



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

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## The AIDS Institute Observes 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of First AIDS Cases

Washington, DC - The AIDS Institute solemnly marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first diagnosed AIDS cases by remembering all of those who have died from AIDS and by issuing a challenge to every single government in the world to provide adequate access to prevention, care and treatment services for all people affected and infected with HIV disease.

Today marks the 25 anniversary of the first reported AIDS cases, and since June of 1981, more than 25 million people world wide have perished from AIDS and another 46 million men, women and children worldwide are now living with HIV and AIDS, making HIV disease the worst pandemic in human history.

"I think the most striking thing is the brutal nature of this virus - the incredible losses and misery we have seen around the world," said Dr. Donald Francis, Founder and President of Global Solutions for Infectious Diseases of San Francisco, and one of the first researchers to recognize the profound implications of AIDS during the early days of the epidemic.

In the United States, more than 600,000 people have died from AIDS and 1.1 million are now living with HIV disease. In the United States and in other industrialized countries, people with insurance generally have access to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), which has turned HIV disease into a chronic but manageable illness for many patients, making the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary also a celebration of life.

"We have enjoyed remarkable treatment success in the United States, making it possible for many people living with HIV and AIDS to live longer and with a higher quality of life," said Dr. Gene Copello, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. "But we must make these treatment advancements more available in the developing world as well as in our own country where waiting lists for life-saving drugs and healthcare are still experienced. Access to care is one of our most important issues."

In the developing world, widespread access to HAART (Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy) is non-existent, condemning millions to inevitable disease progression and death. In the years ahead, millions will perish from AIDS on the African continent alone, more than "our ability to comprehend," said Francis, a former researcher with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who played a key role in eradicating small pox and developing vaccines for the Ebola virus and hepatitis B in the 1970s and 1980s. "These are the equivalents of small size countries dying off completely," he said.

(more)

In the United States, the AIDS epidemic has shifted during the past several years, primarily becoming a disease of color that disproportionately impacts African-Americans, and Latinos. African-Americans account for 12 percent of the US population but comprise nearly 45 percent of the nation's AIDS cases, and the majority of new HIV and AIDS cases. AIDS is the leading cause of death for African-American women between the ages of 25 and 34. Latinos, meanwhile, represent 14 percent of the US population but account for 19 percent of the nation's AIDS cases diagnosed since the start of the epidemic.

"HIV/AIDS is now an epidemic of color but even more importantly, it is an epidemic of poverty," asserted Marilyn Merida, Board President of The AIDS Institute. "When you look at poverty in this country, people of color are disproportionately impacted. These are serious social problems, and there needs to be serious structural interventions to help address poverty issues."

This year also marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AZT, the first federally approved medication for the treatment of HIV and AIDS. But even more importantly, 2006 is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HAART, one of the great accomplishments of modern medicine.

"The AIDS crisis is one of the finest examples of human accomplishment," said David Miller, a board member of The AIDS Institute from New York City, citing the treatment advances. But at the same time, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has underscored the "abysmal failings" of government in addressing the disease, Miller observed. "Every sign of what was to come was overtly available and completely ignored," he said regretfully.

Copello concurred with that assessment but adds: "We must maintain the hope that in the years to come AIDS will be stopped and we will see the beginning of the end of this horrific human tragedy. To get there we need responsive governments and communities around the world to ensure access to prevention, treatment, and care services - and the resources with the will to find a cure."

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For more information and to become involved in AIDS advocacy, please contact The AIDS Institute at: (202) 835-8373, or by email at: [Info@theaidsinstitute.org](mailto:Info@theaidsinstitute.org) or [www.TheAIDSInstitute.org](http://www.TheAIDSInstitute.org)

The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit agency that promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education.