Hear From Latino Gay and Bisexual Men Affected by HIV

Nine findings from ViiV Healthcare's Latinx Listening Initiative

September 15, 2020 By Trent Straube

While the United States has seen an overall trend of decreasing new HIV cases, HIV rates among Latino men who have sex with men have gone up. What's more, when tested for the virus, these men are more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS, meaning they've been living with HIV for years without care or treatment. Add to that a hostile political climate, a tough economy, language barriers and complicated issues of family, sex and religion, and it's clear that these men face unique challenges to maintaining their health.

To better understand and address these needs, ViiV Healthcare launched the Latinx Listening Initiative as part of its Positive Action for Latinx Men program. (Latinx is a gender-neutral term preferred by some members of the community.) Findings from the sessions are published in the report Here as I Am.

The cover of “Here as I Am,” a report by ViiV Healthcare’s Positive Action for Latinx Men program ViiV Healthcare/Christopher Gregory-Rivera

The report, which you can download for free in English and Spanish on ViiVHealthcare.com, was

released today, September 15, the first day of National Hispanic Heritage Month.

For the listening sessions, ViiV collaborated with community leaders and 41 organizations in 11 cities across the United States, including Puerto Rico, resulting in over 760 interviews with Latino gay, bisexual and trans men. ViiV worked with the Latino Commission on AIDS to assess how Latino gay men with HIV achieve good health outcomes, and ViiV partnered with storytelling platform Memoria to record sessions in a story booth.

You can listen to edited versions of some stories (each under three minutes) on ViiV's website. Stories include "Inspiration From a Best Friend," "Stigma and Sexual Health," "A Mother's Full Embrace" and "Finding Strength by Living My Truth."

In the Findings section of Here as I Am, the authors write: "We found that the biggest challenge for men in this study was navigating the mix of familial, societal and political responses to their multiple identities—as sons and brothers, as gay, bi or trans men, as men living with HIV and as Latinx men. In this uncertain landscape, family-like networks and providers that are highly trusted are especially important."

In a separate summary of its report, ViiV offers a snapshot of key insights from the initiative, divided into these two categories:

Context That Impacts Latinx Gay and Bisexual Men's Health

- Family (including chosen family) is central and essential to the work.
- Diversity reflects and affects men's everyday experiences, access to care and health outcomes.
- Mental health and substance use, often a response to environmental traumas, are central barriers to holistic health.
- Current national dialogue, policies and abuses around immigration have a powerful impact on HIV prevention, treatment and care.
- Stigma in its different manifestations is experienced and described differently everywhere.

Response Must Acknowledge That

- Developing and sustaining Latinx leaders and Latinx-led, community-based organizations is

critical for movement building.

- Resilience is actualized through proving oneself, community connections and giving back to the community.

- Affirming care providers who share a higher degree of trust and intimacy, who are knowledgeable and who represent the community are essential in delivering health care that helps men meet their health goals.

- Infusing language-appropriate materials and spaces in all programming is a key driver in improving health outcomes.

Of the participants in the listening sessions, 46% were living with HIV, 55% were open about their sexuality and the average age was 40.7. In terms of national origin, 29% were from Puerto Rico, 37% were from the U.S. mainland and 34% were born in another country.

In related POZ news, see "Meth and HIV Among Gay and Latino Men [VIDEOS]" and "ViiV's $3.7M COVID-19 Fund Will Support HIV Groups and Research."

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