

WISCONSIN AIDS/HIV PROGRAM NOTES

September 2008

Responding to the Emerging HIV Epidemic among Wisconsin Men Who Have Sex with Men

This issue of *Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program Notes* focuses on the HIV epidemic among Wisconsin men who have sex with men (MSM). The continuing and emerging HIV epidemic among MSM is an extremely important issue and one that requires serious consideration and action from health and human service providers, community and political leaders, individuals, and society-at-large. This article briefly highlights the epidemiology of the HIV epidemic among MSM, Wisconsin's current prevention efforts directed to MSM, recommendations addressing the prevention of HIV among MSM, and related information resources.

Snapshot of the recent HIV epidemic among Wisconsin MSM

Men who have sex with men (MSM) are historically the population most affected by HIV infection in Wisconsin. In 2007, 69% of HIV cases occurred among MSM, including 64% among MSM without a history of injection drug use, and 5% among MSM who reported injection drug use (MSM&IDU). Between 2000 and 2007, cases reported among MSM increased 34%. Most of this increase was among MSM youth and young adults under 30 years of age. MSM of all races are among the persons most affected by HIV in the state. MSM in Wisconsin minority populations bear a heavier burden of HIV infection than their white counterparts, with black MSM being eight times more likely and Hispanic MSM four times more likely than white MSM to be infected with HIV. Similar increases in HIV infection among MSM and the disproportionate impact on MSM of color have been reported throughout the nation.

Current DHS HIV prevention efforts reaching MSM

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) supports several prevention initiatives targeting MSM through the use of state and federal funding. Because the majority of HIV cases, including those among MSM, are located in southeastern and southern Wisconsin, prevention programs are concentrated in these areas. Despite this concentrated focus, the DHS supports HIV prevention programs for MSM in all areas of the state, both urban and rural. The table at the end of this article highlights current MSM HIV prevention initiatives funded by the DHS and coordinated through the Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program.

Prevention efforts directed toward MSM is a major focus of the Statewide Action Planning Group (SAPG) of the Wisconsin HIV Community Planning Network. The SAPG is responsible for advising the DHS on statewide planning of HIV-related care

September 2008

and prevention activities. SAPG membership includes public health professionals, care providers, persons living with HIV and individuals affiliated with professional, academic and community-based groups. Some of the needs and priorities regarding MSM and that have been addressed recently by the SAPG include:

- ***Promoting annual HIV testing among all MSM.*** While most MSM report having been tested for HIV, like many of their peers nationally, only a small number have been tested within the last year. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual testing for all MSM at risk for infection. To address this, a *community norm* among gay and bisexual men for annual HIV testing would help reduce the stigma of HIV in the community and would likely re-engage community members who feel they are no longer at risk for HIV. From a social marketing standpoint, having MSM at low or no risk for HIV test annually will further normalize annual testing for peers at risk. A statewide initiative to engage local LGBT groups and LGBT-oriented media in a campaign supporting annual testing is currently under consideration for 2009.
- ***Strengthening communication channels for disseminating public health information to MSM community members.***
While the HIV epidemic among MSM has been increasing for some time, there is a need to establish effective communication links for delivering this information to the community of MSM. It is often difficult or impossible to include information specific to the health needs of gay and bisexual men in traditional press releases directed to mainstream media. HIV observance days such as World AIDS Day and National HIV Testing Day rarely carry messages mentioning gay and bisexual men. National reporting sometimes refers to the impact on young African American MSM as the epidemic among "black men" or "African American youth" rather than stating specifically that a major concern in the emerging epidemic is with men of color who have sex with men. For 2009, the DHS AIDS/HIV Program is working with the SAPG to create a complete and consolidated list of LGBT media contacts statewide, and to develop the capacity to utilize them to deliver public health news and messages on HIV and other topics of concern directly to the LGBT community.
- ***Integrating use of the internet and other technologies with HIV prevention efforts directed to gay, bisexual and MSM communities.***
The Wisconsin DHS AIDS/HIV Program has been working with HIV prevention providers to improve their use of the internet to reach MSM on multiple levels. National studies indicate that MSM with very high risk behaviors turn to websites, chat-rooms, email and other technologies to find sex partners. The ease and anonymity offered by these venues may increase the likelihood of risky sexual behaviors. Young MSM are especially drawn to the internet as a way of connecting with their peers.

September 2008

Many HIV prevention providers, both large and small, struggle with new communication technologies and maintaining a workforce that is adept with changing technologies. For 2009, the DHS AIDS/HIV Program is planning a series of steps to assist HIV prevention providers in using new and emerging technologies more effectively. These efforts include supporting recommends of the SAPG for developing a consolidated internet 'portal' site for Wisconsin gay men's health and researching resources to provide technical capacity building to HIV prevention provider agencies.

- ***Reviewing, revising, and improving HIV prevention interventions targeting MSM.*** There are a wide variety of interventions, including CDC- approved behavioral interventions, which target diverse groups of MSM, including young MSM and African American and Latino MSM. Several of the DHS funded prevention efforts directed to MSM use the federally endorsed interventions and some are included in the summary table at the end of this article. While effective, most programs are resource intense and require specially trained staff and a significant time commitment from participants; however, relatively few of the state's higher risk MSM have accessed these programs. For 2009, the DHS AIDS/HIV Program will be reviewing program models to look at effective prevention strategies such as those based on social marketing and community outreach to address this need.

