



# COVID-19 VACCINATION ACCESS & INFORMATION

Understanding Barriers for People with Disabilities in New Hampshire

Research conducted by:  
Institute on Disability

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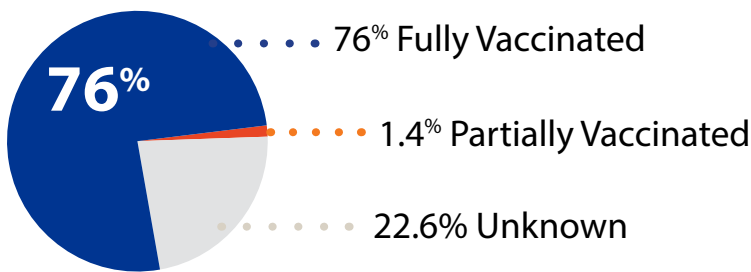
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an effort to improve COVID-19 vaccine access for older adults and people with disabilities in New Hampshire, the NH Developmental Disabilities (DD) partner organizations explored barriers to vaccine access and concerns about COVID-19 booster shots.

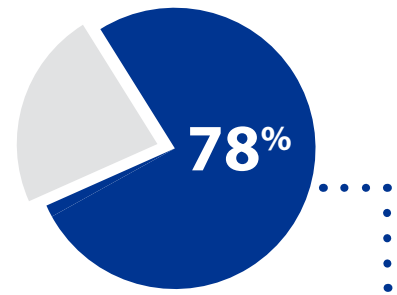


**625**  
People with  
Disabilities  
Surveyed

## Vaccination Status






## Interest in Booster Shot



Percent of vaccinated respondents that would get a booster shot.

## Top Concerns with Booster Shot

-  79.5% Don't trust it's safe
-  52.9% Not effective
-  41.8% First dose was enough

“ There were snags at every turn even though we were eligible to receive the vaccine. ”

-Respondent

## Key Barriers to Accessing Vaccination



Accessing the (VAMS) website



Finding or getting to a location



Confusion about eligibility, availability, and safety.



// It has not been an easy straight forward process at all. There were snags at every turn even though we were eligible to receive the vaccine. The health equity around this process and lack of complete misunderstanding of the work families do to keep their children out of long term care facilities is maddening. I hope this story assists in giving a better picture of what some families have struggled with during this time. I know we are not the only ones that have a similar experience. //

-Respondent

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the CDC, “Analysis of the National Immunization Survey Adult COVID Module found that, compared with adults without a disability, those with a disability had a lower likelihood of having received COVID-19 vaccination, despite being less likely to report hesitancy about getting vaccinated. Adults with a disability reported more difficulties obtaining a COVID-19 vaccine than did persons without a disability.”<sup>1</sup> In NH, individuals, especially those with communication challenges and the need for support from a family member or caregiver during the vaccination process, were treated differently and not positively, particularly in public settings.

The Administration for Community Living/Administration on Developmental Disabilities offered grants to University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) to make vaccine access better for older adults and people with disabilities in response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The NH DD Act partners, UNH Institute on Disability, NH Council on Developmental Disabilities and Disability Rights Center-NH, have utilized these and other resources to explore access to vaccines and experienced barriers. This research has been reviewed and approved by UNH’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The following is a summary of those activities.

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1 Ryerson AB, Rice CE, Hung M, et al. Disparities in COVID-19 Vaccination Status, Intent, and Perceived Access for Noninstitutionalized Adults, by Disability Status — National Immunization Survey Adult COVID Module, United States, May 30–June 26, 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021;70:1365–1371. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7039a2external\\_icon](http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7039a2external_icon).

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## CONSIDERATIONS

The response Covid-19 and its variants has changed over time. This research was conducted in the summer of 2021, prior to the impacts of the Covid-19 Delta variant. Vaccine rates were also continuing to rise during this period. Responses in the focus groups and in the Granite State poll are in the context of this window of time.

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## FOCUS GROUPS

The IOD, in collaboration with the NH Council on Developmental Disabilities and Disability Rights Center-NH, conducted five (5) focus groups to collect information on barriers to accessing vaccinations for people with disabilities and their families.

