



# Coronavirus Vaccination Hesitancy Among American Indian and Alaska Native People

Data and Insights to Encourage Further Vaccine Uptake

**LANGER RESEARCH ASSOCIATES**  
SURVEY RESEARCH DESIGN • MANAGEMENT • ANALYSIS

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# Expert Review Panel

The following experts reviewed the survey questionnaire and/or the final results. We thank them for their contribution to the study.

**Dr. Dedra Buchwald**

Director, Institute for Research and Education to Advance Community Health (IREACH), Washington State University

**Dr. Vicki Freimuth**

Professor Emeritus, Department of Communication Studies and Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia

**Todd Harwell**

Chief, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Bureau, State of Montana

**Dr. Greg Holzman**

State Medical Officer, State of Montana

**Dr. Jill Jim**

Health Director, Navajo Nation

**Dr. Spero Manson**

Director, Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health  
University of Colorado School of Public Health

**Dr. Cora Neumann**

Founder, We Are Montana

**Dr. Yvette Roubideaux**

Vice President of Research and Director of Policy Research Center, National Congress of American Indians

**Dr. Michelle Williams**

Dean of the Faculty, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

**Dr. Anne Zink**

Chief Medical Officer for the State of Alaska

# Study Overview

- Summary of a National Random Sample of 603 American Indian & Alaska Native people in an online survey about vaccine uptake, collected via Ipsos KnowledgePanel® for Langer Research and COVID Collaborative.
- This study was conducted from Feb. 17 – March 1, 2021, about two months into vaccine rollout.
- 16% of respondents currently live (7%) or have lived (8%) on tribal reservation land.
- 37% of respondents live in urban areas; 36% in suburban; and 27% in rural.
- The results are intended to be informative and help guide further vaccinations, without claiming to be a definitive picture of the perspectives of all AI/ANs.

As of early March, our study highlighted high levels of mistrust in both the vaccines and those distributing them among American Indian and Alaska Native people.

49%

Completely/mostly trust that the vaccine is **safe and effective**  
(Compared to ~60% of general population)

33%

Completely/mostly trust that the vaccine was adequately **tested for safety and effectiveness among AI/AN people**

