Demand AIDS Drug Assistance Program Become an Entitlement like Medicare!

February 10, 2011 By Eric Sawyer

It is unbelievable that the ADAP waiting list for HIV medications has now grown to over 6,000. Year after year the AIDS Drugs Assistance Program requires specific annual Authorization and Appropriations Bills and successful legislative action. The Congress has year after year voted to pass the reauthorization and appropriation bills but also basically flat funds the program, while the prices of all AIDS medications rise. The number of US citizens who need access to ARVs through the program continues to grow.

Annual reauthorization has set the precedent for continued funding, yet this hard fought for safety net for the working uninsured poor remains perched on the edge of a cliff waiting for the program reauthorization efforts to fail and send thousands of PLWHIV into harm's way.

It is time we stand up and demand the Congressional leadership to transition the ADAP program into the category of an entitlement program. As an entitlement program (like Medicare and Medicaid) the Federal and State Governments would be required to fund the ADAP Program based upon the level of need, not based upon a negotiated appropriation bill amount, or a continuation of last year's funding level. Like Medicare and Medicaid anyone who meets the eligibility requirement would be provided ADAP services.

Some are saying - impossible - this is a heavy lift but consider recent scientific evidence on Treatment as Prevention.

Treatment as Prevention long term research has proven that providing anti-retroviral medications reduces the viral load and infectivity of individuals whom are compliant with treatment. Studies by Julio Montaner in British Columbia have shown that providing free access to every person living with HIV and access to harm reduction services can lead to dramatically reduced rates of new HIV infections Province wide.

Treatment as Prevention research proves that providing access to ARVs reduces the global public reservoir of entire communities, leading to lower HIV transmission rates, thus providing a public health benefit.

The recent increase of nearly 2,000 in the last month to the ADAP waiting list makes it time to step forward with this demand. We are about to hold the annual AIDS Watch advocacy effort targeting

Congressional Leadership on HIV. We must change the ask away from the same old process of begging crumbs from the table of Congress and hoping for a short term fix to win enough funds to provide a years relief for the ADAP funding crisis. It is time to demand a systemic fix, transitioning ADAP to an entitlement program where the fund must be provided by States and the Federal Government to meet the level of need, ensuring that everyone who qualifies for the ADAP program gains access. This battle won't be won immediately, so we will still have to ask for a short term emergency funding to eliminate the ADAP waiting list. This would solve the problem long term when won.

I similarly think the AIDS Community must return to the demand we ACT UP Founding Activist championed in the 1980's - that being CURE AIDS NOW!! And return to the demand for research funding to FIND A CURE FOR AIDS. The AIDS CURE Project is leading this renewed effort and their work must be supported.

Will you join me in a conference call this Friday at 12 Noon EST to discuss adding this to our community demands? And if NAPWA, NMAC and other National Advocacy Campaigns like C2EA, Health GAP and leading ASOs like amfAR, GMHC, Housing Works, APLA, SFAF, CAF, will join ACT UP in bring forward this demand, hopefully it can be a priority demand, perhaps even during next week's AIDS Watch.

ACT UP is planning a Late Spring ACT UP Anniversary Action which will highlight the demands expressed above. I hope to talk to you Friday at noon. A free conference call has been set up to discuss this proposal:

Free Conference Call
Conference Dial-in Number: (605) 562-3000
Host Access Code: 718007*
Participant Access Code: 718007#

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