

2025

ANNUAL REPORT





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OUR MISSION

WHAT WE DO

We work every day to **prevent disease, promote wellness, and ensure access** to essential public health services. Our team handles everything from monitoring community health trends and investigating outbreaks to sharing life-saving information and enforcing public health laws.

While we operate **four public health clinics** offering immunizations, health screenings, and more, a lot of our work happens outside of the clinic walls. Our staff make **thousands of home and site visits** each year - supporting families, assessing environmental hazards, and bringing health education directly into neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.

Whether it's lead testing, restaurant inspections, or stopping the spread of illness, **we meet residents where they are to build a healthier Kent County.**



OUR MISSION

To serve, protect,
& promote a healthy
community
for all.



LETTER FROM THE HEALTH OFFICER



On behalf of all of us at the Kent County Health Department, I am honored to share this report for the past year. In addition to our nation's 250th anniversary, **2026 also marks the 95th anniversary of the Kent County Health Department.** I think many of our Founding Fathers would be proud that our nation and our community have embraced science and policymaking through representative processes for better health. Benjamin Franklin famously said, "public health is public wealth." Franklin understood – especially after losing his four-year-old son to smallpox – that great suffering could be limited through preventative community action. I believe Franklin would agree that while there's much yet to accomplish, Kent County is very wealthy because it consistently ranks among the healthiest quadrant of counties in the nation.

The year 2025 had highs and lows as all years do. One of the biggest challenges was the **temporary closure of the clinic at our main building on the Fuller Campus for essential renovations.** For nearly a full year, our services and staff were relocated to other locations. I cannot overstate how grateful I am to the people of Kent County who endured additional travel and the inconvenience of delayed appointments. In late 2025, our Fuller Campus clinic reopened and is now equipped to provide first class care to our community. Another significant challenge was the **re-emergence of an old adversary – measles.** This illness made news around the country with 2,289 confirmed cases, 242 hospitalizations, and the deaths of two children and an adult according to the CDC. These were the national highest totals since 1991. While the impact in Kent County was relatively light (four cases), we recognize the threat that re-emerging vaccine-preventable diseases pose for our community. Your Kent County Health Department will always be **committed to providing quality service while also maintaining readiness for new, emerging, and re-emerging threats to your health and safety.**

In this document, you will find reports for many of the programs provided by this department. These programs span the broad work across our divisions of **Community Clinical Services, Community Health Strategy, Community Wellness, Environmental Health, and Administration.** I hope you find this informative and that it helps you as we all work together for a healthier and wealthier Kent County. I also ask for your assistance in 2026 as we, alongside our healthcare partner organizations, embark on the next edition of our Kent County Community Health Needs Assessment. These assessments are required by federal law every three years and provide priceless data that helps to inform public priorities moving forward. Your participation in this assessment is essential for the community to have truly representative information. Please look for more information very soon.

Thanks for all you do to make Kent County a healthy place for all!

Adam London.
PhD, RS, DAAS
Administrative Health Officer

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEAM

Executive Senior Leadership & Senior Leadership



Adam London, PhD, RS, DAAS
Administrative Health Officer



Kirstin Oldenberg, MD
Medical Director



Gail Brink, CPA
Deputy Health Officer



Karla Black, PhD
Deputy Health Officer



Christopher Bendekgey, MS
Community Clinical Services Director



Sara Simmonds, REHS, MPA
Environmental Health Division Director



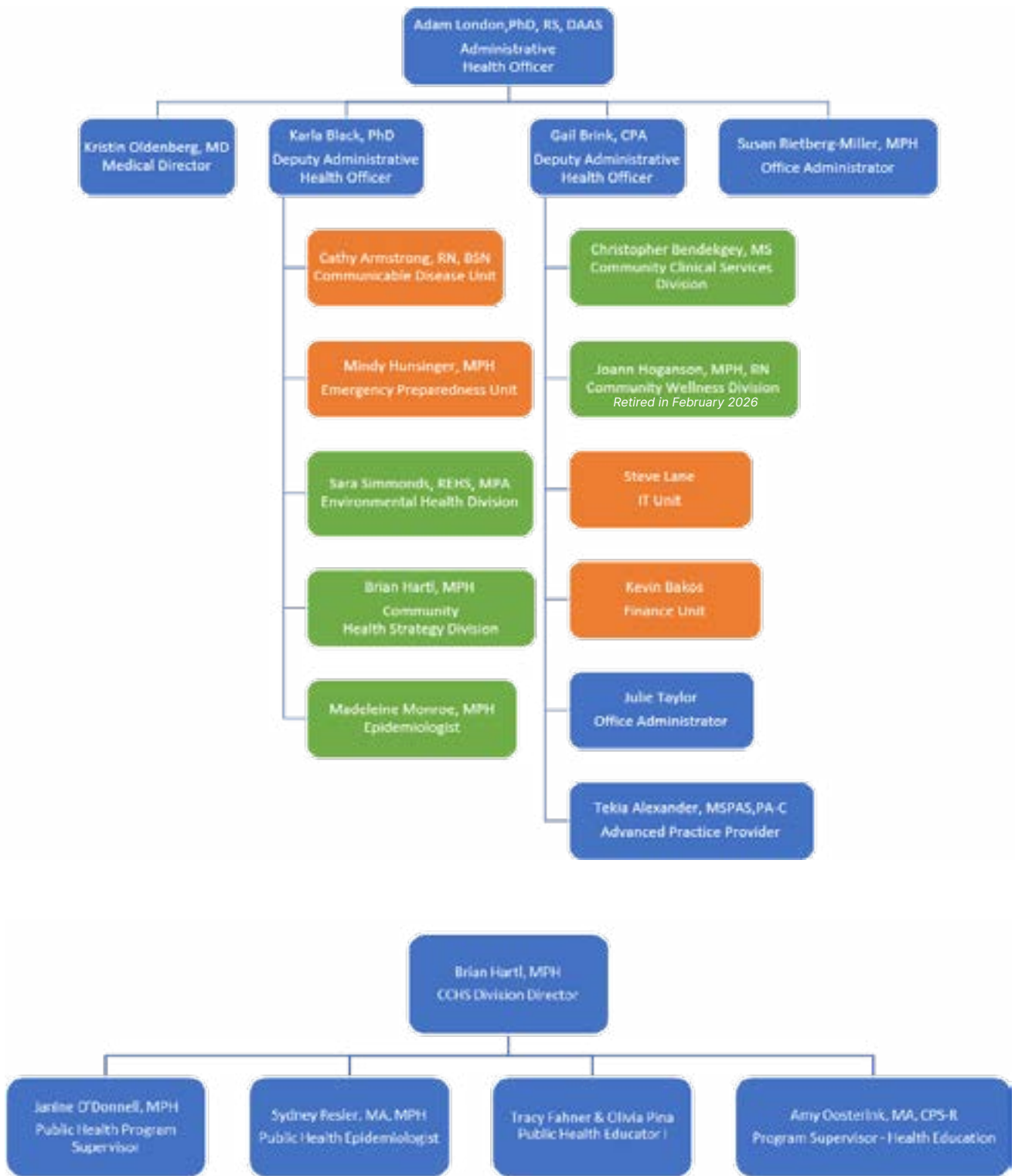
Brian Hartl, MPH
Community Health Strategy Director



