Leading Through Crisis
Reducing the Impact of COVID-19 in Latin America and Africa
Session 6 |September 10th, 2020

Public Health Briefing – Dr. Tom Frieden
"Vaccines and COVID-19"

Leadership Essentials – Prof. Christopher Robichaud
"COVID-19 in the Post-Truth Era"

PUBLIC HEALTH

"Vaccines and COVID-19," Dr. Tom Frieden – Important Information

- We don't yet know whether there will be a safe and effective vaccine. There are grounds for being guardedly optimistic that vaccination will be possible. We can begin – now – engaging with communities to share information, listen to perceptions and concerns, and develop linkages.
- National health authorities will most likely maintain control of vaccine supplies and distribution. Cities are likely to be allocated insufficient vaccine for demand at first, with supplies increasing as manufacturing scales up. There will likely be guidelines for who gets the vaccine first – healthcare workers, other first responders, elderly, and others at increased risk. Mayors may need to implement transparent policy decisions and mechanisms to ensure that people don't "jump the line," and especially that all communities have access.
- Countering misinformation: Mayors can assist with efforts to counter misinformation by presenting facts and amplifying public health messaging from municipal, national, and global authorities. It's usually best not to interact directly with those spreading misinformation – engagement amplifies their voices. Be a trusted and credible source of accurate information – merely present facts and remain consistent with established messaging.
- What can Mayors and other city leaders do to prepare?
  - Involve both public and private health systems
  - Map community organizations and community leaders to help reach all communities
  - Create and train vaccination teams
  - Develop high-volume and high-throughput vaccination sites
  - Establish good recordkeeping to know who has been vaccinated with which vaccines, keeping in mind that more than one dose will likely be needed
- What are reliable sources of information?
  - World Health Organization (WHO)
  - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
  - Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)
  - Prevent Epidemics, especially the Weekly Science Reviews: https://preventepidemics.org/covid19/science/weekly-science-review/

CRISIS LEADERSHIP

"COVID-19 in the Post-Truth Era," Prof. Christopher Robichaud - Important Information

We are living in a "post-truth" era, supported by four pillars:
- Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers[1]
  - Epistemic bubbles: informational networks from which relevant voices have been excluded
  - Echo chambers: social structures within which relevant voices have been actively discredited
- Truth decay[2]
  - Blurring of fact and opinion, disagreement about facts, and declining trust in institutions that provide information
- Information disorder[3]
  - When false or private information is publicized and causes harm (deliberately or accidentally)
  - Examples[4]: sharing satire as if it were real; impersonation of genuine sources; fabricated or manipulated content; misleading use of real information to frame an issue or individual
- Prevalent speech malignancies
  - Lying, silencing, misleading, and sheer disregard for whether statements are true or false

Techniques by which bad information spreads[5]:
- Ping-ponging (coordinated use of complementary websites to help a story become widely circulated)
- Conspiracy theories
- Exploitation of news outlets' desire to "balance" coverage by placing propagandists or faux experts alongside real experts

Two important underlying trends have eroded trust in experts[6]:
- Democratization of knowledge: the Internet allowing everyone to "figure things out for themselves"
- Decision-making disenfranchisement: populist resistance to a small group of experts making decisions based on inaccessible knowledge that directly impacts the public at large (often negatively)

What can Mayors and other city leaders do about all this?[7]
- Change the messenger: If you aren't viewed as credible by some people, give platforms to others who will tell the truth (e.g., members of other political parties, ordinary people who became ill)
- Appeal to local pride: Patriotism can motivate people to "do better than those other places have"
- Poke some fun: Though responding to bad information can amplify it, you may need to address widespread or harmful theories, and parody can make people more attentive and receptive

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[1] C. Thi Nguyen, "Escape the Echo Chamber"
[2] Jennifer Kavanagh & Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay*
[3] Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan, "Information Disorder"
[4] Claire Wardle, "Fake News. It's Complicated."
[5] Center for European Policy Analysis, https://www.cepa.org/disinfo-techniques
[6] Andrea Lavazza & Mirko Farina, "The Role of Experts in the COVID-19 Pandemic"
[7] Anne Applebaum, "The Facts Just Aren't Getting Through"