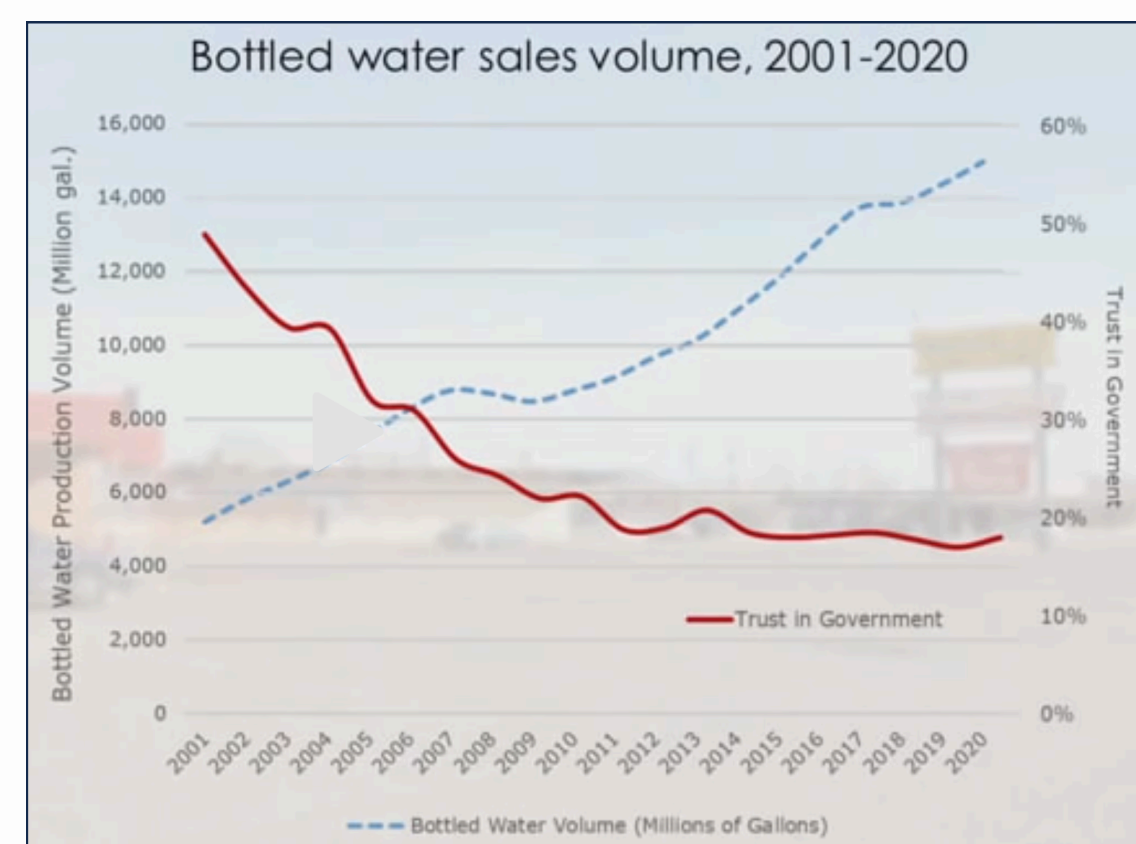




### Issue: Alarming Distrust

Early in my Internship, I identified a critical disconnect between public water suppliers and many pockets of the population: **an increasing, alarming percent of Americans do not trust their tap water.** I had the opportunity to leverage perspectives of both the Office of Drinking water and a non-profit partner, Virginia Health Catalyst, to combat these concerning trends.

- **Problems Anywhere Lead to Distrust Everywhere**
  - System failures on the news resonate across the country, particularly in communities of similar demographic (i.e. Flint, MI and Jackson, MS.)
- **Disinformation and General Distrust**
  - Generalized government distrust is at an all time low
- **Negative Outcomes from Consumer Exits**
  - Public health and economic harm
  - Negative feedback loop



**“Bottled Water’s Link to Governmental Distrust” - Manny Teodoro, 2022**

### Goals

- **Advance investigation and project development for building trust and literacy in tap water**
  - Develop physical resources meant to inform and address common public concerns
- Combine academic and learned ODW perspectives with community non-profit partners
- Engage with active learning of public health and health equity

### Outputs and Outcomes



#### Office of Drinking Water

- Researched and advanced focus on identified issue of **declining public trust**
  - Developed Website and infographic deliverables on topics of tap water regulation and treatment steps for future public distribution
- Contributed to ongoing **PFAS Regulation Response Effort**
  - Authored key communication and information updates across ODW PFAS webpage
  - Integrated past slide decks into new, generalized presentations for ODW leadership use towards public
- Learned from **conversations with ODW personnel** and other agencies within VDH



#### Virginia Health Catalyst

- Developed grant-funded, participatory action research project: **“Community Water Dialogue”**
  - Project acknowledges declining trust in tap water and its challenges to health equity through a highly-localized, community focused outreach program
  - Steered early-stage development of program structure, research and material outlines
- Reported on project focus and development updates at quarterly **Water Equity Taskforce** meeting, July 24th
- Participated in several other VHC projects across scope of oral health
  - Providing feedback in **oral health policy development sessions** utilizing learned VDH perspective

### Personal Development

- Affirmation of a public health focus being valuable towards a career in Medicine
- Building my professional skills and network
  - Conversations with medical professionals through several organizations and levels of VDH
  - Project-based action and accomplishments

### Touring Henrico Water Treatment Plant



### ODW and VHC Project Examples



### Challenges

- **How do we bring public health advocacy out from behind the desk?**
  - Bolstering proactive communication in response to waning distrust and for-profit competitors
- **Solutions within scope of possibility**
  - Bringing practical, but necessary changes to meet a foreboding public health worry
- **Extent of previous skills and knowledge**
  - Drinking water was brand new field for me, but a welcome experience
  - Learning from and working with individuals of completely different skills and perspectives

### Lessons Learned

- **Public health and the power of prevention**
  - reducing risk factors for chronic diseases, lowering health care spending, etc.
  - Particularly powerful perspective for myself wanting to go into medicine
- **“Breaking down silos”**
  - An expression I first heard from one of my mentors, and integral in continually and effectively meeting the mission of VDH
- **Pervasive issues of health inequity in our state**
  - Even less thought-of matters of drinking water can spiral into matters of food insecurity, predatory marketing, environmental harm, etc.
- **Knowledge to champion VDH and tap water alike**
  - I am now one of the unique few who knows what exactly VDH does, as well as what exactly is in my tap water. These are both ideas that for the better of our society - more people should know!
  - Ready and knowledgeable to continue with these perspectives through the rest of my career, and hopefully to make a few more people choose tap water along the way

### Acknowledgments

I owe great thanks to the following who served as wonderful mentors and coordinators: Bailey Davis, Kathleen Banfield, Jeff Stover, Bridget Cochran, and Felicia Baez