

WISCONSIN AIDS/HIV PROGRAM NOTES

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Follow-up to the Investigation of Increased Cases of HIV Infection in Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men in Milwaukee

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Background and context

Milwaukee County accounts for 17% of the Wisconsin residents but half of persons living with HIV. The Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) observed an increase of more than 140% in HIV incidence in young Black men who have sex with men (YBMSM) under age 30 in Milwaukee from 2000 to 2008 and estimates that as many as one third of adult African American MSM in Milwaukee are HIV-positive.

The Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program, in collaboration with the City of Milwaukee Health Department (CMHD), invited the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist in conducting an epidemiologic investigation in Milwaukee regarding increases in HIV infection in YBMSM. CDC investigators presented the findings¹ at meetings in Milwaukee in March 2010; these findings were also summarized previously in an article in *Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program Notes*² and recently in the *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*³.

This article provides an update pertaining to the investigation, its aftermath, and services for YBMSM. It addresses:

- ENDHIV Milwaukee: The planning process to engage the community in mounting a response to the epidemic in YBMSM.
- CDC's presentation of qualitative interview data from a presentation titled "Does Homophobia Play a Role in HIV Transmission among Young MSM in Milwaukee?"⁴
- Recent funding for services and proposed structural interventions to address HIV in YBMSM in Milwaukee.

ENDHIV Milwaukee

The CMHD and the Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program contracted with Diverse and Resilient (D&R) to conduct a community engagement and planning process to mount a response to the epidemic in YBMSM. Since summer 2010, D&R has conducted a series of community meetings and other activities with African American MSM, HIV service providers, and state and local education and public health leaders. Planning for the effort has occurred in close collaboration with CMHD and AIDS/HIV Program staff. As a result of meetings and other activities, there are increases in:

- knowledge among both MSM and providers about the rapid rise in HIV cases in YBMSM;

¹ HIV Infection in Young Black MSM: http://dhs.wi.gov/aids-hiv/Stats/CDCSlides_MkeBlackMSMInvest.pdf.

² Investigation of Increased Cases of HIV Infection in Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men in Milwaukee, <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aids-hiv/ProgramNotes/Program%20Notes/April2010ProgramNotes.pdf>

³ "Increase in Newly Diagnosed HIV Infections among Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men — Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, 1999–2008," *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Feb 4, 2011, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm6004.pdf>

⁴ http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aids-hiv/Stats/CDC_MKE_Homophobia.pdf

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- HIV testing opportunities for MSM;
- engagement in planning by both young and older Black MSM;
- understanding the role of social determinants in HIV transmission in YBMSM; and
- clarity on the part of young and older Black MSM, service providers, and community members regarding sensible approaches to addressing the epidemic in YBMSM.

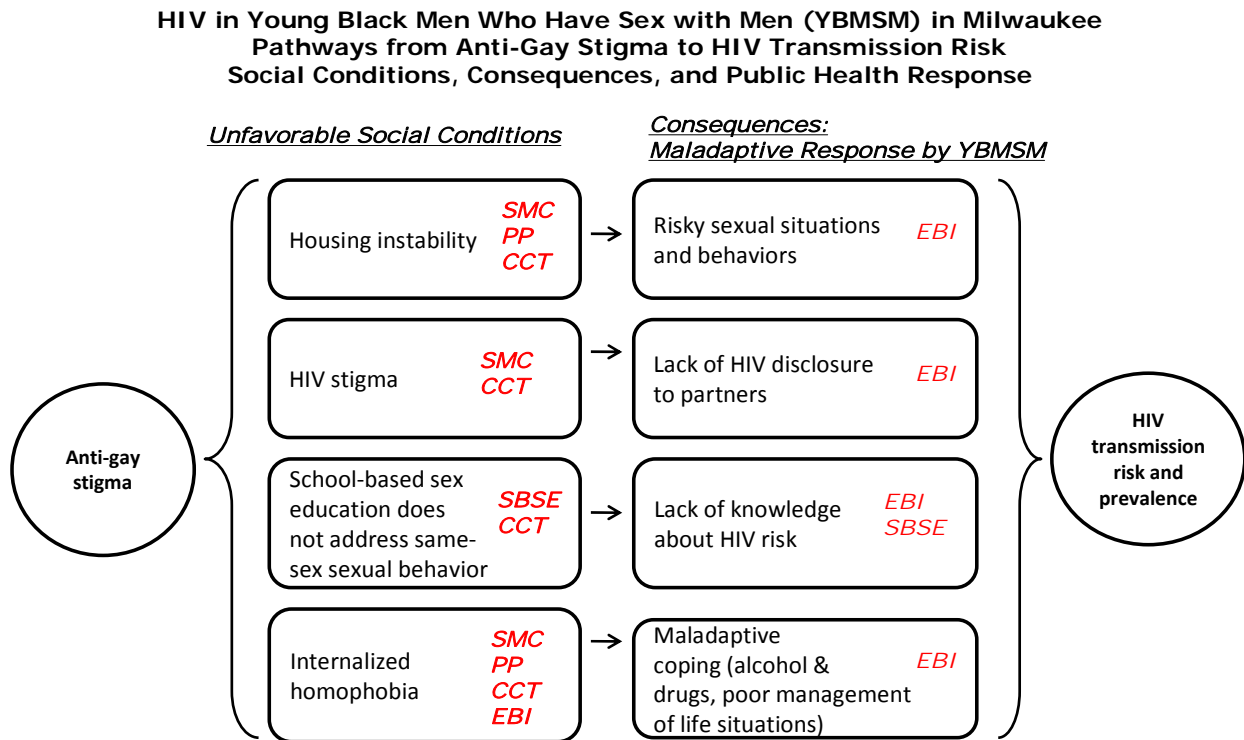
Role of anti-gay stigma in HIV risk for young black MSM

