

LOCAL NEWS | [www.expressgaynews.com](http://www.expressgaynews.com)

## **Local AIDS agencies get prevention \$ for poz men**

**Program is part of a new approach to get prevention message to already infected men**

By PHIL LAPADULA

Feb. 25, 2005

Two local HIV/AIDS service agencies have recently received federal funds for a prevention program aimed at HIV-positive people.

The programs are part of a larger, national new effort by AIDS experts to redirect the HIV-prevention message to men who are already infected by the virus.

AIDS Project Florida in Fort Lauderdale and the South Beach AIDS Project in Miami Beach both received funding for the program through the Florida Department of Health.

The L.I.F.E. program, which was first launched in San Francisco seven years ago, seeks to reduce the spread of HIV from HIV-positive to HIV-negative individuals by focusing on "co-factors," such as substance abuse, social isolation and depression that can lead HIV-positive individuals to engage in risky sexual behavior.

The funding for the program comes at a time when new AIDS cases are on the rise in Florida. Last week, state health officials reported a 24 percent increase in new AIDS cases in the state.

### **Reasons for shift to programs for positives**

Recently, federal funding for HIV prevention has shifted away from the HIV negative population and toward prevention for positives programs.

Jeff Leiphart, founder of the L.I.F.E. program and director of the Shanti L.I.F.E. Institute in San Francisco, said that prevention programs aimed at people who are already HIV-positive have proven to be effective and cost-effective in an era of limited health-care resources.

"In order to create a new HIV infection, you need a positive and a negative person to come together," Leiphart said.

"So it didn't really make sense to focus on only one half of the equation. The number of at-risk negative people is dramatically larger than the number of positive people, so in an era of shrinking resources it makes sense to focus on the smaller group to prevent new infections."

In addition, Leiphart said it is easier to locate HIV-positive people because many are receiving treatment within the health-care system.

"Getting high-risk HIV negative people into prevention programs has been problematic because there's not a compelling reason for them to do so," Leiphart said. "It is also difficult to locate them."

### **APFL's HIV+ prevention budget doubled**

The state nearly doubled APFL's funding for prevention for positives, increasing it from \$96,000 to \$190,000, when the agency decided to launch the L.I.F.E. program, said Will Spencer, executive director of APFL.

Spencer said the program was launched in January, and L.I.F.E. workshops are scheduled to begin in March. The agency has hired a new staff person for the program, Spencer said.

The L.I.F.E. program money will be used to enhance APFL's three-year-old PALS program, a program for HIV-positive people that focuses on issues such as nutrition, fitness and medication adherence.

"Prevention messages must address underlying issues, such as self-esteem and social support," said Manuel Rodriquez, director of education for APFL. "If a person is depressed, he is more likely to engage in unprotected sex."

**Risk of co-infection**

Rodriguez said the program's prevention message will also emphasize the risk of co-infection for HIV-positive patients, discrediting the myth that HIV-positive people "have nothing to lose" by engaging in unsafe sex.

"The last thing you want is to be co-infected with hepatitis or another HIV strain," Rodriguez said.

Preventing and treating substance abuse will be another major focus of the program.

"Crystal meth will destroy your immune system and help HIV to replicate faster," Rodriguez said. "Crystal meth also reduces the effectiveness of HIV meds and affects a person's decision making regarding safer sex."

South Beach AIDS Project is currently recruiting clients for its L.I.F.E. program. Alex Prado, director of prevention at South Beach AIDS Project, said the program's three-hour workshops will focus on co-factors such as sexual risk behavior, nutrition, hygiene, crisis coping and life purpose. He said the workshops would also include visualizations and yoga.

---

© 2005 The Express Gay News | A Window Media Publication