

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

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Michigan Public Policy Survey

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Local leaders' views on Michigan's initial COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Spring 2021

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This report presents the opinions of Michigan's local government leaders during the spring of 2021 regarding COVID-19 vaccines, including information on local government actions to support the rollout of vaccines in local communities, and adoption of employee-related policies or practices regarding COVID-19 vaccination, along with their confidence in the vaccines' safety and the fairness of how they were being distributed. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government officials in the Spring 2021 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), conducted between April 5 and June 7, 2021, and includes comparisons to public opinion data from the State of the State Survey (SOSS) conducted by Michigan State University.

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP). Respondents for the Spring 2021 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,364 jurisdictions across the state.

Key Findings

- As COVID-19 vaccines became available to the public in the spring of 2021, 19% of Michigan local governments (including 73% of counties and 46% of cities) reported taking actions on their own or in coordination with other units of government regarding the rollout in their communities. Common actions reported include community information dissemination, assisting local health departments, providing jurisdiction facilities, and coordinating with other community groups to help run vaccine clinics.
- Among Michigan local governments with employees, very few (9%) have adopted their own employee policies or practices regarding vaccinations for their jurisdiction's employees, such as mandating vaccinations, helping schedule them, and providing extra time off for them.
 - Counties (26%) and cities (23%) are significantly more likely than townships (4%) or villages (7%) to have adopted such policies.
 - Large jurisdictions are also more likely than small ones to have adopted such policies. Overall, 27% of jurisdictions with more than 30,000 residents and 20% of jurisdictions with 10,001-30,000 residents have employee policies or practices regarding COVID-19 vaccines, compared with just 3% of the smallest jurisdictions.
- From April to early June 2021, 78% of Michigan local leaders statewide were somewhat (43%) or very (35%) confident that vaccines were being distributed fairly, while 11% were not at all confident, and 11% were unsure. However, this assessment may have changed once vaccines became more widely available late in spring 2021.
 - Officials from large jurisdictions, and from jurisdictions in southeast Michigan were more likely than others to say they were "not at all confident" that COVID-19 vaccines were being distributed in a fair way. Meanwhile, officials from the Upper Peninsula were the most likely to be "very confident."
- Most Michigan local officials were also confident in the safety and efficacy of available COVID-19 vaccines, with 75% somewhat (31%) or very (44%) confident, and only 16% not at all confident in vaccine safety and efficacy.
 - Local leaders' views on vaccine safety were highly correlated with partisanship, with 74% of Democrats saying "very confident," compared with 57% of Independents and 32% of Republicans. High confidence was also higher among men (49%) than women (40%) and among older local leaders (61% among those 70 and older).



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Background

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, an overwhelming consensus in the medical and public health fields has emerged that the best way to end the current global health crisis is through mass vaccinations.¹ A crucial turning point in that goal was the rapid development of multiple vaccines, with the first breakthrough news announced on November 9, 2020 by Pfizer and BioNTech.² Shortly after that, the first COVID-19 vaccines distributed in the U.S. rolled out of a Pfizer manufacturing plant in west Michigan in December 2020.³ Although the course of distribution across the state in the early days of 2021 was rocky,⁴ vaccines became available to ever-widening groups within the Michigan population by spring.⁵ At that time, vaccine appointments remained hard to come by in some parts of Michigan, but by late April, at least in some areas of the state, vaccine availability had caught up with, and began to exceed demand.⁶

Over the summer, the new challenge facing Michigan has become the continuing pockets of individuals with vaccine hesitancy and declining vaccination rates.⁷ One of the key factors in vaccine hesitancy among the public is lack of trust—in science, in health-care professionals, in public health institutions, and in governments in general⁸—which presents a great challenge to the vaccine delivery campaigns.

Throughout Michigan's rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines, hospitals, pharmacies, and local health departments (primarily county health departments) all played major roles.⁹ Other local governments have played a smaller role, but many have still been integral in facilitating the distribution of and their residents' understanding of vaccine availability. In fact, the potential role of local governments in helping increase vaccination rates is coming into sharper focus since residents normally express higher levels of trust in their local governments than in the state or federal government.¹⁰ Local governments could also play an additional role in vaccine rollout as employers, through policies incentivizing or mandating vaccination among their employees.

