



COMMUNITY VOICES FOR HEALTH

Somali Perspectives on COVID-19 in Minnesota

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BACKGROUND

While COVID-19 is a devastating historical event, it also offers the opportunity for new innovative methods to do better, more accessible and wider reaching community engagement. These methods are urgently needed to ensure communities will be engaged in COVID-19 related research. Our long-term objective was to build capacity to ensure sustained and effective engagement of Somali immigrant patients in COVID-19 related health research. We conducted a survey to engage community members for input on:

1. Preferred methods of community engagement to ensure broad reach in the community,
2. Views on the priorities for COVID-19 related PCOR/CER topics, and
3. Views on capacity building needed to support participation in PCOR/CER projects.

METHODS

We trained 40 community ambassadors to seek input from the Somali community members across Minnesota. The ambassadors were selected through our networks and represented a broad range of individuals, selecting for diversity of location, gender and, age. Each individual reached out to other community members using safe and socially distanced methods, and to document the survey responses. The findings were presented to our Community Advisory Group and three focus groups of stakeholders, including community leaders, faith leaders, researchers, health care providers, public health entities, state and governmental agencies.

COMMUNITY SURVEY FINDINGS

Participants

A total of 940 people took part in the survey, all self-identified as being Somali and as living primarily in Minnesota. Just over half of the sample (55%) identified as female. 77% of participants were born abroad, and 66% of participants had lived in the US for 15 years or more. A range of ages, education levels and household size were represented. 21% of survey respondents reported having had COVID-19 first-hand, and 32% reported having a household member also test positive. 35% replied someone in their household had lost their job due to COVID-19.

My family and I tested positive back in August. We were all down with a range of symptoms for about 2-3 weeks. My parents both ended up in hospital. My mother passed after 2 weeks in the ICU and my father came back home to recover after 3 weeks in critical care.

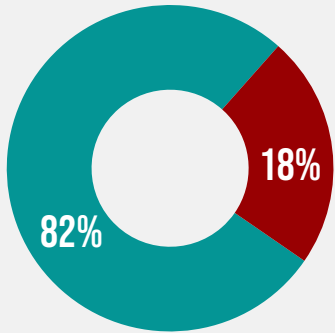


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Views on Community Engagement

Survey participants were asked if they had been asked for their input on COVID-19 by any organization or institution and 23% (n=194) indicated they had been asked for their views and 77% (n=653) said they had not.

FIGURE 1
SHOULD THE SOMALI COMMUNITY BE CONSULTED ON COVID-19



Survey participants were asked if they felt it was important that Somali community members were asked their views on COVID-19, and 82% (n=674) said it was, and 18% (n=144) said it was not.

I believe everyone's ideas and views are important. I also believe I can make a change in my community. I will try my best to bring in ideas and feedback which will help my neighborhood.

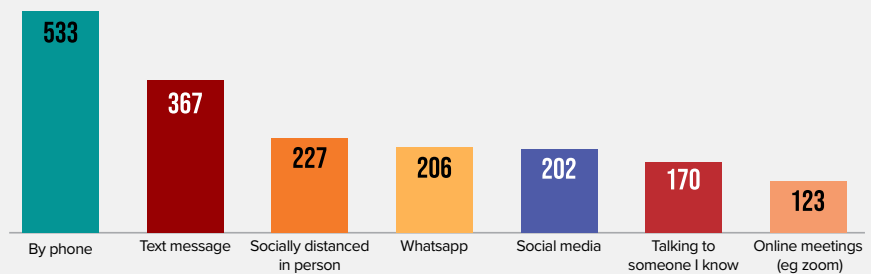
When asked why community engagement was important, respondents described it being important for both raising awareness and to address the needs of the community.

Preferred Methods of Community Engagement

Survey participants were asked to rate their top three ways they felt community engagement could be done during this time of COVID-19. The top three preferred methods were to participate in engagement by phone (n=533), text message (n=367) and socially distanced in person (n=227). Further details can be found in Figure 2.

