. Sarah Dash, president and CEO of the Alliance, moderated the discussion and introduced the speakers, which included James Blumenstock, senior vice president, pandemic response and recovery at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), Kate Johnson, program director, healthcare cost and coverage at the National Governors Association (NGA), and Esther Krofah, executive director of FasterCure, a Center of the Milken Institute. Event materials, including speaker bios and resources, can be found online at the Alliance's [webpage](#).

Highlights

ASTHO's **James Blumenstock** explained why the United States fell short of its December 2020 vaccination target, noting that early in the rollout, a well-defined target was not set and that it was difficult to measure progress without any specific target. He also argued that expectations were poorly managed, causing the government to overpromise and underdeliver.

As of February 2021, about 56 million vaccine doses were delivered to vaccine providers and distributors, but only about 34 million have been administered. Mr. Blumenstock explained that there are many reasons why this difference is so large, including an initial "learning curve" in vaccine distribution, minor instances of wastage, lag times between dose delivery and dose reporting, vaccine dose underreporting, low throughput vaccination sites, and initial conservative inventory management by states. Going forward, Mr. Blumenstock said the government must continually assess and adjust supply, introduce better management and transparency in communications between the federal and state governments, be more flexible, bring to scale the vaccination campaign, and address vaccine hesitancy.

Kate Johnson with the NGA discussed elements of the states' approach to vaccination and highlighted areas where improvements can be made. Ms. Johnson identified four elements of the existing vaccination effort: 1) Determining allocation to critical populations; 2) Distribution and administration of vaccines; 3) Data infrastructure for vaccine management, tracking, and reporting, and; 4) Communication and engagement. Ms. Johnson also noted that equity must remain a foundational characteristic of all four of these elements.

Ms. Johnson explained that while Governors have allocated vaccine doses to high-risk patients in an equitable and efficient manner, supply shortages impede states' efforts and may delay efforts to expand vaccine eligibility. Ms. Johnson also noted that some states' vaccination efforts move more slowly than others as they struggle with outdated distribution and data infrastructure at the county and local levels, which also contribute to equity and efficiency issues. Ms. Johnson emphasized the importance of intergovernmental communication in the vaccine response, which she believed was crucial to address equity concerns and improve vaccine uptake.

Ms. Krofah discussed global vaccination efforts and how COVID-19 variants will pose an ongoing challenge as the rollout continues. She explained that it will take a global effort to end the worldwide pandemic by achieving herd immunity, and underscored the importance of therapeutic developments. To respond to the variants, Ms. Krofah argued that the federal and state governments should work to improve genomic sequencing. As a way to improve genomic sequencing, Ms. Krofah said state governments should ramp up the use of existing data structures while bringing more labs on-board to handle COVID-19 test sequencing. Ms. Krofah said that states should continue to rapidly deploy vaccines to the most at-risk population groups while diligently and consistently maintaining case mitigation efforts.

Ms. Dash concluded the event by thanking the panelists. The Alliance will continue to monitor ongoing vaccination efforts and provide insights to policymakers as these efforts proceed. Future events related to COVID-19 vaccination will be hosted on AHP's website as part of their [COVID-19 webinar series](#).