Joann Hoganson, MSN, RN
Community Wellness Director

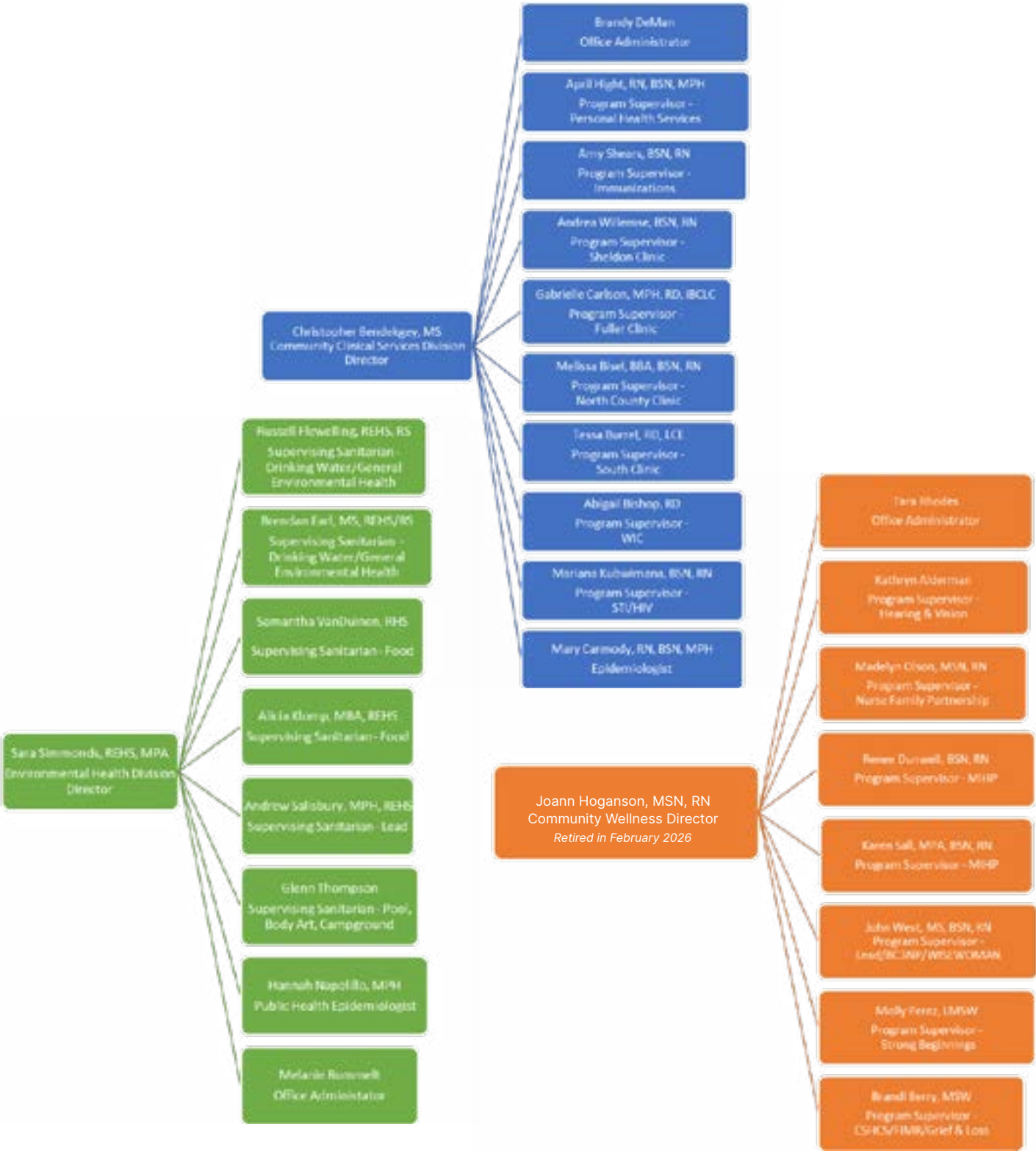
INTRODUCTION TO THE TEAM

Organizational Structure



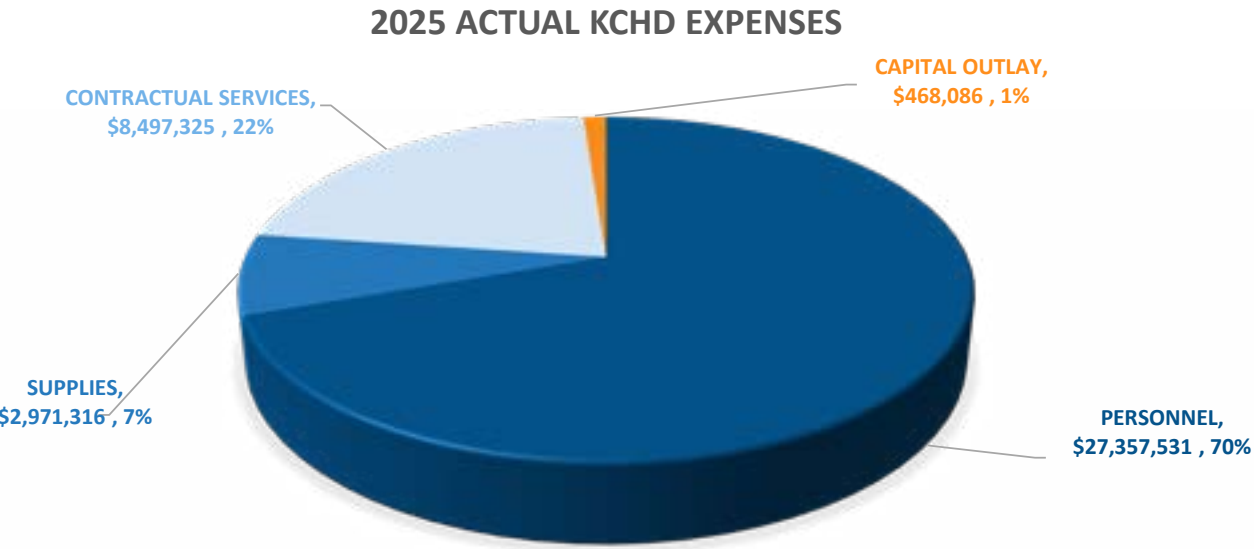
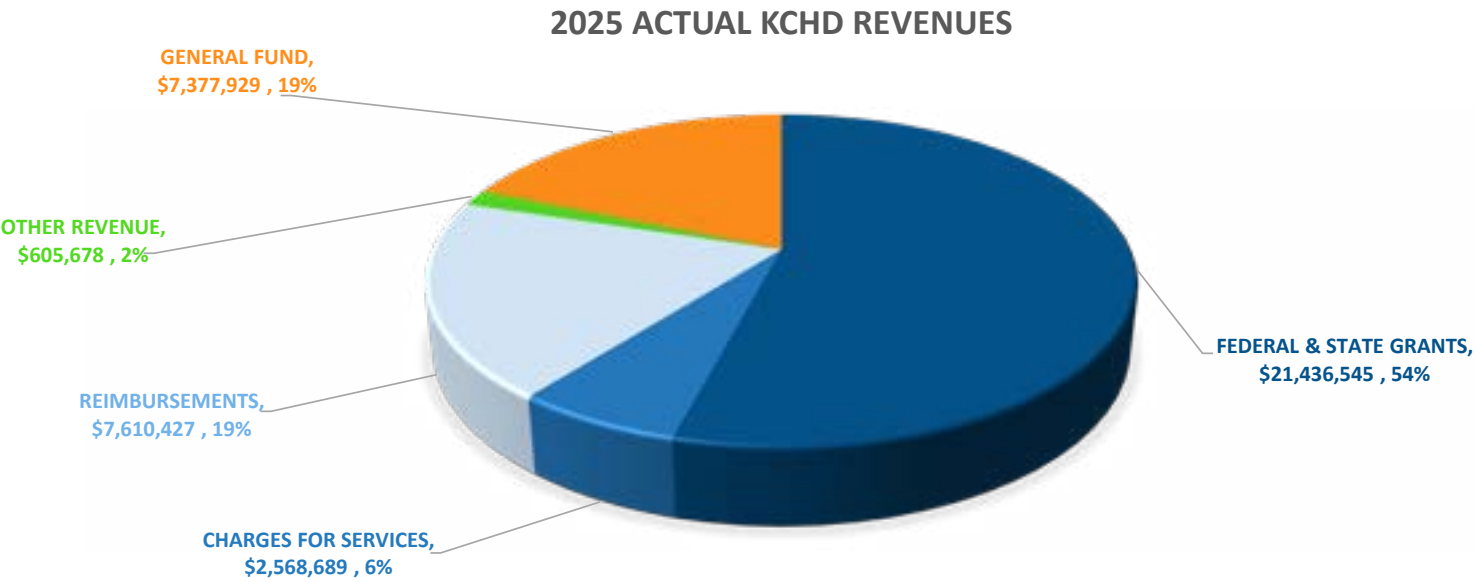
INTRODUCTION TO THE TEAM

Organizational Structure (cont.)



FINANCE REPORT

Budget for Fiscal Year 2025



OUR DIVISIONS & UNITS

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COMMUNITY CLINICAL SERVICES

The **Community Clinical Services (CCS) Division** works to protect the health of our residents by prioritizing the **prevention, detection, and treatment of various illnesses** and diseases. Through the expertise of its dedicated staff, the division delivers a **comprehensive range of clinical services**, including:

- Routine and international **travel immunizations**
- **Oral health screenings** with fluoride varnish applications
- **Nutritional support** for prenatal and postnatal women, infants, and children (WIC)
- **Medical care for sexually transmitted infections** (STIs), HIV, and tuberculosis (TB)
- Partners with the Department of Public Works for **safe sharps disposal**

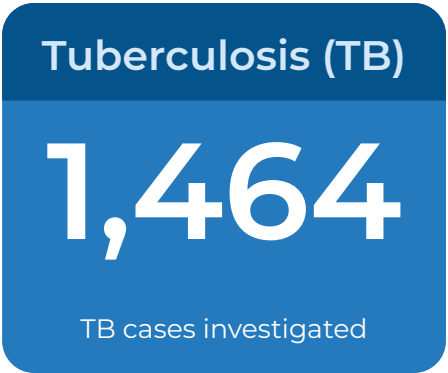
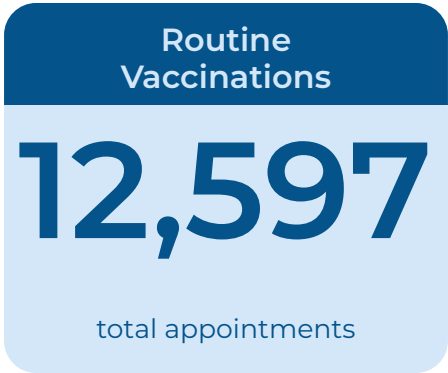
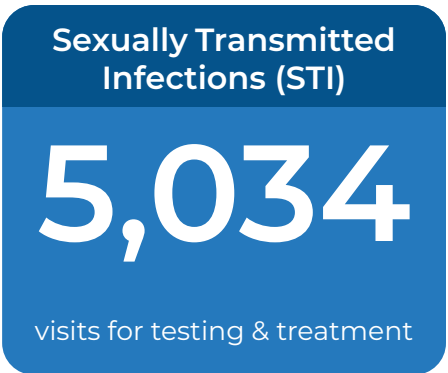
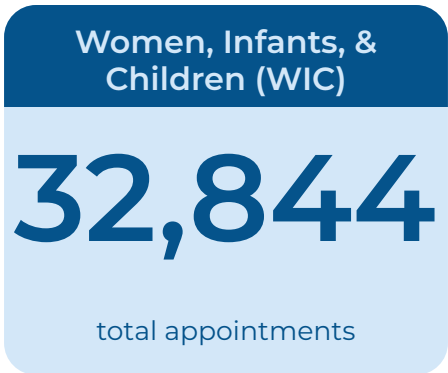
These services play a vital role in **safeguarding public health and ensuring equitable access to care.**



Our newly renovated health clinic provides improved workspaces for our staff and positions us to better meet the needs of a growing community for years to come. Shorter wait times, greater privacy, enhanced workflows, and a more welcoming environment will benefit the tens of thousands of residents who visit our Fuller campus each year.

