Hurray for Hollywood!

Tinseltown showers protease on players

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Hollywood is hell for actors with HIV, but the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) has lightened their load a little. The union is the first U.S. corporation to underwrite the cost of protease inhibitors for its members. “It is the most important, constructive way we could help,” said SAG executive director Marcia Smith.

The program is and additional safety net for five-year SAG veterans not covered by health insurance and not able to get AIDS Drug Assistance Program funding. “We don’t have a waiting period,” Smith said. “So some people will use it as a stop-gap that lets them get medication immediately while they’re waiting for approval from other programs.” Other clients will be long term.

About a quarter of SAG’s 98,000 members have health insurance coverage through the union. Smith said five people signed up for the program in the first month. “We have upward of $100,000 in our fund for AIDS right now,” she said. “We’re committed to more aggressive fundraising if that’s what it takes to supply medication to every member who needs it.”

And if housing is needed, West Hollywood will soon be home to the Actors Fund of America’s $6.1 million apartment complex for low-income entertainment professionals with HIV and AIDS. The fund aids more than 50 actors with AIDS each year.

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