



## SB 306 (Pan) STI Testing + Treatment

### Purpose

Authored by Senator Richard Pan - a practicing physician and Chair of the Senate Health Committee – SB 306: STI Testing + Treatment – seeks to address the alarming rise of sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates in California by expanding access to STI prevention, testing and treatment statewide. 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 STI. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated STI 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 STI 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 STIs Can Lead to Serious Long-Term Health Consequences

Signs that the STI 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 STIs 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. STIs also increase both the transmission and acquisition of HIV.

### Health Inequities Persist

Although our STI 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 STIs 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 STI 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 STIs.

### **The Solution**

The scope of the STI epidemic requires action now. California must invest in strengthening our public health infrastructure and expanding access to STI services to communities most impacted by the STI crisis. SB 306 will help address the STI epidemic and improve health outcomes by:

- Increasing 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 STI prevention practice
- Update state law to increase congenital syphilis screening and testing

### **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)