

# VAC/GMHC Community HIV/STI Prevention Initiative

## Information sheet

### The brief

The AIDS Trust of Australia has made available to the Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre two grants of \$5,000 each, from the Elton John Foundation, to fund the development of two HIV/STI prevention projects.

If you have a great idea for something you think could help reduce the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections among gay men and other men who have sex with men in Victoria, tell us about it!

Members of the VAC/GMHC's Health Promotion Team will work with the creators of the two entries chosen by the grant initiative's Selection Committee to develop their ideas for implementation during Midsumma 2008. Individuals and groups are invited to apply.

### Selection criteria

A Selection Committee comprised of representatives of the VAC/GMHC's Health Promotion Team, the Department of Human Services, People Living With HIV/AIDS Victoria and the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, will select the two applications for implementation based on the following criteria:

- Creativity, imagination, originality, ingenuity;
- The entry reflects an understanding of the relevant HIV/STI prevention information;
- The proposal's ability to appeal to and engage the targeted MSM audience;
- The proposal's ability to be realistically achieved within the available budget and timeframe;
- The proposal complements existing HIV/STI prevention work of the VAC/GMHC and other agencies; and
- The candidate is able to commit to the timeframe of the project's working process.

### Eligibility

The competition is open to anyone who is resident in Victoria, with the exception of employees of the VAC/GMHC, the DHS, PLWHA and ARCSHS.

### How to apply

Applications in writing outlining your proposal can be posted to:

VAC/GMHC Grant Initiative  
C/o Max McLean  
6 Claremont St  
South Yarra, 3141

Or emailed to: [max\\_mclean@vic aids.asn.au](mailto:max_mclean@vic aids.asn.au) with 'VAC/GMHC Grant Initiative' in the subject bar.

Applications should not exceed 1,000 words in length. Applications must include applicant's name and contact details. The closing date for applications is C.O.B Friday 16 November 2007. The successful applications will be announced in MCV on 29 November.

## HIV and STI information

Here is some of the important information that the VAC/GMHC's Health Promotion Program promotes in its campaigns and websites. Any of these points could be a good starting point for your entry:

### Risk reduction

In recent research conducted by the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, UNSW, and the National Centre in HIV Social Research, UNSW, 158 men from Melbourne who had recently become HIV positive were asked whether they could identify the particular sexual encounter in which they believed the HIV transmission occurred.

Of the 91% who were able to do so, this encounter involved unprotected anal intercourse in 71% of responses. In 38% of the high-risk events identified involving unprotected anal intercourse (UAI), infection occurred when the reported risk event involved **serosorting**, **strategic positioning**, or intercourse with a man whose **viral load** was believed to be **undetectable**.

- Fucking without condoms is the most common cause of gay men becoming HIV positive in Victoria. Some men try and reduce the risk of unprotected sex with anonymous, casual or regular partners by methods including: **serosorting**, **strategic positioning** and by relying on an HIV positive partner's **low or undetectable viral load**. These methods are discussed below.
- **Serosorting**: Some men don't use condoms, even with anonymous or casual partners, because they think they can tell if a sexual partner is the same HIV status as them just by asking them, or by guessing from the way they look, where they met them, or whether or not *they* ask to use a condom. None of these methods is reliable and this is one of the causes of new HIV infections. This is known by health professionals as serosorting.
- If a sexual partner tells you they're HIV negative, they might *think* they're telling you the truth but that doesn't mean it's true! How long ago did they have the HIV-negative test result and what have they done since? After all, if they're prepared to have sex without condoms with *you* then how do you they know they haven't got HIV from someone else they've had unprotected sex with?
- **Strategic positioning**: Some men who are HIV negative think that they can fuck safely without condoms so long as they are the active (i.e. 'top' or insertive) partner rather than the passive (i.e. 'bottom' or receptive) partner. Although it is true that the risk of getting HIV is lower for the active partner, there are plenty of men have become HIV positive while being the active partner.
- **Low or undetectable viral load**: Some men don't use condoms because their HIV positive sexual partner tells them they have a low or undetectable viral load. This refers to the amount of the virus a person has in their body at any given time. It's true that the lower the amount of HIV a person has the less likely they are to pass on HIV, but just because it's undetectable in a test it doesn't mean the virus has gone altogether. Once you have HIV you cannot get rid of it, only reduce its presence in the body. Also, the viral load test measures the amount of HIV in the *blood* but the amount of virus in *cum* (i.e. ejaculate) can be quite different. The risk of passing on HIV with a low or undetectable viral load also depends on a number of other factors. For example, if either sexual

partner has another STI this greatly increases the risk of any virus passing from one partner to the other.

- The only reliably safe way to have unprotected anal sex is with a partner with whom you've been tested *twice* – once and then once again three months later. You also need to have developed the trust and communication with that partner to know that neither of you will have unprotected anal sex with anyone else – and to know what to do if this happens. To find out more about this process see 'negotiated safety' in the menu at [www.stayingnegative.net.au](http://www.stayingnegative.net.au).

### **HIV and other Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**

- Since HIV arrived on the scene it has been easy to forget all the other STIs around, such as syphilis, gonorrhoea and Chlamydia. Researchers believe that this is why many gay and other men who have sex with men don't get tested as regularly for other STIs as they used to before HIV came along. As a result, the number of cases of STIs other than HIV has been steadily increasing – dramatically, in the case of syphilis, diagnoses of which have increased 3,400% in Victoria since 2000! (diagnoses of gonorrhoea have increased 46% and diagnoses of Chlamydia have increased 212% since 2000).
- Having an STI like syphilis or gonorrhoea greatly increases your risk of getting or passing on HIV. This is because the sores or irritations they cause make it easier for HIV to pass from one body to the other during sex. Having another STI can also dramatically increase an HIV positive person's viral load.
- Not all STIs have symptoms so, unless you get tested, you can have one and be passing it on to your sexual partners without knowing.
- Fortunately, unlike HIV, most STIs are easy to detect and easy to treat. If you have an STI it will show up in a simple sexual health check with your doctor or at a sexual health clinic and most can be treated simply and effectively with a short course of medication.
- Men who have sex with men should get a sexual health check at least once year. The more sexual partners you have, the more frequently you should get tested.
- For more information about STIs go to: [www.thedramadownunder.info](http://www.thedramadownunder.info)

### **PEP**

- PEP is a month-long drug treatment that can stop HIV from taking hold in the body if it is begun within 72 hours of the virus entering the body.
- For more information about PEP go to: [www.pepnow.info](http://www.pepnow.info)

For further enquiries about the grant initiative contact Max McLean at the VAC/GMHC Health Promotion Program on 9865 6700, or at <a href="mailto:max_mclean@vicaids.asn.au">max_mclean@vicaids.asn.au</a> .
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