

**Building Capacity to Create an HIV Prevention Survey for Gay Men in  
BC: Final Report**

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## **Project Description**

The Community Based Research Centre (CBRC) in Vancouver received a grant of \$15,000 from Health Canada's Community-Based Research Capacity Building Program: Skills Building Initiatives – CBR Workshops to complete a project entitled, “**Building Capacity to Create an HIV Prevention Survey for Gay Men in BC.**”

The overall goals of the project were to support the development of a coordinated HIV prevention survey for gay men in Vancouver, Victoria and Prince George; to provide a capacity building opportunity for community and public health personnel involved in HIV prevention research and programs for gay men in Vancouver, Victoria and Prince George; to outline a framework for developing a collaborative planning process for gay men's prevention in BC; to strengthen networking and collaboration among prevention personnel in Vancouver, Victoria and Prince George; and to enhance our experience and knowledge into community based research efforts. We have successfully met our goals for the project.

The formative consultation phase of the project was critical in assisting us to organize a capacity building initiative that ensured participation from key organizations and individuals in BC and responded to HIV prevention needs.

In this project, the Community Based Research Centre worked in close partnership with:

- 1) Gay Men's Health Programs, AIDS Vancouver
- 2) MSM Outreach, ASIA
- 3) Men's Wellness Program, AIDS Vancouver Island
- 4) AIDS Prevention Street Outreach Program, BC Centre for Disease Control
- 5) GALA North – Gay and Lesbian Association – Prince George
- 6) Sigma Research, London, United Kingdom
- 7) Community-based researchers

We also collaborated with:

- 1) Spectrum Health Clinic, Vancouver
- 2) BC Persons With AIDS Society
- 3) Vanguard Project
- 4) Gay and Lesbian Centre, Vancouver
- 5) Latino MSM Outreach Project
- 6) Gay West, Vancouver
- 7) Pride Health Services
- 8) Bureau of HIV/AIDS, STD and TB, Health Canada
- 9) Community-based researchers & graduate students
- 10) BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

The research capacity building project trainer/facilitator was Ford Hickson, Senior Researcher with Sigma Research in London, United Kingdom. We called on Ford Hickson to learn from his experience as a community based researcher in HIV/AIDS working to describe the needs of gay men in HIV prevention. He works as part of a

network of HIV prevention programs and facilitated the development of a framework for setting HIV prevention goals.

## **Project Activities**

### **Consultation Phase**

The idea of a periodic survey process in BC had been talked about at community prevention meetings for some years. The recent provincial assessment of gay men's HIV prevention helped to revive discussions on the need for data on gay men for HIV prevention programs and collaborative planning and programming. In order to develop the original proposal we undertook an assessment of the environment. This gave us evidence to direct our capacity building efforts to survey development. We also understood the value of building on last year's capacity building project.

We consulted with Ford Hickson at Sigma Research in London (UK) on the following:

- 1) Sigma Research's experience in survey development, collaborative work with researchers and health promoters;
- 2) Recommendations for a BC wide project: survey development and capacity building
- 3) Capacity building training sessions: logistics, participation, goals and objectives
- 4) CHAPS (UK prevention network for gay men) collaborative prevention and research model

We gathered a Provincial Steering Group for the project composed of 1) community and public health personnel in gay men's HIV prevention in Vancouver, Victoria and Prince George and 2) experienced community based researchers in gay men's HIV prevention. This created a 10 person Steering Group. This group was the target for the most comprehensive aspects of the research capacity building project.

We prepared Provincial Steering Group members for the sessions by surveying their health promotion needs, reading "Making it Count" (collaborative planning framework from the UK) and reviewing the National Sex Surveys from 1997-20.

We also identified the additional key programs, services and researchers that could collaborate in a gay men's survey in Vancouver. Our consultations enabled us to bring together a larger Vancouver based group interested in being involved in the survey.

### **Capacity Building Sessions**

We organized three distinct capacity building activities on this project:

- 1) a 4-day capacity training for a core group of HIV prevention personnel and community-based researchers from Vancouver, Victoria and Prince George
- 2) a half-day capacity building activity for the core group to meet with the larger group of Vancouver HIV prevention personnel
- 3) a community presentation on data from the UK gay men's sex survey

## Session 1:

This was a four day training for the 10 member Provincial Steering Group for the BC Gay Men's Sex Survey. The Steering Group is made up of the key program and researcher personnel working directly in HIV prevention for gay men. We worked together under the guidance of Ford Hickson from Sigma Research in five areas:

- 1) Developing a planning framework for prevention collaboration
- 2) Selecting our sample
- 3) Identifying the needs
- 4) Survey as prevention intervention
- 5) Survey project management

These meetings provided participants with the necessary awareness, skill development and guidance to construct the survey and develop a process for data collection and analysis. The output from this training was a draft version of the BC survey. The three cities also considered how to develop a sustainable system of gathering data on gay men through HIV prevention surveys.

