Pa. expands COVID-19 vaccine eligibility

BY BRET PALLOTTO
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Pennsylvania expanded initial eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday, but those in Centre County and across the state still have to wait for their shots

Anyone 65 or older is now eligible, as well as those aged 16 to 64 with underlying medical conditions that make them more vulnerable to the disease, though the state does not expect to receive additional allotment of the already limited vaccine.

Underlying medical conditions now eligible include cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Down syndrome, heart conditions, those who are immunocompromised, obesity, pregnancy, sickle cell disease, smoking and Type 2 diabetes.

About 3.5 millions Pennsylvanians are eligible to receive the vaccine; the state administered nearly 409,500 as of Tuesday, according to state Health Department data.

"We must have patience as the amount of vaccine available in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation remains limited," Cindy Findley, a deputy health secretary who leads the state's vaccine task force, said Tuesday. "... We are well aware we don't have enough vaccine to meet the

demand at this point."

There are six registered vaccine providers in Centre County, though two have not yet received the vaccine and at least three others said they do not have enough to make it widely available.

Mount Nittany Medical Center, Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital, Moshannon Valley Pharmacy and Rite Aid in Bellefonte received the vaccine, according to the state and interviews with providers.

Mount Nittany's supply is limited to groups who were already eligible, while Encompass Health and Moshannon Valley Pharmacy are only vaccinating health care workers.

Boalsburg Apothecary

and Mountaintop Area Medical Center have not yet received the vaccine, according to the state.

"This is a huge, huge undertaking and I'm sure everybody in the state level is doing the best that they can," Moshannon Valley Pharmacy owner Bill Faust said Wednesday. "As the weeks go on, things are going to get moving smoother and I think we'll see more and more people getting vaccinated. A project this size is something our country has never undertaken."

The state is still in its first phase — 1A — of distribution, which also includes long-term care facility residents and health care personnel.

The next phase includes people in congregate settings, first responders and workers in food and agriculture, manufacturing, education, grocery stores, public transit, childhood and adult day care and the U.S. Postal Service.

The 1C phase is set to include workers in more than a dozen other sectors.

Nearly 2,300 people have received at least one dose of the vaccine in Centre County, while 1,190 are inoculated, according to state data. A majority of the vaccinations have been administered by Mount Nittany Health.

The health care system has received 5,600 doses of the vaccine as of Wednesday, spokesperson Nichole Monica wrote in an email. About 2,200 people received at least one of the two required doses, accounting for about 4,400 doses.

The remaining doses are expected to be administered to community health care workers, who are al-

ready on a waiting list.

The health system plans to provide updates on its website, mountnittany.org /coronavirus, and expects to launch a self-scheduling option when there's more information about when more of the vaccine is coming.

Geisinger, whose nearest vaccine center is in Mifflin County, expanded availability Tuesday for its patients. Those interested in finding out if they're eligible can complete a five-question quiz on the state's website.

Alaska boasts the highest percentage of residents who received at least one dose of the vaccine (7.6%), according to a USA Today analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

Alabama has the lowest percentage (2.3%). About 3.6% of Pennsylvanians received at least one dose.

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Kamala Harris is sworn in as vice president by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor as her husband, Doug Emhoff, holds the Bible during the inauguration at the U.S. Capitol.

Centre County women celebrate Harris' milestone

BY MARLEY PARISH
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Centre County women and advocates had reason to celebrate Wednesday when Kamala Harris made history by being sworn in as vice president, but say the moment is just one step in moving forward as a

country.

Harris is the first woman, the first Black person and the first South Asian-American to serve as United States vice president. She was sworn in at the U.S. Capitol, just two weeks after a deadly mob attempted to undo the results that elected Harris and President Joe Biden to office.

Though Wednesday was a celebratory occasion, State College NAACP President Lorraine Jones said the Jan. 6 riot and events leading up to the insurrection cannot be forgotten.

"We want to be hopeful that the new administration represents the interest of the people that put them in power. We cannot talk about the joy of Vice President Harris without putting it into the context of the insurrection that occurred just two weeks ago," Jones said. "We still have more rivers to cross."

In the aftermath of the insurrection, communities have witnessed acts of hate, but leaders have come together to push back against violence, harmful rhetoric and hold people accountable for their actions. Centre County advocates know it will take time to repair damage caused by years of misinformation, but they are eager for Harris to serve as a role model for women and minorities of all ages.

The daughter of a Jamaican father and Indian mother, Harris was the first Black woman to serve as California's attorney general. When she was elected to

the Senate in 2016, she became the second Black woman in the chamber's history. In November, alongside President Joe Biden, Harris reflected on the generations of women of all races who helped pave the way for her ca-

"While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last," she said. "Because every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities."

Black women are too often overlooked, but they often prove to be the "backbone of our democracy," Harris added.

The American
Association of University
Women of State College —
a nonprofit committed to
empowering women and
girls — offered congratulations to Harris. In a joint
statement, co-presidents
Sally Kalin and Cindy Hall
said Harris has "forged a
path that will inspire women of all political stripes"
to guide the nation's future.

