Symposium 10: Strategic approaches for addressing sexual health: lessons, challenges and opportunities (sponsored by the CDC)

**S10.1 ADDRESSING SEXUAL HEALTH IN CANADA**

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Following a decline in reported rates of reportable sexually transmitted infections into the late-1990s in Canada, rates have been rising steadily with over two-thirds of reported chlamydia and gonorrhea cases occurring among young people under 25 years of age. These increases have paradoxically occurred in the face of a decline in teenage pregnancy; an increase in condom use, a stable age of first sexual intercourse, and fewer lifetime sexual partners. Up to 35% of women and 15% of men report being coerced into sexual intercourse. Sexual minority adults experience higher rates of violent victimisation, including sexual assault, and rates of discrimination three times higher than heterosexuals. Sexual minority and gender variant individuals are up to seven times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexuals. The burden of poor sexual health in Canada is unevenly distributed across the population with a concentration of poor sexual health outcomes among the economically disadvantaged, in more isolated areas, and among sexual minority and gender variant populations.

Our approach to addressing sexual health embraces a population health philosophy. The approach does not focus solely on sexual behaviour, but on determinants that influence the contexts within which decisions and choices affecting sexual health are made. It is a multi-sectoral approach fostering partnerships across government departments and with community organisations. It is a holistic approach that does not focus solely on the physical aspects of sexual health, but on the emotional, mental, and social aspects as well.

As part of a symposium on national approaches to sexual health, this presentation will examine key experiences, challenges and opportunities encountered in the Public Health Agency of Canada’s approach to protecting and enhancing the sexual health of Canadians. In particular, it will highlight Public Health Agency of Canada’s leadership and commitment to sexual health through its investment in research to develop national indicators of sexual health and to collect baseline national data; present exemplary health and social interventions to create supportive environments to promote the sexual health of all Canadians; and share innovative methods used to engage members of vulnerable populations in the development and implementation of sexual health interventions.

**S10.2 DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO IMPROVE SEXUAL HEALTH IN THE USA**

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**Background**

The first formal U.S. government recognition of the importance of a sexual health framework for enhancing STD/HIV prevention—The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behaviour—was published in 2001. Since then, many measures of adverse health outcomes of sexual behaviour have improved only minimally or worsened, including HIV, STD, and teen pregnancy. CDC is committed to enhancing program impact for STD/HIV prevention and other programs by complementing traditional prevention efforts with a health promotion framework that comprehensively addresses the broader issue of sexual health.

**Methods**

We have developed a cross-CDC Sexual Health Steering Committee including Divisions of STD Prevention, HIV/AIDS Prevention, Viral Hepatitis, Adolescent/School Health, Reproductive Health, and Violence Prevention which works collaboratively with a Sexual Health Workgroup of the CDC/HRSA Advisory Committee on HIV and STD.

**Results**

Key objectives of the CDC sexual health effort include increased knowledge and awareness of and healthy/respectful attitudes regarding sexual health; increased use of high-quality, coordinated and integrated educational, programmatic, and clinical services; increased healthy, responsible, and respectful sexual behaviours; improved healthy and respectful sexual relationships, free of coercion; and decreased adverse health outcomes, including HIV/STD, viral hepatitis, unplanned pregnancy, and sexual and intimate partner violence. Initial efforts focused on a policy discussion paper and expert consultation on ‘A Public Health Action for...’