

MARCH 2025

## MODERATOR

### CHRISTOPHER SKISAK, PHD

Executive Director  
Houston Business Coalition on Health

## PANELISTS

### SUE LETANG

Senior Manager, Health and Welfare Plans  
US Foods

### JOHNATHAN MARKERT

Director, Benefits and Well-Being  
Tokio Marine HCC

### SUSAN MCBROOM

Director, Human Resources  
Patriot Rail Company

### DIANE C. MCCLUNE, RN, MBA

Strategic Consultant  
Pittsburgh Business Group on Health

### WENDY MCLAURIN

Director, Human Resources  
City of Gary, Indiana

### CAROLE MENDOZA

Vice President, Benefits  
Voya Financial

### ROSA NOVO

Employee Benefits Director  
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

# Examining Employer Vaccination Strategies: Highlights From an *AJMC*<sup>®</sup> Employer Roundtable

This publication was sponsored by Pfizer, Inc.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Vaccinations play a vital role in preventive care strategies. However, to document vaccination goals, organizations take varying approaches ranging from informal benchmarks to structured objectives
- Onsite and community clinics offer valuable means of promoting vaccination and must be paired with initiatives to educate patients and remove barriers to access.
- Tracking vaccination outcomes remains a challenge; 5 of 7 employer panelists do not track outcomes through claims or primary care initiatives.
- Trust is critical in health care decisions, with health care professionals playing a pivotal role in promoting vaccines.
- Vaccine fatigue, vaccine myths, and distrust in the health care industry must be overcome with tailored approaches, education, and careful consideration of who delivers vaccination messaging.
- Manufacturers, payers, social determinants of health, and employee incentives must be considered to execute successful employee vaccination campaigns.

On July 23, 2024, *The American Journal of Managed Care*<sup>®</sup> convened a panel of 7 employers to discuss challenges and strategies surrounding employee vaccination.

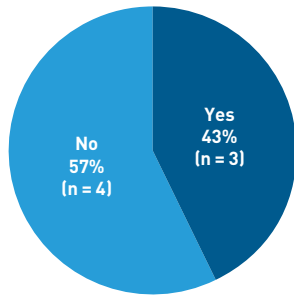
The event was moderated by **Christopher Skisak, PhD**, executive director of the Houston Business Coalition on Health. This *AJMC* Clinical Brief recapitulates key findings from the roundtable. Suggested action items (✍️) are noted throughout and summarized in the final **Table**.

## THE ROLE OF VACCINATION IN EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING INITIATIVES


Vaccinations play a vital role in broader employee well-being and preventive care strategies, according to the panelists. First, they should be integrated within a comprehensive preventive care framework, according to **Sue Letang** of US Foods and **Susan McBroom** of Patriot Rail. At US Foods, vaccinations are promoted alongside essential screenings such as annual physicals, colonoscopies, and mammograms. Similarly, Patriot Rail requires employees to complete annual wellness examinations, including receipt of immunizations, with a financial penalty of \$75 per month for noncompliance.


Vaccinations can also be encouraged by wellness program incentives. **Johnathan Markert** notes that at Tokio Marine, flu vaccines are encouraged through the company's health care plan and tied directly to wellness program participation. Patriot Rail also offers the support of a third-party health assistant to provide guidance on preventive care resources and immunization benefits, ensuring a more integrated approach to health management.


**Figure 1.** Do You Have Vaccination Goals for Your Company?





**Figure 2.** Integrating Vaccination Into Employee Health Programs

- 

Offer onsite vaccinations during clinics and benefits fairs.
- 

Cover vaccines fully under both medical and pharmacy benefits.
- 

Integrate vaccination schedules, education, and vaccine titers into wellness programs.
- 


Align vaccination initiatives with open enrollment.
- 

Offer cash, premium reduction, or health savings account contribution for health screenings, PCP visits, vaccination, and/or tobacco-free status.

PCP, primary care provider.

Additionally, vaccinations carry long-term value within organizational wellness strategies. Most employers consider vaccines essential for well-being and disease prevention, notes **Diane McClune, RN, MBA**, representing a Pittsburgh-based multiemployer group. This approach is both a health imperative and a sound business strategy. Indeed, vaccine awareness has been a key element of the *stay healthy* initiative of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, according to representative **Rosa Novo**, underscoring the role vaccines play in maintaining a healthy, productive workforce.

