

Building Vaccine Confidence in Kansas

A guide for local health departments

PREPARED BY



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THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING COLLABORATORS

Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE)

Kansas State University Research and Extension

Community Care Network of Kansas

Immunize Kansas Coalition

The Virality Project

Stanford University

United Methodist Health Fund

de Beaumont Foundation

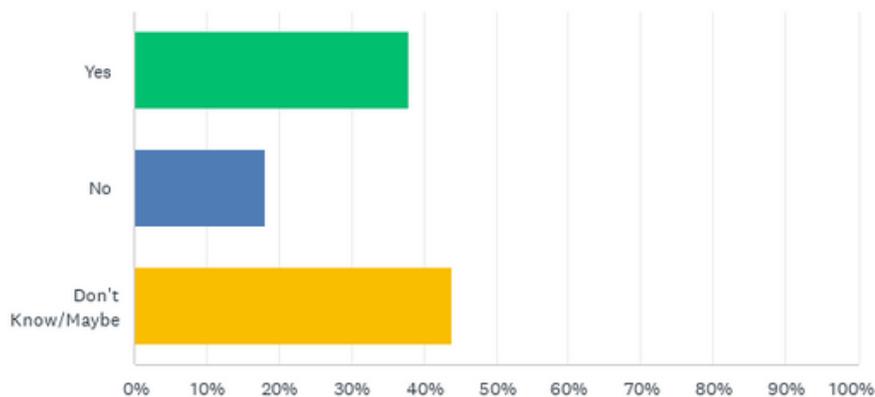
Kansas Health Institute

SEK Multi-County Health Department

INTRODUCTION

According to a survey done in early January 2022, 45% of health department administrators in Kansas do not feel comfortable or equipped to combat vaccine misinformation online in their communities. Conducted in June 2021, the Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE) found that public health professionals are skilled at tracking viruses but are not trained in responding to misinformation online when it happens. With the vaccine hesitancy movement growing, this white paper hopes to serve as a resource for local health departments to adequately combat misinformation and hesitancy in their own communities.

Do you feel that you have been adequately trained to deal with vaccine misinformation?
(online or in-person)



Survey Responses for Combating Misinformation, January 2022

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed doubts on vaccine confidence, particularly in the Midwest. For example, a study done in June 2020 published in Applied Geography noted that the state of Kansas was in the top five of states who were spreading the most misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccinations on Twitter. This misinformation spread continued in-person conversations, with the Kansans for Health Freedom (KSHF) chapter growing. KSHF effectively marketed themselves both online and in-person, reducing trust in public health professionals. In a study of Kansas local health departments in 2022, over 90% of those surveyed believe that misinformation is a problem in the state.

BACKGROUND CONT.

chip_{control} cause infertility_{MRNA} vaccinated_{things} cause_{issues}
government_{government control} people_{long term side}
COVID vaccine_{causes fertility issues} vaccine
Mostly COVID_{term side effects} etc_{will cause} work_{way}
made_{bad} side effects_{Many} changes DNA_{tracked} conspiracy



snapshot of what health departments are hearing on COVID-19 vaccine misinformation, January 2022

As explored in the introduction, public health professionals are not equipped to deal with the rising misinformation while also vaccinating and participating in the community. Equipping local health department professionals with tools to build trust both in-person and online will break the cycle of distrust spreading in Kansas while also increasing vaccination rates for children and adults.

In addition, vaccine rates for children have decreased significantly from 2019 to 2022, with the rates dropping 15% due to a lack of follow-up visits. Groups against vaccination have used the decrease in childhood vaccines as a vehicle to sow seeds of doubt into vaccine-hesitant people. As a result, the vaccine hesitancy movement has grown considerably in Kansas over the last two years. With vaccination rates in rural communities being historically lower due to availability, Kansas is at an increased disadvantage with rural vaccine acceptance and risk exposing unvaccinated children to preventable diseases.

BACKGROUND CONT.

Before we dive deeper into the "why" of this work, it is important to understand the history of the vaccine hesitancy movement and why it has been effective at instilling fear in young moms, families, and people who don't trust government interventions. When Dr. Edward Jenner developed the first vaccination for smallpox in 1798, England was fearful of this "experimental" medical procedure. At the time, vaccination was not regulated or well researched, so patients rightfully had questions. Jenner was able to convince the public of the importance of vaccination through empathy and answering questions.

