

# Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy through Pharmacies



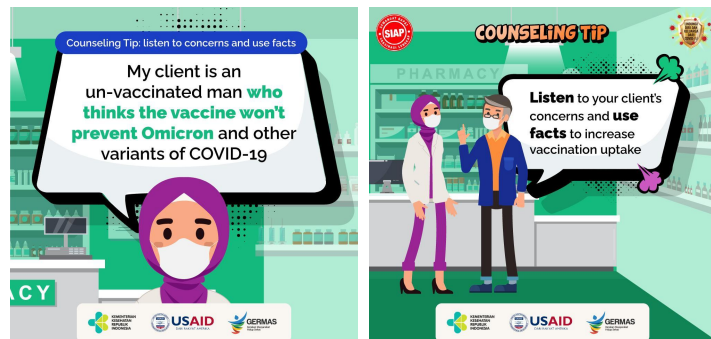
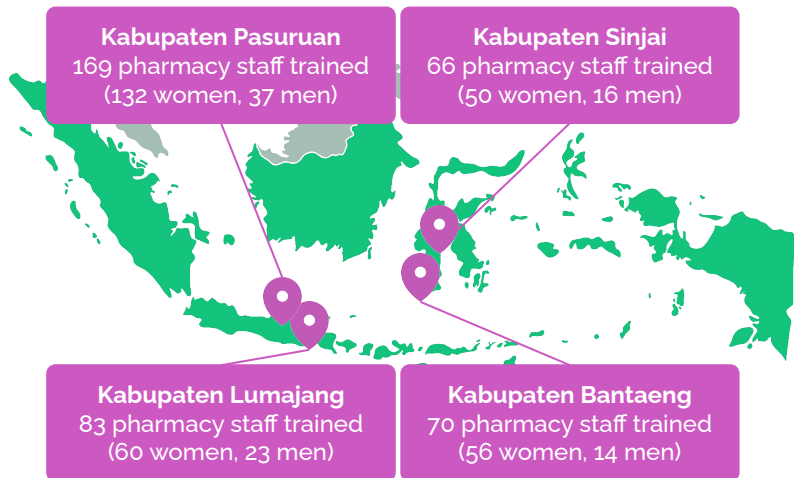
## Challenge: Improving COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage in Rural Indonesia

By December 2021, Indonesia reported more than 4.2 million COVID-19 cumulative cases and more than 143,000 related deaths.<sup>1</sup> One year after the January 2021 launch of COVID-19 vaccination efforts in Indonesia, less than half of eligible adults had been fully vaccinated. Vaccination coverage was hampered by access gaps as well as myths and misperceptions regarding vaccine safety and efficacy.<sup>2</sup> Communication regarding COVID-19 vaccination was limited to centralized messaging relaying basic facts. Community level questions about benefits and risks remained largely unaddressed resulting in hesitancy to vaccinate particularly among rural, elderly, pregnant and other vulnerable groups. Pharmacies—which outnumber primary care health centers by a factor of three—had not been engaged at scale as of late 2021, representing a missed opportunity to strengthen Indonesia’s pandemic response.

## Solution: Leveraging SwipeRx to Engage Pharmacies to Generate Demand for COVID-19 Vaccination in Indonesia

During 2022, SwipeRx contributed to USAID’s Breakthrough ACTION project –implemented by Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (JHCCP) and Jalin Foundation in Indonesia –to engage pharmacies as a myth-busting and COVID-19 vaccine promotion channel targeting under-vaccinated communities in rural Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> Using a combination of digital and offline engagement techniques,

SwipeRx built capacity at 121 community pharmacies to address common questions about COVID-19 vaccination and encourage under-vaccinated pharmacy clients to seek additional counseling and care at the nearest public health center. Within two months, SwipeRx trained 388 pharmacy staff (77% women) at 121 community pharmacies in districts with the lowest vaccination coverage in the country: Kabupaten Lumajang, Kabupaten Pasuruan, Kabupaten Sinjai and Kabupaten Bantaeng. Retail pharmacies were selected by the SwipeRx e-procurement sales team using the following criteria: i) located in a high traffic area and ii) 70 or more clients served each day.



