

Keeping the Lights On: The New Project Helping STD Clinics Stay Open

STD Prevention **SUCCESS STORIES**



Patient testing and care are an integral part of state and local STD programs. Although keeping the doors open can be a challenge, research shows that the care that STD clinics provide is crucial: **more than 60% of patients seeking STD screening and treatment choose state and local public health clinics over other accessible healthcare options because of the low cost, quick service, and expert care.** Yet due to the lack of support structure, many STD clinics have been unable to bill for STD services and obtain reimbursement from health insurers as they try to ensure that patients get the healthcare they deserve.



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To tackle the complex challenges that come along with providing in-demand, high-quality care while also keeping costs down for STD clinics, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (**ASTHO**) collaborated with CDC to launch an initiative designed to encourage innovative ideas for more economical service and payment models. **Washington State, Mississippi, and Rhode Island** kicked off the pilot phase of the project, and have successfully generated new ideas on how to provide and support more efficient and effective STD healthcare.

“This project has been a game-changer,” said Lori Elmore, a Policy Analyst in CDC’s STD Program. “It has opened doors to ongoing discussions with private and public health insurers, and offered a unique opportunity to combine STD program priorities with other programs and agency-wide initiatives. This will promote better long-term operations, healthcare services, and financial viability.”

About half
of local health
departments use STD
clinics as a primary
point of referral for
STD services.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for HIV/AIDS,
Viral Hepatitis, STD, and
TB Prevention



In the latest phase of the project, **Alabama** has also joined the effort. The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) is developing a strategy for the state's STD clinics to bill health insurers to generate revenue aimed at keeping more clinic doors open. And the glue that holds the whole system together? An especially cooperative process established between Medicaid and state public health departments throughout Alabama. Through this partnership, the ADPH can offer STD and HIV testing and treatment, and additional benefits that were previously not covered, such as family planning services for Medicaid recipients.

“One of the most beneficial outcomes of this project is the freedom it has given the ADPH to explore regional partnerships,” said Mary Scisney, STD Nurse Consultant with the ADPH. Through the collaborative process created by the project, public health leaders and stakeholders in



each county helped to identify which patients could be billed, and how much they would be able to pay. These regional partnerships have worked so well that a statewide billing for services policy is now on the horizon for Alabama. “STD billing would not have been a viable option for the ADPH five years ago,” said Scisney.

The ADPH focused on the unique needs of the communities it serves to develop new system practices. But the ultimate goal? Adapt these new innovations to improve STD clinic operations nationwide. “The success of the ADPH efforts demonstrates that public health and Medicaid and other health insurers can partner to help identify mutually beneficial solutions that offer more sustainable STD services and payment methods,” said Elmore.

But it's about more than billing. It's about keeping Americans healthy.

“This venture has been highly effective at promoting the sexual health concept as a legitimate reason for STD billing. We wanted to rethink STD prevention and

control without focusing on stigma, but instead on setting a goal to improve sexual health for all Americans,” said Scisney.

Nevada has also come on board with the project –seeking to identify potential innovations and solutions that could help advance prevention, testing, and treatment efforts. The goal is to ultimately bring Medicaid billing more within the scope and influence of the state.



Thanks to the promising outcomes in all of these pioneering states, more effective time and cost-saving options that are both patient- and provider-friendly are in the works and headed to a growing number of STD clinics around the country.

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