November 5, 2018

The Honorable Alex M. Azar, II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Status of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA)

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the HIV, STD, & Hepatitis Policy Partnership, a coalition of five of the nation’s leading organizations focused on ending the HIV, STD, and viral hepatitis epidemics in the United States, we are writing to inquire about the status of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA).

We were pleased that the Administration requested nominations for new PACHA members and that the nomination process closed in January. We understand that HHS received many nominations, including from our organizations. Since March 2018, we have repeatedly been told by various administration officials, that new PACHA members will be appointed “soon.” However, after six months, we have not received any additional information about new appointments.

As you know, PACHA is an invaluable body that provides a voice for the community to share advice, information, and recommendations with the Administration regarding the nation’s HIV-related programs, policies, and research.

While HIV remains one of the nation’s most serious public health challenges, we now “have the science to solve the AIDS epidemic” as CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield noted in a recent interview with PBS. In the same interview, internationally-renowned researcher Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at NIH commented that “It’s certainly doable in the United States.”

Since the very beginning of the epidemic, people living with HIV and those affected -- state, tribal, and local governments, health providers, government and industry scientists, faith leaders, and community partners -- have played a pivotal role in the nation’s response to HIV. This sustained community engagement and partnership with governmental public health systems has resulted in tremendous progress in increasing the percentage of persons living with HIV who know their status, are linked to care, and have achieved viral suppression, as well as reducing death rates. Despite our progress, much work remains to be done if we want to see the end of HIV in our lifetimes.

To this end, we are requesting that the PACHA appointment process occur as soon as possible so that the group can reconvene and resume providing regular, critical advice, information, and recommendations to the Administration on the nation’s HIV-related policies.
We are deeply concerned that without an active PACHA providing regular feedback and input, HIV-related policies developed and implemented by the Administration without community input will have the unintended consequence of undoing years of progress we have made in the fight to end HIV in the U.S. PACHA is also vital to raising the awareness of HIV comorbidities such as other sexually transmitted infections and viral hepatitis. As the Administration embarks on the important work of updating the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS), convening PACHA is critical in order to ensure the updated NHAS incorporates the voices of all stakeholders.

We recognize that we are at a unique moment in history where, for the first time ever, we have an opportunity to end HIV within our lifetimes. We look forward to continuing to work alongside you and PACHA to make this possibility a reality.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns about PACHA. Please direct any response or questions to any of us at the addresses below. Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to the health of all Americans.

Sincerely,

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Cc:  Dr. Brett P. Giroir, Assistant Secretary for Health
     Dr. Tammy R. Beckham, Acting Director, Office of HIV/AIDS and Infectious Disease Policy
     Ms. Kaye Hayes, Executive Director, Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS