

# LEVERAGING POLICY CHANGE WITH PROVIDERS: *A PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS STORY IN OKLAHOMA*

## POLICY SUCCESS STORIES

### BACKGROUND

Since 2018, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) has partnered with the Denver Prevention Training Center to host in-person symposiums for providers on syphilis. These symposiums have been opportunities to educate a wide range of individuals offering health care services in Oklahoma about rises in syphilis cases, particularly among pregnant women. After the success of initial symposiums, the passage of [SB292](#) led to a particularly impactful symposium for OSDH. By capitalizing on the unique confluence of policy change and high morbidity data, OSDH hosted a successful symposium that mobilized more providers to prioritize syphilis testing.



**National Coalition  
of STD Directors**



## HOW DID THE SYMPOSIUM DEVELOP?

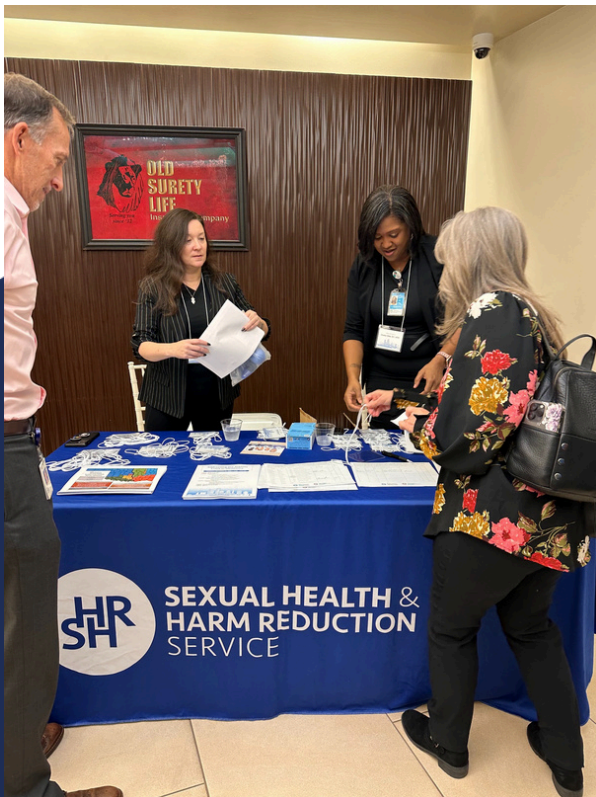
- Oklahoma policymakers passed SB292 during the [2023 state legislative session](#). The bill modified statutory language to align with the CDC's prenatal syphilis testing recommendations and required insurance carriers to cover serological testing with no cost-sharing.
- OSDH was able to use the policy change to further entice providers to join and learn more about the bill's impact in the fall of 2023.
- In addition, OSDH used high STI morbidity data to frame the symposium, focusing on Oklahoma's dramatic increases in congenital syphilis rates. For example, from 2011 to 2021, congenital syphilis rates in Oklahoma [increased by 4,521%](#).
- The department utilized Ending the Epidemic (EHE) funds to support the event's operational costs, as the symposium focused on syndemics and how integrated HIV, STI, viral hepatitis, and harm reduction strategies can collectively strengthen the response to these epidemics.





## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

- The symposium reached a variety of providers and health care professionals, and primarily consisted of nurse practitioners, advanced practice nurses, midwives, physicians, and health educators.
- Nearly **68% of participants** said they intended to change their practice protocols based on the new syphilis testing and regulatory changes.



## WHAT ARE SOME KEY LESSONS LEARNED?

---

### **Centering policy change can generate engagement.**

While promoting SB292 did not exclusively make the symposium popular, it helped generate interest and was an integral facilitator for discussion by centering key policy changes. In addition, changes in state legislation that codify requirements and guidelines can be a motivating factor for providers to integrate changes into their practice due to the legal weight they hold.

### **Partnering with a local clinical champion is key.**

OSDH partnered with Dr. Jennifer Smith of Integris Health to speak at the symposium. Her peer leadership approach as a person working with Oklahoma patients made her relatable and trustworthy. It also took the burden off the state health department to have to answer every question and helped create a comfortable space for providers to learn from each other.

### **Continuing education (CE) credits and other provider-friendly tactics are beneficial incentives.**

Whenever possible, it is crucial to leverage tools that make symposiums more inviting to providers, including CEs, evening hours, and other flexible arrangements.

### **When replicating or expanding to other regions, remember that recruitment requires partnerships.**

OSDH's 2023 symposium in Oklahoma City was replicated the next year in Oklahoma's second-largest city, Tulsa. While still successful, the engagement was lower. OSDH noted this may be because they needed more time to partner with organizations in Tulsa to develop a customized and tailored marketing strategy.