

COVID Misinformation Plagues California's Indigenous Speakers | North Coast Journal

By Hannah Getahun

November 12, 2021

Ismael Patia and his family arrived at a COVID-19 vaccine clinic in downtown Fresno on a recent Saturday afternoon. His decision to get vaccinated had been a difficult one. But he finally was persuaded by an interpreter who talked to him in his native language, Mixteco, and eased his fears. "I've been hearing about people dying of the vaccine," Patia, a farm worker from Lagonia Yucutini in Guerrero, said in Mixteco.

Patia's language has no written form, and he is one of the hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala in California who speak Indigenous, non-Spanish languages and have struggled to stay informed and healthy during the pandemic.

Often unvaccinated, with limited access to information about the vaccines, many of these immigrants are farmworkers who live in poverty, with low wages, less access to health care and crowded housing. Combined with the language barriers that allow pandemic misinformation to spread, they are particularly vulnerable to infection and serious illness.

State and county officials have tried to reach them: They have provided COVID-19 materials translated into Mixteco and other Indigenous languages. And many counties teamed with Indigenous community groups to launch their own extensive outreach programs and clinics.

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