

# Community Health Promotion in Action

STD Prevention  
**SUCCESS  
STORIES**



Efforts to reduce STDs in the United States hinge largely on local public health programs across the country effectively targeting the needs of the communities they serve.

It's especially important to include members of the community they are serving in planning sexual health promotion efforts, which often involve both sensitive topics and vulnerable populations.

Here are two stories of STD programs working closely with community members to make strides in promoting and improving sexual health.

**Health promotion** is the process of empowering people to increase control over their health – and the external factors that can influence it.

Health promotion aims to improve the health of individuals and communities through actions like education and behavioral change.





## User-Centered Campaign Development in Rhode Island

From 2005 to 2014, Rhode Island saw a dramatic increase in syphilis rates among men who have sex with men (MSM). In response, Tom Bertrand, Chief of the Center for HIV, Hepatitis, STD, and Tuberculosis at the Rhode Island Department of Health, set out to develop a syphilis prevention campaign for MSM. His team started where all campaign development should: with the end user.

“We did formative research and got input from gay men,” Bertrand says. Feedback from focus groups and patients at STD clinics helped the team identify messages and imagery that were likely to resonate with MSM. With this information and resource support from Denver Public Health, Bertrand and his team developed ads that ran for eight weeks — which directed users to a page they created featuring topics like how to find gay-friendly doctors.

“This campaign was more than just a marketing blitz. It was an effort to refer people to resources in Rhode Island,” says Bertrand.

His team also reached out to hookup sites and apps — an approach Bertrand believes will be critical to preventing STDs among MSM going forward. “They are organizations we should be identifying as partners,” he says. “We need to work with them.”

If you ask Bertrand, the most important takeaway from this program is that public health staff must involve communities in behavior change campaigns. This approach is getting results. Syphilis rates in Rhode Island leveled off after the campaign compared to the previous year. Bertrand hopes that is a trend that will continue for a long time.



## The Power of Community in South Los Angeles

Paulina Zamudio is a Section Manager in the Division of HIV and STD Programs at the Los Angeles (LA) County Department of Public Health. She’s also one of the founders of the Community Advisory Coalition (CAC), a group committed to reducing STD disparities among young people in South LA.

CAC began when health department staff started meeting with leaders in South LA, where STD rates are highest in the county. “We talked to them about getting the community involved in trying to decrease STD rates — not only providers, but also schools, faith leaders, and business owners,” Zamudio says. “We knew we wouldn’t be able to make inroads unless we got the whole community concerned and involved.”

Member diversity is a defining characteristic of CAC. Zamudio stresses the importance of representing populations most affected by STDs in South LA, citing their Youth Task Force.

“We want to make sure that those impacted have a voice,” says Zamudio.

Additionally, CAC has recently seen more nurses and health teachers joining the coalition to learn more about STD prevention — and to access CAC resources for young people about where to go for local STD services.

Zamudio notes that working with so many community players presents a unique set of challenges, but she loves her work for the same reason. “My favorite part of the job is working directly with the community — talking to people who are concerned and willing to do something about STDs.”