North Carolina Launches Effort to End the HIV Epidemic

Here's how the state health department and N.C. AIDS Action Network plan to shape the strategy.

March 26, 2019 By Trent Straube

North Carolina is the latest state to launch a project whose explicit goal is ending HIV. In fact, the statewide strategy is called just that: the N.C. Ending the Epidemic Plan. As The Daily Tarheel reports, the initiative is a collaborative effort spearheaded by the state health department and the North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NCAAN).

The plan is in its early stages. According to an NCAAN blog post, the AIDS organization and the state health department's Communicable Disease Branch (CDB) are working together to hold in-person events and conduct digital outreach across the state throughout 2019. The goal is to gather information from stakeholders, notably people living with HIV, and to form a steering committee that will then help shape the plan. Residents can also participate through regional meetings, statewide initiatives and upcoming forums.

"Treatment works, and that's the miracle of this century, so now we just need to push and really help as many people as we can get into care and prevent new infections for those who are not yet infected," Evelyn Foust, head of the CDB, told The Daily Tarheel.

Foust was referring to the fact that HIV treatment not only keeps people who have HIV healthy but also prevents them from transmitting the virus sexually if they're undetectable, a fact known as undetectable = untransmittable, or U=U. In addition to condoms, another form of prevention is the daily tablet Truvada as pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP.

But challenges to testing residents for HIV and getting them on treatment or on PrEP when necessary remain. As the newspaper points out, stigma, racism and funding pose barriers, as does the fact that many people live in rural areas and thus face transportation issues.

In related news, North Carolina isn't the only state with plans to end the HIV epidemic. To read about Connecticut's recent "Getting to Zero CT" commission, click here. Similarly, the National Minority AIDS Council has launched a new training center to end the HIV epidemic in America. Learn more about that here.

And read an interview with NCAAN’s Christina Adeleke about modernizing the state’s HIV laws and attending AIDSWatch here.

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