

## 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on **HIV/AIDS, STDs, & STIs**

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### **Fighting HIV stigma and homophobia in African American communities to reduce disparities and new infections among black MSM**

**Robert Newells**  
AVAC PxROAR, USA

Among gay and bisexual men, black/African American gay and bisexual men, especially those who are younger are the group most affected by HIV according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2010, they accounted for almost as many new HIV infections as white gay and bisexual men, despite the differences in population size of African Americans compared to whites. According to published research, stigma, homophobia, and discrimination put MSM of all races and ethnicities at risk, particularly black MSM. A focused effort to reduce stigma associated with HIV, particularly in African American communities, which bear a disproportionate burden of the epidemic is required to reduce infection rates among black MSM. Homophobia experienced by black MSM may be particularly damaging because black MSM typically encounter homophobia from individuals embedded within their social environments, including their families and churches. Faith leaders and their institutions have been identified in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy as having a vital role to serve in reducing HIV-related health disparities and the number of new HIV infections by promoting non-judgmental support for persons living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS and by serving as trusted information resources for their congregants and communities. African American faith leaders and churches must be educated and engaged in an effort to eliminate stigma as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy targeted at black MSM.

#### **Biography**

Robert Newells has been active in local and national HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment efforts since 1999. Since 2012, he has been an ARV-based prevention research advocate with AVAC's Prevention Research, Outreach, Advocacy, and Representation (PxROAR) program, and he works with African American faith communities to address stigma and homophobia as the Umoja California Outreach Chair for the Coalition of Welcoming Congregations of the Bay Area and a member of the East Bay HIV Faith Collaborative.

[newellsrobert@gmail.com](mailto:newellsrobert@gmail.com)