



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heart Disease, HIV/AIDS and Fitness Should Be Nation's Top Health Priorities, According to New Survey of Gays and Non-Gays

Witeck-Combs Communications/Harris Interactive survey also shows that more than half of all adults surveyed think federal research on lesbian and gay health is extremely important

ROCHESTER, N.Y.— March 15, 2004— According to national survey results released today by Witeck-Combs Communications and Harris Interactive®, when asked to identify (from among 22 current health issues) which they feel should be the nation's top three health care priorities, a majority of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) adults indicate that HIV/AIDS (50%) should be a top health care priority followed by fitness-nutrition-exercise (36%) and heart disease (34%).

Among heterosexual adults surveyed, four out of ten (42%) believe that heart disease should be a top national health care priority, followed by 33% who select HIV/AIDS and 30% who rank obesity as a top priority. Nearly equal proportions of GLBT and heterosexual adults (30% and 31% respectively) indicated that obesity should be a top national health care priority as well.

Responses to this question, overall, mark a shift from last year for the top three health priorities for GLBT respondents. Last year, GLBT respondents cited heart disease as their second and obesity as their third choice for the nation's top health priorities. This year fitness-nutrition-exercise edged out heart disease as the second health priority.

Overwhelmingly, GLBT adults (87%) say it is important for the National Institutes for Health (NIH) to conduct research on the health issues of lesbians and gays, and when asked that same question, well over half of heterosexual adults (57%) agreed.

These are highlights of a nationwide Witeck-Combs Communications/Harris Interactive study of 2,204 adults, of whom about six percent (6%) self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT). The survey was conducted online between February 16 and 20, 2004 by Harris Interactive, a worldwide market research and consulting firm, in conjunction with Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc., a strategic public relations and marketing communications firm with special expertise in the GLBT market.

"Recent medical news reports about obesity becoming our nation's number one killer may have influenced both GLBT and heterosexual responders to our health care priorities question this year," said Colleen Dermody, vice president for Witeck-Combs Communications.

"It is interesting that both heterosexual and GLBT Americans rate HIV/AIDS and heart disease as two of their top three health care priorities," continued Dermody. "As the national debate over gay marriage continues to

dominate headlines and percolate as a hot topic among heterosexual and GLBT Americans, there seems to be little debate over our nation's health care priorities."

Some key findings from this survey include:

- Nearly one-third of GLBT adults (31%) mentioned obesity as a top health care priority.
- Nearly a quarter (22%) of heterosexual adults indicated that substance/drug use should be a top health care priority, compared to 12% of GLBT adults.
- For 21% of heterosexual adults and 19% of GLBT adults, breast cancer is a top health care priority.
- Last year nearly one out of four (24%) GLBT adults said they had deliberately withheld information about their sexual practices from their doctor or other health care professional. This year the number who had withheld information went down to 21%. In that same question asked of heterosexual adults, the numbers were 5% in 2003 and 6% in 2004.

"We know that heart disease is a leading killer of women in the United States, and lesbians may be at even greater risk than heterosexuals," said Kathleen DeBold, executive director of The Mautner Project for Lesbian Health. "Common risk factors for heart disease among all women – including obesity and smoking – are even more prevalent in the lesbian community."

"The fact that LGBT people acknowledge that they withhold information that may help their doctors provide better quality medical treatment is a serious – and potentially life-threatening – problem," continued DeBold. "Eliminating the barriers to open communication between health care providers and their LGBT patients is essential to reducing mortality and morbidity among this medically underserved community," said DeBold.

"An overwhelming majority of people who responded to this survey feels that the National Institutes for Health should conduct research on the health issues of lesbians and gays," said Donald Hitchcock, national field director for National Coalition for LGBT Health. "As the body of evidence grows about health disparities experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, so too will the call for more research."

Notes on reading tables:

GLBT refers to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender respondents. The percentage of respondents has been included for each item. An asterisk (*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent. A dash represents a value of zero. Percentages may not always add up to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple answers from respondents answering that question.

**TABLE 1
NATIONAL HEALTH PRIORITIES**

“Next, we’d like to ask you about some national health issues and your experiences with healthcare. Which of the following do you feel should be the nation’s top three health care priorities?”

Base: All adults

	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%
HIV/AIDS	50	33
Fitness programs (nutrition & exercise)	36	20
Heart disease	34	42
Obesity	31	30
Tobacco use	20	14
Breast cancer	19	21
Substance/Drug use	16	22
Safe sex education	16	13
Depression/Anxiety	11	10
Domestic violence	11	19
Sexually transmitted disease (STDs)	10	12
Diabetes	10	17
Alcohol use	10	10
Stroke	5	9
Testicular cancer	5	1
Ovarian cancer	3	3
Colon cancer	2	6
Anal papilloma	2	1
Prostate cancer	1	5
Cervical cancer	1	3
Osteoporosis	-	1
Other health care priority	6	8

Note: The percentages above represent the net of total mentions given (a rating of 1, 2 or 3) to the individual items.

**TABLE 2
WHETHER PEOPLE WITHHELD INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUAL PRACTICES FROM DOCTOR**

“Have you ever deliberately withheld information about your sexual practices from your doctor or other health care professional?”

Base: All adults

	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%
Yes	21	6
No	77	93
Decline to answer	2	2

**TABLE 3
IMPORTANCE OF NIH RESEARCH ON HEALTH ISSUES OF LESBIANS AND GAYS**

“On a scale from 1 to 7, where ‘1’ means ‘not at all important’ and ‘7’ means ‘extremely important,’ how important is it for the NIH to conduct research on the health issues of lesbians and gays?”

Base: All adults

	Not at all Important (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Extremely Important (7)
GLBT	7	4	2	16	9	10	51
Heterosexual	23	9	11	22	12	8	15

Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive between February 16 and 20, 2004, among a nationwide cross section of 2,204 adults (ages 18+). Of those adults surveyed approximately six percent (6%) self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT). Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. "Propensity score" weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size (for the total sample), one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision ± 2 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Statistical precision for the GLBT sample is ± 9 percentage points. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online survey is not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc.

Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc. (www.witeckcombs.com) is the nation's premier strategic marketing communications firm, specializing in reaching the gay and lesbian consumer market. With over nine years experience in this unique market, Witeck-Combs Communications has developed respected relationships throughout the community and serves as a bridge between corporate America and gay and lesbian consumers. The Gay Financial Network (gfn.com) has twice identified Bob Witeck and Wesley Combs as two of the nation's twenty-five most influential openly gay business executives.

About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for **The Harris Poll**®, and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, U.S.A., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com) and Tokyo-based Harris Interactive Japan—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of local market- and opinion-research firms, and various U.S. offices. **EOE M/F/D/V**

To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit www.harrispollonline.com.

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