

## 3 KEY STRATEGIES: ACTION ITEMS

### ✓ Build A Comprehensive Team

- ▢ Include stakeholders from cross-campus departments on the team.
- ▢ Include students on the team.
- ▢ Include local healthcare providers and organizations on the team
- ▢ Include state and/or national organizations on the team.
- ▢ Stay connected to a national network.
- ▢ Partner with your local, regional, and or state health department.

### ✓ Gather Knowledge

- ▢ Utilize existing quantitative data and gather what is missing.
- ▢ Gather qualitative data.
- ▢ Keep current as data evolves and monitor your progress.

### ✓ Engage Your Campus

- ▢ Explicitly tie your efforts to the institutional mission and values.
- ▢ Make it easy for your campus community to take action.
- ▢ Apply cultural humility strategies to reach everyone.
- ▢ Partner with students who are best positioned to reach their peers.
- ▢ Build the student communication pipeline if one doesn't exist.
- ▢ Use a multi-layered approach to campus engagement.
- ▢ Actively reach the students who aren't already engaged.
- ▢ Make joy and hope a prominent part of the work.

## LEARN MORE:

Find the resources referenced in this publication and more on the CoVAC Initiative's [Community College Engagement page](#).



The Campus COVID-19 Vaccination and Mitigation (CoVAC) Initiative is a project of the American College Health Association, funded by a cooperative agreement with the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



# Managing Public Health Crises At Community Colleges: 3 Key Strategies



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A NOTE FROM THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Community colleges often deal with challenges distinct from four-year institutions—they tend to serve predominantly or exclusively commuter students, lack campus health centers, have a more diverse student body with open admissions policies, experience frequent turnover of the student population, and be intertwined with the community workforce. Even with these challenges, community colleges had many successes throughout the course of the pandemic.

The goal of this committee was to identify and compile resources meant to specifically assist community colleges in their efforts to manage public health crises. By highlighting the many success stories from across the country, we hope to help others gain a greater understanding of the strategies, resources, and collaborations that can assist community colleges with student success efforts, employment, and other health or emergency situations.

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Managing Public Health Crises  
At Community Colleges:  
3 Key Strategies

Recognizing the pivotal role community colleges played during the COVID-19 pandemic, The American College Health Association’s Campus COVID-19 Vaccination and Mitigation (CoVAC) Initiative gathered leaders from community colleges across the country to capture their insights and recommendations to inform effective responses to future public health crises. The strategies described in this publication can and should be used to address the diverse and evolving health needs of college students across all types of campuses, including students’ needs arising from the mental health crisis.

3 Key Strategies

✓ Build a comprehensive team, with diverse representation from on- and off-campus partners.

✓ Gather the knowledge needed to act, utilizing existing data if available and collecting campus-specific information when possible.

✓ Utilize the team and the knowledge gathered to engage the campus community across many channels.



# 3 Key Strategies in Action

## STRATEGY 1: Build a Comprehensive Team

Putting together a dedicated team of campus stakeholders with clearly outlined responsibilities proves helpful for launching and maintaining efforts to solve health-related crises on campus.



**Include all stakeholders from cross-campus departments on the team.**

### Ozarks Technical Community College, MO



Ozarks Technical Community College's (OTC) COVID Response Team included representatives from across the institution, including the Chancellor, the Chief of Staff, the Dean of Students, the Provost, the Associate Vice Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, the Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services, and representatives from the Student Care Team, the Research Department, the Communications and Marketing Department, and the Human

Resources Department. Touching all areas of the college system, the Response Team's operations and processes were transparent for the entire community. The Response Team was also highly productive, meeting 2-3 times per week initially. OTC believes this model helped everyone to "row in the same direction during a time that was very unpredictable and sometimes unstable."



**Include students on the team.**

### Coahoma Community College, MS

Coahoma Community College (CCC) enlisted the help of its student leaders and collaborated with various health entities to address the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CCC collaboration included representatives from student engagement, student government, career services, student support services, tutorial services, campus safety, health and counseling services, student activities, and the COVID-19 response team. Together they created unified messaging to address community concerns about the rapid pace of change and provide credible information about COVID-19 and the vaccine.



**Include local healthcare providers and organizations on the team.**

### Temple College, TX

Leveraging existing relationships with two hospital physicians who served on its Board of Trustees, Temple College created a mutually beneficial partnership with the local healthcare system. These physician Trustees provided valuable insights on safety measures, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, and in return, Temple College provided ventilators and use of the college's simulation center as a makeshift hospital. All parties reported this partnership had a positive impact on students, staff, and the community.



