

Building a National Coalition for Sexual Health in the US:

Overview of a Participatory Approach with Key Stakeholders

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Key questions

- Why was it important to develop a coalition of national partners across multiple sectors to support a sexual health approach in the US?
- What key steps were taken to create the foundation for a National Coalition for Sexual Health?
- How were key stakeholders involved and what did we learn from them?

Why was this important?

The landscape: Traditional STD/HIV prevention approaches have relied upon implementing strong vertical programs, with robust technical expertise and high quality services being delivered at the national, state, and local levels. However, epidemics of STDs, HIV, and hepatitis interact synergistically with each other and with other associated conditions. Overlapping patterns and distributions of disease require new ways of thinking about public health work that focus on connections among health-related problems, consider those connections when developing health policies, and align with other avenues of social change to assure the conditions in which all people can be healthy.

The call to action: A broader, holistic, health-focused framework has the potential for reducing the fear, discrimination, and stigma associated with STDs/HIV, enabling better reach of prevention programs to the general public, populations at risk, and health care providers. Strategic partnerships with groups from a variety of backgrounds were determined to be essential to achieving this vision.

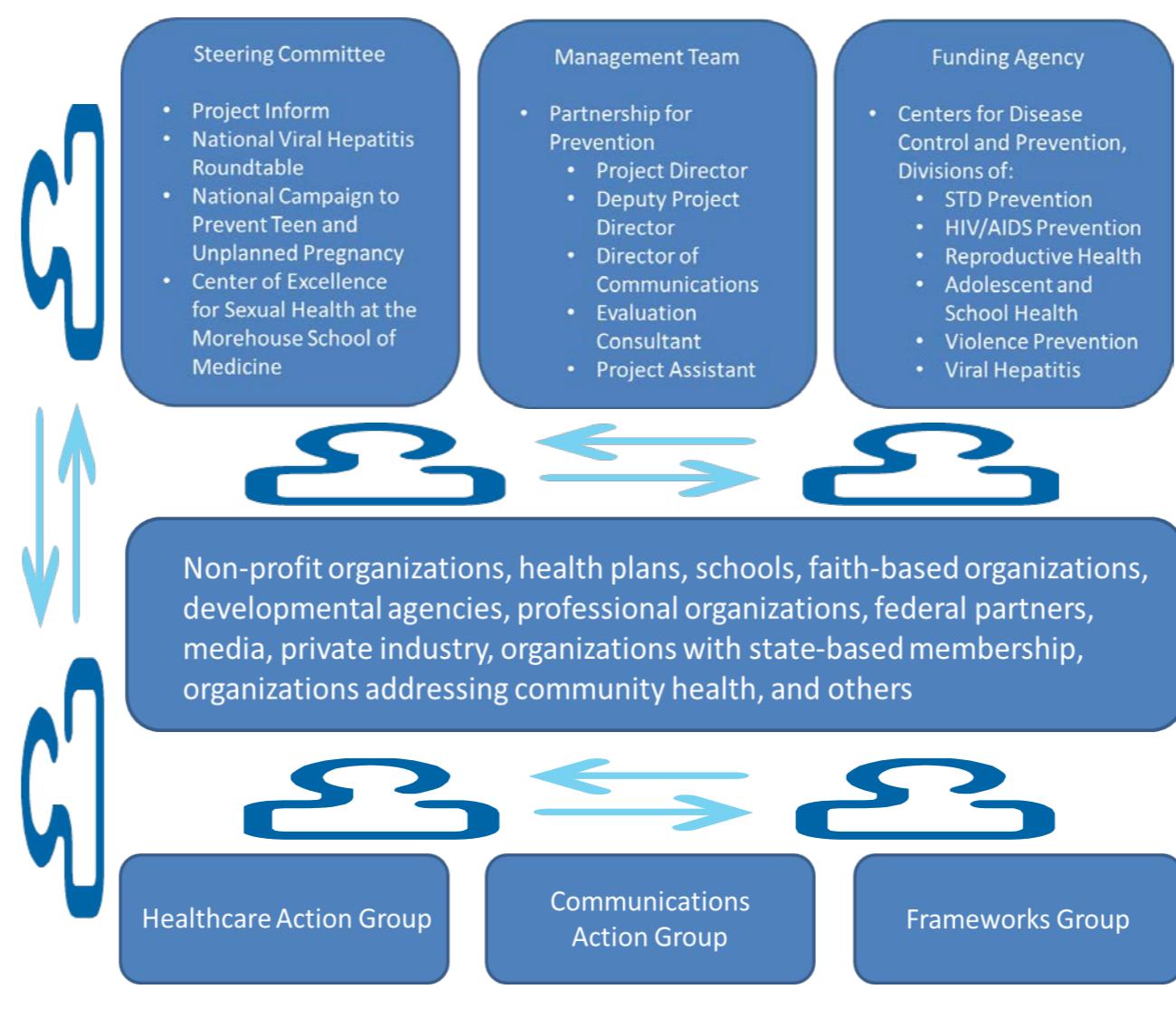
Setting the foundation: Unlike coalitions built around a discrete population or disease, sexual health brings together key stakeholders from multiple areas. Incorporating their concerns and values into the coalition's foundation from the earliest stages involved a multi-stage process of information gathering.

What did we learn and what does it mean?

- Giving meaning to and building acceptance of the concept of "sexual health" to mainstream sexual health among influential sectors (e.g., media, industry) and the general public is key.
 - Follow the example of heart health
 - Explain sexual health in 1-2 meaningful sentences, not a paragraph
- Providing national leadership around sexual health will have downstream benefits for a range of stakeholders, including those focusing on a single aspect of sexual health or specific target audiences.
 - More limited interests can benefit from the inclusive umbrella of sexual health
 - Multiple sectors speaking with one voice on sexual health can amplify the message
- Leaving the traditional disease reduction/disaster avoidance framework carries possible risk and initial work should endeavor to minimize it.
 - Stakeholders with buy-in for a specific topic or population may not be motivated to expand interest to sexual health
 - Funding streams still often follow a siloed approach, forcing organizations to focus on a segment of the population and not the whole
- There is broad support for the benefits of a sexual health approach (e.g., coordinating and leveraging resources across national partners).
 - Organizations acting in concert have the potential to achieve greater gains
 - The expansiveness and interconnectedness of sexual health is a more intuitive framework for many organizations and an easier sell to their constituents

An iterative cascade of feedback

- Steering committee was recruited to bring in a diversity of expertise to guide and oversee planning in partnership with management team and funding agency
- Management team prepared trends and issues papers in key areas of possible focus to guide stakeholder discussions
- Feedback and input was sought from key stakeholders in multiple sectors
- Initial foundation of coalition developed (e.g., mission, vision, values, benefits, member responsibilities, etc)
- Feedback again sought from all levels of stakeholder involvement
- Membership expanded based on needs



The National Coalition for Sexual Health aims to improve sexual health and well-being by encouraging productive and sustained conversations about sexual health and promoting high quality sexual health information and health services.

You can contact the National Coalition for Sexual Health at ncsh@prevent.org. You can contact the first author at ploosier@cdc.gov.