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TESTING TOGETHER COUPLES HIV TESTING AND COUNSELING

AIDS Partnership Michigan (APM) is excited to announce **TESTING TOGETHER**, a ground breaking new HIV testing and counseling service for male couples/sexual partners. Officially known as Couples Voluntary Counseling and Testing (CVCT), **TESTING TOGETHER** provides an opportunity for male couples/sexual partners to get tested for HIV together and receive their results together in a safe, neutral environment in a way that affirms their relationship and allows for open discussion about safer sex. Testing together and receiving your results together can start an ongoing healthy conversation between partners about HIV in their relationship, and allow them to talk openly about building a risk reduction plan together. Trained counselors help the couple through discussions about not only their HIV test results but assist the couple in developing skills for addressing issues around HIV and having continued dialogue about sex within the context of their relationship.

CVCT was first developed more than 20 years ago and utilized with heterosexual couples in Africa and found to reduce HIV transmission by more than 50%. The intervention was adapted for use with male same-sex couples by Emory University researchers, Patrick Sullivan and Rob Stephenson. Focus groups and clinical trials were conducted in Atlanta and Chicago to refine the adaptation of the intervention. HIV test counselors are or have been trained in Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and now Detroit.

“There are two trends fueling Testing Together. One, the number of gay Americans telling the U.S. Census they're living with same-sex partners nearly doubled in the past decade, to about 650,000 couples. About half those of same-sex partnerships are men who have sex with men (MSM). Additionally, recent research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control suggests that up to 68 percent of new HIV infections in MSM come from a main sex partner, not from casual sex, in part because main sex partners are more likely to forgo condoms” notes Hank Millbourne, APM’s Associate Executive Director. “Furthermore there are few interventions or vehicles that affirm male same-sex relationships, **Testing Together** does that in a very honest and open way.”

Couples/sexual partners will be screened separately to determine their eligibility for the service and if eligible will be given a short survey about their relationship. They will then meet with a counselor, discuss risk factors and get tested together. When the results are ready in about fifteen (15) minutes, the counselor will provide them to the couple together. APM is currently the only agency in Michigan with counselors trained to provide this service. The service will officially launch at four APM HIV test sites (APM Main Office –Detroit, APM Pontiac Office, Affirmations Community Center and the Ruth Ellis Center) , beginning October 1, 2012 and will be by appointment only initially.

For more information on **TESTING TOGETHER** or to schedule an appointment, contact Clarence Peoples at APM’s Main Office at 313-446-9820 or the Michigan HIV/AIDS/ STD Hotline at 1-800-872-AIDS (2437).