



Health Misinformation In Rhode Island

Health misinformation affects both the United States as a whole and the state of Rhode Island. The following cases highlight how misinformation can shape people’s perception of public health, even in a highly vaccinated state, such as Rhode Island.

Case 1: Reproductive Health Care Act

According to the ACLU, when the Rhode Island state legislature was considering the Reproductive Health Act (S2163, H 7340), critics actively spread disinformation about the act. This disinformation included myths that the act would abolish informed consent, remove regulatory oversight, and allow RI to become a “haven for abortionists” who wish to sell fetal parts.¹

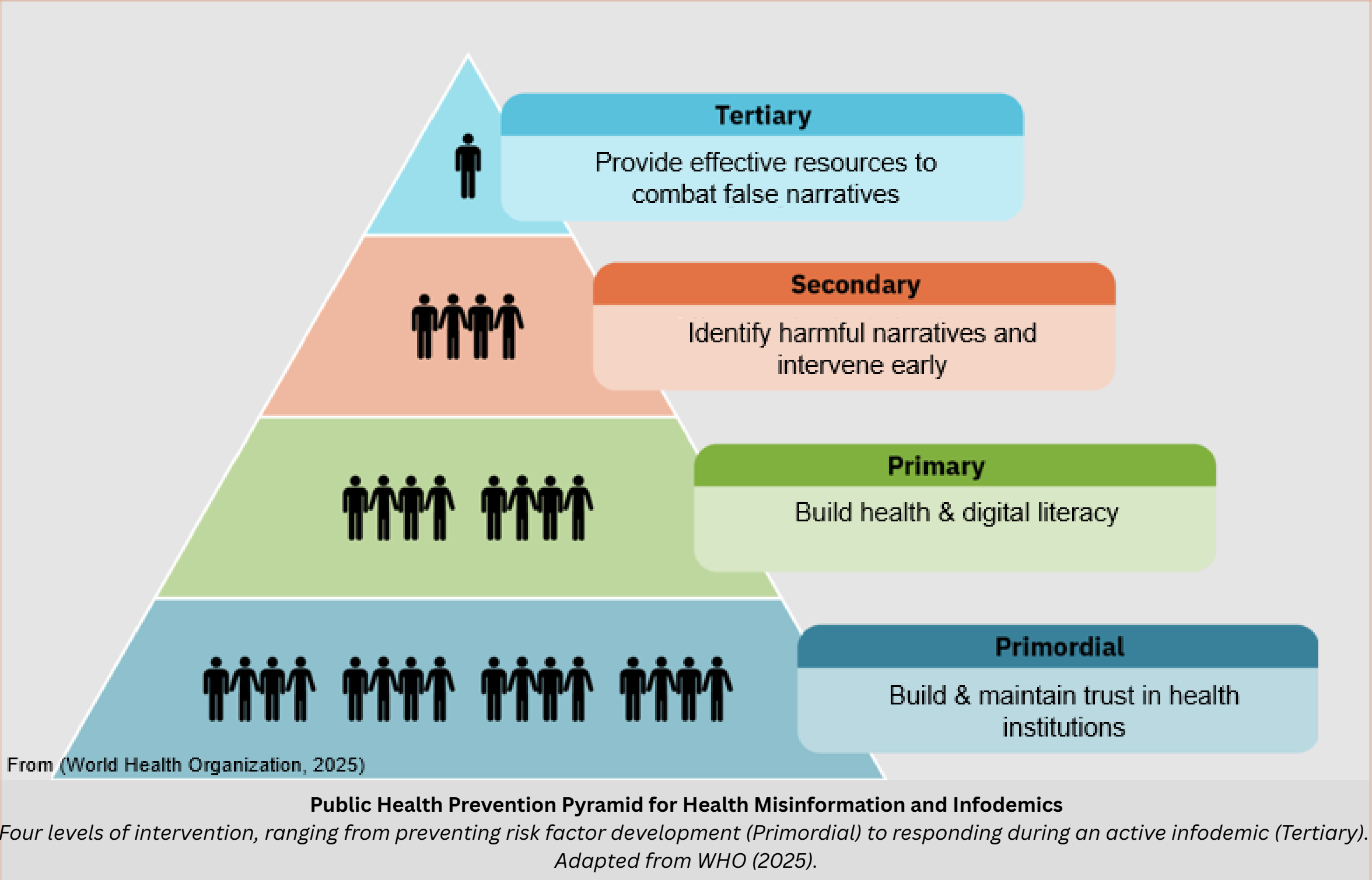
Each of these claims was demonstrably false. The act ultimately died in committee.

