

**VCH Community Engagement Report: December 14, 2011  
 Seek and Treat to Optimally Prevent (STOP) HIV**

**Fall 2011 Community Discussions**

Introduction

Seek and Treat to Optimally Prevent (STOP) HIV/AIDS is a four-year (2009-2013) pilot project funded by the BC Ministry of Health to expand HIV testing, treatment and support services in BC. The pilot project focuses on individuals living with multiple barriers to care, including addiction, mental health issues, homelessness and other social or environmental factors. From its initial stages, the STOP project has identified community partnership as critical to an accountable, responsive and effective pilot project.

For the Vancouver portion of STOP HIV/AIDS, VCH leadership has requested that its Community Engagement department develop and facilitate mechanisms for ongoing community discussions, so that pilot-projects are tailored to the actual needs and conditions for the various communities involved, and to increase project impact among hard-to-reach populations. In partnership with the Vancouver-based community representative from the provincial STOP Leadership Committee, Kath Webster, discussions were conducted in Summer 2010 (to gather initial stories experiences of HIV services), and Spring 2011 (to obtain recommendations on specific plans for STOP HIV projects). Reports for these consultations are available at [www.vch.ca/ce/reports](http://www.vch.ca/ce/reports).

This report covers consultations during November and December 2011.

Methods

In past discussions, participants suggested that some groups for Fall 2011 should include HIV education on a variety of topics. Following up on this idea, the STOP HIV Community Representative and VCH CE staff offered to meet with groups in November and December 2011, offering a presentation of updates, with or without an additional education session. Four groups requested a presentation (with our without additional education), as follows:

**Groups conducted**

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Group Date</b>	<b>Number and Gender of Attendees</b>
Positive Women’s Network	Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2011	16 women
Positive Living BC	Wed. Nov. 23, 2011	17: 16 men, 1 woman
VANDU	Mon. Nov. 28, 2011	7: 5 men, 2 women

Maximally Assisted Therapy (MAT) Program at Downtown Community Health Clinic (DCHC)	Wed. Dec. 14, 2011	6: 5 men, 1 woman
TOTAL:		46: 26 men, 20 women

The following was presented (with additional information from presenters):

Priority Topics from Community Participants	VCH STOP HIV Projects
Peer Outreach Workers	Trained for outreach, testing, support, education
Easier to get medical services	- Variety of locations - Longer hours - Language and immigration needs - Testing at hospitals
Public health ads	<i>'Know your Status'</i> <i>'It's Different Now'</i> <i>"What's your number?"</i>
HIV education for PHAs	Discussion/support groups in various locations
HIV education for healthcare professionals	Teaching how and when to test, and communication skills around HIV
Housing	New housing in place for HIV+ people – stabilization beds, supportive units, Subsidized Independent Living units

## Findings

Because the STOP projects are now implemented, and will continue to the end of March 2013, there was no formal process to obtain specific feedback from group participants. However, attendees did offer observations about the STOP project, as follows:

*"It's great to hear and read about and see more support and awareness of the disease."*

**1) Strong sense of importance of the peer navigators and peer support workers**, who act as a vital link in the first hours or days after diagnosis, and provide accompaniment to appointments and support/discussion groups. This new project also requires skilled and sensitive supervision of peer workers, many of whom are newly returned to work and need supportive guidance.

**2) Concern expressed about newly diagnosed people who still don't know about resources**, who continue to self-isolate and engage in risk behaviours (for their own health and others).

**3) Public health ads --** The campaign entitled *'Its Different Now'* (IDN) includes posters and a website. One of the poster images elicited some unfavorable comments from some of the participants. It must be acknowledged that the IDN campaign posters were designed to provoke curiosity and bring people to the website for the promotion of routine HIV testing.

As well, it was mentioned that the ad campaign, 'What's your number', for gay men, uses an online quiz to help people calculate how often they should be tested for HIV, based on their risks. It was suggested that every ad campaign needs to have a similar on-line quiz, for any population.

#### **4) Offering tests at community events**

Some concerns were expressed about some community-based testing events conducted earlier this year in the Downtown Eastside:

- There were long line-ups for tests, sometimes taking 1.5 hours.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that everyone waiting for a test is aware that they have the option to be tested by a nurse or by a peer, based on their individual choice. The option to choose between nurse or peer is key to some people's sense of confidentiality and trust.
- Concern was expressed that some peer-testers seemed unclear about guidelines for pre- and post-test discussions. Future events, where peers are conducting HIV tests, should ensure they apply pre- and post-test guidelines with consistency across various organizations and events.
- Some participants felt that there is potential for confusion regarding the nature of the results from a rapid test and the process for accessing after-test support. Efforts should be made to improve communication related to these issues.

Group participants acknowledged that improvements were later made at subsequent testing events, and encouraged ongoing careful monitoring by the VCH STOP HIV team with regard to quality of people's experience at these events.

#### Next Steps

Current funding commitments for the STOP HIV pilot-projects end in March 2013. The Vancouver STOP project wishes to start planning now for HIV services beyond this date, and has asked that a new phase of community consultation be conducted in January and February 2012 to inform their planning. Interviews, surveys and discussion groups will be conducted, asking people about their experiences of STOP HIV services, and the linkages between services, assessing priorities and areas for improvement.

Our sincere thanks to everyone for your support, and we look forward to seeing everyone again.

Yours truly,

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Vancouver Coastal Health

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S.T.O.P. Leadership Committee