State of Florida to Move 6,500 People From Life Saving AIDS Drug Assistance Program

The AIDS Institute Calls on Florida, Congress and the President to Take Action

Tampa, FL – In an unprecedented move in the treatment of HIV/AIDS in the United States, the State of Florida is moving 6,500 low-income people from its AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). The Florida ADAP program currently serves about 10,000 people across the state but officials say they only have enough money left to support roughly 3,500 patients until April 1, 2011 when new federal dollars are expected.

“This is devastating,” stated Michael Ruppal, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “Efforts to fill the financial gap from additional state or federal sources have yielded nothing. We are in a perfect storm with the loss of jobs and health insurance, increased infections and increased diagnoses through expanded testing programs, while at the same time State and Federal governments are cutting their budgets.” Ruppal continued, “We are risking peoples’ lives with the potential of treatment interruptions that dramatically increase their chances of becoming resistant to the same drugs that are currently saving their lives.”

ADAP’s provide HIV-related medications to uninsured and under-insured people living with HIV/AIDS or about one-quarter of the people with HIV/AIDS estimated to be receiving care in the U.S. ADAP is part of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program, which is funded by both federal and state resources. Receiving medications daily is critical to effective AIDS treatment.

The ADAP crisis is not unique to Florida. Ten states have instituted waiting lists to receive medications from the program. Of the over 5,550 people on waiting lists, Florida’s is the largest with over 2,879. Wait lists are just one measure of how a state ADAP is doing. States are also reducing their eligibility, and in the process, actually disenrolling patients from the program, and reducing their formularies.

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson of Florida stated in recent letters to President Obama and Florida Governor Rick Scott, “These events make it clear that the current federal funding level for the ADAP program is not enough to ensure the program’s viability during this period of economic turmoil.” He went on to say, “I will also encourage state officials to work with your administration to ensure that Florida’s ADAP program is administered properly and that all money is spent as efficiently as possible.” Nelson also requested that Scott “find additional state resources to keep the program fully operating.”

Florida officials, in an attempt to prevent treatment interruptions to patients, announced their plan for the 6,500 patients to receive their medications from a pharmaceutical sponsored charity for the next 6-8 weeks. Ruppal stated, “This charity program was established to provide a temporary safety net for those patients who are on wait lists. It is supported by donated medications by many pharmaceutical companies but was never intended to handle the volume and scale of this crisis. We need long lasting solutions.”
In the last Congress, funding proposals by the House of Representatives called for an increase in ADAP of $60 million for fiscal year 2011, while the Senate proposed an increase of $65 million. Unfortunately, Congress did not pass a full year spending bill and the government is operating on a continuing resolution at current funding levels.

“There are rallying cries from many members of the new Congress to significantly cut spending,” stated Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “The ADAP program cannot afford to be cut; too many lives are at stake.”

A twenty percent cut to the program would translate into removing over 19,100 people across the country from the program. Even with level funding, the situation would continue to be grave since ADAP utilization continues to skyrocket.

“We need states such as Florida and the U.S. Congress to protect ADAP from any cuts. Additionally we need Congress to increase funding by at least the $65 million that was proposed by the Senate for FY11. We also need the Obama Administration to forcefully insist on these increases in addition to proposing adequate increases in FY12 and relay the urgency of this request to the Congress as they deliberate next year’s spending bill,” stated Schmid.

We are living in challenging times and record budget deficits and there is a call for spending freezes and cuts. In the process, programs must be prioritized and protected from cuts. For the sake of the over 1.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS in our own country, ADAP must be one of those programs.

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For more information and to become involved, please contact
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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit agency that promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education.