

Key Messages from the Evaluation of Sheffield's COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce for people from ethnic minority backgrounds



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In 2021-22 an independent evaluation explored the work undertaken through Sheffield's COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce for people from ethnic minority backgrounds **led by the BAMER5 group of voluntary, community and faith (VCF) organisations**.¹ The taskforce aimed to raise awareness of the COVID-19 vaccine and to support vaccine uptake in communities known to have higher levels of vaccine hesitancy.

Overall, the evaluation paints **a very positive picture about the effectiveness of the Taskforce** and provides some key messages for the future.

1. Overcoming barriers to health promotion

The **Vaccine Taskforce was able to overcome a number of barriers to vaccine uptake** including awareness, understanding, misinformation, language and a lack of trust in the health system. This was achieved through a core strategy based on **communication, community engagement and outreach** that utilised the BAMER5's existing reach into and understanding of ethnic minority local communities, to deliver a range of activities that directly addressed some of the key factors associated with vaccine hesitancy.

2. Utilising existing community 'health assets'

VCF organisations such as the BAMER5 are an example of community 'health assets' with **rich histories and long track records of working with local communities to promote health**. They have in depth knowledge of their communities which enables them to identify the most appropriate strategies for promoting health messages to different population groups. This is particularly important for work with people from ethnic minority backgrounds whose needs and circumstances, and the strategies that best support them, are very often different from the majority population that access mainstream services.

3. Making a contribution to increased vaccination levels in people from ethnic minority backgrounds

Key stakeholders believe that the **Vaccine Taskforce made an important contribution to Sheffield's COVID-19 vaccine 'success story'**. Sheffield has the highest vaccination rate of the English core cities and saw a significant narrowing of the gap between the majority white population and key ethnic minority groups between March and November 2022 – the time period when the Taskforce was active. **It is likely that the Vaccine Taskforce indirectly saved lives and prevented**

¹ The five organisations are: ISRAAC Somali Community Association, Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association, Aspiring Communities Together, Pakistan Muslim Centre, Firvale Community Hub.

serious illness amongst the target population groups. For the small amount of money invested the Taskforce represented extremely good value for money.

4. Implications for the future

The findings of this evaluation have important implications for the **future engagement and involvement of organisations led by ethnic minority groups in public health issues.** It was widely recognised that, prior to the pandemic, partnership with the public sector had been far from ideal but that there was an opportunity to change this in ways that would benefit the health of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the longer-term. Key to this will be **maintaining a commitment to partnership working based on trust and understanding of each other's strengths and challenges.**

Key stakeholders recognised the importance of **supporting VCF organisations led by ethnic minority groups to be more sustainable** through more equitable funding practices and wider support, including commissioning services differently so that the needs and circumstances of people from ethnic minority background communities are taken into account. Other enabling factors included a **recognition of the added value that VCF organisations led by ethnic minority groups provide** for the health system, **enabling them to work together in partnership** rather than in competition with each other, and **minimising bureaucracy** so that it doesn't become a burden or detract from frontline delivery.

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