Community Responses to National HIV/AIDS Strategy

July 13, 2010

The White House released its national HIV/AIDS strategy on June 13 to address the U.S. epidemic. For more details about the strategy, click here.

Comments from the HIV/AIDS community were prompt and varied. Here are excerpts from some of the initial responses.

Phill Wilson
President and CEO, Black AIDS Institute

"Today represents a new day in our country's nearly three-decade-long struggle against AIDS. For the first time, we finally have a national plan in place to guide our fight against the epidemic and to hold decision-makers accountable for results … The new strategy provides a promising opportunity for us to get real about the shortcomings in our national response to the epidemic …

"If the new AIDS strategy is to succeed, it has to work for Black people. In reporting results, the Obama administration needs specifically to report outcomes for Black people. Only if prevention and treatment programs work for Black America will we win our national fight against AIDS …

"To put available prevention weapons to effective use, experts estimate that annual prevention spending needs to increase from $750 million to $1.3 billion for at least each of the next five years. This new strategy offers a sound, evidence-based approach to better results, but it will be worth little more than the paper it is written on if we don't follow through with essential resources."

Click here to read Wilson's statement.

Paul Kawata
Executive Director, National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC)

“This is a historic time on many fronts. On the one hand, President Obama has made history today by being the first President ever to create a truly national strategy to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The ideas contained in this plan are aggressive and would certainly go a long way toward combating what continues to be one of our nation’s most troubling public health emergencies.

“I use the word ‘plan’ purposefully, however, because without the funds to carry out the President’s ambitious agenda, this falls significantly short of a strategy. The blueprint is most certainly there … but now our collective attention must shift to resources.

“And while the President can rightly lay claim to a historic and much-needed moment in the HIV/AIDS movement, history continues to be made each and every day as more people living with HIV/AIDS continue to join the ranks of those waiting to receive life-saving medicines. Tragically, this has become an issue of resources as well—an issue that has become an all-too familiar refrain in the battle against this disease.

“We must look at this plan as a solid first step in achieving our ultimate goal: eradicating HIV/AIDS. Now the conversation must turn to implementation—and how we fund such an audacious goal. To ignore the difficult topic of HIV/AIDS funding would be tantamount to placing the President’s strategy in a shredder.”

Click here to read Kawata’s statement.

Kandy Ferree
President and CEO, National AIDS Fund

“Today’s release of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) by the Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP) demonstrates the dedication and commitment of the Obama administration to fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States …

“For two decades, the National AIDS Fund has been mobilizing private sector investments to support community-driven responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and we are now playing a strategic role in discussions with ONAP about the importance of public-private partnerships in the implementation of the NHAS …

“With the release of NHAS, we must be more diligent than ever in creating inventive cross-sector partnerships that capitalize on our strengths as individuals, organizations, government agencies and communities.”

Click here to read Ferree’s statement.

Charles King

President and CEO, Housing Works

“The president’s plan is so flawed that it might actually represent a step backwards in combating HIV and AIDS in the United States. Since his days on the campaign trail, President Obama has repeatedly said that he wants to lead the fight against AIDS.

“Unless he commits significant new resources intended to make major inroads against the spread of HIV, he will be regarded as a leader who did next to nothing about the most devastating epidemic of our time …

“I am astonished that, after 15 months of intensive study by his administration, the president believes that the United States is only capable of reducing annual HIV infections by 25 percent. Would President Obama suggest that we only clean up 25 percent of the Gulf oil spill? Never. We have the prevention tools to dramatically reduce the spread of HIV if only we would dedicate the resources to doing so. This report does a disservice to America’s young people and people of color, who are most at risk.”

Click here to read King’s statement.

Marjorie Hill, PhD
CEO, GMHC

“The news of the NHAS brings much-needed hope for all Americans affected by HIV/AIDS. We commend President Obama and the leadership of the Office of National AIDS Policy, particularly Jeff Crowley, Greg Millett, and James Albino. We are encouraged that the 14 community forums across the country allowed for the perspectives and experiences of people living with HIV to inform the content, and ultimately the success, of the strategy."

Click here to read Hill’s statement.

Craig E. Thompson
Executive Director**, AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA)**

“We must have adequate, targeted resources to implement the plan. Failure to achieve the goals set forth in the Strategy will cost us much more than what it will cost now to get the work done … The President today said the Strategy will one day make the United States a place where ‘new HIV infections are rare’ and ‘all people living with HIV/AIDS have access to high quality, life-extending care, free from stigma and discrimination. APLA has been committed to that vision since 1982, and we believe the National AIDS Strategy will help make that vision a reality."

Click here to read Thompson's statement.

Guillermo Chacon
President**, Latino Commission on AIDS**

"We hope that the U.S. HIV/AIDS strategy will target more resources to the most affected communities of color in the U.S. and its territories. Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., especially demand urgent attention for their unique needs."

Click here to read Chacon's statement.

John Tedstrom
President **and CEO, Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GBC)**

"We are very enthusiastic that the strategy explicitly calls for the CDC to work with the private sector to improve the reach and impact of prevention campaigns. One of the best, fastest ways to make public education more effective is to draw on the marketing and advertising skills of the private sector. Business has tremendous expertise in those areas, including talented, caring professionals who are willing to share what they know and help where they can. With private sector marketing and advertising capabilities, we can reach more people, more quickly, more effectively than the government could do on its own."

Click here to read Tedstrom's statement.

Michael Weinstein
President**, AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF)**

"From what we've learned of it so far, there is really no 'there' there. This strategy is a day late and a dollar short: 15 months in the making, and the White House learned what people in the field have known for years. There is no funding, no 'how to,' no real leadership."

Dana Van Gorder
Executive Director, Project Inform

"We are pleased to see that the Strategy sets ambitious and achievable targets for reducing the impact of HIV on the nation, and that key concepts behind TLC+ have been substantially incorporated into the Strategy ... We particularly commend the administration for asserting that expanded treatment of HIV-positive people is likely to play a significant role in preventing new infections. While HIV-positive people should begin treatment primarily because it will prolong their

lives, we must encourage them to recognize that doing so may also help them in the efforts to avoid transmitting HIV to others."

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