
Domestic AIDS Policy Experts Provide Frank Assessment of U.S. Leadership, Including Recent Success and Most Urgent Unmet Needs

WASHINGTON, DC -- This morning -- days before the opening of the XIX International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC -- leading national experts on domestic AIDS policies gathered at the National Press Club to call on elected leaders across the country to “end AIDS in America” by providing the right leadership, making the necessary investments and implementing the best, most scientifically-proven policies.

“Thanks to our government finally lifting the HIV travel ban, in just days 25,000 delegates and 2,000 journalists will gather in Washington for the first International AIDS Conference in the United States in 22 years,” said Carl Schmid, deputy executive director at The AIDS Institute. “New scientific advancements, coupled with what we have learned in the past on how to prevent HIV and correct public policy decisions in Washington and the states, all together could actually end AIDS in America.”

Also during this morning’s pre-International AIDS Conference briefing, experts from a diverse array of HIV/AIDS organizations assessed the current state of AIDS in America, including how the implementation of healthcare reform and federal funding cuts could impact goals laid out nearly two years ago in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

Julie Scofield, Executive Director, National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors, said, “The Obama Administration put forth an ambitious National HIV/AIDS Strategy – which seeks to reduce the number of new infections, increase access to care, and reduce health disparities on a disease that has mostly affected gay men, African Americans, and the poor. In order for us to achieve those goals, adequate resources are necessary. President Obama has proposed critically important increases in funding, but unfortunately Congress has been unwilling to support these essential budget requests.”

Ronald Johnson, Vice-President of Policy & Advocacy, AIDS United, echoed Scofield’s remarks citing that, “Implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and maintaining Medicaid, Medicare and the Ryan White Program, which provide healthcare to low income people with HIV, are all critical to ensuring people with HIV receive treatment. Unfortunately, all of these programs are under attack by Congress and some states have already signaled they will not participate in the Medicaid expansion or set up insurance exchanges. It is time to stop the political fighting and move to full implementation of the ACA --not only in Washington, but in each of the states.”
Cornelius Baker, Senior Advisor, National Black Gay Men’s Advocacy Coalition, focused his remarks on drawing attention to those communities currently most impacted by HIV/AIDS. Baker stated, “Today, in America, nearly 1.2 million people are living with HIV/AIDS – the highest number ever of Americans living with the virus – with nearly 50,000 new infections every year. While we’ve made progress in our battle against AIDS, too many Americans still die of this disease. Yet, AIDS is not on the minds of the people or many of our elected officials. In order to end AIDS in the U.S., the leadership of policy makers in Washington, at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, and in state capitals, is needed – desperately.”

Schmid concluded stating, “As our country prepares to host this year’s global AIDS conference, it’s imperative we take a look at what our elected leaders are doing domestically to end this epidemic, especially since 40% of the new cases of infections happening in America each year are among our youth under the age of 29.”

Today’s briefing included policy experts from just a few of the organizations that are part of AIDS In America, a coalition of national and regional U.S. HIV/AIDS federal policy advocacy organizations that will be participating in the XIX International AIDS Conference. The conference is the premiere place for the exchange of new scientific knowledge and dialogue on the most pressing topics related to HIV and AIDS. The conference will include participation from policy makers and advocates, as well as persons living with HIV and AIDS from around the world.

A full copy of the hard-copy press kit (including a contact list and speaker bios), photos from today’s briefing (credit: Luna Media Group), and the full audio from today’s briefing can be found here: www.aidsinamerica.org.

**Interview requests for the policy experts who participated in today’s briefing (quoted), please contact Brad Luna at brad@lunamediagroup.com or 202-821-8140.**

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The “Pre-International AIDS Conference Briefing: Assessing Domestic Policy Efforts to End AIDS in the U.S.” is organized by AIDS In America, a coalition of national and regional U.S. HIV/AIDS federal policy advocacy organizations.