### **Process**

Three questions were developed in consultation with the UNH Survey Center's Granite State Survey. The questions were:

1. Did you have any problems when you got your vaccine? Or Did you have any problems trying to help someone else get a vaccine?
2. If recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and/or the NH Department of Health, would you receive a COVID-19 booster shot?
3. If not, what are the reasons why you would not get a COVID booster?

We applied for IRB approval to use these questions. The request was approved including a registration process that ensured confidentiality and required participants to provide informed consent to participate.

We developed a series of Power Point slides that included specific questions about access to getting the COVID-19 vaccine, any barriers they experienced, and willingness to receive a booster if offered.

While the number of participants was low, participant responses were consistent. Individuals, especially those with communication challenges and the need for significant support from a family member during the vaccination process, were treated differently and not positively, particularly in public settings. NH's approach to vaccine administration in early 2021 included an online registration process, with backup support from 211, the statewide information and referral service. Depending upon an

individual's eligibility category and location, initial vaccines were available through physician's offices, state run vaccine sites, mobile vaccine clinics, and other vendors, including pharmacies.

The process to access an appointment for the initial vaccine was challenging as families felt they had a more demanding level of proof than community members without a disability. They also felt that consideration should have been given to prioritize family members for the vaccine because many of them were the only support their family member with a disability had. If the family member were to become ill from COVID-19, then there could have been no one provide care for the individual with a disability.

There were comments about the online registration system that are not different that those reported in the news. Issues remain, however, issues remain for those who cannot easily access computers or the internet.

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## AREA AGENCY FEEDBACK

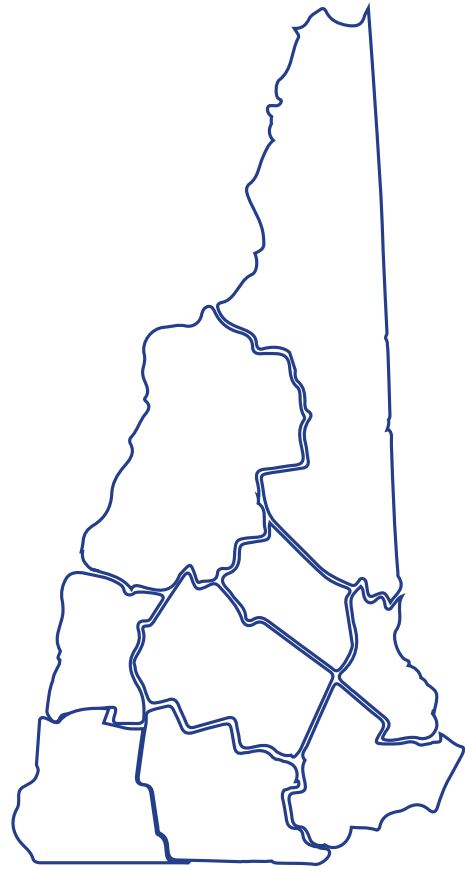
In addition, a survey was conducted in September asking for Area Agency feedback on their experience with assisting individuals and their families, home care providers and Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in accessing vaccines, barriers they faced, and how they addressed them. Seven of the 10 Area Agencies responded.

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## BARRIERS & APPROACHES

The reported barriers to accessing vaccines were similar to those initially reported by the general public, including challenges associated with the VAMS system, which was run by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, delays in scheduling, a shortage of the vaccine and staff to administer, and reluctance at times to participate in the vaccination process. The state of NH did resolve some of the barriers by the creation of a NH registration system with regular communication on accessing vaccines.

Area Agencies have noted some reluctance to receive vaccines by individuals and their families, home care providers and DSPs. The reason for the reluctance varies but most agencies have addressed these concerns with open



**Catchment Area of New Hampshire  
Area Agencies**

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communication, education provided by state and national resources, and ongoing updates on new and emerging information about the vaccine. One agency offered a financial incentive to home care providers to receive the vaccine. Most agencies are committed to helping anyone who changes their mind about the vaccine with resources to find an available vaccine location.