Supplemental funding to support statewide strategic planning directed to MSM

Most recently, the CDC awarded the DHS supplemental prevention funding to support the development of a plan to enhance HIV prevention services for Wisconsin MSM. During the fifteen month award period, beginning October 1, 2008 and ending December 31, 2009, project activities will result in the development of a strategic HIV prevention plan which is expected to identify:

1. existing HIV prevention efforts and HIV prevention resources directed to Wisconsin MSM;
2. existing HIV prevention programming that effectively reaches Wisconsin MSM;
3. HIV prevention service gaps, potential opportunities for improvements, and areas that would benefit from program development and enhancement; and
4. key strategic plan goals, objectives, activities, strategies, timelines, and parties responsible for accomplishing the goals and objectives of a strategic HIV prevention plan for Wisconsin MSM.

Additional information resources regarding prevention and the HIV epidemic among MSM

The Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program is committed to targeting prevention resources to the diverse communities of MSM in Wisconsin. Prevention service providers are strongly encouraged to monitor the emerging HIV epidemic among MSM and to

September 2008

critically examine ways to implement HIV prevention services that are effective in responding to the prevention needs of Wisconsin MSM.

For additional information regarding the HIV epidemic among MSM and related resources, see the following web-based resources:

CDC's website on HIV and MSM

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/msm/index.htm>

Gay Men of African Descent

<http://www.gmad.org/>

Gay & Lesbian Medical Association

<http://www.glma.org>

Medline Plus: Gay, Lesbian Transgender Health

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/gaylesbianandtransgenderhealth.html>

Resources from the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at UCSF

<http://www.caps.ucsf.edu/doiit.php>

Resources from the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors

<http://www.nastad.org/Programs/HIVPrevention/HivPrevResourceMinutes.aspx>

Resources from the Wisconsin HIV Community Planning Network

<http://www.wihiv.wisc.edu/communityplanning/library.asp>

Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program

<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/aids-hiv>

Wisconsin HIV/STD/Hepatitis C Information and Referral Center

<http://www.irc-wisconsin.org/>

September 2008

**MSM HIV Prevention Activities Supported by
Wisconsin Department of Health Services**

AIDS Network

600 Williamson Street

Madison WI 53703

608-252-6540

800-486-6276

- Testing for at risk populations
- Latino MSM group
- Programming for African American MSM
- Bar and event outreach to MSM combined with testing
- LGBT health conference
- Convening local leaders to focus on holistic health for gay men

ARCW Southeast

820 N Plankinton Ave

Milwaukee WI 53203

414-273-1991

800-359-9272

- Testing for at risk populations
- Internet outreach for MSM
- Bar and event outreach

ARCW Northeast

445 South Adams Street

Green Bay WI 54301

920-437-7400

800-675-9400

- Testing for at risk populations
- Internet outreach for MSM
- Bar and event outreach

ARCW West

505 Dewey Street

Eau Claire WI 54701

715-836-7710

800-750-2437

- Testing for at risk populations
- Internet outreach for MSM
- Bar and event outreach

September 2008

ARCW North

1105 Grand Ave, Suite 3

Schofield WI 54476

1-800-551-3311

- Testing for at risk populations
- Internet outreach for MSM
- Bar and event outreach

Diverse & Resilient

315 Court Street, Suite 101

Milwaukee WI 53233

414-390-0444

- Building leadership among adult African American MSM
- Coordinating an intervention through LGBT youth groups across the state (DEBI)
- ongoing group for transgender African Americans
- Training providers working with transgender people
- Building leadership & capacity among LGBT groups to meet HIV prevention needs of youth

La Casa de Esperanza

210 NW Barstow, Suite 110

Waukesha WI 53188

262-928-4405

- Testing for Latinos
- Latino MSM group

La Crosse Area Hmong Mutual Assistance

1815 Ward Ave

La Crosse WI 54601

608-781-5744

- Capacity building for persons working with LGBT Hmong youth

Milwaukee LGBT Community Center

315 W Court Street, Suite 101

Milwaukee WI 53212

414-271-2656

- Testing for African American MSM
- African American MSM group
- HIV prevention for youth

September 2008

New Concepts (for *Health Institute of Milwaukee - H.I.M.*)

1531 W Vliet Street
Milwaukee WI 53205
414-444-1952

- Testing for African American MSM

OutReach, Inc.

PO Box 168
Madison WI 53701

- Health website for transgender individuals
- One time HIV modules for transgender groups

16th St. Community Health Center

1032 S. 16th Street
Milwaukee WI 53204

- Testing for at-risk Latinos
- One-on-one intervention for Latino MSM
- Latino MSM group

STD Specialties Clinic

3251 N Holton Street
Milwaukee WI 53204

- Testing largely focused on MSM

Youth Services of South Central Wisconsin

1955 Atwood Ave
Madison WI 53704
608-245-2550
800-798-1126

- Outreach to homeless LGBT youth
- LGBT youth group