

University of Massachusetts Medical School

Community Health Clerkship
Health Advocacy

IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE IN AN UNDERSERVED LATINO COMMUNITY

Advocacy Organizations	
What are some Local organizations that do advocacy work?	AIDS Project Worcester, North Shore AIDS Health Project, Greater Lawrence Family Health Center
What are some State level organizations that do advocacy work?	AIDS Action Committee, Latin American Health Institute of Boston, MassCARE
What are some National level organizations that do advocacy work?	CHAMP (Community Health And Mobilization Project), AHF (AIDS Healthcare Foundation), National Minority AIDS Council, Latino Commission on AIDS
What are some International organizations that do advocacy work?	The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, The Clinton Foundation, International AIDS Society, UNAIDS
Advocacy Issue	
Looking at the State, National, and/or International level, at the websites or information from the organizations above, what is a major area of advocacy at this time? <i>Try to choose an advocacy issue that will in some way affect the local community.</i> Advocacy specifically refers to promoting legislation, policies or specific budgetary appropriations that positively affect a health issue. This may occur through decreasing barriers to accessing health services, providing an infrastructure conducive to effective health promotion programs, or directly increasing the resources and infrastructure of the public health system.	The topic of HIV testing procedures in Massachusetts is currently a major area of advocacy. Under current Massachusetts law, it is illegal to perform an HIV test without getting the patient's explicit written consent. However, the CDC has recently released guidelines for HIV testing that recommend that testing be done routinely for all patients age 13-64, regardless of risk factor, without written consent. There is currently a law being considered by the Massachusetts House of Representative that would change the law in order to accommodate the CDC recommendations.
What specific law, policy or appropriation is being advocated for?	The bill being considered by the Massachusetts House of Representatives is House bill H.2209. The law that currently governs HIV testing procedures in Massachusetts is Chapter 111, Section 70F of Massachusetts General Law.
Who is doing the advocating? (Which organizations?)	Some advocacy groups are advocating passing Bill H.2209, which would lift the requirement for written consent being performed for HIV testing. These groups include the Massachusetts Medical Society and the American Academy for HIV Medicine. Other advocacy groups want to defeat the bill and keep in place the requirement for written consent. These groups include AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, the ACLU HIV/AIDS taskforce and the GLAD HIV Law Project
Who is being lobbied?	The Massachusetts House of Representatives.

Whom will this issue affect?	This issue affects all healthcare providers and all patients in Massachusetts, because if the bill is passed, HIV testing will likely become a routine part of the medical care that all patients age 13-64 receive, regardless of their risk factor.
Were they or will they (in your opinion) be successful?	We are not confident that H.2209 will be passed.
Why or why not? What do they need to be more successful?	In order for HIV testing to become more routine, it is not entirely necessary for the Massachusetts law to change. Even under current law, healthcare providers can still encourage all their patients to be tested, though obtaining written informed consent does take more time. Therefore, we are not confident that the policy-makers will see a strong reason to change the policy. Furthermore, many patient-privacy advocates in the HIV community are not in favor of changing the procedure. In order to gain more support for a policy change, advocates for H.2209 need to do more to convince their opponents that patients' privacy and wishes will still be respected.
What are the consequences if they are not successful?	If they are not successful, Massachusetts law will remain as it is, and written consent will still be required for HIV testing.
If they are not successful, what other strategies can be used to achieve the same goal?	Routine testing for HIV could still be put into place, though it would be more difficult to implement because healthcare providers would have to spend extra time with each patient obtaining written informed consent.
How can physicians and/or nurses be involved in this advocacy issue?	Physician and nurses are in a unique position with regard to this issue. Though their day-to-day responsibility is to protect the wishes and privacy of their patients, they are also in a position to appreciate the potential public health benefits of making HIV testing more routine. Healthcare providers who are in favor of adopting CDC guidelines can be involved in this issue by being vocal about what benefits they think will come of it, as well as by providing assurance to the public that procedures to protect the wishes of the patient will be in place.