By embedding vaccinations into these broader initiatives, organizations can not only enhance employee health but also drive long-term productivity gains.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Integrate vaccinations into broader preventive health care initiatives.

**Documenting Vaccination Goals**

Many organizations do not document vaccination goals (**Figure 1**). Those that do take varying approaches that range from informal benchmarks to structured objectives focused on improving employee health outcomes.

Some organizations do not formalize their vaccination goals. For instance, while Patriot Rail covers the cost of recommended vaccines and follows CDC guidelines, it does not set specific vaccination targets, McBroom explains. Voya Financial similarly does not establish formal goals beyond aiming to exceed industry averages reported by their health plan, according to **Carole Mendoza**.

Other organizations define clear vaccination goals. The City of Gary, Indiana, outlines a target of 90% to 100% participation in vaccinations based on age and vaccine history, notes **Wendy McLaurin**. Self-insured employers often use historical data to set annual goals that are broken down by vaccine type and demographic group, adds McClune.

Vaccination goals can help raise awareness and improve immunization rates, Novo notes. Her organization strives to increase vaccinations, although directly linking these efforts to broader preventive initiatives constitutes a challenge.

Establishing clear vaccination goals, whether through informal benchmarks or structured targets, helps organizations to foster better health outcomes and improve employee well-being.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Establish clear vaccination goals.

**Vaccination Within Holistic Approaches to Employee Health**

Integrating vaccinations into broader wellness strategies is a key component of holistic employee health approaches, according to the panelists (**Figure 2**). A common practice is offering onsite

vaccinations during clinics and benefit fairs; the panelists agree on the importance of full insurance coverage for vaccines.

Accessibility is another key focus. For instance, flu shot clinics can be brought onsite to major locations, Markert emphasizes. Moreover, immunizations can be made central to wellness events, McLaurin and McBroom agree; vaccination schedules and education can be integrated into wellness programs, and vaccine titers can be provided for employees who are uncertain about their immunization history.

Aligning vaccination initiatives with open enrollment is another common strategy. Employees are most focused on health during the open enrollment period, McClune highlights. Moreover, incentives such as wellness time off can boost participation, Mendoza explains.

US Foods takes a proactive stance on vaccination, according to Letang, who states that promoting preventive care and vaccinations is essential for maintaining a healthy, readily available workforce. This strategy is not formalized but the organization incentivizes preventive measures by offering \$65 monthly for employees and partners who complete health screenings as well as an additional \$65 for being tobacco-free.

Ongoing education is crucial for promoting immunization awareness, particularly for older employees, as Novo stresses. Streamlining health benefits simplifies access to preventive care options, Letang shares. As her employees are faced with many point solutions for holistic wellness, such as cancer screening and vaccination, Letang offers a centralized means to access these points that she has dubbed *benefits in a box*.

These strategies demonstrate a comprehensive approach that combines vaccination access, education, and incentives to improve employee health outcomes.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Facilitate vaccination by ensuring coverage, fostering access, and promoting awareness.

### Vaccination and Productivity

Panelists believe that vaccination plays a critical role in enhancing productivity and reducing absenteeism. However, vaccination is not a focus in many organizations. For example, while her organization's health and wellness programs aim to prevent absenteeism, specific vaccination efforts are not prioritized, McBroom notes. This sentiment is shared by Markert and McLaurin, who primarily focus on encouraging primary care provider (PCP) visits as their main strategy.

Linking vaccination to reduced absenteeism poses challenges, as Novo observes. Employers explore various strategies to mitigate absenteeism; however, she notes, determining the impact of vaccination efforts is "extremely difficult." Although sick days appear to be reduced after vaccinations, establishing a clear connection to vaccination initiatives remains elusive.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Consider how vaccination initiatives align with productivity goals in your organization.

