

## RENT RELIEF AND COVID-19 TESTING, VACCINATION IN ST. LOUIS

Over 8 million U.S. households have fallen behind in their rent during the COVID-19 pandemic and another 2 million are at least 3 months behind on mortgage payments.<sup>1</sup> Racial and ethnic minority households are twice as likely to be affected as white households, and more than 1 in 4 low-income households are affected. These same groups lag in COVID-19 vaccination rates.<sup>2</sup> In partnership with the City of St. Louis and 2-1-1, we aim to increase COVID-19 vaccination and testing among low-income and minority adults who are housing unstable. The proposed study will be integrated within the City's rent-relief program. Residents seeking rent assistance will call a telephone helpline (2-1-1) to complete eligibility screening and apply for rent relief. When this process is completed, callers will be offered a referral to our study team. Via a brief mobile-optimized survey, we will evaluate the City's rent relief program process and offer participants 1) in-home COVID testing and 2) vaccination support. The offers of testing and vaccination will be randomized to test different *targeted messages*, and employ *sequential request strategies* that are proven to increase behavior change. The aims of the study are:

**Aim 1.** Determine the COVID-19 vaccination rate of housing-unstable adults in St. Louis.

- We will ask callers to the rent-relief helpline if they are thinking about getting vaccinated (yes, no, not sure, already vaccinated), and report the proportion "already vaccinated."

**Aim 2.** Evaluate the impact of targeted messages on callers' getting tested and vaccinated.

- By random assignment, 1,000 callers to the rent-relief helpline will be shown different messages, including themes related to housing instability, security and protection, relative priority, social norms and civic obligation before being asked if they are interested in receiving an in-home COVID test and if they are interested in or thinking about getting vaccinated. The Health Communication Design Studio will develop, evaluate and choose from the themes.
- Use statistical analyses to compare differences in testing and vaccination responses by message type:
  - Which messages elicit greater testing and vaccination intentions and behavior?

**Aim 3.** Evaluate the impact of a sequential request strategy on willingness to take and return an in-home COVID-19 test and become vaccinated against COVID-19.

- At baseline, callers to the rent-relief helpline will be offered in-home COVID-19 testing and vaccination support. We will report the proportion of callers who accept the offers, and after one month follow-up, the proportion who complete the test and return the results or report having been vaccinated. We will also ask about the outcome of rent-relief support.

Many communities across the U.S. will be using federal funding from the American Rescue Plan to help residents meet rent, mortgage and utility payment needs. The systems put in place to distribute this assistance will reach millions of Americans experiencing financial strain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because many in this group have been vaccinated and tested at lower rates than other Americans, there is a unique opportunity to link vaccination and testing to delivery of social needs support. Findings from this supplemental research can help other communities determine how best to integrate social needs and COVID-19 prevention services.

## Literature Cited

1. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Housing insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic. March 2021. Available at: [https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/cfpb\\_Housing\\_insecurity\\_and\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic.pdf](https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/cfpb_Housing_insecurity_and_the_COVID-19_pandemic.pdf). Accessed May 6, 2021.
2. State Health Access Data Assistance Center. COVID-19 vaccination rates: State-level and subpopulation evidence from the Household Pulse survey – Update 4. March 25, 2021. Available at: <https://www.shadac.org/news/covid-19-vaccination-rates-state-level-and-subpopulation-evidence-household-pulse-survey-0>. Accessed May 6, 2021.