



Five Year Report

Summary of
Research Findings

1995 to 2000

October 2000

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Thank you for five great years!



Has it really been five years since we launched the Vanguard Project? Where has the time gone? It doesn't seem so long ago that we were enrolling our first participants and distributing our brand-new promotional materials featuring John Ferrie's colourful artwork.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Vanguard participants for your ongoing participation in the study. It's been great working with you. You've been wonderful teachers; it's through you that our understanding of the gay community continues to expand and be enriched.

Since we launched the Vanguard Project in May 1995, we've enrolled over 1000 participants, conducted over 2700 HIV tests, collected over 1600 blood samples for storage and received over 2200 completed questionnaires.

We've also revised the questionnaire four times, produced three newsletters, several brochures and updates and sent out untold thousands of letters and birthday cards.

And that's not all - the Vanguard research team has also published four academic papers, written several others and had the privilege of presenting our findings dozens of times to the media and at national and international conferences.

None of this would have been possible, of course, without the cooperation and dedication of the Vanguard participants. You guys are great! Without your contributions over the years, there would

be nothing to report in this Five Year Report.

In addition to the Vanguard Project, Vanguard participants have been involved in a number of related studies over the past few years, including the Vancouver Injection Drug User Study (VIDUS), the Vancouver HIV Vaccine Trial, focus groups conducted by AIDS Vancouver's Man to Man Program, a qualitative counselling study coordinated by Michael Botnick and a two-phase clinical trial testing the effectiveness and counselling implications of the rapid HIV test kits.

We would also very much like to acknowledge the contribution of the project's Community Advisory Committee, which has met regularly since before the study began and continues to oversee it. We are also very grateful to the many medical clinics and physicians who have acted as test sites for this study.

We look forward to continuing to work with all of you in the future. Thanks again for your participation, cooperation and enthusiasm!

Steve Martindale and Mary Lou Miller have worked for the Vanguard Project since 1995/96, prior to which Steve worked at AIDS Vancouver and Mary Lou worked at the Bute Street Clinic.

Between the two of them they are responsible for recruiting and tracking participants. Mary Lou provides HIV testing and counselling at the Three Bridges Community Health Centre (formerly the Downtown South Community Health Centre) and Steve creates and distributes print materials and mail-outs from The Centre (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Centre).

Mary Lou and Steve have presented findings from the Vanguard Project to the media and community-based groups, as well as at national and international conferences, including talks on rapid HIV testing, post-exposure prophylaxis, characteristics of male sex trade workers and HIV incidence and risk behaviours. They were also co-authors on the published Vanguard papers.

Over the past four years Steve and Mary Lou have also played key roles in bringing to life a number of other projects, including the "Boys R Us" Boystown drop-in centre, the Monday Health Project, the Vancouver HIV Vaccine Trial, the hep A vaccination campaign and the clinical and counselling trials for the rapid HIV test kits.

Mary Lou and Steve

A Blast from the Past

“Hello from Baltimore!”



by **Steffanie Strathdee**
Former Vanguard Director

Greetings Vanguard participants!

Remember me? It's been two years since I passed the baton to Dr. Bob Hogg as the Director of the Vanguard Project to take up a faculty position at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health in Baltimore (U.S. of A). I still remember what my neighbour (note the Canadian spelling) said to me when I informed her of my upcoming move. "Ohmigod...the School of Hygiene? You start off doing AIDS research and now you are going to study sanitary napkins?" (Sigh...)

I freely admit that the most painful part of my move (besides leaving behind the bald eagles in my backyard) is being frequently mistaken as an American. In fact, I totally identify with the Molson commercial The

Rant, which you will appreciate does not receive air time on US TV channels.

