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More than 100 Organizations Call for a National AIDS Strategy to End the Epidemic in the United States

Strategies to address the nation's largest public health challenges, including AIDS, should be part of Presidential candidates' national health plans

WASHINGTON, Sep. 17, 2007 -- More than 100 organizations from across the country are calling for the next President to commit to ending the AIDS epidemic in America. They have requested that every Presidential candidate commit to developing a results-oriented national AIDS strategy designed to significantly reduce HIV infection rates, ensure access to care and treatment for those who are infected and eliminate racial disparities. The groups issued a "Call to Action" that has been presented to all Presidential candidates. The Call to Action and a list of supporters is available at www.nationalaidsstrategy.org.

"More than 1.7 million HIV infections and over half a million deaths into the domestic AIDS epidemic, our government still does not have a comprehensive plan to respond effectively," said Rebecca Haag, Executive Director of AIDS Action. "The wealthiest nation in the world is failing its own people in responding to the AIDS epidemic at home. Our country must develop what it asks of other nations it supports in combating AIDS: a comprehensive national strategy to achieve improved and more equitable results."

The Call to Action asserts that the lack of an outcome-based response to HIV domestically has led to unacceptable results: half of people with HIV are not in care, there is a new infection every 13 minutes, infection rates have not fallen in more than 15 years, and dramatic racial disparities are becoming even more pronounced.

"America's response to AIDS is not serving those most in need," said Phill Wilson, Executive Director of the Black AIDS Institute. "We cannot make significant progress on national AIDS statistics unless government and community efforts better respond to the needs of Black America, and we need a comprehensive national strategy to get there."

"We need a plan, not a patchwork," said Julie Davids, Executive Director of Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP). "We need to move from a response to AIDS that is often bureaucratic to one that is evidence-based and outcomes-oriented; a response that reaches everyone at risk of infection or needing care."

The Call to Action statement states that to be successful a national AIDS strategy should:

- Improve prevention and treatment outcomes through reliance on evidence-based programming
- Set ambitious and credible prevention and treatment targets and require annual reporting on progress towards goals
- Identify clear priorities for action across federal agencies and assign responsibilities and timelines for follow-through
- Include, as a primary focus, the prevention and treatment needs of African Americans, other communities of color, gay men of all races, and other groups at elevated risk
- Address social factors that increase vulnerability to infection
- Promote a strengthened HIV prevention and treatment research effort
- Involve many sectors in developing the national strategy: government, business, community, civil rights organizations, faith based groups, researchers, and people living with HIV/AIDS

Mark Cloutier, the Executive Director of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation notes the "enormous human and economic costs resulting from the lack of a focused response to HIV/AIDS domestically. Without action there will be more unnecessary deaths, billions of dollars in increased health care expenses and a significant loss of productivity in our economy. A more effective national response to HIV/AIDS is a critical part of building a stronger and more responsive health care system for all Americans."

Pernessa Seele, founder and CEO of The Balm In Gilead, said, "The legacy of the next Executive Office resident will be determined by what she or he says and does to move communities and this country from where we are - in crisis because of HIV/AIDS - to where we want and need to be - a world leader in the advancement of research, testing, treatment and eradication of HIV/AIDS at home and abroad."

"It is unconscionable that the United States, which has all the necessary resources to end the AIDS epidemic, does not have a comprehensive plan to stop AIDS deaths, reduce infections, and get people the medical care that they need," said Robert Bank, Chief Operating Officer of Gay Men's Health Crisis, (GMHC) in New York.

"We want the American public to know that the knowledge and strategies needed to end the nation's HIV/AIDS crisis already exist," said David Ernesto Munar, vice president at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. "Strong national leadership can change the course of the epidemic."

AIDS advocates and leaders all over the country are currently contacting their colleagues in civil rights, social justice, and health care organizations urging their endorsement and support.

All organizations and individuals concerned about America's AIDS crisis are encouraged to sign the Call to Action at www.nationalaidsstrategy.org

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