"For generations of girls, she will serve as an acknowledgment that leadership at the highest levels is achievable," they said.

AAUW State College
Public Policy co-chair Mary
Dupuis said it is a "true
delight" to see a woman
being inaugurated as vice
president for the first time,
adding that Harris being a
woman of color is "simply
the icing on the cake."
AAUW State College Diversity and Inclusion Chair
Jordan Glover said the
election of Harris is arguably the most important
advancement for women in

She added that it is a "huge step" toward breaking the highest glass ceiling—the presidency—and achieving equity for women.

"For young women, women of color and anyone who sees (themselves) in the new vice president, she represents a beacon of hope and a start of a new chapter in our country's history," Glover said.

Data compiled by RepresentWomen, a nonpartisan organization, show that women make up 51% of the country's population but are the minority in political leadership. Women account for 24% of the Senate, 27% of the House and 30% of statewide elected executives; statistics for women of color are even lower.

The Centre Women's Leadership Coalition, a branch of the Community Diversity Group, believes Harris's election proves that strides for diversity can be made at every level of government, founder Charima Young and chair Laura Leites said.

"Diverse representation matters to ensure we are developing policies and laws that benefit all groups of people," they wrote in a joint statement. "The Coalition's mission is to ensure that happens at the local level."

With an upcoming panel on representation in local government, the Coalition plans to continue supporting and encouraging women and people of color to explore options that were once closed to them.

"Seeing people who represent diverse identities inspires others to blaze trails into positions of influence," they said. "The Centre Women's Leadership Coalition is doing our part to make certain women and people of color will continue to have seats at the table at every level."

For more information on the Centre Women's Leadership Coalition, email centrewomenlead@gmail.com.

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Jana Marie Foundation dialogues to be held virtually

BY DAVID PENCEK

During these polarizing times, it seems as if having conversations on difficult topics and people of varying viewpoints coming together to just talk isn't happening anymore. It's created more divisions in our society.

Five years ago, Jana Marie Foundation started
Mokita Dialogues to foster
healthy discussions among
diverse members of the
community. The monthly
events continue to bring
people together to talk
about issues and topics
affecting our communities
and our world.

On Jan. 28, the foundation begins its fifth year of Mokita Dialogues. The one-hour talks are inspired by the word "Mokita," which comes from the language of Kilivila, spoken near Papua New Guinea. It means "a known truth left unspoken;" think of it as an elephant in the room.

The first Mokita Dialogues for 2021 will cover the topic of "Belonging," and begin at 11 a.m. Medora Ebersole, education and community programs manager for the Center for the Performing Arts at Penn

State, will lead the discussion. The conversation will explore what it means to belong, offer opportunities to share and amplify best practices, and ground us in the knowledge that we already mean something to our community.

"The Mokita Dialogues series has provided a safe space for community members to come together to explore a variety of topics that often go unnoticed or unaddressed. Each session also provides an opportunity for follow-up and action," said Marisa Vicere, president of Jana Marie Foundation.

As of now, each of the 2021 conversations will be held on Zoom. To join, visit Tinyurl.com/Mokita Dialogues. Mokita Dialogues are held at 11 a.m. on the fourth Thursday of each month (except for November and December, when they will be held Nov. 18 and Dec. 16, respectively). Each session, led by a different facilitator from the community, features activities that encourage thought and conversation, and also suggestions for ways to continue the discussion in our communities.

"Some of my favorite

memories come from what has happened after the conversation," Vicere said. "We've had dance classes start, coffee dates that have led to new initiatives and projects to fill a gap of services, and community members stepping up to get involved through volunteering at a number of organizations. It is inspiring to see so many new collaborations happening."

The rest of the 2021 schedule of topics (subject to change) is:

Feb. 25: "Sex and the Internet"

March 25: "Transitions" April 22: "Mental Health" May 27: "Embracing

Failure"

June 24: "Homeless-

ness" **July 22:** "Human Traf-

ficking"
Aug. 26: "Grief"
Sept. 23: "Suicide Pre-

vention"
Oct. 28: "Bullying"
Nov. 18: "Difficult Con-

versations"

Dec. 16: "Forgiveness"

For more information
about Mokita Dialogues
and other Jana Marie Foundation programs, volunteer
opportunities, and how to

donate, visit janamariefoundation.org and follow the Jana Marie Foundation on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

David Pencek is the communications specialist for Jana Marie Foundation.

Child care workers eligible for \$600 grants

Associated Press

HARRISBURG

Employees of licensed child care facilities in Pennsylvania will be eligible for a one-time, \$600 grant to reward them for providing a valuable service through the pandemic, Gov. Tom Wolf's administration said Wednesday.

Wolf's administration said the money is coming from a federal government program that subsidizes child care costs and left-over money initially targeted for child care providers in coronavirus relief aid legislation approved last spring by Congress.

About \$20 million is available, and could provide grants to as many as

33,000 child care workers, the administration said.

Eligible employees must have been employed by a licensed child care provider on Jan. 1, earn a gross salary of no more than \$70,000 and work a minimum of 20 hours per week at the child care facility.

It will replace this year's grants from a program designed to boost the pay of highly qualified early childhood education teachers.

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