# I Want My HIV MD!

A California law sets a pro-PWA precedent

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Would you lie to save your life? That's just what some privately insured California HIVers were doing in an effort to get expert care at AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) clinics, which serve mainly those without insurance or with state MediCal. This led AHF and the American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM) to lobby for a law requiring HMOs to refer HIVers to an HIV specialist. (Studies have shown that patients with HIV-savvy docs live longer than those without.) The bill, signed back in 2000 by Gov. Gray Davis, didn't kick in until January, after the AAHIVM and other groups devised criteria to define "AIDS specialist." The law also rules that HMOs lacking certified docs must connect HIVers to out-of-network specialists (and cover the cost) or face fines. "This bill…will help save lives," said its sponsor, former Democratic state-assembly member Martin Gallegos. It's also the nation's first and only—let's hope not for long.

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