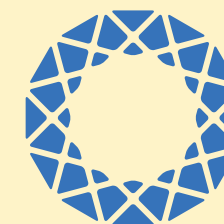
**Include state and/or national organizations on the team.**

### Tulsa Community College, OK

Tulsa Community College (TCC) took action to support student health and wellness during and beyond COVID-19 by forging partnerships with organizations like The Jed Foundation and Thriving Campus. TCC offered mental health awareness programs to connect students with resources and create a culture of care, funded a Peer Health Education Program, and offered virtual Mental Health First Aid training for students and staff. TCC also created virtual opportunities for students to gain service hours through long-term volunteer programs like Wellness Advocates and the Student Wellness Advisory Board.

## STAY CONNECTED TO A NATIONAL NETWORK COMMUNITY COLLEGE HEALTH COALITION

Thaddeus Mantaro, PhD, Dean of Student Health and Wellness at Dallas College in Texas, recently led the formation of ACHA's Community College Health Coalition, a group of approximately 100 members nationwide. This coalition fosters relationships, promotes information sharing, and highlights best practices for college health professionals at community colleges who often face different challenges than their colleagues at four-year institutions. With a goal of sharing resources and information tailored for community college leaders, the coalition empowers leaders to find innovative solutions and do more with less. To learn more, see the Community College Health Coalition page at [www.acha.org](http://www.acha.org). Members of ACHA can also join the [Community College Health Coalition's online community](#) in ACHA Connect. Network with other community college staff, ask and answer questions about common challenges, and stay up to date on the coalition's activities.



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### Partner with your local health department.

#### Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, WA

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department partnered with Clover Park Community College, Pierce Community College, and Bates Community College to host COVID-19 vaccination clinics. The colleges provided needed space, and Clover Park Community College also provided nursing students to assist as vaccinators at the clinics. This collaboration extended benefits to all involved and the larger community.



*Many community colleges collaborate with local health departments, as encouraged by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). These partnerships offer benefits such as accessing health data, providing professional development for staff and students, collaborating on community messaging, and identifying and planning strategies with community partners.*



—Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, WA



### Partner with your regional health department.

#### North Central Missouri Community College, MO

During the COVID-19 outbreak, North Central Missouri College (NCMC) collaborated closely with regional public health agencies, devising a pandemic plan and supporting public health efforts. NCMC reported positive COVID-19 cases and provided information to allow contact tracing, which was particularly helpful for residential students with different permanent addresses. The local health department helped NCMC distribute accurate weekly dashboards and develop communication templates and reporting forms. NCMC also partnered with the local hospital for expedited COVID-19 testing tailored to the college community. NCMC reciprocated by assisting in vaccination drives, supplying medical materials, and cheering on health workers. This collaborative effort contributed to a safer campus and community.



### Partner with your state health department.

#### SUNY Jamestown Community College, NY

Jamestown Community College (JCC) extended an existing partnership with the Cattaraugus and Chautauqua County Departments of Health for influenza vaccination to include COVID-19 vaccination, with support from the New York State Department of Health. These partnerships resulted in a high number of vaccinated individuals in our communities. The Cattaraugus and Chautauqua County Departments of Health also helped JCC with contract tracing and tracking. Both counties provided free rapid antigen tests to JCC campuses for students and employees. JCC Health Services played a crucial role in COVID-19 mitigation efforts, assisting infected individuals and implementing daily wellness checks. These community partnerships were essential in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

## STRATEGY 2: Gather Knowledge

When working on health-related issues on campus, data can help identify the most pressing needs and ensure that efforts towards a solution on campus are successful and impactful.



### Utilize existing quantitative data and gather what is missing.

#### Coahoma College, MS

Coahoma Community College (CCC) partnered with the Mississippi Department of Health and area urgent care facilities to better understand local current COVID-19-related data. They also collected data from students who were vaccinated against COVID-19. The Campus COVID-19 task force consistently shared updated protocols and best practices with students, faculty, and staff at all campus locations and posted updated data on their campus website.



