



## **HIV/AIDS AMONG THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN THE TEN COUNTY HOUSTON AREA: Epidemiological Trends 1992-1999**

Prepared for The Houston Area HIV Services Ryan White Planning Council  
By The Partnership for Community Health

April 2001

### **INTRODUCTION**

The epidemiological information in this presentation demonstrates that:

1. Today HIV and AIDS continues at epidemic proportions in the African American Community.
2. While there may be a perception that the HIV and AIDS epidemic is waning, in reality the number of African Americans living with HIV and AIDS increases every year.
3. While AIDS is often thought of as a “gay” disease in the African American community, African American heterosexuals are the fastest growing risk group in the Houston area, quickly overtaking African American men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) as the largest group of people living with HIV and AIDS.
4. Notably, however, young gay African Americans are also becoming infected at an alarming rate and are at substantial risk of becoming HIV infected.

### **CUMULATIVE AIDS, LIVING WITH AIDS, AND LIVING WITH HIV**

There are three measures used to show the impact of HIV and AIDS on the African American community:

1. “Cumulative AIDS” indicates how many persons in the community ever had AIDS and shows the overall impact of AIDS on the community. (AIDS is a medical diagnosis based on being infected with HIV along with a heavily compromised immune system and/or different types of serious infections.)
2. The trend of increasing numbers of African Americans living with AIDS demonstrates AIDS continuing impact on the African American community, and the number of African Americans living with AIDS an indication of the number of African Americans that must have regular care by medical and other service providers.
3. The total number of African Americans living with HIV and AIDS indicates the overall impact of the epidemic on the African American community in Houston.



There is excellent information on the number of African Americans living with AIDS because everyone diagnosed with AIDS must be reported to the health department.

Data on the number of people with HIV infections is much less accurate because mandatory HIV reporting only began in 1999. That is the reason that epidemiologists have to estimate the number of people living with HIV, and the estimate is usually given as a range rather than a single number.

### **Cumulative AIDS Among African Americans**

AIDS disproportionately impacts the African American community. While 19% of the Houston area population is African American:

- About half of those living with HIV are African American,
- 44% of those are living with HIV and AIDS are African American, and
- About 33% of all those ever diagnosed with AIDS are African Americans.

The higher proportion of African Americans living with HIV (and corresponding lower proportion ever diagnosed with AIDS) shows that new infection rates are higher among African Americans than in other ethnic communities.

As disproportionate as the epidemic is for African Americans in the Houston area, AIDS has had a greater impact nationally. Nationwide African Americans represent 12% of the populations, and 37% of all those diagnosed with AIDS are African American.

When all these percentages are translated to numbers, at the end of 1999 a total of 6,064 African Americans in the Houston area had been diagnosed with AIDS. Of those, 3,080 had died. At least 6,700, and as many as 9,100, African Americans are currently living with HIV and AIDS in the Houston area.

African Americans living with AIDS, like those in other ethnic communities, are living longer and their death rate is declining. The AIDS-related death rate has declined from 46.9 per 100,000 in 1992 to 25.1 per 100,000 in 1999. However, the death rate is significantly higher for African Americans than other ethnic groups. In 1998, 57% of AIDS deaths were African American. Over 3,000 African Americans -- about half of the African Americans who ever had AIDS in the Houston area, have died.

The good news is that the death rate among African Americans in care is significantly lower than the death rates of African Americans not in care. This lower death rate indicates the need for African Americans to seek care early in their HIV infection.

Decreased mortality, plus newly diagnosed African Americans progressing from HIV to AIDS, means that there are an increasing number of African Americans living with AIDS who need care. From 1992 to 1999 there was a 607% increase in AIDS cases diagnosed among African Americans. In 1999, 2,984 African Americans were living with AIDS, and they represented nearly 40% of all living AIDS cases in the Houston area.



## **African Americans Living with AIDS**

Who are the African Americans living with AIDS in the Houston area?

- The largest proportion of African Americans was MSM, although this proportion has declined from 44% in 1992 to 33% in 1999.
- African American heterosexuals have increased from 9% in 1992 to 26% in 1999, while African American IDUs have remained at about the same proportion.
- While 71% of the African Americans living with AIDS are male – reflecting the high number of MSM, over half the heterosexuals are women, and over 40% of the IDUs are women.

