



# County of Monterey

Board of Supervisors  
Chambers  
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor  
Salinas, CA 93901

## Board Report

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**File #:** PAR 21-010, **Version:** 1

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Receive a preliminary analysis report in response to **Board Referral No. 2021.16** seeking to combat health misinformation and curb the spread of falsehoods that threaten the health and safety of our residents and visitors.

### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

- a. Receive a preliminary analysis report in response to **Board Referral No. 2021.16** and direct that staff:
  - 1) Proceed with completion of referral as described below; or,
  - 2) Take action to direct that staff:
    - i. Proceed with completion of referral based on modifications by the Board; or,
    - ii. Return to Board with a more comprehensive analysis of referral and anticipated effort for completion; or,
    - iii. Rescind referral.
- b. Provide further direction, as appropriate.

### PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS:

#### **Referral Summary & Background:**

Board Referral No. 2021-16 assigned on September 14, 2021, requests the County Administrative Officer and the Monterey County Health Department implement the areas of action cited by the Surgeon General of the United States Dr. Vivek H. Murthy in his advisory entitled “Confronting Health Misinformation” (Advisory) (Attachment 3).

U.S. Surgeon Murthy issued his first Advisory on July 15, 2021 to warn the public about the urgent threat of health misinformation, including disinformation which has threatened the nation’s response to COVID-19. During the pandemic, the public has been exposed to a wide range of misinformation about the use of face coverings/masks, physical distancing, testing, treatments, and vaccines which has led to confusion, mistrust of government, distrust of health care systems and undermining of public health strategies.

As stated in the Advisory, addressing health misinformation will require a “whole-of-society” effort and as such includes a call to action for all stakeholders including individuals, families, and communities as well as the education, healthcare, media, technology, research, philanthropy, and government sectors.

The Advisory states that governments can take the following actions:

- Convene federal, state, local, territorial, tribal, private, nonprofit, and research partners
- Increase investment in research on misinformation
- Continue to modernize public health communications
- Increase resources and technical assistance to state and local public health agencies
- Expand efforts to build long-term resilience to misinformation

Board Referral No. 2021.16 identifies these additional strategies:

- Identify and label health misinformation and disseminate timely health information to counter misinformation that is impeding our ability to keep our community safe
- Continue to focus on community engagement strategies, including partnerships with trusted messengers and the Monterey County VIDA program
- Work with the medical community and local partners to enhance our County of Monterey website that will serve as a central resource for combating health misinformation in our community

**Proposed Project Description:**

Many of the Advisory's call to action for government are already underway. The County of Monterey as the lead in our COVID-19 response efforts, and in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including County residents, has implemented a multi-pronged approach in responding to the pandemic. The Community Foundation for Monterey County convenes the County's COVID-19 Collaborative, comprised of representatives from local government, education, business, media, non-profit, and faith-based sectors, which has implemented many strategies in support of the County's response efforts.

In January 2021, a major initiative was implemented to help combat misinformation and to ensure residents are aware of resources available to them. The VIDA (Virus Integrated Distribution of Aid) Program was created in response to the community's need to receive information in their preferred language from trusted leaders or Community Health Workers. VIDA has been instrumental in addressing myths about the COVID-19 virus, testing, treatments, and the vaccine, specifically amongst our Spanish speaking and African Americans/Black residents.

The County through an agreement with TMD Creative and in collaboration with the COVID-19 Collaborative Communications Working Group, has developed bilingual and culturally appropriate messages and public service announcements for public consumption through social media, print, radio, and television platforms. Messages are focused on preventive measures individuals and institutions can take to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in our County.

County staff will further review activities underway and determine if additional strategies should be explored. For example, the County could explore partnering with our local institutions of higher education to quantify the harms of health misinformation, particularly among African American/Black residents, to increase trust of local agencies and increase vaccine readiness and acceptance.

**Estimated Project Cost:**

The County is already implementing many strategies outlined for the government sector in the Board Referral 2021.16 and the Advisory. Staff will further review activities underway and determine if additional strategies and staffing should be considered and return to the Board with a request for additional funding if needed, in November 2021.

**Staffing Level Estimate:**

The County is already implementing many strategies outlined for the government sector in the Board Referral No. 2021.16 and the Advisory. Staff will further review activities underway and determine if additional strategies and staffing should be considered and return to the Board with a request for additional staffing and funding if needed, in November 2021.

**Departmental Challenges:**

The spread of health misinformation has been problematic before and now during the pandemic. However, today we are experiencing spread at an unprecedented speed and scale.

**Proposed Response Date:**

Staff will report back to the Board of Supervisors within 90 days or January 2022 with an implementation status update including a request for additional resources as needed to implement and sustain activities.

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:**

This recommendation advances the Board of Supervisors Health and Human Services Strategic Initiative and supports all three key objectives: Reduce regional, socio-economic inequities in health outcomes; improve health outcomes through health and wellness promotion and access to top quality healthcare; and advocate for a sufficient allocation of funds from the state and federal governments that will enable the County to carry out its authorized health care programs.

Mark a check to the related Board of Supervisors Strategic Initiatives

- Economic Development
- Administration
- Health & Human Services
- Infrastructure
- Public Safety

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Approved by:

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Date:  
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**Attachments:**

- Preliminary Analysis Report
- Board Referral No. 2021.16
- Surgeon General Misinformation Advisory