### IMPLEMENTING VACCINE PROGRAMS

Vaccination programs are integral to engaging employees in preventive care, panelists emphasized. Several organizations offer onsite vaccination clinics. For instance, Tokio Marine provides clinics for in-person employees, while the Gary Health Department offers clinics to local schools and businesses as part of their outreach efforts.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools pairs flu shot clinics with educational campaigns aimed at promoting access and removing financial barriers. The organization coordinates with location staff to schedule appointments, provides after-hours opportunities, identifies local pharmacy options, and produces multilingual materials to boost participation. The widespread closure and absence of retail pharmacies, which serve as health care access points in rural areas and health care deserts, increases pressure on employers to provide immunization opportunities.

Education is a central approach at US Foods, Patriot Rail, and Voya Financial. Although US Foods no longer offers onsite COVID-19 and flu clinics, and Patriot Rail lacks a specific vaccination program, both prioritize educating employees on the importance of vaccines. Recently, Patriot Rail introduced an initiative requiring annual wellness visits, which include preventive screenings and vaccinations, as part of their health care plan. Voya Financial takes a collaborative approach by partnering with carriers to promote vaccinations.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Revisit the role of clinics, educational campaigns, and partnerships with carriers in your vaccination strategy.

### Responsibility for Vaccination Programs

The responsibility for vaccination programs varies widely among employers (Figure 3), with collaboration and external resources emerging as common themes. In some organizations, responsibility is decentralized. For instance, US Foods lacks a dedicated vaccination lead, whereas the Benefits Department manages vaccination efforts at Voya Financial. At the City of Gary, the executive director and health services manager of the Health Department take charge.

In other organizations, individual leaders like Markert, Novo, and McBroom oversee vaccination programs directly. In these organizations, McBroom emphasizes, it is essential to collaborate with brokers and forums like the Florida Alliance, where ideas are often shared and brought back. Involving multiple stakeholders to identify challenges and solutions is essential, McClune underscores, as this prevents organizations from working in isolation.

External networks, such as the Midwest Business Group on Health (MBGH), are crucial resources, according to McLaurin and Mendoza. These coalitions provided guidance and shared experiences that proved helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participation in the Employer Health Innovation Roundtable, which helps identify innovative solutions tailored to employee needs, has similarly benefited US Foods, Letang reports.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Collaborate with health service brokers, professional forums, and employer coalitions to maximize the efforts of small vaccine program staff.

**TRACKING PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND USING DATA**

Tracking the outcomes of vaccination programs remains a challenge, the panelists agreed, despite its recognized importance. Five panelists’ organizations do not track outcomes through claims or primary care initiatives. For instance, Tokio Marine and US Foods prioritize managing high-cost claims and chronic conditions like diabetes and cancer over vaccination tracking. A hyperfocus on high-cost claims and expensive drugs has been the priority at Tokio Marine and has helped maintain stable premiums at US Foods.

Novo highlights the gap in her organization between vaccinations and outcomes, explaining that while the number of individuals vaccinated is visible, “there is no systemwide identifier linking health conditions or outcomes.” To truly assess the impact of vaccinations, she notes, in-depth analysis is needed to isolate specific health factors. Miami-Dade County Public Schools actively uses data from the United States Preventive Services Task Force to address vaccination gaps, particularly for adults, through targeted communication efforts. Although the organization has seen improvements in preventive measures, including a record 60% vaccination rate last year, linking this data to health outcomes proves difficult. Novo tracks vaccination rates by bargaining unit, such as *teachers* and *bus drivers*, but expresses a desire to connect this data with health outcomes.

Patriot Rail has a similar limitation, McBroom shares. While the organization tracks wellness visits, it does not monitor which specific

vaccines are administered. That employees seek care outside the health plan makes tracking outcomes more difficult, Mendoza adds.

In contrast, the Gary Health Department tracks vaccination performance on a monthly basis, states McLaurin, and uses this data to assess both employee and community-wide outcomes. Self-insured employers with data warehouses can set specific vaccination goals and track visits by type, McClune adds, although challenges with aggregated data often persist. Tracking can be further complicated by employee turnover, Mendoza emphasizes, affecting cohort consistency over time.

Universally, data are not being used to the degree that panelists would like. Segmenting their employee populations for heightened outreach and collaborating with health plans and vendors to increase communication with those at highest risk, for instance, constitute aspirational goals.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Compare your organization’s vaccination rates with data from the United States Preventive Services Task Force to address vaccination gaps.