Fast forward a few centuries to the development of the oral polio vaccine (OPV) in the 1950s. Young children would be able to receive this vaccine free of charge at school. In the United States, the effort to eradicate polio was a nationwide effort that included mothers, families, and even the president - who had been disabled by polio and was passionate about a vaccine. Every day groups felt included in the solution and had their concerns heard.

For Halloween in 2019, Simpson dressed as the least scary thing she could think of, Measles. Now, she is telling the world that vaccines work, proving that empathy and compassion work to change minds for the better.

[view the Newsweek article here](#)

Now, we are in 2022 where the misinformation spreads quickly online and in-person. Heather Simpson, a former vaccine skeptic, has channeled her fear for good. Promoting the importance of empathy towards other anti-vaccine supporters. Throughout history, we see an overarching trend of empathy and trust weaved into vaccination. It is imperative that we continue to use these components in the fight to combat misinformation on vaccines today.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THIS WORK

Empathy is the most effective intervention for combatting misinformation, whether it be online or in person. However, it is important to also remember that **empathy for yourself is important too. Your work as public health professionals cannot be done without boundaries.** With that said, it is important to have **boundaries in place that promote factual information over fear. If you aren't sure if the information you're sharing is factual, then don't share it.**

KEY TERMS

Vaccine Hesitant vs "Anti-Vaccine":

People who are vaccine-hesitant are not opposed to vaccines, but typically are opposed to one or two vaccines on the vaccine schedule because of personal beliefs or concerns over safety. An "anti-vaccine" or "anti-vaxxer" is a person who is against all vaccines regardless of safety or science. These people are typically "radicalized" by social media or in-person conversations. It is important to note that vaccine-hesitant people can become vaccine confident, but it is rare that an "anti-vaxxer" will support vaccines.

Disinformation vs Misinformation:

Disinformation is information that is spread online or in-person that is intended to deceive and cause concern. Disinformation is typically well organized and will make trustworthy experts seem "stupid" and are "conspiracy theory" in nature. Misinformation is similar, but it is not typically intended to mislead. It can be shared by someone online or in-person without them knowing it isn't true. Misinformation can also be shared with incorrect information and correct information together.

Media Literacy:

This term refers to a person's ability to discern between true information and fake information online. For older individuals and those less tech-savvy or who don't have access to the internet, this is a large issue as people can be easily persuaded to believe something.

Freedom of Choice:

This is a term coined by individuals who do not want to receive vaccinations. It has become relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic as a response to vaccine mandates and government intervention.

Health Literacy:

This term refers to one's ability to understand health and healthcare on both an individual basis and on a community level. Many have been groomed to not ask questions and put misplaced trust in bad actors - leading to confusion and anger. Confronted with a pandemic with complex symptoms, it can be easy for health literacy to not be understood.

THEORY OF PRACTICE

The lack of vaccine confidence is not just a Kansas issue. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made vaccination a political issue. With science becoming political, it has been difficult to convince traditional science deniers and conspiracy theorists that vaccines prevent disease. Rural Kansas has been highly affected by this issue, with most unvaccinated adults in Kansas being from rural areas. It is important for us to explore "freedom of choice" language being used by many. This "choice" stems from individuals not wanting interference from government or other people. Because of this, rural communities are not accepting vaccine mandates and recommendations for vaccinations, exposing them to vaccine preventable disease.

THEORY OF PRACTICE CONT.

This lack of trust in the government coupled with the lack of vaccine availability has decreased confidence in vaccinations for both childhood vaccinations and COVID-19. A report from the Kaiser Family Foundation in early 2021 reported that more than 1/3 of providers in rural America are not even recommending the COVID-19 vaccine for children under 18 years old – which is a deterrent for already vaccine-hesitant parents.

Renee DiResta with Stanford University's Virality Project notes that "health departments are not central to the narrative because they didn't want the backlash at the time." Health departments traditionally have less access to public groups thus building networks have been difficult.

Organizations such as the Community Care Network of Kansas and K-State Research and Extension are creating unified messaging for these rural communities to increase vaccine confidence. However, local health departments have not been traditionally included in these conversations. Along with inadequate training on vaccine misinformation, health department professionals did not want the backlash that comes with hesitancy, taking a reactive rather than proactive approach.