BY THE NUMBERS

Community Clinical Services



NEWLY RENOVATED HEALTH CLINIC



Modernizing Our Main Clinic to Better Serve Our Community

In 2025, we completed a major renovation of our main clinic at 700 Fuller Ave. NE in Grand Rapids, marking the **first significant update to the facility in nearly two decades**. Construction began in late 2024 and remained on schedule throughout the year, allowing our Clinical Services area to reopen to the public by appointment on November 17, followed by the reopening of Environmental Health services on November 24. We celebrated the completion of the project with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in December.

This **nearly \$5 million investment** reflects our commitment to providing equitable, accessible, and high-quality public health services to Kent County residents. Designed with patients and families in mind, the refreshed spaces **enhance confidentiality and improve the overall experience through separate waiting areas, additional exam rooms, and upgraded soundproofing**. The project added six exam rooms for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and immunization services, as well as six additional rooms for personal health services, including STI testing and treatment and HIV testing and case management.

*"These renovations mark an **exciting step forward** in our ongoing commitment to providing exceptional public health services," said Director Adam London. "This renovation brings our physical space in line with the realities of modern public health and the rightful expectations of today's patients—for **privacy, respect, safety, and dignity.**"*



IMMUNIZATION CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE

We developed and launched a **two-phase immunization awareness campaign** focused on flu, COVID-19, and RSV prevention, with the goal of reminding families that kids just want to be kids and that **immunizations play a key role** in helping them grow up healthy.

The initial spring 2025 phase built on existing creative assets, refreshing visuals of children engaged in everyday activities to reinforce a **hopeful, future-focused message**. Messaging was tailored across placements, including a hockey-themed execution with the Grand Rapids Griffins that positioned protection against flu, COVID-19, and RSV as "facing off" against illness in a familiar, engaging way. All artwork followed Kent County brand guidelines and was produced in English and Spanish to ensure accessibility. The spring phase launched in March but was paused on May 30, approximately one month earlier than planned, due to evolving federal vaccine guidance.

The campaign was reinstated in winter 2025 with refreshed artwork and continued emphasis on reaching families where they naturally gather. Across Meta platforms, the winter phase generated **1,770,995 impressions, reaching 223,301 people and driving 11,608 link clicks** at an efficient \$0.52 cost per result. Audience performance was strong across key segments, with seniors, expecting parents, and parents of young children all demonstrating meaningful engagement. The senior-focused group generated 3,960 clicks, while expecting parents and parents of young children contributed 3,980 and 3,668 clicks respectively, each showing **strong efficiency and reach across priority audiences**.



Across both phases, the campaign combined community partnerships, digital media, and targeted audience strategies to deliver sustained awareness & engagement around timely vaccine education in Kent County.

OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

Mobile Units

60 

mobile unit events

7,000

connections made

1,500

at-home covid tests provided

Meeting Residents Where They Are: Mobile Outreach

In 2025, our Mobile Unit continued to expand access to public health services by **bringing resources directly into communities across Kent County**. We rolled into at least 60 community events, meeting residents where they live, work, and gather. In total, **we spoke with over 7,000 people** about our services. Through partnerships with community organizations, schools, local agencies, and our own programs, the Mobile Unit served as a welcoming and accessible connection to health information, services, and support.

Our goal is to **reduce barriers to care while increasing awareness of available public health resources**, particularly for under served and vulnerable populations. At outreach events, our staff provided health education, connected residents with community resources, offered referrals to services, and shared information about programs including Immunizations,



MOBILE UNIT EVENTS

WIC, Personal Health Services, and lead education. When appropriate, we also provided select direct services through the Mobile Unit, such as STI testing at community events like Pride Fest.

In addition, we **distributed more than 1,500 at-home COVID-19 test kits** along with health and wellness items, educational materials, and other resources that support healthy lifestyles and community well-being. The Mobile Unit also helped strengthen relationships with community partners while increasing awareness of the our commitment to health equity across Kent County.

By meeting residents where they are, we continue to **build trust, improve access to essential services, and support** healthier individuals, families, and communities.



**MEETING RESIDENTS
WHERE THEY ARE.**



COMMUNITY WELLNESS

The **Community Wellness (CW) Division** promotes lifelong health by providing **education, support, and early intervention** for families across Kent County. Staffed by nurses, social workers, educators, and outreach workers, the division offers:

- **Home visiting programs** for pregnant individuals, new parents, and infants
- **Vision and hearing screenings** in schools and childcare settings
- **Support for families of children** with special health care needs
- **Case management** for children with elevated blood lead levels
- **Youth prevention programs** focused on substance use and healthy decision making

Services are delivered in homes, clinics, schools, and community settings, helping to reduce health disparities, **support early development, and connect families to vital resources** that promote long-term well-being.



Health Education & Promotion

22,398

student contacts

4,713

students reached

7

In-person programs, including:

- Alternative to Suspension
- CATCH My Breath
- LifeSkills
- Prime For Life
- Signs of Suicide
- Yo Puedo
- Peer to Peer Youth Leadership

1

Clerk

5

Health Educators

BY THE NUMBERS

Community Wellness

1,346

glasses for students

30

refugee health screenings

Children's Special Health Care Services

4,512

clients served

14

families received safe sleep education

61

FIMR recommendations

517

navigation services provided for Medicaid

+

Breast & Cervical Cancer Navigation Program

1,690

clients served

3,633

services provided



2,470

Strong Beginnings home visits



Nurse-Family Partnership

Helping First-Time Parents Succeed

2,391

home visits from Nurse Family Partnership

Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP)

8,524

visits provided

1,468

clients served

665

Lead Team services

86

enrolled in WISEWOMAN

BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

Back to School Bash Brings Resources to Children with Special Health Needs

For the past three years, our team has proudly hosted a Back-to-School Bash on the grounds of the Kent County Health Department. The purpose of this event is to **create a welcoming space for families of children with special health care needs while providing school supplies, resources, and fun activities tailored specifically to them.**

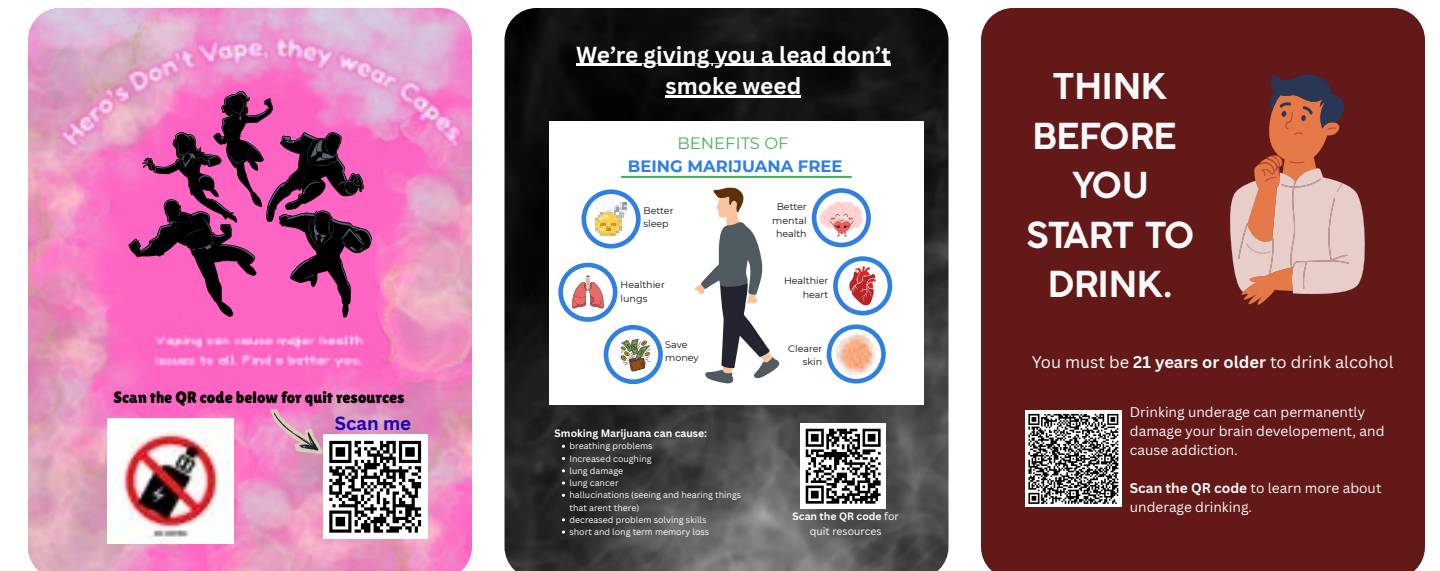
During our 2025 event, we were honored to serve **more than 300 local families.** Thanks to the generous support of numerous community partners and service providers, families received **dinner, backpacks, school supplies,** and many other helpful items. Children and families also enjoyed special experiences with the Kent County Sheriff's Office Mounted Unit and horses, our local library system's Bookmobile, and our largest event partner, Village 99.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all of the organizations, volunteers, donors, and community members who have supported the Back-to-School Bash over the years. Your generosity has helped create meaningful experiences and lasting memories for the families we serve.



PEER TO PEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Our **Peer to Peer (P2P) Youth Leadership** program empowers students to become positive role models and advocates for substance-free living through an adapted Botvin LifeSkills curriculum. Working with existing leadership groups or as a standalone program, we equip students to educate their peers through classroom presentations, school-wide campaigns, and public service announcements (PSAs) focused on **substance use prevention and social-emotional learning (SEL).** This initiative builds leadership, communication, and prevention skills while fostering a healthier, more informed school community through student-led outreach and education.



BUT NOT POT CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE



But Not Pot/Pause Pot

In a time of increasing marijuana normalization, the **But Not Pot** and **Pause Pot** campaigns, developed by King Media in partnership with our health education team, **engaged two diverse audiences at very different stages of life:** pregnant and nursing people and parents of teens and young adults.