To learn about the views of Michigan's local leaders and the actions local governments may be taking with respect to the pandemic, the Spring 2021 Michigan Public Policy Survey asked a series of questions on these issues. In fact, the survey went into the field on April 5, the same day that vaccine eligibility officially expanded to the general public in Michigan. The survey asked local government officials about their government's role in the vaccine rollout, policies regarding vaccination for their jurisdiction employees, as well as the local leaders' confidence in the fairness of vaccine distribution, and in the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

Among Michigan local governments, counties and cities are the most directly involved in community vaccine rollout

Looking at the role of local governments in Michigan during the spring of 2021 as COVID-19 vaccines were becoming increasingly available and accessible to the public, 19% of jurisdictions statewide said they had taken specific actions regarding the rollout in their communities (see *Figure 1a*). County health departments were heavily involved in the rollout, reflected in 73% of counties saying they had taken actions. By contrast, actions were also reported by 46% of cities, but just 16% of villages and 10% of townships. It's important to note that most of the MPPS survey responses were collected by the end of April, and as vaccine distribution shifted from a focus on mass clinics to more varied local distribution approaches in late spring 2021, the number and type of jurisdictions involved in distribution may have increased and yet not been captured well in the MPPS.

As shown in *Figure 1b*, larger jurisdictions are also more likely than smaller ones to have taken actions. Among the largest jurisdictions (with more than 30,000 residents), 75% reported being involved in their community's vaccine roll-out, compared to just 8% of the smallest jurisdictions (with less than 1,500 residents). It is also worth noting again that many of Michigan's small jurisdictions provide few public services in general, and so were less likely to then take on a new role in vaccine distribution efforts.

Regionally, jurisdictions in Southeast Michigan were most likely to have taken any actions, however this appears to primarily be driven by Southeast Michigan having more large jurisdictions, and more cities, compared to other regions of the state.

Figure 1a

Percent of local governments reporting actions taken regarding the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines for their wider community, by jurisdiction type

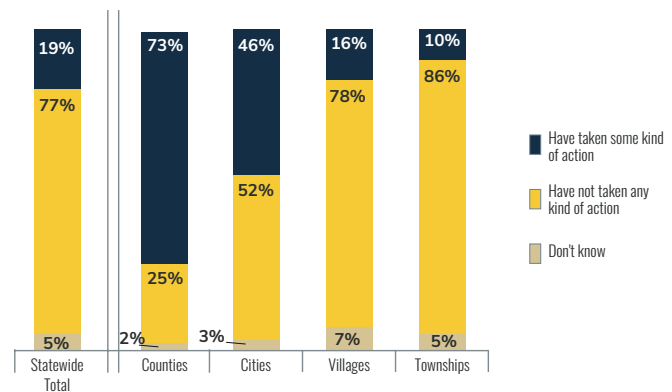
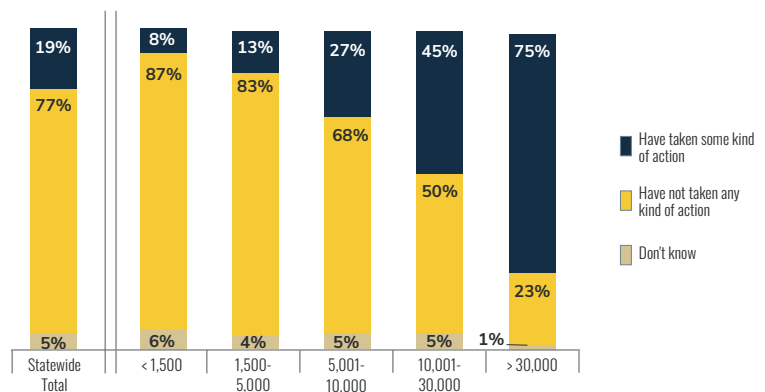


Figure 1b

Percent of local governments reporting actions taken regarding the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines for their wider community, by jurisdiction size



In an open-ended survey question, the MPPS asked local leaders in those jurisdictions that were actively supporting local vaccine rollouts to describe what their jurisdictions were doing. The most commonly mentioned action was partnerships with the local health department or other public entities to help distribute the vaccines; some jurisdictions also operated other vaccine clinics that were not sponsored by the local health department, including pop-up or mobile vaccination clinics. Another common action described by local leaders was offering the use of public facilities for vaccine distribution. A few jurisdictions also described government employees serving as volunteers, assisting with transportation, and scheduling assistance for the general public. Below are some examples in their own words:

Voices Across Michigan

Quotes from local leaders about the actions their jurisdictions were taking in April-June 2021 regarding community rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines.

