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The Task Force Policy Institute Releases Report on Bisexual Health

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By Denise Penn

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, in collaboration with the BiNet USA, and the Fenway Institute in Boston, has released a groundbreaking report titled "Bisexual Health: An Introduction and Model Practices for HIV/STI Prevention Programming." The report was released in conjunction with National LGBT Health Awareness Week.

"We are extremely proud to be a part of this report," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the Task Force. "Bisexual people have suffered the blows of discrimination far too long. It is absolutely overdue that we open the door of the 21st century and address the realities of the lives of bisexual people. Bi invisibility and biphobia have a profound effect on the health of bisexual people."

According to the report, many bisexuals have negative experiences with health care providers, whether it is because they are afraid to come out to their providers or because their providers give them improper or incomplete information on HIV/STI prevention. Despite data confirming the existence of a significant bisexual population, sexual health issues affecting bisexuals have been under-represented in academic and professional literature.

"Data from the 2002 National survey of Family Growth, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that 1.8 percent of men and 2.8 percent of women ages 18 to 44 identify as bisexual. Also, 12.9 percent of women and 5.9 percent of men ages 18 to 44 report being attracted to both men and women," says Jason Cianciotto, research director of the Task Force Policy Institute.

In the report, sex educator and co-author Amy André provides an introduction followed by a brief review of available academic literature on issues affecting the health of bisexuals, with a focus on HIV and STI prevention. "Some people who experience attraction to both women and men use the word 'bisexual' to describe themselves, while others don't. Many lesbian, heterosexual and gay individuals have had sex with partners of more than one gender. This report speaks to their health as well. Factors such as race, age and gender may intersect with bisexuality and impact health care. These intersections are also examined in this report."

Locally, the Los Angeles-based Bienestar recently convened state legislators at the State Capitol to hear testimony by HIV experts and individuals living with AIDS about the increasing impact of HIV and AIDS on Latinos in California. In Los Angeles County, approximately 72 percent of Latinos with HIV develop full-blown AIDS within a year of receiving their HIV diagnosis.

Luigi Ferrer, a Massachusetts Public Health HIV contract manager and former president of BiNetUSA, points out that many HIV-positive Latinos are bisexual, and it is important for outreach to be sensitive to cultural differences "Many programs are doing HIV prevention work and outreach to Latino men. The combined oppressions of poverty and racism and homophobia have a cumulative effect."

The report outlines the work of Marshall Miller and Julie Ebin of the BiHealth Program at Fenway Community Health in Boston, suggesting model policies and practices that health care providers can replicate around the country.

Denise Penn is a past BinetUSA president and contributed to the Task Force report.