



Homelessness and Safe Sex Practices

by Nicole Arcieri

February is a month of decadence and celebration. It's Black History Month, Mardi Gras falls upon us, Lunar New Year festivities occur, and we even have Groundhog Day! One of the most popular holidays among the February mix is Valentine's Day, which, if you are currently reading this, has just passed. For many, it is a time of romance and intimacy, therefore, it is important that people are having safe sex.

The average person probably has access to condoms, dental dams, and birth control medication or intrauterine devices (IUDs). Unfortunately, for the homeless community, access to these items are hard to come by. You may be wondering, "Why would someone who is homeless need access to these products?" The simple answer is that people that are homeless have sex, too! Just because someone struggles with homelessness, does not mean they don't engage in intimate relationships with others.

People that are homeless already struggle with being able to afford food, tents for shelter, warm clothes, and sanitary products. On top of all this, the homeless community also has to worry about how they are going to have safe sex. Condoms and dental dams can be expensive and have to be stored properly. They must be kept in a cool, dry place where the opportunity for them to tear will not arise. These guidelines may be difficult for

someone who is homeless to follow, as they might not have a safe place to carry these products or the ability to make sure they are stored at the appropriate temperature. Furthermore, these items expire, and they can be pricey to replace.

Birth control medication, on the other hand, may be accessible to some people in the homeless community, but it is ultimately still difficult for many people that are homeless to get their hands on medication or IUDs. IUDs must be administered to patients by a doctor and birth control medication is always prescribed by a medical professional. Furthermore, birth control medication must be stored in a dark, room temperature place. These obstacles among many more make it difficult for people that are homeless to have access to birth control. There are some nonprofit organizations, like Planned Parenthood, that offer high quality care to people of different income levels, but there is still so much work to be done.

It is important that we listen to the homeless community when attempting to tackle problems like these. What do people that are homeless have difficulty accessing the most when it comes to safe sex and pregnancy prevention? How do we fix these problems? What organizations can I support that are actively working with people that are homeless to solve these issues? Most importantly, we must eliminate the stigma that people that are homeless cannot experience intimacy and affection.