“We worked with a local charity organization to schedule and administer vaccines to employees through the county Health Department.”

“City staff assisted seniors with online registrations for vaccination appointment. Promotion of vaccination clinics on social media.”

“We have posted informational flyers in the village.”

[REDACTED] County’s public health and emergency management departments have been proactive in planning, developing and executing regional vaccination clinics using available spaces at community high schools five days per week.”

“Waived zoning restrictions to allow drive up testing and vaccination facilities.”

“Agreed to work with the local Commission on Aging to provide a site for administering vaccinations. There was an underwhelming interest, so it wasn’t used.”

“We are actively working with [REDACTED] County to provide mobile vaccinations to homebound seniors and disabled residents. This project has been extremely successful.”

“Our Fire Department has been administering vaccines to the elderly and sick residents of the community.”

“When vaccines finally became widely available, I coordinated with both a local pharmacy and the district health department to set up vaccination clinics at our township hall.”

Relatively few local governments have enacted employee policies or practices regarding vaccination

As the COVID-19 vaccines have rolled out nationwide, a common topic of discussion has been workplace vaccination policies among employers. A national survey of both state and local governments found that 13% have mandated (5%) or incentivized (8%) COVID-19 vaccines for their employees, although another 65% were more generally encouraging employees to get vaccinated.¹¹

Among Michigan local governments statewide, the MPPS found that, among those jurisdictions that reported having any employees, just 9% had developed or adopted policies or practices regarding COVID-19 vaccinations for their employees at the time they completed the survey in the spring (see *Figure 2a*). These kinds of employee policies and practices were most commonly reported among counties (26%) and cities (23%). Meanwhile, only 7% of villages and 4% of townships reported having COVID-19 vaccine policies or practices for their own employees.

Adoption of employee vaccination policies or practices also differs by the jurisdiction's population size. Just 3% of the state's smallest jurisdictions reported having employee policies or practices regarding the COVID-19 vaccines, compared with 27% of the largest jurisdictions (see *Figure 2b*).

Figure 2a

Percent of jurisdictions adopted any employee vaccine policies or practices as of June 2021, by jurisdiction type (among jurisdictions that report having any employees)

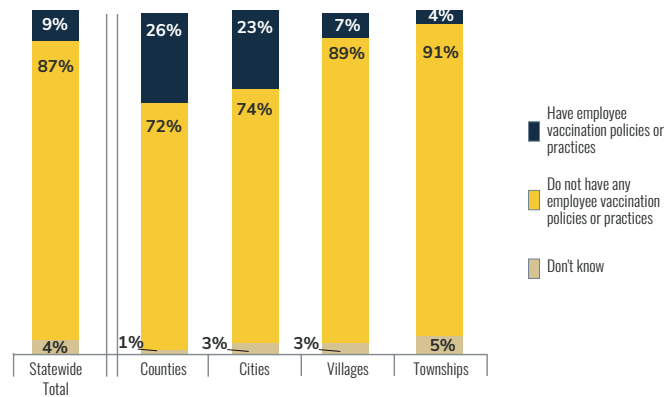
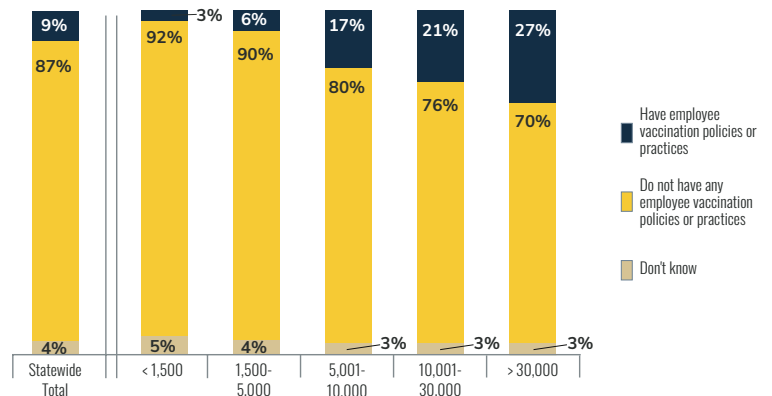


