BOOM!ing in the Bronx

Business isn't the only thing expanding after two HIV and harm reduction services join forces.

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It's been a year since CitiWide Harm Reduction merged with Bronx AIDS Services. Today, the new organization—titled BOOM!Health—still battles HIV and drug use, but as the name implies, these issues no longer get top billing. "AIDS and harm reduction are part of our history and our core," says Robert Cordero, the group's president and chief program officer, "but we give equal weight to the other problems we are dealing with in the Bronx—poverty, access to medical care, overdoses, diabetes and hepatitis C."

In other words, BOOM!Health focuses less on specific medical conditions, like HIV, and more on the larger issues fueling them, like homelessness and injection drug use. To that end, BOOM!Health offers a menu of services, including onsite medical care, case managers to help with paperwork, communal meals through the Momentum Project, and a full-scale pharmacy (which is important since a few Bronx pharmacists were busted for crooked practices). As Cordero puts it: "It's really a holistic approach."

Adding to its current locations, BOOM!Health began construction on a five-story wellness center in the South Bronx, slated to open in January. It'll feature an LGBT and youth drop-in center plus a BOOM!Cafe and culture center that'll be operated by the youth as part of a job training program. "These are the same kids," Cordero says, "who end up on Christopher Street [in Manhattan] getting themselves into challenging situations because they don't have any place in the Bronx to socialize or stay safe and learn to become healthier. We're trying to check this at its core."

BOOM!Health's successful merger has Cordero urging other organizations and nonprofits to explore similar partnerships. His advice? Look for a group that complements but doesn't duplicate your work and funding stream; check your egos at the door; and don't wait until you are in crisis mode.
And we think a snazzy new name always helps!

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