

EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE FUNDING: UNDERSTANDING A CHANGING EPIDEMIC

M•A•C AIDS FUND AND COUPLES VOLUNTARY COUNSELING AND TESTING (CVCT)

M•A•C AIDS FUND

The M•A•C AIDS Fund (MAF), the heart and soul of M•A•C Cosmetics, was established in 1994 to support men, women and children affected by HIV/AIDS globally. As the third largest U.S.-based private donor for HIV/AIDS causes, MAF is a pioneer in HIV/AIDS funding, providing financial support to organizations working in underserved under resourced regions and populations, both in the U.S. and internationally. To date, MAF has raised \$224 million (USD) exclusively through the sale of M•A•C's VIVA GLAM Lipstick and Lipglass donating 100% of the sale price to fight HIV/AIDS.

In 2010 as part of its special initiative focused on young MSM of color, MAF awarded a grant to Emory University to support an adaptation of couples HIV counseling and testing (CVCT) for male couples, developed in response to the rising rates of HIV infection among MSM in the U.S. In 2009, 61% of new HIV infections in the US were among MSM.⁶⁰ CVCT is an HIV testing service in which partners participate in all phases of HIV testing as a couple, including pre-test counseling, testing, and post-test counseling. First developed in the late 1980s as an intervention for heterosexual couples in Rwanda, CVCT has become a mainstay of HIV prevention programs in Africa. Despite studies demonstrating a reduction in HIV transmission among serodiscordant couples (where one partner is HIV-positive and the other is HIV-negative) by 50%,⁶¹ CVCT has not been implemented in the U.S. where HIV counseling and testing services remain largely focused on the individual.

Armed with research from Africa showing that around 60%⁶² of new HIV infections come from main—or cohabitating—partners, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began to investigate the role of main partners in HIV transmission among MSM in the U.S. Early research found that the majority of new infections among MSM

are likely due to sex with main partners.⁶³ In a 120-couple randomized trial, one-in-five couples were found to be discordant, and 12% of all men tested were HIV positive.

Emory University took the lead in adapting CVCT as a new intervention, called *Testing Together*, for MSM couples in the U.S. By targeting MSM—the largest population group at-risk for HIV in the U.S., and the only one in which rates of HIV infection continue to grow—the initiative aligns with goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS). For example, the NHAS has a goal of reducing new HIV infections by 25% by 2015. Based on the success of CVCT in Africa, knowledge of HIV status of the MSM couples that participate in the U.S. pilot is expected to reduce HIV transmission within discordant couples by half. The provision of supportive services to the couples that participate in the intervention is also expected to promote the stability of couples, which plays an important role in promoting linkages to care. Finally, in terms of reducing health disparities, 80% of the men tested in the U.S. pilot were African American, indicating that this new HIV intervention is also acceptable to MSM of color, a target population of the NHAS.

With support from the M•A•C AIDS Fund, *Testing Together* has now moved out of a research setting into four clinics in Atlanta and Chicago, two cities with high HIV/AIDS rates, and large populations of African American and Hispanic MSM. The goal is to test 400 couples over the next year, and to learn more about the acceptability of the intervention from a broad array of counselors and participants.

"M•A•C AIDS Fund support is serving as a critical bridge as we move this from an academic process to the real world. We will now be able to offer community-based organizations and health departments good guidance on how best to implement this important new service."

– Patrick Sullivan, DVM, PhD, Associate Professor, Emory University

60 The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. *The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the United States*. August 2011. Available at: www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/3029-12.pdf.

61 Sullivan and Stephenson. "Couples Voluntary HIV Counseling and Testing for Men Who Have Sex With Men." *GMHC Treatment Issues*. September 2011. Pgs 2-4.

62 Dunkle KL, et al. "New heterosexually transmitted HIV infections in married or cohabiting couples in urban Zambia and Rwanda: an analysis of survey and clinical data." *Lancet*. 2008 Jun 28;371(9631):2183-91.

63 Sullivan et al. "Estimating the proportion of HIV transmissions from main sex partners among venue-attending men who have sex with men in the 5 US cities." *AIDS*. 2009; 23(9):1153-62.