



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
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TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
MAY 23, 2014**

Dear Chairman Harkin and Members of the Subcommittee:

The AIDS Institute, a national public policy, research, advocacy, and education organization, is pleased to offer comments in support of critical HIV/AIDS and hepatitis programs as part of the FY2015 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriation measure. We thank you for supporting these programs over the years, and hope you will do your best to adequately fund them in the future in order to provide for and protect the health of many Americans.

HIV/AIDS remains one of the world's worst health pandemics. According to the CDC, in the U.S. over 636,000 people have died of AIDS and there are 50,000 new infections each year. A record 1.1 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV. Persons of minority races and ethnicities are disproportionately affected. African Americans, who make up just 12 percent of the population, account for 44 percent of new infections. HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects low income people; nearly 90 percent of Ryan White Program clients have a household income of less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The U.S. government has played a leading role in fighting HIV/AIDS, both here and abroad. The vast majority of the discretionary programs supporting domestic HIV/AIDS efforts are funded through this Subcommittee. We are keenly aware of current budget constraints and competing interests for limited dollars, but programs that prevent and treat HIV are inherently in the federal interest as they protect the public health against a highly infectious virus. If not adequately funded, there will certainly be increased infections, more deaths, and higher health costs.

With the advent of antiretroviral medicines, HIV has turned from a near certain death sentence to a treatable chronic disease if people have access to consistent and affordable health care and medications. Through prevention, care and treatment, and research we now have the ability to actually end AIDS. In 2011, a ground-breaking clinical trial (HPTN 052) – named the scientific breakthrough of the year by *Science* magazine – found that HIV treatment not only saves the lives of people with HIV, but also reduces HIV transmission by more than 96 percent –

proving that HIV treatment is also HIV prevention. In order to realize these benefits, people with HIV must be diagnosed through testing, and linked to and retained in care and treatment.

We also have a National HIV/AIDS Strategy that sets clear goals and priorities, and brings the federal agencies addressing HIV together to ensure resources are well coordinated. Over the past thirty years we have made great progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS and are truly at a tipping point. However, without stable and adequate funding that progress is in jeopardy, as well as the lives of millions who are or will be infected.

The Ryan White Program

The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program provides some level of medical care, drug treatment, and support services to approximately 554,000 low-income, uninsured, and underinsured individuals with HIV/AIDS. With people living longer and continued new diagnoses, the demands on the program continue to grow and many needs remain unmet. According to the CDC, only 37 percent of people living with HIV in the U.S. are retained in HIV care, only 33 percent have been prescribed antiretroviral treatment, and only 25 percent are virally suppressed. We have a long way to go before we can realize the dream of an AIDS-free generation. With continued funding we can improve these numbers and health outcomes.

The AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), one component of the Ryan White Program, provides states with funds to pay for medications for over 200,000 people. Over the last couple of years, as more infections were identified due to increased HIV testing and people lost their jobs and health insurance, demand on the program far outpaced its budget. This led to ADAP wait lists of 9,300 people. We are thankful that President Obama and Congress allocated additional funds, which when combined with assistance from pharmaceutical companies has virtually eliminated the wait list. With inadequate funding that could all change.

We urge you to ensure that ADAP and the rest of the Ryan White Program receive adequate funding to keep up with the growing demand. According to NASTAD, enrollment in ADAP increased by 8 percent between FY2012 and FY2013, and utilization reached its highest level ever. With this increased demand for medications comes a corresponding increase in medical care and support services provided by all other parts of the program.

As the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is implemented, there will be expanded opportunities for health care coverage for some Ryan White clients. While it will result in some cost shifting for medications and primary care, it will never be a substitute for the Ryan White Program. Over 70 percent of Ryan White Program clients today have some sort of insurance coverage, mostly through traditional Medicaid and Medicare. Their coverage will not change with health reform; the Ryan White Program will be needed as it is today. The Medicaid expansion is a state option and not all states are moving forward with it at this time. As ACA is implemented, benefits will differ from state to state and there will be many gaps that will have to be filled by the Ryan White Program. Plans will not offer all of the comprehensive essential support services that the Program does, such as case management, transportation, and nutritional services, that are needed to ensure retention in medical care and adherence to drug treatment. This approach of coordinated, comprehensive, and culturally competent care leads to better health outcomes.

