



Skin Lightening Product Use:

Understanding Consumer Perspectives and Effective Educational Messages

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260), was enacted into law, providing appropriations for the FDA to educate the public on the potential risks of products containing hydroquinone or mercury, including partnering with community-based organizations with records of reaching out to communities.

To build a foundation for the development of an educational initiative, the FDA's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE) collaborated with the Reagan-Udall Foundation for the FDA (FDA Foundation) to conduct formative research among diverse stakeholders for their perspectives, attitudes, knowledge, and motivations on the use of and potential risks from skin lightening products containing hydroquinone or mercury.

The research was designed to develop a better understanding of the drivers of the use of skin lightening products among diverse racial and ethnic communities and to help design tailored communications to educate communities on the potential risks and harms. Virtual listening sessions were held to gain a more in-depth understanding of consumer perspectives on skin lightening products. Participants reported either personally using, considering use, or knowing someone who used skin lightening products. More than 140 organizations, representing racial and ethnic minority groups, universities, community groups, patient advocacy groups, and public health organizations, were contacted.

Six listening sessions were held in total, each with consumers representing diverse communities (such as estheticians in clinical, med spa and salon settings, and members from the Asian American and Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino communities). Additionally, interviews were conducted with seven experts in dermatology, race, culture, and health communication among diverse populations. During the listening sessions, researchers explored consumer awareness of ingredients, concern about ingredient safety, and information that would be helpful for consumers when selecting skin care products to guide future message development and testing.

These findings will inform the creation of materials developed by FDA OMHHE to educate the public.