



Health Departments: Your Community's Front Line of STD Prevention

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF HEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN STD/HIV PREVENTION

Sexually transmitted disease (STD) and HIV programs in state and local health departments are on the front lines in keeping our communities strong and healthy through the direct delivery of STD and HIV prevention and control services. Their activities may include providing clinical services, education and awareness efforts, and monitoring disease trends through surveillance and epidemiology. In some states, STD and HIV control and prevention programs are administered jointly. In all states, STD and HIV programs coordinate with each other and other local and state programs, such as hospitals, family planning clinics, and Departments of Education and Corrections to promote sexual health in all communities. The activities of local and state STD and HIV programs are funded by a mixture of state, federal and private dollars.¹

What do Health Department STD and HIV Programs Do?

- Clinical Services and Disease Intervention
 - Health departments provide free or low cost testing and treatment in many settings, including public clinics, family planning centers, school-based health centers, and correctional facilities. As many as 85 percent of patients served by STD clinics are below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.² These individuals would likely be unable to access services if not for health departments and their strong collaboration with community-based organizations.²
 - Health departments also provide important STD and HIV prevention services through their Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS). The underpinning of all STD and HIV programs are DIS. DIS personnel conduct voluntary interviews with patients to obtain the names and contact information of their sexual partner(s) and then use that information to contact a patient's sexual partner(s) and inform them of their potential exposure to an STD or HIV.³ This breaks the chain of disease transmission and protects the public health. All DIS complete an extensive CDC training course which provides a strong foundation for field investigation techniques, making their skill set essential to other disease outbreaks such as H1N1.

- Education, Awareness and Professional Training
 - Health departments are responsible for educating the public about STDs and HIV, including the costs and consequences of the diseases and how to best prevent transmission. Health departments also serve as an informational resource for health educators and providers, including training. For example, the Michigan STD Program regularly coordinates with the State Department of Education to conduct comprehensive sexual health education programs and train teachers to deliver sexual health courses.⁴

- Surveillance and Epidemiology
 - Health departments have the primary responsibility for local and state surveillance and epidemiology efforts. Surveillance is the ongoing, systematic collection and monitoring of STD and HIV case reports. The data collected through surveillance efforts are then synthesized and analyzed by epidemiologists who study how an illness is spreading through the population and where to intervene to halt transmission. Both activities are critically important components of STD and HIV programs.

- Health Departments as Innovators
 - Local health departments are incubators of public health innovation. Expedited partner therapy (EPT), for example, is a relatively recent tool developed by health departments. With EPT, individuals who test positive for a bacterial STD at a clinic are sent home with enough antibiotics for themselves and their partner(s), if the partner is deemed unlikely to seek an STD exam. Preliminary research suggests that EPT is an efficient and highly cost-effective way to prevent further spread of STDs.⁵

Effective STD and HIV prevention programs in your state ensure the health and well-being of our communities. And everyone benefits from a healthy community. To learn more about the role STD and HIV programs play in your state, please contact the STD and HIV program directors at your department of health. They are a wealth of information. Additionally, the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCS D) and the National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) can both provide extensive resources.

Get in Touch with Us:

Please contact NCS D's State Policy Associate, Burke Hays (202-842-4660, StatePolicy@ncsddc.org) or NASTAD's Policy and Legislative Affairs Manager, Emily McCloskey (202-434-8067, emccloskey@NASTAD.org) with any questions. Or visit the state policy section of NCS D's website at <http://www.ncsddc.org/statepolicysection> and NASTAD's website at www.nastad.org for more information.

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