The message for both, however, was similar – how **marijuana use can be a risk to the developing brain of the unborn, infants, teens, and young adults.** Using Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram, a combined messaging effort delivered over **985,000 impressions**, reached more than **221,000 users**, and generated **4,000 clicks** in July and August 2025.



ABOUT LAST NIGHT CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE

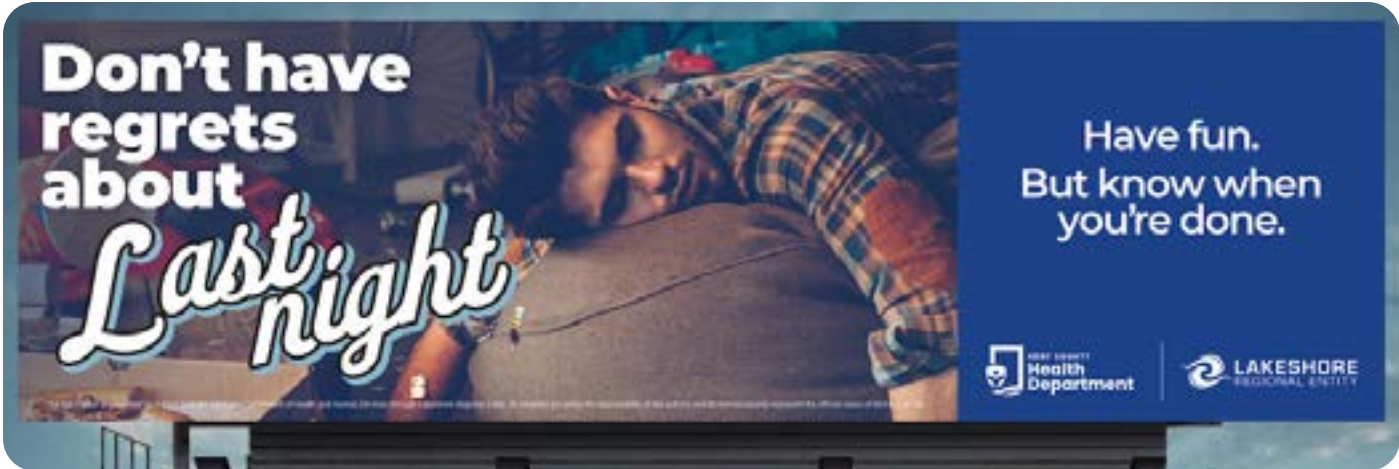
We're proud to share that our **About Last Night** campaign, developed in partnership with King Media and our health education team, earned a **2025 Gold Viddy Award in the Short Form Web Video – Health & Wellness** category. This recognition highlights excellence in health and wellness storytelling and reflects the impact of our work to address rising binge drinking rates among Kent County adults ages 21–34.

Awarded the 2025 Gold Viddy in the Short Form Web Video – Health & Wellness category



The campaign was designed to reach young adults with **messaging that felt authentic, relevant, and grounded in lived experiences.** By using storytelling that resonated with our audience, we demonstrated that public health communication can be modern, culturally relevant, and genuinely engaging—without sacrificing clarity, credibility, or impact.

Across Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram, About Last Night generated nearly **250,000 impressions**, reached more than **71,700 users**, and produced over **12,600 engagements** in August 2025, underscoring both its reach and resonance within the community.



COMMUNITY HEALTH STRATEGY

The **Community Health Strategy (CHS) Division** works in partnership with individuals and organizations to continually **assess and address community health needs** to improve the quality of life for all who call Kent County home. In addition, staff from CHS also lead coalitions that aim to reduce the impact of **substance use, infant mortality and suicide**, and provide learning opportunities to students pursuing degrees in public health.

Community Health Needs Assessment

A Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) is a **community-driven data collection effort to identify the strengths, challenges, health priorities, and opportunities to address and improve public health**. Every three years, we collaborate with healthcare and community partners to conduct a CHNA, gathering direct input from residents to better understand the health and well-being of people in Kent County and the issues that matter most to them. The 2023 CHNA Report contains information on a variety of health topics (e.g. substance use, chronic health conditions) and investigates local factors that impact health (e.g. economic security, education). CHS staff spent the year planning the next Kent County CHNA, which will be conducted in 2026.

Community Health Improvement Plan

A community health improvement plan (CHIP) is a **community-wide strategic plan that is developed to respond to top health issues** identified through the completion of a community health needs assessment (CHNA). CHIPs include goals, objectives, and strategies agreed upon by community partners that are intended to address top health concerns. **Strategies are implemented over a 3- to 5-year timeframe and evaluated for community impact**. The major health systems in Kent County utilize the CHNA to develop Implementation Strategies (IS) that include plans on how the systems will work to address the county's top health priorities (Housing, Access to Healthy Foods, Health Insurance, Access to Health Care). We use grant funding received from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan Health Endowment Fund and the WK Kellogg Foundation to support local projects coordinated by community-based organizations that aim to impact the health priorities.

Healthy Kent

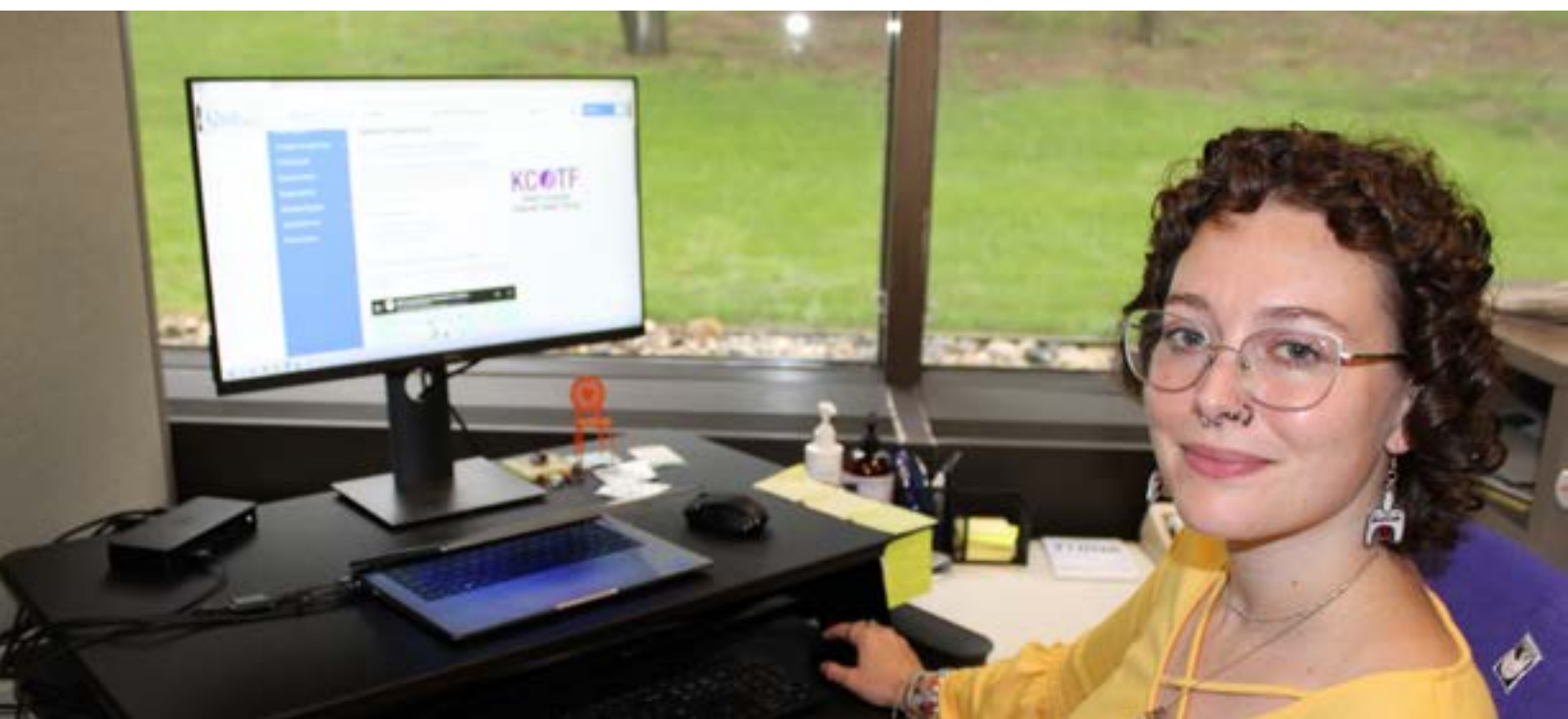
Healthy Kent is a **community collaborative providing a neutral, non-competitive space where organizations and individuals can work together** in areas of mutual interest related to the health of Kent County residents. Healthy Kent, which is coordinated by a CHS staff member, focuses on improving birth outcomes and reducing infant mortality and suicides in Kent County. To this end, Healthy Kent is made up of several work groups, including the Infant Safe Sleep Coalition, the Kent County Breastfeeding Coalition, the Dads Count! Fatherhood Coalition, the Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders Coalition and the Suicide Prevention Coalition.

Academic Health Department

The Kent County Academic Health Department (KCAHD) was **created in 2015 to establish formal relationships with academic institutions to enhance public health education, training, research, and service**. The benefit of this partnership is twofold; (1) students are better prepared to enter the workforce with a solid foundation in hands-on public health practice and (2) public health organizations gain increased capacity to perform core public health functions and to meet emerging community needs. The KCAHD **offers internships three times a year** in the Spring/Summer (May-August), Fall (September-December), and Winter (January-April).

Kent County Opioid Task Force

The Kent County Opioid Task Force is a **collaborative partnership of public health professionals, healthcare providers, recovery organizations, law enforcement, harm reduction advocates, and community partners working together to reduce opioid misuse and overdose** in Kent County. Through coordinated efforts in prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery, the Task Force works to reduce stigma, expand access to lifesaving resources and treatment, and improve health outcomes for individuals and families affected by substance use.



