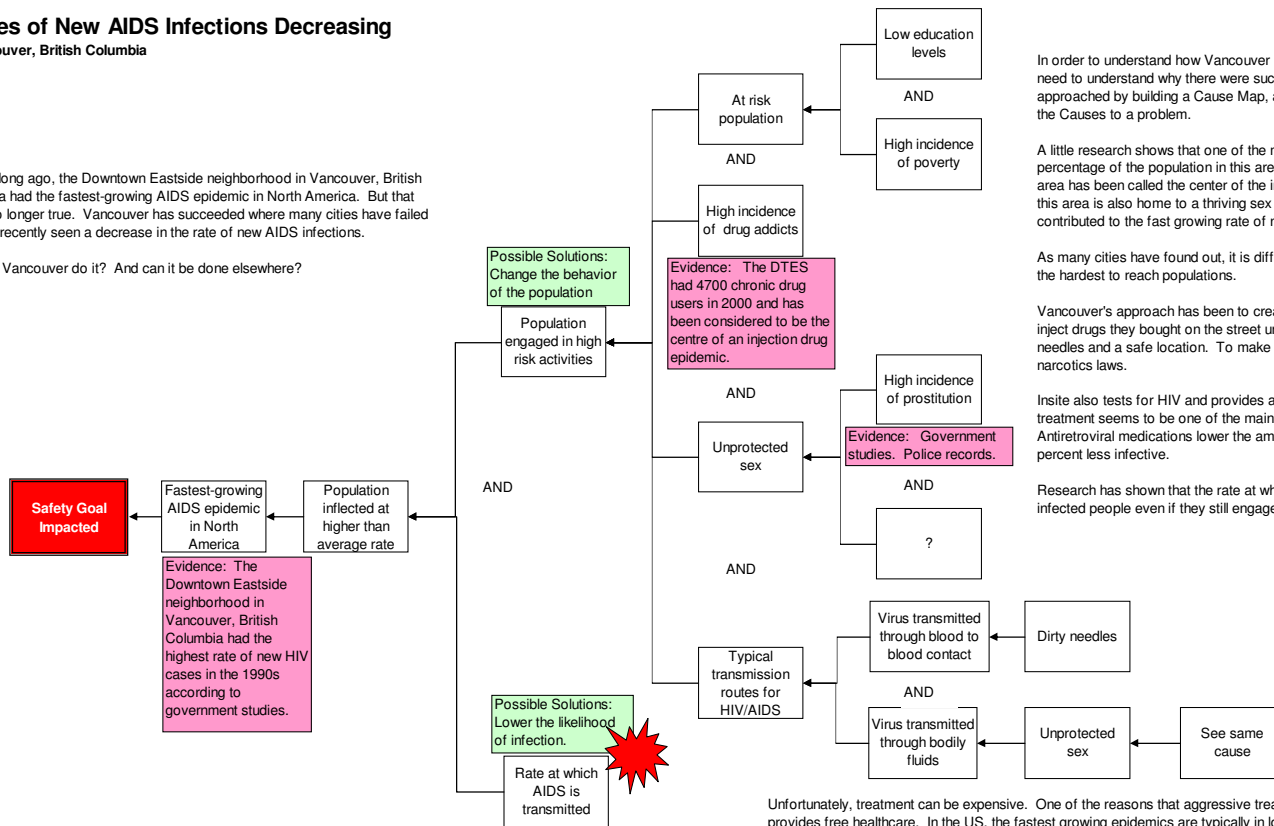


Rates of New AIDS Infections Decreasing

Vancouver, British Columbia
2011

Not too long ago, the Downtown Eastside neighborhood in Vancouver, British Columbia had the fastest-growing AIDS epidemic in North America. But that has is no longer true. Vancouver has succeeded where many cities have failed and has recently seen a decrease in the rate of new AIDS infections.

How did Vancouver do it? And can it be done elsewhere?



In order to understand how Vancouver has been successful in fighting the AIDS epidemic, we first need to understand why there were such high infection rates to begin with. This problem can be approached by building a Cause Map, an intuitive visual root cause analysis method that lays out the Causes to a problem.

A little research shows that one of the major contributors to this problem is that a significant percentage of the population in this area is engaged in high risk behavior. The Downtown Eastside area has been called the center of the injection drug epidemic. Along with rampant drug problems, this area is also home to a thriving sex trade. Shared needles and unprotected sex significantly contributed to the fast growing rate of new infections in the area.

As many cities have found out, it is difficult to change behavior. Drug addicts are typically one of the hardest to reach populations.

Vancouver's approach has been to create a "safe injection site", called Insite. At Insite, addicts can inject drugs they bought on the street under the supervisor of nurses. They are provided clean needles and a safe location. To make this work, Insite currently has a special exemption from narcotics laws.

Insite also tests for HIV and provides aggressive treatment for those infected. Aggressive treatment seems to be one of the main factors that has slowed the infection rate in Vancouver. Antiretroviral medications lower the amount of virus in the blood, which in turn makes a person 90 percent less infective.

Research has shown that the rate at which the AIDS virus is transmitted can be lowered by treating infected people even if they still engage in high risk behavior.

Unfortunately, treatment can be expensive. One of the reasons that aggressive treatment works in Canada is that the government provides free healthcare. In the US, the fastest growing epidemics are typically in low income areas where health insurance is limited.

The antiretroviral medication can also have some unpleasant side effects so many doctors don't prescribe it until there are signs that their patient's immune system is compromised.

Vancouver's approach is also obviously controversial. Using government funds to provide a place for individuals to inject illegal drugs is going to raise a lot of questions. Insite was created under a more liberal government and the issue is due to be reviewed by the Canadian supreme court this year.

Cause Map High Level

ThinkReliability
Houston Office 281-489-2904
www.ThinkReliability.com

Copyright ThinkReliability 2011

