



TOWARDS A GLOBAL FORUM ON MSM & HIV/AIDS ISSUES

The Global Forum of Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) and HIV/AIDS is being launched at the International AIDS Conference – *AIDS2006* – in Toronto, Canada. This initiative is a response to the shared concern that existing HIV/AIDS strategies do not adequately address MSM needs. A loose network of civil society groups, AIDS organizations, MSM groups and other agencies, the Forum will work at the global and national levels to advocate for improved AIDS programming for MSM, and to share information on best practice in HIV prevention, treatment and care and support for MSM. The Forum is composed of organizations and agencies with a commitment to social justice and human rights issues, and with those committed to improving the HIV/AIDS response to MSM and other sexual and gender minorities.

Guiding Principles

The work of the Forum will be guided by the following principles:

- **Human rights/social justice.** The inter-related co-factors for HIV risk, and disparities in access to care, treatment and prevention education, have a common basis in the significant social discrimination faced by MSM. We believe that human rights and social justice are key to the health and well being of MSM and other sexual and gender minorities.
- **Strength-based-** solutions, programmatic, and policy responses often frame the HIV/AIDS problem in negative in ways and that demonize MSM; we believe that effective responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic directed at MSM and other sexual and gender minorities must acknowledge and build upon the strengths, competencies, and resources men possess.
- **Sex positive approach.** All MSM and other sexual and gender minorities have the right to healthy and fulfilling sex lives, free from judgement and persecution. We believe that negative attitudes and narrow views about sex, sexuality and sexual expression are counter-productive and have deleterious effects on the health and wellness of MSM and other sexual and gender minorities.
- **Empowerment.** Self-organizing and open participation in the provision of appropriate HIV prevention, care and support services for MSM and other sexual and gender minorities is important in our work to end HIV/AIDS We believe in supporting and respecting self-determination and self-initiated HIV/AIDS programmatic and policy responses.
- **Involvement.** There must be greater involvement of MSM and other sexual and gender minorities in program planning and policy development arenas. We believe that HIV/AIDS program and policy responses are strengthened by ensuring inclusion, parity and representation.
- **Resources.** There is an urgent need to increase investment and funding for HIV programming directed at MSM and other sexual and gender minorities. At a minimum, we believe that funding should be at a level commensurate with the impact left by HIV/AIDS on MSM and other sexual and gender minorities.

A Global Agenda for Gay and other Men who have Sex with Men

Over two days (August 10 & 11) in advance of the International AIDS Conference in Toronto three hundred delegates from around the world came together to identify, explore and address HIV risk, vulnerability and impact among men who have sex with men.

During workshops on nine key themes participants were invited to suggest how a Global Forum on MSM & HIV could help advance a global agenda for Gay Men and other Men who have Sex with Men.

Participants' suggestions, which are detailed below, will form part of the work plan and strategy for the Global Forum as it emerges over the coming months.

In General

- Increasing visibility, enhancing awareness and generating political will aimed at addressing the HIV related needs of MSM globally.
- Providing opportunities for further networking, exchange and collaborative work, between countries, regions and internationally.
- Acting as a catalyst for innovation and experimentation.
- Celebrating our successes and achievements.

HIV Prevention Activities among Gay Men and Other Men who have Sex with Men

- Documenting and raising awareness of the fact that the vast majority of the world's gay and other MSM lack access to even the most basic HIV prevention services.
- Advocating for the funding and programming needed to close the HIV services gap for MSM.
- Advocate for the use of existing technologies like PEP and research on emerging technologies for MSM like microbicides.
- Promoting the use of evidence based HIV prevention programs and policies in general and in program design and implementation with MSM.

Community Organising and Networking

- Linking existing regional networks of gay and other men who have sex with men.
- Supporting the development of regional MSM networks where they don't exist or are emerging.

Influencing Policy in Responding to the HIV Related Needs of MSM

- Develop an international policy agenda on MSM & HIV.
- Help define the link between homophobia, HIV and MSM.
- Challenge international institutions and their silence on MSM, HIV and homophobia.
- Build an evidence base to help support MSM related advocacy.

