U.S. Senate Proposes Increasing HIV Funding for Fiscal Year 2021

But is it enough? And what about support for syringe services?

November 16, 2020 By AIDS United

Senate appropriators released all 12 of their spending bills for fiscal year 2021 last week. These bills represented a positive development concerning HIV-related funding, although there are certainly many areas where AIDS United wishes to see improvement as the bills go to conference with the House's spending bills.

Significant increases to Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America funding

Senate appropriators included an additional $207 million in spending over fiscal year 2020 levels in their Labor, Health and Humans Services, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Of that $207 million, $50 million would go to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, $60 million would be added to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention HIV prevention efforts, $87 million would go to Community Health Centers via the Health Resources and Services Administration, and $10 million would go to the Centers for AIDS Research in National Institute of Health. All of this new funding is under Ending the HIV Epidemic line items that are separate from the traditional funding structure of the programs they are supporting.

Minor gains in fighting the overdose epidemic, but no syringe funding ban repeal

The Senate's Labor-HHS appropriations bill provided a slight increase of $5 million for the CDC's Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases program to address HIV and hepatitis, bringing its overall funding to $15 million, which is significantly short of the $58 million HIV and viral hepatitis advocates requested. Unfortunately, Senate appropriators once again failed to join their House counterparts in fully repealing the harmful and unnecessary federal ban on funding for the purchase of syringes and related drug use paraphernalia. This harms efforts to eliminate injection drug use-related HIV and viral hepatitis transmission. Overall, Senate appropriators increased fiscal year 2021 funding for responses to the overdose epidemic by $88 million over previous levels, although most of this will go toward traditional treatment, prevention services and research. This funding will not go to syringe services programs and other clinics rooted in harm reduction.

Flat funding for many important programs

The Senate did not increase nor decrease a number of vital HIV-related programs that saw increases in the House's fiscal year 2021 appropriations bills. The Senate provided flat funding for the Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS program, at $410 million, declining to meet House appropriators at the $430 million level they set in their Department of Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill this summer. The Minority HIV/AIDS Fund also did not receive any additional funding in the Senate after seeing an $8 million increase in the House. And once again, the Indian Health Service portion of the Ending the HIV Epidemic program was denied any funding. The House bill would have provided $5 million to the Indian Health Service, still far short of the $27 million being requested by the AIDS Budget and Appropriation Coalition and the Trump administration. It is also worth noting that Senate appropriators have funded the entire Indian Health Service at $49.1 million below fiscal year 2020 spending levels at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on Native communities.

We are hopeful that the House and Senate will be able to come to an agreement over the differences in their bills, and have confidence that this budget will be passed by both sides without another CR. AIDS United will continue to engage with legislators to ensure that the national budget is maximized to benefit people living with and vulnerable to HIV in the days and weeks ahead. Specifically, we will be watching for additional COVID-19 relief, as cases in the United States begin to rise yet again.

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