**Tracking Primary Health Care Visits**

Trust is critical in health care decisions, particularly regarding vaccination, panelists agree. Health care professionals play a pivotal role in promoting vaccines, Novo emphasizes, stating, “When a health care professional says, ‘You should get your vaccines,’ it’s much more impactful.” Employees are more likely to trust their doctors than their employers, Letang agrees. Fostering the employee-physician relationship builds trust, which, in turn, increases vaccine uptake, she adds.

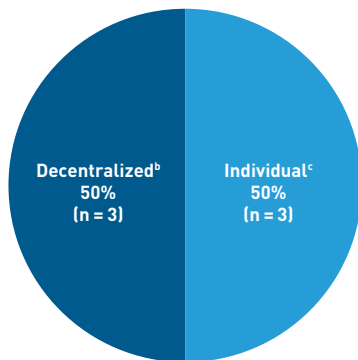
The success of the Pittsburgh Business Group on Health in promoting the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine largely stems from strong physician-patient trust, McClune emphasizes. The correlation between having a PCP and higher vaccination rates should be explored, as Mendoza and Letang note.

However, challenges in tracking employee PCP engagement persist, most panelists acknowledge. While Miami-Dade County Public Schools tracks the percentage of employees with PCPs, for instance, the numbers remain low. “Although 64% of employees had an annual visit,” Novo states, “most were with specialists rather than PCPs.” Patriot Rail recently required employees to visit a PCP; it is implementing virtual primary care services for employees in rural areas.

Tokio Marine incentivizes employees to see their PCPs by offering lower health care premiums in exchange for a signed form from their physician, allowing for tracking of participation. Around 45% of the company’s employees see a PCP, Markert estimates. At the City of Gary, incentives for primary care visits have also increased employee engagement, according to McLaurin. However, estimating the percentage of employees who have a PCP has been difficult, especially after transitioning to fully insured coverage, as many employees are reluctant to share health information.

To address trust issues, Patriot Rail partners with an employee health monitoring and data analytics company, which provides

**Figure 3. Responsibility for Vaccination Programs (%)<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup>Pittsburgh Business Group on Health does not administer vaccine programs directly.

<sup>b</sup>US Foods, Voya Financial, City of Gary

<sup>c</sup>Tokio Marine, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Patriot Rail

confidential support and improves tracking of primary care visits. Even when trust is established, Novo adds, language barriers affecting PCP access exist, particularly in Miami-Dade County, where only 6% of PCPs speak Spanish.

Overall, panelists agree that while the PCP relationship is vital, numerous barriers—including access, trust, and data collection—limit engagement. A guidebook to help organizations better understand and leverage these data is needed, Skisak notes.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Foster employee-physician relationships with incentives. Track visits with forms or using a third-party service.

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO VACCINE HESITANCY

A central aim is to get better preventive care commitment and follow-through from employees and dependents, McClune notes. However, panelists agree, vaccine fatigue, myths, and distrust constitute substantial barriers to employee vaccination.

#### Vaccine Fatigue

Employees' COVID-19 experience has affected their willingness to stay current with vaccinations, several panelists note. Fatigue has recently led to reduced vigilance in Gary, McLaurin adds, citing a recent COVID-19 spike after physicians began diagnosing it as a common cold.

#### Vaccine Myths

Myths play a major role in reducing vaccination rates, panelists observed. The impact of myths is exacerbated by numerous information sources, including social media, and concerns about adverse events. Misinformation can spread even without outright falsehoods, Markert notes, as employees may follow influencers who reject vaccines, believing that not vaccinating is a healthier choice. Many employees question the need for vaccines against diseases like measles or polio that they have never encountered, Letang emphasizes, compounding the challenge.

Personal choice plays a significant role, the employers agree, with many employees perceiving little need for vaccinations. This is especially true if vaccination against a target disease like influenza was not part of an employee's upbringing or if they have never contracted the disease. Employees often see vaccines like the influenza shot as only mitigating—not eliminating—disease, McBroom adds, which fuels skepticism.

Employees avoiding artificial ingredients in food may reject vaccines as unnatural interventions, panelists note. In this context, myths about vaccines, such as their links to autism or adverse health effects, spread easily. Social media amplify skepticism and misinformation, Letang argues, overshadowing critical facts. Combating these myths is especially difficult when misinformation comes from trusted authorities, the panelists agree. "In Florida, some professionals advised against the COVID-19 vaccine," Novo observes. "How do you fight that battle?"

