The Healthy Living Project: Exploring the Mental Health and Social Service Needs of Older Gay and Bisexual Men and Transgender Women Living with HIV in Los Angeles County (LAC)

Keshav Tyagi MPH1; Jeff Bailey MPH2; Matt G. Mutchler PhD3, 2, 3; Juliana Soto 2; 4; Bennett Reagan1

APLA Health; 1California State University, Dominguez Hills; 2UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies; 4City of Los Angeles AIDS Coordinator's Office

Overview
The Healthy Living Project was a qualitative research endeavor to formally explore the needs of older PLWH in Los Angeles. The formal purpose of this project was to comprehensively understand community-specific challenges and concerns faced by older people living with HIV (OPLWH) in LAC, and to receive community-level input for programmatic and public health service directions. Focus groups were conducted with gay and bisexual men, heterosexual men, transgender men, and transgender women. The results presented here focus on gay and bisexual men, and transgender women. Participants were asked questions about their experiences and difficulties aging with HIV. Population-specific differences were observed, and emerging themes that arose included worries of financial security, safe and affordable housing, cultural competence for HIV and aging medical service, and social support.

Methods
• To learn about where and what type of services older adults living with HIV receive in Los Angeles and how to disseminate program information to them.
• Understand barriers and challenges older gay men living with HIV experience
• Understand experiences with HIV care and support services and identify service gaps for this population
• Explore possible program activities/strategies that older adults living with HIV perceive will assist them in managing the psychosocial and physical complexities of aging with HIV.

The Gay Dilemma

The Healthy Living Project
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Introduction
• There are an estimated 60,000 people living with HIV (PLWH) in LAC. Of this number, 45% are over the age of 50, which is poised to increase to 72% by 2025.
• The majority of PLWH are living longer due to effective HIV medications and treatments. However, PLWH have to manage multiple chronic diseases (co-morbidities) commonly associated with older age in addition to maintaining their HIV treatment regimen.
• Research demonstrates a correlation between depression, loneliness, health, HIV/AIDS-related stigma and stigmatization having negative impacts on population health.
• There is a significant gap in innovative programmatic and public health efforts to address psychosocial, social, and physical health complexities impacting PLWH.

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Racial Distribution of Focus Group Participants Across Groups

The Gay Dilemma

The Gay Dilemma

Conclusions – Programmatic Directions

Program Recommendations

• Safe and affordable housing
• Health and nutrition education
• Case management and advocacy
• Financial counseling
• Community education on HIV
• Social support groups

Training for Providers

• Enduring demands of HIV, aging and population-specific issues.
• Respect for cultural perspectives on HIV and healthcare.
• Development of awareness for population-specific issues including gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and race.

Programmatic Considerations

• Centralized care and service organization
• Transportation and distance to medical and service centers

Limitations

• We recruited small participant samples per population group, which were gathered through samples of convenience.
• These results are specific experiences of particular individuals, and may not be reflective of what all OPLWH in LAC feel about aging with HIV.
• All focus groups were conducted in English, which leaves out the experiences of monolingual Spanish population members, who make up a large portion OPLWH in LAC.

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Study Participants
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