BY THE NUMBERS

Community Health Strategy

Community Health Improvement Plan

11 projects funded
\$105,000 awarded
\$245,000 awarded to KCHD by Michigan State Police Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program

Infant Safe Sleep Coalition



35

attendance at no-cost community health worker continuing education training



Academic Health Department

12 student interns
8 schools



7 project areas

- mosquito & tick collection
- beach monitoring
- analysis of food service inspection data
- deer population management
- health education program planning
- CHIP support & lead inspections

BY THE NUMBERS

Community Health Strategy

Harm Reduction

Grand Rapids Red Project

1,369 naloxone kits distributed



Opioid Settlement Spending Plan

3,043 test strips for substance use



791 fentanyl
778 xylazine
1,474 medetomidine

Opioid Task Force

\$20 million

in Opioid Settlement funds through the year 2038



Recovery

2 community-based peer recovery coaches hired

78 Arbor Circle clients served in last quarter



Healthy Kent Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders Coalition

Unraveling the Link Between Perinatal Mental Health & Substance Use Conference



107 participants



7 hours of continuing education units

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The **Environmental Health (EH) Division** is a multidisciplinary team of 56 professionals working in areas of health education, epidemiology, environmental health sciences, and administrative support. Daily, EH strives to **prevent injury and illness by identifying and evaluating environmental hazards and their sources** that may impact human health. We do this by educating our community, evaluating environmental conditions, and ensuring environmental hazards have been reduced and/or eliminated in areas where we live, work, and play. EH delivers a wide range of prevention focused services, including:

- **Lead inspections, risk assessments, and home health screenings** to reduce childhood lead poisoning and household hazards
- **Mosquito and tick surveillance** to monitor disease risks like West Nile Virus and Lyme Disease
- **Food safety inspections and education** for more than 2,600 licensed food service establishments
- **Oversight of private drinking water wells and septic systems** to prevent contamination and protect groundwater
- **Inspections of public swimming pools, monitoring of recreational beaches, and education on indoor air risks**, including radon

BY THE NUMBERS

Environmental Health



EH was awarded a grant to monitor bacteriological levels of some inland lakes in Kent County, and chose Millennium Park to ensure visitors have a positive experience swimming and splashing around its beach and splashpad. EH collected water samples near the bathing beach for E. coli and inspected the operations of the splashpad to keep visitors healthy while cooling off last summer.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development awarded EH a grant to educate residents about safe food handling in the home.

For the third year in row, the EH team has worked with the Grand Rapids Tattoo Festival to ensure that facilities performed in compliance with state regulations and clients received body art services like tattooing or piercing safely while at the festival.



BY THE NUMBERS

Environmental Health

Food Safety Services

114,798

Kent County residents

1 in 6

residents affected by foodborne illness

662

temporary food licenses provided for facilities at festivals & community events

3% increase



120

cases of foodborne illness investigated

2,668

food licenses

3rd

highest licensed county



Onsite Wastewater & Water Supply

391

public water wells monitored used by

84,358

people

93

preschools, daycares, & before-or-after school care facilities inspected

32.7 million

gallons untreated sewage pollution was prevented

456

new well and/or septic systems constructed

908

septic permits

691

water well permits

3,879

well & septic services performed

Mosquito Monitoring



7,502

mosquitoes trapped

20

locations monitored

46

WNV positive mosquito pools

BY THE NUMBERS

Environmental Health

Recreational & Public Facilities

Public Swimming Pools

363

facilities



80

bacteria positive samples

2,430

water samples

50

closures due to violations

Campgrounds



19

licenses issued

7

temporary licenses issued

children's camps inspected

7

Body Art Facilities



121

facilities

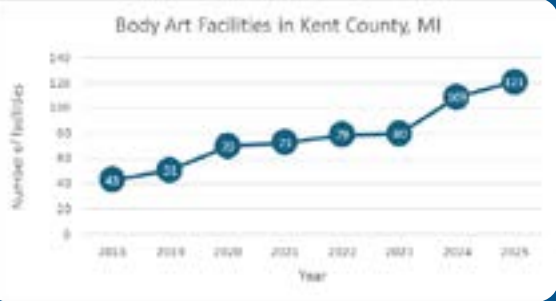


38

inspections

110

temporary licenses issued



Healthy Homes

Radon Outreach & Awareness



1,232

radon kits distributed

Ready by 5



medical staff trained on testing children for lead

55

63

events

79

home health screenings

GRAND RAPIDS TATTOO FESTIVAL

Safe Ink Starts with Us

For the third year in a row, the **Grand Rapids Tattoo Festival** returned to downtown Grand Rapids, bringing the energy and creativity of nearly 400 tattoo artists from around the world to DeVos Place Convention Center. During the three-day event, attendees had the opportunity to receive tattoos on site, explore art exhibitions, shop for merchandise, and connect with artists.

While festivalgoers enjoyed the experience, **our Body Art Team was working behind the scenes to help ensure every procedure was performed safely** and in accordance with Michigan's body art regulations. We talked to artists about health and safety requirements, making sure they understand the standards that protect both artists and the public.

To verify compliance, our team inspected all 103 procedure booths, reviewing:

- Required documentation and artist certifications
- Hygiene and infection prevention practices
- Applications submitted to both the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and our department
- Overall compliance with Michigan Body Art Rules

Thanks to careful planning, strong collaboration, and thorough preparation, **every booth passed inspection and received a temporary body art facility license within just 10 hours.** This efficient process helped the festival open on schedule while reinforcing the importance of safe body art practices.

It's another example of how public health quietly keeps Kent County residents safe.



RADON OUTREACH & AWARENESS

Taking Action Against Radon

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, behind smoking. Because it's colorless, odorless, and tasteless, many people don't realize it could be in their homes.

It forms naturally as uranium breaks down in the ground but can **sneak into buildings through foundation cracks, floor drains, sump pits,** and other openings. During the colder months, when doors and windows are typically closed, radon can build up indoors—making winter an ideal time to test.

That's why, during **National Radon Action Month** in January, our team made it easier for Kent County residents to protect themselves and their families from this invisible threat by offering free radon test kits throughout the month.

To make testing as accessible as possible, we **partnered with Kent District Library to distribute free test kits, helping us reach a wide range of residents in communities** throughout the county. Kits were also available at our Fuller Avenue campus, our North and South clinic locations, and Kent County Community Action. By working together with our community partners, creating healthier, safer homes across Kent County.



FOOD SAFETY AT HOME



Our food team secured a grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to **expand community education on safe food handling practices** and reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Through this funding, the team **distributed 500 food safety kits** containing practical tools to help residents safely store, prepare, and handle food at home.

To maximize community reach, the team **partnered with several organizations to host educational presentations** and kit distribution events, including the Kent District Library (pictured), Flat River Outreach Ministries of Lowell, Kent County Community Action, multiple local health departments, and other community partners.

With an estimated 60% of foodborne illnesses originating in the home, this initiative extended the team's prevention efforts beyond licensed food establishments and **directly into the community.** By working together with our community partners, we create healthier and safer homes across Kent County.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

The **Communicable Disease (CD) Unit** serves as the Kent County’s **frontline disease detectives**, investigating reports of infectious diseases, assessing public health risks, and taking swift action to prevent illnesses from spreading. Whether responding to a highly contagious disease, evaluating a potential rabies exposure, or tracking emerging trends like Lyme disease, the CD Unit works behind the scenes every day to protect the health of Kent County residents.

In 2025, the CD Unit **responded to four confirmed measles cases**. Preventing the spread of measles requires an intensive public health response, including case investigations, contact tracing, testing coordination, and prevention efforts. To contain these cases and limit further transmission, CD staff, supported by additional personnel during the response, **dedicated more than 705 hours to investigation and mitigation** activities.

The CD Unit also plays a critical role in preventing rabies, a disease that is nearly always fatal once symptoms develop but is highly preventable when exposure is identified early. Staff assess potential rabies exposures, provide guidance to healthcare providers and residents, and determine when post-exposure treatment is needed. In 2025, **81 bats were tested** in Kent County, with two testing positive for rabies. The team also **investigated 352 reported animal bites** to evaluate exposure risk and recommend appropriate follow-up. Residents who discover a bat inside their home are encouraged to safely contain it and contact the CD Unit before releasing or disposing of it. Staff can determine whether testing is recommended and guide residents through any next steps.

The CD Unit also monitors trends in tick-borne diseases. **In 2025, reported Lyme disease cases increased sharply, rising from 136 cases in 2024 to 238 cases**. This increase contributed to Michigan meeting the criteria for a high-incidence Lyme disease jurisdiction, allowing healthcare providers to prescribe preventive antibiotics after certain high-risk tick exposures. This important public health designation gives providers another tool to reduce the risk of Lyme disease before illness develops.



RAPID RESPONSE TO PROTECT THE COMMUNITY FROM MEASLES

BREAKING NEWS LIVE

When two cases of measles were confirmed in Kent County in 2025, we moved quickly to protect the community and prevent further spread. Following the first case in April—the county’s first in more than a decade—and a second case in July, we kept residents informed through press releases and social media updates while our teams launched a coordinated response behind the scenes.

Each measles investigation required an immediate, all-hands-on-deck effort involving rapid information gathering, exposure assessment, and identification of individuals who may have been at risk. Within 24 hours of each confirmed case, we had planned, staffed, and supplied Mobile Unit Clinics to administer Immune Globulin (IG), a treatment that can help reduce the risk of developing measles after exposure.

In total, we mobilized two Mobile Unit Clinics, providing timely intervention for those who needed it most. By providing care in a private and comfortable setting, we helped minimize additional community exposures while ensuring residents received prompt treatment. Behind every clinic were nurses, communicable disease investigators, logistics staff, and support teams working together with a shared goal: protecting the health of our community.