#### Distrust in the Health Care Industry

Compounding vaccine fatigue and vaccine myths is distrust in the health care system and even in science, the panelists concur. Historical health care disparities, particularly in the Black community, contribute to this distrust, Mendoza notes. In certain areas, political culture can further fuel skepticism, with public health officials sometimes downplaying vaccines.

A broader mistrust in science itself may be a factor, Novo observes. Previous generations of parents trusted medical professionals and vaccines like those for polio, she notes. However, many current parents, empowered by social media, question vaccines, fearing that they cause conditions like autism.

Distrust extends to pharmaceutical companies, panelists agree. Employees often mistrust the motives of these manufacturers and perceive a focus on profits, Mendoza highlights. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines, she adds, has further deepened doubts, with people questioning the reliability of these vaccines.

#### Overcoming Obstacles

Addressing vaccine hesitancy requires listening to employee concerns, educating stakeholders, and carefully considering who communicates with employees, the panelists unanimously agree (Figure 4). Listening sessions have been successful in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Novo highlights, "We focus on education and answering specific employee concerns." By hosting question-and-answer sessions with pharmacists from in-network pharmacies before clinics, the organization achieved a 60% immunization rate—the highest in years. The pharmacists not only emphasized the

**Figure 4.** Strategies to Overcome Vaccine Hesitancy

<b>Listen</b>	<b>Listen to employee concerns including during dedicated listening sessions.</b>
<b>Educate</b>	<b>Educate physicians about how to engage patients.</b>
<b>Consider</b>	<b>Consider who communicates with patients, engaging pharmacists and other community voices.</b>

importance of immunizations but also addressed specific employee concerns in a private setting, which boosted engagement.

Physicians must be educated to engage patients without confrontation, McClune emphasizes, to focus on understanding concerns rather than merely presenting facts. With financial support from large pharmaceutical companies, this occurred through the Pittsburgh Business Group on Health, as physicians taught physicians and pharmacists. The effort substantially increased vaccination rates.

Education initiatives remain critical, as is noted by McBroom, who conducts year-round programs including lunch-and-learns and webinars. The choice of educator is vital; pharmacists are often viewed as neutral figures and are less affected by mistrust related to the COVID-19 pandemic, McClune adds.

Using trusted community voices to discuss vaccine benefits can be effective, Mendoza argues, as it was when Voya Financial employed the voice of a Black woman from their executive leadership team. Testimonials from colleagues can resonate powerfully, too, Letang adds. Novo's organization even creates videos featuring actors from minority communities to promote the COVID-19 vaccine, which has enhanced relatability and trust.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Listen to employee concerns, educate stakeholders, and carefully consider who communicates with employees.

### VACCINATIONS AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Substantial social inequities in benefits design and health service access exist, panelists acknowledge, and social determinants of health (SDOH) play a role in shaping employer vaccination and wellness strategies. Voya Financial has developed a dashboard to track health measures—such as emergency department usage and preventive care—that is segmented by race, ethnicity, gender, wage, and geography by using the Area Deprivation Index. “We’ve identified gaps and started targeted campaigns around preventive care and vaccinations,” Mendoza observes.

An SDOH dashboard also exists for the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, where it is used to focus on communities facing significant social and economic challenges, Novo adds. The organization brings onsite clinics to underserved areas where large retail pharmacies are absent.

Data from health plans and systems can also be used to identify needs in food deserts and areas with limited public transportation, as McClune does. Her vaccination programs align with this broader SDOH strategy, addressing overall health needs in these communities. Targeted approaches to improve vaccination rates in underserved populations is critical, all panelists agree.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Create a dashboard to track health measures (eg, wellness visits) segmented by race, income, and other SDOH.

### The Role of Executive Leadership

Executive support is crucial for the success of well-being initiatives, panelists agree, particularly when addressing social inequities among employees. However, such support can be absent. For instance, some executives at the Pittsburgh Business Group on Health have been reluctant to fully engage in a program addressing health inequities among Black women in Pittsburgh, according to McClune. Despite employing directly affected populations, executives often fail to recognize that offering good benefits alone is not enough to ensure equitable health outcomes. “The challenge is persuading executives that we must go beyond just offering benefits,” she notes.

