

2020 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: L.A. COUNTY'S COVID-19 EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS JOINT INFORMATION CENTER

Issue Area & Population Category: Disaster/Emergency Response & Management, Urban

Overview: The COVID-19 pandemic prompted an unprecedented communications mobilization to bring multilingual, multicultural and multi-platform messaging to residents of the nation's most populous county.

Challenge: The arrival of the previously unknown and highly contagious COVID-19 virus created the biggest communications challenge Los Angeles County has ever faced: how to bring fast-moving, potentially lifesaving information to 10 million residents--in multiple languages and with cultural sensitivity--when in-person media briefings and traditional working arrangements were impossible due to the Safer At Home orders.

Solution: Virtually overnight, Los Angeles County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Countywide Communications joined with the departments of Public Health and Health Services to mobilize an extensive Joint Information Center (JIC) made up of 39 staff from 22 County departments working and collaborating almost entirely via telework. From their scattered locations, this team came together to create COVID-19 safety and recovery messages in as many as 17 different languages, sent 2.1 million bilingual text messages with public health safety tips, and collaborated with the community to create visually compelling public information campaigns such as "#BYOM" (Bring Your Own Mask) and "#TheRiskIsReal" targeting young adults on digital platforms. Customized in-language social media campaigns engaged at-risk populations, including the Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander community. And an innovative text messaging campaign, featuring physician videos in English and Spanish, pushed out crucial information to low-income clients in the County's health care system.

Innovation: #TheRiskIsReal and #BYOM social media campaigns enlisted real people--multi-ethnic social media influencers and COVID-19 survivors--to create memorable and innovative

messaging designed to reach younger adults who now make up 76% of new COVID-19 cases. The Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander COVID-19 Community Toolkit was first-of-its-kind and a creative collaboration with residents who helped us develop culturally relevant and in-native language COVID-19 public service announcements, vibrant photography, and social media postings. The video text messaging campaign leveraged the talents of bilingual doctors in our health care system and resourcefully repurposed an existing text messaging system to drive clients to the Health Services website for urgently-needed information on testing and safety.

Results: This ongoing communications initiative has set new records for reach and impact: More than 7.7 million unique visits and 20 million-plus page views on COVID-19.LACounty.gov; more than 60 million impressions, 88,000 retweets, 259,000 link clicks and 157,000 likes on Twitter; and 150,000-plus new followers across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. PSAs in the texting campaign reached 300,000 patients, more than half of them Spanish speakers, and increased patients' time on the COVID-19 Health Services website by 75%.

Replicability: These communications tactics--especially direct collaborations with the public, using existing resources like the text messaging system, and creating compelling, authentic visuals to attract and build audiences--can be adopted by other agencies. One sign of the universality of our messaging: the City and County of Honolulu have adopted our [Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander campaign](#).

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Optional Submission:

- **Confronting COVID-19 website:** <https://covid19.lacounty.gov/>
- **#TheRiskIsReal:** <https://covid19.lacounty.gov/risk/>
- **Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander landing page:** <https://covid19.lacounty.gov/nhpi/>
- **#BYOM** <https://covid19.lacounty.gov/byom/>