### Gather qualitative data.

#### Dallas College, TX

In mid-fall 2021, Dallas College offered students who received a COVID-19 vaccine a \$200 incentive. The Chancellor tasked the Business Continuity Office (BCO) with evaluating the incentive program. The BCO, in partnership with Student Success and Athletics Coaches, invited unvaccinated students to focus groups at six of the seven Dallas College campuses. They learned the nature of students' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about the COVID-19 vaccines, who was influencing their vaccine decision making, their level of trust in the institution and government decisionmakers, as well as their feelings about how their education had been impacted by the pandemic response. This feedback was critical in helping Dallas College assess their campus efforts. (For more see page [6 ])



### Keep current as data evolves and monitor your progress.

#### Illinois Valley Community College, IL

Illinois ordered all community colleges to close for the 2020-2021 academic year. Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC) formed a volunteer campus team to address pandemic challenges. The team consisted of personnel from Human Resources, Student Services, Business Services, and Health Professions, and was coordinated by a certified social worker. The coordinator fostered positive conversations with and offered support to employees. The college reopened with testing, masking, and vaccination protocols in place supported by the LaSalle County Health Department and campus security. The volunteer team met regularly, monitored the health crisis using real-time data, and as a result, IVCC saw 100% compliance with vaccination or testing protocols for staff and faculty.



In the student focus groups convened by Dallas College in fall 2021, the college asked:

How has the college’s response to the corona-virus pandemic impacted students and their academic journey?

Although most students believed Dallas College’s response to the pandemic was helpful and made the environment safer, they also found the lack of social interactions between students and with instructors hindered their enjoyment of the college experience and their ability to learn.

- “I had to be online for my whole freshman year. I did not have a good college experience.”
- “It was hard to do online, and I did not finish last year.”
- “I struggled not being at class in person.”

Why didn’t unvaccinated students take advantage of the \$200 incentive the college offered to those receiving the COVID-19 vaccination?

Students refusing the COVID-19 vaccine reported concerns about safety and efficacy. They reported being uncomfortable with unknown long-term and short-term side effects and concerns about the vaccine’s ability to protect them from getting COVID-19.

- “My dad showed me an article that said it could affect my ability to have children in the future.”
- “I’m not going to get the vaccine, because I don’t see a point if you can still get sick.”

“Something felt off. It was created in such a short amount of time.”

Who are the major influencers in students’ vaccine decision-making processes?

Almost half of students reported being influenced primarily by their family in their decision not to be vaccinated against COVID-19, with another 15% reporting that they have been influenced by celebrities. The vast majority of students reported having one or more immediate family members who had already been vaccinated against COVID-19 and that seeing the side effects their family member experienced discouraged them from wanting to get vaccinated themselves.

- “Some of my friends got the vaccine, but they don’t push me to get it or treat me any differently.”
- “I listen to my mother. She doesn’t want me to get it because of the unknowns.”

- “Nicki Minaj did not go to The Met Gala because they were requiring to be vaccinated.”

What information did students rely upon to make their decision and what misinformation needed to be addressed?

Over a third of the students said they did not believe the COVID-19 vaccine reduced a person’s chances of hospitalization and death from COVID-19; a smaller percentage believed that it would reduce severity of symptoms but overall was not very effective and would not impact every person in the same way.

- “No, the numbers show that if you get the vaccine, you have 30% chance of going to the hospital.”
- “I don’t think so. My dad’s friend got vaccinated and then died.”
- “I don’t think it will prevent anyone from getting COVID.”
- “I think it lessens the symptoms, but you can still be hospitalized depending on your immune system.”

What other factors were driving students’ vaccine decision-making process?

When given an open opportunity to share their thoughts, students expressed mistrust of the government and concerns about their freedom to choose whether or not to be vaccinated. A smaller but significant portion of the students shared that the incentives being offered for those choosing to be vaccinated against COVID-19 made them suspicious of the vaccine.

- “It’s scary knowing the government is doing this to divide people, vaccinated and unvaccinated.”
- “I’m watching everything unfold, the mistreatment of humanity. The government has an agenda to get whatever they need done.”
- “It is kind of terrifying knowing that the president is trying to get everyone vaccinated and I’m not vaccinated.”
- “Now that Dallas College is giving money, it seems even more like I’m a lab rat.”
- “Stop offering incentives. If this is supposed to help me, why are you offering to pay for it? The doctor’s office doesn’t give you money for your medicine, so why now?”

STRATEGY 3: Engage Your Campus

Engaging the entire campus community in meaningful and varied ways will help you promote the health-related message you need to convey. Whether it’s building vaccine confidence, promoting healthy behaviors, or sharing safety tips in a health-related crisis, creative and meaningful engagement that addresses the specific concerns of the campus community can have a lasting, community-wide impact. These efforts should include campus personnel, students, families, and the surrounding community.

✓ Explicitly tie your efforts to the institutional mission and values.

Portland Community College, OR

For fall 2021, Portland Community College (PCC) formed and shared a set of guiding principles to inform their planning and decision making as students returned to campus. Recognizing that guidance from health authorities and information would continue to change rapidly, these principles provided context for PCC’s decision making throughout the academic year.