Digital posters deployed through SwipeRx app and social media channels to build counseling capacity to address COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

## Digital Engagement Results & Learnings

Within 6-weeks, 663,000 exposure points were generated through SwipeRx deployment of 4 quizzes, 2 digital poster sets, 1 single poster and 1 animation. More than one in every 10 exposure points (12%) corresponded with a reaction, comment or share within the digital community of pharmacy professionals. The quiz game challenging pharmacists to identify the types of clients who require COVID-19 vaccination achieved the highest engagement rate. To encourage pharmacy clients to seek counselling advice from trained pharmacy staff, SwipeRx placed standing banners, wearable “ask me” pins and counter-top counselling tools at all 121 pharmacies. All digital and in-pharmacy campaign content was approved by the MOH before disseminating in Bahasa language.

<sup>1</sup> <https://vaksin.kemkes.go.id/>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.covidbehaviors.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Financial assistance was provided by USAID through Jalin Foundation under subcontract 034/IO-21004/ISPC/sw/1/2022.



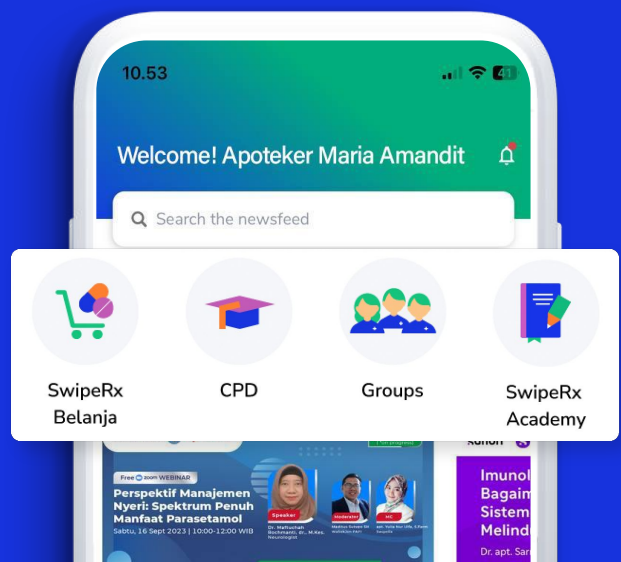
**Pharmacist Tifanda**  
in Kabupaten Lumajang

“We live in a relatively rural area, so the community here is less exposed to information that is readily available in the cities. My clients have heard many negative things around COVID-19 vaccination and people here are easily influenced by rumors and myths. Because of this, I agreed to participate in the SwipeRx program because of my hope that these in-pharmacy materials would bring more awareness in the community about the benefits of full vaccination. My clients were very curious about the standing banner. Because of its size and colorful design, it is easy for my older clients to read. After seeing the banner, many clients wanted to know more information about how many doses are recommended and why booster doses are needed. SwipeRx helped me refer clients to the nearby public health center for more counseling and vaccination.”

## Lessons & Recommendations

Through SwipeRx, USAID’s Breakthrough ACTION project enabled the MOH to scale pharmacy engagement in the least vaccinated, remote areas of the country to address vaccine hesitancy within a matter of weeks. Key learnings from this initiative include the following:

- MOH approval of the digital campaign was a significant achievement, and likely enhanced campaign influence. However, the time required to secure approval was substantial and resulted in multiple no-cost extensions for the overall project timeline.
- With 12% engagement rate, the digital campaign went beyond dissemination of information to prompt a response from more than 1 out of every 10 pharmacy professionals exposed. This strong result was achieved as a result of purposefully interactive digital campaign content.
- Among all in-pharmacy materials utilized by the project, the standing banner was preferred by pharmacy professionals because of its visibility which helped trigger pharmacy counseling sessions.
- Joint promotion of community vaccination events –between both SwipeRx and service delivery partners–was planned but not implemented during the 9-month initiative. In future, longer-term engagement of SwipeRx is recommended to ensure linkages with complementary investments in facility-based vaccination and other health services.



*Through SwipeRx, more than 130,000 pharmacy professional and students in Indonesia can access reliable, pharmacy-relevant news, accredited continuing professional development (CPD) courses, e-procurement and a digital community of practice with thousands of peers and experts. As of mid-2023, more than one-fourth of all retail pharmacies in Indonesia procure medicine and other supplies through SwipeRx. SwipeRx is an official media partner of the General Directorate of Public Health of the Indonesian Ministry of Health.*

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