How Will Biden's Administration Picks Impact HIV Policy?

A look at Biden's choices of public health leaders—from Xaiver Becerra to Anthony Fauci—and how they'll affect HIV policy

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President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris announced this month their picks for key public health roles. Not only will these Biden administration nominations and appointments inherit the current White House's COVID-19 response, but they will also be responsible for taking the necessary steps toward health equity, access to health care and ending the HIV epidemic.

With nearly 300,000 deaths from COVID-19 and an aggressive plan to end the HIV epidemic by 2030, this team certainly has work to do.

Department of Health and Human Services

Xavier Becerra was an unexpected selection to lead the Health and Human Services department. In his work as California's attorney general, Becerra has a long track record of fighting for the Affordable Care Act and for health equity. This could signal a Biden administration's intent to not just defending the ACA, but also expanding upon it. However, some Senate Republicans are concerned that Beccera's lack of public health policy expertise as well as his lack of direct health care work might hinder his understanding of complex health topics, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Biden's pick to lead the CDC is Dr. Rochelle Walensky. Walensky, who has a deep background in HIV, is currently the chief of infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital and is a professor at the Harvard School of Medicine. These experiences are likely to serve Walensky well at the CDC, as she rebuilds from the trauma of the Trump administration's muzzle of science and expertise within the agency. Walensky has quickly become one of the nation's leading experts on COVID-19, as she led one of the largest infectious disease centers in the country from the start of the pandemic. Her experience in researching HIV also brings hope that the CDC will once again lead efforts to end the HIV epidemic.

White House Domestic Policy Council

Susan Rice has been named to lead the White House Domestic Policy Council, which is where the

Office of National AIDS Policy resides. While Rice has limited experience handling domestic policy, she does have a wide breadth of knowledge on the foreign front, specifically when it comes to LGBTQ+, health, housing and HIV issues.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Rep. Marcia Fudge was selected to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development. This department is responsible for the selection of who will lead the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS. This program is vital to ensure that people living with HIV are able to access affordable housing, which oftentimes allows folks to remain in HIV care. Rep. Fudge's focus during her time in Congress was most explicitly on issues related to agriculture and less so on issues related to housing and urban development, but Fudge herself seems confident in her ability to effect change, saying that she would try to incorporate her passion for issues like providing food assistance for hungry children into her new role.

Other notable picks

There are a variety of other health selections we continue to monitor during this transition period. The first is Dr. Vivek Murthy, who was recently nominated to his former position as U.S. Surgeon General. Additionally, not only will Dr. Anthony Fauci remain in his role at the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, he will also serve as Biden's chief medical adviser on COVID-19. Fauci has long been a champion for ending the HIV epidemic, serving at the NIAID since 1984.

Another person to watch is Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, chair of Biden's COVID-19 advisory board and chair of Biden's health equity task force. Nunez-Smith is currently the associate professor of medicine and epidemiology at the Yale School of Medicine, where she is also associate dean for health equity research and the founding director of the Equity Research and Innovation Center.

So, what does it all mean for our work?

So far, the selections that the President-elect has made in offices that will have a direct impact on our work to end the HIV epidemic look promising. We look forward to building new relationships with their offices over the coming weeks. Our aim is to work in coalition to ensure community voices are heard as we all work to end the HIV epidemic. Our work to end the HIV epidemic by 2025 is within our grasp.

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