AGRARIAN IMPERATIVE THEORY'S ROLE IN VACCINE MISINFORMATION

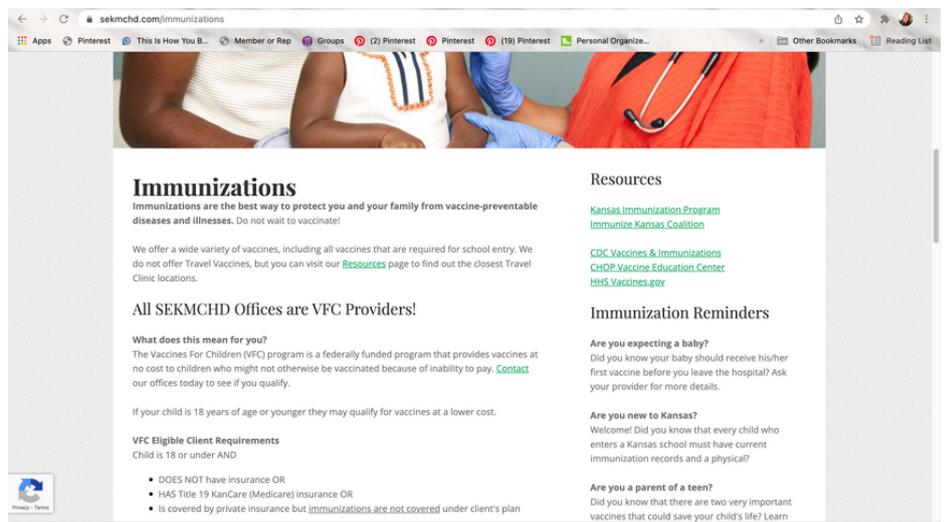
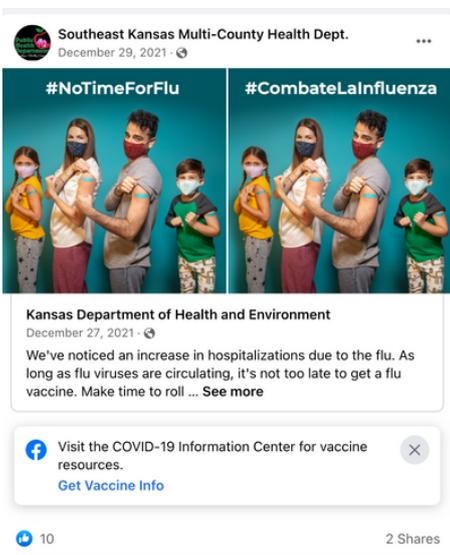
The Agrarian Imperative Theory details that farmers and ranchers cling to their land and resources to maintain survival. This theory encourages farmers to migrate to areas that will help them survive better. Because of this theory, many areas in Kansas have become farming lands due to resources. These communities traditionally do not feel that they need government assistance with healthcare or food, as survival depends on them for their communities to thrive.

Similar to the Black and Latinx communities' distrust of the government, the rural community exhibits a similar understanding of mandates and healthcare because it does not recognize their individual rights, liberties, and capacities. Because these groups do not believe in the government, they are health and media illiterate. They prefer to get their news from each other and don't fully understand the need for government intervention. Through the strategies mentioned in this paper, we can re-build the trust that was lost in rural Kansas.

RECOMENDATION #1

united messaging across platforms

According to many reports from the de Beaumont Foundation, united messaging is key to community engagement in areas with low social media literacy rates. In many communities, health departments are the first line of defense against vaccine misinformation both online and in-person. KALHD recommends developing at least one social media platform to inform the community of updates. After social media is developed, it is important to have aligned messaging across social media and in person. This could include flyers, communication tools online, or an in-person community awareness campaign. Whatever you choose, it will encourage the community to listen to the health department.



social media and webpage examples courtesy of SEK Multi-County Health Department

KDHE & KALHD CAN HELP!

KALHD hosts training opportunities for LHDs during our mid-year and annual meetings. Training opportunities are also mentioned in the weekly immunizations newsletter. In addition, KDHE has contracted with CML Collective to develop flyers and campaign materials for health departments for free. The Public Health Communications Collaborative also has various resources available for health departments to share online.

