Why You Need to Attend USCA!!!

June 19, 2018 By Paul Kawata

This year's United States Conference on AIDS is very important because the federal government will discuss its plan to end the HIV epidemic in America during a USCA plenary, then hold a town hall to collect feedback from attendees. Everyone needs to come prepared to share their thoughts on what it will take to make this happen.

Biomedical HIV prevention has given us real pathways to end the epidemic. U=U, PrEP, PEP, and TasP have made it possible to consider the end. However, it can't happen without a plan.

While NMAC is encouraged by this development, we are also very concerned about working with this administration. Can we put aside our differences and work together? NMAC hopes the value of planning to end an epidemic that disproportionately impacts communities of color greatly outweighs the difficult politics. This will be a true test of our leadership and there are no guarantees.

There are many communities and organizations who want and need to be part of the process. NMAC supports and encourages multiple efforts. We are particularly excited about our work with the Coalition to End AIDS. Working collaboratively on a document from AIDS United, we will bring a consensus statement to USCA.

Let's encourage the feds to create a real plan, not some bullshit paper that sits on a shelf. What have we learned over the last 37 years? HIV sits at the intersection of oppression, discrimination, and stigma. When the world turned its back on us, we did not wait to be saved; we saved ourselves and the people we loved. For many years we suffered unimaginable pain as we buried more people than we remember. Now we have the opportunity to build the plan to end the epidemic. What should the plan say about us? While the federal government will have its own process, NMAC calls on them to make community a full and equal partner. The new strategy needs input from the many sectors and communities highly impacted by HIV.

What innovations can we bring along with our efforts to end the HIV epidemic? For example, every time there is an HIV test, let's also test for STDs and Hepatitis. These sexually transmitted infectious diseases are drivers for each other. Working to reduce any of these infections supports our overall efforts to end the HIV epidemic.

This process has the potential to implode. Community needs to monitor and work directly with multiple federal agencies. The specific agency plans are probably more important than the overall federal plan. HRSA, CDC, HUD, SAMHSA, NIH, NIAID, OAR, and other federal departments need to

be accountable to community. We must be at the table as these plans are built, implemented, and reviewed.

The 2018 USCA is all about putting together the federal plan to end the HIV epidemic in America. If you want to be part of this process, then you need to attend the meeting. Just because we ask to be part of the process does not mean we support the final plan. Our support is not guaranteed. It depends on the plan's level of community engagement, real biomedical HIV prevention initiatives that speak to the realities of the communities highly impacted by HIV, and funding to make it happen. If it's a good plan, then the 2019 United States Conference on AIDS and the 2019 Biomedical HIV Prevention Summit will focus on its implementation. This is a multi-year effort that needs your engagement from the beginning. See you in Orlando!

Yours in the Struggle,
Paul Kawata

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