# CDC's "Banned" Words Represent an Attack on Marginalized People

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Last week, it was revealed that high level Trump administration officials at the Department of Health and Human Services and possibly at the Office of Management and Budget had asked staff at the CDC to refrain from using certain words in their Fiscal Year 2019 budget justification. CDC officials then told other staff that they should not use the words "vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based" and "science-based" in their Fiscal Year 2019 budget justifications.

The budget justification is the document that accompanies release of the Administration's budget and typically describes programs and explains the purpose of funding decisions for each program. The budget is usually released the first Monday in February each year. A request to avoid certain words as the document is being prepared implicitly suggests that the use of those words could result in a loss of funding.

Other government agencies later reported being given similar instructions. For example, the State Department has suggested that references to "sex education" be rewritten as "sexual risk avoidance."

The CDC's director, Brenda Fitzgerald, later said that "there are no banned words at CDC", although she did not deny that CDC officials had been asked to omit certain words from their budget justifications. HHS officials also stated that they had not banned words however it is clear that pressure was transmitted to staff to avoid some types of words.

AIDS United is particularly alarmed that a prohibition of these and other terms will hurt the ability of agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services and the State Department to effectively address the HIV epidemic as well as the health and well-being of both the transgender community as well as African-American and Latino/a communities. For those vulnerable and diverse communities that are at high-risk for HIV and viral hepatitis, the banning of those 7 words erases them from a funding landscape that already fails to provide needed resources. After all, how can you obtain the necessary funding to provide care for vulnerable, diverse and/or transgender individuals living with or affected by HIV if you can't even define who they are?

On their website, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) make a pledge that they will, “base all public health decisions on the highest quality scientific data” and “Treat all persons with dignity, honesty, and respect.” Banning concepts such as “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “diversity,” “transgender,” “fetus,” “evidence-based” and “science-based” has the potential to reverse this pledge. AIDS United strongly opposes any effort by the Administration to censor or erase these words. Such actions are unacceptable and would have a profound and negative impact on the fight to end the HIV epidemic.

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