Biden’s First 100 Days, Assessed by a National HIV Policy Group

Plus: Specific steps the Biden-Harris Administration can take to support those with HIV and end the epidemic.

April 30, 2021 By AIDS United

The Biden-Harris administration celebrated 100 days in office this week. While we have been impressed with the work this administration has done so far, we are hopeful for bold action to come.

Many previous presidents have noted that the first 100 days are often spent building a team of Cabinet members. But, in its first 100 days, the Biden-Harris administration was also able to ensure a team of industry-leading experts was able to address COVID-19 and set the building blocks to addressing other major issues.

Responding to COVID-19

Even though the Biden-Harris administration set a goal of vaccinating 100 million Americans by 100 days in office, the push to vaccinate has resulted in more than 200 million Americans vaccinated against COVID-19. The level of detail that has been focused on vaccination has made this effort quite successful, as well as the support of grassroots organizers who worked to educate their communities on the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. While there are still disparities in who has access to the vaccine, we are hopeful that everyone will have the chance to be vaccinated by the end of the summer.

The Biden administration also spent a considerable amount of time in the first 100 days pushing the American Rescue Plan. This effort passed both chambers of Congress and resulted in expanding benefits for those impacted by COVID-19. The American Rescue Plan supplemented unemployment benefits, provided $20 billion in emergency rental insurance and ensured health departments were supported with $350 billion in aid for state, local and tribal governments. In a major success for harm reduction advocates, the plan also provided $30 million for syringe service programs.

Supporting access to health care

Swiftly after taking office, the Biden-Harris administration took action to ensure more individuals had access to health care. This involved reopening and extending the open enrollment period for the Affordable Care Act, ensuring people have health care coverage during a pandemic. The administration also rescinded Section 1557 of the ACA to ensure protections for LGBTQ individuals and people living with HIV. The administration also blocked the "public charge" rule, allowing undocumented individuals to access health care without fear of penalty.

An administration that lets science lead

The administration committed to fully staffing the cabinet with industry leading experts. Many of the administration officials serving at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are veterans of the HIV epidemic. The CDC has recently declared racism a public health crisis as well. This is a major shift from the previous administration, which took steps to ban training discussing anti-Black racism. The reversal of this ban ensures that conversations on racial justice continue and that health disparities are addressed.

What can the administration take action on?

To ensure the health and well-being of those living with HIV, this administration must take steps to ensure those vulnerable to HIV have access to preventive care and other health care services.

One of the first things this administration can do is to end the X Waiver. Requiring medical providers to obtain this waiver in order to prescribe buprenorphine (a medicine used to treat opioid use disorder) just creates more obstacles for those looking to provide harm reduction care. Additionally, the administration could easily work to end the ban on syringe service providers using federal funds to purchase syringes. The funding ban is a major obstacle for people who use drugs who are looking to begin harm reduction treatment.

While President Joe Biden did mention LGBTQ+ Americans in his address to the joint session of Congress, the administration could do more to help those living with HIV. The administration can specifically take action by supporting the collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data across federal agencies. These actions would not only strengthen the national response to COVID-19 but would also allow agencies to be more effective when reaching out to these populations for HIV prevention and treatment.

The administration must also work with Congress to ensure that sex education classes move beyond ineffective "abstinence only" lessons toward effective and inclusive safe sex education practices. Comprehensive, inclusive sex education is critical to ending the HIV epidemic. These

classes must include safe sex practices for LGBTQ individuals to effectively address those most impacted by the HIV epidemic.

President Biden should also reestablish and staff the the Office of National AIDS Policy within the White House Domestic Policy Council as soon as possible so that the administration can begin fully committing itself to addressing the health and well-being of people living with and impacted by HIV in the United States. This new Office of National AIDS Policy must engage with partners throughout the federal government, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Human Resources and Services Administration, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Food and Drug Administration and Office of National Drug Control Policy, to ensure the National HIV/AIDS Strategy and Ending the HIV Epidemic program address the myriad issues facing people living with HIV.

Why do we need support from the White House?

We know that vocal support from the president on ending the HIV epidemic is crucial. The attention and action that comes with having HIV be a focus for the various departments and agencies that the White House controls would be a major step forward towards ending the epidemic. Taking action to uplift the needs of people who use drugs and LGBTQ+ individuals is a step forward in that direction.

The administration must take steps to prioritize the health, safety and well-being of those living with HIV. AIDS United is excited by what has happened over the first 100 days of this administration and is looking forward to working with the White House on these issues.

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