What began with two confirmed cases became an opportunity to put our preparation and teamwork into action. Throughout the year, our Communicable Disease team investigated four measles cases, dedicating more than 705 hours to investigations, testing, and prevention efforts aimed at limiting further spread. From rapidly tracing exposures to delivering preventive treatment in a matter of hours, our response demonstrated how quickly we can mobilize to protect the health and safety of our community.



TWO CASES OF MEASLES IN MICHIGAN KCHD

RESPONSE TO RABIES-POSITIVE BAT

Rabies-positive bat found in Kent County

"Even indoor cats and dogs can be at risk if a bat enters the home," said Angela Hollinshead, Director, KCAS. The easiest way to protect them is the rabies vaccine.

When we were notified of a rabies-positive bat in Kent County on April 3, 2025, we **alerted the community through a media release and our social media channels**, sharing information on potential exposure risks and prevention. That notification quickly set our response in motion.

As additional bats were submitted for testing throughout the year, **a total of 81 bats were tested, with two confirmed rabies-positive cases identified.** Each positive result prompted follow-up to assess potential exposures and determine whether rabies post-exposure treatment was needed.

At the same time, our Communicable Disease team **followed up on 352 animal bite reports across the county.** Each one represented a potential exposure that needed to be reviewed, investigated, and addressed in coordination with healthcare providers, animal control partners, and residents.

From the initial notification and public messaging to the steady stream of bite investigations throughout the year, **we worked to respond quickly, assess risk, and help prevent rabies exposure in the community.**

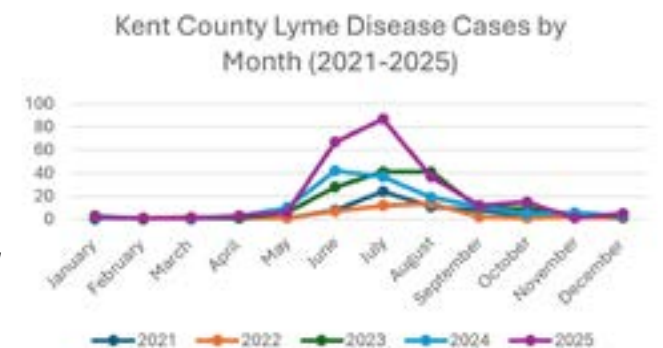


UPTICK IN LYME DISEASE CASES IN MICHIGAN

In Michigan, ticks can be active whenever temperatures are above 40°F, contributing to the ongoing risk of diseases such as Lyme disease — a **growing public health concern** across the state and here in Kent County.

About Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a **bacterial infection spread through the bite of infected black legged ticks**, also known as deer ticks. Common symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue, muscle and joint aches, and a characteristic bull's-eye rash. If left untreated, Lyme disease can affect the joints, heart, and nervous system. However, most cases can be treated successfully with antibiotics when detected early.



Local and Statewide Trends

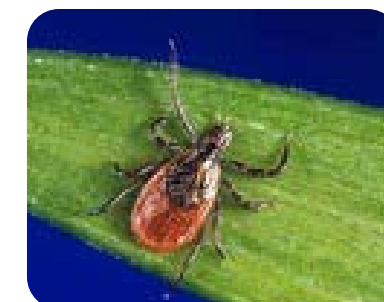
In 2026, Michigan became a high-incidence state for Lyme disease, meaning infected black legged ticks are now widespread and the risk of human exposure is increasing. Kent County has experienced this trend firsthand, with **Lyme disease cases increasing 255% over the past five years** — rising from 64 reported cases in 2021 to 237 cases in 2025.

Reducing Your Risk

Black legged ticks can remain active anytime temperatures are above 40°F, meaning this is the time of year to practice prevention methods, including:

- **Use insect repellent** when spending time outdoors.
- **Wear long sleeves and pants** in wooded or grassy areas.
- **Check yourself, children, and pets** for ticks after outdoor activities.
- **Remove attached ticks promptly** with tweezers.

As tick populations continue to grow in Michigan, prevention and early detection remain key to reducing the impact of Lyme disease.



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The **Emergency Preparedness (EP)** program strengthens the community’s ability to withstand and recover from emergencies that threaten community health, including severe weather, environmental health emergencies, and communicable diseases. The program **plans, trains, and coordinates with partners to ensure a rapid, organized response**. In 2025, the preparedness program **achieved national re-recognition through Project Public Health Ready**, demonstrating commitment to quality improvement in preparedness and response.

Outreach initiatives included an expanded Inclusive Preparedness curriculum, which empowers individuals of all abilities with essential preparedness skills. Additional interactive modules were offered in 2025, including an **introduction to preparedness, hands-only CPR, weather awareness, fire safety, law enforcement, and mass care procedures**. New partnerships – including Girl Scout Preparedness and North Kent Community Fest – expanded the diversity of preparedness education, strengthening community resilience by ensuring preparedness resources are accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of Kent County residents.



ANNUAL SKYWARN TRAINING

The annual **SkyWarn event** brings together partners from emergency response organizations across Kent and Ottawa counties to **strengthen community preparedness for severe weather**. Led by meteorologists from the National Weather Service, the two-hour training equips approximately **200 community members each year** with the skills to recognize severe weather features, understand what information should be reported, and effectively communicate observations to the National Weather Service. Our EP team plays an active role in the event as a member of the planning committee, led by Kent County Emergency Management. In addition, EP **hosts an educational resource table focused on health-related hazards** associated with severe weather and shares practical strategies residents can use to prepare for and reduce those risks.



OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

- COMMUNITY FEST -

We had a fantastic time participating in the **first-ever Kent County North Community Fest** in August 2025, where more than **1,000 community members** gathered at our North Campus in Cedar Springs for an afternoon of food, fun, and connection.

In addition to hosting **five information tables** featuring resources from our Environmental Health, Community Wellness, Community Health Strategy, and Emergency Preparedness programs, our team brought its mobile unit to provide a private, air-conditioned breastfeeding space for nursing parents and pregnant attendees. We also offered routine immunizations and immunization records to families who requested them.

From delicious food and free ice cream to children's activities, big trucks, and appearances by our K-9 and mounted units, the event **showcased the power of partnership and community**. We were proud to be part of this successful inaugural celebration and to connect with residents in a fun, welcoming environment.



OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

- KIDSDAY AT THE ZOO -

Outreach Highlights – KidsDay at the Zoo

On August 7, we joined approximately **5,000 community members** at **WGVU's KidsDay at John Ball Zoo**, connecting with families in a fun, welcoming environment while promoting healthy habits and sharing valuable public health resources.

Throughout the day, our team **engaged hundreds of children and parents** through conversations, educational materials, and giveaways designed to support everyday wellness. More than **300 respiratory wellness kits were distributed**, each containing practical items such as a reusable tumbler, tissues, cough drops, hand sanitizer, and lip balm — simple tools that encourage healthy habits long after the event ends.

KidsDay also provided an opportunity to highlight the important role public health plays in our community. During a [live interview on The Shelley Irwin Show](#), our Communications Manager, Christina Anthony, discussed the value of meeting residents where they are, building relationships through community events, and helping people connect with trusted health information and services.

Events like KidsDay are more than just a day of fun — they help **strengthen community connections, increase awareness of available resources, and make public health more accessible to families across Kent County**. We are grateful to WGVU Public Media and John Ball Zoo for creating an event that brings thousands of families together and provides organizations like ours with meaningful opportunities to engage, educate, and inspire healthier communities.



300



Respiratory wellness kits shared filled with:

- KCHD Tumbler
- Tissues
- Cough drops
- Hand sanitizer
- Chapstick



ANNUAL STAFF AWARDS



Amy Shears

What does this award mean to you?

Receiving this award is an incredible honor and truly humbling. It represents not only recognition of my work, but also a celebration of the entire public health team and the vital role we play in keeping our communities healthy. I'm grateful to be part of a mission that protects lives every day, and this award reaffirms the impact of that work.

Why do you do what you do?

I became a public health nurse because I believe in prevention, education, and equity in healthcare. Working in public health and our Immunization program allows me to help protect people of all ages from preventable diseases and ensure everyone has access to lifesaving vaccines. Every day, I'm motivated by the knowledge that what we do makes a lasting difference in the health of our community.

Dr. Prothro Award

Dr. Winston Prothro was the Director of the Kent County Health Department in the 1950's. He was instrumental in joining city and county health departments, testing of the Salk Polio Vaccine, and establishing the first outpatient alcoholism treatment center in the United States. An ardent promoter of healthy lifestyles, he used television to promote health with a regular program called "The Health of Our City." This award goes to an employee who has demonstrated commitment to his or her field of work both on and off the clock. Nominees must be passionate about their respective fields of work and be committed to advocating on behalf of clients or educating the community about public health issues.

What coworkers are saying about Amy:

Amy is a tremendous force for public health in Kent County. She diligently works to promote health messaging, support initiatives to boost public health measures, and make KCHD an approachable and reliable source for health guidance. Throughout the measles cases of 2025, Amy has gone above and beyond to serve Kent County, including supporting contact tracing efforts and setting up igG clinics. Amy, and her immunization team, work so hard to ensure our communities' safety and health, despite the negativity that comes from community around vaccinations. Amy is also such an incredibly positive force. Her passion and kindness make all in her orbit feel comfortable and respected. It is truly an honor to work with Amy!

I am honored to nominate Amy Shears for the Dr. Prothro Award in recognition of her outstanding commitment to the KCHD Immunization Program and the communities we serve. Her passion for public health, leadership, and client-centered care consistently go beyond the expectations of her supervisory role, both on and off the clock. Amy demonstrates unwavering dedication to ensuring every client receives access to timely and equitable immunization services. She has been instrumental with arranging Mobile vaccination and IG prophylaxis for vulnerable populations, including a Hepatitis A Outbreak at a Migrant Farm and Measles cases in our county.

