



HIV PREVENTION TRIALS NETWORK

## HPTN 061

### The BROTHERS Study

(Broadening the Reach of Testing, Health Education, Resources and Services for Black Men Who Have Sex With Men)

#### What is HPTN 061?

The BROTHERS study is a research study to see if certain strategies can show promise for slowing down the spread of HIV among Black men who have sex with other men (Black MSM). Another aim is to better understand the men's lives and how that relates to HIV risk. The study is ongoing and will finish participant visits in December 2011.

The research study was open to Black men who have sex with other men, regardless of their HIV status, who were 18 years old or older. Most participants had three visits spaced out over a year. At these visits, participants were asked questions about their past and current lives. They were offered testing for HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases, as well as an opportunity to work with a peer counselor who could assist them in getting connected to resources available in their community, such as medical care and social services.



*Note: Although in research the term "MSM" is used to describe men who have sex with men, the participants in this study most often define themselves as gay, bisexual, same gender loving, transgender, or in other ways.*

#### Why Black men?

Although it is estimated that Black MSM make up less than half of one percent of the U.S. population, recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that in 2009 over 20% of new HIV infections were diagnosed among Black MSM. This higher risk for HIV is particularly prevalent among younger Black MSM (ages 13-29), where there was a 48% jump in new infections between 2006 and 2009.

#### Who participated?

A total of 1561 men enrolled in six cities. These cities (and the local name of the study) were: Atlanta, GA (BROTHERS), Boston, MA (Project SOS), New York, NY (Brothers' Project/Project Achieve), Los Angeles, CA (The Brothers' Project), San Francisco, CA (Unity), Washington, DC (061). The participants in the study were diverse in terms of age, income, education and other characteristics.

## Study status

Much has been accomplished since the study began in 2008. Each site had to hire and train staff, strengthen relationships in their communities, generate support for the study and recruit participants. A key question at the beginning of the study was whether Black MSM would agree to participate. The number of men enrolled clearly shows that Black MSM were willing to volunteer their time, information and samples to participate in the study. In addition, more than 350 men worked with a peer health counselor at one or more study sites, and participants have come back for more than 2200 follow-up visits to date. This success speaks to the dedication and support of staff and community partners at each site.

## What results are still to come?

This project began with the goal of answering several specific questions:

- Would participants be interested in using HIV prevention components offered in this study, such as HIV testing, working with a peer counselor, receiving referrals for health care or other supportive services?
- Would these HIV prevention components show promise for slowing HIV infection?
- What individual sexual behaviors may be affecting risk for HIV?

Answering these questions can only be addressed once the data from **all** the participant visits is collected. As with any research study, it usually takes several months from the last participant visit until results are released. For the BROTHERS study we are expecting the last participant visits in December 2011.

While the results from the main study questions are collected, the project team is exploring many other questions that the data from HPTN 061 can answer. For example, team members want to know how HIV risk among Black men who have sex with men might be affected by their religious experiences, or perceptions of racism and experience of homophobia, or by sexual abuse while a child.

The first major presentation of results is planned for the summer of 2012 at the International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC. A major paper announcing study results is expected in November 2012.

## As HPTN 061 winds down, what happens next?

It will take several months to determine if the results of HPTN 061 indicate the need for a follow-up study. Recent HIV prevention studies have shown that men who had sex with men could lower their risk of HIV infection if they took a pill once a day containing medicine usually used to treat people already infected with HIV. This prevention approach is called PrEP. Could “PrEP” lower the risk of HIV for Black men who have sex with men? This is an important question, one that the HPTN 061 sites would be perfectly poised to investigate. Efforts are underway to secure funding and approval for such a study, but it will take time, hard work and investment to conduct this or any other research study. Therefore, it will be critical to keep funding strong for research on preventing HIV among Black MSM so there can be more than one study underway at a time, and to prevent funding gaps.

**HPTN thanks the 061 protocol team, community working groups and participants who helped make this study possible, and a special thanks to NIH for funding the 061 study.**

To learn more about the HIV Prevention Trials Network, visit [www.hptn.org](http://www.hptn.org). Follow HPTN on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter @HIVptn](#)