Advancing the Role of MSM Communities in Health Promotion

- Facilitate the development of a broader response to MSM's health needs, in the context of responding to the imperative of HIV/AIDS.

Resource mobilisation

- Help get money to grassroots projects NOW.
- Secure a long term commitment to funding MSM programs by all relevant public (including national governments), private and non-government donors in HIV/AIDS. Including by:
 - Increasing access to capacity building with a focus on resource mobilisation
 - Developing a shared understanding that we deserve the money and a strategy for getting it.
 - Being creative, including using projects to leverage more resources when they demonstrate need and how it can be met.
 - Ask UNAIDS to designate a dedicated focal point for MSM work to enact the welcome assignment of the MSM portfolio to UNAIDS.
- Help break the silence that prevents MSM programs from being funded.

Working with MSM on HIV/AIDS in Difficult Social and Political Environments

- Act as a global focal point for these issues at events like the High Level Meeting on AIDS.
- Help fight the medicalisation of HIV/AIDS.
- Act as a counterpoint to the very organised and influential religious networks and US Government.
- Link to other Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights groups fighting similar struggles.
- 25 years into the struggle MSM is still a satellite. We need a network to improve the environment in which we work, including World AIDS Conferences.

Reducing Vulnerability and Advancing Gay/MSM/Transgender Rights

- Developing and sharing a better understanding of gay/bi/msm and transgender human rights violations and HIV risk and impact.
- Developing a sexuality rights defenders initiative, which could support gay and msm human rights activists, provide international protection when they are at risk and opportunities for sharing their work with their peers internationally.
- Acting as a civil society focal point on human rights issues as they relate to MSM and HIV, including by cooperating with the human rights movement, UNAIDS, other parts of the UN.

Advancing a Research Agenda for Effective work on AIDS with Sexual Minorities

- Develop a vision of what should happen in research and how to make it happen.
- Help clarify the agenda and identify who controls the resources.
- Question the evidence based culture and undertake research and documentation that helps inform programming.
- Advocate for research that is localised, contextualised and community based.

Substance Use and Risk

- Advocate for a harm reduction approach to substance use, including the use of needle and syringe exchange and substitution therapies.
- Promote research and data collection on the relationship between substance use and HIV risk especially in low and middle income countries.
- Adopt and advocate for action on a wide range of substances.

- Develop holistic approaches to substance use that focus on health and well being, as opposed to the relationship between drugs and sexual risk taking exclusively.

Next steps

Members of the steering committee for MSM & HIV the pre World AIDS Conference satellite event will be meeting to plan how to take the creation of the Global Forum forward.

In addition to working on projects to advance each of the agenda identified during MSM & HIV the Forum will focus on developing a range of initiatives to communicate with key stakeholders including:

- The creation of a list-serv/ mailing list for the Global Forum on MSM and HIV/AIDS to facilitate information exchange.
- The development and dissemination of a newsletter or bulletin in print and electronic forms.
- The development of a website devoted to regional and global information sharing and networking.
- Preparation for *AIDS2008* activities focused on MSM and other sexual and gender minorities including 2007 regional inputs/activities at Foro (Latin American and Caribbean Conference), ICASA (Africa) and ICAAP (Asia and the Pacific).

Key Agencies and Individuals

Key agencies and individuals committed to the Global Forum on MSM Issues include the following:

- AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)
- AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA)
- Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO)
- AVE de México
- Canadian AIDS Society (CAS)
- ENDA TM Health
- Health Policy Initiative/Instituto nacional de salud publica (Mexico)
- International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance
- Latin American and the Caribbean Council of Aids Services Organizations (LACCASO)
- NAZ Foundation International
- Terrence Higgins Trust
- UNAIDS

For more information

For the latest developments visit www.msm-aids2006.org

MSM
AT AIDS 2006

MSM & HIV: Advancing a Global Agenda for
Gay Men and Other Men who have Sex with Men

