Jobs Are Racial Justice

As health groups receive millions in federal funds to end the HIV epidemic, they must invest it in local communities.

August 11, 2020 By Paul Kawata

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last week announced the distribution of $109 million in new funding to the 57 jurisdictions that were prioritized for the Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) efforts. Since their 2020 EHE budget was $140 million, that means $31 million stayed at the CDC. NMAC is calling for transparency for how CDC intends to use this money. While we have no reasons to be concerned, CDC has not always been transparent in how it spends its HIV funds.

Transparency is important because too many people don't trust people in power, particularly people in government. Black Lives Matter is calling for a new accountability when spending the public's money. If we are going to build an HIV movement that is committed to racial justice, then it starts with being transparent about the money. Money is power, and we need to monitor how HIV funds are being spent.

We also need to get the money out the door because community is hurting. To my friends at the targeted health departments, please get the money to community as quickly as you can. I don't need to tell you that people are hurting. This new money comes just as America is falling into an economic tsunami. These millions of dollars should translate into thousands of new jobs. With unemployment hovering at 10%, it matters.

Just as I requested that the CDC be transparent with the money they are keeping, I also think it is important for health departments to be transparent. While the vast majority are great, there are some health departments that keep too much of the money. After all these years fighting HIV, we know that community, particularly people living with HIV/AIDS, are core to the solution.

To all of the community-based organizations and health centers who are getting new funding to end the epidemic, whom you hire matters. NMAC hopes you will hire staff from the communities that are hardest hit by HIV. Black Lives Matter is a fight for racial justice and health equity. You can stand in solidarity with the struggle by hiring people from the struggle. Racism is real, and our movement has the opportunity with these new jobs to change lives and to end the HIV epidemic.

Our staffs are watching, boards are concerned, donors want to know how we are responding to Black Lives Matter, and people living with HIV want us to do the right thing. While it's not enough money, $109 million is a start. All of our jobs are to make sure the money is going to where it can

have the largest impact in the communities hardest hit by HIV. We know how to end the HIV epidemic, but do we have the will power and the money to make it happen?

Yours in the struggle,
Paul Kawata

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