So what have I been up to? The simple answer is more of the same. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (a phrase that when inserted casually into any conversation down here is guaranteed to make any American believe that all Canadians are bilingual). I am still focused on HIV prevention and am still amazed that the latest news story is about the dissidents who think HIV doesn't cause AIDS. (See what I mean about *déjà vu?*)

Since I began my career in AIDS research way back when, HIV infection rates among gay and bisexual men went down but have since gone up again. At the XI I I International Conference on AIDS in Durban, South Africa, in July 2000 (where my name tag read "USA/CANADA" as country of origin), my colleagues and I presented research from the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (the granddaddy of all HIV studies, known as the Big MACS). This study shows that even among men in their 40s, those with a relaxed attitude towards AIDS and those with "HIV burn-out" are four times more likely to have unprotected sex. Sound familiar?

AIDS is becoming more and more entrenched in minority communities. Among young gay and bisexual men across the US, the HIV infection rate among African-Americans is 20 times higher than among other gay and bisexual men. Some of my recent research has shown that among male injection drug users, those who have sex with men have among the highest HIV infection rates. In my mind, gay and bisexual men are still not being targeted effectively with prevention messages that are tailored to their own communities.

Until her departure to the United States in 1998, Dr. Steffanie Strathdee had been the Director of the Vanguard Project since the study began, as well as having been responsible for two other studies at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS. Steffanie continues to conduct HIV epidemiological research at the School of Hygiene & Public Health at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and she still provides input on the findings of the Vanguard Project. Her third paper based on Vanguard data has recently been accepted for publication.

Welcome from the Principal Investigator

Dear Vanguard Participants:

OK, I can almost hear the members of the Community Advisory Committee saying, "What about good news?" Well, we are moving closer to starting a large-scale "Phase III" clinical trial with a promising candidate HIV vaccine, which means that thousands of people like yourselves around the world will be asked to volunteer to see if it works in the real world. But maybe even that is not new to you, since in Vancouver you were at the leading edge in testing one of the first HIV vaccines.

I often reflect about my time with the Vanguard Project, how we agonised over what to call the study only to discover after the fact that our chosen name was shared by a horde of RVs (yes, recreational vehicles!) which I regularly see driving across US highways. (Note that I did not say "freeways.")

And here's a story that brought a smile to my face just last week: I was approached by the head researcher of the Baltimore MACS, who was lamenting that he needed help coaxing his back participants to the study after 16 years. (And you think you guys have it bad after five years of surveys!) I gave him some advice and days later he came back to me boasting that he had found the "best web site" designed for men participating in a "really cool" research study. Three guesses as to which site that was?

(Yep, <http://cfeweb.hivnet.ubc.ca/vanguard/project.html>)

With fond regards,

Steffanie Strathdee

Although I have never met most of you, I want to thank you for your participation in the Vanguard Project. Without your commitment there would be no research findings to study, to present or to publish.

I am also appreciative of the hard work of Steffanie, Steve, Mary Lou, Bonnie, "Sister C" and the Community Advisory Committee in starting this study and keeping it alive.



They were instrumental in ensuring the long-term success of the project.

I would like to thank everyone else involved in this study, including Aslam Anis, Erin Strutt, Jean Shoveller, Katherine Quayle, Marieke Steenstra, Michael V. O'Shaughnessy, Nada Gataric, Nancy McLean, Paul Perchal, Richard Harrigan and Terry Trussler, as well as the individuals described in more detail

in the Staff section of this report. Without their involvement, the project would not have been able to make such an important contribution.

The study has also thrived from the financial and in-kind support it has received from the National Health Research Development Program of Health Canada, the Vancouver/ Richmond Health Board, The Centre, the BC Centre for Disease Control, local AIDS-care physicians and clinics, AIDS Vancouver, BCPWA and other community organisations and BioChem Pharma and BioChem ImmunoSystems.

Starting from the initial recruitment in May 1995 to last month's presentations at the International AIDS Conference in South Africa, this report summarises the project's work over the last five years. Although it does not mention all the work that has been done by our group or all the people who have participated in the project, the report will give you a synopsis of the study's accomplishments.

