

PUBLIC COMMENT
Provided by
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Distinguished Council Members:

My name is Dr. Gene Copello. I am the Executive Director of The AIDS Institute, a national public policy research, advocacy, and education organization. Thank you for providing this opportunity to receive public comment.

On behalf of The AIDS Institute I commend you for imagining an HIV-free generation. There are many differences among all of us struggling to end HIV/AIDS, but, clearly, we share one unifying theme in common: the hope for an end to the pandemic. No generation should have to endure the plague of the past two and a half decades. You have articulated our common hope: an HIV-free generation.

Indeed, ending HIV/AIDS will require new strategies on the part of the United States and our neighbors around the world. The ongoing leadership of the United States is crucial to achieving an HIV-free generation. New strategies are needed if we are to truly end the domestic epidemic and the global pandemic.

The AIDS Institute holds the following concepts as core principles we invite you to consider as you finalize recommendations for a new American HIV strategy.

1. HIV prevention efforts must be based on public health science that leads to a reduction in HIV infection.
2. High quality medical treatment and care must be provided to all Americans living with HIV/AIDS regardless of where they reside in the United States. This includes the availability of trained HIV medical providers in all jurisdictions.
3. Research to find better medical treatments and, ultimately, an HIV preventative vaccine and curative therapies is an essential component of any strategy to end HIV/AIDS.
4. HIV medical co-morbidities, including Hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted infections, must be addressed as part of the overall plan to provide adequate medical treatment of HIV/AIDS.
5. A number of factors that contribute to HIV infection and disease progression must be addressed. These include: cultural issues; socioeconomic factors, especially the relationship between HIV infection and poverty; and stigma and discrimination.
6. Internationally, barriers to the provision of HIV prevention, treatment, and care must be overcome. These include lack of infrastructure; trading regulations that impede the donation of medications and medical supplies such as tariffs; and the alarming rates of other infectious diseases such as malaria.
7. Adequate government funding will be required to achieve an HIV-free generation.

The AIDS Institute further suggests that the Council consider the following specific factors in finalizing its recommendations.

In regard to Prevention:

1. Emphasis should be placed on strategies that will reduce HIV infection in men who have sex with men (MSM). Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that 47% of all new cases are MSM and half of those cases are among African Americans. Strategies to reduce HIV infection among MSM who are minorities, especially African Americans, are a key component in controlling the domestic epidemic.
2. Several jurisdictions in the United States have legal needle exchange programs functioning that are funded by non-federal sources. Those programs should be noted as part of the domestic effort to curb HIV infection.
3. HIV rapid testing in public health and community settings should be made widely available and legal and funding barriers to this service removed. In addition, as part of the overall domestic testing system, the introduction of over-the-counter (OTC) HIV test kits should be piloted as a demonstration project and assessed.

In regard to Treatment and Prevention:

As previously stated, The AIDS Institute, based on its own position paper on the reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act, generally supports the treatment and care principles articulated by the Administration. The Council has elaborated on those principles in its recommendations. We strongly recommend that language be added that discusses the relationships between Medicaid and Medicare and the Ryan White CARE Act at the systems and client levels; and how those relationships can be improved. This is very important with the approaching implementation of Part D of the Medicare Modernization Act.

The AIDS Institute congratulates the Council and its staff for developing recommended strategies that will hopefully achieve an HIV-free generation. We stand ready to assist you and our community and governmental partners in liberating our world from HIV infection.