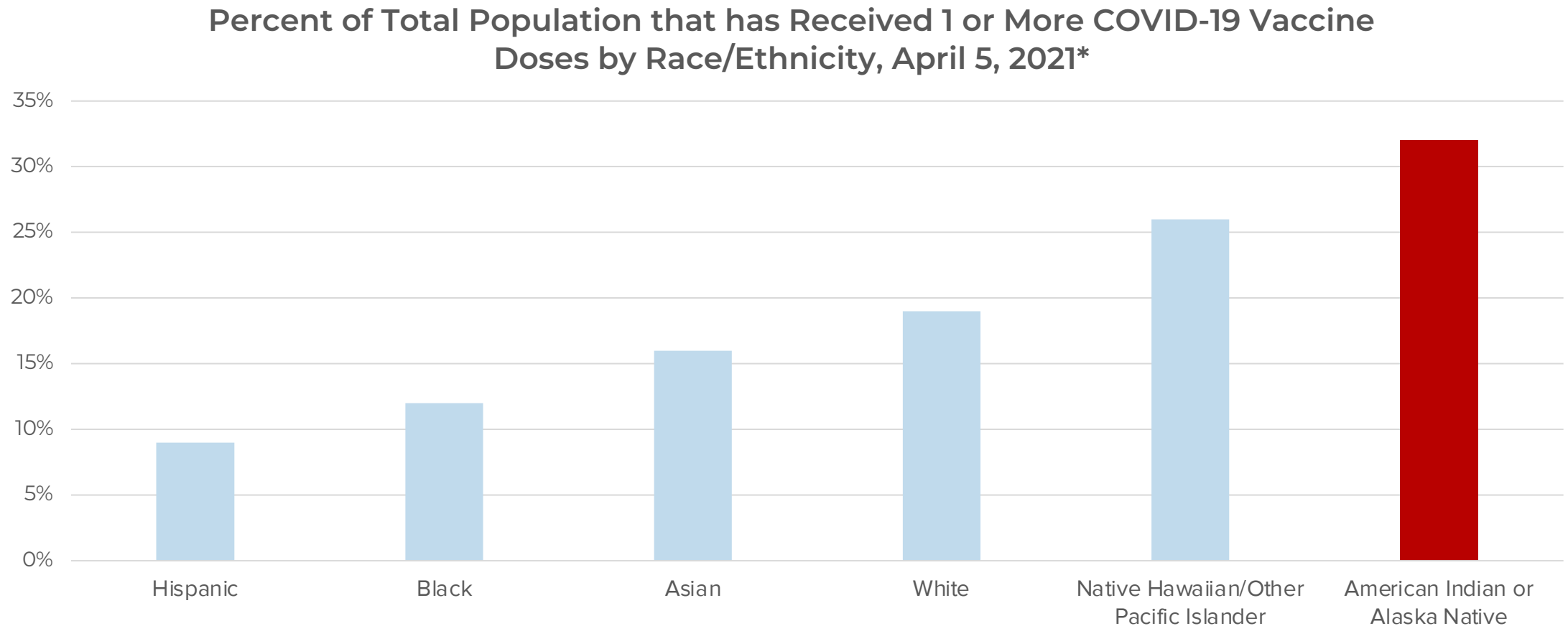
14%

Completely/mostly trust the **federal government**

48%

Think people in their community getting a **less safe version of the vaccine is a legitimate concern**

Yet CDC data in early April revealed the promising news that American Indians and Alaska Natives were leading the nation in COVID-19 vaccine uptake.



\* Source: Latoya Hill and Samantha Artiga. Published: April 09, 2021. "COVID-19 Vaccination among American Indian and Alaska Native People." *KFF*, 9 April 2021, [www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/covid-19-vaccination-american-indian-alaska-native-people/](https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/covid-19-vaccination-american-indian-alaska-native-people/).

\*Based on 53% (56.5 million) of vaccinations with known race/ethnicity

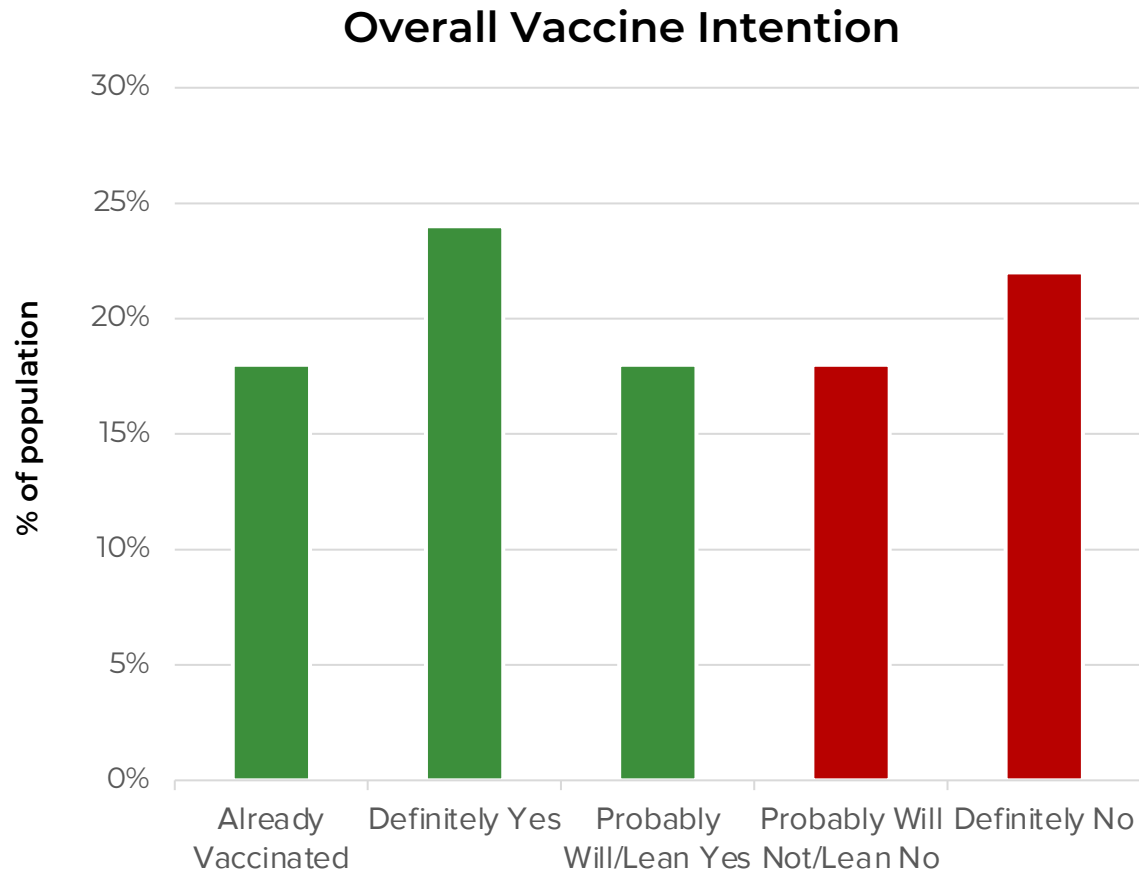


A recent report from the Kaiser Family Foundation highlighted the actions taken by local tribal communities that likely contributed to early uptake performance on tribal lands.

