



At The Cost of Survival Rally, HIV Advocates Made the Stakes Plain: Cuts Cost Lives

HIV activists at the rally displayed a long “receipt” on the lawn — a powerful symbol of the costs our communities are being asked to bear.

June 15, 2026 By [AIDS United](#)

AIDS United started Pride Month in June by gathering with partners, advocates, community members, health care providers, and people directly impacted by HIV at the U.S. Capitol for The Cost of Survival Rally — a powerful call to Congress to protect the programs that help people survive, stay healthy, and live with dignity.

The rally, organized as part of the national [Seven Days in June Week of Action](#), brought our movement together at a critical moment. As Congress considers federal funding decisions that will shape the future of HIV prevention, care, treatment, housing, food assistance, Medicaid, and other essential supports, advocates made one message unmistakably clear:

Survival should not come with a price tag.

“Across the country, our communities are being forced to navigate impossible choices because of policy decisions that threaten Medicaid, housing, food assistance, HIV prevention, treatment access, and the basic supports that make health possible,” said Carl Baloney, Jr., President and CEO of AIDS United. “The Cost of Survival Rally was about naming the truth our communities know too well: health care, housing, food, and dignity should never be treated as luxuries.”

A Movement Made Visible

The photos from the rally tell a story of urgency, solidarity, and resolve.

Across the Capitol grounds, advocates held signs, stood shoulder to shoulder, and lifted up the voices of people who know exactly what is at stake when public health programs are treated as expendable. Speakers from across the HIV movement named the real-world consequences of federal cuts — not in abstract policy terms, but in the language of lived experience.

Throughout the rally, speakers representing national HIV organizations, community-based providers, people living with HIV, public health advocates, and directly impacted communities reminded Congress that the HIV movement is watching, organizing, and demanding action.

Speakers helped ground the event in the human reality behind the policy debate, calling advocates together to make visible the cost of cuts and the urgency of protecting care. Leaders from Seven Days in June, the [Save HIV Funding Campaign](#), AIDS United, and coalition partners reinforced the importance of sustained federal investment in HIV prevention, treatment, housing, and care.

Speakers also lifted up the broader systems that make health possible: Medicaid, housing assistance, food security, harm reduction, transportation, case management, and the community-based organizations that connect people to lifesaving services every day.

Every photo captured a different part of the same truth: our communities are showing up because they have to.

People living with HIV showed up. Providers showed up. Advocates showed up. Public health leaders showed up. Allies showed up. And together, we reminded lawmakers that behind every budget line is a person, a family, a clinic, a case manager, a housing program, a prevention service, a prescription, a meal, a ride to an appointment, and a future that deserves protection.

The "receipt" showing the cost of budget cuts to people with HIV; it was created by Carlitos Díaz of QLatinx and displayed June 2026. Courtesy of AIDS United

The Receipt: Showing the True Cost of Cuts

One of the most striking visuals from the rally was the long “receipt” displayed by advocates — a powerful symbol of the costs our communities are being asked to bear.

The receipt did not show luxury items. It showed the basic supports that make survival possible.

The receipt was created by [Carlitos Díaz \(IG: thealbopapi\)](#) of [QLatinx \(IG: @qlatinx\)](#).

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW FULL RECEIPT IMAGE](#)

The image was simple, but the message was devastating: when Congress cuts HIV funding and related safety net programs, someone still pays the price.

That price is paid by people who lose access to medication. It is paid by people who fall out of care because transportation disappears. And by people who cannot maintain treatment because housing becomes unstable. Or by clinics forced to stretch already-limited resources.

Community-based organizations are asked to do more with less. Meanwhile, people who are already navigating poverty, stigma, racism, transphobia, criminalization, and barriers to care.

The receipt reminded everyone who saw it that cuts are not savings. They are cost shifts — from the federal government onto the backs of people and communities who can least afford to absorb them.

HIV Funding Is Health Care Funding

At the rally, speakers emphasized that HIV funding is not separate from the broader health care system. It is part of the infrastructure that helps people access preventive care, primary care, mental health services, housing support, medication, and the trusted community-based programs that keep people connected to care.

Federal HIV programs have helped transform what it means to live with HIV in the United States. They have saved lives, reduced new transmissions, strengthened public health systems, and supported generations of people living with and vulnerable to HIV.

But that progress is not guaranteed.

Years of flat funding, rising health care costs, reductions in Medicaid and insurance coverage supports, and increasing strain on state and local systems have left many programs under pressure. In some places, cost-containment measures, service reductions, and growing uncertainty are already threatening access to care.

At a time when we have the tools to prevent new HIV transmissions and support people living with

HIV in reaching viral suppression, disinvestment would be both morally indefensible and fiscally short-sighted.

The Human Cost of Policy Decisions

Throughout the rally, speakers returned to a central point: these decisions are not abstract.

A cut to housing support can mean someone loses the stability they need to stay in care. Cuts to Medicaid can mean someone loses access to the provider they trust. Reductions in food assistance can mean someone has to choose between groceries and transportation to a medical appointment. Prevention programs with reduced funding can mean fewer people have access to PrEP, testing, condoms, harm reduction, and culturally competent education. Community-based organizations losing funding can mean fewer trusted messengers reaching the communities most impacted by HIV.

For people living with and vulnerable to HIV, survival often depends on an ecosystem of support. Medication matters. But so do housing, food, transportation, insurance coverage, case management, mental health care, harm reduction and trusted community relationships.

When that ecosystem is weakened, people are harmed.

That is why The Cost of Survival Rally mattered. It created space for our movement to connect the dots and make visible what too often gets hidden in appropriations debates and budget charts.

Standing Together at the Capitol

The setting mattered, too.

Standing on the Capitol grounds, advocates brought the message directly to the lawmakers whose decisions will determine whether HIV programs are protected, strengthened, or cut. The crowd made clear that people are watching. Communities are organizing. And the HIV movement will not be silent while lifesaving programs are put at risk.

The rally took place ahead of key congressional appropriations decisions, including the House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee markup and full committee consideration of federal funding levels. Advocates urged Congress to reject cuts and increase investments in HIV prevention, care, treatment, research, and the broader supports that make health possible.

The timing was also deeply significant. That Friday, June 5th, marked 45 years since the first Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report documented what would later become known as the HIV epidemic. More than four decades later, our movement continues to carry the lessons of that history: silence costs lives, neglect costs lives, and policy choices cost lives.

But we also carry the power of community, care, advocacy, science, and collective action.

Thank You to Everyone Who Showed Up

AIDS United is grateful to every partner, advocate, speaker, staff member, volunteer, and community member who helped make The Cost of Survival Rally possible.

We are especially grateful to Joseph White for helping organize this action and for bringing people together around a message that reflects the urgency of this moment.

We thank our partners in Seven Days in June, the Save HIV Funding Campaign, and the many coalition organizations that continue to fight for the future of HIV prevention, treatment, care, housing, and health equity.

We also thank the speakers who used their voices to make the stakes plain. Their remarks reminded us that this fight is about more than numbers on a page. It is about whether people can afford medication, remain housed, stay insured, access prevention, reach care, and live with dignity.

And we thank every person who showed up — whether you held a sign, shared your story, brought a friend, took a photo, contacted a lawmaker, or simply stood in the crowd to make our movement more visible.

Every person there helped tell a stronger story.

Now Congress must act.

[View more photos from The Cost of Survival Rally](#)

[This press release](#) was originally posted June 11, 2026, by AIDS United.