

# Build Trust & Enhance Communication

Building trust and enhancing communication includes innovations that provide opportunities to address the longstanding breach of trust between health systems and communities, especially for those who have been historically oppressed, marginalized, and underserved by health systems. This breach has been exacerbated by the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color, as well as many of the necessary policies put in place, including new spatial protections, PPE, and limitations on hospital visitation.

These policy shifts require novel innovations, such as new methods for establishing personal connections through PPE, along with renewed commitment toward essential long-term improvements, such as acknowledging systemic racism and inequities in care, promoting shared decision making, and coordinating effective interdisciplinary team care. Participants highlighted how these innovations have the potential to benefit birthing people and their clinical and support teams both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Person-centered team communication, shared decision-making, and informed consent provide the foundation for the trustworthy, respectful, and dignified care that all birthing people deserve.

Participants highlighted that innovations that build trust and enhance communication can be particularly helpful for:

- Filling in communication gaps created by contact limitations (e.g. lack of non-verbal cues from facial expressions under PPE)
- Communicating with birthing people with positive or suspected COVID cases regarding potential changes in recommendations or care
- Providing people from diverse communities, people with limited English proficiency, and people with sensory disabilities a clearer understanding of their clinical status to ensure informed consent, shared decision making and expectations for perceived outcomes of care.
- Continuing intentional communication practices after the pandemic to improve trust, engagement, and shared decision-making with birthing people and their support

## Strategies for Building Trust and Enhance Communication

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Health system leaders interested in innovations that build trust and enhance communication should consider the following strategies for building demand among birthing people and health system stakeholders and augmenting the supply of enabling factors to support successful and sustainable implementation. These strategies summarize key action steps recommended by participants for

building momentum, but they are not intended to be comprehensive or required for all settings depending on your local context.

## Promote direct communication with communities to build a foundation for trust and collaboration in care

- Connect with groups who are advocating on behalf of birthing people
- Create spaces for community conversations to build trust and promote communication, with particular attention to listening to community concerns
- Establish consistent two-way communication channels with communities to assure health systems hear from stakeholders and to promote transparency and collaboration
- Develop clear, shared policies for community access to hospital information and health records
- Solicit community input through varied methods to reach a broad range of stakeholders
- Supplement quantitative data on improvement opportunities with community stories to understand the full picture of needs and gaps
- Engage the community to co-design quality improvement ideas that work best for them

## Educate clinical teams on communication gaps and improvement strategies

- Increase awareness among clinicians about gaps in communication and trust with birthing people, especially with added barriers from PPE and COVID-19 restrictions
- Consider bias and anti-racism training, as well as educational programming for providers to understand the historical causes of community mistrust
- Reinforce the need for more communication with birthing people and across clinical teams
- Promote a culture of true shared decision-making, including conveying a full understanding of both the benefits and risks of different care options
- Train clinicians on strategies for improving communication (e.g. using key words to verbalize thought processes with birthing people, using more words when communicating through masks)
- Train clinicians on how to recognize explicit and implicit biases and assist in ensuring culturally competent, equitable care

## Adapt communication and relationship-building methods for PPE and other contact limitations

- ❑ Post reminders outside rooms to add extra human elements into care when birthing people and their support people cannot see their clinical team's faces
- ❑ Focus on conveying expressions through eye contact over masks (e.g. "happy eyes")
- ❑ Add names and photos to PPE or expanded name badges to increase visibility and legibility
- ❑ Post laminated photos of the care teams in birthing people's rooms
- ❑ Procure transparent face masks for showing facial expressions and facilitating lip reading for birthing people who are hard of hearing
- ❑ Leverage technology, such as iPads with FaceTime, for conversations that benefit from visible facial expressions (e.g. initial introductions, informed consent discussions)

## Increase the representativeness and cultural concordance of clinical teams and services

- ❑ Enable access to clinical career paths for people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, including hiring, training, and advancement opportunities
- ❑ Increase access to representative and culturally concordant birth education