

## N2Men site to reach GBT men in South Bay

Published 08/18/2011

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Health Trust CEO Frederick Ferrer

A San Jose-based nonprofit is set to launch a website offering a single stop for information on HIV and sexually transmitted diseases to young gay, bi, and transgender men. The Health Trust, which provides non-medical HIV services, as well as grants and advocacy, will launch N2Men.org on Saturday, August 20. Among other topics, the site will feature information on the best ways to protect against STDs, where to get an HIV test in San Jose, and places to meet other men who are “into men” in Silicon Valley. The agency wants to offer “frank answers to intimate questions that gay men may not feel comfortable asking their doctors or friends,” a statement said. A blog by Dr. Frank Spinelli, a gay New York internist and author of *The Advocate Guide to Gay Men’s Health and Wellness*, is also expected to be among the offerings.

Health Trust CEO Frederick Ferrer said in an interview, “Even though we’re in Silicon Valley, there is not a good online presence” to get information similar to what the site will offer. The agency is promoting prevention. “Having an STD raises the likelihood of HIV infection,” added Patty Fisher, director of policy and communications at the Health Trust. Although “HIV is not necessarily rising, STDs are rising at an alarming rate,” Fisher added. According to Santa Clara County data that Fisher provided, there were nearly 6,000 new chlamydia and gonorrhea infections in Santa Clara County reported in 2010. Officials suspect the actual number of infected people is likely much higher.

Primary and secondary syphilis cases increased 38 percent in the county between 2009 and 2010, according to the data, which also show that almost 90 percent of new syphilis cases are among men who have sex with men. The highest proportion – 41 percent – is among people who are 20 to 29 years old.

### Outreach

For the launch of <http://www.N2Men.org>, 20 gay men will have been given some training on HIV and other STD prevention and will be at San Jose’s LGBT Pride festival. The Pride celebration begins the same day the website launches. Ferrer, who’s openly gay and HIV-negative, said other outreach targets would include gay bars and San Jose’s WaterGarden bathhouse.

Craig Gawlick, a 29-year-old gay man who lives in Mountain View, is one the people who’s been trained as a peer counselor. He’ll be at Pride this weekend to help publicize the site. He said he grew up in Santa Clara County and there wasn’t a centralized place to find information on things like testing “or anything to do with being gay.” Gawlick said he gets tested regularly, and he’s STD free and HIV-negative. He spoke of the need for a site like N2Men.org. He said doing a Google search for STD and HIV information “has spotty results right now for Santa Clara County. A lot of websites for different organizations aren’t up-to-date or they’re no longer working.” Ferrer addressed the site’s social aspects. He said they want to encourage people to have “social, healthy” interactions and provide them with alternatives to bars. He said in his agency’s view, “If you really are going to do HIV or STD prevention, you really have to think about what are the reasons why people don’t use protection even after they’ve received education. ... If education alone solved the problem, we wouldn’t have infection rates going up.”

### Funding

Ferrer, who said his agency would be doing most of the website work on its own, estimated the first phase of the site would cost about \$10,000. He said the second phase, which would feature more content, would be unveiled by the end of the year. That phase would probably cost another \$5,000, he said. The Elton John AIDS Foundation gave the Health Trust a \$75,000 grant to do HIV prevention and education work in the South Bay, Ferrer said. He said the website is just one project for which they’re using the funds. An Elton John foundation staffer didn’t respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

For more information, visit <http://www.healthtrust.org>.

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