

METH, MEN, and HIV

TERMS: A gay man is someone who identifies as gay (or homosexual, or queer). The term MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) is used to signify men who have sex with other men, but do not consider themselves gay or identify with the “gay community” (yet can include gay men).

Cultural/normative restraints against gay/homosexual behavior and identity have loosened a great deal in much of the majority culture; however, stigma regarding homosexual behavior remain very strong in the African American, Latino, and Asian-Pacific Islander communities.

Bars have long been important as safe places for gay men to congregate. Thus, the social environment was an alcohol using environment, to which other drugs were later added.

Meth and Sex

Meth use increases the risk of HIV transmission by enabling and prolonging anal intercourse, and through the sharing of needles when the drug is injected.

A recent study in San Francisco of gay men who tested for HIV at anonymous test sites found that meth users were three times as likely to be HIV positive. *Buchacz 2005*

The Internet provides a venue for gay men to anonymously meet each other for the purpose of a “hook up”— a sexual encounter. It is a highly attractive alternative to bars because it is safer, surer, and available to all.

Treatment / intervention

“A continuum of community-based, low threshold, early intervention programs as well as community-based relapse prevention for aftercare, needs to be available to MSM populations within the community settings they frequent and trust, for crystal meth treatment engagement and relapse prevention efforts to be effective.” *NY LGBT Network 2005*

Prevention

The CA Governor’s Prevention Advisory Council found that:

1. There are no evidence-validated , meth-specific prevention approaches.
2. Most meth efforts are focused on intervention, suppression, and treatment.
3. Coordinated community-based approaches such as those occurring in San Diego, Washington, and Kansas are producing promising outcomes. *Governor’s Prevention Advisory Council Ad-Hoc Committee on Methamphetamine, 2005*

Organizations serving the gay/MSM communities should provide leadership in the recognition that this population is at increased risk for substance abuse problems of all kinds, that community norms have a major impact on both individual and community health, and that the community as a whole has a responsibility for fostering healthy norms for youth and others.

DATA: Data collection should be the first step in creating your project in order to answer the questions of *who* is doing *what* with *whom* and *when* and *where*. Sources of data/information may include: health and social service agencies that serve the population, key informant

interviews, focus groups, random intercept interviews at known venues, and surveys of convenience or snowball samples.

SALES/AVAILABILITY: Meth is widely and easily available in venues such as bars, parties, and bathhouses. Law enforcement, businesses, health and social service organizations, and social groups all have a role to play in containing availability.

PARAPHERNALIA: As with the general population, display and easy availability of paraphernalia gives the message that use of the associated drugs is acceptable. Your coalition can work with other AOD prevention projects to monitor smoke shops and ABC licenses.

OUTREACH: Outreach materials should be specific to the target population and the venue and should include basic information about meth, where to go for more info, risk reduction info (including information about syringe exchange, where available), HIV prevention information, and info on treatment availability.

SOCIAL MARKETING: Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing techniques to pro-social causes or messages. Social marketing materials, to be successful, must be developed with input from, and tested with, the target population.

MEDIA ADVOCACY: Media Advocacy is the art and science of creating news. Media advocacy events must be visually interesting so that they both look good on camera and get a message across. Media advocacy often takes advantage of real-world events and activities. For example, the campaigns to “take back” Halloween and Cinco de Mayo from the beer companies have used the industry’s own ads as the basis of media events.

SUMMARY

Promising prevention approaches with some evidence of success include:

1. Social marketing campaigns that change perceptions of the relative risks of using meth and other drugs.
2. Social marketing campaigns that change community norms regarding drug use.
3. Education campaigns that provide risk reduction information.
4. Treatment options that do not require abstinence.
5. Enforcement campaigns that include community organizations and businesses.
6. Broad-based efforts by collaboratives including health and social service providers, government, businesses, media, and so on, to provide more options for gay men, decrease discrimination, decrease perceived stigma, and generally enhance opportunities for satisfying lives without drug use.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.CAmethaction.org

www.crystalbreaks.org

www.drugfree.org/Portal/DrugIssue/meth/ads.html

www.mysexycity.com/main2.htm

www.adp.cahwnet.gov

www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/crystalmeth/docs/meth_literature_index.pdf