Along with the resources listed here, KALHD is partnering with the Immunize Kansas Coalition to develop a step-by-step guide for social media using messages from Immunize Kansas Coalition's **Get Caught Up** campaign.



twitter post courtesy of KDHE

RECOMENDATION #2

appreciative inquiry + motivational interviewing

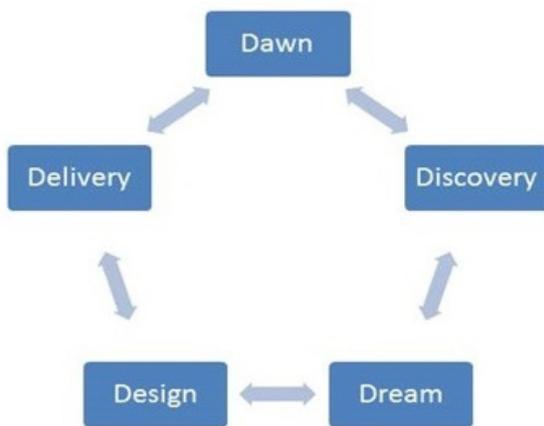
We have all learned that relationships matter and they are the way that trust is maintained. K-State Research and Extension (KSRE) has developed a model for developing meaningful relationships through appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry is a tool used by organizations across the world to create purposeful change throughout the community.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

K-State has integrated appreciative inquiry with their extension agents and created a campaign that encourages vaccination at regular well visits.

"The pandemic has strained so many relationships, so it's important that we work to restore them. Appreciative Inquiry is an intentional way to get the process of rebuilding relationships underway by identifying what's working now and dreaming about what could be. Like many community-based organizations in Kansas Extension is turning towards the positive for vaccination, wellness and relationships."

5 Phases of Appreciative Inquiry



Dawn- building relationships to lay the foundation for change

Discovery- finding the 'best of what is'

Dream- imagining an ideal future

Design- planning for and committing to collaborative change

Delivery- creating the future through innovation and action

diagram by University of Waterloo

HOW KALHD HELPS

KALHD is working with the Immunize Kansas Coalition to develop training for health department professionals on how to motivate patients to get vaccinated. KALHD also has developed resources for appreciative inquiry on our vaccine resources page.

RECOMENDATION #3

community interventions through diverse funding

All effective interventions require funding streams. Thankfully, many local, state, and federal partners have created funding resources for vaccine education interventions. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, more resources have become available for health departments to spread the word about vaccines.

HERE'S A FEW PLACES TO START

Rural Health Information Hub

Good for rural health providers who provide vaccines. There is also vaccination resources geared towards health departments.

Department of Health and Human Services

Information about federally-funded grants for vaccine education. You can also view all grants at www.grants.gov

National Association of City and County Health Officials

You don't have to be a member to access NACCHO's funding resources, With COVID-19, there are many grant opportunities for education available.

The Mercury Project

The Mercury Project is a global group of researchers who are working to combat misinformation and find interventions that support accurate information. Their webpage includes additional resources and funding opportunities as they become available.

KALHD CONTINUES THE CONVERSATION

Along with the websites included above, KALHD will keep a catalog of all available funding resources for vaccine education on the vaccine resources page of our website. By providing these resources, we hope to continue to build health department capacity.

SOURCES & REFERENCES

[Kaiser Family Foundation COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor Dashboard](#)

[Kansas Department of Health & Environment COVID-19 Vaccine Dashboard](#)

[Geospatial Analysis of Misinformation in COVID-19 Related Tweets - Applied Geography](#)

[Impact of Rumors and Misinformation on COVID-19 in Social Media - Journal of Preventative Medicine & Public Health](#)

["Vaccine Access For Kids In Rural America Is A Struggle" - Newsy](#)

[Changing the COVID Conversation: Articles & Dashboard - de Beaumont Foundation](#)

[COVID-19 Vaccine Education Initiative - Ad Council COVID Collaborative](#)

[Why People Farm: Refinements to the Agrarian Imperative Theory - Ag Week](#)

FURTHER READING

[Shots Heard Round the World: Better Communication Holds the Key to Increasing Vaccine Acceptance](#)

[5 Research-Backed Steps to a Pro-Vaccine Social Media Event - University of Pittsburgh](#)

