What’s the Best Way to Promote U=U in Puerto Rico?

That’s the focus of one of three federal grants to research and address the island’s epidemic.

November 7, 2019 By Trent Straube

A trio of grants from the National Institutes of Health will fund research to fight the HIV epidemic in Puerto Rico. Two of the grants involve Yale School of Public Health and the University of Puerto Rico, and a third was awarded to the District of Columbia Center for AIDS Research (DC CFAR).

The grants arrive via President Trump’s “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America” initiative. The plan’s goal is to lower new HIV rates nationwide by 75% in five years and 90% in 10 years. One way to accomplish this is by targeting federal funding to 48 counties—including Washington, DC, and San Juan, Puerto Rico—that account for more than half of the new HIV cases in the country. (Learn more about the plan on POZ.com and on HIV.gov.)

The Yale and San Juan researchers will collaborate on two projects, reports Yale Daily News. One of the projects will explore providing self-test kits to the partners of people living with HIV. The second will look at how to adapt and promote the U=U message.

U=U stands for Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, which refers to the fact that people with HIV who take meds and maintain an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV through sex.

The hope in Puerto Rico is that the U=U message will inspire people with HIV to get treatment and adhere to their meds, thus not only making them healthier but also lowering new HIV cases.

With the third grant, DC CFAR lead researcher Carlos Rodriguez-Diaz, PhD, MPH, hopes to build a government-community-academic partnership on the island. DC CFAR is part of the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. According to a Milken press release, a similar partnership in DC has lowered HIV rates in our nation’s capital by 72% in the past 10 years. DC researchers will work with the Puerto Rico Department of Health, scientists from the University of Puerto Rico and public health leaders in the local community

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