Much has been accomplished in the last five years. None of it would have been possible without your support and commitment to the study. Thanks again!

Bob Hogg

Dr. Bob Hogg is a demographer who is the principal investigator of the Vanguard Project. He is also the Director of the Population Health Program at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and an Associate Professor in the Department of Health Care and Epidemiology at UBC. Along with Dr. Julio Montaner, he is the local site investigator of the VaxGen phase III HIV vaccine efficacy trial being conducted in Vancouver. He is interested in the natural history of HIV disease, the determinants of HIV infection and the impact of antiretroviral therapy on health and quality of life and in issues regarding access to antiretroviral therapy in developing nations. He has presented Vanguard data at national and international conferences and co-authored numerous Vanguard papers.

Community Advisory Committee

In October 1994, before the Vanguard Project was launched, a Community Advisory Committee was established to provide input and feedback on the direction of the study. Representation was solicited from a wide range of local community-based organisations, including AIDS service organisations, youth services, ethnocultural and Aboriginal agencies and gay and lesbian student groups.

The Community Advisory Committee has met repeatedly over the years and has been invaluable in providing us with a range of perspectives, communicating the concerns of various communities, and suggesting effective methods of recruitment and publicity.

The Advisory Committee has also helped us interpret and publicise the findings of the study.

The following individuals and agencies are currently represented on the Community Advisory Committee:

Andrew Barker.....Man to Man Program, AIDS Vancouver
Bill Coleman.....STD Clinic (formerly ATEC)
Chuck Lafferty.....Urban Native Youth Association
Daphne Spencer.....BC Centre for Disease Control (BC CDC)
Evan Mo.....Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS
Garry Johnson.....formerly "Sister C"
Henry Koo.....AIDS Community Action Program (ACAP)
Jenn Horgos.....Gab Youth Services, The Centre
Joe Leung.....BC Persons with AIDS Society (BC PWA)
Justin Jagosh.....The Centre/LGBT PHAC
Kathy Churchill.....Vancouver Native Health Society
Matt Keri.....Three Bridges Community Health Centre
Nancy McLean.....Vancouver HIV Vaccine Trial
Paul Harris.....Street Nurse Outreach Program
Paul Perchal.....Education Department, AIDS Vancouver
Peter Granger.....Three Bridges Community Health Centre
Ron Fremont.....YouthCO AIDS Society
Terry Trussler.....Community-Based Research Centre
Victor Peralta.....Vancouver Native Health Society

For more information about any of these groups, contact the Vanguard Project or visit the following web sites:

<http://aidsvancouver.bc.ca>

<http://www.intergate.bc.ca/business/thecentre>

<http://www.youthco.org>

The Vanguard Project...

is an ongoing study of HIV rates and risk factors among young gay and bisexual men in the Greater Vancouver area. Since the study was launched in 1995, over 1000 participants have been recruited and more continue to join each month.

Who can participate?

To be eligible to participate in the Vanguard Project, you must be between 15 and 30 years of age and live in the Lower Mainland. The study is open to all men who have sex with men, whether you define yourself as gay, bisexual, straight or transgendered.

All information gathered by this study, including the names of participants, will be kept strictly confidential. You can participate in the Vanguard Project without providing your real name or any other information about yourself. We respect whatever degree of privacy you're comfortable with, as long as we have some way of communicating with you from year to year. You can, for instance, provide us with a postal box instead of your street address or register by e-mail instead of over the phone.

About the Vanguard Project

What's involved?

Participating in the study is easy. All you have to do is visit a doctor or a medical clinic for an annual blood test and sample and complete a self-administered questionnaire.

