

HIV/AIDS

Study Proposal 08.10

1. Describe your project idea, including clearly defining the problems and specific policy questions to be addressed.

It has been 20 years (1988) since the Citizen's League looked at the issue of stopping HIV(AIDS) in Minnesota. During that period of time, the numbers of individuals living with HIV has increased dramatically, largely due to the medications that keep the mortality rates low. As a result, more Minnesotans than ever before are living with a communicable disease for which there is no comprehensive public health education plan coming from government or the private sector.

2. Why is this problem important?

HIV is a devastating illness that has an incredibly high fatality rate. It disproportionately impacts communities of color, gay/bisexual men and non-US born Minnesotans. And, it is a virus that is sexually-transmitted.

3. How could the Citizens League make a unique contribution?

The Citizen's League could revisit the plan it created in 1988 to determine (a) what worked and what didn't work and (b) how today's realities either help or hinder the efforts to do good public health education regarding AIDS.

4. What are prospects that project would yield recommendations that could be implemented and have a major impact on the problem?

The implication of the study's results could be for health plans to step up their efforts (currently almost nonexistent) to provide HIV education for subscribers, the government (MN Department of Health) could provide broad-based HIV education, physicians would learn about the recently-changed guidance regarding HIV testing.

5. Explain how this problem can be addressed by data, research, and reason? Identify probable sources for data and research.

There is a wealth of data available regarding risk behavior, populations impacted, etc. The challenge is pulling it together in one place that is not biased by government mandates for how the data are to be interpreted and used.

6. Explain how this proposal can be framed without partisan bias.

HIV remains a political issue -- that is the problem. Anytime sex, use of drugs and death are discussed, politics come up. That said, HIV knows no boundaries of political affiliation and has been a concern to those on the left and the right (as well as the center!)

7. Why would this project be attractive to members?

HIV is a growing problem in MN. The numbers that will be released by the MN Department of Health and the Minnesota AIDS Project on April 14, 2008 will attest to that. As the number of individuals living with HIV continues to grow exponentially due to falling death rates, the number of transmissions will follow suit as this is a communicable disease.

8. How would this project reach out to under-represented segments of the community?

HIV disproportionately impacts communities of color, most notably the African American community. That

said, there is only a handful of traditionally-African American CBO's or groups that have addressed the issue of HIV. HIV is an issue that demands discussion about race, class and sexual orientation -- all of which can often pit communities against each other.

9. What is the potential for making this issue visible to a broader public? Why?

There is a mandate that those of us who understand the increasing problems / risks that HIV poses in MN face as we work to bring this issue to the public. The domestic media has by and large abandoned any coverage of domestic AIDS issues -- AIDS has become an "over there" problem, e.g. "it's a terrible problem in sub-Saharan Africa, India, SE Asia and former Soviet States, but not here". attention to this problem from a group as citizen-based as the Citizen's league will help raise the profile and thus help to educate the public.

10. What resources—funding, experts, etc. might be available to support this project?

The MN AIDS Project has a great deal of expertise on the policies that impact our ability to provide good HIV education. Data exists at the MN Department of Health and other governmental entities (including Hennepin County) charged with administering federal grant programs for both HIV prevention and care. And for both prevention and care, there are consumer-driven advisory groups.