“The overall health and safety of our communities as well as a commitment to being equity-minded in our decision-making have been at the center of our processes.”

— President Mark Mitsui, Portland Community College 9/27/2021

Portland Community College: Guiding Principles (select)

- We will continue to prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of our community. We will follow the guidelines of federal, state, and local health authorities, as well as other appropriate safety and wellbeing considerations, in determining the extent to which operations and classes should remain in remote status.
- We will center the diverse instructional needs of our students by offering a flexible hybrid model of in-person and virtual instruction.
- We will center the diverse support needs of our students by offering a flexible hybrid model of self-service, in-person, and virtual services.
- We will prioritize access and inclusion for our most marginalized and vulnerable community members, for whom the pandemic exacerbated many inequities.
- We will thoughtfully customize approaches to teaching, services, and operations based on each area’s
- We will capitalize on what we have learned this past year and continue to innovate and try new approaches with the goal of improving equitable student success. In the pursuit of continuous improvement, we will regularly examine and refine practices as we learn more and as the context around us changes. Our goal is the continued improvement of outcomes for students and a positive workplace for employees.





**Make it easy for your campus community to take action.**

### Dallas College, TX

Building on the strong partnerships they developed and the information they gathered about their students' needs, Dallas College actively promoted COVID-19 vaccines for the campus and surrounding community. By partnering with Dallas County Health & Human Services, a third-party vendor, HEB Grocery Stores, and Six Flags Over Texas, Dallas College was able to offer convenient drive-through and walk-up vaccine clinics and provide incentives such as Six Flags tickets, cash rewards, and groceries to encourage students and employees to get vaccinated.



**Apply cultural humility strategies to reach everyone.**

### Santa Rosa Junior College, CA



Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) partnered with student athletes and nursing students to provide COVID-19 vaccination for students and employees, including Eritrean and Spanish-speaking members of the community with different information and support needs. SRJC brought vaccination clinics to under-served areas and partnered with Spanish-speaking county health staff to assist with paperwork, medical assistant students to do online data entry, and peer ambassadors to promote the clinic through bilingual, culturally sensitive outreach efforts, materials, and social media posts.



**Partner with students who are best positioned to reach their peers.**

### Coahoma Community College, MS

In fall 2021, Coahoma Community College (CCC) partnered with student government to better understand how to promote COVID-19 vaccinations on campus. Student government engaged the CCC student body through a variety of communication platforms, including the college website and social media accounts. They also created a public service announcement featuring CCC students sharing why COVID-19 vaccination was important to them, those they love, and their CCC community. This PSA was featured on the college's social media and at many events, including well-attended sporting events.



**Build the student communication pipeline if one doesn't exist.**

### University of the District of Columbia, DC

To promote COVID-19 vaccination and reduce hesitancy, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) formed a Public Health Club with student peer ambassadors. They created social media posts, conducted outreach activities, organized workshops, collaborated with campus stakeholders, and shared materials on COVID-19 vaccination. The Public Health Club was critical in getting the word out through early flyer distribution and leveraging campus influencers for social media. UDC supported the Public Health Club's persistence by focusing on making their meetings and events joyful and emphasizing the enjoyment of the work.



**Use a multi-layered approach to campus engagement.**

### Davidson-Davie Community College, NC

Davidson-Davie Community College (DDCC) employed various methods to engage students during the COVID-19 pandemic, including email, digital screens, message boards, bulletin boards, posters, fliers, and in-person events including a forum hosted by student government. DDCC's outreach focused on mitigating the spread of COVID-19, student mental health education, and the rationale driving college vaccine policies and procedures.



**Actively reach the students who aren't already engaged.**

### Ohlone College, CA

Ohlone College (OC) student wellness ambassadors shared information and education on COVID-19 and vaccinations, using different methods to reach different students. Ambassadors offered Zoom education sessions, in-person tabling, and social media to spread the word. Partnering with the campus bookstore, OC offered incentives including branded 'swag' when promoting COVID-19 vaccination, and this helped increase the student ambassadors' ability to engage other students.



**Make joy and hope a prominent part of the work.**

### North Central Missouri Community College, MO

As part of North Central Missouri Community College's (NCMCC's) mission to value individuals and care about their success, faculty members took initiative to make students feel included during a period of isolation. When commencement was held virtually rather than in person, faculty celebrated graduating students by sending them t-shirts and personalized notes from their advisors. NCMCC's Senior Student Affairs Officer also coordinated a celebratory ribbon campaign across Missouri colleges and universities, the result of which was shared with the Missouri Department of Higher Education.

