Pharmacies Take Action to Address HIV

Pharmacies have been accelerating their efforts to provide HIV prevention and care services in their retail locations.

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From Harold J. Phillips, MRP, Director, White House Office of National AIDS Policy

Since the release of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (the Strategy), I have been working with federal and community stakeholders to increase the low-threshold availability of PrEP and other services throughout communities. As part of these efforts, I have been working with several partners to expand the role of pharmacists in efforts to end HIV. Pharmacists are important partners in implementing the Strategy. Over the last few months, several pharmacies have been accelerating their efforts to provide HIV prevention and care services in their retail locations.

Accelerating Actions

My office, the White House Office of National AIDS Policy, in conjunction with the U.S. Business Action to End HIV, and the Elton John AIDS Foundation, convened leaders from across the pharmacy sector at the American Pharmacists Association headquarters in D.C. to explore opportunities to expand the role of community pharmacies and pharmacists in HIV prevention and care.

The meeting included 40 individuals representing major retail pharmacies (Avita Care Solutions, CVS Health, Walgreens, and Walmart), community pharmacy representatives, affiliated associations, the federal government, and experts. The meeting focused on opportunities and challenges and included action planning for joint work to increase services provided in communities by pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

I have been very excited to see several pharmacy chains take significant actions to expand the services offered to address HIV. In June, Walmart, a founding member of the U.S. Business Action to End HIV, opened 70 specialty HIV pharmacies in Colorado, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Florida. By the end of 2023, Walmart will have more than 80 HIV Specialty Pharmacies of the Community in 11 states. These pharmacies, operating within the traditional pharmacy setting, are staffed with a team of HIV-trained pharmacists, technicians, and community health workers who can assist people with HIV in addressing health concerns.

On World AIDS Day 2022, Walmart announced, in conjunction with the Elton John AIDS Foundation, a nationwide training HIV Prevention + Treatment continuing education program available to all

Walmart pharmacies and Walmart health team members.

On June 27, National HIV Testing Day, Walgreens teamed up with Greater Than HIV, health departments, and community organizations for their annual event providing free HIV testing and counseling at more than 400 locations. Counselors were available to answer questions about HIV prevention and treatment options and provide referrals to PrEP. Since the partnership began in 2011, more than 76,000 free HIV tests have been provided, including over 15,000 self-tests. Additionally, more than 3,000 Walgreens pharmacists have received specialized training to assist people with HIV on medication counseling, prevention options, and available financial assistance programs.

Also in June, the Human Rights Campaign announced a nationwide self-testing initiative supported by CVS Health. The initiative, Wellness in Action, will distribute 3,000 self-testing kits to community-based partners focused on reaching those in communities disproportionately impacted by HIV. Community partners working on this initiative include Arianna's Center (Fort Lauderdale, FL), TruEvolution (Riverside, CA), Abounding Prosperity (Dallas, TX), Thrive SS (Atlanta, GA), and Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus (Chicago, IL). Select CVS MinuteClinics in those locations will also work with an individual's health plan to provide access to additional follow-up services.

Pharmacists as Key Partners in Implementing the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

The Strategy emphasizes the role of pharmacies in increasing access to a variety of HIV prevention and care services such as testing, PrEP education and initiation, medication education and adherence counseling, and playing a key role in the re-engagement of patients who have fallen out of care.

Recent studies have emphasized the key role that pharmacies play in delivering HIV prevention and care services to people in communities. A CDC study focusing on COVID-19 found that patients visit their community pharmacies 12 times more frequently than their primary care provider. Key partners, including members of U.S. Business Action to End HIV, the American Pharmacists Association, and many national and local partners, have been working to update scope of practice laws and regulations to allow for pharmacist-initiated PrEP and PEP. A study by GoodRx found that in the year after states expanded their scope of practice laws to allow for pharmacist-initiated PrEP, that the PrEP fill rate was 24% higher than in the year before the law was changed.

The U.S. Business Action to End HIV launched on World AIDS Day last year and has continued to engage corporations in accelerating public-private partnerships to end HIV. I am confident that the actions taken, and the future commitments by these partners and others in the community, will lead us further towards reaching our collective goal to ending HIV in the U.S.

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