Indeed, many executives don’t view employee well-being as their responsibility, Letang adds. “They pay a salary and expect employees to handle the rest,” she observes; this attitude leads to resistance in sponsoring wellness programs.

Executives focus heavily on return on investment, McLaurin notes, making it essential to prove that investing in employee health leads to better outcomes like reduced absenteeism. However, collecting data to demonstrate these results is challenging, because information is spread across multiple systems.

Although a healthier workforce should reduce the number of claims, McBroom adds, it is still necessary to make the case for wellness programs to executives. “Even with CEO support, we need to demonstrate value more effectively,” she notes.

Executives must be constantly educated, Novo emphasizes, and benefits teams should report directly to CFOs. Insurance companies and pharmacies must also support wellness initiatives, she notes, particularly in the public sector, where social inequities are most pronounced. “Support from health care executives could help address basic employee needs like access to healthy food or transportation,” she adds.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Engage executive leadership in wellness initiatives by demonstrating return on investment.

### STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL VACCINE PROGRAMS

A successful vaccine program requires consideration of topics ranging from employee incentives and engagement to the setup of community vaccine clinics to how to work with payers, according to the panelists.

#### Employee Incentives and Motivation

Incentivizing and accommodating employees can significantly improve participation in preventive care and vaccination programs, panelists agree. Many organizations fully cover preventive care and offer financial incentives. Just as Tokio Marine lowers monthly premiums for PCP visits, Voya Financial provides 4 hours of paid time off and a \$200 health savings account contribution for getting preventive care, including vaccinations; Patriot Rail offers \$100 for similar efforts. Employees of US Foods receive \$65 monthly for cancer screenings.

As incentives are offered, employee needs must be accommodated, as McLaurin and Novo highlight. Bringing vaccination services directly to work locations, addressing logistical barriers like transportation and timing, and offering education to address employee concerns have significantly boosted participation in both wellness and vaccination programs.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Offer paid time off, cash incentives, and logistical support (eg, transportation) to boost participation in preventive care programs.

### **Engagement Strategies: Remote vs In-Person Employees**

Reaching hybrid or fully remote employees with preventive care services presents unique challenges. Mendoza frames the issue in this way: “Half of our people are 100% remote, 40% are at least partially remote. How do you bring those services to people?”

Communication and flexibility are essential in serving these employees. Mailers can be sent to the homes of workers to advertise on-site programming, events can be scheduled on days when most employees are in the office, and digital signage can be used as they are at US Food. Additionally, rural employees can be educated with lunch-and-learn sessions and weekly *Did You Know?* updates, as they are at Patriot Rail. Collecting employees’ preferred contact information can improve outreach, according to Letang. Moreover, targeting spouses can engage male employees who are less interested in preventive care, McBroom notes.

Digital health tools like teladoc health are useful but limited in fully remote environments, note McBroom and Novo. Although employees can receive prescriptions remotely, they still need to visit a pharmacy or laboratory for vaccinations and testing. Digital solutions must be complemented by practical, in-person services to fully address the needs of remote and hybrid employees, the panelists agree.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Collect preferred contact information, engage spouses of male employees, and complement digital solutions with in-person services to engage hybrid or fully remote employees.

### **Accessing Vaccines at Pharmacies and Beyond**

Overlapping strategies can be employed to encourage vaccination among in-person, hybrid, and remote employees. Voya Financial uses online vouchers for free vaccinations at pharmacies, which US Foods also offers to employees and their spouses. A key concern is flexibility to allow vaccinations at onsite clinics, pharmacies, or physicians’ offices, the panelists note.

Pharmacies themselves play a key role. Within the Pittsburgh Business Group on Health, partnering with pharmaceutical companies to train pharmacists on patient engagement has led to a substantial increase in regional HPV vaccinations.

Collaborating with CVS, Walgreens, and Publix has been crucial to vaccination efforts for in-person employees at the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. With many of the organization’s employees holding second jobs, Novo notes, evening and weekend care is essential.

The role of public health departments is critical to the vaccination of in-person workforces, McLaurin emphasizes. Free COVID-19 testing and vaccinations at onsite events has helped to ensure that employees of the City of Gary have accessible vaccination options beyond traditional health care settings.

