

## Convention on gay HIV+ men: a community initiative to incite MSM mobilisation

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### Enabling gay men living with HIV to speak about their situation

We know that gay men often develop sexual harm reduction strategies based on the knowledge of the partners' HIV status. Also, surveys in gay community settings reveal that about 15% of gay men in France are HIV positive. Yet, HIV/AIDS as such is no longer as much a priority among gay men as it once was.

AIDES, as a community-based association, collects everyday testimonials from HIV positive gays across France who feel they no longer have a place in their community. Therefore, AIDES decided to bring together HIV positive gays along with gay associations so the former could share their experiences and be heard.

### A safe space for 220 participants

The Convention was held over three days in November 2006. 220 HIV positive gays took part. Workshops were held on prevention, health, relations with the community, daily life and love and sex lives. In parallel, 50 delegates from French gay NGOs took this opportunity to work on the promotion of gay health and, specifically, the place they grant to HIV positive gay men in their own organisations.

The main points of the workshops were publicly presented to public authorities including the health ministry.

### Facing homophobia, serophobia and socio-economic precariousness

This event highlighted the difference between those infected before the arrival of highly-active antiretroviral treatments (in 1996) and those infected after their arrival. The latter are often younger and spoke of their discomfort when confronted with the physical effects of the illness on their elders. Also, there is a link between socio-economic precariousness and being HIV-positive. The double whammy of serophobia and homophobia can easily become a triple whammy by adding social inequality. For many the gay community is a place of discrimination and rejection. Bringing together such a large and diverse group of HIV positive gays gives a real validity to the conclusions. The presence of gay associations permitted a more efficient dissemination of the conclusions in gay communities.

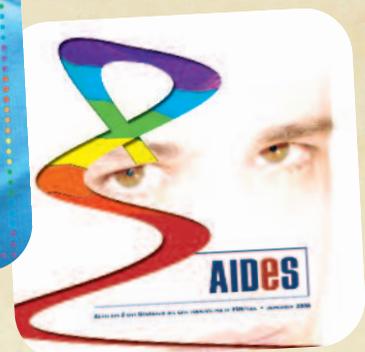
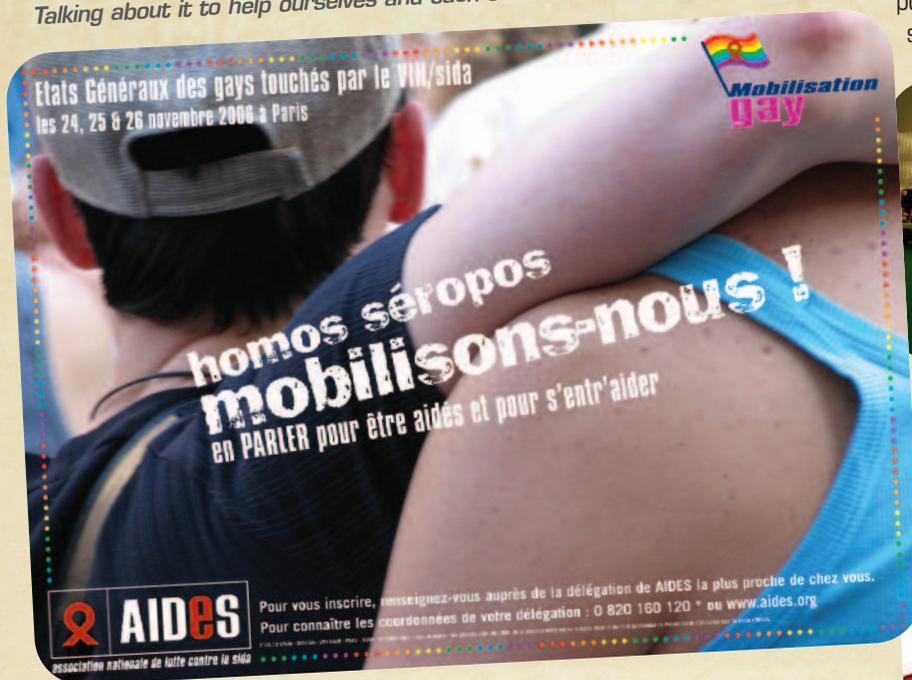
### Speaking about sex, aging, and one's HIV status

The participants expressed their wish to talk about sexuality and their HIV status. They would like to be able to talk things over more freely with HIV negative gays. Many participants also talked about the specific difficulties related to aging when you are HIV positive. These demands have to be transformed into actions. We must address in priority the taboo around being HIV positive in gay communities as it has major detrimental consequences on the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The outcomes and recommendations from this convention were widely disseminated in France via both a comprehensive 180-page book (5,000 copies) and a synthetic newsletter (100,000 copies). A concrete response: AIDES has since implemented several informal "sex weekends" that bring together both HIV positive and HIV negative gay men dedicated specifically to exchange about sexuality.

Convention for HIV positive gay men,  
24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> November 2006

HIV positive gay men, let's get together!  
Talking about it to help ourselves and each other.



### AIDES, a French NGO

Set up in 1984, AIDES is the largest HIV/AIDS community-based organisation in France, with centres in over 70 cities. We support partner organisations in Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

#### Our main goals:

- To inform vulnerable people about HIV/AIDS prevention and testing
- To support PLWHAs, (social & professional integration, therapeutic education)
- To advocate for the rights of PLWHAs.