PACHA Meeting in Houston Examined Ending the HIV Epidemic in Texas [VIDEOS]

The Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) visited community partners in Texas, notably women and Latinos.

May 17, 2024 By HIV.gov

The Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) met in Houston, Texas, on March 27 and 28, 2024. Among the topics PACHA explored during its 80th full Council meeting were the response to rising syphilis rates and work to end the HIV epidemic in Texas. PACHA also engaged with community members during a "PACHA-to-the-People" community engagement session and in visits to three organizations engaged in the HIV response in the Houston area.

Ending the HIV Epidemic in Texas

Panels comprised of community members shared perspectives with the Council and engaged in discussions about efforts to end the HIV epidemic in Texas, addressing policy, service delivery, community engagement, and more. The first panel began with statewide perspectives on HIV and the HIV response, followed by a discussion with representatives of three of the five Texas counties prioritized in the Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. initiative who highlighted some of their successes as well as challenges.

Another panel focused specifically on addressing the needs of cisgender Black and Latina women and included a discussion of a new OIDP-led initiative supporting efforts to end the HIV epidemic among Black women. Focusing on another population disproportionately affected by HIV in Texas, another panel discussed the HIV needs of Hispanic/LatinX communities. This discussion considered both statewide and local perspectives and highlighted the specific challenges experienced by some immigrants seeking HIV services, as well as the particular circumstances of border communities. A final panel explored the unique needs of both urban and rural jurisdictions' work to end the HIV epidemic. The panel members highlighted innovative approaches that are tailored to the community setting and offered recommendations for how federal programs could better support those efforts.

PACHA-to-the-People Continues with Site Visits and Community Engagement Session

PACHA continued its ongoing efforts to hear firsthand from people in communities who are responding to HIV every day through both site visits and a community engagement session. Members visited three community-based organizations in Houston that address different aspects of HIV prevention and care for Houstonians:

- Fundación Latinoamericana De Acción Social (FLAS), which provides education, HIV and STD counseling and testing, treatment referrals, and other services in the Latino community.
- The Normal Anomaly Initiative, Inc., which tells the stories of Black, queer plus persons and works to change those stories through advocacy, direct services, and technical assistance.
- Avenue 360 Health and Wellness, a Federally Qualified Health Center with six clinics in the Houston region providing primary, behavioral health, and dental care to medically underserved communities. The health center's services include HIV testing, prevention, and care.

View a short video about these site visits:

During the PACHA-to-the-People community engagement session, community members shared observations and requests with PACHA. The topics spanned many issues and included a recommendation for more resources for nursing and health professionals' HIV education; a request for initiatives and incentives to expand routine opt-out HIV testing in the emergency department; an appeal for continued investment in capacity development among community-based organizations; a reminder to pay community members rather than expecting them to volunteer when sharing their expertise and lived experience with HIV; requests for incentives or a mandate from the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program for states to exercise the option to use program resources to purchase health insurance for clients, particularly in states that have not expanded Medicaid; and encouragement to federal agencies to ensure that grant reviewers reflect communities being served by the programs. View the video of this conversation:

Syphilis Task Force Update and Remarks from ADM Levine

Dr. Timothy Harrison, Principal Deputy Director of the HHS Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy (OIDP), shared an update with Council members about the National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Task Force, acknowledging PACHA's June 2023 recommendation for urgent federal action on the rapidly rising rates of primary and secondary syphilis as well as congenital

syphilis.

In response to the syphilis crisis, HHS formed the multi-agency task force chaired by the Assistant Secretary for Health, Admiral Rachel Levine, MD. The task force is using a syndemic approach to coordinate and integrate effective interventions, with the goal of better preventing and treating syphilis and reducing health inequities. The task force, which includes representatives of all the divisions of HHS as well as members from the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, has implemented actions to address missed opportunities for syphilis screening and treatment and to raise both public and health care provider awareness about syphilis. Watch his remarks. Read ADM Levine's recent blog post about syphilis.

ADM Levine also shared remarks highlighting federal efforts to address HIV among women, particularly Black women and transgender women who are disproportionately affected. She also discussed the HIV elements of President Biden's Fiscal Year 2025 budget, shared an update on the HOPE Act on which PACHA had encouraged action during its prior meeting, and highlighted HHS' syndemic approach to understand and address the interactions of HIV, STIs, viral hepatitis, and substance use. Watch her remarks.

PACHA Business and Announcement

The Council's four subcommittees shared updates on their work. The members also reflected on all the information shared by the several panels that explored important topics during the two-day meeting and began making plans for the next meeting and their next subcommittee discussions.

Kaye Hayes, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Infectious Disease and Director of OIDP, also announced that her long-time colleague Caroline Talev would be the new Executive Director of PACHA.

Next PACHA Meeting: June 5-6, 2024

The next PACHA meeting will take place June 5-6, 2024, in Washington, DC. Details about that meeting are available on HIV.gov's About PACHA page.

This blog post was published May 15, 2024, on HIV.gov.

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