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# GRANITE STATE POLL RESULTS

The [UNH Survey Center](#) conducts the [Granite State Poll](#), a survey of public opinion in the state of New Hampshire. Conducted monthly, the Poll interviews at least 750 respondents from across the state.

In June 2021, the Institute on Disability added several questions to the poll with a focus on vaccine status and any problems getting or helping someone get the vaccine. There were 625 people with a disability that responded to the question about vaccine status. Seventy-six percent (76%) reported that they were fully vaccinated and 1.4% partially vaccinated. Barriers to accessing

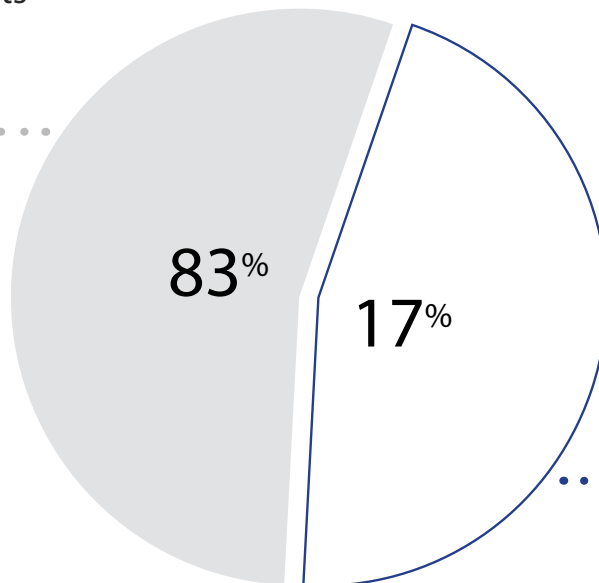
vaccinations included accessing the (VAMS) website, finding and/or getting to a location, and confusion about eligibility, availability, safety and how to sign up. More than 47% of those responding to the survey reported helping or trying to help a person with a disability access the vaccine. Barriers cited are similar to those described above.

While more than 78% of those fully or partially vaccinated reported that they would get a booster shot if recommended by CDC and/or NH Department of Health, there were concerns as outlined on the following page.

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## Comparison of Granite State Poll Respondents

Percent of respondents with disability (625)



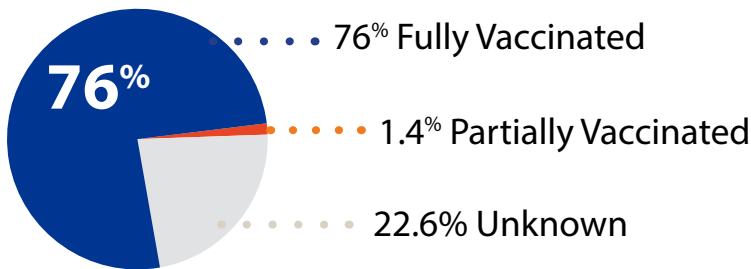
Percent of respondents without disability (125)



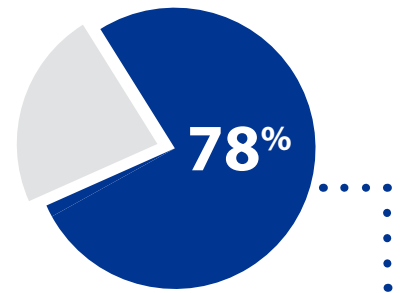
# Granite State Poll Results: Vaccination Status, Concerns, and Barriers

Over 625 people responded to the Institute on Disabilities's questions in the Granite State Poll about their vaccination status, concerns with and interest in the COVID-19 booster, and barriers to accessing vaccinations. The following is a summary of their responses.