## About Sigma Research and Ford Hickson

Sigma Research is a world leading HIV prevention research organization, part of the CHAPS Network assisting UK groups like Gay Men Fighting AIDS (GMFA), Terrence Higgins Trust and others to create a collaborative community prevention planning process and an annual survey of gay men.

Through such efforts Sigma has developed an expertise in working with community AIDS groups, crafting gay men's prevention surveys and providing training in using surveys as both a research instrument and, significantly, a community prevention intervention. For several years, Sigma Research has been at the forefront of community based HIV research in the UK. The unit privileges collective action, transparency and reports written for health promoters and planners.

This project brought Ford Hickson, senior researcher with Sigma Research to Vancouver to work with various stakeholders in AIDS prevention for gay men.

Ford Hickson is Senior Research Fellow with Sigma Research, part of the University of Portsmouth, UK. Since 1993 he has led the design of the National Gay Men's Sex Survey, the world's largest series of cross-sectional surveys. In 1997 he led a collaborative group of ten community based HIV prevention agencies to articulate a strategic planning framework to reduce HIV infection among gay and bisexual men. The framework has subsequently been integrated into the UK's new National AIDS Strategy.

## Session 2:

This was a half day session for HIV prevention personnel from community groups and public health and HIV prevention researchers. We organized the session into the following areas:

- 1) introductions
- 2) update on HIV prevention for gay men in BC
- 3) Sigma model for developing surveys responsive to prevention programs
- 4) Identifying areas of concern about gay men's prevention
- 5) Networking lunch

## Session 3:

This was a community forum with a presentation by Ford Hickson on the latest data from the Gay Men's Sex Survey 2001. Followed by questions and discussion. Attended by HIV prevention personnel and researchers, gay men and health professionals.

## Evaluation

### **Review of Project Objectives:** (summary of changes due to project)

1. Prevention educators and researchers will have a better understanding of a collaborative prevention planning process for gay men informed by community based research.

Expected Outcome: Improved collaborative planning process for prevention.

Participants learned about the collaborative planning model used in the UK. We made a commitment to pursue collaborative planning in BC in gay men's health promotion. We can adapt many of the UK goals and objectives to a BC context.

Expected Outcome: CBR integrated in prevention planning process.

Participants learned the value of program driven research based on the needs of the identified population. There is a commitment to integrate community research activities into our planning process.

Expected Outcome: More effective interaction among community, public health and researchers working in gay men's HIV prevention.

These sessions enabled participants to take the time to learn together and form relationships. Participants came from the identified three areas of community, public health and research.

2. Prevention educators and researchers will be equipped to manage a community level prevention survey for gay men in three regions of BC.

Expected Outcome: Greater capacity to produce evidence for prevention planning among educators and researchers in gay men's prevention in BC.

Participants made substantial progress on the construction of a survey instrument on gay men and sex in BC. Participants now have a working model for producing program relevant research data. We now have the skills and capacity to manage a three-city survey project.

3. Prevention educators and researchers will have identified key variables to survey for gay men's prevention research and the best ways to ask particular questions.

Expected Outcome: Increased skill in survey construction by all participants.

Participants identified prevention concerns, identified data that would be relevant to BC programs, and constructed questions to get that identified data. Participants had the experience of constructing a survey from the beginning.

Expected Outcome: Greater understanding of issues related to gay men's prevention in BC.

The sessions all ensured that the capacity building was reality based and dealt with the issues of common concern to BC gay men. Participants had the time to review and consider all the issues.

4. Prevention educators and researchers will gain an up-to-date understanding of the model of community-based research used by Sigma Research in the UK.

Expected Outcome: Greater understanding of using community based research in prevention.

Participants worked very closely each day with Ford Hickson, Sigma researcher. He took care to present the model and experience of Sigma, but encouraged participants to consider what would work best for BC. Participants are very familiar with the work of Sigma.

