Surprise: Trump's Proposed Budget Preserves AIDS Funding!

So why do these national AIDS groups want Congress to reject the proposal?

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Trump's budget blueprint includes massive cuts at the Environmental Protection Agency, the State Department and the National Institutes of Health, to name a few examples. But one area of funding is, unexpectedly, not on the chopping block: HIV treatment and prevention.

And yet five national AIDS-related health organizations released a press statement urging Congress to reject the budget proposal. Before we get to that, let's look at HIV issues in the budget.

According to Vox, the proposed budget not only calls Ryan White HIV/AIDS providers a "high priority" it wants to preserve but also "provides sufficient resources to maintain current commitments and all current patient levels on HIV/AIDS treatment under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief."

Ryan White programs provide health care to people living with HIV in the United States who don't have other coverage. Last year's budget allotted the program $2.3 billion in funding, making it the largest federal source of HIV-related funding after Medicaid and Medicare.

On the international front, the United States provides global funding through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which was launched by President George W. Bush. More than 11.5 million people receive daily HIV meds thanks to PEPFAR.

But as international advocacy group Health GAP points out in a statement about Trump's budget: "More than half of people living with HIV do not have access to treatment, and millions are dying unnecessarily because of austerity budgeting. Two billion dollars in additional annual resources are needed from the U.S. to fully fund PEPFAR and the Global Fund. Maintaining the status quo is no reason to celebrate—it's a decision to not do the necessary scale up via PEPFAR, which leaves 19 million people untreated and will cause millions of avoidable deaths."

Meanwhile, the five national health groups calling on Congress to reject Trump's budget include AIDS United, the National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD), the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) and The AIDS

Institute (TAI).

In a press release, they state that the budget will hamper the U.S. response to HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs, or STDs). That's because the budget calls for major cuts to the agencies that protect public health and fight infectious diseases. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services is looking at an 18 percent cut.

"We appreciate that the administration recognizes the importance of the Ryan White providers, other safety-net providers, and global health, including PEPFAR," said Michael Ruppal, executive director of The AIDS Institute, in the press release. "However, the cuts to the National Institutes of Health, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other parts of HHS will reverse our progress on ending the HIV epidemic. If enacted, the budget would be devastating to our nation's public health infrastructure and harm people living with and/or at risk for HIV and STDs. HIV and STD programs are critical to the public health of our nation and must not be cut."

What's more, the budget proposal includes significant increases to defense spending at the expense of nondefense funding. "To end the HIV epidemic and maintain progress on HIV and STD prevention, treatment, care, and support, defense spending and nondefense discretionary spending must be funded in a balanced approach. We expect Congress to take action and ensure balance for these cap increases," stated Paul Kawata, executive director of NMAC, in the press release.

David C. Harvey, executive director of NCSD added: "CDC data show the highest combined rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis in the U.S. in 20 years. With further budget cuts, we can expect these rates to continue to rise, which is quite alarming."

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