Figure 2b

Percent of jurisdictions that adopted any employee vaccine policies or practices as of June 2021, by jurisdiction size (among jurisdictions that report having any employees)



In another open-end question asking local leaders to describe their jurisdiction's employee vaccination policies or practices, only a handful reported that their jurisdiction required—or was even considering requiring—vaccines for their employees. Some jurisdictions did report changes to COVID-19 quarantine and/or sick leave policies once their employees all had the chance to get vaccinated. A number of jurisdictions reported assisting their employees in scheduling vaccination appointments, and some offered extra paid time off for vaccination (and sometimes for vaccine side effects).

Voices Across Michigan

Quotes from local leaders about the actions or policies that their jurisdictions were taking in April-June 2021 regarding jurisdiction employee COVID-19 vaccination.

“Adapting personnel policies so that employees who receive the vaccine and must isolate due to Covid exposure will not need to use their accrued sick time for the time away from work.”

“We have offered a cash incentive for employees to get vaccinated. We have worked closely with the hospital to help coordinate scheduling for vaccinations.”

“We contacted all of our employees and asked if they would like a covid-19 vaccine. We scheduled those that wanted to take advantage of the vaccine through our county health organization.”

“If an employee received the COVID-19 vaccine and still gets COVID-19, then the City will cover that employee's sick time. However, if an employee does not get the vaccine, and gets COVID-19, and has to use sick time (whether or not because he is sick or because of an epidemic order), we will not cover that employee's sick time. This is an incentive, but not a requirement, to take the vaccine.”

Most local officials are confident in the fairness of vaccine distribution

Beyond local government policies and actions, the MPPS also asked local officials about their own perceptions regarding the fairness of vaccine distribution. Overall, from April to early June 2021, local leaders from 78% of Michigan jurisdictions were somewhat (43%) or very (35%) confident that vaccines were being distributed fairly, while 11% were not at all confident, and 11% were unsure (see *Figure 3a*). However, as vaccine availability increased later in spring and early summer of 2021, these perceptions may have changed. (Note: any such shifts may not be captured in the MPPS data, since most of the survey responses were collected in April.)

The MPPS did find regional differences across the state in terms of views on vaccine distribution fairness. Officials from Upper Peninsula jurisdictions were the most likely to say they were very confident (41%) that vaccines were being distributed in a fair way, while officials from the East Central Lower Peninsula (32%) and Southeast Lower Peninsula (31%) had less confidence. It's worth noting that on March 12, 2021, the LMAS (Luce, Mackinac, Alger, and Schoolcraft) District Health Department in the eastern Upper Peninsula became the first county health department in Michigan to open up eligibility to all residents aged 16 or over.¹²

Each year the MPPS also asks local officials to characterize their jurisdictions on an urban-rural spectrum: rural, mostly rural, mostly urban, or urban. As shown in *Figure 3b*, officials who considered their jurisdiction to be fully urban (23%) were significantly less likely to say they were very confident that vaccines were being distributed fairly compared to officials who considered their jurisdiction to be fully rural (33%), mostly rural (36%), or mostly urban (40%).

Figure 3a
Local officials' confidence in the fairness of COVID-19 vaccine distribution, by region

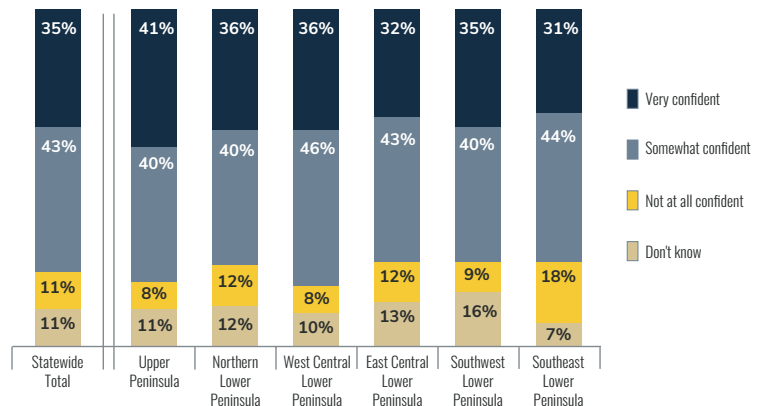
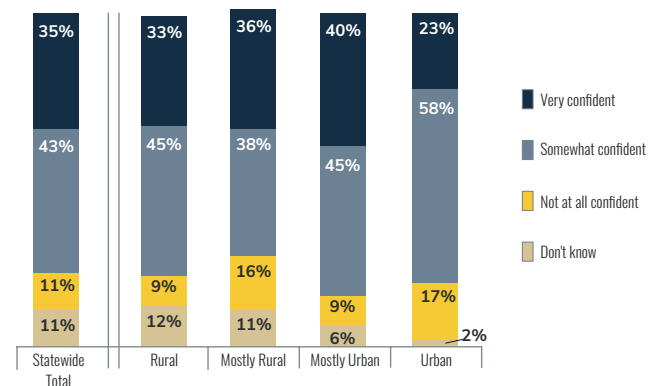


