



## SB 306 (Pan) STD Coverage + Care Act

### Purpose

Authored by Senator Richard Pan - a practicing physician and Chair of the Senate Health Committee – SB 306: STD Coverage and Care Act – provides a comprehensive approach to addressing California’s STD public health crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The bill aims to strengthen California’s public health infrastructure and expand access to STD coverage and care to improve health outcomes and create a more equitable health system. The measure is sponsored by APLA Health, Black Women for Wellness Action Project, Essential Access Health, Fresno Barrios Unidos, Los Angeles LGBT Center, and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

### Background

#### Stark Statistics

New data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 1 in 5 people in the U.S. have an STD. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated STD rates in California and across the country that were already skyrocketing to crisis levels prior to the public health emergency. According to the latest data available, in 2018, nearly 68 million STD infections were reported nationwide with rates of syphilis, chlamydia, or gonorrhea up 40% since 2013. California also had the second highest syphilis rates in the nation in 2018. While 90 percent of all male syphilis cases in 2013 were among bisexual and gay men, the epidemic has spread among women. Between 2008 and 2018, the syphilis rate among women of reproductive age increased by 743 percent. In 2018, more than 329 babies were born with congenital syphilis in California and there were 20 stillbirths associated with the disease. More than 100 babies were born with congenital syphilis in Los Angeles County alone in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Untreated STDs Can Lead to Serious Long-Term Health Consequences

Signs that the STD epidemic has been neglected for far too long have already manifested in alarming ways. The CDC confirmed in 2020 that a new, antibiotic-resistant strain of gonorrhea began to spread across the country amidst the COVID-19 crisis. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) also issued an alert in December of 2020 about the rising number of disseminated gonococcal infections, a severe complication of untreated gonorrhea that spreads across the body through the bloodstream.

The CDC estimates that untreated STDs cause at least 24,000 women in the U.S. each year to become infertile. The number of cancers related to Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infections in men dramatically increased in 2016. Untreated syphilis can also lead to negative maternal

child health outcomes, including infant death. The CDC estimates that of the pregnant women who acquire syphilis up to four years before delivery, 80% will transmit the infection to the fetus, and 40% may result in stillbirth or death. STDs also increase both the transmission and acquisition of HIV.

### Health Inequities Persist

Although our STD public health crisis is effecting communities across the state, California youth, Black, Indigenous and people of color, and gay, bisexual, and transgender people are disproportionately impacted. Statewide data indicate over half of all STDs in the state are experienced among California youth ages 15 – 24 years old. Currently, African Americans are 500% more likely to contract gonorrhea and chlamydia than their white counterparts. These disparities are expected to worsen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies conducted by the CDC suggest a range of factors linked to social determinants of health likely contribute to STD rate disparities, including inequitable access to safe, culturally competent, quality health, mental health and substance use treatment services, as well as high rates of incarceration, lack of access to economic mobility and education opportunities, adequate housing, racial segregation, and racism.

### The Cost of Inaction

In a recently released report, the CDC estimated that new infections acquired in 2018 totaled nearly \$16 billion in direct lifetime medical costs nationwide. Chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis combined accounted for more than \$1 billion of the total cost. Sexually acquired HIV and HPV were the costliest due to lifetime treatment for HIV at \$13.7 billion and treatment for HPV-related cancers at \$755 million.

Approximately \$1 billion is spent annually in California on health costs associated with STDs.

### **The Solution**

The scope of the STD epidemic requires a bold response. California must take a comprehensive and robust approach to strengthening our public health infrastructure and expanding access to STD coverage and care to communities most impacted by the STD crisis. SB 306 will help address the STD epidemic and improve health outcomes by reducing barriers to STD services and treatment by:

- Expanding access to STD services and treatment for low-income and uninsured patients through the Family PACT program and provider network
- Increase prevention through innovative strategies like home testing + expansion of health professionals that conduct rapid testing in the community
- Revise current law to support the delivery and increased utilization of Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT), an evidence-based and effective STD prevention practice
- Update state law to require congenital syphilis testing during the third trimester of pregnancy

### **Contact**

Please direct inquiries about this policy proposal to:

- Sylvia Castillo, 626.587.9646 / [scastillo@essentialaccess.org](mailto:scastillo@essentialaccess.org)
- Kathy Mossburg, 916.444.3108 / [kmossburg@mvmstrategy.com](mailto:kmossburg@mvmstrategy.com)