Number’s Up

CDC gives thumbs down for unique identifier

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Numbers? Names? Neither? The battle over HIV case reporting continued in January when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published an article criticizing the use of unique identifier (UI) codes for tracking HIV cases by Texas and Maryland, the only two states with such a system. The codes, which include birthdates and partial Social Security numbers, are meant to dispel would-be test-takers’ fear that their names will be sent to a state agency. Most AIDS organizations favor UIs over names, and some reject any form of listmaking as a recipe for driving those at risk underground. But the CDC is pushing for names, claiming that UIs “complicate efforts to collect risk-behavior information” and “contribute to a high rate of incomplete case reporting.” Officials in charge of Maryland’s three-year-old UI system admit flaws but remain fans. “We’re seeing improvement in completion of codes,” said Liza Solomon, director of AIDS administration for Maryland’s Department of Health, adding: “If you really want a system to work, it needs to be supported. The CDC refuses to fund UI systems.”

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