

## AIDS & TWO-SPIRITED

### *Here are the Facts!*

Two spirited (gay) Aboriginal males show a higher rate of HIV infection than any other Aboriginal group.

Men who have sex with men constitute 52.4% of infections among Aboriginal males.

### *Why are Two Spirited Men at Higher Risk?*

Although sex between two-spirited men is normal and healthy to engage in, anal sex without a condom is an extremely high risk behaviour.

Feelings of guilt and shame may surround the same sex activities of younger gay men. Alcohol and drugs are sometimes used to counteract these feelings. Impaired reasoning and judgement often result, leaving two-spirited men unable or unwilling to negotiate safer sex while under the influence.

Studies have show that gay men who have had experiences of sexual abuse when younger are often confused about their sexual orientation. Two-spirited survivors of residential school abuse may be unable to explore their same sex orientation in a safe and healthy way. Unresolved abuse issues often lead to depression, substance abuse, low self-esteem all of which may in turn lead to the kind of risky sexual and drug-use behaviour that puts

people at risk for HIV infection.

Gay men often internalize the negative attitudes they encounter about homosexuality. Messages received from churches, schools, leadership, and other institutions saying homosexuality is wrong can lead a gay man to believe he is worthless or deviant. Such feelings often lead to reckless behaviour that put him or her at risk for HIV infection.

### *What Can Be Done to Help?*

Two-spirited members of our communities must be encouraged to share and express their sexuality without fear of hatred or violence. Specific programs aimed at Two Spirited men and women must be developed in order to reach this high risk segment of our populations.

Support groups and workshops must be developed to address healthy sexuality, including homosexuality.

Homophobia is defined as a fear or hatred of homosexuals. Service providers must learn to address this problem in our communities.



This fact sheet was prepared by The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network located in Ottawa, Canada. CAAN is a National Coalition of Aboriginal people and organizations that provide leadership, support, and advocacy for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS regardless of where they reside. For more info call CAAN at 1-888-285-2226. Statistics taken from LCDC Epi-Updates.