Case 2: Covid-19 Vaccination Hesitancy

Vaccine hesitancy revolved around mistrust of the vaccine and concerns about its safety, reducing public trust. As a result, about 8% of Rhode Islanders reported vaccine hesitancy, according to a study published in the National Library of Medicine.²

WHO-Based Framework Response to Cases 1 & 2
Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) can combat misinformation by adopting WHO-infodemic framework:

- Primary Prevention: Use media literacy and public education to screen social media posts for misinformation. This will build trust in RI public health guidance.
- Secondary Prevention: Use Brown University IFL to identify misinformation early.
- Tertiary prevention: Debunk misinformation through local organizations, including RIPHA, Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), and Rhode Island Quality Institute (RIQI), using clear, repeated, evidence-based, and detailed explanations.



Can you spot misinformation ?

1. "New Study Proves Universal Healthcare Would Save the U.S. Economy \$10 Trillion by 2030."
2. "Red States Quietly Reintroducing Lead Pipes in Low-Income Neighborhoods to Cut Costs."
3. "WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefits Face 75% Cut Under Proposed Federal Budget Realignment."
4. "Trump Administration Fast-Tracks Psychedelic Research to Address Veteran Mental Health Crisis"
5. "Government to Track Grocery Purchases to Enforce 'Meat-Free' Personal Health Quotas."

This interactive 5-question quiz is modeled on the Misinformation Susceptibility Test developed at Cambridge University. Look at these titles and see if you can spot early signs of misinformation based on the title alone.

PRIMORDIAL:

- Consider ways institutions can combat the detrimental effects of new technologies like AI before they become commonplace
- Consider state laws to increase AI transparency around AI use in health care
- Consider state laws that regulate the use of AI to deny insurance claims automatically.

PRIMARY:

- Further develop horizontal and vertical media literacy curricula to be implemented in K-12 public schools
- Increase professional development opportunities for educators in media literacy
- Support NGOs like Media Literacy Now, which work to promote critical thinking and media literacy in public education

SECONDARY:

- Building on the WHO’s Social Listening model, Brown University, Information Futures Lab (IFL) can combat misinformation and data deficits in Rhode Island.³
- IFL can perform it through analyzing trends using data, such as Wastewater, Google searches, and emergency department data.
- Subsequently, it shares the findings with the local organizations to debunk misinformation.

TERTIARY:

- When debunking, repeat the truth several times
- Use positive language rather than negative
- Provide details about the true explanation

References

1. ACLU of Rhode Island . *Reproductive Health Care Act (S 2163, H 7340): Myths and Facts*

2. Rogers BG, Tao J, Almonte A, Toma E, Nagel K, Fain R, Napoleon SC, Maynard MA, Murphy M, Sarkar IN, Chan PA. Statewide evaluation of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in Rhode Island. PLoS One. 2022 Jun 1;17(6):e0268587. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0268587. PMID: 35648751; PMCID: PMC9159551.

3. OpenStax. (n.d.). *Levels of prevention. In Population Health. OpenStax. Retrieved March 28, 2026, from https://openstax.org/books/population-health/pages/2-5-levels-of-prevention*

4. World Health Organization. (2025). *Strategies to combat infodemics in public health. Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, 31(5). Retrieved March 28, 2026, from https://who-j40.corephp.org/emhj-volume-31-2025/volume-31-issue-5/strategies-to-combat-infodemics-in-public-health.html*

5. Brown University School of Public Health. (2022). *Brown School of Public Health launches new Lab to combat misinformation, data deficits, outdated communication practices — and to catalyze innovation: https://sites.brown.edu/informationfutures/2022/06/14/ifl_launch-2/*