Service-Learning LC 3

The mission of the Cincinnati Health Department (CHD) is to enhance access to health services for the citizens of Cincinnati. As an integral part of this mission, CHD addresses all social determinants of health, with a particular focus on equity, access, and the reliability of healthcare services throughout the city. CHD achieves these goals through the implementation of specific programs, including the establishment of city-operated health clinics, dental facilities, and pharmacies in particularly vulnerable communities. Moreover, CHD provides vital support to the Women-Infants-Children (WIC) Program, aiming to promote food literacy and availability. Another essential initiative is the Reach-Involve-Support-Empower (RISE) program, designed to enhance birth outcomes and reduce infant mortality rates. (1-5)

The significance of these programs cannot be overstated, as numerous Cincinnati residents depend on them for consistent and dependable healthcare services. Without the presence of these programs, a substantial portion of the city's population would be left without reliable access to healthcare. These initiatives are sustained through government funding, which offers both advantages and disadvantages. One notable advantage lies in the reliability of the government funding received, with a low risk of complete cessation. Furthermore, the funding stems from tax revenue, ensuring a steady and dependable source of financial support. However, it is important to note that the funding allocated to CHD is comparatively lower than that received by many private organizations. The financial backing obtained by private entities often enables them to offer more comprehensive services as a result of increased investments from private stakeholders, as opposed to funds derived from taxpayer contributions. (6)

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted CHD and its capacity to provide programs and services. Budget cuts in 2021 strained the Cincinnati Health Department, and a majority of available resources were rejected toward controlling the spread of COVID within the local community (1). Although the CHD website primarily draws information from the CDC and the state of Ohio, it offers valuable resources such as vaccine details and COVID dashboards that benefit citizens. However, limited information specific to Cincinnati, such as vaccination locations and local COVID testing centers, is available. Despite the resource challenges posed by COVID, CHD admirably expanded its efforts to include information on other potential public health hazards, including mpox, candida, and measles. (6)

In summary, the Cincinnati Health Department's mission is undeniably valuable, and the existing funding aids in its pursuit. Yet, the allocation of additional funding toward specific programs could immensely enhance the well-being of Cincinnati's citizens.

The Cincinnati Public Health Department, as a governmental organization, holds the responsibility for safeguarding the health and well-being of the communities across the Cincinnati area. Their mission, as stated on their website, is "to ensure access to quality services and enhance community health and wellness" (6). Among their various programs, several are tailored to address specific health challenges prevalent in the region. Notably, their robust lead abatement program (7) collaborates closely with local healthcare providers to guarantee the safety of children residing in dilapidated housing, where elevated lead levels could jeopardize their health. Additionally, to better cater to the needs of local neighborhoods, they conduct Community Health Assessments, the outcomes of which are documented in regularly updated

reports (8). These concerted endeavors are designed to equitably allocate resources and elevate health outcomes.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cincinnati Health Department assumed a pivotal role in orchestrating the response efforts in Cincinnati. They established testing sites, acted as a primary information source for the general public, and formulated guidelines pertaining to testing and vaccination (9). Their website, for instance, disseminated CDC-endorsed safety guidelines (9). However, the battle against misinformation and distrust of medical systems posed formidable obstacles that hindered their initiatives (10). Regrettably, public health funding remains conspicuously low on the priority list of the Ohio government. In terms of per capita spending, Ohio ranked 13th lowest (11) in 2021, allocating a mere $24 per individual. This predicament isn't unique to Ohio alone; even the CDC has witnessed reduced funding, particularly when adjusted for inflation. Astonishingly, even in 2023, despite escalating health demands in the aftermath of COVID and the emergence of M-Pox, there persists a glaring lack of adequate funding for emergency preparedness (12).

In times of emergencies, effective messaging through social media and news outlets has become increasingly crucial. Presently, the Cincinnati Health Department primarily relies on traditional media press conferences, with much of their social media content being reposts from the Hamilton County Health Department and the CDC. While these sources are valuable, there's an imperative need for the Cincinnati Health Department to customize their messaging to cater to the unique concerns of the Cincinnati community across all communication platforms.

