Looking Back on HIV Policy in 2020

AIDS United zooms in on the community's biggest HIV policy wins in 2020—accomplished via virtual work.

December 24, 2020 By AIDS United

This year has certainly been one to remember here at AIDS United. We've had many hurdles to overcome in this last year, and we are certainly hopeful for the year to come. As we close out an unusual year, our policy team reflects on some of the HIV advocacy community's biggest wins in 2020.

First, we would be remiss without mentioning our shift to a completely virtual office. As we took our operations completely virtual in mid-March, we also made the difficult choice to pivot to a fully virtual AIDSWatch. While this change was a departure, a virtual AIDSWatch allowed us to learn and grow together while not putting any of us — especially all of us living with HIV — at risk or in harm's way. We made the event free, and the increased accessibility resulted in 900 people tuning in to AIDSWatch on Zoom and many more tuning in to watch the morning plenary via Facebook Live. Our success at AIDSWatch has given us the confidence to make AIDSWatch virtual again in 2021.

Throughout this tumultuous year, we ensured that the needs of the HIV community were before congressional leaders. From more than 130 virtual Hill meetings to more than 14,000 actions taken, the voices of the HIV community were loud and clear. We worked with House and Senate leaders to secure additional funding for Ryan White programs and The Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS program. We advocated for those who depend on the U.S. Postal Service to receive their HIV medications, to have the Food and Drug administration end the discriminatory blood ban and to ensure that people living with HIV were included in COVID vaccine trials.

Our advocates and partner organizations were kept informed on what was happening throughout 2020 through our policy updates and blog articles. We were named one of Healthline's Best HIV blogs of 2020 with topics ranging from congressional appropriations, harm reduction, COVID relief packages, racial justice and action taken by the Supreme Court.

Our Public Policy Council welcomed four new members to its ranks, bringing our council to 54 members as we enter 2021. We are thrilled to welcome the Southwest Center, Multicultural AIDS Coalition, the National AIDS Housing Coalition and Bill's Kitchen to the PPC.

AIDS United continued our work to have racial justice lead our response in our policy and advocacy work. This year brought a national spotlight to anti-Blackness and white supremacy after George

Floyd was killed. We have long known that racism, anti-Blackness and white supremacy hinder our ability to end the HIV epidemic. In response to this and as a recommitment of our values, our Public Policy Council created a new committee to focus on racial justice not only within the HIV sector but the entire health care field. This group will be releasing the first step of its first major project in 2021.

The 2020 election was an important opportunity for our partnerships to get out the vote to grow stronger in this virtual environment. We elevated the work of the Positive Women's Network's Get Out The Vote efforts through the 2020 election. We will be continuing to work with our partners to ensure that everyone is registered to vote, has access to vote and is committed to turning out for their local, state and national elections. We are ready to work with the incoming Biden administration to ensure that ending the HIV epidemic remains a priority.

As we enter a new year and a new administration, we are excited for how our work will evolve over the coming year. To end the HIV epidemic by 2025, we certainly have work to do.

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