

Maricopa County's Catalyzing Congenital Syphilis Prevention Project

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The *Catalyzing Congenital Syphilis Prevention (CCSP)* project is a partnership between Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH) and local health care community organizations designed to deliver syphilis screening and treatment services to pregnant females and females of reproductive age in an effort to promote STI awareness, increase syphilis testing, and prevent congenital syphilis.



The “What”

In 2021, Arizona emerged as the #1 state in the nation for rates of congenital syphilis, with Maricopa County, the third-largest health jurisdiction in the U.S., serving as the primary contributor of reported infections in the state. Recognizing the urgency of addressing this concerning trend, the MCDPH initiated a collaborative effort with local health care community organizations and maternal health programs. The goal was to connect pregnant females and females of reproductive age with referral sources for convenient at-home syphilis testing.

Through a referral-based process, MCDPH provided at-home comprehensive sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing services, including syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV testing, at no cost to clients. Moreover, the project linked clients to the MCDPH STD Clinic if treatment was required. To enhance knowledge and awareness surrounding STIs, safe pregnancies, and sex education, the project has also delivered educational training to participating sites and their clients.

Since its launch in June 2022, the project has formed collaborations with four community health organizations to effectively deliver syphilis screening services. In response to partner needs and with the aim of boosting STI testing rates among participating sites, the project has further expanded its scope to include STI outreach events. This partner-based intervention was selected due to its tailored approach and focus on achieving three primary objectives: (1) increasing the detection of



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syphilis among pregnant females and females of reproductive age; (2) averting a higher number of congenital syphilis cases; and (3) decreasing the overall rate of congenital syphilis in Maricopa County.

Through these strategic partnerships and a multifaceted approach that includes education, outreach, and accessible testing services, the project continues to address the rising rates of congenital syphilis in Maricopa County, Arizona.

An essential aspect of the CCSP project is the strengthened relationship between MCDPH and various community health organizations. These collaborations enhance our ability to coordinate efforts and respond more effectively to the challenges posed by congenital syphilis.

The “So What”

The CCSP project has taken positive steps towards addressing the increasing rates of congenital syphilis in Maricopa County. Through our intervention, we have observed notable outcomes. Participating sites made 428 referrals for syphilis screening, resulting in the testing of 28 clients either through a direct referral or an attended outreach event. Notably, our efforts also reached 8 pregnant participants, highlighting the importance of utilizing a targeted approach. Additionally, 2 clients' partners also underwent testing. These testing outcomes are encouraging given they contribute to the early identification and treatment of syphilis infections.

Furthermore, educational training sessions were conducted for participating site leadership, focusing on safe pregnancies, STIs, and sex education. One additional educational presentation was also given to 12 postpartum and pregnant clients. By providing comprehensive knowledge and raising awareness, we aim to promote safer sex practices and potentially reduce syphilis transmission.

Perhaps most importantly, an essential aspect of the CCSP project is the strengthened relationship between MCDPH and various community health organizations. These collaborations enhance our ability to coordinate efforts and respond more effectively to the challenges posed by congenital syphilis.

The “Now What”

Our project continues to support the development of community health workers' abilities in addressing maternal and congenital syphilis prevention with their clients. Overall, we have received positive feedback from both participating agencies and their participants.

It is important to note that despite a high number of referrals, the response rate for STI screening services has been relatively low. Currently, we have observed that outreach events and proactive appointment scheduling have yielded a higher

participating sites. To improve these rates, we are exploring additional strategies, including organizing more outreach events and implementing a referral opt-out approach for participating sites to encourage increased syphilis screenings.

Lastly, to supplement the low response rates for STI testing, we plan to continue offering educational training sessions to promote STI awareness. Although previous training sessions have primarily targeted participating site leadership, we recognize the importance of conducting additional sessions specifically tailored for clients.

Key contributors to this project include Stephanie Devlin Maricopa County Department of Public Health.