Previous conversations with a representative from the Cincinnati Health Department have highlighted the challenge stemming from limited funding and staff availability. This underscores a critical gap in public health messaging and accessibility. Consequently, it is important to secure increased funding to empower them in achieving their objectives. While federal sources contribute 4.3% of funding for local Ohio health departments, a substantial 20% originates from the state through the Ohio Department of Health (DOH) (13). This situation presents an opportunity to advocate for amplified health department funding during the state fiscal year budget discussions in 2025. Notably, Ohio passes its state budget biennially, allowing for a 1.5-year window to champion a budget augmentation that wouldn't diminish funding for other local health departments.

Considering that the average salary for a social media manager position in Ohio stands at $47,673 (14), it is recommended that the Cincinnati Health Department secures a $50,000 funding increase. This would cover the role's remuneration as well as associated expenses like recruitment and oversight. This strategic financial boost would enable the department to enhance community education by reaching Cincinnatians where they commonly access their public health information.

The advocacy process will require meetings with the Ohio Department of Health and key stakeholders within the Ohio Legislature Health Committee. These engagements will be spearheaded by us, medical students, who possess experience collaborating with health departments and conducting research on social media utilization. Through heightened awareness about the efficacy of public health messaging on social media, coupled with examples of successful endeavors, such as those by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, we hope to show the pressing necessity of effective public health communication. In this

manner, our efforts will contribute to addressing the mounting challenge of health-related misinformation and ensure that individuals obtain the necessary healthcare promptly.
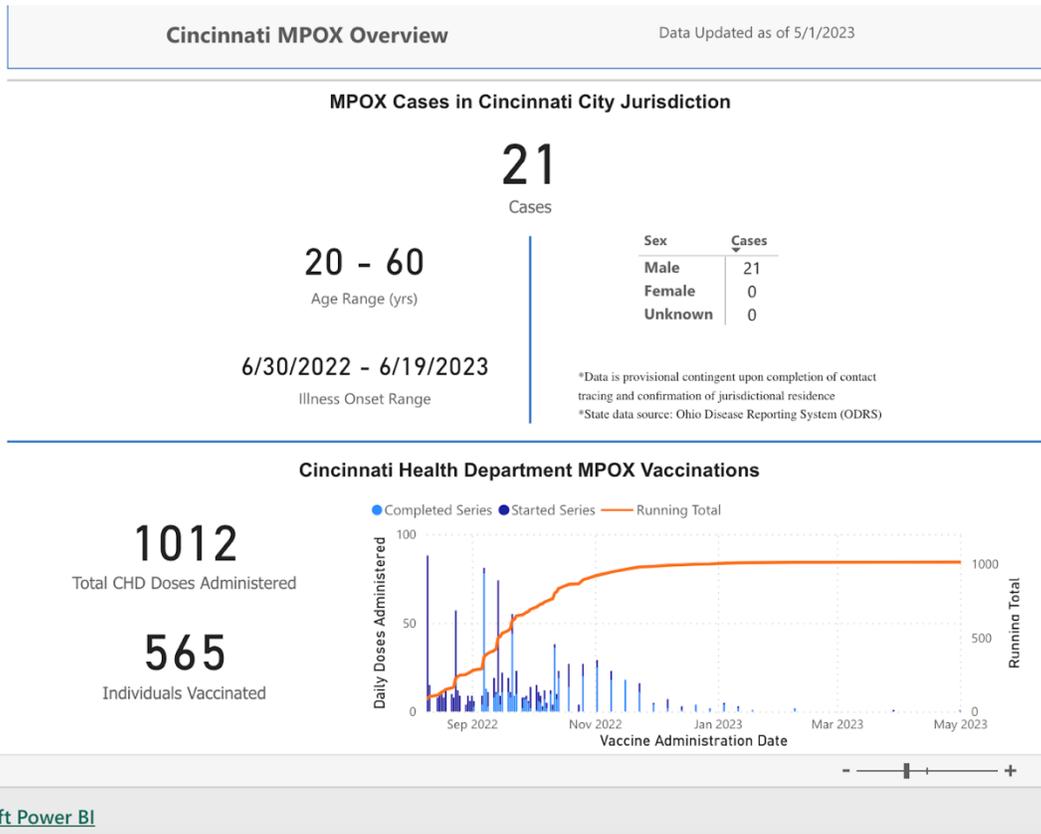
Figure 1. Table of Cincinnati Mpox Cases and Vaccinations. (15)
Our LC worked with CHD to create social media informative videos on mpox for college students. At the time of our project, vaccinations were beginning to be distributed. Our work allowed us to see the need for a social media manager for CHD.

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