Low-Income Housing Advocates Celebrate, Reflect and Plan

April 15, 2016 By AIDS United

The week of April 4th was marked by celebration, reflection and forward thinking by advocates of affordable housing for the low income people, including those living with HIV. In a climate of extreme budget austerity, HIV and housing advocates are proud to hold the line on federal funding for housing for people living with HIV. Moreover, affordable housing advocates celebrate the momentum that has been gained towards reforms through the Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act of 2016 (H.R. 3700), which would increase access to affordable rental housing, provide assistance to low-income renters, and facilitate homeownership.

Celebration and Reflection

As a part of activity by affordable housing advocates, the National Low Income Housing Coalition held its 34th Annual Leadership Awards Reception on April 5th in Washington, DC, awarding AIDS United allies including Nancy Bernstine with the Cushing Niles Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award and Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) with the Edward W. Brooke Housing Leadership Award. Bernstine, a lifetime advocate for housing affordability most recently, retired from the National AIDS Housing Coalition (NAHC) where she served as its Executive Director since 2003.

“It’s been my great good fortune to work on the intersection of housing and health care for people living with HIV/AIDS. I am so happy that members of the NAHC board are here–Board President Art Bendixen, longtime board members Shawn Lang and Kathie Hiers, and Executive Director Rusty Bennett. The work of HIV/AIDS housing advocates and providers is so important–at its core, stable, affordable housing and services for people with HIV/AIDS is what enables them to access and adhere to the wonderful medications and treatment regimens, and to manage their illness and live productive and healthy lives. I have witnessed this amazing, too often unheralded, segment of the low income housing community, work magic with woefully stretched resources, but stitching together solutions that help thousands of people get healthy and stay healthy. I share this recognition with them,” said Bernstine during her acceptance speech.

NAHC and AIDS United collaborated on suggestions on how best to modernize the legislation, ultimately becoming our position statement. Additionally, on April 7th the NAHC held a congressional staff briefing on housing programs serving people living with HIV/AIDS, including the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program. The presentation included data

indicating a need for AIDS housing, a discussion of housing as a structural intervention, an update from Representative David Price's office about the modernization of the HOPWA formula, a myriad of Congressional asks, and concluded with a personal story from AIDSWatch 2016 Louisiana State Coordinator Dorian Gray about how the HOPWA program has made a difference in his life.

The data that was presented showed that at any given time, 50% of people living with HIV will have a housing need, and since the U.S. has approximately of 1.2 million people living with HIV, the need far outstrips current resources. Also, the HIV/AIDS Housing Cascade was presented, which is modeled after work done in New York City, and shows that among those who are housed, 99.8% of those diagnosed are linked to care compared to 80% of those reported on U.S. Treatment Cascade and 69% are virally suppressed as compared to 30% of those reported on the U.S. Treatment Cascade. Such data can be powerful advocacy tools when showing how effective housing can be for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Forward Thinking

The briefing was concluded by a series of congressional asks for the modernization of the HOPWA formula. The HOPWA program is the only program to provide housing specifically to individuals living with HIV. HOPWA is administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of HIV/AIDS Housing. The following recommendations were made:

- $375 million in funding for HOPWA Program

- $12 million distributed (outside the formula) to those HOPWA formula jurisdictions that would lose funding with the HOPWA formula modernization.

- $3.5 million dedicated to HOPWA technical assistance in order to accommodate training on changes necessitated by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the proposed HOPWA formula update.

- $24.5 million to expand HOPWA competitive grants to facilitate replication of innovative programs and to permit expansion in existing programs.

AIDS United supports these recommendations which are consistent with our position statement on housing. We advocate for affordable access to stable housing which plays a critical role in preventing costly new HIV infections, improving HIV-related health outcomes, reducing mortality, and decreasing the use of expensive emergency care and other crisis services. We support the modernization of the HOPWA formula to better align the program with today's epidemic by

securing Senate passage of the House-passed H.R. 3700, including the HOPWA modernization language. Additional legislative efforts to support HOPWA modernization can be tracked using the AIDS United's Policy Action Center. For questions, please reach out to Director of Government Affairs, Carl Baloney at cbaloney@aidsunited.org.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/lowincome-housing-advocates-celebrate-reflect-plan