Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

We look forward to seeing everyone at the 2022 Biomedical HIV Prevention Summit in Chicago. However, COVID is not over.

April 13, 2022 By Paul Kawata

We are one thousand strong at this year's Biomedical HIV Prevention Summit in Chicago. Here is the agenda. We look forward to seeing everyone at the Sheraton Grand Riverwalk Chicago. It's been a long time. However, COVID is not over, and everyone must take care. While participants are required to show proof of vaccination in advance, there are no guarantees. NMAC is particularly concerned about people who are immune compromised.

Hotel staff are wearing masks at NMAC's request. There will be outdoor spaces to eat meals; however, the temperature will be cool. Bring a jacket or sweater. If you are not feeling well, stay home or in your hotel room. Contact the conference office if you need a "free" COVID test. Anyone with COVID will be required to isolate until they test negative.

The Summit is not only an opportunity to learn the latest on biomedical HIV prevention, but also a place to build a movement. This year's Summit includes many new leaders looking for programs that reach and keep their communities healthy. This year there are large delegations from:

- Chicago House
- Arianna's Center
- Indian Health Service
- NAESM
- NMAC's Young Gay Men of Color PrEP fellows
- NMAC's Storytelling Project

President Biden put forward a budget recommendation for a new national PrEP plan. Conversations about the plan and PrEP will likely dominate the gathering. While NMAC is very thankful for the President's plan, we ask our movement to consider the following:

1. Differences in opinion about PrEP program priorities
2. Very heavy lift in Congress

NMAC is concerned that current PrEP programs miss too many people of color. The data say that 42% of the new cases of HIV are among African Americans, yet only 8% of the people on PrEP are

Black. 29% of new cases are Latinx while only 14% of the people on PrEP are Latinx. White Americans are 28.5% of new cases of HIV and 63% of the people on PrEP. I was challenged figuring out PrEP utilization for Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians, or Pacific Islanders. How do we fix PrEP for communities of color?

Even if community agrees on a pathway forward, there is still a very heavy lift in Congress. As part of his FY23 budget recommendations, President Biden put $213 million in mandatory spending for a new national PrEP Initiative. Over the next 10 years this program is budgeted at $9.8 billion. While I believe our movement has some of the best policy staff working the Hill, the “mandatory” nature of this spending makes it a unique challenge to pass in Congress.

In other words, there is plenty to discuss and lots of concerns. Special thank you to Gilead, ViiV, and MISTR for their support of the meeting, the faculty for sharing the latest information on biomedical HIV prevention, the Chicago Host Committee, attendees for traveling during this confusing time, and NMAC’s staff for making this meeting a reality.

I just got my fourth booster, so I’m feeling ready. For everyone staying home, I completely understand. We are trying our best to keep everyone safe but, as we’ve learned from safer sex education, safety is everyone’s responsibility. We are not just looking out for ourselves; we must also care for other attendees.

Yours in the Struggle,

Paul Kawata

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