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For Immediate Release
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HIV Prevention Working Group Hosts Town Hall Staggering Statistics for MSM Demand Action

Washington DC - Today, Mayor Adrian M. Fenty and officials from the DC Department of Health (DOH) released the long-awaited results of a study on HIV-related risk behavior by men who have sex with men (MSM) in the District of Columbia, the 2008 MSM National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) Study.

To discuss the results of the study and to begin to strategize the city's response to the crisis within the gay community, the HIV Prevention Working Group will host a town hall meeting on Monday, March 29th, from 7:00-9:00pm at the DC Center. Local Council Members and DOH officials will attend the event.

The NHBS Project examines the behaviors of local populations at high-risk for HIV – heterosexuals, injecting drug users and MSM – on a rotating three-year cycle. The 2008 MSM Study, conducted by the George Washington University School of Public Health, interviewed 500 MSM, using a venue-based sampling method.

The results of the study are “staggering,” according to the DOH report:

- Fourteen percent of the study participants tested positive for HIV;
- Of those testing positive in the study, 40% were unaware of their diagnosis prior to the study;
- Among those that tested newly positive who had seen a doctor within the past year, only slightly more than one-third had been offered an HIV test by their health care provider.

"These figures indicate that a little less than half of MSM in the study who were positive did not know their status," says Daniel O'Neill, Chair of the HIV Prevention Working Group. "Moreover, not enough healthcare providers are routinely offering HIV tests as a basic standard of care, and MSM could certainly benefit from increasing their use of condoms, as well."

Twenty-five percent of African American participants tested positive for HIV, demonstrating the overwhelming toll the epidemic continues to have on MSM of color in the District. Despite 57.4% of MSM reported having used a condom during their last anal sex (a figure nearly twice that of local heterosexuals engaging in intercourse), high rates

of unprotected anal sex within networks of many partners of unknown serostatus continue to result in skyrocketing rates of transmission.

Although the MSM Study faced several methodological limitations, which skewed the selected subjects towards an older, higher income, more educated, and disproportionately white sample of men that largely frequented adult gay venues, the HIV Prevention Working Group believes the report answers critical questions about the behavior of MSM that are key to effectively responding to the epidemic.

As such, the DC Center encourages the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community to join local officials in developing a strategy at the upcoming town hall meeting to more effectively address the crisis highlighted by this report.

The HIV Prevention Working Group, a program of the DC Center, was formed in 2008 in response to the alarming rise in new incidence of HIV and other STDs among MSM within the District and beyond. The Working Group identifies gaps in the local HIV/STD prevention landscape, supports existing public health efforts, and initiates new prevention projects where there is a demonstrated absence and need. Ultimately, it aims to develop a coordinated strategy among the District's many and varied organizations doing prevention work for MSM. The Working Group meets the fourth Wednesday of every month at the DC Center.

The mission of The DC Center is to celebrate, strengthen, and support community among the LGBT residents and organizations of Metropolitan Washington, DC.

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