



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

MICHELLE SOLOMON
Acting District Manager

February 13, 2006

Thomas R. Frieden
Commissioner, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
125 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Re: Crystal Methamphetamine

Dear Commissioner Frieden,

We would like to thank Brett Larson, Director of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health for DOHMH for attending our last Housing, Health and Human Services (HHHS) committee meeting to discuss the local use of crystal methamphetamine ("meth") and other related substance abuse issues. Brett has met with us previously and has always been very responsive to our requests for information.

The use of crystal meth in our district was first raised just over one year ago, when the committee invited Bret, along with local health practitioners, to discuss the rising use of the substance in CD4. Recently, partly as a follow-up to this initial meeting, the HHHS committee convened a large and diverse group of health and substance abuse service providers within our district for a forum on substance abuse generally. Everyone in attendance expressed a strong and virtually unanimous concern about the current and potential negative impact of crystal meth abuse on our community, including noting the potential for expansion beyond the core user population to date.

The HHHS committee believes that there are several cogent reasons for the concerns expressed by the substance treatment providers at our forum. They are: The allure of a late night club capacity in our district which rivals that of any community in the world and threatens to grow even larger; their knowledge of the psychologically reinforcing aspect of crystal methamphetamine use, leading to repetitive usage, frequently including use of other, potentially harmful substances; evidence of unprotected, risky sexual activity precipitated and enhanced by this drug usage; manifestation of neglect of familial and societal participation and responsibilities by users, and incapability to address the public health consequences of their behaviors. Further, due to recent reportage that Mexican traffickers have now begun manufacturing and exporting this substance, we believe the major difference between the susceptible populations of the American far west, middle west and east coast markets are merely geographic.

While recognizing these very serious health impacts of crystal meth abuse, Brett reported that the Department's information suggested that the use of the substance had not spread beyond its

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primary user group (gay males), nor was it showing any signs of spreading beyond this group. Bret also mentioned that the use of crystal meth may have peaked over the last year or so.

We are hopeful that this picture proves to be accurate. Nonetheless, we would still be concerned about the inadequacy of current prevention and treatment resources for the primary population involved, especially given the apparent difficulty of effective intervention. There does not seem to be a stable or minimally adequate funding stream for the prevention, education or treatment services regarding crystal meth use and we expect to include these items as priorities in our budget requests this year.

In addition to our serious concerns about the lack of treatment options for the current user group, however, we also remain concerned about the potential for broader use of crystal meth. Ironically, as you no doubt saw, there have been two major articles in the New York Times about the crystal meth problem recently - the first, the day after our meeting. While the articles focused on use in other parts of the country, we know of no particular reason not to believe this pattern might spread to New York City. We urge the Department to vigilantly monitor signs of presence and abuse of this and similar "boutique" drugs among all populations citywide, as well as to strengthen its interventions directed toward current and likely user populations.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We hope that you will keep us informed on new trends and developments in this area.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4

Cc: Elected officials
Service Providers
Brett Larson