We Have the Technology

The vice president of Policy and Advocacy at AIDS United on ending the AIDS epidemic through investing our time and money in new technologies.

December 2, 2011 By Ronald Johnson

“We can re-build him. We have the technology.” Remember that classic opening line for the show “The Six Million Dollar Man” from the 1970′s?" Well a version of that line is what has been going through my head as we observe this year’s World AIDS Day.

“We can end AIDS. We have the technology.”

In other words, we are coming out of 2011 with a pretty clear prescription of what we need to do to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States and around the world. Thomas Frieden of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that AIDS is a winnable battle. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health said major investments now can end this epidemic. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has proclaimed that creating an AIDS-free generation in our lifetime is actually within the realm of the possible.

So, while it looks like we have been shown the right path, are we going to take it?

On this World AIDS Day, it is important to remember that the United States is a part of the Global community that is fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and remains tremendously impacted by it. Nearly 1.2 people are infected with HIV in the United States. More than 640,000 of those who know their HIV status aren’t receiving the consistent care they need. There are an estimated 56,300 new HIV infections each year. Some U.S. cities report HIV prevalence rates of over 2%, a rate that surpasses many developing nations across the world. HIV/AIDS has hit many of our nation’s vulnerable communities the hardest, including communities of color (particularly African-Americans and Latinos), gay men, women, and people in living in the U.S. South.
So what can we do to continue calling attention to HIV in America? As we announced yesterday, AIDS United is now part of the Coalition for National HIV Awareness Month. The goal of National HIV Awareness Month (NHAM), the first of which will be in July, 2012, is to engage civil society and the private sector in the United States to create broad-scale public awareness of HIV/AIDS, end HIV stigma and discrimination and engage new stakeholders in the fight against the disease, with the ultimate goal of ending the epidemic. Find out more about National Awareness Month at www.nationalhivawarenessmonth.org

The release of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) by the White House Office of National HIV/AIDS Policy in July, 2010, has been a pivotal step towards redoubling our efforts to end this epidemic here on our own soil, providing us with a clear and ambitious “blueprint” for ending the domestic epidemic. The NHAS seeks to reduce new HIV infections, increase access to HIV care, and reduce HIV-related health disparities.

But with NHAS comes tremendous responsibility. We must take a good hard look at what we have been doing...finding out what works and changing what doesn’t. And then directing our strategic investments into what is working.

And what do we know works?

We know that condoms work in preventing transmission. So do syringe exchanges programs that provide clean needles to drug users who might otherwise transmit HIV by sharing needles. We know that targeted behavioral interventions work for affected populations, giving them the tools to make better health decisions for themselves and those they care about.

We know that getting HIV infected people access to treatment saves lives and dramatically inhibits transmission. We know that developing networks of care, where people can get wraparound services to address immediate and ongoing needs for shelter, food, addiction and mental health, will only increase their stability and improve their adherence to HIV treatment.

We know that important scientific and medical advances, like microbicides continue to be made in preventing HIV transmission and that improvement in the delivery and efficacy of treatment is also advancing.

So we know what works and there are many paths to success. But now we must invest, invest, invest.

One more time. We must invest! Our passion. Our talent. Our time.

And yes, our money. Public sector, private sector and individuals - we must invest NOW.

This year’s World AID Day theme is Getting to Zero: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS-related deaths. We now have a clear path to get to zero.

“We can end AIDS. We have the technology.”

Let’s ensure we have the moral commitment and the financial investments to Get to Zero!

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