

**VDH Division of Disease Prevention
Public Hearing Minutes
Richmond, VA
September 22, 2006**

The public hearing began at 12:30pm and there were forty-two attendees and five representatives from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

Ben Alonso, Health Care Planner for the VDH Division of Disease Prevention, opened the meeting with a brief overview of the public hearing process and explanation of ground rules for the meeting. Attendees were informed that questions and comments not asked during the meeting could be submitted afterwards for inclusion into the minutes.

Ami Gandhi, the HIV Prevention Community Planner for VDH, gave an update on HIV prevention activities and services. Participants were given an overview of the HIV Community Planning Committee and were encouraged to apply for membership. Information was also given, on behalf of Virginia Organizations Responding to AIDS (VORA), regarding a *Call to Action for Gay, Bisexual, and Other Men who have Sex with Men*. Attendees of the public hearing were encouraged to show their support of this Call to Action.

Attendees were asked what barriers they are facing in their communities to provide HIV prevention services as a result of the recent funding losses. One participant stated that HIV prevention messages have not been communicated in the African American community and more people are coming in for care and are sicker when they come in.

An advocate from the Emporia/Greensville area stated that there is only one provider in their area and that there is a lack of education. Also, being in a rural area leads to geographical discrimination, which makes people living with HIV/AIDS unaware of services available to them. There is also a sense of denial in the rural areas, especially in the Black community. More involvement is needed from area churches and other leaders. Also, children and young adults have a sense of invulnerability. David Bolter, from CHASE in the Crater Health District, stated that they provide trainings in the Emporia region. Representatives from 'Sisters' Keepers' in Richmond also offered assistance to the Emporia area.

One attendee stated that transportation is an issue in being able to reach at risk populations and that many areas do not have any funding to provide HIV prevention services. A suggestion was made for VDH to provide more training for providers and increase literature available. Also, another suggestion was made to provide incentives for rural providers to provide services.

An attendee asked why funding has decreased and why more money is not available. They were informed that Federal funding has decreased over the last 3 years

and State funding has not increased since 1989. They were also told that VDH has no control on funding and attendees were encouraged to advocate for more funding. Attendees were also told of the recent release of the African American Faith Initiative request for proposal.

Ben Alonso then gave an update of Health Care Services, including an update on Ryan White CARE Act (RWCA) reauthorization, the revision of the case management standards, additions to the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), the development of a State Pharmaceutical Assistance Program (SPAP) for ADAP and Medicare Part D clients.

A consumer that had received Ryan White funded services in a neighboring state before moving to Virginia asked why they had more money available for a wider array of support services. Mr. Alonso informed the consumer that the region they had lived in previously was part of a RWCA Title I Eligible Metropolitan Area (EMA), while the Richmond metropolitan area does not receive Title I funds. The additional funding source most likely contributed to the additional services clients in the area were able to receive.

A suggestion was made by another consumer that care sites conduct surveys to identify needs. Fred Wilson, program director for the Central Virginia HIV Care Consortium notified the consumer that the Central region does send surveys to its care providers on a bi-annual basis. However, not every consumer from every agency may receive the survey.

A consumer who had formerly been incarcerated spoke about his difficulties obtaining housing following his release. Because of the felony on his record, he is unable to get a job and is ineligible for housing funded by Section 8 or Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS (HOPWA).

An attendee from Sister's Keepers expressed a desire for more gas and food vouchers, dental and vision services, utility payments, and exercise programs. Fred Wilson informed her that the Central region has a substantial amount of supportive services, including transportation vouchers for primary medical care and dental care providers. Due to limitations in funding not all forms of supportive services can be paid for with Ryan White money. Providers and clients are encouraged to seek assistance for services not funded by Ryan White by utilizing existing local and state programs and charities.

By e-mail, a comment was submitted expressing a desire for increased funding for sexual health education and awareness using proven prevention methods to reduce the incidence of STDs and teen pregnancy.