Therefore, the Ryan White Program, while it may need to change in the future, must continue and must be adequately funded.

The AIDS Institute urges the Committee to reject the President's budget proposal to eliminate dedicated funding for Part D of the Ryan White Program and transfer it to Part C. Part D serves women, infants, children, and youth with HIV/AIDS and is a well-established system of care that has worked since 1988 in nearly eliminating perinatal infection and providing medical care and family-centered support that helps ensure these vulnerable populations remain in care and adherent to their medications. With youth, particularly black gay youth, being the only population experiencing an increase in HIV incidence, we cannot afford to dramatically alter the only Ryan White Program part dedicated to their care. While changes to the structure of the Ryan White Program might be needed in the future, it should not be done through the appropriations process and not without community input.

CDC HIV Prevention

As a Nation, we must do more to prevent new infections, but we only allocate 3 percent of our HIV/AIDS spending towards prevention. All the care and treatments costs would be saved if we did not have the infections in the first place. Preventing just one infection would save \$402,000 in future lifetime medical costs. Preventing all the new 50,000 cases in just one year would translate into an astounding \$20 billion saved in lifetime medical costs.

With more people living with HIV than ever before, there are greater chances of HIV transmission. The CDC and its grantees have been doing their best with limited resources to keep the number of infections stable, but that is not good enough. It is focusing resources on those populations and communities most impacted by HIV and investing in those programs that will prevent the most number of infections. This includes young black gay men, who experienced a 38 percent increase in new infections from 2008-2010 and is a population which merits additional attention and resources

With over 200,000 people living with HIV who are unaware of their infection, the CDC is also focused on increased testing programs. Testing people early and linking them to care and treatment is critical not only for their own health outcomes but also in preventing new infections.

The CDC estimates that in 2010, 26 percent of all new HIV infections occurred among youth ages 13 to 24. Nearly 75 percent of those infections were among young gay men. Clearly, we must do a better job of educating the youth of our Nation, including gay youth, about HIV. Adequately funding the HIV Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) will help address this critical need.

CDC Viral Hepatitis Prevention

Given that more than 5.3 million people in the U.S. are living with hepatitis B and/or C and 65-75% of them are undiagnosed, funding for the Hepatitis Prevention Division must be increased. With a 25 percent mortality rate among affected baby boomers – those born between 1945 and 1965 – and with prevalence rates two times higher than whites for African Americans in that birth cohort, we cannot afford to inadequately fund this program. The current amount of only \$29 million is far too small to conduct testing, surveillance, and other hepatitis prevention

and educational programs for the entire country. Currently there is no national surveillance system to track hepatitis infections and testing programs are inadequate; therefore the majority of the millions affected will never become aware of their disease until they present with liver cancer or cirrhosis. Increased funding for testing and surveillance could bring more people into care and treatment allowing them the chance to receive new and more effective treatments that actually can result in curing their hepatitis.

HIV/AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

While we have made great strides in the area of HIV/AIDS, there is still a long way to go. Continued research at the NIH is necessary to learn more about the disease and to develop new treatments and prevention tools. Recent breakthroughs have provided functional cures in a few instances in infants and adults. Work also continues on vaccine research as scientists learn more about the disease, and combined with cure research it may be possible to see the end of AIDS if funding is maintained.

Again, we thank you for your continued support of these programs critical to so many individuals and communities nationwide. We have made great progress, but we are still far from achieving our goal of an AIDS-free generation. We now have the tools, but we need continued leadership and the necessary resources to realize our goal. Thank you.

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