[Vaccinating Rural America: Q&A with Dr. Amanda Cohn - Rural Health Monitor](#)

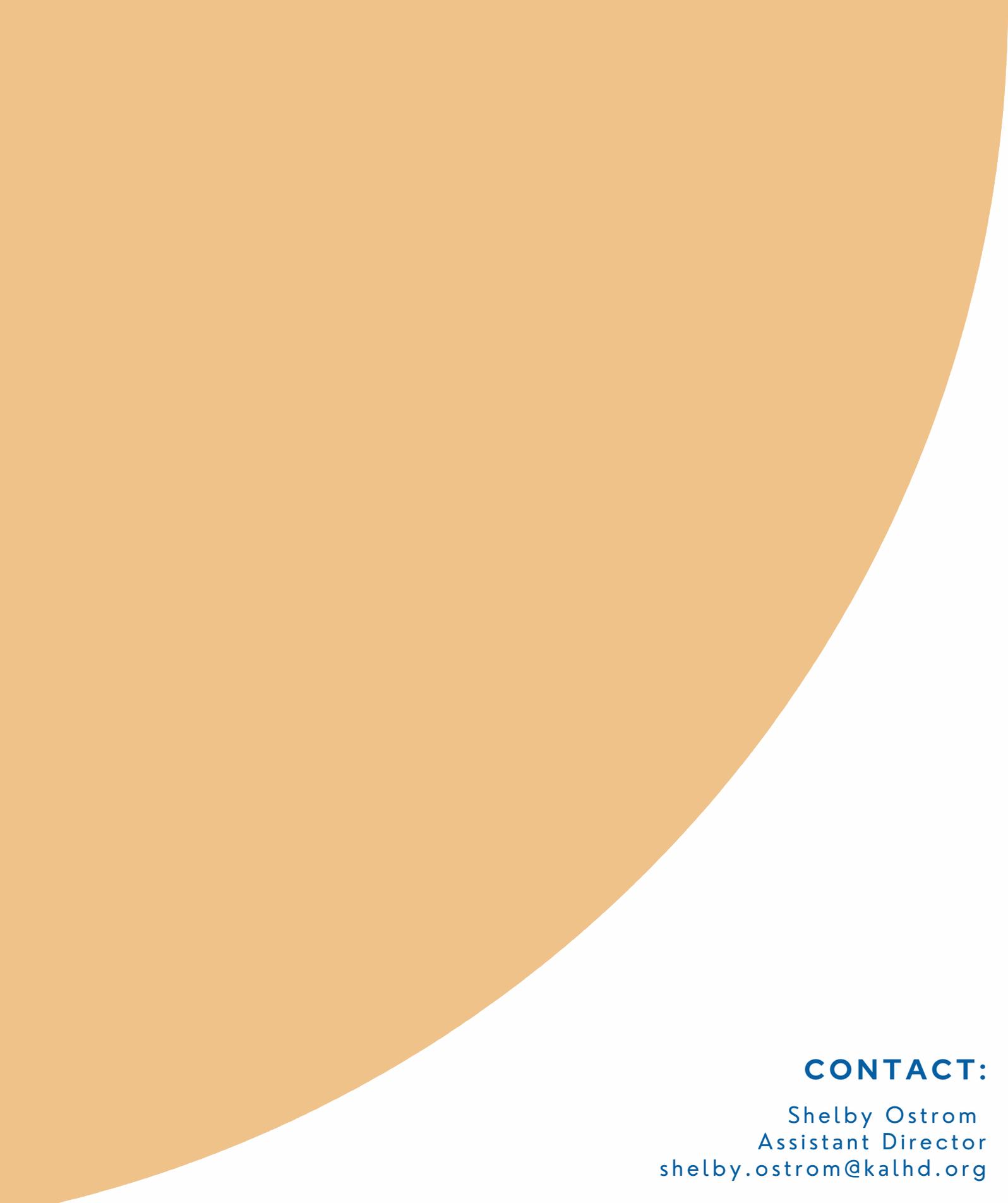
[Social Media in Public Health Departments: A Vital Component of Community Engagement - de Beaumont Foundation](#)

[The Case for Tracking Misinformation The Way We Track Disease - Big Data & Society](#)

[MedlinePlus Evaluating Internet Health Information - National Library of Medicine](#)

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