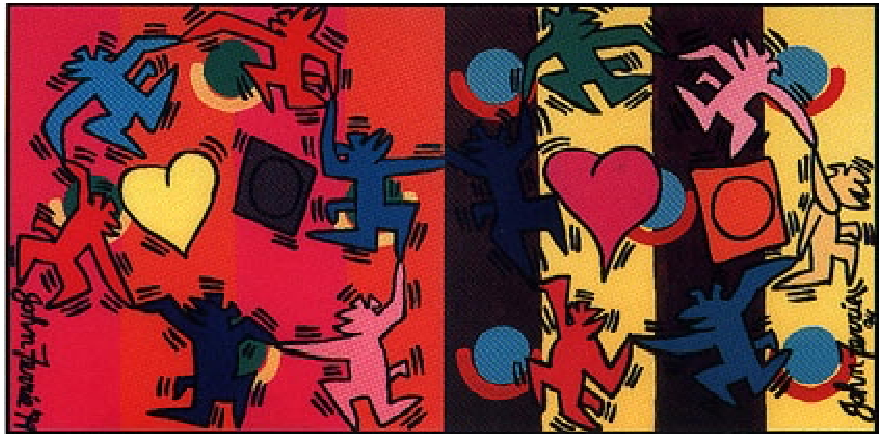
If you don't have a doctor you feel comfortable with, we will refer you to one of the doctors or clinics participating in the study. Whether or not you receive your own test results is entirely up to you.

Once a year you will be contacted by the Project Coordinator reminding you that it's time for your annual visit. And that's all there is to it!

Why should I participate?

For your own health.

The Vanguard Project can assist you in accessing better health care. Looking for a gay-positive doctor? We can refer you to physicians who are familiar with health issues affecting men who have sex with men.



Concerned about confidentiality? We can direct you to medical clinics where you can be tested for HIV without having to provide your name or BC Care Card number.

While you're there, you can also be screened for other STDs, have a complete medical exam or speak with someone who understands your concerns and who won't pass judgment on your sexual behaviour. Think of the Vanguard Project as a partner in your own health.

For the health of the community.

As well, the Vanguard Project has very important implications for the community, as the

results of this type of research directly affect public policy. For instance, an accurate picture of HIV-infection rates influences decision-making on the distribution of government funds for health care and AIDS education.

Who is behind the study?

The Vanguard Project is being conducted by the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS at St. Paul's Hospital and the University of British Columbia. The study is funded by a grant from the National Health Research and Development Program, Health Canada. ■

About the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and the VLAS

Under the direction of Dr. Martin Schechter and colleagues, the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS initiates and coordinates epidemiological studies, distributes drugs for people with HIV/AIDS, provides education to health care providers, conducts and develops innovative laboratory procedures and participates in clinical trials. Research supports each of these initiatives.



British Columbia
Centre for Excellence
in HIV/AIDS

The Centre for Excellence is located on the sixth floor of the Burrard building in St. Paul's Hospital, in downtown Vancouver.

The Vancouver Lymphadenopathy-AIDS Study (the VLAS) was a longitudinal study of HIV rates, risk factors and disease progression in a cohort of 1000 gay men aged 18 to 75 in Vancouver. Running from 1982 to 1998, the VLAS was the largest and longest-running study of its kind in Canada.

Participants in the VLAS were recruited through the offices of six Vancouver physicians, several of whom are also involved in the Vanguard Project.

Originally biannually and subsequently on an annual basis, VLAS participants completed questionnaires, had medical exams and submitted blood samples for HIV testing and storage.

Like the Vanguard Project, the objective of the VLAS was to monitor the rate of HIV infection in this population and to examine the social determinants of risk behaviour, as well as to study the natural history and progression of HIV-disease and to provide information to improve the health of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Funded by the National Health Research and Development Program, Health Canada, the VLAS was a project of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS at St. Paul's Hospital, in cooperation with the University of British Columbia.

Some of the published findings of the VLAS are available in a 1996 publication entitled "HIV/AIDS Research in British Columbia: A Ten Year Retrospective." Copies of this book are available by request.

The VLAS