

Barbers and Ink: Empowering the Iowa City Community to Screen and Vaccinate Against Head & Neck Cancers

Introduction

Head and neck cancers carry a significantly worse prognosis when they are not treated in a timely manner. Empowering members of the community who routinely work near the head and neck region could assist in identifying individuals who have concerning lesions that should be further evaluated.

With some cancers of the head and neck, HPV vaccination has been shown to significantly decrease their incidence later in life. Iowa has the highest incident rate of oral cavity and pharynx cancer in the nation and only 47% of young adults ages 19 to 26 completed the HPV vaccination series according to Iowa Health and Human Services. The HPV vaccine is most efficacious when performed prior to being exposed to HPV. The CDC recommends vaccination through the age of 26, which is the primary demographic of undergraduate students at the University of Iowa.

To address early screening and vaccine promotion, we propose the **Barbers and Ink Initiative**. This initiative will be a low-cost, community-based education and screening program designed to increase awareness of HPV vaccination for students at the University of Iowa and improve early detection of head and neck cancer by barbers and tattoo artists in Iowa City.

This model focuses on:

- Education and information distribution on head and neck cancer detection and vaccinations to barbers and tattoo artists throughout Iowa City
- HPV vaccination education and referral pipeline for members of the University of Iowa

Targeted Populations

Primary focus:

- Residents of Iowa City and the surrounding communities
- Adults over 60 years old
- Young adults under 26 years old
- Current or former tobacco users

Outreach to community partners in Iowa City will include:

- Over 20 local small business barbershops and salons
- Over 10 local tattoo shops

Methods

Community Education

- Organize an event among physician residents at the University of Iowa to distribute information and educate barbershops, salons, and tattoo shops
- Symptom checklist handouts with bilingual educational materials in English and Spanish
- Integrate vaccination and signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer at a Community Health Seminar event sponsored by the University of Iowa for additional outreach

Topics covered:

- Tobacco, alcohol, and HPV risk
- Early symptoms (non-healing ulcers, neck mass, facial lesions)
- When to seek care
- Local referral options
- Vaccination resources

Expected Outcomes

- Increased awareness of early head and neck cancer signs and symptoms in Iowa City
- Early identification of individuals requiring diagnostic evaluation
- Increased tobacco and alcohol cessation and HPV vaccine referrals
- Establishment of a scalable, low-cost educational model

Impact on Community Health

This initiative addresses disparities in early detection by individually meeting with individuals who work in trusted community settings. By lowering barriers and leveraging volunteer academic resources, the project demonstrates that impactful head and neck cancer outreach can be delivered with minimal funding.

The program may serve as a replicable model for small-scale, high-impact community engagement efforts aligned with the mission of the American Head and Neck Society.

Budget Summary

Category	Cost
Educational materials printing	\$500
Community event materials (table setup, signage)	\$300
Vaccination assistance (bus passes/ride vouchers)	\$200
Total Requested	\$1,000

All personnel (faculty, residents, students) will serve on a volunteer basis.

No additional funding is expected.