- Launched tailored outreach and communications efforts to share culturally relevant messages
- Used local languages to educate about vaccine safety and efficacy
- Tapped into sense of responsibility by equating vaccination with protecting Native community and culture (w/ initial focus on the elderly at higher risk of illness)
- Leverage trusted community resources and providers to distribute vaccines

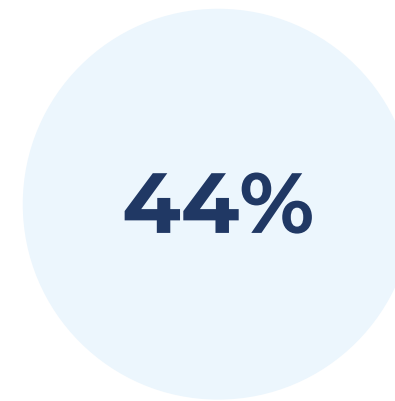
\* Source: Latoya Hill and Samantha Artiga. Published: April 09, 2021. "COVID-19 Vaccination among American Indian and Alaska Native People." *KFF*, 9 April 2021, [www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/covid-19-vaccination-american-indian-alaska-native-people/](https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/covid-19-vaccination-american-indian-alaska-native-people/).

After a strong initial rollout, vaccine efforts must now focus on encouraging vaccination in the 33% of AI/AN people in our study who plan to “wait and see” before getting a shot.



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**Of those unvaccinated individuals that may get vaccinated...**



Planned to get the vaccine as soon as possible



Planned to wait and see before getting the vaccine

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Our statistical model highlights four key predictors of vaccine uptake—on these predictors, attitudes among the wait and seers lag behind those who intended to get the vaccine as soon as possible.

**#1**

Trust in safety and effectiveness of the vaccine

**#2**

Belief that those around you want you to get the vaccine

**#3**

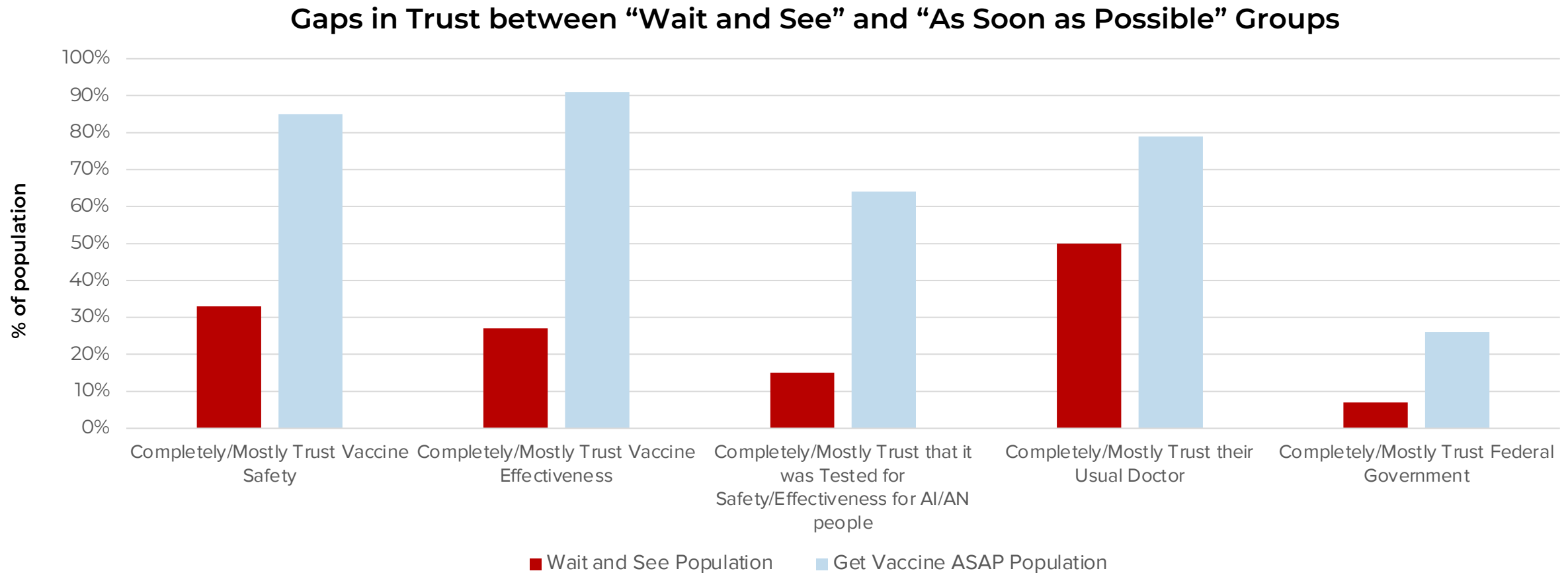
Belief that vaccination is a community responsibility

