

Executive Summary

Proposal for Research Targeting the Medically Underserved

Grantor: Department of Health and Human Services – National Institutes of Health.

Intent of RFP: Solicit proposals addressing health promotion, disease prevention, and health disparities that target medically underserved areas as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). North El Dorado County and Pollock Pines meet the DHHS criteria.

Proposed Staffing:

0.40 FTE Epidemiologist

0.25 FTE Disease Investigator

Proposed Target Audience:

Males and females ages 15-24 who reside in medically underserved areas of the County

Background:

If untreated, chlamydial infections can progress to serious reproductive and other health problems with both short-term and long-term consequences. *Chlamydia trachomatis* infection is the most commonly reported infectious disease in El Dorado County. In 2008, 229 chlamydia cases were reported with a rate of 1.3 per 1,000 people. Surrounding counties of similar size and demographics show notably lower rates of chlamydia. For example, Calaveras County has an infection rate of 0.69 per 1,000 people.

Teenage girls have the highest rates of chlamydial infection; 15- to 19-year-old girls represent 35% of infections and 20- to 24-year-old women represent another 28%. These high percentages are consistent with high rates of other sexually transmitted infections among teenagers. Males with chlamydial infections are most likely under represented because of the high proportion of asymptomatic cases (for which medical intervention is not sought) and the lack of screening opportunities for men compared with those for women.

Social marketing systematically applies marketing along with other concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioral goals for a social good. Many successful health promotion campaigns have utilized social marketing to achieve positive behavior change in a target audience. Asking people not to smoke in public areas and promoting the consistent use of seat belts are two examples of social marketing.

Specific Aims

Our overarching goal is to recruit community members to assist in the design and implementation of a campaign that promotes and supports socially beneficial behavior change among individuals at high risk for chlamydia infection in El Dorado County. **The research hypothesis for this proposal is: An innovative social marketing campaign will reduce chlamydia infection rates in high risk areas of the County.**

The proposed project will be developed and implemented in three phases over two years. Phases one and two will be accomplished in the first year of the project; phase three will be accomplished in year two. The three phases are:

Phase 1: Convene focus groups to develop the concepts of a social marketing campaign and discuss how to best position the messages for promotion. Social marketing principles have demonstrated effectiveness in formulating and implementing broad-based behavior change programs. We will begin by convening focus groups to help us define what the needs of the target group are. In the focus groups, residents of the target areas aged 15-24, partner agencies, and local high school health academy members will be asked to discuss gaps in knowledge and barriers to seeking care for sexually transmitted infections. Discussion topics will also include innovative media modalities to deliver the prevention messages, language to be used, and other ideas that will contribute to a successful campaign to reduce the incidence of chlamydia as well as other sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

Phase 2: Develop a social marketing campaign, centered on an interactive website that addresses STD questions/concerns and acts as a resource directory to link the audience with services in the community. Preliminary studies conducted by the Communicable Disease team have provided qualitative data suggesting that lack of anonymity is a concern that prevents individuals from seeking information about sexually transmitted infections and notifying partners of potential exposure. In the second phase of our project we will work with the County's Information Technology Department to develop an interactive website, taking what we learned in the focus groups to ensure age-, content-, and venue-appropriate messaging. The website will promote the exchange of accurate health information and list resources for prevention/early intervention services offered by the County and other local healthcare partners. The website will also offer an anonymous method of communication. An individual would have the ability to ask questions and view posted responses from our Disease Investigator and/or use the website to notify a partner that he/she may have been exposed to a sexually transmitted infection with the assurance that the individual's identity would remain anonymous.

Phase 3: Launch the social marketing campaign and begin evaluation of its effectiveness. In the third phase of the project we will "go live" with the website as the cornerstone of our social marketing campaign. The evaluation component of the campaign will incorporate measurement tools to allow us to discern whether program goals are being met and aid us to systematically improve our marketing efforts. We will track the number of individuals visiting the website, the number of contacts made with the Disease Investigator through the interactive website information exchange, and the volume of partner notification messages sent. During the campaign's second year we will conduct follow-up focus groups to assess the effectiveness of the efforts. It will be a number of years before we could expect to see a documented decrease in the disease burden of chlamydia in our County. However, a marked increase in the exchange of accurate health information and positive behavior change among individuals at high risk for chlamydia and other sexually transmitted infections are intermediate outcomes that can be measured.

El Dorado County Health Services Department is continuing to transition from a clinic based model focused largely on the individual, to a community-focused public health model. If this grant is approved and funded, we can use experts within our community, including the residents, to partner with us in the development of an innovative campaign that can ultimately reduce the disease burden of chlamydia among teenagers and young adults in El Dorado County.