Overall, the panelists focused on flexibility and partnerships to overcome vaccination barriers for remote and in-person employees alike.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** To lower barriers, offer vaccinations at onsite clinics, pharmacies, and physicians’ offices, and partner with pharmacies and local health departments.

### **Community Vaccine Clinics**

Additionally, vaccination clinics must be brought to the communities where employees live, panelists emphasize. This is especially true for those with limited access to transportation. Many employees of the Miami-Dade Public Schools system do not own cars, so partnering with local supermarkets like Winn-Dixie and health departments is essential, Novo notes. These partnerships allow her organization to use community resources for employees’ families while focusing their own funds on employees.

Health care can also be integrated into community events such as the City of Gary’s *Wind Down Wednesdays* at the beach, where the health department offers vaccinations alongside entertainment. “It’s about making health care accessible where people naturally gather,” McLaurin said.

Local universities can help turn vaccination events into comprehensive health fairs as they have for the Pittsburgh Business Group on Health, offering biometrics and education on other health topics like obesity.

To encourage participation, targeted communication is key. Geo-access reports are used by the Miami-Dade Public Schools to organize clinics. US Foods uses wellness champions at remote locations to replicate successful events from the corporate office.

For the clinics themselves, vaccines can be sourced from various providers including health plans (Pittsburgh Business Group on Health, City of Gary), health departments (City of Gary), retail pharmacies (US Foods, Miami-Dade County Public Schools), and manufacturers or onsite vendors (Miami-Dade County Public Schools). These diverse strategies enable broader access to preventive care across distributed workforces.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Collaborate with local organizations to bring vaccination clinics to the communities where employees and their families live.

### Messaging Strategies

Varied, community-centered messaging strategies are key to boosting vaccine participation, panelists agree. Offering incentives like raffle prizes (US Foods), postering public spaces like schools and barber-shops (Miami-Dade County Public Schools), and mailing information to employee homes, particularly targeting spouses (Voya Financial), have all proven successful. Coordinating with local events to avoid scheduling conflicts is important, McClune stresses, and faith-based outreach has proven successful for the City of Gary. The latter has partnered with churches in the Black community, leveraging the trust people have in pastors to promote vaccination. The Pittsburgh Business Group on Health has found similar success in using the American Heart Association's *Search Your Heart* initiative, which is also focused on churches in Black communities.

Nevertheless, the use of in-person events to promote vaccination varies. US Foods hosts a national rodeo and a subsequent wellness fair with vendors and prizes to boost engagement, whereas Tokio Marine and Voya Financial do not conduct in-person events.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Be creative in your community-centered strategies to boost employee vaccination.

### Ideal Resources From Manufacturers

Manufacturer resources play a critical role in educating pharmacists, physicians, and the public, panelists emphasize. "Manufacturers offer excellent, unbranded materials tailored for different languages, age groups, and educational levels," McClune continues.

Manufacturers can also facilitate vaccination discussions between employees and their PCPs or pharmacists. Onsite immunization clinics where patients can ask questions beforehand are helpful, Novo highlights; manufacturers could support these efforts by providing physicians to address patient inquiries.

Manufacturer partnerships in educating health care professionals can be helpful, as they have been for McClune and Markert. However, messaging should originate from sources beyond just manufacturers to ensure credibility and trust, McBroom cautions.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Engage drug manufacturers for development of educational materials, support with onsite clinics, and partnership in educating health care professionals.

### Working With Payers

Preventive care, including vaccinations, should be seamlessly covered by health plans, panelists emphasize. Coverage should span both the medical and pharmacy benefits to minimize obstacles for employees, Mendoza adds. If it does not, Novo echoes, vaccines administered at onsite clinics can be billed as office visits, leading to charges for employees. If payers seek to cover vaccinations under 1 benefit—to improve reporting, for example—employers can insist on broader coverage, Mendoza advises.

Pharmacies and pharmacists play a crucial role in vaccine education, panelists agree. Better communication between health plans and pharmacies and valuing of pharmacists as trusted patient advisers are needed, Markert and McLaurin stress. CVS pharmacists help distribute information for US Foods on health solutions for diseases like diabetes and cancer when employees pick up prescriptions, Letang notes, reinforcing the partnership between employers and pharmacies. Moreover, vendors for US Foods refer employees to relevant solutions and report back on utilization. "This approach is crucial," Letang added, "as we have 30,000 employees and a very small staff."