What truly sets Amy apart is her ongoing commitment outside regular working hours. Whether volunteering at weekend clinics or coordinating emergency immunization responses during outbreaks, she consistently prioritizes the health and well-being of the community. Amy's leadership has also had a lasting impact on the KCHD Immunization Program team. She is very supportive of her team on and off work and truly helps staff feel valued and empowered to do their best work. Under her guidance, we've seen increased vaccination coverage levels in Kent County and a stronger community trust in our Immunization Program. It is with great respect that I submit this nomination for Amy!

ANNUAL STAFF AWARDS



Barbara Hernandez

What does this award mean to you?

This is an incredible honor. I want to emphasize that this has been a true team effort while I've had the privilege of facilitating these projects, the real work and ideas came from everyone who took part. QI is not something done by one person; it's built on collaboration, shared experiences, and collective problem-solving. When I first stepped into my role, I was told QI would be a major focus, though I didn't fully grasp what that would entail. Over time, and with the continuous support of our division director, Sara Simmonds, I was encouraged to explore initiatives that not only supported our internal team but also would aim to improve the services we provide to the public. It's been inspiring to be part of a division that truly values innovation and continuous growth. To me, this award represents a shift in how we think about our work from just meeting standards to asking, how can we do this better? It shows that we are committed to excellence, that we're not afraid to look deeply at our processes, embrace feedback, and seek meaningful change. This recognition belongs to all of us and reflects our shared commitment to making things better for each other and for the communities we serve.

Dr. Slemons Award

Dr. C.C. Slemons directed the Kent County Health Department from 1910 to 1930. Dr. Slemons initiated school and public meeting closures to halt the spread of illness during the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918, recommended the use of screens to keep flies from spreading disease, enforced quarantines, and initiated the Goiter Belt study that resulted in the addition of iodine to salt. Known to all as "The Health Man," he also had the first telephone installed for use by public health nurses. This award goes to someone who has created improvements in his or her respective program through the power of ideas, technology, or previously unused methods.

What coworkers are saying about Barbara:

Barbie has been instrumental in rolling out QI initiatives in EH. Not only is she extremely knowledgeable about QI, she also has the temperament necessary to facilitate a productive QI session. Without her strong organization skills, we wouldn't have been able to see our project through to completion. She is great at keeping everyone in the group informed and on task. She has a passion for this type of work that is refreshing and so motivating. You can't help but be excited for future endeavors when having a conversation about QI processes and what results could mean for our department and ultimately our community. She is patient, understanding and above all, a listener. Myself and others appreciate so much all the hard work she has put into the Food Program (and others!) and want her to be recognized. Thanks Barb!

Barb has been instrumental in making quality improvements since she joined Environmental Health just a couple years ago. On top of streamlining processes and thinking of ways to make things run more efficiently, she does it with the best attitude and meets every challenge with a positive outlook.

An example of this is acting as a facilitator and working with supervisors, clerks, IT, Central Services, and state partners during Food License renewal season to ensure licenses applications are being sent, processed, and licenses mailed out as quickly as possible. She is the calm in the storm and someone that I personally feel that I can lean on when it gets chaotic. She took on the role of doing a QI project to ensure license applications were being sent to the correct contact person and cross-checking information, which was a learning curve for many of us. She listened to frustrations, offered solutions, followed due process, and came prepared with options to move forward. I don't know that this would have been a successful project without her. Barb is so deserving of this award because she thinks outside of the box to help us all serve our community as best as we can.

ANNUAL STAFF AWARDS



Dr. Delabbio Award

Dr. Daryl Delabbio was the Kent County Administrator from 1996 to 2017 and a champion for customer service. Every member of the KCHD team serves internal and external customers each day. As public health professionals, it is important that we work with the heart of a servant. We must actively listen and show genuine compassion. We must help with a sincere interest for the customer. This award recognizes an employee who has a servant's heart and whose positive energy makes KCHD a more welcoming and valuable place in our community.

What coworkers are saying about Jill:

It is with great respect that I nominate Jill Huizenga for recognition through this award. As a dedicated nurse in the Immunization Program here, Jill exemplifies what it means to have a servant's heart and she plays an essential role in making our workplace and community a more compassionate, welcoming, and effective environment. Jill brings joy and positivity to our team every single day. Whether she's helping an anxious client who needs reassurance to receive Immune Globulin injections after a Measles exposure or stepping in to help a colleague without being asked, her kindness and grace are both constant and contagious. She understands that health care is about more than just providing service, it's about building trust, showing empathy, and meeting people where they are. Her presence lifts the spirits of those around her and sets a tone of genuine care and professionalism.

Beyond her warm demeanor, Jill is deeply committed to public health. She has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure that every individual who walks through our doors receives not only the care they need but also the dignity they deserve. Her work in the Immunization Program has been especially impactful, helping increase vaccine education to VFC Provider offices in Kent County. She is a tireless advocate for our patients and a strong pillar within our department.

Jill dedication, compassion, and leadership are truly exemplary. She doesn't seek recognition, she simply shows up each day ready to make a difference. It is this consistent commitment that makes her so deserving of this honor.

The **Dr. Bora Award** for cultural competency and humility was awarded to Elizabeth Rodriguez. (not pictured)

What coworkers are saying about Elizabeth Rodriguez:

Elizabeth is very knowledgeable on the resources available within the community. She strives to help others no matter what the circumstances are she goes above and beyond always for clients and also others within the community. Thank you, Eli for all you do. You are certainly a shining STAR!

Jill Huizenga

What does this award mean to you?

I am so grateful to have been recognized for customer service. I truly believe that we called to treat people with kindness and respect. I feel truly blessed to work with people in our community. I enjoy helping people, answering questions, or just helping to improve someone's day. It is my goal to treat everyone who walks through our doors with the respect and kindness that I would like to receive.

Why do you do what you do?

When I started my career as a nurse, I fell in love with public health. Working in clinics and in the Immunization Program has allowed me the opportunity to help improve the health and well being of people in our community. I truly believe that Public Health has and will continue to have the greatest impact on promoting health and preventing illness. I love my job!

ANNUAL STAFF AWARDS



Dr. Mack Award

Dr. Douglas Mack was Kent County's Public Health Director from 1987 to 2001. During his tenure, Dr. Mack was able to foster a level of community collaboration previously unprecedented in Kent County. This award goes to an employee who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to forge strong community partnerships to improve outcomes and foster teamwork between KCHD and outside agencies and individuals.

What coworkers are saying about Olivia:

Olivia Piña exemplifies the spirit of this award through her exceptional leadership of the Health Equity Council. As the primary point of contact for numerous community organizations and stakeholders, Olivia approaches her work with deep intentionality, professionalism, and care. She is thoughtful in every interaction, always focused on strengthening relationships and fostering trust. Olivia's attention to detail is unmatched—she recalls specific moments and insights from previous conversations that make partners feel genuinely seen and valued. Despite managing an extraordinarily heavy workload, Olivia consistently shows up with warmth, humility, and a can-do attitude. Her tireless efforts, collaborative spirit, and unwavering commitment to community make her a model of public service and a truly deserving recipient of the Dr. Mack Award.

It's common knowledge in public health that for our work to be effective, we must collaborate across sectors and engage people with diverse perspectives and lived experiences. What is less recognized is how challenging and time-consuming it is to build strong, trusted relationships between public health, community partners, and residents – and then sustain those relationships to successfully collaborate. Olivia has continuously shown her dedication to developing and nurturing community partnerships. Through her hard work, she has fostered a culture of teamwork between the health department, residents, and organizations that has enabled KCHD to collaborate and work alongside community in a meaningful way. For the past three years, Olivia has been the driving force behind the Kent County Health Equity Council (HEC), serving as the "glue" that holds this essential group together. The HEC is a diverse group of residents and CBO leaders who represent populations most impacted by health inequities. They bring invaluable expertise and lived experience that is critical for effective public health efforts. Olivia thoughtfully coordinates and plans monthly HEC meetings and has cultivated a group dynamic where people feel included, valued, and safe to share their perspectives. She is always finding ways to amplify their voices and ensure HEC members are participating in decision-making, not just the subject of it. Olivia goes above and beyond to reciprocate and grow these partnerships by showing up to their events, often held on evenings and weekends (not just asking partners to attend our meetings and events). She takes the time to connect individually with people and continuously seeks their input to co-create solutions. Olivia also focuses on developing new partnerships by considering whose perspectives are missing, and meeting with people to expand the HEC. The impact of Olivia's work is evident internally at KCHD and externally among the broader community. Her dedication to authentic community engagement has helped strengthened relationships and trust between dozens of partners and KCHD. Her commitment to sustaining the HEC has also enabled individuals and organizations to develop trusted partnerships with each other, which has fostered cohesion among the broader partner network.