I think that the government needs to hear our perspectives, so that they can be taken into action to help this pandemic.

FIGURE 2
PREFERRED METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT



Survey respondents were asked who they wanted to hear the views of the community. The answers fell into the following categories:

- The community
- Healthcare Systems and providers
- Government agencies

I feel like if we join together we can make a difference.

Building Confidence in Community Engagement

Respondents described four factors that would help with increasing confidence that they were being heard:

1. Demonstrating the **impact** of engagement: Seeing action and change, including in healthcare
2. The **process** of engagement: Proactive outreach, listening, dialogue and partnership
3. Demonstrating **representation**: A place at the table, trusted connections
4. **Commitment** to the Community: Supporting the community



To have all of the decision makers in healthcare take their time in promoting and fostering growth and trust in immigrant communities.



Barriers to Community Engagement

Common barriers to participation in community engagement.

- Not feeling listened to.
- Community perceptions of COVID-19.
- Lack out outreach.
- Not having a role in decision making.
- Lack of trust.

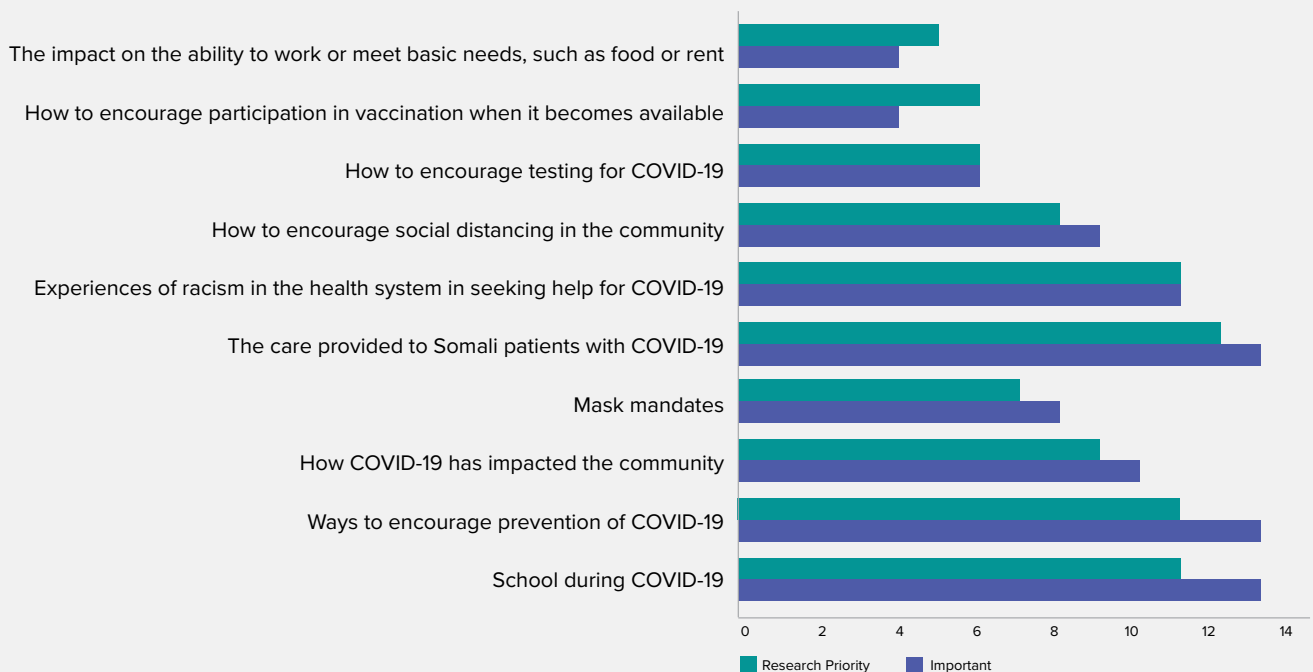
COVID-19 Priority Topics

Survey participants were provided with a list of 14 different topics relating to COVID-19, which were identified in collaboration with the Community Advisory Group. Each participant could chose up to five topics they felt were the most important priorities for future research relating to COVID-19. The top three topics considered a priority for future research in relation to COVID-19 were:

