

Just when health care specialists thought they had a handle on HIV/AIDS rates among gay and bisexual men, a wave of drug use and risky behavior has created a need to focus prevention messages directly to them once more.

To fight new cases of HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men, Cascade AIDS Project launched a new department this month called Men's Prevention and Wellness.

"CAP is making a whole new commitment," said Michael Anderson-Nathe, who was recently hired to manage the nine-member department. "The Men's Prevention and Wellness department directs a lot more resources—including staff, funds and energy in general—focusing on men's wellness and prevention."

Anderson-Nathe hails from Minnesota, where he worked in the field of HIV/AIDS education and prevention since the mid-'90s. He co-founded a nonprofit agency called Minnesota Men of Color in 1997 and served on its board for two years. Before coming to CAP, Anderson-Nathe served as health educator and HIV program coordinator for the Clackamas County Health Department.

Several factors identified the need for a separate men's department at CAP. Feedback from focus groups held last year indicated a desire for the agency to be more aggressive in the gay community.

National HIV/AIDS statistics also pointed to the need for a change. Between 2000 and 2002, HIV infection among gay and bi men increased by 17 percent nationally, according to Thomas Bruner, executive director for CAP.

Until this month, men's issues were addressed under the general Prevention and Outreach department, which also targeted prevention in other populations.

"Organizationally, this increases resources we're investing in gay/bi men's health, increases visibility and gives the work a more concentrated

KEEP IT SEPARATED

CAP launches gay and bi men's department

by Jaymee R. Cuti



Clockwise from top left, Ian McDonald, Michael LaClair, Lee Abbott, Joseph Sullivan, Michael Anderson-Nathe, Richard Paz, Cesar Pecori and John Garlington are on the Men's Prevention and Wellness team at Cascade AIDS Project.

focus," says Bruner.

Several high-risk behaviors are contributing to a resurgence in HIV infections among gay men, including the increasing use of crystal methamphetamine, a tripling of syphilis rates and the popularity of barebacking—sex without condoms.

"The trends are certainly there that point toward a potential nightmare if we don't get our hands around this," Bruner says.

He especially attributes meth use among gay men to an increased need for intervention.

"If HIV is the fire, crystal meth is the gasoline," Bruner says. "As if we didn't have enough

of a challenge preventing new HIV infection, the explosion of meth use, including here in Portland, has added a whole new layer of urgency and complexity to our work."

He also cites a challenge in reaching those most in need of help, people who the new department will prioritize.

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—Thomas Bruner

"The people who need the most amount of intervention are often in the most denial or the least interested in hearing about their risk," says Bruner.

Although the majority of CAP's clients are men, its HIV/AIDS prevention efforts expanded in the past, attempting to reach other vulnerable communities such as women, intravenous drug users, homeless populations, people of color and those who spent time in the criminal justice system.

"It didn't mean we quit working in the gay community, but we deliberately broadened our focus to reach the other high-need communities," says Bruner. "In the last couple of years, it's become apparent that the need among gay/bi men has risen dramatically again."

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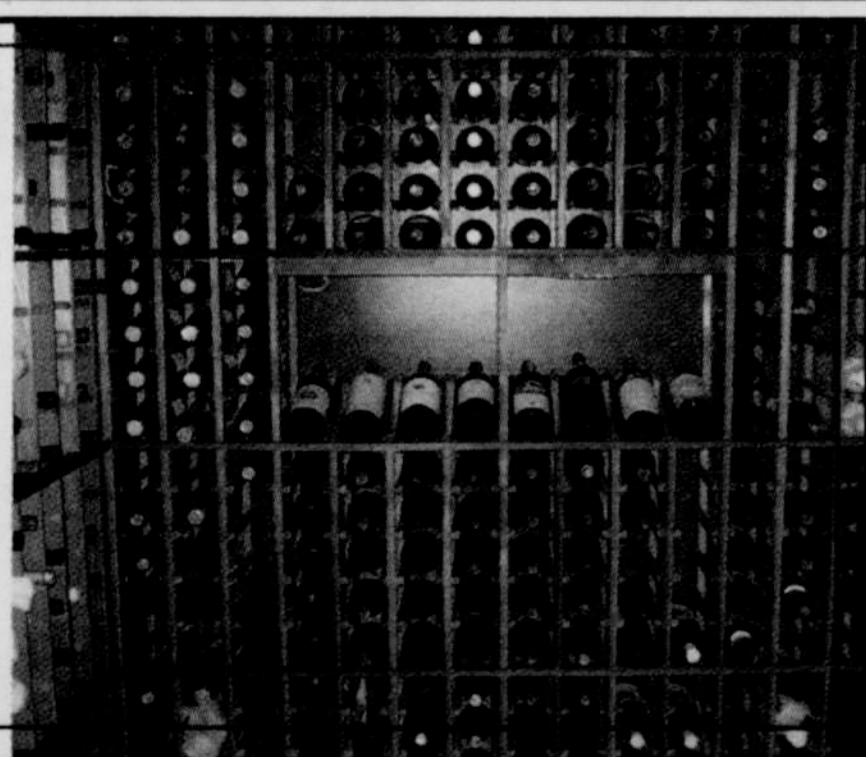
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