Olivia Pina

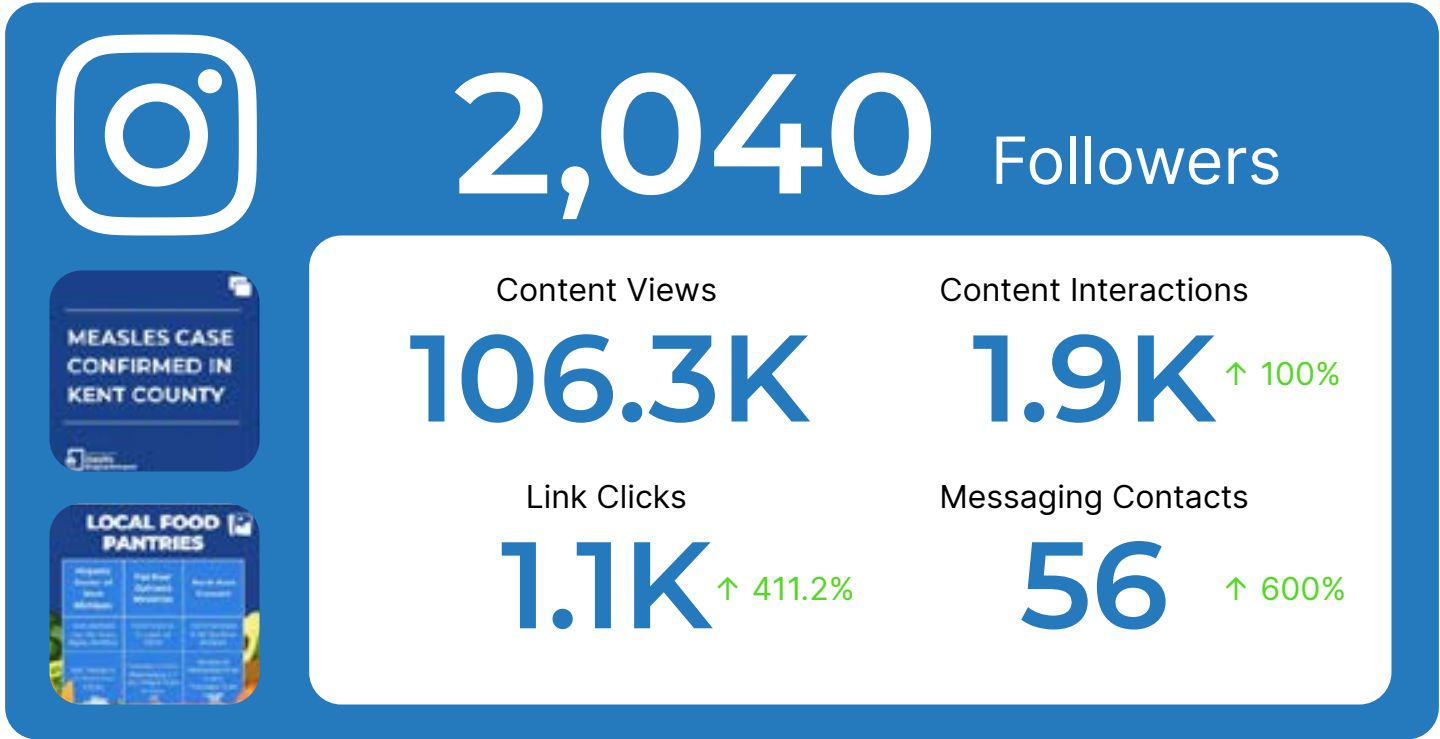
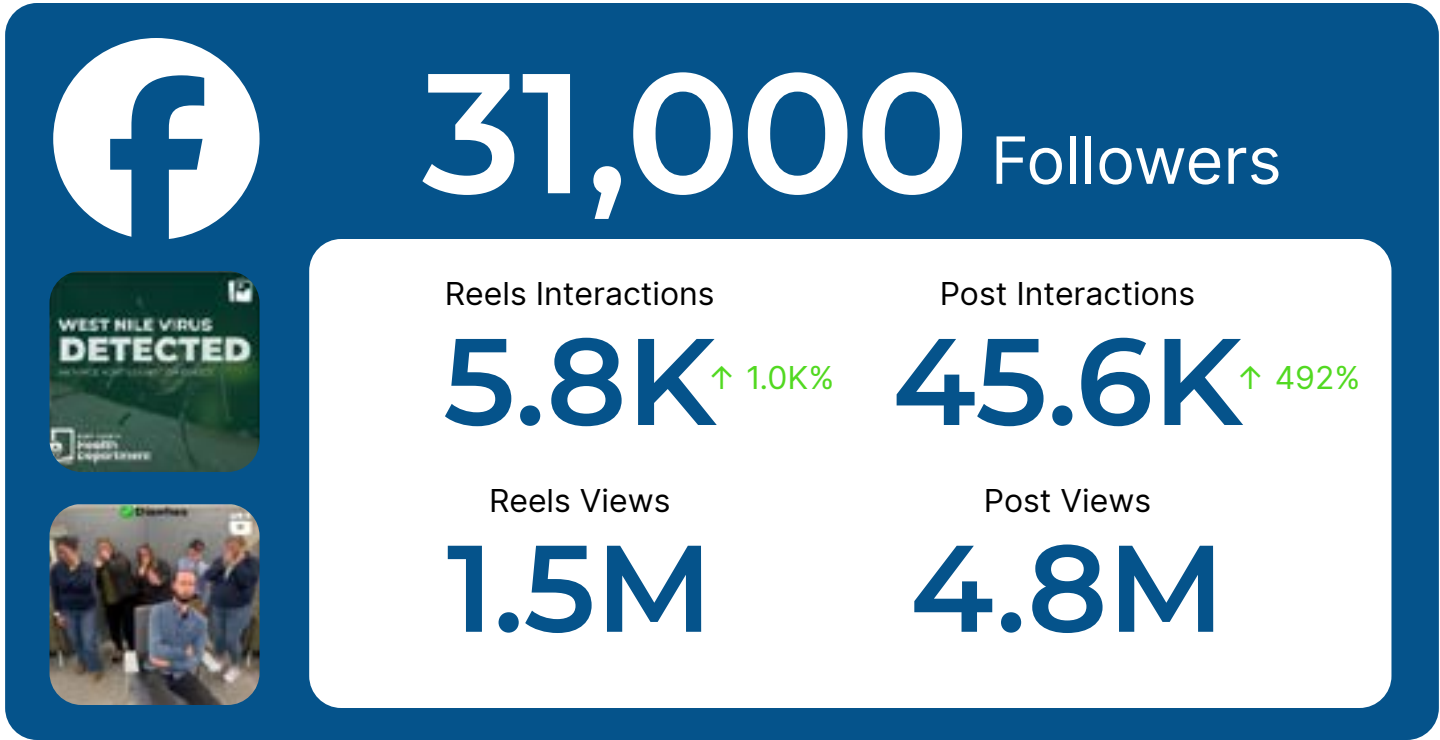
What does this award mean to you?

For me personally, it's encouraging to see this kind of work recognized, not just for myself, but for everyone involved in collaboration and trust-building as part of public health. It was also inspiring to learn about the work of other Health Department staff who are contributing in so many impactful ways. Recognizing this kind of work helps reinforce its importance and encourages continued collaboration across teams and communities.

Why do you do what you do?

I believe everyone deserves a fair chance to thrive. We all experience the world differently, and I want to be part of work that creates space for people to share their unique experiences navigating life. These experiences deeply shape health outcomes, and I'm grateful that so much of my work focuses on creating spaces for community to influence how we design programs, allocate resources, and set priorities. I truly believe this approach improves our chances of building a more just and equitable system where everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and succeed.

SOCIAL MEDIA INSIGHTS



NEWSLETTER

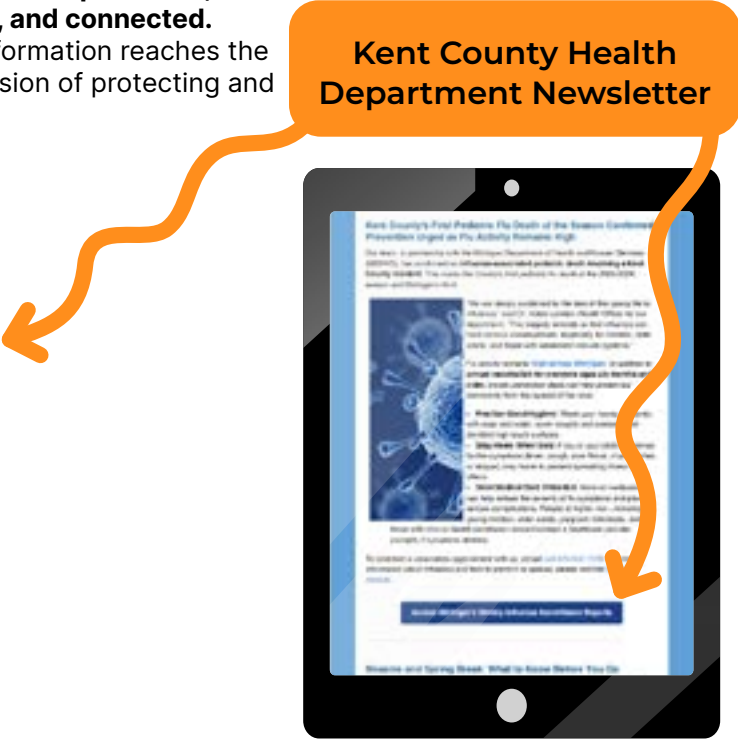
Every second Wednesday of the month, we publish an e-newsletter that has become one of our most effective ways to connect with the community. Delivered directly to **more than 50,000 subscribers**, its reach extends far beyond inboxes as stories are shared across websites, social media platforms, and by local news outlets, helping important public health information reach thousands more residents.

What readers see each month is the result of weeks of planning and collaboration. Nearly a month before publication, senior leaders come together to **identify emerging public health issues, review trends and local data, and determine which topics will have the greatest impact** for our community. Every article is chosen with a shared goal: providing timely, trustworthy information that empowers residents to make informed decisions and contributes to a healthier Kent County.

The newsletter's impact is reflected in its consistently strong engagement. With an **open rate that regularly falls between 45% and 50%**, well above typical email newsletter benchmarks, it demonstrates that our audience values receiving reliable health information directly from their local health department.

The newsletter also serves as the foundation for many of our other communications. Topics introduced in the monthly edition often expand into press releases, social media campaigns, and other outreach efforts, creating a **coordinated approach to public health messaging**. Just as importantly, our local media partners look to each edition for timely story ideas and updates, helping amplify critical information when it matters most.

By maintaining this consistent monthly cadence, the newsletter has become more than a communication tool - it is a **trusted resource that keeps residents, healthcare providers, community partners, and the media informed, engaged, and connected**. Together, these efforts ensure important public health information reaches the people who need it most and strengthens our shared mission of protecting and improving the health of everyone in Kent County.





STAY CONNECTED