Expected Outcome: More effective use of research techniques in prevention strategy.

Participants will be reviewing their programs to see how research techniques can benefit their program efforts. This survey project will use the survey instrument to communicate information on prevention issues to gay men while gathering data to inform programming.

Expected Outcome: Increased sensitivity of researchers to prevention program needs.

Researchers that attended the meetings have a much richer understanding of the prevention programs needs of gay men. The survey model is based on needs identification and this approach has helped to orient researchers to the needs of gay men and the programs trying to address these needs.

5. Educators, researchers, policy makers and funders in gay men's prevention will have formed relationships and developed common understandings of the direction of gay men's prevention research and programming and the policy and funding gaps in the province of BC.

Expected Outcomes: More effective policy framework for gay men's prevention in BC.

From these sessions, we now have been able to agree that a framework is essential for effective prevention research, planning and programming. We learned about the UK policy framework. We now need to create a framework that will work for BC.

Expected Outcomes: More responsive and supportive funding mechanisms for community based research in BC.

We made limited progress in this area. Prevention personnel and researchers have a solid understanding of how essential community research is to planning and programming efforts. Because of the shifts in structures in the Ministry of Health and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, there was no one available to be involved in our meetings. The mandate of existing structures has changed and the new structures are not yet in place. However, we were able to ensure that the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and the BC Centre for Disease Control were involved in this capacity building and their support will be vital in the years ahead.

6. Members of the gay community, educators, researchers, policy makers and funders in gay men's prevention will have an awareness of gay men's HIV prevention issues.

Expected Outcome: More gay community members informed about gay men's prevention issues and what the research is saying.

Through our capacity building efforts, we had the opportunity to work with the key gay men's HIV prevention people from Vancouver, Victoria and Prince George. The community forum where Ford Hickson presented data from the UK Gay Men's Sex Survey exposed others to prevention issues.

Expected Outcome: Active working relations among HIV prevention and government policy and funding in BC.

As stated above, we did not make the progress we had anticipated in the area of funding and policy. Government structures are in the midst of change. Authority for funding is being transferred from the province to the local Health Authority. Positions and people

have not yet been identified. We did make excellent progress in working closely with the BC Centre for Disease Control. This is a key government partner for future developments in gay men's HIV prevention.

7. All participants will be able to think critically about HIV prevention research, planning and programming issues in the region.

Expected Outcomes: Provides gay men with information to assist in their prevention decisions.

At our capacity sessions, participants identified priority areas in prevention information to get out to gay men. These will be included in the upcoming survey.

Expected Outcome: Enhanced translation of research into action.

The model of community research we are using starts as a response to the needs of gay men, identifying unmet needs and focusing on areas where prevention programming exists. In this way our instrument is responding to the planning and programming environment. We still have work to do in taking the survey results and reviewing their impact on planning and programming directions. This will likely be part of our next capacity building initiative.

8. Prevention educators and researchers will strengthen relationship networks by engaging in collaborative prevention planning and research activities.

Expected Outcome: More effective CBR network for sustained research, planning and programming.

This capacity building project has strengthened the relationships between public health, community and researchers. We now have a provincial group to coordinate the prevention survey. As well, we have a network of other stakeholders who have committed their support to gay men's HIV prevention.

## **Feedback**

Participants responded to a feedback questionnaire.

They were asked to outline what they had learned in the capacity building sessions.

Identified learnings included:

- Understanding the connections between a targeted survey and program delivery
- Need to critically examine HIV prevention strategies
- Value of matching survey questions to identified needs
- Value of having educators inform survey design rather than researchers
- Possibilities and limitations of survey research
- Using the survey as an education opportunity
- Realizing the level of capacity present in the community



Participants were asked about the best features of the capacity building sessions. Most identified resource person, Ford Hickson from Sigma Research as being very effective and skilled. Everyone stated that a collaborative learning environment had been achieved.

One participants stated, “I liked that there was room for debate among the participants, good discussion of issues around prevention. Provided an ideal learning environment.” Another commented, “The format of the workshops was really effective and allowed time for processing ideas and discussion of the issues.”

When asked if the capacity building sessions will make a difference in their work, participants said they would. Comments included, “The information gathered will be used to direct future goals and practices, as well the info shared at the sessions has already fostered new community partnerships for outreach and technique sharing.”

Overall participants said that the sessions were excellent. Participants made suggestions for future research capacity building opportunities.