In November 2010, William Jeffries, PhD, lead staff for CDC's investigation in Milwaukee, returned to Wisconsin to present qualitative interview data regarding the role of anti-gay stigma in HIV transmission among young MSM in Milwaukee. Dr. Jeffries described pathways from anti-gay stigma to HIV risk and prevalence. These include:

- housing instability leading to risky sexual situations;
- HIV stigma leading to non-disclosure of HIV status;
- lack of attention to same-sex sexual contact in sex education leading to a lack of personalization of the risk of HIV; and
- internalized homophobia leading to maladaptive coping.

Interventions to address the needs of YBMSM and the social context

Findings from the investigation in Milwaukee and extensive literature indicate that while behavioral interventions focused on changing HIV risk behaviors in YBMSM are critical, they are insufficient. Structural interventions addressing the broader community, including parents, are needed to affect the social conditions in which YBMSM live their lives. The figure below summarizes the pathways described by CDC and shows the existing interventions and prospective opportunities.



Public Health Response

EBI = Effective behavioral interventions to reach YBMSM, funded by DPH, CDC, SAMHSA, NIMH

SMC = Social Media Campaign to the Black community, exploring funding options, research & evaluation by CAIR & UW-Madison

PP = Parent Pride, for Black parents of LGBT young people, exploring funding options

SBSE = School-based sex education to Milwaukee students, funded by MPS and supported by NASTAD

CCT = Cultural competence training to providers and educators re LGBT youth and adults, funded by DPH and MPS

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EBI are “Effective Behavioral Interventions,” funded through the Wisconsin DPH to several organizations in Milwaukee; CDC directly to Diverse & Resilient; the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) to the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin; and the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) to the Medical College of Wisconsin, Center for AIDS Intervention Research (CAIR). Together, SAMHSA, NIHM and CDC funding represents more than \$3 million over a 5-year period to reduce risk behaviors and improve coping strategies in both HIV-negative and HIV-positive YBMSM.

SMC is a Social Media Campaign, for which a funding request is currently under review. The objective of the campaign is to reduce anti-gay stigma in the African American community in Milwaukee, with a short-term goal of reducing the frequency with which families ask their LGBT sons and daughters to leave home, and a longer-term goal of reducing the level of internalized homophobia many YBMSM face. Faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Mass Communication and CAIR researchers will conduct research for the messages and pre-post evaluation to assess the impact of the campaign. Other funds will support the research and evaluation efforts.

PP is Parent Pride, an effort to support parents of LGBT youth, for which a funding request is currently under review. This component will develop a cadre of African American parents of LGBT youth who can serve as peer mentors to help parents support and advocate for their young people.

SBSE is school-based sex education, funded by the Milwaukee Public Schools, and supported by the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD). This component will strengthen sexual health curriculum by providing information on same-sex sexual behaviors. Health teachers will be trained to deliver the curriculum effectively.

CCT is cultural competence training for providers and educators regarding LGBT youth and adults, funded by DPH and MPS. Professionals to receive training include teachers and other school professionals and a broad range of health, social services and housing service providers.

Other Interventions include DPH and privately funded counseling and testing and partner services, to ensure that HIV-positive individuals continue to be diagnosed and linked to care as soon as possible after acquiring HIV, as well as care and treatment to ensure that persons with HIV infection are supported in staying healthy and reducing the risk of further transmission.

Upcoming activities

The Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program and CMHD, along with Diverse & Resilient and other partners in Milwaukee share a sense of urgency about the HIV epidemic in young black MSM. Responses to the findings of the investigation are ongoing. DPH expects to release 2010 HIV surveillance and prevention and testing data this spring, with continued monitoring of the epidemic and services to YBMSM. Planning led by D&R is ongoing, with opportunities for community members to participate. Finally, media interest in the issue continues. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (MJS) journalist James E. Causey recently highlighted the issues facing many young black gay men through a profile of one man living with HIV⁵ and the MJS has summarized the recently released MMWR article⁶.

⁵ Facing the AIDS threat, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/111695699.html>

⁶ HIV increase among county's black men prompts CDC to focus on prevention <http://www.jsonline.com/features/health/115193534.html>, February 2, 2011.

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Preparation is also currently underway for a broadcast on this topic by public television station WUWM.

For additional information:

The websites for organizations mentioned in this article include the following:

Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program (includes pages for statistics & reports and resources for consumers and clinicians)

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

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HIV/AIDS

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/>

City of Milwaukee Health Department, STD/HIV Services

<http://city.milwaukee.gov/StdHIVAids444.htm>

Department of Public Instruction, HIV/AIDS/STD Prevention Program

<http://dpi.state.wi.us/sspw/aidshiv.html>

Milwaukee Public Schools (health)

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

National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD)

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

Diverse & Resilient

<http://www.diverseandresilient.org/flashintro.asp>

AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin

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

Center for AIDS Intervention Research (current research project)

<http://www.mcw.edu/cair/CurrentResearchProjects.htm>