- The care provided to Somali patients with COVID-19
- Ways to encourage prevention of COVID-19
- Experiences of racism in the health system in seeking help for COVID-19

FIGURE 3

TOPICS OF IMPORTANCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES IN RELATION TO COVID-19



Views on Participating in Research

Of this group of participants, it was the first time participating in research for 84% (n=648) of people. Participants were asked if they would be interested in continuing to participate in research in the future, and 30% (n=responded yes, and 39% responded maybe.

Survey participants described what would help encourage or support them in participating in research. Having a trusted connection to someone involved in the research was seen as helpful (27%, n=302), as was being paid for their time (23%, n=262) and it being a topic someone cared about (22%, n=243). Additionally having some training in research was also seen as helpful (21%, n=233). Fewer respondents felt ready to participate immediately in research (5.3%, n=60).

I would share my experience in any topic to bring awareness, understanding and solutions. I do believe conducting research is important and necessary to develop understanding and problem solving.

FIGURE 4
INTEREST IN FUTURE RESEARCH

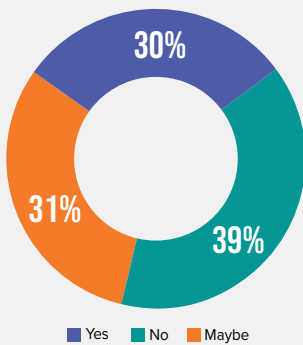
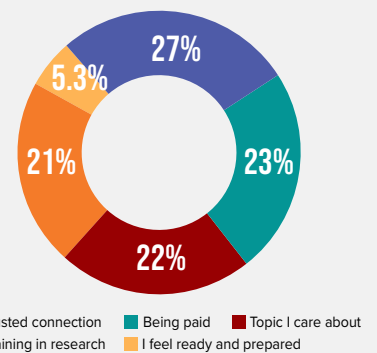


FIGURE 5
FACTORS THAT WOULD ENCOURAGE RESEARCH PARTICIPATION



CONCLUSIONS

- The Somali community in Minnesota is very engaged and keen to participate in community engagement when it is presented in a culturally relevant, trusted way.
- There was a strong directive from the community to build trust and engage in a sustained dialogue, partnership and relationship with health systems and policy makers.
- This community based survey showed that even during a pandemic, we can be creative in reaching a diverse group of community members.
- Community engagement activities with the Somali community during COVID-19 has been challenging for agencies.
- Survey respondents shared their priorities for COVID-19 related research topics, and that prevention of COVID-19, the care received and the impact of racism are top priorities.
- Addressing barriers such as communication challenges, trust, and the experience of racism can help to build and grow the trust needed for engagement.
- This study reached a wide range of Somali community members across Minnesota. The community is diverse and there are a range of views and experiences influenced by many factors, including age, gender, education and life circumstances.
- There is a need to develop cultural bridges that can build common understanding.

Community Advisory Group: Abdisalam Adam, St Paul Public Schools, Nimo Ahmed, University of Minnesota, Nunay Ali, Abbot Northwestern Hospital, Zam Zam Ali, Hennipen Health, Abdifatah Haji, Somali Medical Association, Nawal Hirsi, M Health Fairview, Larry Hiscock, M Health Fairview, Rev. David Hottinger, Hennipin Healthcare, Abdullahi Osman, Community Representative, Sakhaudiin Mohamed, Somali Medical Association, Abdi Sabrie, Minnesota State University Mankato, Tarabi Jama, St. Louis Park Public Schools, and Abdullahi Yusuf, Mayo.

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