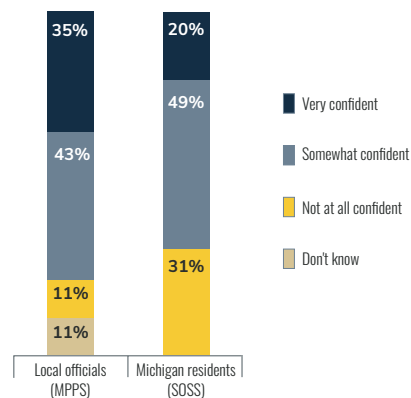
Figure 3b
Local officials' confidence in the fairness of COVID-19 vaccine distribution, by urban-rural self-assessment



Local leaders' confidence in the fairness of vaccine distribution was significantly higher than that of the public at large. During spring 2021, Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research conducted its State of the State Survey (SOSS) among Michigan residents across the state, and on that survey asked whether Michiganders felt COVID-19 vaccines were being distributed fairly.¹³ As shown in *Figure 3c*, compared to the general public, Michigan local officials were significantly more confident that vaccines were being distributed fairly. While 35% of local leaders statewide said they were very confident in the fairness of vaccine distribution, only 20% of the public said the same. Meanwhile, nearly a third (32%) of Michigan residents said they were not at all confident in distribution fairness, compared with just 11% of local leaders.

Figure 3c

Local officials' vs. public confidence in the fairness of COVID-19 vaccine distribution



Note: The State of the State Survey (SOSS) did not include a "don't know" response option



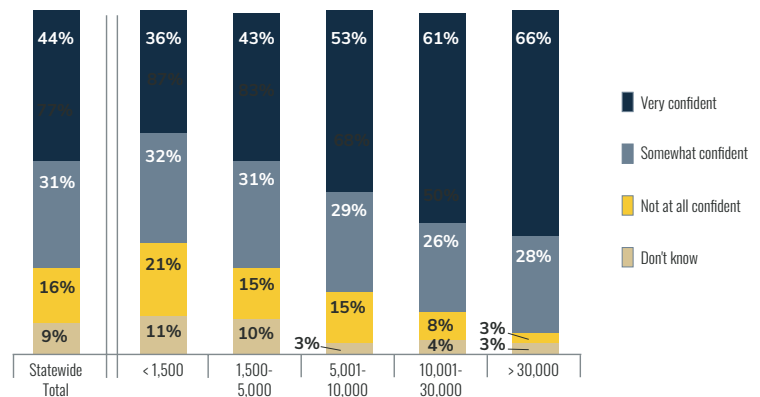
Most local officials also confident in the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines

Finally, the MPPS also asked local officials about their own personal assessments of the safety and efficacy of available COVID-19 vaccines. Overall, as of April-June 2021, top elected or appointed officials from 75% of Michigan jurisdictions reported being somewhat (31%) or very (44%) confident the vaccines are safe and effective (see *Figure 4a*).

When the data are analyzed using statistical regression, differences among officials by the population size of their jurisdiction stand out. That is, when controlling for factors such as regional differences, community urban-rural status, local officials' partisan identification, and even their "confidence in scientific research," local leaders from larger jurisdictions were more likely to be very confident in the COVID-19 vaccines compared with those from smaller places.

