

COMMUNITY EDUCATION GROUP RECEIVES \$3.5 MILLION CDC GRANT TO SUPPORT VACCINATION EFFORTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

CEG to Expand Services for Rural, At-Risk, and Underserved
in Fight Against Pandemic and Growing Syndemic in West Virginia

CHARLESTON, West Virginia (August 12, 2021) – The CDC has awarded a \$3.5 million cooperative agreement to the [Community Education Group](#) (CEG) to develop a one-year pilot initiative “Lessons Learned, Lessons Applied” to increase COVID vaccinations and testing within West Virginia’s most vulnerable and rural communities. The CDC grant will enable CEG to build the evidence base of effective interventions to improve vaccination coverage and to identify and implement strategies to reduce disparities in vaccination coverage in rural and at-risk populations throughout West Virginia. CEG anticipates additional resources to replicate this program throughout the Appalachian Region, and later expand nationwide to rural America.

“The CDC funding will allow CEG to address the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Substance Use Disorder syndemic in West Virginia,” **said CEG Executive Director A. Toni Young.** “We are grateful to West Virginia Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito for playing a pivotal role in securing CDC funding to serve our most vulnerable neighbors.”

“The COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are safe, effective and our best chance at defeating the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is critical that we work together to increase vaccine confidence for West Virginians living in rural communities. I am pleased the CDC is investing in the Community Education Group to do just this while also supporting community outreach efforts to benefit public health. CEG remains a strong partner for the Mountain State, and I will continue to work with organizations, communities, and state and local governments to vaccinate more West Virginians to keep ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities safe,” **said Senator Manchin.**

With the Delta Variant, new COVID cases and deaths from COVID are increasing, especially in hard-hit rural America. CEG’s “Lessons Learned, Lesson Applied” program will work with federal, state, and community partners, as well as community education groups, to utilize mobile and portable services, with plans to hire 50 health and community workers. CEG will also be training local community health workers, relying on social network theory to increase testing and vaccination throughout West Virginia.

“Our COVID-19 vaccine distribution in West Virginia was one of the strongest in the nation, setting the example for communities across the country,” **Senator Capito said.** “This effort was vital to our state’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and it helped save countless lives. I’m glad to see this funding from the CDC headed to West Virginia to help continue that success while strengthening vaccine distribution efforts across rural communities in the future.”

According to the [CDC](#), COVID-19 incidence in rural areas surpassed that of urban areas in September 2020. As of April 2021, COVID-19 vaccination coverage was lower in rural counties (38.9%) than in urban counties (45.7%). These disparities are consistent across all age groups and genders. The Delta Variant surge [raised rural cases of COVID-19](#) five-fold since June 2021, according to Kentucky-based news organization The Daily Yonder, which monitors rural cases [nationwide](#).

“Life-saving services for the people of West Virginia wouldn’t be possible without our industry partner, **Gilead Sciences**, who provided an initial two-year \$500,000 award supporting CEG in building the necessary infrastructure to fulfill this mission,” **said Young**. “Plans for these CDC funds include recruiting and supporting a cohort of contract nurses and community health workers, as well as establishing training centers in Morgantown and Charleston where CEG can train outreach workers and build capacity to fight this statewide syndemic within the COVID pandemic.”

Ongoing support from industry partners such as ViiV Healthcare and Merck allows CEG to continue its outreach work in rural communities through its [Rural Health Service Providers Network](#). "I commend Toni Young, Executive Director of Community Education Group for her persistence in lifting up the clear and present danger of the syndemic of COVID, HIV, and substance abuse in West Virginia. We cannot allow our communities to struggle through these epidemics and their corresponding impact. These additional resources will support wider use of the tools we have available to combat these epidemics," **said Marc Meachem, Head U.S. External Affairs, ViiV Healthcare.**

[Community Education Group \(CEG\)](#) works to eliminate disparities in health outcomes and improve public health in disadvantaged populations and under-served communities by conducting research, training community health workers, educating and testing people who are hard to reach or at risk, sharing its expertise through national networks and local capacity-building efforts, and advocating for practical and effective health policies that lead to social change.