**#4**

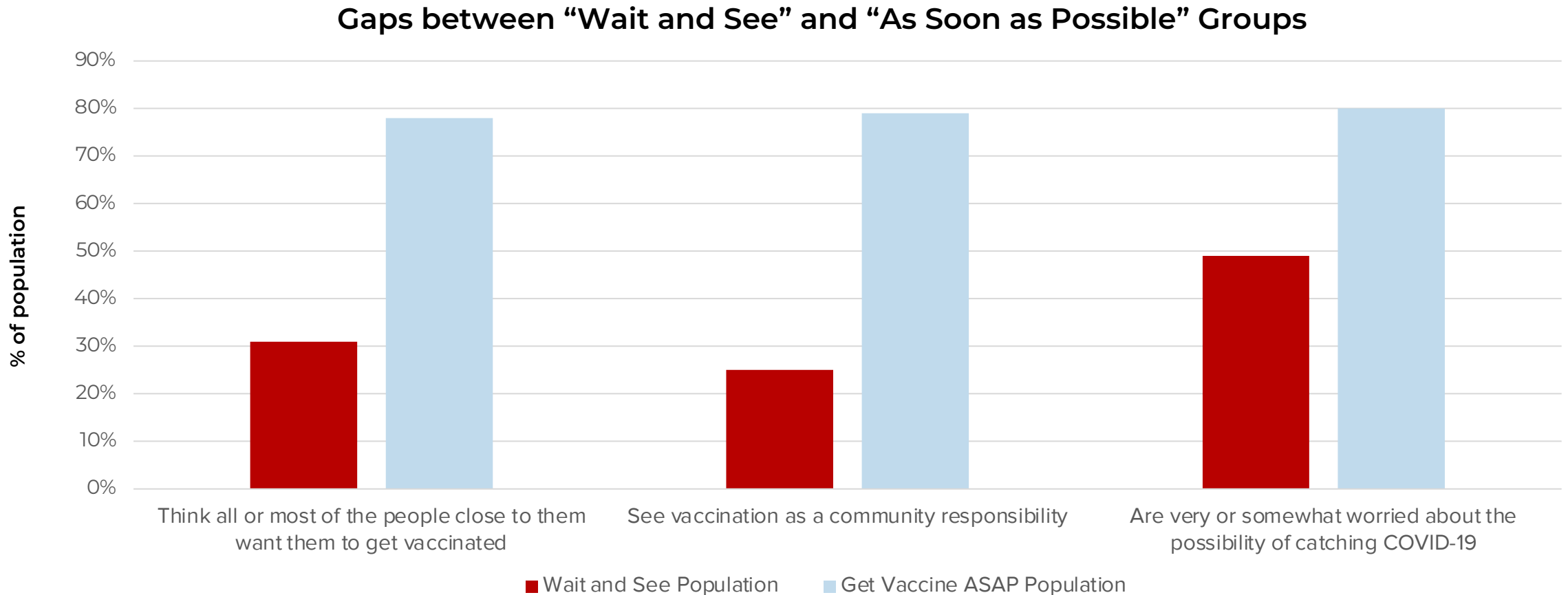
Concern about getting sick from COVID-19



There were significant gaps in trust between “wait and see” and “ASAP” groups when it came to the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine, the vaccine testing process, and those distributing it.



“Wait and seers” are also 31-54 points less likely to be compelled by other leading predictors of uptake—social pressure, community responsibility, and fear of infection—than the “ASAP” group.



For the 40% of AI/ANs who did not intend to get the vaccine, trust in the vaccine's safety, efficacy, and value remain significant barriers—that could be overcome with trust-building efforts.

*"I don't trust the first version of anything. It always has something wrong because it's still being tested."*

*"It has not been proven whether it prevents one getting the virus, or only if it lessens the severity. Also, I am concerned about possible side effects (short and long term) from getting the vaccine."*

*"It has no purpose; you still can get the virus and you still have to wear a mask."*

*"I prefer to do my best to keep my body strong against illness. I try not to need medicine or vaccines."*

*"I would like to get it but I am aware that it was a rush job and it may not work. It may even harm me or my son."*

We can use insights from this study to get shots into the arms of critical “wait and seer”—including those that do not yet intend to be vaccinated—and ensure uptake among urban AI/AN people.

Efforts to increase AI/AN vaccine uptake can enhance focus on demonstrably effective access, messenger, and messaging strategies by:

- **Acknowledging** that vaccine skepticism is linked to **historical harms and distrust**
- **Calling on respected vaccinated people** to signal that vaccination can help preserve culture and way of life
- **Emphasizing safety and effectiveness** through trusted messengers like local leaders, healthcare providers, and elders
- **Bringing vaccinations to community members** vs. asking them to travel to get vaccinated (a third of respondents said distance was a challenge for getting healthcare services, and 2 in 10 cited transportation as a challenge)