Figure 4a

Local officials' confidence in the safety and effectiveness of available COVID-19 vaccines, by jurisdiction size



Consistent with national public opinion polling,¹⁴ partisan differences among local leaders were significant on the MPPS. Only 32% of local officials who self-identify as Republican were very confident in the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, compared to 57% of Independents and 74% of Democrats (see *Table 1*). There were also significant differences by gender and age, with men (49%) being more likely to say they are very confident than women (40%) and those over 70 being significantly more confident than local officials younger than 70. Meanwhile, in contrast to perceptions of fairness of distribution, there were no significant regional differences in views on the vaccines' safety and effectiveness.

Table 1

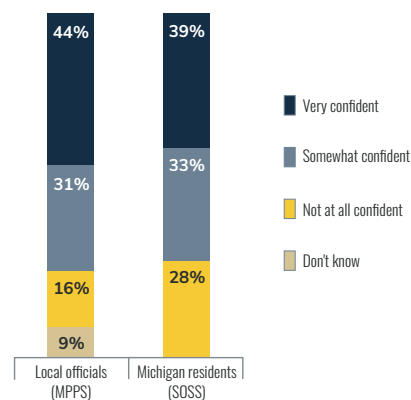
Local officials' confidence in the safety and effectiveness of available COVID-19 vaccines, by partisan self-identification, gender, and age

	Statewide Total	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Men	Women	Under 70 years old	70 or older
Very confident	44%	32%	57%	74%	49%	40%	43%	60%
Somewhat confident	31%	35%	25%	22%	30%	30%	31%	26%
Not at all confident	16%	23%	11%	3%	14%	20%	18%	9%
Don't know	9%	9%	8%	1%	6%	11%	8%	5%

As shown in *Figure 4b*, local officials were somewhat more likely to say that they were very confident (44%) in the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines compared to the general public in Michigan (39%), as found in the spring 2021 SOSS. Local officials were also significantly less likely to say they were “not at all confident” compared to residents, however some of these differences may be attributable to the fact that the MPPS included an explicit “don’t know” response option while the SOSS did not. However, even a small difference in this direction is notable since a greater proportion of local government leaders identify as Republican than the Michigan population as a whole, and, as shown above, Republican local officials are less likely to be very confident in the vaccine compared to their Democratic counterparts. For example, according to responses on the 2021 MPPS, 58% of Michigan local government leaders self-identify as Republicans, while 17% say they are Independents, and 25% identify as Democrats. (By comparison, according to Gallup polling in 2018, 39% of Michigan citizens self-identify as Republicans, 16% as Independents, and 45% as Democrats.¹⁵)

Figure 4b

Local officials' vs. public confidence in the safety and effectiveness of available COVID-19 vaccines



Note: The State of the State Survey (SOSS) did not include a “don’t know” response option



Conclusion

During April and May 2021, although county health departments took a local lead on COVID-19 vaccine roll-out across Michigan, just 19% of general-purpose local governments (counties, cities, townships, and villages) took actions to support community-level vaccination efforts. However, the timing of the MPPS survey—with most data collection completed by the end of April—may have missed potentially increasing activities by local governments later in the spring. Additionally, less than 10% of Michigan local governments implemented policies or practices regarding COVID-19 vaccinations among their own employees. Beyond specific local government policies and actions, most local officials were either somewhat (43%) or very (35%) confident that vaccines were being distributed fairly. In addition, most were either somewhat (31%) or very (44%) confident that the available vaccines are safe and effective, potentially pointing the way for local governments to leverage the higher trust residents place in them, to help counteract vaccine hesitancy and misinformation that has slowed vaccination rates.

Notes

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Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government, conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. Surveys are conducted each spring (and prior to 2018, were also conducted each fall). The program has covered a wide range of policy topics and includes longitudinal tracking data on "core" fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and designed to build-up a multi-year time-series.

In the Spring 2021 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors and managers; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2021 wave was conducted from April 5 – June 7, 2021. A total of 1,364 jurisdictions in the Spring 2021 wave returned valid surveys (67 counties, 208 cities,

173 villages, and 916 townships), resulting in a 73% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.37%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or below, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. "Voices Across Michigan" verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for clarity and brevity. Contact CLOSUP staff for more information.

Detailed tables of the data analyzed in this report broken down three ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village); by population size of the respondent's community, and by the region of the respondent's jurisdiction—will be available online at the MPPS homepage: closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.

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The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP), housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

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