How Biden's First Week in Office Impacts the Work to End HIV

Here's why we think the Biden-Harris administration will make good on its pledge to end the HIV epidemic by 2030.

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In his inaugural address, President Joe Biden pledged to unite the nation by combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing racial injustice and ensuring health care access for all Americans.

But, for this administration, the first step in achieving these goals is to undo many actions of the White House that preceded them. Several recent executive orders, as well as new hires in the administration, have given those of us in the HIV community hope that President Biden will make good on his pledge to end the epidemic by 2025.

First, Dr. Rochelle Walensky started in her new role as the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Walensky has worked in HIV research and care since her medical school residency. She has several years of experience working in Boston, where she led the infectious disease department at Massachusetts General Hospital and was a professor at Harvard School of Medicine.

Additionally, just before the Biden administration began, Dr. Demiitri Daskalaskis, a longtime HIV-advocate from New York City, joined the CDC. Dr. Daskalaskis work and commitment to ending the epidemic has been outstanding. It is of great importance to the HIV community to have two individuals who have been dedicated to end the HIV epidemic in our corner at the CDC, and we wish both Dr. Walensky and Dr. Daskalakis the best of luck in their first few months on the job.

The Biden administration furthered its commitment to the LGBTQ community by nominating Dr. Rachel Levine, the former health secretary for the state of Pennsylvania, as the Assistant Health Secretary. If confirmed by the Senate, Levine would be the first out transgender person to hold the position as well as the first transgender person to go through a Senate confirmation process for a federal position.

We also saw further commitment from the administration to end the HIV epidemic through executive action and hirings.

Over the past week, President Biden signed several executive orders outlining the need to prioritize racial equity. The administration formed an equity task force dedicated to equity in the

COVID-19 pandemic response as well as ensuring racial equity is at the forefront of any policies coming out of the White House and federal offices.

Among these actions, the administration has set a broad definition of equity to include race, sexuality, gender, ability as well as those who face inequality due to their location. The executive order also allows for the Director of Management and Budget to partner with all federal agencies to study the best ways to make their offices more equitable to the above categories. This is a large step forward that shows a willingness for significant investment on addressing racial inequities. We are hopeful that the Biden administration will continue to build on this momentum and address the deep racial inequities that occur in health care. We cannot end the HIV epidemic without such action.

Finally, on her first full day in the White House, first lady Jill Biden visited Whitman-Walker Health, a member of our Public Policy Council. She is the third first lady to visit the AIDS service organization since its founding in 1973. Whitman-Walker provides essential care to those living with and vulnerable to HIV in the Washington, D.C., area.

These and other actions taken by the new administration signal a turning point in our work to end the epidemic. Over the coming weeks, we are hopeful that the Biden administration will not only continue to address COVID-19 but also begin to lay the foundation for ending the epidemic by 2025.

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