## **Newly Diagnosed AIDS Cases Among African Americans**

Newly diagnosed AIDS cases indicate those most at risk for progressing from HIV to AIDS.

The total number of African Americans progressing from HIV to AIDS has decreased from 571 to 265 annually between 1992 and 1999. However, African Americans represent an increasing proportion of new AIDS cases – from 32% in 1992 to 53% in 1999.

The number of African American MSM who are progressing to AIDS has declined from 38% to 26% of new AIDS cases from 1992 to 1999. IDUs have declined from 28% to 19% of new AIDS cases. Heterosexuals, however, have increased from 12% to 27% of new AIDS cases, making heterosexuals the risk group most likely to progress from HIV to AIDS.

## **HIV**

Unless HIV infection is detected and treated early, it is highly likely to lead to AIDS. The number and profile of those recently infected by HIV show how quickly the epidemic is spreading, where to focus prevention efforts, and the need for early treatment.

1999 was the first year for HIV reporting data. While the data is not an accurate reflection of all HIV cases, it does provide insight into the profile of those newly diagnosed with HIV. In the first year of HIV reporting:

- The number of male African Americans diagnosed with HIV was over twice the number diagnosed with AIDS, and the number of female African Americans diagnosed with HIV was over three times the number diagnosed with AIDS.
- African American heterosexuals were the risk group most likely to be diagnosed with HIV. There were 138 females compared to 56 males.
- A large number of African Americans (n=150) did not reveal or did not know how they became infected.



In recent studies measuring infection rates among young gay men throughout the U.S., infection rates ranged from 2% to 12%. Rates of infection among young African American gay men were much higher and, while Houston was not a site for the study, Houston trends follow national trends.

## **ADHERENCE**

In a survey conducted in summer 1999, 84% of the African Americans who had accessed care reported taking medications for their HIV infection or AIDS. The survey also revealed that:

- African Americans were less likely to adhere to their medication regimen than other ethnic groups.
- Of those taking medication, nearly 50% said they frequently skipped or stopped taking it. Of those, 80% did not consult their doctor.

African American women are more likely than men to often skip or stop taking their medication.

## **TOP HIV AND AIDS CARE NEEDS**

In the last comprehensive needs assessment conducted in 1999, about 50% of the African Americans living with HIV and AIDS said that outpatient medical care and transportation were their top needs.

Between 30% and 35% of the African Americans living with HIV and AIDS said that food, rental assistance, drug reimbursement, and help finding housing were among their top needs.

Typically a larger percentage of African American men living with HIV and AIDS were more likely to say they needed HIV and AIDS services than African American women. However, African American women were more likely than men to say that transportation and assistance finding housing were among their top needs.

African Americans living with HIV and AIDS were more likely than Anglos to report needing transportation, food, and assistance finding housing. The greater need for basic services reflects the low household income of many African Americans living with HIV and AIDS.

## **BARRIERS TO CARE**

In the last comprehensive needs assessment conducted in 1999, no single barrier was said to be greater than a moderate barrier by African Americans. The highest ranked barriers for African Americans were transportation, red tape, lack of treatment knowledge, and lack of insurance coverage. The next set of barriers included waiting for an appointment, navigating the system, rules and regulations, and confidentiality. African American men generally report higher barriers than African American women.



African Americans have the highest overall barrier score. They report significantly higher barriers than other ethnic groups for obtaining treatment, child care, obtaining insurance, navigating the system, treatment knowledge, waiting for an appointment, feeling like a number, location of the organization, knowing about needed services, and transportation.

## **CONCLUSION**

HIV continues at epidemic levels in the African American community in the Houston area. Compared to other ethnic communities, a greater percentage of the African Americans are being infected by HIV, progressing from HIV to AIDS, and dying of AIDS.

One reason a greater proportion of African Americans with HIV and AIDS are dying is that, compared to other ethnic communities, HIV infection among African Americans is being detected and treated later, and adherence to medication is worse.

By 1998, African Americans represented the majority of the newly diagnosed AIDS cases in the Houston area and, within the African American community, heterosexuals are the risk group most likely to progress from HIV to AIDS.

MSM continue to be the largest group of African Americans living with AIDS – although if current trends continue, heterosexuals will be the largest group in the near future.

The greatest care needs among African Americans are outpatient treatment, transportation, food, and rental assistance. The highest barriers to receiving services are transportation, red tape, lack of treatment knowledge, and lack of insurance coverage.