**Making the Case for Local Public Health**

*Sample Op-Ed*

NACCHO recently developed a toolkit to help local health departments (LHDs) demonstrate the value and impact of their work to stakeholders, including policymakers and the public, through op-eds. The toolkit includes tips for getting started, a sample op-ed, and recommendations for tailoring messages based on local needs, trends, and priorities.

This document contains the sample op-ed. The full toolkit can be accessed [here](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/LHD-HSH-Program-Op-Ed-toolkit_Final.pdf).

**Sample Op-Ed and Suggestions for Customization**

The sample text below is intended to help guide and inform the development of your op-ed, and it could also be used to frame a similar communication format, such as a letter to the editor or blog. For the purpose of this sample op-ed, we selected STIs and specifically congenital syphilis as our focus, and we wrote from the perspective of the hypothetical “NACCHOville Health Department” in NACCHOville City, NACCHOville County, USA. However, you should focus on the issue that best meets the goal of your op-ed. The highlighted text demonstrates where to include your **key messages**, where to include **more details on local trends**, and how to **connect the issue(s) to the work of your health department**.

**Funding Cuts Leave NACCHOville Residents—and Babies—Vulnerable to Sexually Transmitted Infections**

**Communities across the United States are facing rising rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including a resurgence in congenital syphilis**—syphilis transmitted from parent to fetus during pregnancy—and NACCHOville is no exception. **NACCHOville Health Department (NHD) is on the frontlines of the STI crisis, promoting and protecting the health and safety of our community.** At the same time, we, like many health departments across the country, are also experiencing funding cuts that impact our ability to effectively respond. This puts NACCHOville residents, including newborn babies, at risk.

At NHD, we have been working for more than 25 years to provide STI prevention and treatment services in our county. **In 2019, we provided affordable, high-quality STI services to more than 800 NACCHOville residents.**

Nationally, rates of syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia have reached [20-year highs](https://www.cdc.gov/std/stats17/default.htm), and cases of congenital syphilis have [doubled](https://www.cdc.gov/std/stats17/default.htm) since 2013**. In NACCHOville, our STI rates rose 12 percent last year, including a 16 percent increase in syphilis. We also saw our first cases of congenital syphilis in years.** The rise in STIs has disproportionately impacted NACCHOville youth, who accounted for more than half of cases diagnosed in 2019. While increases have been seen across the county, cities in eastern NACCHOville have been hardest hit.

Despite our critical role in battling rising rates of STIs and fighting cases of congenital syphilis, local health departments have faced stagnant and declining budgets for nearly a decade, and in 2017, a National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) survey found that [one-third](http://nacchoprofilestudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017-Forces-of-Change-Main-Report1.pdf) anticipate budget cuts in the next fiscal year. **At NHD, we’ve experienced declining budgets for nearly a decade and have had to reduce our clinic hours and turn patients away. We’ve also had to cut down on our outreach efforts, which have been critical to reaching residents of eastern NACCHOville, far from NHD’s location in downtown NACCHOville City.** This insufficient funding, coupled with increasing STI rates, has impacted our ability to respond effectively to the STI crisis and protect the health of NACCHOville residents.

Local health departments are the first line of defense in protecting our communities against persistent and emerging diseases and health challenges. As our nation faces skyrocketing STI rates, **we must ensure that local public health has the resources to address these issues and protect our community**.

Please contact Kat Kelley, Program Analyst, HIV, STI, & Viral Hepatitis, at [kkelley@naccho.org](mailto:kkelley@naccho.org) or 202-507-4223 with any questions about this resource.