The Last Drag Campaign: Countering the Tobacco Industry’s Targeting of the Gay and Lesbian Community

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> PROBLEM
• Overall smoking rate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) in California is 30.4% — nearly double that of the state’s general population.
• Among LGBTs, 18–24 year-olds have the highest smoking rate of 43.4%, which is 2.5 times higher than the general population in this age group.
• The tobacco industry aggressively targets LGBT persons through direct and indirect advertising, community outreach and sponsorships.
• Messages to LGBT community have been relatively absent from advertising until recently, creating positive responses to such overtures.
• Very few smoking cessation programs tailored specifically to LGBT individuals in Los Angeles County.

> OBJECTIVES
• To create awareness about the high smoking rates among LGBT individuals.
• To promote smoking cessation services specifically tailored to the LGBT community.

> METHODS
• A focus group of gay men and smoking cessation service providers was conducted to develop a communication campaign theme and messages to promote free smoking cessation services. The multi-faceted 3-month campaign branded with the unifying tag “Breath Easier. Play Harder.” was developed and consisted of four strategies:
  – Print ads designed specifically for gay publications that would drive smokers to quitting resources.
  – The first ever gay anti-smoking street team, conducting peer-to-peer outreach in bars and nightclubs to inform LGBTs about the free smoking cessation classes and to promote the Web site.
  – Aggressive media relations to broaden reach of message via general market, ethnic and LGBT media.

> RESULTS
• Thousands in target audience saw and/or interacted with street team.
• Communication campaign increased number of calls to smoking cessation providers.
• Last Drag LA Web site averaged 1,986 hits per day in the first month.
• Print advertising delivered more than 500,000 impressions.
• International AP wire story and photo resulted in hundreds of placements throughout country and around the world.
• More than 35 blogs discussed campaign (99% positive).

> CONCLUSIONS
• Ongoing communication campaigns that promote comprehensive smoking cessation services tailored specifically for LGBT individuals are needed.
• LGBT population is already overloaded with critical health messages. Communication campaign should promote cessation services in a non-judgmental manner to motivate smokers to quit.
• Communication strategies should include a lifestyle marketing component and target LGBT individuals at locations where they are most likely to smoke such as bars, clubs and gay pride festivals.