We Condemn Trump's Domestic Gag Rule on Family Planning Providers

Here's how the administration's abortion-related attack relates to HIV. Plus: Will the CDC stop collecting vital LGBT data?

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For decades, the Title X family planning program has played an indispensable role as the nation's only federal program devoted to the provision of affordable reproductive health services to low income and underserved communities. On Friday, the Trump administration is expected to attack the Title X program and the millions of people who rely on it for care by instituting a domestic "gag rule" on all recipients of Title X funding, denying grant money to any provider who discusses abortion with their clients or who provides abortions with non-federal funds in the same physical location where it utilizes Title X funds. The Administration applied a similar "global gag rule" to international health funding beginning in 2017. According to officials in the Administration, the policy is directly aimed at Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of reproductive health care in the U.S.

If instituted, this rule would force providers at Title X-funded health centers to voluntarily withhold vital information from clients about their health care options, a practice that is in violation of both accepted medical ethics and the original purpose of the Title X program to "assist in making comprehensive voluntary family planning services readily available to all persons desiring such services." As a result of this punitive and deeply harmful rule and the inevitable loss of funding to reproductive health care providers who are unwilling to deny their pregnant clients counseling and referrals on the full range of options from adoption to abortion, low income individuals who are living with or at risk of contracting HIV will be unable to access the sexually transmitted infection screenings that are so desperately needed, along with other vital services like cancer screenings and birth control.

We are particularly concerned as many Title X providers also provide HIV prevention and treatment services and in many communities are the sole providers of such care. For example, the 2015 HIV outbreak in Scott County Indiana was made worse by the closure of a Planned Parenthood clinic in 2013. That clinic had been the only regular source of HIV testing in the county. As a result, the outbreak was not identified quickly, resulting in many more cases that should have been prevented.

AIDS United vigorously opposes this domestic gag rule and links arms with all Title X-funded health

centers including Planned Parenthood. We strongly oppose the dangerous imposition of a rule that has the potential to degrade the health of millions of vulnerable people in the U.S. We call on the Trump administration to rescind this rule immediately.

In related news, The Williams Institute revealed that an official with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had said the agency was planning to remove LGBT questions from the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). This system is one of the only systems to collect measures of LGBT people's health and consequently one of the only sources of quantitative information about the health of LGBT people. AIDS United is seeking to verify the report and calls on CDC Administrator, Dr. Robert Redfield, to ensure that the CDC and other agencies will continue to collect this vital information and that no changes are made in the collection of LGBT data in the BRFSS or other systems.

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