During XIX Int’l AIDS Conf., U.S. Policy Experts Warn:

Massive Fiscal Cutbacks, Political Gridlock Threaten to Undermine Potential Progress on Ending AIDS in America

Significant Differences between White House and Congress on Funding AIDS Care & Prevention – As Well As Health Care Reform

WASHINGTON, DC - This morning at the XIX International AIDS Conference, a panel of domestic HIV/AIDS policy experts delivered a sharp warning to the nation’s elected leaders that if recent proposals to gut funding for HIV programs aimed at caring for the nation’s record 1.2 million people living with HIV along with preventing new HIV infections, and blocking health care reform passed, it would seriously jeopardize the country’s ability to achieve any progress towards ending AIDS in America.

Instead the panel, which included national HIV/AIDS experts among women, and the African-American and Latino communities, called on elected leaders across the country to fully fund and support policies and strategies, including implementation of health care reform, to attain the goals outlined in the “ambitious”, two-year-old National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

“The past few days have focused the world, yet again, on this epidemic, but unless we see a greater commitment by leaders in the U.S to ending HIV/AIDS, we risk losing the progress that’s within reach,” said Carl Schmid, deputy executive director of The AIDS Institute. “New scientific advancements, coupled with what we know already on how to prevent HIV, with the correct public policy decisions in Washington and the states, we could actually end AIDS in America. Now is the time for bold action by Congressional leaders and continued leadership from President Obama if we are to make ending AIDS in America a true reality, instead of just a nice piece of rhetoric.”

Panelists addressed the importance of implementing health reform, which will provide care and treatment to people with HIV/AIDS, and providing the necessary financial resources to prevent HIV and care for those who are already infected. Funding for HIV programs is in serious jeopardy given the significant cuts programs face on the horizon due to sequestration, coupled with severe cuts outlined in the proposed health spending bill introduced last week in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Julie Scofield, executive director of the 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, but Congress has been unwilling to support...
these budget requests. The House is proposing massive cuts to some programs, and next year AIDS programs are facing over $500 million in cuts due to sequestration.

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. 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.”

“We know that HIV in the U.S. primarily affects people of color and gay men of all races and ethnicities, but these communities are all too often stigmatized, marginalized and overlooked,” said Daniel C. Montoya, deputy executive director of the National Minority AIDS Council. “The Obama Administration has made significant progress in focusing additional resources and prevention efforts toward these communities. But, without full implementation of health care reform and a continued investment of resources, this progress can be lost. In order to finally end this epidemic, we must do better at engaging communities that are most heavily impacted in identifying solutions.”

“We cannot end AIDS in the U.S. without addressing the needs of women, particularly Black women,” said C. Virginia Fields, President and CEO of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS. “They represent over one quarter of all infections but are often overlooked by our political leaders. Political grandstanding won’t save one life, but it does stand to cost our country countless Mothers, Daughters and Sisters unless we turn the tide on this epidemic.”

** Media requests for participants in today's press conference, contact Brad Luna at Brad@lunamediagroup.com or 202-821-8140 (cell). **

A full press kit for today’s event – including bios for each of the speakers, background information, contact sheet for the AIDS In America coalition and more – is available online. Click here for vital charts and graphs used in today's press briefing. Click here for speaker bios. Click here for contact information for members of the “AIDS in America” coalition.

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The “International AIDS Conference Briefing: Assessing the U.S Government Efforts to End AIDS in the U.S” is organized by AIDS In America, a coalition of Executive Directors and Senior policy staff from over 20 national and regional HIV/AIDS organizations working to ensure that the federal policies needed to end HIV in the U.S. are in place. For more information, please visit: www.AIDSinAmerica.org.
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