## Vaccination Status

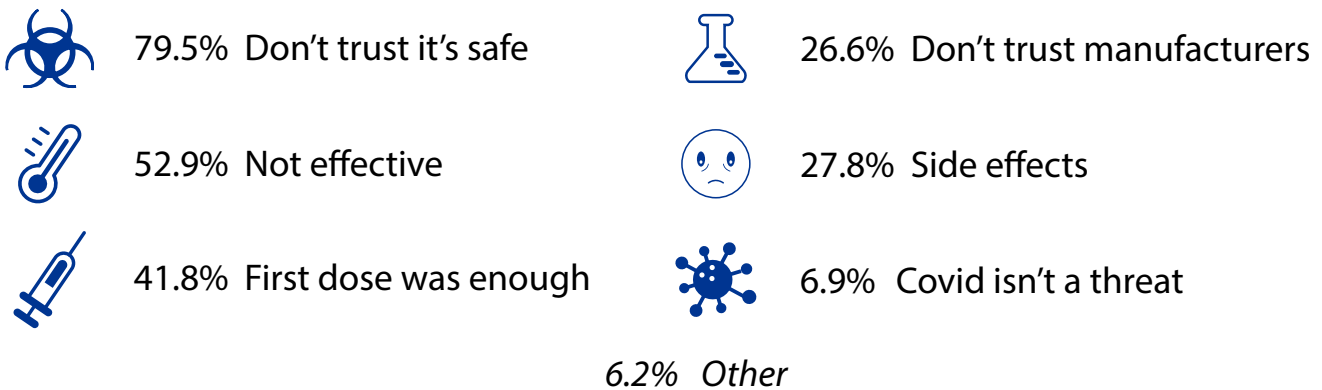


## Interest in Booster Shot

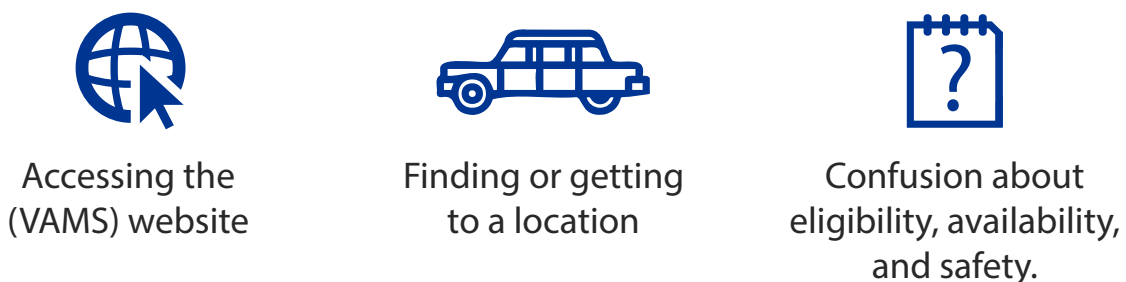


Percent of vaccinated respondents that would get a booster shot

## Concerns with Booster Shot



## Barriers to Accessing Vaccination

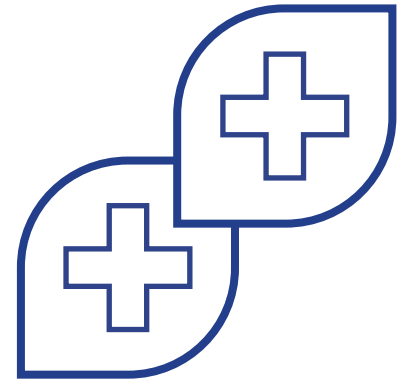










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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the feedback from the three sources, many of the initial barriers (i.e., access to VAMS and NH website, supply of vaccine and appointments, and locations to access vaccines) have been addressed by the state.

The ongoing needs to ensure older adults and people with disabilities have access to vaccines and up to date information for vaccine education include:



-  Communication about the need for vaccinations by public health officials that are fact based.
-  Information coming from trusted sources through multiple channels.
-  Education for health care providers about providing accommodations for people with disabilities (communication, physical access, etc.).
-  Multiple and diverse ways in which individuals with disabilities and their family members and caregivers can ask specific questions about the Covid vaccine, boosters, etc.
-  Considerations of accessibility throughout the process.
-  Continued commitment to meeting the diverse needs of people with disabilities throughout this crisis – administration of vaccines for people who are home bound or lack access to transportation, clinics at trusted sites like area agency offices.
-  Recognition of the importance of family caregivers and support professionals play in supporting the health of people with disabilities.
-  Options to support family members and or primary support professionals as priority populations for vaccine access when they are often the primary caregiver.