Benefits can be integrated and communication can be streamlined across health care vendors, Novo notes, citing the use of a single sign-on system at Miami-Dade County Public Schools. CVS has been particularly collaborative, Novo observes, engaging in follow-up questions, sharing patient information more openly than other pharmacies, and ultimately facilitating better care coordination for employees.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Ensure that vaccinations are covered under both pharmacy and medical benefits, and partner with pharmacies to boost vaccine education.

Figure 5. Strategies to Address Unmet Needs



**Integrate point solutions.**



**Optimize data use to target programs, tailor messaging, and track outcomes.**



**Convince decision-makers to invest in employee wellness.**



**Engage manufacturers.**



## CLOSING THOUGHTS AND ACTIONABLE STEPS

Several common unmet needs exist in employer vaccination programs, panelists agree (Figure 5). Chief among these is the integration of point solutions. “It’s overwhelming and confusing for the employee,” Novo explains. Moreover, employees given a particular diagnosis (eg, cancer) might benefit from multiple point solutions, such as those for depression treatment and social services, Letang adds, and these employees have little time to research their options. There is a need for the organizations offering these solutions to share and analyze data with one another to foster early identification and treatment of comorbid disease, Skisak notes; an employee picking up a prescription for a lipid medication at a pharmacy could receive information about vaccines, for instance.

Such integration would benefit employers, too, the panelists conclude. Just as a single online portal to access all point solutions could benefit the employee, a single portal for these organizations to collaborate with each other could benefit the employer, Letang and Novo agree. Point solution vendors must begin to work together to offer single communications around topics (eg, cancer, weight loss) and customer service scripts, alleviating the pressure on Human Resource Departments with small staff sizes. Such integration would reduce employer costs by preventing expenses

associated with disease progression and reducing absenteeism, panelists agree.

Using data to target programs and messaging is also important, panelists note. Comparison of PCP visits with vaccination rates would be ideal, Mendoza notes, but the challenge lies in limited time and resources. Budget constraints are a concern, as McLaurin adds: “Our budget for wellness could be \$20,000. How much can you do?”

Convincing decision-makers to invest more in employee wellness is another shared priority. Employers are often excluded from key discussions with hospitals and health plans despite their significant role in health care coverage, McClune observes. Indeed, employers understand their workforce best and should be partners in these discussions, Novo adds. Miami-Dade County Public Schools tailors communications to meet the needs of their English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole-speaking employees.

Manufacturers can play a role, panelists note, and can work to understand the needs of employers and employees. They can also offer support through grants for wellness programs, especially for public employers.

The roundtable inspires greater employer emphasis on vaccination and offers actionable strategies, Markert concludes. Ongoing conversations like the roundtable are critical, panelists agree, and can help to drive meaningful change. •

**Table.** Action Items

	Integrate vaccinations into broader preventive health care initiatives.
	Establish clear vaccination goals.
	Facilitate vaccination by ensuring coverage, fostering access, and promoting awareness.
	Consider how vaccination initiatives align with productivity goals.
	Revisit the role of clinics, educational campaigns, and partnerships with carriers.
	Collaborate with health service brokers, professional forums, and employer coalitions.
	Use United States Preventive Services Task Force data to address vaccination gaps.
	Foster employee-physician relationships with incentives, and track visits.
	Listen to employee concerns, educate stakeholders, and carefully consider who communicates with employees.
	Create a dashboard to track health measures (eg, wellness visits) segmented by category.
	Engage executive leadership in wellness initiatives by demonstrating return on investment.
	Offer paid time off, cash incentives, and logistical support for preventive care programs.
	Collect preferred contact information, and engage spouses of male employees.
	Offer vaccinations at onsite clinics, pharmacies, and physicians’ offices.
	Bring vaccination clinics to the communities where employees and their families live.
	Be creative in your community-centered strategies to boost employee vaccination.
	Engage drug manufacturers for educational materials and broader support.
	Ensure that vaccinations are covered under both pharmacy and medical benefits.





